

"Keene, the Gaffe Machine" - By Olimpiu G. Urcan

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On his Twitter page on June 12, 2016, Raymond Keene prefaced a link to his new column for the London *Sunday Times* in characteristically sensationalist fashion: “Amazing discoveries in the first edition of Alekhine’s Defence.” The column discussed the well-known 1925 game played in Paris between Eugène Znosko-Borovsky and Alexander Alekhine. Later that day, Keene sent out a new, more specific tweet, in which the singular (“discovery”) replaced the plural (“discoveries”): “The new discovery is 16...Nd3+ when Alekhine could have won brilliantly.” In the column itself, which gave the game score with notes “based on” the 1975 Dover edition of S. Tartakower and J. du Mont’s *500 Master Games of Chess*, Keene wrote the following after Alekhine’s 16...Nc2+:

Although this regains material, the computer points out that 16...Nd3+!! is winning. The main point is that after 17.Bxd3 Rxd3 18. 0-0 is impossible as 18...Rxa3 19. Qd4 Bc5 wins the white queen. White therefore cannot get his king safe and the black pieces will run riot despite the material deficit. A typical line is 18.Qa2 Bc5 19.Nd2 Re3+ 20.Kf1 Bd3+ 21.Kf2 Bg6 22.Kf1 0-0 and ...Rd8 follows with carnage.

Was this “new discovery” (computer-generated, by his own admission) worthy of such hype? Not even close. The book *500 Master Games of Chess* made no mention of 16...Nd3, but the move has been discussed by most other annotators from 1925 onwards, including Znosko-Borovsky and Alekhine. Znosko-Borovsky commented on the move on page 36 of the February 1925 *L’Echiquier* and, again, on page 218 of *Kagans Neueste Schachnachrichten* the same year. As for Alekhine, in his notes on page 41 of *On the Road to the World Championship 1923-1927* (Oxford, 1984 – the translation of his book *Auf dem Wege zur Weltmeisterschaft*) he too examined 16...Nd3+, awarding it an exclamation point. A modern case where 16...Nd3+ was given is page 65 of Alexander Khalifman’s *Alexander Alekhine: Games 1923-1934* (Sofia, 2002). These references demonstrate that Keene’s offering was not “new” and was not a “discovery.” It was just one more demonstration of his stupefying level of ignorance, and of his laziness with regard to even basic research.

Two days later, in his June 14 *Times* column, when discussing the well-known game Taimanov vs. Najdorf, Zurich, 1953, Keene wrote that his notes were “based on those from *Najdorf: Life and Games* by Alexander Beliavsky (Batsford).” That book had nothing to do with Beliavsky. It was by Lissowski, Mikhalchishin and Najdorf, and the notes to the Taimanov vs. Najdorf game were by Najdorf himself. An example of what “based on” means comes after 19...g3:

Najdorf: “White is already poised to begin his direct attack on the queenside, so I have no alternative but to throw all my forces into a violent assault on his king.”

Keene: “White is poised to begin the queenside attack so Black throws all his forces into a violent assault against the white king.”

Is there any easier way of cobbling together a chess column?

And so on to today’s column (15 June). Keene published a well-known simultaneous game Schultz vs. Alekhine, Stockholm, 1914. This time, his notes were claimed (falsely, in fact) to be “based on” Reinfeld’s in *The Unknown Alekhine 1905-1914* (Pitman). Reinfeld identified White only as “Schultz,” but Keene somehow came up with the name “Evelyne Schultz,” who is a modern-day player. White was Erik Gustav Schultz (1863-1917).

A Keene tweet about the game boldly claimed “The first ever Dragon exchange sacrifice,” and in his article he wrote:

The earliest stage in the development of the Dragon variation of the Sicilian Defence, with its typical sacrifice of rook for knight on c3, can be traced to today’s game by the ever ingenious Alexander Alekhine.

That too is nonsense. In a well-known simultaneous game played by Emanuel Lasker in London on February 1, 1908 against D. Mackay, the latter sacrificed the exchange on c3. The game has been published in many newspapers, magazines, books and databases. To mention just two periodicals which specifically commented on 13...Rxc3: page 131 of the March 1908 *British Chess Magazine* and page 198 of the March 1908 *Lasker’s Chess Magazine*. Lasker himself wrote that 13...Rxc3 was “an ingenious sacrifice that appears to be sound on general principles.”

So that is what Raymond “based on” Keene has been giving *Times* readers over the past few days: well-known old games with crude rewrites of other people’s annotations, and a stream of factual howlers which are all his own.

Postscript: An even older specimen of the exchange sacrifice, although the game did not involve a prominent player, was Lawrence vs. Curt, New York, 1907. See [item 339](#) in Tim Krabbé’s Open Diary.