

**Karsten Müller**

# **The Best Endgames of the World Champions**

**Volume 1**

**From Steinitz to Tal**

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**JBV Chess Books**

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# Preface

Since the world chess champions excel in *all* areas of the game, it goes without saying that you can learn the most not only from their skills in the opening and the middlegame, but also from their superb handling of the endgame.

The individual chapters are divided into two parts.

– In the first part you find thoroughly annotated endgames on a special topic on which the respective world champion has produced many particularly impressive examples (followed by exercises on this subject).

My choice fell on Steinitz's skillful handling of the bishop pair, Lasker's art of defense, Capablanca's use of the king, Alekhine's art of attacking in the 4<sup>th</sup> game phase, Euwe's skillful use of passed pawns, Botvinnik's iron logic and long-term strategy, Smyslov's meticulous rook endings and – last but not least – Tal's magic, which also often gave his endgames an enchanting touch.

– In the second part you find particularly interesting endgames that can rightly be described as *classics* (followed by exercises on this subject). With regard to these instructive and inspiring evergreens, I was of course spoiled for choice, but I hope you like the selection.

And since I consider exercises to be important and useful to encourage the reader's active participation, additional exercises are included in the discussed examples. To deal with the various exercises, please note the information in the immediately following introductory remarks.

I would like to thank GM Mihail Marin for his excellent foreword and his analytical contributions – Rainer Woisin from ChessBase for the permission to use my DVD '*Endgames of the World Champions*' as the basis for this book and for the idea of working with QR codes – Robert Ullrich and Thomas Beyer for the layout, the selection of photos and the presentation – and Lothar Nikolaiczuk for the excellent work that went far beyond normal editing.

GM Dr. Karsten Müller  
Hamburg, May 2021

## Foreword



*Mihail Marin*

For people belonging to different cultures and living in remote geographic areas, chess has since always been a universal language. However, I cannot repress the feeling that, same as many important languages, it admits a wide range of "dialects". Depending on the chess circles one attends, one can hear debates, questions and assumptions about forced opening variations and stunning novelties, deep middlegame plans and brilliant tactics and last but not least about subtle endgames and technique.

During my frequent visits to Hamburg over the past years, usually involving my participation to Karsten Mueller's *Endgame Magic*

shows, it was refreshing to discover that to both Karsten and me, using the "endgame dialect" provides no lesser delight than high class music or art and no lesser intellectual challenge than thorough calculating of long variations.

In the long and tortuous process of finding the truth, or to coming close to "solving" our favourite game, the endgame occupies a privileged place. It is precisely in this area where one should dig analytically if wishing to reveal little pieces of the global truth. Given the reduced number of pieces, one can be more confident about the own analysis. Unsurprisingly, many of the rules and conclusions established centuries before the computer era maintained their validity until today.

Switching to a less abstract theme, the endgame is the phase where many games are decided, making it an essential area of learning and training for players of all levels. World champions from different historic eras perfectly knew that. Some of them were renowned tacticians, others excelled at positional chess. Many of them analysed the opening in depth, while others played it by intuition. However, it is hard to think of a player reaching the supreme title without a deep mastering of the endgame phase.

If I needed to express the feelings raised by Karsten's last book in just one word, I would use "delight". I had, of course, seen and analysed a large number of the featured examples, but revisiting them was like an intellectual *caressing*. Those I knew only superficially entered now my must-analyse list. I found the frequent tests ideal for mental training, even when I was familiar with the positions.

I would like to conclude with a piece of warning. Reading a chess book does not automatically make you stronger. Keeping it under the pillow while sleeping, does not achieve that, either. A book should offer the reader a reliable starting point for independent work, analysis and thought.

I invite you to indulge yourself with examining the world champions' best endgame achievements.

Mihail Marin

Domnesti (Romania), April 2021

## Two introductory remarks

1) The thematical exercises are marked 'E01.01' etc. – while the additional ones are simply identified as 'Exercise 1' etc. The solutions can be found after each chapter. The symbol '\*\*\*\*' indicates that an exercise is more difficult. In this regard, however, the same piece of advice applies to all tasks: If the search for the solution threatens to turn into torture, take a look at the solution section.

2) The assignment of every single world champion to a certain 'playing style' goes back to my recently published book 'The Human Factor' (together with GM Luis Engel; Joachim Beyer Verlag 2020). Since I am of the opinion that this aspect plays an important and often clearly recognizable role also in the endgame, I will give a brief overview of the details that characterize the different types of players. Readers interested in this aspect can look up these explanations if a particular category is mentioned in the text.

### Activists

World champions: Alekhine, Tal, Spassky, Kasparov, Anand

(As to the rare type of 'hyperactive player', all of the following characteristics are even more pronounced.)

**Their strengths:** They rate initiative and attacking options relatively high and material values lower. They often have a good sense for initiative and dynamics and are also ready to accept static weaknesses. One of their usual strengths is the concrete calculation of lines based on intuitive evaluation.

**Their weaknesses:** Sometimes they make pawn moves that look good at the moment, but do far more harm than good in the long run. They tend to overestimate their own attack on the king while underestimating the opponent's attack. They are significantly less good in defense, often take risks and as a rule try to keep the third result (meaning: their own victory) in the game.

## Theorists

World champions: Steinitz, Botvinnik, Kramnik

**Their strengths:** They are extremely familiar with their structures and all the associated maneuvers and plans and can also rely on their sharpened intuition when using them. Their play is logical and systematic. Many representatives of this type are good at theoretical endgames and know the entire relevant endgame theory by heart.

**Their weaknesses:** They stick to their principles, even if they sometimes don't fit the position. Occasionally, they lack a sense of the limits of the respective area of application and also the flexibility required to switch to other approaches in a specific position if necessary.

## Reflectors

World champions: Capablanca, Smyslov, Petrosian, Karpov, Carlsen

**Their strengths:** They have a very deep understanding of the game and recognize relevant patterns almost at first glance. They have a very fine feel for the harmony and coordination of the pieces. They are very good when it comes to restricting the opposing pieces more and more and disrupting their coordination. Therefore, active prophylaxis and strategies of dominance and restriction are typical for them. And they are also very good in strategic endgames, in which their strengths come into their own, because the dynamic potential of the queens no longer 'disturbs' and accordingly less dynamic chaos can arise.

**Their weaknesses:** They are sometimes not so good when it comes to calculating concrete lines, which makes them vulnerable in the sense that the opponent can strive for concrete dynamic positions in which every single move is important and which require much concrete calculation.

## Pragmatics

World champions: Fischer, Euwe, Lasker

**Their strengths:** They are characterized by the fact that they have a very concrete approach. They calculate long lines very accurately and rarely blunder. They incorporate many practically relevant factors into their decisionmaking and are often good at confronting opponents with problems that are unpleasant to solve in practice. Pragmatics can often defend themselves very tenaciously by using their precise calculation skills

**Their weaknesses:** The concrete approach can, however, turn out to be a weakness under certain circumstances. In strictly technical or positional situations a pragmatic occasionally feels a little bit insecure because he doesn't know what to calculate. In general, they may have difficulty recognizing long-term plans and taking them into account. Sometimes they are a little too materialistic (similar to theorists). Overall, however, they are relatively balanced and have hardly any weaknesses worth mentioning.



## The first world champion – Wilhelm Steinitz

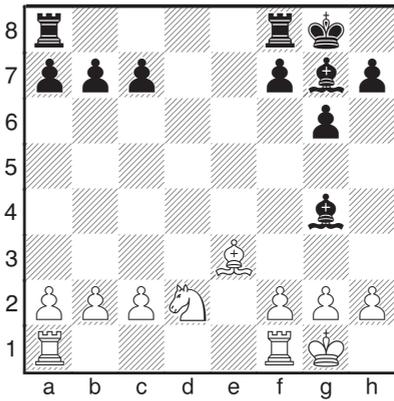
**Wilhelm Steinitz** (May 14, 1836 – August 12, 1900), a native Austrian (from 1888 US–American), was the first generally recognized world chess champion from 1886 to 1894 (after his victory over the Polish–German master Johannes Zukertort). In a sense, he is considered a revolutionary because he sharply criticized the fierce attacking chess that was prevalent at the time (the so-called ‘romantic chess’). Based on his scientific approach, he laid the foundation for the ‘positional school’ of modern chess by formulating principles of strategy and positional play that are still valid today.

As for his style, he was a ‘theorist’ (see also ‘introductory remark 2’ on page 9). For example, one of his theories relates to the ‘Steinitz king’, which he considered to be a strong piece that can defend itself. – Another relates to the fight ‘♙♙ vs ♙♞’ and the corresponding art of handling the pawns – which is called ‘Steinitz’ restriction method’.

This main strategy of the side with the bishop pair is based on the relative immobility of the knight, which sometimes finds it very difficult to reach or leave certain complexes of squares. This is perfectly illustrated in the following classic.



**01.01**  
**Berthold Englisch**  
**Wilhelm Steinitz**  
 London 1883



Black has full positional control, a powerful bishop pair and a slight initiative – all in all a mixture that can prove fatal in the case of imprecise defense.

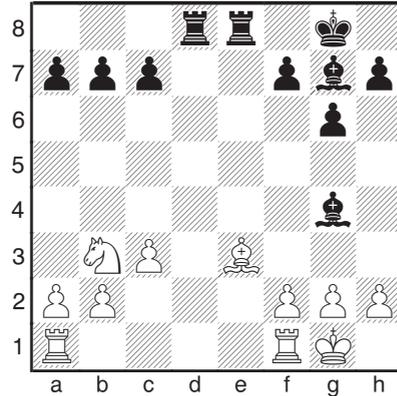
**15...♖ad8**

Of course not 15...♘b2? 16.♖ab1 ♘e5 17.♖xb7, because this unnecessarily allows the activation of the white pieces and provides them with useful squares. In fact, the task is precisely to *prevent* the knight from obtaining such perspectives. Because while a bishop benefits from flowing pawn structures, a knight usually feels at home in a position with a broken structure – for example the one after the wrong approach where (for starters) the square on c5 would fall into White's hands.

**16.c3 ♜fe8**

The activation of the last piece comes with the threat ♜xe3 and thus with tempo. Or better said: the activation of the *penultimate* piece, because don't forget the king!

**17.♠b3**



**17...b6!**

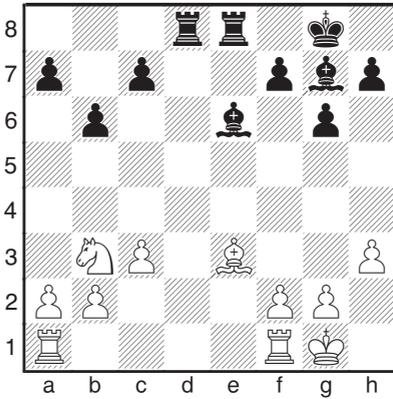
Black begins to make the light-squared bishop strong – the one without a counterpart – and at the same time restricts the knight's range.

The well-known German trainer Holger Borchers created the poetic term *green bishop* for such a 'bishop without a counterpart'. Because green is the color of hope and the hope of a bishop pair is primarily based on the potential of the 'green' specimen, which (according to a corresponding rule of thumb) should be made as strong as possible.

By the way, 'theorists' are very fond of such terms and the related rules. Accordingly, they often enrich the chess language with a whole system of word creations, and being a train-

er myself, I clearly support this approach.

**18.h3 ♖e6**



**19.♞fd1?!**

19.♞d4!? came into consideration, because after e.g. 19...♙d5 20.♞fe1 c5 21.♞b5, Black has nothing more than a solid positional advantage.

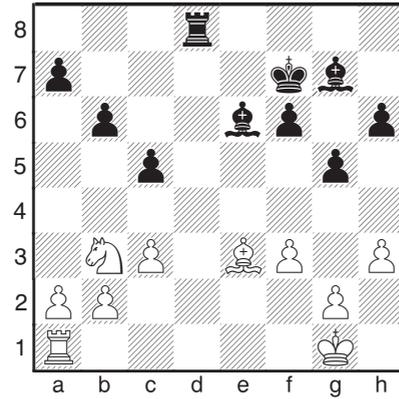
**19...c5**

Black further restricts the white pieces (especially the knight) by depriving them of the important square on d4.

**20.♙g5 f6 21.♙f4 ♖f7 22.f3 g5**

Steinitz is now using his entire army to gain more and more space.

**23.♞xd8 ♞xd8 24.♙e3 h6**



With all his pawns on dark squares, Black intends to push the f-pawn to f4.

**25.♞e1 f5**

Instead of this somewhat critical move, 25...a5!? could be considered already at this point.

**26.f4**

After putting up a stop sign, White can hope to use the square on e5 as a base for the knight.

**26...♙f6**

26...g4!?

**27.g3?**

White wants to take back on f4 with the pawn if necessary, but there was no time for such positional luxury. The biggest problem is the offside knight, which should immediately set course for greener pastures with 27.♞d2, although Black still has good winning chances.

**27...a5!**

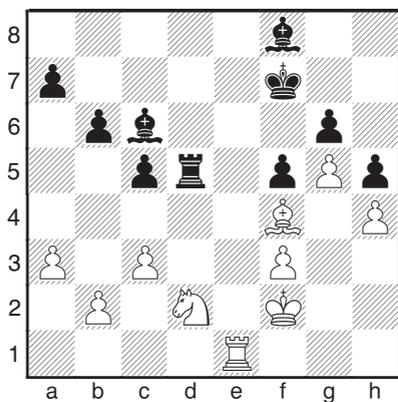
Black uses the deadly threat of destroying the white queen side structure with a4-a3 to push the knight back even further.

## Exercises on the subject of 'The power of the bishop pair'

(solutions starting on page 40)



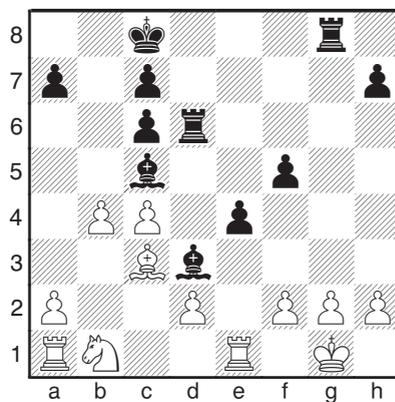
**E01.01**  
**Alexander Sellman**  
**Wilhelm Steinitz**  
London 1883



Black to move and win



**E01.02**  
**George B. Fraser**  
**Wilhelm Steinitz**  
England 1867



Black to move and win



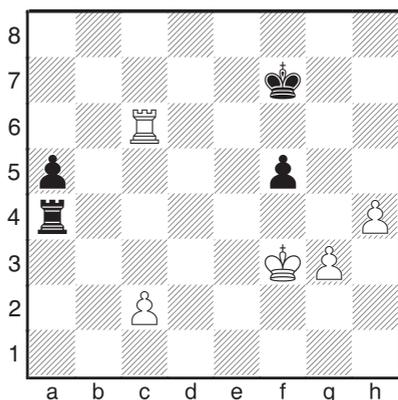
## The second world champion – Emanuel Lasker

**Emanuel Lasker** (December 24, 1886 – January 11, 1941), the so far only German holder of this title, was also a mathematician and philosopher. In 1894 he defeated Wilhelm Steinitz quite clearly (+10 =4 -5) and maintained the chess crown for a period of 27 years (until 1921) and thus longer than any other world chess champion. During this time he defended his title several times – 1896/97 against Steinitz (+10 =5 -2) – 1897 against the American Frank James Marshall (+8 =7 -0) – 1908 against Siegbert Tarrasch (+8 =5 -3) – 1910 against the Austrian Carl Schlechter (+1 =8 -1) and 1910 against the Polish–French champion Dawid Janowski (+8 =3 -0).

As he stylistically was a pragmatic (see also ‘introductory remark 2’ on page 9), I’m going to take a closer look at his tenacious art of defense and especially the active defense in the rook ending.



**02.01**  
**Carl Schlechter**  
**Emanuel Lasker**  
 Vienna 1910



**54...♖e4!?**

Lasker parts with another pawn in order to activate his pieces to the maximum.

1) The passive approach 54...♔g7? loses according to the pattern 55.c4 ♖a3+ 56.♔f4 ♖c3 57.h5 a4 58.♖a6 a3 59.♔xf5 ♖xg3 60.♔e5 ♖h3 61.♖a7+ ♔h6 62.♔d4!+-.

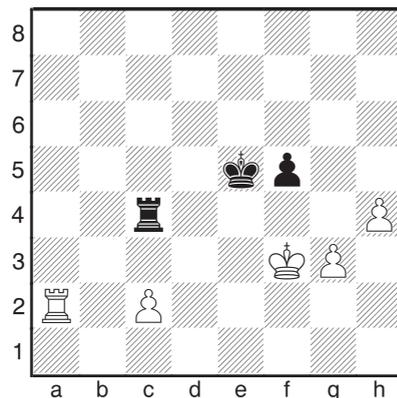
2) 54...♖a1?! is also playable, but after 55.♖a6 (55.h5 a4=) Black shouldn't shy away from the return 55...♖a4! (= Δ56.h5 ♖c4!), since the pseudo-active push 55...a4? loses according to the pattern 56.♔f4 a3 57.♔xf5 a2 58.♖a7+ ♔f8 59.♔g6 ♖g1 60.♖a8+ ♔e7 61.♖xa2 ♖xg3+ 62.♔f5.

**55.♖c5 ♔f6 56.♖xa5 ♖c4 57.♖a6+**

**♔e5 58.♖a5+ ♔f6 59.♖a6+ ♔e5 60.♖a5+ ♔f6 61.♖a2**

White has repeated the moves several times to convince himself that his rook can do nothing better than cover the c-pawn.

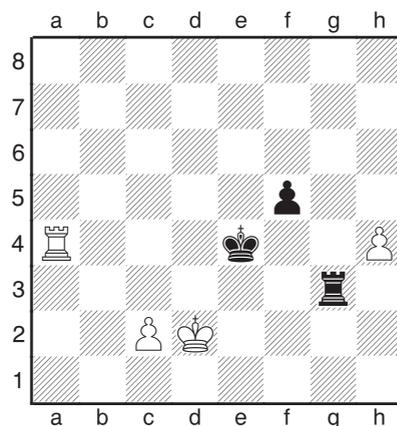
**61...♔e5**



Lasker's plan has worked perfectly, because now his two pieces are maximally active.

**62.♖b2**

After 62.♔e3 ♖c3+ Δ63.♔d2 ♖xg3 64.♖a5+ e4 65.♖a4+ ...

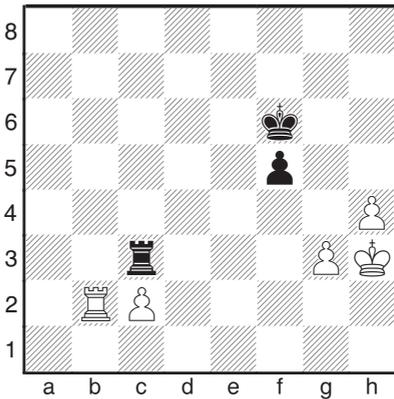


... 65...♔e5 White doesn't get any further.

**Exercise 1:** 65...♔f3 also leads to a draw, because after a possible exchange of the rooks both sides get a new queen in the same move. – Is this statement true?

(solution on page 64)

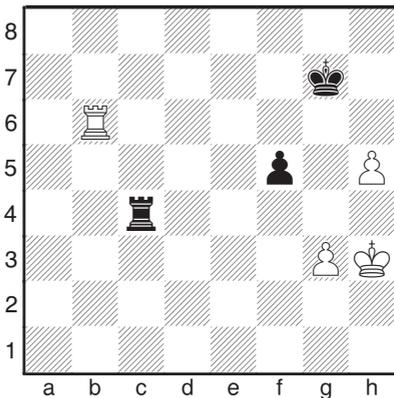
62...♖c3+ 63.♔g2 ♕f6 64.♕h3



64...♖c6!?

Schlechter had hoped for 64...f4?, since he could still have won with 65.♖b3! ♖xc2 66.♖f3.

65.♖b8 ♖xc2 66.♖b6+ ♕g7 67.h5 ♖c4



Now the black rook is so active, that White cannot make any progress.

68.♖g6+ ♕h7 69.♖f6 ♖c5 ½-½

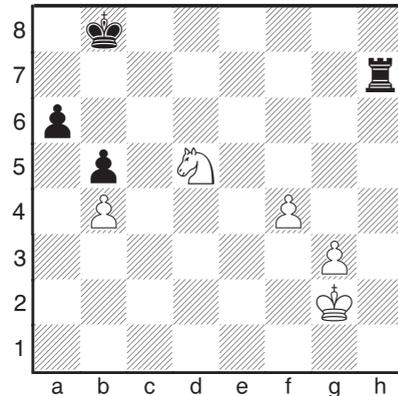
In view of the possible continuation 70.♔g2 ♖a5 (70...f4? 71.g4+-) 71.♔f3 ♕g7! 72.♖g6+ ♔f7! (72...♔h7? 73.♔f4 ♖b5 74.♖f6+-) 73.♔f4 ♖b5 74.♖g5 ♔f6=.

In the following famous and profound example, even a great defender like Emanuel Lasker was on the verge of defeat in a difficult position.



02.02

Emanuel Lasker  
Edward Lasker  
New York 1924



70.♔f3!

First of all the king has to be centralized, because after a hasty pawn

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