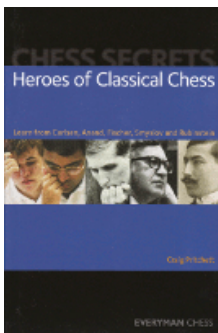




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The King's Gambit, Still Kicking

The German Lieutenant-Colonel Adolf Rosentreter (1844-1920) is almost forgotten as a chessplayer and with a quick search, without going through old magazines, I could find only one game by him.

The Rosentreter Gambit is almost forgotten also, which may be a good reason to study it, according to Viktor Kortchnoi's motto "everything that is well forgotten, is new."

The game by Rosentreter that I found was important for opening theory. At the time it was played everyone thought that after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.0-0 Nf6 5.d4 Bxd4 6.Nxd4 Nxd4 7.Bg5 h6 8.Bh4 g5 Black had a good position, until Rosentreter showed in a game against a certain Höfer, played in Berlin in 1899, that after the fine move 9.f4 White has a big advantage.

But this line is not what is known as the Rosentreter Gambit; that goes 1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.d4. The last time I checked my database there were 152 games in which this gambit was played, which is practically nothing.

To play for an advantage White must be willing to sacrifice a piece and the position after 4...g4 5. Bxf4 gxf3 6. Qxf3 showed up thirty times. Somewhat surprisingly, considering the lack of popularity of the line, in two of these games top players were involved. Fedorov-Adams (1997) was won by White and Morozevich - Alexandrov (2008) was won by Black.

For many years Alexei Fedorov was the most prominent Knight of the King's Gambit and his results were excellent; he scored about sixty-seven percent with white. A few years ago he stopped playing the gambit, probably because he didn't want to be too predictable, to the great regret of many admirers.



Emre Can

The Rosentreter Gambit reappeared at the World Team Chess Championship that was held in January of this year in the Turkish city Bursa. It was played in the match Turkey - Armenia by the young Turkish player Emre Can against the redoubtable Gabriel Sargissian. White lost in twenty-one moves.

This may appear to be bad news for the lovers of gambit play, but here appearances deceive. On his way to a quick defeat, Can had reached a position that may be called a gambiteer's dream.

The extent to which the Rosentreter Gambit has passed into oblivion can be

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judged by the fact that a prominent Internet journalist who commented on Can's game, called it the Muzio Gambit, which is a related piece sacrifice with far different consequences.

Can, Emre (2442) - Sargissian, Gabriel (2680)

WchT 7th Bursa (3), 07.01.2010

King's Gambit [C37]]

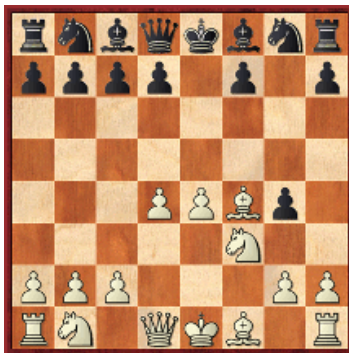
1.e2-e4 e7-e5 2.f2-f4 e5xf4 3.Ng1-f3 g7-g5 4.d2-d4

This is the Rosentreter Gambit. The Muzio Gambit is 4.Bc4 g4 5.0-0.

4...g5-g4

Just as in the variation with 4.Bc4, 4...Bg7 is a good and solid move.

5.Bc1xf4



This was already recommended by Paul Keres around 1950, but according to my database it took until 1987 before it was actually played in a tournament of some importance. The main variation, if the term can be used for such a rare line, went 5.Ne5 Qh4+ 6.g3 fxg3 7.Qxg4 g2+ 8.Qxh4 gxh1 Q 9.Nc3 and White, a rook down, may be better. However, as Keres indicated, Black can spoil the fun with the sober 7...Qxg4, when the endgame is certainly not worse for him.

5...g4xf3 6.Qd1xf3 d7-d6 7.Nb1-c3 Nb8-c6 8.0-0-0

Fedorov - Adams, European team ch 1997, went 8.Bc4 Qh4+ 9.Bg3 Qf6 10.Qxf6 Nxf6 11.0-0 and here Black felt forced to return the piece. After 11...Nxd4 12.Rxf6 White had a small advantage and went on to win.

8...h7-h5 9.Qf3-f2

In Morozevich-Alexandrov, FIDE World Cup 2000, White played 9.e5.

9...Bc8-g4 10.Rd1-d2 Bf8-h6 11.h2-h3 Bg4-d7 12.e4-e5

White has a dangerous attack.

12...Bd7-f5

Putting his bishop on an undefended square, which could have cost him dearly.



13.Bf1-c4

Missing his first chance of a direct hit. After 13.exd6 cxd6 14.Nb5, Black would have big problems, as the attempt to protect d6 by 14...Bf8 would fail after 15.d5.

13...Ng8-e7 14.e5xd6

Now White's attack peters out. White would still have a good game after 14.Bxh6 Rxh6 15.Rf1 with the threats 16.g4 or 16.Qe3.

14...Bh6xf4 15.Qf2xf4 Qd8xd6 16.Qf4-f2

White has nothing; he is just a piece down.

16..a7-a6 17.Rh1-e1 0-0-0 18.d4-d5 Nc6-e5 19.Rd2-e2 f7-f6

The pedant computer prefers 19...Nxc4 20.Rxe7 Be6, but White doesn't need acrobatics. His simple human move ends it quickly.

20.g2-g4 h5xg4 21.h3xg4 Bf5xg4 0-1

Though this game may not be an effective advertisement for the Rosentreter Gambit, the fact that Fedorov beat Adams with it and Can obtained a fine position against Sargissian suggests that this forgotten variation has some merit.

Trying to learn more about it I consulted back issues of *Kaissiber*, the German magazine of ChessCafe's columnist Stefan Bucker, but even this treasure trove of unusual opening variations had nothing on the Rosentreter Gambit. I found a photo of Rosentreter and some biographical information, but this was connected to the gambit line in the Italian opening that I mentioned earlier.

There is much material on other variations of the King's Gambit in *Kaissiber* and in the latest issue of January-March 2010, the Dutch player Michiel Wind presents a spectacular novelty.

While going through the recent book, *The Fascinating King's Gambit*, by Thomas Johansson – an excellent work says Wind – he came to the following variation:

1.e2-4 e7-e5 2.f2-f4 exf4 3.Bf1-c4 Ng8-f6 4.Nb1-c3 c7-c6 5.d2-d4

The usual move is 5.Bb3, which is alright but not very exciting.

5...Bf8-b4

After 5...d5 6.exd5 cxd5, White can transpose to the main line with 7.Bb3, but more logical seems 7.Bb5+, winning back the pawn at f4 immediately.

6.Ng1-e2

A novelty of Johansson, who calls it the Humble Gambit.



Here Johansson gave 9.Nxf4, with some compensation for the pawn, but Wind's Rybka came up with a stunning sacrifice, turning the "humble" gambit into a ferocious hitman.

9. Bc4xf7+ Ke8xf7 10.Ne2xf4

With good reason Wind remarks that it will not be immediately apparent to humans that White is winning here, but with Rybka's aid he came to the conclusion that in fact White's attack should triumph. What a surprise after only eight natural moves.

If true, this would mean that Black should not play 8...Be7, but 8...d5 with a more or less equal game. However, Johansson pointed out in an email to Wind that White could sacrifice one mover earlier: 8. Bxf7+ Kxf7 9.bxc3 and here 9...Be7 would transpose to the line that is supposed to be losing for Black, while after 9...Rf8 10.cxb4. White has a good game.

To avoid all this, instead of 7...Nxc3 Black has a choice of different moves, all covered in Johansson's book.

So it seems that the King's Gambit, a hospital patient according to Spielmann and an offense against the justice of chess according to Lasker, can still inflict some vigorous blows occasionally.

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