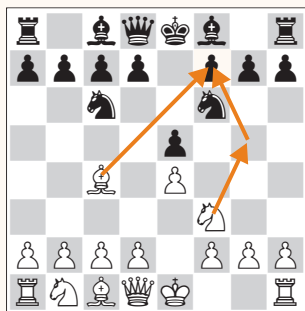


## Two Knights Defence

1.e2-e4 e7-e5 2.♘g1-f3  
 ♚b8-c6 3.♙f1-c4 ♘g8-f6



This defence was noted by the Abruzzian Giulio Cesare Polerio in the 16th century, and discussed again by Giambattista Lolli and Domenico Lorenzo Ponziani two centuries later. In the 19th century it was adopted chiefly as a means of avoiding the much-feared consequences of the then reigning **Evans Gambit**. Why was it used just as an expedience in the past, given its popularity today? It should be remembered that even though 3...♘f6 is the most natural move (it attacks the unprotected e4-pawn), it is in effect a pawn sacrifice... at least from the modern viewpoint!

4.♘g5 d5 5.exd5 used to be automatically followed by 5...♘xd5?!, but at this point either 6.♘xf7!? (the celebrated **Fried Liver Attack** – also known by the original Italian name **Fegatello Attack**), or 6.d4!, produces positions which are undoubtedly advantageous to White.

It was only at the beginning of the 20th century, when the playability of 5...♘a5! was discovered (as were 5...b5!? and 5...♘d4!?) that the popularity of this defence boomed, as it was now seen as an effective way for Black to fight for the initiative. Indeed, 3...♘f6 has currently overtaken 3...♙c5 in popularity.

Against the Two Knights White has fundamentally three lines to consider – excluding 4.♘c3?!, which allows 4...♘xe4! with the idea of...d7-d5.

### A) 4. d2-d3

The most solid and currently the most popular move. It is in line with the modern tendency to play 3.♙c4 with a positional approach. After 4...♙c5, we are back in the **Giuoco Piano**. However, 4...♙e7 is the more popular choice. It is solid, even if slightly passive, and it generally leads to positions which are strategically similar to the **Closed Spanish**.

### B) 4. d2-d4

is a natural response in the centre, to which

4. ... e5xd4

is the best reply. You may be wondering why 3...♘xe4 is valid after 3.d4 in the **Petroff Defence**, whereas in the **Two Knights** 4...♘xe4? is considered to be so bad. The answer is that in the Two Knights after 5.dxe5, White already threatens 6.♙d5 with a clear advantage, whereas in the Petroff after 4.dxe5, Black gains easy equality with 4...d5 (there is no bishop on c4 to prevent this move).

**B1) 5. e4-e5**

In modern play this positional approach is the most usual continuation.

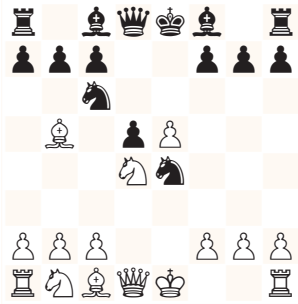
5. ... **d7-d5**

6. **♙c4-b5!**

With the g7-pawn defended, 6.exf6 does not make sense.

6. ... **♞f6-e4**

7. **♞f3xd4**



Arriving at a complex position. Black obtains satisfactory play after either the solid 7...♙d7 or the aggressive 7...♙c5.

**B2) 5. 0-0**

This classical move is currently less popular (5.c3 ♞xe4!). Black can respond 5...♞xe4 6.♖e1 d5 **7.♙xd5!** ♞xd5 8.♞c3 ♞a5 (or 8...♞h5) with a balanced position and results that tend to favour Black.

Another response is the more ambitious

5. ... **♙f8-c5**

6. **e4-e5**

We have arrived at the famous **Max Lange Attack**.

6. ... **d7-d5**

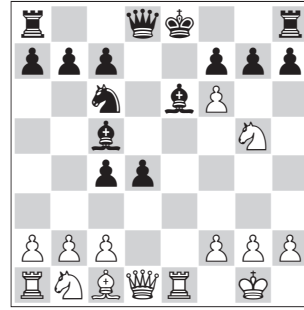
7. **e5xf6**

Now yes!

7. ... **d5xc4**

8. **♖f1-e1+** **♙c8-e6**

9. **♞f3-g5**



The threat is 10.♞xe6 followed by 11.♞h5+ and then 12.♞xc5. After the virtually forced

9. ... **♞d8-d5**

comes

10. **♞b1-c3**

This knight is immune because of the undefended ♞d5.

10. ... **♞d5-f5**

11. **♞c3-e4**

and the threat is 12.g4. It is surprising that with such active pieces White does not obtain anything after

11. ... **0-0-0!**

12. **g2-g4** **♞f5-e5**

Keeping the c5-bishop defended.

13. **♞g5xe6** **f7xe6**

14. **f6xg7** **♖h8-g8**

15. **♙c1-h6** **d4-d3**

Dozens of games have demonstrated that the position is dynamically balanced with possibilities for both players.

**C) 4. ♞f3-g5**

The critical move, at least in terms of the application of chess theory, is this now comparatively little-played and romantic move.

A 'beginner's move', huffed Tarrasch, who was famous for such dogmatic dismissals.

4. ... **d7-d5**

Before examining this line, let's look at another surprising move available to Black: **4...♘c5!?**



which delightfully ignores the attack on f7, so as to counterattack f2. This is the **Traxler Variation** (or **Wilkes-Barre** for the Americans), and it dates back to the end of the 19th century. After 5.♘xf7 ♙xf2+!, Black seems to have sufficient counterplay, even if a hundred years of analysis has not fully explored the resulting positions. Let's just say that in practice it is easier to play the black side. It is therefore not surprising that White prefers the safer 5.♙xf7+, even if after 5...♗e7 (threatening 6...h6) 6.♙b3 or 6.♙d5, Black receives a certain degree of compensation with ...♞hf8-♞d8-e8-g6 and ...d7-d6 followed by ...♙g4. It must be said that White, in addition to having an extra pawn, should be able to take advantage of the unhappy position of the black king on e7 if he can play a well-timed c3 and d4. In short, this counterattack is perhaps not 100% sound, but it is dangerous and greatly feared.

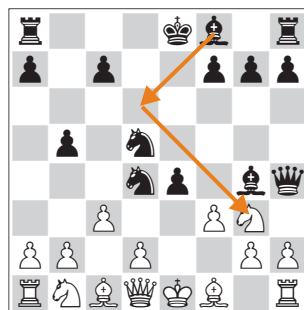
### 5. e4xd5

*As we have already said, 5...♘d5?! gives White the advantage after either 6.♘xf7!?* (the *Fegatello*) or 6.d4!.

At this point the main move is

### 5. ... ♘c6-a5

Also interesting are the **Ulvestad Variation** 5...b5!? and the **Fritz Variation** 5...♘d4, which often merge at various stages: the following is a line that exemplifies the furious complications that can arise from 5...♘d4: 6.c3 b5 7.♙f1! ♘xd5 8.♘e4 ♞h4!? (8...♘e6 is more solid) 9.♘g3 ♙g4 10.f3 e4!



clearing the diagonal for the f8-bishop to exploit the uncomfortable position of the knight on g3: 11.cxd4 ♙d6 12.♙xb5+ ♘d8 (the king is safer here than on f8), and now either the classical 13.0-0 or the more recent **13.♞b3!?** ♙xg3+ 14.♗d1 seems to give White the advantage.

### 6. ♙c4-b5+

In case of 6.d3 h6 7.♘f3 e4!, Black obtains good play.

### 6. ... c7-c6

6...♙d7!? is also becoming popular.

### 7. d5xc6 b6xc6

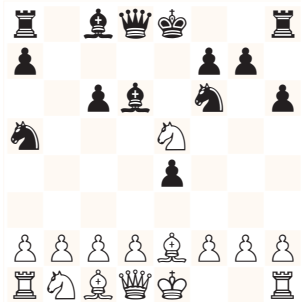
### 8. ♙b5-e2

8.♞f3!? was not considered to be dangerous until recently. However, today it must be treated with respect: it was successfully employed by Karjakin in 2005 and by Short in 2006!

### 8. ... h7-h6



For the pawn Black has a fairly significant lead in development and he is ready to grab centre space with his pawns. If White doesn't want to lose another tempo after 9.Nf3 e4, he can continue with the unnatural but interesting 9.Nh3, which was played by Steinitz, and later by Fischer. Remember that White is a pawn up and that 9...Qxh3 – to create bad doubled pawns for White – removes the dynamic quality from Black's position. With his bishop pair and the weak c6-pawn, White can look to the future with confidence. Black's best option is to ignore the Nh3 and continue development with 9...Qc5 and ...0-0, with good compensation. The most common 9th move, however, remains 9.Nf3 and now 9...e4 10.Ne5 Qd6 (10...Qc7 is also playable)



either 11.d4 or 11.f4. Black has compensation which is difficult to evaluate.

### Brandenburg, Daan Postny, Evgeny

Hoogeveen 2006 (4)

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Qc4  
Nf6 5.e5 Nxe4 6.Qxe2 Nc5 7.0-0 Qe7  
8.Qd1 d5 9.Qb5 0-0 10.Qxc6 bxc6  
11.Nxd4 Qe8 12.c4 f6 13.Nc3 fxe5  
14.Qxe5 Qf7 15.Qe2 Qd6 16.cxd5  
Qg4 17.f3 Qae8 18.Qd2 Qh5 19.h3  
Qh4 20.Qf2 Qg3 21.Qd2 Qd6  
22.Qf2 Qg3 23.Qd2 Qxh3 24.Qg5  
Qxd4+ 0-1

### Nakamura, Hikaru Ganguly, Surya Shekhar

Khanty Mansiysk 2005 (1)

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Qc4  
Nf6 5.e5 d5 6.Qb5 Ne4 7.Nxd4  
Qd7 8.Qxc6 bxc6 9.0-0 Qc5 10.f3  
Ng5 11.f4 Ne4 12.Qe3 Qb8 13.Qc1  
Qd4 14.Qxd4 c5 15.Qf2 Qb5  
16.Qd1 Nxf2 17.Qxf2 Qc6 18.Nd2  
Qb6 19.c4 d4 20.Qc2 0-0 21.f5  
Qad8 22.Qf1 Qa8 23.Qg1 d3  
24.Qc3 Qd4 25.Qf2 Qe8 26.Qe1  
Qh6 27.Qa3 Qg5 28.g3 h5  
29.Qxc5 h4 30.Qxd4 hxg3 31.Qf1  
gxf2 32.Qxf2 Qg4 33.f6 gxf6  
34.Qe3 Qd1+ 35.Qe1 Qxe1+  
36.Qxe1 fxe5 37.Qxd3 f5 38.Qd7 e4  
39.Nb3 f4 40.Nd4 e3 41.Nf5 Qh8  
42.Nh4 Qg8 43.Ng6 f3 44.Qe7  
Qxe7 45.Nxe7+ Qf7 46.Nf5 e2  
47.Nd4 Qf6 48.Nb5 Qe5 49.Nxc7  
Qe4 50.Nb5 Qd3 51.b3 Qe4  
52.Nc7 Qxc4 0-1

### Canal, Esteban Monticelli, Mario

Venice 1948

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Qc4  
Nf6 5.0-0 [5.Ng5?! d5 6.exd5 Nxd5?

7.0-0 ♖e7 8.♗xf7 ♘xf7 9.♞f3+ ♗e6  
 10.♗c3! dxc3 11.♞e1+ ♗e5 12.♙f4  
 ♙d6 13.♙xe5 ♙xe5 14.♞xe5+ ♗xe5  
 15.♞e1+ ♗d4 16.♙xd5 ♞f8 17.♞d3+  
 ♗c5 18.b4+ ♗xb4 19.♞d4+ 1-0  
 Morphy-Amateur, New Orleans 1858]  
**5...♗xe4 6.♞e1 d5 7.♙xd5 ♞xd5**  
**8.♗c3 ♞a5 9.♗xe4 ♙e6 10.♗eg5**  
**0-0-0 11.♗xe6 fxe6 12.♞xe6 ♞d5**  
**13.♞e2 ♙d6 14.♙g5 ♞df8 15.♙h4**  
**d3 16.cxd3 g5 17.♙xg5 ♗d7 18.♞e4**  
**♞xf3 19.♞xf3 ♞xg5 20.♞f7+ ♗e7**  
**21.♞ae1 ♞e8 22.g3 ♞g6 23.♞b3**  
**♗c8 24.♞a4 a6 25.♞g4 ♞f7 26.♞g7**  
**♞f8 27.♞xh7 ♞d8 28.♞g4+ ♗b8**  
**29.♞e4 ♗d5 30.♞e6 ♗b4 31.♞f7**  
**♞h8 32.d4 ♞h5 33.a3 ♗d3 34.b4**  
**♞h8 35.h4 ♞g8 36.♞e3 ♞d1+**  
**37.♗g2 ♗xf2 38.♞xf2 ♞g7 39.♞ef3**  
**♞xd4 40.♞e8+ ♗a7 41.♞e3 1-0**

**Cueto Chajtur, Johny  
 Sophe, Guillermo**

Buenos Aires 2000 (1)

**1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♙c4**  
**♗f6 5.0-0 ♙c5 6.e5 d5 7.exf6 dxc4**  
**8.♞e1+ ♙e6 9.♗g5 ♞d5 10.♗c3**  
**♞f5 11.♗ce4 0-0-0 12.fxg7 ♞hg8**  
**13.♗xc5 ♞xc5 14.♞xe6 fxe6**  
**15.♗xe6 ♞d5 16.♗xd8 ♞xg7 17.♞f1**  
**♗xd8 18.♙f4 ♗e6 19.♙d2 ♗c5**

**20.♞d1 ♞f5 21.♙b4 ♗e6 22.♞xc4**  
**♗f4 23.♞xd4 ♞xg2+ 24.♗f1 ♞g4**  
**25.♗e1 ♞g1+ 26.♗d2 ♞d1+ 0-1**

**Polerio, Giulio Cesare  
 D'Arminio, Domenico**

Rome 1610

**1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♙c4 ♗f6**  
**4.♗g5 d5 5.exd5 ♗xd5 6.♗xf7 ♗xf7**  
**7.♞f3+ ♗e6 8.♗c3 ♗e7 9.d4 c6**  
**10.♙g5 h6 11.♙xe7 ♙xe7 12.0-0-0**  
**♞f8 13.♞e4 ♞xf2 14.dxe5 ♙g5+**  
**15.♗b1 ♞d2 16.h4 ♞xd1+ 17.♞xd1**  
**♙xh4 18.♗xd5 cxd5 19.♞xd5 ♞g5**  
**20.♞d6+ ♗e7 21.♞g6 ♞d2**  
**22.♞xg7+ ♗f8 23.♞g8+ ♗e7**  
**24.♞h7X 1-0**

**Radjabov, Teimour  
 Naiditsch, Arkadij**

Warsaw Ech 2005 (8)

**1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♙c4 ♗f6**  
**4.♗g5 d5 5.exd5 ♗a5 6.♙b5+ c6**  
**7.dxc6 bxc6 8.♙e2 h6 9.♗f3 e4**  
**10.♗e5 ♙d6 11.d4 exd3 12.♗xd3**  
**♞c7 13.b3 0-0 14.♙b2 ♗e4 15.♗c3**  
**♙f5 16.h3 ♞ad8 17.0-0 c5 18.♙f3**  
**♗g5 19.♗d5 ♞d7 20.h4 ♗e6**  
**21.♗e5 ♞e8 22.♞e1 ♙b8 23.♞d2**  
**♞b5 24.c4 ♞a6 25.♙c3 ♗b7**  
**26.♗c6 1-0**