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## Gambit Cartel

Tim McGrew

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**ChessCafe.com** is pleased to introduce its newest columnist, correspondence master Tim McGrew. An associate professor of philosophy at Western Michigan University, Tim is married with two daughters, one of whom, according to Tim, is an avid player and "has won far more trophies than I ever did as a kid." Tim's own forte on the chessboard is gambits.



His hobbies include recreational mathematics, playing the piano and reading good books. He is no slouch as a chess instructor either. He took one of his students from being a class C player to champion of Mississippi.

We hope you enjoy his new column, *Gambit Cartel*...

### Canning the Caro: The Milner-Barry Gambit Part 1

About twenty-five years ago, I discovered the refutation of the Caro-Kann.

Perhaps youthful enthusiasm colored my assessment a bit. I had found my weapon in an obscure note to a game in Tartakower and du Mont's massive book *500 Master Games of Chess*, and in one of my first attempts at serious home analysis I had found an improvement for White. I went off to the US Amateur Team Championships in Philadelphia about two decades ago praying that my opponents would open with 1...c6.

None of them did. But in the huge skittles room I met a friendly expert named Mike Feinstein and discovered by watching his games that he was a Caro man. Summoning courage, I asked him for a game, and would he mind taking Black?

Fairy tales rarely work out better. Mike, a consummate good sport, spent at least an hour that afternoon taking the Black pieces, unable to believe that he was being mated repeatedly by a mere C player. I went home without any cash (our team came in just under the money) but secure in the conviction that the Caro was busted.

Twenty-five years on, my judgment has mellowed. I still have a low opinion of the Caro, but that is largely because in many lines it yields positions that I do not like to play for Black -- and that is not the same thing as saying that they are unplayable. Still, I think my one time "secret weapon" is better than its theoretical reputation and it undeniably yields interesting games. It is time to reveal some of my secrets, attempt a more objective analysis of their merits, and introduce a new generation of d'Artagnans to the set of ideas that gave me so much joy in my youth.

The gambit idea becomes visible on move four after the standard moves **1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4** and now, instead of the perfectly sensible and strong recapture with the Knight, **4.f3!?**



This audacious sacrifice is a close relative of the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, but it predates Diemer's pioneering experiments with his f-pawn. It is the brainchild of Sir Stuart Milner-Barry, who is

better known for his pawn sacrifice line in the Advance French, made famous when Ken Messere demolished Zagorovsky with it in the 5th correspondence world championship in 1965. Sir Stuart was playing 4.f3!? against the Caro as early as 1932. White's objectives are simple: he wants rapid development, an open f-file, and the attacking chances these will bring against the Black King. What is much more important if you are interested in practical results, this move is likely to get your average Caro player out of the lines he knows well.

Theoretical coverage in the major reference works is sparse. MCO 13, BCO 2 and NCO all ignore White's fourth move. It does not make it into Keene's *Complete Book of Gambits*, and it is not mentioned in the wonderful old RHM book *Understanding the Caro-Kann*. Tartakower and du Mont recommend that Black counterpunch with 4...e5, and many authorities consider this to be the main line. Filip, who does the analysis for this section of ECO B, advocates grabbing the pawn with 4...exf3. This turns the game into a sort of Blackmar-Diemer where Black has not yet committed his Knight to f6 -- an oversight he

generally remedies within the next few moves. Filip also mentions two alternatives. He quotes the line given in Tartakower and du Mont, but where they leave it unassessed he offers an opinion (see below). He also mentions 4...e3!?, a relative of the Langeheinicke Defense to the Blackmar-Diemer, but he gives no further analysis. Finally, the sensible 4...Nf6 transposes directly into the O'Kelly Defense to the Blackmar-Diemer, which was recommended in Watson and Schiller's *Big Book of Busts*.

I did not record any of my early adventures with the Milner-Barry, and at that time I was utterly unaware that the BDG existed. All I knew was that I had a lot of fun in this crazy Caro line when people took my f-pawn! Here is a recent outing that will give readers something of the flavor of the line.

**McGrew - Smirnov, World Chess Network,  
March 17, 2002**

**1.d4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.f3 exf3 5.Nxf3 e6  
6.Bd3 Nf6**

By transposition we have reached a rather unfavorable line in the Ziegler Defense to the BDG.

**7.0-0 Bd6 8.Qe1 0-0 9.Qh4 Be7 10.Bg5 h6**



**11.Bxh6!**

A classic sacrifice that I like to call the "Blitz." Black now loses by force.

**11...gxh6 12.Qxh6  
Re8 13.Ng5 Bf8  
14.Bh7+ Kh8**

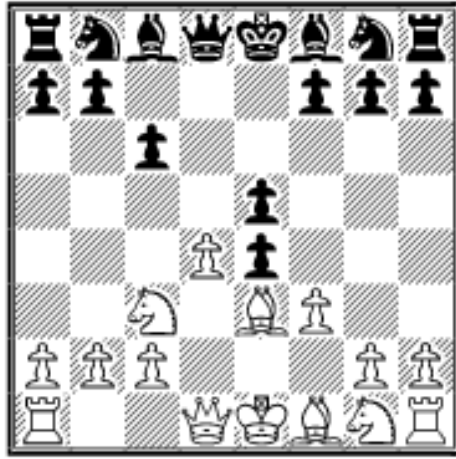
**15.Nxf7#**

My youthful analytical adventures focused on 4...e5. Tartakower and du Mont give 5.dxe5 Qxd1 6.Nxd1 exf3, which Filip evaluates as -/+. This may be a bit harsh, but it certainly wasn't the sort of position I had been looking for when I ventured out on gambit waters.

Several BDG books recommend that White defer f3 and play 4.Bc4 to avoid the central kick. Knowing nothing of all of this, I accepted 4.f3 as my main line and developed a different idea. In a recent online game against a FIDE master, I had the opportunity to revisit my home analysis.

***McGrew - Nh2, Internet Chess Club, August 23, 2002***

**1.d4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.f3 e5 5.Be3!?**



This was my improvement on Tartakower and du Mont. By clearing the line between the Rook and the Queen, White prepares to play a Queenless middlegame where he will have good piece activity to

compensate for the pawn -- should Black be unwise enough to take it. It was fortunate for me that I had never heard of the Blackmar-Diemer, since I might otherwise have been discouraged from playing this move by analogy with the Lemberger Counter-Gambit 1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.Nc3 e5, where 4.Be3 -- despite Schiller's recommendation in his monograph on the BDG -- is probably the weakest of White's commonly played options.

### 5...exd4

One of my crazier ideas was to answer 5...exf3 with 6.Qxf3!? intending 6...exd4 7.0-0-0! when White has very active play, e.g. 7...c5 8.Bf4 Be7 9.Qg3 Nc6 10.Qxg7 Bf6 11.Qg3 with excellent compensation for the pawn. In fact, by move 8 Black looks like he's in trouble: 8...Bd6 9.Nb5 (9.Re1+ Ne7 is not so convincing.) 9...Bxf4+ 10.Qxf4 Be6 11.Nc7+ Kd7 12.Nxa8 Nc6 13.c3 Qxa8 14.cxd4 cxd4 15.Bb5 looks strong, and 8...a6 9.Re1+ Be7 10.Nd5 Kf8 (10...Qa5 hits the R/e1, but with 11.Nc7+ Kf8 12.Rxe7 Nxe7 13.Nxa8 White comes out on top.) 11.Bc4 Bg5 12.Bxg5 Qxg5+ 13.Kb1 and the threat of Nc7 forking a8

and e8 (an abstract fork!) is deadly.

Though I'm not normally a fan of the Ryder Gambit (a BDG sideline defined by 1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.f3 exf3 5.Qxf3), I think this Queen capture might have a future, particularly against greedy opponents.

But the sensible 6.Nxf3 also leads to interesting positions. One line I analyzed went 6...Bg4 (I was obsessed with the possibility of having my attack neutralized through exchanges and examined every swapping line I could think of!) 7.Bc4 Qe7 8.0-0 e4 9.Bxf7+!?, which leads to an obscure position that I will leave readers to explore.

### **6.Bxd4 c5**

I had looked closely at this move in my home analysis. If Black can force Queens off under favorable circumstances, then this whole gambit is no good.

### **7.Be5!?**

One of the points of my Be3 maneuver is that the additional control of squares on the dark diagonal makes this an appealing place for the Bishop.

### **7...Qxd1+**

The alternatives don't look very convincing for Black. In my home preparation all those years ago I had examined 7...Qe7 8.f4! inviting 8...f6? 9.Ne5! +-; 7...Qb6 8.Nd5! Qa5+ 9.b4! cxb4 10.Nc7+ forcing Black to part with his Queen to stop mate; 7...Be6 8.Qxd8+ Kxd8 9.0-0-0+ Nd7

10.Nxe4 and Black's misplaced King gives White some advantage; 7...Nd7 8.Bf4 keeps alive the threats of Nd5 and Nb5.

### **8.Rxd1**

I had pinned my analytical hopes on this position, reasoning that White's threats to c7 and, in some lines, d6 would be difficult for Black to parry. It was therefore a great satisfaction to me when my opponent marched straight into the main line of my old analysis.

### **8...Nc6 9.Bg3**

White can try something more ambitious: 9.Nd5!? Nxe5 10.Nc7+ Ke7 11.Nxa8 Nf6 12.fxe4 Nxe4 13.Nc7 and the White Knight escapes. Black has some play for his small material disadvantage; pending further analysis I'm inclined to rate the position overall as murky or slightly favorable to White. But murky positions are okay if you know them and your opponent doesn't!

### **9...exf3**

9...Be6 is probably better. The position after 10.fxe4 (10.Nb5 Rd8) 10...Nf6 11.Nd5 0-0-0 12.Nxf6 Rxd1+ 13.Kxd1 gxf6 is again obscure but certainly playable, which is more than we can say for Black after the move in the game.

### **10.Nxf3**

Here 10.Nd5! is even more convincing, e.g. 10...fxg2 11.Bxg2 +-.



## **10...Nf6**

Last chance for 10...Be6.

## **11.Nb5**

There goes the c7 square!

## **11...Ke7 12.Bd6+ Ke6 13.Bc4+**

Of course 13.Nc7+ is immediately terminal, but the thrill of the King-hunt was upon me.

**13...Kf5 14.0-0 Kg6 15.Bd3+ Kh6 16.Bf4+ g5  
17.Bxg5+ Kh5** and Black resigned.

This was all very satisfying. Black could have played better at move 9, but I think the position is playable for White and the possibility of 9.Nd5!? offers more scope for experimentation.

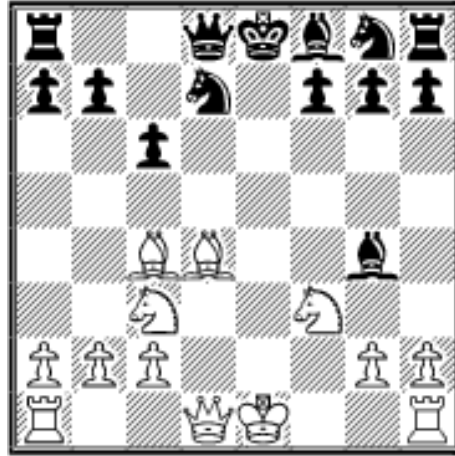
The advent of chess databases in the 1990's dealt a blow to my pride, as I discovered that "my" idea with 5.Be3 had been used nearly a decade before I was born.

## ***Nievergelt - Hess, Lucerne, 1957***

**1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.Nc3 c6 4.f3 e5 5.Be3!? exd4  
6.Bxd4 exf3 7.Nxf3**

I think it is unwise for Black to take the bait here. White's pieces are much better developed than Black's, and forcing a trade of Queens by ...c5 runs into the sorts of problems we saw in the previous game.

## **7...Bg4 8.Bc4 Nd7**



Although 8...Qe7+ is superficially attractive, it can be met by the cheeky 9.Kf2!? when things look dubious for Black, e.g. 9...Qb4? 10.Bxf7+ Kxf7 11.Ne5+ Ke8 12.Qxg4 Ne7 13.Rhe1 h5 14.Qe4 Rh6 15.Ng6+-;

or 9...Be6 10.Re1 when White is nearly fully mobilized and Black is nowhere near to untangling; or 9...Bxf3 10.Qxf3 Qh4+ 11.Kf1 Nf6 (11...Qxd4?? 12.Qxf7+ and 13.Qxf8+ is crushing) 12.Re1+ Be7 13.Ne4 0-0 14.Nxf6+ Bxf6 15.Re4 Qh6 16.Bxf6 Qxf6 17.Qxf6 gxf6 18.Re7 and White's piece activity coupled with Black's shaky Kingside looks like full compensation for the pawn.

## 9.0-0

White's mobility clearly compensates for the pawn. Black's exposed King gives him trouble, and his undefended Bishop is perpetually in danger of falling off. Immediate threats include 10.Re1+, which is very embarrassing, and the more dramatic 10.Bxf7+ Kxf7 11. Ng5+ and 12.Qxg4.

## 9...Bxf3

Black gets rid of his weak Bishop, but at the cost of mobilizing White's heavy pieces. 9...Ngf6 looks like it must be better, but 10.Qe2+ Be7 (10...Qe7 11.Rae1 Qxe2 12.Rxe2+ gives White an edge as 12...Be7? can be met by 13.Rfe1+-) 11.Rae1

leaves Black embarrassed for a good move, e.g.  
11...Bxf3 12.Rxf3 Kf8 13.Ne4 with the threat of  
14.Ng5 or, more terrible still, 14.Bxf7! Kxf7  
15.Ng5+ Ke8 (15...Ke6 16.Qd3+ mates) 16.Ne6  
and Black's Queen must move, allowing 17.Nxg7+  
and 18.Qxe7+.

### **10.Qxf3 Ngf6 11.Ne4 Be7 12.Rad1 Qc7**

12...0-0? drops a piece to 13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.Nxf6+  
Qxf6 15.Rxd7+-

### **13.Ng5 0-0 14.Qb3?!**

Though it is hard to argue with success, 14.Qh3!?  
looks like an improvement: 14...Rad8 15.Nxf7  
Rxf7 16.Qe6 Rdf8 17.Qxe7 Nd5 18.Qe6 N7f6  
19.Bxf6 gxf6 20.Rxf6 Nxf6 21.Qxf6+-; or  
14...Qc8 15.Rde1 Bc5 16.Bxc5 Nxc5 17.Rf5! and  
Black is practically lost since 17...Ncd7 is met by  
18.Re7 ganging up on f7.

### **14...Ng4?**

It would be better to stick to the center with  
14...Nd5 15.Bxd5 cxd5 16.Qxd5 Bf6 17.Qf5  
Bxd4+ 18.Rxd4 Nf6, when I don't see how White  
can make progress: 19.Qd3 Qa5! 20. Rf5 (20. Rxf6  
Qxg5 is about equal) 20...Qe1+! 21.Rf1 Qa5 with  
a draw through perpetual motion. Now, with the  
diagonals open, White uncorks a sparkling finish.  
[see diagram]

### **15.Bxf7+ Kh8 16.Bxg7+! Kxg7 17.Ne6+ 1-0**

Does the 4.Be3 idea resurrect the Milner-Barry  
Gambit? It is too early to tell: there are some

sharper fifth and sixth moves for Black that require precise handling. Tune in next time for more!

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