

opening repertoire

the French defence

Cyrus Lakdawala

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About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 30 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the U.S.

Also by the Author:

Play the London System

A Ferocious Opening Repertoire

The Slav: Move by Move

1...d6: Move by Move

The Caro-Kann: Move by Move

The Four Knights: Move by Move

Capablanca: Move by Move

The Modern Defence: Move by Move

Kramnik: Move by Move

The Colle: Move by Move

The Scandinavian: Move by Move

Botvinnik: Move by Move

The Nimzo-Larsen Attack: Move by Move

Korchnoi: Move by Move

The Alekhine Defence: Move by Move

The Trompowsky Attack: Move by Move

Carlsen: Move by Move

The Classical French: Move by Move

Larsen: Move by Move

1...b6: Move by Move

Bird's Opening: Move by Move

Petroff Defence: Move by Move

Fischer: Move by Move

Anti-Sicilians: Move by Move

Opening Repertoire: ...c6

First Steps: the Modern

Caruana: Move by Move

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Introduction

Do you believe in love at first sight? I do. When eight years old, I played over a Botvinnik game where he won beautifully with the French Winawer (today, I don't even remember Botvinnik's opponent, or the actual game for that matter), and I fell in love with the opening. I continue to play it five decades later.

You at age eight and age 58 are two different people. Yes, you both shared joint memories, yet the old you's perspective has been radically altered by time. Today, I understand that the French Defence is difficult to play, yet full of opportunity for Black.

I am by nature nomadic in my choice of openings, playing one for six months and then suddenly switching to another. When we veer away from our childhood favourite opening, it is kind of the opposite of being homesick. I have played the French Defence for five decades and am happy to announce that I never abandoned my first love. In my opinion the French is perhaps the most difficult opening in all of chess to comprehend and master, since it is too large to be boxed into a single category of tactical or strategic.

The worst possible military strategy is a WWI, full frontal assault against a well fortified enemy. The French is just that impregnable machine-gun nest which is not so easy for White to approach. If we lose, it will generally be by siege, rather than direct force. I only finished writing *First Steps: French Defence* a year ago, so why write another book on the French? Well, the *First Steps* version differs in two versions:

1. I can handle memorization of my home address, zip code and phone number. My brain draws the line in protest if I'm forced to analyze long, forcing lines, so I don't expect my readers to do so either. What good is reading something without comprehension? *First Steps* are not jargon-infested books, which makes you ask: "Now how about repeating that in plain English?". They are designed for players in the 1200-1800 range, while this book is written for 1800 players and up, with the analysis a bit more involved.

2. *First Steps: French Defence* is a basic explanation of complete coverage of *all* French lines, while this book is a targeted repertoire which is far more streamlined.

A teacher/chess writer teaches not at his own level, but for the level of the student/reader. This isn't so easy to incorporate into a chess book, since there is a wide range of rating/comprehension levels for the readers. In *Opening Repertoire: French Defence*, as much as possible, I've tried to avoid long, theoretical forcing opening lines. This won't be the book where the rigid/petty government worker forces us to fill out a page in triplicate

Opening Repertoire: The French Defence

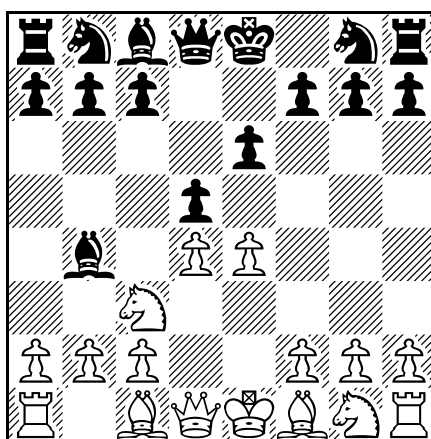
to purchase a roll of stamps. Your writer sees himself as a kind of male Jeanne d'Arc who leads an army of the theoretically destitute into easy-to-understand lines, which for the most part, stay away from memorization of long, forcing tactical lines. Which is how I constructed this repertoire.

The rhythms of opening theory rise, fall and then rise up again, varying rapidly as new comp-generated ideas are introduced over time. The result of this proliferation at this rate means that it grows well past the understanding of the average club player. You can't teach someone to like or dislike something. People who play French Defence – which some consider a fatalistic belief system – know right off the bat this opening is for them or not for them. There are certain eligibility requirements, before we earn our license to play the French:

1. For the most part, the positions tend to be closed, so we must feel comfortable in them.
2. In most lines Black cedes some central space to White, so if you are the kind who feels uncomfortable with a lack of space, then maybe the French isn't your best choice.
3. Black's position is ultra solid and not so easy to break down, so don't expect every French game to be filled with adventure and action (although many games are just that).
4. Anticipation of the opponent's intent is the powerful resource of all skilled defenders. In the (mostly) blocked positions which arise, it's rare for a natural tactician/attacker to hit us with a surprise shot we don't first see coming, a mile away. So in a way we are not on high alert for a game-killing shot from our opponents as is more common in open positions.

Let's take a look at some of our key positions:

Anti-Winawer Lines

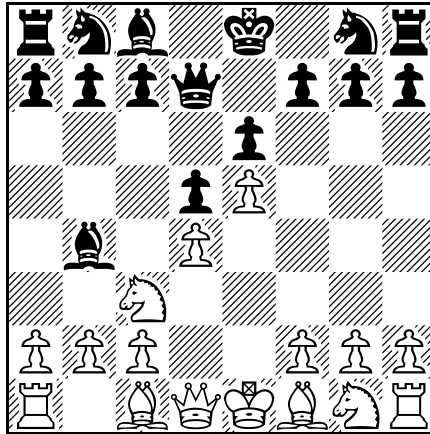


In this book Chapters One and Two are weightier than other chapters since 3...c3's popularity is two to one in favour of any other third move. In Chapter One we look at all of

White's non 4 e5 Anti-Winawer alternatives: 4 exd5, 4 ♖ge2, 4 a3, 4 ♗d3, 4 ♕d3, 4 ♗d2 and 4 ♖g4.

I don't consider a single one of these as any kind of theoretical threat to Black, but that doesn't mean they aren't dangerous, since we chess players love to slave over the main lines and ignore our preparation of sidelines. So in this chapter our only danger is that we won't do our homework.

Winawer French Main Line, Petrosian's Variation



As a teacher and a writer, I live with the great fear that nobody is either listening or reading. So please remain calm. No, we who play Petrosian's line are not some creepy community, who has an aversion to developing our pieces in the opening stages of a chess game. Just because we don't understand an opening variation right now, doesn't mean that it must remain unknown forever.

I know that convincing some readers of the viability of Black's position is going to be as easy as forcing a three-year-old to swallow vile-tasting medicine. I play this line as Black and I don't play drunken, debauched variations where the law doesn't exist. After Black's absurd looking last move 4...♕d7, we imagine Dostoyevsky's editor admonishing him: "Fyodor Mikhailovich, please stop with the suicide and gloom, and maybe try writing a bit more cheerfully!"

We deliberately block our c8-bishop, but this is no worry since we plan to eliminate our bad bishop via ...b7-b6 and ...♗a6. Also if White plays 5 ♖g4, we have the option of playing 5...f5, when all of a sudden our 4...♕d7 makes complete sense, since our g7-pawn is protected. In fact, we even have the option of responding to 5 ♖g4 with the retro move 5...♗f8. Why give White both space and a development lead? Here are some key factors of the position:

1. White's space is negated by the fact that our opponent lacks targets in our camp.
2. White's development lead is negated by the fact that the position is closed.

Opening Repertoire: The French Defence

3. Meanwhile, Black is the only one with the two viable pawn breaks, in ...c7-c5 and ...f7-f6, later on.

4. In this variation our opponent fights an enemy with no face and no name, since there is nothing in Black's camp to attack.

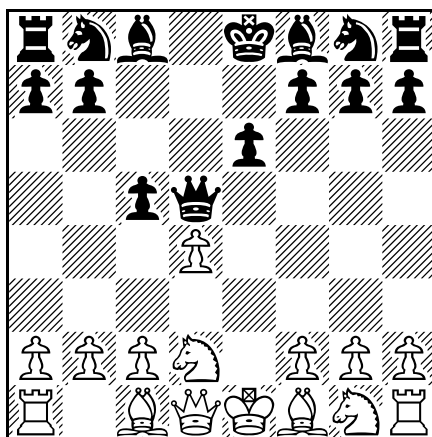
5. The modern age doesn't suit me so well and your writer pines away for an earlier, simpler, comp-free era, which this line magically transports us back to. My mind is an unfit vessel for cramming in reams of complex theory. But give it an idea and it takes root, remains and flourishes. Petrosian's Variation is a position of ideas – not variations – and is a place where if your opponent attempts to out-book you with comp analysis, it fails miserably, since we lure him or her into our realm of concepts, rather than numbers.

So White's intention to attack and deliver checkmate feels that frustrating sense of 'over-there', just out of reach. Don't worry. This line isn't one of those backwoods towns which are so small, that they don't show up on the roadmap. Our line has been quality tested by many GMs, starting with Petrosian, and proven to be sound.

Some lessons cannot be studied or explained, but instead, absorbed via experience where we slowly – and often painfully – learn the lessons life teaches us. The position is difficult to comprehend for both sides, which means this factor will be in our favour.

Why? Simple math. We as Black will reach this line far more often than our opponents playing the white side. So our accumulated experience may give us a decisive factor. Also, the comps don't really understand Black's position in Petrosian's line and routinely weigh it overly in White's favour. This means your opponents will look at the '+0.83' assessment in a position which in reality may be even, and not bother to look at the line further, since in their mind there is no reason to go deeper into a position which greatly favours them (but in actuality, doesn't).

Tarrasch Variation

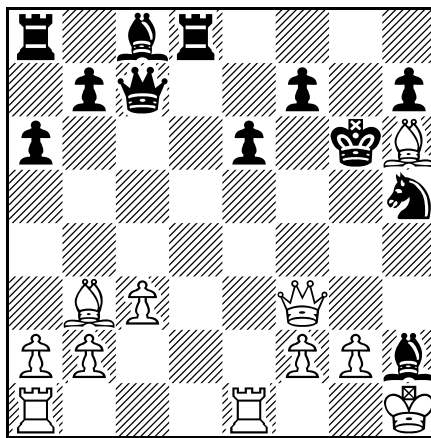


The great partisan divide in chess is players who go for closed games versus those who prefer open games. Of course we Frenchmen and Frenchwomen are firmly in the closed category – except against the Tarrasch! Interpretations on just how to play against Tarrasch vary widely. I have tried every possible version and over the years have come to the conclusion that the ...♞xd5 line is by far Black's soundest way to meet it.

The ...♞xd5 Tarrasch cannibalizes features from the ...♞xd5 Scandinavian lines. The positions which arise swing wildly, from dull, to a long piece sacrifice line where Black can hold his or her own if you do your homework. Just as a prosecutor attempts to shake the defendant's memory with a barrage of questions concerning minute details, modern opening theory does the same to all of us on the witness stand, at least in the opening phase of a chess game.

Be warned: if you willingly enter long, forcing lines which can be comped to kingdom-come, you better be good at following orders. It isn't easy to look in the mirror and face down our own stylistic weaknesses. This is one of the few French lines which is open and most of us French guys prefer it closed. Yet I find that the black position's inherent solidity keeps me from flubbing the ...♞xd5 Tarrasch, the way I do most other open positions.

A strong theoretician has an eye for salvaging a useful line, which others may discard as junk. Outwardly, Black's position looks poor, since our side lags in development, yet just as in the Scandinavian, 1 e4 d5, Black's position proves to be infuriatingly difficult to punish for White. As it turns out this line is one of the most solid ways to meet Tarrasch and White strains even to produce a birthright '+='.



Grey hair begins to grow on our heads for two reasons:

1. The natural passage of time.
2. The unnatural, from stress and discontent, such as playing Black in the diagram just above.

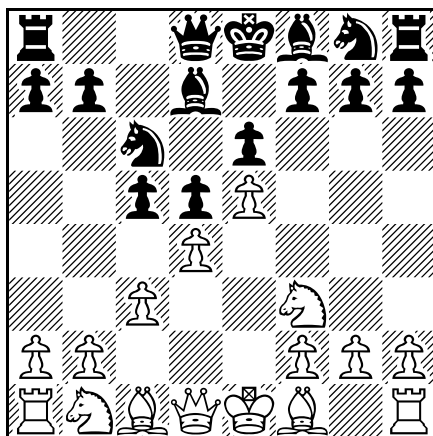
Before you agree to enter the above position, it will be necessary for you to sign a legal document which clears me of liability, just in case you end up getting mated and then irra-

tionally demand your money back for this excellent book. This line is a town without a mayor, a main street, and worst of all, a police department.

I don't want to get you nervous, but the above diagram is just the *start* of theory in this line. Don't worry though. The admission of ignorance when we don't understand something is, in a weird way, the beginning of wisdom. There are no secrets in our electronic/database/comp era. If a defensive idea has been found to secure Black's position (they have) by some GM, within a week every club player is familiar with it. Only through the lamp of study and repetition can we orient ourselves to a line this externally disorienting.

I (and more importantly, the comps) assure you that Black is OK in the diagrammed position. The two sides engage in unparallel endeavours with completely equal efficiency. White is trying to mate us, while we hope to survive and convert with our extra piece. The comps call it about even. Obviously, we need to know what we are doing, since inattention to theoretical detail is the thief who carries off our most precious possessions. We must also rely on our memory (who for me is the friend who instantly forsakes me in difficult times, exactly when I need her the most), which comes with repeated study of the line. Rest easy. If an Indian fakir can sleep comfortably on a bed of nails, then you and I can feel comfortable playing Black's side of the diagrammed position from the Tarrasch.

Advance Variation

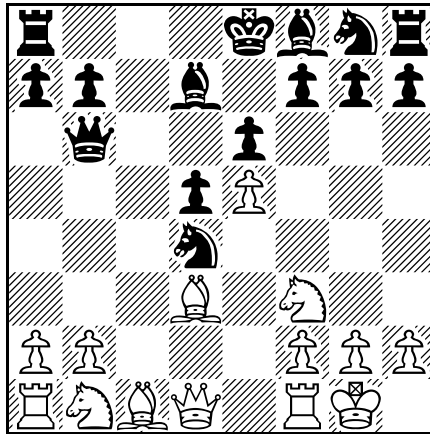


Whatever line is hot is the centre of chess civilization. At the moment the Advance Variation is one of White's most popular choices against the French, with some considering it as the perfect way to punish our French. Before we talk about the perfect line against the French, we must first establish the definition of "perfect". The Advance Variation is indeed one of our most challenging lines, since we can easily get squeezed from lack of space. Our job is to chip away from the sides by adding pressure to e5 and especially d4. The fact that extra space is somehow an advantage is not a bipartisan point of agreement. White can

easily overextend if our opponent pushes too recklessly or allows too many swaps, since in an ending, Black may be the one to stand better.

Rather than the traditional 5...♖b6, we instead play 5...♘d7, which is a wait-and-see strategy. We may or may not place our queen on b6, depending on how White sets up.

Milner-Barry Gambit

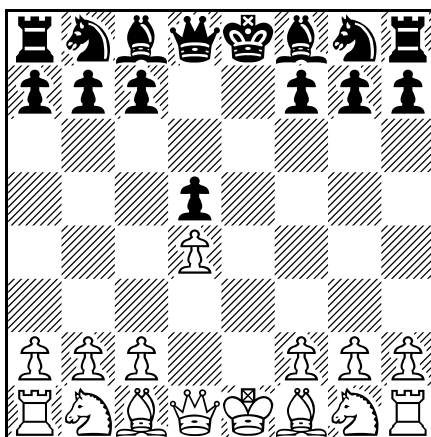


We were taught as children that hard work and perseverance will fulfill our dreams. Of course, this is a lie our parents told us. If you don't believe me, then ask the following two people:

1. A factory worker who slaves away at some mindlessly boring job for 40 years and then retires, barely remaining above the poverty level.
2. An honest positional player (i.e. your writer), who outplays his immoral/lazy tactician opponent for 39 moves, only to get swindled and lose on the final move of the time control. This is the danger we face against the Milner Barry Gambit. The comps like our position, but as we all understand, our fragile human brain is liable to mess things up when it is confronted by confusion.

Gambits tend to be the pastime of the young – except for this one. At the San Diego Chess Club none of the kids play it, yet three adults do, one aged 81. Black is up a solid pawn here and we should win since the game is still relatively closed, yet as we all understand, the law of karma often leaves us unsatisfied in the realm of chess. If we as Black come into this line prepared, then our opponent's Edward G Robinson-like taunts from *The 10 Commandments*, "Where's your messiah now?" won't scare us, since we, taking on the role of Charlton Heston, have faith our preparation will carry us through the dark times to come.

Exchange Variation



One glance at the exciting diagram above and you are undoubtedly overcome with a maelstrom of whirling emotions...oh, you aren't? Not every French player hates the Exchange Variation; we just hate those who play it against us. When our cruel opponent plays the Exchange line against our French, he or she is basically telling us: "You may need to lower your expectations for an exciting game."

Your writer is one of the great apologists of this line...when I play it as White. When I face it as Black, I spew my hatred for it like a fire and brimstone preacher, attempting to scare the hell out of his congregation. When I was a kid, the most dangerous words in the world to utter to my father were: "I'm bored", since he would immediately put me to work with menial chores and housework. So today, I am genetically incapable of getting bored, even in the most boring position, like the one in the diagram, which must be wildly stimulating to your imaginations.

Chess openings are tailored for many levels of intelligence. As you may have guessed, the infuriating Exchange French is the choice of those at the lowest level (which may explain why I play it as White against French). This is one of those openings which isn't theoretically dangerous, yet it's infuriating when a player 250 points lower than you plays it and manages to grovel a draw. In this book, I try and show as many paths of asymmetry as possible for Black, so that we can actually play for a win. I am sick and tired of French Defence books which under-cover this very important line (including my own two previous French books!), so in this book I covered the Exchange Variation extensively, with an unheard of nine games.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks as always to Byron, Nancy and Richard Palliser for the final edit.

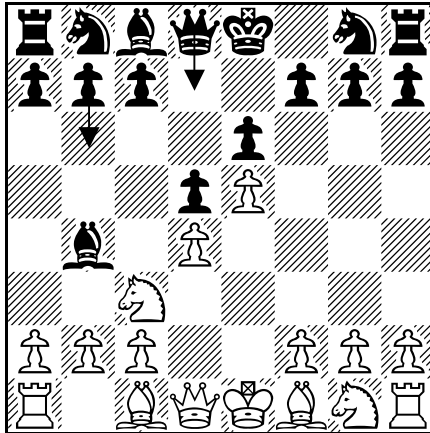
Good luck in your French adventures and Vive la France!

Cyrus Lakdawala, San Diego, February 2019

Chapter Two

The Main Line Winawer: 4 e5

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e5



Against the main lines I advocate the slightly offbeat 4...b6 and 4...♙d7 Petrosian Winawer lines, which in the database are Black's third and fourth most popular responses to White's 4 e5. Our main ideas are:

1. We delay our natural ...c7-c5 pawn break.
2. We replace it with the plan ...b7-b6 and eventually ...♙a6, after which we swap off our bad bishop for White's good light-squared bishop, which in turn greatly reduces White's attacking chances.
3. In this line we offer White a space and development lead, with the following fine print in the contract: There are no visible targets to attack in our position. If White plays ♙g4 at some point, we can actually retreat our bishop to f8, which covers g7. In the 4...♙d7 version we can also meet 5 ♙g4 with 5..f5, after which our queen on d7 covers g7.

Now one bit of advice I offer to some of the comp-worshipping readers: Please *ignore* the

comp's early evaluation of this line. It will incorrectly claim that White is up around '+1.00' due to White's space and development lead. In this case we humans understand the position better than the comps:

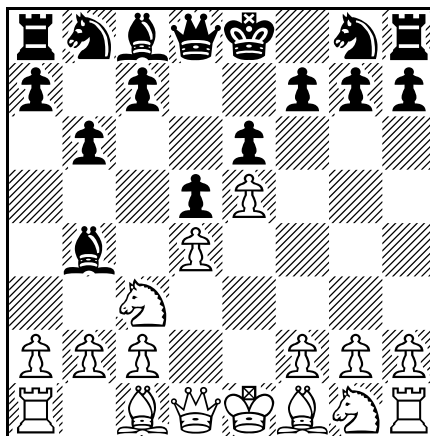
1. White's development lead is negated by the fact that Black's position is devoid of targets and completely closed.
2. White's space 'advantage' is negated by the fact that Black – and not White – controls the where and when of pawn breaks, with ...c7-c7 or ...f7-f6 or ...f7-f5. White's two natural pawn breaks of c2-c4 and f2-f4 then f4-f5 are far more difficult to engineer.

Game 8
E.Joppen-T.Petrosian
Belgrade 1954

1 e4 e6

I really hate the 'Does-anyone-really-care-today-why-Arch-Duke-Ferdinand-was-assassinated?' theory of chess study. Some of my students ignore history and are not interested in looking at older games like this one, claiming they are out of date. I vehemently disagree and feel that you should first go over the older games of any opening you play to put our present day into context.

2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e5 b6



I need to muster the force of authority before I propose to the reader a non-standard suggestion. Some of my students argue the tired old bugaboo that if they veer from mainstream theory, it's certain to be wrong. If this were the case, there would be no new theory. A new belief system has been introduced by Petrosian.

5 ♚g4

Alternatively:

Opening Repertoire: The French Defence

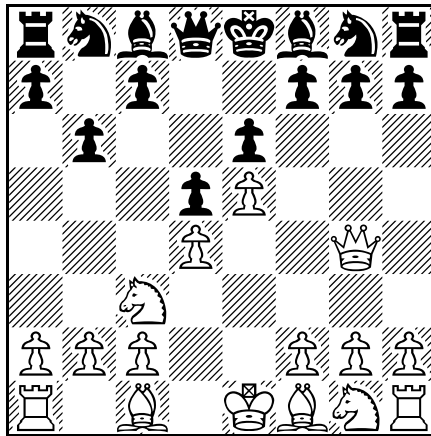
a) Later in the chapter we look at 5 a3.

b) 5 ♕d3 (now when Black plays ...♕a6, White will have lost a tempo if he swaps on a6) 5...♞d7 6 ♖f3 ♕a6 7 0-0 (White correctly refrains from the tempo-losing swap on a6) 7...♕f8!? (I don't want to take his knight and don't want to play ...c7-c5 until my bishop is safe) 8 ♕f4 (perhaps he thinks I am about to play ...f7-f6?, which wouldn't even occur to me when so far behind in development) 8...♗e7 9 a4 ♕xd3 10 ♞xd3 ♖bc6 11 ♞d2 ♗g6 12 ♕g3 ♕b4! (we must be flexible in this line) 13 ♗h4?! (extricating himself from the pin with 13 ♞d3 is correct) 13...0-0 14 f4?? (don't judge White too harshly, as my opponent and ex-student Varun is rated over 2400 today, but at the time he was eight years old and rated just below 2000; here he had nothing better than 14 ♗f3) 14...♗xd4! when White is unable to recapture and Black won a key central pawn for free, V.Krishnan-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2009.

c) 5 ♗f3 ♞d7 6 ♕d2 ♗e7 7 ♗e2 (7 a3 ♕xc3 8 ♕xc3 ♕a6 is fine for Black who has the only two pawn breaks in the position, with ...c5-c5 and ...f7-f6) 7...♕xd2+ 8 ♞xd2 ♕a6 9 h4 c5 10 c3 ♖bc6 11 ♗f4 ♕xf1 12 ♗xf1 Black stood at least equal and could even castle king-side here, L.Psakhis-N.Short, Hastings 1987/88.

d) 5 f4 tends to be popular at the club level. I don't think it's so great, since it reduces the scope of White's dark-squared bishop: 5...♗e7 6 ♗f3 ♗f5 7 ♕d3 (7 g4 ♗h4 is fine for Black) 7...h5 8 0-0 ♞d7 9 ♗e2 ♕a6 10 ♕xa6 ♗xa6 11 ♞d3 ♗b8 12 ♕d2 ♕e7 (Black wants to preserve his good bishop) 13 ♗g3 g6 14 ♕e1, T.Thorhallsson-J.Timman, Reykjavik 2000. Black doesn't look worse after 14...♗xg3 15 ♕xg3 c5.

5...♕f8!



What would Morphy say if he saw Petrosian's last move? It violates no less than three principles:

1. Don't move the same piece twice in the opening, unless absolutely necessary (with Black's coming ...♕f8).
2. Don't retreat a piece in the opening (...♕f8 again).

3. Don't fall behind in development in the opening (you guessed it: ...♗f8)

Yet Petrosian's last move, I assure you is a good one. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once theorized that if a lion had the power of speech, we humans would still have no idea what it was talking about, since its brain is too far divergent from the human model, and essentially we could never accurately translate the lion's intent. Petrosian's line of the French strikes many people this way.

It almost feels nonsensical for Black to avoid hitting White's d4 base pawn with ...c7-c5 and Black's play looks ridiculously passive. However, keep in mind that that you can say "Dr. Jekyll is gentle and kind", and you would be right. But haven't you forgotten about his other side?

This line, which I have played for almost five decades, contains a sinister side behind the passive facade. Many of us wish our chess talents would lie elsewhere. I know in my heart that I will never be competent in open positions, so I steer the game to where my abilities lie, in blocked, logic based positions – even when externally they don't look logical, as in this line.

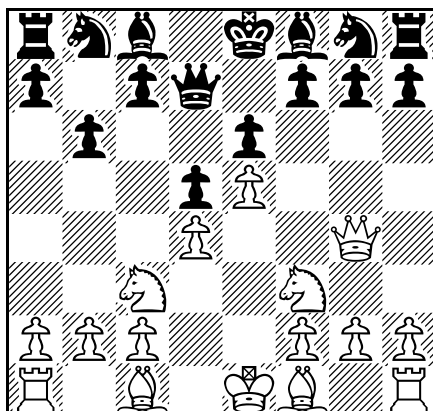
Chess teachers, much like the Greek and Hindu gods, desire obedient, devoted students who trust every word we tell them without question. I have an 11-year-old 2150-rated student named Ming, who has played the French all his chess life. I tried to talk him into playing Petrosian's line, which would admirably suit his doveish needs, but he keeps telling me: "The line is stupid and Black's position is ridiculous! I comped the line and it says White is winning." Then I have Ming play White against me, after which he loses 10 games in a row – most of them without a fight – and still, he refuses to alter his claim. So this line is a tough sell. In heavy theoretical openings like the Winawer, it's easy to feel like Drew Barrymore, who lost her memory on a daily basis in *50 First Dates*.

I feel that the 4...b6 and 4...♖d7 (which we look at later in the chapter) lines are easier to play than main line, 4...c5 Winawer, since they are logic/intuition based, rather than memorization/tactically based. Black's undeveloped pieces may appear to resemble those third rate government office workers who work just enough to not get fired, and no more. The retreat to f8 is, however, far superior to pushing the g7-pawn to g6, or moving the king to f8. Even with White owning space and now a huge development lead, Black's position is frustratingly target-free and is the equivalent of a bulky, powerfully built fighter throwing a punch at the wind.

6 ♗f3

Alternatively, 6 a4 ♗c6! (preventing a4-a5) 7 ♗b5 ♗b7 8 ♗f3 (8 a5 is met with 8...a6) 8...a6 9 ♗e2 ♖d7 10 0-0 ♗ge7 11 ♗d1 (a move like this shows that White's development lead isn't all that valuable in this closed position; GM Sevillano retreats his knight to reposition it on the more active e3-square) 11...♗f5 12 c3 was seen in E.Sevillano-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2007. Black looks just fine after 12...♗a5, intending ...♗b3. This game is annotated in *First Steps: French Defence*.

6...♖d7



Petrosian had a way of shifting a position so that it went well beyond his opponent's strategic frame of reference. So first he develops and undevelops his dark-squared bishop and then the first piece to be 'developed' is the queen, to the seemingly nonsensical d7-square. Actually d7 is the natural square for the queen in this line, since:

1. White may later play for an f2-f4 and f4-f5 break, so on d7 Black reinforces the f5-square.
2. With ...♚d7, Black enables a future ...f7-f5 trick, where the queen controls g7, even if Black's bishop were not currently on f8.
3. Much later, Black can play ...f7-f6 and our e6-pawn is still protected by our queen.
4. Black usually plays ...0-0-0, so moving the queen to d7 is a first step in that direction.

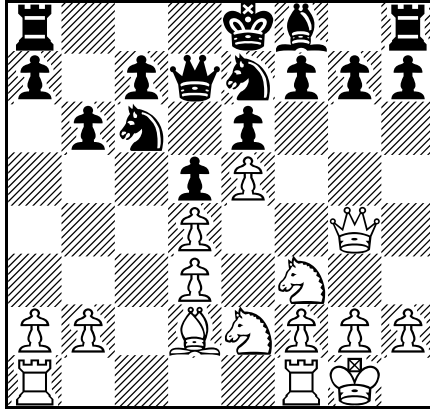
7 ♖b5?!

White plays with the strategic commitment level of a sailor docked in town for the weekend, who meets an alluring woman at a sleazy bar. The awful plan is to play back to a3 if kicked and then he can back up his d4 point with c2-c3. The obvious problem with this move is that it loses a load of time for White. Today, more often seen are:

a) 7 ♗b5 c6 8 ♗e2 (8 ♗a4 a5 threatens ...b6-b5 and ...a5-a4, trapping White's bishop, and after 9 a3 ♗a6 White's bishop is misplaced on a4) 8...♗a6 9 0-0 ♘e7 10 ♚d1, M.Müller-R.Vaganian, German League 1998. Black looks no worse after the freeing break 10...c5.

b) 7 ♗e2 (the idea behind this move is that when Black plays ...♗a6 and ...♗xe2, White recaptures with the c3-knight, which brings it over to the kingside and also now White can meet ...c7-c5 with c2-c3) 7...♗a6 8 0-0 ♘e7 9 a4 ♗xe2 10 ♖xe2 ♗bc6 11 ♗d2 ♗f5 12 ♚h3 (thinking about g2-g4) 12...h5 13 ♚fb1, S.Maze-L.Karlsson, Salou 2008 (not 13 g4? hxg4! and Black obtains more than enough compensation for the exchange), when Black looks fine after 13...a5.

c) The idea with 7 ♗d3 is that when Black plays ...♗a6 and ...♗xd3, White recaptures with the c2-pawn, which opens the c-file. Why is that important? Because Black's king will almost certainly castle long, since the kingside will be infested with white attackers: 7...♗a6 8 0-0 ♗xd3 9 cxd3 ♘e7 10 ♗e2 ♗bc6 11 ♗d2 was G.Kamsky-I.Zugic, Buenos Aires 2005.



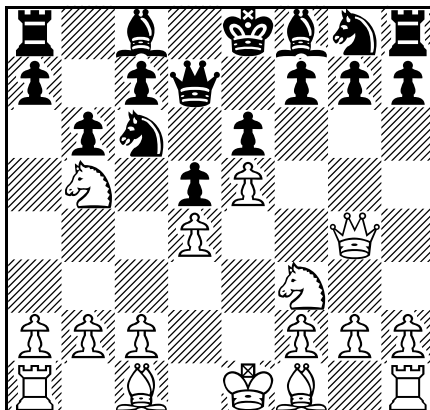
Black looks OK after 11...h5 12 ♖h3 ♜f5!. Remember: on g2-g4, with play ...h5xg4! with a promising exchange sacrifice.

d) 7 a4 (the idea is to meet ...♙a6 with ♙xa6 and then a4-a5) 7...♞c6! (we must be flexible and not play the ...♙a6 plan 100% of the time; Black threatens the annoying ...♞b4) 8 ♙d2 ♞ge7 9 ♙e2 ♜f5 10 0-0 h5 11 ♞f4 g6 12 ♙b5 ♙h6! 13 ♞g5 (no choice) 13...♞fxd4 and Petrosian won an important central pawn in M.Tal-T.Petrosian, Soviet Championship, Leningrad 1977.

e) 7 h4 (White stakes out more kingside space and leaves open a possibility of a rook lift to h3) 7...h5 (I think it's important to check White's territorial ambitions and not allow h4-h5, even though Black's last move may later allow White to plant a piece on g5) 8 ♞f4 ♙a6 9 ♙xa6 ♞xa6 10 0-0, P.Kruglyakov-Y.Kruppa, Kiev 2005. Black stands at least equal after 10...♞b4 11 ♞d2 c5.

f) In our next game we look at 7 a3.

7...♞c6!



Opening Repertoire: The French Defence

Not 7...c6?? 8 ♖d6+ and Black can't take the knight since then g7 hangs.

8 c3 a6 9 ♗a3 f5!

In this way Black's bishop is free to chop White's a3-knight, inflicting damage to his opponent's structure.

10 ♕g3

After 10 exf6 White may be the one down in development after 10...♗xf6 11 ♖h4 ♕xa3 12 bxa3 0-0.

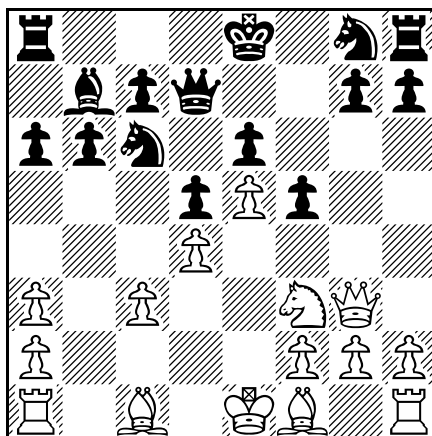
10...♕xa3

This move not only inflicts White with doubled a-pawns, but also weakens c4, later perhaps enabling Black to play ...♗a5 and ...♗c4, without fear of b2-b3.

11 bxa3

The comp, who is no longer a savant in blocked games, thinks White stands a touch better. He doesn't. The fact that White's former b2-pawn now goes à la mode over the a2-pawn isn't a great sign for White's structure.

11...♕b7



Black's queenside position is kind of a weird mirror King's Indian structure, where Black may eventually play for a ...c7-c5 break. Also, take note that it is now Black, not White, who leads in development.

12 ♗g5?!

Come on buddy, bring out a piece. Any developing move is better.

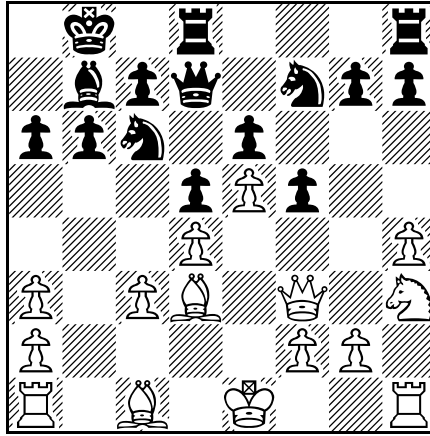
12...0-0-0

Black has nothing to fear on White's open b-file and castling is a safe choice. Petrosian, above all else, was a cautious man. I think it would be completely safe to play 12...h6 13 ♗h3 g5, seizing kingside space. If 14 f4 g4 15 ♗f2 h5 White doesn't have time to try and open the kingside with the misguided 16 h3?! due to 16...h4 17 ♕d3 g3 18 ♗d1 ♗a5. Black's control over the queenside light squares offers him a clear advantage.

13 h4 ♗h6

The knight will be redeployed on f7. 13...♖ge7?? hangs an exchange to 14 ♖f7.

14 ♙d3 ♚b8 15 ♜f3 ♞f7 16 ♞h3



Rapid development is certainly not included in Joppen's philosophy.

16...g6

Petrosian is not the kind of player who takes serious risk. Saying this, a knight sacrifice on e5 looks awfully tempting after 16...♞fxe5! 17 dxe5 ♞xe5 18 ♜g3 ♞xd3+ 19 ♜xd3 e5, and advantage Black. For the piece, Black gets two pawns, a development lead and a massive, rolling centre.

17 ♜e2

Attacking a6. 17 h5? is too slow and is met with 17...♞cxe5! 18 dxe5 d4 19 ♜g3 gxh5 20 f3 dxc3 21 ♙c2 ♜hg8 22 ♜f2 ♞xe5 with four pawns for the piece and a wicked initiative. If 23 ♞f4?? Black breaks through with 23...♞xg2! 24 ♞xg2 ♞xf3+ 25 ♙f1 ♞d2+ 26 ♙xd2 ♜b5+, when White can resign.

17...♙a7 18 ♙g5?

The biggest problem is the one to which the least attention is paid. White gives away his sole asset in his position: his dark-squared bishop, and with it, his control over the dark squares. Correct was 18 ♞f4 with an inferior but still playable position.

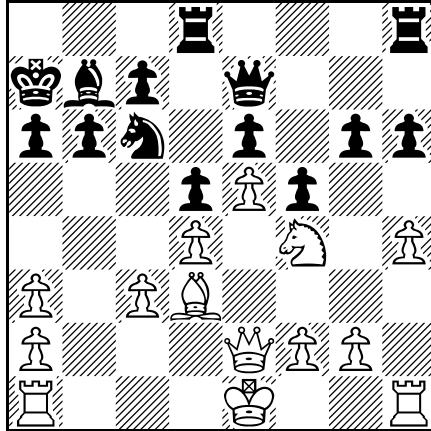
18...♞xg5 19 ♞xg5

Alternatively, 19 hxg5 h6 20 0-0-0 ♞a5 21 ♙b2 ♙c6! when ...♙b5 is coming and after that, Black's knight will land on c4. Now if 22 ♙xa6 b5! White's bishop is trapped.

19...h6 20 ♞h3 ♜e7

With a double attack on a3 and h4.

21 ♞f4



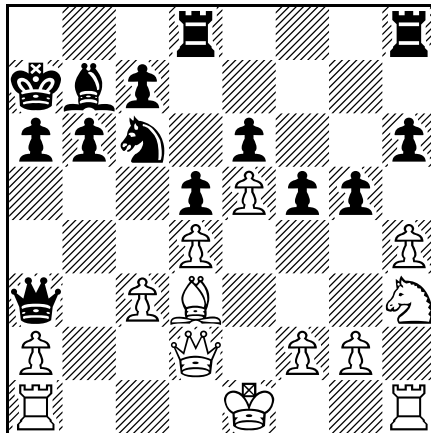
Exercise (combination alert): White threatens 22 ♖xg6. How should Black respond?

Answer: Ignore it and play ...g6-g5.

21...g5! 22 ♗h3

White realized that the problem with 22 ♗g6 is that Black can play 22...♙xa3, threatening c3 and then the a1-rook. After 23 ♕d2 ♖hg8 24 h5 ♗a5 Black is up a pawn with a strategically won game and White's knight, far from being a strength, is actually stuck on g6 with no real influence on Black's position.

22...♙xa3 23 ♕d2



Exercise (combination alert): Petrosian's strategic ability was superior to his tactical eye. What did the future world champion miss?

23...♖e7?!

We reach the close-but-no-cigar moment. While Black's position is still winning after this move, Petrosian missed the far stronger:

Answer: 23...♗xe5!! is no impulse buy, since lines open at an alarming rate against White's undeveloped position: 24 dxe5 d4! (threat: ...♗xg2) 25 O-O dxc3 26 ♖e2 ♗d4! (threat: ...g5-g4, trapping White's knight) 27 ♖e3 ♗hd8 28 ♗c2 (28 ♗e2 is met with 28...♗e4) 28...♗g4! 29 f3 ♗d2! (Black continues to target g2) 30 ♗f2 f4 31 ♖e1 ♗xf3!. After this overloaded defender/pin shot, White is crushed.

24 O-O-O ♗dg8 25 ♖b1 ♗a5

Seizing control over c4.

26 hxg5 hxg5 27 f4 g4! 28 ♗g5 ♗c6!

Intending ...♗b5.

29 ♖b2 ♗c4 30 ♖b4

30 ♗xc4 dxc4 turns Black's formally bad bishop into a monster.

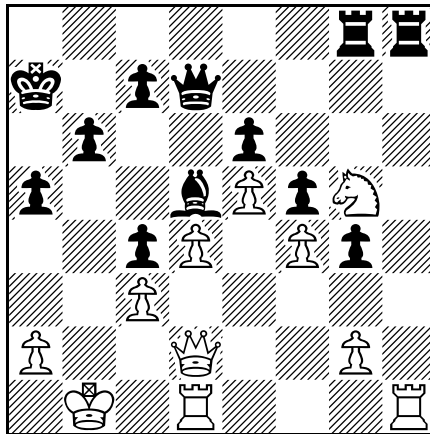
30...♖d7! 31 ♗xc4 a5!

Zwischenzug.

32 ♖b2

Likewise, if 32 ♖b3 dxc4! (stronger than 32...♗a4 33 ♗b5) 33 ♖xc4 ♗d5 34 ♖e2 ♖c6 35 ♗hg1 ♗h2 36 ♗d2 ♖xc3 when White's game falls apart.

32...dxc4 33 ♖d2 ♗d5



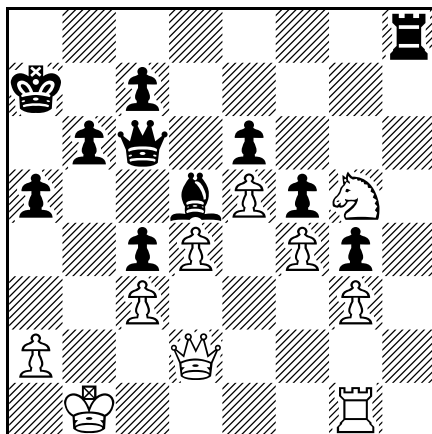
Tremble before the awesome strategic power of Petrosian, the patron saint of blocked positions. It feels as if the best of White's position was torn out, and in its place was grafted the worst. This is an example of absolute domination on one colour and White's position is destitute of counterplay. This is the moment in the play where the lights dim for every character, except one: Black's bishop. Black's monster 'bad bishop' towers over White's rather useless 'good knight'.

34 ♗dg1 ♖c6 35 ♗xh8

Opening Repertoire: The French Defence

Also hopeless is 35 ♖a1 ♜xh1 36 ♜xh1 ♙xg2 37 ♜h6 ♙d5.

35...♜xh8 36 g3



Exercise (planning): Black has access to two clear winning plans. Find one.

Answer: 36...♞e8!

Plan 1: Transfer the queen to the h-file and infiltrate on h2.

Answer no.2: Also winning is 36...b5! (play for a queenside pawn breakthrough on b4) 37 a3 b4! (anyway) 38 axb4 axb4 39 cxb4 c3 40 ♞d3 ♜b8 and Black has a winning attack.

37 ♖b2 ♞h5 38 ♙c2 ♞h2

Mission accomplished. The ending is completely hopeless for White.

39 ♞xh2 ♜xh2+ 40 ♖b1 ♙a6! 0-1

The next step in Black's plan is to infiltrate with his king: 41 a4 b5 42 axb5+ ♖xb5.

Black's king will reach b3 and if White's rook protects it with ♜c1, then Black plays ...♞g2 and ...♜xg3.

Game 9

A.Chisitiakov-T.Petrosian

Moscow 1957

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e5 b6 5 ♞g4 ♙f8

At club level we don't have to play this line as well as Petrosian. Mere competency is good enough to beat most of your opposition, who I predict will not know what to target in your position.

6 ♘f3

White can also play a2-a3 one move earlier, as seen in the following Petrosian game: 6