



COLUMNISTS

Over the Horizons

Stefan Bücker



CHESSTHEATRE

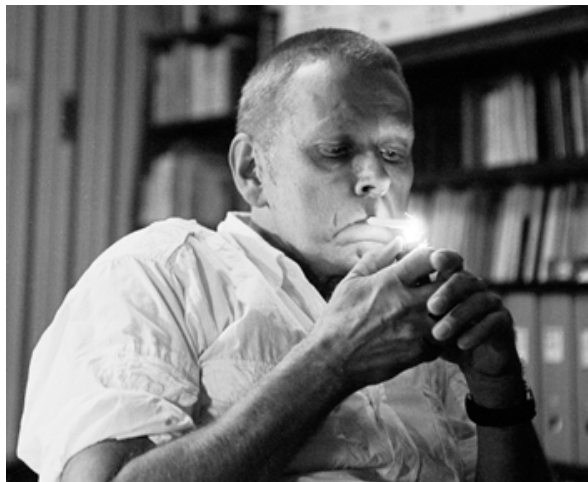
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Marxism and Shocking Chess Discoveries

Our May [column](#) covered the North Sea Defense, which was independently invented by Gerard Welling and the Swedish theoretician **Rolf Martens**. Sadly, I have learned that Rolf Martens (born February 22, 1942 in Oslo) died on April 22, 2008. In spring of this year he had still defended his ideas on the Internet [7]. In memoriam, we will look at another of his ingenious openings.

The leading opening theoreticians of the past followed an almost scientific approach to identify the main lines. Carl Friedrich Jaenisch used to check even minor alternatives, mainly with the intention to find their refutation, so that afterwards he could focus on the more important lines (ironically, many of these sidelines are now named after him). Tassilo von der Lasa, the editor of the German *Handbuch* and a strong player, was even better in singling out the preferable treatment for both sides. At that time any opening was a wilderness, and the main goal of the authors was to see order in the chaos.



Rolf Martens 1999 (c) by Eskil Fagerström (Sweden)

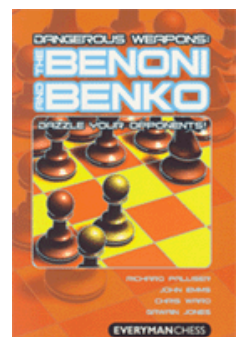
Today every opening seems to be charted. A game begins, the knights are developed to their usual squares, and both players are, more often than not, well informed about the available alternative main lines. In an environment where stereotypical play is all too common, a modern theoretician may set himself a task completely different to his traditional role: to generate more chaos in the order.

At least this is the impression you get when you see the arsenal of “Ultra Hypermodern Counter Attack (UHCA) Systems” [3]. There are seventy unusual opening ideas, collected – and often invented – by Rolf Martens; for example, 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Qh4 (“Minerva Variation”) or 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Ng4 (Caro-Kann, Kangaroo Variation). Most ideas are accompanied by short analyses. There is a lot of chaos on the board. However, in searching for new ways the author’s approach also remains systematic. When he found a strong idea such as 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 a6 (“Kamchatka Defence”), he looked for possible transpositions. And when he began to like Nh6 in certain French positions, he tested the idea in other French lines or in other openings.

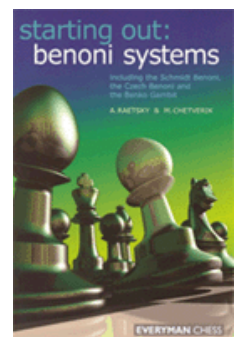
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Another sign for the Swede's originality had been his "Cannae Theses" in *SSKK Bulletin* no. 205 (1988/3). The only chess magazine I ever saw with a bust of Hannibal on the cover.

In [6], Martens reported on his personal background: "I was born in Norway in 1942 and have lived in Sweden since 1950. I've worked as a welder in relatively big industries for 24 years and also have had jobs in various other fields. I was brought up as an intellectual and have a university degree with mathematics and physics as main subjects. On the web, there are some mentions of me in connection with chess. I was Swedish champion at that game in 1967 and later, *after I had learned some Marxism, made some "shocking" discoveries in its opening theory.*" (emphasis mine, S. B.)

Martens was so left, politically, that for some years he sympathized with the ultra-left German KPD/ML (NEUE EINHEIT), a party that followed "the political line of Marx, Lenin and Mao Zedong. Apparently, it was the only party in Europe (at least) that did this. However, at some point or other in the 1980s, it too started to degenerate" [6].

"Rolf Martens is the closest you can get to a chess myth in Sweden," wrote Jesper Hall in his excellent article [4] in *New In Chess Magazine*, and continued: "[He] impressed everyone with his dynamic and tactical play, for which he rarely used more than an hour per game. In 1969, he scored 3-3 against Ulf Andersson in a training match which has become legendary. [...] Gradually, in the early seventies, he retired from both the academic field and the chess world. Before his comeback in the mid-eighties, he was more or less silent as far as chess was concerned."

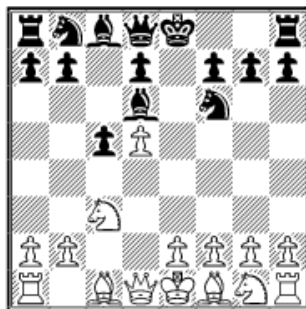
A Refutation of the Snake Benoni?

One of Martens' most successful opening ideas is the Snake Benoni:

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3

Richard Palliser contributed the chapter "Killing the Snake" in *Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko* (London 2008) [8], where he claims that "against an early Nc3, the Snake Benoni appears unplayable." We will see. – By the way: 4 Nf3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 followed by 0-0, Re8 and Bf8, as played by Yakov Murey in 1979, is called "Snail Benoni" in Martens' list [3]. And if here 6 Bg5 0-0! 7 Nbd2 (7 Nc3 Re8 =) 7...Re8 8 e3, as recommended by Raetsky & Chetverik [5], I don't see what is wrong with 8...h6 9 Bh4 Be7 10 Qb3 d6 =.

4...exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6!?



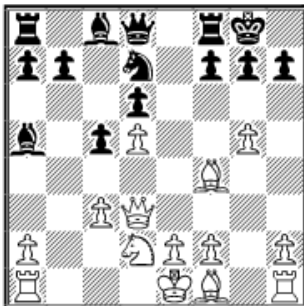
Characteristic for the variation is the snake-like movement of Black's bishop: Bf8-d6-c7-a5 or Bf8-d6-e5. The variation was adopted by GM Miezis and other strong players.

6 e4

This is considered the critical move. However, even after 6 Nf3, Palliser sees an advantage for White: 6...Bc7 7 g4 (Piket – Adams, Groningen

1995) 7...Ba5! (the correct reply; 7...0-0? 8 g5, and the knight cannot flee to h5), and now:

(a) 8 g5 Ne4 9 Qd3 Nxc3 10 bxc3 0-0 11 Bf4 d6 12 Nd2 Nd7!



According to Maurits Wind Black is okay: 13 Bg2 (13 Bxd6 Re8 14 Nc4 Nb6 15 Nxa5 Qxd6 16 Bg2 Qf4 with the threats of Qa4 and Qxg5, =) 13... Re8 14 Nc4 Ne5 15 Bxe5 (15 Nxe5 dxe5 16 Bd2, about =) 15...Rxe5! 16 Nxe5 Qxg5 17 Nc4 Qxg2 18 0-0-0 Qg5+ 19 Kb2 Bc7. In return for the exchange, Black has a pawn and the bishop-pair (analysis by Wind).

(b) 8 Qd3 Qe7 9 Bd2 0-0 10 d6 and White is better, Bles – Miezis, Antwerp 1996. – However, instead of the superficial 8...Qe7? there is a solid alternative overlooked by Richard Palliser: 8...0-0! 9 g5 (9 h3 Na6 =) 9...Nh5 (in contrast to the line 7...0-0? 8 g5 mentioned above, the h5-square is now available for the knight); for example, 10 d6 b6 11 Bh3 Ba6 12 Qc2 Nc6 13 0-0 Qe8 =.

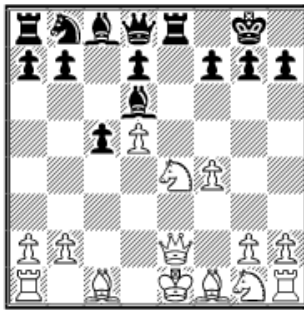


6...Be5!?

This interesting idea was found by the Dutch IM **Gerard Welling** from Eindhoven. Instead of the “long march” Bd6-c7-a5 typical for the Snake Benoni, Black prefers to exchange the bishop without further ado, saving valuable time. In 2007 Martens had written [7] that “for many years I have considered the reply 6...0-0 [...] as insufficient and instead 6...Be5 as both necessary and sufficient for Black.” The move was already recommended in [3] and [4], with both sources calling it the “Eindhoven Variation”. How is it possible that both sources [5] and [8] miss it? (Much worse: why did my own work [2] ignore it, too?)

In [3] Martens had expressed his doubts whether my Vulture was correct; nevertheless, he continued: “Anyway, this system’s author has inspired me to check out ‘surprising’ solutions to some opening problems elsewhere. They sometimes succeed and are the best.” So he was not only inspired by Marxism, but also by me.

Instead of the surprising text move, on six pages Richard Palliser mainly analyzes the old attempt 6...0-0. After 7 f4 Nxe4 8 Nxe4 Re8 9 Qe2!, wild complications arise.



But neither 9...Bf8 nor 9...b5 guarantee sufficient compensation for the sacrificed piece. Another move was lately recommended on the Internet [7] by "Simplicissimus": 9...Bc7 10 g4 Nc6!? (an amusing idea, also missing in [8]) 11 dxc6 d5 12 Bg2 dxe4 13 Nh3? Qh4+ 14 Nf2 e3 etc. In his reply Rolf Martens does not seem convinced, and in fact 13 g5 (instead of 13 Nh3?) seems more critical.

In the diagram position, 9...Na6! 10 Nf3 (so far Palliser [8]) and now 10...c4! is relatively best. Here Black gets fair chances; e.g., 11 Nxd6 (11 Bd2 Nc5) 11...Rxe2+ 12 Bxe2 Nb4 13 Kf1 Qc7 14 Nxc4 Nxd5, when White only has a slight advantage.

7 Nf3

7 Bd3!? d6 8 Nf3 deserves attention:



(a) 8...Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 0-0 comes into question, but the apparent simplicity of the position is deceptive: 10 0-0 (10 h3 Re8) 10...Bg4 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Nbd7 13 c4 (13 Bf4 Qc7 14 Qg3 Ne5 with a solid position for Black) 13...Ne5 14 Qe2 Nxd3 15 Qxd3 Qe7 16 Re1 Nd7 +=. Black's resulting position is somewhat passive (similar to the important sideline 9 Bb5+ Bd7 10 Bd3 Bg4 11 0-0 below), but it certainly can be defended

(b) In the sources listed below Rolf Martens preferred 8...Nbd7. Here he had stopped in [3]. The next source [4] gave already more details: 9 0-0 0-0 10 Re1 Re8 11 Bc2 with the threat of 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 f4 Ng6 14 e5 dxe5 15 Bxg6 hxg6 16 fxe5. But neither 11...Qb6 [4] (Jesper Hall: "Rolf believes in equality whereas I believe that White has a slight edge.") nor his latest attempt 11...Bxc3 12 bxc3 b5 [7] are sufficient to equalize.

7...Bxc3+ 8 bxc3



8...d6

8...Nxe4? 9 Bd3 Nf6 (9...f5? 10 Bxe4 fxe4 11 Bg5 Qa5 12 0-0! gives White a strong attack) 10 Qe2+ Qe7 11 Qxe7+ Kxe7 12 0-0 d6 (12... Nxd5? 13 Re1+ Kd8 14 Bc4 +/-) 13 Re1+ Kd7



(a) 14 Ng5?! Nxd5 15 Bc4 Nxc3 16 Nxf7 Rf8 17 Bb2 b5 18 Be6+ Kc6 19 Bxc8 looks great for White, but underestimates Black's resources: 19... Na4! 20 Nxd6 Nxb2! with sufficient counterplay because of his pawn majority on the queenside.

(b) 14 c4! h6 15 Bb2 Kd8 16 Bxf6+. It is this harmless approach which may refute Black's eighth move. After 16... gxf6 17 Nd2! there could follow: 17...Na6 18 a3 Nc7 19 Re3 Rb8 20 Rf3 Ne8 21 h3 b6 22 Ne4 +/-.

9 Qa4+!?

Or 9 Bb5+ (9 Bd3 Bg4 leads to the same position) 9...Bd7 10 Bd3 Bg4

(a) 11 Qa4+ Nbd7 12 Nd2 0-0 13 Qc2 Ne5 14 0-0 Qc7 15 h3 c4! 16 Nxc4 Nxc4 17 hxg4 Nxc4 with an unclear situation; for example, 18 Rb1 (18 e5 h5) 18...Nge5 19 Be2 Rac8 20 Rd1 (so far analysis by Maurits Wind), and now 20...Rfe8 equalizes.

(b) Again, the simpler reply 11 0-0 may be the real threat: 11...0-0 12 h3 Bxf3 13 Qxf3 Nbd7 14 c4! (14 Bf4 Qc7 15 Qg3 Ne5) 14...Ne5 15 Qe2 Nxd3 16 Qxd3 Re8 17 Re1 Nd7 += and once again (as in the similar line with 7 Bd3 d6 8 Nf3 Bxc3+, above) Black's passive position can certainly be defended.

9...Nbd7

9...Bd7? 10 Qb3 would be a serious loss of time.

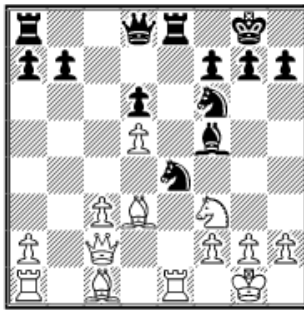
10 Bd3 0-0 11 0-0 Re8

More precise than 11...Nb6 12 Qd1 Bg4 13 h3 Bh5 14 Bf4! Qc7 15 Re1. Black is struggling in this difficult situation: 15...Rfe8 16 c4 Bxf3 (else 17 g4) 17 Qxf3 Nfd7 18 Bf1! Ne5 19 Qb3 Ng6 20 Bh2 f6 21 Rab1 Re7 22 Re3 +/- (Maurits Wind).

12 Qc2

12 Re1 Nb6 13 Qd1 Bg4 14 Bf4 Nh5 15 Bd2 c4 16 Bc2 Qf6, and Black has nothing to fear.

12...c4! 13 Bxc4 Nxe4 14 Re1 Ndf6 15 Bd3 Bf5



Although White has the bishop-pair, the position should be about equal, considering Black's coming play on the c-file. A possible continuation is 16 c4 Bg6 17 Be3 Qa5 18 Rab1 Rac8 19 Bd4 a6 20 a4 Nc5 21 Rxe8+ Nxe8 22 Bf5 Rb8 23 Ra1 Nf6 24 h3 (24 Nh4 Qb4; 24 g3 Re8 25 Rb1 Bxf5 26 Qxf5 Qxa4) 24...Nfe4 25 Nh4 Re8 26 Kh2 Qd2 27 Qxd2 Nxd2 28 Bxc5 dxc5 29 Nxg6 fxc6 30 Bd3 Ne4 =.

Sources

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- [2] St. Bücker: "Snake-Benoni," in: *Groteske Schacheröffnungen* (Stuttgart 1990)
- [3] R. Martens: List of Ultrahypermodern CounterAttack (UHCA) Systems, April 1999
- [4] J. Hall: "Seek, and thou shalt find! The unorthodox explorations of Rolf Martens," in *New In Chess Magazine* 1999/8, pp- 58-71
- [5] A. Raetsky, M. Chetverik: *Starting Out: Benoni Systems*, London 2005
- [6] R. Martens: "On my Background"; ([Internet](#), March 2005)
- [7] R. Martens: numerous postings on his ideas in opening theory, until spring of 2008, on the [Internet](#).
- [8] R. Palliser, J. Emms, Chr. Ward, G. Jones: *Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko*, London 2008
- [9] St. Bücker: "Rolf Martens' Snake-Benoni widerlegt?," in *Kaissiber* 33 (2008), p. 72

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