

Endgame Corner

**450 Instructive
Endgame Exercises**

**Karsten Müller
&
Alex Fishbein**

**Foreword by
Wesley So**



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450 Instructive Endgame Exercises
by Karsten Müller & Alex Fishbein

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Introduction

Solve Your Endgame Problems with 450 Endgame Exercises

There are already many endgame books, so why this one? Well, most books deal with elementary endgames, or are very advanced and contain no exercises. But you have only really learned something when you can do it over the board with the clock ticking. And solving exercises is very close to this.

Mark Dvoretsky included exercises in his excellent *Endgame Manual*. Our book is meant less as an endgame manual but more as your endgame proving ground. By selecting many exercises of diverse themes, we have tried to give you the chance to become comfortable with each theme as you solve more positions. We have also added a scoring system, which will measure your endgame strength, allowing you to track it over time. Your “Endgame ELO” (the meaning of which should not be overestimated, by the way) will help you find weak spots, guiding you to study the relevant chapter of *Dvoretsky’s Endgame Manual* (“DEM5”) again. Themes which we consider most important (practically or theoretically) have an abundance of examples. There are also many positions which specifically train calculation and visualization.

Before describing the scoring system in detail and offering more specifics on how to work with the book, we want to say a few words about the content, structure, and format.

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All these positions are from actual games and come from Karsten Müller's files, which contain many exercises geared for players at all levels. Most of them were already published in his ChessBase Magazine column, which started in 2006. Alex Fishbein selected and tested them, included the notes needed for this book, and added the scoring system.

The exercises comprise nine chapters. We start with theoretical positions, most of which are useful to remember. We proceed directly to pawn endgames, which are the foundation of everything, as well as the best resource for calculation training. Rook endings are the most important, and the chapter dedicated to them is a third of the book. After that, we cover minor piece endings and endings with material imbalances. We conclude with a chapter with a mix of all types of positions.

The solutions are at the end of each chapter. The solutions usually contain some verbal explanation of the ideas behind the position. Some important and recurring ideas like “bodycheck” and “change of the leader” are introduced in *italics*. We recommend that the reader review Dvoretsky's book for a deeper examination of these concepts. In general, we tried to make the solutions detailed enough but, by necessity, the explanations will not be as thorough as in an endgame textbook. Still, the solutions often try to give instruction beyond just the required lines, so we recommend that you look at the entire solution even if you solved the problem perfectly.

Once you have looked at all the solutions for each chapter, you can tally your point total and see how it stacks up on the scoring chart. You will find the scoring chart for each chapter at the end of that chapter's list of exercises. Let's finally explain this scoring system:

In every exercise diagram, you will find a number of stars (or “points”), from 1 to 5. 1 means it is a relatively simple problem which should just take seconds to solve (there are not many of those). 5 means that even a super-GM might have difficulty solving it. Of course, difficulty level is often subjective, some people find some things easier than others, but we have tried our best to rank exercises appropriately. But in general, we recommend that you spend at least a few minutes (sometimes at least 15-20 minutes) on each problem.

You will often have the opportunity for partial credit. For example, a 4-star position may award two points for finding the correct first move, and another two points for seeing the idea which might be 3-4 moves down the road. The solutions will clearly state what you need to have seen to reward yourself with points, which will be shown in ***bold italics***.

A small number of positions offer “extra credit.” The reason for this is that we wanted to avoid the situation when we ask you to find more than you need to see in a game. For example, it can even be harmful to a practical player to train by solving endgame studies where you can play the first and second move without thinking but need to find something on move 10. That’s not how you play a real game: when there is only one move to be made, you make it.

We generally tried to avoid this type of exercise, but there are rare cases here when you can (and should) make a decision without seeing a key detail later on. We then award “extra credit” for that detail. This does not change the number of “stars” (or difficulty points), and does not go into the total points available. For example, if you get extra credit, you can score 5 points for a 4-point problem. The extra credit is not announced at the time you see the exercise diagram, but only shown (as a surprise) in the solution.

The scoring charts at the end of chapters should be taken with caveats. They might say that if you score 100%, you are Magnus Carlsen, and they might award you an “Endgame ELO” of 1400 or so if you score 5%. Well, neither of your authors knows what it is like to be Magnus Carlsen. Also, both of us are well past the age where we remember what we could solve when we were 1400. Bottom line: these scoring tables are subjective and won’t work perfectly for everyone. Still, they should at least give you an idea of how you are progressing from one session with the book to the next.

This brings us to some advice we wanted to share about how to work with the book. You might be familiar with *The Woodpecker Method* by Axel Smith and Hans Tikkanen. They recommend solving the same position many times until you know it. We agree. You can solve one chapter, wait a month and then solve the same chapter again, and then again a month later. This way it will remain in your memory much better, which is especially useful with endgame ideas that recur. You can even use the Woodpecker Method within chapters. We have often put several examples on the same theme, spread throughout the chapter. The solutions will at times indicate that you have seen the idea before, and sometimes refer to a previous problem. Note that down and solve those problems again.

Your authors didn’t reach GM level just magically, and they didn’t learn the secrets of rook endings without refreshing the same positions over and over again. You will be surprised that even strong grandmasters will forget the exercises they solved after a year or two. The “photographic memory” of grandmasters is a myth (with only a handful of exceptions).

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In addition to *The Woodpecker Method*, we want to mention another exercise book, from another era, which also inspired what we tried to do here. *The Best Move* by GMs Hort and Jansa featured a point system with partial credit. The concept of that book was quite different in other ways. For example, it asked the reader to evaluate the position (better, worse, equal, etc.) before solving it. We do not do that here, but we buy into the idea that an intuitive feeling is important (even in endgames).

To that end, you will have the opportunity to apply practical skills, or “survival skills,” in addition to just calculating variations. There are times when you need to choose a move by the method of elimination (e.g., everything else loses immediately). There will be positions which you won’t see through to the end but can still get full credit for. Rook endings in particular are very complicated, and you often need to play by feel. The diversity of exercises and themes can help you find what you are best at: intuition, practical logic, or precise calculation.

In conclusion, we would like to thank everyone who helped create this book. This was not an effort of just one or two people, and we cannot mention everyone who assisted. Both authors gave these exercises to students and friends to test them and this sometimes contributed to the analysis. Alex Fishbein’s son Mitch, a National Master, worked through many exercises, showing some of them to less advanced players.

We also want to mention GM Alexander Baburin, whose *Chess Today* publication featured a number of these positions.

Finally, we very much appreciate Wesley So’s foreword.

Karsten Müller & Alex Fishbein
October 2023

Foreword

Excellent Endgame Exercises

I have been watching Karsten's endgame series since 2006 (the "Chess Endgames" video series on ChessBase) and I used that knowledge to win my first Philippine Championship. That video series is one of my favorites, and well recommended for its simplicity and detail. I was honored to have once participated in his "Endgame Magic" show at the ChessBase studio in Hamburg, and even made an endgame training session with him. Karsten Müller is a justly renowned endgame research expert. His co-author, American grandmaster Alex Fishbein, worked with Karsten on the fifth edition of the classic *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual*.

When I train, like everyone else, I study openings in preparation for upcoming opponents. But there are other areas that need focus as well, and one is the study of endgames. They refresh the memory and give a deeper understanding of the game. Even though chess has become excessively computerized, books that help you to "understand" versus "memorize" will never go out of style.

Endgame Corner is detailed, well-researched, informative and in-depth, with both authors sharing their experiences, recent games and new examples.

There is a nice point award system, so you know which level you are playing, while errors and solutions are well explained in an interactive, puzzle style format.

Endgame Corner

I really like this material and hope that you will as well. If you are fascinated by endings, or feel the need to improve this part of your game, this book is a “must” addition to your library.

Chess is a difficult and deep game even for me and endgames are a beautiful and special world.

Grandmaster Wesley So
October 2023

Chapter 3

Transition to a Pawn Ending

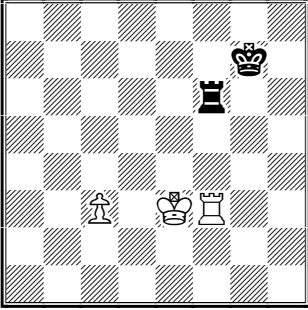
In the previous chapter, you had the opportunity to test your theoretical knowledge and calculation ability in pawn endings. But sometimes the decision of whether to trade to a pawn ending is the most pivotal in the game.

Until Joel Benjamin's excellent work *Liquidation on the Chess Board*, this topic was not well researched in literature. At most, you were given advice that you must calculate the pawn ending to the end when converting to it. But this is sometimes very difficult! We already saw how complicated pawn endings can be, and here you have to visualize them in the future, while other pieces are still on the board.

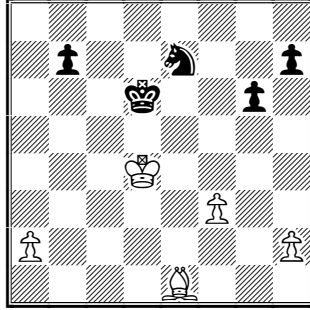
Chapter 3 will give you the chance to practice this skill. The good news is that you are given the hint that there is a liquidation; that in itself will make some positions easier. In a few cases, you may need to find the best way to liquidate. But usually, your main task is to decide whether or not to trade.

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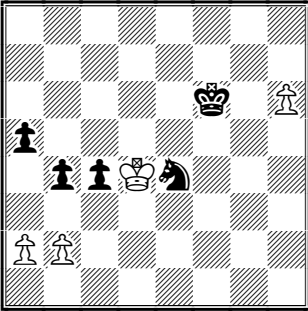
3-1 B *



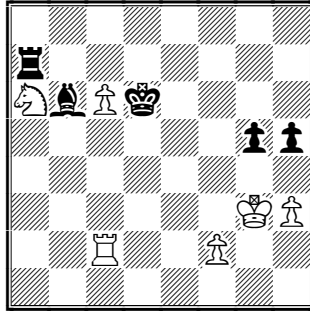
3-4 W **



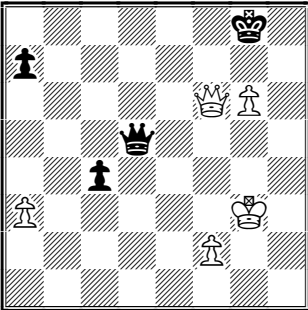
3-2 W **



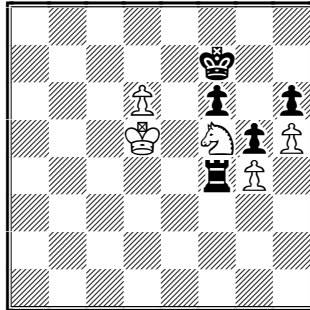
3-5 W **



3-3 W **



3-6 B **



Endgame Corner

Chapter 3 Solutions

3-1 Kovchan – Khalifman

St. Petersburg 2011

46...♖×f3+!

Any other move loses: the black king is way too far from the pawn.

47.♖×f3

The key squares are b5, c5 and d5. If White's king manages to reach one of them, White will win. As both kings are still on the kingside, e5, f5 and g5 would also be sufficient. So Black must defend those squares as well:

47...♖f7!

Distant opposition, *1 point*. Not 47...♖f6? 48.♖f4 ♖e6 49.♖e4 ♖d6 50.♖d4+-.

48.♖f4 ♖f6!

Opposition. A simple position, to start this chapter. The game was soon agreed drawn.

3-2 Malisauskas – Laurusas

Vilnius 2014

47.♖×c4! (2 points) saves the day.

If you chose 47.h7 ♖g7 48.♖×c4, you also get *2 points*, as it is equivalent. In the game, White ran into a pawn breakthrough after 47.♖×e4? a4 48.♖e3 (48.♖d4 c3 49.b×c3 b3 50.a×b3 a3+-) 48...c3 and resigned.

47...♗d6+ 48.♖c5 ♗e4+
49.♖b5 ♗c3+ 50.♖×a5 ♗×a2
51.♖a4 ♖g6 52.♖b3=

3-3 Kryakvin – Zakaryan

Moscow 2019

62.♖f7+!

1 point. White trades into a winning pawn ending with the outside passed pawn.

62...♖×f7 63.g×f7+ ♖×f7
64.♖f4 ♖f6 65.♖e4 ♖g5
66.♗d4 c3 (66...♖f4 67.♖×c4 ♖f3
68.♖b5 is similar to the game)
67.♖×c3 ♖f4 68.♖b4 ♖f3
69.♖a5 ♖×f2 70.♖a6 ♖e3

Black resigned in view of 71.♖×a7 ♖d4 72.♖b6! *Full credit (2 points)* for seeing that White wins by one tempo in the ending: 72...♖c4 73.a4 ♖b4 74.a5+-.

3-4 Teclaf – Murzin

Online 2021

39.♗g3+? was played in the game, but with the minor pieces on the board Black can defend. 39...♖e6 40.♖c5 ♖d7 41.♖b6 ♖c8 42.♖c5 ♖d7 43.♖b6 ♖c8 44.♖c5 ♖d7, drawn. Simplification with

39.♗b4+! ♖e6 40.♗×e7 is worth *2 points*. White wins after

40...♖×e7 41.♖e5 b6 (41...♖d7
42.♖f6 ♖d6 43.♖g7 ♖e6 44.♖×h7
♖f7 45.f4 ♖f6 46.♖g8! ♖f5
47.♖f7+-) 42.♗d5 (but not 42.a4?
♖d7 43.♖d5 ♖c7 44.♖e6 ♖b7