

by Alfonso Romero and Oscar de Prado

The Agile London System

A Solid but Dynamic Chess Opening Choice for White

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Preface

The moves 'd4-♘f3-♕f4' constitute the 'London System', an opening which, despite a fully deserved reputation for solidity and simplicity, conceals a system of play which is much more profound than appears at first sight.

This system, which sets up the same pawn structure as in other Queen's Pawn openings – generally with c4 or c3, d4, e3, f2 etc. – and allows a natural development of the white pieces, has the great virtue of being playable versus almost any black defensive set-up. After the opening moves, the different plans and ideas mould the theory of the variation in each resulting position. This is when the game acquires a strategic direction, forcing each side to understand the opponent's intentions and rewarding understanding more than concrete calculation.

Perhaps this is why some players, generally those who prefer quiet positions, resort to this system when faced with Black's most aggressive defences, such as, for example, the Dutch, the King's Indian or the Grünfeld, seeking positions in which manoeuvring play predominates and thus avoiding the sharp exchange of blows that takes place in the main lines. Yet, despite what one be tempted to think, the London System has an aggressive side to it, arising from its similarity to the Torre Attack.

When Black selects a Queen's Gambit Declined set-up – 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6 3.♕f4 ♘f6 – White can choose between two options: the first is to put pressure on the centre by playing c2-c4, developing the queen's knight to c3 and bringing the rook to c1, while Black tries to solve the problem of developing his queen's bishop. The second plan is to place our light-squared bishop on the b1-h7 diagonal and develop our queen's knight to d2, preparing to support our centre with c2-c3 and attack on the kingside.

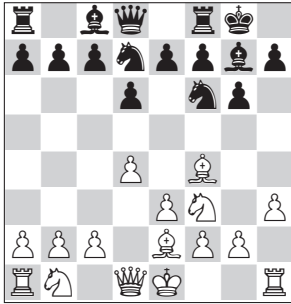
In the following examples we shall see how, versus one and the same black set-up, we can choose between different schemes as White, leading to widely differing plans. This versatility can be very useful, enabling us to adapt our play versus different types of opponent.

All this explains why for me, with more than fifteen years of experience playing the London System in all kinds of tournament and versus every type of player, the London System is not so much an opening as a whole system of play, in the widest possible sense.

King's Indian Example Struggle for the e-file

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♕f4 g6 3.e3 ♕g7 4.♘f3
d6 5.h3 0-0 6.♕e2 ♘bd7

We have reached a fairly standard King's Indian set-up versus the London System. Here Black needs to decide which central break to select, ...e7-e5 or ...c7-c5.



7. ♖h2!

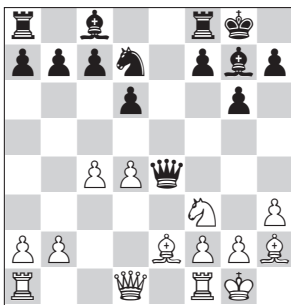
The first important point. It is important to understand that sooner or later this move will be necessary and that now it is up to Black to commit himself in the centre. Castling would be somewhat premature, since it would give Black enough time to establish his centre.

7.0-0 ♖e8 (7...♖e8 does not threaten 8...e5, as we shall see further on) 8.c4 e5 (White must retreat the bishop) 9.♗h2 ♘e4! (Black plays this before White can develop his queen's knight) 10.♘c3 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 with equality, since now it is White who is on the back foot. But note that 11...f5 would not be good in view of 12.c5!

7... ♖e8

We see that Black has opted for the ...e7-e5 break.

8.c4 e5 9.♘c3 exd4 10.exd4 ♘e4 11.♘xe4 ♖xe4 12.0-0



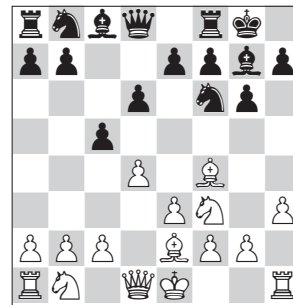
By delaying castling as long as possible, we have succeeded in bringing the black queen to a square from which it will quickly be driven back and we have gained an advantage in space. Now it would not be good for Black to continue with his queenside development...

12...b6 13.♗d3 ♖e7 14.♗e1 ♖d8 15.♗e4 ♗b8 16.♖a4

With advantage, since White can exploit the weak light squares, especially c6.

The weakness on d6

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f3 g6 3.♗f4 ♗g7 4.e3 0-0 5.♗e2 d6 6.h3 c5



This time Black decides to put pressure on White's centre with the advance ...c7-c5.

7.c3 b6

Planning natural development with ...♗b7 and the knight will emerge at c6 or d7.

8.0-0 ♗b7 9.♘bd2 ♘bd7 10.♗h2

This is always an important move to reduce the impact of a possible ...e7-e5 break.

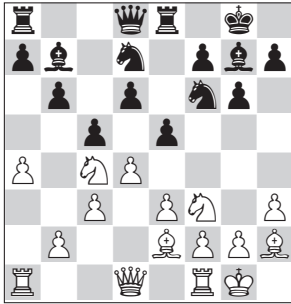
10...♖e8 11.a4

It is important for us to control the b5-square, to give our knight a better chance of stability on c4.

11...e5?

Black fails to appreciate the weakness of his d6-square, which White will quickly exploit.

12. ♖c4



White gains a positional advantage. Here 12...♔c7 would not help much: 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♔d6!. Now the only way to avoid defeat is the modest queen move 14...♔c8!.

Black's best reply is definitely 12...♖e4! but after 13.a5! b5 14.a6! (a thematic idea) 14...♙c8 15.dxe5 bxc4 16.♔d5 ♖b8 17.♔xe4 ♖xb2 18.♙xc4, White has the advantage.

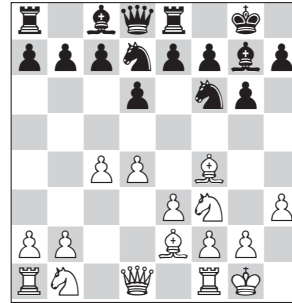
A Typical Mistake by Black

1.d4 ♖f6 2.♙f3 g6 3.♙f4 ♙g7 4.e3 d6 5.h3 0-0 6.♙e2 ♖bd7 7.0-0?! ♙e8

In this case Black wants to break with ...e7-e5 with the support of his rook, but he overlooks a very simple tactic, one that is curiously common in practice.

8.c4

Against this set-up White prefers to play aggressively.



8...e5?!

Black fails to appreciate the connection between the queens and is in for a surprise.

9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♖xe5 ♖xe5 11.♔xd8 ♖xd8 12.♙xe5

with an extra pawn.

I think the publication of this book is very opportune, not only because of the exposure this system has been receiving lately at the level of the world's elite, but also in view of the structure of the book, the practical advice offered in certain positions and the useful exercises that are presented throughout. I am sure that it will be welcomed not only by many club players but also by experienced tournament players, in both cases especially if they have little time for studying openings.

IM Enrique Alvarez

Chapter 1

Introduction and historical evolution

Introduction

The London System, which also includes the line known as the Pereyra Attack in Argentina, is characterised by the solid set-up for White of d2-d4, ♘f3, ♙f4, e2-e3, c2-c3, h2-h3. It is a universal system, valid against almost any black response and one of the safest for White. It is very popular with club players who want to avoid the more theoretical lines or having to study the whole range of their opponent's defences, but it is also played regularly by strong grandmasters, such as Kamsky or Grachev. The French grandmaster Eric Prié is possibly the greatest specialist in it, world-wide. It is also played more sporadically by Ponomarev, Eljanov, Bacrot, Dreev and Bauer, and in the past it was used by such strong players as Spassky, Keres, Bronstein, Jussupow and Kasparov. Nowadays Carlsen is a role-model for many players, since he plays secondary lines, or lines which do not promise an opening advantage, and concentrates on the middlegame or the endgame. It is very common to see elite players playing the Réti or the English with white, quiet openings which are based on schemes or ideas rather than very complex or concrete theoretical lines.

The idea of writing a book on the London System arose from the need to fill a gap with regard to this opening. There have been very few books on the London and none of them are completely up to date. Oscar de Prado has been using the London System ever since he realised that he had little time to study openings. He looked for an opening system which would be useful against everything and in which he would not need to memorise a large number of variations. And he came across the London System, via the so-called Pereyra Attack, known by this name in Argentina in honour of the master Manuel Pereyra Puebla, who played it regularly and with his own attacking ideas, which differed in some lines from the pure London System. The opening is easy to understand, and with it De Prado began to obtain good and pleasing victories and to achieve good results, including against strong players. In this way he accumulated more experience, studying and improving the system. In our work as trainers – for many years – both of us have also begun to teach this opening to our students. And thus was born the idea of this book. The Spanish edition (from 2014) was for the major part written by Oscar de Prado, with various contributions by Alfonso Romero. The English version has been updated until 2016 by Romero, and this update includes, among others, five crucial new games: two by Magnus Carlsen, two by Gata Kamsky, and the important game Grischuk-Nakamura.

The London System is ideal for players who do not have much time to study openings or who like to play solidly. Although in many variations it is necessary to be accurate with the move order, in general we shall base our play on general concepts and common themes, rather than very concrete or complicated variations.

With this opening it is very difficult to end up in a bad position with white or to be surprised at an early stage; the aim is not to gain an advantage right from the first moves, but to play a quiet set-up and to choose the path to follow according to the opponent's response. In many variations the position opens up and White wins many games with strong attacks on the enemy king; the fact that it is a solid system does not mean that we renounce the attack or the initiative. Rather it is that sometimes we shall play positionally and at other times aggressively. The advantage over his opponent that someone who plays the London on a regular basis will have is greater experience in the majority of the positions reached; this confers an advantage from the start, because frequently opponents do not come up with the best plans, owing to their lack of experience with these positions. In addition, the belief that this is a harmless or drawish opening leads opponents to be too nonchalant and to prepare inadequately against it. The London System is going to be valid for us against almost all our opponents' possible responses, but we have to know a little more, because at times we shall play positions from the Queen's Gambit, the Slav or the Caro-Kann. The c-pawn usually goes to c3 but in some lines it goes to c4. The same thing applies to the move h2-h3; you have to know the right moment to play it. As a rule the bishop on f4 is a good piece and we must not allow its exchange, while the other bishop goes to e2 or d3, depending on the defence chosen by our opponent. We shall be looking at all these subtleties as we go through the book.

The Evolution of the System

The London System was first played in the nineteenth century. The first recorded game was Labourdonnais-McDonnell, London 1834, a game which began with the moves 1.d4 d5 2.♘f4 c5 3.e3 ♘c6 4.♗f3 ♘g4 5.♙e2 ♘xf3 6.♘xf3 e6 7.c4, and despite the fact that it ended in defeat, White gained a slightly better position. Then came several more games, such as Zukertort-Munk, Berlin 1869. The first player to begin to play it regularly was the Irish master Mason, who first played it in 1880 in Wiesbaden, and a year later it was also played by the English master Blackburne, who had already been using it as an attacking line since he took up the game. It gained a certain amount of renown in the New York tournament in 1889. Let us now look at two of the earliest London System games, played by Mason and Blackburne.

Game 1

James Mason

Alexander Wittek

Vienna 1882 (18)

...d7-d5 with an early ...e7-e6

1.d4 d5 2.♘f4

At that time it was very common to play 1...d5 with black. In fact it was the usual reply to 1.d4.

The move ♘f4 was played quite frequently in those days, but after e2-e3

White nearly always followed up with c2-c4, transposing to positions from the Queen's Gambit.

**2...e6 3.e3 ♗f6 4.♗f3 ♘e7 5.♘d3
b6 6.♗bd2 ♘b7 7.♗e5**

A very interesting idea and one which is still topical today: White delays castling in favour of planting his knight on the strong square e5, in preparation for an attack on the black king.

7...a6 8.c3 ♗bd7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♖f3



Another plan which is still relevant today is the transfer of the queen to the kingside via f3-h3, to attack the black king and at the same time prevent ...♗e4.

10...♗e8 11. ♖h3 ♟f8

A typical defensive manoeuvre: the knight defends h7 and can go to g6, blocking the diagonal b1-h7 against the white bishop, without weakening the kingside pawns.

12. ♟df3 ♟e4 13. ♖h5 ♟g6 14. ♗ad1

There was an interesting sacrifice here with 14. ♟xf7!? ♟xf7 15. ♟e5+ ♟g8 16. ♟xg6 hxg6 17. ♖xg6 ♟d6 18. f3 ♖f6! (18... ♟f6 19. ♟g5 with compensation) 19. ♖h5 ♟xf4 20. exf4 ♟d6 21. ♟g6 ♟f7 22. g3 ♟f8 and White has some compensation, with two pawns for the piece.

14... ♗f8 15. ♟d2 ♖e8 16. f3 ♟xd2

16... ♟f6 is better.

17. ♗xd2 f5 18. ♖h3

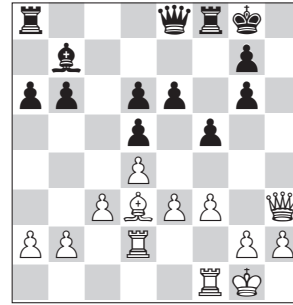
Or 18. ♟xg6 hxg6 (18... ♖xg6 19. ♖xg6 hxg6 20. ♟xc7±) 19. ♖h3 with a slight advantage to White.

18... ♟d6 19. ♟xg6 hxg6

Again 19... ♖xg6= is better.

20. ♟xd6 cxd6

The white position is advantageous; he has the better bishop and the superior pawn structure and he can break with g2-g4, followed by ♖g2, and attack Black's castled position.



21.f4

This is not best, since he might want to break with e3-e4 but now he will be unable to support it with the pawn on f3. It was better to play 21. g4, or 21. ♖h1 ♟f7 22. g4 ♖h8 23. ♖g3±.

21... ♟f7 22. g4 ♖h8 23. ♖g3 ♖e7

24. ♖g2 ♖f6 25. ♟h1

It was better to move the king towards the centre with 25. ♟f2.

25... ♖h7 26. g5

Closing the position is not White's best course of action; the position remains slightly better for Black. It was appropriate to return with 26. ♟g1, planning to play ♟f2, where the king would be safer.

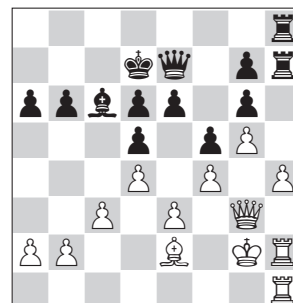
26... ♖e7 27. h4 ♟e8

Black himself takes the opportunity to send his king to the other wing.

28. ♖h2 ♟d7 29. ♟e2 ♖ah8 30. ♟g2

White realises his mistake and rectifies it by removing his king from the h-file.

30... ♟c6 31. ♖h1



White now has everything ready to play h4-h5 at an opportune moment.

31...♟c7 32.♟f2

The pawn break leads to equality after 32.h5 gxh5 33.♞xh5 ♜xh5 34.♞xh5 ♞xh5 35.♟xh5 ♟e8=.

**32...♞d7 33.♟f3 ♟c8 34.♟g3 ♟e8
35.♟e2 ♟d8 36.♞c1 ♟c6?!**

It was necessary to play 38...b5. Now White rightly switches to the other flank. Once again we should remind ourselves of the importance of playing on both wings, in order to create weaknesses. In this case the black rooks are a long way from the queenside.

37.c4! ♟b7

37...dxc4 loses to 38.♟xc6 ♟xc6 39.♟xc4 ♟xc4 40.♞xc4 ♟d7 41.♞hc2.

38.♟g2?!

38.♞c3! would have given White a decisive advantage.

38...♟d7 39.♞c3 ♟a8 40.♞h1!

The other rook now heads for the queenside.

40...♞b8?

It was necessary to play 40...♞c8 41.♞hc1 ♞hh8 42.a4, but White retains the advantage.

41.cxd5 ♟xd5 42.♞hc1

The invasion of the rooks on the seventh rank is decisive. Notice the black rook, out of play on h7.

42...♟e8 43.♟xd5 exd5

If 43...♟xd5 44.♟c2 wins.

44.♞c6

1-0

What I like best about this game is how White used the plan of transferring the queen to the kingside, which is typical nowadays. I also like how White switched his attack to the other wing when he saw that the h4-h5 break would bring him no advantage and realised that the black rooks could not arrive in time.

Game 2

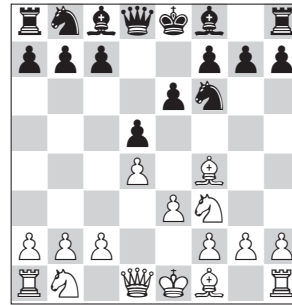
...d7-d5 with an early ...e7-e6

Joseph Blackburne

Max Harmonist

Breslau 1889 (7)

1.♟f3 d5 2.d4 ♟f6 3.♟f4 e6 4.e3



Here we have the standard formation of the London System.

**4...♟e7 5.♟d3 0-0 6.♟bd2 b6
7.♟e5**

Blackburne copies Mason's idea and improves it. He delays castling and launches an attack by occupying the e5-square, one of the key squares for the white knight.

7...♟b7 8.♟f3!

With this move White prevents the enemy knight from jumping to e4 and brings his queen into the attack against the black king. We saw how Mason castled early, but Blackburne has another idea in mind and will play without castling for a good part of the game.

8...c5 9.c3 ♟bd7 10.♟h3

This position could have easily arisen today. White is now taking aim at h7 with ideas such as g2-g4-g5 or ♟f3-g5. The white king can castle queenside or stay in the centre.

10...♞e8

Other options are 10...g6 and 10...h6.

11.♟df3



With the threat of 12.♖xf7, followed by 13.♗g5+. Black should have exchanged on e5 now.

11...♗e4?! 12.♗xd7! ♖xd7 13.♗e5 ♖d8 14.f3 ♗f6 15.♗g4

Or 15.g4 g6 16.♗b5, with clear advantage to White.

15...g6

On 15...h6?, 16.♗xh6 is stronger than 16.♗xh6, and White wins.

16.♗b5

It was better to play 16.♗h6+ ♖g7 17.♗e5, with a clear advantage.

16...♗d7?

16...♖f8! was better, since after 17.♗h6 (17.0-0) 17...♗xg4! 18.fxg4 (18.♖xg4 f5 19.♖h3 ♖f7 with equality) 18...♗h4+ 19.g3 (19.♗d1) 19...♗g5 20.♗xf8 ♖xf8 Black has excellent compensation.

17.♗h6+ ♖g7



18.♗xf7!

A thematic sacrifice which leaves White with a decisive advantage.

18...♗h4+

If 18...♗xf7 then 19.♖xh7+ ♗f6 20.g4 with mate in four moves.

19.♗g3 ♗xf7

Or 19...♗xg3+ 20.hxg3 ♗xf7 21.♖xh7+ ♗f6 22.♖h4, and White wins.

20.♗xh4

20.♖xh4! was quicker.

20...♖c8 21.♗g3 ♗g8 22.0-0 a6

23.♗d3

The game is decided; White has an extra pawn, the bishop pair and an attack on the black king.

23...e5 24.♖ae1 ♖c6 25.e4 cxd4

26.exd5 ♖c8 27.cxd4 ♗xd5

28.dxe5 ♖c5+ 29.♗f2 ♖e7 30.f4

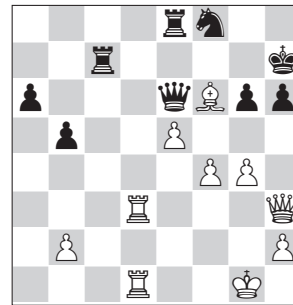
♗xa2 31.♗h4 ♖g7 32.♗c2 ♖ac8

33.♗b3+ ♗xb3 34.♖xb3+ ♗h8

35.♖d1 h6 36.♖h3 ♖c7 37.♖d6

♗h7 38.♖fd1 ♗f8 39.♗f6 ♖f7

40.♖d3 ♖e6 41.g4 b5



42.♖xh6+!

1-0

It's mate next move. A good start, with an attractive attacking game.

At the beginning of the twentieth century most of the strong players of the time played this opening: Tartakower, Rubinstein, Nimzowitsch, Marshall, Maroczy, Janowsky, Schlechter, Sämisch, Tarrasch and even Capablanca, who played it for the first time against Tipl in London. But it was in the strong London tournament of 1922 that it became important, since it was

used by several players, such as Watson, Rubinstein, Alekhine and Capablanca, and it became known as the London System, the name by which it is still known today.

Game 3

...d7-d5 without an early ...e7-e6

José Raul Capablanca

Otto Tipl

London 1911

**1.d4 d5 2.♘f4 c5 3.e3 ♘c6 4.♗f3
♗f6 5.♗bd2 ♘g4**

In view of previous games in which White played ♗e5 and this bishop remained passive, Black develops it quickly.

6.c3 e6 7.h3

A good move, forcing the black bishop to commit itself and at the same time opening an escape route for White's own bishop on f4.

7...♘h5 8.♖b3

The usual plan for White (which remains applicable today) when Black's bishop is not on c8 is to put pressure on the b7-pawn. Black can do likewise with ...♖b6, attacking b2.

8...♖b6 9.♗e5

9.♖xb6 axb6 10.♘b5 was a good alternative, with a slight advantage to White.

9...♗xe5 10.♘xe5

Again it was good to play 10.♖xb6 axb6 11.dxe5 ♗d7 12.♘b5±.

10...♗d7?!

It was better to play 10...c4 11.♖xb6 axb6 12.e4 b5 13.g4 ♘g6 14.♘xf6 gxf6 15.exd5 exd5 16.♘g2 0-0-0 with possibilities for both sides. White has the better structure, while Black has doubled pawns and a weakness on d5, but the bishop pair and the open character of the position provide more than sufficient compensation.

11.♘b5 f6 12.♘h2 c4 13.♖a4

The pin is unpleasant and the bishop on h5 plays a passive role.

13...♗d8 14.b3!



The typical break when Black plays ...c5-c4. This plan is still considered the correct one today.

14...a6?!

It was better to play 14...cxb3 15.♖b1!? (15.axb3 a6 16.♘d3±) 15...♘g6 16.♖b2 (16.♖xb3 ♘c2) 16...a6 17.♘e2 e5 18.♖xb3 ♖c7 19.0-0±.

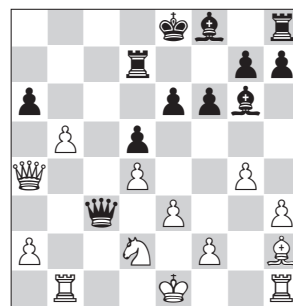
15.♘xd7+ ♗xd7 16.bxc4± ♖b2?

Here it was better to play 16...♘g6 17.e4 dxe4 18.♖b1 ♖c6 19.♖xc6 bxc6 20.♖b8+ ♗f7 21.♗b3±.

17.♖b1+– ♖xc3 18.g4 b5

If 18...♘g6 then 19.♖xb7+–.

19.cxb5 ♘g6



20.bxa6!

An attractive finish; the white pawn will soon queen.

20...♘xb1

If 20...♘c2 then 21.a7 ♘xa4 22.a8♖+ ♗f7 23.♖xa4+–.

Chapter 7

The London System versus the Slav

1.d4 d5 2. ♖f4 ♞f6 3.e3 ♙f5 4.c4

1.d4 d5

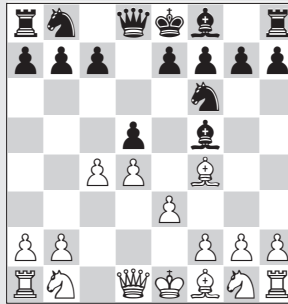
1...c5 2.c3 cxd4 3.cxd4 d5 4.♙f4 (4.♞c3)

1...♞f6 2.♞f3 c5 3.c3 cxd4 4.cxd4 d5

2.♙f4 ♞f6

2...♙f5; 2...c6

3.e3 ♙f5 4.c4



4...c6

4...♞c6; 4...e6

5.♞c3 e6 6.♞b3 b6

6...♞b6; 6...♞c8

In this chapter we shall see the London System in action against the Slav Defence set-up. We shall begin by looking at the Slav Exchange Variation, which can arise by transposition if Black plays an early ...c7-c5 and then exchanges quickly on d4. We therefore need to know how to play the white side of the Slav Exchange Variation, even though strictly speaking it does not form part of the London System.

Then we shall look at the symmetrical lines where Black plays ...d7-d5 and ...♙f5 and also lines with ...c7-c6. In general, against the Slav White should aim for the plan of c2-c4, ♖c3 and ♗b3, putting pressure on the b7-pawn, in similar manner to the variations where Black plays ...♗b6, putting pressure on the b2-pawn.

In the main line, Black has problems defending the b7-pawn. The variations with ...♗b6 lead to endgames which are favourable to White after White plays c4-c5 and the queens are exchanged. Playing ...b7-b6 weakens the queenside but ...♗c8 is not the best square for the black queen, just as ♗c1 is not ideal for White.

We have included some other types of Slav with ...c7-c6 and ...♗b6 or ...♙g4, which are also interesting.

Game 38

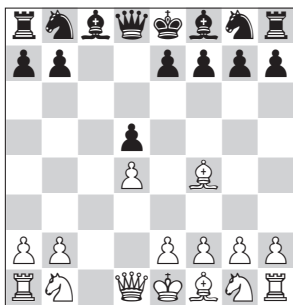
Slav Exchange

Li Chao 2680

Mariya Muzychuk 2503

Gibraltar 2014 (3)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♙f4



Here we have the Exchange Variation of the Slav Defence. It is a line that we need to learn as White, since we can end up in it via several different move orders, such as 1.d4 c5 2.c3 cxd4 3.cxd4 d5 4.♙f4, or 1.d4 ♖f6 2.♖f3 c5 3.c3 cxd4 4.cxd4 d5. It has a drawish reputation, but it has to be handled with care. It is a very comfortable option for White, who is usually able to gain some slight advantages with no risk of losing. The

main plan is to play on the c-file and the queenside. White also can play here 4.♖f3 or the most precise move order, which is 4.♖c3 ♖f6 5.♖f3 ♖c6 6.♙f4.

4...♖c6

Against this move order Black has the option of playing 4...♗b6 5.♖c3 ♖f6 (5...♗xb2? 6.♖xd5) 6.e3 (6.♖c1 ♖c6 7.e3 ♗xb2 8.♙d3) 6...♗xb2 (6...♖c6 7.♙d3 ♙g4 8.♖ge2± Grischuk-Kamsky, Moscow 2013) 7.♙b5+ ♙d7 (7...♖c6 8.♖ge2) 8.♙xd7+ ♖bxd7 9.♖ge2 with compensation, Morozevich-Mamedyarov, Tashkent 2012.

5.e3

If 5.♖c3 (5.♖f3) then 5...e5!? is interesting: 6.dxe5 (6.♙xe5 ♖xe5 7.dxe5 d4 8.♖e4 ♗a5+ 9.♖d2 ♖e7 10.♖f3 ♖c6= Varga-Grigoriants, Hungary 2011) 6...d4 7.♖e4 ♗a5+ (7...♙f5 8.♖d6+ ♙xd6 9.exd6 ♖f6 10.♖f3 ♖h5= Maisuradze-Lampert, Gibraltar 2014) 8.♖d2 ♖ge7 9.♖f3 ♖d5 10.g3 (10.♙g3 ♖e3 11.fxe3 dxe3± Mikhailov-Volkov, Taganrog 2013) 10...h6 11.h4= Stefanova-Ali, Skopje 2013.

5...♖f6 6.♖c3



6...♙g4

The most popular continuation is 6...a6 7.♙d3! ♙g4 (7...g6 8.h3 ♙f5 9.♗f3 ♙xd3 10.♞xd3± Kramnik-Aronian, Istanbul 2012) 8.♘ge2 e6 9.0-0 (9.♞c1 ♙d6 10.f3 ♙h5 11.0-0 ♙g6 12.♗a4 ♙xd3 13.♞xd3 ♙xf4 14.♘xf4± Bruzon-Yakovenko, Poikovsky 2012) 9...♙e7 10.♞c1 ♙h5 (10...0-0 11.♗a4 ♞c8 12.f3± Aronian-Nakamura, Sandnes 2013) 11.♞b3 (11.♗a4±) 11...♗a5 12.♞a4+ ♘c6 13.♙g3= Wang Hao-Caruana, Tashkent 2012.

Another common sequence is 6...♙f5 7.♞b3 ♘a5 8.♞a4+ ♙d7, which transposes to the game.

7.♞b3 ♘a5 8.♞a4+

If 8.♙b5+ then 8...♙d7 9.♞c2 (9.♙xd7+ ♞xd7 10.♞b5= Hertneck-Kramnik, Germany Bundesliga 1993/94) 9...e6=.

8...♙d7 9.♞c2

The alternative is 9.♙b5 e6 and now:
 B) 10.♙xd7+ ♘xd7 11.♗f3 a6 12.0-0 ♙e7 13.♞fc1 (13.♞ac1= Garcia-Dominguez, Las Tunas 2001; 13.♗d2 ♞c8= Fridman-Balogh, Munich 2013) 13...♘c6 14.♞b3 (14.♞d1 0-0 15.♗a4 ♞c8 16.a3= Grachev-Yilmaz, Kocaeli 2014; 14.h3 0-0 15.♞d1 ♘b6= Mirzoev-Solak, Denizli 2013) 14...♞b6 15.♞d1 0-0 16.♗a4 ♞a5 17.a3± Kotic-Mihok, Budapest 2011;

B) 10.♞c1 ♞c8 11.♗f3 ♞c4!? (11...a6 12.♙xd7+ ♘xd7 13.0-0=) 12.♞d1!?

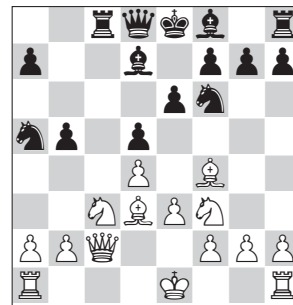
(12.♙xd7+ ♘xd7 13.♞c2=) 12...♙xb5 13.♘xb5 ♙b4+ 14.♙e2 ♞xc1 (14...0-0 15.♞a4 ♙c3 16.♞a3 ♙b4 17.♞a4 ½-½ Wen Yang-Ni Hua, Danzhou 2013) 15.♞xc1 0-0= Romanov-Eljanov, Legnica 2013.

9...♞c8

Here 9...e6 is slightly better, as played in several games in the 2014 Gibraltar tournament: 10.♙d3 ♙e7 (10...♗h5 11.♙e5 ♘c6 12.♞e2 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 g6 14.♗f3 ♙b4 15.0-0= Vitiugov-Dreev, Gibraltar 2014) 11.h3 ♞c8 12.♗f3 ♘c4 (12...b5 13.a3 0-0 14.0-0= Li Chao-Rodshtein, Gibraltar 2014) 13.0-0 0-0 14.♗e5 ♙c6 15.♞ac1 b5± Smirnov-Belous, Taganrog 2014, or 15...♗d6 16.♞b3± Svidler-Le Quang Liem, Tromsø 2013.

10.♙d3 e6 11.♗f3 b5

Making use of the pin on the white queen, Black threatens ...b5-b4 and consolidates his grip on c4. Another option is 11...♙b4 12.0-0 0-0 13.♗e5± Nisipeanu-Zhao Zong, Canberra 2014.



12.♞e2

The best move for White is considered to be 12.a3, and now:

B) 12...♙e7 13.0-0 0-0 14.♗e5 (14.♞fc1) 14...♙e8= Ju Wenjun-A. Muzychuk, Beijing 2013;

B) 12...♘c4 13.0-0 ♙e7 and now:

B1) 14.♗e5 ♘h5 (14...0-0 15.♞e2± Yakovenko-Sjugirov, Yerevan 2014)

15. ♖xd7 ♜xd7 16. ♔g3 (16. ♔e5±)
16... ♗xg3 17. hxc3 g6= Palac-
Svetushkin, Porto Carras 2011;

B2) 14. h3 a5 15. ♖e2 ♗xa3 (15... 0-0)
16. ♗xb5 ♗xb5 17. ♔xb5± I. Sokolov-
Giri, Bostel 2011.

12...a6

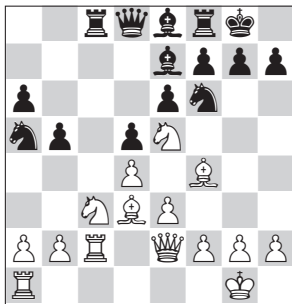
White is better after 12... ♗c4 13. 0-0
♔e7 14. ♖ac1 (14. b3±) 14... a6 15. b3
♗a5 16. ♗e5± Naiditsch-Dubov, Wijk
aan Zee 2013.

Best is 12... b4 13. ♗d1 ♖b6 (13... ♗c4
14. b3 ♗a3=) 14. ♗e5± Kosic-Pajkovic,
Cetinje 2009.

13.0-0 ♔e7 14. ♗e5 0-0

Or 14... ♖b6 15. ♔g5 (15. ♖ac1±) 15... h6
16. ♔xf6 ♔xf6± Soors-Cabrera, Fermo
2009.

15. ♖fc1 ♔e8 16. ♖c2



White has emerged from the opening with a slight advantage: he is ready to double rooks on the c-file, has a strong knight on e5, and the bishop on d3 it is better than its counterpart on e8. Black is trying to gain a grip on the c4-square, but his pieces are rather passive.

16... ♗d7

Another option was 16... ♗c4 17. ♖ac1
♗d7 18. ♗f3±.

17. ♗f3

White avoids piece exchanges. If
17. ♗xd7 then 17... ♔xd7 18. ♖ac1 ♗c4
19. ♗b1 ♖a5 20. b3 ♗d6 21. ♖c5 h6=
(21... ♗b7 22. ♔c7±; 21... ♗e4 22. ♔c7±).

17... ♗b6 18. ♖ac1 ♗ac4?!

It is better to play 18... ♗c6 19. a3.

19.e4

White decides to open the centre. However, it was better to play 19. ♗b1±, with the idea of b2-b3, driving back the black knight, with a slight advantage to White.

19... dxe4 20. ♖xe4

It seems better to recapture with the knight: 20. ♗xe4! ♗d5 21. ♔d2±.

20... g6 21. ♔h6

It is better to play 21. ♖e2 ♔c6 22. ♗e4
♗d5 23. ♔h6±.

21... ♔c6 22. ♖e2 ♔xf3

Or 22... ♖e8 23. ♔e4 ♗d6 24. ♔xc6
♖xc6 25. ♗e5 ♖c8 26. ♗e4 ♖xc2
27. ♖xc2 ♗d5=.

23. ♖xf3 ♖e8 24. ♔e4



24... ♖xd4 25. ♔b7 ♖cd8?

This allows White a clear advantage. It was necessary to exert some control over the b5-square with 25... ♖c5, e.g. 26. ♔xa6 b4 27. ♗e4 (if White plays 27. ♗b5?, as in the note to move 27, then Black has the edge after 27... ♖d7) 27... ♗e5 28. ♖e3 (28. ♗f6+ ♗h8=) 28... ♖xe3 29. ♔xe3 ♖xc2 30. ♖xc2 ♖a8=.

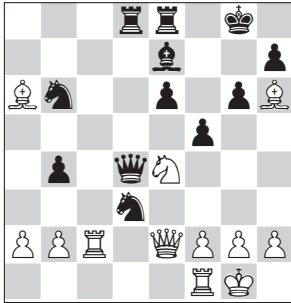
26. ♔xa6 b4 27. ♗e4

Even better was 27. ♗b5 ♖d7 28. h4
♔f8 29. ♔g5 ♔e7 30. b3±.

27... ♗e5 28. ♖e2 ♗d3 29. ♖f1

Here it was better to play 29.♖a1±, indirectly defending the bishop on a6 as well as the pawn on a2.

29...f5?



A clear mistake, weakening Black's king and leaving Black in a lost position. The best try was 29...b3!? 30.axb3 ♖b4 31.♖d2 ♕e5 32.♙b5, although White maintains a slight advantage.

30.♗g3 f4

If 30...♗c5 then 31.♙b5 ♗bd7 32.♖d1 ♕f6 33.h3 g5 34.♙xg5 ♕xg5 35.♙xd7 ♗xd7 36.♕xe6++.

- 31.♕xe6+ ♖h8 32.♗e2 ♕f6**
- 33.♕xf6+ ♙xf6 34.♖c6 ♙h4**
- 35.♙xd3 ♖xd3 36.♗xf4**

And, faced with the loss of a piece, Black resigned.

SUMMARY

We have seen that from the Benoni or after 1...♗f6 Black can transpose to the Exchange Variation of the Slav Defence. It is a line which a London System player needs to know and which can be reached by transposition. The Exchange Variation is a very solid line, and although it has a drawish reputation, it is played quite often. Black often relaxes in this type of variation, thinking that any move will do to make a draw, but this is not the

case – Black needs to play carefully. White's plan is based on doubling rooks on the c-file and playing on the queenside or in the centre. In this game Black chose a fashionable line with ...♙g4. White emerged slightly better from the opening and was first to double rooks on the c-file. Black had the c4-square under control, which is important, but after breaking in the centre with e3-e4 White gained the better game and his advantage became decisive after Black blundered with 29...f5.

Game 39

Slav Exchange

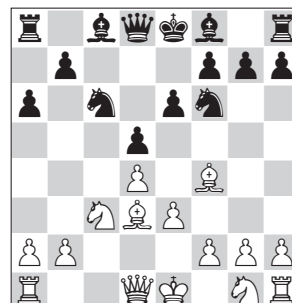
Arkady Naiditsch 2712

Sergey Movsesian 2705

Croatia tt 2012 (6)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♗c3 ♗f6 4.cxd5 cxd5 5.♙f4 ♗c6 6.e3 a6 7.♙d3 e6

In this game we shall look at the line with ...e7-e6. In the London System generally, I much prefer White in the variations where Black leaves his queen's bishop shut in with ...d7-d5 and ...e7-e6, and this position is no exception. The bishop on d3 is always aimed towards h7. White has options of mounting an attack with ♗e5, f2-f4 and g2-g4-g5, followed by bringing the queen to the kingside. In the next game we shall look at lines with ...♙f5.



Index of main variations

This index is a general guide to the main variations, using the most common move orders, but there are many different ways to arrive at the same position by transposition. We recommend looking in the chapter that you are interested in and then searching within each game to find a particular move, or concrete move order. In the games, the main and best variations for both sides are presented.

VERSUS THE GRÜNFELD (Chapter 2)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♙f4 g6 3.e3 ♙g7 4.♘f3
0-0

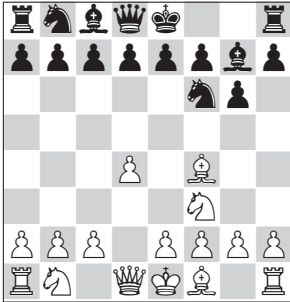


5.♙e2
5.♘bd2
5.♙d3
5...d5
5...♘h5

6.0-0
6.♘c3
6.h3
6...c5 7.c3 ♘c6
7...b6
7...cxd4
7...♙b6
8.♘bd2
8.dxc5
8...♙b6
8...b6
8...cxd4
9.♙b3 c4 10.♙a3

VERSUS THE KING'S INDIAN (Chapter 3)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♙f4 g6 3.♗f3 ♙g7

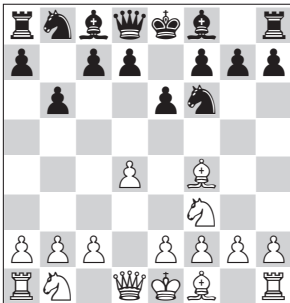


4.e3
4.♗c3
4...0-0 5.♙e2 d6
5...c5
6.0-0
6.h3

6...c5
6...♗bd7; 6...♗c6; 6...♗fd7; 6...b6
7.c3
7.h3
7...b6
7...cxd4
7...♙b6 (7...♙e6, 7...♗h5)
8.♗bd2
8.♙b3
8.h3 ♙b7 9.♗bd2 ♗bd7
9...♗c6
10.a4
10.♙e1
10...a6 11.♙h2
11.♙b3; 11.♙e1
11...♙c7
11...♙c8; 11...♙a7; 11...♙b8

VERSUS THE QUEEN'S INDIAN (Chapter 4)

1.d4 ♗f6 2.♙f4 e6 3.♗f3
3...c5 4.e3 b6 5.♗c3
3...♙e7 4.h3 b6 5.e3 ♗e4
3...b6



4.e3 ♙b7 5.♙d3
5.♗bd2; 5.h3
5...♙e7 6.h3 c5 7.c3 0-0
7...cxd4 8.cxd4
8.♗bd2 cxd4 9.exd4 d6 10.0-0
♗bd7
10...♗c6
11.♙e1

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