

First Steps : the Scandinavian

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About the Author

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Also by the Author:

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A Ferocious Opening Repertoire

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The Caro-Kann: Move by Move

The Four Knights: Move by Move

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The Nimzo-Larsen Attack: Move by Move

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Petroff Defence: Move by Move

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Anti-Sicilians: Move by Move

Opening Repertoire: ...c6

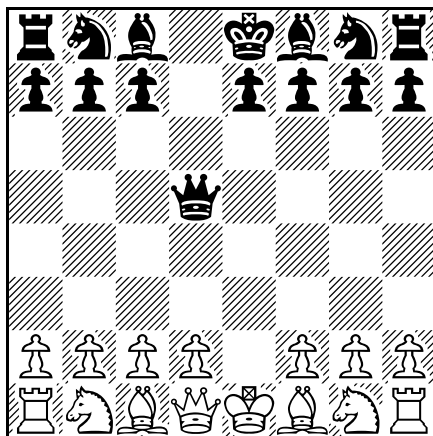
First Steps: the Modern

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Introduction

When we first enter the exciting/terrifying arena of rated tournament chess it may feel that whatever we know, everyone else seems to know more. Our first task is to build an opening repertoire, preferably one which fits our natural style and inclinations. So why would we pick the Scandinavian, which presumes to be beyond the grasp of the law and which, in the 2...♔d5 versions, we flagrantly violate by bringing out our queen on the second move? So honest and upright is your writer, that if I accidentally exceeded the speed limit by five miles per hour, I would drive to the nearest police station and turn myself in, demanding that they ticket me. Well, maybe this is a slight exaggeration, but I certainly wouldn't play an opening line which violates chess laws. Yet I happily play the Scandinavian.



It may feel crazy even to consider the ...♔d5 Scandinavian lines, since on her second move Black's insane queen goes swooping up, as if she were Daenerys Targaryen, Breaker of Chains, Mother of Dragons, riding Drogon (that's the largest of her three dragons, with black and red markings) into battle. When we play 2...♔d5 the laws of physics begin to break down. After all, how can bringing out our queen as the first piece developed be sound? If a clinical psychotic were to see such a move, his or her first thought would be: "That's crazy!" The natural corollary of 2...♔d5 is that we as Black – already a move down – fall further behind in development. You may ask, "What logical end are you striving to reach?" Why should we play a line with such an un-

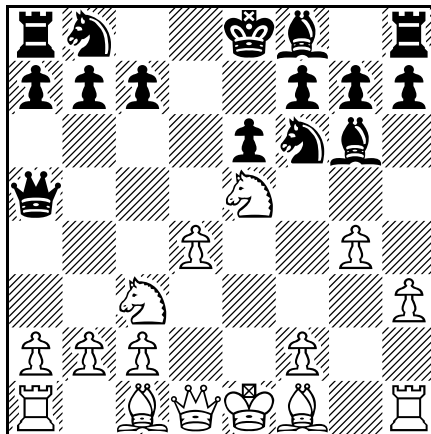
wanted, inherited by-product? Starting the game down in development with Black is not some species-specific issue, since most openings have us behind in development as Black. It's just that the ...♙xd5 Scandi flaunts it. My answer is to dismiss your concerns about the line's soundness credentials. Black may be behind in development, yet remains relatively safe since White must deal with these issues:

1. White is unable to exploit his or her development lead, since Black's ultra-solid ...c6/...♘f5/...e6 set-up renders the position rigid.
2. White lacks targets in our weakness-free position, which greatly dilutes the development lead.
3. For some bizarre reason, the vast majority of my miniature wins (in under 20 moves) tend to come from Scandinavians. Why? Well, because many of my opponents tend to go berserk at the sight of 1...d5!, in response to their push of their e-pawn. A good chunk of your club-level opponents will not respect or understand the Scandinavian's hidden resources and they may proceed recklessly in a position you will probably know better than they do.

When it comes to opening choices, we tend to get to pick from two categories:

1. Openings based on memorization of data and sharp, computer-checked forcing lines.
2. Openings based on depth of understanding, which takes precedence over absorption of data.

So which category does Scandinavian fit in? The answer is both. There are incredibly sharp lines in the ...♙a5/...♘g4 Scandinavians, which are nothing more than tactical, homework/comp battles between the two sides, like the following position in the following diagram:

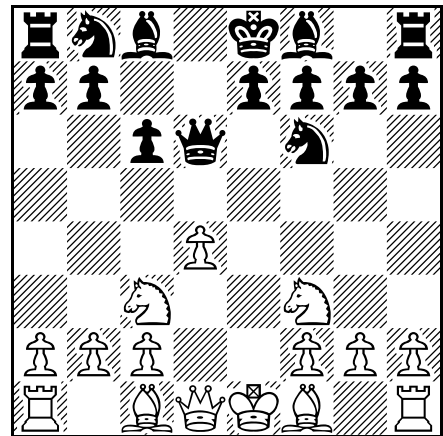
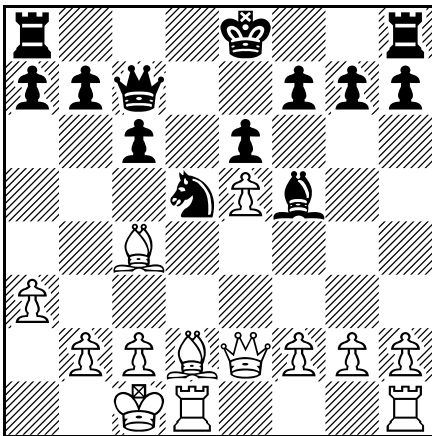


The above position is a realm of no second chances, since if we mess up we become the startled sinner on Judgment Day, unprepared for the Almighty's righteous wrath. In this position, Black must be booked up on 9 ♖c4, which places our queen in great peril; 9 h4, intending to go after our bishop with 10 h5; and also the 9 ♘g2 line, threatening our b7-pawn. If you aren't comped

up here, you are as good as dead with the black pieces. I take to quiet strategic lines as a narcotic to a terminally ill patient in chronic pain. Your writer is bred for abstract logic, rather than the blood and gore of tactics and calculation. So how do I get away with playing this crazy line? The reason I score well is that this line is heavily comped. I have been playing it for three and a half decades and holding my own, even versus GMs, since they play my computer, not me. The Scandinavian is the movie martial arts master who makes the apprentice sweep the floor and mow the lawn for months (in our case years!) before he is willing to teach the disciple. It's a long learning curve to master the Scandinavian, but I assure you, it's well worth the wait, because once you understand it, you will wield it as a terrible weapon. It's a difficult opening to learn and we can't treat it as the shoe-store clerk who decides to change careers by studying YouTube videos on surgery, and then applies for the newly opened post of head of neurosurgery at the local hospital.

The Caro-Kann Scandinavians

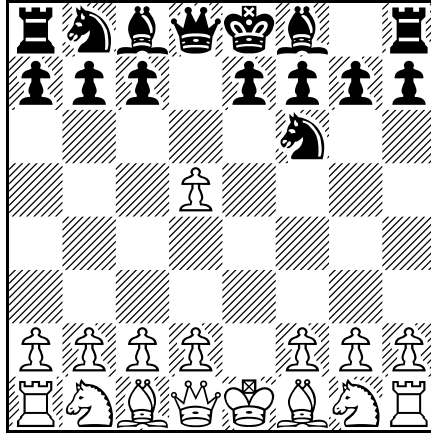
The Scandinavian, once considered just an interesting oddity, is now a fully fledged member of the sound openings category, especially when we enter the ultra-solid lines like the ...♙a5/...c6 and ...♙d6/...c6 lines which exude a Caro-Kann flavour, as in the two diagrams below. I actually consider the lines rather easy to learn and understand. Many of our sharp trendy lines are hard to remember and it's easy to get disoriented in the network of tributaries. Not this one. If modern opening theory is Big Brother, then the ...e6/...c6 Scandinavian structure is Winston Smith.



The soundness credentials of the black side of a line like the Chigorin Ruy Lopez are impregnable. Would you be surprised if I claimed the same status for some lines of the Scandinavian? Your tactically challenged writer has survived all these years, simply by ducking sharp positions and playing deviously solid lines. What does “solid” have to do with the Scandinavian? Well, any time you play a ...c6 version, you get a very solid Caro-Kann(-ish) version, as in the above two diagrams. But you may ask: “If you like Caro-Kann structures, then why not just play the Caro-Kann?” The answer is: in the Caro-Kann White has the option to veer with un-Caro lines like the Advance Variation, or the Panov-Botvinnik Attack, where he or she often takes on an isolani. In the Scandi-

navian ...c6 versions we always get positions similar to the ultra-solid structures derived from the Classical lines of the Caro, which arise from the move order 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 dxe4 4 ♗xe4. Our Scandi positions are exceedingly similar. Trust me. These lines easily pass as civilization.

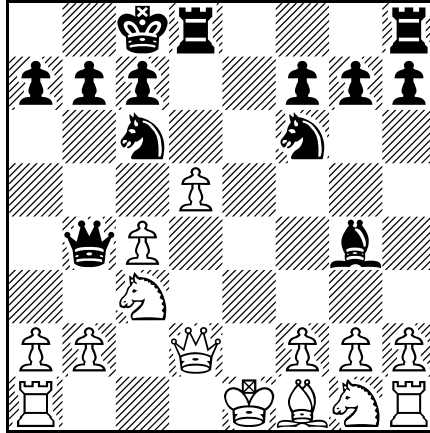
The 2...♗f6 Scandinavian



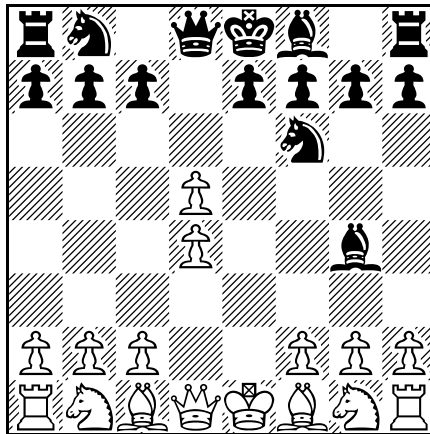
The Scandi rules are subject to change without notice and maybe the laws of physics suddenly begin to alter, where the sun begins to revolve around the earth, and not the other way around. The diagram above is the starting position of the 2...♗f6 Scandinavian, which is a completely different opening from the 2...♙xd5 lines, and is filled with geological caprices. First of all, it's really a gambit, since White can push the c2-pawn to c4 in order to hang on to the now extra d5-pawn. We have several interesting responses at our disposal. A gambit with the white pieces tends to be a risky proposal, while a gambit with the black pieces almost feels reckless. Now I am normally an intolerant, puritanical conservative when it comes to gambits. So just think what I will have to say about sacrificing with the black pieces! Having studied the lines carefully, I came to a shocking conclusion: Black's various gambits all appear sound. I have never played the 2...♗f6 Scandinavian lines, always incorrectly viewing them as shady and every time I was tempted in the past, I always backed off, thinking this love affair is as doomed as Fay Wray's cross-species fling with King Kong. But now, having absorbed greater understanding of the lines, I vow to start playing the 2...♗f6 Scandi.

In a weird way, this is almost two different books, within a single book, since the 2...♗f6 lines are so alien from the 2...♙xd5 lines. Back in the 1980s, IM David Strauss and I shared a room at a tournament where he successfully played the 2...♗f6 Scandinavian. Bewildered, I asked David: "But, but, but, doesn't it just lose a pawn to 3 c4 - ?" It does. In that position we can play 3...e6, turning it into the dangerous Icelandic Gambit, where White can fall seriously behind in development. I have never had the guts to play the line, yet I saw friends like IM David Strauss and GM Darwin Laylo absolutely destroy strong players with it. So be warned: The 2...♗f6 line may out-

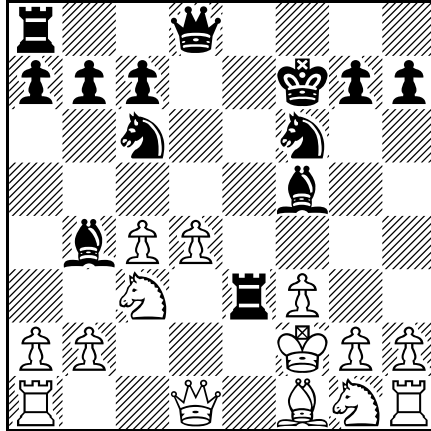
wardly feel less risky than the 2...♙xd5 lines, but I assure you it's not. The wide range of the Scandinavian offers us great leeway either to go all out and force the issue, as in the 2...♘f6 lines, or play ultra solidly, as in the ...♙d6/...c6 Caro-Kann Scandinavians, which I play. The road lies ahead for us, but first we must provision for the journey. Here are some of the positions we reach in the 2...♘f6 lines:



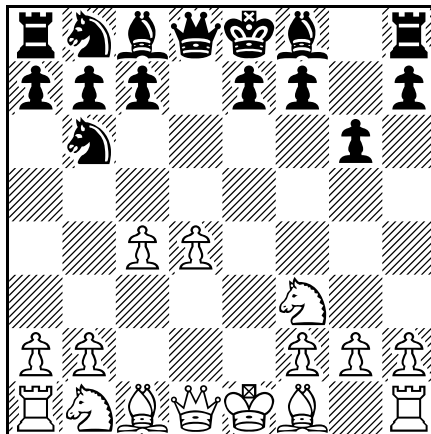
The above position was reached from the Icelandic Gambit, from the game Kuijff-Hodgson. Black may be down a pawn, yet his massive development lead and potential for a wicked attack surely compensate.



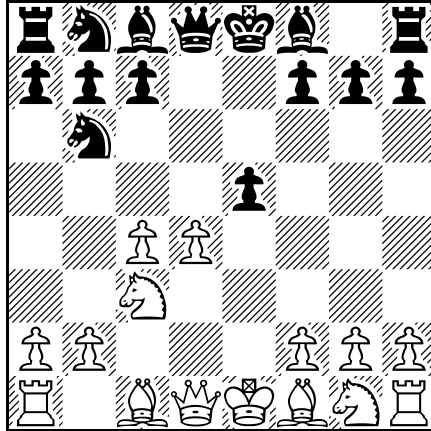
This is the Jadoul Gambit, White can play f2-f3, followed by c2-c4, securing the extra pawn on d5. Just as in the Icelandic Gambit, in the Jadoul Gambit (also called the Portuguese Gambit) Black gets a massive development lead and sacrifices one and sometimes even two pawns. Now if a safety-first chicken of your writer's calibre agrees to play such a line, then rest assured that it's sound.



I walked by my buddy GM Darwin Laylo's board at a tournament and saw this position, which arose from the Jadoul Gambit. Let me tell you that Jane Eyre's suffering at the orphanage was a picnic when compared with what is about to happen to White here.



White doesn't always try to hang on to the d5-pawn, and sometimes just gives it back to seize a large pawn centre. But this doesn't mean that Black is doomed to stand worse. The positions we reach can resemble lines from Alekhine's Defence, where we first give White the centre, then do everything we can to either overextend or dismantle it.



White originally declined to hang on to the offered d5-pawn, yet here we see another sacrifice on our part. Even though we may soon be down a pawn in an ending, our massive development lead, coupled with White's slight overextension, offers us more than enough compensation and, in fact, I think White will be lucky to remain equal.

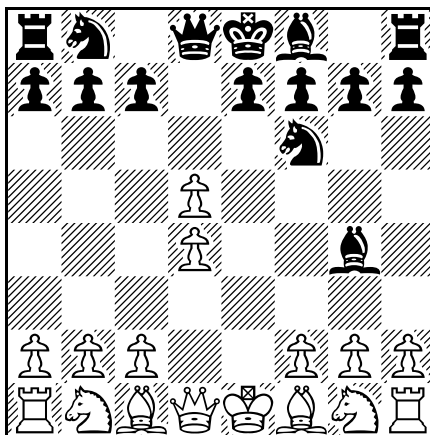
Many thanks to cousin Richard for his edit and also to Nancy for proofreading. May our overconfident and under-booked opponents rub their hands in glee when we respond to 1...d5!.

Summary

The 3 ♖f3 move order shouldn't confuse us, since it usually transposes to 3 d4 ♖xd5 lines.

Game 35 I.Sudakova-A.Muzychuk Zlatibor 2007

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♖f6 3 d4 ♘g4!?



This is the risky but potentially rewarding Jadoul (or Portuguese) Gambit. Once we commit to such a precipitously life-altering choice, the matter is closed and we should refuse to explore our conscience on the decision. Anyone who essays this gambit is clearly not adhering to the live-and-let-live lifestyle!

4 f3!

White's best chance at an advantage is to enter Black's lair and accept the gambit. The one practical problem White faces with such a decision is that the odds are about 10-to-1 on that Black knows the lines better, since Jadoul Gambit players get this position all the time as Black, whereas White gets it about once every two years in tournament play!

Others:

a) I remember reading once that Leko said White should decline the gambit with 4 ♙e2 and just be satisfied with a mild space edge. I disagree with this assessment and feel that Black equalizes at the end of the variation 4... ♙xe2 5 ♚xe2 ♚xd5 (in this case it's more logical for Black to recapture with the queen, since we reach a 2... ♚xd5-like position where Black has benefited from the swap of a pair of pieces) 6 ♖f3 e6 7 0-0 ♖c6 8 ♖c3 ♚f5 9 ♙e3 0-0-0 and Black has reached a favourable version of a 2... ♚xd5 line and equalized.

b) 4 ♖f3 ♚xd5 5 ♙e2 ♖c6 6 c4 ♚f5 7 ♙e3 e5! also equalizes, as 8 d5 ♖b4 9 ♖a3 ♙xf3! forces White to recapture with the g-pawn, since d3 must be covered: 10 gx3 (10 ♙xf3? ♖d3+

11 ♖f1 e4 favours Black) 10...0-0-0. Here the comp calls it even, while I prefer Black's position.

c) 4 ♗b5+ is a delayed form of acceptance of Black's gambit. After 4...♟bd7 5 f3 ♗f5 6 c4 a6 7 ♗xd7+ (7 ♗a4 is met by 7...b5! 8 cxb5 ♟xd5 9 bxa6 ♜xa6 with a development lead and open files on the queenside for Black's missing pawn) 7...♞xd7 8 ♟e2 e6 9 dxe6 ♞xe6 offers Black a development lead and the bishop pair for the pawn.

4...♗f5 5 c4

White clings to the pirate's booty on d5. Instead:

a) 5 ♗b5+ ♟bd7 6 c4 a6 transposes to line 'c' above.

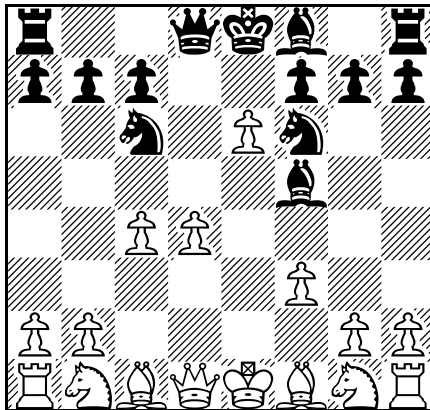
b) I'm not so sure that 5 g4!? constitutes a "free" tempo since White's move doesn't count as development and may actually later contribute to overextension. After 5...♗g6 6 c4 e6! (Black must break up White's gigantic central mass) 7 ♟c3! exd5 8 g5 ♟fd7 9 ♟xd5 ♟c6, White remains a pawn up, yet also lags in development and owns a position with an overextended feel. The greedy comp prefers White, while most humans would be okay taking on Black.

5...e6

Nothing ventured...

Warning: If you play this gambit, then don't delay on the dismantling of White's imposing centre.

6 dxe6 ♟c6!



Black declares this to be a place without rules, and where money is spent lavishly on the war effort.

Tip: Our mantra with the Jadoul Gambit is: *Development over material.*

When we attack furiously, without worrying about material or structural cost, the preservation of our own life almost feels like a redundant afterthought. Black has three pieces out, while White has yet to develop a single piece.

7 ♗e3

A noticeable undercurrent of unease runs through White's position.

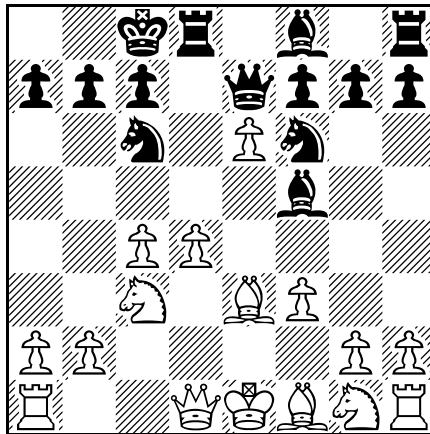
Dangerous is 7 exf7+?! (greed isn't generally regarded as a virtue; White scores a miserable 29% in my database from this position) 7...♙xf7 (Black's king clears the path for a future rook check on e8, making White's position look really scary). White's main line move here is actually a blunder. Most of the games in the database continue 8 ♗e3? (in such a position a single mistake will be your last, with no reset button to push; correct is 8 ♘e2 ♘b4 9 ♘g3! with insane complications) 8...♙b4+ 9 ♘c3 ♗e8 10 ♙f2 ♗xe3! 11 ♙xe3 (in a tournament at the San Diego Chess Club I witnessed my buddy GM Darwin Laylo dismantle his opponent from the Black side of this position) 11...♙c2! 12 ♗d2 (or 12 ♗xc2 ♗xd4+ 13 ♙e2 ♙xc3 14 bxc3 ♗e8+ and White gets massacred) 12...♘g4+! 13 fxc4 ♗g5+ 14 ♙e2 ♗e8+ and White must resign. This shows the terrible fate for White if he or she doesn't know what he or she is doing against Jadoul's Gambit.

7...♗e7

Black can also first give check on b7 and then bring the queen out. One example: 7...♙b4+ 8 ♘c3 ♗e7 9 ♗d3 (9 d5!? 0-0-0 offers Black loads of compensation) 9...♙xd3 10 ♗xd3 0-0-0 11 0-0-0 ♘e5! 12 ♗e2 ♙xc3 13 bxc3 ♗a3+ and Black achieves strong attacking compensation for the missing material, R.Nolte-D.Laylo, Philippines Championship, Manila 2008.

8 ♘c3 0-0-0!

Of course. Did you think we would bother to capture on e6? (If so, please refer to our development over material mantra above.)

**9 ♙f2!?**

The lesson we all learned from the dumbest of the Three Little Pigs is that it isn't wise to build your house from straw. White's king isn't all that safe on the queenside and instead goes for the safer kingside, at the cost of gumming up her development. White may have been better off going for a more normal set-up with 9 ♗d2 fxe6 10 0-0-0 ♗b4, when both ...♘a5 and ...♘e5 are in the air and Black gets full compensation for the pawn.

9...♗b4

9...fxe6 also scores well for Black.

10 ♖ge2

White's main move. The comp suggests the unplayed idea 10 ♖a4!?, which can be met by 10...♗xd4! 11 ♗xd4 ♖xd4! 12 ♕xd4 ♕xa4 with a wicked attack and dark square power for the exchange.

10... ♕xc4!

A new move in the position which looks like a slight improvement over the also promising 10...fxe6.

11 exf7 ♕xf7

White's king is vulnerable to future ...♗g4+ tricks.

12 ♔g1

I don't know about you, but I already prefer Black, whose massive development lead and piece activity more than make up for White's not-so-impressive extra pawn.

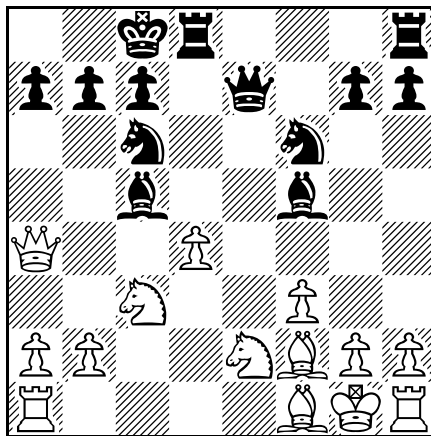
12... ♗c5

Adding more heat to d4.

13 ♕a4?

Clarity tends to be the first casualty of war. This natural move walks into a cleverly implanted booby trap. White should try 13 ♖a4 to reduce pressure on d4, though I still prefer Black after 13...♗d6.

13... ♕e7! 14 ♗f2



Exercise (combination alert): Black has access to a clever tactical sequence where she regains her lost material while retaining the initiative. What should she play here?

14... ♗xd4!

Answer: Removal of the guard/mating net.

Step 1: Sacrifice the knight on d4.

15 ♖xd4 ♜xd4!

Step 2: Offer a full rook, which can't be accepted.

16 ♛b5?!

White reels from the shot and places her queen on the wrong square. Others:

a) 16 ♖xd4?? ♛e3+! (this stunning queen sacrifice reveals why Black's rook can't be taken)

17 ♖xe3 ♖xe3 mate, exploits the white king's vulnerability in his g1-nook.

b) 16 ♛a5! is still lost for White but better than the move played in the game.

16... ♖d7! 17 ♛e2 ♛d6

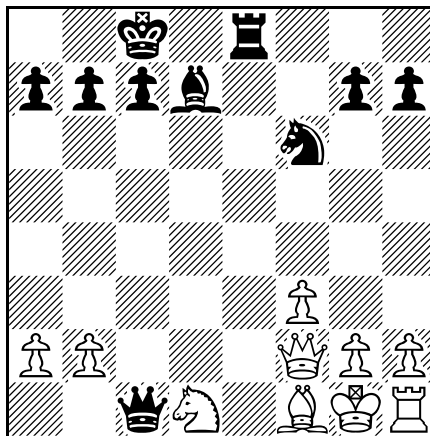
Of course Black isn't about to swap queens.

18 ♜d1 ♜xd1

More accurate is 18... ♜e8! 19 ♛c2 ♜xd1 20 ♖xd1 ♖xf2+ 21 ♖xf2 ♜e1, when White is paralysed.

19 ♖xd1

Forced. 19 ♛xd1?? is met by the crushing 19... ♖g4! 20 fxg4 ♜f8! and White's game collapses.

19... ♜e8 20 ♖xc5 ♛xc5+ 21 ♛f2 ♛c1

White's position is a dystopia of undevelopment.

22 ♖c3 ♖c6?!

Black should add heat to the f1 pin with 22... ♖e6! 23 h4 ♖c4, threatening ... ♜e1, with decisive pressure.

23 h4

Now is not the time for the queen to go pawn grabbing: 23 ♛xa7?? ♛xb2 24 ♛c5 ♜e1 25 h3 ♜c1 26 ♛f8+ ♖e8 27 ♖e4 ♜xf1+! 28 ♖xf1 ♛c1+ pops the rook in the corner.

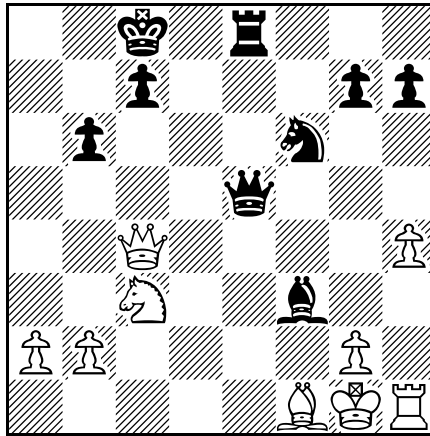
23... ♛f4?!

There was no rational reason to give up a7. Black's almost spiritual disdain for all things material goes too far. She is winning if she simply secures the a-pawn with 23...a6!.

24 ♛xa7!

When there is no way to improve your position, then grab material!

24...b6 25 ♖a6+ ♙b7 26 ♗c4 ♗e3+ 27 ♔h2 ♗e5+ 28 ♔g1 ♙xf3!?



Black's wishes fail to coincide with her position's requirements. Just because we *can* get away with something doesn't mean we *should*. Sometimes when we spot a combination, we should still reject it, since in its commission we actually improve the opponent's position, as in this case. Black may have been better off playing 28...♙b8.

29 ♗h3!

Suddenly, White is able to develop her rook. Not 29 gxf3?? ♗g3+ 30 ♙g2 ♗e1+ and wins.

29...♙b7 30 ♙e2?!

Inaccurate. Black only has an edge after 30 ♗d3.

30...♗d8

Black can pick up a pawn with 30...♘d5! 31 ♘xd5 ♙xd5 32 ♗d3 ♙xa2.

31 ♗d3 ♗xd3 32 ♗xd3 ♗f4! 33 ♙f3?!

White generates more play with 33 ♘b5 ♗xh4 34 ♗c3.

33...♙xf3 34 ♗xf3 ♗xh4 35 g3

A queen check on a8 accomplishes nothing.

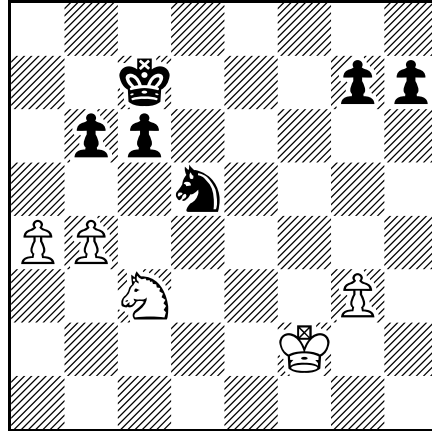
35...♗d4+ 36 ♙f1 ♙b8 37 ♗f2!?

She tries her luck in a pawn down knight ending. I would have kept queens on the board.

37...♗xf2+ 38 ♙xf2 c6 39 a4 ♙c7 40 b4?

White hopes to keep Black worried about the possibility of an outside passed pawn with a future a4-a5. The problem is that b4 itself becomes a target after Black's next move.

40...♘d5

**41 ♟e4**

It's hopeless to give up a second pawn. Also lost is 41 ♟a2 ♟d6 42 a5 b5! 43 ♟e2 ♟c7 44 ♟c1 c5.

41...♟xb4 42 ♟g5

With dual threats on h7 and e6. The problem is it's just too slow.

42...♟d3+ 43 ♟e3 ♟c5 44 a5

44 ♟xh7 ♟xa4 45 ♟g5 ♟d6 is also completely lost for White.

44...bxa5 45 ♟d4 ♟d6! 46 ♟f7+ ♟e6 47 ♟d8+ ♟d7 48 ♟f7 ♟e6+ 49 ♟c4 ♟c7 50 ♟e5 ♟g5 51 ♟d3 ♟e4 52 g4 ♟f6 53 ♟c5 ♟xg4 54 ♟e6+ ♟d6 55 ♟xg7 ♟e5 56 ♟h5 ♟f6 0-1

Summary

I am the kind of player who normally frowns on a gambit from move-down Black. In this case I make an exception and tell you that the Jadoul Gambit appears sound and is actually tempting me to try out the 2...♟f6 Scandinavian lines, since I would feel terribly uncomfortable defending White's side. It almost stretches credulity that starting the game a move down, we can sacrifice one or more pawns and get away with it, yet this seems to be the case here in this anomalous line, since White is so far behind developmentally.

*Game 36***S.Bouaziz-B.Larsen**

Las Palmas Interzonal 1982

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♟f6 3 ♟b5+