

The Grandmaster Battle Manual

By

Vassilios Kotronias



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Preface

The titles of some books are self-explanatory, but I suspect the reader would like to know what to expect from *The Grandmaster Battle Manual*. A hint is that at one point I considered using the title *How to Win Open Tournaments*. This book is indeed based on my extensive tournament experience and I hope it will help chess players to be more successful. However, I want to write about more than *just* winning. I want to encourage chess players to fight hard, enjoy the struggle, and then win!

I should forewarn the reader that in places I go into great depth and show a lot of analysis. I wish a lazier approach were possible, but a modern chess player must work hard for success. Naturally, I cover many topics and I will not attempt to list them all here. Chapter titles such as *Be a Harsh Critic of Your Own Wins*, *Facing Lower-rated Opponents*, *Defence makes the Difference!* and *The Challenge of the Last Round* are easy to understand. However *Beating the Wall-Y Structures* does, I confess, sound a little wacky. In fact, the topic of this chapter is how to deal with rock-solid openings such as the Petroff, Slav and Berlin Wall. If, like me, you have spent years bashing your head against these “walls”, you might also have developed a taste for quirky titles.

Throughout my career I have put a lot of work into my chess and I have extended that effort into this book. Over the years I have been rewarded with some competitive success, but of course not as much as I would like. I hope the reader benefits from my experiences and, who knows, perhaps my own play will also improve!

Vassilios Kotronias
Athens, Greece
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Annoy Them!



The theme of annoyance is in my opinion an important aspect of the practical chess game, and in order to avoid the risk of being misunderstood I would like to make it clear immediately that by the term “annoyance” I mean only the kind of embarrassment that chess moves may cause to us or our opponents. Throughout the years I have been the victim of several such “embarrassments” and I can assure you that they can be much more frustrating than unfair off-the-board “moves” such as unjustified and continuous draw offers, facial grimaces, speaking during play, and so on. With so many contrasting styles among the ranks of chess players, it is in fact only natural that “annoyance” should emerge as a major factor that decides the outcome of the struggle on the board.

The list of complaints muttered by the vast majority of chess players after a bad game is endless. As such, it does contain mild comments, like the classic and, to a certain extent, pathetic “I had a winning position today, but I blew it” or the slightly more exciting “Gosh, how could I lose this fantastic position?” to name but a couple. However, many other similar comments born out of temporary desperation are much less flattering for us, and, I can assure you, my publisher would not allow me to mention them here. Of course, all these comments are lacking in real self-criticism and fail to take into account our own deficiencies or the practical problems set by our opponents that changed the course of the games we (undeservedly?) lost or drew.

So, in what way can a move or a plan be annoying or embarrassing? How can apparently lifeless entities force us to get carried away with disrespectful language? Is it the purely objective strength of such moves that forces us to classify them as undesirable, or is it the sentiment caused by their execution at the board?

I would like to answer these questions in a straightforward manner, because I am eager to proceed with the practical examples: every move has a special “flavour” and sometimes we can be allergic to it! Even the very best, widely acknowledged as universal-style players have their own weaknesses and may often skip the calculation of a line on account of dislike or fear. Some others may avoid entering an advantageous endgame in search of something more concrete or out of fear it might bore them to death! Thus, the main strength of an annoying chess move or plan is, above all, that it is directed against the opponent’s style and that it tries to interfere with the smooth course of the game, even if the move itself is not objectively correct.

In the vast majority of cases, this annoying little move is designed, and often succeeds, in changing the character of the game. Bypassing the question of its objective value, we may identify a move of that kind from such attributes as the stirring up of a crisis or attempting to wrest the initiative by some concession, for example, a material one. The following example could have been a similar case, but the player at a disadvantage failed to grasp the opportunity of “annoying” the opponent:

Viswanathan Anand – Judit Polgar

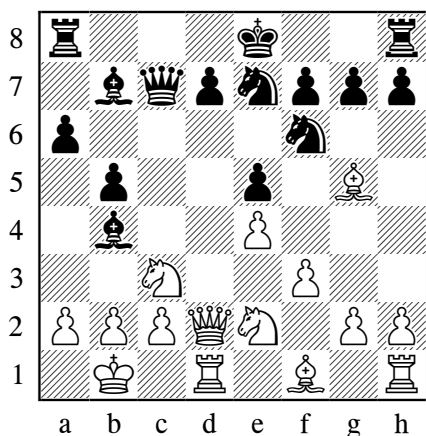
World Championship Tournament, San Luis 2005

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘c6
5.♗c3 ♜c7 6.♙e3 a6 7.♞d2 ♗f6 8.0–0
♙b4 9.f3 ♗e7 10.♗de2 b5 11.♙f4!? e5
12.♙g5 ♙b7 13.♗b1**

I have refrained, contrary to my usual tendency, from commenting on the opening moves so far, as they are not relevant to our topic.

It is obvious that the opening has been a success for White – he has the more harmonious development, his king has already reached safety and he has pressure on the d-file. Additionally, he has a positional threat (ruining the enemy's kingside pawn structure by ♙g5xf6) and a tactical threat (♜c3xb5).

Overall, the situation is unpleasant for Black but certainly not hopeless: the fact that she controls the critical d5-square with several pieces means that White must watch out for a potential ...d7-d5 advance that could free Black's play, although admittedly at the moment this possibility looks remote.



13...♙a5?!

Rather surprisingly, Judit Polgar fails to pose her illustrious opponent the most practical problems, a task at which she usually excels. To be honest, I do not know if the improvement I am going to suggest would have saved Black in the long run, but one thing is for sure: Vishy Anand is very powerful with queens on the board, a relatively safe king and some sort of initiative in an asymmetrical position. After the text move he gets a useful respite to acquire all the above mentioned elements and steer the game his way.

So, how could Judit have played? It is obvious that in such a difficult situation radical

measures must be taken, as otherwise the quality of Black's game will deteriorate quickly, and this is actually what happened in the game. On the other hand, such measures are barely detectable on the horizon.

I will analyse several moves including 13...d5?, 13...♞c8?! and 13...♙c5 before getting to what I believe is the best annoying move, 13...0-0-0!?

13...d5?

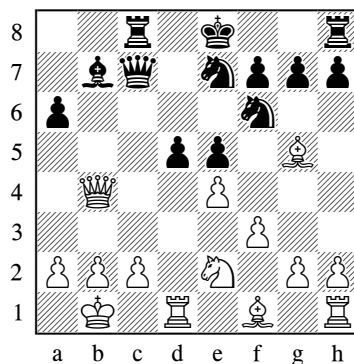
This move was mentioned by several commentators, including Gershon and Nor in *San Luis 2005* and De la Villa in *Dismantling the Sicilian*. There follows:

14.♜xb5 ♞c5 15.♜c7† ♞xc7

No salvation is offered by 15...♙f8 16.c3! ♞xc7 17.cxb4 dxe4 18.♙xf6 gxf6 19.♞h6† ♙e8 20.♜c3+ and the white pieces are coming from everywhere.

16.♞xb4 ♞c8

After 16...0-0 17.♙xf6 gxf6 18.♜g3 Black's demise will arrive from the h5-square. For example, 18...♞fb8 19.♜h5± or 18...d4 19.♜h5±.



Now instead of De la Villa's 17.♞d2±, even better seems:

17.♞a4†! ♙c6

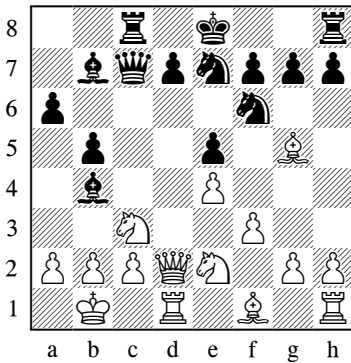
17...♙f8 18.♙xf6 gxf6 19.♜g3 d4 20.♜h5+–

18.♞a3 ♙b7

18...♙b5 19.♞d2+
 19.♞d2 dxe4 20.♙xf6 gxf6 21.fxe4 ♙xe4
 22.♘c3 ♙c6□
 22...♙b7 23.♙xa6 ♙xa6 24.♚xa6+—
 23.♙xa6 ♞b8 24.♞f1 f5 25.♚c5 ♞b6 26.♚xb6
 ♞xb6 27.♙c4±

White has a big advantage in the endgame. Thus, Black's attempt to break free with an immediate ...d7-d5 fails for tactical reasons.

Instead, strategically unfortunate is:
 13...♞c8?!



14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.g3!

Black has lost the option of castling long and it is clear that her king will not find a safe refuge behind the damaged kingside pawn structure.

15...d5

15...♙xc3 16.♘xc3 b4 17.♘a4 0–0 18.♙h3± leaves White with a clear advantage and an easy game.

16.♙h3! ♙xc3

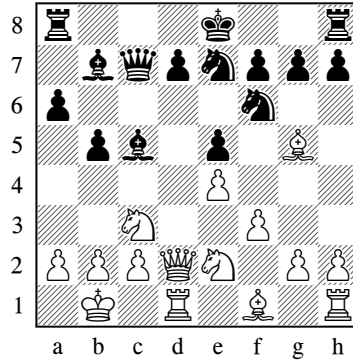
16...d4 17.♙xc8 ♞xc8 18.♘xb5!+—

16...♞d8 17.♘xb5±

17.♘xc3 ♞d8

Now either 18.♞h6± or 18.exd5 ♘xd5 19.♘e4± would have left Anand with a powerful position and playing on his own favoured territory, as an excellent attacker and tactician.

Another possibility offered by Gershon and Nor is 13...♙c5.



This is certainly better than the above tries. However, I believe White still has an annoying edge after 14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.♞h6 ♞b6 16.♘g3!, eyeing h5 and intending to meet 16...0–0 with 17.♘d5±. Black would be obliged to capture the knight, and then 18.exd5 gives the knight on g3 a pleasant variety of options for its next stop.

Before sharing my findings on the position after 13.♞b1, I will first explain my approach towards it, because otherwise the whole chapter would have no meaning:

1) It is clear that conventional methods will not work in such a situation, especially when you are dealing with the world's top tactician, who has a sharp feeling for the initiative and is one of the finest players in chess history.

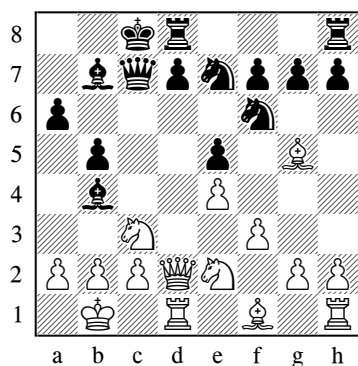
2) Black must at all costs minimize the danger to her king, and if possible create a crisis with some liquidations taking place. The only safe place I could see for the black king was the queenside.

3) Another feature that drew my attention was that in anticipation of White's planned ♙g5xf6, Black should be able to quickly respond with ...d7-d5, in order to eliminate the weakness on the d-file and give life to the bishop pair.

4) As I implied above, if Black does not coordinate various, possibly extraordinary, components to achieve a substantial outcome, then she would be as good as lost. But what gave me faith that a solution really existed was the impression that Black's opening play was not *so* bad as to deserve a fatal verdict as early as the 13th move.

All these thoughts led to the “non-Rybka” solution that I present below:

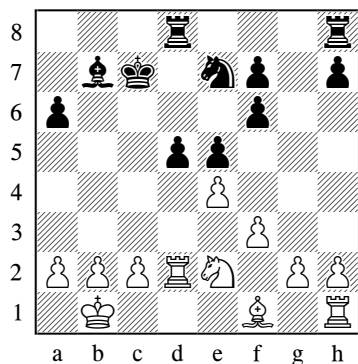
13...0–0–0!?



This untried possibility seems to be the most critical response. Black is sacrificing a pawn for endgame compensation. After the rather forced:

14. ♖xf6 gxf6 15. ♘xb5 ♙xd2 16. ♘xc7 ♔xc7
17. ♗xd2 d5!

Black has lost a pawn and does not even possess the bishop pair, but this is a rather superficial assessment:



If we take a closer look at the diagram position we begin to realize that things have started to go Black's way. Suddenly it would have been Judit who would have the better and most harmonious development. Indeed, the black king has been relieved from his worries as the queens are gone, and White is experiencing severe difficulties in consolidating the extra pawn in view of his weak back rank in conjunction with Black's increasing activity. All this amounts to good practical chances and such a development would have undoubtedly passed the initiative over to the defender and forced Vishy to show excellent technique in order to make something out of his extra pawn.

However, as is usually the case with debatable decisions born out of difficult situations, it can be argued that there are not only pros but also cons in the above reasoning. For example, a discouraging factor for my suggested course of action could be that Anand is an excellent technical player as much as he is a tactician and he might slowly capitalize on his material superiority in this ending. Notwithstanding the element of truth such a statement contains, I would still prefer my suggestion over the continuation chosen in the game.

An elaboration of the remarks I made earlier offers concrete answers as to why 13...0–0–0! is good:

Firstly, the energy one has to burn in a longer game is much greater and so small inaccuracies can happen along the way.

Secondly, the transition from a beautiful attacking position to a dull ending is disturbing, even for professionals of this class.

Thirdly, Judit is an excellent defender of worse endgames when she has active pieces, as is the case here.