



COLUMNISTS

Over the Horizons

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CHESSTHEATRE

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Minor Systems to Last a Lifetime

Young players are often warned not to rely on lesser-known openings. "Sooner or later your opponents will find out what is wrong with it, and you'll have to study something else. Rather build your repertoire on standard lines." This sounds reasonable, but standard systems and quiet play are often not to the taste of a young talent, and there are examples of players who score heavily with rare openings. Shouldn't it be possible to identify at least a handful of lines that combine a surprise effect with soundness? For this purpose let us check the latest cutting-edge theory.

Boris Avrukh's new book [Grandmaster Repertoire 2: 1.d4, Vol. 2](#) (Quality Chess, Glasgow 2010) belongs to the ambitious "Grandmaster Repertoire" series that "provides a repertoire to last a lifetime," if we can believe the book's publisher. Boris Avrukh's earlier 1.d4 Volume One had presented a Catalan-oriented repertoire for White after 1 d4 d5, the new volume covers the remaining replies after 1 d4 (without 1...d5). In most cases, Avrukh recommends a reply involving the fianchetto with g3 and Bg2. The analyses are generally excellent.



Boris Avrukh

While I am less impressed by the research (the oldest book in the bibliography has the date 1999, and on p. 202 the author admits: "I am not writing about chess history in this book, so I have decided to deal with the moves rather than the names"), a major plus of the book is that Avrukh spends a lot of energy on "minor systems." As can be expected, he mainly discusses the established systems, such as the Budapest Defense, various Benoni and Indian Systems, the Modern and the Dutch Defense. However, the 614 pages also recommend ideas against "Black Knights Tango," English Defense, 1...a6 followed by b5 and many other systems. The Vulture (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 Ne4) is missing, but there is another exotic Benoni:

Snake Benoni 5...Bd6

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6

The last move defines the Snake Benoni. It is covered on pp. 102-107 in the book. Only in a later chapter, p. 127, about 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 a6, there follows a hint that Black might include an early ...a6: "I think in reply we should play naturally. 4 a4. I do not see how Black can profit from the inclusion of a6 and a4" [...]. "If 4...e6 5 g3 exd5 6 cxd5 Bd6 7 Bg2 we get a position from the Snake Benoni (see page 102) that Black could also reach

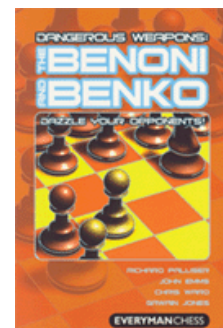
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by Richard Palliser

from the normal Benoni move order, so I don't see much point in this 3...a6 move order."

6 Nc3 0-0 7 Bg2



[FEN "rnbq1rk1/pp1p1ppp/3b1n2/2pP4/8//2N3P1/PP2PPBP/R1BQK1NR b KQ - 0 7"]

7...Re8

Alternatives are 7...Be5 8 Nf3 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 and 7...Bc7 8 d6! Ba5 9 Nh3!. In both cases Avrukh's analysis looks convincing. His conclusion at the end of the chapter stresses the importance of the motif d5-d6. Perhaps Black should consider to prepare Bc7 by means of Qe7, or to include the moves a6 and a4, as mentioned above: 7...a6 8 a4 (typically played earlier) 8...Qe7 9 Nf3, transposing to Chuchelov – Womacka, Porz 1990. None of these lines is easy for Black, but to justify the claim at the end of the chapter ("I believe that the contents of the present chapter represents quite a serious challenge to the future of the Snake Benoni..."), these alternatives should have been considered.

8 Nf3 Bc7 9 d6 Ba5 10 Nd2 Bxc3 11 bxc3 Qa5 12 0-0

Explanations and sidelines to these moves fill almost three pages in the book.

12...Nc6

According to Avrukh it is too risky to grab the c-pawn: 12...Qxc3 13 Rb1 Qd4 14 Bb2 Qxd6 15 Bxf6 Qxf6 16 Ne4 Rxe4 17 Bxe4 Ibragimov – Miezis, Cappelle le Grande 1998, but objectively this sacrifice of the exchange for a pawn may not be worse than the text.



[FEN "r1b1r1k1/pp1p1ppp/2nP1n2/q1p5/8//2P3P1/P2NPPBP/R1BQ1RK1 w - - 0 13"]

A critical position. Instead of 13 Re1 from Gattea – Miezis, Bled 2002, Avrukh recommends 13 Qb3 "!" hoping for 13...Rxe2 14 Nc4 Qa6 15 Bg5!. But Black can better ignore the pawn on e2; e.g., 13...Rb8 (or 13...b5) 14 Nc4 Qa6 15 Be3 b5 (b6) 16 Nd2 Bb7 17 Rfb1 Ba8, unclear. – Unfortunately, White has a stronger continuation:

13 c4! Re6

13...Qc3 14 Rb1 Qd4 15 e4 Re6 (or 15...Qxd6 16 f4!) 16 Bb2 Qxd6 17 f4

with a strong attack; e.g., 17...Ne8 18 e5 Qc7 19 Bd5 +/-.

14 Nb3 Qc3 15 Bg5 b6

15...Ne4 16 Rc1 Qb4 fails to 17 Qd3! Nxd5 18 f4.

16 Bd5 Rxd6 17 Bxf7+ Kxf7 18 Qxd6 Qxc4



[FEN "r1b5/p2p1kpp/1pnQ1n2/2p3B1//2q5/1N4P1/P3PP1P/R4RK1 w - - 0 19"]

White has won the exchange for a pawn. A possible continuation is 19 Bxf6 gxf6 20 Rad1, and Black can only fight for a draw.

Clarendon Court: 1 d4 c5 2 d5 f5

1 d4 c5 2 d5 f5



[FEN ""rnbqkbnr/pp1pp1pp/8/2pP1p2/8/8/PPPPPPPP/RNBQKBNR w KQkq f6 0 3"]

Avrukh: "I do not rate this variation highly, but who knows, maybe I am wrong." His main line follows a tactical game:

3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e4 fxe4 5 g4!? e6

[Kaissiber 25](#) analyzed 5...h6, but perhaps Avrukh is right: a slight advantage for White.

6 dxe6

The alternative 6 Bg2!? (Avrukh) may be better.

6...h6 7 g5 hxg5 8 Bxg5 Be7 9 Nge2 Nc6 10 Bg2



[FEN "r1bqk2r/pp1pb1p1/2n1Pn2/2p3B1//
4p3/2N5/PPP1NPBP/R2QK2R b KQkq - 0 10"]

An interesting situation:

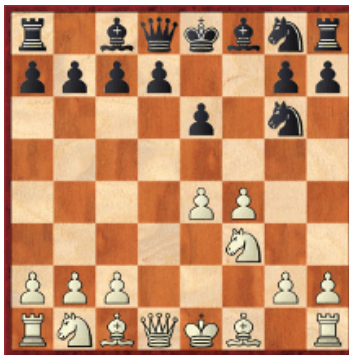
- (a) 10...Qb6? 11 Qd2 dxe6 12 0-0-0 Ne5 (threatening 13...Nc4) fails to 13 Qf4 +/-.
- (b) The book's mainline: 10...dxe6 11 Qxd8+ Bxd8 (Buturin – Trushnikov, Lvov 1996) 12 Be3 "!"N" Avrukh, when White is slightly better (+=).
- (c) Even 10...d5?! comes into consideration: 11 Bxf6 Bxf6 12 Qxd5 Qxd5 13 Nxd5 Bxb2 14 Rb1 Be5 15 Bxe4 Bxe6 16 Rxb7 0-0-0 17 Ne7+ Kxb7 18 Nxc6 Bd5 19 Nxd8+ Rxd8 20 Bxd5+ Rxd5 +=.
- (d) According to Avrukh, 10...0-0 is worse: 11 exd7+ Bxd7 12 Bxf6 Rxf6 13 Nxe4 (+/-), but Black hasn't much to fear after, say, 13...Rf7 14 Qd2 Bg4 15 0-0-0 Nd4 16 f3 Bxf3 17 Qxd8+ Rxd8 19 Rxd8+ Bxd8 20 Nxc5 Bg5+ 21 Kb1 Be3 22 Ne4 Nxh2 =.

Bogolyubov Defense 1.d4 Nc6

1 d4 Nc6 2 d5

Avrukh: "This is undoubtedly the most principled continuation."

2...Ne5 3 e4 e6 4 f4 Ng6 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 Nf3



[FEN "r1bqkbnr/pppp2pp/4p1n1/8/4PP2//
5N2/PPP3PP/RNBQKB1R b KQkq - 0 6"]

6...Bc5 7 Nc3 Nh6 8 f5 Nh4

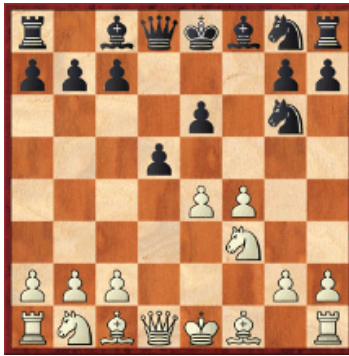
So far Minasian – Teran Alvarez, Ubeda 1999.

9 Ng5

"!N" Avrukh. The threat 10 Qh5+ is very strong; e.g., 9...exf5 10 Qh5+ Ng6 11 exf5 Nxf5 12 Bd3. "Black has no defense against White's direct threats," Avrukh. The fast collapse of Black's position is surprising. In the last diagrammed position, Black may not have equalized, but instead of 6...Bc5 some alternatives deserve attention, such as 6...Bb4+, 6...b6, or the direct

counter in the center:

6...d5!?



[FEN "r1bqkbnr/ppp3pp/4p1n1/3p4/4PP2//5N2/PPP3PP/RNBQKB1R w KQkq d6 0 7"]

7 Nc3

The variation was lately discussed on www.chesspub.com. Some of the alternatives:

(a) 7 Qd3 Bb4+ 8 Bd2 (8 c3 Be7! 9 g3 dxe4) 8...Bxd2+ 9 Nbx d2 Nxf4 10 Qe3 dxe4 11 Qxf4 exf3 12 0-0-0 fxg2 13 Bxg2 Qe7 14 Qa4+ Bd7 15 Qa5 Nf6!?.

(b) 7 c4 Bb4+ 8 Nc3 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 dxe4 10 Qxd8+ Kxd8 11 Ng5 Ke7 12 Ba3 + Ke8 13 g3 Nf6 14 Bg2 e5.

(c) 7 e5 Nh6 8 Bd3 Be7 9 Bxg6+ hxg6 10 Qd3 Nf5 11 g4 Nh4 12 0-0 Nxf3+ 13 Rxf3 Bc5+ 14 Kg2 Qh4.

(d) 7 g3 Bd7!? 8 Nc3 (to take the pawn is risky: 8 exd5 exd5 9 Qxd5 Qe7+ 10 Kf2 0-0-0) 8...Bb4 9 Bd3 Qe7 10 Bd2 0-0-0, unclear.

7...Bb4 8 g3 Bxc3+! 9 bxc3 Nf6 10 e5 Ne4



[FEN "r1bqk2r/ppp3pp/4p1n1/3pP3/4nP2//2P2NP1/P1P4P/R1BQKB1R w KQkq - 0 11"]

Black can be satisfied with his position; e.g., 11 c4 c6 12 Bd3 Qa5+ 13 Kf1 0-0 14 Kg2 Nc5 15 cxd5 Nxd3 16 Qxd3 exd5 =.

It is still possible to play the Snake Benoni, the Clarendon Court, or 1 d4 Nc6, even against the strongest opposition. But I have to admit that White keeps a slight advantage in each of these lines, sometimes more. Avrukh's analyses are inspiring, and his repertoire suggestions are consistent and reliable. In a comparison test, I tried to find good lines for Black in the Czech Benoni and in the Dutch Defense, with mixed results. More in the next column.

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