

Chapter Four

Gambit Play

The majority of chess players marvel at a great attacking game. A brilliant attack is often the wonder of many an amateur player, who exclaims: 'how did that player get away with such daring and crazy play?'

The most impressive games often start with one side gambiting a pawn in return for an attack, but gambit play requires you to be willing to take risks. Such an approach to the game is sadly becoming less frequent, mainly due to the introduction of computers, which often show the correct way to proceed through the resulting complications.

I often get depressed when I look at one of my games with the 'help' of a chess program. Before turning on the computer I am feeling on top of the world, marvelling at my brilliant play, but within ten minutes of analysis with the computer I suddenly realize just how weak my play was. Every move

seems like a mistake when *Fritz* is on! This can really get you down, but one thing which you have to remember is that humans do not play like computers. We are very susceptible to making mistakes, unlike computers, and even the world's best players rarely play perfectly.

I have noticed that many readers of my previous books rely heavily on their computers. I often get a message back from a reader stating something along the following lines: 'I really liked your book which I have put through the latest version of *Fritz*. On page 78 you state that Black is clearly better after move 25, but when I left my computer to analyse this position overnight it thought that Black's advantage was only +0.25...'

Such a statement puts me in two minds. On one hand I am glad that someone has taken such an interest in

the book, but, on the other hand, the first thing I think is: ‘Oh no, this is not the most important issue!’ Indeed, the most important thing is to understand the main ideas of the opening being covered – remember the dangers of learning a line parrot fashion? It is also far more important for most players to improve their middlegame and end-game play than become bogged down analysing every sub-variation in an openings book. Well, at least until one becomes a strong grandmaster!

The point I am really trying to make is that you should not put all your faith into a chess program because when it comes down to actually playing the game, you have to face your opponent, not your computer! Moreover, while I would not recommend playing in a gambit manner against any strong chess program, it is an entirely different story playing like this against a human. Even if they survive the initial complications after accepting the gambit, faced with the prospect of defending for the whole game, it is very likely that they won’t be able to defend in the perfect manner.

Let us not give up on gambit play! Indeed, as we will see in this chapter, there is still plenty of room for Morphy-like play in the 21st Century. Our first modern Morphy is the exciting Swedish grandmaster, Emanuel Berg. I have learnt a number of attacking ideas from studying his games and have always been impressed by his aggressive

handling of the white pieces. Here we will see him employing one of the most critical lines against the Najdorf.

Game 19
E.Berg-J.Thomassen
Helsingor 2009
Sicilian Defence

**1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6
5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4**

We saw Radjabov play this line against Anand in the previous chapter. White basically wants to crush Black as quickly as possible; a plan which works out perfectly in this game!

7...♗e7

This is one of the main moves. Black breaks the pin on his knight and no longer has to worry quite so much about the e4-e5 advance.

8 ♖f3

In this variation White nearly always deploys his queen to this square, for a couple of reasons:

1. To deter Black from playing an early ...b5. Indeed, if Black plays the seemingly natural advance 8...b5? he will find both rook and knight attacked after 9 e5.

2. White prepares to castle queen-side, making the king safer and enabling the queen’s rook to generate some pressure down the d-file.

8...♕c7

A very sensible response. From c7 the queen gives extra protection to the

e5-square, thereby making it harder for White to play e4-e5 himself. Black can also now consider playing ...b5 as he can meet e5 with ...♗b7. Note too that it is often not advisable for Black to castle kingside too early, as his king can easily come under a nasty attack there.

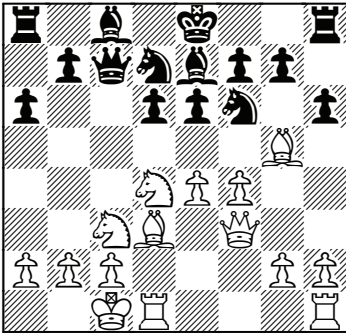
9 0-0-0 ♖bd7

Providing extra cover to e5.

10 ♗d3

White develops his last piece to a good, aggressive square. Later on in the game the bishop on d3 may put h7 under pressure, especially if Black castles kingside.

10...h6



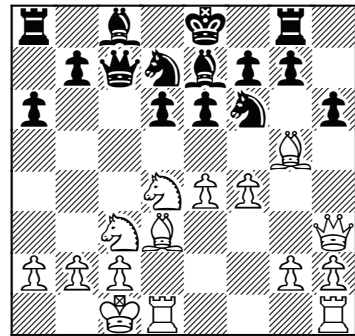
A number of strong players have played this move and it is clearly not a mistake, but Black does have to be very wary about making pawn moves as they can create some serious weaknesses. Here Black has weakened his kingside light squares and at some point White may be able to start some tactics based on e4-e5, ♖xe6 and ♗g6+ ideas. This is something that Black has to keep an eye open for.

The main alternative is 10...b5, as was played in no lesser game than B.Spassky-R.Fischer, World Championship (Game 15), Reykjavik 1972, which continued 11 ♖he1 ♗b7 12 ♖g3 0-0-0 (Fischer avoids the critical piece sacrifice 12...b4 13 ♖d5! exd5 14 exd5, which opens lines against Black's central king) 13 ♗xf6 (13 ♖dxb5 is a very interesting option here) 13...♖xf6 14 ♖xg7 ♖df8 15 ♖g3 b4 and Black had managed to generate enough play for the sacrificed pawn.

11 ♖h3!?

I like this move. White's queen is actually well placed here and begins to put e6 under some pressure.

11...♗g8?



A slip in concentration that will cost Black dearly. This move pays no attention to White's last move. The real intention behind 11 ♖h3 was not to pin the h-pawn, but rather to line up a sacrifice on e6.

Black should have overprotected the pawn on e6 by moving the knight on d7, and 11...♖b6 has been his most

popular choice. Two very uncompromising players clashed here in E.Berg-T.Hillarp Persson, Swedish Championship, Kungsoor 2009, and after 12 ♖he1 e5 13 ♜f5 ♙xf5 14 exf5 0-0-0 15 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 16 fxe5 ♙xe5 (16...dxe5? 17 ♜e4 is very unpleasant for Black) 17 f6+ ♖b8 18 fxg7 ♙xg7 19 ♙e4 ♙xc3 20 ♚xc3 ♚xc3 21 bxc3 White had a small advantage, mainly because his bishop was much stronger than Black's knight.

11...♜c5 is another sensible option, but 11...0-0? looks like suicide. I would then be extremely tempted to blow open the black king's defences with 12 ♙xh6.

12 e5!

Thematic. White opens up the light-squared bishop so that it can land on g6 at some moment. The position is obviously very complicated and Black must defend with extreme care.

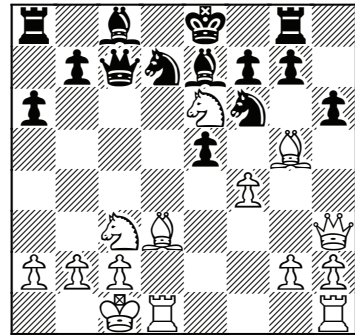
12...dxe5

This seems to be the best way to continue. Instead the game J.Jens-M.Azadmanesh, Leiden 1998, saw 12...hxg5 13 exf6 g4? 14 ♜xe6! ♚b6 (14...fxe6 15 ♚h5+ ♙d8 16 fxe7+ ♙xe7 17 ♜e4 is winning for White, as the black king is too exposed) 15 ♜xg7+ 1-0.

13 ♜xe6!

The point of White's play! This is a typical sacrifice which offers White very good compensation. My computer actually feels that Black is better here, but in a practical sense it is very hard to defend. For a start Black will struggle

to find good squares for his pieces.



13...fxe6

13...♚c6!? may have been worth considering, intending 14 ♜xg7+ ♚xg7 15 ♚xh6 ♚g8, although White still has very good compensation after 16 ♖he1.

14 ♙g6+ ♙d8

The only option: 14...♙f8?? 15 ♚xe6 leads to checkmate.

15 ♙xf6

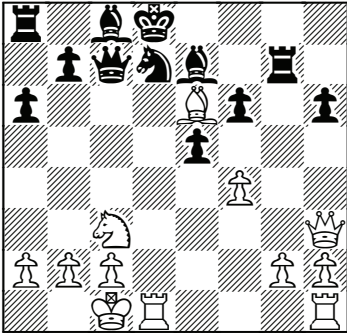
White's compensation lies in the fact that Black's pieces are cramped, his king is stuck on d8, the position is open and White has a number of open lines down which to attack. This all adds up to excellent compensation!

15...gxf6

Alternatively, 15...♙xf6 16 ♚xe6 ♚f8 and now White can increase the pressure with 17 ♚d6! and, with ♚hd1 to follow, I suspect that White is winning.

16 ♙f7 ♚g7 17 ♙xe6

Black is tied down to the defence of his knight on d7. In actual fact I think that his position is pretty hopeless. He has no active plan or way to continue; he just has to sit there and suffer.

**17...♙f8**

This is a rather unpleasant and passive way to play, but the rook on g7 needs to assist the defence.

18 ♘d5

Another decent option was 18 ♖xh6! with the immediate threat of 19 ♖xf6+. Play could continue 18...♙e8 19 fxe5 (trying to open up the e-file) 19...fxe5 20 ♖hf1 and White is winning.

18...♙c6 19 ♘xf6

It was also worth thinking about 19 fxe5 which opens up the f-file. After 19...fxe5 20 ♖hf1 ♙e7 Black is paralysed and White might be able to win immediately with 21 ♙xd7 ♙xd7 22 ♘e7 ♙xe7 23 ♖h4+ ♙e8 24 ♖f6.

19...♖xg2

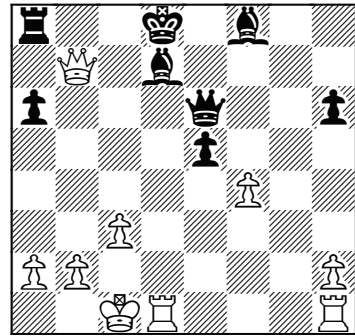
Instead 19...exf4 keeps the f-file closed, but opens the e-file. You cannot always have it your own way! After 20 ♖he1 White should be winning, such as with 20...♙d6 (attempting to close the d-file) 21 ♖xh6 ♖xg2 22 ♙f5 ♘xf6 23 ♖xf6+ ♙c7 24 ♖xd6! ♖xd6 25 ♖e7+ ♙c6 26 ♙e4+.

20 c3!

Simple and good. There is no need to rush as overall Black's pieces lack coordination.

20...♖b6

This makes White's task a lot easier, but the situation was difficult anyway. Instead 20...♙d6 may have objectively been best. Saying that, White is winning after 21 ♘d5! ♖g7 22 ♖xh6 ♙f8 23 ♖h4+ ♙e8 24 ♙xd7+ ♙xd7 25 ♘f6+.

21 ♖xg2 ♖xe6 22 ♘xd7 ♙xd7 23 ♖xb7 1-0

Black resigned as after 23...♖c8 White will play 24 ♖xd7+ and then 25 ♖d1.

Thomassen only really made one mistake in this game and that 11th-move slip led to a devastating defeat. I would, however, have been quite worried about playing such an opening against Berg in any case. You should always try to consider your opponent's style and, if you can help it, try to avoid playing to their strengths. Berg is a tactical, attacking player so he must have been very happy with the way the opening turned out, especially once he

got to land a thematic blow on e6.

In complicated, tricky positions, pay extra attention!

We will now see an even more dangerous attacker behind the white pieces, Veselin Topalov. He can play either 1 d4 or 1 e4, and more often than not he will completely destroy his opponent. This game is no exception. White plays a trendy pawn sacrifice and maintains the pressure on his opponent right until the end of the game.

Game 20
V.Topalov-V.Anand
Bilbao 2008
Queen's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♖f6 **2 c4** e6 **3** ♗f3 b6 **4 g3** ♙a6 **5** ♖c2

A dangerous line which I alluded to in the notes to Game 16, Adorjan-Kudrin. 5 ♖c2 is by far the most popular choice at the moment. White plans to take over the centre with 6 e4 and is ready to offer a dangerous gambit.

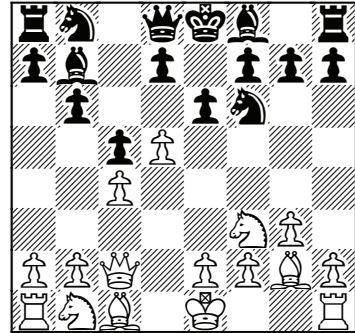
5...♙b7

This stops 6 e4 and gives extra protection to the d5-square. We will see why this is important in a moment.

6 ♙g2 c5

Black can play this counterattacking idea as a result of his previous move. In general the two ideal responses to ...c5 are e2-e4 and d4-d5, but both of these moves seem to lose a pawn here.

7 d5!



However, White makes this push anyway! This pawn sacrifice gains time and also gives White some useful pressure along the d-file.

7...exd5

Black really must accept the pawn. Otherwise White's centre will be too strong after 8 e4 and Black's light-squared bishop will become a bad piece.

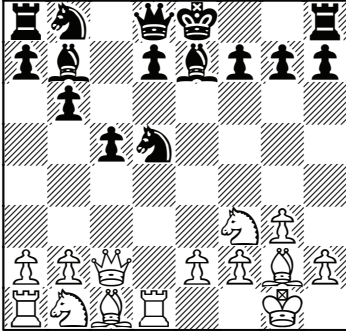
8 cxd5 ♗xd5

The standard response. The other capture, 8...♙xd5, has been known to be bad ever since the game P.Tregubov-A.Greet, Fuegen 2006, which continued 9 ♗c3 ♙c6 10 e4 d6 11 ♙f4 ♗h5 12 0-0-0 ♗xf4 13 gxf4 ♙e7 14 e5 0-0 15 h4! (Tregubov must have had a sneak preview of the final chapter!) 15...♖c7 16 ♗g5 when White had a big attack and won very quickly.

9 0-0 ♙e7 10 ♖d1

This sets up threats against the knight on d5, as when White moves his knight from f3 this piece will be attacked. Meanwhile Black's pieces are a

little clumsily placed and it will take him a while to rearrange them.



10...♖c8

Black plays this rather strange move in order to overprotect the bishop on b7, which avoids a lot of tricks. He has also tried:

a) 10...♗c6 11 ♕f5 (11 ♖xd5? is a mistake due to 11...♗b4 when White loses the exchange) 11...♗f6 12 e4 g6 13 ♕f4 0-0 14 e5 ♗h5 15 ♕c4 was B.Gelfand-P.Leko, Jermuk 2009, where White had good compensation for the pawn. He enjoyed pressure down the d-file, a dangerous, cramping pawn on e5 and Black had weakened his kingside by playing ...g6, while also placing his knight on h5.

b) 10...0-0?! is a mistake as White can play 11 ♕e4! which wins two pieces for the rook. The game M.Devereaux-S.Tofte, Gibraltar 2008, continued 11...♗a6 12 ♖xd5 ♗b4 13 ♗c3 f5 14 ♕c4 b5 and now White should have captured the pawn: 15 ♕xb5 ♗xd5 16 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 17 ♕c4 with a winning position.

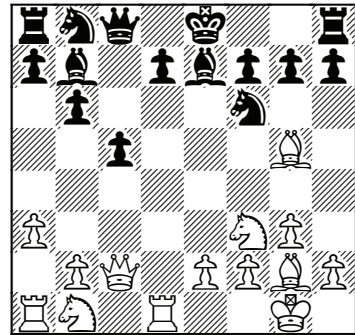
11 a3

A prophylactic move against ...♗b4. Now White is ready to play e2-e4.

11...♗f6

With this move Black aims to take the e4-square under his control. Having vacated the d5-square, he can consider pushing his own pawn to d5.

12 ♗g5!



This is a good move for one main reason: at the moment both players are fighting for control of the d5-square and, by playing ♗g5, White indirectly increases the pressure on that square.

12...d5

A very principled decision. If Black can maintain his pawn on this square then he will have a good position. Indeed, White must act quickly before Black manages to consolidate his material advantage.

13 ♗xf6

Removing one defender of the d5-pawn.

13...♗xf6 14 ♗c3

A critical moment. What can Black do about the threat to his d5-pawn?

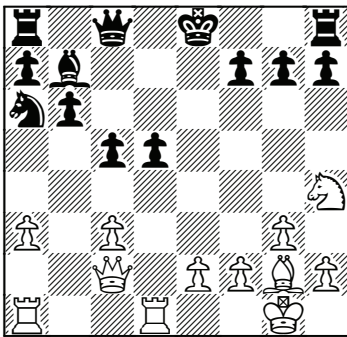
14...♙xc3

Probably Black's best move. The white knight on c3 was stronger than the bishop on f6, so Anand exchanges these pieces. Let's take a quick look, though, at one of Black's alternatives, namely 14...♚e6, trying to hold everything together. The most thematic move in this position is 15 e4!?. White is ahead in development so he naturally tries to open the position. Play could continue 15...dxe4 16 ♖g5! ♙xg5 17 ♜xe4 and, due to threats on the long diagonal, White is a lot better.

15 bxc3 ♜a6

Black must develop his remaining piece. He might like to get his king to safety, but 15...0-0?! runs into 16 ♜g5! when White has a dangerous attack: for example, 16...g6 17 ♙xd5 ♙xd5 18 ♚xd5 and, by forcing ...g6, White has created some nasty weaknesses on the kingside. He also has control of the d-file and play is actually quite similar to the main game.

16 ♜h4



The best square for White's knight

is f5. There the knight puts pressure on g7, d6 and Black's king position in general. Black's pawn on d5 is also now under attack. As I said in the introduction to this game, Topalov just keeps putting Anand under pressure and it is very hard to defend against such play.

16...g6

This move feels right as it keeps the knight out of f5, although White is guaranteed an advantage after it as Black has created some significant dark-squared weaknesses. Maybe Black could have tried 16...♚e6, but again White is better after 17 ♜f5 0-0 18 c4! and he will win back his pawn while retaining a positional advantage.

17 ♙xd5 ♙xd5

Black should exchange the bishop on d5 before White has a chance to play c2-c4. Indeed, after 17...0-0 18 c4! ♙xd5 White can play 19 cxd5 when the d-pawn will be a real problem for Black.

18 ♚xd5 0-0 19 ♚ad1

White has the advantage. Black has lost his extra pawn and the d-file, weakened his kingside and his knight on a6 is very much out of play.

19...♞c7

Anand tries to bring the knight back into the game.

20 ♚d7 ♜e6

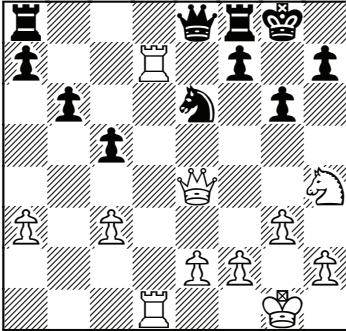
This looks like a very natural square for the knight. Another idea was 20...♞b5 when there is a threat of 21...♞d4. In actual fact this position was later reached in V.Bhat-G.Papp, Lubbock 2009, which continued 21

♙d5! a6 22 ♚d2 ♜a7 23 ♞d8 and White retained the advantage.

21 ♜e4

White centralizes his queen. Slowly but surely he wants to bring her around to either f6 or h6.

21... ♜e8?!



The black queen is very passive here. It is hard to recommend another move, but maybe Black should have tried 21...c4!? when ... ♞c5 is an idea. Indeed, after 22 ♚g4 ♜c5! (but not 22... ♞c5? 23 ♞f5!) Black is clinging on.

22 ♞f3!

A good move. The knight has performed its duty well on h4, forcing Black to weaken himself with ...g6, and so now rejoins the play.

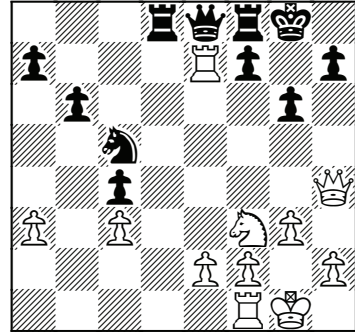
22...c4?!

Uncharacteristically Anand gives in without a fight. His position would still have been unenviable after 22... ♞d4 , but he might have been able to last a bit longer: 23 ♞e5 ♞b5 24 ♞1d3 ♞xa3 25 ♚d5 and White is better, but game goes on.

23 ♚h4

Things are really tough for Black now!

23... ♞c5 24 ♜e7 ♞d8 25 ♜f1 1-0



Black resigned as 26 ♞g5 is coming.

This is just about the only game in this book where the loser ended up in a difficult position without clearly doing anything wrong. This is probably more of a reflection on Topalov's play and the strength of White's gambit than Anand's play, though.

Sometimes in chess you do not need to try too hard; just keep the pressure up and your opponent's position will eventually crumble!

In the next game Black completely throws his opponent off track with a wacky opening, the Elephant Gambit. This is quite a dubious opening, but the game we are about to look at actually inspired me to give it a go against David Howell. Unfortunately I got an awful position from the opening and lost in quick fashion. The brave (one might say the foolish!) are not always successful.