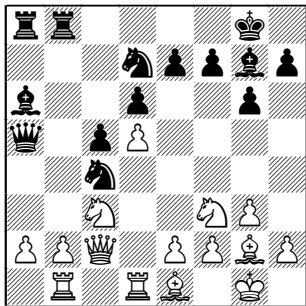


Introduction

In this book I will try to teach you how to put Black into a positional squeeze in the most popular gambits against 1.d4.

Remember the old aphorism that the best way of meeting a gambit is accepting it? This may be true, but only for absolutely incorrect systems, such as 1.d4 e5 2.dxe5 d6? Of course, here we take everything and sail forth to converting our material advantage. But look at another example:

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6.♘c3 ♙xa6 7.♘f3 d6 8.g3 ♙g7 9.♙g2 ♘bd7 10.♖b1 ♔a5 11.0-0 0-0 12.♔c2 ♘b6 13.♘d1 ♘fd7 14.♙d2 ♘c4 15.♙e1 ♖fb8, Banikas-Tregubov, Kallithea 2009:



Would you really go for this position as White if you did not know that it was assessed as one of the

newest and most sophisticated set-ups against the Benko?

White is a pawn up, but all his pieces are huddled on the first two ranks. Both rooks are humble defenders of the weak pawns. One imprecise move, and White's position will crumble down. Common sense suggests that unless White plays like a machine, he should better seek another approach in that opening.

I do not want to get involved into theoretical disputes over the Benko Accepted. I only claim that White's choice is dubious from practical point of view. The more mistakes you usually commit in your games, the more dangerous it is.

I think that instead of trying to refute those gambits by clutching to an extra pawn, it is better to play good positional chess, occupy the centre, and deny any counterplay to the opponent.

Now comes my strongest argument in favour of the Positional approach: it allows to greatly decrease the role of computer assisted home analysis. Such considerations will soon become a leading factor in the process of constructing a repertoire.

The game of chess has reached a major crossroads in its existence.

Foreword

Due to the rising of the invincible computer monsters, it will either disappear, as it has happened with checkers, or it will branch to different formats: computer chess and human chess. Of course, nothing would stop human players to use a bunch of engines for home preparation. Thus, a lot of more or less forced variations and even whole sharp systems will simply vanish from practice since they will be deeply analysed to finite evaluations. It would be at least impractical to choose sharp concrete variations against weaker players because of the risk of stumbling into a home made theoretical mine.

Therefore, in order to survive the opening, the better players would have to adopt a solid positional approach based on understanding. In such circumstances, computers are not too helpful because of the great numbers of branches of similar worth.

Avoiding home preparation is only one part of the problem. The more important task is how to outplay the opponent.

Unlike computers, humans cannot always seek for the best move, executing tons of calculations. They must be saving time and energy so they rely on typical plans, general principles and also involve some degree of prophylaxis in their decisions. When we play over the board, we should always be aware that we are prone to mistakes. By accepting the gambits, we put ourselves in a precarious situation where the price

of every move is higher than normal. When we are on the defensive, such mistakes would be often decisive. It would be of little consolation that in the postmortem we could claim an advantage in the form of an extra pawn, for example.

My task in this book will be to help you build a viable, stable and durable repertoire against the major gambits. Note that the systems I propose are safer and much easier to play, but they are in no way inferior to any other. For instance, after 1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.♘f3 g6 5.cxb5 a6, the move 6.b6 fares the decent 58% while 6.bxa6 yields only 48%. Two moves earlier, 4.♘f3 achieves 60% to only 52% for 4.cxb5.

My repertoire does not require a lot of memorising since the main lines do not feature an all-in clash. Both sides can choose plenty of different move orders so I focus on plans and ideas. I also explain what to do after the opening, which pieces to exchange and which ones to cherish. And, of course, I provide a full, step by step, branch by branch theoretical coverage in the “Step by Step” chapters.

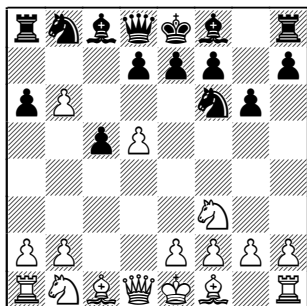
You will be surprised how easily it could be to play against those gambits if one knows what to do.

Read first the “Main Ideas” chapters! They give explanations which you will not find in the “Step by Step” coverage.

Kiril Georgiev
2010

Part 1

Main Ideas



1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.Bf3 g6 5.cxb5
a6 6.b6

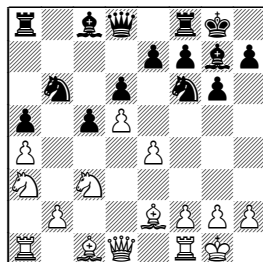
Objectives and Move Order

The Benko is a demanding opening. It is highly unbalanced strategically, and one cannot treat it by general considerations. The piercing dark-squared bishop on the h8-a1 diagonal and the open b-file create tons of tactics. The missing c4-pawn turns White's centre unstable and vulnerable to undermining by ...f7-f5 or ...e6. That's why our first tasks will be quick development and consolidation. Next, we should restrict Black's counterplay by imposing blockade on the squares c4 and b5 (or b6). Only when we get a firm grip on the position, could we think about launching a kingside attack.

Here are two model games of the most devoted fan of the Benko Declined lately, V.Milov, which best illustrate White's strategy:

V.Milov–Rincon Bascon Dos Hermanas 2006

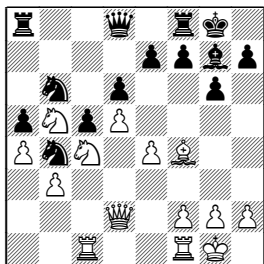
1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.Bf3
g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.b6 d6 7.Bc3 Bg7 8.e4
0-0 9.a4 Bxb6 10.Bd2 Bbd7 11.Bxe2
a5 12.Bc4 Bb8 13.0-0 Bb6 14.Ba3



Stage 1 is completed. White has castled, c4 is under control.

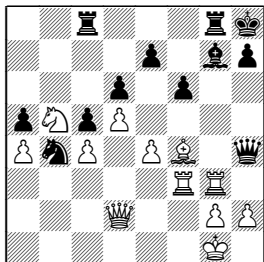
14...Be8 15.Bf4 Bc7 16.Rc1 Ba6
17.Bxa6 Bxa6 18.b3 Bd7 19.Bc4
Bb4 20.Bd2 Bb6 21.Bb5

Part 1



Stage 2 is over as well. Black is deprived of any counterplay. The c4-square is blockaded, the b-file is plugged. We'll be often observing Black in such a predicament. His knight on b4 is a pathetic sight. It spent 5 moves to arrive there, where it is totally useless. White is finally ready for the kingside assault.

21...♖xc4 22.bxc4 ♖d7 23.♖fe1 f6 24.♔g3 g5 25.f4 gxf4 26.♔xf4 ♖ac8 27.♖c3 ♖h8 28.♖h3 ♖g4 29.♖g3 ♖h4 30.♖f1 ♖g8 31.♖ff3



White is already winning, seemingly without having calculated a single variation. His play has been purposeful, with a clear plan.

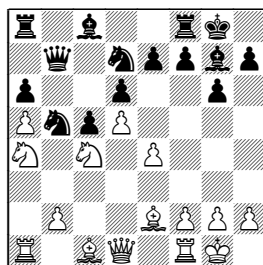
31...f5 32.exf5 ♖f6 33.♔g5 ♖f8 34.♖h3 ♔f6 35.♖xh7+! ♖xh7 36.♖h3+ ♖g7 37.♔h6+ ♖f7 38.♔xf8 ♖cx8 39.♔c7 ♖h8 40.♖xh8 ♖xh8 41.♖e2 ♔d4+ 42.♖h1 ♔e5 43.g3 ♖h6 44.♔g2 ♖f6 45.h3 ♖xf5 46.♖g4+

♔f6 47.♖e6+ ♖g7 48.♖xe7+ ♖g8 49.♔e6 ♖g6 50.g4 ♔d3 51.♖f8+ ♖h7 52.♖f5 ♔e1+ 1-0

In the next game, Black lets White's a-pawn to a5. Thus he obtains the b5-square for his minor pieces, but the overall picture is similar. White bars the b-file with a knight at b6, instead of b5:

V.Milov–Abrahamyan Minneapolis 2005

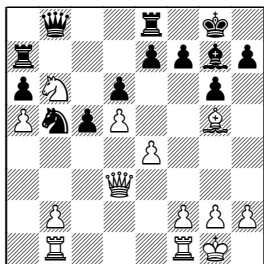
1.d4 ♔f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.♔f3 g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.b6 d6 7.♔c3 ♔bd7 8.e4 ♔g7 9.a4 ♖xb6 10.a5 ♖b4 11.♔d2 0-0 12.♔e2 ♔e8 13.0-0 ♔c7 14.♔c4 ♖b7 15.♔a4 ♔b5



Compared to the first diagram from the previous page, White's pieces on the queenside are shifted forward. This spatial advantage enables another good plan for White. Besides attacking the black king, he can also open up the left wing by b2-b4. This is even the main plan in the structures with a white pawn on a5.

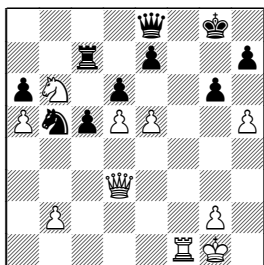
16.♔ab6 ♔xb6 17.♔xb6 ♖a7 18.♖b1 ♔d7 19.♔g5 ♖e8 20.♖d2 ♔d4 21.♔c4 ♔b5 22.♖d3 ♔xc4 23.♖xc4 ♔b5 24.♖d3 ♖b8

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.♗f3 g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.b6



Here b2-b4 gives a stable edge, but Milov prefers the kingside attack:

25.f4 ♖c7 26.f5! ♗d4 27.♖bc1 ♕e5 28.♕f4 ♕xf4 29.♖xf4 ♖f8 30.fxg6 fxg6 31.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 32.♖f1 ♖b8 33.h4 ♗b5 34.h5 ♖e8 35.e5!



During the last 10 moves Milov demonstrated a nearly full set of White's most important techniques in the kingside attack: he began with f4-f5, then came the turn of the h-pawn, while finally e4-e5 serves as the *coup de grâce*.

35...dxe5 36.♖g3 ♗d6 37.♖xe5 gxh5 38.♖f3 h4 39.♖g5+ ♔h8 40.♖h6 ♗f7 41.♖h5 ♔g8 42.♖xh4 ♖b7 43.♖g4+ ♔h8 44.♖h5 e5 45.d6 e4 46.♖f1 1-0

White deals the decisive blow nearly always on the right wing, but that happens in deep middlegame.

In the opening, we have other concerns. Let us consider them in turn.

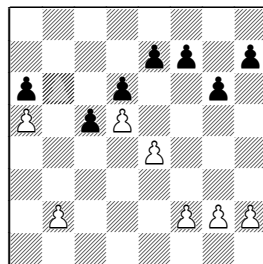
Our primary task in the opening after 1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 will be quick development.

For that, we need to achieve e2-e4.

Recently 4.♖c2 has come into fashion, but this move removes the support for our main trump, the d5-pawn. That offers Black the possibility of open up the centre by ...e6 which results in very sharp play and many forced variations. Another common sense argument against this move is that the queen might turn misplaced on c2. Still, in Part 2 I examine shortly the 4.♖c2 system which could be a solid alternative to our main repertoire.

In many cases the main ideas of the Positional Benko with b6 are applicable to that system, too.

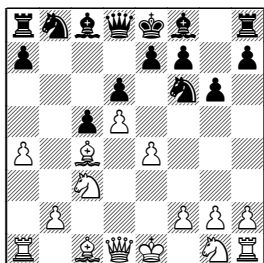
The most natural way to prepare e2-e4 is 4.♗c3, but it does not work due to 4...b4. Obviously, we must define the situation on the queenside first. Our aim is to obtain this pawn structure:



Note that we want it WITH the

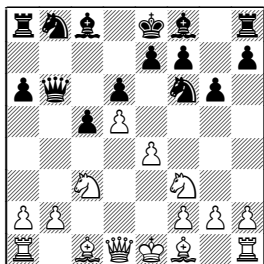
a6-pawn, in order to keep the black heavy pieces shut behind it. Before the b6-system became popular, White often tried to achieve that by immediately attacking the b5-pawn with 4.a4 bxc4 5.♖c3 d6 6.e4 g6 7.♗xc4

Diagram 1



Let us compare this position with the next one (which arises after 1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.♖f3 g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.b6 ♗xb6 7.♖c3 d6 8.e4):

Diagram 2



On Diagram 2, the knight is on f3. This is compensated in the first case by the move a4 which is indispensable anyway. In Diagram 1, White has an extra move – ♗c4, but this is hardly the best square for the bishop since it deprives the f3-knight of its ideal stand. Moreover,

on ...♗a6 White has nothing better, but spend a tempo on ♗b5 which suggests that we can hardly claim a clear extra tempo up in comparison to Diagram 2.

In Diagram 2 Black has 2 extra moves – ...♗b6 and ...a6. And here is the big catch. **The pawn on a6 is a horrible “asset”.** It deprives Black’s minor pieces of the a6-square. It is also a target in many variations where White fixes it by a2-a4-a5. Finally, the b6-square is weakened and, as we saw in game 2 V.Milov-Abrahamyan, White often plants there a knight.

Summarising: Diagram 2 shows a better version of the same pawn structure.

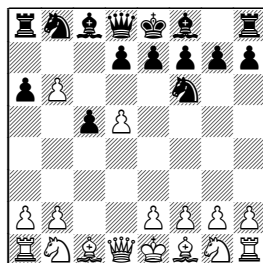
So we reject 4.a4 and confine our choice to:

1. 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6, or
2. 4.♖f3 g6 (4...d6) 5.cxb5 a6 6.b6.

Both move orders are possible and you can vary them, but I recommend the latter one.

Let us consider the pros and cons.

1. 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6

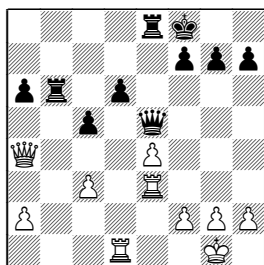


1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.♘f3 g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.b6

Pros: This is the most straightforward path to the desired structure. Black cannot evade it by 4...b4.

Cons: Black can attack the centre by 5...e6. That brings about independent pawn structures so I devoted a separate part of the book to them. The learning overhead of this variation is relatively small, but White's choice is very limited. Black can drag us more or less forcedly into a pretty dry heavy pieces middlegame with meager winning chances for White. If you face a strong opponent or prefer to minimise risk, that is a perfect choice.

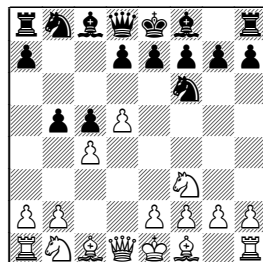
The critical line goes 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6 e6 6.♘c3 ♘xd5 7.♘xd5 exd5 8.♙xd5 ♘c6 9.♘f3 ♞b8 10.e4 ♙e7 11.♙d2 0-0 12.♙c4 ♞xb6 13.♙c3 d6 14.0-0 ♙e6 15.♙d3 ♙xc4 16.♙xc4 ♙f6 when a lot of variations lead to a complete extermination of the minor pieces, e.g. 17.♞ad1 ♙xc3 18.bxc3 ♙f6 19.♞d3 ♞e8 20.♙a4 ♔f8 21.♞fd1 ♘e5 22.♘xe5 ♙xe5 23.♞e3



See **game 14 Kuljasevic-Andrews**, USA tt ICC, 2007 (p.120). White has the draw in the pocket

and he exerts lasting pressure, but I think that the other move order leads to more fresh positions:

2. 4.♘f3



Pros: This is a flexible move which keeps all options open. The majority of games feature 4...g6 or 4...d6 when we reach the b6 system by 5.cxb5 a6 6.b6. That way we sidestep the variations with 4...e6.

Cons: The only drawback I can see is the necessity of learning two more systems as Black can lead the game into closed strategic positions by 4...b4 or initiate sharp complications by 4...♙b7. I consider them in Part 2. However, these options should not be of particular concern to us since play is rich and promising for White. I often meet in chess literature the old myth that 4...♙b7 allegedly gives Black sufficient counterplay. Modern practice and my analyses do not confirm that at all. In fact, at higher level, very few players opt lately for 4...♙b7 and they are usually crushed in the opening.

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