

Chess in Miniature: Volume 1

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POPULAR CHESS

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Introduction

Do you ever wish that you could win miniature games of the sort that are so beloved by chess magazines and newspaper columns? The ones that the local club hero demonstrates with such alacrity while you try not to join in your clubmates' oohs and aahs of approval.

Books of attractive miniatures generally present annotated games, praising some moves and criticising others. They are instructive, and worth buying for that. The encounters are attractive and exciting, and worth viewing for that.

The writer sometimes indicates the typical errors that the losers have made, but those errors are not necessarily exclusive to short games, or to attractive ones either. Brilliant short games are exciting and entertaining, and readers are likely to absorb the chess lessons contained in the annotations if they are being entertained. On its own, that can make the process of reading a book of attractive miniatures an instructive process.

This book, along with its companion volume *Chess in Miniature Volume 2*, is probably the first to attempt to identify how a brilliant short game is created. To explain how the concept came about, we need to go back seventeen years or so.

In 2008, having recently played several fairly attractive short chess games, I wrote an article for *CHESS Magazine* entitled 'Chess In Miniature' (published in the July issue of that year). In preparation for that article, I had prepared a database of around fifty of the most attractive miniatures (games of 25 moves or fewer) that I had played, and I identified ten common factors that arose in them. I then rank-ordered those factors according to how often they cropped up in the games, and presented them as lessons that might be used by players to enable them to play attractive miniatures more often. My purpose had been as much to entertain as to instruct, and I didn't take the idea too seriously.

The recent mini-deluge of books which focus on brilliant miniatures made me wonder whether the approach that I took in that article might actually be of practical value to the chess-playing public. The purpose would be to help readers understand how attractive miniatures come about. With these insights, playing through such games could become even more enjoyable. And, possibly, readers might be inspired and armed to create mini-masterpieces themselves.

It's all in the Winner's Skills and Approaches

A whole variety of factors help to make a game short, and another set help to make the whole thing attractive. Some factors even help to make games short and attractive. Good games (of any length) are normally created by both sides playing well but, except in the case of draws, one side playing better.

Attractive miniatures are different. It is important for the winner to play well, and for the loser to play sufficiently badly to lose quickly, but not so badly as to ruin the game as a spectacle. Looking through many hundreds of these games, I realised that the winners exhibited skills and approaches, consciously or not, which caused the losers to make the small errors – or simply slightly sub-standard moves – that helped the games to be short and exciting. I called these skills and approaches 'Secrets'.

Examining a multitude of brilliant miniatures, I identified the sixteen Secrets. In this Volume, we will examine in detail the top eight:

1. Be tactically aware
2. Find ways to involve your queen in the attack
3. Play the white pieces
4. Play against opponents rated at least 100 elo points below you
5. Involve knights in dominant positions and sacrifices
6. Be prepared to sacrifice for the initiative, to expose the king and to attack
7. Target the king early
8. Stay calm

My research, which I will briefly outline later, showed that Secret 1 occurred in the vast majority of attractive miniatures (no great surprise there), Secret 2 appeared in somewhat fewer games and so on down to the final Secret 16. This is not to say that the Secrets low down the list are unimportant. On the contrary: when they are used, they are often the key factor that makes a game attractive or short (or both!).

It is not Just One Secret at a Time

I give each Secret its own chapter – but most of the games could appear in several different chapters. In a short summary after each game, I point out whether (and how) any of the other Secrets 1-8 featured.

Here is a typical example of a game featuring nearly all of our eight Secrets, with the key themes highlighted in italic type.

Game 1

Danylo Shkuran – Buse Kocyigit

Turkey 2019

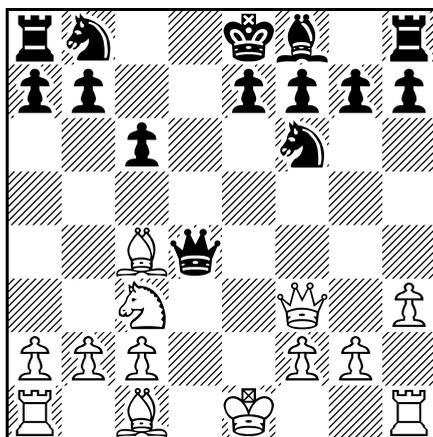
Scandinavian Defence

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♖xd5 3 ♘c3 ♜d6 4 d4 ♞f6 5 ♙c4 c6 6 ♞f3

6 ♞ge2 has been played far more often. White has in mind a gambit which I can find in only one previous game on my database.

Black is lured into unfamiliar territory, which presumably has been analysed in advance by *the player of the white pieces* (3). This illustrates one reason why White wins a large majority of the short attractive decisive games – there are more gambits available, and they are often aimed at gaining a big lead in development. That is what happens here.

6... ♙g4 7 h3!? ♙xf3 8 ♜xf3 ♜xd4



This was a *pawn sacrifice for the initiative* (6). It is possible that Black was aware of the previous game in this line, where Marie Sebag now played 9 ♙b3 against Anatoly Karpov at Cap d'Agde 2014. She couldn't break through Black's solid defence, leading to a comfortable victory for the former world champion.

9 ♜e2

By aiming her queen at the e6-square, White raises the spectre of a bishop sacrifice there, which causes Black to put her queen on awkward squares.

9... ♞bd7 10 ♙e3 ♜e5

Black avoids the d6-square, which would allow White to play 11 ♜d1 with gain of time. The text move is not bad, but it allows White to castle queenside at once – something that 10... ♜d6 would have at least delayed – and it also allows White's coming f2-f4 advance to arrive with gain of time.

11 0-0-0 e6 12 f4!

White targets the king early (7).

12...♚c7?

Black needed to keep control of f5 for now, but presumably she feared further attacks on her majesty after 12...♚a5 13 ♔d2. However, that would have given her time to castle queenside at once or to play 13...♙b4 with a view to eventually castling kingside.

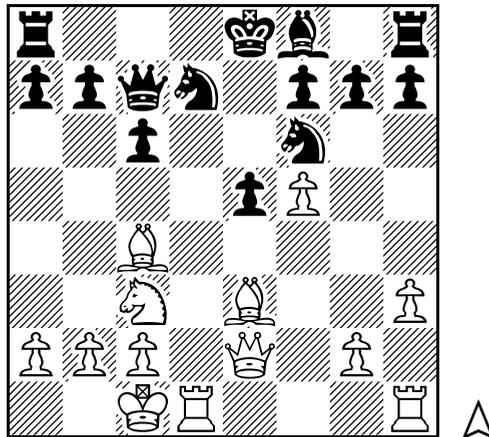
A further factor is at play here. The *large difference in rating* (Secret 4; White was rated 2368, Black 2023) is reflected in the fact that White can both judge the position and calculate more accurately and deeply than her opponent. Despite the innocent nature of Black's queen retreat, it allows White to strike at once...

13 f5!

...and she is sufficiently *tactically aware* (1) to seize her opportunity.

13...e5

Black should return the pawn at once with 13...0-0-0 14 fxe6 fxe6 15 ♔xe6. White would have a big advantage, but at least Black would still be on the board.



After the move played, White can trap the black king with a far-seeing sacrifice.

14 ♔xf7+!

The f7-square (or the f2-square when the attacker has the black pieces) is a significant factor in many games, being a focus for sacrifices and even a crossroads for the attacker's pieces. This sacrifice allows White *to involve her queen in the attack* (2), where she will create mayhem...

14...♚xf7 15 ♚c4+

...and she moves with gain of time to a square from which she can cause further inconvenience to the black queen.

15...♚e8 16 ♘b5!

Exploiting the pin on the c6-pawn, the *knight moves to a dominant position* (5), as we shall see, and the poor black queen has to move again.

16...♖c8

Both 16...♖d8 17 ♖e6+ ♗e7 18 ♘c7+ and 16...♗b8 17 ♖e6+ ♙e7 18 ♘d6+ ♙d8 19 ♘f7+ lose material, so Black heads down White's main line.

17 ♖e6+ ♙d8

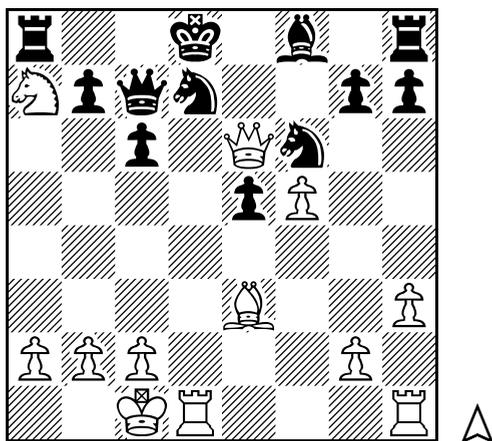
Naturally, Black loses her queen after 17...♙e7 18 ♘d6+. White's next move is obvious, but it forms an essential part of the combination.

18 ♘xa7!

Black may have expected to be able to give up her rook for this knight, with chances of survival, but probably realised in time that 18...♗xa7 would be met with 19 ♙b6+! when her queen must give up its life with 19...♗c7. However, the story would not end there because, by a further sacrifice, White would force mate: 20 ♗xd7+! ♘xd7 21 ♗d1 and there is no defence.

So, Black must prevent 19 ♙b6+.

18...♗c7



And now the combination continues...

19 ♗xd7+! ♗xd7

19...♘xd7 allows 20 ♙g5+ ♘f6 21 ♗d1+, winning the queen and more. By offering her queen at once, Black hopes to give White some work to do after 20 ♗d1 ♙e7, but there is another surprise in store.

20 ♙b6+! ♗c7 21 ♗d1+ ♘d5 22 ♗xd5+! 1-0

It finishes with another sacrifice.

22...cxd5 23 ♘b5 is nice (23 ♙xc7+ ♙xc7 24 ♘b5+ is similar, and 23 ♗xd5+ ♙e8 24 ♙xc7 is also an easy win for White) and now 23...♗xb6 24 ♗xb6+ ♙e8 25 ♘c7+ wins the rook as well. There were other ways to win quickly, including 22 ♘b5! ♗xb6 23 ♗xd5+ cxd5 24 ♗xb6+,

transposing to the previous line, and 22 ♖xc6+ bxc6 23 ♗xd5+ cxd5 24 ♕xd5+, winning the rook as well as the queen. Which is the most attractive, I will leave to you to decide.

Of the eight secrets covered in this volume only 8 (“Stay Calm”) didn’t apply.

I hope that reading through the games, and understanding the Secrets used by the winners, will not only enhance your enjoyment of 97 wonderful games (and 94 in the second volume) – most of which are probably new to you – but also that your future enjoyment of miniatures will be enhanced when you can spot some of the secrets being utilised by the winner and you can say “I saw what White/Black did there!”.

To check whether you have absorbed the Secrets, I have included a short final chapter which contains a handful of games where you are asked to identify which of Secrets 1-8 featured in them.

My Research

My research work involved collating and analysing a 200-game Test Database, containing a random selection of attractive miniatures. To collate the list, I looked through downloads of *The Week In Chess* from the early months of 2019 until I had a full 200 suitable games.

I looked through all 200 games carefully, noting the Secrets that were used by the winner in each case. During that process, some Secrets were added to the list and some removed. Finally, I ranked each Secret according to the number of games in which it was used.

Secrets 1-8, which we cover in this Volume, all arose in at least 40% of the games in the Test Database.

I then searched books, magazines and databases to create a Master Database of more than 700 high quality miniatures from which I selected the games that appear in these volumes.

I have tried to avoid showing you too many well-known games, although occasionally a classic is just too apt to ignore if it demonstrates our Secrets in a clear and brilliant fashion. By no means all of the games that I have selected are played by Grandmasters. In fact, to demonstrate that most of us are capable of creating a little beauty on our day, I have even selected some games played at, and below, the level of the average club player.

Whatever the case, I think you will greatly enjoy playing through some really lovely games.

But first I will attempt to answer a few questions that you might ask:

What does no.8 ‘Stay Calm’ Mean?

As you will see as you proceed through the book, most of the eight Secrets can be sub-divided into at least two factors, but they remain self-explanatory. The chapter entitled Secret 8, which demonstrates how some winners remain calm during the storm, can be split into two. One is staying calm in defence, or when faced with a surprise (such as a novelty in the opening).

Since we cannot get into a player's head, in most cases it is impossible to identify calmness just by looking at his moves. However, if we compare blood-and-thunder sacrifices – which are made with a capture or a check – with sacrifices which don't employ such strong-arm methods, we can see a combination of calmness and tactical expertise. The simplest of these sacrifices is the “silent sacrifice”, where a piece is placed *en prise* without a capture or a check. In the coming chapters, before we get to that Secret 8, you also will see sacrifices described as “shunning”, “passive”, “unpinning”, some of which may be unfamiliar to you, and also moves described as “quiet”. You will sometimes see me also describing them as “calm” or “cool”. The *intermezzo* – which, as you will read in Secret 8, is a specific type of shunning sacrifice – also fits into the “calm” category.

All will be explained when you reach that chapter.

Doesn't a Miniature Happen Because the Loser Makes a Big Blunder?

This is a common misconception. If that were always the case, then most miniatures would be fundamentally unattractive and would only be worth looking at if the finish was particularly brilliant. The fallacy is based on the assumption that any move which is not a blunder is as good as any other. This is obviously not the case. A player often wins – despite his opponent not making an outright error – because his plans suit the position better, or he calculates better than his opponent.

The main message that I want to get over is that the winner of a pretty miniature normally has an approach which puts pressure on his opponent, and that makes the loser play worse. You will see very few outright blunders played by the victims in these games.

Is the List of Secrets Comprehensive?

Probably not. For instance, I could have included such factors as:

- i. Involve bishops in the attack;
- ii. Involve rooks in the attack;
- iii. Open lines for rooks and bishops; and
- iv. Involve all of the pieces in the attack.

...all of which would be another way of saying “Use accepted attacking principles”. Or, to put it another way, “Play well”. The few Secrets which touch on attacking technique here are ones which are crucial. Very few attacks succeed without making sure that the queen can come into contact with the defender's king. Knights are best at supervising attacks and pulling off surprise moves. Although this is not a manual on attacking chess, I trust that my annotations are instructive and will help improve your game.

The Secrets that I have highlighted in these two volumes are those which are the most likely to make the games short and attractive, but not necessarily those which are the most reliable

ways to win games in general. On the contrary, some of them are risky such as: being ready to sacrifice, targeting the king early, provoking a crisis, and playing on the opponent's greed. If any reader has the ambition to play games which are most likely to be published, which means short attractive games, then he or she needs to accept that there will be risks involved.

Are Your Statistics Reliable?

As the saying goes, there are lies, damned lies and statistics. Anyone with knowledge of statistics will point out that my pretence of statistical rigour is flawed.

For instance: in an ideal world I should have used a larger sample (i.e. more games) in the Test Database; "attractiveness" should have been defined precisely; my sixteen factors should have been objective and measurable, instead of mostly being based on my own subjective opinion; I should have set up a random sample of games for each factor so that I could clarify whether, for instance, targeting the king early was more or less likely to lead to quick victories than to slow, unattractive losses!

The process of research and analysis, before even starting to write anything down, took me a year. Greater rigour would have multiplied the time taken several-fold. I trust that you will accept my process for what it was: a way of presenting you with some really lovely games, and demonstrating to you what led to them being so.

Why Should I Read this Book?

There is nothing like playing through a glorious miniature to lift a chessplayer's spirits. There are 97 of them here, most of which should be new to you. I trust that, on its own, this should make the book a pleasure to read.

In the past I have made a habit, in my books and magazine articles, of helping my readers to look at chess games in a new and different way. My intention has been to increase both the reader's enjoyment and understanding. In these volumes, many of the Secrets that I have highlighted are aimed at putting the opponent under psychological pressure. Understanding how to exert those pressures can help you to improve your results, even in games which are more than 25 moves long.

I suppose the big question is: will reading this book help me to play attractive miniatures, or will the ambition to play them make me so gung-ho that I lose more games than I win? Briefly, the answer is: that depends on you. Be aware of the dangers but, for instance, honing your combinational skills through regular solving of tactical exercises can help.

Also remember that opportunities for mini-masterpieces don't arise that often, especially if you don't do anything to help. My 200 game Test Database came from a total of 27,763 consecutive games in my main database. That is around one attractive miniature in every 138 games played. So be realistic about your chances. As a tactician, my own strike rate has been more like one game in fifty.

You could help yourself by identifying the attractive miniatures that you have played to date and identifying, in each one, which Secrets that you have used. That will help you to

identify where your relevant strengths lie. I seem to have a facility with knights, and they feature strongly in my most attractive miniatures. It is also useful to know which Secrets feature rarely in your list. You can decide whether you want to make a conscious effort to apply them more often.

First and foremost, I hope that you enjoy this book – and *Volume 2* should you decide to read it too. I would also be delighted if, as a result, you play some games that you can treasure for ever.

David LeMoir,
Snettisham, Norfolk
October 2025

Chapter Two

The Queen Rules

Find ways to involve the queen in the attack

Each chapter will feature games with a single major theme, but the other themes also can be of great importance since, without them, the games would probably not have been as short, or possibly as attractive. So, from now on, I will be summarising the themes that occur in the games with a note headed 'Some Other Secrets used by the winner'. Each Secret used will be denoted by its number in the list in the introduction. I will not single out Secret number 1 ("Be tactically aware"), because that applies in virtually every game.

In nearly nine out of ten games from the random 200 game sample that I examined, the queen was heavily involved in the attack. Indeed, many sacrifices were played specifically to get the queen into contact with the opposing king. So overwhelmingly important is this Secret that it applies, in various ways, in nearly every game in the book.

In our first two games in this chapter, the queen swoops around the board, sowing confusion wherever she goes. In the first one, White's queen comes into the game early, with a clear ambition to land a check on the h7-square against Black's castled king. When that has been achieved, and aided by three sacrifices by the other white pieces, she pockets the black queen and establishes a winning material advantage.

Game 11

Vladimir Ivanov – Sergey Sivokho

Russia 1992

Scandinavian Defence

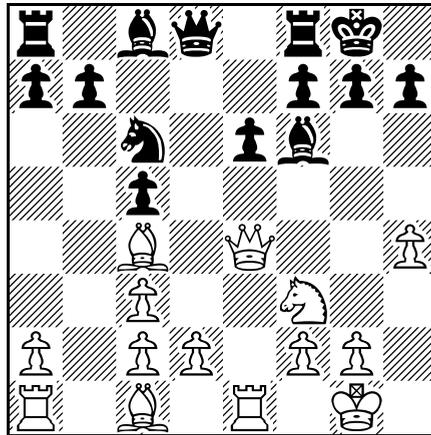
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 ♘xd5 4 ♙c4 e6 5 ♘f3 ♙e7 6 0-0 0-0 7 ♚e1 ♘xc3 8 bxc3 c5 9 ♚e2!?

White puts his queen to work at once. It would be more natural to advance the d-pawn, but he has in mind a remarkable, if rather artificial, idea.

9...♖c6 10 ♚e4!? ♜f6

Since White has not yet moved his d-pawn, Black makes its advance more difficult to achieve. Also, a plan of ♜d3 then c3-c4 and ♜b2 is now going to be dubious. White's next move adds a further touch of mystery.

11 h4!



With this move, White's plan seems a little clearer. He appears to be teeing up to play ♜d3 and, after ...g6 in reply, to advance with h4-h5 and weaken the black king's defences. Black is not fazed by that prospect, so he continues his development.

11...♖e8 12 ♖b1

A useful intermediate move, making the development of Black's queenside pieces more difficult and taking the rook off the long diagonal.

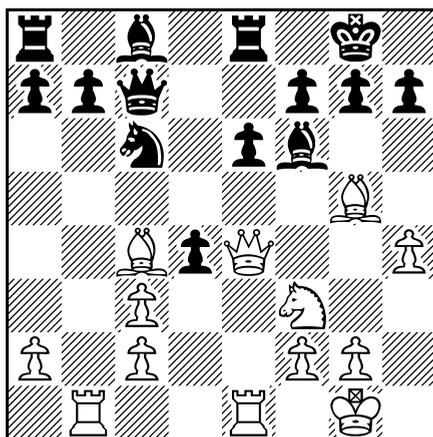
12...♚c7 13 d4!

White changes tack. He frees his queen's bishop before continuing with his plan. This is a pawn sacrifice, since 13...cxd4 14 cxd4? loses a pawn to 14...♖xd4 (discovering an attack on the bishop at c4) 15 ♜d3 ♖xf3+.

13...cxd4 14 ♜g5!

Where did that come from?

When Black moved his queen to c7, it gave the bishop at f6 one fewer defenders, and now the big threat is 15 ♜d3, forcing the queen into the h7-square because 15...g6 would lose the bishop.



14...♙xg5

There is no good way to break White's coming attack.

The ingenious 14...♘e5 can most simply be met with 15 ♖xe5! ♙xe5 16 ♗xe5 ♘xe5 17 ♚xe5 ♜f6 18 ♚e4! ♜fg5 19 cxd4 ♜gxh4 20 d5 e5 21 f4 and White emerges with a crushing positional advantage.

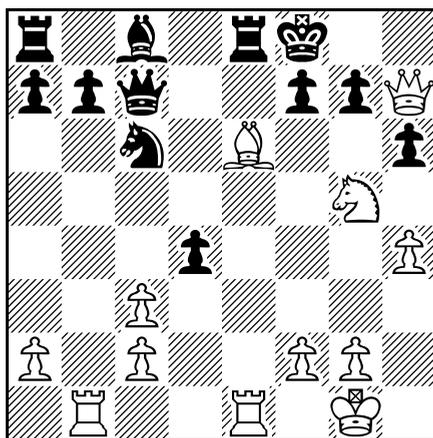
14...h6 also allows White a straightforward positional advantage after 15 ♙xf6 ♜gxh6 16 cxd4, although the tactical 15 ♙d3! ♜hxg5 16 ♜hxg5 is also likely to win.

Black tries his luck by letting the white queen in to h7.

15 ♗xg5 h6

After 15...g6, there is no need for White to roll the dice with 16 h5!? because, with Black's dark-squared bishop exchanged, he would again have a big positional advantage after the simple 16 cxd4.

16 ♗h7+ ♜f8 17 ♙xe6!!



Giving Black a choice of two minor pieces to capture.

17...♙xe6

17...♖xe6 is met by 18 ♖xe6! fxe6 (18...♙xe6 19 ♗xe6+ fxe6 20 ♖h8+ loses the rook on a8) 19 ♖h8+ ♙e7 20 ♖xg7+ and now:

a) There is a quick mate after 20...♙d6 21 ♗e4+ ♙d5 22 ♖b5+! ♙xe4 23 ♖g6+ ♙f4 24 ♖g3+ ♙e4 25 ♖f3 mate.

b) 20...♙d8 21 ♖f8+ ♙d7 22 ♗e4 gives White a winning attack: for example, 22...♖d8 23 ♗c5+ ♙c7 24 ♖xb7+! ♙xb7 25 ♗xe6+ ♙d7 26 ♗xd8 ♖xd8 27 ♖xh6 and White's three connected passed kingside pawns will win the day.

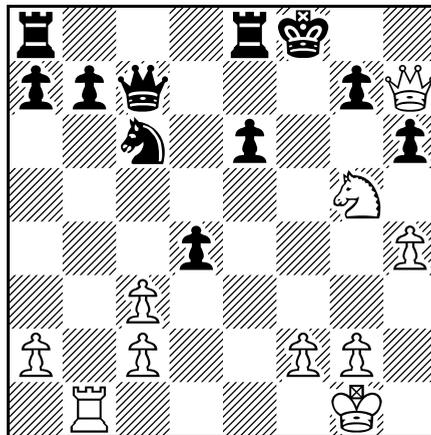
Leaving the rooks on the board with 17...fxe6 is no better, because the black one on e8 tends to get in its king's way. A simple way for White to reach a winning position is 18 ♖h8+ ♙e7 19 ♖xg7+ ♙d8 20 ♗f7+ ♙d7 21 cxd4, after which he will pick up the h-pawn and have three pawns for the piece. Meanwhile Black still has his queenside pieces at home and the white h-pawn will be hard to stop. White also has other, more risky, methods available which he may have preferred.

Finally, accepting the other minor piece with 17...hxg5 loses more prosaically to 18 ♖h8+ ♙e7 when White has a choice between 19 ♙xc8+ and the more aesthetic 19 ♙xf7+ ♙xf7 20 ♖xe8+ ♙f6 21 hxg5+ ♙xg5 22 ♖b5+, after which the king will eventually be run to ground.

Following the move played, White throws more fuel on to the fire.

18 ♖xe6! fxe6

18...♖xe6 loses material to 19 ♗xe6+ fxe6 20 ♖h8+ ♙f7 21 ♖xa8.



After the text move, the attack appears to have blown itself out as 19 ♖h8+ ♙e7 20 ♖xg7+ allows the king to escape via d8.

Yet again, appearances are deceptive, as White has prepared a vicious sting in the tail of his combination.

19 ♖xb7!!

The queen cannot move in view of mate on h8, so Black must accept the rook.

19... ♖xb7 20 ♖h8+ ♔e7 21 ♖xg7+ ♔d6 22 ♞e4!

Even now, White must be accurate, since after 22 ♖xb7 hxg5 Black is material ahead and stands to win.

22... ♔d5 23 ♖xb7 ♔xe4

Otherwise the knight escapes with 24 ♞f6+.

24 ♖xc6+ ♔f5 25 cxd4 1-0

With two rooks against a queen and three pawns, the ending is hopeless for Black, especially as White's pawns are sound while his own are isolated and vulnerable. For a player rated 2220 Elo, which White was at the time, that was the game of a lifetime.

Some Other Secrets used by the Winner

Secret no.7: White's queen manoeuvre to e4, followed by the march of the h-pawn, targeted the black king early.

6: White sacrificed a pawn in the opening to gain time and to set up his kingside attack.

5: White's knight on g5 hovered over the black king and, in many variations, was instrumental in allowing White to mate or win material.