Sergei Tiviakov & Yulia Gökbulut

Rock Solid Chess

Tiviakov's Unbeatable Strategy: Pawn Structures

New In Chess 2023

Contents

Foreword by Anna Ushenina

Sergei Nikolaevich Tiviakov is a very strong chess player, brought up by the Soviet chess school, back when such names as Smyslov, Petrosian, Karpov and Kasparov dominated the chess world. In an era when computers were just beginning their march, there was not yet that influence of chess programs and digital indicators, like 0.2 or 1.0. Positions and games were analysed independently, by human hands, relying on the assessments made as a result of the logical conclusions of the recognized masters of the art. Great attention was paid to chess strategy and positional play, understanding the smallest nuances of a position. And whoever understood these better generally had a greater chance of winning.

Sergei has been honing his positional understanding for many years. And it is not surprising that he has outplayed many strong chess players, managed the highest achievements in sports, became the European Champion and was repeatedly the Dutch number one.

I have absolutely no doubt that this book will help you improve your positional understanding, to begin to see the pattern of the game better and to give direction to what you need to strive for in certain positions. It will already be clear to you why the computer shows 0.3 or 1. I am sure that you will want to study not only this book, but also the continuation of this series of works by Sergei Nikolaevich.

International Grandmaster Anna Ushenina,
Former Women's World Chess Champion,
Perpignan, France, 2022

Foreword by Jorden van Foreest

I first met Sergei on the train, just after the last round of the Hoogeveen Chess Tournament in 2012. The tournament had just finished, and while he had been facing the likes of Nakamura, Giri, and Hou Yifan in the crown group, I had started my chess journey in the Open group. Needless to say, I was pretty shocked and nervous to suddenly find myself sitting across from Sergei Tiviakov. While I do not remember all the details, since I was only 13 years old, I recall we did have a very pleasant train-ride home.

As it turned out, Sergei lived near my home, and the idea of hosting a couple of training sessions arose. In fact, this was the start of many training sessions at Sergei's place. Later, my brother Lucas joined me, and some years later, Sergei trained my sister Machteld too.

Growing up in the age of computers, I have always been fond of analyzing chess with the assistance of engines. However, we mere mortals do need certain principles to guide us while playing chess. These, the engine cannot give to us. Sergei would always stress the importance of this. Over the years the training would mainly focus on developing my understanding of chess by analysing my own games, studying many games from the great players, understanding pawn structures, etc., thus significantly increasing our grasp of the game.

The book itself has been divided into various important themes, delving deeper into them on the basis of entire games. Personally, I have always liked going through entire games rather than simply solving stand-alone positions. This makes for a light and enjoyable read. At the same time, the reader is engaged since throughout every game there will be several questions asked, ensuring you have to think for yourself as well.

I am sure that by the time you have completed this book you will have elevated your understanding of the game of chess, and you will have all the necessary principles under your belt to outsmart your next opponent.

I hope you will have just as great a time reading the book as I did.

Jorden van Foreest,
International Grandmaster,
Groningen, the Netherlands, 2022

Preface by Sergei Tiviakov

How was the idea of this book born? In December 2020 I was asked to become one of the lecturers at the Russian grandmaster chess academy run by Artur Muromtsev. I agreed, and as a direction for my work I selected various themes in chess strategy, which were either not covered at all in modern chess literature or else dealt with only very superficially. So, I started collecting original material...

My work was received very positively, not only by students at the grandmaster school, but also by strong professionals from Belgium and Uzbekistan, in running numerous group and individual sessions. The quantity of material continued to grow and I reached the moment when I wanted to share it with a wider circle of chess enthusiasts.

It took a long time to find a co-author who could bring together all the material into an ordered collection of information. I am extremely grateful to Yulia Gökbulut for her invaluable contribution to the creation of this book!

The book was conceived along the same lines as the 'Chess Lectures' of the great World Champion Tigran Vartanovich Petrosian, published in the USSR in 1989 and which enjoyed enormous success among chess players.

Many people know that Petrosian is one of my favourite chess geniuses, and I have learned a great deal from the play of Tigran Vartanovich. My style of play is also quite similar to his, and may be described as 'safety-first strategy' or, indeed, 'rock solid chess'. In the period from 2005 to 2020, I held the world record for the longest streak of games without defeat – 110 games in 11 months. In 2020, my record was broken by the 16th World Champion, Magnus Carlsen.

I have read Petrosian's *Chess Lectures* many times, each time finding something new, and I also use it in my lectures with students.

As all strong players know, a knowledge of opening theory is not enough for successful play. After the opening stage of the game, there follows the most difficult phase to study and to understand, namely the middlegame. One of the main questions in this stage of the game is 'What should one do in this or that pawn structure?'.

A great many publications have come out, which attempt to help the reader with this. Among these I found my favourite – Boris Zlotnik's *Typical Positions in the Middlegame*, published in the USSR in 1986 in Russian, and also translated into English in 2020.

Boris Zlotnik was one of the trainers at the Smyslov Chess School, in which I studied from 1980 to 1984. His book was regarded as indispensable for a whole generation of players at that time. It is a model of the Soviet

Chess School and I wish to continue its traditions, by creating a classic book, which will be topical for a long time to come.

My researches here cover five themes: pawn majorities, doubled pawns, semi-open lines in the centre, open lines in the centre and double fianchettoes. Thus, I cover those pawn structures which not only arise most often in my own games, but which are not given their due attention in the modern specialist publications.

The aim of this book is to enable all who wish to get to grips with the main methods and principles of play, and to demonstrate the direction of travel in the chess jungle. Thus, even in the densest thicket, you will always be able to find a path out into the daylight!

The book is aimed at players of all strengths, from beginner to grandmaster. Everyone reading it should gain much of value in their own practice.

Sergei Tiviakov,
International Grandmaster,
Winner of the Chess Olympiad 1994,
European Champion 2008
Groningen, the Netherlands,
November 2022

Preface by Yulia Gökbulut

The motivation for writing this book was my desire to use the knowledge and skills gained while studying at the Department of Sports Journalism at the Russian State University of Physical Culture and Sports, to take up open games in chess.

When I was six years old, my grandfather gravitated towards beautiful romantic lines and so pointed me to the King's Gambit. At first, the opening pawn sacrifice brought me positive results. However, after my first coach Vladimir Leonidovich Predein taught other children in the section of the Palace of Pioneers the counter-answer 2...d5, fortune turned away from me.

After that, in order to increase my authority among my peers, my grandfather suggested I surprise them with the Danish Gambit. But this did not bring me many points and so then my relative showed me how to place my pieces in the English Opening.

With my Black repertoire, things developed in similar fashion: after 1.e4 e5, the white knight would a few moves later break through to f7 (replies such as ...♘h6 and ...♕e7 did not save my position), take the rook and enable a deadly attack on my king. So my grandfather recommended I follow his example and play the French Defence.

My second active helper was my father. He succeeded in becoming an adult 'second-category player', read Lev Polugaevsky's book *The Birth of a Variation* and, in his worship of the author, recommended me to study it. This homework exercise decided my second opening as Black, the Sicilian, whilst as White I switched to 1.d4.

So my acquaintance with open games ended that quickly, without my ever getting to grips with their positions and plans, which duly told on my professional level.

Now, as a chess trainer, I am convinced that children should play only open games for as long as possible. Sometimes, at tournaments, I see how other coaches deliberately show their inexperienced students things like the London System or other closed openings, so as to insure their pupils against quick mates and to enable them to score their first points in tournaments, in front of their demanding parents.

In one chapter of this book, Sergei Tiviakov writes: 'Unfortunately, there are some things in chess which we can only learn from our own defeats.' An unsuccessful outcome to a game is an essential experience,

which allows us to widen our playing profile and develop our positional feeling in the most varied chessboard situations.

It is well-known that opposites attract: the Dutch grandmaster has opened 1.e4 all his professional career. In addition to this, I was attracted by his 'impenetrable' Queen's Indian. It turned out that his games and analyses helped to plug various gaps in my chess knowledge.

Of course, this book is not an openings guide. But the initial stage of the game is very important, since it determines the fundamentals of the game, its further rhythm and piece composition.

Sergei Tiviakov's distinguishing features are the simplicity and modesty of his presentation, his fine professional erudition, his confident belief in classical openings, universal positional approach and his prudence in decision-making at the board. This is all conducive to trusting his thoughts and adopting the ideas he promotes.

Yulia Gökbulut,
Women's FIDE Master,
Runner-up in the Turkish Women's Championship, 2022
Kirikkale, Turkey,
November 2022

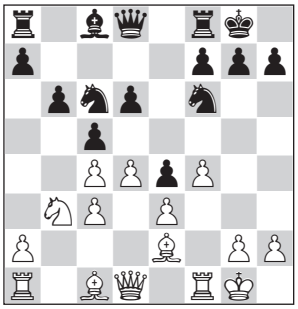
Human chess versus computer chess

What is the difference, how do we exploit the latter's achievements and identify its weaknesses

The increasing role of engines in modern chess has affected not only the game itself, but also the training of players. And I have my own ideas about the impact of artificial intelligence on the opening, middlegame and endgame. In this chapter, I want to discuss computer and human chess: how you can use their features to your advantage, to optimize professional results. The mental work of an individual and the process of making decisions are not similar to computer thinking. A person will never be able to achieve the machine speed of calculating and sorting out variations, and due to this fact, he has to focus on the general basic principles of the game, intuition, and knowledge that he has accumulated before the game. The engine, having begun to recommend a certain move, can instantly lose faith in it.

Game 1 Nimzo-Indian Defence
Paul Johner
Aron Nimzowitsch
Dresden 1926 (2)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♗d3 c5 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.0-0 ♗xc3 8.bxc3 d6 9.♘d2 b6 10.♘b3 e5 11.f4 e4 12.♗e2



Before us we have an episode from the game Johner-Nimzowitsch (I will return to this classic encounter again later in the book, but there will analyse it from the viewpoint of prophylaxis).
Let us examine the difference in approach to the same position by the computer and the human. There are two completely different moves for Black which achieve the same prophylactic idea.
Aron Nimzowitsch chose **12...♕d7**,
preventing a white pawn advance starting on the kingside.
Question: *What move do you think my friend Stockfish suggests, to disrupt Johner's plans?*

Computer play is typically 'move by move', based on the calculation of variations. In addition, the computer likes to sacrifice material to contribute to establishing a tough fight on the board. Therefore, in this position Stockfish very much likes the move 12...h5. But the majority of human players, even very top players, do not want to complicate the course of the game. If 13.♗xh5, then after 13...♘xh5 14.♕xh5 there follows 14...♗a6 with a very good position for Black, thanks to his concrete play against the c4-pawn, which is more than sufficient compensation for the sacrificed material. On 15.♕e2 there follows 15...d5.
The situation on the board is sharp and the Black player needs to see the reply to such moves as 15.♕d5 and 15.f5, but, in the opinion of the computer, here he already has a small advantage.
The human approach to the position is quite different: we try to play without calculating variations, mainly relying on general considerations. And this difference in the choice of moves must be appreciated.
13.h3 ♘e7 14.♕e1 h5 15.♗d2 ♕f5 16.♔h2 ♕h7 17.a4 ♘f5 18.g3 a5 19.♖g1 ♘h6 20.♗f1 ♗d7 21.♗c1 ♖ac8 22.d5 ♔h8 23.♘d2 ♖g8 24.♗g2 g5 25.♘f1 ♖g7 26.♖a2 ♘f5 27.♗h1 ♖cg8 28.♕d1 gxf4 29.exf4 ♗c8 30.♕b3 ♗a6 31.♖e2 ♘h4 32.♖e3 ♗c8 33.♕c2 ♗xh3 34.♗xe4 ♗f5 35.♗xf5 ♘xf5 36.♖e2 h4 37.♖gg2 hxg3+ 38.♔g1 ♕h3 39.♘e3 ♘h4 40.♔f1 ♖e8 0-1

Let us look at another game which also enables us to contrast the computer and human approaches.

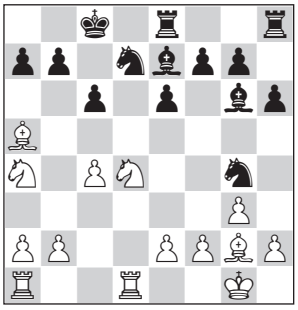
Game 2 Réti Opening

Milos Pavlovic 2507

Mikhail Ivanov 2451

Bad Wiessee 2006 (7)

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 c6 4.0-0 ♗f5 5.d3 e6 6.c4 dxc4 7.dxc4 ♕xd1 8.♖xd1 ♘bd7 9.♘c3 h6 10.♗e3 ♘g4 11.♗d2 ♗c5 12.♗e1 0-0-0 13.♘a4 ♗e7 14.♘d4 ♗g6 15.♗a5 ♖de8



Question: *Assess the sides' chances and find for White the human and computer move choices.*

White has a significantly better position, close to winning. Regardless of which move we choose, the human one or the computer one, we will have the advantage.

The possible 16.♗h3 doesn't give White anything: the knight on g4 is on the edge and far from the queenside, whereas now we are effectively driving it back where it wants to go, which is counter to chess principles. And 16.b4 is risky, because the bishop on a5 is shut out of the game. Is there a way to play ♘b5 without sacrificing a piece? 16.♖ac1 is a very strong move, the natural human reply. Before going over to concrete play, it is necessary to strengthen the position, and only then play ♘b5, and then White will win.

16.♘b5

Absolutely the correct decision from the computer point of view, because the problems in one's own position can sometimes be solved by counterplay involving a sacrifice. Thus, both 16.♘b5 and 16.♖ac1 are roughly equal in strength and both lead to a win.

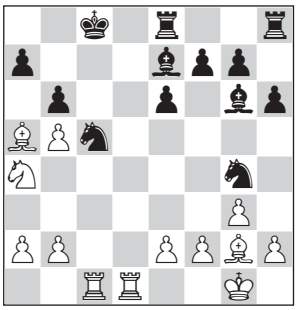
16...cxb5

Black must accept the gift.

17.cxb5 ♘c5

17...♘gf6 18.♖ac1+ ♔b8 19.♖c7 and the rook breaks through to the seventh rank, when the result of the game is settled.

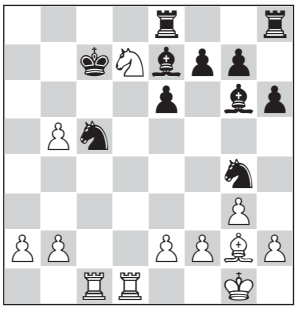
18.♖ac1 b6



It seems the position is unclear, but the computer points out a precise route to victory.

Question: *How should White continue a decisive attack on the king?*

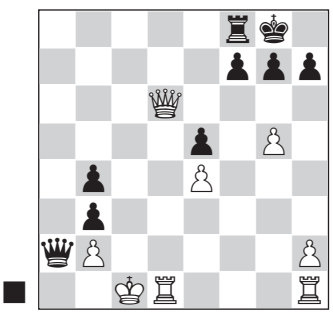
19.♗xb6?
Giving Black a chance to save himself. The correct decision involves one of the computer lines of calculation. Very often, such lines escape the attention of the human player. For example, 19.b4 is tempting, but the bishop on a5 hangs, and the advantage passes to Black.
But meanwhile, 19.h3 is winning, and after 19...♘f6 20.♗d2, and now if 20...♔b8, then 21.♗f4+ +–. The move 19.h3 is very hard to find at the board, because when searching for a move, we strive not only to create problems for the opponent, but also to minimise our own risk. Once we start to play like the computer, with piece sacrifices, then we lose the right to make any errors, and we must continue to play extremely accurately.
When an engine decides on a variation, it does so calmly, without succumbing to its own emotions, fears and prejudices, and it confidently calculates everything to the end. If you follow your home computer analysis in a game, then keep in mind that a person is able to accidentally make one or two machine moves, but three or four in a row without knowing the position is unlikely.
19...axb6 20.♘xb6+
White has three pawns for the piece. The human feels that White stands better, but it is not all so clear and obvious.
20...♔c7 21.♘d7



21...♘f6
Black should have played 21...♖d8 22.b6+ ♔c8 23.b7+ ♔c7 24.b8♕+ ♖xb8 25.♘xc5 ♗xc5 26.♖xc5+ ♔b6=.
22.b6+ ♔c8 23.♘xc5 ♗xc5 24.♖xc5+
24.b4+–; the pawns have to be broken up!
24...♔b8 25.a4 ♖d8 26.♖dc1 ♗e4 27.a5 ♗xg2 28.♔xg2 ♖c8 29.b4 ♘d5 30.♖1c4 ♖xc5 31.bxc5 ♔b7 32.c6+ ♔a6 33.c7 ♔b7 1-0

So, in the examples above, I have shown two different approaches, the human approach and the computer approach.

Game 3 Exercise position



I first saw this puzzle on page 14 of GM Alexey Dreev's *Improve your*

Practical Play in the Middlegame. He uses computer engines to analyse and write his books, and in this book I found many interesting examples from the viewpoint of computer analysis.

Let us assess this position from the viewpoint of general principles. We should start with the material balance – Black is a whole rook down!

Question: *Is it possible to make a draw here, a rook down?*

In a highly complicated position, White is ready to utilize a typical device: evacuating his king from the danger zone. But simplifying by ♕xf8+ leads White to defeat, since later he loses the pawn on b2 and Black creates a passed pawn.

If we give this position to players for playing out as a training exercise, in 99% of cases the player with the extra rook will win. Maybe once in a hundred cases Black will make a draw. However, the computer assesses it as 0.00, and its assessment is based on a series of only moves, regrouping the pieces.

Let us just try to guess the first move in this position.

1...♕a8

The first step is correct! 1...♕a5 loses.

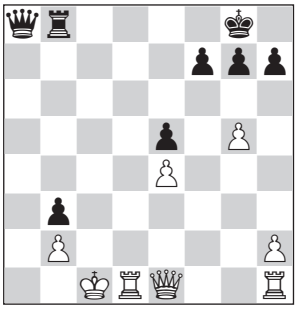
2.♕xb4

Now we must find Black's next only move. For example, 2...♖c8+ loses.

2...♖b8

The second move is also found!

3.♕e1



We have already guessed two correct steps, but the current position is far from a draw. The price of every move is still high and you need to find the only saving idea, which, in my opinion, is almost impossible for a human. Obviously Black should try to give perpetual check, but 3...♕a7, with this idea, loses.

Despite the difficulty of finding the third move, there is still a continuation that creates endless threats to the enemy king. To do this, you need to connect an additional playing resource. Keep in mind that often the computer does not make quiet moves. Everything is subordinated to one single goal.

This puzzle arises as a result of one important theoretical continuation in the Najdorf Variation of the Sicilian Defence (6.♗e3 e5). When we analyse any opening variations, we need to find such positions in which the opponent must make only moves to maintain the balance. With the current example, I touch on the topic of 'using computer modules in opening preparation'.

CHAPTER 1

Pawn majority on one flank

In this chapter, we deal with the pawn structure '3 vs 2 on the queenside and 3 vs 4 on the kingside'. It occurs often in my repertoire, for example after seven moves in the French Defence: 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 ♕xd5 5.dxc5 ♗xc5 (or 5...♕xc5). Thus, the move 5.dxc5 has been played in 25 of my games.

Such a structure also arises in the Sicilian as follows: 1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5 3.exd5 ♕xd5 4.d4,

and then there is the exchange of the d- and c-pawns. Again we have three pawns against two on the queenside and three against four on the kingside. This position is typical and occurs very often.

In addition, there is also the structure 'two pawns against one on the queenside and four against five on the kingside.' We will also study that in this chapter. I don't know of any book that deals specifically with this topic, although in the chess literature you can find individual examples. Therefore, I will try to convey to you my vision of playing pawn-majority structures based on my own games.

I achieved my professional growth by studying the legacy of world champions. In my youth, I was a student at the school of Vasily Smyslov, the seventh king of chess, a grandmaster of the positional style of play, and I adopted his style of fighting. In addition, I was influenced by the work of Tigran Petrosian, who also had a pronounced desire to gain the better position gradually.

A distinctive feature of the resulting structures is the absence of a pawn centre, which makes attacking play impossible. Usually White should stick to the strategy of positional chess.

Question: *Which pawn majority is preferable, what advantage does it give?*

In order to understand this, you need to perform a simple arithmetic operation: 3 divided by 2, is 1.5; and 4 divided by 3 gives approximately 1.33. The former is greater, which suggests that three pawns on the same flank is a more valuable advantage. Of course, there are exceptions, but they are rare.

A similar structure also appears from the Caro-Kann Defence and the Scandinavian Defence; there are also similar positions from the Queen's Indian Defence.

To illustrate the above, let's start with my game against the Russian grandmaster Evgeny Romanov. In it, I used one of the typical methods of playing with a pawn majority – the exchange of pieces and the transition to the endgame.

Game 15 French Defence

Sergei Tiviakov	2663
Evgeny Romanov	2616

Al-Ain 2012 (5)

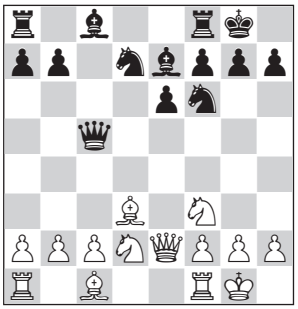
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 ♕xd5

The objective assessment of this position is equality, regardless of how White continues (5.♘f3 or 5.dxc5). But I feel confident here, because I play the French Defence with both White and Black.

5.dxc5

This move probably does not really fight for an advantage, but it allows White to avoid the very well known continuations involving the moves 5.♘gf3 cxd4 6.♗c4. With the move 5.dxc5 I avoid theory, and in general I do not strive for move-by-move play, because I am not especially concerned with obtaining an advantage in the opening – it is more important to place one's pieces on the board in such a way as simply to establish a mental battle, based on the classical general principles of chess.

5...♘f6 6.♘gf3 ♕xc5 7.♗d3 ♗e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♕e2 ♘bd7



This theoretical position arises very often. White has several plans. And from this moment, he should already start thinking about what sort of endgame he wants.

Question: *Of what does White's advantage consist?*

By exploiting the pawn majority on the queenside, White will create a passed pawn in the endgame. This is his main object and therefore in the game, I chose to move the c-pawn.

10.c4

As well as 10.c4, White has 10.♘e4. We will see the plan associated with this move in another game.

The position is neutral, and Black can achieve equality in various ways.

10...b6

Question: *What do you think are the merits of variations where White does not fight for an advantage?*

The psychological trap consists in the fact that the opponent will have studied critical variations in detail, but economized his time on preparation when he sees an equal position, counting on finding the right moves during the game itself.

11.♘e4

White has the task of exchanging as many pieces as possible. At first glance, it seems that his play is light-hearted and he is not striving for an advantage. But in reality this is not the case. White is trying to lull his opponent into a false sense of security, hoping that he will relax and stop thinking deeply about the position, thinking that White is only after a draw.

I have good personal relations with Evgeny and our games have often ended peacefully. During this game, he may well have thought the same would be the case here.

11...♕c7 12.♘xf6+

Black could play 12...♗xf6, but then he would have to calculate the sharp variations associated with 13.♕e4; for example, 13...g6 14.♕xa8 ♗b7 15.♕xa7 ♖a8 16.♕xa8, and Black has compensation for the pawn.

12...♘xf6

White needs to complete his development. He has two plans to activate the ♗c1:

1) occupy e5 with the knight, followed by placing the bishop on f4;

2) play b2-b3, so as to put the bishop on b2.

But there is no special difference between these continuations.

13.♘e5 ♗b7 14.b3

I will repeat once more, so that this rule should be established firmly in your mind: *When there are no pawns in the centre of the board, it makes no sense to play for a mating attack; it is possible only when you have control over the centre.*

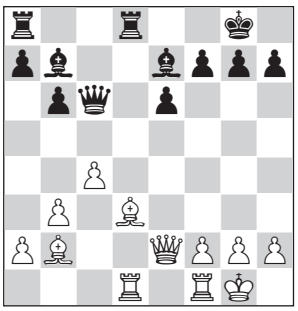
14...♘d7 15.♘xd7 ♕xd7 16.♗b2

So already the knights have been exchanged. White continues to play for simplification.

16...♖fd8

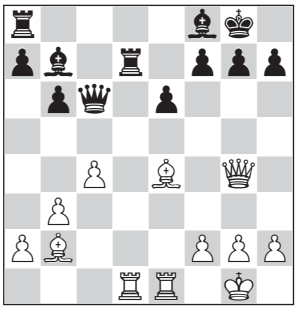
If you look at this position with the eyes of the computer, then everything is going as it should: for a long interval of time, Black has played correctly and has not committed any mistakes.

17.♖ad1 ♕c6

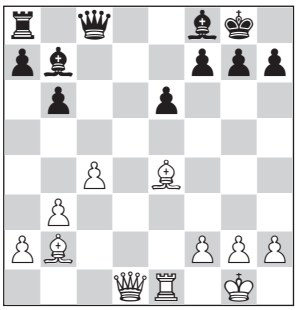


Question: *Which pieces would White like to exchange in the future? Which form of simple endgame does he wish to obtain?*

At this point in time, we need to understand which ending White has the best chances of winning.
A Serious Question: 'Will Black succeed or not in creating problems?' – the further fate of the game depends on the correct answer to it. If we leave only the heavy pieces on the board, exchanging all the light ones, then the control over the d-file will be decisive, since it is the only open file here. The queen endgame is always a draw.
The correct answer to the given question is to keep the dark-squared bishops, and the heavy pieces must leave the board. The opponent's pawns occupy the dark squares a7 and b6, and the white bishop, located on b2, can eventually attack them, while the enemy counterpart on e7 will be incapacitated.
When we go in for exchanges, we must take good pieces from the opponent, and leave him with bad ones. Thus, my task in the current position is to get an endgame with dark-squared bishops.
18.♕g4 ♗f8
The computer suggests 18...g6 as leading to equality, but it is far from easy for a human to make such moves, weakening the king.
19.♖fe1
Here the assessment of the position starts to change. The intelligent machine is already starting to like White's position. I am preparing the exchange of light-squared bishops.
19...♖d7 20.♗e4



20...♖xd1 21.♕xd1 ♕c8
After determining our plan of play, involving exchanges, we should think further. We need to imagine what will happen in the future, after the disappearance of a few pieces.



Question: *What very useful move can White play here?*

For example, the move 22.a4 is very bad, because in reply Black plays 22...a5 and we cannot exploit his weaknesses, whilst we lose the

prospect of creating a passed pawn after the move 23...♗c5.
White's advantage on the queenside consists only in possible dynamics: the possibility of setting his pawns in motion, so as eventually to reach the promotion square.
And what if 22.a3 ? Probably, this step will prove useful in future, but for now it limits the activity of White's dark-squared bishop. Therefore, I began play on the kingside, since after all, in the endgame, Black can also create a passed pawn on the kingside.

22.h4!

If White later plays 23.h5, then there is a threat of 24.h6, and Black would have to answer 23...h6 himself. And once he has done that (23...h6), the white pawn on h5 fixes weaknesses in the black structure on h6 and g7. As a result, the black king would be tied to the defence of g7. And if Black wants to get rid of it with the move ...g7-g6, then he destroys his pawn structure, which deprives him of the chance to create a passed pawn on the kingside.
One can say that it was thanks to the move 22.h4 that I managed to win this game.

22...♗xe4

Black cannot stop the advance of the enemy h-pawn.

23.♖xe4

Because I have control of the open d-file, Black cannot do anything here.

23...♕e8 24.h5

I also had the idea of playing 24.♖d4. Then Black plays ...♗e7, ...♖d8, and the exchange of rooks is unavoidable. White does not prevent this and continues to follow his plan precisely.

24...♖d8 25.♖d4 ♖xd4 26.♕xd4 h6

Black's last move was necessary. If he had played 26...f6, then I would myself have played 27.h6, destroying Black's pawn structure.
But now the theatre of war switches to the other flank. My queenside pawns are set in motion: we must play a2-a3, b3-b4, c4-c5 and create a passed c-pawn.

27.a3

It is important to note that, in order to create his play, White has control of the whole board, is upholding the principle of centralization and thus reducing Black's play to nothing. Despite the fact that I have made definite progress, Black can still hold a draw here. However, from this moment he needs to defend very accurately.
At the risk of boasting, I would point out that my manner of play in this game reminds one very strongly of the style of Karpov, Petrosian and Carlsen. The Norwegian World Champion often heads into equal positions, and then wins seemingly from nothing.

27...♕e7 28.b4 ♕g5

By taking aim at the white kingside pawns, Black strives to create counterplay.

29.♕d1 ♕h4 30.♕e2

And here my opponent stumbled...

Question: *How should Black play?*

In my opinion, there is a large margin of safety in chess. If Black's play is solid and he doesn't make a single major mistake, then it's always possible to save the position for a long period. But if inaccuracies are committed over a long time, then there always comes a moment when the defender has to make computer moves, and choose the only plans and continuations. Thus, the margin of safety in case of inaccurate play by the opponent always decreases, especially when the game approaches time trouble: it is easy to make mistakes then.

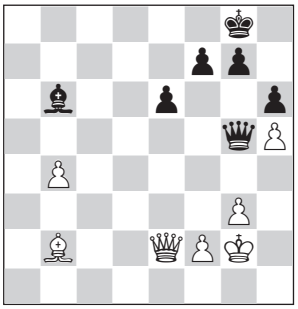
As a result of Black's previous mistake on the thirtieth move, his problems have become noticeable and he now has to play accurately.

Question: *How can Black try to reach a draw?*

This position seems difficult, even lost; White has, I would say, a decent advantage, but the chess engine shows equality. The machine can calculate many moves ahead, and this is its strength, and during the game such a deep and faultless analysis of variations is not available to the human.

If you suggested the plan 30...♗e7 and 31...♗f6, you are on the wrong path, because the white pawns are far advanced and the king on g8 is a long way away. The bishop manoeuvre does not save Black.

30...a5 is the only correct plan. The defence of the position requires concrete action from my opponent. But why did he not play this? It appeared to him that after 31.g3 ♕g5 32.c5 the pawn could promote. I was hoping my opponent would avoid this continuation, because of the complicated nature of the calculations. The computer offers the series of moves 32...axb4 33.cxb6 ♗c5 34.axb4 ♗xb6 35.♔g2.



analysis diagram

And it seems that White is better, but in reality here it is still equality. So, after 30.♕e2, Black needed to shake off his tiredness and devote all of his resources to the calculation of variations.

30...♗d6 31.g3 ♕e7 32.♕f3 f5

Now we see that the pawn on h5 is starting to play a decisive role – it

fixes the weaknesses in the enemy position, its colleagues on h6 and g7 being paralysed.

33.♗d4 ♕c7?

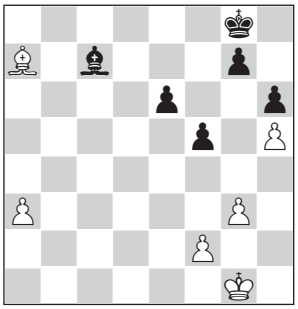
The decisive mistake! After this move, the game cannot be saved.

Question: *Show how White wins in all variations. Remember our strategic idea in such structures.*

34.c5

Forcibly creating a passed pawn.

34...bxc5 35.bxc5 ♗xc5 36.♕c3 ♗b6 37.♕xc7 ♗xc7 38.♗xa7



Just in this position, we can see that the pawn on h5 occupies a key position. If it were not there, then Black could quickly activate his king, by bringing it to the centre: ...♔f7, ...e6-e5, ...♔f7-e6-d5, with a draw. But since the g7-pawn is weak, Black must spend time defending it.

And now I will tell you one more very important thing when playing with a pawn majority. In itself, it is like a single advantage. Remember the principle of two weaknesses? One pawn majority is not enough to win. But when there are additional defects in the opponent's position: doubled pawns, weak squares, for example, or White, in addition, has the advantage of two bishops, then the principle of two weaknesses already begins to work clearly. And the pawn majority acquires a decisive character.

Here, White has two advantages: one of them is the passed pawn, and the other is the weak pawns on g7 and h7, which force Black to spend his playing energy on getting rid of this positional disadvantage.

38...g6 39.hxg6 ♔g7

It was more precise to start with 39...f4, but my analysis after the game shows that White wins here too.

40.a4

The last move before the time control. Here it was more accurate to play 40.♗e3 (since the bishop prevents the possible move 40...f4) 40...♔xg6 41.a4, and White brings home the full point.

40...♔xg6

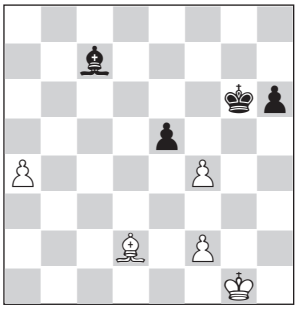
Black could have muddied the waters by means of 40...f4, exploiting his last chance. In 2012, I spent a lot of time analysing this endgame to the very end: 41.gxf4 ♗a5 42.♔f1 ♔xg6 43.♗e3 h5 44.♔e2

h4 45.♔f1 ♔f5 46.f3, and I came to the conclusion that White wins.

41.♗e3 e5 42.♗d2

Since the king on g6 must support the h6-pawn, he cannot stop the a-pawn. Black could save the game by exchanging the kingside pawns and giving up his bishop for one of them: if his king gets to a8, it would be a draw. This is what Black aims for in the subsequent play.

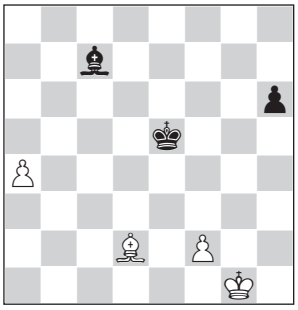
42...f4 43.gxf4



43...♔f5

On 43...exf4 White wins as follows: 44.♔g2 ♔f5 45.♔f3 ♔e6 46.♗xf4 ♗a5 47.♔g4 (I have checked this position on the computer with the Nalimov tablebases. Thus, here White must not play 47.♗xh6 because of 47...♗xf2) 47...♔d5 and 48.♗xh6, winning.

44.fxe5 ♔xe5



45.a5!

In this simple endgame, I demonstrated good technique and did not make a single mistake. Taking the pawn with the bishop by 45.♗xh6? would have been wrong. Of course, White must not play into this position: after the move 45...♔e4 it is a draw according to the tablebases, as also after 45...♔d4.

45...♔d5 46.a6 ♔c6 47.♗e3 h5

But now Black cannot give up his bishop for the f2-pawn.

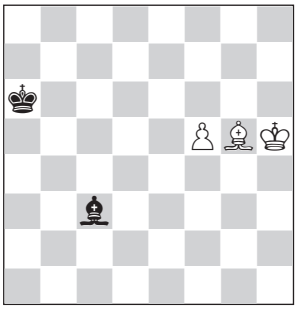
48.♔g2 ♗d8 49.f4 ♔c7 50.f5

The passed pawn advances further.

50...♔b8 51.♔h3

Now White carries out the plan ♗e3-f2-h4, ♔xh5, and a queen soon appears on the board.

51...♔a8 52.♗f2 ♗f6 53.♗h4 ♗c3 54.♗g5 ♔a7 55.♔h4 ♔xa6 56.♔xh5



We have reached one of the basic endgames which, for example, can be found in the aforementioned Portisch book and also in Panchenko's endgame manual.

56...♔b7 57.♔g6 ♔c6 58.♗h6 ♔d7 59.♗g7 ♗b4 60.f6 ♔e6 61.f7 ♗d6 62.♗h6 ♗b4 63.♔g7 ♔f5 64.♔g8 ♔g6 65.♗f8 ♗c3 66.♗a3 ♗g7 67.♗c1 1-0

CHAPTER 7

The double fianchetto

The double fianchetto for Black implies the development of the bishops to the squares g7 and b7. This flexible opening formation is reminiscent of the Queen's Indian Defence or the Réti Opening, a universal method of playing for Black that will suit almost all chess players.

Some of you will play fianchetto openings, such as the King's Indian Defence. True, in this opening the bishop usually does not go to b7, but the King's Indian can also be handled in such an original fashion. And in this chapter you will find a similar example. In the Queen's Indian Defence, the king's bishop is brought to the e7-square, but in certain circumstances it can also be sent to g7.

Let us look at how I reach double fianchetto positions.

English Opening
1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 b6 3.g3 ♗b7 4.♗g2

Here, as well as the main continuation for Black, which is 4...e6, it is also possible to play 4...g6. After 5.0-0 ♗g7 we have a position with the double fianchetto.

I want to tell you about my performance statistics in this variation. In the present position, I have played both moves, 4...e6 and 4...g6. After 4...e6, against me White scores 36% of the points, and after 4...g6 only 32%. That is, based on a large number of my own games, we can conclude that the double fianchetto brings me more points than the classical variations of the Queen's Indian Defence.

When I started playing 4...g6, this continuation was not very popular at the top level. However, over time, after I began to use this bishop formation regularly and achieved good results, many other grandmasters became interested in it. In 2011, I wrote a theoretical article 'English Opening/Early Divergences 4...g6 – Black's Double Fianchetto in the Queen's Indian' for *Yearbook 98* (New In Chess, page 233), in which I explained the methods of playing for Black. After that, a large number of strong chess players incorporated this variation into their opening repertoire. For example, in the last Candidates Tournament, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave faced Ian Nepomniachtchi in the penultimate round, and he also went into a double fianchetto: Nepomniachtchi-Vachier-Lagrave, Ekaterinburg ct 2021: 1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 b6 3.g3 ♗b7 4.♗g2 g6 5.d4 ♗g7 6.d5 ♘a6 7.♘c3 ♘c5 8.0-0 0-0 9.♕c2 a5 10.♖d1 ♘e8 11.♗f4 ♘d6 12.b3 ♖e8 13.♗e5 e6 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.♖ab1 e5 16.♘d2 f5 17.a3 ♕f6 18.b4 axb4 19.axb4 ♘a6 20.e4 f4 21.♘e2 fxg3 22.fxg3 c5 23.bxc5 ♘xc5 24.♖xb6 ♕d8 25.♖db1 ♕c7 26.♘c3 ♖f8 27.♖6b2 ♗a6 28.♘d1 ♖ab8 29.♖xb8 ♖xb8 30.♖xb8 ♕xb8 31.♕b2 ♕xb2 32.♘xb2 ♘c8 33.♔f2 ♘b6 34.♗f1 d6 35.♔e3 ♔f6 36.♗e2 ♔e7 37.♘b1 ♗c8 38.♘c3 ♗d7 39.♗d1 ♗e8 40.♗c2 ♗d7 41.♗d1 ♗e8 42.♗c2 ½-½. Vachier-Lagrave played very passively and probably had not studied my game against Kenneth Norman (see below).

The main quality of this pawn structure is its great complexity. For example, unlike the Queen's Indian Defence, the positions are more complex.

If I want to make a draw as Black and to easily parry the opponent's blows, then I play 4...e6. Then the

game goes either to the English Opening, or to the Queen's Indian Defence, or to the Catalan Opening, where I equalize without any problems. But when I am striving to achieve victory at all costs, I choose the move 4...g6.

This variation attracted my attention a very long time ago: I had a few games in 1986-1987. One day in 1998, at a tournament in Beijing, I was defeated by the ninth Women's World Champion, Zhu Chen. And since then, I have not lost in this variation for the last twenty-three years!

In this chapter, by looking at examples of typical games played with this line, you will get information about the main plans for Black. I would like to add that the double fianchetto is the best and most effective method of fighting the London System.

After 1.d4 ♘f6, for example, when we know that the opponent only plays lines with the development of the bishop to f4, it is very easy to neutralize White's opening advantage and even hope for an advantage ourselves. Of five games where this has been played against me, I won three, despite the fact that White's position is very solid.

Now I want to show you my game against Erik van den Doel, a strong Dutch grandmaster, to convince you of the effectiveness of the double fianchetto against the London System. His main opening preference is 1.e4: he rarely opens with 1.d4. But lately he has decided to switch to closed openings and practice a solid variation of the London System. In preparation for our meeting, I noticed that Van den Doel repeatedly developed his bishop on the f4-square.

Game 87 London System

Erik van den Doel	2593
Sergei Tiviakov	2583

Amsterdam ch-NED 2018 (5)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4

The most effective version of the double fianchetto is when Black's pawn is still on e7, that is without the move ...e7-e6.

The most accurate move-order is:

2...b6 3.e3 ♗b7 4.♘f3 g6

In the early stages of the opening, we purposely do not play either ...e7-e6 or ...d7-d6, nor waste time on other moves. We should complete development as soon as possible: put the bishop on g7 and castle. After that, once White has committed himself to a certain line of play, we begin to advance the centre pawns in the appropriate way.

5.h3

So far, my opponent plays in standard fashion. Black often plays this way in the London System, so as to secure h2 as a retreat for the bishop, because otherwise, Black can play 5...♘h5 6.♗g5 h6 7.♗h4 g5 8.♗g3 ♘xg3, and the bishop is exchanged. White prefers to keep it.

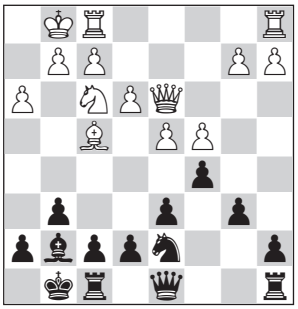
5...♗g7 6.♗e2

And only here I play:
6...d6 7.0-0 0-0 8.c4
As well as 8.c4, White can choose the move 8.c3. But 8.c4 is a more aggressive reply.

Question: *To play for a win, what plan should Black choose?*

Here Black has two options: to play ...e7-e5 or not. When giving preference to one of them, we must take into account the fact that we are not faced with the task of equalizing – we want to gain the upper hand in the game.
Let's use the defect of the f4-bishop's position. White developed it to this square so that it would put pressure on the centre. If we play ...e7-e5, then at some point the enemy bishop will come to life.
8...♘bd7 9.♘c3 ♘e4
This is a typical Queen's Indian move. The idea here is to bring the bishop on g7 to life.
10.♘xe4 ♗xe4 11.♘d2 ♗b7 12.♗f3 ♗xf3 13.♘xf3
One gets the impression that my opponent does not want to undertake anything, but just tries to make a draw.

13...c5 14.♕d3



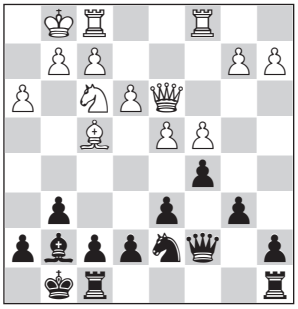
From the computer's viewpoint, the position is equal, but from a human standpoint, it is better for Black, on account of the quality of his pieces.
Question: *What can we say about the bishop on f4? Is it good or bad?*

At this moment, the activity of the bishop is minimal, and it is not easy for White to get it into play, because after e3-e4, cxd4 the bishop on g7 starts to work.
Black's play should be based on creating weaknesses in the opponent's ranks, but in such a way that the enemy bishop does not show itself in action. The strategy is typical. It can be used in similar positions.
When we draw up a plan, we must decide on which part of the board we will act: on the queenside, in the centre, or on the kingside? To play with the bishop shut out on f4, one must give up activity in the centre and on the kingside. I will attack on the queenside with ...a7-a6 and ...b6-b5, having previously made the move ...♖b8. White cannot prevent this plan. Because the black

knight protects the c5-pawn, there is always ...♘xc5 in response to dxc5. Even if the opponent closes the centre with d4-d5, I will have a plan to advance the b5-pawn, as in the Benoni Defence. But the difference is that in this variation we develop a very strong initiative with equal material.

14...♕c7 15.♖ac1

My opponent does not realize the dangers of his position. He should probably have played 15.♖fc1.



15...a6 16.a4 ♕b7 17.♖fd1 b5

To achieve the last move, I do not even need to put the rook on b8.

18.cxb5 cxd4 19.exd4

If 19.♘xd4, there follows the fork 19...e5.

19...axb5 20.axb5

Question: *What simple move gives Black the advantage? How does he regain the pawn on b5?*

I have a much better pawn structure, with one pawn island against three.

20...♖a5

This is a poor move, after which White can equalize. Correct was 20...♖ab8. The difference is that after the text move, White can solve the problem of his bad bishop. In addition, I have a weak pawn on e7.

21.♖e1

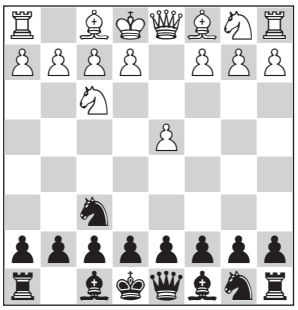
I cannot play 21...♖e8 because of 22.♗xd6, and on 21...♖xb5 22.♖xe7. Therefore I was forced to reply:

21...♗f6 22.♗g5 ♖e8 23.h4

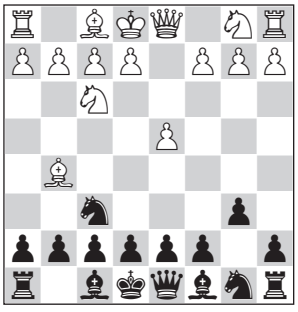
In the end, the game was drawn; I missed my winning chances!

23...♖xb5 24.♖c7 ♕xc7 25.♕xb5 ♖b8 26.♕e2 e6 27.♕d2 ♕b6 28.♖c1 ♗g7 29.d5 exd5 30.♕xd5 ♘e5 31.b3 ♘g4 32.♕d2 h5 33.♗f4 ♖e8 34.♗xd6 ♕xb3 35.♗f4 ♖a8 36.♕c2 ♕b4 37.♗g3 ♗f6 38.♖b1 ♕a4 39.♕xa4 ♖xa4 40.♗c7 ½-½

In the London System, White can play another move-order: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3.



The main move I play here is 2...e6. But then White will follow the former course with 3.♗f4, and Black will not be able to carry out his plan of ...d7-d6 and ...c7-c5 with the pawn on e7, due to the pressure of the enemy bishop on the d6-pawn. True, even with a pawn on e6, I have chosen a double fianchetto, continuing in this way against Zdenko Kozul, Vladimir Epishin and Gata Kamsky: 3...b6 4.♘bd2 ♗b7 5.h3 g6 ..e3 ♗g77.♗e2 0-0 8.0-0, for example, 8...d6 9.c4, (or 9.♗h2) I played 9...♕e7 or 9...♖e8 and after the necessary preparation ...e7-e5; or 10... ♘e4 11. ♘xe4 ♗xe4 and then 12...e5. If we want a draw, then in this way we can neutralize the London System. Black has no problems here. But if we know that our opponent only plays the London formations, then we can do more: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 b6 3.♗f4 ♗b7 4.e3 g6, and then put into practice the plan I applied in the game against Van den Doel. And if White responds with 3.g3, then 3...♗b7, and I can choose 4...g6, 5...♗g7, and we have a standard position with a double fianchetto. To fight for an advantage after 2...b6, White needs to continue 3.♗g5.



Now 3...♗b7 is not very good, because the pawns get doubled after 4.♗xf6 with advantage to White. Therefore, if Black does not want to allow this, he should play 3...♘e4, and then 4.♗h4 ♗b7 5.e3.
At the summer tournament in Estonia in 2021 this move-order was seen in my rapid game against the Ukrainian GM Anna Ushenina.

Game 88 Torre System

Anna Ushenina	2376
Sergei Tiviakov	2663

Saaremaa rapid 2021 (3)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 b6 3.♗g5 ♘e4 4.♗h4 ♗b7 5.e3

5...g6 6.♗e2 ♗g7 7.0-0 0-0 8.♘bd2 c5 9.♘xe4 ♗xe4 10.a4 d6 11.a5 ♘d7
Subsequently I outplayed my opponent and won:
12.c3 ♘f6 13.♘d2 ♗c6 14.♗f3 ♕c7 15.♕e2 ♗xf3 16.♘xf3 ♘e4 17.♖a2 c4 18.axb6 axb6 19.♖fa1 ♖xa2 20.♖xa2 b5 21.♘e1 e5 22.f3 ♘f6 23.♘c2 ♘d5 24.dxe5 dxe5 25.e4 ♘f4 26.♕d2 ♗h6 27.♔f1 ♔g7 28.♘b4 g5 29.♗g3 ♖d8 30.♘d5 ♘xd5 31.exd5 f6 32.♕e3 ♕d6 33.♖a7+ ♔g8 34.♕e4 ♗g7 35.♗f2 ♕xd5

36.♕xd5 ♖xd5 37.♔e2 h5 38.♖b7 f5 39.h3 h4 40.♗e3 ♗f6 41.♖c7 ♔f8 42.♗c5+ ♔e8 43.♗b4 ♗d8 44.♖h7 ♖d7 45.♖h6 ♔f7 46.♖c6 ♖d5 47.♖a6 ♗f6 48.♖c6 ♗g7 49.♖b6 ♗f6 50.♖c6 ♗d8 51.♖a6 ♔e8 52.♖e6+ ♔d7 53.♖g6 f4 54.♖h6 ♔c8 55.♖e6 ♔b7 56.♗d6 ♔c6 57.♗b4+ ♔b7 58.♗d6 ♗b6 59.♗xe5 ♗e3 60.♗d4 ♗xd4 61.cxd4 b4 62.♔d2 ♖xd4+ 63.♔c2 ♖d5 64.♖e4 ♖c5 65.♖e6 ♔c7 66.♖g6 ♔b7 67.♖d6 c3 68.bxc3 ♖xc3+ 69.♔b2 ♖e3 70.♖d2 ♔c6 71.♔b1 ♔c5 72.♖d8 ♖e1+ 73.♔c2 ♖e2 74.♔b3 ♖xg2 75.♖c8+ ♔d4 76.♔xb4 ♖g3 77.♖g8 ♔e3 0-1

Did you pay attention to the fact that White ended up with a bad piece in this game, the dark-squared bishop on h4? However, unlike the standard London arrangement on h2, it at least exerted some pressure on Black's centre. The e7/d6/c5/b6/a7 pawn chain limited the activity of this bishop. Its construction is one of the methods of fighting against the opponent's pieces.

Now let us turn to the main variations of the double fianchetto system.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3

A common continuation. I have had as many as 47 games against it.

2...b6 3.♗g2 ♗b7 4.0-0

In this position, there are two moves:

1) 4...e6, to which I have given preference in 25 games, with White making 36% against me;

2) 4...g6

In 8 games, my opponents (who included such strong players as M.Amin Tabatabaei, Mihail Marin, Miroljub Lazic and others) have scored just 18%.

When White has not moved his c-pawn, he has here a good continuation in:

5.d3

So as to continue 6.e4.

Question: *Should Black play 5...d5 or not? If we avoid it, what piece set-up should we adopt?*

It is important to know the antidote to any possible white plan, so we will look in detail at all the correct ways to respond. I confess that initially I did not know what to play in this position. It so happened that I made mistakes and very quickly ended up in a very unpleasant situation, in which I had to offer a draw to a weaker opponent. There is a big difference between positions with pawns on g6 and d5 and pawns on e6 and d5 with White's pawn on d3. It lies in the fact that the presence of the pawn on d5 cannot prevent the advance of the white pawn to e4;

sooner or later the opponent will make this move. But when it hits e4, it can advance to e5 and further to e6; White will have a strong space advantage in the centre.
With the pawn on g6 we can, of course, play ...♘bd7 and ...e7-e5, but then the bishop on g7 will be bad.
If we decide on a plan to block the e4-pawn with ...e7-e5, then we need to keep the bishop on the f8-a3 diagonal.

6.♘bd2 ♗g7 7.e4

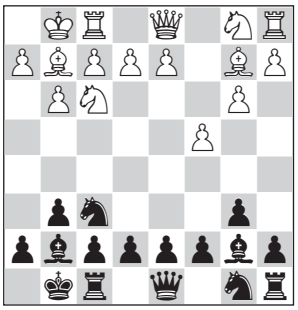
On 7...dxe4, 8.♘g5.

7...e6 8.♖e1 c5 9.e5 ♘fd7 10.♘f1

This is how my game against Miroljub Lazic continued; it ended in a short draw after 10...♘c6 11.♗f4 ♘d4 12.♘xd4 cxd4 13.h4 h6 ½-½ (Algiers 2015).

The drawback of the fianchetto on the kingside is the weakness of the dark squares. White can later play ♗f4, ♕d2, h2-h4. The pawn on g6 gives him a target for an attack on the king.
Therefore, if the opponent plays 5.d3, you should not play 5...d5. Instead of this, we should take play into Sicilian realms: 5...♗g7 6.e4 d6. And after any of White's possible moves 7.♘c3, 7.♘d2 or 7.♖e1, we reply 7...c5, 8...♘c6, reaching a type of Closed Sicilian. This is a perfectly acceptable position for Black. If White starts an offensive with ♘h2 and f2-f4-f5, then Black can counterattack in the centre with ...d6-d5 or create threats on the queenside.
Very often against me in such lines opponents play 4.b3 immediately or a move later after 4.c4 g6, reaching a symmetrical position with a double fianchetto.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 b6 3.♗g2 ♗b7 4.c4 g6 5.b3 ♗g7 6.♗b2 0-0 7.0-0



This position has been reached six times in my practice.
After 7...c5 you get the standard *tabiya* from the English Opening. White will play 8.♘c3, then 9.d4, and everything will end in mutual exchanges and a draw. But, as I told you earlier, I choose the double fianchetto to play to win.
Now we will consider a game in which one of the sides is basically ahead in development (after all, White is the first to make a move in a chess game!), so it is beneficial

for it to exchange in the centre with the subsequent opening of the lines. In this position, I do not fight for an advantage in the centre, but I try to complete the development of my pieces, and only after that I proceed to specific play.

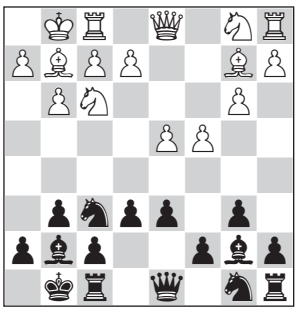
7...e6

This is my favourite move.

8.d4 d6

Here White has two knight moves: 9.♘bd2 and 9.♘c3. Most players prefer 9.♘c3, since 9.♘bd2 is passive and allows 9...c5 10.♕c2 a6. Black could immediately exchange on d4, but I am waiting: 11.e4 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♕c7 and 13...♘bd7 – we have a very good Hedgehog. Those who play the Paulsen Variation of the Sicilian Defence for Black are very familiar with this position with the bishop on g7, where they spend extra time moving the bishop to g7 from e7. The most important thing is not to miss White's tactic e4-e5 in such positions.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 b6 3.♗g2 ♗b7 4.0-0 g6 5.b3 ♗g7 6.♗b2 0-0 7.c4 e6 8.d4 d6



I have had this position four times in practice, and won three times.

9.♕c2 c5 10.♘c3

In old *Informants*, they give

10...♘c6

with the idea after 11.d5 of going 11...exd5 12.cxd5 ♘b4, winning material.

Therefore:

11.♖ad1 ♕e7 12.e3 ♖ac8

In the event of the stereotyped

13.a3

(as Jonathan Mestel played against me in 2010), there follows

13...cxd4 14.exd4 ♘a5,

and White can do nothing to oppose the advance of the pawn to d5, after which his pieces hang. The opponent cannot just dry up the position in this variation.

I had an interesting game in this line with the young master Yaroslav Remizov.

Game 89 English Opening

Yaroslav Remizov	2385
Sergei Tiviakov	2606

Chelyabinsk 2021 (4)

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 b6 3.g3 ♗b7 4.♗g2 g6 5.b3 ♗g7 6.♗b2 0-0 7.0-0 d6 8.d4 e6

9.♕c2 c5 10.♖d1 ♕e7 11.♘c3 ♘c6 12.e4

The move 12.e4 is premature. The machine thinks that it is necessary to wait: 12.e3. Here, according to the computer, Black equalizes. That shows that the double fianchetto is a good and reliable continuation. Strange as it may seem, after 12.e4 this is already a position with an advantage for Black. It seems that White did everything right: he developed his pieces and captured the centre, but missed something.
Question: *Which route should Black follow next?*

Sometimes in difficult game positions it is advisable to provoke the opponent to capture the centre, and then seize the initiative ourselves.
We should prepare ...e6-e5, and then seize the square d4. But I did not like the immediate 12... e5 because of the possible 13.♘d5 with exchanges, so to begin with I preferred:
12...♘d7 13.♘b5
On 13.dxc5 dxc5, and then 14...♘d4 or 14...e5.

13...e5
The computer thinks the unwelcome guest should be kicked with 13...a6, and the piece sacrifice, which I was afraid of, does not work: 14.dxc5 ♗xb2 15.♕xb2 axb5 16.cxb5, because Black can simply return the piece by capturing on c5 with the knight or the b-pawn.
14.dxc5 dxc5 15.♘c7 ♖ac8 16.♘d5 ♕d8 17.♗h3 ♘d4= 18.♘xd4 cxd4 19.♗a3 ♖e8

White should now have played 20.f4 with the idea of 21.f5, which leads to a crazy battle. But after the move
20.♕e2
Black's position is preferable, in my view. The engine suggests immediately stripping our king with 20...f5 21.exf5 ♘f6. Black sacrifices material, to activate in the centre. I saw this continuation at the board, but could not believe that such an idea could work: 22.♗g2 ♘xd5 23.cxd5 ♗xd5∓, and the continuation 22.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 23.fxg6 simply loses because of 23...♗f3. This is the sort of interesting idea that exists in this variation.
20...♖c6 21.♘b4 ♖c7 22.♘d5 ♖c6 23.♘b4 ♖c7 24.♘d5 ½-½