



C O L U M N I S T S

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

**Reviewed this month:*****Mastering the Najdorf***

by Julen Arizmendi and Javier Moreno

English Attack

by Nick de Firmian and John Fedorowicz

The English Attack

by Tapani Sammalvuori

The Scandinavian Defence

by James Plaskett

The Essential Center-Counter

by Andrew Martin

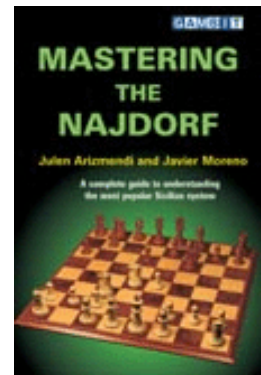
Sicilians and Scandinavians

The Sicilian Defense has been the most popular opening throughout the last few decades, with the popularity of the various lines fluctuating tremendously. At one point the Scheveningen Variation was the most popular, but then the Keres Attack came into fashion and scared many of its adherents away. The Classical Sicilian also had its time in the spotlight, but the tide turned when it was established that Black was struggling in a number of critical lines in the Rauzer. For a long time the Najdorf became the center of attention and it is still in the repertoires of Kasparov and Kramnik. Now the Sveshnikov is center stage and it seems that all the top level Najdorf players have included the Sveshnikov Variation as well. However, against the Najdorf, there is no doubt that the newest trend is the English Attack.

Meanwhile, the Scandinavian Defense is only rarely seen in games between GMs, yet the theoretical works on this opening are exploding in number. After reviewing the two most recent books on the subject it is clear that we haven't heard the last on this combative opening.

Mastering the Najdorf by Julen Arizmendi and Javier Moreno, 2004 Gambit, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 224 pp., \$27.50

Gambit Publications has taken more chances than any other publisher regarding unknown authors. You can't help but admire their courage. Many writers, including myself, have been plucked from relative obscurity, and are now well known to a general majority of the chess public. The same can be said about the authors of this book. Julen Arizmendi is a Spanish international master with two grandmaster norms and a member of the editorial staff of the magazines *Jaque* and *Teoría*'s. Co-author Moreno Carnero's is a grandmaster from Spain who has worked for Shirov and studied with Anand.



Both of the authors play the Najdorf Sicilian, so they should be perfectly capable of illuminating some of the secrets of the opening. Additionally, the bibliography lists two titles by GM Jesus de la Villa, which are probably not readily available to a wider audience: *Desmontando la Siciliana* is a heavy volume with 336 pages, according to the descriptions I found on the Internet, and *El Ataque Inglés* is a somewhat shorter treatise that is still available in Spain.

Let's see how the material is divided:

- Symbols (1 page)
- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (5 pages)
- 1 The Classical 6 Be2 (39 pages)
- 2 The Positional 6 g3 (20 pages)
- 3 6 f4 (16 pages)
- 4 The English Attack: 6 Be3/6 f3 (50 pages)
- 5 The Old Main Line: 6 Bg5 (38 pages)
- 6 The Fischer Attack: 6 Bc4 (31 pages)
- 7 6 a4 (5 pages)
- 8 Alternatives on Move 6 (6 Bd3, 6 h3 and 6 Rg1) (11 pages)
- Index of Variations (4 pages)

I don't have any major objections with the coverage, although the fact that chapter one is longer than chapter five is quite surprising, and the 20 pages allocated to chapter two seems high at first glance. Nevertheless, once you delve into it you realize the page allocations have been well-spent. In the introduction the authors write:

“In order to help the reader orientate himself during the first moves of each variation, every chapter begins with a detailed introduction explaining how the material has been organized.

Regarding the selected material, our intention was not only to present those possibilities that have been tried in practice, but also to explain the reasoning behind each move and search for novelties for both sides that could alter the theoretical evaluation. A great effort was made in this regard, which required hard investigative work. This resulted in much original analysis that, although inevitably containing mistakes, was made with professional rigour. We are conscious that a book based on openings in the age of information has a risk of being out of date very soon, especially with such a fashionable opening

variation as the Najdorf, but nevertheless we are optimistic and believe that the explanations of the moves, the exposition of typical plans and the great amount of suggestions will give this book a long and useful life.”

Throughout the book the author’s fulfill the aims described in the introduction, you’ll find suggestions, improvements over existing theory, as well as good chunks of original analysis. Consider the following example from chapter two:

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 g3 e5 7 Nde2 Nbd7 8 Bg2 b5 9 h3 Bb7 10 g4 Nc5 11 Ng3 g6 12 0-0 Ne6!

With this move, they branch off from the main game, Masserey-Gallagher, Swiss Team Ch 1999 with their own analysis:

13 a4 b4 14 Nd5



14...a5!

(a very important move; Black wants to get rid of the strong knight, but here he can tolerate its presence while he finishes his development, 14...Nxd5 15 exd5 Nf4? (15...Nc5 +=) 16 Bxf4 exf4 17 Qd4 gives White a clear advantage)

a) 15 c3 bxc3 16 bxc3 Bg7 (the alternative 16...Nxd5 17 exd5 Nc5 18 f4 Bg7 is also possible) 17 Nxf6+ Bxf6 18 Ba3 Nc5 is


good for Black.

b) 15 Be3 Bg7 is reasonable for Black.

c) 15 f4 exf4 (15...Nxd5 16 exd5 Qb6+ 17 Kh1 Nxf4 18 Bxf4 exf4 19 Qe2+ Be7 20 Rxf4 {20 Rae1 0-0 21 Qxe7 fxg3 is unclear but seems fine} 20...Ba6! 21 Qe4 Ra7, followed by 22...0-0; Black has no problems) 16 Nxf4 (16 Nxf6+ Qxf6 17 e5? Qd8! -/+) 16 ..Bg7 17 Nxe6 fxe6 18 g5 Qb6+ 19 Kh1 Nd7, Black cannot castle kingside at the moment, but his activity clearly makes up for this.

You will find such examples in every chapter, supported by well-phrased explanations that make the material accessible to a wide range of players, from those with less experience to those much stronger players who are interested in new ideas in a highly topical opening in which many of their opponents will be armed to the teeth.

I am very impressed by the presentation of the material along with the recommended variations. This is a very solid piece of work that I expect will find its way onto the bookshelves of many chessplayers around the world.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *Mastering the Najdorf* by Julen Arizmendi and Javier Moreno

English Attack by Nick de Firmian and John Fedorowicz, 2004 Batsford BT, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 256 pp., \$22.95

When two strong American GMs team up to write about an opening both of them know very well the result should be excellent. De Firmian is the author of *MCO* and *Chess Openings: the Easy Way*, while Fedorowicz has previously written a well-received book on the Benko Gambit and is a columnist on the acclaimed Chesspublishing.com website. However, I have found his column wanting. He frequently has an all-too-relaxed attitude about educating his readers and often only adds one, two, or three comments to an entire game.



The chapters are divided as follows:

- Introduction
- Definitions of Symbols (1 pages)
- The English Connection (8 pages)
- The Najdorf Variation (1 pages)
- Lines where Black plays ...e5 (61 pages)
- Chasing the bishop with ... Ng4 (22 pages)
- Lines where Black plays ...e6 (102 pages)
- The Taimanov Variation (50 pages)
- The Scheveningen Variation (3 pages)
- Index of Variations (4 pages)

While the above reflects what is on the contents page, the material is further broken down into 36 smaller chapters, which are more accurately defined in the Index of Variations. This makes it relatively easy to locate the various lines.

There are several things I'm unhappy about with this book. The first is that it utilizes a one-column format, which is a waste of space. But more importantly some chapters remind me of nothing other than a database dump with long game quotations and few, if any, comments regarding mistakes and possible improvements. Even when these are given, they are not supported with a great deal of analysis, but rather a loose comment and a one or two-move suggestion. This is not how you write a thorough book or help the reader to understand the material. Finally, the authors don't seem keen on indicating where mistakes were made in the games. So you often have a position after twenty or so moves where one side is decidedly doing better, but no one has made so much as a dubious move. Additionally, the presentation is inconsistent. For example, let's look at the following line:

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Be3 e6 7 f3 b5 8 Qd2 Nbd7 9

g4 Nb6 10 g5

At this point the authors – or author since throughout the book there are cases where the singular “I” is used instead of “we.” – make the cryptic comment: “10 a4!? is out of place in the English Attack. 10...bxa4 11 Nxa4 Nfd7 12 Nxb6 Nxb6 13 Qa5 Nd7 14 Qxd8 Kxd8 += Rubino-Gregory, St Chely d’Aubrac 2001.” If the assessment is +=, why is it “out of place?”

10...Nfd7



Here a number of moves are given:

After 11 f4?! the authors give two different lines, one of which is winning for White after a dubious move from Black (with no improvement suggested) and the other leads to a clear advantage for Black without further mistakes from either side.

Next they offer 11 h4 with the comment that it “...amounts to a huge waste of time,” and then they provide two lines, both ending in equal play.

Next comes 11 Bd3 leading to a slight edge for Black despite no moves being annotated as dubious or mistaken.

11 Qf2 has a variation that ends on move 20 with a decisive advantage for Black, yet again without any moves being evaluated as errors, only an improvement is suggested.

There is also a brief discussion of 11 a4, against which they suggest 11...Nxa4 to give Black better chances than their main move, 11...b4, which leads to a clear advantage for White, once again without any move on either side being faulted.

11 0-0-0 Bb7

11...Qc7 is offered as an alternative, leading to an edge for Black as in Kunte-Georgiev, Istanbul 2000. But there are a handful of GMs with this name, which one is it?

Now they cite five different continuations for White, the best of which leads to a slight plus for Black; in each case without suggesting any major mistakes by White. If the main line leads to a small plus for Black, why is it the main line? And why isn't 11 0-0-0 given as dubious, while the moves that don't lead to a worse game are called “out of place” or “huge wastes of time?”

The present book has some new material, some new ideas and improvements, as well as a bit of independent analysis, but it falls short on so many levels that it is impossible to recommend it to other than the most devoted English Attack practitioners.

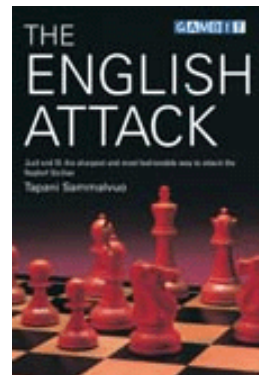
My assessment of this book:

Order *English Attack*

by Nick de Firmian and John Fedorowicz

The English Attack by Tapani Sammalvuo, 2004 Gambit, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 272 pp., \$28.95

This book, by the Finnish International Master Sammalvuo, left me completely in awe. It is tightly packed with relevant and intelligently chosen material, and the extent of the original input is similar to Watson's excellent works on the French and the Modern Benoni.



The book is monumental in every dimension. Will anybody ever study all of the 272 oversized pages in this book? I hope not, but it certainly stands as testimony to the explosion of opening theory during the last decade. Some years ago the variations surrounding the set-up with 6...e5 were covered in depth in the Russian-language *Shakmatny Bulletin* in 5-6 pages. Now that same complex is covered by Sammalvuo in 92 jam-packed pages!


Let's look at how the material is divided:

- Symbols (1 page)
- Bibliography (1 page)
- Foreword (1 page)
- Introduction (3 pages)
- A Small Attacking Guide (5 pages)
- The English Attack against Other Sicilians (2 pages)
- 1 The New Move-Order 6 f3 (16 pages)
- 2 6...Ng4 and Unusual 6th Moves for Black (43 pages)
- 3 The Najdorf Line 6...e5: Introduction and the Positional 7 Nf3 (14 pages)
- 4 The Najdorf Line 6...e5 7 Nb3: Introduction and the Hypermodern 8...h5 (20 pages)
- 5 The Najdorf Line 6...e5 with 8...Be7: Early Deviations and the Dubious 10...h6?! (11 pages)
- 6 The Najdorf Line 6...e5 with Early Castling by Black (21 pages)
- 7 The Najdorf Line 6...e5 with 8...Nbd7: Introduction and the Modern 9 g4 (14 pages)
- 8 The Najdorf Line 6...e5 with 8...Nbd7: The Old 9 Qd2 (12 pages)
- 9 The Scheveningen Line 6...e6: Early Deviations (16 pages)
- 10 The Scheveningen Line 6...e6 with 8...Nfd7 (18 pages)
- 11 The Scheveningen Line 6...e6 with 7...Nc6 (23 pages)
- 12 The Scheveningen Line 6...e6: The Main Line 8...h6 without 12 Na4 (27 pages)
- 13 The Main Line: The Critical 12 Na4 (18 pages)

- Index of Variations (3 pages)

The author's input is considerable. There are new ideas, independent analysis, and improvements or refutations of current theory on every page. Each chapter begins with a short introduction and closes with a theoretical summary, giving guidelines for both White and Black, along with rules of thumb that offer general principles to help you steer through the complications. I found them to be very useful.

Even though the book is laden with theory, the presentation is well-balanced with a lot of prose explaining typical ideas, positional themes, standard plans, and why some things are bad and why other things are better. It makes studying this book much less frightening than it could have been and you actually learn a lot, not just about this opening, but about chess in general. This makes the book more approachable for players rated lower than 2200. Without a doubt this book is one of the biggest achievements in opening theory this year.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *The English Attack*

by Tapani Sammalvuo

The Scandinavian Defence by James Plaskett, 2004 Batsford BT, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 192 pp., \$22.95

English GM Plaskett is not a name I normally connect with this opening, but he is a 1 e4 player so I'm sure he has experience playing against it. The benefit of this is that most of the monographs on this opening have been written by players who play the opening as Black and they often have a bias for Black's chances. However, none of Plaskett's previous books have substantially impressed me, although they have all been of decent quality.




Let's see how he divided the material:

- Introduction (2 pages)
- 1 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 d4 e5 (2 pages)
- 2 The Main Line: 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qa5 (21 pages)
- 3 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qd8 (8 pages)
- 4 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qd6 (51 pages)
- 5 The Patzer Variation 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qe5+ (11 pages)
- 6 The Modern Scandinavian 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 (2 pages)
- 7 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Bb5+ (9 pages)
- 8 Main Lines 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Nxd5 (16 pages)
- 9 The Scandinavian Gambit 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 c6 (4 pages)
- 10 The Icelandic Gambit 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 e6?! (15 pages)
- 11 The Portuguese Variation 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4!? (38 pages)

- 12 In Conclusion (6 pages)
- Index of Variations (3 pages)

On the positive side, all the main lines are there, but that's about it. It immediately concerns me that 3...Qa5 has only been allocated approximately the same number of pages as the much less respectable lines: 3...Qd8 and 3...Qe5+. Furthermore, the old main line 2...Nf6 followed by 3...Nxd5, is represented with even less pages, while the modern 3...Qd6 line and the Portuguese Variation constitute nearly half of the book. Moreover, the book is written in the one column format, which wastes an astounding amount of space around the diagrams. The fact that Plaskett occasionally uses 3-5 diagrams per game makes some of the pages look almost empty. If the book was written in two-column format it would likely span only 120 pages, which definitely isn't nearly enough to scratch the surface of the theory on this opening.

These are just a few of the many problems I found with this book. There are typos, silly misplaced comments, missing lines, and almost a complete lack of independent suggestions or analysis. The utilization of the pages is poor, some of the main games are old and/or partly irrelevant, and loose and space consuming annotations are given that neither elevates your understanding of the opening nor brings any other positive aspects. The coverage is inadequate for strong players, and overall there are too many loose ends and not enough independent work from the English GM.

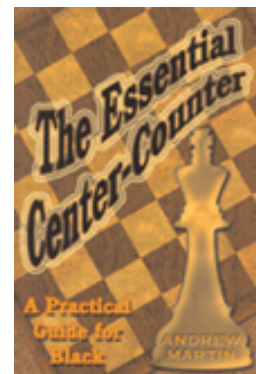
My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *The Scandinavian Defence*
by James Plaskett

The Essential Center-Counter by Andrew Martin, 2004 Thinkers' Press, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 142 pp., \$19.50

I recently reviewed Andrew Martin's excellent *King's Indian Battle Plans*, which was also published by Thinkers' Press, and according to the back cover blurb of this book it was an international bestseller. For your entertainment here's the rest of the text:

"Grandmaster Jonathan Speelman was an analyst in Vishwanathan Anand's camp for the 1995 world championship match against Garry Kasparov. They looked at the Center Counter (aka 'Scandinavian') and pronounced it as quite playable.



In 2004 one test was made of this decree and it was Speelman-Martin, 4NCL, September. This important game was full of fireworks before eventually being drawn. Martin's ...Bf5 was more than a little playable - Black possibly had a slight edge.

But the real point is that the Center Counter can be aggressive and dangerous. Because of international master Martin's preferred 2...Qxd5, the Center Counter also doesn't require a mountain of memorization nor knowledge to learn and use it.

In 10 chapters you are guided through declined and accepted variations. Transpositional variations from non-CC games such as the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit are not just investigated, they are taken apart.

36 games are annotated in the friendly style that Andrew Martin is known for - his writing makes you want to play the system!

In 2004 Martin set a world record by playing 321 simultaneous chess games, all at once."

This sensational way of writing is aimed at attracting people to buy a product because they don't know any better. It sounds as if the Speelman-Martin game was the only master game played with this opening in 2004. But how about seeing that exciting game, which all of us have held our breath to play through? Are you ready?

Speelman-Martin

4 NCL 2004

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qa5 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 Bc4 c6 6 Qe2 Bf5 7 Ne5 e6 8 g4 Bg6 9 h4 Nbd7 10 Nxd7 Nxd7 11 d3

According to the book, the critical line is 11 h5 Bxc2 12 d3 b5 (12...Ba4!?) 13 Bxe6 fxe6 14 Qxe6+ Be7 (14...Kd8 15 Bg5+ Kc7 16 Bf4+ =) 15 Bg5 Qd8 16 Kd2 Bxd3! 17 Bxe7 Qxe7 18 Qxe7+ Kxe7 19 Kxd3 Ne5+ 20 Kd4! Nxe4 21 Rhg1 with equal chances, but why end the line just when it is getting interesting? After 21...Nxf2 22 Rxg7+ Kf6 23 h6 is anything but easy for Black, so he would have to find 21...Rhd8+ 22 Kc5 Ne5 23 Rxg7+ Ke6 24 f4 Nd3+ 25 Kxc6 Rab8 26 Nxb5 Nb4+ 27 Kc5 Nd3+ with a likely draw.

11...h5 12 Bd2 Qe5 13 g5 ½-½

Yes, that's all folks, a 13-move draw blown up to sound like the battle of the year! If the above game is the main selling point it doesn't bode well for the rest of the book. But before I lose myself, let's see how the author has divided the material:


- Symbols (1 page)
- Preface (2 pages)
- **Part One**
- **White does not like the Center Counter at all** (2 pages)
- 1 The Introduction (9 pages)
- 2 Tricky, but ultimately unsatisfactory White second moves: 1 e4 d5 2 Nf3; 2 d4; 2 e5; 2 Nc3 (15 pages)
- 3 I don't like the Main Line: 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5! 3 d4; 3 Nf3 (17 pages)
- 4 In the backwoods: 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qa5 4 b4?!; 4 f4; 4 g3; 4 Nf3 (13 pages)
- **Part Two**
- **Okay, I accept your offer** (2 pages)
- 5 Tricky move orders: 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qa5 4 Bc4 c6 5 d3; 4

- Bc4 c6 5 Nf3; 4 Bc4 c6 5 d4 (excluding Nf3); 4 Nf3 c6 5 Others (13 pages)
- 6 The Main Line Introduction: 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qa5 4 d4 (4 pages)
 - 7 6 Ne5 Be6; 6 Bd2; 6 Bd3 (13 pages)
 - 8 I castle: 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qa5 4 d4 c6 5 Nf3 Nf6 6 Bc4 Bf5 7 0-0 (8 pages)
 - 9 Early hits with the Queen's Knight: 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qa5 4 d4 c6 5 Nf3 Nf6 6 Bc4 Bf5 7 Bd2 e6 8 Nd5 and 8 Ne4 (9 pages)
 - 10 Main Line Debate: 8 Qe2 Bb4, etc. (23 pages)
 - End Credits (1 page)
 - Index of Games (3 pages)
 - Index of Variations (3 pages)

Well, for starters, it only deals with 3...Qa5 in addition to some early oddities from White. But I don't understand the inconsistencies on the contents page. Most of the chapters have a text heading, except chapter 7, where there is none. Plus, most chapters list all the moves from move one, while chapters 7 and 10 only list the moves 6 and 8. Why? To the author's and publisher's credit they have added a couple of indexes, which were much needed but not included in Martin's massive *King's Indian Battle Plans*. However, cynics can argue that there is another reason why it is included in this book.

The book only has 142 pages, and if you minus off the pages that are half empty, you are then down to about 124 pages. The publisher has also used a font that is considerably larger than what is normally seen in chess books and half of the space used is spent on inferior moves for Black. This is an intolerable waste of space in a book that is too short already. This could be tolerated if the material was concise and offered on point coverage of this interesting opening, but here too the book stumbles tremendously. For example in chapter 4, the move 4 b4?! is covered over the course of 4½ pages, using no less than eleven diagrams; one page has four diagrams and the same position is diagrammed twice. In comparison, *Modernes Skandinavisch* by Matthias Wahls also uses four pages on the same line, but that book is 302 pages long, has bigger pages and uses a smaller font size. Most telling of all, none of Martin's material in this chapter is new; it is all included in Wahls' book.

The author has added some analysis of his own, but much of the analysis that is presented as Martin's is actually taken from Wahls' book and lifting material from other books to present it as your own is appalling. Andrew Martin has authored several good books, but this one is a pathetic, rushed piece of work that should never have been published in its current state.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *The Essential Center-Counter*
by Andrew Martin



[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About The Chess Cafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2004 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"**The Chess Cafe®**" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.