



The Gambit Cartel

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Every Once in a While Part II

Last month we looked at some ideas for Black in the 5.b6 Benko. Here I want to pick up that theme again and explore one key maneuver, ...Bd7-b5, that seems to solve a lot of Black's problems in that line. We'll get right to the games.

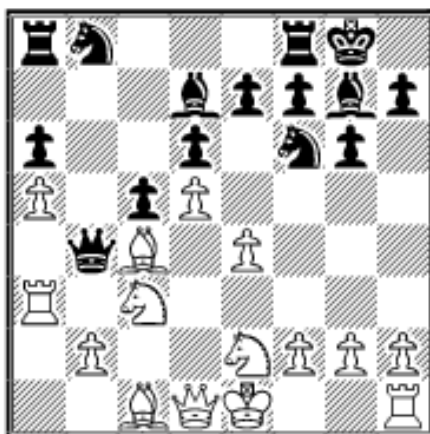
Mikhalevski, V (2545) - Hendriks, W (2345)

Dutch Open, Dieren 1998

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6 d6 6.Nc3 g6 7.e4 Bg7 8.a4 Qxb6 9.a5 Qb4!?

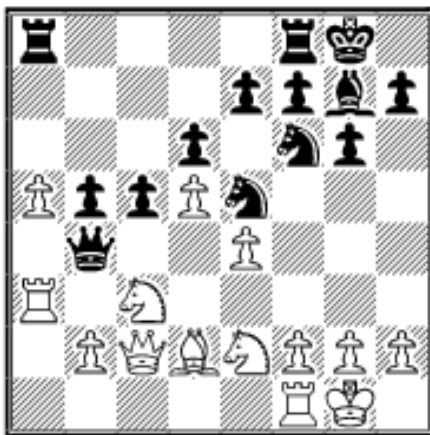
One also sees 9...Qc7 here, but it isn't clear to me that Black's queen is better on c7 than on b7. And when White's rook comes to a4, as it almost has to, the maneuver ...Bd7-b5 will gain a tempo back.

10.Ra4 Qb7 11.Bc4 0-0 12.Nge2 Bd7 13.Ra3 Qb4



It's curious how often Black's queen comes back up to this square. The one thing to look out for is that Black can, if he isn't cautious, get the lady trapped there. But see the note to move 18, below.

14.Qd3 Bb5 15.Bxb5 axb5 16.Bd2 Nbd7 17.0-0 Ne5 18.Qc2 (see next diagram)



18...Qc4

Perhaps it's just the fond memory I have of having once played a similar sacrifice in a tournament game, but I'd be very tempted by 18...Nc4 19.Rb3 Qxb3!? (19...Qxa5 20.Rxb5 may favor Black as well but isn't as sexy.) 20.Qxb3 Nxd2 21.Qxb5 Nxf1 22.Kxf1 Rfb8 23.Qa4 Rxb2 But such things are not to everyone's

taste!

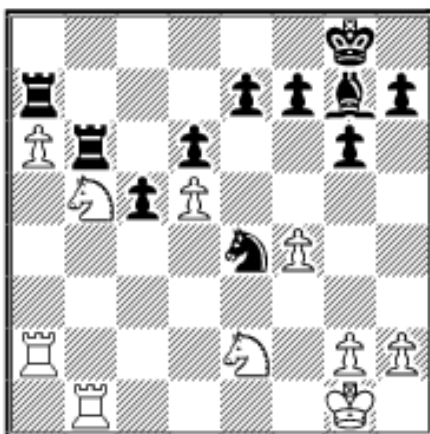
19.f4 Qd3 20.Qxd3 Nxd3

The arrival of a black knight on d3 in a Benko is bad news for White. It usually means that his queenside is about to disappear. Certainly that's what it means here.

21.Nxb5 Nxb2 22.Bc3 Nxe4! 23.Bxb2 Bxb2 24.Ra2 Bg7 25.Rb1 Ra6

Here 25...Rfb8 is also tempting. It takes a little experience in such positions to realize that White's pawn cannot really be queened on a8, though, so it's hard to fault Black for trying to blockade it further up the board.

26.Nc7 Ra7 27.Nb5 Rb8 28.a6 Rb6!



This tactic is brought to you courtesy of the N/e4, which covers the flight square at f2.

29.Ra4 f5

And no, we're not about to move him!

30.Ng3 Bd4+! 31.Rxd4 cxd4 32.Ne2 d3 33.Ned4 Raxa6 34.Rd1 d2 35.Kf1 Ra5 0-1

A very attractive upset.

Naumkin, I (2406) - Rotstein, A (2544)
Porto San Giorgo, 2003

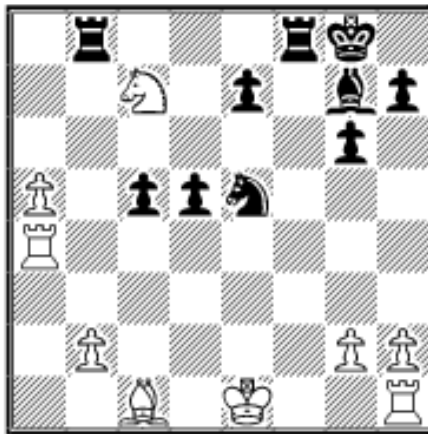
1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6 d6 6.Nc3 g6 7.e4 Bg7 8.a4 Qxb6 9.a5 Qb4!? 10.Ra4 Qb7 11.Bc4 0-0 12.f4 Bd7

Here again we see the thematic maneuver.

13.Ra3 Qb4

And again the queen returns to b4.

14.Qd3 Bb5 15.Bxb5 axb5 16.e5 dxe5 17.fxe5 Ng4 18.Nf3 Nd7 19.e6 Nde5 20.Nxe5 Nxe5 21.Qxb5 fxe6 22.Ra4 Qxb5 23.Nxb5 exd5 24.Nc7 Rab8!?



With this apparently innocent move Black sets a fiendish trap ...

25.a6??

... and White walks straight into it. 25.Nxd5 Nd3+ 26.Ke2 Nxc1+ 27.Rxc1 Rxb2+ 28.Kd3 leaves the outcome in doubt since White's a-pawn is strong.

25...Nd3+ 26.Ke2 Rf2+! 0-1

In all of the games so far, Black has returned his queen to b4. But there is an alternative setup illustrated in the next two games that deserves serious consideration.

Gervasio,R (2347) - Mensch,E (2353)

Villeurbanne, 2002

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6 d6 6.Nc3 g6 7.e4 Bg7 8.a4 Qxb6 9.a5 Qb4!? 10.Ra4 Qb7 11.Bc4 0-0 12.Nf3 Ne8

The beginning of a useful rearrangement. Black will put his bishop on b5 and his knights on c7 and d7.

13.0-0 Nc7 14.Re1 Bd7 15.Ra1 Bb5 16.Qd3 Bxc4

Black's light-square bishop has no higher destiny awaiting, so this swap makes sense even though it trades Black's ostensibly "good" bishop for White's "bad" one. Anyone can see that Black's remaining bishop is anything but bad!

17.Qxc4 Nd7 18.Bg5 Rfe8 19.Reb1 Rab8 20.Qd3 Ne5 21.Nxe5 Bxe5

22.Na4 Qb3!

The tide is turning in Black's favor. White hasn't managed to make any headway on the kingside or in the center, and Black's pieces are pouring in along all of the open lines on the queenside.

23.Qe2 Rb4 24.Nb6

The knight isn't really going anywhere special from here: the whole point is to try to cut off Black's retreat with his rook.

24...Na8?!

It's aesthetically cute to put a knight in the corner, but Black hardly needs to do it. He can just thumb his nose at the whole business and play 24...Nb5 25.Bd2 Qc2 26.Re1 Nd4 It

doesn't take a genius to see that White is lost here.

25.Nd7 Bd4?

But this is really a slip. Taking on b2 was simple and straightforward, though some of Black's initiative has dissipated due to the wacky burial of his knight.

26.Qxa6 Qc2**27.Rf1?**

White misses a shot here. With 27.Bxe7! he could really turn the tables. It looks like Black's making terrific progress, but after 27...Qxf2+ 28.Kh1 Rxb2 29.Rg1 he runs out of steam abruptly.

27...Rxb2 28.Bh4??

One more slip, caused by the sudden turn from offense to defense, and White's game collapses.

28...Qxe4 29.Qc6 Qxh4

The passed a-pawn by itself is no threat.

30.Nf6+ Qxf6 31.Qxe8+ Kg7 32.Kh1

32.Qxa8 Rxf2 forces mate: the discovered check is just too strong.

32...Rxf2 33.Rxf2 Qxf2 34.Rb1 Nc7 35.Qxe7 Nxd5 36.Qxd6 Nc3 37.Rc1

Now for a nice finishing touch.

37...Ne4! 0-1

Black threatens a smothered mate.

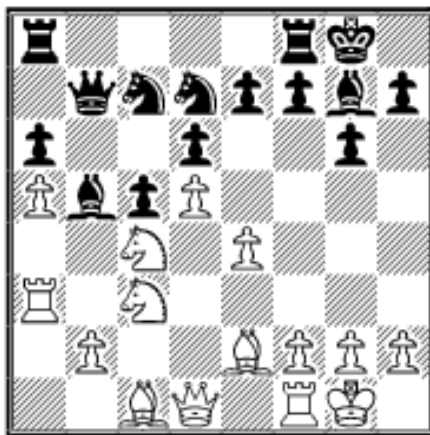
Bratchenko,A (2383) - Sivokho,S (2476)

St Petersburg, 2001

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6 d6 6.Nc3 g6 7.e4 Bg7 8.a4 Qxb6 9.a5 Qb4!? 10.Ra4 Qb7 11.Nf3 0-0 12.Be2 Bd7 13.Ra3 Bb5

Again, Black implements the plan without putting his queen on b4 first.

14.0-0 Nbd7 15.Nd2 Ne8 16.Nc4 Nc7



Here we see Black's redeployment plan in pure form. The e5-square is reasonably well covered, b5 is reinforced, b6 is defended – in short, Black has set up a very plausible barricade against White's assaults. The drawback is that it is difficult to undertake anything active from a posture like this. Difficult, but not impossible.

17.Bg5 Rfe8 18.Rb3 Qa7 19.Qd2

Rab8

Black's plan for achieving activity now becomes clear. He will swap on c4 and then use the b-file to press against b2 and the b5-square as a transfer point for his N/c7 to reach d4.

20.Ra1 Bxc4 21.Bxc4 Ne5 22.Rxb8 Rxb8 23.Be2 Kf8 24.h4 Rb4 25.h5 Nb5

25...Qb7 is also a very attractive move.

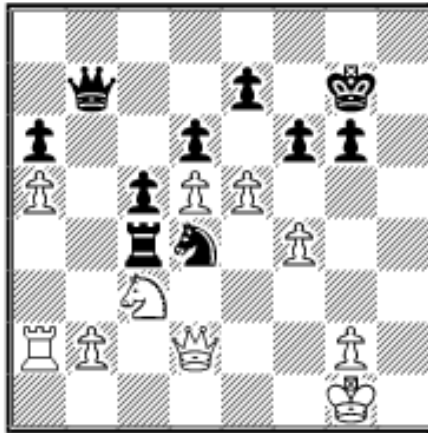
26.hxg6 hxg6 27.Bh6?!

White has missed the last chance to take off the knight on b5, which now becomes a monster.

27...Nd4 28.Bxg7+ Kxg7 29.Ra2 Qb7

There's a case to be made for the immediate 29...Nxe2+ 30.Qxe2 c4! If White sits still Black will drop a knight on d3 and White can kiss the game goodbye. But maybe he can do that anyway: 31.Ra4 Qc5 leaves White virtually paralyzed because his pawn on a5 will hang after an exchange of rooks. And 32.Ra3 Nd3 33.Nd1 allows the miniature combination 33...Rxb2 34.Nxb2 Qxa3 35.Nxd3 cxd3 when White gets cleaned up.

30.f3 f6 31.f4 Nc4 32.Bxc4 Rxc4 33.e5



Hand it to White: he is doing what he can to stir up complications. Which way should Black capture here?

33...Rb4!

No way at all! White cannot really break through on the e-file with his rook marooned on a2.

34.Qf2 Nb5 35.exf6+ exf6 36.Qe3

Nd4 37.Qe8 Qc7

37...Nf5! would cover e7 and d6 and expose the pawn at f4.

38.Qe3 Qf7 39.Qd3 Qb7 40.Qe3 Kf7 41.Ra1 Qe7 42.Qf2 f5 43.Re1 Qd8 44.Re3 Rb7 45.Re1 Re7 46.Rxe7+ Qxe7

Now Black's central outpost and less vulnerable pawns give him the edge.

47.Qd2

47.Qf1 aiming for a6 may be desperation, but it's the kind of desperation I'd be most worried about if I were Black.

47...Nb3 48.Qd3 Qe1+ 49.Kh2 Nd2 50.Qxa6

Bad timing. Very bad.

50...Nf1+ 51.Kg1 Ne3+ 52.Kh2 Qf2

52...Ng4+ is also very convincing. The combined power of a knight and a queen to harry an exposed king is an awesome thing.

53.Qe2 Nf1+ 0-1

I admit: I'm jealous of these games. I'm jealous of the lucky guys who have been having such a great time with the Benko. I've spent such a long time hanging out with cheaper, easier openings. Maybe, just maybe ...



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