

Dejan Antic and Branimir Maksimovic

The Modern French

A Complete Guide for Black

New In Chess 2012

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Foreword

An important question that all chess players have to answer is how to select the right openings for their repertoire. This book examines the pros and cons of one of the richest openings you can ever play, the French Defence.

The French Defence combines subtle strategic ideas with tactical motifs. After the introductory opening moves, it is clear that his relative lack of space is something that Black will have to deal with. He compensates for this by undermining White's central pawns. The position is delicately balanced, and a slight error by either White or Black is often all it takes to end up in major trouble.

As evidenced by multitudes of games, a lack of understanding of the key strategic ideas can easily lead to a swift collapse of the black position. Likewise, we have seen countless brilliant victories by leaders of the black pieces. Once you master the secrets of the French Defence you will have a powerful weapon at your disposal, offering strong counterplay and plenty of winning chances.

Still, for most players the opening of choice against 1.e4 remains the Sicilian Defence. Does the Sicilian ultimately offer the best chances for Black? This is a matter of opinion, but what we do know for certain is that in French Defence battles many more subtleties lie hidden under the surface, requiring a deeper understanding and a more strategic approach compared to the typically straightforward Sicilian plans.

The French has been an integral part of many top players' repertoires, and it was the key weapon in the hands of old masters such as Botvinnik and contemporary stars such as Carlsen and Morozevich. When you look at their tournament results, it becomes clear that they choose the French Defence in important games, when they need to secure a win with the black pieces.

Over the intensive two-year effort of writing this book, the aim of the authors has been to present you with more than the traditional bone-dry analysis of all possible variations. To this aim, apart from explaining the essential strategies and plans pertinent to this opening, we also cover a multitude of complex plans and theoretical novelties as part of our new strategic approach.

All the popular and topical variations are covered in detail. We have omitted some rarely-seen sidelines such as 2.b3 or 2.f4 that are of little value, and pose no threat to Black. Through the extensive analysis of strategic plans from the basic to the most complex, we aim to address the needs of players ranging from the ranks of chess enthusiasts up to the level of professional grandmasters.

For example, the **King's Indian Attack** with 2.d3 has always been a weapon of choice of white players who want to avoid theoretical duels. We are offering an array of excellent possibilities that are on Black's disposal.

In the **Exchange Variation**, a seemingly drawish and symmetrical system, we have analysed a line with a very active approach for Black.

The **Advance Variation** is becoming increasingly popular thanks to the new ideas implemented by Grischuk, Movsesian, and of course Sveshnikov. Therefore, we have dedicated lots of space to an investigation of 5...♙d7, instead of the 'standard' 5...♗b6, which seems slightly shaken after the efforts of the above-mentioned aces.

In the **Tarrasch Variation** we propose Morozevich's line 3...♙e7. Although 3...c5 is more common in the tournament arena, we believe that Morozevich's idea offers lots of scope for exploring new possibilities.

In the **Steinitz Variation** we have devoted equal attention to the lines 7...♙e7 and 7...a6, as these two share some frequent strategic plans for the further course of the game. These lines are the most popular with black players and we believe that our contribution, filled with new ideas, cements their reputation as the best responses in the given position.

We are particularly proud of the ideas we have developed in the **McCutcheon Variation**. We believe that 4...♙b4 is a dynamic move in the full spirit of the French Defence. It is not our intention to downgrade the value of 4...dxe4, with which Black goes for a certain amount of simplification. But perhaps this is a good place to quote our older colleague grandmaster Vladimir Raicevic, a great expert on the French Defence, who once said: "The key to a successful French Defence is in holding the pawn on d5 and not giving way in the centre!"

Through the extensive analysis of strategic plans, from the basics to the most complex, we have aimed to address the needs of players from the ranks of chess enthusiasts up to the level of professional grandmaster.

We'd like to relay an anecdote that took place while we were working on the book. After receiving the materials and going through them, one of the translators was so taken by what he saw that he exclaimed, "This is so incredibly well-explained that I cannot wait to start playing the French Defence!"

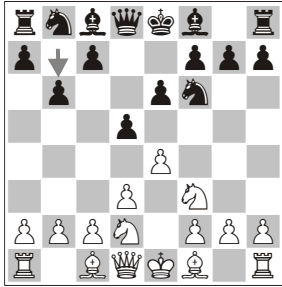
At a time when commercial aspects dominate the chess books publishing industry, the authors' primary aim has been to give you an evergreen work of art which at the same time will make you enjoy better winning chances as Black than ever before.

We thank all the people who have generously helped in the creation of this book: translators International Master Dr. Aleksandar Davidovic and Goran Urošević, the editor of the Chessdom website, and the New in Chess editors for their active support and participation.

April 2012,
Dejan Antic
Branimir Maksimovic

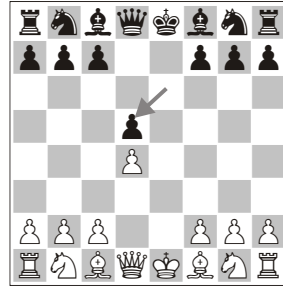
Your French Repertoire in a Bird's-Eye View

King's Indian Attack



1.e4 e6 2.d3 d5 3.♘d2 ♗f6 4.♘gf3 b6

The Exchange Variation



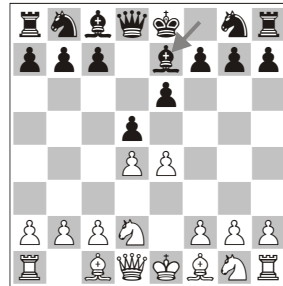
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5

The Advance Variation



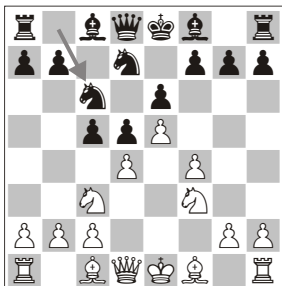
3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♗c6 5.♗f3 ♖d7

The Tarrasch Variation



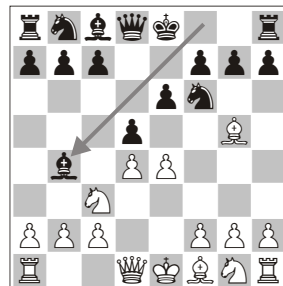
3.♗d2 ♖e7

The Steinitz Variation



3.♗c3 ♗f6 4.e5 ♗fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♗f3 ♗c6

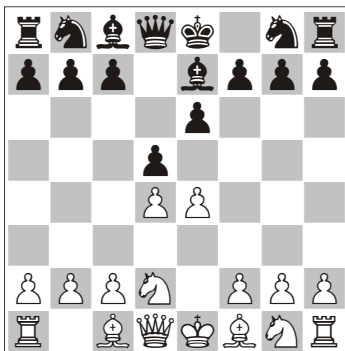
The McCutcheon Variation



3.♗c3 ♗f6 4.♗g5 ♖b4

Chapter 4 – The Tarrasch Variation

1.e2-e4 e7-e6 2.d2-d4 d7-d5 3.♖b1-d2 ♘f8-e7



The most frequent and best responses to the Tarrasch Variation 3.♘d2 are 3...♗f6 and 3...c5, which do not commit the black bishop to e7, but the text aims to transpose into one of these positions.

The basic idea is that White's next move cannot meet the needs of both systems, so Black can choose the most appropriate continuation. For example, with the natural 4.♗gf3, White has lost the possibility of the ideal knight set-up with ♗ge2 and ♗df3, which occurs in the Tarrasch Variation with 3.♘d2 ♗f6, while 4.♙d3 or 4.c3 do not fit into the main variation of the Tarrasch with 3.♘d2 c5.

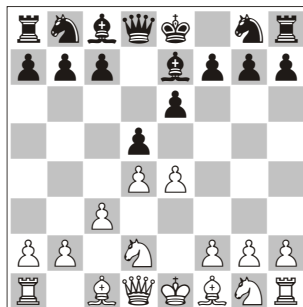
The main disadvantage of this development lies in the early commitment of the black bishop and additional opportunities for White to play 4.e5 and try to take advantage of the difficult development of Black's kingside.

White has four important choices on move 4:

- 4.c3 (see p.149)
- 4.♙d3 (see p.152)
- 4.e5 (see p.185)
- 4.♗gf3 (see p.195)

● 4.c3

This calm move gives White less chances in the struggle for the advantage.



4...c5!

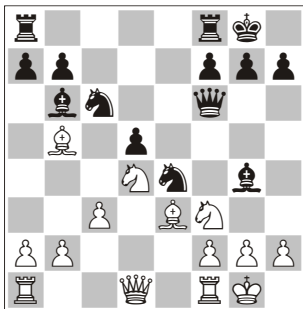
The Modern French

Black takes play into a system with ...c5, where White's tepid fourth move is less effective. Of course it is possible to transpose into the Rubinstein system with 4...dxe4, but that is another story. 5.dxc5 5.e5 transposes into 4.e5. 5...♙xc5 6.♘b3 ♙b6 7.exd5 exd5 8.♘f3 ♘f6



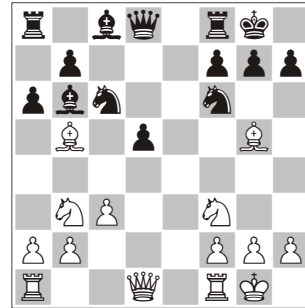
Now White usually selects one of three squares for his bishop:

A) 9.♙b5+ ♘c6 10.0-0 Nothing comes from 10.♙e2+ ♘e4 11.♘fd4 0-0 12.0-0 ♙d7, and White has put his queen on the e-file without any necessity. 10...0-0 11.♙g5 11...♙f4?! is a routine move that quickly gives Black the initiative: 11...♘e4 12.♘bd4 ♙f6 13.♙e3 ♙c7 (logical and better is 13...♙g4!N



14.♙e2 ♙fe8 15.♙e1 ♙ad8 when it is obvious that the initiative is on Black's side) 14.♙c2 a6 15.♙d3 ♙e8 16.♙fe1

with play for both sides in Boronyak-Berczes, Zalakaros 2008. 11...a6!

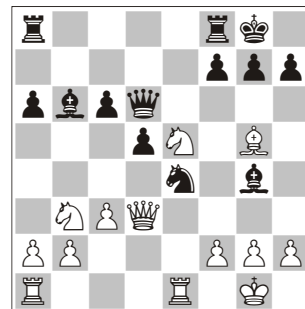


An important move for continuing the typical play with ...h7-h6, ...g7-g5 and ...♘e4. After the immediate 11...h6?! 12.♙xf6 ♙xf6 13.♙xd5 Black does not have enough compensation for the pawn.

A1) 12.♙xc6 bxc6 13.♙e1 ♙g4 14.♙d3 ♙d6 15.♘e5 (15.c4 ♙fe8). and now:

A11) One practical example saw 15...♙h5?! 16.♙e3 (16.♙xf6!? ♙xf6 (16...gxf6?? 17.♙g3+-) 17.♘d4± c5? 18.♘d7+-) 16...♙xe3 17.♙xe3 ♙fe8 18.f3?! (18.♙c5!±) 18...a5? (18...♘d7! 19.f4 f6 20.♙h3 fxe5) 19.♙e2? (19.♙c5!± – both opponents persistently ignore the important strategic square c5) 19...a4+ Strikovic-Arsovic, Vrnjacka Banja 2010.

A12) But Black also has 15...♘e4!

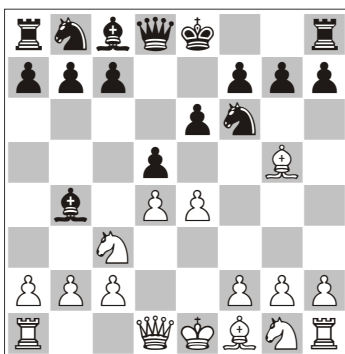


Chapter 6 – The McCutcheon Variation

1.e2-e4 e7-e6 2.d2-d4 d7-d5 3.♘b1-c3 ♞g8-f6 4.♙c1-g5

The most popular continuation for White. He still doesn't want to determine the central structure, but instead develops a piece while pinning the black knight. The advance e4-e5 or the exchange exd5 now looks more dangerous. Black can choose between three solid lines that lead into three entirely different types of position: 4...dxe4, trading the dangerous e-pawn, the classical 4...♙e7, or 4...♙b4, which is also the basis of our repertoire.

4...♙f8-b4

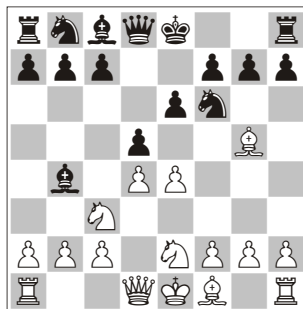


The move famously named after John Lindsay McCutcheon (1857-1905). The basic idea behind the system is active play on the queenside and in the centre. This counterplay should compensate for White's kingside activity and it can turn out to be very dangerous and even devastating, because Black is not only playing against the pawn structure, but also against the king stuck in the centre.

We will examine:

- 5.♘e2 (see p.297)
- 5.♙d3 (see p.298)
- 5.exd5 (see p.299)
- the main move 5.e5 (see p.301)

● 5.♘e2



5...h6!? Taking advantage of White's lack of ambition to slip in this little move that forces a useful exchange. 5...dxe4 also leads to equality: 6.a3 ♖e7 7.♙xf6 ♙xf6 8.♗xe4 0-0 9.♚d3 (9.♚d2 e5!?= 10.0-0-0 exd4 11.♗xf6+ ♚xf6 12.♚xd4 ♗d7 13.♗c3 ♚xd4 14.♚xd4 ♗f6 15.♙c4 ½-½ Di Berardino-Ikonnikov, Hoogeveen 2008) 9...e5=. **6.♙xf6 ♚xf6 7.a3 ♙a5** and now:

A) **8.exd5 0-0** 8...exd5? 9.b4 ♙b6 10.♗xd5±. **9.♚d2 ♚d8 10.dxe6N** 10.♚f4=. **10...♙xe6 11.♚e3 ♗c6 12.0-0-0 ♙xc3 13.♗xc3** Ruining the pawn structure in order to keep the extra material with 13.bxc3?! leads White into an inferior position: 13...♙c4 14.♗g3 ♗a5! Simple and strong! Black takes the important c4-square into possession. 15.♚e5 ♚xe5 16.dxe5 ♚xd1+ 17.♗xd1 ♙xf1 18.♚xf1 ♚d8+ 19.♗c1 ♗c4 20.♚e1 ♚d5 21.e6 fxe6 22.♚xe6 ♗xa3 23.♚e7 ♚c5 24.♗e4 ♚c6 25.♗b2 ♗c4+ 26.♗b3 ♗f8 27.♚d7 a5♞. **13...♗xd4 14.♙d3 c5 15.♚d2 15.♚e4 ♙f5 16.♚xb7?** (16.♚f4 g5 17.♚g3 ♚g6 18.♙xf5 ♚xf5=) 16...♙xd3 17.♚xd3 ♚xf2-+. **15...b6** ½-½ Mamedov-Antic, Kavala 2010;

B) **8.b4 ♙b6 9.e5 ♚e7 10.♗a4 ♙d7** and now:

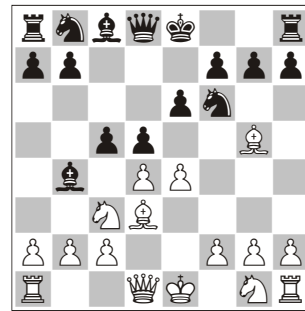
B1) **11.♗xb6?!** There is no greater gift for a rook than an open file. **12...axb6 12.♗f4?** 12.c3 c5 with an excellent position: 13.g3 0-0=. **12...♚xa3!♞** 0-1 (40) Paveliev-R. Bagirov, Moscow 2008 – a sample of the tactical blow facilitated with the opening of the a-file;

B2) **11.c3 0-0 12.♗b2** Black also enjoys fine play after 12.♗f4 ♙xa4 13.♚xa4 ♗d7 (finishing the development and planning to open the f-file

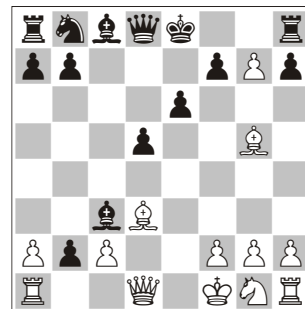
next) 14.♙d3 g5 15.♗h5 f6 16.♗xf6+ ♗xf6 17.exf6 ♚xf6 (17...♚xf6 18.0-0 c6 19.♚ae1 ♚ae8= 20.♚e5 ♙c7 21.♚e3) 18.0-0 ♚af8 19.♚ae1 c6= Jacobs-Jones, ICCF corr 2000. **12...a5** It is more effective to immediately open the f-file because the king is still in the centre: 12...f6! 13.♗d3 ♗c6♞ and Black is clearly better. **13.♗d3 ♙b5 14.♗ef4 ♗d7 15.h4 ♚a7 16.♚c1 axb4 17.axb4 ♚fa8♞**, Saptarshi-Sengupta, New Delhi 2010;

B3) **11.♗c5?!** Black obtains the better pawn structure on the kingside **11...♙xc5 12.bxc5 0-0♞** followed by ...b7-b6! or ...f7-f6!.

● **5.♙d3 c5!**

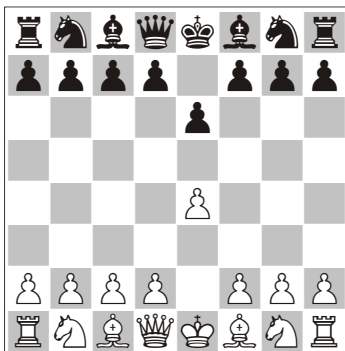


Using the pin against the knight and lack of support for the d4 pawn to immediately strike in the centre. **6.e5 cxd4 7.exf6** 7.a3 dxc3 8.axb4 cxb2 9.♚b1 h6 10.exf6 hxg5 11.fxg7 ♚g8♞. **7...dxc3 8.fgx7 cxb2+ 9.♗f1 ♙c3!**



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French Defence 1.e4 e6



King's Indian Attack 2.d3 d5



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Advance Variation 3.e5 c5 4.c3



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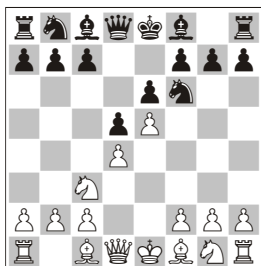
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Tarrasch Variation 3.♘d2 ♙e7



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