Judgement and Planning

When we sit down to play a game, or analyze a chess position, we have two main ways of playing. In the traditional chess speak we often label these methods as positional or tactical. Players, themselves, will label themselves [or others] as a "tactical" or "positional" player.

Of course, there were also those 'universal' players, ones that could go either way. In the literature people would talk about a player's predominant style, and the comment would be that a tactical player might become a great player, but it seemed that all the great players were always outstanding positional players.

This dichotomy always made me think. What were they really discussing, or trying to say? How does one reconcile the World Championship caliber players: Mikhail Tal and Tigran Petrosian, or Alekhine and Capablanca from the past. And then how did Lasker or Euwe fit in?

The advent of computers into the world of chess made this type of question much easier to comprehend (at least for me). It was clear that computers "did not think", but were programmed to calculate.

By brute force they simply calculated forward from the position that they were given, and evaluated the best way to go based upon how they evaluated the best "ending position" that they could find. Initially their 'brute force' didn't go very far, very fast and they made elementary errors due to the "horizon effect" of how far they could see ahead. Any competent chess player had no difficulties in leading them into a "trap".

Thus, we could say that the best human players could play for position, a future set-up that they knew would be favorable, or even decisive, for themselves. Indeed this was the simple mechanism that they always used to defeat weaker players, anyway.

Thus, they played positionally, in essence backwards from where they wanted to get to, all the while still calculating how to go forward from where they were.
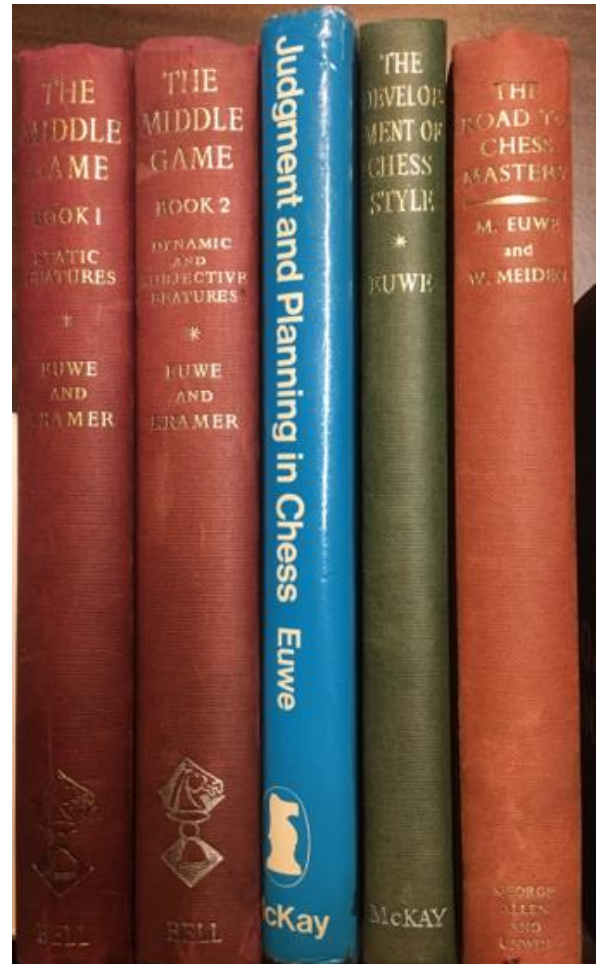

The hardcover Euwe collection: Sold as a set.

This was exactly the key point to grasp. And for me it immediately made clear all of the above questions.

Computers have become much stronger. Now, the best human players have little chance against the best of them, or even against the ones available for your typical smart phone.

We can't really rely on our ability to calculate things out to the end, except in the "simplest" of positions. Instead we must rely upon other factors to guide us: our *positional judgement*.
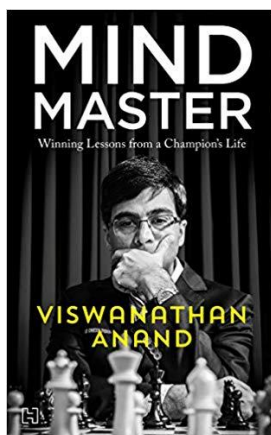
In this article we will delve a bit into this topic. Along the way we will be discussing the position at right with white to play. [For you purists, the last move was ♖f8-e8]
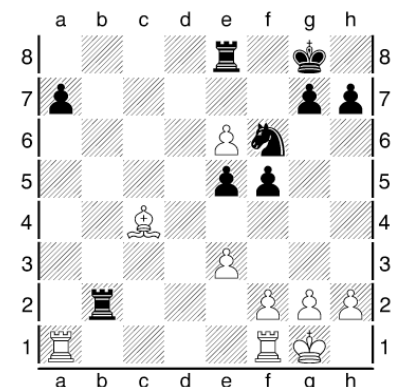
Here is your chance to analyze this position before continuing!

White to play.

Vishwanathan Anand recently turned 50 (last December) and the most recent Chess Life reviewed two new books about him.

I obtained a copy of his book [Mind Master] as soon as it came out to try and mine it for suggestions in how he plays, how players could improve, etc. It was a thoroughly fascinating read, and did not disappoint at all. Perhaps it is also appropriate to say that I had also anticipated the book on his matches and that, too, found its way to my library within days of its release. The book by Abeln came out first, and it only heightened my anticipation for getting the Anand book.

I was reviewing a lot of his career and highlights for my students. In addition to the above books I was also enjoying the series of tributes about him on the ChessBase India web site. Indeed, I have compiled a great deal of material about Vishy (about 150 pages!) that I use with my players.

He was a player who has transcended the transition to the modern chess era of digital clocks, no adjournments, and the computerization of chess study and preparation. Not only has he lived it, but in many ways he was a trailblazer in just how the work could and should be done.

Early on he asked about the problem of the computers being unable to think positionally, and would they ever be able to do it? The computer expert's answer to him was sobering. It was not a question of if, but simply a matter of when(!), because positional play was simply a matter of seeing all the tactics deeply enough. Positional chess didn't need to involve thinking properly, just calculating deeply enough. It was after that discussion that he definitely started using the computers in new ways…

Position no.2 White to move [a6xb5]

Tactical Chess

Playing forward and then Evaluating

Always present, but becomes more important as the number [and quality] of the undefended squares increase.

Positional Chess

Visualizing a future position and bringing it back to the current board set-up.

You still need to check out the tactics as you attempt to move forward from the current position towards your intended set-up and goals.
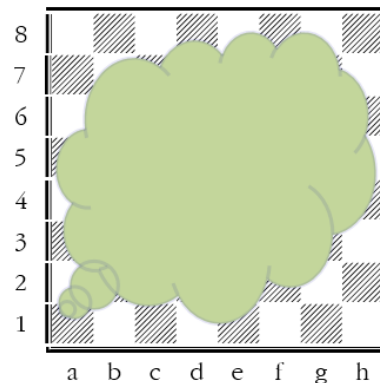
This is from the Anand Quiz (good luck!)

Honing our judgement skills are even more valuable in our games due to the fast time controls, and multiple games per day of most tournaments. Let us move on to the main course. Contact me with any questions or comments.

Hines,Craig (1787) - Geisleman,Dennis (1951) [D02]
Indianapolis Open (5.9), 12.15.2019 *[FM Lester VanMeter]*

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗f4 ♗g4

[A typical structure that Dennis likes to play with either color: Get the d-pawn forward, and then bring out the queen's knight, and queen's bishop. Try to trade for the opponent's king's knight.

Is this a "good" and "strong" way to play the opening?

No, it isn't, but it is "not terribly bad' either, and playing a consistent structure has advantages.

In the opening one's play should be guided by some key principles (as detailed in a Fundamental article):

1. Play for the 5th Quadrant.
2. Develop our pieces.
3. Prevent the development of our opponent's forces.
4. Deal with King Safety for both sides - promote ours and try to destroy his.

Understanding what development truly means IS important!

It DOES NOT mean simply moving our pieces from the first rank towards the center.

EVERY OPENING has a story.

You need to learn those stories. In each opening, each piece has its role, and squares from which it will be most effective.

Development means getting our pieces to those "good" squares as efficiently and as effectively as possible. All the while trying to disrupt our opponent from doing the same. Each move is precious and should not be squandered.

It is true, though, that one can get away with a less than optimal opening if the opponent is not sufficiently skilled to take advantage of the weaknesses that it has.]

4.e3 e6 5.♘bd2 ♗d6 6.♗xd6 cxd6 7.♗e2

[D02: 1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 sidelines, including 2...Nf6 3 g3 and 2...Nf6 3 Bf4]
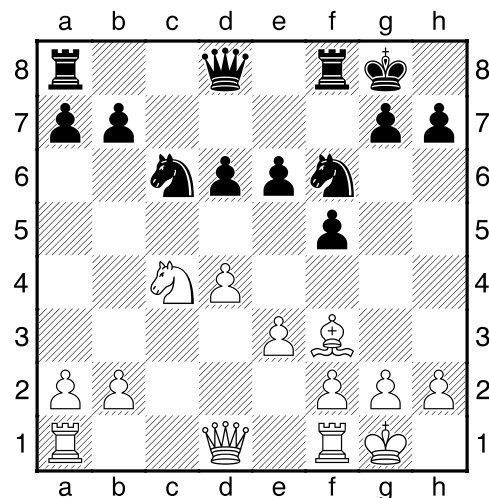
[7.h3 ♗xf3 8.♘xf3 ♕b6 9.♕c1 ♘f6 10.c3 0–0 11.♗d3 e5 12.♗e2 exd4 13.exd4 ♖fe8 14.♕c2 ♖ac8 ½–½ (42) Jakovenko,D (2713)-Rakhmanov,A (2602) Khanty-Mansiysk 2013]

7...f5 8.0–0 ♗xf3N

[Predecessor: 8...♘f6 9.c4 0–0 10.♖c1 ♔h8 11.h3 ♗h5 12.♘g5 ♗xe2 13.♕xe2 ♕e7 14.f4 0–1 (35) Brown,A (2116)-Richmond,P (2253) Hinckley Island 2009]

9.♗xf3 ♘f6 10.c4 dxc4 11.♘xc4 0–0?

[Diagram]

[I could have talked about king safety in the previous note, but I thought it better to save it until here.

Castling early is always promoted as being the "right way to go in the opening" in order to get 'King Safety", but I have always remembered the advice from my first chess teaching book: *Chess Made Simple* by Milton Hanauer. [Naturally an excellent book!] and highly recommended even today for "chess newbies".

Castle when you wish to, or when you HAVE to, not just because you can.

This is an echo of what I said earlier about the opening and development. Each move is precious, especially in the opening, and a typical mistake is wasting a precious move on castling too early.

Here is a prime example: the 5th quadrant needs to be dealt with. Having given up the ♗g4 unnecessarily (but for Dennis it is a preferred method of play) black should blunt the bishop and lock down the center.

Craig has played the opening as white in his preferred style actually, and has experienced this type of position before. He seizes the opportunity given to him and he embarks on the correct path of exploiting his initiative and piece configuration.

He will get a better structure (which Dennis avoids) or a strong initiative, as in the game, which was possibly under-estimated by Dennis.]

[11...d5!= 12.♕b3 ♖b8]

12.d5!± ♘e5 13.♘xe5 dxe5 14.dxe6 ♕b6 15.♕b3↑ [White has a strong initiative.]

15...♕xb3 16.axb3

[As a result of this skirmish the play has clarified. Black developed White's ♖a1 for free for white (thank you very much!). The doubled pawns are not a detriment to white. White is at present a pawn to the good.

Possibly, though, black might be able to simplify enough to reach a drawn position, but I'd bet strongly against that.

White's pressure along the h1–a8 diagonal is very worrisome, and black really should bite the bullet and try to advance with e5–e4.]

16...♖fe8? [16...e4±]

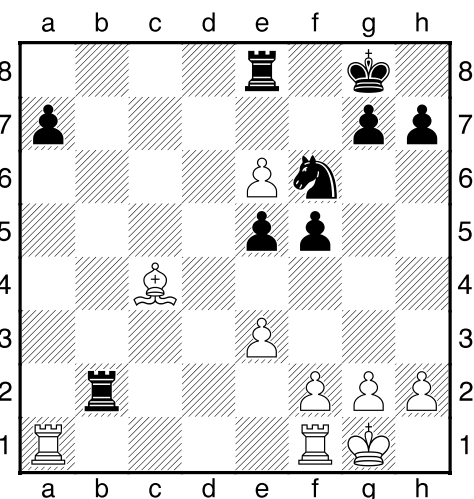17.♗xb7+− [Straightforward, logical, and winning if followed up correctly.]

17...♖ab8

[Black will do what he can, but white will not fall for the naive error 18. ♖a1xa7? ♖e8–e7]

[Further research with the SM shows that even "the error" ♖a1xa7 allowing the pin actually wins too!]

18.♗a6 ♖xb3 19.♗c4 ♖xb2 [Diagram]

Here, one needs to decide upon the "story" of the game…

What do I mean by 'the story of the game' ??

Back in the day the prominent "sports announcer" was Curt Gowdy and he always had to have his 'story of the game' that he could use to simply relate to the fan what was the most important factor in the game that he was covering. [No matter the sport: baseball, basketball, football, etc.]

It was his signature characteristic. The only problem I had with Curt was that he was often way too quick to rush to judgement, and pound in "his story". Any team that made a comeback, and by golly, he was quick to change his tune…

Still his concept struck a chord and stuck with me. There really was always a key story. You had to sometimes wait to find it, but in the end, it would be there.

In chess I looked for the simple stories. I asked the question: *How are chess games decided? In reality, there are very few ways. Naturally if the game plays out, there would always be a checkmate, and thus KING SAFETY cannot be ignored, and is number one. Many chess players and teachers touted material, but that could not stand for me, as one can find numerous examples where the guy behind in material wins. What was it that was important here, and I hit upon, it isn't the amount of material that decides, but the MOBILITY of the material that one has available. (Thus, it is strongly linked to material, but is not exactly the material count.) Therefore, reason number two came into being. Finally, the key question comes out. What if both sides are able to execute an unstoppable mate in one? Who wins? Well, it is simple, the one who has the move, and can dictate the play, thus it is a question of who (in chess terms) has the INITIATIVE. I could not think of any other basic fundamental way of deciding a game. Anything I found was simply a variation on one of these three themes.*

That these three key reasons are my elements of positional chess, should now come as no surprise to the reader.

In the game before us there are two major themes: mate or queen the e-pawn. Both are viable! Both win!

But you as a player need to decide how you wish to play. Since they both win, maybe it makes no difference, but I think that it makes a huge difference if one is much easier than the other. (Kinda, like deciding between taking an elevator, versus the stairs. As just one example…)

[This is where a decision has to be made for white. This is a key moment in the game, and where judgement and planning come into play.

Let's make no mistake that white does have a winning position here. Of course, the old saw says, "Yes, but he still HAS to win it!" Is he up to that task? It is right here that the prominent way of studying today ... with the Silicon Monster {SM} does a disservice to many of our players trying to learn the game.

 The SM tells you the moves, and you say, ok, I see that (or will see that) and they just move on. I recommend studying games with the 3x method (something I actually devised, and used extensively when I jumped from a weak master [which is what I am again today!] to a strong master that I was in my heyday [and is what I aspire to reclaim as best I can since I retired and became a government worker].

1. It involves owning a game, before you study it thoroughly.
2. Summarizing it succinctly (into the story of the game).
3. And then looking at it in depth so you can understand when you could have "anticipated the ending", and also find improvements.]

What do you choose?

There is no "wrong" answer. Just like there are many ways to skin a CAT – just be sure to find a 'dead' one first as that is much easier!!

20.e7+

This is certainly a logical choice, and 'looks' good, too! Just get the bishop to control e8, and it is over. However, my hand just wanted to take the a7 pawn with the rook...

Why?

I wanted to dominate the 7th rank, double rooks there, attack the poorly defended pawn at g7. Besides, nothing would ever "stop" me from pushing e6-e7 later (as far as I could tell.) I wanted mate first, queening was secondary. My opinion here is that white was thinking queen first, and mate second. But there are plenty of mating themes still to come! As well as queening ones, too.

Here is what the impassionate SM has to say:

[Fritz 14:

(1) 20.♖xa7 g6 21.h3 ♖c2 22.♗a2 ♖cc8 23.♖d1 ♖a8 24.♖dd7 ♖xa7 25.♖xa7 ♘e4 26.♖c7 ♘d6 27.♔h2 h6 28.♗b3 ♔f8 29.♖d7 ♖b8 30.♗d5 ♖b6 31.♖h7 h5 1.98/23;

(2) 20.e7+ ♔h8 21.♖xa7 ♘g8 22.♖d1 ♖bb8 23.♖dd7 ♖bc8 24.♗f1 g6 25.g4 ♔g7 26.gxf5 gxf5 27.♗h3 ♘f6 28.♖db7 ♔g6 29.♖a5 ♖c1+ 30.♔g2 ♘g4 31.e4 h5 32.♗xg4 hxg4 33.♖xe5 f4 34.♖b6+ ♔f7 35.♖f5+ ♔xe7 1.81/22]

20...♔h8 21.♖xa7 ♘g8 22.♖d1 g6? [Diagram]

It is possible that white had not foreseen that ♘g8 prevents the invasion ♗c4-f7 due to the attack on e7. But his move 22 ♖d1 indirectly guards the pawn due to mate threats! Black must now deal with mates on the back rank, and had three choices: push the g- or h- pawn or retreat the rook to cover the last rank. Black chose the g-pawn.
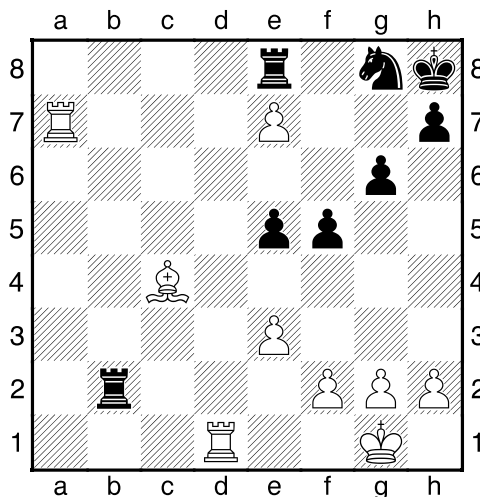
[22...♖bb8 23.♖dd7 ♖b1+ 24.♗f1 ♘f6 Holds out the longest, but loses. In fact, this is one of those cases where "the best" move – the one that loses in the longest manner (according to the SM) isn't necessarily the best idea, as it is too easy, and gives no chances for the opponent to stumble.

Andrew Soltis, in his *"Chess to Enjoy"* Chess life column wrote a very instructive article regarding this new way of looking at chess analysis.]

Again, white has a choice: Directly try to win, or 'win slowly'.
**Which would you choose?**

23.h3

Queening the pawn (and mating threats) again play their role.

Throughout this part of the game, white must also consider that black does have some back-rank mating ideas, and he must be prepared to deal with them. He chose to eliminate the back-rank mate threats to himself by pushing his h-pawn. Thus, he decides to play "slowly" for the win.

However, he could have played a "spectacular" attack and driven home his advantage. The SM can take center stage. One can use the undefended ♖e8 and a mating pattern of ♖×g8 to succeed, as well as one last mate, with the promoted queen!

Enjoy:

[23.♖a8! ♖xa8 24.♖d8
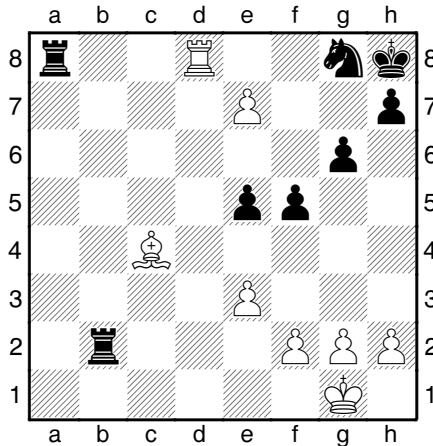
24...♖a1+ (24...♖b1+ 25.♗f1 ♖bb8 (25...♖aa1 26.g3) 26.e8♕ ♖xd8 27.♕xe5+) 25.♗f1 ♖bb1 26.g3 (26.h3? [26.g3 8.03] 26...♖xf1+ 27.♔h2 f4 28.♖xg8+ ♔xg8 29.e8♕+ ♔g7) ;

⌓23.♖a8!! ♘f6 (23...♖xa8 24.♖d8) 24.♖xe8+ ♘xe8 25.♖d8 ♖b1+ 26.♗f1]

23...♖bb8 24.♖dd7 ♔g7? [Diagram]
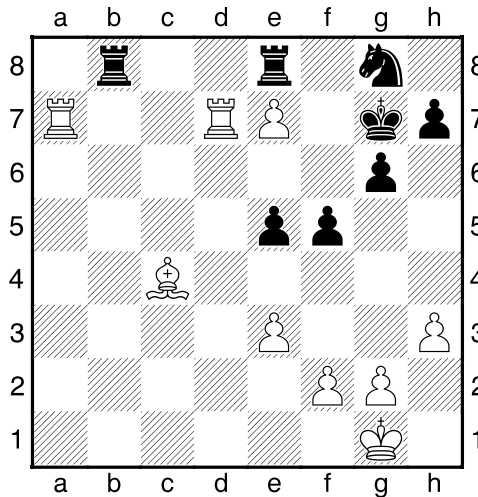
Black wishes to bring his king towards the e-pawn and destroy it. Not surprisingly: Again – TWO big choices!

[24...♘f6 will hold out the longest, but...]

Yet again queening the pawn (and mating threats) will play their role. But now there is a third element in play related to mobility. If I simply shut down all of black's pieces, white can win by strolling his king up the board and having superior force. One can visualize a white pawn on g5 simply strangling black.

There is yet another way to deal with superior mobility also. In this case, as black tries to squirm out he will weaken his king side pawn structure. If I trade my one pawn at e7 for two (or more) of his king side pawns, then I will win due to "material" (extra pawns) or as I would prefer to say superior mobility because I have more pawns.

We now have a direct way of playing to break the blockade on e8 when the black king sits on g7 as the advance e7-e8/♕+ due to the ♖a7 is deadly. We can deflect the blockading ♖e8 by capturing on either g8 or b8.

We now understand that the black king wishes to play to f6, and so we can set up mating nets based upon this factor. Do you see how to do this? Visualize a future position!
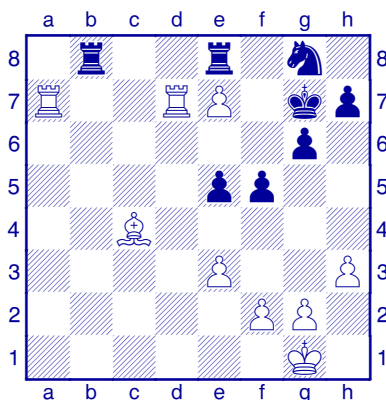
Again, not surprisingly multiple ways will win!

Craig chooses the most direct method...

25.♖d8 [Strongly threatening ♖×b8.] **25...♔f6** [Diagram]
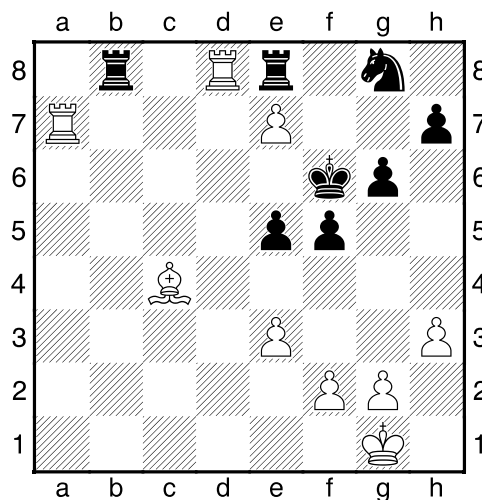
26.♖d6+ [... But tired and under stress from the battle and clock chooses...] **26...♔g7 27.♖d8?** [... to repeat, and call it a day before the long drive back to Evansville.] **27...♔f6 28.♖d6+ ♔g7** [Accuracy: White = 55%, Black = 45%.]

½–½

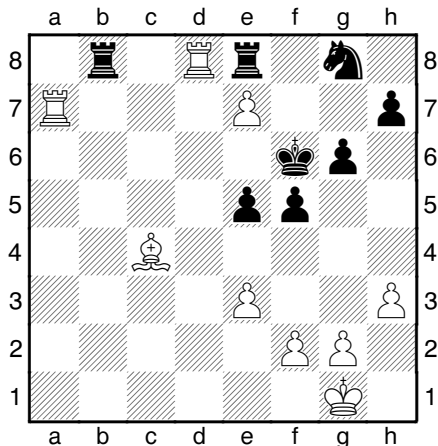We will look here in more depth at the two plans available to white.

First the direct game continuation of 25. ♖d8.

Then an alternative plan of 25. g4.

In both cases white is directing his play against the black's king wish to play to f6 and eliminate the e7 pawn.

Challenge yourself here: Analyze these two ideas and compare notes with me!

**25.♖d8** [Strongly threatening ♖×b8.] **25...♔f6**

First the continuation 26.f4 (3.95) pressurizes black! It sets up a potential mate(!) by playing a rook to f7, so black cannot take on d8.

If black captures the pawn on e7 (with either piece) he will end up a piece down as white will play fxe5+ as a key move.

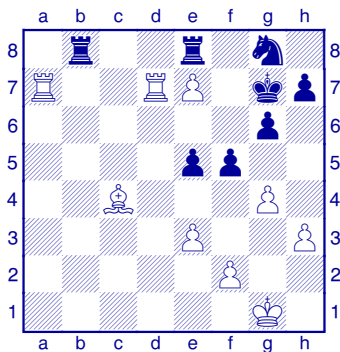**Finally** 26...exf4 27.exf4 ♘xe7 28.♖d6+ ♔g7 29.♖e6 decides

There is a second line:
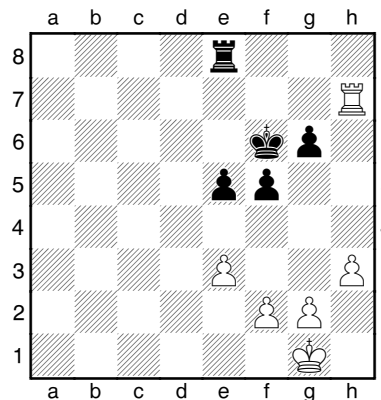[26.♗xg8 ♖xg8 27.♖ad7!+– Star move!
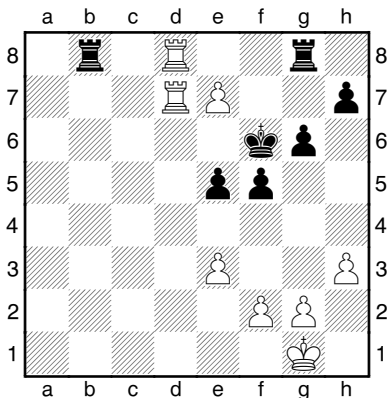
27...♖e8! 28.♔h2! One last star move]
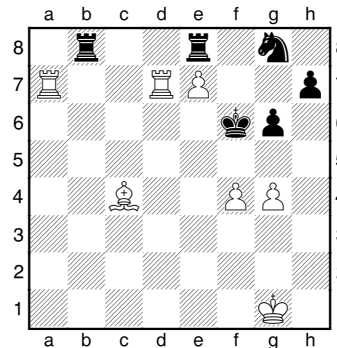
This leaves my suggestion {LVM} 25.g4 ♔f6 26.f4

But not 27.♖xg8? ♖xg8 28.e8♕ ♖xe8 29.♖xh7=

As mentioned offhand by Burnett;

(26.♔g2+– is more deadly and wins.SM) 26...exf4 27.exf4 fxg4 28.hxg4 **which only draws**

2019¶

Milestones:¶

51·years·since·my¶
first·USCF·tourney¶

41·years·since·I¶
became·a·Master¶

2018·&·2019¶
US·Senior·Champ·Age·65-69¶

Top·50·in·the·U.S.:¶
Players·over·65¶

FM·Lester·VanMeter¶

U.S.C.F.·National·Life·Master·/·F.I.D.E.·Chess·Master¶

Indiana·Chess·Hall·of·Fame¶

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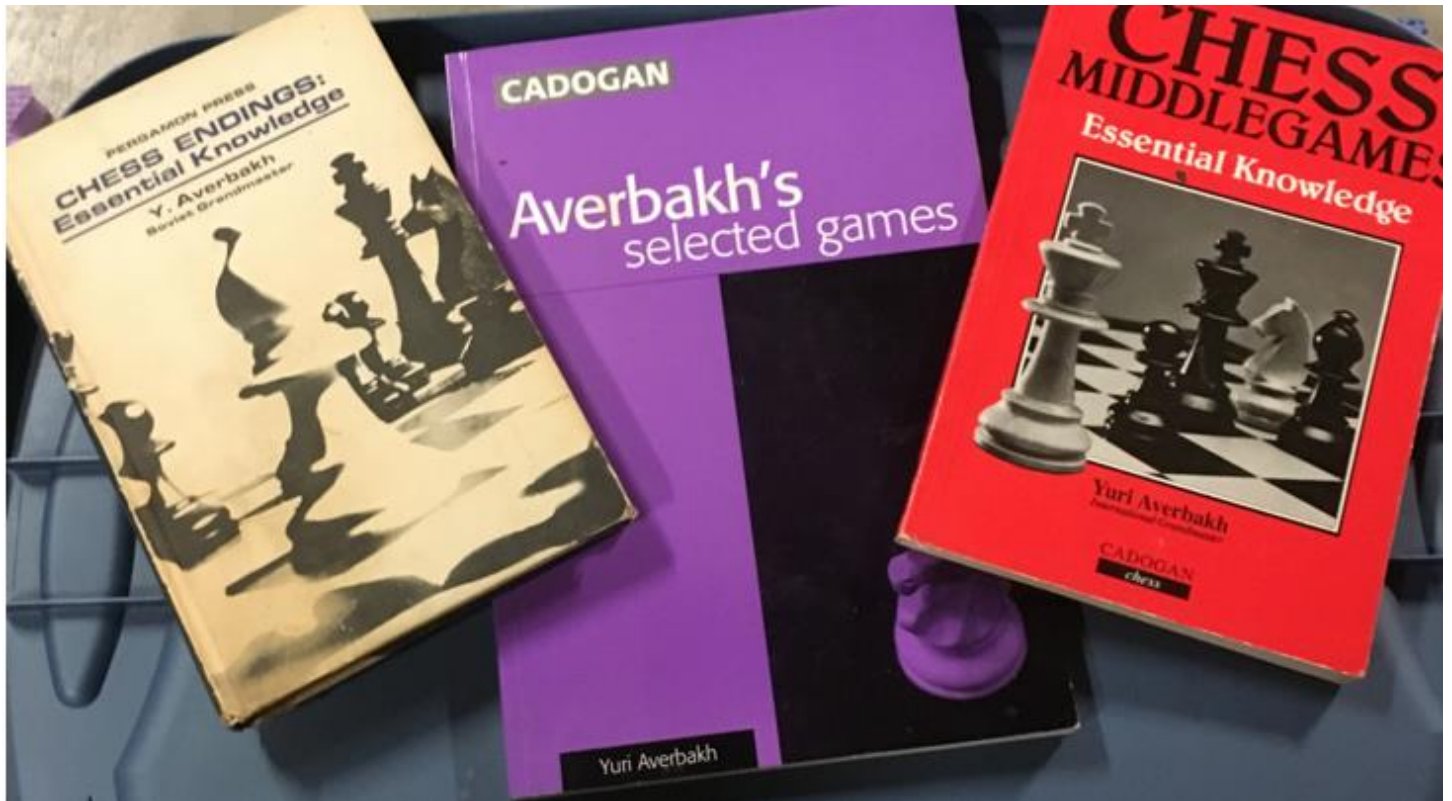
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