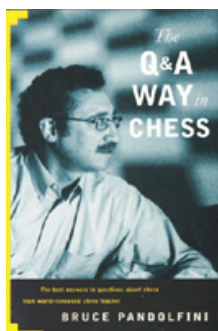




COLUMNISTS

The Q & A
Way

Bruce Pandolfini



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The Dragon Wagon

Question I am in my thirties and have been playing chess for many years. You might say I am on the Dragon wagon. I play the Sicilian Defense and in particular play the Dragon. You might say I like putting my bishop on g7. (I also like other systems that make use of a7-a6 and b7-b5, and would love if I could to merge my two favorite notions in one concept.) I am about 1400 in chess ability strength. In playing the Dragon, I win and I lose, though I do not always know what to do at the right time. Is there some approach to all of this that can enable me to prevent or stop or discourage (or anything) the advances on the kingside? Anyhow, can you suggest any good instructional material? Thank you, I like to read your columns whenever I can. I need help, and the worst thing that can happen to me is when White plays f2-f3, then g2-g4, h2-h4-h5, and castles queenside. **Paul Manham (USA)**

Question If that's the worst thing that can happen to you, I'd like to know how I could become you. That ambition unrealizable, the Dragon, though not the only good way to proceed against the Sicilian Defense, is very popular for those handling Black, and the so-called Yugoslav Attack, though not the only good way to counter the Dragon, is a typical weapon in White's arsenal. To be sure, White hopes for a kingside pawn storm against Black's king. White is even willing to sacrifice a few pawns, and sometimes more, to fuel a promising offensive. If you want to find reinforcement for this idea, among the countless corroborating examples out there, you might take a look at Bobby Fischer's victory over Bent Larsen from the Portoroz event of 1958, which is the second game offered in Fischer's classic, [My 60 Memorable Games](#). It's in that contest that Fischer provided us one of his best known quotes: "I'd won dozens of skittles games in analogous positions and had it down to a science: pry open the KR-file, sac, sac ... mate!"

Fischer aside, you can try to blunt White's kingside juggernaut a bit, replying, when opportune, with the advance h7-h5, but this doesn't necessarily stop the line-opening expansion. At best, it endeavors to render White's anticipated assault ineffective. If you're going to tap the Dragon, you must do more than defend perfectly. Indeed, you have to manufacture your own counterattack on the queenside, where White's king is probably castled. Do it correctly, and you might stop White's aggression in its tracks. At least, that's the hope. Naturally, things don't always work out so neatly and as planned. These days, there are all kinds of new counter-weapons for Black, such as combining the kingside flank with the moves a7-a6 and b7-b5, merging your two favorite notions in one concept. In fact, the idea isn't even so new, and it's fairly common, so you can merge with some confidence.

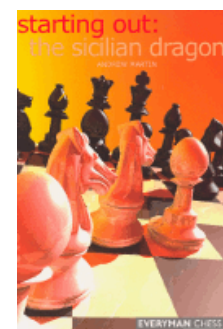
There are plenty of books worth exploring here. [Play the Sicilian Dragon](#) by Edward Dearing is one; [Starting Out: The Sicilian Dragon](#) by Andrew Martin is another. I also recommend the excellent volume, [The New Sicilian Dragon](#) by Simon Williams. But there are other helpful texts on the Dragon, and you can find lots of good material online. You should also consider two fairly good DVD products, Andrew Martin's [ABC of the Sicilian Dragon](#) and Foxy Openings DVD, [Vol. 45: The Sicilian Dragon](#). All of the above should prove enjoyably helpful.

Question I am a casual player and I never played in a rated tournament. I often become confused when trying to play over an annotated game. I cannot decide how much time I should put into it. I also do not know whether I should be discouraged if I cannot play over all the notations. Sometimes I do not understand them and I often find myself getting exhausted trying to do it. If I wanted to play over every note how should I do it? I play over the game on a chess set, although I have some software that would allow me to play it

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[Solitaire Chess](#)
by Bruce Pandolfini



[Starting Out:
The Sicilian Dragon](#)
by Andrew Martin



[Sicilian Dragon 1](#)
by Dorian Rogozenko

on computer, and I have a laptop so I can move it about. If I could, I would like to do it my way, even though I cannot sing like Frank Sinatra. Any thoughts you have I would appreciate. **Richard Howsen (USA)**

Question Since I presume you're playing and studying chess for pleasure, why don't you go with the approach you find most pleasing, spending as much or as little time on it as you'd like? I suspect you'll get more out of that than you might from any other method, however much others applaud a single technique or comparable ones. For the most part, I would examine the game with software, rather than use an actual chessboard and set, since you can do more and proceed much faster on screen. You can also save positions, without fear of pieces becoming displaced, and when feasible, you can add reminders and useful comments to the saved material. This allows you to take breaks, lessening your burden, while minimizing lost thoughts. In addition, by virtue of using software, you typically have access to supportive examples whenever you'd need them or would like to see them.

If you had the time, and were willing to make the effort, you should play over a game in depth. There naturally are multifarious ways to do this, but I suggest you try the following approach. Play through the given game one time, without investing much enterprise, just to get a feel for the terrain and to establish an overview. This can be very helpful later, if somehow you become stuck on a point. That is, the answer to an immediate confusion might become obvious once you see the game's ultimate path, despite the idea not being explained in the notes (or if an idea is not presented fully).

Once you get a sense for the game's narrative, try playing through it more seriously and pointedly, examining each move and comment in sequence and as each one applies. You'll have to figure out how much time to be set aside for this activity by trial and error, again, to see what works for you. But you don't have to do everything in one session either. As I seem to be implying, you can partition your efforts, as long as you make certain to reacquaint yourself with what you've already done every time you come back to that particular game. I don't know of any studies on this, but there's some general writing on it, on how to review a game. I'm not exactly sure where he treats these ideas, but some of the best explanations for how to analyze and play over a game can be found in the writings of C.J.S. Purdy. But again, to get more from your efforts, find and adopt the method that seems to work best for you, even if it runs counter to conventional wisdom. There's much to be said for doing it your way, even if you can't sing like Frank Sinatra.

Question For the past two years I have been playing chess in a nearby club. I first came in contact with chess as a youngster, when my father showed me how to play, but I never took it to it until recently. I play at the club once every week or every two weeks. I usually get my head handed to me, though I win an occasional game. Generally, my opposition is a tad better than me, though that extra experience they have seems to make all the difference, and they wind up squeezing me in the endgame. My approach has been one of seeking instruction from my play, trying to play enough so that my experience gains and, eventually, so will my playing skill. But how long do you think I have to make such sacrifices? I'm starting to become a little discouraged. I am even thinking of giving up, and I do not want to do that. Also, can you recommend one book to help me study the endgame, maybe one of yours? I hope you can help me. **Thomas Bouchet (USA)**

Question You're obviously a sincere person, and it's clear you really want to play and enjoy this great game. Clearly, your take on the matter is on the money. If you keep playing, your overall ability is bound to gain. One question I'd be concerned with is the quality of your opposition. When players are trying to improve expeditiously, teachers and coaches usually recommend that they "play up." That is, they play opponents at least a level better than they are. But I think there's a potential drawback to such a program, in that, if you always play up, you're going to lose so much and so often that all the fun is taken out of it. Eventually, too much defeat leads to loss of enthusiasm. The next step could easily be giving up the game altogether, as you now seem to be considering.

So what I usually advocate is to play a variety of opposition, some stronger,

some weaker, where the real test is adjusting to the differences in strengths, styles, and the nature of the ideas thrown at you. That will give you some winning experience, which will encourage further excitement and play. Those victories should keep you motivated, involved, and eager for more competition. The idea is that the process feeds on itself and the player is propelled onward.

You want one book to study the endgame. I recommend you take a good look at Jeremy Silman's [Complete Endgame Course](#). His endgame presentation is excellent, and he has a few books out there that might help on how one approaches improvement. No matter what, my advice to you is to stay with chess, figuring out individual ways to make the game more satisfying. Good luck, and have fun.

Question In many fields, where there are competing young people, groups of gifted participants may influence individuals in the group, stimulating each others development. This is the idea of learning from one's peers, and why we have better schools and universities. In chess we hear of, for instance, Russian players who grew and become stronger because they played each other as juniors, whether it was constant blitz chess or more serious chess. Did you bump into any of that when you were a young player, and is that what stimulated you to become a strong player? Do you have any anecdotal asides to share? If you did play with other strong players, did any of them become stronger than you? **Benson Rosenfeld (USA)**

Answer I'm not sure what I bumped into when I was younger, but whatever it was, I never really became a strong player, at least not by my standards. In my teens, I played with other teenagers at the Marshall Chess Club, and a number of us showed some merit. Maybe five or six of us reached the master level or better. By far the most talented of the group was Andy Soltis, who eventually became a grandmaster. But the truth is, in my opinion, he had the talent to be a super grandmaster, if he had not devoted himself to his career and being a full-time journalist. Andy was a very creative player, and a real force at the chessboard. My only strategy against him was to get his queen off the board before he mated me, but that didn't help much, since he easily outclassed me in the endgame as well. What did I know? Anyhow, Andy still became a terrific player, and even something else: the best chess writer in America.

Question I heard about people playing different types of chess besides the standard form we all know about. I'm not talking about blitz or speed chess, though. Can you tell me anything about these new chess games? Thanks! **Rossa Testa (USA)**

Answer I'm not sure what new games you mean. Perhaps you've come in contact with Fischer Random Chess, versions of which have other names as well. The basic thing in this form of chess is that players start with the pawns in place, on each player's second row, but the pieces are randomized along the front row. They then play regular chess from there.

When groups of players get together, they sometimes play Bughouse Chess, which can lead to lively encounters. Kids love the game, though adults often play it for thrills as well. In Bughouse, you play with at least one partner (there can be many more, though such massive Bughouse affairs are unusual), one of you starting with white and the other black. In this way, anything you capture in your particular game is given to your partner to be placed on the board in his or her game, with each placement counting as a move and executed whenever the player thinks it desirable. Various other rules apply, many strange positions can occur, and that's one of the typical reasons (there are several others) educators sometimes are opposed to the game.

Yet the game has many virtues, too, and young players in particular seem to have so much fun, it's practically impossible to stop them once Bughouse sessions get going. I usually let my students play Bughouse, but that doesn't mean anything. I have my own problems, and maybe I like Bughouse more than I should (nah!). Those are two versions of non-standard chess now popular, but there are others. Since my hands are getting as tired as my brains, I'm going to stop right here.

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published below.

Why do you play chess?

(Concerning my misquote of Yogi Berra, for which I apologize to the readers, we have the following funny correction – BP)

Arfur from the **USA** - Pandolfini quotes Yogi Berra, "you can learn a lot by watching." I always thought it was "you can observe a lot by watching." Of course Mr. Berra has stated, "lots of the stuff I said I didn't say."

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The Q & A Way is based in large part on readers' questions. Do you have a question about preparation, strategy or tactics? Submit your questions (with you full name and country of residence please) and perhaps Bruce will reply in his next **ChessCafe.com** column...

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