

# EXPERIMENTING WITH THE DRAGON

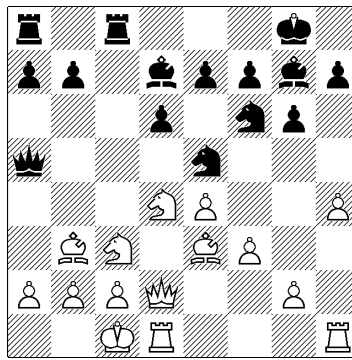
by GM Mikhail Golubev (1998)

I have played the Dragon Variation of the Sicilian Defense almost from the very beginning of my chess studies, eventually amassing about 150 games with it. As such, I have accumulated some experience with it, and so I would like to share some of this with the reader. After **6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 Nc6 8.Qd2 0-0**, the three principle systems played against the Dragon today are 9.Bc4, 9.0-0-0 and 9.g4. These lines fall within the nomenclature of the Rauzer Attack (the name 'Yugoslav Attack' is probably incorrect, this is discussed best of all in Levy's book, 1972). Here are some experiments of mine versus the Rauzer Attack, including ideas that encouraged me to continue my investigations.

## 1) 9.Bc4

Along with many other young chess players at the end of the 70's and the early 80's, I studied and played the Dragon under the influence of brilliant victories by Sosonko, Miles and Mestel after **1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cd4 4.Nd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.h4 Rc8 11.Bb3 h5! 12.0-0-0 Ne5 13.Bg5 Rc5!!**. However, contrary to other players from Odessa, such as D. Berkovich and S. Savchenko, my attention focused upon the variations without ...h7-h5. It is difficult to explain why I chose this different path. Probably, this was because I had been seriously studying the move order: 10.h4 Ne5 11.Bb3 Rc8 12.h5 (12.0-0-0! is more precise, though many don't know this) 12...Nh5 13.0-0-0 Qa5! =. So, from my childhood until now, I have used the variation with 12...Nc4 (after 10.h4 Ne5 11.Bb3 Rc8 12.0-0-0 or 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4), often incorporating the plan of Veresov and Dubinin with ...Qd8-a5:

**9.Bc4 Bd7 10.h4 Qa5 11.Bb3 Rfc8 12.0-0-0 Ne5**



Black is OK after **13.b5 Nh5 14.Bh6 Nd3!?**. This is also true for **14...Bh6 15.Qh6 Rc3!**. Now **16.bc3 Qc3?** has been refuted by Karpov and Gik: **17.Ne2 Qc5 18.g4 Nf6 19.g5 Nh5 20.Rh5 gh5 21.Rh1 Qe3 22.Kb1! Qf3 23.Rh5 Ng6 24.Qh7 Kf8 25.Rh1!! e6 27.Nd4**. Instead, **16...Nf6(!)** remains reliable. After **16...Rc8!?**, the Russian correspondence chess player Sanakoev published some new analyses of his old game against Stern, but it won't alter any theoretical conclusions. White has more chances after **14...Nd3**. But even in this line he has nothing more than the trap: **15.Kb1 Nb2! 16.Kb2 Bh6 17.Qh6 Rc3! 18.g4** (Lepeshkin's idea with **18.e5!?** is yet to be tested) **18...Nf6 19.e5 de5?? (19...Rb3!) 20.g5! +-**. Instead, **14.g4 Nf6 15.Bh6 Rc3 16.bc3 Bh6 17.Rh6 Rc8 18.Kb2, 18...Qb6** equalizes, while **18...Bg4!?** (Budovich) is quite interesting. Recently White began to play **14.Nd5!?** **Qd2 15.Rd2**. I am of opinion that this variation is approximately equal. Those who are afraid of it might consider **13...Rc3!?**.

Another White option is **13.g4**. Now **13...b5** is dubious after **14.h5 Nc4 (14...b4!?) 15.Bc4 bc4 16.Bh6! Bh8 17.Nf5! Re8 18.hg6 fg6 19.Bg7!**. The main line with **13...Nc4 14.Bc4 Rc4** offers White hope for an advantage. (This line is similar to **10.h4 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.0-0-0 Nc4 13.Bc4 Rc4 14.g4!?** **Qa5!?**, but in the latter case White has the important additional resource **15.Nb3!?** **Qa6 16.Bh6!**, making use of the rook's position on f8). In 1994, I returned to a move that I used in my childhood: **13...Rc4** (Veresov's idea) **14.Bc4 Nc4 15.Qd3 b5 16.Kb1 Rc8 17.Nb3 Qa6 18.Bc1** when White is probably better (Klovans-Golubev,

Biel 1994). Later I learned that I missed **15...Qb4! 16.Nb3 Ne4!!** when Black is OK, as in Petkevics-Rausis, Latvia, 1995. If **14.g5**, then **14...Nh5 15.f4 Rd4 16.Qd4 Ng4** provides counter play, as occurred in the almost unknown game Ivanchuk-Mozgovoï, Evpatoria 1984.

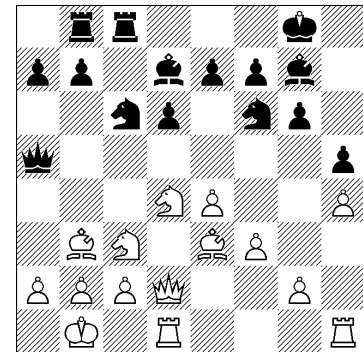
## 13.Kb1!

This continuation leads to a headache for Black in the system with **Qd8-a5**. After **13...Nc4 14.Bc4 Rc4 15.Nb3!** (main line) I tested all queen retreats except for the clearly dubious **15...Qe5!?**. The move **15...Qa6** brought me my first GM-norm in the last round game against Istratescu (Lucerne, 1994). But I won't use this move in the future because **16.e5, 16.Bh6, and 16.h5** are all extremely unpleasant. After **15...Qc7 16.Bd4! Be6 17.h5 a5 18.hg6 hg6 19.a4** Black balances between the draw and the loss, the latter being more probable. There remains to play **15...Qd8!?**. Here, a variation from the game Kupreichik-Ribli, Sombor 1970 is still relevant: **16.e5 Ne8 17.h5 Be5 18.hg6 hg6 19.Bd4 Rd4 20.Nd4**.

There are few players presently who are ready to fight for Black in this line. The only hope for him in this variation remains the move **13...b5!?**, introduced by Korchnoi more than 30 years ago. Should Black play **13...h5!?**, then it has been known for a long time that **14.Bg5!** is unpleasant.

...In 1990 I paid attention to the other possibility, viz., to combine ...Qd8-a5 with ...h7-h5:

**10.h4 Qa5 11.Bb3 Rfc8 12.0-0-0 h5! 13.Kb1 Rab8**



This variation has been rejected on the basis of analyses done by Lotsov in his comments upon the game Suslov-Zelinsky, 1967, published in a Latvian magazine. The game continued: **14.g4 hg4 15.f4**

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Nd4 16.Bd4 e5 17.fe5 de5 18.Qg5 Nh7 19.Qg6 ed4, and here, instead of 20.h5?, Lotsov proved that White has an advantage after 20.Qf7! Kh8 21.Ne2! Bc6 22.Nf4 Be4 23.h5 Rf8 24.Ng6 Bg6 25.hg6!, etc. Instead, I discovered how to strengthen Black's game by 23...Ng5! (21...Nf6!? is also possible) and subsequently following up with ...Ra8-b8.

**Al. Kovacevic-Golubev, Novi Sad 1990** 14.Nde2 b5 (14...Ne5) 15.Bh6 Bh8 (15...b4!?!; 15...Ne5!?) 16.g4 (16.Qg5 Kh7!?!; 16...Ne5) 16...b4 17.Nd5 Nd5 18.Bd5 (18.ed5 Ne5, unclear) 18...b3! 19.Bb3!?! Nb4?! (19...Qd2) 20.c3?! (20.Nd4!) 20...Na2 21.Ba2 Rc3, unclear.

**Hartlieb-Golubev, Schmiden 1992** 14.g4 hg4 15.f4 Nd4 16.Bd4 e5 17.fe5 de5 18.Qg5 Nh7 19.Bf7? Kf7 20.Rdf1 Kg8 21.Qg6 ed4 22.Nd5 Qc5 23.Qf7 Kh8 24.Ne7 Qc2 25.Ka1 Rc6 +.

**Thiel-Golubev, Hof (rapid) 1992** 14.Nde2 b5 15.Nf4!?! b4!?! (15...Ne5 16.Ncd5 Qd2 17.Rd2 Nd5 18.Nd5 Nc6) 16.Ncd5 Nd5 17.Nd5 e6 18.Ne7!?! Ne7 19.Qd6, and correct was 19...Nc6! 20.Qd7 Qe5 21.Bc1 Nd4 22.f4!?! Qe4 23.Rbe1 Qa8!.

**Neumeier-Golubev, Loosdorf 1993** 14.Nd5 Qd2 15.Rd2 Nd5 16.Bd5 Ne5!?! 17.Ne2 b6 18.Bd4 a5 19.a3 Rc7 20.Nf4 e6 21.Ba2 b5.

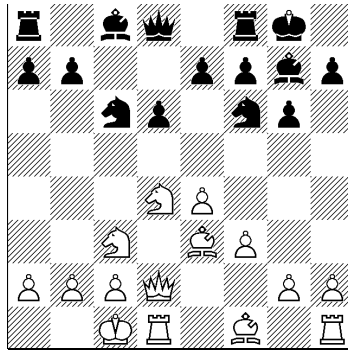
**Kulaots-Golubev, Weilburg 1995** 14.Rhe1 b5 15.Bh6 Nd4 16.Bg7 Kg7 17.Qd4 Qb6 18.e5 (18.Qd2!?) 18...Qd4 19.Rd4 de5 20.Re5 e6 21.Ne4 Bc6 22.Nd6 Rf8 23.a4?! (23.Rc5 Rb6 24.Ne4 Rfb8) 23...ba4 24.Ba4 Ba4 25.Ra4 Rfd8.

**Rosenberger-Golubev, Germany 1996** 14.Nde2 b5 15.Bg5 b4 16.Nd5 Nd5 17.Qd5 Qd5 18.ed5?! Na5 19.Nd4 Nb3 20.Nb3 Bf5 21.Rd2 Rb5 22.Be7 Be5 23.Bg5 a5, and the results of the opening were good everywhere.

Still, this variation occasionally troubled me, so I avoided using it against dangerous opponents. Initially, I considered two dangerous lines: 14.g4 hg4 15.h5 and 14.Bg5!?. The last possibility, based upon the continuation 14...Nd4 15.Qd4 Nh7? 16.Qd5, took much of my time. However, I do not want to waste your time here because I have discovered at last that **14.g4! hg4 15.h5! Nh5 16.Nf5!** practically de-

stroys Black's position. So this experiment first contributed to my ELO rating and then to theory. Nevertheless, the more popular systems with Ra8-c8 prove that Black's condition is good. So, 9.Bc4 ceased to be the main line after the mid 90's.

**2) 9.0-0-0!**



It was rare to play this line in the period beginning in the 50's (when 9.Bc4 started to be fashionable) until about 1977, when Timman used 9.0-0-0 against the originator of 9.Bc4...13...Rc5!! Sosonko. Even afterwards, the move 9.0-0-0 was less fashionable than 9.Bc4. In comparison, it was not easy to find the checkmate promised by Fischer in the 9.Bc4 line. But, 9.0-0-0 was the move that the discoverer of this attack, Vsevolod Rauzer played against Chekhover in Leningrad, 1936: 6.f3 (now White plays 6.Be3!) 6...Bg7 7.Be3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.0-0-0! Nd4 10.Bd4 Be6 11.Kb1! Rc8 12.h4 Nh5?! 13.Bg7... I concluded long ago that Rauzer was right. After the natural and logical 9.0-0-0, Black is presented with quite difficult strategic problems.

**9...d5!?**

This is the most popular line versus 9.0-0-0, first suggested by A. Konstantinovsky in 1937. All other reasonable replies for Black were also found in the 30's. 9...Nd4 10.Bd4 Be6, is Chekhover's plan. It also has an extensive theoretical history (whenever I play against the Dragon as White, my opponents often choose to play this line against me). After 11.Kb1! White exerts an unpleasant pressure and is superior in all variations. 9...Nd4 10.Bd4 Qa5 (Lisitsin 1938) has been rejected long ago (11.Kb1!; 11.Bc4!). The cunning move 9...Be6 (Lisitsin 1938) has not found its

justification after 10.Kb1 (and there is also 10.Ne6!?).

Only 9...Bd7 (Veresov 1938) remains. Frequently it transposes from 7...Nc6 8.Qd2 Bd7 9.0-0-0 0-0. Several years ago I prepared material on this line for the *Correspondence Chess Informator*, analyzing 10.g4 Ne5 11.h4 b5 12.Nd5 (12.h5!?) 12...Nd5 13.ed5 b4. White is superior after 14.h5 Qa5 15.Kb1! Qd5 16.Nf5!, but Black has more chances in other lines.

A related idea was seen in the game Maes-Golubev, Leuven 1995: 6.g3 Bg4 7.f3 Bd7 8.g4 Nc6 9.Be3 Bg7 10.Qd2 0-0 11.h4 h5 12.g5 Nh5 13.0-0-0 Rc8 14.Rg1 e6!?! N 15.Nb3 (15.Rg5!?) 15...Ne5 16.Be2 Qh4 17.Bg5 Qf2 18.Be3 Qh4 19.Bg5 Qf2 20.Be3, draw.

**10.ed5!**

This is strongest. Versus Leonid Milov's idea - 10.Kb1!?! Nd4 11.e5!! - I found probably the best continuation in 1996 with 11...Nf5!?! 12.ef6 Bf6! 13.Nd5 Qd5! 14.Qd5 Ne3. Subsequently many players have tried it and no White advantage has been found.

Against Dvoiris's move 10.Qe1!?! I have played 10...e5 11.Nc6 bc6 12.ed5 Nd5 13.Bc4 Be6 14.Ne4 Qc7 15.Bc5 Rfd8. Here the essential difference between similar positions arising after 10.ed5 is that White has no time to fix the pawn structure on Kingside. Instead, the line 12...cd5 13.Bg5 Be6 14.Bc4! favours White. The contemporary theoretical viewpoint of 10...e6 is not bad. I studied this move with S. Savchenko in 1989 but always favored 10...e5. Stanislav later used his idea 10...e6 11.g4 e5!! against Morozevich. My idea was 11.h4 Qc7 - I told Boris Alterman about this move, and he later played it against Kramnik (1990).

**10...Nd5 11.Nc6 bc6 12.Bd4!**

Suetin introduced this move in 1955. Till then, the important variation with 12.Nd5 cd5 13.Qd5 Qc7 14.Qc5 Qb7 15.Qa3 Bf5 16.Ba6 Qc7 17.Qc5 Qb6 18.Qb6 ab6 19.Bc4 Rfc8 20.Bb3 Ra2 21.Rd8 = (Ravinsky-Beilin) has been explored. Instead, after 15.b3 Bf5 16.Bd3 it is best to play 16...Rac8 with the idea of 17.Qa7 Bd3 18.Qb7 Rc2 = (Rychagov-Savchenko, 1988). Many theoreticians recommend 17...Qb5, but

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after 18.Kb1: 18...Qe5? 19.Bd4; 18...Rc2 19.Bc2 Bc2 20.Kc2 Rc8 21.Bc5! or 18...Bd3!? 19.Rd3 Ra8 20.Qd7, all lines favor White.

**12...e5**

This has been popular for decades. However lately Black has started to play less ambitiously: 12...Nc3!? 13.Qc3 Bh6 14.Be3 Be3 15.Qe3 Qb6 (Alterman's idea) and 12...Bd4!? 13.Qd4 Qb6 14.Na4 Qa5 (or even 13...Qc7).

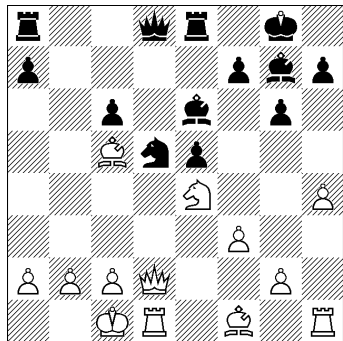
**13.Bc5 Be6**

Black once played 13...Re8 as a drawing attempt. I remember how I lost my interest for this move because of the variation 14.Nd5 cd5 15.Qd5 Qd5 16.Rd5 Be6 17.Rd6 Ba2 18.b4! (Van der Wiel's move) 18...a5 19.Bb5 Rec8 20.Bd7 Rc7 21.Bc6 ab4 22.Ba8 Rc5 23.Kb2 Be6 24.Rd8 Bf8 25.Rhd1 Kg7 26.Bd5 Be7 27.Re8. Today, 18...Bf8 19.Ra6! is in fashion. Other options are 13...e4? 14.Ne4!? f5 15.Nc3 and 13...Rb8?! 14.Bc4! (14.Nd5!? cd5 15.Qd5 Qf6 is not quite clear).

**14.Ne4 Re8**

14...Rb8 is doubtful because of 15.Bc4!. Also, if 14...a5, then 15.Bc4 is a good answer.

**15.h4!**



One of the key positions of the 9.0-0-0 attack, it has been thoroughly highlighted since the end of the 70's.

Black has a wide range of choices, but most are unpleasant:

**15...Nf6?** 16.Qd8 Rad8 17.Rd8 Rd8 18.Be7 Ne4 19.Bd8.

**15...Rb8?!** 16.Bc4 is good for White.

**15...f5** 16.Ng5 Bh6 17.c4!? shifts to a better ending - Kudriashov-Sabitov, Moscow 1981.

**15...h6 16.g4 Qc7** ('mainline'). Here, to my mind, Black is in a really bad state after 17.g5.

**15...a5** 16.Bc4 h5 will be discussed below, there is still 16.g4!? (16.h5 Nb4!?).

**15...Nf4!?** This move was sometimes used after the Van der Wiel-Tiviakov game: 16.g3 (16.Qe1!?) 16...Qd2 17.Rd2 Nh5 (17...Nd5) 18.g4 Nf4!, and White enjoys a somewhat better ending.

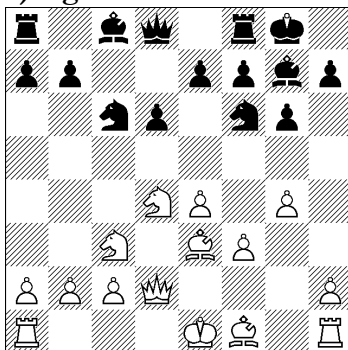
In 1993 I managed to use the novelty **15...h5**. Tiviakov later examined this move in his book. Let us consider the variations arising after 16.Bc4!:

**Kudrin-Golubev, Moscow 1995** 16...a5 17.a4! Nf4 (17...Qc7 18.g4!?) 18.Qd8 Rad8 19.Rd8 Rd8 20.Be6 Ne6 21.Bb6!, and White is clearly better.

**Howell-Golubev, Biel 1993** 16...Nf4 17.Qd8! Red8 18.Be6! Ne6 and now, instead of 19.Rd8?!, as analyzed by Tiviakov, 19.Be7! Rd1 20.Rd1 Nf4 (20...f5 21.Nc5!?) 21.Nf6, when neither 21...Kh8 nor 21...Bf6 22.Bf6 Ng2 diminish White's winning chances.

Still, not everything is clear for me after **15...h6 16.g4 Nf4!?** 17.Qc3 Bd5. After the popular 18.g5, it is interesting to consider 18...hg5 19.hg5 Ne6!? 20.Be3 Qe7! (20...Nd4 21.Rh3!?). Or 18.Qa3 Qc7 19.g5 Be4!? 20.fe4 hg5 21.hg5 Bf8 as in McDonald-S.B. Hansen, Arhus 1990. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that Black can survive after 9.0-0-0.

**3) 9.g4**



White prevents the move ...d6-d5 (9...d5? 10.g5! Nh5 11.ed5!). It appears to me that this variation occupies an intermediate position: it is not so aggressive as 9.Bc4 and not so objectively strong as 9.0-0-0. Still, Black's path to equality is not all roses in this case either. The main continuation is **9...Be6**. In 1997 I met a rare idea for White promoted by Hungarian GM Varga: 10.Ne6 fe6 11.Bc4. I believe that I managed to find a successful counter plan: 11...Qc8 12.Bb3 Na5

13.0-0-0 Nb3 14.cb3 Nd7 15.Rhf1 Bc3!, with good game. However, sometimes one does not wish to make conventional moves, even if one finds them adequate.

The much more problematic continuation **9...h5** brought me several victories. The game Dolmatov-Dorfman, USSR 1983, continued **10.h3** Nd4 11.Bd4 Qa5 12.0-0-0 when the move h7-h5 has not been justified. Instead, I think my move **10...d5!?** is more interesting. It is supported by the variations 11.g5 Nh7 12.ed5 Nd4 13.Bd4 Ng5 and 11.gh5 Nh5!? 12.ed5 Nb4 13.Bc4 e6 14.de6 Bd4 15.gf7 Kh7, where Black makes good use of his h7-square.

**Balcerak-Golubev, Senden 1996** 11.g5 Nh7 12.0-0-0 Bd4 13.Bd4 de4 14.Ne4 Nd4 15.Qd4 Qc7!?, with a good game.

**Kovchan-Golubev, Alushta 1997** 11.Nc6 bc6 12.e5 Nd7 13.f4 h4 14.0-0-0 Qa5 15.Qe1 Re8 16.Qh4 Rb8 17.a3 Ba6!, with compensation.

To date, my novelty has been justified in practice. Instead, the best continuation for White is **11.Nc6 bc6 12.0-0-0!** e5 13.Bc5! or 12...Qa5 13.ed5! when the correctness of Black's plan is questionable.

What conclusion might be drawn from this discussion? Probably, that the Dragon Sicilian still has plenty of room for new ideas.

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