



## COLUMNISTS

**Checkpoint**

Carsten Hansen

**Reviewed this month:*****Offbeat King's Indian***

by Krzysztof Panczyk

***Starting Out: The Grünfeld***

by Jacob Aagaard

***The Dynamic Reti***

by Nigel Davies

***The Benko Gambit Revealed***

by Neil McDonald

**Crazy about Fianchettoes  
Part II**

This month's column continues reviewing books that feature a fianchetto opening. I have played all of these openings with some regularity, except the Grünfeld, which has never appealed to me despite being perfectly playable. There is something that bothers me about the broad center found in the Exchange Variation (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3). Theoretically, Black is doing reasonably well, despite the center pawns, so it must be a matter of taste and a preference for playing with the central pawns rather than against them.

*Offbeat King's Indian* by Krzysztof Panczyk and Jacek Ilczuk, 2004 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 176 pp., \$19.95

Over the years the King's Indian Defence (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7) has ridden a roller coaster ride of popularity. Kasparov's endorsement of it prompted the latest peak, with most of the young up-and-coming players following suit. But after Kramnik defeated him a couple of times, he switched to the Nimzo-Indian, Queen's Gambit Accepted, and other more solid openings. Nowadays it is has all but been abandoned, one of its remaining adherents is the boy from Baku, Teimur Radjabov, who has achieved decent results.



All this aside, it seems like most of the decent books on the King's Indian have either focused on the main lines such as the Classical and the Fianchetto variations, or have tried to fit everything into one volume, or have specialized in just one variation. So a general guidebook dedicated to the rare or offbeat lines against the King's Indian seems warranted. Therefore I anticipated receiving the present book with quiet excitement, yet after viewing the contents my hopes were crushed:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6**
- 1 5 Nge2 (31 pages)
- 2 5 Bd3 (32 pages)
- 3 Makogonov System: 5 h3 (33 pages)
- 4 Averbakh System without ...c7-c5: 5 Be2 0-0 6 Bg5 (43 pages)
- 5 Averbakh System with ...c7-c5: 5 Be2 0-0 6 Bg5 (29 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

I had a hard time not abandoning this book early on. What happened to the Smyslov Variation (4 Bg5 or 4 Nf3 followed by 5 Bg5), and the Bf4-system, or the systems where Black avoids ...d6, but plays ...c6 followed by ...d5, or so many other offbeat lines that deserve to be discussed? Why are there only five chapters, since after 4 e4 there are numerous lesser lines that could have been included? Moreover, the coverage of the Averbakh System, which decidedly is a main line, was the straw that broke the camel's back. Not only is it included; it takes up over 40% of the book and renders its title farcical.

I became aggravated again upon realizing that the Bibliography lists only four titles: ECO E from 1998, a Polish book from 1987, and two books from 1980 by Geller and Gufeld respectively. This is completely unimpressive, particularly since the publisher released a book in 2000 exclusively focused on 5 Nge2. You would think that if the authors didn't have the book, the publisher would have supplied it. There are also many other recent KID titles that could have been used as reference works.

Fortunately that's the end of the bad news. The other chapters seem to have covered the necessary points quite well. The theoretical coverage is generally very good with plenty of original analysis and new ideas. As is usual for this series from Everyman, the presentation is based on complete games and the authors put a great deal of emphasis on the first 25 moves or so, then the annotations diminish considerably; just as it should for an opening book. I will conclude with a game from the book, sans



[sic] by Everyman Chess. These books were originally meant to target beginners and less experienced club players who wanted to obtain some kind of overview of the opening, but it has turned out that even very strong players have found this series beneficial. We all need a well-explained and guided introduction when we begin to study a new opening, and seasoned professionals can be on the international tournament circuit for years without finding the time to delve deeply into the basics of a particular opening. A main reason for this is that many players now prepare a new opening for each game, with the hope of catching their opponents off guard. In this way true depth is seldom obtained.”

And he continues:


“What this book is trying to do is to give you a good introduction to what the Grünfeld Defence is all about, what lines there are and how they have been played. This is not a standard theoretical work as much as it is an introduction, both historically and theoretically. In the choice of games a great emphasis has been paid to the instructive and entertainment value rather than whether the actual line is completely critical. The reason for these choices are simple: theory will continue to move fast and evaluations change from year to year, but the typical concepts of the opening change more slowly and the glory of brilliant games will never fade. The idea is that this book will also make sense in five years time.”

It sounds like a very noble cause, so let’s see how he has divided the material:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Preface (2 pages)
- Introduction (8 pages)
- 1 Classical Exchange: Main Lines (31 pages)
- 2 Classical Exchange: Minor Lines (25 pages)
- 3 Modern Exchange Variation: 8 Rb1 (19 pages)
- 4 Modern Exchange Variation: Other Lines (21 pages)
- 5 The Russian System (26 pages)
- 6 Bf4 and Bg5 Systems (18 pages)
- 7 Other White Systems (18 pages)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

I was somewhat surprised that the Fianchetto variation didn’t have a chapter of its own, but it receives due attention in chapter seven. Overall, Aagaard has done extremely well, the material was well-chosen and conveys what needs to be known. I also found the balance between explanations and variations very pleasant and conducive to learning and understanding. This book comes as a blessing; for you actually learn something new on every page.

I highly recommend this book. It is, as promised, a guide for all levels of players and is not oversaturated with theory. In fact it often seems like he is trying to sneak in some theoretical coverage, but it is so sparse that you feel obligated to memorize everything, one line after another.

My assessment of this book: 

## Order *Starting Out: The Grünfeld* by Jacob Aagaard

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*The Dynamic Reti* by Nigel Davies, 2004 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 144 pp., \$19.95

This book presents a repertoire for White based on the Reti after 1 Nf3. Although it can easily transpose to other openings, let's see how Davies presents it:



- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- 1 Closed Reti (1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Be7) (16 pages)
- 2 Open Reti (1 Nf3 d5 2 c5 e6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 dxc4 or 3...dxc4) (10 pages)
- 3 Reti Slav (1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6) (17 pages)
- 4 Reti Benoni (1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4) (13 pages)
- 5 Reti Accepted (1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 dxc4) (8 pages)
- 6 Symmetrical English: 2...Nc6 or 2...g6 (1 Nf3 c5 2 c4 Nc6 or 2...g6) (15 pages)
- 7 Symmetrical English: 2...Nf6 (1 Nf3 c5 2 c4 Nf6) (15 pages)
- 8 Reti King's Indian (1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 b4) (14 pages)
- 9 Reti Dutch (1 Nf3 f5) (12 pages)
- 10 Others (1 Nf3 g6 or 1...d6 or 1...Nc6) (16 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

Generally, it is hard to have any objections because essentially everything stays within the same range of openings. The Reti lines and the transpositions to the English Opening are inevitable, but in the last chapter there are some curveballs. After 1 Nf3 g6, Davies suggests that White continue with 2 e4 Bg7 3 d4 d6 4 Nc3, which is a regular Pirc Defence. This is miles from the rest of the repertoire, and although he makes an excellent case for White, you would think he could have found something somewhat more similar.

Davies emphasizes understanding the positions rather than memorizing reams of theory, which has been cut down to the bare necessities. He has the ability to make the reader understand why the openings were chosen and how they lead to typical positions where the standard plans are easy to follow and similarly easy to execute. Few authors can accomplish this as consistently as Davies does.

If you are looking for a new repertoire as White and you don't want to invest lots of time studying theory, then this book could easily be for you.

My assessment of this book: 

## Order *The Dynamic Reti* by Nigel Davies

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*The Benko Gambit Revealed* by Neil McDonald, 2003 Batsford B.T., Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 144 pp., \$21.95

English Grandmaster Neil McDonald has been one of the more productive writers over the last few years; I have eleven of his books myself. Many of them have been of reasonably good quality, with a few lemons in the mix.

The ...*Revealed* series is the poorer cousin to the popular *Starting Out*...series from Everyman Chess. The idea is to give players a basic introduction to an opening by presenting some games, discussing basic strategy, and reviewing some of the existing theory.

Let's look at the contents:

- Introduction (1 page)
- First Moves (11 pages)
- Heroes and Zeros (23 pages)
- Strategy in the Benko (57 pages)
- What's Hot? (58 pages)
- Benko Tricks and Traps (26 pages)
- Test Positions (8 pages)
- Solutions (14 pages)
- Details (17 pages)
- Before the Fight (2 pages)
- Bibliography (2 pages)

This looks reasonable enough, but many pages are so loaded with diagrams, in one column format, that there is little room for anything else. This leaves a lot of white space and consequently, this book is a very quick read. I got through the first 70 pages during a 45-minute lunch break – while eating at the same time.

McDonald sums up the contents in the very brief introduction:

“This book is also going to be something of a roller coaster ride. Reading about the heroes of the Benko will send you away with a warm glow thinking that you have discovered an opening that wins every time against 1 d4. After that the Strategy chapter will bring you down to earth as you'll see that White actually has his chances too. Then in 'What's Hot' we'll examine the most promising recent lines for both White and Black. The Tricks and Traps chapter in essence shows how not to play the Benko as Black, but the Test Positions section, with its emphasis on Black's dynamism, gives you the chance to redress the balance. Finally the Details chapter gives an objective summary of





the current state of Benko theory.”

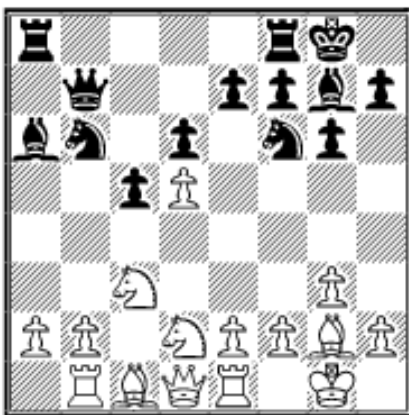
Despite my reservations, the book is very good reading. And although McDonald does not play the Benko as Black, he gives the reader an excellent introduction to this opening. The material is well-selected with good examples and easy-to-understand explanations of the typical ideas and strategies in the different variations. The opening concepts are presented in such a way that you feel as if you are ready to play the opening upon completion of the book; that in itself is quite an accomplishment.

Let's look at an annotated game from the 'Heros and Zeros' chapter. Oddly this chapter includes the game Nimzowitsch-Capablanca, St. Petersburg 1914, which definitely didn't feature the Benko Gambit, but nonetheless showed some ideas that are akin to it.

### V. Hort - L. Alburt

Decin 1977

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 Nf3 d6 8 g3 Bg7 9 Bg2 Nbd7 10 0-0 Nb6 11 Re1 0-0 12 Nd2 Qc7 13 Rb1 Qb7!?**



A courageous move. It isn't often that Black plans to snatch the d5 pawn from under the nose of the bishop on g2.

**14 b3**

Hort can't quite believe that Alburt really intends to take on d5 as it would leave the black queen and the rook on a8 very awkwardly placed. However, as Steinitz once remarked 'a centre pawn ahead is worth a little trouble.'

**14...Nfxd5!**

A very useful pawn to grab, but what about

the pin on the black queen? Well, there isn't going to be any pin!

**15 Nxd5 Nxd5 16 Nf1**

No doubt expecting 16...e6 when 17 Ne3 Nxe3 18 Bxe3 d5 19 Bxc5 would be very nice for White, but there is another surprise awaiting Hort. [CH: Here there is another diagram.]

**16...Nc3!!**

An excellent positional sacrifice of the queen.

**17 Bxb7 Bxb7!**

And not the feeble 17...Nxd1 when 18 Bxa8 Nc3 19 Be4 Nxe4 20 Bb2 would be a 'clean' way for White to be the exchange up in the endgame.

**18 Qd3**

No matter how White plays the knight fork will ensure that Black picks up a rook as well as a bishop for the queen.

**18...Be4 19 Qe3 Bd4 20 Qh6 Bxb1 21 a3 Ba2**

In return for the queen, Black has a rook and a bishop. This isn't quite enough materially speaking, but he has enormous positional plusses: an active knight and strong bishop pair, and targets for his rooks on a3 and b3. It is also very important than [sic] he has a very solid pawn chain to keep out the white queen.

There is only one word of warning necessary for Black to chop up the white

queenside, but he must remember that committing so many pieces to the far side of the board leaves his king vulnerable to a sudden attack. Here for example if the white knight were on f3 rather than f1, Black would have to resign immediately after 1 Ng5. Of course this is no more than a fairy tale, but should Black play with insufficient energy then White can build up an attack with Nd2, Nf3, Qh4, Bh6 and Ng5.

However, this isn't going to be any passive defence from Black. Alburt has correctly judged the time factor and concluded that White will be unable to bring enough force to bear on his kingside before he has broken through on the queenside. This means that White's pieces will be tied to defensive duty and therefore unable to coordinate their action in an attack.

### **22 Nd2 Rfb8**

The black pieces are now all beautifully coordinated whereas the white pieces, apart from the queen, are all tied to the defence of pawns: the rook must defend e2, the bishop on a3 and the knight b3. [CH: here is another diagram.]

### **23 b4**

As both the a and b pawn are ultimately doomed, Hort decides to make the best deal possible by exchanging them for the c5 pawn. Strategically speaking this is a good idea as it prevents Black acquiring a passed pawn on c5, but unfortunately the pressure from the black pieces will be quite suffocating.

### **23...cxb4 24 axb4 Rxb4 25 Nf3 Bg7 26 Qh3 Be6!**

Now the poor white queen is driven all the way back to f1.

### **27 Qf1 Bc4 28 Kg2**

The white king moves out of the way to allow the knight to retreat to g1 to help defend e2.

### **28...Ra1 29 Ng1 Rbb1**

The black rooks have migrated across the board from a8 and b8 to a1 and b1.

### **30 Kh3**

A quite ridiculous position in which the white king is the only piece that can be moved without dropping material.

### **30...h5 31 f4 Be6+ 32 Kg2 Nd5 33 Kf3**

No there is nothing wrong with the diagram. There really is a white king on f3 and the knight on g1 and not vice versa. Alburt at last decides to put his opponent out of his misery.

### **33...Bc3 34 Rd1 Bb2 0-1**

It is no wonder that players sat up and took notice of the Benko after crushing wins such as this.

At the moment this book is probably the best available introduction to the Benko Gambit. It can also be used by those that are only slightly familiar with the opening and need to have it explained in a proper fashion. However, those that know the opening well will find it too superficial and without sufficient amounts of theory to make it really interesting. So if you are rated below 2000 and need a good serviceable weapon against 1 d4, this book could well be the answer.

**My assessment of this book:** 

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