

I. Rabinovich

THE RUSSIAN ENDGAME
HANDBOOK

Translated and Revised from the 1938 Edition



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Editor's Preface

Ilya Rabinovich's classic endgame manual was first published in the Soviet Union in 1927 and reissued in 1938 under the title of, *The Endgame*. We present here a "translated and revised" edition, meaning that we gladly accepted Jim Marfia's excellent translation of the 1938 Russian text and then made slight alterations to the voice, to make the final result sound more natural to the mind's ear in our less formal times, yet without changing the meaning of any statement.

Although this work was conceived as a teaching aid for group lessons, the individual student can make good use of everything in it (except for the foreword). The book you are holding truly constitutes a complete course on the endgame, assuming little about the reader's knowledge of the final phase of the game but taking the student to a high level of understanding.

For this edition, we have dispensed with the more complex aspects of the author's discussion of the theory of "corresponding squares," which we consider to be of diminishing value in these times of increasingly fast time controls and sudden-death play. On the other hand, for the reader's convenience we have added many new diagrams for the exercises and alternative positions.

Chapter 3

Queen vs. Pawn (or Pawns)

The queen does not always win against a pawn. A pawn which has advanced to the seventh rank often *forces* the draw. In some positions, even a pawn taking the sixth rank can save the game even if the opponent has the move.

A. QUEEN vs. PAWN ON THE SEVENTH RANK, WITH THE WHITE KING OUT OF PLAY

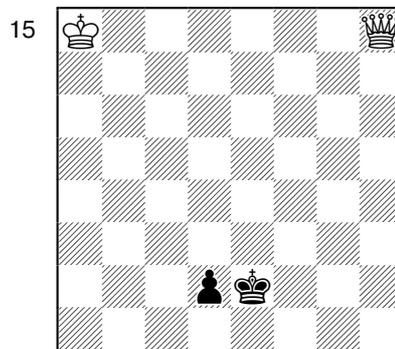
If the stronger side's king is far away, and the pawn has already reached the *seventh rank* and does not have to worry about an immediate death (that is, if it is supported by its own king), then the *a*-, *c*-, *f*-, and *h*-pawns (the rook's and bishop's pawns) can force a draw; the rest of the pawns will lose in the majority of cases.

We begin with the *center* pawns.

(See Diagram 15)

Here, White manages to paralyze the opponent's threat (...d2-d1♚): he can drive the black king to d1.

1. ♚e5+



White to move wins

White could also play 1. ♚b2, paralyzing the pawn.

1...♚d3

Or 1...♚f1(f2) 2. ♚d4! ♚e2 3. ♚e4+ ♚f2(f1) 4. ♚d3! ♚e1 5. ♚e3+.

2. ♚d5+ ♚c2

Nor does 2...♚e2 change things. If 2...♚c3/e3, Black threatens nothing, so White can bring his king one square closer.

3. ♚c4+ ♚b2(b1) 4. ♚d3!

Chapter 3

Slowly but surely, the queen approaches her goal.

4... ♔c1 5. ♕c3+ ♔d1

Forced. Now White brings the king closer, since nothing threatens it.

6. ♕b7! ♔e2

Once again, Black gets aggressive. Once again, White must defend himself against ...d2-d1♕.

7. ♕c2

Tying up the pawn. 7. ♕e5+ and 7. ♕c4+ are also good.

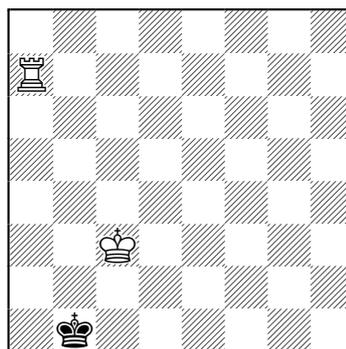
7...♔e1!

If the king retreats to e3, then with 8. ♕d1! White effectively stops the pawn, and may approach with his king unhindered.

8...♕e4+ ♔f2(f1) 9. ♕d3 ♔e1 10. ♕e3+ ♔d1 11. ♕b6, etc.

In the example just presented, it is not difficult to indicate the basic winning idea: by a system of checks, tied in with close attacks on the pawn, White forces his opponent to *occupy the square in front of the pawn*, thereby gaining the time needed to bring his king closer. Such a gain of time is commonly referred to as *winning a tempo*. The opponent's threats are temporarily paralyzed, and White makes use of this pause to bring up his reserves.

In the example we have examined, White *makes it his turn to move*. In many positions, the win is achieved by the opposite method: *giving the opponent the move*. For example, look at this position:



White to move

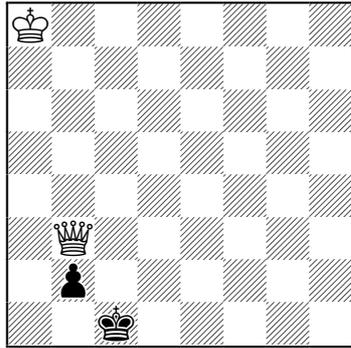
Here White quickly achieves his goal by means of a waiting move: 1. ♖a8, for example. He *gives his opponent the move*, making him run into the jaws of death. Black has to make a move which is not good for him, as he is in *Zugzwang*. White does not win directly with 1. ♖a8, rather he *loses a move* in order to create the most favorable situation for himself.

As we can see from the above, the winning methods in these two comparable positions are completely different. In the first method, we have “won” a tempo, while the second method involves “losing” a move. We also call this latter method a *waiting move*, with the aim of *giving the opponent the move*.

Returning to queen vs. pawn endings, it's not difficult to see that the

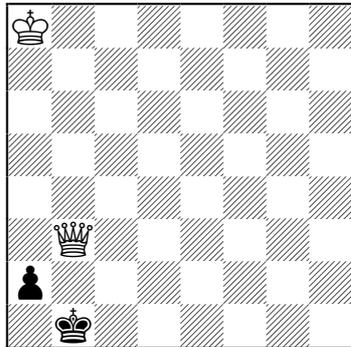
Queen vs. Pawn (or Pawns)

knight pawn (*b-* or *g-*) is just as helpless in the ending cited as a center pawn. For instance, in the following position:



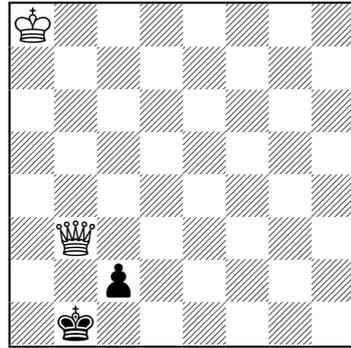
with ♔c3+ White can force Black to guard the pawn, winning a tempo to bring up the king.

Rook and *bishop* pawns enable Black to save himself by stalemate. For instance, in the position below:

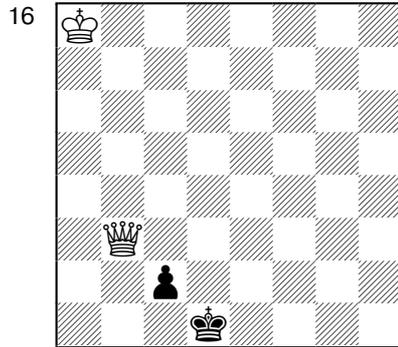


after 1...♔a1 White cannot have his king approach, because of *stalemate*. White has no other plan, since forcing Black to head for the corner can only be accomplished with the check at b3, which we have already examined.

With a bishop pawn, Black has a different stalemate combination. For example, in this position:



Black can retreat into the corner *without fearing the loss of the pawn*.



White to move. Draw

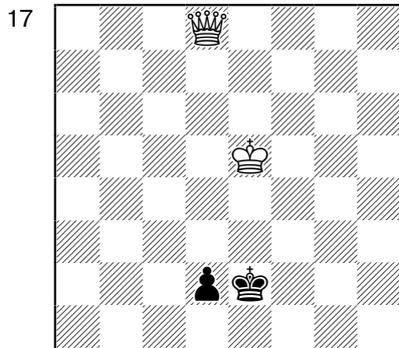
Even in the position in Diagram 16, Black gets a draw, in spite of the fact that his king goes to a less favorable position. For instance, 1. ♔b7 ♔d2 2. ♕b2 ♔d1 (of course not 2...♔d3? because of 3. ♕c1) 3. ♕d4+ ♔e2 4. ♕c3! (or 4. ♕f4 ♔d1) 4...♔d1 5. ♕d3+ ♔c1 (White now wins a tempo, which, however, proves insufficient to win the game) 6. ♔b6 ♔b2 7. ♕d2

♔b1 8. ♖b4+ ♔a2 9. ♗c3 ♔b1 10. ♗b3+ ♔a1!, etc.

And so, *if the white king does not succeed in participating in play, then a pawn (supported by the king) which has reached the seventh rank can force a draw if it is on the a-, c-, f-, or h-files; whereas the b-, d-, e-, and g-pawns lose.*

B. QUEEN vs. PAWN ON THE SEVENTH RANK WITH AN ACTIVE WHITE KING

Moving on to positions in which the white king is closer to the action (and the black pawn stands, as before, on the seventh rank), we need to point out right away that in some cases the king's role could be a *negative* one. An example could be the following position by B. Guretsky-Kornitz:



White to move. Draw

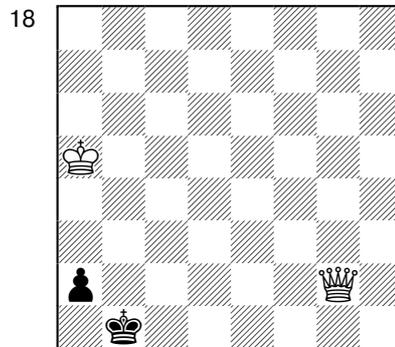
Here, White's king just gets in the way of giving check on the e-file; nor can White pin the pawn, either. The game will end in a draw, despite the fact that the black pawn is neither a rook's nor a bishop's pawn!

Leaving aside such exceptions, the white king's increased activity can only *improve* his winning chances. Even in the fight against rook's or bishop's pawns (on the seventh rank), a small improvement in the king's position will pay dividends.

For greater clarity, we examine each of these types of pawns separately.

a) THE ROOK'S PAWN

Place the black king on b1, and its pawn on b2. Let the white queen take the g2 square. Now the question arises: where to place the white king, so he can force the win? For example, we show that with the white king on a5 or on e4, it's a win with White to move (Diagrams 18 and 19).



White to move and win

To achieve his goal, White need only bring his king to b3.

1. ♔a4!

The less effective move 1. ♔b4 is just as strong.

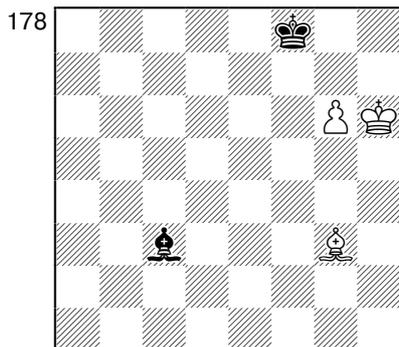
Chapter 10

Bishops of the Same Color

A. BISHOP + PAWN vs. BISHOP

This ending was so thoroughly examined in the mid-nineteenth century (1847-1856) by L. Centurini, that these days we need only to flesh out his analysis a bit.

We begin our survey with an examination of two won positions; these positions show what elements constitute an advantage in this type of endgame.



*White to move wins;
Black to move draws*

Black to move forces the draw very simply with 1...♔g8 (the king occupies

an impregnable position in front of the pawn).

If it's *White to move*, then the first thing he needs to do is to prevent 1...♔g8 with

1. ♔h7!

The king goes *in front of* the pawn, in order to: 1) prevent Black from playing ...♔g8, and: 2) prepare the pawn's advance.

1...♘b2

The bishop must guard the g7 square. Instead of 1...♘b2, he may, with equal "success," play 1...♘d4 or 1...♘f6.

2. ♘f4 ♘d4 3. ♘h6+ ♔e8 4. ♘g7!

Driving Black's bishop off the a1-h8 diagonal.

4...♘c5

Black's only move. For instance, if 4...♘e3, then 5. ♘a1 followed by g6-g7.

Black must make a move that allows his bishop to land in timely fashion back on the h6-f8 diagonal, in order to protect g7.

5. ♖e5 ♗f8

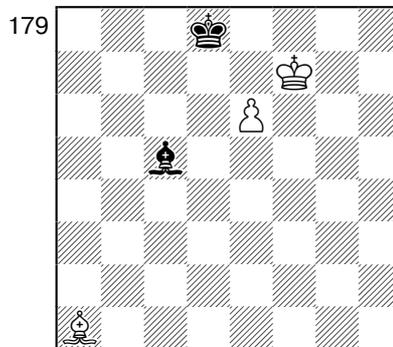
The pawn cannot move yet (6. g7 ♗xg7); but there is a significant change in the black bishop's positioning: from the spacious long diagonal it has been forced to go to the short diagonal h6-f8. Here its movements are very restricted, since it has only two squares available (g7 and h6) to move to, and those are attacked by White's king, while the third (f8) could be attacked by the enemy bishop from e5.

6. ♗d6!

This move clarifies the whole matter at once, whereas 6. ♔g8 ♗h6 7. ♗d6 (with the threat of 8. ♔h7) would have allowed Black to put up a longer resistance; on (6. ♔g8 ♗h6) 7. ♗d6, Black could have abandoned the shorter diagonal for a little while (for example, by 7...♗e3), since there would be no reason to fear 8. g7? for the time being.

Besides 6. ♗d6!, White can also win with 6. ♗f4 ♔-any 7. ♗h6.

The example we have presented demonstrates the power of the king in front of the pawn, as well as the great significance of the length of the *shorter* diagonal.



Win

Here Black must guard e7, at the intersection of the a3-f8 and d8-h4 diagonals. Both of these diagonals are spacious enough; nonetheless, here too Black loses, because *his king is badly placed*.

1. ♗f6+ ♔c8!

The king must avoid the dark squares, because 1...♔c7 would allow White to *win a tempo with a check*: on 1...♔c7, there follows 2. ♗e7 ♗d4 3. ♗d6+! and then e6-e7.

2. ♗e7 ♗e3 3. ♗b4 ♗g5

If now 4. ♗e7, then again 4...♗e3. However, White has a move allowing him to drive Black away from *both* diagonals (a3-f8 and h4-d8).

4. ♗c3!

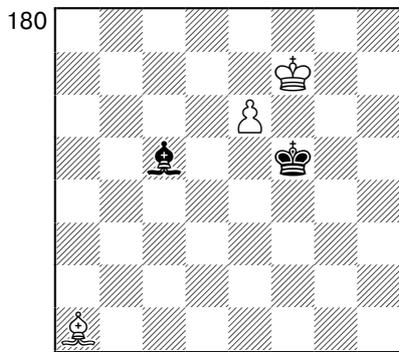
The decisive move. Black is helpless against the threat of ♗f6!

The threat of ♗f6 turned out to be stronger than ♗e7. This is not difficult to explain: *on e7, the bishop blocks its*

Bishops of the Same Color

own pawn, in view of which Black manages to move his bishop from one diagonal to the other.

The ending we have examined also allows us to explain where the black king must stand in order to get the draw: It must be where it can ward off the threat of ♖f6 – that is, *on f5*.



Draw

The only difference in this position from Diagram 179 is the black king's position.

1. ♖f6 ♜b4 2. ♜e7 ♜d2

Black could also play 2...♜a5, 2...♜c3, or 2...♜e1, since after any of those moves, the black bishop could reach the h4-d8 diagonal.

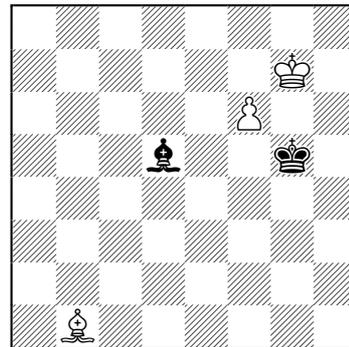
3. ♜c5 ♜g5, **draw**.

The black bishop had to abandon the long diagonal for a shorter one. However, this is not very important here, since: 1) the shorter diagonal also in this case has *sufficient* length: it has 5 squares, of which only 3 squares can be interdicted:

two by the king, and one by the bishop; 2) White does not have, in this position, the combination depicted in Diagram 179 – meaning that here White cannot drive the black bishop off the d8-h4 diagonal *with* ♜f6; in order to drive the bishop off the indicated diagonal, here he would have to take up the less useful position at e7.

If we take another look at Diagram 180, then we can see exactly which position is most favorable for Black's king: Black's king should stand *behind the pawn, holding the vertical opposition*.

If we shift Diagram 180 one file to the right – in other words, if we look at this position



the shorter diagonal gets even shorter. However, Black still obtains a draw since the shorter diagonal has just enough room: it consists of four squares (e8, f7, g6, h5), and White can only deny access to three of them.

Moving the position we are examining one further file to the right, then the shorter diagonal grows still shorter, and this is reflected in the game's result.