

**Review of the book Secrets of pawnless endings, J. Nunn, 1994, 0713475080**

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## REVIEWS

### SECRETS OF PAWNLESS ENDINGS

by John Nunn

London, UK

B.T. Batsford, Ltd., 1994, London, UK  
320 pages, ISBN 0-7134-7508-0

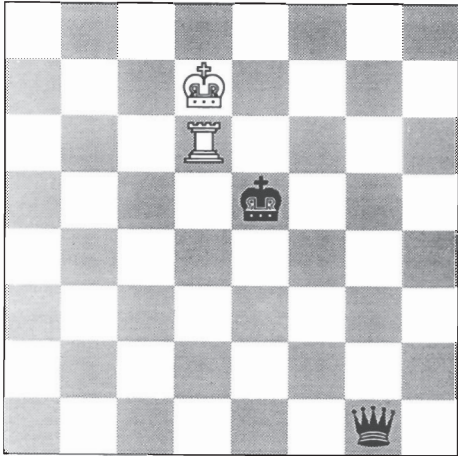
*Reviewed by I.S. Herschberg and H.J. van den Herik*

If the Editors had requested John Nunn to review his own book, his invited contribution *More, and More Perfect Prose* elsewhere in this issue would have shown him to be a poor evaluator of his own efforts, exclusively due to a near-pathological excess of modesty. Thus, when he writes that "the book (...) was produced with the aid of Ken Thompson's CD-ROM databases", he gravely understates the weight of the rôle he has played himself. True enough, the databases have been an indispensable aid, just as essential to the book as the King is to a chess-player. Yet, the modesty in this simple statement is overpowering; without six months of Nunn's devoted, continuous and sustained effort, the book would never have been, nor would it have any of the magnificent qualities it shares with its illustrious predecessor reviewed earlier in these pages (Van den Herik and Herschberg, 1993). The superb achievement now before us was to make sense of the enormous volume of information in the databases. For this, he deserves high praise indeed, subject to one rider Nunn agrees with: there is a limit to the amount of information one can bring within human reach and it is not given to mere human beings always to make sense of what the database presents one with.

It is an excess of modesty which must have provoked Nunn to sweep under the carpet the sheer labour of it: he never even refers to his manual efforts in typesetting the volume himself. Again, it is an exercise in self-effacement to qualify the Miscellaneous Endings of his Chapter 13 as relatively unimportant. While we agree with Nunn's assessment of their relative rarity, they have great power to entertain, which our readers may appreciate to no less a degree than their power to instruct. It is delightful to see how, even in this light-hearted chapter, there is room for a concluding section of odds and ends which brings across the footlights that chess can be hilarious.

As in its predecessor volume, considerable trouble has been taken to collect relevant material from games actually played. It turns out that even simple endgames may be savagely butchered by Grandmasters. In 1985, the chess world was astounded to watch Korchnoi playing on in a clearly lost endgame. He had been ahead, and some thought he played on out of pique. Others thought his persistence to have been motivated by his knowledge, picked up from the computer-chess world, that even the easy KQKR endgame would be hard to win. Korchnoi resigned after a few moves, chiefly because some of his moves were feeble indeed. Yet it remains to be seen whether Kasparov at that moment would have found the effective plan for a win without the aid of additional knowledge such as a database might have provided. We should remember that, in 1978, Grandmaster Browne had failed to win this endgame against Ken Thompson's database (Fenner, 1979), a fact mentioned in the book but unfortunately not referenced as a diagrammed game.

All Grandmaster games ending in the KQKR configuration show that the defender plays this endgame badly. Nunn concurs: "In all these practical examples, poor defence relieved the attacker of the task of finding the win in [Diagram 1]. This supports the theory that even a small amount of knowledge (...) might be enough to confuse the opponent." As a case in point, Nunn (p. 61) presents the following unflattering analysis of Korchnoi-Kasparov in the London 1985 Candidate Tournament (see Diagram 1).



**Diagram 1:** Korchnoi-Kasparov (1985).  
(Nunn, 1994, p. 61)

We paraphrase Nunn: "The game continued 1. **Re6+ Kf5** 2. **Rd6 Qa7+** 3. **Kd8** (unnecessarily passive, since the defender should not retreat to the back rank unless this is really forced; 3. **Kc6 Qa4** 4. **Kc7 Ke5** 5. **Rg6 Qa7+** 6. **Kd8 Qf7** 7. **Ra6** would have led to the same conclusion, but two moves slower) **Ke5** 4. **Rg6 Qa5+** (4. ... **Qf7** 5. **Ra6 Kd5** 6. **Rb6** would have led directly to a position called the 'third-rank defence') 5. **Kd7 Qa4+** 6. **Ke7** (yet again, poor defence allows a relatively easy win; we saw in the third-rank defence that the key strategy for the attacker is to switch his Queen from one side to the other with a gain of tempo, and 6. **Kc7** would have prevented this) **Qh4+** (of course: now it is easy) 7. **Kf8 Qd8+** (7. ... **Kf5** was three moves faster) 8. **Kf7 Kf5** 9. **Rh6 Qd7+** White resigned because 10. **Kg8 Kg5** 11. **Rh7 Qe8+** 12. **Kg7 Qe4** leads to the elementary Berger position".

We must utter, we feel, and in part even iterate, a few criticisms. An index of reciprocal zugzwang positions would have been desirable (but was perhaps too long). So would an index of study composers and, separately, an index of games by participants. Yet, even as it is, it is impossible to recommend this book too highly. It is of interest to every chess-player, from the over-the-board practitioner to the devotee of the most abstruse studies.

## REFERENCES

- Fenner, C.J. (1979). Computer Chess, News about the North American Computer Chess Championship. *The British Chess Magazine*, Vol. 99, No. 5, pp. 193-200.
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## KONSTRUKTION UND OPTIMIERUNG VON BEWERTUNGSFUNKTIONEN BEIM SCHACH

by Peter Mysliwietz

Ph.D. Thesis, January 1994

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Fachbereich Mathematik - Informatik  
Paderborn, Germany  
202 pages

Reviewed by Ingo Althöfer

ZUGZWANG is a successful chess program running on massively parallel hardware (e.g., on 1024 Inmos Transputers in a grid). It is the brainchild of Peter Mysliwietz and Rainer Feldmann. The former specifically has been responsible for its evaluation functions, which also are the topic of his doctoral dissertation (in German).

In the reviewer's idea, the most interesting of the eight chapters are those dealing with deriving strong functions from experts' knowledge (Chapter 6) and the automatic optimization of weights in linear functions (Chapter 7) – both have a strong experimental component.