

Alexey Bezgodov

The Extreme Caro-Kann

Attacking Black with 3.f3

New In Chess 2014

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Foreword

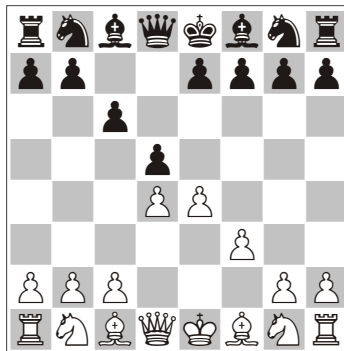
For more than a hundred years, the Caro-Kann Defence has had the reputation of being solid, reliable... but a bit boring. This was expressed best of all back in the 1970s by the young Anatoly Karpov, who was then only just storming the heights of world chess: 'This defence has always struck me as rather depressing in its passivity'. Within a decade or two, it became the main opening for the legendary twelfth world champion! The defence has achieved enormous popularity, and its reputation as prospectless has been reduced to nothing. We need some new ideas, or, at least, ideas that have been hidden, to strengthen White's hand.

At the present moment, a frequent White choice after 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 is the natural development of the king's knight. After the equally natural exchange on e4 and development of the bishop to f5, the long theoretical variations end in an equality that is welcome for Black.

Somewhat more popular is 3.e5. However, in this case too, Black can solve his main problem, which is the development of the c8-bishop. By drawing the white pawn to e5, the bishop gets a splendid and active post. This, and this alone, is the main point of Black's whole set-up. Note that for the sake of achieving this, Black puts his pawn on the modest square c6, taking away the best development square for his queen's knight!

White has similar issues in the Panov Attack. After 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘f3 ♙g4! there have already been many hundreds of draws, in long forcing variations. And note once again that the development of the bishop on c8 is a sign that Black has solved most of his opening problems.

But now to our main topic. There is a variation, which allows White to complicate the life of the enemy bishop to the maximum extent, preventing it developing easily. This is the old variation, known since the 19th century, 3.f3 !



One can easily imagine an inexperienced player asking 'What sort of nonsense is this? Just to stop the bishop getting out, we deprive our knight of its best square

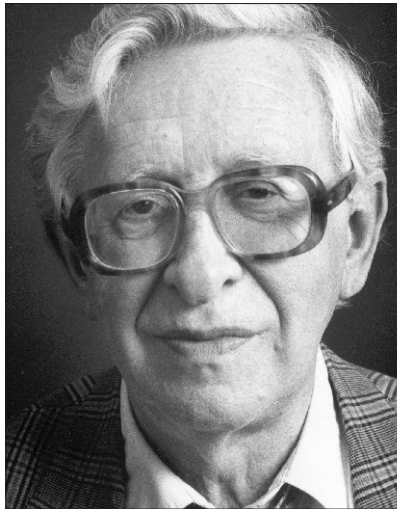
on f3?'. But I would remind you that Black's very first move does exactly this to his queen's knight! So in this regard, the opponents are quits! The pawns on e4 and d4 look both proud and also effective. And the bishop on c8! The main hero of the Caro-Kann, it has nowhere to go, a bit like some of the heroes of the 19th century Russian literary genius, Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Let us think about what is happening. Black is done out of his main idea and needs to think anew, in completely different (and, in some ways, unpleasant) circumstances. Because the bishop has nowhere sensible to move to, he must move something else. The situation has become hard to predict and unusually interesting, right from move three. By conceding the centre, Black can start to fight for the initiative, but White is rather well prepared for such a battle! On the other hand, if Black plays more slowly, then White's space advantage may in the near future be strengthened and become the source of problems for Black.

I would point out that the name *The Extreme Caro-Kann* was invented by me in February 2013. The word 'extreme' has two meanings:

1. Reaching the highest point, the ultimate, the limit.
2. Leaving the ranks of the ordinary, exceptional (in complexity, difficulty, danger, etc.) (definitions taken from Wikidictionary).

This book is devoted to an unusual treatment of the Caro-Kann as White, involving the move 3.f3!?. Although Grandmaster Geza Maroczy played this move back in the 19th century, even to this day by no means all devotees of the quiet and solid Caro-Kann are prepared for it as well as they should be. The modest, apparently even somewhat pointless move of the bishop's pawn, has not in the course of 100 years joined the list of the most popular continuations. And few people remember that it was a strong weapon in the hands of one of the most 'positional'



Vassily Smyslov

of all world champions, Vassily Smyslov, a player who practically never played moves which do not meet the demands of the position. In our day, it is played by many strong players, at least occasionally. I will show some of the games of elite players in this chapter. Increasingly, black players are coming to understand that the move 3.f3 is not just a joke or a fad. Even substantial preparation is not always enough to guarantee Black against misfortune in the opening. I would add that the Maroczy-Smyslov system is not only creative (like all worthwhile openings), but is developing rapidly. More and more experts are taking part in the discussion 'for' and 'against' this at one time shocking

move. But the extent of the analytical exploration of this move is negligible, compared with other, more topical variations. I have spent a lot of effort on the line (not just for White, but for Black as well, in order to find the best responses). Overall, White's chances in this variation seem to me preferable, whilst the variation can be recommended to anyone who enjoys creative searches and is not afraid of risk.

In our day, many players who deserve the epithet 'great' have shown an interest in the brainchild of Messrs Maroczy and Smyslov. I would mention Vassily Ivanchuk, Alexander Morozevich, Judit Polgar, Ian Nepomniachtchi, Artyom Timofeev, Denis Khismatullin, the young women's world champion Hou Yifan... The list is easy to begin, but hard to complete, especially as the number of adherents of the variation continues to grow sharply.

I hope that many of those who read my book will take into their arsenal the study and practice of this fascinating chapter of modern opening theory!

A brief summary of the contents of the book is as follows:

Chapter 1 – Rare continuations

Chapter 2 – The Fianchetto Variation – 3...g6

Chapter 3 – Immediate French-type play 3...e6

Chapter 4 – The Georgian Variation 3...♙b6. The queen prepares the counter-blow ...e7-e5

Chapter 5 – The immediate blow in the centre 3...e5

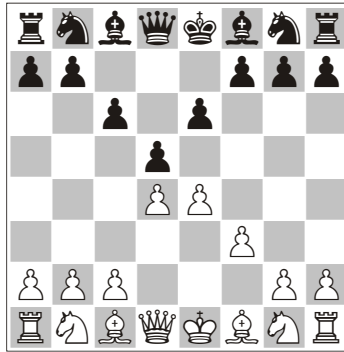
Chapter 6 – The central blow after the exchange 3...dxe4 4.fxe4 e5

Alexey Bezgodov
November 2013,
Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia

Chapter 3

3...e6: The Semi-French Variation

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3 e6



This chapter was the hardest one for me, in truth. The fact is that at this moment, the theory of this particular variation is not yet established. Even many top players treat the positions after 3...e6 more on the basis of experiment and luck than solid preparation, even in our scientific times! Of course, there is much that is positive in this, but it is hard to bring together any kind of solid theoretical basis in such a situation.

The move 3...e6 is very flexible. Without entering an immediate battle in the centre, Black simply plays what is unquestionably a useful move and is later ready to choose between many plans, depending on how his opponent proceeds. In many lines, the unusual position of the pawn on f3 simplifies Black's game and even allows him to take the initiative.

After many months of work and constant thought, I came to the following decision: I will analyse four games with the gambit move 4.♙e3 and eight with the more well-founded 4.♘c3. Why this way? The truth is that the gambit line is not without its dangers for Black, and has been played many times by strong players (in particular, ex-world champion Vassily Smyslov), and in addition, I found a number of new ideas for White in this line. But there is also another reason, about which more later.

The move 4.♘c3 may be stronger. Black has many interests paths then, which it is impossible to analyse in detail in a book of this size. I only wish to point out that after 4...♘f6, which I do not analyse, White has to play 5.e5 ♘fd7 6.f4 c5 7.♘f3, transposing into the popular Steinitz Variation of the French Defence: 1.e4 e6 2.d4

d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♘f3. The position is exactly the same, but with each side having played one extra move (the pawns on f4 and c5 have each moved twice, instead of once). So those who wish to play 4.♘c3 need to have some idea of this French variation also, the theory of which can be found in other books. Specially for those who play other variations as White against the French, I offer as an alternative the gambit line 4.♙e3.

Let us return to the move 4.♘c3. Most often, Black replies 4...♙b4, after which White has a lot of possible replies. I have decided to analyse two: the gambit move 5.a3 and the developing 5.♙f4. I hope this will be sufficient for the practical success of the reader.

I would point out once again – in the variation with 3...e6, there is an especially great difference between the quantity of practical examples and the degree of systematisation of the theory. So it is essential to develop your knowledge of this variation independently. In other lines in this book, it is possible (although, of course, not recommended) to do without this.

Game 23

Smyslov, Vassily

Kan, Ilya

Sverdlovsk 1943 (11)

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3 e6 4.♙e3

The 22-year old Vassily Vasilievich Smyslov already had a highly-developed technique and a rare degree of positional understanding. However, this did not stop him sacrificing a pawn in the opening, if in return he could obtain the initiative, or even hopes of it!

4...dxe4



5.♘d2

It is possible that White gets richer compensation after the apparent bad oversight 5.fxe4 ♖h4+ 6.g3 ♜xe4 7.♜e2! or 7.♜d2!?. In this respect, we will examine the game Lukin-Dorokhin.

5...exf3 6.♘gxf3

I would draw the reader's attention to the rare move 6.♜xf3!?. White gets ready to castle queenside if the chance arises, but even so, this is not the best decision: 6...♘f6 7.♙d3 (7.♙c4 ♘d5 8.0-0-0 ♘d7 9.♙b1 ♜f6, and Black is better) 7...♘d5 8.♙f2 ♘b4 – White does better not to head for this position!

6...♘f6 7.♘c4

An important manoeuvre. Whilst heading for e5, the knight also gives the bishop on e3 greater freedom of movement.

7...♘bd7

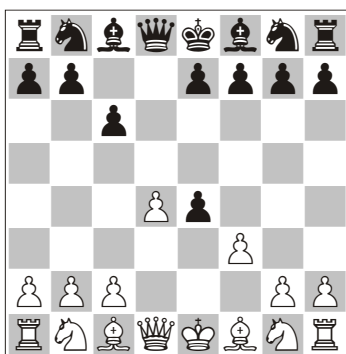
A natural developing move, but I do not really like it.

There have been no tests of the principled 7...c5 8.dxc5 ♘d5 (weaker is

Chapter 6

3...dxe4: Surrendering the Centre

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3 dxe4



We have come to the sixth and last chapter. This is devoted to the very principled variation 3...dxe4 4.fxe4 e5. What does the difficulty of this variation consist in, compared with others? The point is that here Black plays very firmly in the centre, without giving up material (as opposed to the line with 3...e5). White's pawn centre may look very nice, but the slightest inaccuracy can result in its becoming an object of attack. Therefore great accuracy is required of White. The play is significantly more dynamic than in many other variations of the ECK. White has no real space advantage, and so he must rely on dynamic, even aggressive play.

I would suggest that White rely on the choice between several systems after the popular 5.♘f3 ♙e6. These are the traditional 6.c3, the relatively new 6.♘c3 and the 'greedy' 6.dxe5. In all these variations, accuracy and care are required from Black, as well as concrete knowledge. White can win as a result of the smallest and mostly barely perceptible error from his opponent. I myself could not decide which of these three continuations is the most promising. Therefore, I prefer to discuss all three.

The fashionable variation 5...♙g4 is examined on the basis of the example of the instructive game Hou Yifan-Danielian. The variations suggested by me are, as far as I can see, sufficient to allow White a successful search for the advantage.

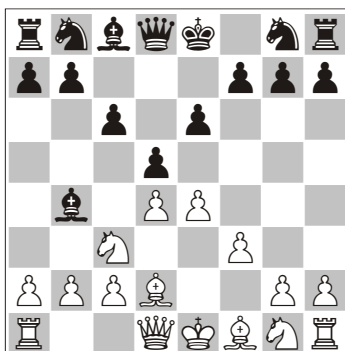
Chapter 7

Three Important New Games

In our day, the theory of all popular variations develops more and more quickly. The Extreme Caro-Kann, popular with players of all levels, is no exception. Thus, in the last few months since this book was prepared for publication, three important games have been played.

For some time now, a variation which has become popular is 3...♞b6 4.c3 (I would remind you that I think the natural 4.♘c3 is stronger) 4...e5! 5.exd5 exd4 6.♞e2+ ♔d8!. However, the game Yakovenko-Motylev from September's Poikovsky tournament, which ended in a draw as early as the 15th move, showed that Black has no problems here. This game is quoted below.

Now the variation with 3...e6. I would draw the reader's attention to the fact that, after 4.♘c3 ♙b4, there has been a growth in the popularity of the move 5.♙d2.



Later, White frequently moves the queen's knight to e2, exchanges bishops and plays a position which reminds one very much of the French Defence. In such positions, White retains his light-squared bishop, which is usually stronger than its opposite number. Play usually takes on a relatively quiet character, but one favourable for White.

However, the most interesting developments in recent months have been the theoretical and practical duels at the Tromsø World Cup. In the match between Sergey Azarov and Alexey Dreev, there were two tests of the combinative idea 3...e6 4.♘c3 ♙b4 5.a3 ♙xc3+6.bxc3 dxe4.

In the book, I then examined 7.♞e2, after which I suggested 7...c5!?, but left the reader to look into this line himself. This is how Dreev played, and White did not obtain any real advantage. Of course, now I have to take this line more seriously! This is my conclusion: Dreev's idea 8...f5 is not bad and with accurate play, promises Black equality. In the game, White did manage to obtain the better play, but it

was not enough to win. You can find possible improvements for both sides, in the commentary to this game. My alternative suggestion at move eight is 8.fxe4!? cxd4 9.♟f3. However, I cannot guarantee White an advantage in this position.

Sergey Azarov was obviously disappointed with the outcome of the move 7.♟e2, and in his next white game against Dreev he preferred 7.♟h3!?. This is a very promising line. With a more accurate follow-up, Azarov could have posed his opponent some problems, and this is indicated in the notes.

Of course, a great many questions in this intriguing system not only remain unanswered, but have not yet even been formulated! Maybe after the publication of this book, the system will get a new boost of popularity and further development. I have no doubt that many readers of this book will make their own contributions to the theoretical and practical researches in the Extreme Caro-Kann.

Yakovenko, Dmitry
Motylev, Alexander
 Poikovsky 2013 (4)

Game 66 Yakovenko-Motylev after 5...exd4
 6.♟e2+ ♔d8).
5...exd4 6.exd5+ ♔d8

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3 ♟b6 4.c3

This rather tame-looking move started to interest theoreticians and practical players in May 2013. A test in a rapid game Nabaty-Laznicka, Beer-Sheva 2013, brought White success, and here Dmitry Yakovenko decides to try the same continuation.

4...e5

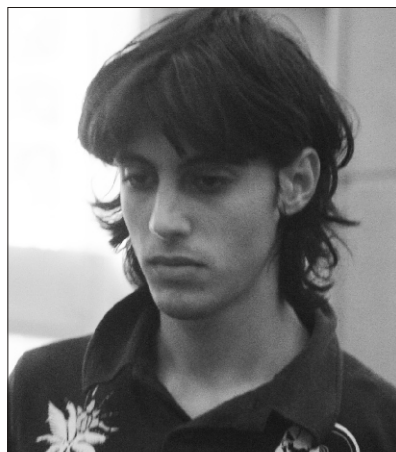
The most principled reply, and the best. After other moves, White has good chances to strengthen his centre and retain the better game.

5.♟e2

This is Tamir Nabaty's innovation. However, Alexander Motylev proves to be excellently prepared, and I believe that the argument in this particular variation of the Extreme Caro-Kann can be considered to have been resolved in Black's favour.

Only Black can hope for any advantage after 5.dxe5 ♟c5, with the initiative.

After 5.exd5 there is also 5...cxd5∞ (it is also possible to transpose into



Tamir Nabaty

Index of Variations

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3



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3...h5	12
3...c5	15
3...♘a6	17
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3...g6 4.♘c3 ♙g7 5.♙e3



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3...e6



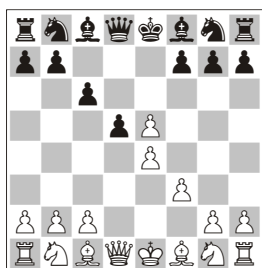
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5.fxe4	78
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3...♔b6



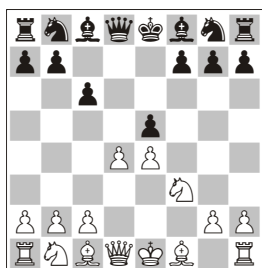
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