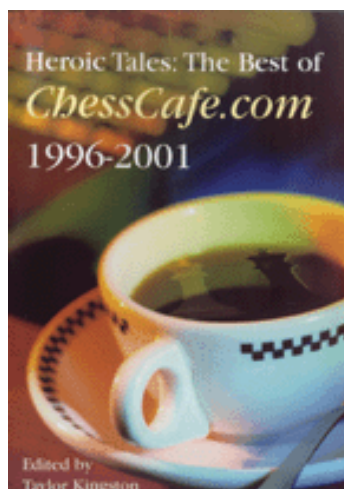


The Gambit Cartel

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The Bishop's Gambit

One of the beauties of the information age is the availability of ... well ... information. Time was when you'd be lucky to find half a dozen games in your favorite weird sideline, and that only after thumbing through many dog-eared volumes. Now all you have to do is to head over to Mark Crowther's weekly download site or pull up the ChessBase online database and you have at your fingertips a magnificent wealth of information such as the World Champions of the Botvinnik era could only dream of.

As I was silently thanking Mark for a decade's labor (and silently downloading the free files from his site for the end of 2004), it occurred to me that it might be useful to have a look at some gambits from the year past. Since the several-time Michigan Women's Champion cuts a wide swath with the Bishop's Gambit, and since I was annotating several of her games for our state magazine, it seemed a natural place to begin. (I also looked at some useful anti-Sicilian lines ... but more about those in another column.)

The Bishop's Gambit is one of the oldest chess openings on record, showing up in the writings of Polerio around 1600 – roughly the same time at which Galileo was supposedly dropping objects off of the Tower of Pisa. (Which he almost certainly didn't, though the Flemish engineer Simon Stevin did something like that, repeating an experiment done over a millenium earlier by John Philoponus. But I digress ...)

McDonnell used it repeatedly and unsuccessfully in his long match with la Bourdonnais, and Adolf Anderssen did well on both sides of the opening, using it to win the "Immortal Partie" against Lionel Kieseritzky. Bobby Fischer used it briefly in the 1960's, and the Polgar sisters – particularly Judit – used it in the late 1980's when Judit's rating was shooting up from a mere 2300 to the upper 2500's in the space of a year or so. Several top players (Morozevich, Ivanchuk, Short) use it as an occasional weapon. And a quick look through a good recent database reveals a number of players in the 2400+ range who trot it out regularly and one (H. Jonkman) who seems to play nothing else.

Here is a brief survey of some of the most interesting games of 2004 in this swashbuckling opening from the Romantic era of chess.

Pridorozhni, A (2493) - Piot, O (2245)

20th Open Cappelle la Grande, 05.03.2004

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Bc4 Nf6

The most common response, though we will see others below.

4.Nc3

If 4.e5 d5 is the usual prescription, taking advantage of the exposure of the bishop.

4...c6

With this move we transpose into Turner-Howell, which we'll consider below. But the two games now diverge.

5.e5 d5 6.Be2!?

This is a very interesting decision. 6.exf6 concedes the bishop pair. After 6...dxc4 White has some difficulty finding a good plan. For example, it does not work to simplify and play against Black's pawns: 7.fxg7 Qh4+ 8.g3 Qe7+ (8...fxg3! may also work: 9.Qe2+ Be6 10.gxf8Q+ Kxf8 and White is in huge trouble.) 9.Qe2 Bxg7 and the bishop pair looks like a genuine asset, e.g. 10.Qxe7+ Kxe7 11.gxf4 Bf5+

6...Ne4 7.Nf3 Bc5

This apparently silly move actually has a sane point. Black is luring the white d-pawn forward so that he can pin the knight at c3.

8.d4 Bb4

The position now bears comparison to one of the most important lines of the Vienna Gambit, 1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.f4 d5 4.fxe5 Nxe4 5.Nf3 Bc5 6.d4 Bb4. Black's basic strategic aims are very similar in the two lines.

9.Bd2 Qa5

Not the only reasonable move. 9...c5!? is playable, and 9...Nxd2 10.Qxd2 g5 is a completely different approach to the position that looks worthy of some analysis, though I'd be a little worried about playing like this without preparation.

10.Nxe4 dxe4 11.Ng5

**11...e3?!**

This move is superficially attractive, but in hindsight it looks premature here. 11...Bxd2+ looks like a much more reasonable way to simplify things. After 12.Qxd2 Qxd2+ 13.Kxd2 e3+ 14.Ke1 f6 15.exf6 gxf6 16.Nh3 Bxh3 17.gxh3 Rg8 18.Rf1 Nd7 19.Rxf4 Black will end up a pawn down, but as White's h-pawns are doubled this hardly

matters. I think I'd rather be black here.

12.Bxb4 Qxb4+ 13.c3 Qe7

Having provoked the exchange, perhaps with the idea of snatching a pawn on b2, Black pulls back from the brink. 13...Qxb2 is simply too greedy for a player with an uncastled king: 14.0-0 Qxc3 15.Ne4 Qa5 16.Nd6+ Ke7 17.Bg4 Nd7 18.Rxf4 and White calls all of the shots.

14.h4 Bf5

It still makes sense to kick the knight with 14...f6, though after 15.exf6 Qxf6 16.Bd3 h6 17.Ne4 White could claim reasonable compensation for his pawn.

15.Bc4 Bg6?

This relinquishes a very important diagonal ...

16.Qg4!

... which White promptly seizes. The threat of a check at c8 is only one of his points here.

16...h6?

One of the facts I try to drill into my students is that one must always calculate the consequences of the forcing sequences immediately available to both sides. Here Black, who from his rating is surely strong enough to have seen what was coming, apparently didn't calculate before reaching out to brush away the knight.

17.Bxf7+! Bxf7 18.Qc8+ Qd8 19.Qxd8+

TWIC gives the clearly erroneous 19.Nxf7 1-0

19...Kxd8 20.Nxf7+ 1-0

The knight cannot even be trapped, so Black hasn't even a bad excuse for continuing the game.

Our next game is a must-see: a 2700 level GM taking out a solid 2600 player with this gambit.

Ivanchuk, V (2716) - Nikolic, P (2648)

5th IECC Playoff Final Antalya TUR (1), 30.05.2004

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Bc4 Qh4+

This check must have been one of the first defensive ideas explored in the Bishop's Gambit. Emmanuel Lasker recommended it for black in *Common Sense in Chess*, and even Fred Reinfeld, who revised the openings analysis for the 1946 edition (which practically no one has – the Dover edition on your shelf is a reprint of the 1917 edition), retains 3...Qh4+ as the recommended line.

4.Kf1

The king is not nearly as exposed here as he would be on e2, and Black's queen may herself be harassed by Nf3. In fact, Ivanchuk achieves a powerful position here without a great deal of difficulty.

4...d6

Here Lasker (and Reinfeld) both recommend 4...d5 Bxd5 5.g5. Oddly, I can find hardly any games in this formerly popular line between 1929 and 1989. But then van den Doel won a droll game with it (by transposition: 3...d5 4.Bxd5 Qh4+ etc.) in 18 moves at Cappelle la Grande 2001. Someone ought to investigate this ...

5.d4 Be6 6.Qd3 Nf6 7.Nf3

The anticipated strike at the queen.

7...Qg4 8.Nc3 Be7 9.h3 Qg6 10.Bxf4



I have to admit that White's centralization here is impressive. Ivanchuk is also setting a little trap – at this level of play, really more of a joke for the players to share, though such a joke could easily turn fatal for someone unable to evaluate the end of a tactical sequence accurately.

10...0-0

Nikolic politely declines the bait. 10...Bxc4 11.Qxc4 Nxe4? looks merely messy at first glance, but after 12.Qxc7! Black has no way to recover his balance.

11.Re1

Black's position could not be said to be bad, but because of White's grip on the center it is difficult for him to find an effective plan. He decides to go shopping for the perfect exchange of minor pieces, but meanwhile his queenside is sleeping.

11...Nh5 12.Bh2 Ng3+?!

In hindsight this looks like the turning point of the game.

13.Bxg3 Qxg3 14.Ne2! Qg6 15.Nf4

White has repositioned his knight to a very effective square without any loss of time.

15...Qh6 16.g3

We now come to a puzzling set of moves where White allows Black to swap on c4 and Black declines to do it. I had thought that the idea was 16.Nxe6 fxe6 17.Qb3. But perhaps Chucky saw what Deep Fritz 7 suggests: after 17...Nc6 18.Bxe6+ Kh8 White's advantage is evaporating because Black threatens to take on d4.

16...Nd7 17.Kg2 Nb6?

But this is pretty clearly an error. 17...Bxc4 18.Qxc4 c6 still looks like a reasonable way for Black to hold the balance, though White's position is a bit more pleasant to play.

18.Bxe6 fxe6 19.Rhf1

19.Qb3 would provoke the same exchange sacrifice we see in the game.

19...c5 20.d5 Rxf4

This doesn't quite work, but it is instructive for us lesser mortals to see even the near misses of the super-GMs because it teaches us to consider ideas we might never have thought of. Black was under pressure in any event since White was threatening to sink a knight into e6, so it is hard to suggest really good alternatives.

21.gxf4 Qxf4 22.dxe6 Rf8 23.b4!?

When someone figures out how super-grandmasters come up with moves like this, please let me know! Until then, my best guess is that it is intended to clear the d4-square, e.g. 23...cxb4 24.Nd4 when the f-file is very useful and the knight has bright prospects on f5.

23...Rf6 24.Qb5 Rxe6 25.bxc5 Bh4?

Now the roof caves in. 25...dxc5 26.Qe8+ (26.Nd4!? Qg5+ 27.Kh1 Qh5 28.Qb3 c4 29.Qf3 +/-) 26...Qf8 27.Qxf8+ Bxf8 28.e5 looks like a longish but winning ending.

26.Nxh4 Qxh4 27.Qb3

Neatly pinning the rook and defending h3 laterally.

27...d5 28.cxb6 1-0

In our next game, White wins impressively – but he gets some help from his opponent along the way.

Zakarian, D (2328) - Mina, N (2195)

Aegean Open (6), 17.07.2004

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Nc3 Bb4!?

This position looks like a Schliemann Ruy Lopez with colors reversed. Since I like the Schliemann, I'm a little worried about black here. I suppose Black's idea will be to make something of the exposure of the bishop on c4.

5.e5 d5 6.exd6

I think White should consider 6.Bb5+!/? here. One point is that the standard, almost Pavlovian response 6...c6 puts Black in an awkward dilemma after 7.exf6 since 7...cxb5 leaves Black with ridiculously

damaged pawns, though he does have all eight of them (for the moment).

6...Qxd6 7.d4 0-0

7...Ne4! looks like a stronger (and sharper) alternative, directed (believe it or not) against the weak pawn on g2. It is entirely possible that White's kingside will evaporate, e.g. 8.Nge2 Qc6 9.Qd3 Nd6 10.Bb3 Qxg2 11.Rg1 Qxh2. I'm not saying the position is without its "messy" element, but I strongly suspect Black isn't worse.

8.Nge2 Nh5?!

On just about every level I dislike this move. Deep Fritz advises the improbable looking 8...Bxc3+ 9.bxc3 Bh3!? The more I look at this, the better it looks, so perhaps Black really can get away with it! The principal point is that 10.gxh3 Qc6 wins back the piece and leaves White's king singularly short of pawn cover. Even 8...f3 9.gxf3 Re8 has its points. Would you want to be white here?

9.0-0 Bg4 10.Qd3 g5

With this move – which Tarrasch termed “the suicide move” in front of one's castled king – Black takes the defense of the pawn at f4 from a foible into an obsession.

11.Nd5 Ba5 12.h3 Be6 13.Qf3 Ng7 14.Nexf4!?

A very gutsy sac.

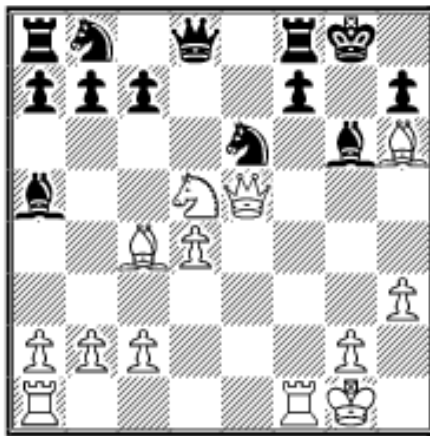
14...gxf4 15.Bxf4 Qd8 16.Qg3 Bf5

Black hopes to cover the g-file with this bishop, but things don't work out as planned ... 16...Kh8 was probably forced, but after 17.Be5 Rg8 18.Nf6! White's pieces are flowing well and Black lacks any semblance of coordination.

17.Bh6! Bg6 18.Qe5!

Oh no!

18...Ne6



19.Nf6+

Alternatively, 19.Ne7+ Qxe7
20.Bxe6 fxe6 21.Qxe6+!
would have been a very nice finish.

**19...Kh8 20.Bxe6 Nc6 21.Bg7+
Kxg7 22.Ne8+ Kh6 23.Qg7+ Kh5
24.Bg4+ 1-0**

After three white wins, readers might begin to wonder whether I am “selling” this gambit. For balance, here is a game that readers facing the Bishop’s Gambit with black might well take for a model.

Turner, J - Howell, D (2304)

Welsh International Newport WLS (3), 09.01.2004

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Bc4 c6!

Pushing this pawn, either this move or next, is perhaps the best and certainly one of the sharpest responses at Black’s disposal. In a nutshell, Black is arguing that White’s bishop will be exposed on c4, and he is prepared to accept an isolated d-pawn for the privilege of biffing the bishop on the nose. More than a hundred years ago Wilhelm Steinitz took out a patent on 3...Ne7. The main idea is to put the knight on g6, controlling f4 and leaving open the possibility of ...Qh4+. A secondary idea is to prepare ...c6 and ...d5 without exposing the knight to the e5 push (though as we shall see, allowing this is not necessarily so bad for Black). The line suffered a reversal in the game Fischer-Minic, Vinkovci 1968 when Fischer sacrificed the exchange and broke through convincingly on f7. But recently Fedorchuk, Karpov and Sokolov have been seen using it.

4.Nc3

White reasserts some control over d5, but Black can match him there.

4...Nf6

Momentarily transposing into the position we saw in Pridorozhni-Piot, where White tried 5.e5.

5.Qe2

White’s play has tactical point. Putting the queen on e2 creates trouble for Black’s planned ...d5 push. The alternative 5.Qf3 hasn’t been seen much since it was discovered that 5...d5 6.exd5 Bd6 is a good gambit

line for Black.

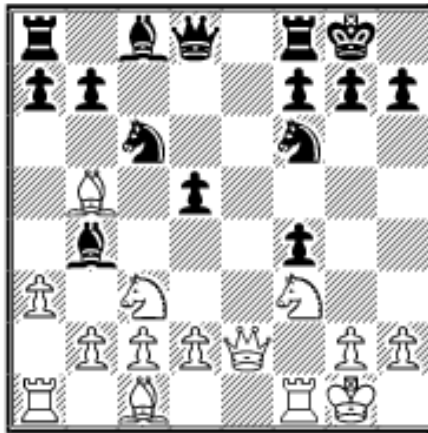
5...Bb4

Black decides simply to get the pieces out and castle before playing ...d5.

6.Nf3 0-0 7.0-0 d5

All according to the master plan.

8.exd5 cxd5 9.Bb5 Nc6 10.a3



10...Re8!

In *Masters of the Chess Board*, Richard Réti tells a story about a consultation game he played with Capablanca where the great Cuban refused to play a simple hit like this. Morphy, Réti notes, would unhesitatingly have played the rook move. Whatever the truth about that Capablanca game, I'll side with Morphy here. Ninety-nine times out of 100 a move like ...Re8 is not only obvious but very strong.

11.Qd3

There is no good alternative position for the queen. But now White's remaining queenside pieces will be buried because of his inability to move his d-pawn.

11...Bc5+ 12.Kh1



12...g6!?

This move is a good example of what I like to call "Rule of Two" thinking. If you have difficulty formulating plans, it may be because you are thinking too much about what your opponent might do. One way to break through this problem is to imagine that you have two moves in a row and find something attractive to do with them. You can

then consider the first of those two moves to be one of your candidates. Of course, having done this, you have to come back to earth and analyze the consequences in the ordinary way, giving your opponent a chance to move. But the technique, if practiced against opponents of one's own strength, does aid both experienced and improving players in coming up with decent short range plans. Here, Black's "Rule of Two" fantasy move is 13...Bf5 trapping White's queen in mid-board.

13.Re1 Rxe1+ 14.Nxe1 Ng4!

Another (if obvious) Rule of Two application. But this is not just a cheapo: the knight is useful on g4 apart from its ability to fork at f2.

15.Qxd5 Qe7!

Black's moves have a wonderful multi-purpose feel to them. Here he defends the bishop on c5 and incidentally finds an excellent square for his queen, threatening a back rank mate.

16.Be2 Be6!

White's queen is hounded mercilessly. 17.Qe4 allows that dreadful fork on f2 – but where else is there to go?

17.Qf3

Unfortunately, the queen blocks a square desperately needed by the knight on e1.

17...Qh4 0-1

Proving my point from move 14. White, forked on h2 and e1, throws in the towel.



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