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*Yes, I have a question for Bruce!*

## COLUMNISTS

## *The Q & A Way*

Bruce Pandolfini



## Cornered in the Good, the Bad and the Ugly Corner

**Question** I had a question about two very difficult endgame checkmates (at least difficult for me). They are the knight, bishop and king vs. king endgame and the 2 bishops and king vs. king endgame. I know there is a pattern in rook and king vs. king endgames, as you just keep shortening the king's space. When I try to do the two endgames above, I just can't seem to handle them. I've tried practicing against a computer with no avail. I also have your book *Pandolfini's Endgame Course*, where in chapter 2 it explains some of these, but I can't actually grip the knowledge. Is there any easier way to practice or learn these two types of mates? I'm provisionally rated around 1114 USCF. **Vinn Piskorski (USA)**

**Answer** Neither of the two basic mates you've referred to occur that much in actual play, though the one with two bishops is significantly easier. There are many books that explain the mating method, so it would be wise to have a few of these volumes around, if only for checking purposes. But in this case I wouldn't rely on books as your main tool. Instead I think it more prudent to use software. I realize you say you've already tried practicing the two-bishop mate against a computer, but it's not clear how you've done that. Since you didn't spell out exactly what you did, I'm going to suggest that you go back to your mouse and monitor, this time with a particular procedure in



mind.

Using a chess program, set up a position from the two-bishop basic mate, perhaps drawing it from an endgame or introductory text. Taking the superior side, try to play out the position to mate. With some reflection, start by deciding on your very first move. Then arrange for the computer to move from the same starting position. If the computer's move is the same one you chose, no problem. If it's different, however, try to see how. Be sure to think it over. Then, whether or not you've understood, accept the computer's move as being right and play it.

Once the computer responds, try to think up the superior side's second move, and again compare it to what the computer suggests is right. As before, try to figure out why the computer selected the move it did. Whether you wind up understanding it or not, play that second move and continue on this route to mate, deciding on successive moves and comparing them to the computer's choices. Keep following the computer's plan, even if you don't comprehend or worse, begin to suspect the computer doesn't seem to know what it's doing either. Eventually it will (in a sense), and that path should serve you sufficiently for now. In time, you should begin to be slightly more receptive to what the computer has decided is the right variation. The sheer weight of steady application will impress an unexpressed technique. Do this exercise enough times and I have no doubt you'll ultimately develop a greater facility for coping with the two-bishop-and-king basic mate, whether you can articulate the method or not.

Mastering the bishop-and-knight basic mate is a much harder task. Even after understanding what textbooks have to say about it, you'll probably have practical problems executing it in real game situations. The study obstacles are compounded here, since most books that treat this mate tend to emphasize variations over explanations, and the student is left to figure out the equation largely for himself. But I should caution you. If you're looking for an all-purpose method to follow blindly, without any move-to-move thought – in other words, an approach antithetical to the game itself – you're doomed to failure. Even after getting some general ideas down, you're still going to have to calculate specific variations right down to the end, until the lone king is lassoed in a proper corner and mated.

The winning concepts can be found in Cheron or Averbakh, or even in an ABCs of Chess article I think I wrote for the January 1979 or 1980 issue of *Chess Life*. (It was a long time ago.) I'm not going to detail all of the variations here, since that would require an examination of

specific chess positions, and the parameters of this column do not allow for that. Nonetheless, here are some notions and guidelines to enable you to reinforce – though not replace (you can't replace the indispensable) – the variations and explanations you've probably already studied which discuss the drive from a bad or wrong corner toward a good or right one. Other aspects of this mate, such as the right-triangled nets and much talked about "w" maneuver will have to be discussed in some future column, assuming the editor allows me keep my job after this one.

Since chess is a goal-oriented activity, it's okay to work backward, from the final drive toward mate to primeval beginnings, where pieces may be randomly placed without seemingly any ultimate purpose, kind of like some of the friends I made back in my Washington Square Park days. Let's start with two things in mind. First, expect your opponent to play the most resistant moves possible. Second, don't lose sight of the fact that the only things you can count on are those you can force.

From the outset, keep your eyes on a good corner. The lone king can be mated by force only in such a place. (The king can be mated in a bad corner, of course, but only if your opponent makes a mistake or cooperates, and we're not interested in what can't be forced.) Now there are two good corners and two bad ones. The good ones are those of the same color on which your bishop travels. Most schachspielers know all this, so there's nothing revelatory so far.

Before the king can be forced to one of the good corners (it doesn't meaningfully matter which one, as long as you follow up correctly), it must be contained. Usually it gets contained in a bad corner because the defender, realizing his days are numbered, heads to a place where he can find temporary refuge. He knows, after all, that mate can't be forced in a bad corner. (Yes, the bad corners are also referred to as the wrong ones and the good corners as the right ones). Even if the inferior side doesn't cooperate, you're going to force him there. When the king has been trapped in a bad corner, you should systematically aim to drive it toward a good one. Most of us have heard or read about this final drive toward a good corner, too, so at this point there's still nothing new under the sun.

Once you've trapped the king in a bad corner, the concluding drive toward the Stanley Cup is impelled by a concerted SWAT team effort, where the bishop and knight are alternately called upon to guard square after square along the outer row leading toward the cornered mating net, and that technique works no matter which good corner you

head for. As we've already said, it starts with the lone king confined to a bad corner, which means either on the actual bad corner square or occupying either adjacent square on the outside edge. Furthermore, the attacking king should be in position on either c6, f6, f3, or c3 (in other words, on one of the corners of the inner box of squares critical to much endgame play, what some players call the "larger center.") The king should be placed on that inner-box corner, diagonally across from the actual bad corner in question. If the designated bad corner is a8, the attacking king should occupy c6; if the designated bad corner is h8, the attacking king should occupy f6; if the designated bad corner is h1, the attacking king should occupy f3; and if the designated bad corner is a1, the attacking king should occupy c3.

Meanwhile, with the attacking king in place, the knight should be poised to attack the designated bad corner by moving to a square that guards it. If the designated bad corner is a8, the knight should be able to go to b6 if the attacker wishes a1 to be the good corner, or c7 if the attacker wants h8 to be the good corner. If the designated bad corner is h8, the knight should be able to go to f7 if the attacker wants a8 to be the good corner, or g6 if the attacker wants h1 to be the good corner. If the designated bad corner is h1, the knight should be able to go to g3 if the attacker wants h8 to be the good corner, or f2 if the attacker wants a1 to be the good corner. And if the designated bad corner is a1, the knight should be able to go to c2 if the attacker wants h1 to be the good corner, or b3 if the attacker wants a8 to be the good corner.

Finally, the bishop must be flexible enough to join the action or temporize purposefully. This can be accomplished most admirably (though not necessarily) by having the bishop centralized. Once your three units are so disposed, you're ready for the final push toward the good corner.

The final drive commences when the knight is able to seize control of the designated bad corner, whether the knight-move is check or not. If it's check, you'll need to temporize with the bishop for a turn. Simply move the bishop along the diagonal it already occupies that leads to the square it must go to next move, horizontally or vertically adjacent to the designated bad corner. If it's not check, the lone king will be forced to move to the third square along the outer edge heading for the desired good corner. As it does so, your bishop should then be able to move into the square horizontally or vertically adjacent to the starting bad corner, so that it then guards the second square inward along the outer row leading to the chosen good corner (in other words, the square the lone king had occupied a move before).

Thus, if you need to guard b8, your bishop must be positioned to move to a7; if you wish to guard a7, your bishop must be poised to move to b8; if you wish to guard g8, your bishop must be ready to move to h7; if you want to guard h7, then you need to be able to move your bishop to g8; if you want to guard h2, then your bishop must be stationed to move to g1; if you want to guard g1, your bishop must be prepared to move to h2; if you want to guard b1, your bishop must be able to move to a2; and if you want to guard a2, your bishop must be able to move to b1. It's that simple.

If the knight move that guards the bad corner is check, you'll have to waste a turn after the enemy king moves to safety. This way, you'll force the lone king to move to the third square heading toward the promised land. As already indicated, in most cases in this ending, where you have to gain or lose a move, you can do so by moving the bishop along the diagonal it already occupies so that you still keep contact with the square the bishop must move to next (or, in other instances, so that the bishop keeps an eye on a square it must continue to guard).

How do you figure out which good corner is the right one to settle on for the final drive? Start by determining which square the knight is going to occupy so that it guards the bad corner and whether in doing so it will block the invasion of the bishop. The bishop must be free to move to the square horizontally or vertically adjacent to the starting bad corner, so that it can help drive the lone king in the other direction toward the proper good corner.

Thus, if the knight occupies g3, the bishop must be able to move to g1 and drive the lone king toward h8; if the knight occupies f2, the bishop must be able to occupy h2 and drive the lone king toward a1; if the knight occupies g6, the bishop must be able to occupy g8 and drive the lone king toward h1; if the knight occupies f7, the bishop must be able to occupy h7 and drive the lone king toward a8; if the knight occupies c7, the bishop must be able to occupy a7 and drive the lone king toward h8; if the knight occupies b6, the bishop must be able to occupy b8 and drive the lone king toward a1; if the knight occupies b3, the bishop must be able to occupy b1 and drive the lone king toward a8; if the knight occupies c2, the bishop must be able to occupy a2 and drive the lone king toward h1. Clearly, the entire process only works if bishop and knight assist each other harmoniously, and this is true even from the start, when choosing the appropriate mating corner. Usually, they aid each other best when they guard squares different in color. To guard opposite colors they must occupy the same color -- but



that's just chess.

Once the bishop guards the second square inward along the row heading toward the hoped for mating corner, your knight is free to be repositioned to guard the third square along that key row, since it no longer has to continue guarding the designated bad corner. The bishop, remember, prevents the lone king from going back to where it started (for the purpose of this discussion), to the designated bad corner, so the knight is relieved of its initial responsibility. With the first two squares of the outer row leading to the good corner secured as a block, the lone king is therefore forced to move toward the good corner. If the lone king is on c8 it will have to go to d8; if it's on h6 it will have to go to h5; if it's on f1 it will have to go to e1; and if it's on a3 it will have to go to a4.

Where does the knight then go, after the lone king has moved to the fourth square along the Khyber Pass? It should go in the direction of the good corner, to the square immediately diagonally contiguous to the friendly king. For example, if the friendly king starts on c6 and the good corner is at h8, the knight should go from c7 to d5; if the friendly king is on c6 and the good corner is at a1, the knight should go from b6 to d5; if the friendly king is on f6 and the good corner is at a8, the knight should go from f7 to e5; if the friendly king is on f3 and the good corner is at a1, the knight should go from f2 to e4; if the friendly king is on f3 and the good corner is at h8, the knight should go from g3 to e4; if the friendly king is on c3 and the good corner is at h1, the knight should go from c2 to d4; and if the friendly king is on c3 and the good corner is at a8, the knight should go from b3 to d4. This class of knight-move also prevents the lone king from leaving the confines of the outer row: that is, the knight guards the lone king's possible escape square on the second row in from the edge.

Thus, if the knight has moved to d5 it guards the potential escape square e7 for the lone king on the a8-h8 line and b4 for the lone king on the a1-a8 line; if the knight has moved to e5 it guards the potential escape square d7 for the lone king on the a8-h8 line and g4 for the lone king on the h1-h8 line; if the knight has moved to e4 it guards the potential escape square d2 for the lone king on the a1-h1 line and g5 for the lone king on the h1-h8 line; and if the knight has moved to d4 it guards the potential escape square e2 for the a1-h1 line and b5 for the a1-a8 line. Note that for most of these situations there is a parallel mirror-image position going in the opposite direction.

After the knight has been so centralized, securing control of a potential escape square, the lone king then has two ways to go: back toward the

bad corner, to the third square along the edge from the bad corner, or toward the good corner, to the fifth square along the edge from the bad corner. We shall first consider what happens when the king moves back toward the bad corner, although, to the unschooled eye, moving toward the good corner seemingly provides an opportunity for escape, and accordingly is the variation most resistors would choose.

If the lone king has moved back to the third square along the edge from the bad corner, the centralized knight can move into position to check the king, denying the king any further use of the third square along the outer row leading from the bad corner to the good one. The ideal place to give this check is on the second row in from the edge row, the knight occupying the fifth square on that very row (the same potential escape square it was guarding on the previous turn). After giving such a check, the knight is actually on the same row that contains the bishop. Thus, if the bishop is on a7, you'll want the knight to move to e7 to guard c8; if the bishop is on g8, you'll want the knight to move to g4 to guard h6; if the bishop is on h2, you'll want the knight to move to d2 to guard f1; and if the bishop is on b1, you'll want the knight to move to b5 to guard a3.

Once the lone king moves out of check, from the third to fourth square along the edge out from the designated bad corner toward the desired good corner, it will be menacing the knight, threatening to take it. You wouldn't want to move the knight because it guards the third square along the action-packed edge, preventing the lone king's retreat -- that is, you shouldn't surrender what you've just gained, not if you want your play to have a logic to it. So the next move is expected: to protect the knight with your king. Thus, if the knight needs to be protected on e7, you'll move your king to d6; if the knight needs to be protected on g4, you'll move your king to f5; if the knight needs to be protected on d2, you'll move your king to e3; and if the knight needs to be protected on b5, you'll move your king to c4. (As an exercise, you fill in the other mirror-image possibilities, knowing that appropriate exercise can be good.)

The lone king's next move is forced: to move to the fifth square along the outer row from the starting bad corner. Thus, if the lone king is on d8, it will have to go to e8; if it is on h5, it will have to go to h4; if it is on e1, it will have to go to d1; and if it is on a4, it will have to go to a5. (Once again, you should work out the mirror-image stuff, for your own fun and profit.) In all such cases, the lone king will then be threatening to move off the outer row to the apparent freedom of the adjacent row, one horizontal or vertical row in from the edge,

depending on what the situation is, horizontally or vertically. The best way to stop this breakout is to use the attacking king once again. Here, for example, if the lone king is on e8, the attacking king will want to go to e6; if the lone king is on h4, the attacking king will want to go to f4; if the lone king is on d1, the attacking king will want to go to d3; and if the lone king is on a5, the attacking king will want to go to c5. (Naturally, there are other corresponding positions here too, in this matter-antimatter parallel universe.)

At this juncture the lone king will have two possibilities: to move back toward the bad corner or to move ahead toward the good corner. Moving toward the bad corner is immediately refuted by a bishop check. Thus, if the lone king moves back to d8, the bishop checks on b6, driving the king back to e8; if the lone king moves back to h5, the bishop checks on f7, driving the king back to h4; if the lone king moves back to e1, the bishop checks on g3, driving the king back to d1; and if the lone king moves back to a4, the bishop checks on c2, driving the king back to a5. In all such cases, and their mirror images, the attacking side, without any real work, gains control of the fourth square along the edge heading toward the good corner, and the process continues apace.

But what happens if the lone king moves ahead, along the outer edge, to the third square from the good corner? At that point it would seem to be threatening to break out. If the lone king is on f8, for example, it will be threatening to move to g7; if it's on h3, it will be threatening to move to g2; if it's on c1, it will be threatening to move to b2; and if it's on a6, it will be threatening to move to b7. And that's just half the story.

There are two ways to deal with this lust for freedom, to adumbrate Nietzsche and Nimzovich. In the old way, the bishop is free to guard the potential escape square directly. For instance, if the potential escape square is g7, the bishop could guard it from d4; if the potential escape square is g2, the bishop could guard it from d5; if the potential escape square is b2, the bishop could guard it from e5; and if the potential escape square is b7, the bishop could guard it from e4.

Another way to go is to begin setting up a certain kind of mating net, which hasn't been discussed in the answer to this question so far and will not be explored deeply here. But merely to presage the concept without showing it in all its encompassing totality, consider this: instead of guarding g7, the bishop could move to e3 and then g5; instead of guarding g2, the bishop could move to c4 and then e2; instead of guarding b2, the bishop could move to d6 and then b4; and



instead of guarding b7, the bishop could move to f5 and then d7. Each of these maneuvers leads to the setting up of a net that slightly shortens the process, but would grossly (and unacceptably) lengthen this text were I to discuss those possibilities further. Since an end is called for, I'm going to restrain my usual impulses toward gross excess and opt for the old way. That works nicely too.

Let's say we indeed choose to guard the potential escape square with the bishop and save the net-forming for some other explanation – a distant one, relating to a galaxy far, far away. If we guard g7 with the bishop from d4, the lone king must move back to e8; if we guard g2 with the bishop from d5, the lone king must move back to h4; if we guard b2 with the bishop from e5, the lone king must move back to d1; and if we guard b7 with the bishop from e4, the lone king must move back to a5. Once again, we shall jettison discussion of the mirror images, no matter how haunting they may be.

Once the king has moved back to the fourth square from the good corner, which is the fifth square from the bad corner, we can secure the fourth square along the outer row heading toward the good corner with the bishop. Thus, with the lone king on e8, the bishop can go to b6; with the lone king on h4, the bishop can go to f7; with the lone king on d1, the bishop can go g3; and with the lone king on a5, the bishop can go to c2. As before, you should figure out the mirror-image situations for your own practice. Whichever outer row we're fighting for, the battle for half of it will have been won by the combined pieces. In all cases, after the bishop takes control of the fourth square along the edge from the bad corner, the lone king will have to move to that third square from the good corner: to f8 when the good corner is h8; to h3 when the good corner is h1; to c1 when the good corner is a1; and to a6 when the good corner is a8.

At this point, the knight is free to move, attempting to reposition in order to seize control of the fifth square along the edge leading to the good corner. The best knight-move is toward the direction of the good corner, to the square immediately diagonally contiguous to the friendly king. Thus, with the attacking king on e6, the knight should go to f5; with the attacking king on f4, the knight should go to e3; with the attacking king on d3, the knight should go to c4; and with the attacking king on c5, the knight should go to d6. (To mirror what has already been enunciated, I advocate that you do the mirror-image thing on your own to receive a full measure of benefit.)

If the lone king then moves back toward the bad corner by occupying

the fifth square from the bad corner along the edge, the knight then checks on the square diagonally adjacent to the actual good corner square. Thus, in the type of situation under discussion, if the lone king is on e8, the knight checks from g7; if the lone king is on h4, the knight checks from g2; if the lone king is on d1, the knight checks from b2; and if the lone king is on a5, the knight checks from b7.

Both kings then move toward the knight; the defensive king to attack the knight and get out of check; the attacking king to secure the knight. The defensive king must move toward the good corner and the attacking king follows suit. Thus, for example, if the lone king has moved to g8, the attacking king goes to g6; if the lone king has moved to h2, the attacking king goes to f2; if the lone king has moved to b1, the attacking king goes to b3; and if the lone king has moved to a7, the attacking king goes c7.

By this time you should have some idea how to handle the drive toward the good corner. I'll leave you a little of the work to figure out the actual mates, which I suspect you probably have some inclination for, based on your previous efforts and the fact that you have spent a millennium reading this far. But I won't delineate or specify anything else at this time, despite my college experiences and all that indefatigable study of G.E. Moore. You can get concrete variations and a filling out of this text from any number of sources, which naturally you'll want to consult. Good luck on your way toward good corners and basic-mate executions. If you or any other readers are interested in similar and further discussions, let me know and I'll certainly pass on that information.

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