

The Modernized Nimzovich Defense

1.e4  c6!

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**The Modernized Nimzovich
Defense 1.e4 ♞c6!**

Christian Bauer

Thinkers Publishing 2020



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To Judith

Key to Symbols

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

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Preface

Readers who have had the opportunity to watch some of my games or read my previous books will no doubt have noticed my tendency to avoid main lines and search for uncharted territories as soon as the first few moves of the game. This had prompted me to start writing on 1...b6, which, along with the Philidor Defense and the Scandinavian, were weapons I used at a certain period of my chess career. I got attracted by the system covered in the present book something like five years ago, when I discovered that there existed no notable drawback to allowing a quick d4-d5 after the sequence 1.e4 ♘c6 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♘c3 g6.

I'd like to share here my experience and ideas with this rare set-up, and offer the reader a Black repertoire on that topic. At different points I will try to offer alternatives, whether one prefers a solid line, or rather a more complex one.

Hope you'll enjoy reading this book and dare to try the system it deals with in your future tournaments!

Christian Bauer
June 2020

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Part I

Alternatives to 2.d4 and 2. f3

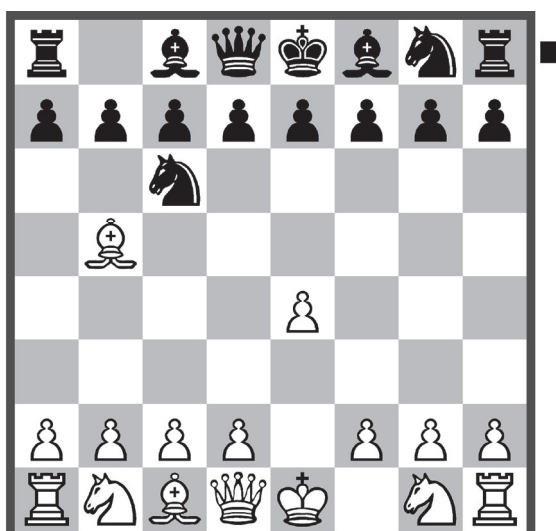
Introduction to Part I

This small part will mostly be devoted to 2.♗b5 and 2.♘c3. Black doesn't need to know much there, and he can choose from many different possibilities with almost no forced lines.



2. ♖b5

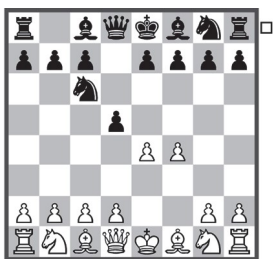
1.e4 ♘c6 2. ♖b5



1. e4 ♘c6 2. ♙b5!?

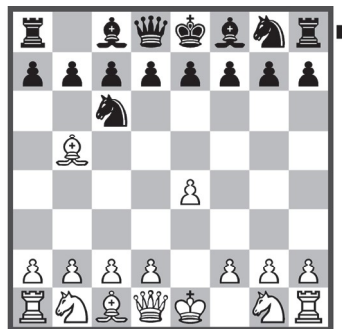
A creative attempt to play for an opening advantage and to enter unexplored territory as quickly as possible. My recommendation now is 2... ♘f6, but I will briefly talk about other options.

Before dealing with 2. ♙b5 and 2. ♘c3, let me say something about 2. f4?!. At first glance, pushing the f-pawn looks interesting, until Black replies 2... d5! .



Position after: 2... d5!

This counter-strike in the center has already been mentioned by Wisniewski in his book *Play 1... ♘c6!* back in 2007, similarly to what I wrote myself in *The Philidor Files*: 1.e4 d6 2.f4?! d5! (obviously the extra tempo ... ♘b8-c6 speaks in Black's favor). After 2.f4?! d5! White will be left with weaknesses one way or another, for instance 3. ♘c3 dxe4 4. ♘xe4 [or 3. d3 e5; or else 3. exd5 ♙xd5; finally 3. e5 d4!]. This is even stronger than 3... ♙f5 or 3... ♘h6-f5. In all cases White can only bitterly regret the advance of his f-pawn.].



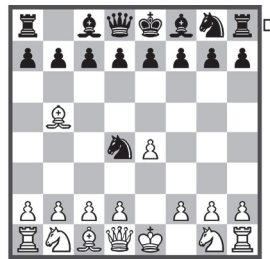
Position after: 2. ♙b5!?

2... ♘f6

A) 2... e5 3. ♘f3 transposes to a Ruy Lopez. From Black's standpoint, a merit of this move order could be that it rules out the Scotch and the Italian.

B) 2... a6!?, Hasangatin, R (2496) – Usmanov, V (2459) Sochi 2017, practically forces White to swap if he wants to be consistent, after which both recaptures are playable. If one compares this with an Exchange Ruy Lopez, 1.e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙xc6 dxc6, White is probably happy not to have blocked his f-pawn.

C) 2... ♘d4?!



Position after: 2... ♘d4?!

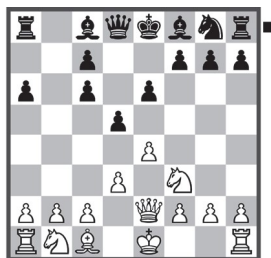
This reminds one of the mirror line 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘g5 ♘e4 3.♘h4 g5 in the Trompowsky, but after 3. ♘a4 b5 4. c3 bxa4 5. cxd4 the a4-pawn is bound to fall and White has no concerns over his king's safety.

D) 2... d5!? 3. ♖e2 Alternatives are no better [especially 3. exd5? ♖xd5 and Black already stands on top!].



Position after: 3. ♖e2

D1) 3... a6 4. ♘xc6+ bxc6 5. ♘f3 e6 6. d3



Position after: 6. d3

White's position is quite harmonious, David, A (2534) – Ternault, M (2323) Paris blitz 2019.

D2) 3... dxe4 is quite decent too and maybe better. Following 4. ♘xc6+ bxc6 5. ♖xe4 ♖d5 6. ♘c3 ♖xe4+ 7.

♘xe4 f5 and next 8...e5 there appears a position where Black has good central control and the pair of bishops to compensate for his structural weaknesses.

E) Finally the direct 2... g6 also exists, but by starting with 2... ♘f6 Black limits his opponent's possibilities in my opinion.



Position after: 2... ♘f6

3. d3

A) 3. ♘xc6?!

A1) 3... dxc6 4. d3 e5 5. ♘f3 ♘d6

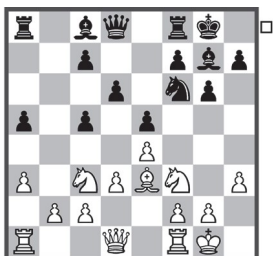


Position after: 5... ♘d6

Hasangatin, R (2509) – Schneider, I (2481) Berlin (blitz) 2015. Compared

with 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5. ♗xc6 dxc6 Black won't need to spend a tempo on ...♗c5-d6 later on. He thus has an improved version of the line above.

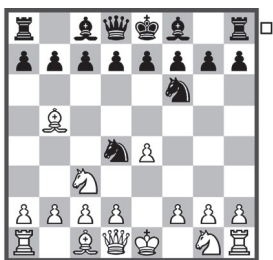
A2) 3... bxc6 4. d3 d6 5. h3 g6 6. ♘f3 ♗g7 7. 0-0 0-0 8. ♘c3 e5 9. ♗e3 c5 10. a3 a5



Position after: 10... a5

Van der Weide, K (2490) – Kalantarian, N (2415) Linares 1999. This is certainly fine for Black, who can prepare the ...f7-f5 push. In that particular game he won convincingly in 34 moves.

B) 3. ♘c3!? ♘d4



Position after: 3... ♘d4

4. ♗d3 [4. e5 ♘xb5 5. ♘xb5 ♘d5 This causes Black absolutely no worry, in

contrast with the similar line of the Rossolimo Sicilian 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♘d4 5.e5 ♘xb5 6.♘xb5 ♘d5 and now 7.♘g5!.] 4... d6 5. ♘ge2 ♘c6 [5... e5!?!; 5... c5!?!] 6. ♗b5 g6 7. d4 a6 8. ♗xc6+ bxc6 9. 0-0 ♗g7 10. ♗g5 0-0 11. ♖d2



Position after: 11. ♖d2

David, A (2553) – Lagarde, M (2599) Le Blanc-Mesnil (blitz) 2019. Here White could be somewhat better, with an improved version of 1.e4 ♘c6 2.♘f3 d6 3. d4 ♘f6 4.♘c3 g6 5.♗b5 a6 because his f-pawn isn't blocked. On the other hand, it remains to be seen whether the knight is worse-placed at e2 than it would be at f3.



Position after: 3. d3

3... g6

A) 3... d5!? 4. e5 ♘d7



Position after: 4... ♘d7

A1) In the event of 5. d4 a6! [5... ♘b6?! 6. a4] 6. ♙e2 [or 6. ♙xc6 bxc6] 6... ♘b6 and next 7... ♙f5, Black must be fine.

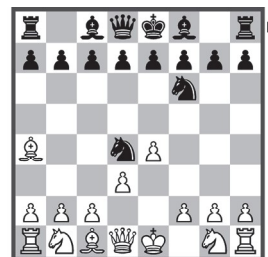
A2) 5. ♘f3 a6 Black insists on provocative chess [otherwise, the sounder 5...e6 was available]. 6. ♙xc6 bxc6



Position after: 6... bxc6

7. 0-0 [7. e6!? fxe6 8. ♙e2 e5∞] 7... ♘c5?! [7... e6 8. c4 ♙e7∞] 8. ♘d4 ♙d7 9. f4 ♘e6 10. ♘b3 g6 11. ♘c3 ♙g7 12. f5 gxf5 13. ♙xf5 ♘f8 14. ♙g5 ♘g6 15. ♘c5 ♙d8 16. ♙h5± David, A – Miles, A Cappelle-la-Grande 1997.

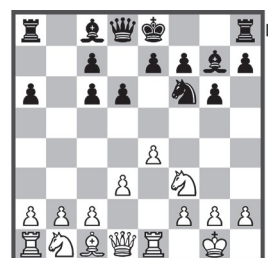
B) 3... ♘d4?! The knight jump remains dubious, even if White will have lost one tempo, compared with 2... ♘d4, if he achieves c2-c3 followed by d3-d4 at some point. 4. ♙a4



Position after: 4. ♙a4

4... b5 [4... e5 5. c3 ♘e6 6. ♘f3 ♙d6 Vitiugov, N (2638) – Vlassov, N (2471) Warsaw 2008. Black had handled the opening in an overly eccentric way and quickly came under pressure.] 5. c3 bxa4 6. cxd4 ♙a6 7. ♘c3 a3 Van den Doel, E (2547) – Kogan, A (2504) Lisbon 2000, and now 8. b4! would have brought White a neat plus.

C) 3... a6 4. ♙xc6 bxc6 5. ♘f3 [5. f4!?] 5... d6 6. 0-0 g6 7. ♙e1 ♙g7∞



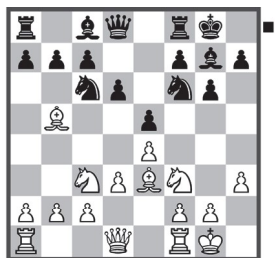
Position after: 7... ♙g7∞

Onischuk, V (2558) – Vlasenko, M (2400) St Petersburg 2012. Black could be satisfied with the outcome of the opening.

D) 3... e5!? offers a transposition to some 1.e4 e5 lines, for instance 4.♘f3 would mean here a 4.d3 Berlin Defense. It is not clear whether White could benefit from pushing his f-pawn here or in the near future.

4. c3

4. ♘f3 ♗g7 5. 0-0 0-0 6. ♘c3 d6 7. h3 e5 8. ♗e3=



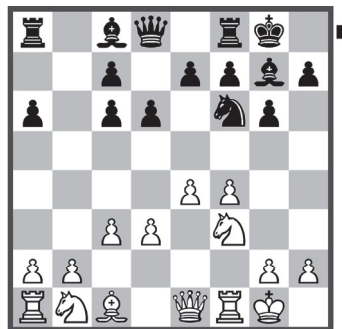
Position after: 8. ♗e3=

Van der Weide, K (2452) – Doettling, F (2477) Essen 2000. Both sides are fairly solid in this sort of Ruy Lopez with ...g6. Black may try to prepare the ...f7-f5 thrust now.

4... ♗g7 5. f4 d6 6. ♘f3 0-0 7. 0-0 a6 8. ♗xc6

Retaining the bishop with 8. ♗a4 b5 9. ♗c2 was sensible too.

8... bxc6 9. ♔e1

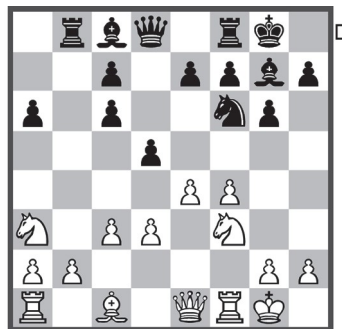


Position after: 9. ♔e1

9... ♖b8

Here or on the next move I would have preferred 9... a5∞ in order to vacate the a6 square for the bishop and remind White of his Achilles heel: the d3-pawn.

10. ♘a3 d5?!



Position after: 10... d5?!

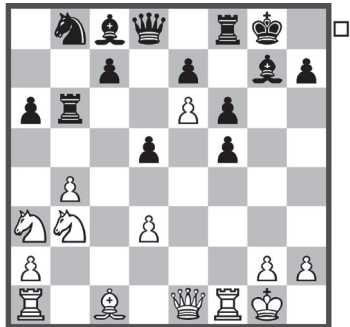
The ensuing closed character of the game will suit the white cavalry.

11. e5 ♘d7 12. ♘d4 ♖b6 13. b4 c5

Maybe 13... a5 14. bxa5 ♖a6 15. ♘b3 c5 offered better chances to muddy

the waters, though White remains clearly better.

14. ♘b3 cxb4 15. cxb4 f6 16. e6 ♘b8
17. f5 gxf5



Position after: 17... gxf5

18. ♘c5?!

An inaccuracy, where 18. ♘d4!± would have kept a firm grip on the position.

18... ♘c6 19. ♘c2 ♘e5?

The decisive mistake, instead of 19... d4!, when Black would still have been alive.

20. ♘d4 ♙e8 21. ♘xf5 ♙xe6 22. ♘xg7 ♙xg7 23. d4



Position after: 23. d4

1-0 Bauer, C – Boyer, M Saint-Affrique 2018.

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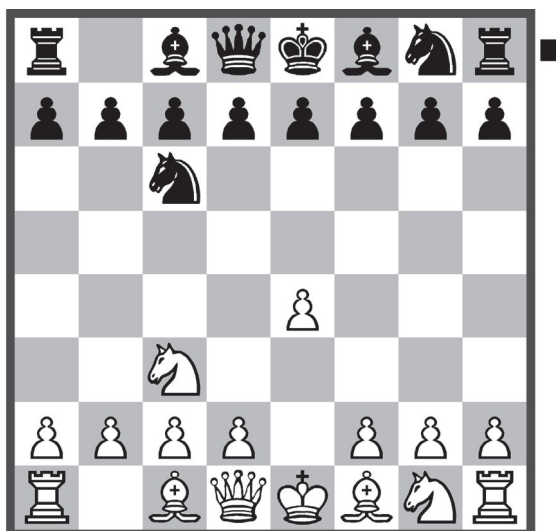
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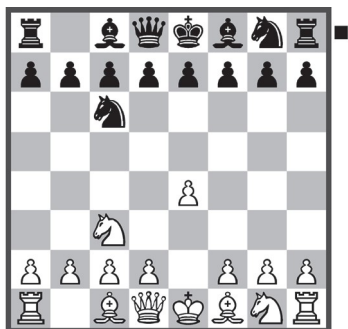


2.  c3

1.e4  c6 2.  c3



1. e4 ♘c6 2. ♘c3



Position after: 2... ♘c3

2... ♘f6

2... e6 and 2... e5 are equally good, but if Black doesn't mind the position after 3.d4 d5 4.e5 ♘d7, then 2... ♘f6 should reduce his opponent's worthwhile options.

3. ♘f3

3. d4 d5

A) The position after 4. exd5?! ♘xd5



Position after: 4... ♘xd5

has occurred just 30 times out of more than 700. It is completely harmless for Black, who can then de-

velop his light-squared bishop before playing ...e7-e6. In addition, and especially if White plays ♗b5, the ...♘xc3 bxc3 ♕d5 resource could be available.

B) 4. e5 ♘d7 leads to richer and less forcing games than 3. ♘f3 d5 and will be examined in chapter 5, subchapter d.

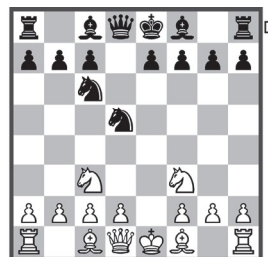
3... d5



Position after: 3... d5

4. e5

In my opinion Black gets full equality after the swap 4. exd5 ♘xd5.



Position after: 4... ♘xd5

A) 5. ♗b5 and now the easiest is:

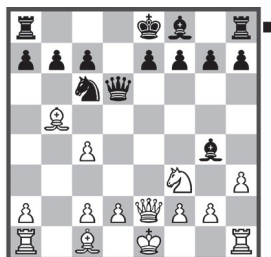
A1) 5... ♖d6 6. 0-0



Position after: 6. 0-0

6... ♗f5? [6... ♘xc3! was this time mandatory in order to avoid what follows] 7. ♘xd5 ♖xd5 8. c4 ♗d6 9. d4 0-0-0 10. d5 ♘b4 11. ♘g5± Sutovsky, E (2639) – Vlassov, N (2466) playchess.com 2003.

A2) 5... ♘xc3 6. bxc3 [6. ♗xc6+ doesn't need to be feared: 6... bxc6 7. bxc3 ♖d5 or 7... ♗g4 and Black's pair of bishops compensates for his isolated doubled pawns] 6... ♖d5 7. ♖e2 ♗g4 8. c4 ♖d6 [8... ♖f5!?] 9. h3



Position after: 9. h3

A2.1) 9... ♗h5 and

A2.2) 9... ♗xf3 10. ♖xf3 a6 [10... ♖e5+?! 11. ♔d1 and the rook on a1 is immune] 11. ♗xc6+ ♖xc6 12. ♖xc6+ bxc6 would have more or less kept the balance.

A2.3) 9... ♗d7?! 10. 0-0 0-0-0 11. ♖e3?! [11. ♗b2; and 11. c3 were stronger] 11... ♔b8?! [11... e5!] 12. ♖b1±



Position after: 12. ♖b1±

Sepp, O (2448) – Kristjansson, S (2474) Beijing 2008.

B) 5. ♗c4 ♘b6 6. ♗b3



Position after: 6. ♗b3

B1) 6... a5!? 7. a4 ♗f5 8. d3 e6 9. ♗e3 ♗g4 10. h3 ♗h5 11. g4 ♗g6

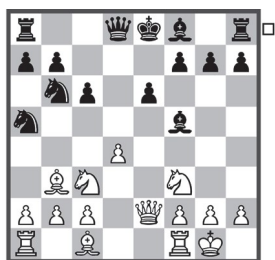


Position after: 11... ♖g6

Kjartansson, D (2409) – Bauer, C (2625) chess.com 2018. White has committed himself with the early g2-g4 advance and though he can cope with that at the moment, a timely ...h7-h5 will provide Black with play on the kingside.

B2) 6... ♖g4? 7. ♖xf7+ ♔xf7 8. ♘g5+.

B3) 6... ♖f5 7. 0-0 e6 8. d4 ♘a5 9. ♔e2 c6



Position after: 9... c6

Antonio, R (2519) – Gonzales, J (2468) Dapitan 2009. Since Black can take the b3-bishop whenever he pleases, he should be comfortable here.

C) 5. d4 ♖g4 6. ♖e2 ♘xc3 [6... e6!?] 7. bxc3 e6 8. ♔b1 ♔b8 9. h3 ♖h5 10. 0-0 ♖d6 11. ♖g5 ♖e7 12. ♖e3 0-0 ½-½ Vallejo Pons, F (2420) – Bernal Moro, L (2455) Mondariz 1996. There was obviously some life left in the position, but Black had his share of the chances.

4... ♘e4

4... d4 and 4... ♘d7 are valid too.



Position after: 4... ♘e4

5. h3

Preventing ...♖g4 is a bit slow, but I doubt whether the alternatives could seriously trouble Black. For instance:

A) 5. ♘e2 ♖g4 6. d4 e6 7. h3 ♖f5 8. c3 f6 Black gets counterplay with this typical undermining push.

B) 5. ♖b5 a6 [5... ♘xc3 6. dxc3 a6 is also fully acceptable] 6. ♖xc6+ bxc6 7. ♘a4!? e6 8. 0-0 a5