

# Champions of the New Millennium

*By*

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# Chapter 1

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## Veselin Topalov



Born March 15, 1975 in Rousse, Bulgaria

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Highest Rating in July 2006: 2813

Veselin Topalov is the biggest “new” star of the first decade of the 21st century, despite his age and numerous earlier accomplishments. No other mature player has been able to achieve such a significant jump in strength.

Topalov lives in Salamanca in Spain, partly because his business manager, IM Silvio Danailov, resides there as well. He was one of the first chess players to prepare with coaches from other sports, including sports psychologists. One example is his special training to deal with the fear of losing: Topalov has been able to demonstrate that he is unconstrained by this fear, and indeed his games reveal that he is prepared to accept a higher level of risk than his contemporaries. Topalov gets indirect support and sponsorship from Bulgaria – state officials attend the Sofia tournaments. Various grandmasters have acted as Topalov’s official second, most recently Ivan Cheparinov.

Topalov is unquestionably one of the world’s strongest players with a fearless attacking style, and his chess is generally exciting and unpredictable. He seems to specialize in material imbalances with the help of sacrifices in his quest to gain the initiative. His original approach can be seen in his predilection for attacking with knights and his courage in playing very deep exchange sacrifices.

Veselin started to play chess at the age of 8, and in 1989 was already able to win the World U14 championship in Puerto Rico, followed by silver in the World U16 in Singapore 1990. The 1990s were very fruitful for the dynamic youngster, who played attractive chess full of tension and life.

In knockout tournaments for the FIDE World Championship he reached the last 16 in 1999, losing to Kramnik 1-3. At the same stage in 2001 he lost 3-4 to Shirov. In the semi-finals in 2004 he fell to the overall winner Kasimdzhanov 2-4. In Dortmund 2002, playing for the right to challenge Kramnik for his Classical World title, Topalov lost the final Candidates match to Leko 1.5-2.5.



Some notable accomplishments of Topalov include defeating Kasparov in Linares 2005 in his last official tournament game, and winning the 2005 Sofia MTel Masters (+4,=5,-1), the strongest event of that year with an average rating of 2744. He reached the top of the rating list in October 2006 achieving 2813, the second highest rating of all time.

Topalov's most significant tournament result was winning the double round robin 2005 FIDE World Championship in San Luis, Argentina, 1.5 points ahead of Anand and Svidler. En route to this achievement he scored a remarkable 6.5/7 in the first half. The champion was duly awarded the chess Oscar for 2005.

In Elista 2006 he lost the unification match with Kramnik on tiebreak (1.5-2.5) after tying in regular games 6-6. Unsupported allegations of cheating were made against Kramnik by Topalov's camp, and the term "toiletgate" was coined. The controversy left an unpleasant aftertaste for the whole event. We will refrain from reviewing all the painful details. Suffice it to say that the match was interrupted after four games with the score at 2-2 and, following the allegations, Kramnik did not show up for Game 5, which was awarded to Topalov. The match continued on October 2, 2006, with FIDE president Kirsan Ilyumzhinov upholding the 3-2 score in favour of Topalov.

No doubt the psychological repercussions of the 2006 unification match took their toll on Topalov. However, after losing the title he has clearly proven his class and the efficiency of his approach to training. The list of his tournament triumphs is truly enviable – 1-2 place in Corus 2006, 1-3 in Corus 2007, 2-3 place in Morelia/Linares 2006, 3-4 in Morelia/Linares 2008, 1st place in Sofia MTel 2006 and 2007, 2nd place in 2008, 1st place in Vitoria Gasteiz 2007 and 1st place in the Grand Slam final in Bilbao 2008 and Nanjing 2008, 1.5 points ahead of the field in a category 21 event! In 2008 Topalov was on top form and occupied 1st place in the rating list.

## The Creative Attacking Player

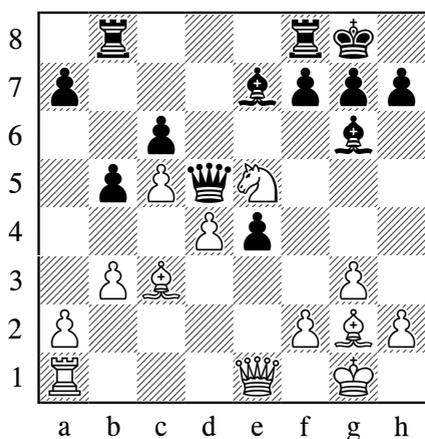
Topalov is one of the finest universal players of modern times, but in his heart he is above all a tactician and an attacking player. His early successes had indicated that he was capable of beating any opponent, but the lack of deeper strategic insight was stopping him from reaching the very top. Then Veselin worked on his chess and moved to an even higher level – his excellent opening preparation is on a par with Kasparov in his best days; he plays dynamic positions and his active approach offers chances to win with both colours; he has a profound understanding of the relationship between material and initiative, just like Petrosian. Topalov is physically fit and very often improves his tournament position in the final rounds when his competitors are struggling with reduced energy levels. His special psychological preparation helps him to cope with stress, time trouble and the fear of losing. The Bulgarian star is showing the way for the younger generation in his willingness to extend his preparation beyond the limits of 64 black and white squares.



**18.♖xe4!!**

In one fell swoop Veselin extinguishes Black's central control whilst preparing pressure on c6 and the h1-a8 diagonal.

Until this game 18.♘e5 was played without great success: 18...♗xc3 19.♖d3 ♖c7 20.♖xc3 ♜e8 As in Kramnik – Leko, Dortmund 2004, with approximately equal chances.

**18...dxe4 19.♗e5 ♖d5 20.♖e1****20...♗f5**

The alternative is:

**20...f5**

This would be met by:

**21.f3 ♗xc5**

The best practical chance.

On 21...♗b7 22.fxe4 fxe4 White would have faced a difficult crossroads. The tempting 23.♖xe4 ♖xe4 24.♗xe4 ♜bc8 25.a4! bxa4 (25...b4!?) 26.♞xa4 a6 27.♞b4 ♜c7 28.♞xb7 ♞xb7 29.♗xc6 ♜c7 30.♗a5 ♞xc6! (much better than 30...♞cc8? 31.♗d5† with a won game for the first player) 31.♗xc6 ♗f7 is only slightly better for White.

It seems that 23.♖xe4 ♖d8 24.♗xc6 ♗xc6 25.♗xc6 wins, though the battle would be more complex.

**22.dxc5 ♖xc5† 23.♗h1 ♜be8**

Should Black try 23...b4, then 24.♗b2 exf3 25.♗xf3 gives a big edge.

**24.b4 ♖d6 25.♖d1!**

With a clear advantage.

**21.g4!**

Pushing the bishop to g6 where it will be less able to stop White's central pawns.

**21...♗g6****21...b4!?**

On this there follows:

**22.gxf5 bxc3 23.♖xe4 ♖xe4 24.♗xe4 ♗f6**

If 24...♞b4!? 25.♗xc6 ♗xc5 26.♗xb4 ♗xb4 27.a3? ♗d6 28.♗c6 ♗f4 29.♞a2 ♞d8 30.d5 ♗f8 31.♞c2 ♗d2 32.♗f1 ♗e7 33.♗e2 ♞d6 gives an edge to Black with ...♞h6 coming. Naturally the precise move 27.♞c1! would keep White happily in control.

**25.♗xc6 ♗xd4**

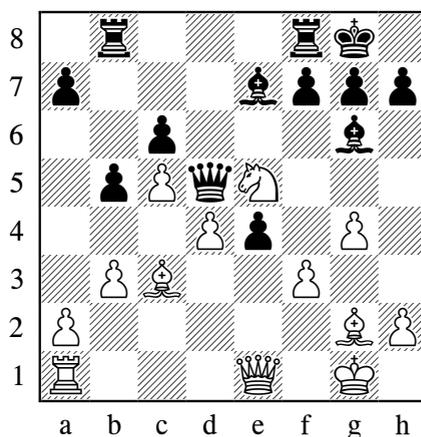
25...♞b7 26.♗g2! ♞c8 27.♗f3 with a slight edge.

**26.♗xd4 ♞b4 27.♞d1**

White has a won game.

**22.f3!**

This diagonal must be opened!

**22...b4**

Black has a couple of options we should consider:

On 22...♙xc5 23.dxc5 ♖xc5† 24.♙h1 exf3  
25.♙xf3 ♜fe8 26.b4 ♖b6 27.♖g1 White is in  
control due to his strong pieces.

22...♖e6 23.fxe4 f6 24.♘xg6 hxg6 25.♖g3

White could also play 25.g5 ♜be8 26.gxf6  
♙xf6 27.e5 with a pleasant edge eyeing the  
c-pawn, but 25...fxg5!? puts the whole idea  
under a question mark.

25...♜be8 26.b4

Instead 26.♜f1 ♜d8 27.b4 ♖xa2 28.d5 is  
met by 28...cxd5 29.exd5 ♙xd5! and Aronian  
is fine. But not 28.♖c7 ♖c4! 29.♜f3 ♜xd4!  
(29...♜f7 also makes a good impression)  
30.♖xe7 ♜d1† 31.♙f2 (not pleasant, but  
31.♙f1 ♜xf1† 32.♜xf1 ♖xc3 is bad as well)  
31...♖a2† 32.♙g3 ♖g1 33.♜f2 ♖b3 34.♜f3  
♖c2 when Black wins.

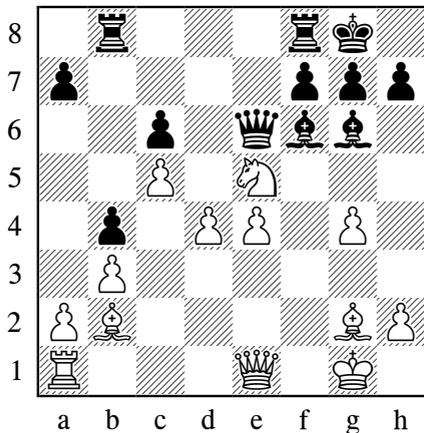
26...♖c4 27.a4 a6 28.axb5 axb5 29.♞a7

29.d5 cxd5 30.♙f1 ♙xc5† is unclear.

29...♜f7 30.♞a6 ♜c8 31.h4 g5 32.h5

The impending d5 will be lethal. However,  
the defender would do much better with 30...  
f5! with an unclear position.

23.fxe4 ♖e6 24.♙b2 ♙f6



If instead 24...♜fe8 then 25.♖f2 f6 26.d5  
cxd5 27.exd5 ♖c8 28.♘c6 and White's pawns  
are unstoppable.

After 24...h6 25.♙h1 ♜fe8 White's over-  
whelming centre decides, even though the  
immediate 26.d5 cxd5 27.exd5 ♖a6 28.d6  
♙f6 would be only slightly better.

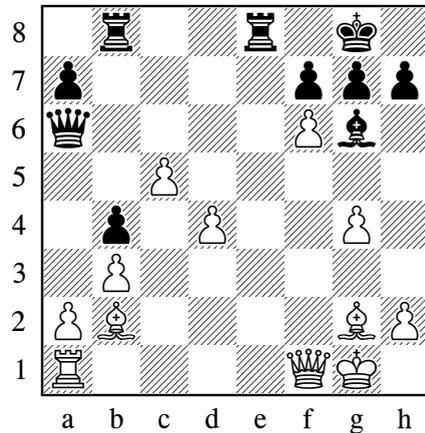
25.♘xc6!

Clarifying the centre by exchanging the  
knight for bishop and creating two passed  
pawns.

25...♖xc6 26.e5 ♖a6 27.exf6 ♜fe8

On 27...♖xf6 28.♖f2 ♖g5 29.d5! ♖xg4  
30.♖d4 ♙f5 31.♖xg4 ♙xg4 32.c6 and the  
pawns triumph!

28.♖f1



28...♖e2

Hoping to gain a tempo on the bishop with  
an exchange on e2, but Veselin refuses to  
oblige!

On 28...♖xf1† 29.♙xf1 gxf6 30.d5 wins.

29.♖f2!

Wonderful! White realizes that the pawn on  
g4 is not relevant: once Black loses control of  
e2 counterplay is squashed and the pawns will  
roll with an easy win.

29...♖xg4 30.h3 ♖g5

Another move to analyse is:

30...♖h5 31.♞e1

Too impatient would be 31.d5?! ♞e2 32.♞g3 ♞d8 33.♙d4 ♞d2 34.♙e3 ♞xg2† 35.♞xg2 ♞xd5 36.♞e1 gxf6 37.c6 ♞d1 38.♞xd1 ♞xd1† 39.♞f1 ♞d6 40.♞f3 ♞e5 41.♙f4 ♞a1† 42.♙f2 ♞xa2† 43.♙g3 ♞c2 44.c7 ♙f5 and Black survives!

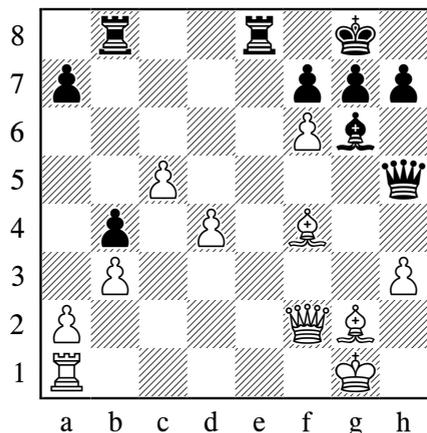
31...♞g5 32.d5 ♙e4 33.♞xe4! ♞xe4 34.♙h2 ♞ee8

Not 34...♞f4?! 35.♞g3.

35.fxg7

With the towering bishop duo and two advanced connected pawns, the victory is assured.

31.♙c1 ♞h5 32.♙f4

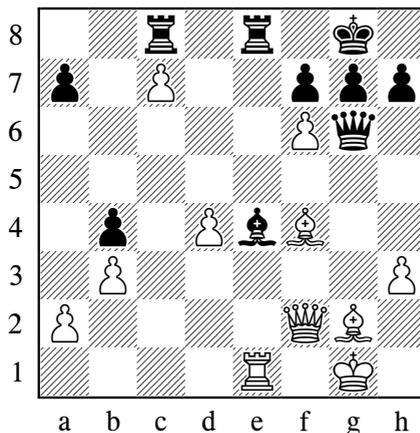


32...♞bd8?!

A much tougher defence was 32...♞bc8! when White's best seems to be 33.♙e5 gxf6 34.♙xf6 ♞e2 or 33.fxg7 ♙e4 with unclear fighting positions.

33.c6 ♙e4 34.c7 ♞c8 35.♞e1 ♞g6

On 35...♙xg2 36.♞xe8† ♞xe8 37.♞xg2 ♞d1† 38.♙h2 g6 39.♞e4! ♞f8 40.d5 wins.



36.♞xe4!

A second exchange sac on the very same square as the first!

36...♞xe4 37.d5

White now has a won game.

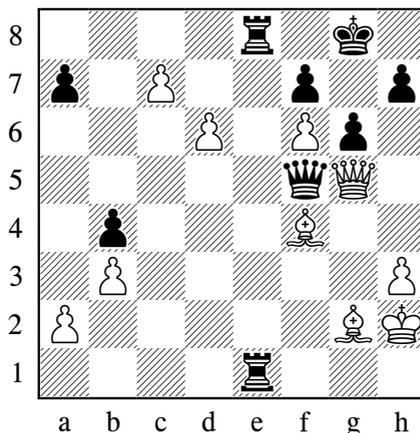
37...♞ce8 38.d6

A triumphant march!

38...♞e1† 39.♙h2 ♞f5 40.♞g3 g6

Unfortunately 40...♞xf6 41.d7 was out of the question for the defender.

41.♞g5



Besides having to worry about passed pawns, Black must not forget to protect his king.

An enterprising win was 41.♖g4!? ♜c5 42.d7 ♜g1† 43.♔g3 ♚1e3† 44.♕h4 ♜f2† 45.♖g3 and Aronian would have no defence.

41...♖xg5 42.♙xg5 ♚d1 43.♙c6

An instructive case of bishops over rooks!

43...♚e2† 44.♔g3

1–0



## Game 2

### Peter Svidler – Veselin Topalov

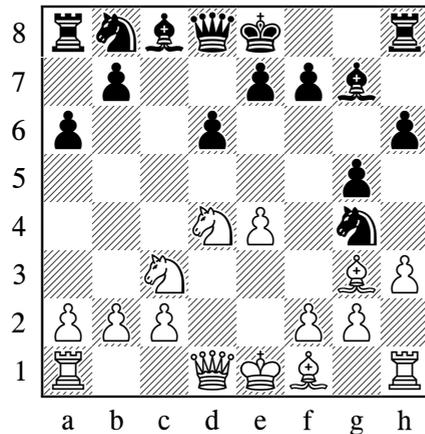
San Luis 2005, World Championship

Topalov unleashes an inspired novelty that soon leads to a fascinating endgame. When you surprise your opponent in the opening you will almost invariably gain on the clock. In this case a psychological advantage was also gained. Under constant pressure and short of time, Svidler finally cracks.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♙e3 ♘g4 7.♙g5

If instead 7...♙c1 then 7...♘f6 puts the onus on White to play for a win.

7...h6 8.♙h4 g5 9.♙g3 ♙g7 10.h3



Or on 10.♙e2 h5 11.♙xg4 (if 11.h4 ♘c6 12.♘b3 gxh4 13.♚xh4 ♙e6 14.♖d2 ♖b6 is equal) 11...hxg4 12.0–0 ♘c6 13.♘f5 ♙xc3 14.bxc3 ♖a5 15.♖xg4 f6 is fine for Black.

10...♘e5 11.♘f5

Instead if 11.♙e2 ♘bc6 12.♘b3 ♙e6 13.♘d5 ♚c8 14.0–0 ♘g6 15.c3 ♙e5 16.♙xe5 ♘cxe5 Black has a nice grip on the centre.