

The Benko Revisited

Volume 2

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Volume 2

Alexey Kovalchuk

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
⊙	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⊃	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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Introduction

Dear Reader,

I am glad to welcome you to the second volume dedicated to the Benko Gambit. This volume examines the most basic lines. It is these lines that can be found most often at the board. We'll take a look at the rare and tricky lines and move on to the more popular and classic lines.

In the first volume, in the Introduction, we touched on my personal attitude to this opening, which has been constantly changing over the course of the last 10 years. We touched upon the history of how the opening developed, noted who needed to play this opening and what to expect from it.

What do I want to highlight in this Introduction?

This is what the reader will notice in this volume – that the lines have become more specific, sometimes requiring very accurate knowledge. The load on memory increases, but it will be rewarded a hundredfold, since the positions that arise are interesting and full of dynamic factors.

In this volume, we look at positions that start after 1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. cxb5 a6. We'll start with the rarer continuations and end with the most popular and relevant ones.

My first classical game with the Benko Gambit

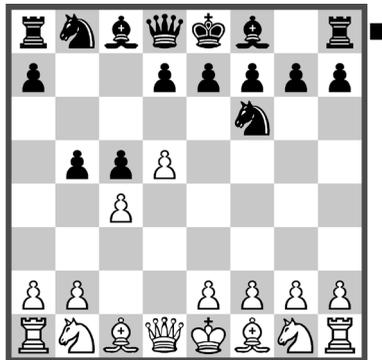
My path to the Benko Gambit began in 2012 when a wonderful book by the Ukrainian grandmaster Valery Aveskulov, *Attack with Black*, was published. I think this is the best book on the Benko Gambit (but I hope that my work will also take a prominent place). Having carefully studied this book, I went into battle. The game was played at one of the championships of the Rostov region in Russia. By the way, the future promising young Russian grandmaster (now rated over 2700), Andrey Esipenko, played in that tournament. I drew with him, but returning to the Benko Gambit, I played against the leader of the tournament, Igor Mandrykin. Let's have a look at this game!

♁ Mandrykin

♚ Kovalchuk

♁ Azov 2012

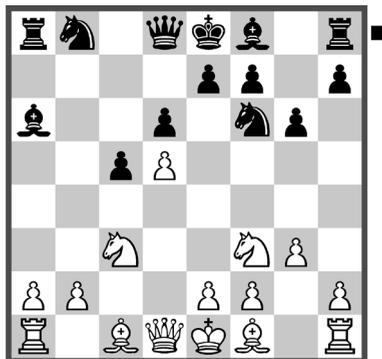
1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5



Position after: 3... b5

I made this move with great enthusiasm. I had never played like this before and I remember that I wasn't very worried about doing so back then.

4. cxb5 a6 5. bxa6 g6 6. ♘c3 ♙xa6 7. ♘f3 d6 8. g3



Position after: 8. g3

The Fianchetto System is one of the main lines in the Benko Gambit. Chapter 8 of this book is devoted to this line.

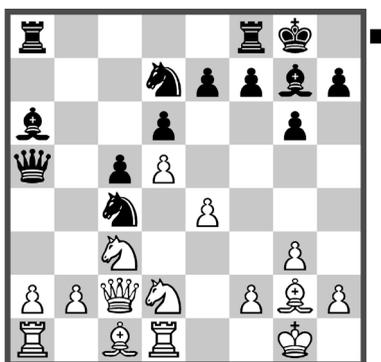
8... ♙g7 9. ♙g2 ♘bd7 10. 0-0 ♘b6 11. ♖e1 0-0 12. e4 ♘fd7 13. ♚c2 ♘c4

13... c4? This is bad, because of 14. ♖e3+— with the further ♘d4-c6.

14. ♖d1

This is a dubious continuation after which Black gets better play. The best response was 14. ♖f1!. See Chapter 8 for details.

14... ♔a5 15. ♘d2



Position after: 15. ♘d2

15... ♘a3!

A strong move. Black is succeeding on the queenside.

16. bxa3 ♔xc3 17. ♔xc3 ♖xc3 18. ♖b1 ♖fb8?!

18... ♖d3! This was the way to victory. 19. ♖b3 [19. ♖b7 ♘e5 20. ♖xe7 ♖e2 21. ♖e1 ♘d3 22. ♖xe2 ♘xc1— White loses material.] 19... ♖c2— Black has a decisive advantage.

19. ♖b3 ♖xb3 20. axb3 ♖b8?!

This move releases the advantage.

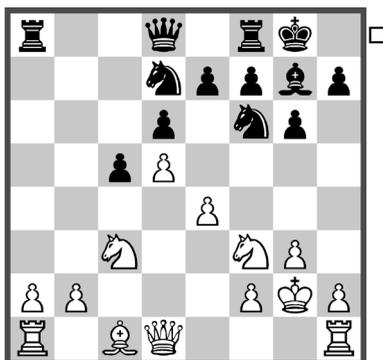
20... ♖d3 Black could still retain the remaining advantage after this move. 21. ♖f1 ♖c2 22. ♖e1 ♘e5 23. ♔g2 ♖xd2 24. ♖xd2 ♖xa3— The b-pawn is weak; Black is clearly better.

21. ♖f1 ♗xf1 22. ♔xf1 ♘xd2 23. ♘xd2 ♖xb3 24. a4 ♞b8 25. a5 ♞a6 26. ♔e2 ♜a3 27. ♜b1 ♞b4 28. ♘xb4

This is the beginning of the application of the Benko Gambit. Despite the missed opportunities, I could be satisfied with the results of the opening – the game was drawn.

As time passed, I was content with this opening, but in 2014 a book by the Russian grandmaster Alexei Kornev *A Practical White Repertoire, Volume 3* was published, which gave the following line.

1. d4 ♞f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. cxb5 a6 5. bxa6 ♘xa6 6. ♞c3 g6 7. e4 ♘xf1 8. ♔xf1 d6 9. ♞f3 ♘g7 10. g3 0-0 11. ♔g2 ♞bd7



Position after: 11... ♞bd7

After these moves, the author offered the following line.

12. a4!

This line has become very popular in recent years, played by Magnus Carlsen and other top players.

For many years I lost my desire to play the Benko Gambit. Nevertheless, the years passed and with the advent of neural networks, it was possible to expand one's understanding of the game. New unique analyses appeared and I managed to find an interesting novelty in this variation. It should also be added that in 2019, a book by Boris Avrukh, *Grandmaster Repertoire 2B – Dynamic Systems* was published,

where a rather convincing analysis was provided, in which White gets an advantage in the Benko Gambit.

Is the Benko Gambit laying on the verge of death and can no longer be played?

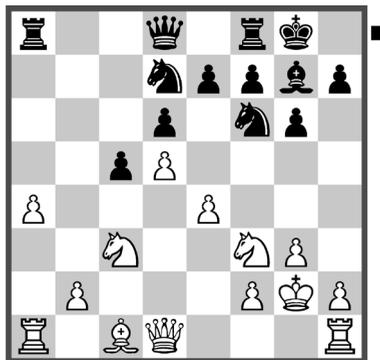
However, with the help of new engines, I found a new interesting idea that I implemented in the game. Let's see it.

♁ Lysyj (2605)

♚ Kovalchuk (2379)

🌐 Chelyabinsk 2021

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. cxb5 a6 5. bxa6 ♙xa6 6. ♘c3 d6 7. e4 ♙xf1 8. ♔xf1 g6 9. g3 ♙g7 10. ♘f3 ♘bd7 11. ♔g2 0-0 12. a4



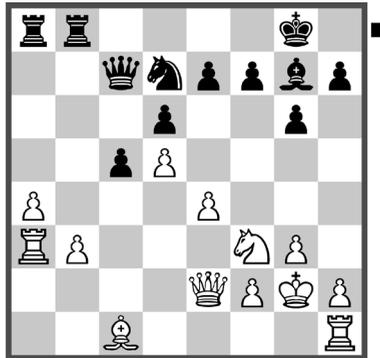
Position after: 12. a4

Here I recommend playing the following move.

12... ♙b6!

For all the details of this option, see chapter 8.

13. ♙e2 ♖fb8 14. ♘b5 ♘e8 15. ♖a3 ♘c7 16. ♘xc7 ♙xc7 17. b3



Position after: 17. b3

This whole variation is analyzed in the latest book by Boris Avrukh in *Grandmaster Repertoire 2B – Dynamic Systems*. We must pay tribute to Boris that everything that he analyzes has a good analytical depth and it is not for nothing that everything that comes out of Boris's pen is immediately taken into account by strong chess players, even at a very high level. But from the solitude of my house, I prepared an improvement that Boris did not consider.

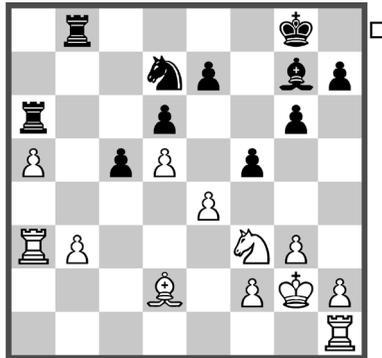
17... ♔a5!!

This move was the result. The idea of the move is that Black can play ...♔c3, attacking the weak b3-pawn, or else to offer the exchange of queens with ...♔a6 combined with a further blow to the center with ...f5.

18. ♘d2

Another important line is 18. ♘d2 ♔c3 19. ♘c4 ♖xb3 20. ♙d2 ♔xc4 21. ♔xc4 ♖xa3∞ where the analysis from Chapter 8 shows that for the queen, Black has enough compensation for equality.

18... ♔a6! 19. ♔xa6 ♖xa6 20. a5 f5!

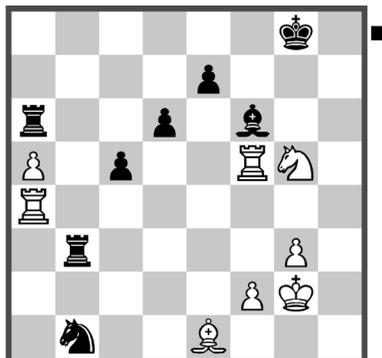


Position after: 20... f5!

White's center is crumbling and the weaknesses of the a5-, b3- and d5-pawns give Black sufficient counterplay.

21. exf5 ♘f6 22. fxg6 hxg6 23. h4 ♘xd5 24. h5 gxh5 25. ♖xh5 ♘c3 26. ♙e1 ♙f6 27. ♜f5 ♘b1 28. ♜a4 ♜xb3 29. ♘g5

In this critical position, I overestimated the idea of ♜a4-g4. It seemed to me that the position of the black king was unsafe, but this is not so; White has no specific threats, and I played the wrong move.

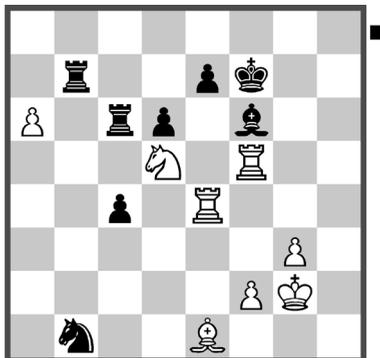


Position after: 29. ♘g5

29... ♔g7?!

29... ♘a3! 30. ♜g4 ♘c2! This was better and a strong idea. 31. ♙d2 ♘d4 32. ♜d5 ♙xg5 33. ♜dxg5+ ♔f7= Play is equal.

30. ♖e6+ ♔f7 31. ♜e4 c4 32. ♘c7 ♜c6 33. ♘d5 ♜b7 34. a6



Position after: 34. a6

34... ♜a7??

This was a gross miscalculation. Much better was 34... ♜xa6!

A) 35. ♘xf6?! exf6 36. ♜xc4 ♜e7 This is not so strong [but not 36... ♔e6? 37. ♜cf4 ♜f7 38. ♜b5 ♘a3 39. ♜e4+ ♔d7 40. ♜b7+- with a victory]. 37. ♜c1 [37. ♙b4 ♜a4 38. ♜ff4 ♜ea7 39. ♙xd6 ♜xc4 40. ♜xc4 ♜a6± Black's chances of a draw are greater than White's chances of winning.] 37... ♘a3 38. ♙c3 d5 39. ♙b4 ♜e4 40. ♙xa3 ♜xa3 41. ♜xd5± White has an extra pawn. However, such rook endgames are almost never won and Black has great drawing chances.

B) 35. ♜xc4! ♔g6 36. ♜ff4± Black is clearly worse, but he can defend stubbornly.

35. ♜xe7+! ♜xe7 36. ♜xf6+ ♔e8

36... ♔g7 37. ♘xe7 ♔xf6 38. ♘xc6+- The problem is that after this sequence, White is left with an extra piece and a won position.

37. ♘xe7 ♔xe7 38. a7 ♜a6 39. ♜h6 c3

39... ♜xa7 40. ♜h7+ ♔e6 41. ♜xa7+-

40. ♙xc3 ♘xc3 41. ♜h8! 1-0

A painful defeat, but nevertheless it has nothing to do with the opening. When using good opening preparation, remember that your practical skills must always be in shape too, then good opening preparation will give you wonderful results. I brought this game to you, dear reader, to show that the Benko Gambit is a good and correct opening and you can play it even against a 2600+ player. Yes, the result of this game blurred the overall impression, but I apologize in advance, because during this game I did not understand certain things. I believe in the Benko Gambit – if you are afraid to use it with a classical time control, then you can play this opening in rapid or blitz.

When analyzing, I was guided by the chess principle. This is the best way to play from the point of view of the chess player/practitioner, but is also good from the point of objective analysis. While working on the book, I tried to cover the options as widely as possible. Even if the reader seems overwhelmed with options, keep in mind that these options can be useful for a less sophisticated chess player. This book can be useful to both amateurs and professionals. Many of the options have been analyzed in depth and are illustrative, showing how the game can develop, while I have also tried to explain in words what is happening on the board. In every variation that the reader will see in this book, I have tried to be objective. Of course it is impossible to achieve an ideal result, but nevertheless I have tried my best. Much time was devoted to analysis. Using powerful software, I was not afraid to spend extra time analyzing the options as deeply as possible.

Therefore, dear reader, why am I recommending this book to you?

You can save much time. The Benko Gambit is a narrowly focused work on which I have spent hundreds of hours in analysis. This is a product of several years! Only you can judge this book. I hope your journey will be interesting and exciting through the pages of this book.

I would appreciate it if you could write a review of this book or if you could share your own impressions or ideas with me. My e-mail address is: alexekov@yandex.ru. I wish you good luck and success in your endeavors.

Alexey Kovalchuk, Taganrog, Russia 2021

Part I

White Refrains from Taking on a6

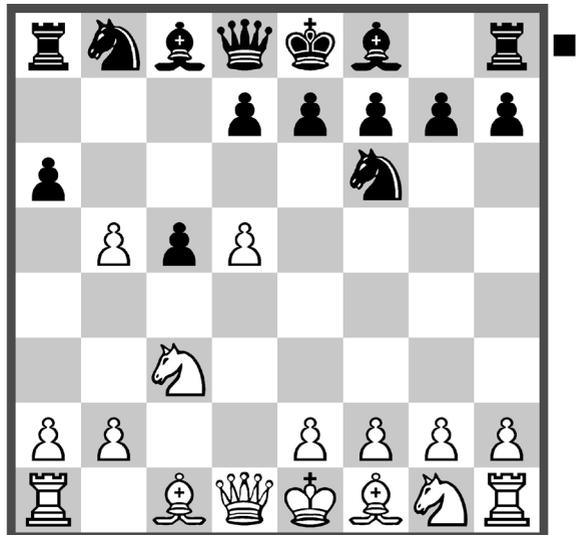


Zaitsev Variation

5.  c3

1.d4  f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5

4.cxb5 a6 5.  c3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – Zaitsev Variation – 5.♘c3

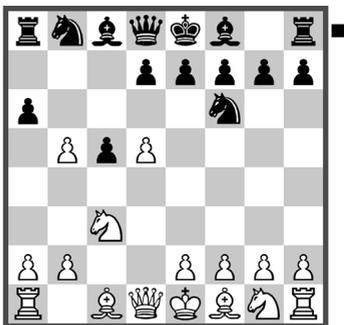
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.♘c3 axb5

a) 6.--	21
b) 6.e4 b4 7.♘b5 d6 8.--	24
c) 6.e4 b4 7.♘b5 d6 8.♙d3	29
d) 6.e4 b4 7.♘b5 d6 8.♙c4?!	30
e) 6.e4 b4 7.♘b5 d6 8.♙f4 g5 9.e5 & 9.♙e3	32
f) 6.e4 b4 7.♘b5 d6 8.♙f4 g5 9.♙xg5	36
g) 6.e4 b4 7.♘b5 d6 8.♘f3 ♘xe4 - Alternative	43
h) 6.e4 b4 7.♘b5 d6 8.♘f3 g6 9.e5 & 9.♙c4.....	45
i) 6.e4 b4 7.♘b5 d6 8.♘f3 g6 9.♙f4.....	52
j) 6.e4 b4 7.♘b5 d6 8.♘f3 g6 9.♙d3.....	56

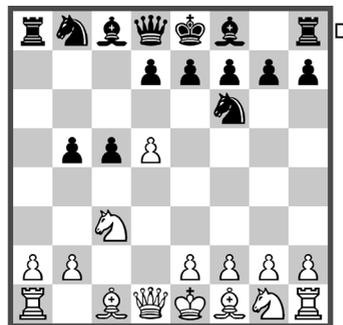
a) 6.--

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. cxb5 a6 5. ♘c3!?

White has many opportunities. Let's consider them.



Position after: 5. ♘c3!?



Position after: 5... axb5!

This interesting move was introduced into serious practice by the well-known and creative grandmaster Igor Zaitsev, a long-term second of the ex-world champion Anatoly Karpov. Although this move had been used before, Zaitsev's idea was after 5... axb5, to reply with 6. e4. Igor Zaitsev is famous in the chess world for his unexpected and creative ideas in the opening. He used this variation against Benko in 1975. This move leads to an interesting and creative game. However, in modern practice, the variation is not often encountered by strong players, since Black has found good ways of playing comfortably.

5... axb5!

The most principled and strong continuation. A position has arisen in which

6. ♙g5?!

In the style of the Trompowsky Attack. However, this continuation is rare and questionable.

A) 6. f3 b4 7. ♘b5 d6 8. e4 See the line with 6. e4.

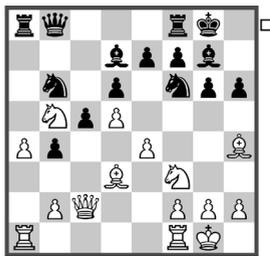
B) 6. ♙f4 b4 7. ♘b5 d6 8. e4 See the line with 6. e4.

C) 6. e3?! Too passive. 6... b4



Position after: 6... b4

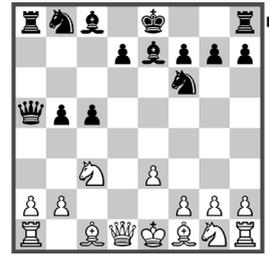
7. ♖b5 Again, this is risky, as the knight can serve as an object of tactical motifs. [7. ♖a4 ♔c7 8. ♕d2 ♕a6 9. ♕xa6 ♖xa6 10. ♜f3 ♜xd5 11. 0-0 ♜f6] White must seek compensation for the lost pawn and his knight on a4 is out of the game.] 7... d6 8. a4 There are several games in this position, but here it is more accurate to play the following. 8... ♜bd7N 9. ♜f3 [9. ♕e2 ♕b7 10. ♕f3 Now Black has a useful move. 10... ♜e5! 11. e4 ♜xf3+ 12. ♔xf3 ♕a6 13. ♖b1 g6 14. ♜e2 ♕g7 15. 0-0 ♔b6] White must lose at least a pawn.] 9... g6 10. ♕d3 ♕g7 11. 0-0 ♜b6 12. e4 ♕d7 13. ♔c2 0-0 14. ♕g5 h6 15. ♕h4 ♔b8



Position after: 15... ♔b8

Now it is difficult for White to defend against the tactical ...c5-c4. 16. b3 ♜xe4! 17. ♖ae1 ♜f6 18. ♖xe7 ♕xb5 19. ♕xb5 ♜bxd5 20. ♖ee1 ♜c3+ Black has an extra pawn and an active knight on c3.

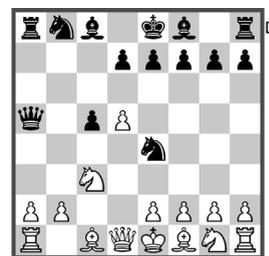
D) 6. d6 ♔a5! [6... exd6 However, the move in the game is stronger.] 7. dxe7 ♕xe7 8. e3 Vega Viejo, M (2173) – Arias Rodriguez, S (2155) Asturias 2001.



Position after: 8. e3

Now there is a very strong move. 8... c4!N 9. ♜f3 ♜c6 10. g3 b4 11. ♜e2 ♕b7 12. ♕g2 ♜e5 13. ♜xe5 ♕xg2 14. ♜xc4 ♔c7 15. ♖g1 ♕e4] Despite the surrendered pawn, White's position is extremely unpleasant, his light squares are weak and the king is stuck in the center. Black has a stable initiative and more than sufficient compensation for the pawn due to his active pieces and better development.

E) 6. ♜xb5 ♕a6! The most accurate. [6... ♔a5+ 7. ♜c3 ♜e4



Position after: 7... ♜e4

However, here I found a new interesting idea that has not been tested in practice. 8. ♔d3!N f5 9. f3 ♜d6 10. e4 fxe4 11. fxe4 g6 12. e5 ♜f5 13. ♜f3 ♕g7 14. ♕d2 0-0 15. ♜b5± White is somewhat