

The French Defense Revisited

**A Practical Guide
for Black**

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Boroljub Zlatanovic**

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*To our families for their
wholehearted support*

*To all French Defense
lovers worldwide*

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
○	lead in development
○	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⊃	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

Preface

For “French lovers”, their favorite defense is equal to love. It is easy to fall in love with specific structures, to learn to be patient and to have the gift of understanding chess!

The dance by Black’s pieces during deep middlegame is often the key to a deep strategy. I was only 14 when I started feeling that the French Defense would become my eternal companion, and this affinity has lasted almost half a century. I will forever remember my tough fights against Timman, Caruana, Speelman, Psakhis, Velimirovic, Lobron... and I am glad to see stars such as Carlsen, Caruana, Nepomniachtchi, Ding and So being attracted to playing the French.

I have really enjoyed reading this book. It is divided into three parts and it is expertly conceived. Zlatanovic and Jacimovic have regularly played their favorite opening for decades and they have a great sense of the nuances. Boroljub radiates creativity, energy, understanding, a talent in tactical clashes and a strong desire to win. How beautiful is his victory against the strong grandmaster Ante Brkic! I witnessed Boroljub’s triumphs in tournaments facing famous grandmasters. He is indeed an eminent coach and author.

Dragoljub’s pieces are always on the right spots, guided by the hand of a skilled strategist. Our meetings at tournaments and conversations about “our opening” were a treat for me. I enjoyed watching his victory over the European champion Macieja – another shining moment of the French Defense! Dragoljub’s performance at the Olympiad in Istanbul in 2000 was a great achievement, when he won the gold medal for his results on the third board!

I am glad to see the authors devote an entire chapter to rare systems. Such variations may cause you to feel uncomfortable if you are not well prepared. The book is a valuable guide for chess players who play the French Defense and those who are about to fall in love with this defense.

The book is authentic and is to be recommended. It is a delight for me and has motivated me to “dive into the French whirlpools” once again. Both less devoted players and strong grandmasters will read this book with great enthusiasm.

Grandmaster Milan Drasko, Serbia, January 2023

Introduction

For almost two centuries the French Defense has been a universally popular opening. Many authorities have made their contribution to establishing the theory. Thanks to their efforts, players nowadays can easily make a choice between the many and various options, whether peaceful or sharp, whether statically or dynamically orientated. Just as importantly, if not more so, fans of the French worldwide can today find good options to play both for a win and a draw! All this makes the French Defense very popular. However, the authors think that many lines have not been well explained or should be revisited. Some other lines deserve a better reputation. Finally we have also suggested some new approaches. Simply speaking, the French Defense looks to be inexhaustible and there cannot be enough books dedicated to it. This book takes a step in the direction of revitalizing our favorite opening!

The authors have decided to set the book in order from the less to the more popular and complex lines. In the case of the most popular moves 3.e5, 3.♘d2 and 3.♘c3, we decided to offer two options for Black – one aims to lead to calm play, taking care first with finding balance and equalizing; the other aims to lead to a direct game. Needless to say, we wish to arm the reader in all scenarios that can arise in a practical game of chess, depending on their intentions, wishes, preparation, motivation level, and standings etc.

In the theoretical part, we have given more or less common lines suggested and tried to set out plans and patterns for both sides. Additionally, in the model games and exercise sections, we have explained some typical mistakes, failures, tactical motifs, and strategic regroupings in action! Some meticulous readers may think that some lines have not been covered in detail in the theoretical part, but this has been decided deliberately with the intention of paying attention to the last two practical parts. We have tried to keep lines where it's always possible to win as Black (as a real fighting game), and we have also explained the variations from a psychological aspect.

Finally, we have tended to present fragments or whole games that have been played by the true authorities of the defense, simply because they are the ones who set the trends! However, unlike the majority of books, we have also presented many games played by those who are not famous, or even anonymous and unrated! In sum, everyone who has created a masterpiece should find a place in publications. Moreover, this approach should help average players who are lovers of the French to become more confident!

Dragoljub Jacimovic & Boroljub Zlatanovic, Serbia, January 2023

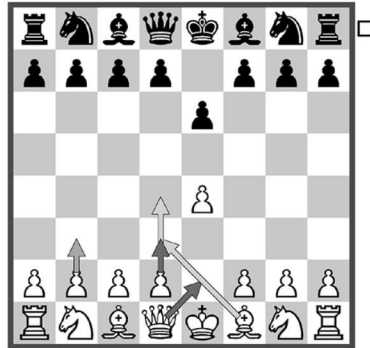
Part I

Theory

Chapter 1

Early Sidelines

1.e4 e6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – Early Sidelines

1.e4 e6

a) 2.b3

b) 2.♞e2

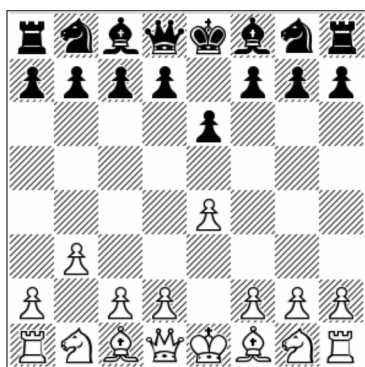
c) 2.d3 – King's Indian Attack

d) 2.d4 d5 3.♞d3

White generally has many ways to answer on his second move. Therefore as a result Black has many options on his second move. This can lead to a plethora of lines and generally players should be equipped with knowledge of structures that may occur from other lines and openings. Here we present 2.b3, 2.♞e2 and the King's Indian Attack, 2.d3. These lines sometimes follow similar patterns, but we give various different approaches, with the aim of presenting relatively simple ways to equalize and to reach sufficiently complex positions so as to keep chances even or for more. We also present a deviation on the third move 3.♙d3. This is a unique deviation that is deserving attention at the moment. Here the reader will gain some suggestions that can easily progress beyond the opening to reach a solid middlegame.

a) 2.b3

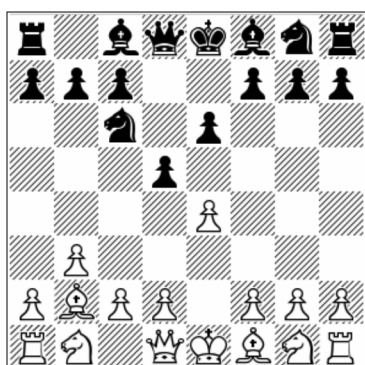
1.e4 e6 2.b3?!



Position after: 2.b3?!

This is often used by tacticians. The idea is to get out of theory, to castle queenside quickly and to attack on the dark-squared diagonal. Black has many options, and although capturing looks to be the most principled, we would rather suggest another approach – surprise someone who wanted to surprise you!

2...d5 3.♙b2 ♞c6



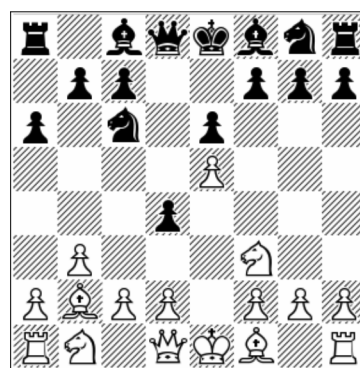
Position after: 3...♞c6

This is our suggestion here. White has a few options. The point is to wait for White's development idea before reacting. Furthermore Black waits for the potential capture to free his light-squared bishop. Another option is to go for the promising advance ...d4 from a Benoni structure. Very often in the Indian Defenses it is dangerous for Black to meet the d5-advance with a fianchettoed bishop on b7. This is the approach we suggest here.

4.exd5

This primitive move is probably the best here.

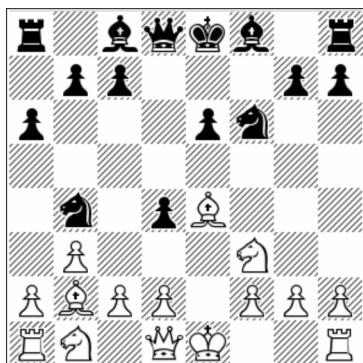
A) 4.e5 This is pointless, but possible. 4...d4!?
5.♞f3 a6!



Position after: 5...a6!

Black's knight must stay alive on c6. It is both a defender and an attacker, the key piece here.

A1) 6.♔d3 ♖b4!? 7.♙e4 [7.♘xd4 c5 8.♘f3 ♘xd3+ 9.cxd3 ♙xd3 10.♙e2 ♙xe2+ 11.♔xe2 ♘e7] 7...f5! 8.exf6 ♘xf6



Position after: 8...♘xf6

9.d3 [9.a3 ♘xe4 10.axb4 ♙xb4 11.♔xd4 0-0 12.♘c3 ♘g5! Black has an advantage.] 9...♘xe4 10.dxe4 c5 11.c3 dxc3 12.♔xc3 ♘d3+ 13.♔f1 ♔d7! 14.♘bd2 ♙e7 15.♔xg7 ♙g8 16.♙h6 ♙f6 Black is in a great position and has more than enough compensation.

A2) 6.♘a3 ♙d5 7.c4 ♙e4+ 8.♙e2 ♙xe2+ 9.♔xe2 f6 10.exf6 gxf6 This is excellent for Black.

B) 4.♔b5?! Another silly attempt.



Position after: 4...♔b5?!

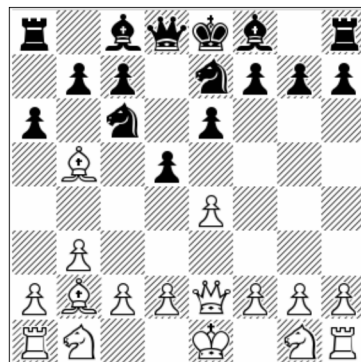
B1) 4...dxe4 To be fair this is also good. 5.♘c3 ♙g5 This gives Black an advantage, in Tsypov, Z (2460) – Rapport, R (2717) Danzhou 2016. Here White should choose the following. 6.♔xc6+ [6.g3? This allows Black to play 6...♔d7!. White is already hopeless without anything for the pawn and the opponent has superior

development.] 6...bxc6 7.g3 ♘f6 Black is in a slightly worse situation.

B2) 4...♘ge7

B2.1) 5.♘c3? d4 6.♘ce2 a6 7.♔d3 e5 8.f4 [8.c3 ♘g6 9.cxd4 exd4 10.♙c1 ♘b4 11.♔b1 c5] 8...exf4 9.♘xf4 ♘g6 Evidently Black is better. White has passive bishops.

B2.2) 5.♙e2 a6



Position after: 5...a6

6.♔xc6+ [6.♔d3? This doesn't make sense in view of 6...♘g6!.] 6...♘xc6 Now White has a few options.

B2.2a) 7.f4 b6 8.♘f3 ♔b7 9.d3 dxe4 10.♙xe4 [10.dxe4 ♙d6! 11.g3 ♙c5 12.a3 a5 13.♘c3 0-0-0] 10...♙d5 11.♙xd5 exd5 This gives Black a better endgame after ...f6!.

B2.2b) 7.exd5 ♙xd5 8.♘f3 ♙f5 9.d3 [9.♘a3? b5 The knight is excluded from the game, and at the same time Black installs his bishop on the most dangerous diagonal.] 9...♔d7 10.♘bd2 0-0-0 11.0-0-0 e5 12.♘e4 f6 Black is preferable with the bishop pair and perfectly restricts the opponent's minor pieces.

C) 4.♘c3?! A strange move. Black with tempo has the following. 4...d4 5.♘ce2 e5