

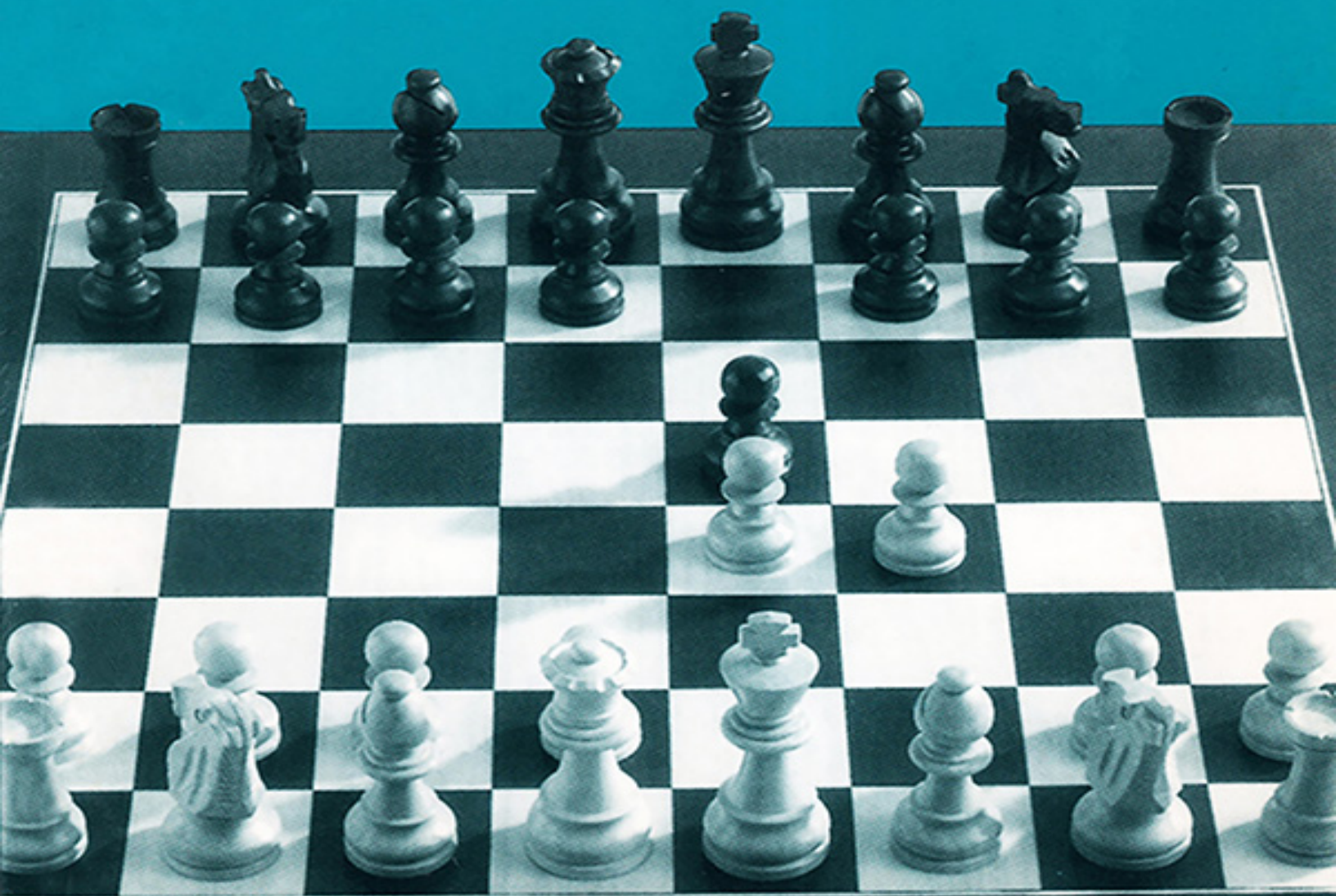
BATSFORD CHESS OPENING GUIDES

The
**KING'S
GAMBIT**

A modern view of a swashbuckling opening



NEIL McDONALD



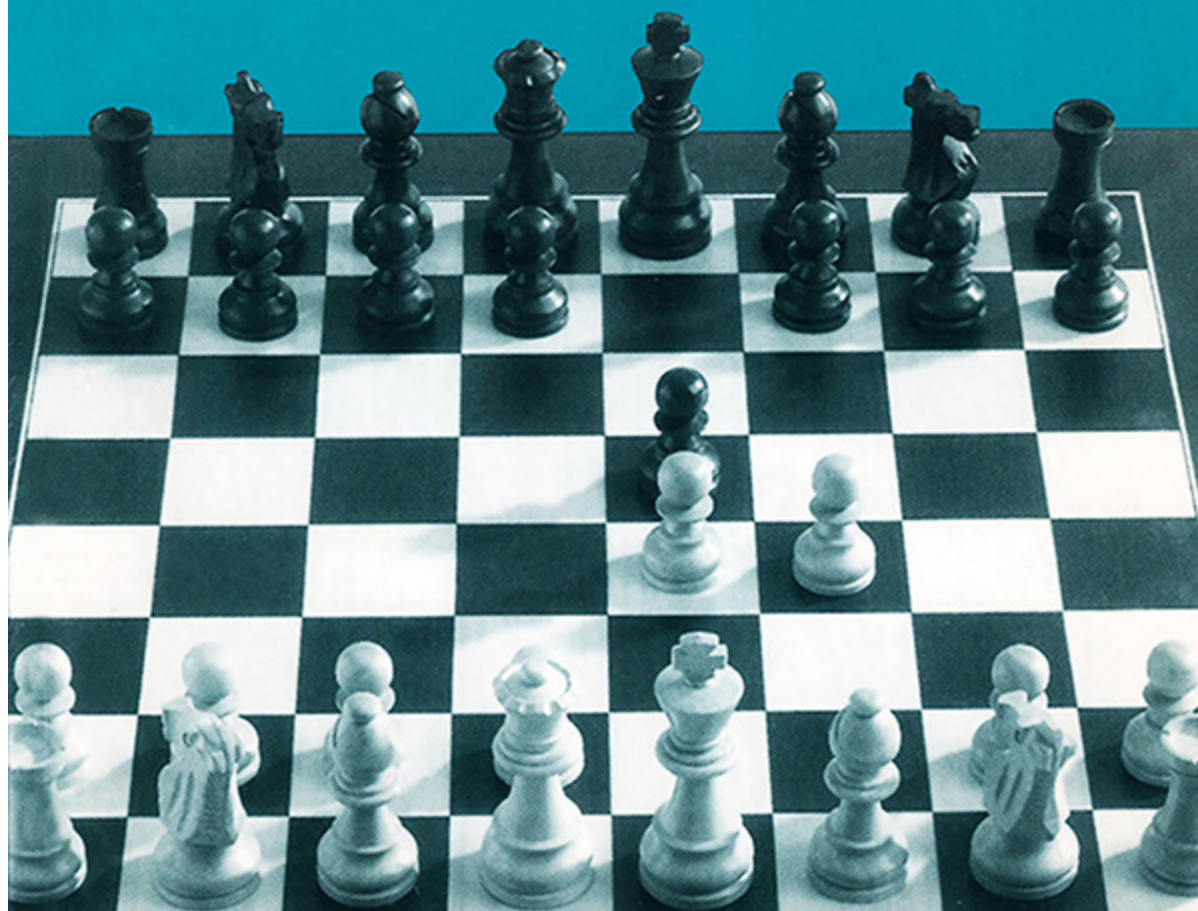
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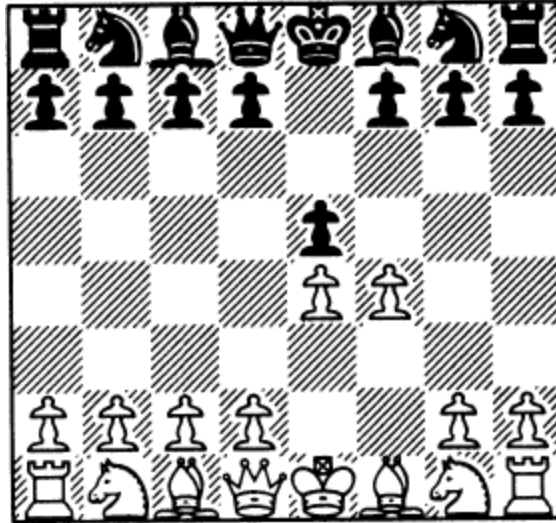


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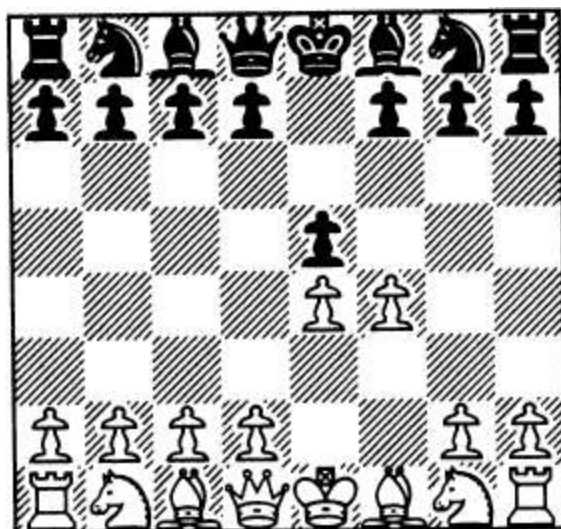




1 e4 e5 2 f4



The King's Gambit



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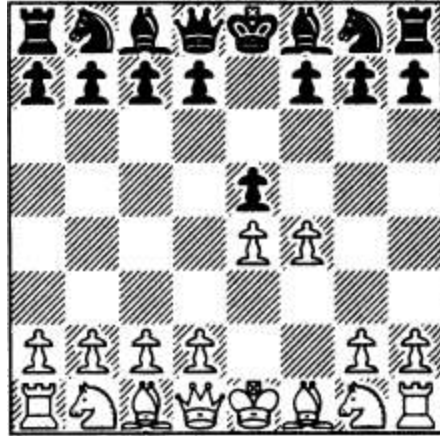
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The King's Gambit

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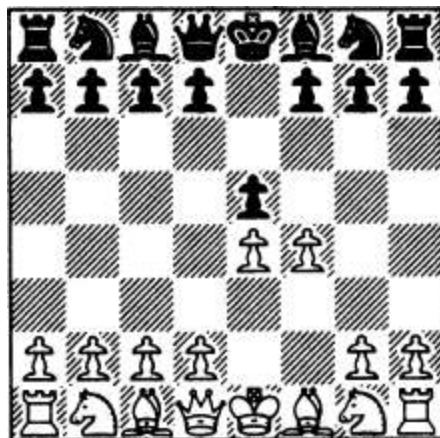
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INTRODUCTION

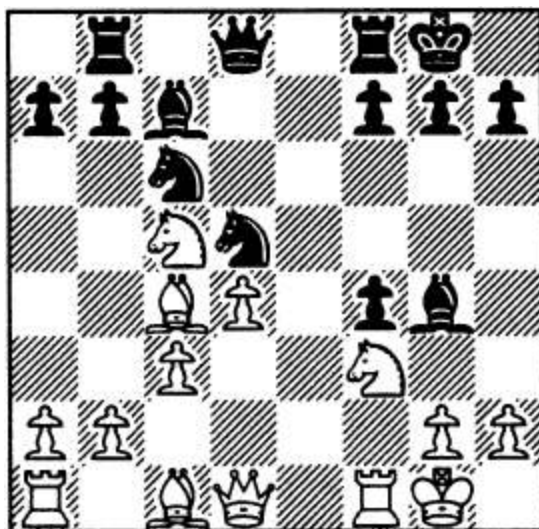


In the 19th century the art of defence was little understood. Hence, enterprising but unsound gambits often enjoyed great success. In those halcyon days for the King's Gambit, boldness and attacking flair were more important than rigorous analytical exactitude. The King's Gambit proved the perfect weapon for the romantic player: White would push aside the black e-pawn with 2 f4! and then overrun the centre, aiming to launch a rapid attack and slay the black pieces in their beds.

Nowadays, after a century of improvements in technique and the accumulation of theory by trial and error, things are somewhat different. Black players have learnt how to defend and any impetuous lunge by the white pieces will be beaten off with terrible losses to the attacker.

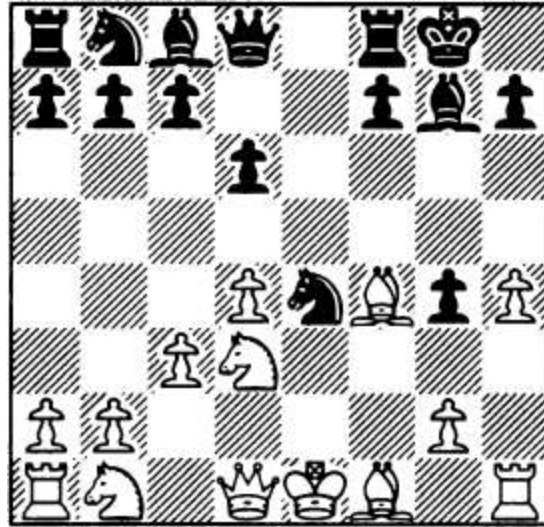
Even in the King's Gambit, therefore, White is no longer trying to attack at all costs. He has had to adapt his approach and look for moves with a solid positional foundation, just as he does in other openings. As often as not, his strategy consists of stifling Black's

activity and then winning in an endgame thanks to his superior pawn structure. Here is an example of this in action.



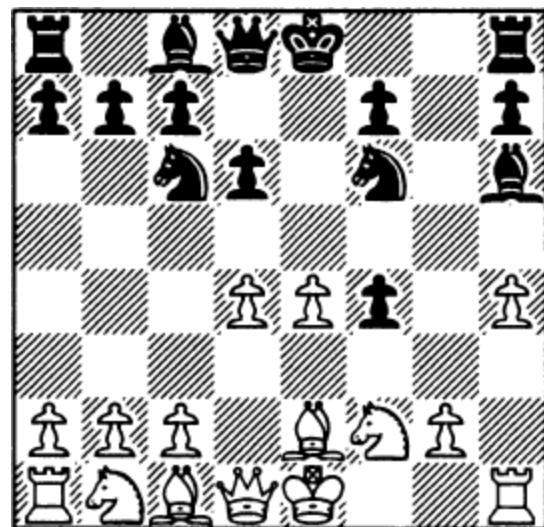
This position is taken from the game Illescas-Nunn, which is given in the notes to Game 45 in [Chapter 7](#). White has the better pawn structure (four against two on the queenside) and any endgame should be very good for him. On the other hand, Black has dynamic middlegame chances, as all his pieces are very active. White found a way to force an endgame here with 13 ♔e1! ♚e8 14 ♔h4! ♚xh4 (more or less forced) 15 ♘xh4. There followed 15...♙e3 16 ♙xe3 ♚xe3 17 ♚ae1 ♚xe1 18 ♚xe1 and White's queenside pawns were much more valuable than Black's ineffectual clump on the kingside. Furthermore, Black has not the slightest counterplay. It is no surprise that White won after another 22 moves.

There was no brilliant sacrificial attack in this game, yet White succeeded in defeating a top-class grandmaster. Here is another example, taken from Game 15 in [Chapter 2](#).



Despite the fact that he is a pawn down, White's chances would be no worse in an endgame. After all, he has control of the excellent f4-square and could aim to exploit the holes in the black kingside, which is looking disjointed. However, as Tartakower remarked 'before the endgame the gods have placed the middlegame'. White is behind in development and in the game Black exploited this to launch an attack on the white king after 10 ♖d2 ♜e8 11 ♘xe4 ♜xe4+ 12 ♔f2 c5! etc., when White was soon overwhelmed.

This conflict between Black's activity and White's better structure is central to the modern approach to the King's Gambit.



This position was reached in Short-Shirov, Madrid 1997, after White's ninth move (see [Chapter 2](#), Game 8). White has established the ideal pawn centre, while Black has doubled f-pawns. Therefore, statically speaking, White is better. However, Shirov has correctly judged that his active pieces are more important than White's superior pawn structure. Black has a lead in development and can use this to demolish the white centre. The game continued 9...♔e7! 10 ♘c3 ♙d7 11 ♙f3 O-O-O 12 a3?! ♙xe4! and White's proud centre was ruined, as 13 ♙xe4 f5 regains the piece with advantage. Shirov quickly followed up this positional breakthrough with a decisive attack. The time factor was of crucial importance here: in the 'arms race' to bring up the reserves White lagged too far behind.

So what is Black's best defence to the King's Gambit? Three general approaches are possible:

- a) take the pawn and hold on to it, at least temporarily, with...g7-g5.
- b) play...d7-d5 to counterattack.
- c) decline the pawn in quiet fashion.

Of these options, the last one is the least promising. White shouldn't be allowed to carry out such a key strategical advance as f2-f4 without encountering some form of resistance. Black normally ends up in a slightly inferior, though solid, position. Nevertheless, undemonstrative responses remain popular, mainly for practical reasons: there is less theory to learn than in the main line.

Option b) is under a cloud at the moment. Although defences based on ...d7-d5 allow Black free and rapid development of his pieces, often his inferior pawn structure comes to haunt him later in the game.

That leaves option a), 2...exf4. This is undoubtedly the most challenging move after which play becomes highly complex. As will be seen in Chapters 1 and 2, White has no clear theoretical route to an advantage after 2...exf4 3 ♘f3 d6 or 3...g5, while the variations in

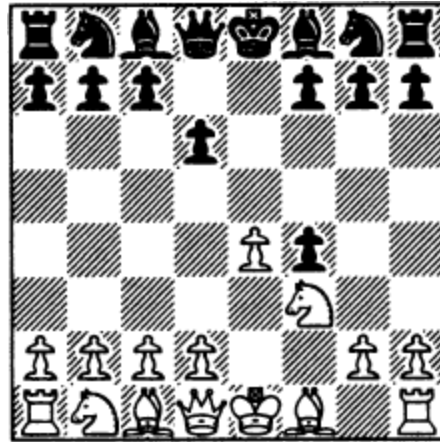
[Chapter 3](#) have a poor standing for White. Black should therefore bravely snatch the f-pawn.

However, one should not forget the Bishop's Gambit 3 c4. Fischer favoured this move and at the time of writing it has been successfully adopted by Short and Ivanchuk (see [Chapter 6](#)). Furthermore, when I told David Bronstein I was writing a book on the King's Gambit, he replied 'You want to play the King's Gambit? Well, Black can draw after 3 f3. Play 3 c4 if you want to win!' However, as a word of warning we should remember the words of a great World Champion who grew up in the glorious age of the King's Gambit: 'By what right does White, in an absolutely even position, such as after move one, when both sides have advanced 1 e4, sacrifice a pawn, whose recapture is quite uncertain, and open up his kingside to attack? And then follow up this policy by leaving the check of the black queen open? None whatever!' Emanuel Lasker, *Common Sense In Chess*, 1896. A hundred years on, the jury is still out!

Neil McDonald
February 1998

CHAPTER ONE

Fischer Defence (3 ♘f3 d6)



1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♘f3 d6

‘This loss (against Spassky at Mar Del Plata 1960) spurred me to look for a “refutation” of the King’s Gambit... the right move is 3...d6!’ – Bobby Fischer, *My Sixty Memorable Games*.

It is ironic that Fischer, who hardly ever played 1...e5 as Black and only adopted the King’s Gambit in a handful of games (always with 3 ♘c4), should have discovered one of Black’s most effective defences. Or perhaps we should say rediscovered, as 3...d6 was advocated by Stamma way back in 1745, but subsequently ignored. This neglect is puzzling. Why wasn’t the strength of 3...d6 appreciated in the heyday of the King’s Gambit by Anderssen, Morphy and others? We can either conclude that even in the field of ‘romantic’ chess modern players are way ahead of the old masters, or point to the creativity of a genius able to find new ideas in familiar settings. After all, who would look for an improvement on move *three* of any opening?

The idea behind 3...d6 is simple. In essence, Black wants a Kieseritzky Gambit ([Chapter 2](#)) without allowing White to play ♖e5. If after 4 d4 g5 White plays 5 ♖c4, Black can enter the Hanstein Gambit with 5...♗g7 (or the Philidor after a subsequent 6 h4 h6). The Hanstein seems favourable for Black since he has a very solid kingside pawn structure. It is better for White to strike at the black pawn structure immediately with 5 h4!, as he also does in the Kieseritzky. Although after 5...g4 6 ♗g1, White's knight has been forced to undevelop itself, Black has had to disrupt his kingside structure with...g5-g4. The strange looking position after 6 ♗g1 is the subject of Games 1-4, while 6 ♗g5 is seen in Game 5.

Instead of 4 d4, White can try 4 ♖c4, when Black responds 4...h6, hoping for 5 d4 g5 etc., when he reaches the favourable Hanstein. However, White can try to cross Black's plans with either 5 d3 (Game 6) or 5 h4 (Game 7).

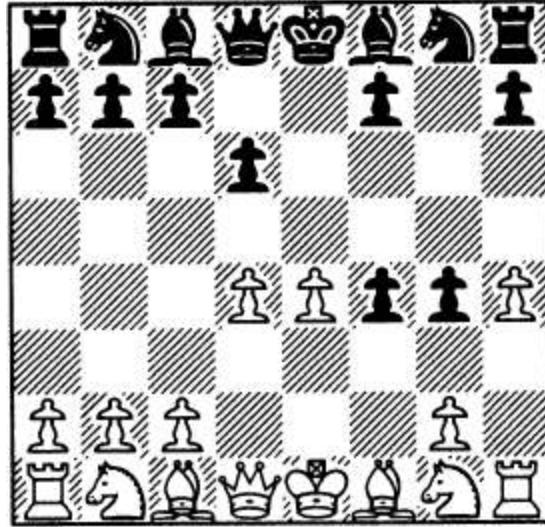
<i>Game 1</i> Short-Akopian <i>Madrid 1997</i>
--

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♗f3 d6 4 d4 g5 5h4!

The best move. White undermines the black pawn structure before Black has the chance of solidifying it with ...h7-h6 and...♗g7. The resulting position may or may not be good for White, but one thing is clear: if he delays even a move, e.g. with 5 ♖c4, then Black will definitely have good chances after 5...♗g7 6 h4 h6 etc. (see [Chapter 3](#), Games 19 and 20).

5...g4 6 ♗g1

The Allgaier-related 6 ♗g5?! is examined in Game 5.



6...♘h6

If Black's last move was forced, here he is spoilt for choice. Alternatives include 6...♙f6 (Game 3, which may transpose to the present game) and 6...f5 (Game 4). Two other moves should also be mentioned:

a) 6...f3. This was popular once, but perhaps Black has been frightened off by the move 7 ♘g5! This is one of the many new ideas that Gallagher pioneered and then publicised in his *Winning with the King's Gambit*. After 7...♘e7 8 ♙d2 h6 (8...f6 9 ♘h6! ♘xh6 10 ♙xh6 was good for White in Gallagher-Bode, Bad Wörishofen 1991) 9 ♘xe7 fxg2 (Black has to interpose this move as 9...♘xe7 10 gxf3 is bad for him) 10 ♘xg2 ♘xe7 11 ♘c3 ♘g6 12 ♙f2 White had good compensation for the pawn in Gallagher-Ziatdinov, Lenk 1991. We have the typical disjointed black kingside to contrast with White's solid centre.

b) 6...♘f6. Instead of defending the f4-pawn, Black counterattacks against the e4-pawn. After 7 ♘xf4 ♘xe4 8 ♘d3 d5 (Black tried to make do without pawn moves in Hebden-Borm, Orange 1987, but was in deep trouble after 8...♙e7 9 ♘e2 ♘g7 10 o-o o-o 11 ♘xe4! ♙xe4 12 ♘bc3 ♙c6 13 ♙d2 d5 [now he has to move a pawn to prevent 14 ♘h6] 14 ♘g3 etc. Another way to bolster the

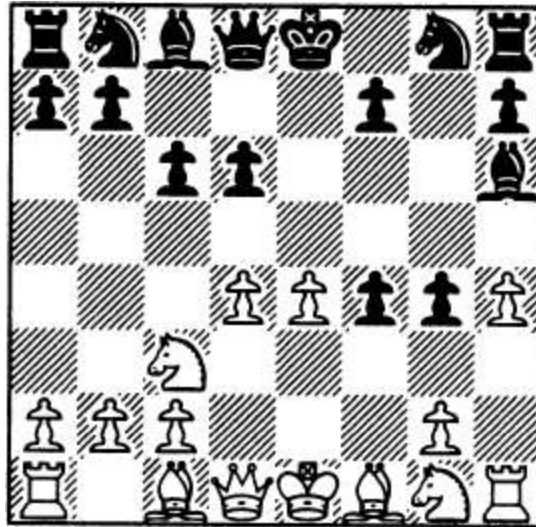
knight is 8...f5, but White had a good endgame after 9 ♖e2 ♗g7 10 ♗xe4 fxe4 11 ♗g5 ♗f6 12 ♜bc3 ♗xg5 13 hxc5 ♖xg5 14 ♗xe4 ♖e3 15 ♗f6+ ♜d8 16 ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 17 ♜xd2 ♗c6 18 ♜af1 ♗e7 19 ♜xh7 etc. in Hebden-Psakhis, Moscow 1986) 9 ♗xe4 dxe4 10 ♗c3 ♗g7 11 ♗ge2 o-o 12 ♖d2 f5 13 o-o-o ♗c6 14 h5 a6, Yakovich-Zuhovitsky, Rostov 1988, and now Bangiev thinks that White is better after 15 h6.
7 ♗c3 c6

Here three other moves are possible:

a) 7...♗f6 aims to start an immediate attack on White's centre after 8 ♗ge2 d5!? Then the game Christoffel-Morgado, Correspondence 1995, continued 9 e5?! ♗h5 10 g3 ♗c6 11 ♗g2 ♗e7 12 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 13 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 14 gxf4 c6 15 ♖e2 h5 and Black had a small advantage in view of his control of the important f5-square. Gallagher suggests that White's play can be improved with the more dynamic 9 ♗xf4!? ♗xf4 10 ♗xf4 dxe4 11 ♗c4!, looking for an attack down the weakened f-file. After 11...♗c6! (Black must attack d4, not just to win a pawn but also to exchange queens) 12 o-o ♖xd4+ 13 ♖xd4 ♗xd4 14 ♗fd5 ♗xd5 15 ♗xd5 ♗e6 16 ♗f6+ ♜e7 17 ♜ae1 Gallagher concludes that White has more than enough for his pawns. Indeed, he should regain them both over the next couple of moves whilst retaining a positional advantage.

b) 7...♗c6 is Black's second option. Now 8 ♗b5 a6 9 ♗xc6+ bxc6 10 ♖d3 ♖f6 11 ♗d2 ♗e7 12 o-o-o was unclear in Bangiev-Pashaian, Correspondence 1987. The critical move is 8 ♗ge2, which leads to the sharp variation 8... f3 9 ♗f4 f2+! 10 ♜xf2 g3+ 11 ♜xg3 ♗f6. Black has sacrificed his f- and g-pawns to expose the white king in similar fashion to the 5...d6 variation of the Kieseritzky (see [Chapter 2](#), Games 8-10). This position has been analysed extensively by Gallagher, whose main line runs 12 ♗e2 ♖g8+ 13 ♜f2 ♗g4+ 14 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 15 ♖d3 ♗g7 16 ♗e3 ♖d7 17 ♗cd5 o-o-o 18 b4 ♖de8 19 b5 ♗d8 20 c4 ♗e6, and now 21 c5 dxc5 22 dxc5 ♗xa1 23 ♖xa1 ♗xf4 24 ♗xf4 gives White compensation for the exchange.

c) 7...♘e6 was tried in Gallagher-Hübner, Biel 1991. Now instead of 8 ♔d3 a6! 9 ♘d2 ♘c6, which looked good for Black in the game, Gallagher suggests 8 ♘ge2, when 8...♚f6 9 g3 fxg3 10 ♘xg3 ♘xc1 11 ♚xc1 ♚f4 is not too different from the position reached in Games 1 and 2.



8 ♘ge2 ♚f6 9 g3 fxg3 10 ♘xg3 ♘xc1 11 ♚xc1 ♚h6?

After this White achieves easy development. The correct 11...♚f4, which prevents White's smooth buildup by attacking the knight on g3, is examined in the next game.

12 ♘d3! ♚e3+ 13 ♘ce2 ♘e7 14 ♚d2!

This game demonstrates that the King's Gambit often offers White good endgame chances, even when he is a pawn down.

14...♚xd2+ 15 ♚xd2 d5?

It is never a good idea to open the centre when you are underdeveloped. White now regains his pawn while maintaining his positional advantages. It was better to dig in with 15...♘e6, e.g. 16 c4 ♘a6 or 16...c5.

16 ♚ce1 ♘e6

If 16...dxe4 17 ♘xe4 the threat of 18 ♘d6+ is very disruptive.

17 ♘f4 0-0

Giving back the pawn, as 17...dxe4 18 ♖xe4 leads to disaster on the e-file.

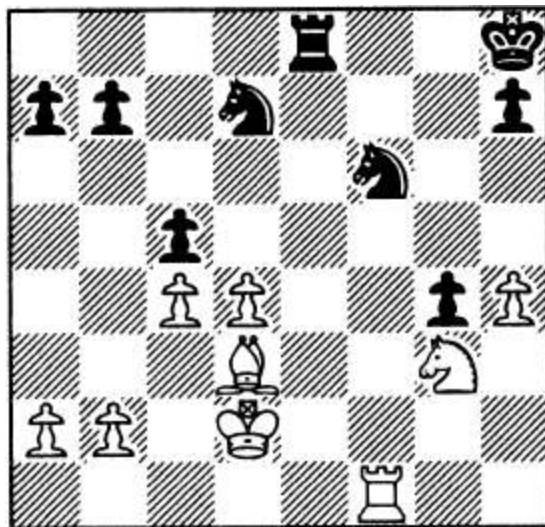
18 exd5 ♖xd5 19 ♖xe6 fxe6 20 ♖xe6

White regains his pawn with excellent chances. He has more space in the centre, a lead in development and the opportunity to attack the sickly black g-pawn, which, although passed, is well blockaded and difficult to support.

20...♗d7 21 ♖f5

It was even better to play 21 ♖f5 according to Short, when after 21...♗f6 22 c4 ♖b6 23 ♔d3 White is in complete control.

21...♔h8 22 ♖f1 ♖ae8 23 ♖xe8 ♖xe8 24 c4 ♖5f6 25 ♖g3 c5

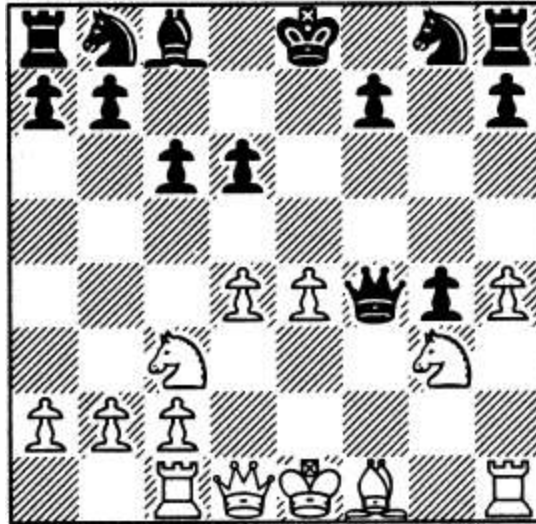


A typical King's Gambit situation has arisen. The black kingside pawns are inert, while the white centre is mobile and strong. Therefore Akopian concedes a protected passed pawn, hoping to entice the knight from the excellent blockade square on g3 and so activate the g-pawn. The alternative was to wait passively while White increased his space advantage with b2-b4 etc.

26 d5 ♗g7 27 ♖f5+ ♗h8 28 ♖d6 ♖f8 29 ♖e1 g3 30 ♖f5 ♖b6 31 b3 ♖e8 32 ♖xb7 ♖g7 33 ♖h3 ♖f4 34 ♖xc5 ♖xh4 35 ♖g2 ♖h2 36 ♖e2 ♖f5 37 ♖e4 ♖d6 38 ♖f3 ♖h6 39 ♖e6 ♖f6 40 ♖g2 ♖d7 41 c5 ♖f7 42 d6 ♖fe5 43 ♖d5 ♖f5 44 c6 ♖b6 45 ♖g2 ♖f2 46 ♖xf2 gxf2 47 ♗e2 1-0

Game 2
Fedorov-Pinter
Pula 1997

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♘f3 d6 4 d4 g5 5 h4 g4 6 ♘g1 ♙h6 7 ♘c3 c6 8 ♘ge2 ♚f6 9 g3 fxg3 10 ♘xg3 ♙xc1 11 ♚xc1 ♚f4!



An attempt to disrupt the build up of White's position. The attack on the knight means that White has no time for ♘d3 as played in the game above.

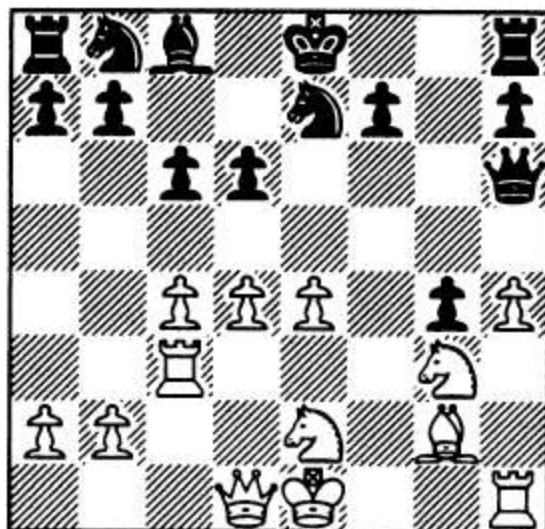
12 ♘ce2 ♚e3 13 c4?!

White finds an ingenious way to expel the queen. Nevertheless, the endgame with 13 ♚d2 ♚xd2+ 14 ♚xd2 seems a better approach.

13... ♙e7 14 ♚c3 ♚h6 15 ♙g2

White could still have played for an endgame with 15 ♚d2. However, 15... ♚xd2+ 16 ♚xd2 c5! 17 ♙g2 ♘bc6 looks better for Black. Why is this endgame worse for White than in Short-Akopian above? The point is that White has played c2-c4 here, which means that Black's counterblow ...c6-c5! cannot be met with c2-c3, maintaining control of the central dark squares. The white centre is thus split after the inevitable d4xc5 and the e5-square becomes a

strong outpost for a black knight. White is correct to seek a middlegame attack in the game.



15...0-0

Here 15...c5 is the natural positional move, undermining White's centre. But the crucial question is: can White overwhelm his opponent before he can develop his pieces? It seems that the answer is yes after 16 ♖d3! ♗bc6 17 dxc5 dxc5 18 ♖d6. For example, 18...♙e6 (18...♚e3 19 ♗f1! wins the queen, while 18...♚g7 19 ♗h5 ♚xb2 20 ♗f6+ ♚f8 21 0-0 gives White a big attack) 19 ♗f5! ♚f6 20 ♖xe6! fxe6 21 ♗d6+ ♚d7 22 e5! ♚g6 23 ♗f4 ♚g8 24 ♗xb7+ ♚c8 25 ♗xc5 ♚d8 26 ♚d6 with a very strong attack.

16 0-0 ♗g6?

Here 16...c5! was the most challenging move. As far as I can see Black then has good chances, e.g. 17 dxc5 dxc5 18 ♖d3 ♗bc6 19 ♖d6 ♚xh4!? Of course, the position remains very complicated and there could be a knockout blow concealed among the thickets of variations.

17 ♖f6

Now, in view of the threat h4-h5, White wins the important d6-pawn, after which he can *always* claim positional compensation for the pawn deficit.

17...♚xh4 18 ♖xd6 c5

Too late!

19 ♖f5 ♜g5 20 ♜d5

After 20 ♜g3!?, 20...h5 looks okay for Black, but not 20...♘c6 21 ♜xg4! nor 20...♙xf5? 21 exf5 ♜xf5 22 ♙xb7 ♘d7 23 ♜d5! ♜e6 24 ♙xa8 ♜xa8 25 ♘f4!! ♘xf4? 26 ♜xg4+ and White will be the exchange up in the endgame.

20...cxd4 21 ♜g3 ♜f6 22 ♜xg4 ♙f3 23 ♘f4 ♙xd5 24 ♘xd5 ♜e5 25 ♜g5 ♜h8 26 ♜h5 ♘d7

There was a draw by repetition after 26...♜e8 27 ♘fe7 ♜g7 28 ♘f5 ♜e5.

27 ♜f3

A last winning try. White could have forced a draw with 27 ♜xh7+ ♜xh7 28 ♜h5+ ♜g8 29 ♘h6+ ♜h7 30 ♘f5+ ♜g8 31 ♘h6+.

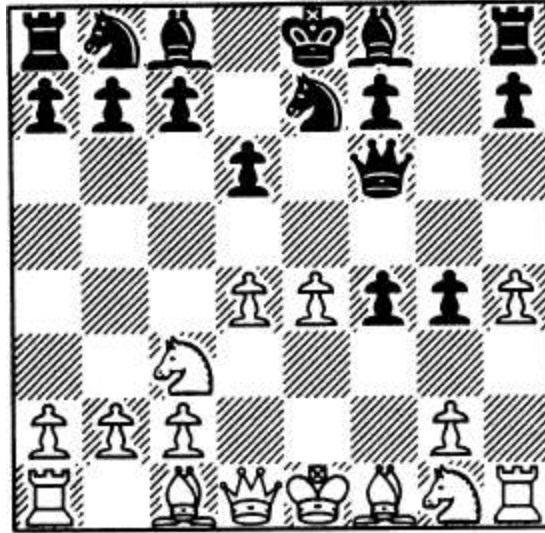
27...♜fe8 28 ♘h6 ♜g7 29 ♘xf7+ ♜g8 30 ♘h6+ ♜h8 31 ♘f7+ ½-½

White has to force the draw in view of the material situation.

<i>Game 3</i> Gallagher-G.Flear <i>Lenk 1992</i>
--

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♘f3 d6 4 d4 g5 5 h4 g4 6 ♘g1 ♜f6 7 ♘c3 ♘e7

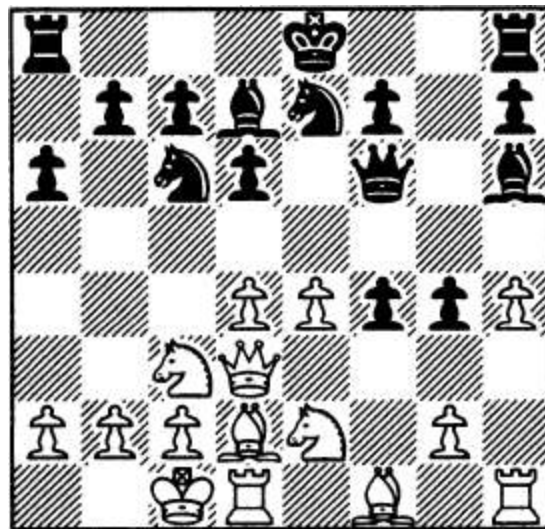
After 7...c6 8 ♘ge2 ♙h6 play will transpose to the two games above. Gallagher points out that the attempt to refute 7...c6 with 8 e5 falters after 8...dxe5 9 ♘e4 ♜e7 10 dxe5 ♜xe5 11 ♜e2 ♙e7 12 ♙d2 ♘f6! Meanwhile, Bangiev recommends 7...c6 8 ♘ge2 ♙h6, but this is either a brainstorm or a misprint.



8 ♖ge2 ♜h6 9 ♔d2!?

Note this idea only works after ...♘e7. If you put the knight back on g8 and play...c7-c6 instead, then 9 ♔d2?? loses a piece after 9...f3.

Gallagher actually prefers 9 ♔d3 here. Play could go 9...a6 (to play ...♘bc6 without allowing ♖b5) 10 ♜d2 ♘bc6 11 0-0-0 ♜d7 when a critical position is reached:



This idea received a practical test in the game Russell-Beaton, Scotland 1994 (through a different move order beginning 8 ♔d3!?). Unfortunately, White blundered immediately with 12 ♜d5?, when he had nothing for his pawn after 12...♘xd5 13 exd5 ♜e7 14 ♜c3 0-0-0

Summary

Black's chances in the variations examined in this chapter, with the possible exception of the Becker Defence, are by no means as good as those he achieves by entering the Kieseritzky Gambit. Why should Black be content with a solid, but slightly inferior position? It is perhaps reasonable to suppose that the King's Gambit would be much more popular with White players if the variations in this chapter were to arise more often!

1 e4 e5 2 f4 (D)

2...exf4

2...♘h6 – *Game 57*

2...♔f6 – *Game 58*

2...♔h4+ – *Game 59*

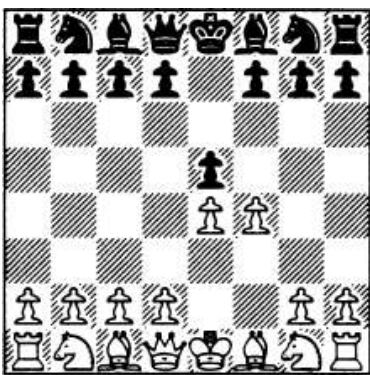
3 ♘f3 h6 (D)

3...♘f6 – *Game 56*

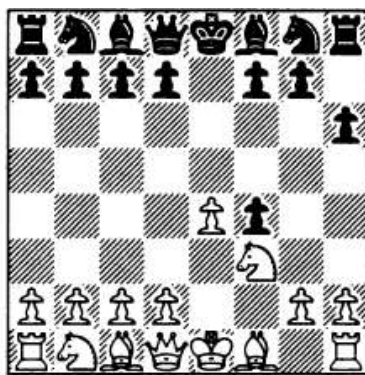
4 ♘c3

4 b3 – *Game 55*

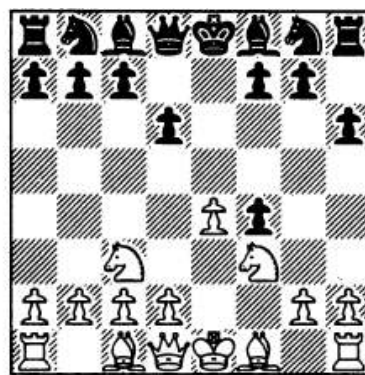
4...d6 (D) – Game 54



2 f4



3...h6



4...d6

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