

# Bishop and Knight vs Lone King

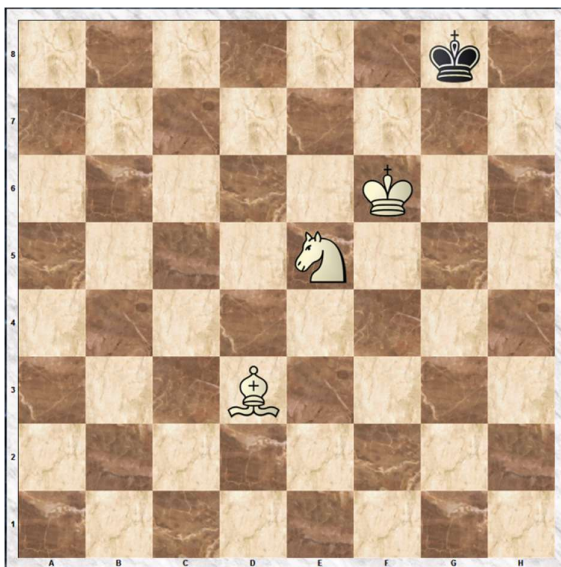
by Brad Horne

If you have done some endgame studies before, you may know that this particular pawnless ending is one of the most tricky to master. It is often at the player's annoyance, holding a Bishop and Knight up in material, to be unable to complete the mate in fifty moves over the board... and all too often, it ends in a draw!

I had the unique experience of sparring this ending out with a friend, over and over when I was about 18. My hope is that after you have gone through this material and practiced the ending with a friend a few times yourself, you too will be able to finish it off without needing to stress about time controls or "how to do it".

This study is done in a way that you can follow some basic patterns, rather than follow a tablebase through, which although "perfect", tend to break with patterns and simplicity in order to shave off one or two moves. In other words, you might find quicker mates than in the lines given here, but with these lines and following the patterns and ideas I'm giving you, it shouldn't be long before you have a mastery over this endgame.

Let's start with the standard position to learn, coming from what you might find in an endgame book:



Ok, now the first thing you need to know is this endgame:

**YOU MUST FORCE THE KING TO THE CORNER OF THE BOARD THAT MATCHES THE BISHOP COLOUR.**

With a light squared bishop, we cannot mate the king on h8 or a1. We need to force the king to a8 or h1. If we had a dark square bishop, then we would need to force the king to a1 or h8.

This is also the key to defending – if you are defending this position, you need to try to keep away from those key squares and also try to keep the king centralised if possible. If your opponent knows this material, you won't succeed, but it is worth a shot. I know at least two people who had this ending and failed to finish with it, so don't just resign because YOU

know it; make your opponent demonstrate that they know it too!

Ok, so how do you force that king across to a8? Well there's a pattern you can use that works beautifully from the given position. You need to memorise the patterns you will encounter here. Let's begin!

**1.Nf7... Kf8** is forced. Now we need to stop the king going back to g8, which is easy!

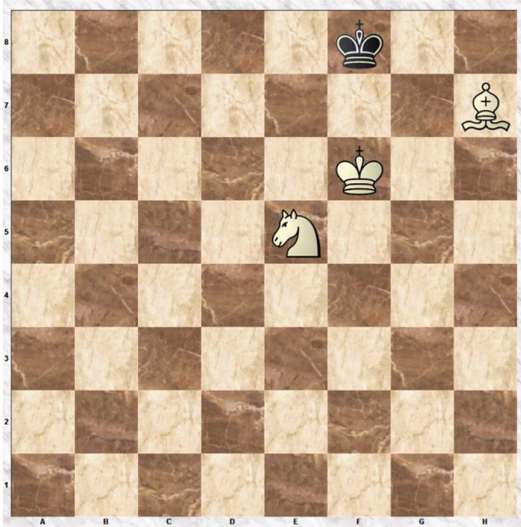
**2.Bh7... Ke8** is forced. Follow it along on a board of your own!

Now **3.Ne5** here is a key move to remember. Watch how the knight moves. It will go in a pattern, f7, e5, d7, c5, b7, a5... Almost leading the enemy king to its demise!

Ok, now black has a choice, either **run back towards h8** or **try to escape the 8<sup>th</sup> rank via c7 and maybe head to a1**.

This is the first of three breakaway chances black has. They occur every 3 moves – move 3 (here), 6 and 9.

Firstly, let's see how to proceed when black tries to hold position by relentlessly heading towards h8.



This is the easiest one for white to cope with.

**3...Kf8**

**4.Nd7...Ke8** is again forced.

**5.Ke6...Kd8** is forced.

Half way there already!

Now **6.Kd6**. This is another key move to remember. You get to remember these key moves with practice!

This is the next breakaway option for black, at move 6. We'll look at this later.

If the king tries to run back to **6...Ke8**, then **7.Bg6+** is the answer, forcing the black king back to **7...Kd8**.

Now, from here, you might recognise the same exact pattern as we saw on move two! Go back and have a look! The pattern is the same, the kings are lined up, the knight between them and the bishop preventing a move to the right for the black king. The only difference it is white's move! If it were black to move right now, then it would be the exact same thing. So we **BURN A MOVE**. Waste a tempo. Give the move to black!

**8.Bh5... Kc8** is forced. 8.Bf7 works just the same 😊

**9.Nc5** the same pattern as before. The black king has the same choice. Try to go back to the safe corner or try to escape to the a7 square and run down trying to escape this way (the 9<sup>th</sup> move breakaway). Black tries to go back to the safe corner but we all now know, that this just doesn't work, but let's look at the line for the sake of completeness:

**9...Kd8**

**10.Nb7+...Kc8**

**11.Kc6...Kb8**

**12.Kb6** sticking to the same pattern. **12...Kc8**

**13.Bg4+...Kb8.**

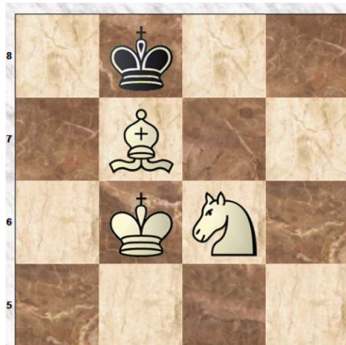
**14.Na5...** be careful not to stalemate – always in all endgames! Nc6 here would be a huge mistake! **14...Ka8**

**15.Bc8...Kb8**

**16.Ba6...Ka8**

**17.Bb7+...Kb8**

**18.Nc6#**



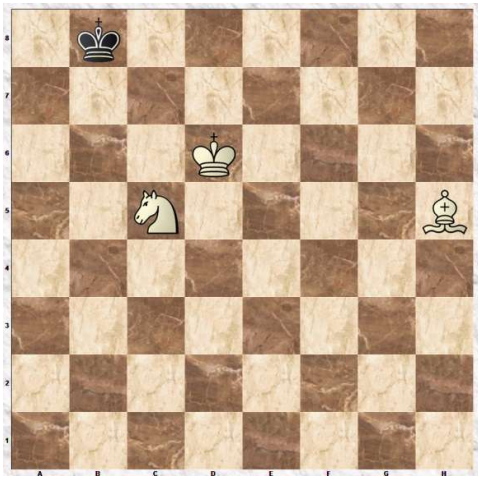
**Memorise that finish!** Once you get the king to the mating corner, you will need to find the mate. It is a reasonably simple matter of replicating either one of the diagrams here, left or right, while avoiding stalemate!

It really doesn't matter which one you go for, whichever you find the path for first really – especially if you are under time pressure. The game could have concluded with 15.Nb3...Kb8



16.Nc5...Ka8 17.Bb7+...Kb8 18.Na6+...Ka8 19.Bc6#. Note that the bishop could be anywhere on the long diagonal to achieve the mate; it does not have to be right next to the king!

Ok, so now let's look at what happens if black decides to run away from this pattern, starting with the variation given on move 9 (*the 9<sup>th</sup> move breakaway*). Instead of trying to run to h8, black tries to run away and down the board towards a1, or perhaps the middle?! Later, we will look at earlier attempts to perform this breakaway (one on move 6 and another on move 3). We will find that none of them work of course, and that stopping these breakaways involves the same concepts.



Let's go back to move 9 and look at what happens if black tries to break away with **9...Kb8**

The black king tries a breakaway, a sprint to the opposite safe corner. The key to dealing with the breakaways in this ending is all about boxing! You build a box with some piece co-ordination.

In this position it's a bit too easy. Kd7 alone is enough.

**10.Kd7...Ka7**

**11.Kc7** and the breakaway is all over. The king is well and truly trapped in the mating corner. It's only a matter of setting up one of those finish-off patterns.

**11...Ka8**

**12.Na4** (I'm going for the other pattern for finishing this time!)

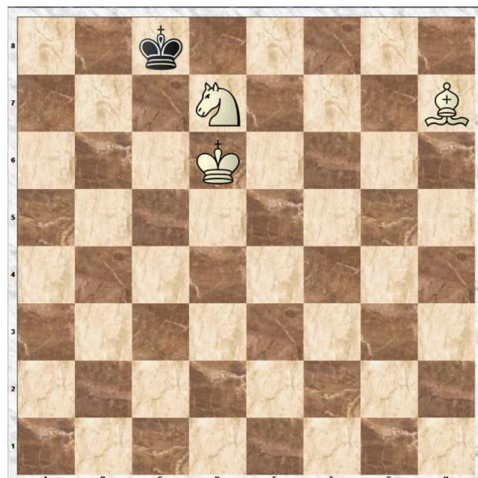
**12...Ka7**

**13.Be2** (controlling a6, closing the box)...**Ka8**

**14.Nb6+...Ka7**

**15.Nc8+...Ka8**

**16.Bf3#**



That's almost too easy! This breakaway on move 9 is futile and too late. Let's now look at an earlier attempt, *the breakaway on move 6*. Go back to move 6 and let's see what happens if black tries **6...Kc8**:

The key to this move is the pattern of the way the knight progresses in all these examples and the knight box we saw in the previous breakaway attempt (the move 9 one).

**7.Nc5**. If the king runs back to **7...Kd8**, **8.Bg6** forces us back on to the same lines as we have already seen. EG **8...Kc8 9.Bf7** burning a move **9...Kd8 10.Nb7+** and we are back on the main line.

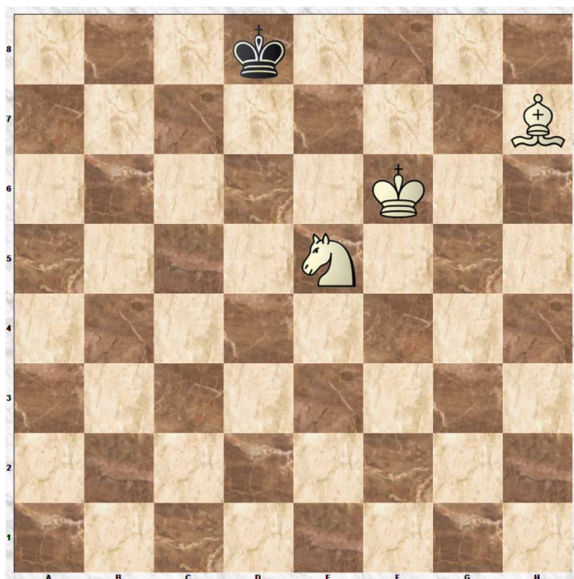
**7...Kb8**

**8.Kc6**. There are faster mates here, but simplicity is the key. If the king

now tries to go back to **8...Kc8**, we have **9.Nb7** and once again the black king is well and truly trapped in the mating corner. The same is true if the king tries for **8...Ka7** or **8...Ka8** since we can simply play **9.Kc7** and again, the king is locked in and we only need to get to one of the finishing patterns.

Now we will move on to the earliest and most challenging breakaway attempt.

Ok let's go right back to *the 3<sup>rd</sup> move breakaway* attempt and try **3...Kd8**.



This is probably the best defensive try and where the fun really begins! We must be careful not to allow the king to escape down the board.

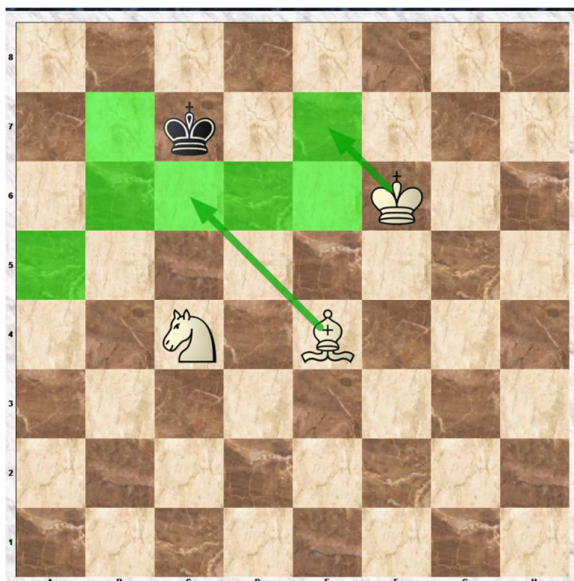
To do this, we must use “boxing” precisely – make an impassable barrier with our pieces. Pay attention now, as this type of technique is the key to winning this endgame from any given position!

We need to stop the king going down the board too far and also from running back to h8 at the same time! We must use all our pieces to accomplish this.

**4.Be4**. The idea is to control key squares in conjunction with the knight. The knight will go to c4 to make a barrier. Imagine the bishop on e4 and the knight on c4 and **look at the squares they control!**

Again, black has two tries, run back to h8 or make a break for it towards a1. If black plays **4...Ke8**, trying to run back towards h8, we have **5.Bd5...Kf8**, **6.Nd7...Ke8** **7.Ke6** with similar positions as we have already seen.

So let's continue with **4...Kc7**.



**5.Nc4**. Now look carefully at this position!

An almost inescapable box formed by the knight, bishop and king! This is why Be4 works - you plan to build the box!

This kind of boxing is how you will force the king to where you want it to go!

If the king tries heading to h8, Kf7 will cut it off and you will need to herd the black king back, which will involve the key move Bc6. If the king tries to get to a6, trying to get out to b5, again, Bc6 seals the box shut. Just don't play Bc6 while the king is on c7! Remember, *every time you now move your king towards the mating corner, the easier it becomes*. There are many variations but trust yourself to work them out.

Let's continue to try to break out.

**5...Kb8**.

**6.Ke7...Ka7**

**7.Kd7...Ka6**

**8.Bc6**. The box is shut tight with the bishop, not the king. **8...Ka7**

**9.Kc8...Ka6**

**10.Kc7...Ka7**

**11.Bb5**. The black king is stuck in the mating corner and again, we finish off by building one of the final mating positions, eg **11...Ka8**. **12.Nb6...Ka7**. **13.Nc8...Ka8** and **14.Bc6#**.

Now, finally, we come to the last part... getting the king to ANY corner in the first place! This is the trickiest part, but it is still not too hard if you can visualise boxes! It is a matter of applying logical ideas like “get your king to the centre”, “centralise your pieces” and “drive the king to an edge” by building boxes and barriers.

Let's assume the WORST position for white.



I don't think it can be worse for white. I wouldn't have a clue on how to deliver the fastest mate here, but I do know how to achieve A mate!

Firstly the initial moves are simple, get your pieces towards the centre.

Next, build a barrier, driving the enemy king to an edge or corner.

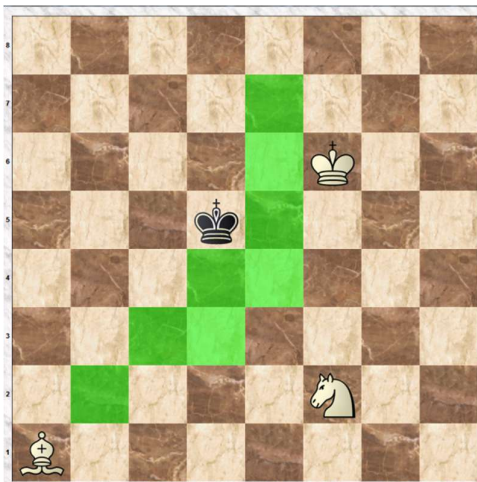
Finally deliver the mate as you have seen already.

I'm playing against my computer here, verbalising thoughts as I go.

**1.Kg7... Ke4.** I am moving toward the centre, the computer is trying to stay in it.

**2.Kf6... Kd5.** Black could have tried Kf3 threatening to win the cornered knight, but Bd4 allows the knight to escape, and both pieces are centralising in the process.

**3.Nf2.** I am using barriers already. Bishop and knight now build a barrier, together with the king:



Nice barrier?! **3...Kd6**

**4.Kf5** (I am trying to get my king in the centre)... **Kd5.**

**5.Be5** centralising my bishop and forcing the king away from the centre.

**5...Kc6.**

**6.Ke4...Kc5.**

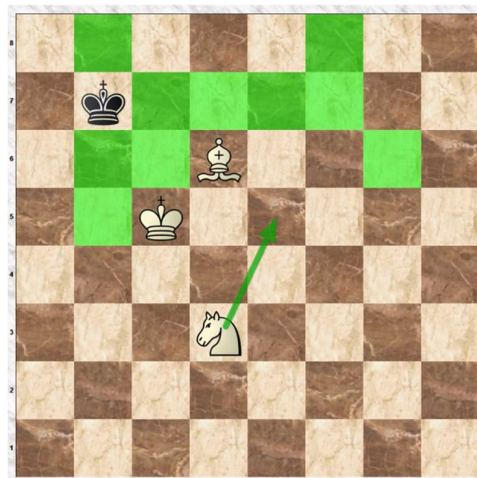
**7.Nd3+** I am centralising my pieces, trying to force the king further away.

**7...Kc6**

**8.Kd4....Kb5.**

**9.Kd5...Kb6.**

**10.Bd6...Kb7** (the computer is already seeing the mate numbers so is trying to keep them maxed) On moves such as Bb5, Bc5 forces the king to an edge.



**11.Kc5.** Looking at containment! The king shouldn't be running towards h8 (remember why?) but if it does, I have it controlled with Ne5 if needed!

**11...Ka7**

**12.Kc6.** The king is trapped and I already have a plan to play Bc7 and then casually get my knight to d5 to make the study position! It's all over.

**12...Ka8**

**13.Nb4** (I need not waste a move on Bc7 if black makes no attempt to run while I am setting up!)

**13...Ka7.**

**14.Nd5.** The classic line is prepared.

**14...Ka8**

**15.Nb6+...Ka7** (recognise it yet?!)

**16.Be5** (burning a move)... **Ka6.**

**17.Bb8... Ka5.**

**18.Nd5...Ka4** the computer is going for the 3<sup>rd</sup> move breakaway. Apparently it takes more moves!

**19.Be5...Kb3.**

**20.Ne3** (the box is closed, just like we saw)...**Kb4.**

**21.Kb6** (closing the lid on ideas of heading back to a8)... **Ka4.**

Computers defend very well when they have tablebases to look up. This does take more moves, but now every move I can make with my king towards a1 will make it easier for me, so I only need figure out how to do that.

**22.Bc3...Bb3.**

**23.Bd2...Ka4**

**24.Kc5...Kb3.**

**25.Kb5** (moving towards a1, one more square removed for the black king)...**Ka3.**

**26.Kc4...Ka4** Where is he going?! Nowhere, that's where!

**27.Nd1** heading for b2 when the time is right...**Ka3.**

**28.Be1...Ka4.**

**29.Nb2+...Ka3.**

**30.Kc3...Ka2.**

**31.Kc2...Ka3.**

**32.Bc3...Ka2.**

**33.Bb4...Ka1.**

**34.Nd3...Ka2.**

**35.Nc1+...Ka1.**

**36.Bc3#**

And there we go! I just beat Houdini! Well... as close as I'll get anyway!

Obviously I can't provide lines for every move black could make, but hopefully, with some practice, you will be able to win with this ending quite easily in your own games.

I personally find this ending to be fun to do as so few people know it. Unfortunately it is also one of the rarest endgames you will encounter, which is *why* so few people know it, but I have won with it at least four times in real games. The only time I have ever drawn it is when I have been too low on time to build boxes!

Happy chessing!

Brad Horne.