

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 P-K4 P-K4 2 P-KB4 PxP 3 N-KB3 P-Q3!

This is the key to a troublesome position, a high-class "waiting move." At Mar Del Plata, 1959, I played 3...P-KN4 against Spassky, but this is inexact because it gives White drawing chances in the ensuing ending: e.g., 4 P-KR4 P-N5 5 N-K5 N-KB3 6 P-Q4 P-Q3 7 N-Q3 NxP 8 BxP B-N2 and now 9 P-B3! (replacing Spassky's 9 N-B3) 9...Q-K2 10 Q-K2 B-B4 11 N-Q2 leads to an ending where Black's extra Pawn is neutralized by White's stranglehold on the dark squares, especially KB4.

Another good try, but also inexact, is the Berlin Defense:  
3...P-KR3 4 P-Q4 P-KN4 5 P-KR4 B-N2 6 P-KN3 P-N5 (also playable is 6...P-Q3 7 PxBP P-N5) 7 N-R2 PxP 8 NxP (8 QxP loses to 8...PxN 9 QxB QxP+ 10 K-Q1 Q-B3) 8...P-Q4 9 P-K5 B-B4 10 B-KB4, where Black cannot demonstrate any advantage.

Of course 3...P-Q4 equalizes easily, but that's all.

4 B-B4

4 P-Q4 transposes, the only difference if White tries to force matters after 4...P-KN4 5 P-KR4 P-N5 6 N-N5 (White also gets no compensation after 6 BxP PxN 7 QxP N-QB3 or 6 N-N1 B-R3) 6...P-KB3! 7 N-KR3 PxN 8 Q-R5+ K-Q2 9 BxP Q-K1! 10 Q-B3 K-Q1 and with his King and Queen reversed, Black wins easily.

4...P-KR3!

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 P-Q4 P-KN4 6 0-0 B-N2 7 P-B3

Necessary to protect the QP. 7 P-KN3 is always met by P-N5.

7...N-QB3

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...N-K2(!) in passing. I think 7...N-K2 is best because there is no reason why Black should not strive to castle K-side: e.g., 8 P-KN3 P-Q4! 9 PxQP PxNP 10 PxP (if 10 N-K5 PxP+! 11 K-R1 0-0 12 P-Q6 QxP wins) 10...0-0 11 Q-N3 Q-Q3 12 K-N2 N-B4 wins.

There is little practical experience with this sub-variation.

8 Q-N3

If 8 P-KN3 P-N5 9 N-R4 P-B6 10 N-Q2, Euwe and other analysts betray their soft-mindedness toward this opening by giving the inferior 10...B-B3(?) 11 N(2)xP PxN 12 QxP - "unclear"!!

This is yet another example of sentimental evaluation -

after 12...Q-K2 followed by B-R6 and 0-0-0 Black wins easily.

The Pawn on KB6 is a bone in White's throat so why force him to sacrifice when he must anyway?

10...Q-K2 is the strongest move.

In this last variation (instead of 10 N-Q2) White can vary with

10 Q-N3 but then comes Nimzovitch's beautiful winning line:

10...Q-K2 11 N-B5 BxN 12 PxB (if 12 QxP R-N1 13 QxN+ Q-Q2

14 QxQ+ BxQ and Black has a winning endgame) 12...0-0-0  
13 BxP Q-K7 14 Q-K6+ (if 14 R-B2 NxQP! 15 RxQ PxR wins) 14...R-Q2!  
15 R-B2 Q-Q8+ 16 R-B1 Q-B7 17 N-Q2 N-B3 (threatening N-Q1)  
18 B-N6 (if 18 Q-N3 QxQ 19 BxQ P-Q4 with a winning endgame)  
18...P-Q4 followed by N-K2 with a winning game for Black.

8...Q-K2 9 P-KR4 N-B3

Again theoretical disagreement. Perfectly good is 9...P-N5!  
10 BxP (forced, not 10 KN-Q2 NxQP! 11 PxN BxP+ etc.) 10...PxN  
11 RxP - given by analysts again as "unclear,"  
but after N-B3 followed by 0-0, White has nothing for the piece.

10 PxP PxP 11 NxP NxKP

A wild position, but Black is still master.

12 BxP+

The game is rife with possibilities. If 12 NxN QxN 13 RxP Q-K8+  
14 R-B1 Q-R5 15 BxP+ K-Q1 16 Q-Q5 N-K4! 17 PxN BxP  
(threatening B-R7 and mate) 18 R-Q1 Q-N6 wins,  
owing to the threat of R-R8+.

12...K-Q1 13 NxN

Not 13 N-K6+ BxN 14 QxB QxQ 15 BxQ NxQP!

13...QxN 14 BxP

14 RxP also loses to 14...Q-K8+ 15 R-B1 R-R8+ 16 KxR QxR+  
17 K-R2 QxQB etc.

14...NxP

And Black wins...

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