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Introduction

The Sicilian Dragon was one of my early loves. I still think it is a great opening to learn from because there are so many thematic tactical and positional ideas. It is an opening that is ripe with exchange sacrifices and opposite side castling attacks. The Dragon is an opening where one can learn about the dynamic balance between the initiative and material; attack and counterattack; and pawn structure and piece play. It is also a fun opening to analyse at home, and I have always kept an interest in the Dragon even long after I stopped playing it regularly.

I first started playing the Dragon in its Accelerated version (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6), which is safer than the pure Dragon (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6) as covered in this book. The Accelerated allows the Maroczy Bind (5 c4), but Black is able to avoid certain lines of the Yugoslav Attack by using this move order. Eventually I moved to the Dragon and entered the fascinating world of the Yugoslav Attack. One of the positive aspects of the Dragon is also negative in a way – it is a very narrow opening. The only critical lines are those in the Yugoslav Attack. Black has to be very well prepared for both 9 Bc4 and 9 O-O-O (and to a lesser degree 9 g4), but other than that Black has a relatively easy life. Because there are only a couple of critical ways for White to play, Black can prepare more deeply, but there is also less variety in the opening.

The Dragon introduced me to the world of 2...d6 Sicilians and after while I switched to the more ‘mature’ Najdorf, which has always been more popular at higher levels. In recent years, however, the Dragon has made quite a comeback. Carlsen and Radjabov have used it regularly, while players such as Ivanchuk, Kasimdzhanov, Grischuk, Shirov, Nakamura and Gashimov have all been found on the black side.

This book is broken up into two main parts. The first part covers the Yugoslav Attack with 9 Bc4. This has always been considered the sharpest way for White to play, but Black has a relatively broad choice of responses. The five chapters cover the Soltis Variation, which could be considered the backbone of the 9 Bc4 Dragon

for Black, as well as some modern lines for both sides. I do not cover 12 h4 Nc4, which I have always found to be a bit passive. This system is very rarely played nowadays. Originally I had wanted to include the old line with ...Qa5. This approach was recommended by Chris Ward in his pioneering works *Winning with the Dragon* and *Winning with the Sicilian Dragon 2*. These books influenced me and countless others. Unfortunately, this line has fallen on hard times and I was unable to find anything to change theory's current opinion of these lines as inadequate. I have also omitted minor lines for Black.

The second part of the book covers 9 0-0-0, which I consider to be the most annoying move to meet, as well as the related but less dangerous move 9 g4. Black should really meet 9 0-0-0 with 9...d5, but I have also covered the risky alternatives 9...Nxd4 and 9...Bd7. Perhaps the biggest development in the Dragon over the last couple of decades has been the realization that after 9 0-0-0 d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bd4, the near-universal 12...e5 appears to be inadequate. Black has survived with the once rare moves 12...Bxd4 and 12...Nxc3, although it must be said that in many cases he is just playing to equalize and make a draw in these lines. Black's success with these moves caused White to look for fresh approaches and thus the variations 10 Qe1 and 10 Kb1 were born.

By now the reader may have gathered that lines outside of the Yugoslav Attack are not covered in this book. Practice has shown that lines such as the Classical, Fianchetto, and Levenfish are less dangerous for Black. Therefore they are played much less frequently at a high level and develop at a slower pace. Existing Dragon literature covers these various lines quite well and I did not have anything special to add to them, so I decided to focus on the lines that are really the most dangerous for Black. I will highlight the 'developments' in the Dragon while also trying to explain how they have come about, as opening theory is evolutionary. I tried to write this book with an objective eye, but I will admit that I have some sympathy for the Black cause.

As always I have several people to thank: first and foremost my wife Heather, for, well, everything; both of our mothers, for watching Zoe the baby so that I could work; John Emms, for his help with the format and his patience with my never-ending promises of meeting extended deadlines; Joe Fang, for the use of his library, his proof-reading, and for blitz games in 1994; and Dennis Monokroussos and Roland Loetscher for sharing their secret analysis.

David Vigorito, Somerville, Massachusetts,
October 2011

Chapter Two

Modern Variation: 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 Kb1

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 Kb1 (Diagram 1)

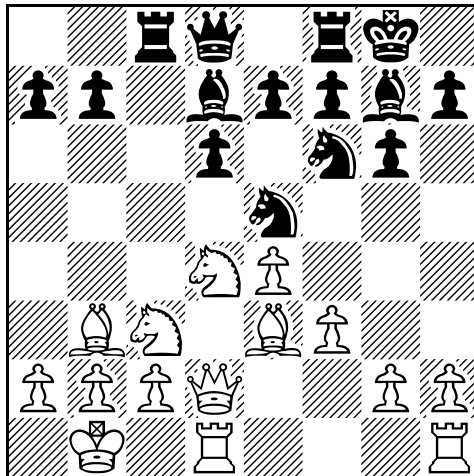


Diagram 1 (B)

This variation has caused some real headaches for the Dragon player. Black can now play the direct 12...Nc4, as seen in Game 12, or he can play a waiting move of

his own. In the following two games we look at Black's typical waiting move 12...Re8. After 13 h4 h5 we have a position that obviously resembles the Soltis Variation. White can then choose between the positional 14 Bh6 of Game 13 or the more dangerous 14 g4 of Game 14, which constitutes a serious threat to the viability of Black's position. In Game 15 we look at Carlsen's pet line 12...a6. While 12 Kb1 almost always helps White, it is less clear that these waiting moves will really benefit Black, especially when the position heats up, and 12 Kb1 remains a dangerous weapon against the Dragon.

Game 12
B.Bok-I.Cheparinov
Biel 2011

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 Kb1 Nc4 (Diagram 2)

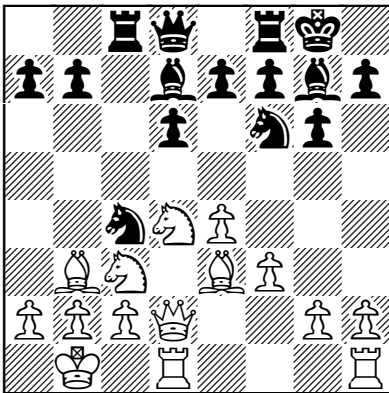


Diagram 2 (W)

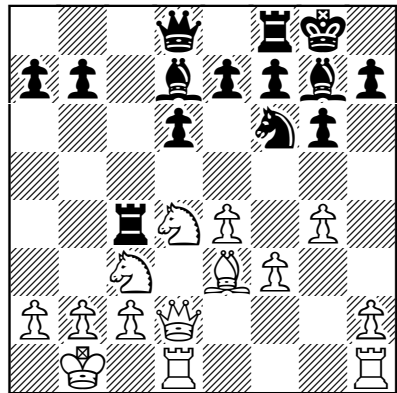


Diagram 3 (B)

This is the most natural move and we have seen that Black reaches a decent position with the moves h4 and ...h5 thrown in. In this position, however, everything is much different.

13 Bxc4 Rxc4 14 g4! (Diagram 3)

White has a tremendous score from this position. Advancing the g-pawn first means that Black has to be concerned with not only the typical h4-h5 plans, but g4-g5 can cause trouble as well.

14...b5

Dearing considered this move to be dubious, but it has been by far the most popular and scores pretty much as well (or I should say as badly) as anything else. Black's main hopes of the salvation of 12...Nc4 are connected with this move and the coming sacrifice.

Alternatives do not inspire. Slow moves such as 14...Re8 and 14...a6 are well met by 15 h4. If Black tries to activate his queen he is likely to just get pushed back: for example, 14...Qc5 (or 14...Qc7) 15 g5 Nh5 16 Nd5! (another point to 12 Kb1 – Black must retreat because exchanging on d2 would allow Nxe7+) 16...Qd8 17 Ne2 intending Ng3.

15 b3! (Diagram 4)

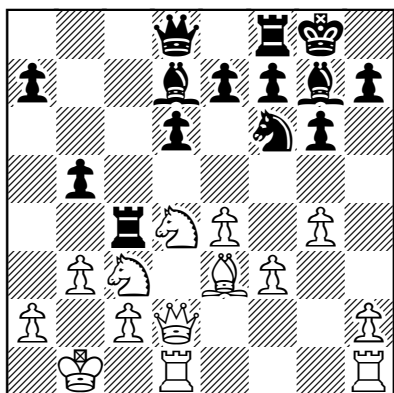


Diagram 4 (B)

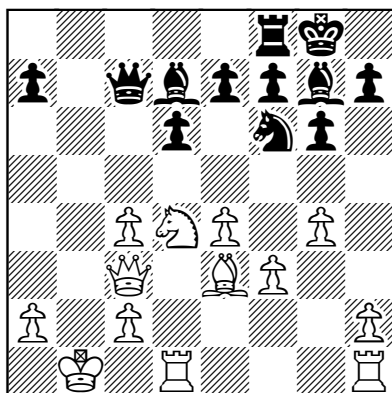


Diagram 5 (W)

This is the key move for White. We have already seen this counterintuitive move in Game 2 and here it is even more effective.

It is too early to take the pawn, because 15 Ndx b5 is well met by 15...Qb8!: for example, 16 Nd4 Rfc8 17 Ka1 Bxg4 18 fxg4 Nxe4 19 Qe2 (if 19 Nxe4 Rxc2) 19...Rxc3 20 bxc3 Nxc3 21 Qd2 Qa8! (with the idea ...Qd5) 22 Qd3 e5! 23 Rdf1 (23 Nb3 e4 gives Black a winning attack) 23...exd4 24 Bf4 Qd5 25 Kb2 Rb8+ 0-1 A.Shchekachev-M.Golubev, Dimitrovgrad 1988.

After the text, already Black needs to resort to drastic measures.

15...b4!?



KEY DEVELOPMENT: This idea of Golubev's is Black's best practical chance. Black sacrifices the exchange and a pawn.

The most common move is actually 15...Rc8, but White can now safely grab the pawn with 16 Ndx b5. Black has scored horrendously after both 16...a6 17 Nd4 Qc7 18 Nde2 and 16...Qa5 when White has done very well with both 17 a4 and 17 Nd5.



WARNING: 15...Rc5? 16 Ne6! wins material for no compensation – a trap that has caught out dozens of players, including several grandmasters!

16 bxc4

White can back out with 16 Nce2, but this looks far less challenging. Now 16...Rc8 17 Qxb4 a5 is reasonable, but in practice Black has preferred 16...Rc7 and then:

a) 17 Qxb4? e5 18 Nb5 Rb7 19 a4 a6 wins a piece.

b) 17 Ng3 Rc3 18 Bh6 Bxh6 19 Qxh6 e5! gave Black good play in P.Negi-P.Carlsson, Wijk aan Zee 2008.

c) 17 g5 Ne8 (Black's knight is pushed back to an unusual square, but it can aim for c3 and White will find it difficult to bother the black king) 18 Nc1 Rc3 19 a4 Qa5 20 Nde2 Nc7! 21 Nxc3 bxc3 22 Qe1 Bxa4! and Black broke through in E.Vovsha-B.Smith, U.S. League (internet) 2009.

d) 17 Bh6 Bxh6 18 Qxh6 e5 (18...a5 and 18...Rc5 are alternatives) 19 Nf5 gxf5? (this is too dangerous, so Loetscher suggests 19...Bxf5 20 gxf5 Qe7 21 h4 Rfc8 22 Rd2 Nh5) 20 Rxd6! Ne8? 21 gxf5 Qe7 22 Rg1+ Kh8 23 Rg7! was winning for White in J.Hirneise-R.Loetscher, Boeblinger Open 2010.

16...bxc3 17 Qxc3 Qc7 (Diagram 5)

Black has sacrificed a significant amount of material – an exchange and a pawn. In return all his pieces are active, his king is safer, and he can take aim at the weak c4-pawn. This seems a bit sketchy but Black's position is the easier to play and there are some tricks...

18 Kc1?!

The b-file is opened so White moves his king. This is a logical idea, but the timing is important. It is difficult to decide if the king should head towards the centre or into the corner. Moving to a1 looks dangerous because of the long reach of the Dragon bishop, but moving to c1 makes it more difficult for White to get his rooks to the open b-file. There are several possibilities and a lot of room for exploration:

a) 18 Ka1 Rc8 19 Rb1 Be8! is a thematic idea; Black prepares ...Nd7.

b) 18 Bc1 was seen in A.Greet-G.Jones, Torquay 2009. Now 18...Rb8+ 19 Ka1 Be6 looks reasonable, while Jones suggests the immediate 18...Be6 with the idea 19 Nxe6? Rb8+ 20 Bb2 fxe6 when White has problems on the long diagonal.

c) 18 h4 is natural. Black could try 18...Rb8+ 19 Ka1 Be8 20 h5 Nd7 with the idea 21 Rb1 Rc8 or block the kingside with 18...h5 19 g5 Nh7 intending ..Rc8 and ...Nf8-e6.

d) 18 g5! is considered best. After 18...Nh5 (18...Rb8+ basically loses a tempo because White will take the b-file: for example, 19 Ka1 Ne8 20 Rb1 Rc8 21 Rb4 a5 22 Rb2 when White is better after either 22...Qxc4 23 Qxc4 Rxc4 24 Rd1 or 22...d5 23 exd5 Nd6 24 c5! Qxc5 25 Qxc5 Rxc5 26 Rb8+ Be8 27 Rc1 Rxd5 28 c3 according to Khalifman) White has:

d1) 19 Kc1 Rc8 (19...Be5 is also possible) 20 Qd3 Be5 21 h4 Nf4 (Stocek suggests 21...Rb8 with compensation) 22 Bxf4 Bxf4+ 23 Kb2 Be5 (Black has good play after 23...Rb8+ 24 Ka1 Rb4) 24 c3 Qa5 25 Rb1 Qa4 26 Ka1 a5?! (26...Rxc4) 27 Rb3 Kg7?! 28 Kb2 Rxc4? 29 Ra3 Rxd4 30 cxd4 Bxd4+ 31 Kb1 Qb4+ 32 Rb3 and by now White was much better in B.Socko-J.Stocek, German League 2006.

d2) 19 Ka1 is more critical (**Diagram 6**).

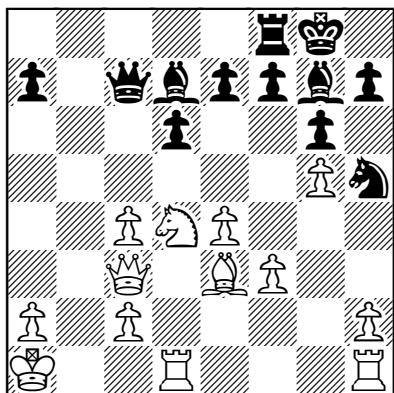


Diagram 6 (B)

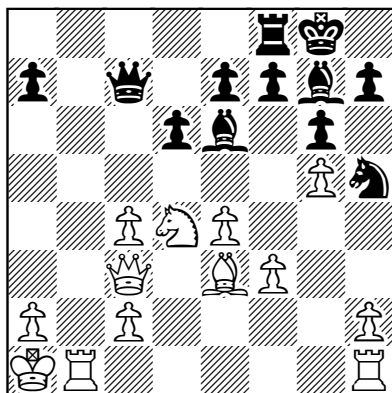


Diagram 7 (B)

White's king looks at risk on the long diagonal, but he hopes to seize the initiative by quickly getting his rooks to the b-file. Black has tried a few things here:

d21) 19...Be5 20 Rb1 Rc8 21 Rb2 Qxc4 22 Qxc4 Rxc4 23 Rd1 Ba4 24 Rd2 Nf4 25 Kb1 was V.Nithander-J.Magnusson, Swedish League 2008. Black's play looks insufficient for a whole exchange.

d22) 19...Be6 20 Rb1 (**Diagram 7**) 20...Rc8!? 21 Rb4 d5!? is an important idea.



TIP: While it is a good plan to gang up on the c4-pawn, Black should be careful with the timing of its capture because White will usually welcome simplifications. Indeed, both 20...Qxc4 21 Qxc4 Bxc4 22 Rb7 and 20...Bxc4 21 Rb4 Rc8 22 Rhb1 see White activating his rooks and taking over the initiative.

d23) 19...Bh3!? is a fascinating refinement. Black threatens ...Bg2xf3 and this is a bit of a distraction: 20 Rhg1 (Black has active play after 20 Rb1 Bg2 or 20 Bf2 Nf4, while 20 Rhe1 Rc8 21 Rb1 Bg2 is rather annoying for White) 20...Be6! 21 Rb1 (**Diagram 8**) 21...d5!? ('Now Black's idea of inserting ...Bh3 and Rg1 becomes clear. White's h-pawn is hanging.' – Loetscher; Black could also consider 21...Rc8) 22 Qd2 (instead 22 c5!? dxe4 23 fxe4 Qxh2 is more critical according to Loetscher) 22...dxe4 23 fxe4 Bxc4 (Black has good compensation for the material) 24 Rb4 Ba6! (not 24...Rd8?! 25 Qc3) 25 c3 and now instead of the 25...Be5 26 Rgb1! of J.Heiduczek-R.Loetscher, Boeblinger 2010, Black should play 25...Rd8!. Here Loetscher gives 26 Qc2 (Black is doing well after 26 Qb2 Nf4 27 Bxf4 Qxf4 28 Re1 Qxg5) 26...Nf4 27 Rd1 e5! when White should force the draw by playing 28 Nb5 (28 Bxf4?! exf4 already looks slightly better for Black) 28...Rxd1+ 29 Qxd1 Bxb5 30 Rxb5 Qxc3+ 31 Kb1 Qxe3 32 Rb8+ Bf8 33 Rxf8+ Kxf8 34 Qd8+.

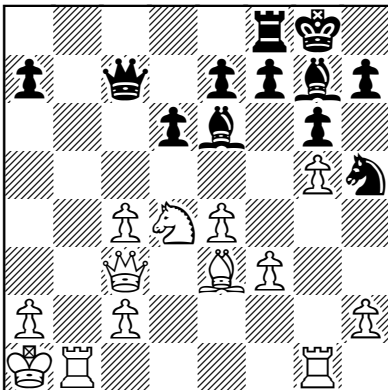


Diagram 8 (B)

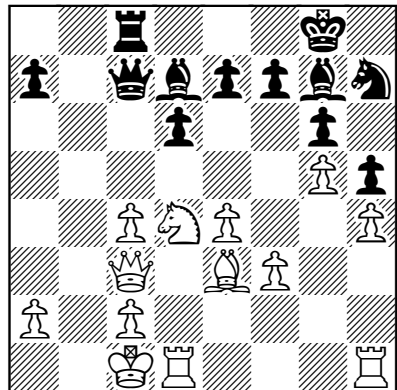


Diagram 9 (W)

Now we return to 18 Kc1:

18...Rc8 19 h4 h5 20 g5 Nh7 (Diagram 9)

The knight looks bad here, but the kingside is closed and Black intends ...Nf8 when the knight will re-enter the game via d7 or e6. It is much easier for Black to improve his position than it is for White.

21 Kd2 Be6 22 Ke2 Bxc4+ 23 Kf2 Nf8 (Diagram 10)

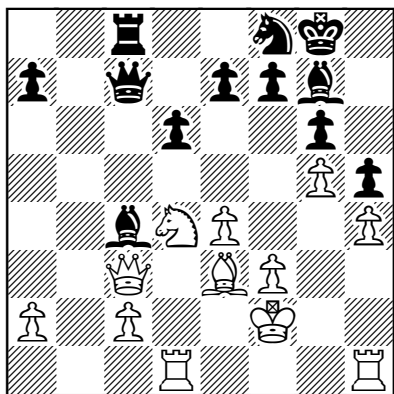


Diagram 10 (W)

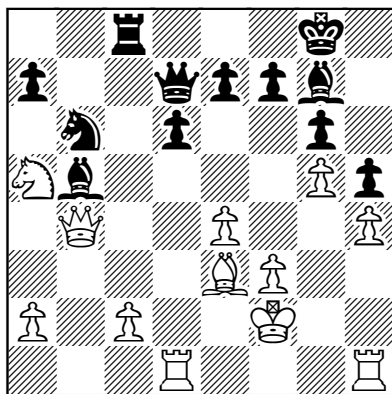


Diagram 11 (W)

Black has good compensation for the exchange. The b-file is not of much use and White's king will not find total safety anywhere on the board.

24 Qa3 Nd7 25 Nb3 Nb6 26 Na5

White is fighting for the c4-square, but the knight is not well placed here.

26...Bb5 27 Qb4 Qd7! (Diagram 11)

The black queen protects the bishop and keeps an eye looking at the kingside.

28 Bd4

Black is much better after 28 Qb1? Na4 or 28 Rc1? Bc3 29 Qa3 Ba4 when the a5-knight is in trouble. White can exchange knights with 28 c4 Nxc4 29 Nxc4 Rxc4, but then Black is only down the exchange for a pawn while keeping a much better position.

28...Rxc2+ 29 Rd2

If 29 Kg3 Be2! is very strong: for example, 30 Bxg7 Bxf3! wins, as ...Qg4+ is too hard to deal with. This idea will be a recurring theme in the game.

29...Nc4

After this move Black should probably be willing to acquiesce to a draw. Instead

29...Bxd4+ 30 Qxd4 and then 30...Qc7 or 30...Rc7 were decent alternatives.

30 Rxc2 Bxd4+ 31 Kg3 (Diagram 12)

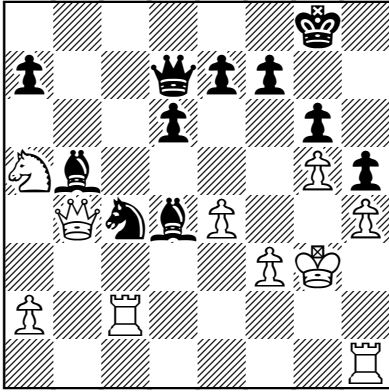


Diagram 12 (B)

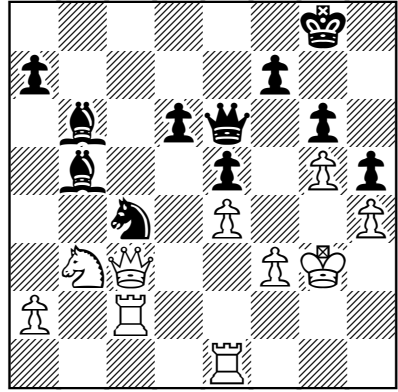


Diagram 13 (W)

31...Bc5?!

Down two exchanges, Black spurns a repetition of moves with 31...Be5+ 32 Kf2 Bd4+.

32 Qc3 Ne3

Black does not really have enough after 32...Nxa5 33 Qxa5.

33 Rb2 e5 34 Nb3 Bb6 35 Re1 Nc4 36 Rc2 Qe6 (Diagram 13) 37 Qb4

I can imagine both sides were getting low on time by this point and the mistakes start to creep in. White would have good winning chances after 37 a4! Bd7 (better than 37...Bxa4 38 Qxc4 or 37...Ba6 38 a5) 38 Rh1 Ne3 39 Re2 when the e3-knight is stuck. After 39...Bxa4 40 Rxe3 Bxe3 41 Qxe3 Bxb3 42 Qxa7 White should be able to convert.

37...Bd7 38 Rh2

Now 38 Rh1 Ne3 gives Black good play. After 39 Re2 he can repeat the position with 39...Nf1+ 40 Kg2 Ne3+ or play for more with 39...f5!.

38...Be3?!

Black tries to get the bishop into the attack. This is natural but not best. Other tries:

a) 38...Ne3 39 Qd2 (Black has good compensation after 39 Qc3 f5! 40 gxf6 Qxf6 41

Rxe3 Qf4+ 42 Kg2 Bxe3) 39...f5 40 gxf6 Qxf6 41 Rxe3 Qf4+ 42 Kg2 Qxe3 (42...Bxe3 43 Qxd6 is no better) 43 Qxe3 Bxe3 44 Rh1 when White is better in the endgame.

b) 38...a5! 39 Qc3 a4 40 Nd2 (or 40 Rc1 Ne3 with the idea ...f5; then 41 Qb4!? looks forced, but 41...Ng4! is totally unclear) 40...Ba5 41 Qxc4 Bxd2 42 Rc1 (similar is 42 Qf1 Bf4+ 43 Kg2 Bxh2 44 Kxh2 Qxa2+) 42...Bf4+ 43 Kg2 Bxc1 44 Qxc1 Qxa2+ and Black has good chances.

39 Rhh1

Another idea is 39 Rxe3!? Nxe3 40 Kf2.

39...Bf4+ 40 Kf2 a5 41 Nxa5 Nd2 42 Re2 Nxf3 (Diagram 14)

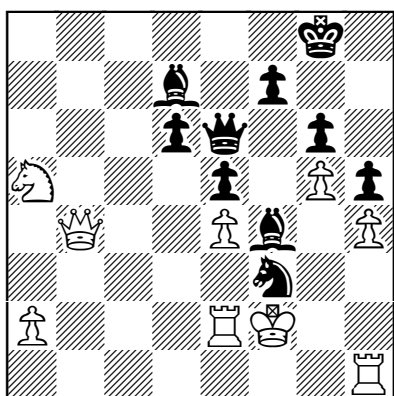


Diagram 14 (W)

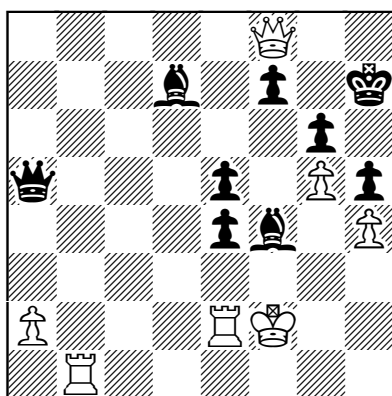


Diagram 15 (B)

White's king looks like it is in trouble, but he has a strong response.

43 Qb3! d5 44 Kxf3 Qa6?!

Instead 44...Qg4+ 45 Kf2 leads nowhere, but 44...Ba4! keeps Black in the game: for example, 45 Qxa4 Qg4+ 46 Kf2 Qg3+ 47 Kf1 Qf3+ with a draw.

45 Kf2! Qxa5 46 Rb1?!

White should play 46 exd5, even though matters are not so simple after 46...Bg4.

46...dxe4 47 Qb8+ Kh7 48 Qf8 (Diagram 15) 48...Qd5??

A terrible blunder. Instead 48...Qa7+ 49 Kg2 Bh3+!? (this should lead to a draw; Black could also play the immediate 49...Bg4 with further complications) 50 Kh1 (50 Kxh3 Qd7+ 51 Kg2 Qg4+ is a draw) 50...Bg4 51 Rf2 e3 52 Rb8! Qxb8! 53 Qxb8 exf2 (with the idea of mate with ...Bf3) 54 Kg2 Be3 55 Qb5 e4 gives Black good winning chances, so here White should take a draw with 53 Qxf7+ Kh8 54 Qf6+

Kg8 55 Qxg6+ Kf8 56 Qf6+ with perpetual check, as 56...Ke8? loses to 57 Qh8+.

49 Qh6+ 1-0

Game 13

P.Leko-M.Carlsen

1st matchgame, Miskolc (rapid) 2008

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 Kb1 Re8 (Diagram 16)

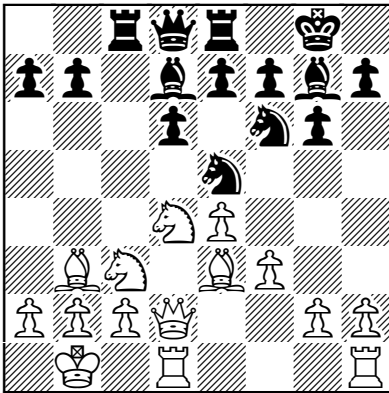


Diagram 16 (W)

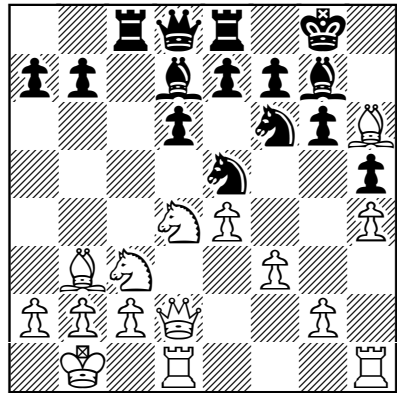


Diagram 17 (B)

Instead of forcing things, Black too makes a move that is generally useful. His e7-pawn is over-protected and his king has a little more room, but the f7-square could become a soft spot in his position.

13 h4

This is the critical continuation. Other moves are less dangerous:

a) 13 g4 is now well met by 13...b5! exploiting the weakness of the f3-pawn. After 14 g5 (14 h4 b4 gives Black good play after 15 Nd5?! Nxd5 16 exd5 a5 or 15 Nce2 a5) 14...b4 15 Nce2 Nh5 16 Ng3 a5 (Black could also consider 16...Nxc3!? 17 hxg3 a5 18 Qh2 Kf8!? 19 Qxh7 Nc4 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 which may favour White, but is not so clear) 17 Nxh5 gxh5 the position is rather unclear.

b) 13 Bh6 Bxh6 14 Qxh6 Rxc3 15 bxc3 a5! (if we compare this position to that with h4 and ..h5 inserted – see the notes to Black's 13th move in Game 3 – the g6-

square is not weakened) 16 a4 (Black has excellent compensation after 16 a3 Qb6 17 Ka1 Qc5) 16...Qb6 (or 16...Qc7) 17 h4 (17 Ka2 Qc5 with ideas like ...Qxc3, ...Nc4, and ...b5 gives Black excellent attacking chances) 17...Bxa4 18 h5 Nc6 (18...Bxb3 19 cxb3 Nc6 20 hxg6 Nxd4 21 gxh7+ Kh8 is the same, but Black could try 19...Rc8!? in this line) 19 hxg6 Bxb3 20 gxh7+ Kh8 21 cxb3 Nxd4 22 cxd4 Qxb3+ 23 Ka1 1/2-1/2 was S.Karjakin-V.Ivanchuk, Foros 2007.

13...h5

Black continues in Soltis style. If Black plays 13...Nc4? 14 Bxc4 Rxc4 15 g4 (or even 15 h5!?) he will have a worse version of lines discussed in the previous game.

14 Bh6 (Diagram 17)

White wants to exchange off the Dragon bishop. Instead 14 Bg5 Rc5 transposes directly to 12 h4 h5 13 Bg5 Rc5 14 Kb1 Re8, as in Games 10 and 11. The main alternative is 14 g4! which is considered in the next game.

14...Nc4

Instead 14...Bh8?! preserves the bishop, but White's attack has proven to be very strong after 15 g4!. Also bad is 14...Bxh6?! 15 Qxh6 Rxc3 16 bxc3 when White's Kb1 is much more useful than Black's ...Re8 compared to the analogous positions discussed in the notes to Game 3.

The only reasonable alternative is 14...Qa5!? which has seen some action in the U.S. Chess League:

a) 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 g4 (16 Rhe1!?) 16...hxg4 17 h5 Rh8 18 hxg6 fxg6 19 Ne6+? (White should try 19 f4 or 19 fxg4) 19...Bxe6 20 Bxe6 Nxf3 21 Qe3 Rxc3 22 bxc3 Rxh1 23 Rxh1 Qb6+ 24 Qxb6 axb6 with a winning ending for Black in D.Schneider-M.Martinez, U.S. League (internet) 2005.

b) 15 g4! Rxc3 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 bxc3 Rc8 18 gxh5 Nxh5 19 Rhg1 Nc4 (even worse is 19...Qxc3 20 Qg5!) 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 Rg5 (Khalifman mentions 21 e5!? with one possibility being 21...Qxc3 22 Qxc3 Rxc3 23 exd6 exd6 24 Kb2 Rc8 25 Rge1 when White has the advantage) 21...Qxc3 22 Qxc3 Rxc3 23 Kb2 with a slight edge for White in I.Schneider-M.Martinez, U.S. League (internet) 2006.

15 Bxc4 Rxc4 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 (Diagram 18)

This position is the same as that in Game 3, but here Kb1 and ...Re8 have been added. This would seem to favour White slightly and it very well could, but matters are not so clear and there are even circumstances where the difference helps Black.

17 Nd5

White sticks with a positional continuation. The alternative is the aggressive 17 g4

hxg4 18 h5 Rh8 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 f4 (Pavlovic suggests 20 b3!? Rc5 21 fxg4 Bxg4 22 Nd5 Qe8 23 Rxh8 Qxh8 24 Rg1 Qh5 25 Qg2 Bh3 26 Ne6+! Bxe6 27 Nf4 Qg4 28 Qf2 Nxe4 29 Qd4+ Nf6 30 Rxg4 Bxg4 31 Nd3 Ra5 32 Qc3 when he prefers White in this unclear position) when compared to the analogous position, White actually has the move Kb1 for free (because Black has played ...Rf8-e8-h8 instead of ...Rf8-h8). This could be useful in some circumstances, but White's back rank could also be of some consequence.

Now (Diagram 19):

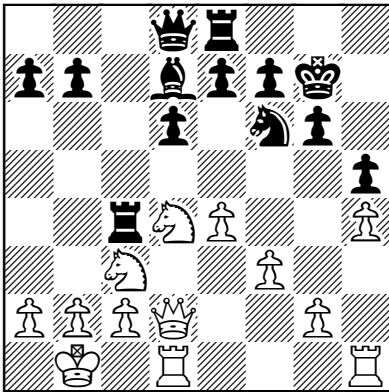


Diagram 18 (W)

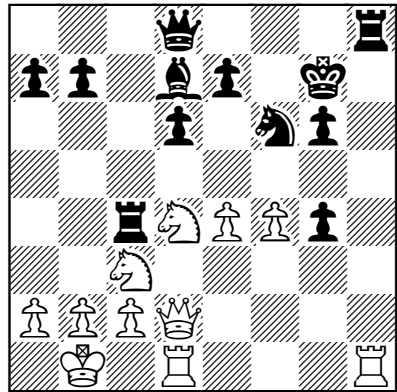


Diagram 19 (B)

a) 20...Rxh1 21 Rxh1 Kf7 22 Qd3 Rc5 23 e5 (after 23 Re1 e5 24 Nb3 Rxc3! with the idea of ...exf4 gives Black good compensation) 23...dxe5 24 Nb3 Rc8 25 fxg4 Bc6 26 Rf1 Qxd3 27 cxd3 Rd8 28 exf6 exf6 29 d4 was P.Negi-V.Papin, Istanbul 2005. White is up a piece but Black's passed pawns are dangerous. Khalifman prefers White here, while my computer thinks Black is better...

b) Again, 20...e5 is obviously similar to Soltis, but with White having played Kb1, so the positions should be compared:

b1) 21 fxg4 dxe5 22 Ne6+ (22 Nde2 Rh3! is again fine for Black) 22...Bxe6 23 Qxd8 Rxd8 24 Rxd8 Nxe4 25 Nxe4 Rxe4 with equal chances in the ending, E.Berg-R.Kasimdzhanov, Dresden Olympiad 2008.

b2) 21 Nde2 Rxh1 22 Rxh1 Nxe4 23 Nxe4 Rxe4 24 fxg4 Qe8! (this time 24...Rxe2? 25 Qxe2 is bad because 25...Qg5 is not check) 25 Qh6+ Kf7 26 Nc1 (here 26 Nf4 Qxe5 27 Qxg6+ Ke7 28 Nd3 Qd5! is fine for Black; with the king on c1, 29 Rh8 would be strong, but here there is 29...Re1+! 30 Nc1 Qd2 when only Black has chances)

26...dxe5 27 Nd3 Bf5 (27...b6!?) 28 Qh7+ Kf6 29 Qh4+ Kg7 30 Qh7+ Kf6 1/2-1/2
M.Kravtsiv-S.Abu Sufian, New Delhi 2011.

b3) 21 Rxh8 was recommended by Khalifman. After 21...Qxh8 22 Nde2 Rc6 23 fxe5 (if 23 Qe3 Qh2!) 23...dxe5 24 Ng3 Qh6 25 Qd3 Qh2 (as Khalifman points out, 25...Qg5 26 Nd5! is promising for White) 26 Rf1 Be6! (more natural than 26...Bc8 27 Nce2! as given by Khalifman) White has:

b31) 27 Nce2 Bc4 28 Qd8 Bxe2 29 Qe7+ gives Black a choice between allowing perpetual check after 29...Kg8 or 29...Kh6!? 30 Rh1 Qxh1+ 31 Nxh1 Nxe4 32 Qxe5 Bf3 with unclear play.

b32) 27 Qd8 Bxa2+! (or 27...Bf7 28 Rh1 Bxa2+!) when Black's play looks sufficient after 28 Kxa2 Ra6+ 29 Kb1 Qxg3 or 28 Nxa2 Qxc2+ 29 Ka1 Ra6.

Returning to 17 Nd5 (Diagram 20):

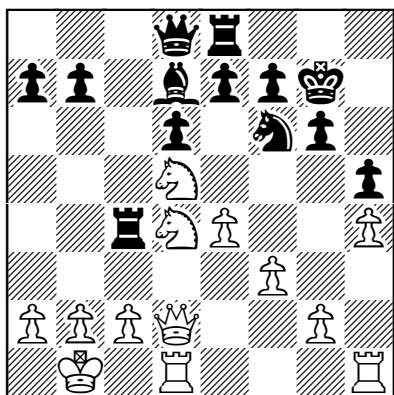


Diagram 20 (B)

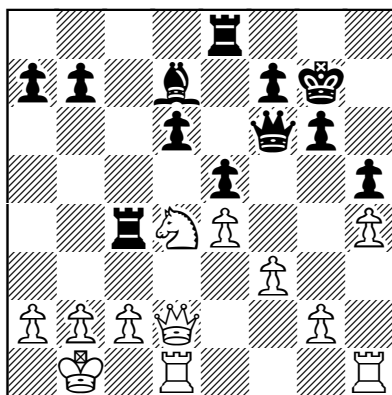


Diagram 21 (W)

17...e5!

White keeps some advantage after either 17...e6?! 18 Ne3 or 17...Nxd5 18 exd5 because of his greater control of space.



TIP: Black can very often play ...e5 in the Dragon when the dark-squared bishops have been exchanged. With this move Black contests the dark squares and fights for his share of the centre. If Black can maintain some control of the weakened d5 and d6, this advance should be considered. Black can sometimes even sacrifice the d6-pawn, as he does in this game, to get active piece play.

18 Nxf6

Black has no problems after 18 Ne2 Nxd5 19 Qxd5 Rc6 with the idea of ...Be6. Also harmless is 18 Nb3 Nxd5 19 Qxd5 Rc6 20 Na5 Rb6 with the idea 21 Nxb7 Qb8.

18...Qxf6 (Diagram 21) 19 Nb3

Less threatening is 19 Ne2 Rc6 (after 19...Be6 20 Qxd6 Rec8 21 c3 White had an edge in I.Salgado Lopez-A.Arribas Lopez, Linares 2007, and here 21 Nc3!? looks even better) 20 Nc3 Be6 (**Diagram 22**) and now:

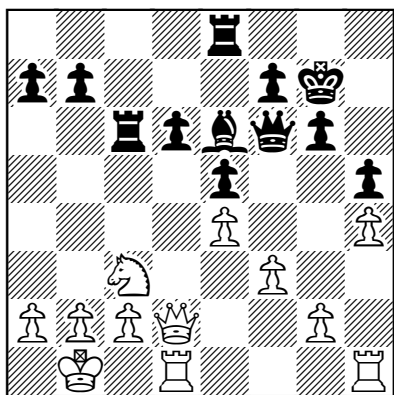


Diagram 22 (W)

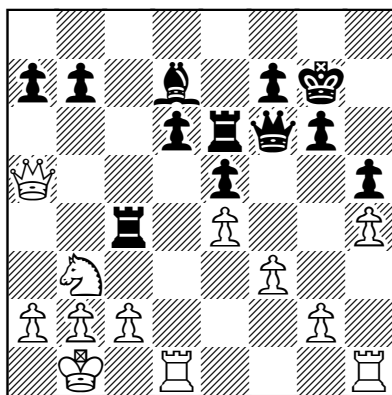


Diagram 23 (B)

a) 21 Qe3 Rec8! is fine for Black. If 22 Qxa7?! Qd8! (threatening ...Ra8) 23 Qe3 Qa5 and Black has a strong attack.

b) 21 Nd5 Bxd5 22 Qxd5 Qf4! 23 Qd2 Qxd2 24 Rxd2 f5 25 Re1 Kf6 26 c3 Ke6 was level in S.Karjakin-M.Carlsen, Baku 2008.

19...Rec8



KEY DEVELOPMENT: Black offers the d6-pawn for activity rather than passively defending the pawn.

Instead 19...Rc6? 20 Na5 Rb6 21 Nc4 is no good, but protecting the pawn with 19...Re6 has also been tried. Now White should play 20 Qa5! (**Diagram 23**).

White has tried other moves, but this is the most pointed. The queen attacks a7 and there are ideas of invading Black's position via c7, b6 (after ...a6), and a7. Black has tried:

a) 20...Ra4 21 Qc7 Bc6 22 Rd2!? (after 22 a3 Kf8 Black intends ...Qe7, but 23 Qb8+ Kg7 24 Rd2 keeps a little pressure) 22...Ra6 23 a3 Rb6 (or 23...Qf4 24 Rhd1 Qxh4 25 Rxd6 with a small edge) 24 Qb8 a6 25 Qc7! 25...Rb5 26 Rhd1 Qxh4 27 Rxd6 when Black's awkwardly placed b5-rook gives him some problems.

b) 20...a6 21 Qb6 d5!? (after 21...Bc8 both 22 Na5 and 22 Qe3 keeps some slight pressure) 22 Qxb7 Bc6 23 Qxa6 Ba4 24 Qa7 dxe4 25 fxe4 Bxb3 26 axb3 Rxe4 27 g3 when White is up a pawn, although the position is still not so clear.

20 Qxd6 Be6 21 c3 (Diagram 24)

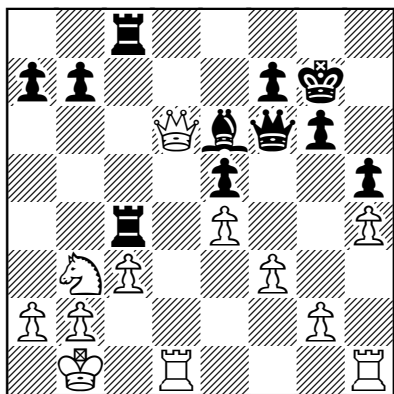


Diagram 24 (B)

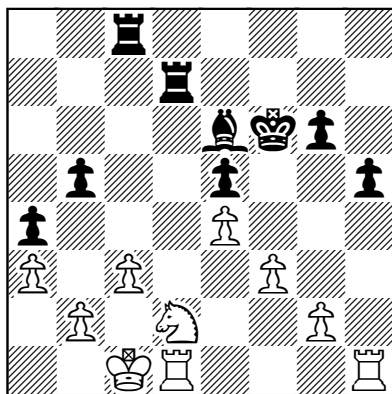


Diagram 25 (W)

21...b5

Black has also tried 21...a5 a few times. After 22 Nxa5 Ra4 23 Nb3 Ra6 24 Qd2 (24 Qb4!?) 24...Rca8 25 Qg5 Qxg5 26 hxg5 Rxa2 Black has some compensation for the pawn, but I do not think it can be enough.

A reasonable alternative is 21...R4c6!? and Black has done okay after 22 Qd3 (or 22 Qd2 Qe7) 22...Qe7.

22 Qd2

White has also tried 22 Rd2!? in several correspondence games. After 22...R4c6 23 Qa3 (if 23 Qd3 Qf4 24 Rdd1 Black could play 24...Rb6 with the idea of ...b4 or 24...Qg3 25 Qxb5 Rb6 26 Qe2 Bxb3 27 axb3 Rxb3 when it is not easy for White to make progress) Black has:

a) 23...a6 24 Na5 R6c7 25 Rd6 Qf4 26 Nb3 Qg3 27 Rd2 Qf4 28 Rhd1 Qxh4 29 Qxa6 b4 30 cxb4 Bxb3 31 axb3 Qe7 32 Qd6 was A.Isaev-M.Rocius, correspondence 2008.

This looks funny, but White is still probably a little better.

b) 23...Rd8! is an active solution: 24 Qxa7 Bxb3 25 Rxd8 Qxd8 (worse is 25...Bxa2+?! 26 Qxa2 Qxd8 27 Qd5!) 26 axb3 Qd3+ 27 Ka2 Qc2 (even better is 27...Qe2! 28 Qa5 Rd6) 28 Qa5 Qxg2 29 Qxb5 Qxh1 30 Qxc6 Qxh4 when Black had enough play to draw in S.Salzman-D.Flude, correspondence 2007.

22...a5?!

This inaccuracy goes unpunished. Better was 22...Qe7!? intending ...b4. If 23 Qd6 Qf6 repeats the position.

23 Qg5

Black would have more serious problems to solve after 23 Nxa5 Ra4 24 Nb3 Rca8 25 Qg5!.

23...Qxg5 24 hxg5 a4 25 Nd2 R4c7 26 a3 Rd7!

The d2-knight is short on moves so Black takes control of the d-file.

27 Kc1 f6 28 gxf6+ Kxf6 (Diagram 25)

Black has enough for the pawn and the game quickly fizzles out to a draw.

29 Nf1 Rxd1+ 30 Kxd1 Rd8+ 31 Ke1 Kg5 32 g3 Rd3 33 Nd2 Bc4 34 Nxc4 bxc4 35 Ke2 Rd6 36 Rh2 ½-½

Note that White cannot play 36 Rd1? because of 36...Rxd1 37 Kxd1 h4 when Black wins.

Game 14

J.Polgar-G.Kaidanov

2nd matchgame, Hilton Head 2010

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 Kb1 Re8 13 h4 h5 14 g4! (Diagram 26)

This attacking continuation is much more dangerous than 14 Bh6. We saw in Game 1 that the direct 13 g4 did not work so well for White in the Soltis Variation, but the addition of the moves 12 Kb1 Re8 actually changes things considerably.

14...hxg4 15 h5 Nxh5 (Diagram 27)

Instead 15...Rxc3 looks insufficient after 16 Qxc3! (Black managed to get counter-play after 16 bxc3 Nxf3 17 Nxf3 Nxe4 in L.Arashidze-D.Vocaturo, Antalya 2009) 16...Nxh5 17 f4 Nc6 18 f5.

16 Bh6!