

## Book Review

by Don Aldrich

***School of Chess Excellence I: Endgame Analysis, by Mark Dvoretsky  
 (Editions Olms 2002) paperback, FAN, 260 pp., \$25***

From the late 80's through the 90's, Dvoretsky, perhaps the premier chess trainer in the world, wrote a series of books covering all aspects of chess published by Batsford. Prior to Batsford's bankruptcy, several authors were shorted royalties, including Dvoretsky. Batsford was then bought by Chrysalis, and has started republishing again. It is not clear to me what the status of the copyrights of some of the pre-bankruptcy material is. However, Dvoretsky retained his copyright, and thus is free to publish again with a new publisher.

This book was originally published as 'Technique for the Tournament Player'. Now in its new incarnation, it has been updated, added to, and published by the prestigious Olms house of Switzerland. It has a new, vastly improved translation by Ken Neat, about 40 pages of new material, some corrections and updates to retained material, and is given the first class treatment that all Olms' products have – the paper and binding are far superior to even many hardbacks. The diagrams and type are superb.

The book is divided into three parts: Adjourned Positions, The Endgame, and Studies. Each part consists of 10–15 separate chapters or 'lectures', running from 3 to 10 pages. Each chapter covers one or two positions or ideas in great detail. There are questions posed for the reader at critical junctures, which the reader is asked to solve before moving on. At the end of each section there are a number of problems relating to the material just presented to be solved with the answers in the back.

It is important to understand that the book is titled: 'Endgame Analysis'. This is not a primer of endgame technique. There are no chapters on the opposition, or how to win the Lucena position. One could argue that the major focus of the Soviet School was on what Dvoretsky calls the 'calculation of concrete variations'. This simply means improving calculation and visualization skills. Throughout all of his works, Dvoretsky is constantly hammering on how important this is, and many of his exercises are designed to foster and grow these skills.

What many do not understand is how useful the endgame can be for this exercise. Many endgame studies, which Dvoretsky uses a lot of, have only a few pieces or pawns on the board, and are amenable to calculation of quite lengthy lines. Several years ago I attended a week long chess camp that featured a number of expatriate Russian instructors, such as Dmitri Gurevich, Gregory Kaidanov and so on, and one of the things they had us doing day and night was solving King & pawn endgames in our heads. Often the solutions would go 20+ moves. The point was not so much learning about pawn endings as improving calculation skills.

And so it is here. The first section of the book, adjourned games, might not seem to be useful to the modern player in the era of sudden death time controls. As Dvoretsky says, the point of these chapters is not to teach how to analyse adjourned positions but to foster the analytical skills of the student. This section contains some very deeply analysed positions.

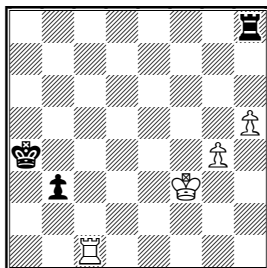
The second section, 'The Endgame', is simply a collection of lectures on various endings which are unified only by the fact that there is an interesting point or two to be gleaned, and of course to improve the calculation of those concrete variations. The chapters feature titles such as 'The King Establishes a Record', 'Mined Squares', 'The Reward for Tenacious Defence', and so on.

The third section, entitled 'Studies', focuses on using the composed endgame study to improve one's analytical abilities. He sets out a number of them, but this is not simply a study selection. Each one is discussed in detail, and he explains how to use them in one's training. Significantly, he notes that a surprisingly high number of classics have been 'cooked'. He brings this up not for aesthetic reasons, but as an example how to use them in training. Most of the cooks given were done by students in his classes, and he is encouraging the reader to do the same at home.

One of the unique features of this presentation is that one is not told what the task is; that is, the diagrams only indicate that it's White's move, and are silent on the result, as opposed to the standard 'White to move and win or draw' captions. As Dvoretsky notes, in a game, there is no one to tell you who is going to win. And this very technique is what has led to a number of the cooks. Some poor student thinks he is supposed to win a position that was designed to be drawn, or win it with black, and he does so! As with all Dvoretsky books, the problems are quite difficult. Actually reading a chapter the way he wants you to, solving the problems as you go along, is a serious study task that can take several hours.

Here is an extract from the chapter entitled 'Rook against Pawns':

**Simagin – Bronstein**  
Moscow Championship, 1982



After some historical background, you are given a question: **Q 2-26. How should Black Defend?**

After working it out on your own, you find the following:

**1...♖h8!** The primitive 1...b2? 2.♗b1 ♕b3 3.g5 does not leave Black any chance at all. He must stop the pawns, if only for the moment.

**2.♕g3?** The king heads for h4, in order to set the pawns in motion. As we shall see later, this natural move throws away the win.

**2...b2 3.♗b1?!** Here too the opponent could have been set far more serious problems. The subsequent events develop by force.

**3...♕b3 4.♕h4 ♗a8!**

4...♗c8! was equally good. **To halt the advance of two connected passed pawns, a rook is best placed to the rear of them, behind the more advanced pawn.** The rook has fulfilled its objective at h8, and it now heads for the first rank, to h1.

**5.g5** There is more analysis at this point, but I just give the remaining moves for completeness. **5...♗a1 6.♗xb2+ ♕xb2 7.♕g4 ♗h1! 8.g6 ♕c3 9.♕g5 ♕d4 10.g7 ♕e5! 11.♕g6 ♗g1+ 12.♕f7 ♗f1+! 13.♕e7 ♗g1 14.h6 ♗g6! 15.♕f7 ♗f6+ 16.♕e8 ♗e6+ 17.♕d8 ♗d6+ 18.♕c8 ♗c6+ 1/2-1/2**

At this point, a new diagram appears, the position from the above game after 3.♗h1! instead of 3.♗b1, and the reader is challenged with 'What is Black to do now?', which is followed by another two pages of analysis. The chapter ends with two exercises involving Rook against pawns to solve. I should also mention this

chapter contains a second game fragment containing another reader challenge, and several pages of hard core analysis and explication of the particular problems in this type of ending. And this is typical of the book. This chapter is six pages, focuses on one issue or technique, offers three reader challenges, and two exercises. In addition to forcing one to work on his calculating skills, it teaches an extremely useful technique for a particular ending. I would guess that to properly cover the material in this chapter will require 2-4 hours of time depending on the reader's skill and tenacity.

The effort will be worth it. Dvoretsky's genius lies in selecting the right problems for the student, and asking the right questions. Working through one of his books will improve one's play, virtually no matter what his strength. Dvoretsky's programs are designed for players of the 'first category', i.e. youngsters of Class A-expert strength or better, so the material is suitable for virtually anyone under 2400. While some of his books can definitely be over the head of a weaker class player, the ideas here are so fundamental that I think almost anyone can benefit.

**Conclusion:** In short, I cannot give a strong enough recommendation to this book. If you like endgames, you will love it. If you hate endgames, you may find that they can be entertaining after all. And if you do the work, you will definitely improve.