

DRAGONMASTERS

VOLUME 1

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Production: BestInGraphics
Graphic Studio – DrieDee Plus

ISBN: 9789464201956
D/2023/13732/39

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All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

E-mail: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

First edition 2023 by Thinkers Publishing.
This book is printed on environmentally friendly paper.

VOLUME 1

DragonMasters

ANDREW BURNETT

Thinkers Publishing 2023



Key to symbols

!	a good move	±	White has a serious advantage
?	a weak move	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!!	an excellent move	+−	White has a decisive advantage
??	a blunder	−+	Black has a decisive advantage
!?	an interesting move	→	with an attack
?!	a dubious move	↑	with initiative
□	only move	⇝	with counterplay
=	equality	Δ	with the idea of
∞	unclear position	▷	better is
≡	with compensation for the sacrificed material	N	novelty
±	White stands slightly better	+	check
∓	Black stands slightly better	#	mate

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For Hannah and Jacob

If dragons really existed my archaeologist daughter and son duo will one day find proof of them! No pressure kids.



An Openings Book Like No Other

Editorial Foreword by David Levy

 would like to explain why I enthusiastically accepted Andy Burnett's invitation to edit this book.

When I was a junior, competing in the British Boys Under 15 Championship in 1960, I met International Master R.G. (Bob) Wade who gave me a hugely important piece of Chess advice. He explained that, from the perspective of the openings, learning a lot of analysis by heart was far less important than understanding the ideas behind the openings. This advice was endorsed in my mind by the title of one of the first Chess books that I borrowed from the library – Reuben Fine's *"The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings"*. The point Bob emphasized was that if one knows the ideas behind an opening, it will be much more likely that one will be able to navigate one's way successfully through to the middle-game, even if one forgets (or never knew) some particular piece of analysis of the opening variation in question.

In those days, of course, there was very little in the way of openings monographs. All serious players owned a copy of *"Modern Chess Openings"*, which was widely nicknamed the Chess players' bible, but there was little else of quality on the openings unless one was able to obtain Chess magazines from abroad, such as the Russian *Shakhmatny Bulletin* and *Shakhmaty vSSSR*.

By the time I became an IM, in 1969, that paucity of openings information had started to undergo a significant change, firstly with the launch of the bi-annual Yugoslav *Informator*, and a few years later by the publication of the first of what was destined to become a long series of detailed openings books from the London-based publishing house B.T. Batsford, whose Chess editor was that same Bob Wade. When I flew out to Portugal to take part in the tournament where I would earn my IM title, my luggage contained only the seven *Informators* that had been published to date, which I had borrowed from Jonathan Penrose at Bob's suggestion, and a handful of other books. They proved to be of some little use, so I was unable to prepare in any great depth for any of my games. My longest lines of

preparation were the first 9 moves of a topical variation of the Caro-Kann, which the Czech GM Miroslav Filip played against me, and the first 11 moves of a line in the Modern Benoni which Bulgarian GM Milko Bobotsov had essayed previously and which he repeated against me in Portugal. I managed to draw both games without difficulty, which was both very good for my morale and helpful to my score.

How the field of openings study has changed during the subsequent 50 years or so! Nowadays no self-respecting tournament player leaves home for an event without access to at least a huge database of games, literally millions of games, that can provide not only all of the published games played with any particular variation, but also expert analyses of variations, sub-variations, and sub-sub variations – detail to the n^{th} degree. And as well as the databases, and computer software to assist a player in analyzing the openings, there are now available very many books on the openings, written for the benefit of all levels of Chess player. In fact there is so much information now available on the openings that it is something of a mammoth task for tournament players who wish to immerse themselves in the detail of their favourite opening or variation. Preparation for a tournament game can now start with a systematic computer-aided tabulation of one's opponent's entire opening repertoire, their favourite variations, and the "novelty" moves they have unleashed on previous opponents or against which they have had to defend in past games. Add to this the ability of the modern tournament player to discover the latest improvements, the up-to-date theory of a variation they are preparing, and we can see how easy it would be to get lost in the forest of detail.

In preparing recently for a "seniors" team tournament I found, in a key line of analysis in my current repertoire, a "new" idea recommended at move 17, in which the further analysis extends to move 33 and the comment "with a drawn ending". Some difference from my Portugal tournament half a century ago, where my "deepest" preparation had been 11 moves. Nowadays only a player with a superhuman memory could remember all of the ways and byways of their openings repertoire, which brings me back to Bob Wade's advice to me in 1960 – learn the *ideas* behind the openings that you play.

What makes this book by Andy Burnett so fascinating and original in its approach is that he works from a purely historical basis. He explains, with copious examples, when a particular move or idea in the Dragon variation was first played, and how that move or idea developed from what was known theory beforehand.

The greatest benefit of this approach, in my opinion, is that we can follow the *development* of the many *ideas* that are the bedrock of the Dragon as we know it today. And following the development of those ideas is a truly excellent way to get to *understand* the ideas behind the Dragon. The late Bob Wade would, I feel certain, have loudly applauded the publication of Andy's book. With this book the reader is able to gain a superb level of understanding of the ideas behind the Dragon variation. And that is why I was so enthusiastic about getting involved in the editing task to which Andy invited me.

Editing this book has been a labour of love which I have truly enjoyed, just as writing it has been the consummation for Andy of his decades long love affair with the Dragon.

I too have been a Dragon lover for just about all of my competitive chess career. I cannot remember exactly when I adopted the variation, but I do recall my first Dragon exchange sacrifice on c3, which came when I was a teenager playing in the Hertfordshire Junior Championships. That affinity with the Dragon has never wavered – I have been a loyal Dragon foot soldier through its (temporarily) bad times as well as the good, and have never regretted my stubbornness, even when I was smashed by Boris Spassky at the 1974 Olympiad in Nice. So, an additional pleasure for me in editing this book has been somewhat like the enjoyment to be found in reading about a lifelong friend.

During the editing process for this book I have not contributed to the analysis – credit for all of the content is due to Andy. What I hope I have been able to do is contribute to the book's readability. Andy has a chatty style of writing, so readers will experience his exposition of the Dragon more like listening to a conversation between experts than as a study exercise. The experience will, I believe, be refreshing as well as highly instructive.

London,
December 2022



Preface

It is said that every good story has a beginning, a middle and an end, but in fact there can be multiple versions of each (as chessplayers know only too well - we call them openings, middlegames and endings!) The main storyline of the Dragon starts in the next chapter, but first it might be useful, or at least interesting, to see how your author came to have a three-decades and counting love affair with the Sicilian Dragon.

Almost every chess player can cite a specific game that attracted them to a particular opening. From copying their favourite player's main weapon or being struck by the ingenuity or beauty of a particular opening concept, something will usually 'click' to bring a player and an opening together. For example, I started to play the Vienna with g3 as White after my Scottish compatriot, GM Paul Motwani, won several beautiful games with it (against Jonsson for example, if it is of interest to you), and as Black I chose the Czech Benoni on the back of two incredible Bent Larsen games (against Flohr and Hamann).

The following game is where my love for the Dragon came from and I can still picture myself playing through the game in *Chess* magazine, reaching 18...♙xg4 and 19...♗h5, and almost laughing at the genius of it all.

Game 1

○ Plaskett, James

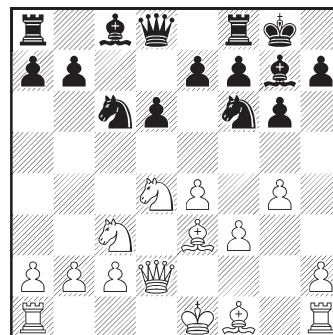
● Watson, William

Brighton, 1983

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 o-o 8.♙d2
♘c6 9.g4

One of the 'dark triad' of White choices here, along with 9.♙c4 and 9.o-o-o Although all are referred to as being part of the Yugoslav Attack, that may well be an incorrect labelling according

to Mikhail Golubev in his 1999 treatise, *Easy Guide to the Dragon*.

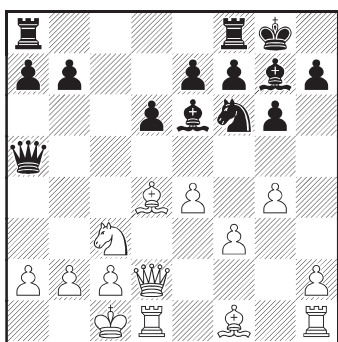


9...♙e6

9...♘xd4 is considered to be less accurate, but we will cover this particular opening conundrum in detail much later on our journey through the Dragon landscape.

I should also note that, throughout the games in this book, engines were of no use to the players at all – they simply didn't exist! I have made use of them at certain points when I felt it was useful to the story, or because the lines they showed were intriguing, brilliant and/or beautiful, and certainly not to disparage old analysis or any of the players and writers!

10.0-0-0 ♘xd4 11.♙xd4 ♚a5



This is a success of sorts for Black, having reached a5 in one fell swoop. The more accurate move-order, castling first, delaying g4 and playing ♔b1 instead, would force Black to play ...♚c7, ...♝fc8 and only then ...♚a5, but we will learn why it is so important in a later game. This encounter is just a teaser, a little something to whet your appetite, and a chance for me to reminisce a little.

12.a3

12.♔b1?!

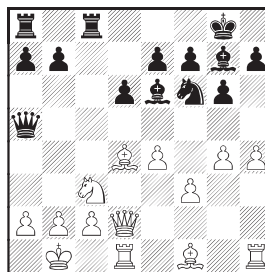
As we will see at the end of volume 2 of DragonMasters, this was Anand's choice in game 15 of his 1995 World Championship match against Gary Kasparov.

12...♝fc8

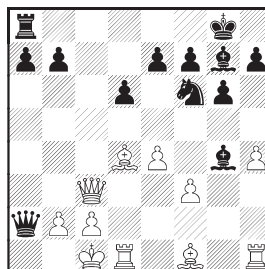
Black intends 13...♝xc3 if allowed. Instead, 12...♝fb8 is an interesting choice, e.g. 13.h4 b5 14.h5 b4.

Now Anand played 13.a3, but let us see what might have happened had he ignored Black's threat and instead bashed on with

13.h4



13...♝xc3! 14.♚xc3 ♚xa2+ 15.♔c1 ♙xg4!?

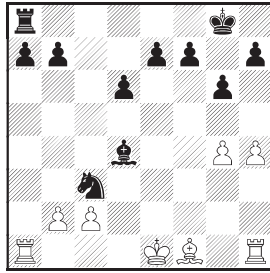


This, I believed for a long time, was basically winning for Black because of:

16. fxg4 ♖a1+

Not 16... ♜xe4?? 17. ♖a3

17. ♔d2 ♜xe4+ 18. ♔e1 ♜xc3 19. ♖xa1
♙xd4



However, the engines of 2022 find a way through the material deficit and visual difficulties for White, capitalising on the temporary unwieldiness of Black's forces:

20. ♙g2 ♖c8

20... ♖b8 21. bxc3 ♙xc3+ 22. ♔e2 ♙xa1
23. ♖xa1 a6 is also unclear.

21. ♖h3 ♜b5 22. c3 ♙b6 23. ♙xb7 ♖c5
and White may be able to hold a precarious balance.

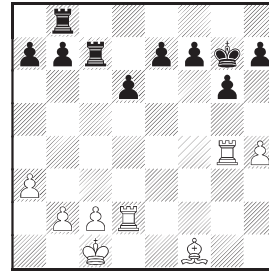
Instead of all this, 15... ♖a1+ 16. ♔d2
♖a4 is the modern engine's favoured approach for Black.

12... ♖fc8 13. h4 ♖ab8 14. h5

14. ♜d5!?

This was played in a later game against Watson by Paul Motwani. It doesn't particularly challenge Black, but it can lead to a curious end-game...

14... ♖xd2+ 15. ♖xd2 ♜xd5? (Watson actually played 15... ♙xd5!) 16. exd5 (16. ♙xg7 is equal.) 16... ♙xd5! 17. ♙xg7 ♙xf3 18. ♖h3 ♙xg4 19. ♖g3 ♔xg7 20. ♖xg4 ♖c7



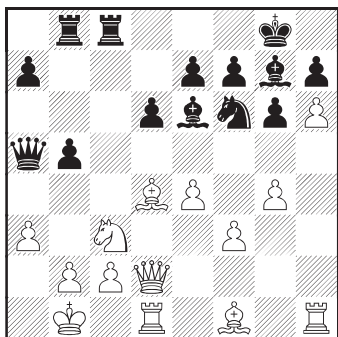
...and this very interesting ending will be scrutinised in volume 2.

14...b5

So, we have two rather brutal and straightforward attacks taking place, one on either side of the board. This is primarily what the Dragon is noted for and it provokes equal parts delight and fear!

15.h6

This is a big decision, and one that most engines would come to favour in many similar positions in later years. The position can also arise with White's king on b1 (White having saved a move with ♔b1 instead of g4, an idea that will be explained later in the book). Indeed, I reached this latter version as Black against the rising Ukrainian junior Kirill Shevchenko at the 2018 European Individual Championships in Batumi, the Georgian resort city on the Black Sea.



Although I knew of this move's existence, it still came as a surprise to me and I couldn't recall anything much about it at the board. Unfortunately, caught unawares, I went wrong quite quickly, finding myself in a lost position after...

16...♔h8

Instead, Black can try:

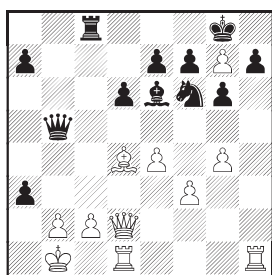
16...b4

A move we will see soon in our main game.

17.♘b5 ♜xb5

17...♔h8 18.g5 transposes to the game.

18.♙xb5 ♚xb5 19.hxg7 bxa3



A crossroads of sorts:

a) 20.♞h2

This was seen in Harris – Ward, which Black went on to win after 20...axb2

although the engines think it should be equal at this point.

b) 20.♞d3

Almost two decades on and this is the engine's preference. For a human who hasn't studied it *with* an engine, however, all three results are possible in such positions, and that's a huge part of the allure of the Dragon!

c) 20.♞h2

Given by Ward, who states: "... White should have tried [this] as the theme 20...♙xg4 21.♙xf6 ♙h5 doesn't work because of 22.♞d5 followed by taking on h5."

20...h5

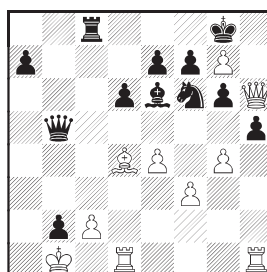
This ungainly move is a tougher nut to crack, though, as White has to be very careful of his own king. For example:

21.♞d2

21.♞d3 axb2 22.♞d2 ♞a4 23.♙xb2 ♜b8 24.♞h6?? ♞a2+ wins for Black while 21.gxh5 is met by the simple

21...♞xh5.

21...axb2 22.♞h6



22...♙a2+!! 23.♙xa2 ♞a4+ 24.♙xb2 ♜xc2+ 25.♙b1 ♞a2#.