

Mini-Lessons from Short Games of the 21st Century

by IM Nikolay Minev

#7: Triumphs and Disasters Among the Elite

The following games are played between top players in the world – rated 2600 and over – and all end with a quick knock out. These examples of triumph for the winner and misery for the loser show that the elite chess players are not immune to making common errors. The instructive side of these short stories is to learn how to punish mistakes.

B43 Francisco Vallejo-Pons – V. Topalov
Leon 2006

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 d6 6.g4!?

This is the Keres Attack, but only if Black now plays 6...Nf6. Against all other answers, White's 6.g4!? is an interesting experiment.

6...Ne7?!

Probably a dubious plan.

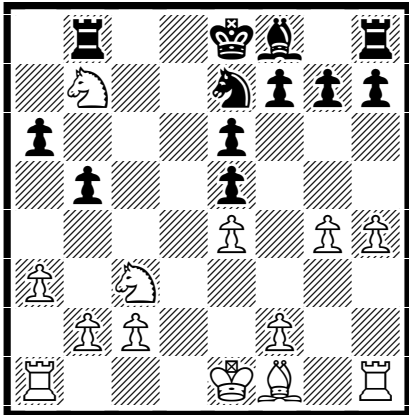
7.a3 Nbc6 8.Nb3 b5 9.h4 Bb7 10.Bf4! Ne5?

This loses. Maybe 10...Ng6 11.Bg3 (11.Be3) Be7 is more resilient.

11.Bxe5 dxe5 12.Qxd8+ Rxd8 13.Nc5 Rb8

If 13...Bc8? 14.Nxb5! axb5 15.Bxb5+ Bd7 16.Nxd7 Rxd7 17.Rd1 and White wins.

14.Nxb7



14...Nc6

The alternative is 14...Rxb7 15.a4! bxa4 (15...b4 16.Bxa6) 16.Bxa6 Rxb2 17.Bb5+ Kd8 18.O-O-O+! and wins.

15.a4 b4 16.Bxa6 bxc3 17.Bb5! Kd7 18.Na5 cxb2 19.Rd1+ Kc7 20.Nxc6 1-0

B90 N. Short – V. Anand

Dubai 2002

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.a4?! Nc6 7.f4 g6 8.Be2 Bg7 9.Be3 O-O 10.O-O Bg4 11.Nb3?!

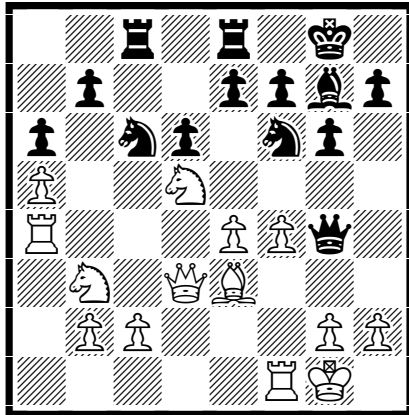
Critical is 11.Bxg4 Nxg4 12.Qxg4 Nxd4 (12...Bxd4 13.Bxd4 Nxd4 14.Qd1) 13.Qd1.

11...Qc8 12.a5 Re8 13.Ra4?

A strange idea.

13...Bxe2 14.Qxe2 Qg4 15.Qd3 Rac8 16.Nd5?

The fatal mistake in worse position.



16...Nxd5 17.exd5 Ne5! 0-1

For if 18.Qe4 f5 19.Qb4 Rxc2 or 18.Qd1 Qxd1 19.Rxd1 Nc4, in both cases with a winning position for Black.

B90 V. Kramnik – V. Topalov
Wijk aan Zee 2005

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e6 7.f3 b5 8.g4

Is this idea too early and too ambitious, or is it the right way for White to seize the initiative? We still don't know, even after Black's convincing success in this game.

8...h6 9.Qd2

Perhaps 9.a3 is a necessity!

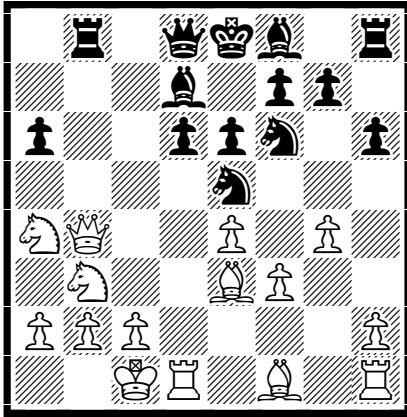
9...b4 10.Na4 Nbd7 11.O-O-O?!

If 11.Qxb4 d5. Maybe 11.Be2 is better.

11...Ne5! 12.Qxb4

It seems that White has nothing better.

12...Bd7 13.Nb3 Rb8



14.Qa3

If 14.Nb6? Nc6, but probably 14.Bb6 was White's last chance.

14...Nxf3 15.h3 Nxe4 16.Be2 Ne5 17.Rhe1 Qc7 18.Bd4 Nc6 19.Bc3 d5 20.Nbc5 Qa7 0-1

C08 M. Carlsen – Pr. Nikolic
Wijk aan Zee 2005

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Ngf3 c4?!

In my opinion, Black's best is 5...a6.

6.b3 cxb3

If 6...b5? 7.a4!

7.axb3 Bb4 8.Ne5!?

A novelty, instead of 8.Be2, 8.Bb5+, or Bronstein's 8.Bd3!?

8...Ne7

If 8...Bc3? 9.Qf3!

9.Bd3 Nbc6 10.O-O Bc3 11.Ra4 Bxd4

Instead 11...Nxd4? Is bad because of 12.Nb1! but 11...Nxe5 12.dxe5 Bxe5 looks unclear.

12.Nxc6 Nxc6 13.Ba3

Keeping the opponent's King in the center is enough compensation for a pawn.

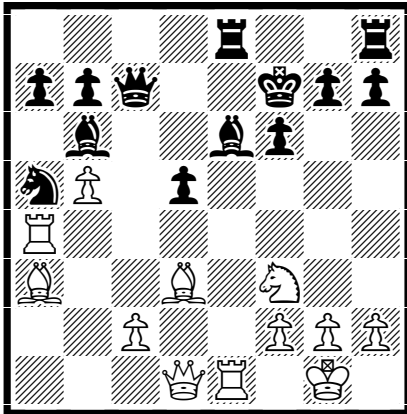
13...Be6 14.Nf3 Bb6 15.Qa1! Qc7 16.b4! f6

The alternative is 16...O-O 17.b5 Ne7 18.Ng5 h6 (18...g6? 19.Qf6) 19.Nh7 Rfe8 20.Bb2 with a strong attack.

17.Re1 Kf7 18.b5 Na5

If 18...Ne7? 19.Bxe7 Qxe7 20.Bf5 etc. Maybe 18...Nd8 offers more resistance.

19.Qd1 Rae8



20.Ng5+!! fxf5 21.Qf3+ Kg8 22.Rxe6 1-0

C51 A. Kogan – V. Anand
Venaco 2005

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.b4 Bxb4 5.c3 Ba5 6.d4 Bb6 7.O-O

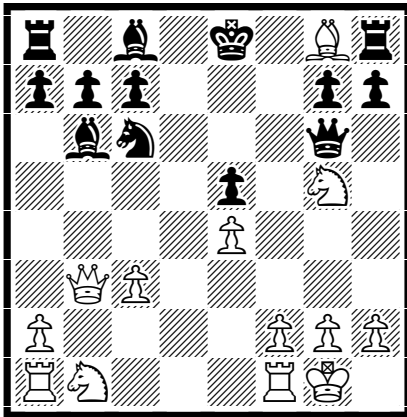
Critical is 7.dxe5!? The old theory gives 7...h6 8.Qd5 Qe7 9.Ba3 Qe6 10.Qd3 Nxe5 11.Nx5 Qxe5 12.f4 (Tartakower-Chajes, Carlsbad 1923) and according to Unzicker (ECO) White has the advantage. The assessment looks correct. Unfortunately we will not

see the improvement that was prepared by Anand, because White avoided this continuation, instead playing a well known variation recommended for Black by E. Lasker.

7...d6 8.dxe5 dxe5 9.Qb3 Qf6 10.Bg5 Qg6 11.Bd5 f6!?

An incredible novelty! The established line (from long ago) is 11...Nge7 12.Bxe7 Kxe7 13.Bxc6 Qxc6 14.Nxe5 Qe6 15.Qa3+ Qd6!=.

12.Bxg8 fxc5 13.Nxc5



13...Kf8!!

The point of Black's novelty. This unexpected move wins at once, while 13...Qxg5 14.Qf7+ Kd8 15.Rd1+ Nd4 is unclear.

14.Ne6+ Kxg8! 15.Nxc7+ Kf8 16.Nxa8 Bh3 17.g3 Qxe4 18.Qa3+ Ne7 0-1

D39 L. van Wely – Z. Ribli
Germany (Bundes liga) 2000

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 d5 4.Bg5 Bb4+ 5.Nc3 dxc4 6.a3

A rare continuation. Usual is 6.e4.

6...Bxc3+ 7.bxc3 b5 8.e4!?

A novelty, instead of 8.a4

8...Nbd7?

Better is 8...h6 9.Bxf6 Qxf6 10.a4 c6 11.g3 O-O 12.Bg2 a6.

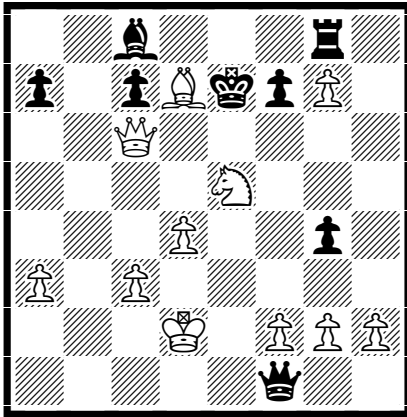
9.e5 h6 10.exf6 hxg5 11.fxg7 Rg8 12.Qb1! g4 13.Ne5 Qg5

If 13...Nxe5? 14.Qh7!

14.Qxb5 Rb8 15.Qc6 Qf5 16.Bxc4! Rb1+ 17.Rxb1 Qxb1+ 18.Kd2 Qxh1

Or 18...Qb2+ 19.Kd3 Qb6 20.Bb5 Rxg7 21.Rb1 and White should win.

19.Bxe6! Ke7 20.Bxd7 Qf1

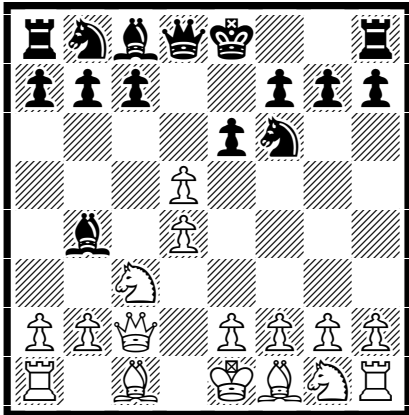


21.Ng6+! 1-0

For if 21...fxg6 22.Qe6+ Kd8 23.Qxg8+ Kxd7 24.Qf7+, or 21...Kd8 22.Qf6+ Kxd7 23.Ne5+ and wins.

E34 Y. Pelletier – M. Carlsen
Biel 2005

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Qc2 d5 5.cxd5



5...c5!?

A truly surprising novelty, used for the first time in Bareev – Topalov, Monaco 2005.

6.dxc5

It seems that after 6.dxc6 Qxd4 7.cxb7 Bxb7 Black has enough compensation for the pawn.

6...Nxd5

Instead 6..exd5!? 7.Bg5! transposes into a line that has been quite popular recently.

7.Bd2 Bxc5 8.Nxd5 Qxd5 9.e4 Qd4

Maybe 9...Qc6 is the better try.

10.O-O-O Nd7 11.Bb5 O-O??

A blunder. Black should play 11...Qe5!? 12.Nf3 Qc7.

12.Bc3 Qxf2 13.Qxf2 Bxf2 14.Bxd7 Be3+ 15.Kc2 1-0

E35 I. Sokolov - Levon Aronian

Turin (ol) 2006

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Qc2 d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.Bg5 c5!?

Sharper than 6...h6 7.Bxf6 Qxf6 8.e3.

7.dxc5 h6 8.Bh4?!

The theory recommends 8.Bxf6.

8...g5 9.Bg3 Ne4

In case of 9...d4 is possible 10.a3 or 10.O-O-O!?

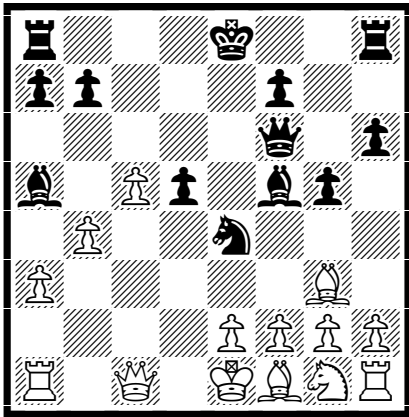
10.Bxb8? Qf6!

Best. Naturally not 10...Rxb8? ``.Qa4+ and White wins a piece.

11.Bg3 Nxc3 12.a3 Bf5 13.Qd2

There is no defense. If 13.Qc1? Na2+, or 13.Qb3 Ba5 14.Qxb7 O-O (14...Ne4+) and Black wins.

13...Ba5 14.b4 Ne4 15.Qc1



15...Rc8!! 16.Ra2 Rxc5 17.Qa1 Qc6!!

A fantastic final blow.

18.Qe5+ Kd8! 19.Qxh8+ Kd7 0-1