

DragonMasters

The Life and Times of The
Fiercest Opening in Chess

Volume 2

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Fiercest Opening in Chess

Volume 2

Andrew Burnett

Thinkers Publishing 2026



Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
↻	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
⊖	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⌢	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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Introduction

Welcome back to DragonMasters and to volume 2, which – covering the years 1974 to 1995 – has a more modern bent to it than its predecessor. As I am reminded daily by friends, family and most everyone, however, even these years (my own childhood, youth and young adulthood) are considered “ancient history” by the youngsters of today!

By 1974, the Dragon had already had its early era and in volume 1 we tracked its path from birth, through its informative years and youthful exuberance, to a rather painful period in its life. By the end of the book, the likes of Paulsen, Pillsbury, and Botvinnik defending the Dragon’s honour had given way to Fischer and Karpov determined to put it out of business forever.

However, as John Nunn and Joe Gallagher wrote in their 1995 book “Beating the Sicilian 3”: “The Dragon is one of the most controversial lines in the Sicilian. At various times over the years, it has appeared to be in its death throes only to be suddenly revived by the discovery of new ideas for Black.

“Practitioners regard the variation as their private property and defend it with an almost religious fervour against the many who wish to commit the heresy of mating Black down the h-file.”

Indeed, and we will witness just how “religious fervour” displayed itself. Our current volume also coincides with a time of great change in the world of chess (emanating from the wider world itself, of course) with advances in technology and travel combined with a huge increase in player numbers thanks to the Fischer – Spassky match of 1972.

The number of tournaments increased exponentially, with it the number of games, and this saw theory rapidly expanding. Magazines and books proliferated. Gone were the days when a novelty might be hidden for a year. Now ideas and novelties were being tested on a monthly, sometimes even weekly basis (in volume 3 this would increase to daily and even hourly!).

This change in 'pace' is reflected in the contents of volume 2 and how it is written. Whereas, say 1000 games between 1851 and 1974 were whittled down to roughly 100, I've had to do the same with 10,000 games in our current 21-year period.

Everything was moving much more quickly, and often the stories that animated a particular game were less easy to spot, or ignored by the necessity for faster reporting, or simply aren't known for a number of other reasons (not everything of interest written in English, Spanish, Russian, 'Yugoslav', etc. has been translated into every language, for example!).

Joking aside, I have tried, nevertheless, to bring these historical characters and situations to life as much as possible. And, of course, this would be impossible without the numerous writers, journalist and players who preceded me in covering the greatest chess opening of all.

Thanks to them all and welcome, once again, to the life and times of the fiercest opening chess – the Sicilian Dragon!

Andy Burnett,
Newcastle 2025

Chapter 1: Resurrection

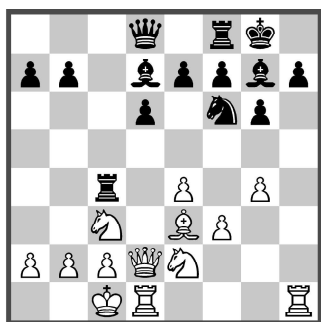


We left off our *DragonMasters* journey with Anatoly Karpov landing a crushing blow against the Dragon's viability, defeating Viktor Korchnoi in the 1974 Candidates Final (which became the de facto World Championship decider following Fischer's refusal to defend his title, Karpov crowned in 1975). As so often in the history of the Dragon, the

Brave warriors behind the black pieces were quick to find ways to plug the theoretical holes, fighting back with renewed vigour and creativity against White attempts to keep the fire-breathing beast at bay. One such response, taken up with some enthusiasm, had in fact been seen shortly before the Karpov-Korchnoi encounter...

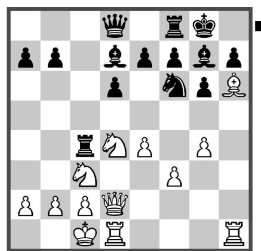
♙ Martin Gonzalez, Angel
 ♚ Tarjan, James Edward
 ♛ Malaga 1974

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4
 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 g6 6. ♙e3 ♙g7 7. f3 ♘c6
 8. ♚d2 0-0 9. ♙c4 ♙d7 10. h4 ♖c8
 11. ♙b3 ♘e5 12. 0-0-0 ♘c4 13. ♙xc4
 ♖xc4 14. h5 ♘xh5 15. g4 ♘f6 16.
 ♘de2



Position after: 16. ♘de2

To those unfamiliar with this system,
 back in the good old days there were
 plenty of games with 16. ♙h6

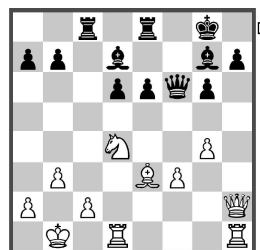


Position after: 16. ♙h6

White continues with the simple plan of
 wanting to deliver mate down the h-file.
 Now 16... ♘xe4 17. ♚e3 ♖xc3 18. bxc3

♘f6 19. ♙xg7 ♙xg7 and upon
 20. ♚h6+ (we'll see the move 20. ♖h2
 later in the book, in the hands of none
 other than Gary Kasparov) the response
 20... ♙h8 to facilitate a defensive
 ...♖g8-g7 manoeuvre. In the mean-
 time, the 'Karpovian' text kills two birds
 with one stone as the central knight is
 withdrawn from the firing line to offer
 support to its compatriot on c3 so as to
 dissuade the thematic exchange sac
 there.

White has plenty of other move 16 op-
 tions available but I'd like to highlight
 just one, more recent, example that
 caught my eye: 16. ♙b1 ♖e8 17. b3
 ♖c8 18. ♘d5 ♘xd5 19. exd5 e5 20.
 dxe6 fxe6 21. ♚h2 ♚f6



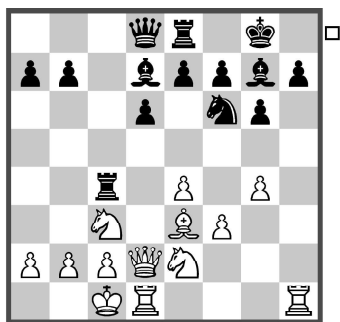
Position after: 21... ♚f6

22. a4!?? (Go figure! After 22. ♚xh7+
 ♙f7 Black is threatening the queen-
 trapping ...♖h8 and while 23. g5 ♚e5
 24. ♖h6 ♚xe3 25. ♖xg6 ♖g8 looks
 dangerous it was evidently rejected!
 The game move is, as you may have
 guessed, an engine concoction, as was
 the continuation 22... g5 23. ♚xh7+
 ♙f7 24. ♚h5+ ♚g6 25. ♙xg5 ♖h8 26.
 ♚xg6+ ♙xg6 27. ♖xh8 ♖xh8 and with

the bishop pair as compensation for the pawn, Black managed to grovel for a draw in the endgame in the catchily-named pairing Ethereal 14.24 (3535) – KomodoDragon 3.2 (3587) tcecc-chess.com INT 2023.

You'll find numerous engine ideas peppered throughout this book, but generally only for a good reason. Often it will be to show the unusual, as above, but I will also use modern assessments when it varies (sometimes wildly) with that of the world's most famous players. Not as a stick to beat them with, of course, but to highlight how modern chess varies from our predecessors.

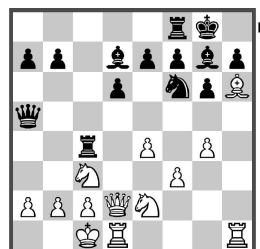
16... ♖e8!?



Position after: 16... ♖e8!?

English GM and DragonMaster Chris Ward believes this is “almost certainly” Black's best. He explains the idea behind the rook's short shuffle: “Over-protecting e7 but enabling ♗h6 to be met by ...♗h8 preserving the Dragon bishop without having to sacrifice the exchange.”

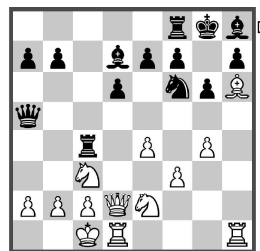
16... ♖a5 was the move seen in the de-nouement game of DragonMasters volume 1, when Karpov defeated Korchnoi after 17. ♗h6



Position after: 17. ♗h6

Now there are two main pathways for Black to follow:

A) 17... ♗h8

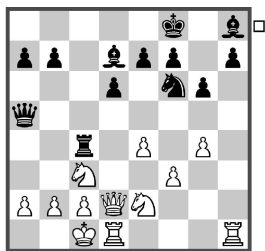


Position after: 17... ♗h8

This is the move Black would love to play, keeping the Dragon bishop and simply ignoring the hanging rook on f8, but is it viable?

A few attempts have been made it prove it playable, perhaps the most interesting coming almost 50 years(!) after the present game.

18. ♗xf8 ♔xf8



Position after: 18... Kxf8

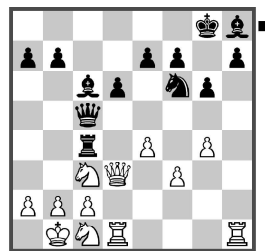
Ward points out that that Tarrasch allegedly asserted 'the bishop pair is as good as a rook and a knight' and writes:

"I notice that in recent times people have been trialling various flat positions (pitting engine against engine!) with those scenarios and also with the bishops having an extra pawn to boot. Interestingly, the computer generally does well with the 'extra material' compared to the practical play edge that humans might have with the diagonal dominance. This position provides another excellent example. My view was always that over the board Black would have reasonable compensation with the bishop pair and a pawn for the rook and the knight. The engine assessment is just as the maths states you are about $(5+3) - (3+3+1)=1\text{pt down!}$ "

19. Qe3

White threatens e5, followed by g5, winning material.

19... Qc6 20. Kb1 Qc5 21. Qd3 Kg8 22. Nc1

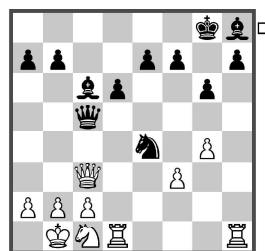


Position after: 22. Nc1

The threat of Nb3 almost forces Black into the following exchange sacrifice.

22... Rxc3 23. Qxc3 (23. bxc3 Nd7 gives Black strong play against the white king.)

23... Nxe4



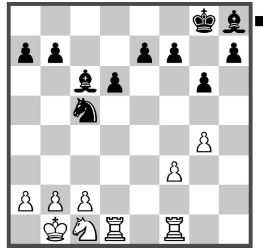
Position after: 23... Nxe4

A nice move to play but with the queens off it is likely that White is just better.

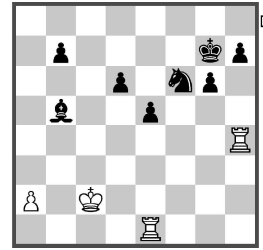
24. Qxc5 Nxc5

Two sets of 'bishop and pawn versus rook' is a highly unusual material imbalance.

25. Rhf1



Position after: 25. ♔hf1

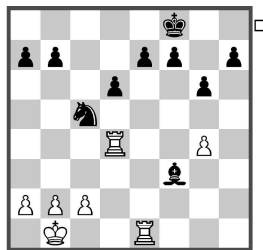


Position after: 38... ♔xb5

25... ♔f8

As Ward points out, perhaps 25... h5 26. gxf5 gxf5 followed by ...♙f6 and ...h4 was a better practical attempt. This, however, is a game between two engines! I have literally no idea what 'practical play' means to a machine.

26. ♘e2 ♙b5 27. ♖fe1 ♙c6 28. ♘d4 ♙xd4 29. ♖xd4 ♙xf3



Position after: 29... ♔xf3

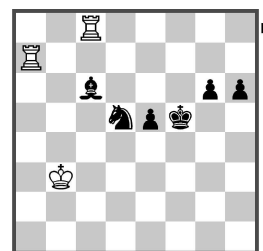
Black has won another pawn but at the cost of the bishop pair.

30. b4 ♘d7 (30... ♘e6?? is met by 31. ♖xe6 fxe6 32. ♖f4+) 31. g5 f6 32. ♖f4 ♙c6 33. c4 a6 34. ♔c2 e5 35. ♖h4 ♔g7 36. gxf6+ ♘xf6 37. b5 axb5 38. cxb5 ♙xb5

"It's all fascinating stuff ..." says Ward, revealing: "Standard engines have Black not far off equality but the heavy hitters conclude that retaining the one pawn (and not for long!) is adequate for the full point."

Again, in a practical game, none of this would deter DragonMasters from entering the position. The game finished:

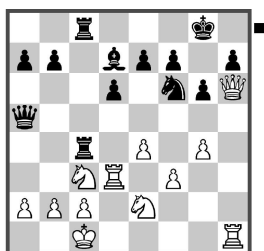
39. ♖d1 ♔f7 40. a4 ♙d7 41. ♖xd6 ♔e7 42. ♖d3 b6 43. ♖b4 ♙c6 44. ♖xb6 ♙xa4+ 45. ♔d2 ♙e8 46. ♖b7+ ♔e6 47. ♖f3 ♘d7 48. ♖a7 ♔d6 49. ♔e1 ♔e6 50. ♔f2 h6 51. ♔e1 ♘c5 52. ♖f8 ♙b5 53. ♖b8 ♙c6 54. ♖c8 ♘d3+ 55. ♔d2 ♘b4 56. ♖g8 ♔f5 57. ♖b8 ♘d5 58. ♖c8 ♘b4 59. ♔c3 ♘d5+ 60. ♔b3



Position after: 60. ♔b3

60... ♖b7 (60... ♖b5 61. ♜c5 picks up a piece.) 61. ♜xb7 ♘f4 62. ♜f7+ ♔e4 63. ♜c4+ ♔d5 64. ♜cxf4 exf4 1-0 (64) LCZero 0.31-dag-e429eeb – BT3 – 2 (3642) – Stockfish dev – 20231010-002636 (3673) tcec-chess.com INT 2023.

B) 17... ♖xh6 18. ♜xh6 ♜fc8 19. ♜d3!



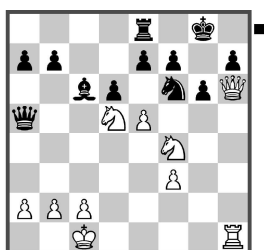
Position after: 19. ♜d3!

Chris Ward: “Seriously bolstering that knight on c3!”

19... ♖e6

A historic moment in the Dragon was, of course, the famous Candidates final match game of 1974, which continued:

19... ♜4c5 20. g5 ♜xg5 21. ♜d5 ♜xd5 22. ♘xd5 ♜e8 23. ♘ef4 ♖c6 24. e5



Position after: 24. e5

24... ♖xd5 25. exf6 exf6 26. ♜xh7+ ♔f8 27. ♜h8+ (1-0, Karpov, A – Korchnoi, V Moscow 1974).

20. a3

Instead 20. g5 ♘h5 21. ♘f4 ♜e5 22. ♘h5 gxh5 23. ♜xh5 ♜g7 is unpleasant but at least avoids getting mated. What follows now though is difficult to get one’s head around!

20... ♜4c5 21. ♔d2

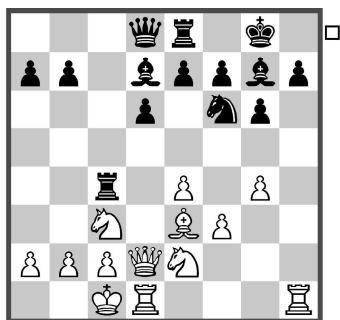
Ok, White wants to get in b2-b4 without allowing the a3-pawn to drop but who saw that coming?

21... ♜c4 22. g5 ♘h5 23. ♘f4 ♜e5 24. ♘h5 gxh5 25. ♜xh5 ♜g7 26. ♔e3

Yes with the king already nicely centralised on e3, White gets a better version of the aforementioned endgame which was now converted into a win (1-0, Stockfish dev – 20231010-002636 (3673) – LCZero 0.31-dag-e429eeb – BT3 – 2 (3642) tcec-chess.com INT 2023.)

Back to our main encounter after 16... ♜e8!?

In his 1996 Batsford book, *Anatoly Karpov’s Best Games*, the by-then former world champion agrees with Ward and states that the game move 16... ♜e8 “seems safer for Black, as 17. ♖h6 is met by the retreat 17... ♖h8.”



Position after: 16... ♖e8!?

Tarjan actually played 16... ♖e8 several times, with a healthy 2.5/5 against strong opposition. The Californian was one of several players from the USA who didn't receive as much praise as they perhaps deserved, the cloud of Bobby Fischer's genius and madness an ever-present when talk turned to the land of 50 states.

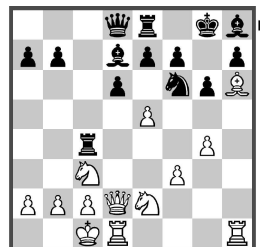
Tarjan, however, was an incredibly gifted player who could, and did, mix it with the best. Although he turned to a career as a librarian in the mid-80s, when he re-emerged some 30 years later he beat none other than Vladimir Kramnik in a sensational game at the 2017 Isle of Man Masters tournament.

His opponent in our present game was himself a four-time Spanish champion and four-time Olympian, although the Catalanian player never quite made it to Grandmaster status.

17. e5!?

The other version of the dangerous-looking central push is:

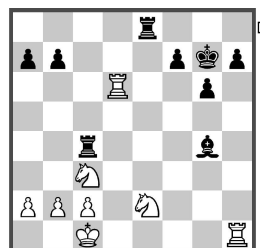
17. ♖h6 ♖h8 18. e5!?



Position after: 18. e5!?

(18. ♖e1 is Hartston-Sosonko, which we will see in our next game.) After 18... ♖xg4 19. fxg4 we have another branch;

A) 19... ♖xg4 20. exd6 ♖xd6 21. ♖xd6 exd6 22. ♖xd6 ♖g7 23. ♖xg7 ♖xg7



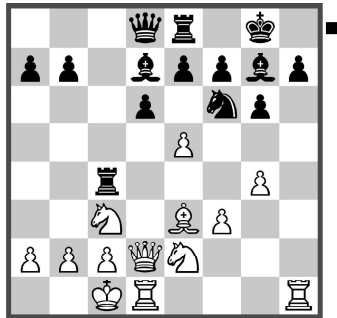
Position after: 23... ♖xg7

Tarjan, again as Black, defeated Albin Planinc after 24. ♖g3 – “the knight is clumsily placed” say Miles and Moscow – but curiously 24. ♖d4 has an almost perfect score over five games in the database, (Tarjan losing to both Browne in 1975 and Matulovic in 1976). This despite Black standing perfectly well at

this point with his three connected passed pawns for the piece.

B) 19... ♖xe5! is considered to be more accurate by Dragon experts Sapi and Schneider (backed 35 years later by the engines) but now – fully 50 years on from the game – engines show no real preference for one move over the other.

Back to our main game and Karpov states that 17. e5!?, a logical-looking, sharp pawn thrust in the centre, is “no good” due to the following sacrifice:



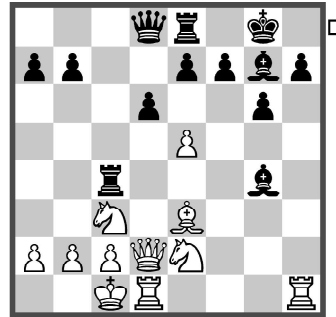
Position after: 17. e5!?

17... ♖xg4

The knight sac is actually forced.

17... dxe5 loses simply to 18. g5 chasing away a defender of d7; White wins a full piece.

18. fxg4 ♖xg4



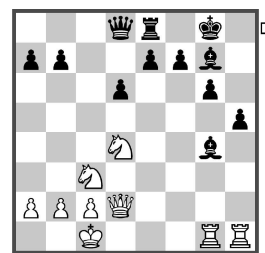
Position after: 18... ♖xg4

19. exd6?!

This is described as “an error in a difficult position” by Sapi and Schneider. They explain: “By exchanging the pawn White avoids losing it. However, since exchanging queens is forbidden because of the loss of a piece on the e-file, this move only serves to activate the black queen.”

A) Karpov gave 19. ♖d3 ♖c8 as the reason behind e5 not working, while the modern engine states empirically that;

B) 19. e6!? keeps a rather precarious (im)balance: 19... ♖xe6 20. ♖d4 ♖xd4 21. ♖xd4 ♖g4 22. ♖dg1 h5!



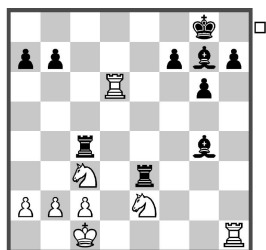
Position after: 22... h5!

This is what we love to see. (If it's not, then I fear you have bought, borrowed, begged, or stolen the wrong book!)

Five connected pawns (four of them passed) against a rook. Throw in the bishop pair strafing the board and you've got all the elements necessary for... 0.00 according to the engines. For humans, of course, it's a visual treat and a battle of sorts between creativity and materialism, which might well describe a vast chunk of Dragon games.

19... ♔xd6 20. ♔e1

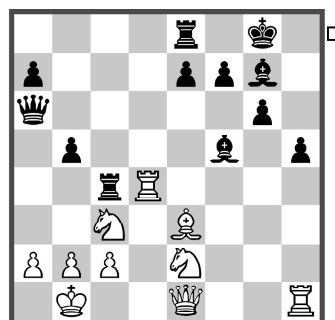
White can't take on d6 for tactical reasons down the e-file, e.g. 20. ♔xd6 exd6 21. ♖xd6 (21. ♙xa7 ♙xe2 22. ♘xe2 ♖xe2) 21... ♖xe3



Position after: 21... ♖xe3

The game position is seen nine times in the database, with Black getting his revenge by scoring a dominating 8 wins against only one loss.

20... ♔a6 21. ♖d3 b5 22. ♔b1 ♙f5 23. ♖d4 h5



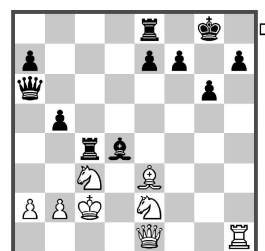
Position after: 23... h5

Similar to the note at move 17, where Black basically had three connected passed pawns for the piece, here he has four connected passed pawns (!) and a raking bishop pair – more than enough compensation.

Of the alternatives, two stand out for the simple reason that the Dragon bishop must be relinquished:

A) 23... ♙xd4 is rarely something Black will do, giving up the dark squares, unless there is a dire need, or a forced win. Likewise;

B) 23... ♙xc2+! 24. ♔xc2 ♙xd4



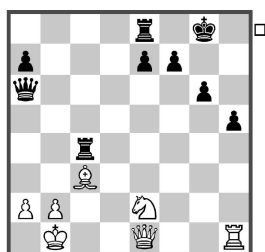
Position after: 24... ♙xd4

This falls into the latter category, but I'm not convinced any Dragon player would be completely happy.

25. ♖xd4 b4

B1) 26. ♜xh7 fails to the intermediate 26... ♜xd4 (Not 26... ♔xh7?? 27. ♚h4+ ♔g8 28. ♚h8#)

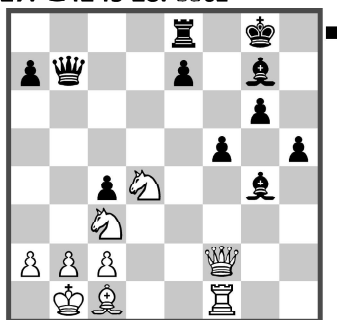
B2) 26. ♔b1 bxc3 27. ♖xc3 (27. ♜xh7 ♜xd4) 27... h5



Position after: 27... h5

Yes, Black is winning, and no, it will never be comfortable while the bishop lives!

24. ♜xc4 bxc4 25. ♘d4 ♖g4 26. ♜f1 ♚b7 27. ♚f2 f5 28. ♖c1



Position after: 28. ♖c1

28... ♜d8??

A bizarre move that changes the assessment from winning for Black to winning for White! It's hard to even imagine what Tarjan was thinking about here unless he had completely forgotten/overlooked/blanked on the fact that White's previous move defended b2.

Alternatively;

A) 28... ♚b6! 29. ♘db5 ♚xf2 30. ♜xf2 h4 and White can do nothing against the inexorable advance of the kingside pawns. Instead;

B) 28... e5 looks very natural, but things get a little awkward after 29. ♘db5 ♜e7 30. ♖g5 ♜d7 31. ♚c5 e4 32. ♘d6.

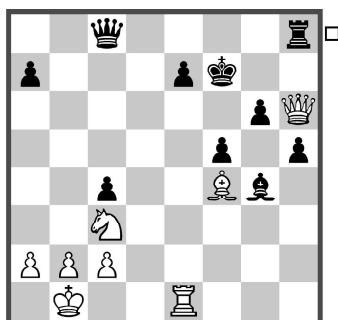
29. ♘e6 ♜c8

29... ♖xc3 30. ♘xd8 ♚xb2+ simply isn't mate.

30. ♘xg7 ♔xg7 31. ♚f4

With his dark-squared bishop gone, so too are Black's threats and White finishes things off efficiently.

31... ♔f7 32. ♚h6 ♜g8 33. ♖f4 ♚c8 34. ♜e1 ♜h8



Position after: 34... h8

35. ♖xe7+

Remember the dark squares?

35... ♔xe7 36. ♖g7+ ♔e6 37. ♖xg6+ ♔d7 38. ♖f7+ ♔c6 39. ♖d5+

and Tarjan resigned here as 39... ♔b6 40. ♖b5# is mate.

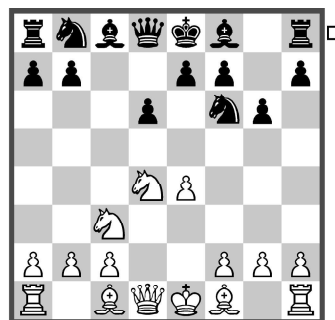
1-0

The Hastings Premier of 1975-6 (the event is traditionally held over the New Year period) saw multiple outings for the Dragon, with Sosonko, Miles and Korchnoi all taking the black pieces. Those riding out on St. George's side in the English coastal resort (famous for its era-defining battle of 1066) included Hartston, Kaplan and Sigurjonsson.

Let's see how the former, a two-time British champion, fared against a former Soviet Russian émigré who would soon become a two-time champion of the Netherlands (adding the 1978 title to that of 1973.)

♗ Hartston, William R
♘ Sosonko, Gennadi
♙ Hastings 1976

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 g6



Position after: 5... g6

Bronstein-Korchnoi in round 11 had seen the old classical variation with ♘e2, ♘e3 and ♘b3, followed by king-side castling, with Bronstein winning a long game. Sigurjonsson and Sosonko drew in round 7 with the Icelandic player using Karpov's favoured version of the classical line, ♘e2, ♘g5 and ♘b3. Earlier, Sigurjonsson had used a similar variation, but with f4 instead of developing the dark-squared bishop. Also, in round 3, Michael Stean drew a 102-move game with Sosonko after 6.g3.

Most of these variations were discussed in some depth in volume 1 and are regularly trotted out when White isn't quite ready or willing to enter the sharper 'Yugoslav Attack' lines.

6. ♖e3 ♗g7 7. f3 ♘c6 8. ♖c4

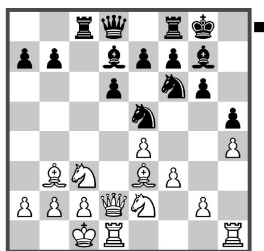
8. ♔d2 0-0 9. 0-0-0 was Julio Kaplan's choice against Sosonko, also in round 11. Why have I mentioned all these games? Because it shows just how popular the Dragon variation was at the time. Nowadays you can go entire tournaments without seeing anyone brave enough to essay the Dragon, but as you will see — and I will argue in volume 3 — the Dragon is still alive, kicking and even (dare I say it?) sounder than ever!

8... 0-0 9. ♔d2 ♗d7 10. h4 ♘e5 11. ♖b3 ♜c8 12. 0-0-0 ♘c4

12... h5 was seen in the same round 5 as our present game, in the encounter between Julio Kaplan and Tony Miles, which resulted in a resounding win for the Argentinian-born, Puerto Rican IM.

Miles, however, had won a nice game with it on home ground earlier in the year en route to his first GM norm. Let's take our usual detour to have a look at that game...

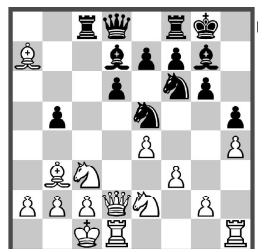
13. ♘de2?!



Position after: 13. ♘de2?!

"This discourages exchange sacrifices but it does nothing to further White's own attack," states Mayer of this otherwise solid-looking move.

13... b5 14. ♖xa7?

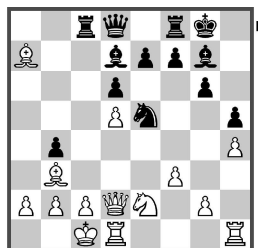


Position after: 14. ♖xa7?

Pawn-grabbing on the queenside opens lines towards his own king. As Mayer correctly points out, "White can rarely win in the Soltis variation with a policy of strict materialism."

That being said, modern engines confirm that White is already short of promising ideas, whereas Black's play will flow easily.

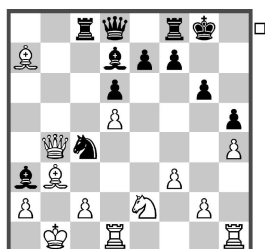
14... b4 15. ♘d5 ♘xd5 16. exd5



Position after: 16. exd5

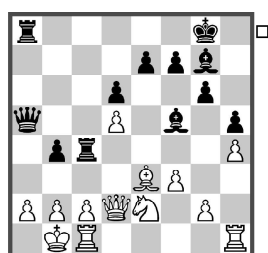
16... ♔a5

Very natural, and not bad, but 16... Nc4! is already close to game over. 17. Qxc4 (17. Wxb4 Qxb2+ 18. Qb1 Qa3! !



Position after: 18... Qa3!

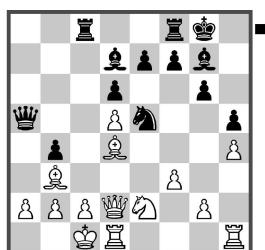
19. We1 Rc7 20. Qd4 Wa8 gives Black a crushing attack. 17... Qxc4 18. Qe3 Wa5 19. Qb1 Qf5 20. Rc1 Ra8



Position after: 20... Ra8

This shows why the capture on a7 was such a highly dubious plan.

17. Qd4

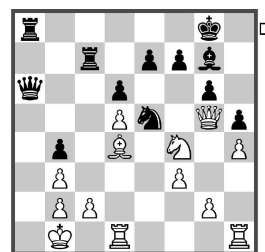


Position after: 17. Qd4

17... Nc4?

If one week in politics is a long time, then one move in the Dragon can be even more important! Now this knight foray isn't best. Instead:

17... Rc7 as indicated later by Miles, retains Black's superiority. The intention is simply to double on the c-file, while the f8-rook is now also free to visit a8. If White continues as in the game 18. Wg5 Wa6 (18... Rfc8) 19. Nf4 Qa4 to remove the main defender of the white castle. 20. Qb1 Qxb3 21. axb3 Ra8



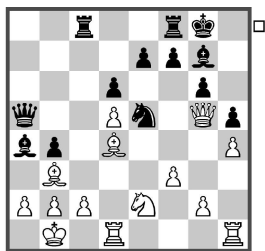
Position after: 21... Ra8

and you can enjoy yourself finding defensive tries and their subsequent demolition.

18. Wg5 Ne5

Black admits his last move was a mistake. It was also possible to play the just-seen 18... Wa6 (18... Rc7 19. Qxg7 Qxg7 20. g4 and White's attack is off-and-running.) 19. Qxg7 Qxg7 20. g4 and now if 20... Na5 21. Nd4)

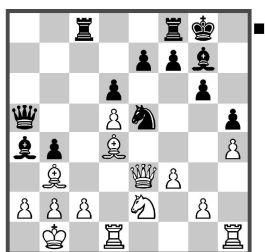
19. Qb1 Qa4



Position after: 19... Qa4

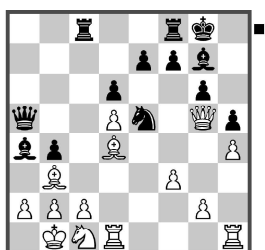
20. Nc1

Pawn-grabbing with 20. Qxe7 looks a little dicey but 20. Qe3 was good:



Position after: 20. Qe3

White intends to recapture on b3 with the queen, keeping queenside lines closed. It is a bit unusual, so unsurprising that it wasn't played – in the Dragon, if anywhere, there are so many thematic ideas that sometimes it's very difficult to start thinking outside the box.



Position after: 20. Nc1

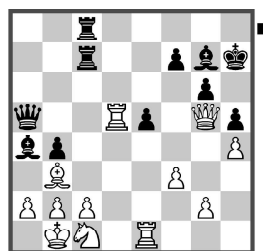
20... Rxc7

Here 20... Qxb3 21. cxb3 (21. Nxb3? allows a good version of 21... Qxd5) 21... Qxd5 22. Qxe5 Qxe5 23. Qxe5 Qxe5 24. Nd3 is close to equal.

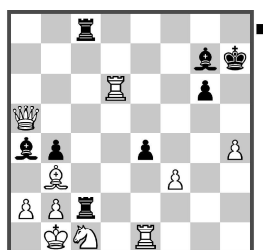
21. Rhe1

The alternative 21. f4 is reasonable but very committal. 21... Ng4 22. Qxg7 Qxg7 23. f5 (23. Rhf1?? f6 which is a thematic queen trap!) 23... Nf2 24. g4! Rf8= (24... Nxf4 25. Rhe1)

21... Rfc8 22. Qxe5 22... dxe5 23. d6 exd6 24. Rxd6 Qh7 25. Rf5??



Instead, 25. g4 Rxc2 26. gxh5 e4 27. hxg6+ fxg6 28. Rf2 just about holds on, although Black is much better. (28. Qxa5??



Position after: 28. Qxa5??

allows 28... ♖xb2+ 29. ♔a1 ♖xb3+ mating.)

25... ♔a8 26. ♜d3

There is no good square for the rook, which is under threat in view of ...♙xb3 (If 26. ♜d2 ♙h6 or 26. ♜dd1 ♜xc2.)

26... e4

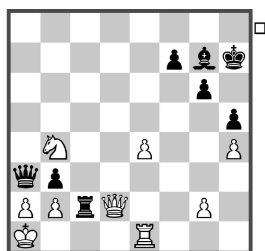
26... ♜xc2 also works immediately.

27. fxe4 ♜xc2! 28. ♙xc2 ♙xc2+ 29. ♔a1 ♙xd3

The alternative 29... ♙xb2+ leads to mate in 9 after 30. ♔xb2 ♙xd3 according to the engines, but the text is the human approach.

30. ♘xd3 b3

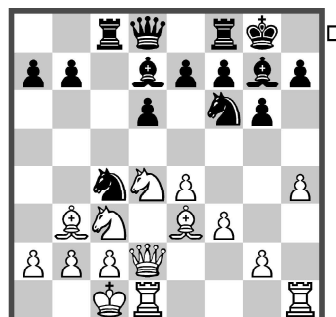
...and White resigned as 31. a3 ♔xa3+ mates while 31. ♘b4 ♔a3 32. ♔d2 ♜c2



Position after: 32... ♜c2

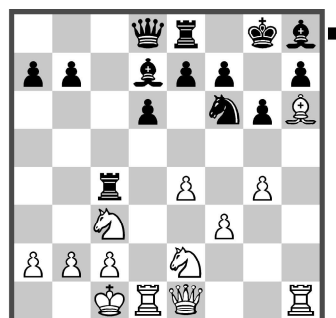
is a sweet finish. (0-1 Haag, E – Miles, A Birmingham 1975.)

Ok, following that lengthy aside, let's get back to **Hartston-Sosonko...**



Position after: 12... ♘c4

13. ♙xc4 ♜xc4 14. h5 ♘xh5 15. g4 ♘f6 16. ♘de2 ♜e8 17. ♙h6 ♙h8 18. ♔e1



Position after: 18. ♔e1

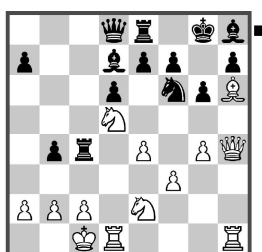
We have just seen the immediate 17. e5 and the delayed 18.e5, but Hartston comes up with something different. It looks like White wants to play in 'Grand Prix Attack'-fashion by quickly bringing the queen to h4 via e1. It's far from clear what her majesty plans to do from there, though, and as we see Black quickly builds counterplay. The queen sometimes uses this square just to

sidestep the d-file, to oppose the d1-rook and Black's d8-queen, but here there appears to be little or no tactical justification behind the manoeuvre.

18... b5! 19. b3

White immediately has second thoughts.

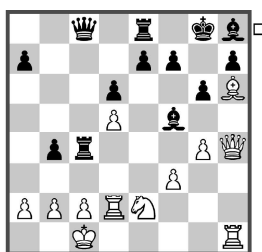
19. ♖h4 b4 20. ♘d5



Position after: 20. ♘d5

This looks good (White wants to remove the f6-knight and target h7) until you see that Black has 20... ♙c8 and strikes first after;

A) 21. ♜d2 ♘xd5 22. exd5 ♙f5!!

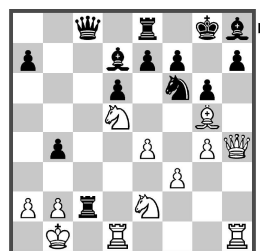


Position after: 22... ♙f5!!

Utilising the pin on the queen and once again confirming that the sharpest lines

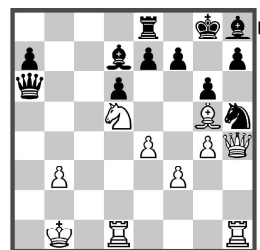
of the Dragon often rely on landing the first big blow. Or;

B) 21. ♙g5 Ignoring Black's threats doesn't work out well: 21... ♜xc2+ 22. ♔b1



Position after: 22. ♔b1

22... ♜xb2+! 23. ♔xb2 ♘xd5+ 24. ♔b1 and now Black can defend with 24... h5 (Or even 24... ♘f6 when 25. ♘f4 b3 26. axb3 ♙a6 27. ♘d5 ♘h5!)



Position after: 27... ♘h5!

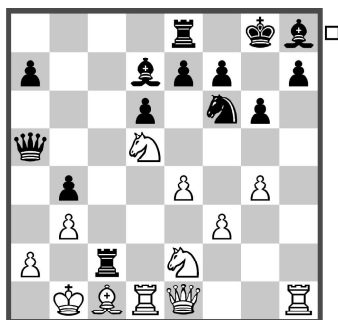
shows Black's counterattacking capabilities.) 25. gxh5 ♘c3+ 26. ♘xc3 ♙xc3 and Black gets there first.

C) 21. c3 bxc3 22. ♘exc3 ♘xd5 23. ♜xd5 ♜xc3+ 24. bxc3 ♙xc3+ 25. ♔d1 ♙xf3+ winning.

19... ♜c8 20. ♔b1 ♙a5 21. ♙c1?

An admission by Hartston that his king-side plan has failed.

21... b4 22. ♖d5 ♜xc2!!



Position after: 22... ♜xc2!!

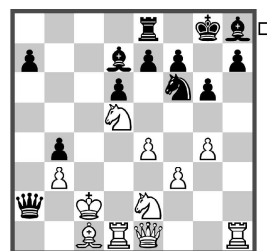
Moves like this show why Sosonko was a feared Dragon specialist. It was only the very best players in the world who could withstand his relentless attacks.

The Hastings Premier tournament itself was saved that year by a last-minute injection of £5000 from football "Pools" (a massively-popular, pre-internet, betting game) tycoon Paul Zetter, who reportedly "dropped in from the Canaries en route to a safari in Africa to attend the final banquet."

After Sosonko's blow in the game, it would take rather more than a philanthropic tycoon to save the day for White here. The king hunt is on...

23. ♞xb4

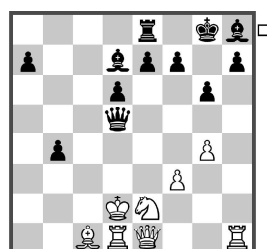
Accepting the rook sac doesn't work:
23. ♔xc2 ♚xa2+



Position after: 23... ♚xa2+

A) 24. ♔d3 ♞xd5 (24... ♜b5+?? allows the king to run with 25. ♔e3) 25. exd5 ♚xb3+

A1) 26. ♔d2 ♚xd5+



Position after: 26... ♚xd5+

Not only are Black's bishops lethal weapons against the wandering white king, but Black already has five pawns for the rook! 27. ♔e3 (The quickest way to end the misery is by 27. ♔c2 ♜a4+ 28. ♔b1 ♚b3+ 29. ♜b2 ♚xb2#) 27... ♚c5+ and again the king is caught in the crossfire.

A2) 26. ♔e4 f5+ 27. ♔f4 ♜e5+ 28. ♔g5 ♚xf3 Heading for the open road was never likely to be any safer and here the king is caught deep in enemy territory with no escape.