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Over the Horizons

Stefan Bücker



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An Academic Question

When you are discussing the King's Gambit in an Internet forum or in a pub, sooner or later one of the guests, or perhaps the pub's owner, will ask: "Why do you analyse the King's Gambit, when ninety-five percent of GM games are in the Ruy Lopez?" Such a remark suggests that the King's Gambit must have a defect. Apparently the inquirer cannot remember the details, but top players certainly must know why it is bad. Any hint that the grandmasters are but a small minority, less than one percent of the playing crowd, won't help. The King's Gambit had been branded as a "romantic" opening, which was never meant as a compliment. Later they used statistics to demonstrate, not too successfully, that 2 f4 was a weaker move than 2 Nf3. And now we have the ninety-five percent argument.

For **Bent Larsen**, the overwhelming popularity of one single line often signaled that it was time for a change. Then he adopted something new: Bird's Opening, 1 b3 ("Nimzo-Larsen Attack"), the Vienna Game, 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+ instead of 3 d4, and many other systems. He has been extremely successful for many years with a broad opening repertoire. Larsen played the Sicilian Najdorf, but dropped the system when it became too popular, and later warned amateurs in [1]: "Is it the sum total of their ambition in chess to be two moves ahead of Fischer in the analysis of the Poisoned Pawn line of the Najdorf?" And in *Bent Larsen's Good Move Guide* (Oxford 1982) we find the following remark (p. 80): "Why always play the Spanish? Many players have read everything in the book about 3 Bb5, but have skipped lightly across 3 Bc4."

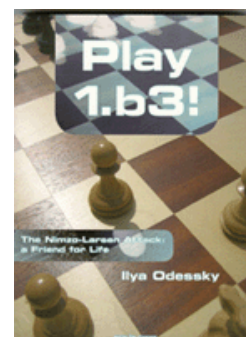


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He played the King's Gambit in his youth, but later used it only as a rare surprise weapon. Larsen's "Personal Approach to the Openings," as his well-known article in [1] was titled, was everything else than dogmatic. Can there be a better encouragement for building an opening repertoire that fits your own style than the following [1]:

"When I say an opening is natural for a player I mean that he *likes* it, and that he *believes* in it (which is not necessarily the same thing). I have

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never believed, or ‘felt’, that the King’s Indian is a correct defense for Black, but I have often liked playing it. I feel the same about the Dutch Defense, and in this case more masters will agree with me! ... Some openings I consider absolutely correct, but I do not like to play them.” Or take Bent Larsen’s remark on gambit play [1]: “Being a pawn down keeps many players awake. A gambit never becomes sheer routine as long as you fear you may lose the King and pawn ending!”

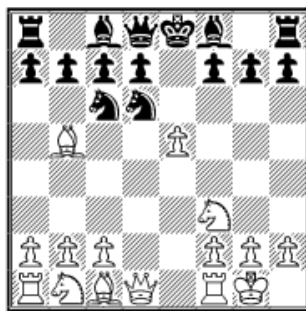
Whether the Ruy Lopez is better than the King’s Gambit, remains an academic question. On a line in the King’s Gambit, Garry Kasparov wrote (*My Great Predecessors, Part 1*, p. 30): “White cannot build up any particular momentum.” Can White really build up some momentum in the Ruy Lopez? I asked a grandmaster who had written a book on the Ruy Lopez, whether there was anything wrong with my analysis on the Steiner Variation in the Marshall [2]. He didn’t reply.

In GM tournaments, the King’s Gambit will remain a surprise weapon. Not because it were incorrect, but because it takes more time to prepare dozens of tactical main lines for White than to find an underestimated side-line for Black for the next game against a 2 f4 player. The King’s Gambit’s abundance makes a lot of its charm, but at the same time there are practical handicaps, at least in the eyes of grandmasters. On any other level, I see no reason why the King’s Gambit cannot be used on a regular basis. Both main systems, the King’s Knight Gambit 1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 and the King’s Bishop Gambit 3 Bc4, seem to be basically sound and offer plenty of chances for the attacker.

Asked by readers of *Kaissiber* whether they should rather learn the French Defense or the Caro-Kann Defense, Bent Larsen replied: “Know thyself.” Chess isn’t easy and there is no standard repertoire that applies to everyone. A typical King’s Gambit game often enters irrational complications just a few moves beyond your prepared stuff and your theoretical worries quickly fade away. On the other side a Ruy Lopez player may spend a lot of time in front of the computer on distilling only a shade of an endgame advantage against the Berlin Wall. The following updates of two lines studied in earlier columns illustrate what I mean.

Update 1. The Berlin Wall of the Ruy Lopez, L’Hermet Variation

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 dxe5!?



In his epic work *The Berlin Wall* (Glasgow 2008), John Cox analyzes the sharp text move, invented by **Rudolf L’Hermet** from Magdeburg, on five of the 328(!) pages. – I am a bit puzzled by Cox’ remark: “...the German columnist did not invent the move, and perhaps the Anglophone world’s ‘Mackenzie Variation’ is more correct.” Can a reader help? Obviously Cox has read *The Oxford Companion to Chess*, but Hooper/Whyld didn’t give a source for their claim.

6...Nxb5 7 a4 Nbd4 8 Nxd4 Nxd4 (8...d5!) 9 Qxd4 d5 10 Nc3 c6 11 a5



The [December](#) column [\[8\]](#) analyzed 11 Qd3? (Stevic – Howell, Dresden 2008). That game sparked the interest of **Ludger Keitlinghaus** (Germany). Though he considers 6 dxe5 rather as disadvantageous for White, he finds it too harsh to label 11 Qd3 with a question mark, since the move is a relatively new and logical idea that at least tries to build up some pressure. And yes, he is probably right. It is not carved in stone that 10 Nc3 c6 11 a5 gives White any advantage, so I should be tolerant against the highly interesting alternatives 10 Qd3 and 10 Nc3 c6 11 Qd3. Even more so, since only last fall I had studied these Qd3 lines for weeks, unfortunately to no avail. So the ? expressed mainly my own frustration.

11...Bf5

Keitlinghaus: “Black has a simple alternative in 11...Be7, followed by 0-0. The missing light-squared bishop and the weakness of the square f5 will hamper White’s chances.” Again, the grandmaster is probably right. 11...Be7 hasn’t been played often and isn’t in [\[9\]](#), but the move is sound and perhaps makes it even more difficult for White to achieve anything, in comparison with the text move. After 12 f4 Bf5 play could transpose to the next note, but there cannot be much wrong with 12...f6 or 12...b6 either.

12 f4 Qd7

The standard reply: White recognizes that the immediate 12...Bxc2 13 f5 would be too risky, so he strengthens his control over the white squares and renews his threat Bxc2. However, in analogy to Keitlinghaus’ suggestion above, 12...Be7!? deserves attention:

(a) 13 Ne2 (13 b4?!) 13...Bxc2 14 f5 f6 15 Nf4 fxe5 16 Qxe5 Qd6 17 Qxg7 Qf6 18 Qg3 Qxf5 19 a6 b6 20 Ne2 Qg6, about equal.

(b) 13 Qf2 0-0 14 Be3 f6 15 exf6 Bxf6 16 Bxa7 Re8 17 Bb6 Qe7 18 Ra4 Qf7 19 Nd1 Bg4 20 Ne3 Bd7 =.

13 Qf2!

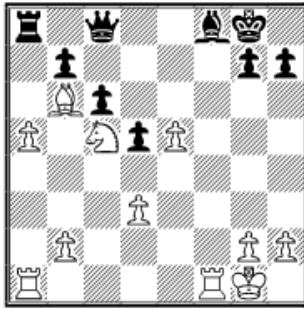


Ludger Keitlinghaus remembers a rapid game with this position, in which he had Black. He couldn’t recall his next moves, but queries my 13...c5: “Why has Black to dismantle his pawn structure?” There goes my splendid analysis... Seriously, my analysis file *did* consider other lines than 13...c5 14 Ne2 Bxc2 15 f5 0-0 16 Bg5 Re8 17 Nd4! [\[8\]](#), but none of them seemed to give Black full equality, and so I just preferred the line

with the nicest diagram. But well, here are the alternatives:

13...Bb4

Or 13...Be7 14 Be3 f6 15 Bxa7 fxe5 16 Na4 Qe6 17 Nc5 Qc8 18 fxe5 0-0 (18...Rxa7 19 Nb3) 19 Bb6 Bd3 20 Qxf8+ Bxf8 21 cxd3



For example 21...Bxc5+ 22 Bxc5 Qg4 23 d4 h6 24 Rf3 Qe4 25 b4 followed by Raf1, +=.

14 h3 Qd8!?

(a) 14...0-0 15 g4 Bxc3 16 gxf5! Bb4 17 c3 Be7 18 Qc2, e.g., 18...Bc5+ 19 Kh2 a6 20 b4 Ba7 21 Qd3 Rad8 22 Ra2 +=.

(b) 14...h5 prevents g2-g4, but is also a commitment. Black will castle short, when the pawn h5 is a potential weakness.

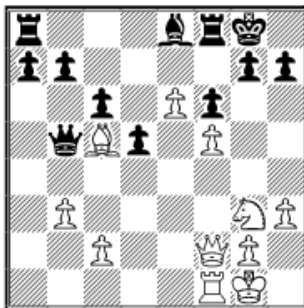
15 Be3 Bxa5 16 Ne2 0-0 17 Ng3 Bd7 18 Rxa5!? Qxa5 19 f5

As I told you, this analysis is a bit boring. Now 19...Qc7 20 Nh5 looks risky.

19...f6 20 e6 Be8

20...Bc8?! invites 21 Nh5 Qc7 22 Bxa7.

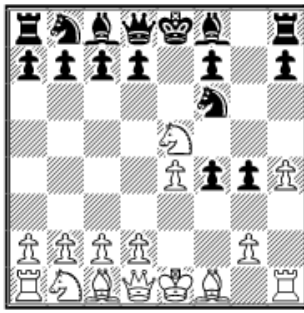
21 Bc5 Qb5 22 b3



White has more than sufficient compensation (at least +=). I still believe that 13 Qf2! is an excellent novelty in a position that has occurred twelve times in the database. However, I admit that the modest looking 12...Be7, as recommended by Ludger Keitlinghaus, looks absolutely equal. Not to forget the reliable alternatives 13...Be7 and 8...d5!. We conclude that for this month the Berlin Wall remains intact. Good luck with studying the remaining 323 pages of Cox' "endgame" work.

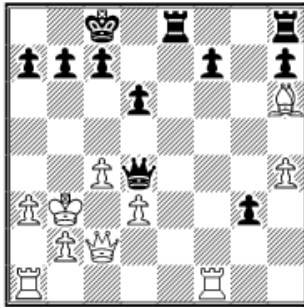
Update 2: The Kings's Gambit, Kieseritzky Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 g5 4 h4 g4 5 Ne5 Nf6



The present main line of the Kieseritzky Gambit. Another [ChessCafe.com](#) article [3] explored the Hungarian Defense 5...d6 6 Nxg4 Nf6, recommending 7 Nxf6+ Qxf6 8 Nc3 Nc6 and then:

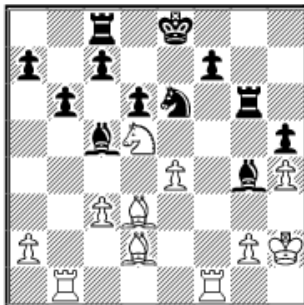
(a) 9 Nd5 Qg6 10 d3 Qg3+ 11 Kd2 Nb4! 12 Kc3!? (a new idea by Maurits Wind, not mentioned in [3]) 12...Nxd5+ 13 exd5 Bg4 14 Be2 Qf2 15 Qe1 Bg7+ 16 Kb3 Qb6+ 17 Qb4 Qxb4+ 18 Kxb4 Bxe2 19 Re1 0-0 20 Rxe2 Rae8 21 Rxe8 Rxe8 22 Bxf4 Bxb2 23 Rf1 = (analysis by Maurits Wind). Instead, White may choose my proposal 15 a3!? to stir up the situation, but after 15...Bxe2 16 Re1 0-0-0 17 Qxe2 Qc5+ 18 Kb3 Qxd5+ 19 c4 Qd4 20 Rf1?! (20 Qe4 =) 20...Bh6 21 g3 Rde8 22 Qc2 fxg3 23 Bxh6 White is struggling, considering Black's menacing pawns.



According to my analysis [6], White holds (23...Re6 24 Bf4 Rg8 25 Rf3 g2 26 Bh2 Qxh4 27 Bg1), and OTB against a human opponent, the aggressive 15 a3!? could well score a few points. But the risks should not be underestimated.

(b) 9 Bb5, the move analysed by Michael Jensen, is still a good alternative, see: [3].

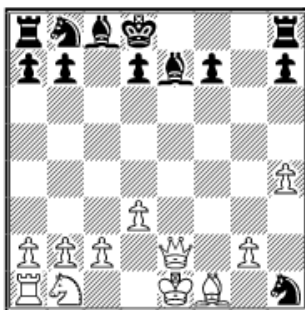
(c) 9 d4 (Hector's move) 9...Qxd4 10 Bxf4 Bg7! 11 Qxd4 Nxd4 12 Bd3. This was the set-up I recommended for White in [3]. In my extended analysis in *Kaissiber* 32 [6], I mainly studied the reply 12...Bg4 (while 12...Ne6 [1] and 12...Rg8 [6] remain solid alternatives), giving the following main line: 13 0-0 Ne6 14 Nd5 h5 15 Bg3! Bxb2 16 Rab1 Bd4+ 17 Kh2 b6 18 Bb5+ Kf8 19 Bc4 Rc8 (perhaps 19...Rh7 or 19...Kg7 20 Nxc7 Rac8 are more precise). White's pieces are more mobile than Black's, which fully compensates for the invested pawn: 20 c3! Bc5 21 Nf6 Rh6 22 Be1! Ke7 23 Nd5+ Ke8 24 Bd2 Rg6 25 Bd3



25...Rd8 (or 25...c6 26 Nf6+ Ke7 27 e5 Rg7 28 Bh6 Rgg8 29 Ba6! Rcd8 30 Nxc8+ Rxc8 31 Rf6, and White is better) 26 Rf5! c6 (26...Ng7 27 Rbf1) 27 Rbf1 Rd7 28 Nf6+. White is clearly better (+/-). Of course my analysis doesn't change the general assessment that the Hungarian Defense is solid and often leads to a draw. However, new ideas in [3] and [6] make it more difficult for Black to achieve his half point.

6 Bc4!

6 Nxc4!? Nxe4 (6...d6 transposes to the Hungarian Defense, above) 7 d3 Ng3 8 Bxf4 Nxe4 9 Qe2+ Qe7 10 Nf6+ Kd8 11 Bxc7+ Kxc7 12 Nd5+ Kd8 13 Nxe7 Bxe7



My earlier ChessCafe.com article [4] had a serious flaw: My recommendation of 14 Qf3 Bxh4+ 15 g3 isn't "roughly even" [4], as suggested, but better for Black: 15...Re8+ 16 Kd1 d6! (threatening 17...Bg4 18 Qxg4 Nf2+, so White has no choice) 17 Qxh1 Bg4+ 18 Kd2 Bg5 + 19 Kc3 Nc6; for example, 20 Na3 Rc8! 21 Rb1 Nd4+ 22 Nc4 b5 23 Qd5 Nf3 24 Qd6+ Bd7 25 Bh3 Rxc4+ 26 dxc4 Re3+ 27 Kb4 Be7, and with a little luck White may survive. That wasn't exactly what I had intended. Such things happen in the King's Gambit.

Thus in the diagram position I ruefully return to the old 14 Qg4 d6 15 Qf4 Rg8 16 Nc3. Apparently White isn't worse after 16...Be6 17 0-0-0!? (improves upon 17 Be2 from Baucher – Morphy, Paris 1858) 17...Ng3 18 d4 Nd7 19 Bd3 d5 20 Nb5 Rc8 21 Nxa7 Rg4 22 Qd2 Ra8 23 Qa5+!? Ke8 24 Bb5 Bd6 25 Bxd7+ Bxd7 26 Kb1 Be6 27 Qb6 Ne4 28 Nc6! Kf8 29 Qxb7 Re8 30 a4, unclear [7].

6...d5 7 exd5 Bd6

Against the less popular treatment 7...Bg7 (Max Lange) 8 d4 Nh5, that *Kaissiber* article [7] now prefers Oskar Cordel's radical 9 Bxf4!?, with unclear consequences.

8 d4 Nh5 9 Nc3

Or 9 0-0 0-0 (if 9...Qxh4 10 Qe1 Qxe1 11 Rxe1 0-0 12 Nc3 Bf5, Michael Jensen's idea 13 Rf1 comes into consideration; e.g., 13...Na6 14 Bxf4 Nb4 with mutual chances [7]) 10 Rxf4!? (Henk Smout), unclear. For more details, see [5] and [7].

9...0-0

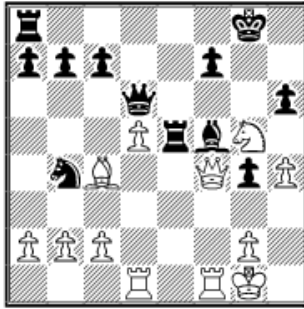
Jaenisch's 9...Qe7 had been covered in [4]. That article's title "A Patient Novelty" was referring to 10 0-0 Bxe5 11 Nb5! 0-0 12 dxe5 a6, and now 13 Nd4!, the move published in 2004 by the Australian **David Flude** on www.chesspub.com, 24 years after 11 Nb5 had been given in print as a mistake. For the details, see [4]. However, a mistake in that analysis needs to be corrected: If 11...a6 (instead of 11...0-0) 12 Re1! Nd7 13 d6! cxd6 14 dxe5 0-0, the continuation 15 e6 ("+" in [4], but Black survives: 15...Qh4 unclear) should better be replaced by 15 Nxd6 +/-, e.g. 15...Qxh4 16 Bxf7+ or 15...Nxe5 16 b3 Qf6 17 Bb2 f3 18 Qd4 etc. [7].

10 Ne4!

In [\[4\]](#) I had recommended the traditional continuation 10 Ne2. But later **Hans-Christian Eberl** from Austria found the strong 10...Qe7! 11 Nxf4 Ng3!, which convincingly refutes White's idea. For example, 12 Ne6 fxe6 13 Qg4+ Qg7 14 dxe6 Qxg4! 15 Nxg4 Kh8 16 Rg1 b5! 17 Bb3 Nc6 18 Be3 Nf5 -/+ or 15 e7+ Be6 16 exf8Q+ Kxf8 17 Bh6+ Ke8 18 Nxg4 Bxg4 -/+.

10...f5

Apparently more critical than 10...Re8 11 0-0 Bxe5 12 dxe5 Rxe5 13 Ng5 Qd6 14 Qd4 Nc6 15 Qf2 Nb4 16 Bxf4 Nxf4 17 Qxf4 Bf5 18 Rad1 h6

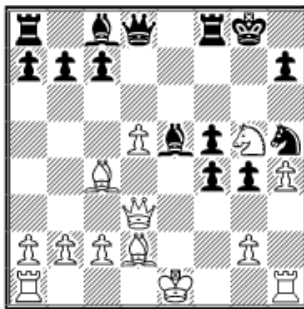


19 Nxf7! Kxf7 20 Qxg4 Kf6 21 h5 Nxc2 22 Qg6+ Ke7 23 Rxf5 Rxf5 24 Qxf5 Qx5+ 25 Kh1 Qxc4 26 Qe5+ Kf8 27 d6 cxd6 28 Qxd6+ Ke8 29 Qe5 + Kf8 30 Kg1 Re8 31 Qd6+ Kg7 32 Qg6+ Kf8 33 Qxh6+ Kg8 34 Qg6+ Kf8 35 Rf1+ Ke7 36 Qg7+ Kd6 37 Rd1+ Kc6 38 Qd7+ Kb6 39 Qxe8 Qc5 + 40 Kh1 a6 41 Rc1 Ka7 42 Qe2 Nd4 43 Rxc5 1-0, Eberl (Team "Schlechter's Erben") – Kayis (Team Satranc Okulu-Sbilyap), corr. 2007 (ICCF Ch. League 2007, C Group 4).

11 Ng5 Nd7 12 Qd3! Nxe5

Both 12...Bxe5 13 d6+ Kh8 14 dxe5 Nxe5 15 Qc3 cxd6 16 Nf7+ Rxf7 17 Bxf7 Nf6 18 Bb3 and 12...Ng3 13 Bxf4 Nxh1 14 Ke2 Qf6 15 Rxh1 offer White attractive chances.

13 dxe5 Bxe5 14 Bd2!

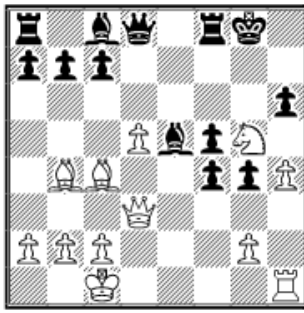


14...Ng3

Or 14...Bxb2 15 Rb1 Bf6 16 Kd1! Kg7 17 Rxb7 Kg6 18 Rb5, unclear [\[7\]](#).

15 0-0-0 Nxh1 16 Rxh1 h6 17 Bb4!

In this hair-raising situation, White seems to have sufficient compensation for the sacrificed material:



17...Kg7

(a) 17...hgx5 18 Be7! Qd7 19 d6+ Kg7 20 Qd5 Qe6 21 Qd3 Qd7 = [7].

(b) 17...f3 18 gxf3 hxg5 19 Be7 [7].

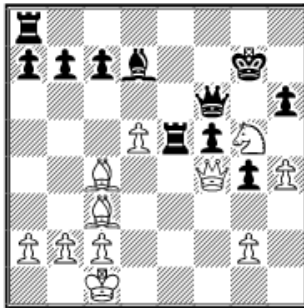
(c) 17...Bd6 18 Bc3 hxg5 19 Qd4 Qf6 20 Qxf6 Rxf6 21 Bxf6 with compensation [7].

(d) 17...b5 18 d6+ Kh8 19 Nf7+ Rxf7 20 Bxf7 cxd6 21 Qd5 Rb8 22 Re1 Bb7 23 Qe6 Bg7 24 Bc3 Qxh4 25 Qd7 = [7].

18 Re1 Re8 19 Rxe5 Rxe5 20 Qd4 Qf6 21 Qxf4 Bd7

Another line from my analysis in [7]: 21...Kg6 22 h5+ Kxh5 23 Nh7! Qg7 24 Bc3 Kg6 25 Nf8+ (=).

22 Bc3



The chances are equal; for example, 22...hxg5 23 hxg5 Qe7 24 Bxe5+ Kg6 25 Qg3 Qxg5+ 26 Bf4 Qe7 27 Bd3 Kf7 28 Bxc7 = [7].

Sources:

- [1] B. Hochberg (ed.): *How to Open a Chess Game*, New York 1974.
- [2] **ChessCafe.com**, August 2006, [Repairing the Steiner Variation](#)
- [3] **ChessCafe.com**, June 2008, [Fashionable or Ailing?](#)
- [4] **ChessCafe.com**, July 2008, [Kieseritzky Gambit: A Patient Novelty](#)
- [5] **ChessCafe.com**, July 2008, [Kieseritzky Gambit: The Discussion Continues](#)
- [6] St. Bucker: "Am Triumphlager des Königsgambits," [Kaissiber 32](#) (2008)
- [7] St. Bucker: "Der Stand der Dinge," [Kaissiber 33](#) (2008)
- [8] **ChessCafe.com**, December 2008, [Olympic Experiments](#)
- [9] J. Cox: *The Berlin Wall*, Glasgow 2008

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