



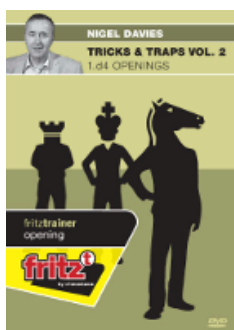
## COLUMNISTS

### Middlegame Motifs

Nigel Davies

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## The Sicilian Exchange Sacrifice

The sacrifice of rook for minor piece is known as an exchange sacrifice and represents a form of minor material commitment. Often the compensation can be of a purely positional nature and last for many moves.

One of the most common varieties of exchange sacrifice occurs in the Sicilian Defence, in particular the Dragon Variation with **1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6**. Black often gives up a rook for White's knight on c3, the two major motives for doing so being to weaken White's king position (should he be castled long) or to win the e4-pawn that is protected by a knight on c3. Sometimes both of these objectives are fulfilled, occasionally there are other reasons.

In the following games we see one of the great Dragon specialists at work against grandmaster opposition. Jonathan Mestel was one of the most talented British players and would have certainly gone much further in the game had he turned professional.

**Janosevic, Dragoljub (2465) – Mestel, Jonathan (2290)**  
Birmingham Zettors (3), 29.03.1975  
Sicilian Dragon [B78]

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

The move that characterises the so-called Dragon Variation; Black posts his bishop on g7 so as to breathe fire down the h8–a1 diagonal. One of the special features of this development is that the bishop often facilitates exchange sacrifices against c3.

**6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3**

The so called Rauzer Attack which is most dangerous line against the Dragon. White is getting ready to play Qd1–d2 and then castle long after which he is perfectly placed to attack Black's king side fianchetto defences with h2–h4–h5 plus exchanging off Black's dark-squared bishop with Be3–h6. But as we shall see it's not all one way traffic.

**7...0–0 8.Bc4 Bd7 9.Qd2 Nc6 10.h4 Ne5 11.Bb3 h5 12.Bh6 Bxh6 13.Qxh6 Rc8 14.g4!?**



[FEN "2rq1rk1/pp1bpp2/3p1npQ/4n2p/3NP1PP/1BN2P2/PPP5/R3K2R b KQ g3 0 14"]

Playing for mate against his young opponent. 14.Qe3 might have been a safer way to proceed, preventing the exchange sacrifice on c3 at least for the time being.

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**14...Rxc3 15.bxc3 Qa5 16.0-0-0**

16.Qe3 was also worth considering but Black has excellent play after 16...hxg4.

**16...Qxc3 17.Kb1 a5**

Threatening to win the bishop on b3 with ...a5-a4 but Jansevic just keeps going with his own stuff.

**18.gxh5 a4 19.hxg6 axb3 20.cxb3 fxg6 21.h5 Nxh5**



[FEN "5rk1/1p1bp3/3p2pQ/4n2n/3NP3/1Pq2P2/P7/1K1R3R w - - 0 22"]

**22.f4?**

A mistake which might have been motivated by wanting to beat his young opponent. After 22.Rxh5 gxh5 23.Rg1+, all roads seem to lead to a draw; for example, 23...Bg4 24.Ne6 Qd3+ 25.Ka1 Qc3+ (Or 25...Rf7 26.Qg5+ Kh8 27.fxg4 Qc3+) 26.Kb1 Qd3+ etc.

**22...Nd3! 23.Qxg6+ Ng7 24.Rh2 Rc8**

Not the best. Black could actually have played 24...Qxd4! , the point being that 25.Rdh1 (25.f5 Rxf5! 26.exf5 Bxf5 Black gets a winning attack.) 25...Bh3! stops the mate on h8 and leaves the bishop immune because of the threats against b2.

**25.Qg1 Nxf4 26.Rc2 Qa5 27.Rxc8+ Bxc8**

With two pieces against a rook Black is better here but the fact that his king is exposed means that it won't be easy. But Mestel handles this phase with exceptional maturity and *sang froid*.

**28.Qe3 Qe5 29.Nf3 Qf6 30.e5 Bf5+ 31.Ka1 dxe5 32.Qxe5 Kf7 33.a4 Bc2 34.Rd4 Nfe6 35.Qxf6+ Kxf6 36.Rb4 Nc5**



[FEN "8/1p2p1n1/5k2/2n5/PR6/1P3N2/2b5/K7 w - - 0 37"]

**37.Rc4?!**

A time trouble error? 37.Rb6+ was much better, when 37...Nge6 38.Nd2

makes it difficult.

**37...Nxb3+ 38.Kb2 Bd1 39.Rf4+ Nf5 40.Rb4 Bxf3 41.Rxb3 Bc6**

Now everything is clear because the e-pawn will cost White his rook. But Janosevic decides to check whether his opponent knows how to mate with bishop and knight against king.

**42.a5 e5 43.a6 bxa6 44.Rb6 Nd4 45.Rxa6 Kf5 46.Kc3 Kf4 47.Kd2 Nf3+ 48.Kd1 Bb5 49.Rb6 Bd3 50.Rb2 Kg3 51.Rb3 e4 52.Ra3 Kf2 53.Ra2+ Kf1 54.Ra3 Be2+ 55.Kc1 Kf2 56.Rc3 Nd4 57.Kd2 Nf3+ 58.Kc1 e3 59.Ra3 Bc4 60.Rxe3 Kxe3 61.Kb2 Kd2 62.Ka1 Kc3 63.Kb1 Nd4 64.Ka1 Nc2+ 65.Kb1 Bd5 66.Kc1 Ba2 67.Kd1 Nd4 68.Ke1 Bd5 69.Kd1 Be4 70.Kc1 Ne2+**



[FEN "8/8/8/4b3/2k5/4n3/2K5 w -- 0 71"]

This knight has had quite a career!

**71.Kd1 Kd3 72.Ke1 Ke3 73.Kd1 Bh7 74.Ke1 Bc2 0–1**

This next game is an even better scalp against a future top GM and noted Sicilian basher. Once again it's the exchange sacrifice on c3 that takes the wind out of White's sails.

**Nunn, John – Mestel, Jonathan**

Hastings, 1977

Sicilian Dragon [B75]

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 Nc6 8.Qd2 Bd7**

A cunning move order from Mestel which delays castling in order to deprive White of a clear target to attack. And meanwhile he can pursue his queenside play.

**9.0–0–0**

9.Bc4 is a major alternative here.

**9...Rc8 10.Kb1 Ne5!? 11.Bh6**

This makes the Dragon exchange sacrifice possible as White's queen is drawn away from the defence of c3. [11.h4 was probably a better idea.

**11...Bxb6 12.Qxb6**



[FEN "2rqk2r/pp1bpp1p/3p1npQ/4n3/3NP3/2N2P2/PPP3PP/1K1R1B1R b k - 0 12"]

### 12...Rxc3!

Here we go, an exchange sacrifice motivated purely by the desire to weaken White's king position. Black doesn't even get a pawn for his investment, just ongoing pressure against White's weaknesses.

### 13.bxc3 Qb6+ 14.Ka1 Qc5 15.Qd2

Perhaps White should have played 15.Kb2 when 15...Qb6+ 16.Ka1 Qc5 would repeat moves. And this could indicate that Nunn was playing to win at this stage of the game.

### 15...0-0 16.Rb1 b6 17.Bb5

This might not be the best either as after the exchange of bishops a black knight gets to sit on the c4 square. 17.Bd3 looks preferable.

### 17...Rc8 18.Bxd7 Nfxd7



[FEN "2r3k1/p2npp1p/1p1p2p1/2q1n3/3NP3/2P2P2/P1PQ2PP/KR5R w - - 0 19"]

### 19.f4?!

Driving the knight to c4 so as to keep his c3-pawn, but this creates additional pawn weakness in White's position (e4 for starters). It might have been better to play 19.h4 though the endgame that arises after 19...Qxc3+ (19...h5!? is also interesting) 20.Qxc3 Rxc3 looks fine for Black because of Black's solid position, piece play and pawn for the exchange.

### 19...Nc4 20.Qc1 a6 21.h4 e5! 22.fxe5 dxe5 23.Ne2 Qf2!

Suddenly White is in serious trouble because of his multiple pawn weaknesses.

### 24.Qd1

It is too late for White to try and bail out into an endgame, as after 24.Qf1 Qxf1 25.Rbxf1 Nc5 White's pawns would drop like over ripe apples.

### 24...Nc5 25.h5

Or after 25.Rf1, there follows 25...Qxg2 26.Qd5 Ne6, etc.

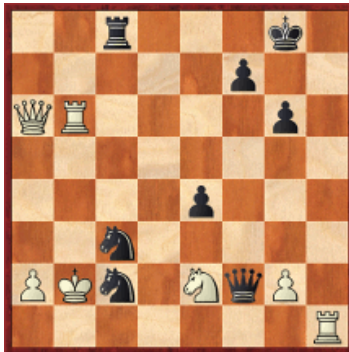
**25...Ne3 26.Qd2 Nxe4 27.Qd3 Nxc3! 28.hxg6**

Or 28.Nxc3 Nxc2+ 29.Kb2 Nb4+ 30.Qe2 Nd3+ 31.Ka1 Qd4, etc.

**28...hxg6 29.Rxb6 e4 30.Qxa6**

After 30.Rxg6+ fxg6 31.Qd7 Nxc2+ 32.Kb2 Na4+, White would have to give up his queen to avoid mate.

**30...Nxc2+ 31.Kb2**



[FEN "2r3k1/5p2/QR4p1/8/4p3/2n5/  
PKn1NqP1/7R b - - 0 31"]

**31...Qxb6+! 0-1**

After White recaptures his queen and king get forked from a4.

### Exercises (Solutions next month)



[FEN "2r2r2/pp1bppk1/3p1np1/q3n2p/  
3NP1PP/1BN2P2/PPPQ4/2KR3R b - - 0 15"]

White's attack is looking very dangerous but Black has a way of hitting back. What is it?



[FEN "5rk1/1p1bpp1p/3p1np1/p1q1n3/  
P2NP3/1BP1QP2/2PK2PP/3R3R b - - 0 17"]

Black has obtained good positional compensation for the sacrificed exchange.

How can he get rather more than that?

### Solutions to last month's exercises

#### Petrosian, Tigran – Spassky, Boris

World Championship 26th Moscow (10), 02.05.1966



[FEN "r1b2rk1/2q2ppp/p1n1pb2/3pN3/1p1P1P2/2PB1R2/PP1N2PP/R2Q2K1 w - - 0 16"]

White to play has successfully exploited Black's poorly placed knight on a5 to develop a strong attack, but now needs a finishing blow. What did he do?

**30.Qh8+! 1–0** This devastating move caused Spassky to resign. After 30.Qh8 + Kxh8 31.Nxf7+, followed by 32.Nxg5, White emerges a piece to the good.

#### Davies, Nigel (2510) – Rayner, Francis (2285)

Wrexham, 1994



[FEN "7r/k1pr1q2/NpQp1p1n/p4Pp1/4P1Pp/5R1P/PPP5/1K1R4 w - - 0 29"]

In this position I found a way to break through with White and exploit Black's a5-knight. What was it?

**23.Bxf6! Bxf6 24.e5! Be7** After 24...dxe5, White gets a winning position with the sequence 25.Ne4 Qe7 26.Rxb8 Rxb8 27.Qc3 Nb7 28.Nxf6+ Qxf6 29.fxe5, etc. **25.Ne4 Qa3?!** This loses immediately but 25...Qa7 26.Qa4 Rb5 27.exd6 Bd8 28.Rxb5 axb5 29.Qxb5 would hardly be much better. **26.Rf3 1–0** The queen is trapped.

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