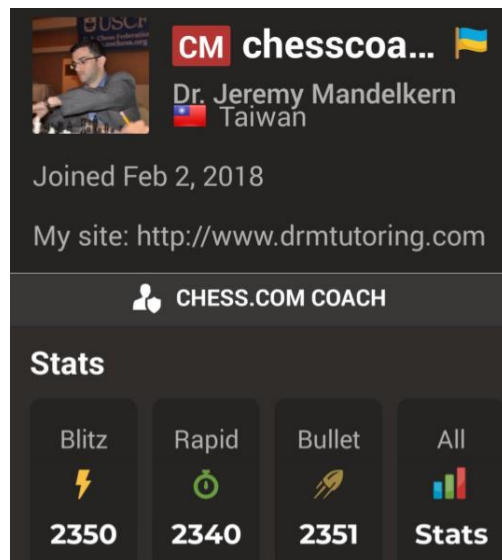TOP SECRET

CLASSIFIED

Anti-London Opening Analysis

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CHESS.COM COACH

Stats

Blitz	Rapid	Bullet	All
⚡	⏱	🚀	📊
2350	2340	2351	Stats

Dear Students,

This resource contains an insider's analysis of the London System opening (London) from black's perspective. Using this primer, with consistency, we can torpedo white's hopes for any edge with the London, often emerging out of the opening no worse or even better with black so buckle up & let's book-up on the anti-London!

Disclaimer: Not all move orders can be covered in this resource so only the most essential attempts by white will be addressed whereas lesser attempts/inferior move orders

are omitted as they can be refuted by keen players "over-the-board". This analysis is for YOUR eyes only!! As students of Coach M, you have been granted special security clearance to view this TOP SECRET information contained within. May it serve your game well and may our pawns be passed!

The London System opening (London): The London (Figures 1-4) is characterized by white's placement of the d-pawn to d4, king's knight to f3, and queen's bishop to f4, in some order. Depending on white's move order; whether it is 2. Bf4, 3. Bf4, or if this B to f4 move is delayed further still, such as in the "Harwitz Attack", (1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bf4), different set-ups for black are possible to torpedo the London.

As the Harwitz Attack has both good statistics and a favorable engine evaluation for white, we should consider sidestepping it with black by a deviation on move 3. or move 4. For instance, black can opt for a Queen's Indian defense (3… b6), a Ragozin defense (4… Bb4), or a Semi-Slav defense (4… c6), as promising alternatives. With these suggestions, black achieves adequate statistics in master play and the engine evaluations, at least in the

optimal lines for black, are not that impressive for white. Specialists, who desire to do so, can also learn the fine lines of play to emerge, as black, from a Harwitz Attack, being only slightly worse (see for instance the recent games of Hikaru Nakamura, who with some regularity, opts to defend the black side of the Harwitz Attack.). Our focus for this primer analysis will rather be on when white plays either 2. Bf4 or 3. Bf4 and how we can effectively torpedo these London tries. Here are two common London System opening set-ups for white/black when white opts for 3. Bf4:
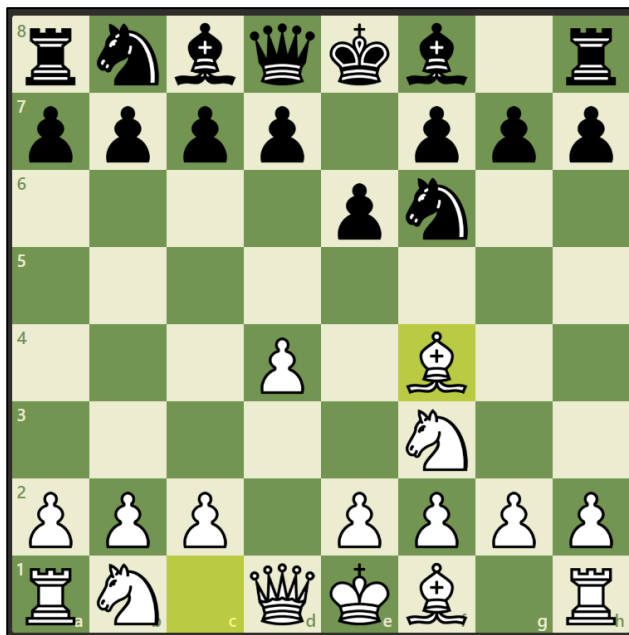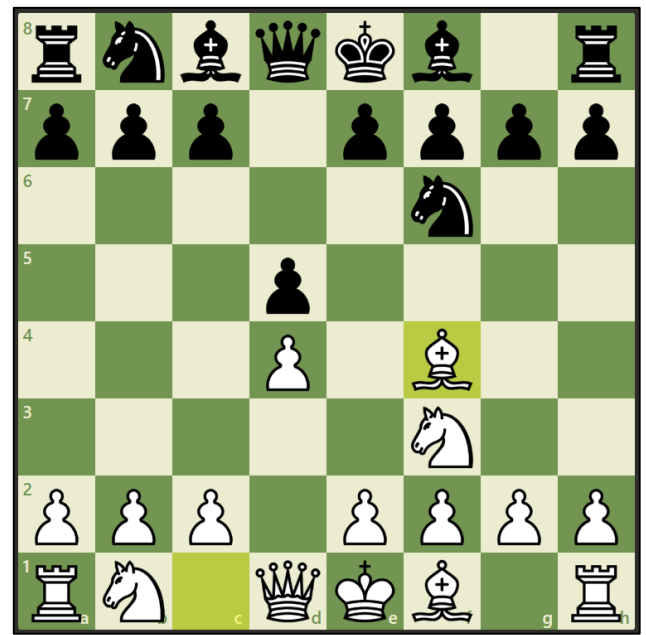

Figure 1   Figure 2

Figures 1-2: Symmetrical (or quasi-symmetrical) London opening set-ups after 3. Bf4, where black will usually play the d-pawn to d5.
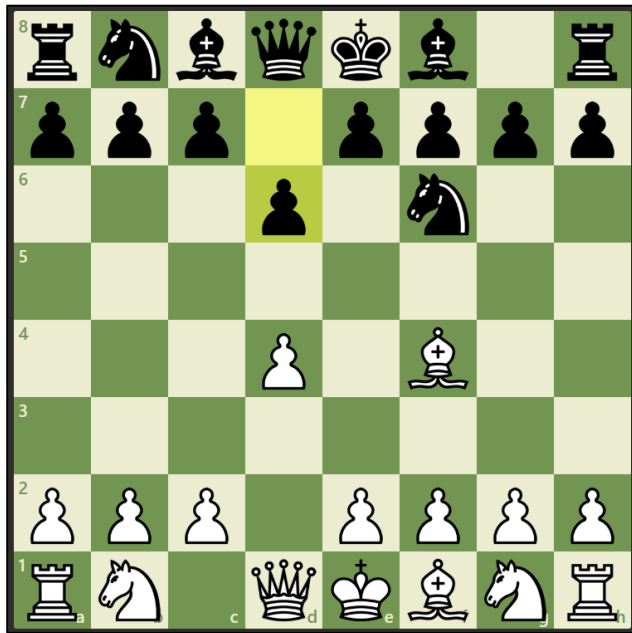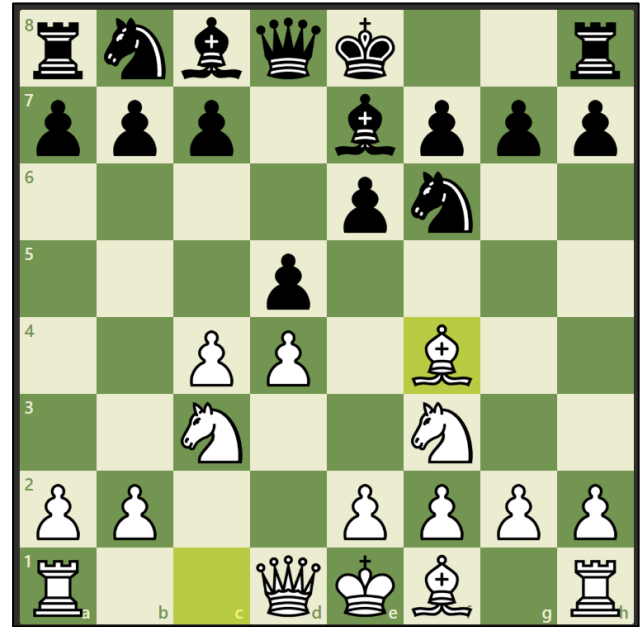
Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 3: An asymmetrical London opening set-up for black after 2. Bf4

Figure 4: The formidable Harwitz Attack

Our sources within chess.com have smuggled out statistical summaries of the frequency of occurrence of the London opening, at the master level, which is now given here (Figure 5-8).

A46 Indian Game: London System

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 e6 3. Bf4

3. Bf4	7896	37%	29%	34%

Moves to play in this position

3... c5	3260	35%	30%	34%
3... b6	2632	32%	32%	36%
3... d5	1693	46%	24%	30%
3... Be7	240	33%	27%	40%
3... Bd6	75	44%	21%	35%

D02 London System

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 d5 3. Bf4

3. Bf4	12383	37%	30%	33%

Moves to play in this position

3... c5	6590	35%	27%	38%
3... e6	3173	42%	29%	28%
3... Bf5	1395	38%	38%	24%
3... c6	1061	34%	39%	27%
3... g6	602	33%	32%	36%

Figure 5   Figure 6

Figures 5-6: Symmetrical (or quasi-symmetrical) London opening set-ups after 3. Bf4, where black will usually play the d-pawn to d5.
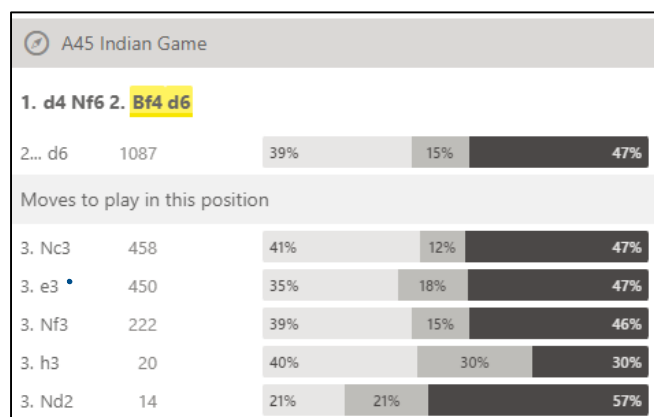

A45 Indian Game				
1. d4 Nf6 2. Bf4 d6				
2... d6	1087	39%	15%	47%
Moves to play in this position				
3. Nc3	458	41%	12%	47%
3. e3	450	35%	18%	47%
3. Nf3	222	39%	15%	46%
3. h3	20	40%	30%	30%
3. Nd2	14	21%	21%	57%

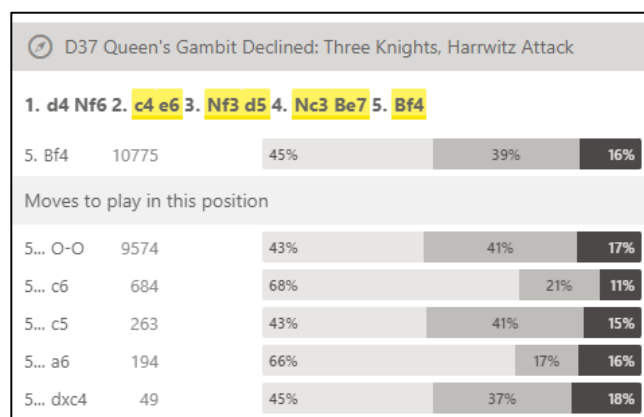| D37 Queen's Gambit Declined: Three Knights, Harrwitz Attack				
1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bf4				
5. Bf4	10775	45%	39%	16%
Moves to play in this position				
5... O-O	9574	43%	41%	17%
5... c6	684	68%	21%	11%
5... c5	263	43%	41%	15%
5... a6	194	66%	17%	16%
5... dxc4	49	45%	37%	18%

Figure 7   Figure 8

Figure 7: An asymmetrical defensive set-up, where black places the d-pawn on d6 after 2. Bf4 so as to "blunt" the London bishop.

Figure 8: The Harwitz Attack's (impressive) statistics for white.

We observe here that the 3%-4% "gap", measuring the white winning percentage minus the black winning percentage, for the London, is generally slightly favorable towards white, at least in the two common starting positions shown in Figures 1-2 (see also Figures 5-6). Of note also is that in the 8% gap in the asymmetrical defensive set-up seen in Figure 3 (see also Figure 7) actually favors black! These observations motivate us towards an asymmetrical defensive set-up, like that shown in Figure 3 (see also Figure 7) wherever possible.

The "opening defense rule of thumb 1" below gives some backing towards learning each of the defensive systems presented here in this London primer.

OPENING DEFENSE RULE OF THUMB 1:
Any defense against 1. d4, 1. e4, 1. c4, or 1. Nf3, that cuts the gap to 10% (or less) is a defense worth using/playing with regularity.

Thus, by this rule of thumb, the defensive set-ups given in Figures 1-3 (see also Figures 5-7) are worth using/playing with regularity. Other defenses that also achieve this "gap-less-than-10%" threshold include but are not limited to the *Sicilian Taimanov* Variation (1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6, (2% gap)), *Queen's Gambit Ragozin* Variation (1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Bb4, (8% gap)), and the *English Opening, Carls-Bremen, Reversed Dragon* Variation (1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. g3 d5, (4% gap)). Here gap statistics are from the chess.com Explorer. The above line of reasoning leads us to the following Corollary 1:

> **CORROLARY TO OPENING RULE OF THUMB 1:**
> *Any defense against 1. d4, 1. e4, 1. c4, or 1. Nf3, that fails to cut the gap to 10% (or less) is a defense worth weening off/ditching/reducing regularity of reliance upon it.*

Thus, by the above Corollary, the set-up used by black in Figure 4 (see also Figure 8), allowing a Harwitz Attack, (29% gap), should be either shelved completely by players of the black pieces or at least there should be some weening-off/ditching/reducing regularity of reliance upon it. Specialists who can navigate the fine line for black in the Harwitz Attack can disregard the above rule of thumb which like most chess principles, offer only guidelines and are NOT absolute. Following the above rules, white can opt for the Harwitz Attack when permitted, knowing that the statistics (Figure 8), at least in master play, heavily favor white.

We'll now survey (3) set-ups within the London and gauge the suitability of them for inclusion in our own repertoire as black.

A. 2. Bf4, the "jump-the-gun London"

Players of the London sometimes are just so eager to show their London and consequently they bang out 2. Bf4?!, (see Figure 9), however, as we'll see, this move order is often markedly inferior to delaying Bf4 to move 3 (at least according to Coach M's experience and analysis in playing against the London.). Diagrammed below in Figure 9 is this "jump-the-gun-London":
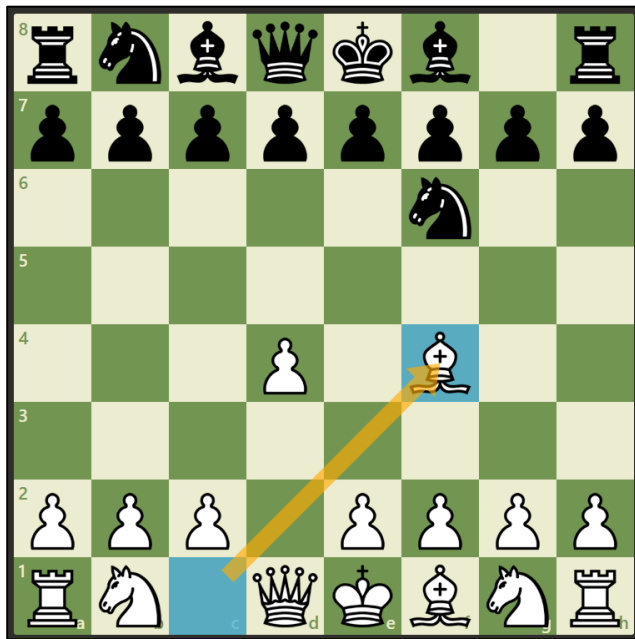

Figure 9

Figure 9: The "jump-the-gun-London"

Question: *So what's the drawback of playing 2. Bf4?!*
Answer: *After 2. Bf4?!, black can play 2…d6! (Fig. 10).*
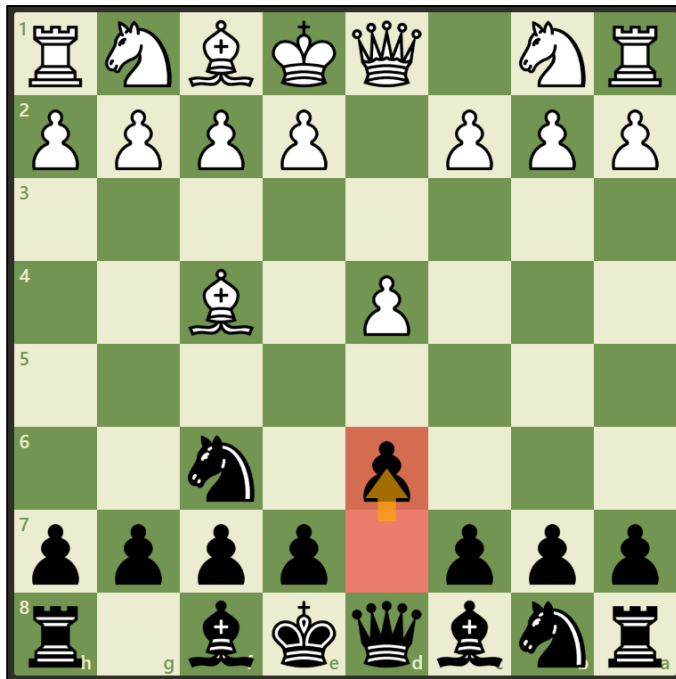
Figure 10

Figure 10: Black counters 2. Bf4?! with the excellent 2…d6!

After the excellent 2…d6!, white has two pressing issues:

1. The B on f4 can be blunted by 2…d6!, after which it tends to be ineffective on this h2-b8 diagonal.
2. The B on f4 is exposed to a Nh5 hop and to the e5 pawn thrust. These threaten to either bag the bishop for a knight or gain a tempo while securing a strong foothold in the center, outcomes that favor black.

After this very *anti*-London response 2…d6!, white may struggle to realize even a nominal edge as we'll see. Factors 1-2 tend to make black's game rather easy, even with representative "best" play by white (Figures 11-12).
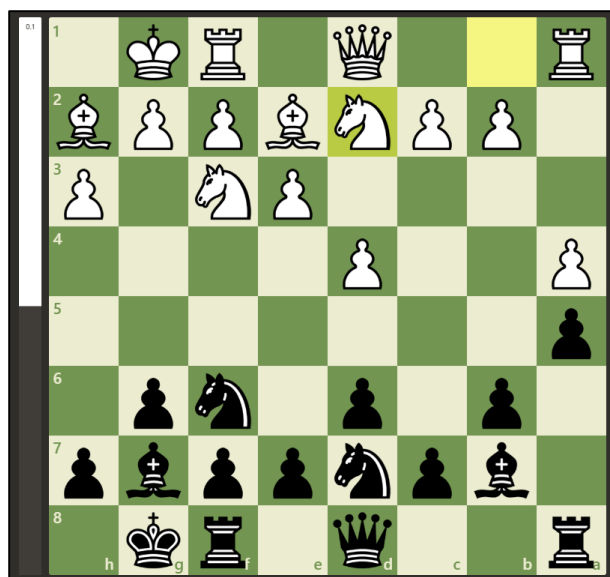
Figure 11   Figure 12

Figures 11-12: With white and black playing relatively "best" or equal best moves from the 2. Bf4 variation, as determined by the resident chess.com Stockfish 16 engine, white's edge is nominal or nonexistent.

Furthermore, any deviation in the first (5) moves by white are consequential resulting in disadvantage for white as compared to the theoretical positions given in Figures 11-12. To this point, white's first moves in the 2. Bf4 London, as played by masters/specialists, almost invariably are 1. d4, 2. Bf4, 3. Nf3, 4. h3, and then 5. e3, in that order! This move order for white is compulsory against our star anti-London set-up with 2…d6!

Should white shuffle this 5-card pack and say, play e3 too early on move 3. or 4., (a common error), black can pounce and will already be no worse (see the illustrative

positions and exercises at the end of this primer for instance.). Figures 13-14 shows further theoretical positions where black has thematic ideas to play for the initiative from 2. Bf4?! London positions that evaluate in the 0.00 range (black has equalized).

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figures 13-14: Theoretical positions where black has equalized without any difficulty against 2. Bf4?! Engine evaluations are given by Stockfish 15.1 at relatively high depth.

B. 3. Bf4 or 4. Bf4, London System Opening:

As we saw in Figures 1-2, white can hope for a nominal edge by waiting an extra move or two to play the key London move B to f4. This section covers some of the most common move orders when white plays 3. Bf4 or 4. Bf4. Our recommendation for black will be a transposition into the *Queen's Indian Miles Variation* (QIDMV) given in Figure 15. This QIDMV has the benefit of a full computer engine backing evaluation of 0.00 though it should be said that white does have some success, at least in master play, in racking up more wins.
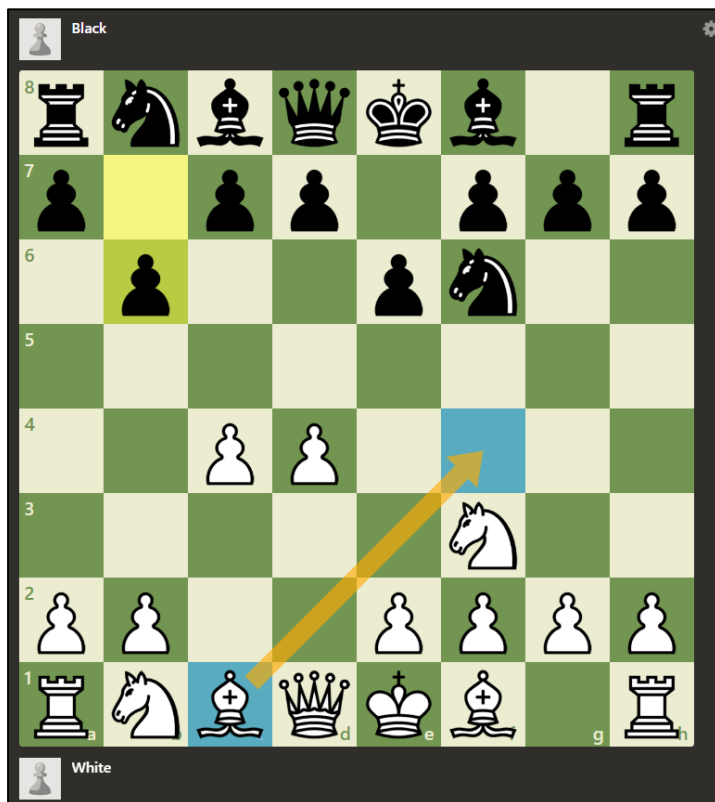
Figure 15

Figure 15: The starting position out to move 4. of the QIDMV.

One explanation for the favorability in the gap may be the relatively small sample size of master games down this route. In fact, the QIDMV is bit of a rarity in master play.

The opening takes its' name from the creative English GM, Tony Miles, the very same GM who famously defeated World Champion Anatoly Karpov in a classical game with 1…a6!? Strategies for white in the QIDMV, are characterized by the London move B to f4, and mirror those in other London set-ups. Namely, white aims to "win on the queenside" but, as we shall see, black is well-positioned to torpedo this one as well with simple thematic play. Generally, play is balanced and equal in the theoretical (best) lines of play yet white does enjoy a favorable gap of 14%. This size of such a gap normally might deter us from taking on such a defensive set-up yet the cold hard engine analysis in this line conveys that black nullifies white's opening edge completely by move 6. Thus we may set aside the corollary to opening rule of thumb 1.

Master play will typically follow the main line 4. Bf4 Bb7
5. e3 Bb4+ 6. Nbd2, after which, engine analysis indicates
that white's edge is already nominal and that black has for
all intents and purposes equalized by move 6.

Remark 1: It can be seen that statistics for the QIDMV
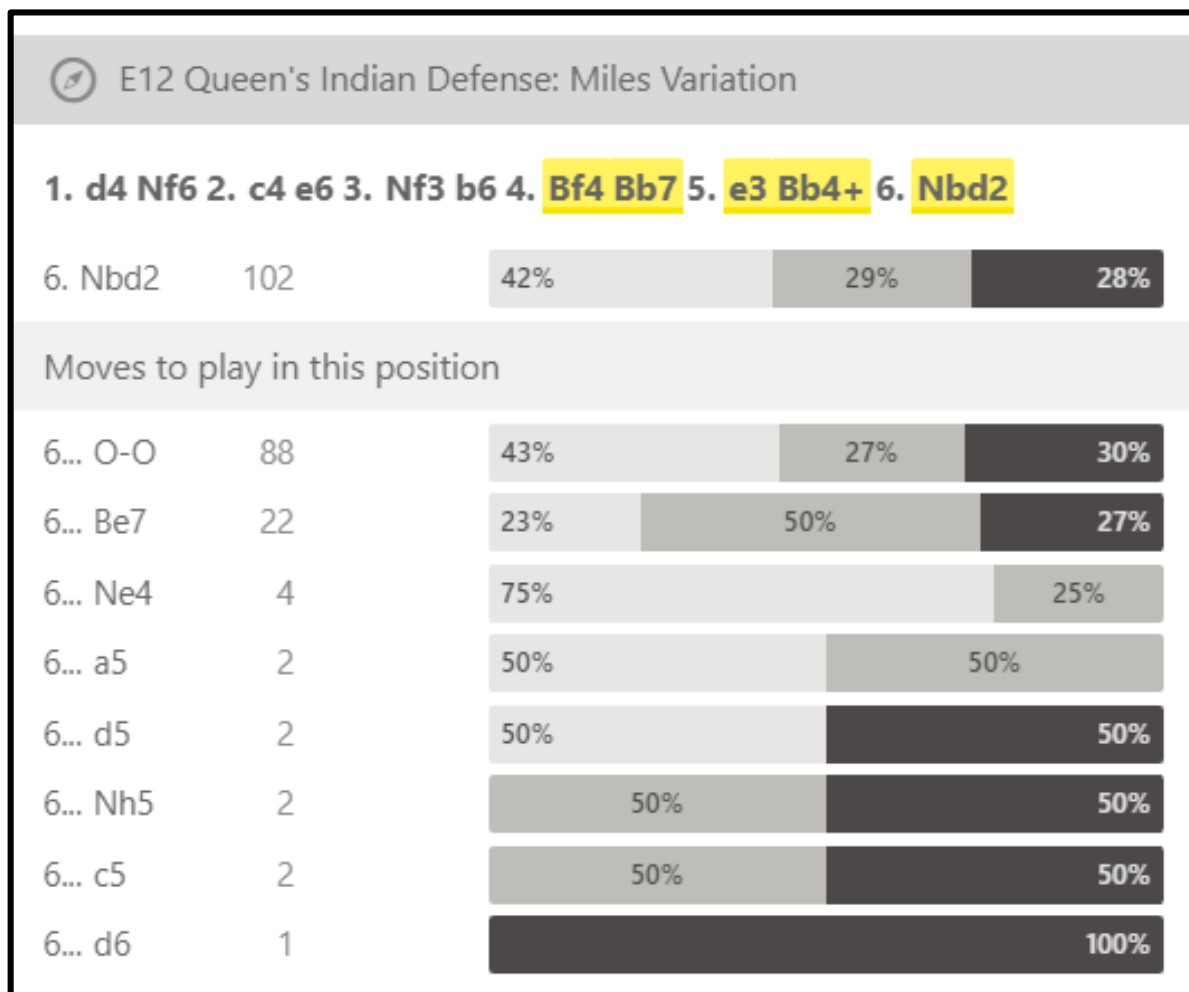out to move 6 favor white in the 6…0-0 line.

E12 Queen's Indian Defense: Miles Variation

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. Bf4 Bb7 5. e3 Bb4+ 6. Nbd2

6. Nbd2	102	42%	29%	28%

Moves to play in this position

6... O-O	88	43%	27%	30%
6... Be7	22	23%	50%	27%
6... Ne4	4	75%		25%
6... a5	2	50%	50%	
6... d5	2	50%		50%
6... Nh5	2		50%	50%
6... c5	2		50%	50%
6... d6	1			100%

Figure 16

Figure 16: In QIDMV master games, white has a favorable 14% gap.

Remark 2: Only 102 master games feature the Mile's Variation of the QID according to the chess.com Explorer.

The 13% gap in the 6. 0-0 "main line" stacks up well when compared to the alternatives for white, 4. g3 and 4. a3, though engine analysis does not rate white's Miles Variation as sufficient for any real edge.

Incidentally, the same conclusion is reached, according to deep engine analysis, into the Kasparov-Petrosian Line 4. a3 as well as the kingside fianchetto line 4. g3 in the QID. Namely, no real edge for white. Truly, the QID is a rather tough nut to crack and therefor defending the Miles Variation is as sound an option as any for black when facing either 3. Bf4 or 4. Bf4.

This all said, due to the small sample sizes, little stock can really be put into these gap statistics and further analysis/practice is required to ascertain whether this Miles variation is capable of threatening our anti-London recommendations or will it just be another dead end for white in the London? Figures 17-18 below show that black has fully equalized by move 6 against the QIDMV according to deep engine analysis.

Figure 17   Figure 18

Figures 17-18: Black has equalized by move 6 in the QIDMV.

Summarizing, our recommendation for black against 3. Bf4 London is to take a page from the QID and play 3…b6, inviting a QIDMV or lesser alternatives by white. Further Figures 19-20 show that black has
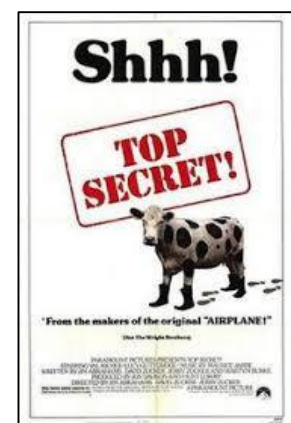
reduced white's edge to nominal levels and statistics are generally bullish for black (except in the QIDMV) though we have already seen that the engine does not indicate any real edge for white.
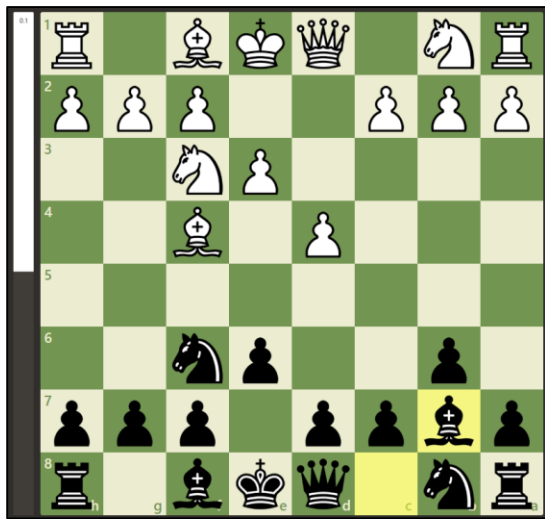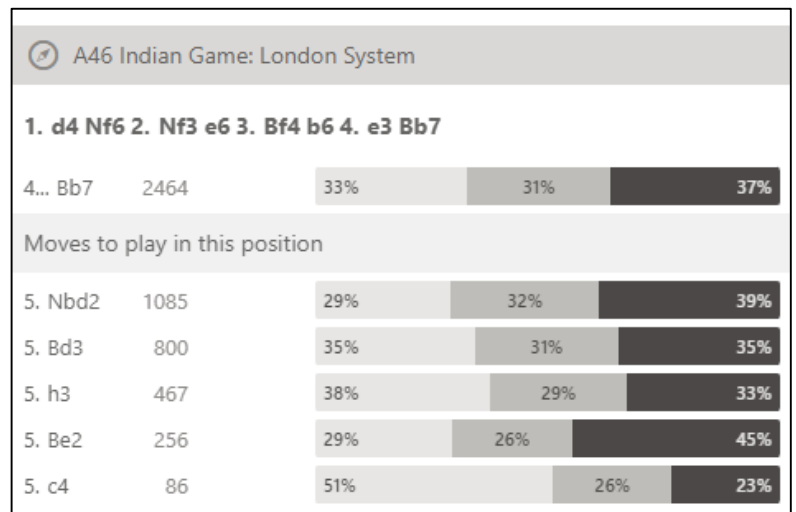

Figure 19

Figure 20

Figures 19-20: Black has reduced white's edge to nominal levels by employing a QID-style development scheme to combat white's 3. Bf4 London.

White may choose several options here including 5. c4, (a QIDMV), though again engine evaluations do not rate white's position advantageous at all, (see Figures 17-18).

Remark 3: One "elephant in the room" is why Coach M does not recommend meeting the London with a symmetrical 3… d5 or even 3…c5, as black, which also equalizes quite easily doesn't it? Well yes but the reason Coach M does not generally recommend these systems is the oxygen in the game can quickly get sucked out due to the high level of symmetry, leaving dry positions with little for either player to play for (at least from Coach M's experience). Against a strong high-rated player, going for a "snoozefest" overly symmetrical defense may actually be a reasonable strategy, that is, to "play for a draw", and then force your high-rated opponent to push and possibly overextend or to take excessive risk to "make something out of nothing" but this strategy is simply not Coach M's cup of tea and thus we opt for the recommendation to meet 3. Bf4 or 4. Bf4 Londons with a QID set-up. Play will be more imbalanced generally and thus give black more opportunities to take the game from white (at least based on Coach M's experience).

C. Odds and Ends, The Jobava London

This peculiar London variation is characterized by white committing a cardinal sin in the queen's pawn game. Namely, white willfully blocks their own c-pawn with their queen's knight without guarantee of the ability to play pawn to e4. Yikes! The risk for white is amplified with this peculiar idea as without the ability to play either pawn to c4 or pawn to e4, black has excellent chances to take the lion share of the center. In other books, this opening is also referred to as a Veserov opening and can be described as a Chigorin's defense (a rather poor defense) but played by white up one tempo (I.E. a reversed Chigorin). We will give a simple line of play for black that smack's the Jobava London sufficiently hard to warrant this whole line basically being tossed in the rubbish bin for white.

ABC's of smacking the Jobava London:

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nc3?! (YECH!) d5! 3. Bf4 a6! 4. e3 b5! 5. Bd3 Bb7 (Black successfully clamps on e4.) 6. Nf3 e6 7. 0-0 c5! (Black already has a small edge.).

Can white find some improvement here? Well yes but as we'll see, a tweaked move order still doesn't completely fix all of white's self-made problems by playing Nc3 in

front of the c-pawn in the London. Here's one improved move order for white that does about as good as any other yet black is still perfectly OK.

1. d4 Nf6 2. Bf4?! d6! 3. Nc3!? Nbd7! (threating to steal a tempo with e5) 4. Nf3! (denying e5) c5! (preventing e4). The gap is an astounding 20% in favor of black here though only 100 or so master games have gone down this queer route for white. See Figure 21 for a view of this peculiar line of play along with an evaluation bar run at high depth, ~40, using Stockfish 16.1 lite. Stockfish 15.1 was similarly employed, running at even higher depth, and found interestingly that white's position is not without its merits. These engines both put white ahead by ~+.1 after a deep dive and so we may actually consider this to be one of white's "best bets" when insisting on playing a 2. Bf4 London and meeting our d7-d6 defensive concept. Only the supercomputers (and perhaps Super GMs) who access such computers may know whether white really has any edge here… Coach M let the engines think out to depth 50 to reach their conclusions…

If you can find em', you can send me an Alpha Zero or Leela Zero or some super charged Stockfish game in this line but I did not find any such game and thus am

doubtful that this line of play is actually anything much to write home about for white… This said, at full disclosure, several strong GMs have played this position, and relatively recently! Some of the cream of the crop actually have opted for both sides, including even some Super GMs! Perhaps this one is one to study further then for those wishing to adopt the recommendations given here in this primer to play 2…d6! against the London, at least when meeting 2. Bf4?!
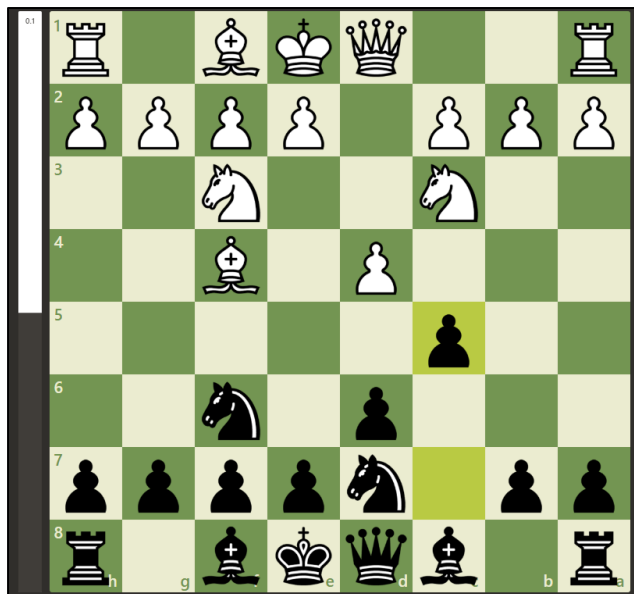

Figure 21

Figure 21: White keeps an edge in this rare London line of play. Is this discovery sufficient enough to move us back into the snoozefest lines where black plays 3… d5, 4… c5, and 5…Nc6, etc., etc…? Given that ultra-high depth engine dives lowered white's edge to ~+.1, it seems that this is no real threat to our suggested line of play but study is needed.

Diagrams of thematic moves and exploitations:

1. White fudged the move order (h3 before e3, whoops!).

2. White develops the K's B to the wrong square (ouch!).

3. A fun Queen move to put in the tool box

…The Queen can support the e7-e5 thrust from the e8 square, with the potential benefit of leaving the K's R to stay behind the f-pawn and then play for f7-f5. Notice black opted to not block a4 with a5 but a6 instead. Also, notice white's N is on d2 and not c3 when this idea arises…

4. A key N move in our anti-London set-up
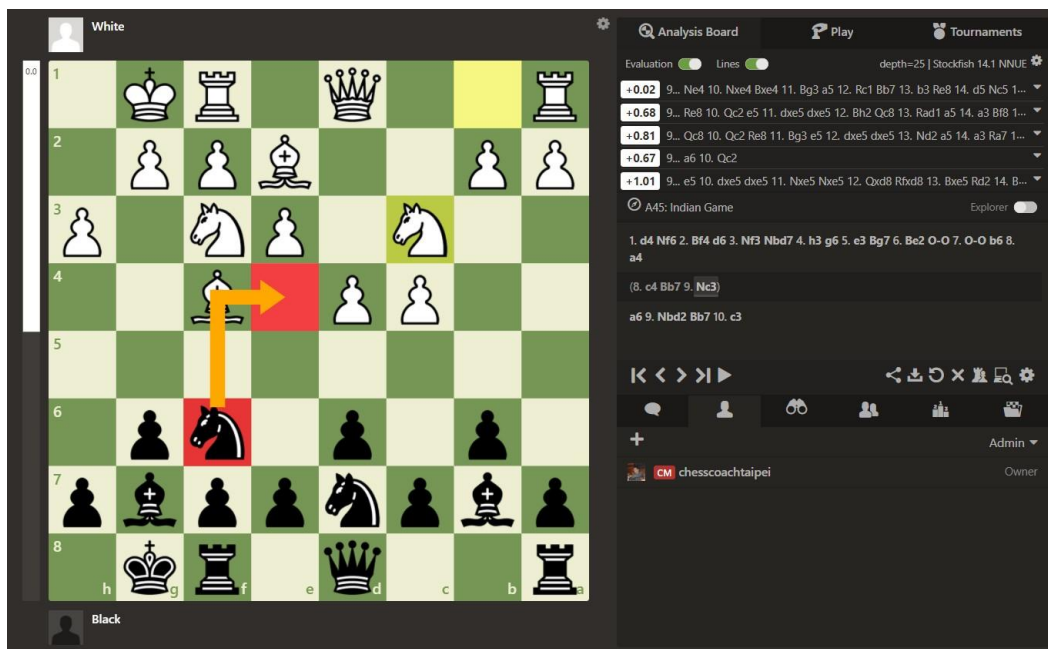
Select Illustrative Games:

Anti-London:

https://www.chess.com/game/live/54406211865

https://www.chess.com/game/live/69147112533

https://www.chess.com/game/live/74680347821

https://www.chess.com/game/live/89124114063

https://www.chess.com/game/live/33622767731

https://www.chess.com/game/live/106337917367

https://www.chess.com/game/live/102880932785

https://www.chess.com/live/game/101890518969

Queen's Gambit Declined – Harwitz Attack:

https://www.chess.com/game/live/87410526099

https://www.chess.com/game/live/80368824183

https://www.chess.com/game/live/90607132831

https://www.chess.com/live/game/113752846831

https://www.chess.com/game/live/116024984497

https://www.chess.com/game/live/118171778195

Queen's Indian Defense - Miles Variation:

https://www.chess.com/game/live/78848552389

Anti-Jobava London:

https://www.chess.com/game/live/86965850957

https://www.chess.com/game/live/98766880925

Opening Exercises:

1. Black to play and exploit white's fudged move order.

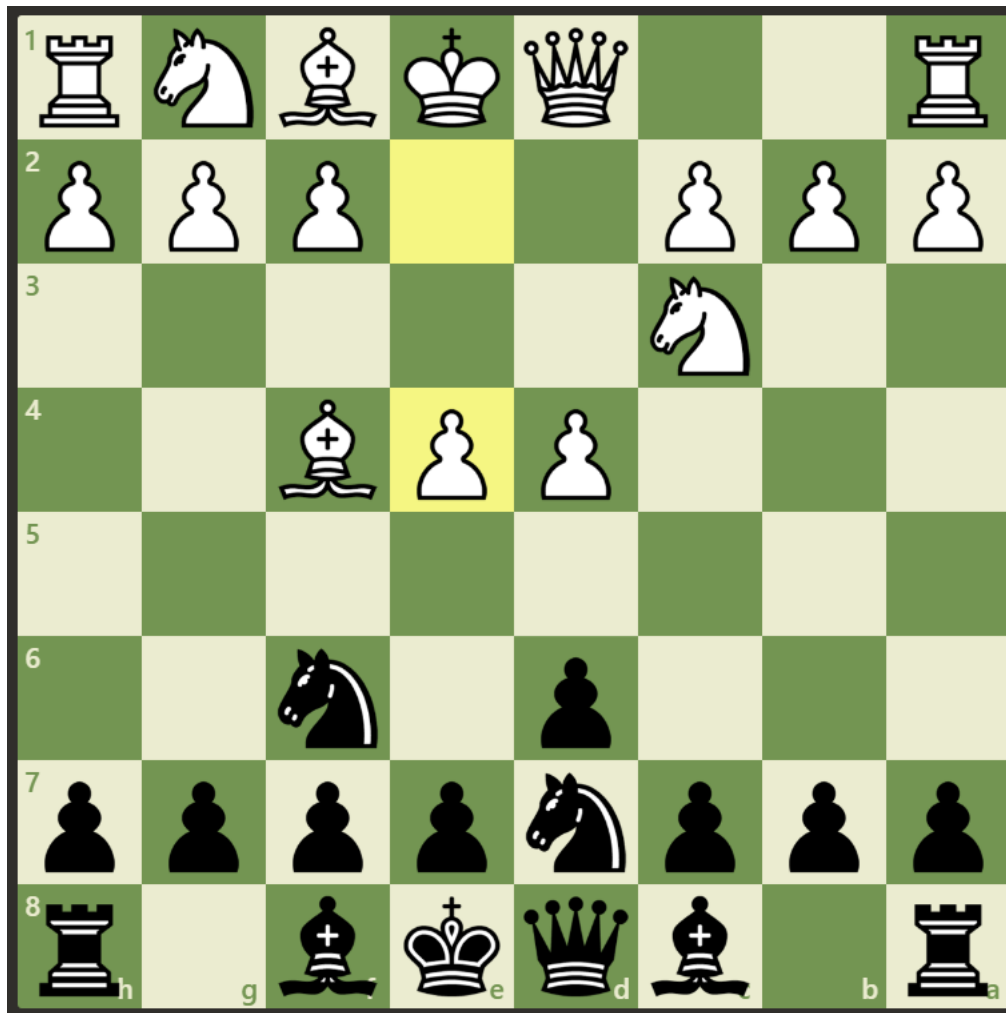2. Black to play and exploit white's lemon 6. Bd3?!

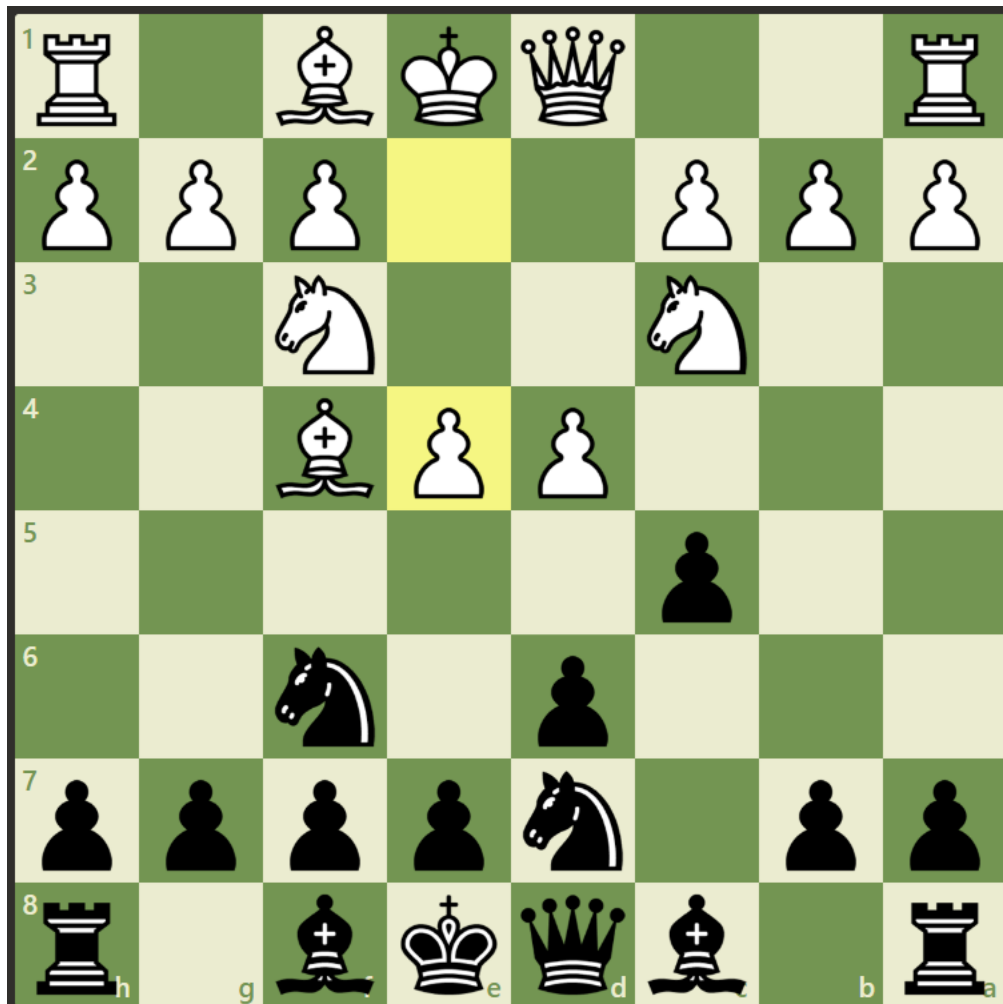3. Black to play. What's black's best plan here?
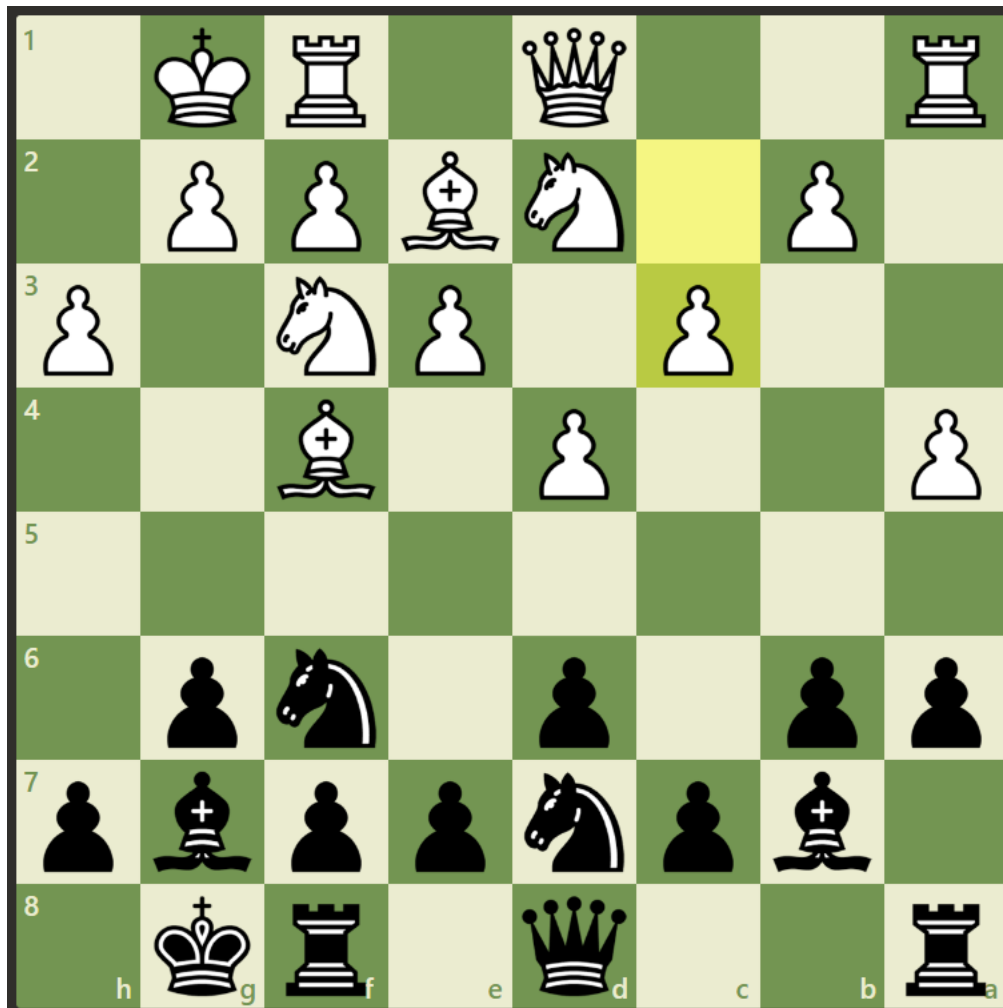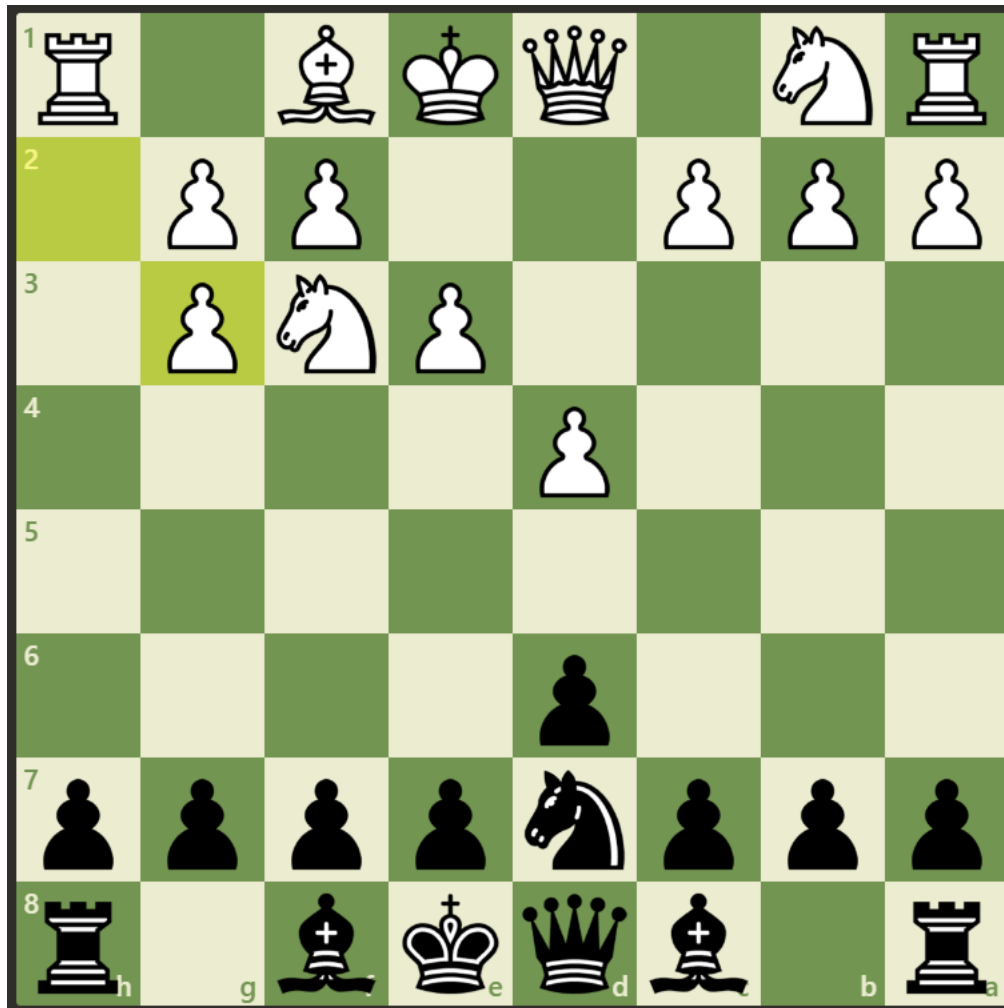
4. Black to play. Which move gives full equality?

5. Black to play and exploit white's move order.

6. Black to play and exploit a faulty Jobava London.

7. Black to play. This position can arise from the 2. Bf4 London when white fudges the move order and ends up losing their B to a Nh5 hop/raid (1. d4 Nf6 2. Bf4 d6 3. Nf3 Nbd7 4. e3?! (h3 was correct) Nh5! 5. Bg3 NxB 6 hxN). How should black develop here?
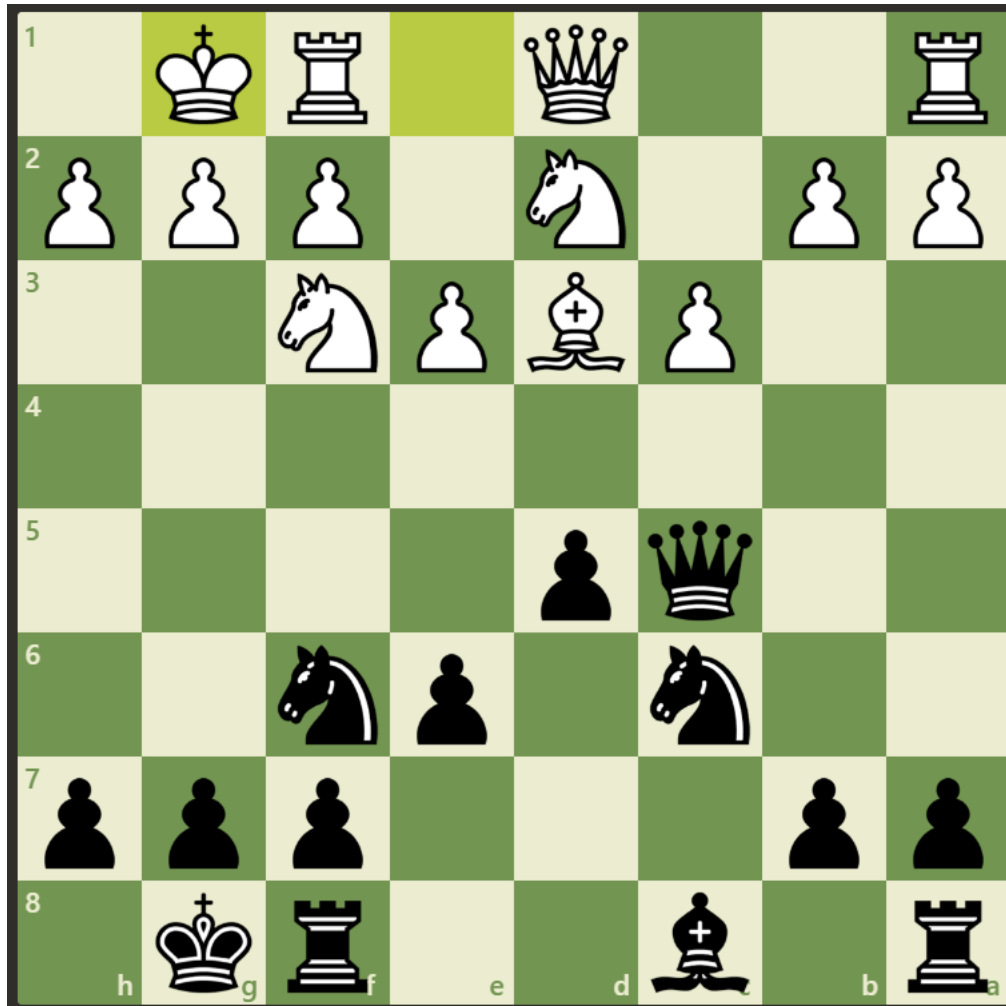
Miscellaneous London Middle Game Exercises:

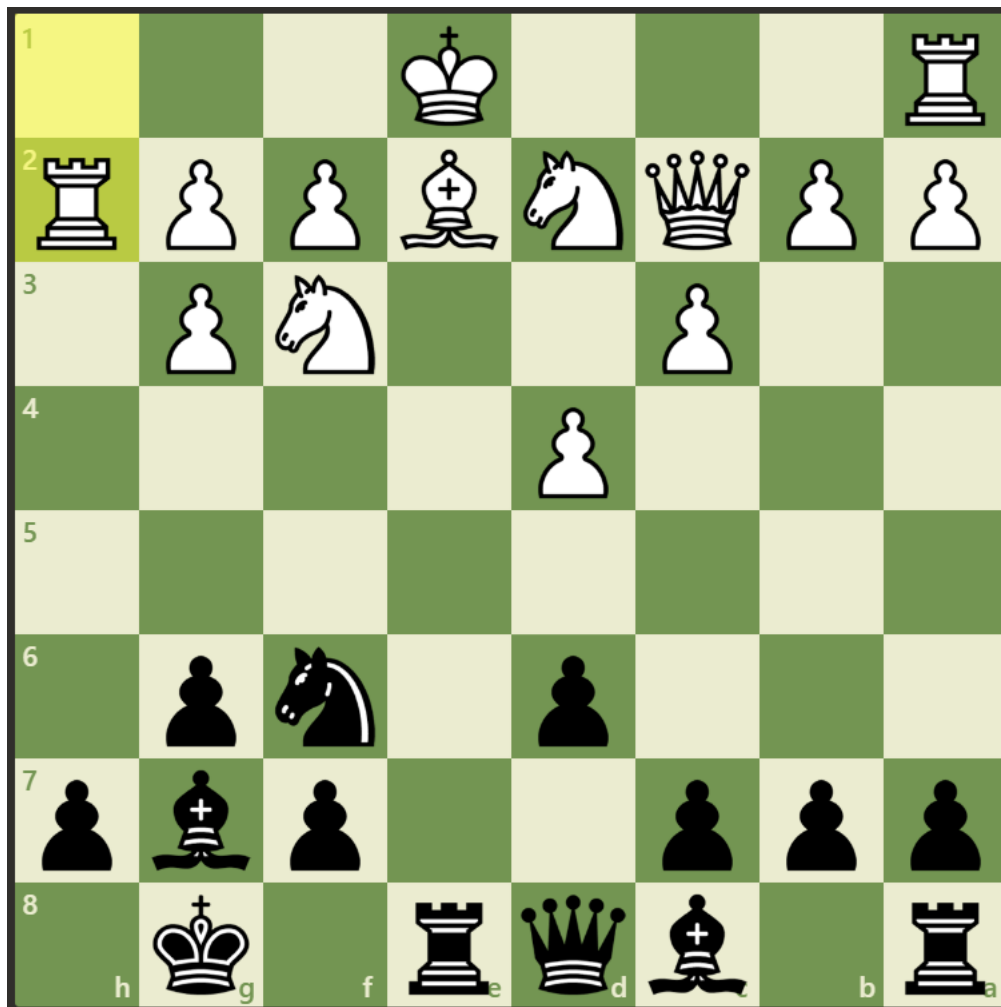8. Black to play. How best to continue against this luke warm London line played by white?
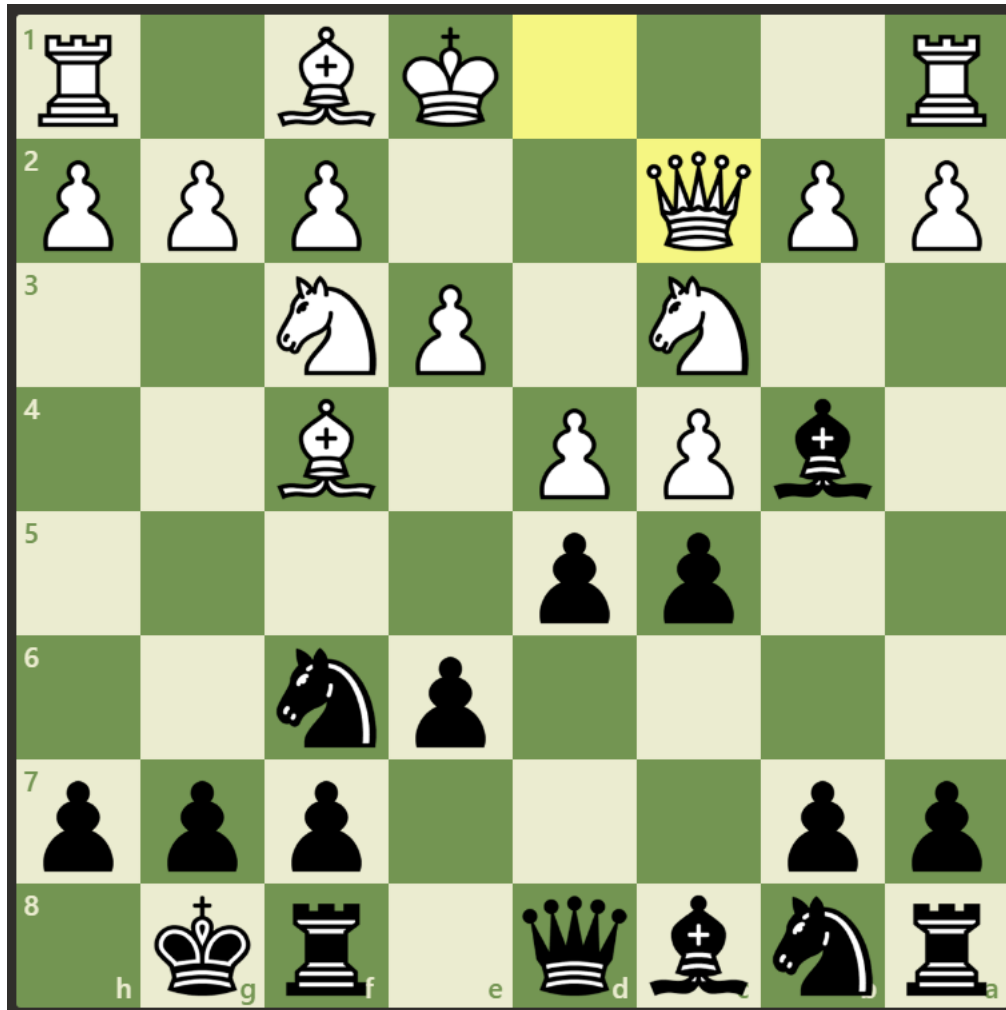
9. Black to play. From the "symmetrical" defensive set-up against the London, the dark B's have already been traded off. How should black continue here?

10. Black to play here. From a 2. Bf4 London gone wrong, black was able to play e5 with a tempo against white's B and the game has now morphed into some sort of super charged Philidor defense. How to take the game to white here?

11. Black to play. From a 2. Bf4 London gone wrong, black nabbed the B for N with a Nh5 hop/raid. Can you poke a hole in white's faulty set-up here?

12. Black to play. From the "symmetrical" defensive set-up against the London, the dark B's have already been traded off. How should black continue here?
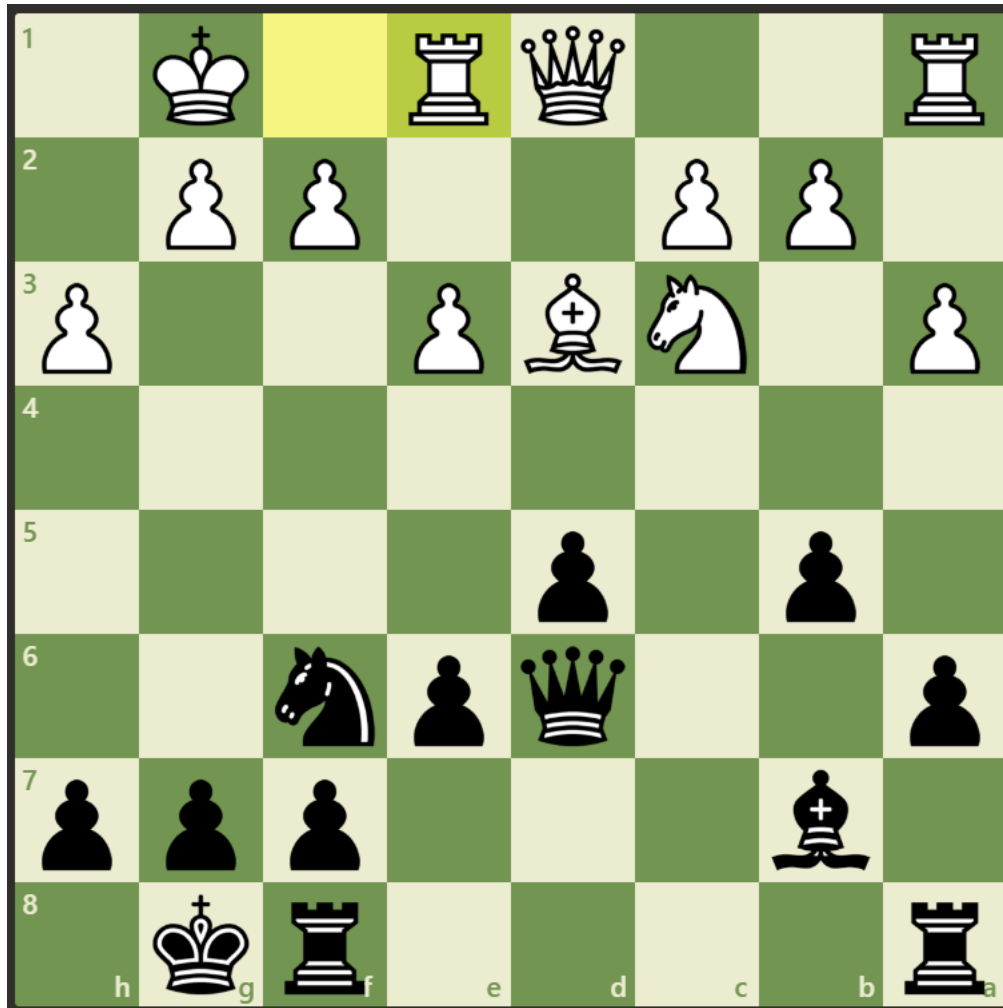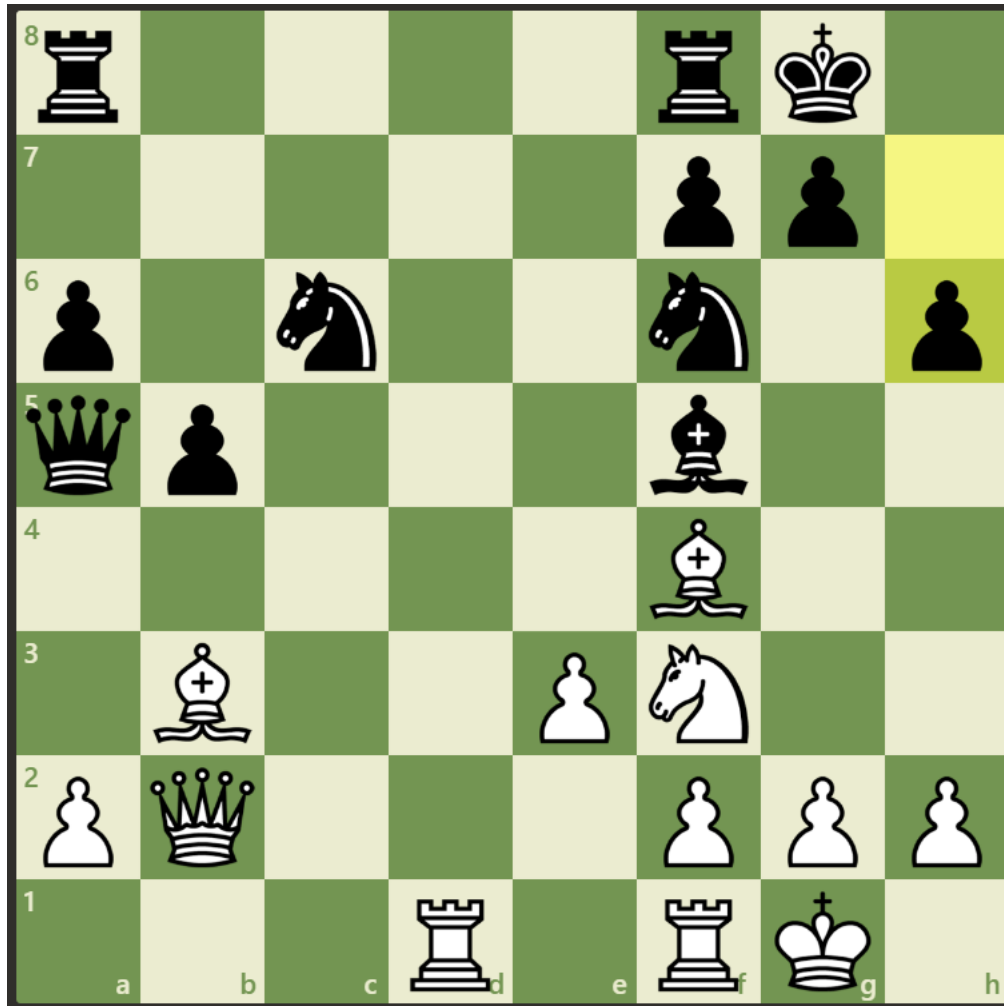
Harwitz Attack Exercises for White:

13. White to play. From a Harwitz Attack, (1. d4 Nf6 2.
c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bf4), which left black
slightly inferior, how to enter a favorable endgame?

14. White to play. From a Harwitz Attack, (1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bf4), white is crushing black here. How do you exploit black's faulty set-up?

15. White to play. From a Harwitz Attack, (1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bf4), white is better here. What's the most effective plan for white here?

Solutions to Exercises:

1. Nh5! bags the B and black is no worse.

2. e5! works tactically, advantage black.

3. Qe8! is an excellent play preparing to expand with Ne4 as well as the thrusts of both e and f pawns in some order.

4. Ne4! is the only move for black here giving equality.

5. e5! exploits white's move faulty move order.

6. cxd! exploits white's faulty e4 attempt since capturing back ends in an e5 fork!

7. g6! to fianchetto the king's bishop is correct and black is no worse.

8. cxd! is one path for full equality.

9. e5! taking the center is no worse for black.

10. a5! and white is on the ropes.

11. Bf5! is crushing.

12. e5! again, taking the center, is no worse for black.

13. Ne5! and the endgame for white is favorable.

14. Rd6! with dual threats on both N's wins material (See the illustrative QIDMV games above to find this exact position and the winning continuation.)

15. Rab1! begins an effective "minority attack".

How was this **Anti-London System Opening Primer**?

You can let me know on my "Dr. M's Chess and Math Page on FB. LIKE and FOLLOW me there for updates on when I post more original chess content.

I'm so much looking forward to continuing to develop high-quality chess materials in 2024 and beyond.

Seeing you all continue to climb the ranks, grow stronger, and achieve your chess goals is what drives me as a chess coach! All the best!

Sincerely,

Dr. Jeremy Mandelkern (Coach M)

P.S.

(*) Do visit my website, http://drmtutoring.com/en_US/chess-tutoring/,

for more Chess Worksheets or find me on FB at "Dr. M's Chess and Math Page", and please do LIKE and FOLLOW my page there, which will encourage me to make more original high quality chess content.

Thanks!

-Coach M