THE NEW WINAWER REPORT

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Two Side Lines

Oscar awards favour films that premiere at the end of the year: Academy voters prefer films that are fresh in their minds, and a picture may be judged as soon as the credits roll, if not sooner.

It's a very different matter to judge a new chess book, especially a new book on openings. Any thorough treatment must now account for a vast trove of material, and—since the days are long gone when a book could merely recite known analysis—authors must innovate and improve over previous authors, all of whom had the same engines and databases.

Emanuel Berg's *The French Defence Volume 2*, devoted entirely to 7 ♕g4, appeared in December. It's immensely detailed and thought-provoking, and would surely have been shortlisted for Book-of-the-Year given more time.
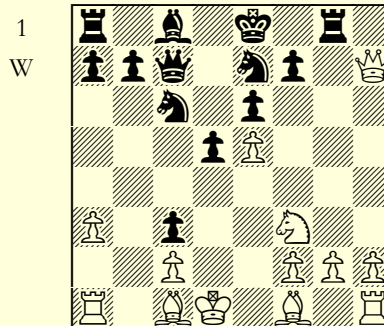
This issue considers two side lines covered by Berg and by Watson's also-outstanding *Play the French, 4th edition.* They're right that Black's fine in each case. Though neither book gives the strongest continuations …

✳   ✳   ✳

Euwe variation: 12 ♗f4? and 12 h4!?

In Euwe's variation (*1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♘e7 7 ♕g4 ♕c7 8 ♕xg7 ♖g8 9 ♕xh7 cxd4 10 ♔d1!? ♘bc6 11 ♘f3 dxc3* **(1)**), the main line 12 ♘g5 introduces very sharp play but it now appears that Black gains equal chances with 12 … ♘xe5, after either 13 f4 f6! or 13 ♗f4 ♕b6!.

This is far from the only line, though, and in particular White may shore up e5 or g5 to suppress Black's defences. The most critical tries are 12 ♗f4 and 12 h4.

1 W

A: 12 ♗f4?

White protects e5 before embarking on ♘g5. The idea is plausible enough and 12 ♗f4 has from time to time been given as best: '!' Ivkov *ECO-81 p. 107*, Nesis & Blekhtsin *TF p. 104*, and Minev *NFI-2 p. 301*. But a tempo is too high a price to pay and the line is actually bad.

A1: (*from* **(1)**) 12 ♗f4? ♗d7

The older continuation, not bad though not enough to force an advantage.

<div align="center">13 ♘g5</div>

13 ♗g3? 0-0-0 14 ♗d3 is 'a very solid continuation, unjustly neglected' according to Moles *MLW p. 46*, based on **Kuijpers–Padevsky, Alekhine Mem, Moscow 1963**: 14 … ♕b6 15 ♔e2 (± Botterill *The New Chess Player 7/331*; 'about equal' Watson *PtF-1 p. 151*) 15 … ♘f5 16 ♖hb1 ♘cd4+ 17 ♔f1 ♘xg3+ 18 hxg3 ♕c5 19 ♕h4 ♘xf3 20 gxf3 ♖h8 21 ♕b4= (0-1, 40).
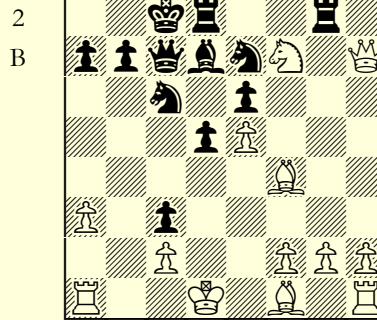
But Black may improve via 17 … ♕c5! N, holding the WQ out of the game a little longer, with the immediate threat … ♘xg3+ and … ♖h8∓, e.g. 18 ♘xd4 ♘xg3+! 19 hxg3 ♕xd4 20 ♕h5 (*20 ♖e1 ♖h8*) 20 … f5 21 exf6 ♕xf6∓. Comparatively best is 17 ♘xd4 ♘xg3+ 18 ♔e3 ♕c7! 19 f4 ♕c5∓.

<div align="center">13 …   0-0-0</div>
<div align="center">14 ♘xf7 (2)</div>

And now:

a) **14 … ♖df8** 15 ♗d3? ♔b8 16 g3 ♗e8 17 ♘d6 (*17 ♘h6, 'probably best'* Malinin, is met by *17 … ♖xf4! ∓∓*) 17 … ♗g6∓ **Malinin–Lavrentyev, ¼-final 18th USSR corr Ch 1983-85** (0-1, 54) *Shakhmaty 1987 no. 17, p. 12 (Malinin)*.

Instead 15 ♖b1 is essential. After 15

<div align="center">2
B</div>

… ♘f5 **Thipsay–Levitt, British Ch, Edinburgh 1985** *Informator 40/(370)* continued 16 ♘d6+?! ♘xd6 17 exd6 ♕d8 18 ♗g3 e5 (⊜ Korchnoi *C18-19 p. 62*) 19 ♕d3? (*19 ♖b5∓*) 19 … d4 20 ♗e2 ♕g5, with … ♗f5 to follow: ⊜ per the Informator editors but already ∓ (though ½-½, 32). Better 16 ♗h6!. **Wockenfuss–Hohm, M/1115 corr 1985**, proceeded 16 … ♘xe5? 17 ♗xf8 ♖xf8 18 ♘xe5 ♕xe5 19 ♖xb7 ♕d4+? (but *19 … ♔xb7 20 ♕xd7+* is also difficult for Black, perhaps lost) 20 ♗d3± and 1-0, 43. Black should play 16 … ♖e8 followed by … ♘ce7 and … ♕c5, ∞/=.

b) **14 … ♕b6**, ('∓' Moles based on the game below, '∞' Botterill) 15 ♘xd8 ♕d4+? 16 ♕d3 ♕xf4 17 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 18 ♕xc3 ♕xf2 led to a quick Black win in **Moe–Holm, training game, Denmark 1970** (0-1, 23), but simply ♖b1-b3, ♕e3 and a gradual unwinding must be ±, as attested by several examples.

Black must play 15 … ♖xd8!, as in **Miralles Fraile–Comas Andreu, Spanish corr (III CEAPE) 1991**: 16 ♕d3 ♕b2 17 ♖c1 ♕xa3?! 18 ♕b5? ♘a5∓ (0-1, 23). Better 18 ♖b1=, but earlier Black can improve with 17 … ♖f8! N∓, with

the difference that 18 g3 Qxa3 19 Rb1 Nb4 20 Bc1 Nxd3! is now winning.

Best is 16 Be3 Qb2 17 Rc1 Nf5 18 Bg5 Qb6 19 Ke1 Rf8, with full compensation but no more, ∞/=.

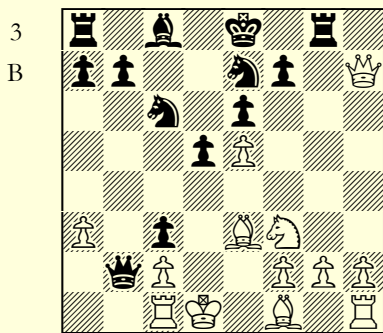### A2: (*from* (1)) 12 Bf4? Qb6!

Suggested by Flórián *Informator 7/212*, introduced by Botterill and pioneered by Watson, and now usually preferred.

13 Be3

'! □' Faragó. Instead 13 Ke1 and 13 Bg3 are weaker: cf. Watson *PtF-4 p. 254* and Berg *pp. 41-43*.

Not 13 Ng5?? Qd4+ 0-1, **Gudyev–Herbrechtsmeier, von Massow Mem corr 1988**. An important point! Black does not have to hurry to prepare castling.

13 … Qb2

14 Rc1(3) Bd7

Here Watson gives only 14 … Qxa3 '!', continuing 15 Rb1 b6 16 Bb5 Bb7∓. Berg *pp. 43-44* extends this line significantly, concluding with equality.

Watson's '!' implies a problem with theory's former standard 14 … Bd7, which was his own previous recommendation *PtF-2 p. 156*. What could this be?

White has several approaches:

a) **15 h4** ('?' Korchnoi) and now **Steil–Faragó, Budapest 1986** *Informator 42/365 (Faragó)* continued 15 … 0-0-0 16 Bd3 Nf5 17 Bxf5 exf5 18 Qxf7 Rgf8 19 Qg6 d4 20 Bg5 d3 21 cxd3 Ne7∓ and 0-1, 25. Faragó gives 17 Bg5 '!' Rh8 '!' (∓) but 17 … Rdf8 18 Qh5 Qxa3∓∓, **Bowie-Reed–Salter, NATT04-9 corr 1995** (0-1, 25), is more straightforward.

b) **15 Bd3** 0-0-0 16 Ke2 d4 '∞' Korchnoi. Better 15 … Qxa3, e.g. 16 Ke2 d4 17 Bg5 Qc5∓.

c) **15 Ng5**, when Maddex's 15 … Rf8 (Schiller *FWPP p. 20*, Watson *PtF-2 p. 156*) may be met by 16 Bc5!=. Better 15 … Nxe5! 16 f4 0-0-0!!∓∓ (*17 fxe5 Nf5*).

d) **15 Bc5** (best) 15 … 0-0-0 16 Qxf7 (*16 Qd3? Nf5∓ 17 g3? Rg4∓∓* and 0-1, 24, **Bauer–Schmidt, E. German Youth League 1988** (in no database)) 16 … Nf5 17 Bd3, and now **Crespo–Veen, ½-final-01 19th World corr Ch 1991-94** continued 17 … Rde8? 18 Ke2 Nd8 19 Qxe8 (*19 Qxg8 Rxg8 20 Rb1±*) 19 … Bxe8 20 Rb1= and ½-½, 54. Better 17 … Rxg2! N, e.g. 18 Bxf5 (*18 Ke2 Rg4 19 Rb1 Re4+∓∓*) 18 … Qb5! 19 Bh3 Qxc5 20 Bxg2 Qxf2∓ or 19 Bd6 Qb6 20 Bd3 Rxf2 21 Qf4 Rh8∞/∓.

So 14 … Bd7! leads to a significant advantage for Black, and 12 Bf4? is poor.

B1: 12 h4!? Qb6

The thematic … Qb6 has less point if the white QB has not moved. **Mestel–Short, Hastings 1983-84** showcases an ideal outcome for White: 13 Be3 d4? 14 Bg5 Bd7 (*14 … Qb2 15 Rc1 Qxa3 16 Nxd4± or 16 h5±*) 15 Bd3 0-0-0 16 Ke2 Qc5 17 Rhb1 a6 18 Qe4± and 1-0, 64. Better 13 … Qb2, reaching Steil-Faragó with h4 added, ∞/=.

For 13 Ke1 Bd7, see B2.

B2: 12 h4!? Bd7

These moves fit any approach but White must now choose between the immediate Ng5 and a more measured buildup.
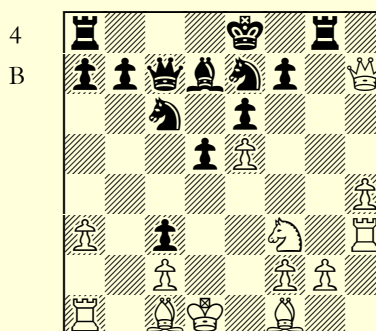
a) **13 Ng5?!** favours White after 13 … Nxe5?! 14 Bf4 f6 15 Bxe5! N fxe5 16 Qf7+ Kd8 17 Rb1 or 13 … 0-0-0?! 14 Nxf7 Rdf8 15 Rb1 N Nf5 16 Bh6!.

The flaw is 13 … Rf8! 14 f4 (when Euwe, in the original 10 Kd1 article *Archives, Serial no. 1, Openings 8d, 15 July 1952,* thought 'Black has not the least counterplay') 14 … Nf5! as in **Davies–Watson, Manchester 1978**. Berg *p. 38*, with new analysis, evaluates this as ∓.

b) White would like to emulate Mestel-Short, with for example Bg5-f6, Rb1-b3, Qd3, Nd4 and h5. But this is quite difficult to arrange. Berg *pp. 38-39* considers 13 Bg5?! Qb6! 14 Ke1 Qb2 15 Rd1 0-0-0 16 Qd3 Qxa3 17 Rb1 Rxg5!∓; cf. also 12 Rb1 Bd7 13 Bg5 0-0-0 14 Qd3 Rxg5! (∓) *p. 39*.

The recent game **A. Krzyżanowski–Hengl, EU/M/WS/035 ICCF corr 2011** provides the idea, not considered by Berg or Watson, of **13 Rh3!?(4)**.

After 13 … 0-0-0 14 Bg5 (actual move order Bg5, h4, Rh3) 14 … Qb6 15 Qd3 Kb8 16 Ke1 Rc8 17 Qxc3 d4 18 Qb3± White built up an advantage (½-½, 50). And 15 … Qb2?! 16 Rc1 Qxa3 17 Nd4± also gives White an appreciable edge.

After 13 … Qb6! 14 Ke1 0-0-0 15 Qd3 (it's better to leave the QB on c1 for now) 15 … Rg4 16 Qxc3 Black has compensation, ∞/=. This is still the best of White's 12th move choices. ▶

GMR-2   BERG, Emanuel, *The French Defence 2* (Grandmaster Repertoire 15). Glasgow: Quality Chess 2013. ISBN-13: 978-1-907982-43-9.

C18-19   KORCHNOI, Victor, *C18-19 French Defence*. Nicosia: S. I. Chess Informant 1993. No ISBN.

ECO-81   MATANOVIĆ, Aleksandr (editor-in-chief), *Encyclopedia of Chess Openings C: 1. e4 e6; 1 e4 e5*. New edition. Belgrade: Šahovski Informator 1981. ISBN-10: 0-7134-2697-7.

NFI-2   MINEV, Nikolay, *French Defense 2: New and Forgotten Ideas*. Davenport, Ia.: Thinker's Press 1998. ISBN-10: 0-938650-92-0.

MLW   MOLES, John L., *The French Defence Main Line Winawer*. London: Batsford 1975. ISBN-10: 0-7134-2921-6.

TF   NESIS, Gennady, & BLEKHSTIN, Igor, *Tactics in the French*. (Tr.: Malcolm Gesthuysen.) London: Batsford 1993. ISBN-10: 0-7134-7209-X.

FWPP   SCHILLER, Eric, *French Winawer Poisoned Pawn*. Coraopolis, Pa.: Chess Enterprises 1988. ISBN-10: 0-931462-74-6.

PtF-2   WATSON, John L., *Play the French* (New [2nd] edition). London: Cadogan Books 1996. ISBN-10: 1-85744-101-X.

PtF-4   —, *Play the French* (4th edition). London: Gloucester (Everyman) 2012. ISBN-13: 978-1-85744-680-7.