

King's Gambit Primer

The King's Gambit is a potent weapon from Morphy's time, which has never been completely refuted. Defensive technique has improved in the last 150 years, so that Black need not fear if he knows his lines of play. The unprepared player should be very, very careful.

We enter the King's Gambit after the first three moves; 1.e4 e5 and 2.f4.

1.e4 e5 **2.f4**



Whites plan is simple: he will draw Blacks e-pawn away from the centre and open the f-file by temporarily giving up his own f-pawn. If Black accepts the gambit f-pawn (with 2.... exf4) Black's pawns on f4 and f7 might become targets. If White can tempt Blacks pawn away from the centre, White can try to dominate the centre with a later d4 as this would give him very strong pawns on both e4 and d4.

Blacks Options:

1. Accept the gambit pawn with 2.... exf4
2. Decline the gambit pawn with either 2.... d5 or 2.... Bc5

Note: Black should not try to sure up his e5 pawn with 2.... d6? as this gives him a very cramped position and an inferior centre (White will play to develop his pieces rapidly while the f8 bishop remains entombed by his own pawns).

Accepting the gambit

(A) 1.e4 e5 2.f4 **exf4**.

Black accepts the offered pawn.

Black has two main plans here:

1. Try to hold onto the extra pawn.
2. Give back the pawn at an appropriate moment to improve development or position.

Taking the pawn does fall in with Whites plan of f-file attacks and domination of the centre, BUT the immediate threat White must guard against is the potentially nasty check by Black playing ...Qh4+. White has two methods of dealing with the threat of this check: 3.Nf3 or 3.Bc4.



(A1) 1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 **3.Nf3**

This move is virtually forced if White wishes to avoid the nasty check mentioned above.

Black usually responds **3...Nf6** which forces a liquidation of the centre pawns, e.g.



1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 **Nf6** 4.e5 Nh5 5.d4 d5

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 **Nf6** 4.Nc3 d5! 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.Nxd5 Qxd5

Note that the response **3...g5** (instead of 3... Nf6) by Black is very complicated and not for the faint-hearted!

(A2) 1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.**Bc4**

With this move White accepts the check (... Qh4+) and also accepts that he will probably have to move his King to f1 as a result of that check.

White hopes that his strong centre and excellent development will lead to an advantage.

Black should try to gain some equality in the centre before unleashing the check. Usually equality can be reached by giving back the gambit pawn in return for either improved development or the permanent displacement of White's King. Black's usual counter to this move is **3.... d5**.



1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Bc4 **d5** and now White has:

4.Bxd5 Nf6 with equality as the Bishop will have to move for the third time, allowing Black to catch up in development.

4.exd5 Qh4+ 5.Kf1 with complications for Whites displaced King.

Declining the gambit

Black has a couple of ways to decline the gambit pawn. He can play a gambit of his own (Falkbeer Counter-Gambit: 1.e4 e5 2.f4 **d5**), or he can play for rapid development via a quick bishop move (1.e4 e5 2.f4 **Bc5**). Both lines are valid ways to refute the gambit.

(B1) Falkbeer Counter-Gambit
1.e4 e5 2.f4 **d5**

Black tries to turn the tables on White with a counter gambit of his own. He hopes to secure an attack at the expense of a pawn. Black gives up a pawn to take back the initiative. It is effective against players who only know how to attack. Theory says that White gets the better ending.

White usually responds with an immediate capture of the d pawn:

1.e4 e5 2.f4 d5 3.**exd5**

[Note: White should not play 3.fxe5?? due to the reply 3...Qh4+ 4.g3 Qxe4+ which is winning for Black.]

3... e4! (Black's game rests on the strength of this pawn).

4. d3 (a natural move) 4...Nf6! Black makes it a true gambit by not immediately exchanging pawns.



(B2) 1.e4 e5 2.f4 **Bc5**

This is the King's Gambit Declined. Black obtains a fairly safe position.

Black's second move 2... Bc5 is made possible by the fact that White cannot afford to capture the e-pawn just yet [e.g. 3.fxe4? Qh4+! 4.g3 Qxe4+ and White will lose his rook.]



Instead, White should look to play the natural looking **3.Nf3** as this guards against the Queen check on h4.

Now that Black has moved his bishop out, he can defend the d-pawn with ...d6 quite happily. Black should **not** try to sure up his e5 pawn earlier with 2.... d6? At this gives him a very cramped position and an inferior centre (White will play to develop his pieces rapidly while the f8 bishop remains entombed by his own pawns).

So after 1.e4 e5 2.f4 Bc5 3.Nf3 d6 we arrive at this position:

White has two playable lines:

4. Nc3 when black counters with 4....Nf6

Or

4. c3 when Black can rip open the centre with 4....f5!

