

1 Introduction

Hello. As I try to make master, I am formalizing my black repertoire. This is my notes and analysis, and I hope it helpful to you.

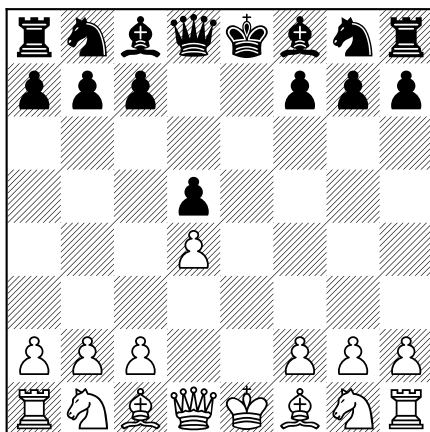
Most of the lines are fairly combative, except in the Steinitz where white can force a very early repetition with Na4- Nc3.

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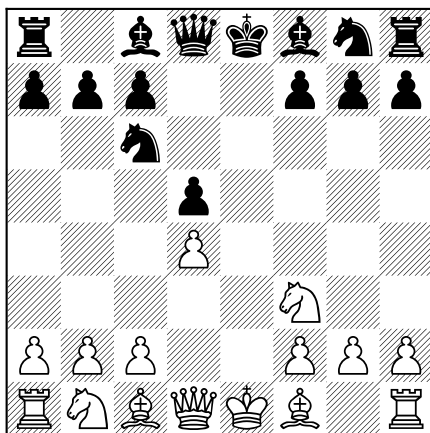
2 Exchange Variation

The Exchange French has a few different move orders, but the main one is
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5



White has a few different options here, but there are only two kinds of approaches: white plays for c4, or white plays without c4.

4 ♖f3 The most common move in the position. The best scoring move and the one I recommend is **4... ♜c6**.



Black wants to play Bd6, Nge7, Bf5, and Nxf5. However, if black starts with Bd6 then white can play **5 c4**, when black is no longer able to play **5... ♜b4+** in one move. So **5... ♜c6** is like a waiting move.

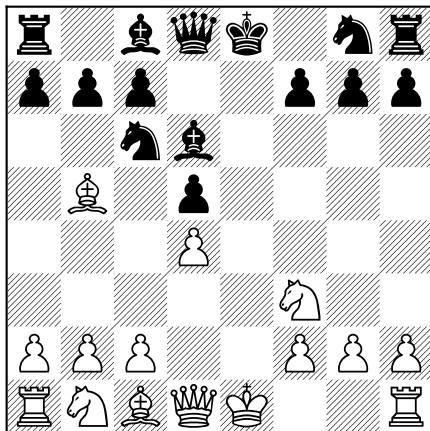
White can play **5 ♜b5**, **5 ♜d3**, **5 ♜f4**, or **5 ♜c3**

2.1 5. Bb5

5 ♖b5:

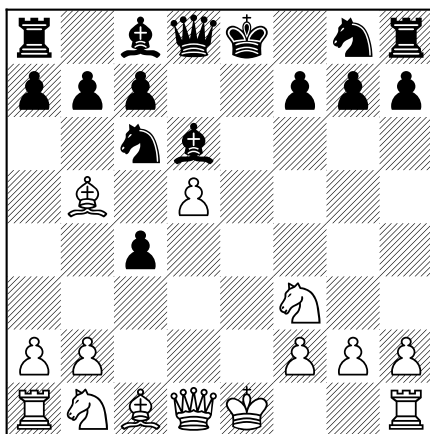
White prepares to castle and pins the c6 knight. Black should do likewise and prioritize castling.

5... ♜d6



This is the best move, preparing Nge7. White's only try is

6 c4!? dxc4 7 d5

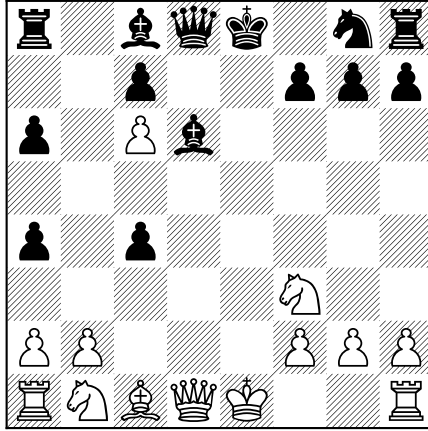


Of course black should play 7... a6

if 8 ♖xc4 then 8... ♚e7+ when black either trades queens or plays Ne5.

Back to the mainline:

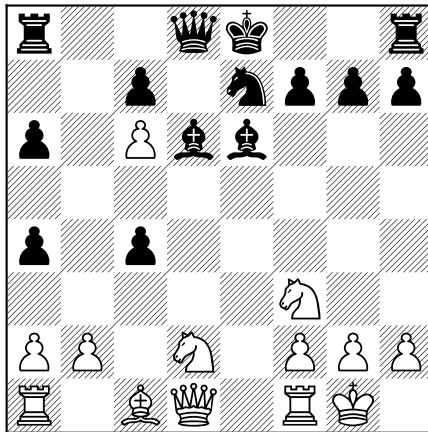
8 ♖a4 b5 9 dxc6 bxa4



Here if 10 ♖xa4?! black is better with 10... ♖e7+ 11 ♙e3 ♙c5 12 O-O ♙x3

Back to the mainline:

10 O-O ♘ge7 11 ♘bd2 hits c4 11... ♙e6 Defends c4



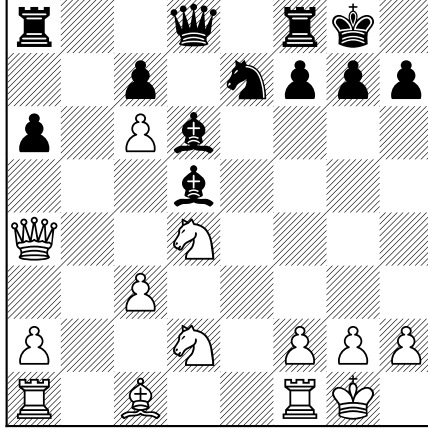
12 ♖xa4 c3!

12... ♙d5 planning 13... ♙xc6 is the more popular line, but white is slightly better there. It is better to throw in c3 and only then play Bd5.

13 bxc3 ♙d5 14 ♘d4 O-O

Here 15 c4?! is the most popular move.

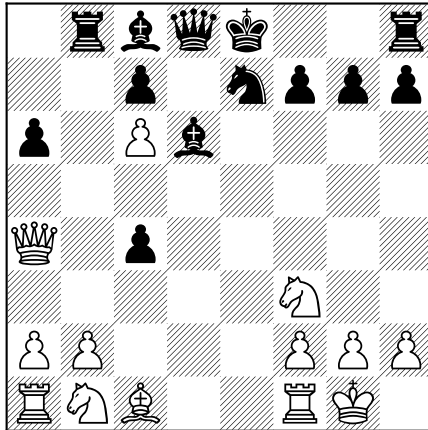
But black is better with:



15... ♖xc6 16 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 17 ♜xc6?? ♜f6! And the dual threats of Bxh2+ and Qxa1 mean black is winning.

13 ♗e4 is also met by 13... ♖d5

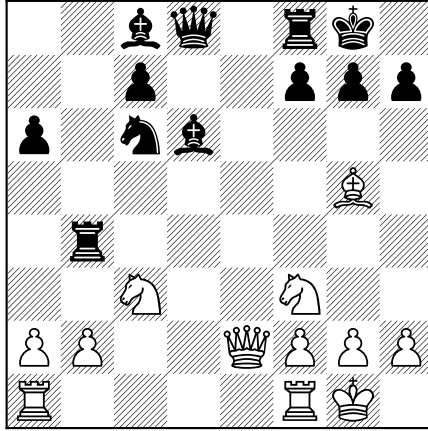
11 ♜xa4 ♜b8 I think 11... O-O will transpose



2.1.1 12. Qxc4?!

The most popular move on lichess, but it gives black good development.

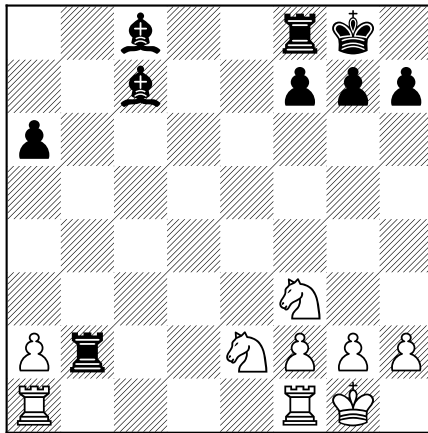
12 ♜xc4?! O-O 13 ♗c3?! ♜b4 14 ♜e2 ♗xc6 15 ♖g5



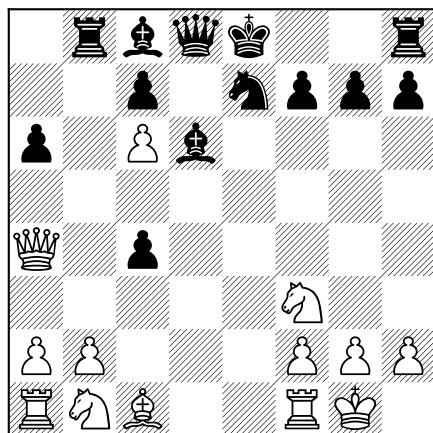
Here black has only played 15...f6? on lichess. But black can get a sizeable advantage (-1.1) with 15...Qd4!

Of course black has a strong initiative if 16 Qxd4 ♖xg5

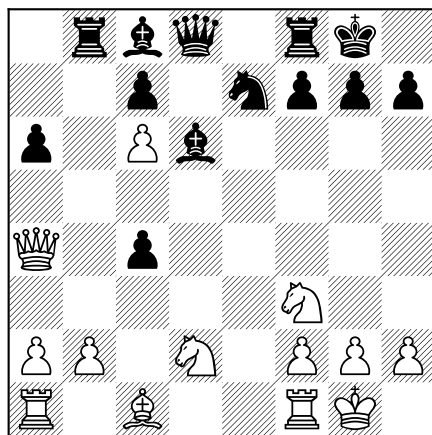
Instead: 16 ♗xd8 ♖xe2+ 17 ♖xe2 ♜xb2 18 ♗xc7 ♗xc7



2.1.2 12. Nbd2



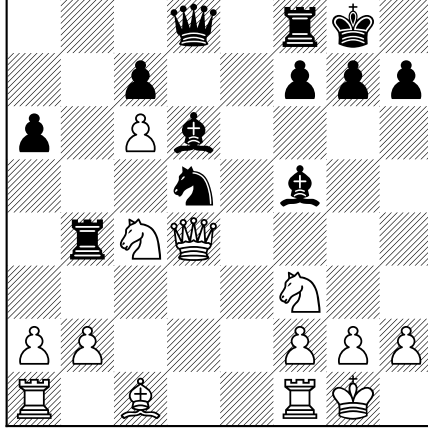
12 Nbd2 O-O Aiming to recapture on c4 with the knight.



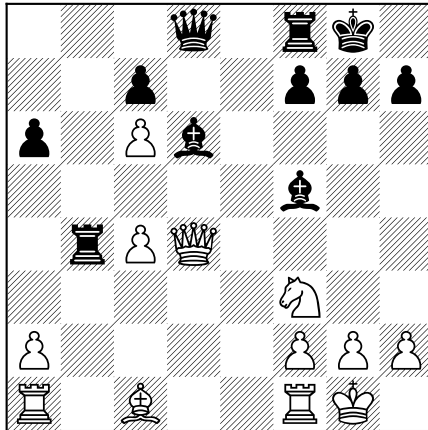
Here if **13 a3** then black can take on c6 with **13... Le6** **14 Nxc4 Ld5** and **16... Lxc6**

Back to the mainline: **13 Nxc4 Bb4** **14 Qc2 Lf5** White can blunder the exchange here with **15 Qe2?? Ld3!**

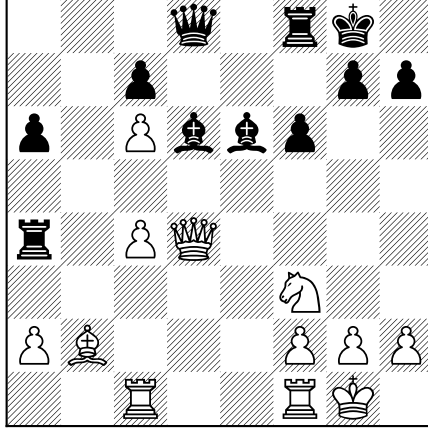
Instead of that, better is **15 Qc3 Nd5** **16 Qd4**



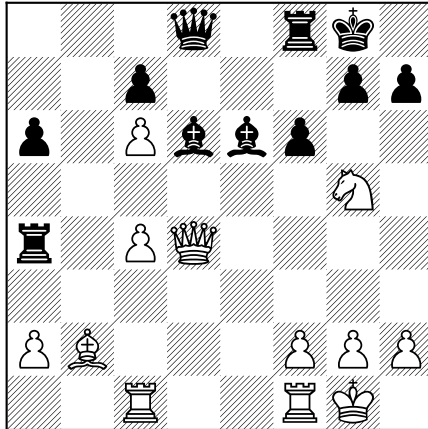
The easiest way for equality is for black to trade the c4 knight
16... ♞b6 17 b3 ♞xc4 18 bxc4



Here **18... ♞d3!?** is possible, with the familiar idea of **19 ♚xd3??, ♜xh2+**
 But I prefer **18... ♞e6** There is only one critical line: **19 ♞b2 f6 20 ♞ac1 ♞a4**



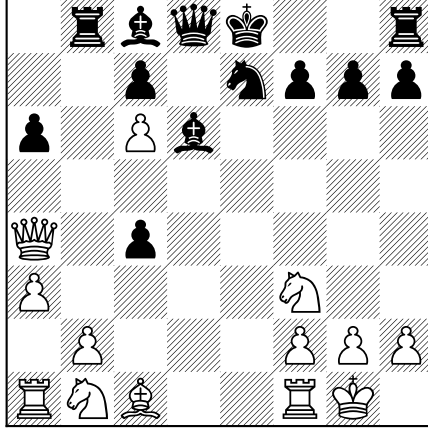
Here if **21 ♖fd1 ♜e7** is fine for black
The critical move is **21 ♘g5!**



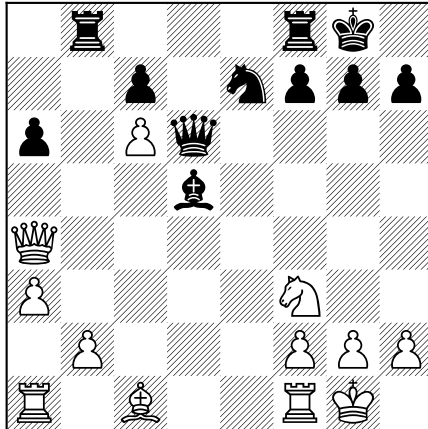
21... ♙xh2+! 22 ♜xh2 ♜xh2 23 ♙xh2 ♜xh2 with an equal ending.

2.1.3 12. a3

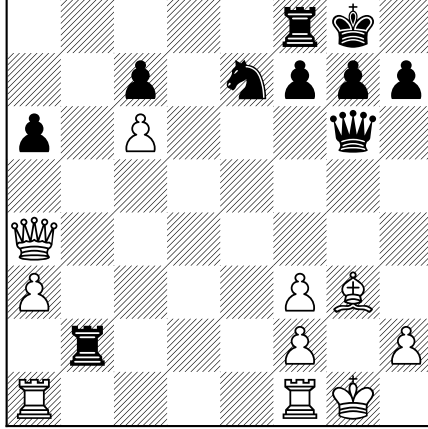
White forcibly prevents Rb4



12... O-O 13 Qbd2 Re6 14 Qxc4 Rd5 This idea again, going for Bxc6
15 Qxd6 Rxd6

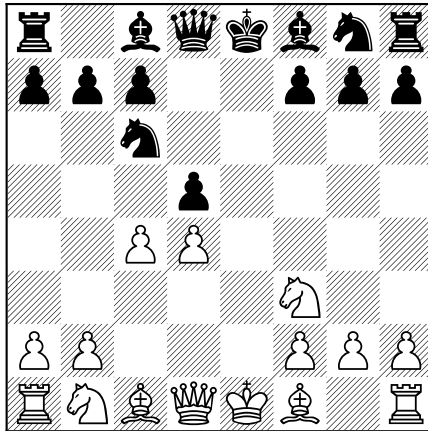


White has several moves, but I think they can all be met with Qg6. For
example: 16 Bf4 Rg6 17 Bg3 Bxf3 18 gxf3 Rxb2 and black is slightly
better with 19... Qf5 in the air



2.2 Exchange French with c4

Of all the exchange french lines, this is the most interesting one.

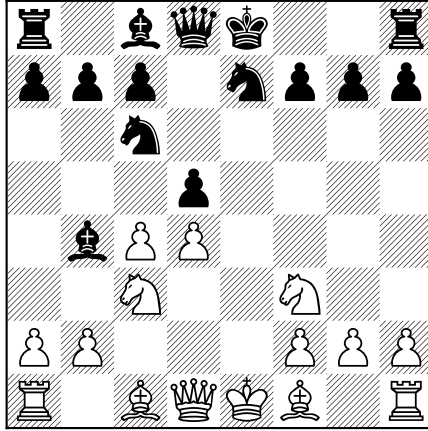


5... ♖b4+

2.2.1 6. Nc3

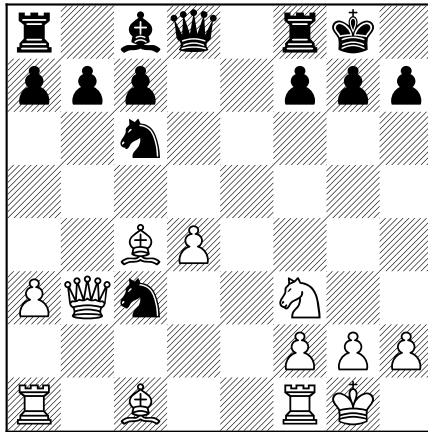
At high depths (50), Nge7 is slightly better than Nf6. It is also more popular

6... ♖ge7

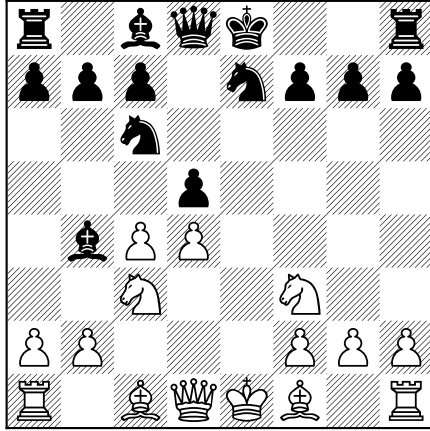


White has a wide choice on move 6. Let's cover Be2/Bd3, a3, and c5

7 a3 ♙xc3+ 8 bxc3 O-O 9 ♙e2 dxc4 10 ♙xc4 ♘d5 11 O-O ♘xc3 12 ♙b3?!



12... ♘e4 13 ♖e1? ♘a5! 14 ♙c2 ♘xc4 15 ♙xc4 ♘d6 and black is up a clean pawn



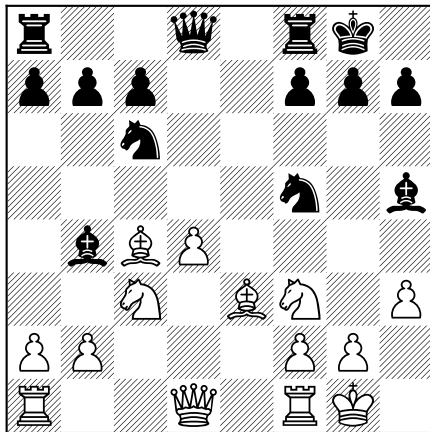
7 **♖e2 dxc4** The capture has to be played at some point anyways, and doing it now means Be2 and Bd3 will transpose immediately

8 **♖xc4 O-O** White can try 9 **h3** but black is fine with either 9...**♗d5** or 9...**♗f5**

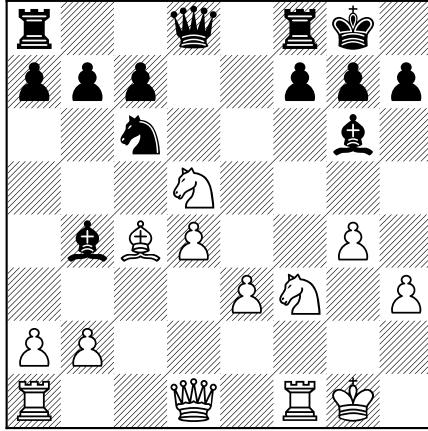
9 **O-O ♗g4** black threatens the d4 pawn. If 10 **d5?? ♗e5** is good for black, he wins the d5 pawn.

Most popular is 10 **♖e3** when 10...**♗f5** 11 **h3 ♗h5!** keeping the tension scores 65% for black on lichess.

I will show the full line because there is a tactic at the end for black to win, although without it he is also fine

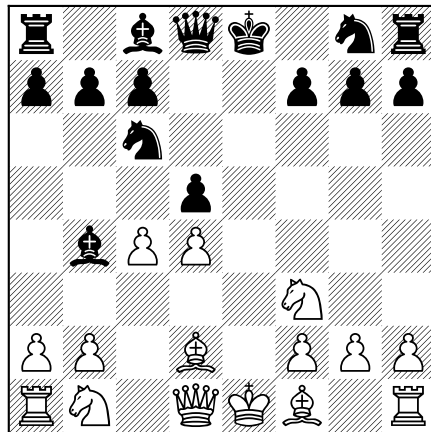


12 **g4 ♗xe3** 13 **fxe3 ♗g6** 14 **♗d5**



14... ♖a5! and black is winning (attack on c4 and d5)

2.2.2 7. Bd2

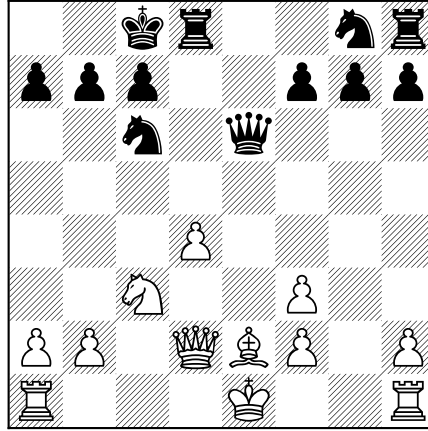


6... ♗d2 7 ♖xd2 ♗g4!

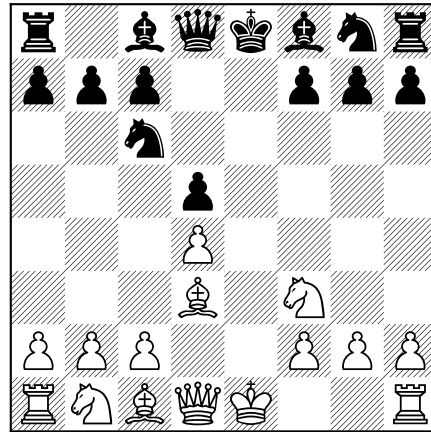
If 8 ♗e2 then 8... dxc4 is good for black

The more difficult move is

8 cxd5 ♖xd5 9 ♖c3 ♖e6+ 10 ♗e2 ♗xf3 11 gxf3 O-O-O



2.3 Popular 5. Bd3



White plays in the most natural and boring way. Black's plan is to play Nge7, Bf5, and Nce7.

5...d6 6 O-O dge7

White has several options on move 7.

7 c3 f5 8 fxf5 gxf5

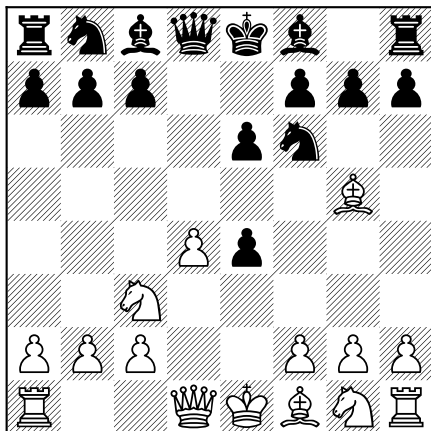
9 Bb3!? b6 10 Bb5 Bd7 11 Re1+ dce7=

9 Re1+ dce7 10 g5 f6 11 h4 g5 12 g3 gxg3 13 hxg3 Bd7 14 dbd2 O-O-O

3 Burn

I tried to make the classical variation work, but I felt like white was better in every line. The Alekhine-Chatard is pretty fun for black though.

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 ♜f6 4 ♗g5 dxe4



5 f3? ♗b4! 6 fxe4 h6 7 ♗xf6 ♜xf6 8 ♜f3 c5! and black is better
5 ♜xe4 ♜bd7

White has many options. I will start with only Nf3, but if I find some alternative to be difficult I will add it.

6 ♜f3 h6

3.1 7. Nxf6+

Almost exclusively played in the master database.

3.2 7. Bxf6

The most popular move in the lichess player database

3.3 7. Bh4 Be7

Still a popular move.

8 ♜xf6+ ♗xf6

If 9 ♗g3 then 9...c5 is fine for black

9 ♗xf6 ♜xf6

10 ♗d3 c5 Black has no issues

10 ♜d2 O-O 11 O-O-O e5 Black would like to play Bf5 and be equal.

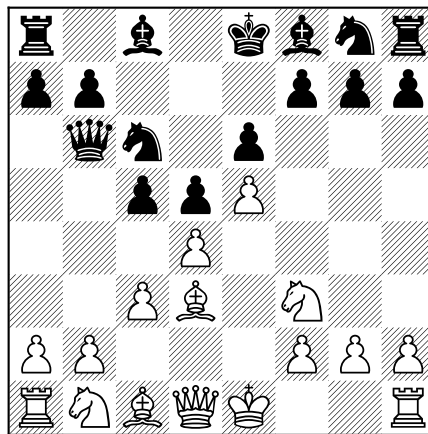
White has a bit more activity in the ending,

3.4 6. Bd3

4 Steinitz

5 Milner-Barry Gambit

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♚b6 6 ♗d3



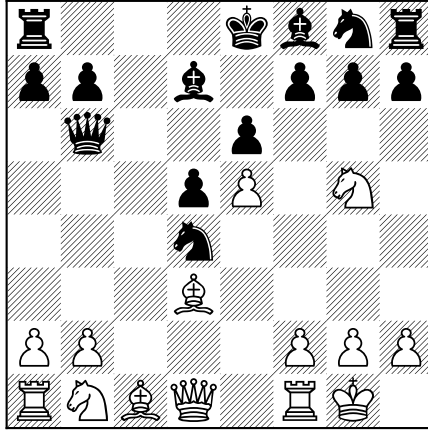
The starting position of the Milner Barry Gambit. A popular option against the French, white gets good development and central control in exchange for a pawn.

5.1 8. cxd4 Nxd4 mainline

6...cxd4 7 O-O ♗d7 8 cxd4 ♘xd4

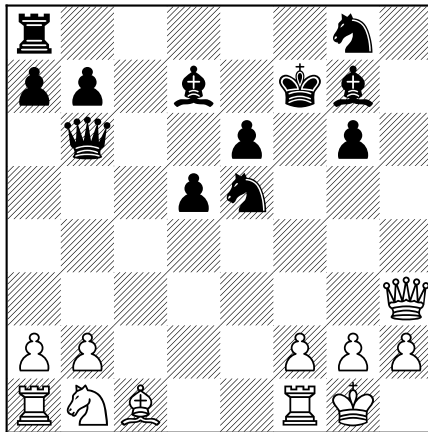
5.1.1 9. Ng5?!

9 ♘g5



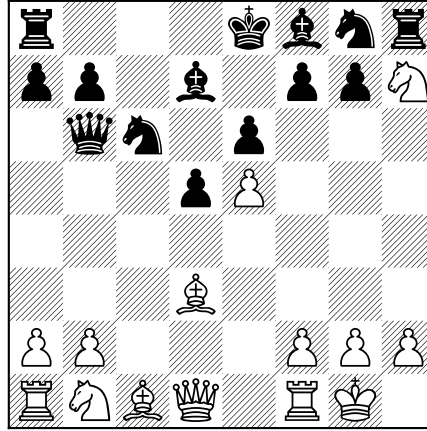
White makes the dual threats of $Nxf7$ / $Nxh7$. But there is nothing to worry about. The best move is **9... Qc6**, attacking the e5 pawn

10. $Nxf7$ 10 $Qxf7??$ $Qxf7$ 11 $Qh5+$ $g6$ 12 $Qxg6+$ $h\times g6$ 13 $Q\times h8$ $Qg7$
 14 $Qh3$ $Q\times e5$



and black is winning (-6)

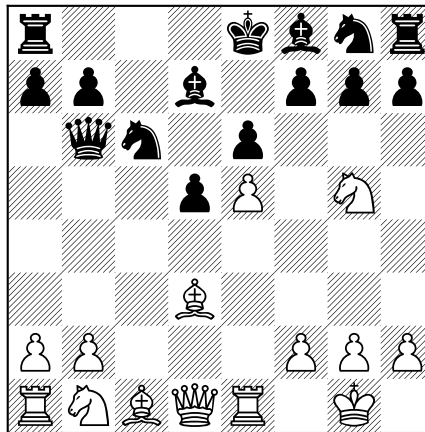
10. Nxf7



White grabs a pawn, but black can win the e5 pawn at his leisure and has a wicked attack along the h-file.

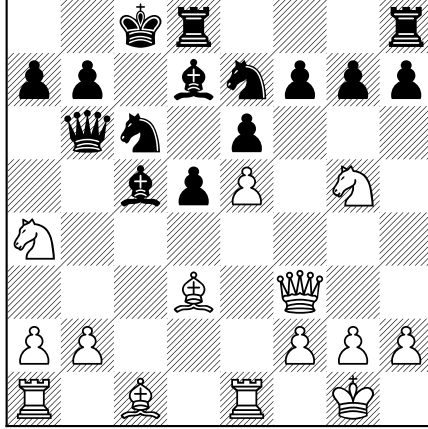
For example: **10... ♖c5** Black prepares to castle queenside and not allow Nxf8. White has mostly tried Qh5 and Nc3 on lichess. **11 ♜h5** loses immediately to **11... O-O-O 12 ♜xf7? ♜xe5 13 ♜xg7 ♜xd3 14 ♜xh8 ♜xf2+ 15 ♝h1 ♜d4**

10. Re1

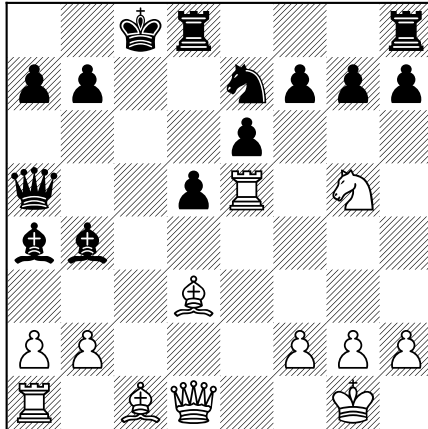


White defends e5

10... ♖c5 Hits f2 **11 ♜f3** Hits f7 **11... O-O-O** f7 is taboo as Qxf7 and Nxf7 can be met with Rf8 when black is crushing **12 ♜c3 ♜ge7** here white has only played one move on lichess: **13 ♜a4**

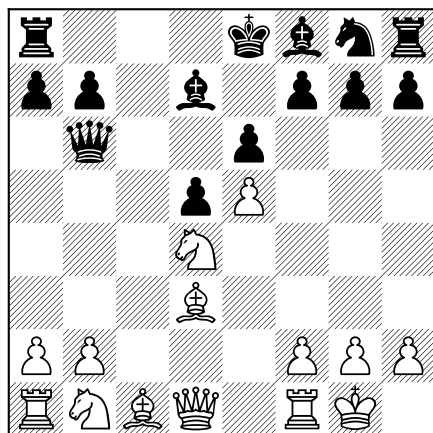


It looks dangerous, but can be squashed by 13... ♖a5 hitting e1 and a4 14 ♜d1 ♙b4 15 ♜e2 ♘xe5 16 ♜xe5 ♙xa4



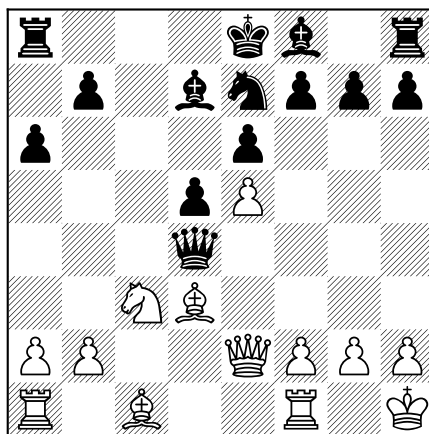
Black has a very comfortable position (-2)

5.1.2 9. Nxd4 mainline



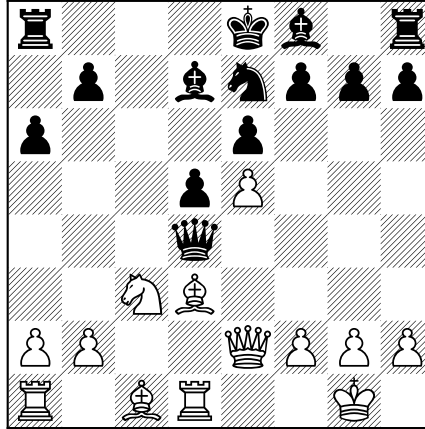
9... ♙xd4 10 ♘c3 a6 stops all Nb5 business

11. Qe2 11 ♜e2 ♘e7



12. Kh1

12... ♜c6 Almost a novelty (1 game played in the lichess master database)
13 f4 ♜b6 14 ♜e3 d4 15 ♜f2 ♘f5 16 ♜xf5 exf5 17 e6 f6



12. Rd1

12... ♖h4 May look strange, but white cannot exploit the queen's positioning 13 g3 ♖h3 14 ♖f3 h5 Be3 can be met with Nf5. Nc6 is also good now that white doesn't have f4.

11. Re1

6 Advance French

Black has many good options against the Advance. There are many possible plans, but I think only three of them are serious. Namely, the line with Qb6 & c4, the line with Qb6 & Nh6, and the line with Bd7 & Nge7. I never felt that Bd7 & Nge7 was very harmonious, as it always involved an oddly timed f6. Qb6 & c4 is more normal, but leads to very closed positions where both sides struggle to make progress. Qb6 & Nh6 leads to active and open positions, and I like it.