

Victor Bologan

Bologan's Caro-Kann

A Modern Repertoire for Black

New In Chess 2018

This book is dedicated to the fond memory of Mikhail Podgaets,
Honoured Trainer of the USSR, who revealed to me the secrets of the
Caro-Kann.

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Foreword

In our day, the Caro-Kann Defence has achieved great popularity. Maybe this is because in a complicated positional battle, it is easier to outplay a less experienced opponent. This is probably the reason why this opening has been a trusted weapon for many world champions, also because of its sound positional basis.

In this book, I offer a complete repertoire for Black in reply to 1.e4, explaining both the strategic ideas and the exact move orders. In the main, the book is based on my own games and analyses, including work with Mikhail Podgaets, the trainer of the 12th World Champion, Anatoly Karpov, and also on the practice of leading grandmasters of today. I will show how I play as Black, at the present day (of course, in the future I may choose other lines and try to strengthen Black's play). The possibilities in the Caro-Kann are enormous, Black having a wide choice of possible plans, piece set-ups, move orders, etc.

On the one hand, I show high-level analyses, and on the other, I also try to explain the main ideas in as simple and accessible a way as possible for the average player, so I hope that the book will be of benefit to players of a wide variety of different levels. At the end of each section, there is a brief conclusion, which draws the reader's attention to the key points, which need to be mastered and remembered. I should like to thank, for their assistance with this book, Grandmaster Dmitry Svetushkin, International Master Vladimir Barsky and FIDE Master Mikhail Popov.

The Caro-Kann is a very solid opening. Its basic idea is to strike in the centre with the protected pawn on d5; at the same time, unlike the French Defence, here the light-squared bishop is still able to come out to f5 or g4.



Black obtains a solid pawn structure and it is very rare in the Caro-Kann for him to obtain weak pawns, and he also rarely has bad pieces. The only problem is that he obtains a slightly passive position, mainly because the

queen's knight is deprived of the square c6. But Black can improve his position by carrying out the advance ...c6-c5, and thanks to this can even take the initiative.

The honour of having invented this defence belongs to the 19th century Austrian master Markus Kann. His ideas were taken up and developed by the English master Horatio Caro, who in 1886 published the first serious analyses of this new opening. The opening became popular at the start of the 20th century, when it was often used successfully by Aron Nimzowitsch, Savielly Tartakower, and the third World Champion, José Raul Capablanca. A great contribution to the theory of the opening was made by Mikhail Botvinnik, Salo Flohr, Vasily Smyslov, Paul Keres, Tigran Petrosian, Mikhail Tal, David Bronstein, Anatoly Karpov, Isaak Boleslavsky, Alexander Konstantinopolsky, Vasily Panov, Alexey Suetin, Vladimir Makagonov, Yuri Balashov, Yuri Razuvaev, Bent Larsen, Garry Kasparov, Yasser Seirawan, Michael Adams, Evgeny Bareev, Alexey Dreev, Peter Leko, Daniel Fridman, Igor Khenkin, Vladimir Burmakin, Alexander Grischuk, Fabiano Caruana, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Alexander Riazantsev and others. From the names of the players who have used the Caro-Kann, one can study the whole history of chess!

This opening is not only very solid and reliable (from the viewpoint of playing for a draw as Black), but also very complicated. It contains many subtleties and positional nuances, thanks to which one can hope to outplay an opponent. The opening has been successfully used over many decades by the 12th World Champion, Anatoly Karpov, including in matches for the World Championship, and the opening has earned an excellent reputation at the highest level. Karpov was helped with this opening by the player and well-known theoretician Mikhail Podgaets (1947-2009).

A representative of the star-studded generation of Odessa players, who emerged into the All-Union arena in the 1960s, Podgaets was five times a world champion as part of the Soviet student team. Playing in Union championships, he was Ukrainian Champion in 1976. In the mid-1980s, he joined Karpov's team and worked with the latter until the end of his life. The 12th World Champion was persuaded to abandon his beloved Spanish, which he had used in his World Championship matches with Kasparov, in favour of the rock-solid Caro-Kann, which Podgaets had played all his life. After achieving an outstanding result at Linares 1994, a delighted Karpov described Podgaets as the best trainer in the world.

I started working with Podgaets in December 2002: we had a training session together, he showed me the Caro-Kann, and I decided to put my faith in this solid opening, which also offers chances to take the initiative. I had first played it as Black in Buenos Aires, two years earlier, beating

grandmaster Pablo Ricardi. The tournament was a happy one for me overall, because not only did I share 1st-2nd places with Judit Polgar, but it was also there that I met and became friends with Podgaets!

In 2003, my results jumped sharply. I won the Aeroflot Open in Moscow and then the super-tournament in Dortmund, where I won three games in the Caro-Kann: I beat Peter Leko and Arkady Naiditsch as Black and Vishy Anand as White. Mikhail Podgaets had not only done a great job of sharing his analyses of this opening, but had also infused me with its culture.

In my book, I pay a good deal of attention to correspondence games played via the Internet; these are of the very highest quality, as the players are able to exploit all the resources of modern technology, a combination of human and silicon intellect. Many of the old analyses I had made with Podgaets were tested on powerful computers, in the process of writing this book, and this has improved their quality. But perfection has no limits!

As usual in my books, I have tried to offer the side whose repertoire is being presented (in this case, Black) a choice of alternative plans, so that you can choose which suits your character better, as well as making the opponent's job of preparing for you more difficult.

In the classical main line, as well as the tried and tested plan with ...0-0-0, which nobody has ever managed to refute, in recent months there has been a great surge in popularity of the plan with ...♗e7 and an early ...c6-c5, after which Black does not hurry with kingside castling, so as not to come under a direct attack. This plan is given serious attention in this book.

In the system with 3.e5 we have detailed consideration of some new and some well-forgotten ideas for White, involving seizing space. Although our bishop comes out to f5, White has many resources to fight for an advantage. In reply, I recommend a very resolute system with an early ...c6-c5. I have played this many times with both colours and consider this the strongest continuation. This is also the plan which has generally been preferred by Peter Leko.

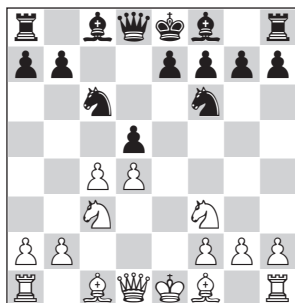
In our day, practically all of the world's leading players employ the Caro-Kann regularly, both the younger players and the more experienced ones. It is interesting to see how each player has his own way of handling this deep opening, in which one can develop the pieces in various ways, using different set-ups and plans. Proving an advantage for White has become more and more difficult. I recommend that the reader include the Caro-Kann Defence in his repertoire, and I wish you success!

Victor Bologan,
Doha, March 2018

CHAPTER 14

Panov Four Knights: 6... ♖g4

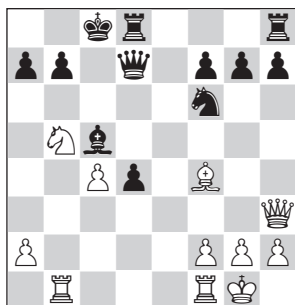
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 ♘c6 6.♘f3



6.♘f3 is the so-called Four Knights system. We will examine two plans for Black: in this chapter, the resolute play for a draw with 6... ♖g4, and in the following Alekhine's move 6... ♗e6, with the help of which Black tries to engineer a complicated position with play for all three results.

6... ♖g4 7.cxd5

The Lithuanian master Vldas Mikenas, against Salo Flohr (Folkestone, 1933), tried the gambit continuation 7. ♗e2 dxc4 8.d5 and won a nice game after 8... ♗xf3 9. ♗xf3 ♘e5 10.0-0 ♖d7 11.♗e2 ♘xf3+ 12.♖xf3 0-0-0 13.b3 e6 14.bxc4 exd5 15.♗f4 d4 16.♘b5 ♗c5 17.♞ab1 ♖c6 18.♖h3+ ♖d7?



19.♘xa7+!! ♗xa7 20.♖a3. Of course, modern-day computers suggest improvements for both sides on practically every move, but that is not the point – a knowledge of chess history is always useful. Modern theory considers that it is best to decline the offered pawn in favour of 7...e6 8.c5 Black is fine after 8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♗xf3 dxc4 10.0-0 ♗e7=. 8... ♗e7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♗e3 If 10.h3 ♗xf3 11.♗xf3 b6 Black eliminates the c5-pawn, which cramps his position, and obtains adequate play. 10...♘e4 This knight jump is a standard way to respond to the queenside press. 11.♞c1 On 11.♖a4 a possible reply is 11...♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♖c7 13.c4 – White must hurry, else Black will break

with ...e6-e5 or ...b7-b6 – 13...♞ad8 14.♞ab1 ♟f5 15.♞bd1 dxc4 16.♟xc4 ♟e4=. 11...♟f6 12.h3 ♟h5 13.a3 ♟xc3 14.♞xc3 a5= Black has tied the enemy forces to the defence of d4 and prevented the advance b2-b4. In this complicated position, both sides have chances.

In reply to 7.♟g5 it is worth considering the queen raid on the other flank: 7...♞a5!? 8.♟xf6 exf6 9.♟e2 9.cxd5 ♟b4! 10.dxc6? ♟xc3+ 11.bxc3 ♞xc3+ 12.♟e2 0-0, and White is defenceless. 9...dxc4 Black wants to complete his development quickly and create pressure against the d4-pawn. 10.♟d2 ♟e6 11.♟xc4 ♟xc4 12.♟xc4 0-0-0 13.0-0 ♟xd4 14.♟xf7 ♟b8= Li Ruifeng-Shimanov, St Louis 2017. White needs to show definite accuracy, so as not to fall into a bad position.

7...♟xd5 8.♞b3

The attempt to play for the pin on the ♟c6, exploiting the absence of Black's ♞♟, gives nothing: 8.♟b5 (as Nimzowitsch played against Alekhine at Bled 1931) 8...♞c8 9.h3 ♟h5 10.0-0 In reply to the direct storm 10.g4 ♟g6 11.♟e5 e6 12.♞a4 Black simply sacrifices a pawn: 12...♟e7 13.♟xc6 bxc6 14.♟xc6+ ♟f8 15.♟xd5 (White practically has to exchange his bishop for this actively-placed knight) 15...exd5 16.♟e3 h5!, and Black goes over to a counterattack, exploiting the weakened position of the enemy king, Lauer-Wajnberg, LSS email 2013. 10...e6 11.g4 In this 'moderate' version, White's

plan looks completely harmless. 11...♟g6 12.♟e5 After 12.♞a4 ♟d6 13.♟xd5 Black can permit himself a combination:



13...♟e4!? 14.♟g5 f6 15.♟f4 ♟xf4 16.♟xf4 ♟xf3 17.♞b3 ♟d5= Jabot-Sorcinelli, FICGS 2012.

12...♟d6 13.♟xd5 exd5 14.♞e1 0-0 15.♟f4 ♟e4!, and Black's chances are superior, because the white king is weakened, Del Rio Angelis-Gomez Esteban, Spain 1997.

The outwardly aggressive 8.♟c4 turns out to be a blow in the air: 8...e6 9.0-0 ♟e7 10.h3?! (more solid is 10.♟xd5 exd5 11.♟e2=) 10...♟xf3 11.♞xf3 ♟xd4 12.♞e4 ♟b6 13.♟d3 ♟c6 14.♟e3 ♟d5 15.♟xd5 exd5 16.♞g4 0-0 17.♞ad1 ♟f6 Pavlicek-Albesa, LSS email 2013. Here White can immediately make a draw by 18.♟e4 ♟e7 19.♟c5=, whilst if he persists in trying to work up some initiative, then he can find himself a pawn down with no compensation.

8...♟xf3 9.gxf3 e6

This move leads directly to a slightly better endgame for White. From time to time, even at GM level, one sees the move 9...♟b6,

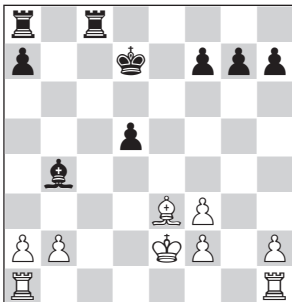
which leads to a more tense position. However, as already mentioned earlier, if Black wants to play for a win, then I suggest the move 6...♙e6, whilst in this chapter, devoted to 6...♙g4, I will show a precise path to the draw.

10. ♖xb7 ♜xd4 11. ♙b5+ ♜xb5



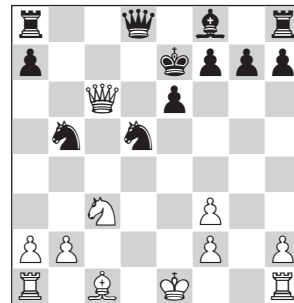
12. ♖c6+

An important intermediate check. White forces the enemy king to e7, where it interferes with the normal development of the pieces. No advantage comes from the direct 12. ♖xb5+ ♖d7 13. ♖xd7+ ♜xd7 14. ♜xd5 exd5 15. ♙e3 (15.0-0 ♙c5 16. ♙e3 ♜d6 17. ♖fd1 ♖hd8 18.a3 ♙b6 19. ♖d3 ♖ac8 20. ♖ad1 ♜e6 21.b4 ♖c4, and Black is, at a minimum, not worse, Paolillo-Migliorini, FICGS 2008) 15... ♙b4+ 16. ♜e2 ♖hc8.



Many years ago, I equalised without any trouble as Black in this position. Games played in recent years (including correspondence games) have confirmed that Black does not experience any particular problems here: 17. ♖ac1 17. ♖hd1 ♜e6 18.a3 ♙d6 19. ♖d2 ♙c5 20. ♖g1 g6 21.b4 ♙xe3 22.fxe3 ♖c3 23. ♖g1 ♖xa3 24. ♖xd5 ♖a2+ 25. ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 26. ♖xd2 ♖b8 27. ♖d4 ♖b5 28. ♖e4+ ♜d6 29. ♖d4+ ♖d5 30. ♖f4, draw, Riha-Hrubaru, FICGS 2007. 17...a6 He can also play more bravely with 17...a5, which has been tested in correspondence chess. For example, 18. ♜d3 ♙d6 19.h3 a4 20. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 21. ♖c1 ♖xc1, draw, Woodhouse-Salzmann, ICCF 2013. 18. ♜d3 g6 19. ♙d4 ♜e6 20.h3 ♜f5= Rozentalis-Bologan, Philadelphia 1994.

12... ♜e7



13. ♖xb5

In reply to 13. ♜xb5 Black has the effective reply 13... ♖c8! 14. ♜xa7 (he cannot keep the queens on the board: 14. ♖d6+ ♜e8 15. ♖e5 ♙b4+, and Black goes over to the attack) 14... ♖xc6 15. ♜xc6+ ♜d6 16. ♜d4 ♙e7 17.0-0 ♙f6 18. ♖d1 ♖hb8 19.a3 ♖a4 20. ♜e2 ♜c6= Evsin-Carvalho Guimaraes, LSS email 2014. It is

difficult for White to complete the development of his queenside, and the extra pawn is no real benefit. It is worth considering one more intermediate check, **13.♖c5+**, after which the best reply is **13...♘d6**. Less accurate is **13...♙e8**, although this move led White to a tragicomic end in a recent game at a stage of the FIDE Grand Prix: **14.♖xb5+ ♖d7 15.♘xd5 exd5 16.♖b3** (more accurate was **16.♖d3 ♙b4+ 17.♙f1 f6 18.♙g2 ♙f7 19.♙f4 ♙a5 20.♞hd1 ♞ad8 21.♞ac1±** Grischuk-Vidit, Doha 2016) **16...♙d6 17.0-0 ♞b8 18.♖e3+ ♙f8 19.♞d1??** (19.♖g5) **19...♖h3**, and in the game Riazantsev-Jakovenko, Sharjah 2017, White was forced to stop the clocks, because after **20.f4 ♖g4+** he is a rook down. **14.♘xd5+ exd5 15.0-0 ♖c8 16.♖xd5 ♖b7**, and White's compensation for the piece is sufficient only to hold the balance, e.g. **17.♖e5+ ♙d7 18.♞d1 ♞e8 19.♖f5+ ♞e6 20.♖xf7+ ♙e7 21.♙g5 ♞e8** (Plat-Kjartansson, Schwäbisch Gmünd 2018) **22.♞xd6+ ♞xd6 23.♞e1 ♖c6 24.♞xe7+ ♞xe7 25.♖xe7+ ♙c8 26.♖f8+ ♙b7 27.♖xg7+ ♙a6 28.♖e7=.**

13...♖d7

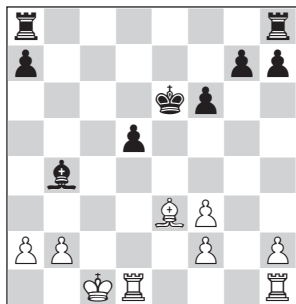


14.♘xd5+

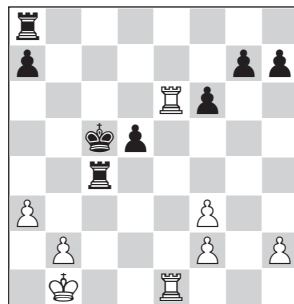
14.♙g5+ f6 15.♘xd5+ ♖xd5 transposes into a position examined below.

It does not pay White to avoid the queen exchange by putting his queen on the edge of the board. It has been known for a long time that, in this case, Black can quickly untangle his kingside pieces and go over to a counterattack: **14.♖a5 ♘xc3** This move was played by a young Garry Kasparov 40 years ago. Also good is **14...f6 15.0-0 ♘xc3 16.bxc3 ♙f7 17.♖a6 ♙c5 18.♙f4 ♞hc8** with advantage to Black, A.Onischuk-Dreev, Yalta 1995. **15.♖xc3 15.bxc3 f6 16.♞b1 ♙f7 17.♖a6** (Gaprindashvili-Chiburdanidze, Pitsunda 1978), and here after **17...♞c8 18.♞b7 ♞c7** Black can count on an advantage. **15...f6 16.♙e3 ♙f7 17.0-0 ♙e7** Ma. Tseitlin-Kasparov, Daugavpils 1978. **14...♖xd5 15.♖xd5**

More common is the intermediate move **15.♙g5+** with the idea of luring the black pawn to f6. From a formal viewpoint, of course, it is unfavourable for Black to have to put a pawn on a dark square of the same colour as his bishop, but in this position, Black has a very large reserve of solidity and this small detail does not influence the assessment of the position: **15...f6 16.♖xd5 exd5 17.♙e3 ♙e6 18.0-0-0 ♙b4**

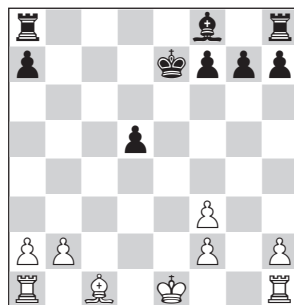


19.a3 19.♖d3 ♜hd8 20.♔b1!? ♜d7
 21.♞c1 a5 22.♞c6+ ♔f5 23.♞b6
 ♕e7 24.♞b5 ♔e6 25.a4 ♕b4=
 Bologan-Velicka, Bern 1999; Black
 has no problems after 19.♞hg1
 g5 20.a3 ♕d6 21.♞ge1 ♕e5 with
 equality, Gavrikov-Dreev, Biel 1995.
19...♞hc8+ 20.♔b1 ♕c5 White's
 bishop is very well placed on e3,
 from where it exerts pressure
 against the queenside, so it
 makes sense to exchange it off.
21.♞he1 21.♞d3 ♕xe3 22.fxe3 ♞ab8
 23.♞hd1 ♞b5 draw, Mukhutdinov-
 Khenkin, Moscow 1990. **21...♕xe3**
22.♞xe3+ ♔d6 Black still needs
 to show a certain amount of
 accuracy, because he is behind in
 development and has to bring his
 king into the battle, but his rooks
 come to his aid in time. **23.♞de1**
 Harmless is 23.♞ed3 ♞c5 24.b4,
 draw, Howell-Wells, Budapest
 1994. **23...♞c4** Defending the king
 in advance from frontal checks.
 In addition, from this square,
 the rook can swing over to f4 or
 h4, to counterattack against the
 opponent's weak pawns. **24.♞e6+**
 ♔c5



25.♞g1 25.♞a6 ♞f4 26.♞c1+ ♔d4
 27.♞c3 ♔e5, and the black king,
 moving round his central pawn,
 breaks through to the kingside;
 25.b3 ♞c3!, after which White has
 to exchange a pair of rooks and
 his attack on the king runs out
 of steam. **25...g6** 26.♞xf6 ♞h4
 27.♞c1+ ♔d4 28.♞d6 ♔e5 29.♞d7
 ♞xh2 30.♞e1+ ♔f6 31.♞d6+ ♔g5
 32.♞xd5+ ♔f4 Black's counterplay
 is enough for equality, Lanin-
 Markus, LSS email 2013.

15...exd5



The critical position of the
 variation. White has tried various
 ways to exploit the weakness of the
 d5-pawn and his small advantage in
 development, but Black has
 demonstrated that he has fully
 adequate defensive resources.

- A) 16.♙e3
 B) 16.♙f4
 C) 16.0-0

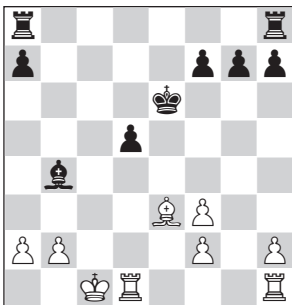
In reply to 16.♗d2 Black fianchettoes his bishop and fastens onto the b2-pawn: 16...g6! 17.♗d3 ♙g7 18.♞b1 ♜hc8=

A) 16.♙e3

As we have already pointed out, e3 is a good square for the bishop. On the other hand, the black king will now feel comfortable on e6, because there is no check from e1: 16...♗e6 17.0-0-0 17.♞c1 ♙b4+ 18.♗e2 ♜hc8 19.♗d3 a5 20.♞xc8 ♞xc8 White cannot win the bishop ending, as he himself has many pawn weaknesses, and so the chances are equal, Pigusov-Dreev, Tallinn 1986. 17.♞g1 ♙d6 18.♞xg7 ♙e5 19.♞g4 ♙xb2=, Rogers-Adams, London 1988.

17...♙b4

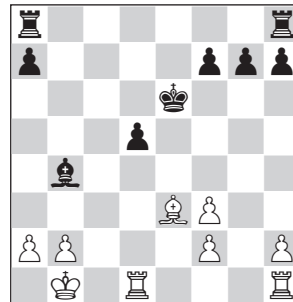
Or 17...♞c8+ 18.♗b1 ♙c5 19.♞he1 (19.♞hg1 g6 20.♞g4 ♜hd8 21.♞a4 ♙b6= Gdanski-Adorjan, Polanica Zdroj 1992) 19...♗d6 20.♞d3 (20.♙f4+ ♗c6 21.♙e3= Vorobiov-Burmakin, Seville 2016) 20...♞hd8= Kavalek-Rogoff, Oberlin 1975.



18.♗b1

White is promised little by 18.♙d4 f6 19.♞hg1 ♗f7 20.♙e3 ♜hd8 21.♞g4 a5 22.♞d3 ♞d7= G.Garcia-Becerra Rivero, Matanzas 1995.

18.a3 ♜hc8+ 19.♗b1 ♙c5 20.♞he1 ♙xe3 21.fxe3 (the assessment of the position is not changed by 21.♞xe3+ ♗d6 22.b3 (22.f4 ♞ab8 23.♞d4= Vaganian-Dreev, Odessa 1989) 22...♞e8 23.♗c2 ♞e6 24.♞d4 ♞g6 25.♞ed3 ♞g2 26.♞xd5+ ♗e6 27.♞d6+ ♗f5 28.h4 ♞xf2+ 29.♗c3 h5 30.b4 ♞c8+ 31.♗b3 ♗f4, and Black has sufficient counterplay for a draw, Sanikidze-Guidarelli, Cappelle-la-Grande 2011) 21...♞c4 22.♞d2 ♞b8 23.♞ed1 ♞b5 with an equal position, Kalinitschew-Komarov, Novosibirsk 1989.



18...♜hc8!?

I recommend to the reader in all positions of a similar type as this, distinguished only by small details (especially whether the f-pawn is on f7 or f6), the same basic plan of counterplay. This is: the bishop goes to b4, the king's rook occupies the c-file, and then, according to the situation, either a bishop exchange on c5 or the transfer of

the rook via c4 to the kingside. For completeness, I will mention that Black does have another plan of defence, one which is less active but more solid, namely: 18...♖hd8 19.♖hg1 g6 20.♞d3 ♕a5 21.♕d4 ♜f5 22.♞b3 ♞d7 23.♞d1 h5 24.♕e3 ♞ad8 25.h3 ♜e6= Likhachev-Schwarz, ICCF email 2014.

19.♞d3 ♕c5

Also possible is 19...♞c7 20.a3 ♕c5 21.♖g1 g6 22.♖gd1 ♞d8 23.b4 ♕b6 24.♜b2 ♞c4 25.♜b3 ♞d7 26.♞e1 ♜f6 27.♞ed1, draw, Vieito Soria-Monreal Godina, ICCF 2014.

20.♞c1

20.♞e1 ♕xe3 21.♞dx3+ ♜f6 22.♞e7 ♞c4 with counterplay for Black, Stripunsky-Dreev, ICC 2001.

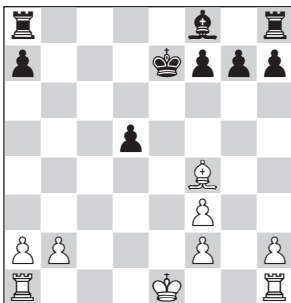
20...♕xe3 21.fxe3 g5 22.♞a3 ♞xc1+ 23.♜xc1 a5 24.♜d1 ♞b8 25.b3 ♞b5 26.♞a4 h5 27.♜e1 f5 28.h3 ♜d6 29.♜e2 ♞c5

The threat of penetrating on c2 forces the white king to cut short its journey to the kingside.

30.♜d2 ♞b5 31.♜e2 ♞c5 32.♜d2 ♞b5 ½-½

Ivanchuk-Najer, Turkey tt 2017.

B) 16.♕f4



An aggressive move: White shows that he is not interested in the a7-pawn and the queenside, and intends instead to organise an attack on the king, using the open central files. But even so, few pieces remain on the board and so Black, by exercising the necessary care, can beat off the attack.

16...♜d7!?

From this square, the king controls the penetration squares on both open files and can always come to the aid of the d5-pawn.

Less accurate is 16...♜f6, although in this case too, the position does not go beyond the bounds of equality. For example: 17.0-0-0 ♕c5! (worse is 17...♞d8?! 18.♖hg1 ♞d7 19.♕e3 ♖g8 20.♖g4 with advantage to White, Kindermann-Lobron, Bern 1990) 18.♞xd5 ♕xf2 19.♜b1 (19.♕e5+ ♜g6 20.♕d4 ♕xd4 21.♞xd4 ♞ac8+ 22.♜b1 ♞hd8 23.♖g1+ ♜f6 24.♞f4+ ♜e7 25.b3 g6 26.♞e1+ ♜f8 27.♞c1 ♞xc1+, draw, Potkin-Sjugirov, Rogaska Slatina 2011) 19...♞he8 20.♞hd1 ♞e2 21.♞d6+ ♜f5 22.♕g3 f6 23.♞d7 ♕xg3 24.hxg3 ♜g6= Jensen-Gatterer, ICCF 2011.

17.0-0-0 ♜c6 18.♞d3

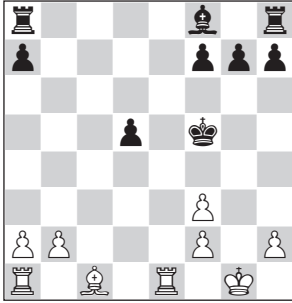
White gets nothing after 18.♜b1 ♕d6 19.♞d4 ♕xf4 20.♞xf4 f6 with an equal position, Rechlis-Huzman, Tel Aviv 1996.

18...♕d6 19.♕e3 ♕e5 20.♜b1 ♞hd8 21.♞c1+ ♜d6

The chances of the two sides are equal, A.Onischuk-Khenkin, Polanica Zdroj 1999.

C) 16.0-0 ♖e6

After kingside castling, the black king has no need to fear a rook incursion on the g-file, so he can calmly head for f5.

17.♞e1+ ♜f5**18.♞d1**

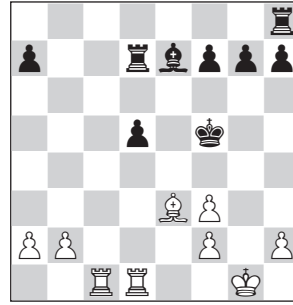
18.♟e3 ♟e7 19.♞ad1 ♞hd8 20.♞d4 h5 21.♞ed1 ♜e6 22.♞e1 ♜f5, draw, Jacewicz-Proskuryakov, ICCF 2011.

18...♞d8 19.♟e3 ♞d7

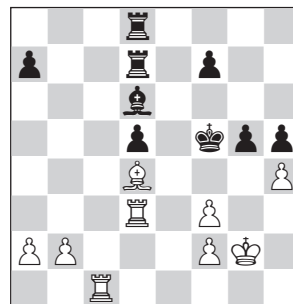
Black has managed to bring the rook from a8 to d7 and covered all his weaknesses. All that remains is to develop the kingside.

20.♞ac1

20.♞d4 ♟c5 21.♞f4+ (21.♞g4 ♟e7 22.♞xg7, and in the game Rook-Gburek, ICCF 2012, the players agreed a draw in view of 22...♟f6 and 23...♟xb2) 21...♜e5 22.♞c1 (in reply to 22.♟d2!?) Black holds the balance with 22...f5! 23.♞e1+ ♜f6 24.♞c1 ♞c8 25.♞a4 ♞dc7=) 22...♟xe3 (also possible is 22...♟b6 23.♞h4 d4 24.♞e4+ ♜f5= P.H.Nielsen-Filippov, Gistrup 1996) 23.fxe3 ♞b8 24.b3 ♞bb7= Adams-Morovic Fernandez, Leon 1995.

20...♟e7**21.♞d4**

In reply to White's attempts to exploit the tactics, Black can himself defend tactically: 21.♞c4 ♟f6 22.♞c5 ♞hd8 23.b3 ♟e5 24.♞a5 ♟c3!, after which taking the pawn is risky: 25.♞xa7?! (25.♞c5 ♟e5=) 25...d4 26.♞xd7 ♞xd7 27.♟c1 ♞a7, and it is already White who should show some accuracy.

21...g5 22.♞d3 ♞hd8 23.♟d4 h5 24.♜g2 ♟d6 25.h4**25...f6 26.hxg5 fxg5 27.♞e1 ♞b7 28.a3 ♟f4=**

(Chodorowski-Vasile, ICCF 2011)

Here Black has improved his position to the maximum on the kingside, which in turn compensates fully for the weakness of the d5-pawn.

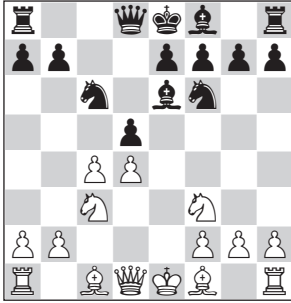
Conclusion

I have played this endgame with both colours and on the basis of my own experience I can say confidently that White's attempts to squeeze some advantage out of the position have all been exhausted. Black has a very clear and simple set-up, and it is not clear what White can count on, other than a draw. But White can certainly achieve a draw without any problems, if that is all he wants.

CHAPTER 15

Panov Four Knights: 6... ♖e6

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 ♘c6 6.♗f3 ♖e6



This ugly-looking but rather poisonous move was first played by Alekhine, against Dake at Pasadena 1932. The World Champion made a serious mistake in the opening and lost, after which the line disappeared from practice for a long time. It experienced a new life in the 1980s.

- A) 7.c5
- B) 7.♖g5
- C) 7.♗b3

♗xd5 13.♖xc6+ bxc6 14.♗f3 ♖f6=
 Degraeve-Gharamian, St Quentin
 2015.

We will take a brief look at 7.cxd5

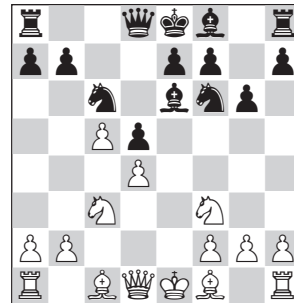


7... ♖xd5. One of the main ideas of the system: Black is ready to cede the two bishops, but in return he wants to obtain a strong blocking knight on d5. 8.♖e2 e6 9.0-0 ♖e7 10.♗e5 ♗b6 11.♖b5 a6 12.♗xd5

A) 7.c5

This move is met most often in practice. Black's reply is understandable: he has to complete the development of his kingside.

7...g6



8. ♖b5

Let us analyse the alternatives briefly:

8.♔d3 ♕g7 9.0-0 0-0 10.a3 ♖g4
11.♙e2 ♜e4 12.♙e3 b6 13.cxb6
♜xc3 14.bxc3 axb6 with a pleasant
position for Black, Parizek-
Michalik, Prague 2017.

After the pressure has been
removed from d5, the follow-up

8.♖b3 is not so dangerous for
Black. But the position remains
quite sharp and he needs to be
careful: **8...♗c8** The following game
shows the dangers facing Black if
he is careless: 8...♜a5 9.♙b5+ ♕d7
10.♖a4 ♜c6 11.0-0 a6



12.♞e1! axb5 13.♜xb5 ♕g7 14.♖xa8,
and White won in Tsavdaris-
Caburro, cr 2006.

9.♙f4 ♕g7 10.h3 0-0 11.♞d1 ♜e4
A typical manoeuvre in positions
with the white pawn on c5, and at
the same time setting a small trap.
12.♙b5? ♜xc5! 13.dxc5 d4 14.♜d5
♖d8 15.♙c4 (Starostits-Kryakvin,
Berlin 2017), and here the most
precise is **15...♙xd5 16.♙xd5 ♜a5**
17.♙xf7+ ♞xf7 18.♖e6 ♖c8.

8.h3 is a slow move. Black quietly
completes his development, trades
off the cramping pawn on c5 and
begins to fight for the initiative:



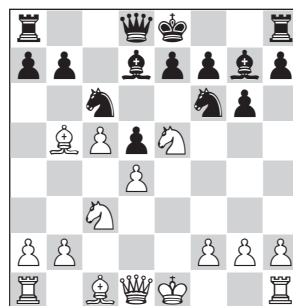
8...♕g7 9.♙e2 0-0 10.0-0 ♜e4
11.♙b5 ♖c7 12.♙e3 ♜xc3 13.bxc3 b6
14.cxb6 axb6 15.a4 ♜a5 16.♞c1 ♜c4

8...♕g7 9.♜e5

Harmless is 9.0-0 0-0 – now White
must either allow the knight
into c4 or the bishop to g4: 10.h3
♜e4! 11.♞e1 ♜xc3 12.bxc3 ♕d7
13.♙f4 ♜a5 14.a4 b6 15.♜e5 ♙e8=

9...♕d7

The knight can also be defended
by 9...♖c8 10.♖a4 ♕d7 11.0-0 a6
12.♙xc6 (worse is 12.♜xd7 ♖xd7
13.♙e2 0-0 14.♞d1 ♞ad8 15.♙e3 (in
reply to 15.h3 Black transfers the
knight via e8 to c7 and prepares the
march of the f7-pawn) 15...♜g4



10.♙xc6

After **10.0-0** Black can already start fighting for an advantage: **10...♞xe5**
 A quieter continuation is also possible: **10...0-0 11.♖e1 a6 12.♙xc6 ♙xc6 13.♞a4 ♙xa4 14.♞xa4 ♖c8 15.f3** (not a nice-looking move, but White obviously did not wish to allow the enemy knight into e4)



15...♖c7! Black prepares a different route for the knight. Admittedly, here he needs to calculate all the variations accurately. **16.♙d2 ♞d7 17.♙a5 ♞xe5 18.dxe5** (after **18.♙xc7 ♞xc7 19.dxe5 ♙xe5** Black will get two pawns for the exchange and a powerful phalanx in the centre) **18...♞d7** (Black's entire game hangs on this tactical nuance) **19.♞xd7 ♖xd7 20.♖ac1 d4=** Khenkin-Van den Doel, Bad Homburg 2016.

11.dxe5 ♞e4 12.♙xd7+ ♞xd7 13.♞xe4 dxe4 14.♞xd7+ ♞xd7 Equality is maintained after **14.♙f4 ♞f5 15.♞a4+ ♙f8 16.♙e3 ♙xe5 17.♖ad1 ♞e6=**. **14...♙xd7 15.♙f4 ♙e6** Negi-I.Popov, New Delhi 2015.

10...♙xc6

Too passive is **10...bxc6 11.0-0 0-0 12.♖e1 ♞c7 13.h3 ♞b7 14.b3 ♙f5 15.♙f4 ♞e4 16.♞xe4 ♙xe4 17.f3 ♙f5 18.g4 ♙e6 19.♞d2±**.

11.0-0 ♞d7

The knight must be removed from e5.

12.♞xc6 bxc6 13.♙g5 0-0 14.♞d2 f6 15.♙e3 a5

B) 7.♙g5



Here Black immediately has two good replies:

B1) 7...♞e4

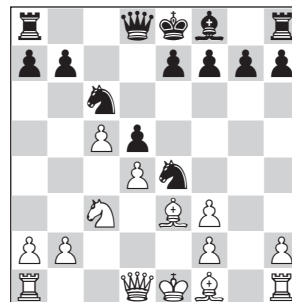
B2) 7...g6

B1) 7...♞e4

This leads to sharper forcing play.

8.♞xe4

8.cxd5 ♙xd5 9.♞xd5 ♞xd5 10.♙e3 e6 11.a3 ♖d8 12.♙e2 ♙e7 13.0-0 ♙f6 with good counterplay for Black, Makovskis-Fridman, Liepaja 2014.
8.c5 ♙g4 9.♙e3 ♙xf3 10.gxf3



10...♞xc5!? It is hard to refrain from such a nice move, but probably

the simpler 10...♘f6 11.♙b5 g6 is even stronger. 11.dxc5 d4 12.♚b3 dxe3 13.fxe3 ♚c8 14.♞d1 e6 with mutual chances, Gahan-Kryakvin, Liffre 2017.

8...dxe4 9.d5

This sharp position 'requires further analysis', as people usually say in such cases.

This is the variation which the computer considers as the main line:

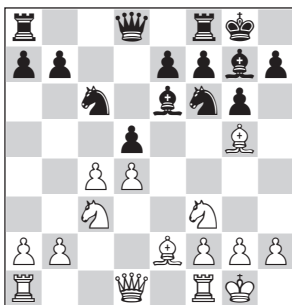
9...exf3 10.dxe6 ♚a5+ 11.♚d2 ♚e5+ 12.♚e3 fxe6 13.0-0-0 g6 14.gxf3 ♙g7

Each side has its trumps.

B2) 7...g6 8.♙e2

8.♙xf6 exf6 9.a3 (9.♙e2 ♙g7 10.0-0 0-0 11.♚a4 a6 12.♞ad1 f5 13.♞fel ♞e8 with mutual chances, Manik-Kovalenko, Katowice 2017) 9...♙g7 10.♙e2 0-0 11.0-0 f5 12.♞c1 ♞c8 13.b4 a6 14.c5 g5 with counterplay, Svidler-Külaots, Tallinn 2016.

8...♙g7 9.0-0 0-0



10.♞c1

10.♞e1 dxc4 11.♞c1 ♞c8 12.d5 ♘xd5 13.♙xc4 ♘xc3 14.♚xd8 ♘xd8 15.♙xe6 ♘xe6 16.bxc3 ♘xg5 17.♘xg5 ♙xc3, and Black realised

his material advantage in Mecit-Lupulescu, Turkey tt 2017.

10...♞c8 11.b3 h6 12.♙e3 ♚d6 13.♚d2 ♘e4 14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.d5 exf3 16.♙xf3 ♘e5 17.dxe6 ♘xf3+ 18.gxf3 ♚xe6

With a roughly equal game, Kiuttu-Külaots, Oulu 2013.

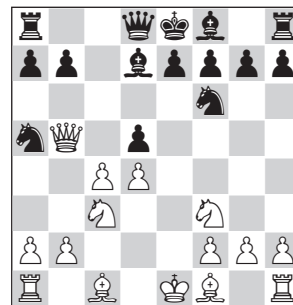
C) 7.♚b3

At the present time, this is the most unpleasant reply for Black to face. White maintains the tension in the centre and at the same time attacks the queenside, weakened by the exit of the bishop from c8.

7...dxc4

Black should take up the challenge, after which we reach a very complicated position, which is interesting to study. Despite the fact that I have not managed to find precise equality, the position is certainly fully playable.

After the tempting 7...♘a5 White had prepared a temporary queen sacrifice: 8.♚b5+ ♙d7



9.cxd5! e6 (White is also better after 9...♙xb5 10.♙xb5+ ♘d7 11.♘e5±) 10.♚e2 ♙e7 11.dxe6 ♙xe6 12.♚d1 0-0 (Forcen Esteban-Thejkumar,

Sitges 2015) 13.♙d3 ♖c8 14.0-0
♙b4 15.♗e4± Of course, Black
has definite compensation for the
sacrificed pawn, but he still faces a
long struggle for equality.

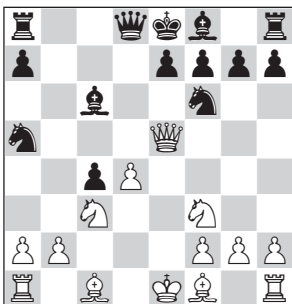


8. ♖xb7

Little is promised by 8.♙xc4 ♙xc4
9.♖xc4 e6 10.0-0 ♙e7 11.♖d1 0-0
12.d5 exd5 13.♗xd5 ♗xd5 14.♖xd5
♖b6 (Berke-Goryachkina, Belgrade
2013), and Black completely
equalises.

8... ♖c8

White is better after 8...♖c8 9.♖b5.
On 8...♗a5 White has prepared a
strong idea: 9.♖b5+ ♙d7 10.♖e5
♙c6 (on 10...e6 there is the
unpleasant 11.♖g3 g6 12.♙e2 ♙c6
13.♗e5 ♙g7 14.h4 ♗e4 15.♗xe4
♙xe4 16.♙d2 ♗c6 17.♙c3±)

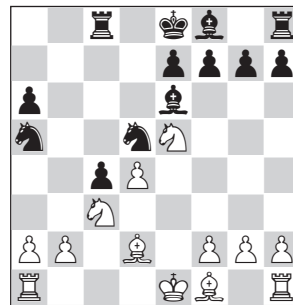


11.b4! ♙xf3 (it turns out that taking
the pawn is very dangerous: 11...
cxb3 12.axb3 ♗xb3 13.♙b5! ♙d7
14.♖a6 ♖c8 (better is 14...e6!?, but
here too, after for example 15.0-0
♙e7 16.♙g5 0-0 17.♙d3 Black's
position looks dangerous) 15.♙b2 e6
16.0-0 ♙b4 17.♗e4±) 12.bxa5 ♙c6
13.♙xc4 e6 14.d5 ♙d6 15.♖e3 ♙d7
16.dxe6 ♙xe6 17.♙xe6 0-0 18.0-0±
– White has an extra pawn.

9. ♖b5 a6!? 10. ♖a4

Black's task is easier after 10.♖xa6
♗xd4 11.♗xd4 ♖xd4 12.♙e2 g6±.

10... ♗d5 11. ♗e5 ♖a5 12. ♖xa5 ♗xa5 13. ♙d2



Thanks to his advantage in
development, White retains the
initiative in the ending.

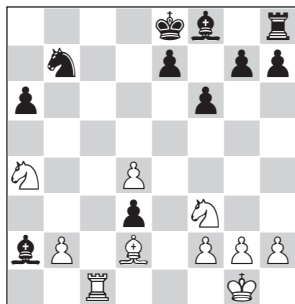
13... ♗b4 14. ♖c1 f6

Of course, the knight must be
expelled from the commanding
heights.

15. ♗f3 ♗b7

White is better after 15...♗d3+
16.♙xd3 cxd3 17.b3!, but other black
attempts are worth considering,
such as 15...♖b8, 15...♙f7 or 15...g6.

16. ♗a4 ♗d3+ 17. ♙xd3 cxd3 18.0-0 ♖xc1 19. ♖xc1 ♙xa2



20. ♖e1 ♘d6 21. ♘xd3 ♙c4 22. ♘b4
g5 23. ♘b6 ♙b5 24. ♖c7±

Thanks to the two bishops and the weakness of the d4-pawn, Black can perfectly well count on a draw, even if he loses the a6-pawn.

Conclusion

If Black does not want to make a draw in the Four Knights line (after 6... ♙g4), then he can try the less common 6... ♙e6. Admittedly, he must be prepared for the fact that after 7. ♖b3 White has an unpleasant initiative, and if the opponent is well-prepared, then, after a series of accurate moves, he will have to defend a somewhat inferior endgame.