

# **The Scotch Gambit**

## **An Energetic and Aggressive System for White**

**Alex Fishbein**



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The Scotch Gambit  
by Alex Fishbein

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# Table of Contents

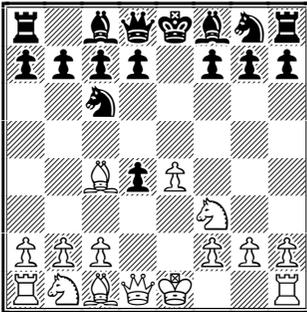
<b>Introduction</b>	5
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
The Main Line of the Modern Attack	8
Theoretical Section	8
Illustrative Games	13
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
Deviations from the Main Line	27
Illustrative Games	27
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
The 3...♗c5 Variation	39
Theoretical Section	39
Illustrative Games	41
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
The 5...♗g4 and 5...♗e4 Variations	51
Theoretical Section	51
Illustrative Games	53
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
The 5 0-0 Variation	60
Theoretical Section	60
Illustrative Games	61
<b>Chapter 6</b>	
The Max Lange Attack	66
Illustrative Games	66

<b>Chapter 7</b>	
The von der Lasa Variation	74
Theoretical Section	74
Illustrative Games	79
<b>Chapter 8</b>	
Deviations from the von der Lasa Variation	89
Theoretical Section	89
Illustrative Games	91
<b>Chapter 9</b>	
The Jobava Variation	100
Theoretical Section	100
Illustrative Games	102
<b>Chapter 10</b>	
Other Moves for Black after 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3	115
Illustrative Games	115
<b>Game Index</b>	124
<b>Bibliography</b>	125

# Introduction

## What is the Scotch Gambit?

The moves 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♙c4 define the Scotch Gambit.



The difference between the Scotch Gambit and the Scotch Game (4.♗xd4) is that White delays recapturing the pawn on d4. With 4.♙c4, White develops quickly and attacks the f7-square, Black's weakest point in the opening. Black's reaction to White's immediate assault in the center will determine the pawn structure, and then White will typically (although not always) regain the pawn.

The most common response to White's fourth move is 4...♗f6, transposing to the Two Knights' Defense (1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.♙c4 ♗f6 4.d4 exd4). Here, 5.e5 initiates the Modern Attack, which forms the main part of this book. The other response is 4...♙c5, after which White either transposes to the Giuoco Piano with 5.c3 or continues in gambit

style with 5.0-0. The second half of the book illustrates that the gambit line 5.0-0 is much better for White than its reputation and also offers a modern and positional approach for White after 5.c3.

While technically the Scotch Gambit usually transposes to the Two Knights' Defense or the Giuoco Piano, the Scotch Gambit move order commits both sides to concrete and sharp play, and the resulting positions form a stark contrast to the slow maneuvering characterized by the d2-d3 lines. This brings us to the main benefits of the Scotch Gambit for White.

## Why you should play the Scotch Gambit

To improve in chess, it is important to play openings that develop a sense of initiative, an ability to calculate variations, and a good feeling for king safety. I know many players who did not reach their full potential because they did not play attacking systems. Some variations in the English Opening, for instance, develop your strategic sense at the expense of tactics. Today, many lines even after 1.e4 e5 are also very slow and positional. White often plays d2-d3 even in the Ruy Lopez, and confrontation is delayed until much later.

# The Scotch Gambit

I think those openings are more appropriate for grandmasters, as they already have the tactical skills. Early in your chess development, however, you need the tactics. The Modern Attack of the Two Knights' and the other lines we analyze in this book are conducive for developing your feeling for the initiative. With an early d2-d4, an immediate fight for the center ensues. We will encounter situations already in the opening where one or both kings come under attack. You will train your ability to see through complications. At the same time, however, the opening variations in this book have no shortage of positional themes. You will see weaknesses of squares, pawn structure subtleties, and good and bad bishops.

## How this book is structured

You will find ten chapters, each covering a significant branch of the opening. In the first chapter, we immediately delve into the main line of the Modern Attack. The next several chapters examine other lines that start with the Scotch Gambit and transpose into the Two Knights' Defense. After that, we look at two ways to continue if Black plays 4...♗c5. Finally, we mention systems where Black does not play 2...♗c6.

Most chapters begin with a "theoretical section." Here, you will find the move sequences that I consider the best for both sides, or most principled, in that branch. The theoretical section is therefore designed to be a step ahead of published theory or games in that particular variation. You will find my own suggested plans there, or subtle improvements or corrections. The

theoretical section can serve as the basis for your own further research.

After the theoretical section comes the "illustrative games" section. Each chapter will have a few representative games. We pay special attention to the opening, the transition from the opening to the middlegame, and typical middlegame plans. I almost always show the entire game; if the middlegame or ending is not relevant to our theme, then I may show it with few or no comments. I have tried to select mostly games of high quality and played by strong players.

## What is special about this book

I am addressing this book to a wide audience: from intermediate players to professionals. There will be analysis of variations and descriptions of strategy. My bar for all of my recommendations is very high: I must be willing to play them myself. I am an active practical player, a lifelong 1.e4 player as White, and I have often played 1...e5 as Black. You will see a few of my own games here. If a line does not work for me, I cannot recommend it to others.

Therefore, this book offers a glimpse into a creative laboratory. It was as much a learning experience for me as I hope it will be for you. Each chapter is in the form of a recipe that I would make for myself. I have tried to avoid a common pitfall in repertoire books: illustrating your recommendation with a beautiful game, while leaving the best response by your opponent as an aside. In this book, Black's most important replies in the most topical variations are clearly visible (usually in the theoretical

## Introduction

section). This book is a presentation, on paper, of the theory file in my database, where I take special care not to miss the best move by a future opponent. In this way, I have tried to achieve the highest degree of intellectual honesty. In addition, a quarter of the selected games illustrate what not to do as White, and how Black can win with purposeful play if White makes mistakes. For these reasons, this book should also be useful to people playing 1.e4 e5 with Black. In fact, because I emphasize strategical themes over memorization, I hope this book can improve your chess even if you never play this opening for either color.

This book is also unusual in that it updates an opening that has been left in the shadows. Because of fashion trends, the Modern Attack of the Two Knights' Defense has never been very popular. It has never been played at the world championship level. Only a handful of grandmasters play it regularly for White. The limited practice makes for a rich harvest for independent study. Many interesting lines discussed here have rarely been played in serious tournaments. Some of them enjoyed their peak in popularity in the 19th

century. I have updated their evaluation, and you now have the state of the art of an important branch of theory.

The Modern Attack has been featured in several recent repertoire books as a chapter but has not been subjected to thorough analysis – until now. Still, much of my work would be almost impossible without referring to these excellent books. Glenn Flear wrote a wonderful book on open games in 2010, and it formed a starting point for my theoretical research. In the last couple of years, some branches were analyzed further, and I have used four recent sources: *Bologan's Black Weapons* (Victor Bologan), *A Simple Chess Opening Repertoire for White* (Sam Collins), *Playing 1.e4 e5* (Nikolaos Ntirlis), and *The Open Games with Black* (Martin Lokander). I thank these authors for paving the way to a much more detailed analysis.

I hope that my book will revive interest in the Modern Attack and other Scotch Gambit variations, help you broaden your opening repertoire, and enhance your understanding and, most importantly, your enjoyment of chess.

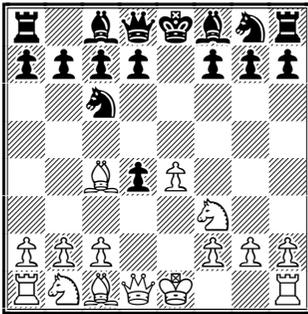
Alex Fishbein  
July 2017

## Chapter 1

# The Main Line of the Modern Attack

### Theoretical Section

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 e×d4  
4.♙c4



With 3.d4, White makes an immediate bid for the center. With 4.♙c4, White attacks the f7-pawn, which is defended only by the king. This direct approach provokes an immediate confrontation in the center. Concrete play and tactics abound: both sides must play accurately.

I am a devotee of exciting, tactical play in the opening. Tactical vision should be developed early in your chess learning. I am also a proponent of classical chess, with its emphasis on the center. It is certainly possible to play a slower game with White, such as the

Giuoco Pianissimo (“very quiet game”) with ♙c4, d3 and a4, which has been all the rage lately. But I think Bobby Fischer would have wanted to play something a little sharper, even today. Magnus Carlsen, too, developed his combinational vision before he honed his subtle positional sense.

Returning to the diagrammed position, a drawback of White’s strategy is that Black can quickly counterattack with ...d5 and force the trade of White’s bishop (at the cost of other concessions). This results in a strategically complex position, which this first chapter examines.

### 4...♗f6

Black needs to do something in the center, and 4...♗f6 is his most common response. Black has transposed to the 4.d4 variation of the Two Knights’ Defense. People who do not play 3...♗f6 in response to 3.♙c4 because they are concerned about having to sacrifice a pawn in the 4.♗g5 variation are much happier to play 4...♗f6 here. Black is looking to push through d7-d5 as soon as possible, challenging the white bishop.

## The Main Line of the Modern Attack

The other main move, 4...♖c5, is the subject of Chapters 6-9. Other, less popular, moves will be discussed in Chapter 2.

### 5.e5

White's alternative here, 5.0-0, is covered in Chapter 5. It leads to very concrete play but can only be recommended in certain tournament situations, because it allows Black to equalize without much trouble. With 5.e5, White forces the black knight to move again. In fact, it may need to move a third or fourth time later in the opening. White will gain a lead in development. However, this comes at a cost. White will need to exchange the light-square bishop, and Black will exert influence over some key light squares.

### 5...d5

Black's main idea: he fights for control of the center. The other two playable replies, 5...♗g4 and 5...♗e4, are covered in Chapter 4.

### 6.♖b5

The only move, 6.e×f6 d×c4 is very bad for White: he has no compensation for the pawn.

### 6...♗e4

Installing the knight in the center. I cannot overemphasize how important the center is in this opening. White will spend several moves dislodging the knight from here. Although not entirely in the spirit of this system, 6...♗d7 is also possible and is covered in Chapter 2.

### 7.♗×d4 ♖d7

7...♖c5 is an important alternative that is recommended by Ntirlis, among others, and, until recently, was considered Black's surest reply. However, we illustrate in Chapter 3 that the only way for Black to fight for equality there is a temporary pawn sacrifice with very few chances to take over the initiative.

### 8.♗×c6

No other moves are worth considering. White needs to develop as quickly as possible. For example, after 8.♗×c6 b×c6 9.♖d3 ♖e7! (Nemeth-Pacher, Budapest 2016) White is already experiencing difficulty with the e-pawn.

As a brief historical detour, I want to mention the famous game Lichtenhein-Morphy (New York 1857), which continued: 9...♖c5 (instead of 9...♖e7, which the computer recommends today) 10.♖×e4 (here and later, it might have been wiser to castle) ♗h4! 11.♖e2 d×e4 12.♖e3 ♖g4 13.♖c4 ♖×e3 14.g3 ♖d8 15.f×e3 ♖d1+ 16.♖f2 ♖f3+ 17.♖g1 ♖h3 18.♖×c6+ ♖f8 19.♖×a8+ ♖e7 and White resigned because of unavoidable mate.

After this game and a couple of other games like this, people did not play this opening for White for many years, because nobody could explain where White had gone wrong. The only person who understood strategy well enough to educate people about this variation was Morphy himself, but he preferred to just let his moves do all the talking. The move 8.♗×c6 was not played until almost 40 years after the Morphy game.

### 8...b×c6 9.0-0 ♖c5

9...♖e7 will be covered in Chapter 2.