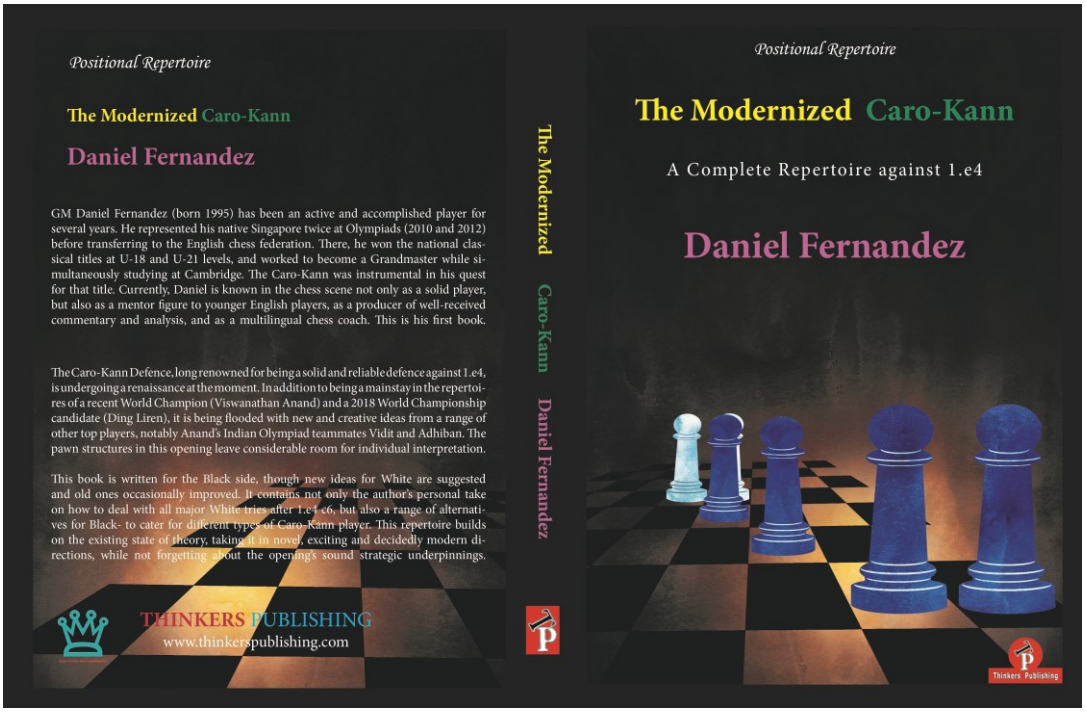
THINKERS PUBLISHING Announces a brand new publication:

The Modernized Caro-Kann

By Daniel Fernandez



This book is written for the Black side, though new ideas for White are suggested and old ones occasionally improved. It contains not only the author's personal take on how to deal with all major White tries after 1.e4 c6, but also a range of alternatives for Black- to cater for different types of Caro-Kann player. This repertoire builds on the existing state of theory, taking it in novel, exciting and decidedly modern directions, while not forgetting about the opening's sound strategic underpinnings.

The Caro-Kann Defence, long renowned for being a solid and reliable defence against 1.e4, is undergoing a renaissance at the moment. In addition to being a mainstay in the repertoires of a recent World Champion (Viswanathan Anand) and a 2018 World Championship candidate (Ding Liren), it is being flooded with new and creative ideas from a range of other top players, notably Anand's Indian Olympiad teammates Vidit and Adhiban. The pawn structures in this opening leave considerable room for individual interpretation.

Thinkers Publishing wishes you success on your lifelong journey of chess improvement!

GM Daniel Fernandez (born 1995) has been an active and accomplished player for several years. He represented his nativd Singapore twice at Olympiads (2010 and 2012) before transferring to the English chess federation. There, he won the national classical titles at U-18 and U-21 levels, and worked to become a Grandmaster while simultaneously studying at Cambridge. The Caro-Kann was instrumental in his quest for that title. Currently, Daniel is known in the chess scene not only as a solid player, but also as a mentor figure to younger English players, as a producer of well-received commentary and analysis, and as a multilingual chess coach. This is his first book.

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Table of Contents

Key to Symbols used 5
Introduction by the author 6
Aims of this book 7
Bibliography 13

PART I – Less common or critical attempts

1.e4 c6 2.--

Chapter 1 – Early minor lines 17
Chapter 2 – Two Knights main line 47
Chapter 3 – King's Indian Attack and Fantasy 73
Chapter 4 – Pseudo-Panov (2.c4) 91
Chapter 5 – Exchange and Panov-Botvinnik variations 109

PART II – Advance Variation

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5

Chapter 1 – Various White systems against 3…♗f5 (4.--) 147
Chapter 2 – Short system recommendation 1 (5…♘e7) 175
Chapter 3 – Short system recommendation 2 (5…c5) 197
Chapter 4 – 3…c5: The Arkell-Khenkin Variation 223
Chapter 5 – Annotated games for thematic structures in the Advance Caro 241

PART III – 4…♘d7 sidelines

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘d7

Chapter 1 – The 5.♗c4 system 259
Chapter 2 – Minor 5th moves 285
Chapter 3 – More challenging lines after 5.c3 305
Chapter 4 – Surprise weapons for Black after 5.♘g5 319

PART IV – 4…♘d7 main line

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘d7 5.♘g5 ♘gf6 6.♗d3 e6 7.♘gf3 ♗d6 8.♕e2 h6 9.♘e4 ♘xe4 10.♕xe4 ♕c7

Chapter 1 – An interesting White attempt: 11.a4!? 345
Chapter 2 – Main line with 14….♘f6 (and a reason for rejecting it) 357
Chapter 3 – Main line with Ding's improvement 14…♖d8! 379
Chapter 4 – Sightseeing along the Yellow Brick Road 399

Introduction to the Dynamic Caro-Kann

There are, broadly speaking, three different kinds of serious opening books entering the market these days. While making no value judgments about them, here they are:

1) **The encyclopaedia.** The author wants to dissect an entire opening, move by move, ending his or her variations only when the game enters tablebase territory. Densely packed with confusing variations and definitely not bedtime reading! It is impossible to fault their work ethic, but the long variations can be artificial at times, and are not memorable or conducive to nurturing real interest from the reader. That has to come from within.

Examples: anything by Boris Avrukh, Nikolaos Ntirlis, or Vassilios Kotronias.

2) **The BuzzFeed essay.** The author wants you to be captivated by their passion and dedication to their opening. The books carry bombastic titles and inside they are laden with anecdotes, references to creative processes that occurred in Soviet Ukraine in 1982, and the odd extremely brilliant improvement or line that merits instant inclusion into your repertoire.

Examples: Steamrolling the Sicilian by Sergey Kasparov; Tiger's Modern by (naturally) Tiger Hillarp Persson; The Flexible French by Viktor Moskalenko.

3) **The personal archive.** The author has almost certainly assembled the book exclusively from their existing analyses, which may date back a fair bit, but would prefer that you did not know this. The sentence "I prepared this in 2014 but then GM X played it and made me sad" is almost certain to come up. These books are like the previous type in that they can be full of unrecognised gems (and they repay the effort of sifting through to see which of their novelties are actually that special) but unlike the previous type, they tend to be written with an unmistakable undertone of professional rivalry.

Examples: anything by Negi Parimarjan or Milos Pavlovic.

Without intending any malice against any of the mentioned authors (I have learned something from all your books!) we should note that there are limitations to each of the approaches. My fellow Thinkers Publishing author Raja Panjwani, in his introduction to his The Hyper-Accelerated Dragon, distances himself from the "Darwinian angst" characterising the 3rd category of book, and succeeds in perching himself somewhere between the 2nd and 3rd categories above.

Aims of this book

In the book you are now holding in your hand, I intend to straddle not only two, but all three of the above categories, darting from rigorous theory to anecdote to jealously guarded novelty and then all the way back. The book is intensely personal, as befits an opening book about an opening I have played from both sides no less than 60 times over 8 years. Hopefully, this depth of experience has helped me to bring together these disparate ways of looking at the various lines into one coherent narrative.

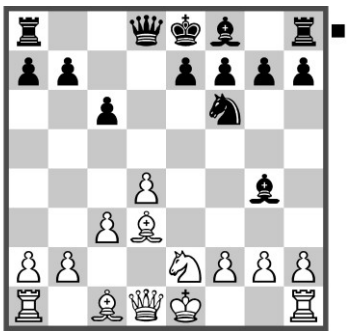
I have tried to write a one-of-a-kind book, overflowing with not only novelties but also plans, useful context and passion. The range of methods is quite astounding: I've used illustrative games (Chapter II.5) and ridiculous computer lines (subchapter IV.3.2), meshed together qualitative and objective evaluations, sometimes for the same position, and occasionally found some really great lines through trusting my gut feeling above the computer (subchapter I.5.5).

Regarding that last point, I would like to draw your attention to the following game, which provided me with an early taste of how the human mind can sometimes be better than the silicon one.

♙ Fernandez, Daniel (2367)
♟ Arkell, Keith (2434)
4NCL 2014

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘c3 dxe4 4. ♘xe4 ♘d7 5. c3 ♘gf6 6. ♘xf6+ ♘xf6 7. ♗d3 ♗g4 8. ♘e2

(see diagram on the right)



Position after: 8. ♘e2

This position is discussed at slightly greater length in chapter III.3.

Suffice it to say that this is inaccurate, because of the next note.

8... ♗xe2?!

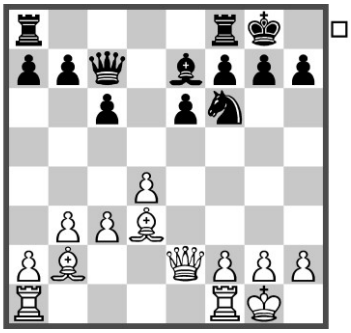
9. ♕xe2 e6 10. 0-0

10. f4!± exploits Black's lack of a bishop-pair in ideal fashion: White will force through f5 on the next move.

10... ♗e7 11. b3

11. f4 g6 12. f5?! is still possible as a piece sacrifice (!) because Black's pieces are stuck in awkward positions, but it is nowhere near as strong as on the previous move. 12... gxf5 13. ♗xf5 exf5 14. ♖xf5 ♘d5!∓

11... 0-0 12. ♗b2 ♕c7



Position after: 12... ♕c7

13. c4?!

Reflecting a serious gap in my understanding: now Black's regrouping proceeds as if on autopilot.

13... ♖fd8

This may be the wrong rook, because of the next note.

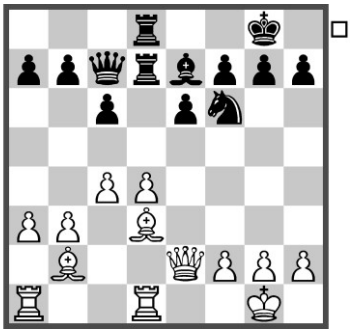
14. ♖fd1

'Forgiving' Black his previous move.

14. f4 g6 15. g4⇆ was necessary, in order to bust out of the positional headlock I am in.

14... ♖d7 15. a3 ♖ad8

This is what the computer would term an equal position, but in reality I think Black is already significantly better.



Position after: 15... ♖ad8

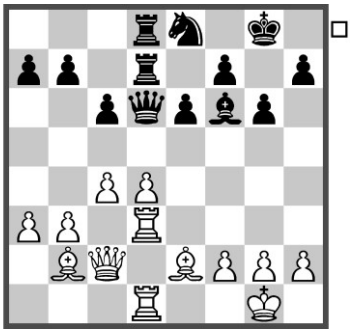
16. ♖ac1 ♕b8

A) 16... ♘e8 was the move Black probably wanted to play, but because of the c-file there is 17. d5!±.

B) 16... g6 was also possible immediately; not only does this create a square for the bishop or queen on g7 but also it shuts down White's d5-based tactics because there will no longer be ♗f5.

17. ♕c2 g6 18. ♗e2 ♘e8 19. ♖d3 ♗f6 20. ♖cd1 ♕d6!?

The beginning of a truly amazing concept, that I didn't understand until he played his next move. The queen is often found on c7 in the Caro-Kann, but here it takes a swing and winds up on... g7.



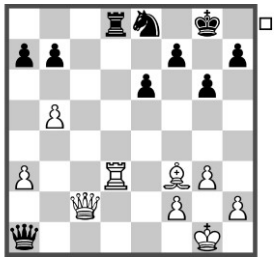
Position after: 20... ♕d6!?

21. g3 ♕f8 22. b4

22. ♗f3 ♕g7 23. ♕d2 is the computer's favoured method of playing but after a few more moves, beginning with 23... h5! it recognises that Black is in fact better. Note that Black can choose his moment to go ...c5, or avoid it completely.

22... ♕g7 23. ♕a4

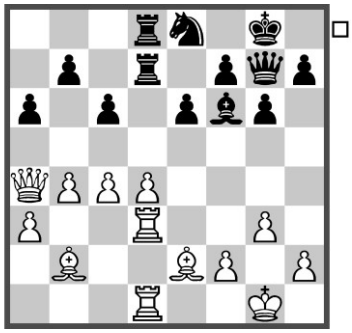
23. ♗f3 is the computer's opinion, but first of all, no human wants to give up d4 for free, and secondly, it just as quickly finds a line ending in Black's favour: 23... ♗xd4 24. ♗xd4 ♖xd4 25. b5 cxb5 26. cxb5 ♖xd3 27. ♖xd3 ♕a1+!



Position after: 27... ♕a1+!

Setting up tactics based on ...♕d5 forks. 28. ♔g2 ♕f6 29. ♖xd8 (29. ♗xb7 ♕f5!∓) 29... ♕xd8 30. ♗xb7 ♘d6 31. ♕c6 (31. ♗c6 ♘xb5!∓ is the point) 31... ♕b6 32. ♕xb6 axb6 33. ♗c6 ♘c4∓ Black has a superior endgame: White should probably sacrifice the a3-pawn right now for king activity but his king will have no way in and he will be restricted to grovelling for a draw while Black manoeuvres round with his extra pawn.

23... a6!



Position after: 23... a6!

Ensuring that White cannot make his pawn break without losing the d5-square.

24. b5 axb5 25. cxb5 cxb5 26. ♕xb5 ♘d6 27. ♕b4 ♘f5 28. ♗f3

White has pulled out all the stops in an effort to get counterplay against Black's b7-pawn and to open the position. However, it is, properly speaking, not enough for equality.

28... ♘xd4?!

This is hasty and throws away a perfectly good bind that gave winning chances. Of course, the machine doesn't 'get' this and thinks the move is fine, but it is possible to defuse all the tricks it finds for Black in the subsequent notes.

A) 28... ♘e7!?∓ was one possibility; Black occupies the d5-square, for which he has worked so hard, with his knight, and then regroups his queen and possibly one rook, so as to attack the d4-pawn from a more active angle.

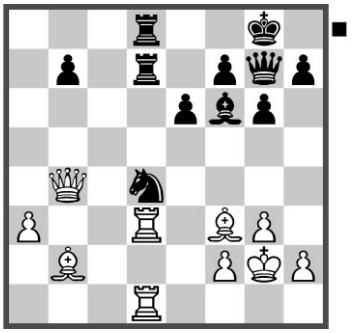
B) 28... ♕f8∓ was also good enough to maintain the edge; the idea is to play ...b6 next and hence stop that pawn from being a target.

29. ♔g2!

(see diagram next column)

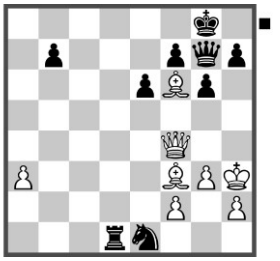
29... ♘c6

A) 29... b5 30. ♗xd4 ♗xd4 31. ♕xb5 e5 32. a4=



Position after: 29. ♔g2!

B) 29... ♘c2!? would have led to an entertaining set of desperado moves: 30. ♖xd7! ♖xd7 31. ♕f4 ♘e1+ 32. ♔h3! ♖xd1 33. ♗xf6!



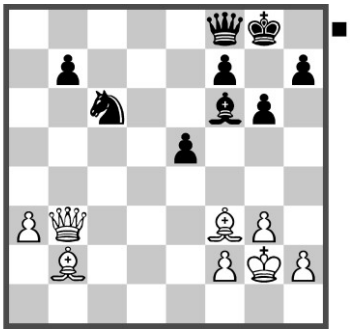
Position after: 33. ♗xf6!

33... e5!! 34. ♗xe5 (34. ♗xg7 exf4 35. ♗xd1 ♔xg7 36. gxf4 ♔f6∓) 34... ♘d3! 35. ♕e3! ♘xf2+!? (35... ♘xe5 36. ♗xd1 ♕f6=) 36. ♕xf2 ♕h6+ 37. ♔g2 ♖d2 38. ♗e2 ♖a2∞

30. ♖xd7 ♖xd7 31. ♕f4 e5?!

31... ♖xd1 was the last try: 32. ♗xf6 g5 33. ♗xg7 gxf4 34. ♗xd1 ♔xg7 35. ♗f3!=.

32. ♕a4 ♖xd1 33. ♕xd1 ♕f8 34. ♕b3



Position after: 34. ♕b3

White might even have a little something now, but I didn't feel like pushing my luck, and obviously while the pawn deficit remains it can all still rebound in my face. A close shave and a lesson well learned, even if it might not seem so superficially.

½-½

The grand old English maestro of the Caro-Kann clearly had a thing or two to teach me, and even to teach the computer. We will examine the line more closely in chapter III.3. This game was a great learning experience for me: never underestimate the power of understanding, especially in simple positions, or of the role of momentum in chess.

Momentum? Is this guy mad? Is this like some New Age, healing-crystal kind of chess analysis? Will he soon be talking about the hidden orchestra on the d3-square or the feng shui benefits of having your knights face each other at the start?

Not quite (though you will notice that a lot of good players have a knight-routine, and some have a bishop-routine too.) Momentum is a very real phenomenon that has most visible effects when, for instance, only one side has play, or a gambit is in the final stages of being neutralised.

Momentum is very much a qualitative concept, and as (to my mind as a seasoned computer analyst) a fairly uncontroversial example of the same, it has a place in a chess book. However, that being said, it is important to recognise and reinforce the line between qualitative observation ("Only White can be better because of his control of the c5-square") and subjective nonsense ("I would prefer to play White because he has a knight against a bishop).

The former attempts to balance out actual pros and cons, albeit in simplistic fashion, while the latter might as well be "Black is better because his back is to the bar so he won't be distracted."

My stylistic choices as a writer – and how you should use them as a reader

There is, however, a legitimate use of bias in writing, which is a second-hand one: deciding where to give alternatives. For instance, I dislike accepting gambits, if I have another choice of comparable quality; or entering IQP positions. Hence for both the completeness of my own repertoire and the retention of academic integrity in this book, I have tried very hard to give alternatives to doing either of those things.

Likewise, I very much enjoy messy positions, particularly when the pieces left dangling en prise are not my own, or they exist merely on a computer screen. Therefore, to avoid giving only lines which are 'easy to recommend but hard to play' I have consciously corrected for my own tendency and given alternatives in many such positions.

Due to the addition of such alternatives, as well as the historically relevant lines and annotated games, there are a number of chapters which are surplus to requirements for forming a repertoire (II.5, III.4, IV.4) and two others that can be omitted if you make certain choices (III.2, IV.3). However, I do think they are worth the time of at least a majority of Caro-Kann players, else I would not have written them.

One place where I may have been lax in the provision of alternatives is in the use of pronouns: he/she/they and the associated genitive forms his/her/their. Please do not take offence if I have lazily written just the male forms: I wouldn't take offence if a different author wrote 'her' all the time, and after all this is primarily a chess book!

So as not to alienate the rare White player who has picked up this volume, I should point out that there are some quite interesting White bits in here, even if I don't consider them to get any objective advantage (IV.1, III.3, parts of I.1), in addition to a number of strong replies that may prove useful to you: the act of explaining why something hasn't been chosen for Black is perfectly sufficient as a guide to playing the same rebuttal from the White side.

Administratively, I have tried to organise the book into Parts, as outlined in the contents. References to other places within the book are always within the same Part, so that they are completely self-contained. So, for instance, if in II.3.2 you saw a reference to 'line 5.3', this means II.5.3. The numbering system is straight-forward: the Part number is followed by a chapter number and then a subchapter number. There are no divisions within subchapters, and certainly no confusing codes like 'B235b294'.

It remains to let you get on with studying my favourite opening. I don't promise equality (largely a nebulous concept anyway), or that the book is comprehensive (exhaustive opening books are a myth, though I have tried and some try even harder), but I do promise you an interesting ride!

Daniel Fernandez
Budapest
February 2018

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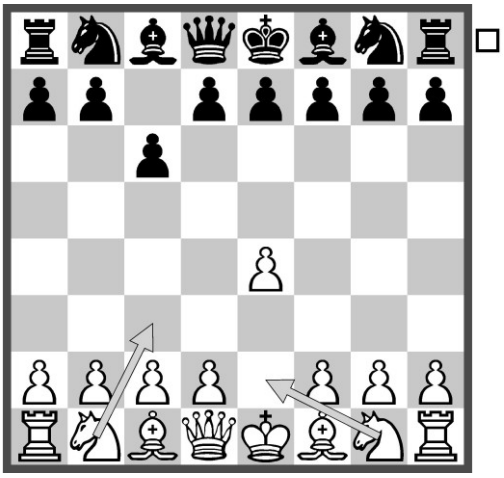
Part I:

Less common or critical attempts

Early minor lines

1.e4 c6 2.--



Chapter guide

Chapter 1 – Early minor lines

1.e4 c6

1.1) 2.♘e2 and others 20

1.2) 2.♘c3 d5 minor lines (3.♕f3!?, 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘e4 5.♗e2!?) 23

1.3) 2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘e4 5.♗e2 ♗f5! 26

1.4) An extra option! ..... **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

1.5) 2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘e4 5.d4..... **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

1.6) 2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘e4 5.♘e2 ♕b6 6.d4 e6 7.♘g3. **Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**

Introduction to Chapter 1

Every book needs to tackle its loose ends, either at the start or at the end. As you can see, I have gone for the former approach, but I have split the material over three chapters. In the present one, I begin by tackling the "deservedly minor yet still noteworthy" options, and I am aided in doing this by the fact that after 1…c6 it is possible to 'premove' 2…d5.

It is possible to spend rather too much time on this kind of thing; therefore, I shall not preoccupy myself with 2.♘a3, 2.h4 and so on. Instead, after some remarks on 2.b3 and 2.♘e2, which have been tried on occasion by some rather good players, we turn our attention to a relatively major system, which is characterised by White playing his knights to c3 and f3 in one order or another.

One of my most important findings in the Two Knights' System was that White's often-neglected option 5.♗e2 is actually rather dangerous. I believe myself to have found equality against it, but the task was not easy, and supporters of both colours should take note.

Line 1.6) then takes us a bit further along the path to the main line which will form the basis of the next chapter, turning off with 7.♘g3 rather than the now-famous 7.♘fg1…

1.1) 2.♘e2 and others

1. e4 c6 2. ♘e2!?

An interesting line, favoured by quite a few top players. It seems to me the rationale behind the move is to try and get some sort of Advance or Tarrasch French position a tempo up (because Black has taken two tempi to play ...c5). We are not going to trouble ourselves with 2.♘a3, 2. ♘h3 and other random things, but there are two quite minor moves that are nevertheless somewhat intelligent and have been recommended in books before.

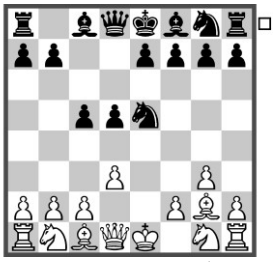
A) 2. b3!? d5 3. ♗b2 dxe4

Position after: 3... dxe4

A1) 4. ♘c3 is better, but more conciliatory and hence less popular. It should be met by a normal developing scheme: 4... ♘f6 5. ♘ge2 ♗f5 6. ♘g3 e6 7. ♕e2 ♘bd7 8. ♘gxe4 ♗e7= for instance and now Black has the option to initiate play on the queenside with ...♕c7 and either ...a5 or ...b5.

A2) 4. ♕e2 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 ♗g4! Forcing White to walk into a later ...♘d5. 6. ♕e3 ♗f5 7. h3 ♘d5!? (7... ♘bd7 as recommended by Houska is also fine- that text follows the game Tu, H – Ni, H Ho Chi Minh City 2014, which Black won in thematic fashion.) 8. ♘xd5 cxd5 9. ♘e2 ♘d7∓ It is not even clear to me how White intends to try and regain the pawn.

B) 2. g3 d5 3. e5 c5 Now White's f4-systems will be dealt with under 2.f4 d5 3.e5 in chapter 3, but independent is 4. ♗g2 ♘c6 5. d3!? (5. ♘f3 ♗g4∓) 5... ♘xe5



Position after: 5... ♘xe5

I am reluctant to recommend ...g6 as then f4! leaves our repertoire; or ...e6 as it closes in the c8-bishop. However, either move is of course playable if Black does not wish to allow a repetition. 6. ♕h5 ♕c7 7. ♗f4 ♕a5+ 8. ♔f1 (8. ♘c3 ♘g6=; 8. ♗d2 ♕c7 is an immediate draw by repetition) 8... ♘g6 9. ♗d2 ♕c7 10. ♕xd5 ♘f6 11. ♕b3 ♖b8= Black has fully equalised.

C) 2. ♘f3 d5 3. exd5 cxd5 4. ♘e5

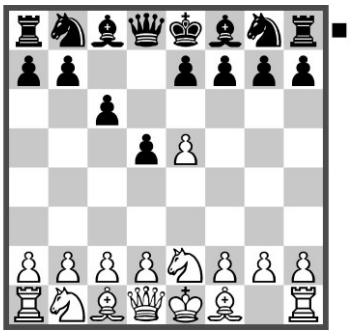
Position after: 4. ♘e5

This is a minor third line. White admits that the position is equal, but tries to introduce some imbalance into it by winning the bishop pair. The move has been chosen by Carlsen. Black can react in various ways, including: 4... e6 5. ♗b5+ (5. d4 ♘c6 6. ♗b5 a6 7. ♘xc6 ♕c7 8. ♗a4 ♗d7=) 5... ♘d7 6. d4 a6 7. ♗d3 (7. ♗xd7+ ♗xd7 8. 0-0 ♖c8=) 7... ♘xe5 8. dxe5 ♘e7 9. 0-0 ♗d7=.

2... d5

2... e5!? is also good, for once, but it does not belong in a Caro-Kann book.

3. e5



Position after: 3. e5

3... c5

This is the main line, and I find it to be playable but not in the conventional way.

A) 3... f6 4. d4 g6 5. f4↑ might be computer-sanctioned for Black, but isn't clever

B) 3... d4!? Leading to interesting play, and most importantly not giving White the kind of game he was after. The key thing to remember is to play ...c5, if possible, and attack the e5-pawn; typically with the queen but maybe the knight or bishop. 4. b4 (4. c3 c5 5. b4 ♕d5!=) 4... a5 5. ♗b2 axb4 6. ♘xd4 ♕d5= Black was doing well and eventually won in Abergel, T – Svane, R Germany 2014.

4. d4 ♘c6!

4... cxd4?! 5. ♘xd4 ♘c6 6. c4 e6 7. ♘c3 ♗c5 (7... ♘ge7?!

Position after: 7... ♘ge7?!

8. ♘db5! is an opening trap known at least since Hillarp Persson, T – Willemze, T Hoogeveen 2007, which con-

tinued 8... ♘xe5 9. ♕a4 ♘7c6 10. cxd5 exd5 11. ♘xd5 ♗d6 12. ♗e3→) 8. ♘xc6 bxc6 9. cxd5 cxd5 10. b4 ♗f8 Reached by Keith Arkell in 3 of his Black games, and the position certainly appears robust at first glance, but there are concrete problems with Black's position.

5. c3 ♗f5

A) 5... cxd4 6. cxd4 ♗f5 7. ♘bc3 e6 8. a3 ♘ge7 9. ♘g3 ♗g6 10. h4! h6 11. h5 ♗h7 12. ♗d3 ♗xd3 13. ♕xd3± Black is very short of ideas, even if he also has relatively few immediate problems. If he could swap off one pair of knights he would be fine.

B) 5... ♗g4 was chosen by Anand and is a perfectly valid move too.

6. dxc5!?

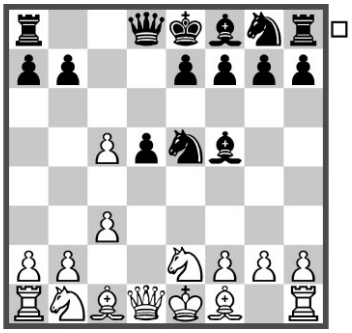
6. ♘g3 ♗g6 7. h4 e6! is fine for Black, e.g. 8. h5 ♗xb1 9. ♖xb1 cxd4N (9... h6± Polster, W – Solozhenkin, E ICC INT 2000) 10. ♗b5 ♘ge7!?⇆

6... ♘xe5!

(see diagram next column)

To my mind, the only thing one has to remember about 2.♘e2.

6... e6 is played far more often but runs into concrete problems.

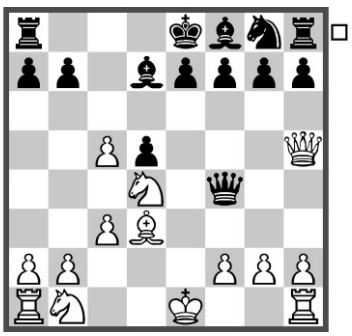


Position after: 6... ♘xe5!

7. ♘d4

7. ♘g3 ♗c8 8. b4 ♘f6= It is almost sacrilege to end a variation on move 8, but here there is really not a lot to say until more games are played. To my mind, Black is completely fine.

7... ♗d7 8. ♕h5 ♕b8 9. ♗f4 ♘d3+ 10. ♗xd3 ♕xf4=



Position after: 10... ♕xf4=

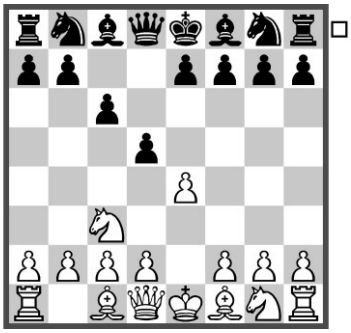
Black had equalised in Sedina, E – Botta, G Lugano 2011.

1.2) 2.♘c3 d5 minor lines (3.♕f3!?, 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘e4 5.♗e2!?)

1. e4 c6 2. ♘c3

Undoubtedly the most mainstream of the ideas I have filed into chapter 1, and it is with this move that we shall chiefly occupy ourselves in this chapter. As (almost) always, Black plays 2...d5.

2... d5

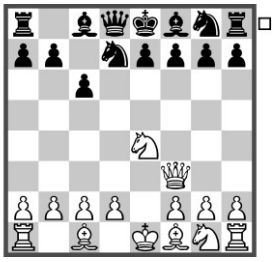


Position after: 2... d5

3. ♘f3

The famous Two Knights system.

3. ♕f3 An interesting minor system, noticed and then developed further by my friend FM Marcus Harvey. The main point is that after ...d4 White plays ♗c4 and ♘ce2, and we obtain some kind of strange Closed Sicilian. 3... dxe4 (3... d4 4. ♗c4 e6 5. ♘ce2 c5 6. ♕g3 is not all that comfortable for Black, particularly if you have never seen it before or played the Sicilian.) 4. ♘xe4 ♘d7



Position after: 4... ♘d7

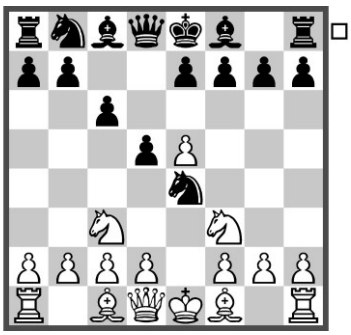
I am aware that this is the most boring recommendation I could have made- not trying to treat ♕f3 as anything different but just continuing with the normal scheme of development. White will find nothing better than d4 and c3 setups, which will lead us right back to the 5.♕e2 lines in Part III. One independent try: 5. b3!? ♘gf6 6. ♗b2 ♘xe4 7. ♕xe4 ♘f6 8. ♕e5!? Else ...♗f5. 8... ♕d5 (8... g6 9. 0-0-0 ♗g7 10. ♖e1↑ has the potential to be slightly uncomfortable) 9. ♘f3 ♕xe5+ 10. ♘xe5 ♗f5=

3... ♘f6

White players of this system tend to enjoy their bishop pair (the 3...♗g4 lines) and it is not clear to me how good the small centre is if White refuses to go d4 himself.

3... ♗g4 4. h3 ♗xf3 5. ♕xf3 e6 6. ♕g3 Posing small and strange problems to Black's development. I played in more or less approved fashion: 6... ♘f6 7. d3 b5 8. a3 g6 but after 9. ♗e2 White was more comfortable and eventually won a topsy-turvy encounter in McShane, L – Fernandez, D London 2015.

4. e5 ♘e4



Position after: 4... ♘e4

5. ♗e2!?

One of the biggest surprises of this book was just how tough it was to crack this unassuming White 5th move.

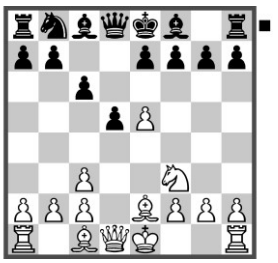
A) 5. ♘xe4 dxe4 6. ♘g5 ♕d5= leaves Black with an easy life as in Li, R – Smirnov, A Saint Louis 2017; White is virtually compelled to release the central tension with d4 or d3.

B) 5. d3 ♘xc3 6. bxc3 c5= leaves White with a position where d4 would be a waste of time, but it isn't quite a KIA either.

5... e6?!

Appears most solid, and it is useful to examine this first, for the lines that come later.

5... ♘xc3 is logical, but my feeling is this does not actually equalise. 6. dxc3



Position after: 6. dxc3

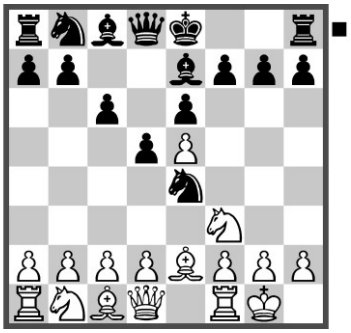
A) 6... ♗g4?! 7. h3 ♗xf3 8. ♗xf3 e6 9. 0-0 ♘d7 10. ♕e2± was the starting point of my previous investigations; however I concluded that Black seems to lack concrete ways to play and the momentum is clearly with White. Both f4 plans and c4/cxd5/c4 plans are possible, and both are annoying.

B) 6... g6 7. h4! Black now essentially has to commit to an h-pawn move, and neither of them is particularly desirable. 7... h5 (7... h6?! 8. ♘d4!?→; 7... ♗g7 8. h5 ♗g4± is ultimately nowhere near as terrible as it looks, but that isn't saying much.) 8. ♘d4 ♗g7 9. e6 0-0! 10. exf7+ ♖xf7 11. ♗e3!± Either ♘f3-g5 or simply g4 will follow soon.

6. 0-0 ♗e7

6... c5 7. ♘b5! a6 8. d3!± gets an advantage for White, but only because Black is only attacking b5 once...

7. ♘b1!



Position after: 7. ♘b1!

Black is faced with a slightly awkward choice.

7... 0-0

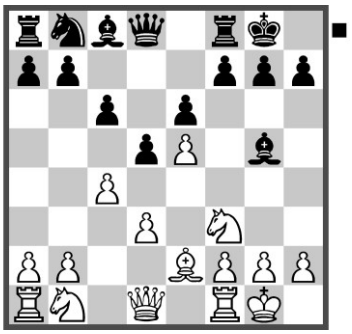
A) 7... f6 8. d3 ♘c5 (8... ♘g5 9. ♘xg5 fxg5 10. c4±) 9. exf6 ♗xf6 10. d4± Arribas Lopez, A – Solaesa Navalpotro, L Madrid 2015.

B) 7... h6 8. d3 (8. h4?!∓ might appear to be an interesting gambit line but is met by the geometrically appealing ...♕b6! threatening ... ♘g3 and hence obligating White to play d4.) 8... ♘g5 9. ♘fd2 0-0 10. c4 f6 11. f4 ♘h7 12. ♘f3±

8. d3 ♘g5 9. ♗xg5

9. ♘e1 f6!=

9... ♗xg5 10. c4±

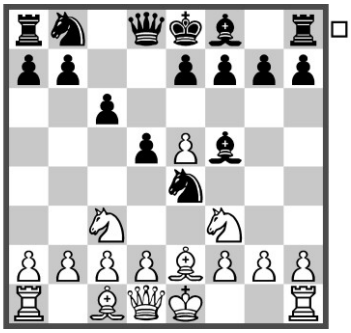


Position after: 10. c4±

The strategic battle is by no means over and Black has a big trump in the form of the bishop pair, but his lack of space is very noticeable.

1.3) 2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘e4 5.♗e2 ♗f5!

1. e4 c6 2. ♘c3 d5 3. ♘f3 ♘f6 4. e5 ♘e4 5. ♗e2!? ♗f5!



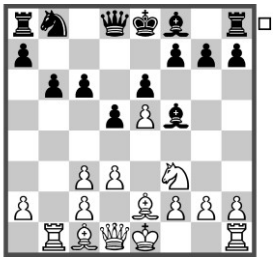
Position after: 5... ♗f5!

Almost by a process of elimination. In the main line, White pushes this bishop back, and it is instructive to see why it is better on d7 than c8.

6. ♘h4!

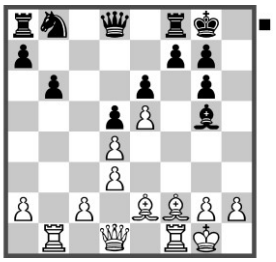
A) 6. ♘b1 e6 now fails to bother Black, who will get a position from the French (...♘c5-d7, ...c5, ...♘c6) but with the light-squared bishop outside. For instance: 7. 0-0 ♗e7 8. d3 ♘c5 9. ♗e3 ♘cd7 10. d4 (10. c4 dxc4 11. dxc4 c5=) 10... 0-0 11. ♘bd2 c5 12. c3 ♘c6=

B) 6. d3 ♘xc3 7. bxc3 e6 8. ♖b1 b6 leads to considerable tempo gains but is ultimately harmless. White should now continue with the f4-f5 push, or else his position makes no sense.



Position after: 8... b6

9. 0-0 ♗e7 10. ♘d4 ♗g6 11. f4 c5! 12. f5! cxd4 13. fxg6 hxg6 14. cxd4 0-0 (14... ♗g5!? 15. c4! ♗xc1 16. ♖xc1 ♕h4 leads to a mess, but White is better in a standard game between good players...) 15. ♗e3 ♗g5 16. ♗f2=



Position after: 16. ♗f2=

White's queenside is rather weak and Black has more strategic ideas at his disposal, so even as a fan of the slow effect of the bishop pair, I would prefer to be Black.

C) 6. 0-0 e6 7. d4 ♗e7 8. ♘xe4 ♗xe4 9. ♗d3 0-0 10. ♗e3 ♗xd3 11. ♕xd3 ♘d7= is not particularly critical and Black will get in ...c5 next.