


Book Review

by Graham Brown

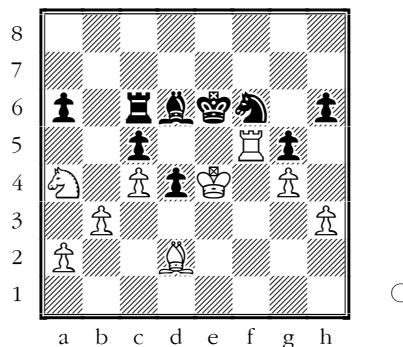
Learn Chess Tactics, John Nunn (2004 Batsford) pp., £14.99

Learn Chess Tactics is a basic course for beginners. Some basic chess knowledge is assumed but there is a quick revision course in the first chapter. It is from the author of many diverse works, from the fun and intriguing *Solving in Style*, to the rather dry & dusty, but academically super-charged treatise: *Secrets of Minor-Piece Endings*.

This book falls somewhere between these two in style. Certainly it has elements of dullness. There is the slight scent of school book to all this, with each chapter laid out very much the same, and a massive solutions section taking up nearly 1/3 of the book.

Having said that, judged by textbook standards, this is a super book. It gets on with the job very specifically. OK so the solutions do occupy a large ratio, but that's because there is a lot of good explanation and further diagrams with them. The exercises build in difficulty and are all from real and recent games. They are really well chosen and interesting to go through. As such they really do give you a good feel for each idea. It also, commendably, sticks to practical tactics that "occur time and time again" It is not about attacking play in general, the ideas presented are those that simply win material. Nunn, as an expert problem solver and writer, could have easily put all sorts of 'Solving in Style' type flashy stuff in here but he sticks to the task. The examples he promises, "are bound to arise in reader's games sooner or later" And he should know as he is no stranger to the cut and thrust of practical play at all levels, well know to be a dangerous tactician.

There is a discussion of each theme, such as – fork, pin, removing the guard etc. Then come lots of exercises to solve. They start off very easy to show the pure idea, but go slowly up to some pretty difficult ones. The way they are carefully graded means that the beginner is led step by step to more challenging examples. Simple one-move forks are followed by ones requiring a one-move preparation. Further on we are expected to arrange the unusual king fork that Michael Adams whipped up against Timman in Dortmund 1999.

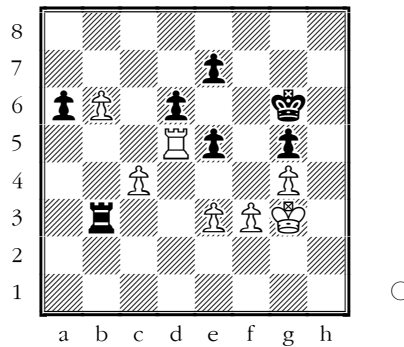


And by the end we are asked to set up a knight fork with two preliminary sacrifices.



At the end of the book are "miscellaneous examples" where all the themes in the book are covered. No clues are given as to the theme or difficulty of each exercise.

Here's one I liked, when I eventually found the solution ... but I guess it isn't that difficult really, see if you can beat about 5 mins!



If you want a book that teaches tactics in a way that makes Harry Potter look dull ... keep looking! But if such a book ever gets written, then its author will probably have read this excellent one first.

Solutions:

1. Rxf6 Kf6
2. Kd5

1. g6+ Bxg6
2. Re7+ Ke7
3. Ng6+

1. Rb5 ab
2. c5