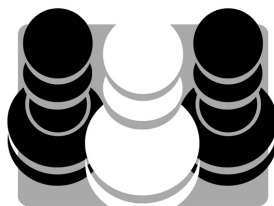


The Alterman Gambit Guide

Black Gambits 1

By
Boris Alterman



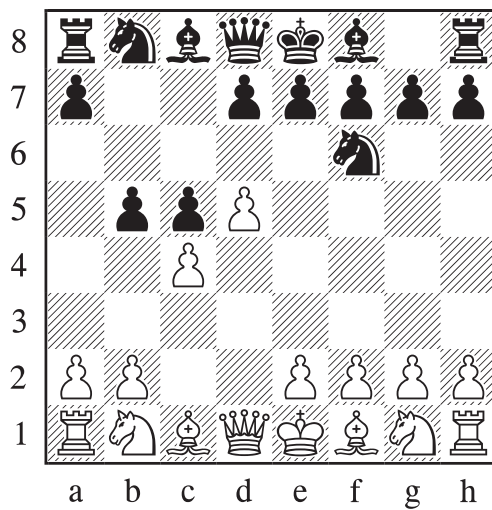
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Chapter 1

The Benko Gambit



1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5

The Benko Gambit was one of my favorite openings as a junior. I loved to fianchetto my bishop on g7 (my favorite opening against 1.e4 was the Sicilian Dragon) and Black's middlegame strategy was easy to understand yet highly effective. Being a kid you almost never worry about a small material sacrifice – getting active play for your pieces is much more important! Fortunately the gambit is good enough for adults as well...

Game 1 NN – Alterman Ukraine 1984

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5

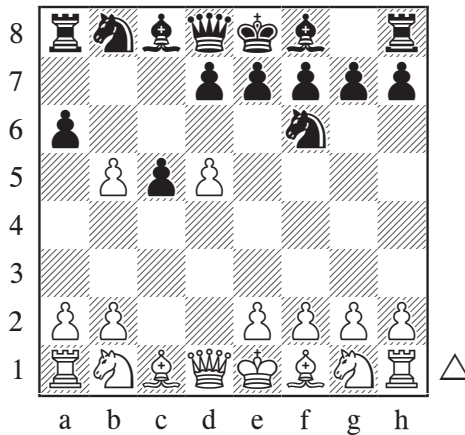
The present game was one of my first experiences with the Benko Gambit; prior to this event, I had mainly tested it in blitz games.

4.cxb5

This game was played in the first round of the National School Team Championship, where the level of the players on the top board was usually close to the first or second category level (approximately 1800-2000). Despite my opponent being at a decent level for his age, it soon became obvious that he had no clue about how to meet my chosen opening.

White can hardly contemplate 4.♘c3? as 4...b4 makes the knight look silly, for instance 5.♘b1 d6 6.♘f3 g6 7.g3 ♗g7 with a fine position for Black.

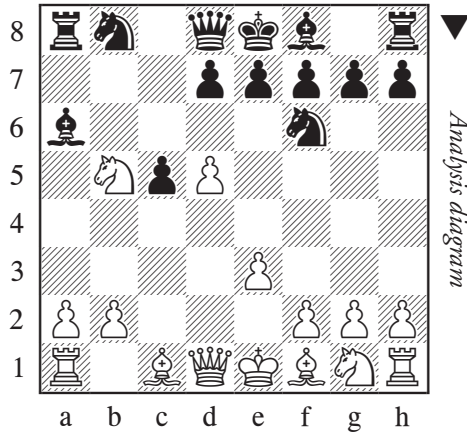
4...a6



5.e3

After a few minutes of thinking White decides to protect the pawn on b5. Instead 5.bxa6 is the main line, and White can also decline the gambit with 5.b6.

Here is an example of disastrous opening play from White: 5.♘c3 axb5 6.♘xb5 (The alternative 6.e4 will be considered in the final section of the chapter.) 6...♗a6 7.e3?? (White had to play 7.♘c3 transposing to the main line.)



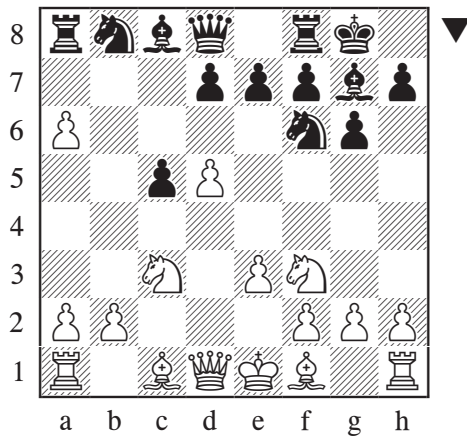
7...♙xb5! 0–1 Kirchoff – Foldi, Dortmund 1986. White resigned as he will lose a piece due to the queen check on a5.

5...g6

I decided to continue with the normal development, waiting for White to capture on a6 one day...

6.♘f3 ♗g7 7.♘c3 0–0 8.bxa6?!

This came as a pleasant surprise. Later I discovered that the best response was 8.a4!, strengthening White’s position on the queenside and refusing to gift the opponent a tempo. See Game 9 for further details on this.



8...d6!

This accurate move saves valuable time. The immediate 8...♙xa6 would have allowed 9.♙xa6 when White has achieved a minor victory, having expended only a single tempo exchanging bishops.

9.♙e2

Allowing Black to justify his idea, but it was hard to suggest a more constructive move.

9... ♖xa6

Perfect timing!

10. ♖xa6?!

This loses additional time. White should have castled instead.

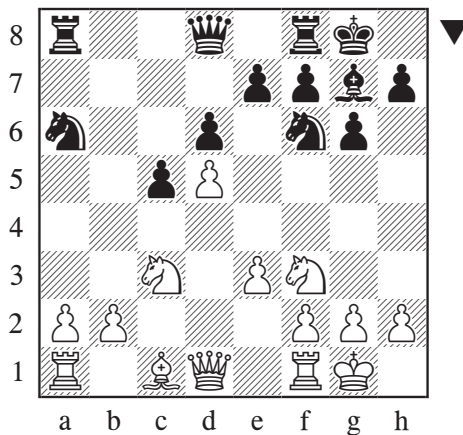
10... ♞xa6!

It was also possible to capture on a6 with the rook and put the knight on d7. From there one possible plan involves ... ♞g4 and ... ♞ge5, intending to jump to c4 or d3 later. Alternatively the knight may go to b6 and later c4 or a4.

I knew about these plans, but correctly decided to accelerate my development by taking on a6 with the knight. Later this piece can head towards the d3-square via b4 or c5, while the other knight can go to d7 and later b6 or e5.

11.0-0

White finishes his kingside development. It seems like his position is okay, but Black's next move highlights his problems.

**11... ♜b6!**

Now White will have a hard time developing his queenside pieces.

12. ♞e2

Covering the b2-pawn and preparing to complete development with e4 and ♜f4.

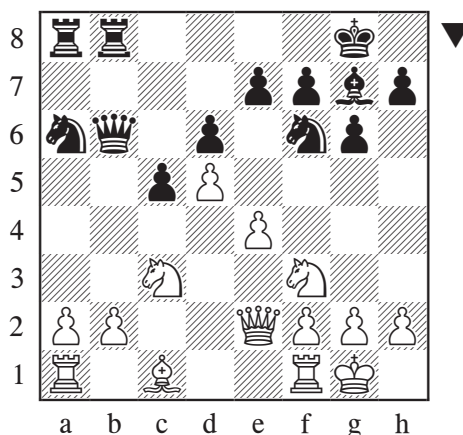
12.b3 could be met by 12... ♞e4 13. ♞a4 ♜b7 14. ♜b2 ♜xb2 15. ♞xb2 ♞b4! when Black wins the d5-pawn while keeping a huge positional advantage.

12... ♜fb8

Another standard idea: the rook comes to the open file and increases the pressure on the b2-pawn.

13.e4

White's only chance for active play is in the center.



13...♖d7!

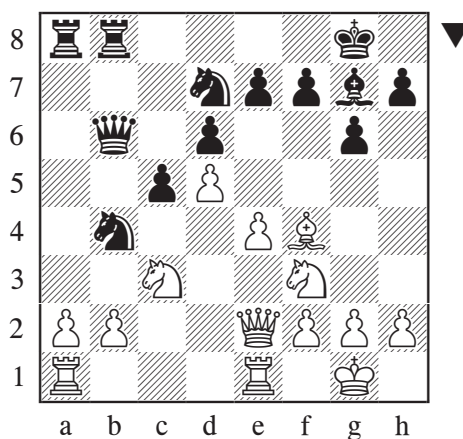
Another important move. Black prevents e5 and opens the long diagonal for his bishop.

14.♗e1

Since the bishop is unable to leave the c1-square, White develops his rook.

14...♖b4 15.♙f4?

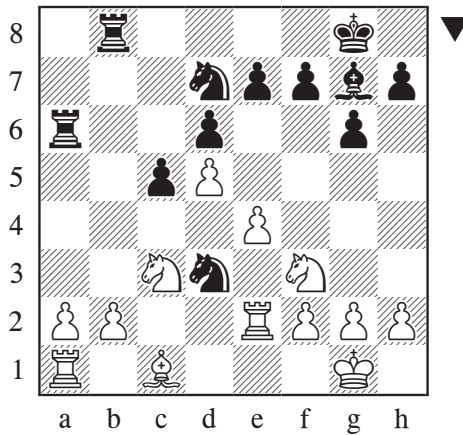
White totally overlooks the power of Black's next move. 15.♙g5!? was better, although even here Black can proceed in the same way as in the game, as capturing on e7 would lead to the loss of the white bishop after ...f6.



15...♙a6!

This came as a great surprise for my opponent. The idea of exchanging queens while a pawn down might seem counterintuitive, but in fact it makes perfect sense. After the queen trade White loses all hope of any meaningful counterplay in the center or on the kingside. Meanwhile Black's queenside assault is in no way diminished. The weakness of the d3-square only adds to White's troubles, especially in view of the unfortunate position of his bishop.

16.♙xa6 ♖xa6 17.♗e2 ♖d3 18.♙c1

**18...c4!**

White remains a pawn up, but his pieces are virtually paralyzed. With his last move Black cements the outpost on d3 and prepares to bring the other knight into the attack.

19.♔f1 ♖7c5

Black has achieved everything he could have wished for, and the game is almost over.

20.♝b1?

A blunder, but there was no good defense against ...♞b3.

20...♙xc3**0-1**

I am glad to have won so thematically in one of my first serious games with the Benko Gambit. The above game illustrated several key maneuvers and ideas.

What we have learned:

- ❖ After the moves cxb5 and ...a6, tension may occur between the pawns on b5 and a6. This may continue for several moves as neither side wishes to facilitate the opponent's development by capturing prematurely.
- ❖ Usually the b8-knight will go to d7, but occasionally it does better to move to a6, as in the above game.
- ❖ In the standard Benko Gambit Accepted structure, Black can obtain ongoing queenside pressure with ...♝b6 (or ...♝a5) followed by ...♞fb8.
- ❖ A timely ...♞f6-d7 retreat can help to take control over the e5-square, while preparing to deploy the knight on the queenside.
- ❖ A queen maneuver to a6 can be useful for trading queens and/or attacking the light squares.
- ❖ Black's compensation often persists after – and may even be intensified by – a queen exchange.
- ❖ The ...c5-c4 advance can be used in conjunction with ...♞d7-c5 to activate the d7-knight while clamping down on the d3-square. (It is important that White cannot profitably use the d4-square for his pieces.)