

New ideas in the Dragon Sicilian

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The Sicilian Dragon remains very a popular choice by Black. The World Champion Garry Kasparov played it very successfully against GM Anand in 1995 World Championship match in New York. Recently, scores of fresh ideas were introduced for both sides, bringing new life into the opening. I would like to offer a few to your attention here.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6



This is the main position of the Dragon Variation and White has a few choices here. Mainly, he has to decide whether to castle Kingside or Queenside. There is also a possibility of the King's Bishop fianchetto with 6.g3. After years of practice it's been proven that the variations where White castles Queenside represent the most challenge for Black.

GM Jaan Ehlvest – GM Ron Henley, New York Open, 1997

6.Be3 Bg7

A well-know mistake here is 6...Ng4? 7.Bb5+! and Black loses after 7...Bd7 8.Qxg4! or 7...Nc6 8.Bxc6+ Bd7 9.Bxa8, winning the exchange.

7.f3

This move prevents ...Nf6-g4 and protects e4-pawn, also it supports g2-g4 in the future.

7...0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6

In this situation White has three options, all of them are very reasonable, 9.0-0-0, 9.Bc4 and 9.g4. Recently 9.0-0-0 is the most popular. White wants to save some time with this move, compared to the line 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 Nc4 13.Bxc4 Rxc4. As we can see, in that line White exchanges his Bishop for opponent's Knight. Therefore, some players prefer to castle immediately. However, it opens other possibilities to Black that were not available after 9.Bc4.

9.0-0-0

As mentioned above, 9.g4 also deserves attention and leads to a very complex game.

Here are some recent examples 9...Be6 (also was played 9...h5!?)

Varga – Golubev, Romania, 1997, further continued: 10.Nxe6 fxe6 (Black's pawn structure is damaged, but he builds a strong center and opens the f-file for his Rook. The question is whether White will be able to take advantage of the opponent's weak pawns in the center before Black activates his pieces)

11.Bc4 Qc8 12.Bb3 Na5 13.0-0-0 Nxb3+ 14.cxb3!? Nd7 15.Rhf1 Bxc3! 16.bxc3 Ne5 17.Bf4 and here *17...Nd3+ 18.Qxd3 Rxf4* with an even game, according to M. Golubev.

Sax – Relange, Pula, 1997. 10.0-0-0 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 Qa5 (this keeps the game within traditional lines, similar to those after 9.0-0-0 Nxd4 10.Bxd4 Be6) *12.a3 Rfc8 13.h4 Rab8* (both sides show their intentions. Black will meet opponent's attack on the Kingside with counterplay on the Queenside) *14.h5 b5 15.hxg6 fxg6 16.g5 Nh5 17.Bxg7 Nxg7 18.Bh3!* (previously White continued with 18.Nd5 here and Black more or less equalized after 18...Qxd2+ 19.Rxd2) *18...Bxh3 19.Rxh3 e6* (prepares...b5-b4, which would meet Nc3-d5 otherwise) *20.Rdh1 b4 21.Na2! Qa4 22.Rxh7 Nh5 23.R1xh5! gxh5 24.g6!* (White threatens Rh8+) *Rxc2+ 25.Qxc2 Qxc2+ 26.Kxc2 b3+ 27.Kb1 bxa2+ 28.Kxa2 a6 29.b4 1-0*



9...Bd7

This move was considered poor for years, since now ...Ra8-c8, ...Nc6-e5-c4 loses its appeal, but Black has another idea in mind. Other choices are 9...Nxd4 10.Bxd4 Be6, or 9...d5!?

Dvojris – Brodski, Berlin, 1996, further continued:

10.Qe1!?

(another hot idea is 10.Kb1!? with the idea to meet 10...dxe4? with 11.Nxc6! and White wins at once, *but in Camacho – Diaz, Cuba, 1996*, Black came up with an interesting improvement. After 10...Nxd4 11.e5 Nf5! 12.exf6 Bxf6 13.Nxd5 Black played amazing 13...Qxd5! 14.Qxd5 Nxe3 15.Qd2 Nxd1 16.Qxd1 Be6. Here a pair of powerful Bishops

overlooking the Queenside combined with open c- and d-files should give Black enough counterplay according to Camacho. This idea needs a bit more practical testing)

10...e6 11.h4 Qc7 12.exd5 Nxd5 13.Nxd5 exd5 14.Qd2!?(White's Queen has a little to do on e1 now and returns to a more promising position) 14...Re8 15.h5 Rxe3?! 16.Qxe3 Nxd4 17.Qxe8+! Bf8 18.Rxd4 Bf5 19.Qa4 Qe5 (19...b5 20. Bxb5 gives White an advantage according to Dvojris, but the position remains complex) 20.Rd1 Rc8 21. Bd3 Bxd3 22.Rxd3 Qg5+ 23.Kb1 Qxg2 24.Rhd1 White an advantage and he went on to win the game.

10.g4

White starts his usual Kingside pawn storm, so Black must counterattack on the Queenside.

10...Rc8 11.h4 Ne5 12.h5 Nxf3?!



For a short while this idea enjoyed some popularity. Obviously not good is 12...Nc4? 13.Bxc4 Rxc4 and the game arrives into the theoretical position, but White saved two tempi compared to the line with 9.Bc4, where White plays Bf1-c4-b3xc4. Instead of the following, deserves attention 12...Qa5!? 13.Nb3 Qc7 14.Be2 b5 with a counterplay on the Queenside, as in *Morozevich – Fedorov, Russia, 1997*.

13.Nxf3 Bxg4

Perhaps this is the point of Black's sacrifice. He hopes to win the h5-pawn, having three pawns for a piece and effectively stopping White's attack.

14.h6!

Previously, White continued with 14.Be2 Bxh5 and Black had some counterplay.

The text move was recommended by GM Onischuk in the Informant # 68, and Ehlvest, no doubt, was familiar with it. Really, after 14...Bxf3 15.hxg7 Kxg7 (15...Re8 meets 16.e5!) 16.Bh6+ White has an advantage. Therefore,

14...Bh8 15.Be2

Now White has a piece for two pawns and Black is yet to develop a serious counterplay.



15...Qd7?

Black can't afford to play like this in the Dragon Variation. I can't think of any use that Black can extract from his Queen there! It's perhaps understandable why Black did not play 15...Qa5, since after 16.Nd5! Qxa2?? 17.Nxe7 checkmates, or 16...Qxd2 + 17.Rxd2 Nxd5 18.exd5 leads to unfavorable ending for Black, but the text leaves no hope. Ehlvest recommends 15...b5! and gives White an advantage after 16.a3! stopping there. If Black continues with 16...a5, then 17.Nxb5 Nxe4 18.Qe1 should keep an advantage. Still, it was better than Henley's 15...Qd7.

16.Bd4!

Now Black's lifeline, a1-h8 diagonal, is blocked while no counterplay on the Queenside is available yet. Black takes desperate steps.

16...e5

When Black has to play this move in the Dragon, with his Bishop still present on g7 or h8, you know that something went wrong.

17.Be3 Rxc3!

The exclamation mark goes for the courage. Basically, it's the only move.

18.Qxc3 Nxe4 19.Qe1

Perhaps other moves were possible too, but this is the safest. Now the Bishop on e2 is protected, the fork on g3 is prevented and Black's compensation is obviously not sufficient.

19...Rc8 20.Kb1

White protects a2 and escapes the pin on the c-file.

20...d5!

The best, otherwise White plays c2-c4, as in 20...Be6 21.c4! as pointed out by Ehlvest.

21.Rg1 Be6



Basically, White's win is a matter of time now, since Black has no serious threats.

22.Qb4 Qc7 23.Bd3

Ehlvest points out that better was 23.Ka1! a5 (23...Qxc2 meets 24.Rc1! Qxe2 25. Rxc8+ Bxc8 26.Qe7 and White wins) 24.Qa3 d4 25.Nxd4! exd4 26.Bxd4 Bxd4 27. Rxd4 Qxc2 28.Qe3 with Rg1-d1 to follow. You can feel the presence of the h6-pawn in that position!

23...Nd6 24.Ng5 e4 25.Rc1 Bf5?



After this move it's all over. In case of 26...exd3 27.cxd3 Qd7 28.Rxc8+ Nxc8 29. Bd4 Ehlvest gives White a decisive advantage. Perhaps, Black has very little to be cheerful about in that case, but the text is even worse. The rest is simple enough.

26.Be2 b6 27.Rgd1 Nc4 28.Bxc4 dxc4 29.Rd5! f6 30.Rxf5! gxf5 31.Ne6 Qd7 32. Nf4



Black resigned

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