

Oscar de Prado

The London System in 12 Lessons

Strategic Concepts, Typical Plans and Tactical Themes

New In Chess 2021

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Preface by grandmaster Pepe Cuenca

I can recall two nightmares that marked my adolescence: one chess-related, one non-chess-related. The non-chess-related one was that I dreamt I was choking on a piece of chewing gum. I woke up but still thought that the dream was real. I desperately hurled myself off the top bunk in which I slept and as I fell I managed to knee my little brother in the stomach. My brother brought me back to reality, not before calling me every name under the sun.

The chess-related nightmare was called *the London System*. Between the ages of thirteen and twenty-three I must have played at least fifty games against the Serbian International Master Slobodan Kovacevic in tournaments in Andalucía. The much-loved 'Kovy', as we affectionately called him among my group of chess friends, was a specialist in this line, which caused me much suffering for many years over the board. And I say over the board because away from it, analysing with Kovacevic was a real pleasure, and I learned a huge amount from him.

My desperation was so great that one of my best friends, International Master Marcos Camacho, even suggested playing 1.d4 ♖f6 2.♗f3 b6 3.♙f4 ♙a6!?, to drag London players out of their comfort zone at all cost. Rather desperate measures, as you can see!

The book *The Agile London System* by FIDE master Oscar de Prado was a great success. I read it with great pleasure and learned about many variations of which I was unaware, or to which I had previously paid no attention. This new book aims to explore even more deeply the different strategic plans involved and bring the theoretical lines up to date. This updating of the London System is needed, since in recent years there have been many games with it among the world's chess elite, including the World Champion Magnus Carlsen, who has employed it as one of his main weapons in several rapid and blitz world championship events.

A mistake that London System players often make is to play it in 100% of their games with the white pieces, and without studying it very deeply. I think that with this book the reader will come to realise the richness of this opening and how necessary it is to know it well, both with white and with black. There are some variations which are more positional but also some very aggressive lines of a tactical nature, or involving an attack against the black king.

All in all, I would say that the London System is a very interesting weapon and I think that this book of Oscar's is a meticulous piece of work, in which you can learn all the intricacies hidden in this opening, which every day is being employed by ever more tournament players.

A special game

This is perhaps one of the games with the London System that has made the greatest impression on me in the last few years and which has given me the greatest enjoyment. I was also fortunate to be able to provide live commentary to this game, which was a very exciting experience. The game was played between two good friends of mine, two of the most outstanding young players in Spanish chess: Miguelito Santos and Jaime Santos. Fasten your seat belts and prepare to enjoy yourselves!

Game 1 London System, main line
Miguel Santos Ruiz 2581
Jaime Santos Latasa 2575
 Iberoamericano Internet 2020 (2)

**1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♙f4 c5 4.e3
 ♘c6 5.♘bd2 e6 6.c3 ♙d6**

This is the line I myself usually play against the London System, The middlegame battle, as nearly always in this system, revolves round the squares e4 and e5.

7.♙g3

7.♙xd6?! would mean losing the above-mentioned battle for the square e5.

7...0-0

7...♙xg3?! is risky for Black. After the opening of the h-file White has

plenty of attacking possibilities against the black king.



8.♙d3

The natural square for the bishop. It controls e4 and points at h7.

8.♙b5!?! is the other very interesting possibility, which the World

Champion Magnus Carlsen himself has played with great success. His victory over Vishy Anand is very

instructive: 8...a6 9.♙xc6 bxc6 10.♙a4 ♖b8 11.♙a3 ♙xg3 12.hxg3 cxd4 13.cxd4 a5 14.0-0 ♙b6 15.b3 ♙a6 16.♖fc1 ♘d7 17.♙d6 ♙a7

18.♖xc6 ♙b5 19.♖c7 ♖b7 20.♖ac1 a4 21.♖xb7 ♙xb7 22.♖c7 ♙b8 23.♖xd7 ♙xd7 24.♙xd7 1-0 Carlsen-Anand, Doha 2016.

8...b6 9.♙e2!?

A very venomous attacking line. White's main idea is to break very quickly with e3-e4.

9.♘e5 is the main line. White prepares the advance 9...♙b7 10.f4 and attack on the kingside. Here there is one of the most attractive

positional manoeuvres that I learned when studying this line in depth: 10...♖e7 (Black threatens to play ...♗e4 and subsequently ...f7-f6 to expel the powerful knight from e5) 11.♖f3 (for the moment White prevents this) 11...♗f5 12.♙f2. After this move it would seem that Black has made a fool of himself, because g2-g4 is coming, but... 12...♙e7!! (making room for the knight on d6; later Black will occupy e4 with a complicated and very interesting position) 13.g4 ♗d6 14.g5 ♗fe4 15.0-0-0 c4 16.♙c2 b5 17.♖h3 b4 18.♗xe4 dxe4 19.♙e1 ♙d5 20.♖g1 b3 21.axb3 cxb3 22.♙b1 f5 23.gxf6 ♙xf6 24.♖g4 ♗f5 25.♗d2 ♖a5 26.♗e2 ♙xe5 27.dxe5 ♖ad8 28.♗f2 ♖a1 29.♙d2 ♙c4 30.♖h5 ♖xb2 31.♗e1 ♖xd2 0-1 Karjakin-Adams, Wijk aan Zee 2016.

9.e4! is another very venomous move to which Black should respond with ...♙e7. I can testify to the dangers of this variation. I faced it over the board in the Madrid League 2016/17 against the strong International Master Javier Moreno Ruiz. I was nailed to the board for 45 minutes thinking and I didn't have a clue what to do. In fact I was clearly worse after capturing the pawn, which seems the most natural: 9...dxe4 (9...♙e7! is the correct response, but not at all easy to play over the board if you don't know the position) 10.♗xe4 ♗xe4 11.♙xe4 ♙b7 12.dxc5 ♙xc5 13.♖a4 and, for example, after the 'natural' 13...♖c8? 14.♙xh7+!! and... hasta la

vista, baby! 14...♗xh7 15.♖h4+ ♗g8 16.♗g5, with a decisive advantage. **9...♙b7 10.e4 ♙e7!**

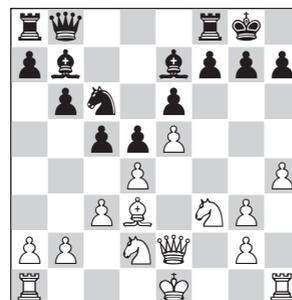
The typical response to e3-e4, to avoid the fork ...e6-e5. If 10...dxe4 11.♗xe4 ♗xe4 12.♙xe4 (12.♖xe4 g6 13.0-0-0∞) 12...cxd4 13.♖d1, reaching very complex positions. **11.e5 ♗h5**



12.h4!N

A novelty that contains a lot of venom, as we'll see in the game. White is preparing a support point for the knight on g5. 12.a3, introduced in Welling-Blomqvist, Fornebu 2106, is the main move in this position.

12...♗xg3 13.fxg3 ♖b8! Better than 13...♖c7 because after 14.♙xh7+ ♗xh7 15.♗g5+ ♗h6 16.0-0 the black queen is unable to go to e8 to protect f7.



14. ♖xh7+!

White goes all-in with the bishop sacrifice on h7.

14... ♖xh7 15. ♘g5+ ♖h6

The only move. 15... ♖g8 16. ♗h5 ♖xg5 17. hxg5 f6 18. g6 and it's all over; 15... ♖xg5 16. hxg5+ ♖g8 17. ♗h5 transposes.

16. ♗d3

Threatening mate in one. If now 16. ♗e3 cxd4 17. cxd4 ♖a6! 18. ♘xe6+ and again we can appreciate the importance of the queen being on b8 rather than c7: 18... ♖h7 19. ♘xf8+ ♗xf8, with a clear advantage to Black. The bishop pair is clearly superior to the rook.

16 ♘df3 is the recommendation of the engine (with equality), in a position that a human being needs weeks to understand!

16... ♖g6 17. h5!



17... ♘xe5!!

If 17... gxh5 then 18. ♗h7+ ♖xg5 19. ♗xh5 mate.

18. hxg6+

Not 18. dxe5? ♗xe5+ 19. ♖f2 ♗xg5 and White's attack is insufficient.

18... ♖g7

If 18... ♖xg5 then 19. ♗e3+ ♖f6 20. ♗f4+ ♖xg6 21. ♗h6+ ♖f5

22. ♗h5+ ♖g4 23. ♗g5+ ♖xg5 24. ♗h3 mate.

19. ♗h7+ ♖g8



20. ♗h8+!

And here, incredibly, Black has to play 20... ♖g7 with a draw by repetition. Not even the engines, to start with, see the winning variation for White after the capture of the rook. Stockfish needs about ten seconds on my machine.

20... ♖xh8?

If 20... ♖g7 then 21. ♗h7+ ♖g8 22. ♗h8+ with a draw.

21. g7+ ♖xg7 22. ♗h7+ ♖f6

The king goes for a stroll up the board.

23. ♗h6+ ♖f5



24.0-0-0?

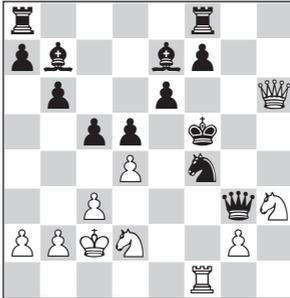
24. ♖e2!! is the key move to win, since it threatens the deadly check

on f1 and at the same time prevents the check on d3. If 24...♙a6+ then 25.c4! and there's no way to prevent ♜f1+, winning.

24...♘d3+ 25.♙c2 ♜xg3 26.♜f1+ ♘f4

And Black has been given time to provide cover.

27.♘h3



27...♙d3+?

After 27...♙d6, White would have had nothing better than 28.♜h5+ ♙f6 29.♘xf4 ♙xf4 30.♜e5+ ♙e7 31.♜xf4, and Black's advantage in material is too great.

28.♙c1 ♜xf1+

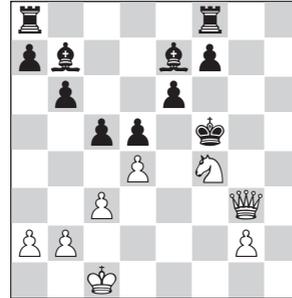
The only move.

GM José Cuenca Jimenez
Granada, May 2021

29.♘xf1 ♘xh3 30.♘g3+ ♙g4 31.♜xh3+ ♙f4 32.♘e2+ ♙g5 33.♜g3+ ♙h6 34.♜h3+ ♙g6 35.♘f4+ ♙g5 36.♜g3+?

It was a draw after 36.♜e3!, for example 36...♙f5 37.♜e5+ ♙g4 38.♘h3 ♙h4! 39.♜e3!.

36...♙f5



And Miguel lost on time in an inferior position, having run out of checks. When you face the London System you expect long positional games, but this opening contains some diabolical variations, such as the one shown in this game. I hope you liked it!

Introduction

The London System, which also covers the so-called Pereyra Attack, the New York System and the modern Jobava Attack, is a universal opening system characterised by a set-up for White usually based on playing d2-d4, ♘f4, ♖f3, e2-e3, c2-c3 and h2-h3 and which can be played against almost any response by Black. It has a reputation for solidity and it relies more on schemes than long lines of theory. It's more important to understand the ideas and plans of the system than to study a lot of theory, although at times it requires a degree of precision in the move-order.

It has long been a popular opening with club players and amateurs but in recent years, following the publication of my previous book *The Agile London System* in 2016, added to the fact that the world elite, led by Magnus Carlsen, began to play this system on a regular basis, the popularity of the London has really taken off and it has featured in a great number of games. At the same time we have seen the appearance of a host of courses, books and videos on this opening, as well as a great deal of analysis devoted to it.

In this book we are going to look at the London System from a more practical viewpoint, focusing on the needs of amateur players, in contrast to my previous book *The Agile London System*, which was a much more theoretical work and tried to cover all possible options. To be clear, the present book is neither a theoretical manual on the London System, nor simply an update to the previous book, although the latest novelties and the currently critical lines are analysed. This is essentially a new book, focusing on the specific themes that arise in this opening and with an explanation of the most important plans and ideas. The aim is to help the amateur player to understand the London System and play it correctly and easily.

The London System is ideal for players who don't have much time to study openings, or simply dislike, or are not very good at, studying long and difficult theoretical variations. We can play the same opening against many black responses and we can often play our ideal set-up without worrying too much about the move-order, or the opponent's preparation. The worse that can happen is that Black equalises, but from that point on we can play the rest of the game from a solid position and with a knowledge of the plans.

In the present book we are going to cover a variety of important strategic concepts, common situations, move-orders, typical plans and ideas, as well as typical tactics, combinations and endgames, all in a clear and simple way, so that anyone can learn and play this opening, no matter their playing level.

LESSON 2

The attack on the b2-pawn

In this chapter we're going to look at the various positions in which Black attacks the b2-square, which is the weakest point in White's position after the early bishop sortie to f4. Black can attack it in various set-ups, but the main threat arises after Black plays ...♙b6, attacking the pawn on b2.

We shall see the best plans and ideas for White and how to respond to the threat against the b2-pawn, whether to defend it or to sacrifice it. In the event of the latter, as a rule, in the majority of cases, if Black takes the pawn he nearly always gets into difficulties.

Generally speaking, the idea of ...♙b6 to attack the b2-pawn isn't dangerous for White; often, when the queen can't take the pawn, it ends up badly placed on b6 and has to retreat, losing a few tempi.

Let's begin with the most direct way for Black to attack the b2-pawn.

Game 1 Benoni defence

Luca Moroni

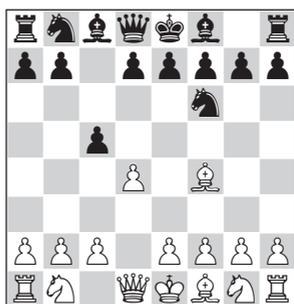
2530

David Paravyan

2653

Internet blitz 2020

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♙f4 c5



3.e3

The main move in the London System. Against this move-order White has various other options, such as 3.d5. This advance leads to positions typical of the Benoni, or the Benko Gambit Declined, and of

course this is a good option to bear in mind if you want to avoid the main line that we're going to study. A lot of strong players have opted for this, including Carlsen, but since it's a departure from the usual schemes of the London System we're not going to study it in this book.

The move 3.c3 is inferior, due to 3...♙b6 and now as the b5-square is not defended (as is the case after 3.e3), we can't play 4.♘a3?, since Black can capture on b2 (4...♙xb2) with advantage, because the knight can't jump to b5.

The alternative 4.♙b3 ♙xb3 5.axb3 cxd4 is also unpromising for White; if White had played 3.e3, he could now recapture on d4 with a good position, but after 6.cxd4 the white structure is left damaged and the opening of the a-file is insufficient

compensation. Black is already a bit better.

So White needs to protect the pawn with 4.♖c1 or 4.♖c2, although neither of these is sufficient to gain any advantage. There is also a gambit option with 4.♘d2!? ♜xb2 5.e4, but it's unclear whether White's compensation will be sufficient.

An interesting alternative to avoid everything that we are about to see, and which strong players have employed quite often, is 3.dxc5!?



analysis diagram

Now Black has several options:

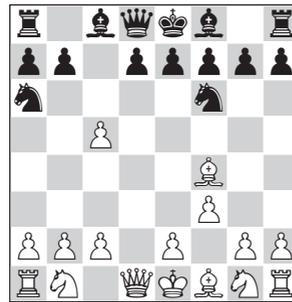
A) 3...♘c6 has been played, e.g. 4.♘c3 (4.♘f3!?) 4...e5 5.♙g5 ♙xc5 6.e3 ♙b4 (6...0-0!?) 7.♘ge2± Aronian-Kasparov, St Louis rapid 2017;

B) Black can also go after the pawn directly with 3...♖a5+ 4.♖d2 (the alternative would be 4.♘c3) 4...♖xc5 (better than 4...♖xd2+ 5.♘d2 ♘a6 6.♘b3 and White is slightly better) 5.♘c3 d6 6.e4 ♘bd7 7.♘f3 a6 8.♙e3 ♖a5. This position is similar to some Sicilians: White has a slight advantage, Repka-Fedorchuk, Cattolica 2019;

C) 3...♘a6

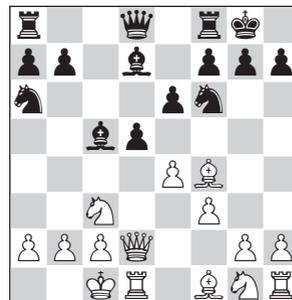
C1) Now the most popular continuation is 4.♖d4 ♖a5+ 5.c3 (or 5.♘c3 ♘xc5 6.♙d2 ♘e6 7.♖h4 (7.♖d3!?) Bauer-Heimann, Switzerland tt 2017) 7...g5 8.♖g3 d5± Rapport-Giri, Wijk aan Zee 2014) 5...♖xc5 6.e3 e6 7.♘d2, with equal play in Aronian-Nepomniachtchi, St Louis blitz 2017;

C2) 4.f3!? is an interesting move, played recently in the strong classical tournament in Prague.



analysis diagram

4...e6 (if 4...♘xc5 5.e4 g6 6.♘c3 ♙g7 7.♖d2 0-0± Shimanov-Nepomniachtchi, Internet rapid 2020) 5.e4 ♙xc5 6.♘c3 d5 7.♖d2 0-0 8.0-0-0 ♙d7 (8...♘c7± Dhulipalla-Lalith, New Delhi 2018)



analysis diagram

9. ♖xa6!? (another interesting option was 9.e5 ♘e8 10.h4) 9...bxa6 10.e5 (if 10.exd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xd5 exd5 12.♖xd5 ♖a5 Black gains compensation for the sacrificed pawn; he has the bishop pair and open files against White's castled position) 10...♘e8 11.♘xd5?! (the quiet 11.♖e3 was better, with unclear play) 11...exd5 12.♖xd5.



analysis diagram

This is White's idea; now it appears that he will regain the material, due to the simultaneous attack on c5 and d7.

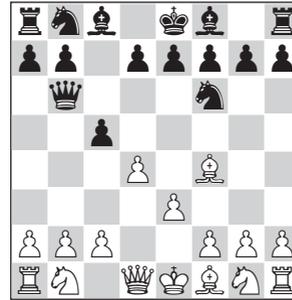
12...♖b6?.

An error. The move to call White's sacrifice into question was 12...♖a5!

13.♖xa8 (if 13.♖xd7 ♖b8 with a clear advantage to Black) 13...♘d6! 14.♖d5 (if 14.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 15.exd6 ♖xa2, with a clear advantage to Black: the queen is superior to the two rooks, White is behind in development, and furthermore Black has a strong attack with the queen and the bishop pair, which will cost White material) 14...♖e6 15.♖d2 ♖b6 16.♖d3 ♖b8 17.b4 ♘c4, and Black has a strong attack and is clearly better.

13.♖xd7 ♘c7 14.♘e2, with advantage to White, although Black managed to save the half-point in Shankland-Anton Guijarro, Prague 2020.

3...♖b6



Here we have one of the positions where Black attacks the b2-pawn in the quickest possible way. Now White must decide whether to defend it or sacrifice it.

4.♘c3

White speeds up his development and doesn't bother to defend the pawn. But it's more precise to play 4.♘a3!, since if Black plays ...a7-a6 the white knight can then go to c4.



analysis diagram

In addition to 4...♖xb2 5.♘b5, which transposes to the main game, Black has several options:

A) If 4...a6 5.♘c4! ♖a7 (the only safe retreat square – other moves all lose: 5...♖c6 6.d5 ♘xd5 (6...♖xd5 7.♗b6) 7.♗e5 ♖c7 (7...♖d6 8.♗xf7) 8.♖xd5) 6.dxc5 ♖xc5 7.e4!, with advantage to White, as 7...♗xe4 loses to 8.♙e3! ♖c6 9.♗b6;

B) Another option is 4...cxd4 5.exd4 ♗d5 (5...d6 6.♗c4 ♖d8 7.c3± Grachev-Roiz, Minsk blitz 2015) 6.♙c1 e6 7.♗c4 ♖c7 with a slight advantage for White, Tang-Oparin, Charlotte tt 2019;

C) There's also 4...d6 5.♗c4 ♖c7 6.c3 (an interesting alternative here is 6.a4) 6...g6 7.h3 ♙g7 8.♗f3 0-0 9.♙e2 with balanced play, Williamson-Freeman, cr 2017.

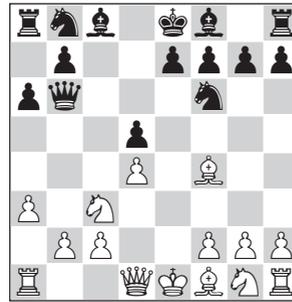
4...♖xb2

Of course, this capture isn't obligatory.

A) Black can play 4...cxd4 5.exd4 a6:

A1) Here, 6.♙c4?! has been played, e.g. 6...e6?! (Giri doesn't dare to take on b2, but the critical move would be 6...♖xb2! 7.♗ge2 ♖b4 8.♖d3 d5 9.♙b3 e6 and Black is better, as I fail to see any compensation for the pawn, Heinzel-Mirumian, Ostrava 2011) 7.♗ge2!? d5 (7...♖xb2? 8.♙b3±) 8.♙b3 ♙d7, with a complex position, although Levon Aronian won two online blitzplay games against Anish Giri from this position (in 2018);

A2) 6.a3 indirectly defends the b2-pawn, since now if 6...♖xb2 then 7.♗a4 wins the queen. After 6...d5



analysis diagram

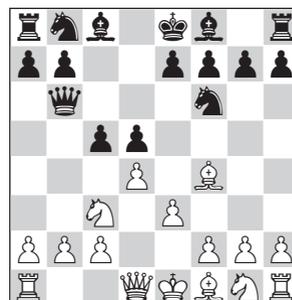
... we have a position in the style of the Jobava Attack. Here there are several options:

A21) An interesting idea is 7.♗a4!? ♖d8 8.♗f3 ♙g4 9.h3 ♙xf3 10.♖xf3 e6 11.c3 ♙d6 12.♙xd6 ♖xd6 13.♗c5= Toro Solis de Ovando-Benz, cr 2018;

A22) There is also 7.♙d3 ♙g4 8.♗ge2 (8.♖d2!?) 8...e6 9.f3 ♙h5= Gubajdullin-Khegay, Voronezh 2018;

A23) Finally there is the normal 7.♗f3 ♙g4 8.♙e2 ♗c6 (8...e6 9.0-0.♙xf3 10.♙xf3 ♗c6= Rodriguez Amezcqueta-Sarana, Spain tt 2019) 9.♗a4 ♖d8= Tran Minh Thang-Paravyan, St Petersburg 2018.

B) 4...d5?! is dubious,



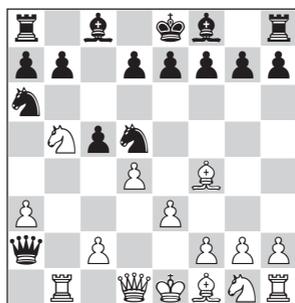
analysis diagram

as after 5.♘b5 ♘a6 White can gain the advantage with either 6.c3 ♙d7 (6...c4 7.a4±) 7.a4 c4 8.b3!± or 6.dxc5 ♙xc5 7.♗f3±, or 6.a4±;

C) Also possible is 4...e6 5.a3 cxd4 (if 5...♗c6? 6.♗f3?! (6.♘b5!±) 6...a6 7.♙e2= Ponomariov-Svidler, Moscow blitz 2010, or 5...d5?! 6.♘b5 ♘a6± Nihal-Nepomniachtchi, St Petersburg blitz 2018) 6.exd4 d6 7.♗f3 with equality, Torre-Luther, Tekirdag 2016.

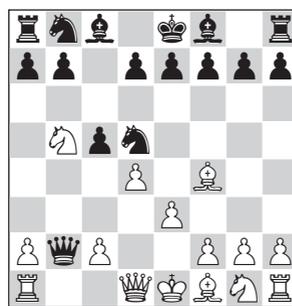
5.♘b5 ♘d5

The only defence; 5...♘a6 is bad due to 6.a3! ♘d5 7.♖b1 ♙a2.



analysis diagram

Here White has several ways to win. The main idea is to trap the black queen, and the best way to do this is with 8.c4! (the idea 8.♖b3 also gives White a decisive advantage) 8...♗xf4 9.exf4 cxd4 10.♗f3 e6 (if 10...♗c5 11.♗fxd4 e6 12.♖c1 a6 13.♗c7+ ♔d8 14.♗xa8) 11.♙c1 d3 12.♙xd3 ♙e7 (if 12...♗c5 13.♙e2 ♗e4 14.♖a1 ♙b3 15.♗c7+ ♔d8 16.♗xa8 ♙c5 17.0-0) 13.0-0 14.♖d1 ♗c5 (14...b6 15.♖a1) 15.♖b2 and finally the black queen is lost.



6.a3!

White is not content with forcing a draw with 6.♖b1 ♙xa2 7.♖a1 ♙b2, as has happened in many games. Of course, here Black accepts that White can draw if he wants, which means that normally players stronger than us will not choose this line, since they are risking a draw. Often it will be players at an equal or lower level who will play this line.

6...a6

This was thought to be the best defence.

A) Thanks to the development of stronger engines, it has been discovered that Black can also play 6...♗c3!? 7.♗c7+ ♔d8 8.♙c1 ♙xc1+ 9.♖xc1, which was previously considered advantageous to White, but after the discovery of 9...e5!



analysis diagram

things are not so clear and after 10. ♖xe5 d6 11. ♗xa8 dxe5 12. dxe5:

A1) In the only game so far with this line Black played badly: after 12...b6? 13. ♗e2! ♗xe2 14. ♖xe2 ♖d7 15. ♖d1 ♖c8 White had a clear advantage and went on to win in Abreu Jaen-Jaquez, Santo Domingo 2016;

A2) Also interesting is 12...c4!? 13. ♖xc4 ♖xa3 14. ♖a1 (14. ♗e2 ♖xc1 15. ♗xc3 ♗c6 16. ♖e2 ♗xe5 17. ♖d1+ ♖d7 18. ♖b3 ♖a3 19. ♗b5 ♖e7 20. ♗ac7=) 14... ♖b2 15. ♖xa7 ♗c6 16. ♖a2! ♗xa2 17. ♖xa2 ♖c3+ 18. ♖e2 ♖a5, with equal play;

A3) 12...♗c6! gives rise to a complex position: 13. ♗e2 ♗xe2 14. ♖xe2 ♖f5 15. g4 ♖d7 with equal chances. In general it appears that Black is holding after 9...e5!.

B) 6...♗xf4? loses after 7.exf4



analysis diagram

7.cxd4 (7... ♗a6 8. ♖c4 ♗b4 (8...d5 9. ♖a2) 9.axb4 ♖xb4+ 10.c3 ♖xc4 11. ♗c7+ ♖d8 12. ♗xa8 ♖xc3+ 13. ♖f1) 8. ♖c4 (not 8. ♗c7+? ♖d8 9. ♗xa8 ♖c3+ 10. ♖e2 b6 and Black wins; but another way to win is 8. ♖b1 ♖a2 9. ♗c7+ ♖d8 10. ♗xa8 Breskanu-Sabirov, Bryansk 2019) 8...d3 (8...a6

9. ♖a2) 9.cxd3 d5 (9... ♖f6 10. ♗c7+ ♖d8 11. ♗xa8; 9... ♗a6 10.d4 and the black queen is doomed) 10. ♖b1 ♖f6 11. ♗c7+ ♖d8 12. ♗xd5 ♖g6 13. ♗f3.



analysis diagram

Here White doesn't win the rook but even so, with the black king stuck in the centre, White has a winning advantage.

7. ♖b1 ♖a2 8. ♖c1!

Again, White is not satisfied with 8. ♖a1 ♖b2 9. ♖b1.

8...axb5 9. ♖a1



White has trapped the enemy queen, although Black gains considerable compensation. The positions that arise from here are difficult to evaluate and complicated to play; although White has some advantage, converting it isn't easy. If this type of position is too

complicated for you, there is always the option of taking the draw or opting earlier for 3.d5 or 3.dxc5.

9... ♖xa1 10. ♖xa1



10...c4?!

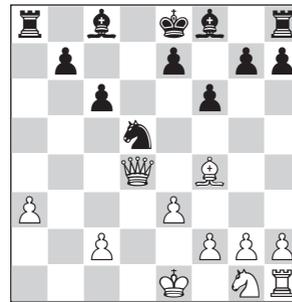
A rather dubious idea.

A) Instead, 10... ♖xf4?! isn't good either, in view of 11.exf4 b4 12.a4 cxd4 (12...g5 13.dxc5 ♖g8 14.f5! ♕g7 15.♖a2 ♕c3+ 16.♔d1 ♖c6 17.♕c4 e6 18.♗e2±) 13.♕b5 ♖c6 14.♗f3, with advantage to White;

B) In the original line examined on page 139 of our previous book on the London System, Black chose 10... ♖c6, which was based on two games played by a great theoretician of the London System, GM Eric Prié.

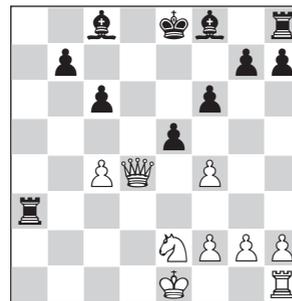
11. ♕xb5 (11.dxc5?! b4 12.a4 ♖c3 gives Black good play) 11...cxd4 (worse are 11... ♖xd4 12.exd4 ♖xf4 13.dxc5 ♖xg2+ 14.♔f1 ♖h4 15.♗e2+- and 11... ♖xf4 12.♕xc6 bxc6 13.exf4 cxd4 14.♖xd4±) 12.♕xc6 dxc6!? (a new idea, although it's slightly better to capture with 12...bxc6! 13.♖xd4 f6 14.c4 ♖xf4 15.exf4 and White stood better in the game Prié-Argandoña Riveiro, San Sebastian 2011,

analysed in our previous book). After 13. ♖xd4 f6 Black threatens ...e7-e5.



analysis diagram

14.c4! (the best move; if 14.♗f3!? ♖xa3? (it's better to play 14...e5 15.♕xe5 fxe5 16.♖xe5+ ♕e7 17.e4 ♖f6 18.0-0∞) 15.0-0.e6 16.♗d2± Starke-Schuster, cr 2010) 14... ♖xf4 (14...e5 15.♕xe5 fxe5 16.♖xe5+ ♖e7 17.♗f3 ♖xa3 18.0-0 leaves White with a clear advantage, thanks to his better development and the poor coordination between the black pieces) 15.exf4 ♖xa3 16.♗e2 (another option is 16.♗f3 e5 17.♖b2 exf4 (17...♕b4+ 18.♖xb4 ♖a1+ 19.♔d2 ♖xh1 20.fxe5±) 18.0-0±) 16... e5.



analysis diagram

Black must react quickly and normally he lashes out with this. After 17.♖b2 exf4 18.♘xf4 ♙c5 19.0-0 0-0 White maintains the advantage, although it won't be easy to realise it, Sesko-Sorensen, cr 2018;

C) It has also been discovered that 10...e5! is good and leads to equal play:



analysis diagram

C1) 11.dxe5 c4 12.♗d4 ♘xf4 13.♖xf4 ♙xa3 14.♘f3 ♙b4+ 15.♙e2 0-0 (15...d5 16.exd6 0-0 17.g4 ♖a2 18.♘d4 ♘c6= Bachmann-Ozalp, cr 2017) 16.g4 ♖a2 17.♘d4 ♘c6 18.♙f3 ♘xd4+ 19.♖xd4 ♖xc2 20.♖b6= Gleichmann-Tinture, cr 2016;

C2) Similar is 11.♙xe5 c4 12.♙xb8 (12.♖b2 ♖a5 13.♙xb8 ♙xa3 14.♖b1 ♘c3 15.♖a1 ♙b4 16.♖b2 ♘d5+ 17.♙e2= Starke-Laghetti, cr 2010) 12...♖xa3 13.♖b2 (13.♖b1!? ♙b4+ 14.c3 ♖xc3 15.♙d1 ♖xe3 16.♖f5 ♖e1+ 17.♙c2 ♖xf1 18.♖xd5 ♖xf2+ 19.♙d1 0-0, again with a balanced position in Sesko-Dard, cr 2016) 13...♙b4+ 14.♙e2 ♖a2 15.♖c1 ♙a3 16.♖d2 ♙b4 17.♖c1 ♙a3 ½-½ Guilliard-Schwerteck, Lauffen am Neckar 2011.

11. ♙xb8! ♖xb8 12. ♖b2 ♘c7

It's important for Black to protect the b5-pawn, which furthermore protects the one on c4. It's time now to make an evaluation of the position.



We can see that for the queen Black has rook, bishop and pawn, which gives him sufficient compensation; furthermore there are still a lot of pieces left on the board and the position is quite closed: both sides are lagging in development.

White's pawn on a3 is weak and is going to be lost after Black plays ...♖a8 and ...e7-e6, so White must act quickly: if White is able to take on b5 and c4 he will have the advantage; he also needs to open lines for the queen and bring his king to safety.

13.a4?!

It was better to play 13.d5! ♖a8 14.♘f3 ♘xd5 (if 14...e6 15.d6! ♙xd6 16.♖xg7+–) 15.♖xb5 e6 16.♙xc4 ♘f6 17.0-0±.

13...d5 14.axb5 ♙d7 15.b6 ♘b5 16.♘f3?

A bad move; it was better to play either 16.g4! e6 17.♙g2 ♙a3 18.♖b1± or 16.♘e2 e6 17.g3 ♙a3 18.♖b1 0-0±.

16...f6?

16...e6 was better, e.g. 17.c3 ♖a8
18.♗e2 ♜a3 19.0-0.♝xc3 and if
anyone is better I think it's Black.

17.e4?!

This move loses the advantage.
Instead, 17.g3! was better, e.g. 17...
e6 18.♗h3 (threatening 19.♗xe6)
18...♗a3 19.♞b1 ♝f7 20.0-0.♜a8
21.♞d2 ♞c3 22.♞e1 ♗b2 23.f4±.

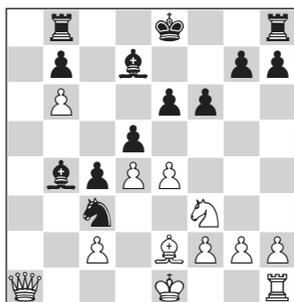
17...e6 18.♗e2?

A further mistake, leaving White in
a difficult position. It was essential
to play 18.exd5 exd5 19.c3 ♜a8
20.♗e2 ♜a3 21.0-0.♝xc3 22.♞e1!,
with an equal game.

18...♗a3 19.♞b1

Here 19.♞a1 was better, although
Black already has a clear advantage
after 19...♗b4+ 20.♞d2 0-0 21.♞c1.

19...♞c3 20.♞a1 ♗b4



Black's position is now winning.

21.♝f1

If 21.exd5 0-0! 22.dxe6 ♗xe6, or
21.♞b2 ♞a2+ 22.♝f1 ♜a8.

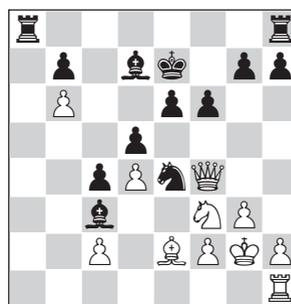
21...♞xe4 22.g3 ♝e7

It was slightly better to play 22...0-0
or 22...♗c3.

23.♝g2 ♜a8 24.♞c1 ♗c3

Stronger was 24...♜a2!.

25.♞f4



25...g5!

Black restricts the possible activity
of the white queen.

26.♞c7?

White falls into the trap. He wants
to free his position and gain some
activity but, as we'll see, this move
loses the queen; it was necessary to
retreat with 26.♞e3, although Black
maintains a winning advantage
after 26...♜a2 27.♗d1 h5.

26...♞hc8 27.♞xb7 ♞d6

Finally, the white queen is also lost
and the game is over.

**28.♞xa8 ♜xa8 29.h4 g4 30.♞h2 h5
31.f3 f5 32.fxg4 fxg4 33.♞b1 ♞b8
34.♞f1 ♗xd4 0-1**

Game 2 Benoni defence

Jiri Stocek 2560

David Navara 2732

Ostrava ch-CZE 2017 (4)

1.d4 ♞f6 2.♗f4 e6 3.e3 c5 4.♞f3

The most common move here; you
can also play 4.♞d2 ♞b6 5.♞c4!,
or 4.c3 ♞b6 5.♞a3 or 5.♞b3, with
advantage to White.

4...♞b6

Once again an early attack on the
b2-point. It's a similar idea to the
previous game but one move later

This allows the exchange of queens, although 32...♖f6 33.♗d6+ ♖g7 34.♗d4+ ♖f8 35.a4 was equally hopeless.

33. ♗d5

The simplest, exchanging queens. The ending will be won without any problems, so Black resigned.

Game 44 Systems with ...d7-d5 and ...e7-e6

J. Deepan Chakkravarthy 2557

Kumar Reddy Poluri Bharat 2270

Mumbai 2019 (5)

1.d4 e6 2.c3!?

A peculiar move-order and not the most appropriate one, but by transposition we soon end up in the normal variation of the London System that we are studying. The usual move-order would be 2.♙f4 ♘f6 3.e3 d5 4.♘d2 c5 5.c3 ♙d6 6.♙g3 (6.♘gf3!?, 6.♙b5+!?) 6...0-0 7.♘gf3 ♗c7.

2...d5 3.♙f4 ♙d6 4.♙g3 c5 5.e3 ♗c7!?

More normal would be the move-order 5...♘f6 6.♘d2 0-0 7.♘gf3.



6. ♘f3

White could exploit Black's move-order by playing 6.♗g4! g6 7.♘a3

(7.♙xd6 ♗xd6 8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.♗d4 ♗xd4 10.cxd4±) 7...a6 8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.♙xd6 ♗xd6 10.♗d4±.

6... ♘f6 7. ♘bd2 ♘bd7

It's more normal to castle first:

7...0-0 8.♙d3 ♘bd7.

8. ♙d3 0-0

In the previous game we saw the idea of dxc5 and various other options for White. Now let's study the most popular move, 8.♙d3.



9. ♗c2!?

An interesting idea, to try to complicate the game slightly. Other moves lead to quieter and more balanced positions:

A) 9.0-0 b6 (or 9...e5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♙xe5 12.♙h4!?) (12...♙xe5 ♗xe5=) 12...♙g4 (12...♙xh2+ 13.♖h1 ♘g4 14.♙e2 h5 15.g3 ♘xe3 16.fxe3 ♙xg3 17.♘f3±) 13.♙e2 ♙xe2 14.♗xe2 ♜ae8 (14...♙xh2+ 15.♖h1±) 15.♜ac1 h6 16.♘f3±) 10.e4 (or 10.♙xd6 ♗xd6 11.♜e1 ♙b7 12.e4 dxe4 13.♘xe4= Kindermann-Adams, Germany Bundesliga 2017/18) 10...♙xg3 11.hxg3 dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♙b7 13.♗e2= So-Carlsen, Internet blitz 2017;

B) 9.♗e2!? e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♙xe5= Abasov-Dominguez Perez, Khanty-Mansiysk 2019;

C) 9. ♖xd6 ♜xd6 10.0-0 e5 11.dxe5
 ♗xe5 12. ♘xe5 ♜xe5 13. ♖e1 ♖d8
 (13... ♜c7 14.e4 dxe4 15. ♘xe4 ♗xe4
 16. ♖xe4 h6= Sevian-Nihal, Internet
 blitz 2019) 14.h3 ♖f5 15. ♜c2 ♖xd3
 16. ♜xd3= Berkes-Howell, Budva tt
 2019;

D) 9.e4?! cxd4 10.cxd4 dxe4
 11. ♘xe4 ♗xe4 12. ♖xe4 ♗f6 13. ♖d3
 ♜a5+ ♣ So-Carlsen, Internet blitz
 2017.

9...h6

A normal reaction, but there are several options for Black in this position:

A) 9... ♖xg3 10.hxg3 h6 11.0-0 b6
 (11...e5 12.dxe5 ♗xe5 13. ♘xe5 ♜xe5
 14.c4= Grebnev-Ponomarev, Sochi
 jr 2019) 12.b3 ♖b7 13. ♖fc1 ♜d6
 14.a4=;

B) 9... ♖d8 10. ♖xd6 ♜xd6 11.0-0
 b6 12. ♖fd1 h6 13.a4 a5 14.h3 ♖b7=;

C) 9...b6 10. ♖xd6 ♜xd6 11.0-0
 ♖b7 12.a4 ♖ac8=;

D) 9...e5 10.dxe5 ♗xe5 11. ♘xe5
 ♖xe5 12. ♗f3 (an improvement
 would be 12. ♖h4! h6 13. ♗f3 ♖e8
 14.0-0 c4 15. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 16. ♖e2 g6
 17. ♜d2 ♖e6 18. ♖fd1±) 12... ♖xg3
 13.hxg3 h6 14.c4 ♖e6= Vachier-
 Lagrave-Dominguez Perez, Internet
 blitz 2018.

10.0-0

This is better than 10. ♖d1?! ♖xg3
 11.hxg3 e5 (11...b6 12.0-0 ♖b7♣)
 12.dxe5 ♗xe5 13. ♘xe5 ♜xe5= Zhou
 Jianchao-Vallejo Pons, China
 tt 2018, while 10. ♖xd6 leads to
 equality after 10... ♜xd6 11.0-0 e5
 12.dxe5 ♗xe5 13. ♘xe5 ♜xe5 14.c4=



10...e5

The typical reaction and the one that Black aims for. 10...b6 has also been played: 11. ♖xd6 ♜xd6 12. ♖ad1!? (12. ♖fe1= and 12.a4= would be normal, but 12.e4?! is dubious, e.g. 12...dxe4 (12...cxd4! 13.cxd4 dxe4 14. ♗xe4 ♜d5♣) 13. ♗xe4 ♜c7 14.dxc5 bxc5 15. ♖fe1= Dzagnidze-Galoyan, Batumi 2003) 12... ♖b7 13. ♖fe1 ♖ac8= Chernyshov-Mamedjarova, Abu Dhabi 2005.

11.dxe5

White has an interesting alternative in 11.e4 dxe4 12. ♗xe4 ♗xe4 13. ♖xe4 exd4 14.cxd4 ♖xg3 15.hxg3 ♜b6 16.a4, with equal chances.

11... ♗xe5 12. ♗xe5 ♖xe5 13.c4

Trying to unbalance the pawn structure. The other pawn break 13.e4 has also been played: 13... ♖xg3 14.hxg3 ♖e6 15. ♖fe1= Erdogdu-Tilicheev, Halkidiki tt 2019.



13...♙xg3 14.hxg3 ♙e6

Here 14...dxc4 also leads to equal play: 15.♙xc4 (15.♘xc4 ♙e6 16.♙e2 b6 17.b3 ♖ac8 18.♗fd1=) 15...b6 16.♗fd1 ♗e7 17.♙e2 ♙e6 18.a4 ♖ac8 19.♘c4 ♗fd8 20.♙f3=.

15.cxd5 ♘xd5 16.a3 ♗fd8 17.♘f3 ♖ac8

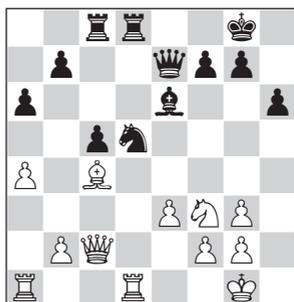
Objectively the position is equal, although that doesn't mean there is no play, since the pawn structure isn't symmetrical and there are still plenty of pieces left on the board.

18.♙c4

A normal continuation would have been 18.♖ac1 ♗b6 19.♗fd1 ♘f6=.

18...♗e7 19.♗fd1 a6 20.a4!?

This move is interesting, as although it gives up the b4-square, this won't be very useful for Black and it's much better to prevent the advance ...b7-b5.



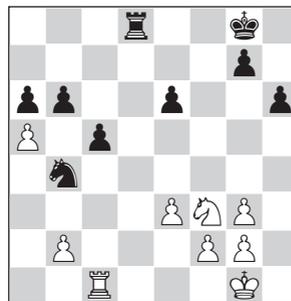
20...♘b4 21.♗e4 b6 22.♖ac1 ♗f6

23.♙xe6 ♗xe6 24.♗xe6 fxe6

Objectively the ending is equal, although the e6-pawn is isolated and a bit weak.

25.♗xd8+ ♗xd8 26.a5!?

Trying to weaken the black pawn chain, but it was better to centralise the king with 26.♔f1.

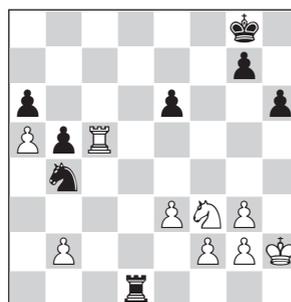


26...b5

It was possible capture the pawn with 26...bxa5 27.♘e5 (27.♗xc5 ♗d1+ 28.♔h2 ♘d3=) 27...♗d2 28.b3 (28.♘c4 ♗xf2 29.♔xf2 ♘d3+ 30.♔e2 ♘xc1+ 31.♔d2 ♘b3+ 32.♔c2 a4 33.♘b6 ♘a5 34.♘xa4 ♘b7=; 28.♗xc5 ♗xb2 29.♗xa5 ♖b1+ 30.♔h2 ♖b2=) 28...♖b2 29.♗xc5 ♖b1+ 30.♔h2 ♗xb3 31.♗xa5 ♖b2=.

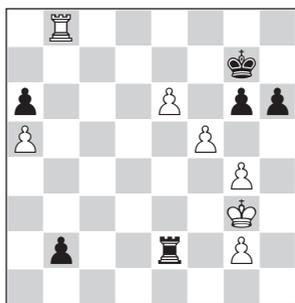
Black can also equalise with 26...♘d3 27.♗d1 bxa5 28.♘e5 ♗d5 29.♘xd3 (29.♗xd3 ♗xe5=) 29...c4=.

27.♗xc5 ♗d1+ 28.♔h2



28...♖b1?!

This move is an inaccuracy. Black could equalise without many problems with either 28...♗f1 29.♖c8+ ♔h7 30.♗e8 ♗xf2 31.♗xe6 ♗xb2=, or 28...♘d3 29.♖c6



41.♔f3?

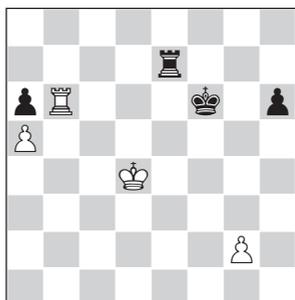
An error that spoils the advantage. And once again it's a demonstration that rook endings are very difficult to play well.

White could have won with 41.♔f4! ♖f2+ (41...♖xg2 42.♖b7+ ♔g8 43.f6; 41...gxf5 42.gxf5 ♖f2+ 43.♔e5 ♖e2+ 44.♔d6 ♔f6 45.g4) 42.♔e3 (42.♔e5 ♖e2+) 42...♖f1 (42...♖c2 43.e7; 42...♖xg2 43.e7) 43.♖xb2 gxf5 44.♖b6! (44.gxf5 ♖xf5±) 44...fxg4 45.♖xa6 ♔f6 46.e7+ ♔xe7 47.♖xh6 ♖a1 48.a6.

41...♖e5!

With this move Black manages to equalise the game once again.

42.♖xb2 gxf5 43.gxf5 ♖xf5+ 44.♔e4 ♔f6! 45.e7 ♖e5+ 46.♔d4 ♖xe7 47.♖b6+



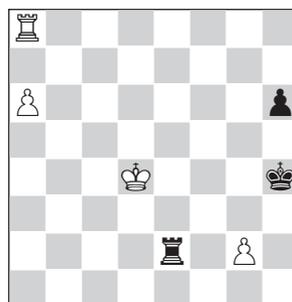
47...♔g5!

The only move to draw. The king needs to become active and seek shelter from White's checks.

48.♖xa6 ♖e2 49.♖a8 ♔h4

49...♔h5 was also drawing, e.g. 50.a6 (50.♖g8 ♖a2=) 50...♖xg2 51.♔c5 (51.a7 ♖a2=) 51...♖g5+ 52.♔c6 ♖g6+=.

50.a6



50...♖xg2??

Black makes a fatal slip, just when there were several moves to draw, e.g. 50...♖a2 51.♔c5 (if 51.a7 ♖a4+ 52.♔c5 ♖a6 53.♔b5 ♖a2 54.g3+ ♔h3 55.♔b6 ♖b2+ 56.♔c7 ♖c2+ 57.♔d6 ♖a2) 51...♖c2+ 52.♔b6 ♖b2+ 53.♔a7 ♖xg2! 54.♖h8 h5 55.♔b7 ♖b2+ 56.♔a8 ♔g4 57.a7 h4 58.♖b8 ♖a2 59.♔b7 h3 60.a8♖ ♖xa8 61.♖xa8 h2 62.♖h8 ♔g3=.

51.♖h8! ♖g4+

If 51...♖a2 then 52.♖xh6+ ♔g5 53.♖c6 ♔f5 54.♔c5 ♔e5 55.♔b6 ♔d5 56.♔b7, or 51...♖g6 52.a7.

52.♔e5 ♖g7 53.♖xh6+ ♔g5 54.♖h1

And Black resigned, since the black king is cut off and after 54...♖a7 55.♖a1 White wins by bringing his king across to support the a-pawn.

We're going to finish this chapter with an interesting idea discovered

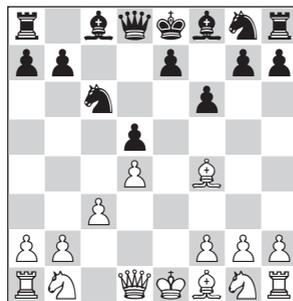
only a few years ago, one which could catch a London System player off guard.

Game 45 Caro-Kann (Exchange Variation)

Ferenc Berkes 2649

Kaare Hove Kristensen 2350

Gilleleje 2020 (3)



1.d4 d5 2.♘f4 c5 3.e3

In this move-order it's important to keep in mind the interesting Morris Gambit 3.e4, which we covered on page 183-186 in our previous book on the London System. In the event of 3.c3 cxd4 4.cxd4 we're in the Exchange Variation of the Slav Defence.

3...♟c6

The most precise move-order for Black if he wants to play this variation is probably 3...cxd4 4.exd4 ♟c6 5.c3 f6. This position can also arise from the Caro-Kann Exchange Variation.

4.c3

The most common move in this move-order. White can also play 4.♟f3 or 4.♟c3.

4...cxd4 5.exd4

White could recapture with the c-pawn (5.cxd4), again transposing to the Slav Exchange, which is why it's best for Black to exchange on d4 on move 3, which avoids this variation.

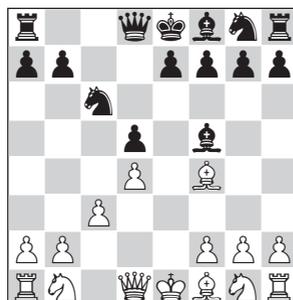
The same position can also arise from 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c3 (4.♟d3 ♟c6 5.c3) 4...♟c6 5.♟f4.

5...f6!?

A new line, which has been called the Apeldoorn Variation. It seems that the idea originates with the Dutch GM Erwin l'Ami, who shared it with IM Merijn van Delft, who in turn showed it to a group of players at the Apeldoorn club, who then began to study and play it.

In Yearbook 131 Van Delft published an article on this variation, which is gaining supporters. It can be unpleasant to face for any London System player who isn't prepared for it. Black's idea is to profit from not having played ...♟f6 and to look for alternatives which are not possible in the normal variation of the Caro-Kann Exchange.

Another interesting move is 5...♟f5. White then has several options:



analysis diagram

A) 6.♘d2 e6 7.♗gf3 ♘f6 (7...♙d6 8.♙xd6 ♖xd6 9.♘h4 ♙g6± Duda-Artemiev, Moscow blitz 2019) and now:

A1) 8.♙e2 ♙d6 (8...h6 9.0-0 ♙d6 10.♙xd6 ♖xd6 11.♚e1 (11.♘b3!? 0-0 12.♚e1=) 11...0-0 12.a4 a5 13.♖b3= Kamsky-Bartel, Germany Bundesliga 2019/20) 9.♙xd6 ♖xd6 10.♘h4 (10.0-0 0-0 11.♚e1 ♚fc8 12.♘b3± Hobber-Savanovic, Stockholm 2019/20) 10...♙e4 (10...0-0 11.0-0 ♚fe8 12.♚e1 ♙e4 13.a4 a6 14.♘hf3=) 11.0-0 0-0 (11...g5?! 12.♘hf3 ♙xf3 13.♘xf3 g4 14.♘e5 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♖xe5 16.♖a4+± Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son-Naiditsch, Riyadh rapid 2017) 12.f3 ♙g6 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.f4= Karakehajov-Paichadze, Turkey tt 2011;

A2) 8.♘h4 ♙g4 (8...♙e4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♘f3 ♙d6 11.♙xd6 ♖xd6 12.♙d3± Kramnik-Topalov, Paris blitz 2016) 9.♖b3 (9.♘hf3 ♙d6 10.♙xd6 ♖xd6 11.♙d3 0-0 12.0-0=) 9...♙d6 (9...♖d7 10.♙d3 ♙e7 11.♘hf3 0-0± Grabinsky-Pavasovic, PRO League rapid 2017) 10.♙xd6 ♖xd6 11.h3 (11.♖xb7 ♚b8+; 11.♙d3!?) 11...♙h5 12.♙d3 (12.g4?! ♙g6 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.♙g2± Tang-Cheng, PRO League rapid 2019) 12...0-0-0 13.♙b5∞ Wang Hao-Gelfand, St Petersburg rapid 2018;

A3) 8.♖b3 ♙d6!? (or 8...♖c8 9.♘h4 ♙e4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♘f3 ♙d6 12.♙xd6 ♘xd6 13.♙d3± Sjugirov-Robson, Internet blitz 2020; 8...♖d7!?)



analysis diagram

A31) 9.♖xb7 ♙xf4 10.♖xc6+ ♘f8 11.♘e5! (better than 11.g3 ♙d6 (11...♙xd2+ 12.♘xd2 g6?! (12...g5?! 13.♖a6± Swayams-Shyam, Pardubice 2018; 12...h5∞; 12...♚b8∞) 13.♙g2 (13.♖a6±) 13...♙g7 14.0-0? (14.♖a6±) 14...♖b8∞ Artemiev-Shirov, Moscow 2016) 12.♘h4 ♚b8 13.♘xf5 exf5∞ Palchun-Kobalia, St Petersburg 2017) 11...g6 (or 11...♙xd2+ 12.♙xd2 ♚b8 13.♖c5+ ♙g8 14.♖xa7 (14.♙e1!?±) 14...♘b2+? (14...h6∞) 15.♙c1 ♚c2+ 16.♙d1 h5 17.♘c6± Gorodetzky-Parligras, Riga rapid 2019) 12.♖b7!? (12.♘df3 ♙g7 13.♖b7 ♚f8 14.♙d3 ♚b8 15.♖xa7 ♚xb2 16.0-0 ♚b8∞) 12...♙xe5 13.dxe5 ♘g4 (or 13...♘d7 14.b4? (14.g4! ♚b8 (14...♙xg4? 15.♖b4+--)) 15.♖xa7 ♙xg4 16.♖d4±) 14...♘xe5± Nilsson-Hector, Växjö 2020) 14.♘f3 ♙g7 (14...♙e4? 15.h3 ♘h6 16.♘d4± Gorodetzky-Krstulovic, Budapest 2019) 15.h3 ♘h6 16.♘d4 ♚b8 17.♖xa7 ♚xb2± Buckels-Hector, Germany Bundesliga 2019/20.

The alternatives are inferior:

A32) 9.♙xd6 ♖xd6 10.♙e2 0-0 11.0-0 ♚ab8 (11...♘e4 12.♘xe4 ♙xe4= Gholami-Vaishali, Ortisei

2018) 12.a4= Bachmann-Hong, Philadelphia 2017;

A33) 9.♔g3 ♕xg3 10.hxg3 ♖e7 (10...♗d6 11.♖xb7 ♜b8 12.♗a6 0-0= Caruana-Grischuk, Paris rapid 2018) 11.♔b5 0-0 12.♔xc6 bxc6 13.♗a4 c5 14.♗a3 ♜fc8= Pähz-Khademalsharieh, Internet blitz 2020.

B) Although played quite a lot, 6.♖b3 gives White nothing:



analysis diagram

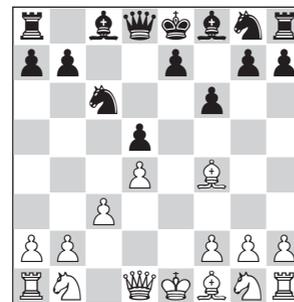
6...♗d7! 7.♘d2 (7.♘a3!?: 7.♘f3 f6!?) 7...e6 (7...f6!?) 8.♗g3 f6!?. This position arose from a Caro-Kann in Spielmann-Nimzowitsch, Karlsbad 1923, Game 5 in Nimzowitsch's book *Chess Praxis*; further proof, if it be needed, that 'there is nothing new under the sun'. Naroditsky-Erdős, St Louis 2019, continued 9.h4=;

C) 6.♔d3 ♕xd3 7.♖xd3 leads to very equal play, e.g. 7...e6 8.♘f3 ♔d6 9.♔xd6 ♖xd6 10.0-0 ♘ge7 (10...♘f6=) 11.♘bd2 0-0 12.♜fe1= Geller-Pultinevicius, Internet blitz 2020;

D) 6.♘f3 e6 7.♖b3 ♔d6! (the normal move is 7...♖c8, e.g. 8.♔e2 ♔e7 9.0-0 ♘f6 10.h3 h6 11.♘bd2 0-0 12.♜fe1 ♘e4! (12...♗d7 13.♘e5

♘xe5 14.♔xe5 ♜ac8 15.a4±; 12...♗d8 13.a4 ♔d6 14.♔xd6 ♜xd6± Grachev-Paravyan, Moscow blitz 2018) 13.♘xe4 (13.♜ad1=) 13...♔xe4 14.♘d2 (14.♘e5!?) 14...♔g6 15.a4 a5 (15...♗d8 16.a5 ♔d6 17.♔xd6 ♜xd6 18.♗a3± Kamsky-Shirov, St Petersburg rapid 2018) 16.♘b1 ♗d8 17.♘a3 ♔d6 18.♔xd6 ♜xd6 19.♘b5± Grachev-Shirov, St Petersburg blitz 2018) 8.♖xb7 (or 8.♔xd6 ♖xd6 9.♘bd2 ♘f6 10.♔e2 0-0=) 8...♔xf4 9.♖xc6+ ♘f8 10.♘bd2 (10.♘e5? ♘e7 11.♗a4? (11.♖c5?) 11...♔xe5 12.dxe5 ♖b8= Kabanov-Tomashevsky, Sochi 2018) 10...g6 (10...♜b8 11.♗a4 ♘e7= Dolukhanova-Vitenberg, Kragero 2019) 11.g3 (11.♘b3!?) 11...♔xd2+ 12.♘xd2 ♜b8=). So in general, Black gains good compensation with the sacrifice of the b7-pawn.

The main line of the Caro-Kann Exchange Variation would be 5...♘f6 6.♔d3, although there White has good prospects of gaining a slight advantage.



6. ♔g3!?

A prophylactic retreat.

A) Black's main idea with ...f7-f6 can be seen after the natural