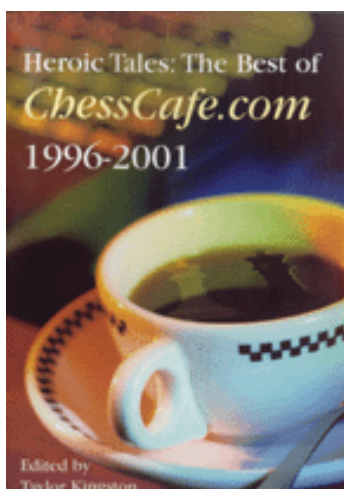


The Gambit Cartel

Tim McGrew



Come to the Dark Side

Every couple of months I get a barrage of emails containing amazing games in bizarre and sometimes nameless openings. Ostensibly the author is my friend Clyde Nakamura. But this month's installment, coinciding with the release of Star Wars, Episode III, has left me speculating that there may be Darker Forces at work.

Clyde specializes in openings that no sane player would touch. One can, for example, find titled players who are willing to give the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit an occasional fling (Lane, Welling and Velimirovic come to mind); this is not risky enough for Clyde, who insists on playing it *with colors reversed*. A recent book by Müller and Voigt demonstrates that the Danish Gambit is alive and well; Clyde is always happy to sacrifice two pawns on a diagonal in the first few moves of the game, but he finds bizarre new ways to do it – say, on the diagonal f4, e3, d2. Hebden and Corbin have scored some recent successes with the Elephant Gambit (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d5!); Nakamura finds this too tame, so he essays 1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 d5!??, which he has named the Khan Gambit in honor of one of his students.

As I play over the games Clyde sends, I almost always go through the same cycle of reactions. First I shake my head in amusement as I see the latest weirdness he has concocted. Then I watch with growing admiration as he mounts an attack, often successfully, from such inauspicious beginnings. And finally I return and scratch my head, wondering if maybe there is something to the opening after all.

No description I could give can do justice to the games, so (with Clyde's permission) I will showcase two of them here – by no means his most extravagant experiments! – that will give you a taste for his uncompromising style. Since we've already introduced the Soller Gambit in this column, I selected a few of his efforts in this line.

First, let's look at a near miss against a powerful computer, a Crafty 19.14 clone running on the ICC.

***duckbreath* (2742) - *Evilone* (2100)**
Internet Chess Club, 2004

1.d4 e5 2.dxe5 f6

The Soller Gambit – a BDG reversed.

3.exf6

Objectively this move is probably White's best, taking the free pawn. But it does give Black exactly what he is looking for. Giving the pawn back with 3.e6?! isn't very strong because, as Stefan Bücker points out in his book *Englund Gambit* (1988), Black has a pleasant choice between 3...dxe6 equalizing or the more ambitious 3...d5!? 4.Nf3 Bxe6 when the position resembles the Langeheinicke Variation of the BDG with colors, of course, reversed.

3...Nxf6 4.Nf3 d5 5.e3 c6

"I like to guard my pawn at d5," Clyde explains. This is more than a mere whim. In the standard BDG Euwe Defense lines, one of Black's chief sources of counterplay is pressure against the white d-pawn. Here Black doesn't have his queen's knight out yet, so the c6-square is free.

6.Bd3 Bd6 7.0-0 0-0 8.c4

White will isolate the d-pawn and put pressure on it. The onus is on Black to whip up a kingside attack before this positional fact becomes the main feature of the game.

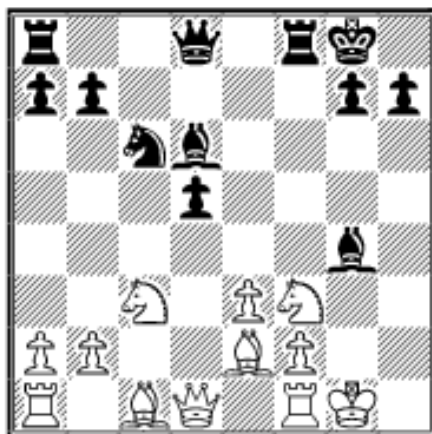
8...Bg4 9.cxd5 cxd5 10.h3 Bh5 11.Nc3 Nc6

Black's idea now is simply 12...Ne5, bringing everything over to the kingside. White decides to break the annoying pin before that can happen.

12.g4 Nxf4

"The moment of truth," Clyde writes. "I decided to sac my N at g4 and go for the attack on the white kingside." But there is more to this combination than the mere sacrifice of a knight!

13.hxf4 Bxf4 14.Be2



14...Rxf3!!

Only this second sac justifies the first. Black is down a full rook (okay, for one pawn), but White now comes under severe pressure.

15.Bxf3 Qh4 16.Re1

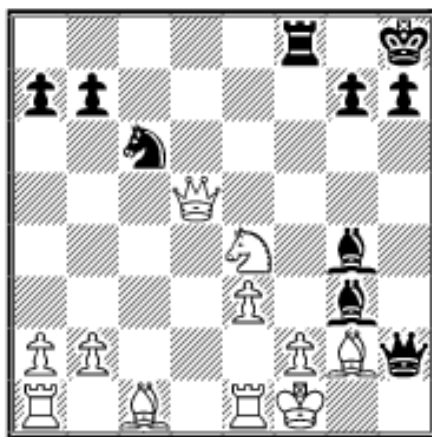
Making some space looks natural. Clyde points out that White could draw (!) with 16.Qxd5+ Kh8

17.Qxd6 Bxf3 18.Qh2 (18.Qg3?? Qh1#) 18...Qg4+ 19.Qg3 Qh5 20.Qh2 Qg4+ etc.

16...Qh2+ 17.Kf1 Rf8

Here Clyde gives the amazing line 17...Bg3 18.Qxd5+ Kh8 19.Nd1 Rf8 20.Bg2 Bxd1 21.f4 Bg4 22.Re2 Rd8 23.Qxd8+ Nxd8 24.Rd2 Bh4 –+, which Fritz8 found.

18.Qxd5+ Kh8 19.Bg2 Bg3 20.Ne4



Here is a truly amazing position. What would you play?

20...Bh3

“Yes,” Clyde wrote in his notes to the game, “I missed the win.” The oversight was forgivable, since the win is not obvious: 20...Bxf2 21.Nxf2 Qg3! 22.Qd2 Ne5 23.a3 Bh3 24.Ke2 Rxf2+ –+, again courtesy of Fritz8. The rest of the

game is an anticlimax as Black’s attack fizzles.

21.Nxg3 Qxg3 22.Re2 Ne5 23.Bxh3 Qxh3+ 24.Qg2 Qh5 25.f4 Ng4 26.Qxb7 Qh3+ 27.Kg1 h5 28.Bd2 Rf6 29.Qg2 1–0

Now for a direct hit:

Sajic Velja (1976) - Evilone (1995)
Playchess, 2005 [A40]

1.d4 e5 2.dxe5 f6 3.exf6 Nxf6 4.Nf3 d5 5.g3

Faced with an unfamiliar opening, White decides on the security of a fianchetto. The game now becomes a sort of Bogoljubow Defense to the BDG with colors reversed.

5...Bd6

An interesting choice. By analogy with the BDG, the bishop would normally go to c5.

6.Bg2 Bg4 7.0-0 Qd7

Black is lining up for a bishop swap on h3.

8.Re1?

White reflexively removes his rook from f1 so as to meet ...Bh3 with Re1. But this reactionary policy does not hinder Black from completing his development and mounting an attack. 8.c4 looks sharper, since after 8...dxc4 9.Ne5! the tactics seem to work in White's favor.

8...0-0 9.c3

Having lost the right moment to play c4, White is reduced to playing optically "nice" moves that do not contribute to an active plan.

9...c6 10.Qb3 Kh8

There is also something to be said for 10...Na6!? intending ...Nc5 hitting the queen and heading for the natural outpost at e4.

11.Bg5 Ne4



Black's development is so harmonious that it is doubtful whether White has any advantage anymore. This is not an accident: it is a matter of Clyde's understanding of these types of positions, knowing where his pieces belong.

12.Be3 Na6!

Here is another example of understanding. Black's queen stands well on d7, so the knight cannot come out that way. Clyde therefore maneuvers the knight into play via a6 and c5.

13.Nbd2 Nac5 14.Bxc5 Nxc5

Black gains time against the white queen, but with the f2-square weakened by White's 8th move I think I would prefer 14...Bxc5! True, White can swap knights off with 15.Nxe4, but after 15... dxe4 White must give back the pawn with 16.Nd4 Bxd4 17.cxd4 Qxd4 =+ lest a worse thing befall him on f2.

15.Qc2 Rae8 16.Nb3 Ne4 17.c4 Bf5!?

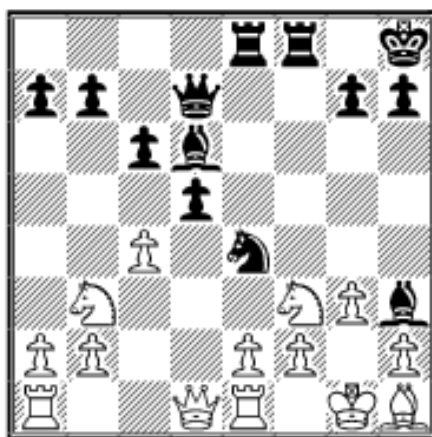
By putting his bishop opposite White's queen, Black creates a practical problem. One threat here is simply ...Nxc3, perhaps after ...Bb4 to drive White's rook to a more awkward square.

18.Qd1?

White blinks. It would be more circumspect to play 18.Nbd4 Bc5 19.cxd5 Qxd5=.

18...Bh3?

Black misses his chance for a clear edge with 18...dxc4 19.Nd2 Nxd2 20.Qxd2 Qe7 or, in this line, 19...Qe7 right away. Fritz 8 likes 18...Bb4 19.cxd5 Bxe1 20.Qxe1 Qxd5 21.Rd1.

19.Bh1?

White returns the favor. 19.cxd5 would leave White much better.

19...Qg4

Who but a Sith would think of a move like this? Most of us would be trying ineffectually to find a way to exploit the weak light squares. Clyde decides that what the position calls for is a cascade of sacrifices on g3, the best-defended point in White's

kingside.

And the crazy thing is, he's right!

20.Qd4

White defends by pinning the knight, but he gets hit with another bolt of blue lightning.

20...Rf4!! 21.e3??

To err is human – as we discovered this month when Kramnik blundered horribly several times in Bulgaria. But it is too late to save the game even with machine-like defensive technique. Fritz momentarily likes 21.Qxa7, but after 21...dxc4 22.Nbd4 Rff8 disaster looms on g3.

21...Rxf3 22.cxd5 Be5?!

This does not throw anything away, but Black need not be coy: 22...Bxg3! closes the subject.

23.Qd1 Ref8

23...Nxg3! is most efficient now.

24.dxc6??



But even a better move would not have saved the game: 24.Bxf3 Rxf3 25.dxc6–+.

24...Nxg3! 25.Bxf3 Ne2+! 0–1

It's mate next move.

As usual, I come away from Clyde's games feeling dazed and confused. The sacrifice *can't* be objectively right. But he makes it look so easy

to get a winning position.

It's enough to make you want to go home and rethink your life.

Postscript

Am I falling under Clyde's influence? Is it too late ...?

Aloe (2503) - McGrew (2443)

Internet Chess Club, 2004

1.d4 e5 2.dxe5 Nc6 3.Nf3 f6 4.exf6 Nxf6 5.c4 Bc5 6.Bg5?

Don't ask – Jedi mind trick.

6...Ne4! 7.Be3 Bxe3 8.fxe3 Nf6 9.Nc3 0–0 10.g3 d6 11.Bg2 Be6 12.b3

**Qe8 13.0-0 Qh5 14.Nd4 Ng4! 15.h3 Nxe3 16.Qd2 Nxf1 17.Rxf1 Bxh3
0-1**

Bigorso (2397) - Tim McGrew (2451)

Internet Chess Club, 2005

**1.d4 e5 2.dxe5 Nc6 3.e4 f6 4.exf6 Nxf6 5.Bd3 Bc5 6.Nf3 d6 7.0-0 0-0
8.h3 Qe8 9.Bg5 Qh5**

9...Nxe4 looks pretty good in hindsight.

10.Bxf6 Rxf6 11.Nbd2? Bxh3! 12.Nh2 Qg6! 0-1



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