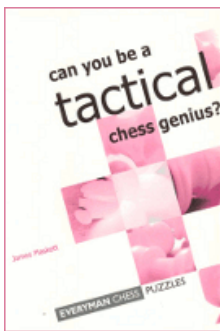




## The Skittles Room



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## The Bxh6 Sacrifice

### Part Two

by Steven B. Dowd

#### The Sacrifice in Specific Openings

#### The Urusov Gambit

One opening in which the Bxh6 sacrifice is often seen is the Urusov Gambit, one of my long-time favorites for White. Back in 1998, in his [October 1998 Kibitzer](#) column, Tim Harding covered the Urusov and some examples of the Bxh6 sacrifice.

**1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Nf6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nf3 Nxe4 5.Qxd4 Nf6 6.Nc3 Be7 7.Bg5 c6 8.0-0-0 d5 9.Rhe1 0-0 10.Qh4**, looking at the superior 10...Bf5, which does not allow the sacrifice, but he still considered probably better for White, and

A) 10...Nbd7 (inferior) 11.Bd3 and Black has hemmed in his queen's bishop. 11...h6?! (risky) 12.Bxh6 gxh6 (12...Ne4? 13 Qg4), a trick that would not be possible if Black had not castled. After 13.Qxh6 Re8 14.Ng5 (14.Re3) 14...Nf8 15.Re3, he notes "White has a dangerous attack; even if it is not quite clear; I doubt if you would like to be the defender here!" The engines see this as equal, but in a practical game?

B) 10...Be6 11.Bd3 h6 (11...g6 12.Nd4) Harding indicated as a line now refuted. 12.Bxh6. 12...gxh6 13.Qxh6 is hopeless for Black (we should know that from reviewing LeMoir's advantages); thus, critical is 12...Ne4. Older texts saw 13.Qf4 as the main line, with the "Bible" of my own youth, Max Euwe's *Theorie der Schach-Eröffnungen* giving 13...Bd6 14.Qe3 Bc5 15.Nd4 Qf6! 16.Bxe4 Qxh6 17.Qxh6 gxh6 18.Bf3 Bxd4 19.Rxd4 Nd7 as equal. White seems a little better, but 18...Bxd4 also doesn't seem forced, and very equal.

Harding noted that "it now seems that 13.Qh5! does the business for White.

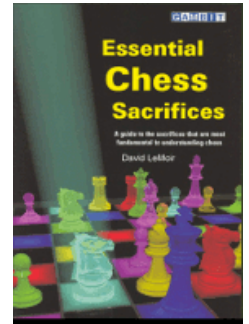


[FEN "m1q1rk1/pp2bpp1/2p1b2B/3p3Q/4n3/2NB1N2/PPP2PPP/2KRR3 b - - 0 13"]

"Then 13...Nxc3? would lose rapidly to the thematic 14.Bxg7!," and he gives two main lines:

B1) 13...gxh6 14.Bxe4 Nd7 15.Bf5 Nf6 16.Qh3 Bxf5 17.Qxf5, favorable to White with a safer king and no weaknesses. However, after 14.Bxe4, I've tested 14...Bg5+! and not found it wanting, perhaps someone knows a refutation?

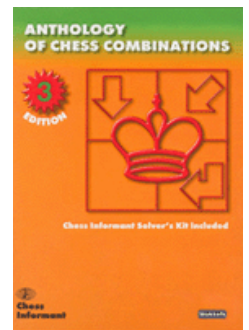
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by David LeMoir



[Bxh7+](#)  
by David Rudel



[Anthology of Chess Combinations](#)  
by Chess Informant

B2) 13...g6 14.Qe5 Bf6 15.Qf4 "with tremendous complications"; e.g., 15... Nxc3 16.Rxe6 fxe6 17.Qg4 Nxa2+ 18.Kb1 Rf7 19.Kxa2 Kh8 20.Qxg6 Qg8 (20...Qa5+ 21.Kb1 Qb4 22.Bg7+! Rxc7 23.Qe8+ and wins) 21.Qh5 and White should soon regain the sacrificed exchange with a very good game.

However, what about, after 16.Rxe6, not capturing on e6, but instead 16... Nxa2+ 17.Kb1 Nc3+!, you may ask? This looks good for Black at first glance, when White can repeat the position or go in for 17.bxc3 Bxc3. This is dangerous-looking for White, since it seems he has to play 18.Kc1 here, but actually the clearance move 18.Rde1!! is the near-clincher and Black faces great difficulties: 18...fxe6 and now 19.Qg4 Rf6 20.Bxg6 21.Qb6+ 22.Kc1 Qb2+ 23.Kd1 Qb1+ (23...Qb4?? 24.Rxe6! and mate will come quickly) 24.Ke2 Qb4!, when 24.Bh7+ Kf7 and so on looks best, but 24.Qg5!! (see diagram) and White should win, but even better is 19.Qg3!, a not-so-obvious move.



[FEN "rn4k1/pp6/2p1prBB/3p2Q1/1q6/2b2N2/2P1KPPP/4R3 b - - 0 25"]

Another classic game in the Urusov that has made many miniature anthologies is the following:

### Thompson – Weberg

Correspondence (US), 1949 [C24]

**1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Nf6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nf3 Nxe4 5.Qxd4 Nf6 6.Nc3 Nc6 7.Qh4 Bb4 8.0-0 Bxc3 9.bxc3 0-0 10.Bg5 h6 11.Bxh6 gxh6 12.Qxh6 d5 13.Rad1 Bf5**

13...Re8 may be better.

**14.Nh4 Bh7 15.Rd3 Kh8 16.Rg3 Rg8 17.Bd3 Ne4?**

The losing mistake. 17...Ne5! should be better for Black, and you have to wonder if Black made a notation error here when sending his card.

**18.Bxe4 dxe4 19.Nf5 1-0**

After 19...Rxc3; for example, 20.h(f)xc3 Qf8 21.Qf6+ Kg8 22.Nh6+, and Black is left with insufficient compensation for the queen.

### The Sicilian Rauzer with ...h6

One of the best books I have bought recently is Yakovich's *Sicilian Attacks*, which covers opposite-side castling by both sides in the Sicilian. GM Makarichev had been having great success with the line **1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 d6 6.Bg5 e6 7.Qd2 a6 8.0-0 h6 9.Be3 Nxd4** and a later ...b5.

Murey found the solution, one of those that seems paradoxical at first glance – rather than let Black exchange knights, we will do so for him – so after 8...h6 **9.Nxc6! Bxc6 10.Bf4 d5!** (10...e5? 11.Bxe5!) **11.Qe3!** The line we are concerned with continues **11...Bb4 12.Be2! 0-0 13.e5 Nd7 14.Qg3 Kh8**, and now a familiar move, **15.Qh3!**



[FEN "r1bq1r1k/3n1pp1/p1p1p2p/3pP3/1b3B2/2N4Q/PPP1BPPP/2KR3R b - - 0 15"]

15...Qe7 loses quickly to 16.Bxh6! gxf6 17.Qxh6+ Kh8 18.Rd3, so Black is perhaps forced to try to bring the bishop back to e7, but **15.Qh3 Be7 16.Bxh6 gxf6 17.Qxh6+ Kg8 18.h4 Nxe5 19.Ne4 f5 20.Rh3 f4 21.Ng5 Rf7 22.Nxf7 Nxf7 23.Qg6+ Kf8 24.Bh5 Qe8 25.Rf3 Bd6 26.g3 Qe7 27.gxf4** provides what Yakovich calls a "rough material equality," but again, it is the type of position I would rather have as White – what about you? Even if Black defends well, can he hope for more than a draw?

The alternative 15...Kg8 is mentioned by Yakovich, and doesn't lead to good results for Black, but he doesn't mention the try 15...Bxc3, as in the game Klima-Stocek, Pizen 2005, 16.Qxc3 (16...bxc3 doesn't look good) and now after 16...Rb8?!, White returned to h3 with 17.Qh3, but why not just take the c6-pawn, practically for free? Better seems 16...Qb6 17.Qh3 Kg8, when the sacrifice looks flashy but unsound, 17.Bxh6 gxf6 18.Qxh6 Nxe5! 19.Rd3! Nxd3+ 20.Bxd3 f5! and it looks like White has to take the perpetual repetition, since the h1-rook can't get out in time to do any damage.

### Conclusion

I consider my investigation here only a preliminary one; I don't see why an entire book could not be written on this sacrifice. In fact, I hope to write a follow-up in which the squares h6/h3 are seen as focal points, with sacrifices of other pieces on that square. There are more openings and positions where the Bxh6 sacrifice might work, and a player/theoretician might find this worthy of further investigation. I end the article with some test examples where the reader needs to ascertain whether the sacrifice is sound or not in various positions taken from actual games.

### Some Test Examples

These should be considered exercises to be completed after reading the text. I won't pretend they are comprehensive, but are here to help you decide whether playing Bxh6 is "the move."

#### #1 Kamsky – Lautier, Dortmund 1993



[FEN "r2q1rk1/1p2bpp1/p1b2n1p/8/5B2/2NB4/PP1Q1PPP/3R1RK1 w - - 0 16"]

White has some moves to choose from here. 16.Qe2 wins the black queen since Bh7+ is threatened and the bishop on e7 hangs if the queen moves away, but is 16.Bxh6 better, and why?

#2 Shamkovich – Aguiano, Mexico City 1978



[FEN "r2r2k1/pb1nbpp1/1qp1pn1p/1p2N3/  
3P1B2/P1N1P3/BPQ2PPP/2R2RK1 w - - 0 15"]

Is 15.Bxh6 sound here?

#3 Howell – Pruijssers, World Junior, 2008



[FEN "2r1r1k1/3bqpp1/3p3p/3Pp2Q/1b5P/  
5R2/1PB2PP1/R1B3K1 w - - 0 31"]

With the bishop hanging at c2, can the sacrifice still work?

#4 Authenrieth – Berenhorst, German Championship, 1985



[FEN "r2r1k2/pp1n2p1/2q1p2p/2p5/2P2B2/  
3P1N2/PP1Q1PPP/4R1K1 w - - 0 17"]

White just sacrificed the exchange with 16.Rxe6 fxe6. Does the sacrifice on h6 now work?

#5 Leko – Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2005

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 b6 4.g3 Ba6 5.Qa4 Bb7 6.Bg2 c5 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.0-0  
0-0 9.Nc3 Be7 10.Bf4 a6 11.Rfd1 d6 12.Qb4 Nc6 13.Qa3 d5 14.Qa4 Qc8 15.  
cxd5 b5 16.Qc2 Nb4 17.Qd2 Nbx5 18.Nxd5 Nxd5 19.Rac1 Qe8 20.Nd4  
Rd8 21.Bg5 h6



[FEN "3rqrk1/1b2bpp1/p3p2p/1p1n2B1/3N4/6P1/PP1QPPBP/2RR2K1 w - - 0 22"]

The game ended in a draw after **22.Bxe7 Qxe7 23.Qa5 Rc8 24.Nb3 Nf6 25. Bxb7 Rxc1 26.Rxc1 Qxb7 27.Qd2 Rc8 28.Rxc8+**. Would the sacrifice **22. Bxh6** have been better?

### Answers

**#1** In the game, **16.Bxh6 gxf6 17.Qxh6 Re8 18.Bc4 Bd7 19.Rd4 Bf8 20.Qg6 + Bg7 21.Qxf7+ Kh8 22.Rh4+ Nh7 23.Rxh7+! Kxh7 24.Qh5+ Bh6 25.Bd3 + Kg8 26.Qxh6** followed, and Black resigned. Some have suggested that the forcing **18.Qg5+ Kf8** may be better, with a mating net, but Black can wiggle out after **19.Bc4 Bd6 20.Qh6+ Ke7 21.Qg7**, and after **21...Kd7** he gets out of the mating net, forcing **22.Rxd6+**, still winning handily, but not as handily as in the game. In the initial position, the hardest thing to see is **23.Rxh7+!**

**#2** The engines don't see the game continuation **15.Bxh6** as any better than the quiet **15.Rfd1**. After **15.Bxh6**, it may be best to ignore the bishop with, say, **15...c5**, and to fully understand why **15.Bxh6** works here, you have to see the other weak focal points and sacrifice some more: **15...gxf6 16.Bxe6!** (a double bishop sacrifice!) **16...Nxe5 17.dxe5** and now **17...Kg7** seems to be Black's only chance to "limp along" - instead he self-destructed with **17...Nd5??** and after **18.Qg6+** mate follows. At that point, Black resigned.

**#3** White is winning in any case, he can even play **31.Rg3** here, but after **31...Rxc2 32.Bxh6 Qf8**, he can give up the queen, again trying to limp along. Howell settled things in grand style: **31.Bxh6! Rxc2 32.Bxg7!!** (we saw this thematic strike in the Urusov example) **32...f5** and now the switchback **33. Bh6! Rc4 34.Rg3+ Rg4 35.Rxg4+ fxf4 36.Qg6+ Kh8** and after another switchback, **37.Bg5!**, Black resigned.

**#4** An interesting note before we begin. I searched for a long time for a good game in the databases where the sacrifice fell short without it being an obvious blunder, meaning good defensive play by Black. I could not find one! When Black did win, it usually involved the sacrifice being correct, but the attacker playing incorrectly, as here. Wins also occurred with some frequency by Black declining the sacrifice – remaining a pawn down, but winning later after a White blunder.

White played here **17.Bxh6 gxf6 18.Qxh6+ Ke7 19.Qg7+?**

It is hard to understand why White played this move, letting the black king out of the box. But we have all done it before – at least I have – and probably at the end of this game, White was kicking himself for ruining the attack. White's continuation after the attack deserves a diagram, since it isn't easy to see down a rook: **19.d4!!**



[FEN "r2r4/pp1nk3/2q1p2Q/2p5/2PP4/5N2/PP3PPP/4R1K1 b - - 0 19"]

White has only three pawns for the rook, but an overwhelming position. The black king is held in the box; he can't go to d6 now and White is threatening 20.d5 or in some situations Ne5 and so on. If 19...Nf8 20.Qh4+ Kd6 21.Qg3+ Ke7 22.d5! Qd6 23.Ne5! and the black pieces are a tangled mess; how will Black meet threats like Qg8 without losing back much material - and more?

The funny thing is that checking on g7 still doesn't give away the win. White can play for the perpetual. He seems to, for a time, but lets the back king further slip from his grasp and eventually, lets the rook plus tell. Here is how it finished:

**19...Kd6 20.Qg3+ e5 21.Nxe5 Nxe5 22.Rxe5 Kd7 23.Rd5+ Kc8 24.Rxd8+ Kxd8 25.Qg8+ Qe8 26.Qd5+ Qd7 27.Qg8+ Qe8 28.Qd5+ Ke7 29.Qxb7+ Kf8 30.Qf3+ Kg7 31.Qg3+ Kh6 32.Qf4+ Kg7 33.Qg3+ Kh7 34.Qh4+ Kg6 35.Qg3+ Kh6 36.Qh3+ Qh5 37.Qe3+ Qg5 38.f4 Qf6 39.Qh3+ Kg7 40.Qg4+ Kf8 41.h4 Rd8 42.h5 Rd4 43.Qc8+ Kg7 44.Qc7+ Kh6 45.Qxc5 Rxf4 46.g3 Qd4+ 47.Qxd4 Rxd4 48.Kf2 Rxd3 49.b4 Rd4 50.Ke3 Rxc4 51.a3 Rc3+ 52.Kd4 Rxa3 53.g4 0-1**

**#5 22.Bxh6 gxh6 23.Qxh6 Rd7!** (23...Qd7? 24.Nf3! and White is winning) **24.Nxe6!** (another focal point) **24...fxe6 25.Qxe6+ Kh8 26.Bxd5 Bf6 27.Qxe8 Rxe8 28.Bxb7 Rxb7 29.Rc2**, and again we have an interesting position – White has four connected passed pawns for the bishop, but can he win this? If White wanted to win, it was the best chance, especially since Black can go astray easily on move twenty-three, but a draw would still be the most likely result.

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