

Beware the Cavalry

by Erik Malmsten, Jan. 2017

I've lost many games falling for a crushing Knight fork. Have you? Part of my attraction to openings that go Bishop to knight five and capture the Knight on bishop three is to get rid of a potentially pesky Knight. Then I close up the pawns to weaken my opponent's Bishop and manoeuvre my Knight for the big breakthrough.

On the Knight, Eugène Znosko-Borovsky wrote in *The Art of Chess Combination* (1936), my favourite book as a kid:

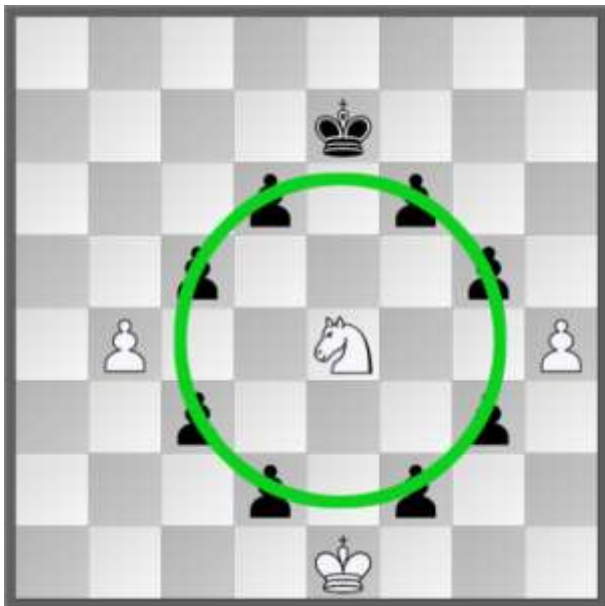
"Inexperienced players have a fear of this piece, which seems to them enigmatic, mysterious, and astonishing in its power. We must admit that it has remarkable characteristics which compel respect and occasionally surprise the most wary players."

When I first learned chess the Knight was the most realistic looking piece, and throughout history, a charge of horses have been a decisive part of battles. But the chess Knight moved the strangest, like a triangle. A series of vertical Knight moves reminds me of a cubist painting.

It can be frustrating getting the Knight to where you want it. With a White Knight on e4 and a Black pawn on e5, how many moves does it take the Knight to capture it? Three. Black pawn on d4? Three. Black pawn on the white square c6? Four. Black Rook on a8? Four. Black Rook on h8? Three. Even number of moves for the same coloured square. From a light square attacking the dark squares, to being on a dark square attacking the light squares.

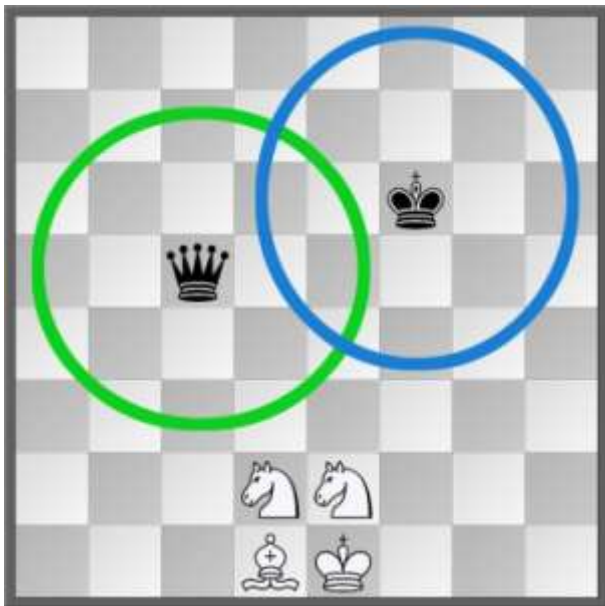
A good training exercise is the Knight Tour. Fill a board with a Knight and 63 coins, or 64 pieces, and move the Knight until it captures all other 63 pieces, having moved to all the squares on the board.

A major chess skill is pattern recognition, seeing geometric shapes. An interesting way of seeing a knight's possible squares is forming a circle of eight possible squares, an electrical energy field that moves with the knight. This could also be a diamond, angled square. Perhaps a moon, or even just a half moon or triangle of four squares in front of the Knight.



And then each potential square will have a second circle of possibilities. Once a Knight crosses the middle of the board it quickly hits a whole lot of targets. Also, as a Knight is the lowest valued piece, it can always be sacked for a couple of pawns to open up the King.

If I have two pieces on squares of the same colour, I should always look for the forking square that connects them. This is something that I have to actually tell myself during a game. If my opponent has a Knight, I need to be aware of putting pieces on forking squares. Likewise, as an attacker I should look for forking squares that connect my opponent's pieces. A possible way of seeing the forking square is seeing the knight circle around both of the pieces, as if they were both knights and the circles will cross on the forking square(s).



I want to share a few short games that show how quickly a Knight can destroy a position.

The first cavalry attacks I learned were:

1) The Légal Mate in the center:

Legall, Francois Antoine Kermeur Sire De – Saint Brié

Paris, France 1750

Légal was the chess teacher of Philidor.

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bc4 d6
4. Nc3 Bg4
5. Nxe5??

Giving up the Queen.

- 5... Bxd1??
6. Bxf7+ Ke7
7. Nd5#



The Knight on e5 covers the d7 escape square and the Knight on d5 covers f6.

But in an actual game Black would win a piece with 5. Nxe5. White can first try 5. h3 and if Bh5? then 6. Nxe5 wins the pawn. But Black goes 5... Bxf3 6. Qxf3 Nf6 for an equal position. The idea of looking at this game is not to memorize the opening but to see the squares that Knights attack and how the minor pieces work together.

2) The smothered mate, Philidor's Legacy, which has come up in games:

NN – Greco, Gioachino

Italy 1625

1. e4 e5
2. f4 f5?!

A crazy Panteldakis Counter gambit.

3. exf5 Qh4+
4. g3 Qe7
5. Qh5+ Kd8
6. fxe5 Qxe5+
7. Be2

Kasparov likes 7. Qe2 Qxf5 8. Bh3 (*My Great Predecessors*, Part 1 (2003)).

- 7... Nf6
8. Qf3 d5
9. g4?!

The computer likes to give the pawn back for piece development with d4 and if Qxd4 10. Nc3 c6 11. Bd2 Qe5 12. g4 White is better. Or 9... Qxf5 10. Bd3 equal.

- 9... h5
10. h3?

10. g5 is better. A sharp line is Nc6!? 11. gxf6 Nd4 12. Qd3 Bxf5 13. Nf3 Bxd3 14. Nxe5 Bxe2 15. Nf7+ Kd7 16. c3 Nc2+ 17. Kxe2 Rh7 18. Ne5+ and the computer gives a draw by repetition.

10... hxc4

11. hxc4 Rxc4

12. Qxc4 Qg3+

13. Kd1

13. Kf1 would protect the Knight.

13... Nxc4

Or 13... Ne4 14. Nh3 Qxc3 15. Qxc3 Nf2+.

14. Qxd5+

Better to go 14. Bxc4 but that loses the f-pawn.

14... Bd7

15. Nf3



15... Nf2+

16. Ke1 Nd3+

17. Kd1 Qe1+

18. Nxe1 Nf2#

Knights attack well with a Queen. Capablanca said that a Queen and a Knight may be stronger than a Queen and a Bishop.

3) A gambit to lure in the opponent into thinking that they are attacking:

Muhlock - Kostić, Borislav [C50]

Cologne, Germany 1912

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bc4 Nd4?!

The Blackburne Shilling Gambit mentioned by Wilhelm Steinitz in 1895.

4. Nxe5?

4. Nxd4 exd4 5. c3 d5 6. exd5 Qe7+ 7. Kf1=.

- 4... Qg5
5. Nxf7?

White forks.

5. Bxf7+ Ke7 6. 0-0 Qxe5=
5. Ng4? d5 6. Bxd5 Bxg4 7. f3 Bxf3 8. gxf3 Qg2 9. Rf1 Be7 with Bh4 mate.



- 5... Qxg2
 6. Rf1 Qxe4+
 7. Be2 Nf3#
- 0-1

Another smothered mate.

4) Have to watch out for sacs opening squares for the Knights:

Santasiere, Anthony - Byrne, Robert Eugene [B06]
47th US Open, Pittsburgh USA (3), 17.07.1946

1. Nf3 g6
2. e4 Bg7
3. d4 d6
4. Bc4 Nd7?

This cramps Black's royalty.



5. Bxf7+ Kf8

If 5... Kxf7 6. Ng5+ Kf8 7. Ne6+ fork; 6... Ke8 7. Ne6 Queen trap; 6... Kf6 7. Qf3 mate.

6. Ng5 Nb6

So the bishop covers e6. Ndf6 is another try.

7. Qf3 Nf6

8. e5 dxe5

9. dxe5 Bg4

10. exf6

Also winning is 10. Ne6+ Kxf7 11. Nxd8+ Raxd8 12. Qb3+ (Qf4?? Rd1#) Be6 13. Qg3.

10... Bxf3

11. fxg7+

11. Ne6+? Kxf7 12. Nxd8+ Raxd8 13. gxf3 exf6 and Black is slightly better.

11... Kxg7

12. Ne6+ Kf6

13. Nxd8 Bxg2

14. Rg1 Bf3

15. Ne6 Kxf7? 16. Ng5+.

1-0

5) The common Knight fork on c7. It can look scary, but can often be defended. Here's a local example:

Haziprodromu, Sam (1979) - De Jesus, Enrique (2002) [B21]

Toronto Closed Reserves, Toronto CAN (9), 04.02.2002

1. e4 c5
2. d4 cxd4
3. c3

The sharp Morra Gambit.

- 3... dxc3
4. Nxc3 Nc6
5. Nf3 d6
6. Bc4 Nf6?!

6... a6 or e6 are better.

7. e5 dxe5?

7... Ng4 is better 8. e6 Bxe6 9. Bxe6 fxe6 10. Ng5=.

8. Qxd8+ Nxd8

8...Kxd8 9. Ng5 with fork on f7.



9. Nb5

With fork on c7.

- 9... Be6

9... Kd7 is bad, Nxe5+ Ke8 and Nc7 mate.

Also 9... Rb8 10. Nxe5 threatening Nc7 mate 10... e6 11. Nc7+ Ke7 12. 0-0 White is better.

10. Nc7+ Kd7
11. Nxa8 Bxc4
12. Nxe5+ Kc8

12... Ke8 gets mated again.

13. Nxc4 Kb8

14. 0-0 Kxa8

Those Knights were scary and White is up the exchange, but Black actually won this game. He had good piece play and White eventually gave back the exchange for an equal endgame.

[13.Nxc4 Kb8 14.0-0 Kxa8 15.Ne5 e6 16.Rd1 Nd5 17.Bd2 Bd6 18.Nc4 Bc7 19.Rac1 Nc6 20.a3 Nd4 21.Kf1 Nb3 22.Rc2 Nd4 23.Rcc1 Nb3 24.Rb1 Rd8 25.Bg5 f6 26.Nd2 Nd4 27.Bh4 Nf5 28.Bg3 Bb6 29.Nc4 Bd4 30.Rd3 h5 31.h4 e5 32.Rbd1 Nxc3+ 33.Rxc3 Rd7 34.Rb3 Kb8 35.g3 a6 36.Ke2 b5 37.Ne3 Ne7 38.a4 Rb7 39.axb5 axb5 40.Nc2 Nc6 41.Nxd4 Nxd4+ 42.Rxd4 exd4 43.Kd3 Kc7 44.Kxd4 Kd6 45.Ke4 Ke6 46.Rb4 g6 47.Kd4 Kd6 48.Rb3 Rb8 49.Rf3 Rf8 50.b4 Rf7 51.Rc3 Rf8 52.Rc5 Rb8 53.f4 f5 54.Re5 Rb7 55.Ke3 Rb8 56.Kd2 Rd8 57.Ke3 Rb8 58.Kd4 Rb7 59.Re8 Rc7 60.Kd3 Rc4 61.Rg8 Rxb4 62.Rxc6+ Ke7 63.Rb6 Kf7 64.Kc3 Rc4+ 65.Kd3 Rb4 66.Ke3 Kg7 67.Kd3 Kf7 68.Rh6 Rb3+ 69.Kd4 Rxc3 70.Ke5 b4 71.Rh7+ Kg6 72.Rb7 0-1]

To review, thinking of the squares a Knight can go to as an oval might help you not miss one. When there's a Knight on the board, always be aware that when placing pieces on squares of the same colour there is a forking square that connects them. And look for forking squares that connect your opponent's pieces and how your Knight might get there.

We looked at openings where the cavalry charged in, but there's more to learn about Knights: sacking a Knight to open up a castled King, the power of a Knight outpost, two Knights working together, Knight versus Bishop or Knight versus Rook, and even underpromoting to a Knight.

On the club's website I have posted a file with a few more games. Playing through a couple before a tournament game may help keep one's mind alert for pesky Knight moves. Beware the cavalry.