



COLUMNISTS

Over the Horizons

Stefan Bucker



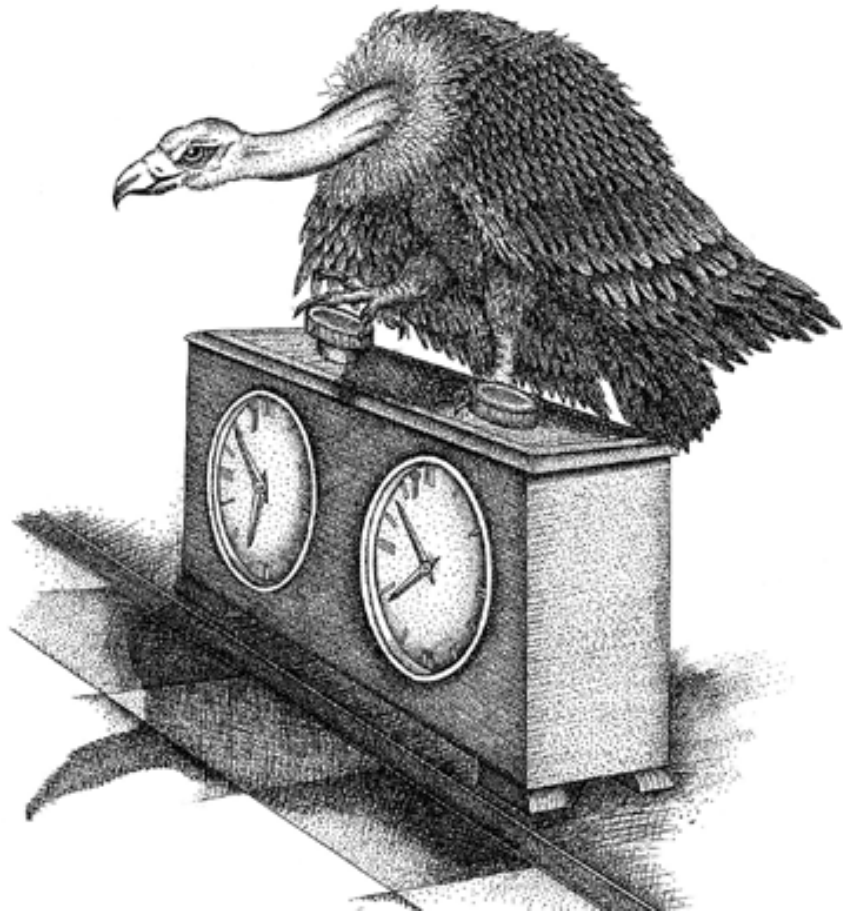
Stefan Bucker, born 1959, won the Championship of North Rhine & Westphalia in 1983 and 1988, and participated in three German Championships (1984 – fifth place, 1987 – eleventh place, 1991 – eleventh place). He is best known for his analysis of unusual chess openings. It started in the early 1980's with privately published booklets on 2...Qf6 in the King's Gambit, on the Vulture, Hawk and Woozle, the Closed Sicilian and a mixture of White gambits. The publishing house Franckh-Kosmos produced improved versions of the first two (1985, 1986) and two new works: *Das neue Königsgambit* (1986) and *Groteske Schacheröffnungen* (1990). The latter also has a chapter on another of Bucker's specialties: 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ne4, the Mokele Mbembe. *Englund Gambit* (1988) was written for publisher Manfred Mädler. From 1991 to 1996, Bucker worked in the editorial staff of the chess monthly *Schach-Report/Deutsche Schachzeitung*. In 1996 he started his own chess magazine *Kaissiber*.



Vulture's Wing Play (Part 1)

In one of the chapters of *Dynamic Black Defenses* (1989) Tim Harding presented my repertoire against 1 d4 – the Vulture, Hawk and Woozle. I liked his well-written account, but in the first paragraph the Irish author issued a warning: “His system is logical – but is the game of chess itself logical enough to reward the pioneer? Bucker's system is not easy to play well ...” [\[4\]](#).

My book *Der Geier* (1986) had included only a few practical examples for the Vulture, today more than 400 games are available. According to a recent database, White scored 58 percent, but in reality the system is much better. This article has all the logic that you need to play it well.



Z. Nasiolkowski, Lüdenscheid

1 d4 is considered to be safer than 1 e4, because the e4-pawn can be attacked immediately, say, by means of 1...Nf6 (Alekhine's Defense) or 1...d5 (Scandinavian Defense). In case of 1 d4, a promising method of instantly undermining White's center doesn't exist. Or does it? My recommendation is an aggressive version of the Benoni:

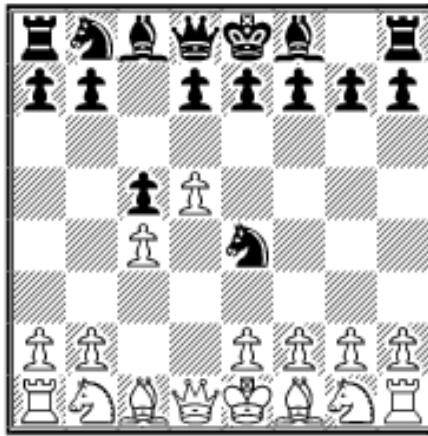
1 d4 c5

Luring the d-pawn into Black's camp.

2 d5 Nf6 3 c4

For now, we'll concentrate on this main line. Just if you are wondering: 3 Nf3 c4!? is the Hawk, and 3 Nc3 Qa5!? the Woosle.

3...Ne4!?



The starting point of the Vulture. Black intends 4...Qa5+, to force a radical change in White's set-up. Instead of the usual Nb1-c3, Black wants to see this knight pinned on d2, where for a while it hampers White's development. If everything goes as planned, the Ne4 retreats to d6 and a later ...b5 and ...f5 will destroy the white pawn center. However, this concept may not be possible against White's best play,

as we'll see in part two next month.

In the diagrammed position, the majority of players prefer **4 Qc2 Qa5+ 5 Nd2**, which has been my own main line since 1977. **Part 2** of this article will give a detailed analysis of the critical lines to prove that Black's position is sound. **Part 1** covers everything else. A selection of instructive games may be the best way to introduce the reader to the world of the Vulture. Instead of the natural **4 Qc2**, other continuations have been tried. The *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings (ECO)* recommends **4 f3** ("+/="). In my opinion this move isn't stronger than the alternatives, but since other authors have repeated *ECO's* assessment, it has to be considered.

M. Sorokin (2515) – H. Kadhi (2305)

Bratislava Open, 1993 [\[8\]](#)

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 Ne4 4 f3 Qa5+

This in-between check deflects the Nb1 from its best square (c3), and this lack of control over b5 might invite a later counter ...b7-b5. A knight on d2 is also in the way of the Bc1.

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," Raetsky/Chetverik [\[7\]](#).

5...Nd6!

This maneuver favors the advance ...b7-b5, which is so typical for Benoni structures. Often the black knight reaches the d4-square via f5 or b5. These circuitous flights inspired my brother Peter to name the system "Vulture": the knight hovers above the white position.

6 e4

6 b3? is refuted tactically: 6...Nf5! 7 Bb2 (7 e4? Ne3 –+; 7 Kf2? Qc3 8 Rb1 Qd4+ 9 Ke1 Qh4+) 7...Ne3 8 Qc1 Na6 9 Kf2 Nxf1 =.

6...g6! 7 Bd3

7 e5 Nf5 8 Bd3 (1-0, 35 in V. Shishkin – A. Nadanian, Kiev 1997)
8...Bg7! =.

7...Bg7

Perhaps 7...b5!? is more precise, avoiding the exchange on c4. White now cannot castle, as in the next diagram. Then 8 cxb5 Nxb5 or 8...a6 is similar to the next game.

8 Ne2 b5



The knight moves took some time, but the result often isn't as strange as we would expect. In the Benkő Gambit ...Nf6-e8-c7-b5 is a well-known maneuver, to exchange off the Nc3 and to increase the power of Bg7. In the Vulture the knights may be exchanged on c4, with a similar effect. But there remains a difference: Black hasn't sacrificed his a-pawn.

9 0-0

9 Kf2 bxc4 10 Nxc4 Nxc4 11 Bxc4 Qb6 12 Rb1 d6 13 Be3 a5! 14 Qd2 Qb4 15 Rhc1 f5 =+ (0-1, 31) Feiler – Bückler, Bundesliga II 1997.

Or 9 cxb5 Nxb5 (9...a6!?) 10 0-0 0-0 11 Kh1 d6 12 Nc4 Qd8 13 Rb1 Na6 14 a3 Rb8 15 Bd2 (draw, 44, in Paasikangas – K. Heinola, Rampere 1990) 15...Qd7! 16 Qe1 e6 17 dxe6 fxe6 =.

9...bxc4

For 9...0-0, see the next game.

10 Nxc4 Nxc4 11 Bxc4

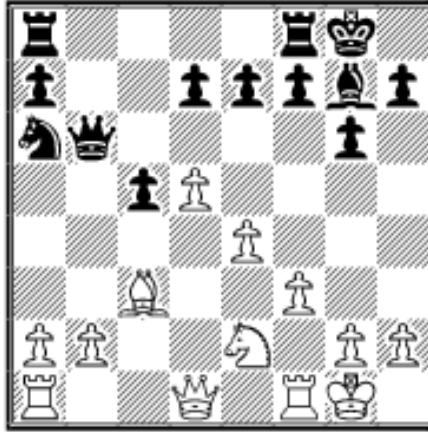
“Black has a Benoni structure but with some lost tempi,” Raetsky/Chetverik [7]. In the diagram position below, White doesn't have a significant lead in development, so how can you then speak about “lost

tempi?”

11...Ba6 12 Bd2 Qb6 13 Bxa6 Nxa6 14 Bc3

“It is obvious that White has a slight advantage out of the opening,” Raetsky/Chetverik [7]. I can’t see an advantage.

14...0-0



Chances are equal, but this didn’t stop Sorokin from disposing of his opponent in short order: **15 e5 f6** (15...e6) **16 d6 exd6??** (16...e6 =) **17 Qd5+ Kh8 18 exf6 +- Bh6 19 Qg5! c4+ 20 Kh1** Black resigns

L. Esposito (2155) – M. Popchev (2419)

Porto San Giorgio Open, 2002 [8]

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 Ne4 4 f3 Qa5+ 5 Nd2 Nd6 6 e4 g6

Preparing ...b7-b5. In the Vulture this advance is only playable if White cannot react with b3, because in the long run the knight might be stranded on d6 and become a serious problem.

In the oldest 3...Ne4 game, Lattarulo – Canal, La Spezia 1974, the Peruvian GM continued 6...e5 and won (*Kaissiber* #20, p. 4). Being unaware of this game, I “invented” the Vulture three years later. From the beginning I preferred 6...g6, but Canal’s 6...e5 might deserve another look.

7 Bd3 Bg7 8 Ne2 0-0 9 0-0 b5 10 cxb5 a6!? 11 bxa6 Bxa6

Or 11...c4 12 Bc2 Nxa6.

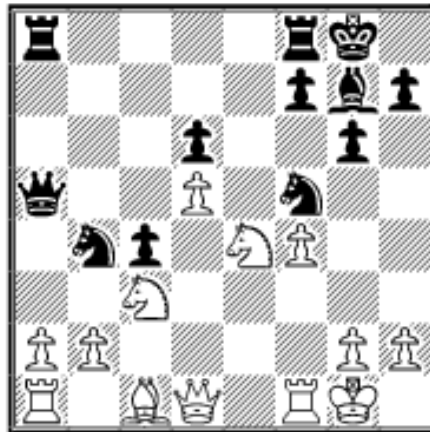
12 Bxa6 Nxa6 13 f4 c4

Black’s sacrifice (...a7-a6) in the style of a Benkő Gambit has lead to sharp play.

14 e5 Nf5 15 Ne4 d6 16 exd6

Or 16 g4 Nh6 17 N2c3.

16...exd6 17 N2c3 Nb4



The active black pieces compensate for the loss of a pawn.

18 g4 Qb6+

By means of 18...Ne7 19 f5 Nexd5 Black could have regained his pawn.

19 Kh1 Ne3 20 Bxe3 Qxe3 21 Nxd6 Nd3 22 Qf3 Qxf3+ 23 Rxf3 Nxb2 24 Rb1 Na4 25 Ndb5 Rfd8 26 Rc1

The ending offers equal chances to both sides, i.e. 26 Ne4 Ra5 =.

26...Nc5 27 Rc2 Nd3 28 Rf1 Ra5 29 a4 Nc5 30 Na3 Bxc3 31 Rxc3 Nxa4 32 Nxc4 Nxc3 33 Nxa5 Rxd5 34 Nc6 Rd2 35 Ne5 Ne4 36 Kg1 f6 37 Nf3 Ra2 38 Nh4?

38 g5 Kf7 =. Black didn't have much. At this stage of the game, White even manages to lose.

38...Kg7 39 Ng2 Nd2 40 Rd1 Nf3+ 41 Kh1 Rf2

The terrible placement of the white knight on g2 cannot be repaired.

42 h3 h5 43 Ra1 hxg4 44 hxg4 Kh6 45 g5+ fxg5 46 fxg5+ Kxg5 47 Rb1 Kg4 White resigns



Esteban Canal

Tournament book Venice 1948

G. Timoshenko (2510) – H. Suradiradia (2240)

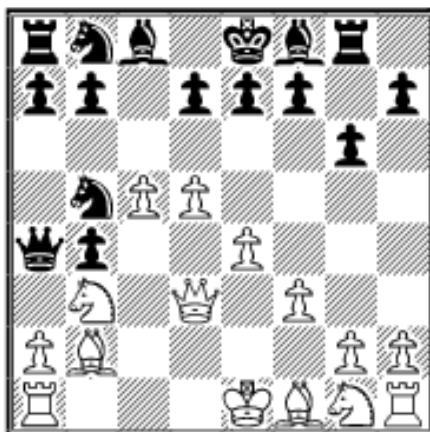
Jakarta Open, 1997 [\[8\]](#)

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 Ne4 4 f3 Qa5+ 5 Nd2 Nd6 6 e4 g6 7 b4

When Nf6 is missing, Black's kingside seems more vulnerable. This pawn sacrifice is a regular guest in the Vulture.

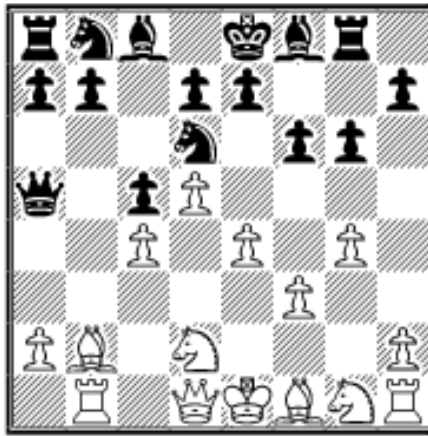
7...Qxb4

7...cxb4 8 Nb3 Qa4 9 Bb2 Rg8 10 c5 Nb5 11 Bd3 b6 had been my recommendation in the first version of this article [\[8\]](#). But Raetsky/Chetverik in their latest book [\[7\]](#) suggested 11 Qd3.



“It is obvious that White has great control,” Raetsky/Chetverik [\[7\]](#). However, I am skeptical. Now 11...Na3 seems forced, with the possible continuation of ...b6 and ...Ba6. If 12 d6 Nc6, or 12 Qd2 d6. White has some compensation for the pawn, but an advantage? I admit that, as always, White has “various opportunities.” (In [\[7\]](#) the authors said: “3...Ne4 does not contain fruitful ideas; it is not ambitious and insufficient to equalize since White has various opportunities.”)

8 Rb1 Qa5 9 Bb2 Rg8 10 g4 f6



White threatened 11 e5, winning the knight. However, 10...f5 (not mentioned by Raetsky/Chetverik [7]) comes into question, about equal.

11 h4 Bh6 12 g5! (12 Nh3 Be3) fxg5 13 hxg5 Bxg5 14 Rxh7 a6?

Too slow. Correct was 14...Nf7 =, intending 15...e5 (again, this possibility was overlooked by

Raetsky/Chetverik [7]).

15 Nh3 Be3 16 Ke2! Bxd2

Or 16...Bd4 17 Nb3, and White gets a dangerous attack.

17 Qxd2 Qxd2+ 18 Kxd2 b5 19 Ng5 Kd8 20 Bc3 b4 21 Be5 a5 22 Bd3 a4 23 Rbh1 Ba6 24 Rh8 Rxh8 25 Rxh8+ Kc7 26 Nf7 Bb7 27 Rh6 Black resigns

Improved Old Benoni

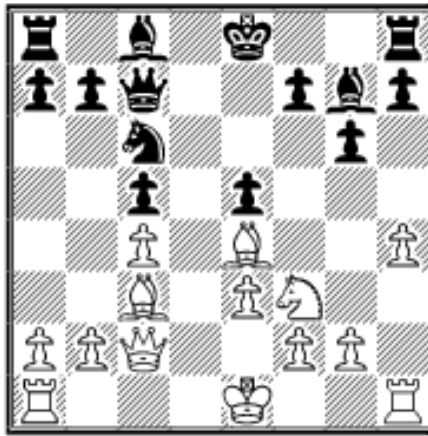
After **4 f3**, White doesn't have an advantage, if Black plays carefully. The main line **4 Qc2 Qa5+ 5 Nd2** was contested in 154 games (scoring 60% for White), so apparently it is putting serious problems on the defender. Next month we'll return to this sequence. But there is an important alternative for White on the 5th move, **5 Nc3 Nxc3 6 Bd2**, which is even more successful in practice: 68 percent in 53 games. Maybe the second players here are feeling uncomfortable, because the closed position requires more patience than other lines of the Vulture.

The line **4 Qc2 Qa5+ 5 Nc3 Nxc3 6 Bd2 e5 7 Bxc3 Qc7** leads to a kind of "Improved Old Benoni," because in comparison with the normal Old Benoni a pair of knights has already left the board. In theory any exchange should help Black in a cramped position. Three examples will demonstrate that **5 Nc3** is by no means a killer variation. My own score with Black is two draws and three wins – against Danner, Tatai and Schönthier.

Schönthier (2265) – Bücker (2405)

Krefeld, 1983 (Int. juniors tournament of the federation of North Rhine & Westphalia) [2]

1 d4 c5 2 d5 Nf6 3 c4 Ne4 4 Qc2 Qa5+ 5 Nc3 Nxc3 6 Bd2 e5 7 dxe6 dxe6 8 Bxc3 Qc7 9 e3 Nc6 10 Nf3 e5 11 Bd3 g6 12 Be4 Bg7 13 h4



13...Be6 14 Bd5 Bf5 15 e4 Be6 16 Bxe6 fxe6 17 0-0-0 h6 18 Ne1 0-0 19 Kb1 a6 20 Nd3 Qe7 21 g3 b5 22 f4 b4 23 Be1 Rad8 24 Bf2 Rxd3 25 Qxd3 exf4 26 gxf4 Rxf4 27 Rh2 Nd4 28 Bxd4 Bxd4 29 Rf1 Qf6 30 Rxf4 Qxf4 31 Qe2 h5 32 Rh1 Kg7 33 Qg2 Qg4 34 Qc2 a5 35 Rf1 Qxh4 36 e5 Qh3 37 Qe2 Qe3 38 Qg2 Qd3+ 39 Ka1 a4 40 Qb7+ Kh6 41 Qf7 Bxe5 42 Rh1 Qf5 43 Qe7 a3 44 Rxh5+ Qxh5 White

resigns

Birens (2122) – S. Collas (2381)

Metz Open, 2005

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 Ne4 4 Qc2 Qa5+ 5 Nc3 Nxc3 6 Bd2 e5 7 Bxc3 Qc7 8 e4 d6 9 f4 exf4 10 Nf3 Bg4 11 e5? (11 Qd2 =) 11...Bxf3 12 exd6 Bxd6 13 gxf3 Qe7+ 14 Be2 f6 -/+



15 0-0-0 Nd7 16 Rde1 Ne5 17 Kb1 0-0-0 18 h4 Kb8 19 h5 Qc7 20 Qa4 g5 21 hxg6 hxg6 22 Ba5 b6 23 Bd2 g5 24 Qc2 Qd7 25 b3 Rh3 26 a4 Rdh8 27 Rhf1 Rh2 28 a5 Rg2 29 axb6 axb6 30 Bc3 White resigns

Sylvia Collas has played the Vulture at least since 1997. Three of her earlier games can be found in the databases under her maiden name Sylvia Aleksieva.

Foisor (2495) – Ungureanu (2380)

Romania 1987 [\[3\]](#)

1 d4 c5 2 d5 Nf6 3 c4 Ne4 4 Qc2 Qa5+ 5 Nc3 Nxc3 6 Bd2 e5 7 Bxc3 Qc7 8 e3

Raetsky/Chetverik [\[7\]](#) give 8 f4 d6 9 Nf3 Nd7 10 e3 Be7 11 Bd3 “and White has the initiative.” They forget 9...exf4 10 Qe4+ Qe7 =, and their 10...Be7 should be replaced by 10...g6. This was in all four editions of my book (1981, 1983, 1986, two pages in *The Vulture*, 1989 [\[3\]](#). It happened in six games: +2, =3, -1, one of them was Tatai – Bückner, Biel 1984 (0-1, 49).

It’s great to see that the Vulture is getting more attention, even when

Raetsky & Chetverik [7] don't know my work.

8...d6 9 Bd3 g6 10 h4 Bg7

Or 10...Nd7 11 h5 Rg8 12 hxg6 hxg6 13 Nf3 Be7 14 0-0-0 Nf6 15 Ng5 (Blübaum – Bückner, Detmold 1983) 15...Ng4! 16 Nh7 Bd7 17 Qe2 0-0-0 18 f3 Nf6 19 Nxf6+ Bxf6 20 Rh7 Rdf8 followed by ...Rh8, which is roughly equal.

11 h5



A critical situation....

11...f5?

Too optimistic. 11...Na6 12 a3 Qe7 13 Ne2 Bd7 14 0-0-0 (14 b4 cxb4 15 axb4 Nxb4!) 14...Nc7 +=.

12 hxg6 hxg6 13 Rxh8+ Bxh8 14 g4 Qh7 15 0-0-0 Na6 16 Ne2

White's threat is 17 Ng3, conquering f5. Simple, but effective. Black's position quickly collapses.

16...e4 17 Bxe4! Bxc3 18 Nxc3 fxe4 19 Qxe4+ Kd8 20 Rh1 Qg7

The case is hopeless.

21 Qf4 Kc7 22 Nb5+ Kb6 23 Qxd6+ Ka5 24 Qd8+ b6 25 Qh8 Qxh8 26 Rxh8 Nb4 27 Nd6 Nd3+ 28 Kc2 Nxf2 29 Rxc8 Rxc8 30 Nxc8 Nxg4 31 Kd3 a6 32 Ke4 b5 33 Kf4 Nf6 34 Ke5 Nd7+ 35 Kd6 g5 36 Kxd7 Black resigns

In the overwhelming majority of the 445 games, White immediately attacks the black knight on e4. Is it really so important to get rid of the knight, or have we all begun to play like computers? First is 4 Qc2 (233 games), then comes 4 f3 (59 games), 4 Nd2 (41 games), 4 Qd3 (23 games) and even 4 Nc3?! (14 games). And 4 Nf3 (which often transposes), 45 games.

There are rarer moves. Maybe they share the fate of 3...Ne4, which at first sight didn't look logical – or too logical, as Harding put it. One day their hidden value might be discovered:

(a) **4 Qa4** Preventing Qa5+. In a review of [2], page 11, Gerald Hertneck found it strange that my analysis began with 4 Qa4. But when

ECO starts with sidelines, why can't I? The move *does* deserve attention: 4...g6 5 f3 Nd6 6 e4 Bg7 7 Bd3 0-0 8 Ne2 f5 9 Nbc3 Na6 10 a3 e5 (10...e6) 11 Be3 f4 (11...Bh6) 12 Bf2 Nf7 13 b4 d6 14 Qb3 b6 15 Kd2 Bd7 16 b5 Nc7 17 Rag1 = (draw, 80) Schwartzman – Fahrner, Werfen 1991.

(b) **4 a3** Qa5+ 5 Nd2 threatens an immediate 6 b4. Hermesmann – Bücken, Bundesliga II, 1986, transposed to the “Improved Old Benoni” explained above: 5...Nxd2 (5...f5) 6 Bxd2 Qc7 7 Bc3 e5 8 dxe6 dxe6 9 Nf3 Nc6 10 e3 e5 11 Qc2 g6 12 0-0-0 Bg7 = (but 1-0, 45).

(c) **4 g3** g6 5 Bg2 Nd6 6 Bd2!?. White sacrifices a pawn, for a lead in development. 6...Nxc4 7 Bc3 Rg8 8 Qd3 Nd6 9 Nh3 b6 10 0-0 Ba6 11 Qf3 h6 12 Re1 Bb7 13 e4 Nb5 14 e5 (0-1, 66). White has some compensation for the pawn, Mercier – Bücken, Krefeld 1983 (Int. juniors tournament of North Rhine & Westphalia).

(d) **4 g4!?** Why should White treat Black's opening with respect, when his opponent apparently tramples upon tradition? To advance on the kingside, when Nf6 has left its post, is as logical as anything else.

None of these four moves give White an advantage, but Part 2 will make it clear that **4 Qc2** is no refutation, either.

Sources

- [1] Stoljar/Kondratjew: *Alt-Benoni-Verteidigung*, Heidelberg 1985
- [2] S. Bücken: *Der Geier*, Stuttgart 1986
- [3] S. Bücken: *The Vulture & Associated Opening Systems*, Wiltshire 1989
- [4] T. Harding: *Dynamic Black Defenses*, Dallas 1989
- [5] S. Bücken: “Der Geier. Bauer d5 als Schwäche”, in *Groteske Schacheröffnungen*, Stuttgart 1990.
- [6] S. Bücken: “Neu vermeldeter Höhenflug”, in *Kaissiber* 3 (1997).
- [7] RAETSKY/CHETVERIK: *Starting out: Benoni Systems*, London 2005
- [8] S. Bücken: “Geiers flottes Flügelspiel”, in *Kaissiber* 21 (2005)

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