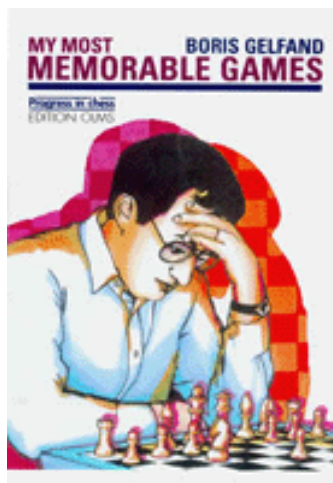




SKITTLES
ROOM



Earlier this year the Swiss publisher Olms released a new book by Boris Gelfand. With permission of the publisher, ChessCafe.com is pleased to be able to present to you the following excerpt from the book. We hope you enjoy...

Excerpt: My Most Memorable Games

by Boris Gelfand

Game 37

Sergey Rublevsky – Boris Gelfand

Akiba Rubinstein Memorial Tournament, Polanica Zdroj 1998

Sicilian Defence [B52]

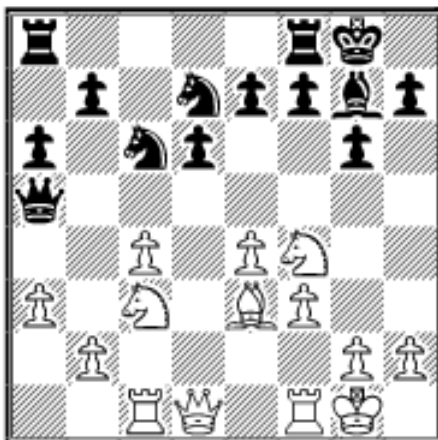
Sergey Rublevsky is relatively little-known to the chess public outside of Russia, but his strength is obvious to even the best players in the world. His rating has hardly ever been below 2650 during the last five years. It is both easy and difficult to prepare against him. His opening repertoire is very narrow, so normally you can easily guess which variations he is going to choose. On the other hand, he polishes them until they are shining and he knows all their ins and outs. So, even though I was sure about the position we were going to reach, he still managed to come out of the opening with an advantage. This game was also important for the tournament standings. The previous year Sergey had won this tournament with a brilliant 7 out of 9, leaving me in second place a point behind. This year too he was in contention for the top places until the last round.

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+ Bd7

I analysed this variation intensively during my candidates match with Vladimir Kramnik in 1994, since when it has served me well for many years. This has happened with me (and, I would guess, not only with me) many times – the level of preparation before and during such matches is so intensive and deep, that you can use such analysis for many years to come. 3...Nd7 and 3...Nc6 have also occurred in my games, but the variation chosen here is the most solid.

4 Bxd7+ Qxd7 5 c4 Nc6 6 Nc3 Nf6 7 0–0

White can try to keep his knight on d4 by the finesse 7 d4 cxd4 8 Nxd4 g6 (8...Qg4 is probably the reason why White prefers 7 0–0, but even after the exchange of queens the game is not drawn: 9 Qxg4 Nxc6 bxc6 11 Bf4 etc.) 9 f3 Bg7 10 Be3 0–0 11 0–0 Qd8 12 Nde2 (12 Qd2 is more logical, but Black is alright after 12...Qa5) 12...Qa5 13 Rc1 a6 14 Nf4 (14 a4 transposes into the Kramnik-Gelfand game, analysed below) 14...Nd7 15 a3?!

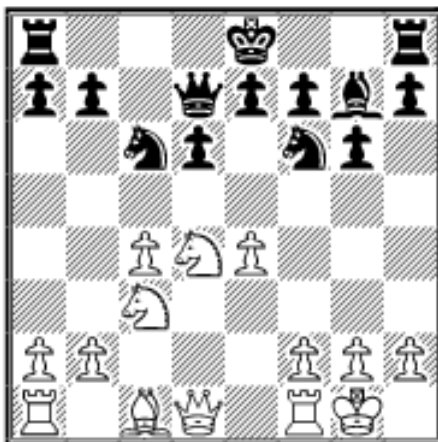


15...e6!

A deep strategic idea: Black sacrifices the d6 pawn, but in return he keeps the white knight out of the important d5 square and gains some tempi for counterplay. This reminds me very much of the King's Indian Sämisch Variation with 6...c5. Some familiar ideas can be seen in the notes to the game Gheorghiu-Gelfand (No.14).

16 Qxd6? (accepting the Greek gift; 16 Nd3 was safer and better) 16...Nde5 17 Qc5 Rfc8! 18 Nce2 (18 Rfd1 Qxc5 19 Bxc5 Nxc4=+/) 18...Qa4! (18...Qxc5 19 Bxc5 Na5!?=+/) 19 Bf2 (19 Nc3 Qb3) 19...Bf8 20 Qe3 Nxc4 and Black stood better in Shirov-Gelfand (Akiba Rubinstein Memorial, Polanica Zdroj 2000).

7...g6 8 d4 cxd4 9 Nxd4 Bg7



10 Nde2

In Tkachiev-Gelfand (FIDE World Championship, Groningen 1997) the rare move 10 Nc2 led to a draw after 10...0–0 11 Qe2 a6 12 Bd2 Rab8 13 Rac1 b5! 14 cxb5 axb5 15 Nd5 (15 Nxb5 Nxe4 16 Qxe4 Rxb5 17 b4 Ra8) 15...e6 16 Ncb4 exd5 17 Nxc6 Rb6 18 exd5 Nxd5 19 Qf3 ½–½.

10...0–0

The very concrete 10...Qe6 became popular after the Kasparov-The World game in 1999.

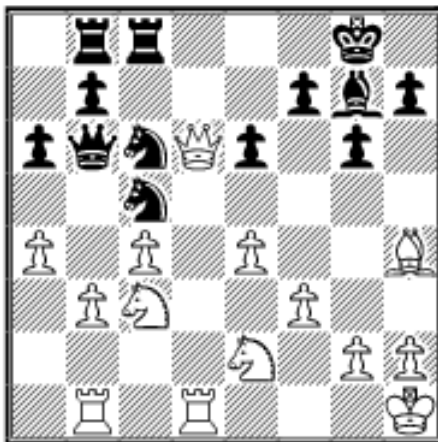
11 f3 a6 12 a4

A Maróczy-style position has arisen where White has some space advantage.

However, Black has exchanged his worse piece in such a structure – his light-square bishop, so I believe that his position is very secure here.

12...Qd8!?

The most precise move. In the first instance Black must improve the position of his queen. In my first game in this line I failed to play well and was deservedly punished: 12...Rfc8 13 b3 Qd8 14 Kh1 Nd7 15 Bg5 Qa5 16 Qd2 Nc5 17 Rab1 e6 18 Rfd1 (18 Qxd6? Nxb3 19 Rxb3 Qxg5 20 Rxb7 Na5) 18...Rab8 19 Bh4! Qb6 (19...Bf8 20 f4+/=) 20 Qxd6!?



20...Be5?.

Immediately after the game I found the strong sacrifice 20...Rd8! (20...Nxb3? 21 a5) 21 Bxd8 (21 Qg3!? Hickl) 21...Rxd8, and now:

A) 22 Qg3 Nd3 23 Rf1 (23 Nd5 Rxd5 (23...Nf2+ 24 Kg1 Nh3+ 25 Kf1) 24 cxd5 Nf2+ 25 Qxf2 Qxf2 26 dxc6 bxc6 27 Nf4 Bh6=) 23...Qb4 24 Nd1 (24 Nd5 exd5 25 cxd5 Na5 unclear; 24 Na2 Qd2-

/+) 24...Qd2 with counterplay;

B) 22 a5 Qxa5 23 b4 Rxd6 24 bxa5 Rxd1+ 25 Nxd1 (25 Rxd1 Nxa5 26 Rd8+ Bf8=+/) 25...Nxa5 with full compensation for the exchange.

21 Qd2 Nxb3 22 Qb2! (Vladimir gains the initiative with a beautiful combination) 22...Nca5 23 Nd5! exd5 (23...Bxb2? 24 Nxb6 Rc6 25 Nd7) 24 Qxe5 Nxc4 (24...dxe4 25 Nf4!? Nxc4 26 Nd5!) 25 Qxd5 (25 Qf4!? with compensation - Kramnik) 25...Qe3? (25...Ne3! 26 Qd3 (26 Qd6 Qxd6 27 Rxd6 Nc5 28 Nc3!?!+/=) 26...Nxd1 27 Qxd1 Qc6! 28 Qxb3 Qc2 29 Nd4!?! +/=) 26 Re1!+/- (Kramnik-Gelfand, FIDE Candidates Quarter-Final, Sanghi Nagar 1994(3)).

13 Be3 Qa5 14 Kh1

Black drew comfortably after 14 Rc1 Nd7 15 b3 Nc5 16 Na2 Rac8 17 Rb1 b5!? 18 cxb5 (18 b4 Qxa4) 18...axb5 19 axb5 Qxb5 20 Nac3 Qd3! 21 Nd5 Rb8!= (Kramnik-Gelfand, FIDE Candidates Quarter-Final, Sanghi Nagar 1994(7)).

14...Rfd8?

Faced with a novelty, I immediately made a mistake. The rook on d8 takes

away an important square from the queen. 14...Nd7 15 Rb1 has been tested a few times in practice. White keeps a slight edge, but Black has a safe position. 14...Rac8 was the normal move, as 15 Nd5 Nd7 16 b4 doesn't work because of 16...Qd8, and the c4 pawn becomes really weak.

Worthy of serious consideration was a pawn sacrifice, similar to my game with Shirov: 14...e6!? 15 Qxd6 Rfd8 16 Qa3 (16 Qc5 Nd7) 16...Rd3 with compensation. In fact I found this idea during an analysis of this game and I was happy to put it into practice in a similar position two years later.

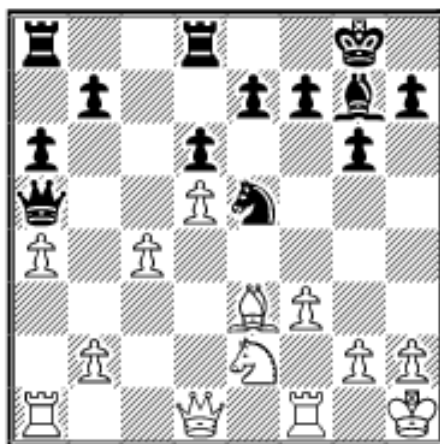
15 Nd5!

15 Qb3 Qb4, or 15 b3 e6 intending ...d6-d5.

15...Nxd5

Unfortunately, this is forced, as bad is 15...Nd7 16 b4 Nxb4 (the rook has taken away the d8 square from the queen) 17 Bd2.

16 exd5 Ne5



White has to prevent ...b7-b5 and ...e7-e6 if he wants to keep an advantage. He needs to play precisely and energetically to do this.

17 b3?!

With the stronger 17 Bd4! (if 17 Qb3 Nd7) White could have consolidated his advantage after 17...Qb4:

A) 18 Rc1 and now:

A1) 18...Bh6 19 f4 Nxc4 20 b3 (or 20 Bc3!? Qc5 21 b4 Qc8 22 a5! (22 Qd4 f6 23 Qe4!? e5 24 dxe6 d5) 22...Rd7 23 Qd4 f6 24 Qd3+/-) 20...Nb6 (20...Na5 21 Bc3 Qb6 22 Qd3! (threatening b3-b4) 22...Rac8 23 Qh3+/- with the threat of Bxa5) 21 Bc3 Qc5 (21...Qe4 22 Ba5 Nxd5 23 Ng3+/-) 22 Qe1! (22 Bg7 Bxg7 23 Rxc5 dxc5; 22 Bd4 Qb4=) 22...Nxd5 23 Ba5+/-, and Black hardly has sufficient compensation for the exchange, as control of the c-file is very important;

A2) 18...Rac8 19 b3 Nd7 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Nd4 Nc5 22 f4 e5 23 dxe6 fxe6+/-;

A3) 18...b5 19 Bc3 (19 axb5 axb5 20 Bc3 Qa4 21 b3 Qa6=) 19...Qxa4

(19...Qc5 20 cxb5, and if 20...axb5 21 Bxe5) 20 b3 Qa3 21 c5! with the threat of c5-c6, and Black's queen is in danger – 21...dxc5 22 Ra1;

A4) Black has to settle for a slightly worse position after 18...Nd7, as he cannot free himself by tactical means;

B) 18 b3, when:

B1) Black cannot free himself by 18...b5 19 f4 Ng4 (19...Nd7 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Nd4!) 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Qd4+ (21 Nd4 Qc5! (21...Ne3 22 Qe1) 22 Ne6+ fxe6 23 Qxg4 exd5 24 Qe6 dxc4 25 Qxe7+ Kg8 26 f5 Qe5 27 Qh4 Rf8 unclear) 21...Nf6 because of 22 g4! (22 cxb5 Qxd4 (22...Qxb3 23 b6 Qxd5 24 a5 with compensation) 23 Nxd4 Nxd5 with counterplay) 22...Kg8 23 g5 Nd7 24 cxb5 Qxb3 25 Rab1+/-;

B2) 18...Nd7! 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 Nd4 Nc5 21 f4 e5 22 dxe6 fxe6+/- with a defensible position, although White stands clearly better.

17...Nd7 18 Bd4

After 18 Rb1 b5 19 Nd4 Bxd4! 20 Bxd4 bxc4 21 bxc4 Rac8 the weak a4 and c4 pawns give Black good counterplay in exchange for his dark-square bishop. As White cannot gain an attack here, Black is alright.

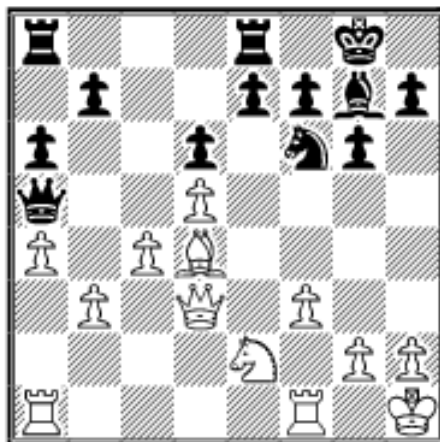
18...Nf6

After 18...Bxd4 19 Nxd4+/- White would achieve his ideal set-up – he has prevented both ...b7-b5 and ...e7-e6 and he can choose between increasing the pressure on the e-file and a direct attack on the king by f3-f4-f5.

19 Qd3

Probably slightly better was 19 Bc3 Qc7 20 a5 Re8 (20...e6) 21 Bd4 e6, or 20 Qd3 e6 21 dxe6 fxe6+/- and although Black has managed to break the grip by ...e7-e6, his pawns are vulnerable, which gives White the edge.

19...Re8



Black can open the game immediately with 19...e6, but this still does not solve his problems completely:

A) 20 b4 Qc7 21 a5 exd5 22 Bb6 (22 cxd5 Re8) 22...Qxc4 23 Qxc4 dxc4 24 Bxd8 Rxd8 with compensation;

B) 20 Bc3 – cf. 19 Bc3;

C) 20 dxe6 fxe6 and now:

C1) 21 Qe3 (21 Bc3!?) 21...Re8 22 Bb6 (22 Rfd1 d5) 22...Qh5 23 Rad1 d5 24 Nf4 Qh6 25 cxd5 g5 with counterplay;

C2) 21 Nf4 Re8 22 Rfe1 (22 Rad1 Qc7) 22...e5 (22...Kf7 23 Rad1) 23 Bc3 Qc5 24 Nh3 d5 (24...b5 25 axb5 axb5 26 Rxa8 Rxa8 27 cxb5 Rb8 28 Qc4+ Nd5 29 Bxe5! Qxc4 30 bxc4 Bxe5 31 cxd5 Rxb5 32 Rd1+–; 24...Rac8!?) 25 Bxe5 dxc4 26 Qxc4+ Qxc4 27 bxc4 Nd7 (27...Rac8!?) 28 Bxg7 Kxg7+/=.

20 Nc3?!

White centralises his pieces. Black has counterplay after 20 Rfe1 (20 Bc3!? – cf. 19 Bc3) 20...e6 21 dxe6 Rxe6 (21...fxe6 22 Nf4 – cf. 19...e6) 22 Bc3 Qb6 23 Nd4 Rxe1+ 24 Rxe1 d5 25 Re7 Rc8, or 20 Rae1 Qb4 (20...e6 21 dxe6 Rxe6 22 Rd1), but stronger was 20 b4! Qc7 (20...Qxb4? 21 Rfb1 Qa5 22 Bb6) 21 a5 Rac8 22 Rac1 e6 23 dxe6 fxe6 (23...Rxe6 24 Nf4) 24 Rfd1 e5 25 Bb6 Qf7!? +/- (25...e4 26 fxe4 Nxe4 27 Nf4+/-).

20...e6 21 dxe6 fxe6

21...Rxe6, intending to double rooks on the e-file, deserved serious consideration, as from c3 the white knight cannot attack the rook at e6 and the d6 pawn cannot be considered weak, as no piece can attack it. After 22 f4 (22 Rad1 Rae8) 22...Qf5!? 23 Qxf5 gxf5 24 Rad1 Ng4 Black has sufficient counterplay on the e-file.

22 Rad1

22 Ne4 Nxe4 23 fxe4 Be5! =.

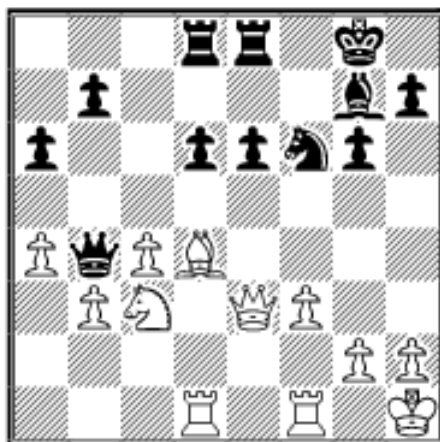
22...Rad8 23 Qe3

An alternative was 23 Rfe1 Qb4! (here too Black must play actively and not be afraid of losing his queen; if 23...d5 24 cxd5 Nxd5 25 Bxg7 Kxg7 26 Ne4+/-) 24 Na2 (24 Bxf6 Bxf6 25 Ne4 Be7) 24...Qa3 (24...Qa5 25 Qe3 Rd7

26 Nc3+/=) 25 Qc2 b5! (25...d5 26 b4+/-) 26 axb5 (26 Bb2 Qc5) 26...axb5
27 cxb5 e5 with counterplay.

23 Ne4 Nxe4 24 Bxg7 Ng3+ (24...Nc5 25 Bc3) 25 hxg3 Qh5+ 26 Kg1 Kxg7
leads to an equal position.

23...Qb4!



It required precise calculation and confidence to put the queen in a dangerous place (during a practical game, when you are pressed for time, you can never be sure that you have not missed something). However, intuitively I felt that Black should have enough resources to save his queen, which in the meantime will disrupt the coordination of the white pieces.

24 Na2

Or 24 Rb1 d5.

24...Qa3

Around here Sergey spent a lot of time, trying to find a way to trap the queen. It cost him dearly, as he lacked this time later on.

25 Qc3

More challenging was 25 Rd2, when it would have been more difficult for me to find the correct way. The lines given below are obviously the result of home analysis; during the game both of us merely saw some ideas, but obviously not all the lines:

A) 25...e5, and now:

A1) 26 Bb2 Qxa2 (26...Qc5 27 Qxc5 dxc5 28 Rxd8 Rxd8 29 Bxe5+/= Nh5!
30 Bxg7 Nxg7 31 Nc3 Rd3 32 Rc1 Ne6 with counterplay) 27 Ra1 Bh6 28
Qxh6 Qxb3;

A2) 26 Bb6 Rd7 27 Ba5 Qc5 28 Qxc5 dxc5 29 Rxd7 Nxd7 30 Rd1+/=;

B) 25...d5 26 Bc5, with these possibilities:

B1) 26...d4 27 Bxd4+/- (27 Qxe6+ Rxe6 28 Bxa3+/=);

B2) 26...Bh6! (the key move of Black's defence, enabling him to maintain equal chances) 27 Qxh6 (27 Qd4 Qxb3 (or 27...e5 28 Bxa3 exd4 29 Rxd4 dxc4 30 Rxc4 Nd5 with counterplay) 28 Qxf6 Qxc4! (28...Bxd2!? 29 Bd4 e5 30 Bxe5 Rxe5 31 Qxd8+ Kf7=) 29 Rc1 Qf4-/+ , or 27 f4 Ng4 28 Qxe6+ Rxe6 29 Bxa3 Ne3 with counterplay) 27...Qxc5=;

C) as indicated by the computer in 2003, Black has the strong reply 25...b5! 26 Bb2 Qc5 (or 26...Nd5!?) and he is at least equal.

25...Qxa2 26 Rd2

Not 26 Rf2? Ne4 27 fxe4 Qxf2, or 26 Bxf6 Bxf6 27 Qxf6 Qxb3 28 Rb1 (28 c5 d5) 28...Qxa4 29 Rxb7 Rd7-/+ , but also possible was 26 Ra1 Nd5! 27 cxd5 (27 Qd3 Qxg2+ 28 Kxg2 Nf4+) 27...Bxd4 28 Qxd4 Qxb3 29 Rab1 Qxd5 30 Qxd5 exd5 31 Rxb7 with a probable draw.

26...Qa3!

Diverting the opponent's pieces from the centre. Now Black has an easy game and it is White who has to play accurately to make a draw. In fact, this is a very instructive moment – psychologically it is difficult to switch from having an advantage to playing precisely to make a draw. Rublevsky understood this well, but he failed to cope with it, most probably due to lack of time.

Less good was 26...Nd5 27 cxd5 Bxd4 28 Rxd4 exd5 (28...Rc8 29 Rc4+/=) 29 Rxd5 Qe2=, or 26...Ne4 27 fxe4 Bxd4 28 Rxd4+/=.

27 Ra1 Nd5

27...Ne4 28 fxe4 Bxd4 29 Rxd4+/= and it is White who is pressing.

28 Qd3

28 cxd5 Bxd4 29 Rxd4 Rc8! =/+ (a strong intermediate move, turning the tables in Black's favour), and if 30 Qxc8 Qxa1+.

28...Nf4 29 Rxa3 Nxd3 30 Rxd3 d5

So, an equal ending has arisen. However, due to the poor position of the rook at a3, Black is 'more equal'.

31 Bxg7

Also possible was 31 Bb6!? Rc8 32 c5 a5 33 Ra2 Bf8 34 Rc2=.

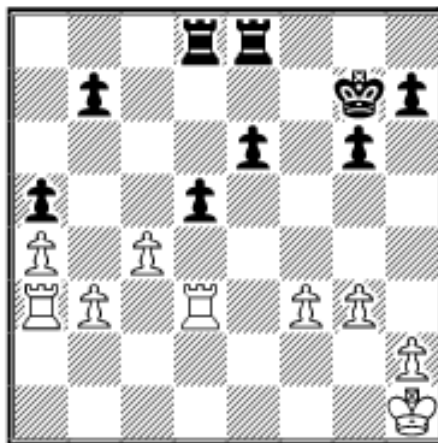
31...Kxg7

31...dxc4 32 bxc4=.

32 g3

32 Kg1 a5 33 Kf2= was better, bringing the king closer to the centre.

32...a5



33 Kg2?!

This natural move creates problems for White. He had to play concretely, but he was already in time trouble: 33 cxd5 Rxd5 34 b4 axb4 35 Rxd5 bxa3 (35...exd5 36 Rb3) 36 Rd3 a2 37 Ra3 Ra8 38 Rxa2 b5 39 a5= and White succeeds in exchanging his a-pawn for the b-pawn, or 33 Ra1 dxc4 34 Rxd8 Rxd8 35 bxc4 Rc8 36 Rb1 Rxc4 37 Rxb7+=.

33...Kf6 34 cxd5?

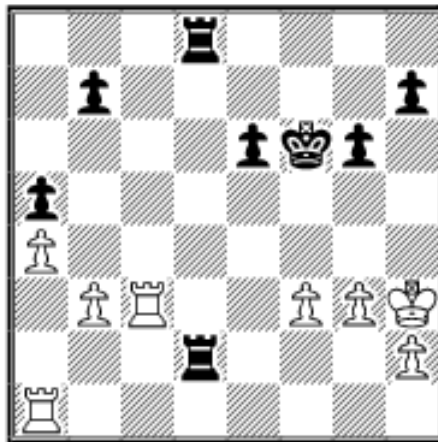
Choosing the wrong moment for this move. 34 Kf2 d4 35 b4! (White was afraid of having to play the inferior ending after 35 Ra2 e5 36 Re2 g5 37 Re4 Kf5 38 h4 h6=/+) 35...Rd7 36 Ra1 Rc8 37 Rc1 axb4 38 Rb3 e5 39 Rxb4 should be enough for a draw.

34...Rxd5 35 Rc3

Now 35 b4 axb4 36 Rxd5 bxa3 37 Rd3 Ra8 38 Rxa3 is bad because of 38...b5 39 a5 Ke5 40 a6 Kd4.

35 Rxd5 exd5 36 b4 doesn't solve White's problems either after 36...Re2+! 37 Kf1 Rb2 38 bxa5 d4-/+ and his pieces are too passive, so that, despite being a pawn up, he is in trouble.

35...Rd2+ 36 Kh3 Red8 37 Ra1



Finally the rook comes back into play, but now the king is Black's target.

37...R8d5!

A strong intermediate move, provoking more weaknesses. If 37...Rb2 38 f4 Rdd2 39 Rh1.

38 g4 Rb2 39 Re3?

39 Rh1 Rdd2 40 Re3 g5 leaves White completely paralysed. The last chance was 39 Kg3 Rdd2 40 h4 Rg2+ (40...e5 41 Rg1) 41 Kf4 Rbe2 42 g5+ Ke7 43 Re3 Rxe3 44 Kxe3 Rb2 45 Rc1 Rxb3+ 46 Ke4 Kd6, or 42 Re3 e5+ 43 Ke4 Rd2 44 Ree1 Rd4+ 45 Ke3 h5! with a serious advantage for Black in both cases. However, White would retain some drawing chances.

39...Rdd2 40 Rae1

40 Rh1 g5--.

40...Rxh2+ 41 Kg3 Rbg2+ 42 Kf4 g5+ 43 Ke4 Rd2!

Cutting off the king from the queenside and starting a new wave of the attack on it.

44 Rd3

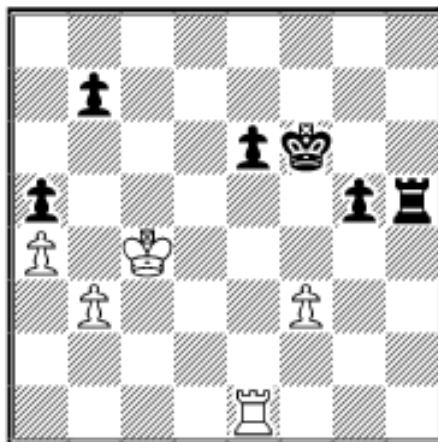
If 44 f4 Rd5 intending ...Rhd2.

44...Rxd3 45 Kxd3 h5!--+

The black rook secures a post on the 4th rank, from where it will attack the b3 pawn.

46 gxh5 Rxh5 47 Kc4

47 Rc1 Rh3 48 Ke2 Rh4.



47...Rh4+

Avoiding the last trap: 47...Rh3? 48 Kb5 Rxf3 49 Kxa5 Rxb3? (49...g4) 50 Rxe6+ Kf5 51 Re5+ Kf4 52 Rf5+! Kg4 53 Rxe5+ Kxe5 with stalemate.

48 Kc5 Rb4 49 Re3 Kf5 50 Kd6 Kf4 51 Rc3 e5 52 Kd5 e4 53 fxe4 Rxe4 White resigns

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