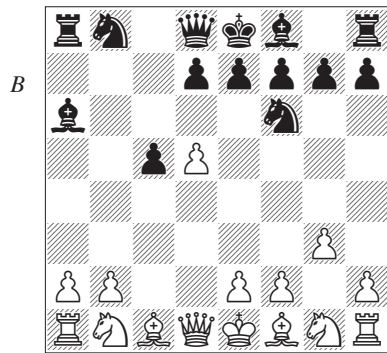


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# 4 Fianchetto Lines

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5  
bxa6 ♗xa6 6 g3 (D)



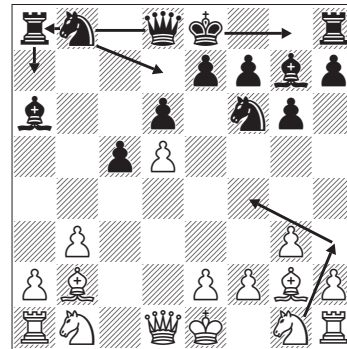
When White accepts the Benko with 5 bxa6 and does not want to enter the Classical Main Line or the sharp variation where White storms the centre, he has the possibility of a set-up based on the fianchetto of his light-squared bishop. This usually leads to rather quiet play where Black is handed the initiative but White just tries to hang on to his extra pawn, while maintaining a very solid position. However, an often-encountered problem for White in most fianchetto lines is that the bishop might prove rather worthless on g2, where it is restricted by the 'friendly' d5-pawn.

Note that Black often prefers the move-order 5...g6 to give him more options versus the Double Fianchetto.

## Common Themes and Planning

### The Double Fianchetto

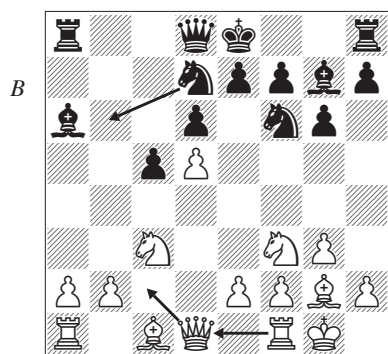
The Double Fianchetto has been the cause of many problems for Black. First of all, White immediately obtains one of the best defensive pawn formations, and, secondly, the usually very strong bishop on g7 is well neutralized by a white one on b2.



Play usually proceeds along the manoeuvres outlined in the diagram. White often has to bring his knight to f4 via h3, since the d5-pawn frequently needs support. A theme one has to know about is that if White plays the natural ♘f3, the reply ...♗b7! is often annoying, because White has no satisfactory way to protect his d5-pawn. While White is

moving his knight round to f4, Black can develop with ...♖bd7, ...0-0, ...♗a7 and ...♕a8, etc., with a strategically interesting struggle ahead.

### The Main Line



Black is to move, but if it were White's turn he would play ♕c2 and ♗d1. This is the best defensive formation White can aim for. The d5-pawn is protected and so is the knight on c3, thus making b3 followed by ♖b2 feasible. Black can either allow this or hurry to play ...♖b6, attacking the d5-pawn. The latter is sensible but has the disadvantage that it hinders the usual queen sortie to a5 or b6.

### Quick Summary

The fianchetto lines are not very popular these days. The best reason I can come up with is that they are too difficult to handle in practice. In this chapter, we shall look at two systems: the Double Fianchetto (Line A) and the Main Line (Line B). The first arises

after 5...♗xa6 6 g3 g6 7 ♖g2 d6 8 b3 ♖g7 9 ♖b2 and used to cause Black some problems. However, the main line, 9...♖bd7 10 ♖h3 0-0 11 0-0 ♗a7, might be just about OK for Black, while 9...0-0 10 ♖h3 ♕a5+!? is a slightly offbeat try. After 5...♗xa6 6 g3 g6 7 ♖g2 d6, Line B deals with the more common 8 ♖c3 ♖g7 9 ♖f3 ♖bd7 10 0-0, when Black has a choice between 10...♖b6 (Line B1), preventing the white set-up with a queen on c2 and a rook on d1, and 10...0-0 (Line B2). My preference is for 10...♖b6, but one has to reckon with Nikolić's idea 11 ♗e1 0-0 12 ♖f4!. Black should probably play 12...♖h5 13 ♖g5 h6 14 ♖c1 and then 14...♖f6. White can now continue 15 ♗b1 and argue that ...h6 is a concession.

## The Theory of Fianchetto Lines

**1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 ♗xa6**

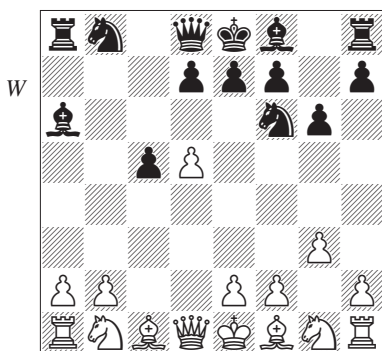
I will begin with a small examination of move-order since often Black chooses to play 5...g6 rather than 5...♗xa6. The idea is to avoid the Double Fianchetto (Line A). Strictly speaking, it does not stop White's queenside fianchetto but this is often less attractive when Black can take on a6 with the knight. A few examples:

a) 6 b3 ♖g7 7 ♖b2 0-0 8 g3 d6 9 ♖g2 ♖xa6 10 ♖c3 ♖b7 11 e4 e6 12 ♖ge2 exd5 13 exd5 ♖b4 and Black has no problems, Ravi Lanka-Hebden, British Ch (Plymouth) 1989.

b) 6 g3 ♖g7 7 ♗g2 d6 8 ♘f3 and now 8...♙xa6 9 ♘c3 transposes to Line B but Black might try 8...♘xa6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♘c3 ♜b6 11 ♘d2 ♘c7 12 ♜b1 ♘d7 13 ♜c2 ♙a6 = L.B.Hansen-P.Cramling, Biel 1991.

c) 6 e3 is perhaps the most consistent attempt to punish Black's move-order, but generally Black has done well, e.g. 6...♗g7 7 ♘c3 0-0 8 ♘f3 d6 9 ♙e2 ♙xa6 10 0-0 ♘bd7 11 ♙xa6 ♜xa6 12 ♜b1 ♜a8 13 b3 ♘g4 with counterplay, I.Almasi-Mi.Tseitlin, Budapest 1993.

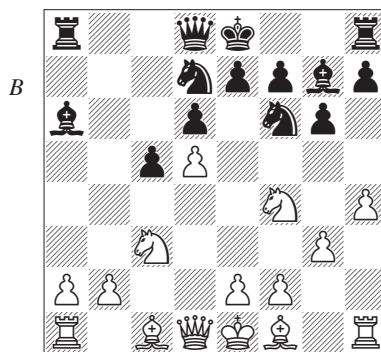
#### 6 g3 g6 (D)



#### 7 ♗g2

This is the most natural and the most common move, but there are some lines involving an 'extended fianchetto', i.e. moving the bishop all the way to h3. After 7 ♘c3 d6 White can choose between a set-up with the knight on f3, or spending a move extra on ♘h3-f4, placing the knight more actively but with no real future:

a) 8 ♘h3 ♗g7 9 ♘f4 ♘bd7 10 h4 (D) and now:



a1) 10...0-0 11 h5 ♘e5 12 hxg6 hxg6 13 ♙h3 ♜a5 (13...♙c8 14 ♙f1 ♜a5 15 ♙g2 ♙xh3+ 16 ♜xh3 ♜fb8 17 ♜c2 ♜b4 18 ♜b1 ♜ab8 19 b3 gave White the advantage in Kiriakov-Van Blitterswijk, Dieren 1997) 14 ♜c2 is better for White; Black must constantly be alert to a kingside attack. 14...♜fb8 15 ♘e6!? ♙h8 (Benko recommends 15...♘xd5 16 ♘xg7 ♙xg7 with an unclear game, and there are certainly many fascinating variations; I have a feeling that White should have something, but the tempting 17 ♜d2 ♘xc3 18 ♜h6+ ♙g8 19 ♙d2 ♙xe2 20 ♙xc3 backfires horribly after 20...♜xb2!!) 16 f4 ♘ed7 (Kovacs-Benko, Debrecen 1975) 17 ♙d2! ±.

a2) 10...h5! (Black wisely makes sure the h-pawn's march is discontinued) 11 ♙h3 0-0 12 ♜c2 ♘e5 13 0-0 ♜b6 14 ♜b1 ♙c8 15 ♙xc8 ♜fxc8 16 b3 ♘fg4 with a roughly equal position, Yusupov-Topalov, Vienna 1996.

b) 8 ♘f3 ♗g7 9 ♙h3 ♘bd7 10 0-0 ♘b6 11 ♜e1 0-0 12 e4 ♘fd7 (12...♘c4 13 ♜c2 ♜a5, with compensation according to Beliavsky, is another idea)