



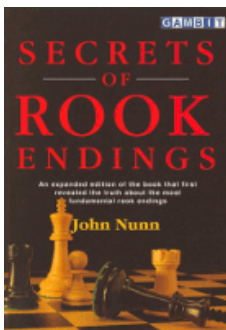
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## All's Well Than Ends Well

by Carsten Hansen

*Secrets of Rook Endings* by John Nunn, 1999, Gambit Publications, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 352pp. \$19.95 (ChessCafe.com Price: \$16.95)

For several years, British Grandmaster John Nunn had produced a number of excellent opening books, including books on the Najdorf Variation in the Sicilian Defence and the Pirc. Then in 1992 he turned his attention to the endgame, specifically five-piece endings. With the help of a database constructed by Ken Thompson, Nunn was able to cover all endgames with five pieces with unprecedented accuracy. His work resulted in three books, *Secrets of Rook Endings*, *Secrets of Minor Piece Endings*, and *Secrets of Pawnless Endings*; all three books were published by Batsford Books.

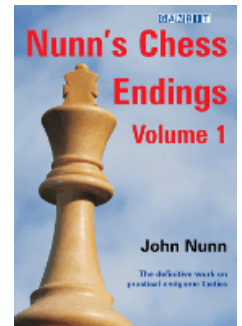
Back then, the publication was surrounded with much controversy. Most notably Danish Grandmaster Curt Hansen openly expressed his feelings in a letter in *New In Chess*. He found this form of chess with its ultimate answers repulsive, as it meant, at least for him, that chess would lose some of its magic. Others, along with Nunn of course, were of the opposite opinion, that a book like this could only raise the level of chess and help us gain a better understanding of these positions with limited material.

Time has passed and now Nunn and Gambit Publications (which incidentally was co-founded by Nunn himself, former *British Chess Magazine* editor and grandmaster Murray Chandler and former Batsford chess editor Graham Burgess) have decided that it is time for a new and expanded edition of *Secrets of Rook Endings*.

Despite the overly broad title, the present book only covers endings with K+R +P vs. K+R. The book contains 573 diagrams and the material has been sorted into six chapters; a chapter each with a-pawns, b-pawns, c-pawns and d-pawns (examples with e-, f-, g- and h-pawns are also given, but since they are just mirrors of positions with their counterparts, they are not treated separately), one chapter has exercises (thirty-nine in total) and the final chapter contains the solutions to the exercises. The last two chapters are additions (welcome ones!) to the first edition and they give the reader a chance to test his or her newly acquired knowledge on examples taken from actual games.

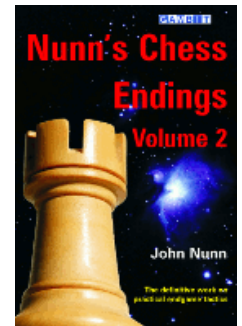
The first four chapters, however, are the backbone of the book. Each chapter

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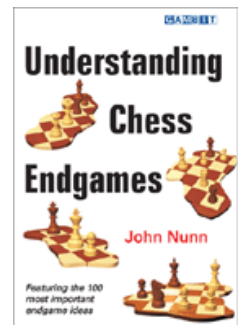
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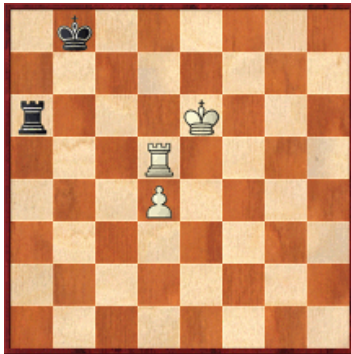
by John Nunn

starts with examples in which the pawn is on the seventh rank, with all relevant positions being exhausted, then the pawn is moved one step backwards with the same exhaustive procedure, until the pawn finally ends up on its starting square on the second rank.

Particular attention is paid to the positions that involve reciprocal *zugzwang*, meaning those positions in which if White has the move, Black can draw, but if Black has the move, he loses. Nunn mentions that he asked some of his grandmaster colleagues how many such positions they thought existed in this type of endgame and most answers ranged between five to twenty-five positions. However, no less than 209 such positions exist, and they are all covered in the book. The presence of these positions helps spice up what could otherwise be a fairly dry endgame presentation.

It has, of course, been possible, with the help of computers, to re-evaluate many of the positions covered in other sources on this endgame. Although some examples of mistakes in studies by the likes of Cheron, Rinck and Berger are given, the majority of mistakes are to be found in the numerous practical examples that show even strong grandmasters do not always get it right, not even in their analyses. One such example is the following, which can be found on page 294:

**Marjanovic – Bronstein**, Vrsac 1979



[FEN "1k6/8/r3K3/3R4/3P4/8/8/w - - 0 67"]

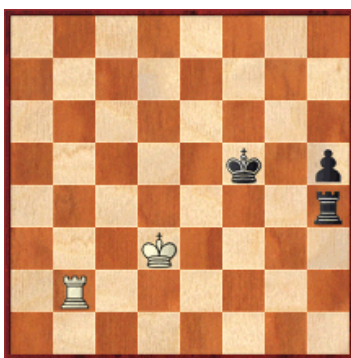
This position is given as drawn in the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Endings (ECE)*. However, Nunn demonstrates that this is not the case: **1 Kd7! Ra7+ 2 Kd8!**, and now: 1) **2...Ra4?!** (Bronstein's choice, but not the toughest defence) 3 Rb5 +! Ka7 4 Kc7 (4 d5? allows Black to draw with 4...Ka6! followed by ...Rd4) 4...Ka6 5 Rb6+ Ka7 6 d5! Rc4+ 7 Rc6 Rb4 8 d6 Rb7+ 9 Kd8 Rb8+ 10 Rc8 Rb1 11 d7 Kb7 12 Ke8, and Black resigned. 2) **2...Rb7** (preventing Rb5+), and here the *ECE* team makes a string of mistakes in their analysis: 2a) **3 Rh5?** Rb6 4 Kd7 Rb7+ 5 Kc6 Rc7+ 6 Kd6 Rg7 (*ECE* gives 6...Rc1=, but this loses to 7 Rb5+ Ka7 8 d5) 7 Rh6 (or 7 d5 Rg6+ 8 Kd7 Rg7+ 9 Ke6 Rg6+ and Black draws) 7...Kc8 8 d5 Rd7+ 9 Ke6 Kc7 with a draw. 2b) **3 Rd6?**, and now: 2b1) 3...Rb4 (*ECE* gives this as losing) 4 d5 Rd4! 5 Kd7 (5 Ke7 Rh4 draws) 5...Kb7 6 Ke6 Re4+ 7 Kf5 Rh4, and Black draws easily. 2b2) **3...Rb5** (another move, which *ECE* incorrectly gives as losing) 4 d5 Kb7 5 Ke7 Rb1 6 Rh6 Rd1 7 d6 (7 Ke6 Kc7) 7...Kc6! draws. 2b3) **3...Rb1** (the simplest way to draw) 4 d5 Rd1!, and Black draws as in 2b1. 2c) **3 Re5!** (this is the refutation that proves *ECE* wrong) 3...Rb6 (if the rook moves on the seventh rank, then Rb5+ wins) 4 Kd7! Rb7+ 5 Kc6 Ka7 (5...Rc7+ 6 Kd6 Rh7, which was good enough for a draw in line 2a, now loses to 7 Re8+ and 8 Re7+) 6 d5! Rb6+ 7 Kc5 Rb1 8 Re7+ Kb8 9 Kc6 Rc1+, and here we are being referred to a position that arises after five moves in the solution to a study by Kopaev from 1955, which (admittedly, this becomes confusing) is with an e-pawn (and actually the position is after the fourth move), but White wins as follows: 10 Kd7! Rh1 (10...Rc7+ 11 Kd6 or 10...Kb7 11 Ke8+ followed e6) 11 Re2! (accuracy is still needed: 11 d6? only leads to a draw after 11...Kb7!) 11...Rh7 + 12 Kc6 Rc7+ 13 Kd6 Rc1 14 Rh2! (the point of White's last few moves) 14...Kb7 (14...Rg1 15 Kc6 Rc1+ 16 Kd7 Rc7+ 17 Ke6 followed by d6 wins) 15 Rh7+ Kb6 16 Rh8 Kb7 17 Ke6 Rd1+ 18 Kd7 Rg1 19 d6, and White wins. All analysis by John Nunn.

It looks a bit complicated and it is. By studying the examples given in the

book, a greater understanding of the endgame can surely be achieved, but the number of examples are so vast and differences between a won and a drawn position (or a drawn and a lost position, for that matter) are often so insignificant that even a seasoned grandmaster can get confused.

So where does that leave us? Is there any use for this book other than as a reference for adjourned or correspondence games? I definitely think so. By studying this book, you can familiarise yourself with the manoeuvres, patterns and methods that can be used in not only endgames with this material distribution, but also other in positions with more pawns, and therefore it will improve your general understanding of the endgame and increase your playing strength.

I mentioned earlier that two chapters had been added in comparison to the first edition. First we have the exercises, which are difficult. In fact, without having studied the previous chapters, the exercises can be close to impossible to solve. For example, **Lautier – Salov**, Madrid 1993, which can be found on page 325:



[FEN "8/8/8/5k1p/7r/3K4/1R6/8 b - - 0 82"]

The task: "In this position Salov found a sequence of 11 consecutive 'only' moves to win the game. Your challenge is to find the first two moves of the solution."

If this sound pretty hopeless to you, then do not despair, because the chapter with the solutions to the chapters is magnificent. Here Nunn gives himself time and space to explain the things to look out for and makes note of the lessons we have learned from the previous chapters. In fact, if you don't have the time to work your way through the entire book, then a good understanding of this endgame can be obtained from first trying to solve the exercises on your own, and then consulting Dr. Nunn's comments to the solution. I am of the opinion that it is these two last chapters that make this not just a good, but an excellent book.

For whom is this book written? For all chess players up to master, or even expert level, this book might easily be too advanced, too long, and too boring. The very thought that we have to plow our way through 352 pages dealing with only one type of ending seems like a dreadful and meaningless exercise. But if you consider yourself a chess player who will go to any serious lengths to improve your chess, then this a must for you. This book will give you material not for a few hours of study, but for hundreds of hours. To learn and understand just the most important positions of this endgame will take a dedicated effort, an effort that is not that much different, for instance, from working your way through the Yugoslav attack in the Sicilian Dragon for the first time. For those who are willing to put in this effort, I in fact will go as far as to say that this is a truly fabulous book

Some people may argue that with the [Nalimov tablebases](#) now widely available, it makes less sense now (in comparison to 1992) to publish a book like this, but Nunn's systematic approach, as well as his educational recaps, tips, and generalisations, help the reader to understand what is actually going on and make this book an essential tool for anyone who wants to improve his or her endgame skills. Weaker players, though, should take note: Start with something more basic before moving on to this admittedly rather heavy-reading book.

With *Secrets of Rook Endings*, John Nunn has once again produced an excellent book that I can wholeheartedly recommend for the serious student. It is worth every penny – and more.

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by John Nunn

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