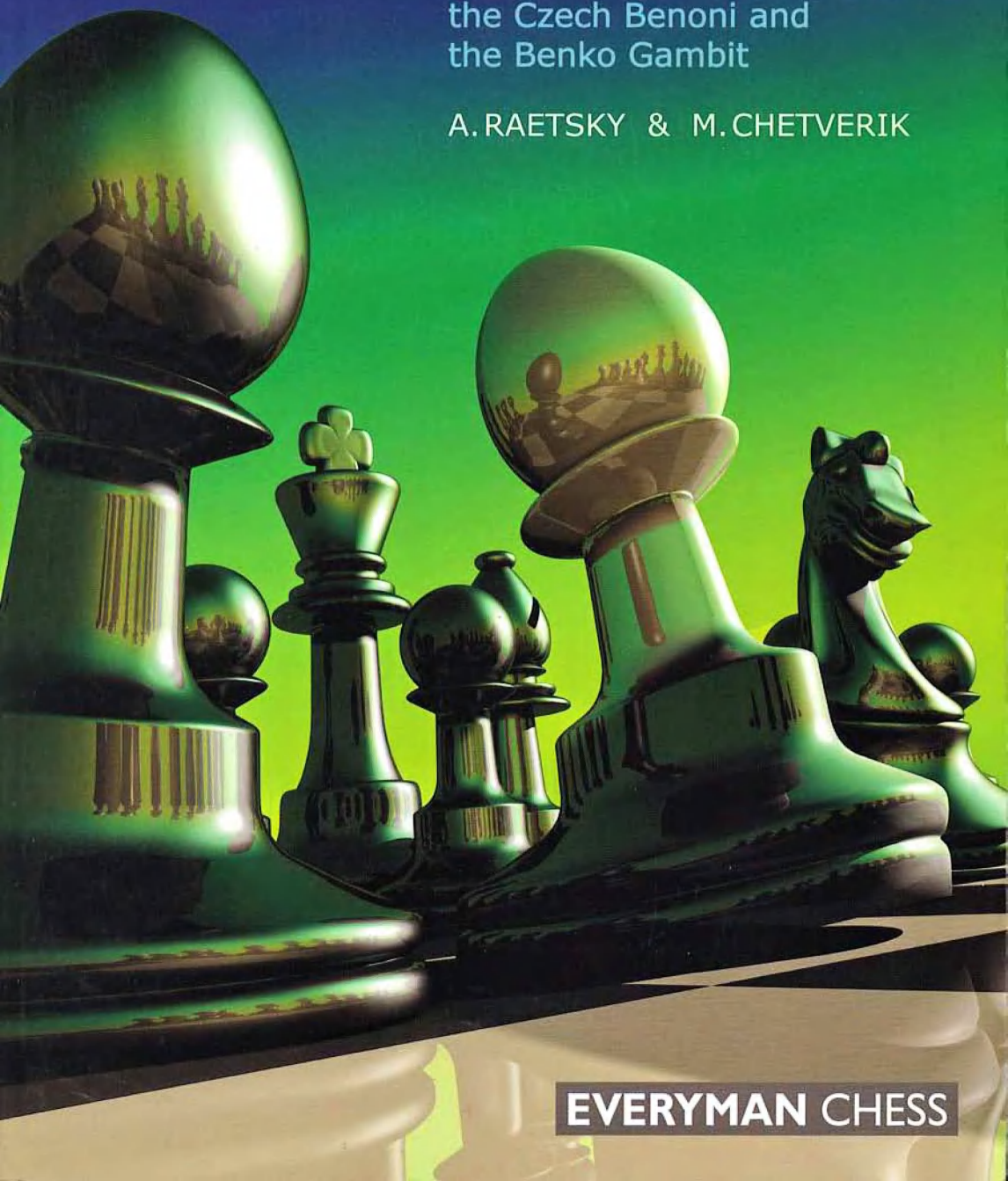


# starting out: benoni systems

including the Schmidt Benoni,  
the Czech Benoni and  
the Benko Gambit

A. RAETSKY & M. CHETVERIK



**EVERYMAN CHESS**

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A. RAETSKY & M. CHETVERIK

**EVERYMAN CHESS**

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# Contents

Introduction	5
1 The Volga Gambit Accepted	7
2 The Volga Gambit Accepted without 5 bxa6	44
3 The Volga Gambit Declined	93
4 The Blumenfeld Gambit and Volga/Blumenfeld Hybrids	115
5 The Czech and Closed Benonis	134
6 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5	157
7 The Schmid Benoni	183
8 The Benoni/King's Indian Hybrid	198
9 Assorted Benonis	213
Index of Variations	236
Index of Complete Games	238

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# Introduction

In 1 d4 openings, Benoni systems are categorised by an early attack on White's d4-pawn with ...c7-c5, against which White replies d4-d5. Black's e-pawn may stay on its original square, it may undermine the centre with ...e7-e6, or it may even pass it by with ...e7-e5, thus switching the play to the flanks. And here we have the root of the fundamental difference between the Benoni and the related King's Indian Defence: in the latter the d4-pawn is attacked with ...e7-e5, while the advance ...c7-c5 is optional and has a supporting role.

The original Benoni occurs when Black immediately advances with ...c7-c5 (1 d4 c5 2 d5). The ...c7-c5 advance delayed by a move leads to the original Benoni only in some cases (for instance, 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5, or 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 d6). More often in practice the formal Benoni construction transposes to other openings. We will cover later examples of the ...c7-c5 advance only in some exceptional cases (for example, 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 – the Volga Gambit; 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 – the Blumenfeld Gambit).

The Benoni name has a very strange origin. If there had been some geographical relationship or a link to the name of a chess player, at least there would be some reasonable explanation. However, this is not the case: instead the name 'Benoni' has a haphazard derivation. The little-known theoretician Aaron Reinganum published a book entitled *Ben-Oni or Defences against Gambit Moves in Chess* in 1825, and this was the first book to propose meeting 1 d4 with 1...c5. Ben-Oni was chosen for the book title only because of its eastern origins. This word means 'son of sorrow' or 'son of death'. Biblical myths refer to On, a city in ancient Egypt where the God of death, Osiris, ruled.

Reinganum did not give examples of games with 1 d4 c5. The game Hanstein-Von der Lasa (1841) is the first one that is known to us. In general, the Benoni was not popular in the 19th century; the dictator of opening fashion, Bilguer, even put a question mark to 1...c5. Only in the 20th century did strong players start to employ the Benoni; even Alekhine played 1...c5, and with success. On the other hand, he wrote: 'I consider this move to be one of my chess sins.' And also: 'There are good reasons to consider this move unfavourable even after

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

1...Nf6 2 Nf3. At the very first step ...c7-c5 we face an obvious positional mistake because White quickly gains an advantage by advancing with his central pawns.' However, Alekhine's opening views failed the test of time to a significant extent.

In the middle of the 20th century the Benoni entered a new stage. The Volga Gambit (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5) became an independent opening. Players started to use the Modern Benoni, which had been tested by the famous American GM Frank Marshall. Finally, the Classical Benoni turned from a dubious experiment (that is how Alekhine saw it) into a sound opening.

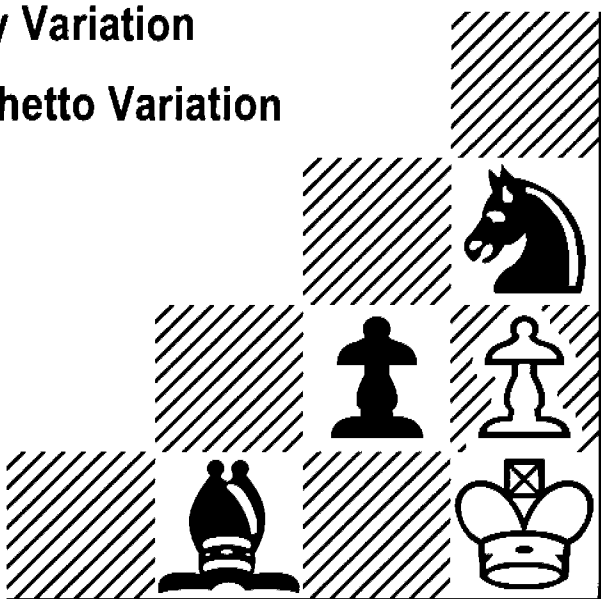
Alexander Raetsky & Maxim Chetverik,  
Voronezh,  
May 2005

## Chapter One

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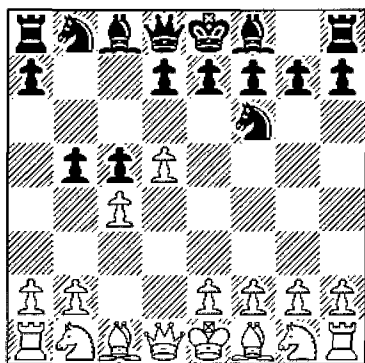
# The Volga Gambit Accepted

- ▨ Introduction
- ▨ The Real Volga Gambit
- ▨ The Main Line
- ▨ Modifying the Main Line with h2-h3
- ▨ 7 Nf3 g6 8 Nd2
- ▨ The Murey Variation
- ▨ The Fianchetto Variation

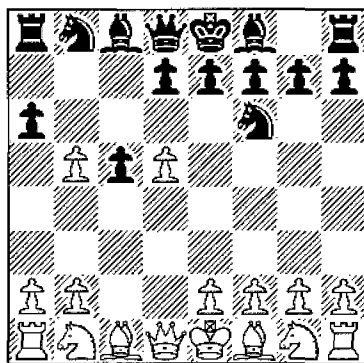


## Introduction to the Volga Gambit

The opening moves in the Volga Gambit are 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e5 3 d5 b5 (**Diagram 1**) with the idea of the pawn sacrifice 4 cxb5 a6 (**Diagram 2**). The move 4...a6 is the key concept of the Volga (in the first game in which 4 cxb5 was tried – Thorvaldsson-Vaitonis, Munich, 1936 – it was met with 4...e6, which is the Volga/Blumenfeld hybrid, covered in Chapter 4).



**Diagram 1 (W)**  
Black plays 3...b5



**Diagram 2 (W)**  
The Volga Gambit

The name 'Volga Gambit' was proposed by the famous Soviet theorist Romanovsky, based on an article in *Chess in USSR* in 1946. The author of this article, Argunov, lived in Kuibyshev (now Samara), a city on the River Volga. The alternative term for this opening is the Benko Gambit, named after the well-known Hungarian grandmaster Pal Benko, who became an American citizen. Benko never missed an opportunity to promote the gambit. In particular, during simultaneous exhibitions he offered his opponents the chance to play White in the hope they would allow the gambit, while in 1973 Benko published his book *The Benko Gambit*. We certainly acknowledge Benko's achievements, but he was a pioneer neither in theory nor in practice. As far back as 1948 Lundin played this gambit against Szabo. It's true that in this game Black was not successful in the opening, but the examples of Golombek-Sefc (1949) and Rabar-Milic (1955) are quite 'modern'.

In the 1970s the Volga Gambit gained in popularity; in fact it became one of the most topical openings in chess theory and was adopted by the following grandmasters: Vasiukov, Browne, Tseshkovsky, Miles and Vaganian. In the 1980s Kasparov employed it from time to time, while in the 1990s Adams, Topalov, Ivanchuk, Shirov, Khalifman, Bareev and many other grandmasters became fans.

The triumphal procession of the Volga Gambit is easy to explain. As general opening theory progressed, the advantage of the first move was no longer so feared. While against 1 e4 the Sicilian Defence became a full-blooded opening with practical chances for Black, there was no similar counteraction against 1 d4. The Volga Gambit didn't exactly become the 'Sicilian' against 1 d4, but it did cause a commotion in its early days. Black parts with his pawn but gains a long-term initiative that often continues even after a queen swap. Nowadays White has learnt how to fight against the Volga Gambit; even so, it is not going to leave the scene.

We think it is reasonable to divide the Volga Gambit into three chapters. After 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 the continuation 5 bxa6 gives White an extra pawn, which his opponent will be unable to win back in the near future. This is what we would term the 'Real Volga Gambit' and is discussed in this chapter. In Chapter 2 we deal with lines where White avoids 5 bxa6. Conventionally speaking, with 4 cxb5 White has already accepted the pawn sacrifice but, unlike in the Real Volga Gambit, whether it is possible to win it back depends on the specific events in the next few moves. Finally, moves other than 4 cxb5 lead us to the Volga Gambit Declined (Chapter 3).

## The Real Volga Gambit

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 Bxa6 (Diagram 3)

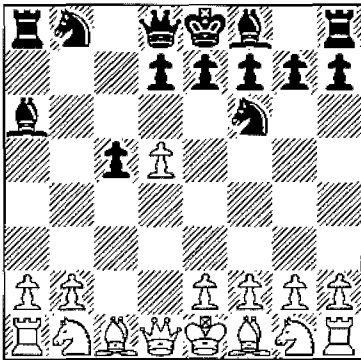


Diagram 3 (W)  
The Real Volga Gambit

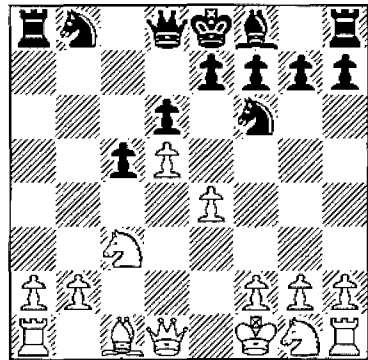


Diagram 4 (B)  
White loses castling rights

The pawn balance is irrevocably broken; Black has given up his pawn and it is not clear how to win it back. Black's advantage in development may seem to give some compensation for his pawn: White does not have any developed pieces while at least two black pieces are developed. Moreover, the queen's rook has obtained an excellent operating line and can also be considered a de-

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

veloped piece. However, in the Real Volga Gambit there is almost no forcing play 'move to move'; the position is closed and the kings are safe. That is why Black's advantage in development is actually of minor importance. Instead Black hopes to prove that he has compensation for his pawn via quite predictable means:

1) Frontal pressure on the a- and b-pawns down the semi-open files. The fianchettoed bishop on g7 is of invaluable help here – it is often exchanged for the c3-knight to win the pawn back. Black's queen and knight frequently invade White's camp, occupying b4, c4, and d3. Black's initiative is regularly supported by the pawn break ...c5-c4.

2) Undermining the centre with ...e7-e6 is normally in accordance with the general plan. After dxe6, ...fxe6 Black forms an impressive pawn centre.

White should be aware of Black's plans, but he does not have to wait for their successful completion – he has his own possibilities:

1) He can seize space on the queenside with a2-a4, strengthening the b5-square for a possible knight invasion.

2) He can break through in the centre with e4-e5, releasing the latent energy of his position.

3) He can attack Black's king – usually combined with e4-e5 in the late middlegame. However, unfortunately for White this does not happen very often. The attack may be successful if Black becomes too involved in his activities on the queenside.

Having acquired an extra pawn, generally White must now react defensively to Black's play. Nevertheless, he has a choice of development schemes on the kingside. After 6 Nc3 g6 the king's evacuation to the side with 7 e4 Bxf1 8 Kxf1 (**Diagram 4**), g2-g3 and Kf1-g2 is considered the main line, which is reviewed in the following section and Games 1-4. The king tour to h2, which is similar to the main line, is covered in Games 5 and 6, while Game 7 sees a pirouette of the knight (7 Nf3 g6 8 Nd2) in order to recapture with this piece on f1 after e2-c4 and retain the right to castle. The aggressive Murey Variation, 7 f4 occurs in Games 8 and 9, and finally the light-squared fianchetto is covered in the final section (Games 10-13).

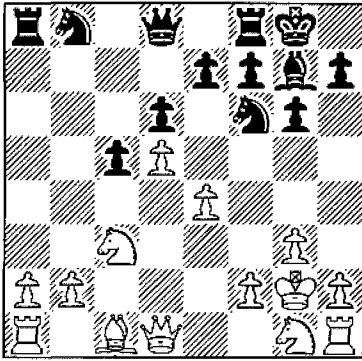
## The Main Line

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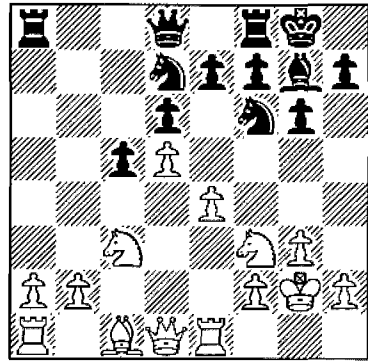
**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 Bxa6 6 Nc3 g6 7 e4 Bxf1 8 Kxf1 d6 9 g3 Bg7 10 Kg2 0-0 (Diagram 5)**

This is one of White's most popular strategies against the Volga Gambit. With 7 e4 White created a pawn centre but at the cost of losing the right to castle. White's king is forced to hide on the wing and g2-g3 provides it with the shortest way to escape. The weakening of the light squares is not that significant because the light-squared bishops have been swapped and Black's forces take aim at the queenside. After the knight develops to f3 we have the basic tabiya

for the Real Volga Gambit.



**Diagram 5 (W)**  
The Main Line



**Diagram 6 (B)**  
Supporting e4-e5

### 11 Nf3 Nbd7

The manoeuvre ...Ng4-e5 worries White a little; that is why in practice we often see the prophylactic 12 h3. However, according to recent theoretical surveys, it is not worth expending time on this prophylaxis. Instead the continuation 12 Re1 (**Diagram 6**) supports the breakthrough e4-e5.

In addition, the rook can successfully defend the queenside along the second rank with Re2.

Black now has a choice between three plans:

- 1) 12...Ra6 followed by ...Qd8-a8 (Game 1). Now Qc2 and a2-a4 neutralises Black's pressure on the queenside to a considerable extent (see the note to Black's 14th move). The alternative option with ...e7-e6 (played in the main game) allows Black to start play in the centre. However, it does not appear to equalise.
- 2) 12...Qa5 is considered in Game 2. The power of the queen prevents White from starting active play on the queenside. However, e7 lacks protection and 13 e5!? looks quite promising. The exchange on e5 allows a formidable battery of the major pieces along the e-file (Sotnikov-Gershon). Instead 13...Ng4 withstands White's action owing to control over the important e5-square.
- 3) Unlike the two plans above, 12...Ng4 (Game 3) is not possible against 12 h3. Here White chooses 13 Bf4 with a deliberate positional consolidation.

When Ne2 is played instead of Nf3, the game transposes to a rare deviation from the main line (see Game 4). The knight on e2 supports its colleague on c3, and both the main game and Korchnoi-Borik demonstrate the typical plan on the queenside with a2-a4 and Nc3-b5. On the other hand, the advance e4-e5 is not such a threat any longer.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Sometimes masters and even grandmasters (Seirawan, Suba, Gulko...) employ the peculiar move 9 g4!? (see the notes to Game 4). With this 'extended fianchetto' White seizes space on the kingside while hoping that his king will not suffer. Indeed, White has nothing to worry about if he plays carefully. However, taking care of safety means he does not have time to force a stable opening advantage.

## Statistics

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In the main line White scores 55%; with the deviation Nge2 – 46%; with 9 g4 – 47 %.

## Theoretical?

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Yes, of course.

## Theoretical Status

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Respected. The continuation g2-g3 and Nf3 makes fans of the Volga Gambit very worried. It is noticeable that Black runs the risk of failing to draw against very skilful grandmasters and to win against weak players who have studied the main line. The combination of g2-g3 and Ng1-e2 has not been as thoroughly studied but it is also respectable, but nowadays we do not take the eccentric 9 g4 too seriously.

### Game 1

P.Horvath  A.Sziebert

Budapest 2002

---

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 e4 Bxf1 8 Kxf1  
d6 9 g3 Bg7 10 Kg2 0-0 11 Nf3 Nbd7 12 Re1 Ra6

This is one of the ideas for generating counterplay: the rook both vacates a8 for the queen and protects the d6-pawn.

13 Qc2!?

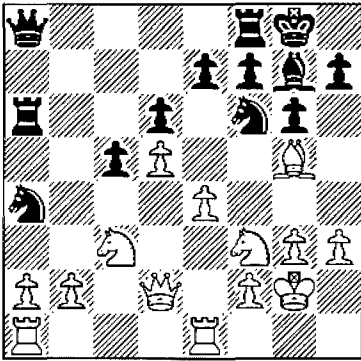
Also interesting is 13 h3 Qa8 and now:

a) 14 Re2 e6!? 15 Bf4 exd5 16 exd5 Nh5 17 Bg5 h6 18 Be3 Nb6 19 Qd3 Na4 20 Rd1 (or 20 Nxa4 Rxa4 21 a3 Rb8 and Black has great counterplay) 20...Nxc3 21 bxc3 Rxa2 22 Rxa2 Qxa2 23 Nd2 Rb8 24 Nc4 Rb3 25 Nxd6 Rxc3 26 Qe4 Nf6 27 Qe7 Kh7 with equal chances, M.Suba-C.Matamoros, Seville 2002.

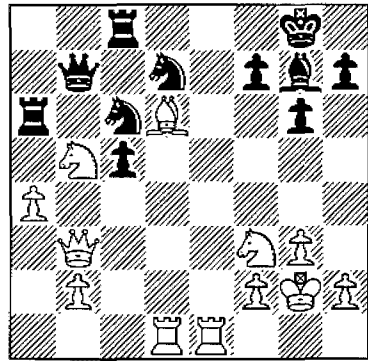
b) 14 Bg5 Nb6 15 Qd2 Na4! (**Diagram 7**)



**NOTE: The manoeuvre ...Nb6-a4 is one of the main strategic ambitions for Black in the Volga Gambit. Once the c3-knight is gone White has trouble keeping his queenside together and Black has definite compensation.**



**Diagram 7 (W)**  
The thematic ...Na4



**Diagram 8 (W)**  
Still a pawn ahead

Here V.Shishkin-V.Malakhatko, Kiev 2001 continued 16 Re2 Rb8 17 Nd1 e6 18 dxe6 fxe6 19 Qc2 d5 (19...Nxb2?! would be too soon; after 20 Nxb2 Rxb2 21 Qxb2 Nxe4 22 Rb1! Bxb2 23 Rxb2 White has a large advantage – we do not see any sensible way for Black to save the queen) 20 c5 Ne4 21 b3 Nb6 22 Bf4 c4! and Black had wonderful counterplay.

**13...Qa8 14 a4 e6!?**

After 14...Rb8 15 b3 Ne8 16 Bg5 White is doing well: 16...Rab6 17 Rab1! (17 Nd2 c4!? 18 bxc4 Rb2! 19 Qd3 Nc5 20 Qe3 Qa5 would give Black compensation) 17...c4 18 bxc4 Bxc3 19 Rxb6 Nxb6 20 Qxc3 Nxa4 21 Qa1 and White was just a pawn up in Z.Gyimesi-K.Van der Weide, Vlissingen 2002.

**15 Nb5 Qb7 16 Bf4 exd5**

Black needs to play actively now that he has sacrificed a pawn. After 16...Ne8 17 Rad1 e5 18 Bc1 Nc7 19 Nxc7 Qxc7 20 b3 White would be ready for Nf3-d2-c4 with a clear edge, as the g7-bishop would have little use here.

**17 exd5 Nxd5 18 Bxd6 Rc8 19 Rad1 Nb4**

19...c4 20 Re4 N7b6 21 Be5!?! would give White a chance to eliminate the strength of the g7-bishop.

**20 Qb3 Nc6 (Diagram 8) 21 Re3**

Maybe 21 Bf4!?! was stronger. After 21...Nce5 22 Qd5 Qxd5 23 Rxd5 Nxf3 24 Kxf3 White has good chances in the endgame, though Black has quite active counterplay too.

**21...Rb6?!**

This is somewhat clumsy. When White's queen improves her position, Black's rook will just be ill-placed on b6.

21...Nce5!?! 22 Bxe5 Nxe5 23 Qc2 Nxf3 24 Rxf3 Rf6 25 Qe2 Bf8 is less clear;

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

White still has this extra pawn, but he needs to find a way to get out of the pin comfortably.

**22 Qd5 Nf6**

22...Bxb2 is met strongly with 23 Be7! Nxe7 24 Qxb7 Rxb7 25 Rxe7 Rd8 26 Nd6, when Black is suffering.

**23 Qxc5 Ng4 24 Red3**

Or 24 Re4!? Nf6 25 Ree1 with a clear edge.

**24...Nce5!? 25 Qxc8+!?**

Also strong is 25 Bc7!? Nxd3 26 Qxb6 Qxb6 27 Bxb6 Nxb2 28 Ra1 Nc4 29 Bd4 when White has good winning chances with his extra pawn.

**25...Qxc8 26 Bxe5 Qc2 27 Rd8+ Bf8 28 R1d2 Qxa4 29 Nc3 Qa1 30 Bd6?**

White misses 30 Bd4! Qa5 31 h3 Nh6 32 Nd5, after which the threats of Nf6+ and Ne7+ are decisive.

**30...Rxd6 31 R2xd6 Qxb2 32 Nd1 Qb7**

The endgame is a little worse for Black, but he manages to equalise over time.

**33 R6d7 Qc6 34 Rd5 Kg7 35 h3 Nf6 36 Rd3 Be7 37 R8d4 Bc5 38 Rc4 Qb5 39 Rdc3 Bb6 40 Rc2 Qd5 41 Ne3 Bxe3 42 fxe3 Qd3 43 R4c3 Qe4 44 Re2 Qb7 45 Rc4 Qa6 46 Rec2 Nd5 47 Kf2 Qe6 48 e4 Nf6 49 e5 Nd7 50 Kg2 Nxe5 51 Nxe5 Qxe5 ½-½**

---

Game 2

□ M.Gurevich ■ M.Ivanov

French League 2001

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 e4 Bxf1 8 Kxf1 d6 9 g3 Bg7 10 Kg2 0-0 11 Nf3 Nbd7 12 Re1 Qa5 13 e5**

White can also prevent ...Ng4, but then Black makes good use of the tempo. 13 h3 Rfb8 and now:

a) 14 e5 dxe5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Rxe5 Rb7 17 Qf3 Ne8 18 Re2 Nd6 19 Ne4 Nf5 20 Bd2 Qd8 21 Bc3 Nd4 22 Bxd4 Bxd4 with counterplay for the pawn in S.Savchenko-K.Van der Weide, Dieren 1999.

b) 14 Qc2 Ne8 15 Bd2 Nc7 16 Re2 Qa6! (**Diagram 9**) 17 Bg5 Rxb2!? 18 Qxb2 Bxc3 19 Qxc3 Qxe2 is quite unclear.



**NOTE: Once the light-squared bishops have come off, Black's queen is usually very well placed on a6.**

**13...Ng4**

After 13...dxe5 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Rxe5 White has achieved his strategic ambition. I.Sotnikov-A.Gershon, Biel 1996 continued 15...Ra7 16 Qe2 Rd8 17 Bd2 Qb6 18 Re1 Rdd7 (weaker is 18...Qxb2?! 19 Rxe7 Rxe7 20 Qxe7 Ra8 21 Re2, with a clear edge for White) 19 b3 Qb7 20 Qf3 Ne8 21 R5e2 and White has some advantage, though not too much.

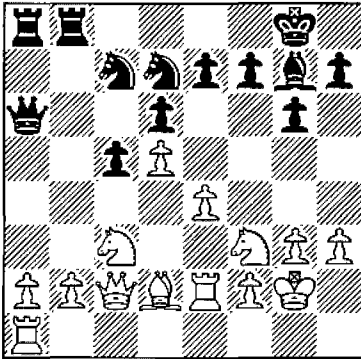


Diagram 9 (W)

a6 – a good place for the queen

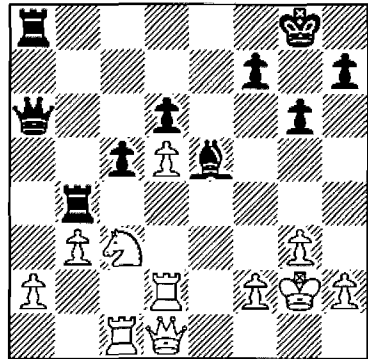


Diagram 10 (B)

Accuracy required

**14 exd6 exd6 15 Bf4 Rfb8**

Or 15...Nge5?! 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 Re4! Qb6 18 Qe2 f5 19 Ra4 Rab8 20 b3 with a clear advantage for White – Dautov.

**16 Re2 Qa6**

Black has no direct route to equality. After 16...Bxc3 17 bxc3 Qxc3, 18 Bxd6?! Rb2 gives Black good counterplay but 18 Re7 Rd8 19 Ng5 seems to favour White; 16...Nge5 17 Nxe5 Nxe5 18 Bxe5 Bxe5 19 Rc1 Rb4 20 Rcc2 is slightly better for White as in the game.

**17 Rc1 Nge5 18 Nxe5 Nxe5 19 Bxe5 Bxe5 20 b3 Rb4 21 Rd2 (Diagram 10) 21...Rd4?!**

21...c4!? 22 Ne2 Kg7 with reasonable counterplay is a better option. Then after 23 bxc4 Rxc4 24 Rxc4 Qxc4 25 Qc2 Qb4 26 Ng1 Ra3 27 Nf3 Bf6 28 Rd3 Qe4 29 Rc3 Qxc2 30 Rxc2 Ra5 31 Rd2 Bc3 a draw agreed in P.Van der Sterren-V.Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1998. 25 Qb3 is a slight improvement; after 25...Qe4+ 26 f3 Qf5 27 Nd4 Bxd4 28 Rxd4 Rc8 Black should still draw but he has to prove it.

**22 Rcc2 Qa5 23 Ne2!**

The beginning of a very strong manoeuvre. After 23 Rxd4 cxd4 24 Ne4 matters are less clear: 24...f5 25 Ng5 h6 26 Ne6 Qxd5+ 27 Qf3 Qxf3+ 28 Kxf3 Kf7 and Black has reasonable drawing chances.

**23...Rb4 24 Ng1!**

The knight is redirecting itself towards c4.

**24...Qa6 25 Nf3 Bg7 26 Qe2 Qb7 27 Rd3 Bh6 28 Nd2 Qd7**

28...Bxd2 29 Rxd2 Qd7 30 Qf3 also gives White excellent winning chances.

**29 Nc4 Re8 30 Qf3 f5?!**

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

This just creates further weaknesses. Better was 30...Rbb8. though after 31 Re2 Rxe2 32 Qxe2 Re8 33 Qf3 Bg5 34 Rc3 Re1 35 Rc2 White is in the driving seat.

**31 Re2 Rbb8 32 Re6! Rxe6**

32...Bf8 is met strongly with 33 Rde3 Rxe6 34 dxe6 Qe8 35 Qd5 and White is winning.

**33 dxe6 Qxe6 34 Rxd6 Qe4**

Also losing is 34...Qf7 35 Ne5 Qb7 36 Rd8+! Bf8 37 Qxb7 Rxb7 38 Nd7.

**35 Qxe4 fxe4 36 Re6 Ra8 37 a4 Rb8 38 a5 Rxb3 39 a6 1-0**

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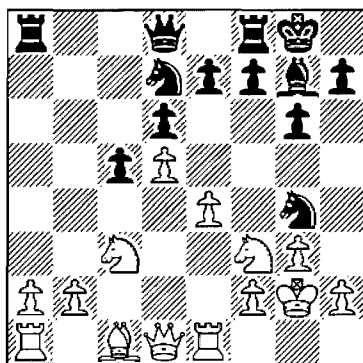
Game 3

□ A.Karpov ■ V.Salov

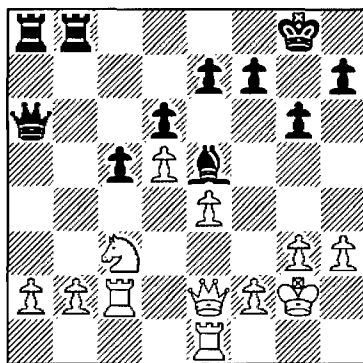
Belgrade 1996

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 e4 Bxf1 8 Kxf1 d6 9 g3 Bg7 10 Kg2 Nbd7 11 Nf3 0-0 12 Re1 Ng4 (Diagram 11)



**Diagram 11 (W)**  
Black plays ...Ng4



**Diagram 12 (B)**  
A marginal edge for White

Or 12...Qb6 13 h3 Ne8 14 Qc2 Nc7 15 Rb1 Rfb8 16 Bg5 Kf8 17 b3 (17 Na4 Qb4 18 b3 Nb5 is less clear – Karpov) 17...Qa5 18 Na4 Nb5 19 Qc1! with a slight advantage for White. Now after 19...Nc3 20 Nxc3 Qxc3 21 Re2 Ra6 22 Qd1 Qb4 23 Rc1 Rba8 24 Rcc2 Black hadn't managed to generate counterplay and was getting into trouble in A.Karpov-Kir.Georgiev, Yugoslavia 1996.

**13 Bf4**

This is a very sensible move, but White has also tried more complicated ideas:

a) 13 Nd2 Nge5 14 Qe2 Nb6 15 f4 Ned7 16 a4 should give White some play. At least after 16...Ra5!? 17 Nb3 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Rxa4 19 Rxa4 Nxa4 20 c4 Qb6 21 Qc2 e5 22 dxe6 fxe6 White retained some prospects in S.Atalik-K.Miton, Los Angeles 2000.

b) 13 Qe2!? is also interesting. After 13...Qa5 14 Nd2, in G.Danner-K.Van der Weide, St Polten 2002 Black misplayed his hand completely with 14...Bxc3 15 Nc4 Qa6 16 bxc3 Nge5 17 Nxe5 Nxe5 when 18 Bh6! Rfb8 19 Qxa6 Rxa6 20 Reb1 was great for White.

**13...Qa5 14 h3**

Also possible is 14 Rc1 with the idea of 14...Bxc3 15 bxc3 Qxa2 16 Rc2 Qa6 (but not 16...Qc4?!, which gives counterplay according to Karpov, but loses directly to 17 Nd2!) 17 Rb2 and White holds on to a slight plus.

**14...Nge5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Qe2 Rfb8 17 Rac1 Qa6**

17...Rb4 18 Bxe5 Bxe5 19 Rc2 is similar to the game. Here 19...Rxb2?! 20 Rxb2 Bxc3 21 Rb5 Qxa2 22 Rb8+ Kg7 23 Rxa8 leads to a clear advantage – Karpov.  
**18 Bxe5 Bxe5 19 Rc2 (Diagram 12)**



**NOTE: White has a small edge here. If you are not prepared to play this kind of position once in a while, then the Volga Gambit is not your cup of tea. However, White does not have great winning chances so objectively it is not a bad choice.**

**19...Qxe2**

19...Rb4?! 20 Qf3 Bxc3 21 bxc3 Ra4 apparently wins the pawn back, but after 22 e5 Rxa2 23 Rxa2 Qxa2 24 exd6 exd6 25 Re7 White takes over the initiative and has good winning chances.

**20 Rxe2 Rb4 21 a3**

21 b3 is met with the thematic 21...c4! when the weak a-pawn will assure Black of equality: 22 bxc4 Rxc4 23 Nd1 Rd4 24 Rcd2 Rda4 25 f3 Bd4 26 Nf2 Bxf2 and despite being a pawn up, there is no way White can ever make progress – Karpov.

**21...Rb3 22 Nd1 Bd4**

After 22...Ra4 23 Ne3 Rxe4 24 Nc4 Rxe2 25 Rxe2 Bf6 26 Re3 Rb7 27 b3 White would have made good progress in return for the e-pawn, which cannot be used for much currently.

**23 Ne3 Bxe3 24 Rxe3 Rxe3 25 fxe3 Rb8 26 Kf3 Rb3**

26...f6 would allow 27 b4!? cxb4 28 Rb2 b3 29 Ke2 f5 30 Kd3 when White might still have some pressure.

**27 a4 f6 28 g4**

Or 28 Rc3 Rxb2 29 Ra3 Kf7 30 a5 Rb7 31 a6 Ra7 and Black is able to make the draw: 32 Ke2 Ke8 33 Kd3 Kd7 34 Kc4 Kc7 35 Kb5 Ra8 36 Ka5 Rf8 37 Rb3 Rb8 – Karpov.

**28...Kf7 29 a5 Rb5 30 a6 Ra5 31 b4 cxb4 32 Rc6 b3 33 Rb6 b2 34 Rxb2 Rxa6 35 Rb5 ½-½**

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### Game 4

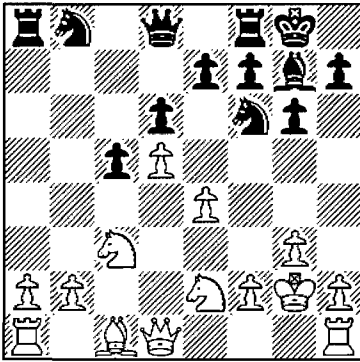
□ D.Komarov ■ E.Solozhenkin

French League 1998

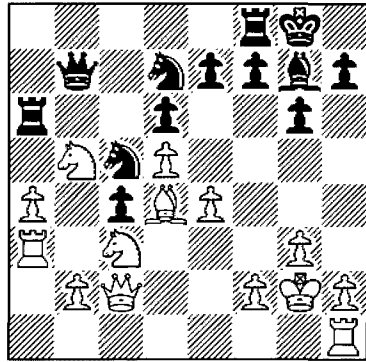
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 e4 Bxf1 8 Kxf1 d6 9 g3

The more committal 9 g4!? shouldn't give Black serious problems. Black should not weaken his kingside with 9...h5?! 10 g5 Nfd7 11 Nge2 Bg7 12 Kg2 0-0 when White can generate a real attack out of 13 f4 Na6 14 f5. Instead play continues 9...Bg7 10 Kg2 (10 g5 Nh5 11 Nge2 Qc8 12 Kg2 Qg4+ 13 Ng3 Nf4+ 14 Bxf4 Qxf4 15 h4 is pretty unclear as well) 10...Nbd7 11 g5 Nh5 12 Nge2 Qa5 13 Bd2 Ne5 14 b3 Nd3 15 Na4 Qb5 16 Bc3 Ne5 17 h4 0-0 when both players have their chances but we do not believe that this is the way to defeat the Volga Gambit. Now in M.Suba-G.Milos, Elgoibar 1993 the continuation 18 Rc1 f5 19 gxf6 Bxf6 20 Bxe5 Bxe5 21 Rc4 Rf6 22 f3 Raf8 gave Black real attacking prospects.

9...Bg7 10 Kg2 0-0 11 Nge2!? (Diagram 13)



**Diagram 13 (B)**  
An alternative development



**Diagram 14 (B)**  
Opposing bishops

We think that this alternative development of the knight also offers good chances of gaining an advantage.

11...Nbd7

11...Na6 can be met by 12 Rb1!.



**NOTE: This idea is becoming more and more standard; White prepares the option of putting the bishop on b2.**

Here A.Goldin-E.Bareev, Irkutsk 1986 continued 12...Qd7 13 b3 Nc7 14 f3 Rfb8 15 Qc2 Nb5 16 Nxb5 Qxb5 17 a4 Qa6 18 Nc3 c4 19 b4 Nd7 20 a5 Ne5 21 Bd2 and White had some advantage.

12 Qc2 Ra6 13 a4 Qa8 14 Nb5 Qb7 15 Nec3

Also interesting is 15 Rd1 Rfa8 16 Nec3 c4 17 Be3 Nb6 (or 17...Ng4 18 Bd4 Bxd4 19 Rxd4 Nb6 20 b3 cxb3 21 Qxb3 Ne5 and White is a little better) 18 Bxb6 Qxb6 19 Rd4 Rc8 20 Nd1 Ng4 21 Rxc4 Rxc4 22 Qxc4 Qxf2+! 23 Nxf2 Ne3+ 24 Kf3 Nxc4 25 Nd3 Bxb2 26 Ra2 and White retains some chances, V.Korchnoi-O.Borik, Vienna 1986.

15...c4

After 15...e6, 16 Rd1 exd5 17 exd5 Ne5 18 Bf4 should keep a slight plus.

16 Ra3 Nc5 17 Be3 Nfd7 18 Bd4 (Diagram 14) 18...Bh6?!

This inspires White to create a very strong attack on the kingside. Better was something like 18...Rfa8 19 f3 Nb3 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Qe2 Nb6 22 e5, though White retains some pressure.

19 h4!? Nb3 20 h5 Nxd4 21 Nxd4 Bg7 22 Nc6 Nb8 23 hxg6 hxg6 24 Nxb8 Rxb8 25 Nb5 Rc8 26 Rc3! Bxc3 27 Qxc3 e5?

27...f6 was forced. Still, after 28 Qe3 e5 (28...g5? 29 Qf3 does not work) 29 Qh6 Qg7 30 Qh3 f5 (30...Re8 31 Nc7! wins) 31 exf5 gxf5 32 Qxf5 Black is in considerable trouble.

28 Nxd6! 1-0

## Modifying the Main Line with h2-h3

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 Bxa6 6 Nc3 g6 7 e4 Bxf1 8 Kxf1 d6 9 Nf3 Bg7 10 h3 0-0 11 Kg1 Nbd7 12 Kh2 (Diagram 15)

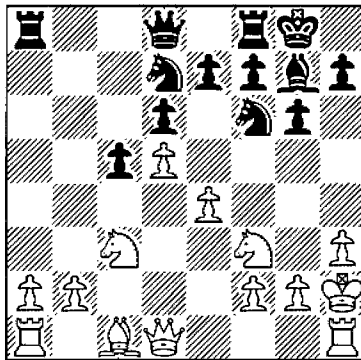


Diagram 15 (B)

Castling 'by hand'

This king evacuation leads to the loss of a tempo (later on White almost always has to move his king back to g1). However, everything is okay with the light squares on the kingside and there is no manoeuvre ...Nf6-g4 to worry about. Because of this White has the breakthrough e4-e5 in his arsenal – the

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

pawn structure f2-g2-h3 is better adapted to this advance in the centre than the main line's f2-g3-h2. Even so, this lunge still requires proper preparation (see the note to White's 14th move in Game 6).

Black's basic plans are the usual: attack the queenside pawns (see Game 6) and undermining with ...e7-e6 (see Game 5). We have some variety here thanks to the atypical advance of the f-pawn in the game Varga-Rogers (see the notes to Game 5).

As with the g2-g3 line, with h2-h3 there is also the option of the rare Ng1-e2, a plan that Grandmaster Shulman particularly likes. He attacked on the king-side against Fominyh (see the notes to Game 5), which is unusual for the Real Volga Gambit. As mentioned previously, the more modest development of the knight doesn't support the e4-e5 advance, and White is usually busy consolidating and improving his position on the queenside.

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## Statistics

With h2-h3 and Nf3. White scores 54%; in the case of h2-h3 and Ne2, 66%.

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## Theoretical?

Fairly, despite a drop in popularity.

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## Theoretical Status

Quite well respected – Black is not ready to exploit the apparent sluggishness of his opponent. Normally, we see a manoeuvring game where White's loss of tempo does not play a significant role.

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Game 5

□ R.Sherbakov ■ H.Teske

Pardubice 1999

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 e4 Bxf1 8 Kxf1 d6 9 h3 Bg7 10 Nf3**

Another version of this line involves developing the knight to e2: 10 Nge2 0-0 11 Kg1 Qb6 12 Rb1 Nbd7 13 Kh2 Rfb8 (**Diagram 16**).

Basically it looks to us as if Black has reasonable counterplay. Here is an example: 14 Qc2 Ne8 15 Bg5 Nc7 16 Rhd1.



**WARNING: 16 Bxe7?! f6 forces White into 17 e5 Nxe5 18 f4 Nf7, when he is suddenly struggling.**

16...Na6 17 Qd2 Nb4 18 a3 (18 b3?! Ra3 19 Na4 Qa6 20 Nec3 Bxc3 21 Nxc3 f6 22 Bh6 Nxa2 with an advantage for Black because of the weak b3-pawn. Y.Shulman-A.Fominyh, Minsk 1995) 18...Ne5!? 19 axb4 cxb4 with an unclear position.

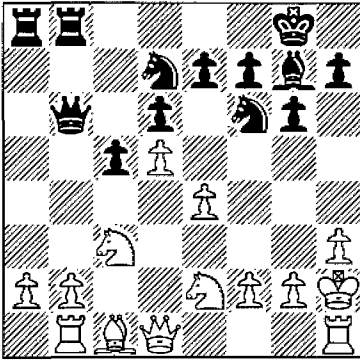


Diagram 16 (W)  
Developing with Nge2

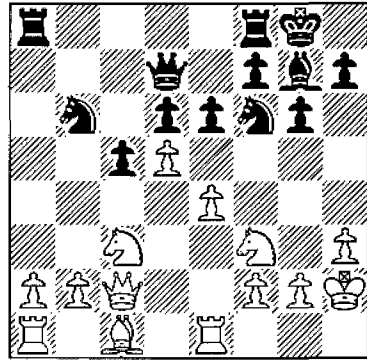


Diagram 17 (W)  
Not quite equalising

**10...0-0 11 Kg1 Nbd7**

11...Na6 isn't natural – the knight is not very flexible here: 12 Kh2 Qb6 13 Re1 Nd7 14 Re2 Nb4 15 Bg5 Rfe8 16 Qd2 Qa6 17 Bh6 Bh8 18 Ne1 Rab8 19 a3 (after 19 Rd1 Qc4 20 a3 Na2! 21 Nxa2 Qxa2 22 Nd3 Ne5 23 Nc1 Qa1 a draw was agreed in A.Graf-E.Ghaem Magami, Shenyang 1999) 19...Qa7 20 Rb1 Na6 21 b3 and we think White is a little better.

**12 Kh2 Nb6 13 Re1 Qd7**

13...Nfd7 has also been tried, with Black obtaining counterplay after 14 Qc2 Nc4 15 Qe2 Ndb6 16 Kg1 Qd7 17 Nd2 Nxd2 18 Bxd2 f5!/? and now:

- a) 19 exf5?! Qxf5 20 Qe6+ Qxe6 21 dxe6 Nc4 and Black has the initiative.
- b) 19 Qd3!/? Na4 20 Qc2 when possibly White retains some advantage.
- c) 19 Nd1 f4 20 Bc3 f3!/? 21 Qd3 Bxc3 22 Nxc3 fxg2 23 Kxg2 Qb7 with chances for both sides, P.Varga-I.Rogers, Lugano 1999.

**14 Qc2 e6!/? (Diagram 17)**

In the game this idea doesn't really manage to equalise. Maybe 13...Nfd7 is preferable.

**15 dxe6**

15 Bg5 allows Black to equalise after 15...exd5 16 Bxf6 Bxf6 17 exd5 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Nxd5 19 Rad1 Nf6 20 c4 Ra6.

**15...fxe6 16 Kg1 d5 17 Ne5 Qb7 18 exd5**

18 Nd3?! would lead White into trouble after 18...d4! 19 e5!/? (not 19 Nxc5? Qc6 20 Nd1 Nfd7 21 b4 d3 when Black wins) 19...Nfd7 20 Ne4 c4 and Black is taking over the initiative.

**18...exd5 19 Bg5 Rae8!/?**

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Black shouldn't allow White to have such a strong knight in the centre. After 19...Nfd7 20 Nxd7 Nxd7 21 Rad1 Rf5 22 Qd2 Nb6 White's advantage is not that great.

**20 a4 Qb8**

Slightly better is 20...Nfd7, although after 21 Nxd7 Nxd7 22 Qd2 d4 23 Nb5 White is doing quite well anyway. Now Black has trouble keeping his centre together.

**21 Bxf6! Bxf6 22 Ng4 Rxe1+ 23 Rxe1 Bd4**

23...Qb7 loses to 24 Nxf6+ Rxf6 25 a5 Nc4 26 Re8+ Kg7 27 Ne4! when besides the extra pawn White also has a very strong attack.

**24 a5 Nc4 25 Nxd5 Qxb2**

25...Nxa5 would also face destruction after 26 Qd2 Nc6 27 Re6 Nb4 28 Ndf6+ followed by Nd7.

**26 Ndf6+ Bxf6 27 Qxc4+ Kh8 28 Nxf6 1-0**

---

Game 6

□ P.Haba ■ M.Prusikin

Germany 2003

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 e4 Bxf1 8 Kxf1 d6 9 Nf3 Bg7 10 h3 0-0 11 Kg1 Nbd7 12 Kh2 Qa5 13 Re1 Rfb8 14 Qc2**

White has also played 14 Re2 but it appears to be less testing. The thing is, if Black has enough time to put all his pieces in the right places, then he is not positionally worse. For example, 14...Rb4 15 Kg1 Ne8 16 a3 Rb7 17 Rc2 Rab8 18 Qe2 Ne5 19 Nxe5 Bxe5 with counterplay, L.Portisch-E.Vasiukov, Manila 1974; or 14...Ne8 15 Rc2 Nb6 16 Qe2 Qa6 17 e5?! (too optimistic; 17 Qxa6 Rxa6 18 Rb1 f5!/? with chances for both sides was more reasonable) 17...Qxe2 18 Rxe2 Nc4 19 exd6 exd6 20 a4 Nc7 21 Re7 Bxc3 22 Rxc7 Bxb2 23 Bxb2 Rxb2 24 Kg3 Rb3 and Black was a little better in Se.Ivanov-S.Sivokho, St Petersburg 1999.

**14...Nb6 15 Nd1 c4! (Diagram 18)**

Black is playing very aggressively, meeting the demands of the position. Slower play would give White a nice position: 15...Qa6 16 Bd2 Nc4 17 Bc3 Rb7 18 Kg1 e6 19 dxe6 fxe6 20 e5!/? and Black is probably already significantly worse.

**16 Be3 Nfd7 17 Re2 Nc5 18 Nd2**

18 Nd4? would be met by 18...Bxd4! 19 Bxd4 Nb3! 20 axb3 Qxa1 21 bxc4 Nxc4! when Black is clearly better – Prusikin.

**18...Nb3!**

Necessary; after 18...Qa4 19 Qxa4 Nbx4 20 Nxc4 Nxe4 21 Rc1 Black is running out of options.

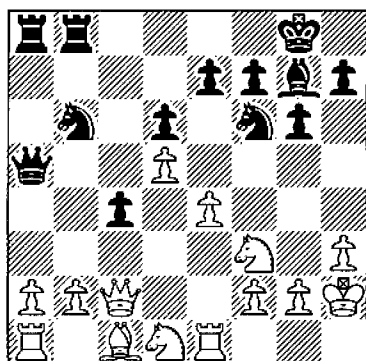


Diagram 18 (W)

...c5-c4 – aggressive play!

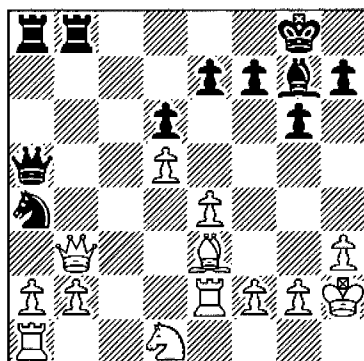


Diagram 19 (W)

Pressure on the queenside!

### 19 Nxb3

19 Nxc4? is less testing. After 19...Nxa1 20 Nxa5 Nxc2 21 Bxb6 Rxb6 22 Nc4 Black has 22...Nd4! 23 Nxb6 Ra6 24 Re3 Rxb6, winning.

19 axb3 Qxa1 20 bxc4 Nd7 21 Nf3 Rb7 is not clear, but it is hard to see why White should have any interest in playing like this.

### 19...cxb3 20 Qxb3 Na4 (Diagram 19) 21 Qd3

21 Qc4 would allow Black to equalise with a very nice variation: 21...Nxb2 22 Nxb2 Rxb2! 23 Rc1 Be5+! 24 f4 Qxa2 25 Qxa2 Rxa2 26 Rxb2 Bxb2 27 Rc2 Ra3! and White does not have a shadow of an advantage.

White could probably have still achieved a slight edge with 21 Bd2! Qa6 22 Qf3 Nc5 23 Re3 Qb7 24 Bc3 Nb3 25 Rb1 Bxc3 26 axb3 Be5+ 27 Kh1 Rc8, as indicated by Prusikin. Still, as already mentioned, Black should not fear this kind of position. Here White might have two extra pawns, but making them count is another matter.

21...Nxb2 22 Nxb2 Rxb2 ½-½

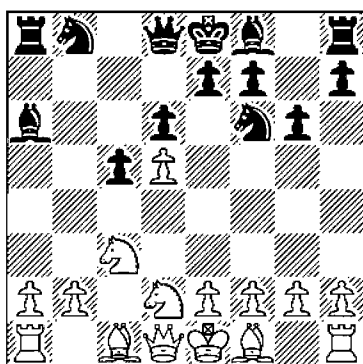
## 7 Nf3 d6 8 Nd2

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 Bxa6 6 Nc3 g6 7 Nf3 d6 8 Nd2 (Diagram 20)

This was first played in 1970 and was popular for some years. White doesn't want to lose his right to castle and so uses his knight's assistance. After e2-e4 and the exchange ...Bxf1, Nxf1 the knight heads for e3 (where it takes control of e4) with castling to follow. If Black plays slowly (see the note to Black's 10th move in Game 7) White can consolidate the queenside. However, the game Bareev-Kasparov (Game 7) identifies the dark side of White's strategy: the

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

breakthrough with e4-e5 is not threatened, the d2-bishop is confined by its own knights, and the weakness of the d3-square affects the situation.



**Diagram 20 (B)**  
White plays Nf3-d2

Besides the banal 8...Bg7, Black has the option of 8...Qa5 (see the note to Black's 8th move in Game 7). If 9 e4 Bxf1 White is unable to recapture on f1 with his knight in view of the loss of the e4-pawn, so he loses his right to castle and Nf3-d2 does not make sense any more. 9 g3 is possible, but if White had intended to fianchetto there was no need for Nf3-d2. Finally, 9 f3 prepares the advance e2-e4 at the cost of a tempo and some weakening of the dark squares.

## Statistics

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8 Nd2 gives White 50% overall, but only 46% after 8...Qa5.

## Theoretical?

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No. Since the 1970s, 8 Nd2 has been very rarely employed and almost always by pretty weak chess players.

## Theoretical Status

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Insignificant. The continuation 8 Nd2 was introduced in the early days of the Volga Gambit; at that time White was looking for an effective weapon against a dangerous new opening. Now White has developed reliable lines and there is no more need for these artificial means.

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Game 7

□ E.Bareev ■ G.Kasparov

Linares 1994

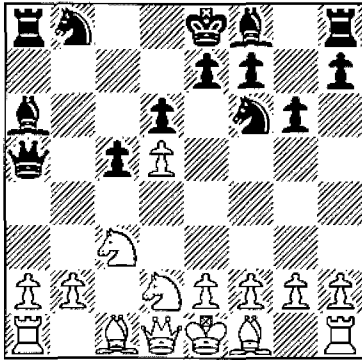
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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nf3 Bxa6 7 Nc3 d6 8 Nd2

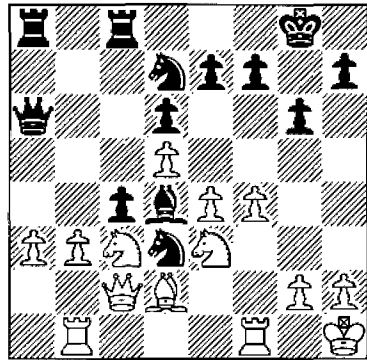
The many tempi lost with this manoeuvre is to some extent outweighed by the arrival at e3 of White's knight. Still, Black should have good chances to equalise.

**8...Bg7**

Black's other option is 8...Qa5 (Diagram 21).



**Diagram 21 (W)**  
A spanner in the works



**Diagram 22 (W)**  
Looking for complications

Now White has various options:

a) 9 g3 Bg7 10 Bg2 0-0 11 0-0 Nbd7 12 Qc2 Rfb8 13 Rd1 Ne5 14 h3 Nfd7 15 Kh2 Ra7 16 f4 Nc4 17 Nxc4 Bxc4 18 Bd2 Qa6 19 Re1 Nb6 20 b3 Bxc3 21 Bxc3 Bxd5 22 e4 Ba8 23 f5 with unclear play, S.Gligoric-D.Rajkovic, Vrbas 1977.

b) 9 f3 Bg7 10 e4 Bxf1 11 Nxf1 Nfd7 12 Qd2 Nb6 13 Ne3 N8d7 14 0-0 c4 with good counterplay for Black, M.Gerusel-R.Knaak, Leipzig 1975.

c) 9 e4 Bxf1 10 Kxf1 Bg7 11 g3 Nbd7 12 Kg2 Qa6 13 Qf1 is probably still slightly favourable for White.

**9 e4 Bxf1 10 Nxf1 Qa5**

10...0-0 11 Ne3 Na6?! is inferior, with White doing well in the following game: 12 0-0 Nd7 13 Qe2 Qc7 14 Bd2 Qb7 15 Rab1 Nc7 16 b3 e6 17 a4 Rfe8 18 Nc4 Qa6 19 Qf3 Ne5 20 Nxe5 Bxe5 21 Rfd1, M.Taimanov-P.Benko, Wijk aan Zee 1970.

**11 Bd2 0-0 12 Ne3 Nbd7**

12...Qa6 13 Qe2 Nbd7 14 Qxa6 Rxa6 15 Ke2 might give White a slight edge in the endgame.

**13 0-0 Qa6 14 Qc2 Ne5 15 b3**

15 a4 is interesting, with White being better after 15...Qd3 (15...c4?! 16 Nb5 Rfc8 17 Bc3 would not be good for Black) 16 b3 Rfb8 17 Rfb1 Qxc2 18 Nxc2 Nd3 19 f3 Nd7 20 Kf1 f5 21 exf5 gxf5 22 Ne3.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 15...Nfd7

15...Rfb8 allows White to get a slight edge with 16 f4 Nd3 17 Nc4 Nb4 18 Qd1, when 18...Nxe4 19 Nxe4 Bxa1 20 Qxa1 Qxa2 21 Qxa2 Rxa2 22 Bxb4 Rxb4 23 Rf3 leaves Black still looking for a clear way to equalise.

### 16 f4 Nd3 17 a3 Bd4 18 Kh1 Rfc8 19 Rab1

Or 19 Rad1 Nb4 20 axb4 cxb4 21 Nc4 bxc3 22 Bxc3 Bxc3 23 Qxc3 Nc5 with good play for Black, a draw being likely.

### 19...c4!? (Diagram 22)

Kasparov is always willing to solve all problems with tactics.

### 20 b4

20 Nxc4 Nf2+ 21 Rxf2 Bxf2 22 Nd1 Bd4 23 Qd3 Bg7 was possibly better, while 20 bxc4 Bxe3 21 Qxd3 Bxd2 22 Qxd2 Qxc4 23 Rfc1 Nc5 seems to give Black good compensation, especially after 24 Rb4?! Qd3!.

### 20...Nf6 21 Ned1 Rcb8

21...Qxa3? would be wrong because of 22 Nb5 Qa2 23 Nxd4 Qxc2 24 Nxc2 Ra2 25 Nde3 Nxe4 26 Be1, when Black's tactic clearly hasn't worked. However, 21...Qb6!? is interesting: following 22 a4 Bxc3 23 a5 Qa7 24 Nxc3 Ng4 (24...Nf2+ 25 Rxf2 Qxf2 26 Qc1 is less clear) 25 g3 Qd4 Black has great counterplay.

### 22 Ne3

After 22 Be3 Qb6 23 Na4 Rxa4 24 Bxd4 Qxd4 25 Qxa4 Nxe4 26 Qc2 Rb5! Black has a clear edge according to Kasparov: White simply cannot advance any piece, and the idea of ...Rxd5 and ...Ng3+ is pretty annoying.

### 22...Rc8 23 b5?!

Black's queen is only better on b6.

### 23...Qb6 24 Nxc4 Nf2+!

First the white rook is lured to a worse square...

### 25 Rxf2 Rxc4

...then the knight is captured.

### 26 Rf3 (Diagram 23)

### 26...Rxa3?

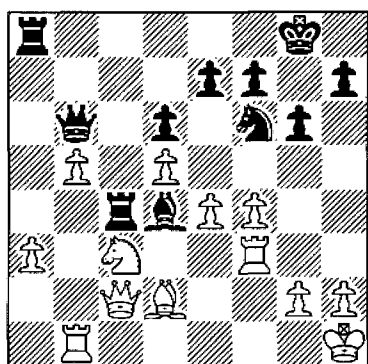
Here Kasparov gives the following variation leading to a clear plus: 26...Bxc3! 27 Bxc3 (27 Rxc3? Nxe4 28 Rxc4 Nf2+) 27...Nxe4 28 Rb3 (or 28 Ba5? Qc5! and Black wins, while 28 Qd3? Nxc3 29 Qxc4 Nxb1 30 Qc6 Qxc6 31 dxc6 Nxa3 32 b6 Nc4 leads to the same result) 28...Rac8 29 h3 Qc5 30 b6 Qxd5! 31 b7 Rb8.

### 27 Qb2! Nxe4

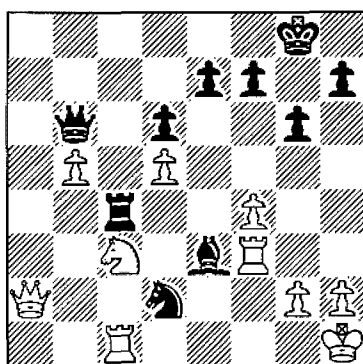
27...Ra8 28 Qb3 Rac8 29 Re1 with unclear play was less forcing, but Kasparov likes to calculate.

### 28 Qxa3 Nxd2 29 Qa2! Be3

29...Bxc3 30 Rxc3 Rxc3 31 Qxd2 Rc5 draws easily, but Kasparov wanted to give White the chance to make a mistake.



**Diagram 23 (B)**  
Black misses a chance



**Diagram 24 (B)**  
White has blundered

### 30 Rc1?? (Diagram 24)

Bareev was apparently tired from calculating all these complex lines, and walked straight into a deadly pin. Necessary was 30 Nd1 when Black has two options:

- a) 30...Bxf4? 31 Rd3 Bxh2!? 32 Ne3! (but not 32 Kxh2? Nf1+ 33 Kh1 Rh4+ 34 Rh3 Ng3+ with a draw) 32...Rh4 33 Qxd2 Be5+ 34 Kg1 f5 35 Qc1 and White is winning – Qc6 comes next.
- b) 30...Qc5 31 Rxe3 Nxb1 32 Qxb1 Rc1 33 Qd3 Rxd1+ 34 Qxd1 Qxe3 35 Qb1 Qb6 36 h3 h5 37 Qb4 h4 (Kasparov) and White cannot improve his position, as Black will have ...Qf2 and perpetual if White tries to force the b-pawn forward.

### 30...Qd4!

Now White's position collapses.

31 b6 Rxc3 0-1

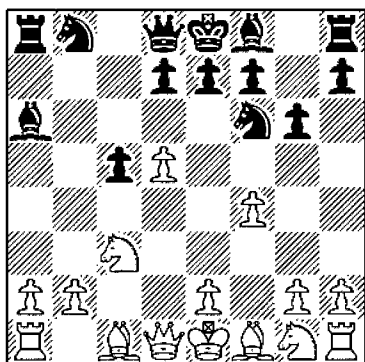
## The Murey Variation

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 Bxa6 6 Nc3 g6 7 f4 (Diagram 25)

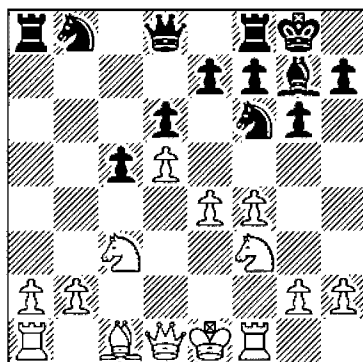
The well-known theorist and international master (now grandmaster) Jacob Murey first employed this aggressive approach in his game against Platonov in 1974. This method of development is quite logical: to prepare the breakthrough with e4-e5 White doesn't block the path of the f-pawn with his knight, but immediately throws it forward. This pawn advance makes the white king unsafe and delays development for one more move, but we again stress that

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Black's army takes aim at the queenside and it is not so easy to reorganise it for an attack on the exposed king.



**Diagram 25 (B)**  
White lunges with f2-f4



**Diagram 26 (W)**  
A choice for White

Grandmaster Mikhail Tseitlin has suggested that 7...Qa5 is the best reply to 7 f4. By threatening the e4-square (where the white pawn is going to appear), Black virtually forces Bc1-d2. The d2-bishop is fairly passive and it appears to be impossible to gain anything from a discovered attack on Black's queen along the e1-a5 diagonal. In the game I.Naumkin-V.Ivanov (see the notes to Game 8) White obtained only a slight edge after a queen exchange.

Let's move on a little further:

**7...Bg7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 e4 Bxf1 10 Rxf1 d6 (Diagram 26)**

Here White has a choice. One option is to put off any active play until after his king escapes the centre; 11 Kf2 followed by 11 Kg1 is yet one further way of evacuation to add to the collection. Game 8 demonstrates protection of the e5-square, the advance with e4-e5, and finally the kingside attack. Also in the note to Black's 11th move there is a model of the breakthrough f4-f5.

An immediate breakthrough in the centre 11 e5 is covered in Game 9. Here the vulnerable initial position of the white king affects the situation. The theoretically important game Hoi-Conquest (see the note to White's 14th move) shows that a queen exchange is the right solution to the king's problems.

## Statistics

White's score in the Murey Variation is 50%. After 7...Qa5 he has scored only 33%, but this performance is an unreliable guide due to the very small number of games.

## Theoretical?

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No! It always remains in the background compared to other systems.

## Theoretical Status

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The Murey Variation seems to be underestimated. It is not easy for Black to defend against the breakthrough with e4-e5, and probably only the rare response 7...Qa5 provides sufficient counterchances. At the very least, the Murey Variation can be recommended as a promising backup system against the Volga Gambit, with White displaying an uncharacteristic fighting nature for this opening (in particular, there's the option of queenside castling).

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Game 8

□ P.Zarubin ■ I.Shlihtin

USSR 1978

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 Bxa6 6 Nc3 g6 7 f4 Bg7**

We believe that 7...Qa5! is the correct way to play for Black; the main idea is to force White to play Bd2, which leaves the b2-pawn exposed for later tactics. For example, 8 Bd2 Bg7 9 Nf3 0-0 10 e4 d6 11 Bxa6 Qxa6 12 Qe2 Nbd7 13 Qxa6 Rxa6 14 Rd1 Rb8 15 Bc1 Rb4 16 a3 Rb7 17 0-0 Ne8 18 Rfe1 Bxc3 19 bxc3 Nc7 and Black had the standard Volga counterplay for the pawn in I.Naumkin-V.Ivanov, Moscow 1992.

**8 Nf3 0-0 9 e4 Bxf1 10 Rxf1 d6 11 Kf2 Nbd7**

Or 11...Na6 12 Kg1 (this position can also be reached via the King's Indian move order 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 0-0 6 Nf3 c5 7 d5 b5 8 cxb5 a6 9 bxa6 Bxa6 10 Bxa6 Nxa6 11 0-0) 12...Nb4 13 Qe2 Qb6 14 f5!? (14 a3 Qa6 15 Qxa6 Nxa6 16 e5 gives unclear play – I.Sokolov) 14...Qa6 15 Qf2 Qc4 16 Qh4 Nxa2 17 Rxa2 Rxa2 18 Nxa2 Qxa2 19 fxg6 fxg6 20 Qh3 Qc4 21 Re1 Qb4 22 Qe6+ Kh8 with chances for both sides, C.Hoi-R.Libeau, Copenhagen 1995.

**12 Kg1 Qb8**

12...Nb6 13 Kh1 Qd7 didn't work well in the following game: 14 Qc2 Rfb8 15 Rb1 Na4 16 Nd1 e6 17 b3 Qb5 18 Nd2 Nb6 19 dxe6 fxe6 20 Bb2 Qa6 21 Ne3 Nbd7 22 a4 d5 23 exd5 exd5 24 Be5 Re8 25 Nf3 and White simply had an extra pawn in R.Peltz-I.Platonov, Daugavpils 1974.

**13 Qe2 Qb7 14 h3 Rfb8**

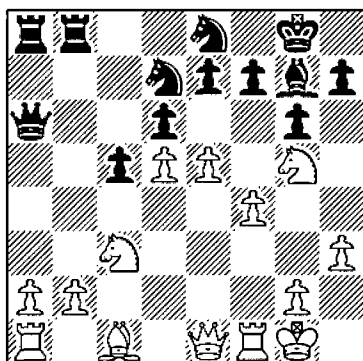
The standard 14...e6 is weak here: 15 dxe6 fxe6 16 Rd1 Ra6 17 Qc4 and the light squares are quite tender.

**15 Ng5 Qa6 16 Qe1 Ne8?!**

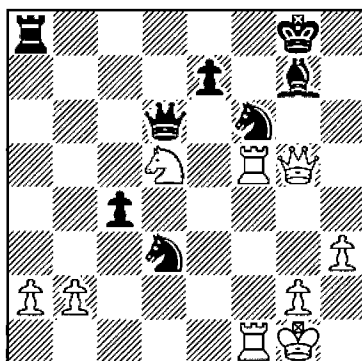
The knight looks pretty passive here – it's a long way from e8 to b5. Better was 16...Nh5!? 17 Kh2 Qc4 when the position is pretty unclear.

**17 e5! (Diagram 27)**

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems



**Diagram 27 (B)**  
Pushing on the kingside



**Diagram 28 (B)**  
How does Black survive?

### 17...dxe5 18 fxe5 Nxe5 19 Bf4

Here 19 Qh4!? looks quite interesting. Our main line is 19...Nf6 20 Rxf6! exf6 (20...Bxf6? loses by force to 21 Qxh7+ Kf8 22 Bf4 Qd3 23 Rd1! – 23 Bxe5 Qe3+ 24 Kh1 Qxg5 25 Bxb8 Rxb8 would on the other hand give Black a fine game – 23...Qf5 24 Rf1 Ke8 25 Nge4! and Black will not be able to defend against all the threats) 21 Qxh7+ Kf8 22 Nge4 and White has succeeded in forcing Black's king into the open.

### 19...Nd3 20 Qh4 h6

20...Nxf4 21 Qxh7+ Kf8 22 Rxf4 Nf6 23 Qh4 Rxb2 24 Rd1 leads to unclear complications.

### 21 Nxf7!

There is no way back now. After 21 Bxb8?! hxg5 22 Qg3 c4 there is no escape route for the bishop on b8.

### 21...g5 22 Bxg5!

22 Nxb6+?! would be a lot weaker. After 22...Bxb6 23 Bxg5 Bg7 24 Bxe7 Rxb2 it is hard to see how White is going to get to Black's king.

### 22...hxg5 23 Qxg5 Rb6

23...Rxb2 is met strongly by 24 Rf3! Rc2 25 Ne4 c4 26 Raf1 when White has gained important time for the attack.

### 24 d6 Rxd6

24...Nxd6 25 Nh6+ Kh7 26 Nd5 gives White reasonable compensation based on 26...Bxb6 27 Qxe7+ Kh8 28 Qf6+ Kh7 with a draw.

### 25 Nxd6 Qxd6 26 Nd5 Nf6 27 Rf5! c4

Probably slightly better was 27...Nxd5 28 Rxd5 Qf4 29 Qg6 Qf2+ 30 Kh2 Nf4

31 Qe4 Rf8 32 Rg5 with chances for both sides.

**28 Raf1 (Diagram 28) 28...Nxd5?**

This loses without a real fight because of White's 31st move. 28...Qc5+?! would also lead to trouble after 29 Kh1 Rd8 30 Ne3! Qc6 31 R5f3 when White has chances on both wings. However, best was 28...Rd8! 29 Nxf6+ exf6 30 Rxf6 Qc5+ 31 Qxc5 Nxc5 when Black still has reasonable drawing chances in the endgame.

**29 Rf7 Qb6+ 30 Kh1 Qxb2 31 Qxd5 Ra5 32 Qxa5 Bf6 33 Qh5 1-0**

Game 9

□ P.Verdier ■ H.Hamdouchi

French League 1999

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 f4 Bg7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 e4 Bxf1 10 Rxf1 d6 11 e5**

White is going directly for the kill.

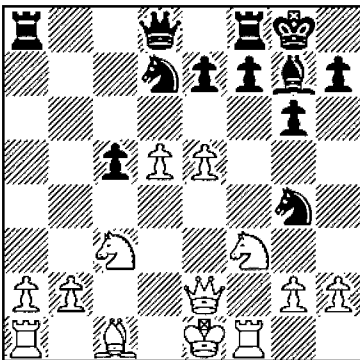
**11...dxe5?!**

This looks very risky. Better is 11...Ne8 12 Kf2 Nd7 13 Qe2 Nc7 14 Kg1 Nb6 15 Rd1 when White's position is a bit more pleasant, but even stronger is 11...Nfd7!? when White has the following logical tries:

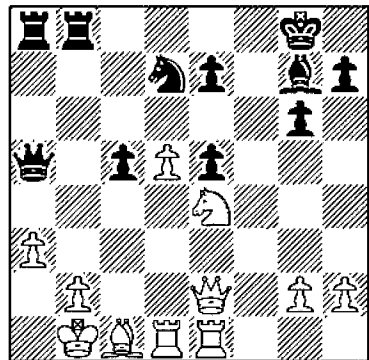
a) 12 Qe2 Nb6 13 e6 f5! 14 Ng5 Na4 15 Rf3 Nxc3 16 bxc3 Ra4 17 Qb5 Ra5 18 Qb3 c4!? 19 Qxc4 Rc5 20 Qb3 Qa5 21 Bd2 Rxd5 22 Rd1 Nc6 and Black had good compensation in I.Christea-L.Vajda, Bucharest 2001.

b) 12 e6 fxe6 13 Ng5 Bxc3+ 14 bxc3 Qa5 15 Nxe6 Rf6 16 Qd3 Na6 17 f5 with unclear complications.

**12 fxe5 Ng4 13 Qe2 Nd7 (Diagram 29)**



**Diagram 29 (W)**  
A direct kill?



**Diagram 30 (W)**  
Easy to go wrong

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

13...Qc7? 14 d6! exd6 15 Qe4 and White wins.

### 14 Bf4

The idea behind White's system is to go for a direct kill, and this is what we think White should have done here with 14 e6! Qa5, when he can try:

a) 15 exd7?! Bxc3+ 16 Nd2 (16 Bd2 Bxd2+ 17 Nxd2 Qb4 is scary for White, not Black) 16...Ne5! 17 bxc3 Qxc3 18 Rb1 Nd3+ 19 Kd1 Rxa2 20 Qe3 Qc2+ 21 Ke2 Qxb1 22 Qxd3 Qxd3+ 23 Kxd3 Rd8 24 Kc4 Rxd7 and it is White who is struggling to keep the balance. J.Markiewicz-M.Manik. Presov 2001.

b) 15 Bd2 Nde5 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 Bf4 Qa6 18 Bxe5 Qxe2+ 19 Kxe2 Bxe5 20 exf7+ Rxf7 21 Rxf7 Kxf7 22 a4 and White appears to have a clear edge, C.Hoi-S.Conquest, Naestved 1987.

### 14...Qb8 15 0-0-0 Ngxe5?!

Here Black had the chance to play 15...Qb4! 16 g3 Rfb8 17 Rd2 Nb6 18 e6 f5! 19 Bxb8 Nc4! as in J.Murey-D.Gurevich, Hastings 1982/83. Here correct play with 20 Ne5 Ngxe5 21 Bxe5 Bxe5 22 Rd3 Bg7 leads to a complex position with chances for both sides.

### 16 Kb1 Qd6

16...f6 17 Bxe5 fxe5 18 d6! opens things up nicely for White's pieces.

17 Rfe1 f6 18 Nxe5 fxe5 19 Ne4 Qb6 20 Bc1 Qa5 21 a3 Rfb8 (Diagram 30) 22 d6!

It was easy to go astray here. After the tempting 22 Qg4?! Nf6 23 Qe6+ Kh8 24 Ng5 White doesn't have anything special: 24...h6 25 Nf7+ Kh7 26 Qh3 is met strongly by 26...Nxd5! 27 Ng5+ Kh8 28 Nf7+ Kg8 29 Nxh6+ Bxh6 30 Qe6+ Kh8 31 Qxd5 Qxa3 32 Qd8+ Rxd8 33 Rxd8+ Rxd8 34 bxa3 with a draw.

### 22...Qxa3 23 Qc4+ Kh8 24 dxe7 Nb6

24...Qa1+ 25 Kc2 Qa7 26 Qe6 also looks very promising for White.

### 25 bxa3 Nxc4+ 26 Ka2 h6

Or 26...Re8 27 Rd7 Nb6 28 Rb7 Nd5 29 Ng5 Rxe7 30 Rxe7 Nxe7 31 Ne6 with a clear edge. Still, this may have been a better try.

### 27 Nd6 Nxd6 28 Rxd6 Re8 29 Rd7 Kh7 30 Bb2 Bf6?

More resistance was offered by 30...Ra6 31 Bxe5 Re6 32 Bc3 Rxe1 33 Bxe1 Bf6 34 Kb3, when the endgame looks bad but not over.

### 31 Bxe5 Rxe7 32 Red1!

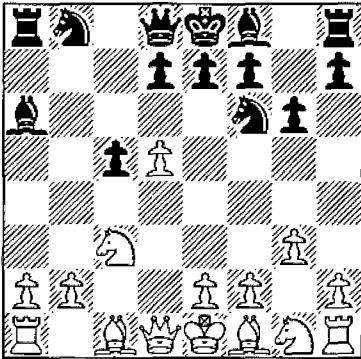
Probably Black overlooked this nice punch.

32...Rd8 33 Rxd8 Rxe5 34 R1d7+ 1-0

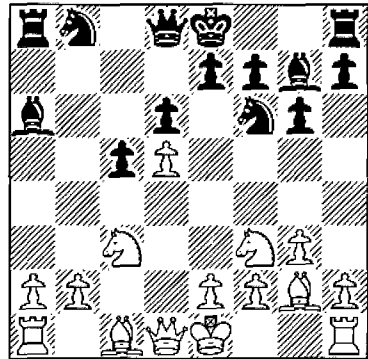
## The Fianchetto Variation

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 Bxa6 6 Nc3 g6 7 g3 (Diagram 31)



**Diagram 31 (B)**  
The Fianchetto Variation



**Diagram 32 (B)**  
Classical development

The popularity of this line is easy to explain. White strives to complete his kingside development as soon as possible. The e2-pawn is not in a hurry to move forward because it covers the vulnerable d3-square. The powerful bishop on a6 is blocked by this pawn and does no great harm to it. Standing on a6, the bishop prevents Black's attack along the a-file; if it moves to other posts (b7, c8) it disturbs the coordination of its own army. The pressure on the queenside that is traditional for the Volga Gambit is not so appreciable here as in the main line.

If this were the whole story, there would be no alternatives to the Fianchetto Variation and the Volga Gambit would lose its fans: in reality, things are not that simple. The advanced pawn on d5 is deprived of any natural support from its 'e' neighbour and is often exposed to Black's attacks: namely, with the knights from f6 and b6, the bishop from b7 or c4, and the queen from a8. The advance e2-e4 to protect the weak pawn, and at the same time to prepare the breakthrough of e4-e5, leaves the a6-f1 diagonal at the full disposal of Black's bishop on a6. Sometimes the a6-bishop moves to f5 via c8 to force e2-e4, and then immediately returns to a6. Of course, Bg2-f1 dampens the activity of the black bishop, but then the fianchetto does not make much sense.

Even if the d5-pawn is not exposed to attack, the other defect of the Fianchetto Variation can still be significant. Exponents of closed games with a fianchettoed bishop, for instance g2-g3 against the King's Indian Defence, become familiar with the downside of the active advance d4-d5: the movement of the g2-bishop is limited by its own pawn on d5, and often by the knight on f3 and the pawn on e4. Playing to break through on the queenside in the Volga Gambit can give White no chance for victory despite being a pawn up, or no possibility to equalise with equal material because of the g2-bishop.

Besides the typical Fianchetto line, there are two quite unusual arrangements

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

(see Game 10). The Soviet master Borisenko suggested developing the f1-bishop to h3. Here the bishop prevents ...Nf6-g4 and controls other squares along the h3-c8 diagonal. In the game Kiriakov-Khairullin the bishop demonstrated amazing mobility by moving from h3 to d7 and on to a4, where it defended the attacked pawns. Of course, this was a result of Black's sluggishness in fighting against this harmless set-up.

The development of the knight to h3 was played as early as 1949 (Golombek-Seft, Trencianske Teplice). Later on this system almost totally disappeared from practice, but it has been restored to life thanks to the St Petersburg grandmasters Aseev, Sergey Ivanov, Ionov and Solozhenkin. Due to his knight on h3 White doesn't have to worry about the fate of his pawn on d5, which is effectively protected by the g2-bishop and, if needed, the f4-knight. In reality the remote position of the knight from the queenside makes Black's counterplay a bit easier to come by, as seen in Zilberman-Greenfeld and Korchnoi-Baklan (Game 10).

In the majority of the cases we have the Fianchetto line in its classical form after

### **7...Bg7 8 Nf3 d6 9 Bg2 (Diagram 32)**

After the move order 9...0-0 10 0-0 Nbd7, White often continues with 11 Qc2 and 12 Rd1 (Game 11). As we see from the Delchev-Roeder game it is not always safe for Black to win the d5-pawn (with ...Nb6 and ...Bc4). Nevertheless, this attack on the weak pawn normally induces e2-e4, after which the central undermining with ...e7-e6 is appropriate (see Vukic-Benko and Avshalumov-Vaisser).

To prevent the repositioning of White's major pieces, the move order 9...Nbd7 10 0-0 Nb6 can be used. Now 11 Qc2 is impossible, and 11 Re1 0-0 is covered in Game 12. Now White can play 12 Bf4 Nh5 13 Bg5 h6 14 Bc1 Nf6, and as a result of this the pawn has been encouraged from h7 to h6 but White still has to decide on his plan. For some reason the sequence 15 Rb1(!) Bxc4 16 e4 Bxa2 17 Nxa2 Rxa2 18 e5 Nfxd5 19 e6 and 20 exf7 has been played in some high-level games, but by forming a strong pawn centre, Black obtains the better chances (see Bacrot-Ponomarev and Nikolic-Fedorowicz). Instead it is reasonable for White to take care of the d5-pawn with 15 Nd2. This knight manoeuvre without provoking the pawn from h7 to h6 (12 Nd2) occurred in the game Grigore-Constantini and was followed by the advance b2-b4.

Theory doesn't consider 10 Rb1 (Game 13) to be a good response to 9...Nbd7. The Kasimdzhanov-Ghaem Maghami game shows that 10...Nb6 can be met by the fianchetto of White's dark-squared bishop, which dampens Black's activity. Apparently stronger is 10...Qa5, preventing b2-b3. Then the logical Bc1-d2 can be met either by preparing ...e7-e6 (Spraggett-Kogan) or laying siege to the d5-pawn in combination with pressure on the queenside (Kramnik-Topalov). After 10...Qa5 it is not worth playing ...Nd7-b6, because a2-a3 and b2-b4 threatens to cause trouble for Black's queen, as in Berry-Mannion.

## Statistics

The combination of Nf3 with Bh3 gives White 59%; Bg2 with Nh3, 45%; and Bg2 with Nf3, 52%.

## Theoretical?

The main set-up (Nf3 Bg2) holds an honourable position in theory and will still be relevant in the future due to its naturalness.

## Theoretical Status

Quite respected if we do not take into account the set-up with Nf3 and Bh3, which is not so serious. At first White is not very active but he is able to fight against his opponent's plans. White's considered strategy may lead to a drop in Black's initiative, simply leaving White a pawn up.

Game 10

□ Y.Zilberman ■ A.Greenfeld

Israel 1995

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 g3 Bg7 7 Bg2

7 Nc3 Bxa6 8 Nf3 d6 9 Bh3 (Diagram 33) is an idea suggested by Borisenko.

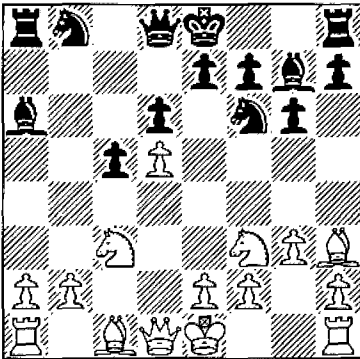


Diagram 33 (B)  
Bf1-h3!?

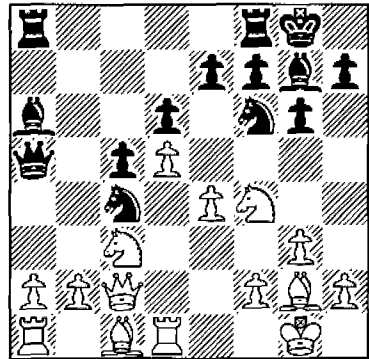


Diagram 34 (B)  
Weakening d3

Black, however, should get good counterplay with normal play. For example, 9...Nbd7 10 0-0 Nb6 11 Re1 0-0 12 e4



**WARNING:** A typical way to lose the extra pawn in the Volga is with 12 Rb1?! when 12...Bc4! is a nice double threat. After 13 e4 Bxa2 14 Nxa2 Rxa2 White, as here, is usually slightly worse.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

12...Nfd7 13 Bf4 Nc4 14 Qc2 Nde5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Bxe5 Bxe5 17 Rac1 Qa5 18 b3 Rfb8 19 Bd7!? Ra7 (19...Bxc3 20 Qxc3 Qxa2 21 Ba4 Qa3 would have equalised easily) 20 Ba4 c4!? (an improvement over 20...Bc8?! 21 Nb1 Bd7 22 Bxd7 Rxd7 23 Nd2 Ra7 24 a4 Bd4 25 Nc4 Qc7 26 Na3 Rab7 27 Nb5 when White had the advantage in P.Kiriakov-I.Khairullin, Krasnoyarsk 2003) 21 Qd2 cxb3 22 Bxb3 Rc8 23 Nb1 Qb6 with compensation for Black.

**7...d6 8 Nc3 Bxa6 9 Nh3**

It's not clear that the f4-square is a good post for the knight, but White can always fight for an advantage due to his extra pawn.

**9...Nbd7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Qc2**

Another try is 11 Bd2. It should be possible for Black to improve over 11...Qc7 12 Qc2 Rfb8 13 Rab1 Ne5 14 b3 Bc8 15 Ng5 (15 Nf4 Bf5 16 e4 Bg4 17 f3 Bc8 with compensation is less precise) 15...Qa7 16 Nf3 Nxf3+ 17 Bxf3 Nd7 18 Bg2 Ne5 19 h3 Bf5 20 e4 Bc8 21 Rfd1 Qa6 22 Be3 Qa5 when Black had not completely equalised in K.Aseev-A.Fominyh, Elista 1996.

**11...Ne5**

Black has also achieved good success with 11...Qa5, for example 12 Bd2 Rfb8 13 Rab1 Ne8 (also interesting is 13...c4!? 14 Rfd1 Ne5 15 Ng5 Bc8 – the bishop has no function on a6 anymore – 16 Nge4 Nxe4 17 Bxe4 Bg4 with compensation) 14 b3 Qa3! (preventing the a2-a4 advance) 15 Nf4 Nc7 16 Bh3 Ne5, as seen in V.Korchnoi-V.Baklan, Neum 2000. Black was clearly in the game here, when White made a blunder: 17 Ng2? Bxe2! 18 Nxe2 (or 18 Bc1 Bd3 19 Qxd3 Nxd3 20 Bxa3 Rxa3 and Black will win the endgame easily) 18...Qxa2 19 Qxa2 Rxa2 20 f4 Rxd2 21 Kf2 Nd3+ 22 Ke3 Rb2! and Black was winning.

**12 Nf4 Qa5 13 Rd1 Nc4 14 e4?! (Diagram 34)**

This weakens the d3-square without any serious prospect of playing e4-e5. 14 b3?! would also be troublesome, as Black has 14...Ng4 15 Rb1 Qxc3 16 Qxc3 Bxc3 17 bxc4 Bxc4 18 a3 Rfb8 with good play. White should play 14 Nd3 Rfb8 15 Bg5 when the position is still unclear after something like 15...Ng4.

**14...Rfb8 15 Nfe2 Ra7 16 h3**

Or 16 b3 Na3 17 Bxa3 Qxa3 18 Rab1 Nd7 19 Na4 Qb4 with chances for both sides.

**16...Nd7 17 Rb1 Rab7 18 Bf1**

18 f4?! is met strongly by 18...Nxb2! 19 Bxb2 Bxe2 20 Qxe2 Bxc3 21 Bxc3 Qxc3 22 Rxb7 Rxb7 when Black is doing quite well.

**18...Rb4 19 Kg2**

19 b3 Na3 20 Bxa3 Qxa3 21 Rbc1 c4 gives Black a supreme version of the standard Volga Gambit.

**19...Nde5! 20 f4**

20 b3 was probably stronger; after 20...Na3 21 Bxa3 Qxa3 22 f4 Nd7 Black's position is a little healthier – Fogarasi.

20...Rxb2!! 21 fxe5 Bxe5!

21...Rxc2?? allows White to turn the tables with 22 Rxb8+ Bf8 23 Bh6 and mate is coming.

22 Rxb2 Rxb2 23 Qd3

23 Qa4 loses to 23...Qxa4 24 Nxa4 Rxa2 25 Nxc5 dxc5 26 Kf3 Ra1 and White has no sensible way to continue.

23...Nd2!! (Diagram 35)

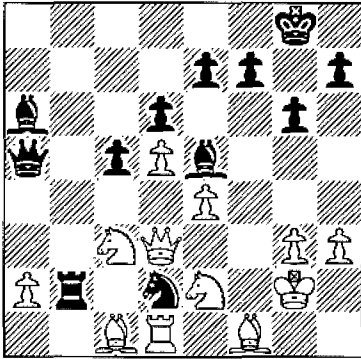


Diagram 35 (W)  
23...Nc4-d2!!

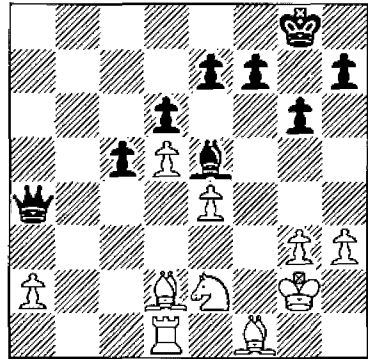


Diagram 36 (W)  
White's position falls apart

24 Qxd2

All lines but one lead to a decisive advantage for Black: 24 Qe3 Nxf1 25 Kxf1 Rc2; 24 Bxb2 Bxd3 25 Rxd2 Bxe2; and 24 Qxa6 Qxa6 25 Bxb2 Qd3. The only try was 24 Rxd2; after 24...Bxd3 25 Rxb2 Bxe2 26 Rb8+ Kg7 27 Nxe2 Qxa2 White still has a few chances to survive – Greenfeld.

24...Rxd2 25 Bxd2 Bxe2 26 Nxe2 Qa4! (Diagram 36)

Now White's position collapses.

27 Re1 Qxe4+ 28 Kf2 Qxd5 29 Be3 Qxa2 30 Bg2 c4 31 Be4 e6 32 g4 d5 33 Bb1 Qb2 34 Kf3 d4 35 Bh6 d3 36 Nf4 Bd4 37 Rf1 Qd2 38 Kg3 e5 39 Nxc6 Qxh6 40 Ne7+ Kf8 0-1

Game 11

□ M.Vukic ■ P.Benko

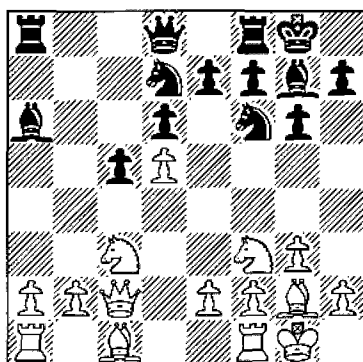
Sarajevo 1967

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 Bxa6 6 Nc3 d6 7 Nf3 g6 8 g3 Bg7 9 Bg2 0-0 10 0-0 Nbd7 11 Qc2 (Diagram 37)

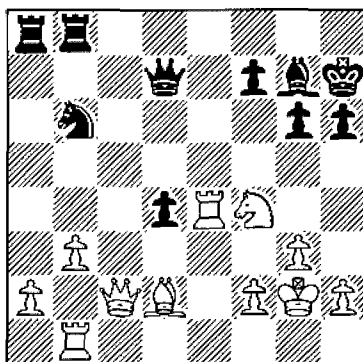
In this position Black has tried many different moves – all of them are valid.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Basically it is just a question of getting the play flowing and this can be done in many ways.



**Diagram 37 (B)**  
Black has many moves



**Diagram 38 (W)**  
Enough compensation for Black

### 11...Qb6

Or:

a) 11...Nb6 12 Rd1 Ra7 13 e4 Qa8 looks a little artificial, but Black gets good counterplay all the same: 14 Rb1 Bb7 15 b3 e6 (now White cannot open the position up due to the weakness of e4, so play becomes very sharp) 16 a4 exd5 17 e5!? (or 17 Nb5 Nxe4!? 18 Nxa7 Qxa7 19 Bb2 Bxb2 20 Rxb2 f5 with compensation) 17...dxe5 18 Nxe5 d4 19 Bxb7 Rxb7 20 Nb5 with unclear play. A.Avshalumov-A.Vaisser, Belgrade 1988.

b) 11...Qc7 12 Rd1 Ng4 13 Rb1 Rfb8 14 Bd2 Nge5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 b3 Bc8 17 h3 c4 18 Ne4 Bf5 was played in S.Savchenko-L.Mendoza, Paris 2001. Now we would probably try 19 g4!? Bxe4 20 Bxe4 Ra3 21 Bc1 Ra6 22 a3, when White is a bit better.

c) 11...Ra7 12 Rd1 Qa8 13 Rb1 looks fine – 13...Nb6 would almost transpose to 11...Nb6 above. Instead in A.Delchev-M.Roeder, Porto San Giorgio 2003, Black thought it was his lucky day and played 13...Bc4?!. However, after 14 a3 Rb8 15 b3 Nxd5 (15...Bxd5 16 Nxd5 Nxd5 17 Nd2 Ra6 18 Nc4 is also very uncomfortable for Black) 16 Nd2! Nxc3 17 Bxa8 Bxe2 White could have achieved a clear plus with 18 Bf3 Bxd1 19 Bxd1 Nxb1 20 Qxb1.

### 12 Rd1 Rfb8 13 Rb1 Ne8

13...Ng4 14 Bd2 Nge5 allows White to grab a slight advantage with 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 b3 Qa7 17 h3 Nd7 18 Be1; it is not clear how Black gets his counterplay flowing.

### 14 Bg5 Qd8

The queen was not too well placed on b6 anyway, so Black doesn't lose too much by returning it to d8 now. However, 14...h6!? was interesting; after 15 Bxe7 Qc7 16 Bh4!? g5 17 Nxc5 hxc5 18 Bxc5 the position is truly unclear.

15 Bf1 h6 16 Bd2 Nc7 17 b3 Nb6 18 e4 Bxf1 19 Rxf1 Qd7 20 Rfe1 Kh7

Good prophylaxis. 20...Na6 21 a3 Nc7 22 Bc1 f5 23 Bb2 gives White an edge.

21 Kg2 e6 22 dxe6 Nxe6

22...fxe6?! allows White to start an attack against the new weakness on g6 with 23 e5 d5 24 h4! Qf7 25 h5 when Black is clearly worse.

23 Ne2 d5 24 Nf4

After 24 e5 Black would probably respond with 24...Rc8 25 a4 c4 26 a5 cxb3 27 Qxb3 Nc4 with great play.

24...dxe4 25 Rxe4 Nd4 26 Nxd4 cxd4 (Diagram 38) 27 a4?

A simple blunder of the a-pawn. However, White doesn't have an advantage following 27 Rbe1 Rc8 28 Qb1 Qc6 29 Rc1 Qb7 30 Rxc8 Rxc8 31 f3.

27...Qb7! 28 f3 Nxa4 29 Rbe1?

Some resistance was possible after 29 Re2, though Black is much better after 29...Ra7 30 b4 Qb5.

29...Qxb3 30 Qxb3 Rxb3 31 Re7 Rb2 32 R1e2 Nc3 33 Bxc3 dxc3 34 Rxf7 34 Nd3 is killed by 34...Ra1! 35 Nxb2 cxb2.

34...Raa2 35 Kf1 g5 36 Rxc7+ Kxc7 37 Ne6+ Kf6 38 Nd4 Rxe2 39 Nxe2 Ra1+ 0-1

Game 12

□ P.Nikolic ■ J.Fedorowicz

World Team Championship, Lucerne 1989

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 g3 d6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 Nf3 Nbd7 10 0-0 Nb6 11 Re1 0-0 12 Bf4

In practice this simply forces Black to weaken his position a bit by advancing the h-pawn. White has also played:

a) 12 Nd2 Qc7 13 Rb1 Qb7 14 b4!? cxb4 15 Rxb4 Qc7 16 Bb2 Rfb8 17 Ba1 was tried out in G.Grignone-R.Costantini, Cesenatico 2000, and here 17...Nbd7 18 Rxb8+ Rxb8 would give Black reasonable play for the pawn.

b) 12 e4 Nfd7 13 Qc2 Nc4 14 Bf1 Nde5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Kg2 is typically unclear.



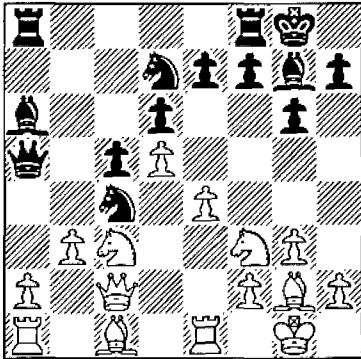
**WARNING: After 14 b3? Black has a standard response 14...Qa5! (Diagram 39) when White has no good moves.**

12...Nh5

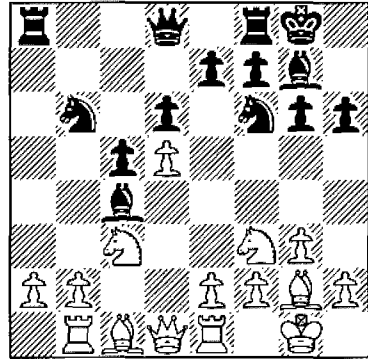
Black has also tried 12...Nc4!? 13 Qc1 Qa5 14 Nd2 Nb6 (14...Rfb8 is well met by 15 Nxc4 Bxc4 16 Bd2 Qc7 17 b3 Ba6 18 Rb1 Nd7 19 a4 and White is a bit

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

better) 15 Qc2 c4 16 e4 Nfd7 17 Nf3 Nc5 18 Be3 Nd3 19 Reb1 Nxb2!? 20 Nd4 N2a4 21 Nxa4 (or 21 Nce2 Rfc8 22 a3 Rc7 23 Rb4 Nc5 with unclear play) 21...Qxa4 22 Qc3 (22 Rxb6 Qxc2 23 Nxc2 Bxa1 24 Nxa1 Rfb8 and Black has good counterplay) 22...Nd7 23 Rb4 Qa5 24 a4 Nc5 25 Qa3 Nd3 26 Rbb1 Qc7 with a complex position, K.Hulak-D.Sermek, Portoroz 1993.



**Diagram 39 (W)**  
No good moves for White



**Diagram 40 (W)**  
15...Bc4 – winning a pawn

13 Bg5 h6 14 Bc1 Nf6 15 Rb1?!

A standard blunder, as described above. After 15 Nd2 Ra7 16 Nf1 Qd7 17 Ne3 Ng4 18 Nxc4 Qxc4 the position would be unclear.

15...Bc4 (Diagram 40) 16 e4 Bxa2 17 Nxa2 Rxa2 18 e5

18 b4 can be met by 18...Qa8!? 19 bxc5 Na4! 20 Rb4 Nxc5 when Black is a bit more comfortable.

18...Nfxd5 19 e6

This position was later reached between two up-and-coming youngsters. Their game continued 19...Ra4!? 20 exf7+ Rxf7 21 Qc2 (after 21 Bh3 Nc7 22 Nh4 Bd4 23 Be3 Bxe3 24 Rxe3 Rf6 Black has an edge) 21...Rf6 22 Nh4 Nb4 23 Qe2 g5 24 Nf3 e5 (here Black should be a bit better, but somehow he loses his grip over the next seven moves) 25 h4 gxh4 26 Nxh4 Ra7 27 f4 Re7 28 f5 Re8 29 Bf3 Qd7 30 Bh5 Rb8 31 Bg6 and White had good play for the pawn in E.Bacrot-R.Ponomarev. Lausanne 1999.

19...Nb4 20 exf7+ Rxf7 21 Bh3 Kh7 22 Be6 Qf8 23 Bxf7

After 23 Bxa2 Nxa2 24 Kg2 Nb4 Black is simply slightly better.

23...Qxf7 24 Re4 Qd5 25 Qe2 e5 26 Re3 (Diagram 41) 26...Qc4?!

The exchange of queens can only favour White here. Stronger was 26...Nc4!, as after the natural 27 Rc3 Black has 27...Nxb2! 28 Rxb2 e4 29 Rxa2 Nxa2 30 Ng5+ hxg5 31 Rc4 Nxc1 32 Rxc1 Bd4 with a slightly more active position.

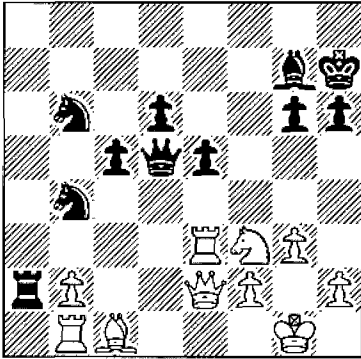


Diagram 41 (B)  
Black's doing well

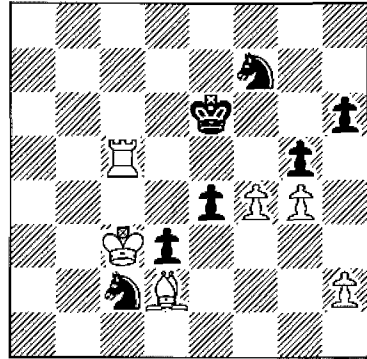


Diagram 42 (B)  
Black misses a draw

27 Qxc4 Nxc4 28 Rc3 d5 29 Nd2 Nd6?!

Black needlessly gives his c-pawn away. Better was 29...Nxd2 30 Bxd2 c4 31 Ra3 Rxa3 32 bxa3 Nd3 33 Rb7 d4 with a very complicated position.

30 Rxc5 g5 31 Nb3 d4 32 Ra5

Here White had a strong option in 32 Bd2!? Nd3 33 Rc6 Nf5 34 f3 Rxb2 35 Rxb2 Nxb2 36 Kf1 when the knight on b2 is in some trouble.

32...Rxa5 33 Nxa5 e4 34 Bd2 Nd3 35 b4 Ne5 36 Kg2 Nf3 37 Bc1 d3 38 Be3 Bc3 39 Nc6 Ne1+ 40 Kf1 Nc2 41 b5 Na3 42 Rb3 Naxb5 43 Na7!

This exchange secures an edge.

43...Nxa7 44 Rxc3 Nab5 45 Rc5 Kg6 46 Ke1 Kf6 47 Kd2 Ke6 48 g4 Na3 49 Kc3 Nc2 50 Bd2 Nf7 51 f4?! (Diagram 42)

After 51 Ra5 White would still have a little pressure: 51...Ne5 52 Ra6+ Kd5 53 Rxh6 Nxc4 54 Rh5 Nxf2 55 Bxc5 and Black has not solved all his problems.

51...e3?

Black miscalculates and misses 51...exf3! 52 Kxd3 Ne5+!; after 53 Ke4 Nc4! 54 Rxc4 f2 55 Rc6+ Kf7 56 Rc5 f1Q 57 Rf5+ Qxf5+ 58 gxf5 a drawn ending arises.

52 Kxd3 exd2 53 Kxc2 gxf4 54 Rf5 Nd6 55 Rxf4 Ke5 56 Rf3 Ne4 57 Kd1 Kd4 58 Ke2 Kc4 59 Rf8 Kc3 60 Rc8+ Kd4 61 Rh8 1-0

Game 13

□ K.Spraggett ■ A.Kogan

Dos Hermanas 2000

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 d6 9 Nf3 Nbd7 10 Rb1

This line has been popularised by Epishin and is currently all the rage. How-

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

ever, we cannot see why this should be that different from other lines where White secures himself a slight edge.

### 10...Qa5

Worthy of note is 10...Nb6 11 b3 0-0 12 0-0 Ra7 (but not 12...Ne8?! 13 Bb2 Nc7 14 Nh4 Ra7 15 Qd2 Qd7 16 Rfd1 Rb8 17 Ba1 Bc8 18 a4 Rba8 19 Nf3 Bb7 20 e4 Bc8 21 Re1 Qd8 22 h3 c4 23 Qe3 Ne8 24 Nb5 Ra6 25 Bxg7 Nxg7 26 Nfd4 and White dominated in R.Kasimdzhanov-E.Ghaem Maghami, Yerevan 2001) 13 Bb2 Qa8 14 Nh4 Rb8 15 Re1 Nbd7!? 16 e4 Ne5 and Black has counterplay – Fogarasi.

### 11 Bd2

N.Berry-S.Mannion, Aberdeen 2001 continued interestingly with 11 0-0 Nb6 (11...0-0 is probably better) 12 a3! Bb7 (12...0-0?? 13 b4 wins) 13 b4 cxb4 14 axb4 Qa6 15 e4 0-0 16 Nd4 Qc4 17 Nce2 e5 (Black should probably have tried 17...Nxe4!? 18 Bxe4 e5 when after 19 Be3 exd4 20 Bxd4 Ra2 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Bf3 White is only very slightly better) 18 dxe6 fxe6 19 Qb3 e5 20 Qxc4+ (20 Ne6 Qxe2 21 Nc5+ Bd5! 22 exd5 dxc5 23 bxc5 with unclear play – Mannion) 20...Nxc4 21 Ne6 Rfc8 22 Nc3 Na3 23 Rb3 and White was a bit better.

### 11...0-0 12 0-0 Bb7

12...Rfb8 failed to equalise in V.Kramnik-V.Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2003, White being a bit better after 13 Qc2 Ne8 14 Rfe1 (14 b3 Qa3! 15 Bc1 Qa5 16 Bb2 c4!? with counterplay) 14...Nc7 15 a4 (the alternative 15 e4 Nb5 16 Nxb5 Qxb5 17 b3 Ne5 18 Nxe5 Bxe5 19 a4 Qd3 gives White an edge) 15...Qb6 16 b3 Bxc3 17 Bxc3 Nxd5 18 Ne5!? Nxe5 19 Bxd5 Bb7 20 Bxb7 Rxb7 21 Bxe5 dxe5.

### 13 Qc2 Qa6 14 e4

14 Nh4 is met by 14...Nb6 15 e4 Nc4 16 Bf4 h6 17 Nf3 e6 with complex play.

### 14...e6 15 dxe6 fxe6 (Diagram 43) 16 b3

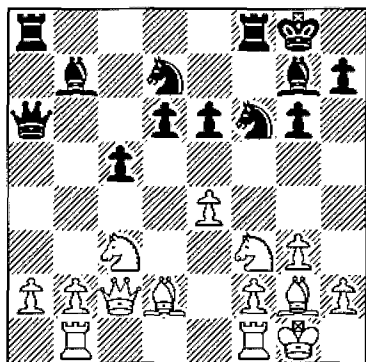


Diagram 43 (W)

White has a few options

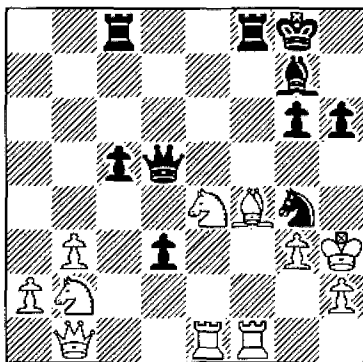


Diagram 44 (W)

The knight is immune

Here White has a number of standard alternatives:

a) 16 b4?! is met strongly by 16...Qc4! 17 Rfc1 cxb4 18 Bf1 Qc5 when Black is doing very well. One possible line is 19 Qb3?! bxc3 20 Rxc3 Nxe4! 21 Qxe6+ Kh8 22 Rxc5 Ndx5 23 Qg4 Bc8 and Black wins.

b) 16 Rfe1 Ng4 17 Bf4 Nde5 18 Nxe5 Nxe5 offers good play for the pawn.

c) The same goes for 16 Ng5 d5 17 exd5 exd5 18 Rbe1 Rae8 – Kogan.

**16...d5 17 exd5 exd5 18 Na4 Rac8**

If 18...Ne4 19 Ng5! Nxd2 20 Qxd2 Qc6 21 Rbe1 Black is under some pressure.

**19 Rbe1 d4 20 Nb2**

The position would be pretty unclear after Kogan's suggested line 20 Re7 c4 21 Nxd4 Bxg2 22 Kxg2 Qd6 23 Rxg7+ Kxg7 24 Bc3.

**20...Ng4 21 Ng5**

Or 21 Bf4 Qa8! 22 Qd3 Qxa2 and Black is in the game.

**21...Bxg2 22 Kxg2 Nge5 23 f4 d3 24 Qb1**

24 Qc1 could be met by the aggressive 24...c4! 25 fxe5 Rxf1 26 Kxf1 cxb3 27 Qd1 Rf8+ 28 Kg2 bxa2 29 Qb3+ Kh8 30 Nf7+ Rxf7 31 Qxf7 Qa8+ 32 Kh3 Nxe5 when nothing makes much sense to us – unclear!

**24...Qc6+ 25 Kh3 h6 26 Ne4**

26 fxe5?! is weak due to 26...Rxf1 27 Rxf1 Nxe5 28 Bf4 hxg5 29 Bxe5 g4+! 30 Kh4 Bxe5 and White's king is in danger.

**26...Qd5 27 fxe5 Nxe5 28 Bf4 Ng4! (Diagram 44) 29 Nxd3**

29 Kg2 leads to good compensation for Black after 29...d2! 30 Bxd2 (30 Re2 Bxb2 31 Rxd2 [31 Qxb2 d1Q 32 Rxd1 Qxd1 33 h3 g5! is good for Black])

31...Bd4 looks dangerous – Kogan) 30...Rxf1 31 Kxf1 (or 31 Rxf1 Re8 32 Re1 Bxb2 33 Qc2 Bd4 34 Qc4 Qxc4 35 bxc4 Ra8 and Black is okay – Kogan)

31...Rf8+ 32 Bf4 Qh5 33 Nd3 g5 and Black has good counterplay.

**29...Qh5+ 30 Kg2 Qxh2+ 31 Kf3 Qh5 32 Kg2**

More testing was 32 Rh1 when after 32...Ne5+ 33 Ke3 Qf3+ 34 Kd2 Nxd3 (34...Qg2+ 35 Kc1 Nf3 36 Qc2 Nxe1 37 Rxe1 Qh3 38 Ne5! with an edge for White) 35 Qxd3 Rcd8 36 Bd6 Qg2+ 37 Kd1 Qxa2 matters are unclear.

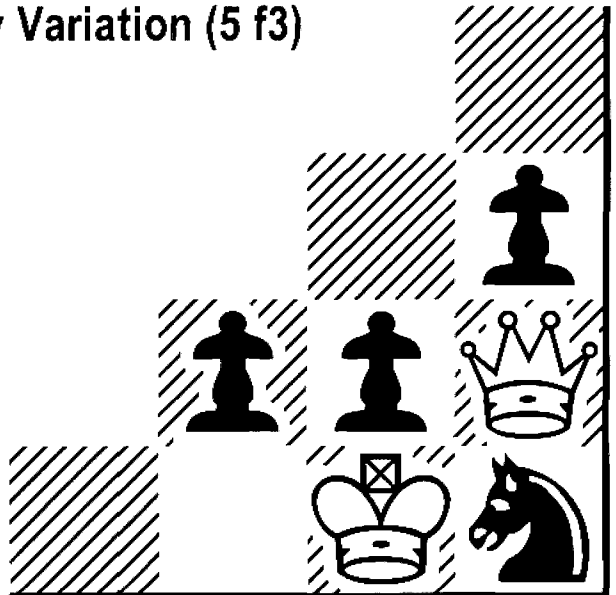
**32...Qh2+ 33 Kf3 Qh5 34 Kg2 Qh2+ ½-½**

## Chapter Two

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# The Volga Gambit Accepted without 5 bxa6

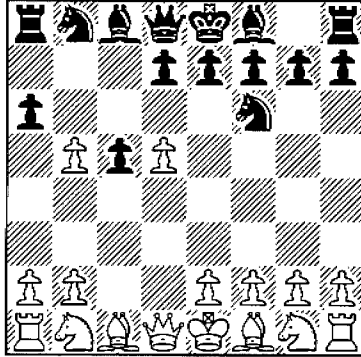
- ▨ Introduction
- ▨ The Zaitsev Variation (5 Nc3)
- ▨ White Plays 5 e3
- ▨ White Plays 5 b6
- ▨ The Dlugy Variation (5 f3)



## Introduction

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 (Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1 (W)**  
Alternatives to 5 bxa6

Since White has already grabbed the gambit pawn on b5, he can maintain material equality even if he does not capture the a6-pawn. If he does take then Black's development is certainly improved, which may be dangerous for White. That is why, instead of 5 bxa6, four other options for White have also been widely played. In every line the material balance depends on the specific sub-variations and not on the fifth-move alternative in general.

The continuations 5 Nc3, 5 e3, 5 b6 and 5 f3 are quite different in terms of their concepts. They have only one thing in common: an aspiration to dominate the centre with e2-e4. The continuations 5 Nc3 (Games 14-18) and 5 f3 (Games 28-30) prepare e2-c4. The advance 5 b6 (Games 24-27) makes the c3-knight safe from the b-pawn attack (which is unpleasant for White in case of the immediate 5 Nc3), and e2-e4 will follow. Finally, 5 e3 (Games 19-23) seems to stand by itself, but after proper preparation White is willing to play e3-c4 without any worries about losing a tempo.

## The Zaitsev Variation (5 Nc3)

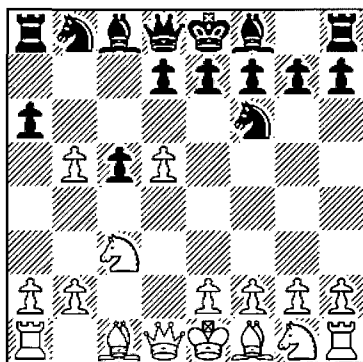
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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 Nc3 (Diagram 2)

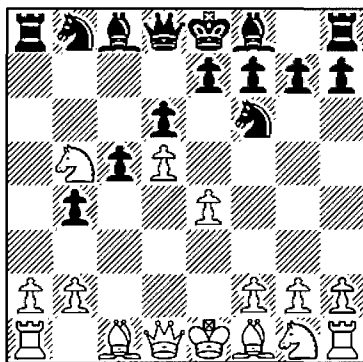
This continuation takes its name from the outstanding analyst, grandmaster Igor Zaitsev. It was also employed before Zaitsev but at that time 5...axb5 was met with the primitive 6 Nxb5. In response Black can either transpose to the main lines after 6...Ba6 7 Nc3, or try promising ideas like 6...e6 and 6...Qa5. Zaitsev played 6 e4, not fearing that his knight could be attacked with ...b5-b4.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Zaitsev lost the game, but it was a defeat against the godfather of the Volga Gambit – Pal Benko.



**Diagram 2 (B)**  
White plays 5 Nc3



**Diagram 3 (W)**  
The main line

5 Nc3 is a healthy developing move and Black has to be on the alert. Inexperienced players often employ standard moves like 5...d6?! and 5...g6?! when 6 e4 ensures White's natural development, which is usually not so easy in the Volga Gambit. The development process is as follows: Nf3, a2-a4, Be2 (or h2-h3, waiting for the capture ...axb5 in order to take with the bishop on b5 in one step) and 0-0. David Bronstein then recommended preparing the advance b2-b4, while the more usual plan with e4-e5 is not bad either.

The continuation 5...Qa5 (Game 14) seems a little premature in view of 6 b6. After 6...Bb7 7 Bd2 Qb6 8 e4 e6 it's not necessary to give up the centre as in the main game. Defending the centre with 9 Bc4 does not achieve its aim in view of 9...Nxe4!. However, after 9 Qf3! (Chetverik-Johanesson) it's not easy for Black to weaken White's grip on the centre.

The attack ...Qd8-a5 is more appropriate together with 5...axb5 6 e4 Qa5 (Game 15). The best-known position is reached after 6...Qa5 7 e5 b4 8 Bd2 bxc3 9 Bxc3 Qa4 10 Qxa4 Rxa4 11 exf6 gxf6 (you can also reach this via 5...Qa5 6 Bd2 axb5 7 e4, but we've just recommended the stronger 6 b6). The passed a-pawn gives White better chances but we should not underestimate Black's pawn centre.

The main position arises after

5...axb5 6 e4 b4 7 Nb5 d6 (Diagram 3)



**WARNING: 7...Nxe4?? runs into 8 Qe2, when retreating the knight leads to mate with Nb5-d6. This is typical for the line!**

Now 8 Bc4?! aims at f7, but the bishop is placed under attack by ...Nb8-d7-b6.

White does not manage to break open the play and he doesn't achieve a favourable position here. The continuation 8 Nf3 is harmless in view of 8...g6 when e4-e5 leads merely to equal play. However, if 8 Bf4 it is too risky for Black to play in the same way as before because after 8...g6 9 e5 dxe5 10 Bxe5 the c7-square is attacked.

Because of the wide variety of complicated lines after 8 Bf4, it is a good idea to identify the general ideas:

- 1) It is in White's interests to shelter his king on the side as soon as possible. Black does not castle very often but instead sends his king via either d7 or d8 to the queenside under the shield of his strong pawn chain.
- 2) The safety of the developed b5-knight is threatened. The knight can be attacked three times (for example, with the queen from b6, with the rook from a5 and with the bishop from a6) and White might not be able to save it without a2-a4. Then we have to think about the consequences of capturing en passant with ...b4xa3.
- 3) The b5-knight is worth the effort. It threatens the c7- and d6-squares and sometimes favourably moves to a7.
- 4) Similarly, Black is proud of his fianchettoed bishop on g7. At the same time, White does not get much assistance from his own bishops. In positions with blocked pawn chains, the knights are as strong as the bishops.
- 5) The wide variety of tactical lines links the Zaitsev Variation with the irrational complications of the Sicilian Defence. Like in the Sicilian, White more often wins with a mating attack on the king, while Black mostly wins on material.

Let us move from general to more specific items. The defence of the c7-square with 8...Na6 (Game 16) gives White the opportunity of Qa4 with threats along the a4-e8 diagonal. We should not forget about 8...Nbd7 9 Nf3 Nxe4!? (Game 17) – Black boldly faces the threats along the e-file. Finally, the extravagant 8...g5, aiming at playing 9...Nxe4 to attack the bishop after 9 Bxg5, is still in fashion. In Game 18 the line 9 Be3 Nxe4 10 Bd3 transposes to 8...Nxe4 9 Bd3 g5 10 Be3 and here we have extremely complex play.

## Statistics

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White's score after 5 Nc3 is only 53%; his success is an even more modest 43% after 5...axb5. In the tabiya 5...axb5 6 e4 b4 7 Nb5 d6 8 Bf4 we have an approximate balance from an impressive percentage of decisive games (84%).

## Theoretical?

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Yes! The positions are very sharp, every move is vital and the theoreticians have not ignored the Zaitsev Variation.

## Theoretical Status

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Is not highly regarded. Objectively, after 5 Nc3 White does not have an edge. Moreover, White can even fail to equalise and find himself in a bad position. However, 5 Nc3 is a very dangerous tactical weapon, especially in games with short time controls. Besides, the Zaitsev can even confuse connoisseurs of the Volga Gambit because they will face problems that are unusual for this opening.

---

Game 14

□ L.Christiansen ■ N.Andrianov

New York 1990

---

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 Nc3 Qa5 6 b6**

6 Bd2 axb5 7 e4 is interesting. After 7...b4 8 e5 bxc3 9 Bxc3 Qa4 10 Qxa4 Rxa4 11 exf6 gxf6 12 Bb5 Ra7 13 Ne2 Ba6 (or 13...Bb7 14 Bc4 d6 15 b4!? cxb4 16 Bxb4 Ba6 17 Bb3 with a white edge) 14 Bxa6 Nxa6 15 d6! e5 16 0-0-0 White's position was preferable in A.Potapov-J.Hudecek, Pardubice 2003.

**6...Bb7 7 Bd2 Qxb6 8 e4 e6 9 dxe6**

9 Bc4?! is met strongly by 9...Nxe4! when 10 Nxe4?! exd5 11 Nxc5 Bxc5 12 Bd3 Bxf2+ 13 Kf1 0-0 is a lousy deal for White. 9 Qf3!?, on the other hand, is a serious attempt for an advantage. After 9...exd5 10 Nxd5 Nxd5 11 exd5 Be7 (not 11...Qxb2?? 12 Qe4+ Be7 13 Rb1 when White wins a piece due to 13...Bxd5 14 Qxe7+) 12 Bc3 0-0 (12...Bf6 is weaker: 13 Qe3+ Kd8 14 0-0-0 Re8 15 Bxf6+ gxf6 16 Qf4 and Black has no way out) 13 Bd3 Re8 14 0-0-0 Qh6+ (14...d6? 15 Bxh7+! Kxh7 16 Qxf7, winning) 15 Kb1 d6 16 Ne2 Nd7 17 Ng3 Ne5 18 Nf5! White was a bit better in M.Chetverik-Johannesson, Pardubice 2001.

**9...Qxe6**

9...fxe6?! is no improvement because of 10 e5 Nd5 11 Bd3 g6 12 Ne4 with a white initiative. However, after 9...dxe6!? (Dlugy) 10 e5 Nfd7 11 f4 Nc6 12 Nf3 Nd4 the position is pretty evenly balanced.

**10 f3 d5?! (Diagram 4)**

This is completely mad: with the amount of time White is now capable of gaining, Black shouldn't open the position. 10...Nc6 is preferable, White being a bit better following 11 Nh3 Nd4 12 Nf4 Qe5 13 Bc4 Bd6 14 Nfe2.

**11 Qb3 Qe7**

Or 11...Bc6 12 0-0-0 c4 13 exd5 cxb3 14 dxe6 bxa2 15 exf7+ Kxf7 16 Bc4+ Bd5 17 Bxa2 with a clear extra pawn for White.

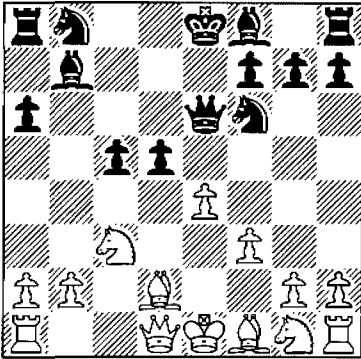
**12 0-0-0! dxe4**

12...d4 is met strongly by 13 Nd5 Bxd5 14 exd5 Qc7 15 Re1+ when White has a strong attack based on 15...Be7? 16 d6! Qxd6 17 Qb7, winning.

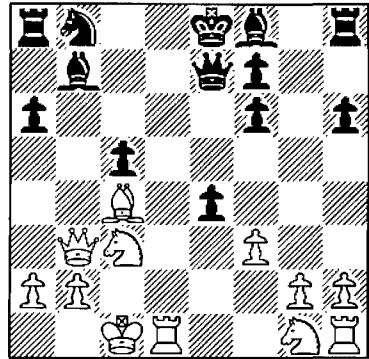
**13 Bg5!?**

## The Volga Gambit Accepted without 5 bxa6

Or 13 Bf4!? Nc6 14 Bd6! Qd7 15 Bxf8 Nd4 16 Bxg7! Nxb3+ 17 axb3 Qf5 18 Bxh8 with a rather large advantage.



**Diagram 4 (W)**  
10...d5?! – unwise!



**Diagram 5 (B)**  
White's already winning

13...h6?

There is absolutely no time for things like this. 13...Qc7 14 Bc4 Bc6 was necessary, though after 15 Nh3 White's initiative is rather strong.

14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 Bc4 (Diagram 5)

15 Bxa6!? Rxa6 16 Qb5+ Rc6 17 Nd5 also wins.

15...Bc6 16 Nd5 Qe5 17 f4 Qd6 18 Ne3

Also strong is 18 Nb6!? Qxf4+ 19 Kb1, when 19... Ra7 20 Bxf7+! Rxf7 21 Qe6+ Be7 22 Rd8+ Kxd8 23 Qc8 is mate.

18...Qc7 19 Bxf7+!

and White wins...

19...Qxf7 20 Rd8+ Ke7 21 Nf5+ Kxd8 22 Qxf7 Nd7 23 Ne2 Kc7 24 Rd1 Rd8 25 Nc3 h5 26 Nd5+ Bxd5 27 Rxd5 c4 28 Nd4 1-0

Game 15

□ M.Chetverik ■ G.Kopjonkin

Presov 2000

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 Nc3 axb5 6 e4

6 Nxb5 is known to be not very dangerous for Black. Now 6...Ba6 7 Nc3 transposes to 5 bxa6 Bxa6 6 Nc3, while Black has two other possibilities:

a) 6...Qa5+ 7 Nc3 Bb7 8 Bd2 Qb6 9 e4 e6 10 Nf3 (10 dxe6 fxe6 11 e5 Nd5 12 Bd3 g6 13 Nf3 Bg7 gives Black decent compensation for the pawn) 10...exd5 11 exd5 Nxd5 12 Bc4 Qe6+ 13 Qe2 Qxe2+ 14 Nxe2 Be7 and both sides have their fair share of the action.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

b) Also interesting is 6...e6 7 dxe6 Qa5+ 8 Nc3 fxe6 9 Bd2 Qb6 10 e4 Nc6 11 Nf3 Be7 12 e5 Ng4 13 Ne4 0-0 with chances both ways.

### 6...Qa5 7 Bxb5

7 e5!? is an intriguing alternative, for example:

a) 7...b4 8 Nb5 Ba6 9 a4 looks good for White. Now after 9...bxa3+? 10 Bd2 Qb6 11 exf6 axb2? 12 Rb1 Bxb5 13 Rxb2 Qxf6 14 Rxb5 White was winning in G.Timoshchenko-M.Zupe, Maribor 1990. Slightly better is 11...Bxb5 12 Qb3 Qxf6 13 Bc3! axb2 14 Qxb2 Rxa1+ 15 Qxa1, though White should also be winning here.

b) 7...Ne4 8 Bd2 Nxc3! (8...Nxd2 9 Qxd2 b4 10 Ne4 gives White the initiative, e.g. 10...d6 11 exd6 Bf5 12 Ng3 Bg6 13 f4 h6 14 f5 Bh7 15 Qe3 with a very large advantage) 9 Bxc3 (9 bxc3 c4 10 a4 e6!? 11 d6 Nc6 isn't that clear) 9...b4 10 Bd2 g6 11 Nf3 Bg7 12 Bc4 Ba6 13 Qe2 0-0 14 0-0 Bxc4 (maybe 14...d6!? 15 Bf4 Bxc4 16 Qxc4 Qa6 with even chances) 15 Qxc4 d6 16 Qh4!? dxe5 was unclear in M.Chetverik-J.Richter, Hungary 1997.

### 7...Nxe4 8 Nge2 (Diagram 6)

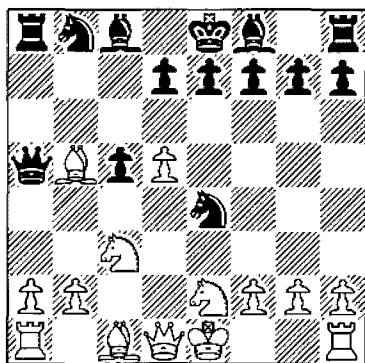


Diagram 6 (B)

White develops quickly

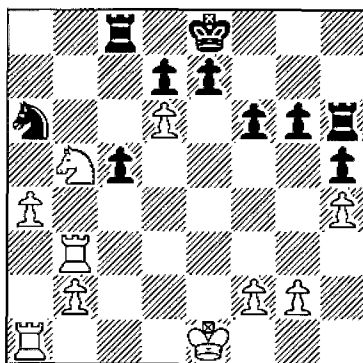


Diagram 7 (B)

20 d5-d6!

### 8...Nxc3

8...g6?! is met strongly by 9 0-0 Nxc3 10 Nxc3 Bg7 11 Qe2 when Black has problems finishing his development. A more attractive option is 8...Ba6, although after 9 Bd3 Nxc3 10 Nxc3 d6 11 0-0 g6 12 Re1 White seems to be doing quite well. For example, 12...Bg7 13 Bg5 Ra7 14 Bxa6 Nxa6 15 a4 (15 Qg4!? f6 is unclear according to Yakovich, but after 16 Bd2 0-0 17 Qe6+ Kh8 18 Ne4 Qb5 19 Rab1 White looks better to us) 15...Bxc3 16 bxc3 Qxc3 17 Re1 Qa5 (or 17...Qg7 18 Qf3 f5 19 Qf4 with a large advantage) 18 Bf6! 0-0 19 Rxe7 Nc7 20 Qf3 Qd2 21 Rd1 Qc2 22 Rde1 and White held a clear plus in Y.Yakovich-Vaatainen, Helsinki 1992. Here the game ended abruptly with 22...Qxa4? 23

Rxc7! Re8 (23...Rxc7 24 Qe3) 24 Qe3! 1-0.

**9 Nxc3 Ba6 10 Qe2!? Bxb5 11 Qxb5 Qxb5 12 Nxb5 Na6 13 Bd2 h5**

Or 13...d6 14 0-0 Kd7 15 Bc3 and White has a pull.

**14 h4 Rb8 15 a4 f6**

We think White has also managed to prove a slight edge after 15...d6 16 Bc3 Kd7 17 Rh3 Rh7 18 Re3 g6 19 f4 Bg7 20 0-0-0.

**16 Rh3 g6 17 Bf4 Rc8 18 Rb3 Bh6?!**

This is refuted by a standard push d5-d6. Sounder is 18...d6 19 0-0-0, when White is slightly better.

**19 Bxh6 Rxh6 20 d6! (Diagram 7)**



**TIP: This useful idea is highly thematic and should be remembered.**

**20...e5 21 a5 Kf7 22 Nc7! Nxc7 23 dxc7 Rxc7 24 Rb8! Ra7 25 a6 Ke7?!**

More resilient was 25...Ke6 26 Rb6+ d6 27 Rd1, though it's true that Black is not doing very well.

**26 Rb7 Ra8 27 a7 Rhh8 28 Ra6 Rhc8 29 Kd2 c4 30 Kc3 e4 31 Kd4 g5 32 Kxe4 gxh4 33 Kd5 Rg8 34 Kxc4 f5 35 f4 Rxg2 36 Rb8 Rxa7 37 Rxa7 h3 38 Ra3 1-0**

Game 16

□ B.Jobava ■ D.De Vreugt

Yerevan 2000

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 Nc3 axb5 6 e4 b4 7 Nb5 d6**

As we mentioned before, 7...Nxe4?? loses to 8 Qe2 f5 9 f3 because of the mate on d6. After 9...Ra5 10 fxe4 Ba6 11 exf5 White has an attack.

7...b3? is bad due to 8 e5 Rxa2 9 Rb1! Ne4 10 Qxb3 Qa5+ 11 Nc3 Nxc3 12 bxc3 – Zaitsev.

**8 Bf4 (Diagram 8)**

8 Bc4?! is a try for immediate attack with e4-e5 and d5-d6, but Black can prevent this easily with 8...Nbd7, and after 9 Nf3 Nb6 10 Bd3 g6 11 b3 Bg7 12 Bb2 0-0 13 0-0 Ba6 he is even slightly better.

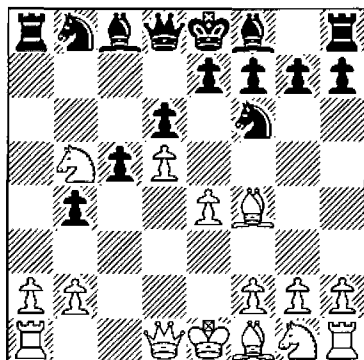
Worthy of note is 8 Nf3 g6 9 e5 (weaker is 9 Bf4?! Bg7 10 e5 dxe5 11 Bxe5 0-0 12 Bc4 Bb7 13 d6 Nc6, when Black has the initiative) 9...dxe5 10 Nxe5 Bg7 11 Bc4 0-0 12 0-0 Ba6 (an improvement over 12...Bb7?! 13 d6 Nc6 14 Nxf7!? Rxf7 15 Re1 e6 16 Be3 Qd7 17 Nc7 Rd8 18 Bxc5 Na5 19 Bxf7+ Qxf7 20 Rxe5 with a clear advantage for White in V.Epishin-A.Sznepik, Warsaw 1990) 13 Re1 Bxb5 14 Bxb5 Qxd5 and Black is okay.

**8...Na6**

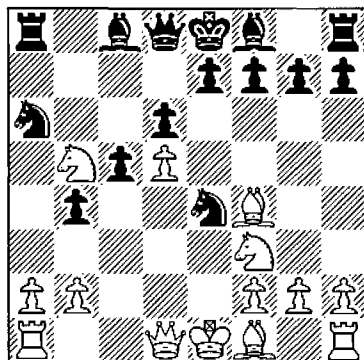
The main moves 8...Nbd7 and 8...g5 are considered in the next two games, but

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Black has other possibilities:



**Diagram 8 (B)**  
Black has many choices



**Diagram 9 (W)**  
Black grabs on e4

a) 8...e5!? 9 dxe6 Bxe6 10 Bxd6 Bxd6 11 Nxd6+ Ke7 12 e5 Ne8 13 Bc4! Nxd6 14 Bxe6 Kxe6 15 exd6 with an attack.

b) 8...Nxe4 is a reasonable move, after which White has two options:

b1) 9 Bd3 Nf6 (9...g5 10 Be3 transposes to 8...g5 9 Be3 Nxe4 10 Bd3 – see Game 18) 10 Qe2 e6 11 dxe6 Bxe6 12 Rd1 Nd5 13 Bg3 Qa5 14 Nf3!? b3+ 15 Nd2 bxa2 16 0-0 with compensation for the pawns – Se.Ivanov/Agrest.

b2) 9 Qe2 g5! (the only move) 10 Be5! (10 Qxe4?! gxf4 11 Bc4 Qb6 12 Nf3 Ra5 is known to be a nightmare for White) 10...dxe5 11 Qxe4 Bg7 12 d6 (12 Nf3 b3!? 13 Bc4 Rxa2 14 Rxa2 bxa2 15 0-0 is rather unclear) 12...Ra5 13 Rd1 0-0 14 Nf3 Nd7! (14...f5 15 Qc4+ e6 16 h4 with the initiative – Bareev) 15 Nxe5 Nf6 16 Qh4 e6 gave both sides chance in A.Dreev-E.Bareev, Tilburg 1994.

c) 8...g6 is also not too bad. After 9 e5 Black should avoid 9...dxe5?! 10 Bxe5 Na6 11 d6 when White has a strong initiative: 11...Bg7 12 Qf3 Be6! 13 dxe7 Qd5 14 Qe2! Kxe7 15 Rd1! and Black is in trouble. Instead Black should go 9...Nh5 and now:

c1) 10 exd6 exd6 11 Qe2+ Kd7 12 Be3 Qe7 (12...Bg7? 13 g4 Nf6 14 g5 Nxd5 15 Rd1 wins for White) 13 g4?! (13 Nf3 probably favours White) 13...Nf6 14 g5 Nh5 15 Bh3+ Kd8 16 Bxc8 Kxc8 17 Nf3 Qe4 18 0-0 Nf4 19 Qd1 Nd7 20 Bxf4 Qxf4 21 Re1 Kb7 with unclear play, G.Kaidanov-K.Grigrorian, Kuibyshev 1981

c2) Also interesting is 10 Be3!? Bg7!? (10...dxe5 11 Bxc5 Na6 12 d6! looks dangerous; 10...Nd7!?) 11 g4 Bxe5 12 gxh5 Bxb2 13 Rb1 Bg7 is unclear according to Kostin, but probably White is better here.

**9 Nf3**

9 Bc4 g6 10 e5 dxe5 11 Bxe5 Bg7 12 Nf3 0-0 13 0-0 Bb7 14 d6 Ne4 15 Bxg7

Kxg7 is extremely messy.

**9...Nxe4 (Diagram 9)**

9...g6 will also be met by a strong attack, so why not take the pawn? After 9...g6 play continues 10 e5 Nh5 11 Qa4! (11 Bg5 f6 12 Qa4 Kf7 13 e6+ Kg8 14 Be3 is less clear) 11...Bd7 12 e6! fxe6 13 dxe6 Nxf4 (13...Bc6 14 Nxd6+ Qxd6 15 Bb5 Qxe6+ 16 Be5 and White is clearly better – Zaitsev) 14 exd7+ Kf7 15 Qb3+ Kf6 16 g3 Ne6 17 Nd2 and White has a strong initiative.

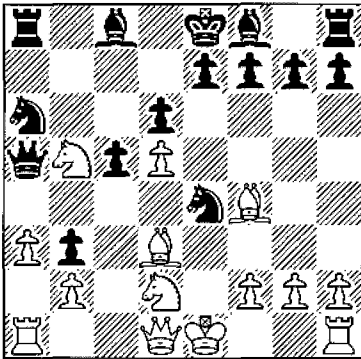
**10 a3!? Qa5**

10...bxa3?? 11 Qa4! and White wins: 10...Rb8 11 Na7 Rb6 12 Nxc8 Qxc8 13 a4 is better for White, who has wonderful play for his pawn.

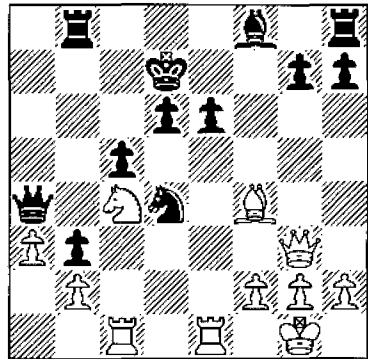
**11 Nd2 b3**

Or 11...Nxd2 12 axb4!? Qxb4 13 Bxd2 Qe4+ 14 Be3 Qb4+ 15 Nc3 with the initiative for White.

**12 Bd3 (Diagram 10)**



**Diagram 10 (B)**  
Careful!



**Diagram 11 (B)**  
The assault is too strong

**12...Nf6?!**

Black had no choice but to accept the exchange on d2 and then retract the queen. After 12...Nxd2 13 Bxd2 White has the initiative, with 13...Qa4? losing to 14 Nxd6+! exd6 15 Qe2+ Kd8 16 Bb5.

**13 0-0 Nxd5 14 Re1 Be6**

14...e5? loses to 15 Nc4! Qd8 16 Nbxid6+ Bxd6 17 Nxd6+ Qxd6 18 Bxe5 – Jobava.

**15 Nc4 Qa4**

15...Qd8? is refuted by 16 Be4 Nxf4 17 Bc6+ when 17...Bd7 is met with 18 Nbxid6 mate.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 16 Qf3 Rb8 17 Nbx<sup>d</sup>6+! ex<sup>d</sup>6 18 Qxd5 Kd7

After 18...Kd8 19 Rxe6! fxe6 20 Qg5+ Kc7 21 Rd1 the attack would also be close to irresistible.

### 19 Bf5 Nc7 20 Qd3 Nb5 21 Rac1

Another appealing possibility was 21 Ne5+!? Kc7 22 Bxe6 fxe6 23 Re4 Qa8! 24 Nf7 Qd5 25 Qe2 with a strong attack.

### 21...Nd4 22 Bxe6+ fxe6 23 Qg3 (Diagram 11) 23...Nf5

White is winning in all lines: 23...e5 24 Bxe5! dxe5 25 Qxe5 Qa8 26 Re4! (Jobava), and 23...Qa6 24 Nxd6! Bxd6 25 Qxg7+ Kc6 26 Qxd4!.

### 24 Qg4! Qa6 25 Qe2 Kc6 26 Qe4+ Kb5 27 Qxe6 Nd4 28 Qd7+ Qc6 29 Qa7 Qa8

Or 29...Ra8 30 a4+ Kb4 31 Bd2 mate.

### 30 a4+ Kc6 31 Na5+ Kd5 32 Qf7+ 1-0

Mate follows on the next move.

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#### Game 17

□ I.Ivanisevic ■ A.Adorjan

Szeged 1997

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### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 Nc3 axb5 6 e4 b4 7 Nb5 d6 8 Bf4 Nbd7 9 Nf3 Nxe4!?

Also possible are:

a) 9...Nb6 10 Ne5!? Nxe4 (10...dxe5?! 11 Bxe5 Qd7 12 Nc7+ Kd8 13 Nxa8 Nxa8 14 f3 and White is simply better) 11 Qe2 Bf5 (11...dxe5?! 12 Bxe5 f5 13 f3 Nd6 14 Bxd6 Nxd5 does not work on account of 15 Bc7!! Nxc7 16 Rd1, winning) 12 g4 dxe5 13 Bxe5 Bxg4 14 Qxe4 f5 15 Qd3 Rc8 with real chaos.

b) 9...Nh5 is probably less reliable: 10 Bg5 Nh6 (10...Qb6!? 11 e5!? dxe5 12 Nd2 Nf4 13 Bxf4 exf4 14 Qf3 Qb8 15 d6 gives White a powerful initiative for the pawn) 11 e5! dxe5 (11...Nxe5?! is bad due to 12 Nxe5 dxe5 13 Qe2 Nxd5 14 Qxe5 with a clear plus; note 14...f6?! 15 Bxf6!!, winning) 12 Qe2 Nb6 (12...Ba6 13 Nxe5 is dangerous for Black on account of 13...Bxb5? 14 Qxb5 Rb8 15 Qc6 Rc8 when there is no draw, but only pain after 16 Bb5!! Rxc6 17 dxc6 Qc7 18 cxd7+ Nxd7 19 Bxd7+ Kd8 20 Bf4) 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Nxe5! fxe5 15 Qxe5 f6 16 Qh5+ Kd7 17 g3 and White's initiative is intense.

### 10 Qe2 (Diagram 12)

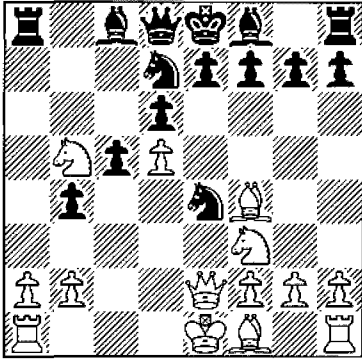
Another enticing idea is 10 Bd3 f5 11 Nh4!? (but not 11 Bxe4?! fxe4 12 Ng5 Nf6 13 0-0 g6 14 f3 Bg7 15 fxe4 Qb6 16 a4 bxa3 17 Rxa3 Rxa3 18 Nxa3 0-0 and Black was better in J.Dobos-A.Adorjan, Balatonbereny 1996) 11...Ndf6 12 f3 g5!? 13 fxe4 gxf4 14 Nxf5 with a rather complex position.

### 10...f5

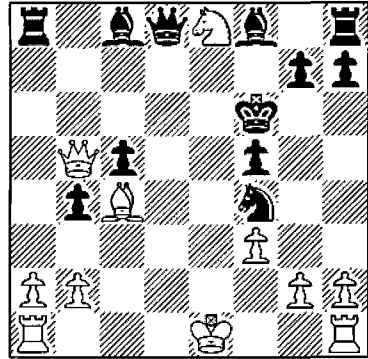
10...Ndf6? 11 Ng5 is strong for White, as 11...Nxc5? 12 Nxd6+ Kd7 13 Qb5+ Kc7 is mate after 14 Ne8!

11 Ng5 Ndf6 12 f3

Black is doing mightily well after 12 Ne6 Bxe6 13 dxe6 g5.



**Diagram 12 (B)**  
Don't play ...Nef6 here!



**Diagram 13 (B)**  
Knight on the rim – grim!

12...Nxd5! 13 Nxe4 Nxf4 14 Nbx6+

This is not too successful in this game, so it's worth studying 14 Nexd6+ Kd7 15 Qe5!? (15 Nf7 Nxe2 16 Nxd8 Kxd8 17 Bxe2 Bd7 is miserable for White) 15...exd6 16 0-0-0 (16 Qxf4 Qe7+ 17 Kf2 Qf6 gives Black all the fun) 16...Qf6?! (16...Kc6!? 17 Qxf4 Rxa2 with unclear play is the future of this line) 17 Qxc5 Ne6 (17...d5? 18 Qc7+ Ke8 19 Re1+ is very strong, as 19...Be7 20 Nd6+ Kf8 allows 21 Qd8+!) 18 Qxb4!? (18 Rxd6+ Bxd6 19 Qxd6+ Ke8 20 Qc6+ Ke7 21 Qxa8 Qe5 and Black has play for the pawn) 18...Qe5 19 Bc4 Qc5 20 Qc3 (White clearly has the initiative) 20...Ra4 21 b3 Rxc4 22 bxc4 Bb7 23 Rhe1 Nc7? (necessarily is 23...d5 24 Re5 Nc7 25 Nxc7 Qxc7 26 Rxf5 when the attack rages on) 24 Nxd6! Kc6 25 Nf7 with a winning position for White, M.Chetverik-Dobos, Hungary 1997.

14...exd6 15 Nxd6+ Kd7 16 Qb5+ Ke6 17 Bc4+ Kf6 18 Ne8+? (Diagram 13)

A grave mistake – the knight will not be coming home. 18 Nf7? also loses to 18...Qc7 19 Nxh8 Bd7 trapping the queen, but 18 Nxc8 Qxc8 19 Qb6+ Kg5 20 g3 Ng6 21 h4+ Kh5 is not entirely clear.

18...Kg6

18...Ke7!? 19 0-0 Be6 should also win.

19 Rd1

19 Qc6+ Be6 20 Nc7 Qd6! and Black wins.

19...Qe7+ 20 Kf2 Be6 21 Bxe6 Rxe8 22 Bxf5+ Kxf5 23 Rde1 Ne2 0-1

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Game 18

□ M.Chetverik ■ S.Kasparov

Gien 2004

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 Nc3 axb5 6 e4 b4 7 Nb5 d6 8 Bf4 g5 9 Be3

Also worthy of note is 9 Bxg5 Nxe4 10 Bf4 Bg7 (or maybe 10...Qa5!? 11 Bc4 Ba6 12 Qe2 Kd8! 13 Nf3 Bxb5 14 Qxe4 Bxc4 15 Qxc4 Qa6 16 Qc2 when the position is quite unclear) 11 Qe2 Nf6 12 Nxd6+ Kf8 13 Nxc8 Qxc8 14 Qf3 e6 15 d6 Nc6 16 Qh3 h5?! (better was 16...Nd4!? 17 Bd3 c4 18 Rc1 Rxa2 with chances for both sides) 17 Bc4 Nd4 18 Rc1 Qc6 19 Ne2 Nxe2 20 Kxe2 Nd5 21 Bxd5 Qxd5 22 Rhd1 Bd4 23 Qf3! Qxf3+ 24 Kxf3 and White had a clear edge in I.Sokolov-A.Khalifman, Parnu 1996.

### 9...Nxe4

Also playable is 9...Bg7!? 10 Bd3 h6 11 h3 Nbd7 12 Nf3 g4 13 hxg4 Nxg4 14 Bc1 Qa5 with unclear complications.

### 10 Bd3 Nf6

10...Qa5!? looks reasonable. Here a great expert in this line showed the way for White: 11 Ne2 f5 (maybe 11...Bg7 12 Bxe4 Qxb5 13 Qd2 h6 with unclear play is preferable) 12 0-0 f4 13 Bc1 Nf6 14 Re1 Kf7 15 b3 Nbd7 16 Bb2 Ne5 17 Bxe5 dxe5 18 f3 Bb7 19 Bc4 Rd8 20 Nc1 Bxd5 21 Qe2 and White had good compensation in I.Sokolov-W.Hendriks, Amsterdam 1996.

### 11 Bxg5 (Diagram 14)

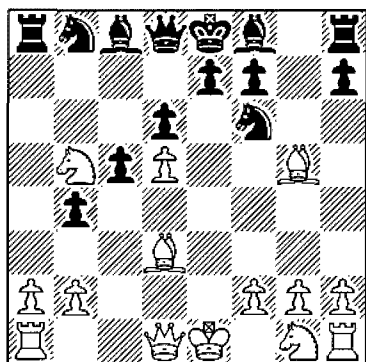


Diagram 14 (B)  
e-pawn for g-pawn

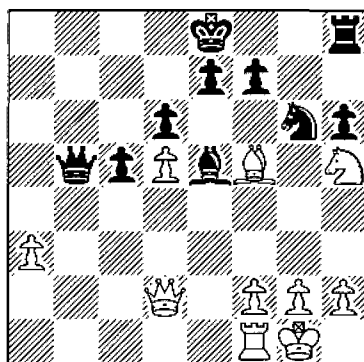


Diagram 15 (B)  
Feeling the strain

### 11...Bg7 12 Ne2 Nbd7

12...Ra5 doesn't solve all Black's problems: 13 Nf4 Nbd7 (13...Qb6 14 Qe2 Ba6 15 Nh5! also offers White the initiative) 14 0-0 Ne5 15 a4 Ng6 16 Bxf6 Bxf6 17

Nh5 Bxb2 18 Ra2 Bf6 (18...Be5 is met by 19 f4 Bc3 20 Nxc3 bxc3 21 Qe1 with attacking chances) 19 Nxf6+ exf6 20 f4 f5 (20...0-0!? 21 Qh5 Qb6 with unclear play was probably better) 21 Re2+ Kf8 22 Qa1 f6 23 Nc7! Kf7 (23...Qxc7? 24 Qxf6+ Qf7 25 Qd8+ Kg7 26 Qxa5 doesn't work out well for Black) 24 Ne6 with a white initiative, M.Chetverik-A.Ooms, Leuven 2004.

**13 Ng3 Ne5 14 Be2 Ng6**

White is a bit better after 14...Rg8 15 0-0 Qb6 16 a4 bxa3 17 bxa3.

**15 0-0 h6 16 Bxf6 Bxf6 17 Qd2 Qb6 18 Nh5 Be5**

18...Bg5?! is met strongly by 19 f4 c4+ 20 Nd4 with a clear edge.

**19 a4 bxa3 20 Rxa3 Rxa3 21 bxa3 Bg4**

White would also retain some pressure after 21...Nh4 22 a4 Rg8 23 Ng3 Nf5 24 Rb1.

**22 Bxg4!**

Keeping up the pressure. After 22 Nxd6+ Qxd6 23 Bxg4 Bxh2+ 24 Kh1 Be5 25 Rcl matters are less clear.

**22...Qxb5 23 Bf5! (Diagram 15) 23...Qb7?**

After this mistake White's initiative becomes too strong. There was certainly much to calculate here and the mistake is quite understandable. Here are some examples:

a) 23...Qb2? 24 Rb1! wins.

b) 23...Bxh2+? 24 Kxh2 Qxf1 25 Qb2 and White wins.

b) 23...Qa4 24 Rb1 Kd8 25 Bxg6 fxe6 26 Nf4 Qxf4 27 Qxf4 Bxf4 28 Rb8+ Kd7 29 Rxh8 c4 30 Rf8! g5 31 Kf1 c3 32 Rxf4 gxf4 33 Ke2 and White wins again.

d) 23...Qc4 was necessary; after 24 Rb1 0-0 25 Qxh6 Qxd5 26 Bxg6 fxe6 27 Qxg6+ Kh8 White has no easy way to prove his advantage.

**24 Rb1 Qa7 25 Qd3 Kd8 26 Qb5 Nh4 27 Qc6! Nxf5 28 Rb7 Qxb7 29 Qxb7 Re8 30 a4 e6 31 a5 Ne7 32 dxe6 fxe6 33 a6 Nd5 34 a7 Nc7 35 a8Q+ Nxa8 36 Qxa8+ Kd7 37 Qb7+ Kd8 38 g4 Re7 39 Qb8+ Kd7 40 f4 Bd4+ 41 Kg2 d5 42 Qb6 Ke8 43 f5 exf5 44 Qc6+ Rd7 45 gxf5 c4 46 f6 Kd8 47 Nf4 1-0**

## White Plays 5 e3

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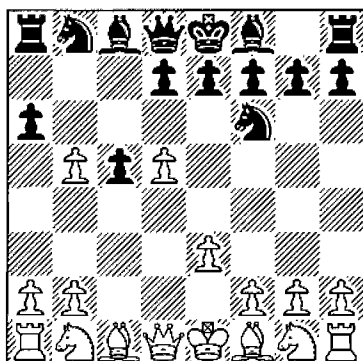
**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 (Diagram 16)**

5 e3 has been popular since the 1970s, especially thanks to the efforts of Hungarian chess players. White clears a path for the f1-bishop, protecting the b5-pawn. Since this cannot be achieved with e2-e4, White is content with a more modest move of the e-pawn. Unfortunately, this pawn limits the flexibility of his other bishop.

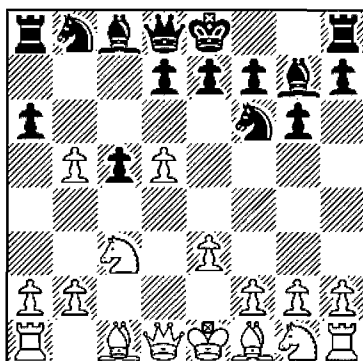
It is quite logical to meet 5 e3 with the symmetrical 5...e6 (Game 19), undermining the important d5-pawn. From time to time White continues 6 dxe6 fxe6

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

(see Riazantsev-Fernandez) with a transposition that is close to the Blumenfeld Gambit. More often White does not rush to provide his opponent with a strong pawn centre and prefers 6 Nc3. After 6...exd5 he usually clears the centre with 7 Nxd5 Bb7 8 Nxf6 Qxf6 and proceeds with his development on the kingside (Halkias-Sziebert), but he can also transfer the king's knight to f4 (usually via e2 rather than through h3 as in the Georgiev-Popov game), hoping to secure the position of his piece on d5.



**Diagram 16 (B)**  
White plays 5 e3



**Diagram 17 (W)**  
White has a choice

The continuation 5...Bb7 (putting pressure on d5) 6 Nc3 (pawn protection) 6...Qa5 (some more pressure) 7 Bd2 axb5 transposes to 5...axb5 (see below), but 7 bxa6 has its own importance. After 7...Nxa6 8 Bd2 Qb6 9 e4 White occupies the centre and Black tries to undermine it with 9...e6.

Natural development with 5...g6 6 Nc3 Bg7 (**Diagram 17**), as seen in Games 20-21, gives White a chance to choose how to place his pieces.

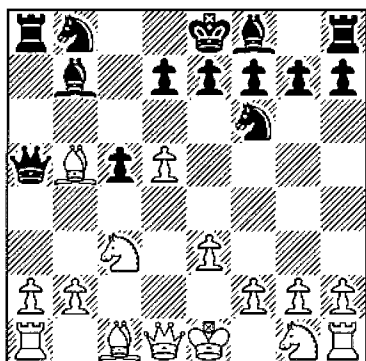
An outstanding expert on 5 e3 is the Hungarian grandmaster Ivan Farago, who introduced the move 7 e4. In the game Farago-Leko Black found a worthy retort – undermining with ...e7-e6. If 7 Nf3 sometimes we see ...d7-d6, as is typical for the main variations in the Volga Gambit (the game Browne-Alburt saw a remarkable succession of white pieces using b5 as an outpost). But the key position arises after 7...0-0 8 a4 Bb7 9 Ra3 (this is an important move that allows ...axb5 to be met with a pawn recapture on b5 since the rook is protected) 9...e6 10 dxe6 fxe6 11 Qd6 (Jelen-Baklan, Georgiev-Rogers). The queen cuts Black's pawn chain but it will not last long; the queen will be forced away, the chain will straighten and will either prove its strength or its weakness in the upcoming fight.

7 a4 0-0 8 Bc4 (Game 21) occurs fairly frequently and is mostly followed by Ng1-e2. It is difficult to indicate the best reply for Black, but it is definitely not 8...Ne8. After 9 Rb1 (Ziegler-Chernin) or 9 Bd2 (Khenkin-D.Cranling) White

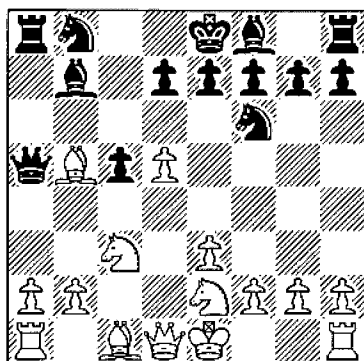
can meet ...axb5 with axb5, and Black is unable to win his pawn back and faces difficulty in developing his pieces on the queenside.

After 5...axb5 6 Bxb5 we must not ignore 6...Qa5+. If instead 6...Ba6 7 Bxa6 Nxa6 8 Nc3 g6 9 e4 d6 10 Nf3 we actually transpose to the line 5 Nc3 d6 6 e4 g6. Additionally, the tempo spent on ...axb5 makes up for the tempo lost on e2-e3-e4. Since we have criticised this standard development in reply to 5 Nc3 in the introduction to the Zaitsev Variation, there really is no alternative to 6...Qa5.

**5...axb5 6 Bxb5 Qa5+ 7 Nc3 Bb7 (Diagram 18)**



**Diagram 18 (W)**  
A popular line



**Diagram 19 (B)**  
Offering the pawn back

Here we have three main branches. After Beliavsky defeated Adams in 1990 the pawn sacrifice 8 e4!? became very popular. However, now it is used very rarely for some reason, even though Black has problems. After 8...Nxe4 9 Nge2 he should not delay ...Ne4-d6, because if 9...g6 10 0-0 Nd6 then the c3-knight is freed and 11 a4 is quite strong. However, after 9...Nd6 10 Bd3 Bxd5 11 0-0 Bb7 12 Bf4 (Hillarp Persson-Fogarasi) White has a significant initiative for his pawn.

After 8 Bd2 Qb6 (Game 22) White should not cling onto his extra pawn; it is more promising for him to give it back immediately with 9 Bc4 e6 10 e4 (Anakov-Kalegin) and especially 9 Nf3 (S.Guliev-Shinkevich). After the queen exchange 9 Qb3 e6 10 Bc4 Qxb3 11 Bxb3 Na6 Black obtained sufficient counterchances in Zimmerman-Chernin. Also possible here is 10 e4!? Nxe4 11 Nxe4 Bxd5 12 Qd3 with very unclear play (Beliavsky-Miles).

The sacrifice 8 Ne2 (**Diagram 19**) was first employed in 1985 by the previously mentioned Farago and is the subject of Game 23.

Now of the two captures, 8...Bxd5 occurs less frequently. In the game Shirov-Adams, after 9 0-0 Bc6 10 a4 e6 White chose another sacrifice with 11 e4 and

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

his advantage in development became very threatening. After 8...Nxd5 9 0-0 the knight retreat to c7, leads to unclear consequences according to Flear's analysis, and new games (in particular Lukacs-Gyimesi) have not clarified anything. On the other hand, if 9...Nxc3 10 Nxc3 Black should prefer 10...e6 (Kramnik-Adams) to 10...g6 (Lukacs-Berg).

## Statistics

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White scores 55% with 5 e3.

## Theoretical?

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Yes. There are plenty of specific lines with relevant analysis.

## Theoretical Status

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Respected. Although no totally reliable way to equalise against 5 e3 has been found yet, the line has still lost some of its popularity. This might be because here White must face some risks in an open double-edged position, while players have learned how to deal with the Volga Gambit in other lines with almost no risk.

Game 19

□ Kir.Georgiev ■ L.Popov

Tivat 1995

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 e6 (Diagram 20)

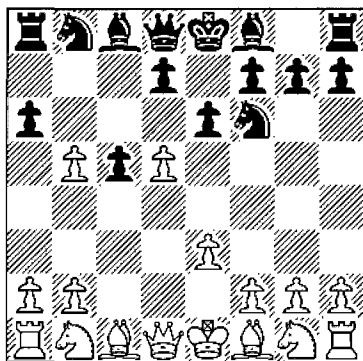


Diagram 20 (W)  
Black plays 5...e6

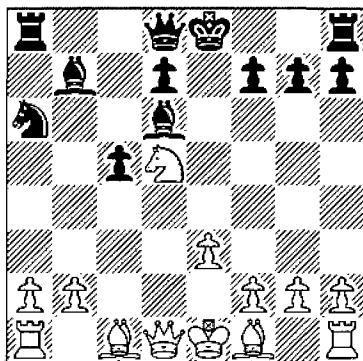


Diagram 21 (B)  
Battling for the d5-square

Black has many options when facing 5 e3, as can be seen over the next few games. One further possibility is 5...Bb7 6 Nc3 Qa5 7 bxa6 (White can play 7 Bd2 axb5 8 Bxb5 transposing to 5...axb5 6 Bxb5 Qa5 7 Nc3 Bb7 8 Bd2)

7...Nxa6 (after 7...Bxd5 8 Bd2 Bc6 9 Nf3 d6 10 Nb5!? Qb6 11 Qb3 Bxf3 12 gxf3 Nxa6 13 Bc3 White has the initiative) 8 Bd2 Qb6 9 e4 e6 10 Nf3 Be7 11 Be2 (or 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 e5 Ne4 13 Bc4 0-0 14 0-0 Rf7 and Black has counterplay down the f-file) 11...0-0 12 d6!? Bxd6 13 e5 Bxf3 14 Bxf3 Bxe5 15 Bxa8 Rxa8 16 Qe2 Qb8 17 Bg5 Nb4 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 0-0 d5 with complex play in I.Khenkin-C.Matamoros, Alcobendas 1994.

### 6 Nc3

6 dxe6 fxe6 7 Nc3 Bb7 8 Nf3 is another way to play for the advantage: 8...Be7 9 Be2 0-0 10 bxa6 Nxa6 11 0-0 d5 (maybe 11...Nb4!? 12 Bd2 d5 is better; after 13 Ng5 Qd7 14 a3 Nc6 15 Qc2 the position is hard to evaluate) 12 b3 Bd6 13 Nb5 Bb8 14 Bb2 Nd7 15 a3 e5 16 e4!? and now in A.Riazantsev-E.Fernandez Romero, Linares 2001 Black played the weak 16...dxe4?!, White obtaining a winning advantage after 17 Ng5 Qe7 18 Bc4+ Kh8 19 Nxh7! Rf5 20 Qg4 g6 21 Qxg6 Qxh7 22 Qxh7+ Kxh7 23 Be6 Rg5 24 Bxd7. Instead Black should play 16...d4 17 Bd3 Nb6 18 Qe2 Qd7 19 Nd2 when White is a bit better.

### 6...exd5 7 Nh3!?

7 Nxd5 is more standard. After 7...Bb7 8 Nxf6+ Qxf6 9 Nf3 Be7 10 bxa6 Nxa6 11 Be2 Nb4 12 a3 we slightly prefer White, and 12...Qg6?! 13 0-0 Nc2 14 Bd3 Be4 15 Bxe4 Qxe4 16 Rb1 Ne1 17 Bd2 Nxf3+ 18 Qxf3 Qxf3 19 gxf3 d5 20 Bc3 was simply an extra pawn in S.Halkias-A.Sziebert, Cappelle la Grande 2002.

### 7...Bd6

Also worthy of note is 7...Bb7 8 Nf4 axb5 9 Nfxd5!? Nxd5 (9...b4 10 Nxf6+ Qxf6 11 Nd5 Qe5 12 Bc4 gives White supreme control – Zimmerman) 10 Nxd5 c4 11 Be2 Qa5+ 12 Kf1 Nc6 and Black has his fair share of the action.

### 8 Nxd5 Bb7 9 Nh4 Nxd5

After 9...Bxf4 10 Nxf4 axb5 11 Qd6 Ne4 12 Qe5+ Kf8 the position is quite unclear, so this is a possible way to go for Black.

### 10 bxa6 Nxa6 11 Nxd5 (Diagram 21) 11...0-0 12 Be2

12 Bc4 is met strongly by 12...Qh4!? 13 Qd3 Nb4 14 Nxb4 cxb4; after 15 Bd5 Bxd5 16 Qxd5 Ra6 Black has good compensation.

### 12...Bxd5?!

This leads to a position where White will always be better. Something like 12...Qb8!? 13 h3 Be5 14 0-0 Qd6 15 Bc4 Nc7 16 Nxc7 Qxc7 was necessary, with Black having some compensation.

### 13 Qxd5 Qc7

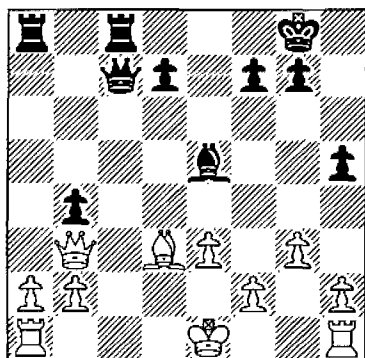
Or 13...Nb4 14 Qc4 Qc7 15 Bd2 Rfb8 with some play, though White remains better.

### 14 Bd2 Nb4 15 Bxb4 cxb4 16 g3 Be5 17 Qb3 Rfc8 18 Bd3 h5? (Diagram 22)

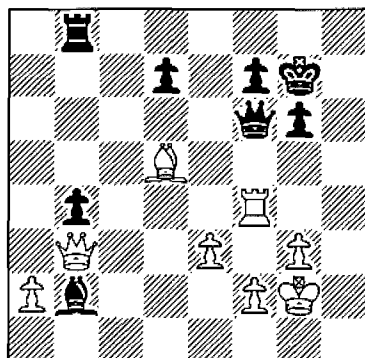
The attack is an illusion, and now White gets time to place his bishop on d5 where it will dominate everything. Necessary was 18...d5 19 0-0 Qd6, though

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

White remains better.



**Diagram 22 (W)**  
Just an illusion



**Diagram 23 (B)**  
f7 falls

19 0-0 h4 20 Be4 Rab8 21 Bd5 Rf8 22 Rac1 Qb6 23 Rfd1 Qf6 24 Rc4 hxg3  
25 hxg3 g6

25...Bxb2? loses to 26 Rf4.

26 Kg2 Kg7 27 Rh1 Rh8 28 Rch4 Rxh4 29 Rxh4 Bxb2

Black is of course losing no matter what. After 29...g5 30 Rxb4 Rh8 31 Qd1 (31 Rb6?? Rh2+! would give Black an undeserved draw) 31...Qh6 32 Kg1 there is no attack.

30 Rf4 (Diagram 23) 30...Qc3 31 Rxf7+ Kh6 32 Qd1! 1-0

Game 20

□ I.Jelen ■ V.Baklan

Groningen 1996

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 g6

Even this slow system seems to be playable for Black, though White should claim a slight edge.

6 Nc3 Bg7 7 Nf3

Or 7 e4 0-0 8 a4 (8 e5 looks tempting at first, but after 8...Ne8 9 f4 d6 10 Nf3 Bg4 Black has considerable counterplay) 8...Bb7 9 Nf3 e6 10 Be2 exd5 11 exd5 axb5 12 Bxb5 Re8+ 13 Be3 Ng4 14 0-0 Nxe3 15 fxe3 Na6 (15...Rxe3 16 Qd2 Re8 17 d6 Bxf3 18 Rxf3 Nc6 19 Raf1 would give White a dangerous initiative) 16 e4 Nc7 17 Bd3 d6 18 Qd2 Ba6 19 Rfe1 Bxd3 20 Qxd3 Qd7 21 b3 Rab8 22 Rab1 Re7 23 Nd1 Rb4 with chances for both sides, I.Farago-P.Leko, Budapest 1992.

7...0-0 8 a4 Bb7

## The Volga Gambit Accepted without 5 bxa6

8...d6 9 Ra3 Nbd7 10 e4 axb5 11 Bxb5 Ba6 12 Qe2 Bxb5 13 Nxb5 Ne8 14 0-0 Nc7 15 b3 Nxb5 16 Qxb5 left White with a slight edge in W.Browne-L.Alburt, Greenwille 1983.

9 Ra3 e6 (Diagram 24)

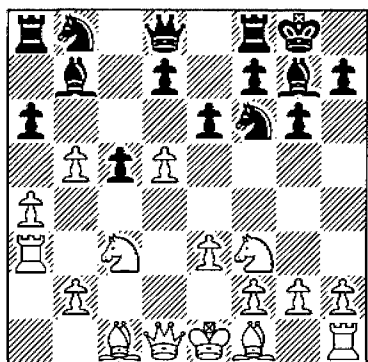


Diagram 24 (W)

Undermining with ...e7-e6

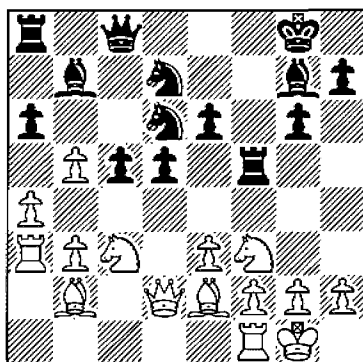


Diagram 25 (W)

An active rook on f5

10 dxe6

10 d6 Nd5 11 Bc4 axb5 12 Nxb5 Na6 13 0-0 Nab4 would give Black good counterplay for his material investment.

10...fxe6 11 Qd6 Qc8 12 Be2 Ne8

Or 12...axb5 13 axb5 Ne8 14 Qd2 d5 15 Rxa8 Bxa8 16 0-0 Nd7 17 b3 Nef6 18 Bb2 e5 19 Na4 Qb8 with mutual chances in Kir.Georgiev-I.Rogers, Biel 1993.

13 Qd2 d5 14 0-0 Nd7 15 b3 Nd6 16 Bb2 Rf5! (Diagram 25) 17 bxa6

17 Bd3 is met strongly by 17...Rxf3! 18 gxf3 c4 19 Be2 cxb3 20 Rxb3 Nc4 with significant counterplay.

17...Bxa6 18 Nb5 Bxb5 19 axb5 Rxa3?!

This allows White to activate his queen (see move 21) and thereby loses some of the momentum. After 19...Ne4!? 20 Qc2 Rxa3 21 Bxa3 Qa8 Black would have sizeable counterplay.

20 Bxa3 Ne4 21 Qa5 Nc3 22 Bd3 Rf8

22...Rxf3?! 23 gxf3 Ne5 looks tempting, but 24 Bb2! Nxf3+ 25 Kg2 Qf8 (25...e5? 26 Bxc3 Qg4+ 27 Kh1 Qh3 28 Qd8+ wins) 26 Qb6 Nh4+ 27 Kg1 Nf3+ 28 Kh1 is an adequate refutation.

23 Qa7

23 Rc1 Qa8 24 Qa6! ensures White of quite a comfortable advantage.

23...Rd8 24 Rc1

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Stronger was 24 Bb2!? Ne5 25 Nxe5 Bxe5 26 Qa1 d4 27 Bc4 when White has a pleasant lead.

24...c4 25 bxc4 dxc4 26 Bf1 Nxb5 27 Qa4 Nxa3 28 Qxa3 Nb6 29 h3

Now Black equalises. 29 Ng5 Rd5 30 Ne4 keeps some pressure.

29...c3 30 Qb3 Rd6 31 Bb5 Qc5 32 Nd4 Bxd4 33 exd4 Qxd4 ½-½

Game 21

□ A.Ziegler ■ A.Chernin

Gothenburg 1996

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 g6 6 Nc3 Bg7 7 a4 0-0 8 Bc4 (Diagram 26)

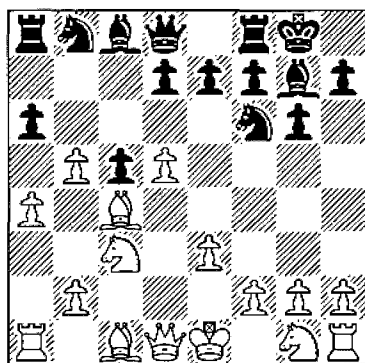


Diagram 26 (B)

What should Black play?

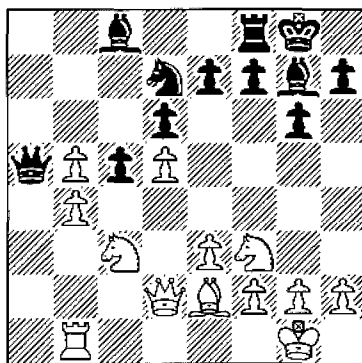


Diagram 27 (B)

White plays b2-b4!

8...Ne8?!

This manoeuvre seems rather artificial. We are in favour of more classical ways of playing the position:

a) 8...d6 9 Nge2 Nbd7 10 bxa6 (here we suggest 10 Ra3!? with the plan of 10...Nb6 11 Ba2!? axb5 12 axb5 Bb7 13 0-0 Qd7 14 e4 Rfc8 15 f3 and White has an edge) 10...Bxa6 11 Bxa6 Rxa6 12 0-0 Qa8 13 e4 Rb8 14 Ra3 Rb4 15 f3 Ne8 16 Qc2 Nb6 17 b3 c4!? 18 Be3 cxb3 19 Rxb3 Rxb3 20 Qxb3 Nxa4 21 Nd4 and quite logically a draw was agreed in B.Spassky-V.Tseshkovsky, Manila 1976.

b) 8...Bb7 9 Nge2 e6 10 Nf4!? axb5 11 Nxb5 exd5 12 Nxd5 Nc6 13 Nd6 Ba6 14 Bxa6?! (better is 14 0-0 Nxd5 15 Qxd5 Qe7 16 Rd1 and White keeps some pressure) 14...Rxa6 15 Nb7 (15 Qd3 is met strongly by 15...Nxd5! 16 Qxa6 Qb8 with sudden counterplay) 15...Qc8 16 Nxf6+ (16 Nxc5 Nxd5 17 Nxa6 Qxa6 18 Qxd5 Nb4 is not clear at all) 16...Bxf6 17 Nd6 Qc7 18 Ne4 Be5 19 0-0 Nb4 20 f4 Bg7 21 Bd2 Re8 22 Ng5 h6 23 Nf3 Nd5 24 Qb3 Nf6 and Black had good compensation in M.Notkin-A.Khalifman, St Petersburg 1995.

**9 Rb1**

Another good move is 9 Bd2 d6 (after 9...Nd6 White can play 10 b3 axb5 11 axb5 Rxa1 12 Qxa1 with an edge) 10 Nf3 Nd7 11 0-0 Nc7 12 e4 Nb6 13 Be2 axb5 14 axb5 Bd7 15 Qb3 Qb8 16 Bf4 Qb7 17 h3 and White was better in I.Khenkin-D.Cramling, Osterskars 1995.

**9...Nd6 10 Be2 axb5 11 axb5 Qa5 12 Bd2**

12 Nf3!? is interesting, as after 12...Bxc3+? 13 bxc3 Qxc3+ 14 Bd2 Qa3 15 Qc2 White has a large positional advantage instead of a material advantage.

**12...Qb4 13 Nf3 Nc4 14 0-0**

14 Na2!? looked strong here. After 14...Qa4 15 Qxa4 Rxa4 16 Bc3 we cannot find any compensation for Black.

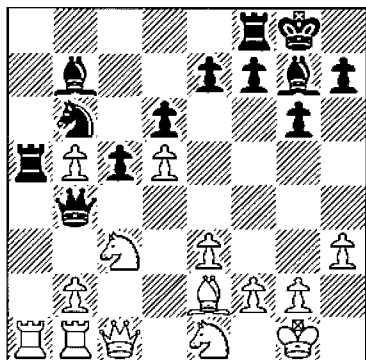
**14...Nxd2 15 Qxd2 d6 16 Ra1 Ra5 17 h3**

It's not clear what White is trying to do here. One option is 17 Rfb1 with the idea of 17...Nd7 18 Rxa5 Qxa5 19 b4! (Diagram 27). 19...cxb4 20 Na2. After the forced 20...Bc3 21 Nxc3 bxc3 22 Qd4 White's position is more pleasant.

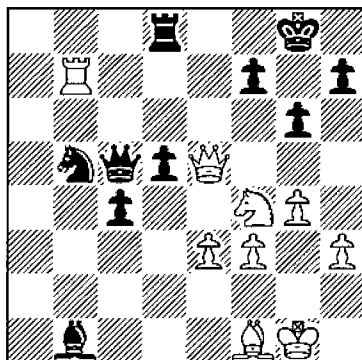


**NOTE: This manoeuvre and pawn advance is a very important weapon for White when he is fighting for an advantage.**

**17...Nd7 18 Rfb1 Bb7 19 Ne1 Nb6 20 Qc1?! (Diagram 28)**



**Diagram 28 (B)**  
Too passive



**Diagram 29 (W)**  
A choice of wins



**TIP: Even when you have won a pawn, it is necessary to play actively.**

This is very passive. After 20 Nd3 Rxa1 21 Rxa1 Qh4 the position is pretty unclear, but White has the chance of 22 Ra7 Rb8 23 Ne1 Qb4 24 Nd3 Qh4 with a possible draw.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

20...Rxa1 21 Rxa1 Nxd5 22 Ra7 Bxc3 23 bxc3 Nxc3 24 Bf1 Be4 25 Rxe7 d5  
25...Rb8 26 Qa1 c4 would allow 27 b6!? with counterplay.

26 f3 Bf5 27 Rc7 Ra8

27...Rb8 28 g4 Bb1 was also better for Black.

28 g4 Bb1 29 Ng2

Black probably overlooked White's queen manoeuvre.

29...Ra2?

Black keeps control and slightly better chances after 29...c4 30 Qd2 Qb3.

30 Qe1 Ra8 31 Qg3 Nxb5

31...c4 32 Qe5 gives White the initiative based on 32...Qb2 33 Kh2 Qc1 34 b6!  
Qxf1 35 b7 Rf8 36 Rc8, winning.

32 Rb7 c4 33 Qe5 Qc5 34 Nf4 Rd8? (Diagram 29)

Losing in a number of ways. After 34...Qc6! Black stays in the game: 35 Qxd5  
Qxd5 36 Nxd5 Bd3 37 Bxd3 cxd3 38 Rxb5 Ra1+ 39 Kf2 d2 40 Nc3 Rc1 41 Ke2  
Rxc3 42 Kxd2 Ra3 and though White has winning chances in this endgame, it  
is far from winning without any errors from Black.

35 Qf6

Winning, but 35 Ne6! was a little quicker.

35...Rf8 36 Kg2 Qxe3 37 Rxb5 Bd3 38 Bxd3 cxd3 39 Rxd5 d2 40 Qd6 1-0

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Game 22

□ Y.Zimmerman ■ A.Chernin

Hungary 1999

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 Bb7 6 Nc3 axb5 7 Bxb5 Qa5 8 Bd2  
8 e4!? (Diagram 30) is Beliavsky's idea.

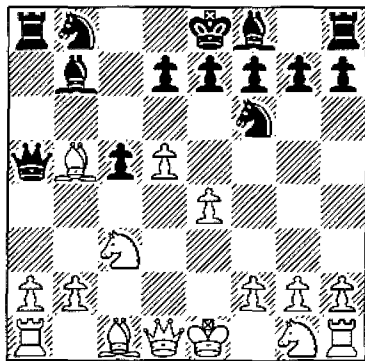


Diagram 30 (B)  
Beliavsky's 8 e4!?

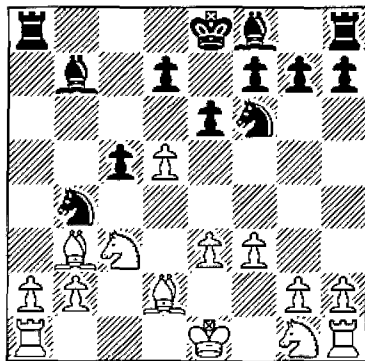


Diagram 31 (W)  
Black is active

Now after 8...Nxe4 9 Nge2 Nd6!? (9...g6?! 10 0-0 Nd6 11 a4 does not look good, while 9...Nxc3 10 Nxc3 Ba6 transposes to 5 Nc3 axb5 6 e4 Qa5 7 Bxb5 Nxe4 8 Nge2 Nxc3 9 Nxc3 Ba6) 10 Bd3!? White decides to play a gambit of his own. 10...Bxd5 11 0-0 Bb7 12 Bf4 Qb6 13 Ng3 g6 14 Re1 Nc8 15 Bb5 Bc6 16 Nd5 Bxd5 17 Qxd5 Nc6 18 Rad1 Ra7 19 a4 gave White good compensation in T.Hillarp Persson-T.Fogarasi, Budapest 1996.

### 8...Qb6 9 Qb3

Probably this is less testing than the other main tries:

a) 9 Bc4 e6 10 e4!? and after 10...Nxe4 11 Nf3! Nxd2 12 Qxd2 Be7 13 0-0 0-0 14 Rfe1 Na6 15 Rad1 White was slightly better in B.Annakov-E.Kalegin, Moscow 1995.

b) 9 Nf3 is also respectable: 9...Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Bxd5 11 a4 e6 12 Bc3 Qb7 13 Ne5!? (White uses the chance to take the initiative) 13...Be7 (13...Bxg2 14 Rg1 Bd5 15 Qe2 with substantial compensation) 14 f3 Bh4+ 15 g3 Bf6 16 0-0 Qc7 17 e4 Bxe5 18 exd5 0-0 19 f4 Bxc3 20 bxc3 and White was a bit better in S.Guliev-V.Shinkevich, Nizhnij Novgorod 1999. In this line 12...Be7!? looks interesting. After 13 Bxg7 Rg8 it is hard to evaluate the position, but 14 Be5 Rxg2 15 Bg3 Qb7 16 Be2 Bb3 17 Qd2 Bd5 18 Qd1 with a strange repetition is an important idea for Black.

### 9...e6 10 Bc4

White should consider 10 e4!? when Black has no logical reply other than 10...Nxe4! 11 Nxe4 Bxd5 12 Qd3 f5 (12...Qb7 13 f3 c4 14 Bxc4 Bxc4 15 Qxc4 d5 16 Qc2 dxe4 17 Qxe4 Qxb2 18 Rb1 Qxa2 19 Ne2 promises White the initiative) 13 Ng3 Bxg2 14 a4 (or 14 N1e2 Bxh1 15 Nxh1 Be7 16 Nhg3 0-0 17 Nh5 Nc6 18 Bc3 Rf7 19 Nef4 Bf8 20 a4 d5 with a mess – B.Kogan) 14...Qb7 15 f3 Be7 16 N1e2 Bxh1 17 Nxh1 0-0 18 0-0-0 Bf6 19 Bc3 d5 20 Nf4 Bxc3 21 Qxc3 Rf6 and the position was deeply unclear in A.Beliavsky-A.Miles, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1984.

### 10...Qxb3 11 Bxb3 Na6 12 f3

12 Nge2 Nb4 13 0-0 is a sensible way to play – White can't do much with the extra pawn if his pieces are not playing. After 13...Nfxd5 14 Nxd5 Nxd5 15 e4 Nb4 the position is unclear.

### 12...Nb4 (Diagram 31) 13 dxe6

Or 13 Nge2 Nd3+ 14 Kf1 and now:

a) 14...Nxb2?! 15 Rb1 Nd3 16 dxe6 fxe6 17 Bxe6! and White's position is preferable.



**TIP: It is often more important to keep a positional advantage rather than to recapture pawns.**

b) 14...Ba6! 15 e4 Bd6 16 Rb1 0-0 when the strong knight, the open files and the tender position of White's king give Black more than enough for a pawn.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

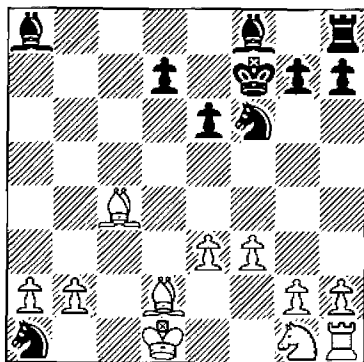
13...fxe6 14 Nb5 c4! 15 Bxc4

White still had time to pull the break. After 15 Bd1 Rxa2 16 Rxa2 Nxa2 17 b3 cxb3 18 Bxb3 Nb4 the position is simply level.

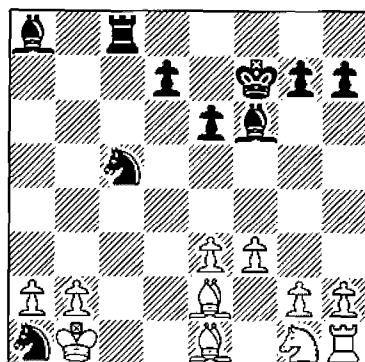
15...Nc2+ 16 Kd1

16 Kf2 is met strongly by 16...Rc8! 17 Rc1 Rxc4 18 Nd4 Rxd4 19 exd4 Nxd4 with better prospects for Black.

16...Nxa1 17 Nc7+ Kf7 18 Nxa8 Bxa8 (Diagram 32)



**Diagram 32 (W)**  
An extra knight on a1



**Diagram 33 (W)**  
The knight is immune

19 Kc1?

19 Bd3 was stronger, though after 19...Bd6 20 Ke2 Rb8 21 Nh3 Rxb2 22 Rxa1 Bb4 23 Rd1 Rxa2 Black is a shade better.

19...Be7 20 Kb1 Ne4! 21 Be1 Rc8 22 Bd3

22 Ba6 Rb8 23 Kxa1 Bf6 also clearly favours Black.

22...Nc5 23 Be2?!

23 Bxh7 was sadly necessary, though after 23...g6 24 Ne2 Nab3! 25 axb3 e5 26 Bc3 d6 the outlook is bleak for White.

23...Bf6 (Diagram 33) 24 Bc3

24 Kxa1 is met strongly by 24...Nb3+! 25 axb3 Rc1+ 26 Ka2 Rxe1 and White cannot develop.

24...Ne4! 25 fxe4 Bxe4+ 26 Kxa1 Rxc3! 27 Nf3 Rc2 0-1

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Game 23

□ P.Lukacs ■ K.Berg

Gausdal 1989

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 axb5 6 Bxb5 Qa5+ 7 Nc3 Bb7 8 Nge2!

This is the modern treatment; White is more interested in dynamic play than a mere pawn.

**8...Nxd5**

8...Bxd5 9 0-0 Bc6 10 a4 looks reassuring for White. For example, 10...e6 11 e4 Bxb5 (or 11...Bxe4 12 Nxe4 Nxe4 13 Be3 Be7 14 Qc2 and White has a plus based on development and the two bishops) 12 Nxb5 Nxe4 13 Ng3 Nf6 14 Rc1 and now:

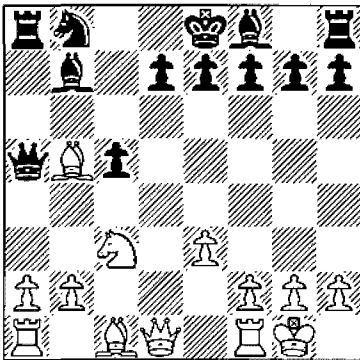
a) 14...Na6 15 Bf4 d5 16 Nf5! Qb4 17 Be5 Qg4 18 Bxf6 Qxd1 (18...Qxf5? is met strongly by 19 Bxg7! Rg8 20 Re5 – Shirov: the important point is of course 20...Qg6 21 Qxd5!) 19 Raxd1 gxf6 20 Rxd5 and White was a bit better in A.Shirov-M.Adams, Chalkidiki 1993.

b) 14...Be7 is an enticing alternative. After 15 b4!? cxb4 16 Nf5! exf5 17 Rxe7+! Kxe7 18 Qd6+ Kd8 19 Bg5 Kc8 20 Rc1+ Nc6 21 Rxc6+ dxc6 22 Qxc6+ Kd8 23 Qd6+ Kc8 there is nothing more than a draw – Shirov. White probably needs to play 15 Bg5!? to hold on to the initiative: 15...0-0 16 Nf5 exf5 17 Rxe7 Ne4 18 Be3 and White has compensation for the pawn.

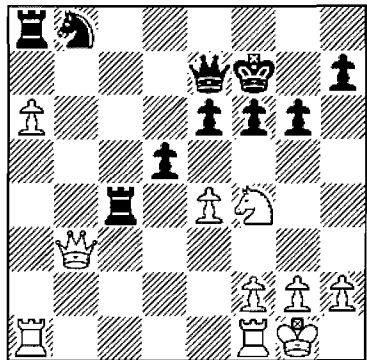
**9 0-0 Nxc3**

9...Nc7 is worthy of attention: 10 Bc4 (less clear is 10 a4 Nxb5 11 Nxb5 Bc6 12 Nec3 Na6 13 e4 g6) 10...Nc6 11 e4 Ne5 12 Bb3 c4!? (maybe 12...e6 13 Bf4 Ng6 14 Ba4 0-0-0! when White is only slightly better according to Flear) 13 Bc2 e6 14 Bd2 Qa6 15 Bf4 f6 16 Qd2 Bb4 17 Rad1 Rd8 18 Bxc5 fxe5 19 Qg5 0-0 20 Qxe5 d6 21 Qh5 e5 and Black had compensation in P.Lukacs-Z.Gyimesi, Budapest 1996.

**10 Nxc3 (Diagram 34)**



**Diagram 34 (B)**  
...e6 or ...g6?



**Diagram 35**  
e3-e4!!

10...g6

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Probably the main line here is 10...e6 11 e4 Bxe4 12 Bxd7+ Nxd7 13 Nxe4 Qa4 14 Qf3 (less dangerous is 14 Nd6+ Bxd6 15 Qxd6 because of 15...Qd4!; after 16 Bf4 e5 17 Qc6 Qa4 18 Qxa4 Rxa4 19 Be3 Ke7 Black should equalise) 14...Ne5 15 Qe3 (15 Qf4 Nd3 16 Qe3 Rd8 17 Nc3 Qc6 18 Qg3 c4 gave Black enough counterplay in V.Kramnik-M.Adams, Chalkidiki 1993) 15...Qd4 16 Qe2 and Black still hasn't solved all his problems – Kramnik.

**11 Bc4**

Also worthy of note is 11 a4 Bg7 12 e4; after 12...Bxc3 13 bxc3 Qxc3 14 Be3 Qe5 15 Re1 0-0 16 Bh6 Rc8 17 Rc1 White has good compensation for the pawn.

**11...Qb4 12 Qd3 Bg7**

12...Ba6 13 Bxf7+ Kxf7 14 Qd5+ e6 15 Qxa8 Bxf1 16 Kxf1 Nc6 17 Qc8 Qc4+ 18 Kg1 Qd3 19 Qc7 Bg7 unnecessarily gives Black considerable counterplay, so 12...Ba6 is best met by 13 Bxa6 Nxa6 14 Nd5 Qb8 15 Bd2 with a slight pull.

**13 Bd2 Qb6 14 Nd5 Qd8 15 Qb3 Ba6 16 Bc3 0-0 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Qc3+ f6**  
Or 18...Kg8 19 Bxa6 Nxa6 20 a3 d6 21 b4 with an edge – Lukacs.

**19 a3**

White also has some advantage after 19 Rfd1 e6 20 Nf4 Qe7 21 Bxa6 Nxa6 22 e4.

**19...e6**

Black's position does not look that awful here, but the weaknesses in the structure combined with the passed pawn on the queenside spell trouble.

**20 Nf4 Qe7 21 b4 cxb4 22 axb4 Rc8 23 b5 d5 24 bxa6 Rxc4 25 Qb3**

Black is in a bad shape: 25...Nxa6 26 Nxe6+! is one symptom; another is 25...Rb4 26 Nxe6+! (Lukacs).

**25...Kf7 26 e4!! (Diagram 35)**

A nice, thematic breakthrough.

**26...Nxa6**

White wins in the long and complicated line 26...Rb4 27 Qh3 h5 28 Nxb5 gxh5 29 Qxb5+ Kf8 (29...Kg7 30 Ra3! with a deadly attack) 30 Rac1! Rc4 31 exd5 exd5 32 Qh8+ Kf7 33 Rb1 Rb4 34 Qh7+ Kf8 35 Qxe7+ Kxe7 36 Rxb4, while 26...Rxe4 27 Nxd5! is also bad news for Black.

**27 Nxe6 Qd7?**

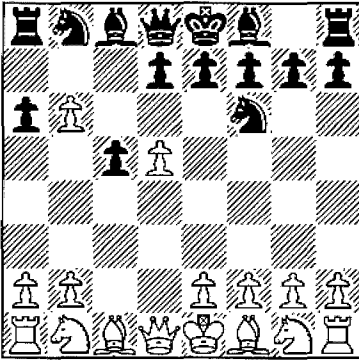
Better resistance was offered with 27...Nc5, though after 28 Nxc5 Rxa1 29 Rxa1 Qxc5 30 Qb7+ Qc7 31 Qxd5+ Kg7 32 g3 White has some winning chances with his extra pawn. Now it is simply over.

**28 exd5 Qxd5 29 Ra4! 1-0**

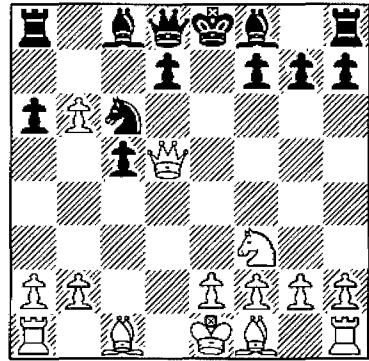
## White Plays 5 b6

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 (Diagram 36)**



**Diagram 36 (B)**  
White plays 5 b6



**Diagram 37 (B)**  
A popular position

This pawn advance was used in the 1970s from time to time; it became more popular in the 1980s and was really booming in the 1990s. 5 b6 allows White to dominate in the centre with Nc3 and e2-e4. Unlike the Real Volga Gambit, here Black restores material equality but his active possibilities are very limited: the a6-pawn blocks the a-file, preventing direct pressure on a2, and the pawn also hinders the natural development of the c8-bishop. That is why the continuation 5...a5 (Game 24), in order to place the bishop on a6 before the advance e2-e4 to prevent White from castling, came into general use. It has been proven that this line is unfavourable for Black because it gives White freedom in the centre. White breaks through with e4-e5, and furthermore both ways of achieving this are equally advantageous. In the games Zueger-Polgar and Atalik-Knopfert White resorted to f2-f4, while the Sokolov-Van der Weide and Akobian-Pinski games demonstrate the advantages of 6 Nc3 Ba6 7 Nf3 d6 8 e4 Bxf1 9 Kxf1 for White. In this position the black pawn on the a-file allows the attack Qd1-a4, contributing to the breakthrough e4-e5.

Without waiting for White's dominance in the centre, Black often plays 5...e6 (Game 25). In the majority of cases 6 Nc3 is met with an immediate double swap on d5. If instead 6...Bb7 7 e4 White retains his pawn on d5 together with a slight but stable plus (this is the reason 5...Bb7 is not popular – there is no better reply to 6 Nc3 than 6...e6).

Going back to 5...e6 6 Nc3, the basic position arises after 6...Nxd5 7 Nxd5 exd5 8 Qxd5 Nc6 9 Nf3 (Diagram 37).



**NOTE:** After 9 Bg5 Qb6 10 Qe4 Be7 11 Bxe7 Nxe7 12 Qxa8 White wins a rook but has to concede perpetual after 12...Qxb2.

White temporarily takes control over the centre but he seriously lags in development on the kingside. Here 9...Be7 10 Ne5 0-0 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Qxd8 Bxd8

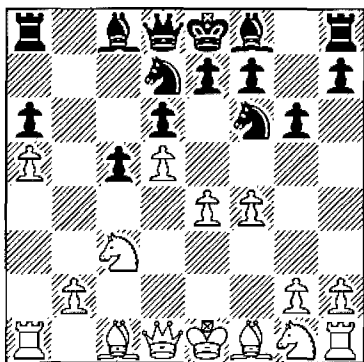
## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

results in an ending that may be defensible but isn't promising for Black (see Mikhalevski-Gershon). 9...Rb8, giving freedom to the c6-knight, is played more often, and now there are a few different variations. After 10 Ne5 White doubles his opponent's pawns (as with 9...Be7 10 Ne5) but still lags in development. The game Djurhuus-Berg proves that it is risky for White to keep queens on in this line. In the popular variation 10 e4 Black dislodges the enemy queen from d5 and sets up a strong pawn centre that is, however, attacked by White (for instance, 10...Be7 11 Bc4 0-0 12 Qh5 d6 13 0-0 Rb6 14 b3 Be6 15 Bxe6 fxe6 as in Gleizerov-Tregubov).

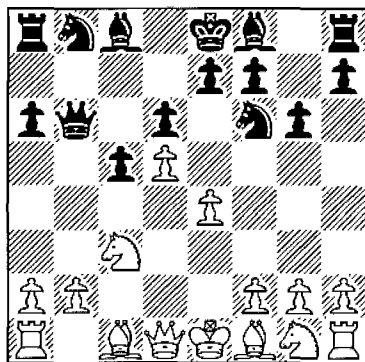
Finally, 10 Bd2 deserves close attention; the bishop moves to c3 and, together with the c4-bishop, takes aim at Black's kingside, while White's king is ready to take shelter on the queenside. This position is quite dangerous for Black, which is clearly seen in the game Vladimirov-Mikhalevski.

The lines 5...d6, 5...g6 and 5...Qb6 often interweave and it is easy to become confused. We are taking a simplified approach by identifying two areas: in Game 26 the b6-pawn is taken by the knight (...Nb8-d7xb6, putting pressure on d5 and c4), while in Game 27 it is captured by the queen.

After 5...d6 6 Nc3 Nbd7, if Black wants to take on b6 with his knight he should prevent a2-a4-a5. After 7 e4 Nxb6 8 a4 g6?! 9 a5 Nbd7 10 f4 (**Diagram 38**) Black was extremely cramped in Tukmakov-Polgar.



**Diagram 38 (B)**  
Black suffers severe cramp



**Diagram 39 (W)**  
Several options



**TIP:** When undertaking the manoeuvre ...Nb8-d7xb6, Black should meet the advance a2-a4 with ...a6-a5.

After 7 e4 g6 8 a4 a5 the white bishop normally occupies the weakened b5-square. The queenside is blocked, so White bets on his attack on the kingside (Bykhovsky-Johansen, Sokolov-Fries Nielsen). It appears that Black should

strive for counterplay with ...e7-e6 (Kaminik-Kalinichev).

After 5...Qxb6 6 Nc3 d6 7 e4 g6 (**Diagram 39**) there are several options.

In reply to 8 f4 Bg7 9 Nf3 it is reasonable to follow the Gofshtein-Alterman game: exchange the light-squared bishop with ...Bg4xf3 and start active play on the queenside with ...Nb8-d7xb6 and ...c5-c4.

It is less effective to restrict the queenside with a2-a4-a5 after Black takes on b6 with the queen rather than with the knight. The reason is the witty queen manoeuvre 8 a4 Bg7 9 a5 Qb4 10 Ra4 Qb7 when by attacking the a4-rook Black wins his tempo back. What is more, after ...Bc8-d7 the queen can come back to b4, while the bishop becomes more active via b5, with equal chances (Kamsky-Illescas).

In the 5...Qxb6 line, the set-up of the white pieces looks like the classical Benoni in the majority of cases. After Bf1-e2 and 0-0 White transfers his f3-knight to c4 via d2 and tries to increase his advantage on the queenside with a4-a5 and Nc3-a4-b6. Black's options are limited and he normally strives to simplify the play.

### Statistics

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After 5 b6 White scores 54%.

### Theoretical?

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Yes. There are quite a few specific lines, but more general plans for both sides have been studied fairly thoroughly.

### Theoretical Status

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Respected. 5 b6 is always fashionable and this popularity is well deserved. In fact, 5...a5 is virtually refuted, while although 5...e6 might be objectively the strongest reply. White has slightly better chances in a complicated fight. In the case of other continuations, Black faces problems finding counterplay and runs the risk of being positionally crushed.

After 5 b6 Black also experiences psychological problems. Instead of gaining some practical opportunities as compensation for his pawn, he loses his initiative. Fans of the Volga Gambit should not forget about 5 b6 in the future.

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Game 24

□ S.Atalik ■ E.Knoppert

Tilburg 1993

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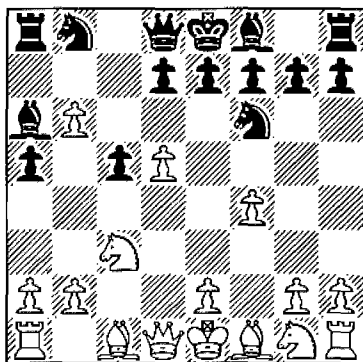
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 a5 6 Nc3 Ba6 7 f4! (**Diagram 40**)

This seems to be the most ambitious approach, but 7 Nf3 d6 8 e4 Bxf1 9 Kxf1 is also better for White:

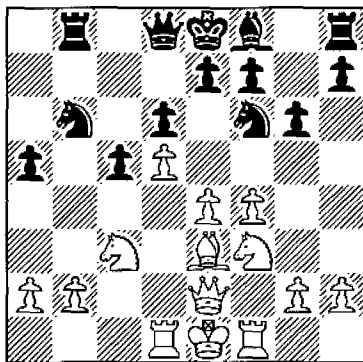
a) 9...g6 10 Qa4+ Nbd7?! 11 e5 dxe5 12 Nxe5 Qxb6 13 Bg5! Qxb2? (13...Rd8 14

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Re1 Bg7 15 Qc6 with a clear edge) 14 Rb1 Qxc3 15 Bxf6 Rd8 16 Qxd7+! 1-0  
I.Sokolov-K.Van der Weide, Leeuwarden 1998.



**Diagram 40 (B)**  
Ambitious play



**Diagram 41 (B)**  
Preparing e4-e5

b) 9...Qxb6 10 e5 dxe5 11 Nxe5 g6 12 Qa4+ Nfd7 13 Bg5 Bg7 (13...Qxb2? 14 Rb1 Qxc3 15 Rxb8+!) 14 Nxd7 Nxd7 15 Re1 Bf6 16 Bh6 Qxb2 17 Ne4 Kd8 18 d6 with an attack, V.Akopian-J.Pinski, Yerevan 1999.

**7...d6 8 Nf3 Nbd7**

Or 8...Qxb6 9 e4 Bxf1 10 Rxf1 g6 (10...e6 11 Qa4+ Nbd7 12 dxe6 fxe6 13 Ng5!? d5 14 exd5 exd5 15 Nxd5! gives White a clear edge) 11 e5 Nfd7 12 e6 fxe6 13 dxe6 Nf6 14 f5!? (why stop now?) 14...gxf5 15 Ng5 h6?! (although after 15...Bg7 16 Rxf5 c4 17 Kf1 0-0 18 Nd5! White has a strong initiative based on 18...Nxd5? 19 Rxf8+ Kxf8 20 Qh5!, winning) 16 Nf7 Rg8 17 Rxf5 Rxc2 18 Rxf6! exf6 19 Qh5 Rg1+ 20 Kd2 Qb4 21 Kc2 Qg4 22 Nxd6+ Ke7 23 Qxc5 and White was winning in B.Zueger-J.Polgar, Biel 1987.

**9 e4 Bxf1 10 Rxf1 Nxb6 11 Qe2**

11 e5!? dxe5 12 fxe5 Nfxd5 13 Ne4 Nb4 gives unclear play.

**11...Rb8 12 Be3 g6 13 Rd1 (Diagram 41)**

Wild and imaginative is 13 0-0-0!? Bg7 14 e5 Ng4 15 Bg1, when White is taking many risks but also has considerable play.

**13...Bg7 14 e5 Ng4**

Here we suggest 14...dxe5!? 15 Nxe5 (or 15 fxe5 Nfxd5 16 Ng5 0-0 with unclear play) 15...Nbx5!? 16 Nc6 Qb6 17 Nxb8 Nxe3 18 Qxe3 Qxb8 19 Qxc5 0-0 when Black clearly has compensation. White has no easy way to solve the problem of his king: on the other hand, he has a lot of extra material.

**15 Bg1**

Interesting here is 15 Bc1!? 0-0 16 h3 Nh6 17 g4 when White has the initiative

according to Van der Weide.

15...0-0 16 h3 Nh6 17 g4 Nd7 18 e6

18 Kf2 Rb4 19 Bh2 Qb8 20 Rd2 is quite unclear too.

18...fxe6 19 dxe6 Nb6 20 Bxc5 Bxc3+

The beginning of an unclear attack. After 20...Rxf4 White gains a slight plus with 21 Bd4 Qc7 22 Qe3 Rff8 23 b3.

21 bxc3 Qc8 22 Bd4 Rxf4 23 Kf2 Nc4 24 Kg3 Rb2 25 Qd3 Qxe6!! (Diagram 42)

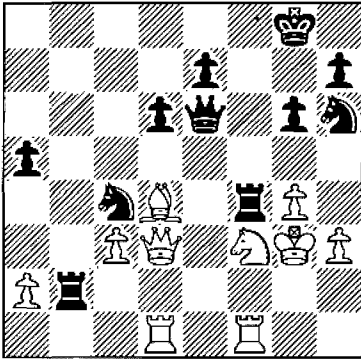


Diagram 42 (W)  
...Qc8xe6!!

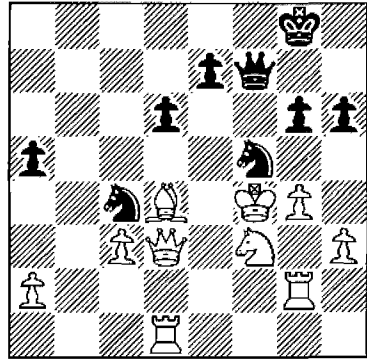


Diagram 43 (B)  
The wandering king

Black has no time to waste. After 25...Rf8? White wins with 26 Ng5 d5 27 Rxf8+ Qxf8 28 Rf1 Qb8+ 29 Kh4 when the king is relatively safe.

26 Kxf4 Rg2! 27 Rg1!

Great defensive play. After 27 Ne1 Black has the cunning 27...Rxf4+!: the line 28 Kf3 Nb2 29 Qe3 Qd5+ 30 Ke2 Re4 31 Rf8+! Kxf8 32 Bg7+ Kxg7 33 Rxd5 Rxe3+ 34 Kxe3 e6! ends with an endgame where Black probably has slightly better chances.

27...Qf7+ 28 Kg5 Nf5

28...e5!? is simpler; after 29 Rxf2 Qe7+ 30 Kxh6 Qf8+ Black has a perpetual.

29 Rxf2 h6+ 30 Kf4 (Diagram 43) 30...e5+?

Black miscalculates the position badly. After 30...g5+ Black has his chances: 31 Nxf5 (31 Ke4? d5 mate) 31...e5+ 32 Bxe5 dxe5+ 33 Ke4 (33 Kf3? Nd4+ 34 Kg3 – 34 Ke4 Qb7 mate – 34...Qf4+ 35 Kh4 Qxg5+ 36 Kg3 Qf4+ 37 Kh4 Nf3+ and Black wins) 33...Nfd6+ 34 Qxd6 Qf4+! 35 Kd5 Nxd6 36 Kxd6 hxg5 (Van der Weide), and though it is White playing for a win here, Black is not without chances for both a draw and a full point.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 31 Bxe5 dxe5+

31...g5+ 32 Ke4 Nfe3 also does not work: White plays 33 Qxe3! and ends with a material advantage.

32 Nxe5 g5+ 33 Ke4 Nfd6+ 34 Kd4 Qf4+ 35 Kc5 Nb7+ 36 Kd5 Nb6+ 37 Kc6 1-0

Game 25

□ E.Vladimirov ■ V.Mikhalevski

Calcutta 2001

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 e6 6 Nc3 Nxd5

6...Bb7 is weaker; after 7 e4 exd5 8 exd5 d6 9 a4 a5 10 Bb5+ Nbd7 11 Bg5 White has a comfortable edge.

7 Nxd5 exd5 8 Qxd5 Nc6 9 Nf3

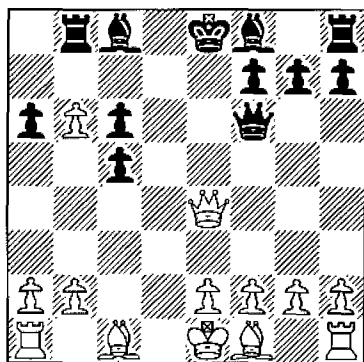
9 Bg5 looks strong based on 9...Qxb6 10 Qe4+, but after 10...Be7 11 Bxe7 Nxe7 12 Qxa8 Qxb2 13 Rd1 Qc3+ Black escapes with a draw.

9...Rb8

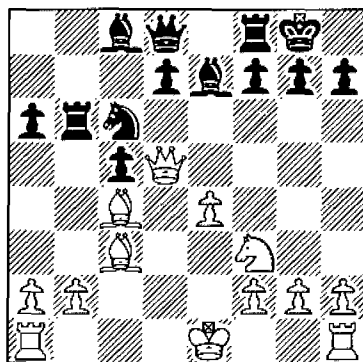
9...Qxb6?! is ineffective because of 10 Ne5! Nxe5 11 Qxa8 Qc7 12 Bf4 Bd6 13 Rd1 with advantage. 9...Be7 also fails to equalise after 10 Ne5 0-0 11 Nxc6 dxc6 12 Qxd8 Bxd8 (12...Rxd8 13 Bf4 Bf6 14 Rd1 clearly favours White, and 14...Rxd1+ 15 Kxd1 Bxb2? 16 e3 Bf6 17 Bc7! – Karpov – even wins for White) 13 e3 a5 14 Bd2 a4 15 Rc1 Bxb6 16 Bc4 Ba6 17 Bxa6 Rxa6 18 Rc2 f6 19 Ke2 Rb8 20 Rd1 Kf7 and Black had not fully equalised in V.Mikhalevsky-A.Gershon, Biel 2001.

10 Bd2

10 Ne5 Qf6 11 Nxc6 dxc6 12 Qe4+ (**Diagram 44**) might superficially look very strong, but there is no clear advantage to be found here.



**Diagram 44 (B)**  
Superficially strong



**Diagram 45 (B)**  
Lining up the bishops

12...Be7 13 g3 (13 Qf4 Rxb6!? is unclear; an important line is 14 Qc7?! Bd8 15 Qxc8 0-0 16 f3 Rxb2! 17 Bxb2 Qxb2 18 Qxa6 Qxa1+ 19 Kf2 Bg5 20 Qc4 Bd2 21 g3 Qe1+ 22 Kg2 Be3 and the attack seemed unable to ever stop in R.Djurhuus-K.Berg, Oslo 1992) 13...Bf5 (or 13...Rxb6 14 Bg2 0-0 15 0-0 Be6 16 Bf4 Qd4!? with even chances – Dreev) 14 Qa4 Qd4 15 Qxd4 cxd4 16 Bg2 Rxb6 17 b3 0-0 18 0-0 Bb4 and we cannot see why Black should be worse here.

A noteworthy attempt for an advantage is 10 e4, when it is not completely obvious to us how Black should equalise: 10...Be7 11 Bc4 0-0 12 0-0 (less troubling is 12 Qh5 d6 13 0-0 Rxb6 14 b3 Be6 15 Bxe6 fxe6 16 Qg4 Qc8 17 Bb2 Bf6 18 Bxf6 Rxf6 19 Nd2 Qf8 20 Nc4 Rb7 21 f4 Rbf7 22 g3 d5 23 Nd2 Nd4 with an unclear game, E.Gleizerov-P.Tregubov, Krasnoyarsk 2003) 12...Na5 13 Bd3 Rxb6 14 Qh5 d5!? 15 exd5 (not 15 Bd2 Nc6 16 Rad1 d4!? 17 b3 Qc7 when matters are a lot less clear) 15...g6 16 Qh6 Qxd5 17 Rd1 and this is an advantage for White, is it not?

### 10...Be7 11 Bc3 0-0 12 e4 Rxb6

Black has two alternatives that should be considered:

a) 12...Nd4 13 Nxd4 Bb7 and White has a clear edge after 14 Qf5! cxd4 15 Bxd4 Bb4+ 16 Kd1 – Dreev.

b) 12...Qxb6!? 13 Bc4 Nb4 14 Qd2 Qg6 15 0-0 Qxe4 16 Rae1!? Qxc4 17 Rxe7 Nd5 18 Bxg7! Nxe7 (18...Kxg7? 19 Qg5+ Kh8 20 Qh6!) 19 Bxf8 (White is clearly better – Dreev) 19...Kxf8 20 Qh6+ Ke8 21 Qd6 Qb4 (21...Rxb2? 22 Qe5!) 22 Re1 c4 23 Rxe7+ Kd8 24 Qe5 Qxe7 25 Qxb8 with equality.

### 13 Bc4 (Diagram 45) 13...Nb4

13...d6 is too slow and White has the edge after 14 Qd3 Bf6 15 0-0 Re8 16 Rad1 – the d6-pawn is a bit tender.

### 14 Qd2 Bb7 15 a3

15 0-0-0 Bxe4 16 Qxd7 Bg5+ 17 Nxc5 Qxc5+ 18 Rd2 is unclear and gives chances for both sides.

### 15...d5 16 exd5

Worse is 16 axb4 dxc4 17 bxc5 Bxc5 18 0-0 Qd3 with a slight pull for Black.

### 16...Nxd5 17 Be5 Rg6

A probable improvement is 17...f6!? 18 Bg3 Re6+ 19 Kf1 Qd7 20 Rd1 Rd8 with unclear play. Most likely Black did not feel confident about stepping into the pin of his own will.

### 18 0-0-0

Less ambitious is 18 0-0 Nb6 19 Qxd8 Rxd8 20 Be2 Re6 21 Rfe1 Re8 when we think Black has equalised.

### 18...Nb6 19 Bxf7+!

19 Bd3 Rxc2 20 Bxh7+ Kh8 (not 20...Kxh7 21 Qc2+ Kg8 22 Rxd8 Rxd8 23 Qb3, which is less clear) 21 Qf4 Bg5 22 Nxc5 Qxc5 and Black is just a bit better.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 19...Kxf7

Probably 19...Rxf7 is stronger; after 20 Qxd8+ Bxd8 21 Rxd8+ Rf8 22 Rxf8+ Kxf8 the endgame is only a little worse for Black.

### 20 Qf4+ Ke6

No choice.

### 21 Bf6!! (Diagram 46)

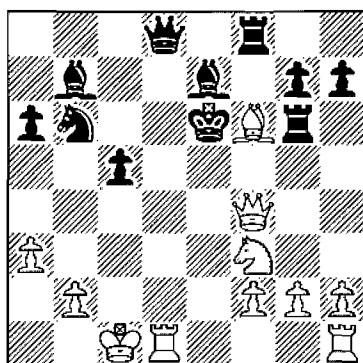


Diagram 46 (B)

21 Be5-f6!!

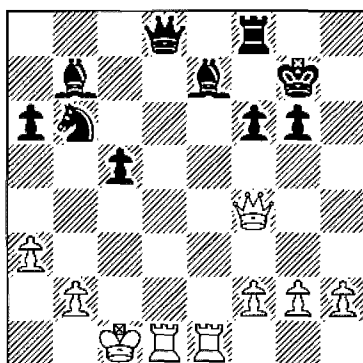


Diagram 47 (W)

Parting with the queen

A fantastic solution.

### 21...gxf6

21...Nd5 could be met with 22 Rxd5 Bxd5 23 Qe5+ Kf7 24 Bxe7 Qxe7 25 Qxd5+ Kf6 26 Re1 Rd8 27 Qc4 when Black's king remains in danger.

### 22 Rhe1+ Kf7 23 Ne5+ Kg7 24 Nxg6 hxg6 (Diagram 47)

Black chooses to part with the queen. 24...Nd5 also gives White the edge after 25 Rxd5 Qxd5 26 Nxe7 Qxg2 27 Nf5+ Kg8 28 h4, when Black's king is pretty open and his pawns are rather weak.

### 25 Rxd8 Bxd8 26 Rd1 Bd5 27 Qd6 Bb3?

27...Bf7 28 b3! a5 29 Qxc5 is still very good for White, but now it is just over.

### 28 Qxf8+! 1-0

Rb8, skewering Black's two minor pieces, comes at the end.

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Game 26

□ A.Kaminik ■ S.Kalinichev

Bad Wissee 2000

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 d6 6 Nc3 Nbd7 7 a4

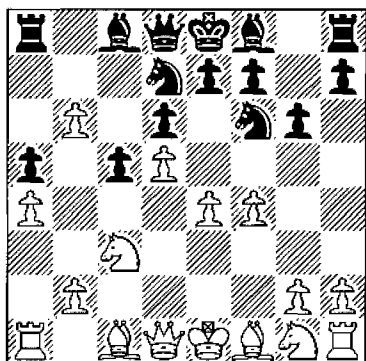
7 e4 Nxb6 8 a4 is an interesting move order, but Black should transpose with

8...a5 as 8...g6?! 9 a5 Nbd7 10 f4 gives White a strong initiative: 10...Bg7 11 Nf3 0-0 12 Bc4 Ne8 13 0-0 Nc7 14 Qd3 Nb5 15 Bd2!? Nd4 (V.Tukmakov-J.Polgar, Amsterdam 1990). Now after 16 Nxd4 cxd4 17 Na4 Nc5 18 Nxc5 dxc5 19 b4 (Tukmakov) White has a very clear plus.

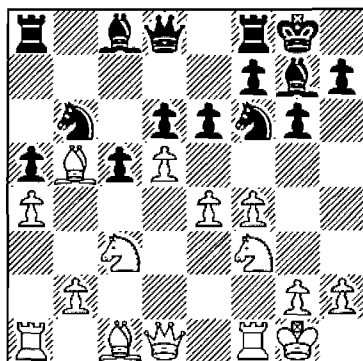


**WARNING: Black should avoid this – his pieces cannot move at all.**

7...a5 8 e4 g6 9 f4 (Diagram 48)



**Diagram 48 (B)**  
A broad centre



**Diagram 49 (W)**  
Fighting back in the centre

9 Bb5 Bg7 10 Nf3 is another strategy that also makes it difficult for Black to equalise. For example, 10...0-0 11 0-0 Ba6 12 b7!? Bxb7 13 Re1 Ne8 14 Bf4 Nc7 15 Bxd7 Qxd7 16 Qd2 Rfd8 17 Rad1 Qe8 18 Bh6 Bh8 19 h4 Bc8 20 h5 Bg4 21 hxg6 fxg6 22 Re3 Rab8 23 Rde1 Rb4 24 e5 dxe5 25 Nxe5 Bf5?! (White is only a bit better after 25...Rd4 26 Rd3 Rxd3 27 Qxd3) 26 Nc6! Qxc6 27 dxc6 Rxd2 28 Rxe7 with a clear plus, I.Sokolov-N.Fries Nielsen, Torshavn 1997. Probably stronger is 11...Nxb6 12 e5!? Ng4 (but not 12...dxe5 13 Nxe5 Nfxd5 14 Nc6 Nxc3 15 Qxd8 with a clear plus) 13 exd6 exd6 14 Bg5 Bf6 15 Bf4 and White is a shade better – Kaidanov.

**9...Bg7 10 Nf3 0-0 11 Bb5 Nxb6 12 0-0 e6 (Diagram 49)**

12...Ba6 has also been tried, but generally White does better in this structure: 13 Qe2 Bxb5 14 axb5 Ne8 15 Bd2 Nc7 16 Nd1 a4 17 Bc3 Qd7 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Nc3 Ra5 (Av.Bykhovskiy-O.Johansen, Gausdal 1991). Here White should have continued 20 b4! cxb4 21 Qb2 Nc4 22 Qxb4 Nxb5 23 Rfc1 Rc8 24 Nxa4 Qa7+ 25 Kh1 Ne5 26 fxe5 (26 Rxc8 Nd3 27 Qb1 Nf2+ 28 Kg1 Nh3+ 29 Kh1 is a draw) 26...Rxa4 27 Qe1 Rxc1 28 Rxc1 with a better structure.

**13 dxe6 Bxe6 14 f5**

14 e5 is not so clear. After 14...dxe5 15 fxe5 Ng4 16 Qxd8 Rfxd8 17 Re1 Nc4 18

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Bxc4 Bxc4 Black is in the game.

14...Bc4

14...gxf5 15 Bg5!? h6 16 Bh4 gives White nice play for the pawn.

15 Bxc4 Nxc4 16 Qe2 Nb6 17 fxxg6

Here White possibly had a better chance to play for an advantage with 17 Bf4!?: after 17...Nh5 18 Bg5 Qd7 19 Nd2 he has a rather strong initiative.

17...fxg6 18 Bg5 h6 19 Bh4 g5

Noteworthy and possibly better is 19...Qe8, when after 20 Rad1 Qe6 21 e5 dxe5 22 Qxe5 Qxe5 23 Nxe5 Kh7 Black is very close to equality.

20 Bf2 Nh5 21 g3 (Diagram 50)

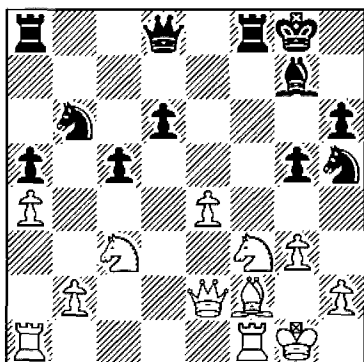


Diagram 50 (B)  
Creating holes

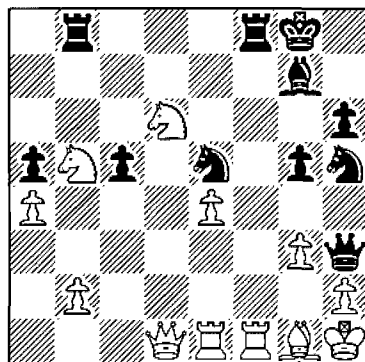


Diagram 51 (W)  
Threatening mate!



**WARNING:** Do not create unnecessary weaknesses in your own camp.

As we shall see later, this is a serious weakness of the kingside. Better was 21 Rad1, when after 21...Qe7 22 Qc2 Qe6 23 e5 dxe5 24 Bxc5 Rfd8 25 Qf2 White has slight pressure.

21...Qe7 22 Nd2 Nf6 23 Rae1 Nbd7 24 Nc4 Rae8!?

Black does not care about pawns – he has higher goals to strive for. More standard is probably 24...Ne5 25 Nb5 Nfg4 26 Nxe5 Nxe5 27 Rd1 Rad8 with unclear play.

25 Qd1 Qe6!



**TIP:** An important part of chess is to attack your opponent where he is weakest. Here this is on the kingside, where the absence of the light-squared bishop is felt very clearly.

**26 Nxd6 Qh3 27 Kh1**

27 Re2 loses to 27...Ng4 28 Be3 Nxe3 29 Rxe3 Bd4.

**27...Rb8 28 Ncb5 Ne5 29 Bg1?!**

This weakens g3 and allows Black to carry out a deadly attack. 29 Bxc5?! is also bad because of 29...Nfg4 30 Qe2 Nd3! when White cannot defend h2 without serious losses: 31 Ba7 Rf2!.

29 Nf5 Nh5 also gives Black good play for the pawn, but after 30 Bxc5 Rxf5 31 exf5 Nxc3+ 32 Kg1 Nxf1 33 Rxf1 Nd3 the position is still not totally clear.

**29...Nh5! (Diagram 51) 30 Rxf8+ Rxf8 31 Re3**

Or 31 Qb3+ c4 32 Nxc4 Rf3!, winning.

**31...Rf1 32 Qd5+ Kh7 33 Nf5 Ng4**

Also strong was 33...Rf2! 34 Bxf2 Ng4 35 Bg1 Nxe3 36 Bxc3 Qf1+ 37 Bg1 Qf3 mate.

**34 Re2 Nf2+ 35 Rxf2 Rxf2 36 Qd3 Qg2 mate! (0-1)**

Game 27

□ E.Gleizerov ■ S.Halkias

Linares 2003

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 Qxb6**

This is the most natural move, and also the one we would suggest. Even so, Black is not guaranteed equality.

**6 Nc3 d6 7 Nf3**

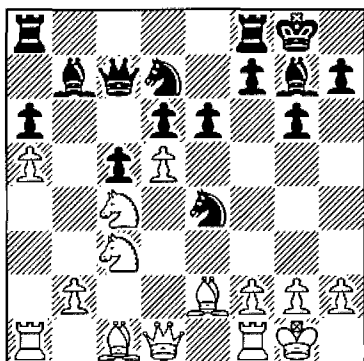
Also possible is 7 e4 g6 8 a4 (or 8 f4 Bg7 9 Nf3 0-0 10 Bc4 Bg4 11 0-0 Nbd7 12 Qe1 Bxf3 13 Rxf3 Qc7 14 Bd2 Nb6 15 Bd3 c4 16 Bc2 Nbd7 17 Rb1 Rab8 with unclear play, L.Gofshtein-B.Alterman, Tel Aviv 1994) 8...Bg7 9 a5 Qb4!? 10 Ra4 Qb7 11 Bc4 (noteworthy is 11 Nf3 0-0 12 Nd2 e6 13 Nc4 exd5 14 Nxd6 Qe7 15 Nxc8 Rxc8 16 Nxd5 Nxd5 17 Qxd5 Nc6 when Black has considerable play) 11...Bd7 12 Ra3 Qb4!? 13 Qd3 Bb5!? 14 Bxb5+ axb5 15 Qxb5+ Nbd7 16 Ra4 Qxb5 17 Nxb5 0-0 18 Ne2 Nb6 19 Ra2 Nc4 (or 19...Nxe4 20 Nc7 Ra7 21 Nb5 Ra6 22 Nc7 with a threefold repetition) 20 f3 Rfb8 21 Nec3 Rxa5 22 Rxa5 Nxa5 23 Kd1 Nb3 24 Kc2 Nxc1 25 Rxc1 Ra8 with level chances, G.Kamsky-M.Illescas, Las Palmas 1994.

**7...g6 8 Nd2 Nbd7 9 e4 Bg7 10 Be2 Qc7 11 0-0 0-0 12 a4 Bb7**

The great expert in the 5 b6 line (a pioneer with White) here played 12...Rb8, but after 13 Nc4 Rb4 14 a5 we are not sure that Black has equalised: 14...Ne8 (or 14...Ne5 15 Nxe5 dxe5 16 Qc2 e6 17 Bg5 and White stands better) 15 Bd2 Qa7 16 Na4 Rb7 17 Nab6 Nc7 18 Bg4 Na8 19 Nxa8 (here 19 Nxc8 Rxc8 20 Bc3 Rcb8 21 Qc2 Nf6 22 Bh3 with a plus makes much more sense to us) 19...Qxa8 20 Bxd7 Bxd7 21 Nb6 Rxb6!? 22 axb6 Bxb2 23 Rb1 Bf6 24 Qf3 Bb5 25 Rfc1 Qb7 with chances for both sides, Y.Scirawan-A.Shirov, Amsterdam 1995.

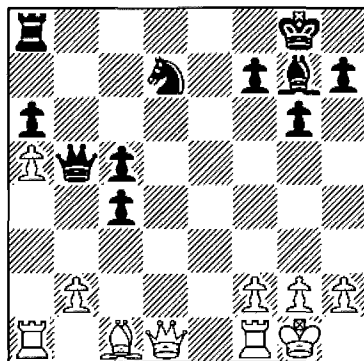
**13 a5 e6!? 14 Nc4 Nxe4! (Diagram 52)**

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems



**Diagram 52 (W)**

...Nf6xe4: a necessary action



**Diagram 53 (W)**

Reasonable compensation

Black needs to activate his sleeping pieces. After 14...exd5 15 exd5 it is very difficult to get the pieces moving: 15...Ne5 16 Nb6 Rae8 17 Bf4 Nfd7 18 Nca4 f5 19 Rc1 and White still has an edge.

**15 Nxe4 exd5 16 Nexd6 dxc4**

A very interesting exchange sacrifice, of course, but we think it is more natural to play 16...Bc6!? 17 Bf4 dxc4 18 Bg3 (but not 18 Bxc4? Ne5 when Black is doing very well; after 19 Qd2 Rad8 20 Rfd1 he has 20...Bxg2! 21 Bxe5 [21 Kxg2? Nxc4 22 Nxc4 Qc6+] 21...Bxe5 22 Qe2 Rxd6 23 Rxd6 Qxd6 24 Kxg2 Qf6 and we assume that Black should win) 18...Ne5 19 Nxc4 Qe7 20 Nb6 Rad8 21 Qc2 Qb7! with counterplay.

**17 Nxb7 Qxb7 18 Bf3 Qb5 19 Bxa8 Rxa8 (Diagram 53)**

Black has reasonable compensation for the exchange, but White should still put him under some pressure. Here we believe that 20 Re1!? is better; after 20...Ne5 21 Qd5 Nc6 22 Qe4 Rf8! Black is probably a tiny bit worse.

**20 Qa4?! Ne5 21 Qxb5 axb5 22 a6 Nd3 23 Ra5 b4 24 a7 h5**

24...Bd4!? is a good attempt to take over the initiative, based on 25 Rd1 b3 26 Kf1 Nxb2 27 Rxd4 cxd4 28 Bxb2 c3 29 Ra3 cxb2 30 Rxb3 Rxa7 31 Rxb2 Rd7 when White should draw but still has to prove it.

**25 Be3 Bxb2 26 Bxc5 Nxc5**

26...b3? 27 Rb5 Be5 28 Bd4! would change the position radically, and not in a direction Black would like.

**27 Rxc5 c3 28 Rb5 Rxa7 29 Rxb4 Rd7**

White also saves the draw after 29...Rc7 30 g3 Kg7 31 Rb3 Kf6 32 Rb1.

**30 g3 Kg7 31 Kg2 Rd3 32 h4 Ba3 33 Rc4 Bb2 34 Re1 Rd2 35 Re7 c2 36 Rec7 c1Q ½-½**

## The Dlugy Variation (5 f3)

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 (Diagram 54)

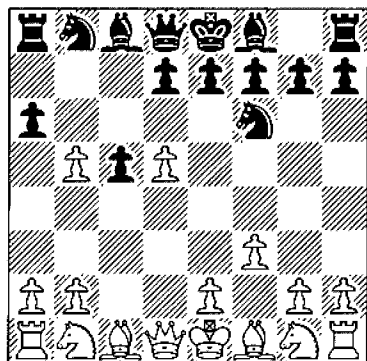


Diagram 54 (B)  
White plays 5 f3

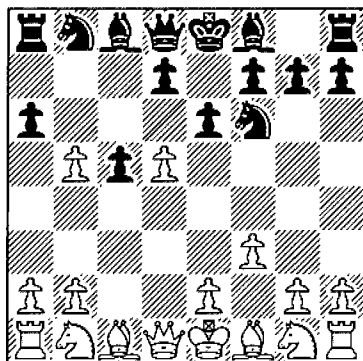


Diagram 55 (W)  
5...e6

This move of the f-pawn, supporting the advance e2-e4, is a relatively new idea in the Volga Gambit. Even after the A.Zaitsev-Adorjan game (1971) it was not widely known, although the tabiya of the line occurred there. The fact is that this encounter featured another move order: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 f3 c5 4 d5 d6 5 e4 b5 (a rare response) 6 cxb5 a6. Only in 1976 did the line become well known after the game Korchnoi-Miles, where White met the Volga Gambit with 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 g6 6 e4 d6 7 a4 Bg7 8 a5!? (interestingly, this failed to find many adherents) 8...axb5 9 Bxb5 Nfd7 10 Qa4 0-0 11 Ne2 Na6 with complicated play. Later 5 f3 was analysed and successfully employed by the American grandmaster Maxim Dlugy.

Some time ago 5 f3 was considered to be virtually a refutation of the Volga Gambit, but modern theory does not share this opinion. White builds up a beautiful pawn chain but temporarily ignores the development of his pieces, and the weakening of the dark squares may also affect the position.

It is very easy to split the line 5 f3 into branches: in Game 28 we review the response 5...e6; Game 29 is devoted to the line 5...axb5 6 e4 Qa5; finally, the line that is typical of the Volga Gambit, 5...g6 6 e4 d6 (with alternatives) is covered in Game 30.

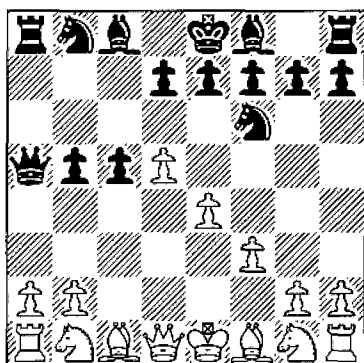
Undermining with 5...e6 (**Diagram 55**) leads to an unusually sharp fight, and is much more impressive than the similar lines 5 e3 e6 and 5 b6 e6.

After 6 e4 an attack on the d5-pawn with 6...Bb7 does not seem to equalise in view of 7 dxex6 fxe6 8 Nh3!? (Bronznik-V.Ivanov) – the pawn centre formed by ...d7-d5 is subject to an unpleasant attack after Nh3-f4.

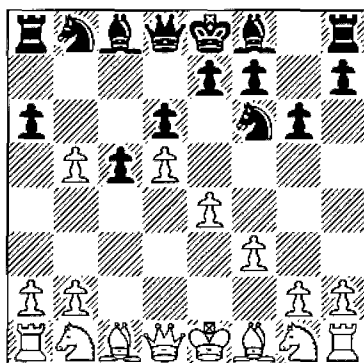
## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Sometimes the exotic 6...c4 is tried (Woitaczek-Harikrishna). By sacrificing another pawn Black clears the a7-g1 diagonal where he places his bishop and his queen if possible. As a result the white king loses his chance to castle and feels distinctly uncomfortable. However, with accurate play White's two extra pawns outweigh Black's initiative.

After 5...e6 6 e4 the main continuation is 6...exd5. Although this may seem strange, the natural reply 7 exd5 (Volkov-Ibragimov) has been relegated to the background and remains a blank spot in the theory of 5 f3. Everyone started playing 7 e5 Qe7 8 Qc2 Ng8 9 Nc3 Bb7 10 Nh3 (normally with queenside castling), preparing an attack on the d5-square. In view of his poor kingside development, it is not easy for Black to defend. The opposition of the queens along the e-file plays an important role. Black's queen hits e5, but sometimes it is dangerous to eliminate this pawn, as shown by the Dlugy-Alburt example. In 1985 in a game between Bareev and Arbakov, Black employed 5...axb5 6 e4 Qa5+ (Diagram 56) for the first time, and this line is the subject of Game 29.



**Diagram 56 (W)**  
5...axb5 6 e4 Qa5+



**Diagram 57 (W)**  
5...g6 6 e4 d6

It is useful to compare the position after 7 Nc3 b4 8 Nb5 d6 with the similar one from the Zaitsev Variation. The f3-pawn is a good defender of its neighbour on e4, but deprives the knight of that square, along with chances for active play.

7 b4!?, aiming to break Black's pawn chain, is interesting. This happens after 7...cxb4, whereas if 7...Qxb4+ the queen is risking her life in the enemy camp. However, after 7...Qxb4 8 Bd2 Qa4 9 Qc1 b4! 10 Qxc5 Na6 11 Qd4 e6 (Gurevich-Claesen) Black's chances are as good as White's in a complicated fight.

More common is 7 Bd2 b4 8 Na3 (the pin on the b4-pawn allows the knight to occupy an ideal outpost) 8...d6 9 Nc4. Here 9...Qa7 doesn't seem to be the most accurate because of the opposition of the queen with the white rook on a1. Af-

ter 10 a3 g6 the manoeuvre Ne2-c1-b3 frees the a-pawn and the travelling knight is ready to settle down on a5. Deviations such as 9...Qc7 (I.Sokolov-Berg, Petursson-Ristic) and 9...Qd8 (Gretarsson-Bellon, Azmaiparashvili-Conquest) are linked to the preparation of ...e7-e6: this is the reason the queen protects the d6-pawn. The difference between these two deviations is as follows: in the case of 9...Qc7 10 a3 e6 11 dxe6 Bxe6 the position of the queen allows the pin of the d6-pawn with 12 Bf4, which is favourable for White. In contrast, with the queen on d8 Black advances with ...d6-d5, equalising without any problem. It is quite unusual for the queen's retreat to its original square to be considered the best choice.

When Black prefers standard development with ...d7-d6 and ...g7-g6 (Game 30), he normally starts with the more flexible 5...g6. After 6 e4 Bg7!? Black can advance with ...e7-e6 instead of ...d7-d6, while the aggressive 7 e5 Ng8 8 f4 is double-edged. White's powerful pawn centre is quite vulnerable and the king's knight can enter play via h6 and f5 (see Volkov-Baklan).

After 5...g6 6 e4 d6 (**Diagram 57**) the standard positioning of the white pieces is illustrated in the game Gurevich-Ermenkov.

After 7 Na3 White places his other knight on e2, while ...axb5 is met with Na3xb5, and then the knight supports its colleague from c3. White has an easier task after 7 Na3 axb5 in view of 8 Bxb5+, when it is not easy for Black to obtain counterchances. With 7 a4 and 8 Na3 White ignores control of the centre and allows his opponent activity with ...e7-e6 (Volke-Adams). 7 Nc3 followed by a2-a4 and probably Ra3 is also played, the game Adianto-Yermolinsky demonstrating White's attack on the kingside. Although the plan is logical for this pawn structure we would not run the risk of recommending it.

## Statistics

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White scores 54% with 5 f3.

## Theoretical?

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Yes. There are many theoretical lines and even more are expected to arise owing to the exceptional complexity of the positions.

## Theoretical Status

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Well regarded, but in a particular way. Having reviewed 5 Nc3, 5 e3 and 5 b6 we can see that 5 f3 combines the sharpness of the Zaitsev Variation with the soundness of the other two continuations. Of course, 5 f3 does not put an end to the Volga Gambit, but it forces Black to think carefully over the antidote. At present 5...e6 and 5...axb5 both appear to be acceptable.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Game 28

□ B.Lalic ■ B.Alterman

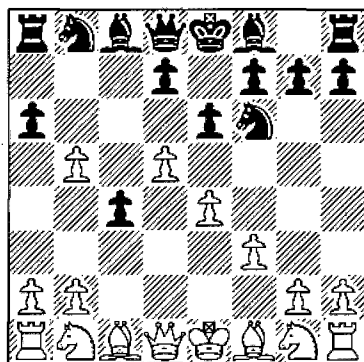
European Team Championship, Pula 1997

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 e6 6 e4 exd5

This is the main move here, but others have also been tried:

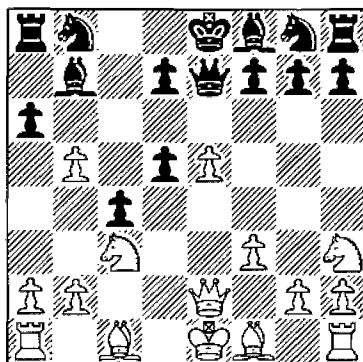
a) 6...Bb7?! looks wrong somehow. After 7 dxe6!? fxe6 8 Nh3 d5 9 Nf4 Qb6 we follow Bronznik's recommendation of 10 a4!? (10 exd5 exd5 11 Nc3 Qd6 12 bxa6 Nxa6 13 Bb5+ Kf7 14 0-0 Nc7 15 Ba4 Be7 gave Black substantial play for his pawn in V.Bronznik-V.Ivanov, Russia 1993) 10...dxe4 11 fxe4 Nxe4 12 a5 Qd6 13 Qxd6 Bxd6 14 Nxe6 when White has a clear advantage.

b) 6...c4!? (**Diagram 58**) is an interesting way for Black to continue to fight for the initiative.



**Diagram 58 (W)**

Black offers a second pawn



**Diagram 59 (W)**

A strange-looking position

b1) 7 Nc3 axb5 8 Nxb5 Ba6 9 Nc3 Bc5 10 Nh3 0-0 11 Bg5 Qb6 12 Qd2 Bd4 is level according to Gagarin.

b2) 7 Bxc4 axb5 8 Bxb5 (8 Bb3 Bc5 9 Ne2 Qb6 10 Nbc3 d6 11 Bg5 e5 with compensation – Tay) 8...Bc5 9 Nc3 Bb7 10 Nge2 (maybe 10 Bg5!?, for example 10...Qb6 11 Nge2 0-0 12 Qb3 exd5 13 e5! and White has some initiative; where this would take us, we don't know!) 10...0-0 11 Kf1 exd5 12 exd5 Ba7!? 13 g3 Qb6 14 Kg2 Qf2+ 15 Kh3 Qxf3 16 Nf4 Qf2 17 Rf1 Qc5 18 Re1 Qd6 and Black had reasonable compensation in R.Wojtaszek-P.Harikrishna, Goa 2002.

7 e5

This is the aggressive idea behind the system, but we are not convinced that 7 exd5!? doesn't lead to an advantage: 7...Bd6 8 Qe2+ Kf8 (8...Qe7 9 Qxe7+ Kxe7 10 Nc3 Re8 11 Bg5 and Black doesn't have enough for the pawn) 9 Nc3 axb5 10 Nxb5 (but not 10 Be3?! when 10...c4! 11 Kf2 Ra5! 12 g3 Bb7 – Bareev –

would give Black a tremendous initiative) 10...Ba6 11 Qd2 Qe7+ 12 Kd1 Qe5 13 Nh3 Bxb5 (13...Nxd5? 14 f4 Qe6 15 Ng5, winning a piece) 14 Bxb5 Qxd5 (or 14...Nxd5 15 Re1 Qd4 16 Qxd4 cxd4 17 Ng5, threatening Nxf7, and White has quite an initiative) 15 Qxd5 Nxd5 16 Ng5 and White, with the two bishops, was a bit better in S.Volkov-I.Ibragimov, Novgorod 1997.

**7...Qe7 8 Qe2 Ng8 9 Nc3 Bb7 10 Nh3 c4 (Diagram 59)**

10...d4?! seems logical, but after 11 Ne4 Black is in trouble: 11...d3 (11...Qxe5? 12 Bf4 Qe6 13 Nhg5, winning) 12 Qe3! Qxe5 13 Nxc5 Qxe3+ 14 Bxe3 and Black has big problems.

**11 Be3 axb5**

11...Qxe5 12 0-0-0 Ne7 13 Bf4 Qe6 14 Qd2 gives White compensation, and 11...Qb4 12 b6 Bc5 13 0-0-0 Qxb6 14 Bxc5 Qxc5 15 Nf4 Ne7 16 Qd2 0-0 is unclear.

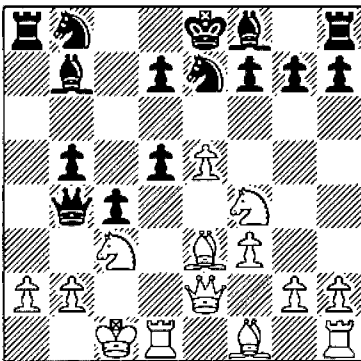
**12 0-0-0**

12 Nxb5 Qb4+ 13 Nc3 Ne7 14 0-0-0! Nf5 15 Bf2 Qa5 16 Nf4 d4! 17 Bxd4 Bb4 offers Black good attacking chances against White's open king, while 12 Nf4 Qxe5 13 Nxb5 Be7 14 0-0-0 Nf6 (Khalifman) is as messy as anything.

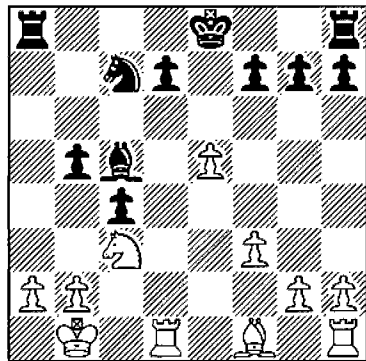
**12...Qb4**

12...Qxe5?! is not very good. After 13 f4! Qe7 White has the surprising 14 Rxd5!, for example 14...d6 15 Rxb5 Nf6 16 Qd2 d5 17 Bxc4! dxc4 18 Bc5 Qd7 19 Qe3+ Qe6 20 Rxb7 Qxe3+ 21 Bxe3 with a clear edge, M.Dlugy-L.Alburt, Los Angeles 1991.

**13 Nf4 Ne7 (Diagram 60)**



**Diagram 60 (W)**  
Can White play Rxd5?



**Diagram 61 (W)**  
A complex ending

**14 Qf2**

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems



**WARNING:** 14 Rxd5 is met by 14...Qxc3+!! 15 bxc3 Nxd5 16 Nxd5 Bxd5, which gave Black a big attack in A.Czerwonski-A.Gipslis, Koszalin 1998. This theme of answering Rxd5 with ...Qxc3+ has cropped up more than once in this line.

### 14...Na6

After 14...Qa5!? Maksimenko suggested 15 Bb6 Qa6 16 Bc5 Qh6 17 Qd2 Bc6 with unclear play.

### 15 Kb1 Nf5 16 Nfxd5 Bxd5 17 Nxd5 Nxe3 18 Qxe3

Or 18 Nxb4!? Nxd1 19 Qd4! Nxb4 20 Bxc4! bxc4 21 Rxd1 Rd8 22 Qxc4 with a complicated position.

### 18...Qc5 19 Qxc5 Bxc5 20 Nc3 Nc7 (Diagram 61) 21 a4!?

White would also have some pressure after 21 g3 Ke7 22 Bh3 Rhd8 23 Ne4 d6 24 Rhe1, but the aggressive text move seems to be stronger.

### 21...bxa4 22 Bxc4 a3 23 Bxf7+

Here White could have kept all his advantage with 23 b3; after 23...Bb4 24 Ne4 a2+ 25 Kb2 Ba3+ 26 Ka1 Ne6 27 g3 (Lalic) the a2-pawn seems doomed.

### 23...Ke7 24 b3 a2+ 25 Nxa2 Nb5 26 Rd5

26 Bd5 Ra7 27 Rd3 Bd4 gives Black good counterplay against White's king.

### 26...Bd4! 27 Rxb5 Rxa2! 28 Kxa2 Ra8+ 29 Kb1 Ra1+ 30 Kc2 Rxh1 31 Rd5 Ba1

White has good winning chances after 31...Rxh2 32 Rxd4 Rxc2+ 33 Kc3 Kxf7 34 b4.

### 32 Bh5 Ke6

32...Rxh2? is met strongly by 33 Bg4 Rxc2+ 34 Kd3 with real winning chances – Lalic.

### 33 Rd1!?

White could still put some pressure on Black with 33 Ra5 Bxe5 34 Bg4+ Kf6 35 Bxd7 Rxh2 36 Bh3 (Lalic), though we think that Black should still draw this endgame.

### 33...Rxd1 34 Kxd1 Bxe5 35 g3 Bd4 36 Ke2 Bc5 37 f4 Kd5 38 Bf7+ Ke4 39 h4 ½-½

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#### Game 29

□ H.Gretarsson ■ J.Bellon

Stockholm 1999

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### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 axb5 6 e4 Qa5+ 7 Bd2

An interesting alternative is 7 b4!? Qxb4+ (7...cxb4 8 Nd2 d6 9 Nb3 Qb6 10 Qd4 Qxd4 11 Nxd4 and White should be better as b5 is dropping) 8 Bd2 Qa4 (8...Qd4?! 9 Nc3 b4 10 Nb5 Qe5 11 Ne2 looks very dangerous for Black) 9 Qc1 b4! 10 Qxc5 Na6 11 Qd4 e6 12 d6 Qc6 13 e5 Nd5 14 f4?! (better was 14 Bc4

Bb7 15 Ne2 f6 with a mess) 14...b3! 15 Na3 Nc5 16 Bb5 Qb6 17 axb3 Nxb3 18 Qxb6 Nxb6 19 Ra2 Bb7 20 Ne2 g5!? and Black had a clear initiative in M.Gurevich-P.Claesen, Belgium 1996.

7...b4



**WARNING: 7...Qb6?! does not work because of a little trick: 8 Nc3 b4 (8...Ba6 9 e5 b4 10 Na4 Qa5 11 Bxa6 Rxa6 12 Nxc5! Qxc5? 13 Rc1, winning) 9 Na4 Qa5 10 Nxc5!, winning a pawn.**

8 Na3 d6

8...Ba6 9 Nc4 Bxc4 10 Bxc4 d6 11 Qe2 g6 12 f4 gives White a very strong initiative on the light squares in the centre – there is both e4-e5-e6 and Bb5+ to worry about.

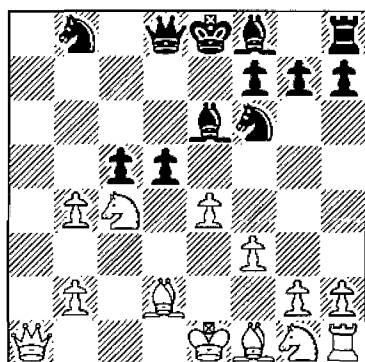
9 Nc4 Qd8

This has been established as the best move. 9...Qc7 is met strongly by 10 a3! e6 (10...bxa3 11 Bc3!? g6 12 e5 dxe5 13 Bxe5 gave White a strong initiative in I.Sokolov-K.Berg, Akureyri 1994) 11 dxe6 Bxe6 12 Bf4!? Ra6 (or 12...Bxc4 13 Bxc4 Be7 14 axb4 Rxa1 15 Qxa1 cxb4 16 Qc1 Qa5 17 Ne2 0-0 and White is a bit better) 13 axb4 Rxa1 14 Qxa1 cxb4 15 Qa4+ Nc6 16 Qa8+ Nd8 17 Qa6 Nc6 18 Nb6 Be7 19 Na8! Qc8 20 Qxc8+ Bxc8 21 Bb5 Bb7 22 Nb6 0-0 23 Ne2 and Black was suffering a bit in M.Petursson-N.Ristic, Athens 1993.

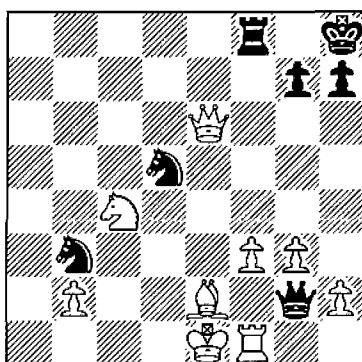
10 a3

10 Bd3 is a more classical move and logically appeals more to our taste. After 10...g6 11 Ne2 Bg7 12 a3 bxa3 13 Rxa3 Rxa3 14 bxa3 0-0 15 Ba5 Qd7 16 0-0 e6 17 dxe6 fxe6 (17...Qxe6?! 18 Bc7 Ba6 19 Nxd6 with a clear plus) 18 e5 dxe5 19 Nxe5 Qa7 20 Nc4 Nd5 21 Be1 Nc6 22 Bf2 White had the advantage in Z.Azmaiparashvili-S.Conquest, Istanbul 2003.

10...e6 11 dxe6 Bxe6 12 axb4 Rxa1 13 Qxa1 d5!? (Diagram 62)



**Diagram 62 (W)**  
Black pursues the initiative



**Diagram 63 (B)**  
Black misses a win

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Black is going hard for the initiative.

**14 exd5 Nxd5 15 Qa4+**

15 b5 Nb4 16 Bxb4 cxb4 17 b3 Bc5!? 18 Qxg7 Bd4 19 Qh6 Bc3+ 20 Kf2 is very unclear, but Black should be okay.

**15...Nd7**

Also noteworthy is 15...Bd7 16 b5 Be7 17 Ba5 Bh4+ 18 g3 Qe7+ 19 Kf2 Bf6, when Black has wonderful counterplay.

**16 Ne2**

Maybe White is better off playing 16 Ne5 N5b6 17 Qc6 cxb4 18 Bb5 Bd5 19 Qxd5 Nxd5 20 Bxd7+ Qxd7 21 Nxd7 Kxd7 (Hertneck) with a likely draw.

**16...Be7 17 bxc5 0-0 18 Nd4?!**

This allows Black to gain time attacking the queen. 18 b4? is also not very good because of 18...Nxb4! 19 Qxb4 Bxc5 20 Qc3 Bxc4 21 Qxc4 Ne5! with a clear edge.

18 Qa5 is necessary; after 18...Nxc5 19 Nd4 Qb8 Black has enough for the pawn, but probably no more.

**18...Nxc5**

Stronger is 18...Bxc5, when after 19 Nxe6 Re8 20 Be2 Rxe6 White would be in trouble.

**19 Nxe6 fxe6 20 Qc2 Bg5 21 Be2**

21 Ba5 Qf6 22 Be2 Qd4 would also offer Black good play.

**21...Bxd2+ 22 Qxd2 Qh4+ 23 g3 Qh3 24 Qd4?!**

White shouldn't allow Black to penetrate his position. Better was 24 Bf1 Qf5 25 Be2 Qh3 with a draw.

**24...Nb3 25 Qe5 Qg2 26 Qxe6+?**

This deserves to lose by force, although Black is also attacking after 26 Rf1 Kh8 27 Nd6 h6 28 Qxe6 Nd4 29 Qe4 Qxh2.

**26...Kh8 27 Rf1 (Diagram 63) 27...Nb4?**

Missing a simple win; after 27...Nd4! 28 Qe4 Ne3! White's position collapses.

**28 Nd6 Nd3+ 29 Kd1 Nxb2+ 30 Ke1 Nd3+ ½-½**

---

*Game 30*

□ M.Gurevich ■ E.Ermenkov

Burgas 1994

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 g6**

Black decides not to bother with the queenside and puts his faith in rapid development.

**6 e4 d6**

White probably can't exploit 6...Bg7!? in any way:

a) 7 Na3 is not a little odd as 7...axb5 must be answered by 8 Nxb5 (8 Bxb5?! Rxa3! 9 bxa3 Nxe4 and Black is better). After 8...Ba6 9 a4 0-0 10 Be3 d6 11 Ne2 Bxb5 12 axb5 Rxa1 13 Qxa1 Nbd7 Black has compensation for the pawn.

b) 7 e5 Ng8 8 f4 d6 9 Nf3 Nd7 10 Nc3 Nh6! (10...dxe5 11 bxa6 exf4 12 Bxf4 Nxf6 13 Bb5 leads to a white advantage) 11 Be2 0-0 12 0-0 Nf5 13 g4! Nd4 14 Nxd4 cxd4 15 Qxd4 dxe5 16 Qf2 axb5 17 Nxb5 exf4 18 Bxf4 Nf6 with chances for both sides, S.Volkov-V.Baklan, Groningen 1998.

**7 Na3**

This is the most reliable option. White has also tried:

a) 7 Nc3 Bg7 8 a4 0-0 9 Ra3 Ne8 10 h4! h5 11 Nh3 axb5 12 Bxb5 Nd7 13 Ng5 Nc7 14 Be2 Ba6 15 g4 Nf6 16 gxh5 Nxb5 17 f4 (U.Adianto-A.Yermolinsky, London 1994) and after 17...Ng3 18 Bxa6 Nxb1 19 Bc4 Ng3 the position would remain a mess.

b) 7 a4 is well met by 7...Bg7 8 Na3 0-0 9 Ne2 e6! 10 Nc3 exd5 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Qxd5 Ra7 13 Bc4 Bd4 14 h4! (14 Bg5 Qb6 15 Bd2 with unclear play was better) 14...Be6 15 Qg5 Bf6 16 Qg3 Bxc4 17 Nxc4 axb5 18 Nxd6 Rd7 19 Bf4 Bxb2 and Black had an edge, K.Volke-M.Adams, Slough 1997.

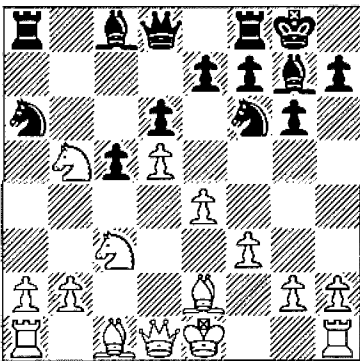
**7...Bg7**

7...axb5?! does not work. After 8 Bxb5+ Nbd7 9 Ne2 Bg7 10 Nc3 White is doing well, e.g. 10...Rxa3!? 11 bxa3 Nxe4 12 fxe4 Bxc3+ 13 Bd2 Bxa1 14 Qxa1 0-0 15 0-0 and we prefer White.

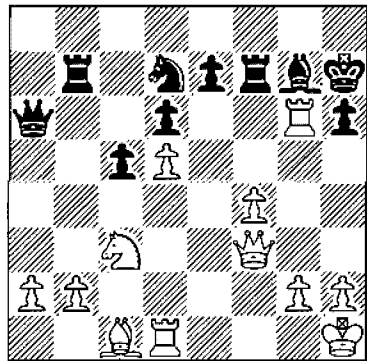
**8 Ne2 axb5**

8...0-0 also doesn't solve Black's problems. After 9 Nc3 e6 10 Bc4 exd5 11 Nxd5 axb5 12 Nxb5 Nxd5 13 Qxd5 Ra6 14 0-0 White retains a slight pull.

**9 Nxb5 0-0 10 Nec3 Na6 11 Be2 (Diagram 64)**



**Diagram 64**  
White's knights sit pretty



**Diagram 65 (B)**  
30 Re6xg6!

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Here White should consider 11 Be3; after 11...Nc7 12 a4 Nxb5 13 Bxb5 Ne8 14 0-0 Nc7 15 Bc4 White has a slight edge (Milos).

**11...Nc7 12 Nxc7 Qxc7 13 Bg5 Qb6 14 Qd2 Ba6 15 Rc1 Bxe2 16 Qxe2 h6 17 Be3 Rfb8 18 Rc2 Nd7 19 0-0 Qb4 20 Kh1 Kh7 21 Bc1!**

After 21 f4? Black will play 21...Bxc3! 22 bxc3 Qxe4, as the 'weak' dark squares cannot be accessed by White's pieces.

**21...Rb7?!**

Better is 21...c4 22 f4 Nc5 23 f5 Nd3 when Black has compensation for the pawn.

**22 f4 Bd4 23 Qd3 Bg7 24 Re2 Qd4 25 Qf3 Qc4 26 e5! Qa6**

26...dxe5 also leads to a white advantage after 27 Re4 Qa6 28 Ra4 Qxa4 29 Nxa4 Rxa4 30 d6 e4 31 dxe7 exf3 32 e8Q f5 33 a3.

**27 e6 fxe6 28 Rxe6!**

White needs to occupy the light squares with pieces, not pawns. After 28 dxe6? Nf6 29 f5 g5 Gurevich thinks White is only slightly better.

**28...Rf8 29 Rd1**

29 Rxe7? fails to 29...Ne5!.

**29...Rf7 30 Rxc6!! (Diagram 65)**

A wonderful rook sacrifice.

**30...Bxc3**

After 30...Kxg6 White wins with 31 Qc4+ Kh5 32 g4+ Kh4 33 Qf3 and mate will follow on g3. Maybe 30...Ne5 is better, though after 31 Rxc6+ Kxg7 32 Qg3+ Kh7 33 h3! White has a very strong attack (Gurevich).

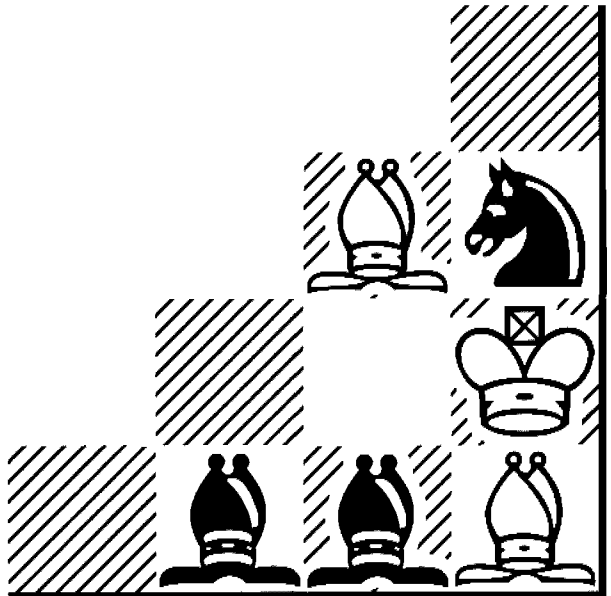
**31 Qe4 Rb4 32 Qc2 Qc4 33 Rxd6+ Qe4 34 Qxe4+ Rxe4 35 Rxd7 Bd4 36 d6 Kg6 37 dxe7 Rfxe7 38 Rxe7 Rxe7 39 h3 Re2 40 b4! Rxa2 41 bxc5 Bxc5 42 Rd5 Bf2 43 Rd2 Ra1 44 Rxf2 Rxc1+ 45 Kh2 h5 46 Kg3 Kf5 47 Kh4 Rc8 48 g3 Ke4 49 f5 Ke5 50 f6 1-0**

## Chapter Three

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# The Volga Gambit Declined

- ▨ Introduction
- ▨ White Plays 4 Nf3
- ▨ Fourth Move Alternatives

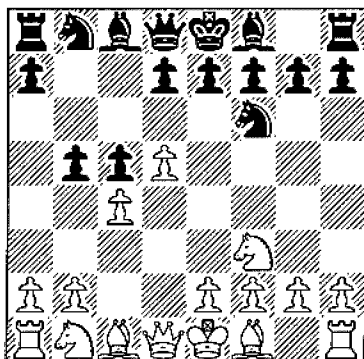


## Introduction

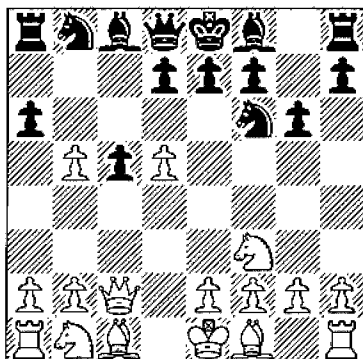
We would like to draw your attention to an amazing fact: the Volga Gambit Declined is older than the Volga Gambit itself! The position after 4 Nf3 (the main way to decline the pawn sacrifice) first arose in 1922 in the enthralling game Rubinstein-Spielmann – twenty-five years before the Volga was discovered. The reason is simple: they used the following move order: 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 b5 (we will review this line later) 4 c4. The opening moves in the E.Jacobsen-Spielmann encounter (1923) are a bit different: 1 Nf3 Nf6 2 d4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 c4. As a result we have very many positions with Nf3 (Games 31-35) and approximately the same number with other continuations (Games 36-38).

### White Plays 4 Nf3

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Nf3 (Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1 (B)**  
Declining with 4 Nf3



**Diagram 2 (B)**  
Hitting c5

This is the most popular and most natural way to decline the Volga Gambit. However, after Black's main reply 4...g6 the game often transposes to the lines covered in the first two chapters. After 5 cxb5 (5 Qc2 transposes to 4 Qc2 in the majority of the cases) 5...a6 6 bxa6 a position from the Real Volga Gambit arises, while after 6 b6 and 6 e3 the relevant sections of the Volga Gambit Accepted are reached. The attack on the c5-pawn with 6 Qc2 (**Diagram 2**) deserves special attention (see Game 31).

Playing Qc2 after 4 cxb5 a6 is impractical, but with the addition of Nf3 and ...g7-g6 (a developing move and a move that just contributes to development) it deserves consideration. The continuation 6...Nxd5 7 Qxc5 Qc7 doesn't seem to equalise, but capturing the c-pawn after 6...axb5 leads to a lag in development

for White. However, even after 7 e4 Qa5 8 Bd2 Qa4 9 Qxa4 bxa4 there is no advantage for White (see Bareev-Topalov). The sharp line with an early ...e7-e6 (6...Bg7 7 e4 0-0 8 Nc3 e6 – see Korchnoi-Greenfeld) has not been studied thoroughly. Both 6...d6 7 e4 Bg7 8 Nc3 0-0 9 a4 e6 (Yermolinsky-Wheeler) and 9...axb5 10 Bxb5 Na6 (Korchnoi-Felgaer) are played more often; in the second case the knight strengthens its position on b4.

We shouldn't forget about the continuation 6 Nc3 (Game 32). There aren't many contact points with the Zaitsev Variation; 6...axb5 isn't often met by 7 e4 b4 8 Nb5 (the line 8 e5 bxc3 9 exf6 Qa5 10 bxc3 Qxc3 11 Nbd2 Qxf6 might give White compensation for his pawn but no more than that) 8...d6 (Black is playing with fire with 8...Nxe4?! – see Van der Wiel-Hodgson) because the arising position in the Zaitsev Variation is safe for Black. Much more promising is 7 d6 (Diagram 3), breaking Black's pawn chain.

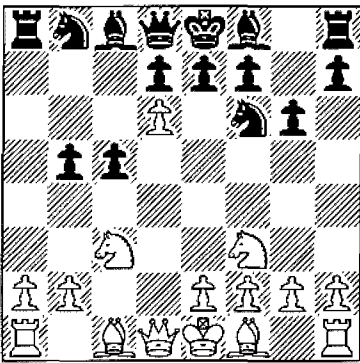


Diagram 3 (B)  
Breaking the pawn chain

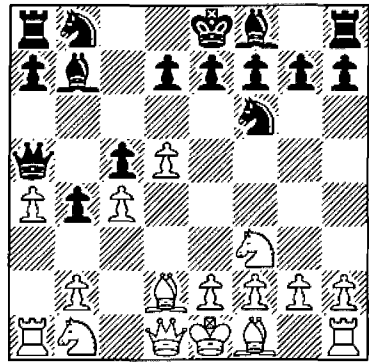


Diagram 4 (W)  
A modification

In this sharp line Black often faces unpleasant surprises (like in Game 32). Apparently he should aim at capturing the initiative without worrying about material, as in Sadler-Hodgson (7...Qa5 8 e3 exd6 9 Bxb5 Ne4!? 10 Bd2 Nxc3 11 Bxc3 Bxb5 12 Bxh8 Ba6).

4 Nf3 is also often met by 4...Bb7 with an attack on the d5-square. The support of e2-e4 with 5 Qc2 (Tkachiev-Conquest) doesn't contribute to the defence of the d5-pawn, which becomes isolated after 5...bxc4 6 e4 e6 7 Bxc4 exd5. In response to 5 Nbd2 (Game 33) two plans are of interest: 5...e6 6 e4 exd5 7 cxd5 c4, leaving White with a strong pair of pawns in the centre but making his development more difficult (Shariyazdanov-Zueger); and 5...bxc4 6 e4 e6 7 dxe6 dxex6 with a more stable position and approximately equal play.

The main reply to 4...Bb7 is 5 a4, forcing Black to make a decision regarding the pawn chain (Game 34). It is not beneficial to maintain the tension with 5...a6 due to the a-file opening and White's attack (Dorfman-Mochalov). If

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

5...bxc4 6 Nc3 e6 7 e4 White has a permanent advantage after quiet play, or better chances in managing the complications after 7...Nxe4. After 5...b4 White comfortably places his dark-squared bishop on b2: this is why the modification 5...Qa5+ 6 Bd2 b4 (**Diagram 4**) became popular because it is now not so easy for the bishop to occupy the long diagonal.

Normally a manoeuvring game takes place with blocked pawn chains (Korchnoi-Zueger, Khenkin-Tregubov).

Finally, after 4 Nf3 the b-pawn can immediately determine its fate of its own free will (Game 35). 4...bxc4 is successfully met by the advance e2-e4-e5 (Izoria-Jianu, Khenkin-Marjanovic). If 4...b4 there is slow manoeuvring after 5 Nbd2, or some excitement on the queenside after 5 a3, which almost guarantees changes in the pawn structure. In the game Razuvaev-Lonchar Black obtained superiority on the queenside but allowed White activity on the kingside while he was trying to take advantage of it. The beginning of A.Kuzmin-A.Vaisser, Benasque 1997 is worthy of note: 5...g6 6 e4!? Nxe4 7 axb4 cxb4 8 Qxd4 with a triple(!) attack, but as a result only a pawn is won back and equality is obtained.

## Statistics

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Overall with 4 Nf3 White has scored 59%. This breaks down to 59% against 4...g6, 55% against 4...Bb7, 68% after 4...bxc4, and 64% after 4...b4.

## Theoretical?

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Yes. The progress of theory has led to many different move orders and various styles of position.

## Theoretical Status

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Respected. The immediate 4...bxc4?! doesn't deserve to be copied, although this capture is quite acceptable at a later stage. If 4...g6 we think that 5 cxb5 a6 6 Nc3!? axb5 7 d6 is a very promising line: it is not easy for Black to cope with the sharp positions which arise.

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*Game 31*

□ V.Korchnoi ■ R.Felgaer

Buenos Aires 2001

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Nf3 g6 5 cxb5 a6 6 Qc2!? d6

There are some important alternatives:

- a) 6...Nxd5 7 e4 (7 Qxc5 Qc7 8 Qxc7 Nxc7 9 b6 Nd5 is also a bit better for White) 7...Nc7 8 Qc3!? Rg8 9 Qxc5 axb5 10 Be2 and White is a tiny bit better.
- b) 6...axb5 7 e4 (7 Qxc5 Na6 8 Qxb5 Rb8 9 Qc4 Nb4 10 Bd2 Ba6 11 Qc1 Nfxd5 gives Black considerable play for the pawn) 7...Qa5+ 8 Bd2 Qa4 (8...b4 9 Na3 d6 10 Nc4 Qd8 11 Be2 Bg7 12 0-0 is a typical position – White has an edge) 9

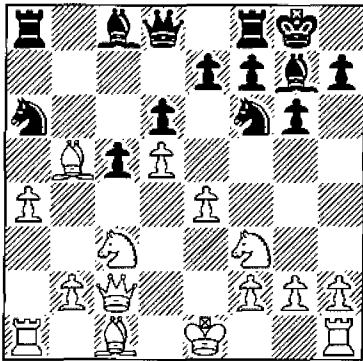
Qxa4 bxa4 10 Nc3 Bg7 11 e5 Ng4 12 Bf4 f6 13 exf6 Nxf6 14 a3 0-0 15 0-0-0 d6 with unclear play. E.Bareev-V.Topalov, Sarajevo 2000.

c) 6...Bg7 7 e4 0-0 8 Nc3 e6!? is also very interesting, and probably the most natural. Now after 9 dxe6 fxe6 10 e5 Nh5 11 Qe4 Ra7 12 Be3 (or 12 Be2 Bb7 13 Qe4 axb5 14 Nxb5 Ra5 with compensation) 12...Bb7 13 Qc4 Bxf3 14 gxf3 axb5 15 Qxc5 Rc7 16 Qxb5 Nc6 Black had good counterchances in V.Korchnoi-A.Greenfeld, Beersheba 1995.

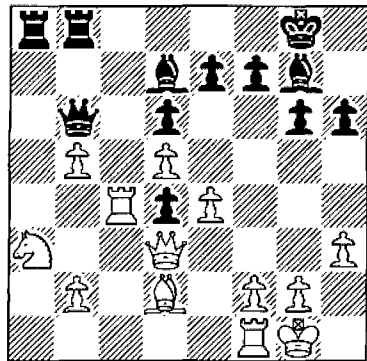
**7 e4 Bg7 8 Nc3 0-0 9 a4 axb5**

9...e6 10 dxe6 Bxe6 11 Be2 axb5 12 Bxb5 d5 13 exd5 Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Qxd5 15 0-0 Na6 16 Be3 Rfe8 17 Rad1 was played in A.Yermolinsky-J.Wheeler, Kings Island 1995. Now after 17...Qb3 18 Qe4 Qb4 19 Ng5 Qxe4 20 Nxe4 Bxb2 21 Bxa6 Rxa6 22 Nxc5 Ra5 White is better – Yermolinsky.

**10 Bxb5 Na6 (Diagram 5)**



**Diagram 5 (W)**  
The knight heads for b4



**Diagram 6 (B)**  
Is ...Bxb5 possible?

**11 0-0 Nb4 12 Qe2 Ne8**

After 12...Bg4 White achieves an advantage with 13 Be3 Nd7 14 h3 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Nc2 16 Rac1 Nxe3 17 Qxe3; Black has almost enough for the pawn, but only almost.

**13 h3 Nc7 14 Bg5 h6 15 Bd2 Nc2 16 Rac1**

Or 16 Bxh6 Nxa1 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Rxa1 Nxb5 19 Nxb5 Qa5 and both sides have their chances.

**16...Nd4 17 Nxd4 cxd4 18 Nb1 Nxb5 19 axb5 Bd7**

Here Black had the chance to stay active with 19...e6!? 20 Na3 exd5 21 exd5 Re8 (21...d3?! 22 Qxd3 Bxb2 23 Nc4 Bxc1 24 Rxc1 would give White the initiative on the dark squares) 22 Qf3 Bf5 with unclear play.

**20 Qd3 Qb6 21 Na3 Rfb8 22 Rc4 (Diagram 6)**

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 22...Qd8

22...Bxb5?? loses to 23 Nxb5 Qxb5 24 Rc8+! Kh7 25 Qxb5.

**23 Rb4 Rb6 24 Nc2 Kh7 25 Nxd4 Bxd4 26 Qxd4 Rxb5 27 Rxb5 Bxb5 28 Qe3 Qf8**

Black also has very few drawing chances after 28...Bxf1 29 Qxh6+ Kg8 30 Bc3 f6 31 Qxg6+ Kh8 32 Kxf1 Qg8 33 Qxg8+ Kxg8 34 Ke2.

**29 Rc1 Rb8 30 Rc7 Ba6 31 Ra7 Bc4 32 Qd4 Bb3 33 Bc3 Rc8 34 f4 Bc2 35 e5 Rd8 36 exd6 1-0**

36...exd6 37 Qf6! wins; more importantly the same goes for 36...Rxd6 37 Ra8! when the tender g7-spot makes Black suffer.

After this game Korchnoi famously told his young opponent: 'You should not give away pawns to grandmasters in the opening.' However, we can safely say that the old master didn't refute his opponent's opening.

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### Game 32

□ **B.Gulko** ■ **O.Renet**

Marseille 1986

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Nf3 g6 5 cxb5 a6 6 Nc3 axb5 7 d6**

This is a tricky sideline that shouldn't lead to any advantage, but it can be difficult to meet in practice.

7 e4 is another crafty line: 7...b4 8 Nb5 (8 e5 bxc3 9 exf6 Qa5 10 bxc3 Qxc3+ 11 Bd2 Qxf6 12 Rc1 Bg7 is unclear) 8...Nxe4?! (better is 8...d6, transposing to 4 cxb5 a6 5 Nc3 axb5 6 e4 b4 7 Nb5 d6 8 Nf3 g6) 9 Qe2 f5 10 d6! exd6 11 Ng5 Bb7 (11...d5 12 f3 Be7 13 fxe4 fxe4 14 Qd2! Bb7 15 Qf4, winning) 12 f3 h6 13 fxe4 hxg5 14 exf5+ Kf7 15 fxg6+ Kg7?! (15...Kxg6, with some hope of surviving the attack after 16 Qg4!, was best according to Van der Wiel) 16 b3 Rh4 17 Bb2+ Kg8 18 Nxd6! 1-0. J.Van der Wiel-J.Hodgson, Brussels 1985. After 18...Bxd6 19 Qc4+! Rxc4 20 Bxc4+ Kf8 21 0-0+ Bf4 22 g7+ Ke7 23 g8Q Qxg8 24 Bxg8 Nc6 Black can still struggle on a bit, but apparently Julian Hodgson was not in the mood.

### 7...Qa5

Or:

a) 7...Bg7 8 e4 Nc6 9 e5 Ng4 10 dxe7 Qxe7 11 Nd5 Qd8 12 Bxb5 Ngxe5 13 Nxe5 Bxe5 14 0-0 with some advantage for White.

b) 7...Bb7 8 Nxb5 Qa5+ 9 Nc3 exd6 10 Bd2 Bg7 11 Qb3 Ba6 12 Ne4 (also interesting is 12 Nd5!? Qd8 13 Bc3 0-0 14 Rd1 with the initiative) 12...Qc7 13 Nxf6+ Bxf6 14 Qe3+ Kf8 15 Bc3 Qd8 16 Rd1 and White was a bit better in T.Radjabov-S.Halkias, Chalkidiki 2002.

### 8 e3 exd6

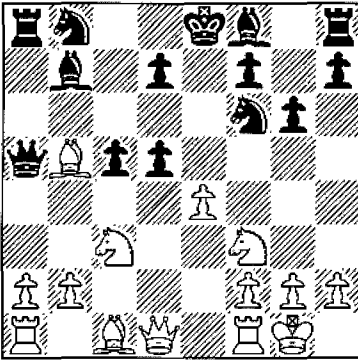
Black has no real choice here. 8...Nc6?! is met strongly by 9 Bxb5 Ne4 10 dxe7 Bxe7 11 Bd2 with a clear edge. 8...Ne4?! is bad because of 9 Bd2 Nxd6

(9...Nxd2 10 Nxd2 c4 11 a4! does not work) 10 Nxb5 Qb6 11 Bc3!? (but not 11 Ne5?! Nxb5 12 Qb3 e6 13 Qxb5 Qxb5 14 Bxb5 Ba6 15 Bxa6 Nxa6 16 Bc3 Bg7 and Black is fine) 11...Rg8 12 Nxd6+ Qxd6 13 Qxd6 exd6 14 a4 and we think White has a rather large advantage.

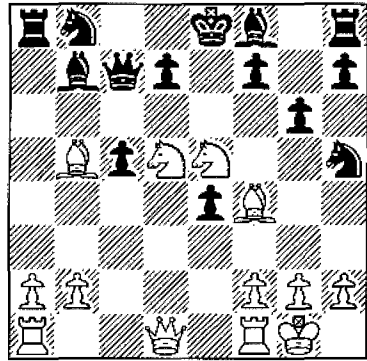
**9 Bxb5 d5?!**

This allows White to open the centre forcefully. Stronger is 9...Ba6 10 Bxa6 Qxa6 11 a4 Bg7 12 Nb5 0-0 13 0-0 Qc6 14 Nxd6 Nd5 15 Nb5 Nb4 when White is a little better (Levitt), while even more preferable is 9...Ne4!? 10 Bd2 Nxc3 11 Bxc3 Qxb5 12 Bxh8 Ba6 with unclear complications. Now after 13 a4 Qc4 14 Rc1 Qe4 15 Qb3 Nc6 16 Bc3 Bh6 17 Qc2 Bd3 18 Qd2 d5 Black had good attacking chances in M.Sadler-J.Hodgson, London 1988.

**10 0-0 Bb7 11 e4! (Diagram 7)**



**Diagram 7 (B)**  
Opening the centre



**Diagram 8 (B)**  
Nice knights!

White is undoubtedly leading in development, so it is time to strike.

**11...dxe4**

11...d4 is killed off by 12 Nxd4! cxd4 13 Qxd4 Be7 14 Bg5 Qd8 15 Nd5 Bxd5 16 exd5 h6 17 d6! hxg5 18 Rfe1! and White wins the house.

**12 Ne5 Qc7?!**

Already it was Black's last chance to stay in the game. Something like 12...Be7 13 Bc4 0-0 14 Bh6 is more resilient, although White retains clear advantage.

**13 Bf4 Nh5**

White also wins after 13...Bh6 14 Bg3 Nh5 15 Nxf7 Nxf7 16 Nd6+ Ke7 17 fxf3 Bf3+ 18 Kh1 Bd4 19 Nxe4 (Gulko), and 13...Bd6 14 Bxd7+ Nbx7 15 Nb5 Nxe5 16 Nxd6+ Ke7 17 Bxe5 Rhd8 18 Nxb7 Rxd1 19 Bxc7 Rd7 20 Bd8+!

**14 Nd5 (Diagram 8) 14...Qd6 15 Nxd7 Nxf4 16 Nxc5+! Bc6 17 Nxe4 Qe5 18 Bxc6+ Nxc6 19 Ndf6+ 1-0**

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Game 33

□ A.Shariyazdanov ■ B.Zueger

Elista Olympiad 1998

### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Nf3 Bb7 5 Nbd2

This actually proves to have considerable sting, whereas 5 Nc3 b4 6 Na4 e6 7 Bg5 h6 8 Bxf6 Qxf6 9 e4 d6 is not clear: the a4-knight isn't very well placed and Black could make good use of his dark-squared bishop later on.

5 Nfd2 is played with the ambition of developing the b1-knight to c3. Now after 5...bxc4 6 e4 c6 7 dxe6 dxe6! (7...fxe6?! 8 e5 Nd5 9 Nxc4 Nc6 10 Nc3 is good for White) 8 Nc3 Nc6 9 Bxc4 White hardly has any advantage. In fact, following 9...Be7 10 Bb5 0-0 11 Bxc6 Bxc6 12 Qe2 Qb6 13 Nc4 Qa6 14 0-0 Rfd8 15 b3 Nd7 16 Qc2 Bf6 Black was better in H.Koneru-C.Weiss, Budapest 2002, although improvements for both sides are likely to be found.

5 Qc2 is best met by 5...bxc4 6 e4 e6 7 Bxc4 cxd5 8 exd5 Be7 (8...Bxd5 9 Bxd5 Nxd5 10 0-0 Be7 11 Re1 Nb4 12 Qf5 looks dangerous for Black) 9 Nc3 d6 10 0-0 0-0 (an improvement over 10...Nbd7 11 a4 Nb6 12 Bb5+ Kf8 13 Bc6 Bxc6 14 dxc6 Qc8 15 b4! Qxc6 16 b5 Qb7 17 Rd1 and White had the initiative in V.Tkachiev-S.Conquest, Ohrid 2001) 11 a4 Na6 12 Bg5 Nb4 13 Qd2 Re8 with chances for both sides.

### 5...e6

5...bxc4 6 e4 e6 does not fully equalise: 7 dxe6 dxe6 (White has a clear edge after 7...fxe6?! 8 e5 Nd5 9 Nxc4 Be7 10 Bd3 Nb4 11 Bb1) 8 e5 Nd5 9 Nxc4 Be7 10 Be2 Nc6 11 0-0 0-0 12 Bd2 Qc7 13 Rc1 Rfd8 14 Qc2 and White's position was preferable in A.Shariyazdanov-A.Averianov, St Petersburg 2003.

### 6 e4

6 dxe6 fxe6 7 cxb5 transposes to the Blumenfeld Gambit (2...e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 cxb5 Bb7 7 Nbd2).

### 6...exd5 7 cxd5 c4 8 Be2 Bc5 9 0-0 Ng4!?

Maybe 9...Qe7 is better. After 10 a4 a6 11 axb5 axb5 12 Rxa8 Bxa8 13 Bxc4!? bxc4 14 Qa4 0-0 15 Qxa8 Nxe4 16 Nxe4 Qxe4 both players have their chances, and 10 e5!? Nxd5 11 Ne4 0-0 is also pretty unclear.

### 10 e5 Bxf2+?!

Black thinks that he is forcing a draw; actually this is probably the losing mistake. Black is also in trouble after 10...Bxd5?! 11 Nb3! when 11...Bxf2+ 12 Rxf2 Qb6 13 Nbd4 Nxf2 14 Kxf2 clearly favours White, and 10...0-0?! 11 Ne4 Bb6 12 Qc2 is also very dangerous for Black.

The best try was probably 10...f5!?, although after 11 h3 Bxf2+ 12 Rxf2 Ne3 13 Nxc4! Nxd1 14 Nd6+ Kf8 15 Bg5 Qb6 16 Rxd1 White has excellent compensation.

### 11 Rxf2 Ne3 12 Qe1 Nc2 13 Qf1 Ne3 (Diagram 9)

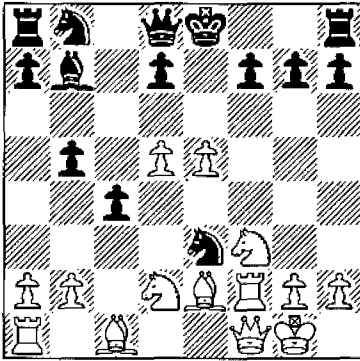


Diagram 9 (W)  
Forcing a draw?

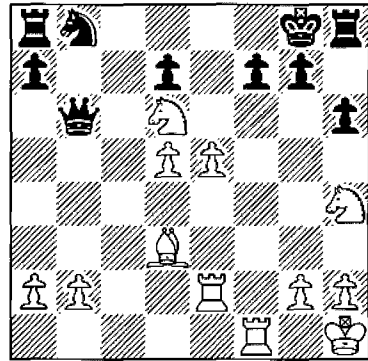


Diagram 10 (B)  
An unstoppable attack

This was clearly what Black was heading for. Now it seems that White cannot avoid the draw.



**WARNING: Do not think that your opponent has to respect your threats in all possible situations.**

14 Nxc4!!

This queen sacrifice is self-explanatory once you see it.

14...Nxf1 15 Nd6+ Kf8 16 Nxb7

Or 16 Ng5!? f6 17 Ngf7 Qb6 18 Kxf1 Bxd5 19 exf6 gxf6 20 Rxf6 with an attack.

16...Qb6 17 Nd6 Ne3 18 Bxe3 Qxe3 19 Bxb5 h6

19...f6?! is punished by 20 exf6 Qc5 21 fxg7+ Kxg7 22 Nf5+ Kf6 23 N3d4 with a winning attack.

20 Raf1 Kg8 21 Kh1 Kh7 22 Re2 Qb6 23 Bd3+ Kg8 24 Nh4! (Diagram 10)

White's attack is completely unstoppable, queen or no queen.

24...Qd4 25 Be4 g6 26 Nxf7 Rh7 27 e6 dxe6 28 dxe6 Qc4 29 Ree1 Nc6 30 Nxc6 Re8

30...Qxe6 loses to 31 Nfe5 Nxe5 32 Bxa8 Qxg6 33 Bd5+ Nf7 34 Re7 Qh5 35 Bxf7+ Rxf7 36 Rexf7 – all pawn endings are winning for White.

31 Nd6 Qxf1+ 32 Rxf1 Rxe6 33 Bd5 1-0

Game 34

□ I.Khenkin ■ P.Tregubov

Herceg Novi 2001

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 c4 Bb7 5 a4 Qa5+

This might look awkward; if Black wants to play ...b5-b4, why not do it

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

straight away? The reason is the c1-bishop. It belongs to b2 here, so Black decides to lure it to d2 before closing the queenside.

Black has also tried the following moves:

a) 5...a6?! is not sound based on something like 6 axb5 axb5 7 Rxa8 Bxa8 8 Nc3! Qa5 (8...b4 9 Qa4!? bxc3 10 Qxa8 cxb2 11 Bxb2 Qb6 12 Qa3 gives White a strong initiative) 9 Bf4!? d6 10 Nd2 b4 11 Nb5 g6 (11...Nxd5 12 cxd5 Qxb5 13 e4 Qa5 14 Nb3 Qa4 15 Bc4 with a lead in development) 12 e4 Nbd7 13 Nb3 Qb6 14 Qa1 Bb7 15 Qa5 Nh5 (or 15...Nxe4 16 Bd3 Nef6 17 0-0 Bg7 18 Re1 and Black is much worse) 16 Bc1 Bg7 17 g4 Nhf6 18 g5 Nh5 (18...Nxe4 19 Bg2 is also great for White) 19 Bh3 Qxa5 20 Nxa5 Bc8 21 Nc6 and White was dominating in L.Dorfman-E.Mochalov, USSR 1981.

b) 5...b4 allows White to build some pressure with 6 Nbd2 g6 7 b3 Bg7 8 Bb2 d6 9 e4 Nbd7 10 Bd3 0-0 11 Qc2 when 0-0-0 is possible, even likely. Therefore Black often delays castling here.

c) 5...bxc4 6 Nc3 e6 7 e4 simply looks better for White, and so it is. We are highly suspicious of 7...Nxe4?! 8 Nxe4 exd5 9 Nc3 d4 when after 10 Bxc4!? dxc3 11 Ne5!? Qe7 12 0-0! c2 (12...Qxe5 13 Re1 Be4 14 Bd5 c2 15 Qd2 f5 16 Bxa8 gives White a clear plus) 13 Qe1 d5 14 Bb5+ Kd8 15 Qa5+ Kc8 16 Bf4 White had a strong attack in A.Sorin-R.Alvarez, Argentina 2000. Stronger is 7...exd5 8 exd5 d6 9 Bxc4 Be7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Re1 when White is a bit better – Black is not well placed for counterplay.

### **6 Bd2 b4 7 Qc2**

Or 7 Bg5 d6 8 Bxf6 exf6 9 e4 g6 10 Bd3 Bg7 11 Nbd2 0-0 12 0-0 Nd7 and Black should not be worse here.

### **7...g6 8 e4 d6 9 Bd3**

9 Be2 Nbd7 10 0-0 Bg7 11 Bf4 0-0 12 Nbd2 Rae8 13 Ne1 Qc7 14 Nd3 e6 15 Bf3 e5 16 Be3 Bc8 gave level chances in V.Korchnoi-B.Zueger, Switzerland 2002.

### **9...Nbd7 10 0-0 Bg7 11 h3 0-0 12 Be3 Rae8 13 Nbd2 e5 14 g4!? (Diagram 11) 14...Kh8**

14...h5 looks dodgy; after 15 Nh2 hxg4 16 hxg4 Nh7 17 Kg2 Bc8 18 Rh1 White should be a bit better.

### **15 Kg2 Ng8 16 Rh1 Ne7 17 Nf1**

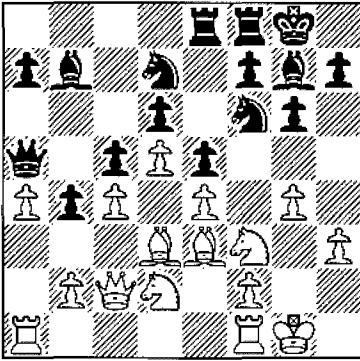
Maybe it was safer to play 17 Rag1 Bc8 18 Kf1 Nf6 19 Ke2 Bd7 20 b3 Nfg8, when the position is even.

### **17...f5!? (Diagram 12)**

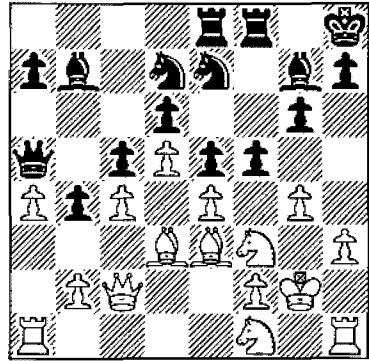
Black needs to become active at some point.



**TIP: When your opponent is using all his forces to prevent a pawn break, sometimes it works all the same, as his pieces are not ready to deal with the other squares weakened and vacated in the process.**



**Diagram 11 (B)**  
All blocked up



**Diagram 12 (W)**  
Black lunges with ...f7-f5

18 gxf5 gxf5 19 exf5 Nf6 20 Ng3 e4!? 21 Nxe4 Nxf5

Black has fine compensation for the pawn. White should continue 22 Bg5 Nxe4 23 Bxe4 Bc8 24 Rae1 Qc7 with unclear play.

22 Neg5?! Nxe3+ 23 fxe3 Qd8

Maybe Black could have taken the initiative with 23...h6 24 Ne4 (24 Ne6? is bad because of 24...Nxd5! 25 cxd5 Rxe6! when Black wins material) 24...Nxe4 25 Bxe4 Ba6 26 Rab1 b3!.

24 Bf5!?

24 Bxh7 Rxe3 25 Nh4 looks strong, but 25...Rg3+!! 26 Kxg3 Nh5+ 27 Kg4 Nf6+ 28 Kg3 Nh5+ is a rather peculiar perpetual check.

24...Nxd5! 25 cxd5 Bxd5 26 h4

26 Kf2? is punished by 26...Qf6 27 e4 Bxe4! 28 Bxe4 Qxg5 with a deadly attack.

26...Bxf3+ 27 Nxf3 Rxe3 28 Rae1 b3

28...Rxe1 29 Rxe1 Qf6 30 Be4 Qxb2 31 Qxb2 Bxb2 32 Bd5! would leave Black suffering in an unpleasant endgame.

29 Qb1 (Diagram 13)

29...Rxf3! 30 Kxf3 Qd7

30...Qf6?! is weaker because of 31 Kg2 Qxf5 32 Qxf5 Rxf5 33 Re8+ Rf8 34 Rxf8+ Bxf8 35 Kf3 when White has very good winning chances – Tregubov.

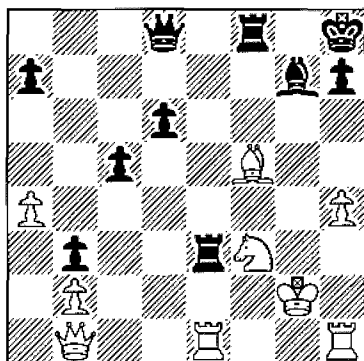
31 Kg4 h5+ 32 Kg5 Qf7 33 Rhf1 (Diagram 14) 33...Be5?

A slip. After 33...Bf6+ 34 Kh6 (34 Kf4? Bxh4! 35 Qe4 Qg7 36 Rg1 Qh6+ 37 Kf3 Bxe1 38 Rxe1 Qg5 and Black wins) 34...Bg7+ (Tregubov) it should be a draw.

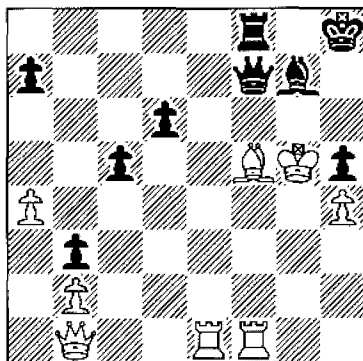
34 Bg6?

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

We are probably talking time trouble here. After 34 Rxe5! Qf6+ (34...dxe5 35 Bh3 Rg8+ 36 Kh6 and White wins! – this is possibly what Khenkin overlooked) 35 Kxh5 Qxe5 36 Qd3 White wins.



**Diagram 13 (B)**  
Time for another sacrifice



**Diagram 14 (B)**  
Now for a double slip

### 34...Bf4+ 35 Kxh5

35 Rxf4 Qxf4+ 36 Kxh5 Qf3+ 37 Kg5 Qf4+ is also a draw.

### 35...Qd5+ 36 Kg4 Qg2+ 37 Kh5 Qd5+ ½-½

#### Game 35

□ Z.Izoria ■ V.Jianu

Heraklio 2002

### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Nf3 bxc4?!

This unprovoked capture seems to give White the initiative rather freely.

4...b4 5 a3 g6 is another line. After 6 axb4 cxb4 7 Be3 a5 8 g3 Bg7 9 Bg2 0-0 10 0-0 d6 11 Nbd2 Bd7 12 h3 a4 13 Nd4 Qc8 14 Kh2 Qa6 15 f4 Rc8 16 Bg1 Be8 17 e4 White was better in Y.Razuvaev-R.Lonchar, Maribor 1996 – Black's queen-side pawns are not really moving anywhere.

### 5 Nc3 g6 6 e4 d6 7 Bxc4

Here White could consider 7 e5!?, when 7...dxe5 8 Nxe5 Bg7 9 Bxc4 just transposes.

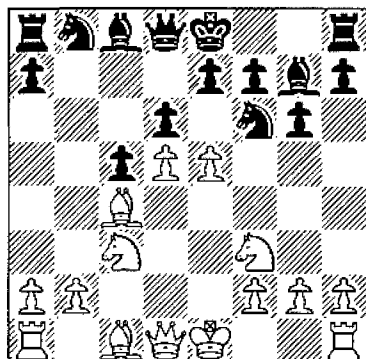
### 7...Bg7

Also worthy of note is 7...Nbd7!?, though after 8 0-0 Bg7 9 Bf4 0-0 10 Re1 White has a slight plus.

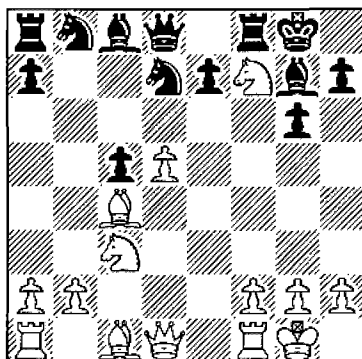
### 8 e5! (Diagram 15)



**NOTE:** White should of course take this chance if it is given to him. Black does better to prevent this on the previous move.



**Diagram 15 (B)**  
An early e4-e5 break



**Diagram 16 (B)**  
Not hanging around!

8...dxe5 9 Nxe5 0-0 10 0-0 Nfd7

I.Khenkin -S.Marjanovic, Athens 2000 continued 10...Bb7 11 Re1 Ne8 12 Bg5 Nd6 13 Nc6! Bxc6 14 Bxe7 Nxc4 (better, but still giving White a clear plus, was 14...Qc7 15 Bxf8 Kxf8 16 dxc6 Nxc4 17 Nb5 Qc8 18 Qd5 Nb6 19 Qxc5+ Kg8 20 Rac1) 15 Bxd8 Rxd8 16 Qe2 Bxc3 17 dxc6 Bxe1 18 c7 Rf8 19 Qxc4 Ba5 20 Qxc5 and White was winning.



**TIP:** White's advantage here consists mainly of a lead in development, so it is crucial to play very directly.

**11 Nxf7! (Diagram 16)**

As stated above, White should not waste a single moment. Here 11 Nc6 Nxc6 12 dxc6 Nb6 13 Qxd8 Rxd8 14 Be2 Bf5 is fine for Black, and 11 Nxd7 Nxd7 12 Re1 Nb6 13 Qb3 Nxc4 14 Qxc4 e6!? 15 Qxc5 exd5 16 Qxd5 Rb8 offers Black sufficient counterplay for the pawn.

**11...Rxf7**

This is forced. After 11...Kxf7 White wins with 12 d6+ Ke8 (12...e6 13 Bxe6+) 13 dxe7 Qxe7 14 Nd5 Qd6 15 Re1+ Ne5 16 f4 and so on.

**12 d6 e6**

After 12...Nb6 13 Bxf7+ Kxf7 14 Qf3+ Bf6 White now has a pleasant choice between:

- a) 15 Ne4 Bf5 16 Nxf6 exf6 17 Bf4 with a slight edge according to Stohl.
- b) 15 dxe7 Qxe7 16 Bg5 with a potentially deadly attack according to us!

**13 Bxe6 Qf6**

After 13...Nb6 14 Bxf7+ Kxf7 15 Re1 Bf5 16 Re7+ Kg8 17 Bg5 White continues

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

to create major threats.

### 14 Bd5?!

After the stronger 14 Qg4!? Bb7 15 Nd5 Bxd5 16 Bxd5 Nb6 17 Qe4 Nxd5 18 Qxd5 Nc6 19 Qxc6 White's advantage is beyond dispute.

### 14...Nb6 15 Ne4 Qf5 16 Bxf7+ Qxf7 17 Nxc5 N8d7

Here the position is very complicated, but White manages to outplay his opponent over the next ten to fifteen moves.

### 18 Be3!? Bxb2 19 Rb1 Bg7

Maybe 19...Nc4!? 20 Ne4 Bb7 21 Ng5 Qd5 22 Qxd5+ Bxd5 23 Rfd1 Bc6 with unclear play.

### 20 a4 Nd5 21 Bd4 Nxc5 22 Bxg7 Ba6

22...Ne4 can be answered by 23 Ba1 Nec3 24 Qd2 Nxb1 25 Rxb1 when most players would prefer White due to Black's devastated king.

### 23 Ba1 Bxf1

After 23...Nd3 24 Qb3 Rd8 25 Rbd1 Qf5 26 Rd2 the pressure is not receding.

### 24 Qd4! Nf6

24...Kf8 is met strongly by 25 Qxc5 Bxg2 26 d7+! Qe7 27 Qd4 when White has various threats.

### 25 Qxc5 Bd3

25...Bxg2 26 Kxg2 Rf8 27 Qe5 is also miserable for Black.

### 26 Rd1 Re8

Or 26...Be2 27 Re1 Re8 28 Bxf6 Qxf6 29 d7 and White will have an extra pawn, which should give him the full point.

27 Bxf6 Be2 28 d7 Bxd1 29 dxe8Q+ Qxe8 30 Bc3 Qd7 31 Qe5 h5 32 Qh8+ Kf7 33 Qg7+ Ke6 34 Qxg6+ Kd5 35 Qd3+ Kc6 36 Qb5+ Kc7 37 Qe5+ Kb7 38 a5 Ka6 39 h3 Qc6 40 Kh2 Bb3 41 Qe2+ Kb7 42 a6+ Kc8 43 Qe5 Bf7 44 Ba5 Kd7 45 Bb4 Qc7 46 Qxc7+ Kxc7 47 Kg3 Bc4 48 Kh4 Bf1 49 g3 1-0

## Fourth Move Alternatives

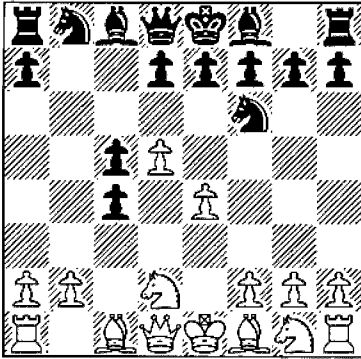
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### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5

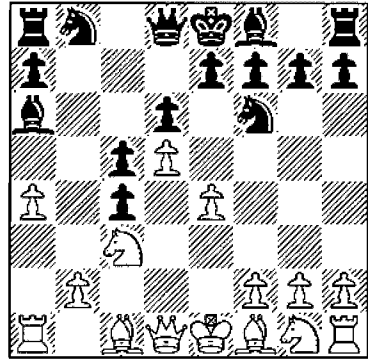
Here we look at white options other than 4 cxb5 and 4 Nf3. With 4 Nd2 (Game 36) White takes control over the important c4-square with the idea of seizing the centre with e2-e4 followed by Bxc4 (after the probable ...bxc4), Ngf3 and 0-0. After 4...bxc4 5 e4 (**Diagram 17**) Black has four ways to develop:

- 1) Pinning the d2-knight with ...Qa5 (Grachev-Martynov). However, Bb2 will ease the development of White's queenside after b2-b3, and later the unpinned knight will be able to attack the queen on a5.
- 2) Typical development with ...d7-d6 and ...g7-g6. Again the dark-squared fianchetto is possible with a slight but lasting advantage (Khalifman-Leko).

- 3) The plan of 5...e6 6 dxe6 dxe6 (Beliavsky-Fogarasi).
- 4) Changing the pawn structure with 5...c3 (Kramnik-Leko).



**Diagram 17 (B)**  
Four ways to continue



**Diagram 18 (W)**  
White can continue with f2-f4

The advance 4 a4 (Game 37), which determines the fate of the b5-pawn, is even more popular than 4 Nd2. After 4...b4 we have emphasised the exciting line 5 g3 e5 6 dxe6 fxe6 7 Bg2 d5 with a formidable yet vulnerable pawn centre for Black (Meister-Andrianov). After 4...dxc4 5 Nc3 d6 6 e4 Ba6 (**Diagram 18**) Black retains his extra doubled pawn on c4.

However, as there is no knight on f3, the plan of f2-f4 and e4-e5 (Tella-Nyback) is noteworthy. 6...g6 can be met with 7 f4, taking the c4-pawn with the bishop (Vaisser-Lputian), or winning the pawn back with the knight after Ng1-f3-d2xc4 (Klimov-Kallio).

In Game 38 we discuss three fairly unusual options for White. 4 f3 usually has no independent value because after 4...g6 5 e4 d6 6 cxb5 a6 it transposes to the well-known line 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 g6 6 e4 d6 (see Chapter 2). On the contrary, 4 e4!? is very exciting, attempting to begin sharp play after 4...Nxe4 5 Qf3 Qa5 6 Nd2 Nd6 7 cxb5. White suffered a defeat in the game Shchukin-Khalifman, and any improvements for White provide only unclear counterplay, which is not something everyone who plays White will be happy with.

Play is quite typical after 4 Qc2 dxc4 (Raetsky-Niklasch), while after 4...Na6 White shouldn't try the greedy 5 cxb5 (Quinteros-Ermenkov); instead White has a slight advantage after 5 a3.

## Statistics

White scores 56% with both 4 Nd2 and 4 Qc2, while 4 a4 scores 48%.

## Theoretical?

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Probably only 4 Nd2 because of the influence of the Kramnik-Leko game.

## Theoretical Status

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After 4 Nd2, 4 Qc2 and 4 a4 White runs very few risks, which sometimes puts fans of the Volga Gambit in a psychologically unfavourable position. However, it is difficult to call the above moves ambitious; they have not gained popularity and are unlikely to obtain any in the future.

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Game 36

□ V.Kramnik ■ P.Leko

Dortmund 1998

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Nd2**

This is hardly the refutation of the Volga Gambit, but apparently Kramnik has found it suitable for at least one appearance.

**4...bxc4**

4...Qa5 does not prove equality: 5 Qc2 bxc4 6 e4 Ba6 7 Bxc4 Bxc4 8 Qxc4 d6 9 b3 g6 10 Bb2 Bg7 11 Bc3 Qa6 12 f4 0-0 13 Ngf3 Qxc4 14 bxc4 Nbd7 15 0-0 and White was a bit better in B.Grachev-P.Martynov, St Petersburg 2003.

**5 e4 c3**

This is a quite logical move: Black returns the pawn and makes sure that White will have a slight weakness on c3. Alternatively:

a) After the traditional 5...d6 White can try something like 6 Qc2!? or play 6 Bxc4 g6 7 b3, for example 7...Bg7 8 Bb2 0-0 9 Ngf3 Nbd7 10 0-0 Nb6 11 Re1 Bg4 12 Bc3 (or 12 h3 Bxf3 13 Qxf3 Nxe4! 14 Bxg7 Nxd2 15 Qc3 Ndxc4 16 Bxf8 Ne5 17 Bh6 Nxd5 18 Qd2 Nf6 with unclear play – Khalifman) 12...e6 13 dxe6 fxe6 14 h3 Nxc4 15 bxc4 (not 15 hxg4?! Nxd2 16 Nxd2 Nxc4 17 Qxc4 Bxc3 18 Qxe6+ Kh8 19 Rad1 Qa5 and Black dominates – Khalifman) 15...Bxf3 (A.Khalifman-P.Leko, Ubeda 1997). Now 16 Nxf3 leads to a position where White has slight pressure.

b) 5...e6 is probably the most logical of all Black's options, as White has neglected the control over the d5-square. Here A.Beliavsky-T.Fogarasi, Hungary 2000 continued 6 dxe6 dxe6 7 Bxc4 Bb7 8 Qe2 Be7 9 Ngf3 0-0 10 0-0 Nc6 11 Nb3 a5 12 Bg5 a4 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Nbd2 a3 15 b3 Nd4 16 Nxd4 Qxd4 with unclear play.



**NOTE: 6...fxe6?! is weaker as White gets to play e4-e5 before Black plays ...d5: 7 e5 Nd5 8 Nxc4 Nc6 9 Bd3 g6 10 Nf3 Ba6 11 Bg5 Qc7 12 0-0 and White is clearly better.**

**6 bxc3 g6 7 Nc4 d6**

7...Nxc4?! is too dangerous. After 8 Qe2 Bg7 9 Qxe4 Bxc3+ 10 Bd2 Bxa1 White has 11 Ba5! with the idea that 11...Qxa5+ 12 Nxa5 Bc3+ 13 Kd1 Bxa5 14 h4 (Leko) gives him the initiative.

8 Bd3 Bg7 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0 Nbd7 11 Bd2 Nb6 12 Na5?!

A bad mistake, probably forgetting a detail in Black's reply. After 12 Re1 Nxc4 13 Bxc4 Rb8 14 Rb1 the position is more or less equal, though it is Black who needs to prove it.

12...c4! (Diagram 19)

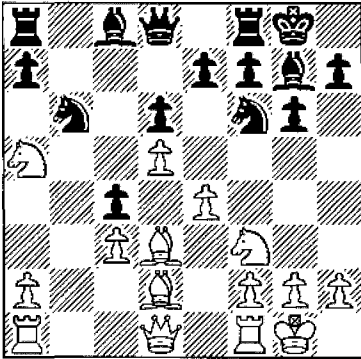


Diagram 19 (W)  
An exchange of pawns?

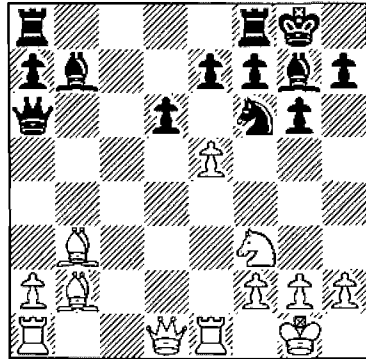


Diagram 20 (B)  
Fighting back

13 Bc2

13 Nxc4 Nxc4 14 Bxc4 Nxe4 15 Qe2 Nxd2 16 Qxd2 Qc7 17 Qf4 Bf5 also looks better for Black.

13...Qc7 14 Re1

White is struggling to find a good move here. 14 Nc6?! e6! 15 Nfd4 exd5 16 exd5 Nfxd5 is a pawn, and 14 Qe2 Nbxid5 15 Nxc4 Ba6 16 Bd3 Rfc8 looks very uncomfortable.

14...Nbxid5 15 Nxc4 Nxc3

Black is also doing quite well after 15...Qxc4 16 exd5 Nxd5 17 Bb3 Qc5 18 Rc1 Be6.

16 Bxc3 Qxc4 17 Bb2 Bb7 18 Bb3 Qa6 19 e5!? (Diagram 20)

Desperately seeking counterplay.

19...Ne4!

19...Ng4 gives White 20 exd6 Bxb2 21 dxe7 Rfe8 22 Bxf7+! Kxf7 23 Qb3+ Bd5!? 24 Ng5+!? Kg7 25 Qxb2+ Kg8 26 Qd2 with compensation. The text is stronger and should lead to a clear advantage.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 20 Rb1 Rac8

20...Rab8!, to defend the bishop, was maybe stronger.

### 21 exd6 Qxd6 22 Bxf7+?!

This allows Black to exchange into a very favourable rook endgame. Necessary was the astonishing 22 Qxd6 exd6 23 Bxg7 Kxg7 24 Be6!: after 24...Rc7 25 Rxb7! Rxb7 26 Bd5 Nc5 27 Bxb7 Nxb7 28 Re7 Rb8 Black is better, but not winning.

### 22...Rxf7 23 Bxg7 Qxd1 24 Rxd1 Nxf2! 25 Kxf2 Bxf3 26 gxf3 Rc2+ 27 Kg3 Kxg7 28 Rb3 Rxa2 29 Rd7 Ra5

29...e6? allows 30 Rxf7+ Kxf7 31 Rb7+ Kf6 32 Rxh7 and White has reasonable hopes of drawing.

### 30 h4 h6 31 Rc3 e6 32 Rd6 Kf6 33 Re3 Re7 34 Re4 g5 35 Rc6 Re5?

Probably time trouble was influencing the players here. 35...gxh4+ 36 Rxh4 h5 should be winning.

### 36 Ra4?

This leads by force to a losing endgame. After 36 Rxe5! Kxe5 37 hxg5 hxg5 38 Kg4 Kf6 39 Ra6 White should be able to draw easily.

### 36...gxh4+ 37 Rxh4 h5 38 Ra6 Rg7+ 39 Kf2 Rb7 40 Rha4 Rb2+ 41 Kg3 Rg5+ 42 Kh3 Rb3 43 Kh4 Rf5

43...Rxf3? gives away the draw to 44 Rxe6+! Kxe6 45 Ra6+! (but not 45 Kxg5? Rf5+).

### 44 f4 (Diagram 21)

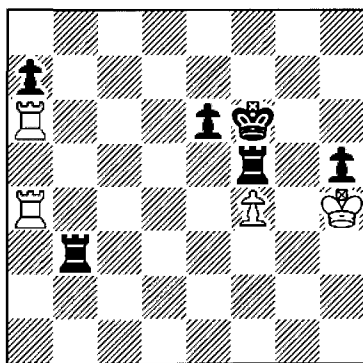


Diagram 21 (B)  
Beware stalemate!

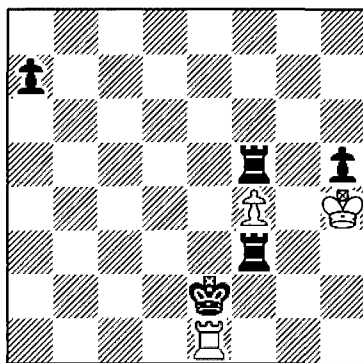


Diagram 22 (B)  
Perpetual or stalemate?

### 44...Rb7?

This throws the win away. However, 44...Rf3? is met by the stunner 45

Rxe6+!! when Black cannot avoid the draw after 45...Kxe6 46 Ra6+ Kd5 47 Ra5+ Ke4 48 Ra4+ Ke3 49 Ra3+ Kf2 50 Ra2+ Kg1 51 Rg2+ Kf1 52 Rg1+ Ke2 53 Re1+ (**Diagram 22**). It's a case of the 'eternal rook'.

The correct way to win is 44...Re3! 45 Rxa7 Rf3 46 Rf7+!? Kg6!! (46...Kxf7? 47 Ra7+ Kg6 48 Rg7+ with stalemate or perpetual) 47 Rg7+ Kxg7 48 Ra7+ Rf7 (Leko).

**45 Re4 Re7 46 Rea4 Rb5?!**

This simply leads to a draw. After 46...Kg6!? 47 Re4 Kf7 48 Rea4 Kf6 maybe Black can still push.

**47 Rxa7 Rxa7 48 Rxa7 Rb4 49 Kg3 Rb3+ 50 Kg2 Kf5 51 Ra5+ Kxf4 52 Rxh5** ½-½

Game 37

□ J.Tella ■ T.Nyback

Jyvaskyla 2001

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 a4**

This is not considered to be dangerous for Black.

**4...bxc4**

Another natural move is 4...b4; after 5 g3 e5 6 dxe6 (otherwise Black is fine) 6...fxe6 7 Bg2 d5 8 Nh3 Bb7 9 Bg5 (P.Meister-N.Andrianov, Budapest 1989) Black should play 9...h6 10 Bxf6 Qxf6 with chances for both sides.

**5 Nc3 d6 6 e4 Ba6**

Yes indeed, why not try to hold on to the pawn for a few moves longer? That said, Black should also get good counterplay after 6...g6, for example 7 f4 (or 7 Nf3 Bg7 8 Nd2 0-0 9 Nxc4 Nbd7 10 Be2 Nb6 11 Ne3 a5 12 0-0 e6 with complex play, S.Klimov-H.Kallio, Stockholm 1999) 7...Bg7 8 Bxc4 0-0 9 Nf3 Ba6 10 Nd2 e6!? 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 Bxe6+ Kh8 13 Bc4 d5!? 14 Bxa6 (14 exd5 Re8+ 15 Kf2 Bxc4 16 Nxc4 Ne4+ 17 Nxe4 Rxe4 gives Black good counterplay) 14...Nxa6 15 0-0 dxe4 16 Ndxe4 Qd4+ 17 Nf2 Nb4 18 Nb5 Qxd1 19 Nxd1 Nc2 20 Rb1 Nd5 21 Ndc3 Ndb4 with compensation, A.Vaisser-S.Lputian, USSR 1983.

**7 f4 Nbd7 8 Nf3 g6 9 Be2 Bg7 10 e5!?** (**Diagram 23**)

White goes for it. After 10 0-0 0-0 11 Nd2 Rb8 12 Bxc4 Bxc4 13 Nxc4 Rb4 14 Qe2 Qa8 both players have active play.

**10...dxe5 11 fxe5 Ng4 12 e6 Nde5**

12...fxe6?! is weak due to 13 Ng5! Bxc3+ 14 bxc3 Qa5 15 Nxe6!? with some initiative.

**13 Ng5 f5 14 Nf7 Qb8!**

A very imaginative exchange sacrifice. Less convincing is 14...Nxf7 15 exf7+ Kxf7 16 Bxg4 fxg4 17 0-0+ Bf6 18 Qxg4.

**15 Nxh8 Bxh8 16 Nb5**

16 0-0?? loses to 16...Nf3+!.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 16...Qb7

Also interesting is 16...Nd3+!? 17 Bxd3 cxd3 18 Qxd3 Bd4 with substantial play for the exchange.

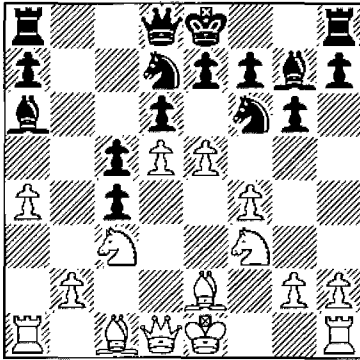


Diagram 23 (B)  
White goes for it

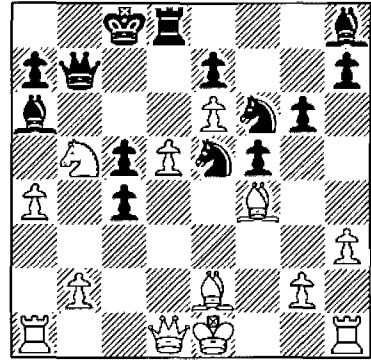


Diagram 24 (W)  
Did White miss 18...0-0-0?

### 17 h3 Nf6 18 Bf4

It's easy to forget about such moves as queenside castling when the position is so open. 18 0-0 Bxb5 19 axb5 Nxd5, with unclear play, was possibly better.

**18...0-0-0! (Diagram 24) 19 Bxe5 Rxd5 20 Qc2 Rxe5 21 0-0 Qe4 22 Qxe4 Nxe4 23 Bxc4 Nd2 24 Nxa7+ Kb7 25 Bxa6+ Kxa7 26 Rfd1 Rd5 27 Bb5?!**

Better was 27 Be2, though after 27...Bxb2 28 Ra2 Bd4+ 29 Kh1 Ne4 Black retains a strong initiative.

**27...Bxb2 28 Rab1 Bd4+ 29 Kh1 Nxb1 30 Rxb1 Rd6 31 Re1 Bf2 32 Rf1 Bg3 33 Bc4 Rd4 34 Bb5 Re4 35 Bd7 c4 36 Kg1 c3 0-1**

Game 38

□ R.Kempiski ■ K.Miton

Zakopane 2000

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Qc2

Other very rare options White has tried include:

a) 4 e4?! simply looks wrong: 4...Nxe4 5 Qf3 Qa5+ 6 Nd2 Nd6 7 cxb5 and now:

a1) 7...Bb7 8 Nh3 a6 9 b6 c4 10 Nf4 g5 11 Nh5!? Qxd5 (but not 11...Bxd5 12 Qe3 Be6 13 b4! cxb3 14 Bb2 Rg8 15 axb3 when White has compensation – Mirkovic) 12 Qe3 Qe6 13 Qxe6 dxe6 14 Nxc4 Nxc4 15 Bxc4 Bxg2 16 Rg1 with unclear play.

a2) 7...Nxb5 8 d6?! (White had little choice but to keep the madness going with 8 b4!? cxb4 9 Nb3 Qa4 10 Nh3 with a complete mess) 8...Nc6 9 Bxb5 Qxb5 10

Ne2 e6 11 0-0 Ba6 12 Re1 Qd3 13 Qxd3 Bxd3 14 Nf4 Nb4 and White was in deep trouble in D.Shchukin-A.Khalifman, St Petersburg 1998.

b) 4 f3 has not found many followers. Black could play 4...g6 5 e4 d6 6 cxb5 a6 (transposing to 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 g6 6 e4 d6) or 4...bxc4 e4 d6 6 Bxc4 g6 7 Ne2 Bg7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Nec3 Nbd7 10 a4 Ne5 11 Be2 c4 with counterplay.

#### 4...bxc4

4...Na6 seems to be best met by 5 a3! bxc4 6 e4 e6 7 Bxc4 exd5 8 exd5 Bd6 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0 Nc7 11 Nc3 with a slight advantage for White.

#### 5 e4 e6

5...d6 6 Bxc4 g6 7 Nf3 Bg7 8 0-0 0-0 9 h3 should be a bit better for White. A.Raetsky-O.Niklasch, Taastrup 2002 continued 9...Nbd7 10 Re1 Rb8 11 Nc3 Qb6 12 Na4 Qb7 13 Bd2 Nb6 14 Nxb6 Qxb6 15 Bc3 when White clearly had a more pleasant position.

#### 6 Bxc4 exd5 7 exd5 d6 8 Nc3 Be7

It would be too soon to commit with the queenside bishop just yet; after 8...Bb7 9 Nge2 Be7 10 Ng3 0-0 11 0-0 g6 12 Bg5 Nbd7 13 Rae1 Re8 14 f4 White has a nice attacking position. The game S.Mamedyarov-B.Galstian, Peniscola 2002 shows how dangerous the attack really is: 14...h6 15 f5! Kg7 (15...hxg5 16 fxg6 Rf8 17 Nf5 Ne5 18 Rxe5! dxe5 19 d6 and White wins) 16 fxg6 fxg6 17 Bf4 Ng4 18 h3 Nge5 19 Bxe5+ Nxe5 20 Rxe5! dxe5 21 Nh5+! gxh5 22 Rf7+! 1-0.

#### 9 h3 0-0 10 Nf3 Nbd7 11 0-0 Nb6 12 b3 Nxc4 13 bxc4 Rb8

Also possible was the following plan: 13...Nd7 14 a4 Nb6 15 Nd2 Bf6 16 Ra2 a5 17 Nb5 Ba6 with unclear play.

#### 14 Bf4 Ba6 15 Nd2 Nh5 16 Bh2 Bg5 17 Nce4 Nf4 18 Rab1 Rxb1 19 Rxb1 Bh6

19...Re8? fails to 20 Nxc5 Qxc5 21 Bxf4 Qxf4 22 Qa4! Rf8 23 Qxa6 Qxd2 24 Qxd6 when White is a pawn up, 24...Qxa2?? losing to 25 Rb8!.

#### 20 Nf1 Qe7 21 Ne3 f5 22 Nc3 (Diagram 25)

White underestimates Black's attack. Better was 22 Ng3 g6 23 Re1 Bg7 when Black has a very sound position, but White also has things to be proud of.

#### 22...Nxc3+! 23 gxc3 Bxc3 24 fxe3 Qxc3+ 25 Kg2 f4

Black has more than enough attacking chances for the piece.

#### 26 Nd1 f3+ 27 Kf1?!

27 Kh1 Qe1+ 28 Bg1 was stronger, when Black has a better endgame after 28...Bxc4!? 29 Qxc4 f2 30 Nxf2 Qxb1.

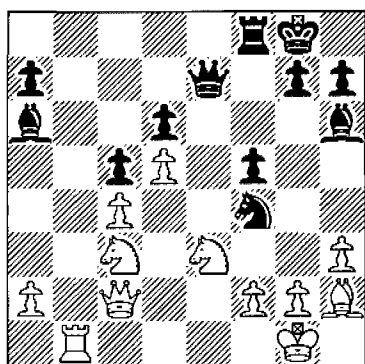
#### 27...Qg5

27...Qh6!? is also very dangerous; one possible variation is 28 Nf2 Bc8 29 Qc3 Bxh3+ 30 Ke1 Bd7 31 Bg3 Qg6 and Black wins.

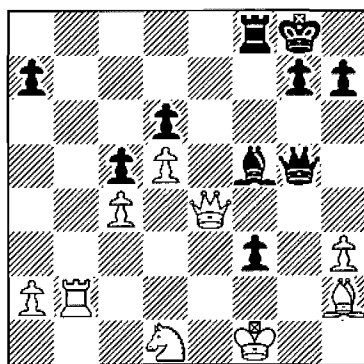
#### 28 Rb2 Bc8

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

28...Qh4, with a clear advantage, was maybe more natural. After something like 29 Qf2 Qxc4+ 30 Kg1 Qc1 31 Rd2 Be2 Black is winning.



**Diagram 25 (B)**  
Underestimating Black's attack



**Diagram 26 (W)**  
Black is drifting

### 29 Qe4 Bf5? (Diagram 26)

Black is losing the intensity in his attack. After 29...Bxh3+! 30 Ke1 Bd7 White is not certain to survive.

**30 Qe3 Qg6 31 Qg1 Bxh3+ 32 Kf2 Qf6 33 Rd2 Bg2 34 Qe1 Qh4+?**

Black is deciding to go for pawns instead of activity, which is a bad choice.




34...Bh3 35 Bg3 Bd7 36 Ne3 Re8 gave much better counterplay.

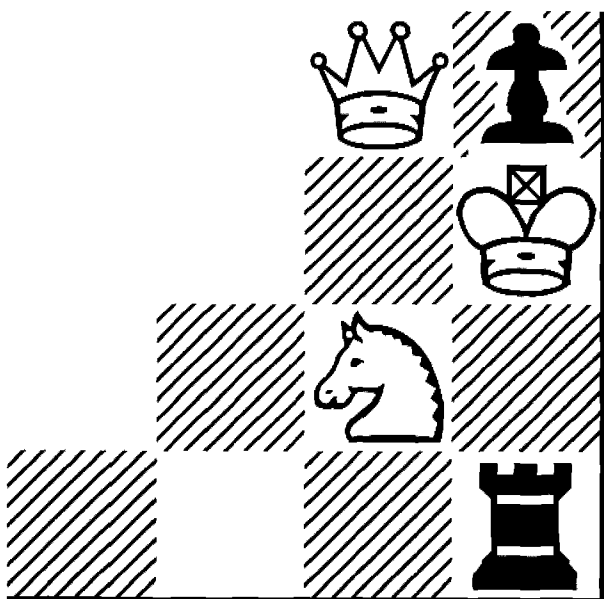
**35 Bg3 Qxc4 36 Bxd6 Qh4+ 37 Bg3 Qd8 38 Qe6+ Kh8 39 d6 Re8 40 Qf5 c4 41 Ne3 c3 42 Rc2 Qb6 43 Rxc3 Qd4 44 Qd3 Qf6 45 Rc7 Bh3 46 Qc3 Qh6 47 Re7 Rg8 48 Qd4 1-0**

## Chapter Four

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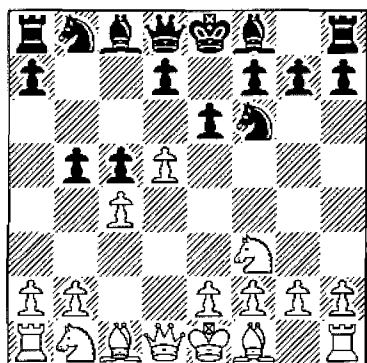
# The Blumenfeld Gambit and Volga/Blumenfeld Hybrids

-  Introduction
-  The Blumenfeld Gambit
-  Volga/Blumenfeld Hybrids

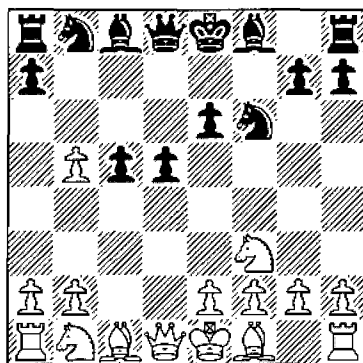


## The Blumenfeld Gambit

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 (Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1 (W)**  
A Benoni and a Volga!



**Diagram 2 (W)**  
Black takes over the centre

The idea of this gambit belongs to the Moscow master and psychologist Blumenfeld. Unfortunately, it has been impossible to find any games where he employed it. On the other hand, Alekhine certainly played it, and thanks to his brilliant win over Tarrasch in 1922 the Blumenfeld found quite a few supporters.

It is natural that this new opening was discovered when hypermodernists declared that putting pressure on the centre rather than occupying it (unlike previously fashionable orthodox variations) was a higher priority. The Blumenfeld Gambit perfectly met this new vision; the pawn on e6 attacks the advanced d5-pawn, and then the advance ...b7-b5 undermines the supporting c4-pawn. After 5 dxex6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 (**Diagram 2**), as seen in Game 39, White's centre dies and its place is occupied by Black's pawns.

Under this strong pawn shield Alekhine prepared and successfully carried out an attack on Tarrasch's king.

The evaluation of 5 dxex6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 is not as simple as it may seem from this first experience of the gambit. White wins a pawn and Black's centre can come under attack after 7 g3; not only in view of Bf1-g2, but also Bf1-h3. The more modern continuation 6...Bb7 (Black is in no hurry to play ...d7-d5) also has its drawbacks – White has enough resources to maintain his extra pawn and neutralise the formidable bishop on b7 (7 Nbd2!?). However, by giving up the centre White yields to some extent and that is why other possibilities on move five have been tested.

5 cxb5 (Alapin) has been buried – after 5...exd5 Black dominates in the centre

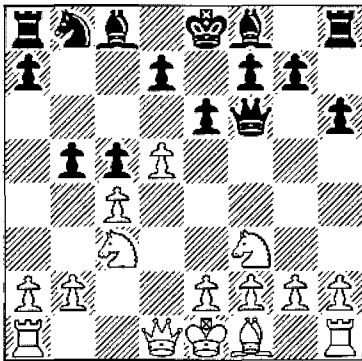
## The Blumenfeld Gambit and Volga/Blumenfeld Hybrids

while maintaining the material balance. The positional continuation 5 a4 (Rubinstein) seems to be a loss of tempo after either 5...b4 or 5...bxc4. On the contrary, Rubinstein's other patent, the counter-gambit 5 e4!?, allows White to gain time for the attack after 5...Nxe4 (the strongest) with a quick Bd3 – here there is much to study.

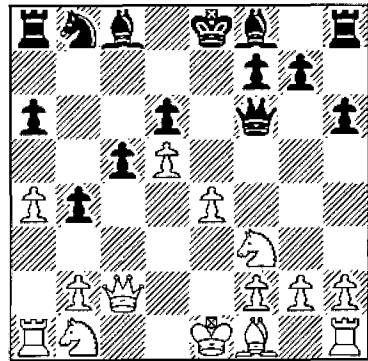
The Blumenfeld Gambit dramatically lost its popularity almost straight after its appearance. The novelty 5 Bg5!?, employed by Duz-Khotimirsky in 1922, is a good explanation for that. The pin is very unpleasant because it prepares the central advance e2-e4. Black started suffering defeats, and in the second half of the 20th century the Blumenfeld Gambit was kept in the background by its younger relative – the Volga Gambit.

In reply to 5 Bg5!? Black sometimes closes his queenside with 5...b4, reaching a passive but solid position. 5...bxc4 was played in the original game (Duz-Khotimirsky against Levenfish), when a transposition to the Closed Benoni, 6 Nc3 d6 7 e4 e5, appears to be favourable for White. 5...Qa5+ (Game 40) also has a long history. Now 6 Bd2 gives nothing in view of 6...Qb6. White can also block the check with his knight (6 Nc3 or 6 Nbd2), but the unclear consequences of these moves haven't been deeply studied. Normally White proceeds with 6 Qd2, giving a pretty complicated position despite the queen swap. After the inevitable exchange Bg5xf6, ...g7xf6 Black's central pawns are potentially dangerous; however, in practice they are often under pressure.

Black often 'puts the question' to the white bishop with 5...h6 (Game 41). After 6 Bxf6 Qxf6 White has a choice between 7 Qc2 and 7 Nc3 (**Diagram 3**).



**Diagram 3 (B)**  
White plans e2-e4



**Diagram 4 (W)**  
A main line

Against 7 Qc2 it is reasonable to close the queenside (7...b4) and to plan the advance of the g-pawn in reply to the advance of the white e-pawn. The conflict between e2-e4-e5 and ...g7-g5-g4 leads to very complex and atypical positions. If 7 Nc3 the key position arises after 7...b4 8 Nb5. Then 8...Na6 deprives

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Black of the threat ...a7-a6, so Rogers introduced the risky 8...Kd8!?

The exchange in the centre 5...exd5 6 cxd5 (Game 42) puts off Black's choice. After 6...Qa5 7 Bd2 Qd8!? the awkward positioning of the bishop on d2 forces White to start from scratch with 8 Bg5), so critical is 7 Nc3 Ne4. If 6...d6 the most interesting line is 7 e4 a6 8 a4 Be7!? and after 9 Bxf6 Bxf6 the attack on the b5-pawn is met by the attack on the b2-pawn. After 6...h6 7 Bxf6 Qxf6 the continuation 8 Nc3!? is considered to be virtually a mistake. But if you are not afraid of sacrificing a pawn for better development with 8...b4 9 Ne4!? Qxb2 10 e3, it is possible to play like this. However, the fundamental line is 8 Qc2 d6 9 e4 a6 10 a4 b4 (**Diagram 4**), when White hopes to gain an advantage with the breakthrough e4-e5 (Chernin-Miles. Van der Stricht-Ikonnikov).

## Statistics

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In the Blumenfeld Gambit Black achieved 43%, which is certainly not bad. It is quite natural that White has the better chances in the main lines 5 Bg5 (60%) and 5 dxe6 (56%).

## Theoretical?

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No – the Blumenfeld Gambit remains on the edges of theory. One of the reasons is that Black cannot reach it after the following move orders: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 and 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3. That is why the Blumenfeld Gambit cannot be the main reply to 1 d4 in Black's repertoire.

## Theoretical Status

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Despite the conventional wisdom it is fairly respectable. The continuation 5 dxe6 can be favourable for White, but in a pretty confused and complicated position. The 'refutation' of the gambit, 5 Bg5, gives Black a wide variety of good defensive lines, each of them having a fighting nature, so Black can choose his favourite.

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*Game 39*

□ S.Tarrasch ■ A.Alekhine

Pistyan 1922

---

**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 c4 c5 4 d5 b5 5 dxe6**

Accepting the pawn is playable but not recognised as the main choice. 5 Bg5 is considered in the next three games, while some other offbeat alternatives are:

a) 5 a4 bxc4!? (Black is fine after the solid is 5...b4 6 Bg5 d6 7 e4 h6 8 Bxf6 Qxf6 9 Qc2 e5 10 Be2 Be7) 6 Nc3 exd5 7 Nxd5 Bb7 8 e4!? Nxd5 (8...Nxe4?! 9 Bxc4 gives White control over d5 and therefore an advantage; now Black can lose quickly with 9...Qa5+?! 10 b4! cxb4? 11 Qd4! Nd6 12 Qe5+ Kd8 13 Bg5+ f6 14 Bxf6+ gxf6 15 Qxf6+ Kc8 16 Qxh8 when f8 hangs) 9 exd5 Qe7+ 10 Be2 Qe4 11 0-0 Qxd5 12 Qc2 Be7 13 Bxc4 Qh5 with chances for both sides (but maybe

## The Blumenfeld Gambit and Volga/Blumenfeld Hybrids

more for Black!), Pham Minh Hoang-L.Vajda, Budapest 2002.

b)  $\bar{5} e4!$ ? (Diagram 5) is probably too 'modern'!

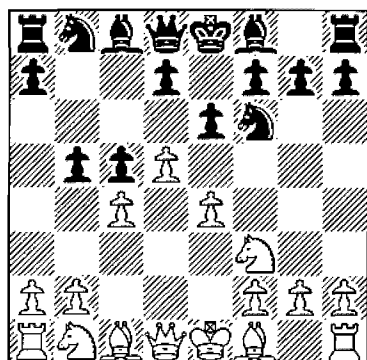


Diagram 5 (B)

$5 e4!$ ?

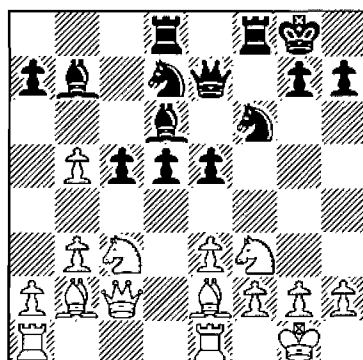


Diagram 6 (B)

An impressive centre

White is doing well after  $5...bxc4!$ ?  $6 Nc3 exd5 7 e5! d4 8 exf6 d5 9 Nxd4!$ ?  $cx d4 10 Qxd4$ , so Black should play  $5...Nxe4 6 dxe6$  (or  $6 Bd3 exd5 7 cxd5 Nd6!$ ?  $8 0-0 c4 9 Re1+ Be7 10 Bg5 f6 11 Bf4 0-0 12 Bc2 Bb7$  with an atypical and unclear position)  $6...fxe6 7 Bd3 Nf6$  (also fine is  $7...Bb7!$ ?  $8 Qe2 Nd6 9 cxb5 Be7$  when the big centre and active pawns gives Black the advantage)  $8 Ng5 Qe7$  ( $8...bxc4!$ ?  $9 Bxh7 Qc7 10 Bg6+ Ke7$  is not clear at all)  $9 Qc2$  (or  $9 cxb5 Bb7 10 0-0 g6 11 Re1 Bg7 12 Nc3 0-0$  with unclear play)  $9...d5!$ ? (Tartakower)  $10 Bxh7!$ ?  $bxc4 11 Bg6+ Kd7 12 Nf7 Rh4 13 Bg5$ . Here we think White is doing well, but Black had enough decent alternatives along the way.

### $5...fxe6 6 cxb5 d5$

Some 15 years ago Mikhail Gurevich came up with a new way of playing this position –  $6...Bb7!$ ?. A promising way to face this idea is  $7 Nbd2!$ ?  $Be7 8 Qc2 Qa5 9 e3 a6$  (or  $9...0-0 10 Qc3 Qxc3 11 bxc3 a6 12 Bb2 axb5 13 Bxb5$  and I guess we are simply talking about an extra pawn?!)  $10 Qc3 axb5 11 Qxa5 Rxa5 12 Nb3 Ra4 13 Bxb5 Rg4 14 Kf1 Rb4 15 Be2 Nc6 16 Nbd2 d5 17 b3$  and we believe Black's compensation is not quite enough for a pawn, H.Koneru-I.Rogers, Wijk aan Zee 2003.

### $7 e3$

This might seem a little passive, but no better alternative exists:

a)  $7 Bg5 Be7 8 e3 0-0 9 Be2 Nbd7 10 Nc3 Bb7 11 0-0 Qc7 12 Rc1 Rae8$  gives Black fine counterplay – it isn't clear the bishop is correctly placed on  $g5$ .

b)  $7 g3!$ ?  $Bd6 8 Bg2$  (we actually like the non-stereotypical  $8 Bh3!$ ?  $0-0 9 0-0 a6 10 bxa6 Nc6 11 Nc3 Rxa6 12 b3 d4 13 Nb5$ , when White might have some advantage)  $8...0-0 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 Nc3 Bb7 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 13 Nd2$

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

(V.Eingorn-F.Handke, Metz 2000). Now after 13...Qf7 14 Qc2 Nf6 15 b3 Rab8 we cannot decide who is better or why!

**7...Bd6 8 Nc3 0-0 9 Be2**

9 e4!? is a sensible suggestion from Euwe. After 9...Bc7 10 Be2 Bb7 11 0-0 Nbd7 both players have their plusses.

**9...Bb7 10 b3 Nbd7 11 Bb2 Qe7 12 0-0 Rad8 13 Qc2 e5 14 Rfe1 (Diagram 6)**

Often with this kind of structure it is important for White to prevent the ...e5-e4 push. This can only be achieved with 14 e4!? when it makes no sense for Black to accept the pawn. Instead 14...d4 15 Bc4+ Kh8 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 Bxd5 Bxd5 18 exd5 d3!? 19 Qc3 is pretty unclear: Black gets to advance his pawn anyway, but White has time to activate his pieces and put pressure on Black's position.

**14...e4 15 Nd2 Ne5 16 Nd1?!**

16 h3 Rf7 17 Rad1 Rdf8 18 Nf1 Qe6 was better, although Black still has good play. Now Black's attack becomes very dangerous.

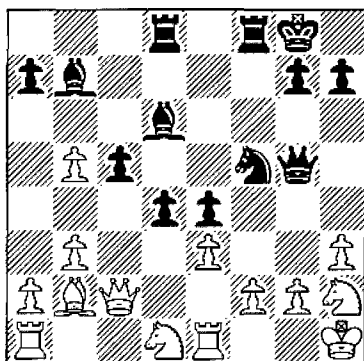
**16...Nfg4 17 Bxg4**

17 Nf1?! fails to 17...Nf3+! 18 gxf3 exf3 19 Bd3 Qh4.

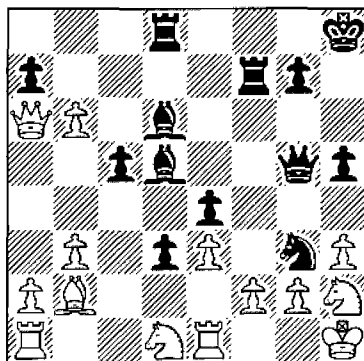
**17...Nxxg4 18 Nf1 Qg5!**

White suddenly feels the attack very intensely.

**19 h3 Nh6 20 Kh1 Nf5 21 Nh2 d4! (Diagram 7)**



**Diagram 7 (B)**  
Gaining momentum



**Diagram 8 (W)**  
Typical Alekhine

**22 Bc1**

22 exd4 allows Black to open up with 22...e3! 23 Qc4+ (23 Rg1 Ng3+!) 23...Rf7 24 Ng4 exf2 25 Ndx2 h5, winning.

**22...d3 23 Qc4+ Kh8 24 Bb2 Ng3+!**

A nice punch from the 'master of attack'; 25 fxc3? Qxc3 will mate.

25 Kg1 Bd5 26 Qa4 Ne2+ 27 Kh1 Rf7 28 Qa6 h5 29 b6 Ng3+!? (Diagram 8)



**TIP:** When you are attacking your opponent's king, usually you want to soften up one colour of square (the dark ones here) and open things up for all your pieces. Rarely do you want to count pawns.

Typical Alekhine. Black also wins after 29...axb6 30 Rxe2 dxc2 31 Qxe2 Be6.

30 Kg1 axb6 31 Qxb6 d2! 32 Rf1 Nxf1 33 Nxf1 Be6! 34 Kh1

34 Qc6 also does not help after the elegant 34...Rf3! 35 Qxe4 (or 35 Qb7 Rg8 36 h4 Qg6 37 Nxd2 Bh3 with complete collapse) 35...Bd5 36 Qa4 Qxg2+! 37 Kxg2 Rg3+ 38 Kh2 Rg2+ 39 Kh1 Rh2+ 40 Kg1 Rh1 mate (Alekhine).

34...Bxh3 35 gxh3 Rf3 36 Ng3 h4! 37 Bf6 Qxf6 38 Nxe4 Rxh3+ 0-1

Game 40

□ M.Chetverik ■ C.Csiszar

Budapest 1996

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 Bg5!

This is clearly considered to be the main move and puts Black's system under pressure. Black has many options to create interesting play, but generally White is well developed and should be ready to face them.

5...Qa5+

5...bxc4 is best met by 6 Nc3 (6 e4 Qa5+ 7 Bd2 Qb6 8 Nc3 Nxe4!? 9 Nxe4 exd5 10 Nc3 Bb7 is not entirely clear). Now after 6...d6 7 e4 e5 8 Nd2!? Be7 9 Nxc4 0-0 10 Be2 Ba6 11 Be3 White has a nice position.

5...b4 6 e4 d6 7 Bd3 a5 8 Bc2!? Be7 9 Ba4+ Nfd7 10 dxe6 fxe6 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 leads to complex play. White probably has several ways to question Black's position after 5...b4, but we do not see any reason why it should be bad.

6 Qd2

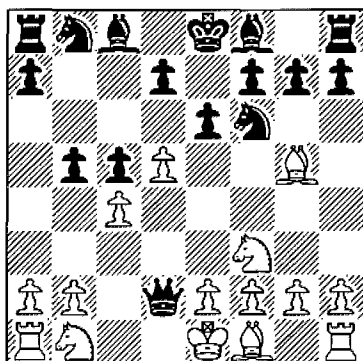
This is traditionally the strongest reply to the check, but White has also tried other options:

a) 6 Nc3 Ne4 (6...b4 7 Bxf6 gxf6 8 Ne4 Be7 9 dxe6 fxe6 10 Nd6+ Bxd6 11 Qxd6 Nc6 is unclear – Co.Ionescu) 7 Bd2 (7 cxb5!? Nxc3 8 bxc3 Qxc3+ 9 Bd2 Qc4 10 dxe6 Qxe6 11 e3 d5 is messy, but might be better for White) 7...Nxd2 8 Qxd2 b4 9 Ne4 Bb7 and Black is not worse, as demonstrated in some games.

b) 6 Nbd2!? is a strong alternative and should be considered seriously. 6...Be7 7 e4 (White can still accept the pawn with 7 dxe6 fxe6 8 cxb5 a6, but it does not make much sense to cling to it; better is 9 e4 axb5 10 e5 Nd5 11 Bd3 Nc6 12 Bxe7 Nxe7 with an unclear game) 7...Nxe4 8 Bxe7 Kxe7 (8...Nxd2? loses material to 9 Nxd2 Kxe7 10 d6+! Kxd6 11 Qf3) 9 b4 Qxb4 10 Rb1 Qc3 11 Rb3 Qa5 12 Rxb5 Qc3 13 Rb3 Qa5 14 Qb1 and White has the initiative.

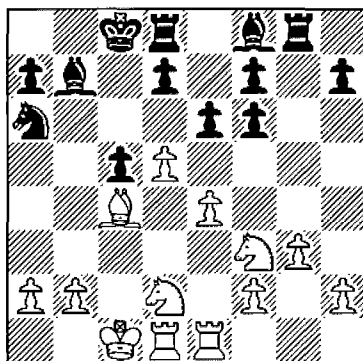
6...Qxd2+ (Diagram 9)

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems



**Diagram 9 (W)**

Which way to recapture?



**Diagram 10 (B)**

...Nc7 or ...Nb4?

### 7 Nbx d2

7 Nfxd2!? bxc4 (7...b4 looks logical) 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 Nc3 Na6 10 Nxc4 Nc7 (10...Nb4 11 0-0-0 exd5 12 Nxd5 Nxd5 13 Rxd5 Bb7 is perhaps slightly better for White, who should consider 14 Rh5) 11 e4 Ba6 12 0-0-0 Nb5 13 Nxb5 Bxb5 14 Na3 Bxf1 15 Rhxf1 and White was doing very well in M.Cebalo-D.Samovojska, Tucepi 1996.



**NOTE: White will usually benefit by having a knight on c3 in these systems, so therefore he should consider recapturing on d2 with the 'wrong knight'.**

### 7...bxc4

7...exd5 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 cxd5 Na6 10 0-0-0 d6 11 e3 Nc7 12 Ne4 favours White.

### 8 e4

A later game between the same players continued 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 e4 Rg8!? 10 g3 Na6 11 Bxc4 Nc7 12 0-0 Bb7 13 Rad1 0-0-0 14 Nb3! f5 (better is 14...d6!?!; the position after 15 Na5 Ba8 16 Nc6 Bxc6 17 dxc6 is hard to evaluate) 15 Ne5 (15 d6 Ne8 16 Ne5 Nxd6 17 Rxd6!? Bxd6 18 Nxf7 Be7 19 Nxd8 Rxd8 20 e5 Kc7 is level) 15...fxe4 16 d6 f6 17 Nf7 Re8 (Chetverik-Csiszar, Keszthely 2003), and here 18 dxc7 Kxc7 19 Rc1 is better for White.

### 8...Bb7 9 Bxf6 gxf6 10 Bxc4 Na6 11 0-0-0

Simpler is 11 0-0 Nc7 12 Rad1 d6 13 Rfe1 0-0-0 14 Nb3 Ba8 15 Na5, when we slightly prefer White.

### 11...Rg8 12 g3 0-0-0 13 Rhe1 (Diagram 10) 13...Nc7

Interesting here is 13...Nb4!?, putting pressure on d5. Now 15 exd5 Nxd5 16 Ne4 Nc7 gives Black counterplay through his two bishops. Instead after 14 a3

## The Blumenfeld Gambit and Volga/Blumenfeld Hybrids

exd5 15 Bb5!? a6 16 Bf1 dxe4 17 Nxe4 f5 18 Nd6+ Bxd6 19 Rxd6 Kc7 20 Rf6 it appears that it is Black who has most to fear because of the weak pawns. However, he has a strong option in 20...Na2+ 21 Kb1 Bxf3 22 Kxa2 Bd5+ 23 Kb1 Be6, when the advance of the d- and c-pawns gives good play.

**14 Nb3 d6 15 Nh4 f5**

White would be dominating after the weak 15...exd5 16 exd5 Rg5 17 f4 Rh5 18 Na5 Bxd5 19 Bxd5 Rxd5 20 Rxd5 Nxd5 21 Nc6 Rd7 22 Re8+ Kc7 23 Nxa7. However, the best was 15...Be7 16 Na5 Ba8, when the position is very unclear.

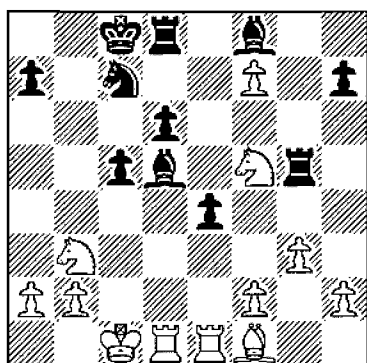
**16 dxe6**

This seems like the real test of Black's position. Now White is better after 16...fxe6?! 17 exf5 d5 18 Bf1.

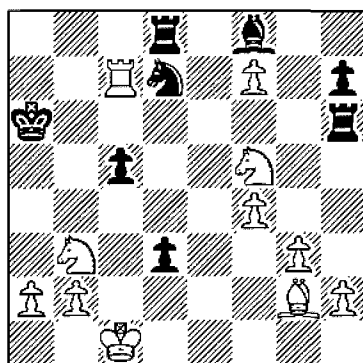
**16...fxe4 17 exf7 Rg7 18 Nf5 Rg5**

18...d5? 19 Nxc7 dxc4 20 Rxd8+ Kxd8 doesn't work because of 21 Na5!.

**19 Bf1! Bd5 (Diagram 11)**



**Diagram 11 (W)**  
White keeps the f7-pawn



**Diagram 12 (B)**  
Both players make mistakes

**20 Rxd5!**



**TIP:** Often a passed pawn on the seventh rank can tie down your opponent's pieces so effectively that it is worth sacrificing material to hold on to it, even if there is no visible prospect of promoting it.

**20...Nxd5 21 Bh3 Kc7 22 Rxe4 Rh5 23 Nh4 Nf6?!**

From here on Black plays quite passively and ends up worse. 23...Be7 24 Bg4 Re5 25 Nxc5 Rxe4 26 Nxe4 Bxh4 27 gxh4 probably still leaves White better in the endgame, but 23...Nb4!? 24 Kb1 Re5 25 f3 is quite unclear.

**24 Ra4 Ra8 25 Bg2 d5 26 Ra6 Nd7 27 Re6 Rd8 28 f4 d4?**

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Opening things up for White's bishop. Better was 28...Bg7 29 Bf3 Rxb4 30 gxb4 c4, though after 31 Na5 White is still doing well.

**29 Ra6 d3 30 Rxa7+ Kb6 31 Rb7+ Ka6 32 Rc7 Rh6 33 Nf5? (Diagram 12)**

Both players were in time trouble now, and the level of play declined. 33 a4 Rf6 34 Rc6+ Rxc6 35 Bxc6 leaves Black suffering without counterplay.

**33...Re6?**

33...Rxb2 34 Be4 Rc2+ 35 Kd1 c4 would give Black strong counterplay.

**34 Bd5?**

34 Rc6+ Rxc6 35 Bxc6 and White should win without too much trouble.

**34...Rf6?**

This is very passive. Better was 34...Re2 35 a4 Nf6 36 Bf3 Ne4 37 Bxe4 Rxe4 when the full point is still in play. Now White wins easily.

**35 Ne3 Nb6 36 Nxc5+ Kb5 37 a4+ Kb4 38 Nxd3+ Kxa4 39 b3+ Kb5 40 Be4 Re6 41 Ne5 Bd6 42 Bd3+ Ka5 43 Nc6 mate (1-0)**

Game 41

□ L.Polugaevsky ■ L.Ljubojevic

Manila 1975

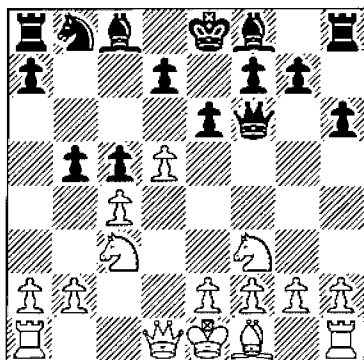
**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 Bg5 h6 6 Bxf6!**

This exchange gives White the advantage through his lead in development. 6 Bh4 bxc4!? 7 dxe6 fxe6 8 Qc2 Nc6 9 Qg6+ Ke7 10 e4 Qe8 11 Qxe8+ Kxe8 12 Nc3 is not completely clear.

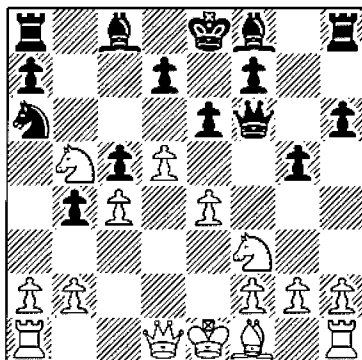


**NOTE: If the Blumenfeld is to be refuted, then it will be through the line of quick development starting with 5 Bg5 h6 6 Bxf6.**

**6...Qxf6 7 Nc3 (Diagram 13)**



**Diagram 13 (B)**  
White chooses development



**Diagram 14 (W)**  
Too ambitious?

## The Blumenfeld Gambit and Volga/Blumenfeld Hybrids

Again the most aggressive developing move. After the more cautious 7 Qc2 Black has time to create active play and use his two bishops purposefully. Black continues with 7...b4!, restricting the b1-knight, delaying White development and thus reducing the development disadvantage: 8 e4 g5 9 e5 (or 9 Nbd2 g4 10 Ng1 Bg7 11 Rb1 h5 12 Bd3 d6 13 Ne2 Nd7 14 f4 with unclear play, P.Nikolic-A.Miles, Tunisia 1985) 9...Qg7 10 h3 h5!? (10...Bb7 is more natural, but White would react with 11 Nbd2! exd5 12 cxd5 Bxd5 13 Ne4 Be7 14 Bc4 Bb7 15 0-0-0 with a serious initiative) 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 Bd3 g4 13 Bg6+ Kd8 14 Ng5 Qxe5+ 15 Be4 with a complete mess.

### 7...b4 8 Nb5 Na6

8...Kd8!? was suggested by Rogers, but after 9 a3!? Qxb2 10 axb4 Qxb4+ 11 Nd2 exd5 12 e3 a6 13 cxd5 White has a serious lead in development.

### 9 e4 g5?! (Diagram 14)

This move is very ambitious and is according to Black's dreams of dominance on the long diagonal. But at the same time it pays too little attention to White's lead in development. Alternatively:

a) 9...Qxb2 seems dangerous, but is possible: 10 Bd3 Bb7 (10...Qf6?! 11 e5 Qd8 12 dxe6 dxe6 13 Be4 Qxd1+ 14 Rxd1 Rb8 15 Bc6+ Ke7 16 Nxa7 g5 17 Bb5 Bg7 18 Nc6+ 1-0 E.Grünfeld-E.Bogoljubow, Vienna 1922) 11 a3 exd5 12 exd5 Be7 13 0-0 and White clearly has the initiative for the pawn.

b) 9...e5, preventing the advance of White's pawn, is the best move. Now after 10 Be2 Bd6 11 Nxd6+ Qxd6 12 0-0 Qf6 13 d6 the position is quite unbalanced.

### 10 e5!?

White continues his aggressive strategy. 10 Bd3 g4 11 Nd2 Qxb2 12 0-0 Be7 13 a3 also gives him good compensation, even if it seems to be less testing.

### 10...Qf4

Or 10...Qg7 11 h3 Bb7 12 a3 Be7 13 Be2 exd5 14 axb4 with the initiative.

### 11 Bd3 g4 12 Qd2!

Black's only active piece is his queen, so naturally White exchanges it.

### 12...Qxd2+ 13 Nxd2 Kd8

Black decides to keep the king in the centre, but really there are no good moves. White also had a clear superiority after 13...Bg7 14 f4 gxf3 15 Nxf3 0-0 16 0-0-0 Rb8 17 Be4 Bb7 18 Rhe1 in E.Najer-V.Malakhov, Moscow 2003.

### 14 dxe6

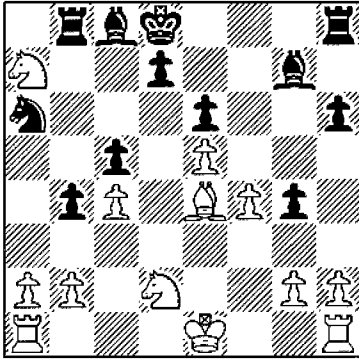
Perhaps White had an even clearer way to obtain complete domination: 14 Be4!? Bb7 (14...Rb8 15 Nxa7 and a pawn is a pawn!) 15 dxe6 Bxe4 16 Nxe4 fxe6 17 0-0-0 Bg7 18 Rd6 (Polugaevsky) and with Rhd1 coming, Black is in a bad state.

### 14...fxe6 15 Be4 Rb8 16 Nxa7 Bg7 17 f4 (Diagram 15)

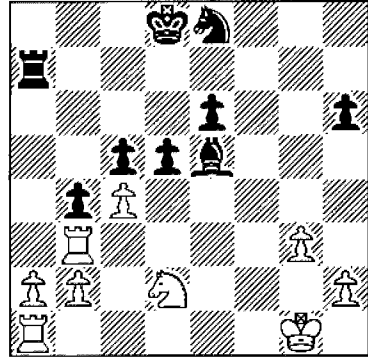
Also interesting is 17 Nxc8 Kxc8 18 f4 d6 19 0-0-0 dxe5 20 f5 with active play.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

but we prefer Polugaevsky's solution.



**Diagram 15 (B)**  
Better structure



**Diagram 16 (B)**  
Too passive



**TIP: When you have a clear structural advantage it is sensible to avoid unnecessary complications.**

17...gxf3 18 Nxf3 Bb7 19 Bxb7 Rxb7 20 Nb5 Rf8

Or 20...d5 21 exd6 Bxb2 22 Rb1 Bf6 23 0-0 and Black has many problems.

21 0-0

It is not clear why the king needs to go into the corner. The more natural 21 Ke2 Nc7 22 Nd6 Ra7 23 a3 bxa3 24 Rxa3 Rxa3 25 bxa3 Ne8 26 Ne4 (Polugaevsky) is also very strong for White.

21...Nc7 22 Nd6 Ra7 23 g3 Ne8 24 Ne4 Rxf3! 25 Rxf3 Bxe5 26 Rb3 d5 27 Nd2?! (Diagram 16)

This is too passive: White holds onto the extra material, but in doing so he lets his pieces down. The right course of action was 27 Rd1! Bd4+ 28 Rxd4 cxd4 29 cxd5 exd5 30 Nc5 Rxa2 31 Rxb4 with advantage (Polugaevsky).

27...Nd6 28 cxd5 exd5 29 Nf3 Bf6 30 Rd3 d4 31 b3 Kd7

Despite having no pawns for the exchange, we cannot see why Black should be worse here – the white rooks are unable to get into play.

32 Nd2 Bg5 33 Nc4 Nxc4 34 bxc4 Be3+ 35 Kg2 Ke6 36 Kf3 Ke5 37 Rxe3+

White needs to avoid 37 a4? Rf7+ 38 Kg4 Ke4 39 Rdd1 d3, when he is likely to lose. Now the game fizzles out.

37...dxe3 38 Rd1 Rxa2 39 Rd5+ Ke6 40 Kxe3 Rxh2 41 Rxc5 Rg2 42 Ke4  
½-½

Game 42

□ G. Van der Stricht ■ V. Ikonnikov

Belgium 2001

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 Bg5 exd5 (Diagram 17)

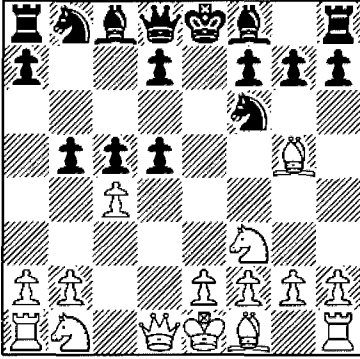


Diagram 17 (W)  
Careful!

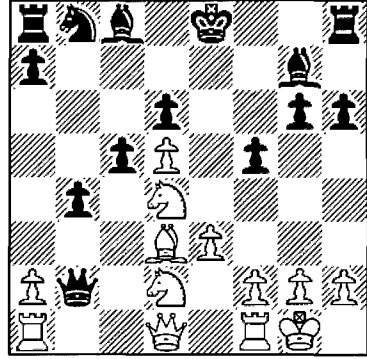


Diagram 18 (B)  
A surprising sacrifice

6 cxd5



**NOTE: 6 Bxf6 Qxf6 7 Qxd5 does not work here as 7...Qxb2 wins for Black. For example, 8 Qxa8 Qc1 mate!**

6...h6

Now this makes more sense, as can be seen in the notes to move eight. Alternatively:

a) 6...Qa5+ 7 Nc3 Ne4 8 Bd2 Nxd2 9 Nxd2 (or 9 Qxd2 d6 10 e4 b4 11 Nd1 Be7 12 Be2 0-0 13 0-0 Qc7 14 Ne3 and White is a bit better) 9...d6 (9...b4 10 Nce4 d6 11 e3 Qc7 12 Qh5 gives Black all kind of problems: both Bb5+ and a2-a3, developing an initiative, are good moves for White) 10 e3 a6 11 Bd3 Be7 12 0-0 and we prefer White.

b) 6...d6 7 e4 a6 8 a4 Be7 9 Bxf6 Bxf6 10 axb5 (10 Qc2 Qa5+ 11 Nbd2 Nd7 12 Be2 Bb7 13 0-0 Qb6 is unclear) 10...Bxb2 11 Ra2 Bf6 12 Bd3 and White has slight edge, E.Solozhenkin-Se.Ivanov, Jyvaskyla 2003.

7 Bxf6 Qxf6 8 Qc2

White can also play more aggressively with 8 Nc3!?, which involves a pawn sacrifice: 8...b4 9 Ne4! (now 9 Nb5 doesn't make a lot of sense because of 9...Qb6). 9...Qxb2 10 e3 d6 11 Bd3 (11 Rb1 Qxa2 12 Ra1 Qb2 13 Rb1 leads to an instant draw) and now:

a) 11...Bg4 12 0-0 Nd7 13 Qa4 Bxf3 14 gxf3 Qe5 15 Qc6 Rd8 16 f4 Qe7 17 f5

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

with enough play for the material. M.Chetverik-Semenov, Voronezh 1980.

b) 11...f5!? 12 Ned2 g6 13 0-0 Bg7 14 Qa4+ Bd7 15 Bb5 gives chances for both sides, but White can also play a very surprising sacrifice in 14 Nd4!!

**(Diagram 18)** – the key idea is 15 Nc4 – 14...Bxd4 15 Rb1 Qxa2 16 exd4 with wild play. We are not totally sure if White is better, but we think he is.

### 8...d6

Interesting is 8...c4!?, as suggested by Ljubojevic. Now after 9 e4 Bb4+ 10 Nc3 0-0 11 Be2 Na6 12 e5 Qb6 13 a4 bxa4 14 0-0 Bukic favours White's attacking chances, and so do we.

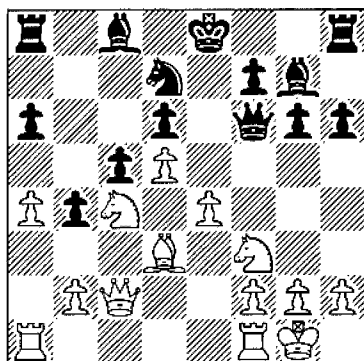
### 9 e4 a6 10 a4 b4 11 Nbd2

White can also try:

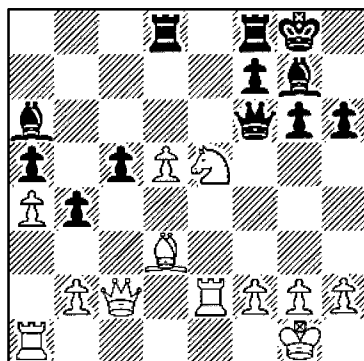
a) 11 h3 Be7 12 Bd3 Qg6 13 g4 Qf6 14 Nbd2 0-0 with very unclear play. However the weakening of the f4-square seems a little bit anti-positional, even if White is playing for a quick attack and not on fine positional judgement.

b) 11 Nfd2!? is a viable alternative. After 11...Nd7 12 Nc4 g5 13 Bd3 Bg7 14 0-0 0-0 15 Nbd2 White is a bit better.

### 11...Nd7



**Diagram 19 (B)**  
A nice outpost on c4



**Diagram 20 (W)**  
White should exchange

11...Bg4 is tempting as this bishop has problems finding a good spot later on, but White can react immediately with 12 e5! dxe5 (12...Qe7?! 13 Nc4 Bxf3 14 Nxd6+ Kd8 15 Qf5 Bg4 16 Nxf7+ Ke8 17 Qxg4 Kxf7 18 Qf5+ Ke8 19 d6 with decisive compensation) 13 Ne4 Qf4 14 Nfd2 Bf5 15 Bd3 Bxe4 16 Nxe4 Nd7 17 g3 Qg4 18 h3 Qh5 19 d6 and Black was under heavy attack in A.Chernin-A.Miles, Tunisia 1985.

### 12 Bd3 g6 13 0-0 Bg7 14 Nc4 (Diagram 19)

Here White had a very attractive pawn sacrifice in 14 e5!? dxe5 15 Ne4 Qb6 16

a5 Qc7 17 d6 Qc6 18 Rac1.

**14...0-0 15 Rfe1 a5 16 Re2**

Also interesting is 16 e5!? dxe5 17 Rac1 Rd8 18 Be4 when White has a passed pawn and active piece play for the pawn. Still, the game continuation seems solid and dependable – for now!

**16...Ba6 17 e5 dxe5 18 Nfxe5 Nxe5 19 Nxe5 Rad8 (Diagram 20) 20 Bc4**

A strange decision to allow Black keep his two bishops. Better was 20 Bxa6! Qxa6 21 Nc6 Rd6 22 Re4; after something like 22...c4!? 23 Rxc4 Bxb2 24 Rd1 White has the better chances.

**20...Bb7 21 Rd1 Rd6 22 Bb5**

This pawn exchange favours Black and Black alone, as his pieces suddenly spring to life. After 22 Bb3 White is okay according to our analysis: 22...Rc8 23 Nc4 Rxd5 24 Nxa5 Rxd1+ 25 Qxd1 Ba6 26 Bc4 with sufficient counterplay.

**22...Rxd5 23 Rxd5 Bxd5 24 Qxc5 Rd8 25 Bd7?**

After 25 Qc7 Qd6 26 Qxd6 Rxd6 White retains reasonable drawing chances. Now he is losing.

**25...Be6!**

The back rank mate is a problem now...

**26 Qc7 Kh7 27 g3 Qe7 28 Nxc6 Qxd7 0-1**

## Volga/Blumenfeld Hybrids

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 e6 (Diagram 21)

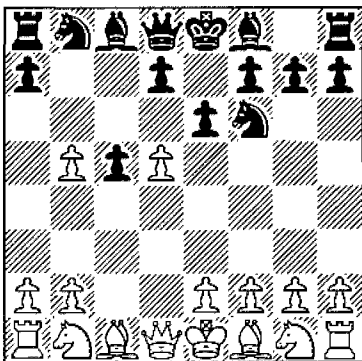


Diagram 21 (W)  
One hybrid

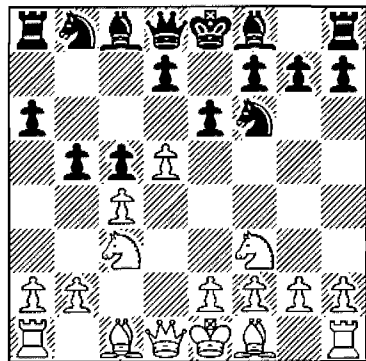


Diagram 22 (W)  
Another hybrid!

Being on the boundary between the Volga and the Blumenfeld, this variation was first played in the game E.Thorvaldsson-P.Vaitonis, Munich Olympiad

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

1936. Black diverts the c4-pawn, but then instead of offering it the chance to move further to the side with ...a7-a6, Black undermines the d5-pawn that has lost support. Undermining with ...e7-e6 is typical for the Volga Gambit, but it does not seem to be right time for it here. The b5-pawn is out of danger and after 5 Nc3 White manages to maintain his advantage in the centre. The main line (Game 43) is 5...exd5 (if 5...Bb7 White supports his pawn on d5 with e2-e4) 6 Nxd5 (also favourable is 6 Bg5 d4 7 Nd5, with dominance in the centre) 6...Bb7 7 e4 (the alternative is 7 Nxf6+ Qxf6 8 e3 followed by putting pressure on c5 and d5 – the ‘hanging’ pawns). Black has an opportunity of winning his pawn back, but after 7...Nxe4 8 Bc4 White gains the initiative.

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 a6 4 Nc3 c5 5 d5 b5 (Diagram 22)**

This was first played in the game L.Christiansen-D.Gurevich, US Championship 1983. Black undermines the centre without sacrificing. 6 e4 b4 7 e5 bxc3 8 exf6 offers White slightly better chances, but more often the attack 6 Bg5 (Game 44) is played. As against the Blumenfeld, Bg5 is unpleasant for Black. The extra moves Nc3 and ...a7-a6 improve White's foundation in the centre and Black is virtually forced to close the position with 6...b4. After 7 Ne4 the key position arises; White has an advantage in the centre but also an undeveloped kingside.

## Statistics

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With 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 e6 Black has scored 38% from 142 games: with 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 a6 4 Nc3 c5 5 d5 b5, 38% from 72 games. Despite the fact there are twice as many games in the first line, it's noteworthy that strong players prefer the second one.

## Theoretical?

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No. These hybrids have no serious theory and this is unlikely to change.

## Theoretical Status

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 e6 has only moderate theoretical status. On the contrary, 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 a6 4 Nc3 c5 5 d5 b5, while being a bit passive, is acceptable for Black. The reason is materialistic – the players have an equal number of pawns and there are no strategic imperfections in Black's position.

---

*Game 43*

□ V.Grabliauskas ■ C.Vredenburg

Berlin 1997

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 e6 5 Nc3 exd5**

5...Bb7?! doesn't achieve the desired pressure on d5. After 6 e4 exd5 7 cxd5 d6 8 Nf3 Be7 9 Bc4 0-0 10 0-0 Nbd7 11 Bf4 Nb6 12 b3 White is simply a pawn up.

**6 Nxd5**

Also interesting is 6 Bg5 d4 7 Nd5 Bb7 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 e4 d6 10 Bc4, when White's better structure should favour him.

**6...Bb7 7 e4!?**



**NOTE: It is said that to the refutation of a gambit lies in its acceptance. However, there are some exceptions, like the Blumenfeld Gambit.**

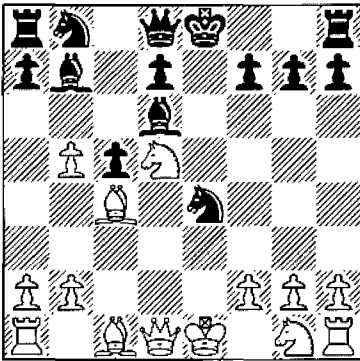
A very sharp reaction, as White decides to take the initiative. Often this is a good strategy against gambit players, who want to have the initiative for themselves.

A solid and sensible approach is to develop and put a pressure on d5: 7 Nxf6+ Qxf6 8 e3 Be7 9 Ne2!? d5 10 Nf4 Qe5 11 Be2 Nd7 12 Bf3 Nf6 13 Nd3 Qf5 14 0-0 0-0. Now in O.Panno-S.From. Varna 1962 White decided to trade his extra pawn for a slight positional plus with 15 b4!? cxb4 16 Bb2.

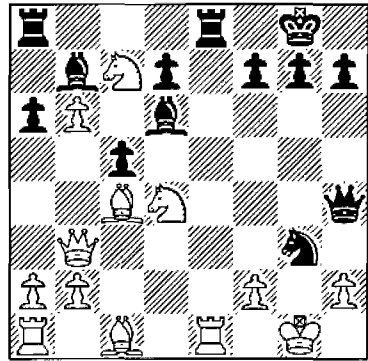
**7...Nxe4**

Necessary. After 7...Nxd5 8 exd5 d6 9 Ne2 Be7 10 Nc3 0-0 11 Be2 a6 12 bxa6 Nxa6 13 0-0 Qb6 14 Rb1 Nc7 15 Be3 Qa5 16 a3 Black didn't have enough compensation for even a quarter of a pawn in Z.Kozul-G.Trkulja, Sarajevo 1998.

**8 Bc4 Bd6 (Diagram 23)**



**Diagram 23 (W)**  
Perhaps 9 Qg4 here?



**Diagram 24 (W)**  
Unfathomable complications

**9 Nf3**

Also noteworthy is 9 Qg4!? – this harmonises well with move White's seventh move. For example, 9...0-0 10 Bh6 Be5 11 Qxe4 (11 Nf3 Bxb2 12 0-0 Nd6 13 Bg5 Qa5 14 Rab1 favours White) 11...Re8 12 Ne7+ Qxe7 13 Qxb7 Bxb2+ (13...Bc3+ 14 Kd1 Bxb2 15 Bd2! Nc6 16 bxc6 Bxa1 17 Qxd7 is an important tactic – Black's initiative peters out while White retains his extra material) 14 Be3 Bxa1 15 Qxa8 Qh4 16 Qd5 Rxe3+ 17 Ne2 and White will soon castle with

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

a clear plus.

**9...0-0 10 0-0 a6 11 b6**

It was also possible to exchange the pawn with 11 bxa6!? Nxa6 12 Qb3, with some initiative. This turns into a clear plus after 12...Nb4 13 Re1 Nf6 14 Nxb4 cxb4 15 Ng5.

**11...Nc6 12 Re1 Re8 13 Qd3**

Here we prefer 13 Bg5! Qb8 14 Bh4 when we cannot see how Black is going to get his pieces into action.

**13...Nb4 14 Qb3**

White is slowly but surely losing his 'iron fist' grip on the position, and now Black comes at him with violent, sacrificial counterplay. 14 Nxb4 cxb4 15 Be3 Qf6 16 Bd5 Bxd5 17 Qxd5 would still have secured White a positional advantage.

**14...Nc6! 15 Nc7 Nd4! 16 Nxd4 Qh4! 17 g3 Nxc3! (Diagram 24) 18 Bxf7+?!**

This leads by force to a draw. If White still wanted to try to win, he would have to enter a treacherous maze of tactics: 18 Rxe8+ Rxe8 19 Nxe8 Nh1! 20 Qc2 (after 20 Be3 Qh3 21 Bd5 Bxh2+ 22 Kxh1 Bg3+ it's still a draw) 20...Qxh2+ 21 Kf1 cxd4 22 Nxd6 Ng3+ 23 Ke1 Qg1+ 24 Kd2 Qxf2+ 25 Kd3 Qf3+ 26 Kxd4 Qf6+ 27 Kc5 Qe5+ 28 Kb4 Qxd6+ 29 Ka4 Qxb6 with unclear play! White's king isn't very safe, but he has a rook versus three pawns.

**18...Kh8 19 Bf4**

But not 19 Rxe8+?! Rxe8 20 Bf4 (20 Nxe8? Qh3! and Black wins) 20...Nh1! 21 Bd5 Bxf4 22 Qf3 Qxh2+ 23 Kf1 Bxd5 24 Nxd5 Be5 when Black has a continuing attack.

**19...Bxf4 20 fxc3 Bxc3 21 Qxc3 Qxd4+ 22 Qf2 Qg4+ 23 Qg3 Qd4+ ½-½**

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Game 44

□ A.Istratescu ■ A.Mastrovasilis

Korinthos 2001

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**1 c4 e6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nf3 a6 4 Nc3 c5 5 d5 b5 6 Bg5**

Playing 6 cxb5 only rewards the move 3...a6, whereas 6 Bg5 points out its deficiencies (losing time) by simply ignoring it.

6 e4 has also been tried and makes good sense too: 6...b4 7 e5 bxc3 8 exf6 Qa5 (8...gxf6 9 Bd3 Bg7 10 0-0 f5 11 bxc3 d6 12 dxe6 was very good for White in L.Ftacnik-A.Fauland, Vienna 1986; after 12...fxe6?! 13 Bxf5! exf5 14 Qd5 Ra7 15 Re1+ Kf8 16 Rb1 White had a winning attack) 9 bxc3 Qxc3+ 10 Bd2 Qxf6 11 Bd3 h6 12 0-0 and White clearly has a strong initiative for his pawn. Now after 12...d6? 13 Qa4+! Bd7 14 Qb3 Bc8 15 dxe6 fxe6 16 Be4 White was simply winning in L.Ortega-A.Barsov, Porto San Giorgio 2002.

**6...b4 7 Ne4 d6**

After 7...Be7 8 Bxf6 Bxf6 9 dxe6 fxe6 (or 9...dxe6 10 Qxd8+ Kxd8 11 0-0-0+ Kc7

## The Blumenfeld Gambit and Volga/Blumenfeld Hybrids

12 Nxc5 Nd7 13 Ne4 and White is better, though the bishops do give Black a bit of compensation) 10 Nd6+ Ke7 11 Qd2 Qc7 12 Rd1 Nc6 13 g3 White is able to find sensible squares for all his pieces and is somewhat better.

**8 Nxf6+ gxf6 9 Bh4**

Or 9 Bd2 f5 10 a3 bxa3 11 Rxa3 Bg7 12 Bc3 Bxc3+ 13 Rxc3 Qb6 14 Qc1 Nd7 15 Nd2 with an edge, A.Chernin-L.Alburt, Subotica 1987.

**9...Be7 10 Qc2 f5 11 g3!?**

Combining development and defence. After 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 e3 Nd7 White might be a bit better, though it is not easy to see why this should be the case.

**11...Nd7**

11...Bxh4 only helps White to put pressure on f5. After 12 Nxh4 f4 13 Bh3! White has a clear plus.

**12 Bg2 Ra7 13 Rd1 Nf6 14 0-0**

14 dxe6 fxe6 15 Ne5 Qc7 16 Qa4+ Kf8 takes away Black's castling rights but doesn't give White an advantage – here structure and coordination of the pieces are far more important.

**14...e5?**

Not just positionally dodgy, but also allowing White to unleash a strong attack. The more sensible 14...exd5 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Rxd5 Be6 17 Rd3 leaves White somewhat better.

**15 Nxe5!**



**TIP: When you lead in development it is often worth looking for very active possibilities; if nothing happens, your lead in development is going to fade.**

**15...dxe5 16 d6 Bf8**

This is very passive, but 16...Bxd6 17 Bc6+ Ke7 is met strongly by 18 Rd5! with various threats. One example of the problems Black is facing is 18...Rc7 19 Ba4 Be6 20 Rfd1!! Bxd5 21 Qxf5! when his position is collapsing.

**17 Bc6+ Bd7 18 Qxf5 Bg7 19 Qxe5+ Kf8 20 Qxc5**

It is all over now. 20...Qc8 is refuted with 21 Qxa7 Qxc6 22 Qb8+ Ne8 23 Qxb4.

**20...Qb8 21 Bxd7 Nxd7 22 Qd5 Rb7 23 c5 Rb5 24 Qe4 Bf6 25 c6 Nc5 26 Qf5 Bxh4 27 c7 1-0**

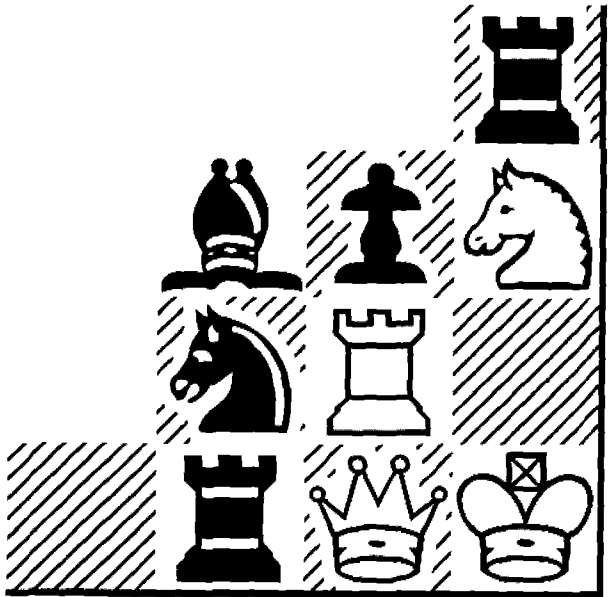
## Chapter Five

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# Closed and Czech Benonis

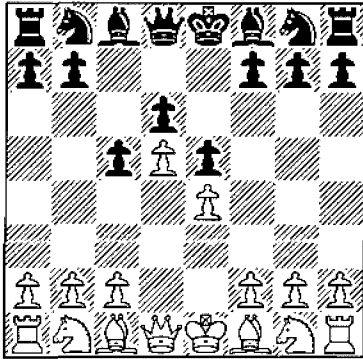
 The Closed Benoni

 The Czech Benoni

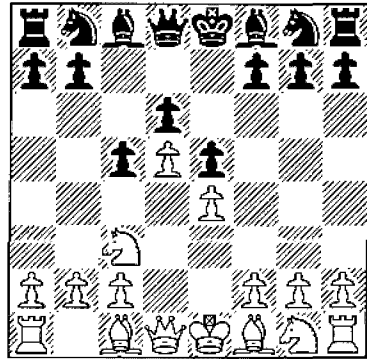


# The Closed Benoni

1 d4 c5 2 d5 e5 3 e4 d6 (Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1 (B)**  
The Closed Benoni



**Diagram 2 (B)**  
White plays 4 Nc3

With 2...e5 Black closes the position and the game becomes quiet and manoeuvring in nature. Giving up his activity in the centre (...e7-c6), Black relies on flank operations: normally this will either be ...f7-f5 or ...b7-b5. Due to his lack of space it is difficult to create counterplay and Black often merely ends up defending. White plans to attack the e5-strongpoint with f2-f4 or the c5-pawn with b2-b4.

Now 4 c4 is almost always followed by 4...Nf6 5 Nc3 Be7, leading to the Czech Benoni (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Bc7 – see the next section). The advance 4 f4 without preliminary preparation does not appear to be flexible in view of 4...exf4 5 Bxf4 Ne7 and ...Ng6, with an attack on the f4-bishop. White can also avoid the main line by transferring the b1-knight to c4 (Game 45). This can also be achieved after 4 Bb5 (Raetsky-Backwinkel) or 4 Bd3 (Chetverik-Shtyrenkov). Of course, in this case there is no need for the king's knight to move to f3, where it blocks the path of the f-pawn, so it occupies the more modest e2-square. The c3-square is taken up by a pawn, which covers d4 and supports the advance b2-b4.

## 4 Nc3 (Diagram 2)

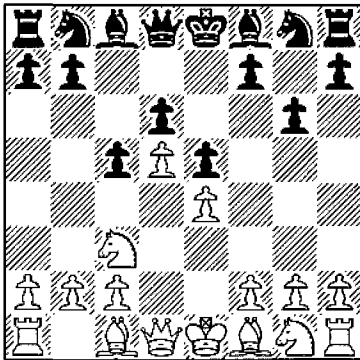
This is the basic position in the Closed Benoni (see Game 46). Black has a wide variety of moves but not all of them are equally good. For example, 4...f5?! is absolutely unacceptable in view of 5 Bb5+; if Black doesn't want to part with his f5-pawn he loses the right to castle. 4...Ne7, to transfer the knight to g6 to take control of e5 and f4, is rarely played. As a countermeasure the flank attack 5 h4!? is reasonable – the reply ...h7-h5 weakens the important g5-square.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

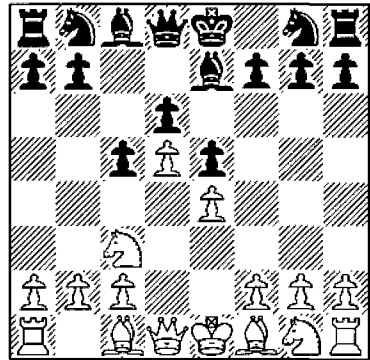
After the natural 4...Nf6 the vigorous advance 5 f4 is more reasonable here than on move four as it is more difficult for Black to take control of the important e5-square. The usual continuations 5 Nf3 and 5 Be2 are also good, as well as 5 Bb5+ (Khenkin-Tibensky shows the interesting idea of an a-pawn advance followed by an h-pawn advance).

Experience has shown that including 4...a6 5 a4 is not necessarily in Black's favour. He prevents his opponent's development to b5 and prepares ...b7-b5, but weakening the b6-square leads to the restricting a4-a5. Unlike the Modern Benoni, opening the b-file (after ...b7-b5, axb6), as a rule, is no threat to White's queenside because there is no support from the dark-squared bishop along the long diagonal. The Yakovich-Rashkovsky encounter proves that 4...a6 can also be met with 5 Nf3 b5 6 a4 b4 7 Nb1 followed by the occupation of the c4-square and a persistent edge.

4...g6 (Diagram 3) is played with the intention of a fianchetto or swapping with ...Bf8-h6.



**Diagram 3 (W)**  
...Bg7 or ...Bh6



**Diagram 4 (W)**  
Planning ...Bg5

Then the rare continuation 5 h4!? with the idea of h4-h5 deserves consideration. The counter advance 5...h5 weakened the g5-square in Andrianov-Ibragimov and gave White the initiative. In Khenkin-Rogers White employed the standard 5 Bb5+ Nd7 6 a4 and the exchange of the dark-squared bishops after 6...Bh6 did not lead to equality due to the weak dark squares on the kingside.

The main reply to 4 Nc3 is 4...Be7 (Diagram 4) – see Game 47.

Black plans to exchange his 'bad' bishop with ...Be7-g5 without weakening the dark squares as with 4...g6. The historic game Alekhine-Tartakower ended in a white success after the fairly indifferent 5 Bd3. However, Black's failure was caused by the hasty advance ...f7-f5, which weakened the kingside.



**WARNING:** The advance ...f7-f5 is the basic strategic idea in the Closed Benoni, but it is almost always unsatisfactory if employed at an early stage of the game without proper preparation.

In reply to 4...Be7 it is logical to prevent ...Bg5 with 5 Nf3, after which 5...Bg4 restores Black's idea. Here it is useful to compare the ways of breaking the pin: 6 Be2 Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Bg5 8 Bxg5 Qxg5 and 6 h3 Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Bg5 8 Bxg5 Qxg5. In the first case White's bishop moves to a fairly passive outpost while the queen remains on its initial square; White has a space advantage but no more than that. After 6 h3 the bishop remains on the promising f1-a6 diagonal while the queen enters the game and is capable of taking part in the attack. However, if Black defends accurately he has chances to equalise (see Djachkov-Malakhov).

Finally, 4...Be7 can be met with 5 f4 exf4 6 Bxf4. Here 6...Bg5 is not a good idea in view of the possible breakthrough in the centre e4-e5 (Shariyazdanov-Malakhov). Black should instead complete his kingside development with 6...Nf6 and 7...0-0. Beliavsky-Ivanovich again demonstrates the drawbacks of a premature ...f7-f5, but Black stands acceptably by taking control of e5.

## Statistics

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In the main position after 1 d4 c5 2 d5 e5 3 e4 d6 4 Nc3 White scores 64%.

## Theoretical?

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Only some specific variations have been thoroughly studied. The players are mainly required to be familiar with general plans.

## Theoretical Status

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Fairly respectable. Even 4 Bd3 and 5 Ne2, although not theoretical favourites, offer White an easy position and slightly better play. After the main 4 Nc3 Black always stands a little worse, although he has some long-term chances. By acting carefully Black is insured against defeat in the opening, but he often struggles to equalise after the opening, in the middle game and even the end-game.

*Game 45*

□ M.Chetverik ■ V.Shtyrenkov

Karvina 2001

**1 d4 c5 2 d5 e5 3 e4 d6 4 Bd3**

This attempt to be flexible didn't really pay off for our co-author. The standard 4 Nc3 is seen in the next game, while some other options include:

a) 4 f4 exf4 5 Bxf4 Ne7 6 Nf3 Ng6 7 Bg3 Nd7 8 Nbd2 Be7 9 Bd3 Nf6 is equal according Emmanuel Lasker. Basically White misses his f-pawn and Black

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

will have good control over e5.

b) 4 Bb5+ also doesn't promise a direct advantage, even though it makes good sense: 4...Nd7 5 a4 a6 6 Bd3 Be7 7 Na3 Ngf6 8 Qc2 0-0 9 Nf3 (here Black risks being worse, so he goes for it) 9...Nxc4!? 10 Bxe4 f5 11 Bxf5 Rxf5 12 0-0 Nb6 13 Nc4 Nxd5 (a chancy decision) 14 Rd1 Nf4?! 15 Bxf4 Rxf4 16 Nfxe5. White has a great initiative here, and after 16...Rb8 17 g3 Rd4 18 c3 Rxd1+ 19 Rxd1 Qf8?! 20 Nxd6! he was already winning in A.Raetsky-P.Backwinkel, Germany 1995. However, 14...Be6 is stronger. White can play 15 Nfxe5! dxe5 (15...Qe8!?) 16 Ne3 Rf7 17 Nxd5 Bxd5 18 c4, but then Black has 18...Bxc4! 19 Rxd8+ Rxd8 20 Qc2 Bd3 21 Qc3 e4 when the position is still quite unclear.

### 4...Be7

The idea is simply to exchange the 'bad' bishop, but luckily chess is a very complex game!

4...g6 5 Ne2 Bg7 6 0-0 Ne7 7 a4 0-0 8 Nd2 Nd7 9 a5 also looks a bit better for White too, as was 4...Ne7 5 Ne2 Ng6 6 0-0 a6 7 a4 Be7 8 Na3 0-0 9 Nc4 Nd7 10 Bd2 b6 11 c3 Rb8 12 b4 Nf6 13 bxc5 bxc5 14 Rb1 Bd7 15 Qc2, H.Kmoch-A.Alekhine, Amsterdam 1936.

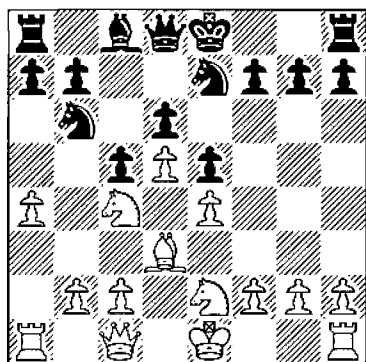
### 5 Ne2 Bg5 6 a4

White could also consider 6 Nd2 Ne7 7 0-0 Ng6 8 a4 h6 9 c3 0-0, but eventually he would have to accept the exchange. Still, after 10 Nc4 Bxc1 11 Rxc1 b6 12 b4 White has an edge.

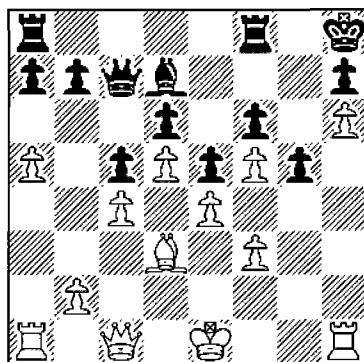
### 6...Bxc1 7 Qxc1 Ne7

7...Nh6!? 8 Na3 f5 is an interesting idea yet to be tried in practice.

### 8 Na3 Nd7 9 Nc4 Nb6!? (Diagram 5)



**Diagram 5 (W)**  
Inventive play



**Diagram 6 (B)**  
A positional mistake

Black needs to be inventive. After 9...Nf6 10 f4 Ng6 11 f5 Ne7 12 0-0 White

has a very pleasant advantage.

**10 Ne3 0-0 11 a5 Nd7 12 h4**

The ambitious 12 Nc4 Nf6 13 f4?! doesn't work on account of 13...Nexd5! 14 exd5 e4 – Black not only regains his piece but also ends up with a very strong, unchallenged bishop.

**12...Nf6 13 h5**

Better was the less energetic but structurally sounder 13 f3 Bd7 14 h5 with a slight edge for White (Shtyrenkov).

**13...Ng4 14 Nxg4**

14 Nc4 is strongly by 14...f5 15 f3 Nh6 16 Qg5 Rf6 when Black has a slight plus.

**14...Bxg4 15 f3 Bd7 16 g4 f6 17 Ng3 Kh8 18 h6**

Or 18 Nf5 Nxf5 19 gxf5 Rg8 20 Qe3 b5 with chances for both sides.

**18...g5 19 Nf5 Nxf5 20 gxf5 Qc7 21 c4?! (Diagram 6)**

This is a positional mistake, creating a target for Black's counterplay. After 21 b3 b5 22 axb6 axb6 23 c4 White is probably not worse.

**21...Rfb8 22 Rh5?!**

This is just not going to work. Stronger is 22 Rg1 though Black is better after 22...b5 23 Qc3 bxc4 24 Bxc4 Bb5.

**22...Be8 23 Rh2 b5 24 b3 bxc4 25 Bxc4**

Or 25 bxc4 Rb3 26 Be2 Rab8 27 Bd1 R3b4 and Black has very strong pressure.

**25...Bb5 26 Rg2 Rb7 27 a6 Rb6 28 Ra3 Rab8 29 Bxb5 Rxb5**

Black has all the play here, of course.

**30 Qe3 Qf7 31 Rh2 Kg8 32 Kf1 R8b6 33 Kg1 Rb4 34 Rg2 Qf8 35 Rh2 Kf7  
36 Qc3 Ke7 37 Qe3 R6b5 38 Qc3 Qb8 39 Rb2 Rb6 40 Kf1 Qe8 41 Ra5 Qb8  
42 Ra3 Qf8 43 Rh2 Qe8 44 Ke1 Kd8 45 Kd1 Qb5 46 Rb2 Qf1+ 47 Kc2 Rd4  
48 Qe3 c4 49 Rb1 Qg2+ 50 Kc1 Rd3 0-1**

Game 46

□ I.Khenkin ■ I.Rogers

Baden 1998

**1 d4 c5 2 d5 e5 3 e4 d6 4 Nc3 g6**

The main move, 4...Be7, is seen in Game 47, while some other options include:

a) 4...f5?! 5 Bb5+! Kf7 6 f4! exf4 7 Nf3 with a strong initiative.

b) 4...Ne7 5 h4 h5 6 Nh3 Bxh3 7 Rxh3 g6 8 Bg5 Bg7 9 g4 again with very active play for White.

c) 4...Nf6 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 6 a4 g6 (6...Be7 7 Nf3 0-0 8 h3 Ne8 9 g4 g6 10 Bh6 Ng7 11 Bd3 f6 12 Ne2 Rf7 13 Ng3 favours White – Boleslavsky) 7 Nf3 Bg7 8 a5 a6 (otherwise a5-a6 is irritating) 9 Be2 0-0 10 Nd2 Ne8 11 h4!? (there is no reason to castle into the attack if you can attack the castled king instead!) 11...b5

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

(11...f5 12 h5 Ndf6 13 hxg6 hxg6 14 exf5 gxf5 15 Nc4 looks very unpleasant for Black) 12 axb6 Nxb6 13 h5 Nc7 14 Na4 Nxa4 15 Rxa4 Bd7 16 Ra3 Nb5 17 Rg3 a5 18 c3 a4 19 Nc4 and White had a nice attacking position in I.Khenkin-R.Tibensky, Kaskady 2002.

d) 4...a6 is an interesting move:

d1) 5 Nf3!? b5 6 a4! b4 7 Nb1 Nf6 (or 7...Be7 8 a5!? f5 9 Nbd2 with a pull) 8 Nbd2 g6 9 Bd3 Bg7 10 Nc4 0-0 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bh4 Qc7 (White is doing very well after 12...g5 13 Bg3 Nxe4 14 Bxe4 f5 15 Nfd2 – Yakovich) 13 Bxf6! Bxf6 14 a5 Bg7 15 0-0 Nd7 16 c3 Rb8 17 Qa4 Bb7 18 Nfd2 (18 cxb4?! cxb4 19 Qxb4 Nc5 20 Qc3 is weaker because of 20...Bxd5! 21 exd5?! e4, when White is close to being busted) 18...f5 19 Rfc1 Ba8 20 Ne3 f4 (Y.Yakovich-N.Rashkovsky, Ekaterinburg 1997). Now 21 Nec4 bxc3 22 bxc3 is most natural and slightly better for White.

d2) Also fine is 5 a4 b6 6 f4!? (this is of course far from the only way to play the position) 6...exf4 7 Bxf4 Ne7 8 Nf3 Ng6 9 Bg3 Be7 10 Bc4 0-0 11 0-0 Bf6 12 Qd2 and White is possibly a bit better.

### 5 Bb5+

Again this check, which is possible but not the most natural. Here are some examples of how White can play:

a) 5 Be2 Bg7 6 Nf3 Ne7 7 a4 0-0 8 0-0 h6 9 Nd2 f5 10 Nc4 is slightly better for White because of 10...f4 11 Bg4!, eliminating Black's good bishop. There is no easy way for Black to develop the queenside.

b) Also interesting is 5 h4!? Nf6 6 Be2 h5 7 Nf3 Be7 8 Ng5 a6 9 a4 Nbd7 10 a5 Nf8 11 g3 Bg4 12 f3 Bd7 13 Be3 N6h7 14 Qd2!? (not the most natural; 14 Nxb7 Nxb7 15 b4!? cxb4 16 Na4 would give White some advantage) 14...Nxc5 15 hxg5 f6 16 gxf6 (Here White should change the course of the game with 16 Bxc5!? dxc5 17 d6 Bc6 18 dxe7 Qxd2+ 19 Kxd2 Kxe7 20 gxf6+ Kxf6 21 Bc4 when White is slightly better in the endgame) 16...Bxf6 17 Na4 Bxa4 18 Rxa4 h4 with chances for both sides, N.Andrianov-I.Ibragimov, Chicago 2002.

### 5...Nd7 6 a4 Bh6



**WARNING:** When Black chooses to exchange the dark-squared bishops so early in the game, he is vulnerable to a rapid attack on the dark squares.

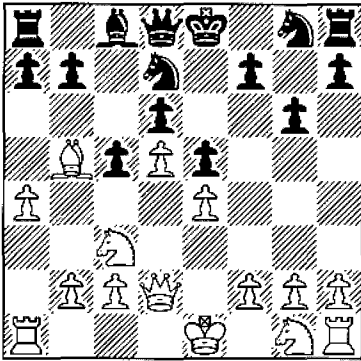
6...Bg7 7 Nf3 Ne7 8 0-0 0-0 9 a5 with a slight edge (Boleslavsky).

### 7 Bxh6!

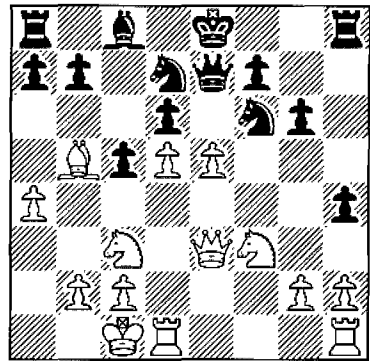
White of course accepts the tempi.

### 7...Nxb6 8 Qd2 Ng8 (Diagram 7)

8...Ng4 doesn't help. After 9 h3 Ngf6 10 Nf3 Qe7 11 a5 a6 12 Be2 Rb8 13 Qh6 Black will feel very unsafe. 10...0-0 11 Qh6 Qa5 12 Ng5 Qb4 13 0-0-0 is also very dangerous for Black – White wishes to play Bxd7 and Rd3-f3xf6.



**Diagram 7 (W)**  
Black loses time



**Diagram 8 (B)**  
The usual breakthrough

**9 f4 exf4 10 Qxf4 Qf6 11 Qg3!**

Keeping control over e5. Black is doing fine after 11 Qxf6 Ngxf6 12 a5 a6 13 Bxd7+ Nxd7 14 Nf3 Rb8 15 Rf1 b5 16 axb6 Rxb6 17 b3 Ke7.

**11...h5 12 0-0-0 h4 13 Qe3 Qe7**

13...Kf8! 14 Rf1 Qg7 15 Nf3 Qh6! 16 Qxh6+ Rxh6 17 Bxd7 Bxd7 18 e5 and White is only slightly better – Khenkin.

**14 Nf3 Ngf6 15 e5! (Diagram 8)**

This is the traditional breakthrough in the Benoni. After this we have not been able to find anything acceptable for Black, and we do not believe anything exists.

**15...Ng4**

15...Kf8 16 e6 Kg7 17 Rhe1 looks pretty bad too.

**16 Qd2 Ngxe5 17 Nxe5 dxe5 18 d6 Qe6 19 Nd5 Kf8**

Or 19...Qxd6 20 Bxd7+ Bxd7 21 Qg5 Kf8 22 Nf6 and wins – Khenkin.

**20 Qg5 Rb8 21 Nc7 Qf6 22 Qxf6 Nxf6 23 d7 Bxd7 24 Bxd7 Rd8 25 Bh3 Kg7 26 Rxd8 Rxd8 27 Rd1 Rd4 28 Rxd4 cxd4 29 Nb5 Nd5 30 Bc8 Nb6 31 Bxb7 Nxa4 32 Nxa7 f5 33 Nc8 Kf6 34 Bc6 Nxb2 35 Kxb2 e4 36 Kc1 g5 37 Bb7 Ke5 38 Ne7 h3 39 gxh3 f4 40 Nc6+ Kd5 41 Na5+ 1-0**

Game 47

□ A.Beliavsky ■ B.Ivanovic

Tivat 1995

**1 d4 c5 2 d5 e5 3 e4 d6 4 Nc3 Be7 5 f4**

Or:

a) After 5 Bd3 Bg5 6 Nf3 Bxc1 7 Qxc1, in A.Alekhine-S.Tartakower, Dresden

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

1926 Black tried 7...Nh6 8 h3 f5. Now White came up with 9 Qg5! 0-0 10 Qxd8 Rxd8 11 Ng5! g6 (11...f4 12 Nb5 Na6 13 Bc4 Nf7 14 Ne6 Rd7 15 0-0-0 is also nowhere near solving Black's problems) 12 f4! (White is using his lead in development to get a preferable structure) 12...exf4 13 0-0 Na6 14 Rxf4 Nb4 15 Rh4 Nxd3 16 Rxh6 Nxb2 17 Rxh7 Nc4 18 exf5 Bxf5 (18...gxf5 19 Re1 Ne5 20 Nb5 and White wins – Alekhine) 19 Rxb7 Re8 20 Nh7 Re3 21 Nb5! with a great advantage for White. Instead Black should play 7...Ne7 8 a4 0-0 9 0-0 Ng6 with a slight disadvantage, nothing more.

b) 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 h3 Bxf3 7 Qxf3 Bg5 8 Bxg5 Qxg5 9 Nb5! Qd8 10 Qg4 Kf8 (10...g6? 11 Nxd6+! Qxd6 12 Qc8+ Qd8 13 Bb5+ Ke7 14 d6+! Qxd6 15 Qxb7+, winning) 11 Nxd6! Nf6 12 Qc8 Qxc8 13 Nxc8 Nxe4 14 Bd3 Nd7 15 Bxe4 Rxc8 16 0-0-0 g6 17 d6 b6 18 Rhe1 Kg7 19 Bb7 Rcd8 20 Bc6 with a slight advantage for White. S.Djachkov-V.Malakhov, Moscow 1995.

### 5...exf4

After 5...Nd7 6 Nf3 a6 7 fxe5 Nxe5 8 Nxc5 dxe5 9 Be2 White has a slightly better structure.

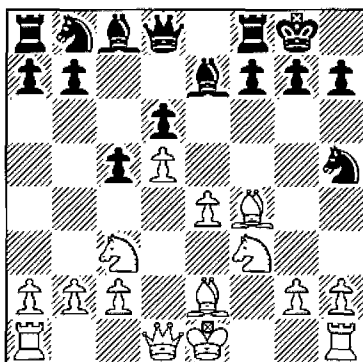
### 6 Bxf4 Nf6

6...Bg5?! 7 Qd2 Bxf4 8 Qxf4 a6 9 e5! Qe7 10 Nf3 Nd7 11 0-0-0!? (11 e6!? fxe6 12 dxe6 Qxe6+ 13 Be2 with compensation was also interesting) 11...dxe5 12 Qg3 Qf6 13 d6 Qg6 14 Nd5 Qxg3 15 hxg3 Kf8 16 Ng5 with the initiative, A.Shariyazdanov-V.Malakhov, Ekaterinburg 1996.

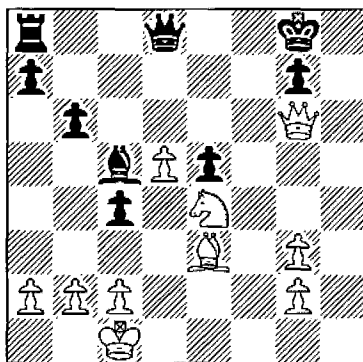
### 7 Be2

7 Qd2 0-0 8 0-0-0 Re8 9 Nf3 Bf8 10 Bd3 Nbd7 is not clear at all, but an aggressive player like Beliavsky must have seriously considered it.

### 7...0-0 8 Nf3 Nh5?! (Diagram 9)



**Diagram 9 (W)**  
An unsound idea?



**Diagram 10 (W)**  
White wins in an instant

The whole idea behind this move has proven to be unsound, and mainly because the knight is badly located. Beliavsky gives 8...Nbd7 9 0-0 Ng4 10 a4 Nde5 11 Nxe5 Nxe5 12 Bxe5 dxe5 13 Qd3 with a slight advantage for White. 8...Re8 9 0-0 Bf8!? 10 Nd2 Nbd7 is probably the soundest option – White's advantage is kept to a minimum.

**9 Be3 f5 10 exf5 Bxf5 11 0-0 Bg6**

Now White has a very strong temporary sacrifice, but 11...Bg4 is met strongly by 12 Nd2 Bxe2 13 Qxe2 Nf6 14 Rae1 and White enjoys a large advantage.

**12 Ne5! Rxf1+ 13 Kxf1 Ng3+**

White also reigns supreme after 13...Qf8+ 14 Kg1 Nf4 15 Nxc6 hxc6 16 Bg4 – Beliavsky.

**14 hxc3 dxe5 15 Bf3 Bd6**

15...Qb6? loses directly to 16 d6! Bxd6 17 Qd5+ Kf8 18 Qxb7.

**16 Be4 Nd7 17 Qd3 Qf6+?!**

Black would be better off playing 17...c4 18 Qxc4 Rc8 19 Qd3 Nc5 with a slightly worse position.

**18 Ke2! Bh5+**

18...c4 19 Qxc4 Rf8 20 Rh1 is also very promising for White.

**19 Kd2 Nf8 20 Rh1 Bg6 21 Bxc6 Nxc6 22 Ne4 Qd8 23 Kc1 b6 24 Rxh7! c4 25 Qe2 Kxh7 26 Qh5+ Kg8 27 Qxc6 Bc5?! (Diagram 10)**

Now White wins instantly. 27...Be7? loses to 28 d6! Bf6 29 Bg5!, but better was 27...Qf8 28 Qe6+ Kh8 29 Nxd6 Qf1+ 30 Kd2 c3+ 31 Kxc3 Qe1+ 32 Kd3 Qd1+ 33 Bd2 Qf1+ 34 Kc3 and White should eventually win – Beliavsky.

**28 Bg5 Be7**

Or 28...Qc7 29 d6! Qf7 30 Qxf7+ Kxf7 31 Nxc5 bxc5 32 d7 and surprisingly White wins in an endgame.

**29 d6! Qf8 30 Qe6+ Kh7 31 Qh3+ Kg6 32 Bxe7 Qf5 33 Qxf5+ Kxf5 34 Ng5 1-0**

## The Czech Benoni

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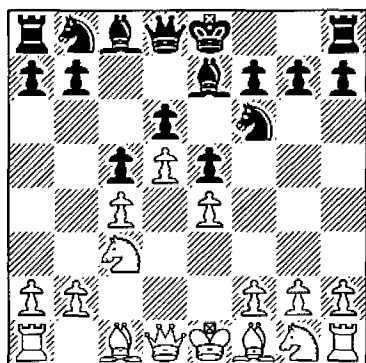
**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 e4 d6 5 Nc3 Be7 (Diagram 11)**

This was first played in the game A.Burn-J.Blackburne, Vienna 1898 with the unusual continuation 6 f4 Nfd7 7 f5 Na6 8 Nf3 Nf6. The variation was named the Czech Benoni because in the 1960s it was successfully employed by the grandmasters Hort and Jansa. However, the Soviet master and theorist Vasily Panov should have priority here. In 1937 he published analysis of this system in the *Chess in USSR* magazine and later implemented it in practice.

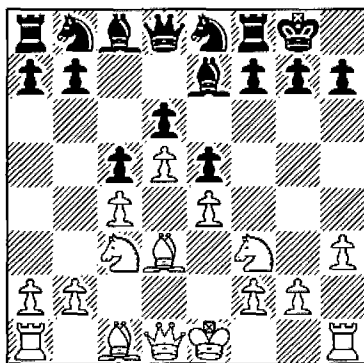
Like in the Closed Benoni, the main plans for both sides are symmetrical: White strives for b2-b4 and f2-f4, while Black aims for ...b7-b5 and ...f7-f5.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Unlike the Closed Benoni, the white pawn is not on c2 but on c4. The c4-pawn strengthens the centre and counteracts against ...b7-b5; however, it limits the light-squared bishop and deprives the knight of the ideal c4-outpost. The position of the knight on f6, compared to the Closed Benoni, makes the exchange of the dark-squared bishops more difficult, as well as the advance ...f7-f5; this is why Black devotes his next few moves simply to the mobilisation of his forces.



**Diagram 11 (W)**  
The Czech Benoni



**Diagram 12 (B)**  
Fashionable

From Diagram 11 White has a wide choice: fianchettoing the light-squared bishop is covered in Game 51, Nf3 with Be2 is reviewed in Game 50, while other white arrangements are covered in Games 48-49.

The continuation 6 f4 is rather premature here because after the swap on f4 Black easily takes control over the important e5-square. Although 6 Nge2 may seem harmless it can be poisonous if a kingside initiative develops with 6...0-0 7 Ng3 Ne8 8 h4!. But if Black isn't in a hurry to castle he gains interesting opportunities on the kingside (6...a6 7 Ng3 g6 8 Bd3 h5). Instead 6 Bd3 0-0 7 Nge2 is strongly met by 7...Nh5 with the intention of exchanging the dark-squared bishops with ...Be7-g5, as well as ...g7-g6 and ...f7-f5 (see Pflieger-Gheorghiu).

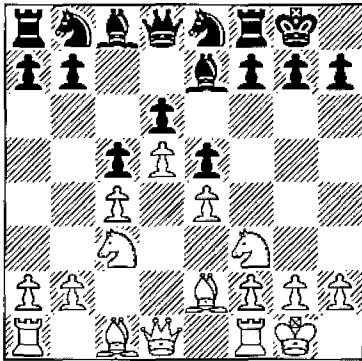
White often employs an aggressive arrangement with Bd3, Nf3 and h2-h3. In this case he shouldn't start with 6 h3 in view of 6...h5!?, which prevents g2-g4 and limits White's actions. The continuation 6 Nf3 0-0 7 h3 Ne8 8 Bd3 (**Diagram 12**) followed by g2-g4 came into fashion after the well-known Kasparov-Miles encounter (Game 49).

White seizes space on the kingside and makes the advance ...f7-f5 more difficult. Obviously this pawn lunge creates weaknesses in White's own camp, and of course kingside castling doesn't make sense here. After 8...g6 9 Bh6 Ng7 10 g4 Nd7 White can either keep his king in the centre (11 Qd2 Nf6 12 Ke2) or castle queenside (Djachkov-Khismatullin). In both cases it is reasonable for

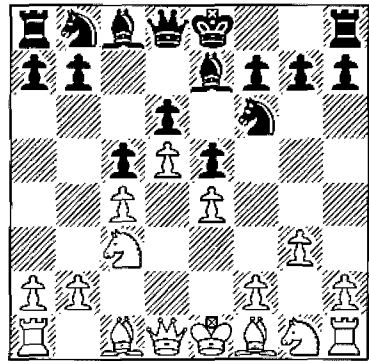
Black to combine aggressive play on the queenside (...b7-b5) with preparation of ...f7-f5 via ...Nd7-f6, ...Kg8-h8 and ...Nf6-g8. It does not seem reasonable to give up on ...g7-g6 (Kasparov-Miles) because White's attack on the kingside is more dangerous than the counterplay with ...b7-b5.

With the usual set-up Nf3 and Be2 (Game 50) White more often starts with 6 Be2, although Black doesn't quite equalise if he meets 6 Nf3 with the pin 6...Bg4. We should mention the long manoeuvre ...Nb8-d7-f8-g6, postponing (or even omitting) castling owing to the closed centre. This manoeuvre is quite good with the passive bishop on d3, but it is not so strong when the bishop is on e2 (see Najdorf-Trikaliotis).

After 6 Be2 0-0 7 Nf3 Ne8 8 0-0 (**Diagram 13**), 8...f5?! isn't quite appropriate because of 9 exf5 Bxf5 10 Nd2 and f2-f4, as in Euwe-Milic: a premature ...f7-f5 in the Czech Benoni is just as suspect as in the Closed Benoni.



**Diagram 13 (B)**  
Classical development



**Diagram 14 (B)**  
White fianchettoes

After 8...Nd7 White had better play without any delay if he wants to attack on the queenside with a2-a3 and b2-b4 (Malich-Polugaevsky). The continuation 9 Ne1 g6 10 Ne3 looks more flexible, but in reality 10...f5 should only be met with 11 f4 because 11 a3 led to Black's initiative on the kingside in Pavlovic-Ivkov. Moreover, 9 Ne1 can be met by the exchange of the dark-squared bishops with 9...Bg5!?

The standard continuation 6 g3 (**Diagram 14**), as in Game 51, doesn't look very useful at first sight.

However, White is planning the energetic f2-f4, when ...exf4 can be met with gxf4. Interesting here is the aggressive 6...Na6 followed by ...Nc7, preparing ...b7-b5 and putting off kingside castling (P.Nikolic-Miles). However, Black normally castles and after 7 Bg2 prefers 7...Ne8, a key move in the Czech Benoni, with the idea of ...g7-g6 and ...Ne8-g7. Then after the advance ...f7-f5 and

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

the exchange  $\text{exf5}$ , Black can take back with his pawn, obtaining a strong pawn roller ... $\text{e5}$ , ... $\text{f5}$ .

After  $6 \text{ g3 } 0-0 \ 7 \text{ Bg2 Ne8, } 8 \text{ Nf3}$  followed by  $0-0$  and  $\text{Ne1-d3}$  isn't bad, but  $8 \text{ Nge2}$  is played more often to avoid blocking the path of the f-pawn. Here  $8 \dots \text{f5}?!$  is unfavourable because White will take control of e4, and an attempt to exchange the dark-squared bishops with  $8 \dots \text{Bg5}$  is not considered to be quite appropriate in view of  $9 \text{ f4}$  (Zilberman-Grinshpun). Also  $8 \dots \text{g6}$  isn't very flexible because White can proceed with  $9 \text{ Bh6 Ng7 } 10 \text{ Qd2 Nd7 } 11 \text{ h4}$  followed by queenside castling and a violent attack on the kingside. Unlike the set-up with  $\text{Bd3}$ , White can exchange his 'bad' light-squared bishop through  $\text{h3}$  (see Lutsko-Sergienko). A more accurate move is  $8 \dots \text{Nd7}$  (Zakharevich-Fedorov) with a full range of possibilities for both sides:  $\text{b2-b4}$  and  $\text{f2-f4}$  for White; ... $\text{b7-b5}$  and ... $\text{f7-f5}$  for Black.

## Statistics

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After ... $\text{Be7}$  White scores 58%.

## Theoretical?

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More yes than no. Owing to extensive practice there is a general idea of the Czech Benoni, although there are still a many details to clarify.

## Theoretical Status

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Respected. Fairly strong players employ it and it will be in practice in the future as well. This is a result of the interesting flank play and the exceptional variety of arising middlegame positions. It is not full of 'move-to-move' play; positional understanding is more important here.

*Game 48*

□ **M.Gurevich** ■ **J.Piket**

Wijk aan Zee 2002

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 h3**

In this and the next game we shall look at the aggressive ideas with an early  $\text{h3}$  Also possible is:

a)  $6 \text{ f4}$  is not that strong here. After  $6 \dots \text{exf4 } 7 \text{ Bxf4 } 0-0 \ 8 \text{ Nf3 Nh5 } 9 \text{ Be3 Bf6 } 10 \text{ Qd2 Qe7}$  Black has reasonable play.

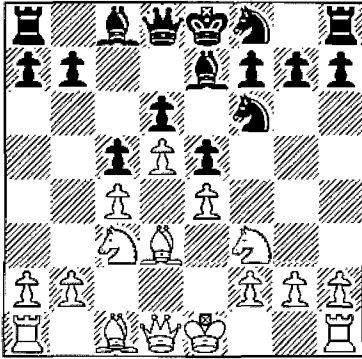
b)  $6 \text{ Nge2 a6}$  ( $6 \dots 0-0 \ 7 \text{ Ng3 Ne8 } 8 \text{ h4}!$  is not too comforting for Black; White has a strong attack after  $8 \dots \text{g6 } 9 \text{ Bh6 Ng7 } 10 \text{ Be2} \ 7 \text{ Ng3 g6 } 8 \text{ Bd3 h5 } 9 \text{ a3 h4}$  (more natural than  $9 \dots \text{Nh7 } 10 \text{ Nf1 Bg5 } 11 \text{ Ne3 Nd7 } 12 \text{ Bd2 } 0-0 \ 13 \text{ Qe2 Rb8 } 14 \text{ g3 Ndf6 } 15 \text{ h4 Bh6 } 16 \text{ f3 Kh8 } 17 \ 0-0-0$  when White was better in A.Aleksandrov-J.Hickl, Chalkidiki 2002)  $10 \text{ Nf1 Nh5 } 11 \text{ h3 Bg5}$  when the position is open for evaluation.

c)  $6 \text{ Bd3}$  and now:

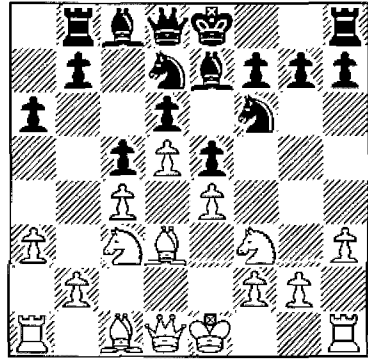
c1) 6...0-0 7 Nge2 Nh5! 8 Ng3?! (better is 8 Be3 Bg5 9 Qd2 Bxe3 10 Qxe3 a6 with equal chances) 8...Nf4 9 Bxf4 exf4 10 Nh5 Bg5 11 g3. White clearly hoped that he would open the h-file or win a pawn, but after 11...f5! 12 exf5 Bxf5 13 Bxf5 Rxf5 14 Qg4 g6 15 gxf4 Bh6 16 Ng3 Rxf4 17 Qe6+ Kh8 18 0-0 Na6 Black was slightly better in H.Pfleger-F.Gheorghiu, Hastings 1964/65.

c2) 6...Nbd7 with a further branch:

c21) 7 Nf3 Nf8!? (Diagram 15)



**Diagram 15 (B)**  
A fashionable treatment



**Diagram 16 (B)**  
Explanation required

This is a fashionable way to treat this system with Black: 8 h3 Ng6 (8...h5 9 h4!? Ng6 10 g3 a6 11 Ng5 should be a bit better for White) 9 a3 h5 10 b4 b6 11 Bc2 Bd7 12 Ba4 Rc8 13 Bxd7+ Qxd7 14 Qb3 h4 15 bxc5 (this surprisingly opens the way for the e7-bishop; stronger is the cautious 15 0-0 Nh5 16 Be3 when White is a bit better) 15...bxc5 16 0-0 Bd8!? 17 Bd2 (17 Qb5 Qxb5 18 Nxb5 Nxe4 19 Nxa7 is unclear – Milos) 17...Ba5 (Black has decent counterplay, and here White goes further astray) 18 Nb5?! Bxd2 19 Nxd2 a6 20 Nc3 Nf4 21 Kh2 Rh6 22 Nd1 Rg6 23 Ne3 Kf8 24 Rab1 Kg8 and Black is more comfortable, R.Leitao-G.Milos, Merlo 1995.

c22) 7 Nge2 is perhaps less dangerous. After 7...Nf8 8 a3 Ng6 9 b4 b6 (9...cxb4 10 axb4 0-0 11 0-0 Bd7 12 b5 and White is better – Black's a-pawn will always be vulnerable) 10 bxc5 bxc5 11 Rb1 0-0 12 0-0 Nh5 13 f3 Nh4 the position is close to level.

**6...Nbd7**

6...h5!? is interesting: 7 Be3 h4 8 Be2 g6 9 Bf3 a6 10 Nge2 Nh7 11 a3 Bg5 reaches a very new area of opening theory.

**7 Bd3 a6**

7...h5 probably does not work here. After 8 f4!? exf4 9 Bxf4 Ne5 10 Nf3 Nfd7 11 0-0 Bf6 12 Nb5 Ke7 13 Ng5! (Psakhis) White's position is very appealing.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

8 Nf3 Rb8

Or 8...h5 9 h4 Rb8 10 a3 and White is slightly better.

9 a3 (Diagram 16)

This move needs some explanation when seen in combination with the next move. Black has cleverly kept his options open so that he can play a knight to g6 before deciding what to do on the kingside. Mikhail Gurevich gives the following reasoning behind his decision: 9 a4 h5!? 10 h4 Nf8 11 Ng5 Bg4 12 f3 Bd7 13 Be3 Qc8 14 Kf2 Bd8 15 a5 Ng6 16 g3 Nh7 and the position is unclear.

9...0-0 10 a4!?

White does not mind losing a tempo as long as Black's king stays on the kingside. However, also possible was 10 0-0 Ne8 (10...b5? 11 cxb5 axb5 12 Nxb5 Nxe4 does not work on account of 13 Na7!) 11 b4 b6 12 Rb1 with a slight plus (Gurevich).

10...Nh5!? 11 Ne2

White does not accept the offered pawn. After 11 g4 Nf4 12 Bxf4 exf4 13 Qd2 Bf6 14 Qxf4 Ne5 15 Nxe5 Bxe5 16 Qf3 Re8 Black would have reasonable counterplay on the dark squares.

11...g6 12 g4 Ng7 13 Bh6 Nf6 14 Ng3 Kh8 15 Qc2

15 Qe2 Bd7 16 Kf1 Ng8 17 Bd2 f5 would give Black great counterplay, so White's queen is better placed on c2.

15...Bd7 16 a5 b5 17 axb6 Qxb6 18 Ra2 a5 19 Bd2 a4 20 Bc3 Ng8 21 Ra3?!

This move does appear to be very slow. White prevents ...Qb3, but this is probably not very relevant. Gurevich instead suggested 21 Ke2 Rb7 22 Rha1 Ra8 23 Qd1 Qa6 24 Kf1 Bd8 25 Kg2 when White would be a bit better.

21...Rb7 22 Kf1 Bd8 23 Kg2 Qc7 24 Qd2 f5! (Diagram 17)

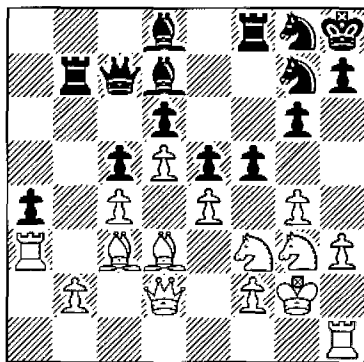


Diagram 17 (W)

Here it comes!

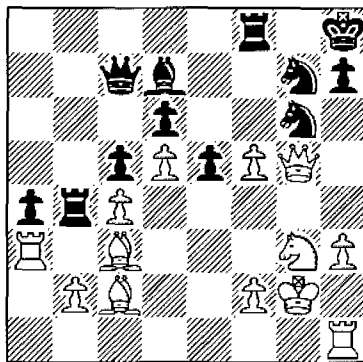


Diagram 18 (B)

White goes wrong



**NOTE:** White often tries to prevent this break, but when it finally becomes possible, it can arrive with extra force.

**25 exf5 gxf5 26 Bc2**

26 gxf5 Ne7 27 Bc2 Nexf5 28 Bxa4 Bxa4 29 Rxa4 Qf7 30 Rf1 Nh5 and Black has a strong attack (Gurevich).

**26...Ne7 27 Qh6**

27 g5, to close the kingside to some extent, would be ignored by Black; after something like 27...Ng6 28 Bxa4 Bxa4 29 Rxa4 e4 30 Ne1 Qe7 31 Nh5 Ne5 32 Nxc7 Qxc7 the attack is just about to start.

**27...Ng6 28 Ng5**

28 Nh5 is not good. After 28...Nxc7 29 gxc7 Rf6! 30 Qc3 Nf4+ 31 Kh2 Nxc7 White simply loses a pawn.

**28...Bxc7 29 Qxc7 Rb4! 30 gxf5?! (Diagram 18)**

A mistake due to time trouble. After 30 b3 axb3 31 Bxb3 Nf4+ 32 Kh2 the game would still be completely open.

**30...Bxf5! 31 Nxf5 Nxf5 32 h4**

32 Bxb4 would lose: 32...cxb4 33 Rg3 Ngh4+ 34 Kh2 Nxc7 35 Qxc7 Nf3+ 36 Kg2 Qxc4 and Black has many ways to kill the game.

**32...Rxc4 33 h5? Nf4+ 34 Kh2 h6 35 Qg4 Rg8 36 Bxf5 Rxc4 37 Bxc4 Qe7 38 Be1 Rc1**

Time trouble. After 38...Qh4+ 39 Bh3 Rc1 40 Rg3 Rxe1 41 Rxe1 Nxc7 it would simply be over.

**39 Kg3 Qg5 40 Rxa4 Ne2+ 41 Kh3 Nf4+ 42 Kg3 c4 43 Ra8+ Kg7 44 Ra7+ Kf6 45 Rd7 Rxe1 46 Rxe1 Nxc7+ 47 Kh3 Nf4+ 48 Kg3 h5 49 f3 hxc4 50 fxg4 Nxd5! 51 Rxd6+ Ke7 52 Rxd5 Qf4+ 53 Kg2 Qxc4+ 54 Kf2 Qh4+ 0-1**

Game 49

□ G.Kasparov ■ A.Miles

1st matchgame, Basle 1986

This game is from the match Kasparov played just after having become world champion, where Miles said about him: 'He is a monster with a thousand eyes who sees everything.'

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 Nf3 0-0**

Black could also play 6...Bg7 7 h3 Bxf3 8 Qxf3 0-0, but after 9 h4!? Na6 10 Bd2 White is better. White will play g2-g3 and Bh3, and Black cannot play his desired ...Bg5.

**7 h3 Ne8 8 Bd3 Nd7**

8...g6 9 Bh6 Ng7 10 g4 Nd7 has also been seen. Now White has several ways to continue the attack, one being 11 Qe2 Nf6 12 0-0-0 Kh8 13 Rdg1 a6 14 Kb1 Bd7 15 Be3 Ng8 16 h4 Rb8 17 Nd2 and now:

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

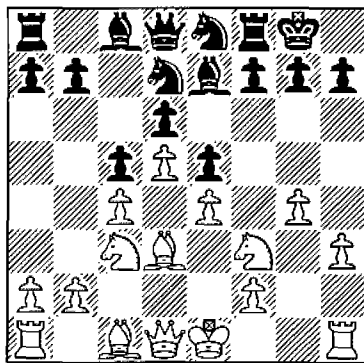
a) 17...f5 18 h5! f4 19 hxg6 h6 20 Bxc5! f3? (20...dxc5 21 Nf3 is a better try, but Black is still under considerable pressure and could quickly lose after moves like 21...Qc7, when 22 g5 h5 23 Nxe5! Qxe5 24 Rxh5+! wins) 21 Nxf3 Rxf3 22 Qxf3 dxc5 23 Qg3 Bg5 24 Qxe5 and White is winning, S.Djachkov-D.Khismatullin, Serpukhov 2003.

b) 17...b5 18 f4! exf4 19 Bxf4 b4 20 Nd1 with a continuing attack.

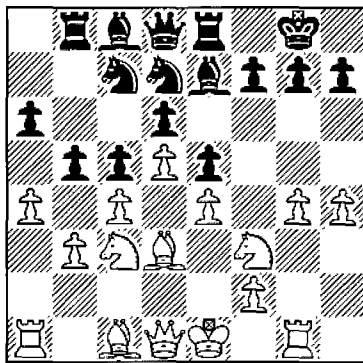


**TIP: White should not do anything to open the queenside, especially not accept such a pawn as the b5-pawn. This is a race, and the more White plays on the kingside, the faster his attack will be.**

9 g4 (Diagram 19)



**Diagram 19 (B)**  
White plays g2-g4



**Diagram 20 (W)**  
Seeking counterplay

9...a6 10 a4 Rb8

Another game saw 10...g6 11 Bh6 Ng7 12 Qd2 Nf6 and now the original 13 Ng1!? Kh8 14 Be3 Nd7 (or 14...Ng8 15 f4 Bh4+ 16 Kd1 f5 17 fxe5 dxe5 18 exf5 gxf5 19 Nf3 and White has the initiative) 15 Nge2 f5 16 exf5 gxf5 17 gxf5 Nxf5 18 Bxf5 Rxf5 19 Ng3 Rf7 20 Nce4 Nf8 21 Ng5 Bxg5 22 Bxg5 Qc7 23 Ne4 Ng6 24 Bf6+ Kg8 25 Qg5 and White had an attack, M.Gurevich-A.Guseinov, Baku 1986.

11 Rg1 Nc7

Better is 11...g6 12 Bh6 Ng7 13 Qe2 – Kasparov.

12 b3

Or 12 a5!? b5 13 axb6 Rxb6 14 b3 Ne8 15 Bc2 g6 16 Bh6 Ng7 17 Qd2 with an edge – Razuvaev

12...Re8 13 h4 b5! (Diagram 20)

Black is seeking active counterplay.



**NOTE: It's worth knowing the following thematic idea: 13...h6 is met strongly with 14 h5! Nf6 15 g5 Nxh5 16 gxh6 g6 17 a5! when White is in complete control.**

**14 g5!?**

14 cxb5 axb5 15 Nxb5 isn't appealing due to 15...Nxd5! 16 exd5 e4 17 Bxe4 Bf6 with reasonable counterplay for Black.

**14...Nf8 15 h5 Bd7**

Or 15...bxc4 16 Bxc4 Nd7 17 Qd3 and White has an edge.

**16 Nh2 bxc4 17 Bxc4!**

After 17 bxc4 Rb4 18 a5 Qb8 19 Ng4 Rb3 Black has counterplay on the queen-side.

**17...f5!?** 18 exf5 Bxf5 19 Nf1 Qd7 20 Ne3 e4 21 Bb2 Bd8 22 Ne2

Here 22 Qc2! Qf7 23 0-0-0 Nd7 24 f4! with an attack is stronger according to Kasparov.

**22...Qf7 23 Nf4**

23 Ng3 is met by 23...Bc8 24 g6 hxg6 25 hxg6 Nxg6 26 Nh5 Bh4! 27 Qc2 Rf8 with chances for both sides.

**23...Bc8 24 Rg4!**

24 g6?! Qxf4 25 gxh7+ looks tempting because 25...Kxh7 26 Rxd7 Kh6 27 Qd2 is very dangerous for Black. However, Black plays 25...Kh8! 26 Rxd7 Re5! 27 Bxe5 dxe5 28 Rg3 Kxh7 when the position is completely unclear.

**24...Qe7**

24...Bxg4 25 Qxg4 Qe7 26 Ne6! Nfxe6 27 dxe6 d5 28 Nxd5 Nxd5 29 Bxd5 with a clear plus for White – Kasparov.

**25 Rg3 Qf7 26 Nfg2! Na8 27 a5?!**

Due to the strategic complexity of the position, both players were getting short of time already. Simpler was 27 Qc2 Nb6 28 Be2 Qb7 29 h6 and Black is under attack – the idea of Qc3 is especially nasty.

**27...Nc7 28 Nh4 Nb5 29 g6 hxg6 (Diagram 21)**

**30 Nxg6?!**

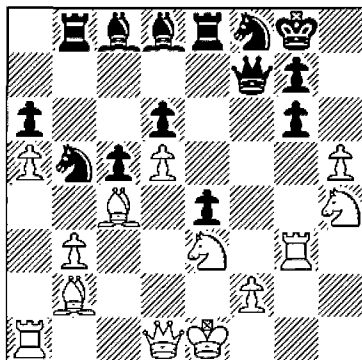
White is aiming to keep the g-file open, but he was better off gaining time with 30 hxg6 Qf4 31 Neg2 Qh6 32 Bc1. Now 32...Qh8 33 Bxb5 Rxb5 34 Bg5! looks dangerous, so Black should probably try 32...e3!? 33 Rxe3 Bxh4 34 Rxe8 Qxg6 35 Rxf8+ Kxf8 36 Nxh4 Qe4+ 37 Be3 Qxh4 38 Qf3+ Kg8 39 0-0-0 when White only has a slight advantage.

**30...Bf6**

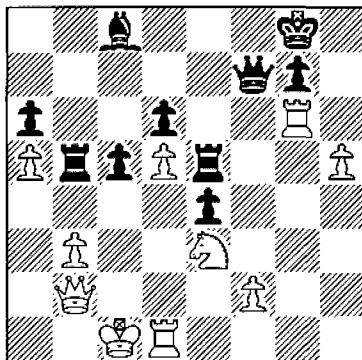
We believe 30...Nd4!? 31 Kf1 Bf6 32 Kg2 Nf3 to be a bit better for Black.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

31 Bxb5 Rxb5 32 Qc2 Bxb2?



**Diagram 21 (W)**  
Which recapture on g6?



**Diagram 22 (B)**  
Late castling!

Did Black forget that White could still castle queenside? After 32...c4 33 Nxc4 Rxd5 34 Nf4 Rc5 the position would still be difficult to assess.

**33 Qxb2 Nxc6 34 Rxc6 Re5 35 0-0-0! (Diagram 22) 35...Rxc6 36 Rg1 Rh7 37 Nc4 Qf4+ 38 Kb1 Rb7 39 Nxd6 Bf5!? 40 Rf6! Qh2?**

Black can struggle on with 40...e3+ though White has a clear plus after 41 Nxf5 exf2 42 Rxc6+ Rxc6 43 Ne7+ Rbxe7 44 Rxf4 Re1+ 45 Ka2 f1Q 46 Rxf1 Rxf1 47 Qe5! – Kasparov.

**41 Rg3 Qh1+ 42 Ka2 1-0**

Game 50

□ M.Pavlovic ■ B.Ivkov

Lugano 1985

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 Be2 0-0**

6...Nbd7 7 Nf3 Nf8 is also possible here, but White replies with 8 h4!?, for example 8...h5 (or 8...h6 9 g3 N8h7 10 Nd2 0-0 11 Nf1 a6 12 Ne3 Rb8 13 a4 and White is better) 9 g3 Bg4 10 Nh2 Bxe2 11 Qxe2 Qd7 12 Nf1 g6 13 a3 Ng4 14 f3 Nh6 15 b4 b6 16 bxc5 bxc5 17 Rb1 f5 18 Bxh6!? Rxh6 19 Ne3 Rh7 20 Qb2 Bd8 21 Qb5! Rf7 22 Ke2 f4 23 Ng2 with an advantage. M.Najdorf-G.Trikaliotis, Nice 1974.

**7 Nf3 Ne8 8 0-0 Nd7**

Black should not rush with 8...f5?! due to 9 exf5 Bxf5 10 Nd2 Nf6 11 f4 exf4 12 Rxf4 Bg6 13 Nf3 Nfd7 14 Bd3 Rxf4 15 Bxf4 Nf8 (or 15...Bh5 16 Qc2 h6 17 Rf1 Na6 18 Bf5 with a clear plus – Euwe) 16 Qe2 Bxd3 17 Qxd3 Ng6 18 Bg3 Nd7 19 Qf5 Ndf8 20 Ne4 h6 21 Rf1 and White was much better in M.Euwe-B.Milic, Beverwijk 1958.

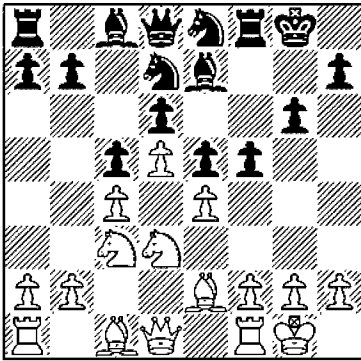
**9 Ne1**

Another interesting idea here is to play on the queenside with 9 a3 g6 10 Bh6 Ng7 11 Qd2 Nf6 (11...Kh8 is met strongly by 12 Rfd1 Nf6 13 Nxe5! dxe5 14 d6 when the control over d5 gives White a clear edge; 12...Nf6 is of course not forced, but it is Black's most natural move – how should he otherwise continue with his plan?) 12 b4 b6 13 Ne1 Kh8 14 bxc5 bxc5 15 f4 Ng8 16 Bxg7+ Kxg7 17 fxe5 dxe5 18 Nf3 Bd6 19 Nb5 Nf6 20 Bd3 Bb8 with a slight plus for White, B.Malich-L.Polugaevsky, Havana 1966.

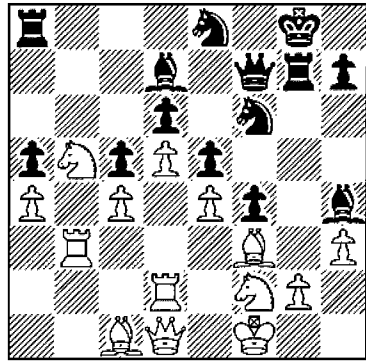
**9...g6**

Traditionally Black would play 9...Bg5 in positions like this, and after 10 Nd3 g6 11 g3 Bxc1 12 Qxc1 Qe7 13 f4 Ng7 it would be unclear.

**10 Nd3 f5 (Diagram 23)**



**Diagram 23 (W)**  
Breaking with ...f7-f5



**Diagram 24 (B)**  
An unnecessary weakness

**11 a3**

White should probably not allow Black to get such a great attack. Preferable is 11 f4!? Bf6 12 exf5 gxf5 13 fxe5 dxe5 14 Bh6 Ng7 15 Qc1, and we like White.

**11...f4 12 b4 b6 13 a4 a5 14 bxa5 bxa5!**

The a5-pawn may be weak, but it's not that easy to attack. White has a slight pull after the inferior 14...Rxa5 15 Bg4 Ng7 16 Nb5 Ra6 17 Bd2.

**15 Rb1**

15 Bg4 would be met by 15...Ng7 16 Rb1 h5 17 Bh3 Ba6 18 Nb5 Nf6 with a strong initiative – Black is not interested in exchanging his light-squared bishop.

**15...Ndf6 16 Qb3 Nc7 17 f3 Nh5 18 Rd1 Bh4! 19 Bf1 g5 20 Rd2 g4 21 fxg4 Bxg4**

Also worthy of note is 21...Nf6!? with the idea of 22 g5 Ng4 23 Qb6 Ra6 24 Qb8

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Ne3 when Black has a nice initiative.

**22 Nf2 Bd7 23 Be2 Nf6 24 Bf3 Rf7 25 Nb5 Nce8! 26 Qd1 Rg7 27 Rb3 Qe7 28 Kf1 Qf7 29 h3?! (Diagram 24)**

This only creates weaknesses. After 29 Nc3 Qg6 30 Rdb2 White has a better chance to withstand the attack.

**29...Qg6 30 Qc2**

Or 30 Nc3 h5 31 Rdb2 Bg3 32 Kg1 Qg5 and Black's attack rages on.

**30...Nh5 31 Ke1?**

31 Rd1 Bg3 32 Nh1 Bh2 was unpleasant, but not 'game over'. Now there are no more possible survival routes for White.

**31...Bxh3! 32 Bxh5 Qxg2! 33 Re2 Bxf2+ 34 Rxf2 Qg1+ 35 Ke2 Qxf2+! 36 Kxf2 Rg2+ 37 Ke1 Rxc2 38 Bxf4 exf4 39 Rxh3 Rxc4 40 Bxe8 Rxe4+ 41 Kf1 Raxe8 42 Nxd6 Re1+ 43 Kf2 R8e2+ 44 Kf3 Re3+ 45 Kf2 Rxh3 0-1**

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*Game 51*

□ I.Lutsko ■ S.Sergienko

Voronezh 1998

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 g3**

This system is less popular than the one with Nf3 and h3, but it still contains considerable sting and should secure White an edge.

**6...0-0**

Another idea for Black is 6...Na6 7 Bg2 (less attractive is 7 Bh3 Bxh3 8 Nxb3 Qd7 9 Ng5 Nc7 10 0-0 h6 11 Nf3 0-0 when White has exchanged the correct bishop but has no play of his own – the chances are even) 7...Nc7 8 Nge2 Rb8 (8...b6 9 Bd2 h5 10 h4 Bd7 11 a4 a6 12 0-0 b5 13 axb5 axb5 14 Rxa8 Qxa8 15 cxb5 Nxb5 with unclear play was suggested by Maiorov; this is hardly forced, and White is likely to have improvements) 9 a4 b6 10 Qc2 Na6 (or 10...a6 11 Na2 b5 12 b4!? bxc4 13 Qxc4 0-0 14 0-0 Nd7 15 Be3 and White has pressure) 11 Na2 0-0 12 0-0 Ne8 13 f4 g6 14 fxe5 dxe5 15 Bh6 Ng7 16 Qd2 Nc7 17 Nec1 a5 18 Nd3 f6 19 Nc3 Rf7 20 Qf2 Bd6 21 h4 with an initiative for White, P.Nikolic-A.Miles, Zagreb 1987.

**7 Bg2 Ne8 8 Nge2**

White can also play something like 8 Nf3 g6 9 0-0 Ng7 10 Ne1 Nd7 11 Nd3 f5 12 f4 with some advantage – it is really a matter of style.

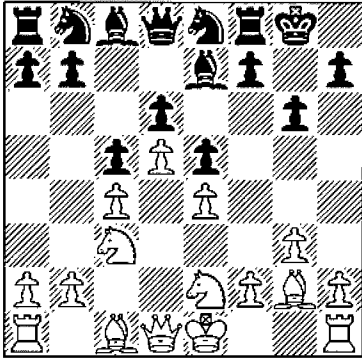
**8...g6?! (Diagram 25)**

This allows White to generate a rapid attack on the kingside.

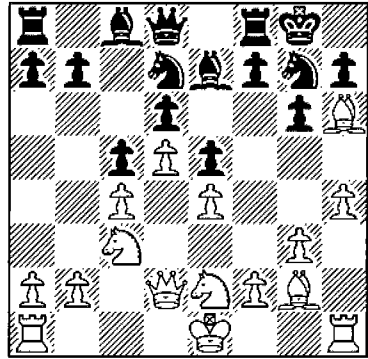
8...Bg5?! is not much better; after 9 f4 exf4 10 gxf4 Bh4+ 11 Ng3 Black must be careful. After 11...f5?! White has 12 e5!, Y.Zilberman-E.Grinspun, Israel 2002 concluding 12...dxe5 13 fxe5 f4 (or 13...Nd7 14 e6 f4 15 exd7 fxe3 16 dxc8Q gxh2+ 17 Ke2 Qxc8 18 Kd3! and Black's compensation is an illusion) 14 0-0 fxe3 15 Rxf8+ Kxf8 16 hxg3 Be7 17 d6 Nxd6 18 exd6 Bf6 19 Be3 Nc6 20 Bxc5

Qa5 21 Ne4 Bf5 22 Qd5 Bd4+ 23 Kh2 1-0.

However, 8...Nd7 is stronger: 9 0-0 g6 (or 9...a6 10 a4 b6 11 f4 exf4 12 gxf4 Bf6 13 Qd3 Ra7 14 Ng3 and the position is unclear) 10 Bh6 Ng7 11 Qd2 Nf6 (11...f5 12 f3 Rf7 13 a3 a6 14 Rab1 and White still controls both sides of the board and therefore has an edge) 12 h3 Kh8 13 Kh2 Ng8 14 Be3 f5 15 f4 (or 15 a3 a6 16 b4 b6 17 Rab1 with a pull – Magerramov) 15...Bf6 16 fxe5 Bxe5 17 Bf4 Re8 18 Rae1 Nf6 19 Bxe5 Rxe5 20 Nf4 and White was slightly better in I.Zakharevich-A.Fedorov, Ekaterinburg 1997.



**Diagram 25 (W)**  
Provoking an attack



**Diagram 26 (B)**  
White obliges!

9 Bh6 Ng7 10 Qd2 Nd7 11 h4! (Diagram 26)

11 0-0 would transpose to lines considered after 8...Nd7.

11...Nf6 12 f3 a6 13 Bh3!? Bxh3 14 Rxh3 Qd7 15 Rh2 b5 16 h5 Nfe8 17 g4 17 Bxg7 Nxc7 18 hxg6 fxc6 19 Qh6 Nh5 might look attractive, but it's not really clear because 20 g4?! is met by 20...Qd8! and Black will have a big advantage after 21...Bg5.

17...f6?!

17...bxc4 18 Ng3 Rb8 19 g5 was better.

18 hxg6 hxg6 19 Nd1 Kf7 20 Ne3 Rh8 21 0-0-0 Nc7 22 f4! Rag8 23 Rf1

After 23 f5 gxf5 24 gxf5 Nge8 25 Rdh1 Bf8 Black would be allowed to exchange his potential 'problem bishop'.

23...Ke8 24 Rfh1 Bd8 25 g5!?

Or 25 f5 g5 26 Ng3 with a lasting structural edge.

25...fxg5 26 f5?

Simpler was 26 fxe5 dxe5 27 d6 Nce6 28 Bxg7 Rxh2 29 Rxh2 Rxc7 30 Qd5 and Black is in for a beating.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

**26...gxf5?!**

The real fight in this game is for squares, not material. After this move White is able to occupy the f5-square and thereby take control. 26...Nxf5! 27 exf5 gxf5 28 Qc2 f4 29 Nf5 bxc4 with a very complicated position was better.

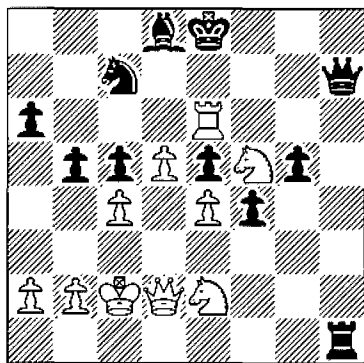
**27 Bxg7 Rxh2 28 Rxh2 f4**

After 28...Qxg7 Black doesn't lose on the spot, but does have to suffer after 29 Nxf5 Qd7 30 Qd1! bxc4 31 Qh1.

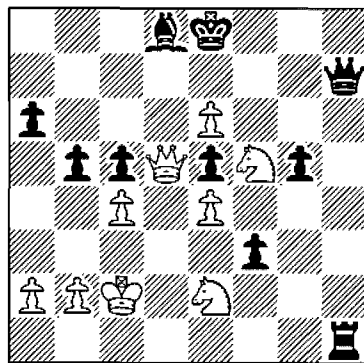
**29 Nf5 Rxg7 30 Rh6?!**

Simpler was 30 Rh8+ Kf7 31 Nxf4! exf4 32 Qh2 Kf6 33 b3! and White wins because of 34 Qb2.

**30...Rh7 31 Rxd6 Rh1+ 32 Kc2 Qh7 33 Re6+? (Diagram 27)**



**Diagram 27 (B)**  
Throwing it away



**Diagram 28 (B)**  
Black misses a win

White has a solid positional advantage, and now he throws it all down the drain. After 33 Qc3! Qh8 34 cxb5 Rh2 35 Kd1! (but not 35 Kd2 Nxb5 36 Re6+ Kf7 37 Qxc5 f3 38 Qc6 Rxe2+ 39 Kd3 Rd2+ 40 Ke3 Re2+ with a most surprising draw) 35...Nxb5 (35...Be7 36 b6 Nb5 37 Qxc5 Nxd6 38 b7! and White wins) 36 Re6+ Kf7 37 Qxc5 Black has hardly any chances of survival.

**33...Nxe6 34 dxe6 f3 35 Qd5 (Diagram 28) 35...Qc7?**

A horrible blunder in time trouble. After 35...fxe2 36 Qc6+ Kf8 37 Qd6+ Qe7! 38 Nxe7 Bxe7 39 Qb8+ Kg7 Black wins (Sergienko). It is of course possible to forgive Black for overlooking this beautiful queen sacrifice in time trouble.

**36 e7! Bxe7**

Or 36...fxe2 37 Qg8+ Kd7 38 e8Q+ Kc8 39 Ne7+ and Black will not live long enough to queen his own pawn.

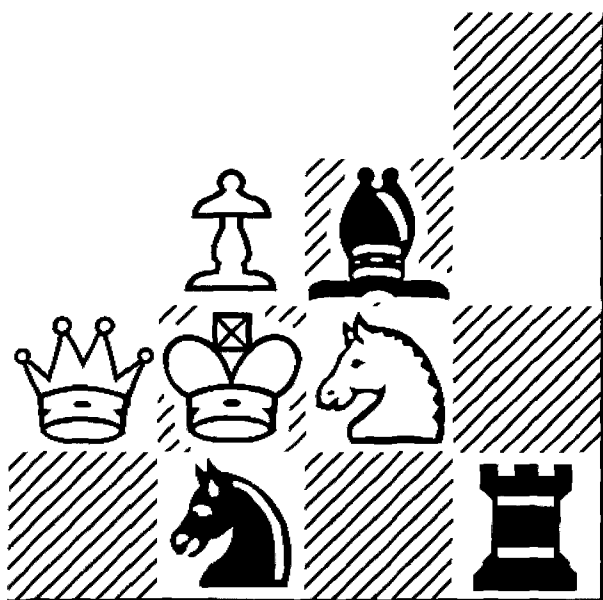
**37 Ng7+ Kf8 38 Ne6+ Kg8 39 Nxc7+ Kh7 40 Ng3 Rh2+ 41 Kd1 f2 42 Qf7+ Kh6 43 Nf5 mate (1-0)**

## Chapter Six

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# 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5

- ▨ Introduction
- ▨ Black Plays 3...b5
- ▨ Black Plays 3...e6
- ▨ 3...g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 e4 0-0

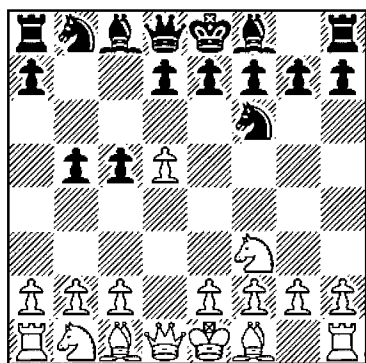


## Introduction

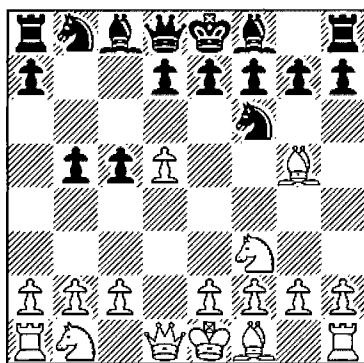
This chapter is a combination of three different variations after 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5. The continuation 3...b5 is related to the Volga Gambit and is covered in Games 52-55. The invitation to the Modern Benoni with 3...e6 is reviewed in Games 56-58. Finally, Game 59 is devoted to 3...g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 e4, and here not 5...d6 with transposition into the Schmid Benoni (see Chapter 7), but 5...0-0 allowing 6 e5.

## Black Plays 3...b5

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 b5 (Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1 (W)**  
A quick wing attack



**Diagram 2 (B)**  
4 Bg5: the main choice

With 3...b5 Black undertakes an aggressive space-gaining plan on the queenside to prepare ...Bb7 with an attack on the vanguard d5-pawn. Now 4 c4 reaches a position from the Volga Gambit Declined (see Chapter 3), while 4 a4 isn't popular. An interesting position arises after 4...Bb7 5 e4!? Nxe4; after any capture on b5 Black proceeds with 6...e6 7 dxe6 fxe6 and obtains satisfactory positions because of his pawn superiority in the centre (see the notes to Game 52).

In most cases White chooses 4 Bg5 (**Diagram 2**).

The bishop development is linked with the idea of exchanging on f6 to compromise Black's pawn structure. The consistent 4...Bb7 is met with 5 Bxf6 exf6 6 e4 (Game 52), and any changes in Black's pawn chain on the queenside are favourable for White. After 6...Qe7 7 Nbd2 b4 (Huzman-Rashkovsky) the c4-square is weakened, while in the event of 6...c4 White undermines the chain with 7 a4 followed by b2-b3 (Miles-Hodgson).

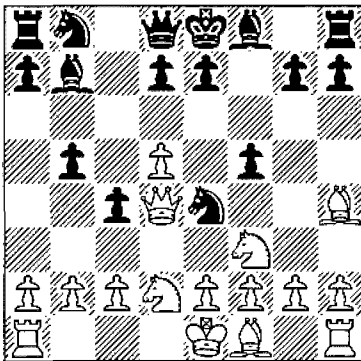
The continuation 4...d6 (Game 53) also demonstrates Black's indifference to his pawn chain. After 5 Bxf6 exf6, the move 6 e3 is too modest; it is preferable to seize the centre with 6 e4. After 6...a6 7 a4 the response 7...bxa4 (Sashikiran-Miton) gives White freedom on the queenside, while the easiest thing Black can do is to close the play with 7...b4. Later White transfers his queen's knight to c4. Black should not allow the restricting a4-a5 (Raetsky-Provotorov); after ...a6-a5 and then ...f6-f5 (Magerramov-Matamoros) he retains chances to equalise.

When the bishop is developed to g5 it is impossible to ignore the counterattack with ...Ne4 (Game 54). This attack has some drawbacks: a loss of tempo and the vulnerability of the knight after the g5-bishop retreats. After 4...Ne4 5 Bf4 Bb7 6 a4 Nf6 Black attacks the d5-pawn and White parries the attack with a method that is generally unusual but typical for the 3...b5 system – e2-e4 (as we have already seen in the 4 a4 line).

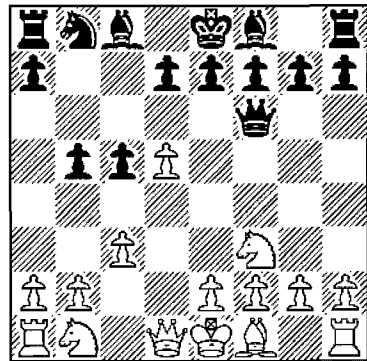


**NOTE:** The pawn sacrifice e2-e4 lifts the attack from the d5-pawn and gains a tempo to eliminate the b5-pawn. In this case the piece attack on d5 is replaced by a pawn attack – ...e7-e6.

If 5 Bh4 the problematic position arises after 5...Bb7 6 Qd3 f5 7 Nbd2 c4 8 Qd4 (Diagram 3).



**Diagram 3 (B)**  
A problematic position



**Diagram 4 (B)**  
The basic position

With 5 Bf4 Black could escape with 8...Nf6 followed by attacking the d5-pawn, but here he shouldn't make this move because of the potential doubled pawns. Correct is 8...Na6! 9 c3 (9 Nxe4 fxe4 10 Qxe4 Nb4) 9...Nxd2 10 Nxd2 Qb6 with ample counterplay (Hübner-Topalov).

Also quite popular is 4...Qb6 (Game 55), protecting the f6-knight and strengthening the b5-pawn. If 5 a4 bxa4 6 Nc3 the black queen grabs the b2-pawn and White obtains the initiative (Naumkin-Jones). However, the basic position

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

arises after 5 Bxf6 Qxf6 6 c3 (**Diagram 4**).

The fight is very complex after 6...Qf5 (Komarov-Kogan), 6...Qb6 (Mchedlishvili-Zhang Pengxiang) or 6...Na6 (Hebden-Sulskis).

## Statistics

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After 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 a4 White scores 54%; in the main line 4 Bg5, 61%.

## Theoretical?

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More yes than no, but only after 4 Bg5 and not the less popular 4 a4.

## Theoretical Status

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It seems to us that the continuation 4 Bg5 doesn't question the soundness of 3...b5. It's true that the exchange Bxf6 damages Black's pawn structure, but any advantage in the sharp variations after 4...Ne4 has yet to be proved, and 4...Qb6 also seems to be quite reliable.

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Game 52

□ A.Miles ■ J.Hodgson

Zaragoza 1993

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5**

Also interesting is 4 a4 Bb7 (this is of course Black's idea; he doesn't want to give away c4 for nothing) 5 e4!? (5 c4 transposes to 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Nf3 Bb7 5 a4, while 5 axb5 Bxd5 6 Bg5 e6 7 Nc3 Bxf3 8 exf3 d5 is hard to evaluate) 5...Nxe4 (of course!) 6 axb5 (6 Bxb5 e6 7 dxe6 fxe6 8 Nbd2 Nf6 9 0-0 Be7 10 b3 0-0 11 Bb2 Nc6 gives Black reasonable play) 6...e6 7 dxe6 fxe6 8 Bd3 Be7 9 Qe2 Nf6 10 0-0 0-0 11 c4 a6 12 Nc3 axb5 13 Rxa8 Bxa8 14 cxb5 Qc7 with chances for both sides, D.Bocharov-I.Khairullin, Samara 2002.

**4...Bb7**

Black's major alternatives are considered in the upcoming games, but he has also tried:

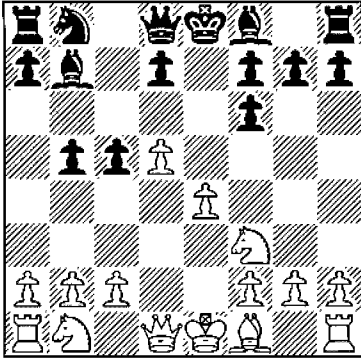
a) 4...Qa5+ 5 c3 Ne4 6 Nbd2 Nxc3 7 Nxc3 h6 8 Ngf3 d6 9 e4 (the lead in development should outweigh the two bishops) 9...Nd7 10 a4 bxa4 11 Rxa4 Qc7 12 Qa1 Nb6 13 Bb5+ Bd7 14 Bxd7+ Qxd7 15 Ra6 Nc8 16 0-0 and White had real pressure in G.Stahlberg-T.Petrosian, Budapest 1952.

b) 4...g6 5 Bxf6 exf6 6 e4 a6 (Black needs to develop normally; after 6...Qe7?! 7 Nbd2 f5 8 Bxb5 fxe4 9 d6! Qxd6 10 Nxe4 Qxd1+ 11 Rxd1 Be7 12 0-0 0-0 13 Nd6 Bf6 14 c3 White was much better in E.Kengis-A.Rogozhnikov, Naberezhnye Chelny 1988) 7 a4 bxa4 8 Nc3 d6 9 Bd3 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Rxa4 and White has a plus.

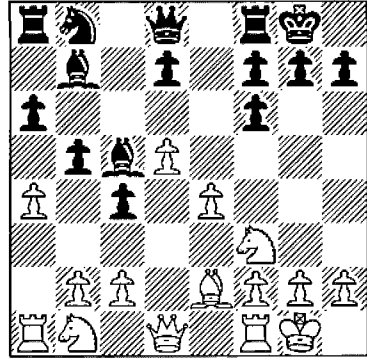
**5 Bxf6 exf6**

5...gxf6 6 e4 a6 7 a4 should favour White: 7...Qb6 8 axb5 axb5 9 Rxa8 Bxa8 10 Na3 b4 11 Nc4 Qa7 12 Bd3 and Black has no easy way to develop his pieces.

6 e4 (Diagram 5)



**Diagram 5 (B)**  
Targeting the b5-pawn



**Diagram 6 (W)**  
Keep it simple!

6 c4 b4 7 e4 g6 8 Bd3 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Nbd2 d6 allows Black to equalise – Hübner.



**NOTE:** In these lines White is trying to get his knight to c4, so he should not put a pawn on this square.

6...c4

A.Huzman-N.Rashkovsky, Kuibyshev 1986 continued 6...Qe7 7 Nbd2 b4 (greed does not pay when you are underdeveloped; after 7...Bxd5 8 Bxb5 Bxe4?! 9 0-0 Bd5 10 Re1 Be6 11 Nh4 White has a strong initiative, with ideas like Nd2-c4-d6 and f2-f4-f5) 8 Bc4 g6 9 0-0 Bg7 10 a3 0-0 (10...a5?! 11 axb4 axb4? is not good, as after 12 Rxa8 Bxa8 13 Qa1! Bb7 14 Qa7 White picks up a free piece) 11 axb4 cxb4 when White had done well out of the opening. Now he decided to rid himself of his only problem, the e4-pawn, in order to develop an initiative: 12 Nb3! Qxe4 13 Na5 Ba6 14 Re1 Qf4 15 Qd3 Qd6 16 Bxa6 Qxa6 17 Nc4 Qb7 18 Ra4 f5 19 Rea1 with good play for the pawn.

7 a4 a6 8 Be2

The bishop is sorely missed after 8 Nd4 Qb6 9 axb5 Bc5! 10 c3 axb5 11 Rxa8 Bxa8 12 Na3 0-0 – the quick development allows Black to first put pressure on the dark squares and then the e4-pawn.

8...Bc5 9 0-0 0-0 (Diagram 6) 10 b3?!

White needed to play simple chess. After 10 axb5 axb5 11 Rxa8 Bxa8 12 Nc3 Qb6 13 b3 cxb3 14 cxb3 Re8 he is better if he does not fall for 15 Bxb5?? Bb4!.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

**10...cxb3 11 cxb3 b4**

Also interesting is 11...f5 12 Nbd2 (12 exf5 Qf6 13 Ra2 Qxf5 with good play) 12...Qb6 13 Qc2 Re8 with chances for both sides.

**12 Nbd2 Re8 13 Qc2 d6 14 Qd3**

Black has an edge after 14 Rae1 Nd7 15 Nh4 g6.

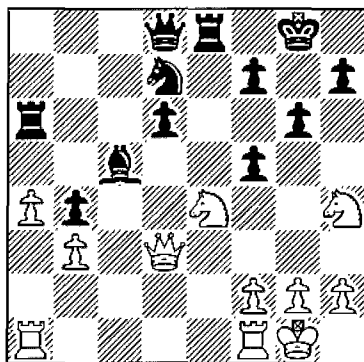
**14...Nd7 15 Nh4 g6 16 Qg3**

White is out of good, natural moves, so he decides to part with a pawn to gain some active play on the light squares.

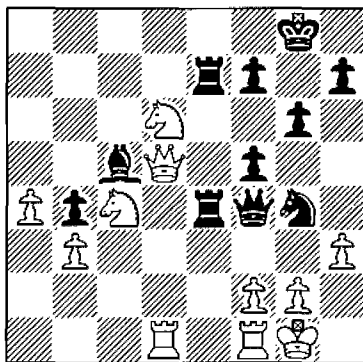
**16...Bxd5 17 Bxa6**

After 17 Nf5 Qc7 18 Rac1 Be6 White doesn't have enough for the pawn.

**17...Bxe4 18 Nxe4 Rxa6 19 Qd3 f5!? (Diagram 7)**



**Diagram 7 (W)**  
An enterprising sacrifice



**Diagram 8 (W)**  
Game over!

An enterprising sacrifice. However, the more normal 19...Qa8 20 Rfe1 f5 21 Nxc5 Nxc5 22 Qc2 Re4 would give Black a pleasant edge.

**20 Nd2**

Maybe White should take the exchange, though after 20 Qxa6 fxe4 21 Qb7 Nf6 Black has a very strong initiative.

**20...Ra7 21 Nhf3 Ne5 22 Qd5**

After 22 Nxe5 dxe5 23 Qxd8 Rxd8 24 Nc4 e4 Black has all the chances.

**22...Ng4 23 Nc4 Ree7**

23...Re2!? seems strong; 24 Rad1 Bxf2+ (but not 24...Nxf2?? 25 Qxc5!) 25 Kh1 Rd7 with a clear edge.

**24 Rad1 Qf8?!**

It would have made more sense to hold onto the extra pawn with 24...Rad7 25

Nd4 Nf6 26 Qf3 Qc8, when Black is a little better.

25 Nd4?

25 Nxd6 Ra5 26 Nb5 Re2 27 Rd2 Rxd2 28 Qxd2 Nf6 with unclear play was preferable.



**TIP: When you can see that your opponent is about to attack your king, don't start manoeuvring your defending pieces away from it!**

25...Re4 26 Nb5 Rae7 27 Nbx d6

27 g3 Qh6 28 h4 Nxf2! 29 Rxf2 Rg4! would also give Black a conclusive attack.

27...Qh6 28 h3 Qf4! 0-1 (Diagram 8)

White resigned because of 29 hxg4 Bxf2+! 30 Rxf2 Re1.

Game 53

□ A.Raetsky ■ I.Provotorov

Voronezh 2004

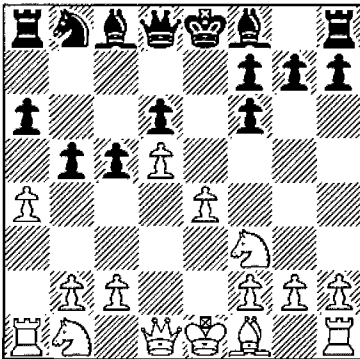
1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 d6 5 Bxf6 exf6

This is the most natural recapture. 5...gxf6 6 e4 Qb6 7 a4 bxa4 8 Ra2! secures White of a slight structural plus – the g-file is not so easy to use for anything.

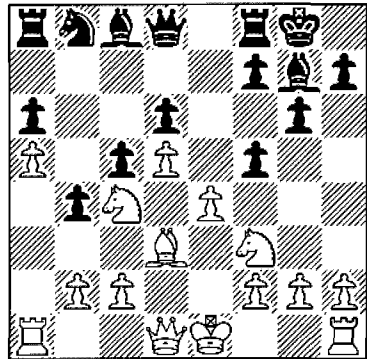
6 e4

White probably needs to play actively in the centre, as after 6 e3 a6 7 a4 b4 8 Nbd2 g6 9 a5 Bg7 it's not clear that he can generate enough pressure to claim an advantage. After 10 Nc4 f5 11 Be2 0-0 12 0-0 Qe7 13 Qd3 Bd7 14 c3 bxc3 15 bxc3 Bb5 16 Rfc1 Nd7 Black was doing fine in Ki.Georgiev-V.Baklan, Cappelle la Grande 1997.

6...a6 7 a4 (Diagram 9)



**Diagram 9 (B)**  
Black cannot hold b5



**Diagram 10 (W)**  
Opening the e-file

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 7...b4

Black's problem is that he cannot retain the b5-pawn. White also has the advantage after 7...bxa4 8 Nbd2 Bd7 9 Bd3 g6 10 0-0 Bh6 11 c3 0-0 12 Bc2 Bg4 13 h3 Bxf3 14 Nxf3 Qb6 15 Bxa4. In K.Sashikiran-K.Miton, Yerevan 2000, 15...Qxb2?! was bad because of 16 Qb1 Qxb1 17 Rfxb1 Ra7 18 Rb6, leaving Black in deep trouble.

### 8 Nbd2

Also fine is 8 Bd3 g6 9 Nbd2 Bg7 10 Nc4 a5 11 0-0 0-0 12 Nfd2 Bb7 13 Qf3 Nd7 14 Qg3 Ne5 15 Rad1 (15 f4 Nxc4 16 Bxc4 f5 17 exf5 Bxb2 18 Rae1 Qf6 is less clear –Burmakin) 15...f5 16 exf5 Bxd5 17 b3 Nxd3 18 Qxd3 Bd4 19 Nf3 Rc8 20 Rfe1 Bxf3 21 Qxf3 d5 22 Ne3 Bxe3 23 fxe3 d4 and White retained a slight plus in J.Maherramzade-C.Matamoros, Istanbul 2000.

### 8...g6

Black can rid himself of his doubled pawn with 8...f5, but after 9 exf5 Bxf5 10 Nc4 Black cannot play his usual ...g7-g6 and ...Bg7 because of the open e-file. After 10...Be7 11 Bd3 Bg4 12 0-0 0-0 13 Re1 White still has the advantage.

### 9 a5 Bg7

9...Bd7 10 Nc4 Ra7 11 Bd3 Bb5 12 0-0 Bg7 13 Nfd2 0-0 14 Re1 also slightly favours White.

### 10 Nc4 0-0 11 Bd3 f5!? (Diagram 10)

Destroying White's right to castle. More solid was 11...Bg4 12 h3 Bxf3 13 Qxf3 Nd7 14 0-0 Ne5 15 Nxe5 fxe5 16 Qe2 when Black is close to equal but will always have problems becoming active.

### 12 exf5 Re8+ 13 Kf1 Bxf5 14 Bxf5 gxf5 15 h4?!

White should play for structure rather than for tactics. Better here was 15 g3 Qf6 16 Kg2 Nd7 17 Qd3 with a persistent edge.

### 15...Qf6 16 Qd3 Nd7 17 Rd1 Re4

17...Ne5 18 Nfxe5 dxe5 19 d6 Rad8 20 Qd5 would suit White perfectly.

### 18 g3 Rae8 19 Kg2 Rg4?

It is not clear what the rook is doing out here. After 19...f4 Black would get decent counterplay, but maybe he did not see that after 20 Ng5 he has the tricky 20...f3+! 21 Kh2 Re2 22 Qxh7+ Kf8 23 Rhf1 Ne5 24 Nxe5 R8xe5 25 Qd3 Qg6 26 Qxg6 fxc6 with very good play for the pawn.

### 20 Rhe1

Simpler was 20 Ne3 Rge4 21 Ng5 with the idea of 21...R4e5 22 Qxa6 when there seems to be no real compensation for the pawn.

### 20...Ne5?

A truly horrible decision. Clearly Black hopes that his pawns will help him to generate active play, but the advance of White's d-pawn is too fast. Better was 20...Rge4 when after 21 Ncd2 Rxe1 22 Rxe1 Rxe1 23 Nxe1 f4 24 Nef3 White

has a tiny edge, but no more.

21 Nfxe5 dxe5 22 Ne3 Rd4 23 Qxf5 Qd8 24 c3 bxc3 25 bxc3 Rxd1 26 Rxd1 e4

Black does not have time to pick up a pawn with 26...Qxa5 as White wins with 27 d6 Qxc3 28 d7 Rd8 29 Nd5 Qb2 30 Qg5 Qb8 31 Ne7+ Kh8 32 Nc6.

27 d6 Bxc3

Or 27...Re5 28 Qg4 h5 29 Qe2 and White should win.

28 Nd5 Bd4 29 Rxd4! cxd4 30 Nf6+ Kf8 31 Qg5 1-0

Game 54

□ J.Timman ■ V.Topalov

Wijk aan Zee 2001

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 Ne4

This is the most complex move here, and White has many options.

5 Bh4

The main move, but also possible are:

a) 5 Nbd2 Nxc5 6 Nxc5 e6 7 Ngf3 exd5 8 e4 Bb7 9 exd5 c4! and Black is fine.



**NOTE: It is not only White who can restrict the mobility of his opponent's pieces in this line.**

b) 5 Qd3 is a very interesting idea. After 5...Nxc5 6 Nxc5 e6 7 Nxf7!? (normal play like 7 h4 c4 8 Qf3 Qf6 9 Nc3 Bb7 10 0-0-0 Qxf3 11 Nxf3 a6 does not promise White any advantage) 7...Kxf7 8 dxe6+ Ke7 9 Qf3 d5 10 Qf7+ Kd6 11 Nc3 (Diagram 11)

White has good compensation for the sacrificed piece: Nxd5, Nxb5, e2-e4 and 0-0-0 are all on the way.

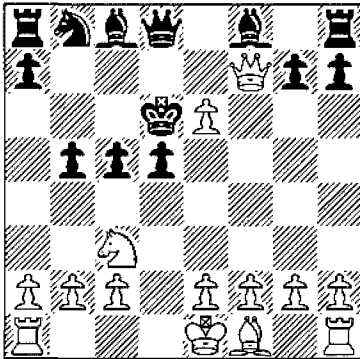


Diagram 11 (B)  
A dangerous sacrifice

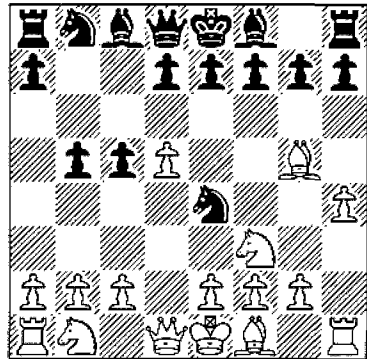


Diagram 12 (B)  
Borrowed from the Tromp

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

c) 5 h4!? (Diagram 12) is in the spirit of Julian Hodgson's treatment of the Trompowsky:

5...g6 6 Nbd2 Nxc5 7 hxg5 Bg7 8 e4 Na6 (8...Bxb2 9 Rb1 Bg7 10 Bxb5 Qa5 11 e5 looks somewhat better for White) 9 a4 (9 Bxb5 Rb8 10 a4 Bxb2 11 Rb1 Bg7 12 d6 0-0 13 Nc4 Nb4 is a mess we would prefer not to comment on!) 9...Bxb2 10 axb5 Nc7 11 Ra2 Bg7 12 c4 d6 13 Qb3?! (White needs to stay active; better was 13 e5!? dxe5 14 Ne4 Bf5 15 Nxc5 Qd6 16 Na6 e4 17 Nxc7+ Qxc7 18 Nd4 e3!? with crazy complications) 13...e6! 14 Bd3 Kf8!? 15 Ra3 exd5 16 exd5 a6 17 0-0 Rb8 18 Re1 h6 19 gxh6 Rxh6 20 Ne4 Rb6 and we prefer Black. Z.Kozul-V.Topalov, Istanbul 2000.

d) 5 Bf4 is also very natural: 5...Bb7 6 a4 (or 6 Qd3 f5 7 Nbd2 c4 8 Qd4 Nf6! 9 d6 exd6 10 Bxd6 Nc6 11 Qc5 Bxd6 12 Qxd6 Qe7 13 Qxe7+ Kxe7 14 e3 with level chances – Avrukh) 6...Nf6 7 e4!? Nxe4 8 Bxb5!? (8 axb5 g6 9 c4 Bg7 10 Nbd2 Nxd2 11 Qxd2 0-0 12 Be2 a6 is equal) 8...e6 9 dxe6 fxe6 10 0-0 (we prefer this to 10 Nc3, as played in P.Tregubov-A.Kogan, Bastia 2003) 10...Be7 11 Re1 a6 12 Bd3 Nf6 13 Nc3 Nc6 with chances for both sides.

### 5...Bb7

Or:

a) 5...Qa5+ 6 Nbd2 Bb7 7 a4! was very typical play from the world champion of the time in G.Kasparov-A.Miles, Basel (3rd matchgame) 1986. Black has made many pawn moves and developed his queen and queenside bishop first, so White decides to go for the kill: 7...Bxd5 8 axb5 Qc7 9 Ra4 Qb7 10 c4 Nxd2 11 cxd5?! (the simple 11 Qxd2 Be4 12 e3 d6 13 Bd3 Bxf3 14 gxf3 Qxf3 15 Rg1 offers White a clear plus according to Kasparov) 11...Nxf1 12 Qd3 d6 13 e4 Nd7 (better was 13...Nxe2! though White has compensation for the pawn after 14 Rxh2 Nd7 15 Nd2 Rb8 16 Nc4 Qxb5 17 Rxa7 – Kasparov) 14 Qxf1 h6 15 Qe2 g5 16 Bg3 Bg7 17 e5 0-0 18 h4! and Kasparov held the initiative.

b) 5...Qb6 6 Nbd2 f5 is very adventurous: 7 Nxe4 (7 a4 Qh6!? 8 axb5 g5 9 Bg3 Nxd2 10 Qxd2 f4 11 Qc3 Bg7 12 Qxc5 0-0 is not clear at all, but Black looks fine) 7...fxe4 8 Nd2 Qh6! (otherwise the e4-pawn is just weak) 9 Bg3 e3 10 fxe3 d6 11 e4 and though White has been obstructed a bit in his development, we still think he has an edge.

### 6 e3

This is not a great test of Black's system, but it is hard for White to prove an advantage here:

a) 6 a4 a6 7 Qd3 Qa5+ 8 c3 f5 9 Nbd2 c4!? (Black is of course playing this position actively) 10 Qd4 e6! 11 Nxe4 fxe4 12 Qxe4 Bxd5 13 Qf4 Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Nc6 15 e4 Bd6 with chances for both sides.

b) 6 Qd3 f5 7 Nbd2 c4 8 Qd4 Na6!? (again playing very creatively) 9 c3 (9 Nxe4?! fxe4 10 Qxe4 Nb4! 11 Rd1 Nxd5! 12 Rxd5 Qa5+ 13 Kd1 Qxa2 would give Black a brilliant attack; firstly, ...e7-e6 is threatened, as well as simple moves like ...Bxd5 and ...Qxb2, while more importantly, White has not devel-

oped his queenside) 9...Nxd2 10 Nxd2 Qb6 11 Qe5 Nc5! (Black is not counting pawns) 12 Qxf5 Qg6 13 Qxg6+ (13 Qf3 e6 14 e4 Bd6 with good play for the pawn) 13...hxg6 14 Bg5 Bxd5 15 f3 e5 16 e4 Bc6 17 Be2 Be7 with a draw in Hübner-Topalov, Istanbul 2000.

6...g6



**WARNING:** After the natural-looking 6...Qa5+?! 7 c3 e6 White gets a clear advantage because of a tactical trick: 8 dxe6! fxe6 (8...dxe6 9 Bxb5+! is the trap) 9 Ne5 and Qh5+ is hard to meet, as ...g7-g6 runs into Qf3.

7 c3 Qa5 8 Nbd2 Nxd2

After 8...Bxd5 9 Nb3 Bxb3 10 axb3 Qb6 11 Qd3 Nd6 12 Bg3 White has more than enough for a pawn.

9 Qxd2 Bg7 10 e4 d6 11 Bd3 Nd7 12 0-0 a6 13 Rfc1

Probably stronger was 13 a3!? with the idea 13...c4 14 Bc2 Nc5 15 Rae1 and White can push the e-pawn.

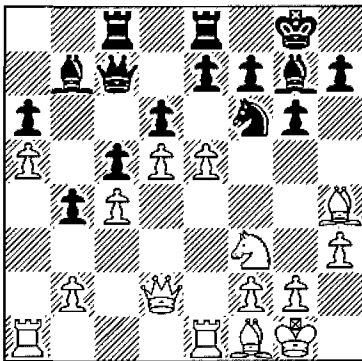


**NOTE:** In this structure White usually seeks chances through a central break.

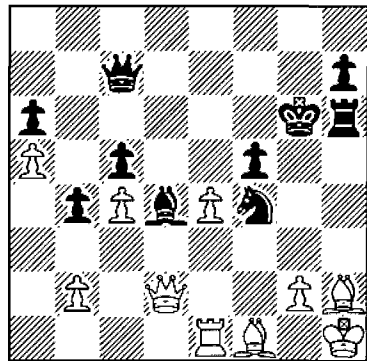
13...Rc8 14 h3 Qb6 15 Bf1 Nf6 16 Re1 0-0 17 a4 Rfe8

Better was 17...c4 18 axb5 axb5 19 b3!? cxb3 20 Ra3 e6 when both players have a very active position.

18 a5 Qc7 19 c4 b4 20 e5 (Diagram 13)



**Diagram 13 (B)**  
A typical break



**Diagram 14 (W)**  
A howler

20...dxe5

Forced. After 20...Nd7 21 e6! fxe6 22 Ng5 (White wants to occupy the e6-

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

square with a piece) 22...exd5 23 Ne6 Qc6 24 cxd5 Qxd5 25 Qxd5 Bxd5 26 Nxc7 Kxc7 27 Bxa6 White regains his pawns and has the advantage of the two bishops.

**21 Nxe5 Nh5 22 Ng4 Bd4 23 Rad1**

White had a last chance to claim an advantage with 23 Be2 Qf4 24 Rad1 Qxd2 25 Rxd2 Ng7 26 Nh6+ Kf8 27 Bg4 f5 28 Bd1 – Tsesarsky.

**23...e6 24 Re4?**

Later Timman thought he should have played 24 Be2 exd5 25 Nh6+ Kg7 26 Bxh5 dxc4 27 Bg4 c3 28 Qg5 f6 29 Nf5+ Kg8 30 Nh6+ with a draw by perpetual check.

**24...f5 25 Nh6+ Kg7 26 Rxe6**

After 26 Rxd4 cxd4 27 Bg5 Qc5 28 Qxd4+ Qxd4 29 Rxd4 exd5 30 cxd5 Nf6 White has very few chances of saving the game.

**26...Rxe6 27 dxe6 Nf4 28 Re1?**

This piece sacrifice simply doesn't work. Better was 28 Nf7 Nxe6 29 Ng5 Nf8, though Black's position remains preferable.

**28...Kxh6 29 Bg3 g5 30 h4 Re8!**

Topalov is always very strong with the initiative, and fearless too!

**31 e7 Be4! 32 hxg5+ Kxg5 33 Kh1 Rxe7 34 f3 Re6**

Now we can see the problem of the sacrifice: to regain the piece White will have to weaken his kingside.

**35 Bh2 Rh6 36 fxe4 Kg6? (Diagram 14)**

A horrible howler in time trouble. After 36...Rxb2+ 37 Kxh2 Qd6! 38 Re3 fxe4 (Shipov) White would not withhold Black's attack.

**37 g3 Nh5?**

37...Nh3 38 exf5+ Kf7 39 Re2 is great for White, but Black is still breathing.

**38 exf5+ 1-0**

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Game 55

□ M.Hebden ■ S.Sulskis

Port Erin 2003

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 Qb6**

This is generally considered the main move here.

**5 Bxf6**

Or:

a) 5 a4 is very aggressive: 5...bxa4 6 Nc3 Qxb2 7 Bd2 Qb7 8 e4 d6 9 Rb1 Qc7 10 e5 dxe5 11 Nb5 Qd8 12 Nxe5 a6 (12...Nxd5? loses to 13 Qf3 f6 14 Qxd5! Qxd5 15 Nc7+ Kd8 16 Nxd5 fxe5 17 Ba5+ Kd7 18 Nc7 Nc6 19 Rd1+!) 13 Nc3 e6 14 dxe6 Bxe6 15 Qf3 Ra7 16 Bf4 with compensation, I.Naumkin-G.Jones, Porto San Giorgio 2003.

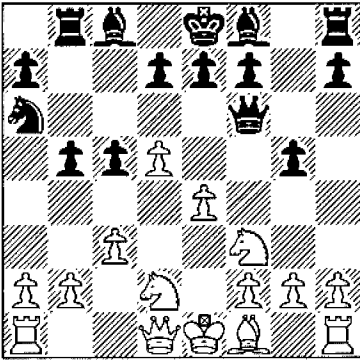
b) 5 Nc3 b4 6 Na4 Qa5 7 Bxf6 gxf6 (7...Qxa4?! 8 b3 Qa5 9 Bb2 d6 10 e4 is dangerous, and 7...exf6 8 b3 Bd6 9 e3 Bb7 10 Bc4 0-0 11 0-0 Na6 12 a3 gives White a slight pull) 8 b3 f5 9 d6!? Bb7 10 dxe7 Bxc7 11 Qd2 with equal chances in a complex position.

### 5...Qxf6 6 c3 Na6

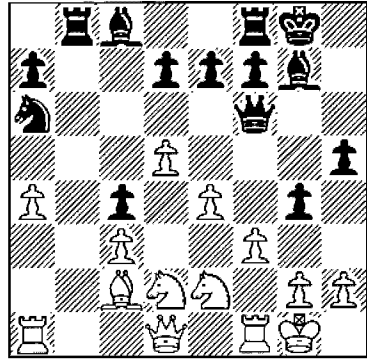
6...Qf5 can be met with 7 a4!? (less dangerous is 7 c4 b4 8 Nbd2 e5 9 g3 d6 10 h4!? Qf6 11 Bh3 Bxh3 12 Rxh3 Nd7 13 g4 h5 14 g5 Qf5 15 Rg3 Nb6 with equal play, D.Komarov-A.Kogan, Paris 1998) 7...b4 8 cxb4 cxb4 9 Qd4 Bb7 10 e4 Qf4 11 Nbd2 and surely White is better.

6...Qb6 might look counterintuitive, but after 7 e4 g6 8 Nbd2 Bg7 9 a4 b4 10 Nc4 Qb7 11 Qc2 bxc3 12 bxc3 d6 13 Be2 Qc7 14 0-0 0-0 15 Rab1 Nd7 16 Nfd2 Ba6 Black was no worse in M.Mchedlishvili-Zhang Pengxiang, Yerevan 1999.

7 e4 Rb8 8 Nbd2 g5!? (Diagram 15)



**Diagram 15 (W)**  
Creative play



**Diagram 16 (B)**  
Misplaced optimism?

Sulskis is known as a very creative player. After the more standard 8...Nc7 9 Bd3 e5 10 dxe6 dxe6 11 e5 Qf4 Black has decent counterplay on the dark squares.

### 9 Bd3

We would probably try to go for the initiative with 9 e5!? Qf5 10 h3 Nc7 11 a4 b4 12 Bc4, when White has a space advantage.

### 9...g4 10 Ng1 h5 11 a4 c4 12 Bc2 b4 13 Ne2

13 Nxc4 bxc3 14 e5 Qf4 15 b3 Bg7 16 Ne2 Qg5 is a complex possibility. The chances are quite balanced, though the position is not!

### 13...bxc3 14 bxc3 Bg7 15 0-0

15 Nxc4 d6 16 Rb1 h4 17 Rxb8 Nxb8 18 Qd4 Qxd4 19 cxd4 Na6 is quite unclear. Which is best: the pawn or the bishops?

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 15...0-0 16 f3?! (Diagram 16)

White is trying to generate an initiative on the kingside, but Black is very well prepared for things like this and he now sacrifices two pawns. 16 Nxc4 looks more natural to us.

### 16...d6 17 fxc4 Qh6 18 gxf5 Bg4 19 Nf3

19 Nxc4 Qxh5 20 Rf2 Rfc8 21 Ne3 Bxe2 22 Rxe2 Bxc3 would offer Black good compensation for the pawn.

### 19...Nc5 20 h3 Bxh5 21 Ng3 Bg6

21...Bxc3 22 Nf5 Qf6 23 Rb1 is not clear either.

### 22 Qe1 Rb2 23 Rf2 Qh8! 24 Qe3?!

Hebden loses his way in this complicated position. After 24 Nf5 Bxf5 25 exf5 Bxc3 26 Qxe7 Nd3 27 Bxd3 Rxf2 28 Kxf2 Bxa1 29 Bxc4 White has two pawns for the exchange. And though his bishop does not have great scope, the position is still very unclear.

### 24...Bxc3 25 e5?

This just loses a piece. The last chance was 25 Rb1, though after 25...Rxb1+ 26 Bxb1 Rb8 Black still has all the play.

25...Rxc2! 26 Rxc2 Bxa1 27 Rxc4 Nd3 28 e6 Ne5 29 exf7+ Rxf7 30 Rc8+ Rf8 31 Rxf8+ Kxf8 32 Ng5 Qh4 33 Ne6+ Kg8 34 Ne2 Nc4 35 Qc1 Bb2 36 Qf1 Bf7 37 N2f4 Ne3 38 Qb1 Qf6 39 Qe4 Nf5 40 Qc4 Qc3 41 Qb5 Qe1+ 42 Kh2 Qg3+ 43 Kh1 Be5 0-1

## Black Plays 3...e6

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### 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 (Diagram 17)

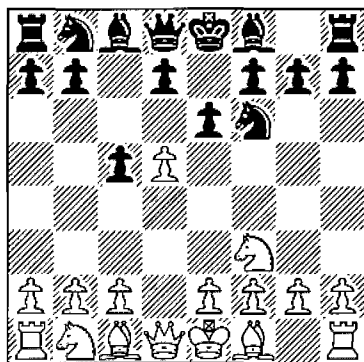


Diagram 17 (W)  
Modern Benoni?

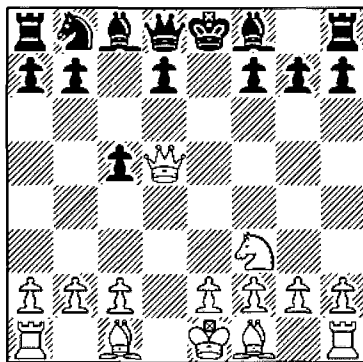


Diagram 18 (B)  
No thanks!

By attacking d5 Black offers his opponent the chance to play against the Modern Benoni, but as well as 4 c4 White has another interesting reply:

#### 4 Nc3

White prefers piece control over d5 to pawn occupation. Now an attempt to bother the c3-knight with 4...b5 can be met with 5 Bg5 (as in the Blumenfeld), and Black will not have compensation for his damaged pawn structure (see the notes to Game 56). 4...d6 5 e4 is unattractive as nobody wants to play a Closed Benoni after losing a tempo with 5...e5! Let us advance two moves further.

#### 4...exd5 5 Nxd5 Nxd5 6 Qxd5 (Diagram 18)

By the way, this was first played in the game W.Michel-R.Spielmann. Semmering 1926. It's not very popular but there are some star names among its advocates.

The central square is occupied by White's strongest piece. The queen cuts the enemy pawn chain and is ready to create threats together with her colleagues. The following examples prove that such threats are not at all trivial:

1) 6...d6 7 e4 Nc6 8 Ng5 Qc7 9 Bc4 Ne5 10 Bb5 Nc6 11 Nxf7! was a trick suffered by the experienced grandmaster Tseshkovsky.

2) 6...d6 7 Ng5 Qf6?! 8 Nxf7 Rxf7 9 Qe4+ is easy to overlook.

Of course, Black will dislodge the enemy queen from the centre. The evaluation of the separate lines and the system as a whole depends on the conditions on which the queen leaves her dominating position.

After 6 Qxd5 Black has three responses that often interweave with each other in the future.

1) 6...Nc6 (Game 56) is Ftacnik's solution of how to dislodge the queen as soon as possible. After 7 e4 Nb4 and ...d7-d5 Black gets involved in a tactical wrangle, leaving his king in the centre. The Mochalov-Rovid and Koziak-Lukovnikov encounters prove that this is not safe for Black.

2) 6...d6 (Game 57) is a bit casual and allows the attack on f7 with Nf3-g5 as shown in the traps above. Of course, White should be very careful: in the Lerner-Pigusov and Kasparov-Illescas (sic!) games White's pieces became tangled in a hasty attack and White had to part with a pawn.

3) 6...Be7 (Game 58) is followed by castling and dislodging the queen with ...d7-d6 and ...Bc8-e6. If possible the more flexible ...Nb8-d7 (Komarov-Armas) is preferable to the standard procedure. In general the play is quite boring; the Karpov-Topalov game became livelier towards the end but that happened by pure chance.

## Statistics

After 6 Qxd5 White achieves 59%.

## Theoretical?

No, despite all the efforts of the co-authors who published their article in *New In Chess Yearbook 39*.

## Theoretical Status

It seems that 6...Be7 and 7...0-0 is like a cold shower for White, who has relied on a tactical fight for his success. The pawn on d6 is very weak in this system but we cannot say that the white one on e4 is particularly powerful, and White loses his advantage in development.

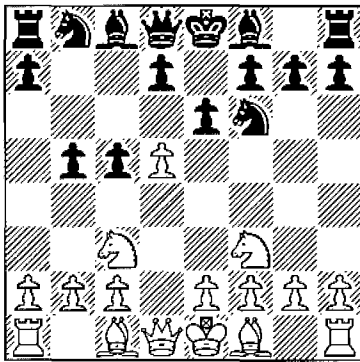
Game 56

□ E.Mochalov ■ K.Rovid

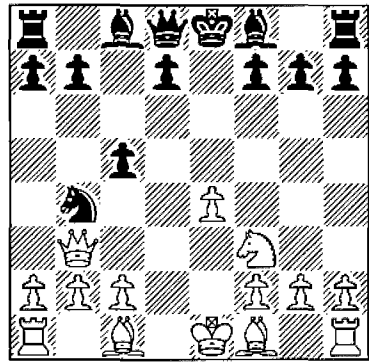
Budapest 1992

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5

4...b5 (Diagram 19) is a hybrid of the Blumenfeld Gambit.



**Diagram 19 (W)**  
Another Blumenfeld hybrid



**Diagram 20 (B)**  
The strongest retreat

White should probably follow in the footsteps of Goldin and play 5 Bg5 b4 6 Ne4 Bb7 7 c4 and now:

a) 7...bxc3 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 Nxc3 f5 10 c3 Bg7 11 Bc4! 0-0 12 0-0 Na6 13 Qb3 Qb6 14 Rfd1 and White is better.



**NOTE:** In this kind of position, White's advantages are all structural and based on a containment of Black's bishops until an opening of the position favours him.

b) 7...Be7 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 Ng3 f5 10 Qd2 a5 11 e4 fxe4 12 Nxe4 f5 13 Ng3 h5 14 h4 Bf6 15 0-0-0 a4 16 Kb1 a3 17 b3 and though complicated, we think White is

better here, A.Goldin-M.Ruiz, Philadelphia 1999.

### 5 Nxd5 Nxd5 6 Qxd5 Nc6 7 e4

This must be the critical move as White is fighting for the d5-square, but 7 Bg5 has also been played:

a) 7...Qb6 8 Ne5!? Nxe5 9 Qxe5+ Qe6 10 Qc7 f6 11 Bf4 Be7 12 e3 is slightly better for White. Now after 12...d5 13 0-0-0 0-0 14 e4!? Qxe4 15 Bb5 Qb4 16 Bd3 White had good compensation in F.Berkes-R.Wojtaszek, Balatonlelle 2002.

b) 7...Be7 8 0-0-0 Nb4 9 Qe5!? f6 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Qh5+ Kf8 12 Nh4!? and White has compensation. One line is 12...d6 13 a3 Nc6 14 Ng6+ Kg7 15 Nxb8 Qxh8 with unclear play, although we think Black is okay.

### 7...Nb4 8 Qb3! (Diagram 20)

The strongest. 8 Qd1 d5 9 exd5 Qxd5 10 Bb5+ Bd7 11 Qe2+ Be7 12 0-0 Bxb5 13 Qxb5+ Qd7 14 Qxd7+ Kxd7 15 Rd1+ Ke8! (Romero Holmes) is only equal.

### 8...d5!?

8...Qe7 9 Be3 Qxe4?! is no good, as after 10 0-0-0 Be7 11 Bxc5! Black is in deep trouble.

### 9 exd5!

Less dangerous is 9 a3 c4 10 Qc3 dxe4 11 Ng5 (11 Ne5!? Qa5!? 12 Bd2 Nxc2+ 13 Qxc2 Qxe5 14 Bxc4 gives White some compensation) 11...Be7 12 Bxc4 Nxc2+ 13 Qxc2 Bxg5 14 Bxg5 Qxg5 15 Qxc4+ Qe7 16 Bb5+ Kf8 17 Qxe7+ Kxe7 18 0-0 and White's advantage is probably gone.

### 9...Qxd5



**WARNING: 9...Nxd5? loses to 10 Bb5+ Bd7 11 0-0 Nb6 12 Ne5! and Black cannot survive.**

### 10 Bb5+

10 Bc4 Qe4+ 11 Kf1 Be6 12 Bxe6 Qxe6 13 Qxe6+ fxe6 14 c3 Nd3 was a bit better for White in A.Romero Holmes-M.Outerelo, Albacete 1989. However 11 Kd1! Be7 12 Bxf7 Kf8 13 Re1 Qg4 14 h3! is much stronger, as 14...Qxg2? 15 Rxe7 Kxe7 16 Bg5+ Kf8 17 Qe3 Kxf7 18 Qe7+ Kg6 19 Nh4+ (Romero Holmes) wins the queen.

### 10...Bd7 11 Bxd7+ Kxd7 12 Qa4+ Kc7 13 0-0 Bd6 14 a3 (Diagram 21)

Also good is 14 Be3!? Rad8 15 Rad1 Qc6 16 Qb3 f6 17 a3 Na6 18 Nd2 with a slight positional edge.

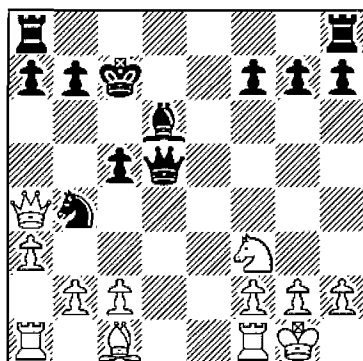
### 14...Nc6 15 Bf4 Rad8

15...Qf5 was met strongly by 16 Bxd6+ Kxd6 17 Qh4 Kc7 18 Qg3+ Kb6 19 Qxg7 Rhg8 20 Qc3 when White was just a pawn up in V.Koziak-A.Lukovnikov, Voronezh 1998.

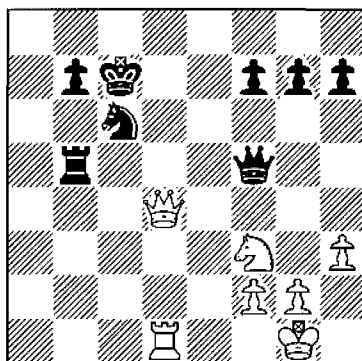
### 16 Rad1 Qf5 17 Rxd6 Rxd6 18 Bxd6+ Kxd6 19 b4 cxb4

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

19...Ra8 is punished by 20 b5 Ne7 21 Re1 b6 22 Nh4 Qg5 23 Qe4, winning.



**Diagram 21 (B)**  
White's king is safer



**Diagram 22 (W)**  
Extra pawn but dodgy king

20 axb4 a6 21 c4 Kc7 22 b5 Nb8 23 Qb4 Rd8 24 Rb1 axb5 25 cxb5 Kb6 26 h3

Or 26 Rc1 Qxb5 27 Qe7 Nc6 28 Qxf7 with a clear edge.

26...Rd5 27 Ra1 Rxb5 28 Qd4+ Kc7 29 Rd1 Nc6? (Diagram 22)

29...Qf6 30 Qd3 Rc5 was better, though Black is still in trouble.

30 Qd6+ Kc8 31 Qf8+ Kc7 32 Qd6+ Kc8 33 Nd4 Nxd4 34 Qxd4?!

Played in time trouble. 34 Rxd4 is stronger and does not allow Black's king to escape.

34...Kb8 35 Qd8+ Qc8 36 Qd6+ Qc7 37 Qf8+ Qc8 38 Qxg7 Qc7

38...Qf5 is strongly met with 39 Qf8+ Ka7 40 Qa3+ Ra5 41 Qe3+ b6 42 Rd6 with a clear advantage.

39 Qh8+ Ka7 40 Qxh7 Ra5 41 Qd3 b6 42 Qe3 Ka6 43 Qf3 f5 44 Qa8+ Kb5?

Black could still offer some resistance with 44...Qa7 45 Qc8+ Qb7 46 Qc4+ Ka7, though after 47 h4 White is close to winning. However, it is very difficult to play this kind of position practically.

45 Rb1+ Ka4 46 Qe8+ b5 47 Qe1 1-0

Game 57

□ K.Lerner ■ E.Pigusov

Kharkov 1985

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 Nxd5 Nxd5 6 Qxd5 d6

This approach is less ambitious than 6...Nc6 followed by 7...Nb4.

7 e4

This is still the most natural move, though others have been tried as well:

a) 7 Bg5 Qb6 8 0-0-0 Be6 9 Qd2 h6 10 Bh4 Nc6 11 e3 g5 12 Qc3 Rg8 13 Bg3 0-0-0 14 Qa3 did not offer White an advantage in A.Raetsky-Moiseev, Kazan 1985.

b) 7 Ng5!? Qe7 (7...Qf6?! would be punished with the tactic 8 Nxh7! Qf5 9 Qxf5 Bxf5 10 Nxf8 Bxc2 11 Bf4 Ke7 12 Rc1 Ba4 13 Ng6+ fxc6 14 e3 when White has great hopes for the endgame) 8 Bf4 Be6 9 Nxe6 fxe6 10 Qd2 e5 11 Bg5 Qe6 12 e4 Nc6 13 c3 h6 14 Be3 with a pleasant edge for White in P.Wells-C.Ward, Swansea 1987.

### 7...Nc6 8 Bc4

This is not very testing as Black now wins some easy tempi. Instead 8 Ng5!? Qc7 9 Bc4 Ne5 10 Bb5+ Bd7 (10...Nc6?? 11 Nxf7! is a nice tactical point) 11 Bxd7+ Qxd7 12 Bf4 Nc6 13 0-0-0 h6 14 Nf3 0-0-0 15 c3 offers White a persistent advantage.

### 8...Be6 9 Qd3 Nb4 10 Bb5+?!

This is of course how White was expecting to gain an advantage, but Black has something cool planned. Better was 10 Qe2 Bxc4 11 Qxc4 d5 12 exd5 Qxd5 13 Qxd5 Nxd5 with simple equality.

### 10...Ke7!! (Diagram 23)

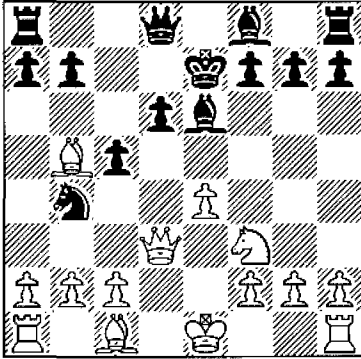


Diagram 23 (W)  
10...Ke8-e7!!

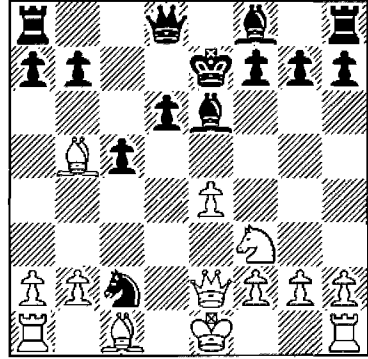


Diagram 24 (W)  
Winning a pawn



**TIP:** Never take a move for granted. Most people 'blunder' because they think the opponent will play the most obvious move and not actually look for alternatives.

### 11 Qe2 Nxc2+! (Diagram 24)

A nice combination that gains a pawn.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

**12 Qxc2 Qa5+ 13 Bd2 Qxb5 14 Ng5**

Or 14 Bc3 f6 15 a4 Qb3 16 Qe2 Qc4 17 Qe3 Kf7 18 Nd2 Qa6 with a large plus for Black. G.Kasparov-M.Illecas, Madrid (rapid) 1989. It's nice to know that even the great Kasparov can lose pawns like this.

**14...Re8**

According to our analysis much stronger is 14...Bc4!? 15 e5 dxe5 16 Rc1 Bd3 17 Qxc5+ Qxc5 18 Rxc5 f6 when White has a horrible endgame.

**15 Nxe6 fxe6 16 0-0-0 Kd7 17 Bc3 Kc7 18 f4 Rg8 19 Rd3**

Probably White should sharpen the struggle with 19 e5!? d5 20 Qxh7 Be7 21 Qg6 d4 22 Be1 Qc6 when Black definitely has play but at least White has won back his pawn.

**19...Be7 20 Rhd1 Rd8 21 g4 Bf6 22 f5**

Black is also enjoying the events after 22 e5 dxe5 23 Rxd8 Rxd8 24 g5 Rxd1+ 25 Qxd1 Be7 26 Bxe5+ Kc8.

**22...exf5 23 exf5 Rge8 24 Qd2 Bxc3 25 Qxc3 Qa4 26 h3 Qxa2 27 Qxg7+ Rd7 28 Qc3 Re2**

Maybe 28...Re4!? 29 Qa3 Qxa3 30 Rxa3 a6.

**29 Qa3?!**

More precise was 29 b4, White drawing after 29...Re4 30 Rd4 Rxd4 31 Rxd4 b6 32 bxc5 dxc5 33 Rxd7+ Kxd7 34 Qg7+. However, it is understandable that White did not feel confident enough to play this.

**29...Qc4+ 30 Rc3 Qf4+ 31 Kb1 Qe4+ 32 Ka2 a6<sup>3</sup> 33 Qb3 h5 34 Rc4 Qe5 35 Rf1 hxg4 36 hxg4 b5 37 Rc2 Re1?!**

Black could still put White under some pressure with 37...c4 when 38 Qd3 Re3 39 Qd2 Rf7 still leaves White to prove that he can hold the position.

**38 Rxe1 Qxe1 39 Qf3 ½-½**

---

Game 58

□ A.Karpov ■ V.Topalov

Dos Hermanas 1994

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 Nxd5 5 Nxd5 exd5 6 Qxd5 Be7**

This is probably the safest way to play the opening for Black.

**7 e4**

This looks right. 7 Bf4 Nc6 8 0-0-0 Nb4 9 Qb3 d6 10 e3 Be6 gives Black good counterplay based on 11 Bb5+ Kf8!? 12 Bc4 Bxc4 13 Qxc4 b5 14 Qb3 a5 when the attack is far advanced.

**7...0-0 8 Be2!**

8 Bc4 d6 9 Qh5 looks attractive. but Black can actually equalise quite easily: 9...Qe8 10 Bg5 Nd7 11 0-0-0 Nf6!? 12 Bxf6 Bxf6 13 Rhe1 (13 Rxd6 Qxe4 14 Bd3 Qf4+ 15 Kb1 g6 16 Qxc5 Be6 would offer the bishops and more than

enough for the pawn – Armas) 13...Be6 14 Bxe6 Qxe6 15 Kb1 Rfe8 16 h3 Qc4 17 Qd5 Qb5 and a draw was agreed in D.Komarov-J.Armas, Belfort 1990/91.



**NOTE: In this system White has a positional advantage, and it is important for him to make sure that Black does not develop an initiative. If he does the structural problems become irrelevant.**

8...d6 9 0-0 Nc6 10 c3 Be6 11 Qh5 h6

11...f5 12 Ng5 Bxg5 13 Bxg5 Qe8 would give White the two bishops, but also Black a good deal of counterplay.

12 Rd1 Re8

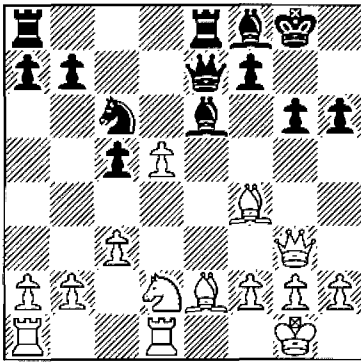
12...f5 is weak due to 13 e5 when one could easily see the game ending 13...d5?! 14 Bxh6! Bf7?! 15 Qxf5 gxh6? 16 Bd3 and mate will follow.

12...Qd7 is also dubious because of 13 Nh4 Ne5 14 Nf5 Bxf5 15 Qxf5 Rad8 16 Qxd7 Rxd7 and the endgame is dreadful for Black.

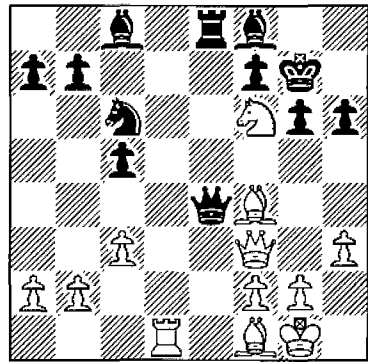
13 Bf4 Bf8 14 Nd2 g6 15 Qf3 d5!? 16 Qg3

16 Nc4!? dxe4 17 Qe3 Qf6 18 Nd6 Bxd6 19 Bxd6, regaining the pawn with some initiative, is an interesting option.

16...Qe7 17 exd5 (Diagram 25)



**Diagram 25 (B)**  
Releasing the tension



**Diagram 26 (B)**  
30 Nd5-f6!!

This is probably releasing the tension a bit too soon. After 17 Bf1 Rad8 18 exd5 Bxd5 19 Nc4 Qe6 20 b3 White might still have a little pressure.

17...Bxd5 18 Bf1 Qf6 19 Nb3 Rad8 20 Rd2 Be6

It was easy to equalise with 20...c4 21 Nd4 Nxd4 22 Rxd4 Qc6 23 Rd2 Bg7. 21 Bc7 Rxd2 22 Nxd2 Bf5?!

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

A strange mistake – now White is able to manoeuvre his knight around freely. 22...Bd5 23 Bd3 Qg5 24 Qxg5 hxg5 gives equal chances.

23 Nc4 Re4 24 Ne3 Bc8 25 Rd1 Re8 26 h3 Qg5 27 Qf3 Kg7

27...Be6 28 Bb5 Rc8 29 Bf4 Qh4 30 b3 would be a bit better for White.

28 Bf4 Qe7

There is no escape from the misery for Black: 28...Qf6?? 29 Bxh6+! is an important point in White's play, and 28...Ne5 29 Qe4 Qe7 30 Nd5 Qd6 31 Bb5 Re6 32 Qe3 also leaves Black suffering.

29 Nd5 Qe4?

This allows a legendary combination. However, after 29...Qh4 30 Nf6! Re6 31 Nd7 Bxd7 32 Rxd7 White also has a winning position.

30 Nf6!! (Diagram 26)

This is probably one of the prettiest combinations by any of the world champions. 30...Qxf3 is met by 31 Nxe8+.

30...Kxf6 31 Be5+! Kxe5 32 Qxe4+ Kxe4 33 Re1+ Kf5 34 Rxe8 Be6 35 Rxf8 Bxa2 36 Rc8 1-0

## 3...g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 e4 0-0

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1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 e4 0-0 (Diagram 27)

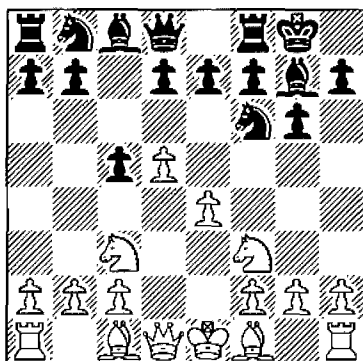


Diagram 27 (W)  
Inviting e4-e5

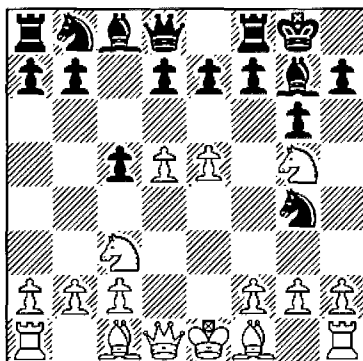


Diagram 28 (B)  
Pure aggression!

The continuation 5...d6 leads to the Schmid Benoni, covered in Chapter 7, but 5...0-0 is an interesting attempt to deviate from typical lines. The standard 6 Be2 is met by an attack on the flank with 6...b5!? (7 Bxb5 Nxe4 8 Nxe4 Qa5+ 9 Nc3 Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 Qxb5), but we mustn't ignore 6 e5!?. In the event of the modest retreat 6...Ne8 White has a pleasant choice between undermining the

centre with 7 d6 and attacking on the kingside with 7 h4!?. But the provocative 6...Ng4 is even more risky: White does not protect his e5-pawn with 7 Bf4 but undertakes an aggressive attack with 7 Ng5! (**Diagram 28**).

It is very important to remember that 7...Nxe5?! is incorrect due to 8 f4 f6 9 Nxb7, while after other defences the white pawn on h-pawn enters the fight (as in Huzman-Minasian).

## Statistics

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After 5...0-0 White scores 58% overall, while after the ambitious 6 e5, 62%.

## Theoretical?

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Bearing in mind the fact that this variation is rarely used, it has been analysed quite thoroughly.

## Theoretical Status

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Not highly regarded. By deviating from the main lines of the Schmid Benoni, Black takes a risk. According to statistics White rarely dares to play 6 e5, but he can and should do this because he can gain a significant advantage here.

*Game 59*

A.Huzman  Art.Minasian

Pula 1997

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 e4 0-0 6 e5

White takes up the challenge. 6 Be2 allows Black to exploit the move order with 6...b5!? 7 e5 (or 7 Bxb5 Nxe4 8 Nxe4 Qa5+ 9 Nc3 Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 Qxb5 and Black is not worse) 7...Ng4 8 Bf4 b4 9 Ne4 d6 10 exd6 exd6 11 0-0 (11 Bxd6?! Re8 12 Nfd2 Nf6 13 Nxf6+ Bxf6 14 Bf4 Bxb2 15 Rb1 Ba6 16 Be3 Bc3 and White will have trouble holding onto his d5-pawn) 11...Nf6 12 Nfd2 (12 Nxd6 Nh5 13 Qd2 Bxb2 14 Rab1 Bc3 15 Qe3 Nxf4 16 Qxf4 Qc7 is unclear) 12...Ba6 13 Bxa6 Nxa6 14 Bg5 h6 15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 16 Bxh6 Bxb2 17 Bxf8 Bxa1 18 Qxa1 Qxf8 19 Ne4 Qg7 20 Nf6+ Kf8 21 Nd7+ Kg8 22 Nf6+ and a draw was agreed in Y.Razuvaev-B.Chatalbashev, Porto San Giorgio 2000.

6...Ng4



**NOTE: 6...Ng4 seems to be thoroughly refuted by White's play in this game.**

After 6...Ne8 Black's life is still not easy. Here White can try:

a) 7 d6!? (this simply leads to a slight advantage) 7...Nc6 (7...exd6 8 exd6 Qb6 9 Nd5 Qxd6 10 Bf4 Qe6+ 11 Be2 d6 12 0-0 Nc6 13 Re1 and White is better despite the pawn deficit) 8 Bg5 f6 (S.Djuric-B.Chatalbashev, Jesolo 1999) 9 dxe7!? Qxe7 (9...Nxe7 10 Bc4+ Kh8 11 exf6 Nxf6 12 Qd6 also favours White) 10 Bc4+ Kh8 11 Nd5 Qe6 12 Ne3 Qe7 13 exf6 Nxf6 14 0-0 and we think it is obvi-

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

ous that White is better.

b) 7 h4!? is also interesting: 8...d6 8 e6 (8 h5!? Bg4!? 9 hxg6 hxg6 10 Rh4 Bxf3 11 Qxf3 dxe5 12 Be3 also promises a good attack for the pawn) 8...fxe6 9 h5 gxh5 10 dxe6 (White can force a draw with 10 Ng5 exd5 11 Nxf7!? Kxf7 12 Qxh5+ Kg8 13 Qh7+ Kf7 14 Qh5+) 10...Bxe6 11 Ng5 Qd7 12 Qxh5 Nf6 13 Qf3 d5 with unclear play. Maybe Black is past the worst here?

### 7 Ng5!

Only through this tactical trick can White hope to get an advantage. 7 Bf4 d6 8 exd6 exd6 9 Be2 Re8 (also playable is 9...Na6 10 0-0 Nc7 11 a4 b6 12 a5 Rb8 13 axb6 axb6 14 Qd2 and if White has any advantage it is very slim) 10 0-0 a6 11 a4 Nd7 12 Nd2 Nde5 13 Nde4 f5 14 Bxg4 fxg4 15 Bg5 Qc7 16 Nf6+ Bxf6 17 Bxf6 Qf7 18 Bg5 Qf5 with equal play. G.Mohr-R.Felgaer, Pinamar 2002.



**NOTE: The weakness of the dark squares around Black's king is not a real disadvantage here, as only with abnormal play can White exploit them.**

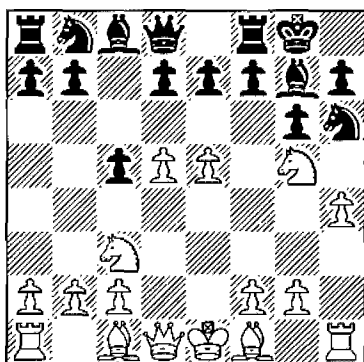
### 7...Nh6

Or:

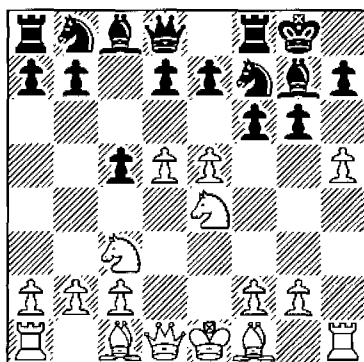
a) 7...Nxe5 8 f4 f6 seems to save the piece, but now White has 9 Nxf7!, blowing the Black kingside away. After 9...Kxf7 10 fxe5 fxe5 11 Bd3 e4 12 Bxe4 Kg8 13 Bxg6 the attack is devastating.

b) 7...d6 8 e6! f5 (8...Nh6 runs into 9 h4! fxe6 10 h5 exd5 11 Nxf7! when 11...Kxf7?! loses to 12 hxg6+ Kxg6 13 Qh5+, but the alternatives are rather grim as well) 9 h3 Nf6 10 g4 and White's attack is probably deadly.

### 8 h4 (Diagram 29)



**Diagram 29 (B)**  
Launching the h-pawn



**Diagram 30 (B)**  
No hesitation

**8...f6**

8...Bxe5 is too slow. After 9 h5 Bg7 White gains a very strong attack with 10 Nxh7!, for example 10...Kxh7 11 hxg6+ fxg6 12 Bxh6 Bxh6 13 Qd2 g5 14 Qxg5 Rf6 15 Bd3+ and Black is mated.

8...Qc7 is met strongly by 9 d6! exd6 10 Nd5 Qd8 11 Ne4 dxe5 12 h5 Nf5 13 g4 Nd4 14 g5 when the big check on f6 gives Black a serious headache.



**TIP: When you have the initiative it is quite normal to sacrifice pawns to gain time and achieve control over important squares. With 9 d6! White is doing both with one move!**

**9 Nge4**

This is probably the strongest. V.Malakhov-T.Markowski, Minsk 1998 continued 9 Nf3 Ng4 10 Bd3 f5 11 Qe2 e6 12 Bc4 h6 13 Bf4 a6 14 a4 Kh8 15 0-0 exd5 16 Nxd5 Nc6 17 Qd2 Kh7 18 Rfe1 b6 19 Rad1 with complete domination for White, but 9...Nf5 10 exf6 exf6 11 h5 g5 12 Bd3 d6 13 Nd2 reduces White's advantage.

**9...Nf7**

9...fxe5 loses quickly to 10 h5 Nf5 11 hxg6 hxg6 12 Qg4 Kf7 13 Ng5+ Ke8 14 Bb5 Rf6 15 Ne6!, and White's attack is also very strong after 9...f5 10 Nxc5 Ng4 11 Nd3 Nxe5 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 13 h5.

**10 h5! (Diagram 30)**

Why open the position for your opponent's pieces when keeping it closed keeps them on the back rank? 10 exf6 exf6 11 Nxc5 b6 12 Nd3 Re8+ 13 Be3 is weaker, though White is still better.

**10...f5**

10...Nxe5 11 hxg6 hxg6 12 f4 Nf7 13 Qg4, with a winning attack, was pointed out by Stohl.

**11 Ng5 Nxc5**

11...Bxe5 loses attractively to 12 Nxh7! when the following line looks forced: 12...Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 Kxh7 14 hxg6+ Kxg6 15 Qh5+ Kf6 16 Qh4+ and White wins because of 16...Ke5 17 Bf4+! Kxd5 18 Bc7!! Qxc7 19 0-0-0+ (**Diagram 31**).

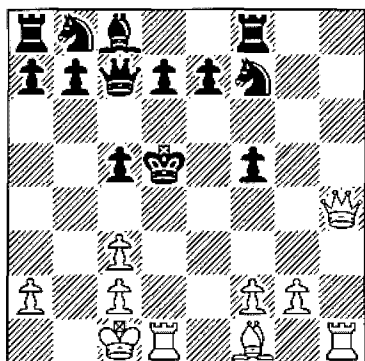
Now 19...Ke6 20 Bc4+ wins, but more importantly after 19...Kc6 White has 20 Qa4+, mating.

**12 Bxg5 Bxe5**

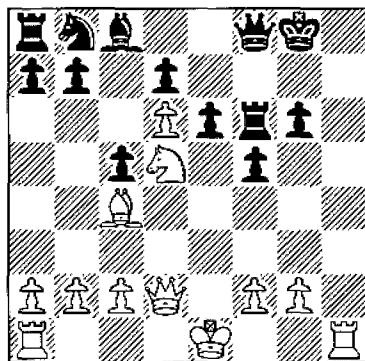
12...h6 can be directly refuted with 13 hxg6! hxg5 14 Rh8+! Bxh8 15 Qh5 when the only move, 15...Rf7, loses to 16 gxf7+ Kg7 17 Be2 followed by Qxg5+ and Bh5+, if not 0-0-0 and Rh1.

12...Qe8 was tried once, but already White's attack is crushing. After 13 hxg6 Qxg6 14 Bxe7 Re8 15 d6 Nc6 (15...Bxe5 16 Qd5+ Qe6 17 0-0-0 Nc6 18 Bc4) 16 Bc4+ Kh8 17 Qh5 Nxe5 18 Qxg6 Nxg6 19 Bf7 Rxe7+ 20 dxe7 Nxe7 21 0-0-0 White was winning in J.Horvath-H.Hamdouchi, Djerba 1998.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems



**Diagram 31 (B)**  
Check!



**Diagram 32 (B)**  
Black's queenside is asleep

**13 hxg6 hxg6 14 d6! Bf6**

14...Bxd6 loses by force to 15 Bc4+ Kg7 16 Bh6+ Kf6 17 Qd2 and the big check on gō is going to hurt.

**15 Bxf6 Rxf6 16 Bc4+ e6 17 Qd2 Qf8?!**

17...Rf7 18 0-0-0 Qf6 19 Rh6 Nc6 20 Rdh1 also looks grim, but it is still here that Black should look for his survival chances.

**18 Nd5! (Diagram 32)**

White sacrifices a knight just to get to Black's king. Notice that Black's queenside pieces have still not left the starting blocks.

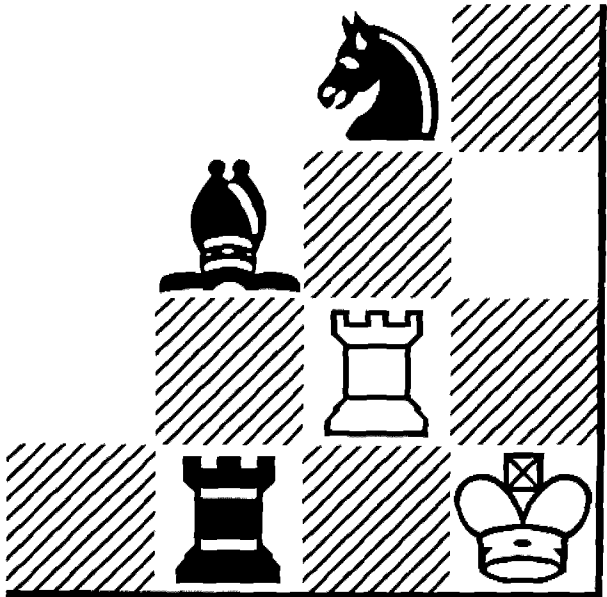
**18...exd5 19 Bxd5+ Re6+ 20 Bxe6+ dxe6 21 Qg5 Bd7 22 0-0-0 Be8 23 Qd8 1-0**

Chapter Seven

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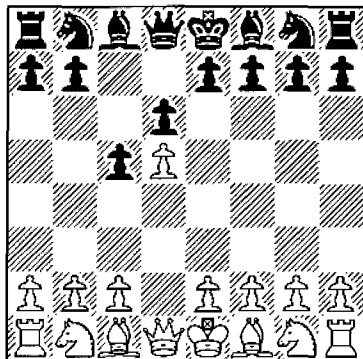
# The Schmid Benoni

- ▨ Introduction
- ▨ Illustrative Games

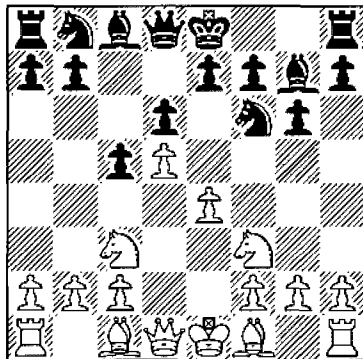


## Introduction

1 d4 c5 2 d5 d6 (Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1 (W)**  
A starting point



**Diagram 2 (W)**  
Deciding on the f1-bishop

Diagram 1 is the starting point of the so-called Semi-Closed Benoni. It also has another title, the Schmid Benoni, named after the German grandmaster who regularly employed this system in the 1960s. Unlike the Closed Benoni (Chapter 5), here Black is not in a hurry to close the centre with ...e7-e5. Instead he retains the possibility of undermining with ...e7-e6, and the long diagonal remains open for the fianchettoed bishop on g7. However, Black will have to keep in mind the advance e2-e4-e5.

3 e4 Nf6 4 Nc3 g6

Here in the majority of cases White plays 5 Nf3, which transposes to a line that can also be reached via 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 d6 4 Nc3 g6 5 e4. However, with 5 f4 White can create a strong pawn phalanx threatening to break through with e4-e5 and f4-f5. It is usually followed by 5...Bg7 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Bd3 with a transposition into the Pirc Defence (1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 g6 4 f4 Bg7 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Bd3 c5 7 d5). Here we analyse only 6 Bb5+, which has its own independent significance. This check, which is typical for the Benoni, is played to damage the coordination of Black's pieces. Now 6...Bd7 is a bit risky in view of 7 e5, but 6...Nfd7 followed by castling and the typical transfer ...Nb8-a6-c7 is acceptable for Black (see the notes to Game 60).

5 Nf3 Bg7 (Diagram 2)

Now White's f1-bishop has to choose. The continuation 6 Bc4, which is quite new, is covered in Game 60. Being placed on c4 rather than e2, the bishop is better at preventing the undermining ...e7-e6. Also, White has an opportunity of building up a battery of queen and bishop along the f1-a6 diagonal to act

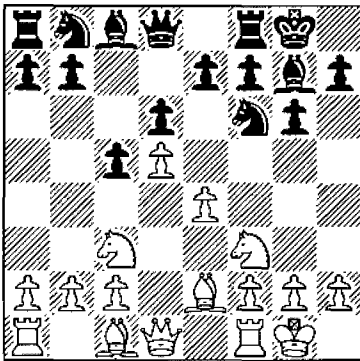
against ...b7-b5. At the same time the bishop on c4 is obviously vulnerable to ...b7-b5 (as in the line 6 Bc4 0-0 7 h3 b5 8 Bxb5 Nxe4 9 Nxe4 Qa5+). Black's queen's knight also often aims at the c4-bishop. Normally this is not achieved by the direct 6...0-0 7 0-0 Nbd7 and ...Nb6 (Zhang Pengxiang-Ni Hua), but after the exchange of the c8-bishop: 7...Bg4 8 h3 Bxf3 9 Qxf3 Nbd7, threatening the bishop both from b6 and from e5 (Grischuk-Markowski, Socko-Dautov).

Quite often 6 Bb5+ is played (Game 61). As mentioned above, this typical check damages the coordination of Black's pieces. After 6...Nbd7 (Movsesian-Markowski) or after 6...Nfd7 (Larsen-Browne) it is more difficult for Black to implement the planned advances ...b7-b5 and ...e7-e6. The swap of the light-squared bishops after 6...Bd7 7 a4 0-0 8 0-0 Bxb5 9 axb5 Nbd7 (Kramnik-Leko) consistently equalises, whereas after 8...Na6 9 Re1 Nc7 10 Bf1 or 10 Bc4 Black remains in a restricted position for a long time.

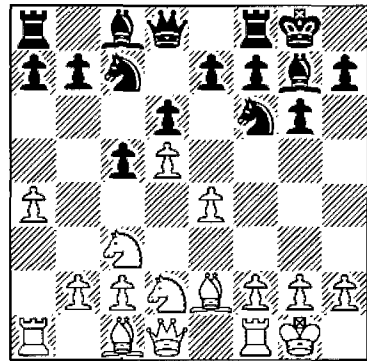
**6 Be2 0-0**

It is not worth avoiding castling, as proved in Botvinnik-Schmid (see the notes to Game 62), which is a model attack on a king that is stuck in the centre.

**7 0-0 (Diagram 3)**



**Diagram 3 (B)**  
A key position



**Diagram 4 (B)**  
9...a6 or 9...b6?

This is a key position in the Schmid Benoni, which often arises from the Pirc Defence (1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 g6 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Be2 c5 6 d5 0-0 7 0-0) and the Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 g6 3 d4 Bg7 4 d5 d6 5 Be2 Nf6 6 Nc3 0-0 7 0-0).

The typical undermining move 7...e6 deserves close consideration. Boleslavsky proposed 8 Bc4 (hoping for the initiative after 8...exd5 9 Nxd5 Nxe4 10 Re1), but after 8...e5 it is unclear what the bishop is doing on c4. The continuation 8 dxe6 Bxe6 is also harmless for Black in view of ...d6-d5 (Dreev-Bareev), so White should proceed with 8 Nd2 exd5 9 exd5 with a position that is similar to the one reviewed in Game 75.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

7...Na6 is employed more often, with the idea of transferring the knight to c7 to prepare ...b7-b5. We cover the transfer of the f3-knight to c4 via d2 in Game 62, and other possibilities for White (8 Bf4, 8 h3, 8 Re1 etc.) in Game 63. The knight is moved to c4 both to support e4-e5 (which is also possible to achieve with the knight on f3) and to put pressure on the d6-pawn to prevent counter-play with ...e7-e6. Moreover, the path for the f-pawn is now cleared. The drawbacks of the manoeuvre are the time expended and the vulnerability of the knight after it reaches c4. After 8 Nd2 Nc7 9 a4 (**Diagram 4**) the continuation 9...a6 invites the restricting a4-a5 (Iordachescu-Zviagintsev), while 9...b6 intending ...Ba6xc4 was used in Smyslov-Schmid and Lautier-Ponomarev.

8 Bf4, 8 h3, 8 Re1 usually interweave with each other. Giving up h2-h3, White should not ignore ...Bg4 (Moreno-Kallio). The famous game Karpov-Korchnoi, which began as a Pirc Defence, saw the more passive development of the bishop to b7.

## Statistics

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After 6 Bc4 White achieves 65%; after 6 Bb5, 68%; and after 6 Be2, 58%.

## Theoretical?

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Only to an extent, here general strategy is more important than the specific lines.

## Theoretical Status

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Respectable. A tense fight that is full of ideas attracts both fans of the Schmid Benoni and those who like to play against the Schmid Benoni. However, the system is not especially popular because White's play is much easier owing to his space advantage and the simple development of his pieces.

## Illustrative Games

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*Game 60*

□ B.Socko ■ R.Dautov

Ohrid 2001

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1 d4 c5 2 d5 d6 3 e4 Nf6 4 Nc3 g6 5 Nf3

White can also try the more aggressive 5 f4 Bg7 6 Bb5+ (6 Nf3 0-0 7 Bd3 transposes to the Pirc Defence: 1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 g6 4 f4 Bg7 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Bd3 c5 7 d5), but this does not have the same potential for quick kills as in the Modern Benoni. For example 6...Nfd7 7 a4 (7 Bd3 0-0 8 Nf3 Nb6!? 9 0-0 c4 10 Be2 f5!? is unclear –Plaskett) 7...0-0 8 Nf3 Na6 9 0-0 Nc7 10 Bd3 a6 11 Qe1 Rb8 12 f5 b5 13 axb5 axb5 14 Qh4 c4 15 Be2 with chances for both sides, S.Djachkov-V.Malakhov, Ekaterinburg 1996. However, 6...Bd7 gives White an advantage after 7 e5 Ng8 8 Qe2 Bxb5 9 Qxb5+ Qd7 10 Nf3 a6 11 Qe2 when e5-

e6 is a serious threat.

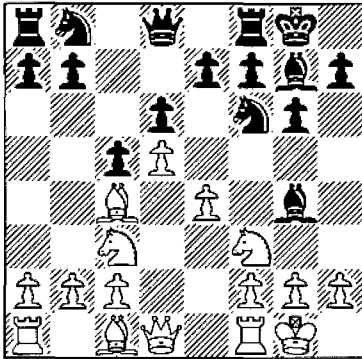
**5...Bg7 6 Bc4 0-0 7 0-0**

7 h3?! would be weak because of 7...b5! 8 Bxb5 Nxe4 9 Nxe4 Qa5+ 10 Nc3 Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 Qxb5 12 Qd3 Qa4 and, with ...Ba6 coming, Black looks better.

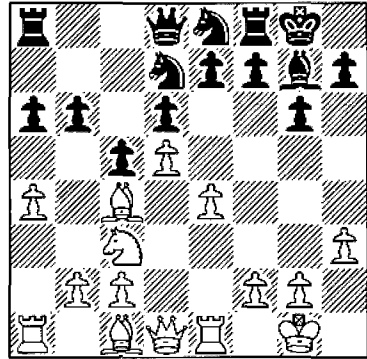


**WARNING: This standard trick occurs often and is important to remember.**

**7...Bg4 (Diagram 5)**



**Diagram 5 (W)**  
Planning a trade



**Diagram 6 (B)**  
Preventing a4-a5



**NOTE: Black should usually rid himself of this bishop when he can in this system.**

Or:

a) 7...Nbd7 8 Bf4 Ne8 9 Re1 Nb6 10 Bf1 e5 11 dxe6 Bxe6 12 a4 Nd7 13 Nb5 Bg4 (13...Bxb2 14 Rb1 Bg7 15 Nxd6 b6 16 Bb5 with the initiative) 14 Nxd6 Be5 15 Bxe5 (Zhang Pengxiang-Ni Hua, Gyula 2000) and here Black's best is probably 15...Nxe5 16 Nxe8 Qxe8 17 Be2 Rd8 18 Qc1, even though he doesn't have enough compensation for the pawn.

b) 7...Na6 8 Re1 Nc7 9 a4 e5 is also not good enough to equalise. After 10 dxe6 Bxe6 11 Bxe6 Nxe6 12 Nd5!? Nxd5 13 Qxd5 White remains a bit better.

**8 h3 Bxf3 9 Qxf3 Nbd7 10 Qd1**

On 10 Qe2 Black can try 10...Nb6!? 11 Bb3 Rc8 12 a4 c4 13 Ba2 a5 14 Be3 Nfd7 with good counterplay.

**10...Ne8 11 Re1 a6**

11...Nc7 12 a4 f5 looks less sound as the light-squared bishop will be missed by Black: 13 exf5 Rxf5 14 Ne4 (14 Ba2 Nb6 15 g4 Rf7 16 a5 Nd7 17 Ne4 is also

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

better for White – Alterman) 14...Nb6 15 Bd3 c4 16 Bf1 Rxd5 17 Qg4 Ra5 (or 17...Rf5 18 Ng3 Rf7 19 a5 Nd7 20 Qxc4 and White is better – Grischuk) 18 Ng5 Qc8 19 Rxe7 Qxg4 20 hxg4 Rc8 21 Bd2 Rc5 (necessary was 21...Rxa4 22 Rxa4 Nxa4 23 Bxc4+ d5 24 Bb3 Nc5 25 Rxc7!? Rxc7 26 Bxd5+ Kf8 27 b4 when the endgame is not too unbearable for Black) 22 Ne4 Rc6 23 Bc3 and Black was in deep trouble in A.Grischuk-T.Markowski, Batumi 1999.

12 a4 b6 (Diagram 6)



**NOTE: Black needs to include this or else White will White will play a4-a5, for example 12...Nc7 13 a5 b5 14 axb6 Nxb6 15 Bf1 e6 16 Qf3 with a slight advantage.**

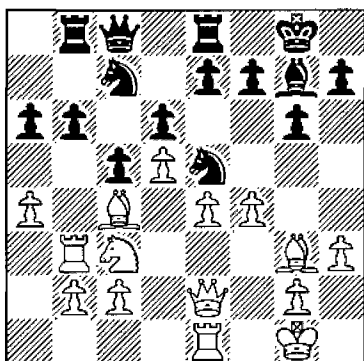
13 Ra3 Nc7 14 Rb3 Re8

As Dautov shows, Black cannot play 14...b5 just yet. After 15 axb5 Nb6 16 Bf1 (16 Qd3 Bxc3 17 Qxc3 Nxc4 18 Qxc4 axb5 with equality is what Black would like) 16...c4 17 Rb4! a5 18 Rxc4 Nxc4 19 Bxc4 Rb8 20 Qd3 Qd7 21 Bd2 White has a clear advantage as Black cannot activate his pieces.

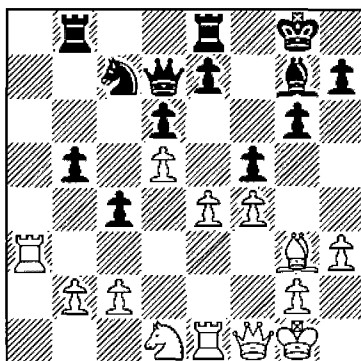
15 Bf4

15 f4 would allow Black to show his counterplay immediately: 15...b5! 16 axb5 Nb6 17 Bf1 c4 18 Rb4 a5 19 Rxc4 Nxc4 20 Bxc4 Bxc3 21 bxc3 Nxb5!. This is the point: without this White's pawns and bishops would be too strong, but with f2-f4 on the board, ...Qb6+ is available. Now after 22 Qd3 Nc7 matters are very unclear.

15...Rb8 16 Qe2 Qc8 17 Bg3 Ne5 18 f4?! (Diagram 7)



**Diagram 7 (B)**  
A misevaluation



**Diagram 8 (W)**  
Undermining d5

White misevaluates the position, or is maybe just unhappy with the boredom offered by the level position arising after 18 Bxe5 Bxe5 19 Qd3 Qb7.

18...Nxc4 19 Qxc4 Qd7

Black is carefully preparing his play, and now White has to unwind his prophylactic set-up. 19...b5?! would be premature, 20 axb5 axb5 21 Nxb5 Nxb5 22 Rxb5 leaving White a bit better (22...Bxb2), based on 22...Qa6?! 23 Rxb8! Qxc4 24 Rxe8+ Bf8 25 Ra1 Qxe4 26 Raa8 – White has excellent winning chances in the endgame with a piece for a few pawns.

### 20 Qf1

20 e5?! would allow Black to win a piece after the long forced line 20...b5 21 axb5 axb5 22 Qe4 f5! 23 Qf3 c4 24 e6 Qc8 25 Rb4 Na6 26 Rxb5 Rxb5 27 Nxb5 Qc5+ (Dautov).

### 20...b5 21 axb5 axb5 22 Nd1 c4 23 Ra3 f5! (Diagram 8) 24 Qf2

Or 24 Qf3 fxe4 25 Qxe4 Qf5 26 Qxf5 gxf5 27 Ne3 Bd4 28 Bf2 b4 29 Ra5 Bb6 and the d5-pawn is history.

### 24...fxe4 25 Ra7 Qc8 26 Qd2 Ra8 27 Rxa8 Qxa8 28 Ne3 Rf8?!

Simpler was 28...Bxb2! 29 c3 Qa3 30 Nd1 Bc1! 31 Qd4 Qc5 and Black is simply winning – Dautov.

### 29 c3 Na6 30 Rf1

Or 30 Nc2 Nc5 31 Nb4 Nd3 32 Rxe4 Nxb4 33 cxb4 Qa1+ 34 Be1 Qxb2 with a poor endgame for White.

### 30...Nc5 31 f5 Nd3 32 Qe2 Qc8 33 Qg4

White should also expect to lose after 33 fxe6 Rxf1+ 34 Nxf1 Qc5+ 35 Ne3 Bh6 36 Bf2 Bxe3 37 Bxe3 Qxd5, though his chances might be better here.

### 33...Qc5 34 Qxe4 Bh6 35 Qe6+ Kh8 36 Rf3 Rxf5 37 Bf2 Rxf3

Black could still mess things up. After 37...Nxf2? 38 Rxf5 Ng4 39 Kh1! gxf5 40 Nxe4 fxe4 41 Qxh6 a draw is very likely.

### 38 gxf3 Nxf2 39 Qxe7 Qxe3 0-1

## Game 61

□ M.Sorokin ■ Y.Shulman

Calcutta 1999

### 1 d4 c5 2 d5 d6 3 e4 Nf6 4 Nc3 g6 5 Nf3 Bg7 6 Bb5+ (Diagram 9)

This check can still disturb Black, even though it is not trying to destroy him immediately, as with f2-f4 included.

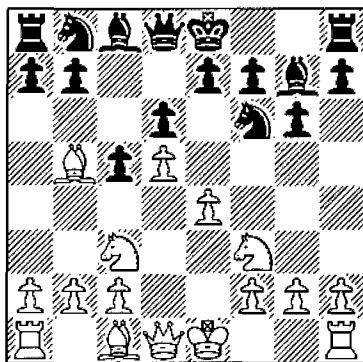
### 6...Bd7

In similar lines in the Modern Benoni this is hardly ever a good move. Both knight moves are more natural there, as a knight has to keep an eye on the e5-square.

a) 6...Nfd7 7 a4 0-0 8 0-0 Na6 9 Bf4 (or 9 Re1 Nc7 10 Bf1 a6 11 Bf4 Rb8 12 a5 b5 13 axb6 Nxb6 14 Ra2 with an edge) 9...Nc7 10 Be2 f5!? 11 exf5 Rxf5 12 Bg5 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Nxd5 (13...Ne5 14 Qd2 Nf7 15 Bd3 Nxe5 16 Nxe5 Rf6 17 Rfe1 and White is slightly better) 14 Bd3 Nxc3 15 Qd2 Rxf3 16 gxf3?! (better was 16 Bc4+ d5 17 gxf3 Ne5 18 Qxc3 Nxc4 with chances for both sides) 16...Ne5 17

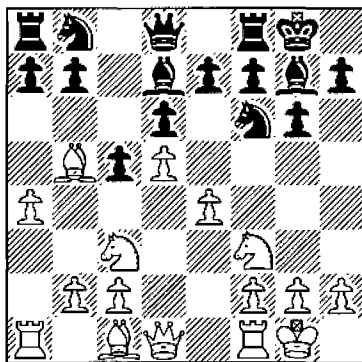
## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Qxc3 (but not 17 Bc4+? e6! 18 Qxc3 Qxg5+ 19 Kh1 b6 20 Rfd1 Qf4 and Black is winning, B.Larsen-W.Browne, USA 1972) 17...Nxf3+ 18 Kh1 Nxg5 and both players have their chances. Our sentiment is probably towards Black, but objectively it is not so easy to evaluate the position.



**Diagram 9 (B)**

Disturbing Black's development



**Diagram 10 (B)**

Exchange on b5?

b) 6...Nbd7 7 a4 0-0 8 0-0 a6 9 Be2 Rb8 (9...b6 10 Bf4 Ne8 11 Qd2 Ne5 12 Nxe5 dxe5 13 Bh6 surely favours White) is another way to play the position. Here Black is trying to gain time by developing along the normal lines of the Modern Benoni. Now instead of 10 Nd2 (as in S.Movsesian-T.Markowski, Polanica Zdroj 2000), White should play 10 a5! (as always) 10...Ne8 11 Nd2 b5 12 axb6 Nxb6 13 Nb3 Nc7 14 Na5 Bd7 15 Re1 with an edge.

**7 a4 0-0 8 0-0 (Diagram 10) 8...Na6**

After 8...Bxb5 9 axb5 Nbd7 10 Qe2 Ne8 11 Bf4 Nc7 12 Rfd1 a6 13 bxa6 Nxa6 14 e5 White has a standard advantage. Now 14...dxe5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Bxe5 Bxe5 17 Qxe5 Qd6 18 Qg5 Nc7 19 Ne4 Rxa1 20 Rxa1 f6! 21 Nxd6 fxe5 22 Nxb7 Rb8 23 Na5 Rxb2 24 c4 Rc2 25 h3 Ne8 26 Nc6 led to a draw in V.Kramnik-P.Leko, Linares 2000.

**9 Re1**



**NOTE: 9 Bxa6 is not very good here. After 9...bxa6 10 Nd2 Rb8 11 Qe2 e6! 12 dxe6 Bxe6 13 Qxa6 Qe7 Black is getting his pieces into very active positions, and White has trouble developing.**

**9...Nc7 10 Bc4**

Also possible was 10 Bf1 Bg4 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Nd7 13 Bg5 Ne5 14 Qg3 when White might have some pressure.

**10...Bg4**

Very thematic. 10...a6 11 e5 Nfe8 12 a5! (but not 12 Bg5 f6 13 exf6 exf6 14 Bf4 b5 15 axb5 axb5 16 Rxa8 Qxa8 17 Bd3 f5 when Black has brilliant play; White's pieces are not supported by his pawns at all) 12...Bg4 13 Bf4 and White retains a slight plus.

11 h3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Nd7 13 Qg3 a6 14 Bd2 b6

Again this move is necessary: 14...Rb8?! 15 a5 b5 16 axb6 Rxb6 17 b3 e6 18 Ra5 and the a6-pawn is really weak.

15 h4!? Rb8 16 h5 b5 17 Bf1 Nb6 (Diagram 11)

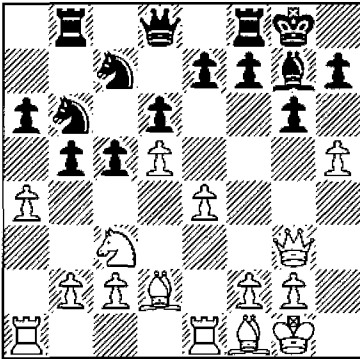


Diagram 11 (W)  
An option of a4-a5

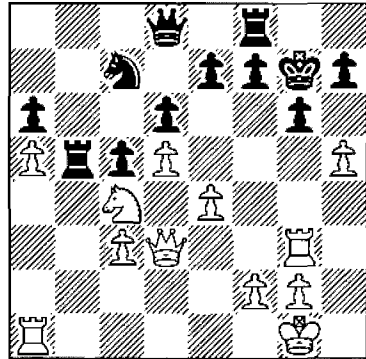


Diagram 12 (B)  
Good winning chances

Or 17...b4 18 Nd1 a5 19 c3 with a slight plus for White.

18 a5

This works out well, although also strong was 18 axb5!? axb5 19 Nxb5 Nxb5 20 Bxb5 Nxd5 21 exd5 Rxb5 22 Bc3 Bxc3 23 Qxc3 with ideas like Ra7 and h5-h6.

18...Nc4 19 Bxc4 bxc4 20 Na4 Rb5

20...e6?! would be answered by 21 hxg6 hxg6 22 Bg5 f6 23 Bf4 e5 24 Bd2 with a white edge – Nb6xc4 is in the cards.

21 Bc3 Bxc3 22 Qxc3 Rb4

22...e5 would be met strongly by 23 Nb6 f5 24 hxg6 hxg6 25 Nxc4 fxe4 26 Qg3 Kg7 27 Rxe4 Nxd5 28 Rd1 when Black is in big trouble.

23 Nb6 Nb5 24 Qd2 Rxb2 25 Nxc4 Rb4 26 Qd3 Nc7

26...e6!? 27 dxex6 fxe6 28 hxg6 Qf6!? is probably a better idea – Black needs to get active. After 29 gxh7+ Kh8 30 f3 Qd4+ 31 Ne3 Kxh7 White's advantage is not too vast.

27 c3 Rb5 28 Re3 Kg7 29 Rg3 (Diagram 12)

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

White should have very good winning chances here, but he lets things slip.

29...Ne8 30 Re1 Nf6 31 hxc6 hxc6 32 e5 dxe5 33 Nxe5 Qe8 34 c4 Rb7 35 Nc6 Rh8 36 Qc3 Rh4 37 Rh3 Rxc3 38 Qxc3 e6 39 Qc3?! Qc8 40 Rd1 exd5 41 cxd5 Qg4 42 Re1 Qd7 43 Rd1 Qg4 44 Re1 ½-½

Game 62

□ J.Lautier ■ R.Ponomarev

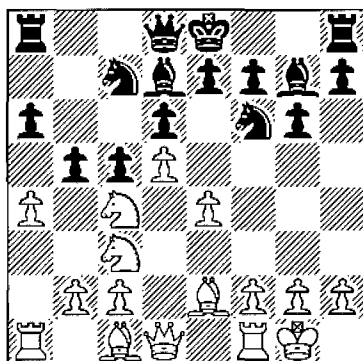
Enghien 1999

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 d6 4 Nc3 g6 5 e4 Bg7 6 Be2 0-0



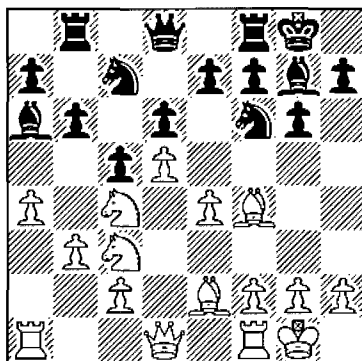
**WARNING:** It doesn't make sense to begin the counterplay on the queenside before castling. Black's king would be too exposed in the centre.

Look at the following example from the great master: 6...Na6 7 0-0 Nc7 8 a4 a6 9 Nd2 Bd7 10 Nc4 b5 (Diagram 13).



**Diagram 13 (W)**

No way back



**Diagram 14 (B)**

A strong positional idea

Now there is no way back; all would be well if White didn't have his next move: 11 e5! dxe5 (11...bxc4 12 exf6 Bxf6 13 Bh6 Rb8 14 Ra2 and Black doesn't have an easy way to continue) 12 axb5 axb5 (12...Nxb5 13 Nxe5 Nxc3 14 bxc3 Ne4 15 Qd3 Bxe5 16 Qxe4 Bxc3 17 Rxa6 Rxa6 18 Bxa6 0-0 19 Be3 with a slight advantage for White was probably sounder) 13 Rxa8 Qxa8?! (it was sadly necessary to recapture with the knight: 13...Nxa8 14 Nxe5 b4 15 Nxd7 Nxd7 16 Ne4 0-0 17 c4 and White is slightly better) 14 Nxe5 b4 15 d6! (this is probably what Black missed) 15...bxc3 (after 15...exd6 16 Qxd6 bxc3 17 Bf3! Nb5 18 Qxc5 Qa7 19 Nxd7 Qxc5 20 Nxc5 White has an extra pawn in the end-game – Botvinnik) 16 dxc7 Qc8 17 Bf4! cxb2 18 Nxd7 Nxd7 19 Bb5 with a winning position. M.Botvinnik-L.Schmid, Leipzig 1960.



**TIP: Do not believe that just because a piece is threatened it will have to move. In this game Botvinnik twice showed that this is not the case.**

### 7 0-0 Na6

7...e6 is not bad at all: 8 dxe6 (maybe 8 Nd2 exd5 9 exd5 is better, when the c4-square could give White an edge) 8...Bxe6 9 Bf4 (9 Ng5 Nc6 10 Nxe6 fxe6 11 Bc4 Nd4 12 a4 is not clear, while 9 Be3 Nc6 10 Qd2 Qb6 11 Rab1 Rad8 should not pose Black any problems at all) 9...d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Bxd5 12 c3 Re8 13 Be3 b6 14 Qa4 Bc6 15 Qb3 Nd7 16 Rad1 Qc7 17 Bb5 Bxb5 18 Qxb5 Nf6 and Black is not worse, A.Dreev-E.Bareev, Wijk aan Zee 1995.

### 8 Nd2 Nc7 9 a4 b6

Black is usually forced to include this move, but 9...a6 has also been played:

a) 10 Re1 Bd7 11 a5 Nb5 12 Ndb1!? e6 13 Bg5 (13 dxe6?! fxe6 14 Bg5 h6 15 Bh4 Bc6 16 Bf1 Qe8 17 f3 Qf7 18 Nxb5 axb5 and Black was better in V.Iordachescu-V.Zviagintsev, Istanbul 2003) 13...Nd4 14 Bc4 h6 15 Bh4 and maybe White is better, but only maybe.

b) 10 a5! Bd7 11 Na4 Bb5 12 Nb6 Rb8 13 Re1 Na8 14 Nbc4 with a slight edge is probably the most natural.

### 10 Nc4

10 Re1 allows Black to play 10...e6 11 Nc4 exd5 12 exd5 Ba6 13 Bf4 Bxc4 14 Bxc4 Nh5 15 Bd2 f5 when he has decent counterplay – I.Belov.

### 10...Ba6 11 Bg5

A very famous game continued 11 Bf4 Rb8 (better is 11...Bxc4!? 12 Bxc4 a6 13 Re1 Nd7 14 Qd2 Re8 15 Bh6 Bh8 when Black is only slightly worse) 12 b3!! (Diagram 14).



**NOTE: This very famous decision is one of the strongest positional ideas for White against the Schmid Benoni.**

12...Nd7 13 Qd2 f5 14 Rad1 fxe4 (14...Bxc3 15 Qxc3 fxe4 16 Bh6 Rf7 17 Bg4 Bxc4 18 Qxc4 Ne5 19 Qxe4 with a slight edge – Smyslov) 15 Nxe4 Rf5?! (necessary is 15...Bb7 16 Bg5 Qe8 17 Bg4 Bxd5 18 Nexd6! exd6 19 Nxd6 Qe5 20 Nb5 Be6 21 f4 though White retains pressure – Smyslov) 16 Bg4! Rxd5 17 Be6+ Nxe6 18 Qxd5 Ndf8 19 Ng5 Bb7? 20 Nxe6 Qc8 21 Nxd6 exd6 22 Qxd6 Qxe6 23 Qxe6+ 1-0, V.Smyslov-L.Schmid, Helsinki 1952.

### 11...Qd7

Also interesting is 11...Bxc4 12 Bxc4 a6 13 Qe2 Nd7 14 f4 Re8 15 Bh4 (15 e5 f6! 16 Bh4 fxe5 is also unclear) 15...Qb8 16 e5 Qb7 17 Rae1 Rab8 when Black has his chances too according to I.Belov.

### 12 b3

A replica of the Smyslov idea above.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

12...e6 13 Qd2

White cannot win a pawn after 13 dxe6 Qxe6 (14 Qxd6? Bxc4 15 Qxc7 Bxe2 16 Nxe2 Nxe4 17 Be3 Bxa1 18 Rxa1 Nxf2! and Black wins), but he can play 14 Rb1 14...Rfe8 15 Re1 though after 15...d5!? Black has quite reasonable counterplay.

13...exd5 14 exd5 Rfe8 15 Bf3 Ng4 16 h3 Ne5 17 Be2 Nxc4

Or 17...f5 18 Nxe5 dxe5 19 Bxa6 Nxa6 20 Rad1 Nb4 with chances for both players.

18 Bxc4 Bxc4 19 bxc4 a6?! (Diagram 15)

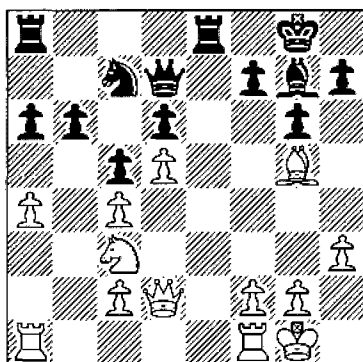


Diagram 15 (W)

Too optimistic

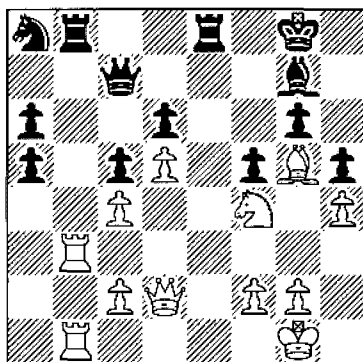


Diagram 16 (B)

Eyeing e6 and g6

This is too optimistic – Black achieves nothing apart from creating weaknesses. Correct was 19...Qf5 20 Ra3 Bxc3!? 21 Rxc3 Re4 with counterplay down the e-file.

20 Rab1 Rab8 21 Rb3 f5?!

Later the weaknesses of the e6-square and the king in general are very uncomfortable. Also poor was 21...b5?! 22 axb5 axb5 23 Nxb5 Nxb5 24 Rfb1! Nc3 25 Rxb8 Nxb1 26 Rxb1 Qa4 27 Qd3. Black should play 21...Rb7 22 Rfb1 Reb8 23 Qd3 when White is only a bit better – Lautier.

22 Rfb1 Na8 23 h4! h5

Or 23...Bxc3 24 Qxc3 Qxa4 25 Ra3 Qd7 26 Rxa6 with a large positional advantage.

24 a5 Qc7

24...b5? is met by 25 cxb5 Bxc3 26 Qxc3 axb5 27 Qf6 Kh7 28 Bf4 and White wins.

25 Ne2! bxa5 26 Nf4 (Diagram 16) 26...Rb4

After 26...a4 White wins with 27 Ne6 Qa7 28 Rxb8 Rxb8 29 Rxb8+ Qxb8 30 Nxb7 Kxb7 31 Qc3+ Kh7 32 Qf6 Qc7 33 Qf8 – Black cannot defend d6, h6 and his king against Bf6.

**27 Re1 Qf7**

After 27...Rxe1+ 28 Qxe1 Qf7 29 Re3 Be5 30 Nd3 Rxc4 31 Nxe5 dxe5 32 Rxe5 Re4 33 Rxe4 fxe4 34 Qxe4 Nb6 35 d6 White is very likely to convert his advantage into a full point – Lautier.

**28 Re6! Rxc4?**

The only move was 28...Nb6 29 Rxb6 Nxc4 30 Qd1 Ne5 31 Rxd6 a4 32 Rxb4 cxb4 33 Nxb5 (Lautier) when Black is still under attack, but not dead yet.

**29 Rb7! Qxb7 30 Rxe8+ Kh7 31 Re7 Qb1+ 32 Kh2 Rxc2 33 Qe3 Qb2 34 Qe6 1-0**

*Game 63*

□ R.Hübner ■ V.Ivanchuk

Dortmund 1997

**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 g6 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Bg7 6 Be2 Na6 7 0-0 Nc7 8 Bf4**

Other ideas include:

- a) 8 Re1 0-0 9 a4 a6 10 a5 Nb5 11 Nb1!? e6!? with chances for both sides.
- b) 8 h3 0-0 9 a4 e6 10 dxe6 fxe6 (10...Bxe6 11 Bf4 Nfe8 12 Ng5 and we prefer White – it's the d5-square once again) 11 e5 dxe5 (11...Nfd5 12 Ne4! is very good for White) 12 Qxd8 Rxd8 13 Bg5 Ncd5 14 Ne4 b6 15 Nxf6+ Nxf6 16 Nxe5 and White is slightly better – Ftacnik.

**8...0-0 9 a4 b6**

Or 9...a6 10 Re1 (also good is 10 h3 Bd7 11 e5 Nfe8 12 Qd2 dxe5 13 Nxe5 Nd6 14 Rfe1 Re8 15 Qe3 Rc8 16 Rad1 with a slight edge) 10...Bg4 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Bxf3 Nd7 13 a5 Nb5 14 Na4! (White is better) 14...Qc7 (14...b6 15 axb6 Nxb6 16 Nxb6 Qxb6 17 c3 Rfb8 18 Qd3 is very bad for Black; he might look active, but there is nothing he can direct his activity against) 15 Bg4 Rad8 16 c3 Rfe8 17 Bxd7 Rxd7 18 Nb6 Rdd8 19 Qd3 with an edge for White, J.Moreno-H.Kallio, Bermuda 2003.

**10 Qd2**

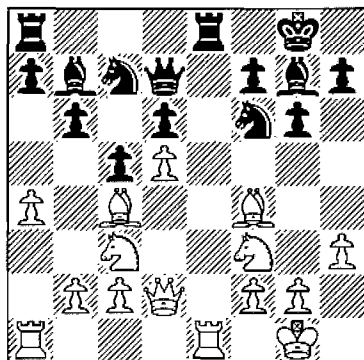
A famous game, A.Karpov-V.Korchnoi, World Championship (Game 32), Baguio City 1978, continued 10 Re1 Bb7 11 Bc4 Nh5 12 Bg5 and now Black erred with 12...Nf6?! (after 12...h6 13 Be3 e6 14 Qd3 exd5 15 exd5 Kh7 Black is only slightly worse) 13 Qd3 a6 14 Rad1 Rb8 15 h3 Nd7 16 Qe3 Ba8 17 Bh6 b5 18 Bxb7 Kxb7 19 Bf1 Nf6 20 axb5 axb5 21 Ne2 Bb7 (21...e5 22 dxe6 Nxe6 23 Ng3 with a clear edge – Karpov) 22 Ng3 Ra8 23 c3 Ra4 24 Bd3 Qa8 25 e5! dxe5 (25...Nfxd5 26 Nh5+! gxh5 27 Qg5+ Kh8 28 Qf5 with mate to follow) 26 Qxe5 Nxd5 27 Bxb5 Ra7 28 Nh4 and White enjoyed a continuous attack.

**10...Re8**

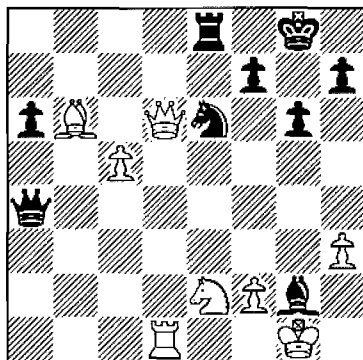
## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Later Black played 10...a6 11 Rfd1 Re8 12 h3 Bb7 13 Bh6 b5 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 axb5 axb5 16 Rxa8 Bxa8 17 b4!? cxb4 18 Nxb5 Nxe4 19 Qxb4 Nf6 20 c4 Nxb5 21 Qxb5 Qc7 in L.Vogt-H.Wirthensohn, Switzerland 2003, but we do not consider this an improvement and Black is a bit worse.

11 h3 Bb7 12 Rfe1 e6 13 Bc4 exd5 14 exd5 Qd7 (Diagram 17)



**Diagram 17 (W)**  
Black is okay



**Diagram 18 (W)**  
33...Be4xg2!!

It is fully justified that Black wins this game – throughout he tries to create real play. After 14...Rxe1+ 15 Rxe1 Qd7 16 Nb5 Nxb5 17 axb5 a6 18 Qd3 a5 19 c3 Re8 (Ivanchuk) a draw is not far away.

**15 Rxe8+ Nfxe8 16 Bh6 Bh8**

Or 16...Bxc3 17 Qxc3 Nxd5 18 Qb3 Ndc7 19 Re1 Bc6 20 a5 b5 21 Bf1 with mutual chances.

**17 Qd3 a6 18 Rb1 Rb8**

Black could also have played 18...Bxc3 19 bxc3 b5 20 axb5 axb5 21 Bxb5 Nxb5 22 Qxb5 Qxb5 23 Rxb5 Bxd5 24 Nd2 f5 with an equal position.

**19 b4!?**

This is in effect a pawn sacrifice. White also has no advantage after 19 Nd2 Ba8 20 Bxa6 Nxa6 21 Qxa6 Bxc3 22 bxc3 Bxd5 23 Rxb6 Rxb6 24 Qxb6 Qxa4 25 Qd8 Qa8 26 Qe7 Ng7 (Ivanchuk).

**19...cxb4 20 Rxb4 Bxc3 21 Qxc3 Nxd5 22 Bxd5 Bxd5 23 Nd4**

White has enough compensation for his pawn, but no more.

**23...Qe7 24 Rb1 Qf6**

Black would also be okay after 24...f6 25 Bd2 Qc7 26 Qd3, e.g. 26...Qc4 27 Qxc4 Bxc4 28 Nc6 Rb7 29 Na5 Ba2 30 Rb2 Rc7 31 Rxa2 bxa5 32 Bxa5 Rc4 with level chances.

**25 Qd2 Nc7 26 Bg5 Qg7 27 c4 Be4 28 Rd1 Re8 29 Be3 Qe5**

This is stronger than 29...Qf6 30 Ne2 Bc6 31 Qxd6 Qxd6 32 Rxd6 Bxa4 33 Rxb6 when White is a bit more active.

**30 Ne2 Ne6 31 Qxd6 Qa5 32 Bxb6 Qxa4 33 c5?!**

Simpler was 33 Rc1 Qc6 34 Qxc6 Bxc6 35 Ra1 Bb7 when the endgame should shortly end in a draw. Probably White was still having aspirations of his own and overlooked Black's response.

**33...Bxg2!! (Diagram 18) 34 Kxg2 Qe4+ 35 Kf1?**

This loses relatively simply, so it's surprising that the German doctor played this. White can still hold the position together with 35 Kh2! Qxe2 36 c6 Qf3 (36...Rc8 37 c7 Qf3 38 Rd3 Qf5 39 Rd5 Qf3 with a possible repetition) 37 Rd3 Qf5 38 Rc3 Rd8!? 39 Qxd8+! (39 Bxd8? Qxf2+ 40 Kh1 Qe1+ 41 Kg2 Qxc3 42 c7 g5! would still give Black chances to win the game thanks to the threats to White's king) 39...Nxd8 40 c7 Nc6 41 Rxc6 Qe5+ 42 Kg1 Qg5+ with a draw. Possibly Hübner was short of time.

**35...Nf4! 36 Qxf4**



36 Nxf4 Qh1 mate was Black's main point.

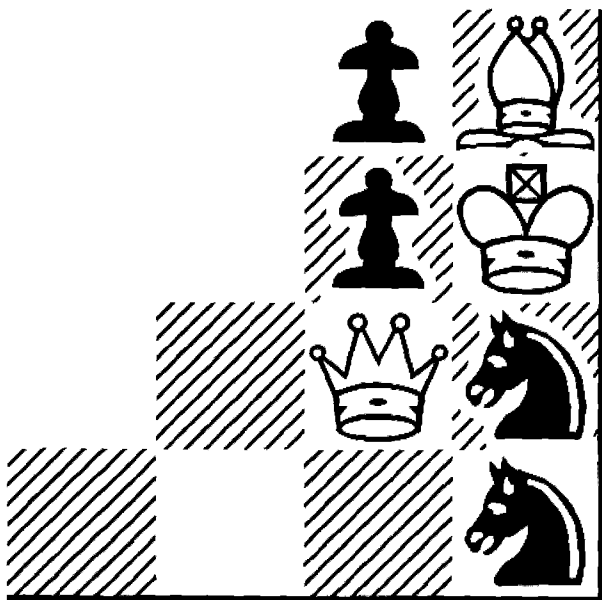
**36...Qxe2+ 37 Kg2 Qxd1 38 Qc4 Qe2 39 Qa4 Qe4+ 40 Qxe4 Rxe4 41 c6 Rc4 42 c7 Kf8 0-1**

## Chapter Eight

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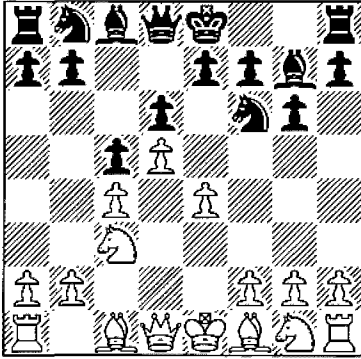
# The Benoni/King's Indian Hybrid

-  Introduction
-  Illustrative Games



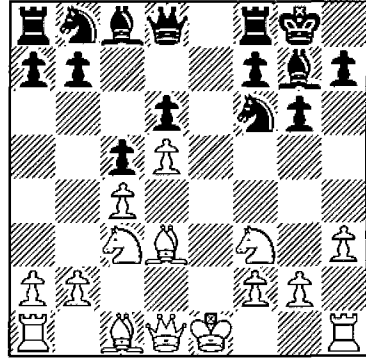
# Introduction

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 d6 4 Nc3 g6 5 e4 Bg7 (Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1 (W)**

The Benoni King's Indian hybrid



**Diagram 2 (B)**

9 exd5

Black is not in a hurry to place his e7-pawn on e5; he wants to use the power of his long-range g7-bishop. As far as we know this was first played in a game Steinitz-Tinsley (1895). The fight grew whimsical from the very beginning: 6 Bd3 0-0 7 Nge2 Nbd7 8 Nf4 Ne5 9 Be2 b6 10 h4 h5 and so on. In the first half of the 20th century the system was employed only in some games, but it has become fashionable since the 1950s. Nowadays the position in the diagram, which is something in-between the Benoni and the King's Indian, is very popular. We will not touch upon a number of lines arising from the King's Indian, for instance 6 f4 (The Four Pawns Attack). The subject of our analysis is as follows: White varies the development of the f1-bishop and the g1-knight while Black promotes ...e7-e6 and swapping on d5, White responding with exd5 thus deviating from the Modern Benoni.

## 6 Bd3

After 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Be2 e6 8 0-0 exd5 White apparently has to play 9 cxd5, transposing into a hugely popular tabiya in the Modern Benoni. In the case of 9 exd5 the e2-bishop is pretty passive and Black manages to equalise (see Game 64). The easiest thing for Black to do is to develop his bishop to f5 and occupy the key point e4, but also acceptable is 9...Bg4. Then h2-h3 forces the exchange on f3, with White gaining an advantage of two bishops. However, it doesn't benefit him greatly due to the closed pawn chains.

## 6...0-0 7 Nf3

After 7 Nge2 e6 8 0-0 exd5 9 cxd5, one of the sharpest variations in the Modern Benoni arises, while if 9 exd5 (Game 65) we have pretty quiet play. The e2-

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

knight does not block the road for the f-pawn, but it blocks the only open file, which makes the fight for an advantage more difficult.

**7...e6 8 h3**

Sometimes White does not spend time on prophylaxis and immediately plays 8 0-0. In the Modern Benoni after 8...exd5 9 cxd5 Bg4 White doesn't have an edge. On the other hand, if 9 exd5 Bg4 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Qxf3 White's position is preferable (see Gurevich-Ivanovic in Game 66).

**8...exd5**

Now 9 cxd5 leads to the most fashionable system in the Modern Benoni. Here the theory often extends beyond move twenty and White has to know it very well. That is why the sound alternative **9 exd5 (Diagram 2)** is a serious option.

This is the main position of the so-called Botvinnik System. The world champion developed it in the twilight of his career and first employed it against Matulovic in 1967, which was a great success. When he used it for the second time against Kavalek in 1969 it led to a draw, but Botvinnik was pressing.

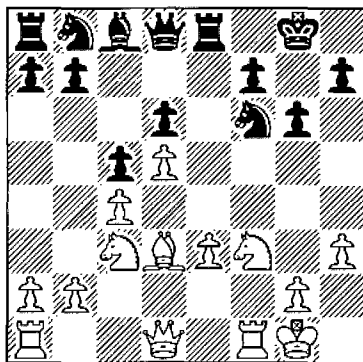
**9...Re8+**

After 9...Qe7+ 10 Qe2 Qxe2 11 Bxe2 (Vera-Martin), Black has less active opportunities and it's not easier for him to defend than in the main line.

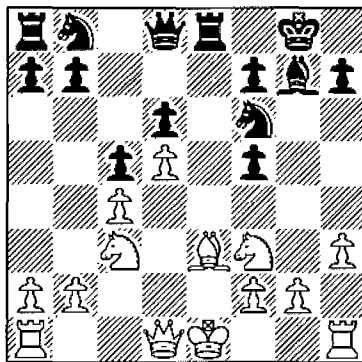
**10 Be3**

10 Kf1 also makes sense but it has not been studied thoroughly yet. White develops his c1-bishop to f4 or g5 and his queen to d2. After g2-g4 he finds shelter for his king on g2 and is ready to contend for the e-file.

After 10 Be3 Black can win a pawn with 10...Bh6 (Game 66) 11 0-0 Bxe3 12 fxe3 (Diagram 3) 12...Rxe3, but White gains an attack on the weakened black king as compensation.



**Diagram 3 (B)**  
A half-open f-file



**Diagram 4 (W)**  
Damaged pawn structure

Instead of 12...Rxe3, stronger is 12...Qe7 (Botvinnik-Kavalek, Shirov-Kovacevic), but White has better chances due to his initiative along the f-file.

In Game 67 we cover other possibilities for Black on move ten. In the normal 'quiet fight' scenario (Chetverik-Mohacsi – 10...a6 11 a4 Nbd7) White retains his long-term advantage thanks to space and control of the only open line. In the gambit variation 10...b5 (Ivkov-Gheorghiu) the interesting complications favour White, while any attempts to dodge complications lead to passive positions without counterplay. In the classic Botvinnik-Matulovic game Black chose 10...Nh5 and ...f7-f5, restraining White's initiative to some extent in view of the control over e4 and g4, but at a cost of weakening the king's position. Control over the important e4-square with 10...Bf5 11 Bxf5 gxf5 (**Diagram 4**), as in Hjartarsson-Blees, is attained at the cost of a damaged pawn structure.

## Statistics

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In the Botvinnik System White has achieved an overall score of 67%.

## Theoretical?

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Yes, but in the Botvinnik System itself, not the deviations from it.

## Theoretical Status

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White retains a slight edge in the quiet play and any complications are almost always favourable for him.

## Illustrative Games

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Game 64

□ G.Zaichik ■ V.Gavrikov

Tbilisi 1976

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 g6 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Bg7 6 Be2 e6 7 Nf3 exd5 8 exd5 0-0 9 0-0

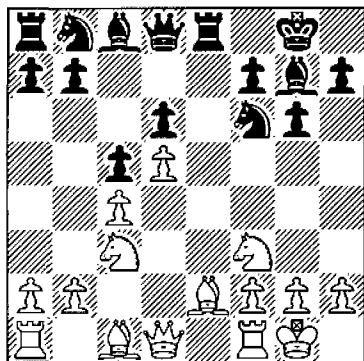
9 h3!? is an interesting idea: it restricts the c8-bishop and later g2-g4 is a standard move. 9...Bf5 10 g4 (10 0-0 makes little sense now; after 10...Ne4 11 Nxe4 Bxe4 12 Ng5 Re8 13 Nxe4 Rxe4 14 Bd3 Re8 15 Rb1 Nd7 Black is no worse) 10...Be4 11 Bf4 Bxf3 12 Bxf3 Ne8 13 Qd2 Nd7 14 h4 a6 15 a4 Qe7+ 16 Kf1 Ne5 17 Qe2 and the position is unclear (and balanced) A.Goloshchapov-A.Vaulin, Zadar 2000.



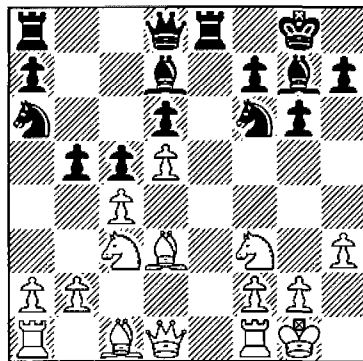
**NOTE:** In this game we will see again and again how Black chooses to rid himself of the c8-bishop, or at least develop it very quickly to f5, as there are no other good squares for it.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 9...Re8! (Diagram 5)



**Diagram 5 (W)**  
9...Re8!



**Diagram 6 (W)**  
Activation required

We like this the best. 9...Bg4 10 Bf4 a6 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Bxf3 Qc7 13 Qd2 Nbd7 14 Rfe1 Rfe8 is also possible, when Black is very close to equalising. However, in some positions Black might regret having parted with his bishop without forcing White to weaken his position in return.



**TIP: In the opening simple developing moves are often the best way forward.**

#### 10 h3 Bf5

This is our preferred treatment of the position. 10...Ne4 11 Nxe4 Rxe4 12 Bd3 Re8 13 Bg5 f6 (or 13...Qc7 14 Re1 Rxe1+ 15 Qxe1 Bd7 16 Qe7 Bf8 17 Qe3 and the initiative is clearly with White) 14 Bf4 Bf8 15 Qc2 Nd7 gives White a slight advantage. Now in P.Ricardi-C.Silva, Cordoba 1998 White decided to change the nature of the position drastically, 16 Bxg6!? hxg6 17 Qxg6+ Bg7 18 Bxd6 Nf8 19 Bxf8 Kxf8 20 Rfe1 leading to a complex mess.

#### 11 Nh4

White is trying to dominate the bishop, but it is really not that bad. 11 Bd3 seems natural, after which Black should play a typical move, opening up the g7-bishop and exchanging the best placed minor pieces in White's camp: 11...Ne4 12 Nxe4 Bxe4 13 Bxe4 Rxe4 14 Qc2 Re8 15 Bg5 Qd7 16 Rae1 Na6 17 a3 Nc7 18 b3 b5 19 Rxe8+ Rxe8 20 Re1 with an equal position, V.Tukmakov-G.Kasparov, Tbilisi 1978.

#### 11...Bd7 12 Bd3 Na6

12...Nxd5? does not work because of 13 Nxd5 Qxh4 14 Nc7.

#### 13 Nf3

13 a3?! would now allow the trick; after 13...Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Qxh4 15 Bf4 Bc6 Black is doing quite well.

**13...b5!?** (Diagram 6)

A provocative sacrifice, but Black needs to activate his pieces somehow or he will soon lose his lead in development generated through White's knight manoeuvre Nf3-h4-f3.

**14 cxb5**

14 Nxb5 Qb6 15 a4 Nb4 16 Bb1 a6 17 a5 Qb8 18 Nc3 h6 would give White an extra pawn, but his pieces are not very well placed. Does he have an advantage? We are not so sure – unclear is the only honest evaluation.

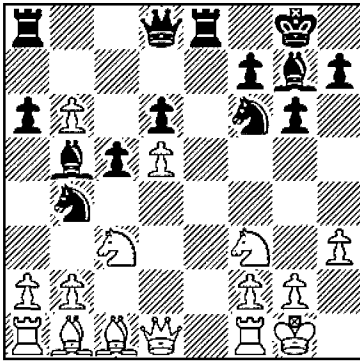
**14...Nb4 15 Bb1**

15 Bc4 Bf5 16 a3 Nc2 17 Ra2 Nd4 also gives Black good counterplay.

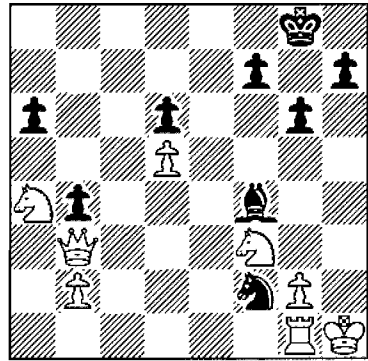
**15...a6 16 b6**

Because of what happens this move could be discussed, but after 16 bxa6 Rxa6 17 Bd3 Nxd3 18 Qxd3 Qa8 Black also has excellent counterplay. It's a kind of Volga, Gambit where the d7-bishop should be very helpful, maybe from f5.

**16...Bb5!** (Diagram 7)



**Diagram 7 (W)**  
Sacrificing



**Diagram 8 (W)**  
A variation of a classic

This move is absolutely forced. Black gets a rook for his two minor pieces, but crucially the white pieces lose much of their coordination. It was White's idea to win a piece eventually after 16...Qxb6?! 17 a3 Qa5 18 Bd2 or force Black to play the awful 16...a5.



**NOTE:** In a dynamic middlegame it is often what the pieces are able to do, and not their numeric value, that matters. At least in the short term.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

**17 a3 Bxf1 18 Kxf1 Qxb6 19 axb4 cxb4 20 Na4**

White decides to hold onto the d-pawn (...Qb5+ doesn't work now), but his knight is badly placed. After 20 Ne2 Qb5 21 Bd3 Qxd5 22 Kg1 Ne4 the outcome of the opening is hard to judge, but 'unclear' seems to be a normal way to evaluate a position like this. We think that Black is fine.

**20...Qb7 21 Ba2 Re4!?**

Improve your worst placed piece! Black clears the way for the for a8-rook to join the attack, and White's position is starting to get critical.

**22 Bb3?!**

This surprisingly appears to lose important time. If White hurried to get his king into safety with 22 Be3 Rae8 23 Kg1 his position might still be tenable.

**22...Rae8 23 Be3 Nh5 24 Kg1 Rxe3! 25 fxe3 Qa7 26 Qd2 Bh6 27 Kh2**

The following line is a good illustration of how the attack cuts right through: 27 Kh1 Rxe3 28 Qc2 Ng3+ 29 Kh2 Bf4! and White's king has nowhere to hide. Black wins in all lines, 30 Rb1 Rxb3! 31 Qxb3 Ne4+ 32 Kh1 Nf2+ 33 Kg1 Nxb3+ 34 Kh1 Qg1+ 35 Rxc1 Nf2 mate (**Diagram 8**) being a nice version of an old classic.

**27...Rxe3 28 Qf2 Bf4+ 29 Kh1 Ng3+ 30 Kg1 Ne4 0-1**

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Game 65

□ I.Sokolov ■ T.Radjabov

Sarajevo 2003

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 d6 4 Nc3 g6 5 e4 Bg7 6 Bd3 0-0 7 Nge2 e6 8 0-0**

8 h3 exd5 9 exd5 has also been tried:

a) 9...Nbd7 10 f4 Ne8 11 0-0 f5 12 Be3 Nc7 13 Qd2 b6 is a standard way of playing the position with Black: he has good control over e4 and White has no obvious pawn advances to nudge this structure.

b) Here a radical way forward is 9...Nfd7 10 f4 f5 11 g4!? Qh4+ 12 Kd2 Nf6 13 g5 Ne8 14 Qg1 Na6 15 a3 with an unclear game, L.Ftacnik-T.Voronova, Lubniewice 1994. The queen could easily turn out to be badly placed on h4, but White's king could experience the same on the queenside.

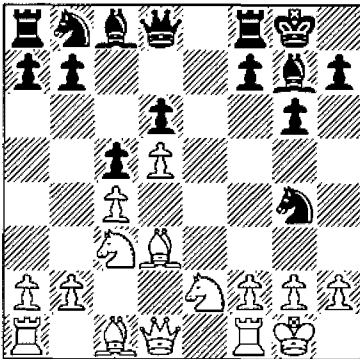
**8...exd5 9 exd5 Ng4 (Diagram 9)**

Black's knight immediately seeks the e5-square and opens up the bishop. This gives the b8-knight flexibility with a6 and d7 possible future routes.

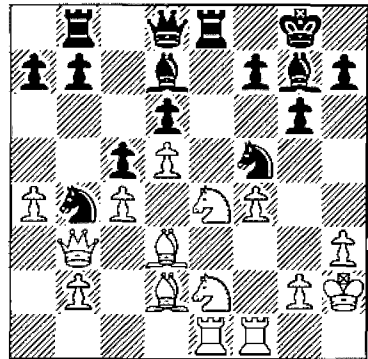
**10 f4**

White decides to remove the idea of ...Ne5 for good. 10 Bf4 Ne5 11 Qd2 has also been played, and this maybe looks a bit sounder. Even so, Black is absolutely fine: 11...Nbd7 12 b3 f5 13 Bg5 Nf6 14 f4?! (it was time to preserve the bishop; after 14 Bc2 Bd7 15 Rae1 Qa5 the chances are even) 14...Nxd3 15 Qxd3 Bd7 16 Bh4 Re8 17 h3 Qe7 18 Rae1 Qe3+ 19 Qxe3 Rxe3 20 Nd1 Ree8 21 Nec3 Nh5 22 Re7 Rxe7 23 Bxc7 Ng3 24 Rf3 Bd4+ 25 Kh2 Ne4 and Black was a

bit better in M.Wiedenkeller-M.Tal, Sweden 1986. Clearly the weakness of the light squares in his position is annoying for White here.



**Diagram 9 (W)**  
Opening up the bishop



**Diagram 10 (W)**  
Offering a sacrifice

**10...Re8 11 h3 Nh6?!**

This might seem a little anti-positional, but it is actually perfectly playable. However, it is also logical to accept being down in development, but gain the bishop pair with 11...Ne3 12 Bxe3 Rxe3 13 Qd2 Re8 14 Kh2 Na6 15 Rae1. For example, 15...Nc7 16 Ng1 Rxe1 17 Rxe1 Bd7 18 Nf3 a6 19 Ne4 Ne8 20 b4 b6 21 Rb1 Qc7 22 g3?! (better was 22 bxc5 dxc5 23 Re1 Rd8 when the position is still unclear) 22...Nf6 23 Nf2 b5! 24 bxc5 Qxc5 25 Rc1 Rc8 and we prefer Black, Y.Seirawan-A.Wojtkiewicz, Tilburg 1992.

**12 Bd2 Nf5 13 Qb3 Na6 14 Rae1 Rb8 15 a3**

15 Nb5 is met with a strong pawn sacrifice: 15...Nb4! 16 Bxb4 cxb4 17 Qxb4 Qb6+ 18 Kh2 Ne3 19 Rf3 Bd7 20 Qxd6 Bxb5 21 Qxb6 axb6 22 cxb5 Rbd8 and Black is doing fine. He will be a pawn down, but all his pieces shine.

**15...Nc7 16 a4 Bd7 17 Ne4 Na6 18 Kh2 Nb4!?** (Diagram 10)

Black gladly gives up a pawn to get control over the dark squares. This is what is called long-term compensation, if this ever meant anything to anyone...

18...Nd4?! 19 Nxd4 cxd4 to clear c5 for the knight might seem reasonable, but after 20 Qa3 Bf8 21 b4 this is clearly not the case.

**19 Bb1**

19 Bxb4 cxb4 20 Qxb4 a5 21 Qb3 Qh4 22 Qb6 Re7 is unclear. Here White should stay away from the trap 23 g3?! Nxg3! 24 N4xg3 Qxh3+ 25 Kg1 Rbe8, when his kingside is rather tender.

**19...Qh4 20 Bc3?!**

This allows Black to land the knight on e3. Superficially it seems that the com-

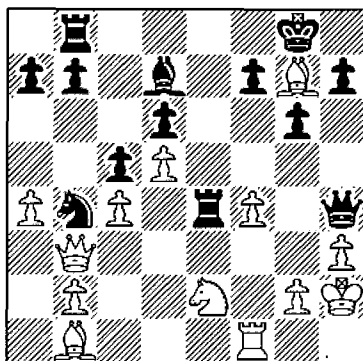
## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

ing exchanges are in White's favour, but actually they favour Black. Stronger was 20 g4 Nh6 21 Kg2 f5 22 Nxd6 fxg4 23 Nxe8 Rxe8 when the position is just a mess.

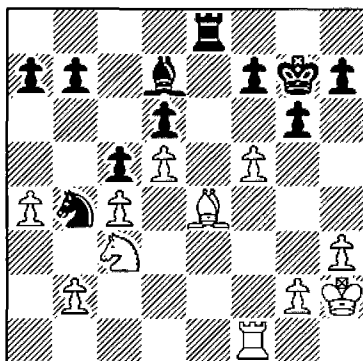
**20...Ne3 21 Bxg7**

A logical sacrifice prepared on the previous move. After 21 Rf3 Ng4+ 22 Kg1 Bxc3 23 Qxc3 f5 24 N4g3 Nf6 Black seems to be better coordinated, though the position is still quite unclear.

**21...Nxf1+ 22 Rxf1 Rxe4 (Diagram 11)**



**Diagram 11 (W)**  
Returning the exchange



**Diagram 12 (W)**  
Allowing a killer pawn move

Black returns the exchange. After 22...Kxg7 23 Qc3+ f6 24 N2g3 Re7 25 Nxd6 White has good play for the exchange.

**23 Bxe4 Kxg7 24 Qc3+ Qf6?!**

A strange mistake. After 24...Kg8 White has problems with his coordination and does not have time to play f4-f5, as a4 and e4 are hanging. After 25 b3 Re8 26 Qf3 Qe7 27 Nc3 f5! 28 Bb1 Qe3 Black has a better endgame.

**25 f5 Qxc3 26 Nxc3 Re8?! (Diagram 12)**

Black should never allow White to advance the pawn. 26...f6 27 Bb1 Rd8 28 fxg6 hxg6 29 g4 only gives White a slight pull.

27 f6+



**NOTE:** A pawn dominating the king like this one can be greatly restricting. The king cannot be activated in the endgame, while the pawn also gives White attacking possibilities, despite the reduced material.

**27...Kf8 28 Bb1 b6 29 a5! bxa5 30 Ne4 a4 31 Nxd6 Re2 32 Ne4?!**

Time trouble seems to be stronger than reasoning here – the knight was better

on d6. After 32 Kg3 White simply has a great advantage, as 32...Rxb2? 33 Re1 followed by Re7 wins.

**32...Na6?**

Black should have taken the chance instantly. After 32...Rxb2 33 Re1 (33 Nxc5 Be8 34 Ne4 a3 35 Re1 Ba4 is not clear at all!) 33...Na6 we think Black should survive: 34 Ng5 h6 35 Nh7+ Kg8 36 Bxg6! a3 (36...fxg6? 37 Re7 wins) 37 Re7 a2 38 Rxf7 Rb8 39 Rxd7 a1Q 40 f7+ Kh8 41 Re7 Nc7 42 f8Q+ Rxf8 43 Nxf8 Qf6 44 Rf7 Qe5+ and we diplomatically evaluate the position as equal.

**33 Rf2!**

Now Black's counterplay is eliminated. If the rooks were exchanged, the fact that Black's king couldn't easily get into play would decide.



**NOTE: In endgames without major pieces, the king is the strongest piece.**

**33...Re1 34 Bc2 Re3 35 Rd2 a3?!**

This idea does not work. Long term this gives Black a passed pawn; short term it allows White to play the decisive Re2, Nd6 and Re7. Necessary was 35...h6 36 h4 Bg4 37 d6, though White will eventually win with reasonable play.

**36 bxa3 Rxa3 37 Re2! Ra2 38 Nd6 1-0**

Game 66

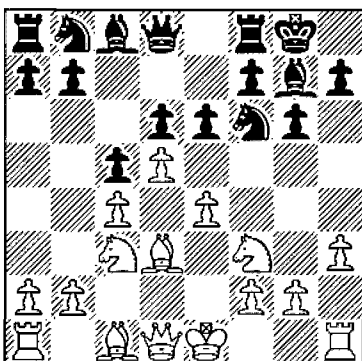
□ A.Shirov ■ A.Kovacevic

Belgrade 1997

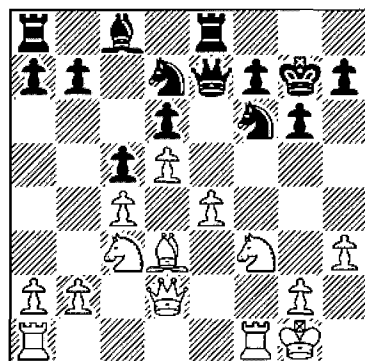
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 d6 4 Nc3 g6 5 e4 Bg7 6 Bd3

The bishop is better placed for the exd5 Benoni structure on d3 – it is all about restricting the c8-bishop.

6...0-0 7 Nf3 e6 8 h3 (Diagram 13)



**Diagram 13 (B)**  
Restricting the c8-bishop



**Diagram 14 (W)**  
Looking for f-file action

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

It is actually not obligatory to prevent the exchange of the bishop. After 8 0-0 exd5 9 exd5 Bg4 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Qxf3 White still has some advantage: 11...Nbd7 12 Qd1 a6 (or 12...Ne8 13 Bd2 f5 14 f4 Bd4+ 15 Kh2 Nef6 though we still prefer White slightly) 13 a4 Re8 14 Bg5 Qa5 15 Bd2 Qd8 16 f4 h6 17 g4!? Nh7 18 Kg2 Rf8 19 Qc2 Ndf6 20 Rae1 Qd7 21 Qd1 Rae8 22 b3 Rxe1 23 Rxe1 Re8 24 a5 and Black was very passive in M.Gurevich-B.Ivanovic, Metz 2003.

### 8...exd5 9 exd5 Re8+

9...Qe7+ 10 Qc2 Qxe2+ 11 Bxe2 is a very interesting endgame to consider for this structure. It seems that the extra space gives White the better chances with good play: 11...Na6 12 Bf4 Rd8 13 0-0 Nc7 14 Rad1 (14 Rfe1 would allow Black to undermine d5 with 14...b5! 15 Bf1 bxc4 16 Bxc4 Rb8 17 Re7 Rb4 18 Rxc7 Rxc4 with an unclear game) 14...a6 15 a4 Bf5 16 g4 Bc8 (16...Bc2? 17 Rc1 Bb3 18 Nd2 is not a good idea) 17 Rfe1 Rb8 18 Ng5 Nfe8 19 Nge4 f5 (R.Vera-A.Martin Gonzalez, Spain 2003) and here 20 Bg5 Rd7 21 gxf5 gxf5 22 Ng3 (Vera) offers White a large advantage.

### 10 Be3

10 Kf1!? is also not ridiculous: 10...Na6 (10...Nbd7 11 Bg5 h6 12 Be3 Ne5 13 Nxe5 Rxe5 14 Bf4 Re8 15 Qd2 is better for White; if he plays g2-g4 there's nowhere better for the king than f1) 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bf4 Nb4 13 Bb1 and here we like the idea of 13...Qb6!? 14 Qd2 Qa6 with play for both sides.

### 10...Bh6

This is probably a bit dodgy. The alternatives are considered in the next game.

### 11 0-0 Bxe3 12 fxe3 Qe7

12...Rxe3?! would allow White to gain a quick attack: 13 Qd2 Re8 14 Qh6 Nbd7 15 Qf4! and the weakness of d6 is suddenly felt very clearly. At the same time Ng5 is in the air.

### 13 e4 Nbd7 14 Qd2 Kg7 (Diagram 14)

As Black suffers from all these Nb5 attacks in this line, it seems logical to play 14...a6. However, 15 Rf2 keeps the advantage, for example 15...Ne5 (15...Nh5 16 g4 Ng7 17 Qh6 f6 18 e5! dxe5 19 Nh4 and White has a strong attack) 16 Nxe5 Qxe5 17 Raf1 Nd7 18 Rxf7 Qd4+ 19 Kh1 Ne5 20 Qf4! Bxh3 (20...Bf5 21 Rxb7 is good for White, as 21...Nxd3 22 Qh6 wins – Botvinnik) 21 Be2 Bd7 (M.Botvinnik-L.Kavalek, Beverwijk 1969) and here White wins after 22 Rf6! Kg7 23 Rxd6 Rf8 24 Rf6 – Botvinnik.

### 15 Rf2

15 Nb5!? also looks strong: 15...Rf8 (15...Ne5? 16 Nxe5 dxe5 17 d6 wins because of Nc7) 16 Qc3 Kg8 17 Nxd6!? Qxd6 18 e5 Nxe5 19 Nxe5 and White has a lasting structural advantage as well as freer play.

### 15...Rf8

Vacating e8 for the knight, but it is not easy for Black to equalise. After 15...Ng8? the knight is just badly placed, and in H.Danielsen-Cu.Hansen,

Esbjerg 1997 White won with a whirlwind attack: 16 Raf1 Rf8 17 Nb5! Nh6? (17...a6 18 Qc3+ Kh6! –Petursson – is probably best; still, we do not like the look of Black's position) 18 Qf4 Ne5 19 Nxe5 dxe5 (19...Qxe5 20 Nxd6) 20 Qg3 f6 21 d6 Qd8 22 Nc7 Rb8 23 Rxf6! Rxf6 24 Rxf6 Bxh3 25 Re6 1-0.

16 Raf1 Ne8 17 Bc2 Ne5 18 Nxe5 dxe5

Black hopes to be able to use the blockade of d6 with his knight, but the lack of development means that White can attack him successfully. 18...Qxe5 19 Ba4 Nc7 was preferable, when White is better, but not by too much.

19 Ba4! (Diagram 15)

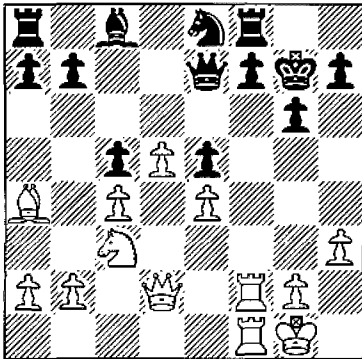


Diagram 15 (B)  
Activating the bishop

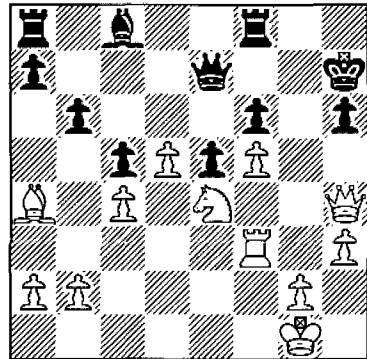


Diagram 16 (B)  
White dominates



**TIP:** When you attack it is important to find a function for all the pieces. Here the bishop is restricted by the pawns, but is still alive.

19...Nd6 20 Rf6! h6

Black can win material, but after 20...Nf5 21 R6xf5 gxf5 22 d6 Qf6 23 exf5 b6 24 Qd5 Rb8 25 Ne4, who cares about exchanges?

21 Qf2! Nf5

21...b6 22 Qh4 Qd8 23 Qg3 Qe7 24 Bc6 Rb8 25 b3 would also give White an overwhelming advantage, e.g. 25...Qxf6? 26 Rxf6 Kxf6 27 Qh4+ Kg7 28 Qe7 and the knight is lost.

22 Rxf5 gxf5 23 exf5 f6 24 Ne4 b6 25 Qh4 Kh7 26 Rf3 (Diagram 16)

Despite the extra exchange, Black has no moves.

26...Rf7 27 d6 Qf8 28 Bc6 Rb8 29 Bd5 Rbb7 30 Be6 Rbd7 31 Rg3 Bb7 32 Bxd7 1-0

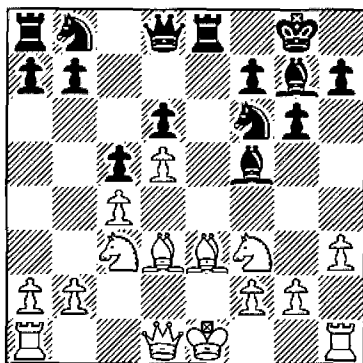
## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Game 67

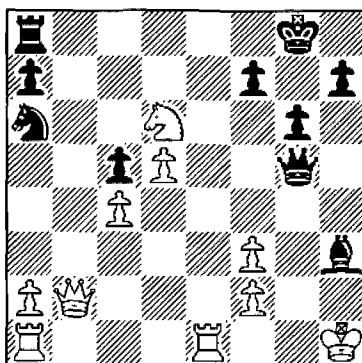
□ J.Hjartarson ■ A.Blees

Tilburg 1992

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 d6 4 Nc3 g6 5 e4 Bg7 6 Bd3 0-0 7 Nf3 e6 8 h3 exd5 9 exd5 Re8+ 10 Be3 Bf5! (Diagram 17)



**Diagram 17 (W)**  
A radical solution



**Diagram 18 (B)**  
Spot the combination

A radical solution to a complex problem. Black has no really good squares for his bishop, so instead of suffering with a passive piece, he decides to suffer from a fractured pawn structure. This determines the course of the game from now on: White will try to limit Black's activity and hope to be able to exploit the weakness of f5 in the long run.

Other options include:

a) 10...b5 11 Nxb5 Ne4 12 0-0 Bxb2 (12...a6 13 Nc3 Nxc3 14 bxc3 Bxc3 15 Rc1 Bg7 16 Bf4 and it is difficult for Black to develop) 13 Bxe4! Rxe4 (13...Bxa1 14 Qxa1 Rxe4 15 Bg5 f6 16 Bxf6 Qd7 17 Bh8! and threats such as Nxd6 are very uncomfortable) 14 Qc2 Rxe3 15 Qxb2 Rxf3?! (15...Re8 16 Rfe1 Rf8 17 Re2 a6 18 Nc3 and White has all the play; Ne4-f6 is only one of Black's concerns) 16 Rfe1! Bd7 17 gxf3 Qg5+ 18 Kh1 Na6 19 Nxd6 Bxh3 (**Diagram 18**) was played in B.Ivkov-F.Gheorghiu, Buenos Aires 1979.

Now after 20 Qh8+!! Kxh8 21 Nxf7+ Kg8 22 Nxg5 Black would probably have resigned. This combination was of course made famous by Petrosian, who defeated Spassky with it. However, a lesser-known fact is it that Alekhine and Euwe overlooked this possibility in a game they played against each other.

b) 10...a6 11 a4 Nbd7 12 0-0 Ne5 13 Nxe5 Rxe5 14 Bf4 Re8 15 Qd2 (White has clearly won the opening battle – Black's play has been very stale) 15...Qc7 16 Rfe1 Bd7 17 Bh6 Bxh6 18 Qxh6 Rxe1+ 19 Rxe1 Re8 20 Re3 Rxe3 21 Qxe3 Be8?! (better was 21...Kf8 22 g4 Qd8 23 g5 Nh5 24 Be2 Ng7 25 Bg4 with a

small but enduring endgame advantage for White) 22 g4 Qd8 23 Be2 Kf8 24 g5 Nd7 25 Ne4 Qe7 26 Qf4 Ne5 27 a5 and White had a clear plus in M.Chetverik-Mohacsi, Gyula 1992.

c) 10...Nh5 11 0-0 Nd7 (11...f5 12 Qd2 Nd7 13 Rae1 Ne5 14 Nxe5 Bxe5 15 Bg5 Qb6 16 Be2 Nf6 17 Bd1! is given as slightly better for White in some old analysis by Boleslavsky, which seems correct) 12 Bg5 f6 13 Bd2 f5 14 Bg5 Bf6 15 Bxf6 Ndx6 16 Re1 Rxe1+ 17 Qxe1 Bd7 18 Qd2 Qf8 19 Re1 Re8 20 Rxe8 Qxe8 21 a3 Kg7 22 b4 b6 23 bxc5 bxc5 24 g3 and White had the standard edge because of more space in M.Botvinnik-M.Matulovic, Palma de Mallorca 1967.  
**11 Bxf5 gxf5 12 0-0 Ne4 13 Ne2**

Though possible, 13 Nxe4 does seem counterintuitive. After 13...fxe4 14 Nd2 f5 15 Qh5 Rf8 16 Bf4 Nd7 Black has active play but without great structural problems.

**13...b5!?**

Black is trying hard to be active. Normal play also does not lead to equality, as can be seen in the following lines:

a) 13...Bxb2 14 Rb1 Bg7 15 Rxb7 Nd7 16 Rb3 Qa5 is a bit better for White (Gufeld).

b) 13...Nd7 14 Qc2 Qf6 15 b3!? Re7 (15...Qxa1 16 Rxa1 Bxa1 does not work as after 17 Nh4 Black is in trouble on the light squares) 16 Rae1 Rae8 17 Nf4 Bh6 18 Nh5 Qg6 19 Bxh6 Qxh6 20 Ng3 and White retains a slight pull (Garcia Palermo).

**14 cxb5 a6**

After 14...Bxb2 15 Rb1 Bg7 16 Nd2 Nd7 17 Nc4 it does not seem to us that Black has made progress. Note the typical manoeuvre 17...Nb6 18 Na5! when the knights will be strong on c6 and f4.

**15 b6 Nd7 16 Qc2 Rb8**

Or 16...Nxb6 17 Rad1 Qf6 18 b4!? Rac8 19 bxc5 dxc5 20 Bf4 and White is better.

**17 Nf4 Rxb6 18 Rab1 Ne5 19 Nd2 Ng6**

19...Nxd2 20 Bxd2 Qg5 21 Kh1 Bh6 22 Rbd1 Qh4 23 g3 Qf6 24 b3 gives White the kind of lasting advantage he is looking for. Slowly Black's counterplay has been neutralised and White can start thinking about how to put pressure on the weaknesses in Black's camp.

**20 Nc4 Rb7 21 Nh5 Bh8 22 f3 f4!? (Diagram 19)**

Black is playing in the true style of the Benoni – very dynamically!

**23 fxe4!**

Excellent judgement. 23 Nxf4 Ng3 24 Rf2 Bd4 would give Black good counterplay, and 23 Bxf4 Nxf4 24 Nxf4 Ng3 25 Rfe1 Rbe7 26 Rxe7 Qxe7 gives Black considerable play on the dark squares.

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

23...fxc3 24 Kh1 Bd4 25 Rf3

This move is logical, but our conservatism still prompts us to suggest redirecting the knight with 25 Ng3!? Ne5 26 Nxe5 Bxe5 27 Nf5, when we think White should be better.

25...Kh8

25...Rbe7?! would be met strongly with 26 e5! Bxe5 27 Nxe5 Rxe5 28 Nf6+ Kg7 29 Nxe8+ Qxe8 30 Qc3 when Black does not have enough compensation.

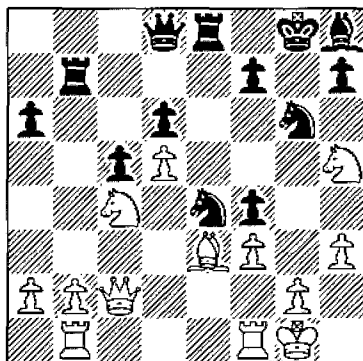


Diagram 19 (W)  
Typical Benoni dynamism

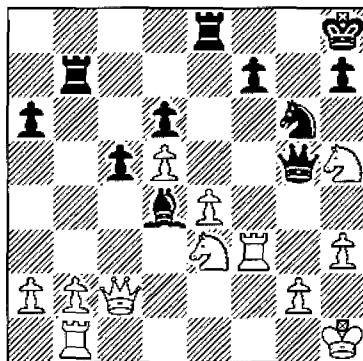


Diagram 20 (W)  
Typical Benoni optimism?

26 Nxe3 Qg5?! (Diagram 20)

Black hopes that his activity will be enough to outweigh the loss of his structure in the following tactics, but this was probably too optimistic. After 26...Nh4!? 27 Rg3 Rbe7 he has better counterplay: 28 Rg4 Re5 29 Ng7 Bxe3 30 Nxe8 Rxe8 and the position is quite unclear. The differences from the main game are that the black queen is less active but, crucially, he still has his important d6-pawn.

27 Nf5! Qxh5 28 Nxd6 Nh4 29 Rff1

White does not fall for the trap. After 29 Nxb7?! Nxf3 30 Qe2 Qe5 31 Qxf3 Qc7 Hjartarsson says that Black wins, but 32 e5! Qxb7 33 Qf6+ Kg8 34 Qg5+ is a draw because of 34...Kf8 35 Qh6+ Ke7?? 36 Qd6 mate.

29...Rg8?

29...Rbb8 30 Nxe8 Rxe8 31 b4 cxb4 32 Rxb4 would still keep Black's inferiority to a minimum. Now White wins.

30 g4! Qe5




The tactics all work in White's favour: 30...Qh6 31 Nxb7 Rxc4 32 Nd8!

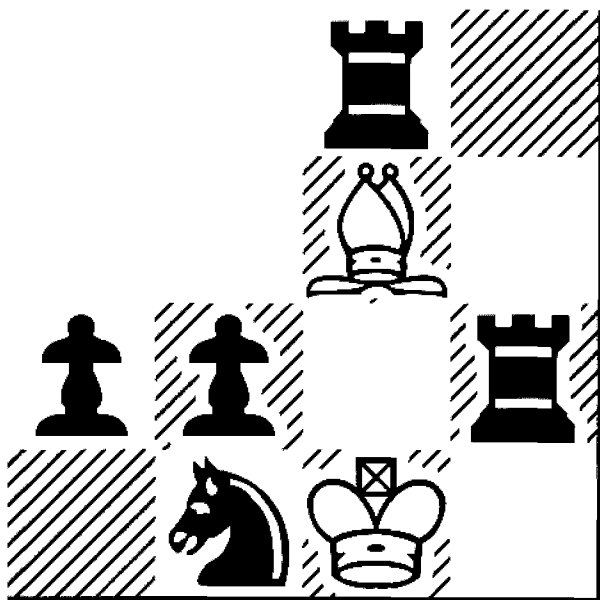
31 Nxb7 Qc7 32 Nxc5 Bxc5 33 b4 Qg3? 34 bxc5 Qxh3+ 35 Qh2 Qd3 1-0

## Chapter Nine

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# Assorted Benonis

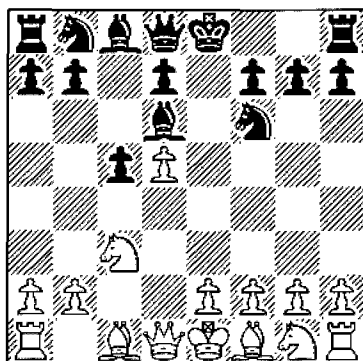
-  **The Snake Benoni**
-  **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 Ne4**
-  **1 d4 c5 2 d5 e6**



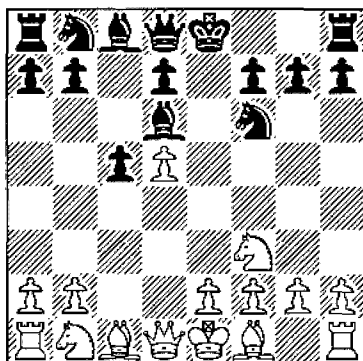
## The Snake Benoni

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 (Diagram 1)

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nf3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 (Diagram 2)



**Diagram 1 (W)**  
One Snake



**Diagram 2 (W)**  
Another Snake!

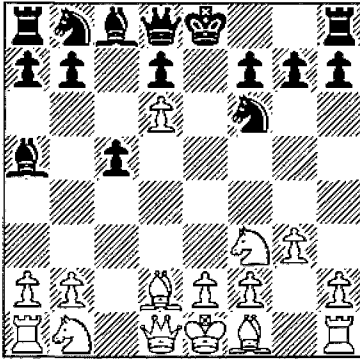
This unusual development of the bishop to d6, i.e. in place of the pawn in the fashionable Modern Benoni, became popular in the 1980s. Strong players, even grandmasters, started to play this move, and the Latvian grandmaster Miezis is a loyal fan.

What is Black unhappy with in the Modern Benoni? After 5...d6 the development of the bishop to e7 is unattractive, so after ...g7-g6 it sets off for the long diagonal. However, the advance ...g7-g6 weakens the kingside and causes enemy attacks. It is even worse when the g7-bishop is exchanged, with gaping holes in the position around the black king.

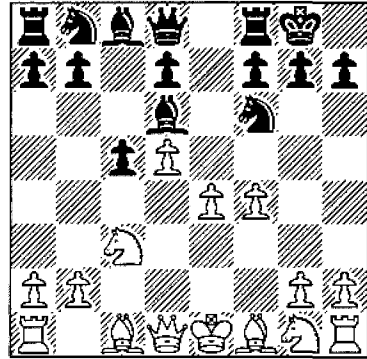
After 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 Black wants to transfer his bishop to a5 via c7 (this serpentine tour f8-d6-c7-a5 explains the name of this variation). The a5-bishop is quite active and can be exchanged for the c3-knight without any problem because Black's pawn chain on the kingside is in its initial form. But after ...Bd6-c7 White has the push d5-d6 at his disposal, seizing space and restricting Black's position.

Due to possible transpositions it was difficult to organise the games. We decided to focus on the order of development of the white knights. In Game 68 the g1-knight has priority (Ng1-f3), while the combination of Ng1-f3 and Nb1-c3 is reviewed in unusual structures. The standard line 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 Nf3 0-0 is analysed in Game 69 and, finally, in Game 70 White omits Ng1-f3. The black bishop's disappointment is easy to imagine once it has reached a5

and cannot find the white knight on c3. This is possible after 4 Nf3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 g3 Bc7 7 d6 Ba5+ 8 Bd2 (**Diagram 3**) and the swap of the 'tempo-grabbing' bishop on a5 for the d2-bishop is favourable for White (see the notes to Game 70).

**Diagram 3 (B)**

Swapping the snake bishop

**Diagram 4 (B)**

Threatening pawns

Instead of 6 g3, also good is 6 Bg5 (Game 68) with the idea of 6...Bc7 7 d6 Ba5 8 Nbd2 (Chernin-Miezis) and the queen's knight will soon have freedom to bother the a5-bishop. In the event of 6 Bg5 h6 7 Bh4 Qa5+ the development of the knight to d2 is related to an unclear pawn sacrifice, but 8 Nc3 grants White an initiative here. There is also one more amazing idea: 4 Nf3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 Nc3 Bc7 7 g4!? (Piket-Adams) with a pawn storm on the kingside where the black king is expected to appear.

After 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Bg5 (Game 69) Black insists on a rather passive plan 7...Re8 and ...Bd6-f8. Here, as with ...Bd6-c7, the idea of d5-d6 isn't bad – White is likely to have compensation for his 'd'-pawn in view of the activity of his pieces (Lugovoi-Ionov, Giorgadze-Lima). However, the replacement of 7 Bg5 with 7 g3 is harmless for Black (Fominyh-Wohl, Farago-Forintos).

Moving onto Game 70, the line 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 e4 0-0 7 Bd3 and Ng1-e2, unlike the identical one in the Modern Benoni, is not dangerous for Black – he has not weakened the kingside and it is easier for him to defend. On the other hand, 7 f4!? (**Diagram 4**) looks to be very strong.

We do not see any radical improvements for Black on the game Hebden-Hector where Black, in fear of e4-e5, immediately sacrificed a piece with 7...Nxe4 but did not obtain sufficient compensation.

If 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 g3, the standard 6...Bc7 is not appropriate in view of 7 d6 Ba5 8 Bg2 Nc6 9 Nh3!? followed by e2-e4, f2-f4 and e4-e5, when White

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

has a strong initiative in the centre and on the kingside (Nikolaidis-Cherniaev). It is better to choose an antidote based on the Pavlov-Ovetchkin game: taking advantage of the absence of the knight on f3, Black found a promising outpost for his d6-bishop on e5.

## Statistics

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In case of 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 Black scores 51%; after 4 Nf3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 – 51%.

## Theoretical?

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No. The Snake Variation is not widely used, and that is why there has been no great desire to study it.

## Theoretical Status

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In our opinion, it is dubious. Black usually plays the Snake Variation to deviate from theoretical continuations. Black ignores his development on the queenside and faces difficulties against several of White's possible set-ups. In particular, what should he do against 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 e4 0-0 7 f4?

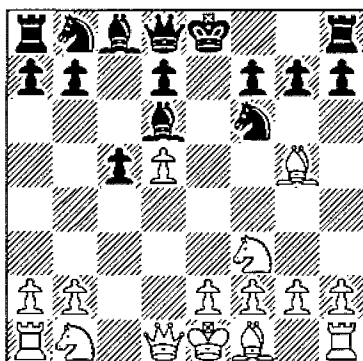
Game 68

□ A.Chernin ■ N.Miezis

Biel 1994

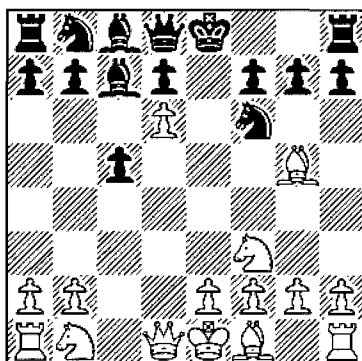
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1 d4 e6 2 c4 Nf6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 Bg5 (Diagram 5)



**Diagram 5 (B)**

An aggressive approach



**Diagram 6 (B)**

Cutting Black in two

The most aggressive approach. Also possible is 6 Nc3 Bc7 and now:

a) Here 7 d6 is less clear: 7...Ba5 8 Bg5 Qb6 9 Bxf6 Qxb2 10 Bxg7 Rg8 11 Rb1

(11 Qc1 Qxc1+ 12 Rxc1 Rxc7 13 Nd2 should be okay for Black, though White is not worse) 11...Bxc3+ 12 Bxc3 Qxc3+ 13 Nd2 has been played without success for Black. Now 13...b6! 14 Rb3 Qh8! with unclear play is worth a try.

b) 7 g4!? d6 (another way to play is 7...Ba5!? 8 Qd3 Qe7 9 Bd2 0-0 – 9...Nxc4 10 Rg1 Ne5 11 Nxe5 Qxe5 12 Qe3 Qxe3 13 Bxe3 and the endgame favours White, who will regain his pawn shortly – 10 g5 Bxc3 11 Bxc3 Ne4 with an unclear position) 8 g5 Nfd7 (8...Nh5 9 Qa4+!? Nd7 10 Qe4+ Qe7 11 Qxe7+ Kxe7 12 Bg2 seems to give White some advantage in the endgame) 9 h4 a6 10 a4 Qe7 11 Bh3 0-0 12 Qd3 Ne5 13 Nxe5 Qxe5 14 a5 Qd4?! (14...Bxh3 15 Rxh3 Nd7 16 Ra4 Qe7 17 Bf4 with unclear play was preferable) 15 Qg3 Qb4 16 h5 Nd7 17 g6! with a very good position for White, J.Piket-M.Adams, Groningen 1995. Black is undeveloped, while the majority of White's pieces are well placed for an onslaught on the kingside. However, as mentioned, Black does have improvements along the way, so this is hardly the most critical line.

6...Bc7?!



**WARNING: White's idea with 6 Bg5 is generally to push the d-pawn to d6 in order to destroy Black's development.**

Here it was better, though not problem-free, to play 6...h6 7 Bh4 Qa5+ 8 Nc3 (or 8 Nbd2!? Nxd5 9 Qb3 with compensation – Stohl) 8...Ne4 9 Qc2 Nxc3 (9...f5 10 e3 0-0 11 Bd3 Na6 12 Bxe4 Nb4 13 Qb1 fxe4 14 Qxe4 Qa6 15 Kd2! c4 16 b3 and White is better – Stohl) 10 bxc3 0-0 11 g4!? Na6 12 g5 hxg5 13 Bxg5 c4 14 Rg1 f6 15 Bh6 Rf7 16 Rd1 when White held the initiative in I.Zakharevich-R.Ovetchkin, Samara 2002. Best is 6...0-0 7 Nbd2!? Re8 8 e3 Bf8 9 Bc4 h6 10 Bh4 d6 11 0-0 when White is leading a bit in development but cannot use it for a direct attack and therefore only holds a slight advantage.

7 d6! (Diagram 6)



**NOTE: After this move the pin on the f6-knight is going to be simply unbearable. This is why in connection with 6 Bg5 this advance is especially strong.**

7...Ba5+ 8 Nbd2 h6

8...Qb6 9 Bxf6 gxf6 10 Qc2 Qxd6 11 0-0-0 gives White plenty of play – Stohl. Actually, we are probably talking about a clear advantage here.

9 Bh4 g5?!

Well, being down in development and with an open king's position, why not throw a few pawns forward and hope for a miracle? Better was 9...b5 10 e3! a6 11 a4, though White will gain the c4-square with a nice advantage.



**NOTE: In this system after the d6-advance, White needs to control the d4-square so as to dominate the b8-knight, so e2-e3 is normal.**

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

### 10 Bg3 Nc6

10...Ne4?! 11 Qc2 f5 12 0-0-0! Nxd2 13 Qxf5! Nxf3 14 exf3 and White wins.  
10...g4 11 Ne5 Ne4 12 Nec4 Nxd2 13 Nxd2 Qf6 14 Qc2 Nc6 15 e3 also leaves White with a rather convincing advantage.

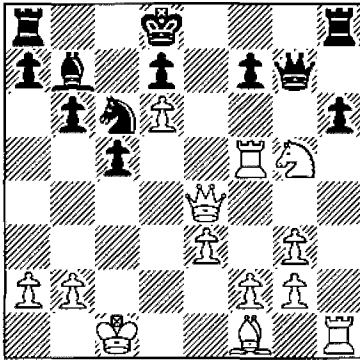
### 11 e3 Ne4

It is hard to believe that Black is already lost here at move 11, but a closer look shows a lack of good moves. After 11...g4 12 Ne5 Bxd2+ (12...Nxe5 13 Bxe5 Ne4 14 Qxg4 Bxd2+ 15 Ke2 and White will regain the piece while keeping the pawn) 13 Qxd2 Ne4 14 Qd5 Qa5+ 15 Kd1 Qa4+ 16 Kc1 0-0 17 Nxc4 Nb4 White is winning because of 18 Qxe4! Nxa2+ 19 Rxa2 Qxe4 20 Nf6+ (Chernin).

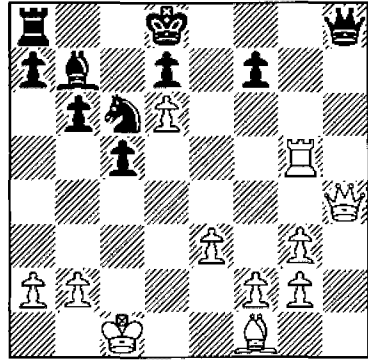
### 12 Qc2 Nxc3 13 hxg3 Qf6 14 0-0-0 Bxd2+ 15 Rxd2 b6 16 Rd5 Bb7 17 Qe4+ Kd8

White's lead in development rules the show after 17...Kf8 18 Rf5 Qg7 19 Ne5 Nxe5 20 Qxb7 Re8 21 f4. Next comes Bc4 when f7 cannot be sufficiently defended.

### 18 Rf5 Qg7 19 Nxc3! (Diagram 7)



**Diagram 7 (B)**  
19 Nf3xc3!



**Diagram 8 (B)**  
Mate is coming

A wonderful blow. Now Black could choose to lose to the beautiful 19...hxg5 20 Rxc3! Qf6 21 Rxh8+ Qxh8 22 Qh4!! (**Diagram 8**) when mate cannot be avoided.

19...f6 20 Nf3 Re8 21 Qh4 Re6 22 Qxh6 Qxh6 23 Rxh6 Rxd6 24 Rhxf6 Rxf6 25 Rxf6 Ke7 26 Rh6 Rf8 27 Rh7+ Kd6 28 a3 Ne7 29 Be2 a6 30 Kd1 b5 31 Ke1 c4 32 Nh4 Be4 33 Rh6+ Kc5 34 f3 Bb1 35 e4 d5 36 exd5 Nxd5 1-0

Game 69

□ G.Giorgadze ■ D.Lima

Elgoibar 1997

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Bg5

If White does not play actively, he is not likely to get an opening advantage. After 7 g3 a6 8 Bg2 Re8 9 0-0 b5 10 Qc2 Bf8 11 Bg5 d6 12 a4 bxa4! (a typical Modern Benoni reaction: Black needs to attack the b2-pawn and to obtain b5 for his bishop; after the passive 12...b4 13 Ne4 Be7 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Nfd2 the control over c4 would give White an advantage) 13 e4 Nbd7 14 Rfe1 h6 15 Bd2 Nb6 16 Nxa4 Nxa4 17 Rxa4 Bd7 18 Raa1 Bb5 and there is no real reason why Black should be worse, I.Farago-G.Forintos, Benasque 1993.

7...Re8 8 e3 h6

An interesting question is whether Black should include this move or not. After 8...a6 9 a4 Bf8 10 d6! the answer is 'apparently, it doesn't matter': 10...Re6 11 Bc4 Rxd6 12 Qb3 Qe8 (A.Lugovoi-B.Ionov, St Petersburg 2002) and here 13 Bxf6! is very strong. After 13...Rxf6 14 Nd5 Rc6 15 Ng5 Black is simply losing.

9 Bh4 a6 10 a4 Bf8

Black needs to do something about his kingside or he can end up in trouble. For example, 10...b6 11 Bd3 Bb7 12 Ne4 Rxe4 13 Bxe4 g5 14 Nxc5 hxg5 15 Bxg5 and White has a glorious attack for no material investment at all.

11 d6! Re6 12 Bc4 Rxd6 13 Qb3 (Diagram 9)

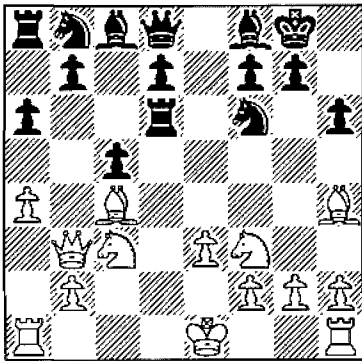


Diagram 9 (B)

Hitting f7

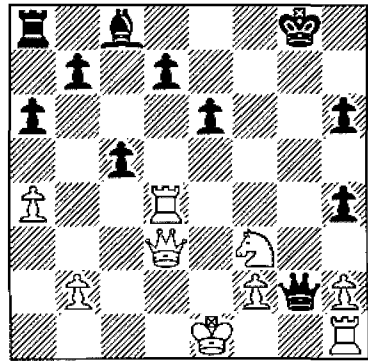


Diagram 10 (B)

Securing a draw

13...Re6

A sad necessity. 13...g5 14 Ne5! Re6 15 Bxe6 fxe6 16 Bg3 gives Black little to be happy about, while 13...Qe8 14 Bxf6 is clearly better for White.

14 Bxe6 fxe6 15 e4 Nc6 16 Rd1?!

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Not the best – now Black gains active counterplay. After 16 Bxf6 Qxf6 17 0-0 d6 18 Rfd1 White has a definite edge.

### 16...g5 17 e5

After 17 Bg3 g4 18 Ne5 Nd4 19 Qc4 b5!? 20 Qd3 d6 21 Ng6 e5 the position is also rather unclear. Still, this might be a better direction for White to go.

### 17...gxh4 18 exf6 Qxf6

It was worth considering restricting White's knight with 18...d5!? 19 0-0 Qxf6 20 h3 Nb4.

### 19 Ne4 Qg7

This leads to a draw. More adventurous was 19...Qf4!? with the idea that after 20 Qe3 Qxe3+ 21 fxe3 d5 22 Nf6+ Kf7 23 Ng4 h3 24 gxh3 Bg7 Black has good play for the exchange with his two bishops.

### 20 Nd6 Bxd6 21 Rxd6 Nd4 22 Qd3

22 Qb6 also leads to a draw, as after 22...Qxg2 White is forced to accept the perpetual with 23 Qd8+ Kh7 24 Qe7+.

### 22...Qxg2 23 Rxd4! (Diagram 10)

Time to secure the half-point.

### 23...Qxh1+ 24 Ke2 cxd4 25 Qg6+ Kf8 26 Qxh6+ Ke7 27 Qg5+ Ke8 28 Qg8+ ½-½

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#### Game 70

□ I.Nikolaidis ■ A.Cherniaev

Heraklio 1996

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### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3

White can also play g2-g3 after 4 Nf3: 4...exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 g3 Bc7 (maybe this is not the best – see the note to Black's 6th move in the main game) 7 d6 Ba5+ 8 Bd2 0-0 9 Bg2 Ne4 10 0-0 Bxd2 11 Nbxh2 Nxd6 12 Rc1 (E.Solozhenkin-D.Shchukin, St Petersburg 1998) and we think that White has good compensation for the pawn here, but of course in the main game where White can play Ng1-h3-f4 it is a better version for him.

### 4...exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 g3

This is a very natural way to play the opening as the d6-bishop now has no future targeting the kingside. Also strong is the full occupation of the centre with 6 e4 0-0 and now:

a) We are not too keen on 7 Bd3. Black should get a good game with 7...Re8 8 Nge2 Bc7 9 0-0 d6 10 h3 a6 11 a3 (11 a4 Nbd7 12 Ng3 Ne5 13 Bc2 Ba5 14 f4 Ng6 with unclear play was maybe more sensible) 11...Nbd7 12 b4 Bb6 13 Kh1 cxb4 14 axb4 Ne5 and Black definitely has good counterplay here. Now after 15 f4?! Nxd3 16 Qxd3 Bd7 17 Bb2 Qe7 18 Ng3 Ng4! he took over the initiative in M.Cebalo-B.Chatalbashev, Lido Estensi 2002.

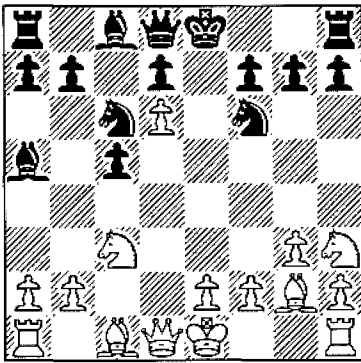
b) 7 f4!? Nxe4!? (this is not strictly necessary, but the quick advance of the e-

pawn is a problem) 8 Nxe4 Re8 9 Qe2! (White is winning material) 9...Bf8 (better was 9...Na6 10 Nf3 f5 11 Nxd6 Rxe2+ 12 Bxe2 Nb4 13 Kf2 though we still prefer White) 10 g4 d6 11 f5 Bxf5 12 gxf5 Qh4+ 13 Kd1 Rxe4 14 Nf3 Qg4 15 Bh3 Rxe2 16 Bxg4 Re4 17 Bh5 and White was clearly better in M.Hebden-J.Hector, Nantes 1987.

**6...Bc7?!**

Again Black is careless and allows the advance of the d-pawn. More solid was 6...0-0 7 Bg2 Re8 8 Nh3 Be5!? (not the original idea of the system, but here it is viable) 9 0-0 d6 10 Nf4 Bf5 11 Nd3 Bxc3 12 bxc3 Be4 13 c4 Bxg2 14 Kxg2 Qe7 15 Qb3 Qe4+ 16 Kg1 Nbd7 and both sides had play in A.Pavlov-R.Ovetchkin, Voronezh 2000.

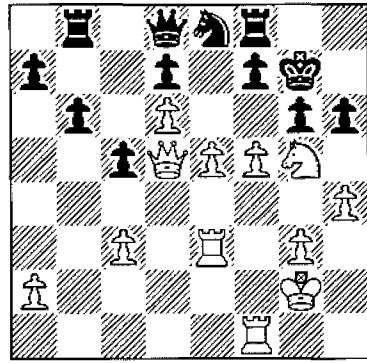
**7 d6! Ba5 8 Bg2 Nc6 9 Nh3!?** (Diagram 11)



**Diagram 11 (B)**

Planning Nh3-f4-d5

The knight is heading for d5. 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0 b6 11 Ne5 Bb7 is unclear



**Diagram 12 (B)**

A crushing sacrifice



**NOTE:** In this kind of position it is important to find relevant squares for your pieces. Not just squares where they look good, but squares where they perform a function.

**9...0-0 10 0-0 Bxc3**

This is may not be the best, but good advice is not easy to give.

**11 bxc3 b6 12 e4**

The outcome of the opening is clear: White has a large advantage.

**12...Ba6 13 Re1 Ne5 14 f4 Nd3 15 Re3 Nxc1 16 Rxc1 Bb7 17 e5 Bxg2 18 Kxg2 Ne8 19 Qd5 g6 20 Ng5 Kg7**

20...Ng7 is strongly met by 21 Ne4 Nf5 22 Rd3 h5 23 Nf6+ Kg7 24 Qb7, and by simply collecting the d-pawn White secures himself a decisive advantage.

**21 h4 Rb8 22 Rf1 h6 23 f5!** (Diagram 12)

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Decisive. Black is so inactive that the extra piece is irrelevant.

**23...gxf5**

White also wins after 23...hxf5 24 fxf6 fxf6 25 Rxf8 Kxf8 26 Rf3+ Kg7 27 Rf7+ Kh6 28 Rf8 when the domination is very clear indeed.

**24 Rxf5 hxf5 25 Ref3 Kh8**

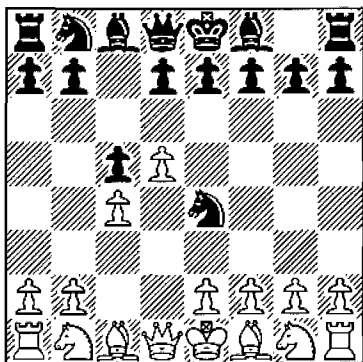
Or 25...f6 26 hxf5, winning.

**26 Rxf7 1-0**

## 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 Ne4

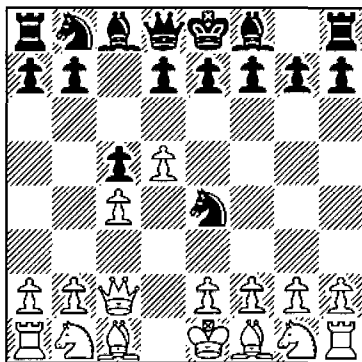
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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 Ne4 (Diagram 13)



**Diagram 13 (W)**

3...Nf6-e4!?



**Diagram 14 (B)**

White plays 4 Qc2

This strange development of the knight, which has been in practice since the 1980s, is another way for Black to deviate from theoretical discussions. Later the bold knight retreats to d6, where it attacks the pawns on c4 and e4 (if the latter is there), supports the breakthrough ...b7-b5 and, in case of e4-e5, moves to f5. Development on the kingside with ...g7-g6 and ...Bf8-g7 takes place without any difficulty, but there are big problems on the queenside – the knight on d6 prevents the developing move ...d7-d6.

After 3...Ne4 White has a wide range of choices. 4 Nd2 isn't accurate in view of 4...Nxd2 5 Bxd2 e5 with a transposition to the Czech Benoni except with the exchange of a pair of knights, meaning Black breathes more freely. More promising is 4 Nf3 g6 5 Nbd2; it is difficult to transpose to the Benoni here and White can develop his initiative both on the queenside (b2-b4) and on the kingside (h2-h4-h5, see Ziegler-Vescovi in Game 71). 4 f3 (also Game 71) made a good showing after 4...Qa5 5 Nd2 Nd6 6 e4 (see Sorokin-Kadhi, Timoshenko-Suradiradja).

The main continuation is 4 Qc2 (**Diagram 14**) as seen in Game 72 (the rare

alternative is 4 Qd3).

Then after 4...Qa5+ 5 Nd2 Nd6 White can choose between the fianchettoed bishop (6 b3 – Chernin-Bischoff) and 6 e4 followed by attacking in the centre once kingside development has been completed (Suba-Narciso, Naumkin-Dormann).

## Statistics

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After 3...Ne4 Black scores 39%. This statistic does not seem reliable because the system is rarely faced by strong players as White, and is almost never used for Black. Unknown players use it considerably in correspondence theme tournaments.

## Theoretical?

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No – theorists study it very rarely. We can assume that even experienced players often see 3...Ne4 for the first time if they come across it over the board.

## Theoretical Status

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Trivial. 3...Ne4 does not contain fruitful ideas; it is not ambitious and insufficient to equalise since White has various opportunities.

*Game 71*

□ G.Timoshenko ■ H.Suradiradja

Jakarta 1997

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 Ne4 4 f3**

This seems to give White a strong initiative. Alternatively:

a) 4 Nd2 is less dangerous for Black. After 4...Nxd2 5 Bxd2 e5 6 e4 d6 7 h3 g6 8 Bd3 Bg7 9 Ne2 0-0 10 0-0 f5 11 f4 Nd7 12 Bc3 Qe7 13 Qc2 White was a tiny bit better at most in P.Tregubov-O.Todorov, Cappelle la Grande 1997.

b) 4 Nf3 g6 5 Nbd2 Nd6 6 h4!? (6 e4 Bg7 7 Bd3 e5 8 b4! is a very tempting pawn sacrifice; White has good chances of developing an initiative here) 6...Bg7 7 h5 0-0 8 Qc2 e6 9 hxg6 hxg6 10 Ne4 Nxe4 11 Qxe4 exd5 12 cxd5 Re8 13 Qc4 and White has an edge, A.Ziegler-G.Vescovi, Copenhagen 1995.

**4...Qa5+ 5 Nd2**

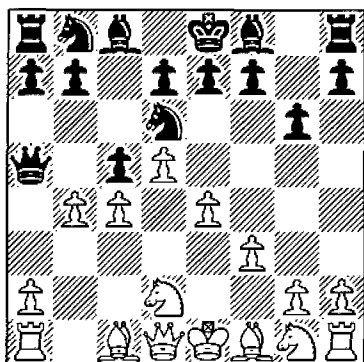
Parting with the bishop would justify Black's play. After 5 Bd2?! Nxd2 6 Qxd2 Qxd2+ 7 Nxd2 g6 8 e4 Bg7 9 0-0-0 d6 we prefer the Black position slightly.

**5...Nd6 6 e4 g6 7 b4!? (Diagram 15)**

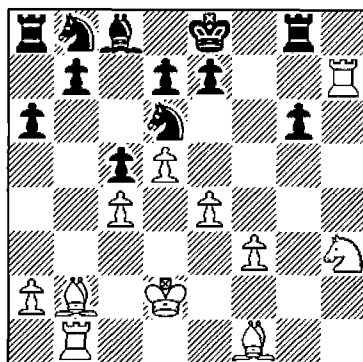
This pawn sacrifice looks very natural and works very well in this game. Still, it is not the only way to develop an initiative. 7 e5 Nf5 8 Bd3 d6 9 exd6 exd6 10 Bxf5 Bxf5 11 Ne2 Bg7 12 Ng3 is better for White, and so is 7 Bd3 Bg7 8 Ne2 b5!? 9 0-0 bxc4 10 Nxc4 Nxc4 11 Bxc4, when Black has a Benoni structure but with some lost tempi: 11...Ba6 12 Bd2 Qb6 13 Bxa6 Nxa6 14 Bc3 and it is

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

obvious that White has a slight advantage out of the opening, M.Sorokin-H.Kadhi, Bratislava 1993.



**Diagram 15 (B)**  
A natural sacrifice



**Diagram 16 (B)**  
A huge advantage

### 7...Qxb4

After 7...cxb4 8 Nb3 Qa4 9 Bb2 Rg8 10 c5 Nb5 11 Qd3 it is obvious that White has great control.

### 8 Rb1 Qa5 9 Bb2 Rg8 10 g4!?

Preventing ...Nf5 and therefore threatening 11 e5.

### 10...f6 11 h4 Bh6?!

A provocative move, but accepting the challenge turns out to be very much in White's favour. However, even after something like 11...Qxa2 12 g5 Bg7 13 gxf6 exf6 14 h5 Qa6 15 hxg6 hxg6 16 f4 White has a great initiative.



**TIP: Do not rush to open the position or solve your problems with tactics when you are behind in development.**

### 12 g5!?

This opening of the position is completely in line with White's previous play.

### 12...fxg5 13 hxg5 Bxg5 14 Rxh7 a6

White would also feel very confident after 14...Qxa2 15 Bc3 Bxd2+ 16 Bxd2 Nxc4 17 Bg5 – the compensation for the pawns is massive.

### 15 Nh3 Be3 16 Ke2! Bxd2 17 Qxd2 Qxd2+

17...Qxa2? would allow White a small combination: 18 Rxe7+! Kxe7 19 Bf6+, winning the queen.

### 18 Kxd2 (Diagram 16)

White's advantage is enormous. Of course something can still go wrong, but

strong players should be able to win against anyone in a position like this.



**NOTE: A lead in development can be just as deadly without queens on the board if the remaining pieces are active.**

18...b5 19 Ng5 Kd8 20 Bc3 b4 21 Be5 a5 22 Bd3 a4

Black does not have time to exploit the apparent weakness of the c4-pawn. After 22...Ba6 23 Rbh1 Nxc4+ 24 Bxc4 Bxc4 25 Rh8 he is facing mate and destruction.

23 Rbh1 Ba6

White also retains complete control after 23...b3 24 axb3 axb3 25 Kc3.

24 Rh8 Rxb8 25 Rxb8+ Kc7 26 Nf7 Bb7 27 Rh6 1-0

Game 72

□ I.Naumkin ■ I.Dorfman

Münster 1989

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 Ne4 4 Qc2 Qa5+ (Diagram 17)

5 Nd2

5 Nc3 Nxc3 6 Bd2! is another strong way of facing this opening:

a) 6...Qa4?! 7 Qxc3 Na6 8 a3 d6 9 e4 Nc7 10 Nf3 with a clear edge. Now A.Goloshchapov-Ragozin, Mainz 1995 continued 10...b5?! 11 Qa5! Qxa5 12 Bxa5 Kd7 13 cxb5 Rb8 14 a4 a6 when White could have played 15 b4! cxb4 16 Rc1, winning. Of course this is not all forced, but it shows some of the problems Black is facing.

b) 6...e5 7 Bxc3 Qc7 8 f4 d6 (or 8...exf4 9 Qe4+ Kd8 10 Nh3 with all kinds of threats) 9 Nf3 Nd7 10 e3 Be7 11 Bd3 and White has the initiative.

5...Nd6 6 e4

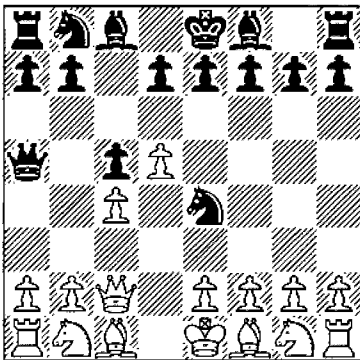


Diagram 17

5 Nd2 or 5 Nc3?

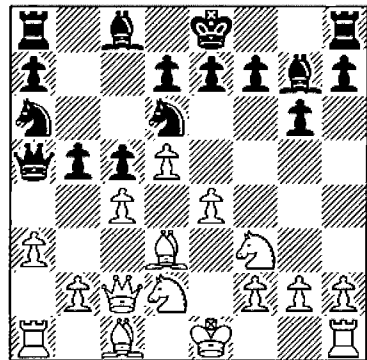


Diagram 18

Black seeks activity

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Another sensible way to develop is 6 b3 f5 (6...e5 7 Bb2 f6 8 e3 g6 9 h4!? Bg7 10 h5 f5 11 Ngf3 and Black's position is close to falling apart) 7 Bb2 e6 8 Bc3 Qd8 9 e4 fxe4 10 Nxe4 exd5 11 cxd5 (simple chess; the attacking player would probably choose 11 Bxg7!? Bxg7 12 Nxd6+ Ke7 13 Nxc8+ Qxc8 14 0-0-0 with the initiative) 11...Nxe4 12 Qxe4+ Qe7 13 Qxe7+ Bxe7 14 Bxg7 Rg8 15 Bc3 and as far as we can count, White was just a pawn up in A.Chernin-K.Bischoff, Austria 1996.

### 6...g6 7 Bd3

The typical 7 b4!? is interesting again. After 7...Qxb4 8 Rb1 Qa5 9 Bb2 Rg8 10 Bd3 Na6 11 a3 White definitely has good play for the pawn.

### 7...Bg7 8 Ngf3 Na6 9 a3 b5 (Diagram 18)

9...0-0 10 e5 Ne8 11 0-0 d6 12 exd6 exd6 13 Rb1 is clearly better for White.



**NOTE: Black needs to be very active in this system, or he risks getting crushed by his lack of space.**

### 10 cxb5

10 0-0 was possible, after which Black must find something better than 10...Nb4? 11 axb4 Qxa1 12 cxb5 cxb4 13 e5 Nb7 14 Nb3 Qa2 15 Bf4 when his queen was trapped in M.Suba-M.Narciso, Andorra 1993.

### 10...Nxb5 11 0-0 0-0 12 Nc4 Qd8 13 e5

White has left the opening with some advantage and has many choices. One is 13 Bd2 d6 14 Ba5 Qe8 15 h3 Rb8 16 Rab1 when he has good chances of starting a queenside expansion.

### 13...d6 14 Bg5

14 Qa4!? Nac7 15 Na5 was a decent alternative.



**NOTE: In Benoni systems getting a knight to the c6-square is often a great achievement for White.**

### 14...f6 15 exf6 exf6 16 Bd2 Bg4 17 Ne3

17 Nxd6?! Nxd6 18 Bxa6 wins a pawn, but after 18...Bxf3 19 gxf3 f5 Black has good counterplay.

### 17...Bd7 18 h4 f5

After 18...Nac7 19 Rfe1 f5 20 Nc4 Nxd5 21 Nxd6! Nxd6 22 Qxc5 White regains the piece with a slight advantage.

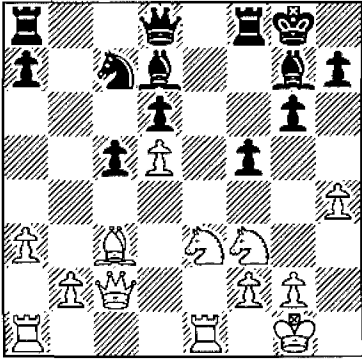
### 19 Bxb5 Bxb5 20 Rfe1 Nc7

20...f4 21 Nc4 Nc7 22 a4 Ba6 23 Ba5 with the idea of Ng5 wouldn't be good for Black.

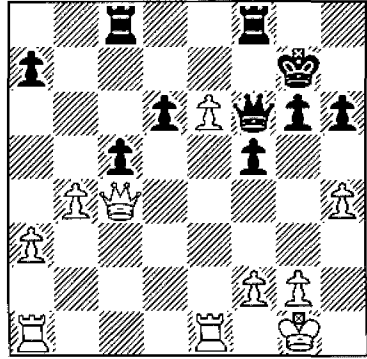
### 21 Bc3 Bd7?! (Diagram 19)

Black is playing without a plan. 21...Bxc3 22 Qxc3 f4 was much better, when a possible outcome is 23 Ng4 h5 24 Qc2 hxg4 25 Qxg6+ Kh8 26 Qh6+ Kg8 and

we cannot see more than a draw for White.



**Diagram 19 (W)**  
Without a plan



**Diagram 20 (W)**  
Winning for White

## 22 Nc4 Bb5

This neglects the important e6-square. After 22...Bxc3 23 bxc3 Nxd5 24 Nxd6 Bc6 25 Nc4 White is better, but nothing like the main game.

## 23 Bxg7 Kxg7 24 Ng5 Bxc4

24...Kg8 25 Ne6 Nxe6 26 Rxe6 Rf6 27 Rae1 also assures White of a clear plus.

## 25 Qxc4 Qf6 26 b4 h6 27 Ne6+ Nxe6 28 dxe6 Rac8?! (Diagram 20)

After this there is no defence. The last chance was 28...Rae8, though White secures himself of good winning chances after 29 bxc5 dxc5 30 Rad1 Re7 31 h5! Rfe8 32 Qxc5, when the fragile position of Black's king will tell.

## 29 Rad1 Qe7 30 bxc5 Rxc5 31 Qd4+ Kg8 32 Qf4 1-0

# 1 d4 c5 2 d5 e6

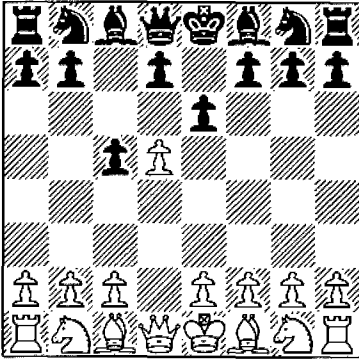
## 1 d4 c5 2 d5 e6 (Diagram 21)

This natural attack on the d5-pawn is not often employed with this move order, the reason being that White has a choice of three good continuations: 3 Nc3, 3 c4 and 3 e4. After 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e4 Black often swaps on d5 (4...exd5), expecting the automatic 5 exd5. However, White has an excellent in-between move 5 e5! at his disposal, after which Black faces problems with his king's knight, development is delayed and defeats like in Raetsky-Berkvens are quite possible. More careful is 4...d6, when White transposes to the 3 e4 line with 5 Nf3 exd5 6 exd5.

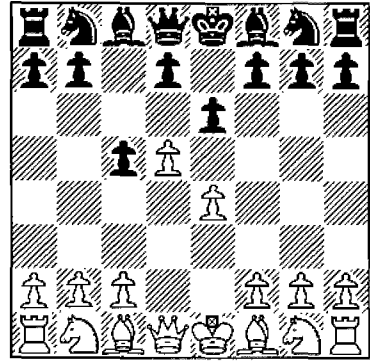
After 3 c4 exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 Nc3 the typical response 5...Nf6 results in the Modern Benoni. Games 73-74 cover Black's deviations in the form of unusual

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

kingside set-ups. After 5...Ne7 (Game 73) Black's knight can move to g6, clearing the road for the f8-bishop to reach f6 via e7. The continuation 6 e4 Ng6 7 Bd3 Be7 8 Nge2 (Hoang Thanh Trang-Berkvens) is promising for White because it gives a chance to attack the bishop that appears on f6 with Ne2-g3-h5.



**Diagram 21 (W)**  
1 d4 c5 2 d5 e6



**Diagram 22 (B)**  
3 d5

More common is the combination of ...Ng8-e7 with the fianchetto (Game 72) – Grandmaster Mikhail Tseitlin is a fan of this system. Unlike the Modern Benoni the knight does not block the path for the g7-bishop and the f7-pawn, but it does obstruct the e-file and doesn't take control of the important e4-square.

If 5...g6 6 Nf3 Bg7 7 Bg5 Black can respond with 7...f6, which certainly does not look like the Modern Benoni. In the case of 6 e4 Bg7 7 f4 Ne7 Black prepares to counter with ...f7-f5 (Bertok-Petrosian). 6 e4 a6 7 a4 Bg7 8 Bd3 Ne7 9 Nf3 Bg4 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Qxf3 Nd7 is considered to be a key line and here the queen is better off on g3 (Khenkin-Narciso) rather than e2 (Yrjola-Efimov), since White has a chance to attack the king.

The continuation 3 e4 (**Diagram 22**), as seen in Game 73, is important owing to the use of another move order: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 c5 3 d5 or 1 d4 e6 2 e4 c5 3 d5.

After the exchange on d5 usually pretty boring positions arise where White retains his slight but stable advantage due to his space advantage, despite the possibility of major pieces swapping along the e-file. However, the d5-pawn can sometimes appear to be under siege, which is demonstrated in the Rogers-Kengis and Radziewicz-Kengis games.

## Statistics

After 1 d4 c5 2 d5 e6 3 e4 White achieves 57%. If 1 d4 c5 2 d5 e6 3 c4 exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 Nc3 Black scores 43% when choosing 5...Ne7.

## Theoretical?

Not especially. The above lines are more practical than theoretical.

## Theoretical Status

The continuation 2...e6 is unlikely to be the main one in Black's repertoire. It looks more like a chance to deviate from theory. We can state that after 3 Nc3 or 3 e4 Black does not have many possibilities for counterplay.

Game 73

□ Hoang Thanh Trang ■ J.Berkvens

Budapest 2000

1 d4 c5 2 d5 e6 3 c4

3 Nc3! (Diagram 23) is an important move.



**NOTE: In Benoni systems White always strives towards occupying d5 with a knight or bishop rather than a pawn. Also, often White can use the c4-square for a knight.**

3...Nf6 (3...exd5 4 Nxd5 Ne7 5 Bg5 Nbc6 6 e4 d6 7 c3 Be6 8 Bc4 favours White because of the control over d5) 4 e4 (4 Nf3 transposes to Chapter 6) and now:

a) 4...exd5?! is strongly met by 5 e5! Ng8 (5...Qe7 6 Qe2 only helps White as 6...Ne4? 7 Nxd5 Qxe5 8 c4 followed by Bf4 wins material) 6 Nxd5 Ne7 7 Bg5 h6 8 Bh4 Nbc6 9 Nf3 d6? (9...Qa5+ 10 c3 Nxd5 11 Qxd5 Ne7 12 Qb3 Qb6 13 Bc4 Qxb3 14 Bxb3 and White is much better was actually Black's only option) 10 exd6 Qa5+ 11 b4! Nxb4 12 Nc7+ 1-0 A.Raetsky-Berkvens, Cappelle 2000.

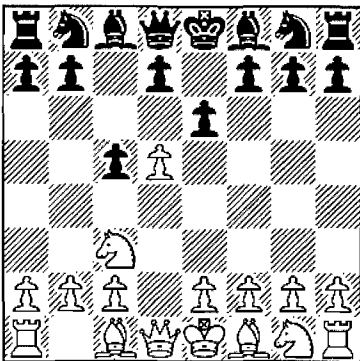


Diagram 23 (B)

3 Nc3!

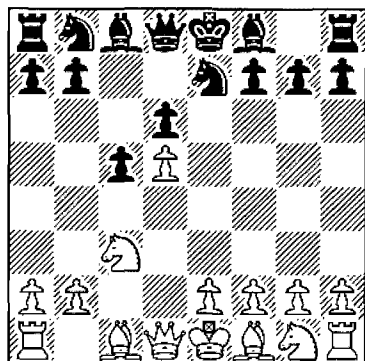


Diagram 24 (W)

5...Ne7 – the key move

b) 4...d6 and now:

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

b1) 5 Nf3 exd5 6 exd5 transposes to Game 75.

b2) 5 Bg5 Be7 6 Bb5+ looks aggressive, but Black is ready to withstand the attack. After 6...Bd7 7 dxe6 fxe6 8 e5 dxe5 9 Bxf6 Bxf6 10 Qd6 Qb6 11 Qxb6 axb6 12 Bxd7+ Nxd7 White has compensation, but the position is only equal.

c) 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 (5...Bd7 6 dxe6 fxe6 7 e5 dxe5 8 Nf3 a6 9 Bxd7+ Qxd7 10 Qxd7+ Nbx7 11 Ng5 gives White some initiative) 6 dxe6 fxe6 7 e5 dxe5 8 Nf3 a6 9 Bc4 Nb6 10 Qxd8+ Kxd8 11 Nxe5 Ke8 12 Be2 Bd6 13 Bf4 Nbd5 14 Nxd5 exd5 15 0-0-0 Be6 16 Bf3 and Black was under some pressure in R.Dautov-Mi.Tseitlin, Bad Zwosten 1997.

### 3...exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 Nc3 Ne7!? (Diagram 24)

This is the key move in this system.

#### 6 e4

White has tried to refute this system on several occasions. Different attempts with Bf4 and Qa4+ have proved useless, so here we focus on normal play. The right way to challenge this 'Space Benoni' is to avoid it on move three, when Black is stuck in an unhappy move order after 3 Nc3!.

6 g3 Ng6 7 Bg2 Be7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 0-0 Bg4 10 h3 Bxf3 11 exf3 (11 Bxf3 Qd7 12 Bg2 Na6 13 f4 b5 also gives Black considerable counterplay) 11...Qd7 12 f4 Na6 13 h4 Bf6 14 h5 Ne7 15 Ne4 Bd4 16 h6 and the position was unclear in C.Matamoros-R.Zelcic, Cannes 1996.

#### 6...Ng6 7 Bd3

More aggressive is 7 f4 Be7 8 Nf3 0-0 but it's not clear whether White has anything direct: 9 Be2 Bf6 10 0-0 a6 11 a4 Bg4 12 Be3 Re8 is unclear.

#### 7...Be7 8 Nge2 0-0 9 0-0 a6 10 a4 Re8 11 Ng3 Bf6 12 Kh1

12 a5 Nd7 13 Be3 Nde5 14 Be2 b5 15 axb6 Qxb6 16 Ra2 Rb8 is unclear.

#### 12...Nd7 13 f4 Qc7 14 Nh5 Bd4?! (Diagram 25)

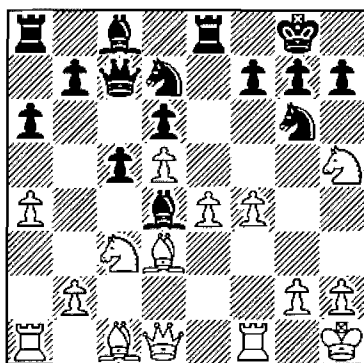


Diagram 25 (W)  
Losing time

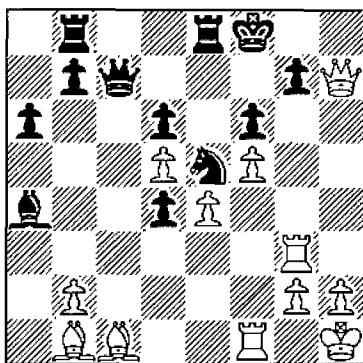


Diagram 26 (B)  
No way out

As we shall see, this just loses time. Better was 14...c4 15 Bc2 Be7 16 Be3 Nf6.  
**15 Ne2 Rb8 16 Bb1 Nf6?!**

This trade is quite unfortunate, as now White generates a rapid attack on the kingside. 16...Bf6 17 g4 was better.

**17 Nxd4 Nxf5 18 Qxf5 cxd4 19 Ra3!**

Maybe Black forgot about this devious move.

**19...Bd7 20 Rg3 f6**

Or 20...Rbc8 21 Bd2 Bxa4 22 f5 Bb5 23 Re1 and Black is in trouble.

**21 f5 Ne5 22 Rh3 Bxa4?!**

Sadly 22...h6 was necessary, though after 23 Bxh6! Bxa4 (23...gxh6 24 Qxh6 Kf7 25 Qh7+ Kf8 26 Rg3 Nf7 27 Rg7 and wins is possibly what Black saw) 24 Bf4 Kf8 25 Bxe5 Rxe5 26 Qg6 Kg8 27 Bd3 Black's outlook is grim.

**23 Qxh7+ Kf8 24 Rg3 (Diagram 26)**

Now there is no defence against Rxg7 and Qh8+.

**24...Qf7 25 Rxg7! Qxg7 26 Bh6 Qxh6 27 Qxh6+ Ke7 28 Qg7+ Nf7 29 e5 1-0**

Game 74

□ I.Khenkin ■ M.Narciso Dublan

Porto San Giorgio 1998

**1 d4 e6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 Nc3 g6 6 e4**

Another interesting and related idea is 6 Nf3 Bg7 7 Nd2 a6 8 a4 Nd7!? 9 Nc4 Ne5 10 Nxe5 Bxe5 11 g3 Ne7 12 Bg2 0-0 13 0-0 Nf5!? with counterplay.

**6...a6**

This move is maybe more committal than Black would like to be at this stage of the game. As can be seen from the following examples, there are some ideas with ...Nd7-b6 followed by ...f7-f5 (the key idea behind the ...Ne7 Benoni), undermining the d5-pawn. Here Black does not want to encourage White to go a2-a4 too soon, as then a4-a5 is a valuable option for White. Here's an example without ...a7-a6: 6...Bg7 7 f4 (or 7 Bd3 Ne7 8 Nge2 Nd7 9 0-0 0-0 10 f4 f5 11 Ng3 Nf6 12 exf5 Nxf5 13 Nxf5 Bxf5 and Black has equalised, M.Bertok-T.Petrosian, Oberhausen 1961) 7...Ne7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 Be2 Nd7 10 0-0 f5!? 11 Ng5 (11 e5 dxe5 12 d6 Nc6 13 Qd5+ Kh8 14 Ng5 Qe8 15 Ne6 Nf6 16 Nxf7 Nxd5 17 Nxe8 Nxc3 18 bxc3 Rxe8 is very messy) 11...Nb6 12 a4 h6 13 Ne6 Bxe6 14 dxe6 fxe4 15 a5?! (better was 15 Nxe4 Bd4+ 16 Kh1 d5 17 Nc3 with chances for both sides) 15...Bd4+ 16 Kh1 Nbd5 17 Nxd5 Nxd5 18 Qb3 Ne7 19 Qxb7 d5 and Black was dominating in R.Sand-Mi.Tseitlin, Passau 1996.

**7 a4 Bg7 8 Bd3 Ne7 9 Nf3 Bg4**

Here a more interesting approach for Black is 9...0-0 10 Nd2 Nd7 11 0-0 f5!? 12 Nc4 Ne5 13 Nxe5 Bxe5 14 f4 Bd4+ 15 Kh1 with unclear play (Mi.Tseitlin).

**10 h3 Bxf3 11 Qxf3 Nd7 12 Qg3 (Diagram 27)**

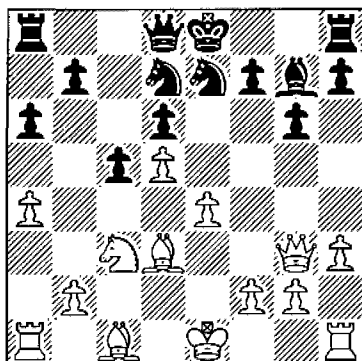


Diagram 27 (B)  
12 Qf3-g3

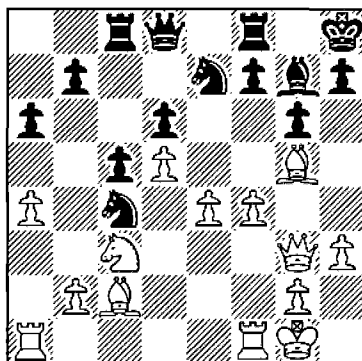


Diagram 28 (W)  
A vulnerable knight

This is a natural square for the queen. Instead J.Yrjola-I.Efimov, Batumi 1999 continued 12 Qe2 0-0 13 0-0 Qc7 14 f4 Rae8, when the queen is clearly misplaced. Now White lost time with 15 Qf3, which allowed Black to play 15...f5!? 16 g4 c4 17 Bc2 fxe4 18 Bxe4 Nc5 19 Bc2 and here 19...Nb3! 20 Bxb3 Qb6+ 21 Kh1 Qxb3 would have been a bit better for Black – Alterman.

**12...0-0 13 0-0**

13 Qxd6?? Be5! is not the way to go.

**13...Rc8 14 Bc2 Kh8 15 Bg5 Ne5?!**

This helps White to open the centre and create a kingside attack. Better was 15...Be5 16 Qh4 f6 17 Bh6 Rf7, though after 18 a5 there is no doubt that White has some advantage.

**16 f4 Nc4 (Diagram 28)**

It is this unprotected knight that causes all the trouble for Black in the coming complications. However, 16...Nd7 was also not very tempting.

**17 e5! f6**

This simply loses an exchange and the game. Black was forced into the unfavourable complications after 17...dxe5 18 fxe5 and now:

a) 18...Bxe5 19 Qh4 Bd4+ 20 Kh1 f6 21 Rxf6! Rxf6 22 Bxf6+ Bxf6 23 Qxf6+ Kg8 24 Qe6+ Kg7 25 d6! Nxd6 26 Rd1 Rc6 27 Be4! Nxe4 28 Qe5+ and White wins.

b) 18...Nxe5 19 Qh4 f6 20 Rxf6! Nf7 21 Raf1 Nxe5 22 Rxf8+ Bxf8 23 Qxe5 and White has a great advantage, but Black can struggle on.

**18 exf6 Bxf6 19 Bxf6+ Rxf6 20 Ne4 Nxd5**

Or 20...Rf8?? 21 Qc3+ and knight is lost.

**21 Bb3 Nce3**

After this Black is losing, but 21...b5 22 axb5 axb5 23 Nxf6 Qxf6 24 Bxc4 bxc4 25 Qf3 also looks hopeless.

22 Bxd5 Nxd5 23 Nxf6 Qxf6 24 Rad1 Ne7 25 Qc3 Qxc3 26 bxc3 d5 27 Rfe1 Rc7 28 Re5 Kg7 29 a5 Kf7 30 g4 Rc6 31 Kf2 Rc7 32 h4 Rc6 33 h5 b5 34 axb6 Rxb6 35 Rde1 Rb2+ 36 Kf3 Rb7 37 hxg6+ hxg6 38 Re6 Ra7 39 Rb6 a5 40 Ree6 c4 41 Ke3 Ra8 42 Kd4 Rh8 43 Re3 a4 44 Ra6 Re8 45 Rh3 1-0

Game 75

□ I.Radziewicz ■ E.Kengis

Koszalin 1998

**1 d4 c5 2 d5 e6 3 e4 exd5 4 exd5 d6 5 Nc3**

5 c4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Be7 is probably not too dangerous for Black. After 7 Bd3 0-0 8 Nge2 Nbd7 9 0-0 Ne5 10 Ng3 Nxd3 11 Qxd3 Ng4 12 b3 Bf6 Black has achieved his strategic ambition and equalises completely. However, 5 Nf3, delaying the decision on whether to play Nc3 or c4, makes good sense: 5...Bg4 6 Be2 Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Be7 8 0-0 Nf6 9 Na3 0-0 10 Nc4 Nbd7 11 a4 Ne5 12 Nxe5 dxe5 13 Re1 Qd6 14 Qd3 was a little better for White in S.Gligoric-G.Barcza, Ljubljana 1969, although there are many alternative moves for both sides.

**5...Nf6 6 Nf3 Be7 (Diagram 29)**

The bishop is usually considered more passive here. On the other hand, White no longer has these e4-e5 options.

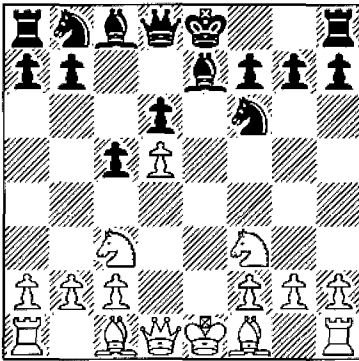


Diagram 29 (W)

No e-pawns

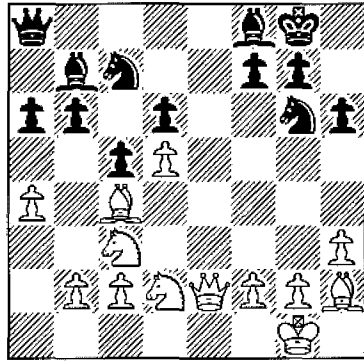


Diagram 30 (W)

Keeping the queens on

**7 Bb5+**

A less aggressive option is 7 Be2 0-0 8 0-0 Na6 9 Bxa6 (9 Re1 Nc7 10 a4 b6 11 Rb1 Bb7 12 Bc4 Rb8 13 Bf4 Re8 14 Qd3 with a slight advantage looks prefer-

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

able) 9...bxa6 10 h3 Re8 11 Bf4 Rb8 12 Rb1 Rb4!? 13 Qd2 Bf5 14 a3 Ne4 15 Nxe4 Rxe4 16 Rfe1 Bf6 17 c3 h6 18 Rxe4 Rxe4 19 Re1 a5 20 Rxe4 Bxe4 21 Nh2 Bg5 and a draw is likely, V.Malakhatko-A.Moiseenko, Bydgoszcz 1999.



**NOTE: This Bxa6 is usually not a good exchange in Benoni systems.**

### 7...Nbd7

White is also better after 7...Bd7 8 a4 0-0 9 0-0 Na6 10 Re1 Nb4 11 Bf4.

### 8 a4 0-0 9 0-0 a6

Black can also try 9...Ne8 10 Bf4 Nc7 11 Re1 a6 12 Bc4!? (12 Bf1) 12...Nb6 13 Bb3 c4!? 14 a5 Nxd5 15 Nxd5 Nxd5 16 Qxd5 cxb3 17 Qxb3 but White's position remains preferable.

### 10 Be2 b6 11 h3 Bb7 12 Bf4 Re8 13 Re1 Nf8 14 Bh2

Or 14 Nh2 Ng6 15 Bg3 Bf8 16 Nf1 b5!? 17 axb5 axb5 18 Rxa8 Bxa8 19 Bxb5 Rxe1 20 Qxe1 Nxd5 21 Nxd5 Bxd5 22 Ne3 Bb7 23 Bc4 (I.Rogers-E.Kengis, Germany 2001) and White maintains some pressure and has control after 23...d5?! 24 Bxd5 Bxd5 25 Qd2 Qf6 26 Qxd5 Qxb2 27 c4.

### 14...Ng6 15 Bc4 Bf8 16 Rxe8 Nxe8 17 Qd3 h6 18 Rd1

Black equalises after this passive move. More logical was 18 Re1 Nc7 19 Qf5 Bc8 20 Qh5 with a slight plus.

### 18...Nc7 19 Nd2 Qd7 20 Re1 Re8 21 Rxe8 Qxe8 22 Qe2 Qa8!? (Diagram 30)

After 22...Qxe2 23 Bxe2 Nxd5 24 Bxa6 Nxc3 25 Bxb7 Nxa4 26 Nc4 b5 27 Nxd6 Nxb2 28 Nxb5 White would have slight pressure in the endgame because of the two bishops, so Black decides to keep his best piece, the queen, active.

### 23 Nf1 b5!? 24 axb5 axb5 25 Nxb5 Nxb5 26 Bxb5 Bxd5 27 Ne3 Be6 28 Qd1?!

White misses a chance to keep the position level, instead allowing Black to advance his d-pawn and take control over the centre. 28 c4 Qa1+ 29 Qd1 Qxb2 30 Bxd6 Bxd6 31 Qxd6 would most likely have led to a draw.

### 28...d5 29 Be2

Better was 29 Bf1 d4 30 Nc4 Qc6 when Black is only a bit better. Now Black is able to attack on both wings.

### 29...d4 30 Nc4 Nh4 31 Qf1 Qa2 32 Be5 Bd5 33 f3 Ng6 34 Bg3 h5 35 Nb6 Be6 36 Qc1 c4 37 Qg5 d3 38 cxd3 Qxb2 39 Na4 Qxe2 40 Qxh5 Qxd3 41 Nc5 Qd1+ 42 Kh2 0-1

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# Index of Variations

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## The Volga and Blumenfeld Gambits

---

- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5**
  - 2...e6 3 Nf3
    - 3...a6 4 Nc3 c5 5 d5 b5 *130*
    - 3...c5 4 d5 b5 *116*
- 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5**
  - 4 Nf3 *94*
  - 4 Nd2 *106*
  - 4 a4 *107*
  - others *107*
- 4...a6**
  - 4...e6 *129*
- 5 bxa6**
  - 5 Nc3 *45*
  - 5 e3 *57*
  - 5 b6 *70*
  - 5 f3 *83*
- 5...Bxa6 6 Nc3 g6 7 e4**
  - 7 Nf3 d6 8 Nd2 *23*
  - 7 f4 *27*
  - 7 g3 *33*
- 7...Bxf1 8 Kxf1 d6 9 g3**
  - 9 Nf3 Bg7 10 h3 *19*
- 9...Bg7 10 Kg2 0-0 *10***

## Benonis

---

### 1 d4 Nf6

1...c5 2 d5

2...e6 228

2...d6 3 e4 Nf6 4 Nc3 g6 5 Nf3 Bg7 184

2...e5 3 e4 d6 4 Nc3 135

### 2 c4

2 Nf3 c5 3 d5

3...b5 158

3...e6 170

3...g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 e4 0-0 178

### 2...c5 3 d5 e5

3...Ne4 222

3...d6 4 Nc3 g6 5 e4 Bg7 199

3...e6

4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 214

4 Nf3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 214

### 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 143

---

# Index of Complete Games

<b>Atalik.S-Knoppert.E</b> , Tilburg 1993 .....	73
<b>Bareev.E-Kasparov.G</b> , Linares 1994 .....	25
<b>Beliavsky.A-Ivanovic.B</b> , Tivat 1995 .....	141
<b>Chernin.A-Miezis.N</b> , Biel 1994 .....	216
<b>Chetverik.M-Csiszar.C</b> , Budapest 1996.....	121
<b>Chetverik.M-Kasparov.S</b> , Gien 2004 .....	56
<b>Chetverik.M-Kopjonkin.G</b> , Presov 2000 .....	49
<b>Chetverik.M-Shtyrenkov.V</b> , Karvina 2001 .....	137
<b>Christiansen.L-Andrianov.N</b> , New York 1990 .....	48
<b>Georgiev.Kir-Popov.L</b> , Tivat 1995 .....	60
<b>Giorgadze.G-Lima.D</b> , Elgoibar 1997 .....	219
<b>Gleizerov.E-Halkias.S</b> , Linares 2003 .....	81
<b>Grabliauskas.V-Vredenburg.C</b> , Berlin 1997 .....	131
<b>Gretarsson.H-Bellon.J</b> , Stockholm 1999 .....	88
<b>Gulko.B-Renet.O</b> , Marseille 1986 .....	98
<b>Gurevich.M-Ermenkov.E</b> , Burgas 1994 .....	90
<b>Gurevich.M-Ivanov.M</b> , French League 2001 .....	14
<b>Gurevich.M-Piket.J</b> , Wijk aan Zee 2002 .....	146
<b>Haba.P-Prusikin.M</b> , Germany 2003 .....	22
<b>Hebden.M-Sulskis.S</b> , Port Erin 2003.....	168
<b>Hjartarson.J-Blees.A</b> , Tilburg 1992 .....	210
<b>Hoang Thanh Trang-Berkvens.J</b> , Budapest 2000.....	229
<b>Horvath.P-Sziebert.A</b> , Budapest 2002 .....	12
<b>Hübner.R-Ivanchuk.V</b> , Dortmund 1997 .....	195
<b>Huzman.A-Minasian.Art</b> , Pula 1997.....	179

## Starting Out: Benoni Systems

Istratescu.A-Mastrovasilis.A, Korinthos 2001 .....	132
Ivanisevic.I-Adorjan.A, Szeged 1997 .....	54
Izoria.Z-Jianu.V, Heraklio 2002.....	104
Jelen.I-Baklan.V, Groningen 1996.....	62
Jobava.B-De Vreugt.D, Yerevan 2000 .....	51
Kaminik.A-Kalinichev.S, Bad Wissee 2000 .....	78
Karpov.A-Salov.V, Belgrade 1996.....	16
Karpov.A-Topalov.V, Dos Hermanas 1994 .....	176
Kasparov.G-Miles.A, 1st matchgame, Basle 1986.....	149
Kempiski.R-Miton.K, Zakopane 2000 .....	112
Khenkin.I-Narciso Dublan.M, Porto San Giorgio 1998.....	231
Khenkin.I-Rogers.I, Baden 1998 .....	139
Khenkin.I-Tregubov.P, Herceg Novi 2001 .....	101
Komarov.D-Solozhenkin.E, French League 1998 .....	18
Korchnoi.V-Felgaer.R, Buenos Aires 2001.....	96
Kramnik.V-Leko.P, Dortmund 1998.....	108
Lalic.B-Alterman.B, European Team Championship, Pula 1997.....	86
Lautier.J-Ponomariov.R, Enghien 1999.....	192
Lerner.K-Pigusov.E, Kharkov 1985 .....	174
Lukacs.P-Berg.K, Gausdal 1989 .....	68
Lutsko.I-Sergienko.S, Voronezh 1998.....	154
Miles.A-Hodgson.J, Zaragoza 1993.....	160
Mochalov.E-Rovid.K, Budapest 1992.....	172
Naumkin.I-Dorfman.I, Münster 1989.....	225
Nikolaidis.I-Cherniaev.A, Heraklio 1996.....	220
Nikolic.P-Fedorowicz.J, World Team Championship, Lucerne 1989 ...	39
Pavlovic.M-Ivkov.B, Lugano 1985.....	152
Polugaevsky.L-Ljubojevic.L, Manila 1975.....	124
Radziewicz.I-Kengis.E, Koszalin 1998 .....	233
Raetsky.A-Provotorov.I, Voronezh 2004.....	163
Shariyazdanov.A-Zueger.B, Elista Olympiad 1998 .....	100
Sherbakov.R-Teske.H, Pardubice 1999 .....	20
Shirov.A-Kovacevic.A, Belgrade 1997 .....	207
Socko.B-Dautov.R, Ohrid 2001 .....	186
Sokolov.I-Radjabov.T, Sarajevo 2003 .....	204
Sorokin.M-Shulman.Y, Calcutta 1999 .....	189
Spraggett.K-Kogan.A, Dos Hermanas 2000 .....	42
Tarrasch.S-Alekhine.A, Pistyan 1922.....	118

<b>Tella.J-Nyback.T</b> , Jyvaskyla 2001 .....	111
<b>Timman.J-Topalov.V</b> , Wijk aan Zee 2001.....	165
<b>Timoshenko.G-Suradiradja.H</b> , Jakarta 1997 .....	223
<b>Van der Strict.G-Ikonnikov.V</b> , Belgium 2001.....	127
<b>Verdier.P-Hamdouchi.H</b> , French League 1999 .....	31
<b>Vladimirov.E-Mikhalevski.V</b> , Calcutta 2001 .....	76
<b>Vukic.M-Benko.P</b> , Sarajevo 1967.....	38
<b>Zaichik.G-Gavrikov.V</b> , Tbilisi 1976 .....	201
<b>Zarubin.P-Shliahtin.I</b> , USSR 1978 .....	29
<b>Ziegler.A-Chernin.A</b> , Gothenburg 1996 .....	64
<b>Zilberman.Y-Greenfeld.A</b> , Israel 1995 .....	35
<b>Zimmerman.Y-Chernin.A</b> , Hungary 1999.....	66

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