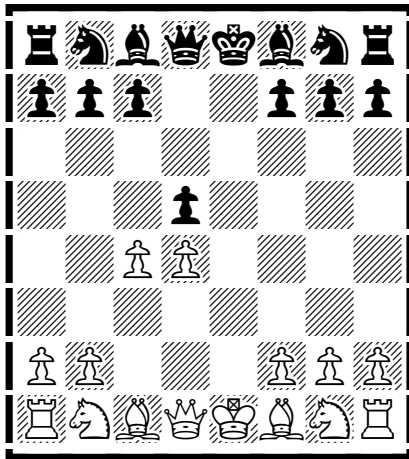


Mini-Lessons from Short Games of the 21st Century

By IM Nikolay Minev

French Defense – Exchange Variation: The Potential of c2-c4

For many years, the Exchange variation of French Defense, with 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5, has been considered only as a tool for a draw against a stronger opponent. However, recently this variation is again in the center of attention because of the continuation 4.c4!?



Practice shows that this continuation leads to positions full of tactics and strategic problems for both sides. In the following pages you will find a small collection of recent games which in my opinion demonstrate the potential of c2-c4 idea, either executed immediately as above, or a few moves later.

The example games are organized as follows:

Part 1: White is victorious after Black plays...dxc4 (immediate or delayed)

Part 2: White is victorious without Black ...dxc4

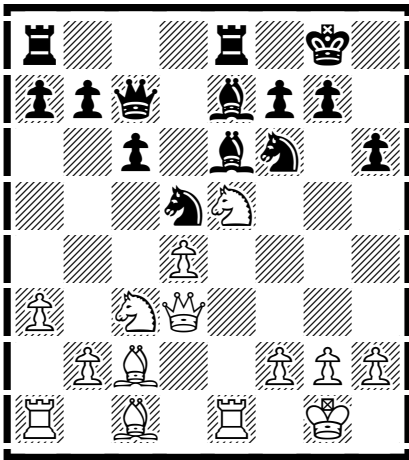
Part 3: Various approaches that give Black the victory

Part 1: Black plays ...dxc4 (either immediately or late)

C42 K. Macek – S. Marjanovic

Prague .2007

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nf3 Be7 6.Bd3 0–0 7.0–0 dxc4 8.Bxc4 Nbd7
9.Nc3 Nb6 10.Bb3 c6 11.Qd3 Nbd5 12.a3 h6 13.Re1 Be6 14.Bc2 Re8 15.Ne5 Qc7

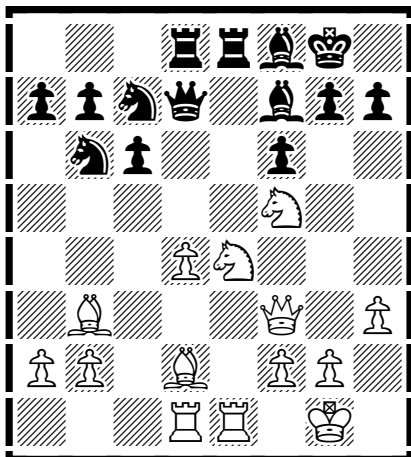


16.g4! Bf8 17.g5 hxg5 18.Bxg5 Ne7 19.Bxf6 Bf5 20.Ne4! gxf6 21.Qg3+ 1–0

C01 K. Mahdi – M. Serov

Oberwart 2010

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.Nf3 c6 5.Bd3 Bd6 6.0–0 Ne7 7.c4 dxc4 8.Bxc4 0–0 9.h3
Nd7 10.Nc3 Nb6 11.Bb3 Ned5 12.Re1 Re8 13.Bg5 f6 14.Bd2 Be6 15.Ne4 Bf7 16.Nh4
Qd7 17.Qf3 Rad8 18.Nf5 Bf8 19.Rad1 Nc7??

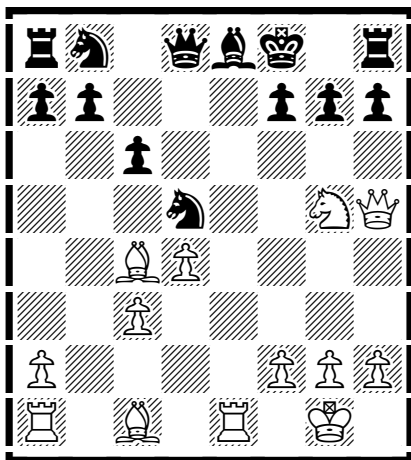


20.Nh6+! 1-0

Because of 20...gxh6 21.Nxf6+.

C01 K. Nagy – G. Nemeth
Zalakaros 2010

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.Nf3 Bd6 5.c4 dxc4 6.Bxc4 Ne7?? 7.Ng5 Bb4+ 8.Nc3 Nd5 9.Qe2+ Kf8 10.0-0 Bxc3 11.bxc3 c6 12.Re1 Bd7 13.Qh5 Be8

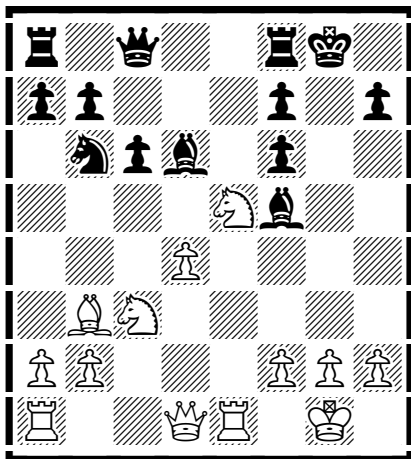


14.Bxd5 cxd5 15.Nxh7+ Kg8 16.Nf6+ gxf6 17.Qg4+ Kh7 18.Re3 1-0

C01 A. Gipslis – B. Sturm

Schwabisch Gmund 1995

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.Nf3 Bd6 5.c4 c6 6.Nc3 Nf6 7.Bg5 dxc4 8.Bxc4 O-O 9.O-O Nbd7 10.Re1 Nb6 11.Bb3 Bf5 12.Ne5 Qc8 13.Bxf6 gxf6

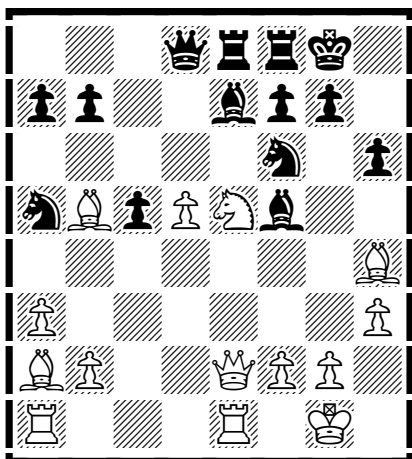


14.Ne4! Bxe4 15.Rxe4 fxe5 16.Qh5 Be7 17.Re3 Nd5 18.Bxd5 cxd5 19.Rg3+ Kh8
20.Qxe5+ f6 1-0

C01 Lupu – Koen

Hajduszobolszlo (Hungary) 1991

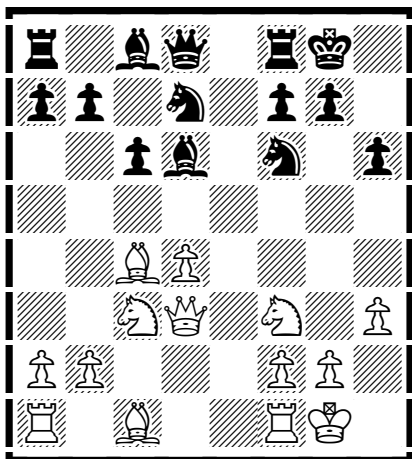
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.h3 Bd6 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.c4!? dxc4 7.Bxc4 Nf6 8.O-O O-O
9.Nc3 Bf5? 10.Bg5! h6 11.Bh4 Be7 12.Re1 Nb4?? 13.a3 Nc6 14.d5 Na5 15.Ba2 c5
16.Nb5 Qd7 17.Qe2 Rae8 18.Ne5 Qd8



19.d6! Bxd6 20.Nxf7! Rxf7 21.Bxf6 1-0

C01 K. Dolzhikova – G. Rodionov
Kiev 2007

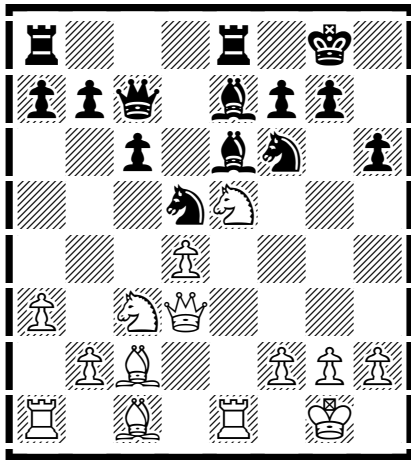
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.Nf3 Bd6 5.c4 dxc4 6.Bxc4 Nf6 7.0-0 0-0 8.h3 h6 9.Nc3 c6 10.Qd3 Nbd7?



11.Bxh6! gxh6 12.Qg6+ Kh8 13.Qxh6+ Kg8 14.Ng5 Bf4 15.Nce4 Bxg5 16.Nxg5 Nb6 17.Qg6+ Kh8 18.Bxf7 1-0

C01 K. Macek – S. Marjanovic
Prague 2007

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nf3 Be7 6.Bd3 0–0 7.0–0 dxc4 8.Bxc4 Nbd7 9.Nc3 Nb6 10.Bb3 c6 11.Qd3 Nbd5 12.a3 h6 13.Re1 Be6 14.Bc2 Re8 15.Ne5 Qc7



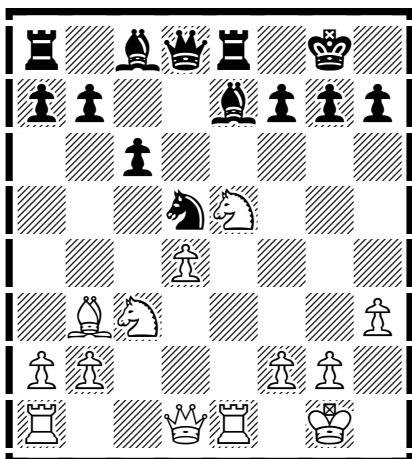
16.g4! Bf8 17.g5 hxg5 18.Bxg5 Ne7 19.Bxf6 Bf5 20.Ne4 gxf6 21.Qg3+ 1–0

The typical position after Black's ...dxc4 can also arise by transposition from a variation of QGA (1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 e5 4.Bxc4 exd4 5.exd4), as shown in this example.

D20 T. Hillarp-Persson – Kleinert
Reykjavik 2000

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 e5 4.Bxc4 exd4 5.exd4 Nf6 6.Nf3 Be7 7.O-O O-O 8.h3 c6 9.Nc3 Nbd7 10.Bb3 Nb6 11.Re1 Nbd5 12.Bg5 Re8?! 13.Bxf6! Nxf6 14.Ne5 Nd5?

Maybe 14...Be6 15.Bxe6 fxe6 16.Qb3 Qc8 or 14...Rf8 is more resilient.



15.Nxd5 cxd5 16.Nxf7! Kxf7 17.Qh5+ Kf6

Or 17...Kg8 18.Bxd5+ Kh8 19.Be4 h6 20.Qg6 Kg8 21.Qh7+ Kf7 22.Bg6+ Kf6 23.Re3 Rh8 24.Rf3+ Ke6 25.Qxg7 and wins

18.Bxd5 Rf8 19.Re5! 1-0

For if 19...h6 20.Qf3+ Kg6 21.Be4+ or 19...g6 20.Qh4+ Kg7 21.Rxe7+

D20 L. Christiansen – M. Heidrich

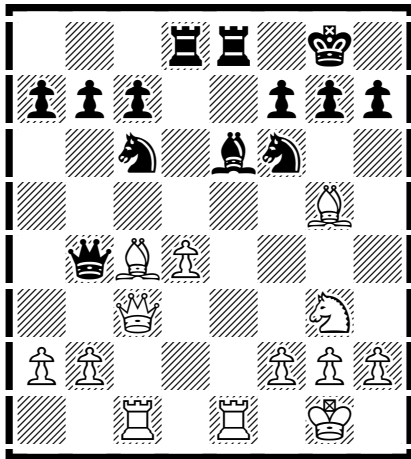
Germany (Bundesliga) 1987

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 e5 4.Bxc4 Bb4+ 5.Nc3 exd4 6.exd4 Nf6 7.Qb3 Qe7+ 8.Nge2 Nc6 9.O-O O-O 10.Bg5 Bxc3 11.Qxc3 Re8?

ECO recommends 11...h6 12.Bh4 g5 13.Bg3 Ne4 14.Qe3 Nxc3 15.Nxc3 with only slight edge for White.

12.Ng3 Be6 13.Rac1 Rad8 14.Rfe1 Qb4?

A fatal mistake, but also after 14...Nxd4 15.Bxe6 Nxe6 (15...fxe6 16.Qxc7) 16.Nf5 Qf8 17.Bxf6 White has a decisive advantage.

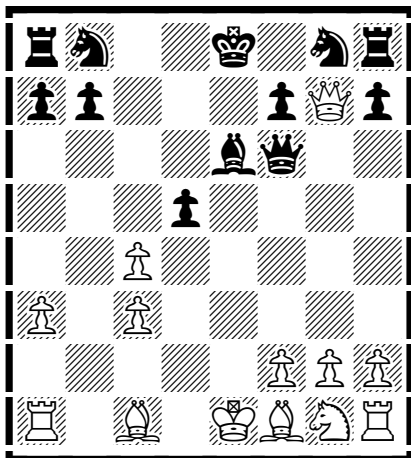


15.Bxf6 Qxc3 16.bxc3 gxf6 17.d5! Na5 18.Nh5! Re7 19.Bb3! 1-0

Part 2: Games where Black does not play ...dxc4

C01 M. Franzenburg – I. Gottschall
Hockenheim (German ch women) 2009

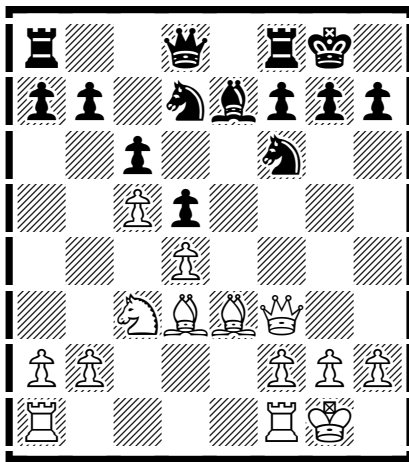
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.c4 Bb4+ 5.Nc3 c5 6.a3 Bxc3+ 7.bxc3 cxd4 8.Qxd4 Be6
9.Qxg7 Qf6



10.Bh6! dxc4 11.Qf8+ Kd7 12.Rd1+ Kc7 13.Bg7 Nd7 14.Qd6+ 1-0

C01 H. Erenska BrloV. – Milashevskaja
Bad Zwischenahn (world ch senior women) 2008

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nf3 Be7 6.Nc3 c6 7.Bd3 0-0 8.0-0 Bg4 9.Be3
Nbd7 10.c5 Bxf3?! 11.Qxf3



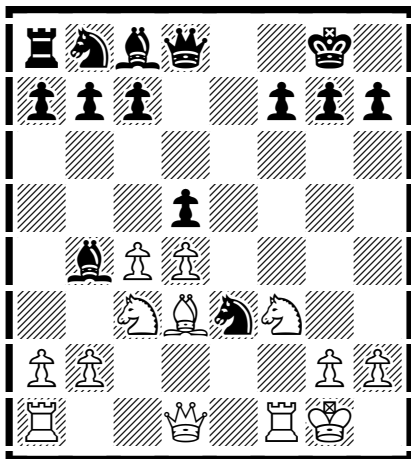
11...Nxc5?? 12.dxc5 d4 13.Rad1! Kh8

If 13...dxe3 14.Bxh7+

14.Bb1 Bxc5 15.Na4 Qe7 16.Bg5 Rad8 17.Bxf6 gxf6 18.Qf5 1-0

C01 B. Khetsuriani – N. Karountzos
Athens 2007

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.Nf3 Nf6 5.c4 Bb4+ 6.Nc3 0-0 7.Bd3 Re8+ 8.Be3 Ng4?
9.0-0 Rxe3 10.fxe3 Nxe3



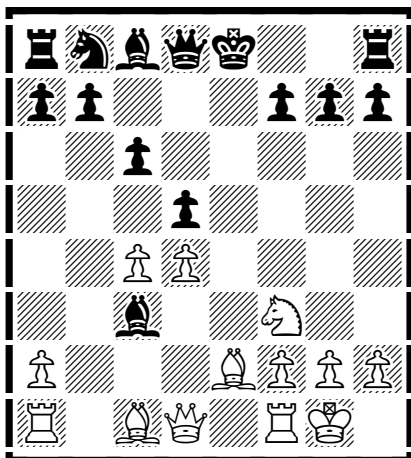
11.Bxh7+ Kxh7 12.Qd3+ Nf5 13.Nxd5 Bd6 14.g4 g6 15.gxf5 Bxf5 16.Qd2 c6 17.Ne3 Bf4 18.Qf2 Be4 19.Ng2 Bh6 20.Ne5 f5 21.Nf7 1-0

C01 M. Congiu – M. Vanderbeeken
Cap D'Agde 2008

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.Nf3 Nf6 5.c4 c6 6.Nc3 Bb4 7.Be2 Ne4?! 8.0-0 Nxc3

Deserving attention is 8...Bxc3!?

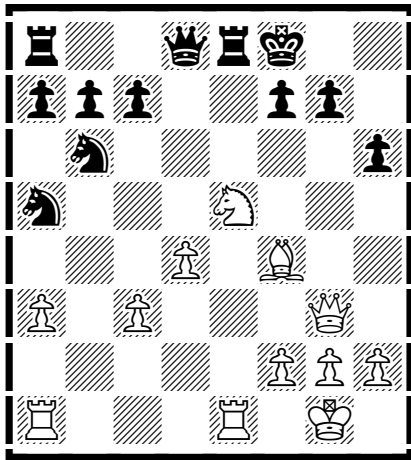
9.bxc3 Bxc3



10.Ba3!? Bxa1 11.Qxa1 f6 12.Qc1 Kf7 13.Bd3 g6 14.Qh6 Na6 15.cxd5 Qa5 16.Bf8!!
Rg8 17.Re1 Qxe1+ 18.Nxe1 Bf5 19.d6 Bxd3 20.Qxh7+ 1-0

C01 K. Zolnierowicz – S. Khamitskiy
Gdansk 2009

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Bb4 6.cxd5 Nxd5 7.Bd2 Nc6 8.Nf3 0-0
9.Be2 h6 10.0-0 Be6 11.a3 Bxc3 12.bxc3 Nb6 13.Re1 Bc4 14.Bxc4 Nxc4 15.Bf4 Nb6
16.Qd3 Na5 17.Ne5 Re8 18.Qg3 Kf8



19.Bxh6 gxh6 20.Qf4 1-0

Part 3: Black gains the upper hand (various systems)

Until now only examples where White was successful have been featured. But this is only half of the story. Naturally 4.c4 does not lead to a winning position for White. Practice shows also many games where Black turns the fight in his favor, as in next few interesting examples, which deserve deeper investigation.

C01 Fairlough - Hankipohja

Budva 1963

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.c4 dxc4 5.Bxc4 Bd6 6.Nf3 Nf6 7.Qa4+? Bd7 8.Qb3 O-O
9.Qxb7? Qe7+ 10.Be2 Re8 11.Nc3? Bb4 12.O-O Bc6 13.Qxa8 Bxa8 14.Ne5 c5 15.Be3
Bxc3 16.bxc3 Nc6 17.Bb5 Nxe5 18.dxe5 Qb7 19.f3 Qxb5 0-1

C01 K. Weissenbach – A. Graf

Lichtenrade 2008

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Bb4 6.Nf3 0-0 7.Bd3 dxc4 8.Bxc4 Bg4
9.0-0 Nc6 10.Be3 Qd6 11.Nb5 Qd7 12.a3 Ba5 13.Be2 Rfe8 14.h3 Bf5 15.Qb3 Nd5
16.Bc4 Nxe3 17.fxe3 a6 18.d5 axb5 19.dxc6 bxc6 20.Be2 Rxe3 0-1

C01 E. Nordin – M. Orndahl

Copenhagen 2007

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.Nf3 Bd6 5.c4 dxc4 6.Bxc4 Nf6 7.Nc3 0-0 8.0-0 h6
9.Be3?

9.h3!

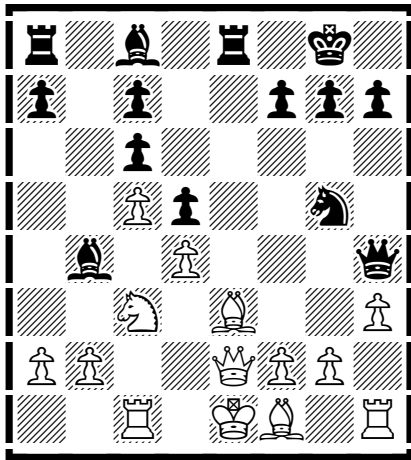
9...Bg4 10.Rc1 c6 11.a3 Nbd7 12.Ba2 Bh5 13.Bb1 Re8 14.d5? Ne5 15.dxc6 bxc6
16.Kh1 Nxf3 17.gxf3 Qd7 18.Rg1 Qh3 19.Rxg7+ Kxg7 20.Bxh6+ Kh8 0-1

C01 J. Vacha – F. De Andres Gonalons

Marianske Lazne 2011

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Be7 6.h3 0-0 7.Nf3 Re8 8.Be3 Nc6 9.Ne5

Bb4 10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.c5 Ne4 12.Rc1 Qh4 13.Qf3 Ng5 14.Qe2



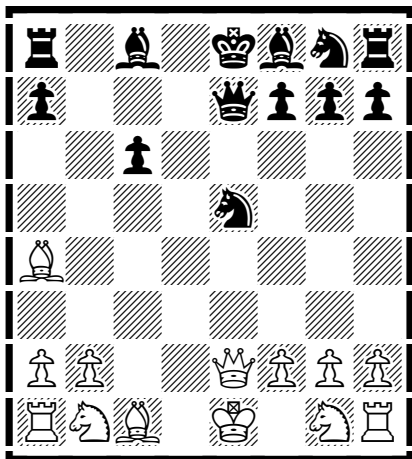
14...Ba6 15.Qxa6 Rxe3+ 16.Be2 Rae8 17.Kf1 Qf4 18.Kg1 Bxc3 0-1

C01 M. Roskam – W. Vermeulen
Utrecht 2005

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nf3 Bg4 7.Be2 dxc4 8.0-0 Bd6
9.Qa4 0-0 10.Qxc4 Bxf3 11.Bxf3 Nxd4 12.Bxb7 Rb8 13.Ba6 Re8 14.Rb1 Ng4 15.h3
Ne5 16.Qa4 Qh4 17.Qd1 Rbd8 18.Be3 Nef3+ 19.Kh1 Rxe3 0-1

C01 S. Budrin – A. Blagodyr
Kiev 2005

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 e5 4.Bxc4 exd4 5.exd4 Nc6 6.d5 Ne5 7.Qe2?? Qe7 8.Bb5+ c6
9.dxc6 bxc6 10.Ba4



10 Ba6 11.Qe3 Nd3+ 12.Kd2 0-0-0 13.Nc3 Nf4+ 14.Kc2 Bd3+ 15.Kb3 Qb4# 0-1

In conclusion, the theoretical assessment of this variation is still not clear, but definitely offers interesting fighting opportunities for both sides.