

GM Nikola Sedlak

THE LONDON SYSTEM
The Adventure Continues



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ISBN 978-86-82410-02-7

Izdavač

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEY TO SYMBOLS	4
PREFACE	5
INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTER ONE - THE CARO-KANN POSITION	9
CHAPTER TWO - THE CLASSICAL SETUP	31
CHAPTER THREE - DUBOV'S LINE	63
CHAPTER FOUR - THE MODERN LINE ...♔b6 – ...♔xb2	79
CHAPTER FIVE - 5... ♕g4	117
CHAPTER SIX - EARLY ...♔b6	125
CHAPTER SEVEN - EARLY ...♕d6	129
CHAPTER EIGHT - THE SYMMETRY	147
CHAPTER NINE - THE GRÜNFELD SETUP	157
CHAPTER TEN - EXERCISES	171
SOLUTIONS	184
CHAPTER ELEVEN - THEORETICAL NOVELTIES	201

KEY TO SYMBOLS

±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
∞	unclear
∞	with compensation
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
⊙	zugzwang
#	mate
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
△	with the idea
□	only move
△	better is
⊕	time
N	a novelty
(ch)	championship

PREFACE

After becoming a grandmaster I became accustomed to an abundance of questions from my students and fellow chess players regarding how one should improve their chess strength. My answer was, and still is, somewhat simple – enjoy chess and all beauties that it offers, be consistent with your daily training, and after you dedicate enough time and other resources to it, results will be there. However, as you can probably guess, my answer did not satisfy many colleagues and pupils of mine. Most of them, if not all, demanded that I tell them something more concrete! Hoping to meet their expectations, I would tell them the following: find an opening that makes you feel comfortable and become an expert in it. Carefully study positions that arise most often, review all of the top level games played, constantly search for novelties that will surprise any well-prepared opponent, pay attention to recurring positional and tactical motifs, and understand ideas behind most common plans for both sides. Accomplishing this is far from an easy task but it is an inevitable step one has to take in order to improve their chess strength. Of course, keep in mind that this piece of advice is only valid if the said opening is not refuted by the modern engines.

One of the most common traps that a chess beginner falls in during his chess improvement journey is a frequent change of openings. This often comes as a result of a painful loss that sometimes had nothing to do with the opening choice itself - it is always easier to blame anyone or anything else than ourselves. I cannot stress enough how important it is not to do this! Every game that you play in a certain opening is extremely valuable. After all, why would you analyze and correct mistakes from those games if you do not plan to employ that opening again?

I genuinely believe that the London system is a strong and a reliable weapon that one can consistently use during his whole life. This statement is also supported by the fact that many young and promising players whose games you will find in the book have the London system as an integral part of their repertoire. Reading this book in a careful manner will save you a lot of time that you would otherwise have to spend on studying the opening by yourself. To add to this, it will not only save you from unpleasant defeats, it will also bring you stunning victories as soon as you decide to employ the London system in your games!

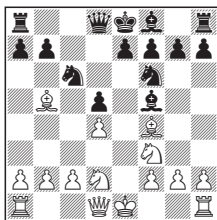
In order to create a strong foundation or broaden your current understanding of the London system, I closely followed a lot of tournaments, searched for interesting novelties, analyzed numerous intricate lines, and provided detailed reasoning behind my recommendations. I sincerely hope that you, my dear reader, will be satisfied with my findings and that your games in the London system give you nothing but good results and enjoyment.

***GM Nikola Sedlak,
December 2022.***

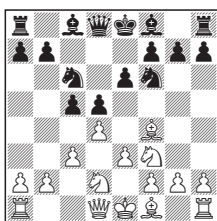
INTRODUCTION

The London System: The Adventure Continues! consists of 11 chapters, with nine of them focusing on the analysis of different variations, one of them being the chapter full of exercises that will help you test your knowledge and the last chapter devoted to the most important theoretical novelties.

First chapter examines the Caro-Kann Variation. In this chapter, we analyze an interesting modern approach with 7. ♗b5! We believe that this move provides White with excellent practical chances.

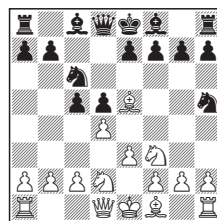


Second chapter is devoted to the Classical Setup. Since this is one of the most common options that Black opts for, we dedicated one of the longest chapters to it. We concluded that White has best winning chances if he plays for the e4 break.

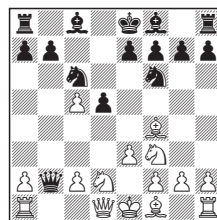


Third chapter deals with 5... ♘h5. One of the connoisseurs of this idea is the Russian Grandmaster Daniil Dubov and this variation is named after him. Here

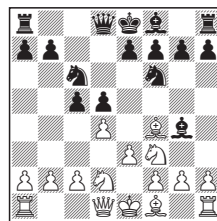
we suggest that White weakens Black's pawn structure before giving up the bishop pair.



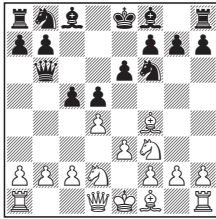
Chapter four is devoted to the sharpest line of the London System - Black accepts the sacrificed pawn on b2 and forces complications. Even though this line might be playable for Black from the engine's point of view, we came to a conclusion that White's practical chances are overwhelming.



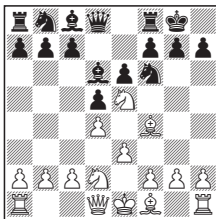
Fifth chapter is dedicated to the positions where Black decides to develop his bishop on g4. White's best chance to obtain an advantage is the early development of the queen on b3 with the idea to pressure Black's b7 pawn.



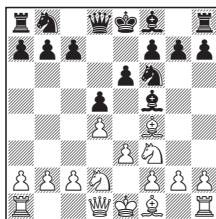
Sixth chapter is the shortest - after Black develops his queen on b6 before playing ...♗c6, White should be familiar with various transpositions. If Black does not choose to transpose into any variation, White is able to claim an advantage. For this reason, this chapter contains no analyzed games, only our suggestions.



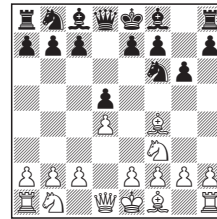
Chapter seven examines the positions where Black intends to play for an early ...♗d6, followed by ...0-0, ...♖c7, ...♗bd7 and ...e5. This approach is popularized by none other than the World Champion Magnus Carlsen himself. We recommend that White plays in a prophylactic manner with 6. ♗e5. The idea is to limit Black's options.



Eight chapter deals with the positions where Black mirrors White's development and places his bishop on f5 without pushing ...c5. White should not complicate the position - we believe that the calm 6. ♗bd2 is the best choice.



Chapter nine deals with a variation that is rarely seen in tournament practice nowadays - the Grünfeld Setup.



As we already noted, **chapter ten** contains a set of exercises that will test your newfound knowledge. We suggest that you read the whole book at least once before doing the exercises.

Last chapter contains all the important theoretical novelties put together - we believe it will help you for your tournament preparations.

Before you embark on the journey of learning the London System, we wish to tell you the following:

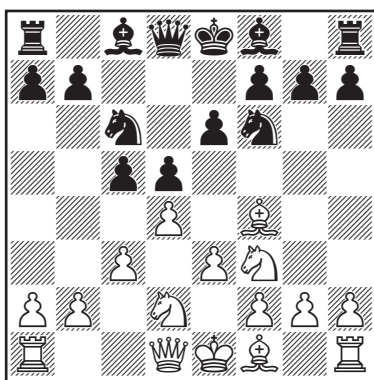
1. *Pay attention to the moves that come before and after the diagram - those are the critical positions and you need to understand them well if you want to master the London System.*
2. *For the sake of simplicity, we used he/him to denote a player or a person.*
3. *Be careful when checking our analyses with your engine - we used the most powerful engines to check all the variations and weaker engines need more time to evaluate the positions.*
4. *Do not rush! Examining a single game for a whole study session is all right.*

CHAPTER TWO

THE CLASSICAL SETUP

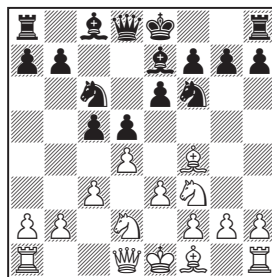
In this chapter we will examine illustrative games that demonstrate how White should play against Black's "classical" set-up which is considered to be one of the main weapons against the London system. This position has characteristics of an improved Slav Defense and Stonewall with reversed colours with a tempo more for White.

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



6... ♙d6 Most played continuation in the chess database. Black wants to play ...e5 after the exchange of dark-squared bishops.

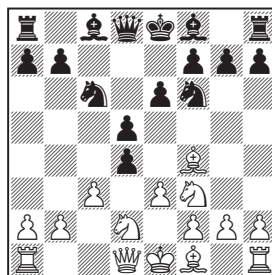
A) More passive is 6... ♙e7



7. ♘e5

Check out the game *N. Sedlak – E. Postny, Zagreb open 2017.*

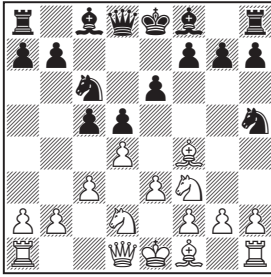
B) 6... cxd4



7. exd4 ♗h5

Check out the game *L. Aronian – J. Duda, Classic Prelim (rapid) 2021.*

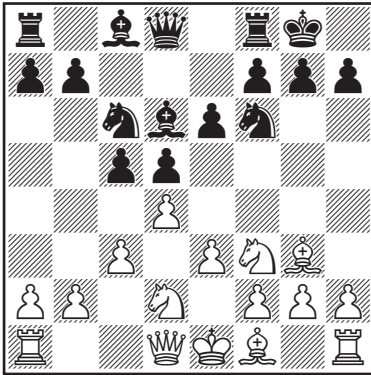
C) 6... ♖h5



7. ♗g5

Check out the game *M. Bluebaum – L. Van Foreest, Bundesliga 2019-20*.

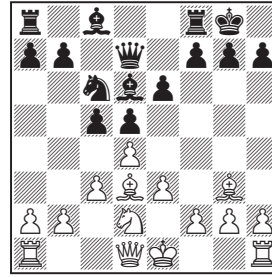
7. ♗g3 0–0



8. ♗d3 It is also possible to play 8. ♗b5, but choosing to develop the light-squared bishop on d3 leads to interesting and sharp positions.

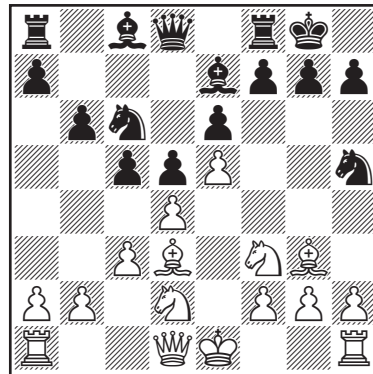
8... b6

8... ♖e7 9. ♗e5 ♗d7 10. ♗xd7 ♖xd7



Check out the game *J. Van Foreest – E. Blomqvist, Teplice open 2016*.

9. e4! ♗e7 10. e5 ♗h5



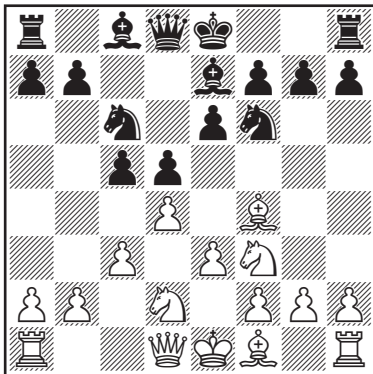
11. ♗g5! ♗xg5 12. ♖xh5

Check out the games *S. Nihal – Ki. Georgiev, FIDE Grand Swiss 2021*, *J. Van Foreest – R. Svane, Bundesliga 2016*, *U. Schuster – B. Komarica corr. 2020*.

N. Sedlak (2552) – E. Postny (2575)
Zagreb 2017

This game illustrates how important it is to be careful about move orders in the London system. Pay close attention to the move 7. $\text{N}e5$ and the reasoning behind it. In the London system, understanding basic ideas is much more important than memorizing numerous lines without any comprehension.

1. $d4$ $d5$ 2. $\text{N}f3$ $\text{N}f6$ 3. $\text{B}f4$ $c5$ 4. $e3$ $\text{N}c6$ 5. $\text{N}bd2$ $e6$ 6. $c3$ $\text{B}e7$ This continuation was still unexplored when this game was played.

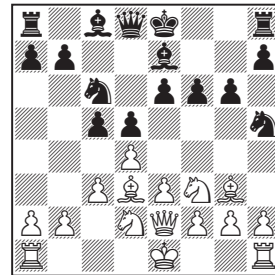


7. $\text{N}e5$ Most principled move. It may seem too early to place the knight in the center, but this move prevents Black from playing $\dots\text{N}h5$ with the idea to exchange the dark-squared bishop.

It is interesting that the typical move 7. $h3$ can cause White more harm than good. By vacating the square for the bishop, White loses the possibility to return the bishop to $g3$. 7... $\text{B}d6!$ If

White were to continue with 8. $\text{B}xd6$ or 8. $dxc5$ there is no good way to utilize 7. $h3$.

Current World Chess Champion Magnus Carlsen played the following moves at the World Blitz Chess Championship: 7. $\text{B}d3$ $\text{N}h5$ 8. $\text{B}e5$ $f6$ 9. $\text{B}g3$ $g6$ 10. $\text{W}e2$



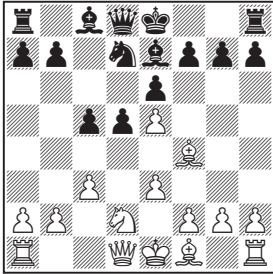
Black continued with the incorrect 10... $\text{B}d7?$ 11. $dxc5!$ $\text{B}xc5$ 12. $e4$ $\text{N}xg3$ 13. $hxg3$ $dxe4$ 14. $\text{B}xe4$ $\text{K}f7$ 15. $0-0-0$ and White has the initiative. M. Carlsen 2837 – Y. Kryvoruchko 2689, Riyadh 2017.

Correct is 10... $\text{W}b6!$ 11. $\text{R}b1$ (White king would not feel safe on the queenside after 11. $0-0-0?$ $c4!$ 12. $\text{B}b1$ $\text{W}d8+$ and Black is faster to carry out the attack on the white king with moves such as $b5$, $a5$, $b4$ etc.) 11... $0-0$ 12. $0-0$ $cxd4$ 13. $exd4$ White could gain the initiative by advancing the pawns on the queenside with $b4$ - $b5$ - $c4$. Another possibility for White is to transfer the knight to $c5$ via $b3$ after placing the b -pawn on $b4$. 13... $a5!$ Black prevents White's plan of playing on the queenside with a simple prophylactic move. Black's plan is to finish the development with $\dots\text{B}d7$ and then to take $\dots\text{N}xg3$ and carry out $\dots e5$ when a good opportunity arises.

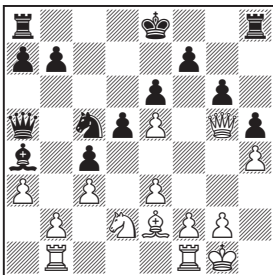
7... ♖d7

7... 0-0 8. ♕d3 ♖d7 9. ♖df3 - is a transposition to the game.

7... ♖xe5 8. dxe5 ♖d7



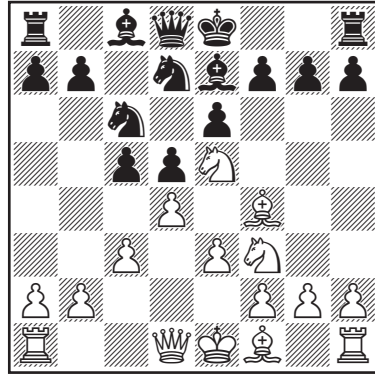
9. h4! A prophylactic move against ...g5. The idea is to play ♖g4. 9... ♖b6 (9... c4 Black gains the c5 square and prevents White's typical development of the light-squared bishop on d3. Still, a blocked center allows White to gain the initiative on the kingside. 10. ♖g4 g6 11. ♕e2 h5 12. ♖g3± Dark squares are weak and White will open the center with the move e4.) 10. ♖b1 ♖a5 11. a3 c4 12. ♖g4 g6 13. ♕e2 h5 14. ♖g3 ♖c5 15. ♕g5 ♕xg5 16. ♖xg5 ♕d7 17. 0-0 ♕a4



18. e4! A pawn break that shatters Black's position. 18... ♖xe4 19. ♖xe4 dxe4 20. ♕xc4 ♕c2 21. ♖be1 ♕d3 22. ♖f6 ♖f8 23. ♕xd3 exd3 24. ♖e4! ♖d8 25. ♖d1 ♖d5 26. ♖f3 ♖xe5 27. ♖xd3 ♖e7 28. ♖d6+ 1 : 0 K. Shevchenko

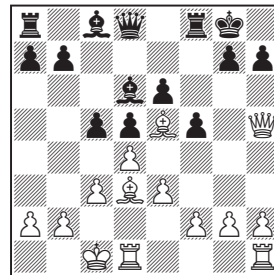
2535 – M. Warmerdam 2448, Skopje 2019.

8. ♖df3



8... 0-0 This is not the best move order for Black. After castling, Black loses the opportunity to advance his pawns and put pressure on the f4 bishop and the f3 knight.

More precise is 8... ♖dxe5! 9. ♖xe5 (9. dxe5? Black did not castle and this allows the advancement of the pawns on the kingside with 9... g5 10. ♕g3 h5!) 9... ♖xe5 10. ♕xe5 0-0 11. ♕d3 After exchanging the knights, White's position is more pleasant because of his active bishops. For example: 11... ♕d6 12. ♖h5 f5 13. 0-0-0

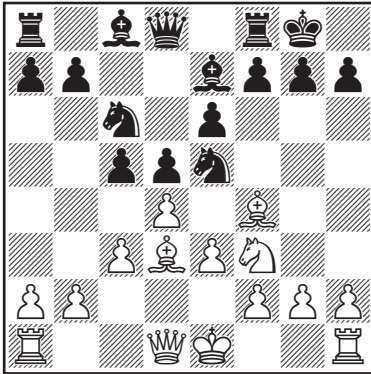


13... ♕d7! Nice tactical solution to solve the development issues. 14. ♕xd6 ♕e8 15. ♖e2 ♖xd6 16. dxc5

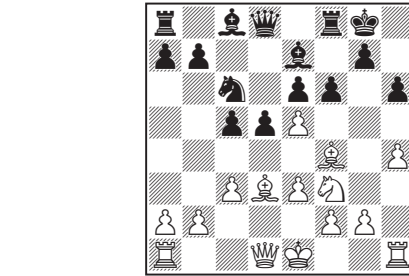
♖xc5 17. ♔b1± White has a simple plan - open the g-file with move g4.

2368 – M. Yankelevich 2120, Neustadt an der Weinstrasse 2019).

9. ♖d3 ♗dx5



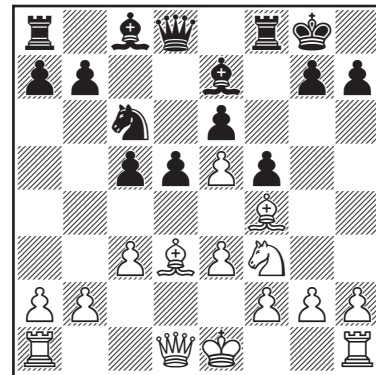
10. **dx5!** Now it is easy to recognize flaws of the 8... 0–0 move. White kept the knights on the board and thereby increased tactical threats on the kingside. After 10. ♗xe5 the position would transpose into 8... ♗de5.



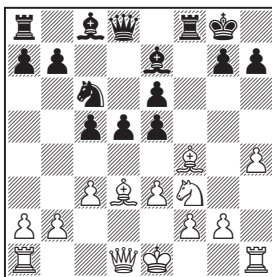
12. ♖c2!N This move vacates the d3 square for the queen in order to launch an attack via the light-squared diagonal. 12... c4 Black controls the d3 square but weakens the pawn structure. 13. ♖e2 fxe5 14. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 15. ♖xe5 ♖f6 16. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 17. ♖d1± with e4 to follow.

10... f5

10... f6 11. h4! h6 The resulting position was seen in J. Zorko 2465 – M. Oleksienko 2615, Slovenia 2017. White continued with 12. ♖h3 but after 12... fxe5 Black was free of any pressure. (Black gets checkmated quickly after 11... fxe5?)



11. **h4!** A thematic move! White makes an outpost on g5 for the knight and prepares to play g4.

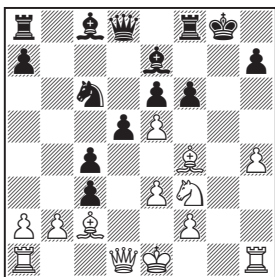


11... ♖d7 Black finishes the development and moves the light-squared bishop to the kingside.

12. ♖xh7+! ♔xh7 13. ♗g5+ ♖xg5 14. hxg5+ ♔g8 15. ♖h5+ – M. Colpe

In one correspondence game Black tried to gain space on the queenside but White was faster to attack on the kingside: 11... c4 12. ♖c2 b5 13. g4 b4

14. gxf5 bxc3 15. f6 gxf6

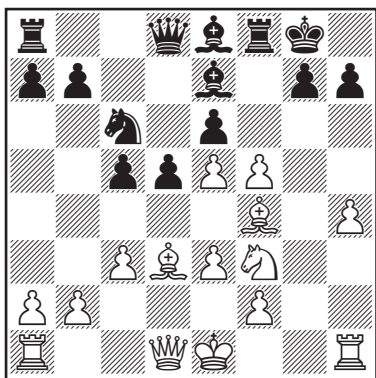


16. ♖d4! White clears the way for the queen to enter the attack. 16... cxb2 17. ♕xh7+ ♖h8 18. ♗h5 bxa1 ♗+ 19. ♕b1+ 1 : 0 A. Gorovets – F. Ynojosa Aponte, corr. 2015.

12. g4 ♕e8! Important accuracy! In a seemingly worse position, Black finds a way to create counterplay.

12... fxg4 13. ♖g5 ♕xg5 14. hxg5 g6 15. ♗xg4 And Black will find it hard to fight against the pressure along the h-file.

13. gxf5



13... ♕h5? In the end, it turned out that this seemingly logical move was a decisive mistake.

It was necessary to insert 13... c4! 14. ♕c2 ♕h5↔ with counterplay. The

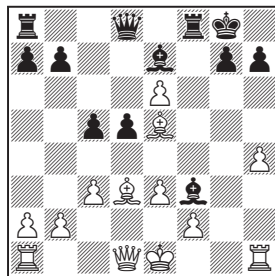
point is that after 15. fxe6 d4! White cannot play 16. ♕xh7+? ♖xh7 17. ♖g5+ because now Black has 17... ♖g6 18. ♗b1+ d3–+

14. fxe6 ♗b6 Black has several logical continuations at disposal, but not a single move improves his position.

For example: 14... c4 15. ♕xh7+! ♖xh7 16. ♖g5+ ♕xg5 17. hxg5 g6 18. ♖xh5+ gxh5 19. ♗xh5++–

White breaks Black's position in a similar manner after 14... d4 15. ♕xh7+! ♖xh7 16. ♖g5+ ♖g6 17. ♗d3+ ♖f5 18. ♖g1+–

After 14... ♖xe5 White gets the chance to carry out a successful mating attack with an impressive queen sacrifice: 15. ♕xe5 ♕xf3



16. ♖g1! ♕xd1 17. ♖xg7+ ♖h8 18. ♖xh7+ ♖g8 19. ♖h8#

Black retains some practical chances with the exchange sacrifice: 14... ♖xf4 15. exf4 ♗f8±

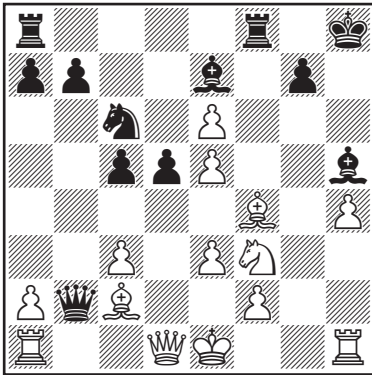
15. ♕xh7+! A logical tactical strike that came as a result of well placed pieces.

15... ♖h8

Accepting the sacrifice would only

speed up the defeat: 15... ♔xh7 16. ♖g5+ ♕xg5 (16... ♔g6 17. ♖c2+ ♖f5 18. ♖g1+-) 17. hxg5 g6 18. ♖xh5+ gxh5 19. ♖xh5+ ♔g7 20. ♖h6+ ♔g8 21. ♖g6+ ♔h8 22. 0-0-0+-

16. ♕c2 ♖xb2



17. ♖d3! This move shatters Black's hopes of finding counterplay on the queenside. White threatens checkmate and defends the c3 pawn at the same time.

17... g6

17... ♖xa1+ 18. ♔d2+-

18. ♖b1 ♖xa2 19. ♖g5 d4 Black tries to find his practical chances in a lost position.

20. ♖xb7 c4 21. ♖e4 ♖a1+ 22. ♕b1 ♖xc3+ 23. ♔f1 dxe3 24. ♕xe3 Black cannot avoid material losses.

24... ♖ab8

Even after 24... ♖ac8 White has 25. ♖f7+ ♔h7 26. ♖g1 ♖g8 27. ♖f4+-

25. ♖f7+ ♖xf7 26. ♖xb8+ ♖xb8 27. exf7 ♖d7 28. e6 ♖f6 29. ♕d4 1 : 0

Conclusion: Black's ...♕e7 move makes sense. The idea of this move is to threaten the exchange of the knight for the dark-squared bishop with ...♖e5. The fact that Black is able to punish 7. h3 with 7... ♕d6! also favors Black.

We can compare this line with one of the variations of Slav Defense: 1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4. e3 ♕f5 5. ♖c3 e6 6. ♕e2!? h6 7. ♕d3! and Black is forced to exchange bishops because it is not possible to play 7... ♕g6. Having that in mind, it is logical to continue with the principled 7. ♖e5 with the fight for the initiative on the kingside. It is useful to remember that the h-pawn's placement on h4 allows ♕xh7 sacrifices in some positions.