



BOOK REVIEWS



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Rook Rules

Steve Goldberg

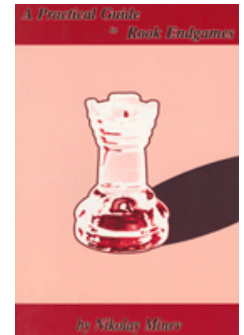
Practical Endgame Play – Mastering the Basics, by Efstratios Grivas, 2008 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 320pp., \$25.95

This is a somewhat “traditional” endgame manual in that it covers many of the most common endgame situations, as a look at the table of contents will show:

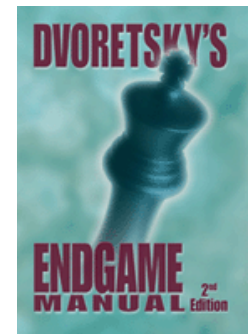
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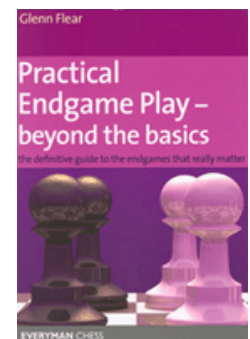
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A Practical Guide to Rook Endgames
by Nikolay Minev



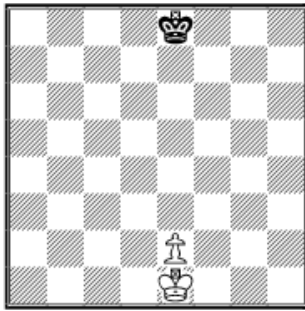
Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual
by Mark Dvoretsky



Practical Endgame Play Beyond the Basics
by Glenn Flear

“The Golden Rules of the Endgame” chapter consists of twenty short statements such as the obligatory “Rooks belong behind passed pawns.” But there are a couple that may give pause to the reader, such as “A rook on the seventh rank is sufficient compensation for a pawn” and “Somebody usually gets the better deal in every exchange.”

Chapter 2 clearly explains the crucial concept of the opposition, while Chapter 3 describes “critical” squares in such a manner that the reader will easily grasp when a related position is won or drawn, without the need for lengthy calculations. The author presents the following simple position:



“Critical squares” have been defined (for all pawns other than the a-pawn and h-pawn) as the square two ranks directly in front of the pawn, plus the squares on either side of this square. Thus, in the position shown, the critical squares are d4, e4 and f4. This means that if the white king can reach one of these squares, the position is won.

With White to move, he wins with **1.Kf2** (or 1.Kd2) **1...Ke7 2.Ke3 Ke6 3.Ke4**. But if it is Black to move, the game proceeds **1...Ke7 2.Kf2** (or 2.Kd2) **2...Ke6 3.Ke3 Ke5** and the game is drawn, since White cannot reach one of the critical squares. Unfortunately, Grivas does not discuss the unique nature of the a-pawn and h-pawn, either in terms of what the stronger side needs to do to queen the pawn, or how the defender may be able to force a draw.

On the positive side, numerous examples are provided of increasingly complex king and pawn endings. I might quibble slightly with the inclusion of a couple positions that contain minor pieces within the “Pawn Endings” section, since the author already has a portion of the book (Section 3: Minor Piece Endings) devoted to this genre.

I was fairly impressed with the author’s treatment of “corresponding squares,” a rather nebulous concept that he explains well with a single clear example.

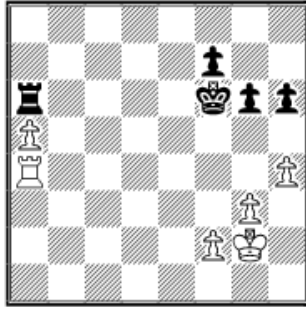
At the start of Chapter 6, Grivas writes, “Rook endings are, in my personal opinion, the most fascinating element of chess.” This may explain the fact that roughly half of this book is devoted to rook endings, both rook and pawn endings and rook and minor piece endings. “Furthermore,” he continues, “of all the chess endings, rook endings are the ones encountered most frequently.”

The author reviews a number of well-known general principles for rook endings, stressing the placement of rooks behind passed pawns, active rook play, and king involvement. He also clearly discusses both the Lucena position and the Philidor position, which any player desiring endgame competence must understand.

There are generally two types of endgame books – one stressing general principles to master, and the other representing more of an encyclopedia of the most common types of positions. This book falls somewhere in between these two options, not as encyclopedic as say, [Dvoretsky’s Endgame Manual](#), but nevertheless, a useful text to have around when you need to review why you lost that rook and three pawns vs. rook and two pawns ending.

Most players will have difficulty reading *Practical Endgame Play* from cover to cover, simply because of the nature of the material. However, the chapters devoted to various rook endings, in particular, are well worth reviewing and taking the time to work through. As in the rest of the book, multiple game segments are provided to emphasize the author’s points.

For example, in Chapter 13, “Rook Endings: Rook & 4 Pawns with a passed a-pawn vs. Rook & 3 Pawns,” Grivas presents the following position from the game Alekhine-Capablanca, World Championship (game 34), Buenos Aires 1927:



When the rook of the superior side is behind its passed pawn, the position is usually won. The winning method for White can be described via the following mini-plans, which constitute the correct way to achieve victory:

- i. White will centralize his king, threatening to transfer it to the queenside and then advance the a-pawn in co-operation with the rook.
- ii. The black king will have to prevent the above-mentioned plan by hurrying over to the queenside itself. This will, however, allow the white king to penetrate on the kingside.
- iii. At the appropriate moment, the white rook will abandon the a-pawn and will move towards the kingside. The co-operating duo of king and rook will ensure material gain on the kingside in exchange for the loss of the a-pawn. From that point on, the win will be simple.

55.Kf3 Ke5 56.Ke3 h5

This weakens the black kingside, but it cannot really [be] called a mistake, as the alternative 56...Kd5 also loses: 57.h5 g5 (or 57...gxh5 58.Rh4) 58.g4 Kc5 59.Ke4.

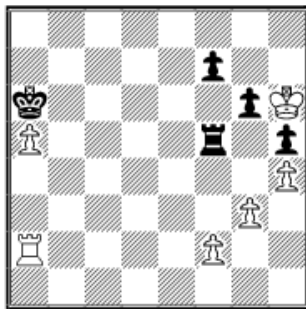
57.Kd3 Kd5 58.Kc3 Kc5 59.Ra2! Kb5

The black rook cannot move as that would allow the further advance of the a-pawn, but the black king is at a loss for a good move and is forced to surrender space to its counterpart.

60.Kb3!? Kc5

White's last aimed to provoke 60...Rxa5 61.Rxa5+ Kxa5, after which 62.Kc4 Kb6 63.Kd5 Kc7 64.Ke5 Kd7 65.Kf6 Ke8 66.f4 leads to an easy win.

61.Kc3 Kb5 62.Kd4 Rd6+ 63.Ke5 Re6+ 64.Kf4 Ka6 65.Kg5 Re5 + 66.Kh6 Rf5



White has completed his second mini-plan.

67.f4

There is a clearer way to win: 67.Kg7! Rf3 68.Kg8 Rf6 69.Kf8 Rf3 70.Kg7 Rf5 71.f4 and Black is in zugzwang.

67...Rc5 68.Ra3 Rc7 69.Kg7 Rd7

70.f5

White's position is so good that he has more than one winning line: 70.Kf6! Rc7 71.f5! gxf5 (or 71...Rc6+ 72.Kxf7 gxf5 73.Rf3 Rc5 74.Kg6) 72.Kxf5 Rc5+ 73.Kf6 Rc7 74.Rf3! (the third mini-plan) 74...Kxa5 75.Rf5+ Kb6 76.Rxh5 Rc3 77.Rg5.

70...gxf5 71.Kh6 f4 72.gxf4 Rd5 73.Kg7 Rf5 74.Ra4 Kb5 75.Re4! Ka6

Or 75...Kxa5 76.Re5+.

**76.Kh6! Rxa5 77.Re5 Ra1 78.Kxh5 Rg1 79.Rg5 Rh1 80.Rf5 Kb6
81.Rxf7 Kc6 82.Re7 1-0**

Recommending a good endgame book is rather subjective, and the past several years have seen a multitude of books devoted to endgame analysis. Grandmaster and trainer Gregory Kaidanov once commented that the best chess book is the one the student loves, that he or she will be self-motivated to utilize.

A player looking for quick and easy “bite-size” bits of endgame instruction might turn to [101 Chess Endgame Tips](#), by Steve Giddins, especially for a quick review prior to tournament play. On the other hand, if a paced, systematic program of study is desired, [Silman’s Complete Endgame Course](#), by Jeremy Silman, is an excellent choice. Another good option for developing a better feel for endgame play is [How to Play Chess Endgames](#), by GM Karsten Müller and FM Wolfgang Pajeken.

But then there are times when more detail is needed for specific situations. How to pull out victory, for example, in a rook ending with pawns on both flanks. Or a complicated endgame with the queens still on the board. In these cases, the encyclopedic coverage of *Dvoretsky’s Endgame Manual* or even Fine’s classic [Basic Chess Endings](#) is called for.

Practical Endgame Play, it seems to me, is a bit of a cross between a fundamental endgame instructional manual and the encyclopedic approach. It straddles a bit of both worlds. The full title is *Practical Endgame Play – Mastering the Basics*, with a subtitle of “the essential guide to endgame fundamentals.” I’m not sure I would refer to this book as *the* essential endgame guide, especially since it’s a bit lean when it comes to bare pawn endings, but it will take the reader through important endgame strategy. Its greatest strength may be the great detail given to various rook endings, arguably the most common type of endgame encountered.

Masters and above may prefer the no-nonsense and to-the-point nature of Dvoretsky’s *magnum opus*, but players of all levels beyond beginner can easily benefit from *Practical Endgame Play*. It’s not quite as daunting as Dvoretsky’s book, and therefore may be more likely to be pulled down from the shelf.

**[Order](#) *Practical Endgame Play – Mastering the Basics*
by Efstratios Grivas**

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