

The Knight

The Cunning Cavalry



Power of the Pieces Series

Sergey Kasparov

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The Knight: The Cunning Cavalry
Power of the Pieces Series
by Sergey Kasparov

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Introduction

Dear readers!

As likely as not, we have already been acquainted through my previous books or met each other on chess tournaments.

Working for you is Sergey Kasparov, a grandmaster from Belarus.

As usual, my wife Tatiana is doing all the technical work on the book (WIM); most likely, you know her as well.

We continue a series of books, each of which is dedicated to a certain chess piece, in this particular case a “Knight.”

That piece is named differently in different languages. In Russian it is called “Horse,” which is a jumping and agile animal, but the most familiar and universally known name for it seems to be “Knight.”



From the Russian Wikipedia:

The knight moves to a square that is two squares away horizontally and one square vertically, or two squares vertically and one square horizontally, thus resembling the Latin letter “L.” It is the only chess piece that does not move only vertically, horizontally or diagonally and can “jump over” pieces of either color. The knight is one of two pieces the move of which has remained the same from the time of chaturanga The other piece is the king). At the start of the game, each player has two knights, each placed next to a rook – white knights on b1 and g1, black ones on b8 and g8. It falls into the category of minor pieces. In a “Staunton” chess set it looks like a horse’s head mounted on a round support.



Let us examine pros and cons of this piece in the different stages of a chess game with various pawn configurations, etc.

As is usual for my books, there are many diagrams to allow particularly busy (or lazy) readers to do without a chessboard. Such a book can be read on subway or train, or just lying on your couch.

I will, though rather infrequently, insert “lyrical digressions” between purely chess-related subjects to provide some kind of relaxation to my readers.

Attention please! The author has no claims for absolute accuracy and coverage of every possible situation in which a knight takes part. The length of the book does not allow exhaustive analysis; besides, I would not want to overload your memory.

Of course, certain games could have been quoted in different chapters of the book (for example, both in “The Kamikaze Knight” and in the “The Knight in Attack”). Do not let it concern you, as this division is quite arbitrary.

Please feel free to send your questions, comments or well-reasoned criticisms to the e-mail address tkasparova@rambler.ru . I wish you a pleasant and productive reading!

Sergey Kasparov
April 2019

Part II

The Opening

Chapter 2

The Knight in the French Defense

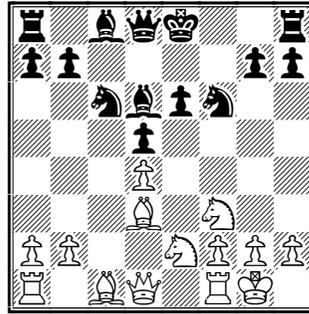
In this chapter we will examine typical actions of a knight in openings. Of course, we are not going to embrace all the openings, but only some of them; otherwise the volume of our book would be enormous.

In this particular opening, a knight often fights for domination over the commanding point e5. Sometimes it occupies this square itself. Ideally, White would like to obtain such a knight versus his opponent's "blunted" light-square bishop.

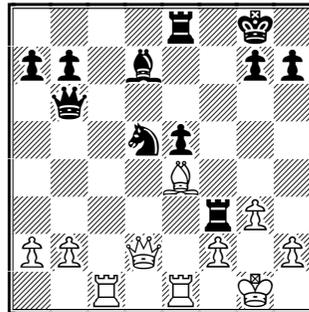
(18) Kasparov S – Astengo
Soazza 2009

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 ♞f6 4.e5
♞fd7 5.♞d3 c5 6.c3 ♞c6 7.♞e2
c×d4 8.c×d4 f6 9.e×f6 ♞×f6 10.0-0
♞d6 11.♞f3 (D)**

As early as that, a picture of the future battle starts to emerge. The backward e6-pawn would like to advance in order to "clear the view" for the bishop on c8. In his turn, White is doing all he can to prevent this. **11...♝c7 12.g3 0-0 13.♞f4** The struggle for the e5-square

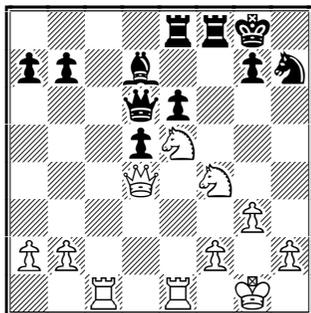


continues; it is favorable for White to exchange dark-square bishops. **13...♞d7 14.♞c1 ♞×f4 15.♞×f4 ♝d6** Or **15...♝b6 16.♝d2 ♞ae8 17.♞fe1 ♞×d4 18.♞×d4 e5 19.♞×d5 ♞×d5 20.♞f3! ♞×f3 21.♞e4**

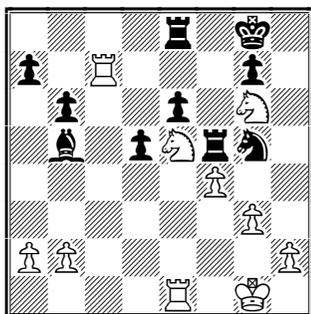


The Knight in the French Defense

21...♞f6 22.♙×d5±, Kveinys-Djurhuus, Oslo 2005. **16.♞e1 ♞ae8?! 17.♗e5±** Our protagonist has occupied the commanding point; it is difficult to exchange it as d4×e5 runs into a fork. **17...♗×d4?! 18.♙×h7+** A typical shot in the French: the d4-pawn is often indirectly defended in this manner. **18...♗×h7 19.♞×d4+-**



Now White's position is already overwhelming. The difference in strength between the e5-knight and the bishop is tremendous. **19...♞f5 20.♞c5 20.g4+- 20...♞×c5 21.♞×c5 b6 21...♗g5 22.♞g2± 22.♞c7 ♙b5 23.♗fg6! ♗g5 23...♞f6 24.♞xa7+- 24.f4 1-0**



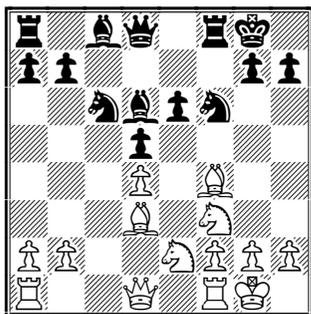
There is a threat of ♗g6-e7, so Astendo stopped torturing himself and resigned.

In the following fragment from a game played in France, it is apparent how

straightforward White can be in his attempts to get control over the most important central point (♙d3-b5×c6).

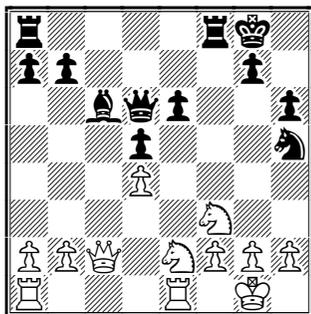
(19) Kasparov S – Pourquet Plancoet 2015

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♗d2 ♗f6 4.e5 ♗fd7 5.♙d3 c5 6.c3 ♗c6 7.♗e2 c×d4 8.c×d4 f6 9.e×f6 ♗×f6 10.♗f3 ♙d6 11.0-0 0-0 12.♙f4

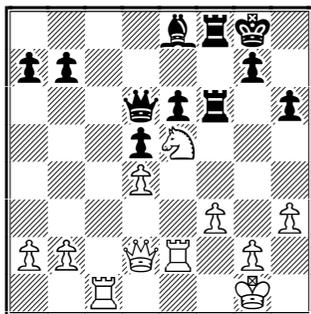


If the coast is clear (11...♞c7), the bishop moves to f4 immediately. Let us keep in mind that the exchange of dark-square bishops is in White's favor – after that, his opponent will only be left with a “bad” bishop. **12...♗h5 13.♙×d6 ♞×d6 14.♞c2** Weakening the enemy king's shelter. **14...h6** Or 14...♗f6 15.♞ac1 ♙d7 16.♞c5 ♞×c5 17.♞×c5 ♞ac8 18.♞fc1 ♗b4 19.♙b1 ♞×c5 20.♞×c5 ♞c8, Aagaard-Brynell, Denmark 2014, 21.♞×c8+ ♙×c8± **15.♙b5 ♙d7** A strong grandmaster's interpretation was much less effective: 15...♗e7?! 16.♗e5 ♗f4 17.♞ad1 ♞b4 18.♗×f4 ♞×f4 19.♗d3+- ♞×d4 20.♞c7 ♗g6 21.♙e8 ♞c4 22.♞d6+-, Tiviakov–Reinderman, Wijk aan Zee 2012. Generally, I have a feeling sometimes that my opponents with Elo ratings of 2100~ play better than eminent chess players. Have you ever experienced this sensation? **16.♙×c6 ♙×c6 17.♞fe1**

The Knight



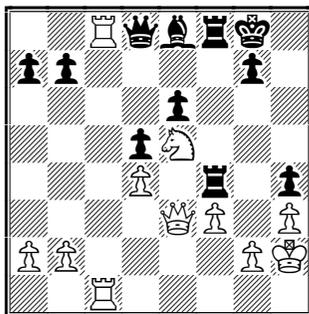
Having traded my bishop for the knight, I obtain exclusive control over the key square e5 and now am trying to avoid exchanging the bad bishop (Qc6-b5xe2) **17...♘f4** **18.♗e5 ♖ac8** **19.♖d2** Also effective is **19.♗xf4 ♖xf4** **20.♖d2 ♖cf8** **21.f3±**. **19...♗xe2+** **20.♖xe2 ♖f6** **21.h3 ♖cf8** **22.f3 ♗e8** **23.♖c1±**



It is hard for the bishop to be of use, while our hero is quite comfortable on the commanding square. **23...♖b6** **24.♖e3 ♖f4** **25.♖d2 ♖d8** **26.♗h2 h5** **27.♖dc2 h4?** Better is **27...♖b6**. **28.♖c8 (D)**

28...♖g5 **29.♗g4 ♗h7** **29...♖xg4?** **30.♖xe6+±** **30.♖e1 ♗g6??** **1-0**

Time-trouble... After seeing that **31.♖xf8 ♖xf8** would be met with **32.♖xg5**, the Frenchman resigned.



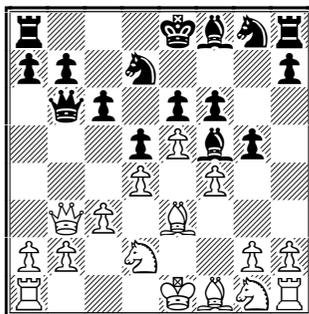
More stubborn though no less joyless is **30...♖e7** **31.♖xe6 ♖xe6** **32.♖xe6+±**

Section 1. The Knight Advances to h6

Both in the French Defense and in the Caro-Kann, a knight is periodically developed via h6. This piece generally stands badly on the rim, but usually this is only an intermediate stage of its route. Let us examine some illustrative examples. My good acquaintance, now a strong Ukrainian grandmaster, usually prepares his games thoroughly and struggles for an advantage with White, but as a result of his knight's intricate manipulations, Black manages to obtain a promising position.

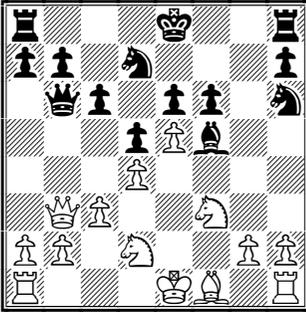
(20) Solodovnichenko – Kasparov S
Guingamp 2004

1.e4 c6 **2.d4 d5** **3.e5 ♗f5** **4.♗e3 e6** **5.c3 ♖b6** **6.♖b3 ♗d7** **7.♗d2 f6** **8.f4 g5**

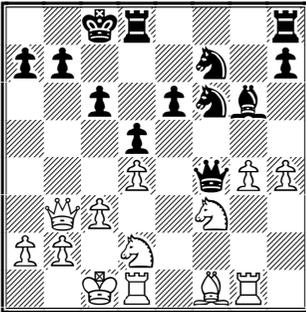


The Knight in the French Defense

At an early stage of the game, Black is already moving against his opponent's pawn center rather vigorously. 9. ♖gf3 g×f4 10. ♗×f4 ♖h6 11. ♗×h6 ♗×h6



This is exactly the reason why our protagonist has not been in a hurry to advance to e7. 12. e×f6 ♗×f6 13. h3 ♗f7 14. g4 ♖g6 15. ♖g1 ♗c7! Yuri clearly overlooked this resource. Now the black queen moves on the weakened black squares in his opponent's camp. 16. 0-0-0 0-0-0 17. h4 ♗f4 ♞

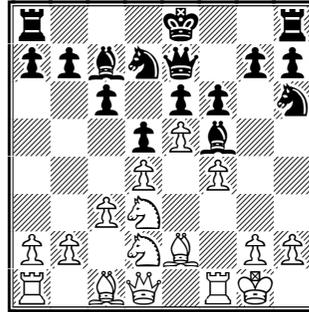


The knight on f7 does an important job of controlling the weakened e5-square. Black's chances are a bit better. ½-½

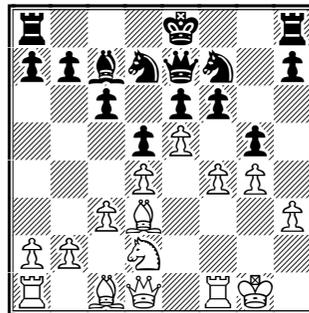
In the following fragment Black obtained excellent counterplay, and the f7-knight had played a big role in this.

(21) Miliutin – Kasparov S
Belgrad 2008

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 ♗f5 4. ♗f3 e6 5. ♗e2 ♖b4+ 6. ♗bd2 ♗d7 7. 0-0 ♗a5 8. c3 ♗c7 9. ♗e1 ♗e7 10. ♗d3 ♗e7 11. ♗f6 ♗h6



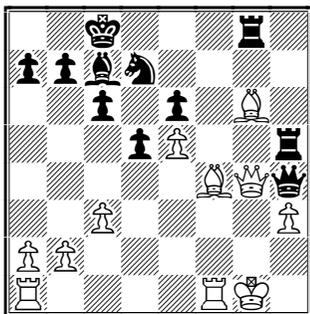
As you can see, in this particular case, that square is also the most comfortable one for the knight. From here it is going to jump to f7 and, just in case, control the f5-square. 12. h3 ♗f7 13. g4! This move is kind of overambitious: he exposes his own king. 13. ♗f3 is better. 13... ♗×d3 14. ♗×d3 g5



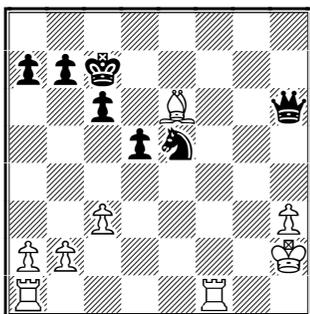
Black has rich counterplay on the kingside and is clearly ahead of his opponent. Castling on opposite sides is imminent.. 15. e×f6 ♗×f6 16. ♗f3

The Knight

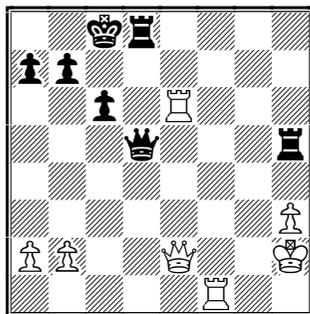
16.fxg5? ♖xg5-- 16...gxf4 17.♖e2
 0-0-018.♗e5 ♗x5 19.dxe5 ♗d7
 20.♗xf4 h5 See comment to
 White's 13th move. 21.gxh5 ♗xe5?!
 Stronger is 21...♗dg8+! 22..♗g6 ♖h4
 23.♖g4 ♗xh5



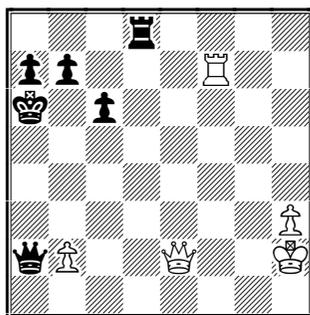
24.♗xh5 ♗xg4+ 25..♗xg4 ♗xe5
 26..♗xe5 ♗xe5 27..♗xe6+ ♖c7 28.♖h2
 (28.♗f2=) 28...♖h6--



22..♗g6 22..♗xe5 ♖g5+/-/+
 22...♗xf4 23.♗xf4 ♖d6 24.♗af1
 ♗e5 25.♗f6 A considerable part of
 the advantage has been already
 squandered, but the position of the king
 remains insecure. 25...♗xg6 Trying to
 protect himself. 26.♗xg6 d4! 27.cxd4
 27.♖xe6+ ♖xe6 28.♗xe6 ♗xh5
 29.cxd4 ♗xh3= 27...♖xd4+ 28.♖h2
 ♖d6+ 29.♖h1 ♖d5+ 30.♖h2
 ♗xh5 31.♗xe6



31...♖g5 I hesitated to take the pawn
 because of time-trouble; however, the
 course of events could be roughly as
 follows: (a) 31...♖xa2 32.♗e8 (32.♖g4
 ♖b8=; 32.♗xc6+ bxc6 33.♖xh5
 ♖xb2=) 32...♗hd5 33.♖e6+ ♖c7
 34.♗f7+ ♖b6 35.♖e3+ ♖a6 36.♗xd8
 ♗xd8 37.♖e2+∞.



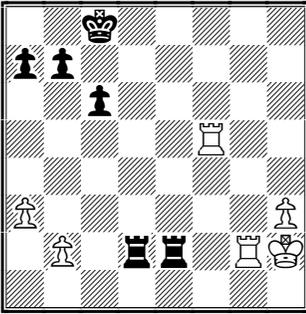
(b) 31...♗xh3+ 32.♖xh3 ♗h8+ 33.♖g3
 ♗g8+ 34.♖h2=

32.♗e3 ♗hh8 33.♗g3 ♖d5 34.a3
 ♗h4 35.♖f3 ♗e4 36.♖f5+?! ♖xf5
 37.♗xf5 ♗e2+ 38.♗g2 ♗dd2 (D)

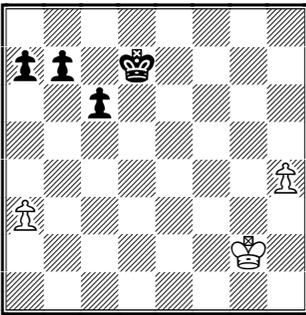
39.♗fg5?

Time-trouble. Numerous inaccuracies
 by both players result in an unclear
 endgame. Perhaps, White could have
 drawn after 39.♗xe2! ♗xe2+ 40.♖g3
 ♗xb2 41.h4 ♗b3+ (41...♖d7 42.h5
 ♗b1∞) 42.♖g4 The passed h-pawn is

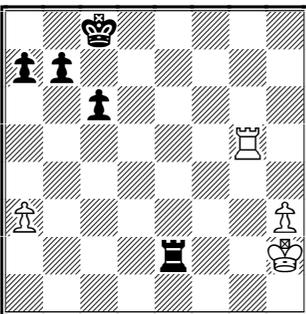
The Knight in the French Defense



rather dangerous. 39...♖×b2 40.♗×e2
And now 40.h4? would not work as the
pawn endgame is lost: 40...♗×g2+
41.♖×g2 ♗×g2+ 42.♔×g2 ♔d7 -+



40...♗×e2+ 0-1

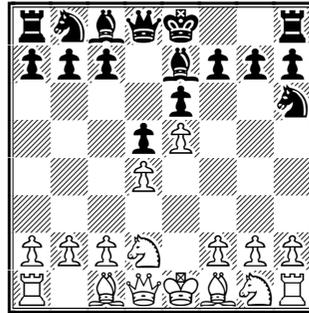


Here Miliutin resigned, which came as a pleasant surprise to me. I think that the outcome of the game was still absolutely unclear.

Quick routs do not necessary happen in sharp opening variations or after mating attacks. See how poor moves instantly transition the game into a difficult endgame.

(22) Kasparov S – Heemskerck
Hoogoven 2012

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 ♗e7 4.e5
♘h6



The e7-square is occupied, so the knight advances “from the rim.” Meanwhile, in this particular case, it results in certain discomfort for Black. 5...♘f3 6.g4! I examined this during my preparation for the game. It looks that my guess was right – I manage to confuse my opponent. 6...♘h6? More logical is 6...♘h4, but even after this move, White’s position remains pleasant: 7.♘h4 ♗×h4 8.g5 ♗×g5 9.♖g4 ♗×c1 10.♖×g7 ♖f8 11.♖×c1 with the initiative. (D)

11...♖h4 12.♗e2 ♗c6 13.c3 ♗e7
14.♖g3 ♖e4 15.♗g2 ♖f5 (Ninov-
Molina, Cesenatico 2007) 16.♖e3±
7.♗×h6 g×h6 8.♖d2 ♗g5 9.♘×g5
♖×g5 10.♖×g5 h×g5 11.h4±

As soon as move 11, the game transposes into a complicated endgame