



## The Pawn Endgame:

Rook and bishop pawns versus rook pawn, all on the same side of the board

by Alexander Baburin

Positions with such a material balance occur quite often in practice, so an exact knowledge of this type of pawn endgame is important. In this article I will present some analyses of this ending.

When I began to study this endgame, I was surprised to find that there were many positions shown in various books, but there were no clear conclusions. I referred to the following books in my research:

- *Encyclopedia of Chess Endings* edited by Alexander Matanovic
- *Basic Chess Endings* by Reuben Fine
- *Endgame Preparation* by Jonathan Speelman
- *The Art of Analysis* by Mark Dvoretsky.

In my research I have come to some definite conclusions and I would like to illustrate them with examples. The positions are grouped in the following order:

- The defender's pawn has advanced.
- The defender's pawn has not advanced and the attacking side has not advanced the rook pawn.
- The defender's pawn has not advanced, but the attacking side has advanced the rook pawn.

**First Condition: The defender's pawn has advanced**

If the defender's pawn has advanced, the attacker usually wins by using triangulation.

Position No. 1



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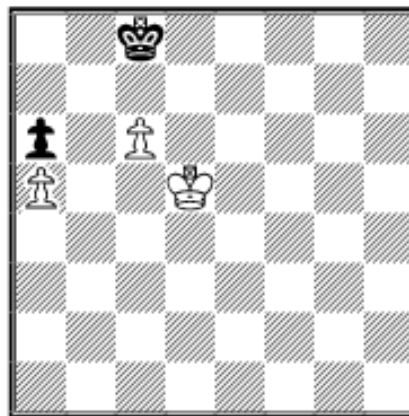
by Jan Timman

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The complete match  
with deep annotations  
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*Fahrni-Alapin*  
White to move

With Black to play, White wins easily, as follows:

**1...Kd8 2.Kd6 Kc8 3.c7**

With White to play, White uses the technique known as triangulation in order to win. The substance of triangulation is that the attacking side has more squares available for his King than the defender. We can explain this method by an example of corresponding squares in this position:

When the White King is on d5, the Black King must be on c8;

When the White King is on c5, the Black King must be on c7;

The White King can reach c5 and d5 from d4 and c4, while the Black King can reach c8 and c7 from d8 alone.

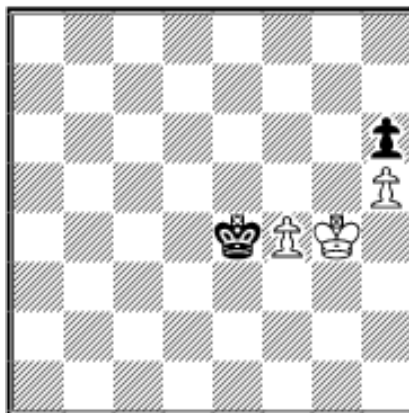
Armed with this knowledge, the solution is quite easy:

**1.Kc4 Kb8 2.Kd4! Kc8 3.Kd5**

We have reached the same position, but with Black to play.

**3...Kc7 4.Kc5 Kc8 5.Kb6 1-0**

Position No. 2



*Ushakov-Davitashvili*

USSR 1968

White to play

Here we have another example of triangulation. We can make pairs of the corresponding squares for the Kings.

- g4-e4
- f3-d4
- g3-d5
- h3, h4-d4

This means that White can reach g3 and g4 from two different squares (h3 and h4), and Black has only one corresponding square available. This should make the rest of the game clear:

**1.Kg3 Kd5 2.Kh3! Kd4 3.Kh4!**

The Black King is forced to go to a wrong square.

**3...Kd5 4.Kg3 Ke6 5.Kf2**

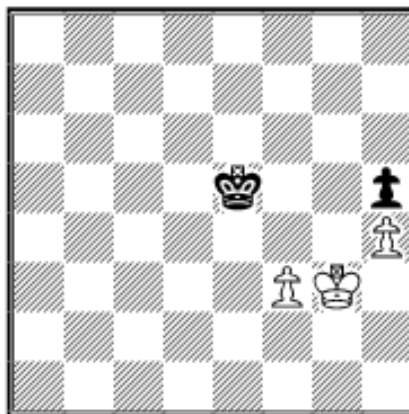
5.Kf3 also wins.

**5...Kf6 6.Ke3 Kf5 7.Kf3 Kf6 8.Ke4 Ke6 9.f5+ Kf7 10.Ke5 Ke7 11.f6+ Kf8!**

We have reached the same position as in the game Fahrni-Alapin. White wins after:

**12.Kf4 Ke8 13.Ke4! Kf8 14.Ke5!**

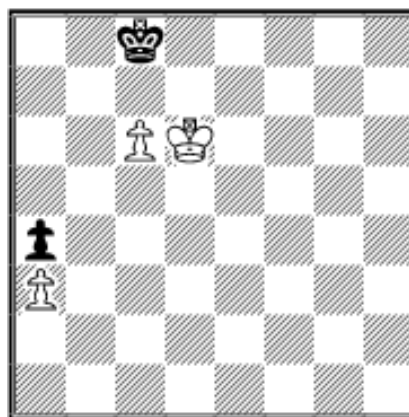
Position No. 3



*Furman-Gerusel*  
Bad Lauterberg 1977  
White to play

**1.Kf2! Kf4 2.Kg2! Ke5 3.Kf1! Kd5 4.Ke2 Kd4 5.Kd2 Ke5 6.Ke3 Kf5 7.f4 Kg4 8.Ke4 Kxh4 9.Kf3 1-0**

Position No. 4



White wins

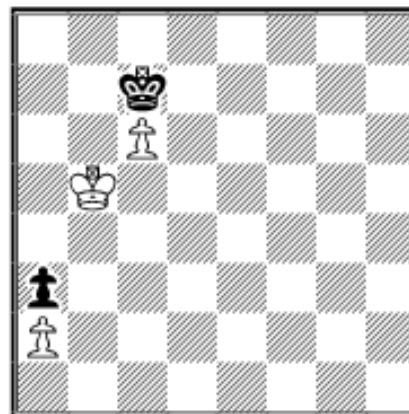
**1...Kd8 2.Kc5 Kc8 3.Kb4! Kc7 4. Kb5 and 5.Kxa4**, winning.

The defending side can rarely draw if his pawn has advanced, hence the rule:

*The Defending Side Must Not Advance The Pawn* (perhaps he dare not even touch it!).

Some of the special cases in which the defending side can draw are illustrated in the next examples:

Position No. 5

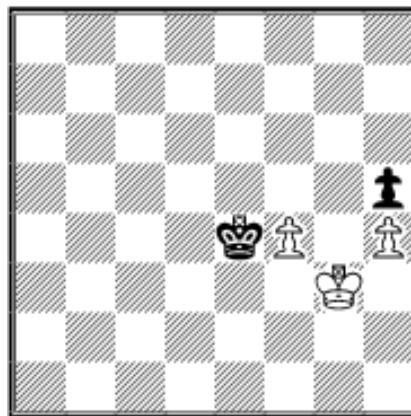


Draw

**1...Kc8**

And the a-pawn can be captured only at the expense of the c-pawn.

Position No. 6

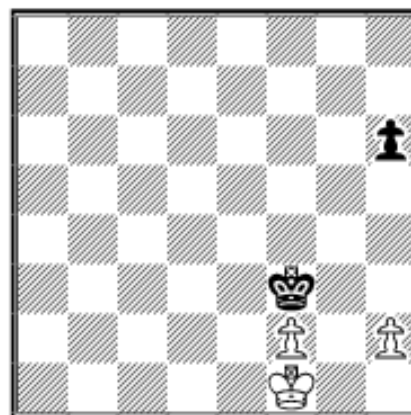


Draw

Let us compare this position with Position No. 2. Here the square h4 is not available for the White King; so Black easily holds a draw as follows:

**1...Kd5 2.Kf3 Kd4**

Position No. 7



**Chéron 1950**

Draw

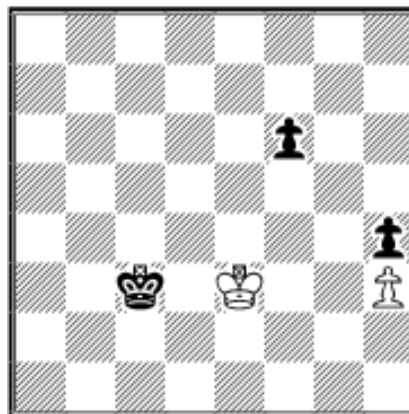
In this position, the Black King is very active and this makes the draw possible.

**1...h5 2.Kg1 h4 3.h3 Ke4 4.Kg2 Kf4 5.Kf1 Kf3 6.Kg1 Ke4 7.Kg2 Kf4 Draw**

With White to play.

**1.Ke1 h5 2.Kf1 h4 3.Kg1 (3...Ke1 Kg2) 3...Kg4! (3...h3? 4.Kf1 Kf4 5. Ke2 Ke4 6.f3+ Kf4 7.Kf2 or 3...Kf4? 4.Kg2 Kg4 5.f3+ Kf4 6.Kf2 win for White) 4.Kg2 h3+ 5.Kg1 Kf4! 6.Kf1 Kf3 7.Ke1 Kg2 Draw**

Position No. 8



*Abrosimov-Daudzvardis*

USSR 1975

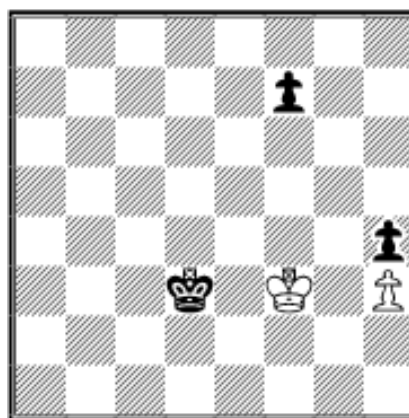
Black to play, draw

White has the opposition; so Black must move the pawn to f5, where it will be captured without any risk for White.

**1...Kc2 2.Ke2! f5 3.Ke3 Kd1 4.Kf4 Ke2 5.Kxf5 Kf3**

*The Encyclopedia of Chess Endings* gives the line 2.Kf4? Kd2! 3.Kf5 Ke3 4.Kxf6 Kf4, winning, but this is incorrect, because after 4.Kg4! the position is drawn, e.g., 4...Ke4 5.Kxh4 f5 6. Kg3 Ke3 7.Kg2.

Position No. 9



**Baburin original 1993**

White to play draws

Black to play wins.

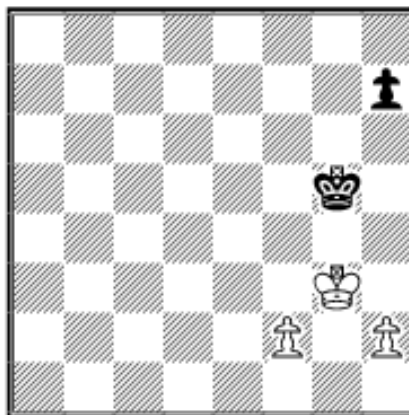
**1.Kg4 Ke3 2.Kg5!** (2.Kxh4? f5 3. Kg3 f4+ 4.Kg2 Ke2 loses) 2...f6+ 3.Kg4! Ke4 4.Kxh4

If Black is to play, 1...f6! 2.Kf4 Ke2! (2...Kd4? 3.Kf5! Ke3 4.Kg4! draws) 3.Kg4 Ke3 *Zugzwang!* Now White must take the pawn with the Black King on e3 where it supports the promotion of the pawn. 4.Kxh4 f5 wins.

***Second Condition: The defender's pawn has not advanced and the attacking side has not advanced his rook pawn***

Usually, the attacking side wins easily, using the reserve tempo at the proper moment, as in our next example.

Position No. 10

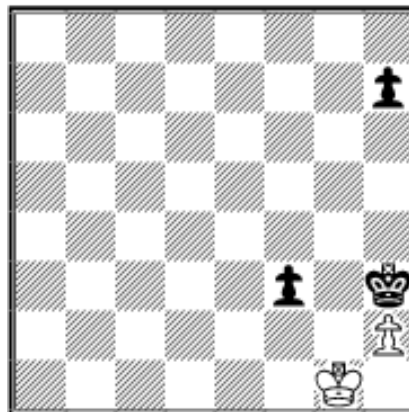


White wins

**1.f4+ Kf5 2.Kf3 Kf6 3.Kg4 Kg6 4.f5+ Kf6 5.Kf4 Kf7 6.Ke5 Ke7 7.f6+ Kf7 8.Kf5 Kf8 9.Ke6 Ke8 10.f7+ Kf8 11.Kf6 h5 12.Kg6 h4 13.h3**

If the attacker's Rook pawn has not moved, a draw is possible in some special cases only.

Position No. 11



**Grigoriev 1920**

White to play draws

Black to play wins

**1.Kf2 Kg4 2.Ke3!**

Now Black has to waste a reserve tempo.

**a) 2...h6 2.Kf2 Kf4 4.Ke1!** (not 4.Kf1? Ke3 5.Ke1 h5! 6.Kf1 h4 7. Ke1 f2+! 8.Kf1 Kf3 9.h3 Kg3) **4... Ke3 5.Kf1 h5 6.Ke1 f2+ 7.Kf1 Kf3 8.h3 Kg3 9.h4**

**b) 2...h5 3.Kf2 Kf4 4.Kf1! Ke3 5.Ke1**

Black to play wins.

**1...Kg4 2.Kf2 Kf4 3.Kf1 Ke3 4. Ke1 f2+ 5.Kf1 Kf3 6.h4 Kg3 7.h5 h6**

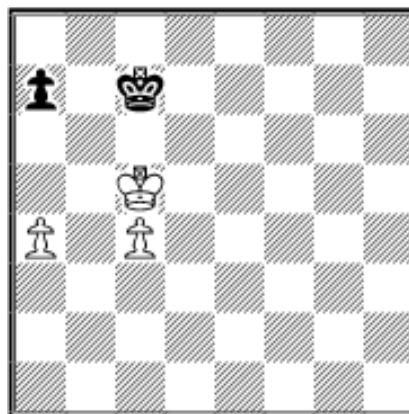
This study gives us a second rule:

***The Attacker Should Not Move The Rook Pawn Without A Good Reason.***

***Third Condition: The defender's pawn has not advanced and the attacker has moved the Rook pawn***

This type of position is the most difficult. Usually the defending side will hold the draw, but he has to prevent the attacker's only winning plan. First I would like to show this plan:

Position No. 12



**Maizelis 1955**

White to play wins.

**1.Kd5 Kd7 2.a5!**

Black has to abandon the opposition.

**2...Kc7 3.Ke6 Kc6 4.a6!**

Once again Black has to abandon the opposition:

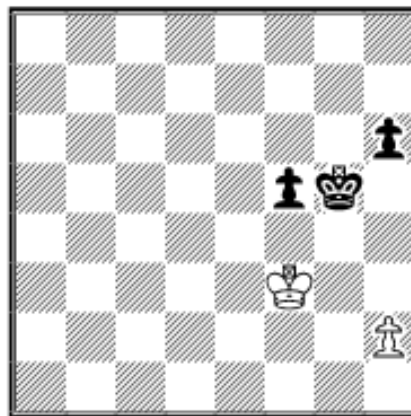
**4...Kc5 5.Kd7 Kxc4 6.Kc6!**

Black to play draws.

**1...Kd7 2.Kd5 Kc7 3.a5 Kd7 4.a6 Kc7 5.Ke6 Kc6! 6.Ke7 Kc7**

In practice the attacking side has won many games using this plan, as in our next example.

Position No. 13



**Vaganian-Sunye Neto**  
Rio de Janeiro 1979

**1.Kg3? h5! 2.Kf3** (2.Kf2 Kg4!; 2.Kg2 Kf4!) 2...h4 3.Kg2 Kg4 4. Kf2 Kf4  
5.Ke2 Ke4 6.Kf2 Kd3 7. Kf3 h3!

Maizelis analysed this position in 1956, but with colors reversed (*Encyclopedia of Chess Endings*, position No. 1025), and concluded that the position was winning. However, a number of readers of *Shakmaty v SSSR* refuted his conclusion!

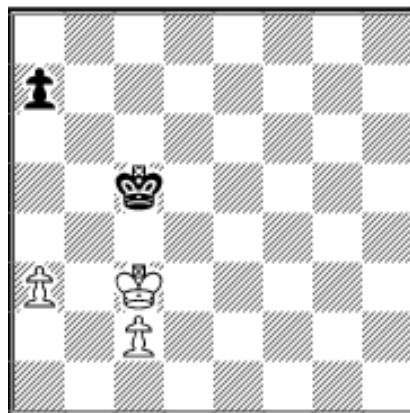
Here is their discovery: When the Black King reaches the fourth rank, White must take the opposition if the Black pawn is on h4 or h6, and must abandon the opposition if the pawn is on h5.

The correct continuation is shown below:

**1.Ke2!! Kg4 2.Ke3 h5 3.Kf2! Kf4 4.Ke2 Ke4 5.Kf2 h3 6.Ke2 h3 7. Kf2 Kd3  
8.Kf3 Kd2 9.Kf2! Draw**

Our next example shows that the attacking side can win if the Bishop pawn has not yet moved.

Position No. 14

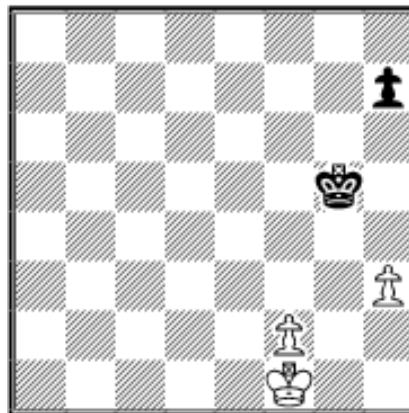


**Ribli-Ree**  
Amsterdam 1973

**1.a4 Kd5 2.Kb4 Kc6 3.Ka5 Kb7** (3...Kc5 4.Ka6 Kb4 5.a5 Ka4 6.c3) 4.Kb5

Kc7 5.Kc5 Kd7 6.c4 Kc7 7.Kd5 wins

Position No. 15



**Baburin original 1993**

White to play wins

Black to play draws

This position is quite interesting. White must activate his King before the Bishop pawn is moved. Black has to prevent this idea.

**1.Kg1!**

The square g2 is mined: 1.Kg2? Kf4! 2.f3 Kf5! (2...Kg5? 3.Kg3 Kf5 4.h4 Ke5 5.Kg4 Kf6 6.Kh5 Kg7 7.Kg5 Kf7 8.Kf5 Ke7 9.h5 Kf7 10.f4 Ke7 11.Ke5 Kf7 12.Kd6 Kf6 13.h6! or 6... Kf7!? 7.Kh6 Kg8 8.h5 Kh8 9.Kg5 Kg7 10.f4) 3.Kg3 Kg5 4.f4+ Kf6 5.Kg4 Ke7! and we have reached the position analysed by the *Shakmaty v SSSR* readers.

**1...Kf5 2.Kh2!!**

White plans Kg3.

**2...Kf4 3.Kg2 Kg5 4.Kg3 Kf5 5.h4 Kf6 6.Kg4 Kg6 7.h5+ Kf6 8.Kf4 Ke6 9.Kg5 Kf7 10.Kf5 Ke7 11.Ke5 Kf7 12.f3! Ke7 13.f4 wins.**

With Black to play . . .

1...Kf5!! 2.Kg1 Ke4 3.Kg2 Kf4

and White has to move the f-pawn.

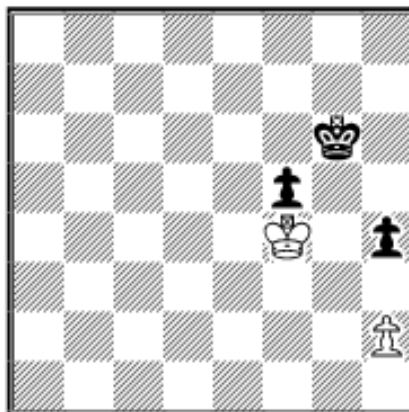
Summing Up, I Would Like To Give Some General Rules:

1. *The defending side should try to NOT MOVE his pawn.*
2. *The attacking side should try to NOT MOVE his rook pawn.*
3. *If the attacking side HAS MOVED the rook pawn, he should try to keep the move of the Bishop pawn in reserve.*

For players who like to analyze for themselves I would like to offer the following two positions to test their knowledge.

GM Jonathan Speelman, in his remarkable book [\*Endgame Preparation\*](#) (I recommend this book for anyone, especially a young player who wishes to improve his or her chess knowledge.) gives the following position

Position No. 16



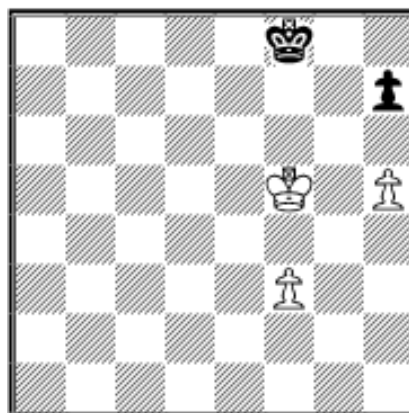
*Tarjan-Larsen*  
Riga 1979

Speelman now gives the following line:

“**1.Ke3** (White could also play 1.Ke5 Kg5 2.h3 Kg6 3.Kd4! Kf6 4.Kd5 when the Black King has no way to get active, e.g. 4...Kg5 5.Ke5 Kg6 6.Kd4 Kf7 7.Ke5! =).”

Is this assessment correct?

Position No. 17



*Azmaiparashvili-Eoljan*

**1...Kf7 2.Kg4 Kf6 3.Kf4 Kf7 4.Kf5 Ke7 5.Ke5 Kf7 6.Kd6 Kf6 7.Kd7 Kf7 8.h6 Kg6 9.f4 Kf7 10.f5 Kf6 draw.**

Can you improve on the continuations of both players?

## Answers

### Position No. 16

#### *Tarjan-Larsen*

The assessment is wrong.

After 1.Ke5?? Kg5 2.h3 Kg6 3.Kd4! Kh5! 4.Kd5 Kh6! 5.Kd4 Kg6 Black wins.

### Position No. 17

#### *Azmaiparashvili-Eoljan*

After 1...Kf7? 2.f4! White wins.

Correct was 1...Ke7! =.

Later, 3...Kf7? was wrong as White could win by 4.Ke5! So correct was 3...Ke6 4.Kg5 Kf7.

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Alex Baburin is a grandmaster living in Ireland. He is the editor and publisher of [Chess Today](#), the first internet-based daily chess newspaper. This article originally appeared in *Inside Chess*.

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