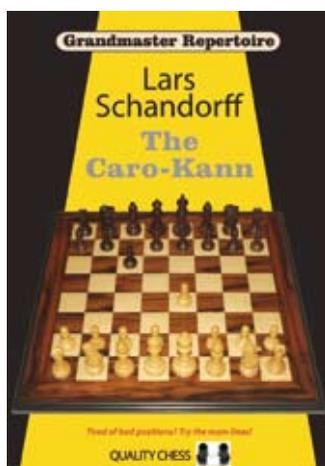


Grandmaster Repertoire 7

The Caro-Kann

By

Lars Schandorff



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Introduction

If you play the Caro-Kann when you are young, then what would you play when you are old?

– Bent Larsen

What to do against 1.e4? It is the oldest dilemma in the chess world. The answer my friend is perhaps not blowing in the wind, but still obvious: Play the Caro-Kann!

The Caro-Kann is solid, reliable and – this may come as a surprise to some of you – a great fighting weapon. The latter point may need a little explanation. It is related to the nature of the opening – typically in the Caro-Kann White has extra space and some initiative, but Black's position is completely sound and without weaknesses. White must do something active and he must do it quickly, otherwise Black will catch up in development and gain a fine positional game. That White is forced to act is what creates the early tension.

The reputation of the Caro-Kann was also affected by the attitude of its exponents. Playing Black is not the same as playing dull chess. For decades the Caro-Kann was considered to be unambitious. In this period you could say it kind of attracted the wrong people. Black's primary goal was to equalize completely and kill all the life in the position. This has changed. Nowadays enterprising players such as Topalov, Anand and Ivanchuk regularly use the Caro-Kann and it is not to get a quick handshake!

Throughout the book I recommend entering the sharp mainlines. This is cutting-edge theory, which means that one new move could change the verdict. It is rare that White comes up with such moves though and in general Black is in very good shape. And most importantly: Black's own winning chances increase dramatically by allowing double-edged play.

So in the Classical mainlines (3.♘c3 or 3.♘d2 and 3...dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♕f5) where White castles long we will not imitate him and try to get a draw, but instead follow in the footsteps of the great Danish fighter Bent Larsen and castle short! Often White will burn his bridges in his eagerness to attack – and if we are not mated, then we will win the endgame!

In the Advance Variation we shall meet 3.e5 with the principled 3...♕f5 – sharp and interesting play is all but guaranteed.

I recommend meeting the Panov Variation, 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4, with 4...♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6. If White chooses 6.♘f3 then we shall equalize in the famous endgame variation. This is the closest we shall come to the old-fashioned dull Caro-Kann, but equal is not the same as drawn – we can still fight

for the win. If White wants to wrestle for an opening advantage he must play 6.♗g5, and that leads to much more interesting play.

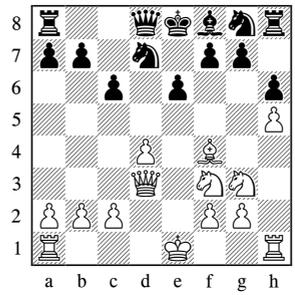
All that remains are the minor lines, which are in general unthreatening, but there are some fun lines. For example, the Fantasy Variation, 3.f3, has become trendy, so I have analysed it with especial care.

The modern Caro-Kann is for everyone. Good luck with it.

Lars Schandorff
Copenhagen, April 2010

Chapter 6

Classical Variation



11. ♖f4

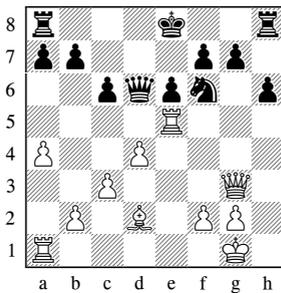
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♕f5 5.♗g3 ♖g6 6.h4 h6 7.♗f3 ♗d7 8.h5 ♖h7
9.♕d3 ♕xd3 10.♙xd3 e6

11. ♖f4 ♙a5†

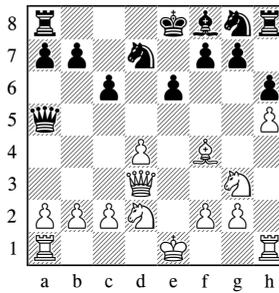
- A) 12.c3 54
- B) 12.♗d2 56

A) after 21. ♙g3



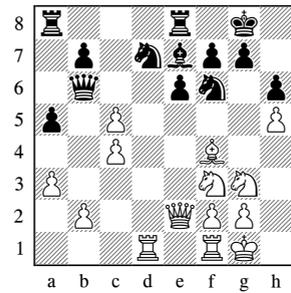
21... ♗g8

B) 12. ♗d2



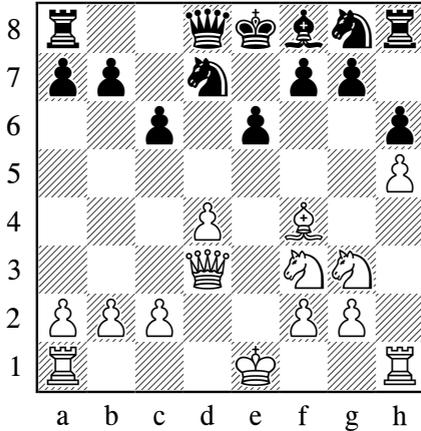
Hector's secret weapon

B) after 19.dxc5



19... ♙xc5N

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♕f5
 5.♖g3 ♗g6 6.h4 h6 7.♗f3 ♗d7 8.h5 ♗h7
 9.♗d3 ♗xd3 10.♖xd3 e6 11.♗f4



A much more active square for the bishop than d2. Having said that, White's basic plan is still the same: to castle long and combine positional and aggressive ideas depending on what Black does. With the bishop on a strong post on f4 the possibility of playing an early ♗e5 is probably the most important difference, and this idea can be disruptive for Black. To balance this, there is also a slight drawback with 11.♗f4 – Black can give an annoying check.

11...♖a5†

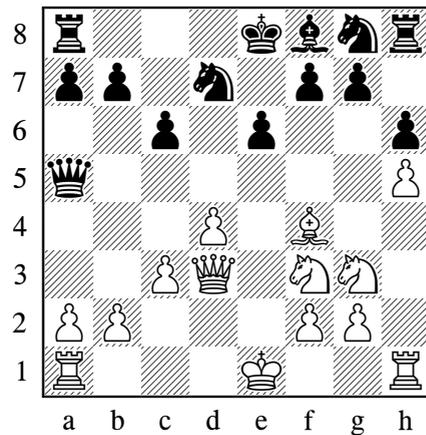
The modern solution and the move that has revived interest in the Caro-Kann. Of course simple development with 11...♗g6 followed by ...♗e7 and short castling is possible, but Black is a bit more passive than I would like, and it is not so easy to equalize.

After 11...♖a5† White has more immediate problems to solve, the first one being how to parry the check. The main move is to withdraw the bishop to d2, but in this section we will examine the minor lines **A) 12.c3** and **B) 12.♗d2**.

But first of all, we should note that offering an exchange of queens with 12.♖d2 is harmless.

12...♖xd2† (Black could even consider 12...♗b4!? 13.c3 ♗e7) 13.♗xd2 ♗b6 14.♗ge4 0–0–0 15.c3 ♗d5 16.♗g3 f5 17.♗c5 ♗xc5 18.dxc5 f4 19.♗h4 ♗df6 20.0–0–0 ♗d5 And with weak pawns all over the board, White had to scramble for compensation with 21.♗c4 in Keijzer – Goebel, corr. 2004, and he probably did have just enough counterplay to hold the balance.

A) 12.c3



White keeps his bishop on the active f4-square. That's the good thing about this move. The pressure from the black queen makes it difficult to castle long, and White soon runs out of normal moves. Those are the bad things!

12...♗gf6 13.a4!

A move based on the rather bizarre logic that if you can't castle long, then why not launch a pawn offensive on that side of the board. White has also tried a bunch of other moves without getting anything. Here is a sample:

13.♗e5 ♗xe5 14.♗xe5 0–0–0 and the threat of ...♖xe5 forces White to lose more time.

13.♖e2 ♗e7 14.♗e5 ♗xe5 15.dxe5 ♗d5 16.♗d2 This is Trylski – Kupryjanczyk, Poznan

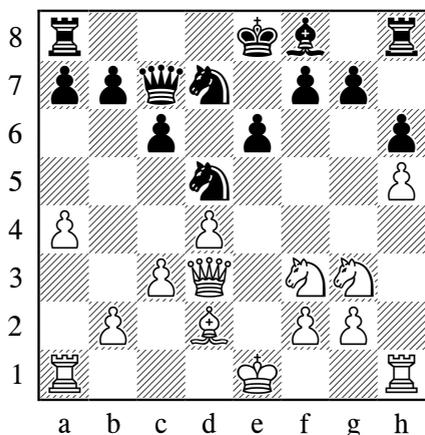
1988, and now 16...♗b6N prevents c3-c4 and solves all Black's opening problems at once.

13.b4 Similar thinking to the mainline, but imprecise in its execution. Black can respond with 13...♗b5 or 13...♗a3, in either case with good play.

13...♗d5

Instead 13...♙e7 14.b4 ♗d8 is solid, albeit rather passive.

14.♙d2 ♗c7



White's pawn on a4 determines his play, at least as far as it tells him what not to do! Castling long is out of the question and the pawn has also left a potential hole on b4 – this hole will become visible if White is compelled to chase the black knight away from d5 with c3-c4.

15.0–0

The normal reaction in an abnormal situation. More original ideas could easily backfire:

After 15.♞h4?! ♙e7 16.♞g4 ♗7f6 it turns out that 17.♞xg7 ♙f8 traps the rook, so White must blushing return with 17.♞h4 when after 17...0–0 Black must be fine.

15.♙f1 Freeing e1 for one rook while leaving the other on h1, hoping to be able to use it in some attacking scheme. In Panchenko – Bronstein, Moscow 1981, Black coolly responded with 15...a5 and steered the game into a positional battle, which quickly turned in his favour: 16.♗e2 ♙e7 17.♗e5?! ♗xe5 18.♗xe5 ♗xe5 19.dxe5 ♗b6

15...♙d6 16.♗e4 ♗5f6

The h5-pawn is about to drop.

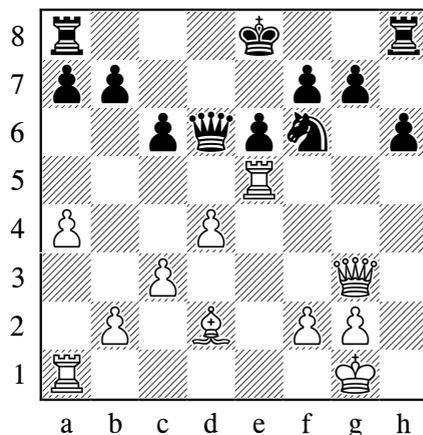
17.♗xd6† ♗xd6 18.♞fe1 ♗xh5

Why not? An extra pawn is always nice to have. We are Caro-Kann players, remember. Not some chaos pilots from the King's Indian.

19.♗e5

Best. Against other moves Black would just withdraw his knight to f6 and ask White what he has for the material.

19...♗xe5 20.♞xe5 ♗f6 21.♗g3



21...♞g8

Cool defence.

22.b4 g5!

Houska proposes 22...0–0–0, but then would follow 23.♗f3 with long-term compensation for the pawn.

23.b5 ♖g6 24.♞ae1 ♔f8

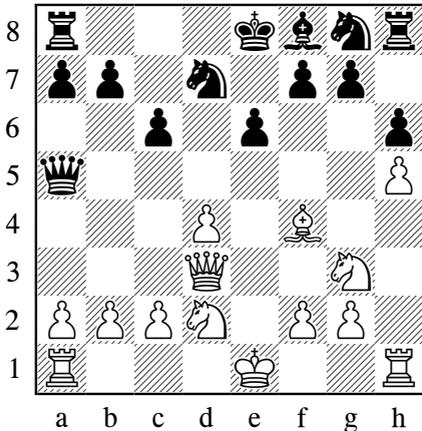
This way Black solves his king's problems without giving White attacking chances.

25.bxc6

25.♞xg5 won the pawn back with tactical means. However, the ending after 25...♞xg3 26.♞xg3 ♞xg3 27.fxg3 ♔g7 is fine for Black.

25...♞xc6 26.♞d3 ♔g7

In Wojcik – Pfalz, corr. 2005, White barely had enough for the pawn.

B) 12.♘d2

A specialty of the imaginative Swedish attacker, Jonny Hector, who has scored a fearsome 6/6 with it. However, Hector's successes should not deceive us about the move's objective merits – Black should be okay just by making standard moves.

12...♘gf6 13.c4

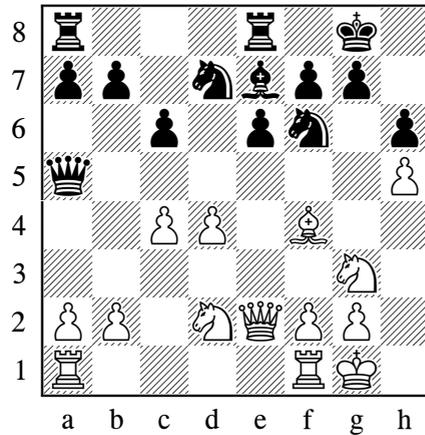
Preventing ...♘d5.

13...♙e7 14.♞e2

Protecting h5 and planning to castle kingside. There is a certain logic behind White's play; everything seems to fit together, which probably fooled some of the strong players who have had to face this line. Let me

repeat myself: if Black makes normal moves, he can't be worse.

Probably as a result of similar reasoning, Hector decided to vary with 14.♞f3! when he played against me in the Danish league in 2009. The game continued 14...0–0 15.0–0 ♞fe8 16.a3 ♞b6 17.♙e3 and now I should have played the simple equalizer 17...c5N 18.dxc5 ♙xc5 19.♙xc5 ♞xc5.

14...0–0 15.0–0 ♞fe8**16.a3**

A refinement by the inventor. In the stem game Hector played 16.♞fd1 when Black logically replied 16...b5! 17.a3 ♞ac8 18.♞ac1 ♞a6 19.♙e5 bxc4 20.♘xc4 c5 with equality, Hector – Iordachescu, Malmo 2005.

16...♞b6

Too passive was 16...♞d8 17.♞ad1 a5 18.♘f3 a4 19.♘e5 ♘f8 when 20.♞f3 ♘8h7 21.♞d3± left White in the driving seat in Hector – Agrest, Helsingor 2009.

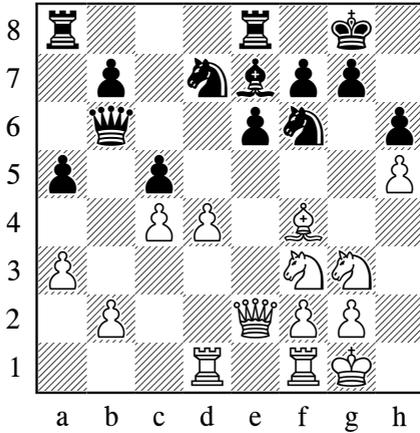
17.♘f3 a5

Holding back b2-b4.

18.♞ad1

After 18.c5 ♞a6 Black gets good play on the light squares.

18...c5=



The typical thrust and, as usual, a clear equalizer.

19.dxc5

So far this is Balogh – Dautov, Warsaw 2005, and now the simplest is:

19...♗xc5N

And Black has no problems.

Conclusion

On 11.♔f4 the modern 11...♗a5† encourages White to return the bishop to d2, which we will see in the next sections.

If he instead plays 12.c3 ♖gf6 13.a4!? then after 13...♘d5 Black is fine.

Hector's pet line 12.♘d2 ♖gf6 13.c4 also does not promise White an opening advantage. Black simply plays 13...♔e7 followed by castling short. Often a well-timed ...c6-c5 will equalize completely.