



Chigorin's Experiences with the Evans Gambit (Part 2)

COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

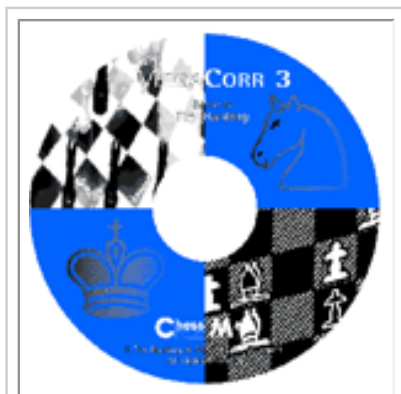
Tim Harding

This is part 2 of my history of the Evans Gambit in the 19th century. It deals with the last two decades of that era when Chigorin was the gambit's leading exponent. Indeed the greatest champion of the Evans Gambit of all time, arguably, was Mikhail Ivanovich Chigorin (31.10.1850-12.1.1908).

He was a late starter in chess. Apparently he did not learn the moves (or at least did not play at all seriously) until he was at least 20 years old and it was in 1873 that he began to play regularly. The book *Mikhail Chigorin, the first Russian Grandmaster* by A.Khalifman and S.Soloviov states that the start of his chess career may be dated from 1873 when he began frequenting the Dominik Café in Petersburg.

By 1879 Chigorin was first among equals in Russia (tying with Alapin in the 1879 Petersburg tournament ahead of Solovtsov, Shiffers and five others). In 1881 he began his international career with third place in the 2nd German Chess Congress (Berlin 1881) and in 1883 he retired from his civil service job to become a full-time professional chess journalist and player. By the late 1880s, with Zukertort deceased, he was the acknowledged world number two.

Despite losing two world championship matches to Steinitz,



Order

[Mega Corr 3](#)

Edited by Tim Harding

in 1889 and 1892, and only drawing matches with Gunsberg (1890) and Tarrasch (1893), Chigorin was probably superior to all three in practical tournament play. As an analyst of complex dynamic positions, he was supreme. He proved this, so far as the world champion was concerned, by defeating Steinitz 2-0 in their telegraph match. However, he played nervously in his head-to-head matches with major foreign opponents.

As a positional player, Chigorin was superior to Steinitz's previous rival, Zukertort. However, he lacked the depth of Steinitz and Gunsberg and the steadiness of Tarrasch. Despite making many important opening innovations in other lines (e.g. 2 Qe2 against the French and 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 in the Queen's Gambit), Chigorin was at his best in 1 e4 e5 open games. Chigorin "had a very subtle feeling for the initiative and he was not afraid to sacrifice material," says Kasparov (in his recent book *My Great Predecessors*), seeing Chigorin as a fore-runner of Alekhine and Spassky.

When Chigorin came on the scene, the Evans Gambit was in double (if not treble) crisis. One problem was the Compromised Defence, where Zukertort had finally got the better of Anderssen in 1871, and another was the Normal Variation where Anderssen had virtually refuted his own ideas in the last round at Barmen 1869. The third issue was that if White preferred 6 O-O then no clear route to advantage was available against 6...Nf6.

The games that I have collected in the Evans include all the main tournament and match games played by Chigorin in the Evans Gambit, plus several correspondence and minor games, but nevertheless he must have played hundreds more Evans games in exhibitions and other games that have not been preserved, especially in the early years of his career. So the following statements are based on the available evidence.

Chigorin did not face many of the defences that are considered most critical today. These either had not yet been invented (5...Ba5 6 d4 d6 7 Qb3 Qd7, for example, and 5...Be7 6 d4 Na5) or (in the case of 5...Ba5 6 d4 exd4 7 O-O Nge7) had been shelved because early results were discouraging,

Usually, Chigorin was willing to engage in a full-blooded debate on the Evans main lines with either colour. With Black, he played the Evans Declined (4...Bb6) occasionally but usually he preferred to employ the Compromised Defence or to defend the Normal Position or the Richardson Attack, the latter two being lines that he also played with White in his mature years.

Prior to 1895, Chigorin was successful as White with the Evans Gambit against opposition of all standards, right up to the world champion and other world top players. From 1895-1899 he experienced a crisis, which was partly due to having to meet a generation of grandmaster opponents and partly due to the new weapons they employed to combat the Evans. In the last decade of his life, Black got a plus score in his Evans games (in some of which Chigorin was Black).

After his loss to Pillsbury (below) Chigorin never again played the Evans against a grandmaster and after his win against Didier (Paris 1900), he stopped playing the gambit with White except in internal Russian events.

In this article I will present three case studies:

- 1. Chigorin & the Normal Position;
- 2. Chigorin v Steinitz in the Evans;
- 3. Chigorin & the early move order issue.

1. Chigorin and the Normal Position

The following sequence frequently occurred in Chigorin's games.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Bc5 6 0-0 d6 7 d4 exd4 8 cxd4 Bb6 9 Nc3



By the mid-19th century this had become known as the Normal Position of the Evans. It can arise via various move orders, including 5...Ba5 6 d4 exd4 7 O-O (when Black doesn't take the c-pawn) and 5...Ba5 6 O-O and 5...Ba5 6 d4, always assuming Black takes just the d-pawn and then follows up with ...d6 and ...Bb6 (in either order).

So this position is an early example of what is nowadays called a "tabiya" - an interesting position offering prospects to both sides that both players agree (tacitly or even by pre-agreement) to discuss in their game. We saw last time that in the Normal Position, Alexander McDonnell liked to play 9 h3, Anderssen preferred 9 d5 and Morphy's choice was 9 Nc3. In this debate, Chigorin was a follower of Morphy.

Chigorin was often involved in the inter-city correspondence matches that were popular in the 19th century. As the leading master in St Petersburg, his hand can be seen in several of the games involving that city, although it cannot easily be determined when in any particular game he was available for consultation and when he was perhaps abroad at a tournament, leaving the move choices to be decided by others.

In the following game, his influence is fairly certain. The 2-game London-St Petersburg telegraph correspondence

match was played 1886-87. Chigorin was captain of the St Petersburg team and Henry Bird was captain for London. Later Chigorin was also involved in telegraph matches against Paris (1894-5) and Vienna (1897-8).

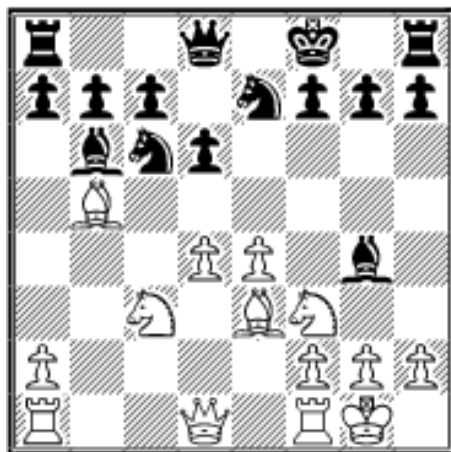
St Petersburg - London

intercity telegraph match 1886-87

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Bc5 6 0-0 d6
7 d4 exd4 8 cxd4 Bb6 9 Nc3 Bg4**

9...Na5 was becoming more usual around this time. This is one of the few competitive games in which Chigorin had to meet 9...Bg4.

10 Bb5 Kf8 11 Be3 Nge7



Some authorities are of the opinion that Black has equality here, but Dr Tarrasch said: "White has a far superior game - complete freedom and opportunity for attack on all sides".

12 a4

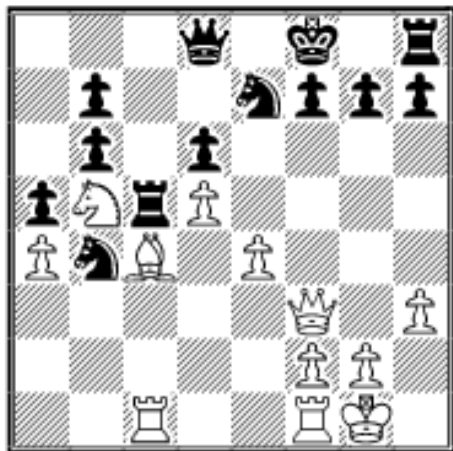
Chigorin played two important games against Gunsberg from this position in later years (5th match game 1890 and Hastings 1895). On the first occasion, Gunsberg played 12...Na5 13 d5 Bxe3 14 fxe3 Ng6 and won a long game, but Chigorin said he should have played 15 Qe1 (instead of Kh1) when after 15...Bxf3 he could have recaptured advantageously on f3 with the pawn.

12...a5 13 Bc4 Qc8

In the Hastings game, Gunsberg improved here with

13...Bh5 14 Kh1 (14 Rc1!? h6! is unclear too.) 14...Nb4 15 d5 (Sokolsky suggested 15 Qb3) but now he should have played 15...Ng6!? 16 Nxb6 cxb6 (Levenfish) instead of 15...Bxe3?!, when White got adequate compensation for the gambit pawn and eventually won.

14 Rc1 Nb4 15 d5 Qd8?! 16 Bxb6 cxb6 17 h3 Bxf3 18 Qxf3 Rc8 19 Nb5 Rc5



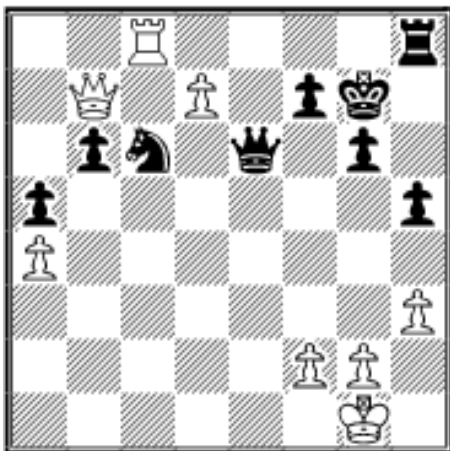
20 e5! Nc8

White has a strong attack anyway. If 20...Nbx d5 21 Bxd5 Rxd5 22 Nxd6 f6 23 Nxb7 Qd7 24 exf6 gxf6 25 Qxf6+ Kg8 26 Rfe1 Ng6 27 Rc7 White wins, or if 20...dxe5 21 d6 Ned5 22 Bxd5 Rxd5 23 Rc7 Qe8 24 Rfc1 and wins.

21 Rfe1! h5 22 exd6 Nxd6 23 Nxd6 Qxd6 24 Re6 Qd7 25 d6 Rxc4

Black had probably been relying on this resource (and its main point at the note to move 30).

26 Rxc4 Qxe6 27 Qxb7 g6 28 Rc8+ Kg7 29 d7 Nc6



Now if 30 Rxc6? Qe1+ 31 Kh2 Qxf2 32 Qc7 Rd8 stops the white pawn, because if 33 Qxd8 Qf4+ Black draws by perpetual check]

30 Qxc6! Qxc6 31 Rxc6 Rd8 32 Rd6 Kf8 33 Kf1 Ke7 34 Rxb6 Rxd7 35 Rb5 Ra7 36 g4

hxg4 37 hxg4 f6 38 Kg2 Ra6 39 Kg3 Ra7 40 Kf4 Ra6 41 f3 1/2-1/2 !?

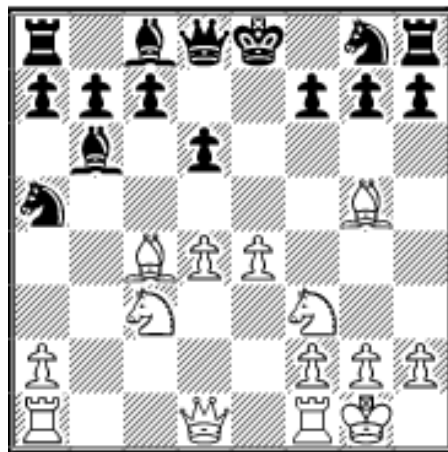
At this point, London (who had lost the other game) gave up the match 1½-0½ but in Chigorin's opinion, White must have won had the game been played out to a finish.

At the start of Chigorin's heyday, the reply 9...Na5 (instead of 9...Bg4) was usually met 10 Bd3 (and it's not a bad move) but Chigorin invariably (so far as I can discover) played 10 Bg5. Many of his games in the Evans involved a deep exploration of the consequences of this move.

Between April 7 and August 23, 1884, Chigorin played the following correspondence game against a Russian amateur. Today it still features in the theory books. I will use it as my "stem game" for discussing the complications arising from the most popular answer to the Göring Attack, namely **10...f6**.

M.I Chigorin - Dorrer
corr, 1884

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Bc5 6 0-0 d6 7 d4 exd4 8 cxd4 Bb6 9 Nc3 Na5 10 Bg5



This is sometimes known as the Göring Attack; the *Handbuch des Schachspiels* attributes the move to Professor Göring who (according to Zukertort) played it in several games against von Minckwitz in 1869. It was then introduced into master practice in 1870 by Von Minckwitz himself against Steinitz at Baden-Baden. Subsequently analysis by von Minckwitz was

published *Deutsche Schachzeitung* 1871 page 33).

The threat to Black's queen means he has three reasonable moves: 10...Qd7, 10...Ne7 and 10...f6 (which was by far the most popular answer in those days and is probably best).

10...f6

Black defends with tempo. He accepts a weakening of his kingside pawns, but he believes this will not matter as the c4-bishop will be captured next move.

The move 10...Qd7 (which Steinitz had played) did not have a good reputation after the reply 11 Bd3. I have not found any examples of Chigorin having to meet this variation, although he probably did in early games that have not been preserved. Unfortunately there is far from a complete record of the games he played in Russia, especially early in his career, although of course his international tournament and match games from the 1880s onwards are well known.

After 10...Ne7!?, the move 11 Bxf7+!? Kxf7 12 Nd5 (suggested by Shiffers) only leads to a quick draw with best play. In the 9th Chigorin-Gunsberg game, 1890, Black got away with 12...Nac6?! but only because Chigorin later blundered. The best reply is 12...Re8 13 Bxe7 Rxe7 14 Ng5+ Kg8 15 Qh5 h6! 16 Qg6!, which Chigorin analysed to a draw in 1890; several games have gone this way.

Instead 11 Nd5! is critical, and after 11...f6 12 Bxf6 gxf6 13 Nxf6+ Kf8 14 Ng5! Ng8?! 15 Ngxh7+! Kg7 16 Bxg8!, Chigorin won a brilliancy against N.Urusov in an 1884 Russian postal tournament. (See the new book *Red Letters* by Grodzensky & Harding.)

The accepted view of this line follows Chigorin in saying that after 14...Nxc4)instead of 14...Ng8) 15 Qh5 Kg7 16

Qf7+ Kh6 White has nothing better than a draw with 17 Qh5+ but 17 Ngxh7 offers some winning chances.

The alternative knight interposition, 10...Nf6, is to be avoided because of the self-pin on the g5-d8 diagonal. After 11 Bd3 Black has to reckon with the double threat of e4-e5 or Nc3-d5 and if he tries to break the pin by 11...h6 12 Bh4 g5 (12...Bg4 13 e5 led to a quick White win in Milkowski-Sobieszczanski, Warsaw 1899.) then White wins by the standard knight sacrifice 13 Nxf5 hxg5 14 Bxg5 according to the *Handbuch*.

11 Bf4!

Both White bishops are attacked, but the one on c4 is indirectly protected by the white queen, as we shall see. The dark-squared bishop must retreat.

In an 1879 postal game against Yakubovich, Chigorin had played 11 Bh4 and eventually won after 11...Nxc4 12 Qa4+ Qd7 13 Qx54 Qf7 14 Nd5 but he was a bit lucky. Yakubovich played here 14...Nh6!, which should have equalised (at least) if correctly followed up.

Many years later, at Hastings 1895, Chigorin had to meet 11 Bh4?! with the black pieces when Pollock played the move against him. Instead of following his Yakubovich game (which Pollock possibly knew) Chigorin replied 11...Ne7 and eventually won.

Back in 1879, Chigorin had already concluded that 11 Bh4 was inferior, because e4-e5 cannot always be forced through. In a second game with Yakubovich he played 11 Bf4, which was to become the usual response.



11...Nxc4?

After Chigorin-Dorrer, a better defence was found for Black but it was unknown outside Russia for many years. The whole Göring Attack is suspect because of 11...Ne7! 12 h3 (best according to Chigorin) 12...Ng6! (After 12...c6, in a later match

game Asharin-Chigorin, White got a good attack but pursued it with insufficient force, said Chigorin.) 13 Bg3 Nxc4 14 Qa4+ Qd7 15 Qxc4 Qf7 16 Nd5 0-0 17 a4 Be6! 18 a5 c6 19 axb6 cxd5 20 exd5 Bxd5 when Black has at least an equal game. Both Chigorin & Polner v. Hardin & Alapin, St Petersburg, 1888, and P.W.H.Smith-P.H.Clarke, England corr 1979, were won by Black.

In two Yankovich-Chigorin games, played in 1900 and 1901, White tried 12 Bd3 instead of 12 h3, but Black won those games also.

12 Qa4+ Qd7

This is better than 12...Kf7 as played in Chigorin-Pollock, New York 1889. (12...Kf8 is possible but rare.)

In that game, Chigorin continued 13 Qxc4+ Be6 14 d5 Bd7 (14...Bg4 15 Nd4!) 15 Ne2 Qe8?! 16 a4! Ne7 17 Be3! and went on to score a sparkling victory against less-than-perfect defence: 17...Ng6 18 Bxb6 cxb6 19 Qb4 Qe7 20 Ng3 Rhc8 21 Nd4 Rc5 22 f4 Rac8 23 Qd2 Rc4 24 Ne6 Nh4 25 Qd1 Bxe6 26 dxe6+ Kg8 27 Qg4 Ng6 28 Nf5 Qc7 29 e7 Kf7? 30 Rad1 Qc5+ 31 Kh1 Rc6 32 e5! fxe5 33 Nxd6+ Rxd6 34 fxe5+ Rf6 35 e8Q+ Kxe8 36 Qd7+ Kf8 37 exf6 1-0. For detailed notes, see (if you have it) the Kasparov book (game 20).

13 Qxc4 Qf7 14 Nd5



In this position with the bishop on f4, the move 14...Nh6 is no longer attractive. White can either capture on h6, wrecking Black's kingside structure. More likely, Chigorin would have continued 15 Rfc1 c6 16 Nxb6 axb6 17 Qb4 and the d6-pawn will drop off.

14...Be6

14...g5?! was featured in the second Chigorin-Steinitz Evans Gambit game, played in the 17th round of the great tournament of London 1883. After 15 Bg3 Be6 16 Qa4+ Bd7 17 Qa3 Rc8 18 Rfe1! g4 19 Nxb6 axb6 20 Nd2 Be6 21 f4 gxf3 22 Nxf3 Ne7 23 e5 fxe5 24 dxe5 d5 25 Rf1 the writing was on the wall and White won in 37 moves.

15 Qa4+ Bd7



Theory now went 16 Qa3. Surprisingly, even the 20th century editions of the *Handbuch* do not mention White's next move, which apparently was unknown outside Russia until long after it was played by Chigorin. Only 16 Qa3 is mentioned in Schlechter's editions of the *Handbuch* which date from the second decade of the 20th century.

Two years after the present game, St.Petersburg played 16 Qa3 in a correspondence game against another Russian city,

Krasnoyarsk. Presumably Chigorin would have led the Petersburg team but perhaps he was not yet sure which was the best move. Or else he wanted to keep 16 Qc2 secret in case he needed it for an important OTB tournament, but in fact that never happened. Another possibility is that he let his colleagues play the opening until a new position arose or they called on him for advice.

If Chigorin had written a book on the Evans before he died, it would doubtless have revealed many secrets known only to Russian players and perhaps some discoveries, known only to him, that he took to his grave. In those days, some opening lines were indeed investigated very deeply, just as they are today, but the difference was that new ideas were not communicated rapidly and it was much easier to keep a secret.

Here is a demonstration. After 16 Qa3 the theory of the day continued 16...Rc8 17 Rfe1 Ne7! (better than 17...Be6? 18 Nxb6 axb6 19 e5 fxe5 20 Ng5! As in Chigorin's second 1879 game with Yakubovich) 18 Nxb6 axb6 19 e5. Schlechter says this line is good for White and he continues 19...fxe5?! 20 Bg3 e4 21 Rxe4 Bc6 22 Rf4 Qd5 23 Re1 Kd7. Up to here was all analysis by Dr C.Schmid in *Deutsche Schachzeitung* 1895, page 34.

A Swedish correspondence game W.Svenson-C.Svenson (published slightly later in *Deutsche Schachzeitung*) continued 24 Rxe7+! Kxe7 25 Bh4+ Kd7 26 Ne5+! Ke8 27 Nxc6 g5 28 Bxg5! Kd7 29 Ne5+! dxe5 30 Qh3+ Kc6 31 Rf6+ Kb5 32 Qd3+ Ka4! 33 Qc2+ Kb5 34 Qe2+ Ka4 35 Qc2+ Kb5 36 Qe2+ Ka4 with a repetition, and the game was broken off here without result. However, Schlechter said that probably 37 Rf3! probably have forced the win.

However, Chigorin would of course know better, because instead of 19...fxe5?! The Krasnoyarsk players chose 19...0-

0!, by means of which Black offers the pawn back to obtain a good position. Consequently, Chigorin's move against Dorrer is best.

16 Qc2!

The new move gives White the advantage. Thanks to his safer King and more harmonious development he has play on both sides of the board. This game was decided on the queenside:

16...Rc8

Chigorin's judgment that 16...Bc6 17 Nxb6 axb6 18 d5 Ba4 19 Qc3 favours White was proved in a later game Shiffers-Kriyanovsky, Russia corr 1890-91.

17 a4 Ba5 18 Rfb1 Ne7

If 18...b6 19 Ne3 and Nc4.

19 Nxe7 Qxe7 20 Rxb7 0-0 21 Rxa7 Bb6 22 Ra6 Ra8 23 a5! Rxa6 24 Qc4+ Kh8 25 Qxa6 Bxa5 26 Qxa5 Qxe4 27 Qxc7 Qxf4 28 Qxd7 Rb8 29 Qa7 1-0.

To conclude, Chigorin had good results with White in the Göring Attack but in his later years he also won games with Black using 11...Ne7. Perhaps he had lost faith in White's objective chances and this was a contributory factor to his more or less abandoning the Evans in his last decade. Practical play, however, was a different matter and his talent often enabled him to win games from equal or even somewhat inferior positions. As Dr Tarrasch commented many years later, about the Normal Position, "Chigorin nearly always carried this line of play to a successful conclusion for White".

2. Chigorin v Steinitz in the Evans

Chigorin's match games with Steinitz are well-known and widely available, but some comments on the debate between the two men in the Evans are necessary.

In Wilhelm Steinitz's first Evans Gambit encounter with Chigorin (Vienna 1882), he experimented with 5...Bf8 and the Russian, not yet at his best, defeated him, spending only 90 minutes on the 39-move game compared with 2 hours 15 minutes for Steinitz. In their second encounter, mentioned above, Steinitz chose to defend the Normal Position and did so poorly.

Thereafter Steinitz was to adopt some other idiosyncratic (even bizarre) defences against the Evans, usually with the same result: 1-0. Yet he was persistent in his belief that 1...e5 was the right move and that the Evans could be countered.

Steinitz did not believe in grabbing all the pawns. His aim as a defender was to hold one extra pawn with a strong-point at e5 in the centre. However, this philosophy led him into some very strange byways. Most of the "defences" he tried against the Evans are not considered highly today.

This particularly applies to Steinitz's pet line from the 1880s in which he developed his queen early on f6, only to have it driven to b8. This line was involved in one of Chigorin's finest victories in the gambit, played in a consultation game involving two Cuban amateurs shortly after his first world title challenge had failed.

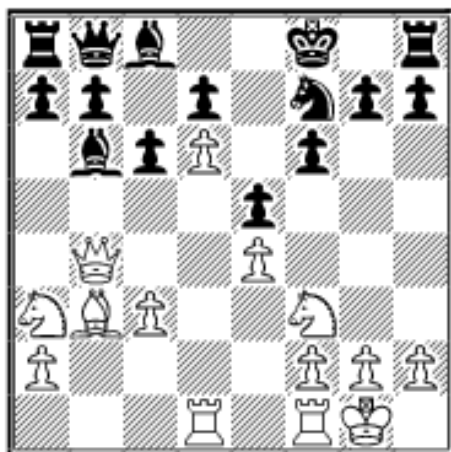
Chigorin & Ponce - Steinitz & Gavilan
Havana, 1889

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Ba5 6 0-0
Qf6 7 d4 Nge7**

In another exhibition game from the series, Steinitz switched to 7...Bb6 and was ultimately successful. You can find interesting comments on that game in Colin Crouch's book on defence. Finally he tried 7...Nh6 but this was comprehensively refuted in the telegraph match.

**8 d5 Nd8 9 Qa4 Bb6 10 Bg5 Qd6 11 Na3 c6 12 Rad1 Qb8
13 Bxe7 Kxe7 14 d6+ Kf8 15 Qb4! f6 16 Bb3 Nf7**

Steinitz believed that this move was an improvement on 16...g6 that had occurred in the 17th match game, which he should have lost.



17 Nh4 g6?

White was not threatening anything in particular with Nf5 so this move is unnecessary. 17...Bd8 was indicated by Chigorin, when the game might continue 18 Qc4 Nh6 19 Nf5 b5. Possibly stronger for White, however, is 18 Bxf7 Kxf7 19

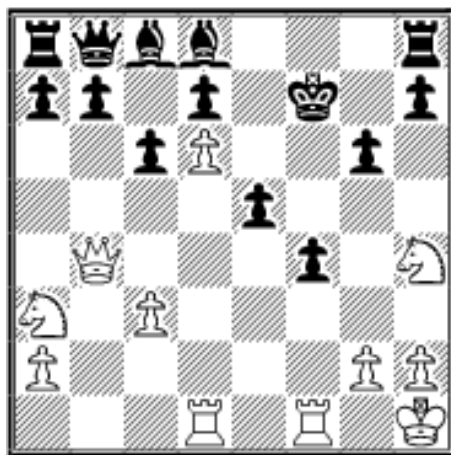
Qb3+ (or first 19 Rd3) 19...Kf8 20 Rd3 g6 21 Rh3 Kg7 (not 21...Qxd6? 22 Nxg6+) 22 Rg3 Kf8 23 Nc4 and while there may not be an immediate win, Black faces a tough defence with his queenside pieces out of action. For example, 23...Ke8 (to avoid Nxe5 followed by Rf3+) 24 Rh3 Rf8 25 Nf3 b5 (25...Rf7 26 Ncxe5 fxe5 27 Nxe5) 26 Rb1 maintains the pressure and brings the last white piece into play (preventing ...bxc4 and with the idea a4).

18 Kh1 Bd8 19 f4 exf4 20 Bxf7!

If 20 e5 Nxe5 so White eliminates the knight in order to break through.

20...Kxf7 21 e5! fxe5

Chigorin wrote: "Certainly an error but only on account of the most ingenious rejoinder which White had in store". If 21...g5 22 Qc4+ Kf8 23 Nf5 and if 23...fxe5 24 Qe4 Bf6 25 Nc4 (Chigorin). 21...Kg7 was the best defence, but after 22 Qxf4 Rf8 23 Qg3! looks stronger than Chigorin's 23 e6 dxe6 24 d7 Qxf4.

**22 Rxf4+! Kg7**

If 22...exf4 23 Qxf4+ Kg7 24 Rf1 Rg8 (the only move as 24...b5 gets mated after 25 Qf7+) 25 Qd4+ Kh6 26 Rf7 White forces mate. The immediate threat is 27 Qe3+ Bg5 28 Qh3.

23 Nf5+! gxf5 24 Rxf5 Rg8 25 Rdf1

This move receives an exclamation mark in Jimmy Adams' book on Chigorin but it is inaccurate, although it spoils nothing. The computer reveals that 25 Qg4+ forces mate, e.g. 25...Kh8 26 Qe4 Bf6 27 Rxf6 Rg6 28 Qxe5 Rxf6 29 Qxf6+ Kg8 30 Re1 etc.

25...b5?

25...Kh6 would have prolonged the game slightly.

26 Qg4+ 1-0. White announced mate in 4.

The first Chigorin-Steinitz title match was, according to Steinitz, played between "...an old master of a young school and a young master of an old school. The young school won despite the age of its protagonist. The young master of the old school sacrificed pawns and pieces, the old master of

the young school did more. He sacrificed a whole series of games."

Chigorin, I think, did not regard himself as the champion of any old school. His play was much more subtle and sound than, say, Anderssen or Zukertort. Only Morphy could be regarded as his precursor.

Regarding his 6...Qf6 line in the Evans, Steinitz admitted it was a difficult line to play against the clock and in match conditions but "I feel thoroughly convinced that the defence is right in principle and will be the best there is to be found once it has been analysed in depth".

Steinitz was totally wrong about this, and I am sure Chigorin was convinced of his rival's folly. In August-September 1890, he played some training games by correspondence against his sparring partner A.A.Markov, in which Black played Steinitz's line. Chigorin won both games easily, adopting two different lines of attack, one of which he then employed to beat Steinitz very easily in the telegraph match that began in October 1890.

In this well-known match, two pet Steinitz opening lines were agreed to be tested: 9 Nh3 against the Two Knights and the 6...Qf6 defence to the Evans. Chigorin was basically giving pawn odds in each game and he destroyed Steinitz totally.

After the telegraph match, Steinitz abandoned 6...Qf6 and employed defences based on 6...d6 in his second world title contest with Chigorin. Steinitz tried both 6 O-O d6 7 d4 Bg4 (as in Evans-McDonnell) and 7...Bd7. In his final Evans games with Chigorin, in 1895-6, Steinitz changed his whole approach and captured the d-pawn after all: 6 O-O d6 7 d4 exd4 8 cxd4 Nf6?!. Although Steinitz made a slight plus score from these four games, as before he did not blaze

trials that other defenders of the Evans were interested in following.

No doubt Chigorin recognized where his greatest strength lay and that is why he chose sharp openings like the Evans Gambit as his battleground, aided by the fact that Steinitz himself believed in $1...e5$ for Black and would not back down and play a different defence to $1 e4$. It was a matter of principle for both of them to contest $1 e4 e5$. While Chigorin would also play other openings (e.g. the Ponziani and King's Gambit) in the 1880s and early 1890s the Evans was his main weapon of choice against strong opponents.

Chigorin believed in his deeper knowledge of the intricacies of the Evans and in his powers of calculation. In the matches that Chigorin played against both Steinitz and Gunsberg, we see that his dogmatic opponents continued to play to the Russian's strength rather than seeking out paths that might be more unpleasant for Chigorin.

Thus in the first world championship match that he contested with Steinitz (1889-90) the Evans arose in eight of the nine games where Chigorin had the white pieces. He played the Ruy Lopez (Spanish) on the other occasion. It is a bit surprising that in the first match, Chigorin "only" won the Evans debate by $+4 -3 =1$ but as he lost the match overall by four points, we can take it that his superiority in the Evans (however slight) made up for his deficiencies in other departments of the game.

In the second championship match of 1892 (played after Chigorin's 2-0 win in the telegraph match) the ageing Steinitz played no better than Chigorin but was "saved" by Chigorin's horrific blunder in the 23rd game, when the Russian allowed mate in one in a greatly superior position. The "Evans mini-match" in 1892 went $+4 -1 =3$ in Chigorin's favour, and overall Chigorin's record in Evans

Gambit games played between the two men was: played 23, won 12, drawn 6, lost 5 with Chigorin always on the white side.

More sensibly, Tarrasch (who was less inclined than Steinitz to defend a pawn for its own sake) only defended with 1...e5 in one game of his 1893 match with Chigorin, normally preferring the French Defence.

3. Chigorin and the early move order issue

One of the main theoretical debates in the 19th century was about whether Black should play 5...Bc5 or 5...Ba5, and in the latter case whether White should continue 6 O-O or 6 d4. Chigorin almost invariably played 6 O-O against either move.

5...Bc5 is rarely seen nowadays and some of the arguments seen in 19th century discussions about the relative merit of the two moves look like splitting hairs nowadays. 5...Ba5 seems more logical to most "modern" players, principally because after 6 d4 exd4 the White c-pawn is pinned so 7 cxd4 is impossible.

Chigorin did play 6 d4 early in his career but after London 1883 the only games where he is White feature 6 O-O. On the black side, he used to play 5...Ba5 and continued to meet 6 d4 by 6...exd4 7 O-O and now sometimes the Compromised Defence (7...dxc3) but more often headed for the so-called Normal Position (7...d6 8 cxd6 Bb6).

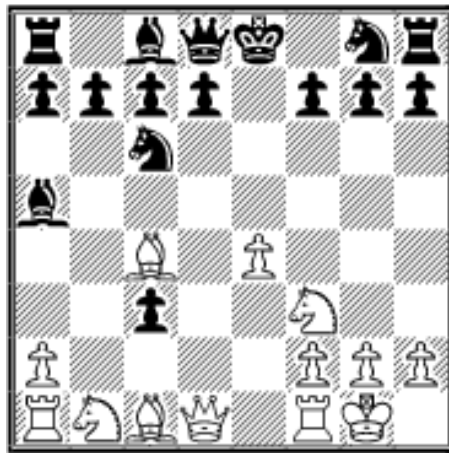
Like his precursors Anderssen and Zukertort, Chigorin was not averse to playing the Evans Gambit with Black. He knew it better than anyone else and if White played an inferior method of attack, he was ready with the answer.

Early in his career, he was sometimes willing to meet

5...Ba5 with the direct 6 d4 and face the Compromised Defence, for example in the following game against an English amateur. His loss with Black to Winawer in this variation in 1875 (see Kibitzer #87, August 203) may have influenced him.

M.I. Chigorin - J.Mortimer
London 1883 (round 10)

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Ba5 6 d4
 exd4 7 0-0 dxc3**



**8 Qb3 Qf6 9 e5 Qg6 10 Nxc3
 Nge7 11 Ba3!**

Chigorin chose the move with which Winawer had defeated him some years earlier. Instead 11 Rd1 0-0 12 Ba3 b5 13 Bd3 Qh5 14 Ne4 Bb6 15 Bxb5 Rb8 16 Qd3 Rd8 17 Nf6+!? gxf6 18 exf6 Bxf2+ 19 Kxf2 Qxb5 20

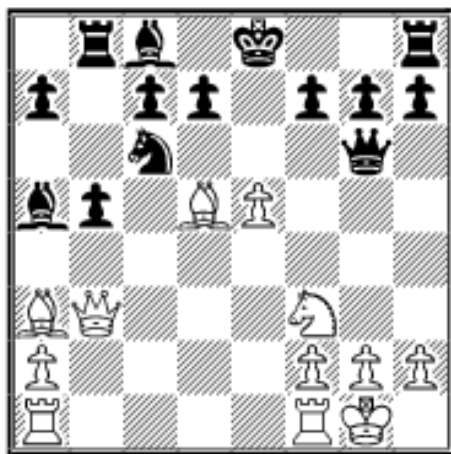
Qxb5 Rxb5 21 fxe7 Re8 22 Rac1 was unclear in Asharin-Chigorin, Riga (match) 1892. Black eventually won in 41 moves.

11...Rb8

Nowadays 11...O-O, often played in the 19th century, is considered critical but 11...b5 had been seen in Winawer-Chigorin.

12 Nd5 Nxd5 13 Bxd5 b5

Mortimer tried 13...Nd8 against Zukertort in a later round but he lost again.



14 Rad1?!

Later it was confirmed that Dufresne's move 14 e6! is indeed best, e.g. 14...fxe6 15 Bxc6 dxc6 16 Ne5 Qe4 17 Qg3 g6 18 Qg5 b4 19 Rad1 0-0 20 Bb2 and now:

a) 20...Rb5 21 Nf7! e5

(21...Rxf7 22 Rd8+ Rf8 23 Qf6 mates) when in Tarrasch-Kelz, Nuremberg 1890, White played 22 Nh6+ and won eventually. White later discovered 22 Qf6! (1-0 in Sandford-Brancon, England corr, 1898).

b) 20...Bb6 21 Ng4 e5 22 Nf6+ Rxf6 23 Qxf6 Bh3 24 gxh3 Qf5 25 Qxf5 gxf5 26 Rd7 1-0 A.Romashkevich-K.Betins, 4th Shakhmatny Zhurnal corr tourney 1894-6.

14...b4 15 e6?!

Wayte wrote in the tournament book that "Chigorin's combination was pronounced unsound, as we are informed by several leading players who analysed it...".

15...fxe6?

The general opinion was that 15...bxa3 might have been taken safely.

16 Bxc6 dxc6 17 Ne5 Qf5 18 Nxc6 0-0 19 Ne7+ 1-0.

Chigorin's mature opinion, however, was similar to Zukertort's: the compensation White gets for two pawns in the Compromised is not as clear as the compensation for one pawn in the slower lines. Twenty-first century opinion is somewhat different: White's attack is very dangerous in almost all lines where Black takes the d4-pawn. The best

lines for Black are those where he plays for positional rather than material advantage.

Evidently Chigorin decided that if White does not want to meet the Compromised Defence, then he must answer 5...Ba5 by 6 O-O. He also met by 5...Bc5 by 6 O-O, probably to avoid the unclear lines arising from 5...Bc5 6 d4 exd4 7 cxd4 Bb4+.

The upside of playing 6 O-O is that the king is safe; there are no pins or checks by Black's bishop. The downside is that there is no immediate threat to regain material and Black has a free developing move. If the Normal Position (see next section) is his intention, then the move order is of no great significance but Black can also counter attack against the white e-pawn: 5...Ba5 6 O-O Nf6.

This was seen as a problem for some years before Chigorin's time but then the Richardson Attack appeared, 7 d4. Black is invited to capture the e-pawn. I have found eight games in which Chigorin was involved in this line; he won seven of them (one with Black) and the other was drawn. Considering that nowadays the Richardson Attack (and hence the position after 6 O-O Nf6) is considered at best equal for White, that is a tribute to Chigorin's attacking powers. See for example the game at the end of this article.

Nowadays, Black often has a different idea in mind when playing 5...Ba5. If White then continues in Chigorin mode with 6 O-O the answer will probably be 6...d6, a flexible move that gives Black many possible replies to the answer 7 d4. The most important of these, both historically and theoretically, is the Lasker Defence, 7...Bb6. Actually, though this was systematised by Lasker (and also adopted by Pillsbury) it may have been Gunsberg who first played it, against Blackburne back in 1879! In the six Chigorin games that I have seen with White against this defence, he scored

only half a point.

From about 1895, new rivals to Chigorin's number two position emerged: Pillsbury and Lasker. When both were able to beat him with Black in Evans Gambit games, the end of an era was signaled, although Chigorin remained a formidable opponent right up to 1907.

In the end, Lasker and Pillsbury defeated Chigorin in the Evans, not by out-calculating him in a critical position (that would have been virtually impossible) but by finding an idea that defused the main energy of the gambit player's idea.

M.I. Chigorin - H.N. Pillsbury
London 1899

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Bc5 6 0-0 d6
 7 d4 Bb6**

Black is going to offer the e-pawn in order to reach a simplified position where he can try to win the endgame on the queenside. Lasker gets the credit for realizing this; Staunton (and presumably Steinitz too) just thought White was better in the resulting position.

In his earlier games against the Lasker Defence, Chigorin had tried to circumvent the main issue by 8 a4 but had no success. Now he decides to try the main line.

8 dxe5

In the consultation game Chigorin & Protoklitov v. Znosko-Borovsky & Levin, White played 8 Be3 Nf6 9 Nbd2 and drew. However, Black was no worse out of the opening.

8...dxe5



9 Qxd8+

Later Chigorin did a lot of analysis of 9 Qb3! Qf6 10 Bg5 Qg6 11 Bd5 Nge7 12 Bxe7 Kxe7 13 Bxc6 Qxc6 14 Nxe5, by means of which White regains his pawn without exchanging queens. The downside for White is that now

he must play with two knights against two bishops. There have been quite a few modern games in that line but there is no conclusive evaluation.

9...Nxd8 10 Nxe5 Be6

Lasker found the idea for this defence in an early edition of the 'Handbuch' but it was dropped from later editions until he revived it in 'Common Sense in Chess' (1896). He also said that while this is equal, and even better move would be 10...Nf6!.

11 Nd2 Ne7 12 Ba3 f6 13 Nd3 Ng6 14 Rab1 Kf7 15 Bd5 Re8 16 c4



16 Nc4 was better according to Chigorin but it is doubtful whether it gives White any advantage.

16...c6! 17 Bxe6+ Nxe6 18 Nb3

Only now did Chigorin see that 18 c5 would be met by 18...Red8!.

So White stood worse and was gradually outplayed:

18...Rad8 19 Nbc1 Rd7 20 c5 Bc7 21 g3 Ne5 22 Nxe5+

**Bxe5 23 Nb3 g5 24 Rfd1 Red8 25 Rxd7+ Rxd7 26 h3 Bc7
 27 Kf1 b5 28 Bb4 h5 29 Kg2 Rd3 30 Rc1 Nd4 31 Rc3
 Rxc3 32 Bxc3 Nxb3 33 axb3 a5 34 Kf3 Ke6 35 Ke3 h4 36
 gxh4 gxh4 37 Kd3 a4 38 bxa4 bxa4 39 Bb4 Be5 40 Ba3
 Ba1 41 Bc1 f5 42 Ba3 Ke5 43 exf5 Kxf5 44 Ke3 Ke5 45
 f4+ Kd5 46 f5 Be5 47 Kf2 Ke4 0-1.**

Some Conclusions

It seems to me that unfortunately the romantic Evans Gambit is doomed to extinction. Garry Kasparov himself won inspirational attacking games against Anand and Piket in 1995, when Shirov also used the gambit to beat Timman, but in subsequent years top GMs have abandoned it again once defensive improvements were shown.

With computer aid, of course, many of the judgments of the late 20th century - as well as the games of the 19th century - may be open to re-examination. There are possibly some important positions where a computer could be used to find new tactics for White. Many analysis programs at present undervalue the initiative that White typically obtains in the Evans Gambit. Nevertheless, deep analysis with computer aid tends to show that in most tactical melees, it is the defence that can be improved, rather than the attack,

Chigorin took the gambit as far as it could go with the 6 O-O lines that he preferred. Ultimately even he failed to find a satisfactory answer to the Lasker Defence and gave up the Evans for the King's Gambit in his final decade.

Twentieth century Evans players (including such grandmasters as Tartakower and Bronstein) managed to go beyond Chigorin and reinforce White's chances in the 5...Ba5 6 d4 exd4 lines. (Attempts to replace 7 O-O then by 7 Qb3 were interesting but ultimately have not proved fruitful.) The situation remains unclear at best in the critical

lines that arise after 5...Ba5 6 d4 exd4 7 O-O Nge7!, while it is also hard to prove any significant advantage in the 5...Be7 defence and even the Evans Declined is problematic.

Perhaps the biggest problem of all for White is the line 5...Ba5 6 d4 d6. If White castles then Black gets the Lasker Defence by 7...Bb6 while if 7 Qb3 the answer 7...Qd7 has proved extremely robust.

Nevertheless the Evans Gambit has been an exciting chapter in chess history and the gambit has produced many beautiful games. Let us end with a Chigorin miniature against his bitter Russian rival Alapin. This is one of his most famous Evans brilliancies.

M.I.Chigorin - S. Alapin
St Petersburg, 1883

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Ba5 6 0-0 Nf6

After this defeat, Alapin preferred the defence 7...d6 8 d4 Bd7.

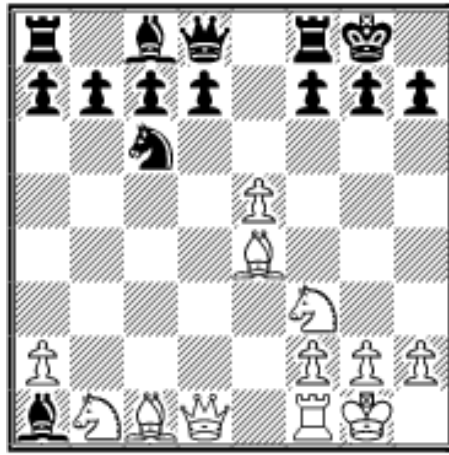
7 d4

This is the Richardson Attack. Chances are roughly equal but the play is complex and White gets good attacking chances if the defender slips us, as this game shows.

7...Nxe4 8 dxe5 0-0 9 Bd5 Bxc3?!

Better is 9...Nc5 10 Ng5 Qe7. Chigorin won several games against inferior defence.

10 Bxe4 Bxa1



White has sacrificed the exchange and two pawns. Now he offers a bishop. Apparently White's next move was suggested by Berger in *Deutsche Schachzeitung* (1876) but Chigorin found mistakes in that analysis.

11 Bxh7+ Kh8

11...Kxh7 12 Ng5+ Kg6 (12...Qxg5 failed in two later Chigorin-Manko games.) 13 Qg4! (13 Qd3+ leads to a draw.) 13...f5 14 exf6 Ne5 15 Qg3! Kxf6 16 f4 gave White a strong attack in Chigorin-Rosenkrantz, St Petersburg 1897, but 16...Nc6 would have been critical. Your computer may tell you Black is winning here but that doesn't necessarily mean it could have won the position against Chigorin!

12 Ng5 g6 13 Qg4 Bxe5?

This was the losing move. Black should have played 13...Kg7 (or first 13...Nxe5, which comes to the same thing) 14 Qh4 Kg7 and after 15 f4 there are various complicated possibilities, of which 15...Ng4 16 Qxg4 d54 may be best.

14 Qh4 Kg7 15 Ne6+! fxe6 16 Qh6+

White announced mate in 10 moves.

16...Kf7 17 Bxg6+ Ke7 18 Qh4+ Rf6 19 Ba3+!

The mate could be extended to the full 10 moves by some meaningless moves starting 19...Nb4.

19...d6 20 Qh7+ Kf8 21 Qh8+ Ke7 22 Qg7+ Rf7 23 Qxf7# 1-0.

Let us give the last word to Chigorin himself. Asked about his love of gambits and complications, he retorted to his critics: "If I often play the King's Gambit or Evans Gambit, it is not because I like losing a pawn at move two or move four, but because I have been able to convince myself by means of analysis of the genuine strength of these lines which offer the best chance of winning. What do they mean by love of complications? What normal person would prefer the complex path to the simple one? The point is that I often foresee victory in the sort of position in which others can only see complications".

Copyright 2003 Tim Harding. All rights reserved.



[\[Chess Cafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About The Chess Cafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2003 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"**The Chess Cafe**®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.