



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

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Rating Chart

- ♦ – Poor
- ♦♦ – Useful
- ♦♦♦ – Good
- ♦♦♦♦ – Excellent



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Reviewed this Month

Grandmaster Repertoire 7: The Caro-Kann

by Lars Schandorff

Chess Opening Essentials 4

by Djuric, Komarov, and Pantaleoni

Mastering the Chess Openings, Volume 4

by John Watson

En Passant

Nunn's Chess Endings, Volumes 1 + 2

by John Nunn

Bent Larsen and Me

The news of Bent Larsen's passing was a heavy blow. My relationship with Larsen began in 1981, when I started working my way through the first couple of volumes of what ended up as a ten-volume series for beginners called *Vi Spiller Skak*, or *We Play Chess*. It happened to be co-authored by my scholastic chess instructor, Jørn Lorenzen and another local teacher Bjarne Tønnies, both rated around 1900, but excellent teachers. In 1982, my scholastic team was invited by the Danish Scholastic Chess Association to be part of a taped session with Larsen, where he instructed us and went over some of the examples from the first volumes. On the topic of combinations, I had the "honor" of answering one of the questions incorrectly.

As any other good Danish chess student, I duly picked up openings that were part of Larsen's repertoire: the English Opening, the Réti, the Nimzo-Indian, the Caro-Kann Defense, the Scandinavian Defense, and the Sicilian Accelerated Dragon.

However, aside from some brief encounters, our paths didn't cross again until 1988 where he played in a tournament in the town of Esbjerg. As part of summer camp for the top Danish junior players, we visited the tournament. We had to pair up and follow a game, which we then had to analyze and annotate in detail. I chose Larsen's game against one of the top young Danish players Karsten Rasmussen. Here is the game; unfortunately, my old analysis is unavailable:

Bent Larsen (2560) – Karsten Rasmussen (2480)

Esbjerg 1988

Caro-Kann Defense [B19]

1.e4 c6

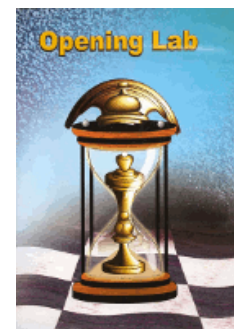
In those days, Rasmussen played the Caro-Kann almost exclusively.

2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bf5 5.Ng3 Bg6 6.h4 h6 7.Nf3 Nd7 8.Bd3

The normal move is of course 8 h5, and only after 8...Bh7, then 9 Bd3. But Larsen never really felt obliged to follow what everybody else thought best.

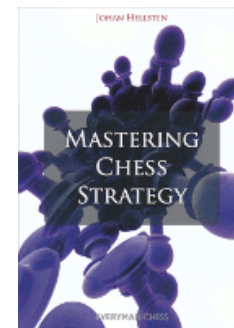
8...Bxd3 9.Qxd3 e6 10.Bd2 Ngf6

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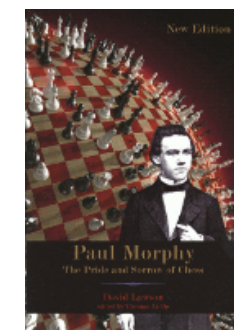
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In a later game, Rasmussen chose 10...Qc7 against Larsen and got a decent position after 11 Qe2 0-0-0 12 c4 Ngf6 13 Bc3 c5 14 0-0-0 Bd6, but Larsen won in the end.

11.0-0-0 Be7



[FEN "r2qk2r/pp1nbpp1/2p1pn1p/8/3P3P/3Q1NN1/PPPB1PP1/2KR3R w kq - 0 12"]

Black can also consider 11...Qc7 12.Ne4 0-0-0 13.g3 Nxe4 14.Qxe4 Bd6 15.c4 Nf6 16.Qe2 c5 with equal chances, Palac-Cvitan, Porec 1998.

12.Ne4

12.Kb1 has been considered harmless since Hort-Larsen, Buenos Aires 1980, where Larsen equalized after 12...c5! 13.Rhe1 0-0 14.Ne4 (Chekhov gives 14.c4 cxd4 15.Nxd4 Nc5 as equal) 14...Rc8 15.dxc5 Nxc5 16.Nxf6+ Bxf6 17.Qxd8 Rfxd8.

12...0-0

A solid alternative is 12...Nxe4 13.Qxe4 Nf6 14.Qe2 Qd5 15.Kb1 (15.c4 Qe4 16.Qxe4 Nxe4 17.Be3 Rd8 18.Rhe1 0-0 19.Re2 f5 20.g3 Bf6 "with a harmonious position, Djukic-Kasimdzhanov, Dresden (ol) 2008," as mentioned in the Schandorff book reviewed below.) 15...Qe4 16.Be3 Nd5 17.Nd2 Qh7 18.Nc4 Rc8 19.Bc1 c5 20.dxc5 0-0 21.Ne5 Bxc5 and Black had a comfortable position in N.Mamedov-Malakhatko, Batumi 2002.

13.Kb1

13.g4!? is also worth considering: 13...Nxe4 (13...Nxg4? 14.Qe2!? is somewhat dangerous for Black) 14.Qxe4 Nf6 15.Qe2 Qd5 16.g5! (16.c4 Qe4 is fully satisfactory for Black) 16...Ne4 17.c4 (Erenburg in *ChessBase Magazine* suggests that 17.Bf4 Qf5 18.Be3 (or 18.Be5!?) 18...h5 with a slightly better game for White) 17...Qf5 18.Be3 (18.gxh6 Nxd2 19.Rxd2 gxh6 and Black is doing well – Erenburg) 18...h5 19.Rhg1?! (Not the best; Erenburg offers 19.Ne5!? g6 20.Qc2 Bd6 21.Nd7 (21.Rhe1 Rfd8=) 21...Rfd8 22.Qxe4 Rxd7 23.Qxf5 gxf5 24.d5 cxd5 25.cxd5 b6 with equal chances, whereas 19.Nd2?? loses on the spot to 19...Nc3!) 19...g6 20.Ne5 Rad8! 21.f3? (A bad mistake, but one that is easy to make. White should have opted for 21.Qc2 c5! 22.f3 cxd4 23.Bxd4 Ng3 24.Qxf5 Nxf5 with equal chances) 21...Nc3! 22.bxc3 Ba3+ 23.Kd2 Qxe5, and Black is clearly better, Zubov-Erenburg, Las Palmas 2003.

13...c5 14.dxc5 Nxc5 15.Nxf6+ Bxf6 16.Qa3 Qb6

16...Qc7!? is also possible.

17.Be3 Rfc8 18.Rhe1

18.g4!? is better for White.

18...a5?!

18...Qc6!?, preventing the advance of the g-pawn, looks like the better move,

after which the chances are about equal.

19.g4 g6?!

19...Be7 is safer.



[FEN "r1r3k1/1p3p2/1q2pbpp/p1n5/6PP/Q3BN2/PPP2P2/1K1RR3 w - - 0 20"]

20.Nd2! Be7 21.Bxh6

Now Black is just a pawn down for nothing.

21...Qb4 22.Qxb4 axb4 23.Bg5 Bxg5 24.hxg5 Ra5 25.Nc4 Ra6 26.Re5 Nd7 27.Re4 Nc5 28.Red4 Kg7 29.Ne5 Rca8 30.Rxb4 Rxa2 31.c3 f6?

After this mistake it is all over rather quickly.

32.gxf6+

32.Rxb7+! is even better: 32...Nxb7 33.Rd7+ Kg8 34.gxf6 Ra1+ 35.Kc2 Nd6 36.Rxd6, and Black is obviously lost.

32...Kxf6 33.Nd7+ Nxd7 34.Rxd7 Ra1+ 35.Kc2 Rf1 36.f4 Rb8 37.Rb5 Rxf4?

Undoubtedly in time trouble, Black makes one last mistake

38.g5# 1-0

After the tournament, Larsen was kind enough to join us for a couple of days at the chess training camp. He played a simul and went over several of the games with all of us. Later in the evening, he would regale us with some of his favorite games and stories. One of the games he presented can be found in *Chess Informant #10*, or, as Larsen described it, the one colored turd-metallic.

I will offer it without annotations, but refer you to those by Danish grandmaster Peter Heine Nielsen in a special issue of [Skakbladet](#), the official magazine of the Danish Chess Federation, that celebrated Bent Larsen seventy-fifth birthday. When going over this game, Larsen had us in stitches from laughter.

Bent Larsen – Svetozar Gligoric

Vinkovci 1970

Réti Opening [A05]

1.g3 g6 2.Bg2 Bg7 3.e4 c5 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.0-0 Nf6 6.d3 0-0 7.Re1 d6 8.Nbd2 Rb8 9.a4 b6 10.Nc4 Bb7 11.h4 Qc7 12.Bd2 Rbd8 13.Qc1 d5 14.Bf4 Qc8 15.exd5 Nxd5 16.Bh6 Rfe8 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.h5 Nf6 19.h6+ Kg8 20.Qf4 Nh5 21.Qd2 f6 22.a5 b5 23.a6



[FEN "2qrr1k1/pb2p2p/P1n2ppP/1pp4n/2N5/3P1NP1/1PPQ1PB1/R3R1K1 b - - 0 23"]

Many players may have heard of Larsen's a- and h-pawn tendencies, but here it is taken to an extreme, both have made it to the sixth rank.

23...Ba8 24.Na5 e5 25.Qc3 Nd4 26.Nb7 Bxb7 27.axb7 Qxb7 28.Nxd4 cxd4 29.Bxb7 dxc3 30.bxc3

White is winning.

30...Re7 31.Rxa7 Kf8 32.Rb1 f5 33.Rxb5 Nf6 34.Ra8 Rxa8 35.Bxa8 Ng4 36.Rb8+ Kf7 37.Bd5+ Kf6 38.c4 e4 39.Rf8+ Ke5 40.dxe4 fxe4 41.Bxe4 Nxe4 42.Bd3 Nf7 43.Rg8 Nd6 44.Ra8 Nb7 45.Ra7 Kd6 46.f3 Nc5 47.Rxe7 Kxe7 48.Kf2 Kf6 49.Ke3 h5 50.Kd4 Ne6+ 51.Kd5 g5 52.Kd6 h4 53.gxh4 gxh4 54.Bf1 Ng5 55.c5 Nf7+ 56.Kd5 Ke7 57.f4 Nh6 58.Bh3 Ng8 59.c6 Nf6 + 60.Ke5 Ne8 61.f5 1-0

I made my first steps as a writer several years later, when I co-authored *The Sicilian Accelerated Dragon* with Peter Heine Nielsen. It was only natural that we included several of Larsen's games, because he had been instrumental in developing several of the lines with games such as the following:

Anatoly Karpov – Bent Larsen

Brussels 1987

Sicilian Defense [B39]

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 5.c4 Bg7 6.Be3 Nf6 7.Nc3 Ng4 8.Qxg4 Nxd4 9.Qd1 Ne6 10.Qd2 Qa5 11.Rc1 b6 12.Be2 Bb7 13.f3 h5

We covered Larsen's predilection for pushing the rook pawns in the previous game, but here he has another idea.

14.0-0 g5!



[FEN "r3k2r/pb1pppb1/1p2n3/q5pp/2P1P3/2N1BP2/PP1QB1PP/2R2RK1 w kq - 0 15"]

The intention is to create a blockade on the dark squares.

15.Rfd1 d6 16.Nd5 Qxd2 17.Rxd2 Be5 18.b4 Rc8 19.a4 h4 20.Bf1 f6

Black obviously has a comfortable game.

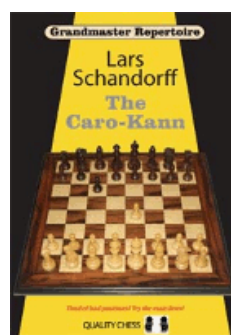
21.Ra2 Bd4 22.Kf2 Kf7 23.a5 Bxd5 24.exd5 Bxe3+ 25.Kxe3 Nf4 26.Kd2 Rc7 27.axb6 axb6 28.Ra6 Rhc8 29.Rxb6 Nxd5 30.Rb5 Nf4 31.Ra5 Ng6 32.c5 Ne5 33.Rc3 dxc5 34.bxc5 Rb8 35.Bb5 Rd8+ 36.Ke2 Nc6 37.Bxc6 Rxc6 38.g3 Rd4 39.Rb5 hxx3 40.hxx3 Rd5 41.g4 Rc7 42.Ke3 e6 43.Rc2 Ke7 44.Rc3 Kf7 45.Rc2 f5 46.gxf5 exf5 47.Kf2 Kg7 1/2- 1/2

With Larsen living in Argentina, and in the Canary Islands before that, he was a relatively rare guest in Denmark in the last decades of his life. Yet, he had a profound influence on several generations of chess players. We all grew up reading his articles in *Skakbladet* and his books. The chess world lost one of its greatest players, but in Denmark we lost the greatest. He was an entertainer and statesman, a brilliant wordsmith and educator, and much more. We already miss him. May he rest in peace.

In this column, I will review some books that Larsen may have approved of in one way or another.

Grandmaster Repertoire 7: The Caro-Kann by Lars Schandorff, Quality Chess 2010, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 251pp., \$29.95 (ChessCafe.com Price: \$24.95)

What could be more appropriate than a book about the Caro-Kann written by a Danish grandmaster. The author Lars Schandorff has already established himself as a no-nonsense author with his previous effort, [Playing the Queen's Gambit](#).



The Introduction begins with a quote by Larsen: "If you play the Caro-Kann when you are young, then what would you play when you are old?" However, Schandorff points out that the current perception of the Caro-Kann is not what it once was: "The reputation of the Caro-Kann was also affected by the attitude of the its exponents. Playing Black is not the same as playing dull chess. For decades the Caro-Kann was considered to be unambitious. In this period you could say that it kind of attracted the wrong people. Black's primary goal was to equalize completely and kill all the life in the position. This has changed. Nowadays enterprising players such as Topalov, Anand and Ivanchuk regularly use the Caro-Kann and it is not to get a quick handshake!" He concludes the Introduction with the words "The modern Caro-Kann is for everyone."

The material is divided as follows:

- Key to symbols used and Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- The Classical Variation (8 chapters – 76 pages)
- The Advance Variation (5 chapters – 64 pages)
- Panov Variation (3 chapters – 32 pages)
- Minor Systems (6 chapters – 65 pages)
- Index of Variations (5 pages)
- Index of Illustrative Games (1 page)

As with the other books in the *Grandmaster Repertoire* series, the material is presented with the thoroughness that will work at grandmaster level, including countless new ideas. These new ideas are usually highlighted by placing the novelty symbol ("N") after the move in question. Moreover, the move is often an improvement over existing theory or a game continuation. This, by the way, goes for both sides.


On occasion it is only a matter of showing a more combative way of continuing the game. In the chapter on the Classical main lines, he doesn't go for the solid lines where Black castles queenside, but rather chooses the option of castling kingside, planting the seed for a great battle.

The material is presented in both game and tree format, and this actually works very well. The material is well-balanced with some prose to explain key ideas and some analysis along with game material. The reader will gain a

good understanding of why the moves are being played along with the analysis to support it. Though the book could have benefited from tighter editing, as some passages clearly originate from a Danish way of thinking, and it is clear that English is not the author's first language.

Larsen, in his book *Åbningsspillet i skak (The Opening Play in Chess)*, wrote that there is no use in knowing how to obtain a good position if you don't understand what to do with it afterward. Schandorff does well to steer his readers away from that predicament. He also emphasizes what is important for the reader to study; for example, in the conclusion to the chapter on the Shirov Variation of the Advance Caro-Kann (1 e4 c6 d4 d5 3 e5 Bf5 4 Nc3), he writes, "The Shirov Variation is certainly wild and Black has to know his stuff, but if he does, then White's bridge-burning strategy tends to backfire. Allow me to repeat that point – Black must study and learn all the lines in this chapter. Having a rough idea of what to do is just enough knowledge to get yourself mated." I don't think it can be said any clearer than that.

This book borders on true excellence. It is much less detailed than the volumes on 1 d4, written by Boris Avrukh, but the quality of the material more than compensates for this perceived lack of quantity of variations. Schandorff does a great job at presenting a repertoire for black in the Caro-Kann in an economical, yet comprehensive fashion. If you play the Caro-Kann from either side, you should pick up this book. Though the material is quite advanced and players rated below 1800 may find it challenging.

My assessment of this book: 

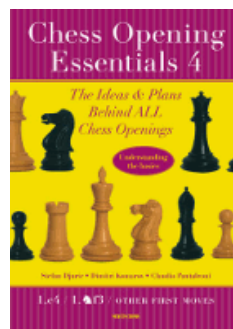
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by Lars Schandorff

Chess Opening Essentials 4 by Stefan Djuric, Dimitri Komarov, and Claudio Pantaleoni, New In Chess 2010, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 254pp. \$28.95 (ChessCafe.com Price: \$23.95)

This is the fourth and final installment in this series of books on the opening. My reviews of the previous volumes can be found in the [ChessCafe.com Archives](#). The true value of these books is that they succeed in presenting the material to those rated below 1800 in a fashion that is both enjoyable and instructive.

The material covered in this volume pertains to Flank Openings, including the main lines 1 Nf3 and 1 c4; minor lines such as 1 f4, 1 g3, and 1 b3; rare lines such as 1 b4 and 1 e3; and finally ridiculous-looking moves such as 1 a4, 1 Na3, and 1 h3.



The preface opens with a clever quote by Lajos Portisch: "There are no bad openings, only badly played ones." However, while most opening moves by White will at worst lead to some minor inconveniences, if Black plays sub-standard opening moves, it can lead to some horrible positions. Despite it being chess we are talking about, it isn't all black and white.

This series employs some unusual graphic devices: colored text is used to emphasize important moves, key positions, and important sequences; bold type indicates main lines; and lines in italics are ones to be avoided. Of course, there is a tried and tested method for indicating inferior choices: the use of standard punctuation such as "?" and "?!." But I will let that rest for now, though I don't see the point of reinventing the wheel.

The material is divided as follows:


- Preface (1 page)
- Glossary of chess symbols (1 page)

- Introduction (4 pages)
- 1 Nf3 (6 pages)
- 1 Nf3 Nf6 (5 pages)
- 1 Nf3 d5 (11 pages)
- Reti Opening 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 (17 pages)
- King's Indian Attack (9 pages)
- English Opening 1 c4 (8 pages)
- English 1...Nf6 (1 page)
- Lines with 2 Nf3 (8 pages)
- Lines with 2 Nc3 (9 pages)
- Defences with 2...e6 (15 pages)
- Symmetrical English 1 c4 c5 (44 pages)
- English 1...e5 (54 pages)
- Minor Openings (29 pages)
- Rare Openings (13 pages)
- Very Rare Openings (9 pages)
- Index of Players (4 pages)

The allocation of pages looks balanced as you make your way through the book. In comparison with the earlier volumes, I found this one quite good. This surprised me, because I was rather unhappy with many things in the first three volumes. I find the presentation in this volume to be much better and more balanced in regards to prose vs. analysis and in the consideration of the lines covered. I could argue about the evaluation of certain lines in some cases, but that is of no particular relevance in a work of this type that seeks to provide a general presentation of the openings.

To its detriment this volume continues the use of unannotated games. In some cases there can be blocks of ten to sixteen games that do not even offer the slightest punctuation to show where one side went wrong. This is simply pointless, as the books target audience will receive little benefit from playing through these games. If you are going to include an illustrative games section, then at least include some sparse annotations.

Still, for the target audience of those rated below 1800, this constitutes a very good introduction to Flank Openings. It has breadth and reasonable depth to satisfy the inquisitive mind as to which openings should be pursued and which should be avoided. Having played and written about many of the openings covered in this volume, I find that the authors have done a very good job. This is the best book in the series.

My assessment of this book: 

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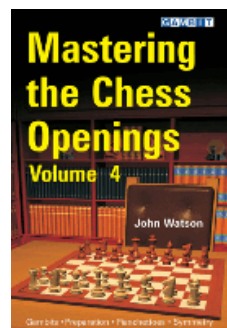
by Komarov, Djuric & Pantaleoni

Mastering the Chess Openings, Volume 4 by John Watson, Gambit Publications 2010, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 319pp. \$29.95 (ChessCafe.com Price: \$24.95)

We have reached the final volume in this truly excellent series. This one covers fianchetto openings, gambits, discussions on symmetrical lines and reversed openings, irregular openings, and some general recommendations and commentary on how to choose and prepare openings.

The material is divided as follows:

- Symbols/Dedication/Acknowledgements (1 page)
- Bibliography (3 pages)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- Reti: Open and Closed Variations (22 pages)
- Reti: Slav Variations (22 pages)




- Modern Kingside Fianchetto (38 pages)
- Modern Queenside Fianchetto (39 pages)
- Gambits (49 pages)
- f-pawns and Reversed Openings (47 pages)
- Symmetry and Its Descendants (20 pages)
- Irregular Openings and Initial Moves (40 pages)
- Choosing and Preparing Openings (19 pages)
- The Future of Openings (4 pages)
- Index of Openings for Volume 4 (2 pages)
- Index of Players (2 pages)
- Index of Openings for the Entire Series (4 pages)

As with the other volumes in this series, Watson takes what is important, interesting, and instructive, and fashions it into what is worth knowing about a particular opening. This means for main line openings, he will give you some fundamentals, a good look at typical ideas, both strategically and tactically, and some instructive examples. For lesser openings, he cuts to the bone and indicates the Achilles' heel of the opening in question and presents lines that will be difficult for the proponents of these openings to face. For example, I would hate to play 1 b4 or 1 g4 against someone who had studied Watson's recommendations in this book. White may be able to survive, but he can also quickly crash and burn.

Watson draws on a wide variety of sources, all of which are listed in the extensive bibliography, and he doesn't hesitate to refer to the analysis of others. However, he adds a great deal of personal input, additional analysis, improvements, and sometimes just supporting prose. Watson's personal input can be found in every part of this book. He is exceptionally good at presenting the material at hand in a fashion that is both interesting and entertaining.

This series is written in such a way that anyone rated from 1500 to 2400 will be able to benefit from it. This particular volume covers openings that are less relevant for stronger players, because they will infrequently encounter them, but to counterbalance this issue Watson sometimes goes into very specific details. Whereas in earlier volumes, the strategic discussions on more popular openings were drawn in more general terms for understanding the ideas and aims for both sides. The collective effort put into all four volumes is truly Herculean and should be praised as an opening book equivalent to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. I am astounded by the consistently high level of writing in all four volumes.

My assessment of this book: 

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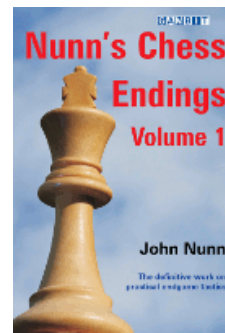
by John Watson

I want to bring attention to a two-volume work that I think Larsen would have enjoyed reading. Larsen enjoyed endgames; he played them well, and thought them fertile ground for showing a greater and more profound level of understanding of the game. In his book on the 1979 Clarin tournament in Buenos Aires, which Larsen won three full points (11/13) ahead of a field that included the likes of Spassky, Najdorf, Andersson, Miles, and Petrosian, Larsen asked the question, "Why does the youth want to play endgames with Andersson?" He answered it himself with "perhaps to learn something." Of course, learning by doing is a good teacher, but only if you take a serious look at what took place afterward. Otherwise, you may end up repeating your mistakes.

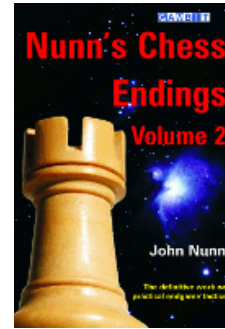
Nunn's Chess Endings, Volume 1 by John Nunn, Gambit Publications 2010, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 319pp. \$29.95 (ChessCafe.com Price: \$24.95)

Nunn's Chess Endings, Volume 2 by John Nunn, Gambit Publications 2010, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 351pp. \$29.95 (ChessCafe.com Price: \$24.95)

In this work, John Nunn "shows how to apply knowledge of standard endgames to find the right methods in tricky real-life practical situations – even when they differ greatly from the idealized forms given by traditional endgame manuals." The first volume covers the Three Key Endgame Skills, Pawn Endings, Knight Endings, Same-Coloured Bishop Endings, Opposite-Coloured Bishop Endings, Knight Endings, and Queen Endings. The second volume covers Rook Endings and Endings with Rooks and Minor Pieces.



I am blown away by both of these books. They represent the finest writing that has ever been done on the practical application of chess endgames. Dr. Nunn has exhaustively found hundreds of examples from real games, analyzed them, gone over the analysis made by others, and found an astounding number of flaws and outright blunders. In some cases, he finds examples that are falsely repeated from book to book. However, he doesn't just debunk other analysts, he also gives credit where credit is due, and applauds excellent play or analysis. In the case of the second volume, he has opened my eyes to concepts in rook endings that I had never known before. For example, in the case of rook and two pawns vs. rook in just how many cases the weaker party can defend successfully if the player in question knows which defensive plays to use and when to use them.



These two volumes deserve to be shortlisted for any book of the year award. They are instructive, entertaining, and truly brilliant. A milestone in writing on the chess endgame. I heartily recommend them to any and all who are interested in improving their understanding of chess endgames. With the study of these fine books, you are bound to improve your results tremendously. You will never regret it buying them.

My assessment of this book: ♦♦♦♦♦

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