

Cyrus Lakdawala

The Scandinavian

move by move

EVERYMAN CHESS

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About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 30 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the US.

Also by the Author:

Play the London System

A Ferocious Opening Repertoire

The Slav: Move by Move

1...d6: Move by Move

The Caro-Kann: Move by Move

The Four Knights: Move by Move

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The Modern Defence: Move by Move

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Series Foreword

Move by Move is a series of opening books which uses a question-and-answer format. One of our main aims of the series is to replicate – as much as possible – lessons between chess teachers and students.

All the way through, readers will be challenged to answer searching questions, to test their skills in chess openings and indeed in other key aspects of the game. It's our firm belief that practising your skills like this is an excellent way to study chess openings, and to study chess in general.

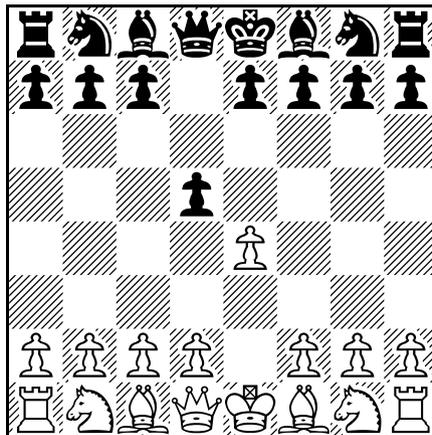
Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation of *Move by Move*. We're really excited by this series and hope that readers will share our enthusiasm.

John Emms,
Everyman Chess

Introduction

My happy association with the Scandinavian began in the mid 1980's (it comes as quite a shock to suddenly realize you have been playing an opening since Ronald Reagan's presidency). I was paired with the black pieces against the monster 2600-rated IM, and friend, Doug Root, who I trailed in the tournament standings by a half point and rating wise by over 100 points. I had never beaten him, and my two defences, French and Alekhine's, felt woefully inadequate. He opened the game with 1 e4. Then a Cat Stevens song (before he became Yusuf Islam!) suddenly popped into my head: "I'm looking for a hard headed woman, one that will make me do my best. And when I find my hard headed woman, I know the rest of my life will be blessed, oh yes, yes it will!"

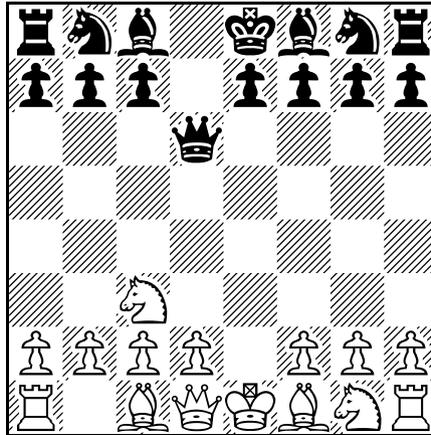
So based on this intuitive data alone, as if by its own volition, my right hand impulsively reached out for my d-pawn and to my horror pushed it two squares, and soon my hard headed woman emerged on d5 (and yes, I realize that by making this confession, you now regard your writer as slightly unbalanced).



The only Scandinavian game I was familiar with was Larsen's masterpiece (a 3...♔a5 Scandi) against Karpov played in Montreal, 1979. In an unbelievably good stroke of fortune, Doug chose the same line as Karpov (the single variation I knew), and overextended, much the same as Karpov did against Larsen. Well, I was hooked. But the question arose: How did I arrive in the situation where good fortune bubbled over? Was it dumb luck, or was the

Scandinavian a better opening than people give it credit for? I chose to believe the latter. I didn't care that at the time (and even today) many strong players considered the Scandinavian borderline sound. In fact, the late GM Rosendo Balinas, after beating down my Scandi, scolded me: "Your first move was an error!" He warned me that Black's early queen excursion walked that precarious tightrope between reason and irrationality. I didn't believe him then and I don't now.

A Violation of all that is Sacred



With the Scandinavian, we issue a flagrant challenge to long established doctrine. Our charmed opening mockingly blasphemes against the sacred verities of the most holy of principles and we must learn to live with a stigma attached. After all, in playing our second and third moves, ...♔xd5 and ...♕d6, Black violates no less than two principles:

1. Don't bring your queen out early, since your opponent's pieces or pawns may give chase, at your loss of time and discomfort.
2. Don't fall behind in development.

However, normal laws of physics collapse when entering this anomalous pocket of space. In this universe, rapid development and central control are arbitrarily punished, while egregious violations like bringing out one's queen early, and moving her over and over again, is blessed with reward! The Scandinavian is a dark alien technology, which doesn't function under any set of mechanical principles with which I am familiar. It's a bit like the hard-working government clerk who finishes his work early, and as a consequence must complete the unfinished work of lazy co-workers. Well, we are the lazy co-workers! The reasons?

First, White has a terrible time opening the position any further, since our Caro-Kann set-up: ...c6, ...♙f5 (or ...♙g4), and ...e6 renders the structure rather rigid, which in turn deflates White's much publicized development lead.

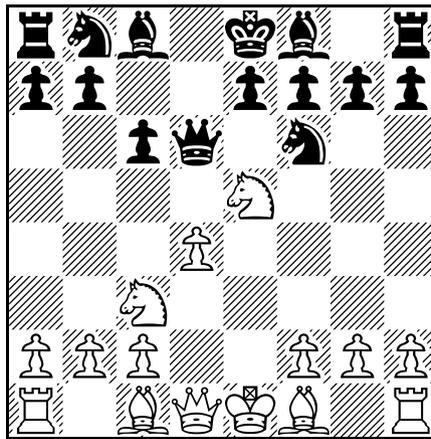
Secondly, your opponent lacks specific targets, despite an often massive development lead.

Lastly, your opponent often believes you are crushed, when in reality he or she may only hold only a mild '+=' or even '=' assessment.

From my experience our opening represents an agency unconstrained by normal chess laws, and we, the faithful, are inexplicably granted amnesty for past, unpunished (and future) crimes, in perpetuity. Ironically, it is precisely our flagrant and defiant violations which plant the seed for the defeat of our law abiding opponent. Our secret? We drizzle temptation before our opponent's eyes. It is in his extravagant attempt to bring us to justice – that very moment is normally when our opponent's guard finds itself at its lowest ebb – and it is precisely then that we counter strike, and White finds his rage channelled into diversionary byways.

Have faith. Our opening is sound. At the time of writing, Black scores just above 46% after 3...♔d6 – slightly above average for a black opening. So the stats just don't bear out the theory that the Scandinavian is some disreputable byway. The opening is legit and here to stay. When you take it up, you discover a mysterious woman you simply fail to fathom, yet still love.

Our Great Hurdle



In the diagrammed position, we have little to no margin for error. Our defence must be comp-perfect or we face Old Testament style divine retribution. We cover this line and its offspring in Chapters Two, Three and Four. It represents no less than an attempt at total eclipse of the ...♔d6 lines and constitutes an existential threat to our very survival. So study these chapters as if your life depends upon it – because it does! If you do study these chapters carefully, you discover that your resources are more than adequate against White's coming assault.

Here is an early Scandinavian game which caught my eye. Note how Lasker just couldn't seem to get his arms around his dream attack.

Game 1
E.Lasker-R.Breckenridge
New York (simul) 1894

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♖xd5 3 ♘c3 ♗a5

Question: Aren't we exclusively covering the 3...♗d6 lines in this book?

Answer: Please keep your voice down or I risk an outraged email from the editor! We are, but the ...♗d6 lines didn't really begin to appear until the 1970's, so I add this game for a historical perspective. Even if we don't cover the ...♗a5 lines in the book, the middlegame position reached in this game appears quite similar to many of the structures we will examine.

4 ♗f3 ♕g4

4...♗f6 and 4...c6 are also played here.

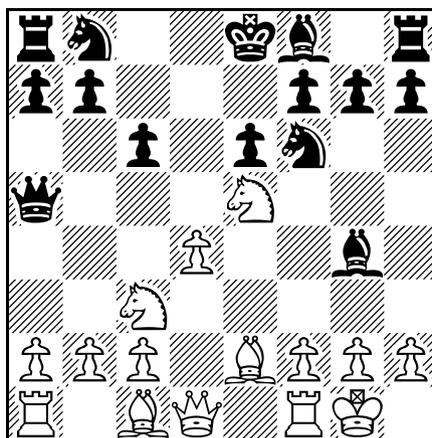
5 ♕e2

Probably too meek to get much of an edge. 5 h3 ♕h5 6 d4 e6 7 g4 ♕g6 8 ♘e5 ♗f6 reaches the critical position of the ...♗a5/...♕g4 Scandinavian. According to theory, White stands clearly better, but I disagree and defend Black with religious fervour, as do a few strong GMs, like Christian Bauer.

5...e6 6 0-0 ♗f6 7 d4 c6

Now we reach positions similar to the ones arising from the 3...♗d6 lines, which we examine in detail in this book.

8 ♘e5!?



He allows Black to swap a bad bishop for White's good bishop.

8...♕xe2 9 ♘xe2

9 ♖xe2 is, of course, also playable.

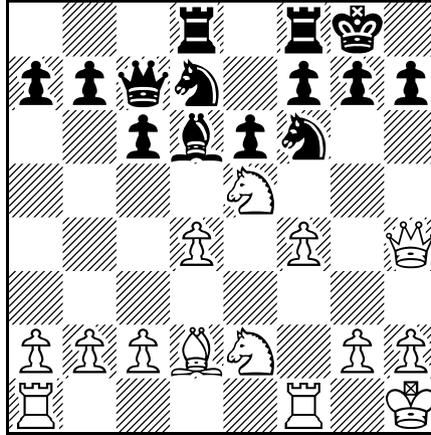
9...♗d6

It's actually better to post the bishop on e7, but they didn't know this in 1894.

10 f4!?

Aggressive and in Lasker's style, but he also weakens his light squares and places pawns on the same colour as his remaining bishop, two factors which haunt him later in the game. I can see why Lasker rejected the boring 10 ♖c4 ♗c7 11 ♖xd6+ ♗xd6.

10...♞bd7 11 ♔h1 ♜d8 12 ♗d2 ♗c7 13 ♗e1 0-0 14 ♗h4



Question: Isn't White better? He has an entrenched knight on e5 and looks like he builds an attack as well.

Answer: I actually prefer Black, who controls the central light squares and owns the better bishop. As for White's attack, we shall see...

14...♞e4

The light squares are the commodity to be bartered for and traded.

15 ♗e3 ♞df6 16 ♞d3 ♞d5!

Black's knights, an infection, begin a slow affliction on the weakened light squares.

17 ♜f3

Undaunted by strategic woes, Lasker pushes forward for mate.

17...f5!

Dual purpose:

1. Black anchors his knight on e4.

2. Tossing in ...f5 keeps his king safer since Black begins to challenge White's kingside space advantage.

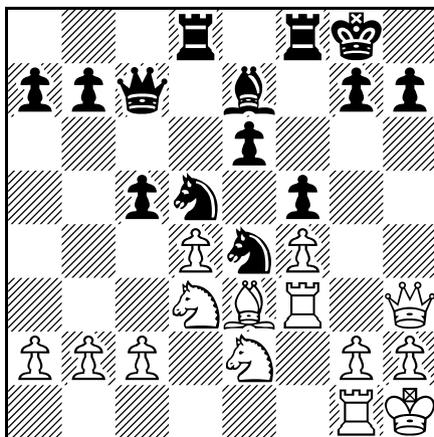
18 ♜g1!?

Also possible is 18 ♜h3 h6 19 ♗g1.

18...♙e7 19 ♖h3?!

Consistent, but dubious. Lasker isn't a likely candidate for the apologetic but correct 19 ♖e1.

19...c5!



Principle: Counter in the centre when menaced on the wing. I never heard of Breckenridge before digging up this game, but he possessed uncanny strategic and defensive instincts for a person living in his time.

20 ♙c1

The bad bishop remains a serious strategic impediment.

20...c4?!

20...♗df6! is virtually winning after 21 c3 cxd4 22 cxd4 (White also loses after 22 ♖xd4 ♗g4! threatening ...♙c5) 22...♗g4! 23 ♖g3 ♗f6! 24 ♗xe4 ♗h6!, picking up material.

21 ♗e5 c3 22 b3 ♗b4

White's queenside pawns are *en prise*. He must generate something on the other wing to compensate, and quickly.

23 ♗g3 ♗xg3+

Houdini likes 23...♗d6 24 ♗h5 g6 25 g4, but the position around Black's king begins to grow turbulent.

24 ♗xg3 ♗d5!

He sees through Lasker's tricks:

a) 24...♗xc2?? drops a piece to 25 ♗xc3.

b) 24...♗xa2? 25 ♖h6 ♙f6 26 ♙a3 when Black must give up an exchange.

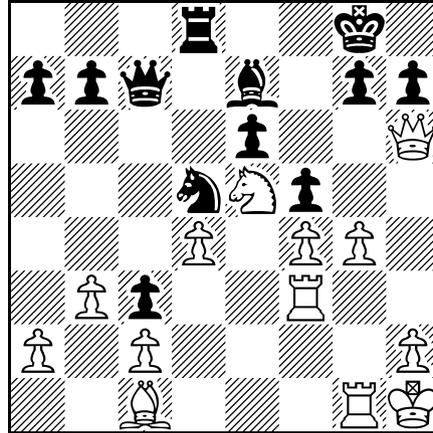
25 ♗f3

25 ♖h6 leads nowhere after 25...♙f6.

25...♗f6 26 g4 ♗h6

Here Lasker's scheming mind began to weigh the pros and cons of a psycho sac.

27 ♖xh6?



Warfare, by its very nature, offers each side license to inflict savage acts upon the other, which would be deemed criminal in times of peace. Chaos asserts itself. Out of nowhere, the queen materializes on h6, as if beamed down by Scotty himself, from the USS Enterprise. She plunges into the murky depths, without thought of retreat or mercy, in a final defiant act of a defiant life. One can never accuse Lasker of an impoverished imagination, and the shocking effect of this move is the equivalent to President Obama delivering a State of the Union speech wearing sandals, shorts, a Bob Marley t-shirt and dreadlocked hair – and his new wardrobe’s effect on the New York Stock Exchange the following day.

Question: I don’t understand. Isn’t this sac, to put it mildly, a bit on the rash end of the scale? Is it madness or veiled calculation?

Answer: Perhaps a little of both. Clearly the move courts death. The sac unleashes one of Lasker’s shady yet maddeningly difficult to refute ideas. In a sense, there is no basis for understanding, since Lasker sometimes deliberately chose “bad” moves to confuse his often confused adversaries, as he attempts in this instance. His sac is more an article of faith in his own remarkable calculation abilities, rather than from logic or empiricism. Lasker rejected truisms in chess and confounded many an opponent this way. His philosophy: It is simple to put forth difficult and even unsound obstacles in an opponent’s path; much more difficult, however, is the actual refutation of the problems by the defence.

Lasker just can’t help himself from such extemporaneous indulgences, especially in a simul game, when he is in no mood for manoeuvring niceties. Technically, the move is an error, but if Lasker plays it, maybe it isn’t an error! Presumptions are sometimes misinterpreted as facts. Now the gates of hell open around Black’s king. Tormented shadows and spirits, pulsing and vibrating with life, writhe in terrible images which labour to take form and come to life in the corporeal realm of materiality. Lasker’s idea comes tantalizingly

close to fulfilment, but in the end, the key simply fails to fit the lock. With hindsight, Lasker should have played the prosaic 27 ♖g2, but then we would have been deprived of a very interesting game.

27...gxf6

Capture of the queen is no cause for rejoicing just yet. Black feasts sombrely, realizing the food consumed may also be poisoned, since ingress into the black king's inner sanctum will not be denied to White, who concedes a dear price for the rights. Over the board it isn't such an easy matter to navigate Black's side without capsizing one's equilibrium.

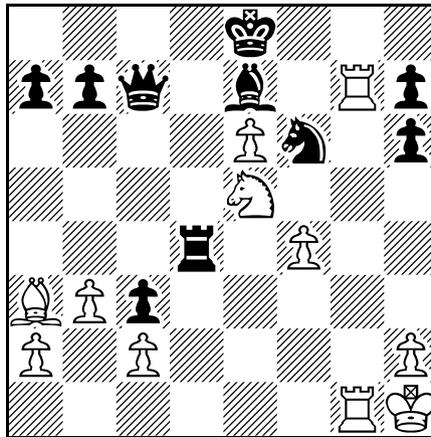
28 gxf5+ ♔f8

28...♔h8?? isn't much of a consideration, since 29 ♖f7 is mate.

29 ♖fg3

Threatening mate in one.

29...♗f6 30 fxe6 ♖xd4 31 ♖g7 ♔e8 32 ♗a3!



Threat: ♖g8+ mating. Lasker cunningly advances in dispersed formation, coming at Black on all sides.

Question: Did Lasker succeed in whipping up compensation for his sacrifice?

Answer: More or less, but mainly less! He doesn't get enough. The high priest on a3 appears terrifyingly magnificent behind the Aztec war mask, yet, somehow, the blandness of his actual face seeps through.

32...♖d6!

The only move, but a good one. In such positions, stasis is an illusion. Either you gain ground or lose it.

33 f5 b5!

Idea: ...b4 and ...♖b7+. Black exudes a confidence not generally seen in a mere master

who faces down a newly crowned world champion, even if in a simul game.

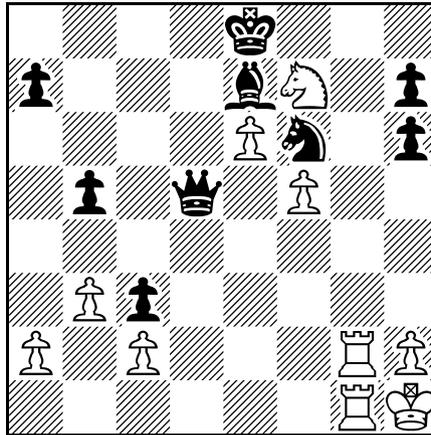
34 ♙xd6

White is forced to release the tension.

34...♖xd6 35 ♘f7 ♗d5+

At long last, Black seizes the initiative.

36 ♖7g2



“Victory has a hundred fathers, but defeat is an orphan,” lamented John F Kennedy, after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. We sense a loss of control from White. Have you ever been handed a shocking revelation, and then paused and realized you subconsciously knew it all along? Well, we all knew White’s attack was waning. The once great undertaking continues its dreary decline to mediocrity and the proximate success of White’s dreams recede with each move. Lasker’s gamble failed and White’s success seems contingent upon Black’s level of confusion, which thus far has been non-existent.

Exercise (combination alert): Find a trick to win more material.

Answer: Double attack. Black threatens both ...♘f2 mate and also ...♘e3, winning an exchange.

36...♘g4!

Houdini also likes 36...♙c5!.

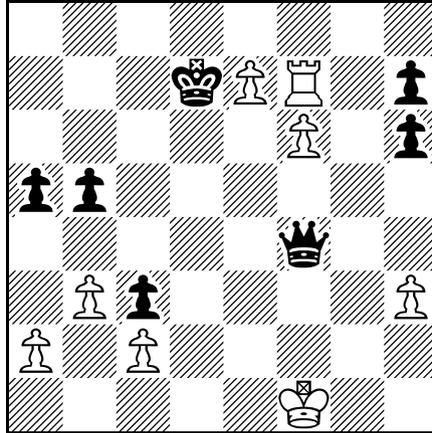
37 h3 ♘e3 38 ♙h2 ♘g2 39 ♖xg2 ♙d6+

Lasker’s truculent resistance arrives near its end.

40 ♘xd6+ ♗xd6+ 41 ♙h1 ♗d1+ 42 ♙h2 ♗f1 43 ♖g8+ ♙e7 44 ♖g7+ ♙d6 45 e7 ♙d7 46 ♖f7 a5

46...♙e8 47 ♖g7 ♗xf5 is the simplest path.

47 f6 ♗f4+ 48 ♙g2 ♗e4+ 49 ♙f1 ♗f4+ 0-1



A panorama of White's lonely kingside tells the story without words. His king throws down his sword and kneels before the hated black queen, who achieves unchallenged ascendancy. He laments the rashness of his beloved queen's earlier self-sacrifice. Sometimes even the greats endure attacking Waterloos. Lasker accepts the aftermath of the misadventure with good grace and resigns, seeing Black's position laden with bounty. The moral of this game: Sometimes crass consumerism and the accruing of wealth really is the way to inner peace and happiness!

Question: Those White passers are deep. How does Black make progress?

Answer: Let's turn this into an exercise:

Exercise (combination alert): Come up with a clear path to Black's victory.

Answer: The cockroach on f4 peers through the crack in the wall and spies a crumb on the open floor on f7. All that is required is to take it. The vengeful queen lords it over White by weaving her way to the rook: 50 ♔g2 (the meek king has the good sense to obey the queen's demands) 50... ♖e4+ 51 ♚f1 (the social pressure on the ostracized king grows out of control; he flees, not from danger, but from what others think of him, and replies, but to no one but the taunting voices in his head) 51... ♜f5+! 52 ♚e2 (52 ♔g1 ♜g6+ is the same) 52... ♜e6+.

Summary: The Scandinavian often resembles a Caro-Kann-like defensive wall, which time and time again frustrates attackers.

Many thanks as always to editors, GM John Emms and IM Richard Palliser, to Nancy for

proofreading, and Tim for comp support.

May your opponents rub their hands with unjustified glee upon seeing you meet 1 e4 with 1...d5!.

Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego,
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