

GATA KAMSKY

CHESS GAMER

Volume 2: Return (2004–2013)

by
Gata Kamsky



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KEY TO SYMBOLS

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

*This book is dedicated to my loving wife,
Vera Nebolsina,
whose support and encouragement
were among the key factors
that allowed me to complete the work.*

G. K.

INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

This is the second volume of my memorable games collection. Here you will find games that I played after my return to chess back in 2004. It had been eight years since my last tournament, and so much had changed for me. I had entered my first marriage and just graduated from Touro Law Center with an eye on my favorite subject, Intellectual Property, and on another new development at the time called cyber law, which dealt with issues related to the internet and international jurisdiction.

At the same time it represented an opportunity for me to return to something that I had devoted so much time and energy to, the game of chess. For the first time in my life I was free to pursue directions of my own choosing.

The decision was a difficult one, but finally I decided to return to chess, feeling that I could somehow positively influence both FIDE and the chess world in general. They were still split and had different world champions, the FIDE one, and the PCA one, which was the more prestigious of the two. The PCA World Champion was Mr. Kramnik, who had succeeded Mr. Kasparov as World Champion in the long line of world championship matches.

Clearly there were some triumphs and failures during this period of my chess career, but ultimately I feel that I have left a certain mark on the generation from which the world's current top players have emerged.

Once again, in the games that follow, I try to share my vision of chess as a great intellectual battlefield where many factors play a role, including psychology and the science of computer home preparation. For me, there still exists the exciting journey to find the great truth of what is happening on the chess board, and the search for an even greater objective, the beauty of the game. With these in mind, I have selected these games, to share with you the knowledge that I have acquired so far.

I must also caution that some of the views and comments expressed on subjects other than chess will sometimes be found to be quite controversial and

not 'correct', in which case I would invite the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

With regard to the structure of the games, I must warn the reader that this book is not intended as a light read; it contains lots of lines and variations that need to be gone over on an actual chess board to understand the point I am making.

Some of the lines are intended to encourage the reader, especially if he's an advanced or aspiring player, to pursue further research on his own.

There are quite a few places where I invite the reader to put himself into the shoes of one of the players and try to calculate some of the lines by himself.

Above all, it is important to remember that chess is an instrument in your hands, and whatever you shape with it can be limited only by your imagination.

Gata Kamsky

GAME 1

- ▷ **Gata Kamsky**
 ▶ **Nick de Firmian**
 San Diego 2004

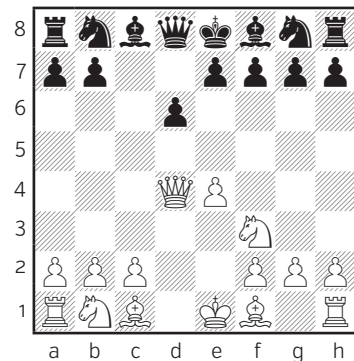
Officially, this was the first serious tournament that I played in since my return to chess in the summer of 2004. While the event took place in December 2004, it was called the 2005 US Championship, and offered qualifying spots for the World Cup in Khanty-Mansiysk later that year. My opponent was Nick de Firmian, one of the top US GMs, and someone I had played against several times before in the early years after my arrival in the US in 1989. Mr. de Firmian had played chess only occasionally in 2004. Overall, the organization in San Diego was good and I was happy to visit California, which I hadn't had a chance to do since the 1990s. I selected this game because it shows how a simple and standard plan can prove very effective right from the opening.

1.e4

The tournament situation required me to play aggressive chess, since in a Swiss system event, the ability to win games is more important than anything else. My goal for the tournament was to play solid chess and

get some feel for what it was like to play on a real chess board against strong opponents. Between 1996 and 2004, I had played only two other classical games, in the FIDE knockout World Championship in Las Vegas in 1999, losing in the first round tie-breaks to the eventual winner of the event, GM Khalifman. Other than that I played a lot of blitz games on the Internet Chess Club (ICC), including hundreds against young up-and-coming stars whose names everyone knows today, since they all reached the top — Morozevich, Aronian, Radjabov, Mamedyarov, Nakamura and Grischuk amongst others. Hundreds of games and sleepless nights!

1...c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♙xd4



For many years my opponent's main weapon against 1.e4 had been the Sicilian Najdorf. I decided to go for my pet sideline, which I had analyzed and continued to improve for the next couple of years.

4...♘c6

Black goes for the old main line. These days 4...a6 and 4...♘f6 are played just as often.

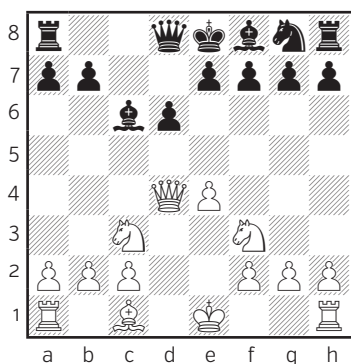
5. ♖b5 ♗d7

Alternatives are 5...a6 and 5...♔d7.

6. ♗xc6 ♗xc6

Recapturing with 6...bxc6 is also possible.

7. ♘c3



The alternative 7.c4 leads to quieter positions resembling the Maroczy bind in the Accelerated Dragon.

The plan in the game is more ambitious, as typically White intends to castle long and proceed with an attack on the kingside.

7...♘f6

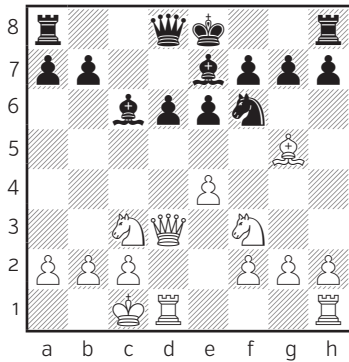
So far we have been following the old main line. The more modern alternatives include 7...h6, preventing the development of White's c1-bishop to g5, and therefore any potential exchange of that bishop for Black's only knight.

7...e5 is usually combined with the plan of ...h7-h6, but has a more forcing nature, since Black declares his structure in the center. In general, in this structure, both sides attempt to emphasize their advantages. For example, because of Black's potentially strong pair of bishops, he wants to complete development and open up the center with the ...b7-b5, ...e7-e5 and eventually ...d6-d5 breaks. White, on the other hand, wants to keep those bishops under wraps and at the same time transfer his f3-knight to a more useful location such as the d4-square, and, if that is not possible, then potentially to c4 or f5, probing for potential weaknesses in Black's camp before starting his programmed f2-f3, g2-g4, h2-h4 advance. For now, White has a small lead in development and intends to use it to maximum effect before Black completes his own development.

8. ♗g5 e6 9.0-0-0

It was more accurate to start with 9.♔d3 for reasons I'll mention later.

9... ♖e7 10. ♔d3



White's idea is to put the f3-knight on d4, where it will be perfectly placed, both preparing the advance f2–f4–f5 and protecting the queenside. I first saw this plan employed by Judit Polgar versus Alexei Shirov back in 1994, and it made quite an impression on me.

10... 0–0?!

A couple of years later, in a tournament in Canada, Sutovsky would employ the correct counter to White's plan, playing 10... ♔a5 to tie White's f3-knight to the defense of the g5-bishop and following up with ... ♔a5–a6 next move in order to trade White's strongly placed queen, exploiting the fact that it is limited in its movements. I had looked at possible improvements for White after that game, and, not liking the types of positions arising, I stopped playing the 4. ♔xd4 variation. In modern times, though, the line has

experienced some sort of renaissance, with lots of games played at all levels.

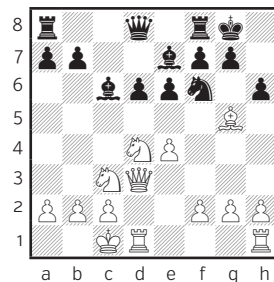
11. ♞d4±

White has achieved a superior version of the similar structure arising in various lines of the Rauzer variation, as Black will have to spend a tempo to remove his c6-bishop if he wants to push his b-pawn. White is ready to push his pawns on the kingside.

11... ♔a5

This was still considered the main line at the time. Black is attempting to bring his f8-rook over to the queenside, in the spirit of the Dragon. His queen is actively placed on a5, hitting White's g5-bishop and a2-pawn, as well as potentially helping promote the thematic ...b7–b5 advance.

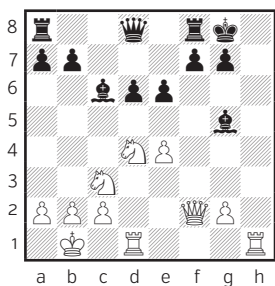
11...h6



In general this move is not considered to be good in situations with opposite-side castling as it gives White a potential target for the eventual g4–g5 pawn break. In this particular case, White's reaction is standard. 12.h4! As in the Rauzer, this move offers a thematic sacrifice of White's bishop, which, if accepted, would open the h-file for a direct attack. The analysis here can be very extensive and possibly Black can defend, but he cannot hope for more than that.

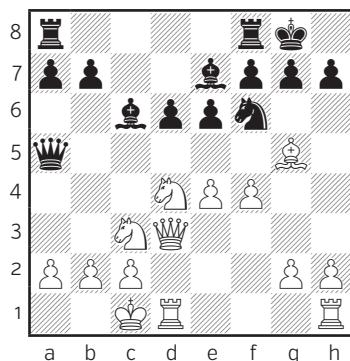
[12. ♖xf6?! ♖xf6 13.f4 (13. ♗xc6 bxc6 14. ♖xd6 ♖a5± Black gets more than sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn due to his very strong dark-squared bishop on f6 and open b-file which give him great attacking chances. White's attack is gone and he will have to focus on defense.) 13... ♖b6 14.g4 ♜ad8 15.h4 ♖xd4 16. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 17. ♜xd4 e5=]

12...hxg5 13.hxg5 ♗g4 14. ♖g3! ♗xf2 15. ♖xf2 ♖xg5+ 16. ♖b1



16... ♖f6 17. ♗xc6 bxc6 18. ♖g3 ♖e5 19. ♖h3 f5 20. ♖h7+ ♖f7 21.exf5 with a strong attack.

12.f4



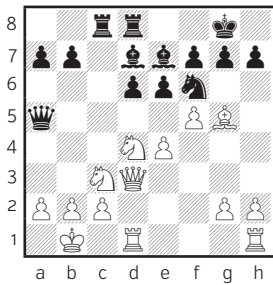
And the race with opposite wing attacks is on!

12... ♜fd8?!

Slightly passive and played with the idea of opening the center, which, however, does not work out well.

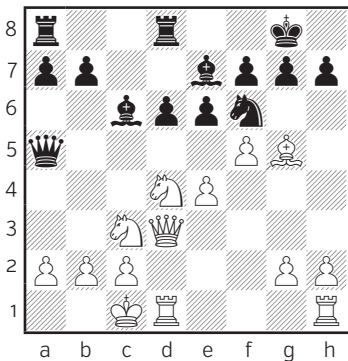
a) 12... ♜fe8 13. ♖b1 ♜ac8 14.f5 and now a sample line could go 14... ♖e5 15. ♜he1! ♖d8 16. ♖h4! ♖a5 17. ♖g3 ♖c5 18. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 19.e5 ♖f8 20.exf6 ♖xc3 21.fxg7 ♖xg7 22. ♖xc3 ♖e4 23. ♖d2 exf5 24. ♖a1!± with a certain advantage for White, thanks to his safe king and superior pawn structure.

b) 12... ♜ac8 has been played most often, however after the logical sequence 13. ♖b1 ♜fd8 14.f5 ♖d7



15.g4 a6 16. ♔d2 ♖c7 17.g5 ♗e8 18.f6±
 Black found himself on the brink of destruction in Karjakin-Grischuk, World Blitz Championship 2010. Obviously Black’s play can be improved, but if he can fall into a much inferior position without playing any obviously bad moves, then it speaks volumes about the opening.

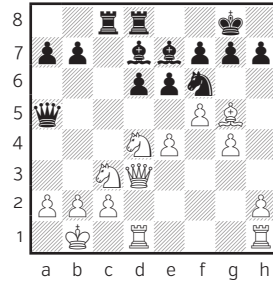
13.f5



A thematic pawn advance which hits Black’s e6-pawn. White wants to provoke Black into playing ...e6–e5, after which he will attempt to transfer his knights to the d5-square, dominating the center.

13...e5?!

13... ♔d7 14. ♖b1! This standard prophylactic move is quite useful. (14.g4 b5! is a possible improvement for Black.) 14... ♖ac8 15.g4

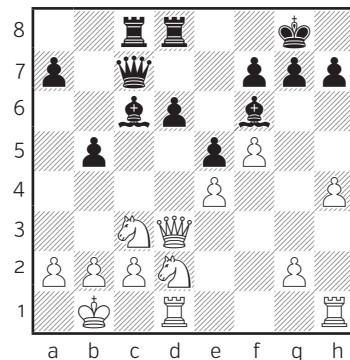


15... ♗a6! (15...b5 16. ♗dxb5 h6 17.h4±)
 16. ♔h4! ♗xd3 17. ♖xd3 h6 18. ♗d-b5!↑ and White keeps the initiative, even in the endgame.

14. ♗b3 ♖c7 15. ♔xf6!

Simple and strong. White removes any hopes of the ...d6–d5 break and prepares to advance on the kingside.

15... ♔xf6 16.h4 ♖ac8 17. ♖b1 b5 18. ♗d2!



A pleasing move to find. White's idea is to play ♖c3–d5 and if it is captured, to recapture on d5 with the e-pawn, freeing the e4-square for the second knight, where it would be ideally placed, blocking Black's e5-pawn and by extension, his f6-bishop from entering the game.

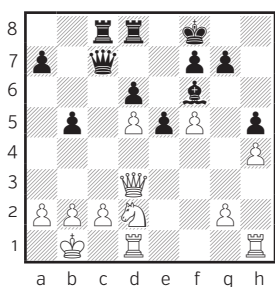
18...h5!?

Black attempts to stop White's advance on the kingside, but merely postpones the inevitable.

19. ♖d5 ♙a5?!

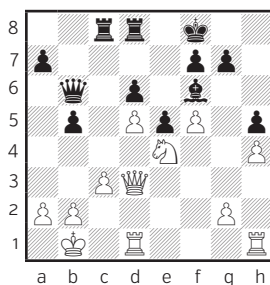
Inaccurate. Black loses an important tempo, as he still has to exchange White's d5-knight later.

19... ♙xd5 20. exd5 ♖f8



21. c3!? (21. ♗e4 ♖e7 22. ♜d2 b4 23. ♜c1! is also clearly better for White. Now that the kingside has been blocked and Black's king has transferred its residence to the cen-

ter, White switches his attention to the queenside. Thanks to his greater maneuvering space and dominating e4-knight, White can move freely, choosing the moment to strike to his advantage. Black is pretty much without counterplay and has to wait passively for White to declare his intentions. 23... ♙c4 24. ♙f3 ♜h8 25. b3±) 21... ♙b6 22. ♗e4



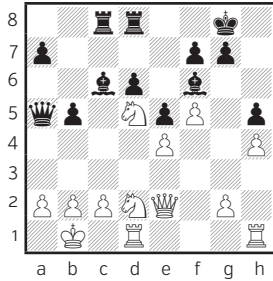
22... ♖e7 (22... a5 23. g4 hxg4 24. h5 ♖e7 25. h6 ♜h8 26. hxg7 ♜xh1 27. ♜xh1 ♙xg7 28. ♙g3± and the attack continues) 23. ♙e2

[23. g4?! hxg4 24. ♜dg1 (24. ♙e2 ♜h8 25. h5 ♜c4 26. b3 ♜cc8 27. ♙xg4 ♜h6∞ is not so clear as Black manages to blockade the kingside.) 24... ♙xh4 25. ♜xg4 ♙f6= Black manages to hold.]

23... ♜h8 24. g3 a5 25. ♜he1 ♙b7 26. ♖a1 This position is much easier to play for White as Black is forced to play waiting moves.

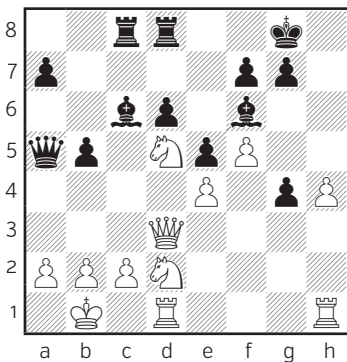
20. g4!?

Following through with the plan, however 20. ♖e2 was more forcing:



20... ♙xd5 21. exd5 ♖b4 22. ♘e4 ♖c4 23. ♖he1! ♙xh4 24. c3 ♖a4 (24... ♖a5 25. ♖xh5 ♙xe1 26. ♘g5 ♖c7 27. ♖xe1+-) 25. b3 ♖xe4 26. ♖xe4 ♖xe4+ 27. ♖xe4 ♙f2! Transferring the bishop to a better location along the a7-g1 diagonal, however White's position is much better due to a simple material advantage in the endgame. 28. a4!±

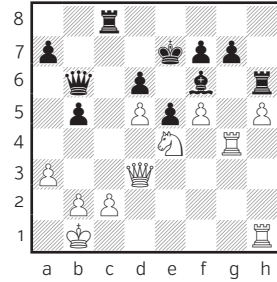
20... hxg4



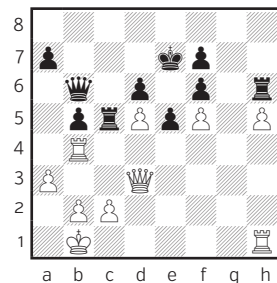
21. ♖hg1?

Unnecessarily giving up the h4-pawn. 21. ♖dg1 was simple and

strong: 21... ♙f8 22. ♖xg4 ♙xd5 23. exd5 ♙e7 24. h5 ♖h8 25. a3 ♖b6 26. ♘e4 ♖h6



27. ♘xf6! This sudden exchange forces Black to recapture on f6 with the g-pawn, giving White a potentially strong passed h-pawn. In addition, White is going to focus on attacking Black's weak queenside pawns, using his spatial advantage for maneuvering between the two flanks for the right moment to get the winning advantage. 27... gxf6 28. ♖b4 ♖c5

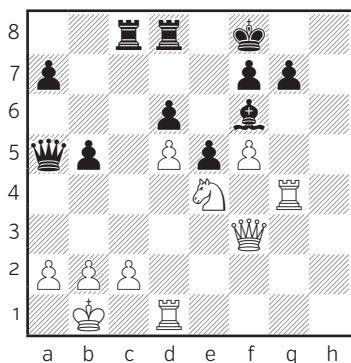


29. ♖hh4! a5 30. ♖b3 ♖b7 31. c4 b4 32. ♖d2 ♖h7 33. axb4 axb4 34. ♖xb4 ♖d7 35. ♖f2 ♖c8 36. h6+- with a completely dominating game.

21... ♙xd5 22. exd5 ♙xh4!

A correct decision by Black. White will have a difficult time breaking through Black's fortress on the kingside.

23. ♖xg4 ♕f6 24. ♗e4 ♖f8 25. ♕f3



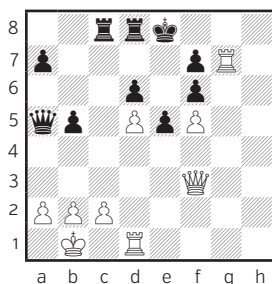
At this point, my opponent was getting low on time. The idea behind 25. ♕f3 is to have the potential ♖xg7 sacrifice, followed by the f5–f6 pawn push.

25... ♖c4?!

This time trouble-related move with the intention of provoking White's queenside pawns to move only makes things easier for White.

a) 25... ♖e7? 26. ♖xg7!+- and Black is suddenly lost.

b) 25... ♖e8! is the correct defense, giving Black hope of defending successfully: 26. ♗xf6+ (26. ♕g3 ♖d7 27. ♗xf6+ gxf6 28. ♕h4 ♖c7 29. ♕xf6 ♖d7=) 26... gxf6 27. ♖g7!?

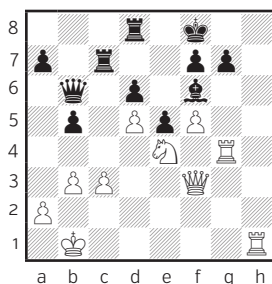


Setting another trap. 27... ♖c7 (27... ♖e7?? This careless move results in mate: 28. ♖xf7+! ♖xf7 29. ♕h5+ ♖f8 30. ♕h8+ ♖f7 31. ♕h7+ ♖e8 32. ♖g1+-) 28. ♕h5 ♖e7 29. ♕h6 e4 30. ♖g2 ♖d7 31. ♕xf6 ♖c7 32. a4!?! Black still has to be careful since his king is quite vulnerable, even if it gets to the queenside.

26.c3?!

Trying to limit Black's ability to think in my time, however this move is inaccurate. White needs to get rid of Black's c4-rook immediately.

26.b3 ♖c7 27.c3 ♕b6 28. ♖h1!



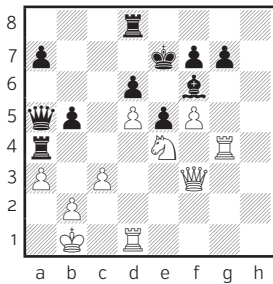
and White is going to infiltrate on the seventh rank with his rooks,

causing serious damage to Black's pawn chain on the kingside. 28... ♖e8 29. ♗h7 ♔d7 30. ♘xf6+ gxf6 31. ♗xf7+ ♖c8 32. ♗xf6 ♔c5 33. ♗h6 ♔xc3 34. ♔xc3 ♗xc3 35. ♗g7 ♗c7 36.f6+–

26... ♗b6?!

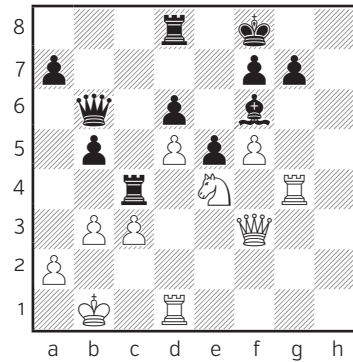
Black misses a computer resource.

26... ♗a4! A remarkable move. Black's rook finds a safe haven on a4 while continuing to exert pressure on White's e4-knight. 27.a3 ♖e7



28. ♗xg7 This attempt to get to the black king tactically ends in an equal position. (28. ♗h1 A more logical choice, taking control of the h-file with the option of placing the rook on h7 to exert pressure along the seventh rank. The game seems to be balanced with correct defense by Black.) 28... ♗xe4 29. ♗xf7+ ♖xf7 30. ♗h5+ ♖e7 31. ♗h7+ ♖f8 32. ♗g1 ♗e1+□ 33. ♗xe1 ♗a4! 34. ♗h6+ (34. ♗g1 ♗e4+ 35. ♖a1 ♗xd5–+) 34... ♖e7 (34... ♗g7? 35. ♗g5) 35. ♗h7+ ♖f8= with a draw.

27.b3

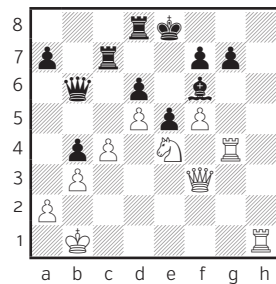


Both sides now had to play quickly, though White's game is a bit easier to play.

27... ♗xe4?!

Perhaps Black thought that he could hold his fortress in the center and on the kingside, but White will slowly improve his position and create a breakthrough on the queenside. It was more advisable for Black to retreat his rook and run with his king to the queenside.

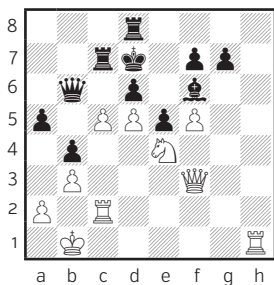
27... ♗c7! 28. ♗h1 b4! 29.c4 ♖e8



30. ♖g2! A much stronger idea than the alternative below. White prepares for action on the queenside to make sure that Black's king does not feel secure there.

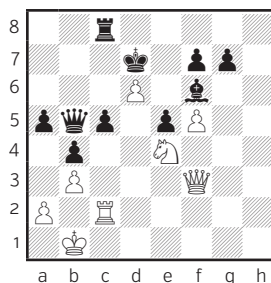
[30. ♖h7 ♖d7 31.c5!? (31. ♗xf6+ gxf6 32. ♖xf7+ ♖c8 33. ♖xf6 ♖h8! 34. ♖fg6 ♖h2↯ and White's king is a bit too open compared to the line mentioned above.) 31...dxc5 32.d6 ♖c6 33. ♗xf6+ gxf6 34. ♖xf7+ ♖c8 35. ♖xf6 ♖b8! 36. ♗d5 ♖cd6 37. ♗xe5 ♖c8 38. ♖xd6 ♗xd6 39. ♗xd6 ♖xd6= and Black equalizes.]

30...♖d7 31. ♖c2 a5 32.c5!

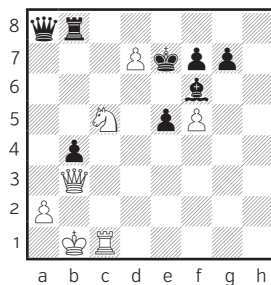


White sacrifices a second pawn in order to open up the position, since Black's bishop is completely shut out on f6. 32... ♖xc5 (32...dxc5? 33.d6 ♖c6 34. ♖d1 a4 35. ♗d3 axb3 36. ♗xb3+-) 33. ♖xc5 dxc5 34.d6! ♗b5 35. ♖c1 (35. ♗xc5+?! ♗xc5 36. ♗b7+ ♖xd6 37. ♖d1+ ♗d4 38. ♖xd4+ exd4 39. ♖c2 ♖h8= Black gets a superior version of this endgame with much stronger coordination among his pieces

which help his d4-pawn.) 35... ♖c8 36. ♖c2!!



A very patient move which maintains White's advantage. 36...♖d8 (36...c4 37.bxc4 ♖xc4 38. ♗d3+-) 37.d7 ♖b8 (37... ♖c7 38. ♗xf6+-) 38. ♖xc5 ♗a6 39. ♖c1 a4 40. ♗c5 ♗a8 41. ♗d3 axb3 42. ♗xb3 ♖e7

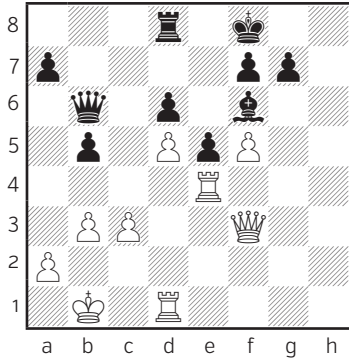


43. ♗e6! ♗e4+ 44. ♖a1 ♖d8 (44... ♗xf5 45.d8 ♗+ ♖xd8 46. ♖c7+-) 45. ♗xd8 ♖xd8 46. ♗a4 ♗d4+ 47. ♖b1 ♗d3+ 48. ♗c2 ♗xc2+ 49. ♖xc2 ♖xd7 50. ♖d3+- and White should win this endgame.

28. ♖xe4±

White gets a material advantage with a comfortable game and, with

Black's bishop out of the game, can make progress at his leisure.

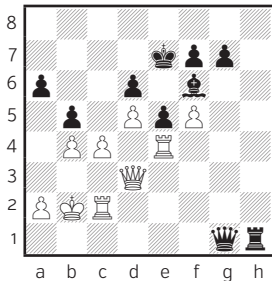


28...♖c8 29.♔b2 ♕e7 30.♖d2 ♚c5
31.♚d3 a6 32.♖c2

White prepares for the b3–b4 and c3–c4 pushes, which will open the c-file for his rooks and create a passed pawn on the queenside.

32...♚b6

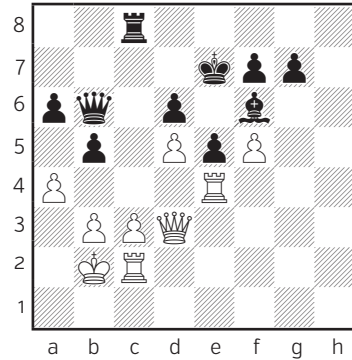
32...♖h8 33.b4 ♚g1 34.c4 ♖h1



35.♔a3!± Forcing Black to exchange queens or face a c4–c5 break. 35... ♚a7 36.c5 a5 37.bxa5 ♚xa5+ 38.♔b2 dx c5 39.d6+ ♔d8 40.♖xc5 ♖h2+ 41.♖c2 ♖xc2+ 42.♚xc2 ♚b6 43.♚d3

♔d7 44.♔b3!+- White simplifies into a winning endgame.

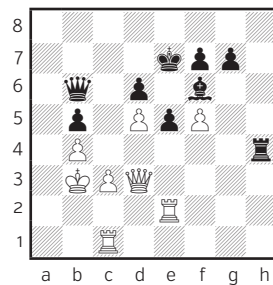
33.a4



33...♖c5?!

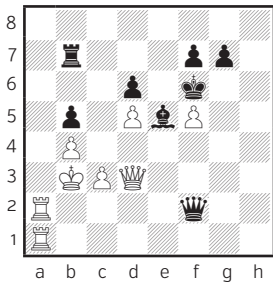
An inaccuracy. Black wants to retain his rook to have some measure of control of the c-file when it opens, however he would be better off looking for active counterplay.

33...♖h8! 34.b4! ♖h1 35.axb5 axb5 36.♖c1! An important move to take control of the first rank. 36...♖h2+ 37.♖e2 ♖h4 38.♔b3



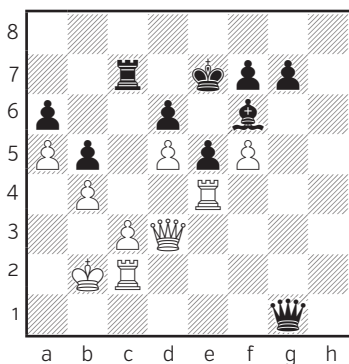
White obtains a winning advantage after transferring his c1-rook to a5,

hitting Black's weak b-pawn. 38...
 ♖c4 39. ♖a1 ♖c7 Otherwise White
 just plays ♖a1-a5xb5 and ♗xc4.
 40. ♖e2! ♖b7 41. ♖a6 ♗f2 42. ♖a8
 (42. ♖6a5 ♗b6±) 42...e4 (42...♗b6
 43. ♖1a6 ♗g1 44. ♖c8 ♙g5 45. ♖g8
 ♙f6 46. ♖aa8+-) 43. ♗xe4+ ♙e5
 44. ♗d3 ♙f6 45. ♖8a2!



Having forced Black to open the
 center, White now switches his
 rooks back to the kingside. The ap-
 proach White utilizes in this game
 to convert his advantage is slow,
 but instructive. One shouldn't
 rush things. 45... ♗b6 46. ♗e4 ♙e7
 47. ♗h4+!+-

34. b4 ♖c7 35. a5 ♗g1



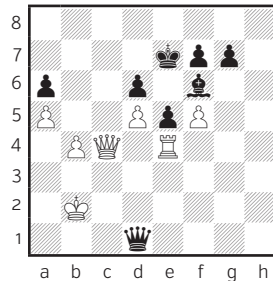
36. c4

36. ♙a2!+- would have been better,
 moving White's king off the a1-f6
 diagonal. The c3-c4 break would
 follow, when Black is lost.

36... bxc4 37. ♖cxc4 ♖xc4 38. ♗xc4
 ♗f2+?

An important inaccuracy. Black
 could have posed more technical
 problems for White had he realized
 that his queen is ideally placed on
 d1, controlling of a lot of important
 squares.

38... ♗d1!



39. ♖e2!! Probably the only move to
 keep winning chances alive. White
 needs to take control of the second
 rank to make progress. (39. ♗xa6?
 ♗d2+ 40. ♙b3 ♗d1+=) 39...e4+ Obvi-
 ous and best. (39... ♙g5 40. ♗c7+ ♙e8
 41. ♖c2 e4 42. ♗c6+ ♙e7 43. ♗b7+
 ♙f6 44. ♗xa6 ♙e5 45. ♗e2 ♗d4+
 46. ♙b3 ♗xd5+ 47. ♙a4 ♗d4 48. a6
 ♙e3 49. ♖c7!+-) 40. ♙a3!