

Mini-Lessons From Short Games Of 21st Century

By IM Nikolay Minev

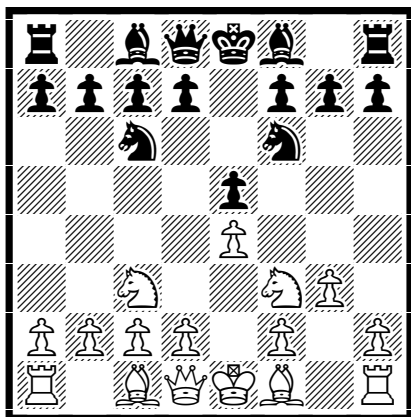
The New Face of the Four Knights

There is currently a strange new variation in the Four Knights Opening, with an early g3. As far as I can tell, this new variation was first played in following game:

C47 A. Nimzovich – E. Grunfeld
Carlsbad 1923

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.g3!?

Instead of 4.Bb5, 4.Bc4 or 4.d4.



4...d5 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.Bg2 Nxc3 7.bxc3 Bd6 8.O-O O-O 9.d3 Bg4 10.h3 Bd7 11.Rb1 Rb8 12.Re1 Re8 13.Ng5 h6 14.Nxf7?

This is a tempting but incorrect sacrifice, as the game shows. Correct is 14.Ne4, and if 14...Bf8 15.f4.

14...Kxf7 15.Qh5+ Kg8 16.Bxh6 Qf6 17.Bg5 Qf7 18.Qh4 Ne7 19.Rxb7 Rxb7 20.Bxb7 Qxa2 21.Bxe7 Rxe7 22.Be4 Qe6 23.Qh7+ Kf8 24.Qh8+ Qg8 25.Qh5 Be8 26.Qg5 Qe6 27.Ra1 c6 28.Kg2 Qh6 29.Qg4 Qd2 30.Qh4 Qh6 31.Qg4 Rf7 32.Qe2 Bc5 33.Bf3 Bd7 34.g4 Qf4 35.Ra5 Bb6 36.Rxe5 Bc7 37.Re4 Qh2+ 38.Kf1 Qxh3+ 39.Bg2 Qh6 40.Qe1 Bg3 41.Re2 Qh4 42.c4 Kg8 43.g5 Qxg5 44.Kg1 Bd6 45.d4 Bh3 0-1

At first glance the experimental idea of Nimzovich looks unattractive and further, the stem game finished in disaster for White. The result was that the new variation was almost forgotten and only in the 1970's was it rediscovered as an option leading to positions which offer strategically interesting ideas and tactics.

Today, after about thousand recorded games, the theory of this new variation still is not firmly established. For those interested, the next short collection of recent games will help with understanding some of the strategical ideas and typical tactics of this new face of the Four Knights.

Variation 4...d5: The Logical Reply

C47 M. Hangweyrer - S. Loffler
Vienna 2002

1.e4 Nf6 2.Nc3 e5 3.Nf3 Nc6 4.g3 d5

This reply (which follows the stem game above) is according to general strategic rules: if the opponent plays in the wing, the best reaction is to counter in the center!

5.exd5 Nxd5 6.Bg2 Nxc3 7.bxc3 Be7

7...Bd6!? – see the stem game.

8.O-O O-O 9.Re1 Bf6 10.Rb1 Re8 11.d3 e4

11...Rb8!?

12.Nd2 exd3

After 12...Bxc3 13.Rxe4 White is slightly better.

13.Ne4! Bf5

In case of 13...dxc2 14.Nxf6+ gxf6 15.Rxe8+ Qxe8 16.Qxc2 and White has good compensation for the pawn. (16...Qe1+ 17.Bf1 Bh3?? 18.Be3)

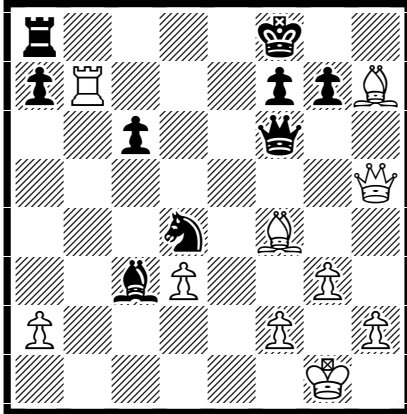
14.cxd3 Bxe4 15.Rxe4 Rxe4 16.Bxe4 Bxc3 17.Rxb7 Nd4 18.Bf4!

Stronger than 18.Rxc7!?

18...c6

If 18...Ne6 19.Rb3!

19.Bxh7+ Kf8 20.Qh5 Qf6



21.Bg6! 1-0

C47 M. Dorin – S. Slipak
Vicente Lopez (Argentina) 2001

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.g3 d5 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.Bg2 Nde7

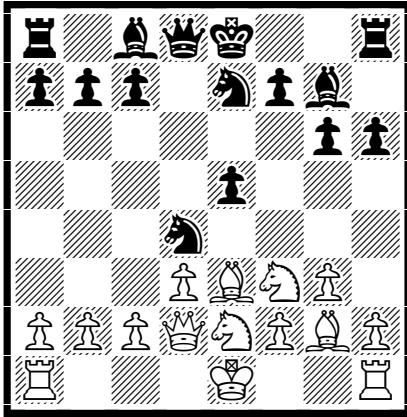
An original and rare continuation that deserves attention.

7.d3 g6 8.Bg5?! Bg7 9.Qd2?

If 9.Ne4? f5 10.Nf6+ Kf7 or 10.Bf6 Bxf6 11.Nxf6+ Kf7. Correct is 9.O-O.

9...h6 10.Be3 Nd4! 11.Ne2?

This loses. If 11.O-O then 11...Bh3! is also possible, or 11...Bg4 with better game for Black.

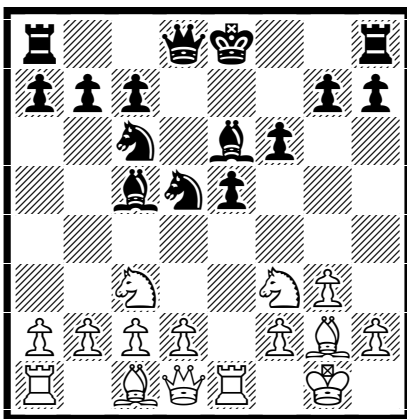


11...Bh3! 12.O-O Bxg2 13.Kxg2 Nxf3 14.Kxf3 Qd5+ 15.Kg4 Qg2! 0-1

C47 P. Guyot – S. Trassaert
Cannes 1990

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.g3 d5 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.Bg2 Be6 7.O-O Bc5!? 8.Re1 f6?

Instead 8...O-O 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4! (10.Rxe5?! Bxf2+) seems to also be in White's favor.



9.d4! Bb4

If 9...Nxd4 10.Nxd4 Bxd4 11.Nxd5 Bxd5 12.Qxd4 and White wins. Better was 9...Nxc3 10.bxc3 Be7, but which is still in White's favor after 11.dxe5 or 11.Nxe5!?

10.Bd2 Bxc3 11.bxc3 Bg4 12.Nxe5! 1-0

For if 12...Nxe5 13.Qxg4 or 12...Bxd1 13.Nxc6+.

Variation 4...Bb4: Preferred by High-Rated Players

C47 M. Weimann – M. Lacrosse
Vlissingen 2007

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.g3 Bb4

This continuation is used mostly by high rated players.

5.Bg2 d6

After 5...Bxc3 6.dxc3 Nxe4 7.Nxe5 White has small edge because of the two Bishops.

6.d3 Bxc3+?!

For the recommended 6...h6 – see the next game.

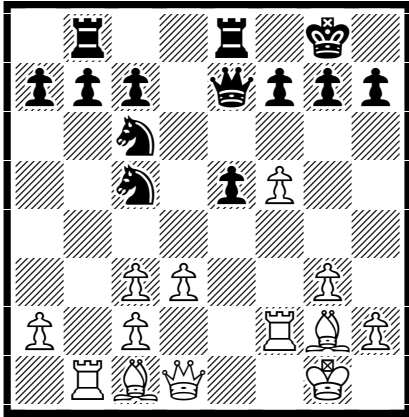
7.bxc3 O-O 8.O-O Qe7 9.Nh4 Bd7 10.Rb1 Rab8 11.Nf5 Bxf5 12.exf5 Nd7 13.f4

White stands better.

13...Rfe8 14.Rf2 Nc5?

This loses. If 14...Nf8, then 15.Rxb7 is possible. Perhaps Black should try 14...f6.

15.fxe5 dxe5



16.f6! gxf6 17.Bxc6 bxc6 18.Ba3

A deadly pin!

18...Qd6 19.Rxb8 Rxb8 20.d4 1-0

C47 I. Glek – A. Onischuk
Wijk aan Zee 1997

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.g3 Bb4 5.Bg2 d6 6.d3 h6 7.O-O Ne7!?

A new idea. Parma, who recommended 6...h6, proposes 7...Be6 and eventually d5, with equal chances.

8.d4

8.Ne2 deserves attention.

8...Bxc3 9.bxc3 Ng6 10.Ba3 Qd7!?

An original defensive idea. Instead 10...Nxe4? 11.Nxe5 Nxc3 gives a dangerous initiative to White, for example 12.Qf3 dxe5 13.Qxc3 Qxd4 (13...exd4? 14.Rfe1+ Be6 15.Bc6+!!) 14.Qxc7 etc.

11.dxe5 dxe5 12.Qc1 Qe6 13.Rb1?

This helps Black. Critical is 13.Nd2, followed by 14.f4.

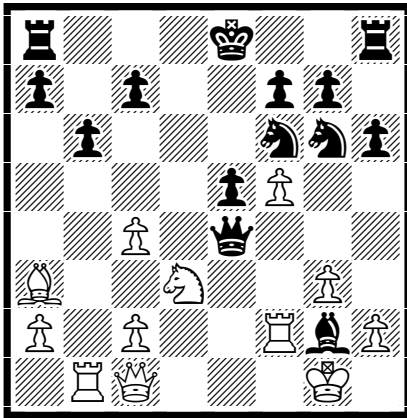
13...b6 14.Ne1?!

14.Nd2!? and 15.f4.

14...Bb7 15.Nd3 Bxe4

15...O-O-O 16.f4 is still unclear.

16.f4 Bxg2 17.f5 Qd5 18.c4 Qe4 19.Rf2



19...Nh4!

Probably White overlooked this powerful reply. Now Black has the advantage.

20.gxh4 Bh3 21.Qe1 O-O-O 22.Nxe5

The record shows that White is in time-trouble.

**22...Rhe8 23.Bb2 Qxh4 24.Rf3 Qg5+ 25.Qg3 Ne4 26.Nxf7? Qxg3+ 27.hxg3 Rd2
28.Ne5 Rg2+ 29.Kh1 Nd2 0-1**

Variation 4...Bc5: Most Often Used in Practice

C47 P. de Carvalho Yamamoto – L. Jukemura
Sao Paulo 2005

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nc3 Nc6 4.g3 Bc5

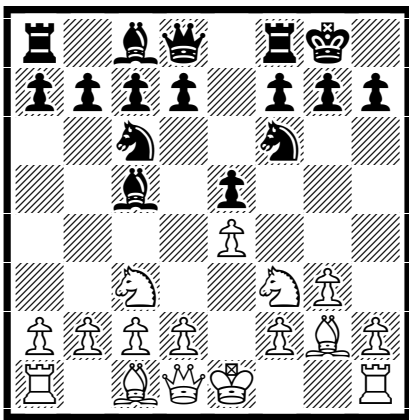
The preferred reply in more than 50% of the games.

5.Bg2

A blunder is 5.Nxe5?? because of 5...Nxe5 6.d4 Bxd4! and White is a without piece (7.Qxd4? Nf3+)

5...O-O?!

Correct is 5...d6. See also the next game.



6.Nxe5!

Here this typical trick works in White's favor.

6...Bxf2+

The alternative is not much better, as shown in the following example G. Xie – L. Nilsson, Sydney 2009: 6...Nxe5 7.d4 Bxd4 8.Qxd4 d6 9.h3 h6 10.f4 Ng6 11.O-O Qe7 12.b3 Bd7 13.Bb2 Bc6 14.Rae1 Rfe8 15.b4 Nf8 16.b5 Ne6 17.Qd1 Bd7 18.Nd5 Qd8 19.Nxf6+ gxf6 20.Qh5 1-0

7.Kxf2 Nxe5 8.Rf1 c5 9.d3 d6 10.Kg1 h6 11.h3 a6 12.Bf4 Be6 13.Qd2

With two Bishops and the open f-file, White has the advantage. The rest of the game shows this convincingly.

13...Nh5 14.Ne2 Qb6 15.c3 c4+ 16.Be3 Qc7?

16...Qd8

17.d4 Nd3 18.g4 Nf6 19.Bxh6 d5 20.Bxg7! 1-0

C47 I. Glek – J. Aagaard
Copenhagen 1996

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.g3 Bc5 5.Bg2 a6?

Correct is 5...d6

6.Nxe5 Nxe5 7.d4 Bd6 8.dxe5 Bxe5 9.f4!

Bold and consistent.

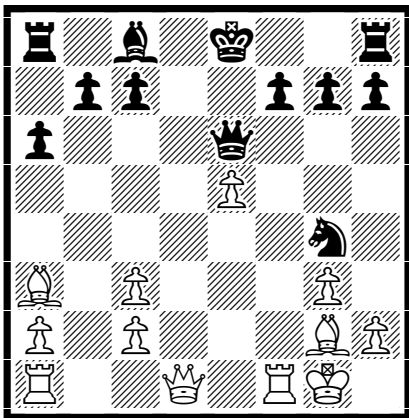
8...Bxc3+ 10.bxc3

White stands better.

10...Qe7?

10...d6!?

11.e5 d6 12.Ba3 Qe6 13.O-O dxe5 14.fxe5 Ng4



15.Bd5 Qb6+ 16.Qd4! Qxd4+ 17.cxd4 Nh6 18.Rab1 Nf5 19.Rxb7! Ne3 20.Bc6+ 1-0

C47 L. Comas Fabrego – J. Morovic Fernandez
Havana 1999

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.g3 Bc5 5.Bg2 d6 6.h3 O-O 7.d3 a6 8.O-O Be6 9.Be3?!

Usual in practice is 9.Kh2.

9...Bxe3 10.fxe3 d5! 11.exd5

11.Ng5!? d4 12.Nxe6 fxe6 13.exd4 Nxd4 unclear.

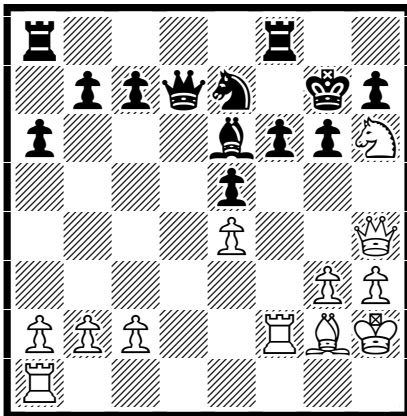
11...Nxd5 12.Nxd5 Bxd5 13.e4?

13.Nh4!?

13...Be6 14.Kh2 Qd6! 15.Nh4 Ne7 16.Nf5 Qd7 17.Qg4 g6 18.Nh6+?!

After 18.Nxe7+ Qxe7 Black stands better. Maybe White should try 18.Qg5!?.

18...Kg7 19.Qh4 f6 20.Rf2?



20...Qe8! 21.Ng4 Ng8! 0-1

For if 22.Raf1 g5 23.Nxf6 gxh4 24.Nxe8+ Raxe8.