

Contents

Preface 7

Part 1. White avoids the main lines

1.e4 e6

1 2.b3; 2.f4 10
2 2.d3; 2.♖e2 12
3 2.♗f3 d5 3.♗c3; 3.e5 18
4 2.d4 d5 3.♗d3 23
5 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 25

Part 2. The Advance Variation

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♖b6 5.♗f3 ♗c6

6 6.♗e2 31
7 6.♗d3 37
8 6.a3 ♗h6 7.b4 cxd4 8.♗xh6; 8.cxd4 ♗f5 9.♗e3 40
9 6.a3 ♗h6 7.b4 cxd4 8.cxd4 ♗f5 9.♗b2 44
10 6.a3 ♗d7 48

Part 3. The Rubinstein Variation

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♗d2 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♗d7

11 5.g3 54
12 5.♗f3 ♗gf6 6.♗g5 h6 7.♗xf6 ♗xf6 8.♗d2; 8.♗xf6; 8.♗e3 56
13 5.♗f3 ♗gf6 6.♗g5 h6 7.♗xf6 ♗xf6 8.♗h4 61
14 5.♗f3 ♗gf6 6.♗xf6 ♗xf6 7.g3; 7.♗d3; 7.♗e2; 7.♗e3 71
15 5.♗f3 ♗gf6 6.♗xf6 ♗xf6 7.c3 80
16 5.♗f3 ♗gf6 6.♗d3 87

Part 4. The Morozevich Variation

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 ♕e7

17	4.c3	101
18	4.e5	103
19	4.♘gf3	113
20	4.♕d3	126

Part 5. The Tarrasch Variation with 3...c5

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5

21	4.c3; 4.exd5 ♖xd5 5.dxc5	136
22	4.♘gf3 cxd4 5.♘xd4	139
23	4.♘gf3 cxd4 5.exd5 ♖xd5 6.♕c4 ♖d6 7.♕b3; 7.♖e2	146
24	4.♘gf3 cxd4 5.exd5 ♖xd5 6.♕c4 ♖d6 7.0-0	151

Part 6. The Winawer Variation

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♕b4

25	Various without 4.e5	163
26	4.e5 b6; 4...c5 5.♖g4; 5.dxc5; 5.♕d2	173
27	4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♕xc3+ 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.♕d3; 7.h4; 7.a4; 7.♘f3	182
28	4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♕xc3+ 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.♖g4	189

Part 7. The Steinitz Variation

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6

29	4.♕d3; 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.♘ce2; 5.♘f3	205
30	4.e5 ♘fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.♕e3	217

Afterword	228
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PREFACE

Black can enter the French defence, as a separate opening, on move one. I believe that seems to be comfortable for him – to have a reliable defence against 1.e4. The point is however, that chess is becoming more popular and universal and you should have various weapons in your opening armour. Still, if you change skilfully your variations inside the French defence, it may serve you faithfully for Black even if it is your only way to counter 1.e4.

According to the generally accepted classification, the French defence is semi-open. I think it can suit the style both of aggressive tactical players, as well as of the adherents to the patient positional maneuvering.

The philosophical justification of the French defence is quite solid. Black complies with the fact that he will fail to compete with White for the dominance of every square on the chessboard, right from the beginning of the game. On the other hand, he fights fiercely for the centre and attacks it with undermining pawn-moves like c7-c5 and f7-f6 and exerts piece-pressure with ♙f8-b4, ♖g8-f6, ♗b8-c6, ♗g8-e7-f5, ♕d8-b6.

The arguments pro and against the correctness of the French defence have begun long ago and continue until now. The main themes are Black's lack of space and the consequence of that – the fate of his light-squared bishop, which is severely restricted right on move one. Meanwhile, all “French” players know quite well the rule that sometimes, at the decisive moment of the game, the same “bad” French bishop inflicts the decisive strike, settling the issue.

In this book you will not find the equivocal answer to principled questions of the type “Can you equalize by playing the French defence?”, or “Can White obtain a convincing advantage after 1...e6?”. Chess is a mini-model of life and the same principles are applicable – there are many questions and no final answers. We have already seen in the French defence striking novelties in variations with perfect reputation, as well as rehabilitation of lines long past and forgotten. Accordingly, I have decided to present to my readers the French defence – the way I see and understand it.

I believe that chess players of all levels can find in this book something new. It will enable some of you to include the French defence in your opening repertoire and for some others to enrich your opening knowledge and sharpen the understanding of its ideas.

The time has long passed when you could have played the opening only according to common sense. Therefore, there are many extensive analyses of concrete positions in the book and new ideas discovered in the process of preparation for games and tournaments.

This book has been written from the point of view of Black, but this should preclude studying it by players who prefer the White side of the French defence. It is always useful to know something thoroughly. It may happen that a player, who loves the White side against the French, might become an ardent fan of it as Black!

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Saint-Petersburg, April 2010*