



BOOK REVIEWS

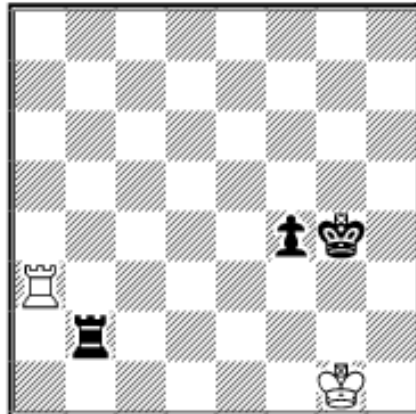


Comprehending Rook Endings

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A Practical Guide to Rook Endgames (CD) by Nikolay Minev, 2006 Russell Enterprises, Inc., \$14.95

Rook endings are notoriously difficult to handle and yet they comprise nearly 50% of all chess endings. Subtle differences in the location of the pieces can radically alter the necessary approach, and it is not uncommon for even high class players to trade blunders and alternately sway from drawn to lost on each move. Minev provides this “typical example” from the game Muldavanski-Pipkov, Bulgaria 1963:
DIAGRAM



“This position is probably the most basic rook-and-pawn endgame, to be found in every decent beginner’s manual (We will revisit this position in the chapter “Rook and Pawn versus Rook”). White easily achieves a draw by keeping his rook on the third rank, and staying there until Black advances his pawn. Then the white rook withdraws to the back rank, and with long-distance checks prevents Black from creating mating threats. Even White’s first move here **1.Ra8?** shows that he has no basic knowledge of this position. Necessary is **1.Rc3** or **1.Kf1**, and only after **1...f3** then **2.Ra8**, followed by checks on the g- and f-files **1...Kg3** **2.Ra3+??** The interesting part is that White is not lost yet. By **2.Rg8+** he still has an opportunity to save the game, but in a more difficult way, which will be presented later in the book. If you do not know the easy way, do not expect anything better the hard way. Now White’s position is totally lost. **2...f3** **3.Ra1** **Rg2+** **4.Kh1** **Rh2+** **5.Kg1** **f2+** **6.Kf1** **Rh1+** and White resigned. He should not

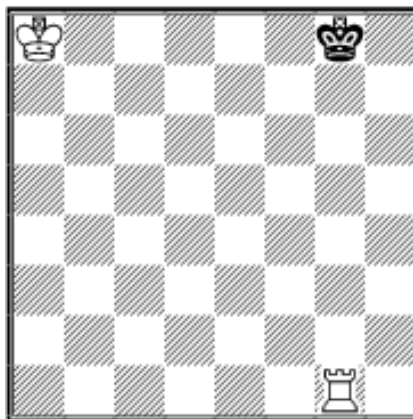
regret the loss of a half-point, since he did not deserve it anyway.”

In order to determine the correct course in any one given position, it is useful to have a coherent strategy and principles for various types of positions. *A Practical Guide to Rook Endgames* (CD) endeavors to accomplish just this by analyzing a small selection of important positions and position types through the lens of pattern recognition development and general principles.

Minev organizes the material broadly into two chapters. The first covers tactical and strategic elements. The second looks at specific types of positions such as rook and pawn versus rook, and rook and pawn endgames with equal pawns. The information is available in ChessBase and PGN formats and can be read in database text files with links to every game example via a ChessBase window with a game board. The CD contains nearly 200 positions (most taken from real games) with heavy annotations and analysis and is refreshingly long on explanation, while still providing the necessary concrete variations.

A Practical Guide to Rook Endgames is intended to be run in conjunction with Chessbase or within the *Fritz* family of engines (Shredder, Junior, etc). The great advantage of the CD is that readers avoid the necessity of setting up a board and reconfiguring it constantly to follow the variations. Instead, it suffices simply to refer to the diagrams on the screen and move the pieces to follow along. Additionally, readers can verify or challenge the author’s assertions and examples with an analysis engine or an endgame tablebase, and can similarly explore questions and alternative lines.

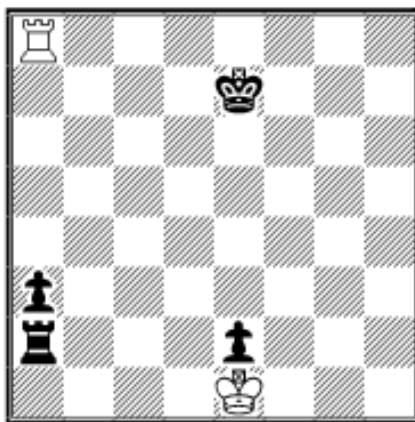
Minev begins his discussion by exploring the characteristics of the interaction of kings and rooks. He approaches the topic by first illustrating concepts and then summarizing them with broad but useful observations, as in the following example, in which the g5-square is highlighted in red in the database window:



A glance at **Diagram #4** is enough to see that Black’s king would use six moves to approach White’s rook and avoid further checks, viz. **1...Kf7 2.Rf1+ Kg6 3.Rg1+ Kf5 4.Rf1+ Kg4 5.Rg1+ Kf3 6.Rf1+ Kg2**. However, if White’s rook is on g5 instead of g1, only two moves are necessary: **1...Kf7 2.Rf5+ Kg6**, and Black’s king attacks the rook, eliminating the checks without leaving its side of the board. The main conclusion is that **the effectiveness of the**

rook decreases the closer it is to the object of its attack. In practical terms, it means that generally we should position the rook as far as possible from the object of attack.

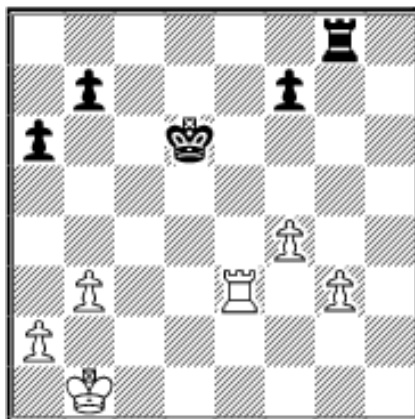
After the introductory examples, Minev offers an overview of common tactical patterns and then surveys strategic elements in rook endings. In the first section on tactics, he discusses skewers, double attacks, pins, deflection, far-advanced pawns, and stalemate. In each case he introduces the idea with a brief explanation and then gives several examples supported by analysis and variations. Here is a simple example from G. Rethy-Euwe, Budapest 1940:



1...Ra1+! 2.Kxe2 a2! It is easy when you know the elementary pattern! Black sacrificed his pawn at e2, but created the same pattern as in Diagram #7 – there is no defense against the threat **3...Rh1! 4.Rxa2 Rh2+.** **White resigned.**

The second section on strategy is longer with more in-depth explanations and many examples for each topic. Here Minev discusses coordination of the pieces, active and passive pieces, pawn structure, the importance of time, shelter for the king, transition to a different type of endgame, and material and positional advantage.

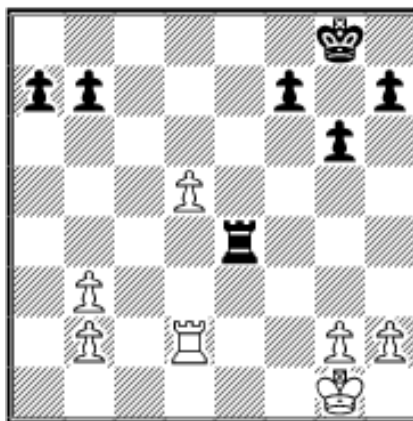
Again Minev provides many helpful general observations such as: “Often it is better to sacrifice a pawn and create active counterplay, than to defend weaknesses passively,” and gives the following example from Kolarov-Filchev, Bulgaria 1978, among others:



Black's play is in accordance with everything we have learned to this point. He is able to save the game though a pawn down.

1...Rh8! The rook will use the open file to penetrate behind the opponent's pawns. **2.Kb2** Otherwise 2...Rh2 and White's king will be stuck on the back rank. **2...Rh2+ 3.Ka3 Rg2 4.b4 f6 5.Kb3 Kd5 6.a4 b5!** White is not allowed to activate his king. **7.axb5 axb5 8.Kc3 Rg1 9.Kd3 Rb1** The main feature of the active rook is its ability to attack weaknesses on different areas of the board. **10.Kc3 Rc1+ 11.Kd2 ½-½**

Minev also presents concepts in language that would help to illuminate ideas for less experienced players without belaboring topics unnecessarily. He writes, "The fight against a passed pawn depends foremost on blockading it. The best way to block is with the king, in order to leave free the more strong and mobile piece – the rook." And then provides the following example from Torre-Miles, Amsterdam 1977:

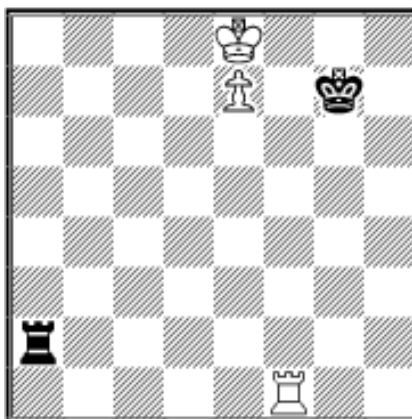


Black uses this important principle in the next position: **1...Kf8!** **2.d6 Ke8 3.Rc2 Rb4** The king can neutralize the passed pawn on his own; now is the time for the rook to attack White's weak doubled pawns. Naturally, all of this is very well calculated, since White's rook also exhibits considerable activity. **4.Rc7 Rxb3 5.Re7+ Kf8 6.Rc7 Ke8 7.Re7+ Kd8 8.Kf2** If 8.Rxf7, then 8...Rxb2 9.Rxh7 a5 and wins. **8...a5 9.Rxf7 a4 10.Rxh7 Rxb2+** Black clearly wins. In addition to the blockade, the main idea was to create the passed pawn. **11.Kf3 a3 12.h4** Or 12.Rh8+ Kd7 13.Ra8 a2 followed by b5-b4-b3. **12...Rb6!** If 13.Rh8+ Kd7 14.Ra8, then 14...Ra6+. **0-1**

Chapter two is the longer chapter by far, as Minev engages in discussions of concrete types of positions. Beginning with rook endings with a single pawn, Minev continues his style of presenting ideas, summarizing them with general principles and then illustrating the positions concretely with numerous examples. First he notes that: "The stronger side has winning chances only if it has additional positional advantages, such as active locations for the king and rook, and good coordination in the effort to advance the pawn." Then he goes on to explore a series of typical examples, including the classic "Lucena" and

“Philidor” positions.

Throughout the discussion, Minev’s comments are insightful and help to give form to the otherwise daunting complexity of the positions. Observations such as: “...checks from the flank are effective only if there are at least three files (squares) between the rook and the opponent’s king” provide guidelines for readers to apply as principles to their own play, distilling the examples into practical advice. Here’s an example from a study by Tarrasch, 1906:



If Black is to move, checks from the flanks force the white king to abandon the pawn: **1...Ra8+ 2.Kd7 Ra7+ 3.Ke6 Ra6+ 4.Ke5 Ra5+ 5.Kd4 Ra4+ 6.Kc5 Ra5+ 7.Kb6** Otherwise, White cannot hide from the checks. **7...Re5=.**

Though Minev’s work certainly stands as a viable treatise for master-strength players, and explores and explains all of the common rook endings, the book’s great contribution is its consistent presentation of clear explanations that provide a framework for understanding these endgames. Players of all strengths can learn from his lucid analysis and improve their comprehension of rook endings. I strongly recommend it.

Order *A Practical Guide to Rook Endgames (CD)*

by Nikolay Minev

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