



The Club Player's Modern Guide to
Gambits

Nikolai Kalinichenko

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Introduction

This is no ordinary opening book. This practical guide describes only those openings in which White or Black sacrifices material at an early stage of the game. They are called gambits (in Old Italian, *gambetto* means tripping).

The justification for such sacrifices can differ quite a lot. In most cases, the side that sacrifices material tends to get ahead of the opponent in development and/or opens lines to attack the enemy king, but there are also gambits aimed at the occupation of the center (Blumenfeld Gambit), depriving the opponent of castling (Cochrane Gambit or Traxler Variation), weakening the opponent's pawn structure (Anti-Moscow Variation), luring an opponent's piece to an unfavorable position (sacrificing the b2-pawn), obtaining a certain positional compensation (Volga Gambit), etc.

Gambits are often associated with the romantic chess of the 19th century. Indeed, that was the heyday of such sharp openings as the King's Gambit or Evans' Gambit, but even nowadays, many games begin with one of the well-known or even innovative gambits, especially if we include all the games starting with 1.d4 d5 2.c4. On the professional "menu," the Marshall Gambit in the Ruy Lopez or the Catalan Queen's Gambit are no less important than the fire-proof Berlin Defense or Anti-Meran Variation. This should come as no surprise: gambits help to reveal the true essence of chess, "the triumph of spirit over matter" (although "matter" often gains the upper hand if it is based on solid grounds!). The clash of ideas and approaches in a genuine chess struggle are also typical of gambits. One could even say that the 21st century, after the more arid era of the late 20th century, shows a certain renaissance of gambits and a surge of interest in them on the part of chessplayers of all levels, including the world champion Magnus Carlsen.

The present book analyzes about 50 of the major gambit lines and systems. Almost 135 games are given in full, with many game fragments selected to illustrate the important deviations. Of course, not all the gambits are listed here. We do not examine some uncommon lines or those unequivocally disadvantageous for the side employing the gambit, or certain variations that have not yet received

a widely accepted name (for example, the variations with an early advance of the g-pawn in the closed and semi-open games developed by Alexey Shirov and other attacking players). The analyses of these and other opening variations can be found in the relevant opening manuals.

The concept of this book is to examine practical games and give theoretical insights in the notes rather than in stand-alone articles. Practice has shown this to be the most effective way of mastering new material. More often than not, recent games by the world's top players have been chosen as an illustration, played in the last few years in particular. However, the most important classic games are mentioned as well.

The theoretical conclusions are generally valid as of early 2019. The readers who may wish to employ one of the examined gambit variations on a regular basis should, no doubt, study the specific books on that very opening, although in most cases the lines and ideas given are sufficient for a beginner or club player to include the system in his or her opening repertoire and give it a try. If, upon studying the book, you enrich your arsenal with even one gambit variation and thus widen your general chess understanding and probably gain some brilliant victories, the author will consider his mission accomplished.

In conclusion, the author would like to thank FIDE trainer Kirill Kuznetsov for his significant help and cooperation.

Nikolai Kalinichenko
April 2019

castling, which is quite annoying in such an open position.

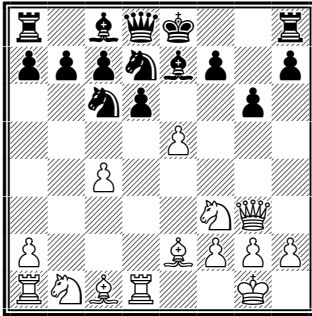
12.0-0 ♖b6

If 12...0-0, White may go for 13.♞d1 ♖b6 14.a4! ♗a5 15.♙h6 ♞e8 16.e6 with strong pressure.

13.c4

It seems that 13.♙h6! d6 14.♙b5 is rather more precise.

13...d6 14.♞d1 ♖d7



15.♙h6!

White attacks without paying too much attention to possible material losses. His main task is to keep his opponent's king in the center and open lines.

15...♗cxe5

Also after 15...dxe5 16.♙g7 (or 16.♗c3!?) 16...♞g8 17.♙xe5 ♗cxe5 18.♗xe5 ♙d6 19.f4 ♖f6 20.♗c3 ♙xe5 21.fxe5 ♗xe5 22.♗d5 ♖d6 23.♖h4, White has enormous pressure.

16.♗xe5 ♗xe5 17.♗c3 f6 18.c5 ♖f7!?

After 18...♙e6 19.cxd6 cxd6 20.♗e4, White maintains the initiative. However, a more stubborn defense is 18...♙d7! and Black is still in the game.

19.cxd6 cxd6

19...♙xd6 20.♙b5+ c6 21.♙f4! would not save Black.

20.♖e3 ♗xh6 21.♖xh6 ♙f8 22.♖e3+ ♖f7 23.♗d5 ♙e6 24.♗f4 ♖e7

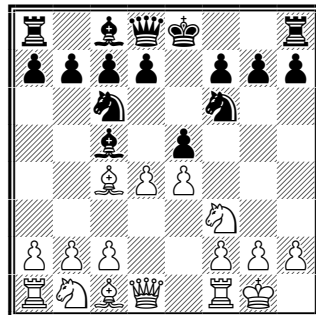
Or 24...♖d7 25.♙b5! ♖xb5 26.♖xe6+.

25.♞e1 1-0 He can do nothing to avoid the crackdown on the e-file, e.g., 25...♞e8 26.♗xe6 ♖xc6 27.♖xc6+ ♖xe6 28.♙b5+.

Estrin Gambit and Max Lange Attack

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.0-0 ♗f6 5.d4

This gambit is sometimes played as early as move four (4.d4). It resembles one of the romantic openings of the 19th century, which it is indeed, to some extent. However, it was not until the mid-20th century that it began to be played regularly, thanks to the



analysis of the Russian chess master Yakov Estrin. It was rare in occurrence at one time, but not because of it having been refuted. White simply preferred to fight for the opening advantage without taking too high a risk. The game has become much more dynamic in more recent times, and the gambit makes its appearance again at almost any level.

If, in reply to 5.d4, Black answers 5...exd4, the game proceeds as the Max Lange Attack, a sharp variation developed by the German theoretician and chess proponent Max Lange in the second half of the 19th century.

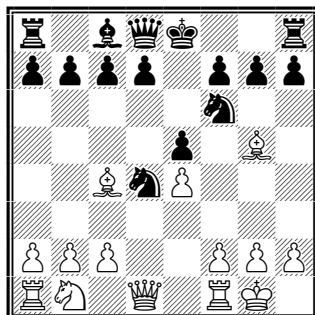
(38) I.Berzins – Aleksandrov
Liepaja 2015
Max Lange Attack C50

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5
4.0-0 ♗f6 5.d4 ♗xd4

Weak is 5...♗xd4?! 6.♗xe5 ♗e6 (even worse is 6...0-0 on account of 7.♗e3) 7.♗xe6! fxex6 8.♗d3 ♗e7 9.e5 ♗d5 10.♖h5+ with a big advantage to White (Tyomkin-Noritsyn, Toronto 2004). After 5...exd4 6.e5 d5, the Max Lange Attack is on the board, see Azarov-Kamsky (game 40).

6.♗xd4 ♗xd4 7.♗g5

The immediate 7.f4 is also popular, see Saric-Miton (game 39).



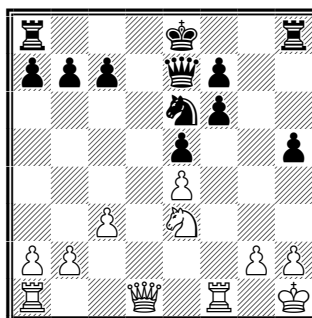
7...d6

With 7...♗e6 8.♗xe6 dxe6 9.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 10.f4 ♖e8! 11.♗c3 a6 12.fxe5 ♗d7 (Agamaliev-Grabarczyk, Bydgoszcz 1999), Black can hope to equalize.

8.f4

One of the key ideas of the Estrin Gambit is to exchange on f6, forcing the recapture with the pawn, and then occupy the weakened f5-square with the knight. White is consistent in carrying this through.

8...♗e6 9.♗a3 ♖e7 10.fxe5
dxe5 11.c3 ♗xc4 12.♗xc4 ♗e6
13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♖h1 h5 15.♗e3



The dust has settled. Despite being a pawn down, White has a definite advantage thanks to his control of key squares and his opponent's weakened structure.

15...♖c5 16.♖d2 ♖d8

More accurate is 16...c6.

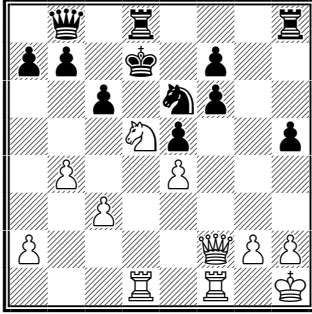
17.♗d5 ♖d7?!

Here again, 17...c6! 18.♗xf6+ ♖e7 is better, and Black has a defensible position.

18.b4 ♖d6 19.♗f2!

White's advantage is great already.

19...c6 20.♖ad1 ♗b8



21.♗×f6!

White handles it precisely till the end.

21...c×d5 22.♗×f7+ ♖c6
23.♗×e6+ ♗d6 24.e×d5+

White's two extra pawns and the ongoing attack bring the game to a rapid finish.

24...♗b5 25.♗f7 ♖d7 26.♗f2
♗a6 27.c4 b6 28.c5 b×c5 29.b×c5
♗g6 30.♗e2+ ♗a5 31.♖b1

Black resigned without waiting to be mated.

Illustrative Games

(39) Saric – Miton

Doha 2014

Max Lange Attack C50

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♖c4 ♖c5
4.0-0 ♗f6 5.d4 ♖×d4 6.♗×d4
♗×d4 7.f4 d6 8.f×e5

Also possible is 8.c3!? ♗e6 9.f5
♗c5 10.♗d2 c6 (he cannot take twice
on e4, 10...♗c×e4 11.♗×e4 ♗×e4, on
account of 12.♗d5) 11.♗e2 ♗e7 12.b4
♗a4 13.♗f3 with some compensation
for the pawn as Black's king will strive
to find a safe haven, Stephenson-
Ledger, Torquay 1998.

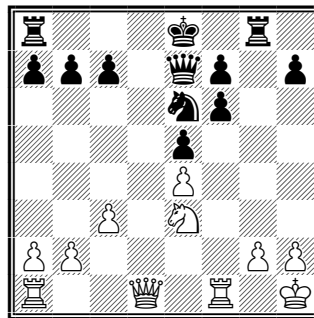
8...d×e5 9.♖g5 ♖c6 10.♗a3
♗e7 11.c3

The position from Berzinsh-
Aleksandrov (game 38) has arisen with
a transposition of moves.

11...♗c6

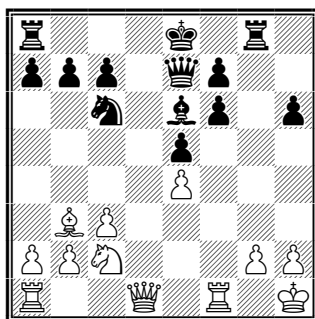
Black prefers to not exchange on
c4, so as to make it more difficult for
the opponent's knight to reach the ideal
blockading position at f5.

11...♖×c4 was tested in Sri Sai
Baswanth-Aleksandrov, Bhopal
2018. There followed 12.♗×f6 g×f6
13.♗×c4 ♗e6 14.♗h1 ♖g8 (14...♗c5!
15.♗a3 ♖g8 was stronger) 15.♗e3 and
White got more than sufficient
compensation for the pawn.



Black immediately went astray with 15...♖c5? (15...c6 was necessary), hoping for 16.♗d5 0-0-0! 17.♖f3 ♖g6 with equal chances. White, instead, played 16.♗g4! forcing Black to sacrifice the exchange with 16...♖xg4, which still did not allow him to save the game.

**12.♖h1 h6 13.♗xh6 gxf6
14.♗b3! ♖g8 15.♗c2**



The knight continues on its intended route.

15...♖g6 16.♗e3 ♖d8 17.♖e2

White's position is more pleasant, although punching a hole in Black's defense would be not that easy.

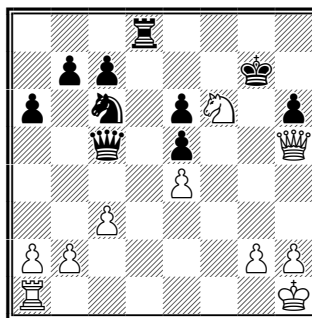
17...a6 18.♖f2 ♖c5!?

Probably the best practical decision: Black strives for a forced line resulting in him losing the extra pawn but activating his pieces substantially.

**19.♗xh6 fxe6 20.♖h5 ♖f7
21.♗g4 ♖g7 22.♖xf6! ♖xf6
23.♗xf6 (D)**

23...♖f2!

The line 23...♖xf6?! 24.♖f1+ ♖e7 25.♖f7+ ♖d6 26.♖d1+ ♗d4 27.cxd4

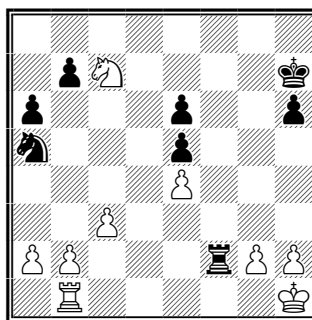


exd4 28.♖f6, is extremely risky for Black, although White does not appear to have any direct win.

24.♗e8+ ♖h7 25.♗xc7 ♖g8

It is White's king that is now under attack, and he has to settle for the exchange of queens. White keeps certain advantage in the resulting endgame but fails to increase it any further.

**26.♖f3 ♖f8 27.♖xf2 ♖xf2
28.♖b1 ♗a5**



29.♖g1

The straightforward 29.♗xh6 ♖e2 30.♗c5 ♗c4 31.♖g1 ♗e3 32.♗d3! deserved attention.

**29...♖c2 30.b3 ♖xc3 31.♗xe6
♖c2**

The opponent's rook being so active, it is really a hard task for White to convert his extra pawn.

32.a4 ♖g6 33.♟f8+ ♖f7
34.♞f1+ ♖e7 35.♟g6+ ♖e6
36.♟f8+ ♖e7 37.♟g6+ ♖e6
38.♟x e5

White has evidently reconciled himself to his fate.

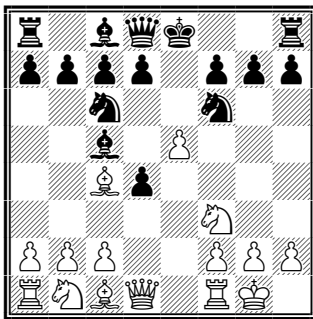
38...♖x e5 39.♞f5+ ♖x e4
40.♞x a5 ♞c1+ 41.♖f2 ♞c2+
42.♖g3 ♞c3+ 43.♖g4 ♞x b3

They could have agreed to a draw already.

44.♖h5 ♞b2 45.♖x h6 ♞x g2
46.h4 ♞a2 47.♞g5 ♖f4 48.a5 ♞c2
49.h5 ♞c6+ 50.♞g6 ♞c5 51.♞g7
♞x a5 52.♞x b7 ♞b5 53.♞x b5 a x b5
54.♖g7 ½-½

(40) Azarov – Kamsky
Arlington 2015
Max Lange Attack C56

1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.♞c4 ♞c5
4.0-0 ♟f6 5.d4 e x d4 6.e5



The Max Lange Attack.

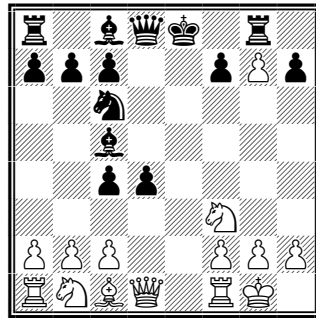
6...d5

On 6...♟g4, White will do better if he refuses to play the tempting 7.♞x f7+?! ♖x f7 8.♟g5+ ♖g8 9.♖x g4 h6 10.♖e4 d5!, with a good position for Black, and instead opts for 7.♞f4 d6 8.ex d6 ♞x d6 9.♞e1+ ♞e7 10.c3!, after which his chances are better.

7.e x f6 d x c4 8.f x g7

The classical 8.♞e1+ ♞e6 9.♟g5 ♖d5 10.♟c3 ♖f5 11.♟ce4 0-0-0 has been explored in depth, however, theory cannot yet give its clear verdict. The main line runs 12.♟x e6 f x e6 13.g4 ♖e5 14.f x g7 ♞h g8 15.♞h6 d3 and so on.

8...♞g8



9.♞g5! ♞e7

The stereotyped 9...♖d5? loses here as the white knight will invade on f6 with a decisive effect: 10.♟c3 ♖f5 11.♟e4! ♞e7 12.♞e1.

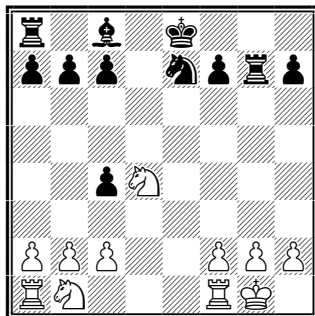
10.♞x e7 ♟x e7?!

Correct is 10...♖x e7! and the game is equal after 11.♞e1+ ♖f6! 12.♟bd2 ♞e6. He can also play 12...♖x g7 in this line, e.g., 13.♟x c4 ♖h8 14.♟ce5 ♟x e5 15.♞x e5 ♖f6? (the hazardous diagonal should have been shut as soon as possible with 15...f6!) 16.♖x d4 ♞x g2+

The Club Player's Modern Guide to Gambits

17.♖xg2 ♘h3+ 18.♖g3! ♖g8+ 19.♖g5
 ♖xg5+ 20.♖xh3 1-0, Karpatchev-Flear,
 Saint Affrique 2011.

11.♖x d4 ♖x d4 12.♗x d4 ♖x g7



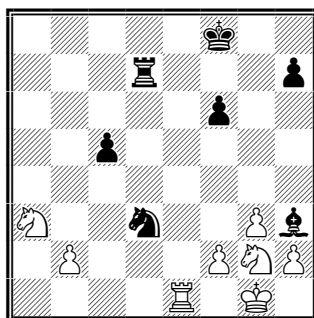
13.♞e1

After 13.♗b5! ♘h3 (or 13...♗d5
 14.♗1c3!) 14.♗xc7+ ♖d7 15.♗xa8
 ♗xg2 16.f3 ♗xf1+ 17.♖xf1 ♖g8
 18.♗a3, White would have won a pawn
 thus obtaining serious winning chances.

13...♗h3 14.g3 ♖d8 15.c3 c5
 16.♗f3 ♖f8 17.♗a3 f6 18.♗xc4

White also manages to win a pawn
 after the text, but Black maintains his
 strong light-square bishop and gets
 substantial drawing chances.

18...♗d5 19.a4 b6 20.♖ad1
 ♖gd7 21.♖d2 a6 22.♗h4 b5 23.axb5
 axb5 24.♗a3 b4 25.cxb4 ♗xb4
 26.♖xd7 ♖xd7 27.♗g2 ♗d3



White was not playing at his best
 for a while and thus lost most of his
 winning chances.

28.♖b1 ♗e5 29.♗f4 ♗f3+
 30.♖h1 ♗f5 31.♖c1 ♖d2 32.♖g2
 ♗e5 33.♗c4 ♗e4+ 34.♖f1 ♗xc4
 35.♖xc4 ♗f3 36.♖c1

Somewhat more precise is 36.♗g2
 ♖xb2 37.♖xc5 ♖b1+ 38.♗e1.

36...♖xb2 37.♗e6+ ♖f7
 38.♗xc5 ♖d2 39.♖e1 ♖e2+
 40.♖f1 ♖d2 41.♖e1 ♖d6 ½-½