

Chess in Miniature: Volume 2

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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 1*, 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. The eight which occurred most often are:

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.

Those Secrets are covered in detail in *Chess in Miniature: Volume 1*. The remaining eight, which we will examine in detail in this volume, are:

9. Identify and exploit the queen's weaknesses;
10. Use your openings to your advantage;
11. Apply sound general principles;
12. Remember the standard attacks, sacrifices and combinations;
13. Provoke an early crisis;
14. Develop advanced tactical and calculating skills;
15. Play on the opponent's greed or ego;
16. Find the most attractive way to finish off the game.

I will continue to number them as above to avoid confusion for readers who have *Volume 1*.

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.

It is true that Secrets 9-16 arise less frequently than the top eight, but it would be a mistake to assume that they 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 which of (and how) Secrets 9-16 featured. I'll repeat the same example game as in the first volume, as it illustrates almost all 16 of the Secrets! This time, I'll reproduce the general annotations but change the comments referring to Secrets, to focus on Secrets 9-16 which are relevant to this volume.

Game 1

Danylo Shkuran – Buse Kocygigit

Turkey 2019

Scandinavian Defence

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

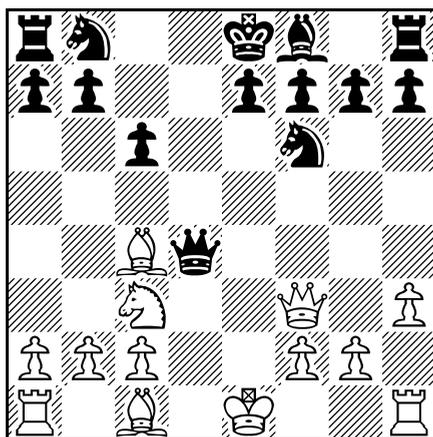
6 ♞ge2 has been played far more often. White has in mind a gambit which I can find in only one previous game on my database.

We have here an example of *using the opening to advantage* (Secret 10). The opponent is lured into unfamiliar territory, which presumably has been analysed in advance by the player of the white pieces.

6...♙g4 7 h3!?

This gambit yields a big lead in development. It also *provokes an early crisis* (13) forcing Black to calculate hard before being able to settle into the game.

7...♙xf3 8 ♖xf3 ♗xd4



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!

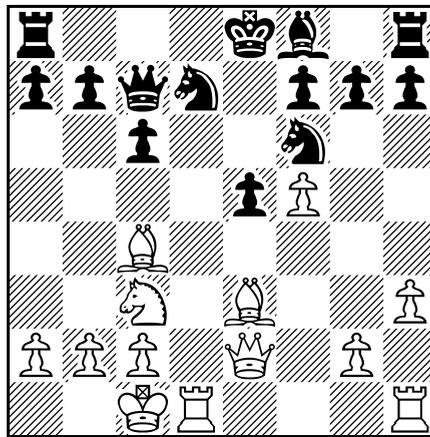
White takes aim at the black king, all the time *exploiting gains of time against the queen (9)*, and she soon becomes exposed to even more of White's time-gaining attacks.

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. Despite the innocent nature of Black's queen retreat, it allows White to strike at once.

13 f5! e5

Black should return the pawn immediately 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 in the centre with a far-seeing sacrifice.

14 ♕xf7+!

The f7-square (f2 if the winner had the black pieces) is a significant factor in many games, being a focus for sacrifices and even a crossroads for the attacker's pieces. ♕xf7+ is a *standard sacrifice* (12), although it is most often followed up with a check by a knight. In this game, it allows White to bring her queen into the attack...

14...♔xf7 15 ♖c4+

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

15...♔e8 16 ♘b5!

Exploiting the pin on the c6-pawn. 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 the main line of White's *long calculation* (14).

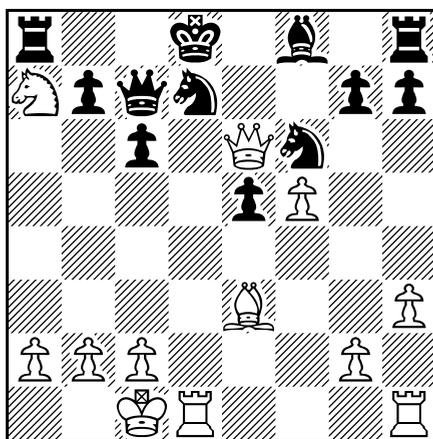
17 ♗e6+ ♔d8

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...♘d7 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!

This is both *very attractive* (16) and very effective.

20...♖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 by this volume, only number 11 (“apply sound general principles”) 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 94 wonderful games – 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 9-16 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.

Each of the Secrets 9-16, which we cover in this volume, arose in fewer than 40% of the games in the Test Database, although it became clear that, when they did arise, they were more likely to be the most crucial factor in creating a brilliant miniature.

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.

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.

That 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, and 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 94 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.

Each chapter features 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. When a game features one or more of the Secrets detailed in this book, I have described their effect immediately after the game annotation.

The Secrets in *Chess in Miniature: Volume 1* also feature often in these games, although I have not singled them out here. If you have read that volume, you may want to identify for yourself where and how they feature. If you haven't read *Volume 1* yet, there is a lot to learn and enjoy by reading that book and coming back to these games afterwards.

In the past I have made a habit, in my books and magazine articles, of helping 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, your approach to the opening can help. So can honing your combinational skills through regular solving of tactical exercises.

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 1* should you decide to read it too. You may already have read it! 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 Three

Play the Position

Apply Sound General Principles

This theme presented me with something of a conundrum. Naturally, it is a good idea to follow this advice until something more pressing comes along, like a chance for a tactic. With most of the other themes, when I was going through the games in the Test and Master Databases I flagged up whenever they occurred. With this factor, however, I only flagged it up when it was a dominating or guiding factor. I did that even when a sacrifice was involved, because some sacrifices are played for purely positional reasons – to control a line or to ruin the opponent’s pawn formation somewhere other than around the king.

In the Test Database, I flagged up this factor in about one game in five. However, in the Master Database, I flagged it in only one game in about fifteen. I suspect that this was largely because, in high quality short games, other factors overwhelm the importance of positional play.

So, this is a relatively short chapter but, nonetheless, I encountered some very interesting and instructive examples. The first is one of those rare attractive miniatures which contain very few tactics, although it does feature a pawn sacrifice (which is declined). In Irving Chernev’s 1965 classic *The Most Instructive Games of Chess Ever Played* (Simon and Schuster, re-issued as a paperback by Dover in 1992), this is one of only three miniatures featured. The winner is a young Tigran Petrosian, against an even younger Victor Korchnoi, and the game is an instructive positional crush. One of the other two miniatures in that book was also played by the great Armenian – against Pachman – not long before he became world champion. I have also included that game in this chapter; see Game 29.

Game 26

Tigran Petrosian – Viktor Korchnoi

Leningrad 1946

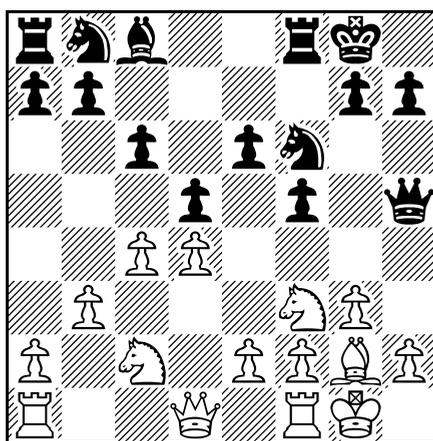
Dutch Defence

1 d4 e6 2 ♘f3 f5 3 g3 ♗f6 4 ♙g2 d5 5 0-0 ♘d6 6 c4 c6 7 b3 0-0

The Dutch Stonewall has had a resurgence of interest in recent years, especially since it was championed by Vladimir Kramnik. Black keeps an iron grip on the centre while developing his pieces with the aim to attack on the kingside, but leaves his central dark squares potentially weak.

Even when he was young, Petrosian was a crafty soul. He has been careful not to develop his queen's knight yet. After the move played, he can force the exchange of dark-squared bishops, leaving e5 very hard to defend. Nowadays 7...♗e7, avoiding that exchange, is almost universally played here.

8 ♙a3! ♙xa3 9 ♗xa3 ♖e8 10 ♗c2 ♖h5



Black's queen manoeuvre is standard procedure in the Dutch Defence, but, in this case, the attack is toothless and the queen soon finds herself out on a limb when she is needed to defend the centre.

11 ♖c1!

There are other moves, but this one temporarily prevents the normal kingside pawn push ...g7-g5 and also eyes the a3- and c7-squares which may, in the future, help the queen to invade the black position.

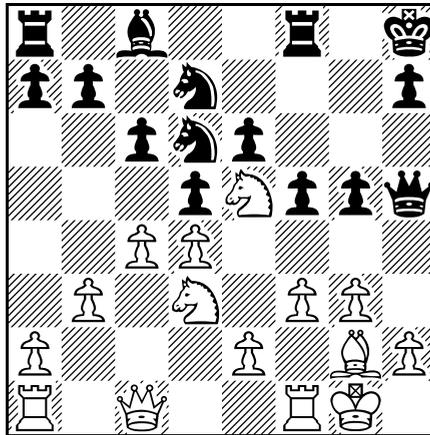
11...♗e4 12 ♗ce1!

The knight aims at e5 via d3.

12...g5 13 ♖d3 ♗d7 14 ♗fe5! ♔h8

The pawn at e2 is taboo: 14...♙xe2?? loses a piece to 15 f3, as the knight cannot move without losing the queen to 16 ♖e1 or 16 ♖f2, and White also has 15 ♕xe4 dxe4 16 ♙xg5+ ♔h8 17 ♗f4, with a winning attack.

15 f3 ♗d6



16 e4!

This is the kind of move that you play when you are confident of winning and you want to polish your opponent off quickly. It involves a pawn sacrifice and some calculation.

Simpler, sacrificing nothing and requiring very little calculation, was the principled 16 ♙a3! ♗f7 17 ♙e7. The vulnerability of the rook on f8 and knight on d7 forces Black to jettison a pawn with 17...♗fxe5 18 ♗xe5 ♙e8 19 ♙xg5, and he would still have his dark-square weaknesses to cope with.

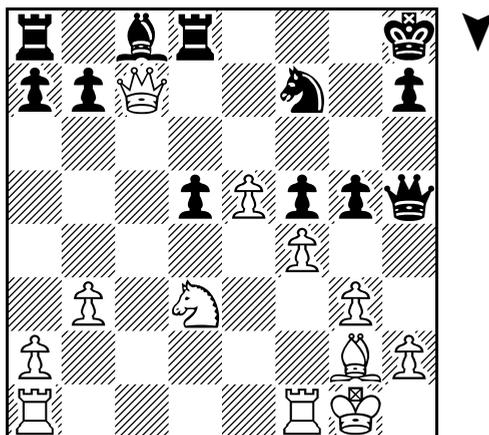
16...♗f7

Black chooses to decline the pawn, but the sacrifice would only have been temporary, and its acceptance would allow White to break through decisively. After 16...dxe4 17 fxe4 we have:

a) 17...fxe4 18 ♖xf8+ ♗xf8 19 ♙a3! exd3 20 ♙xd6 ♙e8 21 ♕e4 when Black can barely move anything, so White will regain the pawn and his remaining rook will soon come to the f-file to finish things off.

b) 17...♗xe4 18 ♕xe4 fxe4 19 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 20 ♗e5 and now the only way to avoid immediate material loss is 20...♖xf1+ 21 ♙xf1 ♙e8, but 22 ♙f6+ ♔g8 23 ♙xg5+ ♔h8 24 ♖f1, threatening 25 ♗f7+, leaves Black helpless.

17 cxd5 ♗dxe5 18 dxe5 cxd5 19 exd5 exd5 20 f4 ♖d8 21 ♙c7



Black is crippled by the power of the white queen and the absence of his own from the main scene of action.

21...b6

White's reply to this move exploits the vulnerability of the rook on d8 and the knight on f7. Black can avoid it with 21...g4, but White can crank up the pressure with 22 ♘c5 (which is prevented by the text move), when Black is losing material. The threat is 23 e6, and 22...b6 would fail against 23 e6! bxc5 24 exf7, threatening mate on e5 and the rook on d8. Another attempt to hold on is 22...♙g6 23 ♖ad1 ♜c6 when White has 24 ♜xf7 ♜xc5+ 25 ♔h1, winning the d5-pawn, because Black must deal with the threat of 25 ♜f6+, bagging the rook.

22 fxg5!

Now recapturing with the queen loses the knight, and the knight recapture loses the rook. Meanwhile 23 ♘f4 threatens to force the queen to abandon his knight. Black could avoid the worst with 22...♙d7, but White could then simply capture the d5-pawn with his bishop and more would follow.

22...♙a6

Instead, Korchnoi pins the knight at d3 to the rook on f1 in the vain hope that Petrosian has fallen asleep and forgotten what his last move threatened.

23 ♘f4 1-0

Other Secrets Used by the Winner

9: The black queen was stuck out of play on the kingside, supporting an attack which never happened.

10: The idea of 7 b3 and 8 ♙a3 may have been unknown to Korchnoi. It certainly brought about a position which suited Petrosian's positional skills.