

The Modernized London System

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Milos Pavlovic

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
☞	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
≈	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⌒	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

Table of Contents

Key to Symbols	4
Introduction	6
Chapter 1 – The ... ♔b6 Defences.....	7
Chapter 2 – Black goes for a Kingside Fianchetto	31
Chapter 3 – 5... ♙f5 & 5... ♙g4	45
Chapter 4 – Systems with an earlycxd4	79
Chapter 5 – Classical Lines with 5...e6	101
Chapter 6 – Black plays 3...e6 4. ♘f3 ♙d6.....	157
Chapter 7 – Early Deviations	189
Chapter 8 – The 2. ♘f3 & 3. ♙f4 Move-order	217

Introduction

Although known for a long time, the London started to catch up in popularity just in the last decade or so. I guess the reason for this is probably the desire of many players to focus more on the practical side of chess, with less use of engines and less memorization of long theoretical lines, and more about positional understanding of game. I must say, it received a huge boost not only in the number of games but also in a deeper understanding of the positions arising from the opening.

In the past it was used from time to time, but only a few players employed it on a regular basis, such as grandmasters from former the Yugoslavia, Milorad Knezevic and Vlado Kovacevic, and the English GM Tony Miles, who used it often. Today, Kamsky is one of the players who uses it very often, and of course Magnus Carlsen, but we have many other grandmasters and non-grandmasters who now have it in their repertoire on a regular basis.

I must say that it's also important to emphasize the move orders of the line, and due to that we have an immense number of transpositions, which you don't find so much in other openings.

My experience with the London is good and bad: after I lost a game to grandmaster Volkov in the Rilton Cup, I decided that such positions are not exactly my cup of tea, but in 2019 I picked it up again in one game in a World Senior tournament and produced a very good game.

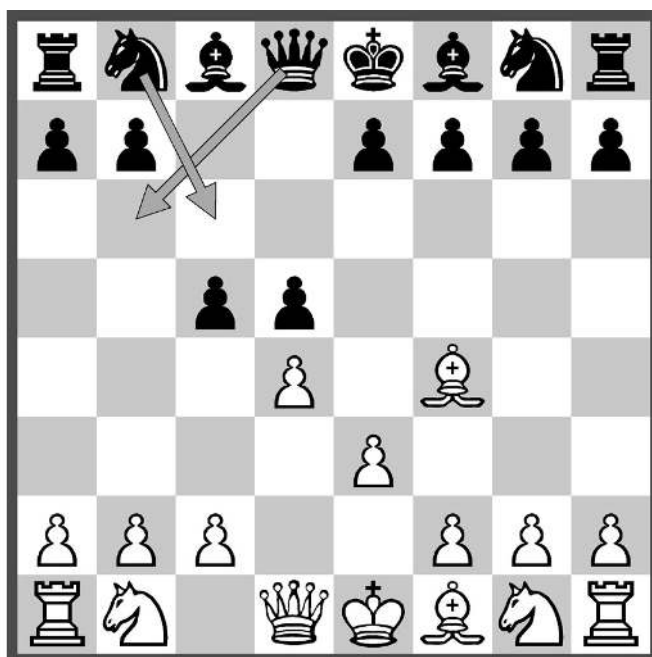
So, as in any opening, good and bad games can happen, but the London itself became a very important part of 1.d4 theory.

Milos Pavlovic, 2024



The ... ♔b6 Defences

1.d4 d5 2.♘f4 c5 3.e3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – The ... ♔b6 Defences

1.d4 d5 2.♘f4 c5 3.e3

a) 3... ♔b6	9
b) 3... ♘c6 4.c3 ♔b6	11
c) 3... ♘c6 4.c3 ♘f6 5.♘d2 ♔b6 6.♔b3 --	16
d) 3... ♘c6 4.c3 ♘f6 5.♘d2 ♔b6 6.♔b3 g6	20
e) 3... ♘c6 4.c3 ♘f6 5.♘d2 ♔b6 6.♔b3 e6	23
f) 3... ♘c6 4.c3 ♘f6 5.♘d2 ♔b6 6.♔c2	27

a) 3... ♔b6

1. d4 d5 2. ♘f4



Position after: 2. ♘f4

The London system is a very popular positional line and also very elastic idea, completely modernized for contemporary chess. There are plenty of ideas that White uses and we will see many, if not most, of them in this book. Basically, the main idea (which was introduced a long time ago) is similar to the Colle-Zukertort system, so... White using the e5-square prepares to launch attacking play. Since then, many things have changed and White has now adopted various positional ideas as well. The same story goes for Black, who has also developed various ideas how to confront this rather interesting idea that we call 'the London'. We will also see possible transpositions to the Caro-Kann, sometimes the QGD, and even the Grünfeld, but first we will focus on independent ideas (that transposition to the Caro-Kann is actually present as a

choice for Black, and we will deal with it in a later stage of this book). There are many transpositions in the lines and I will try to cover them all, because sometimes details are very important as we know.

2... c5 3. e3

Black can try to put pressure on b2 directly:

3... ♔b6



Position after: 3... ♔b6

4. ♘c3

This is a typical reaction, defending and attacking a vital pawn on d5.

4... e6

There are a few other reactions but they lead to similar play:

A) 4... ♘f6 5. ♘b5! ♘a6 6. c3 ♙d7 7. a4



Position after: 7. a4

Placing a knight on the passive a6-square is the main idea. 7... c4 8. b3 ♙xb5 9. axb5 ♙xb5 10. bxc4 dxc4 11. ♘f3 e6 12. ♘e5 ♙c8 13. ♙b1 ♙xb1+ 14. ♙xb1 b6 15. ♙xc4 White has a clear advantage from the early stage of the opening. 1-0 (62) Kamsky, G (2657) – Shuvalova, P (2516) chess.com INT 2022

B) 4... cxd4 5. ♙b5+! ♙d8

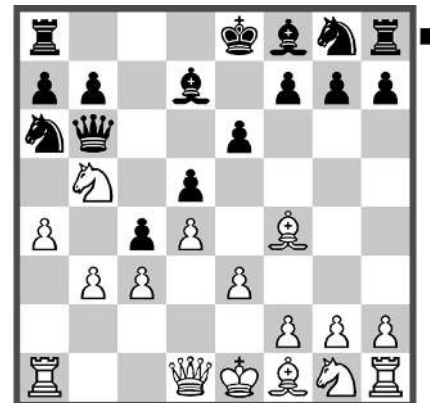


Position after: 5... ♙d8

Simplest now is to take back with the pawn: 6. exd4 [6. ♙xd4 ♙xd4 7. exd4 is less clear. 1-0 (77) Yuferov, S (2412) – Zubkov, V (2333) Moscow RUS 2018] 6... ♘f6 7. ♙d3 a6 8. ♘ge2 e6 9. 0-0 Due

to the bad king on d8, we can say that White is clearly better.

5. ♘b5 ♘a6 6. a4 c4 7. c3 ♙d7 8. b3



Position after: 8. b3

8... ♙xb5 9. axb5 ♙xb5 10. bxc4 dxc4 11. ♘f3 ♙c8 12. ♘d2 ♘f6 13. e4 ♙e7 14. ♙a4 ♙xa4 15. ♙xa4 ♘c7



Position after: 15... ♘c7

16. ♙xa7

Similar to the Kamsky game, here also White has obtained a winning position right from the start of the game. 1-0 (45) Agrest, E (2584) – Thorfinnsson, B (2400) chess.com INT 2018.

b) 3...♘c6 4.c3 ♔b6

1. d4 d5 2. ♘f4 c5 3. e3 ♘c6



Position after: 3... ♘c6

In this chapter we will focus on quick queen to b6 ideas; Black is obviously trying to use the absence of the bishop from c1.

4. c3 ♔b6

We will look at this idea in the present chapter as the main idea, although there are some other move orders that need to be mentioned:

4... ♘f5 5. ♘d2 We will examine this position in a later chapter.

5. ♔b3

Before we continue, I want to emphasize that the old way of defending the pawn, with let say 5. ♔c1, has been abandoned and two other moves simply took over in the modernized version,

and we will concentrate on them in this book. This is our main choice but White has also another viable option:

5. ♔c2



Position after: 5. ♔c2

This move has gained in popularity and it is mainly reached with a knight on f6 and a knight on d2 included, but its possible here as well.

A) 5... ♘f6 6. ♘d2 We will analyse this in more depth in later chapters.

B) 5... cxd4 6. exd4 ♘f5 7. ♔xf5 ♔xb2 8. ♔xd5 ♔xa1 9. ♔b3!



Position after: 9. ♔b3!

9... 0-0-0 10. ♘f3 with bishop to d3 next, White will trap the queen on a1.

C) 5... g6 6. ♘f3 ♙f5 7. dxc5!



Position after: 7. dxc5!

The exclamation mark is to emphasize a main point of the system with the queen on c2. 7... ♙xc5 8. ♙b3 ♙b6 9. ♙xb6 axb6 10. ♘bd2 ♘f6 11. ♙c7 ♘d7 12. ♘d4 ♙g7 13. ♙b5 ♖c8 14. ♙g3 0-0 15. ♘xf5 gxf5 16. 0-0 ♘c5 17. ♘b3 ♘e4 18. ♖ad1 e6 19. f3 ♘xg3 20. hxg3 White has slightly favourable endgame, due to the better pawn structure and also the bishop on g7 is not so strong – it mainly has a defensive role. ½-½ (36) Grachev, B (2626) – Bocharov, I (2563) St Petersburg RUS 2018.

D) 5... ♙f5 6. ♙xf5 ♙xb2 7. ♙xd5



Position after: 7. ♙xd5

7... ♙xa1 [7... ♙c1+ 8. ♙e2 cxd4 9. cxd4 e5 10. ♙b3 exf4 11. g3 ♖c8 12. ♘f3 White is better here despite the temporary awkward position of the king on e2.] 8. ♙b3 0-0-0 9. ♘f3!



Position after: 9. ♘f3!

Preventing ...e5 ideas. 9... e6 10. ♙d3 ♘ge7 11. 0-0 White has a winning position.

5... c4 6. ♙c2



Position after: 6. ♙c2

This is typical play. White has no intention of taking on b6, instead the idea is to undermine the structure with b3, so Black must be quick now...

6... ♙f5

A thematic reply but we will see that its not so good. Today it is even considered as a mistake, although there are some tactics to count on.

A) 6... e5!? Engine-style chess but it has a point...



Position after: 6... e5!?







A1) 7. dxe5 ♙f5 8. ♔c1 g5 9. ♙xg5
♘xe5 10. ♘d2 f6 11. ♚f4 ♘e7 12. b3
♖g8



Position after: 12... ♖g8





















This position has been tested by engines and the positions are rather imbalanced: 13. bxc4 [13. ♙g3 0-0-0 14. bxc4 h5!? 15. ♘gf3 ♘d3+ 16. ♙xd3 ♙xd3 17. c5 ♚xc5 18. ♚b2 ♞f5 with unclear consequences.] 13... ♘d3+ 14. ♙xd3 ♙xd3 15. c5 ♚xc5 16. ♙g3 ♜c8 17. ♞e2 ♙xe2 18. ♚xe2 ♚b5+ 19. ♚e1 ♜g4 Again with immense

complications. ½-½ (55) Stockfish
14_202107131735 (3639) – LCZero
0.28-dev+_69626 (3623) tcec-
chess.com INT 2021.

A2) Taking with the bishop is actually possible and in my opinion a more human approach: 7. xe5 f5 8. c1 [8. xf5 xb2 is the point: taking on d5 is impossible and this gives Black a winning position.] 8... xe5 9. dxe5



Position after: 9. dxe5

Black is going to try to open more lines now with... 9... f6 [9... 0-0-0 10.  f3 f6 11. e6  12.  bd2 f5 13. g3  f6 14.  d4  c5 15.  g2 g5 16. b3 White must make a break in the structure to activate the other pieces. This position is good for White. ½-½ (27) Kamsky, G (2666) – Pavlidis, A (2550) [Deizisau GER 2022] 10. e6 Denying the opening of the position, White is counting on the b3-break and strong d4-square for a knight. 10...  11.  f3  c5 12. b3  c8 13.  bd2  b6 14. bxc4 dxc4 15.  a3  e7 16.  a4+  d7 17.  xd7+  xd7 18.  xc4 Black has compensation here – the bishop pair plus weak pawn on c3 are enough to balance the game. 1-0 (43)

Deac, B (2700) – Grigoriants, S (2557)
chess.com INT 2023.

B) 6... ♘f6 7. ♘d2 transpose to another line with an earlier knight on f6 and knight on d2 included.

7. ♙xf5 ♙xb2 8. ♙xd5



Position after: 8. ♙xd5

The main position. White will try and mostly likely succeed in creating no space for the queen on a1 to retreat.

8... ♙xa1

A) Alternatives also lead to entertaining chess: 8... ♘f6 9. ♙xc4



Position after: 9. ♙xc4

A1) 9... ♘e4 10. ♙b5 ♙c1+ [10... ♙xf2+ 11. ♙d1 a6 12. ♙e2 e5 13. ♙g3 ♙f6 14. ♙f3 ♙g6 15. ♙c4 Black doesn't have enough for the sacrificed piece. 1-0 (37) Sedlak, N (2512) – Czebe, A (2497) Subotica 2005] 11. ♙e2 ♙c2+ 12. ♙f3 g5 13. ♘h3 f5 14. ♙xg5 ♙d1+ 15. ♙e2 ♙xh1



Position after: 15... ♙xh1

16. ♙xb7 ♘d8 17. ♙b5+ ♙f7 18. ♙xf5+ ♘f6 Another nice game played in a romantic style by both players. 1-0 (18) Bogosavljevic, B (2470) – Miladinovic, I (2607) Vrsac 2007.

A2) 9... ♙xa1 This was tested in a recent game... 10. ♙b5 e5 11. ♙xe5 ♙b4 12. ♙d3 ♙xc3+ 13. ♙f1 ♙b2



Position after: 13... ♙b2

14. ♕xf6! [14. ♖e2 ♔xb5 15. ♕xb5 ♕a5 is less clear. 0-1 (37) Kamsky, G (2659) – Aronian, L (2742) chess.com INT 2023] 14... gxf6 15. ♖xc3 ♔xc3 16. ♖e2 ♔b4 17. ♔f5 ♔d6 18. g3 White has the better chances.

B) 8... ♔c1+ 9. ♔e2 ♔b2+ 10. ♔f3 ♖f6 11. ♔xc4 ♔xa1 12. ♔b3 0-0-0



Position after: 12... 0-0-0

And now a simple and strong move gives White a big advantage: 13. g3! Having the g2-square for the king gives White easy play now. [13. ♕b5 is less clear. 1-0 (19) Miles, A (2562) – Minasian, A (2478) Ohrid 2001 CBM 084 [Finkel, A]]

9. ♔b5

Black has a choice here but it seems that none of the options helps much:

9... 0-0-0

A) 9... a6 10. ♔xb7 ♖d8 11. ♔e4! ♔b2 12. ♕xc4 ♖f6 13. ♔xa8 ♔xb1+ 14. ♔e2 e5 15. ♖f3! ♔c2+ 16. ♖d2 exf4 17. ♕b3 ♔f5 18. ♕a4+ White has

a big advantage. 1-0 (44) Neuburger, I – Baranyuk, A corr. 2016.

B) 9... ♔d8 10. ♕xc4 a6 11. ♔b3 e6 12. ♕d3 e5 13. ♕g3 exd4 14. exd4 ♖a5 15. ♔c2 ♖c6 16. ♖f3 ♕a3 17. ♔b3 ♕c1 18. ♔xb7 should win for White as well. 1-0 (50) iCE 3.0 v658 – Deep Onno 1.2.70 Internet (blitz) 2016.

10. ♕xc4 e5

Activating the pieces but it doesn't change the outcome of the position.

11. ♖e2

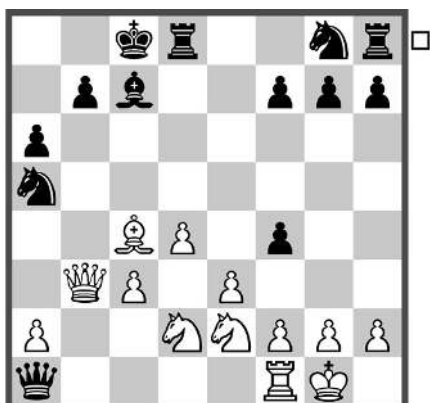


Position after: 11. ♖e2

11... exf4

11... ♕a3 12. 0-0 ♔b2 13. ♖xa3 ♔xb5 14. ♖xb5 exf4 15. ♖xf4 Another big advantage for White. 1/ 2-½ (21) Unuk, L (2008) – Sirnik, B (2249) Sentjur 2013.

12. 0-0 a6 13. ♔b6 ♕d6 14. ♖d2 ♕c7 15. ♔b3 ♖a5



Position after: 15... Nxa5

16. ♔c2 ♕xf1+ 17. ♔xf1 ♘xc4 18. ♘xc4 fxe3 19. fxe3

White is much better. 0-1 (51) Cramling, P (2516) – Zatonskih, A (2489) Beijing 2012.

c) 3... ♘c6 4. c3 ♘f6 5. ♘d2 ♕b6 6. ♕b3 --

1. d4 d5 2. ♗f4 c5 3. e3 ♘c6 4. c3 ♘f6
5. ♘d2 ♕b6

6. ♕b3 c4



Position after: 5... ♕b6

We are dealing here with a standard plan for Black, first developing the knights and only then trying to pressure the b2-pawn. White has two main reactions (actually three, but the third one 7. ♕c1 is passive and is not something to be considered as a strong opening for White), so we have 7. ♕b3 and 7. ♕c2 and we will see them in this and the next chapter.

This is again one of the typical choices here for Black, expanding in order to gain more space and if possible to get a bishop on f5.

It is known that, in this move order, placing a bishop on f5 immediately is not good: 6... ♗f5 7. dxc5!



Position after: 7. dxc5!

7... ♕xb3 8. axb3 e5 9. ♗g3 ♗xc5 10. b4 ♗d6 11. ♘gf3 ♘d7 12. ♘d4 ♘xd4 13. exd4 f6 14. ♗b5 0-0 15. 0-0 a6 16.

♙xd7 ♙xd7 17. ♘f3 White has an edge. 1-0 (41) Yuffa, D (2566) – Nazarov, A (2176) Tallinn EST 2019.

7. ♔c2



Position after: 7. ♔c2

Best by far. Taking on b6 gives Black easy play.

7... g6

With the obvious intention of placing a bishop on f5 with tempo, but Black has a few other ideas as well:

A) 7... ♘h5 8. ♙g5 h6 9. ♙h4 g5 10. ♙e2



Position after: 10. ♙e2

A1) 10... gxf4 11. ♙xh5 e5 12. ♘e2 exd4 This is an engine suggestion but this time it's perfectly sensible. Let's see... [12... ♙e6 13. 0-0 0-0-0 14. b3 cxb3 15. axb3 ♔b8 16. b4 On the other hand, this tends to favor White, who has easy play on a queenside.] 13. exd4 ♙d6 14. ♘f1 ♔d8 15. ♘e3 ♔g5 16. ♙f3 ♙e6 17. b3 cxb3 18. axb3 0-0 19. 0-0 ♖ad8 Still we can say that White has harmonious play but Black's chances also exist.

A2) 10... ♘g7 11. ♙g3 ♙f5 Actually, this position has been neglected a bit; it's not so simple... 12. ♔c1 e6 13. ♘gf3 ♔a5 14. e4



Position after: 14. e4

14... ♙h7 15. 0-0 ♙e7 16. ♖e1 0-0 17. ♘e5 ♘xe5 18. ♙xe5 White keeps some pressure here. The main idea is to take on d5 and then create pressure on the d5-pawn. 1-0 (41) Carlsen, M (2832) – So, W (2812) Leuven BEL 2017.

B) Another interesting motif is to try to activate the bishop first with... 7... ♙g4