

# Introduction

I've never liked playing against gambits.

The problem is that in every opening gambit lines are available. And sometimes you just have to take these pawns, since otherwise your opponent gets a great position “for free”. Even with good preparation, facing a gambit can be nerve-wracking. As an example, I've been playing 1 e4 e5 regularly for a number of years, and still feel a twinge of relief when my opponent doesn't test me with 2 f4 followed by some sideline. It doesn't matter that this move is condemned by theory and laughed at by *Rybka*, it still puts me in a position where I have to find accurate defensive moves rather than reel off the first 15 moves of a Ruy Lopez while my coffee kicks in. Similarly, simply leaving that pawn on f4 (for instance, with 2...♙c5) has to be characterized as a concession – I get off the hook for the next few moves, but I'll need to deal with White's kingside space advantage and half-open f-file during the middlegame.

Considering the above, writing a book like this might seem a masochistic exercise. However, our chess training tends to be the most beneficial

when it's uncomfortable, because it targets skills which most players ignore. So let's get straight into a couple of examples I wish hadn't happened.

## Some Personal Experience

What I'm about to show you is the single worst game in my career. The result (a loss with Black against an IM in the ascendancy, at a tournament where he made his final GM norm) is no disgrace, but the manner in which it came about was horrible. I'll give some additional detail of circumstances behind this game, things that were on my mind, not because I'm making excuses, but because any examination of gambit defence must also include a look at the psychology of gambits, since often our thinking becomes blurred and we stop acting sensibly.

*Game 1*

**G.Jones-S.Collins**

British League (4NCL) 2007

*Philidor Defence*

**1 e4 d6**

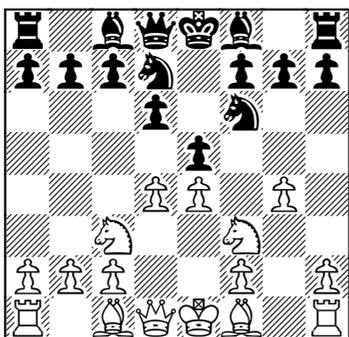
## Gambit Busters!

First factor – I was very late for this game. Over an hour late, in fact. While Gawain could have claimed the point (playing in a team event and already nursing a pint of beer, this would have been entirely understandable), he generously decided to play.

**2 d4 ♖f6 3 ♘c3 e5 4 ♗f3 ♝bd7**

This line is rather hot of late – using this move order to reach the Hanham variation of the Philidor is in the repertoires of many strong players (including GM John Shaw, whose black opening repertoire has been world class for some time).

**5 g4**



The first of many gambits you will see in this book. This line was patented by Shirov.

Second factor – I was already annoyed at myself. The fact is, Gawain and I had played a game in this line at the Bunratty tournament. Gawain played 5 ♕c4 and won the game, and during the post-mortem I expressed my surprise that a natural attacking player like him did not play 5 g4. Thus,

my opponent found out about this line because I told him. Also, in the intervening months I hadn't done any preparation on this line. So here I was, having armed my opponent and not myself, looking at a dangerous gambit with my clock ticking.

**5...♞xg4**

Black can also decline with 5...h6 or 5...g6. For further coverage of this line, see Shirov-Shaw (Game 44).

**6 ♖g1 ♗gf6 7 ♕c4**

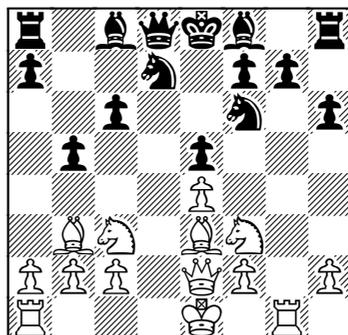
Developing with a threat is an extremely natural way to play, but the bishop on c4 does give Black some tempi in his queenside expansion with ...c6 and ...b5.

7 ♕e3 appears more venomous on the current view.

**7...h6**

One of the hidden points of White's compensation is that Black feels obliged to play this ugly, weakening move to prevent ♘g5. Thus White gains more time for full development.

**8 ♕e3 c6 9 dxe5 dxe5 10 ♖e2 b5 11 ♕b3**



**11...♖c7?!**

A passive move. 11...♖a5! and 12...♗a6, with ideas of ...b4 or ...c5, is a much better approach.

**12 0-0-0 a5?**

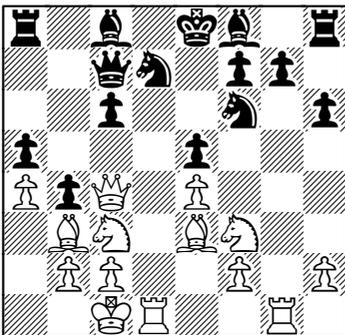
Starting a disastrous plan, based on a very simple tactical oversight.

**13 a4!**

Having put this game firmly out of my mind in the intervening years, I find it hard to remember what I thought of this move. From a positional viewpoint, it is a good result for White to close the queenside and get the c4-square. Probably I was thinking of some queen's pawn openings where after a4 and ...b4, a knight on c3 drops back to b1, then to d2 before settling on an outpost on c4. Some compensation, but nothing overwhelming.

**13...b4??**

I don't think I even saw Gawain's response before it landed on the board.

**14 ♖c4**

Absolutely decisive, even though the position takes a few moves to settle.

**14...♗c5**

The best of an awful bunch.

14...bxc3 15 ♖xf7+ ♔d8 gives White an enormous attack. In such positions all moves win, but if anyone has any residual faith in Black's chances, 16 ♗xg7! ♗d6 (16...♗xg7 17 ♖xg7 forks the knight and the rook) 17 ♗g5!! hxg5 18 ♗xg5 is one of the strongest attacks you're likely to see.

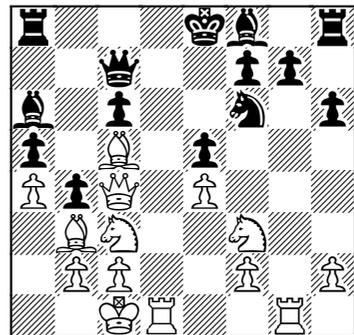
**15 ♗xc5**

I thought for a long time here.

**15...♗a6**

15...♗e6 16 ♗d5! is an amusing mirror image of the game. This doesn't end any better for Black, e.g. 16...cxd5 17 exd5 ♗xd5 (or 17...♗f5 18 d6 and if the queen moves away, the pawn will decisively break communication on d7) 18 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 19 ♖xd5 and the undefended a8-rook is added to Black's woes. After 19...♗d8 20 ♗b6! ♗xd5 21 ♗xc7 White will equalize the pawn count, with a decisive lead in pieces and initiative.

15...bxc3 16 ♗b6 wins prosaically.

**16 ♗b5!**

## Gambit Busters!

Straightforward for someone of Gawain's tactical ability.

**16...cxb5 17 axb5 ♖xc5**

17...♗c8 18 bxa6 ♕xc5 19 ♗xg7 ♕e3+ 20 fxe3 ♗xc4 21 ♕xc4 ♗xc4 22 a7 doesn't work any better.

**18 ♗xg7!**

Accuracy to the end. 18 bxa6 0-0 is only slightly better for White.

**18...♕e3+**

18...♗h7 is the only way to continue, but after 19 ♗xh7 ♖xh7 20 bxa6 Black's king is doomed, not least because of the opposite coloured bishops.

**19 fxe3 ♗xc4 20 ♕xc4 ♕c8 21 ♖xe5 1-0**

Disgusted, I decided to throw in the towel here.

## Conclusions

1. Psychological factors are of paramount importance when facing gambits. The positions we tend to get when our opponent throws pawns onto the fire are often difficult and treacherous, and the best moves (or even good moves) don't suggest themselves very easily. We only have a chance of finding the right moves when we are facing the game in a calm, determined manner.

2. Always look for a better way to implement your idea. Here, I was tempted by the plan of ...a5, ...b4 and ...♕a6. Using this same plan with a queen on a5, instead of a pawn, and putting my bishop on a6 before push-

ing ...b4 would have eliminated White's tactical idea of ♗c4, generated more active play for me on the queenside (since ...b4 is actually a threat, and my queen is actively placed) and saved a tempo.

3. Gawain's play from moves 14-18 was really excellent. Instead of concerning himself with regaining material, he brought fresh forces into the game (pawn to b5, rook to g7) and my position immediately collapsed.

The notes to this following game are based on my annotations for *British Chess Magazine*. My hope while working on this book was that, next to the ugliness of Jones-Collins (the game, I hasten to add, and not the devilishly handsome players who competed in it), I would be able to provide a later example of me perfectly applying all the lessons I learned throughout the writing process and winning a good game against a gambit. I suppose I could claim that Baker-Collins (later in this volume) is this counterexample, but I don't think it is. Instead, I have to show another crushing defeat against a dangerous gambit; again, playing against a strong player.

This game decided the destination of the 4NCL 2009/10 title. Having played ourselves into contention with an excellent 6-2 win the previous day, my team, Barbican, came crashing down to earth with a loss by the same score to the eventual winners.

## Game 2

N.Pert-S.Collins

British League (4NCL) 2010

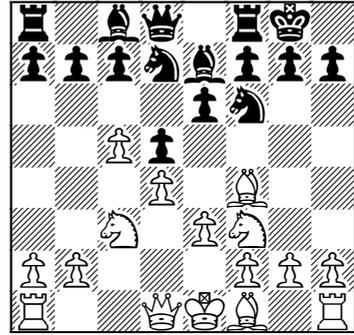
*Queen's Gambit Declined*1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3  $\text{f3}$   $\text{f6}$  4  $\text{c3}$   $\text{e7}$ 

Nick remarked that I was a difficult player to prepare for, and it had been a while since I used the pure QGD (my last outing against 1 d4 was a Tarrasch against Pablo San Segundo in San Sebastian). Such an approach has its benefits, in that sometimes one's opponent can be uncomfortable in an unexpected variation, but the problem is that it is hard to cover all the holes in one's repertoire, and here Nick points out the biggest one in mine!

Nick, on the other hand, is notable for consistently playing the same lines, which he handles with some expertise. In our previous 4NCL encounter, my original play resulted in a weird pseudo-Grünfeld and an eventual win for me, but here Nick forcefully re-establishes the balance.

5  $\text{e4}$  0-0 6 e3  $\text{bd7}$  7 c5

My preparation had been very sloppy. I hadn't seen any games by Nick against 6... $\text{bd7}$ , but assumed he would go for one of the IQP positions (e.g. 7 a3 c5 8 cxd5  $\text{xd5}$  9  $\text{xd5}$  exd5 10 dxc5  $\text{xc5}$  11  $\text{e5}$ ) since he likes these in the other lines (e.g. 6...c5 7 dxc5  $\text{xc5}$  and now 8 cxd5). However, 7 c5 is the critical move, and it at least deserved a brush-up before the game.



7...c6 8 h3

By holding back on the development of his light-squared bishop, White hopes to gain a tempo when I play ...b6, ...a5 and ... $\text{e6}$  by exchanging on a6 in one move. I already sensed that Nick had an idea of a setup with b5, but didn't spend enough time around here to work out a way to avoid it.

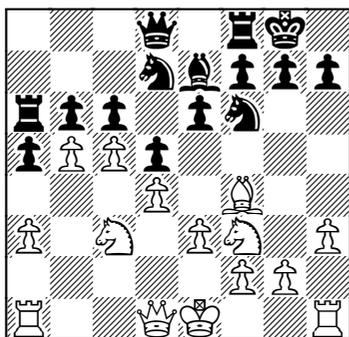
8  $\text{e3}$  b6 9 b4 a5 10 a3  $\text{e6}$  11 0-0 is the quieter approach, which I wouldn't have been unhappy with, despite watching live one of the upsets of the Dresden Olympiad 2008, T.Nyback-M.Carlsen: 11... $\text{c8}$  12  $\text{c2}$   $\text{xd3}$  13  $\text{xd3}$   $\text{h5}$  14  $\text{e5}$   $\text{b7}$  15  $\text{fc1}$   $\text{fc8}$  16 h3  $\text{xe5}$  17  $\text{xe5}$  b5 18  $\text{cb1}$   $\text{c7}$  19 a4 axb4 20 axb5!? bxc3 21  $\text{xc6}$   $\text{f6}$  22  $\text{xc3}$   $\text{f8}$  23  $\text{xa8}$   $\text{xa8}$  24  $\text{a1}$  and White won in 39 moves.

8...b6

8... $\text{e4}$ ! is a good way to opt out with Black, as Nick showed me after the game. Vaganian has played this, which is the end of the matter whenever you are looking for a line to play with Black in the QGD.

## Gambit Busters!

9 b4 a5 10 a3 ♖a6 11 ♖xa6 ♗xa6 12 b5!



The introduction to a dangerous gambit. Indeed, my teammate John Cox, who is currently working on some opening book (the details of which are confidential, even from me), seems to think this line is just superb for White.

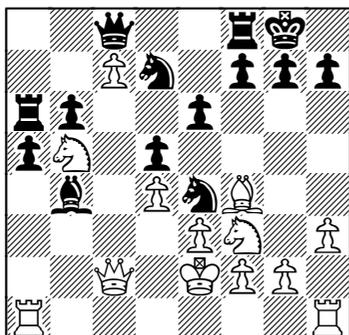
12...cxb5 13 c6 ♗c8 14 c7 ♖xa3?!

This seems dubious, though not because of the line in the game. As Nick told me, 14...b4 15 ♖b5 a4! is the way they play it, with great complications.

15 ♖xb5 ♖b4+ 16 ♖e2?!

16 ♖f1!, as suggested by Nick in post mortem, was much stronger.

16...♖e4 17 ♗c2



17...♗a8

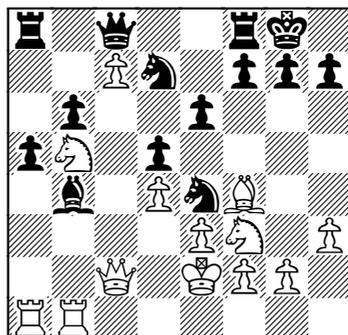
17...♗dc5! was suggested by Nick after the game. I had seen this idea (aiming to return to sacrifice a piece for some pawns, central control, and a closed c-file) but didn't really believe it. However, this would have shown the downside of 16 ♖e2: 18 dxc5 (there is nothing better) 18...bxc5 19 ♗hc1 ♗b7 20 ♖a3 f6, with ...e5 coming and an excellent game for Black.

18 ♗hb1!

Of course.

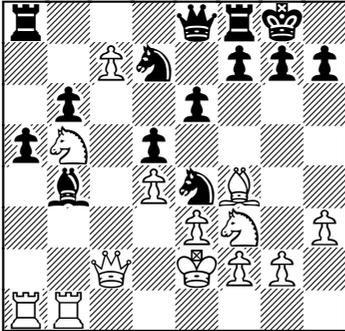
One thing I have noted through playing several games with Nick is that, while he seems like a solid, positional player, he often plays in quite a tactical fashion. Here he takes my ...♗a6 resource out of the position by simple tactical means.

In general, I succeeded in guessing none of my opponent's moves in this game. 18 ♗hc1 is what I expected, when Black has good play after 18...♗a6 19 ♗d3 and the pin is unpleasant, or 19 ♗c6 ♖df6 intending ...♖c3.



18...♖e8?!

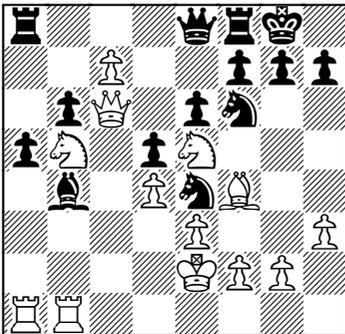
18...♖b7 tries to keep the white queen out of c6, but White is comfortably on top: 19 ♖g5 ♗xg5 20 ♕xg5 f6 21 ♕h4 e5 22 ♔f1 and the c-pawn is the most important aspect of the position.



19 ♖c6

Now Black is basically busted.

19...♗df6 20 ♖e5!



White is dominant, and Black has absolutely no play. Needless to say, the extra pawn plays no role.

20...♖e7?

20...g5, trying to generate some kingside play, was better, but White is

very much on top.

21 ♗d3 ♖e8 22 ♖xe8 ♗fxe8 23 ♗xb4 axb4 24 ♗xa8 ♗xa8 25 f3 1-0

25...♗c3+ 26 ♗xc3 bxc3 27 ♗xb6 is decisive.

A good game by Nick, but I didn't test him at all.

## Conclusions

1. A wide opening repertoire has certain advantages, but you must never forget to cover the most dangerous lines in your preparation. Either have a response or a way of avoiding them ready, since problems like those in the current game are extremely difficult to solve at the board.

2. 8...♗e4! is an excellent practical way of dealing with White's aggressive setup in this game. This idea crops up in some of the more dangerous Queen's Gambit Declined lines – see P.Nielsen-V.Georgiev, Dresden Olympiad 2008 (Game 5) for another example.

3. One of the benefits of being a pawn up is that counter-sacrifices become much more plausible. This game's outcome was decisively influenced by my inability to see the knight sacrifice at move 17. Nick, as a grandmaster, is much more comfortable than other players with the idea of positional piece sacrifices. (I remember Jonathan Rowson pointing out to me that a GM's superiority over an IM is based, in large part, on being comfort-

## Gambit Busters!

able with sacrifices – more on this later). After missing this idea, my position steadily deteriorated.

Conversely, I'm aware of the psychological boost playing a gambit can give a player. My first win against a GM was the product of an unintentional gambit:

### Game 3

#### S.Collins-T.Hillarp Persson

Isle of Man Open,  
Port Erin 2001  
*Modern Defence*

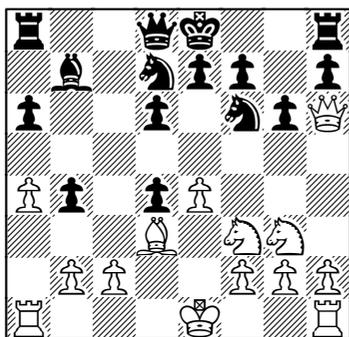
1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 ♖c3 d6 4 ♙e3 a6

This is Tiger's specialty, and the subject of a book he wrote.

5 ♚d2 ♘d7 6 ♘f3 b5 7 ♙d3 ♙b7 8 a4 b4 9 ♘e2 c5 10 ♘g3 ♘gf6 11 ♙h6

11 c3 is more circumspect.

11...♙xh6! 12 ♚xh6 cxd4!



13 0-0

Around here I realized that my intended 13 ♖xd4 fails to 13...♚b6 14

♘f3 ♚xf2+! 15 ♚xf2 ♘g4+.

13...♚b6 14 ♘g5 ♚c8 15 a5 ♚a7 16 ♚ae1

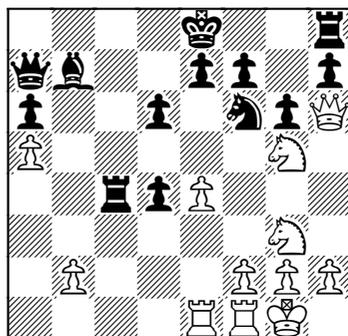
Black has several good options here, but White has a degree of compensation. Tiger went for a “clarifying” line which ended up in disaster.

16...b3?!

Aimed at destabilizing the bishop on d3.

After 16...♚f8! 17 ♘xh7 ♘xh7 18 ♚xh7 ♚c5 Black seems to be better. Material is level, but Black's central control, good coordination and queen-side play seem to be worth more than White's assets. The king can walk to the queenside via d8 and c7 without too much trouble.

17 cxb3 ♘e5 18 ♙c4 ♘xc4 19 bxc4 ♚xc4??

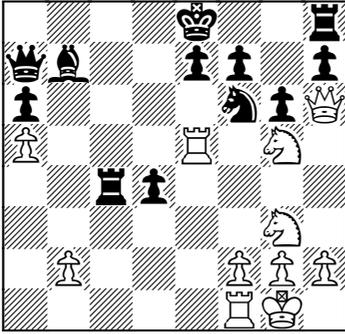


Black has traded off a pair of minor pieces, which is normally an objective worth aiming for – the d3-bishop, although it was slightly passive, could have come into its own had the game opened up. But the cost of this trade is far too great – Black has lost control of

the e5-square, enabling the white pieces to pour through the centre.

19...♖c5! keeps the position unclear.

20 e5! dxe5 21 ♖xe5



Already there is no defence.

21...♗d7

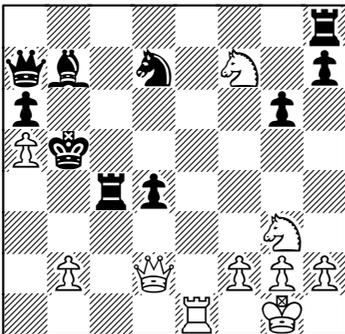
Forcing White into a very easy decision:

22 ♖xe7+! ♗xe7 23 ♖e1+ ♗d6

After 23...♗d8 24 ♗xf7+ ♗c8 25 ♗d6+ ♗b8 26 ♗xc4 White retains his attack with an extra pawn.

23...♗f6? walks into 24 ♗xh7+ ♖xh7 25 ♗h5+ ♗f5 26 ♗f4 mate.

24 ♗xf7+ ♗c5 25 ♗g5+ ♗b4 26 ♗d2+ ♗b5



27 ♗d6+!

An excellent decision to sacrifice and play for an attack.

After 27 ♗xh8 ♗c5 White loses the initiative – the black pieces coordinate well and the h8-knight is out of play. White's extra pawn is not really felt.

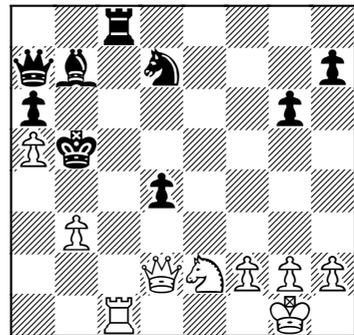
27...♗c5 28 ♗xc4 ♗xc4 29 b3+!

Black can't take this since the open b-file will fuel the attack, but having the pawn on b3 gives me control over the key a4- and c4-squares.

29...♗d5 30 ♗g5+ ♗d6 31 ♗f4+ ♗c6 32 ♖c1+ ♗b5

This position is a good example of the 'principle of the worst piece'. Only the g3-knight isn't participating in the attack, so I bring it across.

33 ♗e2! ♖c8 34 ♗g5+ ♗b4 35 ♗d2+ ♗b5 36 ♗d3+ ♗b4 37 ♗d2+ ♗b5



White's weakened back rank inspires caution: 38 ♗xd4?? ♗xd4 39 ♗xd4 ♖c1+, mating, would be a sorry end to the game. But fortunately the winning finish is easy to calculate:

38 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 39 ♗xd4+ ♗c5 40 b4+ ♗c4 41 ♗e2+! ♗c3

## Gambit Busters!

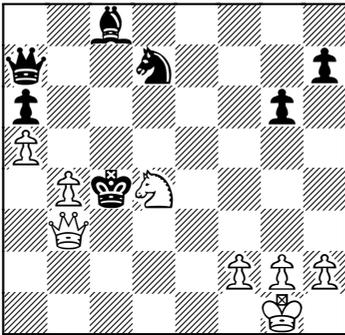
Other moves lose more quickly: 41...♗xd4 42 ♖e3+, 41...♗xb4 42 ♘c6+, or 41...♗d5 42 ♖e6+! ♗xd4 43 ♖e3+.

**42 ♖e3+ ♗c4**

If 42...♗b2 then 43 ♖b3+ and mate on c2 next move (with the queen or knight).

**43 ♖b3+ 1-0**

Beautiful geometry. Black is forced to capture the knight, whereupon 44 ♖e3+ wins the queen, so he resigned.



## Conclusions

1. Sometimes gambits arise by accident. In this game, I simply lost a pawn – the variation at move 13 was a mystery to me until Tiger's 12th move – but luckily my position still provided interesting compensation. It is important in such circumstances not to get annoyed – yes, your opponent got lucky, but so what? – and calmly solve the problems in the resulting position.

2. One of the most important decisions you can make in a game is whether to change the pawn structure.

Tiger's transformation from moves 16-19 was disastrous, since it allowed me to open the e-file. In general, opening the position with your king in the centre is rarely a good idea.

3. King safety is always of paramount importance. This doesn't mean that you need to castle before doing anything else – sometimes the king is safe in the centre, or can castle by hand – but simply that when your king is exposed, all of your other positional assets don't tend to amount to very much.

## Scope

A few words about what this book will cover:

## Theme

The theme is gambits. Gambits are a subset of sacrifices, and my working definition of a gambit is a sacrifice (normally, but not exclusively, the fallen soldier will be a pawn) which occurs during the opening phase (the opening being that phase which occurs until the pieces have been developed and the kings reach safety). Thinking about this definition already gives some guidance on good play following gambits – there are clearly defined tasks in the opening (get your pieces out, get your king into safety), and these tasks don't go away merely because you're a pawn up. Far from it. Indeed, the successful completion of development, and getting one's king

into safety, will often show that a gambit has been successfully dealt with.

### **Perspective**

There are two players in every game, and in this book I will be focussing on the defender. There are many good texts detailing attacking play, but I wanted to narrow the focus in this work. One reason for this is my belief (which is shared by the majority of chess writers I have read), that club players are much less comfortable defending against gambits rather than playing them. I know several players who just go to pieces when facing gambit play (or any form of aggressive play, for that matter) – they get flustered and seem to shed hundreds of rating points. Just think of Tal's opponents, world-class players who missed simple tactics in winning positions due to the relentless pressure caused by the Riga Magician's imagination. Not even Botvinnik was immune – his blunder on the 39th move of the 17th game in

their 1960 World Championship match allowed a combination which might feature in a beginner's book on tactics.

### **Method**

A central premise of this book is that there is a major psychological difference between actually facing a gambit with the clock ticking, and passively looking at an opening variation or an example of defensive play. An excellent method to train against this is to try and predict the moves in the annotated games – this engages you much more than simply playing over the variations, and (hopefully) will result in a broadening of your defensive arsenal.

I must thank Byron Jacobs and, especially, John Emms at Everyman Chess for their indispensable help with this project. To everyone else, thanks for reading!

Sam Collins  
Dublin  
October 2010

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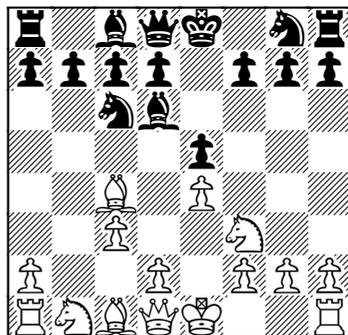
## Chapter Four

# Harsh Treatment of Romantic Lines

It's worth taking a look at some examples of modern approaches to historical gambits. In part, this is because there is nothing new in chess – for every new opening, there are a dozen lines which have been prematurely discarded but are reborn with considerable surprise value.

In the following six games, harsh treatment is meted out to the Evans Gambit, the King's Gambit and the Two Knights Defence.

development of the c8-bishop, but this is achieved with flying colours in this game.



*Game 14*  
**B.Jobava-A.Grischuk**  
 European Team  
 Championship, Plovdiv 2003  
*Evans Gambit*

**1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♙c5 4 b4 ♙xb4 5 c3 ♙d6!?**

Highly unusual but, it seems, not bad. The only downside is the devel-

**6 d4 ♗f6 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♖e1 h6 9 ♘h4?**

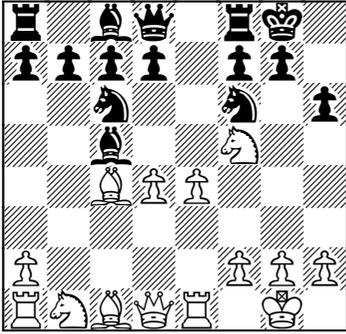
Missing Grischuk's 11th move which, as so often with the talented Russian GM, is a beautifully classical solution to an apparently complex position. White has 8th and 9th move alternatives, for which you can check the theory if you're interested!

**9...exd4 10 ♗f5**

10 cxd4 ♙b4 followed by 11...♗xe4

and 12...d5, or the immediate 11...d5, destroys White's centre and leaves Black clearly better.

**10...♙c5 11 cxd4**



**11...d5!**

The knight on f5 makes this break even more effective than usual.

**12 exd5**

White is worse in all variations: 12 dxc5 dxc4 13 ♖c3 ♙xf5 14 exf5 ♗b4! and the knight comes to d3; or 12 ♙xd5 ♙b4! winning material.

**12...♙xf5**

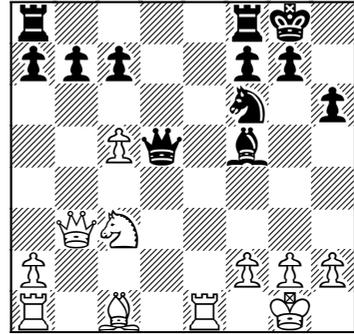
The immediate 12...♗a5 was possible, but even in such a tactically charged position Grischuk obeys the first law of Open Games: development!

**13 dxc5 ♗a5 14 ♙b3?**

Perhaps Jobava was shell-shocked. Giving up the bishop pair while allowing Black to solve his only problem piece is a characteristic error of players about 400 points lower rated than the Georgian.

14 ♙f1, leaving the knight on the edge, restricts Black to a small plus.

**14...♗xb3 15 ♖xb3 ♗xd5 16 ♗c3**



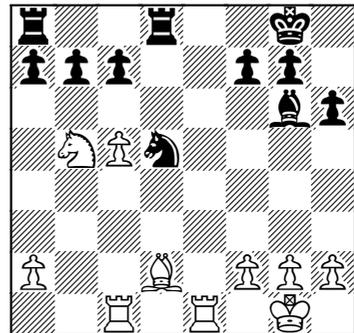
**16...♗fe8!**

Grischuk is the most elegant top player by some distance, as this nuance demonstrates.

**17 ♙e3 ♗c6 18 ♗b5**

The endgame doesn't offer many chances, but 18 ♖ad1 ♖ad8 is no problem for Black either. In such a position with open d- and e-files, it is very tough for White to profitably avoid exchanges. Thus Grischuk, by offering trades, can seize the important lines.

**18...♗xb5 19 ♗xb5 ♗d5 20 ♙d2 ♗ed8 21 ♖ac1 ♙g6**



The presence of opposite-coloured bishops is not sufficient to negate

## Gambit Busters!

Black's extra pawn, since there are so many other pieces. Nonetheless, Black needs to show good technique, and Grischuk is not found lacking.

22 a3 c6 23 ♘d6 b6 24 ♘c4 f6 25 f3  
 ♙d3 26 ♘b2 ♙g6 27 ♘c4 ♖ac8 28 ♖ed1  
 ♗d7 29 ♙e3 ♗cd8 30 cxb6 axb6 31 ♙f2  
 b5 32 ♘a5 ♘f4 33 ♖xd7 ♗xd7 34 ♖a1  
 ♗d6 35 ♙e3 ♘d3 36 a4 ♙e6 37 ♙d2  
 ♗e2 38 ♖a2 ♙f7 39 ♖c2 b4 40 ♙f1 ♖f2+  
 41 ♙g1 b3 42 ♖b2 ♘xb2 0-1

## Conclusions

1. When your opponent plays something outside his normal repertoire, it becomes very desirable to surprise him, since he will very likely not have looked at all of the lines. Grischuk's 5...♙d6!? is perfect from this perspective.

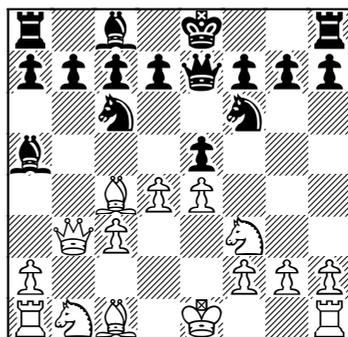
2. In the Open Games, Black's key idea is to push ...d5. White should always keep a careful eye on this advance.

3. Offering piece exchanges when material up is a classic way to seize control of important squares when you have extra material, since your opponent will tend to avoid exchanges.

*Game 15*  
**B.Jobava-L.Aronian**  
 European Championship,  
 Antalya 2004  
*Evans Gambit*

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♙c5 4 b4 14...♙xh3!

♙xb4 5 c3 ♙a5 6 ♖b3 ♗e7 7 d4 ♘f6!



Perhaps this is a product of Aronian's home laboratory, and on Gabriel Sargissian's laptop; but I think it is well within Aronian's powers to work out over the board that his lead in development more than compensates for any displacement of the king.

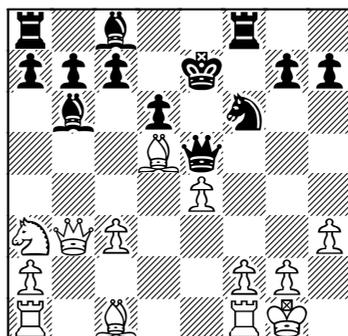
8 dxе5 ♘xe5 9 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 10 ♙xf7+  
 ♙e7 11 0-0 ♖f8 12 ♙d5 ♙b6

White is already much worse.

13 h3

Luckacs suggests 13 ♙h1 ♘xd5 14 exd5 ♗xf2 but it looks pretty hopeless.

13...d6 14 ♘a3



With a decisive attack.

**15 c4**

15 gxh3 ♖g3+ 16 ♔h1 ♜xh3+ 17 ♔g1 ♜g4 mates.

**15...♔d7**

With an extra pawn and an attack, Black is already winning.

**16 c5!?**

A desperate attempt to complicate the game, which is certainly worth a try.

**16...♔xc5**

16...♜g4! was even stronger.

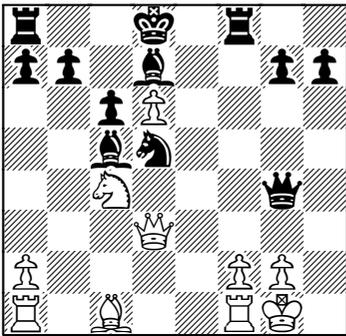
**17 ♖c4 ♜h5 18 ♜g3 ♜g4!**

Offering a trade which White must refuse.

**19 ♜d3**

Now a piece is sacrificed, but White gets nothing like enough compensation, in large part because the centre remains closed.

**19...c6 20 e5 ♖xd5 21 exd6+ ♔d8**



Aronian consolidates easily.

**22 ♜b3 b5 23 ♖e5 ♜h4 24 ♜c2 ♔xd6  
25 g3 ♜a4 26 ♜b2 ♜b4 27 ♖xc6+ ♔xc6  
28 ♜xg7 ♜e4 29 ♔g5+ ♖e7 30 f3 ♜xf3  
31 ♔xe7+ ♜xe7 0-1**

## Conclusions

1. It is always important in preparation to carefully examine the moves you want to play. In this game, f6 was the right square for the knight, with the downside that it lost the f7-pawn. Aronian looked further.

2. In an awful position, anything should be tried to complicate matters. Jobava's pawn sacrifice on move 16 and subsequent piece sacrifice were the best practical chances.

3. When ahead in material, offering exchanges, especially of the queens, is a great resource to drive back your opponent's pieces. Look at Aronian's 18th, 25th and 26th moves for examples.

Peter Heine Nielsen is a strong and extremely well-prepared grandmaster, something which is demonstrated in the following game:

*Game 16*  
**J.Murey-P.H.Nielsen**  
Paris 2006  
*King's Gambit*

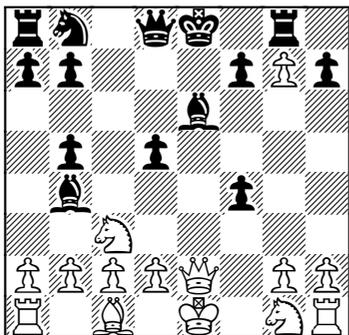
**1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♔c4**

The King's Bishop's Gambit is almost a conventional opening choice by Murey's standards. He famously invented one of the "earliest" novelties of recent times: 1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 ♖f6 3 d4 ♖xe4 4 ♔d3 ♜c6!?.

**3...♜f6 4 ♖c3 ♔b4 5 e5 d5 6 ♔b5+ c6 7**

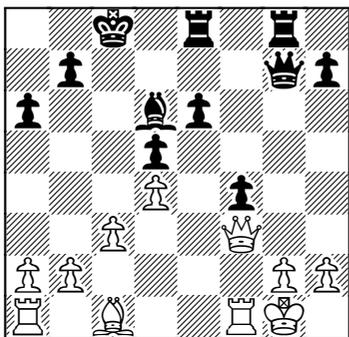
## Gambit Busters!

**exf6 cxb5 8 fxg7 ♖g8 9 ♔e2+ ♙e6**



This is a known position, but the results have been overwhelmingly in Black's favour. White has to struggle to keep control of a lot of files and diagonals, especially against two powerful bishops and a rook which will be very effective on the g-file.

**10 ♘xb5 ♘c6 11 ♘f3 a6 12 ♘bd4 ♘xd4  
13 ♘xd4 ♗f6 14 c3 0-0-0 15 ♘xe6 ♖de8  
16 0-0 ♙d6 17 ♗f3 fxe6 18 d4 ♗xg7**



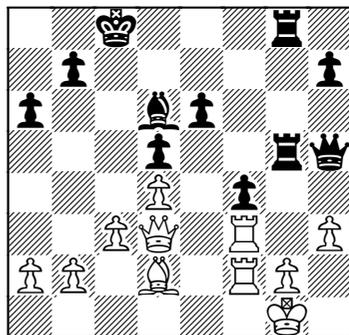
The position has clarified. My computer thinks it is roughly level, but I think you would struggle to find a player who didn't prefer Black, with such a super-highway into White's po-

sition down the g-file (with the f-pawn guarding against any relief with g3). White, meanwhile, will clearly try to play on the e-file, but this shouldn't concern Black too much since his major pieces can laterally defend the e6-pawn while pounding down the king-side files.

**19 ♙d2 ♖ef8 20 ♖ae1 ♗h6 21 ♖e2 ♖f5  
22 h3**

It was hard to avoid this move in the long run (Black always has ideas of ...♖f5, though they will take a little preparation), but I think White is too compliant by playing it now.

**22...♗g6 23 ♗d3 ♗h5 24 ♖f3 ♖fg5 25  
♖ef2?**



Almost inevitably, White gives his opponent a tactical chance. Other moves were better, but practically speaking I think Murey had a miserable defensive task.

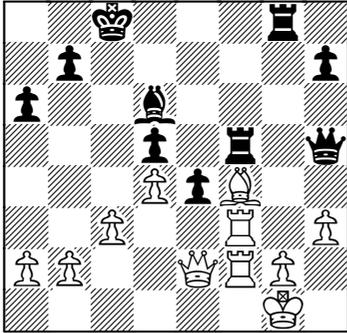
**25...e5!**

White can't afford to open the g1-a7 diagonal, so this e-pawn will prove a very useful addition to the attack.

**26 ♗e2?!**

26 ♖f1 was more tenacious, when 26...e4 27 ♖xf4! sells Black's advantage too cheaply, but of course Black has alternatives on move 26.

**26...e4 27 ♖xf4 ♖f5**



**28 ♖xd6**

28 ♖e3!! is an incredible computer defence, when Black can't take on f3 since 29 ♖e6+ wins on the spot. However, the cool 28...♔d7!!, taking the e6-square under control, is a worthy rejoinder. Black wins here, e.g. 29 ♖g3 ♖xf4 30 ♖xf4 ♔d1+ 31 ♔h2 ♔d3!! (beautiful geometry!) 32 ♖xd3 exd3 and White can play a piece down after 33 ♖xd3 or 33 ♖f7+, or a queen down after 33 ♖xg8 ♖xf4+ 34 g3 ♖d6!! followed by ...d2.

**28...♖xf3**

Now Black crashes through.

**29 ♖xf3 ♖xf3 30 ♖xf3 exf3 31 g3 ♖g6 32 ♖f4 ♖e6 33 b3 ♖e2 0-1**

## Conclusions

1. If you try to confuse your opponent, be careful you don't end up con-

fusing yourself. Murey's offbeat opening led to a difficult game for White.

2. Be careful of giving your opponent the bishop pair in an open position. In this game, Murey managed to trade one of the bishops, but at the cost of dramatically improving the black structure.

3. When you're in a bind, you have to pay paramount attention to controlling your opponent's pawn breaks, since this is a primary method whereby he can bring fresh forces into battle. Murey's lapse on move 25 cost him the game.

This next game is the paradigm of returning material with interest. The enormously dynamic Alexei Shirov puts a major dent in the King's Gambit.

*Game 17*  
**A.Fedorov-A.Shirov**  
 Rubinstein Memorial,  
 Polanica Zdroj 2000  
*King's Gambit*

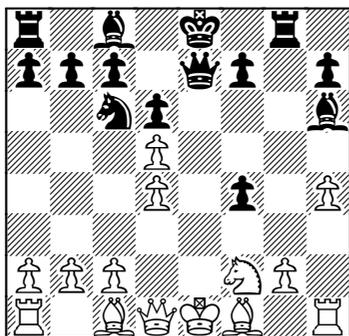
**1 e4 e5 2 f4**

Fedorov's meteoric rise was based on incredibly aggressive chess, fully reflected in his opening repertoire. With Black, he brilliantly defended the Sicilian Dragon against all opponents. With White, the King's Gambit was the cornerstone of his repertoire, but at the time of writing, the top players appear to be in agreement that it just gives

## Gambit Busters!

Black too many chances.

2...exf4 3 ♖f3 g5 4 h4 g4 5 ♘e5 d6 6  
♙xg4 ♗f6 7 ♗f2 ♖g8 8 d4 ♙h6 9 ♘c3  
♙c6 10 ♗d5 ♙xd5 11 exd5 ♙e7+!

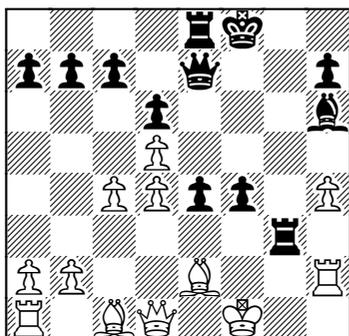


An excellent novelty from Shirov's home laboratory.

12 ♙e2 ♗b4 13 c4 ♙f5!

Shirov sacrifices a piece to bring his remaining forces into play.

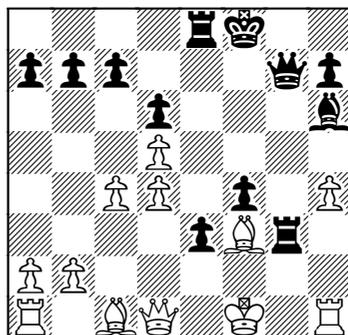
14 ♙a4+ ♙f8 15 ♙xb4 ♖e8 16 ♙d2  
♖xg2 17 ♙f1 ♖g3 18 ♙d1 ♙e4 19 ♖h2  
f5 20 ♗xe4 fxe4



Amazingly (for such an attacking player), Fedorov has found all the computer-recommended defensive moves since move 14. However, although

Black only has one pawn for the piece, this forms part of the deadly pair on e4 and f4 which is strangling the white position.

21 ♙g4 e3 22 ♙f3 ♙g7 23 ♖h1



23...♖g2! 0-1

Not a difficult finish for a player of Shirov's calibre (or for club player, for that matter), but still a nice conclusion to an emphatic attacking display.

## Conclusions

1. The most aggressive setups tend to leave huge holes. By move 4, White has played f4 and h4, leaving the g-file at the mercy of the black rooks. It can be worth sacrificing considerable material to seize the initiative and exploit these weaknesses.

2. King safety is about substance, not form. Black didn't castle in this game, but his king was snug on f8.

3. One of the best forms of compensation for a piece sacrifice is a pawn roller. The pawns on e4 and f4 completely dominated the white army.