

# Book Recommendations by Mark Kaprielian

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## Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....	2
II. Essential Books.....	3
A. The Endgame .....	3
1. Silman’s Complete Endgame course .....	3
2. Just the Facts, Winning Endgame Knowledge in One Volume.....	3
B. How to Think .....	3
1. How to Reassess Your Chess, Fourth Edition .....	3
C. Mating the King .....	3
1. The Art of the Checkmate.....	3
2. Bxh7 +.....	3
III. Rounding out the collection .....	4
A. The Endgame .....	4
1. Practical Chess Endings.....	4
2. Chess Endings, Essential Knowledge .....	4
3. Knight Moves.....	4
B. How to Think .....	4
1. Chess Master at any Age.....	4
2. Win at Chess .....	4
3. Chess Rules of Thumb .....	5
C. Tactics .....	5
1. The Genesis of Power Chess.....	5
2. Chess Training Pocket Book: 300 Most Important Positions & Ideas .....	5
D. For Young Children .....	5
1. Sammy Seahorse Teaches Chess .....	5
IV. Not So Fast (the stuff I know I’ll never get to).....	6
A. Endgames.....	6
1. The Survival Guide to Rook Endings .....	6
B. Tactics.....	6
1. The Art of Attack in Chess .....	6

## I. Introduction

I first recommended a set of books back in 2002. That list has been incorporated into this revised document. With ten years having passed since my last set of recommendations I bought a lot more books that I still haven't read to add to my collection.

While I am still not yet a Master I have gained much insight about the struggle to improve. The books I recommend here are based on my experiences at my current level, about a 1750 rated player. If I were a better player, I might recommend different books, as my perspective would of course be different.

Most everyone agrees that there are three phases of a chess game, the opening, middle game and end game. There are plenty of books that cover these three areas. What I have tried to find are books that help teach you how to think or show you the classic patterns that might otherwise take years to come across. Some of the books I've selected cover these areas specifically and others are more general.

In this document you won't find any on openings. Openings are another subject all together. I have an analogy that I came up with. "If you're driving in another state that you've never been to and your following written directions to get where you're going, if you had to pick either the first half of the directions or the second half of the directions, which would you rather have? I'd pick the second half because even if I did a real good job on the first half (get to the middle game), what good did it do me if I don't know where I'm going (win your won game)." I'm not saying you can do without the first half but let's face it; most people are always worrying about the first half because every time they play, there's a first half. How many times have you said, I played great and had a won game but I blew it.

Having found my collection of essential books, I find that all those other books I've accumulated over the years now look like specialty books. Certainly worth having but not nearly as useful as my favorites listed below. In fact, I've reduced my book collection by over half in the last two years and planning to reduce it even further. I've learned to admit to myself that frankly, I'm never going to work through those books. Many of the books were brand new and most were books that I've read less than 30 pages. I'm even thinning out my endgame books of which I truly had a collection. For many years if someone published an endgame book, I bought it.

I have organized the books into several main categories:

- Essential Books – The minimum list of books to communicate the most knowledge
- Rounding out the collection – Books to expand upon the Essential books or fill in your library
- Not So Fast (the stuff I know I'll never get to)

## II. Essential Books

### A. The Endgame

1. Silman's Complete Endgame course  
*by Jeremy Silman*

The lessons are organized in the order a player needs to know them as he goes up in rating. This is a unique book because it organizes the information by the probability that you will encounter it at your rating level. This is a very practical approach allowing you to concentrate on what you need to know and freeing you to spend time working on other parts of your game.

2. Just the Facts, Winning Endgame Knowledge in One Volume  
*by GM Lev Alburt & GM Nikolay Krogius*

This book is the most systematic and easiest to read book on endgames I've ever come across. It is clearly written and organized by theme. If I had to recommend only one endgame book, this would be it. This book won the Chess Journalist of America Book of the Year award for 2000-2001.

### B. How to Think

1. How to Reassess Your Chess, Fourth Edition  
*by Jeremy Silman*

The fourth edition is much improved over the previous editions so only get the fourth edition.

This is the only book that I have ever found that gives you a set of mental checklists to follow all during a game. Masters will tell you that you can't play high level chess by following rules. Well, fine. My opinion is that this book will help you improve your game so much that one day, you can stop using them. In the meanwhile, I could use a few rules.

### C. Mating the King

1. The Art of the Checkmate  
*by Renaud & Kahn*

This book classifies the types of checkmates, gives them names and shows you how they are done. Every checkmate is boiled down to it's essential for you. Chess is a game of pattern recognition. This one shows you a comprehensive list of patterns. This book will help you see mates where you never saw them before.

This book is in descriptive notation so it may be difficult for some to follow but it is worth the effort

2. Bxh7 +  
*by David I. Rudel*

Both white players and black players need to read this book. It is a fundamental mating position that occurs in many games.

As the book descriptions says: Master both sides of chess' most useful piece sacrifice in 5 easy lessons and 116 exercises

### III. Rounding out the collection

#### A. The Endgame

1. Practical Chess Endings  
*by Irving Chernev*

This book is one of my favorites. I return to this repeatedly to review my basics and have gone through it many times. This is the book that will help you get a feel for dealing with pawn endings. It is very easy to read and is very concise, however it is in descriptive notation which some may find difficult to adjust to. It has example after example of various pawn endings, and chapters with a minor piece is involved. One of this books best features is that it shows the best moves for the defending side as well. This prepares you to recover lost endings and to avoid giving away the win.

2. Chess Endings, Essential Knowledge  
*by Y. Averbakh*

This book shows you some of the tougher endings. Situations such as mating with two bishops or bishop and knight are shown. While it shows you many use full endings, I find this book a bit tough to read as it is short on explanation. It's a thin and small book but its packed.

3. Knight Moves  
*by Charles Alexander*

The first time I read this very slender little book (82 pages), I was too overwhelmed with details. It gives a complete analysis of Knight movement on the board. Two years later I gave it another try and, this time, realizing that it doing a lot restating of the same information on its way to building up to its conclusions, I absorbed it. Turns out that most of the book is background information and that a few rules at the end is the real substance of the book. This book delivers what it promises. When you're done, you will indeed be able to tell how many moves it will take to move your knight to any and all squares on the board in just a few seconds.

#### B. How to Think

1. Chess Master at any Age  
*by Rolf Wetzell,*

I consider this book to be very unique and have seen no other that covers the material that this book does. This book analyzes the thought processes of playing chess and how to make changes to it. It is a very analytical book and being an Engineer, it feels like it was written by an Engineer to me. While it covers a lot of things, two are of particular note. One is its discussion of time pressure and how to eliminate getting into it. The second is an approach to study. I personally use a computer based method very similar to his non-computer assisted approach. Excellent for the introspective thinker.

2. Win at Chess  
*by Ron Curry*

I think this book is a must. This is the only book that I have ever found that gives you a set of mental checklists to follow all during a game. Now, when I talk to Masters, they have told me that you can't play high level chess by following rules. Well, fine. My opinion is that this book will help you improve your game so much that one day, you can stop using them. In the meanwhile, I could use a few rules. 251 pages

Everyone's 2nd Chess Book, NM Dan Heisman

I've only done a quick read of this book and need to revisit it but it offers up another collection of "rules" than you can apply so it makes my list. A lot of these rules you will learn over time but by seeing them in print, you might save yourself a lot of avoidable losses. There is a lot of useful information.

### 3. Chess Rules of Thumb

*By Lev Alburt and Al Lawrence*

I include this book because there may be value in hearing things you never heard of before so you can find out what the idea is all about. That said ...

For me, I've heard most of the things in it. And as most any Master will tell you there are always exceptions to the rule when trying to state a principle in chess. In this book you will even find things that even contradict each other. I think that this is a book for light reading and occasional pondering. Perhaps its greatest use would be to introduce an idea that someone has not yet heard to get them thinking about. Without the context or the correct background experience a rule of thumb will have little value. For example, if you ask me how to play good chess, I could simply say "always play good moves". This may be very clear to me but written down here without volumes of context, it may not be of much value to you.

## C. Tactics

### 1. The Genesis of Power Chess

*by Leslie Ault*

This book discusses a topic and then provides examples where it asks you to select the best moves. It's not saying that there is a mate at the end but that you must select among the candidate moves. It then discusses which moves are better and why. I find this book rather unique in that it forces you to look at the whole board and think as though you were playing as opposed to letting you just seek out a single answer that you know is there. To put it in perspective, Reinfeld's 1001 Brilliant Ways to Checkmate which everyone seems to have at one time or another is the type of tactics book I just can't stand. This book however was the first tactics book I've enjoyed.

### 2. Chess Training Pocket Book: 300 Most Important Positions & Ideas

*by Lev Alburt*

This is a small 5" x 7" book that I found very convenient to take and read on the train during my work commute. I also found it initially very tough to get any of the answers correct. I had to work through it 7 times before I was getting a lot more correct than not.

## D. For Young Children

### 1. Sammy Seahorse Teaches Chess

*by F. Donal Bloss & Andrew Kensler*

This book covers a lot of material in a "light-hearted and whimsical" way. I've recommended this book to several parents and they've all told me it was well done. It has solid step by step instructions that both child and adult will be able to appreciate.

## IV. Not So Fast (the stuff I know I'll never get to)

### A. Endgames

#### 1. The Survival Guide to Rook Endings

by John Emms

I'm a bit torn about recommending this book. This book is very comprehensive and well organized. Strangely I found it difficult to retain the knowledge after several attempts. I was hoping to learn how to win more of these endings but it turns out that most seem to end in a draw. The first few chapters offer a lot of practical information but after that, it gets tougher to come away with clear lessons. If you've been in a Rook and Pawn endgame, the chances are this book will show you a position of the same type and how to draw it

### B. Tactics

#### 1. The Art of Attack in Chess

by V. Vukovic

This book is often referred to as a classic. Having done a light read of it, I can see why. It is a very systematic explanation of how to attack the King wherever it is. It takes into account the various pawn formations that are around the king. This book will require a lot of work and is in descriptive, not algebraic notation.