



COLUMNISTS

Over the Horizons

Stefan Bücker

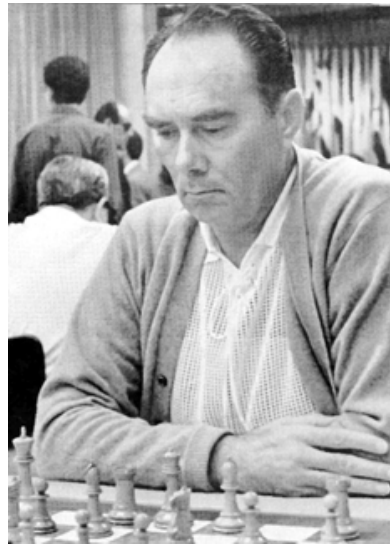


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How to Detect a Novelty

Emil Joseph Diemer (1908-1990) clearly preferred practice over theory. When he had worked out a critical variation of his **Blackmar-Diemer Gambit** (1 d4 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3; or short: BDG) in joint analyses with Georg Studier, it was still possible that he would play something else in his next encounter with the same position. But the times are changing, and today BDG players want to know precisely how to react in a dangerous situation. In the last decades many BDG books and magazines have been published, and while Diemer's own *Blackmar Gemeinde* (1956) mainly presented games, these recent publications no longer rate the beauty of a game higher than its theoretical relevance. Now and then a line suffers a theoretical blow, made known in a new book, and then the BDG player has to do his best to find a novelty that repairs the damage. This is true for any opening, but when a BDG player ignores such a gap, he risks a lot more than a Queen's Indian player. A case study: how to mend a critical BDG variation.



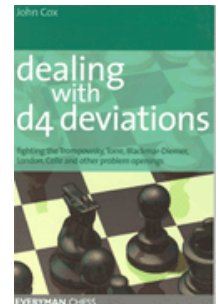
The Belgian GM Albéric O'Kelly, a Correspondence World Champion

1. Trial and Error

Geniuses, who can find the right solution on the spot, are rare. To learn by your mistakes is, in the long run, at least as successful. The model of the naïve club player, who bangs out his first vague idea, only to correct it a few seconds later, is emulated by the software which analyzes a chess position: the first suggestion comes instantly, soon to be replaced by something better. Our opening theory was developed by "trial and error." **Armand Edward Blackmar**, the inventor of the **Blackmar Gambit** 1 d4 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 f3, died in 1888. In the same year Oskar Cordel mentioned 3...e5 in *Führer durch die Schachtheorie* as a good reply. Had Blackmar ever faced 3...e5 in a game, he would have recognized the strength of the move. Certainly he would have chosen the more accurate 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3 in his next game.

One of the critical lines of the BDG is the sequence that **Albéric O'Kelly** showed Diemer in June of 1956: **1 d4 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3**

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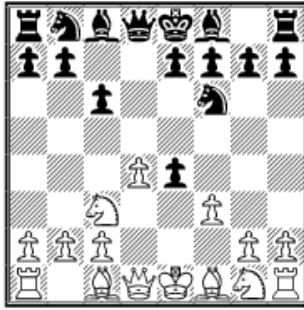


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4...c6!



Black intends 5 fxe4 e5!. To delay taking on f3 has another advantage: the move order 4...exf3 5 Nxf3 c6 gives White additional options, such as 6 Ne5. In his book [1] Diemer recommended the following, adorned with his usual exclamation marks, as the “most forcing” line against O’Kelly’s idea: **5 Nxe4! Nxe4! 6 fxe4 e5 7 Nf3!** exd4 8 Bc4!!, e.g., 8...Bb4+ 9 c3!! dxc3 10 Bxf7+!! Ke7 11 Qb3 cxb2+ 12 Qxb4+ Kxf7 13 Ne5+ Ke6 14 Qc4 +!! Kxe5 15 Bxb2+ and White wins. Some readers will recognize the motif; Diemer had borrowed an old trick from a Caro-Kann Defense: 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 f3!? (von Bardeleben) 3...dxe4 4 fxe4 e5 5 Nf3 exd4 6 Bc4 Bb4+? 7 c3! etc. However, in Diemer’s modified version, where the two knights b1 and g8 are already exchanged, the move **7...Be6!** might be even better than in the Caro-Kann variation. This was the line that I recommended against the BDG when corresponding with Volker Driike and Volker Hergert in 1986. A later thematic correspondence tournament tested the **O’Kelly Defense**; in [2] the participants finally agreed that 4...c6 was a good weapon against the BDG, and that White probably had nothing better than either 5 Nxe4 = or 5 fxe4 e5 6 Nf3 exd4 7 Qxd4 =. These equal lines (the second case may even be slightly worse) are not exactly what a BDG player is hoping for.

Of course, 4...c6 does not refute the BDG. Its objective value may not be greater than 4...exf3 5 Nxf3 g6 (preferred by Georg Studier) or 4...exf3 5 Nxf3 e6 (Joe Gallagher’s BDG-antidote in *Beating the Anti-King’s Indians*, 1996). However, in the last diagram few players take the safe road 5 Nxe4, a majority hopes to transpose to standard BDG positions. While BDG players know that they have to be cautious against 3...e5 or 3...f5, they often underestimate the O’Kelly Variation. Several continuations are inaccurate:

- (a) 5 Be3 Bf5 6 fxe4 Nxe4 is a Vienna Defense with a passive Be3 (it belongs to f4).
- (b) 5 Bg5 exf3 6 Nxf3 Bg4! (Volker Hergert) is a Teichmann Defense, where a Be3 would be more useful, to protect the pawn d4.
- (c) 5 Bf4 exf3 6 Nxf3 Bg4, and as in line “b” White would prefer a Be3 instead of the Bf4; for example, 7 Be2 Bxf3 8 Bxf3 e6.
- (d) 5 a3 (Lev Zilbermintz) 5...exf3 6 Nxf3 g6, a Bogoljubow Defense, where a3 is a bit slow.

And there is, finally, **5 Bc4 exf3 6 Nxf3 Bf5!**



Black may claim that he is playing an improved version of 4...exf3 5 Nxf3 c6 (6 Bc4?!), the so-called Ziegler Defense (but I'd still prefer to name this situation after O'Kelly, whose 4...c6 is the more precise move order). The diagrammed position at least offers more chances than White's other alternatives listed above (a-d). In 1998, I compared the various anti-BDG systems a second time, my article [5] again recommended the O'Kelly Defense and preferred Black in the diagrammed position. However, couldn't my analysis have been wrong? A modern computer still uses the same "trial and error" approach as I did in 1986 and 1998, but it does it a bit faster.

2. Check Forcing Variations

Some theory of 1998 [5], just to see why White's standard attack fails.

1 d4 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3 c6! 5 Bc4 exf3 6 Nxf3 Bf5! 7 0-0 e6 8 Ne5



White threatens to take on f5 or on f7. The tactical **8...Bxc2?!**, deflecting White's queen from the protection of d4, seems to be strong, but only at first sight. After **9 Nxf7! Kxf7**, I found a strong improvement just by checking the most forcing variations: **10 Qxc2! Qxd4+ 11 Be3!** White is clearly better. In the first game with this idea, St. Burke – Ian Gallagher, 4NCL 2007, after **11...Qxc4 12 Rf4! Qxf4** (the queen was trapped: 12...Qa6 13 Ra4) 13 Bxf4 Bc5+ 14 Kh1 Nbd7 15 Ne4 Nxe4 16 Qxe4 Nf6 17 Qe5 Bb6 18 Rf1?! Rhe8 19 Bg5 Bd8, Black was able to consolidate and even win the game (0-1, 57). However, 18 Bg5! Rhf8 19 Rf1 would have been stronger (+/-). And the alternative **11...Qxe3+ 12 Kh1 Bd6 13 Rae1**, where I saw good compensation for White back in 1998, has now become a +/-, thanks to some quiet moves from the computer: 13...Qh6 14 g4! (instead of the "loud" 14 Bxe6+?!) resp. 13...Qd4 14 Ne4! (instead of my 14 Re4). Thus it *can* be fruitful to check forcing variations, but one has to keep an eye on quiet moves, too!

However, in the diagrammed position Black simply plays **8...Bg6!**, and against this solid defense no one has found a promising attack. White's practical results are depressing.

3. Rearrange Old Motives

A small modification of a known motif can make a big difference. When I recently returned to the BDG topic, just to see whether there was something new, the next idea was a major surprise for me.

1 d4 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3 c6! 5 Bc4 exf3 6 Nxf3 Bf5! 7 0-0 e6 8 Ng5!?



The so-called “**Alchemy Variation**,” whose theory was developed and published on the Internet by Emanuel Rajmund [7] and members of the Chesspublishing.com forum (cf. [6] and older threads). The knight’s jump to g5 looks fresh and new – in contrast to Ne5, White may now be able to sacrifice on e6 – but includes also an old motif. Against 8...Bxc2, White can just play 9 Nxf7, returning to the old tactical line above (while 9 Qe2! [7] is probably even stronger). 8...g6 9 h3 h6 10 Nxf7 may also be playable for White. Black’s most reliable reply is the same as in the 8 Ne5 line.

8...Bg6! 9 Ne2

The immediate sacrifice 9 Bxe6!? fxe6 10 Nxe6 was proposed by SWJediknight, who correctly stated that after the natural continuation 10...Qd7 11 Bg5 Qxe6 12 Re1 White maintains an attack [6]. However, 10...Qd6! settles the situation:

- (a) On 11 Qe2, both possible replies 11...Kf7 and 11...Kd7 look reliable.
- (b) 11 Bg5 Nbd7! (11...Qxe6 transposes to 10...Qd7, and 11...Kf7 allows 12 Bxf6 Qxe6 13 Be7+! or 12...gxf6 13 Ne4!) and Black seems to be safe, e.g., 12 Re1 (12 d5 cxd5 [or Kf7] 13 Nxd5 Kf7 etc.) 12...Kf7 13 Bf4 Qb4, and I don’t see a good continuation (14 Qe2 Kg8 15 a3 Qa5).
- (c) 11 Re1 is relatively best, but still insufficient: 11...Kf7 12 Bf4 (12 Bg5 is line b) 12...Qd7 13 Nc7 Bd6 (Na6!?, but the text is simple and good) 14 Bxd6 Qxd6 15 Nxa8 Nbd7 followed by Rxa8. Black is better.

Peter Leisebein’s text move tries to prepare an assault on the vulnerable squares f7 or e6. For example, 9...c5?! [7] 10 Be3 Nc6 11 Nf4 cxd4 12 Bf2 Bf5 13 Re1 Be7 14 Nxf7! with a lasting attack and sufficient compensation for the piece. But Black has a sufficient defense.

9...Bd6! 10 Nf4 Bxf4 11 Bxf4



11...0-0! +/-

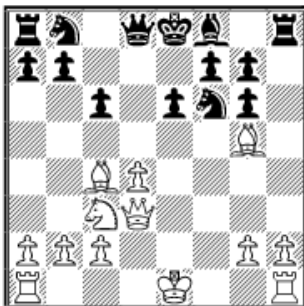
An improvement by “OldGrizzly” [6]. I had found a flaw in the “main” line 11...Nd5 12 Bc1 [7], namely 12 h4! when 12...h6 13 Nxe6 fxe6 14 Qg4 Bf5 15 Qxg7 Rh7 16 Qg8+ Kd7 17 Qg3 Nxf4 18 Rxf4 Na6 19 Rxf5

exf5 20 Be6+ leads to some chances for White, resembling the endings in a Muzio Gambit. However, by just changing the move order OldGrizzly has pushed White back into the cold. There could follow 12 a4 Nd5 13 Bc1 h6 14 Nf3 Nd7 -/+, and White has nothing at all to show for his sacrificed pawn.

4. Call a Grandmaster

When nothing else helps, make a phone call and ask a grandmaster. In this case it was **Lev Gutman**, who calmly listened to my latest dubious attempt to rescue the line, 7 g4??! (more on this below). One hour later he called back. No, he could not bring himself to believe in my raving tactics with 7 g4, but he had found a more positional set-up.

1 d4 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3 c6! 5 Bc4 exf3 6 Nxf3 Bf5! 7 Bg5 e6 8 Nh4!? Bg6 9 Nxg6 hxg6 10 Qd3!



Gutman's key idea is to castle long (in contrast to old games with Ne5-xg6 plus 0-0), play h4 and Rh3 (to be able to take back on c3 with the rook, if necessary) and Rh3-f3, to pin Black's pieces to the weak pawn on f7. The text move includes motifs of Bxe6 and Qxg6+, but in the long run the queen may belong on e2, to exert pressure on the e-file and assist an advance of the kingside pawns.

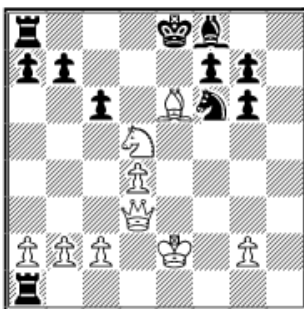
10...Be7

Or 10...Qa5 11 h4!; for example,

(a) 11...Qf5 12 Qe3 Qxc2? 13 0-0 +/-.

(b) 11...Bb4 12 Bxe6 0-0 (12...fxe6? 13 Qxg6+ Kf8 14 0-0 +-) 13 0-0 fxe6 14 Bxf6 Nd7 15 Bg5 +=.

(c) 11...Qxg5 12 hxg5 Rxh1+ 13 Ke2 Rxa1 14 gxf6 Nd7 15 Bxe6 Nxf6 16 Nd5! unclear.



(d) 11...Nbd7 12 0-0-0 0-0-0 13 Qe2! Bb4 14 Rh3. So far analysis by Gutman. White has sufficient play for the pawn, e.g., 14...Nb6 15 Bb3 Rd7 16 a3 Bd6 17 Rf3 Nbd5 18 Na4!.

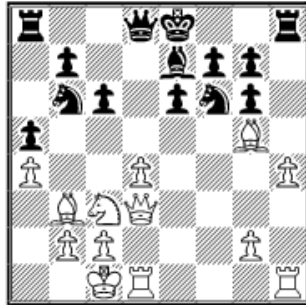
11 0-0-0 Nbd7

Or 11...Nd5 12 Bxe7 Nxe7 13 Ne4, with compensation for White.

12 h4 a5

Or 12...b5 13 Bb3 a5 14 a4 b4 15 Ne4, and Black still has to find shelter for his king.

13 Bb3 Nb6 14 a4



I didn't find an example of the position after 10 Qd3 in various BDG books or in a database of 7,000 BDG games. The reason for neglecting the idea may be that it requires the vision of a grandmaster to recognize the hidden defects in Black's position. Where will the Ke8 go? He may be safer on c8, but then the weakness f7 plays an even greater role and will make it be almost impossible to activate that pawn. White's pawns on the kingside with their urge to advance are not a minority in the usual sense, rather a "qualitative majority" in the terminology of Nimzowitsch.

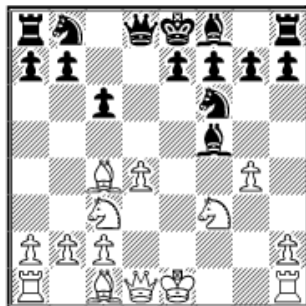
14...Nbd5 15 Kb1 Qc7 16 Rhf1

The position is roughly balanced. Black has an extra pawn, but his task to "convert" the pawn is more than difficult. If he just starts to exchange off the bishops and knights, he might find himself on the defensive, with the backward pawn on f7. On the other hand, White's active pieces and the pressure on pawn f7 allow him to play on with confidence and ambition.

5. Think for Yourself

Now and then we should develop a new idea by ourselves. Lev Gutman didn't regard my idea as correct. Nevertheless, it looks interesting. Nothing for your next correspondence tournament, perhaps, but we shouldn't underestimate the stress factor in OTB chess, or overestimate Black's reflexes in a competition with fast time limits.

1 d4 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3 c6! 5 Bc4 exf3 6 Nxf3 Bf5! 7 g4!??!



Since we are in the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, sporadic excesses with the ! and ? marks are permitted. As far as I can tell, the text move is new. Please let me know, if you ever played it. Now if 7...Bxg4?, White replies 8 Bxf7+ Kxf7 9 Ne5+. And 7...Bg6 8 h4 can hardly be critical either.

7...Nxc4 8 Nh4 g6

The most natural reaction:

(a) 8...e6 9 Nxf5 exf5 10 0-0 Nf6 11 Rxf5, and White is better.

(b) 8...Bd7 doesn't impress either. White may continue: 9 Ne4 b5 10 Qe2 e5 11 Bxf7+ Kxf7 12 Qf3+ Nf6 13 0-0 exd4 14 Qb3+ Ke7 15 Re1, etc.

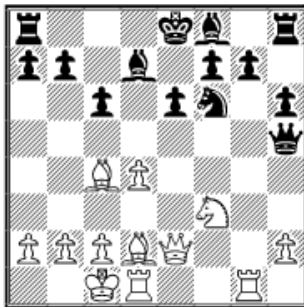
(c) 8...Bc8!? is less "natural" than the text move, but also critical:

(c1) 9 0-0?! Nf6 10 Nf3



Should it really be worth a second pawn to deny the Bc8 an active role and gain one tempo? An interesting idea, but unlikely, e.g., 10...e6 11 Qe2 Nbd7 12 Bf4 Be7 13 Rae1 Nf8.

(c2) 9 Ne4 Nf6 (9...Nd7 10 Qxg4 unclear; 9...e5 10 0-0!) 10 Rf1 (10 Nxf6+ SWJediknight [6] 10...exf6! 11 0-0 Be7) 10...Nbd7 11 Qe2 e6 (11...Nb6 12 Nxf6+ gxf6 13 Bxf7+ Kxf7 14 Qh5+ Ke6 =) 12 Bg5 Qa5+ (12...Be7 13 Nf5 exf5 14 Nd6+ Kf8 15 Nxf7, about =) 13 Bd2 Qh5 14 Nxf6+ Nxf6 15 Nf3 Bd7 (15...Nd5 16 Bxd5 Qxd5 17 Ne5 f6 18 c4 Qxd4 19 Rxf6! Qh4+ 20 Rf2 Bc5 21 Be3 Bd6 22 Nxc6!? unclear) 16 Rg1 (my original analysis went 16 0-0-0 0-0-0 17 Rde1 with compensation, but SWJediknight's 16...Nd5! followed by f6 and an eventual Qh5-e8 [6] is strong) 16...h6 17 0-0-0 =+

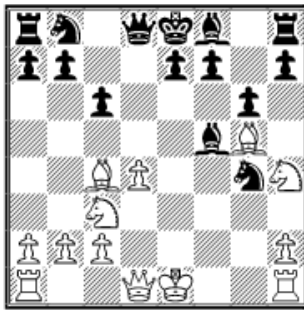


White seems to have some compensation for the sacrificed pawns, e.g., 17...Nd5 18 Qf2 or 17...0-0-0 18 Rdf1 Be8 19 a3 Rg8 20 Qe1.

9 Ne4 Nf6 10 Rf1 Nbd7 11 Qe2 e6 12 Bg5 Qa5+ 13 Bd2 Qh5 14 Nxf6+ Nxf6 15 Nf3 Bd7 16 0-0-0 0-0-0 17 Rde1.

9 Bg5

Apparently more precise than 9 Nxf5 gxf5 10 Bg5 Qd6 or 10...Rg8!, MNb [6]. However, 10 h3 Nf6 (SWJediknight [6]) 11 Bg5 e6 12 d5 may be worth a look.



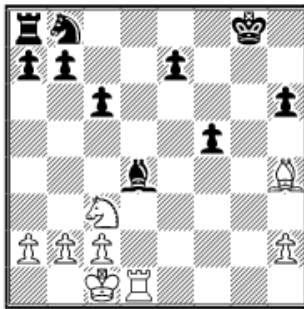
9...Qd6

There is no lack of alternatives:

(a) 9...h6 10 Nxf5 gxf5 (10...hgx5 11 Qxg4 gxf5 12 Bxf7+!?) 11 Bh4 Ne3 (11...b5 12 Bb3 b4 13 Ne4!?!; 11...Bg7 12 Qe2) 12 Bxf7+ Kxf7 13. Qh5+ and then

(a1) 13...Ke6 14 d5+ Kd7 15 Bf2 (15 Rd1 Nxd1 16 Qxf5+ Kc7 17 Qe5+ Kc8 18 Kxd1 Rh7 19 Qf5+ e6 20 Qxh7 Qxh4) 15...Nxc2+ (15...Nxd5 16 Bd4 Rg8 17 Nxd5 cxd5 18 Qf7 Rg5 19 h4 Rg2 20 0-0-0 Kc8 21 Bc5 e6 22 Bxf8 Qd7 23 Be7 Nc6 24 Qf8+), and here either 16 Ke2 Qe8 17 Qxf5 + e6 or 16 Kd2 Nxa1 17 Qxf5+ Kc7 18 Qe5+ Qd6 19 Qxh8. White has reasonable chances for a draw, although Black certainly has an advantage.

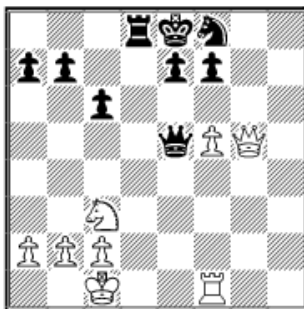
(a2) 13...Kg8 14 Qg6+ Bg7 15 Qe6+ Kh7 16 Rg1 Rg8 17 Qxe3 Qxd4 18 Qxd4 Bxd4 19 Rxg8 Kxg8 20 0-0-0, about =.



(b) 9...Bc8 10 Qf3 Nf6 11 Bxf6 exf6 12 0-0-0 Bh6+ 13 Kb1 0-0 14 Qg3 Kh8 15 d5 with sufficient compensation.

(c) 9...Bg7 10 h3 h6 11 Bf4 Nf6 12 Nxf5 gxf5 13 Rg1 Rg8 14 Qd3, and White has a lot of play for the two pawns.

(d) 9...Qd7 10 Nxf5 gxf5 (10...Qxf5 11 Qd2 f6 12 Bf4 g5 13 Bxb8 Qf3! 14 Rf1 Qe3+ 15 Qe2 Rxb8 16 Be6 Qxe2+ 17 Kxe2 h5 18 Rad1; for example, 18...Bg7 19 h3 Nh6 20 Ne4 Rd8 21 d5 with good chances for a draw) 11 h3 Bh6 12 Qd2 Bxg5 13 Qxg5 Qxd4 14 hxg4 Qxc4 15 Rxh7 Qd4 16 Rxh8+ Qxh8 17 0-0-0 Nd7 18 gxf5 Qe5 19 Qg8+ Nf8 20 Qg5 Rd8 21 Rf1.



Black's extra pawn can hardly be converted, e.g., 21...a5 22 a3 b5 23

Qg2 with counterplay.

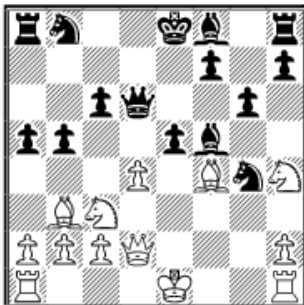
10 Qd2!

10 Nxf5 gxf5 11 Qd3 (11 Qd2? Bh6) 11...e6 12 0-0-0!? Nf2 13 Qe3 Nxd1 14 Rxd1. However, this attack fails: 14...Rg8! 15 d5 Be7 16 Bxe7 Qxe7 17 dxe6 fxe6 18 Bxe6 Qg5! →.

10...b5

Perhaps cautious play is more appropriate: 10...Rg8!? 11 0-0-0 Nd7 12 Kb1 e6 13 d5 cxd5 14 Bxd5 Nge5 15 Qe2 Qb4 or 10...h5 11 0-0-0 Nd7 12 h3 Ngf6 13 Kb1 Be6 14 Bf4 Bh6 15 Bxh6 Bxc4 16 Bf4 Qb4 come into consideration. In both cases Black seems to have a slight advantage.

11 Bb3 a5 12 Bf4 e5



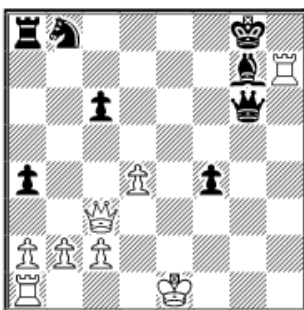
(a) 12...Qf6 13 Nxf5 gxf5 14 0-0-0 Bh6 15 a4 b4 16 Ne2 Bxf4 17 Nxf4.

(b) 12...Qd8 13 a3 Rg8 14 Nxf5 gxf5 15 d5.

(c) 12...Qd7 13 Nxf5 gxf5 14 a3 (after 14 a4?! b4 15 Ne2 Na6, Black will castle long, when his king will find a safe place on b7) with unclear complications.

13 h3 exf4

Or 13...b4 14 hxg4 exf4 15 gxf5 bxc3 16 Qxc3 a4 17 Bxf7+ Kxf7 18 Nxc3 hxg6 19 Rxh8 Bg7 20 Rh7 Kg8 21 fxg6 Qxg6



22 Rxg7+ Kxg7 23 0-0-0 unclear.

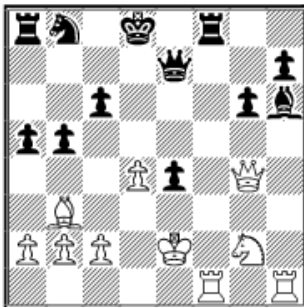
14 hxg4 Bxg4

14...Bd7!? 15 0-0-0! a4 16 Bxf7+ Kxf7 17 Ne4 Qc7 18 Nf3 Bg7 19 Ne5 + Kg8 20 Qxf4 Be8 21 g5 Nd7 22 Nf6+ Bxf6 23 gxf6 Bf7 24 Qh6 Nxf6 25 Rdf1 =.

15 Ne4 Qe7

After 15...Qc7 16 Nf6+ Kd8 17 Nxc4 a4, comes the surprising 18 Be6! Bg7 (18...fxe6 19 Nxc6 Rg8 20 Nxf4 +=) 19 Bf5 Qe7+ (19...gxf5 20 Nxf5 Bf8 21 d5 +=) 20 Ne5 f6 21 0-0-0 fxe5 22 Bxc6 e4 23 Nf5! +=.

16 Qxf4 f5 17 Kf1 fxe4 18 Qxg4 Kd8 19 Ke2! Bh6 20 Raf1 Rf8 21 Ng2



21...Rxf1 22 Rxf1 Qg5 23 Qxg5 Bxg5 24 Bg8, about =.

I can't deny that 7 g4 is risky. More analysis will be necessary to decide whether the move is sound. Fortunately, White has a reliable and more positional alternative in Lev Gutman's idea 7 Bg5 Be7 8 Nh4 Bg6 9 Nxg6 hxg6 10 Qd3!. And we shouldn't forget the equalizing 5 Nxe4. Altogether, it seems that I had overestimated the O'Kelly Defense in my article [4] and [5].

Sources:

- [1] E. J. Diemer: *Das moderne Blackmar-Diemer-Gambit*, Band 1, Heidelberg 1976.
- [2] V. Hergert: *Die O'Kelly-Verteidigung im Blackmar-Diemer-Gambit*, Düsseldorf 1993
- [3] G. Studier: *Emil Joseph Diemer*, Dresden 1996.
- [4] St. Bücken: "Rettung aus grauem Elend durch Diemers Gambit," in: [Kaissiber 5](#) (1998)
- [5] St. Bücken: "Kritische Varianten im BDG," in: [Kaissiber 8](#) (1998)
- [6] Thread "[Antidotes to the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit](#)" (2009-) [7]
- Analyses by Emanuel Rajmund on the colorful [reference site](#) for the Alchemy Variation.

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