

STRATEGIC GOALS OF THE CARO-KANN

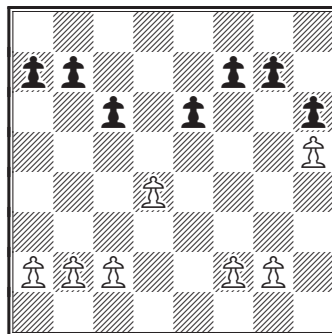
Black's goals in the Caro-Kann Defense are to contest the center and to develop without creating major weaknesses. First of all, Black will develop pieces as quickly as possible. As White's pawns advance further up the board they become possible liabilities in the endgame. Therefore Black should always keep in mind the technique of exchanging pieces, which not only reduces White's attacking possibilities but also leads to favorable endgames.

White should take control of the center immediately with 2.d4 and develop pieces as quickly as possible in order to gain control of space. There are two basic strategies: kingside attack and central breakthrough. I go into greater detail about those strategies in the section on Typical Strategies and Tactics.

PAWN STRUCTURE

Pawn structure is of paramount importance in all of the variations of the Caro-Kann. Each variation has its own particular structure, so we'll consider each of them in a separate section. The following diagram show only the pawns.

Classical Structure

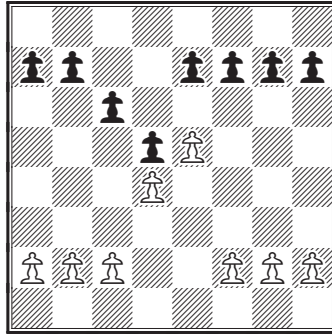


You can see at a glance why the Caro-Kann appeals to endgame

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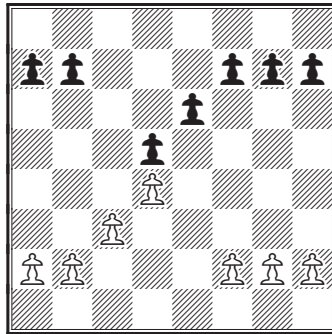
players! White has a weak pawn at h5 and lacks an e-pawn to enable a central breakthrough. White has a little more space and mustn't be allowed to get the king to d6.

Advance Structure



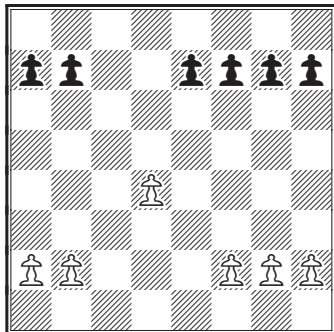
The situation in this structure is quite different from the previous example. White's pawn on e5 guarantees that a very substantial advantage is space. At the same time, however, the center can be undermined by ...f6 and ...c5.

Exchange Structure



The semi-open c- and e-files define the contour of the middlegame and endgames in the Exchange Variation. White can take control of the center and advance the f-pawn to f5. Black can use a minority attack, advancing the b-pawn to b4 to weaken White's pawn structure. Those advances often provide the opponent with tactical opportunities, so they must be used very carefully.

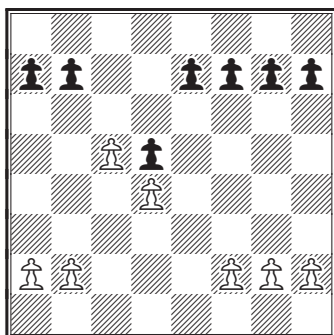
Panov Structure



The endgame looks wonderful for Black if you strip away all the pieces! The isolated pawn at d4 is pathetically weak and in most cases the king and pawn endgame is a simple win for Black. Life is not so simple, however. Black has no presence in the center of the board, and White pieces will have great freedom to move around. The key to the normal Panov structure is piece placement. This subject is covered in the next part of the book.

Before we leave the Panov pawn structure, there is one more important formation to consider. Sometimes White advances the c-pawn to c5 early in the game. This is the Advanced Panov structure.

Advanced Panov Structure



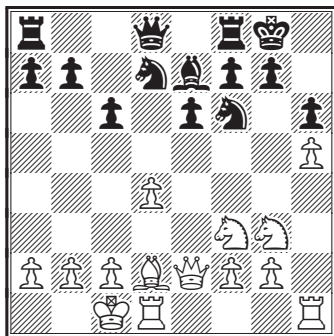
This structure usually works well for Black if ...e5 can be played. That is not easy to achieve, especially in our repertoire, which stations a bishop at e6, blocking the pawn. You will see in the game Einarsson vs. Schiller, however, that there are plenty of resources for Black.

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PIECE PLACEMENT

Where should your pieces be positioned for maximum efficiency in the Caro-Kann? This question cannot be answered generally, because each of the structures in the last section requires a different answer. This time we'll put all the pieces on the board.

Classical Structure



King

The King should be castled on the kingside, usually after all the minor pieces have been developed, but before the rooks or queen move. You should leave it at g8, rather than sending it to the h-file, because, in the endgame, proximity to the center is important. You want to be able to get your king to d5 as quickly as possible.

Queen

The queen should not be developed until it can perform a genuinely useful function. The queen can be developed to a5, b6, c7. Try to exchange queens early to get to endgames where the d-pawn can be weak. One way to do this is with the maneuver ...Qd5-e4, when those squares are safe for occupation.

Rooks

Usually we want to station our rooks on open files, but here there aren't any. Black can use the semi-open d-file, which can become open if White plays Ne5 and Black exchanges and lures the d-pawn from d4 to e5. The role of the rooks in the Caro-Kann is generally to support pawn advances, especially from c6 to c5.

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Bishops

In the Classical lines, the light squared bishop usually leaves the board pretty quickly. We want to keep our dark squared bishop, so that it can patrol critical dark squares, especially d6, c5, and e5. If White plays c3, then Black will have a better bishop in the endgame. Remember, the pawns guard the light squares, while the bishop and knights are responsible for the dark squares.

Knights

In the Caro-Kann Defense, the Black knights are quickly placed on d7 and f6. The knight at d7 guards e5, and helps prepare the liberating advance of the c-pawn to c5. The knight at f6 keeps an eye on the key central squares e4 and d5. Black usually has a least one knight in the endgame, and pure knight endings are quite common.

Pawns

Black has an excellent pawn structure; the only hole is at d6 and White has temporary control of e5. Otherwise there is nothing to worry about. The advance of White's g-pawn to g5 is a potential attacking threat, but it rarely can be used effectively.

The **a-pawn** can be advanced to a5 as part of a queenside attack, or to secure the b4-square. This is especially effective when White is castled on the queenside, which is usually the case.

The **b-pawn** can only advance at the cost of weakening c6. In rare cases, when White has placed a pawn or piece at c3, it can be used as an attacking weapon at b4. In exceptional cases, the pawn goes to b5 to challenge a White pawn at c4, with the idea of freeing d5 for use by a knight.

The goal of the **c-pawn** is c5, where it can be exchanged for White's d-pawn. Then the c-file can be used for an attack.

The **d-pawn** is always absent in the Classical Caro-Kann.

The **e-pawn** advances to e6 and remains there for most of the game. It can play a significant role in the endgame. Sometimes Black will advance it to e5 to confront the White d-pawn.

Don't move the **f-pawn**! It must stay in place to defend the castled king. In some very rare cases ...f5 may be necessary, but keep in mind that the backward pawn at e6 will be very weak.

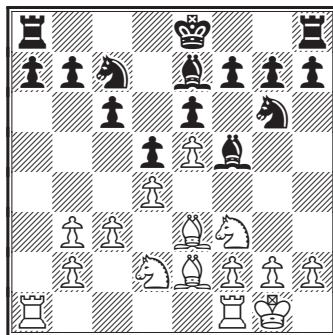
The **g-pawn** does not move unless forced to do so in reaction to a direct threat. In the endgame it may play a significant role, but in the middlegame any advance will weaken important dark squares.

With plenty of defense available on the kingside, pushing the **h-**

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pawn to h6 does not create a major weakness.. It eliminates back-rank threats by making a little breathing space for the king. In some cases, a knight uses the h7-square to pivot from f6 to g5.

Advance Structure



In a typical Advance subject, White has greater freedom of movement and better coordination of the minor pieces. The dark squared bishop is potentially bad, and Black has nothing to fear from direct attacks. In this endgame position, White enjoys pressure on the a-file but can only use a valuable rook to maintain control of it. Black can aim for ...c5 after castling on the kingside.

King

The King stays in the center for a while, but must inevitably castle to coordinate the rooks. Kingside castling is normal. Sometimes the king sits comfortably at d7, and Black should consider this possibility before castling. In the endgame, the king may wish to operate on the queenside.

Queen

White doesn't have any useful role for the queen, so often both queens are developed at b3 and b6. After the exchange, a true endgame may still be far away, as the rest of the army can remain on the board for a long time.

Rooks

In the endgame variation, White will keep one rook on the a-file and use the other one to support action in the center. With no open files, Black has no immediate plans for the rooks. As long as White has

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a rook at a1, a Black rook at a8 is useful. The other rook can come to c8, in support of an eventual advance of the c-pawn.

Bishops

The light squared bishop remains on the b1-h7 diagonal for most of the game. The dark squared bishop operates in the center, where all of the dark squares are important.

Knights

In this variation, the knights present an awkward problem. They do not find their way to the most natural squares. One winds up at c7, where it cannot support the advance of the c-pawn and even blocks a rook at c8. There is no easy way to reposition it to a more useful post. Yet it provides a great deal of support, covering b5, e6, and d5. If White plays c4, Black may be able to get the knight to d5 by playing ...dxc4 and ... b5.

Pawns

The **a-pawn** advances in the positions with the queens on the board, but in the endgame variation it should stay at a7, protected by the rook at a8. The advance to a6 may be forced in some positions, but going to a5 is risky unless you have potential control of a4 and a3.

The **b-pawn** stays in place until its advance will achieve some clear goal. If Black wants to play ...a6, the support of the b-pawn is essential. In some circumstances, the pawn will advance to b5 in support of ...c5, or to attack an enemy pawn at c4.

Getting your **c-pawn** to c5 is your key strategic goal. Then you can play ...cxd4 and White will have to accept either doubled and isolated b-pawns or a weak pawn at e5.

The **d-pawn** is rock solid. If White plays c4, you can consider capturing, since although it undoubles the pawns, it also gives you a juicy target at d4. Don't do this if White can quickly play d5!

The **e-pawn** isn't going anywhere.

The **f-pawn** can advance to f6 as part of a plan to destroy White's center. For this to work, you need pressure at c5 and e5, and the knight at c7 just isn't well placed to support this. If you feel the e-pawn will be safe at e6, even after your bishop at f5 is removed, then it is a plan worth considering.

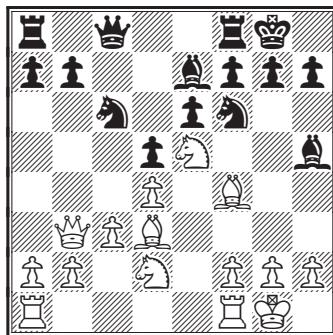
The **g-pawn** is stuck in place, which is just as well, since moving it will only get you into trouble.

The **h-pawn** is best left alone unless you have some significant

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reason to advance it to h6 or f5. Sometimes you may do this to bring the bishop back to h7.

Exchange Structure



King

The King should be castled on the kingside as soon as possible. It would be most unsafe on the queenside, since White can easily blast open the c-file with c4.

Queen

The queen sometimes gets into the game at b6 or a5, but often it must rest, at least temporarily, at c8. This mere defensive role is not permanent, however. In major piece endgames the queen can move to c6 and exert her powerful influence on the queenside.

Rooks

The placement of the rooks is one of the trickiest questions in chess, and in the Caro-Kann both sides must wrestle with this difficult puzzle. It is clear that rooks should be on the c-, d-, and e-files as these files are either open or contain a weak target pawn. Unfortunately, each side has only two rooks, and three files are therefore one too many. The queen can help out, but often she is off on other errands. Careful study of the illustrative games will give you a good idea of the possibilities.

Bishops

Bishops are a pleasure to deal with in the Caro-Kann. Both bishops have an easy time developing.

The dark-squared bishop belongs at e7, and even if it has to capture a White pawn at c5 (a result of d4xc5), it often retreats to e7 when

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attacked. The c-file is no place for a bishop, since it can be attacked by Rc1, Qc2, Na4, or Ne4.

The bishop that starts the game at c8 is often known as a “bad” bishop in the Queen’s Gambit Declined because 2...e6 limits its powers. In the Caro-Kann, however, the e-pawn is usually removed by an early central exchange, and the bishop can be stationed at e6, in defense of the center, or at g4, attacking either a knight at f3 or a pawn at e2. When supported by a queen at d7 or c8, the bishop can also go to h3 to attack an enemy bishop at g2. The bishop sometimes goes to f5, usually to attack a White knight at e4.

The light-squared bishop should only sit at e6 if the defense of the pawn at d5 is essential. This is usually the result of an error on Black’s part, since passive defense is not part of the strategy of the Tarrasch. If the Black pawn has advanced from d5 to d4, however, then a bishop at e6 enjoys a wide perspective on both sides of the board and can be quite strong.

Knights

In the Exchange Variation, your Black knights are quickly placed on c6 and f6, and these are their best positions, keeping pressure at d4 and e4. The role of the knights is to control the center.

Pawns

You can advance the **a-pawn** up the board as long as you have sufficient support from your pieces. The aim of that strategy is to gain some space.

The **b-pawn** requires support to advance, and can weaken valuable squares on the c-file by doing so. Move it only if you can achieve some concrete strategic goal. For example, if you have a pawn at b5, you can play your knight to a5 and then c4.

There can be a **pawn at c6** if White exchanges knights there. In this case the pawn should advance to c5 as quickly as possible.

The **d-pawn** stays in place unless White plays c5, then you capture and move your knight to d5. In some rare circumstances, you might play ...Ne4 and if White captures, you will use the d-pawn to recapture.

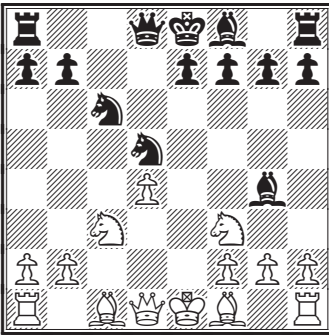
The **e-pawn** is cemented in place and only your opponent can make it move. Even if White advances the f-pawn to f5, it is often wise to let the capture take place at e6. One strategy for Black is to try to attack the White center with ...f6, but that is very hard to achieve as the a2-g8 becomes very weak. The plan is better in an endgame when you have a king at d6.

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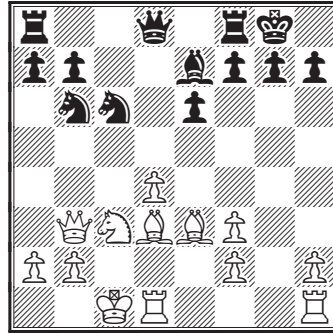
The **g-pawn** does not move.

The **h-pawn** should stay where it is, unless there is a compelling reason to advance it to h6.

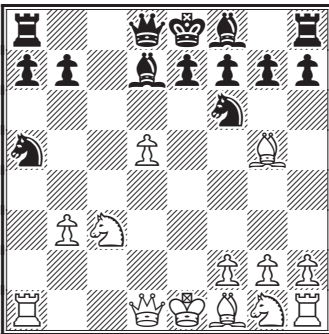
PANOV STRUCTURES



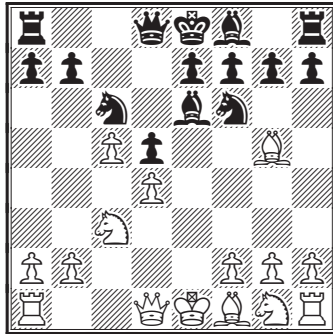
Relaxed Panov



Fractured Kingside Panov



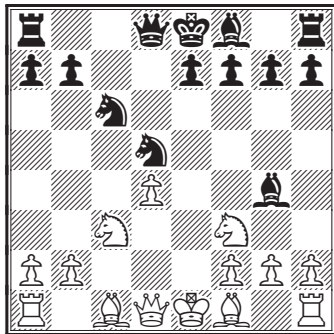
Gambit Panov



Advance Panov

There are four important Panov structures used in this repertoire. The first diagram shows what I call the Relaxed Panov structure. The second, which is a later development of the first, is the Fractured Kingside Panov. The third is the Gambit Panov structure. The final structure is the Advance Panov, characterized by a White pawn at c5. This strategy is comparatively rare in the lines we have chosen for Black, but one should be well prepared to meet it because it is easy to fall into a bad position.

Relaxed Panov



King

The king belongs safely castled on the kingside. Development is important, and you should try to move your king to safety. If the knight leaves c6, then checks on the a4-e8 diagonal can be annoying.

Queen

The queen tends to remain on the d-file, so that after an exchange of knights at d5, the queen can be used to recapture.

Rooks

The placement of the rooks must await White's castling decision. In any case it is useful to have a rook at c8. The other rook can go to e8 or d8 as needed.

Bishops

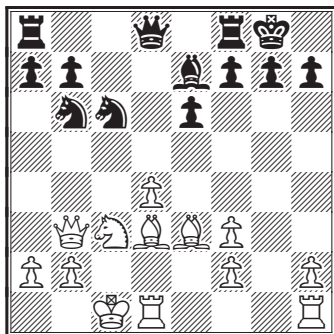
The light bishop usually exchanges itself for an enemy knight at f3, but only when White must recapture with the g-pawn. Otherwise, if harassed by the h-pawn, it retreats. The other bishop usually goes to e7, but may come to d6, b4, or capture a piece at c5.

Knights

Knights belong at c6 and d5 in this line. Keeping pressure on the isolated pawn at d4, and impeding the advance of that pawn, are high priorities for Black.

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Fractured Kingside Panov



King

The king is already castled in this variation.

Queen

The queen again stays on the d-file, within sight of e5, but can sometimes shift to c7 and work on the dark squares.

Rooks

The c-file invites one rook, and the other often goes to e8 so that White cannot, with the exchange by a trick on the g-file in combination with a bishop at h6. Often Black can consider sacrificing the exchange in this case.

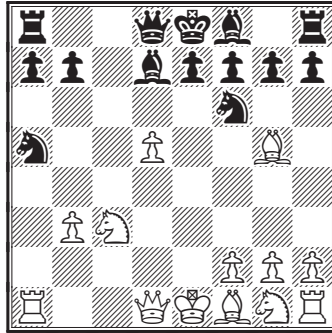
Bishop

The bishop needs to be available for defensive duties at f6 or f8, but if there is not much action on the g-file, can sometimes go to d6 to work on the f4-square.

Knights

The knights should operate on the queenside, and are a major component of the attacking force.

Gambit Panov



King

The king isn't going anywhere soon! Keeping the king safe is one of the most important strategic considerations in this line.

Queen

The queen must stay near home to guard the king, but can sometimes quickly take up an active post at b6.

Rooks

One rook goes to c8. The other has to find some roundabout method of entering the game. In this illustrative game, it never moves at all!

Bishops

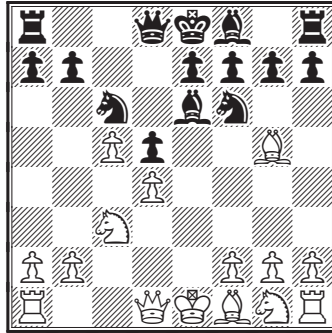
The bishops will eventually see action on the queenside, but early in the game their roles are mostly defensive.

Knights

The knights often depart early in the game. Black, a pawn up, wants to exchange minor pieces whenever possible.

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Advance Panov



King

The king would like to seek shelter on the kingside, but in many lines this is not possible, so a prolonged stay in the center is possible.

Queen

The queen is part of the defensive team here and should not go out on excursions.

Rooks

The rooks tend to stay in place, unless Black castles.

Bishops

At some point the bishop on e6 will want to relocate, to f5 or g4 in most cases. The other bishop will get into the game after White exchanges the bishop at g5 for the knight at f6, which is often seen.

Knights

One knight will be used on the queenside, while the other is likely to be captured at f6. If White fails to capture, the knight can take up an active post at e4.

TYPICAL STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

In this section we examine typical strategic and tactical devices available to both sides. These patterns can often turn up in the early middlegame, so it is a good idea to pay close attention to these positions as well as those you encounter as you work your way through the illustrative games.

Only a small number of key ideas are shown here. Throughout the illustrative games and in the Heroes chapter you will meet additional important strategies and tactics that can serve as your middlegame weapons.

TACTICS FOR BLACK

Black is usually playing for an attack on the queenside if White castles there. A different form of queenside play is the minority attack, where you advance the b-pawn against a White pawn at c3. Finally, your most important weapon is a transition into a favorable endgame.

Queenside Attack

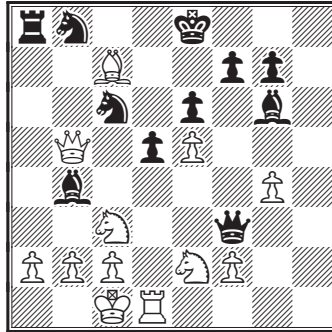
The standard queenside attack can take many forms, but the underlying idea is always the same. Create some weakness in the queenside pawn structure, then bring as many pieces as possible into the attack. Jon Speelman shows the spectacular side of the Caro-Kann by crashing through the queenside pawn barrier.

NIJBOER VS. SPEELMAN

London, 1992

White has just committed a terrible blunder, moving the bishop from b6 to c7. Although the Black king seems to be more exposed, it is White who is dead in the water. The bishop should have retreated to e3, at least cutting off the Black queen.

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18...Bxc3!! This is no time to go on the defensive. There is a tactical refutation to 18...Kd7??: 19.Bxb8 Rxb8 in 20.Qxc6+!! Kxc6 and 21.Nd4+ Kd7; 22.Nxf3. **19.Bxb8 Bxb2+!**; **20.Kd2 d4**; **21.Bc7 Rxa2**; **22.Ke1 Qh1+**; **23.Kd2 Bc3+**. White resigned.

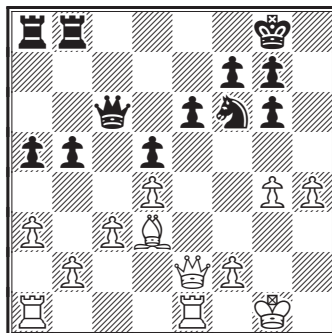
Minority Attack

Black will often advance the b-pawn in situations where Black has a-, b-, and d-pawns facing White pawns on all four queenside files. The idea is to weaken c3, and open up the b-file for use by rooks. In the following example, Black achieves this goal and uses the queenside infiltration as part of a kingside attack.

KUIJPERS VS. SIMAGIN

Moscow, 1963

Observe how Black carries out the plan with utmost efficiency, ignoring insignificant actions on the kingside.



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It is best to play straight through the moves to see the plan in action. 24...b4; 25.cxb4 axb4; 26.h5 bxa3; 27.bxa3 g5; 28.Qe5 Nxc4; 29.Qxc5 Nh6; 30.Kh1 Qc3; 31.Rad1 Kh8; 32.Qf4 Qxa3; 33.Rg1 Qe7; 34.Rg3 Qf6; 35.Qe3 Rb3; 36.Qe5 Qh4+; 37.Kg2 Ng4; 38.Qe2 Qh2+; 39.Kf3 f5; 40.Qf1 Ra2. White resigned.

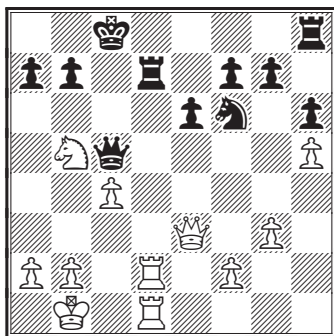
Transition into a Favorable Endgame

This theme will be seen over and over again throughout the book. Because White has often overextended, with a weak pawn at h5: Black can aim for endgames in which that weakness can be exploited. Here is a recent example.

THIPSAY VS. NENASHEV

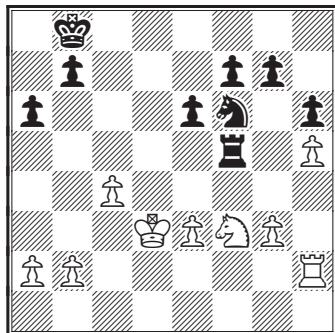
Calcutta, 1997

The pawn structure is a typical Classical Caro-Kann endgame. White's queenside majority is of no special value. The weakness of White's kingside becomes obvious after the exchange of queens.



Black seized the opportunity to get into a favorable endgame. 24...Qxe3; 24.fxe3 Rxd2; 25.Rxd2 Kb8; 26.Rh2. I don't care for this passive defense because the h-pawn remains weak. It would have been wiser to offer the h-pawn immediately. Moving the king closer to the center at c2 might have been stronger. 26...Rd8; 27.Kc2 a6; 28.Nd4 Rc8; 29.Kd3 Rc5; 30.Nf3 Rf5.

TYPICAL STRATEGIES AND TACTICS



So the pawn falls anyway! **31.Ke2 Nxh5; 32.Rg2 Nf6; 33.g4 Ra5. 34.g5** generates a little counter play. **34...Ne4; 35.gxh6 gxh6; 36.Rg8+ Ka7; 37.a3 Rf5; 38.Rh8 h5.** Now the win is inevitable. **39.b4 Nc3+; 40.Kf2 e5; 41.Kg2 Nd1; 42.e4 Rf4; 43.Nxe5 Ne3+; 44.Kg3 Rxe4; 45.Re8 h4+.** White resigned.

TACTICS FOR WHITE

There are three very important things to watch out for when you are playing Black in the Caro-Kann Defense. White will try to attack on the kingside, possibly making effective use of the light squares. The center can be smashed open by the advance of the d-pawn, even if it involves a sacrifice, and you should be on the alert for that, too.

Kingside Attack

In this repertoire, the Black king almost always castles on the kingside. Even in the Classical Variation, which often sees queenside castling, stay on the home flank. It is obvious that White will attempt to go after the Black king.

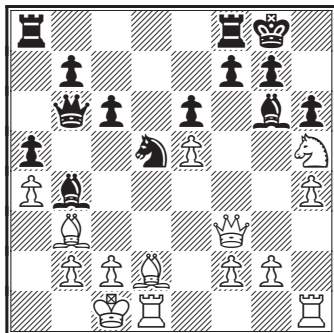
White can often sacrifice to break down Black's defensive pawn barrier. Here is a good example of a sacrifice that does not seem to have much support, at first, but which leads inevitably to victory.

DEFIRMIAN VS. BRUNNER

Biel, 1995

Black's kingside is defended by a rook and a bishop, but the position of the bishop is insecure. White moves the knight away, and then advances the h-pawn to attack it. The exit of the knight comes with a sacrificial flourish, and the bishop is soon trapped.

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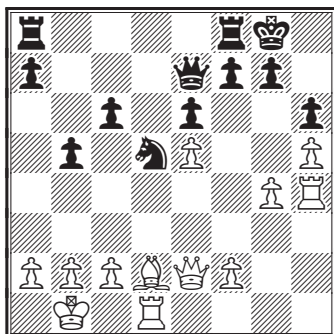
18.Nxg7! Kxg7; 19.h5 Bxd2+; 20.Rxd2 Bf5. 20...Bh7; 21.Bxd5 exd5; 22.Qf6+ Kg8; 23.Rh3 will win. 21.g4 Qc7. 21...Bh7; 22.Bxd5 exd5; 23.Qf6+ Kg8; 24.g5! Qd8; 25.Qxh6 and the g-pawn will advance. 22.Re2 Ne7; 23.gxf5 Nxf5; 24.c3 Qe7; 25.Bc2 Qg5+; 26.Kb1 Kh8; 27.Re4 Ne7 28.Rhe1 Rg8; 29.Rf4 Rg7; 30.Rxf7 and White went on to win.

Another theme is the advance of the g-pawn, which can be sacrificed to create an open h-file, as in the next example.

J. POLGAR VS. KORCHNOI

Madrid, 1995

In positions such as this, White's attack is not easy to deal with. The knight on d5 is strong, but is not posted defensively, and rooks on the back rank are notoriously poor defenders. White smashes open the kingside in straightforward fashion.



22.g5 hxg5; 23.Rg4 f6; 24.exf6 gxf6. 24...Qxf6 runs into trouble with 25.Rxg5. 25.f4 e5. Here Polgar captured the wrong pawn, at e5.

TYPICAL STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

She did win in the end, but would have won much more quickly with 26.fxg5 f5; 27.Rgg1 e4; 28.g6 f4; 29.h6 e3; 30.g7 etc.

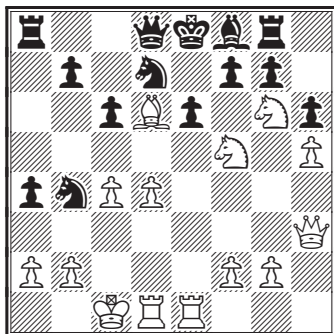
Weakness of Kingside Light Squares

White often uses f5 and g6 as staging points for an attack, and the pawns at f7 and e6 are also subject to attacks and pins. The following excerpt shows an extreme example of exploitation for light square weaknesses. Notice that all of Black's pawns are in their normal, usually safe, positions.

BELYAVSKY VS. LARSEN

Tilburg, 1981

Black must not leave the king in the center too long, as it is not difficult for White to build a strong attack on a seemingly closed e-file. When White can attack with two knights, Black is often in serious danger. Knights can be sacrificed for important defensive pawns, and the open lines can be exploited by the heavy artillery.



Except for the rook at d1, all White's pieces are on the attack. 19...fxg6. 19...Bxd6 runs into 20.Nxd6#. 20.Rxe6+ Kf7; 21.hxg6+!! Kxe6; 22.Re1+ Ne5; 23.Bxe5. **Black resigned**, rather than facing an ignominious mate. 23...Nd3+; 24.Kb1 Nxe5. (Or 24...Kd7; 25.Nxg7+ Ke7; 26.Qe6#.) 25.Rxe5+ Kf6; 26.Ng3 Qc8; 27.Qh5 Bd6; 28.Ne4#.

Central Breakthrough

Especially when Black has not castled, White will often be able to break through in the center with a timely advance of the d-pawn to d5. Even though Black has pawns at e6 and c6, this strategy can be effective because Black can ill-afford to open the e-file before castling.

