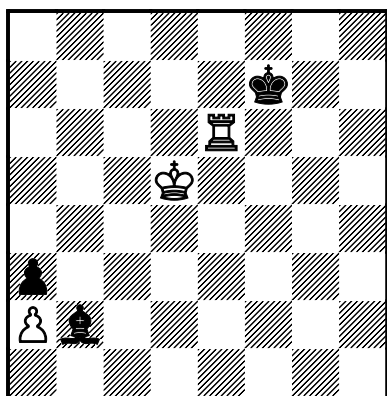


Rook and pawn versus bishop and pawn revisited⁽¹⁾

JAN TIMMAN

I have noticed that many top players use *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual* as a work of reference, and it is true that it is a good handbook, more exhaustive than Keres' *Practical Endgames*. Recently, however, I found a striking error in the book. Dvoretsky refers to my game against Velimirovic from Rio de Janeiro 1979. After White's 68th move the following endgame had arisen:

T.1. Timman – Velimirovic
Rio de Janeiro 1979



Black to move

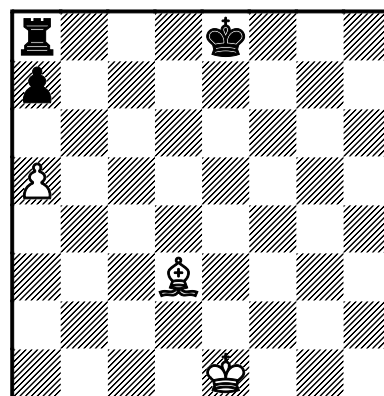
Dvoretsky makes the following general observation about this endgame: 'It was proven that White should win. However the probability of its occurrence in a practical game is rather low, while the proof itself is quite complicated, so we have decided to omit it.'

It is not true that this endgame is always winning. In 1981 I published a long article in *Schaakbulletin* 166 in which I used a diagram to indicate where the safe zones for the black king were. Later, these conclusions were completely confirmed by the database. I also indicated that Velimirovic made the decisive error in the diagrammed position by playing **68...Kf8?** (most sources erroneously give 68...Kg7), allowing White to take his king to

g5, so that its black counterpart will inevitably be cut off on the back rank. All this can be found in my book *Studies and Games*.

As an interesting illustration I will give you the following mini-study:

T.2. J. Timman
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e1e8 0310.11 3/3 Draw

1.Be4 It is important to ensure that the bishop will be able to go to square b7 before advancing the pawn. If the bishop covers the pawn from the f1–a6 diagonal, the position will always be lost. **1...Rb8** 1...0–0–0 would have been an ideal move, but unfortunately this is impossible. The position shows that Black's last move must have been a king or rook move. **2.Kd2!** Certainly not 2.a6? in view of 2...Rb2 and the white king is cut off. Now 2...Rb2 3.Kc3 Ra2 runs into 4.Kb4. **2...Kd7** 3.a6 Now this is possible. **3...Rb6** **4.Bb7** And White is safe.

Dvoretsky is not the only person who thinks that this endgame is always won. Spinhoven and Bondarenko are of the same opinion in their book *De strijd tussen loper en toren* (the battle between bishop and rook). This misunderstanding has probably been fostered by the Swiss endgame theoretician

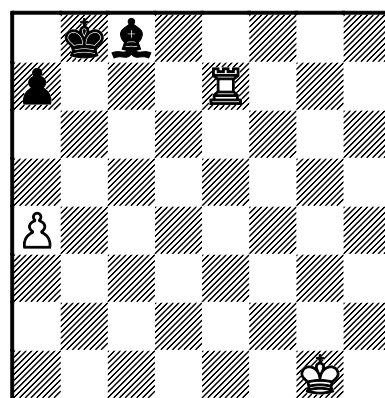
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Chéron, who had investigated the endgame extensively in the 1960s. He gave a plethora of variations, always with the conclusion that White would win, while emphasizing that there are certain key positions that White must strive for. Chéron never explicitly states that the endgame is winning as such, but a brief study of his work suggests that it is, and he probably thought so himself. It wasn't until after a very deep study of the endgame that I discovered that those key positions cannot always be realized. Remarkably enough, the endgame only occurred in my game against Velimirovic. Of the position with a white pawn on a3 against a black one on a4 and a white pawn on a4 against a black one on a5 new practical examples are found each year. Equally remarkably, most of the theoretical investigations into endgames of R + p vs. B + p without any passed pawns concentrate on positions with rook pawns not separated by a square. The position only becomes really interesting with one or more squares between the pawns. Sometimes the moves and conclusions of the database are difficult to understand, but closer analysis usually showed me what exactly was going on. In the conclusions of my investigations I will restrict myself to positions that can be explained in an acceptable and logical manner, with special focus on the crucial manoeuvres that lead to technical positions – which are the most important for endgame theory. The generally lengthy technical process then unfolds gradually. As this contains few surprises, I will ignore it.

I will start with positions with two rook pawns. **(T.3.)**

As a rule, the position is winning with the black king cut off on the back rank, regardless of the position of the white king. In the diagrammed position, however, White must watch out. After 1.Kf2? a5! 2.Ke3 Bb7! it's a draw. There is no remedy against the threat of 3...Bc6. 2...Bg4 won't do in view of 3.Kd2!, and the black bishop is dominated. White wins by playing **1.a5** before deploying the white king.

T.3. J. Timman
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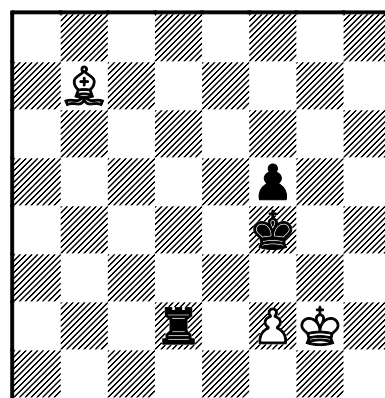


g1b8 0130.11 3/3 Win

Even with the black king not cut off White can win if he succeeds in taking his king to c5, after which Black cannot prevent his king from being cut off. The position is a draw, however, if Black has the king's bishop, since this will enable him to build a fortress by putting his bishop on the g1-a7 diagonal and advancing his pawn to a6.

There are two famous practical examples in which the pawns are separated.

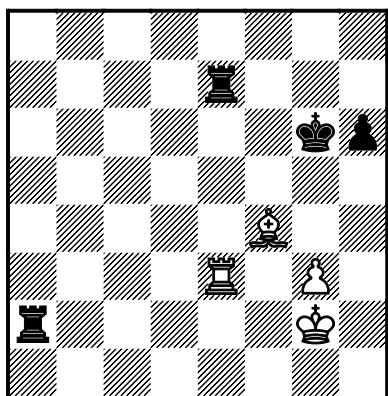
T.4. Gligoric – Polugaevsky
 Amsterdam 1970



Although Black eventually managed to win, this position is a theoretical draw. This would be different with the black pawn on f7 instead of f5, when Black would have the winning plan of taking his king to e1 via the queenside. White's counterplay then would be to attack the black f-pawn. On f7, however, it is just too far away.

(T.5.) White played **53.Kf3?** here, and now Black could have reached a winning position with 53...Txe3+ 54.Bxe3 h5, as Evans indi-

T.5. Reshevsky – Fischer
Los Angeles 1961

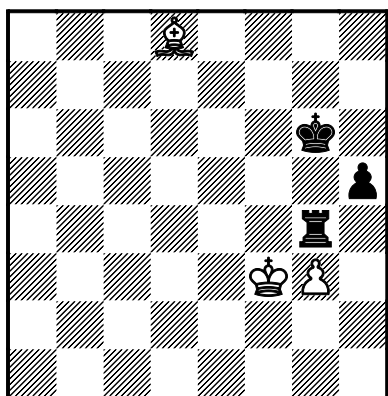


White to play

cated in *Chess Life*, since White will be unable to stop the black king from reaching the crucial g4-square.

How important it is to secure square h3 for the white king is clear to see in the following position:

T.6. J. Timman
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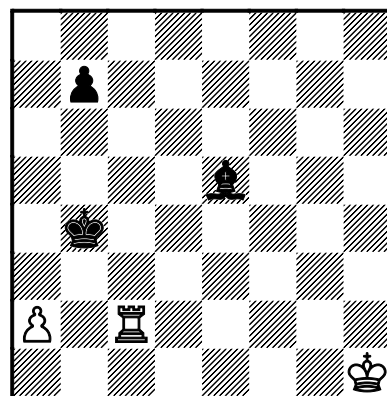


f3g6 0310.11 3/3 Draw

1.Kg2! On its way to h3. **1...Kf5 2.Kh3 Rc4 3.Be7!** The only square for the bishop, as we'll see. **3...Rc1 4.Bf8!** The point of the previous move. The bishop is forced to hide itself; otherwise Black would give check on h1 and then attack the white bishop. **4...Rb1 5.Bg7(Bh6)** and Black won't make any progress.

In the example Reshevsky-Fischer, the position would also have been winning if the black pawn had been on its starting square. Sometimes it's even winning if the king of the attacking player is far away.

T.7. J. Timman
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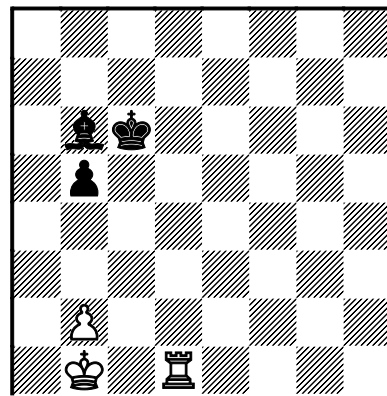
h1b4 0130.11 3/3 Win

Black is threatening to draw immediately by playing 1...Ka3, followed by 2...Bb2. **1.Re2! Bd4 2.Rd2 Bc3 3.Rd3** White has brought the situation under control. Now he has all the time in the world to take his king closer. The quickest route is via the fourth rank, since its eventual destination is c8. The win will take another 65 moves.

Remarkably enough, the diagram position with the king on h7 (instead of h1) would be a draw. In that case Black can save himself with 3...b5! 4.Kg6 Ka3! 5.Txc3+ Kxa2, and the white king is not in time to reach square e2 to restrict its black counterpart's freedom of movement. With the king on h5, however, the position would be winning by the narrowest of margins.

In the following position White has only one winning move.

T.8. J. Timman
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b1c6 0130.11 3/3 Win

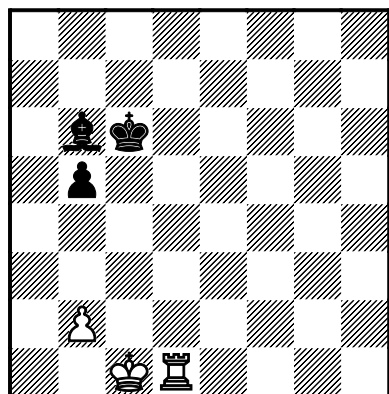
1.Rc1+! The main point is that Black can no longer take his bishop to c5. **1...Kb7** Now White has two entirely different winning plans:

A) **2.Rf1 Ka6 3.Rf6 Ka5 4.b4+! Ka6 5.Kc2 Kb7 6.Kd3**, and now it becomes clear why **2.Rh1** was insufficient for the win, since in that case, Black would be able to activate his bishop with **6...Bf2**. White must always make sure to continue to dominate the enemy bishop. After **6...Kc7 7.Ke4 Kb7 8.Kd5 Bg1 9.Rg6 Bf2 10.Rg7+ Kb6 11.Rg2 Be3 12.Ke4!** the black bishop is forced to leave the g1-a7 diagonal, after which the win is simple.

B) **2.Kc2 Bc5**, and now White will have to be careful: after **3.Kd3 Kb6! 4.Ke4 Be7! 5.Rf1 Ka5!** Black would throw up an efficient defensive line. Winning is **3.Rf1! Kb6 4.Rc3!**, and the black bishop is dominated again. The white king is threatening to penetrate via d4. If Black has a queen's bishop, he can build an effective defensive line by keeping his b6 pawn and his bishop on the long h1-a8 diagonal, from which they cannot be driven away through domination. With the white king on c1 (instead of b1) in the diagrammed position White would have no win, since he doesn't have the crucial rook check. But Black would have to play very accurately to hold his ground.

T.9. J. Timman

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c1c6 0130.11 3/3 Win

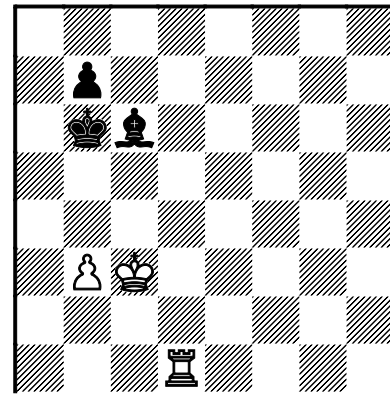
The main line goes as follows: **1.Kc2 Bc5! 2.Kd3 Bf8! 3.Rg1** Keeping the bishop from g7.

3...Kc5 4.Rg6 Kb4 And White will make no progress. All Black's moves were the only moves with which to maintain the balance.

Sometimes White is able to win because of chance circumstances.

T.10. J. Timman

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c3b6 0130.11 3/3 Win

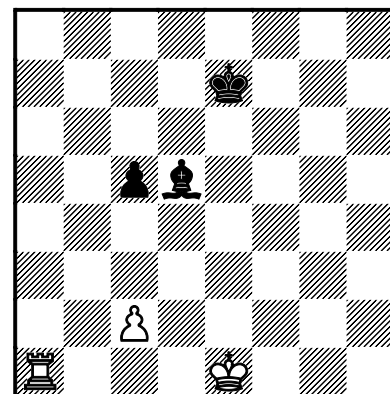
1.Kb4! Kc7 2.Ka5! b6+ 3.Ka6 And the white king has penetrated decisively.

If both players have a c-pawn, there are more winning positions. White usually wins, for example, if the pawns are on their starting squares and Black has a king's bishop.

The following position is a curious one.

T.11. J. Timman

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e1e7 0130.11 3/3 Win

The solution is: **1.0-0-0!** Black's problem is that his king remains cut off. His winning plan involves taking the king to a4. A possible continuation is: **1...Ke6 2.Kb2 Ke5 3.Ka3 Bc6 4.Kb3 Bb5 5.Kc3**, followed by **6.Rb1**. The bishop cannot stay on the f1-a6 diagonal, which means that the white king will penetrate. An important consideration is that the

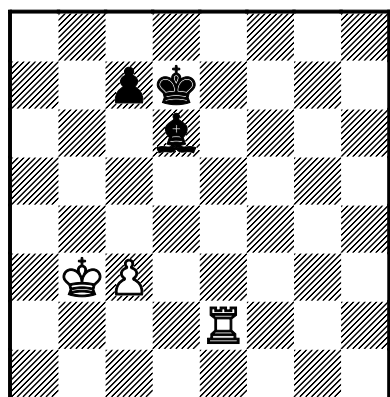
king has square c3: with the white pawn on c3 (instead of c2) the diagrammed position would be drawn.

White cannot win with 1.Rd1?, because after 1...Ke6 2.Rd2 Bf3! his own king would also be cut off. 3.Rd8 is no good, as this is met by 3...Bd5, and the trap is sprung behind the white rook.

Here, too, it is very important that the white pawn was still on its starting square, but the endgame contains an interesting paradox: generally speaking it is advisable to keep the pawn back, but once it is on the third rank, it is often better to advance it as far as possible. This can be seen in the following position.

T.12. J. Timman

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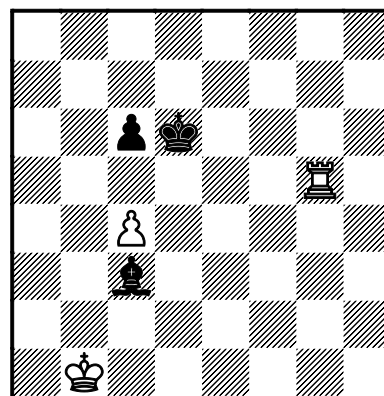
b3d7 0130.11 3/3 Win

1.Kc4 c6 2.Kd4 Centralization. **2...Kc7** 2...Ba3 would have been met by 3.Ra2!. But not 3.c4? in view of 3...Kd6, and Black has the situation under control. **3.c4!** The only way to make progress. **3...Kb6 4.Rb2+ Kc7 5.c5** And this position is winning, because the black bishop's movements are restricted. Only if the bishop can be taken to the g1-d4 diagonal does a position arise which, in certain circumstances, may be drawn. (T.13)

1.c5+ Kc7 2.Kc2 Bd4! 3.Kd3 Bf2 4.Rf5 Bg1! 5.Kc4 Threatening 6.Kb4 and 7.Kb5. **5...Be3** or **5...Kb7** And White can make no progress. With the pawns moved one square to the left, there are even fewer winning chances. The pawn structure prevents White from penetrating with the king via the queenside.

T.13. J. Timman

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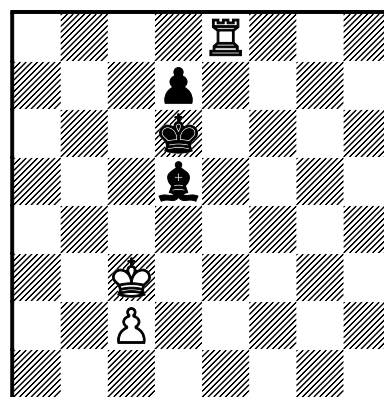


b1d6 0130.11 3/3 White cannot win

The following position is also interesting.

T.14. J. Timman

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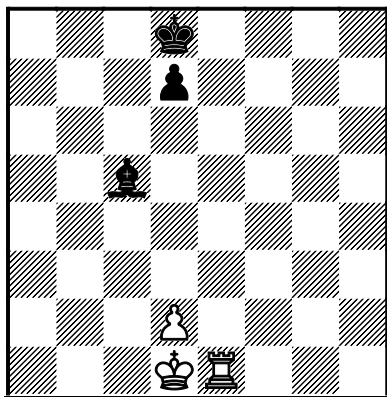
c3d6 0130.11 3/3 Win

1.Kd4 Centralization. **1...Bb7** The most tenacious defence. The obvious move now is 2.Rh8, intending. Eventually the black king will be forced back, and then White will have to play accurately: if the black king goes to e7, White takes his king to c5; if Black withdraws the king to c7, White penetrates via e5.

(T.15) Black is threatening to build an impregnable defensive line with 1...Kc7, followed by 2...d5. **1.Re4!** The same principle as in the previous position. White takes the rook to the c-file in order to upset the coordination in the enemy camp. **1...Kc7 2.Rc4! Kd6 3.Kc2** The only way. After 3.Ke2? Kd5 4.Kd3 Kc6! the white d-pawn would be blocked, giving Black time to play 5...d5. **3...Kd5 4.Kc3!** And White has the situation under control. From this point on it will take another 67 moves to the mate.

T.15. J. Timman

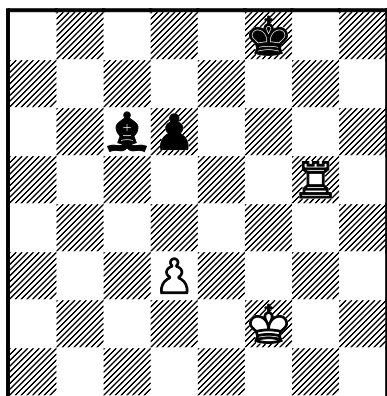
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d1d8 0130.11 3/3 Win

T.16. J. Timman

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f2f8 0130.11 3/3 Win

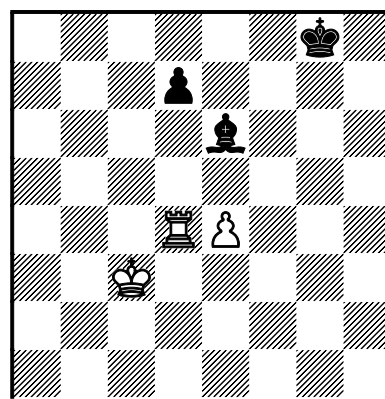
With the pawn on d2 White would have an easy win. Now he will have to advance the pawn again. **1.d4! Kf7 2.d5!** And now White will play up his king. If White starts with 1.Ke3?, Black can draw with very accurate play: **1.Ke3? Ke7 2.Kd4 Bf3!** The only move. Black wants to take his king to d7, after which

he can make his sortie via c6 and e6. **3.Kc4 Kd7 4.Rg3** After 4.Kb5 Ke6! 5.Kb6 Be2! Black will just be able to save himself. **4...Bh1!** Unlikely. Black has to keep his bishop on the long diagonal at all cost. **5.Kb5 Ke6!** Threatening to take the king to the fifth rank. **6.Rg5 Bf3** And the drawn position of the comment to White's fourth move has arisen again.

I will finish with an example of lighter calibre.

T.17. J. Timman

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c3g8 0130.11 3/3 Win

In light of the above it is not difficult to find White's moves. **1.Rd6! Kf7 2.Kd4 Kf6 3.Rb6** (3.Ra6) and Black is in zugzwang. After **3...Ke7 4.Ke5** Black will be forced back to the back rank, after which the play could continue as follows: **4...Bf7 5.Rh6 Be6 6.Rh7+ Bf7 7.Rg7 d6+ 8.Kf5 Ke8 9.Kf6 Bc4 10.Rc7 Bb3 11.Rc3** followed by **12.Rd3** and wins.