

The Scotch Game

A Repertoire for White

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and
Vladimir Barsky**



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The Scotch Game
by Alexei Bezgodov & Vladimir Barsky

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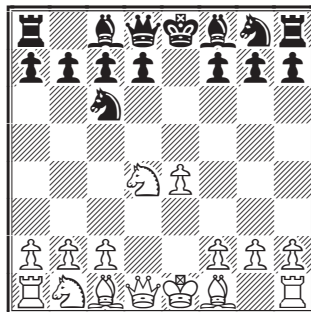
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Introduction

The Scotch Game is a solid positional opening, and has been used by both world-class players and amateurs for two centuries. It became widely popular after the 1824-28 correspondence match between the Edinburgh and London Chess Clubs. It is entirely possible that this opening was used even before that, but these games were published in the magazines and guidebooks of the time and then indexed in the computer databases some 150 years later. The Scottish players, who had White, won the game, and the opening was named in their honor. Interestingly, the line 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.d4 e×d4 4.♙c4, currently known as the Scotch Gambit, occurred in two more games of that match. Edinburgh was White in one game, Black in the other and scored 1½ points.

The idea behind the Scotch Game is simple and clear: White methodically eliminates the e5-pawn that prevents him from dominating in the center. After the exchange on d4, the resulting structure is advantageous for White, because he still has a pawn in the center, while his opponent does not. White controls more space, opens diagonals for both his bishops, and can quickly and comfortably develop his pieces.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.d4 e×d4 4.♙c4



The Scotch Game

This structure does have a certain flaw: to trade the d4-pawn, White spends an important tempo. Now, both sides are equal in their development (both have a knight out), but it is Black to move. However, the initiative is a very subtle thing. It can evaporate very quickly, while White's more tangible positional pluses – space advantage, dominance in the center – remain.

According to “classical” opening theory, which was advocated, for instance, by the famous grandmaster and world championship candidate Paul Keres (1916-1975), the e5-pawn should not be traded (3.d4), but rather attacked with 3..♗b5; in other words, the only “correct” opening where White can count on getting an advantage is the Ruy Lopez. Prominent grandmaster and theoretician Evgeny Sveshnikov (1950–2021) also shared this point of view. However, he often used to put his bishop on c4 on the third move, or, even more often, played 3.d4, and in his later years he played the Vienna Game quite a few times. Why?

Theory, and any “pure science” for that matter, is a fascinating activity for a small group of people who are so inclined, but in practice, we all have to solve much more mundane tasks every day. Can you say, in all honesty, that you know how to get an advantage for White in the Marshall Attack? Do you have some killer novelties in the Open Ruy Lopez? Or perhaps you know a clear way to win in the Berlin endgame or the Jaenisch Gambit? If your surname is not Carlsen, Caruana, or Nepomniachtchi, I really doubt that! The theory of the Ruy Lopez is enormous, theoretical discussions are being held in every tournament and are quite diverse (we have not even mentioned the systems with the bishop going to c5, the Chigorin system, the Breyer, the Zaitsev, etc.) How to remember all that? Where can a simple amateur find so much time and energy?

The Scotch Game is attractive for White because he gets to choose the preferred direction of the struggle, and Black is forced to adjust. And it is not some “one-time gambit”: the opening is based on a solid positional foundation. Here, you can choose relatively simple schemes for your White repertoire in which it is enough to remember the basic plans and typical maneuvers for both sides. Of course, the Scotch, like any other modern opening, has some sharp lines with tempo-for-tempo play. One needs to put in some effort to know all the subtleties, but, on the other hand, you will get a great opportunity to catch your less-prepared opponent unawares and get a serious advantage around move 12 or 15.

The reputation of the Scotch as a harmless, peaceful opening remains in the distant past. In the early 1990s, before his last world championship match with Anatoly Karpov, world champion Garry Kasparov included this opening in his repertoire and used it for almost a decade. The result is impressive: Kasparov played the Scotch in 20 tournament games, winning 12 of them and drawing the others.

World champions have almost always been trendsetters in the opening theory, and, following in Kasparov's footsteps, Sergei Rublevsky, Alexander Morozevich, Vasily Ivanchuk, Teimour Radjabov, Emil Sutovsky, and others included the Scotch in their repertoire. Later, their ranks were joined by Magnus Carlsen (possibly at the advice of Kasparov, who worked with him for a time), Ian Nepomniachtchi, Dmitry Andreikin, Anish Giri, Hikaru Nakamura, Andrei Esipenko and many others. Today, the Scotch is seen in almost every big tournament, not to mention in countless online battles.

It is important to point out that not every player gets around to choosing and adopting a reliable defensive line against the Scotch. Of course, most of the attention is now diverted to the Ruy Lopez and the equally fashionable Italian Game. A lot of new games are played with these openings, with many new ideas, and one needs to be constantly aware of new developments. In such circumstances, not every player would have enough time and energy even to refresh his existing knowledge, let alone absorb something new. And this might lead even an experienced and knowledgeable player to a quick catastrophe in the Scotch – it is impossible to keep everything in one's head at the same time! And this is another important practical resource for White in this dangerous opening.

The book you now hold in your hands consists of seven chapters devoted to various move orders. Every chapter contains comprehensive learning material and illustrative games. To adopt a particular system, it is enough to study the main lines, without going much into the details, and look through the games – this will not take much time. After that, you can start using the opening in faster games in your club or online. Having played a dozen or so games in the Scotch, proceed to delve into the theoretical section again and compare your play with the authors' recommendations – perhaps you will want to correct something. Using such a method, the process of learning a new opening will be quick and enjoyable.

The Scotch Game

Before ending this introduction and getting to the concrete lines, let us remind you of the aphorism of the legendary Danish grandmaster Bent Larsen: “Long analysis, wrong analysis.” To be honest, shorter lines can also be wrong, even though modern technologies allow us to minimize the number of mistakes. The analyses and theoretical calculations in this book do not of course exhaust the rich contents of the Scotch Game. Check them, refute them, come up with ideas on your own!

The authors sincerely hope that *The Scotch Game: A Repertoire for White* will enable you to hone your skill in independent opening work. Let this important and interesting part of chess be pleasant for you and may it bring you many beautiful tournament victories.

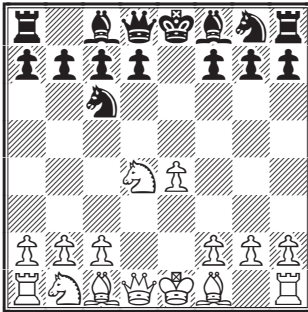
Alexei Bezgodov
Vladimir Barsky
March 2023

Chapter 2

Black Gives Up Space

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 e×d4 4.♗×d4

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 e×d4
4.♗×d4

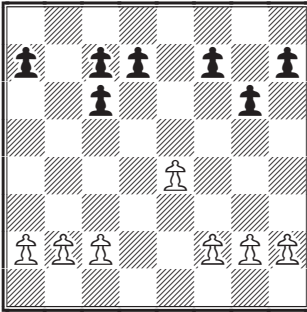


In this second chapter we shall study two perfectly logical lines where Black avoids a direct battle for the center and goes for harmonious development of his kingside pieces. These continuations are not too popular on the highest level, but occur rather frequently in the games of young talents and adult amateur players because they do not require deep theoretical knowledge.

Let's clarify one important point immediately. These two variations can transpose into each other or be played independently. For instance, after 4...d6, Black will not be able to play ...d7-d5 in one move, but he nevertheless retains other resources.

With 4...g6, Black immediately puts his cards on the table. 4...d6 is more flexible, Black still can develop his bishop both to g7 and e7 (and from e7 it will still be able to get to the long diagonal later – on every move White will have to deal with the possibility of ...♗f6-d7 and ...♘e7-f6).

To make your study of the Scotch Game easier, we propose to meet 4...g6 and 4...d6 the same way: 5.♗×c6. After 5...b×c6, a typical pawn structure occurs that we shall see repeatedly in this opening.



White has the more flexible pawn structure, he controls more space (which will become even more obvious after f2-f4 or even c2-c4). Black's doubled c-pawns and the isolated a7-pawn are potential weaknesses. On the other hand, his c- and d-pawns cover the entire center, and Black can vary his pawn structure: he can either go for the d5-break or put his pawns on d6 and c5 and the bishops on b7 and g7. The latter structure is especially important if White plays c2-c4 – in this case, Black will fight for the central d4-square. All in all, a positional struggle lies ahead, full of various subtleties.

We will not try to evaluate Black's chances here. The only thing that's clear is that White still has the better prospects in both cases.

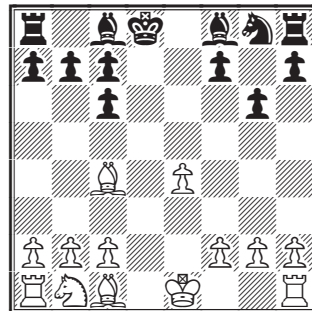
(A) 4...g6 5.♗xc6

5.♗c3 is another good move for White, but then we will have left the territory of the Scotch and entered the "land" of the Three Knights'

Game. There is nothing wrong or unusual in this – such things happen all the time, and even players themselves often fail to notice that they have accidentally crossed the "border." However, an opening monograph should not contain chapters devoted to other openings, and it would be unfair to refer the readers to other books. So, let's continue playing the Scotch!

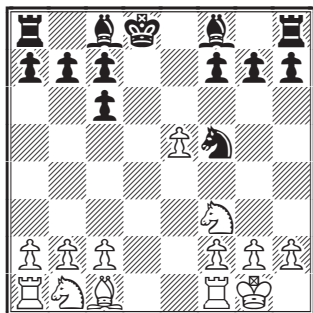
5...bxc6

One must love the endgame way too much to voluntarily play 5...dxc6!?. This love is completely one-sided, however: after 6.♙xd8+ ♕xd8 7.♗c4, Black has no compensation for his ruined pawn structure and lag in development.



It is instructive to compare the position in the diagram with the one that defines the incredibly popular Berlin Endgame (1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♙xd8+ ♕xd8).

The Scotch Game



The pawn structure is very similar: White essentially has an extra pawn in the center (in a hypothetical pawn endgame, White's three queenside pawns will easily contain the four black pawns). The similarity is compounded by the fact that the black king is also stuck in the center. But the Berlin provides Black with very serious compensation for those disadvantages: the bishop pair in an open position. In addition, the e5-pawn has advanced too far (the f5- and d5-squares may serve as good outposts for the black pieces) and is placed on a dark square, severely limiting the only remaining white bishop.

Let's get back to our Scotch endgame now. White has a dream position here. It is somewhat baffling that such a strong and experienced player as Tatjana Lematschko, former women's world championship contender, tried to hold this for Black (rather unsuccessfully): 7...♙e6 8.♙xe6 f×e6 9.0-0 ♗g7 10.c3 ♖e8 11.♙f4 ♝c8 12.♘d2 ♘e7 13.♘b3 b6 14.a4 c5 15.♘d2 ♘c6 16.♘c4±. Black has reinforced her position as well as

possible, but she is still facing a lengthy and difficult defense (Lujan-Lematschko, Calvia 2004).

No better is 7...f6 8.♙e3 ♗d6 9.♘d2 ♖e7 10.0-0 b5?! (this pseudo-active move only leads to new queenside weaknesses) 11.♙b3 ♗e6 12.f4 h6 13.♝ae1 ♙×b3 14.♘×b3±. White is in full control of the center and will soon seize the c5-square, after which the e4-e5 break will be especially unpleasant (Beltugov-Podvalnikov, Perm 1998).

Has it been proven that Black should necessarily lose after this queen trade? No. But for White, this line is a boon and a rare streak of luck.

6.♙c4

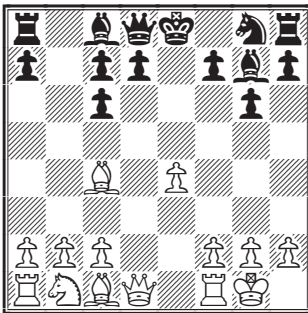
The most natural move – the bishop controls the d5-square and targets f7. In the event of 6.♖d4 ♖f6, Black has no problems. For instance, 7.e5 ♖e6!, and 8.♙c4 can be met with 8...d5!.

In many lines with a similar pawn structure, White prefers to develop the bishop to d3, solidly protecting the e4-pawn and quickly preparing an attack in the center (f2-f4, then f4-f5 or e4-e5). As a rule, it is not especially advisable to put the bishop on d3 until Black plays ...d7-d6, because Black will be able to play ...d7-d5 in one go and equalize. For instance, 6...♙g7 7.0-0 ♘e7 8.f4 d5! – in the few games played in this

line, Black did not suffer much trouble.

Another argument in favor of 6.♘c4: Black had already played ...g7-g6, and this means that the f8-bishop will soon appear on g7. It is good for White to trade this bishop off, weakening his opponent's kingside. To do that, it is necessary to get the c1-bishop to d4. If the other bishop is placed on d3, however, this maneuver is quite difficult to carry out.

6...♘g7 7.0-0



7...♗e7

Black wants to get his king to safety as soon as possible and prepares to castle without getting involved in any clashes in the center.

Let's look at other possible plans:
 (1) 7...d6 8.♗c3 ♗e6. Releasing the pressure from the f7-square and trading off his opponent's most active piece. But at the same time, Black weakens his king's pawn

cover and makes castling short more difficult. 8...♗f6? is completely bad on account of 9.e5! dxe5 10.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 11.♗xf7±; 9...♗g4 10.exd6 0-0 11.♗e4 ♖h4 12.♗f4 ♗xh2? 13.g3! ♖h3 14.♗g5 and Black resigned because his queen is trapped (Jakovenko-Diehl, St. Ingbert 1995); after 10...cxd6 11.♗e1+, Black, in a poor position, loses the right to castle. For 8...♖e7 – see 7...♖e7 8.♗c3 d6.

Let's get back to the attempt to trade bishops: 9.♗xe6 fxe6 10.♗e3 ♗e7 11.♖f3! (not allowing his opponent to hide his king on g8) 11...♖d7 12.♗ad1 (12.♗ab1!) 12...e5 13.h4 ♖e6 14.♗g5 h6 15.♗xe7 ♖xe7 (Votava-Hracek, Karvina 1989). Here, White could get a real advantage with the unobvious 16.♗e2; the knight is clearly more active than the sad black bishop.

Retreating to b3 with the bishop is also possible – see the Illustrative Games.

(2) 7...♗b8. By attacking the b2-pawn Black tries to stop his opponent from calmly developing his queenside. But White has a simple antidote: he puts his knight on c3, closing off the long diagonal, then retreats the c4-bishop to b3; b2 is out of danger after this. Because of that, the active rook move may prove a far from obvious, but important, waste of time.