



# The Gambit Cartel

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## A Shilling in the Mailbag

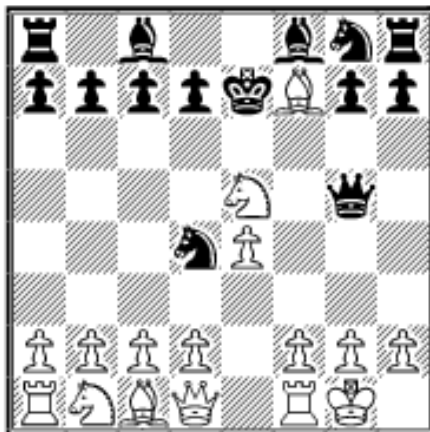
Last month's column on Charlie Gold's exploits with 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nd4!? generated more mail than the three previous columns combined. Shaun Goho was the first one to zip me a message on the history of the gambit, which is now known as "Blackburne's Shilling Gambit" (no acronymic malice aforethought, I'm sure). According to the first edition of *The Complete Chess Addict*, Shaun writes, Blackburne used to use this trappy line to win shilling bets from patzers. I've been unable in a brief search to track down the original source of this story (though it sounds like the kind of thing Blackburne would do). Enrico Senis also wrote to fill me in on this point of history and to direct my attention to Josh Waitzkin's *Attacking Chess*, p. 144, where Josh recounts with admirable candor his own experience on the wrong side of the trap as a junior. Geoff Chandler mentions the Blackburne story on his website and tells me he'll get back to me if he can hunt down a primary source.

Some internet searching turns up a Kostic connection – and a mystery. The following game, really just an illustration of the main line, turns up on some websites and was forwarded to me by Enrico:

**Mulok - Kostic, Zagreb, 1911 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nd4?! 4.Nxe5!? Qg5 5.Nxf7?? Qxg2!! 6.Rf1 Qxe4+ 7.Be2 Nf3#**

But on other websites the game is played in Cologne in a different year. Can anyone find a definitive source for this game?

Reader Martin van Essen was the first to write about a line I neglected to cover: **4.Nxe5(?) Qg5 5.Bxf7+ Ke7 6.0-0!?** (see diagram) offering the piece as a gambit.



This is certainly a lot more fun than most of the lines for White after 4.Nxe5, though I think that as White I'd rather go for the sure thing with 4.Nxd4 instead. Dennis Monokroussos sent a note right on the heels of Martin's that offers some analysis, which I'll quote:

“[B]oth ordinary visual inspection and Mr. Chips inform us that White is doing fine after 6...Qxe5 7.Bxg8

Rxf8 8.c3 followed by 9.d4 or 9.f4. In fact, Shredder 8 thinks White is slightly better after 8...Ne6 9.f4 Qf6 10.f5 Nd8 11.d4: White has two pawns for the piece and loads of space and central control. Serves Black players right for disrespecting the game and their opponents, I say! :)”

Of course the point behind 9.f4 is that 9...Nxf4? 10.d4 pole-axes Black. Deep Fritz 7, that gritty materialist, still prefers Black marginally at the end of Dennis's line after 11.d4 (see diagram) offering 11...g6.



From a God's-eye view it's hard to say how the position should look – for obvious reasons your humble columnist is not in a strong position to say. But for practical play I'm with Shredder on this one. Certainly in a real game Black's defensive task would be extremely difficult.

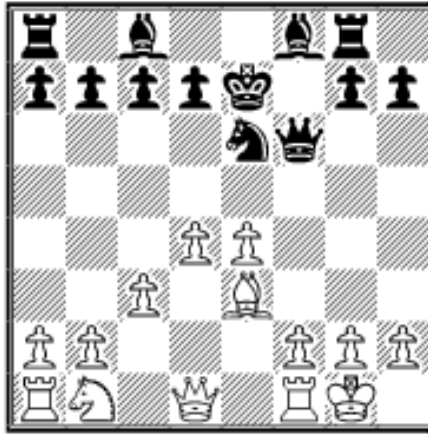
Can Black improve earlier? In Dennis's line, 8...Nc6 comes to

mind. (see diagram)



Here Laurent Linnemer, who independently offered the 5.Bxf7+ Ke7 6.0-0 idea, suggests the line 9.d4 Qf6 10.d5. This idea has merit, but White's last move looks like the right thrust at the wrong time: 10...Ne5 11.f4 Qb6+! 12.Kh1 Nf7 and Black is a little (but only a little) better coordinated than in Dennis's line.

Can White improve on this? Let's take Laurent's line up to move 9 and then try 10.Be3. (see diagram)



Now White threatens d5 without allowing Black that check at b6 (or, for that matter, a bishop check at c5), so White's development is a little better than after an immediate 10.d5. White may also follow up with 11.f4 before 12.d5, giving Black's knight fewer options. All things considered, I would really rather be White here. But as I said before (and in the last column),

White can get some advantage risk-free with 4.Nxd4.

The 6.0-0 idea is not an innovation. *Palmiotto - Hirsch*, Bologna op, 1988 saw **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nd4 4.Nxe5 Qg5 5.Bxf7+ Ke7 6.0-0 Qxe5 7.Bxg8 Rxg8 8.f4?! This seems definitely weaker than Dennis's and Laurent's suggestion of 8.c3. Now after 8...Qc5 9.c3 Black missed his opportunity, playing 8...Nc6+? and losing shortly thereafter: 10.d4 Qc4 11.d5 Nd8 12.b3 Qc5+ 13.Kh1 d6 14.Ba3 Qe3 15.Bc1 Qc5 16.Qd3 c6 17.Ba3 1-0 But with 9...Ne2+! 10.Kh1 Qh5! he could have kept the initiative and might well have held the game.**

*Wicklund Hansen - Willumsen*, NOR-chT2, 1998 saw White follow our analysis more closely: **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nd4 4.Nxe5 Qg5 5.Bxf7+ Ke7 6.0-0 Qxe5 7.Bxg8 Rxg8 8.c3 Ne6 So far we're directly on line with Dennis's variation. 9.d4 Qf6 10.f4 Ke8 11.f5 Ng5 12.e5 Qd8 13.Qg4 Be7 14.d5 d6 15.e6 h6 16.h4 Nh7 17.Qg6+ 1-0 This cannot have been much fun for Black. Sure, 16.Qh5+ may be even stronger than 16.h4, but by that time who cares?**

Lest I be accused of one-sidedness, here's a game to show that White, too, can overextend himself in such positions. *Efthimiou - Hrisanthopoulos*, Estia Nea Smyrni Cup, 1979 **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nd4 4.Nxe5 Qg5 5.Bxf7+ Ke7 6.0-0 Qxe5 7.Bxg8 Rxg8 8.c3 Ne6 9.d4 Qf6 10.e5 Qg6 11.f4 Qf7 12.f5 Nd8 So far this looks pretty convincing, but now White presses a little too hard. 13.Bg5+ Ke8 14.e6? dxe6 15.fxe6 Qg6! 16.Rxf8+? Rxf8 17.e7 Qxg5 18.exf8Q+ Kxf8 and Black duly converted the extra piece into a full point in a long endgame. Moral: if you're going to play with fire as White in these sharp lines, make sure you know what you're doing!**

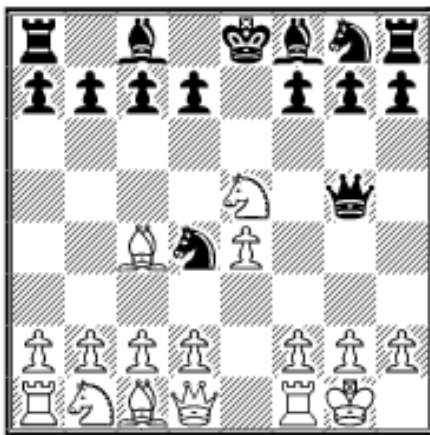
Both Dennis and Laurent also offer some analysis of even bolder ideas. Dennis analyzes 4.Bxf7+ Kxf7 5.Nxe5+, "another fun possibility," he writes, "when Black has to play very accurately to get even a small

edge.” His analysis runs 5...Ke7! 6.c3 d6! 7.Nc4 Nc6 8.d4 Nf6 9.0-0 Kf7. “White probably doesn't have enough for the piece,” Dennis concludes, “but White is better here than Black is after anything normal but 4.Nxe5.” Does anybody feel like trying Black’s position after 5...Ke6 instead of Dennis’s 5...Ke7? Truly, this begins to look like a line that only a computer could love!

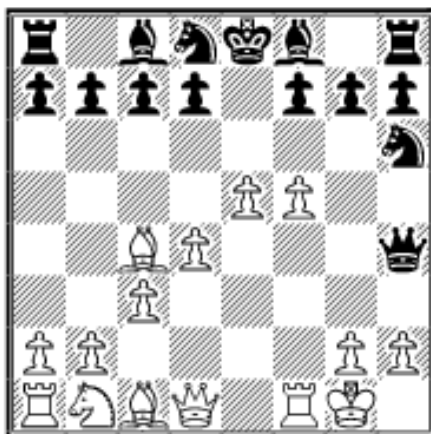
Believe it or not, this has been tried in a tournament game. *Wieteck-Dutschke*, Lahnstein, 1999 saw **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nd4 4.Bxf7+!? Kxf7 5.Nxe5+ Ke8?** Allowing the check at h5 is unwise. **6.Qh5+** (White could also consider 6.c3 Nc6 7.Qh5+ g6 when both 8.Nxc6 and 8.Nxg6 come into consideration.) **6...g6 7.Nxg6** and now Black committed suicide with 7...Qf6?!, but after 7...hxc6 8.Qxc6+ Ke7 9.Qg5+! Nf6 10.Qc5+ d6 11.Qxd4 White has four (!) pawns for the bishop and Black’s king will be exposed long-term.

I cannot resist the opportunity to point out the (distant but discernable) analogy between Dennis’s second line and the Jerome Gambit 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.Bxf7+ Kxf7 5.Nxe5+. The Jerome is, of course, completely unsound; it is a kind of miracle, and a tribute to Jerome’s tenacity, that it was analyzed seriously at all. I would say more about this here, but Rick Kennedy has a superb article on the Jerome coming out in the next issue of *Kaissiber* and I do not want to steal his thunder before that issue hits the press. Dennis’s line is, of course, more serious stuff since Black has lost time and control of e5 with 3...Nd4 by comparison with the Jerome.

Laurent suggests the possibility 4.Nxe5 Qg5 5.0-0!? (see diagram)



His line now runs 5...Qxe5 6.c3 Ne6 7.d4 Qf6 8.e5 Qh4 9.f4 Nh6 10.f5 Nd8 (see diagram)



“In blitz,” writes Laurent, “it would definitely be best to play this kind of counter gambit: Black who was hoping to win in a few moves will be forced to defend a long game...” Objectively I’m not sure about this line (a piece for just one pawn?), but I have to concede that practically it’s not the sort of position I’d head for as Black either. 11.g3 Qe4 (11...Qh3 12.Rf4 looks fine for White) 12.Bxh6 Qc6 13.Bxg7 Bxg7

14.Na3 followed by 15.Qb3 looks ominous.

In practice, I should note, I can find no games with Laurent’s suggestion of 6.c3 – White has tried 6.d3 or 6.Re1 instead. In games in my database in this line (without Laurent’s improvement), Black has won every time, though the games are not exactly convincing.

Where does that leave us? Some readers wrote to suggest that the whole opening should not be played by amateurs (and presumably not by stronger players either). Objectively, for those who want to produce high quality chess, this may be very good advice. But down in the hurly-burly, amateurs have been having a lot of fun with this opening; Charlie Gold, in particular, has amassed a lot of wins in his pet line. And it may have provided Blackburne with a steady flow of shillings, which the old master no doubt transformed into whiskey-and-sodas just as fast as his victims could take his e-pawn.

There is no law against playing for tricks in chess. It is not the way to become a master, but watching the occasional opponent slip on a banana peel is for some players an end in itself. If any of my readers are of this persuasion, I would be the last person to deny them the pleasure they might derive from Blackburne’s (Gold) Shilling.



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