

**Matthias Wahls, Karsten Müller & Hannes Langrock**

# **The Modern Scandinavian**

**Themes, Structures & Plans in  
an Increasingly Popular Chess Opening**

**New In Chess 2011**

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# Preface

When *Modernes Skandinavisch 1* appeared nine years ago, no one could have guessed how popular the line with 2...♖xd5 would one day become. Moreover, at the time it was regarded to be insufficient to achieve equality, or even unsound. Fortunately, since then a lot of work has been put into this opening, especially by unprejudiced amateur chess lovers. This variation got a new chance, and, on the whole, it has not disappointed its fans. In many cases, it has become the nucleus of a repertoire for Black. Even many grandmasters will produce it from time to time as their second defence.

There are, however, several reasons for its popularity with amateurs. First and foremost, there is probably the relative lack of learning which is necessary. At a time when opening theory is growing at a dizzying pace, many of the fans of this defence are extremely thankful that there is in fact one which needs so little maintenance as our Scandinavian. Otherwise one usually has to choose between high performance opening systems which necessitate huge quantities of study time, and rubbish variations which are quick to assimilate and even quicker to dispose of. The Scandinavian combines the best of both worlds: solid quality on one side, and on the other a digestible number of variations that have to be learnt by heart.

The explanation for this phenomenon is in two respects based on structural grounds. When you look at the variation tree, it only takes two moves for us to be in our line: 1.e4 d5 2.exd5 (more or less forced) 2...♖xd5. Voilà! I know many players who take on board the enormous theoretical baggage of the Najdorf Sicilian (in my active days I was one of them). But I hear lots of them groaning: 'If I could only get the Najdorf on the board! All I seem to meet are sub-variations of the Sicilian, 2.c3 and so on and so forth.' In fact as a fan of the Najdorf, you have not solved your problems just because you can recite all the lines in the Poisoned Pawn by heart. Such problems do not exist in the Scandinavian: 1.e4 d5 and White cannot escape anymore.

The second reason has to do with the pawn structure. In the majority of all cases, the same standard pawn centre appears with a white pawn on d4 and black pawns on e6 and c6. The stability of this pawn constellation confers a static character on the position. Sharp, forcing lines are the exception. The Scandinavian is unquestionably a model opening. General plans and strategic motifs are much more important than luxuriant variation trees. You can also steer the course through the opening moves relatively easily without extensive theoretical knowledge, simply by making use of patterns and structural rules.

This leads us straight into the subject of this book. Whereas *Modernes Skandinavisch 1* was essentially a book about theory, its successor is all about structure. Therefore it is more a book about the middlegame than about the opening. Of course, we are discussing only those typical middlegame structures which arise in the Scandinavian Defence. All the important plans, pawn structures and a multiplic-

ity of strategic and tactical motifs will be presented through the medium of whole games.

It has been recognized that a knowledge of the strategic plans associated with an opening and an understanding of its basic structure is more important than learning variations parrot-fashion. Someone with a deep knowledge of 'theory', but with no positional understanding, can easily be led away from the main paths and confronted with serious problems by his opponent. Even if your opponent should be cooperative, even the longest main line comes to an end at some point. Then your 'theory buff' is cast back on his own resources and starts to make mistakes. But if you are familiar with the basic ideas of a variation, the correct moves can be worked out logically at any point.

Rote learning has another, decisive, disadvantage. If a person does not have a photographic memory, unstructured knowledge very quickly fades. It is as good as impossible to try to retain over a long period of time a number consisting of thirty digits, unless you are in possession of special memorizing techniques, which confer structure! This circumstance is linked to the nature of the human brain. The brain organizes itself, creates patterns and a system with which to recognize the patterns. Finding your way through a game of chess is done on the basis of pre-acquired patterns.

Another advantage of the structural approach as compared to the theoretical, is the fact that it does not take up either space or time. Looking into typical central formations, for example, will also be useful for the study of similar openings. The structural relationship between two openings means that motifs from one, perhaps in a somewhat changed form, can be carried over into the other. As far as time is concerned, the knowledge of structures, unlike that of specific opening lines, is never out of date. It pervades one's personal understanding of chess.

In concrete terms this book is organized as follows:

To begin with, the most important strategic themes are presented individually. These constitute the preferences and thus also the winning plans for both sides. From White's point of view the themes are: a lead in development, an advantage in space, and the bishop pair. Black's intentions concern the exploitation of White's weak pawns and squares, and also dynamic counterchances.

The main section looks into the individual pawn structures. In fact, we have discovered 24 different set-ups! The deviations from the standard structure with a white d4 pawn and black pawns on e6 and c6 arise above all in sidelines, i.e. earlier alternatives for White. The so-called derivative structures are of greater importance. Here we are describing descendants of the standard structure which come into being as a result of an exchange of pawns or pieces. The meticulousness with which we examine the individual structures is due to the fact that the pawns really are the soul of chess. Whereas the pieces are the actual combatants, it is the pawns which define and delimit the field of play. They indicate which plans are appropriate and which are not. It is they who decide whether the pieces are heroes or bystanders. Professionals investigate with great precision the pawn structures which are typical

of their favourite variations, because every pawn structure has its own laws. Only those who understand such laws as they apply to any system are able to handle it successfully.

At the end you will find an appendix devoted to opening theory. This is in a way a necessary break with the style of the book which we owe to our readers. Since players with white have had to accept that the Scandinavian is an opening which must be taken seriously, they have started to work out methods to combat it. The most dangerous of these in our opinion is the Kupreichik Variation, which arises after the moves: 1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖xd5 3.♘c3 ♖a5 4.d4 c6 5.♙c4 ♗f6 6.♙d2. Our recommendation here is unambiguous: it is best to simply avoid it. At this point we deviate from the above move order recommended in *Modernes Skandinavisch 1* and replace the move 4...c6 by 4...♗f6. This gives Black the option, after 5.♙c4, of playing 5...♘c6 or 5...♙g4 in order to exploit the early decision about where to place White's king's bishop by playing aggressively.

In contrast to my previous work, this book is a co-production of several authors. I have provided the structure and some of the sample games. Dr Karsten Müller has assembled the majority of the game materials and done almost all of the analytical work. He is therefore by a long chalk the main contributor. And finally, the text of the book has been revised by Hannes Langrock. The book is therefore the result of teamwork involving three players, who actually also came from a team, the Bundesliga team of the Hamburger Chess Club. My personal adventure with the Scandinavian began with that team and closes with it also on the completion of this volume.

In conclusion, may I thank from the bottom of my heart the members of my team! Without their help this book would never have been finished. Another member of the team is of course my publisher, Jürgen Daniel, who showed me an unbelievable amount of patience. Just as much patience has been required of all of you who read the first volume and had to wait for several years for the continuation promised in it. Especially to all of you my thanks must go! I hope that you will have been rewarded for your wait and I wish you much enjoyment when you read it!

*Matthias Wahls,*  
Summer 2006

## Preface to the English Edition

Back in 1997, Matthias Wahls published *Modernes Skandinavisch* (referenced as *Modernes Skandinavisch 1* in this book), an opening book in classical format. Due to its enormous success, the second volume *Modernes Skandinavisch 2* was published in 2006, which deals with the strategic and tactical ideas behind the Modern Scandinavian. The book that you are now reading is mainly *Modernes Skandinavisch 2*. However, most of our English readers will not be familiar with the first volume and miss the theoretical references of that book. Therefore for the English edition, we have included a condensed, but complete repertoire for Black that reflects the recent theoretical developments and which allows you to play the Scandinavian right away. This repertoire can be found in Chapter 18. Especially helpful and valuable sources were Jovanka Houska's excellent book *Starting Out: The Scandinavian*, Christian Bauer's new work *Play the Scandinavian* and articles and analysis by the French expert Eric Prié.

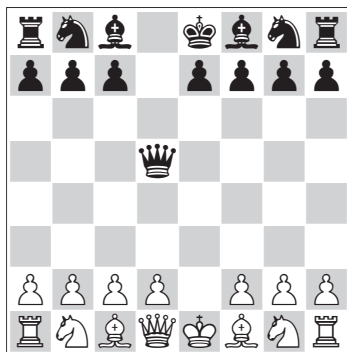
Furthermore, we added a chapter with exercises so that you can test your newly acquired knowledge.

Finally we want to thank Christopher Lutz from *Chessgate* and Allard Hoogland from *New In Chess* for their good cooperation, and Peter Boel, Jan van de Mortel, Anton Schermer and René Olthof for their good job producing the book.

We wish all our readers a lot of success with the Modern Scandinavian!

*Karsten Müller and Hannes Langrock,  
Summer 2010*

# Chapter 1: Introduction



## 1.1 The basic idea

Fundamentally, in the Scandinavian Black would like to complete his development quietly in order to then slowly bring pressure to bear on White's weaknesses. Frequently this is not difficult for him, since many players of the white pieces do not go into this opening in any great depth and thus their actions are not particularly well focussed. Slack play by White does not present much of a danger to Black, but rather protects his compact pawn structure.

In the following game, Matthias himself fell prey to this. It was the reason for him to try out the opening as Black at a later date:

1.1

**Matthias Wahls**

**Curt Hansen**

Tastrup 1992

**1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖xd5**

2...♘f6 is a principled alternative, but is not part of the subject of this book.

**3.♘c3 ♖a5**

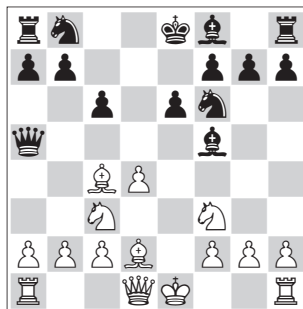
Here too there are alternatives, 3...♖d6 and 3...♖d8. We consider the text move to be stronger.

**4.d4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 ♙f5**

This set-up (followed by ...c6 and ...e6) constitutes the nucleus of our treatment of the opening.

The interesting alternative 5...♙g4 will be represented by a few games.

**6.♙c4 e6 7.♙d2 c6**



A typical pawn structure has arisen. It is very solid and hard to break down, especially if White is not decisive enough in his actions.



8. ♖e2 ♙b4 9. ♗e5 ♗bd7 10. ♗xd7  
 ♗xd7 11. a3 ♙xc3 12. ♙xc3

The exchange of bishop for knight leads to a typical piece constellation in which White has the bishop pair. By allowing it, Black is pinning his hopes on the relatively closed position (the ♙c3 is hampered by the pawn on d4) and on his superiority on the light squares.

12... ♖c7 13. 0-0-0 14. ♙a2?!



From this point on, White moves without a plan.

Basically he wants to open the position by means of pawn advances so that he can make the most of his bishops. But things are not that simple.

14... ♖fe8 15. ♖fe1 h6 16. ♖ad1  
 ♗f6 17. b3?

The plan is ♙b2, c2-c4 and b3-b4. But this is all too slow.

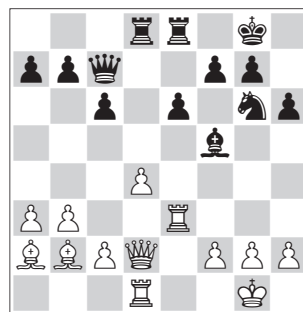
17... ♗d5 18. ♙b2 ♗f4 19. ♖d2  
 ♖ad8 20. ♖e5?

20. c4?! e5; 20. ♖c1.

20... ♗g6?

20... f6 21. ♖e1 c5 with the initiative, for example 22. ♖c3 ♖d7 23. ♖xc5 ♗xc2.

21. ♖e3



Black already has a very pleasant position. He has the more active pieces and play down the d-file.

Since Hansen needed half a point to win the tournament, the game ended as a draw here.

1/2-1/2

## 1.2 White's lead in development

Obviously Black loses time with his early queen moves and in doing so sins against the classical principles of development. But experience has shown that this provocation can be justified on account of his sound structure. That is the reason why you are now reading this book.

### 1.2.1 White plays forcefully

In some lines White tries to exploit his lead in development by forceful, aggressive play, which will demand the greatest of care of Black.

In the next game, this proves too much for him.

2.6

**Boris Spassky**  
**Bent Larsen**

Montreal 1979

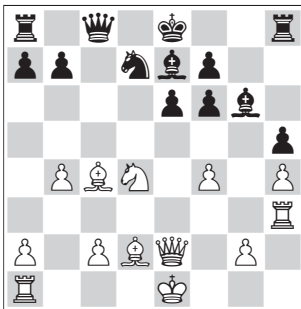
**1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖xd5 3.♗c3**  
**♜a5 4.d4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 ♙f5 6.♙d2**  
**♞bd7?**

Black's order of moves is unfortunate, since it allows White to play the advance d4-d5 in a favourable form.

**7.♙c4 c6 8.♞e2 e6 9.d5! cxd5**  
**10.♞xd5 ♜c5 11.b4 ♜c8**  
**12.♞xf6+ gxf6**

12...♞xf6? 13.♙b5+ ♖e7 14.0-0 with a strong attack for White.

**13.♞d4! ♙g6 14.h4 h5 15.f4**  
**♙e7 16.♞h3**



**16...♞c7**

Since the centre has become unsafe for the black king, preparations are made to evacuate it to the queenside.

The kingside will not do as a place of safety, as is proved by the following variation:

16...0-0 17.♙xe6 (17.♞xe6? ♜e8!)  
17...fxe6 18.♞g3 ♖h7 19.f5 exf5  
20.♞e3 f4 21.♞xf4 ♘e5 22.♞h6+  
♖g8 23.♞xg6+ ♘xg6 24.♞xg6+ ♖h8  
25.♞f5 ♞e6+ 26.♖f2 ♞f7 (26...♞f7

27.♞e1+-) 27.♞h6+ ♞h7 (27...♖g8  
28.♞e3+-) 28.♞xe7+-.

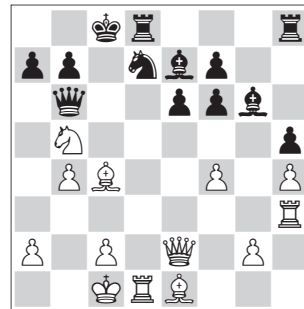
**17.0-0-0 ♞b6**

17...0-0-0? 18.♞b5 ♞b6 19.♙e3+-.

**18.♙e1 0-0-0**

18...♙xb4? 19.♞b3+-.

**19.♞b5+-**



There is no peace for the black king on the kingside either, which demonstrates the miserable nature of Black's position after the opening: the king simply did not have a secure place anywhere on the board.

**19...♞b8 20.♞xd8+! ♖xd8**

20...♞xd8 (20...♞xd8 21.♙f2+-)  
21.♞xa7+ ♖c7 22.f5 ♙xf5 23.♙g3+  
♖d7 24.♞h1 ♖e8 25.♞d1 ♞b6  
26.♙b5+ ♞c6 27.♞c8+-.

**21.♙f2 ♞c6 22.♙xa7 ♞d7**  
**23.a3!? ♞e4**

23...b6 24.♞c3+-.

**24.♙e3 ♙f5 25.♞g3 ♞c6**  
**26.♞d4 ♞a4 27.♞xf5 ♞xa3+**  
**28.♖d1 ♞a1+ 29.♙c1 ♙xb4**  
**30.♙b5 ♞b6 31.♞e4 ♞a5**  
**32.♞xb7**

Black resigned.

## 2.6 The black pawns

The following examples concentrate on the black pawns and their strengths.

### 2.6.1 ...c6-c5

This lever frequently serves to compensate Black for his lack of space. If the black c-pawn is exchanged for White's d-pawn, the d-file is completely opened and the c-file half-opened. The lever ...c6-c5 often leads to equality, sometimes even allowing Black to fight for the initiative:

2.94

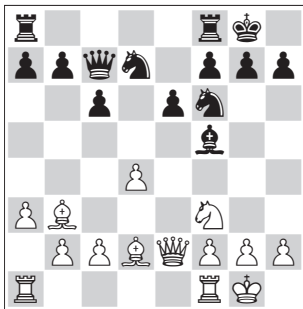
**Sergey Kudrin**

**Patrick Wolff**

Modesto ch-USA 1995

**1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖xd5 3.♘c3  
♜a5 4.d4 c6 5.♗f3 ♘f6 6.♙c4  
♙f5 7.♙d2 e6 8.♞e2 ♙b4 9.0-0  
♗bd7 10.a3 ♙xc3 11.♙xc3 ♞c7  
12.♙b3 0-0 13.♙d2?!**

The alternatives 13.♞ad1 and 13.♗e5 are rightly played more often.



**13...c5!**

Here this lever is very strong, not least because the position of the white bishop after the continuation 14.dxc5 ♗xc5 is not very fortunate.

### 2.6.2 ...e6-e5

This lever frequently leads to an exchange of the black e-pawn for the white d-pawn, and thus to the opening of the two central files. Interestingly, two diametrically opposed consequences are typical. Either the opening of the position leads to a battle, or the resulting symmetry brings about a level game.

**14.♞ac1**

14.c3?! ♞b6 15.♞d1 ♙g4↑ is anything but pleasant for White. Suddenly Black is pressing from all sides!

**14...♙g4!**

Aiming to force an exchange on c5.

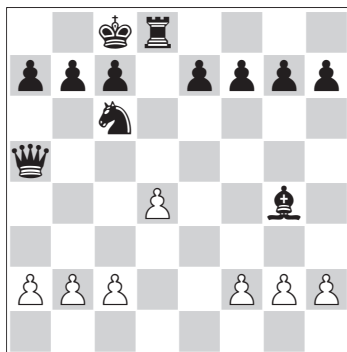
**15.dxc5 ♗xc5 16.♞e5 ♞fc8  
17.♞xc7 ♞xc7 18.♗e5**

With this move White accepts his disadvantage and limits himself to aiming for a draw in a less favourable ending. The alternative 18.♙a2 ♙xf3 19.gxf3 ♗a4 is possibly not as bad as it looks. White does have the bishop pair, and after 20.♙f4 ♞c6 21.♙e5 ♗d7 22.♙d4 e5 23.♙e3 ♗xb2 the reply 24.♞b1!⇒.

**18...♗xb3 19.cxb3 ♞ac8  
20.♞xc7 ♞xc7 21.♞c1 ♞xc1+  
22.♙xc1 ♙d1 23.♙e3 a6 24.b4**☞

Black's superior pawn structure is outdone by the high likelihood of a draw in an endgame with opposite-coloured bishops. This is why the protagonists agreed on a draw after move 47.

# Chapter 15: The Viking centre



The Viking centre is characterized by the black set-up ...♞c6, ...♙g4 and ...0-0-0. The c-pawn is left on its starting square. Just like the Vikings in their day, Black gets down to business and goes after his opponent at once. White's centre is immediately put under pressure and you have to know your way around the sharp variations, because despite the advantage of the first move, a crushing defeat could be around the corner.

However, it is worth noting that Black cannot favourably employ this set-up against all white move orders. It is generally very playable if White holds back with ♞c3.

We now come to the typical themes and motifs connected with the Viking centre.

## 15.1 The opposition of ♙d1/♞d8

The black rook's X-ray attack on the white queen involves some favourable tactical peculiarities for Black.

### 15.1.1 The attack on the d4 pawn

15.1

David Smerdon

Darryl Johansen

Sun Coast 1999

**1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♞xd5 3.♞f3  
♙g4 4.♙e2 ♞c6 5.d4 0-0-0 6.c4  
♞h5 7.0-0?**

This natural move is far too slow as it contributes nothing to the stabilization of d4. 7.♙e3 is critical: 7...♞f6 8.♞bd2 e5 9.d5 ♞d4 10.♞xd4 exd4

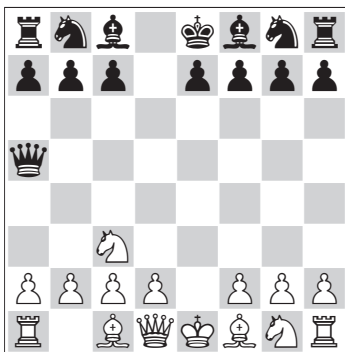
11.♙xg4+ (11.♙xd4 ♙xe2 12.♞xe2 ♞e8 13.♙e3 ♞g4 (Kritz) gives Black compensation for the pawn) 11...♞xg4 12.♙xd4 ♞e8+ 13.♞f1 ♞xh2+ 14.♞g1 ♞xd1+ 15.♞xd1 ♞g4 16.f3 ♞e5 17.♞e1 f6 18.a3 (18.♙xe5?! ♙d6=) 18...♞d7, Rogers-Smerdon, Canberra 2005. According to Kritz, White now gets a slight advantage by playing 19.♞e3.

**7...♞f6!**

# Chapter 18: Theoretical Appendix

## 18.1 Introduction

The following is an up-to-date repertoire based on the line 1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖xd5 3.♟c3 ♖a5. Both to newcomers of the opening and to old foxes it should offer something of interest.



If you are new to the Scandinavian, you should study the main lines first, leaving the sidelines aside. Then start playing the opening and come back to this chapter for any questions that arise from your games.

When the Scandinavian works well for you already, then you should compare your repertoire with our suggestions. Study the chapters on the pawn structures which occur most often in your games to fine-tune your intuition for the details and typical motifs.

In the main lines after 4.d4 Black's development is usually characterized by the moves ...c6, ...♟f6, ...♞f5 and ...e6. But what is the most precise move order?

In *Modernes Skandinavisch 1* Matthias advocated 4...c6 followed by ...♞f5 and ...e6, and only then ...♟f6. The point of holding back the king's knight – the so-called **Königsspringerzurückhaltungspolitik** – is the discouragement of white plans involving ♞c4, ♟e2-g3 and f2-f4. As we explained in the section about the standard centre with f2-f4, it comes in handy for Black if he can develop his knight to e7 or h6.

However, a drawback of 4...c6 (which became only apparent some years after *Modernes Skandinavisch 1*) is the Kupreichik line 5.♞c4 ♞f5 6.♞d2 ♟f6 7.♖e2 e6?! 8.d5!, which gives White a dangerous initiative. In sections 18.7 and 18.8 we describe ways for Black to sidestep this line by playing an early ...♖b6 or ...♖c7.

While these two lines are playable for Black, we nevertheless think that Black should tackle the Kupreichik line at an even earlier stage. Therefore we now recommend 4...♟f6 with the idea of going for a Viking centre with 5.♞c4 ♟c6!? or 5...♞g4!?, respectively 5.♞d2 ♞g4!?