

Crucial Chess Skills for the Club Player

Volume 2

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Robert Ris

Thinkers Publishing 2019



Key to Symbols

!	a good move	±	White stands slightly better
?	a weak move	∓	Black stands slightly better
!!	an excellent move	±	White has a serious advantage
??	a blunder	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!?	an interesting move	+—	White has a decisive advantage
?!	a dubious move	—+	Black has a decisive advantage
□	only move	→	with an attack
N	novelty	↑	with an initiative
⌚	Lead in developpment	↔	with counterplay
⊙	Zugzwang	Δ	with the idea of
=	equality	△	better is
∞	unclear position	≤	worse is
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material	+	check
		#	mate

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Preface

Dear chess fan!

Congratulations on making an excellent move by getting yourself a copy of *Crucial Chess Skills for the Club Player Volume 2*. That's a good first step, but now it's up to you to take the information on board and use it effectively in your own games.

I assume that most of you have read (and enjoyed!) the first volume of this series, but for those who haven't: don't worry. The level of the content of the two books is identical and you can work through the second volume without having studied the first one. However, it's still not too late to get a copy of the first volume!

In the first six chapters I will mainly look at positions with limited material left on the board. Endgames, yes, but also positions where the initiative plays an important role. My aim is to illustrate the specific features of all the pieces and this can best be done without too many other pieces on the board.

Chapter 1 is about the role of the king in the endgame. I have decided to look mainly at examples of the well known endgame of rook vs. pawn, but of course the techniques discussed can be applied to other type of endings, as you can see in the next chapters. The topic of chapter 2 is same-coloured bishop endings, where the importance of mastering pawn structures is highlighted. Pure opposite-coloured bishop endings (Chapter 3) are a different story altogether and among club players they have a very drawish (and perhaps boring) reputation. With spectacular examples from games by the world's best players I hope to give you new inspiration to study such positions.

With major pieces on the board the side having the initiative usually benefits from the presence of opposite-coloured bishops, as you will find out in chapter 4. The eternal question of whether the knight is stronger than the bishop or vice versa is covered in chapter 5. No new answers or conclusions to be expected there, but rather new examples further deepening your understanding of this complicated subject. In Chapter 6 we discuss the power of major pieces, a favourite topic of mine. It still fascinates me to see how much damage the powerful duo of queen plus rook can cause without any other pieces on the board.

The remaining chapters, 7-11, focus on material imbalances, examining various distributions of material. Of course these topics have been discussed in other works as well, but I can offer you a lot of fresh examples from the highest level as well as quite a number of games from my own practice.

There is actually a personal story behind my decision to include this aspect of play in this series. For quite some years I had felt something was lacking in my play and I decided to analyze my own weaknesses. One of the main reasons (in my opinion) why I was not making any progress had to do with my style of play. At the board I considered myself to be a control freak with a rather positional style, avoiding complicated positions with material imbalances where precise calculation was required. I came to the conclusion that I had to adapt my style, at least partially, and play more dynamically in order to put pressure on my opponent's position.

Of course, such a change in one's style of play does not come by itself and it requires effort. I studied various material distributions and attempted to get these types of positions more frequently in my own games. At the moment of writing I have reached my highest rating ever of 2459 and I'm determined to work my way up to the 2500 barrier and the GM title. For now I'm feeling rewarded from taking more risks in my play and I hope you will experience a similar boost in your playing strength after working through this book.

And last, I would like to thank the team at Thinkers Publishing for giving me the opportunity to share my knowledge of the game with the reader. I hope this second Volume will be as inspiring as Volume 1!

Robert Ris
Amstelveen, The Netherlands
December 2018
robert_ris@hotmail.com



The role of the king in the endgame

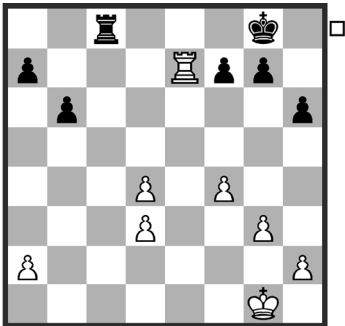
Unlike in the opening and the middlegame, the king should be used as actively as possible in the endgame. Of course, there are also examples where the king actively participates at an earlier stage of the game (the masterpiece Short – Timman, Tilburg 1991 springs to mind), but generally speaking it's recommended to let the king participate actively only when more pieces have been traded off. When there are only a few other pieces remaining on the board the king, in fact, can become one of the strongest pieces and make all the difference.

In this chapter a couple of examples will be presented where the difference in activity between the two kings is striking, which hopefully teaches how to use your king effectively (and how not to!). Furthermore, a great part of this first chapter will be dedicated to the study of both theoretical and practical examples of rook and pawn endings. In my opinion the techniques of using the king are illustrated best on the basis of this type of endgame. Every single tempo counts and choosing the right path for the king plays a very important role in that sense.

A sprinting king

In Volume 1 of *Crucial Chess Skills for the Club Player* a large amount of pages has been dedicated to studying the main principles of rook endings. It had been my intention to avoid this type of ending for this volume, but in vain. Anyway, in all sorts of endgames the participation of the king plays a key role. The first example is a nice appetizer.

- ♔ Kramnik, Vladimir (2792)
 ♚ Duda, Jan Krysztof (2737)
 ♁ Dortmund 2018



27. ♔f2!

Much more effective than 27. ♖xa7?! which can be met by 27... ♜c3!. Still, White retains chances to play for a win, but using your king should become the first thing which crosses your mind.

27... ♚f8

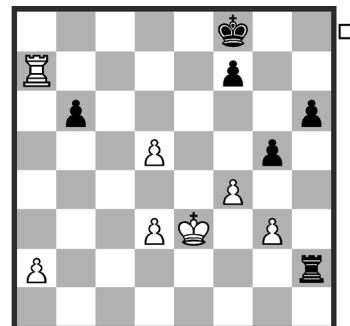
This may look a bit strange, as White is

enabled to capture an extra pawn. However, the problem is that after 27... a5 28. ♔e3 ♚f8 [28... ♜c2 runs into 29. ♜e8+ ♚h7 30. d5 and the d-pawn can't be stopped] 29. ♜e4! the black king remains cut off along the e-file and is therefore unable to approach White's passed d-pawn.

28. ♜xa7 ♜c2+ 29. ♔e3!

That's the right spirit: play actively! I hope you didn't seriously consider saving the pawn on h2 by retreating the king with 29. ♚g1. If you did, promise yourself from now on to look first at active continuations! When I was watching the game live online immediately I drew some parallels with the famous endgame in Capablanca – Tartakower, New York 1924, where the third World Champion demonstrated what impact an active king can make.

29... ♜xh2 30. d5 g5

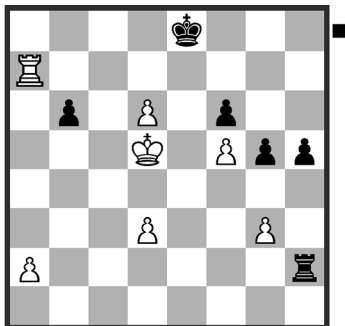


Position after: 30... g5

31. f5!

Kramnik doesn't give his young opponent any hopes of survival, as the text is much more accurate than 31. fxg5?! hxg5 when the black rook could try to stop the white king crossing the sixth rank by playing ...♖h6 at a suitable moment.

31... f6 32. d6 ♔e8 33. ♔d4 h5 34. ♔d5



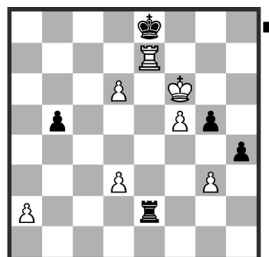
Position after: 34. ♔d5

34... b5

White doesn't have to fear 34... h4 35. gxh4 gxh4 since after 36. ♖h7 the rook is well placed behind the pawn. [However, not 36. d7+? ♔e7! and Black is still hanging in there.] 36... h3 is met by 37. d7+! ♔d8 38. ♔d6 with mate to follow.

35. ♔e6 ♖e2+ 36. ♔xf6 h4 37. ♖e7+!

37. ♖e7+!






Position after: 37. ♖e7+!

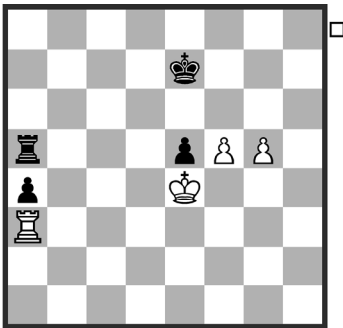
and Black resigned, in view of 37... ♖xe7 38. dxe7 hxg3 [38... ♔d7 39. ♔f7 and White queens first] 39. ♔e6 g2 40. f6 g1=♚ 41. f7#.

1-0

The king in the mating attack

In the first example the black king was stuck on the back rank, whereas the white king played an important role supporting the passed pawn. The king is a powerful piece and should be considered as a weapon to be used when launching a mating attack.

 Li Chao (2681)
 Gagunashvili, Merab (2584)
 Jakarta 2012



62. f6+ ♔f7?

The black king picks the wrong square. Instead, Black should have played 62... ♔e6! with the idea of answering 63. ♖f3 with 63... ♖b5! as 64. f7? [64. g6? drops the f-pawn as well] runs into 64... ♖b4+ 65. ♔e3 ♖b3+ 66. ♔e4 ♖xf3 67. ♔xf3 ♔xf7 and Black even wins.

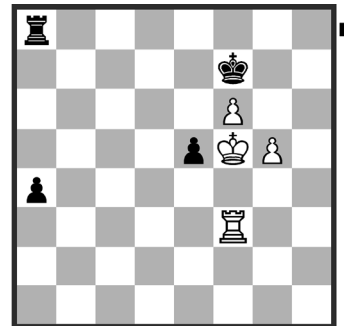
63. ♖f3!

The rook is ideally placed here, threatening to play 64. g6. Possibly the Georgian GM had only counted on 63. ♔f5 which allows Black to save the game with 63... e4+!

63... ♖a8

63... ♖b5 no longer works in view of 64. g6+ ♔xg6 65. f7 and the f-pawn is unstoppable.

64. ♔f5!



Position after: 64. ♔f5!

The white king advances into action. White has calculated correctly that Black's passed a-pawn can't cause any harm.

64... a3 65. g6+ ♔g8 66. g7! ♔f7

Temporarily taking away the g6 square from the white king. In the event of 66... a2, White has 67. ♔g6! ♖a6 [67...

Ignoring the g-pawn, although 58. ♔xg4 would have been possible too.

58... ♖xf2

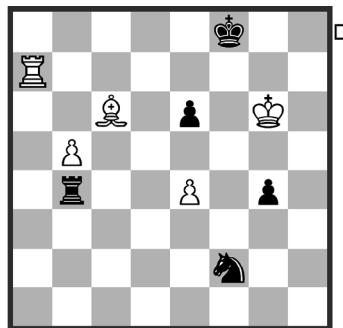
I remember it was my intention to meet 58... ♜b2 with 59. ♔g6! ♜xf2 60. ♜a8+ ♔e7 61. ♜e8+ ♔d6 62. ♜d8+ and on the next move the knight will be taken.

59. ♔f6 ♔g8

59... ♖xe4+ fails to 60. ♔xe4 ♜xe4 61. ♜a8#.

60. ♔g6 ♔f8

(see diagram next column)



Position after: 60... ♔f8

61. ♜a8+! ♔e7 **62.** e5!

And Black resigned, as nothing can be done against the mating threat on e8. Note the unfortunate pawn on g4, which prevents the rook from giving check.

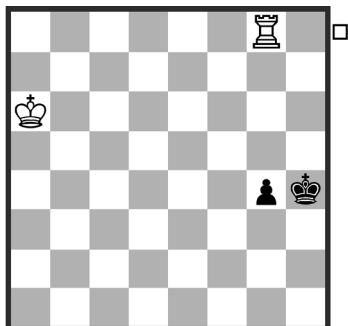
1-0

Rook vs. pawn

Let's move on to some theoretical endgames of rook vs. pawn. The weaker side hopes to queen the pawn with the aid of the king, after which the rook needs to be sacrificed with a draw as a result. In quite a number of situations the stronger side is able to get his king in front of the pawn, which leads to an

easy win. This type of endgame gets interesting when a race takes place with the stronger side's king trying to reach the pawn, while the weaker side intends to push the pawn with the aid of his own king. As you read earlier, the placement of the kings (and the chosen path!) plays a crucial role.

Instructive example 1



1. ♔b5 g3

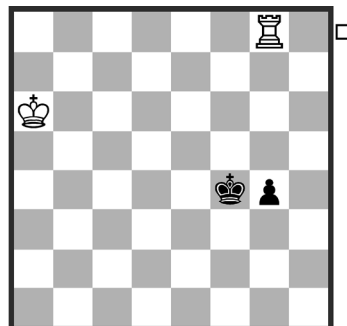
As we will see in other examples, the weaker side's king sometimes crosses the path of its own pawn in order to hinder the opponent's king approaching the pawn. However, in this case that plan turns out to be too slow, e.g. 1... ♔g3 2. ♔c4 ♔f3 3. ♔d3 g3 and now White pushes the black king in front of his own pawn with 4. ♖f8+! with an easy win: 4... ♔g2 5. ♔e2 ♔h2 6. ♖g8 g2 7. ♔f2+–.

2. ♔c4 ♔h3 3. ♔d3 g2 4. ♔e2 ♔h2 5. ♔f2 ♔h1 6. ♖h8#

But not 6. ♖xg2? with stalemate!

Conclusion: White wins as his rook is excellently placed behind Black's passed pawn, guarding the queening square, and his king is able to approach the pawn without being hindered by its counterpart.

Instructive example 2



The position is similar to the previous one, the only difference is that the black king has switched to the other side of the pawn. White can no longer approach the pawn with his king and hence it's a draw, for example:

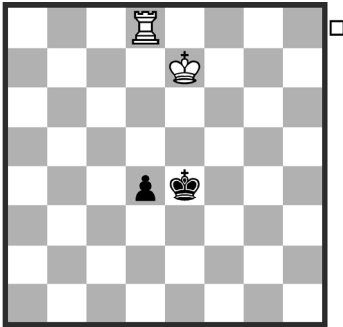
1. ♔b5 g3 2. ♔c4 ♔f3 3. ♔d3 g2 4. ♖f8+

Not 4. ♔d2 ♔f2 5. ♖f8+ ♔g3 and White's king can't get any closer as Black is ready to promote his pawn.

4... ♔g3 5. ♖g8+ ♔f2=

And a draw is inevitable.

Instructive example 3



In some situations the weaker side has already determined the placement for the king to support the advance of the pawn. In the position above the black king is on the correct side of the pawn and hence White's winning plan is to approach the pawn from the other side. The black king is unable to keep the white king away.

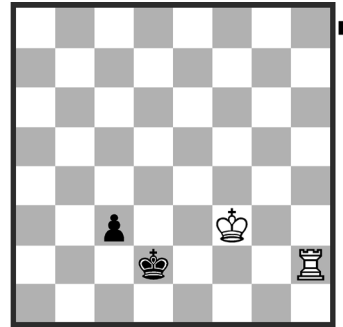
1. ♔d6!

Inferior is 1. ♔e6? d3! and the white king can't approach the pawn, e.g. 2. ♖d7 ♔e3 3. ♔d5 d2 4. ♔c4 ♔e2 5. ♔c3 d1=♚ 6. ♖xd1 ♔xd1 with a draw. Once again, it's clear that there is no time to waste and every single tempo matters.

1... d3 2. ♔c5 ♔e3 3. ♔c4 d2 4. ♔c3+-

On the next move White takes the d-pawn.

Instructive example 4



In contrast to many other types of races, in this type of ending it's often not about going forwards as quickly as possible. It's more important to prevent the opponent's king from approaching the pawn.

1... ♔d3!

This move backwards is the only way to achieve a draw with Black. Other king moves lose instantly: 1... ♔d1? 2. ♔e3 c2 3. ♖h1#; 1... ♔c1? 2. ♔e3 c2 3. ♔d3 and the pawn will be taken on the next move.

2. ♖h8 c2

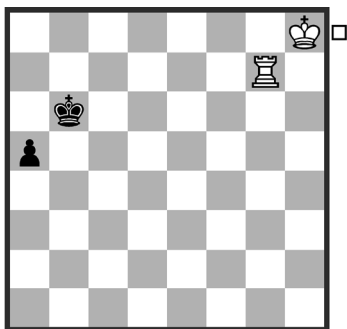
This is good enough, but personally I do prefer 2... ♔d2! 3. ♖d8+ ♔e1! highlighting the power of the king. Black is ready to advance the c-pawn, while in case of 4. ♖c8 ♔d2 the white king still can't get any closer.

3. ♖d8+ ♔c3 4. ♖c8+ ♔d2=

Cutting off the king

So far we have been focusing on choosing the right path for the king. The rook is a powerful piece, being able to make life for the king very hard. By cutting off the king on the fifth rank the stronger side separates the king from the pawn. A very important technique worth remembering!

Instructive example 5



1. ♖g5!

After this move the black king can't cross the fifth rank any longer. Black's only chance is to push the pawn, but then the distance between the king and pawn becomes too big.

1... a4 2. ♔g7 a3

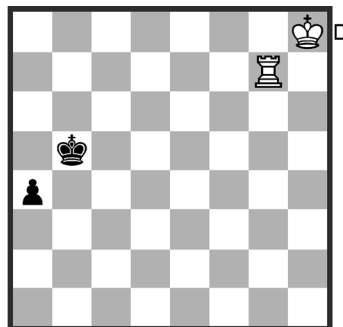
What else? After a waiting move like 2... ♖a6 White could just bring his king closer to the pawn.

3. ♜g3

The black king isn't able to support the pawn any longer.

3... a2 4. ♜a3+-

Instructive example 6



We move up the black pawn and king one rank. In this case White can no longer convert his material plus.

1. ♜g4

Other moves don't work either, e.g. 1. ♜b7+ ♔c4 and White's king is too far away: 2. ♜a7 ♔b3 3. ♔g7 a3 4. ♔f6 a2 5. ♔e5 ♔b2 with a draw.

1... a3 2. ♔g7 a2 3. ♜g1

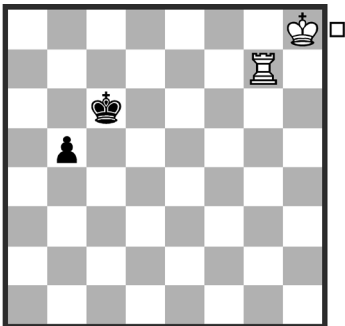
The main difference between cutting off the king on the fourth or fifth rank becomes clear now, as attacking the

pawn with 3. ♖g2 can hardly be recommended since Black just promotes the pawn to a queen.

3... ♔b4 4. ♔f6 ♔b3 5. ♔e5 ♔b2

Black achieves a draw.

Instructive example 7



The position is similar to Example 5, only with the pawn moved one square to the right. White still wins by cutting off the king along the fifth rank.

1. ♖g5! ♔b6

After 1... b4 White just brings his king closer and wins as in Example 5: 2. ♔g7 b3 3. ♖g3 b2 4. ♖b3+-. With the text Black aims to cross the fifth rank first with his king, so that it will not be separated from the pawn. However, this takes a huge amount of time, which White uses to bring his own king closer.

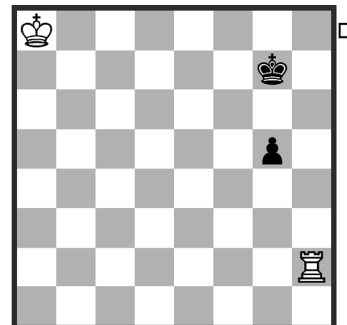
2. ♔g7 ♔a5 3. ♔f6 ♔b4 4. ♔e5 ♔c3

Black has managed to get his king on the right side of the pawn. However, White's king is standing too close and the b-pawn isn't far advanced yet. White wins easily:

5. ♔d5 b4 6. ♖g3+ ♔c2 7. ♔c4

and the b-pawn falls.

♏ Lerner, Konstantin (2495)
 ♚ Dorfman, Josif (2540)
 ♁ Tashkent 1980



The white king is far away from the pawn and it looks as if Black will be very fast generating counterplay. However, cutting off the king on a file (instead of a rank) is another very effective method to enable your own king to approach the pawn without being hindered by the opponent's king.

71. ♖f2!!

An excellent idea. Inferior is 71. ♔b7? in view of 71... ♔f6 72. ♔c6 ♔e5! [72... g4? is met by 73. ♖h5! and the

black king has been cut off along the fifth rank] 73. ♖e2+ ♔f4 and the black king is very well placed as it both supports the g-pawn and blocks the path for the white king.

71... ♔h6

71... g4 is met by 72. ♖g2.

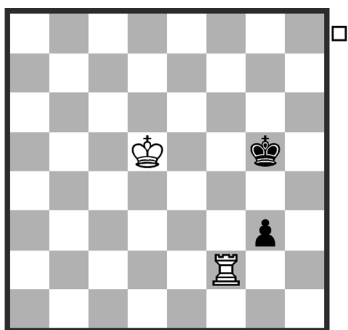
72. ♔b7 g4 73. ♔c6

White could also have played 73. ♖f5! with an easy win. This additional option would not have been available had Black played 71... ♔g6 instead.

73... ♔g5

73... g3?! 74. ♖g2 and Black drops the pawn immediately.

74. ♔d5 g3



Position after: 74... g3

75. ♖f8!

A) The rook is best placed behind the passed pawn and for the moment it also keeps the black king cut off along the f-file. Worse is 75. ♖a2? when Black can just play 75... ♔f4! 76. ♔d4 ♔f3 77. ♔d3 g2 78. ♖a1 ♔f2 with an easy draw. This line shows why the rook is not doing well, trying to control the pawn from the side.

B) Just for the record, both moves 75. ♖f7 and

C) 75. ♖f1 apparently win as well, but it should come naturally to you to place the rook as far away as possible from the black king.

75... ♔g4

75... g2 fails to 76. ♖g8+.

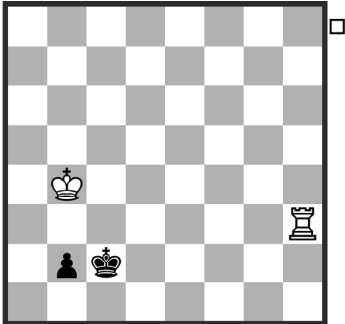
76. ♔e4

Black resigned, in view of 76... g2 77. ♖g8+ ♔h3 78. ♔f3 and the pawn will be taken next.

1-0

Minor promotion

Instructive example 8



1. ♖h2+

The most challenging option, since after 1. ♖c3+ ♔d2 2. ♖b3 ♔c2 Black easily holds.

1... ♔c1

Another option is 1... ♔b1 2. ♔b3 ♔a1! 3. ♖xb2 and Black survives thanks to the stalemate motif.

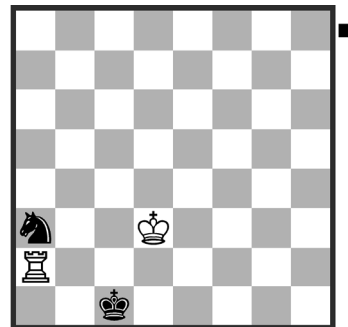
2. ♔c3 b1=♗+!

Thanks to this minor promotion Black is able to save the ending. 2... b1=♗? 3. ♖h1#

3. ♔d3 ♗a3!

The only move, as 3... ♔d1 4. ♖h1# is mate again.

4. ♖a2



Position after: 4. ♖a2

4... ♗b1!

Once you reach the ending of rook vs knight the main advice is to keep the king and knight close to each other. If you are not careful, the knight could be trapped, which is the case after 4... ♗b5? 5. ♖a6! and Black is in zugzwang, as all moves lose directly: 5... ♔b2 [5... ♔d1 6. ♖a1#; 5... ♗c7 6. ♖c6+ wins the knight] 6. ♖b6 and the knight is pinned.

5. ♖c2+ ♔d1 6. ♖c8 ♗a3 7. ♖a8 ♗b1 8. ♖a1 ♔c1

White can't make any progress, which explains why this endgame is considered to be theoretically drawn.