

# Mini-Lessons from Short Games of the 21st Century

by IM Nikolay Minev

## #9: Recipe for a Quick Catastrophe

Most short games show a characteristic pattern – the King of losing side remains in the center and fails victim to attack by a better developed opponent. There are many reasons why the King remains in the center too long (or forever!), but we can consolidate all these reasons in one: wasting time. This includes playing many times with the same piece, playing to many pawn moves, grabbing and defending small material etc.

In most cases, leaving the King in the center leads to disaster, as in all the games presented below. When examining these instructive examples, try to admire not only the attractive winning tactics, but also to understand why the losing player failed in such terrible position.

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### A04 M. Carlsen – S. Dolmatov

Moscow (Aeroflot) 2004

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#### 1.Nf3 f5 2.d3 d6

Recommended by the books. If 2...Nf6, then White can try the very promising gambit 3.e4!? fxe4 4.dxe4 Nxe4 5.Bd3. Maybe Black should try 2...d5!?

#### 3.e4 e5 4.Nc3 Nc6 5.exf5!

This, together with White's next move, is a new idea, which deserves serious attention. It seems that opening files in the center is in White's favor.

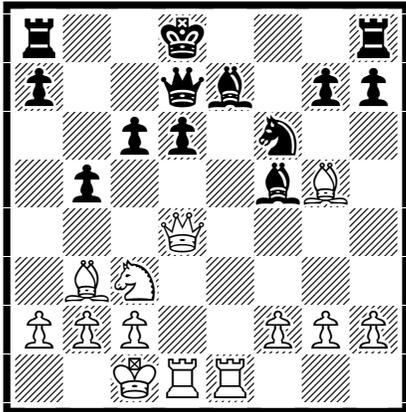
#### 5...Bxf5 6.d4! Nxd4 7.Nxd4 exd4 8.Qxd4 Nf6 9.Bc4 c6

Already Black has big problems with castling, and this move does not help. Where is Black's mistake? Probably 2...d6 is not to be recommended.

#### 10.Bg5 b5

In the case of 10...d5, possible is 11.O-O-O Be7 12.Rhe1 and if 12...O-O 13.Qe5

#### 11.Bb3 Be7 12.O-O-O Qd7 13.Rhe1 Kd8



Black cannot castle and his King will remain in the center, under attack by all White's forces. The catastrophe is not merely near, the catastrophe comes immediately!

**14.Rxe7!! Qxe7**

If 14...Kxe7 15.Bxf6+gxf6 16.Re1+ and White wins.

**15.Qf4 Bd7 16.Ne4 d5 17.Nxf6 h6 18.Bh4 g5 19.Qd4 1-0**

For if 19...gxh4 20.Nxd5! Qg5+ 21.f4 and White wins.

**A45 L. Bruzon Bautista – B. Jobava**

Havana 2005

**1.d4 Nf6 2.Bg5 Ne4 3.Bf4 d5 4.e3 c5 5.Bd3 Nc6 6.Bxe4 dxe4 7.Ne2 cxd4 8.exd4 Bg4 9.h3 Bxe2 10.Qxe2 Qxd4 11.Nc3 e5 12.Be3 Qb4?**

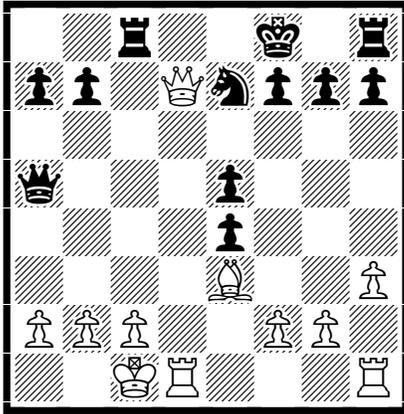
After this, Black's King will remain in the center. Instead, to defend the extra pawn, better was 12...Qd7 and if 12.Nxe4 Be7 13.Rd1 Qc8, gaining time for short castling.

**13.O-O-O Be7 14.Qg4! Kf8**

Forced. If 14...O-O then 15.Bh6 Bf6 16.Rd7!! and Black has no defense against the threat 17.Nd5.

**15.Nd5 Qa5 16.Nxe7 Nxe7 17.Qd7! Rc8**

The decisive mistake in an already very difficult position. Black cannot play 17...Qxa2?? or 17...b6?? then 18.Qd8+! and after 17...f6 18.Qxb7 Re8 19.Qxa7 White should win easily. The best defense is 17...Re8 but it is hard to believe that after 18.Kb1 (18.Qxb7 Qxa2 19.Bc5) Black can save the game.



**18.Bc5!! Re8**

If 18...Qxc5 or 18...Rxc5 then 19.Qd8+!

**19.Rd5! 1-0**

Because of 19...Qxa2 20.Qxe7+! Rxe7 21,Rd8#

**A45 P. Frohlich – G. Lane**  
Queenstown (New Zealand) 2006

**1.d4 Nf6 2.Bg5 e6 3.e4 h6 4.Bxf6 Qxf6 5.Nc3 d6**

Perhaps 5...Bb4 is the better try.

**6.h4**

The idea behind this? I think that White says it loudly : “Don’t try to castle short!”.

**6...Nc6**

Better is 6...c6.

**7.Nb5!? Qd8 8.d5 exd5 9.exd5 Ne5 10.Qd4 c5?**

Opening both center files for your opponent when your King will have no possibility for castling (at least for next few moves) is always dangerous. However, after the obvious 10...a6 11.f4 (White's idea behind 7.Nb5) 11...Nd7 (11...Ng6 12.Qe4+ Be7 13.h5 Nf8 14.Nd4) White has the opportunity to initiate an unclear but very interesting attack with 12.O-O-O!? axb5 (12...Nf6!?) 13.Re1+ Be7 14.Qxg7 Rf8 15.Bxb5 etc.

**11.dxc6 bxc6 12.f4! Ng6**

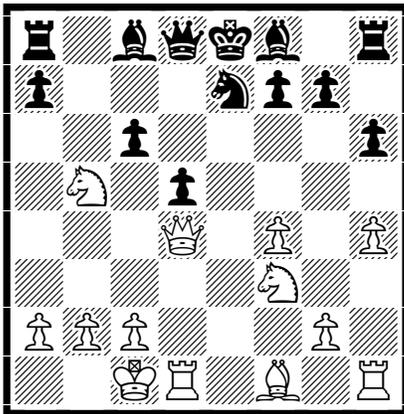
Or 12...Ng4 13.O-O-O! with the same attacking possibilities as in the game.

**13.O-O-O! d5**

After 13...cxb5 14.Qe4+ Be6 15.Bxb5+ Ke7 16.f5 White keeps his strong attack.

**14.Nf3 Ne7**

Or 14...cxb5 15.Bxb5+ Bd7 (15...Ke7 16.Rhe1+ Be6 17.f5) 16.Qxd5 and White wins.



**15.Qc5!! cxb5**

If 15...Be6 16.Nd6+ Kd7 17.Ne5+ Kc7 18.Ndx7 and wins.

**16.Bxb5+ Bd7 17.Ne5 Nc6 18.Qxd5 1-0**

**1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6 6.Nf3 Bb4 7.cxd5 Nxd5 8.Bd2 Nc6 9.Bd3 Nxc3?!**

9...Be7!?

**10.bxc3 Be7 11.Qe2 Bd7?**

Why make this useless move, which makes Black's development even more difficult?  
Correct is 11...O-O!?

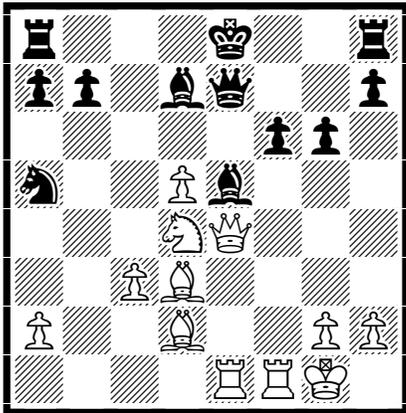
**12.O-O Bf6?**

Here again is necessary 12...O-O.

**13.Qe4! g6 14.d5! Na5 15.Nd4 e5 16.f4 Qe7 17.fxe5 Bxe5**

If 17...Qxe5?? 18.Rxf6.

**18.Rae1 f6**



**19.c4! b6 20.d6! Qd8 21.Rxf6! 1-0**

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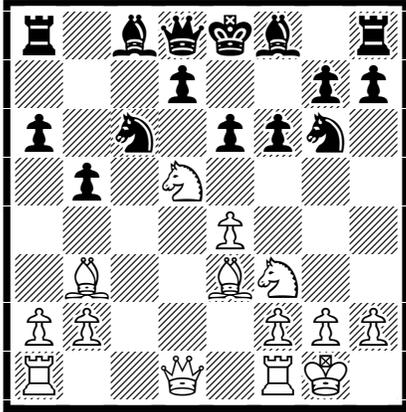
**B21 M. Zelic – S. Martinovic**  
Split 2007

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**1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.c3 dxc3 4.Nxc3 Nc6 5.Nf3 e6 6.Bc4 a6 7.O-O Nge7?!**

Losing even one extra tempo when playing against a gambit always is dangerous.. In my opinion, better is 7...d6, followed by Nf6 and Be7.

**8.Bg5 f6 9.Be3 Ng6 10.Bb3 b5 11.Nd5!**



“In the opening, if you are ahead three or more tempi in development, try to find a winning continuation!” – Rudolf Spielmann.

**11...Rb8**

Played to counter the threat 12.Bb6. If instead 11...exd5, then 12.exd5 transposes into same variation as in actual game.

**12.Rc1 exd5**

This exposes the King and loses quickly. After 12...Be7 13.Nxe7 Ngxe7 14.Bc5 White has more than enough positional compensation for the pawn.

**13.exd5 Nce5 14.Nxe5 Nxe5 15.d6 Qa5**

There is no adequate defense. If 15...Bb7 16.f4 Nc4 17.Re1 and wins.

**16.Ba7 Ra8 17.Qd5 Nc6 18.Rxc6! Bb7 19.Qf7+ Kd8 20.Bb6+ 1-0**

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**B97 K. Spraggett – D. Komljenovic**  
Seville 2007

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**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Qb6 8.Qd2 Qxb2**

The notorious “Poison Pawn” variation, where Black wins a pawn at the cost of several tempi. This automatically means that Black’s King will remain in the center for a long time. This does not mean that Black is lost, but he deliberately takes a big risk.

**9.Nb3 Nbd7 10.Bxf6!**

The attempt to trap the Queen by 10.a3 fails to 10...Nc5

**10...gxf6**

But not 10...Nxf6?? 11.Ra2.

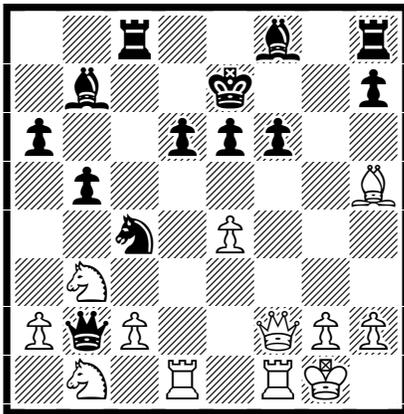
**11.Rb1 Qa3 12.Be2 b5 13.O-O Bb7 14.f5! Rc8**

Black decides to keep his King in the center. Maybe he should try 14...O-O-O, even if it looks very, very dangerous?

**15.Bh5 Ke7 16.Rbd1 Ne5 17.fxe6 fxe6 18.Nb1 Nc4 19.Qf2!**

Stronger than 19.Nxa3.

**19...Qb2**



**20.Qa7 Rc7 21.Qb8 1-0**

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 f5 3.Nxe5 Qf6**

The Latvian Gambit is an opening in which Black plays excessively with pawns and the Queen. This very often leads to positions with Black's King remaining in the center; and sometimes to a quick catastrophe, as in this instructive game.

**4.Nc4!?**

In my opinion, this move is strategically more correct than the continuation that is often seen in practice: 4.d4 d6 5.Nc4.

**4...fxe4 5.Nc3 Qg6 6.Ne3**

Also strong, but more complicated is the immediate 6.d3.

**6...c6 7.d3!**

The point behind 4.Nc4.

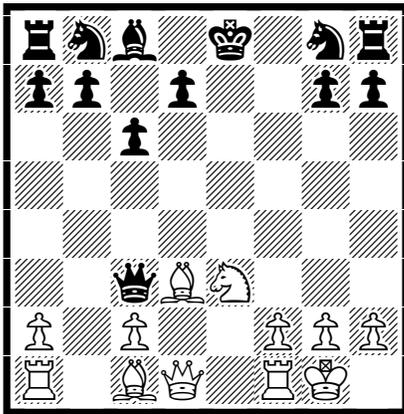
**7...Bb4**

Or 7...Nf6 8.Nxe4 Nxe4 9.dxe4 Qxe4 10.Bd3 with a clear advantage to White.

**8.dxe4 Bxc3+**

Or 8...Qxe4 9.Bd3 Qh4 10.Nf5 Bxc3+ 11.bxc3 Qf6 12.O-O d5 13.Re1+ Kf7 14.Bg5!  
and White wins.

**9.bxc3 Qxe4 10.Bd3 Qe5 11.O-O Qxc3?**



What a picture! Compare the developed pieces. Black has only his Queen in play, while White is ready for decisive action. The expected blow comes immediately!

**12.Nc4!! Qxa1 13.Re1+ Ne7 14.Rxe7+ Kd8**

If 14...Kf8 15.Qe1 Qf6 16.Re8+ Kf7 17.Rxh8 and White wins.

**15.Rxd7+! Kxd7 16.Bg6+ Ke7 17.Qd6# 1-0**

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### D30 Tunik - A. Geller

Togliatti 2001

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 c6 4.Qc2 dxc4**

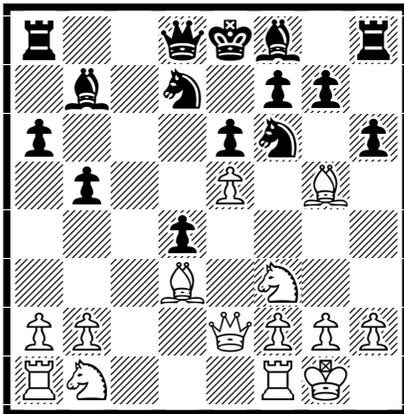
Here, to give up the center is not the best strategy. Better is 4...Nf6.

**5.Qxc4 b5?! 6.Qc2 Bb7 7.e4 Nf6 8.Bd3 Nbd7 9.O-O a6 10.Qe2 c5 11.Bg5 cxd4??**

The decisive mistake. Truly, it is easy to overlook the menace of a very original mate with a Bishop and pawn, but a veteran such as A. Geller should be alert that his King is still in the center. Correct was either 11...Be7 or 11...h6.

**12.e5! h6**

Or 12...Bxf3 13.gxf3 and further as in the game.



**13.exf6! hxg5 14.Qxe6+!! 1-0**

Because of 14...fxe6 15.Bg6#

It is no wonder that Black's King is the victim in all the examples so far. It is much more often that the second player, already a tempo behind, loses additional tempi, compounding the initial disadvantage. As we saw, there can be many strategic and psychological reasons for these additional losses of time. However, these same reasons can also tempt the player with White pieces. Below are presented two examples in which it is White's King that remains in the center too long, and is brutally punished.

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**A21 F. Tahirov – A. Shirov**  
Villa de Canada de Calatrava 2007

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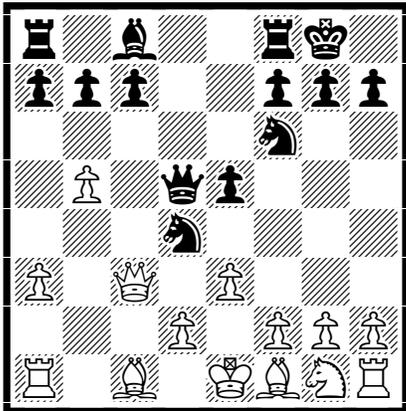
**1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 Bb4 3.Qc2 Nf6 4.a3 Bxc3 5.Qxc3 Nc6 6.b4 O-O 7.e3 d5 8.cxd5 Qxd5**

Playing mostly with pawns, White is already three tempi behind in development. Notice also that White's King's side is still frozen, which means that prior to castling, his King will remain in the center at least three tempi more. White's next move is again a waste of time, which makes the position even worse.

**9.b5?**

Too many moves with pawns!

**Nd4!**



Nothing fancy! This is a typical sacrifice where files are forced open, followed by a decisive assault by all pieces.

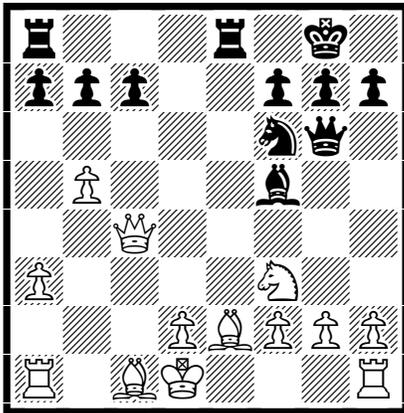
**10.exd4 exd4 11.Qc4 Re8+ 12.Kd1 Qh5+ 13.Be2 Qg6 14.Nf3 Be6 15.Qc2 15...d3!!**

Another typical sacrifice to open more files against the King in the center.

**16.Qxd3**

If 16.Bxd3 Qxg2.

**Bf5 17.Qc4**



**17...Rxe2!! 18.Nh4**

There is no adequate defense. If 18.Kxe2 Re8+ 18.Kd1 Bd3 10.Qc5 Be2+ etc. The best defense seems to be 18.Qxe2, but after 18...Bc2+ 19.Ke1 Re8 20.Ne5 Qxg2 21.Rf1 Rxe5 22.Qxe5 Bd3 23.Qe2 Bxe2 24.Kxe2 Qe4+ 25.Kd1 Qd4! 26.Rb1 (26.Ra2 Qc4!) Qd3! Black wins.

**18...Qh5 19.Qxe2 Bc2+ 20.Ke1 Re8 21.Qxe8+ Nxe8 0-1**

After 22.Nf3 Qxb4 White's position is practically hopeless.

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 dxc4 5.a4 c5 6.d5**

The theory recommends 6.e4!

**6...Bf5 7.e3 e6 8.Bxc4 exd5 9.Nxd5 Nc6 10.Qb3**

10.O-O!?

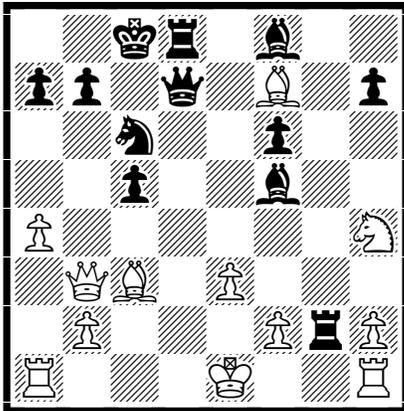
**10...Qd7 11.Nxf6+ gxf6 12.Bd2 Rg8 13.Bc3?**

13.O-O-O!?

**13...O-O-O!**

Castling is not only defensive, but also can be an attacking move!

**14.Bxf7 Rxf2 15.Nh4**



**15...Ne5!!**

When the King is in the center, expect surprises!

**16.Nxf5**

If 16.Nxg2 Nf3+ 17.Ke2 (17.Kf1 Bd3#) Bd3+ 18.Kxf3 (18.Kd1 Bc4+) Qh3+ 19.Kf4 Bd6+ and mate next move.

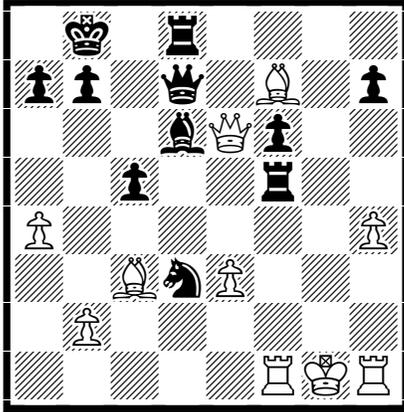
**16...Nd3+ 17.Kf1?**

After the better 17.Kd1 Ne5+ 18.Kc1 Nxf7 Black still has the advantage.

**17...Rxf2+ 18.Kg1 Kb8!**

Avoiding White's only hope 19.Be6.

**19.Qe6 Rxf5 20.h4 Bd6! 21.Rf1**



**21...Rg8+! 0-1**

For if 22.Bxg8 Qg7#

Let's finish this mini-lesson with a quotation from GM Rudolf Spielmann:

**“In an opening castling may well be said to be the most important move, as two pieces are developed at one stroke. The King, to be sure, does not get into play thereby, but making the King secure is the equivalent at least of a strong developing move.”**