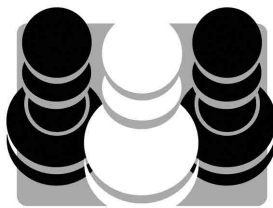


# Sharp Endgames

By

# Esben Lund



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# Foreword

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You hold in your hands a remarkable book – one that has the potential to greatly improve your results on the chess board. The legendary Viktor Korchnoi boldly claimed that anyone who worked through his book on *Practical Rook Endings* would be guaranteed to gain at least 100 rating points. Silas Esben Lund, originally from low-key Denmark like myself, is too modest to make such a claim, so let me do it for him: if you work through this book cover to cover, you are going to gain at least a similar amount of rating points as from Korchnoi's book – very likely more.

But be warned: the emphasis here is on *work*. What you put in, you will get out – don't expect a quick fix. This is a book for the ambitious chess players who are willing to put in the effort to pursue results through hard work and deliberate practice.

The main value of this book is in the depth of the examples and exercises, which are designed to challenge even International Masters and Grandmasters. After trying in vain to solve some of the demanding exercises, I can testify to the difficulty of the challenge!

However, Lund has a knack for making the difficult understandable. His explanations of the *process* by which even the most difficult exercises should be (and have been) solved is to the point and highly instructive. He explains how you can sharpen your skills in calculation; shows how to identify the Critical Moments in the game; and highlights how the middlegame is connected to sharp and basic endgames in a logical thread. In doing so, Lund helps his readers improve not only his or her skills in sharp endgames, but also in the middlegame and technical endgames.

At the core, the emphasis is on making good decisions at critical stages of the game. For that you need to combine several aspects – calculation, intuition, creativity, basic knowledge of chess, just to name a few. And you have to weave these components together into a useful and practical process. This is not easy, as many players tend to be biased in one way or another when making decisions in chess.

When trying to solve some of the exercises, I was reminded of an episode from a training session the Danish National Team had in Copenhagen with the legendary Russian coach Mark Dvoretsky, shortly before the 2000 Olympiad in Istanbul. Dvoretsky was feeding us difficult exercises, similar to those of Lund in this book, and one of them was a deceptively simple rook endgame where Black needed to decide where to go with his king in reply to a check. Using intuition and drawing on my long-term interest and experience in rook endgames, I quickly settled on the right move, but Dvoretsky was not happy with my intuitive decision. He wanted me to calculate and show the *line* that led to the right decision. While I got it right in this particular instance,

Dvoretsky reasoned that being overly reliant on intuition – as opposed to calculation – was a dangerous bias at Critical Moments. Certainly not all Critical Moments can be solved by intuition only. I took the advice to heart and forced myself to calculate deeper at Critical Moments. Shortly thereafter I had an excellent result at the Olympiad, and a year and a half later I reached a new personal best FIDE rating, despite being semi-retired at the time. This book has the potential to do the same for readers who choose to put in the effort – it will improve your ability to make the right decisions at the Critical Moments late in the game.

Out of the many great examples and exercises in this book, I will single out the study by Troitzky (1925) that opens Chapter 2. Unfamiliar to me, this study epitomizes how good decisions draw on a combination of calculation, intuition, creativity, and knowledge of basic endgames. A delight for chess fans interested in both studies and practical play!

I have known Silas for many years from the chess circuit in our shared home country, and I have always liked Silas's approach to chess, and chess coaching and writing in particular. Silas is an independent thinker who weaves plenty of personal experiences and games into his coaching and writing. And he shares a very important trait with other excellent coaches – he actually has a well-considered coaching *philosophy*. His book is extensively researched – not just in terms of the chess content, but also how expertise is achieved – and all the examples have been thoroughly checked by analysis engines and tested on chess students of various strength. As a result, this book is more than just a book – it is a curriculum for how to improve your chess.

Silas likes to take on topics that are under-represented in chess literature. I thoroughly enjoyed his earlier books, which are filled with new concepts that you will find in few other chess books. For example, who else would devote an entire book to bad bishops (*The Secret Life of Bad Bishops*), showing that a bishop is not 'born bad', but starts out as a 'DEB' – doubled-edged bishop – with the potential to be either good or bad, depending on what you do with it. The present book proceeds in the same vein – you will come away with a refined understanding of several key chess concepts – for example, Critical Moments, the role of Deliberate Practice in chess improvement, and the relationship between the middlegame, sharp endgames and basic endgames.

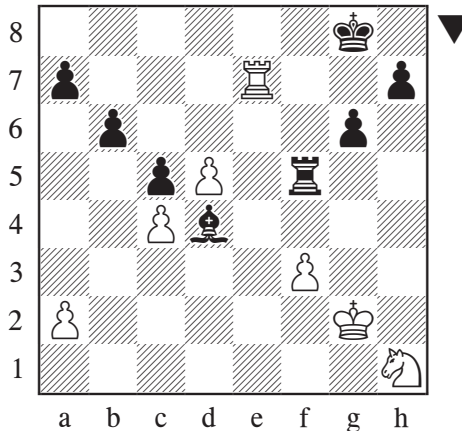
Silas Lund has issued you a challenge: invest time and effort in this book, and your chess results are going to improve – no matter your current level. The question is: are you ready to accept the challenge? I strongly encourage you to accept – you will not regret it.

Grandmaster Lars Bo Hansen  
Orlando, Florida  
September 2017

Here is an example from my own games to show the importance of setting the right priorities in a position. This is even more important in positions with reduced material on the board, as one priority can be conclusive for the final result. To help set the right priorities, it is a good idea to target concrete points of attack – and keep focused on them.

### Silas Esben Lund – Eric De Haan

Schwarzach 2011



Being a pawn down in this endgame, I have just played **36.♖e1-e7**. Which priorities should Black set, and what plan should he choose?

Let's first consider the natural-looking:

**36...♜f7 37.♞e8† ♔g7**

White can then activate the knight with:

**38.♞g3♞**

...and bring it to e4. Black has an extra pawn and a stable position, but White has a certain amount of compensation due to the strong knight on e4 and passed pawn on d5 – supported by an active rook on e8 deep into Black's territory.

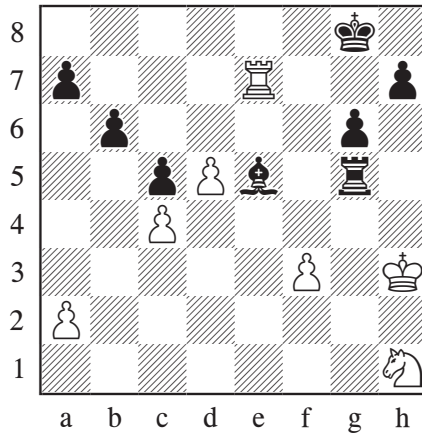
By playing this way, Black's priorities are of a material nature: he wishes to keep his extra pawn, make the position stable and then later try to profit from his material advantage. In the process, he allows White a few tempos to improve his position.

However, the best move in the position is:

**36...♞g5†! 37.♔h3**

37.♔f1? ♞g1† drops the knight.

**37...♞e5!♣**



What are Black’s priorities in this continuation? Quite the opposite to the previous line: instead of hanging on to material (a7 is under threat) he instead strives for an optimal coordination between rook and bishop – at the same time preventing White from activating the knight from the corner. White’s four forces (rook, pawn on d5, king and knight) are working poorly together in this case.

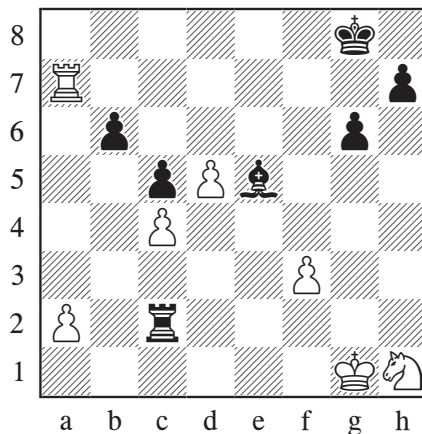
The deeper point behind Black’s play is to attack the pawn on c4 in order to make his own c5-pawn a dangerous passed candidate. This is quite logical, as the c5-pawn is the most advanced of his remaining five pawns. Thus, the plan employed by Black shows **Prophylactic Thinking** as it both harms White’s coordination as well as striving for his own activity.

Notice how easy Black’s moves are to find if you see c4 as the point of attack and then stay focused on it. Play might continue:

**38. ♖xa7**

38. ♖f2?! ♜g3† 39. ♜h4 ♜xf3 40. ♜xe5 ♜xf2 41. ♜c7 ♜f7 is no joy for White.

**38... ♜h5† 39. ♜g2 ♜h2† 40. ♜g1 ♜c2!**





41.♞e7

White plans to advance the d-pawn.

It is still impossible to activate the knight: 41.♘f2?? ♕d4

White can also try 41.♞a6 with the idea of eliminating the b-pawn: 41...♞xc4 42.♞xb6 ♞c1† 43.♘g2 ♞c2† 44.♘f1 ♞xa2† Black has active pieces and is a pawn up.

After 41.♞e7 a sample line goes:

41...♕d4† 42.♘f1 ♞c1† 43.♘g2 ♞xc4 44.d6 ♞c2† 45.♘h3 ♕f6 46.♞b7 ♞d2 47.♞xb6 ♕e5 48.♘g3 ♞xd6†

Black is a pawn up under clearly more favourable circumstances than in the starting position.

Let's recap Black's priorities in this line:

- 1) Point of attack on c4.
- 2) Make the c5-pawn a passed pawn.
- 3) Cooperation between rook, bishop and c-pawn.
- 4) Disturb White's coordination, by preventing the knight from leaving the corner of the board. In the process, Black temporarily gave up his a-pawn.

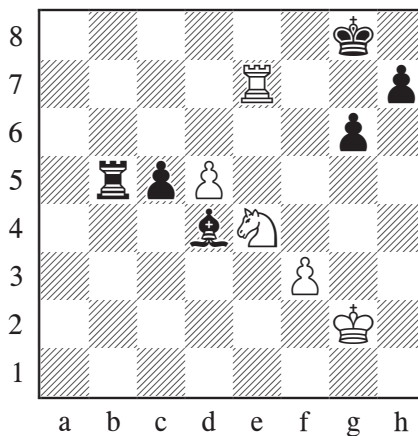
The most annoying thing about this sharp continuation is that Black needs to calculate a lot of lines and allow a certain amount of counterplay. To become a stronger player, you need the **Transform-willingness** in these kinds of positions. In this case, the reward of the sharp sequence of moves was a clear advantage.

Let's see how Black (a Dutch FM) set his priorities in the game:

36...♞f7 37.♞e8 ♞f8 38.♞e7 a6?!

The beginning of a dubious plan.

39.a4 ♞b8 40.♘g3 b5 41.axb5 axb5 42.cxb5 ♞xb5 43.♘e4



Black's priorities were the breakthrough ...b5 to create a passed c-pawn and to avoid the loss of the a7-pawn.

The problem with this plan is that White was given time to activate his knight from h1 to e4. White's cooperation between rook, knight and d-pawn fully compensates for the pawn deficit – in fact, it is Black who has to be careful here despite the extra pawn. Don't forget that White's passed pawn on d5 is the more advanced, and that he controls the 7th rank.

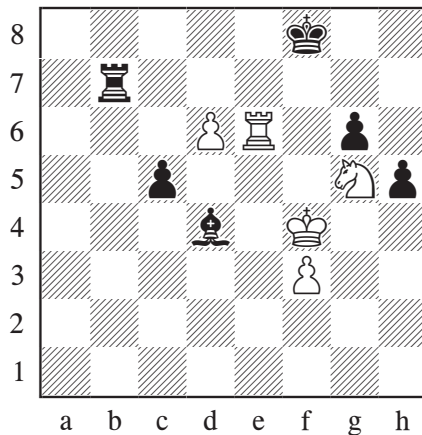
43...♖b2† 44.♔g3 ♖b6?!

44...♖b8 followed by ...♗d8 was best – this would attack the d-pawn while stopping it, thus tying down White's pieces a little. The move played leaves a passive impression.

45.♕f4 h5 46.d6 ♕f8 47.♖e6!

White is slightly better now, but Black can still draw with the right defence.

47...♖b7 48.♘g5!



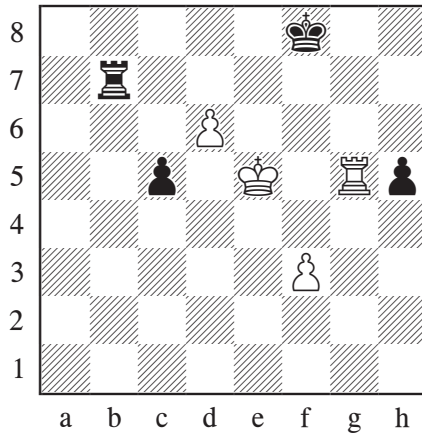
48...♗c3?!

The clearest way to a draw was: 48...c4! 49.♖e4 ♗f6 (not 49...c3? 50.♘e6†! [50.♖xd4?? c2 51.♖c4 ♖b4!-+ is a well-known trick] 50...♕f7 51.♘xd4+-) 50.♖xc4 ♕e8= Black sacrifices his extra pawn and brings his king to the defence against White's d-pawn, thereby freeing the rook from this duty. It is not an easy decision to give up a pawn, though. By playing this way, Black shows flexibility in the defence.

49.♖xg6! ♗d2†?

The turning point of the game: the rook ending is lost for Black. It is possible that Black saw the hopelessness of this decision, although he played it; and I believe that most players can recognize the situation – instead of playing a move that leads to unclear consequences, one chooses a second-rate move that leads to more clarity. **Composure** shows a player's ability not to lose his nerves, but instead to keep the game going.

50.♕e5 ♗xg5 51.♖xg5+-



**51...♖b1**

Or 51...♖h7 52.♔d5 h4 53.♕c6 h3 54.d7+–.

**52.♕e6 ♜e1† 53.♕d7 c4 54.♕c7!+–**

White uses Black's c-pawn as an 'umbrella' (Dvoretsky). This pawn prevents checks from the rear along the c-file.

**54...♜a1 55.d7 ♜a7† 56.♕c6 ♜a6† 57.♕b7 ♜d6 58.♕c7 ♕e7 59.♜e5†**  
**1–0**