

Opening Repertoire The English Defence

José Gonzáles



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About the Author

José González is a grandmaster and a FIDE Trainer. He has been teaching chess for over 25 years and currently coaches some of the top junior players in Catalonia. He is the author of many articles written in Spanish and has created various theoretical works including a Chessable course on the Queen's Gambit Accepted. This is his first published book.

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Introduction

I've always had a predilection to play surprise weapons (sidelines) as Black. I think they can give you an important competitive advantage over your opponents, one that very often will dictate the fate of your games in your favour.

Most 1 d4 players are prepared to face the Slav, the Orthodox Queen's Gambit, the Nimzo-Indian, the King's Indian, and in general all the popular defences, but not the English Defence. And even if they are prepared, their knowledge is less precise compared to that in the mainstream defences.

The English Defence is not as famous as the ones I just mentioned. There are various reasons for that; perhaps the lack of an up-to-date serious book is one of the most important. In this work, I'll do my best to encourage you to take advantage of the opportunity that this wonderful defence gives. Of course, this might change one day soon, but at the present time you'd be surprised to see how badly some strong players handle the white side of this defence.

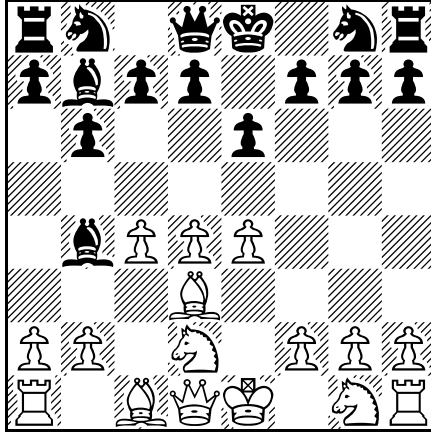
The English Defence has been a powerful surprise weapon already for a long time, from the mid-seventies, when a handful of strong English players pioneered it, up to the present day, when various GMs play it on regular basis.

The English Defence allows White to create a pawn centre, with the intention of later attacking it, with natural moves such as ...♙b7, ...♙b4, ...♖h4, ...f7-f5, ...♗f6, etc, and then destroy it. Almost everything Black achieves in the opening phase is based on the dynamics of the position: exchanges, sacrifices, pawn breaks, etc.

Most of the time, controlling the typical transformations will equal mastering the English Defence. Let's see a couple of examples that highlight the role of dynamics as Black's most powerful resource.

Game 1 **T.Trincardi-La.Karlsson** Eksjo 1979

1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 ♟b7 4 ♟d3 ♟b4+ 5 ♞d2



Question: How should Black proceed?

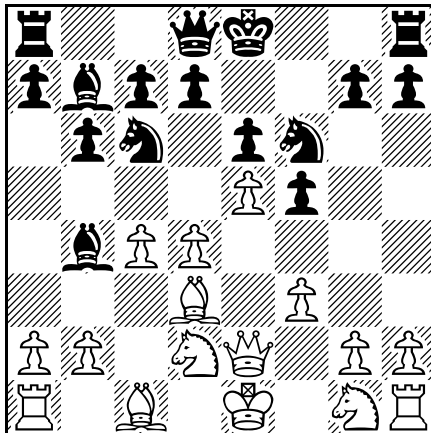
Answer: 5...f5

Black's light-squared bishop drills White's position as far as the h1-rook.

6 ♕e2?

As we'll see, the queen is badly placed here. The immediate 6 f3 was a better try, though after 6...♖g5 Black has a dangerous initiative.

6...♘f6 7 f3 ♘c6 8 e5

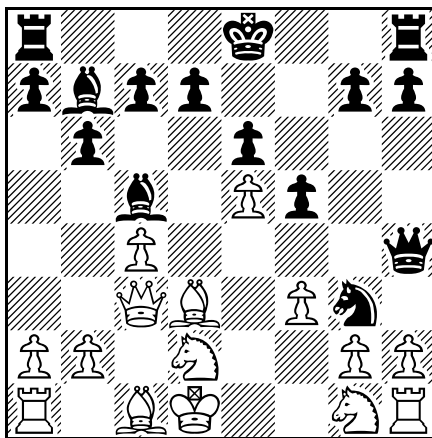


Question: Is there a way for Black to punish his opponent's uncoordinated central advance?

Answer: 8...♖xd4!

Karlsson accepts the challenge, performing a simple but accurate calculation.

9 ♖e3 ♘h5 10 ♗xd4 ♙c5 11 ♗c3 ♗h4+ 12 ♚d1 ♘g3!



The key to achieving a decisive advantage.

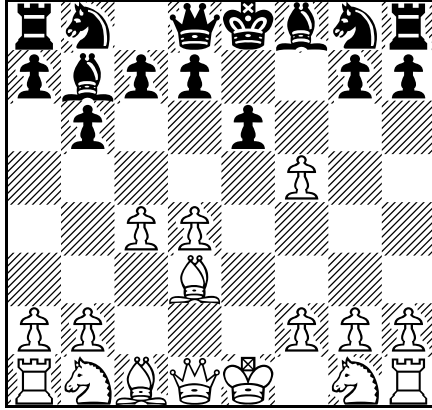
13 ♘b3 ♘xh1 14 ♘xc5 bxc5 15 ♖e1 ♗xh2 16 ♙e3 ♗xg2 17 ♙xc5 ♘g3 18 ♖e3 ♘h5 19 ♖c1 ♙f7 20 ♖c2 ♗g3 21 ♙f1 ♗f4 22 ♗d3 ♖ad8 23 ♗c3 ♖he8 24 ♙e3 ♗h4 25 ♘h3 d6 26 ♖h2 ♙g8 27 ♙g5 dxe5+ 28 ♙xd8 ♖xd8+ 29 ♚c2 ♗d4 30 ♗xd4 exd4 0-1

One of my teammates Vincent Esplugas, a strong FIDE master, enjoys playing the romantic lines of the English Defence. This game filled him with pride – and persuaded me that, despite the risks, it was a great idea to play the English Defence!

Game 2
J.Ramirez Garcia-V.Esplugas Esteve
 Sant Boi 2014

1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 ♙b7 4 ♙d3 f5 5 exf5!

This sacrifice is the refutation of what I call the romantic line of the English Defence.



5...♙b4+

Clearing f8, weakening White's attack with ♖h5, and therefore forcing ♙f1.

Accepting the rook is losing for Black: 5...♙xg2? 6 ♖h5+ g6 7 fxg6 ♙g7 8 gxh7+ ♙f8 9 ♘e2 ♘f6 10 ♖h4 ♙xh1 11 ♙g5 and despite the missing rook White has a winning attack, as both practice and analysis have shown.

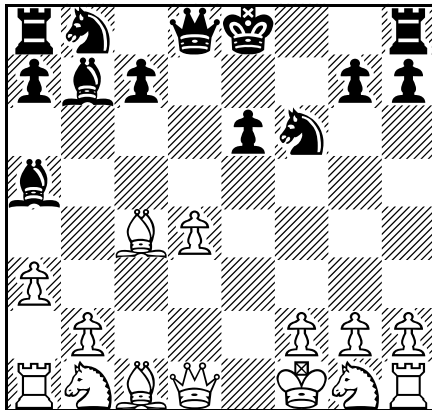
6 ♙f1 ♘f6

In this uncompromising line, Black shows little interest in material considerations. The arising positions are very complex for over-the-board play, yet the truth is exposed by computer analysis, and the engine hates Black's position. For this reason, I quit any hopes of recommending it. I didn't want to offer a line that is only good for its surprise element.

7 c5

The most common theoretical recommendation, but by no means the only promising move.

7...bxc5 8 a3 c4! 9 ♙xc4 ♙a5 10 fxe6 dxe6

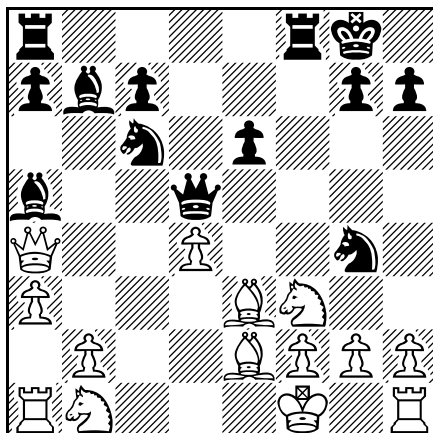


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11 ♖a4+?

White is trying to win material, completely forgetting about the development of his forces. Violating this opening principle rarely brings rewards.

11...♗c6 12 ♖b5 ♖d5 13 ♗e3 0-0 14 ♗f3 ♗g4 15 ♗e2



Now there are various ways to bring the point home. Esplugas chooses to insist on playing ...♗xf3.

Question: How can he accomplish this goal?

Answer: 15...♗a6!! 16 ♗xa6 ♗xf3 17 ♖b5 ♗xe3+ 18 ♗e2 ♗xd4+ 0-1

The game was destined to end in checkmate after 19 ♗d3 ♗xg2 mate. Only White's resignation stopped it.

A nice miniature against a solid opponent.

As you can observe in this wild couple of games, the English Defence counts on various dynamic resources. But in my opinion, dynamics and tactics are only half of its magic. What really makes it different and fantastic is its flexibility.

The English has contact points with other major defences, notably the Queen's Indian, the Nimzo-Indian and the Dutch, and often can even transpose into them. The English Defence's ability to borrow ideas and to mix them, creating hybrids, is what makes it a dangerous and annoying variation to meet.

Besides all these interesting features, the English Defence comes with a quality guarantee! Not long ago, its theoretical reputation wasn't that great, but a sudden turn of events provoked a turning point in the way it is played. It appeared as the majority of important creations, disguised as a simple unimportant thing.

The improvement came as early as move three! After 1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 Black started playing the odd-looking 3...♗b4+. It seems nothing special but turned out to be a serious

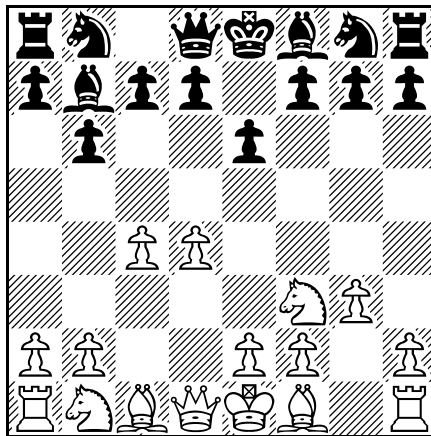
improvement over 3...♗b7. All its details are explained in Chapter Two. After 3...♗b4 the game either transposes to classical lines with 4 ♖c3 (covered in Chapter One), which are good for Black, or enters the modern lines with 4 ♗d2 or 4 ♖d2. With this move order Black can dodge the annoying 3...♗b7 4 ♗d3.

When I discovered that the English Defence is both a good surprise weapon and is indeed sound, I started to dream about writing a book on its wonderful details.

Let's get in the right mood to start by analysing the following game, an interesting example of how the English Defence is played nowadays:

Game 3
E.Kardashevskiy-V.V.Stefansson
Arandjelovac 2022

1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 ♖f3 ♗b7 4 g3



4...♗xf3!

Giving up the bishop pair gives the game an intriguing strategic character. The standard 4...♖f6 5 ♗g2 would transpose to a main line of the Queen's Indian Defence.

5 exf3 ♗b4+ 6 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 7 ♖xd2 d5 8 ♖c3 ♖e7

While both f6 and e7 look good for the g8-knight, from e7 it might later jump to f5 and attack d4.

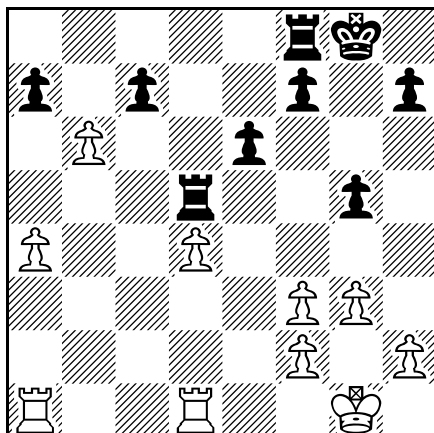
9 cxd5 ♖xd5 10 ♗d3 0-0 11 0-0 ♖c6 12 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 13 ♗e4 ♖d6 14 ♖fd1

Note that 14 ♖ac1 runs into 14...♖xd4!.

14...♖ad8 15 ♗xc6 ♖xc6 16 ♖c3?

The natural desire to reinforce d4 leads White into an inferior ending.

16...♖xc3 17 bxc3 g5 18 a4 ♖d5 19 c4 ♖d6 20 c5 ♖d5 21 cxb6

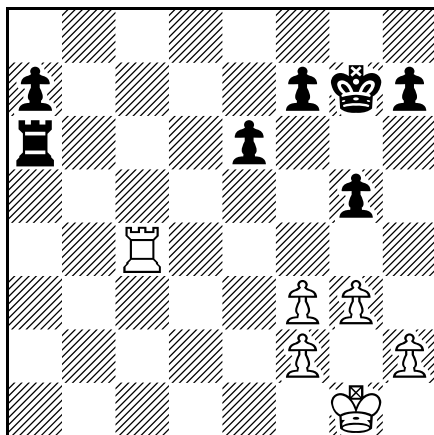


Question: How should Black recapture?

Answer: 21...cxb6!

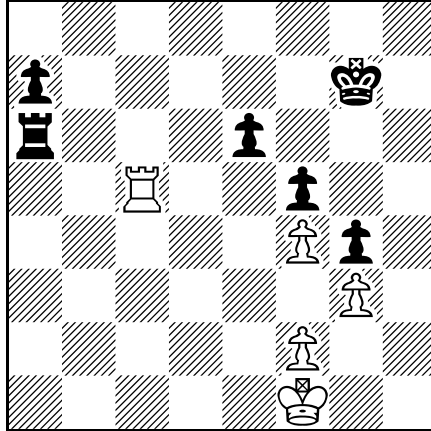
Capturing the other way with 21...axb6 releases the tension and leads to a balanced position after 22 ♖dc1 ♗d7 23 a5.

22 a5 b5! 23 a6 ♖c8 24 ♗dc1 ♗c4 25 ♗ab1 ♗dxd4 26 ♗xc4 bxc4 27 ♗b8+ ♔g7 28 ♗c8 ♗d6 29 ♗xc4 ♗xa6



Despite Black's efforts, the position shows some drawing tendencies, although the defence has the tougher part of the deal.

30 h4 h6 31 hxg5 hxg5 32 f4 g4 33 ♗c5 f5 34 ♔f1

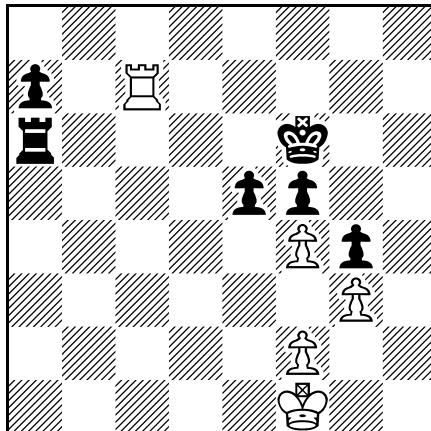


Question: How should Black's king approach the centre, via f6 or f8?

34...♔f6?

Answer: 34...♔f8! is the right move. Now black's king transfer to the queenside can't be stopped, as the following line shows: 35 ♖c7 ♜a2 36 ♔g2 ♕e8 37 ♞b7 ♔d8 38 ♔g1 a5 39 ♔g2 a4 40 ♞a7 ♔c8 41 ♔g1 a3 42 ♔g2 ♔b8 43 ♞a6 ♔b7 44 ♞xe6 ♞c2 45 ♞e3 a2 46 ♞a3 ♔b6 and White is helpless against Black's king's triumphal march to b1.

35 ♖c7! e5



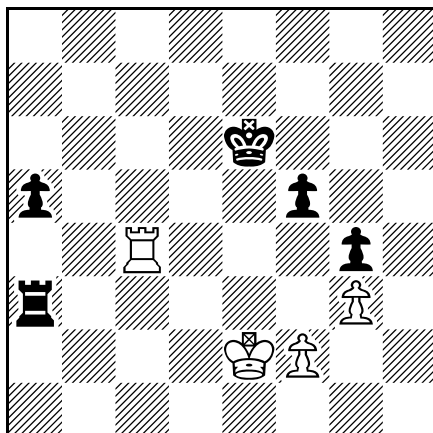
36 fxe5??

This mechanical reaction throws it all away, when the balance could have been kept with almost any legal move. For instance, 36 ♞c5! would send a restriction notice to the black king.

36...♔xe5

Now the king is free to travel to the queenside, supporting the promotion of his passed pawn.

37 ♖e2 ♜a2+ 38 ♖e3 ♜a3+ 39 ♖e2 a5 40 ♜c4 ♖d5 41 ♜f4 ♖e6 42 ♜c4



42...♜b3??

A bad moment to try and improve his rook. The position is winning but there are some important obstacles for Black to overcome before clinching the point. After 42...a4 43 ♜b4 ♖e5 44 ♜c4 ♜a1 White won't find relief in either of the following continuations:

a) 45 ♖e3 ♖d5 46 ♜f4 a3 47 ♜a4 ♜a2 48 ♜a8 ♖c4 49 ♜c8+ ♖b3 50 ♜b8+ ♖c2 51 ♜a8 ♖d1 52 f3 gxf3! 53 ♖xf3 ♖e1 and White is defenceless against ...♜f2+ and ...a3-a2.

b) 45 ♜b4 a3 46 ♜a4 a2, when Black will win by clearing the second rank with the unstoppable double breakthrough ...f5-f4 and ...g4-g3, preparing the tactical shot ...♜h1 to win White's rook.

43 ♜c6+??

White could have saved himself by playing 43 ♜a4 ♜b2+ 44 ♖e3 ♜b5 45 f3 ♜b3+ 46 ♖f2 with an easy draw.

43...♖d5

The rest is relatively straightforward and needs no further comments.

44 ♜a6 ♜a3 45 ♜f6 ♖e4 46 ♜e6+ ♖d4 47 ♜f6 ♜a2+ 48 ♖f1 ♖e5 49 ♜a6 a4 50 ♜a5+ ♖e4 51 ♖g1 a3 52 ♖f1 ♖d3 53 ♜xf5 ♜b2 54 ♜a5 a2 55 ♖g2 ♖c2 0-1

José González García,
December 2022.

simplifications that could have come with the game move. After 42 ♔h2 (or 42 ♚b4 ♛c7!) 42...♟f7 43 ♚ee2 a5, the threats on both flanks will soon give Black a winning position.

42 ♛a1?

White had the chance to exchange queens and end the threats against her king: 42 ♛b4! ♟d5 (not 42...♛c6?! 43 ♟xh6!) 43 ♛xc4 ♟xc4 is a promising endgame for Black, but the presence of the opposite-coloured bishops gives White reasonable hopes of achieving a draw. As it is the game ends quickly.

42...♟g6 43 ♛b2 a5 44 ♛a3 ♟f7 45 ♚ee2 ♟xg2! 46 ♟xg2 ♛xe2 47 ♟xg6 ♟f1 mate

In the following fascinating struggle, we will study a line that can be categorized as the most complex of the present chapter and probably of the entire book.

Game 10
Al. Donchenko-Ch. Bauer
Metz 2014

1 c4 b6 2 ♘c3 ♟b7 3 d4 e6 4 e4 ♟b4 5 f3

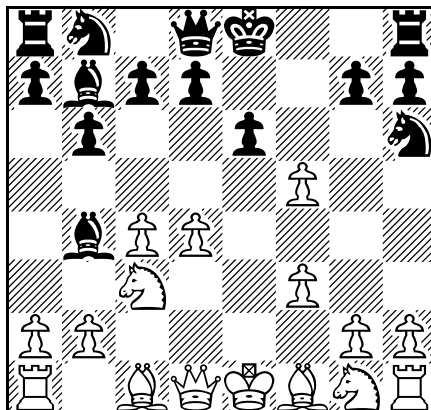
A principled continuation that protects e4 while limiting Black's light-squared bishop. Even though f2-f3 seems rock solid, the slight weakening of the kingside gives Black an explosive idea to fight for the initiative.

5...f5!

Black tries to dismantle White's central pawns, playing ...f7-f5 with no previous preparation. This idea was one of the most important discoveries in the English Defence in the late 1970s.

Black can also take the game into calmer waters with 5...♛h4+ 6 g3 ♟xc3 7 bxc3 ♛e7, as will be studied in the next game.

6 exf5 ♘h6



This ingenious move was introduced by Tony Miles back in 1979 against Oscar Panno. Today, more than forty years later, there are nearly 300 games with it in the database. Black accelerates piece mobilization, not fearing material concessions, leading to a dynamic battle. The kind of positions that will arise are prone to be analysed thoroughly with your favourite chess engine.

7 fxe6

The only move to fight for an advantage. The alternatives allow Black a good game:

a) 7 ♙xh6 (giving up this bishop seems like a major concession, especially as it doesn't inflict any damage) 7... ♜h4+! 8 g3 ♜xh6 (Black already has the initiative due to the supremacy on the dark squares)

a1) 9 fxe6 ♜e3+ (9...dxe6!? comes into consideration) 10 ♜e2?? (a losing blunder; 10 ♙e2 ♙xc3+ 11 bxc3 ♜xc3+ 12 ♙f2 dxe6 13 ♜h3 ♜c6 14 d5 may be okay for White, e.g. 14... ♜d4 15 ♙c1 ♜b2 16 ♜f4 0-0-0 17 ♙b1 ♜c3 18 ♙c1 ♜b2 19 ♙b1 with a draw by repetition) 10... ♙xc3+ 11 bxc3 ♜xc3+ 12 ♙f2 ♜xd4+ 13 ♜e3 ♜xa1 14 exd7+ ♙d8 15 ♜e2 ♜xd7 16 ♜d4 ♜e8 17 ♜e6+ ♙xe6 18 ♜xe6 ♜f6 19 ♜g8+ ♙e7 0-1 P.Balsinde Montemayor-A.Arribas Lopez, Madrid 2011.

a2) 9 ♜d2 (trying to minimize the harm by taking the game into an ending) 9... ♜xd2+ 10 ♙xd2 ♜c6 11 ♜ge2 ♜a5 12 ♜f4? (12 fxe6 was necessary) 12... ♙xf3 13 ♙g1 exf5 (13...c5! looks even better) 14 ♜e1+ , S.Semkov-E.Bricard, Sofia 1990, and now 14... ♙d8 leaves White with little for the pawn.

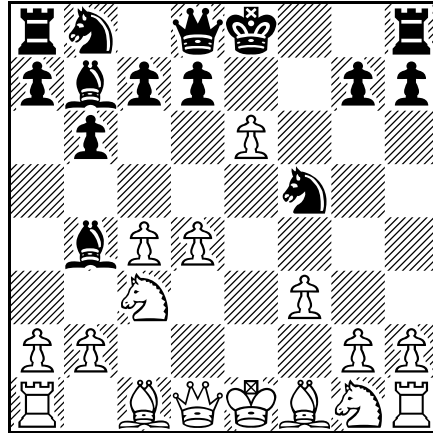
b) 7 ♙e3 ♜xf5 8 ♙f2 (this bishop manoeuvre intends to consolidate the centre and seems solid, but it's far from effective) 8...0-0 9 ♜b3 ♙e7 (Black should be eager to open as many lines as possible to further activate his forces; hence 9...c5! 10 dxc5 ♜a6 11 cxb6 ♙c5 with the initiative) 10 0-0-0 ♙h4! (a nice way to activate Black's pieces; the pressure on the semi-open f-file prevents White from playing g2-g3) 11 ♜c2 ♜g5+ 12 ♙b1 ♙xf2 13 ♜xf2 ♜e3 and the annoying pressure led Black to victory in B.González Acosta-A.Lenderman, San Salvador 2016.

c) 7 ♜h3 (White tries to hurry with the mobilization of his kingside and refrains from capturing the offered pawn) 7... ♜xf5 8 ♙g5 ♙e7 9 ♙e7 ♜xe7 10 ♜b5 ♜a6 11 ♜f2 ♜h4 and Black's strong pressure proved decisive in L.Pfatteicher-M.Efroimski, Innsbruck 2019.

d) 7 a3 (White is unwilling to pay the price for grabbing a pawn and prefers to reinforce the centre and get the bishop pair) 7... ♙xc3+ 8 bxc3 ♜xf5 9 ♜h3 0-0 10 ♙g5 ♜e8 11 ♙d3 h6 12 ♙c1 c5 13 ♙c2 cxd4 14 cxd4 ♜c6 and Black was clearly better in P.Von Buttler-N.Chobaut, correspondence 2010.

e) 7 ♙d3?! (this gives up d4 for no reason) 7... ♜h4+ 8 g3 ♜xd4 9 ♜ge2 ♜f6 and Black already had a promising position in V.Jotic-A.Bokros, Kovacica 2019.

7... ♜f5!



A striking idea! Black threatens ...♖h4+, when g2-g3 would be answered by ...♗xg3.

8 ♖f4

White's best move; taking some poison from ...♖h4 while preparing to castle long. Instead:

a) 8 exd7+ ♗xd7 (Black is two pawns down but has a fantastic lead in development and the minor pieces occupy threatening posts) 9 ♖f4 0-0 10 ♖d2 (if 10 ♗ge2 ♖h4+ 11 g3, as in M.E.Jones-T.Zuppa, correspondence 2001, then 11...♖h5 12 ♖g2 ♖xf3 13 0-0 ♖xg2 14 ♗xg2 ♗f6, followed by ...♗g4 or 15 h3 ♖g6 16 ♗h2 ♗ae8 with overwhelming pressure) 10...♖h4+ 11 g3 ♗ae8+ 12 ♖e2 ♖f6 13 0-0-0 c5 14 d5, G.Hechler-Kl.Bender, correspondence 1995, and here among Black's various ways to increase the pressure 14...♗d4 15 ♖d3 b5! 16 cxb5 ♗b6 was the most promising.

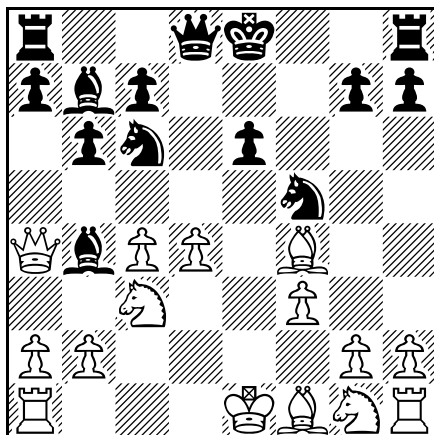
b) 8 ♖d3 ♖h4+ 9 ♗f1 0-0 10 ♗ge2 dxe6 11 ♗e4?? (11 ♖e1 ♖f6 is at least equal for Black) 11...♖xe4 12 ♖xe4, D.Kang-L.Rozman, Titled Tuesday (blitz) 2020, and now 12...♖xe4! 13 fxex4 ♗e3+ 14 ♗g1 ♗xd1 wins.

c) 8 ♗ge2 0-0 9 ♖d3 dxe6 10 a3 ♖c5 11 ♗e4? ♗xd4 12 ♗xc5 bxc5 13 ♗g3? ♗bc6 14 ♖e2 ♗e5 15 ♖c3 ♖xf3! 16 gxf3 ♗exf3+ 17 ♗f2 ♗g1+ 18 ♗e1 ♗gxe2 19 ♗xe2 ♗f3 20 ♖d2 ♖h4+ and White resigned in Kar.Rasmussen-P.H.Nielsen, Danish League 1997.

8...dxe6 9 ♗ge2

Donchenko sticks to his pawn plus but gives away his chances to seize the initiative. Let's see the most promising options:

a) 9 ♖a4+ is the most popular, and perhaps the strongest. After the forced 9...♗c6 Black must proceed with precision:



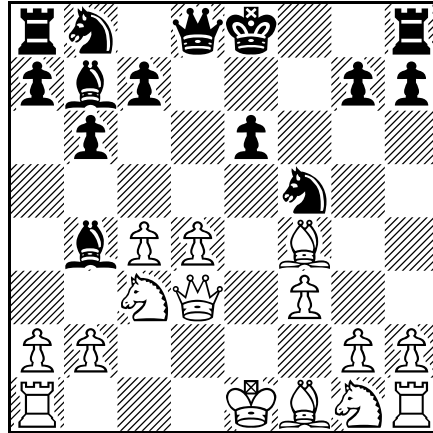
a1) 10 d5 ♗xc3+ 11 bxc3 exd5 12 0-0-0 0-0! (from the practical point of view, this approach looks way more promising than recovering the pawn and ending up in an uncomfortable position: 12...♖f6 13 cxd5 ♖xc3+ 14 ♖b1 ♖b4+ 15 ♖xb4 ♗xb4 16 ♗b5+ ♖f7 17 ♗h3, as in P.Walczak-A.Gaujens, correspondence 2014) 13 cxd5 ♗a5 14 ♗h3 ♖f6 15 ♖b2 h6! and Black has good compensation due to White's weak king.

a2) 10 0-0-0!? ♗fxd4! and now White has a choice to make:

a21) 11 ♗b5 (the most popular continuation) 11...0-0 12 ♗xc7 ♖g5+ 13 f4 ♖h6! (this forced sequence leads to a draw by repetition) 14 ♗xd4 ♖xf4 15 ♗xf4 ♖xf4+ 16 ♖b1 ♗xd4 17 ♗f3 (White has to be careful to direct the game to a draw; not 17 ♖xb4?? ♗e4+ and Black wins) 17...♗xf3 18 ♖xb4 ♗e4+ 19 ♖a1 ♗d4! 20 ♖d2 ♗c2+ 21 ♖b1 ♗b4+ 22 ♖a1 ♗c2+ with a draw, as in B.Niedbala-P.Teclaf, Pokrzywna 2020.

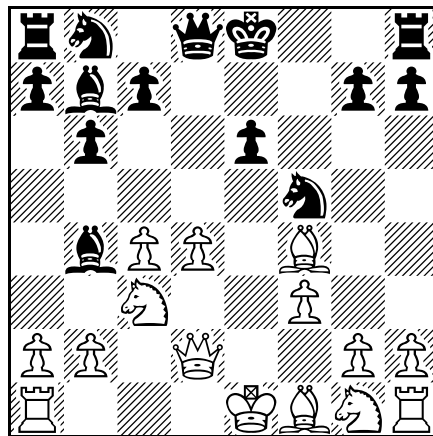
a22) 11 ♗ge2 ♗xe2+ 12 ♗xe2 ♖f6 13 ♗d2? (13 ♗xc7 ♗xc3+ 14 bxc3 ♖xc3+ 15 ♖b1 is about equal) 13...0-0-0 (now Black's active pieces dominate their white counterparts) 14 ♗e4 ♗xd2+ 15 ♖xd2 ♖h6 (the combined pressure on d2 and h2 leaves Black on top) 16 ♖hd1 ♖xd2 17 ♖xd2 ♖d8 18 ♖b5 ♖xd2 19 ♗xd2 ♖xh2 and Black won in D.Covic-B.Filipovic, Bosnian League 2003.

b) 9 ♖d3!? (this clever move leads to a complex endgame that is slightly more comfortable for White)



9...♖xd4 10 ♖xd4 ♘xd4 11 0-0-0 ♕xc3 12 bxc3 ♘f5 13 ♖h3 (White's doubled pawns become even weaker after capturing the c7-pawn: 13 ♕xc7 0-0 14 ♖h3 ♘e3 15 ♖e1 ♖xf1 16 ♖hx1 ♖c8 17 ♕xb8 ♖axb8 18 ♖xe6 ♖xc4 with a level position) 13...♘a6 14 ♕e2! (the pseudo-active 14 ♕d3?! allows Black to castle long with easy equality: 14...0-0-0 15 ♘g5 ♘c5 16 ♕c2 ♖h4) 14...♖d8 and the endgame looks a bit easier for White, although it's still close to equality.

c) 9 ♖d2 (this move is less poisonous than 9 ♖d3)



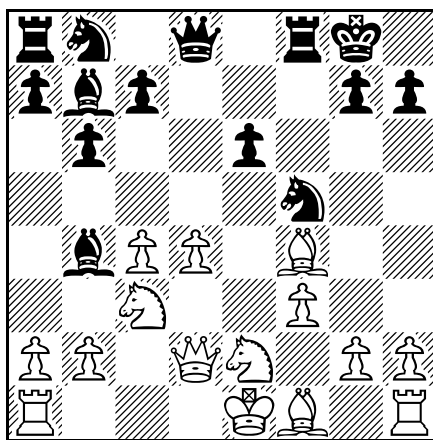
9...♖xd4 10 0-0-0 ♖bc6 11 ♘ge2 ♘f5 12 ♖xd8+ (if Black tries the same sequence against 9 ♖d3, White can play 12 ♖e4! with a strong initiative) 12...♖xd8 13 ♕xc7 ♖xd1+ 14 ♖xd1 e5 and Black has good counterplay for the pawn, U.Hassim-U.Skorna, correspondence 2019.

9...0-0 10 ♖d2

White has also tried 10 ♖d3 c5 11 0-0-0?, as in H.Packroff-F.Montsma, Dresden 2004 (11

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d5 is the most sensible and should lead to equality: 11...exd5 12 cxd5 ♖xd5 13 ♗xd5+ ♕xd5 14 O-O-O ♕f7), when 11...cxd4 12 ♖xd4 (or 12 ♖e4 ♖c6; not 12 ♕xb8? ♗xb8! 13 ♖xd4 ♗d8 and Black wins) 12...♖xd4 13 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 14 ♖xd4 ♕c5 is clearly better for Black.



Question: White is finally ready to castle, keeping his extra pawn and superior structure. Black has a tempo to create something before that happens. What is Black's best move?

Answer: 10...♗h4+!

Black takes the chance to upset White's forces.

11 g3

Accepting a weakness at f3.

Instead, 11 ♖g3 was Panno's response to Tony Miles' invention. In response:

a) 11...♖xd4? loses immediately to 12 ♕g5

b) 11...♕d6 is not the best either: 12 ♕xd6 cxd6 13 ♖ce2 ♖c6 14 O-O-O ♖cxd4 15 ♖xd4 ♖xg3 16 hxg3 ♗xh1 17 ♖xe6 ♗f6 reached a messy position in O.Panno-A.J.Miles, Buenos Aires 1979, though ended with the Englishman's victory.

c) 11...♕e7! would have been a better idea as it covers g5 with the intention of playing ...♖xd4 next move. After 12 O-O-O ♖xd4! 13 ♕e3 (13 ♗xd4 ♖c6 14 ♗e3 ♗xf4 is equal) 13...♖bc6 14 ♕xd4 ♗ad8 Black is doing great! Note that 15 ♖ge2?? loses to 15...♕g5 16 f4 ♗xd4 17 ♖xd4 ♕xf4.

11...♗e7 12 ♕g2 ♖c6 13 O-O-O

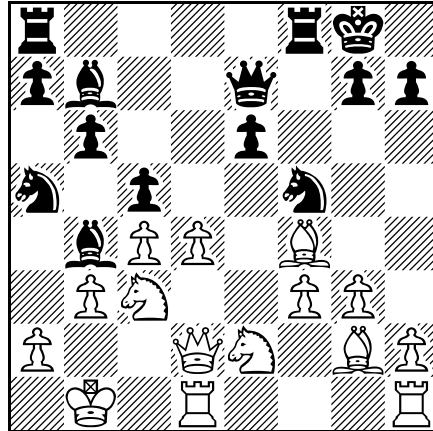
13 O-O? would be a big mistake due to 13...♖fxd4! 14 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 15 ♖h1 (or 15 ♗xd4? ♕c5) 15...e5 with a clear advantage.

13...♖a5 14 b3

White's king seems to have reached a safe haven, leaving Black a pawn down for nothing, but there is a way for Black to create threats and get great compensation.

14...c5! 15 ♔b1?

Trying to blockade with 15 d5? accomplishes exactly the opposite: 15...exd5 16 cxd5 c4 with a fierce attack for Black. 15 dxc5 bxc5 16 ♔b1 was better, but even then Black has nice counterplay based on the enormous activity of his minor pieces.



Question: Black's position is more promising after every sensible move, but at this moment these is a wonderful resource that reinforces his attack. What is Black's best continuation?

15...b5!?

A creative way to hit White's queenside.

Answer: But it is less effective than 15...♕e8!!. This fantastic little move opens all sorts of threats that are almost impossible to counter. Placing the queen on the square where the king starts the game has a magic effect. From e8 she eyes both sides of the board; she supports b5, or might go to g6, and is out of the way of c3-knight, ruling out ♖d5 which is an important defensive resource in some lines. Meanwhile Black threatens ...c5xd4 followed by ...♗d8.

16 dxc5?

Now the game enters a long phase of intense combat where mistakes follow one after another. The position is very complex and even experienced players tend to lose control. Going through the game with the help of your favourite engine can give you the misleading idea that they play poorly, but complications are hard for every human.

Instead, 16 cxb5! c4 looked daunting, but White has the nice defensive intermediate move 17 g4 ♖d6 18 ♖d5!.

16...♗xc5?

16...bxc4 was much better as it leaves White's monarch extremely exposed.

17 cxb5 ♗ac8?

Opening Repertoire: The English Defence

The compromised position of White's dark-squared bishop gave Black the chance for 17...e5! 18 ♗g5 h6, when the game's character changes drastically, leading to a three-fold repetition. 19 g4 hxg5 20 gxf5 ♖ac8 21 ♗c1 g4 22 ♗hf1 ♙a3 23 ♗cd1 (or 23 ♗c2 ♗b4) 23...♙b4 24 ♗c1 ♙a3, etc.

18 ♗a4?

White leaves his opponent's blunder unpunished. It was a good opportunity to continue 18 ♗d3! – a nice resource to escape from the annoying pin, since 18...♙xc3 19 ♗xc3 ♗xc3 20 ♗xc3 ♗xc3 21 ♙d2 is winning for White.

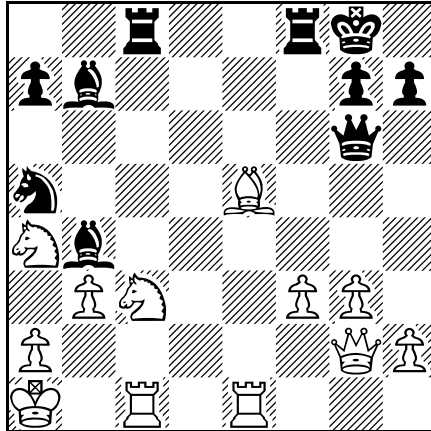
18...♗xb5 19 ♗ec3 ♗e8!

White is under some pressure, but there are plenty of resources to keep the balance.

20 ♗c1??

This careless move allows ...e6-e5 and ruins White's position. It was definitely better to play 20 ♙e5 ♗g6 21 ♙b2 ♗c6 22 f4 ♗f7 23 ♗he1 with dynamic equality.

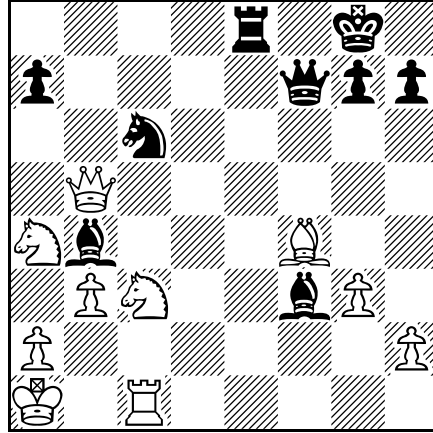
20...e5! 21 ♗he1 ♗g6 22 ♙xe5 ♗e3+ 23 ♙a1 ♗xg2 24 ♗xg2



24...♗xf3?!

Taking with the bishop was better: 24...♙xf3! 25 ♗b2 ♗c6 26 ♙f4 ♙e7, as it ruins White's coordination.

25 ♗e2 ♗f7 26 ♗f1 ♗e8! 27 ♗xf3 ♙xf3 28 ♗b5 ♗c6 29 ♙f4



29...♖f6?

Here 29...♙a3 30 ♖g1 ♗d4 31 ♗d3 ♖f6 was winning for Black.

30 ♗f1??

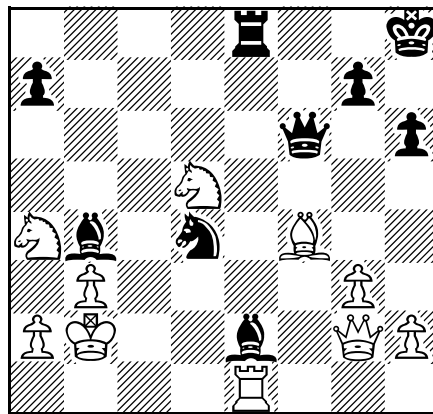
Just when the balance was within reach, White continues the give and take. 30 ♗b2! ♙xc3 31 ♗c4+ ♙d5 32 ♗xc3 is equal.

30...♙e2! 31 ♗g2 h6 32 ♙b2 ♙h8?

Now 32...♙g4! (threatening ...♗e2) 33 ♗c2 ♙xc3+ 34 ♗xc3 ♗b4 35 ♗d2 ♗c8 wins.

33 ♗e1 ♗d4 34 ♗d5??

The final blunder. White could have equalized with the following forced sequence: 34 ♗f2 ♗b5 35 ♗xe2 ♙xc3+ 36 ♙c1 ♗c8 37 ♗c2 ♗d8 38 ♗xc3 ♗xc3 39 ♗e1 ♗d1+ 40 ♗xd1 ♗xd1 41 ♙xd1.



Question: Black to play and mate in five.

Answer: 34...♗a3+! 35 ♖c3

Or 35 ♖xa3 ♗c2 mate.

35...♗b5+ 36 ♖c2 ♗f5+ 0-1

Since ...♗d3 mate follows.

The idea of 5...f5 6 exf5 ♗h6, which creates the complications we studied, was born more than forty years ago and was the result of analytical effort by the pioneers of the English Defence! Nowadays this idea is well known and has been analysed thoroughly with modern engines. This makes the line a double challenge for the Black players, as they must:

1. Study the ins and outs of the variation.
2. Create a mental map of the ideas to memorize them effectively.
3. Do it often to refresh the ideas.

Should this challenge not be your piece of cake, pay close attention to the alternative suggested in the next game. This deals with 5 f3 ♗h4 6 g3 ♗xc3 7 bxc3 ♗e7, heading for positions that are very similar to the Nimzo-Indian Defence.

The following game was played by lesser-known players, but it is one of the few examples available in this line from classical chess by humans. It is far from being flawless but serves well to point out the key elements of this interesting sideline.

Game 11

Fa.Gagnon-M.Desjardins

Gatineau 2014

1 c4 b6 2 ♗c3 ♗b7 3 d4 e6 4 e4 ♗b4 5 f3 ♗h4+

Forcing a slight weakness on the a8-h1 diagonal, which benefits our light-squared bishop. This continuation intends to take the game along a strategic path, and it's ideal for those overwhelmed by the super-analysed sequences arising after 5...f5 6 exf5 ♗h6 above.

6 g3 ♗xc3+ 7 bxc3 ♗e7

The resulting position is strategically unbalanced, White is happy with the strong central pawns and bishop pair, while Black's structure is more solid and there are good chances to blockade the position and attack White's doubled pawns, especially c4. I prefer this to 7...♗h5, when the queen on h5 is active but too exposed to my taste.