



BOOK REVIEWS



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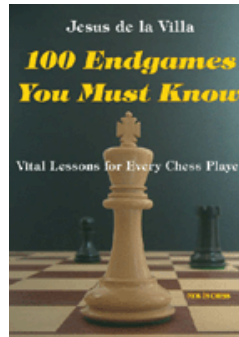
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## Ambiguity in the Endgame

Steve Goldberg

*100 Endgames You Must Know*, by Jesus de la Villa, 2008 New in Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 248pp., \$24.95

Like most endgame manuals, *100 Endgames You Must Know* is arranged thematically, by general endgame type. The table of contents makes this clear:



- Introduction
- Basic Endings
- Basic Test
- Knight vs. Pawn
- Queen vs. Pawn
- Rook vs. Pawn
- Rook vs. 2 Pawns
- Same-coloured bishops: Bishop + Pawn vs. Bishop
- Bishop vs. Knight: one pawn on the board
- Opposite-coloured bishops: Bishop + 2 Pawns vs. Bishop
- Rook + Pawn vs. Rook
- Rook + two Pawns vs. Rook
- Pawn endings
- Other material relations
- Final Test
- Appendix

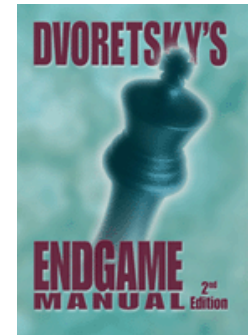
Each of the main chapters is composed of between three and seventeen “endings,” each given its own title; for example, “Ending 3: Key Squares” and “Ending 85: A passed Bishop’s pawn on the same wing.”

On the one hand, the material covered in this book is common to most other endgame manuals, in that the most frequent types of endgame positions are reviewed. On the other hand, this book purposely does not go into the depth of a tome such as [Dvoretsky’s Endgame Manual](#). This is specifically *not* intended to be an encyclopedic reference manual. As the title suggests, the goal is to present what the author believes to be one hundred of the most important, most common sort of endgame structures.

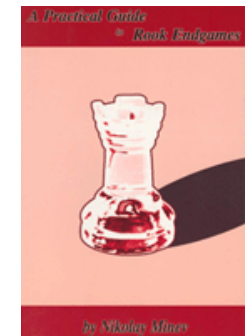
Further, similar to [Silman’s Complete Endgame Course](#), he says that “I consider the approach towards the study of the endgame must be multi-staged and always keep the same pace as the player’s overall playing level.” In other words, beginners need one type of endgame instruction, which is different from what a Class C player needs, which in turn is not as extensive as what is appropriate for an Expert player.

De la Villa doesn’t, however, organize his book specifically by rating class, as does Silman. Instead, he writes, “In the first stage [i.e. for beginning and intermediate players] it is enough to master the basic checkmates, King + Pawn vs. King endings, and to know which main material relations are winning or not; in addition, a few exceptional and frequent situations, such as the Bishop + Wrong Rook’s Pawn ending, etc.” He adds that “A second step in this first stage would involve the Philidor and Lucena Positions in Rook + Pawn vs. Rook endings, as well

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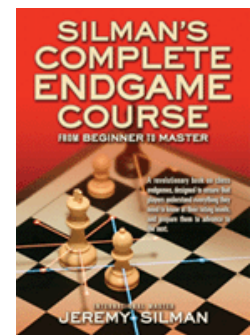


[Dvoretsky's Endgame  
 Manual](#)  
 by Mark Dvoretsky



*A Practical Guide  
 to Rook Endgames*  
 by Nikolay Mineev

Read an excerpt [here](#).



[Silman's Complete  
 Endgame Course](#)  
 by Jeremy Silman

as some more ideas in pawn endings and opposite-coloured bishop endings.” The author then notes that this material is covered in Chapter 1 (consisting of nine endgame positions), and fourteen other specific endings from other chapters.

While the endings selected are indeed helpful as a “first stage” of endgame understanding, the Philidor and Lucena Positions are nowhere to be found among these twenty-three endgames, despite the author having noted their importance. Presumably, Ending 52 (Philidor) and Ending 53 (Lucena) were intended to be included in the list of required study positions.

In the author’s opinion, mastering this “first stage” material is attainable for any player willing to put in a little effort, and is sufficient for players up to about a 1900-2000 FIDE rating. At this point, de la Villa states, “We should move to the second phase,” which involves acquiring “an exact knowledge of some theoretical endings... They are just a few, but you must know them well. This fundamental knowledge and the confidence we acquire with it is the starting point to study other positions of greater complexity or to turn a technical advantage into victory.”

It is for this “second phase” that the bulk of this book was written, roughly for players rated between 2000 and 2400.

The author provides an interesting statistical analysis that I had not encountered before. Using a database of approximately four million games, he breaks down games by various endgame criteria. For example, he found that about eight percent of games ended with one rook for each side, any number of pawns, but no other pieces. About thirty-eight percent of these rook endings concluded in a draw, belying the commonly stated opinion that “all rook endings are drawn.”

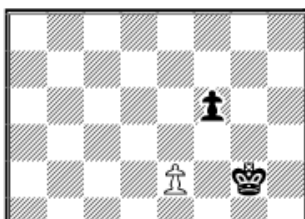
In this same statistical analysis, he found that approximately three percent of all games ended with only pawns left, no other pieces, with about twenty-seven percent of these games ending in draws. Other interesting findings he identifies are

- about fifty-four percent of the time, R+P vs. R endings were drawn
- with R+2P vs. R, draws fell to just under twenty percent
- B+P vs. B, with opposite-colored bishops, were drawn ninety percent of the time, although the
- number of such games was quite small
- B+P vs. B, with same-colored bishops, about fifty-three percent were drawn

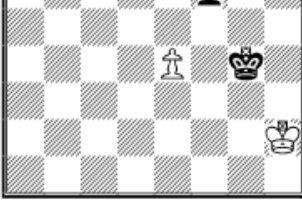
One statistic I found surprising was that a B+N vs. K ending occurred a total of 712 times in his database. This represents a very small percentage of games, but still the number was higher than I would have imagined. Even more surprising, nearly nineteen percent of these games ended in draws! The B+N vs. K is a forced win, yet about a fifth of the time, the winning side couldn’t produce the victory.

Anyone with ChessBase and a large database can run a similar analysis, and my own testing was closely in line with de la Villa’s results. Besides providing some interesting numbers, the point of this analysis is to demonstrate the draw-likelihood for a wide variety of endgame situations. As the author rightly points out, “If you neglect this part of the game, many half points, or even full points, will now and then elude you.”

For example, let’s look at “Ending 81: Pawns on adjacent files:”



“When the pawns are on adjacent files, it is quite easy to calculate the consequences of the capture or the defence of the pawns. You just need to know one interesting resource. Here the



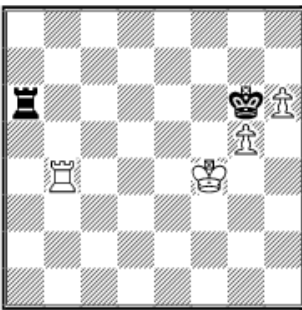
white pawn is lost and, when the black king captures it, he will occupy one of the key squares, thus promoting. Can White be saved? **1.e5!** Yes!!! By means of this pawn sacrifice, White manages to change the key squares: now, instead of

e4, f4 and g4, the key squares are d3, e3 and f3, and the black king cannot reach them. **1...fxe5 2.Kg2 Kf4 3.Kf2** Now the black king is unable to occupy the key squares, therefore the ending is drawn.”

In reviewing the “Basic Endings” from chapter one, it is apparent that this material is not really for beginners, as not enough simple explanations are given, but it is probably suitable for intermediate players (i.e. about 1400-1800) who may need a refresher about some of these basic positions. I did find his presentation of key squares (Ending 3) to be straightforward and clear.

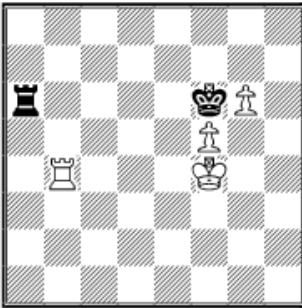
In some cases, though, explanations aren’t entirely clear. Despite an abundance of diagrams, at least for this reviewer, a little fog often remained.

For example, in “Ending 74: Blocked connected pawns,” de la Villa does an excellent job of explaining how a king and rook may be able to draw against a king and rook and two connected passed pawns, in the following position:



**1.Rd4 Rb6 2.Rd8! Rb4+ 3.Ke5 Rb7! 4. Rg8+ Kh7 5.Re8 Kg6 6.Kf4 Rb4+ 7. Ke5 Rb7=**

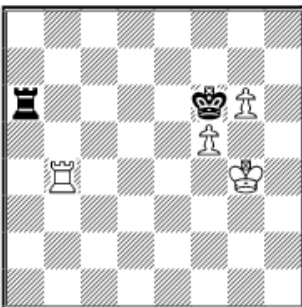
But then the author notes that if the pawns are both moved one file to the left, “White can break the blockade:”



“Here White can force a winning pawn endgame. **1.Re4 Rb6 2.Re6+!** Quite simple. You just have to take into account the position of your king (for instance, if the king were on g4 the ending would be drawn). **2...Rxe6 3. fxe6 Kxe6 4.Kg5 +-**”

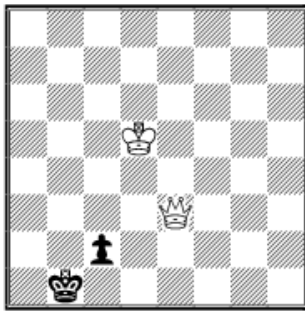
My confusion here is with the comment “if the king were on g4 the ending would be drawn.” Why? No explanation is

given. Let’s take a quick look at the hypothetical position, with the white king on g4:

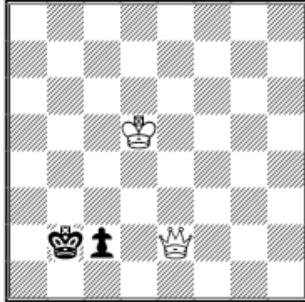


I think the author meant that Black draws with **1.Re4 Rb6 2.Re6+ Rxe6 3. fxe6 Kxg6**, which is indeed a draw. However, if White plays **2.Kf4** instead of **2.Re6+**, he wins, as above.

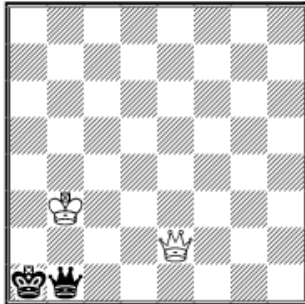
Another confusing case occurs in the author’s Queen vs. Pawn chapter. The following position is presented:



De la Villa notes that this is a drawn position, but points out an interesting trick that Black needs to beware of: **1. Qb3+ Ka1! 2.Qe3 Kb1 3.Qe4 Kb2 4. Qe2**



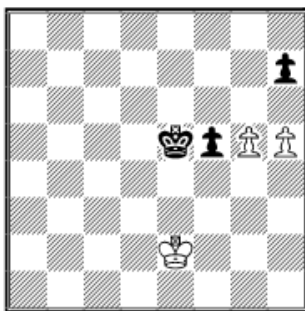
The author notes that the natural-looking 4...Kb1?? loses to 5.Kc4! c1Q+ 6.Kb3, when Black cannot avoid checkmate. This part I found instructive, but then the main line continues **4...Ka1! 5.Kc4 c1Q + 6.Kb3 Qb1+**, producing the following position:



And this variation concludes with the comment, “Only move, but not enough to draw.” But how does White win here? It sure seems like a dead draw to me, but not trusting my own analysis, I asked for a second opinion from Fritz, which quickly confirmed – dead draw. Perhaps what was intended was “Only move, but enough to draw.”

There were a few such instances in which I wasn’t quite certain what de la Villa intended, or I didn’t understand his explanation, but nevertheless, I found most of the book quite informative and helpful.

One short example of a helpful tactic to be aware of appears at the end of “Ending 92: Breakthroughs when the king is far:”



“This is an interesting position, as the two white pawns look harmless and we can learn a new technique here. Sometimes the breakthrough is more efficient if we first push the pawn which has an enemy pawn opposed. This apparently harmless couple of pawns has caught out many players, among them Capablanca. **1.h6!** and White wins. The king will not be able to stop the would-be passed h-pawn: **1...Ke6 2.g6 +-**”

So I’m left with mixed feelings about the book. There really is much to like about it. It is organized in a sensible thematic structure, and many of de la Villa’s explanations are quite clear, and most of his endings offer a brief “Conclusion” highlighting the main point(s) to be learned from the section. Conversely, I found that too often, I had to re-read a portion to understand what he intended to get across. Sometimes it’s just a matter of the material being so complex that this is required, which is normal. But on a number of occasions, there was enough ambiguity that I was unclear exactly what the author was saying.

These are problems I didn’t encounter in [Practical Endgame Play – Mastering the Basics](#), or in [Silman’s Complete Endgame Course](#), either of which are excellent resources for intermediate players looking for a

similar thematic structure. Perhaps the 2000+ player for which *100 Endgames You Must Know* is really intended will not find the same ambiguities as I did, but I would have given this book a complete “thumbs up” were it not for this one issue.

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**Order *100 Endgames You Must Know***

by Jesus de la Villa

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