

Opening Repertoire London System

Cyrus Lakdawala



POPULAR CHESS

About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 40 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the U.S. His recent book, *The Unknown Fischer*, was awarded the chess.com Book of the Year award for 2024.

Also by the Author:

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Introduction

“I am trying to beat the guy across from me and trying to choose the moves that are most unpleasant for him and his style.”

Magnus Carlsen

Magnus’s comment also applies to the openings we choose to play. Do you have that crazy friend who suffers from a serious medical condition requiring surgery, and who lacks health insurance? So he thinks about performing the medical procedure on himself, after watching a few YouTube videos. This is exactly what club level players do when they enter some insanely complex opening, like playing the sharper lines on either side of Open Sicilian, after reading a single book on it.

An opening must be presented to the reader, warts and all, and the relationship with our opening should be one of a friend, rather than an impersonal business contract. Our opening is there to serve us, not the other way around.

Modern day opening theory would be a lot more fun if it didn’t come with such an Orwellian, 1984 vibe. The database represents our collective memory of every recorded game ever played, yet this is not a book for data junkies. It’s for those who seek to understand, rather than memorize. I have no intention of turning the readers into theory-serfs. Keep in mind that Elvis never considered himself a drug addict since he got all his drugs through legal prescriptions, the same way we get our opening theory from books and articles meant for players who can absorb and remember giant swaths of data.

For club level players, memorized data is neither knowledge nor wisdom, and our openings should not be recited as the poems we were forced to deliver to our fifth-grade class. In fact, at club level, an overload of theoretical lines stuffed into our heads and sleepwalked through due to long familiarity, can turn into a data-blackhole gravitational pull which actually may suck out comprehension.

Three decades ago the London was a theoretical wasteland, which is why I played it. That great visionary C. Freddy Lakdawala predicted that it would one day be one of the most popular openings in chess. Maybe the way prophecy works is that people begin to believe something. They then act upon the belief, which in turn makes it come true. In this way, faith

transmutes into reality. One goal of this book is to get past the London's deceptive sameness and begin to understand its vast subtleties. In this book I'm recommending the more 'pure' 2 ♘f4 London move order, rather than the more obsolete 2 ♘f3 and 3 ♘f4, which I advocated in *Play the London System* and *First Steps: Colle/London Systems*.

Do You Have the Right Style for the London System?

We tend to assign positive and negative to openings, when in reality a 'good' opening is one which fits our style, while a 'bad' one doesn't. It's a mistake to believe that the opening which works for me, also works for you. Here are some traits of the London:

1. The London System is one of the most solid ways White can open a chess game. Play it long enough and you overcome the delusional belief that victory always goes to the more ruthless player.

2. Are you tired of the Adderallization of opening study? In my childhood the vast majority of players were detached from information, especially in the opening. Not so today, where it's the opposite issue: data overload. Today we live in the era of The Great Multiplying, where most openings require us to study complex lines just to survive the first 15 moves. The London is *not* in this category, since it is an understanding-based system, rather than one which depends upon memorization and concrete tactical lines. In essence, sharper openings are transient and in perpetual change, while openings like the London evolve slower, which means you are unlikely to be surprised by some shocking, engine-generated new move or idea you have never before seen.

3. The London tends to be understudied by our opponents, mainly for two reasons:

i. They are unafraid of it.

ii. Their Najdorfs and King's Indians require so much effort that they neglect openings like London, assuming that it is easy to play Black against it.

4. The concept of security comes in two parts: physical and psychological. The London fulfils both for White and is one of the safest ways to open with White.

5. Unlike sharper lines, the London is a do-it-yourself opening, where even if we forget the analysis, our position is so solid that it continues to hold.

6. The chess engine is a curious mix of science fiction and science non-fiction, since it is a case of the future within the present. The London, with the exception of a few lines, is still one of the most engine ambush-immune lines in chess. Even if we get surprised by our opponent's engine analysis, we can usually work our way through, since there are so few purely tactical lines in the London. Is the empire of chess dying from the introduction of chess engines? Maybe so and in the opening, I miss humans, which is why I play the London.

7. Lines come into fashion, are phased out and then double back, only to return once again. With the London, in each line we reach similar structures, the effect of which is that we become masters of the structure. Patzers of the world, rejoice. The London is an ideal

opening for new and club level players, since it is a combination of solidity and the fact that the ideas are relatively easy to understand. Yet unlike the old days, when we play the London today, we are no longer turning our backs to the world, since its theory continues to grow, just like all other openings.

Why is the London System so despised?

When I was 10 years old, my mother ordered a Montreal Canadians jersey. To my horror, they sent me a hated Toronto Maple Leafs jersey. To make matters a million times worse, my mother refused to send the jersey back (“a Maple Leafs jersey will keep you just as warm as a Canadians jersey!”) and she forced me to wear the despised jersey to school, where my schoolmates and even some of the teachers shunned me with hateful looks, as if I were a leper.

Now you understand what it’s like to be a London System player. We essentially flaunt the Maple Leafs jersey. So many of my Facebook friends burn with a stalkerish obsession with London, hating it with a passion. Which makes us think: if they hate the London this much, it simultaneously means they fear it.

I am tormented by people who routinely write on my Facebook page idiotic statements like: “Isn’t the London a waste of the white pieces?” My initial response is: “Dear low-IQ Facebook friend, I’m certain that you understand chess a lot better than Magnus Carlsen, who plays the London...” but then I remember manners, delete the rude sentence and type a polite/cold response.

My Facebook friends post at least one The-London-System-Sucks meme per week on my feed. It is easily the most despised opening in chess and for good reason, since hatred/fear of the London arises when the victim comes to the shocking realization that violence can be overcome with a non-violent weapon.

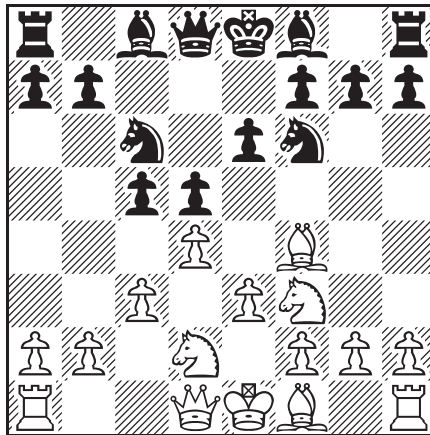
I view the London more as the world leader who speaks expansively of peace (“I begin war, in order to bring peace to the world!”), while secretly plotting destruction. “The London is boring and produces a limited emotional range between mild boredom and outright depression!” accused one of my delusional Facebook friends. This statement is a case of false typecasting. From my experience, very few London games are uneventful. May your opponents grind their teeth in frustration when you gleefully slide your bishop to f4!

Cyrus Lakdawala
San Diego, February 2025

Chapter One

Classical System with ...d5 and ...e6

1 d4 d5 2 ♘f4 ♞f6 3 e3 e6 4 ♗f3 c5 5 c3 ♞c6 6 ♗bd2



In this chapter Black faces our London and plays as if on the black side of a Queen's Gambit Declined. This is one of Black's most common systems, so we need to understand both the moves and subtleties well.

Game 1

Vlatko Kovacevic – Laurent Fressinet

Solin/Split 2000

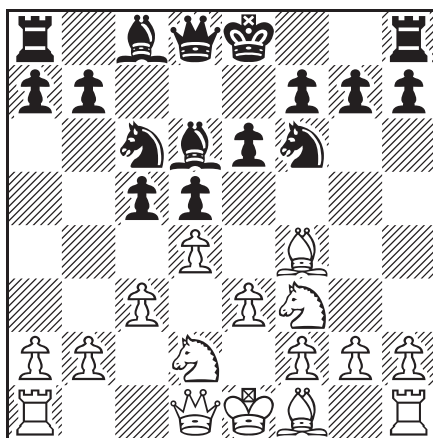
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c3

Kovacevic is a long time London player. In this book we advocate the 2 ♘f4 move order.

2...d5 3 ♘f4 e6 4 ♘d2 c5

Black chooses a quiet variation, which gives White a small yet comfortable advantage.

5 e3 ♘c6 6 ♘gf3 ♘d6



With this principled move, Black fights for control over e5. In fact, one of Black's goals is to achieve the freeing break ...e6-e5. We, as White, should try to disallow this intent. 6...♘e7 is played much less often. We look at this line down the road in the book.

7 ♘g3

The idea is if Black exchanges on g3, two things occur:

1. The h-file opens for our rook.
2. White is left with a remaining good bishop.

7...0-0

Natural, if not forced:

a) 7...♖e7 8 ♘e5 (it's important to remember: don't allow Black to achieve the freeing break on e5, which generally equalizes completely) 8...♙xe5 9 dxe5 ♘d7 10 ♖h5 h6 (10...g6 is met with 11 ♖h6 when the e5-pawn remains tactically protected) 11 ♘f3 g6 12 ♖g4 and White has a slight yet nagging edge due to the e5-pawn and dark-square potential, E.Prie-T. Remille, Marseille 2007.

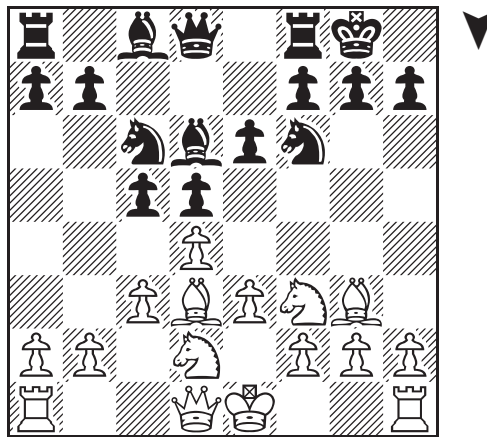
b) 7...♙xg3 8 hxg3 ♖d6 9 ♙b5! (oh, no you don't; we aren't about to allow Black to push

to e5) 9...♙d7 10 ♙xc6! ♙xc6 11 ♘e5 is a position we look at later in the book in the game Carlsen-Ghaem Maghami, where Magnus gives a perfect demonstration of exactly how to conduct White's position.

c) 7...♚c7? is quite common, yet I just consider it a blunder which loses a pawn after 8 dxc5! ♙xg3 9 hxg3. I don't see enough compensation for Black's missing pawn.

d) 7...b6 is best met with 8 ♙b5! ♚c7 9 ♙xd6 ♚xd6 10 ♘e5 ♙d7 11 f4 0-0 12 ♙d3!. White reaches a reversed Stonewall formation, sans bad dark-squared bishop, holding a pleasant edge, F.Menna Barreto-S.Gueler, Gibraltar 2016.

8 ♙d3



We reach one of the critical London tabiya positions. In Chapter Two we cover the 'Ruy Lopez' London with 8 ♙b5, which continues to grow in popularity.

8...♚e7

Black's simple plan is to free his position with ...e6-e5. This pretty much forces White's response.

In the chapter we also cover:

a) 8...b6 is examined in Games 4-6.

b) 8...♚e8 is covered in the next game.

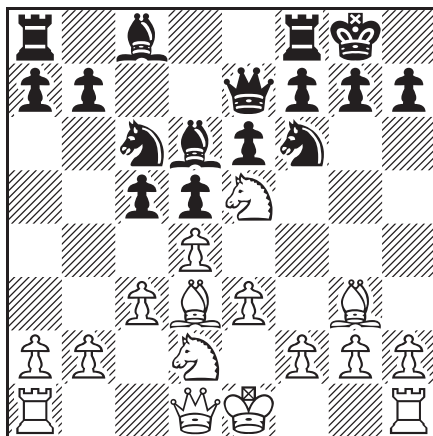
c) 8...cxd4 9 exd4 ♚e8 10 ♘e5 ♚c7 11 f4 ♘e7 12 0-0 ♘f5 gives White a promising Reversed Stonewall Dutch attacking position after 13 ♚e2.

d) 8...h6 9 ♘e5 ♙xe5 10 dxe5 ♘d7 11 ♚h5 f5 12 exf6 ♘xf6 13 ♚e2 e5 14 e4 d4 was H.Liu-E.Song, Canadian Championship, Toronto 2023. White has a pleasant edge after 15 ♙b5!.

e) 8...c4!? (this release of the central tension is commonly played at club level; Black's simple plan is to flood the queenside with a pawn storm) 9 ♙c2 b5 10 e4 (threat: e4-e5) 10...dxe4 11 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 12 ♙xe4 ♙b7 13 0-0 and I would be happy with White's position, E.Arnold-Y.Chalyi, correspondence 2020.

f) 8...♖c7? is a favourite mistake of club level players. Again, White wins a pawn after 9 dxc5! and I don't see sufficient compensation for Black.

9 ♖e5



As mentioned above, we must not allow Black the freeing break on e5. 9 0-0 is playable, but lame. Black stands just fine after 9...♙xg3 10 hxg3 e5 11 dxe5 ♖xe5 12 ♗xe5 ♖xe5.

9...cxd4

I will let you in on a little secret: I love it when Black exchanges on d4. All it does is open the e-file for White's major pieces.

Instead, we'll look at 9...♗d7 in Game 3, while 9...♙xe5!? doesn't equalize for Black: 10 dxe5 ♗d7 11 ♗f3 (also giving White an edge is 11 f4 f6 12 ♖h5 g6 13 exf6! when 13...♖xf6 is met with 14 ♖f3!, while after 13...♗xf6 14 ♖g5 White stands slightly better due to the potential for dark-square power) 11...f6 12 exf6 ♗xf6 13 ♗e5. White can play on the bishop-pair and control over e5, A.Demchenko-D.Alexakis, Internet () 2020.

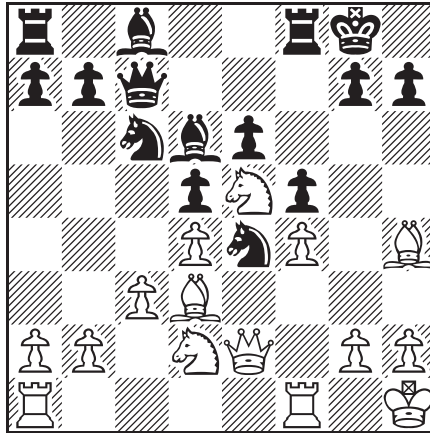
10 exd4 ♗d7 11 f4?!

This is a bit of a Dutch with an identity crisis. White is actually better off taking the piece-play route. Stronger is to hold back on pushing the f-pawn with 11 ♖e2! ♙xe5 (a swap on e5 with either knight or bishop is favourable for White) 12 dxe5 f5 13 exf6 ♗xf6 14 ♗f3 e5? 15 ♗xe5! ♗xe5 16 ♙xe5 ♙g4 17 ♙xf6! ♖xe2+ 18 ♙xe2 ♖ae8 19 f3 ♖xf6 20 ♗f2! ♙f5 21 ♖hd1 and White was up a pawn with a completely winning ending, E.Prie-F.Adell Corts, Mislata 2009.

11...f5?!

Black will soon reach an undesirable double Stonewall formation. 11...f6 improves when 12 ♗xc6 bxc6 13 0-0 c5 14 ♖e1 cxd4 15 cxd4 ♖b8 16 ♗b3 f5! looks only a shade better for White.

12 0-0 ♗f6 13 ♙h4 ♖c7 14 ♖e2 ♗e4 15 ♗h1!



GM Kovacevic's plan is clear: an attack down the g-file.

15...♙d7 16 g4!

We all may take grave risks for love. Sure, this slightly weakens White's king. However, White's attacking chances down the g-file more than compensate.

16...♙e8

After 16...♘xd2? 17 ♖xd2 fxg4 18 ♖g2 and if 18...h5 19 ♘g6 ♜f7 20 h3!, White has a winning attack.

17 gxf5 exf5 18 ♜g1 ♙e7

It's a bad sign for Black that he is willing to swap off his good bishop for White's technically bad one. Fressinet seeks to reduce White's attackers from the board.

19 ♙xe7 ♜xe7 20 ♜g2

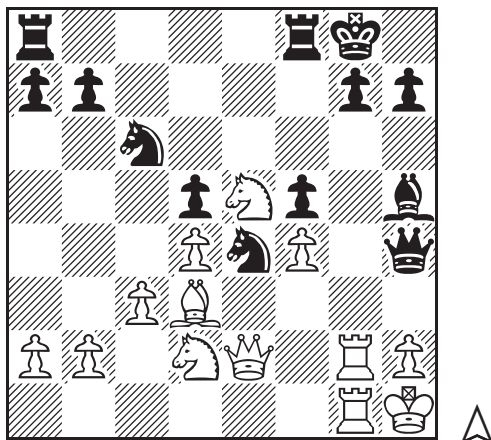
If Black's position was a face, it would register dissatisfaction. It's funny how humans still understand some positions better than engines. In this case the human's perception is the more accurate one. *Stockfish* incorrectly assesses this as the tiniest edge for White, while most humans are capable of anticipating White's attacking potential.

20...♖h4!?

The optimist believes that anything is possible. We feel in our bones that Black can't so easily seize the initiative. 20...♙h8 is a safer alternative.

21 ♜ag1 ♙h5??

Defensive play requires the care and attention to detail of a person attempting to defuse a live bomb. I don't know about you, but I always think "I'm saved!" the move before I go down in flames. Black is still hanging on after 21...♙h8! (White is unable to chop the g7-pawn due to a knight check on f2) 22 ♖e3! ♙h5. White stands better, but is far from winning.



Exercise (calculation/attack): Prove why Black's last move, a misguided attempt at a combination, loses by force:

Answer: Queen sacrifice. White's queen refuses to be so casually dismissed and remains where she is on e2.

22 ♕xe4!!

My mind goes to that Vietnam war photo of the Buddhist monk who set himself on fire to bring attention to the war, all the while serenely sitting in the lotus posture as his body burned.

22...fxe4

22...♕xe2?? walks into mate in three after 23 ♖xg7+ ♖h8 24 ♗g8+! (decoying Black's rook from protection of the f7-mating square) 24...♖xg8 25 ♘f7#.

23 ♖xg7+ ♖h8 24 ♗g2!

Threatening ♖xh7+ and ♗g7 mate.

24...♕g6

Nothing works. If 24...♗f6 25 ♘d7 ♗h6 26 ♘xf8 ♖xf8 27 ♗g8+ and mate next move.

25 ♘xg6+ hxg6 26 ♖xg6 1-0

There is no reasonable defence to the threat of ♖g3, followed by ♖h3. If 26...♗h7 intending ...♗g8, then White wins with 27 ♗g5!. Nothing can be done about ♖h6.

Has there ever been a TV or movie ventriloquist's dummy who didn't become both sentient and completely evil? The London is similar in that it has the reputation of harmlessness, which is actually unfounded since White often whips up dangerous attacks against the black king, especially in the Classical lines. The next game is a good example of how easy it is for Black to allow White a dangerous Reversed Stonewall style attack.

Game 2

Pavel Anisimov – Melis Mamatov

World Rapid Championship, St. Petersburg 2018

1 d4 d5 2 ♘f4 ♗f6 3 e3 e6 4 ♗f3 ♘d6 5 ♘g3 c5 6 c3 ♗c6 7 ♗bd2 0-0 8 ♘d3 ♖e8

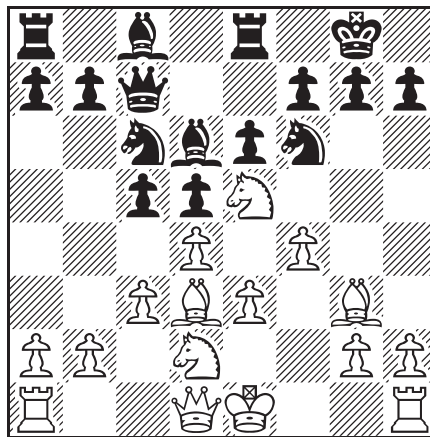
Once again Black intends to free his position with a break on e5, which White shouldn't allow.

9 ♗e5 ♖c7

Black logically continues to pressure the e5-knight.

I am always delighted by the commonly played exchange 9...cxd4 10 exd4, which only seems to benefit White, since it allows our major pieces to seize a firm grip over the critical e5-square. Following 10...♗xe5?! (it was better to play 10...♖c7, although even there, White stands comfortably better) 11 dxe5 ♗d7 12 ♗f3 f5 13 exf6 ♖xf6 14 ♘c2 g6? (moving the knight to b6 was better) 15 0-0 ♗de5 16 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 17 ♖d4 ♗d7 18 ♖e3! b5 (playing ...e6-e5 is too loosening since White can move rooks to e1 and d1, followed by either ♘b3 or ♘a4) 19 ♘d3 a6 20 a4! bxa4 21 ♖xa4 e5 22 ♖b4! Black found himself strategically busted, V.Artemiev-V.Danielyan, St. Petersburg 2016.

10 f4



Such Reversed Stonewall structures are a common feature of the London terrain. If you play the London, it is a good investment of your time to study classic Stonewall Dutch attacking games. In our case we get a kind of Reversed Super-Stonewall, since our normally bad dark-squared bishop has been magically transported outside the pawn chain to g3 and may participate in our coming attack.

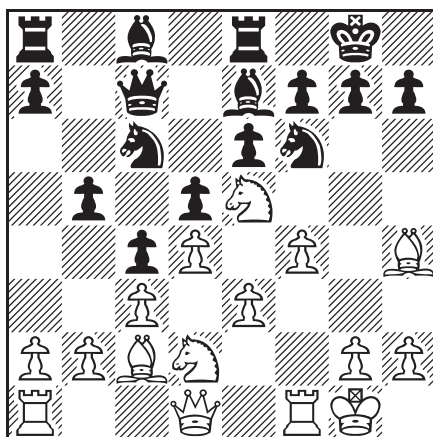
10...b6?!

This way Black develops the light-squared bishop, while fighting for e4. Believe it or not, I consider this natural move a mistake. Alternatives are:

a) 10...♘d7?? is a common London trap at the club level. The refutation is simple: 11 ♙xh7+!, C.Lakdawala-J.Pryor, San Diego (rapid) 2014. After such a blunder, we ponder the purposelessness of life and wonder why we even bother to get out of bed in the morning! If Black accepts the bishop, there follows 12 ♖h5+, 13 ♗xf7+, 14 ♗h5+ and 15 ♗xe8+.

b) 10...♗e7?! 11 ♙h4! ♘g6 12 ♙g5! has been played just once, in a low rated game. White's position appears promising: for example, 12...b6 13 h4! gives White a strong attack.

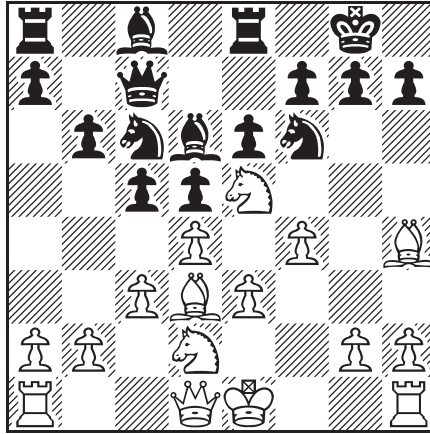
c) 10...c4?! reveals Black's favourite plan at club level. Black mindlessly pushes like mad on the queenside and dares White to deliver mate on the other side: 11 ♙c2 b5 12 ♙h4 ♙e7 13 0-0.



Black is 0-7 in my database from this position, mainly since White's kingside attack is clearly faster than Black's on the other side. For example: 13...♙b7 14 a3 a5 15 ♗f3 b4 16 ♗h3! g6? (a mistake, but at this point I'm not sure what to suggest) 17 ♘df3 (even stronger is 17 ♘xf7! ♙xf7 18 ♙xf6! ♙xf6 19 ♗xh7 ♙d6 20 ♗xg6+ with three pawns for the piece and a winning attack for White) 17...b3!? 18 ♙b1! ♘d7?! (18...♗f8 is better, but even there White has a winning attack with 19 ♘g5) 19 ♘xf7! ♙xf7 20 ♙g3! ♙g7 21 ♘g5 ♘f8 22 f5 saw White generate a crushing attack, A.Shimanov-H.Sobh, Philadelphia 2017.

d) Black's only real option is the indigestible engine suggestion 10...♗f8!, which nobody is going to play on you. Apparently the world really is flat and Black's rook seeks to sail off its edge. A natural defensive player (the engine!) comes with a wild animal's hyperaware sense of coming danger. The idea is that Black can now move the f6-knight, without fear of ♙xh7+. After 11 0-0 ♗e8 now ...f7-f6 is coming and Black looks better off here than in any other variation, although I still prefer White's chances.

11 ♙h4



11...♙e7

We should pay heed too to:

a) Four unfortunates fell for the trap 11...♞d7?? in the database. Just as in the earlier version, 12 ♙xh7+! wins on the spot.

b) 11...♙b7 12 0-0 ♞e7? sees White unleash a winning attack with 13 ♙xf6 gxf6 14 ♙xh7+! ♚f8 15 ♜h5!, E.Paehtz-O.Zimina, Monaco (blitz) 2024.

12 ♙xf6!

Well timed. White eliminates a key black defender, while simultaneously ridding himself of his bad bishop.

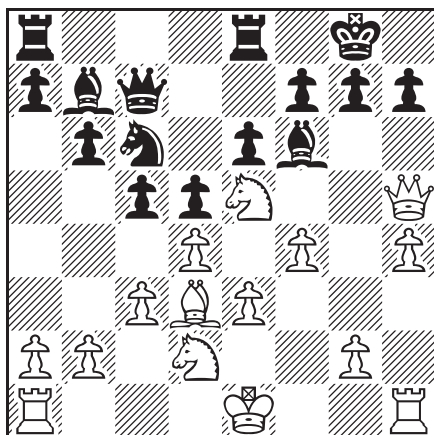
12...♙xf6

After 12...gxf6?? 13 ♜h5 ♙d8 14 ♞xc6! (attracting Black's queen to the tactically unfavourable c6-square) 14...♜xc6 15 ♜h6! f5 16 ♙xf5! it's time for Black to resign.

13 h4!

If the freeway legal speed is 60 miles per hour, who among us hasn't pushed it to the still cop-safe 65? Clearly the move comes with ominous undertones. White plans to provoke ...g7-g6 and then follow with a future h4-h5.

13...♙b7 14 ♜h5



White attackers surge ahead like a bull in heat.

14...g6

14...h6 15 g4! is even worse for Black.

15 ♖f3 cxd4 16 exd4 ♖e7

16...♙g7 17 h5 is also quite miserable for Black.

17 ♖h3

Even better is 17 h5! g5 18 ♖g4 ♙g7 19 h6 f5 20 ♘xc6 ♙xc6 21 ♖xg5 ♖xg5 22 fxg5 ♙f8 23 ♘f3 and Black is busted in the pawn-down ending.

17...♖ac8

The problem with blocking on h5 is, of course, that White will pry the kingside open with a g2-g4 push. Instead, after 17...h5 18 g4 ♘e5 19 fxe5 ♙xe5 20 dxe5 d4 21 ♙e4 Black doesn't have enough for the sacrificed piece.

18 h5

Black's enfeebled kingside pawn cover is on the verge of collapse. 18 ♘df3, reinforcing the e5- and g5-squares, looks even stronger.

18...g5 19 ♘df3?!

Rarely do we win neat and tidy games. It is the nature of chess to win, only after a few stumbles. Here 19 ♖g4! presses White's attack to its fullest potential: 19...h6 20 ♘df3 ♙xe5 21 fxe5 and Black is busted.

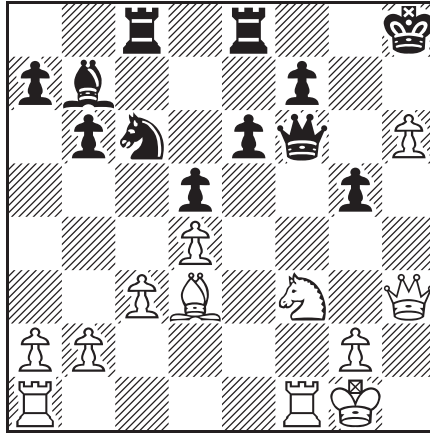
19...h6?!

Black had to try 19...gxf4 20 ♖g4+ ♙h8 21 ♖xf4 ♙xe5 22 dxe5 ♖g8 23 0-0-0. Even here White's attack looks promising.

20 ♘g4 ♙g7

20...♙g7 21 fxg5 hxg5 22 h6 ♙f6 23 0-0 is hopeless for Black.

21 ♘xf6 ♖xf6 22 fxg5 hxg5 23 h6+ ♙h8 24 0-0!



No analysis required. Our eyes tell us that Black can't possibly survive.

24...g4

After 24...♙e7 25 ♘xg5! ♜xg5 26 ♖xf7 ♜e7 27 ♖af1 ♖xf7 28 ♖xf7 Black's position is twisted metal and shattered glass, since his king has no prayer of survival.

25 ♜xg4 ♜g8 26 ♜h5 ♜f4

Threatening a double attack on e3, which is easy to meet.

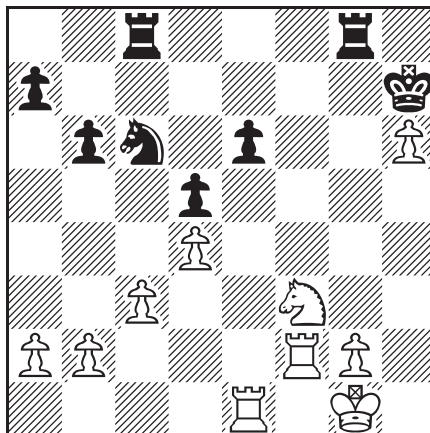
27 ♖f2 ♜e3

27...f5 28 ♖e1 is also wretched for Black.

28 ♜xf7

White missed a faster win with 28 ♖e1! ♜xd3 29 ♖e5 ♖xe5 30 ♜xe5+, winning.

28...♜xd3 29 ♜xb7 ♜h7 30 ♜xh7+ ♙xh7 31 ♖e1



Black is unable to clean up the mess in this ending, since the causes and conditions of success are absent:

1. White is temporarily up two pawns. While h6 will soon fall, this will still leave Black down a pawn.

2. Black's structure is in dire need of soap and bathwater. White can hammer away at Black's backward e6-pawn, which remains an unsettling strategic admonishment.

3. Black nurses a hole on e5.

31...♖ce8 32 ♖fe2 ♘d8 33 ♘e5 ♔xh6 34 ♖e3! ♗g5 35 ♖h3+ ♔g7

35...♖h5?? 36 ♘g4+ wins more material for White.

36 ♖f1

Black can barely move.

36...♖f5 37 ♖xf5 exf5 38 ♗g3+ ♔h7 39 ♔f2 ♘e6 40 ♔f3 b5

Or if 40...♗g8 41 ♖xg8 ♔xg8 42 ♘c6, with dual threats to chop a7 and also the fork on e7.

41 ♗g6!?

Allowing a combination. More efficient is 41 ♘d7! ♔h6 42 ♘f6 ♗d8 43 ♘g8+ ♔h5 44 ♘e7.

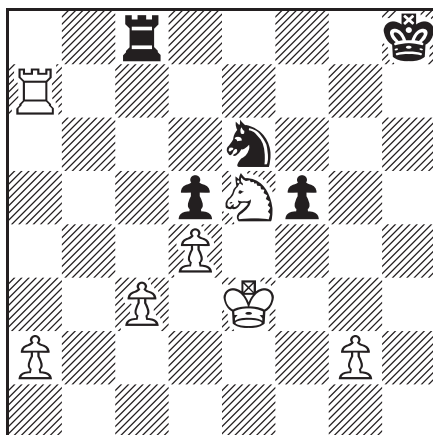
41...b4

Sometimes we refuse to take yes for an answer. The worst fear we have in winning positions is an unpredictable tactical anomaly, like 41...♘xd4+ here. The shot still loses for Black after 42 cxd4 ♖xe5 43 ♔f4 ♖e2 44 ♖a6 ♖xg2 45 ♔xf5 ♖xb2 46 ♖xa7+ ♔h6 47 ♔e6.

42 ♖f6 bxc3 43 bxc3 ♘g7 44 ♔e3

This way c3 is covered.

44...a5 45 ♖a6 ♘e6 46 ♖xa5 ♖c8 47 ♖a7+ ♔h8



Exercise (tactics): Prove why Black's last move was a mistake in an already losing position:

Answer: Give check on g6, followed by a king/rook fork on e7.

48 ♖g6+ 1-0

Chess prodigies are those adult/toddlers who look 9, going on 39 years old. Gata Kamsky isn't a prodigy anymore of course, but I still remember the tournaments I attended when he was a kid in the late 1980s and early 1990s, where he would routinely wipe out adult GMs with ease. He sometimes still does it, just like in this game.

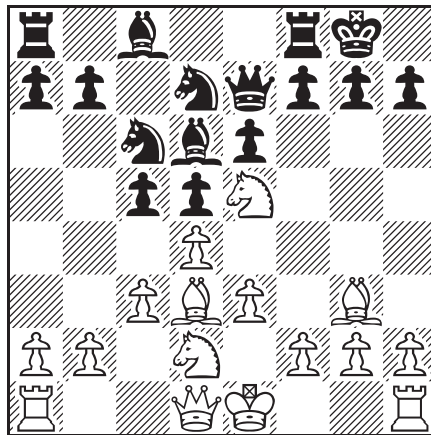
Game 3

Gata Kamsky – Sam Shankland Sturbridge 2014

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♙f4

Agent 007 insists on carrying a Walther PPK, which is an outdated relic from the WWII era. Still, the gun kills Bond's enemies just as dead as a modern-day gun. We London System Luddites despise all forms of technology and opt to live the simple life. Here we soon transpose back to ...d5 and ...e6 lines, although we will indeed look at this move order later in the book for other lines.

2...d5 3 e3 e6 4 ♘d2 c5 5 c3 ♘c6 6 ♘gf3 ♙d6 7 ♙g3 0-0 8 ♙d3 ♚e7 9 ♘e5 ♘d7



What could be more natural? Black adds heat to White's e5-knight, while clearing the way for ...f7-f6.

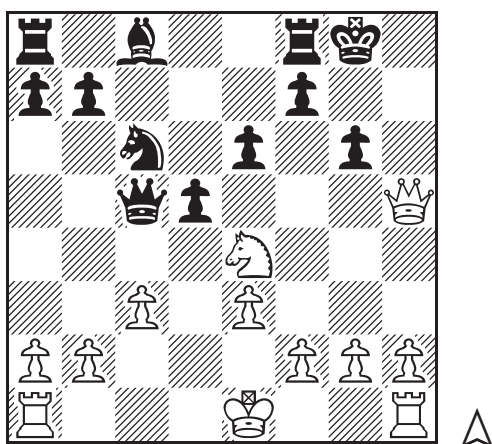
10 ♘xd7!

At first, it's difficult to understand the purpose behind this seeming digression. Didn't White waste time playing ♘f3, ♘e5 and then exchanging on d7? Well, yes, but keep watching!

10...♙xd7?!

What? Now the most natural move in the world gets a dubious mark? Believe it or not, Black is better off with the ridiculously unnatural recapture with the queen, which then defuses the power from White's coming piece sacrifice.

Indeed, the unnatural modification 10...♙xd7! is necessary. White's coming combination only works *because* Black's bishop is on d7. Now let's say White continues the same way Kamsky did in the game with 11 ♙xd6!? (this isn't so strong anymore and White can consider playing 11 ♖f3 or 11 ♗h5 instead, although 11 dxc5! is actually White's best shot at an edge: 11...♙xc5 12 0-0 ♙d6 13 ♖f3 ♙xg3 14 hxg3 b6 15 e4 and White holds a tiny edge, P.Lizak-G.Szabo, Hungarian League 2019) 11...♙xd6 12 dxc5 ♗xc5 13 ♙xh7+ (the problem is this is now only good enough for a draw) 13...♙xh7 14 ♗h5+ ♙g8 15 ♖e4 g6.



Do you see the difference with the next diagram, below? In Kamsky's game the bishop is on d7 and would hang after ♖xc5 and ♖xd7. Here, however, White has no choice but to take perpetual check after 16 ♗g5 ♗e7 17 ♖f6+ ♙g7 18 ♖h5+ ♙g8 19 ♖f6+.

11 ♙xd6 ♗xd6 12 dxc5!

More strategic high treason. The point is seen on White's next move.

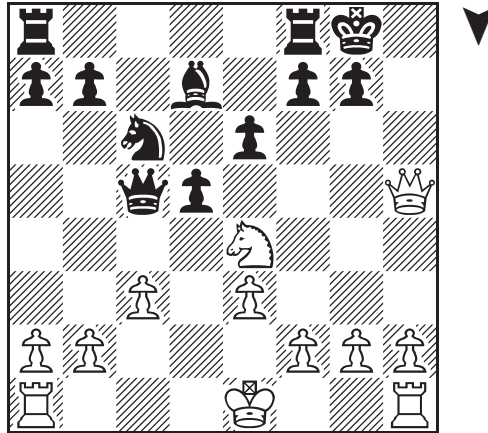
12...♗xc5?

Once again, the most natural move on the board is a mistake, since White can exploit the position of the black queen on c5 in the upcoming combination. Black should enter emergency mode and just hand over a pawn with 12...♗c7.

13 ♙xh7+!

Money changes hands. White's Greek Gift sacrifice appears to miss by a mile, since there isn't even a knight on f3 which can move to give check on g5. It gets to g5 all the same though.

13...♙xh7 14 ♗h5+ ♙g8 15 ♖e4!



The test's trick question is revealed. This shot produces an uplift in the attack's mood and now we begin to see why Black's c5-queen position is exploited.

15...♔c4

Here 15...g6?? loses to simplification with 16 ♖xc5! gxh5 17 ♖xd7 ♜fd8 18 ♖f6+ ♕f8 19 ♖xh5, leaving White two pawns up in the ending.

16 ♖g5

Threatening mate on the move.

16...♜fd8

Black's king must be given luft, since White threatens mate on h7. Black's rook also covers the bishop from attack by the white queen. Instead, 16...♜d3? is met with the interference trick 17 e4! ♜fd8 18 ♜xf7+ ♕h8 19 ♜g6 ♕g8 20 ♜d1 which is even worse for Black.

17 ♜xf7+ ♕h8 18 ♜h5+ ♕g8 19 ♜d1!

Your blind date is homely, bleary-eyed, and with breath stinking of wine and vomit. You know it's going to be a long next four hours. I just described Shankland's position. To believe that Black is OK would be a false positive reading of the position, since White is by no means obliged to take perpetual check.

19...e5

Alternatively:

a) 19...b5 20 f4 b4 21 ♜f7+ ♕h8 22 ♜f1! when the threat to lift the rook to h3 is decisive.

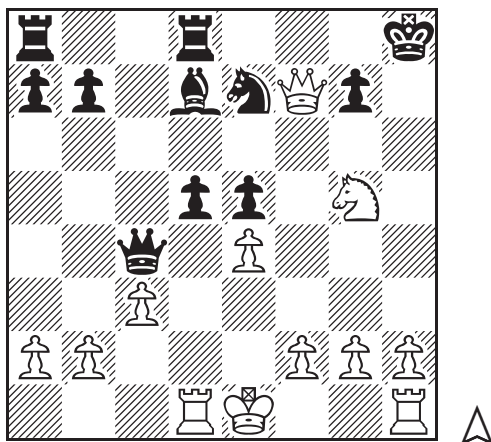
b) 19...♕e8 20 ♜h7+ ♕f8 21 ♜h8+ ♕e7 22 ♜xg7+ ♕d6 23 b3! ♜g4 24 f3! (enabling a future mate on e4 with the knight) 24...♜h4+ 25 g3 ♜h5 26 ♖e4#.

c) 19...♜xa2 (the scriptures tell us that the rich and greedy fail to gain entry to paradise) 20 0-0 ♜c4 21 f4 and the coming ♜f3 is decisive.

20 ♜f7+ ♕h8 21 e4!

Not 21 ♜xd5? ♜h4! when, suddenly, Black is just fine.

21...♖e7!



This is not such a bad practical try. Shankland boldly opts to confront the problem, rather than run from it. Still, the counter-sacrifice doesn't feel all that therapeutic. In this desperate bid to seize the initiative, Shankland gives up a piece to throw White's queen off the light squares and clear the way for ...♗b5, which threatens mate on e2.

Instead, 21...♗g4 fails miserably after 22 f3 ♖c5 23 ♗g6 ♗e3+ 24 ♕f1 ♕g8 25 ♗h7+ ♕f8 26 ♗h8+ ♕e7 27 ♗xg7+ ♕d6 28 ♗xd5#.

22 ♗xe7

Kamsky has regained his sacrificed piece with interest, while maintaining the more potent attack.

22...♗b5

Threatening mate on e2.

23 ♗d2

No problem: e2 is easily covered.

23...♗xa2

Likewise, 23...d4 24 ♗xe5 dxc3 25 ♗xc3 ♗xa2 26 ♗h3+ ♕g8 27 ♗h7+ ♕f8 28 ♗h8+ ♗g8 29 ♗e6+! ♕e7 30 ♗xg8 ♗xg8 31 ♗c7 wins.

24 ♗f7!

Kamsky gets a handle on the unwieldy mess, seeing that his king is actually safer than his opponent's. The queen returns to her light-square track, threatening to return to h5.

24...♗a1+ 25 ♗d1 ♗xb2 26 ♗h5+ ♕g8 27 ♗h7+ ♕f8 28 ♗h8+ ♕e7 29 ♗xg7+ ♕d6 30 ♗xd5+ ♕c6 31 ♗f6+! 1-0

After 31...♕c7 32 ♗e6+ ♕b6 33 ♗xd8+ (nope; ...♗e2 mate is an illegal move since the black king happens to be in check) 33...♕a5 (33...♗c6 34 0-0 wins) 34 ♗xb7+ ♕a4 35 ♗f3! ♗f8 36 ♗d1+ ♕a3 37 ♗d2 ♗xc3 38 ♗b1 ♗c4 39 ♗d6 White consolidates.