

Chapter Three

Evans Gambit and Giuoco Piano



Introduction



Evans Gambit



Giuoco Piano

Introduction

These two openings arise after Black develops his bishop to the active-looking c5-square. In both cases White challenges the bishop and aims to gain time to construct his centre and prepare an attack.

In the Evans Gambit (Games 17-19) White does this directly with 4 b4, already baring his teeth and announcing to his opponent that there won't be a comfortable ride in the opening.

In the Giuoco Piano (Games 20-24) White instead plays c2-c3 and d2-d4, creating tension in the central arena before the players have had time to castle. We will examine Black's main options in the illustrative games that follow. My impression is that if Black is serious about challenging White's central aspirations, then he has to be willing to enter complications.

The other main option, 4 d3, leading to quieter play, was dealt with separately in Chapter One.

Evans Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 (Diagram 1)

The Evans used to be considered as a swashbuckling attempt to attack at all costs. Nowadays this view has moderated, but few would argue with the premise that it is still a risky attempt to seize the initiative.

Strategy

White opens lines while gaining time against the c5-bishop and, as a result, is able to create some early threats with Black's king still in the centre. Naturally there is a price to pay for all this action: a pawn or two for a start, plus a compromised queenside, so if Black survives the early assault he may obtain the advantage.

Theoretical

Despite the sharp nature of this opening, the theory has not evolved that much in recent years due to a marked lack of interest by GMs. However, it is sufficiently

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dangerous to warrant some effort in learning a sensible antidote before allowing 4 b4. I make some suggestions in the following games.

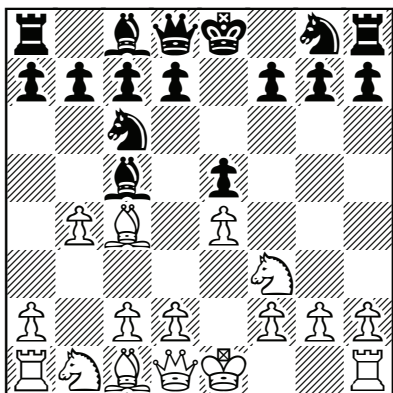


Diagram 1 (B)
Evans Gambit

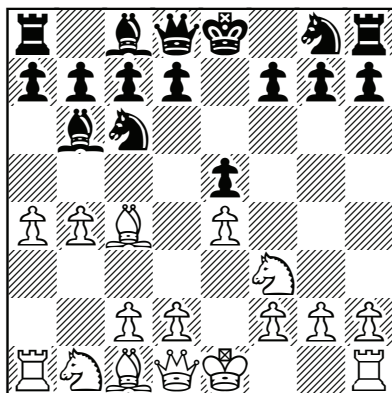


Diagram 2 (B)
Evans Gambit Declined

Game 17

□ G.Kasparov ■ J.Piket
Amsterdam 1995

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bb6

Some gambits are best declined, but not this one! By declining the Evans Black enables White to gain space on the queenside ‘free of charge’.

5 a4 (Diagram 2) 5...a5

The alternative is 5...a6, when White has two tries:

a) 6 Nc3!? is sharpest, and after 6...Nf6 7 Nd5 Nxd5 8 exd5 Nd4 9 a5 Ba7, the shot 10 d6!? offers a pawn to bottle up Black’s development. However, while White obtains practical compensation, this also offers Black chances; e.g. 10...cxd6 (or perhaps 10...Qf6!?) 11 c3 Ne6 12 0-0 0-0 13 d4 Qc7 14 Bd5 Rb8 15 Qd3 b5 16 axb6 Bxb6 17 Bd2 f5 was unclear in A.Morozevich-G.Kamsky, Moscow (blitz) 2008.

b) 6 c3 Nf6 7 d3 d6 8 0-0 is more positional and could also arise via 4 d3. Here White has chances for a pull due to his space preponderance. For example, after the sluggish 8...h6 9 Nbd2 0-0 10 Bb3 Ne7 11 Nc4 White gains a tempo. In Chapter

One we saw that one idea behind an early ...a7-a6 is that the bishop can drop back immediately to a7 avoiding such a loss of time. The game I.Glek-A.Yermolinsky, Wijk aan Zee 1997, continued with 11...Ba7 12 Be3 Be6 13 Bxa7 Rxa7 14 Re1 Ng6 15 d4 Bxc4 16 Bxc4 Ra8 17 Qc2 c6 and White had a small pull.

If Black instead decides to castle immediately he has to take into consideration the following pin: 8...0-0 9 Bg5 (a move tried on several occasions by Yudasin; 9 Nbd2 Ne7 10 Bb3 Ng6 11 Nc4 is a reasonable alternative) 9...h6 10 Bh4 g5 11 Bg3 (although 11 Nxc5?! would be tempting to attack-minded Evans players, Black can defend: 11...hxg5 12 Bxg5 Kg7 13 Qf3 Rh8 14 a5 Ba7 15 h4 Kg6! and then something like 16 Nd2 Bg4 17 Bxf6 Qd7 18 Qg3 Kxf6 clearly favours Black; compare this with Game 3, where a similar sacrifice on g5 was far more favourable for White) 11...Bg4 12 h3 Bh5 13 Nbd2 Kh8 with options and thus counter-chances on the kingside, L.Yudasin-A.Sherzer, Washington DC 2002.

6 b5 Nd4 7 Nxd4 Bxd4 8 c3 Bb6 9 d4 (Diagram 3)

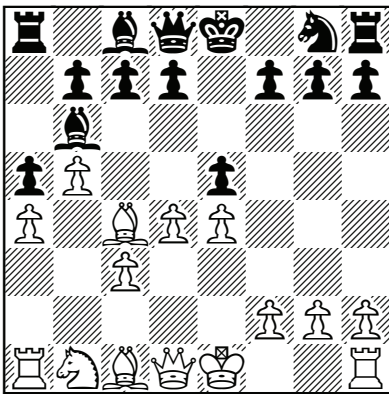


Diagram 3 (B)
Claiming the centre

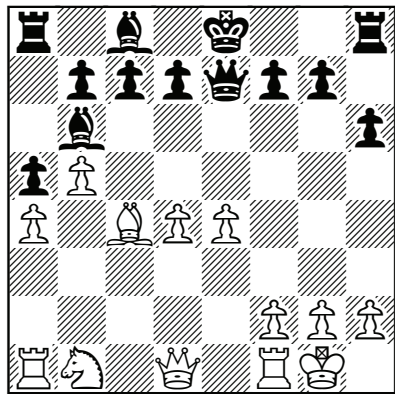


Diagram 4 (B)
Black needs to develop

White expands in the centre.

9...exd4

The pseudo-active 9...Qh4 has received some attention here: 10 0-0 Nf6 11 Nd2 d6 12 Nf3 Qh5 13 dxe5 dxe5!? (after 13...Nxe4 14 Qe1 d5 15 Bxd5 Black was a clear pawn down in S.Nadyrhanov-I.Komissarov, Smolensk 1997) 14 Ng5! (14 Ba3?! is inferior due to 14...Bg4) 14...Bg4 (14...Qxd1 15 Rxd1 Be6, L.Arnold-O.Sick, German League 1998, can be met by 16 Nxe6! fxe6 17 Re1 Rd8 18 Kf1 with an edge) 15 Qd2

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(15 Bxf7+? falls short because of 15...Qxf7 16 Nxf7 Bxd1 17 Nxh8 Bb3) 15...0-0 16 h3 with a pull for White. The black queen is actually not that well placed and the threat of Ba3 is awkward. In my view 9...Qh4 is slightly dubious.

10 0-0 Ne7 11 Bg5

In a later game White tried 11 cxd4, but then Black was able to hit back in the centre and obtained a good position after 11...d5! 12 exd5 Nxd5 13 Ba3 Be6 14 Qh5? (not good; 14 Re1 is better, when 14...Qd7 followed by ...0-0-0 makes sense as Black's king would be safe with the queenside so blocked) 14...Nf4 15 Qf3 Bxc4 16 Qxf4 Qxd4, L.Riemersma-A.Mikhalevski, Amsterdam 1995.

11...h6 12 Bxe7

White could consider 12 Bh4, but Kasparov was intent on rapid development.

12...Qxe7 13 cxd4 (Diagram 4) 13...Qd6?!

This leads to fishing in troubled waters, a dangerous strategy when you are leaving most of your equipment at home! 13...0-0 14 Nc3 c6 is more natural, but then White could render Black's development difficult with 15 Rb1 Bc7 16 b6.

14 Nc3 Bxd4

After 14...Qxd4 Kasparov intended 15 Nd5! Qxc4 (alternatives are hardly improvements: 15...Qxd1 16 Rfxd1 and 15...0-0 16 Qxd4 Bxd4 17 Rad1 Be5 18 f4 Bd6 19 Kh1 leave Black with no good moves) 16 Rc1 Qa2 17 Rxc7! Bxc7 18 Nxc7+ Ke7 19 Nxa8 d6 20 Qc1 with a winning position, having already regained all his material.

15 Nd5!

I was present at the 'Kasparov University' summer camp in the late 1990's. GK himself gave a one hour lecture to each group, the theme in mine being that the 'quality' of pieces is more important than the 'quantity' and this game was one of his chosen examples.



TIP: When assessing long-term sacrifices, consider the relative effectiveness of the pieces on the board, rather than just counting what's in the box.

15...Bxa1 16 Qxa1 0-0 17 e5 Qc5 18 Rc1 (Diagram 5)

Compare the effectiveness of White's forces to Black's!

18...c6 19 Ba2 Qa3 20 Nb6

Winning material, as Bxf7+ is threatened along with the rook.

20...d5 21 Nxa8 Kh8 22 Nb6 Be6 23 h3 Rd8 24 bxc6 bxc6 25 Rc3 Qb4 26 Rxc6 Rb8 27 Nxd5 Qxa4 28 Rc1 Qa3 29 Bc4 1-0

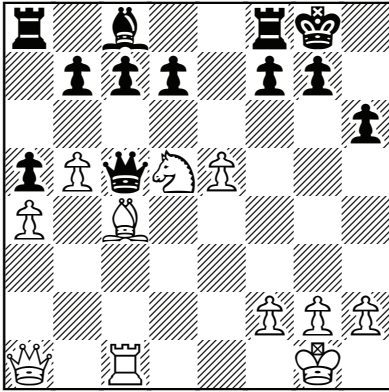


Diagram 5 (B)

Quality, not quantity

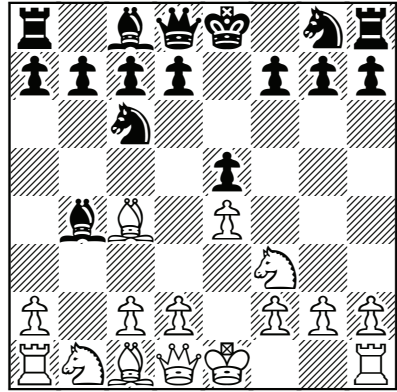


Diagram 6 (W)

Evans Gambit Accepted

Game 18

□ **D.Leygue** ■ **G.Flear**

Cap d'Agde 2006

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 (Diagram 6)

I consider this to be the most principled reply.

For those who like going their own way, 4...d5!? is a little known move that gives Black a playable game; e.g. 5 exd5 Nxb4 6 0-0 Nf6 7 Nxe5 Nbx d5 8 d4 Be7 9 Bb3 0-0 10 c4 Nb6 11 Bb2, R.Felgaer-J.Pierrot, Argentine Ch., Buenos Aires 2000, and now I recommend 11...c5.

5 c3 Ba5 6 d4

6 0-0 is generally accepted as being too slow. Black then has a manoeuvre associated with Lasker, enabling him to obtain a comfortable game: 6...d6 7 d4 Bb6! 8 dxe5 dxe5 9 Qb3 (after 9 Qxd8+ Nxd8 10 Nxe5 Be6 White has regained his pawn, but this queenless middlegame offers Black the better prospects, as White's pawn structure is inferior and Black has no problems with development) 9...Qf6 10 Bg5 (forcing the pace to seek compensation) 10...Qg6 11 Bd5 Nge7 12 Bxe7 Kxe7 13 Bxc6 Qxc6 14 Nxe5 (finally regaining the pawn) 14...Qe6 15 Nc4 (15 Qa3+ gets nowhere due to 15...Qd6) 15...Rd8 16 Qa3+ Ke8, and although Black has been denied

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castling rights, he stands well. His rooks are not inconvenienced by the king's position, while he can boast the bishop pair and so he should have full equality.

6...exd4 7 0-0

White continues in gambit style; i.e. developing rapidly in order to exploit the open lines. A pawn two deficit is a secondary consideration. The alternative, 7 Qb3!?, is considered in the next game.

7...Nge7 (Diagram 7)

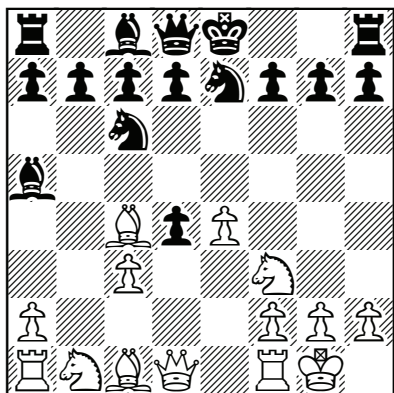


Diagram 7 (W)

Preparing ...d7-d5

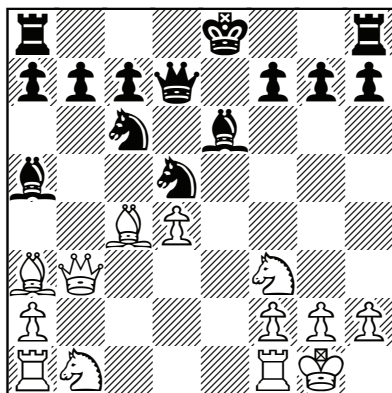


Diagram 8 (W)

Not worrying about b7

Preparing to play ...d7-d5 and not getting distracted by further greedy temptations.

8 cxd4

I actually think that 8 Ng5 is the strongest move here, against which, as in the Two Knights Defence, Black's best reply is 8...d5!. For example, 9 exd5 Ne5 10 Qxd4 (after 10 Bb3 0-0 11 Nxh7 Kxh7 12 Qh5+ Kg8 13 Qxe5 Nf5 14 Bd2 c5 15 dxc6 bxc6 Black had equalized in N.Short-M.Adams, Sarajevo 2000) 10...f6 11 Bb5+ (11 Bb3 Bb6 12 Qa4+ Bd7 13 Qe4 Bf5 14 Qa4+ Bd7 was drawn by repetition in F.Zeller-O.Boguslavsky, German League 2004) 11...c6 12 dxc6 bxc6 13 Be2 0-0 is unclear. At least with 8 Ng5 White isn't worse, whereas after 8 cxd4 I'm less sure.

8...d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Ba3

I have also faced 10 Qb3, when Black must play 10...Be6! (maintaining the d5-strong point; the b7-pawn is less important) 11 Qxb7 Ndb4 12 Ne5, and now

12...Nxe5 13 Bxe6 Nec6 led to complications where Black was somewhat better, N.Doghri-G.Flear, Djerba 1998; but 12...Nxd4! would have best confirmed his superiority.

10...Be6! 11 Qb3 Qd7! (Diagram 8)

The solid 11...Bb4 is recommended by some, but it offers fewer winning chances for Black, so I still prefer my move. After 11...Bb4, best play could be 12 Bxb4 Ncxb4 13 a3 Nc6 14 Qxb7 Na5 15 Qb5+ (or 15 Qa6 Nxc4 16 Qc6+ Ke7 17 Qxc4 Re8, as suggested by influential analyst Marin) 15...c6 16 Qc5 Qb6 with equality.

12 Nbd2

Now 12 Qxb7?? is not recommended in view of 12...Rb8 13 Qa6 Rb6 winning material. Instead, 12 Ne5 may be strongest, when 12...Nxe5 13 Qxb7 Qc8 14 Bxd5 Qxb7 15 Bxb7 Rb8 16 Be4 is given as better for White by Marin, but Black has 16...f5! 17 Bc2 Nc4 18 Bc5 Bb6 with equal chances.

12...Bxd2

Black exchanges off some pieces to reduce the attacking potential of White's army.



NOTE: It's often mentioned that the defender should aim to exchange pieces, whereas the attacking player should keep them on, but such broad generalities have many exceptions. What is left on the board is what matters.

13 Nxd2 Na5 14 Qg3 Nxc4 15 Nxc4

Here capturing the other knight's pawn is plausible, but definitely has its downside: 15 Qxg7? 0-0-0 16 Nxc4 Rhg8 17 Qxh7 Rxg2+! 18 Kxg2 Bh3+! with a winning attack.

15...f6

Defending g7, covering e5, and even preparing a potential escape square on f7 for the king. White has some play for the pawn, but Black's defences seem solid enough.

16 Qf3 0-0-0!

The best practical decision.

17 Rfc1 Kb8 18 Rab1 Nb6!

Protecting his majesty is Black's main priority for the moment.

19 Nxb6 cxb6! (Diagram 9)

I like this move. Capturing in this anti-intuitive way enables Black to form an impenetrable fortress around his king, after which he can turn his attention to other

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issues. For instance, if 20 Rb4 (defending the d-pawn) 20...Rc8 and Black is ready to seize the initiative.

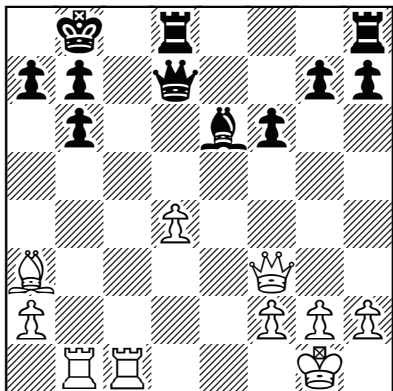


Diagram 9 (W)

The black king is secure

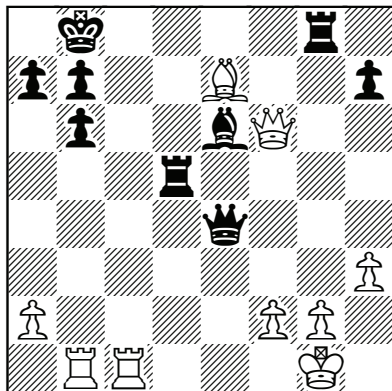


Diagram 10 (W)

Black has a winning attack

20 h3!?

Stopping ...Bg4 and giving some luft for his own king. The d-pawn is left *en prise*, but capturing it looks risky at first sight.

20...Qxd4!

Taking up the gauntlet! White's aim to complicate matters leads to a forcing line where Black comes out on top

21 Be7 Rd5 22 Qg3+ Qe5 23 Qxg7

In for a penny... but now Black obtains a winning attack.

23...Rg8 24 Qxf6 Qe4 (Diagram 10) 25 f3

I was hoping for 25 g4, when I had a nice finish in mind: 25...Rxc4+! 26 hxg4 Qxc4+ 27 Kf1 Rd1+! 28 Rxd1 Bc4+ 29 Ke1 Qe2 mate.

25...Qe2 26 Qf4+ Ka8 27 g4 Rd2 28 Qg3 Qe3+ 29 Kh1 Bd5 30 Rf1

Saving his king...

30...Qxe7 0-1

...but not the game.