

OVERVIEW

A QUICK TOUR OF THE BOOK

To start out, we'll consider what makes an opening a gambit. We'll take a broad definition of any sacrifice in the opening where the material need not be recovered immediately. In return for the sacrificed pawn or piece, the gambiteer will receive some sort of compensation. This will be the topic of the second section. Once these two basic concepts are established, we'll move on to looking at different types of gambits, discussing the features they have in common. In a later section we'll try to pin down the gambit concept as seen in modern chess.

Most gambits can be accepted or declined in some fashion. The pros and cons of accepting gambits is the next subject. We'll see that it is hard to decide whether a gambit should be offered, or accepted. The following section will deal with the issue of objectivity, and why most gambiteers readily admit that their evaluations are weighted toward the player who has the initiative and can launch an attack, rather than the player with, say, an extra pawn.

With powerful computers and software available, and databases of millions of chess games, you might think that statistics could enlighten us. Far from it! In the Statistics chapter you'll see how easily misled players can be when they rely on statistical analysis of the openings to determine which gambits are playable and which are rubbish. The following section presents the world's most popular gambits, a top twenty list of the gambits appearing in tournament play.

The main part of the book is a survey of hundreds of gambits. You'll find:

- the name of the gambit
- international opening code (ECO)
- opening moves
- a diagram illustrating the position
- commentary on the gambit
- an indication of the popularity of the opening
- an indication of how a player might initially react to the gambit, if caught by surprise

The last one requires a bit of explanation. It would have been foolish to attempt to properly evaluate each of the hundreds of gambits. Even with powerful computer assistance, it would take far too long, as gambits often require very deep analysis to determine whether the sacrifice is sound. In gambit I have studied, I often express an opinion in the text. I realize that the reader would appreciate some guidance, but

the evaluations often change and it is best to consult more specific sources in cases where your impression differs.

Instead, I decided to use computer assistance to try to get a picture of how an opponent might react if confronted by the gambit for the first time. I set the computer analysis on a fairly low level, forcing it to choose a reply rather quickly. In other words, I sought the evaluation after a shallow search that might represent the level (if not quality) of thinking of an average tournament player (about 1400-1500). You can use this to find gambits where the quality of the gambit is not revealed until a much deeper search. It is possible for a “refuted” gambit to seem quite promising, and the refutation may not be known by the opponent. This impression should not be confused with objective, thorough analysis. It assumes the opponent is taken unawares. I believe that this information may offer a picture of surprise value of the opening, which is an important practical consideration.

The gambits are organized by the material sacrificed and the capturing piece. This lets you discover gambits that are related to those you may already enjoy playing. If you like to sacrifice your d-pawn to an enemy pawn, you can explore gambits for both White and Black where this is part of the strategy. Some gambits involve more than one theme, but I’ve tried to select the most relevant.

Certain gambits have been selected for special attention. For the most part, these are the gambits with which I’m most familiar, and have played myself. They are usually the most typical gambits displaying the relevant theme. They are found at the start of the section. Specific strategies in that gambit are then presented in brief. The following section contains analysis of gambits that share the same theme with a concluding section briefly describing similar gambits. Please keep in mind that some of the most “important” gambits may only be described in brief. The choice of featured gambits is a purely subjective one, not a sign of inherent value. For example, the **Englund Gambit** (1.d4 e5) is, in my opinion, one of the weakest of the queen pawn capturing king pawn gambits, but it is the paragon of e-pawn for d-pawn gambits, and in any case there were a number of things I wanted to comment on in that opening.

In deciding whether to give a gambit a closer look, as opposed to a brief mention, I was guided in many cases by the existence of a brilliant or instructive game. If I wanted to include a particular game, the opening would have to be elevated to a more prominent status. Again, please don’t assume that the gambits with games are necessarily superior to gambits mentioned only in brief. Indeed, in many cases you will find the analyzed gambits a bit out of the way, as far as your general opening repertoire is concerned. The related gambits with short descriptions may be the ones you want to look at for your own use. To learn how to play gambits in general, playing through the complete games is essential.

The best way to learn gambit play is to study gambit games. Over two hundred and fifty complete games are presented in this book. The games are organized by the major theme of the gambit, categorized by the item that is sacrificed, the location of

the sacrifice, and the capturing piece. I've put the gambits together this way because I believe that most readers are exploring gambits, looking for ones which might be fun to play. Naturally if you are comfortable with a certain type of sacrifice, you might find similar gambits interesting. Even if the games don't start with the same gambit moves you play, you can find instructive strategy and tactics tips which can be applied to your own games.

The greatest chess games are often awarded special prizes for beauty or brilliant play. You will find many enjoyable games with a variety of gambit approaches, presented from exciting start to spectacular finish. You will also see some examples of quick kills, where the gambiteer gets the full point in a dozen moves or less. Some of these even involve championship play!

Some of the games were the most fun, and the most painful, for the author. I include a sampling of my own games in gambit openings, both wins and losses. The main criteria for selection is that there is something interesting in each game. Sometimes it is an opening novelty, often it is a combination or fierce attack. Many of the games involve Grandmasters and International Masters as opponents, and though I do get thrashed from time to time, I also have quite a few upsets. And a bit of luck! By playing through the games you will truly experience the life of a gambiteer (keep in mind, please, this is only one of my chess personalities!) as seen in practical play. The risks, the opening traps, missed middlegame opportunities and even demanding endgames will provide a good overall picture of the gambit experience.

Most players have either few gambits in their repertoire, or many. We will consider the question of how gambits fit into the repertoires of amateur, professional and superstar players.

To help you find discussion of the gambits that interest you, extensive indexes are presented at the end of the book, including some nicknames and aliases for the gambits, which are presented in this book according to the Caxton Named Opening Database from the Caxton project at Chess City Magazine: www.chesscity.com.

At the end of the book there are a few pointers on how to continue your exploration of gambits. By the time you reach it I hope that you will have quite a number of gambits to add to your repertoire!

WHAT'S NOT IN THE BOOK

It isn't possible to provide deep analysis of many gambits in this book. Some gambits have their own multi-volume encyclopedias! I have written many monographs on openings myself, as well as gambit repertoire books for Cardoza. Here, I've had to be quite selective about which gambits receive special attention. To concentrate on the most popular gambits would run into the problem of too much analysis, and to ignore the rare gambits would be to take a lot of fun and exploration out of the project.

I decided to present a smorgasbord of gambits with some light dishes, some main courses, and a few sweet gambits for dessert. The reader who is interested in

any specific gambit should consult specialist literature and web resources. The easiest way is just to type the name of the gambit in your favorite Internet search engine and enjoy the results. Don't forget to visit www.chesscity.com where the publisher provides a great deal of additional analysis and gambit resources.

Some might object that the inclusion of gambits which haven't been played in a while (or ever!) is a bad idea, but I believe that gambiteers will enjoy them. Anyone with a chess playing computer program can dictate the opening, and can choose to explore gambits with such odd move orders as 1.b4 a5 2.a3, which you just aren't going to see on most chessboards. In addition, the legion of gambiteers offers many specialized thematic tournaments dedicated to specific gambits. The Internet provides wonderful opportunities to explore unorthodox openings and rare gambits. Gambiteers truly enjoy chess and aren't always concerned with how many games are won or lost, or whether their favorite line is sound or unsound according to self-appointed authorities.

So, to make room for discussion, however brief, of over 850 gambits means that few gambits can be described in any sort of definitive detail. I've included a number of the most important gambit lines, that is, the lines which are most often seen in professional competition, and made sure that these gambits are presented with enough discussion to get a feel for the opening. On the other hand, mainstream openings which happen to involve some gambit line are not typically covered in detail. A book this size could easily be devoted to the Najdorf Variation of the Sicilian Defense, and several books have already been devoted to the Poisoned Pawn Variation, which is a true gambit. Gambit players rarely head for the **Najdorf Poisoned Pawn** because it would require them to study primarily non-gambit lines in the many Sicilian defenses. The gambiteer is more likely to choose the **Smith-Morra Gambit** (1.e4 c5 2.d4) to handle all Sicilians. I've tried to give more space to openings that have more appeal to gambit players than to mainstream players.

Over the years, some gambit inventors have corresponded with me about their novel ideas. In many cases, the gambit ideas have been quite challenging to crack. I've tried to include them, as most of the analysis was in correspondence and unpublished. Of course there isn't room to include all of the fascinating lines.

Because there isn't much room to present justifications for final evaluation of the gambits, I haven't tried to make definitive evaluations. I do try to point out where published authorities hold a view I find a bit far from reality, but have not made any effort to pin down all of the published analysis of each gambit. As discussed above, I've presented an "impression" of the gambit, indicating an evaluation that an unprepared amateur opponent might have. Strong players won't gain much benefit from this. It is intended to help average players decide whether the opponent, taken by surprise, might not react correctly.

This book was never intended to be a scholarly tome. The goal is to introduce the reader to a huge variety of individual gambits, but also to provide a solid grounding in gambit strategy. Many games are not presented to the final move, but just up to

the point where the result becomes inevitable. Exceptions are made for brilliant finishes because they illustrate some important attacking ideas every gambiteer should be aware of.

Finally, readers cannot help but notice that game references in the book, except in complete games, give only the names of the players and the year of the game. In the past this would have been terrible because it would have been difficult to find the source games in books and tournament bulletins. Since there are now search engines on the Internet which allow you to find games by position or player information, it is not possible for anyone to look up the full game information, even if you don't own a huge chess database. Most chess scholars have the same databases that I use, and can easily find the complete original game. I do realize that knowing the event name can sometimes give a good indication of the quality of the players, but given the predominance of open tournaments, the information is not as useful as it once was. By shortening the reference to the essentials, a lot of space has been saved that I hope has been put to good use!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I expect that readers will bring along many different skill levels and perspectives, and have tried to make the book useful for all levels of players. The material is laid out so that those interested in general issues can avoid most of the detailed opening commentary, and just enjoy the game. At the same time, those looking for specific analysis of critical positions can find what they are after in the supplements following the game.

If you are a beginner or club level player, the most important lessons can be learned by playing through the complete games. In order to maintain the flow of each complete game, detailed analysis of alternative plans in the opening have been placed in a supplement at the end of the game.

You can also browse the reference section, looking for interesting positions that you might want to consider. In casual games, you can try out some gambits without much preparation, and just see how it goes. Or you can develop a complete gambit repertoire, using this book to choose the gambits and looking at individual books or online sources on each of the openings. Remember, you can just get a taste of each gambit in this book, there is always a lot more to learn.

Tournament players may already have established gambits in their repertoires. You will want to examine the relevant annotated games and analytical essays. In the most popular gambits, I've tried to include all of the best defenses and common ways of declining the gambits, so that you'll be able to incorporate the opening analysis into your repertoire.

More advanced players will be interested primarily in the analysis of individual gambits. There are many examples of positions where I take a position opposed to that of popular reference books and technical opening studies. I've offered up quite a number of suggested improvements which are not available elsewhere. You'll want

to keep in mind that the final version of this book was written late in 2001, and although I've added a few 2002 games, you'll want to include games from 2001 and 2002 in your database searches. I think you also can find some goodies by browsing the reference section, as you will find some gambits you haven't seen before.

When you find a gambit you'd like to play, you'll want to search out additional literature, or search the Internet for more comprehensive coverage. Many gambits have an extensive literature and many games can be found in databases. In other cases, very little is known and you'll have to rely on your own analysis and the few tips I've provided. In this book you'll be exposed to more gambits than have ever been collected in one source. It is up to you to decide which ones deserve further investigation.

WHAT IS A GAMBIT?

A gambit is an opening that involves a sacrifice of material, such as a pawn or piece, in order to achieve concrete advantages in the position. A gambit is used to establish greater control of the center, lead in development, weakness in the enemy king protection or pawn structure, or to open lines which can be used for an attack. A gambit is not used to win material, such a maneuver would be properly called a pseudo-sacrifice.

The definition isn't all that clear, actually. Sometimes a gambit is temporary, with the pawn recovered by force. In other cases, the material cannot be accepted without dire consequences. Then there are established gambits where the material is not recovered immediately, but is normally regained after a few developing moves. This is typical of the **Queen's Gambit Accepted** (1.d4 d5; 2.c4 dxc4). The **Queen's Gambit Declined** (1.d4 d5; 2.c4 e6) is far more common than the Queen's Gambit Accepted precisely because White is likely to get the pawn back in any case unless Black tries some very risky strategy to hold on to it.

So in this book I have tried to include the lines which could be reasonably called gambits, even if they do not conform to someone's technical definition or established prototype. If material is offered, it is a gambit. The opponent may decide not to accept it, but then the consequences are still obviously of interest to anyone who intends to play a gambit. There is a prejudice toward analyzing acceptance of the gambit throughout the book, but many variations where the offer is declined are also examined. After all, if you are going to play the gambit you have to be happy with both.

Measuring the sacrifice isn't easy, either. Although material is often described in terms of numbers (pawn = 1, rook = 5, etc.) it is much harder to place numeric values on positional factors. There are computer programs that use numbers to evaluate positions, but it is still an imprecise science. Chessplayers generally evaluate gambits by putting together the positional advantages received in exchange for the sacrificed materials, and judging whether there is "sufficient compensation" for the material.

Gambits used to involve sacrifices in the first few moves, back when opening

theory wasn't well developed. As chess acquired the body of wisdom known as "opening theory", analysis has pushed deeper and deeper into the mysterious caves of the opening stage of the game. Opening theory now plows more than 30 moves deep in some variations. That's more than the initial time control (30 moves in 90 minutes) used in many amateur events! So it is reasonable to revise the notion of a gambit to include sacrifices in the first ten moves or so, perhaps even later. In some openings, such as the Closed Variations of the Spanish Game, ten moves go by without any pawns or pieces being exchange, so a gambit strategy may still be applied. In these cases, once can consider the amount of development completed by the defending side.

If the opening development can be said to end, more or less, when a player's rooks can see each other (as good a definition as any!), then it is fair to consider any material sacrifice which takes place before the gambiteer's opponent has completed development to be a gambit.

But when all is said and done, who cares? The gambiteer knows perfectly well what sort of position suits the fighting spirit, and will aim for it. If it involves a sacrifice, fine. If not, it is no different than a gambit declined. Gambiteers will find plenty of openings in this collection that meet their own definitions of gambit play, and can consider the others bonus openings that are also fun to play.

TYPES OF COMPENSATION

Anyone who invests material in a gambit expects to get something in return. It isn't usually material benefit, that is something characteristic of opening traps but rare in gambits. The goal of a gambit is usually rapid development and some weakness in the enemy position. This weakness can be exploited by using open lines, through control of the center or by using powerfully placed minor pieces. An alternative strategy is to give up a pawn (almost never more than that) to deflect an enemy piece from its station so that another objective can be achieved. Finally, there is a brutal method of simply demolishing the enemy defensive barrier regardless of the material cost. Each of these forms of compensation is presented below.

Before moving on to those specifics, it is worth mentioning that almost all gambits come with an added bonus: the initiative. The player with the initiative is on the offensive, and the opponent is usually required to defend. Many players are uncomfortable defending, and would much prefer to attack. So there is a certain psychological advantage in many gambits.