

Opening Repertoire The Accelerated Dragon

Nigel Davies



POPULAR CHESS

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Opening Repertoire: The Accelerated Dragon

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ISBN (hardback) 978-1-83684-015-2

ISBN (paperback) 978-1-83684-003-9

ISBN (ebook) 978-1-83684-027-5

All sales or enquiries should be directed to

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50 Wellington Street,

Glasgow G2 6HJ

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website: www.popularchess.com

Distributed in North America by National Book Network

Distributed in Rest of the World by Quality Chess UK Ltd through
Sunrise Handicrafts, ul. Szarugi 59a, 21-002 Marysin, Poland

Popular Chess Series

Commissioning editor: Byron Jacobs

Book production by First Rank Publishing, Brighton

Cover by Kallia Kleisarchaki

Printed in Estonia by Tallinna Raamatutrükikoja LLC

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Nigel Davies is an International Grandmaster and FIDE Senior Trainer. He is the author of numerous books and DVDs on the game and is known for the clarity of his explanations. Davies was part of the victorious England over-50 side at the recent European Senior Team Chess Championships, winning team gold, as well as an individual silver medal for his performance on board four.

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Introduction

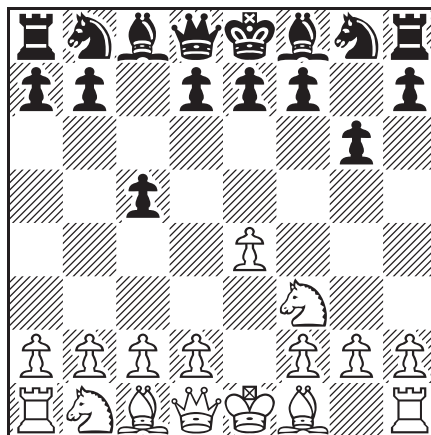
The Sicilian Accelerated Dragon, 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♖c6, has been employed by many leading players. In the past it attracted stars such as Bent Larsen and Tigran Petrosian, more recently it has been employed regularly by Magnus Carlsen, Viswanathan Anand, Veselin Topalov, Vassily Ivanchuk, Jan-Krzysztof Duda and many others. I personally have used it in many games and presented a DVD on it for ChessBase in 2008.

The Accelerated Dragon is characterised by a fianchetto of the dark-squared bishop, just like the standard Sicilian Dragon, 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♖f6 5 ♗c3 g6. The main difference is that Black delays moving his d-pawn, which allows the Maroczy Bind with 5 c4, but reserves the option of playing ...d7-d5 in a single move in many variations. This can have explosive consequences if White plays in the same way as he does in a standard Dragon, as the following game illustrates.

Game 1

Zdenko Krnic – Dragoljub Velimirovic
Yugoslav Team Championship, Pula 1971

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 g6!?



Question: Why did Black play this move rather than developing a knight with 2...♘c6?

Answer: Perhaps because of the Rossolimo Variation with 3 ♗b5. This is a line in which Black can struggle to get counterplay, especially if White captures on c6, doubling Black's pawns. This is also the reason I recommend that Black plays 2...g6 in this book.

3 d4 ♗g7

This was popular at the time of the game, but is very risky for Black because of 4 dxc5 or 4 d5.

3...cxd4 is a better move. White can then play 4 ♖xd4, developing quickly and attacking the rook on h8, which is certainly playable, but Black has 4...♘f6, intending to develop his other knight and gaining time on White's queen.

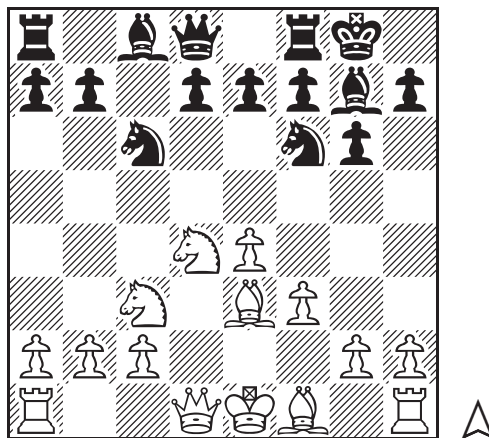
4 ♘c3

Allowing Black to transpose back into a main line of the Accelerated Dragon.

4...cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♘c6 6 ♗e3 ♘f6 7 f3?!

A mistake by White. 7 ♗c4 is the standard move and best, with 7 ♖d2 another move frequently seen at club level. After 7...0-0 (7...♘g4!? 8 ♘xc6 dxc6! 9 ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 is also quite interesting, echoing Larsen's play against the ♖xd4 lines in Games 67 and 68) 8 f3 we're back in our main game, while the immediate 8 0-0-0 is well met by 8...♘g4, depriving White of his important dark-squared bishop. Here 8 ♘b3 has been very rare, but may well be best, and against which Black should just go 8...d6 followed by ...♗e6, as per our approach in Chapter Seven.

7...0-0



8 ♖d2

Question: If 8...d5 is such a problem, why does White not prevent it with 8 ♖c4?

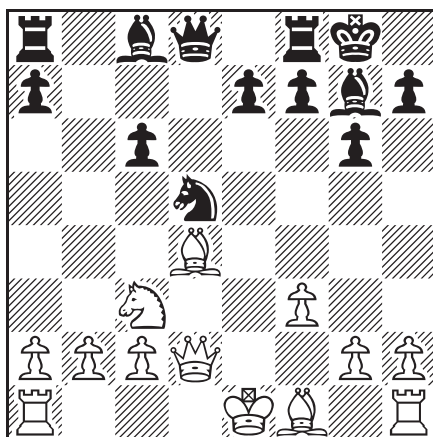
Answer: He can certainly do that, though Black then has 8...♗b6, directly threatening the b2-pawn and with veiled threats against the knight on d4. After 9 ♖b3 there might follow 9...♜xe4 10 ♜d5! ♖a5+ 11 c3 ♜c5 12 ♜xc6 dxc6 13 ♜xe7+ ♔h8 14 ♜xc8 ♖axc8, with Black having the more comfortable game already.

8...d5! 9 ♜xc6 bxc6 10 exd5

10 e5 ♜d7 11 f4 ♖b8 is very promising for Black.

10...♜xd5! 11 ♖d4

In his notes Velimirovic mentioned 11 0-0-0, but this looks very bad for White after 11...♖xc3 12 bxc3 ♖a5, threatening 13...♖a3+.



11...e5!?

Velimirovic was never reluctant to sacrifice material, and here he plays the sharpest move which leads to the sacrifice of the exchange.

Question: Does Black have to play this way?

Answer: No, there was a quieter route to an edge via 11...♖xd4 12 ♖xd4 e5 13 ♖d2 ♜xc3 14 ♖xc3 e4 15 ♖e2 exf3 16 ♖xf3 ♖b8 17 b3 (17 0-0 ♖b6+ 18 ♖f2 ♖xb2 wins a pawn) 17...♖e8+ 18 ♔f2 ♖b6+, with a strong initiative.

12 ♖c5 ♜xc3! 13 ♖xf8

13 bxc3 ♖e8 is just better for Black because his kingside pawn majority is healthy, whereas White's doubled c-pawns will be unable to create a passed pawn.

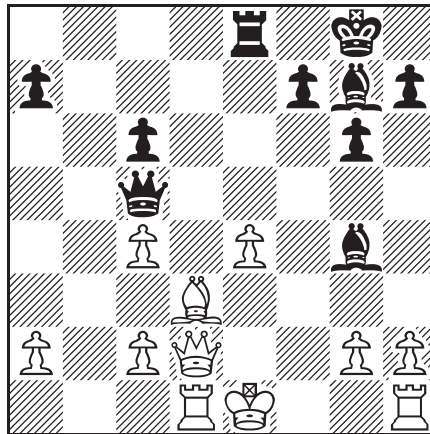
13...♖xf8 14 bxc3

After 14 ♖xc3 there follows 14...e4! 15 ♖xc6 (15 ♖a5 exf3 16 0-0-0 ♗g4 is also very good for Black) 15...♗b4+ 16 c3 ♖xb2 17 ♖e8+ ♗f8, which is winning for Black according to the engines.

14...♖c5 15 ♗d1 ♗e6 16 c4 e4!

Opening up the position to deadly effect. Besides activating the g7-bishop, Black's rook will soon be coming to the e-file.

17 fx4 ♗e8 18 ♗d3 ♗g4



Question: What happens now after 19 ♗b1?

Answer: In that case Black wins with 19...♗c3! 20 ♖xc3 ♖e3+ 21 ♗f1 ♗e2+ 22 ♗e1 (or 22 ♗xe2 ♖xc3, etc) 22...♗xd3+ 23 ♗d1 ♗e2+ 24 ♗e1 ♖xc3+, picking up White's queen and the game.

19 h3 ♗c3!

Much stronger than taking the rook.

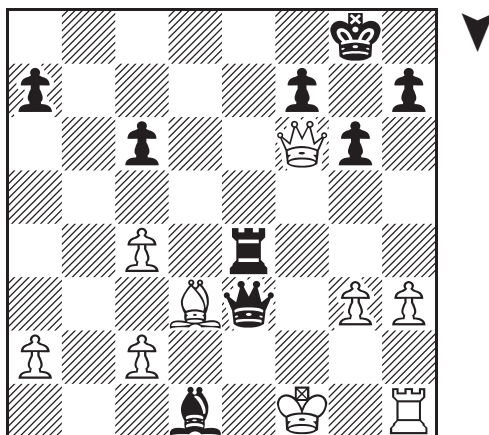
20 ♖xc3 ♖e3+ 21 ♗f1 ♗xe4!

A killer blow, threatening 22...♗f4+.

22 ♖f6

Or 22 ♗xe4 ♗e2+ 23 ♗e1 ♗d3#.

22...♗xd1 23 g3



23...♙e2+?

This wins, but 23...♙f3! would have been devastating.

24 ♖g2 ♙xd3 25 ♚d8+ ♖g7 26 ♚xd3 ♚e2+ 27 ♚xe2 ♜xe2+ 28 ♖f3 ♜xc2

The rook endgame is winning for Black, but still needs due care and attention.

29 ♜b1 ♜c3+ 30 ♖f2 ♜xc4 31 ♜b2 a5 32 a4 ♖f6 33 ♜b6 ♖g7 34 ♜a6 ♜xa4 35 ♜xc6 ♜a1 36 ♜a6 a4 37 ♖f3 a3 38 ♖g4 a2 39 ♖h4 ♖h6 40 g4 f6 41 ♜xf6 ♜b1 0-1

As noted in the game above, it is also possible for White to act against an early ...d7-d5 by playing 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 g6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖c6 5 ♖c3 ♙g7 6 ♙e3 ♖f6 and now 7 ♙c4, but here too there are unpleasant surprises in store. A recent discovery has been the line 7...0-0 8 ♙b3 ♜e8!?, as pioneered by Vadim Zvjaginsev. When White's attempts to treat this as a standard Dragon with 9 f3, he runs into either 9...e6, intending 10...d5, or even the immediate 9...d5.

This line is no joke for White as he will once again find himself facing ferocious counterplay. Here is one of Zvjaginsev's early efforts:

Game 2

Artur Gabrielian – Vadim Zvjaginsev Chigorin Memorial, St. Petersburg 2013

1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 g6 5 ♖c3 ♙g7 6 ♙e3 ♖f6 7 ♙c4 0-0

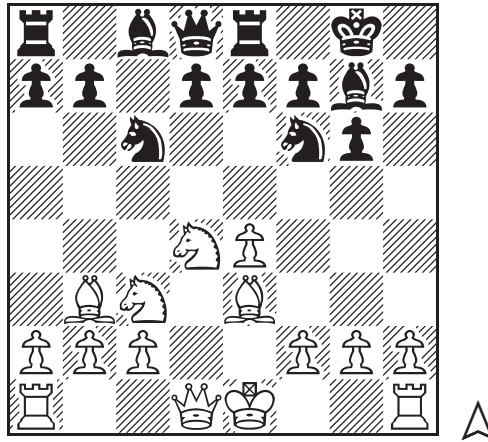
Threatening 8...♖xe4, and if 9 ♖xe4 d5.

8 ♙b3

A prudent retreat. We saw that 8 f3?! ♚b6! is pretty effective for Black in our opening

game, and 8 ♖d2?! ♘g4 is even worse for White.

8...♖e8!?



Although this move was played as early as 2007, in the Australian Under-18 Championship, it was Russian Grandmaster Vadim Zvjaginsev's use of the move that brought it into the public eye.

Question: What is the idea?

Answer: There are several. Firstly, it prepares to meet 9 f3 with 9...e6 or even 9...d5. Secondly, the rook can be well placed on e8 because it defends e7 and can allow Black to sidestep White's attempts to exchange dark-squared bishops, via ♖d2 and ♗h6, with ...♗h8.

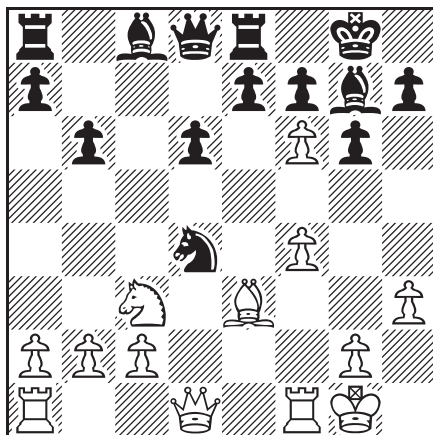
9 h3

A known idea, preventing Black from playing ...♗f6-g4 at an annoying moment. Zvjaginsev played this in an earlier game in the same tournament against Vavulin. That one proceeded 9 ♘xc6 dxc6 10 ♖xd8 ♗xd8 11 f3 b6 12 ♔f2 ♗a6 13 ♗hd1 ♘d7 14 h3 ♔f8, with very comfortable equality for Black and an eventual draw.

9...d6 10 0-0 ♗a5!

A strong move, looking to eliminate White's strong bishop.

11 f4 b6 12 e5 ♗xb3 13 exf6 ♗xd4



14 fxe7!

Question: What does Black do after 14 fxe7?

Answer: He can move his knight with 14...♞f5 and then take the g7-pawn at his leisure.

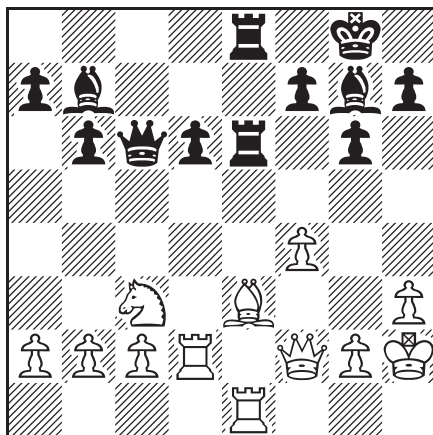
14...♞e2+! 15 ♜xe2 ♜xe7 16 ♜fe1 ♟b7 17 ♜ad1 ♜c7 18 ♜f2 ♜c6 19 ♜d2

Black has a weak pawn on d6 and there are vulnerable squares in front of it, but this is more than compensated for by the pressure on the a8-h1 diagonal. White would really like his f4-pawn back on f3 in order to counteract this.

19...♜e6 20 ♟h2?!

Now White deteriorates rapidly. Best was 20 ♞d5, after which 20...♜ae8 (20...♟xb2 21 f5 is quite dangerous for Black) 21 f5 gxf5 22 c3 is still better for Black, but not decisively so.

20...♜ae8



21 ♖d1

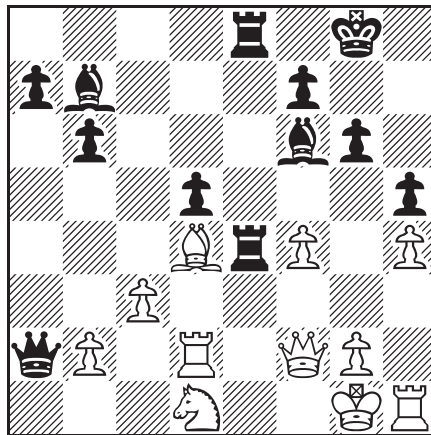
This retreat does not help White's cause. 21 ♖d3 was a better idea: for example, after 21...♙a6 22 ♖dd1 ♙xc3 23 bxc3 ♙b7 White can start trying to exchange pieces with 24 ♙d2.

21...d5 22 c3 ♖e4 23 ♖h1 ♗c7 24 ♗g3 h5 25 h4?!

Creating even more weaknesses, though White would not have relished the thought of the black pawn coming to h4.

25...♙f6 26 ♙g1 ♗c4

26...d4! wins immediately, but it would have to be calculated. After 27 ♙xd4 there might follow 27...♙xd4+ 28 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 29 cxd4 ♖e2 30 ♖f2 ♗c2, leaving White helpless against the threat of...♗d2 followed by...♗e1+.

27 ♗f2 ♗xa2 28 ♙d4**28...♖e6?**

Another inaccuracy, perhaps suggesting that one or both players might have been short of time. 28...♗c4 would have been more accurate, one of the points being that 29 ♙xf6 is met by 29...♖xf4.

29 ♖h3?!

Missing a good chance to confuse matters with 29 f5: for example, 29...gxf5 30 ♗g3+ ♙h7 31 ♙xf6 ♖xf6 32 ♖f2 intends to bring the knight to h3 then g5.

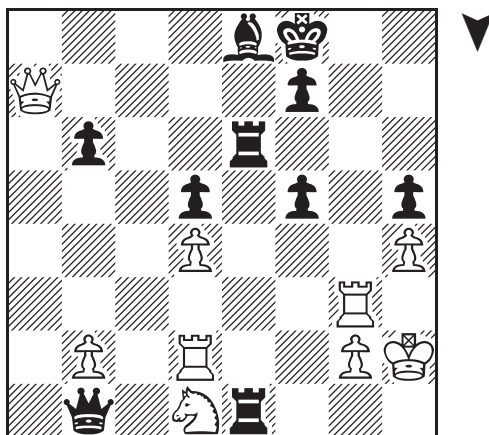
29...♙xd4 30 cxd4 ♗b1

After this White gets counter-chances. Recentralizing the queen with 30...♗c4 would have been better.

31 ♙h2 ♖e1 32 f5! gxf5 33 ♖g3+ ♙f8 34 ♗f4! ♙c6 35 ♗b8+?

A wrong check. White should play 35 ♖f2: for example, 35...♙e8 36 ♗g5 ♖g6 37 ♗xh5 keeps White very much in the game.

35...♙e8 36 ♗xa7



36...♔e4?

Black, in turn, misses his way. 36...f4 would have been very strong here.

37 ♖a3+ ♜e7 38 ♘f2??

A final blunder, which is highly suggestive of time trouble. 38 ♖d6 would have left the issue very much in doubt.

38...♖f4 39 ♘d3 ♖xd2 40 ♘xe1 ♖xe1 41 ♖d6 ♖e6 42 ♖f4 ♖f6 43 ♜g5 ♜e4 44 ♖g3 ♜g4! 0-1

At this point the reader may be wondering why the Accelerated Dragon is not more popular than it is, which is partly due to concern about the Maroczy Bind with 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 c4. This has long been thought to be a critical test, with White obtaining an annoying space advantage. Yet here too it seems that Black can get excellent counterplay if he knows what he is doing in the critical Gurgendize System, 5...♘f6 6 ♘c3 d6. After either 7 f3 or 7 ♗e2 Black can take on d4 and draw the white queen into the open.

Game 3

Bence Korpa – Lorenzo Pescatore Trieste Open 2015

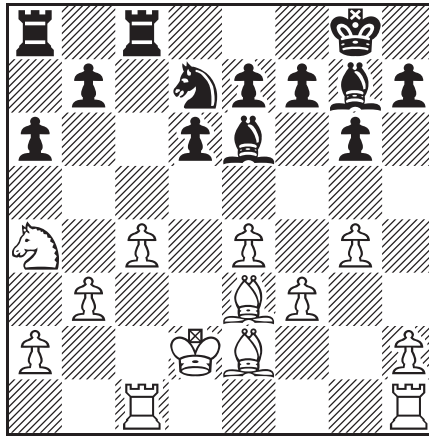
1 ♘f3 c5 2 c4 g6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 e4

Transposing into an Accelerated Dragon via a 1 ♘f3 move order. This illustrates the transpositional advantages of this line, which can be used as the basis of a defence against both 1 ♘f3 and 1 c4.

5...♘f6 6 ♘c3 d6 7 ♗e2 ♘xd4 8 ♖xd4 ♗g7 9 ♗e3 0-0 10 ♖d2 ♗e6 11 f3 ♖a5 12 ♜c1 ♜fc8 13 b3 a6 14 ♘a4

Regarded as critical, forcing the exchange of queens and relying on White's extra space.

14... ♖xd2+ 15 ♙xd2 ♘d7 16 g4



This has been seen as the critical test for Black, cracking down on his attempts to play the freeing ...f7-f5.

16... ♖cb8!

The key move, which changes the assessment of this line.

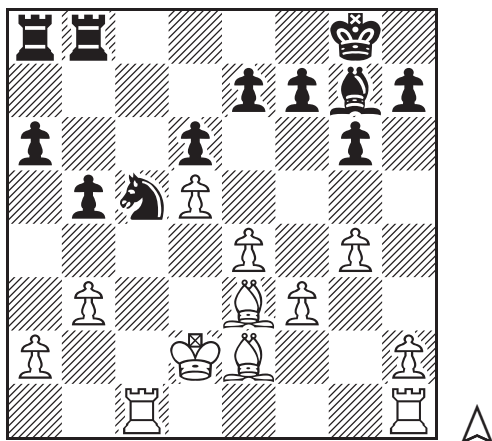
Question: What is the idea?

Answer: At the moment Black simply wants to play...b7-b5.

Question: What had Black played previously?

Answer: In earlier games attention was focussed on 16...f5, but Black was struggling after 17 exf5 gxf5 18 h3 ♖f8 19 f4 ♖ad8 20 g5, despite the best efforts of expert practitioners. For example, 20...♙f7 was introduced by Gadir Guseinov, a noted Accelerated Dragon expert, but 21 ♖hd1 (21 ♙f3!?) 21...e5 22 ♙e1 exf4 (22...♖fe8!? is a possible improvement) 23 ♙xf4 ♙e5 24 ♙xe5 ♘xe5 25 ♘c3 ♙e6 26 ♙f2 was better for White in Bu Xiangzhi-G.Guseinov, Doha 2014.

17 ♘c3 b5 18 ♘d5 ♙xd5 19 cxd5 ♘c5!



The key move, blocking the c-file at the cost of a pawn.

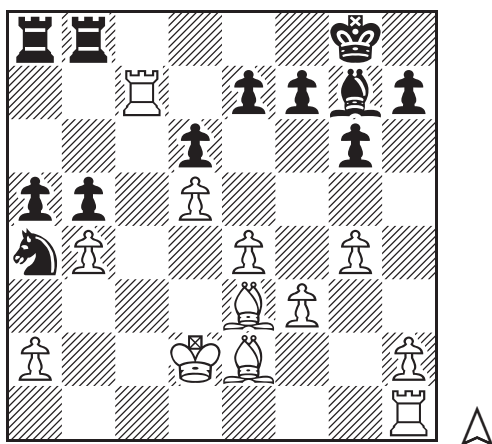
20 b4

White wants to penetrate with his c1-rook, but Black will get counterplay with...a6-a5. Black also gets play after the alternatives, for example:

a) If White takes the pawn with 20 ♖xc5 dxc5 21 ♖xc5, Black gets a blockade on the dark squares with 21...♗h6+ 22 ♔d3 ♗f4, preventing White's pawns from moving and at the same time defending the c7-square. The engines still give White a plus at this point, but that is only because they value material in their assessment algorithms.

b) 20 h4 ♖c8 21 h5 e6 22 dxe6 ♗xe6 23 h6 ♗e5 (23...♗b2! is even better, as we'll note in Chapter One) 24 ♖xc8+ ♖xc8 25 ♖c1 ♖c1 26 ♗xc1 ♗d4 gave Black enough play to draw in G.Ilig-J.De Mingo Matias, correspondence 2019.

20...♗a4 21 ♖c7 a5!



22 ♖b1

22 bxa5 ♖xa5 23 ♖hc1 ♘c5 24 ♖c2 ♚f8 is also good enough for Black.

22...axb4 23 ♖xb4! ♘c5! 24 ♙xc5 dxc5 25 ♖xc5 ♖xa2+ 26 ♚e3 g5

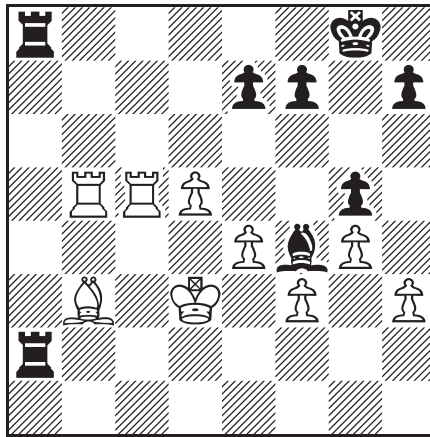
26...♙h6+ may be an even better way to set up a dark-square blockade, 27 f4 being met by 27...♙xf4+ 28 ♚xf4 ♖xe2, with a drawish rook endgame.

27 ♖xb5 ♖a3+ 28 ♚d2 ♖a2+ 29 ♚d3 ♖ba8 30 ♙d1 ♙e5 31 h3 ♙f4

31...♖h2 seems to be Black's simplest move; he just wants to take the h-pawn. The game might then end in a draw by repetition after 32 ♖a5 ♖xa5 33 ♖xa5 ♖xh3 34 ♖a7 ♚f8 35 ♖a8+ ♚g7 36 ♖a7 ♚f8, etc.

32 ♙b3?!

In playing 'for a win', White puts himself in serious danger. He should have played 32 ♖c2 when the game should be a draw.

**32...♖f2**

32...♖d2+! 33 ♚c3 ♖a1 would have put White in serious trouble because Black is going after the f3-pawn with one of his rooks.

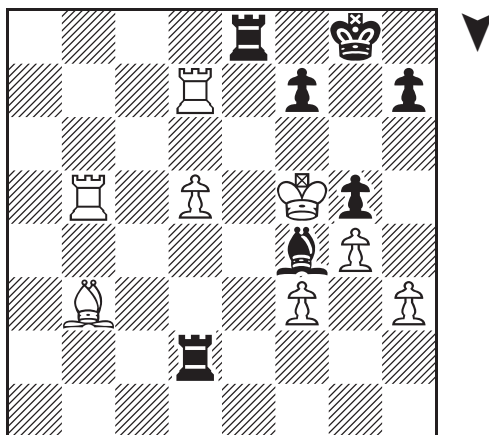
33 d6! exd6

Black might have been worried about 33...♖d2+ 34 ♚c3 ♖xd6 35 e5 ♖h6 36 e6, but 36...f6 is solid enough here.

34 ♖c7 d5?!

After this it should be equal, whereas 34...♖xf3+ 35 ♚e2 ♖e3+ 36 ♚f2 ♖xh3 would have left Black with all the chances.

35 ♖d7! ♖c8 36 exd5 ♖d2+ 37 ♚e4 ♖e8+ 38 ♚f5



38...♖de2??

Only here does Black lose the game. 38...♖d3 is equal: for example, after 39 d6 ♖xb3 40 ♖xb3 ♖e5+ 41 ♔f6 ♖e6+ it is a draw by perpetual check.

39 d6 ♔h8 40 ♔f6 ♖f8 41 ♔xf7! ♖e3 42 ♖f5 ♖e2?!

42...♖b3 would have been more tenacious.

43 h4 ♔c1 44 h5 ♔f4 45 ♖xg5! ♔xg5+ 46 ♔xg5 ♖e3 47 f4 ♖e4 48 ♖e7 h6+ 49 ♔f5! ♖d4 50 d7! ♔g7 51 ♔e5 ♖d1 52 ♔b3+ 1-0

Although Black lost this game, it was certainly not because of the opening and the key move 16...♖cb8; in fact Black was better at certain stages of the game. From a theoretical point of view this move puts the ball firmly in White's court.

Due to its importance, I have addressed the Maroczy Bind first in this repertoire, covering the 7 f3 lines in the opening chapter, followed by the 7 ♔e2 lines in the second and 7 ♖c2 in the third. Because many of these variations are drawish, I have also included a highly experimental, ambitious and risky treatment in Chapter Four in which Black plays 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 g6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♔g7 5c4 and now 5...♗b6.

In Chapter Five the lines based on ♖xc6 are examined, the most important of which is 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 g6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖c6 5 ♖c3 ♔g7 6 ♔e3 ♖f6 7 ♖xc6. Chapter Six will deal with 7 ♔c4, the main focus being on the new 8...♖e8, and then in Chapter Seven the highly transpositional lines with ♔e2 will be covered. The Open Sicilian (3 d4) lines are rounded off in Chapters Eight (g3 lines) and Nine (3d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4), before we look at Closed Systems in Chapter Ten and then miscellaneous lines in Chapter Eleven.

Finally, in Chapter Twelve, I have looked at the two major Flank Openings of 1 c4 and 1 ♖f3. The reason for including them is that, as we have already seen, the Accelerated Dragon can be used as the basis of a defence against them, transpositions into a Maroczy Bind being possible after 1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 g6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖c6 5 e4 or 1 ♖f3 c5 2c4 g6 3 d4

1 d4 2 dxc6 3 e4. This is very good news for exponents of defences against 1 d4 that cannot easily be used against the Flank Openings, which is essentially everything except the Queen's Gambit Declined and King's Indian Defence. After 1 c4 c5 and 1 f3 c5 White can also play different set-ups based on a delayed or omitted d2-d4, and these are the lines that are covered in our last chapter.

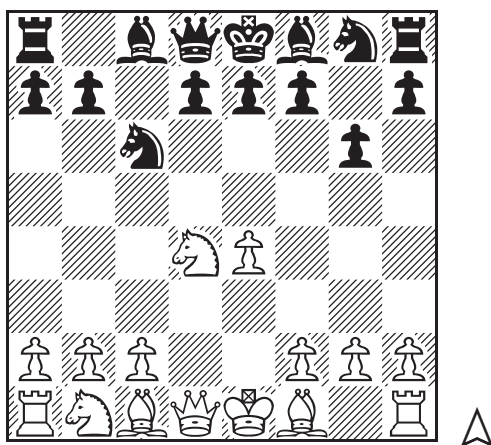
The best way to use this book is to first play through all the games, without paying particular attention to the more theoretical notes. After gaining this overview it is worth trying out the Accelerated Dragon in games with a faster time limit, and then check how you played against the lines I give. Finally, you can look at the theory more closely, checking the lines for yourself, and at this point you will be able to play this opening with great expertise.

Chapter Five

Lines with Nxc6

The lines where White plays Nxc6 are not generally considered dangerous for Black. The most important one occurs after $1 \text{ e4 c5 } 2 \text{ Nf3 g6 } 3 \text{ d4 cxd4 } 4 \text{ Nxd4 Nc6 } 5 \text{ Nc3 Ng7 } 6 \text{ Be3 Nf6 } 7 \text{ Nxc6}$ as after $7 \dots \text{ bxc6 } 8 \text{ e5}$ Black's knight on f6 should go back to g8. Even so it seems that White cannot make much out of his lead in development.

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 g6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nc6



5 Nc3

The immediate 5 Nxc6 is sometimes played by GMs in blitz games, but after $5 \dots \text{ bxc6 } 6 \text{ Nd4 Nf6 } 7 \text{ e5 Nd5 } 8 \text{ e6 Nf6 } 9 \text{ exf7+ Kxf7}$ Black stands very well (see Game 33, Bordais-Baillet, Rennes 2017). Note that this line is not possible if Black plays $4 \dots \text{ Ng7}$ instead of $4 \dots \text{ Nc6}$.

5... Ng7 6 Be3

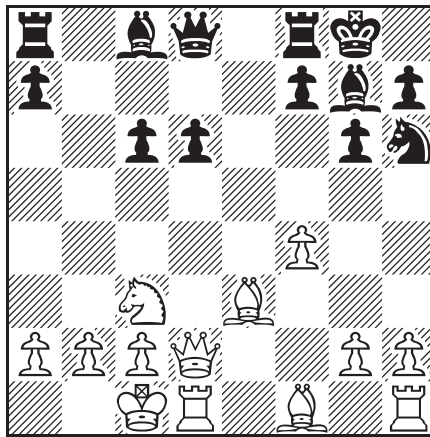
Game 36

Hong Xing – Wang Jue

Chinese Women's Championship, Xinghua 2016

1 e4 c5 2 ♖c3 ♗c6 3 ♗ge2 g6 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♗xd4 ♕g7 6 ♕e3 ♗f6 7 ♗xc6 bxc6 8 e5 ♗g8 9 f4 ♗h6 10 ♖d2 0-0 11 0-0-0 d6 12 exd6 exd6

The human move, but not the only one. The engines also like the immediate 12...♗f5, with humans having played this way too. For example, 13 ♕f2 (13 dxe7 ♖xe7 14 ♕f2 ♕e6 15 g4 ♗ab8 gave Black a powerful attack in Hong Xing-Lu Miaoyi, Shenzhen 2023) 13...♗xd6 (13...♗b8 does not work because of 14 d7 ♕xd7 15 ♖xd7 ♗a5 16 ♖xa7 ♗b4 17 ♖a3 ♖xa3 18 bxa3 ♕xc3 19 ♗d3, with White emerging with the better endgame) 14 ♕d4 ♕h6!? (14...♕xd4 15 ♖xd4 ♕g4 16 ♗d2 ♖b6 is simple and equal, but Black will find it difficult to win games like this) 15 ♕d3 ♕g4 16 ♗de1 ♗b8 17 a3 ♖d7 18 h4?! ♗fd8! 19 g3 c5 20 ♕xc5 ♗c4 won quickly for Black in E.Tairova-N.Chadaev, Moscow 2006.

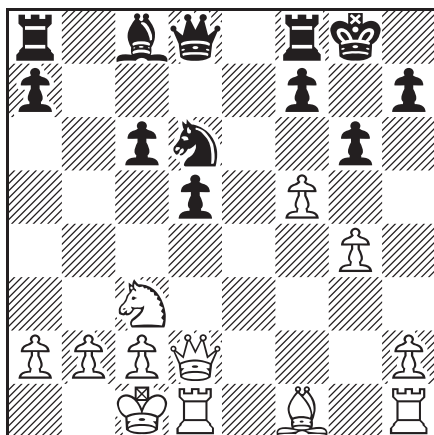


13 ♕d4!

Exchanging the dark-squared bishops is good for both attack and defence.

13...♕xd4 14 ♖xd4 ♗f5 15 ♖d2! d5 16 g4 ♗d6 17 f5!

The sharpest and strongest move. 17 ♗g1 has been played in a couple of games: for example, 17...♗b8 (17...♖b6 18 ♖d4 ♖xd4 19 ♗xd4 f5 20 g5 ♗e4 was better for Black in R.Verstraeten-A.Genzling, Lille 2010) 18 ♗g3 was D.Pruess-E.Perelshteyn, Peabody 2007 (18 ♖d4 is relatively best, but still better for Black after 18...♖b6 19 b3 f5 20 ♖xb6 axb6 21 g5 ♗e4), and now 18...f5 (rather than Perelshteyn's 18...♖f6?!) 19 gxf5 ♗xf5 would have given Black a clear advantage.



17...Re8

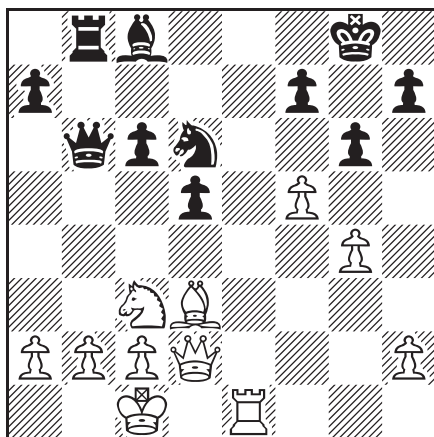
Question: Could Black accept the pawn sacrifice with 17...gxf5?

Answer: That would leave Black's king badly exposed: for example, after 18 ♖f4! (18 ♘d3 ♙h8 19 ♗f4 is also good) 18...♘e4? (18...Re8 was relatively best) 19 gxf5 left Black in all sorts of trouble in J.Sindarov-J.Vakhidov, Uzbek Championship, Tashkent 2021.

18 ♘d3 ♜b8

Taking aim at b2. The engines also like 18...♗h4, which helps prevent White developing an attack on the kingside.

19 ♜de1 ♜xe1+ 20 ♜xe1 ♗b6



20...♖h4 is an objectively stronger move, with an approximately equal game.

21 ♖f4?

Presumably White missed something when she played this way. The correct move is 21 ♘d1, simply defending b2 and getting ready to move over to the attack.

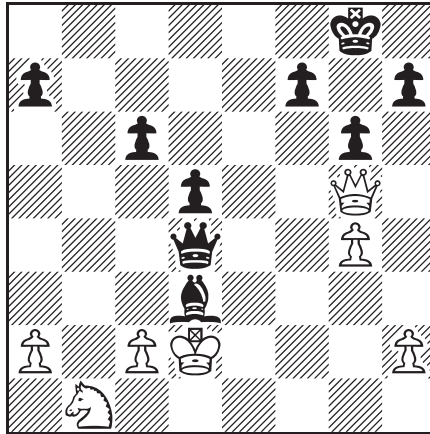
21...♖xb2+ 22 ♔d2 ♖b4 23 ♖g5

Perhaps White had originally calculated 23 ♖h6 d4 24 f6, but only now realized that after 24...dxc3+ she would have to move his king to the e-file, allowing 25...♘e8.

23...♘xf5

23...d4 is even stronger, but you need nerves of steel to play this way. Black's king would manage to sidestep all the bullets after 24 ♖d8+ ♔g7 25 f6+ ♔h6 26 ♖f8+ (or 26 g5+ ♔xg5) 26...♔g5 27 h4+ ♔xg4 28 ♖g1+ (or 28 ♘e2+ ♔h3) 28...♔f3 29 ♖f1+ ♔g2 when White runs out of useful checks.

24 ♖b1 ♘e4+ 25 ♘xe4 ♖d4+ 26 ♘d3 ♖xb1 27 ♘xb1 ♘xd3



28 ♖d8+

The point of Black's play is that after 28 cxd3 ♖b2+ 29 ♔e3 ♖xb1 she reaches a winning queen endgame.

28...♔g7 29 cxd3 ♖b2+ 30 ♔e3 ♖xb1 31 g5 ♖b6+ 32 ♖xb6 axb6 33 ♔d4 f6 34 h4 h6 0-1

Game 37

Dimitar Marholev – Kiril Georgiev
Bulgarian Team Championship, Plovdiv 2003

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 ♘f3 g6 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♘g7 6 ♘e3 ♘f6 7 ♖xc6 bxc6 8 e5 ♘g8 9 ♘d4 ♖a5