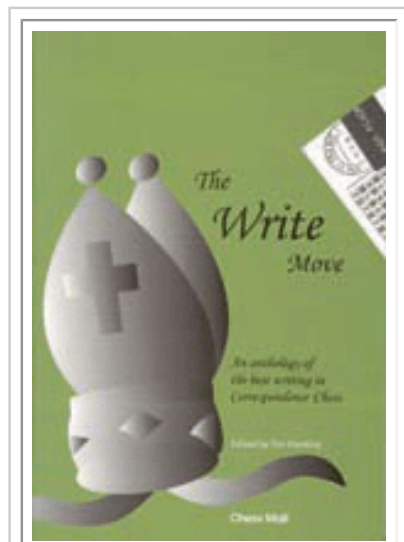




COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



The Write Move
by Tim Harding

The Two Knights Defence Revisited: the d4 Lines

Last month's [column](#) dealt with 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 (and some minor fourth moves). This article looks at White's main alternative, 4 d4, when Black has no real choice but to take the pawn. The column will follow the basic plan of reviewing what some recent books have said about the variation. The book by Palkövi is the most detailed one, but has some errors. Those who want to probe really deeply into these variations will need to look for games in databases and to consult older books as well.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4



The first point to note is that the same position can arise from the Scotch Gambit, 3 d4 exd4 4 Bc4 if Black replies 4...Nf6. So if you are playing a consistent repertoire with Black, and meet 3 Bc4 by 3...Bc5 instead, than in the Scotch Gambit you should play 4...Bc5; if you are a Two Knights player, then 4...Nf6 is your right course.

Just before I concluded this article, a new book arrived in the post: *Play 1 e4 e5!* by GM Nigel Davies (published by Everyman Chess). He advocates meeting 3 Bc4 by 3...Nf6, not because 3...Bc5 is bad (it isn't) but because (to paraphrase Davies) 3...Nf6 makes it hard for White to create a position where only he has winning chances. With 3...Nf6, usually all three results are possible. (Curiously, Davies does not discuss 4 Bc4 in his chapter on the Scotch.)

From the diagram, White has three different moves. Against one of them (castling) Black has two distinct treatments, so really there are four main lines. In increasing order of importance, these are:

LINE A: 5 Ng5 (direct but not a real threat to Black); this is easiest to

dismiss.

LINE B: 5...Bc5 (leading to the Max Lange Attack); in some lines Black may have to sacrifice material, but in practice he can play for a win (especially in correspondence chess where there is less danger of getting confused in long theoretical lines).

LINE C: 5 0-0 Nxe4; Black should be safe in this line if he avoids early traps. Therefore this move is usually preferred to 5...Bc5 in over-the-board play and by masters.

LINE D: 5 e5 (the most promising line says Pinski, in his recent book) has the best reputation but Black should be OK with care. The game tends to take a more positional character than in most variations of the Two Knights, although it has some wild sidelines when both players seek complications. In some books I wrote for Chess Digest in the 1980s, I tried to prove an edge for White, but in practice it is hard to make anything of this and with best play a draw is likely. That is why in my most recent 1 e4 period, I preferred 4 Ng5.

LINE A:

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 Ng5

This move is not played by anybody who understands the position or knows any variations. White moves his knight a second time, under less promising conditions than in the immediate 4 Ng5 lines, and his main hope is that Black, too, will move a knight twice.

Black must save his f-pawn, so these answers are the most common: i) 5...Ne5; ii) 5...d5 6 exd5 Ne5; iii) 5...d5 6 exd5 Qe7+.

The last-mentioned is the recipe approved by theory, but a quick look at the alternatives is in order.

5...d5

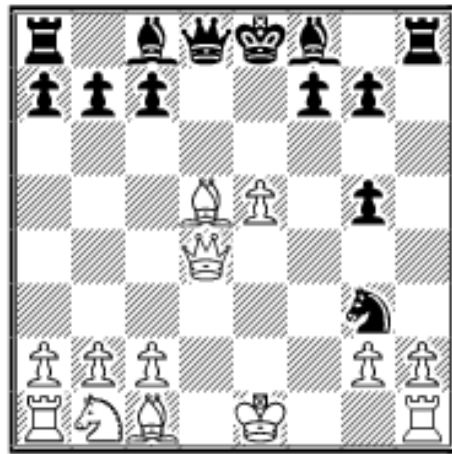
After 5...Ne5 6 Bb3 (the most dangerous try) 6...h6 7 f4 hxg5 8 fxe5 Nxe4 there can follow:

a) 9 Qxd4 when:

a1) Most sources give 9...Nc5 as safe and tending towards a long-term advantage for Black, citing Pflieger-Spassky, Hastings 1965-66.

a2) The current correspondence world champion, billionaire Joop van

Oosterom, played instead 9...d5!? in a postal championship candidates event back in 1987, doubtless after deep study of the aforementioned game. Carleton v Van Oosterom continued 10 Bxd5 Ng3, a move which is given a question mark in Palkövi's book (German edition, 2000). So this position is worth a diagram.



11 Qa4+ (If 11 Bxf7+ Kxf7 12 Qxd8 Black regains the queen by 12...Bb4+.) 11...Qd7! 12 Bxf7+ Kxf7! (Not mentioned by the Hungarian analyst, who only cites Estrin's old analysis 12...Kf8) and it turns out that Black isn't lost at all. He may even stand better, whatever your computer thinks.

There followed 13 Qb3+ Kg6 14 Qxg3 Qg4! 15 Qe3 b6 16 Nc3 Bf5 17 Qf3 Qxf3 18 gxf3 Bc5 19 Bd2 Bxc2 20 Rc1 Bd3 21 Ne4 Bxe4 22 fxe4 Rh4 23 Rc4 Rd8 24 Bc3 Rh3! (Threatening ...Re3+) 25 Rxc5 (If 25 Kf1 Rf3+ 26 Kg2 Rf2+ 27 Kg3 Rdf8) 25...bxc5 26 0-0 Re3 27 e6 Rxe4 0-1.

b) 9 Bd5 was introduced in Zeziulkin-Kalesnik, Minsk 1990, and Black went wrong with 9...Bb4+? which is met by 10 c3!. Your choice is between 9...f5 (played by Michael Adams and recommended by Pinski) and 9...Qe7+ (played in a later Zeziulkin game and recommended by Palkövi). The assessment on 5...Ne5 depends on whether White can find promising continuations against **both** of these options. If not, then 5...Ne5 is playable whatever the old books say.

6 exd5 Qe7+!



This check is reckoned to cut across White's attacking plans in the most effective way.

6...Ne5 is the worst of Black's three options. After 7 Qe2 Qe7 8 0-0 Bg4 9 f3 Nxc4 10 Qxc4 Bf5 White improved on old published analysis by 11 Bf4! in Sokolsky-Konstantinopolsky, 1st USSR Corr. Ch. 1948.

Again we have a situation whether the recent authorities do not agree. Pinski says 7 Kf1 is "the only move," whereas Palkövi marks it as dubious. Since they both agree that 7 Kf1 is

somewhat better for Black, let us just take a look at Palkövi's preference.

7 Qe2 Qxe2+

This is Pinski's answer to the Hungarian theoretician's line. Palkövi actually spends more space looking at 7...Nb4 and 7...Na5.

8 Kxe2 Nb4

Not mentioned by Palkövi, who just cites an obscure Greek game with 8...Ne5 as leading to an unclear position after 11 moves.

9 Bb5+

In practice, the line has rarely been played and when it has (not between masters) 9 Bb3 was usually chosen, but in J. Nagy- R. Pastres, Caorle open 1989, White played 9 d6 instead and eventually drew. He was lucky because 9...Nxc2 is probably winning for Black, and even after 9...Bxd6 Black stands better although White can take the f-pawn in two ways.

9...Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Nxd7 "and Black wins a pawn with no hint of serious compensation for White" says Pinski.

LINE B:

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 0-0



Traditionally, castling has been White's most popular choice, although 5 e5 has probably surpassed it in popularity in recent decades.

As I mentioned above, Black now has two distinct options: 5...Nxe4 and 5...Bc5. The choice between them will depend on how well versed Black is in the theory and on his temperament. By 5 0-0 White follows the classic open game principle of bringing the king rapidly to safety and

trying to get the rook into action, but it has several drawbacks. In the 5...Nxe4 line White loses his e-pawn, potentially a weapon, and in the 5...Bc5 line not only does he encounter difficulties in capturing the forward black d-pawn, but it can even happen that the king is not so safe on g1 after all. Complications tend to last to move 20 or beyond after 5...Bc5 whereas 5...Nxe4 tends to lead to exchanges and some simplification.

Jan Pinski seems to share the view that Black has good chances now. He writes on page 113 that at grandmaster level 5 0-0 “is close to being a small mistake... White has no real chances of fighting for an advantage. In fact, there is a real chance White will emerge with a slightly worse position.”

5...Bc5

In view of the more than satisfactory outcome for Black of the alternative, I am not going to give much space to this move. It will be more fun to analyse the Max Lange for its own sake in some future column, without claiming it is best play for either side. Here I shall just show the main line from Pinski.

6 e5

6 c3 leads to lines from the Italian Game (3...Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 0-0) where Black should be fine if he is careful.

6...d5! 7 exf6

It's possibly better for White to transpose into the 5 e5 lines discussed below by 7 Bb5 Nxe4 8 Nxd4.

7...dxc4 8 Re1+ Be6

Pinski thinks this is at least equal for Black because of the strong pawns at d4 and c4, but he reckons 8...Kf8 is risky.

9 Ng5 Qd5

R. Levit's idea 9...Bf8?, which won a famous correspondence game Aldrete-Oim for Black, has since been refuted.



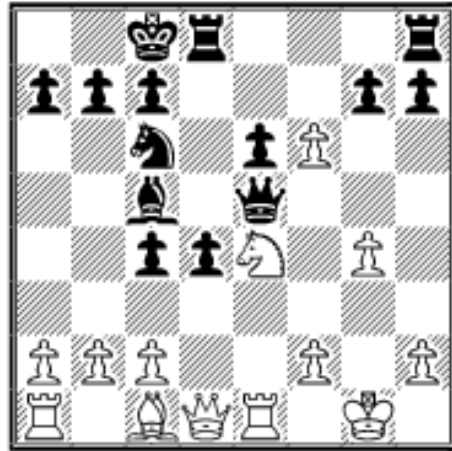
Instead of 10 Rxe6+? fxe6 11 Nxe6 Qxf6!, White should play 10 Qg4! gxf6 11 Nxf7! Kxf7 12 Qxe6+ Kg7 13 Qg4+ (Stronger than 13 Bf4!? or 13 Qxc4 as given by Palkövi) 13...Kf7 14 Qh5+ Kg8 and now:

a) Pinski gives 15 Nd2 “with a fantastic attack,” e.g. 15...Bb4 16 Re4! “and has invested no material for it!!”

b) L. Devocelle – T. Roux, corr France, 2002, went instead 15 Re4 Ne5 16 f4 Nf7 17 Nd2 Qd7 18 Nxc4 f5 19 Ne5

Qe6 20 Re1 c5 21 Bd2 Bg7 22 Nd3 Qd5 23 Re7 Kf8 24 Rae1 Bf6 25 Rc7 1-0.

10 Nc3 Qf5 11 Nce4 0-0-0 12 g4 Qe5 13 Nxe6 fxe6



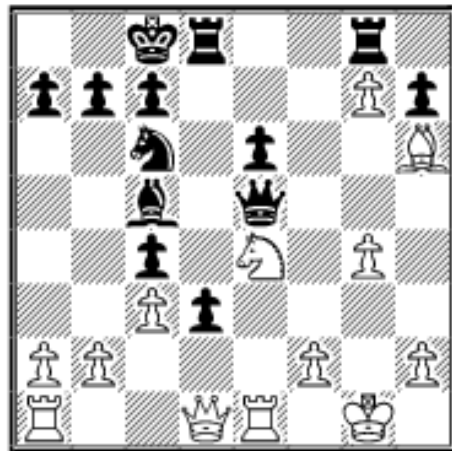
I am not going to try to explain the thinking behind these time-honoured book moves or to consider alternatives. Lots of texts discuss them.

14 Bg5

This move, which surfaced in 1964 in an Indian correspondence game Prasad-Kalyanasundaram, was published in chess columns all around the world. I remember first seeing it in C. H. O'D. Alexander's

column.

The old line was 14 fxg7 Rhg8 15 Bh6 d3! 16 c3.



Now the authorities disagree:

a) Palkövi is doubtful about 16...Be7 because of 17 f4 Qd5 18 Qd2 (Sokolsky) but then Pinski gives 18...Bh4 19 Rc3 Ne7!, "intending ...Qc6 and ...Nd5, and Black is better."

b) Palkövi approves 16...d2! 17 Re2 Rd3. Pinski calls that "highly unclear" because of 18 Nxc5 Qxc5 19 Rxd2 Ne5 20 Rxd3 cxd3 21 Kg2 Qd5+ 22 Kg3 Nf7 23 Qd2

(Radulov-V. Sokolov, Yugoslavia 1961) but then Palkövi gives a long line of analysis starting 23...Qd6+ 24 Kg2 e5 25 g5 Qg6!, aiming to prove equality.

Both authors appear ignorant of a famous English correspondence game J. Moore-Mike Read from 1981, which has been widely published in CC sources, but also in a book by GM John Emms who described it as "a wonderful exhibition." Black played line b) and won fairly convincingly, an opinion supported by some other games. The quality of the pawns is more important than the quantity and the white bishop is not much more than a glorified pawn anyway.

So Pinski is wrong here and the only question is whether after 16...d2 Black wins by force, or can White get a draw.

14...Bb6!

Both Palkövi and Pinski like this move. Black will give up the exchange, after which everything (except material) is in his favour.

15 fxg7 Qxg7 16 Bf6!

Not 16 Bxd8? Rxd8 17 Ng3 d3 (Mills-Mabbs, Southampton 1972).

16...Qf7!?

Another Mike Read idea, mentioned without analysis by Pinski and not at all by Palkövi. 16...Qh6 has also been tried (there's an example in Pinski's book) while Palkövi recommends 16...Qg6.

17 Kg2?!

White should take the h8-rook and admit he stands slightly worse. Now we follow P. Danzanvilliers - Read, corr 1990: 17...d3! 18 c3 Rhf8 19 Bxd8 Nxd8 20 b3 e5? (A mistake that might have cost half a point; Read indicates 20...Qf4! threatening ...Bxf2, and if 21 f3 h5.) 21 bxc4 Qxc4 22 Qb3 Qc6 23 f3 Ne6 24 Rab1 Nf4+ 25 Kh1 d2! 26 Rf1 (26 Nxd2 Nd3 27 Ne4! Nxe1 28 Rxe1 offered good saving chances.) 26...Nd3 27 c4? (Fatal. He should play 27 Qd1 Nf2+ 28 Nxf2 but now Black is winning again.) 27...Nc5 28 Nxc5 Qxc5 29 Qd3 Qd4 30 Qxh7 Qxc4 31 Qe7 Qf4 32 Kg2 Rd8 33 Qe6+ Kb8 34 h4 a6! 35 Qg6 Qc4 36 Rbd1 Qe2+ 37 Kh1 Rd4 38 h5 e4! 39 Qf5 e3 40 Rg1 Qxd1 41 Rxd1 e2 42 Qb1 Ba5!! 0-1.

LINE C:

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 0-0 Nxe4



Nigel Davies gives this capture an exclamation mark and says nothing about 5...Bc5. Pinski gives 5...Nxe4 an exclamation mark, saying it is the safest and most popular response, but admits that Black also has some nice ideas in the Max Lange.

6 Re1

Alternatives here and next move may be fun to analyse or try in blitz, but they are

almost certainly unsound.

6...d5 7 Bxd5

This is only a pseudo-sacrifice as becomes clear after the next move.

7...Qxd5 8 Nc3



Since the knight cannot be taken without losing the queen, Black must move her away and allow the e4-knight to be captured. But where should her ladyship go?

8...Qh5!

This is the move played in Davies's model game. In my early chess-playing days, 8...Qa5 was by far the most popular choice, with 8...Qd8 also considered

playable. However, the latter move is not entirely safe for Black, in view of 9 Rxe4+ Be7 10 Nxd4 f5 11 Bh6!, which is analysed in my book *64 Great Chess Games* in connection with the correspondence game Zavanelli-Canibal, 1999, won by White. Objectively Black should probably be able to hold the balance, but practically speaking he makes his life much more difficult with 8...Qd8.

I see that 30 years ago, when I wrote *The Italian Game* for Batsford, with George Botterill, 8...Qh5 was reckoned unsatisfactory, but I wrote in the margin of my copy "deserves more attention" after some analysis by Zak appeared in the book *Improve Your Chess Results*.

Pinski, too, likes 8...Qh5. He gives it an exclamation mark and calls it "generally underestimated," saying that the queen looks very naturally placed

on the kingside, and the reason for its neglect (he thinks) is that 8...Qa5 equalises easily without traps.

Indeed after 8...Qa5 9 Nxe4 Be6 Black really only needs to know two variations (since 10 Bg5? just loses a tempo after 10...h6), and these are:

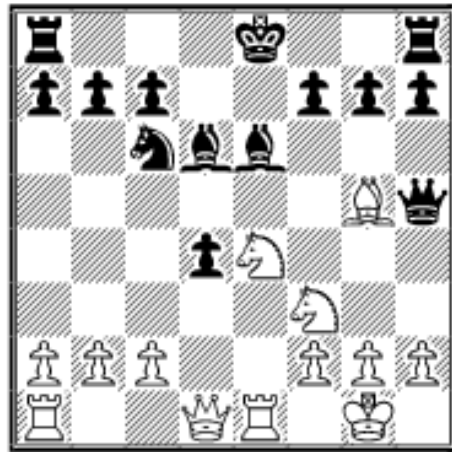
a) 10 Neg5 0-0-0 11 Nxe6 fxe6 12 Rxe6 Bd6= as is well known from countless games, and 12...Qf5 is also playable, I think.

b) 10 Bd2 always used to be answered sharply by 10...Bb4, but Black also has safe replies in 10...Qf5 and 10...Qd5 and I once lost a game against the double-edged 10...Qa4!?!; take your pick. It's clear that Black is not short of ideas in the 5...Nxe4 variations.

9 Nxe4 Be6 10 Bg5

Exchanging queens by 10 Nxd4 doesn't offer White anything except a grinding endgame where (in Palkövi's opinion) Black even has the edge.

10...Bd6!



This move was Zak's improvement. The older move 10...Bb4 leads to an equal game too, most likely, e.g.:

a) 11 c3 dxc3 12 bxc3 Ba5 13 h4 (the line given for White in *The Italian Game*) was improved for Black with 13...Qg4! in Yudasin-Plisetsky, USSR 1979. If instead 13 Nc5? 0-0 14 Nxe6 fxe6 15 Rxe6 Rxf3 is good for Black (Zak) and Palkövi considers 13 Qc1 (Kamsky-Kupreichik, Palma 1989) is also too slow.

b) 11 Nxd4 Qxd1 12 Rxd1 is sounder for White, but not a serious winning try for him. The point of 10...Bd6 is that it's a winning try for Black!

11 c4

The main point of 10...Bd6 is revealed in the variation 11 Bf6? Bxh2+! 12 Nxh2 Qxd1 13 Raxd1 gxf6 14 Nxf6+ Kf8!, where Black wins a pawn.

11...0-0 12 c5 Be5 13 Nxe5 Qxd1 14 Raxd1 Nxe5 15 Rxd4 Nc6!=

Davies claims Black can get an advantage, with this move, as played by

Smirin against the computer program Deep Junior in 2002, instead of 15...f6 (Sveshnikov-Bezgodov, St. Petersburg 1994) as given by Pinski and Palkövi. In that game White missed a chance at move 19 to establish a rook on the 7th rank: 16 Bf4 Bxa2 17 Nc3 Bf7 18 Bxe5 fxe5 and now 19 Rd7 c6 20 Rxe5 b6 21 h3 (Lukacs in *ChessBase Magazine* #105).

Lukacs analyses the game J. Friedel-A. Onischuk, USA ch, San Diego 2004, where Black eventually won, but both sides missed some improvements. Friedel played 16 Rd3 instead of the computer's move 16 Ra4. Lukacs' assessment at move 15, that "White has no advantage at all," is perhaps more realistic than claiming an edge for the second player, but at any rate I think we have seen enough to realise that 5 0-0 is not a strong move and so White must go for 5 e5.

LINE D:

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5

To give all the possibilities from this position would take several columns so I shall just be selective.

5...d5

This is the regular move, but Nigel Davies makes a fair case for 5...Ne4, and even 5...Ng4 is not easy to refute. Pinski calls 5...d5 "a good but perhaps too well-travelled road."

There are three main lines after the move 5...Ne4:



a) 6 Qe2 Nc5 7 0-0 and now instead of 7...Be7, Davies prefers 7...Ne6!, when White is already perhaps wondering if his gambit is going to become a permanent sacrifice. Then if 8 Rd1 d5 9 Bb5 (Mikhalchishin) 9...Bc5 10 c3 Bd7 11 Bxc6 Bxc6 12 cxd4 Bb6 13 Nc3 0-0 and the line needs testing as both authors hint.

b) 6 Bd5 Nc5 7 0-0 (7 Bxc6 helps Black, while if 7 c3!? dxc3 8 Nxc3 Davies gives 8...Be7 and Pinski even suggests

8...Nb4!?) 7...Be7 8 Qe2 0-0 9 Rd1 Qe8! and chances seem about equal.

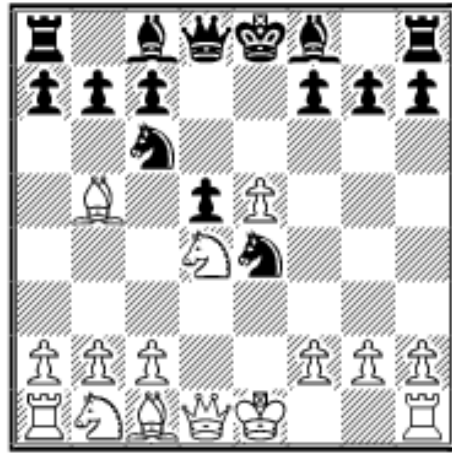
c) 6 0-0 d5 (6...Be7!? is also playable.) 7 exd6 Nxd6 8 Bd5 Nf5 9 Re1+ Be7 10 Bxc6+ bxc6 11 g4 Nh6! occurred in one of my postal games several years ago. I was following a recommendation in *Nunn's Chess Openings*. My

opponent didn't play well and soon lost, so while I thought Black's position rather ugly it did seem effective.

The signs are that 5...Ne4 is reliable, but some of the variations are nebulous, compared with the more concrete play arising in the 5 0-0 lines and after 5 e5 d5, where you can sometimes be in the book up to move 20 or thereabouts. It partly depends what you prefer. If you like to reach uncharted territory early, then 5...Ne4 may be the move for you.

Now we return to 5...d5.

6 Bb5 Ne4 7 Nxd4



In this position, White has a direct tactical threat on c6, but often his aims are more positional: to cripple Black's queenside structure by doubling the c-pawn, and then to blockade the dark squares, controlling d4 and c5, which can lead later to an endgame advantage or even a kingside attack. However, if Black can lift the blockade things can turn nasty for White. The black knight on e4 is sometimes kicked by f2-f3 and then f3-f4 may follow, but there are some lines

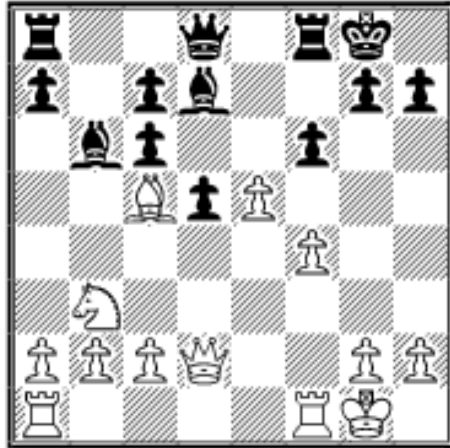
where Black can get a kingside attack.

7...Bc5

This dynamic move suits modern tastes better than the older 7...Bd7, but tactical awareness and some theoretical knowledge is needed to get away with it.

7...Bd7 makes it easier for White to set up the queenside grip, which should yield some advantage with correct play, but Black can keep this to manageable proportions. After 8 Bxc6 bxc6 9 0-0 Bc5! (Others definitely are too passive and give White good chances.) A postal game Harding – Brandhorst (Ireland-USA friendly match 1999) went 10 f3 Ng5 11 Be3 0-0 (This position can also arise via 7...Bc5 8 Be3 Bd7 9 Bxc6 bxc6 if White plays 10 0-0 instead of 10 Nd2 discussed below) 10...0-0 (instead of 10...Bb6) 11 f3 Ng5 12 f4 Ne4 (With the same position that can arise via 11 f4 Ne4 12 Be3 0-0, but Black hasn't played the more critical ...Bb6) 13 Nd2 Nxd2 (I had expected 13...f6) 14 Qxd2 f6 (14...Bb6!?) 15 Nb3 (As recommended in most books. I forgot to check my own 1996 Chess Digest book, which he was maybe intending to improve upon? There I wrote 15 Rfe1!? fxe5 16 fxe5 Bb6 17 e6 Bc8 18 Nxc6 Qd6 (Belinkov-Donchenko,

Moscow 1963) and now 19 Qxd5! (Estrin) ensures that White wins a pawn thanks to the N fork on e7.) 15...Bb6 16 Bc5.



This is supposedly an edge to White (e.g. *NCO*), but this game doesn't really support that assessment. This looks like the kind of position White is aiming for. There are many examples in the database showing Black is lucky if he gets a draw from here, but they are not from high-level contests. However, Brandhorst seems to find the right plan for Black.

16...Re8 17 Rae1 Bf5 18 Qc3 (18 Bxb6 has been played in several games but looks illogical.) 18...fxe5 19 Rxe5 Qf6 20 a4 a5 21 Rfe1 Be4 22 Rxe8+ Rxe8 23 Qxf6 gxf6 24 c3 Kf7 25 Bd4 Ke6 26 Nc5+ Kf5 27 g3 Rb8 28 Re2 h5 29 Kf2 h4 30 b4 Draw agreed.

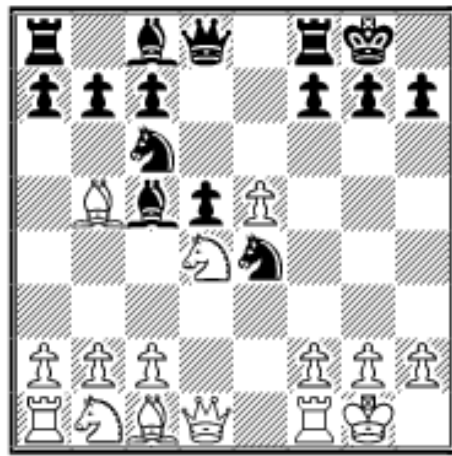
Now we return to the more popular 7...Bc5.



8 Be3

This is usually played nowadays. Capturing on c6 is close to being a blunder: 8 Nxc6?! Bxf2+ 9 Kf1 Qh4! (e.g. 10 Nd4 c6 11 Nf3 Ng3+ with huge complications) is the Keidanz Variation, which Pinski seems to think may be navigable for White. There does seem to be a route to a draw by perpetual check, but I wouldn't recommend trying this in practice as it's too easy to get confused.

After 8 0-0 Black can offer a pawn sacrifice by 8...0-0! (instead of 8...Bd7 9 Bxc6 bxc6 transposing to 7...Bd7) with an interesting position.



Now:

a) 9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 Nxc6 Qd7! 11 Nd4 Qe7 12 Bf4 f6! and now:

a1) White must avoid both 13 Nb3? Bxf2+! and 13 exf6?! Qxf6 14 Be3 Ba6.

a2) Palkövi doesn't mention 13 Be3 but Pinski calls it "virtually the only move," following Rogers-Wong Chee Chung, Singapore 1998. He finds one safe reply

for Black, viz. 13...Bxd4 14 Qxd4 Qxe5 15 Rd1 Qxd4 16 Rxd4 Be6, and one promising try for advantage, namely 13...Bb7!? as given in *ECO*.

a3) 13 e6 Bxe6 is condemned for White in the books, which mention only 14 c3 and 14 Nxe6, but White has a better move: 14 Nc3! Nxc3 15 bxc3 Rfe8 (15...Rae8 may be slightly better) 16 Re1 Qd7 17 Nxe6 Rxe6 18 Rxe6 Qxe6 19 Bxc7 Re8 (White's extra doubled pawn is meaningless; the game is completely equal.) 20 Bg3 d4 21 cxd4 Bxd4 22 Rc1 Bb2 and draw agreed (Radjabov-Maitreya, 4th Gameknot expert tournament, corr 2002).

b) Some books (e.g. Pinski's) advise White not to go in for 9 Nxc6?!, but Palkövi claims that the knight capture is correct and the bishop capture a mistake. After 9...bxc6 10 Bxc6 Ba6! the main line is 11 Qd5! Bxf1 12 Qxc4 Bb5! 13 Nc3 Bxc6 14 Qxc6 Bd4 15 Bf4 when Palkövi himself found 15...Rb8! for Black, advising 16 Rb1 (16 Rd1? Rxb2!) 16...Qe8 17 Qxc7! Qe6 leading to equality. However, Pinski suggests 16...Qh4! 17 Bg3 Qg5 "and White has problems even maintaining equality."

8...Bd7

Of course, 8...Bxd4 is legal, but on principle White should have some advantage. Why bring out the aggressive dark squared bishop early, just to swap it off?

Instead, 8...0-0 is interesting but almost certainly unsound: 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Bxc5 Nxc5 11 Bxc6 Ba6 12 Qxd5? Qg5! 13 f4 (He also loses after 13 Bxa8 Qc1+ 14 Qd1 Qxb2 15 f4 Rxa8!) 13...Qxf4 14 Qxc5 Qc1+ 15 Kf2 Qxh1 16 Bxa8 Rxa8 17 Qc6 Qf1+ 18 Kg3 Rd8 19 Qxc7 Qe1+ 20 Kh3 Bc8+ 21 g4 Qe3+ 22 Kg2 Qd4 0-1.

White should have played Estrin's 12 Nc3!, as given by Palkövi, after which the main line runs 12...d4! 13 Bxa8 (Maciejewski-Bielczyk, Poland 1974) and nobody has yet found a good continuation for Black.

9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 Nd2!



This move became popular in the 1980s and looked dangerous at first.

The old line was 10 0-0 Qe7! and Black is fine, e.g. 11 Re1 0-0 12 f3 Ng5 13 Qd2 f6 14 c3 (Better 14 Nc3) 14...h6 15 h4 fxe5 16 hxg5 exd4 17 cxd4 Bd6 18 Bf4 Qxe1+! 19 Qxe1 Bxf4 20 gxh6 Rae8 21 h7+ Kh8 22 Qa5 Be3+ 23 Kh2 Re6 24 Qxa7 Rh6+ 25 Kg3 Rf4! 26 Qb8+ Kxh7 27 Qd8 Rg6+ 28 Kh2 Bf2 29 Qxd7 Rh4+ 30 Qh3 Rxh3+ 31 gxh3 Rg1 32 a4 Bxd4

0-1 N. Chomejko – A. Schurov, Ukraine corr 1998-99.

10...Qh4

This “looks strongest” says Pinski, and Palkövi also considers it is a reasonable choice.

Black has also tried 10...Qe7 (met by 11 Nxe4 dxe4 12 e6 with favourable, if messy, complications for White), 10...Nxd2 11 Qxd2 0-0 13 0-0! (a long-term edge for White) and 10...Ng5 11 c3!; see the theory books for more details. In each case Pinski thinks White has the edge.

11 Nxe4

11 N4f3 is a sharper possibility, but Pinski does not trust it and recommends 11...Qe7 12 Bxc5 Nxc5 13 0-0 Rb8!, causing problems about the white b-pawn.

11...Qxe4 12 0-0 Bb6

This seems to be played most often as it puts the bishop on a square where it is guarded. Not 12...Qxe5? 13 Re1 0-0 14 Nxc6 Bxc6 15 Bxc5.

Pinski writes that “After 12...0-0?! 13 Re1! Qg6 14 Ne6 Bxe6 15 Bxc5 White has a big advantage and his bishop is much more active.” However, a game between two of America’s strongest postal players soon ended in a draw: 15...Rfe8 (instead of 15...Rfb8 16 b3 Bh3 17 Qf3 Bf5 18 Qc3! Be4 19 f3 Bxc2 20 e6! Kurajica-Smejkal, Novi Sad 1982) 16 Re3 Bf5 17 c4 Qe6 18 Qa4 Reb8 19 b3 dxc4 20 Qxc4 Qxc4 21 bxc4 Rb2 22 Ra3 Rc2 ½-½ R. Potter-K. Dolgitser, 7th CCLA ch. 1992.

13 Re1 Qg6



A critical position for the variation. Pinski gives the game Kristensen-Hebden, Kopavogur 1994, which White lost after making some horrible positional errors, starting with 14 a4 a5 15 Ra3?, instead of which 15 Nb3 (or 14 Nb3 0-0 15 a4) seems to be the way to go.

The best, and almost only, practical example is **14 Nb3 0-0 15 Bc5 Rfe8 16 a4!?** (Palkövi suggested 16 Re3 with an edge to White.) **16...Bf5** (16...a5 keeps the tension – Pinski.) **17 Rc1 Rab8 18 Re3** (In Kotronias-Yilmaz, Pucarevo 1987, White repaired his opponent's pawn structure by 18 Bxb6? and deservedly lost in the end.) **18...Bxc5 19 Nxc5 Rxb2 20 Qd4! Rxc2 21 Rxc2 Bxc2 22 h3** (22 a5!? Palkövi) **22...a5 23 Kh2 Bf5 24 Rg3 Qh6 25 f4** with (as Pinski says) a strong initiative and a position that Nimzowitsch would be proud of. N. Doghri-T. Matsuo, Yerevan ol 1996, ended **25...g6 26 Nb3 Ra8 27 Rc3 Qh4 28 Rxc6 Rb8 29 Nxa5 Qe1 30 Rc5 Be4 31 e6 c6 32 Nxc6 Re8 33 Ne7+ Kf8 34 Rc8 1-0**.

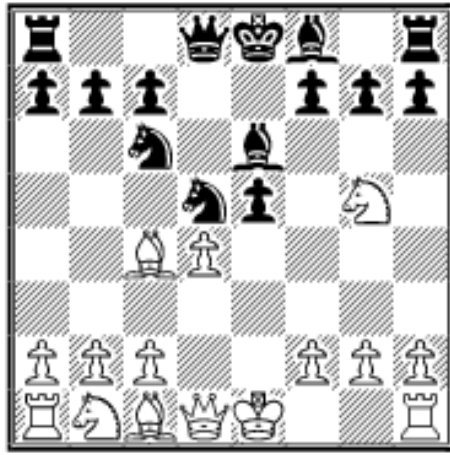
More analysis and practical tests are needed.

This concludes my new look at the Two Knights, and in one of next year's earlier articles (maybe March) I shall look at 3...Bc5 again.

I want to mention two responses to the last [column](#):

GM Karsten Müller, from **Germany**, wrote to say:

“Maarten de Zeeuw's fresh look at (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5) 5...Nxd5?! in the Two Knight's Defence (*New in Chess Yearbook* #76, p.145-150) is really revealing, but I strongly doubt that after 6 d4 his recommendation 6...Be6!? is sufficient for equality.



After 7 0-0 Nxd4 8 Nxe6 fxe6 9 Qh5+ g6 10 Qxe5 Qf6 11 Qxf6 Nxf6 White can simply play 12 Bd3 which gives him a slight, but long term advantage due to his pair of bishops and better pawn structure, e.g. 12...0-0-0 13 Nc3 Bg7 14 Bg5 and White is for choice.”

Another reader claimed I made an “annoying little mistake which, unfortunately, has been made before,” i.e. I committed the “sin” of mentioning the

name Wilkes-Barre in connection with the Traxler Variation, 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 Bc5. Of course I used the correct name, Traxler, several times but the fact remains that there is a minority of players (in North America and elsewhere in the English-speaking world) who still think of this variation as the Wilkes-Barre. For their sake, I mentioned that name (just once, and in parentheses). I don’t accept it is a mistake to do so.

David McAlister, from **North Ireland**, has supplied me with a correspondence game won by Ken Whyld. Here it is, from *Chess*, Volume 14 Number 166-8 (a Triple Number for July, August, September 1949) at page 223. Included are the notes given in the magazine –David says it is unclear whether these are Whyld’s own annotations.

Ken Whyld – J. E. Capstick

Postal Chess Club Major B corr, 1949

French Defence [C02]

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Qg4 Nge7 6 Bg5 Qb6 7 b3 cxd4 8 Nf3 h5 9 Qg3 Nf5 10 Qf4 dxc3 11 Bd3

11 Nxc3 will not do because of 11...Bb4.

11...Nb4

White is now in difficulties and decides, as he must lose the exchange, to recover his pawns with an improved position.

12 Bxf5 exf5 13 0-0 Nc2 14 Nxc3 Nxa1 15 Nxd5 Qc5

If 15...Qa5 16 Qc4. If 15...Qc6 16 Ne3.

16 Rd1 Be6 17 Qa4+ 1-0.

If 17...b5 18 Qxb5+! or if 17...Qc6 18 Qxc6+ etc., while if 17...Bd7 18 Nf6+.

Finally, I wish all readers a Happy Christmas and successful New Year.

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