

Understanding before Moving 3

Sicilian Structures Part 3 Dragon – Sveshnikov – Four Knights

Herman Grooten

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Symbols used:

!	strong move	±	White has a clear advantage
?	weak move	∓	Black has a clear advantage
!!	brilliant move	+−	White has a decisive advantage
??	blunder	−+	Black has a decisive advantage
!?	interesting move	→	with an attack
?!	dubious move	↑	with the initiative
□	only move	↔	with counterplay
=	equal position	Δ	with the idea of...
∞	unclear position	⌢	better is...
≡	compensation for lost material	N	novelty
±	White is slightly better	#	checkmate
∓	Black is slightly better	+	check

Next to most diagrams you will find a small box. The colour of the box indicates which side is to move in that position.

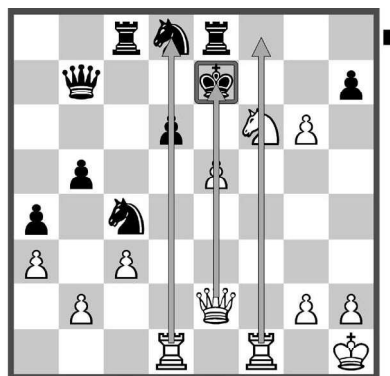
Bibliography

The Hyper Accelerated Dragon	– Panjwani
NIC Yearbook	– Kasparov
The Dragon Sicilian (Chessable Course)	– Giri
Chess Strategy for Clubplayers	– Grooten
Megadatabase	– Chessbase

Explanation of visual aids

In this book we will regularly make use of various types of visual aids. As a chess coach I have observed the impact that these can have on students' understanding.

This means that my diagrams will feature arrows (to indicate the specific manoeuvres that one or both sides would like to execute) as well as highlighted squares or pieces which are the ones being targeted in a more general sense.



Since this book – in contrast to the (Dutch-language) first volume – is not printed in colour, it fell to our software developer Hub van de Laar to nevertheless find ways to illustrate the visual aids in the book so that the positions can be understood at a glance. In the diagram above we can immediately see what White threatens, as well as the weapons that are still in his arsenal. The position comes from a variation in a great attacking game, Karpov – Martin Gonzalez, Las Palmas 1977.

We will not be using letters to denote chess pieces (as these might not be familiar to non-native English speakers) but rather the 'figurine' symbols, as follows:

Chess piece	Letter	Figurine
King	K	
Queen	Q	
Rook	R	
Bishop	B	
Knight	N	
Pawn	–	–

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Foreword

You are holding the long-awaited final volume of my trilogy on the Open Sicilian. This book has been a while in the making—not only because of the demanding work involved, but also due to a time-consuming relocation on my part.

The first volume explored the Najdorf and Scheveningen variations, while the second focused on the Taimanov, Kan, and Richter-Rauzer. In these pages, I complete the series with five further systems: the Dragon, Accelerated Dragon, Sveshnikov, Kalashnikov, and Four Knights.

Each of these openings has already been covered extensively in the literature. For that reason, my aim here—as in the earlier volumes—is not to overwhelm you with endless theoretical detail. Inevitably, we will touch on some theory, but the real focus is on broader concepts and strategic themes: the interplay between structure and strategy, and the plans available to both sides. Some systems share similar ideas—the Dragon with its Accelerated cousin, or the Sveshnikov with the Kalashnikov—but each deserves its own treatment, because even closely related openings have their unique traits.

The structure of each chapter is as follows: an introduction to the key ideas and concepts for both White and Black, followed by a theoretical overview where many of those concepts resurface in concrete form. This is then illustrated with carefully chosen model games, most drawn from high-level practice. Some of these games come from my personal archive and date back decades, though I have updated all commentary where necessary. Others are much more recent and were annotated from scratch. With the rise of online rapid and blitz, even the faster games of today are of remarkably high quality—thanks, in no small part, to the increasing role of powerful chess engines in players' preparation.

When I began working on this book, Stockfish 14 was the leading engine, marking a breakthrough by combining classical methods with AI-driven evaluation. Soon after, Stockfish 15 raised the bar even further. I recall writing on the Dutch website

schaaksite.nl about a puzzle (*see diagram below*) that machines supposedly couldn't solve—only to be corrected almost immediately by a reader pointing out that Stockfish 15.1 had cracked it with ease. Since then, Stockfish 17 and its successors have continued to refine our understanding of the game.

A few personal notes are also in order. In January 2023 I contracted COVID-19, which unfortunately developed into long COVID. The illness affected both my energy and my cognition, and for a long time it seemed impossible to complete this project. Now, in 2025, I am grateful to say I have made a almost full recovery and was finally able to bring this book to completion. As part of that process, I revisited all my earlier analysis with the latest engines to ensure accuracy. While this required many adjustments, I believe it has only strengthened the final result.

Of course, no work can claim to be definitive. Future discoveries may well challenge or refine the conclusions presented here. If you do spot errors, I ask for your understanding—remember, this book is not meant to be a pure theoretical manual. My aim is to give you a *practical, human understanding* of each variation. After all, when you sit at the board—whether over-the-board or online—neither you nor your opponent will have Stockfish whispering evaluations in your ear.

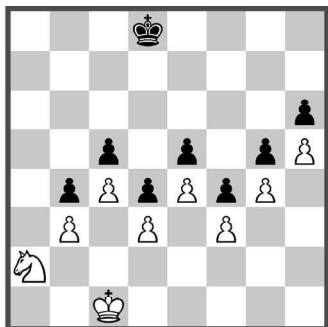
Finally, I owe my thanks to those who made this work possible:

- ♙ GM Daniel Fernandez, for his involvement in both the content and the translation
- ♙ Jos Sutmuller, for editing all the photo material
- ♙ Daniël Vanheirzeele, the great Dragon specialist, for his technical and logistical input, as well as his help with corrections.

I hope that the insights and examples collected here will enrich your understanding and inspire your play in the Open Sicilian.

IM Herman Grooten
Waalre, October 2025

Puzzle



The diagram us a position where White (to move) with a knight up has to find a way in this closed position to break through the black barrier.

Solution:

To outline the winning process in the previous diagram: bear in mind that getting the knight to f5 would win immediately. Send the knight to a4 via c1-e2-g1-h3-f2-d1-b2-a4 and wait for Black to allow ♖b6-d5. Black has to guard the e7-square (and also the f6-square to avoid ♖f6-g8.) With Black's king on f7 or e6 the path will be clear for ♖c7-b5-a3!, this last phase requiring White's king to be on b2/a2. If Black takes, the pawn ending is winning. Otherwise, ♖c2-e1-g2-h4 (with the king giving support on h3) repeats the offer of a lost pawn ending, except Black must now take on pain of ♖f5.

Link to the two articles about this subject:

- <https://schaaksite.nl/2023/01/02/bent-u-slimmer-dan-stockfish/>
- <https://schaaksite.nl/2023/01/08/bent-u-slimmer-dan-stockfish-oplossing/>



The Dragon

Part 1 – Ideas & Concepts

§ 1.1 Introduction

The Dragon is one of the most beautiful Sicilian variations. As the name might indicate, it's also one of the most dangerous for White. At an early stage Black stations the king's bishop on the long diagonal, from where it can catalyse any number of thematic tactical twists, earning it's name of "*Dragon bishop*". Especially in cases where White chooses queenside castling and Black castles kingside, a razor-sharp battle ensues with no room for error. Because Black has already pushed **5...g6**, these opposite-side castling positions give the first player the opportunity to utilise the 'hook' on the kingside with **h2-h4-h5**.

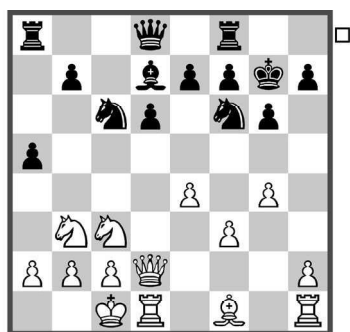
At the cost of a pawn or even sometimes an exchange, White can open lines towards the Black king. But of course Black will not be idly waiting for this to happen. Instead, Black's domain of activity lies on the queenside, where the half-open c-file plays an important role in the evolution of their counter-chances. Black players also have opportunities for sacrificial strikes such as ...♖xc3, or sometimes ...♘xe4 (perhaps preceded by ...♙xg4.) A pawn storm with ...b7-b5 and/or ...a7-a5 can also be launched. All in all, a fascinating fight is in prospect.

§ 1.2 Ideas & Concepts for White



*Attack with
h4-h5 and ♖xh5*

1. e4 c5 2. ♘c3 ♘c6 3. ♘ge2 d6 4. d4
cxd4 5. ♘xd4 g6 6. ♙e3 ♙g7 7. ♚d2
♘f6 8. f3 0-0 9. 0-0-0 ♙d7 10. g4 ♚a5
11. ♘b3 ♚d8 12. ♙h6 a5 13. ♙xg7
♚xg7



Position after: 13... ♚xg7

Already at the moment when Black chose 5...g6, it was apt to realise that White might at some moment use that pawn as a 'hook' for a future pawn storm. With the dark-squared bishops now traded, that's exactly what White does, as follows:

14. h4 a4 15. ♘d4 a3 16. b3 ♖c8 17.
♘xc6 ♖xc6 18. ♘d5 ♙e6



Position after: 18... ♙e6

19. h5!

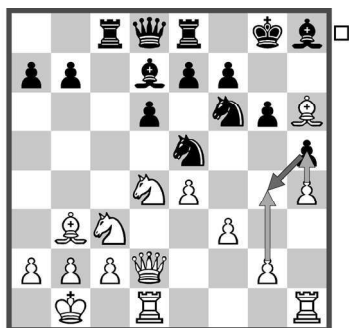
With the h-file unable to be kept closed and therefore White's attack likely being unstoppable, Black resigned. Let's look at a couple of the possible continuations. **1-0**

19. h5! ♙xd5 [The position after 19... ♙xd5 20. h6+ ♙f8 21. g5 ♘e8 22. ♚d4 ♖g8 is also hopeless because of 23. f4 and Black's complete loss of piece coordination decides the game.] 20. exd5 ♖c5 21. hxc6 fxc6 22. ♚h6+ ♙g8 [Marginally more tenacious than 22... ♙f7 23. b4 ♖c8 24. g5 ♘h5 25. ♚xh7+-] 23. ♙d3 ♖f7 24. g5 ♘xd5 25. ♙xg6 Black's defences are collapsing.

(see game Rodriguez, Vila-Dao, Thien Hai, Calvia ol (Men) 2004.)

Break with g4 hxg4, h5

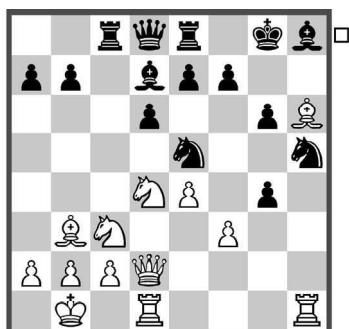
1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4
 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 g6 6. ♙e3 ♙g7 7. f3 0-0 8.
 ♚d2 ♘c6 9. ♙c4 ♙d7 10. 0-0-0 ♖c8
 11. ♙b3 ♘e5 12. ♙b1! ♖e8 13. h4 h5
 14. ♙h6 ♙h8



Position after: 14... ♙h8

Sometimes a bit of force can be required to break open the enemy kingside. To this end White may be able to avail of the following double pawn sacrifice:

15. g4! hxg4 16. h5! ♘xh5



Position after: 16... ♘xh5

Neither does 16... gxh5 17. ♚g5+ ♙h7 18. ♖xh5+— pose any serious resistance.

17. ♖xh5!

As they say: “Wer A sagt, muss auch B sagen”.

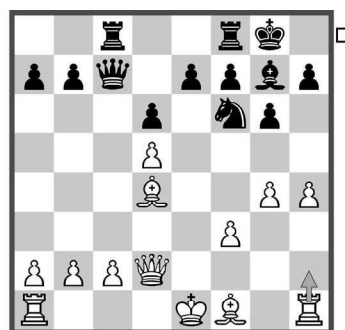
17... gxh5 18. ♚g5+ ♙h7 19. ♚xh5+—

And mate follows soon.

(see game Timofeev, Artyom-Azarov, Sergei, Moscow Aeroflot op-A 2007.)

Multi-functional: ♖h2!

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. g4 ♘xd4 10. ♙xd4 ♙e6
 11. ♘d5! ♙xd5 12. exd5 ♚c7 13. h4
 ♖ac8



Position after: 13... ♖ac8

Here we see a typical idea which can be useful to White in some middlegames:

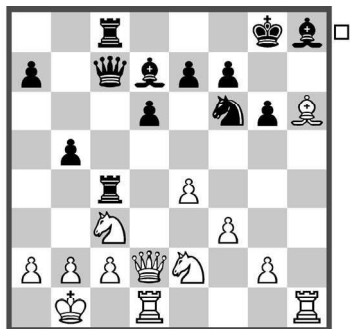
14. ♖h2!

A dual-purpose move. Firstly, the second rank (including the c2-pawn) is reinforced, and secondly, the h1-square is vacated for a possible future doubling of White's rooks.

(see game Grischuk, Alexander-Nakamura, Hikaru, Moscow Tal Memorial 7th 2012.)

 Clearing h-file with ♖f8

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♗f6 5. ♘c3 g6 6. ♙e3 ♙g7 7. f3 0-0 8. ♖d2 ♗c6 9. ♙c4 ♙d7 10. h4 ♖c8 11. ♙b3 ♗e5 12. 0-0-0 ♘c4 13. ♙xc4 ♖xc4 14. ♙b1 ♖c7 15. ♗de2 ♖c8 16. ♙h6 ♙h8 17. h5 b5 18. hxg6 hxg6



Position after: 18... hxg6

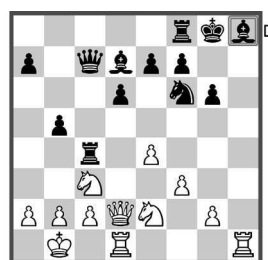
Sometimes with the h-file already open it is still necessary to use some imagination to crash through. For instance, consider the following formidable sacrifice:

19. ♙f8!!

An unbelievable line clearance that wins on the spot.

19... ♖d8

After 19... ♙xf8 20. ♖xh8+ ♙g7 21. ♖h6# wins; 19... ♖xf8 will be met by:



Analysis after: 19... ♖xf8

20. ♖xh8+! This sacrifice was of course implied by the previous one. Black's h8-bishop is the most important defender of the kingside and so needs to be eliminated. White additionally obtains the ability to swing the queen in with check. 20... ♙xh8 21. ♖h6+ ♙g8 [21... ♗h7 22. ♖h1+–] 22. ♖h1 ♗h5 23. ♗d5 ♖d8 24. ♗ef4!+– Here too, if the h5-knight can be liquidated, Black swiftly gets mated. There is indeed nothing left for them to do about this.

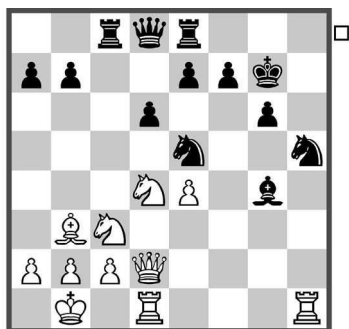
20. ♖xh8+

20. ♖xh8+! ♙xh8 21. ♖h6+ ♗h7 22. ♖g7#.

(see game Lovric, Marko-Milosavljevic, Jovan, Solin op 2007.)

(Pseudo-)sacrifice ♖d4-f5

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. 0-0-0 ♖c8
 11. ♙b3 ♘e5 12. h4 h5 13. ♚b1 ♖e8
 14. g4 hxg4 15. h5 ♘xh5 16. ♙h6 ♘h7
 17. ♙xg7 ♚xg7 18. fxg4 ♙xg4



Position after: 18... ♙xg4

Both players often have to calculate the following standard continuation:

19. ♘f5+!

A knight pseudo-sacrifice that further opens the lines around Black's king and trades off one of their most valuable defenders.

19... ♙xf5

Forced. Note that 19... gxf5 20. ♚g5+ ♘g6 21. exf5 loses immediately.

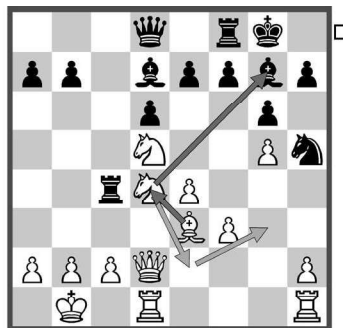
20. exf5 ♖h8 21. fxg6±

The more pawns around Black's king can be traded, the more vulnerable they become. White has a large advantage.

(see game Radjabov, Teimour-Kasimdzhanov, Rustam, Elista FIDE GP 2008.)

Rerouting 17. ♘e2! with ideas ♘g3 & ♙e3-d4

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. 0-0-0 ♘e5
 11. ♙b3 ♖c8 12. ♚b1 ♘c4 13. ♙xc4
 ♖xc4 14. g4 ♚c7 15. g5 ♘h5 16. ♘d5
 ♚d8



Position after: 16... ♚d8

In some positions White plays an early g4-g5, which does however empower Black to plug the h-file shut with ...♘f6-h5. In this case, there might follow an interesting method of challenging this knight:

17. ♘e2!

White hereby prepares ♖g3 to pose the question to Black's h5-knight. In case Black takes ...♗xg3, then after hxg3 White has achieved an important goal: the opening of the h-file. Meanwhile, if Black allows ♖xh5 and then recaptures ...gxh5, White can try and win the pawn with ♗f4xh5 while simultaneously solving unrest in Black's camp. Another feature of 17.♗e2! is that White vacates the d4-square for a future bishop move there, to exchange off Black's strong Dragon bishop.

(see game Erenburg, Sergey-Mikhalevski, Victor, Ashdod op 2004.)

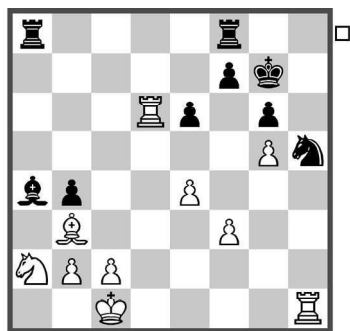
If White's attack doesn't crash through, there's sometimes the backup possibility of entering an endgame with a race between opposing majorities on different sides. Here White shows a great understanding of the situation that has arisen. With **24. ♖c4!** Jakovenko declines to trade (on b3) the bishop which would likely come in very handy in the coming pawn race. If White manages to take the pawn on b4 (possibly even at the cost of the one on g5) their two connected passers will start to advance swiftly.

(see game Jakovenko, Dmitrij-Radjabov, Teimour, Nanjing 2009.)



Pawnrace

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. 0-0-0 ♖c8 11. ♖b3 ♗xd4 12. ♖xd4 b5 13. h4 e6N 14. a3! a5 15. h5 ♗e7 16. hxg6 hxg6 17. g4! b4 18. axb4 axb4 19. ♗a2 ♖a8 20. g5 ♗h5 21. ♖xg7 ♖xg7 22. ♗xd6 ♗xd6 23. ♖xd6 ♖a4

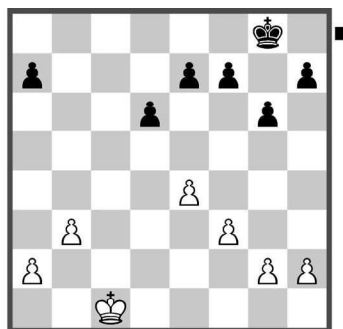


Position after: 23... ♖a4



Pawn endgame

1. e4 c5 2. ♖f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♗xd4 ♗f6 5. ♗c3 g6 6. ♖e3 ♖g7 7. f3 0-0 8. ♗d2 ♗c6 9. ♖c4 ♗xd4 10. ♖xd4 ♖e6 11. ♖b3 ♗a5 12. 0-0-0 ♖fc8 13. ♖b1 b5 14. ♖he1 ♖xb3 15. cxb3 b4 16. ♖xf6 bxc3 17. ♖xc3 ♖xc3 18. bxc3 ♖xc3 19. ♖e3 ♖ac8 20. ♖xc3 ♗xc3 21. ♗xc3 ♖xc3 22. ♖c1 ♖xc1+ 23. ♖xc1



Position after: 23. ♖xc1

For a while this variation was in fashion, where play has telescoped remarkably quickly into a pawn ending. My countrymen, GM Karel van der Weide and IM Jeroen Bosch analysed the ending extensively (at the time there were no engines), reaching the conclusion that Black must tread a narrow tightrope to a draw, starting with **23... ♔f8**.

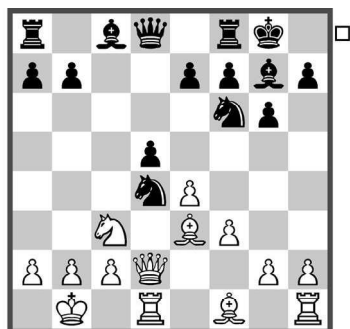
(see game Kosintseva, Tatiana-Cmilyte, Viktorija, Geneve FIDE GP 2013.)



Intermediate move

10... ♖xd4, 11. e4-e5!?

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. 0-0-0 d5 10. ♔b1 ♖xd4



Position after: 10... ♖xd4

At first sight the trade on d4 appears to alleviate all of Black's problems, but White can avail here of a rather shocking intermezzo that might give Black some headaches, i.e.



Konstantin Landa (1972 – 2202)
 (Photo by Harry Gielen)

11. e5!?

It is useful to remember that chess is not checkers (you are not forced to capture pieces) and this move makes Black's task as difficult as possible. After 11. ♕xd4? dxe4 Black's position is comfortable.

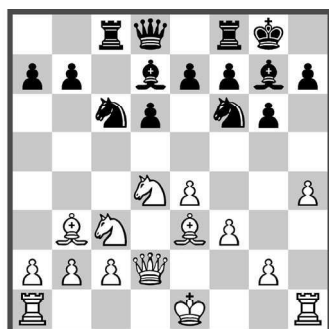
(see game Landa, Konstantin – Tolnai, Tibor, Balatonbereny GM 1995.)

§ 1.3 Ideas & concepts for Black



Response with ...h7-h5

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. ♙b3 ♖c8 11. h4



Position after: 11. h4

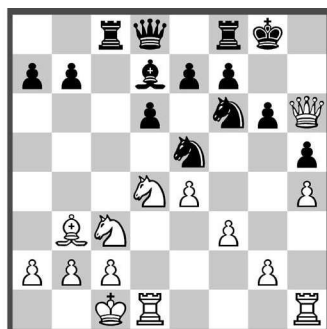
In view of how quickly White's kingside initiative can progress, Black has discovered that one of the best possible courses of action is to halt the opposing h-pawn in its tracks with **11... h5**, a very popular choice that keeps the kingside lines closed for as long as possible. White's rather craven approach of g4, (...hxg4) and then h5, trying to crash through on the h-file anyway, is very often doomed to failure. Practically speaking White more often chooses a central setup with 0-0-0, ♙g5, ♖he1, and f4.

(see game Radjabov, Teimour – Carlsen, Magnus, Baku FIDE GP 2008.)



Exchange Sacrifice ...♖xc3

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♗f6 5. ♘c3 g6 6. ♙e3 ♙g7 7. f3 0-0 8. ♚d2 ♘c6 9. ♙c4 ♙d7 10. 0-0-0 ♗e5 11. ♙b3 ♖c8 12. h4 h5 13. ♙h6 ♙xh6 14. ♚xh6



Position after: 14. ♚xh6

In many Sicilian scenarios it makes sense for Black to not shrink from an exchange sacrifice on c3:

14... ♖xc3!? 15. bxc3

The consequences of this transaction are clear:

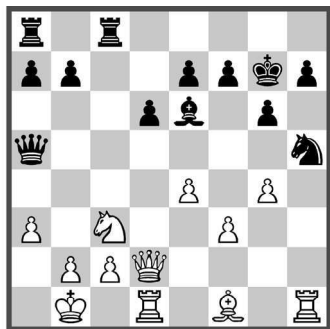
- White's pawn structure on the queenside is fractured and their king position weakened as a result;
- Black can develop play along the half-open c-file while White's major pieces lack open files;
- Black's piece play (in particular the minor pieces) is excellent, and they

can also start playing with potentially disruptive ideas such as ...a7-a5-a4.

(see Kotronias, Vasilios – Anagnostopoulos, Dimitrios, Karditsa 1996.)

Exchange Sacrifice ... ♖xc3

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. 0-0-0 ♘xd4 10. ♙xd4 ♙e6 11. ♙b1 ♚c7 12. h4 ♖fc8 13. h5 ♚a5 14. a3 ♘xh5 15. ♙xg7 ♙xg7 16. g4



Position after: 16. g4

The position looks precarious for Black, but they can once again avail of an exchange sacrifice, even one that leads into an ending.

16... ♖xc3!!

Without this exchange sacrifice Black would likely be going down, but now they develop excellent positional compensation.

17. ♚xc3+

Keeping the queens on the board with 17. bxc3 ♚xa3 18. c4 fails if Black acts with the necessary urgency: 18... b5! ♖ and Black has (more than) sufficient compensation.

17... ♚xc3 18. bxc3 ♘f4

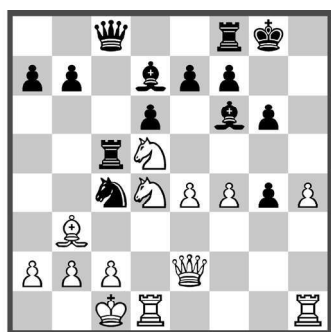
Black's compensation is multifaceted and leads to a practically very pleasant game for them (even as White retains objective equality):

- A beautifully placed knight on a dark squared outpost to counter White's awful-looking bishop on f1
- The half-open c-file for the remaining rook, while White's rooks remain passive
- The ability to create a passed h-pawn starting with ...h7-h5.

(see game Kummerow, Heiko-Sievers, Stefan, Bundesliga 96/97.)

Exchange Sacrifice ... ♖xd5

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 h5 12. 0-0-0 ♘e5 13. ♙g5 ♖c5 14. g4 hxg4 15. f4 ♘c4 16. ♚e2 ♚c8!? 17. ♙xf6 ♙xf6 18. ♘d5?



Position after: 18. Nxd5?

Black has no qualms about removing the strong knight from the board:

18... Rxd5!

Black maintains the "Dragon bishop" while liquidating a strong piece of White's.

19. exd5 b5

In this way Black stabilises their knight on c4 and prepares for the advance of the other queenside pawn. With ...a7-a5-a4 Black can put pressure on White's b3-bishop Bb3 and practically force its trade on c4 for the black knight. That would then open the b-file for further operations by Black. In the meantime we see that Black barely faces any difficulties on the kingside: the response to h4-h5 by White will be simply ...g6-g5, keeping both the h- and g- files closed.

(see game Ivanchuk, Vassily-Topalov, Veselin, Belgrade Investbank 1995.)

Exchange Sacrifice ... Qe6

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 g6 6. Qe3 Qg7 7. f3 0-0 8. Qd2 Nc6 9. 0-0-0 d5 10. exd5 Nxd5 11. Nxc6 bxc6 12. Qd4 e5 13. Qc5 Qe6



Position after: 13... Qe6

One of the important theoretical lines of the Dragon, where Black doesn't hold back from sacrificing an exchange.

14. Ne4

White mostly declines this sacrifice, and rightly so.

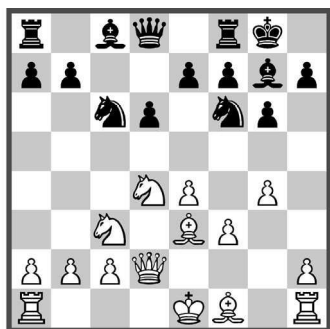
The acceptance with 14. Qxf8? is quite bad for White, due to the threat of ...Qh6 (and other motifs generated by the Dragon bishop) coupled with the chances on the b-file. For instance: 14... Qxf8 15. Qb1 [Following 15. Nxd5 cxd5 16. Qa5 Black takes over the initiative with 16... e4!±, a typical pawn move which brings to life the g7-bishop.] Now comes 15... e4!, opening the long diagonal by any means necessary,

and something like 16. ♖xe4 ♜b8 17. c3 f5 is already very depressing for White.

(see game Shirov, Alexei–Polzin, Rainer, Bundesliga 0506 2006.)

 *Sac. ... ♗xg4, fxg4, ♖xg4*

1. e4 c5 2. ♖f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♖xd4 ♗f6 5. ♗c3 g6 6. ♗e3 ♗g7 7. f3 0-0 8. ♔d2 ♖c6 9. g4



Position after: 9. g4

This advance primarily intends to restrain Black from playing ...d6-d5, but White does have to first take account of the rather adventurous possible piece sacrifice Black can play in reply:

9... ♗xg4?!

Plenty of strong players have taken this for a spin, although with the most modern engines we can see that it's not especially sound.

10. fxg4

Just as in the main variation, 10. ♖xc6 can be played, and in fact transposes. 10... bxc6 11. fxg4 ♖xg4 12. ♗f4!

10... ♖xg4 11. ♖xc6 bxc6 12. ♗f4!

Now Black's compensation is insufficient.

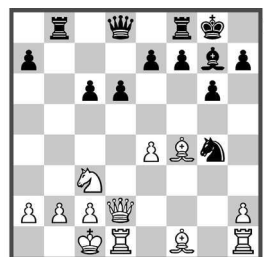
After a move like 12. ♗g1?! Black would get enough compensation, starting with 12... ♜b8! which forces White to calculate possibilities like ...♗h6, or ...e6 followed by ...♔h4.

12... ♜b8

It's important that White can now continue as follows:

13. ♗e2!+–

But not 13. 0-0-0??



Analysis after: 13. 0-0-0??

because of 13... ♜xb2!! 14. ♔xb2 ♗b6+ 15. ♔c1 ♗b4!+–

(see game Efimenko, Zahar – Forster, Richard, EU-chT (Men) 18th 2011.)



Idea ... ♖xd4, ... ♗e6

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



Position after: 9. ♗c4

In such positions Black has numerous possibilities, one of which is the following:

9... ♖xd4 10. ♗xd4 ♗e6!?

By offering a trade in this way, the power of White's bishop along the a2-g8 diagonal is nullified.

11. ♗xe6 fxe6

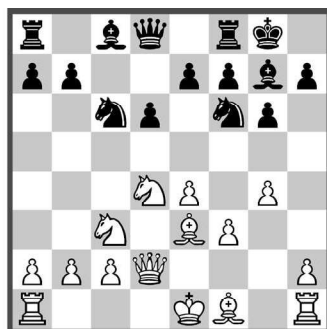
The justification behind accepting this pair of doubled pawns is that the front one (on e6) controls the d5-square. Also, the f-file has been opened and defensive possibilities such as ... ♖f8-f7 have been gained.

(see game *Giri, Anish – Nakamura, Hikaru, Tata Steel-A 74th 2012.*)



Idea ... ♖xd4, ... ♗e6

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. g4



Position after: 9. g4

Rather remarkably, here Black can offer a similar trade:

9... ♗e6!?

Black willingly exchanges off their own bishop pair and accepts a pair of doubled e-pawns.

10. ♖xe6 fxe6



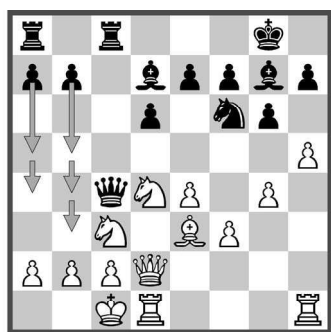
Position after: 10... fxe6

At the same time Black also accepts a third 'pawn island', which according to the dogma doesn't bode well. But in return they have a half-open f-file leading to White's weakened f3-pawn as a target, as well as removing any possibility that White might play $\text{N}d5$ due to the e6-pawn controlling that square. Practice has shown that Black's position here is extremely resilient.

(see Laveryd, Peter – Fedorov, Alexei, Katrineholm 1999.)

Flankattack ...b5 & ...a5

1. e4 c5 2. $\text{N}f3$ d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. $\text{N}xd4$ $\text{N}f6$ 5. $\text{N}c3$ g6 6. $\text{Q}e3$ $\text{Q}g7$ 7. f3 $\text{N}c6$ 8. $\text{K}d2$ 0-0 9. $\text{Q}c4$ $\text{Q}d7$ 10. $\text{Q}b3$ $\text{N}a5$ 11. h4 $\text{K}c7$ 12. h5 $\text{N}c4$ 13. $\text{Q}xc4$ $\text{K}xc4$ 14. 0-0-0 $\text{R}fc8$ 15. g4



Position after: 15. g4

A typical position for the Dragon. Both players have committed to offensive actions on the respective flanks where the

enemy kings are located. But here we see an important difference in the pawn cover of each king: the fianchetto structure on Black's kingside means that White can often push h2-h4-h5 to pressurise the g6-pawn, as indeed has already happened here. Then, with h5xg6 next, White will be able to open a file faster than their adversary. But that doesn't mean Black is helpless: as we see in this example, the counterattack plan of ...b7-b5-b4, ... a7-a5-a4 followed by ...b4-b3 has a way of taking shape rather fast and, supported by the 'dark-squared monster' on g7, Black's attack can hit with surprising force.

15... b5

Black is not without counterchances. There is no obligation to 'sit tight', but rather from now on we see them launch an attack as fast as possible on the queenside. Here the useful 'bayonet thrust' of ... b7-b5 initiates that and creates a threat of ...b5-b4 (followed by ... $\text{K}c4$ xa2) to which White must react.

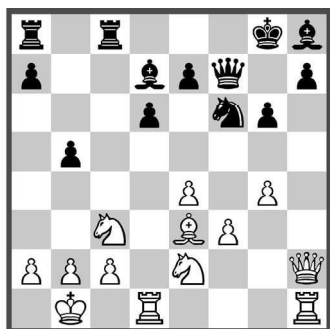
16. hxg6 fxg6 17. $\text{K}h2$ $\text{K}f7$

The price associated with pushing through 17... b4? immediately is too high, as after 18. $\text{N}d5$! White's initiative crashes through immediately.

18. $\text{Q}b1$

Now 18. $\text{N}d5$ could be met by 18... $\text{Q}h8$.

18... ♖h8 19. ♘de2

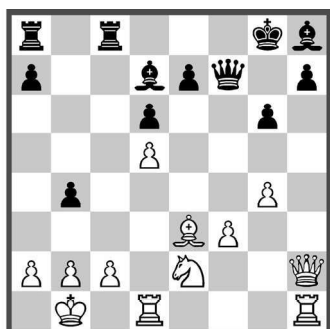


Position after: 19. ♘de2

19... b4

Black tries to give the counterplay concrete form.

20. ♘d5 ♘xd5 21. exd5

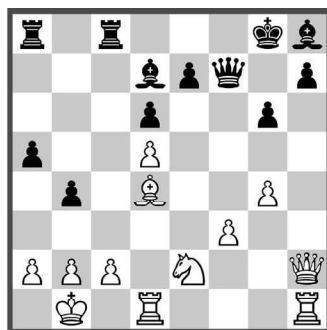


Position after: 21. exd5

21... a5 22. ♖d4

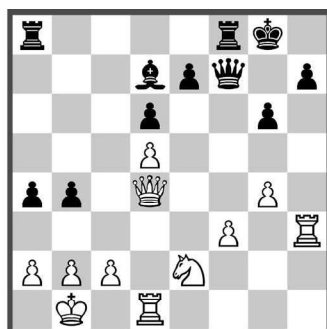
(see diagram next column)

White has been successful in neutralising the Dragon bishop, but in the meantime Black's queenside pawn storm has been inexorably gathering steam.



Position after: 22. ♖d4

22... a4 23. ♖xh8 ♖xh8 24. ♖f4 ♖f8
25. ♖d4+ ♖g8 26. ♖h3



Position after: 26. ♖h3

26... b3!

Finally the pawn storm, so long in the making, has its moment of confrontation with the pawn wall around White's king.

27. ♖dh1 bxc2+ 28. ♖xc2 h5!

It is instructive how Black resists White's kingside attack.

29. ♖g3 a3

This pawn move is another piece of the puzzle.

30. b3

30. gxh5 ♕f5+ 31. ♔d2 axb2→.

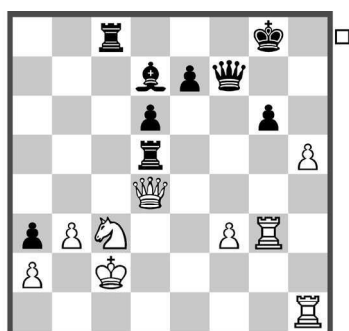
30... ♖fc8+ 31. ♘c3

Now 31. ♔b1?! would lead White into great difficulties after 31... ♖a5! 32. ♘f4 ♖ac5→ when Black starts to take control.

31... ♖a5 32. gxh5

Here 32. ♔d2? fails to the strong 32... ♖xc3!→ when Black triumphs.

32... ♖xd5



Position after: 32... ♖xd5

It looks like White is getting 'rolled', as the kids would say, but there is an unexpected defence available which gets him out of jail. 32... ♕f5+ would be erroneous due to 33. ♔d2! and the Black attack stalls.



Dimitrij Jakovenko (Photo by Harry Gielen)

33. ♕h8+!

A surprising little trick which assures White a draw by repetition.

33... ♔xh8 34. hxg6+ ♔g8 35. gxf7+ ♔xf7 36. ♖h7+ ♔f6 37. ♖h6+ ♔f7

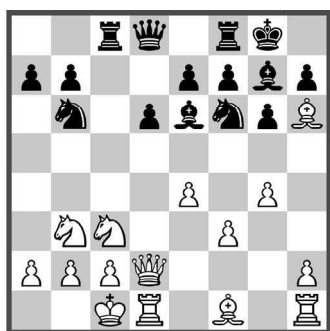
After 37... ♔f5 38. ♖g8! White also saves themselves.

38. ♖h7+ ♔f6 39. ♖h6+ ½-½

(see game Jakovenko, Dimitrij – Jianu, Vlad Cristian, EU-ch 8th 2007.)

Exchange Sacrifice ... ♖h8

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♗f6 5. ♘c3 g6 6. ♙e3 ♙g7 7. f3 0-0 8. ♗b3 ♙e6 9. ♚d2 ♗bd7 10. 0-0-0 ♗b6 11. g4 ♖c8 12. ♙h6



Position after: 12. ♙h6

This position is well known in the chess literature, partly because of what Simagin chose to do here.

12... ♙h8!?

A phenomenal, shocking exchange sacrifice certain to warm the hearts of all Dragon fans. The eponymous bishop is held in such high regard that even an exchange is not too high a price for Simagin to pay to keep it. Nevertheless, a different exchange sacrifice has since been shown to be superior: 12... ♙xh6! 13. ♚xh6 ♖xc3! 14. bxc3 ♚c7 with the threat of ... ♚xc3, and possibly followed by ... ♗a4. Objectively speaking White should be able to refute this sacrifice by accepting it:

13. ♙xf8 ♚xf8 14. ♗d4 ♙c4

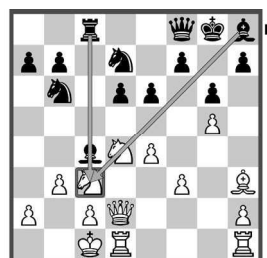
and while everything appears to be going well for Black, actually the opposite is true.

15. g5?!

The engine suggests 15. b3!, a move which would barely cross the minds of most humans because it weakens the c-file as well as the long diagonal. Nobody in their right minds would weaken the dark squares here (especially not the ones around White's king) while the bishop on h8 lives. And yet, the engine (unconstrained by these human dogmata) spits out the line 15... ♙xf1 16. ♖hxf1 ♗fd7 17. f4 when Black is unable to generate counterplay of sufficient value. Importantly, the knight on b6 is somewhat dominated by the pawn on b3 (!) and this factor is of greater weight than the above general considerations.

15... ♗fd7 16. ♙h3 e6 17. ♚b1

Now 17. b3?!



Analysis after: 17. b3?!

would be bad due to 17... d5!∞

Instead **17. f4!±** is much stronger.

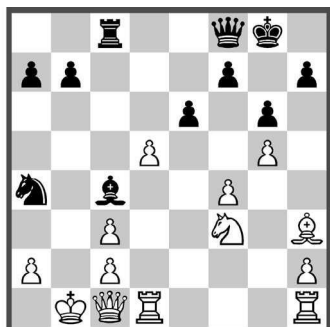
17... ♖e5 18. f4 ♜f3!? 19. ♜xf3 ♙xc3

Noteworthy.

20. bxc3?!

White still could have kept some advantage in the line **20. ♖xd6!? ♙e2 21. ♖xf8+ ♜xf8 22. ♙g2 ♙xd1 23. ♖xd1**, although Black can counter with **23... ♜a4!** and continues fighting.

20... d5 21. ♖c1 ♜a4 22. exd5?



Position after: 22. exd5?

22... ♙xa2+!!→

Beautifully played by Simagin.

23. ♙a1 ♖c5?

A significant inaccuracy.

The win would have been guaranteed by **23... ♜xc3!**

24. dxe6 ♜xc3 25. ♖d4?

After this blunder, Black finishes things off quickly.

With **25. e7!** White could still have saved the game.

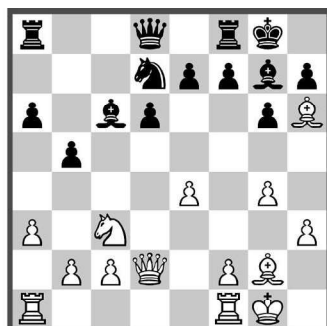
25... ♙xe6 26. ♙xe6 fxe6→ 27. ♖a4 ♜xa4 28. c4 ♖d8 29. ♙a2 ♜b4 30. ♖e1 ♖d3 31. ♖xe6 ♜c3+ 32. ♙a1 ♜a5+ 33. ♖a3 ♜xa3#

0-1

(see game Panov, Vasily – Simagin, Vladimir Pavlovich, Moskou -ch23 1943.)

Exchange Sacrifice ... ♙h8

1. e4 c5 2. ♜f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♜xd4 ♜f6 5. ♜c3 a6 6. h3 g6 7. ♙e3 ♙g7 8. g4 b5 9. ♙g2 ♙b7 10. 0-0 ♜fd7 11. a3 0-0 12. ♖d2 ♜c6 13. ♜xc6 ♙xc6 14. ♙h6



Position after: 14. ♙h6

14... ♗h8!?

That the diehard Dragon aficionados do not lightly part with this bishop has already been noted often, not least in the previous example. But engines do not give this brave exchange sacrifice their stamp of approval either.

15. ♖ae1

After 15. ♗xf8 ♔xf8 16. f4 White's position is objectively better, whatever that means in a practical (blitz!) game. For instance Black can play 16... ♖b6+ 17. ♔h1 ♖c8 with coherent plans of counterplay on the queenside, supported by the mighty Dragon bishop on h8.

15... ♖e8 16. f4 ♖c8 17. ♘d1 ♘c5 18. c3 a5 19. ♔h1 b4 20. axb4 axb4 21. cxb4 ♘b3 22. ♖f2 ♗b5 23. ♖g1 ♘c1 24. ♖d2 ♖b6 25. ♘c3 ♘d3 26. ♘d5 ♖d4 27. ♖e2 ♘xb4 28. ♖f2 ♘d3 29. ♖f3 ♘xb2 30. ♖xd4 ♗xd4 31. ♖b1 e6 32. ♘b4 ♘c4 33. f5 exf5 34. exf5 ♘e5 35. ♖a3 ♗c4 36. ♘d5 ♘d3 37. fxg6 hxg6 38. ♖b7 ♖e1+ 39. ♔h2 ♗e5+

0-1

(see game Nestorovic, Nikola – Andreikin, Dmitry, Titled Tuesday 2015.)

§ 1.4 Overview variations in the Dragon

The most common way of reaching the Dragon is as follows:

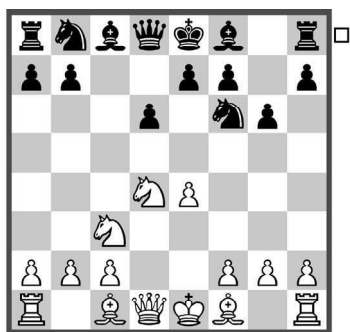
1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6

This pawn move is the standard way of reaching a 'proper' Dragon, while the options of 2...♘c6 and 2...g6 are treated in subsequent chapters.

3. d4

White heads for an open Sicilian, the only real take-no-prisoners approach. Some players, less fond of long theoretical contests (such as British GM Michael Adams) might play 3. ♙b5+ here instead, ruling out the Najdorf as well as the Dragon. Most Sicilian players would happily introduce the death penalty for 3. ♙b5+. 😊

3... cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 g6



Position after: 5... g6

As soon as the king's bishop declares its intention to fianchetto, we are in proper Dragon territory.

In general there are two classes of approaches White can take here.

Firstly, the more strategic systems:

- I) The '**Classical**' system with 6. ♙e2 or
- II) The **Fianchetto** system with 6.g3.

Secondly, with 6. ♙e3 followed by opposite side castling (which tends to be sharper):

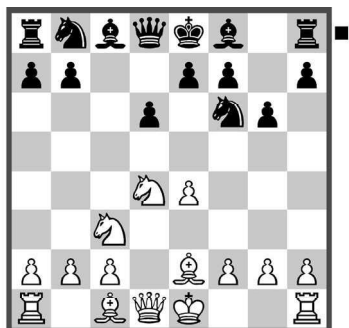
- III) The **9. ♙c4** system,
- IV) The **9. 0-0-0** system, or
- V) The **9.g4** system.

We will handle each of these lines separately in what follows.

Short castling by both sides

I) Classical system with 6. ♖e2

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♗xd4 ♗f6 5. ♗c3 g6 6. ♖e2



Position after: 6. ♖e2

Positional players tend to be fonder of the calm 6. ♖e2, preparing to simply castle short. This is known in literature as the "Classical System" and (with reversed colours) we can end up with a variation known from the English Opening.

6... ♗g7 7. 0-0 0-0

Or 7... ♗c6 8. ♗b3.

8. ♖e1

If White plays in this way, they likely have a special idea somewhere in the back of their mind which is also known from the English (with reversed colours) and which has rather a good reputation

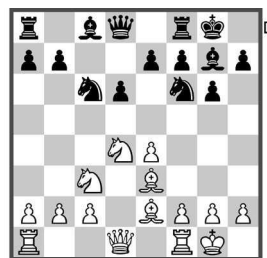
there. Further down the main line you will see exactly what I mean.

The most normal developing move 8. ♖e3



Analysis after: 8. ♖e3

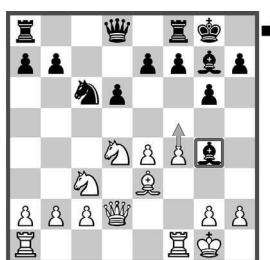
is by far the most common move here in practice, and involves a plan completely different to the one in our main line. So we can already consider this juncture to be a major parting of the ways. 8... ♗c6



Analysis after: 8... ♗c6

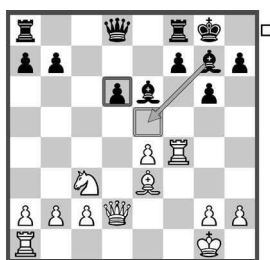
A) An approximately equally large following is had by the normal piece development 9. ♖d2:

A1) It is naturally important to plan for 9... ♘g4, which after 10. ♙xg4 [Rather than 10. ♘xc6 bxc6 11. ♙xg4 ♙xg4 12. ♙h6 ♙xh6 13. ♚xh6 ♚b8= with tame equality] 10... ♙xg4 11. f4 leads to an interesting strategic situation.



Analysis after: 11. f4

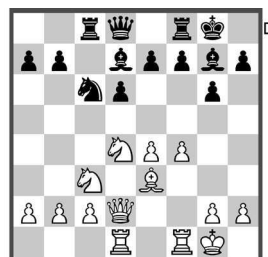
Under some circumstances, Black's g4-bishop can find itself marooned by a future push f4-f5, and so they must take action to avoid falling into a (slightly) worse position. Luckily, there are methods available. 11... ♙d7 A cautious move, and good enough. [11... ♘xd4 12. ♙xd4 e5 13. ♙e3 exf4 14. ♚xf4 ♙e6 is also fine for Black.



Analysis after: 14... ♙e6

Despite the potential weakness of the pawn on d6, the bishop pair and firm

grip on the e5-square compensate Black adequately.] 12. ♚ad1 ♚c8

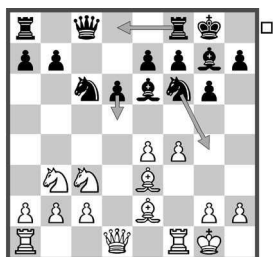


Analysis after: 12... ♚c8

Black's bishop pair doesn't offer any advantage because it is balanced out by White's space advantage. But neither has White been particularly successful in making their case in practice.

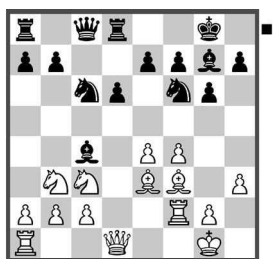
A2) 9... ♙d7 A modest developing move, intending ... ♘xd4 followed by ... ♙c6, which also doesn't seem that problematic for Black.

B) 9. ♘b3 In some way this is analogous to our main line. White retreats the knight to a somewhat more passive square, denying Black the chance to alleviate some of the space disadvantage by means of the trade ... ♘xd4. 9... ♙e6 10. f4 White tries to take control of the initiative with this move, which exploits the fact that with the queen maintained for the time being on d1, Black (still) can't play ... ♘g4. Black's next creates that option in earnest. 10... ♚c8



Analysis after: 10... ♖c8

This is seen as the most important way for Black to reach a playable midgame. Besides the option of ...♘g4 that has arisen, Black's control over the c-file can also sometimes have significance. Additionally and more importantly, the d8-square has been freed for the king's rook so that the typical freeing advance ...d6-d5 can be set in motion. Once the e6-bishop has moved away, it might also be possible to push ...e7-e5. 11. ♔h1 [It's worth noting the following fragment: after 11. h3 ♜d8 12. ♘f3 ♘c4 13. ♞f2



Analysis after: 13. ♞f2

Black has the option of 13... e5!? and in Vila Gazquez – Tiviakov, 2003 crushed White's defences like a knife through butter.] 11... ♞d8

B1) 12. ♘f3 ♘c4 13. ♞f2 e5 is similar to the Tiviakov fragment above: Black would like to play ...d6-d5 without running into the rejoinder e4-e5. It has been known since the time of Boleslavsky that sometimes Black's game can be freed by starting with ...e7-e5 and only then pushing the d-pawn. 14. ♞d2 exf4 15. ♘xf4 ♘e5

B2) 12. ♘g1



Analysis after: 12. ♘g1

This rather curious retreat (played - among others – by Anand, Alekseev, Gurevich, and Negi) was the main intention behind ♘g1-h1. 12... d5 Black must act now or never. 13. e5

B2.1) The sacrifice 13... d4 can be accepted with a clean conscience: after 14. ♘xd4 ♘xd4 15. ♘xd4 Black's compensation is somewhat questionable. 15... ♘g4 16. ♞f3± [16. h3 ♘e3!±]

B2.2) 13... ♘e4