

The Modernized Benko

Milos Perunovic

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Key to Symbols used

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

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Preface

In this modern era, Black players tend to prefer solid, computer-approved openings. I wanted therefore to present a completely new approach for Black. The Benko Gambit has been an unpopular choice since the computer isn't too happy to lose a pawn unless absolutely necessary. When I started playing the Benko 10 years ago, I felt it was a very good choice for open tournaments and weaker opponents, since it leads to an active game for Black. In time, I started using it against strong players as well, and I came to realise that the opening was entirely applicable at even top levels. There is a secret danger for White: so long as White is up a pawn, the computer claims an advantage, but in practice it is very difficult for humans to make use of this theoretical advantage.

The book presents a repertoire for Black after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5. My aim is to offer the essential variations and themes for Black, both in terms of concrete variations and conceptual ideas. In my opinion, the only way for White to test the Benko is to accept the gambit – the main line of this book. In this line I suggest 6...♗g7 instead of 6...♗a6, an idea which I came while analysing the opening with my friend and a lifelong Benko Gambit player, GM Danilo Milanović. After the '...♗g7' move, entirely non-standard positions for the Benko may surface giving way to new motives for Black. Following White's lengthy wandering, I believe the best continuation with '7.a7' has been found, after which very complicated positions arise, and Black has to show very precise skills to stay in the game. The '...♗g7' variation became popular, and I must admit I felt proud when the great Vladimir Kramnik used the '...♗g7' variant earlier this year. Certainly, the '...♗a6' variant is another possibility that is currently suffering because of the 'e4 variation', but I think that Black has still some resources available to fight back, after all we are talking about a 'Fighters Repertoire'!

With this book, I wanted to revitalise the Benko and show that, although the computer isn't that happy with Black's positions in certain lines, his resources are impressive, especially in 'THE PRACTICAL GAME', because White will face many difficulties and Black's counter attacks, no matter how well-prepared he is. Our Beloved Benko is still very much ALIVE!

Milos Perunovic, December 2017.

Part I



4th Move Alternatives

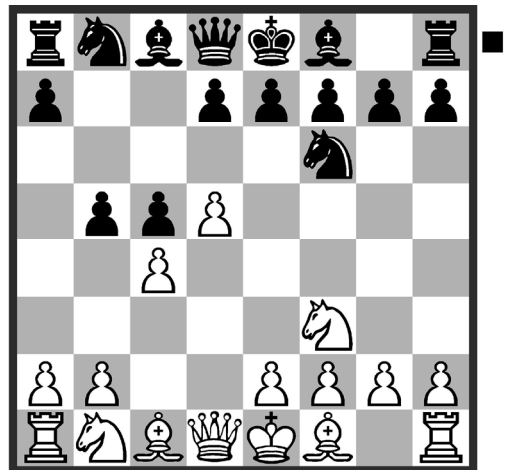
1.d4  f6 2.c4 c5

3.d5 b5





The 4. f3 Variation

1.d4  f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5
4.  f3





Chapter's guide

Chapter 1 – The 4. f3 Variation

1.d4  f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.  f3

a) 4...g6 5.--..... 13

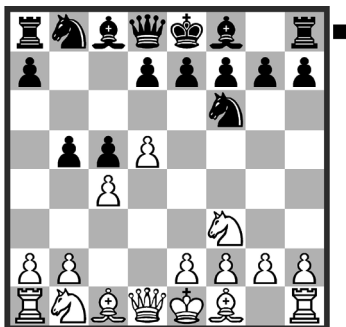
b) 4...g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.  c2..... 15

c) 4...g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.  c3 axb5 7.--..... 20

d) 4...g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.  c3 axb5 7.e4..... 21

a) 4...g6 5.--

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. ♘f3



Position after: 4. ♘f3

White opts for the flexible 4.♘f3. He gives Black the choice which type of position he wants to play. Black has several logical ways to continue. My suggestion is 4...g6. After 4...g6 White can transpose to other lines as well. Other logical continuations for Black are 4...♗b7, 4...bxc4 or 4...b4.

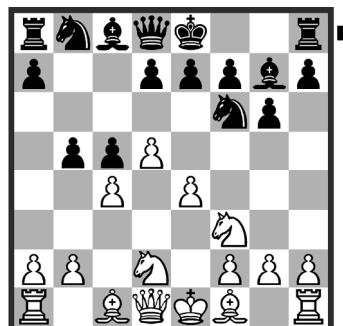
4... g6 5. ♘bd2

A) 5. ♘fd2 ♗g7 6. e4 0-0 7. cxb5 a6 8. ♘c3 e6 9. d6 ♘e8 10. ♘b3 axb5 11. ♘xb5 (11. ♗b5 ♖b6 12. a4 ♘xd6∞; 11. ♘xc5 b4 12. ♘b5 f5) 11... ♘a6 12. ♗c4 ♗b7 13. ♖e2 f5 14. exf5 ♗xf5 15. 0-0 ♖b6 16. ♗d1 ♗d5

B) 5. ♖c2 transposes to chapter 3.

C) 5. a4 transposes to chapter 3.

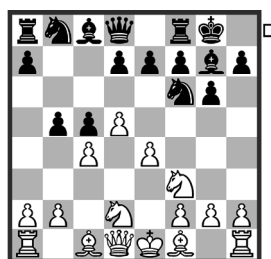
5... ♗g7 6. e4



Position after: 6. e4

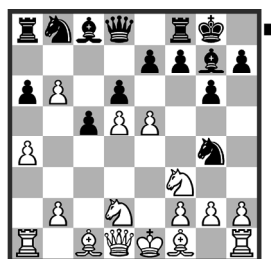
6... bxc4

6... 0-0!? A serious attempt to initiate creative play! Still nobody took any pawn on the queenside!



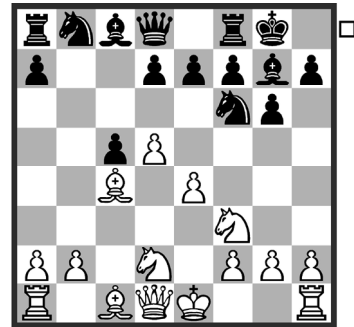
Position after: 6... 0-0!?

A) 7. e5 ♘g4 8. cxb5 a6 9. b6 (9. ♘g5 f5 10. exf6 ♘xf6∞) 9... d6 10. a4



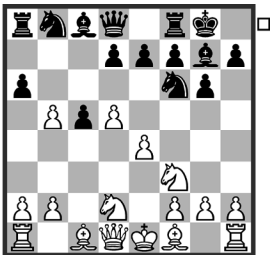
Position after: 10. a4

10... a5! The main idea of this move is to take back the pawn on b6 with the knight. (10... ♖xb6 11. ♘c4 ♗c7 12. exd6 exd6 13. ♙f4 ♜e8+ 14. ♙e2 ♙f8 15. 0-0 ♘f6 16. h3 ♙b7 17. ♘e3 ♘bd7) 11. exd6 (11. ♘c4 ♘d7) 11... exd6 12. ♙b5 ♘d7 13. 0-0 ♘xb6 Black's initiative gives him the advantage.



Position after: 7... 0-0

B) 7. cxb5 a6



Position after: 7... a6

8. a4 (8. bxa6 e6 9. dxe6 fxe6 10. ♙e2 d5 11. 0-0 ♙xa6 Next is ...♘c6. White is stuck with an immobile knight on d2.) 8... ♙b7 9. ♜a3 e6 10. dxe6 fxe6 (10... dxe6!?) 11. ♙d3 axb5 12. axb5 d5 13. exd5 exd5 14. 0-0 ♘bd7

7. ♙xc4 0-0

Now we reached a typical Benko position. It is similar as in the variation with 4. ♘d2. But here, White was not able to execute his main idea with 'b3 and ♙b2'.

He must lose time to play first ♜b1 and then 'b3 and ♙b2'. Meanwhile Black

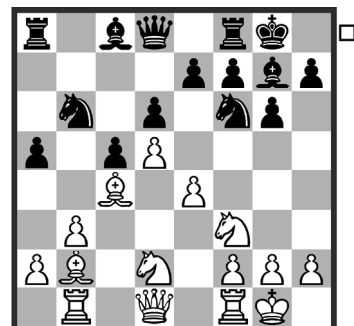
will bring his knight to b6 and his play along the queenside looks more favourable.

8. 0-0 d6

8... ♙b7 Another idea: Black wants to play...e6 instead of ...d6. 9. ♜e1 (9. ♗b3 ♗b6∞ controls d5 and next ...e6) 9... e6 10. dxe6 dxe6 11. ♗e2 (11. e5?! ♘fd7 12. ♙b3 ♗c7 13. ♘c4 ♙d5 ♘ Next is ...♘c6 and ...♘b6.) 11... ♘c6∞

9. ♜b1

9. ♜e1 ♘bd7 10. ♜b1 ♘b6 11. ♙f1 e6 12. dxe6 ♙xe6∞



Position after: 11... a5∞

9... ♘bd7 10. b3 ♘b6 11. ♙b2 a5∞

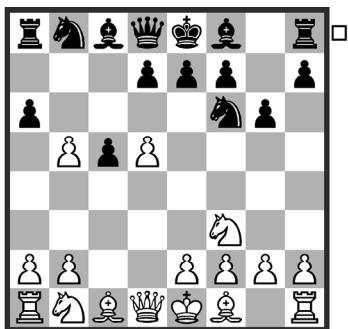
(see diagram previous page)

With the idea ...a4, changing the b-pawns, opening the a-file and next taking the bishop on c4. Black is just more than fine!

b) 4...g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.♙c2

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. ♘f3 g6 5. cxb5 a6

plenty of opportunities to misplay this concrete position.



Position after: 5... a6

7. e4

7. ♙xc5 ♘a6



Position after: 7... ♘a6

6. ♙c2

A) 6. bxa6 ♙g7 transposes to the main line of chapter 8.

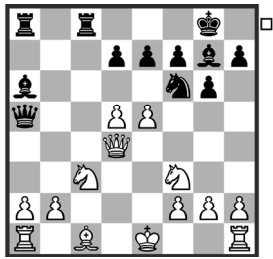
B) 6. e3 ♙g7 transposes to chapter 4.

6... axb5!

This is the most aggressive move. Black can complicate matters, giving White

A) 8. ♙d4 ♙g7 9. e4 ♙b7 10. ♘c3 ♙a5 11. ♙xb5 (11. ♘d2?! 0-0 12. ♘b3 ♙b4♣; 11. ♙d2 b4 12. e5 0-0!♣) 11... 0-0 Black finishes his development, and still is posing White some serious questions: ...♘xd5, ...♘e4, etc. 12. ♙xa6 (12. 0-0 ♘c7♣; 12. ♙d2 ♘xd5 13. ♘xd5 ♙xb5 14. ♙b6 ♙xb6 15. ♘xb6 ♙xe4!?) 16.

♗xa8 ♕xb2 17. ♖d1 ♗xa8) 12... ♕xa6 (12... ♗xe4!?∞ this move will suit the more aggressive player!) 13. e5 ♖fc8!



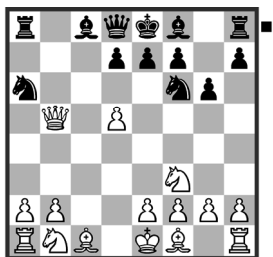
Position after: 13... ♖fc8!

A nice tactical shot! 14. exf6 ♕xf6 15. ♗e5

A1) 15... ♖xc3!? 16. ♗xc3 (16. bxc3 d6 17. f4 ♗c7) 16... ♗xd5 17. ♕f4 ♖c8 18. ♖d1 ♗e4+ 19. ♗e3 ♗b4+ 20. ♗d2 ♗e4+=

A2) 15... d6 16. ♗a4 ♗xa4 17. ♗xa4 ♕b5! 18. ♗c3 (18. ♗b6? ♖xa2! 19. ♖b1 ♖c2) 18... ♕xe5 19. ♗xb5 ♖xa2! 20. ♖b1 ♖b8 21. ♗xd6 exd6=

B) 8. ♗xb5



Position after: 8. ♗xb5

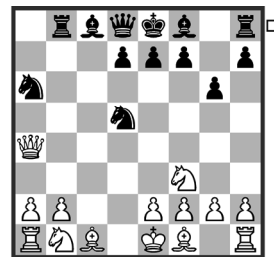
We reached an interesting position. White is three pawns up. On the other hand, Black can finish his development and White's queen is still not out of the woods yet.

B1) 8... ♕g7 9. ♗c3 0-0 10. e4 d6 11. ♕e3 ♕d7 (11... ♖b8!?∞) 12. ♗d3 ♗a5 13. ♗d2 ♗g4∞

B2) 8... ♖b8

B2.1) 9. ♗d3 ♗b4 10. ♗d1 ♗a5 11. ♗c3 (11. ♕d2 ♗e4 12. ♗c3 ♗xd2 13. ♗xd2 ♕g7∞ the threat being ...♗c2) 11... ♗bxd5∞ with more than ample play!

B2.2) 9. ♗a4 ♗xd5



Position after: 9... ♗xd5

B2.2a) 10. e4 ♗c7! 11. ♗d1 (11. ♕d2?! ♗db4∞; 11. ♗a3 ♖b4 12. ♗d1 ♖xe4+ 13. ♕e2 ♗f4 14. ♕xf4 ♗xf4∞) 11... ♗db4 12. ♗a3 ♕g7 13. ♕e2 ♕b7 14. 0-0 ♕xe4 15. ♗b5 ♗c6∞

B2.2b) 10. ♗d4 ♗f6 11. ♗c3 ♕g7∞