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—Bruce Pandolfini



**Basic Chess
Endings**

ALGEBRAIC NOTATION

Reuben Fine
International Grandmaster
Revised by Pal Benko
Foreword by Yuri Averbakh



♔ McKay Chess Library

Basic Chess Endings

Reuben Fine

Revised by Pal Benko



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Dedicated
to the Memory of
Dr. Emanuel Lasker

FOREWORD

In the enormous sea of chess literature there are comparatively few books about the endgame, the third and final phase of the game. Among these books only several can be named as real chess classics. And outstanding among these classics is *Basic Chess Endings*, written in 1941 by Reuben Fine, one of the all-time chess greats.

The task of revising this valuable work for the next generations of players has been brilliantly accomplished by Pal Benko, an experienced grandmaster who twice qualified for the candidates' competitions for the world championship. It is important to add that Pal Benko is not only a noted expert in the field of endgames; he is also a famous chess composer who has contributed to the development of endgame theory. His own endgames visibly adorn this book and complement Reuben Fine's analysis.

Reuben Fine (1914–1993) was for a long time one of the top players in the world. Especially remarkable were his tournament successes from 1935 to 1938. He won or shared first place in the following international tournaments: Hastings 1935–36, Zaandvoort 1936, Oslo 1936, Amsterdam 1936, Stockholm 1937, Ostende 1937, and Margate 1937. In the strongest tournament held up to that time, AVRO 1938, he shared first place with Paul Keres.

Fine is the owner of a unique record. In 1937 he won two tournaments in a row in the USSR (Moscow and Leningrad), where, except for Botvinnik, all the best Soviet players competed. So far this result has not been surpassed by any foreign grandmaster.

As an author, Fine showed himself to be a brilliant analyst who understood the depth and all the particulars of the endgame. It is no exaggeration to say that *Basic Chess Endings* was the first systematic textbook on this phase of the game. Fine chose standard positions of various types and in many cases gave useful rules for practical play.

In this book, as in his other works, he revealed himself to be a natural teacher who, using skillfully selected examples, was able to acquaint the reader with all the basic ideas of the endgame. It is no accident that copies of *Basic Chess Endings* are owned by many generations of players, and not only in the English-speaking countries. Mikhail Botvinnik, for example, considered Fine's work the best book on the subject. My own research in this field was based on Fine's book.

Although as a textbook meant for the general chess public Fine's work has

never become obsolete, it required deep revision. Pal Benko corrected or replaced some examples with more typical or more instructive ones. It was necessary to add new examples that took into account the latest achievements in chess theory and practice.

Since the original publication of *Basic Chess Endings*, chess theory and practice, including the endgame, have made gigantic progress. Thousands of interesting and instructive endings have been played. A number of monumental works have appeared in different languages, including English, concerning both the endgame on the whole and some particular types. New ideas have appeared and new ways of playing have been described.

But chess programs using computers made a genuine revolution. For instance, despite the opinion of theoreticians, it was established with the help of a computer that two bishops win against knight (no pawns). Some analyses of endings with queen and pawn versus queen were defined more precisely, and so on.

In 1954, when the match USA-USSR was held in New York, I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Reuben Fine. Naturally, our talk touched upon *Basic Chess Endings*. He told me that he found the work so fascinating that he completed it in four months—surely a record worthy of inclusion in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. From my own experience I know that to write such a book would take *years*.

Early in the 1990s, I gave an exhibition in the Manhattan Chess Club in New York City. There I met Reuben Fine for the last time. His hair had turned gray; he had grown old. True, we had not seen each other for about half a century. During our talk I asked him if he intended to prepare a new edition of *Basic Chess Endings*.

“Yes, it is my dream,” he answered, “but I don’t know if I have enough time.”

I would like to congratulate the McKay Chess Library for making Fine’s dream come true.

Grandmaster Yuri Averbakh

REVISER'S PREFACE

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of the endgame. This is especially true in today's competitive chess with its faster time controls. A player who is not well equipped with basic endgame knowledge is liable to lose the fruit of even a well-played game.

Grandmaster Reuben Fine's classic book on the endgame was my compass when I started to play chess and continued to guide me after I became a master. Indeed, entire generations of chess players grew up on this great book. No wonder it has been called the bible of the endgame. This very practical and useful one-volume textbook, with its great many examples, explains the mysteries of the final phase of the game in plain language that can be read and enjoyed with profit by amateurs and masters alike.

I was honored to be asked to revise Fine's tremendous work, which had been first published in 1941 and had never been revised. For the most part I have left this great body of knowledge untouched, except to correct errors (unavoidable in such an enormous work) and to delete redundant and outdated material. I have brought the book up to date as regards endgame theory and added new examples. Fortunately, basic endgame theory, unlike opening theory, has not changed much in the last half century, except in certain technical areas.

Converting the original chess notation from descriptive to algebraic, now the universally accepted system, has enabled a much clearer and more compact presentation of the text while preserving its authenticity. The conversion was professionally accomplished by Laszlo Lovass of Hungary.

Thanks to Burt Hochberg, who initiated and supervised this project and edited the manuscript.

I hope all new readers will learn from and enjoy this book as much as I have.

*International Grandmaster Pal Benko
New York, March 2003*

EDITOR'S PREFACE

A dozen or so years ago, in the performance of my duties as chess adviser to David McKay Company, I had the chutzpah to suggest that they publish a revised edition of Reuben Fine's massive masterwork *Basic Chess Endings*. Not surprisingly, given the project's projected costs in time and money, the proposal was turned down.

The present generation of McKay editors, to whom, despite my advancing years and decrepitude, I once again proposed a revision of *BCE*—this time with conversion of the old-fashioned descriptive notation to the modern algebraic system—leapt on the idea with alacrity. They were especially encouraged when I told them that one of the world's leading endgame experts, Grandmaster Pal Benko, was available to do the revision.

Grandmaster Benko and I met a few times in New York to discuss technical aspects of the project, and then he was off to Budapest, his original hometown, where he lives part of the year. Six months later he reemerged in New York armed with the new manuscript, electronically encoded on a computer disc. For my use as backup, he gave me his densely annotated and well worn original hardcover copy of *Basic Chess Endings*, his constant companion throughout his chess career spanning more than half a century.

Editing such a work was a daunting challenge, not only because of its size and complexity (the original book ran to 573 jam-packed pages) but also because of its stature as one of the foundation-stones of chess literature. Who would dare to edit Beethoven's Ninth Symphony? Nevertheless, as readers familiar with the original edition are well aware, Fine's book was by no means error-free. Aside from various technical mistakes (hardly surprising in a such an ambitious undertaking and considering that Fine did not have access to the modern chess writer's best friend, the computer), the typography and the layout of the pages, designed to keep the book to a reasonable size, made great demands on the reader. The chess moves were rendered in an old-fashioned form of descriptive notation (e.g., Kt—B3, using Kt instead of N for knight and an em-dash instead of a hyphen) and in several fonts, including **boldface**, *italics*, and **bold italics**, all smushed together in interminable paragraphs laced with parentheses, brackets within parentheses, and parentheses within brackets. Diagrams were relatively few and you had to look hard to find the relevant analysis, which was sometimes on another page entirely.

Like Grandmaster Benko and most doctors, I have tried first of all to "do no harm." Thanks to his judicious pruning, I have been able to paragraph the text more sensibly, avoiding the need for too many fonts and parentheses while maintaining a reasonable page count. I have also placed each diagram where it belongs; that is, adjacent to the text it illustrates. For the most part, boldface type is used for the main line of an analysis or the actual moves of a game.

The editors at David McKay, which has published most of the major chess works in this country for a century, deserve the gratitude of chess players everywhere for deciding to publish this revision of a major classic. I thank, in particular, Sheryl Stebbins, Beth Levy, Jena Pincott, and Sandy Fein for putting up with delays and other obstacles in their steadfast determination to get the job done. Grandmaster Arthur Bisguier's help in checking for errors was invaluable. Mike Klein copyedited this enormous manuscript with enthusiasm and dedication and with full awareness of the book's importance.

To you, dear reader: May all your games end well.

Burt Hochberg
New York, March 2003

INTRODUCTION

Reuben Fine (1941)¹

The great importance of the ending has often been recognized, especially in recent years. Yet even masters have had to learn practically everything from bitter experience because the standard material available has been scattered in a thousand different, and often inaccessible, places.

Because of the lack of similar material, I have tried to do two things in this work. In the first place the standard positions which come up time and again have been given at great length. Every experienced player simply must know these: they are as indispensable to further proficiency in the endings as a knowledge of the scales is to the performance of a symphony in music, or the mastery of the alphabet to the reading of novels. In the second place I have at the same time tried to make this a useful book of instruction for the more advanced phases of the ending. With this in mind I have given a large number of rules which are at times incorrect from a strictly mathematical point of view, but are nevertheless true by and large and are of the greatest practical value.

The diagrams and their discussion form the bulk of the book. To facilitate reading and reference the solutions have been printed in bold face type, thus setting them off from the rest of the text. Examples and illustrations which are not diagrammed will be of value chiefly to the student who wishes to perfect his knowledge of any branch of the endgame.

While it is manifestly impossible to present more than a small portion of the endings which come up in practical play, I have tried to solve this problem by the use of *typical positions*. Illustrations taken from master games have been selected only because they are representative of large numbers of similar endings.

Consequently, to use the material given here in the analysis of any particular ending, one must first examine that ending to see what category it will fit into and then compare it with the appropriate position or positions. The endings have been classified first according to the kind of material on the board, then according to the amount, and finally according to the nature of the Pawn position. However, in endings with more than three Pawns on each side, the amount of material is usually irrelevant and has not been consid-

¹ This is Grandmaster Fine's original introduction, exactly as it appeared in the first edition.

ered. Thus, to find an ending with Rook and two Pawns vs. Rook and one Pawn, one must consult the appropriate part of the chapter on Rook and Pawn endings, where cases with exactly the same number of Pawns are given. But in an ending with Rook and seven Pawns vs. Rook and six Pawns, one must turn to the part on material advantage in Rook and Pawn endings, and then to the section where that particular type of Pawn position is discussed. While space limitations have unfortunately made it impossible to present more complicated cases where both sides have many pieces, the principles and rules given are equally applicable to all endings.

Only two special symbols have been used. "White" and "Black," where they do not refer to any specific players, denote the superior and inferior sides, respectively. E.g., in endings with R vs. Kt, the side with the Rook is always "White," the side with the Knight always "Black." This facilitates general discussion. The "=" sign has been used to denote a drawn position, rather than mere general equality.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Reviser's Preface</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Editor's Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Chapter I: The Elementary Mates</i>	<i>1</i>
1. THE QUEEN	1
2. THE ROOK	2
3. TWO BISHOPS	3
4. BISHOP AND KNIGHT	4
5. TWO KNIGHTS	6
<i>Chapter II: King and Pawn Endings</i>	<i>7</i>
I. KING AND PAWN VS. KING	7
II. KING AND PAWN VS. KING AND PAWN	10
1. White Queens First	10
2. White Queens With Check	11
3. Both Sides Queen; White Mates or Wins the Queen	12
4. White Captures the Pawn	13
III. KING AND TWO PAWNS VS. KING	15
IV. KING AND TWO PAWNS VS. KING AND PAWN	17
Case 1. Two Connected Passed Pawns	17
Case 2. Two Unconnected Passed Pawns	18
Case 3. One Passed Pawn	19
A. Pawns Are Separated	19
B. Pawns Are United	23
C. White's Pawns Are Doubled	27
Case 4. White Has No Passed Pawn	27
V. KING AND TWO PAWNS VS. KING AND TWO PAWNS	38
1. White Has Two Connected Passed Pawns	38
2. White Has One Passed Pawn	41
3. Neither Side Has a Passed Pawn	43
VI. KING AND THREE PAWNS VS. KING AND TWO PAWNS	48

VII. KING AND THREE PAWNS VS. KING AND THREE PAWNS	53
1. Queen by Force	53
2. Outside Passed Pawn	54
3. Protected Passed Pawn	56
4. Qualitative Pawn Superiority	57
5. Passed Pawns or Set of Passed Pawns Is Qualitatively Superior	57
6. King Is Closer to the Pawns	58
7. White Has the Opposition	60
VIII. FOUR OR MORE PAWNS ON EITHER SIDE	61
A. One Side Is a Pawn Ahead	61
1. Blocked Pawns	63
2. Stalemate	69
B. Materially Even Positions	71
IX. MANEUVERING FOR A TEMPO	88
X. THE OPPOSITION	89
 <i>Chapter III: Knight and Pawn Endings</i>	 93
I. THE KNIGHTS ALONE VS. PAWNS	93
II. KNIGHTS AND PAWNS VS. PAWNS	101
III. ONE KNIGHT AND PAWNS VS. ONE KNIGHT AND PAWNS	112
A. Positions With Material Advantage	112
B. Positions With Even Material	122
1. Better Pawn Position	122
2. Better King Position	125
3. Better Knight Position	127
IV. TWO KNIGHTS AND PAWNS	128
 <i>Chapter IV: Bishop and Pawn Endings</i>	 129
I. BISHOP VS. PAWNS	129
II. BISHOP AND PAWNS VS. KING, WITH AND WITHOUT PAWNS	133
A. Bishop and Pawn vs. Two Pawns	139
1. Advanced Pawns Draw	140
2. Advanced Pawns Win	140
3. Pawn Exchange Unavoidable	141
B. Bishop and pawn vs. Three or More Pawns	141
1. Advanced Pawns Draw	143
2. Advanced Pawns Win	144
3. Pawn Exchange Unavoidable	145
III. BISHOP AND PAWNS VS. BISHOP OF THE SAME COLOR WITH AND WITHOUT PAWNS	152
A. Positions With Material Advantage	152
1. Bishop and Pawn vs. Bishop	152
2. Bishop and Two Pawns vs. Bishop	158

3. Bishop and Two Pawns vs. Bishop and Pawn	160
4. Two or More Pawns on Each Side	163
B. Even Material	171
1. Better Pawn Position	171
2. Better Bishop	179
3. Better King Position	183
IV. BISHOPS OF OPPOSITE COLORS	184
1. Bishop and Pawn vs. Bishop	184
2. Bishop and Two Pawns vs. Bishop	184
a) Doubled Pawns	184
b) Connected Passed Pawns	185
c) Unconnected Passed Pawns	191
3. Both Sides Have Pawns	192
a) The Defender Draws Despite Material or Positional Inferiority	193
b) Material or Positional Advantage Is Decisive	195
(1) Better King Position	196
(2) Better Placed Passed Pawns	197
(3) One Passed Pawn (Actual or Potential) and Play on the Other Wing	201
(4) Better-Placed Pawns	201
(6) Special Combinations	203
<i>Chapter V: Minor Piece Endings</i>	205
I. BISHOP VS. KNIGHT	205
A. The Basic Positions	206
1. Bishop and Pawn vs. Knight	206
2. Knight and Pawn vs. Bishop	209
3. Bishop and Two or More Pawns vs. Knight	212
4. Knight and Two Pawns vs. Bishop	214
5. Bishop and Two Pawns vs. Knight and Pawn	217
6. Knight and Two Pawns vs. Bishop and Pawn	218
B. More Complicated Ending	221
1. Material Advantage	221
2. Positional Advantage	235
a) The Bishop Is Superior	235
b) The Knight Is Superior	245
b1) Weak Color Complexes	245
b2) The Bad Bishop	248
b3) Weak Pawns	253
c) Better Pawn Position	254
d) Better King Position	258
II. BISHOP, KNIGHT, AND PAWNS VS. BISHOP, KNIGHT, AND PAWNS	258
A. Bishops of Opposite Colors	258
B. Bishops of the Same Color	260

III. THE TWO BISHOPS	261
A. The Pawn Structure Is Unbalanced	262
B. The Pawn Structure Is Balanced	266
IV. TWO PIECES VS. ONE	269
A. No Pawns	269
B. With Pawns	272
1. White Has One Pawn	272
2. White Has Two or More Pawns	274
<i>Chapter VI: Rook and Pawn Endings</i>	275
I. ROOK VS. PAWNS	275
A. Rook vs. One Pawn	275
B. Rook vs. Two Pawns	281
C. Rook vs. Three Pawns	288
1. All Pawns Are Connected	288
2. Only Two Pawns Are Connected	291
3. Isolated Pawns	292
D. Rook vs. Four or More Pawns	292
E. Rook and Pawns vs. Pawns	293
II. ROOK AND PAWN VS. ROOK	294
A. The Black King on the Queening Square	294
1. Immobilizing the Rook	295
2. Allowing the King to Be Driven from the Queening Square	295
3. Playing the King to the Wrong Side	297
B. The King Is Cut Off from the Queening File	297
1. The Lucena Position	297
2. When the Lucena Position Can Be Reached	298
3. Exceptions	305
B1. The Black King Is Not on the Queening File but Is Not Directly Cut Off	310
C. The Black King Is Cut Off on a Rank	314
C1. The Black King Is Behind the Pawn but Not Directly Cut Off	317
D. The White Rook Is in Front of the Pawn	320
E. The White Rook Is Behind the Pawn	323
III. ROOK AND TWO PAWNS VS. ROOK	324
A. Connected Pawns	324
B. Unconnected Pawns	329
C. Doubled Pawns	333
IV. ROOK AND TWO PAWNS VS. ROOK AND PAWN	334
A. White Has Two Passed Pawns	334
B. White Has One Passed Pawn	342
C. No Passed Pawn	345
V. MATERIAL ADVANTAGE (IN GENERAL)	346
A. Outside Passed Pawn	346

B. Potential Outside Passed Pawn	361
C. The Extra Pawn Is in the Center	367
D. All the Pawns on One Side	376
1. Rook and Three Pawns vs. Rook and Two Pawns	376
2. Rook and Four Pawns vs. Rook and Three Pawns	379
E. Special Difficulties in Converting a Material Advantage Into a Win	383
1. Weak Pawns	383
2. Strong Passed Pawn	385
3. Strong Rook Position	390
VI. POSITIONAL ADVANTAGE	392
A. Better Rook Position	392
1. The Rook on the Seventh Rank	392
2. The Open File	396
3. White's Rook Is Attacking a Pawn or Pawns Defended by Black's Rook	397
4. Rook Behind a Passed Pawn, Opposing Rook in Front of It	402
5. The More Active Rook	402
B. Better Pawn Position	405
1. Better Passed Pawns	405
2. Exposed Pawns	411
3. Doubled Pawns	421
4. A Protected Passed Pawn	423
5. Qualitative Pawn Majority	424
C. Better King Position	429
1. Centralization	430
2. One King Is Closer to the Vital Pawns	431
VII. TWO-ROOK ENDINGS	433
<i>Chapter VII: Rook and Minor Pieces</i>	441
I. ROOK AND KNIGHT VS. ROOK AND KNIGHT (OR BISHOP)	441
II. BISHOPS OF OPPOSITE COLORS	442
A. Material Advantage	442
1. Outside Passed Pawn	442
2. Potential Outside Passed Pawn	445
3. The Extra Pawn in the Center	446
B. Positional Advantage	447
1. Weak Pawns	447
2. Mating Combinations	448
III. ROOK VS. TWO MINOR PIECES	449
A. Even Pawns	450
B. The Player With the Two Pieces Is One or More Pawns Ahead	454
C. The Player With the Rook Is One or More Pawns Ahead	455
IV. THREE PIECES VS. TWO ROOKS	458

V. THE ADVANTAGE OF THE EXCHANGE	459
A. Rook vs. Bishop (No Pawns)	459
B. Rook and Pawn vs. Bishop	464
C. Rook vs. Bishop and Pawns	471
1. Rook vs. Bishop and Pawn	471
2. Rook vs. Bishop and Two Pawns	472
3. Rook vs. Bishop and Three (or More) Pawns	478
D. Rook and Pawns vs. Bishop and Pawns	478
1. No Pawns for the Exchange	478
2. One Pawn for the Exchange	482
3. Two Pawns for the Exchange	485
4. Three Pawns (or More) for the Exchange	488
E. Rook vs. Knight (No Pawns)	489
F. Rook and Pawn vs. Knight	492
G. Rook vs. Knight and Pawns	494
1. Rook vs. Knight and One Pawn	494
2. Rook vs. Knight and Two (or More) Pawns	494
H. Rook and Pawns vs. Knight and Pawns	496
1. No Pawns for the Exchange	496
2. One Pawn for the Exchange	502
3. Two (or More) Pawns for the Exchange	506
VI. ROOK AND BISHOP VS. ROOK	509
VII. ROOK AND KNIGHT VS. ROOK	517
VIII. VARIOUS COMBINATIONS OF ROOKS AND MINOR PIECES WITHOUT PAWNS	523
A. The Double Exchange	523
B. Rook and Minor Pieces vs. Two Minor Pieces	524
C. Rook vs. Three Minor Pieces	524
<i>Chapter VIII: Queen Endings</i>	526
I. QUEEN VS. PAWNS	526
A. Queen vs. One Pawn	526
B. Queen vs. Two Pawns	530
C. Queen vs. Three (or More) Pawns	535
D. Queen and Pawns vs. Pawns	537
II. QUEEN AND PAWN ENDINGS	538
A. Queen and Pawn vs. Queen	538
B. Queen and Two Pawns vs. Queen	541
1. Connected Pawns	541
2. Unconnected Pawns	543
3. Doubled Pawns	544
C. Material Advantage	544
1. The Defending King Is Not Near the Opposing Pawn Majority (Outside and Potential Outside Passed Pawns)	544