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Steven B. Dowd



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Rating Chart



Reviewed this Month

*Chess Expertise Step by Step:
Vol. 3, Rook Handling*
by Efstratios Grivas

A Good Start!

by Michael McGuerty

Chess Expertise Step by Step: Vol. 3, Rook Handling (DVD), by Efstratios Grivas, ChessBase, Video running time: 4 hours, \$33.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$27.95)

If there is one aspect of chess that every player can improve, it is rook endgames. Even a minor advance in theoretical knowledge can go a long way. In *Chess Expertise Step by Step: Vol. 3, Rook Handling*, Greek GM Efstratios Grivas describes them as the "most fascinating element of chess, rich in both tactical and strategic possibilities." That they are the most frequently encountered type of endgame is further reason to become familiar with their intricacies.

The contents are divided as follows:

- About the author
- Introduction
- Keep Your Rooks Active (four segments)
- A Trapped Rook (six segments)
- Losing a Drawn Rook Ending (six segments)
- Technical Rook Endings (seven segments)
- Rook on the Transfer (seven segments)
- Rook and Knight (four segments)
- Rook [sic] and three Pawns vs. Rook (seven segments; this part should read knight and three pawns vs. rook)

In the "About the author" segment, as can be expected, grandmaster Grivas lists his extensive accomplishments as a chess trainer and author. He is a FIDE Senior Trainer (Secretary of the FIDE Trainers' Commission), an International FIDE Chess Arbiter, and an International FIDE Chess Organizer. He has won several medals at various Olympiads and, in 2010, he was awarded the FIDE TRG Boleslavsky Medal for best author of 2009 (though he does not mention for which title). It is a bit odd that they felt the need to include this as a video clip; a paragraph of text in the index window would have sufficed.

Grivas has a deep, gravelly voice and talks somewhat quickly with a heavy accent, but by the end of the short introductory clip the viewer is already acclimating to his enunciation and inflections and quite soon this does not become an issue at all. During the introduction, he is clearly reading his statement and never looks square at the camera. Nevertheless, his gaze is directed forward in later segments, and, since the focus of the viewer is on the chessboard during the tutorial clips, one does not notice the presenter as much in these portions.

Grivas states that the aim of the DVD is to "cover important parts of this field rook endings and help to assimilate knowledge and understand the depth of

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by Efstratios Grivas



Chess Expertise: Mastering Strategy
by Efstratios Grivas



Chess Expertise: Endgame Magic
by Efstratios Grivas



proper handling of the rook in certain cases: how to keep the rook active; how to trap a rook; how not to lose a drawn rook ending; how to handle technical rook endings; how to successfully transfer our rook; how to use cooperation between rook and knight; and how to defend against a knight and three pawns."

Already in the first game segment, many important principles are conveyed. In **Flohr – Vidmar**, Nottingham 1936, Grivas begins his analysis with the following position:



[FEN "3r1k2/1p3p1p/p5p1/3pn3/3N4/1P2PP2/P5PP/2R2K2 b - - 0 29"]

He states that White seems to be slightly better because of Black's isolated pawn, but Black should be able to hold the position. He notes 29...Ke7 would have drawn, when Black only has one weakness, which White probably cannot exploit.

29...Nc6?! 30.Nxc6 Rc8 31.Rc5?!

Here he notes 31.Ke2! is more precise: 31...bxc6 (31...Rxc6? 32.Rxc6 bxc6 33.b4! Ke7 34.Kd3 Kd6 35.Kd4) 32.Rc5.

31...bxc6?!

31...Rxc6 32.Rxc6 (32.Rxd5 Rc2 gives Black active counterplay for the pawn) 32...bxc6 33.b4 Ke7 34.Ke2 Kd6 35.Kd3, when Black has time to play 35...c5 36.bxc5+ Kxc5 37.Kc3 a5=.

32.Ke2!

32.Ra5?! c5! 33.Rxa6 c4; 32.b4?! Ke7 33.Ke2 Kd6 34.Kd3 Rb8 35.a3 Rb5.

32...Ke7 33.Kd3 Kd6 34.Ra5!

34.Kd4?! Rb8 35.Ra5 c5+! 36.Kd3 Rb6=.

34...Ra8 35.Kd4

White prepares e4. It is too early for 35.e4 dxe4+ 36.Kxe4, as Black's king will hold the weak pawns: 36...Kc7 37.Ke5 Kb6 38.b4 Re8+, allowing the black rook to become active on e2.

35...f5 36.b4

Grivas calls this a critical moment. Black needs to have an active rook, but he first needs to protect his weak queenside pawn.



[FEN "r7/7p/p1pk2p1/R2p1p2/
1P1K4/4PP2/P5PP/8 b - - 0 36"]

36...Rb8?

36...Kc7! was necessary. Grivas then launches into an extensive analysis: 37. Kc5 Kb7 38.Kd6 Re8 39.Ra3

A) b) 39...d4 40.exd4 Re2 41.Rc3 Rxc2 (41...Rd2 42.Rc4) 42.Rxc6 Rxc2 43. a4 g5 44.Rc7+! Kb6 45.Rg7 White is too active and he has a good opportunity to win.

B) c) 39...g5! Grivas states that this simple move has been overlooked in most of the endgame books:

B1) 40.g3

B1a) 40...d4?! 41.exd4 Re2 42.Ra5! h6 43.a4! (43.Rxf5 Rxa2 44.Rf7+ Kb6 45.Rc7 Rxc2 46.Rxc6+ Kb5 47.d5+/-) 43...Rb2 44.Rxf5 Rxb4 45.Kc5 Rxa4 46.Rf7+/-.

B1b) 40...g4! 41.f4 (41.fxg4 fxg4 42.Rc3 Rf8=) 41...Re4 42.Rc3 Rc4= and Black's position is perfectly playable.

B2) 40.Rc3 f4 41.exf4 gxf4 42.Rxc6 Rd8+ 43.Kc5 d4 Black's d-pawn offers good counterplay: 44.Re6 d3 45.Re1 Rg8=, gives Black a perfect position to achieve a draw.

C) 39...f4? 40.exf4 Re2 41.g4 Rxc2 42.f5+/-, the f-pawn is very fast and Black cannot hold the game.

The good news for us is that Grivas admits it is impossible to calculate all these variations. Instead, we need to follow the principles of such positions. We have to activate the rook, so it is logical to protect the pawn with the king and then decide what to do with the rook. For sure, a8 is the wrong square for the rook.

37.a3 Ra8

37...Rb6 puts Black in zugzwang after any White move.

38.e4!

Grivas calls this break "enlarging the battlefield," which many will recognize as the principle of two weaknesses.

38...fxe4 39.fxe4 dxe4 40.Kxe4



[FEN "r7/7p/p1pk2p1/R7/1P2K3/P7/6PP/8 b - - 0 40"]

40...Ra7?!

40...Kc7!

A) 41.Kf4? Rf8+ 42.Kg3 Kb6=, and Black should be fine because the rook is active.

B) 41.h4!? Kb6 42.g4 (42.Kf4? Rd8 43.Kg5 Rd3 44.g4 Rd4 45.h5 Re4=) 42...Rf8 43.h5+/-, White is better, but perhaps not yet winning. This is the line preferred by Dvoretzky in his [Endgame Manual](#).

C) However, Grivas likes 41.Re5! Kb6 42.g4 (42.Re7? a5! 43.Rxh7 axb4 44.axb4 Ra4 45.Rg7 Rxb4+ 46.Kf3 Rh4! 47.h3 Rh6 48.Kg4 c5 49.Kg5 Rh8 50.Rxg6+ Kb5 51.Rg7 c4=) 42...Rf8 (42...a5? 43.Rxa5 Rxa5 44.bxa5+ Kxa5 45.Kd4+-) 43.a4+/-, when White is better, but there is still a long way to go and Black holds more resources for counterplay than after the passive move 40...Ra7.

41.Kf4 h6

Trying to prevent the white king from entering the position. Now White has to find a pawn breakthrough on the kingside to win some critical squares for his king. Worse is 41...Ra8 42.Kg5 Ra7 43.Kh6 Ke6 44.g4 Kd6 45.h4 Ke6 46.g5 Kd6 47.a4+-.

42.h4! Ke6 43.Kg4 Ra8 44.h5! g5



[FEN "r7/8/p1p1k2p/R5pP/1P4K1/P7/6P1/8 w - - 0 45"]

44...gxh5+ 45.Kxh5 Rg8 46.g4+-. Now the f5-square is weak and White must use it to penetrate with the king to c6.

45.g3!

45.Kf3? Rf8+ 46.Ke4 Rf4+ and Black has become active. Now Black has no counterplay and can only play waiting moves.

45...Ra7 46.Kf3! Ra8 47.Ke4 Ra7 48.Kd4 Kd6 49.Ke4 Ke6 50.Re5+!

A nice move. Black must allow the rook or the king to penetrate.

50...Kd6

If 50...Kf6, then 51.Rc5 Rc7 52.Ra5 Ra7 53.Kd4 Ke6 54.Kc5 Rd7 55.Rxa6 Rd3 56.Rxc6+ Kf7 57.a4 Rxc3 58.Rxh6+.

51.Re8 c5

51...Re7+ 52.Rxe7 Kxe7 53.Ke5, and Black is in zugzwang.



[FEN "4R3/r7/p2k3p/2p3pP/1P2K3/P5P1/8/8 w - - 0 52"]

52.Rd8+! Kc6

After 52...Kc7 53.Rh8 cxb4 54.Rh7+ (54.axb4+→) 54...Kb8 55.Rxa7 Kxa7 56.axb4 Kb6 57.Kf5 Kb5 58.Kg6 Kxb4 59.Kxh6 a5 60.Kxg5 a4 61.h6 a3 62.h7 a2 63.h8Q.

53.Rc8+ Kb6 54.Rxc5 Rh7 55.Re5 Kc6 56.Re6+ Kb5 57.Kf5 Rf7+ 58.Rf6 1-0

This entire segment is just fifteen minutes long and yet it is packed with teachable moments and it clearly demonstrates the importance of the rook's activity in the endgame. A few other segments also approach the fifteen minute mark (in the "Technical rook endings" section), while a good many others are seven to ten minutes in length, and others just two or three minutes. Grivas's presentation style is matter-of-fact and straightforward. He is more the staid professor rather than the rambunctious sports commentator.

Most of the other games on the disk are from contemporary grandmaster practice, though there are some golden oldies in Benko-Rossolimo, 1962; Browne-Zuckerman, 1973; and Lein-Littlewood, 1980. Grivas gives the complete game scores with each game, even though his commentary begins in the endgame. Of the thirty-three annotated games, Grivas's own are featured in five; three of which are in the technical rook endings section. In the game Grivas-Papadopoulos, 2006, he showcases his 2265-rated opponent's excellent technique in holding the draw in a pawn-down, four-versus-three rook endgame. If a 2200 can survive the test of a 2500+ grandmaster by following correct principles, then it only underscores the necessity of having this knowledge in your endgame arsenal.

Chess Expertise Step by Step: Vol. 3, Rook Handling comes bundled with the ChessBase Reader and so works as a stand-alone program. It also runs within the [ChessBase database program](#) or any of the Fritz-family of playing programs. The system requirements are Pentium-Processor at 300 Mhz or higher, 64 MB RAM, Windows 7, Windows XP, Windows Vista, etc.

Grivas himself notes that this DVD provides just a small amount of what one needs to learn about rook endings. Yet he is correct in saying "it is a good start!" One can watch these segments multiple times and each time come away with some new insight. Seeing the ideas in action onscreen, they are more likely to stay with you than if you only read them on the page of a book, and you can always review the games at your own pace in the accompanying database. Recommended for any level of player.

My assessment of this DVD: 

Order [Chess Expertise Step by Step: Vol. 3, Rook Handling](#)

by Efstratios Grivas

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We would like to thank Michael McGuerty for filling in for Steve Dowd this month.

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