

First Steps :

Caro-Kann Defence

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About the Author

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Also by the Author:

Starting Out: The Sicilian Dragon

First Steps: the Queen's Gambit

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Introduction

The Caro-Kann Defence is one of Black's most solid and reliable responses to 1 e4. It is introduced simply after the following moves:

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5

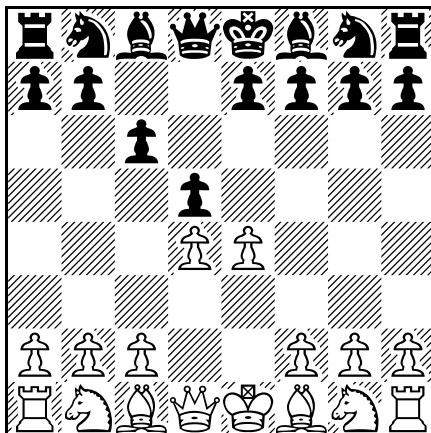
Black secures a firm foothold in the centre and plans modest development, with the idea of gradually neutralizing White's first move initiative. The Caro attracts players of all levels and is a surprisingly diverse opening, with quite a few different approaches available for Black, dependent on what White does. In this book I will introduce the opening and we will take a tour of all the major variations. After that, it is my hope that you will be ready to make a considered choice about how you want to play the Caro or indeed play against it!

Andrew Martin, Bramley,
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Chapter One

Strategic Ideas

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5



Let us break down the opening into strategic ideas. As White, I am considering:

- 1) A way to use my advantage in space.
- 2) Effective development.
- 3) How to set up an attack.

As Black I am concerned with:

- 1) Neutralizing White's advantage of the first move.
- 2) Light-squared control.
- 3) Exploiting the varied nature of Caro-Kann pawn structures to fit my style.

Let's take a look at each of these concepts in turn.

Chapter Three

The Advance Variation

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5

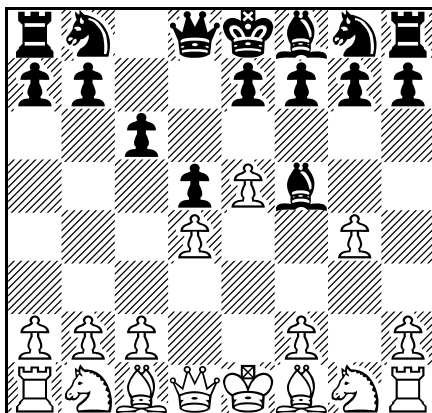
This is the Advance Variation, a very important main line. I always thought that 3 e5 played into Black's hands, as the white central pawns can often become fixed and rigid, but the line has become infused with new ideas recently. Black can do many things, but he should choose either 3...♗f5 or 3...c5. We will take a brief look at irregular ideas at the end of the chapter.

We will start by examining the lines after 3...♗f5, which I recommend as best.

Game 39
A. Shirov-V. Anand
Leon (rapid) 2011

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♗f5 4 g4!?

A questionable idea, yet very direct and aggressive. Black can be caught napping if he gets the next move wrong.



4... ♖d7!

Showing flexibility of thought. Black may turn the game into something resembling the French Defence with ...e7-e6, following up with ...c6-c5, ...♘b8-c6, ...♚b6 etc. By playing this way, Black tries to make 4 g4 look out of place.

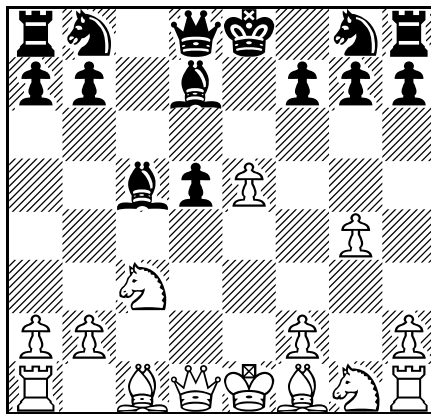
After 4... ♖g6, 5 e6!? could be an idea. The pawn on e6 is selling its life in return for hampering Black's kingside development. If Black captures the pawn, he faces an uphill task to get his pieces out. Possibly 5... ♚d6 is the best reply, but even there 6 exf7+ ♖xf7 7 f4! ♘d7 8 ♘f3 gives White a grip on the position.

Another try after 4... ♖g6 is 5 h4 h5 6 e6, with 6... fxe6 (again, 6... ♚d6 is safer) 7 ♖d3 ♖f7 8 g5 leading to another kingside traffic jam for Black.

5 c4 e6 6 ♘c3 c5!!

A brilliant new move from Anand. Although Black was doing well after the alternative, 6 ... ♘e7, the central break 6...c5 is far more dynamic. Lines are opened by force and the pawn on g4 starts to look very poorly placed indeed.

7 cxd5 exd5 8 dxc5 ♖xc5



9 ♖g2?!

Shirov could have captured on d5 and maybe should have done, but you can understand why he might not trust his very shaky position. Instead, he tries to stabilize, but runs into Anand on top form. After 9 ♚xd5 ♚b6 10 ♖c4 ♖e6 (10... ♖xf2+ is also possible, but leads to nothing decisive after 11 ♖e2 ♖e6 12 ♚b5+ ♘c6 13 ♖xe6 fxe6 14 ♘f3) 11 ♖b5+! ♘c6 12 ♖xc6+ bxc6 13 ♚f3, White manages to protect both f2 and g4, but Black's chances are to be preferred due to his superior development, the bishop pair, and White's very ragged pawn structure.

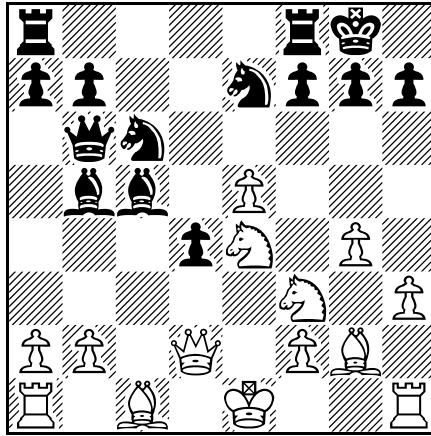
9... ♘e7 10 h3 ♚b6 11 ♚e2 0-0

Black's development flows easily. It is hard to see where White is going to place his king safely.

12 ♘f3 d4!

TIP: When you are ahead in development – *attack!*

13 ♖e4 ♗b5 14 ♔d2 ♘bc6!



Let's draw up a balance sheet:

- 1) King position. Black's king is completely safe but White's king is vulnerable in the centre.
- 2) Piece Activity. Black's development is almost complete and he threatens ...♗b4. White's development, on the other hand, is woeful.
- 3) Material Balance. White is not even material ahead to compensate him for his horrible position. Looking at it this way we can understand that Shirov cannot last much longer.

15 a3 ♘g6 16 b4 ♗e7 17 ♗b2 ♚fd8 0-1

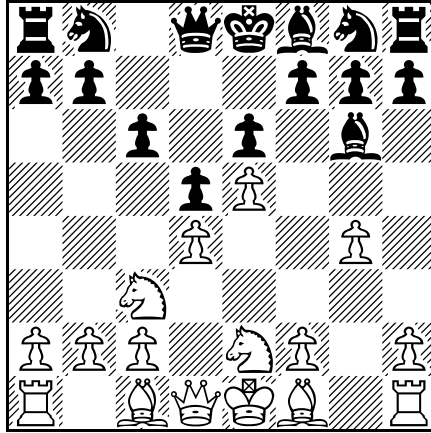
White sees no hope, despite a full board of pieces. A club player might carry on, but it is very hard to see a good move, as Black is just going to take on e5, threatening ...♘d3+. The Caro player should be delighted to see 4 g4 on the board, which is just a little bit too aggressive for White's own good.

Game 40
A.Motylev-V.Anand
 Russia vs. Rest of the World, Moscow (rapid) 2002

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♗f5 4 ♘c3 e6 5 g4

If White must play with an early g2-g4, then this is a better moment to do it.

5...♗g6 6 ♘ge2!



6 ♞g2 introduces a very dangerous attacking system. Black must be careful against this one. White intends a kingside pawn storm, possibly throwing in ♞f4 sometime soon. He makes the bishop on g6 a prime target. As in the first game of this chapter, we will sit alongside Vishy Anand and let him show us the way.

6...c5!

Black has tried many moves, but 6...c5 is generally recognized as the best. With White limbering up for a big kingside knockout, a counter in the centre seems right. Classic chess strategy.

7 ♙e3 ♞c6 8 dxc5 a6!

Anand had prepared this move in advance. Obviously Black can take on e5 instead, but the idea is that he should always be able to do so, and thus taking away the use of b5 is a higher priority.

9 ♞d4

If White tries to punish his opponent by protecting the e5-pawn, he could be in for a shock, as in O.Hofman-A.Torres Sanchez, correspondence 1998: 9 f4 ♞h4+! 10 ♙f2 ♞xg4 (it is clear that White has to be very careful now; he should try 11 ♞d2 , but instead he falters) 11 ♞g1? ♞f5 12 ♞g3 ♞xf4 13 ♞ce2 ♞b4+ 14 ♞c3 ♞xb2 15 ♞b1? (an extraordinarily awful move for a correspondence game) 15... ♞xc3+ 16 ♞d1 ♙xc2+ 17 ♞xc2 ♞xa1+ 18 ♞e2 ♞d4+ 19 ♙xd4 ♞xd4 20 ♞g2 ♙xc5 21 ♞a4+ ♞xa4 22 ♞f3 ♞a3+ 23 ♞g4 h5+ 24 ♞h4 g5+ 25 ♞xg5 ♞e3+ 26 ♞h4 ♞f4+ 27 ♞h3 ♞g4 mate. A terrible game of course, but entertaining. It is definitely a reminder to White that in this variation, he can expect Black to fight for the initiative.

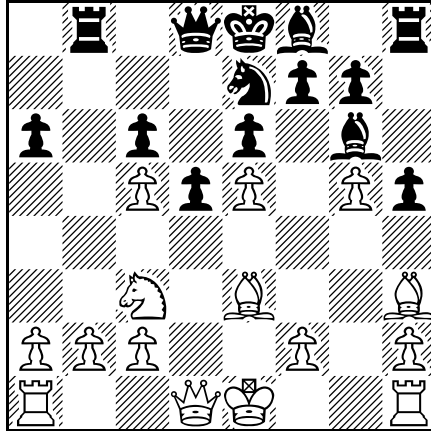
9...h5!

I like Anand's aggressive approach. 9...h5 punctures a hole in White's kingside set-up.

10 ♞xc6 bxc6 11 g5

Not a pleasant move to have to make, as Black now has full control of the key f5-square. The white position is already starting to look ragged.

11... ♞e7 12 ♙h3 ♞b8



13 ♔d4?

Like it or not, White has to play 13 b3 to give himself any chance of equality. Black is still a bit better after 13...♗f5, but White might be able to hold it together.

13...♗f5! 14 ♖g2 ♗xc2

The time has come to pick off some weak pawns.

15 ♔d2 ♗g6 16 ♘a4 ♘f5 17 0-0 ♗e7 18 f4 ♘xe3 19 ♔xe3 ♔a5 20 b3 ♖b4 21 ♔h1

White seems to have recuperated well and has parked his king in a safe place, yet Black is still much better. Let's detail his advantages:

- 1) He has the superior pawn structure.
- 2) He has more active pieces.
- 3) He has the bishop pair.
- 4) After castling, he will have the safer king.

With all the positive aspects of the position operating in Anand's favour, it will be hard for Motylev to save the game.

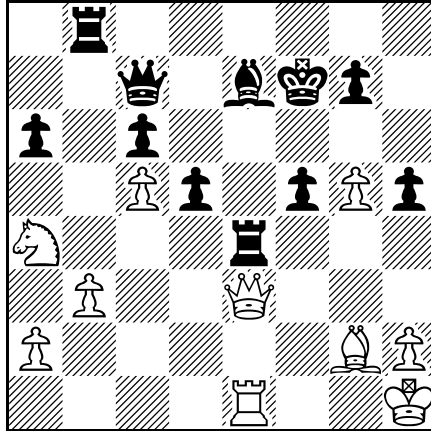
21...0-0! 22 ♖ac1 ♖fb8 23 f5

Pure desperation. Motylev sees Anand's game improving move by move while White's position is just getting worse. In that situation, you might as well try something.

23...♗xf5 24 ♖xf5 exf5 25 e6 ♔c7

25...♔d8 26 exf7+ ♔f8 27 ♔e5 ♗xg5 is also winning for Black.

26 exf7+ ♔xf7 27 ♖e1 ♖e4!



Very nice. By returning the exchange, Anand completely blocks Motylev's attack and sets up a powerful central pawn chain.

28 ♖xe4 fxe4 29 ♜h3 g6 30 ♘b6

30 ♜f1+ ♔g7 31 ♜e6 ♙xg5 leaves White with no good way to continue.

30...♜d8 31 ♜f1+ ♔g7 32 ♜e6 ♙xg5 33 ♜g1 ♙f6 34 ♜f1 ♜e7 35 ♜xc6 e3 36 ♘d5 e2 0-1

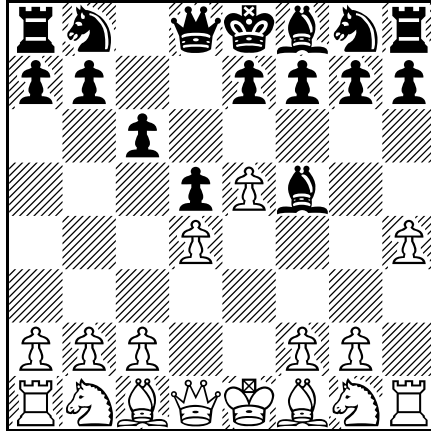
Touchdown approaches. After 37 ♜e1, the reply 37...♜e4+ is terminal. Very nice play by Anand.

The sharp system 5 g4 and 6 ♘ge2 has accumulated a lot of theory over the past 30 years, yet I don't think you need to know that much as Black. Firstly, you have to get into the right frame of mind: you must come out and fight! Secondly, you must form the view (probably correctly) that all these systems with an early g2-g4 are inferior and that a well-timed counter in the centre will always give Black a good game.

TIP: Positive thinking is essential in chess. Believe that you are playing good moves and executing good plans.

Game 41
V.Onischuk-R.Dimitrov
 Corsica 2017

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♙f5 4 h4



4 h4 introduces one of White's main weapons in the Advance Variation. With the centre blocked, White begins aggressive flank operations and gains some space. He may make the bishop on f5 a target, while reserving the alternative option of playing in the centre with c2-c4.

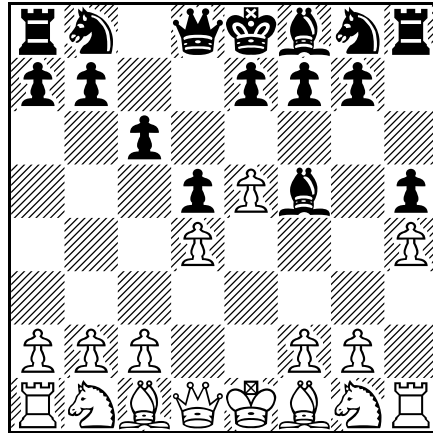
There are quite a few dangers that Black has to negotiate. 4 ♖e2 is another interesting move, a favourite of Boris Spassky in the dim and distant past. The game A.Kaczmarek-M.Bartel, Suwalki 2017, continued 4...e6 5 ♘g3 ♙g6 6 h4 h5! (the best move, throwing a spanner in the works; after 6...h6 Spassky patented 7 h5 ♙h7 8 ♙d3 ♙xd3 9 cxd3!?, when White's plan is to get a kingside attack via moves such as 0-0, ♖g4, f4-f5 and he may even sacrifice the b2-pawn in order to achieve this; e.g. 9...♗b6 10 ♙e3! ♗xb2 11 ♘d2 and the scene is set for strong white pressure; I don't think a pawn is enough to make this prospect attractive to Black) 7 ♘e2 (7 c3 c5 8 ♙b5+ ♘c6 9 ♙e3 ♗b6 10 a4 is okay for White, but not very inspiring) 7...c5! 8 ♘f4 ♙f5 9 ♘xh5 ♘c6 (White has wasted a lot of time picking off the h5-pawn; meanwhile, Black counterattacks in the centre and I already prefer his position) 10 ♘g3 ♗xh4 11 ♗xh4 ♗xh4 12 ♙b5 (White can take on f5, but then the whole centre collapses: 12 ♘xf5 exf5 13 c3 cxd4 14 cxd4 ♗xd4 15 ♗xd4 ♘xd4 16 ♙d3 ♙b4+ 17 ♘c3 ♘e7 and Black holds the advantage) 12...cxd4 13 ♘d2 ♙g4 14 ♘f3 ♙xf3 15 ♗xf3 ♘ge7 16 ♙d2 a6 17 ♙e2 ♘g6 18 ♗b3 0-0-0 (with relatively simple moves, Black has refuted White's odd opening play) 19 ♗a4 ♘gxe5 20 b3 ♙b8 21 ♗b1 ♙d6 22 ♘f1 ♗e4 23 b4 d3 24 ♘g3 dxc2 25 ♗c1 ♘d3+ 26 ♙f1 ♙xg3 0-1.

If Black meets 4 ♘e2 carelessly he can get into hot water. Fortunately for him, 4...e6 5 ♘g3 ♙g6 6 h4 h5! just seems strong.

4...h6

Botvinnik's favourite long ago. 4...h6 is a good move which does not make any positional concessions.

4...h5 is a reliable and more common alternative, which has the drawback of letting White use the g5-square.



Play can continue:

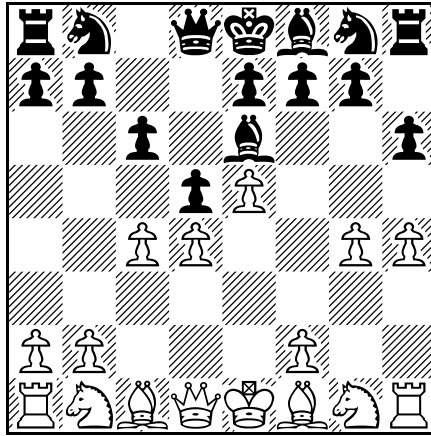
1) 5 ♕d3! ? is the modern reply, playing only for a very small edge. White argues that he owns a bit more space and that will be enough. A.Morozevich-I.Rozum, Sochi (rapid) 2016, now saw 5... ♕xd3 6 ♖xd3 e6 7 ♕g5 ♕e7 (I prefer 7... ♗b6!) 8 ♜f3! ♞h6 9 ♞c3 ♞f5 10 0-0-0 ♞d7 11 ♞b1 ♞c8 12 g3 b5 13 ♞e2 b4 14 ♞f4 g6 15 ♕xe7 ♖xe7 16 ♗a6 ♞b6 17 ♞d3 0-0 18 ♞hg1 ♞c4 19 g4 (White changes gear, increasing the tempo of the game; we now see the realization of the opening edge with Black under serious attack) 19... ♞xh4 20 ♞xh4 ♗xh4 21 gxh5 ♗xh5 22 ♗xa7 ♞b8 23 ♗e7 ♗f5 24 ♞g3 ♞fe8 25 ♗f6 ♗xf6 26 exf6 ♞d6 27 f3 ♞ec8 28 ♞e5 ♞e8 29 ♞g4 c5 30 ♞h1 ♞b7 31 ♞gh3 (the attack has continued, despite the queen exchange) 31... ♞xf6 32 ♞h8+ ♞g7 33 ♞xc8 cxd4 34 ♞e5 ♞h5 35 ♞c6 ♞f6 36 ♞xd4 ♞e5 37 ♞c6+ ♞f4 38 ♞h4+ ♞xf3 39 ♞xb4 ♞xb4 40 ♞xb4 g5 41 ♞d3 1-0. It is hard to believe that 5 ♕d3 gives any sort of advantage at all, although results have been good. Black must show discretion as to which pieces to exchange and which not.

2) 5 c4 has been pretty popular over the years, but with a well-timed capture on c4, Black can control the central light squares, which should see him through. For example, the game P.Ponkratov-A.Shimanov, St. Petersburg 2017, continued 5...e6 6 ♞c3 ♞e7 7 ♞ge2 ♞d7 8 ♞g3 ♕g6 9 a3?! (I prefer 9 ♕g5 ♗b6 10 ♗d2 from White's perspective, but again it is ...d5xc4 that will take the pressure off: 10...dxc4! 11 ♕xc4 0-0-0, when Black threatens to take on e5 and stands very well indeed) 9...dxc4! 10 ♕xc4 ♞f5 11 ♞ge2? (far too ambitious; White should settle for 11 ♞xf5 ♕xf5 12 ♕e3 and an equal game) 11... ♞b6 12 ♕a2 ♞xh4 13 ♞f4 ♕f5 14 ♞f1 g6 15 ♕e3 ♕e7 16 ♞c1 ♞c8 17 f3 g5! (a confident move which pushes White back; throughout this game Ponkratov is plagued by his inability to get his pieces working together) 18 ♞fe2 ♞d5 19 ♕f2 g4 20 ♞xd5 exd5 21 ♞c3 gxf3 22 gxf3 ♞g6 23 ♞g3 ♕e6 24 ♞xh5 ♞d7 25 ♗b3 ♞c7 26 ♕b1 ♞f4 27 ♞f5 ♕xf5 28 ♕xf5 ♞e6 29 ♕g4 ♕h4 30 ♗b4 ♞b8 31 ♞e2 a5 32 ♗a4 ♗b6 33 ♞b3 ♗a6+ 34 ♞d2 b5 35 ♞b4 ♞a7 0-1.

5 g4

This is what they do now. Black should drop back to d7 to avoid any e5-e6 issues.

5...♙d7! 6 c4 ♙e6!?



A new and very interesting move, designed to entice White forward. 6...e6 7 ♘c3 c5! is another good way to go, with the idea 8 cxd5 exd5 9 ♘xd5?? ♙c6 and wins, while 9 ♙e3 cxd4 10 ♖xd4 ♗e7 11 ♗f3 ♗bc6 is rather unclear.

7 c5

Otherwise, Black will get his usual control of d5.

7...♚c8

7...b6 8 b4 a5 is very sharp and White may be down to 9 b5 bxc5 10 dxc5 d4 11 ♙b2 just to keep himself on the board. What an odd position!

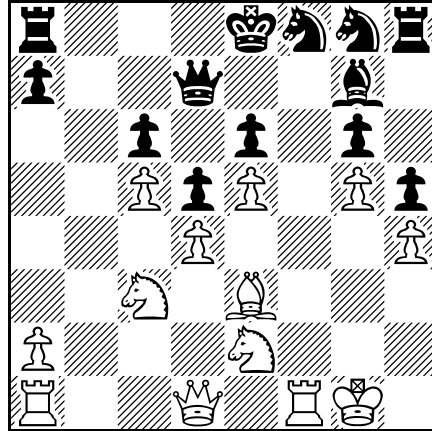
8 ♙e2 h5

Black should again play 8...b6!.

9 g5 g6 10 ♗c3 ♙g7

The bishop is looking at a brick wall, so one would assume Black is going to try to break down the wall by playing a subsequent ...f7-f6.

11 ♙e3 ♗d7 12 b4 f6 13 f4 fxe5 14 fxe5 ♙f5 15 ♙d3 ♗f8 16 ♙xf5 ♚xf5 17 ♗ge2 ♚d7 18 b5 e6 19 bxc6 bxc6 20 0-0



Extra space really does mean something on the chessboard and Black has not really timed his attack on the white pawn chain that well. He can manoeuvre a knight to f5, but in every respect his position is passive.

20...♞e7 21 ♞f4 ♞f5 22 ♟f2 ♚f7 23 ♛a4 ♛c7 24 ♖ab1 ♞d7 25 ♛a6 ♖ab8 26 ♞b5!

Onischuk has found a very nice way of increasing his advantage.

26...♛c8

26...♖xb5 27 ♖xb5 cxb5 28 ♛xe6+ ♚f8 29 ♞xg6 mate is not what the doctor ordered.

27 ♛xc8 ♖hxc8 28 ♞d6+ ♞xd6 29 cxd6 ♖xb1

Black's king is in the wrong place. He would like to play 29...c5, but after 30 ♖xb8! ♖xb8 (or 30...♞xb8 31 ♖b1! cxd4 32 ♖b7+ ♚g8 33 ♟xd4) 31 dxc5 ♞xe5 (or 31...♟xe5 32 ♞d3 ♚e8 33 ♖e1) 32 ♟g3, a crushing discovered check may follow.

30 ♖xb1 ♖b8 31 ♖xb8 ♞xb8 32 ♞d3

Normally, one would classify Black's bishop as the better of the two, but the bishop on g7 is completely walled in, which is why White is winning.

32...♞d7 33 ♟g3 ♚e8 34 ♚f2 ♞b6 35 ♞c5 ♚f7 36 ♚e2 ♟f8 37 ♟e1 ♞c4 38 d7 ♟e7 39 ♞b7 c5 40 ♟f2 1-0

Game 42

A.Oberhofer-R.Dautov
German Bundesliga 2017

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♟f5 4 ♟d3

4 ♟d3 is completely harmless, but you do see it from time to time. It looks as if White is changing his mind, launching complications after 3 e5 and then immediately retracting by offering Black easy exchanges.

4...♟xd3 5 ♛xd3 e6 6 ♞f3