

Preface

It's difficult to think of another opening which has done more to shake off its 'solid' tag than the Caro-Kann. These days, many players who employ the Caro-Kann do so with the intention of reaching sharp dynamic positions, rich in possibilities for both sides and with a guarantee of counterplay for Black. Crucially, there now seem to be viable options which allow players to achieve this goal. For example, whereas once virtually everyone played 3...Bf5 against the Advance Variation, nowadays 3...c5 is an enticing and dynamic alternative. In the Panov-Botvinnik Attack, 5...Nc6 is acknowledged as a good alternative to the super-solid 5...e6. In the main lines of the Classical Variation (4...Bf5), Black players have discovered they can 'safely' spice things up by castling kingside rather than queenside. Finally, in some of the very main lines of the Smyslov Variation (4...Nd7), Black breaks all the 'solid' rules by not castling at all – all in the quest for dynamic play! I hope you enjoy reading this book, and feel moved to try out at least some of the ideas covered within these pages, whether you are attacking the Caro-Kann as White or attacking *with* the Caro-Kann as Black!

Finally, I'd like to thank my co-authors Richard Palliser and Jovanka Houska, for their dedication, enthusiasm and for inspiring me with all their ideas. Thanks also go to Jeremy Silman and Peter Wells for their invaluable help and advice.

John Emms
Hildenborough
October 2010

Series Introduction

The original concept behind *Dangerous Weapons* was to take a major chess opening and to approach it in a completely different way: to concentrate on variations that are ambitious, sharp, innovative, disruptive, tricky, enjoyable to analyse; ones not already weighed down by huge mountains of theory, and ones unfairly ignored or discredited. To me this seemed like an author's paradise, which I'm sure contributed somewhat towards the inspiration behind this series!

The main motivation behind studying major openings in such a way is to be able to present the reader (not forgetting the author!) with a considerable number of fresh, hard-hitting opening weapons for both White and Black; in some cases to create repertoires and in others to enhance and rejuvenate existing ones.

What is a Dangerous Weapon?

For the purpose of choosing opening variations for this series, a *Dangerous Weapon* usually fits into one or more of these overlapping categories:

1. Moves that create complex, original positions full of razor-sharp tactics and rich positional ideas where creative, attacking play is rewarded; moves which are new, rare or fresh, leaving plenty of scope for research.

It should be pointed out that even though mainline theory produces a vast number of wonderfully complicated positions, these opening variations lose out heavily in the 'danger' stakes. No matter how sharp and difficult the position, the opening phase is nowhere near as hazardous for your opponent if he is able to fall back on that comfort blanket known as theory. I've played plenty of incredibly sharp lines without any real fear simply because of reasonable book knowledge and some solid home preparation. Apart from a few exceptions, in *Dangerous*

Weapons the emphasis has generally been on non-theoretical lines, where your opponent is left to his own devices at an early stage.

2. Moves that are highly ambitious; ones which aim for total domination.

Perfect for those not satisfied with a quiet theoretical edge as White and eager to search for a big advantage or even a direct refutation, albeit at some risk; or for those as Black who prefer to strive for the initiative at any cost, preferring this over a manageable disadvantage or sterile equality.

3. Moves that have been previously ignored, discarded or discredited by theory, perhaps unfairly so or maybe for the wrong reasons.

Discredited lines can be especially dangerous – the psychological element cannot be ignored. Facing an opening like this, I find myself asking the question, ‘Why is he playing this variation if it is meant to be bad?’ Often there is a very good reason (a logical improvement, perhaps, which overturns a previous assessment), and in any case how are you supposed to remember a hypothetical 15-move refutation when you only browsed it in a book once, and that was a few years ago?

4. Moves that are visually shocking; moves which seem to contradict the laws of the game.

Disregarding the question of objective merit for the moment, there’s no doubt that a crazy-looking move has at the very least some psychological value. Unleashed on an opponent, it can produce a range of emotions: uncontrolled laughter, perhaps followed by over-confidence; anger (at being insulted by such a move) followed by over-aggression; or perhaps discomfort, followed by timidity. Of course you may instead encounter understanding followed by objectivity – you have to pick and choose your opponents.

Dangerous for Whom?

It would be difficult, probably impossible, to guarantee that every single variation in this book is 100% sound. You have to understand that in some cases ‘dangerous’ can mean ‘dangerous for both sides’. What I do expect, or at least hope, is that your opponent’s ride throughout the opening should be far bumpier than yours!

Guiding you Through

Throughout the book there are various icons together with explanatory notes to emphasize significant points. They should be fairly self-explanatory, but here's a brief summary:



DANGEROUS WEAPON! This signifies a game, variation, sub-variation or position where the Dangerous Weapon has produced the desired effect.



BEWARE! Pointing out immediate danger for the player using the Dangerous Weapon.



ROLL THE DICE! Signifying a variation or sub-variation which is perhaps more suited for games with short time-limits or for players who enjoy taking risks.



TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: This indicates a transposition to a different opening variation. Using different move orders to reach a desirable position or to trick your opponent into something with which he is unfamiliar is becoming a weapon of increasing value.

As the title suggests, *Dangerous Weapons* may not be for the faint-hearted! More than anything, it is aimed at players of all levels who like to be entertained, those who are happy to try out fun-to-play openings at their local chess club, on the Internet, in tournaments, wherever they choose to play.

Good luck studying and playing your *Dangerous Weapons*!

John Emms
Everyman Chess

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Chapter Five

The Subtle 4...a6

Jovanka Houska

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 Bf5 4 Nc3 a6!? (Diagram 1)

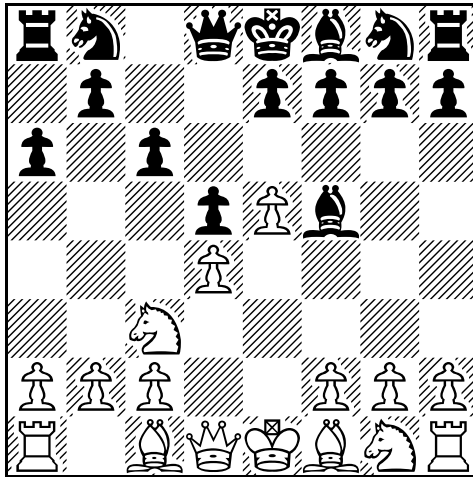


Diagram 1 (W)

4 Nc3 in the Advance Variation leads to some of the most hair-raising lines of the Caro-Kann. 4...e6 is accompanied by long lines of theory and often Black has to suffer an onslaught of the white pawns. Chess is in a modern age of massive technological advancements, and there is now the risk that the latest *Rybka*, *Fritz* or

Shredder, in combination with the human mind, may uncork a devastating novelty that will leave you hopelessly and utterly lost... against anyone!

Of course 4...e6 is the most principled move and those sufficiently prepared and confident should definitely lock horns with White in these main lines. However, for those who wish to play a trickier game, with some slight nuances compared to the main line, 4...a6 may be the move for you.

So what does 4...a6 have going for it? Well, it is most definitely not a move to feel embarrassed about. In fact, it boasts some notable adherents: former world champion Anatoly Karpov and grandmasters Alexander Morozevich, Alexander Riazantsev, Vadim Malakhatchko and Vladimir Burmakin to name just a few.

The big idea of 4...a6 is actually very simple: Black prepares the typical launch of ...c5 counterplay by eliminating the possibility of any Bb5 or Nb5 ideas. Hitting out rapidly in the centre is very much standard in the normal 4...e6 lines, but there White can use the b5-square to slow Black down. For example, a typical continuation in the main line is the following:

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 Bf5 4 Nc3 e6 5 g4 Bg6 6 Nge2 c5 7 h4 h5 8 Nf4 Bh7 9 Nxh5 cxd4

Here White can either play 10 Qxd4 Nc6 11 Bb5 or 10 Nb5, in both cases making use of the b5-square. In the main line with 4...a6, Black no longer has to worry about these possibilities.

Let's take a look at two games with 4...a6 and see how things can pan out.

□ **G.Filev** ■ **A.Braun**

European Championship, Plovdiv 2008

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 Bf5 4 Nc3 a6 5 Be3 (Diagram 2)

The principled and natural reaction to 4...a6. White uses the extra move to further his development whilst still very much keeping open the possibility of a kingside attack.

5...e6 6 g4!?

When White has played 4 Nc3 in the Advance Variation, one can usually expect g2-g4 to be thrown in at some stage. White hopes that by seizing as much space as possible on the kingside, he will make it as difficult as possible for Black to develop his pieces. Of course there is also the issue of intimidating the opponent by rolling forwards with the pawns!

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6 Nge2 Nd7 7 Ng3 Bg6 8 Bd3 Ne7 9 Qd2 c5 10 dxc5 Bxd3 11 cxd3 Nxe5 isn't too bothersome for Black, B.Ling-S.Kolar, Ostrava 2002.

6...Bg6 7 Nge2

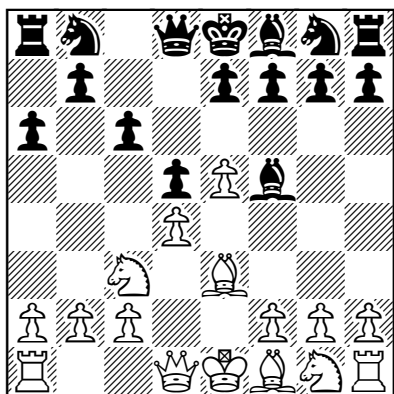


Diagram 2 (B)

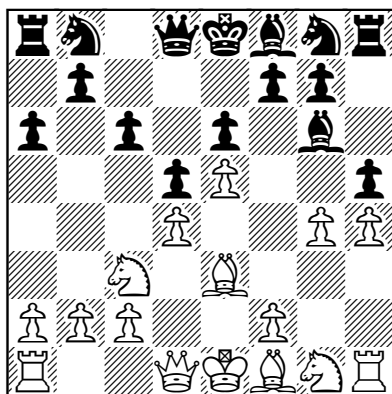


Diagram 3 (W)

The main choice. White plans to reach one of the major positions in the 4 Nc3 variation, but with Be3 and ...a6 thrown in. At first sight, Be3 appears to be a more useful move than ...a6. After all, one is taught that in the opening development is vital, and attacking with many pieces is better than attacking with just a few. However, as previously mentioned there is a key point to Black's strategy. White's play is often based on Bb5+ or Nb5, which Black has handily taken the time out to prevent.

The immediate 7 h4 allows Black to determine the pawn structure with 7...h5! **(Diagram 3).**

For example, 8 g5 c5 9 Nge2 Nc6 10 Nf4 Nge7 (this move is key – it is not necessary to retreat the bishop!) 11 Nxg6 Nxg6. There is considerable pressure against the d4-pawn. For instance, after 12 Bg2 Black has the visually stunning 12...cxd4 13 Bxd4 Nxh4! 14 Rxh4 Qxg5 and Black recovers the piece with added interest (15 Rh2 is met by 15...Qf4!).

If 12 Bd3 Black has 12...cxd4! 13 Bxg6 dxc3 14 Bd3 cxb2 15 Rb1 d4 16 Bd2 Qd5 17 Rh3 Ba3 and White is already lost. Finally, after 12 Be2 cxd4 13 Bxd4 Qc7 the e5-pawn will fall.

7 Bg2 is swiftly met by 7...h5. For example, 8 h3 hxg4 9 hxg4 Rxh1 10 Bxh1 Nd7 11 Nge2 f6 (undermining the pawn chain) 12 Nf4 Bf7 13 Qe2 fxe5 14 dxe5 Qc7 and

Black soon won the e5-pawn in B.Le Roy-F.Doettling, Evry 2008.

If White, after starting so aggressively with g2-g4, chooses to continue meekly, Black should try to determine the pawn structure as soon as he can.

7...c5! (Diagram 4)

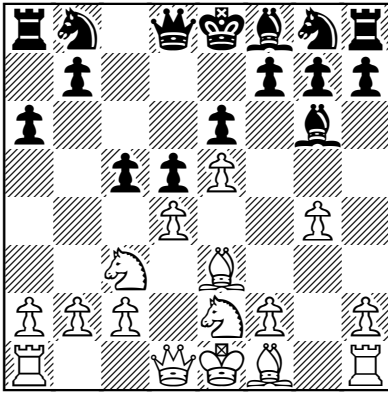


Diagram 4 (W)

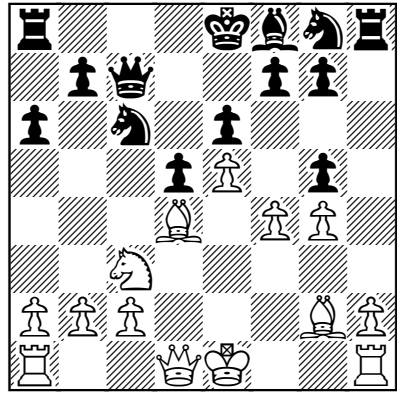


Diagram 5 (W)

The simplest way of playing the position: hit at the base of the pawn chain!

7...f6 is GM Burmakin's speciality, but I like the main line the best.

8 h4

This is probably the best try, although things are by no means clear. Alternatively:

a) 8 f4 and 8 dxc5 are both investigated in the Looking a Little Deeper section.

b) 8 Nf4 is simply met by 8...Nc6 which makes it difficult for White to find a good move. 9 dxc5 loses to 9...d4, and after something like 9 h4 Black has the convincing 9...cxd4 10 Bxd4 Nge7. The bishop is not yet under threat as after 11 h5 Black has 11...Bxc2; and after, say, 11 Rc1 Black plays the calm 11...Nxd4 12 Qxd4 Nc6 13 Qd1 Nxe5 14 h5 Be4 and White's position has fallen apart.

White is forced to play 9 Nxg6 hxg6 10 Bg2 cxd4 11 Bxd4 Qc7, and after the defensive 12 f4 Black can undermine the centre with 12...g5! (**Diagram 5**).



DANGEROUS WEAPON! Even though Black has not yet developed many pieces, his sound pawn structure holds his position together very nicely.

After 13 fxg5 Nge7 Black will regain the e-pawn and emerge with a fantastic

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structure, while White is left regretting his opening choices. Alternatively, after the tempting 13 f5 Nxd4 14 Qxd4 Bc5 White's position is just too loose. Following 15 Qa4+ b5! 16 Nxb5 Qxe5+ 17 Kd2 Kf8 Black sidesteps the attack and it is White who will suffer the consequences of having an open king.

8...h5

The best reaction to h2-h4. In the grand scheme of things, losing the h5-pawn does not matter. White will not only have to sacrifice time and energy to win it, but once the knight lands on h5 it is actually very difficult for it to rejoin the action. This is especially relevant as the battle is often won in the centre.

9 Nf4 Ne7!? (Diagram 6)

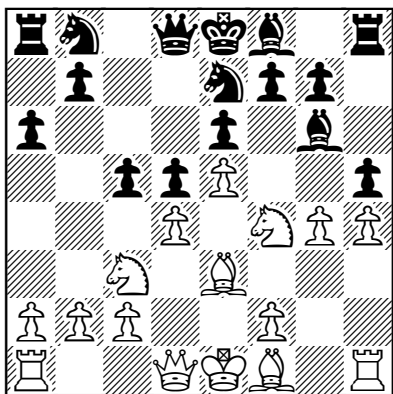


Diagram 6 (W)

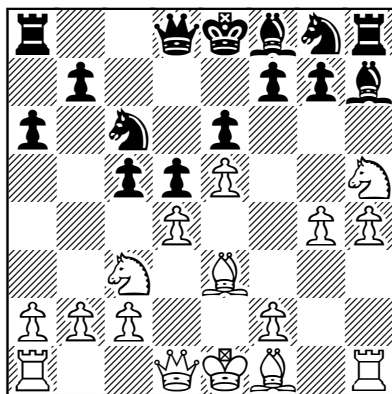


Diagram 7 (W)



DANGEROUS WEAPON! This worked out very well in the game, and I think it is perhaps slightly trickier than the main move.

9...Bh7 is the main line. As in the usual 4...e6 variation, Black gives up the h-pawn in order to tie the knight to the kingside. The rationale is that the pawn can be regained at any time if White wishes to get the h5-knight back into the game. Some lines:

a) 10 g5 does not achieve anything: 10...cxd4 11 Bxd4 Nc6 12 g6 (tempting, but Black's position is a rock) 12...Bxg6 13 Nxg6 fxg6 14 Ne2 Qc7 (the queen accepts a defensive role for the time being) 15 Nf4 Qf7 16 Qd2 Nge7, D.Sengupta-G.Prakash, Mumbai 2003. Once Black has re-routed the knight to f5 he shouldn't have any problems at all.

b) 10 Nxh5 Nc6 (**Diagram 7**) piles pressure on the d4-pawn:

b1) The move Rh1-h3 is often seen in lines with 4...e6 but here 11 Rh3 doesn't make too much sense – the rook is not heading anywhere worthwhile: 11...cxd4 12 Bxd4 Nge7 13 Ne2 Nb4! (Black targets a new soft spot – the pawn on c2) 14 Rc3 Rc8 15 Bc5 and now Black had the stunning 15...Rxc5! 16 Rxc5 Nec6. White is forced to return the exchange but is still struggling against Black's initiative: 17 Rxc6 Nxc6 18 Nd4 Qb6 19 Nb3 Bg6 and with ...Nb4 in the works Black was soon winning in E.Inarkiev-D.Palo, Halkidiki 2001.

b2) 11 Bg2 Nge7! and Black will regain the sacrificed pawn after, say, 12 Ne2 cxd4 13 Bxd4 Ng6. Or if 12 Qd2 Black has the simple 12...Nb4 13 Rc1 cxd4 14 Bxd4 Nec6 and White's exposed king will lead to trouble.

10 Nxg6

Just to show how easily White can go wrong, after 10 Bg2? cxd4 11 Bxd4 Nbc6 the bishop on d4 and the pawn on g4 are looking extremely vulnerable. Following 12 Nxg6 Nxg6 13 g5 Qc7 Black has a fantastic position, not to mention a material advantage very soon.

If 10 gxh5, 10...Bf5 is simple and good.

10...Nxg6 11 gxh5

The aggressive 11 Bg5 is well met by 11...Be7 12 gxh5 cxd4! (12...Nf8 is the fallback option) 13 hxg6 (13 Qxd4 Nc6 14 Qd1 Ngxe5 is better for Black) 13...dxc3 14 gxf7+ Kf8 15 Bxe7+ Qxe7 16 bxc3 Nc6 17 Qe2 Rxh4 18 Rxh4 Qxh4 and Black is slightly better.

11 g5 is another logical move, but it fails to 11...cxd4 12 Bxd4 Nc6 and the e-pawn drops.

11...Nxh4 (Diagram 8) 12 f4?

Positionally this move looks very suspect: if White doesn't manage to start active operations then Black will just be left with a lovely outpost on f5. Alternatively:

a) If 12 dxc5, then 12...Nf5 is more than good enough to win back the pawn with added benefits.

b) 12 Bh3, trying to prevent the knight reaching f5, fails to 12...cxd4 13 Bxd4 Nc6 and because of all the possible forks White's position is very shaky.

c) 12 Qg4 was played recently against me. Black can reply with 12...cxd4! forcing 13 Bxd4 (the point is that if 13 Bg5 Black has the tactical strike 13...Qxg5!) 13...Nf5 14 0-0-0, as in M.Burrows-J.Houska, British League 2010. Here Black should play 14...Nc6 (rather than my 14...Nxd4) 15 Be3 Nxe5 16 Qa4+ (16 Qe2 Nxe3 17 fxe3 Bb4

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gives Black a very satisfactory position) 16...Nc6 (the safest) 17 Qg4 Nxe3 18 fxe3 Qb6 19 Bg2 and now in order to safely castle without giving back the pawn, Black should embark on the following queen manoeuvre: 19...Qb4 20 Qg5 Qe7 21 Qg4 f5 followed by ...0-0-0.

12...Nc6! 13 Bf2?

13 dxc5 was forced, although then 13...d4 14 Bf2 dxc3 15 Bxh4 Qxd1+ 16 Rxd1 Rxh5 is more than good enough for Black.

13...cxd4! 14 Bxh4 Qa5 (Diagram 9)

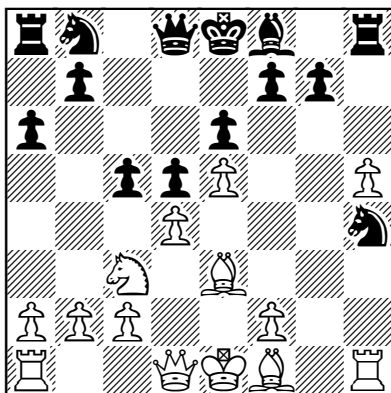


Diagram 8 (W)

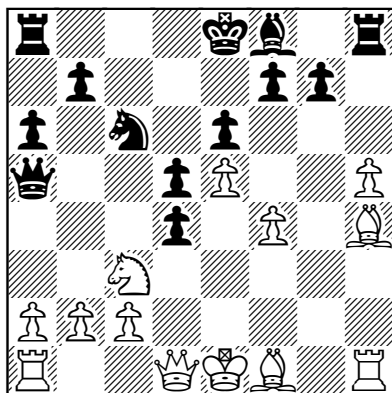


Diagram 9 (W)

Regaining the piece. Now Black is much better.

15 Rh3 dxc3 16 bxc3 Be7 17 Bf2 0-0-0

White's two bishops are handicapped by the poor structure and the fact that they must always guard their monarch.

18 Qg4 Qa4!

White's pieces are scattered around the board with no purpose whatsoever, so Black can afford to be materialistic.

19 Be2 Rhg8 20 Kf1

White rushes to get his king somewhere safe but it's no good.

20...Qxc2 21 Bd3 Qa4 22 Re1 Kb8 23 Rg3 d4!? (Diagram 10)

In standard fashion, Black opens up the position to get at the white king, but perhaps the materialistic 23...Qxa2 might be preferable as it's not clear what White is

doing. 24 Bh7 fails to 24...Rh8 25 Qxg7 Qc4+ 26 Kg2 Bh4 and Black is winning, while after 24 Kg1 it's now time for 24...d4!.

24 cxd4 Nxd4 25 f5

Now it gets messy, but the unsafe position of White's king remains a significant factor.

25...exf5 26 Bxf5 Bc5 27 Rd3 g6!! (Diagram 11)

A critical blow to White, whose position is about to fall apart.

28 hxg6

28 Be4 is the only way for White to continue, but even so after 28...gxh5 29 Qf4 Rg4! he is in trouble. For example, 30 Qf6 (or 30 Qxf7 Rxe4 31 Rxe4 Qb5 32 Ree3 Nc2, winning) 30...Rd7! 31 e6 Nxe6 32 Qe5+ Ka8! intending to meet 33 Bxc5 with 33...Qb5 when 34 Qh8+ is not a problem due to 34...Rd8!.

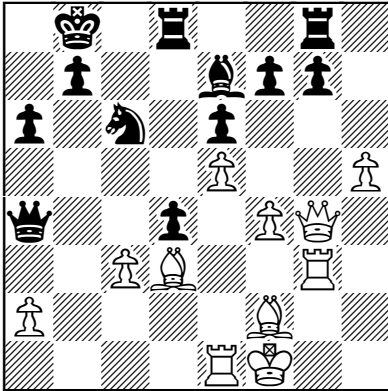


Diagram 10 (W)

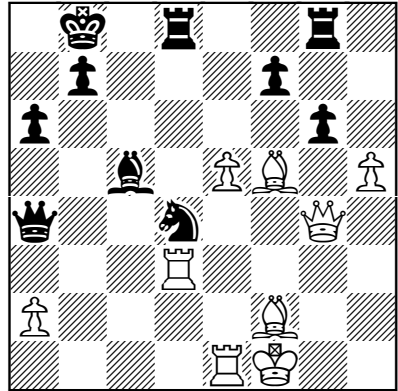


Diagram 11 (W)

28...fxg6 29 Be4 Rgf8

Once the heavy pieces join in the attack, White's king is in big trouble.

30 Qg3 Ka7?!

30...Rxf2+ 31 Qxf2 Rf8 32 Qxf8+ Bxf8 would have been a simpler win.

31 Kg2 Qxa2 32 Rf1 g5 33 Rc3 Bb6 34 Qe3 Rf4 35 Rc2 Rg4+ 36 Kh3 Rh8+ 37 Kxg4 Qe6+ 0-1

White is being checkmated.