

# The Gambit Cartel

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## The Omega Gambit

Are there any gambits that are *utterly* worthless?

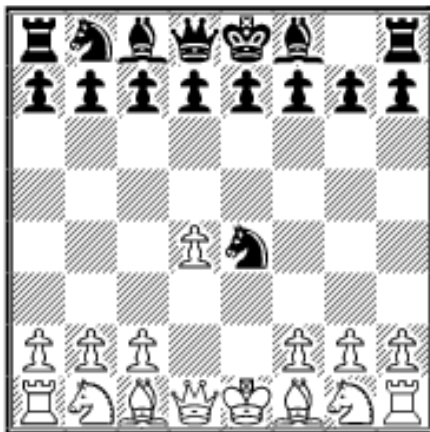
I suspect so. In fact, I think I have stumbled across one by accident. Without intending to, I've played it well over 100 times in the past three years – an average of about once a week.

Stop. Rewind. Can any sane person say that?

Absolutely.

It works like this. Imagine that you've been playing a long series of bullet games (2 min or less per game) online against someone who is a French Defense fanatic. Every game where you've had White has opened 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 ... Now, since time is at a premium, you want to shave every possible tenth of a second off of the time it takes you to play your opening moves. So when you play 1.e4 you immediately shift your mouse, seize your d-pawn, and hold it hovering over the d4-square. He moves, and you simply release it.

Only then do you discover that he has switched up and played Alekhine's Defense: your game has just opened **1.e4 Nf6 2.d4??** No doubt he is chuckling on the other end as he snaps off your e-pawn with **2...Nxe4**.



Is it time to resign and laugh at yourself? Some players will take this graceful way out. Objectively, it is very difficult to see the bright side to giving away one of your center pawns on move 2. But battle-hardened warriors of the Internet bullet world know that it takes more than a missing pawn to finish a game.

This column is for the ones who carry on. The continuations we are about to see may seem at first to

have little or no relation to real chess. But if you're one of ours (and if you're not, why are you reading this column?) you may discover that there is something to learn from this absurdity after all.

First, it helps (but only a little) to know that our gambit has a name: the "Omega Gambit." I'm not sure who first applied this title, though I have a suspicion that it may be a corruption of something like "Omygosh." Or maybe it was chosen to put it as far from possible as Alpha (as in "alpha male"). I would prefer something like the Cheshire Cat Gambit, since after Black's second move all that White has left is his fighting spirit. Eric Schiller covers it briefly in some of his large books, and brief coverage is in honesty all it deserves.

Or is that quite fair? In personal correspondence Clyde Nakamura (no relation), that peerless master of chess openings from the Dark Side, has pointed out that Black loses time and that his knight often disappears from the kingside altogether. That means that his kingside is, at least in theory, a bit weak. And since White's bishops both have free lines for development, White can at least hope for some attacking chances if Black is careless.

Now comes the scary part: he often is. Complacent in his additional material, Black often plays routinely over the next dozen moves where actually a modicum of circumspection is called for. He thinks it should be easy. He thinks anything will do. He thinks White is a moron.

This is precisely where the Omega Gambit is, if not exactly good, at least useful, for it induces in White precisely the opposite attitude. Once that pawn is gone, White has absolutely nothing to live for except the mating attack. So he must throw himself into that attack with all of his might, sacrificing additional pawns or even pieces without looking back.

Here, for those who can close their eyes to the first two moves, is a selection of my online games with the Omega. The lopsided White score should fool no one: I have decided not to show you any of my forty-odd miserable losses. The following "short takes" should be considered inspirational material.

For obvious reasons, I have withheld the names of the victims. All ratings are ICC Bullet ratings; all games were played at a 1 minute time control.

***McGrew - X (2005)***

ICC 1 0, December, 2002

**1.d4 Nf6 2.e4??**

Played much, much too fast, before seeing Black's first move!

**2...Nxe4 3.Nc3 Nxc3 4.bxc3 g6 5.Bf4 Bg7 6.Qd2 d6 7.Bh6 0-0 8.h4**

White wastes no time launching his attack. Quick – decide in less than five seconds how Black should defend against it.

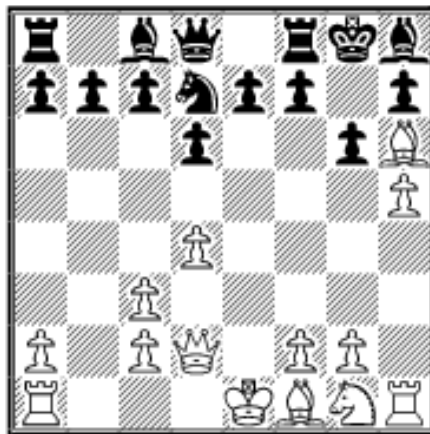
**8...Nd7**

This is a sensible choice, bringing the knight over to the defense of the kingside, but it is not Black's strongest idea.

**9.h5**

White's attacking concept is very pure: open the h-file, sac if necessary, and deliver mate.

**9...Bh8?**



Sometimes this is a smart way to preserve one's fianchettoed bishop. But an exchange is just too high a price to pay for that here. Black was probably understandably afraid of 9...Bxh6 10.Qxh6 when White's pressure against h7 looks alarming. But he can survive, if not in great comfort, with 10...Nf6 11.hxg6 fxg6 12.Nf3 e6! Now Black's second rank is open for his queen to join in the defense of h7, e.g. 13.Bd3 Qe7

14.Ng5 Qg7 Naturally White isn't going to exchange queens. After 15.Qh4 e5 16.0-0-0 exd4 17.cxd4 Black is still a bit better but White has more pressure than he deserves to have, and he can increase it with Rh2 and Rdh1.

**10.Bxf8 Qxf8 11.hxg6 fxg6?**

After this second error, Black's position is unsalvageable. 11...hxg6 would keep some important lines closed and hold White's advantage down.

**12.Bc4+**

Oops! Black's pieces are clumsily posted as far as light square control is concerned, and White now manages to invade at h6 with his queen after all.

**12...Kg7 13.Qh6+ Kf6 14.Qxh7**

White's attacking technique leaves something to be desired. It is more accurate to do everything possible with checks, e.g. 14.Qh4+! Kg7 (14...g5 15.Qxh7 Bg7 16.Rh3! is very ugly, e.g. 16...g4 17.Qh4+ Kf5 18.Bd3+ Ke6 19.Qxg4+ Kf7 20.Bg6+ Kg8 21.Qe6+ Qf7 22.Qxf7#) 15.Qxh7+! Kf6 16.Nf3 and Black's state is hopeless.

**14...Bg7 15.Nf3**

15.Rh3 is also very strong.

**15...e6 16.Bd3**

I know, dear reader, I know. But consider the pace at which this game was played! 16.Qh4+ Kf7 17.Ng5+ Ke8 18.Nxe6 would win a decisive amount of material.

**16...Qf7**

Black returns the favor.

**17.Qh4+ g5 18.Qxg5# 1-0**

*McGrew - Y (2083)*

ICC 1 0, August 2003

**1.d4 Nf6 2.e4 Nxe4 3.Nc3 Nxc3 4.bxc3 d5 5.Bd3 c6**

5...c5! would be more to the point.

**6.Bf4**

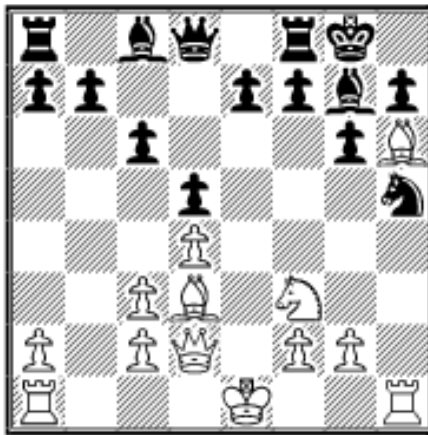
White delays the development of his knight, hoping to avoid a pin (and an exchange!)

**6...g6 7.Qd2 Bg7 8.Nf3 0-0**

For reasons that I find difficult to explain, Black often "castles into it" like this.

**9.Bh6 Nd7 10.h4 Nf6 11.h5 Nxh5??**

Black allows a standard sacrificial combination. He had to try 11...Bxh6 12.Qxh6 Ng4 evicting the queen and retaining some of his advantage, though the game is now titling toward "unclear."



**12.Rxh5!**

Now there is no saving the game.

**12...e5 13.Bxg7 gxh5 14.Qh6 Re8  
15.Bxh7# 1-0**

*McGrew - Y (1977)*

ICC 1 0, August 2003

**1.d4 Nf6 2.e4 Nxe4 3.Nc3 Nxc3  
4.bxc3 d5**

Once again I am a pawn down for nothing – and against the same opponent! Now I develop rapidly to try to make the best of a botched opening.

**5.Bd3**

White defers Nf3 to avoid (if possible) the pin. Fortunately, Bd3 is a very good developing move that he can make while waiting to see where Black puts his pieces.

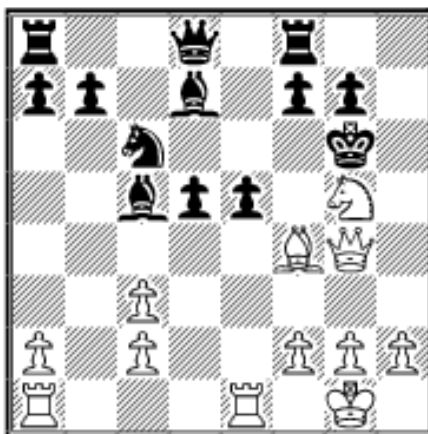
**5...e6 6.Bf4 c5 7.dxc5 Nc6 8.Nf3 Bxc5 9.0-0 Bd7**

This looks almost irrelevant.

**10.Re1 0-0?**

A serious piece of carelessness.

**11.Bxh7+! Kxh7 12.Ng5+ Kg6 13.Qg4! e5**



**14.Ne6+! Kf6 15.Bg5+! Kg6  
16.Be7+ Kh6 17.Qg5+ It's mate  
next move. 1-0**

*McGrew - Z (2163)*

ICC 1 0, March 2004

**1.d4 Nf6 2.e4 Nxe4 3.Nc3 Nf6  
4.Bd3 d6 5.Bf4 Nbd7 6.Qd2 g6**

This looks dubious. White is all lined up for the St. George Swap on

h6.

**7.0-0-0 c6 8.Re1 Qc7**

Black seems to realize that a fianchetto would be injudicious, so he delays that bishop move and tries to get something going on the queenside. But this gives White a chance to mobilize every piece.

**9.Nf3 a6**

Slow. Really slow.

**10.d5 c5 11.Ne4 Nxe4 12.Bxe4 Bg7 13.h4?**

Irresolute! White forgets his original intention. 13.Bh6! would be better right away.

**13...h5?**

Black returns the favor. 13...f5! would give Black a commanding advantage since the poor bishop gets driven from pillar to post, e.g. 14.Bd3 c4 and White is ducking blows.

**14.Bg5 Bf6 15.Qd3 b5**

Black tries to jump-start his queenside attack. But now something delightful happens.

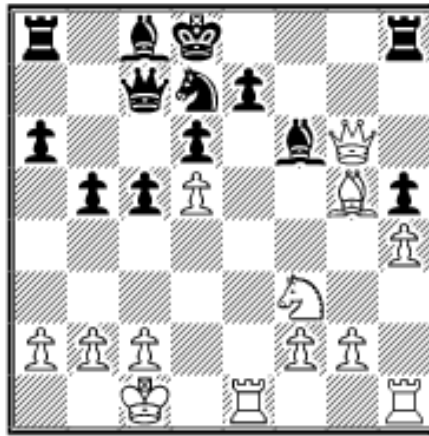
**16.Bxg6!**

White is playing on sheer instinct here.

**16...fxg6**

It is very hard to resist a piece in a 1 minute game, particularly when you don't see a mate. According to Deep Fritz 7, 16...c4 is more accurate here. But Mr. Chips still gives the nod to White after 17.Qe4 c3 18.b3 +=.

**17.Qxg6+ Kd8**



17...Kf8 would be met in the same way.

**18.Rxe7!**

This second sacrifice is the real killer.

**18...Bxe7**

The least of evils. 18...Kxe7  
19.Re1+ leaves Black in a sorry

state.

**19.Bxe7+ Kxe7 20.Re1+?!**

Instinct sometimes delivers a second-best move. 20.Qg7+! is much more efficient.

**20...Kf8??**

Black falls on his sword. He had to try 20...Ne5

**21.Re8# 1-0**

*McGrew - W (1782)*  
ICC 1 0, March 2004

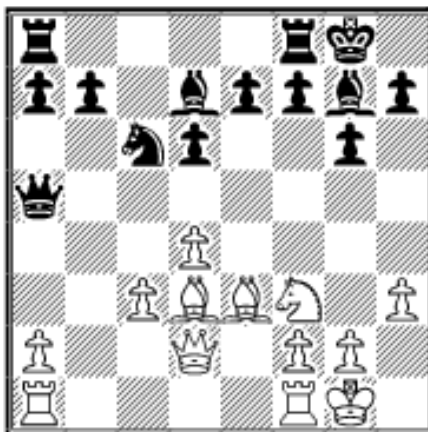
**1.d4 Nf6 2.e4 Nxe4 3.Nc3 Nxc3 4.bxc3 g6 5.Bd3 Bg7 6.Be3 c5**

This is a sensible plan, trying to soften up the long diagonal for the bishop.

**7.Qd2 cxd4 8.cxd4 Nc6 9.c3**

Whatever it takes to stabilize the center.

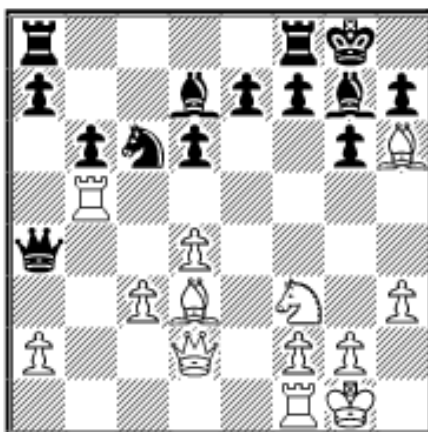
**9...Qa5 10.Nf3 d6 11.h3 0-0 12.0-0 Bd7**



**13.Rab1**

Don't laugh (too hard). Spassky did something coffeehouse like this in one of his match games against Korchnoi ages ago, and it very nearly worked.

**13...b6 14.Rb5 Qa4 15.Bh6** (see next diagram)



**15...Rac8**

You can see White's idea in a line like 15...Bxh6 16.Qxh6 f6 17.Bxg6! hxg6 18.Qxg6+ Kh8 19.Rh5# Hey, that extra rook comes in handy!

**16.Qg5?**

But this just gets in the rook's way. With a few seconds to think it over, I might have tried 16.Rh5! Now 16...gxh5?? 17.Qg5 would make White very happy, but on other moves White can swap on g7 and play to invade with his queen at h6.

16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.Rh5! also comes into consideration, e.g. 17...gxh5? 18.Qg5+ Kh8 19.Qxh5! f5 20.Ng5! and White mates in two.

**16...Na5 17.Rb4 Qxa2 18.Qh4 Rxc3 19.Bb1 Qe6??**

Ahh, the fortunes of war! Black's queen drops on the one square where she is most useful to White. Who says backgammon is the cruelest game?



**20.Bxg7 Kxg7**

20...Rxf3 21.Bxf8 is also hopeless.

**21.Ng5!**

Oops! (Or was that “omigosh”?)

**21...Qf5 22.Qxh7+ Kf6 23.Bxf5 Bxf5 24.d5**

A little joke.

**24...Kxg5 25.Qh4# 1-0**

So that rook came in handy after all!

In the next game, Black tries an unusual setup.

**McGrew - V (2151)**

ICC 1 0, April 2004

**1.d4 Nf6 2.e4 Nxe4 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bd3 c5 5.d5 e5**

So we have a strange Benoni-like position where White has a tempo for his e-pawn.

**6.f4**

I'm just trying to open lines as fast as I can!

**6...Bd6**



**7.fxe5**

Deep Fritz 7, my post-mortem analysis partner for my online games, recommends 7.Nf3 here. Actually, Fritz thinks White has adequate compensation here! One of the more interesting lines runs 7...exf4 8.Qe2+ and now Fritz says Black must move his king, since 8...Qe7 9.Nb5! actually wins material here, e.g. 9...Kd8 10.Qxe7+

Kxe7 (10...Bxe7 11.d6) 11.Kd1! and Black has big trouble meeting the coming Re1+.

**7...Bxe5 8.Nf3**

Now Fritz thinks Black is better, though only by about half a pawn.

**8...Bxc3+ 9.bxc3 0-0?!**

Giving White the king's forwarding address. If Black was going to be greedy, it would have been preferable to play 9...Nxd5 on this turn. Black has to soak up some heat after 10.0-0, but two pawns is a lot of material.

**10.0-0 Nxd5??**

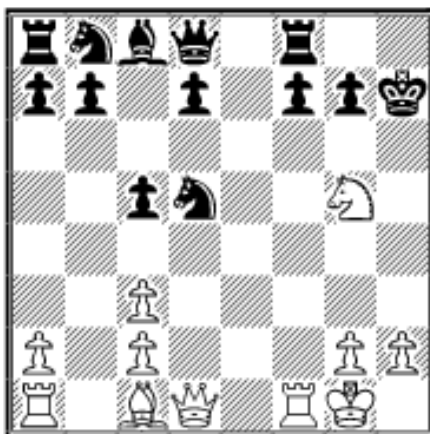
But this bit of gluttony is going too far. Black needed to play 10...d6 here, though I optimistically think I might have made something out of White's position anyway.

**11.Bxh7+!**

Of course. The conditions for a Greek Gift are perfect.

**11...Kxh7**

There is no point in declining. 11...Kh8 12.Qxd5 is worthless for Black.

**12.Ng5+****12...Kg8**

12...Kg6 is in some ways the toughest defense. But since White can immediately regain the piece with 13.Qxd5 he should have little to fear. This impression is reinforced by an examination of some concrete continuations: 13...f5 (13...d6 14.Nxf7!+- is very, very convincing) 14.Qd6+ Rf6 (14...Kh5 15.g4+! Kxg4 (15...fxg4 16.Rxf8 doesn't require any further analysis.) 16.Qg3+ (Yes, I know, but I like to do these things with checks whenever possible.) 16...Kh5 17.Qh3+ Kg6 18.Qh7+ Kf6 19.Qxf5+ Ke7 20.Qe5#) 15.Qg3! Qh8 16.Ne6+ and White picks up the rook in the corner.

**13.Qh5 Nf6**

Ordinarily this would be a show-stopper, completely refuting the Greek

Gift sacrifice. But here the f-file is open, so ...

**14.Rxf6!** Black resigns **1-0**

*McGrew - U (1928)*

ICC 1 0, April 2004

**1.d4 Nf6 2.e4 Nxe4 3.Nc3 Nxc3 4.bxc3 d5 5.Bd3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.Qd2 0-0 8.Bh6 c5**

Officially Black is still doing fine. But White's moves are all automatic here – he really has nothing else that he can do – whereas Black has to sweat it out and make decisions.

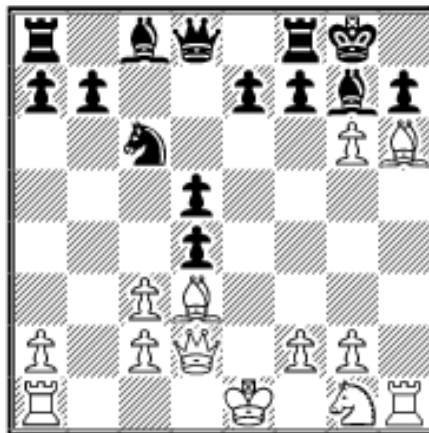
**9.h4 Nc6**

Slipping. 9...c4 10.Be2 Bxh6 11.Qxh6 Qb6 is still better for Black.

**10.h5 cxd4**

Slipping a bit more...

**11.hxg6**



White simply ignores what is happening in the center and plows ahead.

**11...fxg6**

11...dxc3 gets mated in five:  
 12.gxh7+! Kh8 13.Bxg7+ Kxg7  
 14.h8Q+! This tactic is worth remembering. 14...Rxh8 15.Qg5+ Kf8 16.Rxh8#

11...hxg6 is better, according to Deep Fritz 7. But who wants to play the Black position after 12.Bxg7 Kxg7 13.Qh6+ Kf6 ...?

**12.Bxg7 Kxg7 13.Qh6+ Kf6 14.Qxh7 Bf5**



15.Bxf5 gxf5??

15...Kxf5 leaves the game up for grabs. But again, who plays like this in a bullet game?

16.Rh6+ Ke5 17.Nf3+ Ke4  
18.Rh4# 1-0

As I was putting the finishing touches on this article, my 11 year old daughter leaned over my

shoulder to watch some of the games on the laptop. Seeing White's opening moves, she asked with healthy skepticism whether I was planning on teaching this to her for tournament play. I assured her that I was not. "Good," she said. "This doesn't deserve to be called an opening at all." But then, after a pause, a note of curiosity crept into her voice. "If this is such a lousy opening, how come you keep winning these games ...?"

I figure there's hope for her.

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