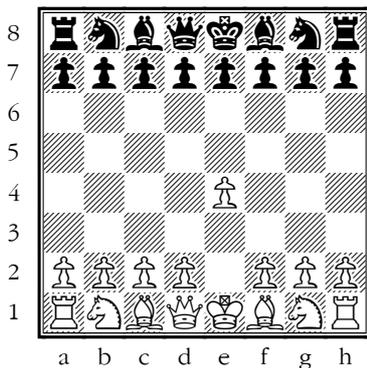


The French Defence in 10 minutes

The French Defence is a different way of playing against 1.e4 as Black than the usual 1...e5.

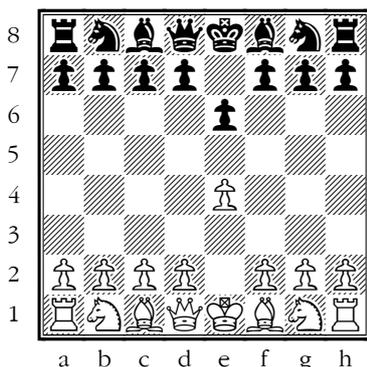
The first few moves

Black notices something interesting about the start position after 1. e4:



The White e-Pawn is *undefended*. Perhaps Black can counter-attack the e-Pawn and get good play.

There are a few defences Black can play that have this idea. In the French, Black plays 1...e6:

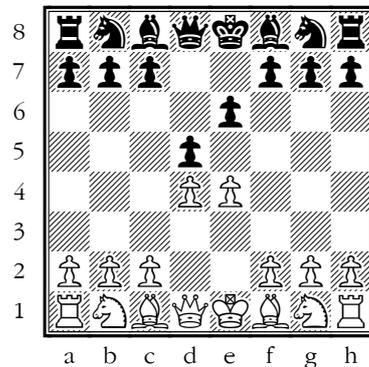


...with the idea of following up with 2...d5, forcing White to think about the e-Pawn.

Play normally goes

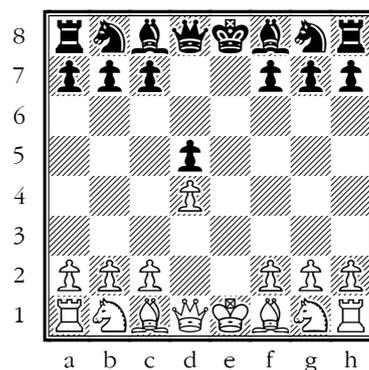
2. d4 (of course, White wants to take over the centre)

2...d5



Sooner or later, White will have to make a decision about the e-Pawn: to swap it or push it. White can swap off on d5:

3. exd5 exd5



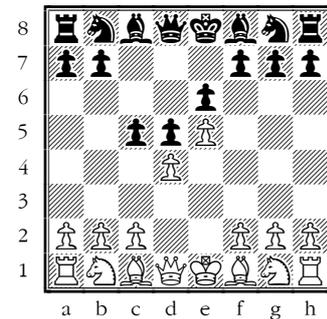
But here Black can get all the pieces out quickly and already has an easy game. White is better off leaving the Black Bishop on c8 locked in for the moment.

OOPS

Learn from someone else's mistake!

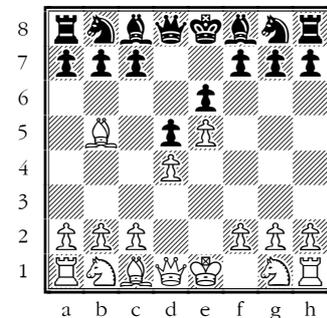
Beginners like to give check, and they like to swap off pieces. If you play the French, you are bound to have one game that goes like this:

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 c5



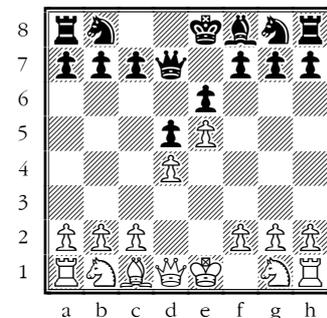
Now, some White players play here a big scary check:

4. Bb5+



Put your Bishop in the way. After

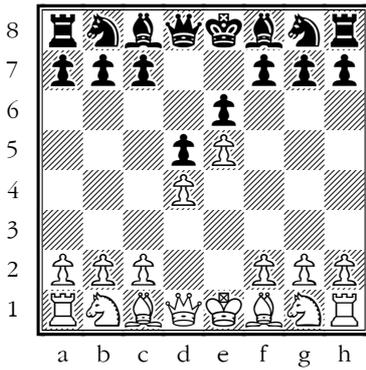
4...Bd7 5. Bxd7+ Qxd7



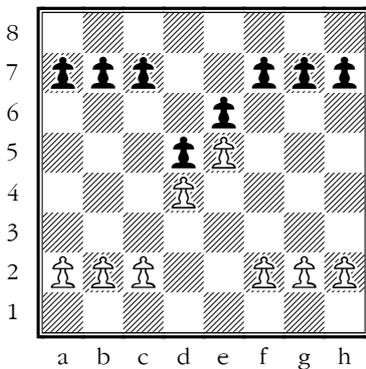
Black has got rid of the biggest problem in the position!

White normally pushes the e-Pawn on to e5. White can do this straight away, or wait a few moves.

If White pushes on to e5 straight away, we get the following position:

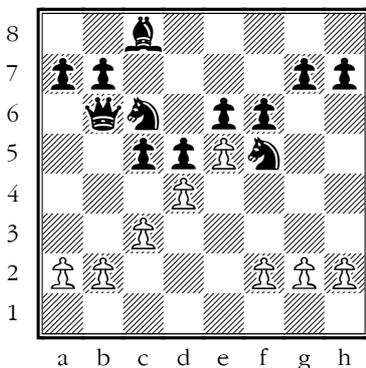


Forget about the pieces for a moment, look at the Pawns.



White has an advanced e-Pawn, while Black's Pawns are all still on the Black half of the board. White has more space, but Black has something to attack.

Black should attack the White Pawns with Pawns and pieces.



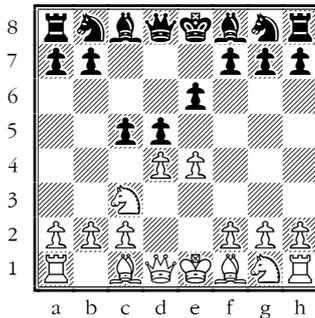
Also, notice the Black Bishop locked in on c8: you must make plans to get this piece going.

Black should try to blow up the White centre with moves like ...c5 and ...f6, but you must pick the right time.

OOPS Learn from someone else's mistake!

Don't play ...c5 until the pawn chain is locked.

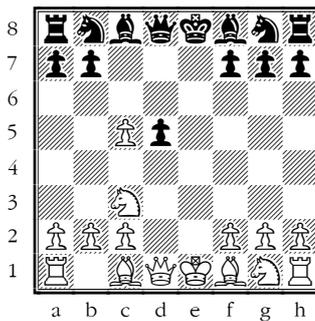
3. Nc3 c5?



The position is not yet closed, and this Pawn move is very dangerous.

White can expose and try to win the Black d-Pawn.

4. exd5 exd5 5. dxc5

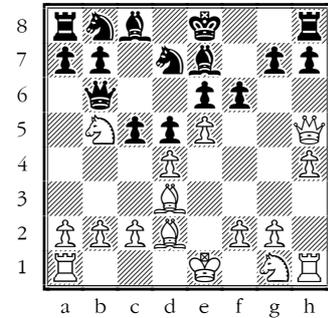


Black has some problems to solve. Don't open up the game when you are behind in development. See also:

Bittner, T - Menge, B [C10] Baden Baden op, 1988 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 c5 4.Nf3 cxd4 5.Qxd4 Ne7 6.Bf4 Nbc6 7.Qa4 Bd7 8.Nb5 Ng6 9.Nc7+ Ke7 10.Qa3+ Kf6 11.Bg5# 1-0

OOPS Learn from someone else's mistake!

The other move. ...f6, can weaken the Black King

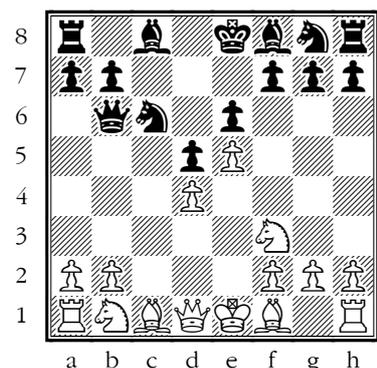


In this position, Black has played ...f6 but has also moved lots of pieces away from the King's-side. White plays a check, but Black dare not put the g-Pawn in the way and has to move the King. White won in another few moves by a direct attack:

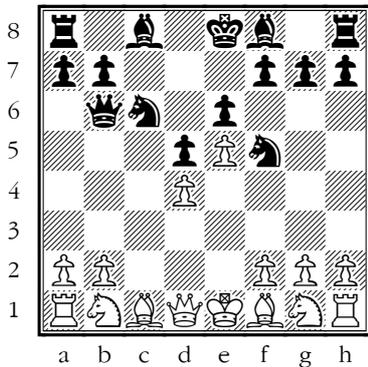
10...Kf8 11.Rh3 cxd4 12.Rg3 fxe5 13.Rxg7 Kxg7 14.Bh6+ Kg8 15.Bg6 1-0

The battle for d4

At some point, Black will normally swap off Pawns on d4, to bring the base of the Pawn chain nearer to Black's pieces. In the last diagram, the base of White's Pawn chain is on b2, which is a long way away. After a swap:



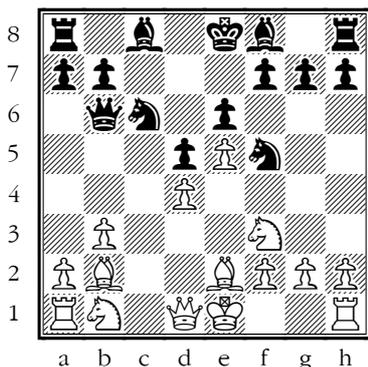
The base of White's Pawn chain is on d4, well within reach. Black will follow up with ...Ng8-e7-f5:



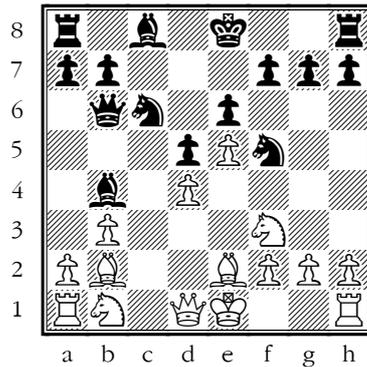
White's d-Pawn is getting into trouble. Two points to note:

(1) As Black, you don't want to make this swap too early, because the White Pawn on c3 is taking away the best square for the White Knight on b1. If the Knight moves, then Black can swap.

(2) If White chooses to try and defend the d-Pawn, the White pieces often get in a tangle. Let's look at an example from a local game:



Black has attacked the d-Pawn three times and White has defended the d-Pawn three times. Is White OK here? Black now shows that White still needs to be careful: Black plays a check on b4 with the Bishop.



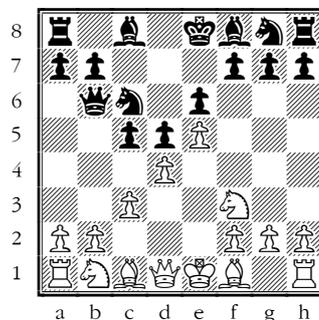
White is not happy to see this move. If White puts a Knight in the way (on d2 or c3), Black will take the d-Pawn. And if White puts a Bishop in the way on c3, Black will still take the d-Pawn! So White must move the King, and so will not be able to castle.

This position isn't exactly bad for White, but it shows how Black can set some problems for White, and at junior level, you will pick up some easy wins with it.

OOPS *Learn from someone else's mistake!*

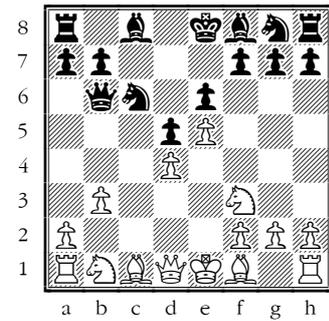
For example, a local junior game went:

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 Nc6 5.Nf3 Qb6



White hopes to take the pressure off the b-Pawn and support d4 with a Bishop on b2, but...

6.b3? cxd4 7.cxd4



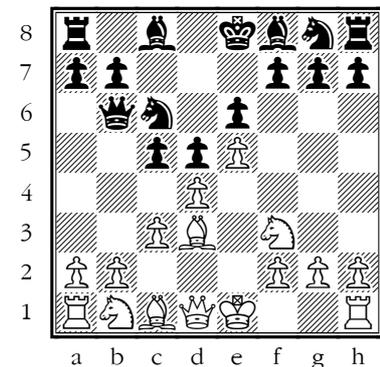
Now

7...Bb4+ 8.Bd2 Nxd4

and White had lost the d-Pawn and was struggling to hang on to the e-Pawn.

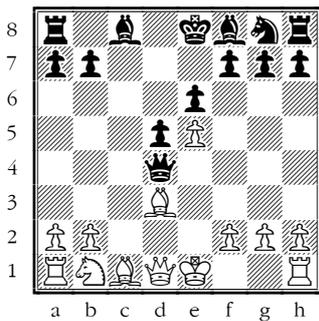
OOPS *Learn from someone else's mistake!*

Black wants to threaten and win the d-Pawn, but there is a trap you must know.



White has cut off the defence of the d-Pawn by the White Queen. But Black should not take the d-Pawn:

6...cxd4 7.cxd4 Nxd4? 8. Nxd4 Qxd4??



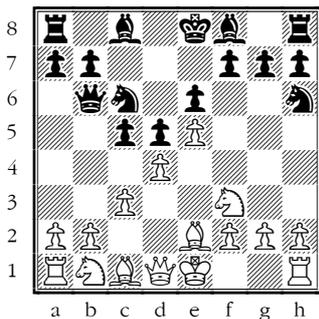
White now has a deadly discovery:

9. Bb5+

and Black loses the Queen...

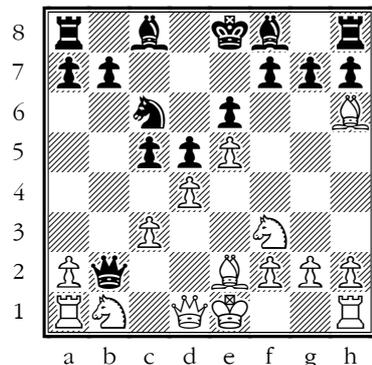
OOPS *Learn from someone else's mistake!*

When the Black Knight comes to h6, White might want to take it.



The Knight will be strong when it comes to f5, and the White Bishop on c1 is always going to be blocked in by the White Pawns. So why not take it? Black hopes that White will get a surprise!

7. Bxh6 Qxb2?



Well, very good, but

8.Be3 Qxa1 9.Qc2!

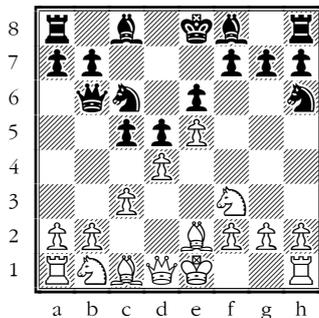
And Black's Queen is lost. So, if Black wants to play the Knight to f5, we need to think harder.

OOPS *Learn from someone else's mistake!*

If you want to get the Knight to f5 in this line, you need to swap pawns in the centre first (even though that gives White a good square to play Nc3).

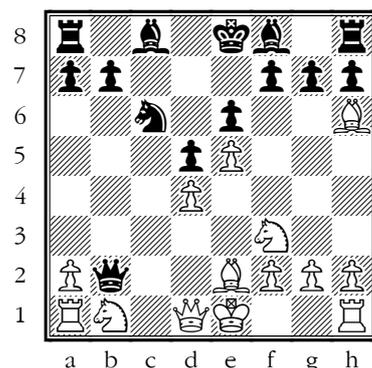
6...cxd4! 7.cxd4 Nh6!

Again, when the Black Knight comes to h6, White might want to take it.



Now White really will get a surprise!

8. Bxh6 Qxb2?

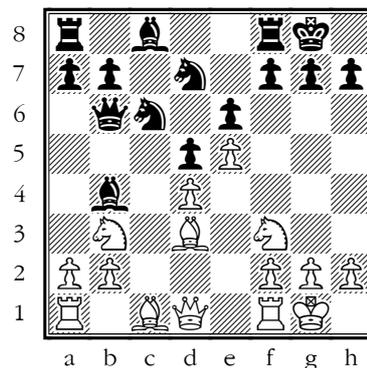


Black is winning: the Queen can escape.

OOPS *Learn from someone else's mistake!*

Don't castle into White's King's-side attack. With a closed centre, Black's King is sometimes safer in the centre.

Efler, L (2255) - Kubat, A [C05] CZE-chT, 1993 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.Bd3 c5 5.c3 Nc6 6.Ng3 cxd4 7.cxd4 Bb4 8.e5 Nd7 9.0-0 Qb6 10.Nb3 0-0



11. Bxh7+! 1-0

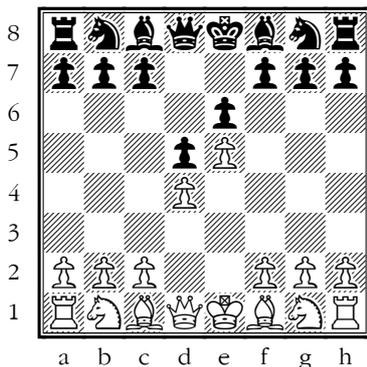
Black resigned! Can you follow why? Often this sacrifice leads to mate, but here White just wins by – well, what?

Some French Variations

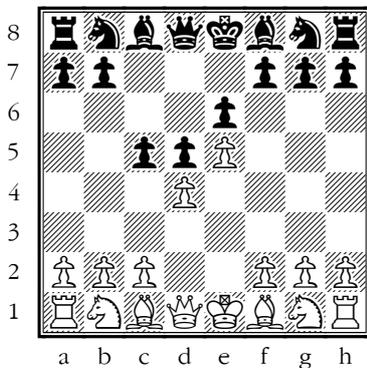
If you get to the point where your opponents know how to play the first few moves with confidence, then you need to learn some definite moves to play back.

The Advance Variation

3. e5

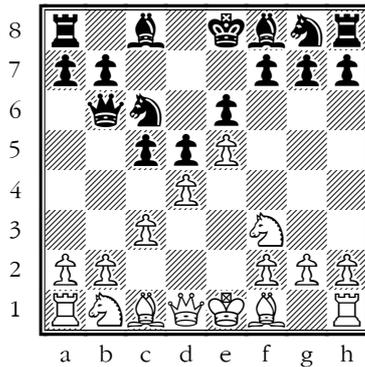


Once the Pawns are locked like this, Black will play **3...c5**, trying to undermine the support of the e-Pawn.



White defends with **4.c3**. Notice that White is having to react to Black's threats, not the other way around.

Black follows up with more attacking moves, like ...Nc6, and ...Qb6.



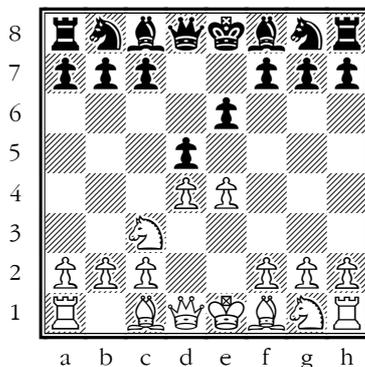
White can hang on to the Pawn but must play carefully. Black can often make White do without castling.

If this is nothing promising for White, why not try and hang on to the e-Pawn on e4?

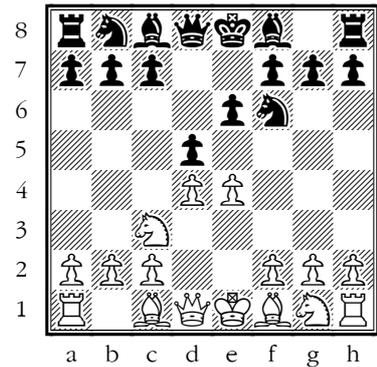
The Classical Variation

At the third move, Black can try to support the e-Pawn with a Knight:

3. Nc3

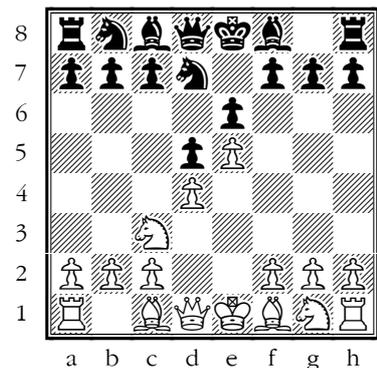


Sadly for White, we now get into a battle for control of the e4 square, which White cannot win. Black does not play ...c5 yet (see above) but attacks e4 with a Knight, trying to make White move the e-Pawn: **3...Nf6**



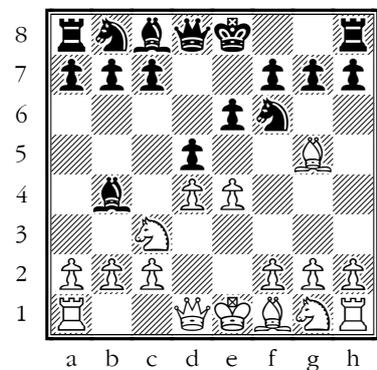
And White needs to do something about e4 again.

If White pushes on with e4-e5 here, we get what is called the Steinitz Variation. The Black Knight usually drops back to d7, where it attacks e5.



Instead of going for this line, White often pins the Black Knight, but Black can pin straight back:

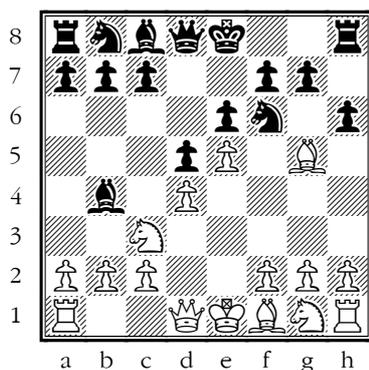
4. Bg5 Bb4



This is called the MacCutcheon Variation. Black can play 4...Be7 instead, but I like the Mac.

It was more fashionable in the 1920s, being played by Alekhine, Capablanca and Tarrasch. Now White usually pushes on with 5. e5, and the fight is on.

Black doesn't lose the Knight on f6 because of 5...h6



The e4-e5 move still isn't forced at move 5, but all the other moves give Black an easy game. If you want the variations, here they are:

5. Bd3 dxe4 6. Bxe4 Nbd7=

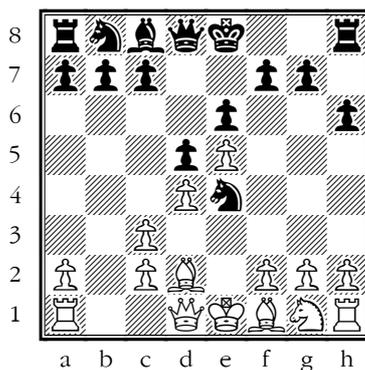
5.f3 h6 6.Bxf6 Qxf6 7.Nge2 dxe4 8.fxe4 e5 =+

5. Qd3 dxe4 +

5. Nge2 h6! =

5. exd5 Qxd5! 6. Bxf6 Bxc3+! =

So, the main variations of the French Defence all lead to the same Pawn structure in the middle. In the MacCutcheon we also usually get a mess on the Queen's-side:

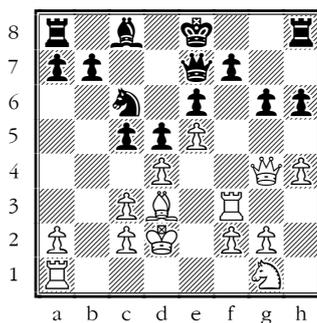


Black has given up the good dark-squared Bishop to make a mess of White's Pawns. White will always have the problem of the weak Queen's-side, even if Black's King's-side is weak without the Bishop.

If Black can avoid an accident on the King's-side, the White Queen's-side can be taken apart.

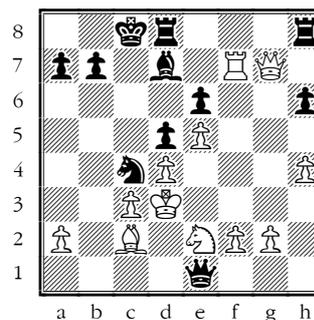
Here is a typical MacCutcheon position, reached after

Ladisić, S - San Marco, B [C12] Paris, 1983 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 Bb4 5.e5 h6 6.Bd2 Bxc3 7.bxc3 Ne4 8.Qg4 g6 9.Bd3 Nxd2 10.Kxd2 c5 11.h4 Nc6 12.Rh3 Qe7 13.Rf3



White is pressing on the King's-side, but has problems on the other wing. Black bursts through with the Queen and nabs a Rook:

13...cxd4 14.cxd4 Qb4+ 15.c3 Qb2+ 16.Bc2 Qxa1 17.Rxf7 Bd7 18.Qxg6 0-0-0 19.Ne2 Na5 20.Qg7 Nc4+ 21.Kd3 Qe1 0-1



Black has caught a bigger fish than a Rook.

P.S.

Other defences (or counterattacks) that use the same attack on e4 include:

The Caro-Kann Defence

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5

The Alekhine Defence

1. e4 Nf6

The Scandinavian Defence

1. e4 d5