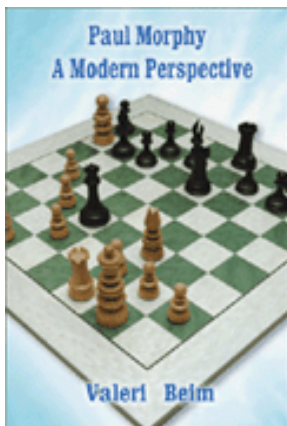




## COLUMNISTS

## New Stories about Old Chess Players

Jeremy P.  
Spinrad



## Anti-Semitism in Chess

The subject of anti-Semitism in chess is quite broad, since anti-Semitism has a long history, and Jews have been associated with chess since the Middle Ages, if not earlier. I came across my favorite story of old associations of Jews with chess in the *London Times*, Oct. 22, 1883; it also appears in Murray's *History of Chess*.

The story deals with an old legend of the "Jewish Pope" Andreas, said to be found in the Midrash. Rabbi Simeon of Mayence (Mainz, Germany) had his son stolen by a maidservant, who gave him to the priests. The boy was baptized, and eventually rose to become Pope. I now quote from the *Times*:

"The Pope being, as Jews have been for centuries, a great player of chess, made himself known to Rabbi Simeon during a game by meeting an opening of his father's in a way which the Rabbi had only imparted to his son."

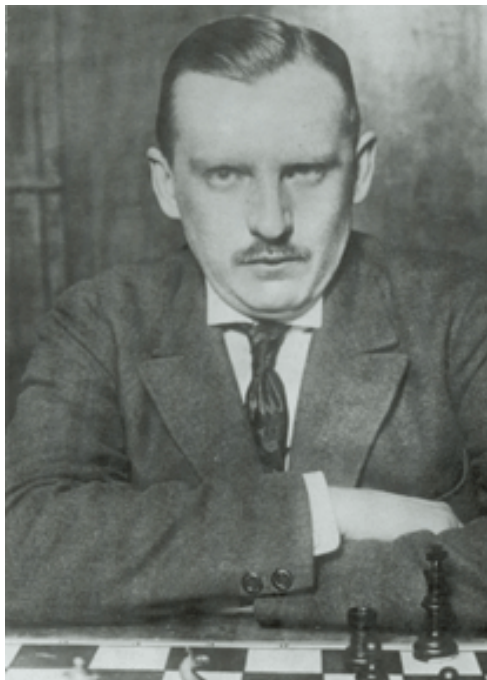
According to the *Times*, the Pope leaves his position, in some versions leaving a written work full of heresies which he instructs his successors to read, and lives his remaining life as a Jew.

Murray points out that the Rabbi, Simeon hag-Gadol, was a historical character who lived in Mainz in the 11th century. The Murray version adds that the Pope won the game, and that Rabbi Simeon was esteemed as the best player of his time.

The *Saturday Evening Post* of April 26, 1884, says that one of the prayers of the Jewish New Year is about the Jewish pope. A different story of a Jewish pope was propagated by the Nazis; a translation from a Nazi paper of a vile piece including a story in which the allegedly Jewish pope Alexander VI poisons cardinals, fornicates, commits "race pollution" and is guilty of incest with his own daughter, is given in the *Living Age* of June 1937.

As for anti-Semitism in chess, the most famous current exponent is Bobby Fischer, who embraces some of its most hateful forms. In his paranoia, he claims to be persecuted both by individual Jews and by sinister Jewish groups. At least one of Fischer's parents is Jewish, which leads to some strange incidents. For example, Fischer was outraged at being listed in the *Who's Who of Judaism*, writing a letter to the editors complaining that he did not want his "good name" lending support to their "gutter religion." I add one insight culled from my readings in chess history: the English language needs a new word for people of Jewish descent, who do not espouse the Jewish

religion. The old word used was Israelite. For example, Disraeli could be called an Israelite despite the fact that he practiced Christianity. Of course, this became confusing once we picked up the word Israeli, but no word has replaced it. Thus, it is difficult in English for an atheist with a Jewish background (a very old Jewish tradition) to describe his ethnicity, and there are people (both Jews and non-Jews) who believe that the term half-Jewish is nonsense, whereas they accept, for example, the term half-Greek. As a parent of half-Jews, I have seen this confuse people at times. My eldest daughter once described herself as a small child as “geek and Jewish,” probably a more common combination than the Greek and Jewish that describes her actual ethnic (but not religious) background.



Alexander Alekhine

Anti-Semitic articles published under Alekhine’s name in 1941 have been the subject of fierce debates among chess historians. The key issues are whether Alekhine actually wrote them or simply allowed his name to appear on them, and whether he was actually anti-Semitic or simply doing what he felt was necessary to survive in Nazi-controlled Europe.

In my research, mostly in English chess journals of the 19th century, I came across a few mild anti-Semitic comments, but nothing worthy of a separate article on the subject. One has to be careful when making charges of anti-Semitism in the 19th century. In those days, discussion of “racial” backgrounds and supposed characteristics of a race was part of normal discussion in a way that makes us feel quite uncomfortable. Consider this passage from the *New York Times* of Aug 12, 1896, celebrating Pillsbury’s achievements:

“There have been other successful players in tournaments who have ‘hailed from’ the US, but they were Americans only by casual residence and should really have been imputed to England or Germany

or ultimately to Palestine, from which so surprisingly large a proportion of the contestants in the Nuremberg tournament seem to owe their origin.”

To a modern reader, this looks very close to a common anti-Semitic position; that a Jew will always have divided loyalties and cannot be considered to be a “real” or a loyal American. However, a more careful reading of the piece makes it clear that this is not at all the author’s intention. The primary other successful tournament player referred to is, of course, Steinitz, who lived in England before coming to the United States, and developed his chess skill in Austria-Hungary (which the author sloppily turns into Germany). The intention is not to slur Steinitz because he is Jewish; the writer simply means that Steinitz, unlike Pillsbury, did not develop as a chess player primarily in the United States. The remark about so many players tracing their origin to Palestine is actually philo-Semitic; he values chess success highly, and thinks that the success of Steinitz, Tarrasch, Lasker, and others is a great credit to the Jewish people.

Sometimes, discussion of race becomes so bizarre that it is nearly impossible to tell what the writer intends. The following is from *Forest and Stream*, May 1, 1879:

“The Echo hears that ‘Jacob G Ascher, who recently defeated Mackenzie in a chess tournament in Montreal, will be entertained at dinner by one of the London clubs on the occasion of his visiting London. Mr Ascher is a Jew.’ Considering the mendacious character of this precious piece of information, most people will be inclined to think that the ‘informer’ of the Echo is also a member of the only community of persons that ever attempted to make bricks without straw, and that the paragraph is a Jew d’esprit prompted by esprit Jew corps. But we do not think so. Seems to be a currish snap at a gentleman by some loafing gentile, whose characteristics are too contemptible to be described in a phrase or epithet. During his recent visit to Montreal, Captain Mackenzie played a very large number of offhand games, occasionally a dozen or so concurrently, and lost, of course, ‘in clustering battle,’ a game or two; but he was defeated, in a chess player’s sense, by no one, so pass that ‘informer’ on, Mr Passmore Edwardes.”

In a future article I will discuss the noted American player Max Judd, whose Jewishness became the source of an international political dispute. In another I will deal briefly with the possibility of anti-Semitism regarding the old German player Julius Mendheim. This section was inspired by an excellent little book called *Luftmenschen – Die Schachspieler von Wien*, by Ehn and Strouhal, which I borrowed hoping to learn about certain specific Viennese chess matches. I ended up reading the book from cover to cover, although most of it dealt with chess from outside the time period I normally study.



Franz Gutmayer

Although anti-Semitism is by no means the only subject covered in the book, its discussion of changes in attitude towards Jews during Steinitz's life, its list of Jewish players lost in the Holocaust, and its history of Jews in Vienna, strike me as excellent writing that could be used in studies of general European Jewish history. For our purposes, the key individual introduced in the book, who is almost unknown in the English-speaking world, is an author and chess player named Franz Gutmayer.

Gutmayer, an Austrian who lived from 1857 to 1937, appears in quite a few entries of Gaige's *Crosstables*. He played in various minor German tournaments from 1883 to 1886 and 1898 to 1911, doing respectably but not standing out compared to other local players. The one tournament listed in which he did play famous opponents was Berlin 1897. Gutmayer finished last, scoring +1 -5 =0, in a round-robin with Bardeleben, Charousek, Mieses, W. Cohn, Walbrodt, and Heinrichsen.

Clearly, as a player, Gutmayer was a minor figure; perhaps a strong local player, but not able to compete at the international level. The *Fireside Book of Chess* mentions that he wrote a book called *How to Become a Chess Master*, although he himself was never able to earn the title. That comes probably originally from Réti, who made the same comment in an article very critical of Gutmayer.

In connection with Réti, it's worth mentioning that we owe a debt of sorts to Gutmayer, for his role in inspiring one of the great books of chess literature. As R.E. Fauber describes on pages 191-2 of *Impact of Genius* (ICE, 1992):

“During 1921 Réti also became infuriated by the writings of a chess hack, Franz Gutmayer. Gutmayer, who never achieved master rank, had the cheek to publish a book on how to become a master. Books

flowed from his pen and cash flowed into his pocket. It was more than Réti could bear silently. He set out to blast Gutmayer's idiocies sneering that 'this Gutmayer who might in perhaps fifty years time be so far advanced as to comprehend Steinitz ... has at present achieved this much at least – a partial understanding of Morphy.'"

The research Réti undertook in rebutting Gutmayer led to the writing of his classic *Modern Ideas in Chess* (1922).

Gutmayer is of interest to me because he also wrote a large number of reasonably popular chess books (the aforementioned *Der Weg zur Meisterschaft* went through at least three German editions), and these contain shockingly anti-Semitic statements. He wrote about two dozen chess books circa 1898-1928, and similar "racial theories" eventually became the basis of Nazi attitudes towards chess.

According to Gutmayer, real chess is anti-theoretical and romantic, as epitomized by Morphy. This chess was standard, he says, in the years before Jews perverted the game. Sample quotes, some of which I will translate loosely, are amazing. He characterizes Jewish chess as:

"No risks, would far prefer a worthless draw. Only do what you can see clearly. Front view: your own crooked nose. Side view: a fat prize."

"A herd of pigs has come into our garden of art, and taken all the nice places in the sun. Now they stink and grunt and wallow to their heart's content. We must throw these disgusting animals out and grab art back from this evil race."

He goes on and on. Steinitz and Lasker are particular targets, called at various times blood lice, apes, basilisks, pigs, camels, tapeworms, and a veritable menagerie of other animals; their games are called stinking cabbage.

Of course, Gutmayer could also be something of an artist, as befits someone who wants to distinguish the tradition of chess beauty from the perverted style of the money-grubbing Jews. As an example, he opens one of his chess books with a poem:

"Ich will sie wieder befreien; die vielen Schacherbuden; von der grossen Läuseplage; von den schmutzigen Schacherjuden. Ich will zu schänden machen den schlechten Stil von heute; die sie eingeführt haben aus Palestina; unsere Leute."

Although I hesitate to meddle with such beauty, a rough translation might be: I want to free you again, the many homes of chess, from the great plague of lice, from the filthy money-grubbing Jews. I want to put to shame the terrible modern style which they have brought out of Palestine and foisted on our

people.

Vienna became a focal point of both Jews and anti-Semitism in chess in the early 19th century. It seems that the mix of chess and politics was particularly volatile in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Löwenthal reports (*Chess Player's Chronicle*, 1852, p. 90) that an attempt to form a chess club in Vienna had placed all the authors of the proposal under the surveillance of the police. This phenomenon was not unique to Austria-Hungary. The Saint Petersburg chess club was also very controversial, and the banning of that club in 1862 was considered a very important political event.

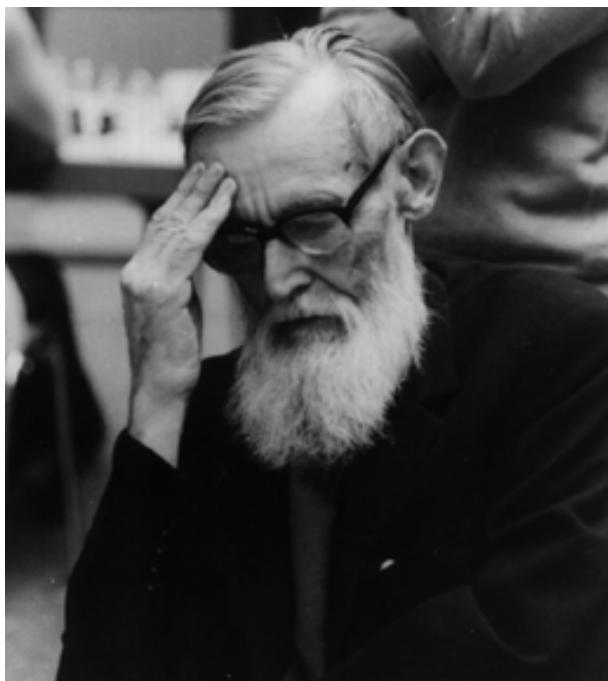
As far back as the 1840s, the choice of chess locale in Vienna was determined by politics. Liberals such as Jenay and Matschenko played at one café, while conservatives and military officers would never enter it. The revolutions of 1848 had an enormous impact on chess in the empire. Of the three great Hungarian players, only Szén stayed, while Löwenthal fled first to America and later to England, and Grimm converted to Islam and moved to the Middle East. Ernst Falkbeer had been a journalist for a Vienna newspaper; when it was closed by the censor, he left for England and Germany.

In 1857, the Vienna chess club was founded, and the political divide was changed for a time into a class divide. High entry fees kept the club membership upper-class, but relatively liberal laws which had been passed regarding restrictions on Jews, combined with (later in the 19th century) pogroms in the east, and the rise of a few important Jewish patrons of chess, meant that the club had a wide range of political views, and became a central point for political discussion as well as for chess.

Perhaps as a reaction to the influx of Jews in the 1880s and '90s, anti-Semitism in chess (and in Vienna in general) increased dramatically. Steinitz, who remembered a relatively tolerant city from his student days in the early 1860s, was shocked at the anti-Semitism that was displayed in the 1890s.

In Germany, the chess association restricted tournament play to members of German birth or nationality. In Vienna, chess was divided into three groups. The nationalist club explicitly excluded Jews. The worker's chess movement, founded in 1909, saw chess as a form of class struggle. By the end of the 1920s this explicitly socialist club had more than 1,200 members, spread around different locales in the city. The Jewish club was formed as a response to the nationalist club. This club became a popular spot for grandmaster simulms, not only with Jews such as Lasker and Rubinstein, but also for the later anti-Semitic Alekhine. Matches were held between the clubs, but feelings ran so high that matches between the Jewish and nationalist club had to be held on neutral territory.





Emil Joseph Diemer

The next important anti-Semitic chess player, who wrote hateful tirades without even the thin justification of self-preservation, was Emil Joseph Diemer, of Blackmar-Diemer Gambit fame. Diemer was a Nazi Party member and anti-Semite, though later he became even more obsessed with homosexuals in chess than Jews in chess. His theories on Jewish vs. German chess were much the same as Gutmayer's: German chess was said to be romantic and good, while Jewish chess was risk-free, defensive, and evil. Diemer joined the Nazi Party in 1931, before it came to power, and became "chess reporter for the Great German Reich." Later in life, Diemer became obsessed with Nostradamus.

There are several books devoted to Diemer, which may seem surprising for a non-GM. In my opinion these books were inspired more by the cult following his gambits enjoyed, than by his politics. One is *EJ Diemer, Missionnaire des échecs acrobatiques*, by D. Senechoud. Another, in which the author appears ignorant of Diemer's extreme views, is *Emil Josef Diemer 1908-1990: A Life Devoted to Chess*, by Alan Dommett (reviewed [here](#)). Most important, though, is *Emil Joseph Diemer: Ein Leben für das Schach im Spiegel seiner Zeit* ("Emil Joseph Deimer: A Life for Chess in the Mirror of his Times," Schachverlag Mädlar, 1996), by Diemer pupil and disciple Georg Studier. The book is discussed by Hans Ree [here](#).

Studier does not shrink from discussing Diemer's unrepentant pro-Nazi views, though perhaps by way of mitigation he points out that even as a party member Diemer remained on good personal terms with many of the Jewish chess masters he knew. For example, on pages 48-49 of the biography, Studier describes Diemer's admiration for Hitler and his hearty approval of the brutal 1934 elimination of Ernst Röhm and other SA officers, which Diemer regarded as a triumph of good over evil. Yet he goes on to say that Diemer felt a special bond with Nimzovitch, a Latvian Jew, and that his 1935

death hit Diemer hard.

Regarding Nimzovitch, Studier describes an incident Diemer witnessed in Germany some time in 1934, soon after the Nazis had come to power. Though petty compared to their later atrocities, it was still malicious. Nimzovitch, apparently in Nuremberg to observe the Alekhine-Bogoljubow World Championship match, had in a moment of impulsive generosity invited more or less everyone else of importance attending the match, including Nazi officials, to be his guest at the Café Habsburg. Anti-Semitic Reich policies, though not nearly as harsh as they would later become, were already causing many Jewish businesses to close. As the Habsburg was the last café in Nuremberg still run by and open to Jews, Nimzovitch assumed few if any non-Jews, especially Nazi Party members, would attend. To his surprise and chagrin, a large number did, not because they desired his company, but so that they could stick him with the bill! Nimzovitch, never a man of means, had to pay a tab he could ill afford.

The Viennese writer Theodor Gerbec (died 1945) adds American chess to the list of evil chess styles, in what seems like a strange mixed condemnation. Like Gutmayer and Diemer, he condemns the purely materialistic Jewish chess, but also adds speculative chess (as in the American stock market), which cannot bring any progress to the game. Perhaps because of my own American Jewish background, I fail to grasp the distinction between good romantic chess and evil speculative chess.

Other anti-Semitic writers, including Alekhine, Bogoljubow, and Ernst Grünfeld, seem to be viewed as less clear-cut; Alekhine and Bogoljubow were not German but were in Germany during World War II, and some excuse their writing as attempts to make sure that they got good treatment under the Nazis. For example, Alekhine did not seem to have shown anti-Semitism in his writings or actions just a few years earlier; he played many Jews and often praised their play. Thus, he can be seen as an opportunist rather than a dedicated racist like Gutmayer or Diemer, though this is of course no excuse for his writings. Grünfeld is excused by some because it is felt that he might have feared that his Jewish-sounding name would attract the suspicion of the regime.

Under the Nazis, it even became policy to rename any opening variation given to a Jewish player, and to try to erase Jewish players from the chess history books, or at least represent them only by their lost games. (Studier says that in the early 1930s, with regard to chess journalism, the party bosses announced “We take no notice of Jews.”)

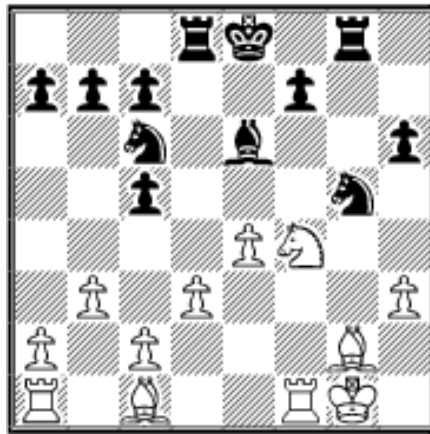
There has been little organized anti-Semitism in chess after the war, with the debatable exception of certain periods in the Soviet Union and problems caused by certain countries hosting FIDE events, e.g. the 1964 Olympiad in Tel Aviv or the 2004 FIDE World Championship in Libya. Of course, individuals who are said to be anti-Semitic exist, but except for the ravings of Fischer (who literally speaks of the desirability of rounding up and shooting



thousands of Jews) none are particularly newsworthy.

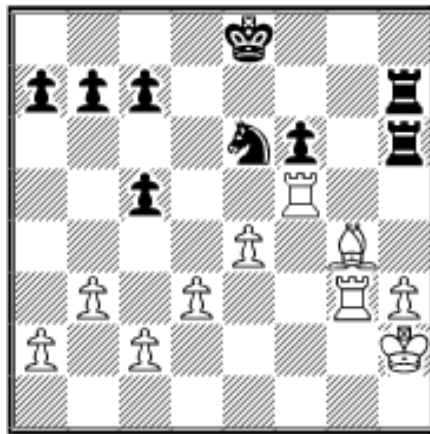
Tournament crosstables show that Gutmayer lost to several Jewish players, but few game scores seem to have survived. The only one I could find comes from the aforementioned 1897 tournament. That future GM Jacques Mieses does not show his usual dashing, Morphyesque style is due not to any “Jewish materialism” but simply to the fact that Gutmayer’s play is so mediocre that Mieses can win with simple moves.

***Mieses-Gutmayer, Berlin 1897, round 7*** (notes by Taylor Kingston, assisted by Fritz8): **1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.g3 Nf6 4.Bg2 Bc5 5.d3 h6 6.h3 d6 7.Na4 Be6 8.Ne2 Qe7 9.Nxc5 dxc5 10.b3 Rd8 11.0–0 g5 12.f4 gxf4 13.gxf4 exf4 14.Nxf4 Rg8 15.Qf3 Nh7 16.Qh5 Qg5 17.Qxg5 Nxg5**



**18.Nxe6 Nxe6?** Simply dropping a pawn, though even after 18...fxe6 Black is still decidedly worse against White’s bishop-pair. **19.Bxh6** Mieses, a very good endgame player, realizes the extra h-pawn can be decisive, and now plays to capitalize on his advantage in a straightforward manner. **19...Ncd4 20.Rf2 Rd6 21.Kh2 Ng5 22.Bxg5 Rxg5 23.Bf3 Rh6 24.Raf1 Rg7 25.Bd1 Ne6 26.Rg2 Rgh7 27.Bg4 Ng5 28.Rg3 f6 29.Rf5 Ne6** If 29...b6, 30.e5! wins another pawn.

Gutmayer’s attempted h-file attack has achieved nothing. Mieses now engineers a breakthrough.



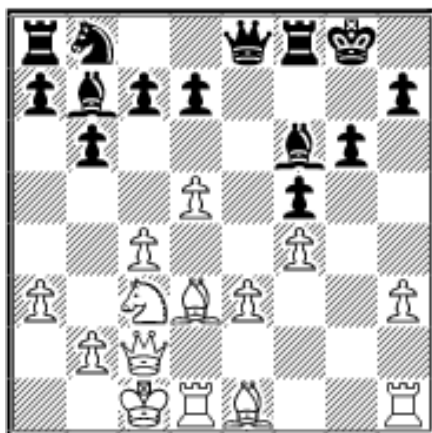
**30.e5! Nd4** If 30...fxe5, 31.Rxe5 Re7 32.Rge3 Kf7 and with Black paralyzed by the pin, White can simplify to an elementary won king ending, either immediately or at his leisure. **31.Rxf6 Rxf6 32.exf6 Kf7** If 30...Nxc2?, 31.Be6 Rh8 34.Rg8+! Rxg8 35.f7+ +-. **33.c3 Nb5 34.c4 Nd4 35.Bf3 b6 36.Be4 Rh6** Time for the final simplification. **37.Rg7+ Kxf6 38.Rxc7 a5 39.Rh7 Rxh7 40.Bxh7 Nc6** Black might as well resign here. **41.Kg3 Nb4 42.a4 Nc2 43.Kf4 Nd4 44.Ke4 Ke6 45.Bg8+**

**Kd6 46.h4 Ne2 47.Kf5 Ng3+ 48.Kg6 Ke5 49.h5 Nxh5 50.Kxh5 Kd4 51.Bd5 Kxd3 52.Bc6 Kc3 53.Bb5 1–0**

In the following game, from the Cologne Hauptturnier A of 1911, Gutmayer is crushed by the Russian master Sergei Nikolaevich Freiman (historical Elo 2420). Gutmayer finished 12th of the 16 competitors with 6 points.

***Freiman-Gutmayer, Cologne 1911: 1.d4 e6 2.Nf3 f5 3.c4 Nf6 4.Nc3 Be7 5.***

**e3 0-0 6.Bd2 b6 7.Qc2 Bb7 8.Bd3 Nc6 9.a3 Qe8 10.0-0-0 Nb8?** A pointless, wasteful retreat. **11.d5 Ng4 12.Be1 Bf6 13.h3 Ne5 14.Nxe5 Bxe5 15.f4 Bf6 16.g4 g6 17.gxf5 exf5**



Black has played the opening badly and is in dire straits. **18.e4 Bxc3 19.Bxc3 fxe4 20.Bxe4 Rxf4** It seems that it is the anti-Semite Gutmayer who is playing “Jewish” chess, as he materialistically grabs a pawn. It is hardly sufficient compensation for his defenseless king, vulnerable on both files and diagonals. **21.Rde1 Na6??** Falling apart completely, though even after 21...Qf7 White wins easily by either 22.Qd3 intending 23.Qd4 and 24.Qh8+, or 22.Rhg1 Rf2 23.Bxg6! Rxc2+ 24.Bxc2+

Kf8 25.Ref1, etc. **22.Bxg6 Qxg6 23.Rhg1 1-0**

For Diemer, I chose the following loss. Most preserved games of Diemer are wins against weaker opponents, often demonstrating the danger of playing weakly against the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit. Of course, the gambit doesn't always work, as here:

**Diemer – M. Koss, 1950, from chessgames.com: 1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.f3 exf3 5.Nxf3 g6 6.Bc4 Bg7 7.Ne5 0-0 8.0-0 Nc6 9.Nxc6 bxc6 10.Ne2 Nh5 11.c3 e5 12.d5?!** Better 12.dxe5, when after either 12...Qxd1 13.Rxd1 Bxe5 14.Nd4 or 12...Qe7 13.Nd4 Bxe5 14.Bh6 (not 14.Nxc6? Qc5+) 14...Ng7, White is in pretty good shape. **12...Bb7 13.Qb3 Rb8 14.dxc6 Bxc6**



**15.Bxf7+??** Definitely romantic and unmaterialistic, but also quite unsound. Better is 15.Qa3, though then White's initiative is spent and Black's extra pawn should win. **15...Kh8! 16.Qc2** If 16.Qe6 Bd7 17.Qd5 Qe7+-. **16...Qd7** Also very strong is 16...Qe7, since 17.Bb3 Qc5+ wins. **17.Bc4** Or 17.Bb3 Rxf1+ 18.Kxf1 Rf8+ 19.Kg1 Bxg2!-+. **17...Qg4 0-1**

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