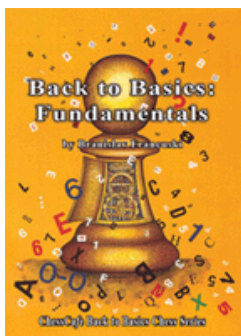




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Scholastic
Chess

Steve Goldberg



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Understanding the Philidor Position

Our [July 2008](#) Scholastic Chess column reviewed the Lucena endgame position, which International Master Jeremy Silman has called “the sacred key to all rook endings.” If you are not fully confident in your ability to handle a Lucena, you might want to review that column.

Another important endgame that probably arises with greater frequency than the Lucena is the well-known Philidor position. Both involve rook and pawn vs. rook endings; played properly, the Lucena is a win for the stronger side, and the Philidor is a draw – but only if you know how to play it properly.

This month’s column is meant to teach you how to hold that draw if you can reach a Philidor position.

Everyman Quiz of the Month

Each month Everyman Chess sponsors our Everyman Quiz of the Month, offering a free chess book to three respondents with correct answers. This month, winners of our quiz will receive the CD *Starting Out: The Sicilian Dragon*, by IM Andrew Martin. Please note – winners within the last three months are ineligible for this month’s contest.



We will accept all contest answers for *two weeks* following the appearance of this column, then randomly select our three winners from this group. In order to meet the two-week deadline, please e-mail your responses to me by February 25, 2009. Send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. Good luck!

Problem #1



White has just played 1.Rf8+.

- Where should the black king move in order to ensure the draw?
- In the actual game, Black played 1...Rf7??. How did White punish this mistake?

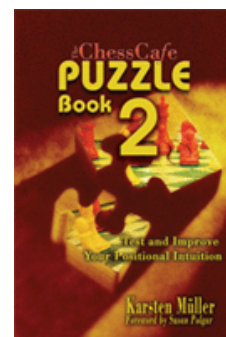
Problem #2

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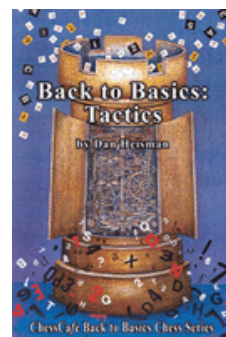
by Bruce Alberston



[ChessCafe](#)

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by Karsten Müller



[Back to Basics: Tactics](#)

by Dan Heisman



It is White to play and win. How does he accomplish this?

The Basics

Let's begin by looking at the following position:



International Master Jeremy Silman, in his outstanding [Silman's Complete Endgame Course](#), describes this position. "White's a pawn up, enjoys the superior king position, and apparently has the more active rook. Though I just listed three serious plusses for White, this is a dead draw. However, people lose this kind of position every day, so you must know what you're doing."

And that's the goal of this month's column. If you understand the basic concepts here, you'll hold the draw against Anand, Kramnik and Carlsen teaming up against you. On the other hand, if you have no idea what to do, you may well drop the game against a kid who has to sit on telephone books to see the board.

In this basic position, the key is really quite simple. The defender needs to prevent the enemy king from getting in front of the pawn. **1...Rh6 2.Rg7 + Ke8 3.Ra7 Rg6.**



"'You shall not pass!' shouts the black rook to the white king," as Silman puts it. Black will simply shuttle his rook along his third rank, until White

pushes his pawn forward. If White wants to check Black with 4.Ra8+, the black king can move between e8 and e7.

4.e6 Now White threatens to break through with Kd6. **4...Rg1!** Black is happy to see the pawn push forward, because now the white king will be unable to hide in front of it, and Black can harass his opponent with checks. **5.Ra4** If 5.Kd6 Rd1+ 6.Ke5 Re1+ and White can't avoid checks without losing his pawn. **5...Ke7** Black also draws with 5...Rd1+ 6.Rd4 Rxd4+ 7.Kxd4 Ke7. **6.Ra7+ Ke8** and White will be unable to make any progress.



Black can repeatedly check the white king with his rook, and if the king moves too far away from the pawn, Black will capture it after ...Re1.

In Practical Endgame Play – Mastering the Basics, GM Efstratios Grivas presents the following similar basic Philidor position. The annotations are his.



1.Rb7 Essentially a waiting move, hoping for a mistake by Black. **1...Rc6**
2.e6 Now White threatens Kf6, winning. Now that the pawn has advanced, Black must leave his third rank and activate his rook.



2...Rc1! 3.Kf6 Rf1+ 4.Ke5 Re1+ 5.Kd6 Rd1+



The position is drawn as White has no good way of escaping checks. Grivas summarizes the three-step process for the defending side in such positions:

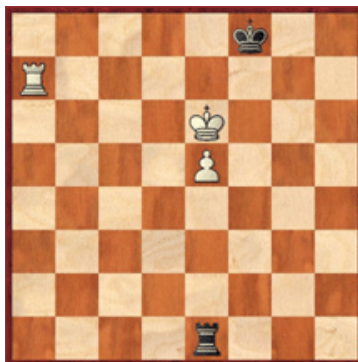
1. Aim for the Philidor position, placing the rook on its third rank.
2. Maintain the rook on the third rank until the enemy pawn advances.
3. At this point move the rook to its eighth rank and start checking from behind.

The Second Defensive Method

French chessplayer (and music composer) Francois-Andre Philidor described the above method of defense over two centuries ago. Renowned trainer Mark Dvoretsky explains a second, more difficult, defensive method that is also available.



In this position, the simple 1...Rb6 is the standard, simple method of defense as noted above. Alternatively, in some positions, a second defensive technique involves placing the black rook behind the pawn. **1... Re1 2.Ke6 Kf8**



The king goes to the “short side” of the pawn, leaving the “long side” for his rook. Dvoretsky notes that in this case, the king can also go to the long side and still draw: 2...Kd8?! 3.Ra8+ Kc7



4.Re8 (4.Kf6 Kd7!) 4...Rh1! (4...Re2? 5.Kf7 Rh2 6.Rg8! Rh7+ 7.Rg7 Rh8 8.Ke7 Kc6 9.e6 Kc7 10.Rg1+-) 5.Rg8 Re1! 6.Rg2 Kd8=



Such a defense with the king on the long side would have been impossible if the short side were even shorter (in the case of an f- or g-pawn).

3.Ra8+ Kg7



Now we can better understand the reason for 1...Re1. This now prevents both 4.Ke7 and 4.Kd7. **4.Kd6** Or 4.Re8 (preparing 5.Kd7) 4...Ra1!=. The black rook will now check from the long side. If 5.Rd8, then 5...Re1! (5...Ra6+? 6.Rd6). **4...Kf7!** Again we see the significance of 1...Re1. White cannot play 5.e6+. Instead, White just retraces his steps: **5.Ra7+ Ke8 6.Ke6 Kf8!** etc.

When the King has Reached the Sixth Rank

So what happens in the event that the stronger side's king has made it to the sixth rank and the above defensive methods are no longer applicable? It depends on which file the pawn is on. Here is how Silman presents the material:



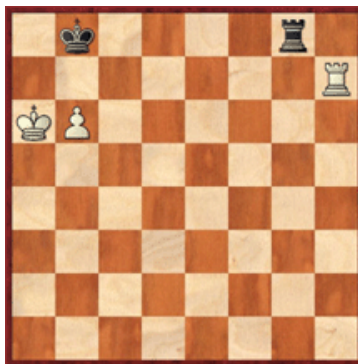
Black's rook has to remain passive. It can't leave its first rank or Rh8# will occur. White wins easily with **1.Ra7 Ke8 2.Ra8+**.

If we move the kings and the pawn over one file, we have the following position:



White again wins by "swinging the rook over" to the other side of the board. **1.Ra7 Kb8 (1...Kd8 2.Ra8+) 2.c7+ Kc8 3.Ra8+ Kd7 4.Rxg8**.

It's a different story, however, if the kings and the pawn are again moved over one file:



Silman states, "If your opponent's extra pawn is a knight-pawn or rook-pawn and your king is in front of it, you should effortlessly draw even if the lobotomy scar hasn't completely healed yet." **1.Rb7+ Ka8 2.Ra7 Kb8**



3.Rb7+ and White is unable to make progress. Note, incidentally, that if White tries 3.b7?? intending 4.Ra8+, he actually loses to 3...Rg6+! Lobotomy scar or not, though, Black can go wrong here. If he simply shuttles his king back and forth between a8 and b8, he's fine. But if he mistakenly plays 3...Kc8 in response to 3.Rb7+, 4.Ka7 wins for White.

Grivas summarizes the situation when the stronger side's king has reached the sixth rank:

1. With rook-pawns, the draw is secured as long as the defending king and rook remain on their first rank.
2. For knight-pawns, the drawing method consists of passive defense with the rook, as in the last example above.
3. Against all other pawns (bishop-, queen- and king-pawns), passive defense with the rook loses. This occurs because the attacking side can maneuver on both sides of the pawn, as with Silman's prior two examples above. However, active defense can save the draw. The defending rook must be placed actively behind the enemy pawn, utilizing Dvoretzky's second defensive method noted earlier.

Actual Games

Let's look at some actual games in which some of these issues come into play:

Albin, Adolf - Vergani, Beniamino
Hastings (9), 1895 [C65]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 Nf6 4.d4 Nxe4 5.dxe5 Nc5 6.0-0 Be7 7.Nc3 0-0 8.Nd5 Ne6 9.Bd3 d6 10.Nxe7+ Qxe7 11.Qe2 g6 12.Bh6 Re8 13.c3 dxe5 14.Nxe5 Ng7 15.Nxc6 Qxe2 16.Bxe2 Rxe2 17.Nd4 Rxb2 18.Bxg7 Kxg7 19.Rfe1 Kf8 20.a4 Bd7 21.a5 c5 22.Nf3 f6 23.Rad1 Bg4 24.Rd6 Kf7 25.h3 Bxf3 26.Rd7+ Kf8 27.gxf3 Re8 28.Rxe8+ Kxe8 29.Rxh7 Rb5 30.a6 bxa6 31.Rxa7 Rb1+ 32.Kg2 Ra1 33.f4 a5 34.h4 a4 35.f5 gxf5 36.h5 Kf8 37.h6 Kg8 38.Rg7+ Kh8 39.Rf7 a3 40.Ra7 a2 41.Kf3 Rc1 42.Rxa2 Rxc3+ 43.Kf4 Rh3 44.Ra7 Rxh6 45.Kxf5 Kg8 46.f4 Rh7 47.Ra6 Rh6 48.Rc6 Kf7 49.Rc7+ Kf8 50.Ke6 f5+ 51.Kxf5 Rb6 52.Kg5 c4 53.f5 c3 54.Rxc3



A classic Philidor position has been reached, and the black rook never

leaves its third rank for the remainder of the game. Thirteen moves later a draw is finally agreed upon.

54...Rd6 55.Kf4 Kf7 56.Ke5 Ra6 57.Rc7+ Kf8 58.Rd7 Rb6 59.Rh7 Rc6 60.Kd5 Rf6 61.Ke5 Rb6 62.Ra7 Rc6 63.Ke4 Rf6 64.Rh7 Rb6 65.Kf4 Rf6 66.Ke5 Rb6 67.Rd7 Ra6 $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$

Dvoretsky annotates a game segment in which Black needlessly gave up a draw in a winning position (he calls such games “tragicomedies”):



This position arose in *Lobron – Knaak*, Baden Baden, 1992.

1...Kxe3? To avoid the theoretical draw, Black should have played: 1... Kd3! The white king is placed at the long side, and one cannot see how White can survive, for example: 2.Rd5+ Kxe3 3.Kc2 Ke2!? (3...Rxc3 4. Re5!? Kf4 5.Re8 (or 5.Rd5 Kf3 6.Re5 e3 7.Kd3 Kf2—+ is also playable.) 5...Rd3!—+) 4.Rd2+ Kf3 5.Rd7 Rf8!? (5...Rxc3 6.Re7 e3 7.Kd3 Kf2—+ followed by Rf3-f8.) 6.Kd1 Kf2! 7.Rd2+ Kf1—+ **2.Kc2 Rxc3 3.Re8 Rg2+**



This is a draw, according to the second defensive method in the Philidor position. $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$

Here’s another of Dvoretsky’s annotated tragicomedies, in which two of the greatest players of their day trade errors:

Larsen – Tal, Bled cmsf (9), 1965



The queenside pawns will inevitably be traded, and the Philidor position will probably occur thereafter. **1.Ra7+ Kc8?** The black king goes the wrong way; he should have tried the short side. 1...Ke8! 2.Ke6 Kf8 3.Ra8 + Kg7 4.Kxe5 b3 5.axb3 Rxb3 with a drawn position. **2.Kxe5 b3?** 2...Rh2 The position is still drawn here, according to Müller. **3.axb3 Rxb3 4.Kd6 Rd3+**



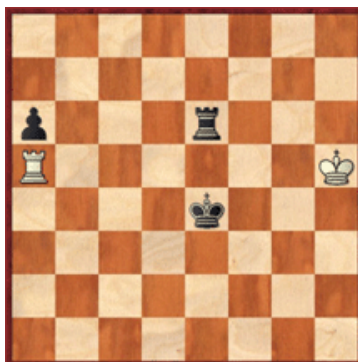
5.Ke6? Larsen misses his chance to punish his opponent for a grave positional error and allows him to employ the second defensive method in the Philidor position. The winning combination: 5.Ke7! Rh3 6.Ra4 with the idea of Rc4+ and Rd4. 6...Rh7+ 7.Ke8 Rh8+ 8.Kf7+- **5...Rh3 6.Ra8+** 6.Ra4 Kd8! **6...Kc7 7.Rf8 Re3! 8.e5 Re1 9.Re8 9.Kf6 Kd7! 9...Rh1! 10. Ra8 Re1!** White played eighteen moves before he agreed to the peaceful outcome of the game. ½-½

Last, I have included a game that doesn't include a Philidor position, but illustrates a trap to be aware of in R+P vs. R endings:

Zukertort, Johannes - Steinitz, William

London (1), 1872 [C56]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.c3 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 Bb6 7.0-0 Nxe4 8.Re1 0-0 9.Rxe4 d5 10.Bxd5 Qxd5 11.Nc3 Qd8 12.d5 Ne7 13. Bg5 f6 14.Qb3 Rf7 15.Rae1 Kf8 16.d6 cxd6 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.Qxd5 Bd7 19.Qxd6+ Kg8 20.Ne5 Bxf2+ 21.Kh1 Bxe1 22.Nxf7 Kxf7 23.Qd5+ Kg6 24.Rxe1 Bc6 25.Qxd8 Rxd8 26.Be3 Kf7 27.Kg1 g5 28.Re2 a6 29. Rd2 Re8 30.Kf2 Bxg2 31.Bxg5 fxg5 32.Kxg2 Kf6 33.Kf3 h5 34.h4 gxh4 35.Rd4 Kg5 36.Rd5+ Kg6 37.Rd6+ Kf5 38.Rd4 h3 39.Rh4 Kg5 40.Rxh3 h4 41.Kf2 Rc8 42.Rb3 Rc2+ 43.Kg1 b5 44.a4 bxa4 45.Rb4 Rc1+ 46.Kh2 Rb1 47.Rxa4 Rxb2+ 48.Kh3 Rb3+ 49.Kh2 Rb6 50.Kh3 Kf5 51.Kxh4 Rg6 52.Kh5 Re6 53.Ra5+ Ke4



Whether or not White could have saved the draw, his next move quickly brings the game to an end.

54.Kg5 Re5+ 0-1

For the reader interested in further research, there are many books that cover the Philidor and related positions, but the ones I found most helpful are these:

- [Silman's Complete Endgame Course](#), pp. 126-132 and pp. 281-285
- [Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual](#), 2nd Edition, pp. 147-149
- [Practical Endgame Play – Mastering the Basics](#), pp. 52-57

Answers to Last Month's Quiz

Problem #1



It is White to move. He is a piece and a pawn ahead, but both of his rooks are attacked and undefended. How can he save them?

Answer: This position is from Alekhine-Verlinski, Odessa 1918. As Yuri Averbakh explains in his Chess Tactics for Advanced Players, Alekhine saved the day with 1.Qd1!! If 1...Bxd1, then 2.Rxc7, and if 1...Qa5, then 2.Qd5.

Problem #2



It is Black to move. How did he bring the game to an immediate end?

Answer: This position occurred in the game Marski-Yudovich, Minsk 1937, as noted in Chess Tactics for Advanced Players. Black won with the simple 1...Re4+.

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