



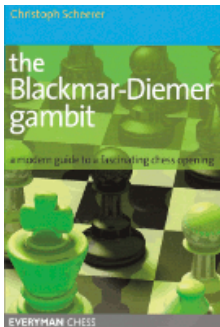
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BDG Bust: The Huebsch Gambit

by Glenn Budzinski

Now that I have everyone's attention, all of you Blackmar-Diemer Gambit fans can calm down. I do *not* have a bust to the Blackmar-Diemer, nor is there one that I'm aware of. What I am proposing, however, is a way for Black to maintain equality or, at the very least, not get blown off the board by an opening that once claimed a phenomenal winning percentage of eighty-five percent for white (as mentioned by Tim Sawyer in [The Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, KeyBook II](#)).

One of the problems with the "BDG," as the Gambit is referred to by its aficionados, is that it's difficult to avoid. Given the number of transpositional opportunities few, if any, of us have been able to avoid playing against the BDG at least once or twice in our tournament chess lives. For example, one can get caught in the BDG web playing a Queen's Gambit: 1 d4 d5 2 e4 and, unless Black is comfortable suddenly shifting to an e-pawn game and the French Defense after 2...e6, he must acquiesce to 2...dxe4, leading to 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3; or Veresov's Opening after 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nc3 d5 3 e4; or, even the Caro-Kann Defense: 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 f3 and, again, the BDG has been reached.

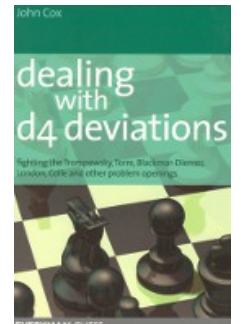
So, what happens when a GM is confronted with the BDG? How does he respond? One of the more popular ways of meeting the BDG is with the Huebsch Gambit, **1 d4 Nf6 2 Nc3 d5 3 e4** and now, instead of the routine 3...dxe4, Black responds **3...Nxe4**.



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The Huebsch is a variation about which there is a certain amount of confusion. First, it is not an independent opening system but a part of the Blackmar-Diemer complex. In fact, it is usually included in opening books about the Blackmar-Diemer as a separate chapter and virtually never stands on its own. (However, At least one monograph has been written devoted strictly to the Huebsch "Hubsch Gambit" by Pape, Jensen and Birk which,

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unfortunately, is no longer in print and was unavailable to me in writing this article.) Second, despite being named in honor of an unknown player, Huebsch, who achieved a spirited victory in 1922 with the white pieces over the renowned Saviely Tartakower (see the PGN file at the end of this article), the variation is initiated by Black, who plays ...Nxe4 instead of ...dxe4 which is the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit proper. (Since it was Tartakower who played ...Nxe4, wouldn't it be correct to refer to the line as the "Tartakower Variation," rather than the Huebsch Gambit?) There is even an issue regarding the spelling of the name "Huebsch," who was so unfamiliar that sources are divided as to whether it's "Huebsch" or "Hubsch." My preference is "Huebsch," since that's the spelling I've seen used in the Tartakower game, which could amount to nothing more than a misspelling by the compiler of the game score.

There are several attractions to playing the Huebsch as black. Given the minimal amount of scholarship, there is still plenty of room for implementing one's own ideas and analysis, and little fear of being caught in a twenty-move deep line of theory that you don't know and your opponent does. It is also a variation that may contain certain surprise value to a BDG opponent who may be aware only of the more publicized lines favorable to White, not realizing that many of the lesser-known lines may give Black at least equality.

One administrative note before we launch into our investigation: all games not cited in their entirety within the text can be found in the PGN file at the end of this article.

Thus, after the sequence (or transposition thereto) **1 d4 Nf6 2 Nc3 d5 3 e4 Nxe4 4 Nxe4 dxe4**, according to most BDG theoreticians, the popular choice for White is **5 Bc4**. (An alternative, 5 Bf4, will be discussed later.) For example, Sawyer writes that "Highly rated BDGers usually choose to play this Bishop move. Other moves are playable, but [I] will not bother to consider them"; [ChessCafe.com](http://ChessCafe.com) columnist Gary Lane, in his *Blackmar-Diemer Gambit*, notes that "It is difficult to believe that White can expect much success from the alternatives" and *Nunn's Chess Openings* merely stops after 5 Bc4 and assesses the position as unclear.



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Some theory does exist in the 5 Bc4 variation. Praxis, as presented in the literature on the Huebsch, indicates that there are at least five common responses: e6, Bf5, g6, c5 and Nc6. If one examines nothing more than tournament results for the popular moves, one can reach a conclusion that White is better. By looking a little deeper, however, I suggest that Black may be able to hold his own at minimum in three of the five lines: g6, c5 and Nc6. Let's examine all five choices, focusing as much as possible on how GMs, IMs and strong masters have handled the positions.

Experience with **5...e6** indicates that it may be the least promising of all of the alternatives for Black, at this point. Although White won a piece in **Diebert-Kudrin**, 1985 Philadelphia Futurity, after **6 c3 Bd6 7 Qg4 0-0 8 Bg5 e5 9 Qh4 Qe8 10 Ne2 exd4 11 Nxd4 h6 12 Be3 Kh7 13 g4 Qe5 14 g5 Nd7 15 0-0-0 Nc5 16 Rdg1 Be6 17 Nxe6 Nxe6 18 Rg4 Bc5 19 g6+ fxe6 20 Rxe4 Bxe3 + 21 fxe3 Qg5 22 Bxe6**, the game ended in a draw when White returned the piece in time pressure. (For the record, according to Serper in *New In Chess Yearbook 46* [NIC YB] from 1998, Black has an improvement in **6...c5 7 Be3**

cd4 8 Bd4 Nc6 9 Be3 Qd1 10 Rd1 a6, with the advantage in Szonyi-Csiszar, 1995 Zalakaros.) Diebert-Kudrin actually looks good for Black, compared to the main line of Gy. Meszaros-Waldmeier, 1994 Lenk, cited by both Lane and Sawyer: **5...e6 6 Nh3** (Sawyer calls this a "favorite of the stronger BDGers") **6...Be7 7 c3 0-0 8 0-0 Nd7 9 Qe2 h6** (Lane gives Nf6 as leading to only a "slight space advantage for White") **10 Qxe4 Nf6 11 Qe2 c5 12 dxc5 Bxc5 13 Bf4 Bd7 14 Rad1 Qc8 15 Be5 Be7 16 Nf4 Re8 17 Rfe1 Nd5 18 Nh5 Bf6 19 Qg4 1-0.**

According to Lane, "In tournament play, [5...Bf5] is one of the most popular replies." It also seems to be the favorite choice among GMs and strong masters who have to face the BDG/Huebsch. Perhaps the strongest over-the-board player who regularly essays the Blackmar-Diemer is Charles Diebert, who has played – and defeated – some of the best players in the U.S., many of whom have tried **5...Bf5**.



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Tom Purser in *Blackmar-Diemer Gambit World* identifies the stem line as **6 g4** (White can also try 6 c3 as in Diebert-Blocker, 1983 Columbus, Ohio which resulted in a White win) **6...Bg6** and follow the game **Diebert-Rohde**, 1985 Philadelphia, which ended in a win for the GM, although White had good chances throughout and may have even missed an opportunity for victory. Black can deviate early, however, with 6...Bd7, which did not work out especially well for GM Benjamin, who lost with it against Diebert in a 1986 Columbus, Ohio tournament. Continuing with Diebert-Rohde: **7 Ne2** (Another idea pointed out by Purser is 7 h4, which led to a quick White win in the 1977 game Welling-Cobben) **7...e5 8 Be3 Qd6 9 c3 Nd7 10 h4 h5 11 Ng3 Nb6 12 Bb3 exd4 13 Bxd4 c5 14 gxh5 Bxh5 15 Nxb5 cxd4 16 Qg4 Qe5 17 0-0-0 Qxh5 18 Qxe4+ Be7 19 Rde1 Qc5 20 Rh3 Rd8 21 Rf3 Rf8 22 Rf5 Qd6 23 Re5 Rd7 24 c4 d3 25 Re3 Kd8 26 c5 Qc7 27 Kd1 d2 28 Rc3 Bf6 29 cxb6 Qxe5 30 Qxe5** (According to Diebert, 30 bxa7! Qa5 31 Qa4! Qxa4 32 Bxa4 Ke7 33 Re3+ would've given him compensation for his pawn-minus.) **30...Bxe5 31 bxa7 Ke7 0-1.** Despite Rohde's victory in this game, Black's results with 5...Bf5 have been less than encouraging.

Sometimes the popular choices are not necessarily the best choices. Such is the situation here. Black can certainly improve upon 5...e6 or 5...Bf5. One reply that appears better than its reputation is **5...g6**.



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Invariably, the game **Diebert-Hayes**, 1986 Columbus, Ohio (Cardinal Open)

is cited as the main line (suggested by both Lane and Sawyer), which saw White win after **5 Bc4 g6 6 f3 Bg7 7 c3 exf3 8 Nxf3 0-0 9 0-0 c5 10 Ng5 e6 11 dxc5 Qc7 12 Qd6 Qxd6 13 cxd6 Bd7 14 Ne4 Bc6 15 Nf6+ Bxf6 16 Rxf6 Rd8 17 Bh6 Nd7 18 Rf4 Ne5 19 Rd1 b5 20 Bb3 a5 21a4 bxa4 22 Bxa4 Bxa4 23 Rxa4 f6 24 Be3 Ra6 25 Bc5 Rc6 26 Rxa5 Nc4 27 Rb5 Nxb2 28 Rb1 Na4 29 Rb8 Rcc8 30 Rxc8 Rxc8 31 Ba7 Nxc3 32 d7.**

However, instead of the obliging 7...exf3, Black can try either 7...c5 or 7...0-0 and seems to be able to hold his own with relative ease, in both cases. For example, Sawyer includes **Birchbeer- Diesen**, a 1995 game played on the ICC, when Black won on time after **7...c5 8 Qb3 0-0 9 dc5 Nd7 10 Be3 Qc7 11 fe4 Nc5 12 Qc2 Be6 13 Be6 Ne6 14 Nf3 Qc4 15 Nd2 Qa6 16 Kf2 Rad8 17 Rhe1 Rd3 18 Nf3 Rfd8 19 Kg1 b6 20 Qf2 Qc4 21 Nd2 Qc6 22 Rf1 Rf8 23 Rad1 Qd7 24 Qe2 Rd8 25 Qf2 Qe8 26 h4 h5 27 Rde1 Nc5**, and was probably no worse than equal throughout. The same can be said for Black after 7...0-0 in **Dowling-Men**, 1993 Springfield, Ohio, which continued with **8.fxe4 e5 9.Nf3 exd4 10.cxd4 Bg4 11.Be3 Nc6 12.Bd5 Nb4 13.Bb3 Qe7 14. e5 Rad8 15.Bg5 Qxg5 16.Nxg5 Bxd1 17.Rxd1 Bh6 18.h4 Nc6 19.Nf3 Na5 20.h5 Nxb3 21.hxg6 Kg7 22.axb3 fxg6 23.Ke2 g5 24.Rh5 g4 25.Ng5 Kg6 26.Rxh6+ Kxh6 27.Ne6 c6 28.Nxd8** and a draw was agreed upon.

Another line that looks good for Black once one digs beneath the surface is **5... c5**.



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Given the move's favorable track record, it's hard to understand why it hasn't been a more popular response by players of the Black pieces in the Huebsch. In fact, after **5...c5 6.Qh5 g6** (5...e6 is not recommended; see Zintgraff-Dick and Soller-Thalman) Black won in **Diebert-Floyd**, 1985 Columbus, Ohio which continued **7 Qxc5 Nc6 8 Bb5 Bd7 9 d5 e5 10 d6 Qf6 11 Be3 Bxd6 12 Qd5 0-0-0 13 0-0-0 Bc7 14 Ne2 a6 15 Bc4 Be6 16 Qxe4 Bf5 17 Qf3 e4 18 Bg5 Qxg5+ 19 Qe3 Qxe3+ 20 fxe3 0-1** and Horn-Diebert, 1986 Columbus, where White tried 8 Be3, but went down to defeat in twenty-four moves. Even early deviations by White don't seem to help his cause, such as 6 c3, which led to a nineteen-move draw in Diebert-Schulien, 1984 Ohio and 6 d5, which resulted in an advantage for Black in T. Fischer-Vieten, 1988 Dortmund. (However, White did garner a quick victory with 6 d5 in the ICC game Birchbeer-Schimpf from 1996, as given by Sawyer.) The main line here would seem to be **7 Qc5 Nc6 8 Bd5 Bd7** (Rebel 10 software likes 8...Bd6 but analyzes it as leading to an advantage for White; 8...Bg7 saw White win in thirty-two moves in another Birchbeer-Schimpf game from ICC. We are told by Sawyer that "Birchbeer" is a pseudonym for an IM, but what kind of a player is "Schimpf"?) **9 Qc4 e6 10 Be4 Qh4 11 Qd3 f5 12 Bc6 Bc6 13 Nf3 Qg4** (simple and perhaps even stronger might be 13...Qe4+) **14 0-0 Bf3 15 Qf3 Qf3 16 gf3 Rc8 17 c3 Bd6 18 f4 b5 19 Bd2 Kd7 20 b4 a5 21 ba5 Rc4 22 Rfb1 Kc6 23 a4 ba4 24 Kf1** with a draw in the 1996 correspondence game **Felber-Schulien**. White appears to get nothing against 5...c5.

Interesting is the move **5...Nc6**. After the obligatory **6 c3**, Sawyer points out six possibilities for Black: 6...Bd7, 6...Qd6, 6...g6, 6...Bf5, 6...e6, and 6...e5. Although 6...Bd7 may hold some promise, (see Jacobsen-Hjortshoj, 1992 Denmark), except for 6...e5, the others appear to favor White. It is 6...e5 that was played in the 1997 GM blitz encounter between Serper and Wilder at the ICC and the move that I wish to consider the main line in this variation. This

game was also the subject of Serper's article in *NIC YB*. While Serper-Wilder continued with 7 d5, it is worth noting that Diebert-Bisguier, 1985 World Open, saw 7 Qb3 Qf6 (7...Qd7 was Diebert-Bukovac, 1986 Buckeye Open, a thirty-one-move victory for White), with the result being a draw in sixty-two moves.

In any event, after **5...Nc6 6 c3 e5**, in this little-explored position, Black has three ways to respond to **7 d5**: 7...Ne7, 7...Na5, or 7...Nb8.



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After **7...Ne7**, White's best course appears to be **8 f3**, recommended by Smith and Hall in *Winning with the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit* and Serper in *NIC YB*. (According to Serper, 8 Qa4 is best met by 8...Bd7 9 Qb3 Nf5 10 Qb7 Nd6 11 Qa6 Be7, when Black has the advantage. Lane, on the other hand, conflicts with Serper's assessment of this position, writing about 8...Bd7 that it "is well met by 9 Qb3 threatening Qxb7 and d6.") But, with correct play after 7...Ne7 8 f3, Serper cites **8...ef3 9 Nf3 Ng6 10 h4 Bd6 11 h5 Ne7 12 h6 g6 13 Bg5 0-0 14 Bf6 e4 15 Ng5 Bg3 16 Kf1** as unclear, meaning that 7...Ne7 might be worthy of further examination as a Black alternative.

After **7...Na5 8 Be2 b6 9 Qa4+ Bd7 10 Qxe4 Bd6 11 g4 c6 12 Be3 cxd5 13 Qxd5 Bc6 14 Bb5 Qd7 15 Bxc6 Qxc6 16 0-0-0**, one would be hard-pressed to disagree with Smith and Hall, who comment "Now, Pape, Jensen and Birk in their booklet *Hubsch Gambit* give equality here; we believe White has the edge, because his King is safer and the Be3 is stronger than the Bd6."

The move that might give Black the best chances after **7 d5** is **7...Nb8**.



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White can now proceed in three ways: 8 Ne2?!, 8 Be3 or 8 Qe2, the latter of which is reputed to be the best of the bunch. The first try, 8 Ne2?! can be quickly dismissed. Serper views it as dubious after 8...Bc5 9 Ng3 Qh4, when Black already appears to have seized the initiative. In fact, Black won from this position in Meszaros-P. Sinkovics, 1994 Hungary.

There is also 8 Be3. While Black went down the drain in the 1990 game Muller-Metzger after 8...Bd6 9 Qh5 Qf6?! 10 Bb5+ Bd7 11 Qe2!, there are better ways to handle the second player's position. One obvious improvement is 8...Nbd7 9 Nh3 Nb6 10 Bb5+ Bd7 11 Qb3 f6 12 0-0 Bxb5 13 Qxb5+ Qd7 14 Qxd7+ Nxd7 15 Rfe1 0-0-0 and Black looks to be a pawn ahead without any apparent danger lurking on the horizon.

Even after Serper's **8 Qe2**, the move he played against Wilder in the ICC game, Black should be able to hold his own. Rather than continuing with Wilder's **8...Bd6**, considered dubious by Serper, Black looks to get a viable position by following Serper's suggestion of **8...f5!** leading to **9 Nh3 Bd6 10 Bg5 Be7 11 Bd2**. At this point, the game may transpose into the variation cited by Serper if Black plays **9...Be7** instead of **9...Bd6**: **9...Be7 10 Bd2 Nd7 11 0-0-0 Nf6 12 fg3 f4 13 Bb5 Kf8 14 fe4 Bg4 15 Qd3 Bd1 16 Rd1 h6 17 Nf4 ef4 18 e5 Nd5 19 Qf5 Kg8 20 Qe6 Kf8 21 Qf5** with equality.

However, there is still the question of what does Black play after **11 Bd2**.



[FEN "rnbqk2r/ppp1b1pp/8/3Ppp2/2B1p3/2P4N/PP1BQPPP/R3K2R b KQkq - 0 11"]

Given the lack of tournament praxis with this position, I enlisted some mechanical assistance and plugged the position into Rebel 10 software, which offered **11...a6 12 f3 b5 13 Bb3 exf3 14 Qxe5** (14 Qxf3 leads to Rebel 10 Analysis "A" - see the Games section - which may be winning for Black) **14... Nd7 15 Qxg7 Bf6 16 Qh6 Qe7+ 17 Kd1 f2g2 18 Rg1 Bb7 19 Qh5+ Qf7 20 Qxf5 Nc5 21 Re1+ Kd8 22 Ng5 Qg7 23 Kc2 Rf8 24 Qxh7 Bc8 25 Qxg7 Bf5 + 26 Kd1 Bg4+ 27 Kc2 Bf5+ 28 Kd1 Bg4+** with, believe it or not, a draw by repetition. Certainly, considerably more practical experience is needed before anything definitive can be said about **5...Nc6** and specifically **7...Nb8**. The early returns regarding this particular variation, however, do not look unfavorable for Black.

But, if White really wants to take his opponent out of virtually all known theory and into the chess world's black hole, **5 Bf4** should do it. It wouldn't surprise me, however, if this move eventually turns out to be White's preferred method of playing against **3...Nxe4**.

According to Lane, **5...Bf5** "looks best" against **5 Bf4**. Given the less than encouraging results with the alternatives, one is initially inclined to agree with him. For example, **5...Nd7** is Diemer-Durao, a quick White victory; **5...e6** can be met by either **6 f3** as in Kampers-Define or **6 Qd2**, Bertolo-Deleplanque, both leading to wins for White; nor does **5...Nc6** doesn't inspire much confidence after **6 Bb5**, seen in the Stummer-Bonner match games.

However, even **5...Bf5** may not be that very appealing for Black. One of the earliest and most convincing (at least from White's perspective) examples is **Diemer-Schroeder**, a game from a 1956 simul given by one-half of the Blackmar-Diemer team: **1.d4 Nf6 2.Nc3 d5 3.e4 Nxe4 4.Nxe4 dxe4 5.Bf4 Bf5 6.f3 e6 7.Qe2 exf3 8.Nxf3 c6 9.0-0-0 Bd6 10.Ne5 h6 11.g4 Bh7 12.h4 Qc7 13.g5 Bf5 14.Bh3 Bxh3 15.Rxh3 h5 16.Bh2 Nd7 17.Ng6 Rh7 18.d5 cxd5 19.Rxd5 Bxh2 20.Rxh2 Kd8 21.Ne5 1-0** But there may be a fly in the ointment, since **7...Qxd4** (rather than the conciliatory **7...exf3**?) leaves Black two pawns to the good after **8 Qb5+ Nd7 9 c3 Qb6**.

Instead of **6 f3** as in Diemer-Schroeder, White tried **6 Qe2** in Stummer-Homann, one of several games played between these two German masters in 1994 to test the **5 Bf4** variation. Although the game was drawn, perhaps Black had an improvement in **11...h5 12 h3 e6 13 f3 hxg4 14 hxg4 Rxh1 15 Bxh1 exf3 15 Nxf3 0-0-0 16 Nh4 Bh7 17 Nf3 Be7**, when Black must be better because of his extra pawn.

Of course, all of these lines in the Huebsch could certainly benefit from more practical tests, especially the 5 Bf4 variation. Black may be able to confidently meet 5 Bc4 with either 5...g6, 5...c5 or 5...Nc6. Although Black may only rarely face 5 Bf4, he should encounter few difficulties holding his own against the two most logical White 6th move tries, 6 f3 and 6 Qe2.

In summary, the Huebsch (3...Nxe4) is hardly a bust to the Blackmar-Diemer. But, on the other hand, Black need not tremble with fear of being blown off the board. There are several relatively clear paths for him to achieve at least an equal position, as long as he plays carefully and doesn't throw caution to the wind.

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