

A BUST TO THE KING'S GAMBIT
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The King's Gambit has lost popularity, but not sympathy. Analysts treat it with kid gloves and seem reluctant to demonstrate an outright refutation. "The Chessplayers Manual" by Gossip and Lipschutz, published in 1874, devotes 237 pages to this gambit without arriving at a conclusion. To this day the opening has been analyzed romantically – not scientifically. Moderns seem to share the same unconscious attitude that caused the old-timers to curse stubborn Steinitz: "He took the beauty out of chess."

To the public, the player of the King's Gambit exhibits courage and derring-do. The gambit has been making a comeback with the younger Soviet masters, notably Spassky (who defeated Bronstein, Averbach and myself with it). His victories rarely reflected the merits of the opening since his opponents went wrong in the mid-game. It is often the case, also, as with Santasiere and Bronstein, that the King's Gambit is played with a view to a favorable endgame. Spassky told me himself the gambit doesn't give White much, but he plays it because neither does the Ruy Lopez nor the Giuoco Piano.

The refutation of any gambit begins with accepting it. In my opinion the King's Gambit is busted. It loses by force.

1. e4 e5, 2. f4 exf4 3. Nf3 d6!

This is the key to a troublesome position, a high-class "waiting move." At Mar Del Plata, 1959, I played 3...g5 against Spassky, but this is inexact because it gives White drawing chances in the ensuing ending: e.g., 4. h4 g4, 5. Ne5 Nf6, 6. d4 d6, 7. Nd3 Nxe4, 8. Bxf4 Bg7, and now 9. c3! (replacing Spassky's 9. Nc3) 9...Qe7, 10. Qe2 Bf5, 11. Nd2 leads to an ending where Black's extra Pawn is neutralized by White's stranglehold on the dark squares, especially f4.

Another good try, but also inexact, is the Berlin Defense: 3...h6, 4. d4 g5, 5. h4 Bg7, 6. g3 g4, (also playable is 6...d6, 7. gxf4 g4) 7. Nh2 fxg3, 8. Nxg4 (8. Qxg4 loses to 8...gxh2, 9. Qxg7 Qxh4+, 10. Kd1 Qf6) 8...d5, 9. e5 Bf5, 10. Bf4, where Black cannot demonstrate any advantage.

Of course 3...d5 equalizes easily, but that's all.

4. Bc4

4. d4 transposes, the only difference if White tries to force matters after 4...g5, 5. h4 g4, 6. Ng5 (White also gets no compensation after 6. Bxf4 gxf3, 7. Qxf3 Nc6 or 6. Ng1 Bh6) 6...f6!, 7. Nh3 gxh3, 8. Qh5+ Kd7, 9. Bxf4 Qe8!, 10. Qf3 Kd8 and with his King and Queen reversed, Black wins easily.

4...h6!

This in conjunction with Black's previous move I would like to call the Berlin Defense Deferred. By this subtle transposition Black knocks out the possibility open to White in the last note (to move 3).

5. d4 g5, 6. 0-0 Bg7, 7. c3

Necessary to protect the QP. 7. g3 is always met by 7...g4

7...Nc6

Here there is disagreement as to Black's best move. Puc and Rabar, Euwe, Keres, and most analysts give the text as the main line and mention 7...Ne7! in passing. I think 7...Ne7 is best because there is no reason why Black should not strive to castle Kingside: e.g., 8. g3 d5!, 9. exd5 fxg3, 10. hxg3 (if 10. Ne5 gxh2+!, 11. Kh1 0-0, 12. d6 Qxd6 wins) 10...0-0, 11. Qb3 Qd6, 12. Kg2 Nf5 wins. There is little practical experience with this sub-variation.

8. Qb3

If 8. g3 g4, 9. Nh4 f3, 10. Nd2, Euwe and other analysts betray their soft-mindedness toward this opening by giving the inferior 10...Bf6?, 11. Ndxf3 gxf3, 12. Qxf3 - "unclear"!! This is yet another example of sentimental evaluation - after 12...Qe7 followed by Bh3 and 0-0-0 Black wins easily. The Pawn on f3 is a bone in White's throat so why force him to sacrifice when he must anyway?

10...Qe7 is the strongest move.

In this last variation (instead of 10. Nd2) White can vary with 10. Qb3 but then comes Nimzovitch's beautiful winning line: 10...Qe7, 11. Nf5 Bxf5, 12. exf5 (if 12. Qxb7 Rb8, 13. Qxc6+ Qd7, 14. Qxd7+ Bxd7 and Black has a winning endgame) 12...0-0-0, 13. Bxf7 Qe2, 14. Qe6+ (if 14. Rf2 Nxd4!, 15. Rxe2 fxe2 wins) 14...Rd7!, 15. Rf2 Qd1+, 16. Rf1 Qc2, 17. Nd2 Nf6, (threatening Nd8) 18. Bg6 (if 18. Qb3 Qxb3, 19. Bxb3 d5 with a winning endgame) 18...d5 followed by Ne7 with a winning game for Black.

8...Qe7, 9. h4 Nf6

Again theoretical disagreement. Perfectly good is 9...g4!, 10. Bxf4 (forced, not 10. Nfd2 Nxd4!, 11. cxd4 Bxd4+ etc.) 10...gxf3, 11. Rxf3 - given by analysts again as "unclear," but after 11...Nf6 followed by 0-0, White has nothing for the piece.

10. hxg5 hxg5, 11. Nxg5 Nxe4

A wild position, but Black is still master.

12. Bxf7+

The game is rife with possibilities. If 12. Nxe4 Qxe4, 13. Rxf4 Qe1+, 14. Rf1 Qh4, 15. Bxf7+ Kd8, 16. Qd5 Ne5!, 17. dxe5 Bxe5 (threatening Bh2+ and mate), 18. Rd1 Qg3 wins, owing to the threat of Rh1+.

12...Kd8, 13. Nxe4

Not 13. Ne6+ Bxe6, 14. Qxe6 Qxe6, 15. Bxe6 Nxd4!

13...Qxe4, 14. Bxf4

14. Rxf4 also loses to 14...Qe1+, 15. Rf1 Rh1+, 16. Kxh1 Qxf1+, 17. Kh2 Qxc1 etc.

14...Nxd4

And Black wins... Of course White can always play differently, in which case he merely loses differently.