

The games

Game 1 – Italian Game

Adolf Anderssen

Jean Dufresne

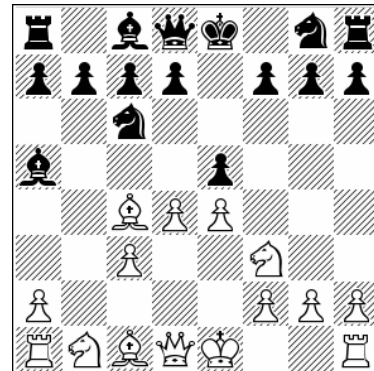
Berlin 1852

This is one of Anderssen's two most famous games, the 'Immortal' against Kieseritzky being the other. This one has attracted a great deal of analysis over the years, especially Black's 19th move. We hope we have now finally been able to answer the questions once and for all.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.b4

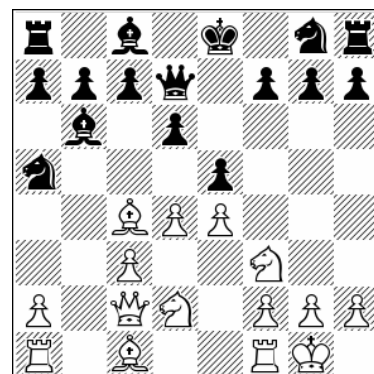
The Evans Gambit has proved one of the more enduring of the classical gambit openings, bringing Kasparov two devastating wins in his only two serious outings with it, and also proving a useful point-scorer for Nigel Short. But nowadays it is believed to have finally been pretty much 'solved' at top level. One might think that such gambits would be the first to be refuted in the modern engine age. However, it's turned out that piece activity and open lines and diagonals are the most valuable of all currencies for modern engines, and that a lost pawn in the opening is often just a minor inconvenience if dynamic chances are present. This was brought home to me (Matthew) most recently when I submitted the Evans-esque 1.e4 1...♗c6 2.b4?!? (the brainchild of English IM Richard Palliser) as an opening for the TCEC (the leading engine competition) Superfinal (a 100-game match played at long time controls from pre-specified opening positions) between top engines Stockfish and Leela. The games were played at classical time controls on extremely impressive hardware, but neither engine made any impression as Black. The tempo gained on the black knight after capturing on b4, and the open lines and diagonals created by the absence of a b-pawn were more than enough to balance the game with counterplay.

4...♙xb4 5.c3 ♙a5 6.d4



6...exd4

Subsequently, Black normally followed a solid plan of defence attributed to Lasker but which was first played by Salwe in 1908 against Rudolf Spielmann: 6...d6 7.♖b3 ♗d7 8.0-0 ♙b6. This is the linchpin of the plan, and Salwe also played this manoeuvre twice in 1906 when he faced the Evans Gambit (though White did not play 7.♖b3). The loose bishop on a5 is brought back to safety; by doing so the a5-square is freed which the knight on c6 can use profitably to exchange off a key white attacker: the bishop on c4. 9.♗bd2 ♗a5 10.♖c2 and now:



analysis diagram

A) 10...♗xc4 11.♗xc4 ♖c6 is an alternative way of returning the pawn to blunt the white initiative. It has been tried a few times in human games, mostly in rapid and blitz: 12.♗xb6 axb6 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♗xe5 ♖a4 15.♖d3 ♗f6 16.♙e1 (16.♖g3 has been the human choice in blitz and obviously caused some worries and problems for the black player!: 16...0-0 17.♙h6 ♗h5 18.♖f3 and now the engine line is the lovely 18...f6 19.♖xh5 ♖e8

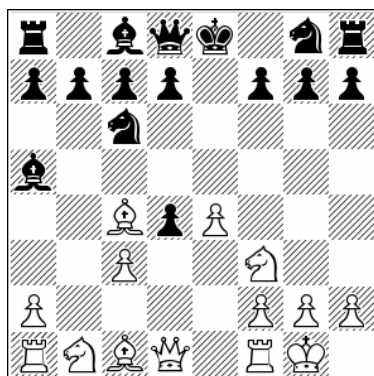
20.♖xe8 ♜xe8 21.♟d3 gxf6 with no problems for Black) 16...0-0 17.♙g5 ♟d7 18.♟xd7 ♞xd7 19.♞g3 ♞a4 20.♙f4 ♞c4 21.f3 ½-½ Dragon 3.1-Stockfish, Classics 2022;

B) 10...♞e7 11.♙a3 ♞f6 12.♙b5+ c6 13.♙e2 ♟e7 14.♙b4 ♙c7 15.♞fd1 0-0 was a Stockfish attempt to keep the extra pawn. The offside knight on a5 gives Black a few headaches but Black's position is basically solid, ½-½ (25) Dragon 3.1-Stockfish, Classics 2022;

C) 10...♟e7. This line, returning the sacrificed pawn for easy development has been the most popular in the modern game. 11.dxe5 ♟g6 12.exd6 ♞xd6 13.e5 ♞c6 14.♙e2 ♟f4 15.♙d1 0-0 16.♟e4 ♟g6 17.♞e1 ♟c4 18.♟ed2 ♟xd2 19.♙xd2 ♙e6 20.a4 ♞ad8 ½-½ Stockfish-Dragon 3.1, Classics 2022.

7.0-0

7.♞b3 is of course also typical and interesting, hitting f7 immediately to disrupt Black's development. 7...♞e7 8.0-0 ♙b6 9.cxd4 ♟xd4 10.♟xd4 ♙xd4 11.♟c3 has been seen fairly frequently in human games with pretty good results for White.



7...d3

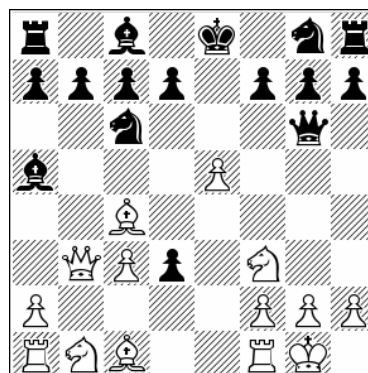
Not the engine choice, but a very reasonable idea to destroy any hope White might have of gaining a double pawn centre as compensation for the sacrificed pawn. On the downside, it is a non-developing pawn move in response to White's lead in development, so it obviously involves some risk. But the text, though not best, is certainly not so bad.

7...♟ge7 is the main choice at top level these days.

7...♟f6 was the engine preference, though it too is not without risk: 8.♙a3 d6 9.e5 ♟e4 10.exd6

cx d6 11.♞e2 d5 12.♟xd4 ♟xd4 13.cxd4. Black is now unable to castle, but finds a good spot for the king on g6! 13...f5 14.♙b3 ♟f7 15.♞b5 ♟g6 16.♙xd5 h6 17.♙xe4 fxe4 18.♙b4 ♙b6 19.♟c3 a6 20.♞d5 ♞xd5 ½-½ Stockfish-Dragon 3.1, Classics 2022.

8.♞b3 ♞f6 9.e5 ♞g6



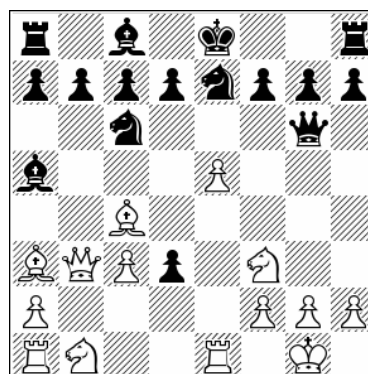
10.♞e1?!

Very natural, but the engines much preferred 10.♞d1. The point is that they consider ...d6 to be mandatory to free Black's position, even at the cost of a pawn. 10.♞d1 already lines up against the isolated d-pawn that will be created after exd6 ...cxd6.

The engine assesses the position as equal after 10...♟ge7 11.♙xd3 ♞h5 12.♟bd2 0-0 13.♙a3 d6 14.exd6 cxd6 15.♙xd6 ♞d8 16.♟e4 ♙e6 17.♞b2 ♟f5 18.♙f4 ♞g4 19.♞c1 h6 20.h3 ♞h5 21.♞b1 ♙b6 22.♟h2 ♟h4 23.♟xh4 ½-½ Dragon 3.2-Stockfish, Classics 2023.

10...♟ge7 11.♙a3?!

Now White should be somewhat worse. The engine prefers to eliminate the d3-pawn by 11.♞d1 or 11.♞e3.



11...b5?

A creative and ingenious idea to free Black's queenside pieces with gain of tempo and give

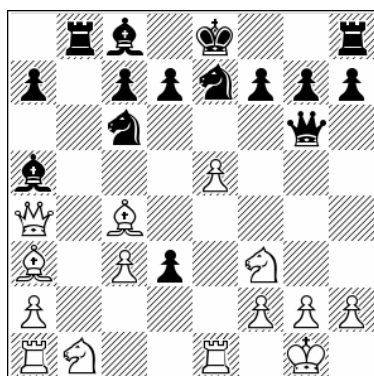
the light-squared bishop not just access to the c8-h3 diagonal, but to the a8-h1 diagonal. It doesn't work particularly well however, because until Anderssen very helpfully opens the g-file with 17.♘f6+, Black doesn't have much to combine with the light-squared bishop to create danger against the white position. And without the assistance of the light-squared bishop in covering the kingside light squares, Black's queen is extremely vulnerable to attack by White's minor pieces.

11...d5 was again the sensible engine choice to free the light-squared bishop and Black's queenside pieces. 12.exd6 cxd6 13.♖e3 0-0 14.♙xd3 ♖h6 15.♘bd2 ♙e6 is a very pleasant position for Black, ½-½ (40) Stockfish-Dragon 3.2, Classics 2023.

12.♙xb5

12.♙xb5 ♖b8 13.♙a4 was the engine favourite but it ends up very similar to the game. Not 13...0-0? 14.♙xe7, winning a piece.

12...♖b8 13.♙a4



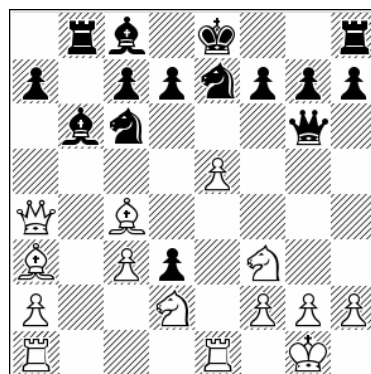
13...♙b6

Putting the bishop to safety, allowing Black to castle and also preventing ♖e3 and ♙xd3.

13...♙b6 was Dragon's favourite, leading to some crazy games after 14.♖e3 ♙b6 15.♙xd3 f5 16.exf6 ♙xf6 17.♖e2 ♘d8 18.♙e4 g5. A great idea, Dragon channelling its inner Basman to bring some new life into a 19th century game! 19.♘bd2 g4 20.♘d4 ♘xd4 21.cxd4 ♘c6 22.♖ael ♘xd4 23.♙xb7 ♘xe2+ 24.♖xe2 ♖e8 25.♙e4 ♙d4 26.♙c4 c6 27.♙xh7 ♘c7 28.♘f1 ♙f4 29.♙d3 ♖xe2 30.♙xe2 ♖e8 31.♘e3 ♙xe3 32.fxe3 ♙xe3+ 33.♙xe3 ♖xe3 and Black had enough play with the passed c- and d-pawns to keep the two bishops at bay! Super play! ½-½ (57) Stockfish-Dragon 3.1, Classics 2022.

14.♘bd2

14.♙d1 0-0 15.♙xd3 ♖h6 16.♘bd2 was the calm engine preference, when Black needs to hurry to secure some control over some kingside squares or the queen will become a target for ♖e1-e4-h4 or ♘e4 and ♙c1: 16...d5 17.exd6 cxd6 18.♖b1 ♖d8 19.♙c2 ♙g4 20.h3 ♙h5 21.♙c1 ♙g6 22.♘e4 ♙h5 23.♙g5 ½-½ (75) Stockfish-Dragon 3.1, Classics 2022. Black fought out of this but it was very uncomfortable.



14...♙b7?

This natural move is the one the engines really dislike! It's the logical continuation of Dufresne's concept but now it's open season for White's minor pieces on the black queen.

It is now essential to get the king out of trouble by means of 14...0-0. White still has a decent initiative after 15.♖e4!, intending ♙xd3, but at least 15...d5 was still just about holding with some very fraught tactics: 16.exd6 cxd6 17.♙xd3 ♙h3 18.g3 ♙f6 when his position looks rather shaky, but is not a complete calamity: 19.♖h4 h6 20.♙c2 (20.♖xh3? ♙xc3, forking the bishop on d3 and rook on a1, is the tactical point) 20...♘e5 21.♖xh3 ♘xf3+ 22.♘xf3 ♙xf3 23.♙xd6 ♖be8 24.♙h7+ ♘h8 25.♙e4 ♙xf2+ 26.♙xf2 ♙xe4 27.♖e1 ♙f5 28.♖h4 ♙d7 29.♖d4 ♘c6 30.♙xf8 ♘xd4 31.♖xe8 ♙xe8 32.♙xg7+ ♘xg7 33.♙xd4+ ♘g8 and Dragon had miraculously reached a holdable endgame! ½-½ (39) Stockfish-Dragon 3.1, Classics 2022. If 34.♙xa7, 34...♙e1+ 35.♘g2 ♙e4+ 36.♘f2 ♙c2+ recovers the c-pawn with check and the resulting queen endgame is a trivial draw for these monsters.

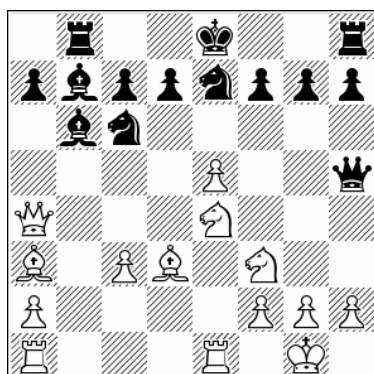
15.♘e4 ♙f5?!

A very odd move that doesn't help matters, but Black's position was in dire straits anyway.

15...d2, to distract the white knight with 16.♖exd2, was Black's best, but it's clear something has gone a bit wrong for Black: 16...0-0 17.♗e4 when the threat of ♕d3 leaves the black queen in severe trouble.

15...0-0 16.♕xd3 ♖h8 17.♗c5 wins the bishop pair and removes any danger against the white kingside with a great position to boot.

16.♕xd3 ♖h5

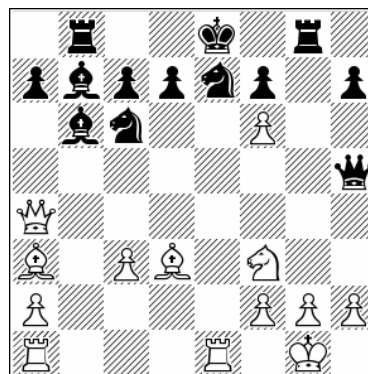


17.♗f6+?

An irresistible move: it might well be the first move one whacks out in a simultaneous display without a second thought! However, decisive as it looks, it is a serious mistake that throws away all of White's advantage! In one fell swoop it opens the g-file and adds a rook to Black's firepower against White's kingside and that's just what Black needs to make use of the activity Dufresne created with 11...b5. White could have obtained a much more crushing position after either of the two prosaic moves. Firstly, 17.♗g3; for example, 17...♖h6 18.♕c1 (Kasparov's choice; 18.♖ad1 and even 18.♗f5 ♗xf5 19.♕xf5 are at least equally overwhelming, but chasing the queen is very natural) 18...♖e6 19.♕c4 ♗d5 (19...♖g6 20.♗h4 wins the queen, in view of 20...♖g4 21.♕xf7+) 20.♗g5 ♖g4 21.♖e4 and again the queen perishes (Kasparov).

Secondly, 17.♖ad1 0-0 18.♗g3 ♖h6 19.♕c1 ♖e6 20.♗g5 with catastrophic material loss for Black in a variety of ways, 1-0 (25) Dragon 3.1-Stockfish, Classics 2022.

17...gxf6 18.exf6 ♖g8!

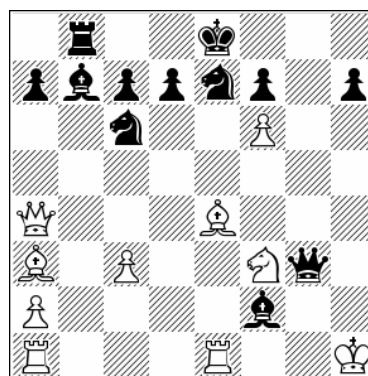


Dufresne finds the best move, setting up some counter-threats along the open g-file. Now we have reached the critical position, to which page after page of analysis has been devoted over the years.

19.♖ad1!

Anderssen chooses the sacrificial move, setting up a beautiful trap, which duly succeeds and is the reason this game acquired its nickname and its anthological popularity. But objectively, the position is only equal.

The alternative was 19.♕e4, which was White's best move objectively, still with a chance of a slight advantage in a crazy position. 19...♖h3 20.g3 ♖xg3+ 21.hxg3 ♖xg3+ 22.♗h1 ♕xf2 (if 22...♖h3+?, 23.♗h2 wins)

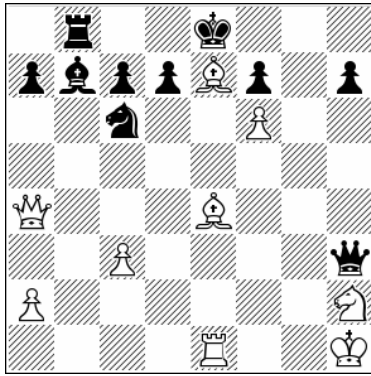


analysis diagram

A) If 23.♖e2??, 23...♗d4 wins;

B) 23.♕d5 ♕xe1 (23...♖h3+ 24.♗h2 ♕xe1 25.♖xe1 ♗e5 26.♕xb7 ♖xb7 27.♖a6 ♖b6 28.♖xa7 d6 29.fxe7 ½-½ Dragon 3.2-Stockfish, Classics 2023) 24.♖xe1 ♗e5! 25.♕xb7 ♖xb7 26.♖e4 ♖xf3+ 27.♖xf3 ♗xf3 28.♖xe7+ ♗d8 29.♖xf7 ½-½ Stockfish-Dragon 3.2, Classics 2023. The ending should be drawn, e.g. 29...d6 30.♖xh7 ♗g5 31.♖g7 ♖b5 followed by ...♖f5;

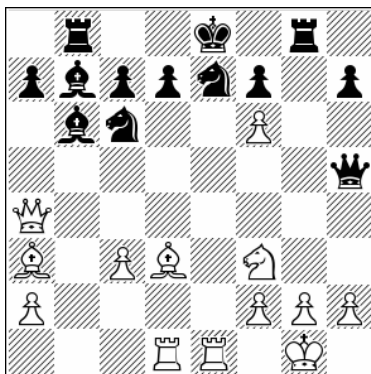
C) 23.♕xe7 ♖h3+ 24.♗h2 ♕xe1 25.♖xe1



analysis diagram

½-½ Stockfish-Dragon 3.1, Classics 2022.

A simple draw for the engines... let's carry on the game for a few more moves: 25...♖h4! (the only move: 25...♖xc3 26.♜f3 is winning for White) 26.♖d1 (also the only move to hold the balance against the threat of ...♜xe7) 26...♜xe7 27.♙xb7 ♖xf6! 28.♙g2 ♖b2 and Black has enough counterplay to hold the balance: 29.♖g4 ♜d8 30.♜f3 ♖g6 31.♖h3 ♖b1 32.♖h4 ♖xe1+ and the engines again called it a day here!



19...♖xf3?

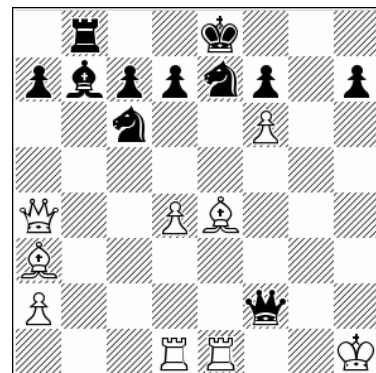
Grabbing material was almost seen as a moral duty in those days, but this allows Anderssen to show his genius idea.

A) Decades of analysis have been devoted to 19...♖g4 and it seems like a perfectly reasonable continuation for Black, though not in the engines' top choices. Now:

A1) 20.♖e4 ♖xe4 21.♖xe4 d6 22.♖e1 ♖g6 23.♖xe7+ ♜xe7 24.♖xe7+ ♜f8 25.♙xg6 hxg6 26.♙c1 ♙d5 27.h3 ♙xa2 28.♖e4 ♜g8 29.♙h6 ♙d5 30.♖h4 ♙xf3 31.gxf3 g5 (necessary to free the black king before ♙g7 happens) 32.♙xg5 ♙c5 33.♜g2 ♖b2 34.♖g4 ½-½ Dragon 3.2-Stockfish, Classics 2023. Equal for the engines, still a sharp, unbalanced endgame for humans;

A2) 20.♙c4 was punted by Stockfish and leads to some crazy tactics: 20...♖f5 21.♖xd7 ♜xd7 (21...♖xd7 22.♖xe7+ ♜xe7 23.♙xf7+ is the point: 23...♜xf7 24.♜e5+ ♜xf6 25.♜xd7+; 21...♖xg2+ 22.♜xg2 ♖g4+ 23.♜f1 ♖h3+ 24.♜e2 ♖xd7. (threatening ...♜d4+) 25.♖b5 ♜g6 26.♖g5 and the attack continues) 22.♜e5+ ♜c8 23.♜xg4 ♜d5 24.♖e8+ ♜d8 25.♙e7 c6 26.♙xd8 ♙xd8 27.♜e5 ♜c7 28.♖a5+ ♜b6 29.♖f8 ½-½ Stockfish-Dragon 3.2, Classics 2023. 29...♙xf6 30.♖xf7+ ♜c8 and all three results are possible! White can take a draw by repetition with 31.♖f8+ to start with.

B) Instead, the engine's first choice is 19...♙d4!, a desperado sacrifice to block the d-file. After 20.cxd4 (20.♙f1 ♙xf6 eliminates the f6-pawn and leaves White only fighting to hold the balance; 20.♙xe7 ♖xg2+ 21.♜xg2 ♜e5 is the amazing idea, finally revealing the genius behind 11...b5!) 20...♖xf3 21.♙e4 ♖xg2+ 22.♜h1 ♖xh2+ 23.♜xh2 ♖xf2+ 24.♜h1.



analysis diagram

Black can give perpetual check by 24...♖h4+ 25.♜g2 with a draw by perpetual, ½-½ Stockfish-Dragon 3.1, Classics 2022, and can even do so more spectacularly with 24...♜f5 25.♙g2+ (25.♙xf5+ ♜e5+ 26.d5 ♖xf5 is also only a draw) 25...♜e3 26.♖xe3+ ♖xe3 27.d5 ♖h6+ 28.♜g1 ♖e3+ etc.;

C) 19...♖h3 is the engine's second choice, and also leads to some sort of equality after 20.♙f1 ♖f5 and now – amazingly for such a sharp position – there seem to be multiple ways White can play that do not affect the balance of the position, among which 21.♙d3, 21.♜h1 and even 21.h4! We'll show you the most outrageous: 21.c4 ♙a8 22.♜h1 ♖xf6 23.♙xe7 ♜xe7 24.♖xd7 ♜f8 25.♖xe7 ♖xf3 26.c5 ♖xg2+ 27.♙xg2 ½-½ Dragon