VAN PERLO'S ENDGAME TACTICS

A Comprehensive Guide to the Sunny Side of Chess Endgames

Modernized and improved edition, New In Chess 2026

Foreword by the author

'Endgame Tactics' is the result of approximately thirty years of collecting, analysing and categorizing. It has grown into a collection of endgames that have a particular charm for me on account of their special character. I have cast them into a framework and little by little, a course of instruction developed, treating many varieties of tactical possibilities that occur in endgame practice. I have drawn on every source I could find. Original analyses I have often rewritten or placed in a different context.

I have used the original manuscript for a series on the endgame in the Dutch correspondence chess magazine *Schaakschakeringen*. Relevant reactions by readers I have later incorporated in this book.

Many players consider the study of the endgame a necessary evil. Resignedly, they plough their way through one or more standard works, restricting themselves to basic positions or, on the contrary, a few exceptionally ingenious studies. Most of them do not find it very exciting.

Actually, this is a pity, for in the endgame, too, there is a lot to be enjoyed and a thorough study of a great number of practical fragments has taught me that even this phase of the chess struggle can produce many different types of drama. Clever tactical tricks, gruesome blunders and other tragicomic scenes, it's all possible. When after many hours of toil the end of the game is nigh, it is a difficult task for many to keep a clear head, to control their nerves and to make optimal use of the opportunities that present themselves.

Especially a well-developed feeling for the multitude of tactical possibilities contained in the endgame often signifies the difference between a full point and an annoying zero!

Of course, an investigation like this can always be continued, supplied and extended with new and previously undiscovered older material. I don't know if I will be able to do this, or if others will take over. But it is clear to me that it is important that the entire field of tactical possibilities is charted and will be in the future.

I owe many thanks to the New In Chess staff, who have cooperated with me, screened my work scrupulously and moulded it into a form which suited my purposes perfectly.

I sincerely hope that the reader will derive as much pleasure from studying the presented material as I have derived from writing it.

G.C. van Perlo, 2006

Preface to the modernized and improved sixth edition

In his Preface to the first edition of *Van Perlo's Endgame Tactics* in 2006 (see page 8-13), W.F. Andriessen, founder/publisher of New In Chess, announced that we might use readers' comments in 'a future edition'. We could never have imagined that the fruits of Dutch correspondence grandmaster G.C. van Perlo's life's work would have such an enormous appeal to chess players all over the world.

In 2006, the author earned the English Chess Federation's as well as the Chess Café's Book of the Year Award for this remarkable, painstakingly researched and analysed work. Van Perlo took an original approach to a subject matter that was hitherto often considered 'dull', displaying 'wicked glee' (the ECF judges' words) at the wealth of endgame tricks and traps he collected. And his wish that readers would derive as much pleasure from studying the material as he'd had from writing it, has come true.

After the first edition, many readers began providing us with feedback, ranging from useful additions to outright refutations of sometimes well-known examples. This process continued after the second edition, over the years (twenty!), right into this sixth edition. *Van Perlo's Endgame Tactics* is indeed a 'living organism'!

German GMs Karsten Müller and Frank Holzke have sent us comments that were very useful, and also Dutch GM Hans Ree and IM and chess tutor Cor van Wijgerden made considerable contributions. All these new analyses were checked with the then current top engines and endgame tablebases by René Olthof.

In 1998, after Wim Andriessen had started working on the first edition of this legendary tome, Ger van Perlo sent him another 100-page manuscript which had not yet been published in Dutch. It consisted of some fantastic new material in rook endgames, organized in the same structure as Part III in *Endgame Tactics*, which corresponds with booklets 2 and 3 of the version that had been published in Dutch in the 1990s. The Dutch correspondence chess grandmaster and chess author suffered a stroke shortly afterwards and passed away in 2010.

At the time, it was decided not to include this new part in the compilation, for various practical reasons. First we wanted to see if there was a market for this work at all. Well – worldwide, the reactions exceeded all our expectations. So when the time came for a fourth edition, six years after the third, we decided to take another plunge and add Van Perlo's 'secret book' to the manuscript, expanding it to a whopping 600-odd pages in the 2014 edition.

This new part contains a fresh number of exciting endgame struggles, brilliancies and tragic mistakes, all celebrated by Van Perlo in his contagiously humorous style. We could have added this material to the chapters in Part III, but decided against this, as Van Perlo had written it as an independent new book in Dutch, and in order to keep the work 'pure Van Perlo' we thought it better to present it as a separate part in the back of this book. As a new feature, the Dutchman had added a series of exercises for the reader. You'll find all this in Part V.

The direct reason for this new, modernized, sixth edition was the fact that a Dutch amateur reader, Wiebe Veldhuis, had gone through the book with the latest engines in 2025 and found around eighty analytical corrections. Another big contribution! The findings of Veldhuis were checked and processed by René Olthof and Frank Erwich, and with our publisher Remmelt Otten, we decided to give the book a new look with a modernized layout which we hope you will enjoy.

While we were working on this new edition, Peter Boll from Arves sent us a list with a more corrections. These were also implemented in this edition.

The most important of all these corrections can also be found on the Errata page of our website, www.newinchess.com.

And so, we are getting ever closer to the truth, although, like Achilles in the race with the Tortoise in Zeno's paradox, we'll never quite catch up with it!

Many thanks to all these contributors to this wonderful project, which will undoubtedly remain vibrantly alive as long as 'endgame fun' exists in chess!

Peter Boel
Alkmaar, January 2026

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Entire chess libraries have been filled with material on rook endgames.

However, if that leads you to conclude that this is a popular subject among chess players, I have to disappoint you. We are not dealing with pure, taintless love here, but with sheer necessity – for two reasons:

1) Rook endgames occur so often in practice that no ambitious chess player can do without study and more than superficial knowledge. Indeed, it is said that the strength of a chess player actually depends on his ability to handle rook endgames. Classic examples of star players in this genre are Capablanca, Flohr and Rubinstein, to name a few.

2) Like no other endgame type, rook endgames lend themselves for technical-scientific treatment, including the formulation of basic rules that are quite straightforward and immediately applicable.

From such an introduction to this subject, it may easily be concluded that we are talking about a very technical and therefore 'dull' subject, requiring above all heavy toil and study. But the power of our game lies in the fact that in practice, there are always many exceptions and special or divergent characteristics to be found, and these render even the study of this subject interesting and entertaining.

It's all well and good to check out all the libraries, i.e. all standard books by Fine, Keres, Averbakh, Berger, Chéron and whoever else, but in practice, where time-trouble, simple human emotions, nerves and other factors continuously influence our chess lives, even the all-time great lose control, and it's just as well that they do. In such cases, to our amazement and astonishment we may see a manifestation of scenes that will never be found in the manuals.

In itself, this is not so surprising, because these endgames are outstanding examples where strategic features and tactical finesses go hand in hand. Usually, technique is essential, but a quick perception of tactical possibilities can come in handy.

We may add that the complexity of rook endgames can grow so high that well-known grandmasters have been known to proclaim in desperation that they can never be won!!

Even with a surplus of two or more pawns, theoretical standard draws have been discovered. In a practical game, this is doubly frustrating, of course.

Experience, however, is the father of wisdom. Especially in practice, it is doubly useful to search for divergences, which are often quite special and often make the difference between half a loaf and no bread.

It is my intention to accompany the reader on this quest for a while.

However, before we start our journey, it is advisable, perhaps even necessary, to have three main rules of the rook endgame within arm's reach. In my opinion, these three rules are extremely important. Sinning against them often lies at the base of the unnecessary loss of points.

Here they are:

a) Passed pawns must be supported by the rook. The defending side must naturally try to prevent this. Tarrasch has formulated the rule that the rook must always be placed behind the passed pawn, whether it be his own or the enemy's.

b) Connected passed pawns are nearly always stronger than isolated ones in rook endgames.

c) The rook as well as the king must be active at all times. Nowhere is passivity more severely punished than in endgames with rooks! Activity is often more important than material!!

So, aggression is often rewarded. And that must be a satisfaction to many of you readers.

Various other more or less important rules (of which there are quite a few) will present themselves in the following, but the abovementioned three lie at the heart of this subject and are usually predominant.

Enough theory, enough previews. We must be on our way!

CHAPTER 2

Pure Rook Endgames

Here we mean endgames with rooks and pawns only – no other pieces on the board. I have warned you: these endgames can be very difficult already. So let's not beat about the bush and name the next paragraph:

A) Disappointment, despair and discontent

Or: the 'simple' endgame of rook + pawn(s) versus lone rook.
You've guessed it: we start with a few examples where things go terribly wrong. The fact that the victims were no amateurs may console you. I will add a little theory here and there that is useful to take note of.

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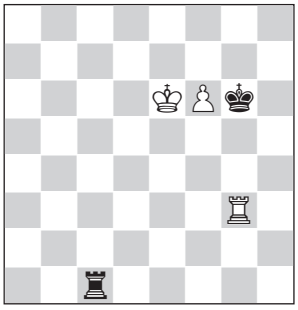
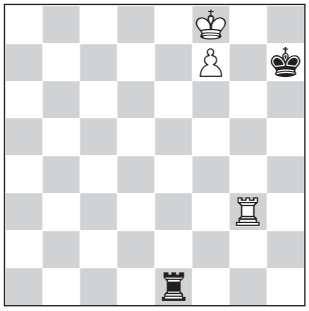


It's unbelievable, but in this position, from Sax-Tseshkovsky, Rovinj/Zagreb 1975, Black resigned. This must have caused him grief afterwards, as it is actually a draw after
1...♔h7!
A move to keep in mind. Black probably knew that it's a draw with his rook on the a-file (as far away as possible), but he does not realize that this is not so hard to achieve. The theoretical way to draw is:
2.f7 ♖c8!
There's a venomous little snake in the grass here: 2...♖e1+? 3.♔d7 ♖d1+ 4.♔e7 ♖e1+ 5.♔f8



analysis diagram

and White wins after 5...♖f1 6.♖g7+ ♔h8 7.♖g8+ ♔h7 8.♔e7 – an archaic piece of analysis by Lucena and Salvio in the 15th and 16th century. But after the text, it is really a draw.
3.♔d7 ♖a8! 4.♔c6 ♖f8
and White can't get through.

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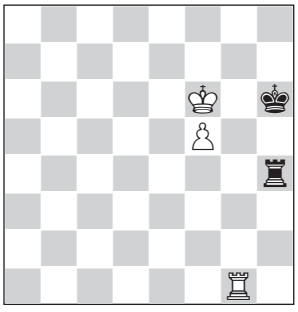
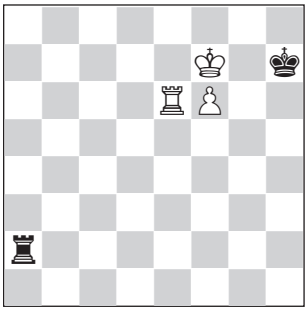


Something similar happened in Miles-Benko, Sao Paulo 1977.
1.♖e1 ♖h2 2.♔f7 ♖a2! 3.♖e6+
Or 3.f6 ♖a7+, but you had gathered that already.
3...♔h7! 4.f6



and again the incredible happened: Black resigned.
Of course it's a draw after 4...♖a8! (beware: 4...♖a7+? 5.♔f8!).
With the rook on e5 instead of e6, this had already occurred in Vienna in 1898 (Steinitz-Blackburne) which continued, in a mirrored position:
4...♖a7+!
In this setting, the correct reply.
5.♖e7 ♖a8 6.♖d7 ♖b8 7.♖e7 ♖a8 8.♖d7 ♖b8 9.♖d4 ♖b7+ 10.♔e6 ♔g6 11.♖g4+ ♔h7 12.f7 ♖b6+
Draw. Those guys knew how to play the game!

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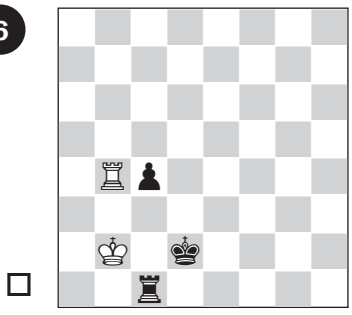

Another player who did not have this knowledge ready was at work in Matsukevich-Lein, Soviet Union 1968. As we know by now, White can draw here with 1.♔a2!, but the unfortunate Matsukevich played
1.♖b8?
and was punished immediately and unrelentingly with
1...c3+ 2.♔a2 ♖d1!.
White cannot organize his defence anymore. The continuation was
3.♖d8+ ♔c1 4.♖h8 c2 5.♖h2 ♖d8 6.♖h1+ ♔d2 7.♖h2+ ♔c3
and White resigned.

With two pawns, it can be quite difficult, too. First I will give a position from a game Dennis Dieks-Quist from the Dutch Team Championship.

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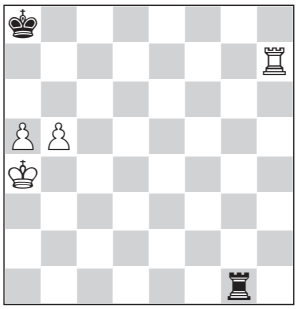

White played:
1.b6 ♖b1 2.♖h4 ♔b7 3.♖b4 ♖h1 4.♔b3?
Still winning was 4.♖d4! ♔a6 5.♖d5! (threatening to take a walk with the king) 5...♖c1 6.♖d7! ♖a1+ (now Black has no side checks) 7.♔b4 ♖b1+ 8.♔c5 ♖b5+ 9.♔c6.
4...♖h3+?
After 4...♔a6! White cannot make any headway, see 5.♔c4 ♖h4+ 6.♔c5

♖h5+ 7.♔d6 ♖h6+ 8.♔e7 ♖h7+ 9.♔f6 ♖b7! 10.♖a4 ♖h7! 11.♖a1 ♖b7 with a draw.

5.♔a2 ♖h2+

Draw agreed, although White could still have played his king to a4 and carried out the winning plan indicated on move 4.

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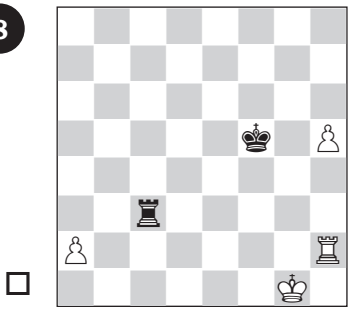


Also tricky was this position from Biro-Liptay, Hungary 1987.

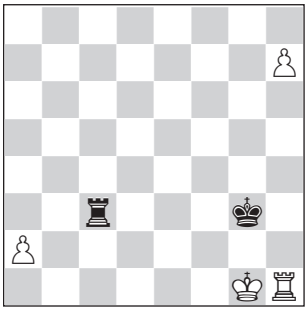
1.h6! ♔g5

More tenacious was 1...♖c1+ 2.♔f2! (2.♔g2? ♔g4!) and White wins after 2...♖c2+ 3.♔g3 ♖c3+ 4.♔h4 ♔g6 5.♔g4 etc.

But now also White has to take care. If he continues rashly with 2.h7, it's already a draw with ♖c1+-c2+-c3+.

2.♖h1! ♔f4 3.h7 ♖c1+

If 3...♔g3, White has a nice trick:



analysis diagram

4.♖h3+!.

But 3...♖c1+ does not save Black either:

4.♔g2 ♖c2+ 5.♔h3

Black resigned.

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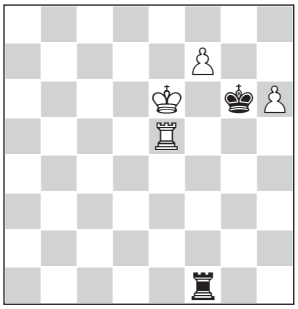

And what to think of Alexander Ivanov-Vitolinsh, Frunze 1979? Here we have the notorious endgame of rook with f- and h-pawn versus rook, which is often impossible to win.

Do you see the tactical possibility with which White can still decide the game with a single blow?

1.♖g5+!!

What a disillusionment for Black! The rook cannot be captured because of 2.h7 and 1...♔xh6 is met by 2.♖g8 or even 2.♖g1!. So, instead of a draw, Vitolinsh earned terrible bafflement and sorrow.

Next, we shall illustrate another great source of misery, of which we have often spoken already:

B) Stalemate tricks

Again? you may ask. But there is no way to avoid them. I guarantee that you will see quite a few tragicomic

scenes and there is much fun to be had.

Initially, we shall keep it simple and, with reference to the previous subject, blaze away with a few rook + 1 pawn versus rook positions.

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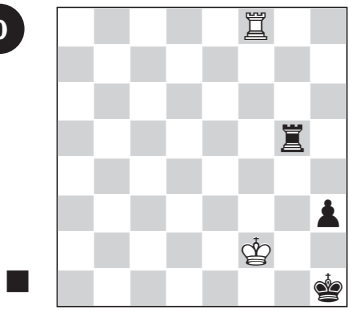
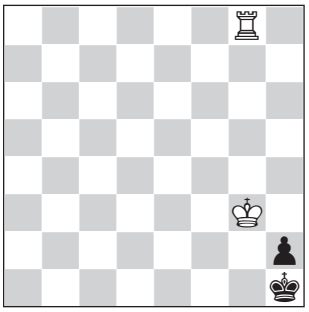


We start with Drimer-Ciocaltea, Romania 1955. To his deep regret, Black saw that the win was gone. So, to please the crowd he decided to play

1...♖g8??

and offered a draw with a smile, to which the first player immediately agreed. Still in the heat of the preceding battle, maybe struck by chess blindness, both had missed that after 2.♖xg8 h2 the stalemate can easily be evaded with 3.♔g3!



analysis diagram

3...♔g1 4.♔h3+ ♔h1 5.♖a8.

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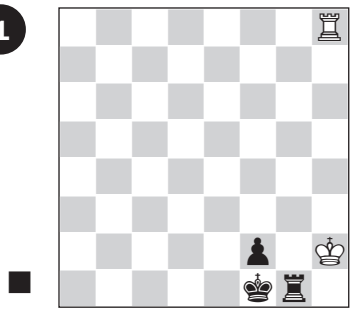

We elaborate on this theme with a fragment from Badestein-Otto, Wernigerode 1952. Here also, things look simple and conveniently arranged. So, Black set off merrily:

1...♔e2 2.♖e8+ ♔d3

The ascent of the ladder, a well-known theme in endgame theory!

3.♖d8+ ♔e4 4.♖e8+ ♔d5 5.♖d8+ ♔e6 6.♖f8

Now please pay attention. After the triumphant 6...f1♕, it is actually perpetual check or a long king walk to try to avoid stalemate. Black saw this and avoided the trap with an underpromotion – always funny:

6...f1♖!

and there the fairy tale ended.

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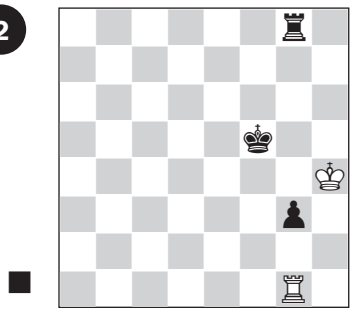
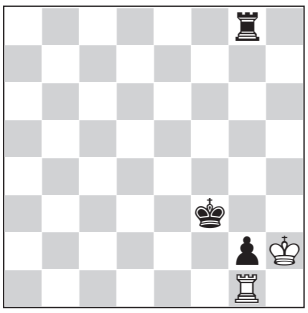


We see a combination of stalemate, mate and underpromotion in Gufeld-Gulko, Soviet Union 1984.

1...♔f4 2.♔h3 g2 3.♔h2 ♔f3!



It does not look good for White, so he tried
4.♖f1+.
Unfortunately, Gulko found
4...gxf1♗
to seal White's fate.
By the way, any other underpromotion would also have sufficed.

That's how hard it can be with only one pawn on the board. Now, let's have a look at positions with a lone rook versus rook plus two pawns.

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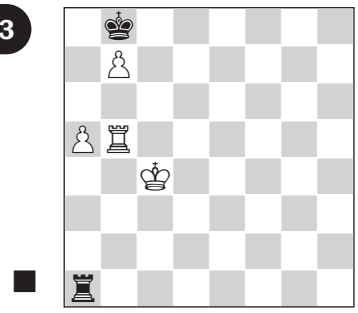
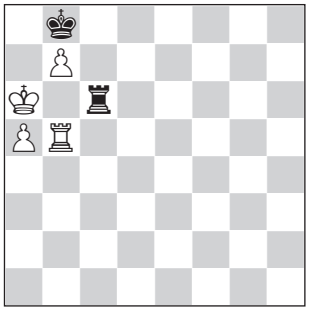


If these two pawns are connected, the position is almost always won, but take a look at Heilman-Bernstein, Berlin 1901. Black managed to draw this as follows:
1...♖c1+ 2.♔d5 ♖d1+ 3.♔c6 ♖c1+ 4.♔b6 ♖c7!

Absolutely vital.
5.♔a6
Or 5.a6 ♖xb7+!, but now there follows
5...♖c6+



and again, White cannot escape stalemate.

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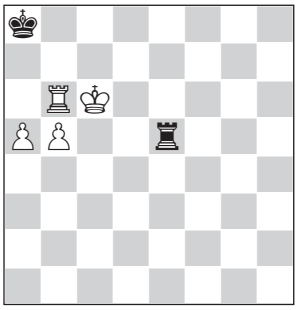
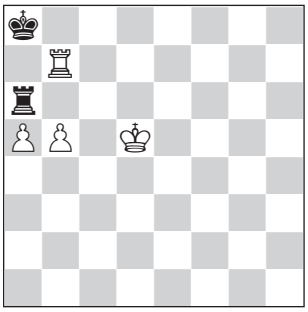


In Teschner-Kurt Richter, Berlin 1958, Black also tried to save himself by stalemate. White continued with the not-so-obvious
1.♖b7!.
A tactical method to solve the problem of how to prevent Black from playing 1...♖h5, introducing a series of inconvenient checks along the h-file. Obviously, with the text White threatens 2.♖d7, with consolidation, but things are not so simple, as the rook appears to be in some danger on b7.

Black has no time left to calmly move his rook to h5, therefore:
1...♖e6+ 2.♔d5!
Karsten Müller has pointed out that 2.♔d7! would have won as well. True, Black can move his rook to the h-file with 2...♖h6, but then 3.♖c7! still decides.
Black tried one more thing:
2...♖a6!



Clever, but White does not intend to cooperate:
3.♖h7! ♖xa5 4.♔c6 ♖a1 5.♔b6
And now there is nothing left for Black, so he resigned.

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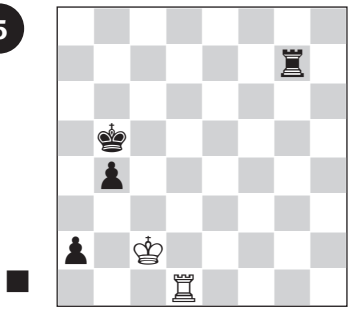

Yet another stalemate trick we see in Witkowski-Rakowiecki, Poland 1979:
1...♔a4 2.♔b2 ♖g2+?
There was only one way to win:
2...b3! 3.♖d4+ ♔b5 4.♖d1 ♔c4.
3.♔a1 ♖c2 4.♖d4!
and Black had to concede the draw because of 4...♔a3 5.♖d3+ ♖c3 6.♖xc3+ bxc3 stalemate.

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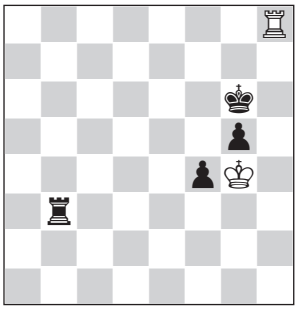

Things can get still worse, as we see in the melancholy case of Hickl-Solomon, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988.
1.♖g8+ ♔f6
and to the horror of everyone watching, White missed the simple draw 2.♖g6+! and played
2.♖f8+??
Terrible, but it gets worse, as Black could seal his next move.
What did he do? Indeed, he sealed
2...♔g6??
instead of 2...♔e7 or 2...♔g7, both with an easy win. But the entire stalemate trick had escaped his attention. So he repeated moves at the adjournment, to be able to search tranquilly for the winning method with his Australian teammates. I can imagine that they quickly opened his eyes and then there was only one hope left: that the White player would resign without further play.
And indeed, this horror story ended happily for Solomon. Hickl did resign!