

Mini-Lessons from Short Games of the 21st Century

by IM Nikolay Minev

#10: The King's Gambit Today

There was a time when the King's Gambit was the most frequently used opening; and there was a time when the King's Gambit nearly disappeared from play – considered an opening only for the archives. Today the King's Gambit is again quite popular in open tournaments, mainly as a surprise. Many things about this sharp gambit are forgotten from the earlier days, and because of this many players improvise at the board, producing unusual games full of tactics, interesting ideas, and “novelties” that were perhaps better left undiscovered. Let's see a few games that are characteristic of the King's Gambit today.

C30 M.Neubauer - H.Rolletschek

Austria (ch) Mureck 2001

1.e4 e5 2.f4 Nf6 3.fxe5

Following an established main line. David Brostein approached this variation differently against Kostro, Tbilisi 1970 with 3.Nf3!?, which after 3...Nxe4 4.d3 Nc5 5.fxe5 d5 6.d4 Ne4 transposed into the same unfavorable variation as in our game. Naturally, instead of 3...Nxe4 Black can continue 3...d5! or 3...exf4, but those are different variations.

3...Nxe4 4.Nf3 d5?!

The theory recommends 4...Ng5 5.d4 Nxf3+ 6.Qxf3 Qh4+ 7.Qf2 Qxf2+ 8.Kxf3 with slightly better chances for White.

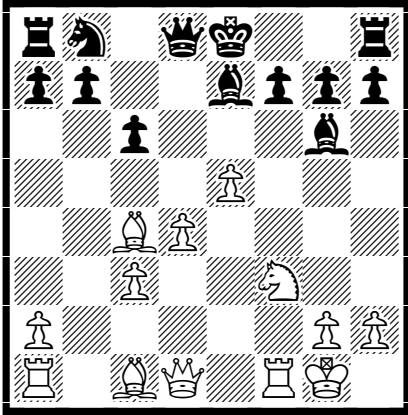
5.d3 Nc5 6.d4 Ne4

Also after 6...Ne6 7.c4 c6 8.Nc3 White has the better game.

7.Bd3 Bf5

A novelty, but one which looks dubious because it loses an important tempo in the opening. In Bronstein-Kostro Black lost after the passive 7...Be7, while B. Ivanovic proposed the untested 7...c5!?

8. O-O Bg6 9.c4!dxc4 10.Bxc4 c6 11.Nc3 Nxc3 12.bxc3 Be7



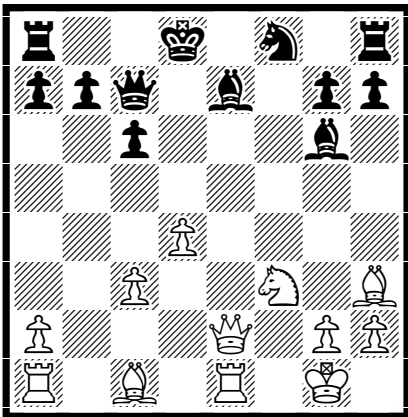
13.e6! fxe6

After this Black's King will remain in the center, but even worse is 13...f6 14.Nh4 or 13...O-O 14.Ne5.

14.Bxe6 Nd7 15.Qe2 Qc7 16.Bh3! Nf8?

16...Kd8!?

17.Re1 Kd8

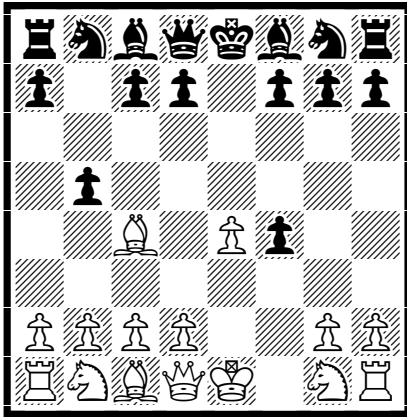


18.Bf4 1-0

Because of 18...Bd6 19.Bg5+ and wins.

C33 J. Steffen – H. Simon
Corr. (Thematic) 2004

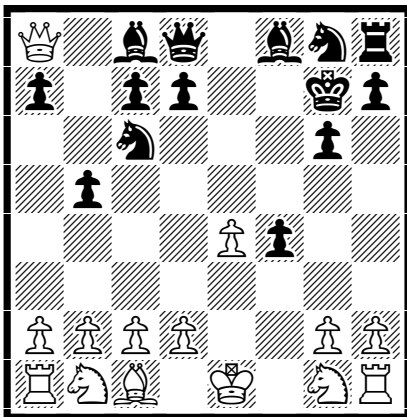
1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Bc4 b5



4.Bxf7+?!

The variation has a dubious reputation, which was tested repeatedly in this thematic tournament. Instead, the main line of recent theory is 4.Bxb5 Qh4+ 5.Kf1 g5 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.d4 Ne7 8.Nf3 Qh5 9.h4 with better chances to White. In my opinion, there are many possibilities for innovations for both sides.

4...Kxf7 5.Qh5+ g6 6.Qd5+ Kg7 7.Qxa8 Nc6



The critical position. White has won an exchange, but his Queen is in a “mouse trap”. The decisive question is whether the Queen can be saved.

8.Nf3 Nf6 9.d3

It seems that White has nothing better and there is no help for his trapped Queen.

9...Bd6! 10.a4

Or 10.Nc3 Qe7 11.Nxb5 Ba6 etc.

10...b4 11.a5 Qe7 12.a6 Bxa6 13.Qxh8+ Kxh8 14.Rxa6 Nxe4! 15.O-O

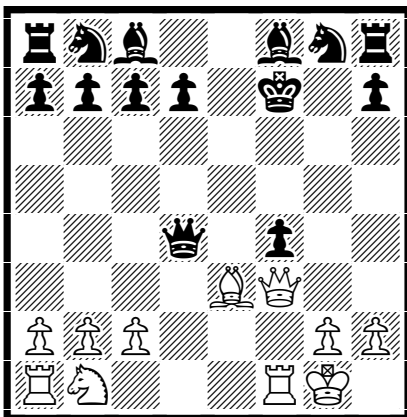
Or 15.dxe4 Qxe4+ 16.Kd1 (16.Kf1 Qc4+) b3! And wins.

15...Bc5+ 16.d4 Nxd4 17.Kh1 Nxf3 0-1

In conclusion, the assessment of this variation 4.Bxf7+ is it is worse than dubious.

C37 M. Uhl – V. Pribe
Germany 2005

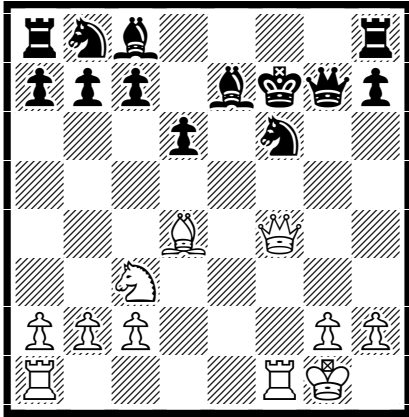
1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.Bc4 g4 5.O-O gxf3 6.Qxf3 Qf6 7.e5 Qxe5 8.Bxf7+ Kxf7 9.d4 Qxd4+ 10.Be3



This piquant position is the theory from a hundred years ago! It is considered that after 10...Qf6 11.Bxf4 Ne7 12.Nc3 Nf5 Black repulses the attack. As we shall see, in our

game Black uses another continuation, which leads to disaster. Does he not know the theory, or is he afraid that the theory is not correct? Probably the former.

10...Qg7? 11.Qxf4+ Nf6 12.Bd4 Be7 13.Nc3 d6



14.Rae1

The threat is 15.Rxe7+! Black is already lost.

14...Bd8 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.Nd5 Re8 17.Qxf6+ Qxf6 18.Rxf6+ Kg7 19.Rxe8 Nd7 20.Re7+ Kg8 21.Rff7 1-0

C39 A. Fedorov – M. Sorokin
Dubai 2002

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.h4 g4 5.Ne5 Nf6 6.Nxg4 Nc6?!

Black improvises. He should follow the theoretical advice 6...Nxe4! 7.Qe2 d5 8.Nf2 Qe7, but most likely he is not familiar with this variation.

7.Nc3 Rg8 8.Nxf6+ Qxf6 9.Nd5 Qg6!?

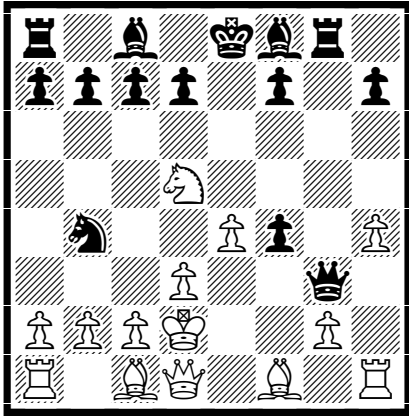
Hoping for counter-play, because 9...Qd8 looks too passive.

10.d3

If 10.Nxc7+?? Kd8 11.Nxa8 Qg3+ 12.Ke2 Nd4#

10...Qg3+ 11.Kd2 Nb4?

The best try is 11...Kd8!



12.Nf6+!

If 12.Nxc7+ Kd8 13.Nxa8 then after 13...Qe3+ 14.Kc3 Qc5+ 15.Kd2 Qe3+ Black has perpetual check, while White's attempt to escape 15.Kb3 Nxc2! 16.a3 (16.Qxc2? Qb4#) Nxa1+ 17.Ka2 Nc2 is in Black's favor.

12...Kd8 13.Qf3! Rg6 14.Nxh7 Be7 15.Ng5 d5

Or 15...Bxg5 16.hxg5 Qxg5 17.c3 Nc6 18.Kc2 with a clear advantage to White.

16.c3 1-0

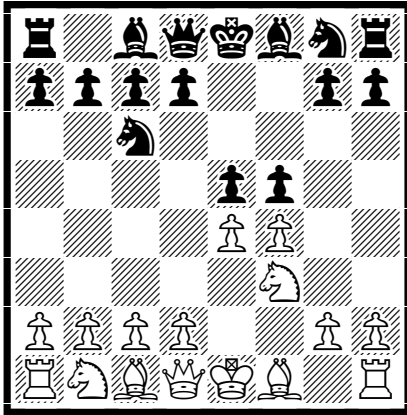
Speaking about the King's Gambit today, I cannot resist the desire to show the following unique experiment, which I saw for the first time in a game from 20th Century.

C30 Ziegler - D. V. Pedersen
Denmark (Team ch) 1998

1.e4 e5 2.f4 Nc6 3.Nf3

Naturally not 3.fxe5?? because of 3...Qh4+.

3...f5



This bold experiment is not mentioned by the theory, most probably, because it looks dubious. However, after the success of this game, perhaps the surprising 3...f5 will attract more attention.

4.exf5

The best continuation is not easy to be found. White has many interesting options to consider: 4.Bc4, 4.d4, 4.Nc3, 4.d3 etc.

4...e4

The symmetrical 4...exf4 5.d4 must be in White's favor.

5.Ne5 Nf6 6.Be2?

Tempting, but the wrong idea. In my opinion White's best is 6.d4.

6...Bc5 7.Bh5+ Kf8 8.Nc3

Instead 8.Nf7? Qe8! 9.Nxh8 Qxh5 is clearly with advantage to Black.

8...Qe7 9.Na4

What else? White is already without good options.

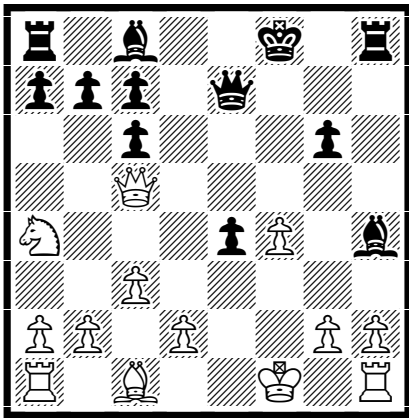
9...Bd4!? 10.Nxc6 dxc6 11.c3 Nxh5 12.Qxh5 g6!? 13.fxg6

After 13.Qh6+ Bg7 14.Qg5 Bf6 15.Qh6+ Kf7! 16.b3 Bxf5 Black has the advantage.

13...hxg6 14.Qg5?

Probably the decisive mistake. White's best defense was 14.Qxg6, For example 14...Rg8 15.Qh6+ (15.Qh5? Bf6 16.O-O b5) Bg7 16.Qg5 Bf6 17.Qh6+ Bg7 =, while 14...Bf6 or 14...Bg7 are unclear.

14...Bf6 15.Qc5 Bh4+ 16.Kf1



16...b5!! 17.Qxc6 bxa4 18.Qxa8 Qc5 19.Qxc8+

Or 19.Ke2 Kg7! and wins.

19...Ke7! 0-1

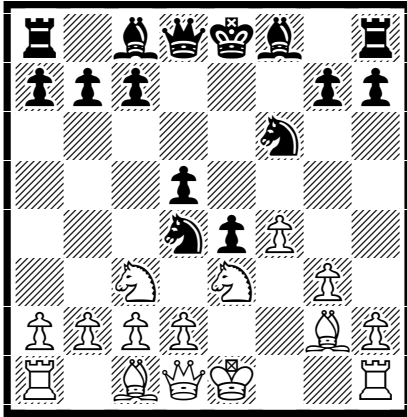
There are about fifty games with this variation from 21st Century. Unfortunately, these games are from low level competitions, and it is too early for a definitive assessment to be made. Here is an example, where it is White who prevails.

C30 A. Cabrera – E. Garcia
Cartagena de Indias (Colombia) 2001

1.e4 e5 2.f4 Nc6 3.Nf3 f5 4.Nc3!? Nf6?! 5.Nxe5 fxe4 6.Ng4! Nh5 7.g3 Nd4

If 7...d5 8.Ne3 Nf6 9.Nexd5! Nxd5 10.Qh5+ and 11.Qxd5.

8.Bg2 d5 9.Ne3 Nf6



10.Nxd5

After this White wins easily.

**10 Nf3+ 11.Bxf3 Nxd5 12.Bxe4 Nxe3 13.Qh5+ g6 14.Qe5+ Qe7 15.Qxe7+ Bxe7
16.dxe3 Bh3 17.Bxb7 Rb8 18.Bc6+ Kf7 19.Bd5+ Kg7 20.Bd2 Bf6 21.Bc3 Bxc3+
22.bxc3 Rhd8 23.0-0-0 Bg4 24.Rd2 1-0**