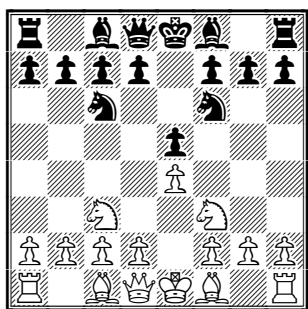


# The Four Knights' Game

Compiled by Steven Craig Miller

## Introduction

1. e4 e5
2. ♟f3 ♞c6
3. ♞c3 ♟f6



This is the beginning position of the *Four Knight's Game*. Before World War I the Four Knight's Game was very popular, but by the 1930s it had lost most of its appeal and was considered to be somewhat dull, if not also drawish. Then in the 1990s, it made a comeback into the international chess circuit. But this opening has always appealed to beginners

## Part 1: The Spanish Four Knights With 4. ... ♞b4

4. ♞b5 ♞b4
5. 0-0

It might seem that it makes little difference whether White castles first and then plays d3, or whether White first plays d3 and then castles. But 5. d3 is considered to be inaccurate since it allows Black piece's to become active.

5. d3 ♞d4 6. ♞a4 (or 6. ♞c4) b5 7. ♞b3 and now:

(a) 7. ... d5 8. ♞xe5 ♟e7 9. f4 ♞xb3 10. cxb3 ♞b7 11. 0-0 dxe4 12. dxe4 ♞c5+ and Black has compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

(b) 7. ... d6 8. h3 c6 9. 0-0 ♞xb3 10. axb3 0-0 with a more or less equal position.

5. ... 0-0

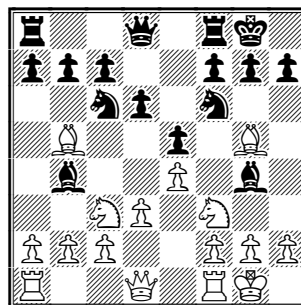
Just as 5. d3 was considered to be inaccurate, so also is 5. ... d6 after 5. 0-0.

5. ... d6 6. ♞d5 ♞c5 7. d4 exd4 8. ♞g5 0-0 9. ♞xc6 bxc6 10. ♞xf6+ gxf6 11. ♞h4 ♟e8 12. ♟d3 ♟e7 13. ♟fe1 ♞b4 14. ♟e2 c5 15. e5 and White is better.

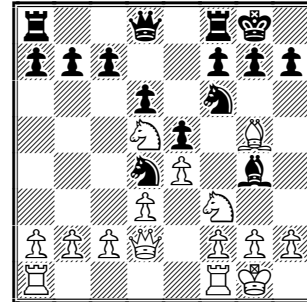
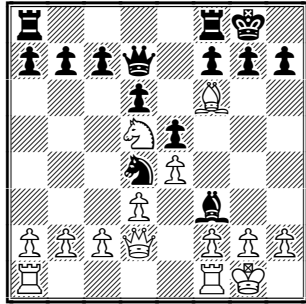
6. d3 d6
7. ♞g5

Now we will take a look at four variations:  
(a) 7. ... ♞g4; (b) 7. ... ♞e6; (c) 7. ... ♞e7; & (d) 7. ... ♞xc3.

(a) 7. ... ♞g4



8. ♖d5 ♗d4  
 9. ♖xb4 ♖xb5  
 10. ♖d5 ♗d4  
 11. ♕d2 ♕d7  
 12. ♗xf6 ♗xf3



11. ... ♗xf3  
 12. ♗xf3 ♗xf3  
 13. ♗xf6 ♗xf6  
 14. ♕e3

Now after:

13. ♕g5 ♕g4

White has a mate in two:

14. ♖e7+ ♗h8  
 15. ♗xg7#

Black could have avoided this mate with 13. ... ♖e6, and, although White is still winning, things are not as simple. Going back to the above diagram, White has a simpler win.

13. ♖e7+ ♗h8  
 14. ♗xg7+ ♗xg7  
 15. ♕g5+ ♗h8  
 16. ♕f6#

The only way for Black to avoid this mate would have been 13. ... ♕xc7 trading the queen for a knight.

Now we will move backwards through this variation in order to try to find where Black should have deviated first. The first place we will start will be move 11 after White plays 11. ♕d2:

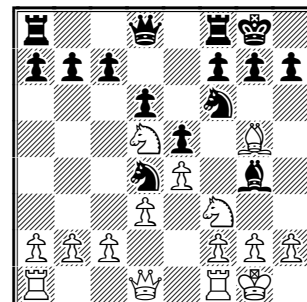
Here with the g-file open allowing Black to check White's king on the g-file, the move 14. ♕h3 (although threatening mate) fails to 14. ... ♗h8. Later in our analysis we will see the move ♕h3 work.

14. ... ♖c6

14. ... ♗h5?! 15. ♕h6 ♗g6 16. f4 c6 17. fxe5 fxe5 18. ♖f6+ ♗h8 19. h4 ♖g8 20. ♖xg8 ♕xg8 21. ♗h2 ±.

15. ♕xf3 ♖xd5  
 16. ♖xd5 ±

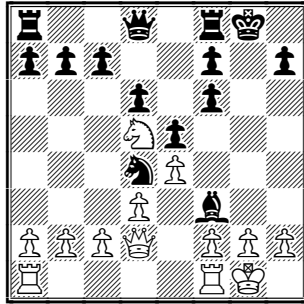
Instead of White playing 11. ♕d2, White could also try 11. ♗xf6.



11. ♗xf6 ♗xf6  
 12. ♕d2

Now in this position, Black can play 12. ... ♖xf3 transposing in the above analysis. But if Black plays:

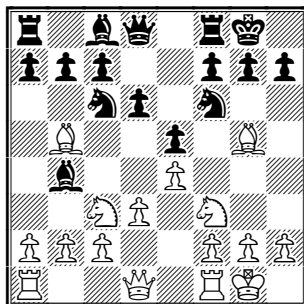
12. ... ♙xf3



13. ♖h6 +-

With the g-file still closed, 13. ♖h6 threatens mate in two. The only way for Black to stop mate is to play ♖xf6.

This concludes are look at the 7. ... ♙g4 line. This line is usually considered inferior, and Black is recommended to try one of the other lines from the following diagram.



(b) 7. ... ♙e6

7. ... ♙e6  
 8. ♖d5 ♙xd5  
 9. ♙xd5 exd5  
 10. c4 ♖g6  
 11. ♙a4 ±

(c) 7. ... ♖e7

7. ... ♖e7  
 8. ♖h4 c6  
 9. ♙c4 d5  
 10. ♙b3

10. exd5 ♖exd5 11. ♖e4 ♙e7 12. ♖f3 =

10. ... ♗d6  
 11. h3 h6  
 12. ♙xf6 ♗xf6  
 13. ♗h5 d4  
 14. ♖e2 ♙d6 =

(d) 7. ... ♙xc3

This line is known as the *Metger Unpin*.

7. ... ♙xc3  
 8. bxc3 ♗e7  
 9. ♗e1 ♖d8  
 10. d3 ♖e6

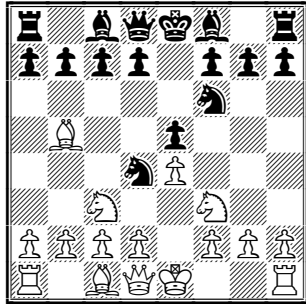
10. ... ♙g4 11. h3 ♙xf3 (11. ... ♙h5 12. g4 ♙g6 13. d5 =) 12. ♗xf3 ∞.

11. ♙c1 ∞

### Part 2: The Rubinstein Variation of the Spanish Four Knights

1. e4 e5  
 2. ♖f3 ♖c6  
 3. ♖c3 ♖f6  
 4. ♙b5 ♖d4

This position is not as common in games among beginners since it appears that Black is violating two basic principles: first, Black is moving an already developed piece, and second, it appears that Black is dropping the e5 pawn. But among more advanced chess players, 4. ... ♖d4 is considered the main move after 4. ♙b5.



(a) 5. ♖xe5

- |     |      |      |
|-----|------|------|
| 5.  | ♖xe5 | ♔e7  |
| 6.  | ♗f3  | ♗xb5 |
| 7.  | ♗xb5 | ♔xe4 |
| 8.  | ♔e2  | ♔xe2 |
| 9.  | ♕xe2 | ♗d5  |
| 10. | ♞e1  | f6 = |

(b) 5. ♖xd4

- |     |      |      |
|-----|------|------|
| 5.  | ♖xd4 | exd4 |
| 6.  | e5   | dx3  |
| 7.  | exf6 | ♔xf6 |
| 8.  | dx3  | ♔e5  |
| 9.  | ♔e2  | ♔xe2 |
| 10. | ♞xe2 | d5 = |

(c) 5. ♞c4

- |     |      |       |
|-----|------|-------|
| 5.  | ♞c4  | c6    |
| 6.  | ♗xe5 | d5    |
| 7.  | exd5 | ♞d6   |
| 8.  | ♗f3  | ♗xf3  |
| 9.  | ♔xf3 | 0-0   |
| 10. | h3   | b5    |
| 11. | ♞e2  | b4    |
| 12. | ♗e4  | ♗xe4  |
| 13. | ♔xe4 | ♞e8 ♞ |

(d) 5. ♞a4

- |    |      |     |
|----|------|-----|
| 5. | ♞a4  | ♞c5 |
| 6. | ♗xe5 | 0-0 |
| 7. | ♗d3  | ♞b6 |
| 8. | e5   | ♗e8 |
| 9. | ♗d5  |     |

9. 0-0 d6 10. exd6 ♗f6 11. d7 (11. dx3?! ♔d6 ♞) ♞xd7 12. ♞xd7 ♔xd7 ♞.

- |     |      |      |
|-----|------|------|
| 9.  | ...  | d6   |
| 10. | ♗e3  | ♔g5  |
| 11. | exd6 | ♗xd6 |
| 12. | 0-0  | ♗4f5 |

13. ♗e1 ♗xe3 14. fxe3 ♞g4 15. ♗f3 ♔h5  
16. ♔e1 c6 (♞ ♞ae8) ∞.

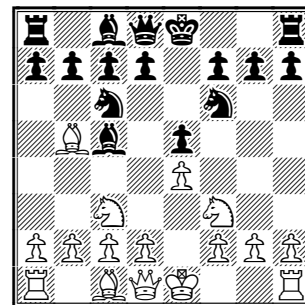
The Spanish Four Knights  
With 4. ... ♞c5

- |    |     |     |
|----|-----|-----|
| 1. | e4  | e5  |
| 2. | ♗f3 | ♗c6 |
| 3. | ♗c3 | ♗f6 |
| 4. | ♞b5 |     |

A common mistake is: 4. ♞c4, which allows the pawn fork trick.

4. ♞c4 ♗xe4 5. ♗xe4 d5 6. ♞d3 dx4 7. ♞xe4 ♞d6 8. d4 exd4 9. ♞xc6 bxc6 10. ♔d4 0-0 11. 0-0 c5 12. ♞c3 ♞b7 =.

- |    |     |     |
|----|-----|-----|
| 4. | ... | ♞c5 |
|----|-----|-----|



In this position, it is better to first castle and then take the pawn.

5. 0-0 0-0 (5. ... d6 6. d4 exd4 7. ♗xd4 ♞d7 8. ♗b3 ♞b6 9. ♞g5 ♞) 6. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 7. d4 ♞d6 8. f4 ♗c6 9. e5 ♞e7 10. d5 ♗b4 11. exf6 ♞xf6 12. a3 ♞xc3 13. bxc3 ♗xd5 14. ♔xd5 c6 15. ♔d3 cxb5 ∞.