

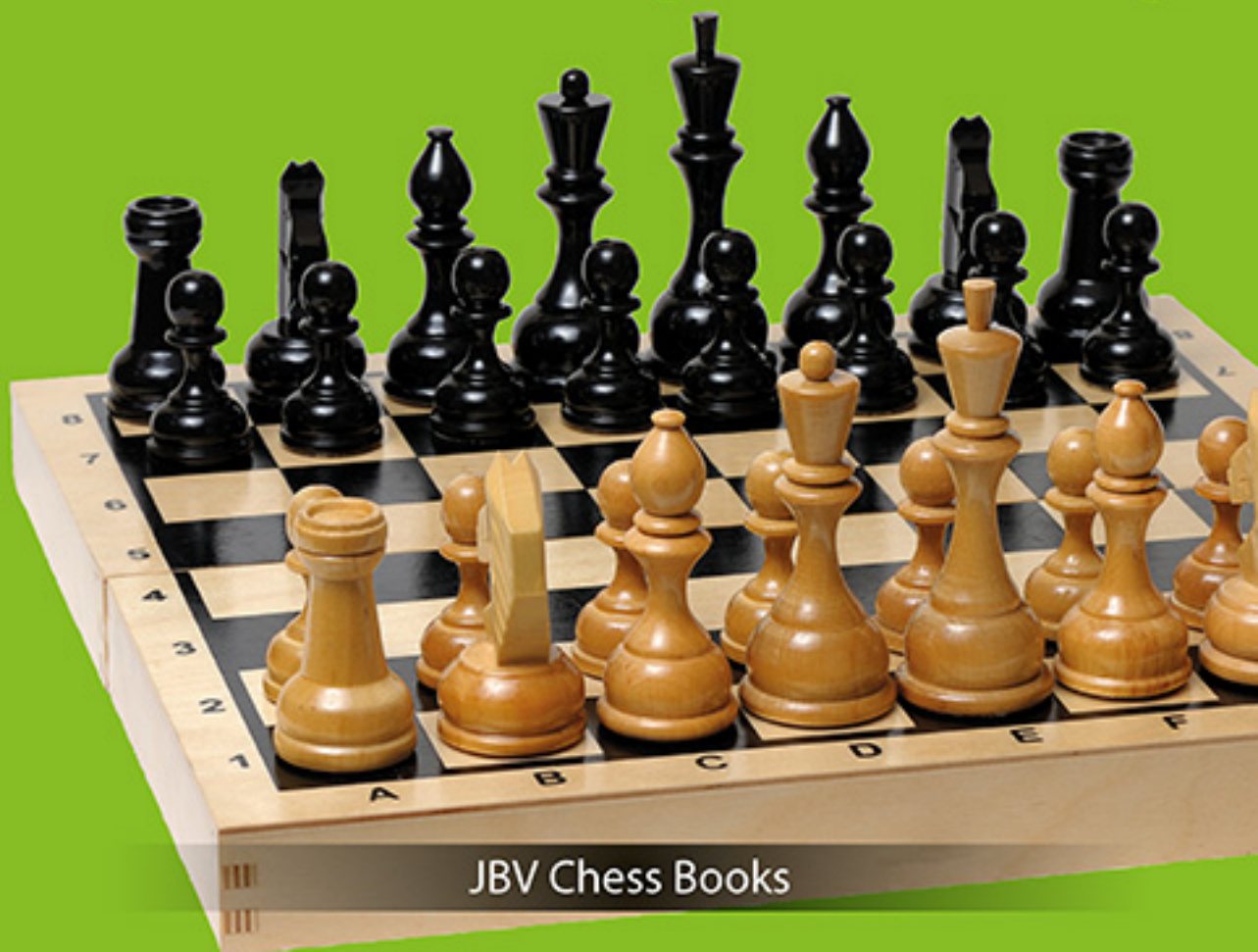
Karsten Müller

Typical Queen's Gambit

Orthodox Variation

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6)

Effective Middlegame Training



JBV Chess Books

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Preface

If someone decides to learn Spanish (the language, mind you - and not the opening!), he will appropriately acquire textbooks that deal with Spanish - not those that deal with *all* Roman languages or even all *European* languages.

Let's take this comparison a little further: If a dictionary is something like an opening book, then a grammar is something like a textbook for the middle game. True, one could fill entire libraries with opening books on the subject of Spanish alone, but what about a corresponding 'grammar'?

Of course, in every middlegame textbook one or the other position is clearly recognizable as *Spanish*, but their number is negligible in the context of French, English, Russian, Italian, Dutch and so on and so forth. And thus of all these other European languages - no excuse me: of all these other *openings* whose middlegame treatment the reader doesn't want to learn at all.

For example, isn't dealing with the issues of isolani, hanging pawns and minority attack just as dispensable for an e4 player as it is essential for a d4 player? - Why should a die-hard enthusiast of Indian openings care about the strategic intricacies of positions resulting from all those complicated Queen's Gambit systems? And of course vice versa: what can a player who 'by nature' avoids fianchetto openings do with all these subtleties of Indian positions?

And it is precisely this conspicuous and astounding vacuum in the area of middlegame literature that inspired me to make an appropriate attempt at improvement: If you want to learn *French* (the *opening*, mind you, and not the language!), you will get a textbook and exercise book in which only *French* is 'spoken' or played.

However, this book deals exclusively with the Orthodox Queen's Gambit (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6) – or, more precisely, with positions that can arise from this basic structure.

And I would like to make one more important point in advance. It is an enormous challenge for every chess author to do justice to a readership with the broadest possible skill level. So it would be absurd in the field of opening and endgame literature to offer, for example, 'French' or 'Rook Endgames' for players between 1400 and 1600, between 1600 and 1800 and so on. Accordingly, you only write *one* book on the respective topic and try to explain all important things as precisely and comprehensibly as possible - and then it's up to each individual reader how intensively he is willing to work with the book in order to achieve the greatest possible benefit.

The task becomes much more difficult with a book like this, which consists exclusively of exercises. Because if the author chooses consistently very simple or

consistently somewhat more difficult examples, then in the first case more advanced players shy away because they feel *underchallenged* - in the second case less advanced players because they feel *overchallenged*.

And therefore here's a good advice - regardless of your skill level. Take each exercise seriously, but don't let it become torture! As soon as you encounter too many obstacles or too much resistance, just take the liberty to open the solution section and turn the test book into a textbook!

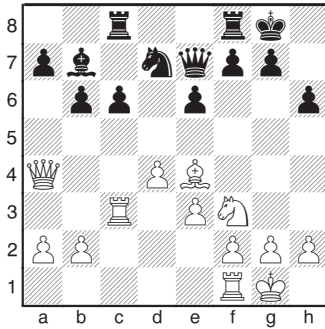
Karsten Müller, Hamburg, September 2025

Exercices

Concrete question (solutions from page 39)



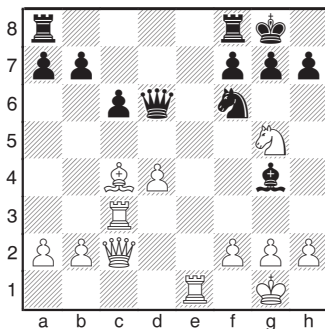
1



Two pawns are hanging.
How should Black best defend?



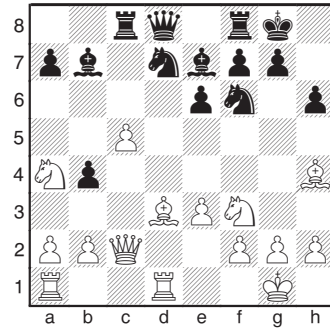
2



Why was the last move ♙g4
a decisive mistake?



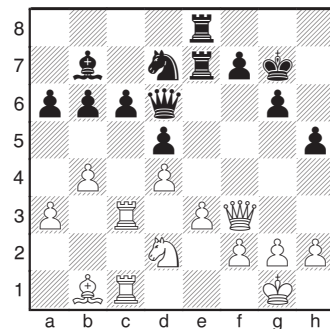
3



Can Black immediately regain
the sacrificed pawn?



4

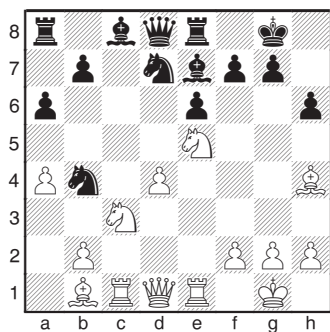


How can Black free himself
from his cramped position?

Violent measure or pressure increase? (solutions from page 45)



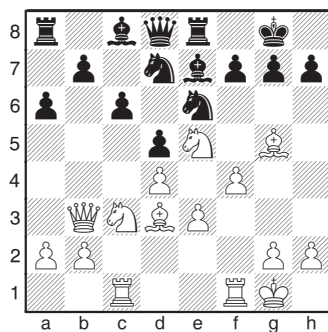
5



White to move



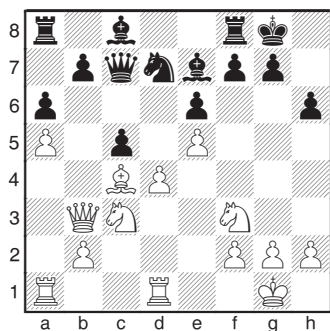
7



White to move



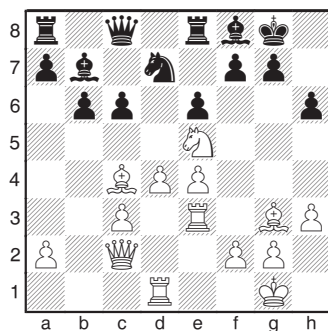
6



White to move



8

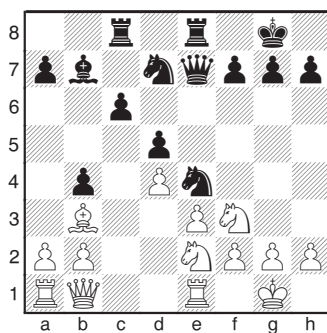


White to move

Miscellaneous (solutions from page 171)



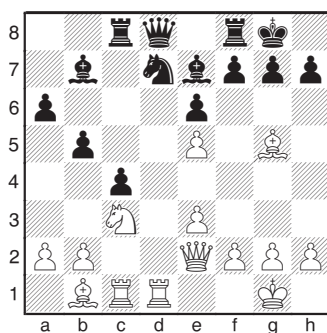
101



Should Black sacrifice – or reinforce?



102



With which astonishing move
can White secure equality?

Solutions

1

Kowsarinia – Malakhov

Russia 2014

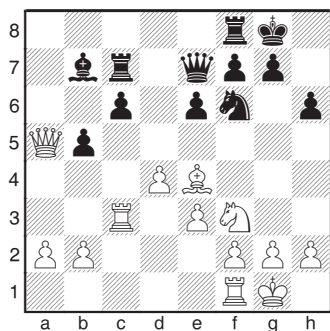
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 ♕e7
5.♗g5 0-0 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 ♘e4 8.♗xe7
♜xe7 9.♞c1 c6 10.♗d3 ♘xc3 11.♞xc3
dxc4 12.♗xc4 ♘d7 13.0-0 b6 14.♗d3
♗b7 15.♗e4 ♞ac8 16.♞a4

Even though at first sight it may seem that there is no satisfactory defense at all, closer analysis leads to the conclusion that as many as *four* candidates deserve attention. In this regard, the question of under what conditions White's queen may capture on a7 plays a key *tactical* role – and the possible activation of Black's so far passive bishop a *positional* one.

I) The game move **16...b5?!** is one of the two weaker candidates, because besides **17.♞xa7**, White can also choose **17.♞a5!?** and exploit the weakening later on, especially since the freeing move c6-c5 is now far out of reach.

After **17...♞c7 ...**

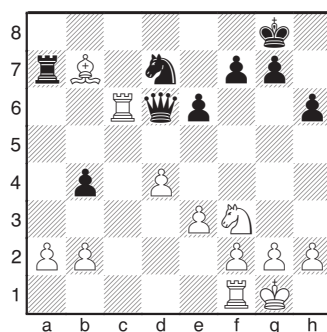
A) ... the game continued with **18.♞a5** ♘f6 (with the double threat ♘xe4 and ♞a8).



And after the only move **19.♘d2** followed by **19...♞a8 20.♞b6 ♞xa2**, Black had clearly benefited from the opening of the a-file.

B) The correct approach **18.♗xc6!** would have led to interesting complications, in which a seemingly insignificant detail was in fact quite important.

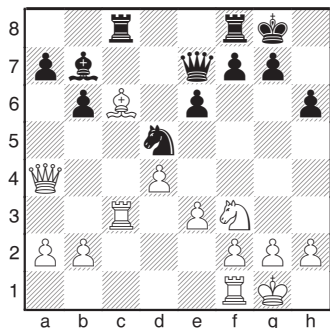
1) For the pseudo-active intermediate move **18...b4?** would have blocked the b4-square, whose importance becomes clear in line 2. After **19.♞cc1 ♞a8 20.♗xb7 ♞xa7 21.♞xc7 ♞d6** and the smart intermediate move **22.♞c6!** ...



... White would have had some advantage, because the queen would have had to retreat passively with **22...♞e7**, before play would continue with **23.♞c8+** (23.♗a6!?) **23...♘f8** (23...♗h7?? **24.♞c7+-**) **24.♗e4~±**.

2) After the immediate **18...♞a8** and the analogous continuation **19.♗xb7 ♞xa7 20.♞xc7 ♞d6** the difference becomes apparent, since **21.♞c6** could now be met actively with **21...♞b4**. And after **21.♞c8+ ♗h7 22.♗e4+ g6 23.a3** instead, White would only have a slight advantage.

II) The approach **16...♟f6?!** was the one that would have led to the activation of Black's bishop – namely after **17.♙xc6 ♟d5** and now:

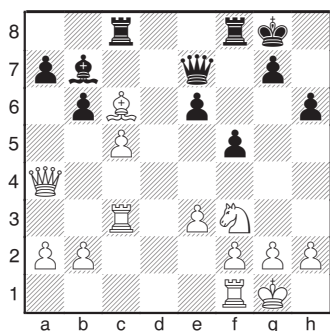


A) 18.♖cc1?! ♙xc6 19.♖xc6 ♖e8 20.♖c4 ♖xa4 21.♖xa4 a5=

B) 18.♙xd5 ♙xd5 Δ19.♟e5?! (Δ19.♖fc1±) 19...♖g5 20.g3 ♖xc3 21.bxc3 f6=

III) The first candidate for equality was **16...♖c7!?** with the possible continuation **17.♖fc1 c5! 18.♙xb7 ♖xb7 19.♖b5~± Δa3** and b4.

IV) Best was to follow the maxim 'attack is the best form of defense' with **16...f5!** – although in this case some tactical skill was also required to foresee and correctly calculate the point in the next move – namely **17.♙xc6 (17.♙d3?! a5=; 17...c5; 17...a6) 17...♟c5! 18.dxc5**



18...♖xc6!?

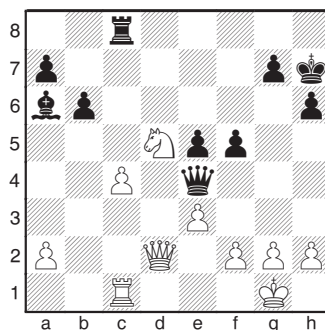
18...♙xc6 19.♖h4 ♖b7= is simpler, but the alternative leads to interesting complications.

A) 19.♖fc1 ♖xc5 20.♖xc5 bxc5= Δ21.♖xa7 ♖a8 22.♖xc5 (22.♖b6 ♖xa2) 22...♖c8 23.♖xc8+ ♙xc8 24.♖xc8+ etc.

B) 19.♟e5 ♖xc5 Δ20.♟g6?

(Δ20.♖xc5 bxc5 21.♖d1~±; 21.h4!?)

20...♖g5 21.♟f4 ♖xc3 21.bxc3 e5 22.♖b3+ ♟h7 23.♟d5 ♙a6~+ (23...♖c8) 25.c4?! ♖c8 26.♖c1 and now the seemingly decisive reinforcement **26...♖h4?** (Δ26.♖c5+) would be refuted pointedly by **27.♖d3! ♖e4 28.♖d2.**



After **28...♙xc4? ...**

(Δ28...♖xc4 29.♟f6+! gxf6 30.♖d7+ =)

... 29.♟f6+! gxf6 30.♖d7+ ♟g6 31.♖xc8 ♙d5 the liberated bishop would once again demonstrate its power. However, the queen could return to her own camp just in time for defense with **32.♖e8+ ♙f7 33.♖b5 ♙d5 34.♖f1 ♙xa2 35.♖e2±.** And although the material is more or less balanced, White holds a clear advantage, because Black's passed pawns are still at the starting blocks and the king is within reach of an attack.

2

Wilén – Henningsen

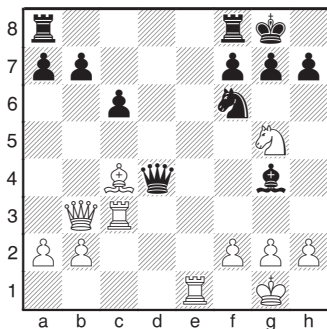
Helsingør 2014

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♙g5 ♙e7
5.e3 c6 6.♘f3 ♘bd7 7.♖c1 0-0 8.♙d3
dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♘d5 10.♙xe7 ♗xe7 11.0-0
♘xc3 12.♖xc3 e5 13.♗c2 exd4 14.exd4
♘f6 15.♖e1 ♗d6 16.♘g5 ♙g4

The bishop's sally (♗16...g6) may at first glance look like a 'shot in the dark', but it is inspired by a comparable maneuver in similar positions, which could be described as 'taking a detour' or 'playing off the cushion'. Since the bishop cannot directly neutralize the dangerous b1–h7 diagonal, this is to be achieved indirectly with the maneuver ♙g4–h5–g6. And if successful, the pawn on f7 would also be protected – which is far more under pressure here than h7. Because this detail was overlooked, the overly positional excursion deserves even two question marks, and within a few moves Black should find himself on the edge of a precipice.

1) However, not after the 'wrong move order' 17.♗b3?, which Black answered with the further inaccuracy 17...♙h5?!

– 17...♗xd4?! also turns out in White's favor with correct play:



– 18.♘xf7?? ♘d5!–+

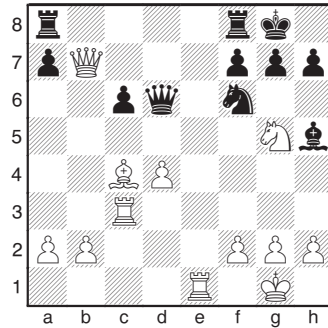
– 18.♗xb7?! ♖ab8∞ Δ19.♙xf7+??

♙h8–+ 20.♗xc6 h6; 20.♗c7 ♘d5

– Correct is 18.♙xf7+ ♙h8 Δ♗f4; e.g. 19.h3 ♗f4 20.♘f3 (20.hxg4 ♘xg4) 20...♙xf3 21.♖xf3 ♗c7 22.♙e6 or 22.♙c4 with a clear minimal advantage thanks to the better minor piece, the generally superior piece play, and the more solid king position.

– When calculating the simple defensive move 17...♗d7∞ the defender may have overlooked that after 18.♖ce3 ♙h5 19.♖e7 he could have relied on 19...♖ae8! – a well-known tactical motif from similar positions.

18.♗xb7

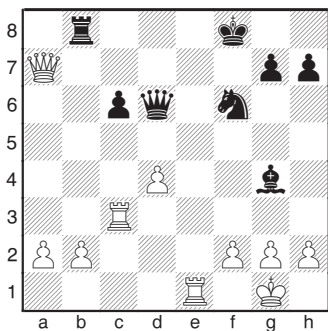


18...♖ab8?!

After 18...♗xd4 19.♗xc6 ♗d2 20.♖ce3 ♖ac8 21.♗a4, White would have been left with only a touch of a minimal advantage; e.g. 21...♗xb2 22.♙b3 or 21...♘g4 22.♘e4 ♗xb2 23.♖e2; 23.♖g3.

19.♗xa7 ♖xb2 20.♗a3 ♗xa3
21.♖xa3~±

2) After 17.♘xf7! ♖xf7 18.♙xf7+ ♙xf7, Black would have been driven to the brink of the abyss as follows: 19.♗b3+ ♙f8 20.♗xb7 ♖b8 21.♗xa7



Δ21...Rxb2?! (Δ21...d7 22.b3~+-)
22.Rxc6! Qxc6 23.Qa3+ +-; 22...Qb4
23.Rec1

3

Feavyour – Ewart

Aberystwyth 2014

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.f3 f6 4.f3 e6
5.g5 b7 6.e3 e7 7.Qc2 0-0 8.d3
dxc4 9.Qxc4 b5 10.d3 b7 11.0-0 h6
12.f4 b4 13.f4 a4 c5 14.dxc5 Rxc8
15.Rfd1

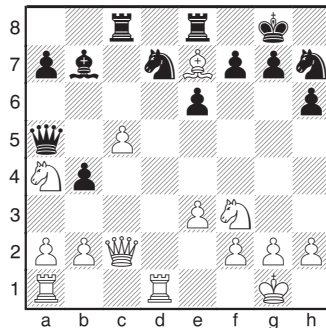
The central lever c6–c5 did not necessarily have to be carried out as a pawn sacrifice, but could, for example, have been prepared with 13...Qa5. In the form chosen instead, it is clear in view of the balance of forces that Black will sooner or later recover the pawn. However, the test question precisely aims at whether this recovery can be achieved immediately, and in this regard the tactical circumstances along the d-file must evidently be examined with utmost precision.

I) After 15...Qa5?! at this point ...

A) ... followed by the highly unnecessary weakening 16.b3?! – the continuation 16...dxc5 17.fxc5 Rxc5+ not only restored material equality, but also invited the opponent's pieces (above all the knight) to settle comfortably on c3 sooner or later.

B) After the better reaction 16.fh7+! the game could have taken the following course.

1) 16...fxh7 17.fxe7 Rfe8

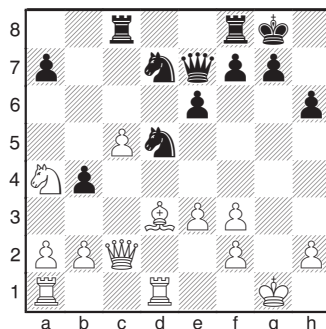


a) 18.Rxd7!? Qc6 19.f8!∞

b) 18.f8! Qc6 19.b3± Δ19...Qxa4?
(Δ19...fxh7 20.Rac1) 20.bxa4 fxc5
21.Rac1±

2) 16...fxh7 17.Rxd7 fxd7 18.fxe7 Rfe8
19.f8! Qc6 20.gxf3 g6 21.a3! Qxh7
(21...bxa3?? 22.Rxa3+-) 22.Qb3 bxa3
23.Rxa3± ΔQb7

II) Surrendering the strong fianchetto bishop with 15...Qxf3 16.gxf3 is not necessary, although, after 16...d5 17.fxe7 Qxe7 ...



... this approach also provides at least adequate compensation; e.g. 18.f8! (18.Rac1 Rxc7) 18...Rxc7 (18...Qg5+) 19.Rac1 Qg5+± 20.fh1 (20.f1?! ...

Index of sources

Books

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ChessBase 16

Stockfish 14

Komodo 13

Periodicals

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Schachmagazin 64

About the author

GM Dr. Karsten Müller was born on November 23rd, 1970 in Hamburg. He studied mathematics and received his doctorate in 2002. From 1988 to 2015 he played for the 'Hamburger SK' in the German 'Bundesliga' and in 1998 he was awarded the title of Grandmaster.

The busy and globally recognized endgame expert was named 'Trainer of the Year' by the German Chess Federation in 2007



He is the author (or co-author) of the following highly esteemed works:

- Secrets of Pawn Endings (with Frank Lamprecht, Everyman/GAMBIT 2000)
- Fundamental Chess Endings (with Frank Lamprecht, GAMBIT 2001)
- Danish Dynamite (with Martin Voigt, Russell 2003)
- Chess Cafe Puzzle Book: Test and Improve Your Tactical Vision (Russell 2004)
- How to Play Chess Endgames (with Wolfgang Pajeken, GAMBIT 2008)
- Chess Cafe Puzzle Book 2: Test and Improve Your Positional Intuition (Russell 2008)
- Bobby Fischer, The Career and Complete Games of the American World Chess Champion (Russell 2009)
- Chess Cafe Puzzle Book 3: Test and Improve Your Defensive Skill! (with Merijn van Delft, Russell 2010)
- Chess Cafe Puzzle Book 4: Mastering the positional principles (with Alexander Markgraf, Russell 2012)
- The Magic Tactics of Mikhail Tal: Learn from the Legend (with Raymund Stolze, Edition Olms 2012)
- Fighting chess with Hikaru Nakamura (with Raymund Stolze, Edition Olms 2013)
- The slow (but venomous) Italian (with Georgios Souleidis, New in Chess 2016)
- The Magic of Chess Tactics 2 (with C.D. Meyer, Russell 2017)

His excellent series of ChessBase–DVDs Chess endgames 1–14 also attracted attention.

Müller's popular column Endgame Corner was published at 'www.ChessCafe.com' from January 2001 until 2015, and his column Endgames is published in Chess-Base Magazine since 2006.

To date, numerous of his books have been published by JBV Chess Books (Joachim Beyer Verlag) – a total of 27 in German and the following titles also in English:

- Magical Endgames (together with Claus Dieter Meyer)
- The Human Factor in Chess (together with Luis Engel)
- The Best Endgames of the World Champions Vol. 1 + 2
- World Chess Championship 2021 (together with Jerzy Konikowski and Uwe Bekemann)
- The Best Combinations of the World Champions Vol. 1 + 2 (together with Jerzy Konikowski)
- Bobby Fischer 60 Best Games
- Chess Training with Matthias Blübaum (together with Matthias Blübaum and Matthias Kreilmann)
- The Human Factor in Chess – The Testbook (together with Luis Engel and Makan Rafiee)
- Typical Sicilian, Effective Middlegame Training (2023)
- Magnus Carlsen – The Chess DNA of a Genius (2023)
- Karsten Müller – Attack (2023)
- Karsten Müller – Endgame Magic (2023)
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