

# Exeter Chess Club: Knight outposts

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## 1 Knight outposts

When looking at openings I often ask players to perform the following exercise:

**On a bare chessboard, put a knight on a1. How many squares can it move to? Just two. On b1, three. On c1, four. On c2, six. On c3, eight. From this you can see that moving from b1 to c3 in the opening makes the knight more than twice as powerful.**

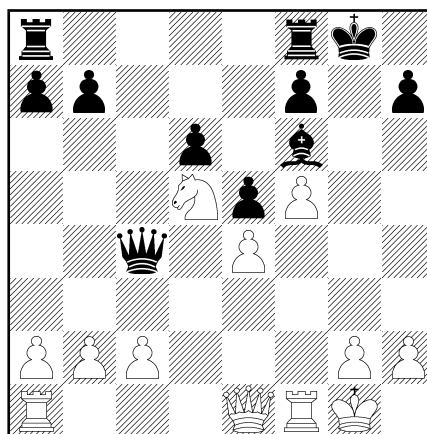
Now, this is part of the argument about control of the centre, and helps explain why development towards the centre is so important. But it is particularly true of knights, because their step is so small. A bishop developed in *fianchetto* on b2 or g2 can extend its reach to the other side of the board, but a knight on b2 can hardly make it to the half-way line. Knights become much stronger by being moved into the centre, but as a rule are vulnerable to being swapped off or nudged by pawns. An *outpost* is a square which a knight can occupy, which is either immune from attack (like d5 in the lower diagram) or the opponent would get into other sorts of trouble by getting rid of it (like in the Tal game overleaf). So, one of the key strategical ideas in chess is the *knight outpost*.

[Event "knight outpost?"][Site "-"][Date "1945.??.?"][Round "?"]

[White "smyslov"][Black "rudakovsky"][Result "1-0"]

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 e6 3.d4 c×d4 4.♞×d4 ♞f6 5.♞c3 d6 6.♙e2 ♙e7 7.O-O O-O 8.♙e3 ♞c6 9.f4 ♖c7 10.♗e1 ♞×d4 11.♙×d4 e5 12.♙e3 ♙e6 13.f5 ♙c4? [ 13. ... , ♙d7 was essential] 14.♙×c4 ♖×c4 15.♙g5 ! 15. ... , ♗fe8

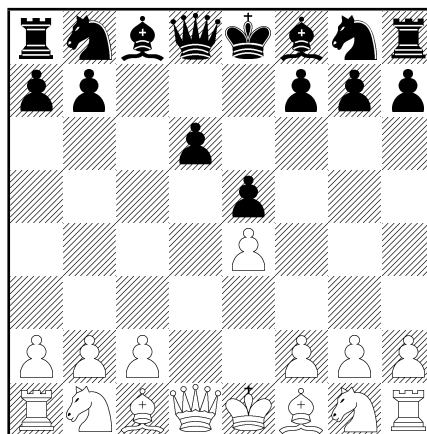
16.♙×f6 ♙×f6 17.♞d5 ! **DIAGRAM**



17. ... , ♙d8 ( 17. ... , ♖×c2 18.♗f2 ♖c6 19.♗c1 ♗d7 20.♞c7) 18.c3 b5 19.b3 ♖c5+ 20.♞h1 ♗c8 21.♗f3! Black's pieces are passive; White has enough of a bind to effect a King's side attack.

21. ... , ♞h8 22.f6 g×f6 23.♗h4 ♗g8 24.♞×f6 ♗g7 25.♗g3 ♙×f6 26.♖×f6 ♗cg8 27.♗d1 d5 28.♗×g7 ! 1-0 ( 28.♗×g7 ♗×g7 29.♗×d5 ♖f8 30.♗d8)

David Norwood describes an exercise given to players in the old USSR where they were given the position in the diagram



and asked:

remove pairs of pieces of equal value to White's advantage.

The solution they were looking for was to remove all the Qs, Rs, and everything else apart from the Kings, one White knight and the Black B on f8. Then White's knight could go to d5, dominating the board, while Black's poor bishop couldn't ever swap it off. It would be a pretty miserable bishop anyhow, which is our next idea - the *bad bishop*. But this exercise also starts to show you how to plan a game of chess based on the pawn structure: this 'remove pairs of pieces' exercise is what you can try and do by exchanging pieces, and this is pretty well what Smyslov does in the illustrative game.

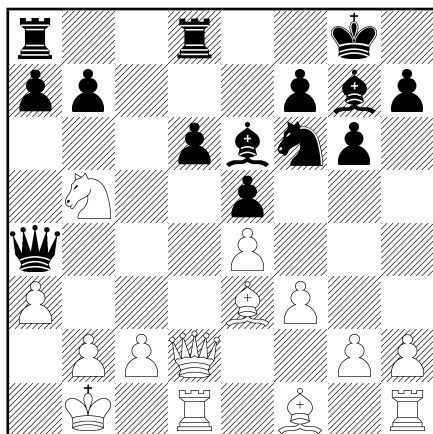
## 2 More knight outposts.

Here's three more, in increasing difficulty. The Boleslavsky game works on the same strategical principles as the Smyslov one but is more tense in terms of tactics. The Botvinnik game shows an outpost being created rather than given to you, and the Tal game shows a common Ruy Lopez theme of outpost with overprotection.

*Fighting tactically with an outpost.*

boleslavsky-lisitsyn, moscow 1953

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 g6 6. ♕e3 ♕g7 7. f3 O-O 8. ♖d2 ♘c6 9. O-O-O Nxd4 10. ♕xd4 ♖a5 11. ♔b1 e5 12. ♕e3 ♕e6 13. a3 ♖fd8 14. ♘b5 ♖a4 taking the d6 pawn loses a piece, but White has a great pawn sacrifice of his own



15. c4! ♕xc4 (else White has a bind) 16. ♘c3 ♖b3 17. ♕xc4 ♖xc4 18. ♕g5 ♖e6 19. ♕xf6 ♖xf6 20. ♘d5 ♖h4 21. ♖e2 ♕f8 22. ♖f1! ♖ac8

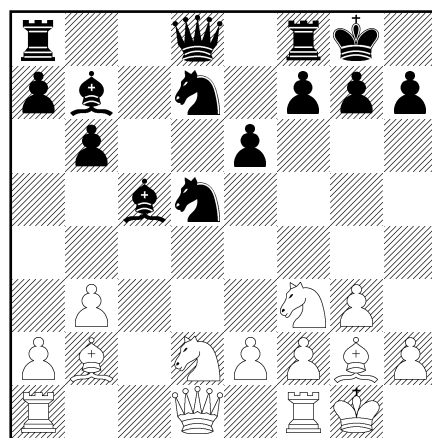
23. g3 ♖g5 24. h4! ♖h6 not ...Qxg3, Rd2! 25. g4 g5 26. h×g5 ♖×g5 27. ♖h5! ♖g6 28. g5! h6 29. ♖×h6! ♖×g5 30. ♖h5! and Black resigns: 30. ..., ♖g6 31. ♖h1 ♖e6 32. ♖h8+ ♔g7 33. ♖h7#

*Building an outpost.*

[Event "??"] [Site "amsterdam"] [Date "1965.??.?"] [Round "??"]

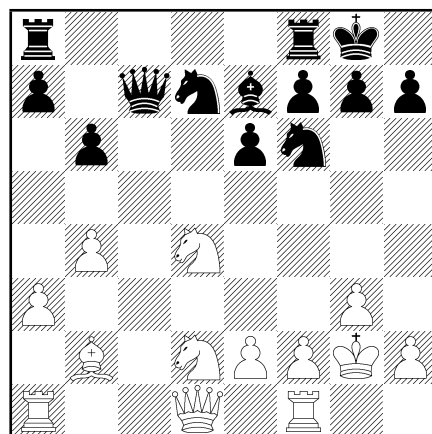
[White "botvinnik, m."] [Black "donner, jh"] [Result "1-0"]

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♕g2 ♕e7 5.O-O O-O 6.b3 b6 7.♕b2 ♕b7 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.d4 c5 10.dxc5 ♕xc5



11.♘bd2 ♘d7 12.a3 N 5f6 13.b4 ♕e7 Pretty level-looking? But Botvinnik has a keen and clear mind, and has spotted an outpost opportunity.

14.♘d4 ♕xg2 15.♔xg2 ♖c7



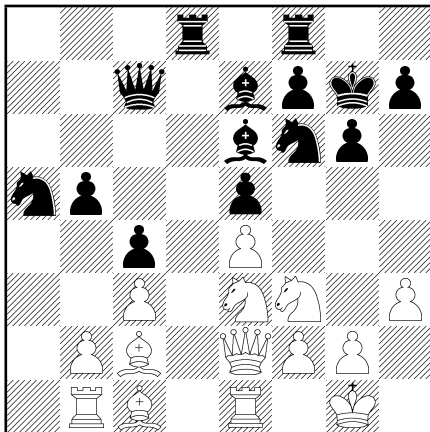
Perhaps now you can start to see it too. The exchange has made Black's white squares on the Q-side a little weak, and if White can use his extra space to get in b5, suddenly the N has a dream

home built on c6. 16.♖b3 ♜fc8 17.♜fc1 ♖b7+  
 18.♜f3 ♘d5 19.e4 N 5f6 20.b5 a6 21.♘c6 Bingo!  
 The rest is an effective exercise in realising this advantage. White will trade a pair of rooks - so Black can't use his two rooks to fight back along a file, but leaving White a rook to be a nuisance with. Black's one rook just can't dodge well enough to stop this...

21. ... ♙f8 22.a4 a×b5 23.a×b5 ♜×a1 24.♜×a1  
 ♜a8 25.♜d1 ♘e8 26.♘c4 ♘c5 27.e5 ♜c8 28.♜a1  
 ♜c7 29.♜a7 ♜×a7 30.♘×a7 ♜×a7 31.♘×b6 1-0

*Outpost with overprotection of supporting pawn*  
 (tal-bronstein)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.O-O  
 ♙e7 6.♜e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.c3 O-O 9.h3 ♘a5  
 10.♙c2 c5 11.d4 ♘c6 12.♘bd2 ♖b6 13.d×c5 d×c5  
 14.♘f1 ♙e6 15.♘e3 ♜ad8 16.♜e2 g6 17.♘g5 c4 !  
 (making an outpost out of d3) 18.a4 ♘g7 19.a×b5  
 a×b5 20.♜b1 ♘a5 21.♘f3 ♜c7



22.♘d5 ! 22. ... ♙×d5 23.e×d5 Unleashing the force built up behind the e-pawn.

23. ... ♜fe8 24.♜×e5 ♜×e5 25.♘×e5 ♘×d5  
 26.♜a1 ♘b3 27.♙×b3 c×b3 28.♙h6+ ! 28. ...  
 ♘g8 ?! 29.♘c6 ♜c8 30.♜ad1 ♜×c6 31.♜×d5 f6  
 32.♜×b5 g5 33.♜×b3 ♘f7 34.♜b7 ♜e6 35.♜×e6  
 ♘×e6 36.h4 ♜g8 37.f4 ♙c5+ 38.♘f1 g×h4  
 39.♜b5 ♜c8 40.f5+ ♘d6 41.b4 h3 42.♜×c5 h2  
 43.♙f4+ 1-0