

The Gambit Cartel

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Bennett's Temptation

One of the nicest benefits of online chess playing sites is the opportunity to make the acquaintance of folks one would otherwise never have met. It is particularly gratifying when readers submit their own gambit ideas for our delectation, as Charlie Gold did a few months ago. This month another reader is willing to admit that he is an inveterate (and successful!) gambiteer.

Randy Bennett has been a chess enthusiast since before the first Fischer-Spassky match. But he has never played tournament chess; in his own words, this makes him an “experienced novice.” For Randy, online chess is the perfect outlet – a place where he can compete without pressure and experiment without risking anything more than a few rating points.

Not that he is a stranger to competition and pressure. Randy was a member of the Canadian International Bridge Team in 1974 (2nd place in the Canadian Open Pairs Championship 1974). He also has the Canadian Team Championship (1990) and the Canadian Open Pairs Championship (1997) to his credit. But in the mid 1990’s he retired from bridge and renewed his interest in chess, which was just then becoming readily accessible on the Internet. At first he played the “normal” 1.e4 e5 openings with either side and the Queen’s Gambit Declined for Black. But for a change of pace he decided to spice up his openings with gambits on both sides.

Our story starts a few years ago when Randy was experimenting with the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit. Yes, I know, it’s hard to find GM-level advocates of the BDG (other than Velimirovic), but it is pretty much the perfect weapon for an amateur who wants to take up attacking chess for the sheer fun of it. In the course of experimentation and refinement – Randy goes over his games with Fritz after they’re done to look for improvements – he stumbled upon something truly startling.

Bennett,R - Bendeck,J

World Chess Network, 12.01.2004

1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.f3 exf3 5.Nxf3 Bg4

This pin is Teichmann's Defense to the BDG. It is the most popular defense in actual play – not, I think, because Black has searched through databases looking for a defense to the BDG but rather because it is a natural developing move that prepares Black to follow one of the great rules of thumb: exchange pieces when you are ahead in material.

6.h3

And yet White prompts that exchange. The reason is that Black's b-pawn is weak and makes a natural target. After 6...Bxf3 7.Qxf3 Black must take time out for 7...c6, when White can defend the d-pawn with 8.Be3 or 8.Qf2 or even sacrifice it with 8.g4!?, the brazen Seidel-Hall Attack. (It is not entirely accidental that this is sometimes called the Cider Hall Attack.)

Midwest master Charles Diebert experimented with 6.Qd3!? when he first took up the BDG. The subtle point is that White leaves h3 free for the queen in some lines, e.g. 6...c6 7.Ne5 Bh5 8.Qh3!? e6 9.Be3 Be7(?) 10.g4 Bg6 11.Nxg6 when Black is compelled to break up his pawns with 11...fxg6, giving White good compensation for his pawn. The unsubtle point is that White is hoping for Qb5+ when the weak b7-pawn falls off.

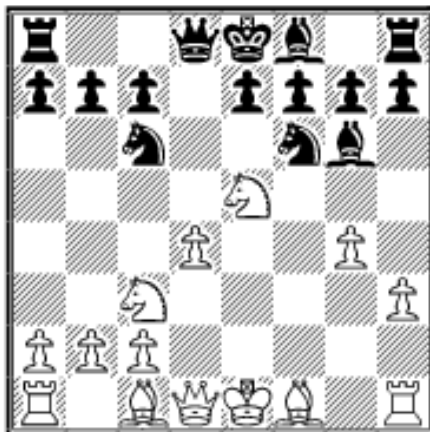
6...Bh5

Aware of the weakness of b7, Black backs up. Now play often transposes into lines similar to the Gunderam Defense (5...Bf5).

7.g4 Bg6 8.Ne5

In one of the books in the German BDG series there is a story about some BDG fans who cornered Korchnoi after a simul to show him some of their lines. Viktor the Terrible tried out this very line, but after a few more moves he shook his head, dissatisfied with Black's position. Black is optically solid and has a pawn, so if the arch materialist Korchnoi isn't happy with the position then there probably is something wrong with it!

8...Nc6?!



This is a key position. Black's last move is not very strong, and White can obtain a small advantage right away here with 9.Bb5 Qd6 10.Qf3 ganging up on the knight at c6. With a += edge defined, we can close out this line and move on. Right?

Wrong – this is where things start getting psychologically interesting. For one thing, Black's move is amazingly common at the amateur

level. Randy has encountered it at least eight times so far. For another thing, Black has the psychological sense that he is taking over the initiative with this developing move. Perhaps he can be encouraged to do something rash ...?

9.Qf3!??

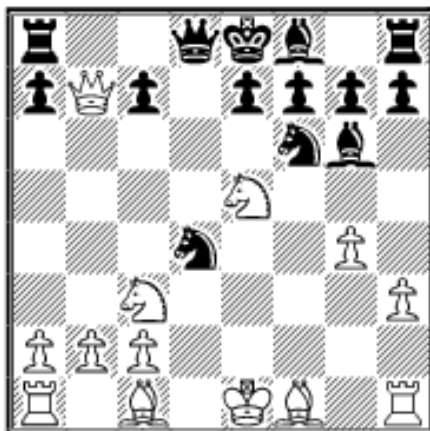
This is Bennett's innovation, originally a fingerslip in a related position. It looks as though White has just missed the knight fork at d4 and the subsequent fork at c2.

When Randy showed the line to Tom Purser, the Godfather of the BDG in the United States, Tom dubbed it "Bennett's Temptation" and began to use it in his own games. The name is perfect, for the temptation to take the pawn(s) is just about overwhelming.

9...Nxd4

This is almost certainly the right move. But now that weak pawn on b7 comes back to haunt Black.

10.Qxb7



Here is the really vital position in Bennett's Temptation. Black's rook is attacked but also defended. Surely nothing ill can come of making a capture – with check! – on c2? After all, if Black needs to do any repair work on his position he should be able to do it just as well after the check as before.

10...Nxc2+

Falling into the trap. As Randy explained it to me in an email note,

White's key idea now is to walk his king to g3(!), sacrificing the knight on e5 with a light heart. If you do not believe, play on!

11.Kf2 Qd4+ 12.Kg3! Qxe5+

Somewhere along the line Black has missed his last chance to get off the conveyer belt to doom. We'll return to this position in a moment to search for an improvement.

13.Bf4!

Suddenly White is clearly winning. The checks have run out and Black's rook and queen are both hanging. Black thrashes around for another move or two.

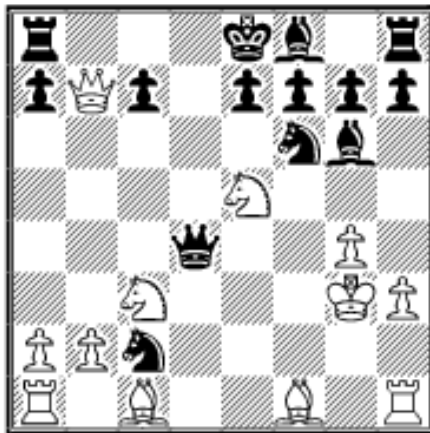
13...Ne4+ 14.Nxe4 Qxe4

There is no salvation in 14...Bxe4 15.Bb5+! when Black cannot step to the d-file without letting White's rooks join the attack. A game Bennett-Simonsen, World Chess Network 2004, concluded 15... Qxb5 16.Qxb5+ c6 17.Qa4 f5 18.gxf5 Bd5 19.Qxc2 1-0

15.Bb5+! 1-0

Vengeance is swift: 15...Kd8 allows 16.Bxc7# Black can only delay this for a few moves but cannot actually stop mate. In a game on the Playchess server in early 2005 one of Randy's opponents demanded to be shown: 15...c6 16.Bxc6+ Qxc6 17.Qxc6+ Kd8 18.Rhd1+ 1-0.

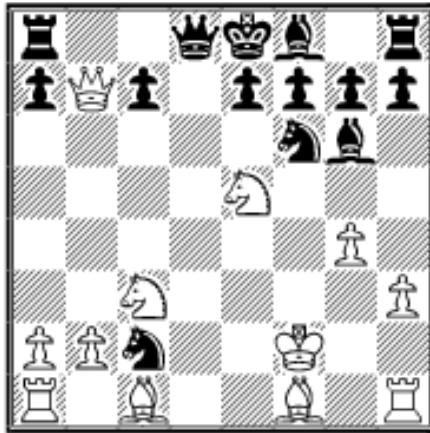
Let's rewind and have a look at the position after **1.d4 d5 2.e4 Nf6 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.f3 exf3 5.Nxf3 Bg4 6.h3 Bh5 7.g4 Bg6 8.Ne5 Nc6 9.Qf3 Nxd4 10.Qxb7 Nxc2+ 11.Kf2 Qd4+ 12.Kg3**



Black is clearly lost after 12...Qxe5+ 13.Bf4, so it is worth asking if there are improvements here. Since White threatens various mates beginning with moves like 13.Qxa8+ or 13.Bb5+, Black cannot afford a slack move here. The only other check that is remotely plausible, however, is **12...Ne4+**. White simply takes the knight with **13.Nxe4**, and now Black is faced with the same dilemma again. If he tries 13...Qxe5 then 14.Bf4 reaches the main line of the game above by transposition. But other moves fall prey to one of the forced mates White is waiting to deliver. If there is a refutation, or even a decent

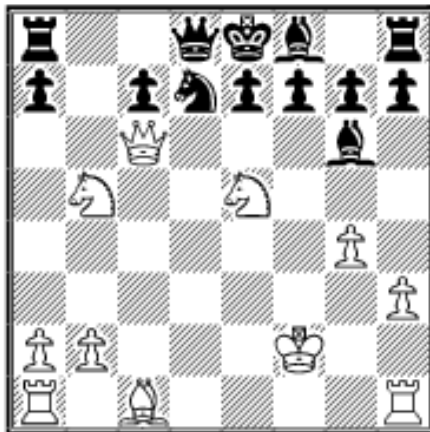
defense, it will have to come earlier.

Let's rewind one full move to the position after **1.d4 d5 2.e4 Nf6 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.f3 exf3 5.Nxf3 Bg4 6.h3 Bh5 7.g4 Bg6 8.Ne5 Nc6 9.Qf3 Nxd4 10.Qxb7 Nxc2+ 11.Kf2**



Deep Fritz 7 at 10 ply thinks this is equal for Black, but *only* in the variation with 11...Qd4+ – the variation that we have just seen dooms Black. At 13 ply the light dawns, and at 15 ply Fritz realizes that Black is giving up his queen to stop mate. The alternatives are not impressive: 11...Ne4+ can be met by 12.Kf3 or, even more simply, by 12.Nxe4 when Black is once again forced back into the ...Qd4+ lines. If

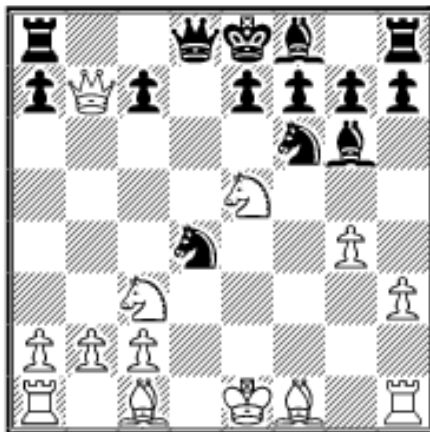
Black tries to retrieve his wayward knight with **11...Nd4**, White has a variety of ways of landing the whole fish, including **12.Bb5+! Nxb5 13.Qc6+! Nd7 14.Nxb5** (see next diagram) when Black's position could scarcely be more horrible.



White can meet 14...Rc8 with 15.Rd1, and virtually anything else runs into 15.Nxc7+ winning Black's queen.

Our search for a decent defense must therefore begin at least as far back as Black's 10th move, where he snaps at the oh-so-tempting bait on c2. After **1.d4 d5 2.e4 Nf6 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.f3 exf3 5.Nxf3 Bg4 6.h3**

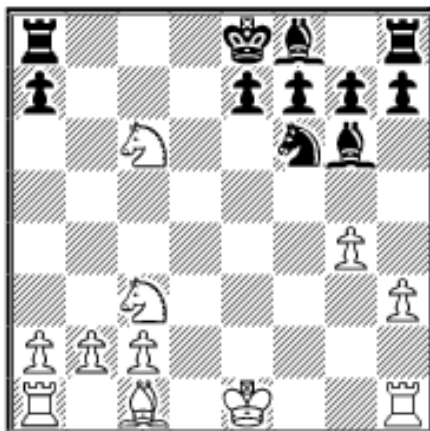
Bh5 7.g4 Bg6 8.Ne5 Nc6 9.Qf3 Nxd4 10.Qxb7, (see next diagram) what alternatives are there?



White's most pressing immediate threat is 11.Bb5+ Nxb5 12.Qc6+ with play similar to the previous line. It makes sense, then, for Black to prevent Bb5+, and one way to do this is **10...c6**. Mindful of Fritz's tendency to give the wrong answer here with insufficient look-ahead, I loaded the position into the Deep Position Analysis function on Fritz 8 and got back the following line:

11.Bg2 Qc8 12.Bxc6+ Nxc6

13.Qxc6+ Qxc6 14.Nxc6 (see next diagram)



Now if Black plays 14...Bxc2, which certainly seems tempting, White has the unusual maneuver 15.Rh2!? Be4 16.Nxe4 Nxe4 17.Re2 Nf6 18.Bf4 when Fritz, at any rate, thinks White is no worse (+ 0.06 at 11 ply). Black just has no luck taking things on the c2-square! But it may be better to leave the bait untouched and try **14...e6**. Fritz goes bonkers here with the strange move 15.g5? for White, which ends up

after a few moves with a decisive advantage for Black. But left to run for a while it finds better alternatives like **15.Rh2!?** when the position is not really very clear. One line runs **15...Ne4 16.Nxe4 Bxe4 17.Nd4 0-0 18.Be3 h5 19.g5 e5 20.Nb3** when Black's bishop pair is offset by the fact that his queenside pawns have gone AWOL.

All things considered, this may be Black's best chance. If we roll back one more full move, to the position after **1.d4 d5 2.e4 Nf6 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.f3 exf3 5.Nxf3 Bg4 6.h3 Bh5 7.g4 Bg6 8.Ne5 Nc6 9.Qf3**, we find that there are no good alternatives to taking the "free" d-pawn.



The problem is that 9...Nxe5 10.dxe5 Nd7 can be met by the promising sacrifice 11.e6! gumming up Black's development. And 9...Nb4 10.Qxb7! Nxc2+ 11.Kf2 Qxd4+ 12.Kg3 looks sort of familiar, doesn't it?

Let us stipulate, for the sake of argument, that 9.Bb5 is objectively a better move than Bennett's Temptation. There is still an argument to be made for Randy's novelty from the most practical of all

standpoints – winning more games. White’s advantage after 9.Bb5 is relatively small, and in a long series of games between approximately evenly matched amateur players it would be surprising if White scored more than, say 65%. Bennett’s Temptation may give Black a *theoretical* advantage if he can find the right moves. But the predictability of Black’s play at amateur level is very high. Randy has sent me numerous games that follow the course of this one for the first 13 moves. He is so accustomed to it now that, with a 5 second increment, it is not at all unusual for his clock to start at 5 minutes and wind up over 6. He is quite literally reeling them in.

Lest anyone should think that they can avoid an ill fate with Black by keeping the d-pawn home, I’ll share here one more of Randy’s games. Black tries to keep the position closed and “hypermodern,” but somehow Randy manages to get an open f-file and come charging down it anyway.

Bennett-Cuaresma

World Chess Network 2005

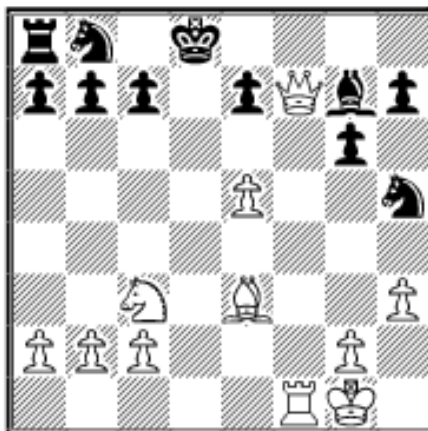
1.d4 Nf6 2.Nc3 g6 3.e4 Bg7?

There is a reason that 3...d6 is the most common move here. Now Black gets driven back.

4.e5 Ng8 5.f4 d6 6.Nf3 Bg4 7.Be3 dxe5 8.fxe5 f6 9.h3 Bxf3 10.Qxf3 fxe5 11.Bc4!

Very energetic!

11...Nf6 12.dxe5 Rf8 13.0-0 Nh5 14.Bf7+ Rxf7 15.Qxf7+ Kd7 16.Rad1+ Kc8 17.Rxd8+ Kxd8



Now the stage is set for a very entertaining mate.

18.Rd1+ Nd7 19.Qg8+ Bf8 20.Qxf8# 1-0

Randy enjoys semi-retirement on the weekends at his cabin in Newfoundland. If it’s wired for the Internet, it’s a safe bet that he’s baiting hooks with pawns back

there. Let the fish beware!



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