



## COLUMNISTS

### ChessBase Cafe

Louis Lima

[\[Find us on Facebook.\]](#)

[Translate this page](#)



#### Rating Chart

- ♦ – Poor
- ♦♦ – Useful
- ♦♦♦ – Good
- ♦♦♦♦ – Excellent

**Free Shipping!**

**On all Orders  
More than \$75!**



**UPS GROUND Only.**

## Ammo for Smith-Morra Gambiteers!

*The Smith-Morra Gambit*, by Lawrence Trent, running time: five hours, twenty-five minutes, \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$25.95)

The Smith-Morra Gambit helped me end a long losing streak against my stepfather back in 2005. I was a 1400-rated player and chess drama centered more at home than the chess club. We used to battle it out at the board in various G15 to G30 time controls, and at some point that year I lost eight games in a row to him. Our weekend game was soon approaching and, unable to fathom another week of despair, I decided to try the Smith-Morra Gambit, which led to this little miniature:

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.c3 dxc3 5.Nxc3 d6 6.Bc4 Qc7?! 7.0-0 e6 8.Nb5 Qd8 9.Bf4 e5 10.Ng5 exf4??** (The big blunder, but White is still looking good after 10...Nh6 11.Qb3.) **11.Nxf7 Qf6 12.Nc7+ Kd7 13.Nxa8 Nh6 14.e5 Nxe5 15.Nxe5+ Qxe5 16.Re1 Qc5 17.Qa4+ Kd8 18.Qe8# 1-0**

Looking back at my patzer miniature I wonder about White's results in the Morra. The percentages on my updated [Mega Database 2010](#) are not compelling, but they do point to more favorable results for White as the Elo rating of the players decrease.

Elo	# Games	Wins	Draws	Losses
Overall	15,595	36%	23%	41%
2400+	60	28%	35%	37%
2200-2399	780	34%	29%	37%
2000 - 2199	994	35%	30%	35%
1800 - 1999	373	35%	30%	35%
1600 - 1799	69	40%	29%	31%
1400-1599	69	41%	27%	32%
1200-1399	31	45%	16%	39%

Mega Database 2010 Statistics for the Smith-Morra Gambit

The Smith-Morra Gambit DVD by IM Lawrence Trent is a terrific production. Trent speaks in an unhurried and clear manner, and his assessments are succinct and easy to understand. This communication style is very consistent throughout the lectures and helps make the contents accessible to intermediate-level players and beyond. His approach was also quite efficient. When authors on opening lectures cover entire games, descending into a labyrinth of variations that do not offer educative connections to the opening, middlegame, and endgame themes, these can quickly become video filler. Trent keeps it simple by only discussing games up to when he has illustrated the desired points, and then moves on to another example.

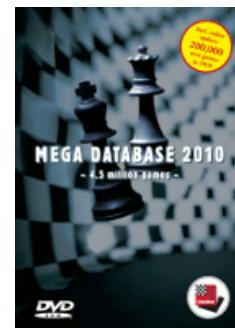
Trent does not hype lines with overly optimistic assessments. One will often hear him summarizing a line by saying that all three results are possible or that more practical tests are needed. This struck me as honest and balanced, making the product valuable to players on both sides of the Smith-Morra Gambit. Black's defenses are well organized, ranging from inferior to superior, and the analysis seemed objective. There is a host of new ideas and novelties, and the production abounds in piece and pawn sacrifices presented as typical in the various defenses.

Those who want to learn the ins and outs of the declined variations might be disappointed as 3...Nf6 and 3...d5 are not covered in this production. Trent recommends the Fritz Trainer by Tiviakov on the Alapin Sicilian, but it still feels like a significant omission, given that Black declines the gambit in

Purchases from our [chess shop](#) help keep [ChessCafe.com](#) freely accessible:



[ChessBase 11, Upgrade](#)  
by ChessBase



[Mega Database 2010](#)  
by ChessBase



[Enter 1.f4, Bird's Opening!](#)  
by Andrew Martin

almost fifty-percent of the games.

I found it somewhat odd that Trent did not include any sample games of his own, and unfortunately I was only able to find one Smith-Morra game in my database. Trent has done a superb job at researching this opening, so this is probably unfair criticism on my part. However, it does give confidence to try these gambits out when authors walk the talk, and there is something special to be said when they show positional nuances discovered from playing experience. Even an author's loss can be instructive. On the other hand, it could well be that this contributed positively in providing unbiased assessments of the various lines, and Trent came up with new ideas in well-known positions one would think everything has been said about them. This is one terrific effort by Trent and a must for Morra gambiteers.

There is approximately 5½ hours of video lecture time organized into twenty-five lectures. Below is a breakdown of the content along with specific length times for each lecture. This will give you an idea of how much time is dedicated to a particular defense you might be interested in:

Video no.	Defense	Length
1	3...e5	15'43
2	3...g6	13'12
3	3...d3 Fianchetto	9'59
4	3...d3 Hedgehog	6'03
5	Early d6 and Nf6	19'59
6	Early NC6 and Nf6	11'33
7	Qc7 Line: Be7 and Ne5	12'32
8	Qc7 Line: Nf6 and Ne5	7'00
9	Qc7 Line: Critical Line 13...dxe5	9'20
10	Qc7 Line: Critical Line 13...Bxg5	5'02
11	Bd7 Line	10'54
12	Classical Main Line I	14'39
13	Classical Main Line II	8'43
14	Siberian Variation	24'32
15	Chicago Defence I	16'12
16	Chicago Defence II	11'42
17	Nge7 Variation I	19'57
18	Nge7 Variation II	7'01
19	Nge7 Variation III	5'30
20	Bc5 System	10'15
21	Bc5 System II	12'27
22	Larsen Variation	12'26
23	Fianchetto Variation	20'32
24	Taylor Defense	17'36
25	Finegold Defense	12'26

Table of Contents

Let's take a look some of the contents:

### **Smith-Morra Gambit Declined: 1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.c3**

#### **3...e5**

The most common reply is 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.cxd4 and Trent spends a bit of the lecture discussing this move. However, his recommendation in the spirit of the opening is 5.Bc4, which he assesses as leading to unclear play and shows a number of possible variations leading to highly double-edged positions. One of the critical lines arose after 5...Qc7 6.0-0 Nf6 7.Ng5 Nd8 8.Qb3 Ne6, which looks nice for Black after Trent's recommended 9.f4.

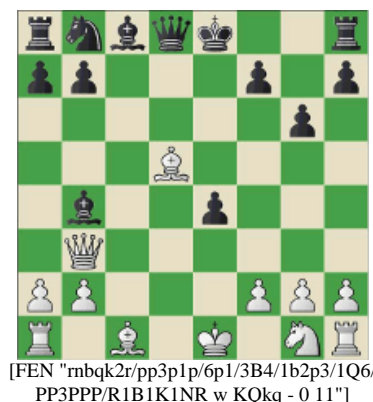
#### **3...g6**

This is my favorite move whenever I decide to decline the gambit and Trent's suggestion was completely new to me. After 4.cxd4 d5 5.Nc3 dxe4, instead of the usual 6.Nxe4 lines, his recommendation is 6.Bc4 played twice in 2008 by

GM Sergei Zhidalgo and most recently seen this year in the encounter Zelic-Radovic from the 24th Open Tula in Croatia. There is also an amateur-level encounter at the 39th Women Olympiad between Orejuela Chango from Ecuador and De LaParra Hurtado from Mexico featuring opposite-side castling. The arising positions don't seem to offer as much complexity as the positional struggles of 4.cxd4 d5 5.e5, but Black still needs to be careful with his initial piece placement as the sample game in the lecture showed. Trent's recommended lines aim for open tactical positions Smith-Morra gambiteers are sure to enjoy.

A good example of what can happen if Black is not on the alert here is the miniature encounter between GM David Howell and Timothy Spanton in 2004, prior to Howell attaining his GM title. What would you play as White after **4.cxd4 d5 5.Nc3 dxe4 6.Bc4 Nf6 7.Qb3 e6 8.d5 exd5 9.Nxd5 Nxd5 10. Bxd5 Bb4+?**

**White to Move**



**11.Qxb4 Qxd5 12.Qc3!** This line could pack some surprise value and my suggestion would be to also look at the games of GM Dusko Pavasovic, who began experimenting with this line before Zhidalgo in 2004.

**3...d3 - Fianchetto and Hedgehog Variations: 4.Bxd3 Nc6 5.Nf3 g6 6.c4 Bg7; 4.Bxd3 d6 5.c4 Nf6 6.Nc3 e6**

This is the second most popular way to decline the gambit after 3...Nf6 and seen at all levels of play. There is so little initial interaction between the pieces that after 4.Bxd3 Nc6 5.Nf3 g6 White has little choice but to try for a positional advantage with 6.c4. Black can either fianchetto his bishop on g7 or choose a hedgehog structure with moves such as d6, Nf6, e6, etc. Nothing new here, but Trent focuses on piece placement and general plans for both sides, concluding that Black has a solid position in spite of White's grip in the center.

**Smith-Morra Gambit Accepted: 1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.c3 dxc3 4.Nxc3**

Trent organizes the material along thirteen defenses, first exploring what he feels are the most inferior set-ups, and methodically moving to Black's more resilient defenses. He also advises white players to be daring, imaginative, and to play with the initiative, otherwise they can easily find themselves a pawn down with no compensation.

**Early ...Nf6 Defenses: 4...d6 5.Bc4 Nf6 and 5...Nc6 6.Nf3 Nf6**

What would a Smith-Morra Gambit product be without the famous 6.e5 dxe5 7.Bxf7+ Kxf7 8.Qxd8 trap? We see that here, of course, but there is much more fun packed in this lecture after other sixth-move black responses. 6...Nfd7 leads to excellent winning chances for White too, and Trent spends sometime discussing this line. You might think you will not be so lucky to face these lines as white, but 5...Nf6 feels like a natural move and there are many examples in my database. Tactics and piece sacrifices also abound after 5...Nc6 6.Nf3 Nf6, the consequence of bringing the knight on f6 too early, and viewers will be in for a treat with some of Trent's novelties here.

### ...Qc7 Lines

Here again, Trent organizes the material around four lines ranging from the less resilient to the most critical. Pawn and piece sacrifices are again prevalent, and you'll want to go back again and again to enjoy these lectures. Here is one position, see if you can spot the ideas and tactical possibilities:

#### Black to Move



[FEN "r1b1k1nr/1pq1bppp/p3p3/4p3/2B1P3/2N2N2/PP2QPPP/2RR2K b - - 0 12"]

#### How should White handle 12...Nf6 or 12...Bd7?

If 12...Nf6 13.Nb5 Qb8 14.Nc7+ Kf8 (14...Qxc7 15.Bb5+) 15.Nxa8 Qxa8 16.Nxe5; If 12...Bd7 13.Nb5 Qb8 14.Rxd7 Kxd7 15.Qd3+ Ke8 16.Nc7+ Qxc7 17.Bb5+ (Trent's analysis) In the game Black lost in similar style after 12...Qb8 13.Bb5+ Kf8 14.Na4 Qa7 15.Nxe5 axb5 16.Nb6 Qxb6 17.Rxc8+ Rxc8 18.Nd7+ 1-0.

Overall, the placement of the queen on c7 seems to foster tactical opportunities for White in various lines. In the recent encounter from the 3rd Karen Asrian Memorial in Armenia between Kalashian (2441) – Inants (2281) this past October, the game went 1.d4 c5 2.e4 cxd4 3.Nf3 a6 4.c3 dxc3 5.Nxc3 d6 6.Bc4 e6 7.0-0 Nf6 8.Qe2 Nc6 9.Rd1 Qc7 10.Bf4 Ne5. Here Kalashian opted for 11.Bb3 instead of Trent's recommended 11.Bxe5, but the board soon exploded in tactical fireworks anyways after Nxf3+ 12.Qxf3 e5 13.Bg5 Bg4 14.Nd5! Qd7 15.Qxf6! Bxd1 16.Rxd1 gxf6 17.Nxf6+ Kd8 18.Nxd7+ Kxd7 19.Bf6 Be7 20.Bxh8 Rxh8 21.Bxf7 and White went on to win.

There is a similar defense seen in a later lecture with the moves 4...e6 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.Bc4 a6 7.0-0 Qc7 8.Qe2 Bd6!?. White enjoys his usual active play along open files, and Trent points out that this line was popularized by Bent Larsen. I've been unable to unearth any games by the great Dane on the Morra, or find a mention elsewhere about this, so perhaps a knowledgeable reader can share some insights.

#### ...Bd7 Line: 4...Nc6 5.Nf3 d6 6.Bc4 e6 7.0-0 Nf6 8.Qe2 Be7 9.Rd1 Bd7

Trent recommends 10.Bg5 and after 10...0-0 he advises to play energetically, aligning the rooks on the d-file rather than playing 10...Rc1 when there is no longer a queen to harass on that file. There are pitfalls here for Black if he is not careful. For instance, what would you play after 10.Bg5 Qb8 11.Rd2 Ne5?

#### What would you play here as White?



[FEN "rq2k2r/pp1bbpp/4pn2/4n1B1/2B1P3/2N2N2/PP1RQPPP/R5K1 w kq - 0 12"]

11...Ne5 12.Nxe5 dxe5 13.Bxf6 gxf6 14.Rxd7 Kxd7 15.Rd1+ Ke8 16.Qh5 with a winning advantage. (Trent's analysis)

**Classical Main Line: 4...Nc6 5.Nf3 e6 6.Bc4 d6 7.0-0 Nf6 8.Qe2 Be7 9.Rd1 e5**

This is still looking like a very solid line for White. Trent shows ways to drum up some initiative and counterplay, foregoing the prophylactic 10.h3 for the quicker 10.Be3, but statistical results of both lines are not so encouraging for White. White also seems to have less fun here than in later systems, such as the Chicago Defense (4...e6 5.0-0 b5 8.Bb3) and the cheeky Siberian Variation (4...Nc6 5.Nf3 e6 6.Bc4 Qc7). Still, I walked away satisfied to see complex and imbalanced positions where the best player wins.

**...Nge7 Variation: 4...e6 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.Bc4 a6 7.0-0 Nge7**

Trent continues the firework display here with games such Zhakarov-Tusev: 1. e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.c3 dxc3 4.Nxc3 e6 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.Bc4 a6 7.0-0 Nge7 8.Bg5 f6 9.Be3 b5 10.Bb3 Ng6 11.Nd5!? exd5 12.exd5 Nce5 13.d6 Bb7 14.Nxe5 fxe5 15.f4 exf4 16.Re1! fxe3 17.Rxe3+ Be7 18.Qd4 Qb8 19.dxe7 Qa7 20.Bf7 + Kxf7 21.e8Q+ Rhxe8 22.Rf1+ Kg8 23.Qxa7 Rxe3 24.Qxe3 winning the game. There is a lot of fun in the ...Nge7 lectures. As in many Black defenses, White must play with initiative, courage, and display high tactical acumen.

**...Bc5 System: 4...e6 5.Nf3 Bc5**

Popularized by a high profile encounter between GM Jan Timman and GM Murray Chandler in 1982, this line never really caught on. The idea is to place the bishop on an active diagonal rather than sit on e7 behind a pawn as in previous variations. However, the absence of this bishop can often be felt when White is able to create play on the kingside. One example of this is the game Horvath, Imre (2355) - Cordara, Michele (2255) not included in the DVD: 1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.c3 dxc3 4.Nxc3 e6 5.Nf3 Bc5 6.Bc4 Ne7 7.0-0 Ng6 8.Qe2 a6 9.Rd1 0-0 10.h4 Nxh4 11.Ng5 Qe7 12.Qh5 h6 13.Rd3 Nc6 14.Rg3 Qf6 15.Nh3 d5 16.Bxh6 Ng6 17.Bg5 Qe5 18.exd5 exd5 19.Bxd5 Qxg3 20.Ne4 Qe5 21.Nf6+ 1-0

**Fianchetto Variation: 4...Nc6 5.Nf3 g6**

This, along with the Taylor and Finegold defenses are considered by Trent to be the most underrated systems Black has at his disposal. This line probably appeals to Dragon players and Trent recommends 6.Bc4 Bg7 and now 7.e5 and White seems to be doing well in practice.

**Taylor Defense: 4...Nc6 5.Nf3 d6 6.Bc4 a6**


This has proven to be a very effective line against Morra gambiteers, giving White somewhat miserable statistical results. More practical tests are needed in the critical line 7.0-0 Nf6 and now Trent recommends 8.b4 Bg4 9.b5 Bxf3 gxf3 10.axb5. Trent prefers to recapture with the knight, but the stem game Hardardson-De Firmian in 1999 shows the bishop recapture instead. Black is doing fine here, but the position looks imbalanced enough to let the best player win among amateur play. It is no surprise that this line was Nick de

Firmian's pick for his [Modern Chess Openings, 15th Edition](#).

**Finegold Defense: 4...d6 5.Nf3 e6 6.Bc4 Nf6 7.0-0 Be7 8.Qe2 a6**

This seemed like a short lecture, given that Trent considers it to be one of the best lines of defense for Black, but there is not a great deal of theory here. One of the critical lines was 1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.c3 dxc3 4.Nxc3 d6 5.Nf3 e6 6.Bc4 Nf6 7.0-0 Be7 8.Qe2 a6 9.e5 dxe5 10.Nxe5 0-0 11.Rd1 Nbd7 12.Bf4 Qe8!, though White seems to have the normal Morra gambit compensation for the pawn, as Black's rooks and light-squared bishop still have to find their way into the game.

In conclusion, if you are looking for a theoretical win for White in the Smith-Morra Gambit, you won't find it here, or probably elsewhere. However, if you seek spirited suggestions, practical advice, and greater understanding of this opening, then this is the ideal product. Trent's organizational approach to the lectures made the ideas and tactical motifs very accessible and easy to remember, and I appreciated his honest approach to the material.

**My assessment of this DVD:** 

**Order [The Smith-Morra Gambit](#)**

by Lawrence Trent

---

© 2010 ChessCafe.com All Rights Reserved.

---

Comment on this month's column via our [Contact Page](#)! Pertinent responses will be posted below daily.

---

 [TOP OF PAGE](#)

 [HOME](#)

 [COLUMNS](#)

 [LINKS](#)

 [ARCHIVES](#)

 [ABOUT THE  
CHESS CAFE](#)

[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)  
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[ChessCafe Archives\]](#)  
[\[ChessCafe Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#)  
[\[Contact ChessCafe.com\]](#)

© 2010 BrainGamz, Inc. All Rights Reserved.  
"ChessCafe.com®" is a registered trademark of BrainGamz, Inc.