

The London System...

...properly played

**Marcus
Schmücker**



Joachim Beyer Verlag



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System
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It is said that without social contacts your mental health may get lost. Therefore I would like to thank my friends Johannes Christoforidis, Joshua Eckardt, Tim Riehl, Mirco Wagner, Markus Marzotko and Dennis Abrams. That's a fine collection of a wandering marmot, a king of boardgames who is *no* chessplayer, and whatnot. Other people will have to judge whether I'm in fact sane, but for the time being we feel very well indeed.

Marcus Schmücker

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Structure of Analysis and Annotations

Main lines and side lines appear in **bold** print and if necessary are subdivided by 1), 2), 3) or a), b), c). Eventual side lines of second or third degree are marked in light grey or medium grey respectively. At the beginning of every sideline the introductory moves are given in order to facilitate a quick and correct reconstruction of the relevant position. For example:

1. d4 d5 2. f3 e6 3. f4 c5 4. c3! b6 5. b3 f6 6. e3 c6 7. bd2
2b) 7...c4 8. c2±

Introduction

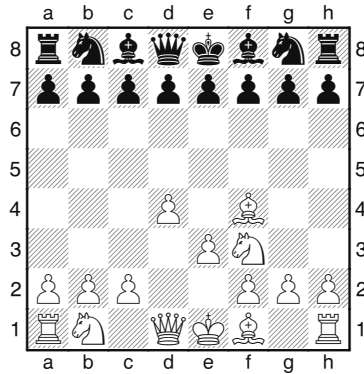
Nine years ago I published 'The London System' (shortened to LS in the text). In German chess competitions this opening is a regular guest, though mostly not on a higher level. But how surprised I was when once I spent my holidays in Greece, and a local gentleman (obviously an avid chess player) asked me, "Aren't you, by any chance, the author of *The London System*?" – That was a nice motivation, of course, and when more and more chess friends started asking questions about a second edition, I set to work in 2014.

At first I assumed that an update would suffice, but far from it. In nine years, even in a rare opening like the LS, many things have changed, mostly, of course, thanks to computers. So I quickly realized that I had a lot more to do than simply correct a few mistakes. In fact, I almost had to write a completely new book. Approximately 80% of the material is new, and accordingly there are plenty of novelties. To check the analysis I have mostly used Stockfish and occasionally Kommodo.

The LS has actually become quite fashionable, considering the fact that it's even used by world champion Magnus Carlsen. But he's not the only top player because Kramnik, Grischuk and many others apply it regularly. I was always of the opinion that in the upper class the LS was regarded as a too tame approach with not enough bite to pose a serious threat for Black.

However, something seems to have changed, and eventually this book will further contribute to the positive development. May you become an enthusiastic LS-disciple, and achieve many nice victories with this interesting opening!

Basic Structure (part 1)

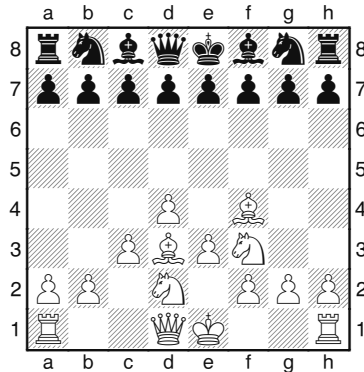


The London System is a versatile weapon, and thus can be applied against almost any black set-up. A frequently asked question is: What's better – 2.♘f4 or 2.♘f3? In my opinion, this decision depends on the individual taste, so to speak. I prefer 2.♘f3, probably taking to heart the beginner's rule 'knight before bishop'.

Anyway, ♘f4 is clearly the most significant feature of the London System, and is inseparably linked to the set-up d4, e3 and ♘f3. The main idea becomes immediately clear: maximum control of the black squares – especially e5. Besides, White solves the problem of the bad bishop in the simplest way by placing it in front of the pawn chain.

In many cases Black feels obliged to offer the exchange of his good bishop by playing ♗d6. A fact that clearly speaks for the strength of the move ♘f4.

Basic Structure (part 2)



If Black doesn't come up with anything special, White can also position the remaining light pieces according to plan. We will come across this basic pattern very often. By placing the pawns on c3–d4–e3 White builds up an unshakable center. The strategical main motif for the future consists in the push e3–e4 (and if possible even e4–e5) at the right moment. Apart from that, active piece play dominates the early stage of the game.

It's characteristic that White can leave his king in the center for a long time. In fact, it's not uncommon to postpone castling to the 20th move, as there are better things to do beforehand. The good bishop on d3 is also of great importance, since it often plays a decisive role in the attack on the king. ♘d2 takes a very flexible position, and can be quickly transferred to both sides according to necessity. The white queen is mostly placed on e2 or b3, and only in rare cases on c2 because this square is needed for an eventual retreat of the light-squared bishop.

Rule of thumb: Only in exceptional cases is c2 a good square for the white queen.

Unfortunately, White cannot always reach the standard set-up, and so one should know in general how to handle the three flexible pieces: the c-pawn,

the king's bishop and the queen's knight.

The movement of **the c-pawn** is easy to understand. Once Black puts pressure on the center with c7–c5, White reinforces with c2–c3. If Black, however, chooses the passive c7–c6, the active continuation c2–c4 is the adequate answer.

Rule of thumb: The movement of White's c-pawn depends mainly on the movement of its counterpart on c7.

If Black chooses a set-up including the move e7-e6, the king's bishop can be placed on d3. Only in case of an Indian set-up with g7-g6, it should better be placed on e2 because on d3 it might feel very uncomfortable in view of the coming push e7-e5 and the subsequent threat of e5-e4. As Black often holds back the fianchetto of the king's bishop, White should better first develop the c-pawn and the queen's knight.

If Black develops his bishop to f5, the answer ♗d3 is not necessarily good anymore because White's light-squared bishop is better than its counterpart. Therefore, the correct

reaction is c2-c4 followed by active play on the queenside. It becomes clear that the LS is an extremely flexible opening, and allows White to strive for activity on both sides. Once a position with c2-c4 and c7-c6 has been reached, and Black does *not* take on c4, White postpones the development of the bishop as long as possible. And only when he runs out of useful waiting moves he will play ♗e2 and castle.

The development of the queen's knight also depends on the position of the white c-pawn. If it's placed aggressively on c4, the more active ♞c3 is logical in order to increase the pressure on d5.

Rule of thumb: The development of both ♗f1 and ♞b1 depends on the position of the white c-pawn.

Why is the focus on positions with early d7–d5?

As already mentioned, the set-up d4, ♘f4, ♗f3 strives for maximum control of the dark squares, in particular e5. By playing d7–d5 Black clearly weakens this key square and, accordingly, must fight for complete equality. If he plays 1...♗f6 instead, he keeps the center flexible and is thus better prepared to fight for the dark squares. Of course, even then White can stick to the standard set-up and obtain a good position. Only if Black plays the King's Indian or Queen's Indian Defense, White should not expect any opening advantage.

Chapter 1.0 – 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6

In the first two chapters we will analyze the lines after 2...e6 and 2...c5, which mostly lead to later chapters by transposition of moves. There are plenty of different move orders, which are always clearly marked. For a better understanding of the London System it's essential to be familiar with them.

Chapter 1.1: 3.♙f4 ♘d6

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6 3.♙f4 ♘d6

Instead of playing ♘f6, Black first activates the bishop. This accelerated ♙d6-version is quite tricky.

3...♘f6 leads to lines treated in Chapter 3 and beyond.

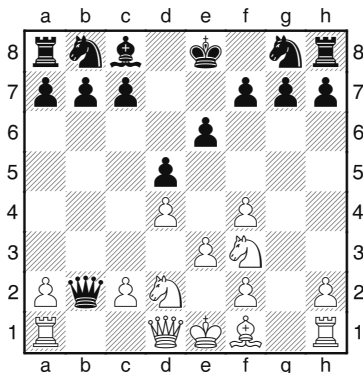
4.♙g3!

In the first edition I have recommended 4.e3 or 4.g3. However, from today's perspective there's no reason to avoid the routine move 4.♙g3.

Rule of thumb: Challenged by ♙d6 the bishop retreats to g3.

4.e3!? was the main variation in the first edition, and is, of course, perfectly playable.

4.g3!? is a quite original treatment. If Black takes on f4, White may obtain good attacking chances in the half-open g-file. The crucial continuation is 4...♙xf4 5.gxf4 ♖d6 6.e3 ♗b4+ 7.♘bd2 ♗xb2.



White obtains good compensation after both 8.♖g1 g6 9.c4 dxc4 10.♙xc4 ♘f6 11.♘e5 and 8.♘e5 ♘e7 9.♙d3 ♘d7 10.♖b1 ♗a3 11.♗h5 g6 12.♗h6 ♘f5 13.♙xf5 exf5 14.♘xd7 ♙xd7 (As. Arnason – Ar. Arnason, Reykjavik 1988).

4...♘e7

This is the only move of independent significance. Its only logical idea seems to be ♘f5 followed by ♘g3 – a time-consuming maneuver which opens the h-file for White.

By the way, 4...f5?! doesn't lead to a good Stonewall, as the ♙g3 already dominates the diagonal h2-b8.

4...♖f6 5.e3 leads to Chapter 3.4.

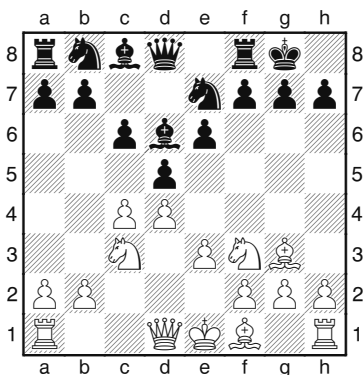
And swapping the bishops by means of 4...♗xg3 5.hxg3 suits White's intentions because it activates the king's rook. Furthermore, the g3-pawn can often become a useful attacker. This variation leads to other chapters by transposition of moves (e.g. 5...♖e4 – see Chapter 3.3; 5...♖f6 6.e3 c5 7.c3 ♖c6 8.♖bd2 – see Chapter 5.1). Therefore, it will not be further analyzed here.

5.e3!

Simply ignoring Black's idea.

1) After 5...0-0 Black cannot follow up with ♖f5 and ♖xg3, as White's attack in the h-file would be too dangerous.

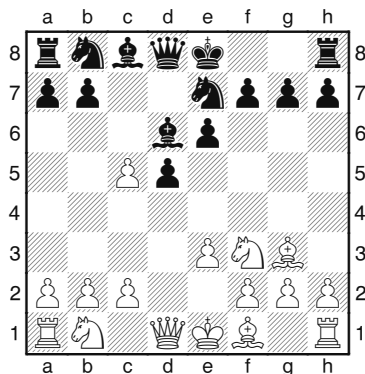
6.c4 c6 7.♖c3±



The developing move ♖bd7 is not possible, and the ♖e7 has no rewarding prospects either.

1.d4 d5 2.♖f3 e6 3.♗f4 ♗d6 4.♗g3! ♖e7 5.e3!

2) 5...c5 6.dxc5!



This book offers many 'rules of thumb' as a practical help for the reader. However, in chess there are not only rules but a lot of exceptions, too. For example, one of the above mentioned rules of thumb said: The movement of White's c-pawn depends mainly on the movement of its counterpart on c7. Accordingly, c7-c5 is almost automatically answered with c2-c3, whereas after c7-c6 White mostly plays c2-c4.

Here, however, White is well advised to play dynamically in order to exploit the passive position of the knight on e7. If you play 6.c3 (e.g. 'by accident' or because of a weak memory), you will still obtain a playable position, as the LS (like all closed openings) is rather forgiving.

6...♗xc5 7.c4

The pressure on d5 impedes the move
 ♖f5.

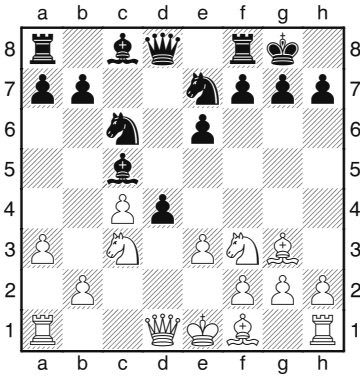
7... ♖bc6

The isolani position after 7... ♖f5?!
 8.cxd5± is not recommended.

8. ♖c3 0-0 9.a3

Keeps the black pieces away from b4
 and threatens to win space by pushing
 the b-pawn.

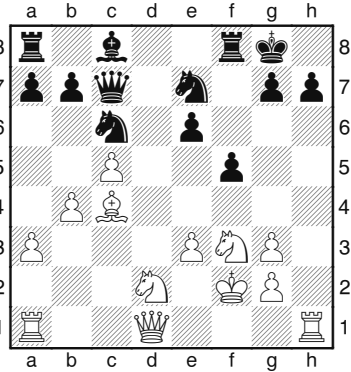
9...d4



Black tries to solve the problems in a
 radical way.

2a) 10. ♖e4!?

Stockfish & Co. prefer this knight
 move, although after 10... ♗b6 11.c5
 ♗a5+ 12.b4 f5 13. ♖ed2 dxe3 14.fxe3
 ♗c7 15. ♗c4 ♗xg3+ 16.hxg3 ♖c7
 17. ♔f2 ...



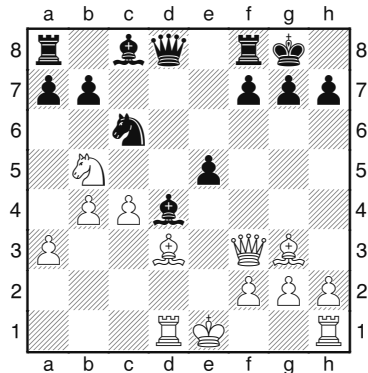
... the position is unclear.

1.d4 d5 2. ♖f3 e6 3. ♗f4 ♗d6 4. ♗g3!
 ♖e7 5.e3! c5 6.dxc5! ♗xc5 7.c4 ♖bc6
 8. ♖c3 0-0 9.a3 d4

2b) 10.exd4! ♗xd4

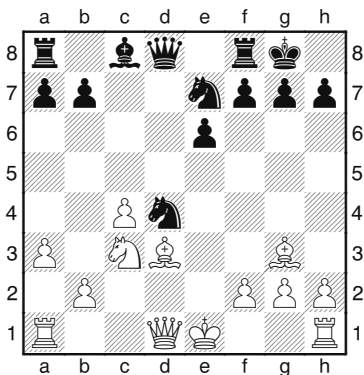
After 10... ♖xd4 11.b4 ♖xf3+
 12. ♖xf3 ♗d4 Black cannot avoid
 the following pin in the d-file.

12... ♗b6? 13. ♖d1 ♖e8 14.c5+-
 13. ♖d1 ♖c6 14. ♖b5 e5 15. ♗d3±



The position is better for White because he's going to win space on the queenside. Furthermore, he obtains the bishop pair and pressure against the black king.

11. ♖xd4 ♜xd4 12. ♕d3



The only reason to hope for equality is the strong ♖d4. However, the bishop pair is also a force to be reckoned with. If necessary, the ♖d4 can be challenged with ♜e2, so that White's chances are slightly preferable in any case.

1. d4 d5 2. ♖f3 e6 3. ♕f4 ♕d6 4. ♕g3! ♜e7 5. e3!

3) 5... ♖f5 6. c4

White cannot do anything against ♖xg3, and so he just puts maximum pressure on the center and prepares to place his queen on c2.

The normal reaction 6.c3 is solid but far less concrete, and after

6. ♕d3 ♜xg3 7. hxg3 ♜d7 the h-pawn cannot be taken anyway.

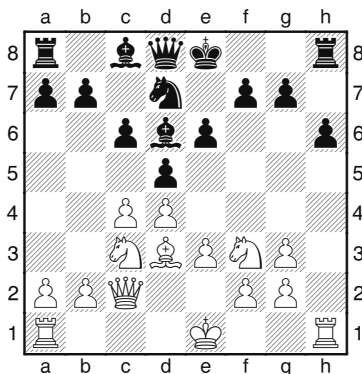
6... ♜xg3 7. hxg3 ♜d7

After 7...c6 8. ♖c2 White continues similar to the main variation.

8. ♖c2

This is one of the exceptional lines (mentioned above) where the queen is well placed on this square. Black must defend h7 and thus slightly weaken his kingside.

8...h6 9. ♜c3 c6 10. ♕d3±



The bishop pair is not active, and White has almost finished the development.

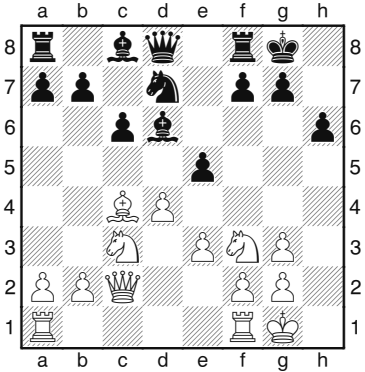
10...0-0 11.0-0!

White has many good moves at his disposal, but I like the textmove most. It's often recommended not to expect too much from the h-file. Since it has already led to a certain weakening of the opponent's pawn structure, White

can just castle, strive for initiative in the center by means of e3–e4, and profit from the better development.

Other moves may be tempting but bad. For example, the wing attack 11.g4? is refuted in textbook style with the central counter 11...e5! leading to immediate equality.

3a) 11...dxc4?! 12.♙xc4 e5



In some lines of the Queen’s Gambit this is the right way to break the chains, but here it fails.

13.♘e4 ♙c7 14.d5! cxd5

After 14...♘b6 15.dxc6 ♘xc4 16.♚xc4 bxc6 17.♚xc6 White remains with an extra pawn.

15.♙xd5 ♘b6 16.♙b3± White’s pieces are too active.

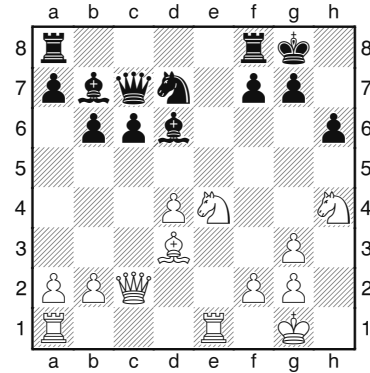
1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6 3.♙f4 ♙d6 4.♙g3! ♘e7 5.e3! ♘f5 6.c4 ♘g3 7.hxg3 ♘d7 8.♚c2 h6 9.♘c3 c6 10.♙d3 0-0 11.0-0!

3b) 11...b6?! This only weakens the queenside.

12.cxd5 exd5

After 12...cxd5 13.♚fc1 ♙b7 14.♘b5 ♚c8? 15.♚xc8! ♙xc8 16.♘d6+– White has rook + two light pieces for the queen.

13.e4± dxe4 14.♘xe4 ♚c7 15.♚fe1 ♙b7 16.♘h4



Dark clouds are gathering over the shelter of Black’s king because it lacks reliable defenders.

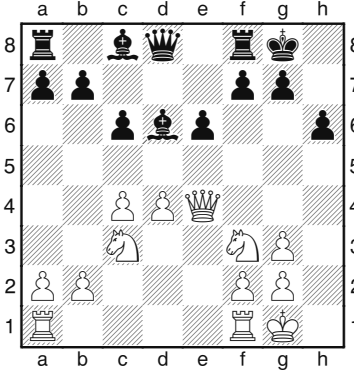
16...g6?

This attempt to prevent ♘f5 loses on the spot.

17.♘xd6 ♚xd6 18.♘g6 fxg6 19.♙c4+ ♖h8 20.♚e6+–

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6 3.♙f4 ♘d6 4.♙g3!
 ♘e7 5.e3! ♘f5 6.c4 ♘xg3 7.hxg3 ♘d7
 8.♚c2 h6 9.♗c3 c6 10.♙d3 0-0 11.
 0-0!

**3c) 11...♘f6 12.e4 dxe4 13.♙xe4!
 ♘xe4 14.♚xe4±**

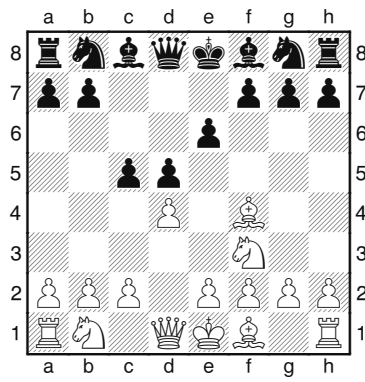


I'm usually a fan of the bishop pair, but it's also important to recognize typical cases when the knights are stronger. This is such a typical case. White is perfectly centralized, and can strengthen his position even further with c4-c5 and ♘e5. Black, however, is unable to activate ♙c8, and also ♙d6 is more a defensive piece.

Conclusion: Early ♙d6 followed by ♘e7 is harmless, but White must often be ready to leave the LS routine pattern behind and choose different set-ups than c3, ♘bd2, ♙d3 etc. Then he has good chances to exploit the unusual position of Black's knight.

Chapter 1.2 – 3.♙f4 c5

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6 3.♙f4 c5



This immediate lever action mostly has no independent significance either.

4.c3! ♚b6

In this form (with a pawn on e6 which hampers the activation of the queen's bishop) the attack on b2 is harmless. Other moves lead to other chapters by transposition of moves.

5.♚b3

Protecting b2 in the most rigorous way. There's no reason to fear the exchange of queens, as ♚xb3 activates White's rook, and the doubled pawns may even be useful.

1) For example 5...♚xb3?! 6.axb3 cxd4.

6...♘c6 7.dxc5 ♙xc5 8.b4 shows a typical way of handling the doubled pawns properly. Now ♘b1