

Opening Repertoire Benoni Mayhem

Andrew Martin



POPULAR CHESS

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Opening Repertoire: Benoni Mayhem

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First Steps; The Queen's Gambit

First Steps; The King's Indian Defence

Play the Budapest

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Introduction

Welcome to the book. We are going to look at several different systems, all of which show intent by Black to play for the win from the word go. Some are relatively mainstream, some more unusual. All are entertaining in one form or another. This first chapter will introduce us to the contents.

You will have to like the Modern Defence in one form or another to play our first system, as 1 d4 g6 will be the main entry point. There is also 1 d4 c5 2 d5 g6 as played below, but White can then go 3 e4, transposing to a Schmid Benoni. The Modern remains a go-to opening when Black is not concerned about risk and wants to play for the win.

Game 1

Shivansh Tiwari – Levan Pantsulaia

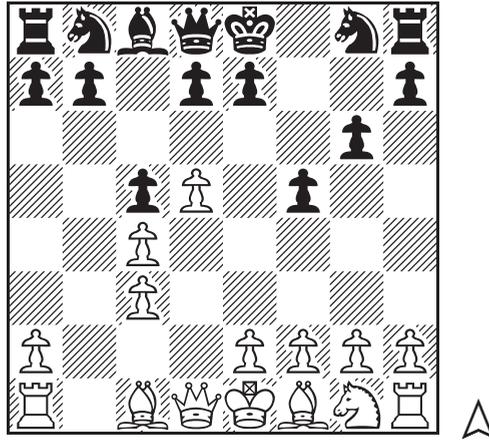
Shillong 2023

1 d4 c5 2 d5 g6 3 c4 ♗g7 4 ♘c3 ♗xc3+

Black bites the bullet.

5 bxc3 f5!?

We will be concentrating on this unusual move, which I believe can be attributed to grandmaster Roman Dzinzhashvili. I stand to be corrected on that one. It came as a surprise to me that Black has two alternatives here, 5...♖a5 and 5...e5!?, both of which are worth playing and are equally uncompromising. We will analyse those in due course. The main idea with all of these moves is to put White on the spot and set original problems that are not easy to solve. For one thing, handling the pawn structure is not at all straightforward – as we will see.

**6 h4!?**

White has several ways to try to blow Black off the board, but with correct play none of them work. 6 h4 is obviously intimidatory.

6...♘f6!

Keeping calm. It is important not to panic as Black.

7 ♖d3

Somewhat unusual. 7 h5 should be coolly met by 7...♙g8 8 hxg6 hxg6, when White has no entry point on the open file. Black often regains the h-file in time, so White has to be careful when playing this way.

7...d6 8 ♘f3 ♘bd7 9 ♙f4 ♚a5

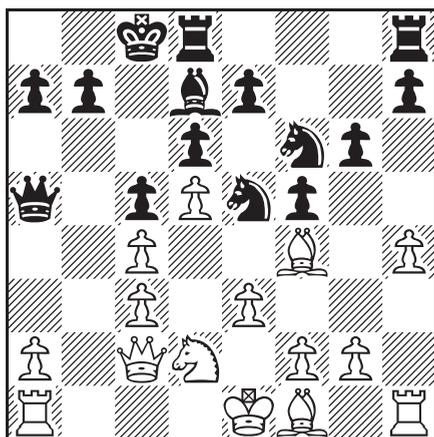
Black is looking to castle queenside.

10 ♘d2 ♘e5 11 ♚c2

It is not clear that capturing on e5 achieves much. After 11 ♙xe5 dxe5 12 e4 fxe4! 13 ♚g3 ♙g4! 14 ♚xe5 0-0 Black is already ahead in development and holds whatever advantage there is.

11...♙d7 12 e3 0-0-0

Completing the plan. Black is not afraid of the half-open b-file as he has plenty of defensive resources. White has now come to a crossroads. Can he find a decent way forward? If not, then Black's long-term advantage of the superior pawn structure will gradually become the key factor.



13 ♖e2 h6 14 ♜b1 ♔b8

14...♜dg8, intending ...g6-g5, was another idea.

15 ♞b3 ♚c7 16 ♚b2 b6 17 a4?!

White quickly loses patience. He wants to play a4-a5, but is this worth a pawn? 17 ♜a1 looks slow, but at least this way White does not give up material. Play could continue 17...♔a8! 18 a4 a5 19 ♞d2 ♔a7 and I would say it is easier for Black to improve his position than it is for White.

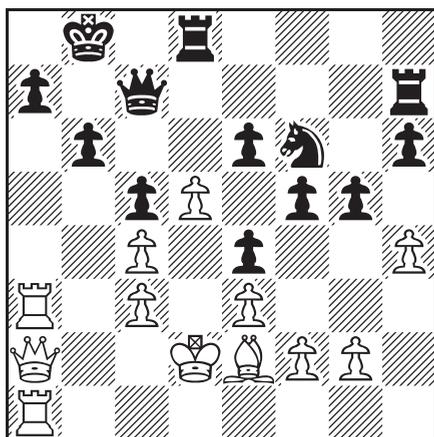
17...♙xa4! 18 ♚a2 ♙xb3 19 ♜xb3 g5

Now counterplay comes swiftly.

20 ♙xe5

20 ♙g3 ♞e4 hardly helps.

20...dxe5 21 ♜a3 e4! 22 ♔d2 e6 23 ♜a1 ♜h7!



White is trying his best, but there really is very little to attack.

24 ♖e1 exd5 25 cxd5 ♜xd5 26 ♟c4 ♜d6 27 ♜a6 f4

Suddenly the counterattack is in full swing.

28 ♜e2 ♜d8 29 ♜a2 fxe3 30 fxe3

If 30 ♜xa7, Black replies 30...exf2+ 31 ♖f1 (or 31 ♖xf2 ♜d2+ 32 ♟e2 ♜xa2, or 31 ♖e2 ♜d2+ 32 ♜xd2 ♜xd2+ 33 ♖xd2 ♜xa7) 31...♜d1+ 32 ♜xd1 ♜xd1+ 33 ♖xf2 e3+! 34 ♖xe3 ♜xa7, when putting White away will not be difficult.

30...♜e7 31 ♜f2 ♜e5 32 ♜1a3 ♜hd7 33 ♟e2 ♜h2 34 ♜a1 ♜xh4 35 g3 ♜h1+ 36 ♟f1 ♜f3 37 ♜6a2 ♜d1+ 0-1

The GM made it look easy. Admittedly there was a large rating differential between the players, but this was a typical game where White floundered in the unusual positions that can arise.

Blocked central positions early in the game are uncommon at all levels of chess. This is why holding a surprise weapon such as the Old Benoni in your repertoire can be very good.

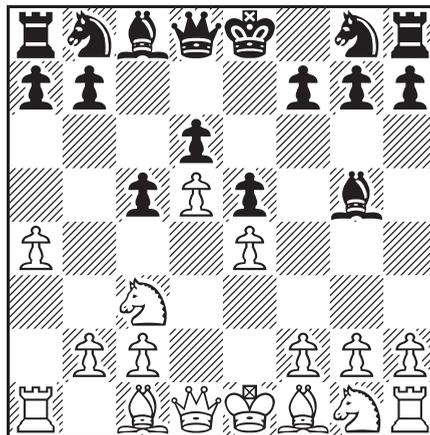
Game 2

Sergio Morales Garcia – Piotr Piesik Titled Tuesday (blitz), Chess.com 2024

1 d4 c5 2 d5 e5 3 ♘c3

We will analyse positions where White plays 3 c4 and, as here, 3 ♘c3, which I think is a better move because it keeps the c4-square free for a knight.

3...d6 4 e4 ♟e7 5 a4 ♟g5!



Blocked central pawn structures are all about good and bad pieces and pawn levers to open the game. White tries to achieve f2-f4 or b2-b4 at the right moment, while Black is looking for the corresponding ...f7-f5 or ...b7-b5 breaks. 5...♗g5 is a good move here, as Black thus manages to exchange his 'bad' bishop, which can become trapped and passive behind the pawn chain. Moreover, Black has less space than White, due to the effect of the pawn on d5, so exchanging is in any case logical to ease the cramp.

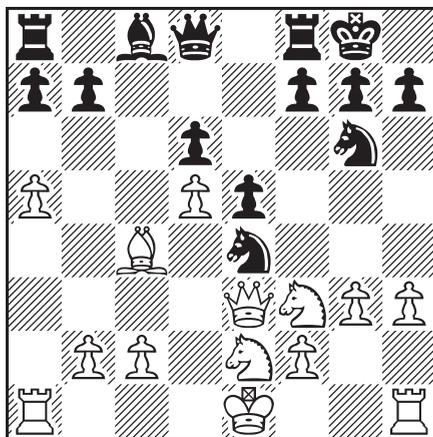
6 ♘f3 ♗xc1 7 ♖xc1 ♞e7 8 ♗d3 0-0

White has a lead in development but is unable to do anything with it, so Black is comfortable. Manoeuvring now follows, with both players trying to engineer a successful pawn lever.

9 h3 ♘g6 10 ♞e2 ♞d7 11 a5 ♞f6 12 g3?!

A little careless, not noticing Black's reply. 12 ♖e3 was more careful.

12...c4! 13 ♗xc4 ♞xe4 14 ♖e3



14...♞c5

I quite like 14...f5, gaining some space and playing thematically; ...f7-f5 is precisely what Black wants to do. However, 14...♞c5 is also fine and it's just a question of taste.

15 h4 ♞e7?!

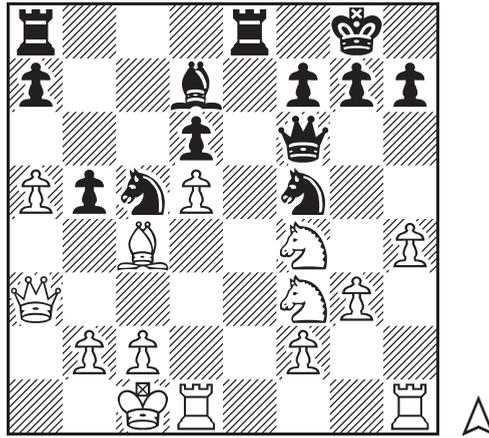
15...♗g4 was safe enough.

16 ♞xe5

I presume Black deliberately allowed this.

16...♞f5 17 ♖a3 ♜e8 18 ♞f3 ♖f6 19 0-0-0 ♗d7 20 ♞f4 b5

The game has opened up. Black has no really bad pieces and he has some tactical chances, although he is a pawn down.



21 ♔d3 ♖ab8

21...♖ac8! was more to the point.

22 ♖b4 ♘a6 23 ♗c3 ♗h6 24 ♙xf5 ♙xf5 25 ♘d4 ♙e4 26 ♘c6 ♙xh1 27 ♘xb8 ♖xb8 28 ♖xh1 ♘c5 29 b4

After 29 ♖e1 White is clearly better.

29...♘e4 30 ♗e3 f5 31 ♗xa7 ♖f8 32 ♗e7 ♘xf2 33 ♗e6+ ♗xe6 34 ♘xe6 ♖c8 35 ♖f1 ♘d3+ 36 ♔d2 ♘xb4 37 ♖xf5 ♖xc2+ 38 ♔d1 ♖c8

Possibly due to a time scramble, the game has gone off the rails.

39 h5 g6 40 ♖g5 ♔f7 41 hxg6+ hxg6 42 ♘f4 ♖a8 43 ♖xg6 ♘xd5 0-1

I presume White lost on time, as 44 ♖xd6 ♘xf4 45 gxf4 ♖xa5 looks level. Both players must be ready for the game to open up in the Old Benoni. Engineering the opening of the position to your advantage is the key skill required.

Game 3

Andrew Jing – Karl Bowden

Titled Tuesday (blitz), Chess.com 2024

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 ♘e4

This is the Vulture, which I don't really rate, but a few diehards continue to give it a go. There are one or two critical lines. White does not play them here.

4 g3 ♗a5+

This is Black's general follow-up. A weird and provocative position is created.

5 ♘d2 ♘d6!?

The knight looks as if it will be a target for advancing white pawns but one of the main points of the opening is to lure White forward into over-extension. Meanwhile, Black threatens ...♘c4 and the knight on d6 supports ...b7-b5.

Not quite a King's Indian, nor a Benko Gambit Declined. The pieces are oddly placed.

18 ♖xb4 cxb4 19 ♗d1 ♜c8 20 ♝c1 ♗a6 21 b3 ♗c5 22 ♗db2 ♜a6 23 ♗d3 ♝ac8?

I put this down to time. 23...♗xd3 24 ♜xd3 ♝ac8 was better and equal. Extraordinarily, researching the online database to complete this introduction, the vast majority of games were either blitz or rapid. It was a struggle to find a so-called classical game! The bigger databases have to start being combed for quality, with all the rubbish being deleted or, better still, not included in the first place.

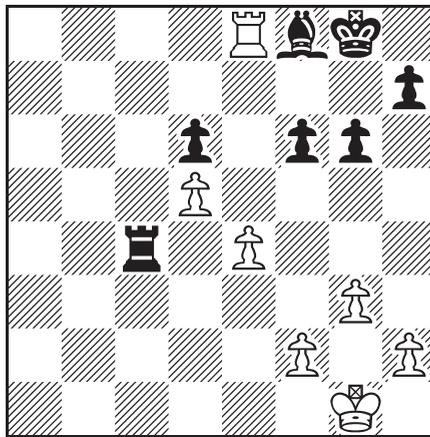
24 ♗xb4 ♜b7 25 ♗d3?

Here 25 ♗c6!, and if 25...♖xc6 then 26 ♗a5 and 27 ♗xc6, is close to winning for White.

25...♜xb3 26 ♗xc5 ♜xc2 27 ♝xc2 ♝xc5 28 ♝fc1 ♝fc8 29 ♖f1 ♖xa4

Now Black has all the advantages of the Benko Gambit without the gambit. Oh joy!

30 ♝a2 ♖b3 31 ♝xa7 ♖xc4 32 ♖xc4 ♝xc4 33 ♝xc4 ♝xc4 34 ♝xe7 ♖f8 35 ♝e8 f6



The game goes on for a long time before White eventually loses.

36 f3 ♖f7 37 ♝a8 f5 38 exf5 gxf5 39 ♝a7+ ♖e7 40 ♖g2 ♝c5 41 ♖h3 ♝xd5 42 g4 fxg4+ 43 ♖xg4 ♝g5+ 44 ♖f4 ♝h5 45 ♖g3 ♖e6 46 ♝a6 ♝g5+ 47 ♖f4 ♝g6 48 h3 ♖f7 49 ♝a7 ♝e6 50 ♖g4 d5 51 ♝a5 ♝d6 52 ♝a3 ♖f6 53 ♝d3 ♖f8 54 f4 ♖h6 55 h4 ♖e6 56 h5 ♖f6 57 ♝d4 ♝d7 58 ♝d3 d4 59 ♝d1 d3 60 ♝d2 ♝d4 61 ♖f3 ♝xf4+ 62 ♖g3 ♝d4 63 ♝d1 d2 64 ♖f3 ♝d6 65 ♖e2 ♖g5 66 ♝f1+ ♖g7 67 ♖d1 ♖h6 68 ♝h1 ♝c6 69 ♖e2 ♝c1 70 ♝d1 ♖xh5 71 ♝g1 ♖xg1 72 ♖f2 ♝h1 73 ♖g2 d1 ♝ 74 ♖g3 ♝g1+ 75 ♖h3 ♝f3+ 76 ♖h2 ♝g2 mate

The Vulture certainly puts an unprepared opponent on the spot. They may get it wrong, as White did here, playing too quietly, in which case Black gets a good position. But Black can suffer if White knows what to do. I show why later. Nonetheless, risk-takers may enjoy the unusual positions that 3...♗e4 creates.

Game 4

L.R. Srihari – Magnus Carlsen Titled Tuesday (blitz), Chess.com 2023

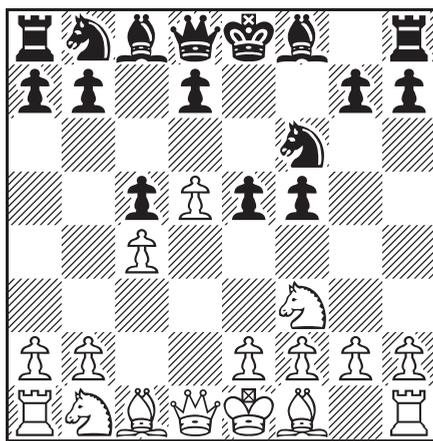
1 d4 c5 2 d5 f5

This is the Clarendon Court opening, named after a block of flats where GM Jon Levitt, the inventor, happened to be living at the time. As befits this book, the idea is sharp and original. If things go well, Black can get a good version of the Leningrad Dutch or provoke White into an over-reaction. If things go badly, Black can be wiped off the board, in a way that is worse than other openings. When you see Carlsen playing the opening in remarkable style, it cannot help but inspire you to rush out and give the Clarendon Court a try. I'm not convinced that the opening is 100% sound, but it is certainly geared towards playing for the win.

3 c4

In my opinion, 3 e4 is far more challenging.

3... ♘f6 4 ♗f3 e5!?



Srihari certainly did not expect this! Given that Carlsen does not blunder pawns this early, 4...e5 falls into the category of a remarkable pawn sacrifice.

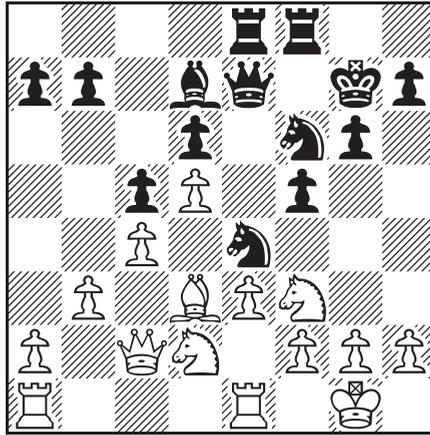
5 ♗xe5

White must capture, otherwise Black follows with ...d7-d6 and has a great position free of charge.

5...d6 6 ♗f3 g6 7 b3 ♘g7 8 ♘b2

The long diagonal is open and both players rush to occupy it.

8...0-0 9 e3 ♗e4 10 ♘xg7 ♔xg7 11 ♗bd2 ♗d7 12 ♘d3 ♕e7 13 0-0 ♗df6 14 ♕c2 ♘d7 15 ♖fe1 ♗ae8



It has been hard to believe that Black has enough for a pawn, but he has White pinned down to an extent and without an active plan, and time can ebb away.

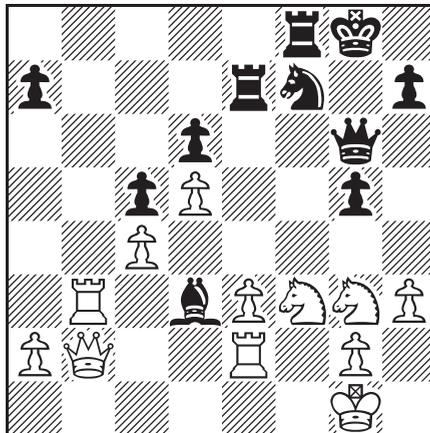
16 ♖f1 ♘g4 **17** ♙e2 ♚f6 **18** ♜c1 g5 **19** h3 ♘h6 **20** ♙xe4 fxe4 **21** ♘d2

21 ♘g3 was interesting here, when Black's best seems to be 21...♙g8 22 ♘d2 g4 23 ♘dx4 ♙g6. After the further 24 h4 I am not sure I believe that Black has enough for his material investment.

21... ♙g6 **22** ♘g3 ♙f5 **23** b4 b6 **24** bxc5 bxc5 **25** ♜b1 ♙e7 **26** ♜b3 ♙g8 **27** ♙b2 ♘f7 **28** f3

28 ♜b7! looks simpler.

28... exf3 **29** ♘xf3 ♙d3



30 ♜e1?!

Tactically, I think 30 ♜xd3 ♙xd3 31 ♙f6! holds up. What can Black do? If 31...♜xe3 then 32 ♘h5 ♙g6 33 ♜xe3 ♙xh5 34 ♙e6 keeps Black tied down.

There's also 30 ♖f2!, ignoring the threats to e3 and c4, since 30...♗xe3 31 ♖d2 ♗fe8 32 ♘f1 and 30...♙xc4 31 ♖b8 ♗xe3 32 ♗xf8+ ♙xf8 33 ♖c1 both win material for White.

30...♙xc4 31 ♖b7?

31 ♖b8 was better.

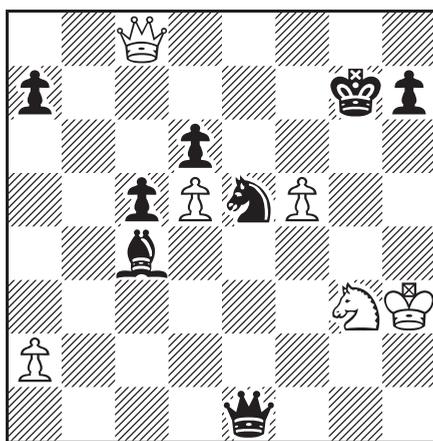
31...♗xb7 32 ♖xb7 g4

Suddenly Black is on top.

33 ♘h4 ♖g5 34 ♘hf5 gxf3 35 e4 ♘e5 36 ♙h2 hxg2 37 ♙xg2 ♗xf5?!

It looks as if the game moves were being flashed out at high speed. Here 37...h5! was tough to meet.

38 exf5 ♖d2+ 39 ♙h3 ♖xe1 40 ♖c8+ ♙g7



41 ♘h5??

Aaarghh. 41 f6+! leads to a draw: 41...♙h6 (or 41...♙xf6 42 ♖e6+ ♙g5 43 ♖f5+ ♙h6 44 ♖e6+ ♙g5 45 ♖f5+ etc) 42 ♖f5! ♙f1+ (forced) 43 ♘xf1 ♘f7 44 ♘g3 ♘g5+ 45 ♙g2 (not 45 ♙g4?? ♖d1+) 45...♖d2+ 46 ♙f1 and so on.

41...♙h6 42 ♘g3 ♙f1+ 43 ♙h4 ♖b4+ 44 ♘e4 ♖xe4+ 45 ♙g3 0-1

Game 5

Anton Korobov – Vugar Gashimov European Blitz Championship, Warsaw 2010

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 ♙d6!?

This is the Snake Benoni, which we cover in the final section of the book. Black's last move looks terrible, but it is not as bad as it seems and it is certainly provocative. Various GMs have taken a liking to the Snake. As with many of the systems in this book, Black offers his

Opening Repertoire: Benoni Mayhem

The manoeuvre ... d7-f8-g6 is also typical of this opening. The knight eyes e5 and f4, restraining the white centre, and the black king has an extra defender in some cases.

14 h2 b8 15 d2 e5 16 f1 d7

Note that White cannot play a4-a5.

17 f4 g6 18 h1 b5!

Black has the queenside pawn majority and uses it. White must try to counter with e4-e5.

19 axb5 axb5 20 b3 a5 21 c1 b4 22 d3

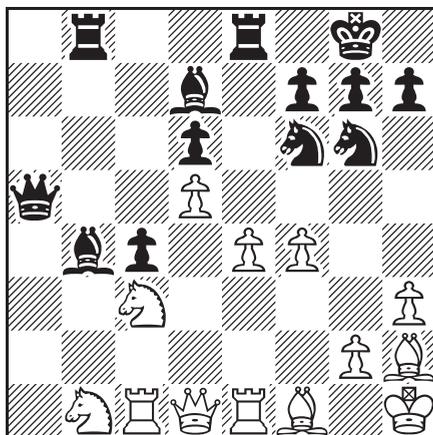
Not yet 22 e5? xc3 23 xc3 xd5 .

22... a5 23 db1 c4!?

23... a8 was also good, with the idea 24 e5 xd5 25 xg6 xc3 26 xh7+ xh7 27 xc3 c6 28 g4 dxe5 and Black has a fine game.

24 bxc4 bxc4 25 f1

25 xc4 bc8 26 d3 c5 27 d2 appears playable for White.



25...h6

25... bc8 was possible, and if 26 e5 then 26... f5 !, since 27 exf6 xe1 28 xe1 xb1 regains the piece.

26 e5 h7 27 e6?!

It was better simply to take the c4-pawn.

27...fxe6 28 dxe6 c6 29 xc4 f6 30 f1 f5 31 d2 ? h4

Blitzing means that Gashimov does not yet find 31... xh3 .

32 e3 xe6 33 xe6 xe6 34 d3 h8 35 e2 e4 36 a6 ?

The machine recommends 36 f5 xf5 37 f4 xd3 38 xe6 , when Black is still much better but not immediately winning.

36... xh3 0-1

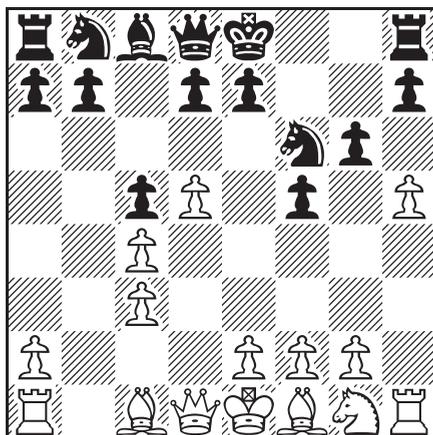
Combat in the Snake Benoni is fascinating.

Game 12

Monika Socko – Alexander Shabalov

Koszalin 1999

1 d4 g6 2 c4 ♘g7 3 ♖c3 c5 4 d5 ♙xc3+!? 5 bxc3 f5 6 h4 ♗f6 7 h5



7...♞g8!

This is the standard reply. Black gives up the h-file with the hope of regaining it in due course, or simply showing that command of the file is irrelevant. He also defends his kingside.

Black may be able to survive after 7...♗h5!?, but in practice most players have decided that this is just too risky. After 8 e4 ♖a5 9 exf5 ♗xc3+ 10 ♙d2 ♗e5+ 11 ♙e2 d6 12 ♜b1, for instance, there is nothing immediately conclusive but the dark-squared bishop is looking ominously strong. I cannot bring myself to like this for Black. 8 ♞h5!? gxh5 9 e4 O-O 10 e5!? also has to be checked; Black has an extra exchange, but can he unravel?

8 hxg6 hxg6 9 ♗f3 d6 10 ♗g5 ♖a5 11 ♗c2 ♗bd7 12 f4?

Perhaps 12 ♙f4 ♗b6 13 e3 was a better set-up. GM Stohl, who annotated this game for ChessBase also gives 12 ♗e6 ♗e5 13 ♜b1 ♙xe6 14 dxe6 O-O-O as slightly better for Black, which represents how tough this line can be to play for White, who must now find a way basically to checkmate Black, because he can't repair the damage to his pawns.

12...♗b6 13 e3 ♙d7 14 ♙d2

This cannot be a good square for the bishop.

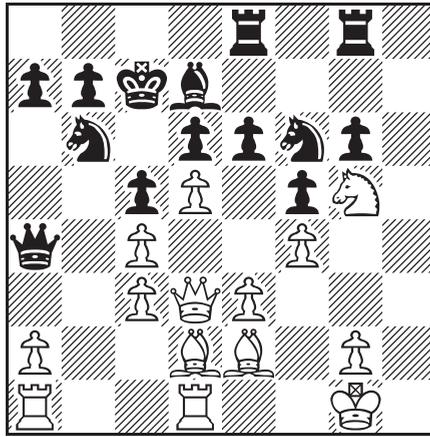
14...O-O 15 ♙e2

Trying to open the game with 15 e4 would lead to 15...fxe4 16 ♗xe4 ♙f5 17 ♙d3 ♖a6! 18 ♗xf6 ♙xd3 19 ♗xd3 exf6 and the pawn on c4 will fall.

15...♞de8 16 ♗d3 ♖a4!

Black commonly occupies the a4-square in this line, either with queen, bishop or knight.

17 0-0 ♔c7! 18 ♚fd1 e6!



This has been very nicely played by Shabalov. White has no attack, nor any prospect of creating an attack. She must sit and watch as Black completely takes over.

19 ♙e1

19 dxe6 ♙xe6! 20 ♙e1 ♚d7 21 ♘xe6+ ♚xe6 22 ♙f2 ♚h8!, with ...♘e4 to come, leaves White very poorly placed.

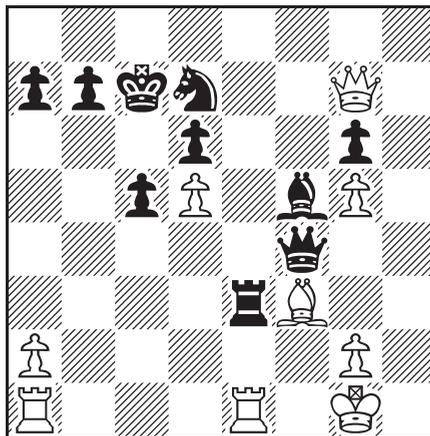
19...exd5 20 cxd5 ♘e4!? 21 c4 ♘xg5 22 fxg5 ♚e4 23 ♚dc1 ♚ge8 24 ♙f2 f4! 25 ♙d1 ♚a6 26 exf4 ♙f5, 27 ♚c3 ♚xc4 28 ♚g7+ ♘d7 29 ♙f3

29 g4 ♙e4 does not improve White's chances.

29...♚xf4 30 ♙g3 ♚a4!?

But not 30...♚a4? 31 ♚xc5+.

31 ♙xf4 ♚xf4 32 ♚e1 ♚e3!



Black's queenside pawn majority is a winning trump, as after 33 ♖xe3 ♜xe3+ 34 ♔h2 c4.
33 ♜f1 ♜xg5 34 ♜ae1 ♜f4 35 ♜d1 ♜e5 36 ♜fe1 ♔b6?!

Simply 36...b5 seems okay, as far as I can see. Why not get the pawns rolling? I sense a time shortage.

37 ♜b1+!

The best she can do, and setting a trap.

37...♔c7

Not 37...♙xb1? 38 ♜xb1+ ♔c7 because of 39 ♜xb7+! ♙xb7 40 ♜xd7+ ♔b6 41 ♜xd6+ ♔b5 42 ♜b8+ ♔c4 43 ♜b3+ ♔d4 44 ♜b2+ and White escapes with a perpetual.

38 ♜bd1 ♙c2 39 ♜c1?

She had to try 39 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 (not 39...♙xd1? 40 ♜e7) 40 ♜xe5 ♙xe5 41 ♜c1, but Black must be winning after 41...♙d3, intending ...b7-b5, ...♔b6, ...c5-c4, ...♔c5 etc.

39...♜d4+ 0-1

In view of 40 ♔h2 (or 40 ♔f1 ♙d3+) 40...♜h4+ and ...♜xe1 or 40...♜h5+ and ...♜xg7.

We can call this a typical win for Black, who was controlling the shots from an early stage, because White did not find an effective early middlegame plan.

3) White Goes Over the Top

Game 13

Nodirbek Yakubboev – Dmitry Andreikin

Airthings Masters, Chess.com 2023

1 d4 g6 2 c4 ♙g7 3 ♘c3 c5 4 d5 ♙xc3+ 5 bxc3 f5 6 e4 fxe4 7 f3

