

BOOK
REVIEWS

This Is the End, My Friend

Glenn Petersen

Van Perlo's Endgame Tactics by G. C. Van Perlo, 2006 New In Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 479pp., \$29.95

I am beginning to dislike Hanon Russell intensely. And van Perlo is rapidly moving up on my short list.

All I wanted to do was buy the book. "I'll send it to you if you review it," says Hanon. That, of course, appealed to my pocketbook. And that was my downfall.

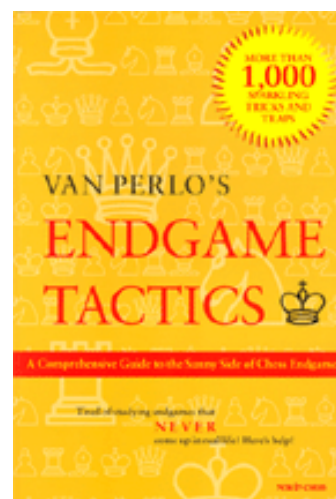
As a rule, I don't like book reviews. One man's poison is another's cup of tea. And far too many reviewers feel they have to Winterize everything they read: undotted i's, uncrossed t's, misplaced commas, etc. Who cares? Just tell me what I'm missing. I'll decide if the purchase is warranted.

To heighten my sense of commitment, Hanon also sent me [Tactical Chess Endings](#) by John Nunn and [A Practical Guide to Rook Endgames](#) by Nikolay Minev. Both are great books. And both wound up on my reference shelf.

We all have reference shelves in our chess library. You know what I mean. You've read the first chapter (or most of it) and you say to yourself, "Wow! I gotta learn that stuff! Maybe after the kids grow up, maybe after I retire, maybe after I hit the lottery." And then the book winds up on that special shelf, to gather dust. No knock on the books – both have much to offer. But it's just too much like work. Not my cup of tea.

I want to be entertained. Van Perlo does that. And that is why he is moving up on my short list.

One of the most entertaining (and instructive) books ever written is Jenő Ban's *The Tactics of End-Games*. The introductory material (Fundamental



Concepts) is perhaps one of the most concise presentations of endgame basics I've ever seen. The knock by purists is that all the material is based on endgame problems and studies. "That position would never occur in a real game." The purists are wrong, of course, but let's keep that as our little secret.

Van Perlo has filled a void by compiling a fantastic collection of endgame positions from actual play. The cover blurbs say it all.

- "A comprehensive guide to the sunny side of chess endgames."
- "Tired of studying endgames that NEVER come up in real life? Here's help!"
- "Enjoying endgame tactics is the first step towards mastering this important part of the game. Endgames are actually fun."
- "More than 1,000 sparkling tricks and traps."

Or, as the author states in the foreword:

"... Many players consider the study of the endgame a necessary evil. Resignedly, they plough their way through one or more standard works, restricting themselves to basic positions or, on the contrary, a few exceptionally ingenious studies. Most of them do not find it very exciting.

Actually this is a pity, for in the endgame, too, there is a lot to be enjoyed and a thorough study of a great number of practical fragments has taught me that even this phase of the chess struggle can produce many different types of drama. Clever tactical tricks, gruesome blunders and other tragicomic scenes, it's all possible. When after many hours of toil the end of the game is nigh, it is a difficult task for many to keep a clear head, to control their nerves and to make optimal use of the opportunities that present themselves.

Especially a well-developed feeling for the multitude of tactical possibilities contained in the endgame often signifies the difference between a full point and an annoying zero! ..."

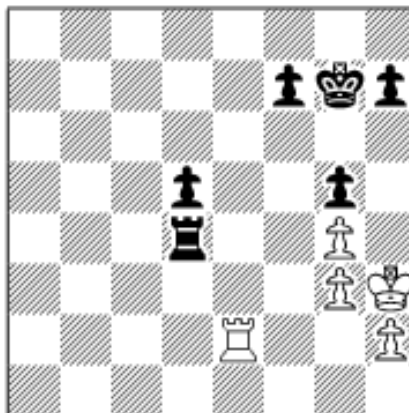
There are actually over 1,100 positions, logically presented in four parts: Pawn, Queen, Rook, and Minor Piece Endgames. The Table of Contents is expansive and laced with whimsy ("Pawn Sacrifices, liquidations and other goodies"). Included is a list of players, an explanation of symbols, and a glossary – all the little things that make a good book better.

But what makes this a good book is van Perlo's running commentary, as he goes from one example to the next. His respect for the game, his delight in every little twist, is undeniable. And it is infectious.

Take for example his commentary to position 322:

“It’s often hard to react in a quiet and balanced manner when, in an apparently easily won position, you fall victim to such a stalemate catastrophe, however obvious it may be.

The end of Zach-Kipke, Berlin 1936, must have been quite hectic. With a broad grin white offered a draw, and the second player indignantly refused. With a look on his face that suggested: ‘If I really have to ...’ Zach produced:

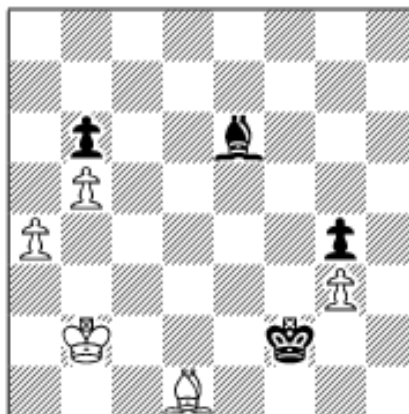


1. Rd2!

(I hope you saw this too) and Kipke’s face grew pale. If he does not take the draw, the win is gone because of the loss of the d-pawn.”

I can certainly identify with Kipke!

The Preface, written by W.F. Andriessen, explains the contributions made by computers: riddles solved, analysis corrected, and the like. It ends with a reference to Position 854, Volosin-Tarasov, Soviet Union 1968:

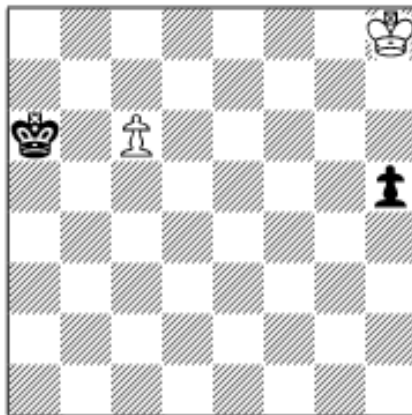


White to Move and Win

1 a5! bxa5 (Not 1...Kxg3 2 axb6 Bc8 3 Kc3 Kf4 4 Bxg4, but in the game, White also invested a piece!) **2 Bxg4! Bd5 3**

Be6? (This looks very strong, but in fact Black could have drawn now with a quite surprising Reti-like King maneuver! See 3...Bxe6! 4 b6 Bd5 5 g4 Kg3 6 g5 Kf4 7 g6 Ke5 8 g7 Kd6!! That's the secret: the king does not go after the g-, but after the b-pawn! Instead of 3 Be6?, White could have played 3 Bd7 Kxg3 4 Bc6 Be6 5 b6 Bc8 6 Kb3, winning. **3...Bb7? 4 g4** Black resigned.

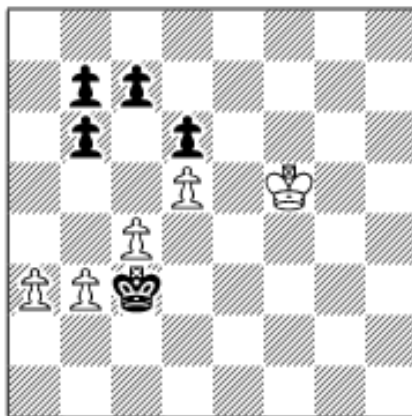
Which leads us to Réti's famous study in Position 855:



White to Move and Draw

[Position 854 and its solution] proves the great practical importance of Réti's study from 1921... It is astonishing in its simplicity. White to play and draw. At first sight this seems impossible, as his king is too far removed from the fray and the black king needs only two steps to eliminate the c-pawn. But the white king can perform two tasks at the same time, developing power in two directions. **1 Kg7 h4 2 Kf6! Kb6 3 Ke5! Kxc6** Black must spend some time on this, otherwise both pawns promote. Now, however, the white king reaches the h-pawn in time. **4 Kf4 h3 5 Kg3 h2 6 Kxh2** with a draw.

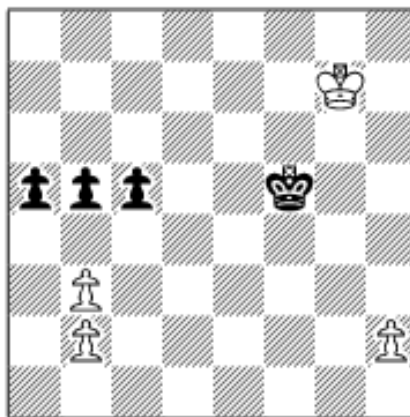
And that takes us to Position 856, Schlechter-Marco, Vienna 1893, the analysis of which inspired the Reti study:



White to Move and Draw

Réti's inspiration for this study came from the following analysis of a Schlechter-Marco endgame, Vienna 1893. There followed **1 Ke6 Kxb3 2 Kd7 Kxc4 3 Kxc7 Kxd5 4 Kxb6! Kc4 5 Kxb7 d5 6 a4 Kb4 7 Kb6** draw.

And that in turns takes us back to Position 7, Lasker-Tarrasch, St. Petersburg 1914.



White to Move and Draw

Black threatens **1...c4 2 bxc4 bxc4** followed by **a4** and **c3**. The white king again seems too far off and the h-pawn can be stopped easily. But Lasker once again live up to his reputation as an escape artist. **1 h4 Kg4 2 Kg6!** There's the rub. Tarrasch has calculated that after **2 Kf6 c4 3 bxc4 bxc4 4 Ke5 c3! 5 bxc3 a4**, the a-pawn will decide the issue. With **2 Kg6**, however, White gains a decisive tempo, because Black must take on h4 first. But then the white king rushes to the queenside, using the b1-h7 diagonal instead of the a1-h8 diagonal. What difference does it make? We will find out! **2...Kxh4 3 Kf5 Kg3!** Tarrasch sees the danger. On **3...c4** follows **4 bxc4 bxc4 5 Ke4 c3 6 bxc3 a4?** (6...Kg3 or 6...Kg5 still draws) **7 Kd3** and now Black is in a right mess. After all, the white c3-pawn is not in the way now that its king is on the b1-h7 diagonal! **4 Ke4 Kf2 5 Kd5 Ke3 6 Kxc5 Kd3 7 Kxb5 Kc2 8 Kxa5 Kxb3** draw.

If you can solve the above positions, God Bless! If you can't, be prepared for hours of entertainment and enlightenment. *Endgame Tactics* is a labor of love by van Perlo – and it shows.

Name a great player from the last century or from this one, and chances are he or she will be represented in this truly comprehensive guide to endgames – either on the winning side or somewhere less flattering. Fischer, Kasparov, Anand, Kamsky, Karpov, Alekhine, Andersson, Tal, Gligoric, Pachman, Botvinnik, Browne, and the list goes on.

I see nothing but hours and hours of pure enjoyment in front of me.

And that is why I am beginning to dislike Hanon Russell intensely, and why van Perlo is working his way up to a similar position.

- No more thoughts of accordion lessons.
- No more concerts.
- No more video game sessions with my son.
- I won't be taking up ballroom dancing in the near future.
- Birthdays and anniversaries will be forgotten, or ignored.
- Relatives will forget what I look like.
- Laundry won't get washed.
- Bills will be paid late.
- No more CSI, House, WWE (maybe that's a good thing!).
- Hundreds of dollars in entry fees expended (I've got the itch again).

And in case any of you are conceptually challenged, this was a favorable review!

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by G. C. Van Perlo

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