

The 3...♔d8 Scandinavian Simple and Strong



Daniel Lowinger

Foreword by Karsten Müller

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2013

Russell Enterprises, Inc.
Milford, CT USA

Dedication:
To my wife, for her incredible support, in this and everything.

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by
Daniel Lowinger

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Foreword

Scandinavian Surprise

Your opponent has probably played 1.e4 his entire life and knows how to answer 1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖×d5 3.♗c3 ♖a5. He might also be familiar with 3...♖d6, but what about the direct retreat 3...♖d8? Can this really be good despite the loss of time? Your opponent will strongly doubt the soundness of your approach and will want to punish you directly. This might play into your hands as your very solid structure gives good long-term prospects, as in the other Scandinavian lines.

The short-term resources also seem to be sufficient, as strong players like Dorfman have repeatedly opted for this line, while Michael Adams has used it as an occasional surprise weapon. In particular, the two plans with ...a6 and ...h6 contain a lot of venom, and score very well in practice.

Regarding the first plan, 1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖×d5 3.♗c3 ♖d8 4.d4 ♗f6 5.♗c4, and now 5...a6!?, introduced by Dorfman in 1992, is dealt with by Lowinger in great detail in Chapter 2. Black even has a large plus score here. The second possibility, 1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖×d5 3.♗c3 ♖d8 4.d4 ♗f6 5.♗g5, and now 5...h6!?, is favored by Djukic, who recently even beat German grandmaster Naiditsch with it – see Game 88. So Lowinger’s favorite quote of the Great Dane, Bent Larsen, “When in doubt, push a rook’s pawn,” applies here as well.

One way to learn an opening is to study games by a role model. Here grandmasters David Garcia and Nikola Djukic are natural choices. The author gives many of their games and annotates them in detail so that you can follow them not only in the opening, but also in the other important phases, such as the transition from opening to middlegame and even in the typical Scandinavian endgames.

The line 3...♖d8 has a bad reputation in chess theory and literature. The alternatives 3...♖a5 and 3...♖d6 are generally favored. Lowinger investigates the reasons for this and traces them back to a loss by Michael Adams against German grandmaster Christopher Lutz in a 1999 rapid game in Frankfurt (Game 52). He rightly concludes that this is not convincing, and that White’s advantage is as small as in the other cases. 3...♖d8 is a bit more passive but also more solid; this might even be an advantage if White does not act very dynamically, as Black does not have to spend additional time moving the queen around, something that often happens in the other two lines.

The author, Dan Lowinger, has played the line himself many times with good results, and his enthusiasm shines through in his treatment. So I wish you fun and success when employing the 3...♖d8 Scandinavian!

Grandmaster Dr. Karsten Müller
Hamburg, July 2013

The 3...♔d8 Scandinavian

27.♖e2! g3 28.♞h3 e×d4 29.c×d4?!

Shaw is clearly rattled. It's hard to shift gears and think of counterattack, but 29.♖e7+! ♜f7 30.♖d8, threatening mate, ties Black down and gives White the advantage.

29...♟f6 30.♞×g3 ♞e8 31.♖c2 ♖h6 32.♖b2

32.♞h1 ♟h5 33.♞h4! is best, and Black is stymied (33...♟f4+ 34.♞xf4+-).

32...♟h5 33.♖×b7+ ♖g8 34.♞g4 ♟f4+ 35.♞×f4 ♖×f4 36.♖×c6 ♖g5+ 37.♖h3 ½-½

(63) Fressinet (2501) - Garcia (2501)
Catalunya 2000

As I write, Laurent Fressinet is ranked 29th among active players in the world. Here we have a worthy competitor finally playing the direct 12.h5. So what was everyone else so afraid of anyway?

1.e4 d5 2.e×d5 ♖×d5 3.♟c3 ♖d8 4.d4 ♟f6 5.♟f3 c6 6.♞c4 ♞f5 7.♟e5 e6 8.g4 ♞g6 9.h4 ♞b4 10.f3 ♟d5 11.♞×d5 c×d5 12.h5

Here we go, into the fire.

12...f6

Obviously, Black is not losing a piece.

13.h×g6 f×e5 14.d×e5

14.g×h7 is the only proper attempt at advantage according to Mr. Houdini, and is the subject of our next game.

14...♟c6

It seems to be Black who is seizing the initiative! White's king is permanently exposed, after all. The analysis engines don't love it, though, as they attach tremendous importance to White's h7-pawn after g×h7 in these variations. Therefore, Houdini asserts 14...h6=. Needless to say, if the materialistic machine thinks the position is equal when Black is down a full pawn, this is because the compensation is fierce indeed.

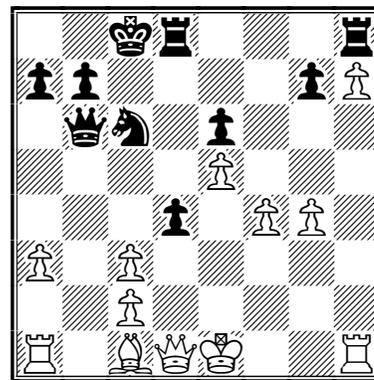
15.f4?

The machine insists on 15.g×h7.

15...♖b6?!

Garcia builds his initiative in frightening fashion, but once again the heartless machine finds a clear advantage for Black after the forcing move 15...d4. Then 16.a3 ♞a5 17.b4 d×c3 18.b×a5 ♖×d1+ 19.♖×d1 0-0-0+ 20. ♖e1 (or 20.♖e2) ♟d4!≠ and Black's domination of the center, together with White's uncoordinated pieces, gives Black a clear edge.

16.a3 ♞×c3+ 17.b×c3 0-0-0 18.g×h7 d4 (D)



If you're not afraid for White here, you're not human...literally!

The machine is perfectly happy taking White here, a position in which strong grandmaster Fressinet is blown to smithereens in under 10 moves. This reminds me of my GPS navigation device, which often leads me along the most desolate paths as it directs me to my destination. I frequently find myself shuddering in my car as I ponder what might happen if the thing were suddenly to stop working.

It goes without saying that White has to do an enormous amount of memorization and preparation to enter this kind of position with any trace of confidence. Could you imagine finding your way here with White and suddenly forgetting your analysis? It's a terrifying thought!

White's king is permanently without shelter and his pieces lack coordination. His only serious trump is his h7-pawn. Black is castled, his king is safe, his rooks are connected, his queen and knight are involved, and he's crashing through the center. What more can we ask for?

19.♖e2 ♜c5 20.♞d3?

Well, that didn't take long. White is naturally afraid that Black might sacrifice his d-pawn and vacate the d4-square for his knight, but the computer says White must allow it and play 20.c4. Of course Black is not then obliged to proceed with 20...d3 right away, or even at all. Perhaps White can satisfactorily meet that threat (20...d3? 21.cxd3 ♘d4 22.♞f2!±). The point is, it's all these perceived threats, some deadly, some

not, that prove overwhelming to a human.

20...♘xe5!±

This one, on the other hand, is deadly.

21.fxe5 ♜xe5+ 22.♞f2 ♞df8+ 23.♞g2 ♞d5+ 24.♞g1 ♞f3

Just like that, it's all over.

25.c4 ♜c6 26.♞e2 ♞g3+ 27.♞h2 ♞d6 0-1

(64) Prokopchuk (2520) – Lopez (2468)

Moscow 2005

It is five years later. The game follows our previous one until move 14, when Prokopchuk plays the computer's top recommendation, securing that much machine-valued h7-pawn.

1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♜xd5 3.♘c3 ♞d8 4.d4 c6 5.♙c4 ♘f6 6.♘f3 ♙f5 7.♘e5 e6 8.g4 ♙g6 9.h4 ♙b4 10.f3 ♘d5 11.♙xd5 cxd5 12.h5 f6 13.hxg6 fxg5 14.gxh7

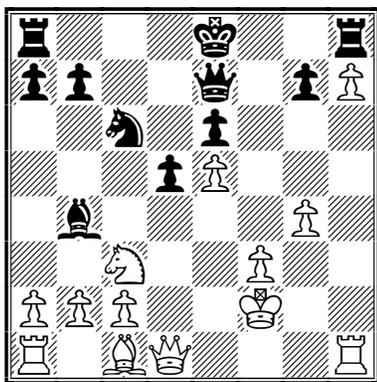
This is the computer-approved path, as noted.

14...♞e7

14...♘c6 15.dxe5 ♞b6 16.♞f1 0-0-0 17.♞g2 ♘xe5 18.♞e2 ♘g6, with characteristic play, was agreed a short draw in Dominguez-Garcia 2001. Lopez's move aims to lop off that pesky h7-pawn pronto.

15.dxe5 ♘c6 16.♞f2 (D)

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Honestly, who wants to play this way with White!?

Personally, I could not imagine playing White in such a position. I would simply feel mortified! Even after hours of analyzing these games with engines, I would never play this way if I faced the 3...♔d8 Scandinavian with White. I am a 1.e4 player, so I invite my readers to test my veracity!

16...0-0-0 17.♘e2 ♚df8 18.♙g2 ♜f7 19.f4 g5!

Of course, the above sequence is not forced. Even with the help of computers, there simply is not enough data to have confident theory in such untested positions. And as I've said, my purpose is not to transcribe reams of computer analysis. In this position, though, the move 19...♘e5 seems a natural alternative worth mentioning, exploiting the same fact as Lopez's choice: that White cannot open the f-file and allow Black's queen to penetrate. Lopez's choice is more ambitious, though, foregoing any recouping of material and potentially opening the g-file as well.

20.♘d4

This is played with the position after White's 23rd move in mind. White has

barely completed the opening, but he is already tired of this game and just wants to escape without a loss. So he trades off pieces and plays his queen to parry the Black queen's decisive entrance. His bishop and rook never have a chance to show their stuff.

20...♚xh7 21.♘xc6 ♜xc6 22.♚xh7 ♜xh7 23.♙d3

White has abandoned illusions of winning; his whole concept is merely to avoid losing.

♙h4 24.♙g3 ♙h6 25.fxg5 ♙g6 26.♙d3 ♙f7 27.♙e2 ♙h7 28.♙d3 ♙f7 29.♙e2 ♙h7 30.♙d3 ♙f7 ½-½

To close this section, I'd like to address the direct 10.h5. My engines tend to go back and forth between this and 10.f3, which has been far more popular in tournament praxis. Ironically, this direct approach is a far more positional one, and White's king will not face the same level of scrutiny that it did in the lines we just looked at. Although nine games with 10.h5 have found their way to the database, I'd like to present one of my own, since according to the engines, my opponent played (slightly) more precisely than the games in the database. Also, I think my errors in the opening phase demonstrate clearly what White is striving for and what to be on guard against.

(65) Pressman (2350) – Lowinger Connecticut 2012

1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♙xd5 3.♘c3 ♙d8 4.d4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 c6 6.♙c4 ♙f5 7.♘e5 e6 8.g4 ♙g6 9.h4 ♙b4 10.h5