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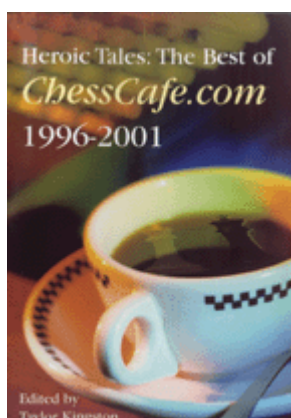
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The Gambit Cartel

Tim McGrew

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A Fistful of Novelties

Last year in the column *Electronic Alchemy* (see the [ChessCafe Archives](#)) I discussed the process of producing theoretical novelties. Of course, much of the process is facilitated by the use of a computer program like Fritz, but the critical first step is *finding* those promising ideas. Where can we look for inspiration?

Upon surveying my modestly large library of chess books and periodicals, I was struck by the thought that virtually all of the opening analysis prior to 1990, and a lot of analysis through 1995, was conducted without the aid of computers. Yes, gentle readers, I know that a few of you out there had Fidelity Chess Challengers back in the late 1970's, but we're talking about computers that we could not beat blindfolded. This creates the possibility for a chessplayer's dream pastime – simply open a book of analysis or a periodical at random and enter the first variation that catches your fancy into a computer. You may well discover an improvement! And the prior literature is so vast that the massive cleanup job of fixing the errors in previous analysis, particularly analysis of currently unfashionable openings, has not even fully begun.

To illustrate this claim, here is a handful of very modest TN's drawn from a random walk through my chess library. In each case I opened a periodical or book almost at random and stopped as soon as something interesting caught my eye.

First is a sideline from the Albin Counter-Gambit:

Holwell - Cleemann
Correspondence, 1987

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5 3.dxe5 d4 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.Bf4

Annotating this game in *Gambit Revue 1 no. 2* (Sept/Oct. 1987), Peter Leisebein says this move is "new." This is another reminder of how things have changed. Today anyone with a database can find half a dozen earlier outings of this natural move. Still let's not over-rate the technology, in those days the definitive theoretical work on the Albin was Paul Lamford's monograph *Albin Counter-Gambit* (1983), and 5.Bf4 is covered there on pp. 31-32.

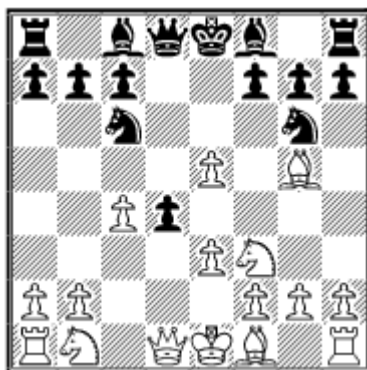
5...Nge7

Leisebein annotates this as a dubious move (!), remarking that in the end the maneuver takes too much time. He recommends 5...f6 instead. But Lamford gives it as Black's main line!

6.e3

According to Leisebein, this is the refutation of Black's idea. Lamford gives game references for 6.Nbd2 (Laurentius-Kostic, Munich Ol 1936) and 6.g3 (Maderna-Grau, Buenos Aires, 1943) and a reference to some analysis by Meinsohn for 6.a3, but he does not mention Holwell's move.

6...Ng6 7.Bg5

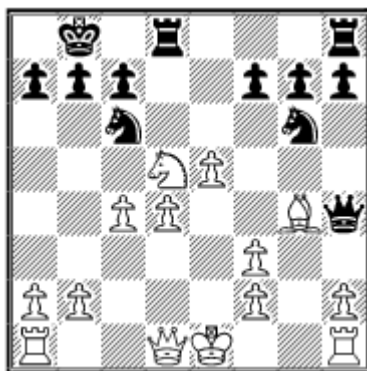


7...Be7?!

Here, I think, is the first slip, one that is not commented on by Leisebein. Black need not give White a two pawn lead. It makes more sense to challenge the bishop immediately, forcing White to lose time retreating: 7...f6! 8.exf6 gxf6 and now Black gets great play whichever way the bishop goes, e.g. 9.Bh4 Bb4+ 10.Nbd2 Qe7 11.Bg3 Bg4 12.a3 dxe3 13.fxe3 Qxe3+ 14.Be2 Bc5 15.Qb3 0-0-0, or 9.Bf4 Nxf4 10.exf4 and now instead of 10...Bf5 11.Be2 Bb4+ 12.Kf1 d3?! of Nebel-Bobber, corr 1988, which could have been met by 13.Nh4! with obscure complications, Black can simply play 10...Bb4+ intending 11.Nbd2 d3! with a very comfortable position.

All of that being said, Cleemann's move is not the end of the world for Black. Let's forge on a bit:

8.Bxe7 Qxe7 9.exd4 Bg4 10.Nc3 Bxf3 11.gxf3 0-0-0 12.Bh3+ Kb8 13.Nd5 Qh4 14.Bg4



14...h5?

Here is the real error. Black's temporary advantage in development must be put to good use before White can find a safe haven for his king. Therefore, Black should line up and lash out with 14...Rhe8! 15.Rc1 h5! Timing makes a real difference: here after White plays 16.Bf5 Black punches with 16...Ngxe5! before White can swap minor pieces on g6. Timing the exchange this way leaves White's bishop vulnerable, so that after 17.dxe5 Rxe5+ 18.Be4 f5-+ Black regains everything with a winning position.

And what about Leisebein's suggestion 5...f6!? It looks like a reasonable idea, but it is not mentioned in Lamford – and as far as I can tell nobody has tried it yet!

Conclusion: Black looks fine either way, but 7...f6 is simpler for Black to play. So 5.Bf4 and 6.e3 is not going to refute the Albin. And you shouldn't throw away your back issues of *Gambit Revue*, since you may find untried novelties there!

Onward to a theoretically important line of the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit:

1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.f3 exf3 5.Nxf3 g6 6.Bc4 Bg7 7.0-0 0-0 8.Qe1 Bf5!?

In their book *Blackmar Diemer Gambit: Bogoljubow Variation 5...g6* (1995), Eric Schiller and John Crayton suggest that this idea “may be underrated.” Their approach in the book is to look for improvements for Black over existing theory, and there is nothing wrong with this provided that the ensuing assessments are objective. So let’s have a look at how one of their lines proceeds:

9.Qh4 Bxc2

“There is a slight loss of time involved in capturing a pawn,” write Schiller and Crayton, “but unless Black’s plan is refuted, it makes sense because the material advantage is very significant.” Taken literally this is quite right and expresses the correct attitude toward grabbing material, but a lot depends on that “unless” clause!

10.Bh6 Nc6

This is an attempted improvement over the line 10...Bxh6, and an improvement is sorely needed. After 11.Qxh6 e6 12.Ng5!? White has scored some spectacular wins in lines beginning 12...Qxd4+ 13.Kh1 Bf5 14.Rxf5! gxf5 15.Bxe6! when Black has to give up too much material to stop mate.

11.d5 Na5

Schiller and Crayton call this “the critical move” and suggest that White’s queen is overworked trying to defend both bishops. The alternative 11...Nb4 fared badly in Vosselman-Wilske, corr 1986: 12.Ng5! Nh5 13.Bxg7 Kxg7 14.Rxf7+! Kg8 (14...Rxf7 allows 15.Ne6+, a common tactical theme in the Bogoljubow Defense) 15.d6 Qxd6 16.Rxe7+! 1-0

Curiously, Sawyer’s massive and thorough *Blackmar-Diemer Gambit Keybook II* (1999), the BDG Bible, gives this game on p. 287, with “Vosselmann” for the spelling of White’s name, but does not mention Schiller and Crayton’s attempted improvement. Had he considered their move, Sawyer would surely have found the following improvement since his analysis in *Keybook II* is almost invariably checked by computer.

12.Ng5 Nxc4 13.Bxg7 Kxg7 14.Rxf6 h6



Now Schiller and Crayton analyze 15.Rf2 and 15.Qxc4? and conclude, correctly, that Black comes out on top in either case.

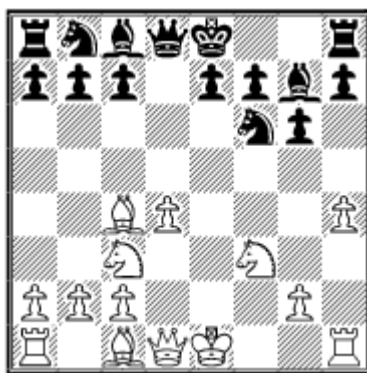
Yet given what happened to poor Wilske, it is not hard to see that 15.Rxf7+! wins out of hand. 15...Rxf7 is well met by 16.Ne6+ picking up the queen, and 15...Kg8 can be met by the piquant 16.Rg7+!

forcing Black into the same fork.

Conclusion: 8...Bf5 may be playable, but the improvements will have to come earlier. Perhaps Black shouldn't snatch that pawn on c2 after all.

Moving to the lighter side of the BDG, let's look at what Schiller and Crayton have to say about Tom Purser's "Mad Dog Attack":

1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.f3 exf3 5.Nxf3 g6 6.Bc4 Bg7 7.h4?!!



This is an amateur's move in the best and fullest sense of the word. White simply begs Black to castle so that he can rip things open with 7...0-0 8.h5 Nxh5 9.Rxh5?!! In the ensuing dogfight Black is objectively better – at least from a Fritz's-eye point of view, so to speak – but to survive to move 25 he will have to find some good defensive moves without Fritz's help. And in amateur chess that rarely happens, as a whole string Purser's victims will testify.

7...Bg4

Schiller and Crayton call this "a principled reply," but that all depends on whether the coming flurry of tactics favors White or Black. Certainly it is better than 7...Nbd7?? when Black gets clobbered with a thematic tactical shot that most of us associate with a bad line of the Pirc: 8.Bxf7+! Kxf7 9.Ng5+ Ke8? 10.Ne6 1-0, Purser-Weinberg, corr 1983.

8.Bxf7+ Kxf7 9.Ne5+ Ke8

Black does have an option here in 9...Kg8, tucking the king back into the corner where he is less exposed but locking in the rook on h8. Schiller and Crayton dismiss this on the basis of Purser-Lind, corr 1980, where Black went down hard: 10.Nxg4 Nxg4 11.Qxg4 Bxd4 12.Bh6! Kf7 13.0-0-0 and Black is obviously not long for this world. But Black doesn't have to walk into the propeller so obligingly. Instead of trading knights, 10...Nc6!? looks like an improvement that yields an interesting game after 11.Be3.

10.Nxg4 Nxg4 11.Qxg4



This position is a natural outcome of the tactical sequence initiated by White's eighth move. Whom does it favor? Unless Black grabs the pawn on d4, White will have a safer king and a better pawn structure.

11...Bxd4 12.Bh6

Black has won a pawn, but he cannot castle. Which factor weighs more heavily? In Motta-Quell, corr 1986,

Black walked into a mate quickly: 12...Bb6? 13.Rd1! Nd7 14.Rf1 c6 15.Qe6 Qc7 16.Qf7+ etc.

As an improvement, Schiller and Crayton suggest that Black attempt to trade queens:

12...Qd7

This is a sensible move and improves significantly on Quell's play. Yet now the authors give the illustrative line 13.Qxd7+(?) Nxd7 14.Nb5 Be5. This makes no sense. Sure, the line favors Black, but why is White acquiescing in the exchange of queens while his opponent's king is caught in the middle of the board?

Looking over the position, I felt sure that White could improve.

13.Qe2!N

At first Fritz is only mildly pleased with White's position, but I felt that this was clearly the right way to handle the line so I pushed Fritz a few moves deeper to see whether White's threats would come together. After a short while, Fritz agreed – Black can ruin White's pawns, but in the end it seems that White's active rooks outweigh his bad pawns.

13...Bxc3+ 14.bxc3 Qc6 15.0–0–0 Nd7

The alternative 15...Qxc3 allows 16.Qg4! when the threat of a check on c8 – or, in the event of 16...Nc6, on d7 – is devastating.

16.Rhe1

If only Black could castle, but alas, his king has wandered.

16...e6 17.Qg4 Nc5 18.Be3! +-

Black is collapsing here since he cannot hold the e6-square.

Conclusion: the displacement of the black king in this line of the Mad Dog Attack is a more serious problem than theory has realized. If you must enter this line as Black, look at 9...Kg8. Better yet, find something different on move seven. And if you're playing this stuff for White, what can I say? You obviously consider chess to be a full contact sport!

Finally, from Len Pickett's engaging little book *Enterprising Strategy in the Opening* (1975), one of my favorite little books on strange and aggressive openings, and in some ways an inspiration for this column, let's look at a line in the De Milliano Attack in Alekhine's Defense:

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Bc4 Nb6 5.e6??!



I remember some happy hours were spent analyzing this when I was a young teenager. Never mind that nobody had ever played Alekhine's Defense against me, and indeed in my

subsequent tournament career nobody has; the very thought of sacrificing a whole piece like this sent shivers down my spine.

The very first question one must ask is what happens if Black takes the piece.

5...Nxc4 6.exf7+

Now Pickett's main line goes 6...Kxf7, but he pauses to dismiss a sideline here:

6...Kd7 7.Qg4+ e6

There are some wonderful tactics after 7...Kc6 8.d5+, but not even youthful fantasy could convince me that I would be fortunate enough to find an opponent to play like that.

Here Pickett gives 8.Bg5 Be7 9.d5 "winning easily," and he follows it up with the line 9...c6 (??) 10.Qxe6+ Kc7 11.Qxe7+ etc. Yet in my juvenile analytical sessions I had already noted 9...Qf8, which looked more than adequate after 10.dxe6+ Kd8 =+. Some time later I noticed that 8.Bg5 is cleanly refuted by 8...h5! when White cannot both defend g5 and keep the pin on Black's e-pawn. If I had ever forgotten this, Fritz would have reminded me in a few picoseconds.

Is all lost in the De Milliano? From the standpoint of theoretical soundness, it probably is. My own novelty, discovered around 1980 and actually played once in Braune-Chlad, corr 1985, was the immediate 8.d5, when best play probably runs 8...Qe7 9.Bg5! (to avoid discovered checks) 9...Qxf7 10.Qxc4 exd5 and White has something, though not enough, for the pawn. This certainly improves on Pickett's line, but it won't resurrect the gambit. In the game mentioned, Braune lost.

If that weren't enough, the main line doesn't give White any advantage: after (6.exf7+) Kxf7 7.Qf3+ Ke8 8.Qh5+ g6 9.Qb5+ Qd7 10.Qxc4 Qe6+! Black has the bishop pair and with queens off the board his loss of castling doesn't look like a serious problem. It would be more fun if Black got a little greedy with 10...Qg4, but if he's sensible he probably won't ask for more than he can have.

Conclusion: I will play the De Milliano in fast games where I think Black is unlikely to find his way through the bewildering array of choices. Yet as a serious tournament weapon for repeated use it is unsuitable. *Sic transit ...*

I strongly encourage readers to try this method of novelty-hunting on their favorite gambit lines. Let me know what you find!



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