



## COLUMNISTS

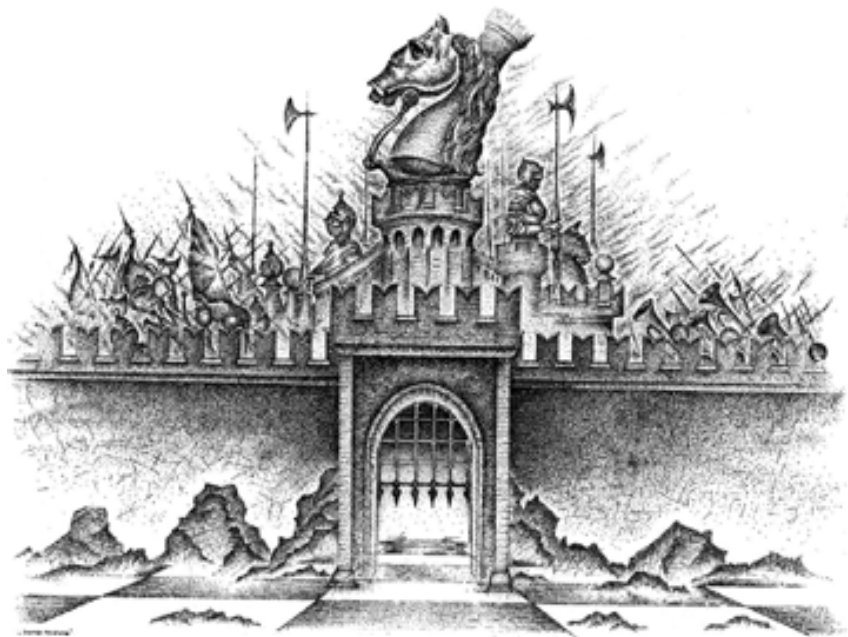
*Over the Horizons*

Stefan Bucker



## Building a Fortress

My March [column](#) on the Mokele Mbembe: **1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ne4!? 3 d4 f6 4 Bd3 d5 5 Nc3! f5**, culminated in an entertaining knight sacrifice. Certainly it was important to know whether the knight on e4 can be trapped by means of **6 Nce2**. Apparently, Black cannot avoid losing the knight, but achieves sufficient compensation nevertheless. Still, I noted at the beginning of the article that a positional approach (6 Nh3!) might be the real test of the opening. In this third and final installment of my Mokele series, this critical line will be discussed in more detail. While no one tried to refute my sacrifice, some readers confirmed that they considered 6 Nh3! as best, or they suggested sensible alternatives.

*The Fortress*

by Zygmunt Nasiolkowski, Germany

Todd Rowland from the United States wrote:

“The article was really encouraging, especially the playability of 8...g6 in the line 4 Bd3 d5 5 f3 Ng5 6 Bxg5 fxg5 7 f4 c5 8 Qh5+. I’ve always enjoyed the Mokele, and have always feared 3 d4 f6 4 Bd3 d5 5 f3. On the downside, I hadn’t realized that 5 Nc3 was such a problem, and 5...f5 is hardly satisfactory, as White will just take the easy positional plus. Here are my games, from around 1993, motivated by the articles in *Myers Opening Bulletin*. They contain errors typical of amateur games.

**Hoyos-Millan (2200) – Todd Rowland (2100)**  
Chicago, 1993

**1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ne4 3 d3 Nc5 4 b4?! Nca6 5 Ba3?!**

In the previous round, White had gotten into a heated argument with his opponent and the organizer, and was upset, explaining his rash opening.

**5...c6 6 Nf3 d6 7 d4 Bg4**



It's hard to suggest moves for White, but probably now he should have played 8 b5 to maintain a roughly equal position.

**8 Bc4 e6 9 exd6 Bxd6 10 c3 0-0**  
(perhaps an inefficient move) **11 0-0 Nc7 12 Nbd2 a5 13 Rb1 Bf5 14 Rc1 Qe7 15 Qb3 Nba6 16 Bxa6 Nxa6**

By the time Black got a clear advantage, he had calmed down, switching from extremes,

explaining why he played the eventual attack methodically rather than decisively.

**17 Nc4 axb4 18 Nxd6 Qxd6 19 cxb4 b5?**

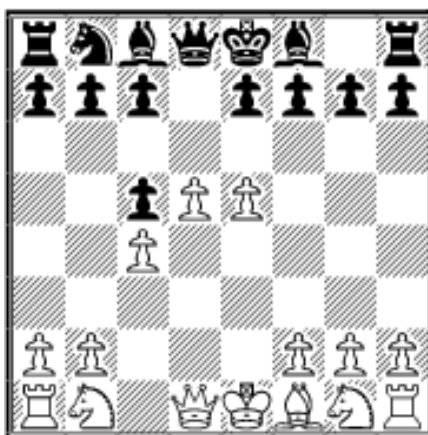
The obvious 19...Nc7 would have led to a simple advantage for Black.

**20 Ne5 Be4 21 Qg3 Rfd8 22 Qf4 f5?! 23 Rfd1 Bd5 24 Rc3 Nb8 25 Rg3 Ra7 26 Bc1 Bxa2 27 Qh4 Bc4 28 Bf4 Qf8 29 Rh3 h6 30 Qh5? (30 Bxh6!) 30...Qf6? (30...Qe8) 31 Rg3 Kh7 32 h4 Rc8 33 Rg6 Qf8 34 Nxc4 bxc4 35 Rxe6 Nd7 36 Bd6 Qg8 37 Qxf5+ Kh8 38 Rde1 Nf6 39 Be5 Rf8 40 Rxc6 Qd6 41 Rd6 Qb5 42 g4 Raf7 43 g5 hxg5 44 hxg5 Nh7 45 Bxg7+ Rxg7 46 Qxb5 Rxg5+ 47 Qxg5 Nxg5 48 Re7 1-0**

*Josh Manion (2400) – Todd Rowland (2100)*

Chicago, 1993

**1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ne4 3 d3 Nc5 4 d4 Ne6 5 Be3 d6 6 d5 Nc5 7 Bxc5 dxc5 8 c4**



**8...e6**

Perhaps 8...g6 is better, not fearing the kingside assault, since White has no dark-squared bishop, e.g. 8...g6 9 Nc3 Bg7 10 f4 (10 Qa4+ c6 11 0-0-0 Qc7 12 d6 carries no bite) 10...0-0 11 Nf3 Bg4 12 h3 Bxf3 13 Qxf3 Nd7. White's center is terrifying, but hard to advance.

**9 Nc3 Be7 10 Bd3 Nd7 11 Nf3 exd5 12 cxd5 f6? 13 Qc2?! (13 e6 wins a piece) 13...Nxe5 14 Nxe5**

**fxe5 15 Bxh7 Bf6 16 0-0-0 Bg5+ 17 Kb1 Qf6 18 Ne4 Qh6 19 Nxc5 Qxc5 20 Bg6+ Kh8 21 Qxc5+ Kg8 22 Be4?!**

Cleaner is 22 Qc2. Black now gets a fair chance to save the game in a rook ending, with his h8-rook developed. White is plainly better, but this chance is more than Black's opening treatment deserved. White outplays Black for

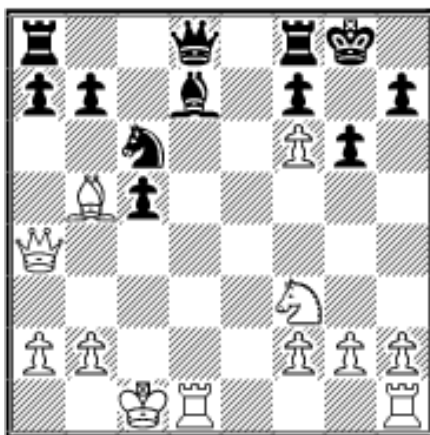
the remainder.

**22...Bf5 23 Bxf5 Qxf5+ 24 Qc2 Qxc2+ 25 Kxc2 Rd8 26 h3 Kf7?! 27 Rhe1 Kf6 28 Rd3 Rhe8 29 Re4 Kf5 30 Rb4 e4 31 Rc3 Rxd5 32 Rxb7 Red8 33 Rxc7 Rd2+ 34 Kb3 Ke5 35 Re7+ Kf4 36 Rf7+ Ke5 37 Rbe7+ Kd6 38 Rxe4 a5 39 Ka3 Rb8 40 b3 Rc8 41 Ree7 Rdc2 42 Ra7 R8c5 43 g4 Rc1 44 Ra6+ Ke5 45 Rf5+ Ke4 46 Rxa5 R5c2 47 f3+ Ke3 48 h4 g6 49 Rf6 Rh1 50 h5 gh 51 gh Rhh2 52 Kb4 Rh4+ 53 f4 Rf2 54 Re5+ 1-0**

Sorry to say that my score with the Mokele was negative, unlike my score with other unusual openings back then. Maybe due to irrational fears of kingside attacks, which wasn't an issue in the Elephant. Nowadays, I am not playing actively, and tend to be more conservative as Black. Perhaps with my fears behind me, I can take up the Mokele again."

In the diagrammed position above, I suggest 8...g6 9 Nc3 c6:

(a) 10 Bd3 cxd5 11 cxd5 e6 12 Qa4+ (12 Nf3 exd5 13 Bb5+ Nc6 14. Qxd5 Qxd5 15 Nxd5 Rb8 16 Rc1 Be6 +=) 12...Bd7 13 Bb5 exd5 14 Nxd5 Bg7 15 Nf3 0-0 16 0-0-0 Nc6 with interesting complications; for example, 17 Nf6+ (17 h4 Nxe5 18 Bxd7 Nxd7 19 Nc3 Bxc3 20 Rxd7 Qa5 =; 17 Rhe1 Re8 18 g4 a6 19 Bxc6 Bxc6 20 Qc4 b5 unclear) 17...Bxf6 18 exf6



18...c4! 19 Qa3 (19 Qxc4? Rc8 is too dangerous) 19...c3 20 Qxc3 (or 20 bxc3 Qc7 21 Rd6 Rfe8 22 Rhd1 Bg4 = 23 h3 Bxf3 24 gxf3 Qc8 25 Qa4 Qxh3 26 Rxc6 bxc6 27 Bxc6 Qc8!) 20...Rc8 21 Kb1 a6 22 Bd3 Qb6 23 Qd2 Nb4 24 Bxg6 hxg6 25 Qxd7 Rfd8 26 Qa4 Qxf2 =.  
(b) 10 f4 Bh6 11 g3 Qb6 (11...g5? 12 Qh5) 12 Qe2 (12 Qb3 g5! =) 12...cxd5 13 Nxd5 Qa5+ 14 Qd2 Qxd2+ 15 Kxd2 Na6 16 Bg2 Be6 17 Kc3 0-0-0!? (17...Rd8 18 Rd1 Rd7 19 Nf3 0-0 20 Rd2 Nc7 21 Nxc7 Rxc7 +=) 18 Nxe7+ Kb8 19 Nd5 Nb4 with approximate equality.

Concerning the move order in this variation, the following game is of interest:

**H. Kauschmann (2220) – R. Junge (2365)**

Germany, Bundesliga II 1993

**1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ne4 3 d3 Nc5 4 d4 Ne6 5 d5**

Manion's move order 5 Be3 avoids the defense e7-e6. However, then Black has the additional possibility 5...c6, followed by g6 and Bg7, delaying d7-d6.

**5...Nc5 6 Be3 e6!?**

6...d6 transposes to the game Manion – Rowland above.

**7 Nc3 exd5 8 Qxd5 c6 9 Qc4 b5 10 Qf4 d5 11 Rd1 Ne6**



Black has solved his opening problems.



12 Qg3 Qa5 13 a3 b4 14 axb4 Bxb4 15 Bd2 0-0 16 Bd3 Ba6 17 Bxa6 Qxa6 18 Nge2 Bxc3 19 Bxc3 Nd7 20 Qg4 Rae8 21 0-0 f5 22 Qf3 Ndc5 23 Nf4 Nxf4 24 Qxf4 Ne6 ½-½

### A Final Visit to the Main Line

Let's return to the main line that we discussed in [March](#). Two readers submitted new analyses, and I spent several further hours with these critical

(and often strange) positions.

1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ne4 3 d4 f6 4 Bd3 d5 5 Nc3

In a letter, **Dirk Spohn** from **Germany**, doesn't show much respect for 3...f6 ("scrap," Spohn) and recommends the unusual **5 Nd2!?**, which I had hitherto seen only in some of my blitz games. The knight move to c3 looks more natural, but Nd2 has some hidden advantages and is difficult to refute. 5...f5 (Not 5...Nxd2? 6 Qh5+. Spohn's main line is 5...Ng5 6 Ngf3 Bg4 7 h3 Bh5 8 g4 Bf7 9 Nxg5 fxg5 10 Nf3 h6 11 h4 gxh4 12 Rxh4 "and White's superior development should be sufficient to win the game," Spohn) 6 Nh3! (Spohn's move improves upon the alternatives 6 f3 Nxd2 7 Bxd2, 6 Ngf3 and 6 Ne2, which I had faced in blitz – in each case I played e6 and c5 and won. Of course, 6 Ne2 e6 could have transposed to the text after 7 Nf4!)

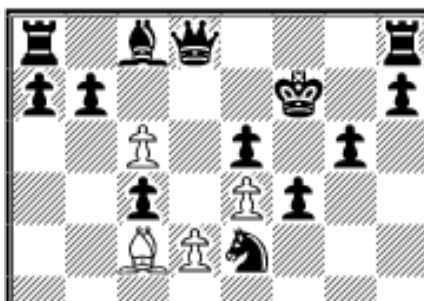


An important decision:

(a) 6...c5, in analogy to our preferred treatment against the main line: 7 Nf4 g6 8 Bb5+! (the immediate 8 c4 is less successful after 8...dxc4 9 Bxe4 fxe4 10 d5 Bg7 11 Nxc4 0-0 12 Qb3 Qe8, unclear) 8...Nc6 (8...Bd7 9 a4! cxd4 10 Nb3 a6 11 Bxd7+ Nxd7 12 f3 Nec5 13 Nxd4 Nxe5 14 b4 g5 15 Nh3 Ncd7 16 Nxg5 +/-, or 9...a6? 10 Nxe4 dxe4 11 Ne6, followed by 12 Bxd7+ and 13 d5, when Black has difficulties developing his Bf8 – or anything else) 9 c4! Bh6 (9...dxc4 10 d5

a6 11 Ba4 b5 12 dxc6 bxa4 13 0-0 Nxd2 14 Bxd2 +/-, Black has lasting problems with his Bc8) 10 cxd5 Bxf4 11 dxc6 and now:

(a1) 11...Bxd2+ 12 Bxd2 Kf7 13 Bc4+! (13 dxc5 Qd4 14 Qb3+ Be6 15 Be3 Qxe5 16 f4 Qf6 17 Qa3 Qh4+ 18 g3 Nxg3 19 Bf2 Qxf4 20 Bxg3 Qe4+ 21 Kf2 f4 +=) 13...e6 (13...Kg7 14 dxc5 Qc7 15 Be3 Rd8 16 Qe2 Qa5+ 17 Kf1 bxc6 18 h4 h5 19 Kg1 +/-) 14 0-0! (14 Bf4 hopes for 14...cxd4 15 f3 Nc5 16 b4 Na6 17 Bxa6 +– etc., but 14...Qa5+ 15 Kf1 Rd8 16 d5 exd5 17 Be2 c4! 18 f3 Nc5 19 Bg5 Re8 20 Qxd5+ Be6 21 Qd4 bxc6 22 Bxc4 Rab8 23 b3 Bxc4+ 24 Qxc4+ Ne6 25 Bf6 Qd2 26 Qc1 Qd4 = equalizes)



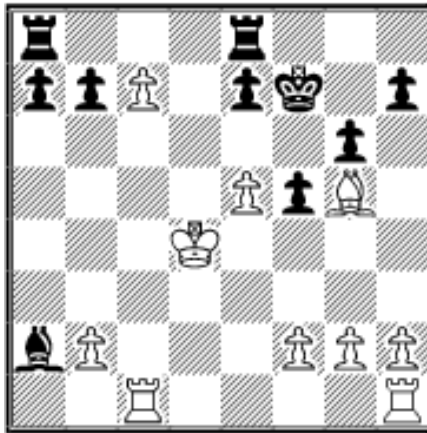
14...cxd4 (14...Qxd4? 15 Be3 loses a piece, and 14...Nxd2?! isn't convincing either) 15 Bh6 bxc6 (15...Qh4 16 Qc1 g5 17 f3 +/-) 16 f3 Nc5 17 Rc1 Qb6 18 Qxd4 Nd7 +/-, Black has managed to exchange the queens, but in the ensuing ending





White's better placed pieces are at least worth a pawn. Black may try 19 Rfd1 (19 Be3) 19...Nxe5 20 Bf1 Qxd4+ 21 Rxd4 g5 22 Bxg5 Rg8 23 h4 h6 24 f4 to simplify, but even then the draw will be difficult to achieve.

(a2) 11...0-0 looks like a mistake, but is quite playable. 12 Nb3 Qb6 13 Bc4+ Kh8 14 Bxf4 Qb4+. Regaining the piece. 15 Nd2 Nxd2 16 Qxd2 Qxc4 17 c7 Be6 18 Rc1 Qxd4 19 Qxd4 cxd4 20 Bg5 Rfe8 21 Ke2 Kg7 22 Kd3 Kf7 23 Kxd4 Bxa2 +=.

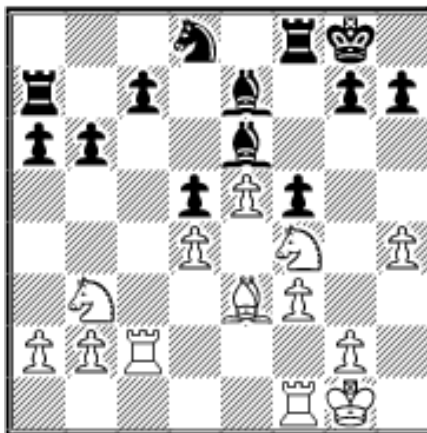


White's position is much better, based on the advanced pawn at c7, but perhaps Black can blockade (24 Rc3 a5).

(b) 6...e6

(b1) 7 0-0 is Spohn's continuation, although this leaves Black time to recover: 7...Be7 (7...c5? 8 Nf4 g6 9 c4 +/-) 8 Nb3 0-0 9 f3 Ng5 10 Nf4 (10 Nxc5!? Bxg5 11 Bxg5 Qxg5 12 c4 +=) 10...b6 (10...c5? 11 Nxc5 Bxc5 12 dxc5 Nf7 13 b4 Nc6 14 Qe1 Nxe5 15 Bb2 Nxd3 16 cxd3 Bd7 17

Qc3 +/-; 10...a5 11 a4 b6 12 c3 c5 13 Bb5 c4 14 Nd2 Na6 15 b3 +=) 11 Be3 Nc6 12 Bb5 Qd7 13 c4 a6 14 Bxc6 Qxc6 15 h4 Nf7 16 cxd5 exd5 17 Rc1 Qb7 18 Qc2 Ra7 19 Qc6 Qxc6 20 Rxc6 Nd8 21 Rc2 Be6



Black is worse, but should be able to hold the position. For example, 22 Rfc1 (22 g3 Bf7 23 Rfc1 c6) 22...Bxh4 23 Rxc7 Rxc7 24 Rxc7 Bg5 25 Ra7 Bxf4 26 Bxf4 Bc8 27 Bg5 Ne6 28 Be7 Rf7 29 Ra8 Rxe7 30 Rxc8+ Kf7 31 Rc6 Rc7 32 Rxb6 Rc2 33 Rxa6 Nf4 34 Ra7+ Kg6 35 g3 Ne2+ 36 Kf2 f4 37 gxf4 Nxf4+ 38 Kg3 Ne2+ 39 Kh4 Rxb2 40 Ra6+ Kf5 41 Ra8 Rb1 42 Rf8+ Ke6 =.

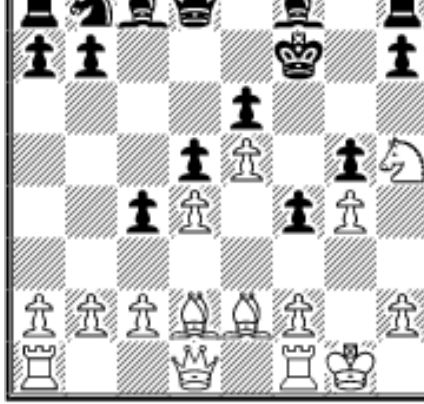
(b2) 7 Nf4 poses difficult problems. 7... Kf7!? (the only reasonable alternative 7... g6 8 0-0 leaves Black helpless against the

coming c2-c4; for example, 8...c5 9 c4 Nc6 10 cxd5 exd5 11 Bb5 cxd4 12 Nb3 a6 13 Bxc6+ bxc6 14 Nxd4 +/-) 8 0-0 c5 9 g4 (after 9 c4 Nc6 10 cxd5 exd5 11 Qh5+ Kg8, Black has some counterplay, e.g. 12 e6 Ng5 13 dxc5 Nxe6 14 Nb3 g6 15 Nxe6 Bxe6 16 Qe2 Qd7 17 Re1 Kf7 18 Be3 Bg7 +=)

After the typical breakthrough g2-g4 in a "misplayed" French, Black's defeat seems near (for example 9...cxd4 10 gxf5 exf5 11 c4! dxc3 12 Nxe4 fxe4 13 Bxe4 +/-). But there remains a last chance: 9...Nxd2 10 Bxd2 c4 11 Be2 g5 12 Nh5 f4.



Closing the door of the fortress. I am not sure how to evaluate this structure. Calling Black's position "sound" comes



close to a sacrifice. But what can his opponent do? The obvious solution would be to sacrifice a piece on f4 – and White *would* get *some* compensation for it. But this is hardly a refutation of Black's play, since the consequences would rather favor Black. If White instead continues quietly, say, 13 c3 Nc6 14 h4 h6 15 b3 b5 16 Qc2 Be7 17 Rfb1 Bd7 18 bxc4 bxc4, the position still looks rather strange.

We return to the main line **5 Nc3**.

### 5...f5

As I explained in my last column, this reply is almost forced. The following considerations are mainly based on analyses by **Maurits Wind** from **The Netherlands**.



### 6 Nce2

After 6 Nh3, Black can transpose to the main line (6...e6 7.Nf4 g6 8.Nce2), but Wind suggests a more enterprising alternative: 6...Nxc3 7 bxc3 c5!? 8 Nf4 (perhaps one of the following is more promising: 8 Bb5+ Nc6 9 0-0 e6 10 Bg5 Qd7, or 8 Qf3 g6 9 0-0 Nc6, or 8 0-0 c4 9 Be2 Nc6 10 Nf4 e6) 8...g6 9 Qf3 c4! (instead of 9...e6 10 g4! (Wind) 10...fxg4 11 Qxg4 Qd7 12 h4! Be7 13 h5 g5 14 Nh3 cxd4 15 cxd4 h6 16 f4 +/-) 10 Be2 e6 11 g4 Nc6 (better than 11...Qd7 12 gxf5

gxf5 13 Qh5+ Qf7 14 Qxf7+ Kxf7 15 Rg1 Ke8 16 Bh5+, starting a strong attack) 12 Qh3 Qa5 13 Bd2 Ne7 14 gxf5 exf5 15 Bf3 Bd7 16 Qg2 Bc6



Another kind of fortress. Black's defensive formation is hard to crack, e. g. 17 Ne6 h6 18 0-0 Kd7 19 Nc5+ Kc7.

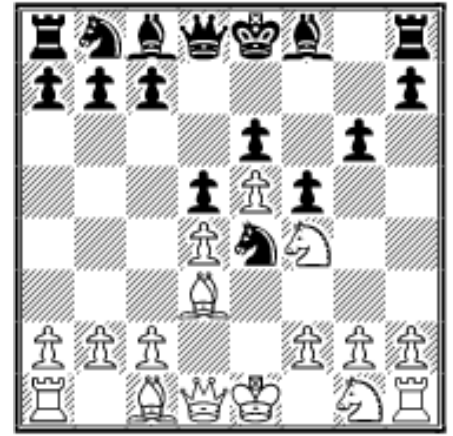
### 6...e6

6...c5? hopes for 7 c3 e6 etc., transposing to the main line, but may be inaccurate because of 7 f3! Nd6 8 dxc5 Nc4 (8...Nf7 9 f4 +/-) 9.Bxc4 dxc4 10.Qxd8+ Kxd8 11. Nh3! Na6 12 Be3 e6 13 0-0-0+ Ke8 14 Rhg1! with advantage for White (Wind).

### 7 Nf4

7 h4 traps the knight, but as I explained last month, Black obtains sufficient compensation after 7...c5 8 c3 Nc6 9 f3 cxd4 10 cxd4 Bb4+ 11 Kf1 Qb6.

### 7...g6



Looks ugly, but Black will obtain counterplay with c5; after 7...Be7?! 8 Qh5+ Kd7, White can simply play 9 Qf7 Qg8 10 Qxg8 Rxd8 11 f3 Ng5 12 c4 c6 13 Nge2 with advantage (analysis by Wind).

### 8 Nge2!

Apparently more precise than 8 Ngh3, when, according to Wind, Black obtains fine play with the characteristic sacrifice 8...c5 9 f3 Qa5+ 10 Kf1 cxd4 11 fxe4 fxe4 12 Be2 Bc5. The text move reduces White's chances to trap the Ne4, but has other advantages: d4 is now well protected, so that White can think about playing 9 f3 Ng5 10 c4.

### 8...c5?!

Evidently the text move is too risky. Wind offers an escape route: 8...Nc6 9 a3 (to stop Nb4) 9...a6 10 0-0 Bd7 11 Be3 Qe7 12 f3 Ng5 13 b3.



A critical position for the Mokele. Black can choose between castling long (13...0-0-0) or short (13...Bg7 14 Qd2 Nf7 followed by 0-0). In each case White is better, but the position resembles a complex French. Black is not without chances. (Wind)

### 9 f3 Ng5 10 c4

My last column expressed the opinion that 6 Nh3 Nxc3! were better than 6...e6 7 Nf4 g6 8 Nce2 c5 9 f3 Ng5 10 c4!. But I had to recognize that the text move (10

c4) arrives at the identical position. Therefore, the move order 6 Nce2!, avoiding the exchange on c3, must be more to the point than 6 Nh3.

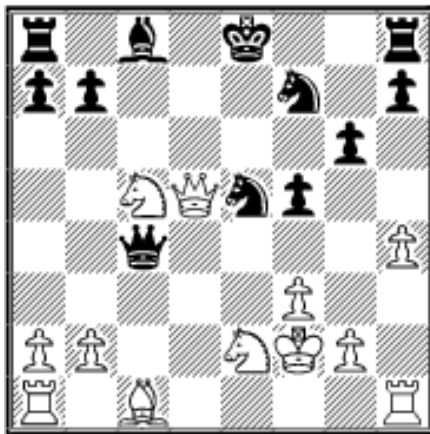
### 10...dxc4 11 Bxc4 Nc6 12 h4 Nf7 13 Nxe6 Qb6

Proposed by Wind. My analysis ran 13...Bxe6 14 Bxe6 Nxd4 15 Nxd4 Qxd4 with interesting complications after 16 Qb3 Nxe5 17 Bg5 Bg7 18 Bxf5 c4. However, White can simply go into an ending where Black can hardly survive: 16 Qxd4 cxd4 17 f4 +/- . No fortress in sight.

### 14 dxc5 Bxc5 15 Qd5 Nxc5 16 Nxc5 Qb4+ 17 Kf2 Qxc4



So far analysis by Wind. After 18 Qxc4



(or 18 Nf4) Nxc4 19 Nf4 b6 (19...0-0 20 b3 Nce5 21 Bb2 b6 22. Rhe1 is also dangerous) 20 Re1+ Kd8 21 Ncd3 Re8 22 Rxe8+ Kxe8 23 Nd5 Kf8 24 Nc7 Rb8 25 Bf4 Rb7 26 Rc1 Ncd6 27 Nb4 h6 28 Nbd5 g5 29 Bd2 f4, White's pieces remain more active, but Black's drawing chances seem to be intact.

This is the kind of endgame advantage that White can achieve against the Mokele Mbembe after finding seventeen strong moves in a row. In reality, after 2...Ne4,

at least ninety-five percent of your opponents do not have the faintest notion of what's going on. In effect, you can play dozens of Mokele games before encountering the dangers described above. In your good old French you may never lose, but every second game just repeats seventeen theoretical moves and then ends in an uneventful draw. Quite a difference...

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