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Over the Horizons

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A Modest Novelty

There is no forced win in chess, and if your opponent has done his homework, he will achieve a decent position after the first ten or fifteen moves. Even if your 1 e4 repertoire is a dangerous minefield, in which you have invested hundreds of hours, there will remain a number of main lines that are fully playable for both sides. Preparing something new in a well known position can be risky – if your novelty had any merit, it would probably have been used before. Nevertheless, it can be advisable to leave the beaten track early. If Black seems to possess a solid book knowledge, it is hardly in your interest to follow an old grandmaster game. Fortunately, there often exists an alternative that is either underestimated or new. It may not be the kind of idea that you are willing to repeat in another game, but perhaps it is sound and surprising enough to score one point.

Attakinsky – Defendarov
French Defense [C11]

1 e4 e6 2 Nf3

The "Two Knights Variation." The present game transposes to a Classical French, but at least White has avoided the Winawer Variation 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4.

2...d5 3 Nc3 Nf6

Our [October column](#) discussed 3...dxe4, resulting in a Fort Knox Variation.

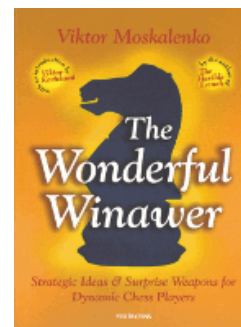
4 e5 Nfd7 5 d4



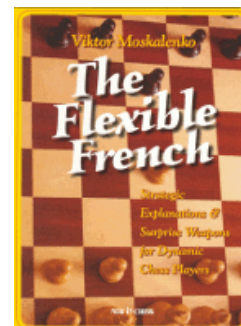
[FEN "rnbqkblr/pppn1ppp/4p3/3pP3/3P4/2N2N2/PPP2PPP/R1BQKB1R b KQkq d3 0 5"]

Another "Tarrasch Variation." Via a transposition of moves the players have reached the variation **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Nf3**, introduced by Siegbert Tarrasch in a game against M. Kürschner (it continued 5...a6?! 6 Bd3 c5 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 Qe2 Nc6 9 a3, and Tarrasch won in thirty-three moves). In Dreihundert Schachpartien, Tarrasch comments on 5 Nf3: "ein Versuch" [an experiment], and the game is vaguely dated: 1892-1894. It was only after World War II that the doctor's idea became quite popular. Most authors consider the chances about equal.

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Siegbert Tarrasch

One of the few authors who recommended White's set-up was Chris Baker, in [A Startling Chess Opening Repertoire](#), London 1998 [1]. He studied 5.Nf3 c5 6.dxc5 in great detail on thirteen pages, coming to the conclusion: "The Two Knights' Variation [...] can lead to some exciting and original chess. It has given me consistently good results against the French Defence over the years and I have yet to be convinced that Black can demonstrate a clear route to equality." In a theoretical competition that I started in 2009, members of [Chesspublishing.com](#) improved upon several book lines [2]; the thread is available online and contains some basic information on the theory of the line. In my opinion, 5 Nf3 is quite promising for White.

5...c5 6 dxc5



[FEN"rnbqkb1r/pp1n1ppp/4p3/2PpP3/8/2N2N2/PPP2PPP/R1BQKB1R b KQkq - 0 6"]

The key idea of Tarrasch's set-up: White is willing to exchange his pawns d4 and e5, so as to exploit these squares for his minor pieces.

6...Nc6 7 Bf4 Bxc5 8 Bd3 f6

8...0-0? fails to 9 Bxh7+ Kxh7 10 Ng5+.

9 exf6 Qxf6



[FEN"r1b1k2r/pp1n2pp/2n1pq2/2bp4/5B2/2NB1N2/PPP2PPP/R2QK2R w KQkq - 0 10"]

9...Nxf6 is equally important, when White could castle long. Moskalenko

analyzed this sharp possibility in a chapter of his [The Flexible French](#).

10 Bg3 0-0 11 0-0 a6

11...Nde5? loses a pawn: 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 Bxh7+ Kxh7 14 Qh5+ followed by 15 Qxe5.

The immediate 11...Nd4 12 Nxd4 Bxd4 is a major alternative. Perhaps White can try 13 Nb5 Bxb2 (13...Be5 Holzer – Dückstein, Vienna 1994, 14 Qe2 +=) 14 Nc7! (better than 14 Rb1 the only move tested in practice) 14...Bxa1 15 Qxa1 Rb8 16 Qe1 Nc5 17 Nxd5 exd5 18 Bxb8 Nxd3 19 cxd3 Bf5 20 Be5 and White has a slight edge. OK, it is very slight. A more ambitious attempt would be 13 Rb1 a6 14 Ne2, transposing to the gambit 11...a6 12 Rb1 Nd4 13 Nxd4 Bxd4 14 Ne2 mentioned below. Unfortunately, it appears to peter out to a draw.

12 Ne2!?



[FEN"r1b2rk1/1p1n2pp/p1n1pq2/2bp4/8/3B1NB1/PPPP1NPP/R2Q1RK1 b - - 0 12"]

Only a modest novelty, maybe not even the best move on the board. However, it includes two little traps, and there is no clear refutation – even if Black finds a reasonable reply, it is still a game of chess. Black will still have his "hanging pawns" on e6 and d5.

I had proposed a different continuation in [2]: 12 Rb1 Nd4 13 Nxd4 Bxd4 14 Ne2!? Bxb2 15 Bd6 Rf7 16 c3 Bxc3 17 Nxc3 Qxc3. It seems that 18 Rc1 fails to 18...Qf6! (18...Qb2? 19 Rc7 Qb6 20 Bg3 Nf6 21 Rxf7 Kxf7 22 Be5 gives White a plus), so White has to be satisfied with a draw: 18 Rb3 Qc6 19 Bxh7 + Kxh7 20 Qh5+ Kg8 21 Rh3 and so on. A later attempt 14 Kh1!? Bxc3 15 bxc3 Qxc3 16 Rb3 Qf6 17 Bd6 Rf7 18 c4 dxc4 19 Bxc4 Ne5 (19...b5?! 20 Rf3 Qxf3 is dubious) 20 Bxe5 Qxe5 21 Rd3 += may or may not work in practice, but Black can simply reply 14...Rf7, which is about equal.

12...Qxb2?

Too optimistic. Just as bad would be the "natural" 12...e5, since White's knight returns to its square with devastating effect: 13 Nc3 Nb6 14 Nxd5 Nxd5 15 Bc4 Be6 16 Bxd5 +/- with a sound extra pawn and a positional advantage. Am I naïve to hope that someone might fall into this trap? Yet it is very tempting to play e6-e5, to punish the "passive" move of White's knight, and weird manoeuvres like Nc3-e2-c3 are sometimes overlooked. And a third plan connected with 12 Ne2 is the advance c2-c4 to undermine the hanging pawns; e.g., after 12...Ba7 or 12...Kh8.

The critical answer must be 12...Nde5 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 c3 Bd7 15 Nf4. Objectively the position is probably equal. But the pawn structure hasn't changed, Black still possesses his hanging pawns, and exchanging pieces won't solve his problem. True, you shouldn't lose because of hanging pawns alone. Anyway, the pawn structure requires careful play from both sides, and the better player should win.

13 Ng5 Nf6

Black's position seems to hold, but new threats are on the way.



[FEN"r1b2rk1/1p4pp/p1n1pn2/2bp2N1/8/3B2B1/PqP1NPPP/R2Q1RK1 w - - 0 14"]

14 Nf4 Nd8

14...Nd4 15 Rb1 Qa3 (15...Qxa2 16 c3 e5 17 Nh5 +/-) 16 Nh5! h6 (forced) 17 Nxf6+ Rxf6 18 Bh7+! Kf8 (18...Kh8 19 Be5! hxe5 20 Bxf6 Nf3+ 21 Kh1! +/-; e.g., 21...gxf6 22 Rb3 or 21...Kxh7 22 Bb2 etc.) 19 Nh3 Rf7 (19...Qc3 20 Nf4 b5 21 Nd3) 20 Re1 Nf5 21 Be5 Qxa2 22 Rb3 +/- with a strong attack.

15 Rb1 Qa3

15...Qxa2? 16 Nh5 h6 17 Nxf6+ Rxf6 18 Be5 Qa5 (else 19 Ra1, winning the queen) 19 Bxf6 gxf6 20 Nh7 f5 21 Nf6+ Kf7 22 Nh5 +/-.

16 c4 h6 17 Nf3 Qxa2

Or 17...dxc4 18 Bxc4 b5 19 Bb3 +/-, and Black suffers from the misplacement of his queen.

18 cxd5 Nxd5

Maybe 18...exd5 19 Bc2 +/- was the lesser evil.



[FEN"r1bn1rk1/1p4p1/p3p2p/2bn4/5N2/3B1NB1/q4PPP/1R1Q1RK1 w - - 0 19"]

19 Ng6! Nc3

Neither 19...Rf6 20 Be5 Qa5 21 Nd2 or 19...Re8 20 Rc1 Qa5 21 Nd2 seems sufficient to defend the position.

20 Qe1 Nxb1

If 20...Rxf3, the reply 21 Qxc3 wins.

21 Nxf8



[FEN"r1bn1Nk1/1p4p1/p3p2p/2b5/8/3B1NB1/q4PPP/1n2QRK1 b - - 0 21"]

21...Nd2

Desperation, but 21...Na3? 22 Qe4 Kxf8 23 Ne5! +- loses on the spot.

22 Nxd2 Kxf8 23 Nc4 Nf7

To prevent the menacing 24 Qe5 (or Qe4).

24 Qc3 Qa4

Else 25 Ra1.



[FEN"r1b2k2/1p3np1/p3p2p/2b5/q1N5/2QB2B1/5PPP/5RK1 w - - 0 25"]

25 Bg6 Nh8 26 Bh7! Qd7 27 Be5! 1-0

Black can hardly move a piece.

Sources

[1] Chr. Baker: *A Startling Chess Opening Repertoire*, London 1998.

[2] [Chesspub.com Forum Thread](#)

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