

The Fighting King

by The Chess Tourist

A King March, also known as a King Walk, Wondering King, Steel King or Fighting King is used to describe the situation where the Chess King willingly or unwillingly joins the fray of the fight in the opening and middle game.

As beginners we are taught the King must be tucked away safely until most of the other pieces are exchanged off the board.

There are a few games that show that a King can be used as a fighting piece even in the middle game. Further, a seemingly safe king can be smoked out through a series of checks into the open where it is checkmated.

Grandmaster Savielly Tartakower, while he was still a chess journalist, advised:

“The monarch must be relieved of worry at all times! However, on occasion he will wade through the tangle of pieces like a sleepwalker and settle the outcome of the battle. Such attempts to use the king as a strong piece in the very middle game are not always successful. But there are occasions when the leader of the army assumes the role of a pitiless executioner. With a terrible laugh, he appears like a specter before the startled hostile ruler!”

We start with the most famous of these games with a Steel King:

The Event was the 15th edition of the **Interpolis Tilburg Chess Tournament** which was a series of very strong [chess](#) tournaments held in [Tilburg, Netherlands](#). It was established in 1977 and ran continuously through 1994 under the sponsorship of [Interpolis](#), an insurance company.

This was a time when GM Nigel Short was in his prime and went on to earn the right to challenge Garry Kasparov in a world championship match in 1993 at a fancy venue in London.



Short's opponent was Jan Timman who had the benefit of the local fan support and had performed quite well in the past editions of this tournament.

Here is the game that has immortalized Short in the annals of chess:

[Nigel Short-Jan Timman \[B04\]](#)

Tilburg, Netherlands 1991

**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7 7.Qe2
Nc6 8.O-O O-O 9.h3 a5 10.a4 dxe5 11.dxe5 Nd4 12.Nxd4 Qxd4
13.Re1 e6 14.Nd2 Nd5 15.Nf3 Qc5 16.Qe4 Qb4 17.Bc4 Nb6 18.b3
Nxc4 19.bxc4 Re8 20.Rd1 Qc5 21.Qh4 b6 22.Be3 Qc6 23.Bh6 Bh8
24.Rd8 Bb7 25.Rad1 Bg7 26.R8d7 Rf8 27.Bxg7 Kxg7 28.R1d4 Rae8
29.Qf6+ Kg8 30.h4 h5**

Black's pieces are tied up on the back rank and have to wait for the inevitable.

What would you do?

31.Kh2! Rc8 32.Kg3 Rce8 33.Kf4 Bc8 34.Kg5

1-0

The White King went and assisted in the checkmate of his black counterpart.

Having seen this game, Tiger Persson, a Swedish Grandmaster and multiple Swedish national champion, decided to plagiarize it in the 43rd Olympiad!

[Tiger Hillarp Persson-Tomas Laurusas \[A07\]](#)

Batumi, Georgia 2018

**1. Nf3 d5 2. g3 Nf6 3. Bg2 g6 4. c4 c6 5. b3 Bg7 6. Bb2 O-O 7. O-O a5 8. Nc3 Ne4
9. Na4 Bxb2 10. Nxb2 Nd7 11. d3 Nef6 12. d4 b6 13. Rc1 Bb7 14. Nd3 Rc8 15. Nfe5
Nxe5 16. dxe5 Nd7 17. Qd2 dxc4 18. Rxc4 Nxe5 19. Rh4 h5 20. Rd1 Nxd3 21. Qh6 Qd6
22. Rxd3 Qf6 23. Be4 Ba6 24. Re3 Qg7 25. Qg5 Rcd8 26. Qxe7 Rd1+ 27. Kg2 Qa1 28.
Bxc6 Rg1+**

Now the White King takes up arms and calmly walks to the frontline facing the Black King as the latter's army watches in disbelief!

29. Kf3 Qf1 30. Kf4 Qxf2+ 31. Kg5 Kg7 32. Rf4 Qxh2 33. Qf6+ Kh7 34.

Qxg6+ Kh8 35. Kh6 1-0

It is not often we see an instructive game where Tal was on the losing end. Here Geller's White King led by example and joined the frontline to execute the Black King

Geller, Efim P - Tal, Mihail [B08]

Moscow, USSR, 1975

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Be2 0-0 6.0-0 Bg4 7.Be3 Nc6 8.Qd2 e5 9.d5 Ne7 10.Rad1 Bd7 11.Ne1 Ng4 12.Bxg4 Bxg4 13.f3 Bd7 14.f4 exf4 15.Bxf4 f5 16.Nf3 fxe4 17.Nxe4 Bg4 18.Rde1 Qd7 19.Neg5 Rae8 20.c4 Nc8 21.Nd4 Rxe1 22.Rxe1 Re8 23.Rxe8+ Qxe8 24.h3 Bd7 25.Nde6 Bxe6 26.Nxe6 Qf7 27.b3 Qf6 28.Nxc7 Qa1+ 29.Kh2 Bd4 30.Qe2 Ne7 31.Nb5 Bg1+ 32.Kg3 Nf5+ 33.Kf3 Nh4+ 34.Kg4 Nf5 35.Qe8+ Kg7 36.Qd7+ Kh8 37.Nxd6 Qd1+ 38.Kg5 Qh5+ 39.Kf6 Bd4+ 40.Ke6 Ng7+ 41.Kf7 g5+ and black resigned in view of:

42.Kf8 h6 43.Nf7+ Kh7 44.Be5 Qg6 [44...Bxe5 45.Nxe5 and white mates faster as now the g6 square is no longer available for the queen to protect her monarch

45.Bxd4 Qf5 46.Qe7 Qg6 47.Nd6 h5 48.Bxg7 h4 49.Ne4 Qf5+ 50.Nf6+ Qxf6+ 51.Qxf6 b6 52.Qh6#

1-0

Sometimes the king goes for a walk involuntarily. The player uses the fact that the King will be exposed. Most times it involves a sacrifice to lure the king out from behind his fortress.

This is an old classic miniature illustrating just such a scenario:

Lasker, Edward - Thomas, George Alan [A83]

London blitz London (City of London 1912

1.d4 e6 2.Nf3 f5 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 Be7 5.Bxf6 Bxf6 6.e4 fxe4 7.Nxe4 b6 8.Ne5 0-0 9.Bd3 Bb7 10.Qh5 Qe7

So now black feels they have safely guarded their king and all his pieces are ready to be deployed but it is not meant to be!

11.Qxh7+! Kxh7 12.Nxf6+ Kh6 13.Neg4+ Kg5 14.h4+ Kf4 15.g3+ Kf3 16.Be2+ Kg2 17.Rh2+ Kg1 18.Kd2#

1-0

And here is a similar idea, this time it is the White King that is smoked out:

F Hermann - Hugo Hussong [C68]

Hauptturnier Frankfurt GER, 09.1930

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bc4 Nf6 5.d3 Bc5 6.Be3 d6 7.Nbd2 Be6 8.Bxc5 dxc5 9.Bxe6 fxe6 10.Nc4 Nd7
11.a4 Qf6 12.c3 0–0 13.0–0 Rad8 14.a5 Ne7 15.Qb3 Ng6 16.Qxb7 Nf4 17.Ne1 Qg5 18.Kh1 Rf6 19.Ne3
Rdf8 20.Qxc7 R8f7 21.Qc8+ Nf8 22.Qxc5 Qh5 23.Rg1

Now what?

23...Qxh2+!!

At the end of the game Alekhine, who was watching the game, commented that he gave a double exclamation for Hugo being able to see the whole sequence of moves to the “study-like finale by which the move is justified”.

24.Kxh2 Rh6+ 25.Kg3 Ne2+ 26.Kg4 Rf4+ 27.Kg5 Rh2 28.Qxf8+ Kxf8 29.Nf3 h6+ 30.Kg6 Kg8 31.Nxh2 Rf5

0–1

[Roberto Cifuentes Parada - Vadim Zvjaginsev \[D45\]](#)

Hoogovens Open Wijk aan Zee NED 1995

1.d4 e6 2.Nf3 d5 3.c4 Nf6 4.Nc3 c6 5.e3 Nbd7 6.Qc2 b6 7.Be2 Bb7 8.0–0 Be7

So far this is all according to theory.

**9.Rd1 0–0 10.e4 dxe4 11.Nxe4 Qc7 12.Nc3 c5 13.d5 exd5 14.cxd5 a6 15.Nh4 g6 16.Bh6 Rfe8 17.Qd2 Bd6
18.g3 b5 19.Bf3 b4 20.Ne2 Ne4 21.Qc2 Ndf6 22.Ng2 Qd7 23.Ne3 Rad8 24.Bg2**

And now let's invite the White King out for a walk...

**24...Nxf2!! 25.Kxf2 Rxe3 26.Bxe3 Ng4+ 27.Kf3 Nxh2+ 28.Kf2 Ng4+ 29.Kf3 Qe6 30.Bf4 Re8 31.Qc4 Qe3+
32.Bxe3 Rxe3+ 33.Kxg4 Bc8+ 34.Kg5 h6+ 35.Kxh6 Re5**

0–1

Black mates with Bf8 no matter what white plays.

This next game was played by the 6th World Champion in a Moscow International Open tournament.

[Botvinnik, Mikhail - Chekhover, Vitaly A \[A11\]](#)

Moscow International–02 Moscow 1935

**1.Nf3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.b3 Nf6 4.Bb2 Be7 5.e3 0–0 6.Be2 c6 7.0–0 Nbd7 8.Nc3 a6 9.Nd4 dxc4 10.bxc4 Nc5
11.f4 Qc7 12.Nf3 Rd8 13.Qc2 Ncd7 14.d4 c5 15.Ne5 b6 16.Bd3 cxd4 17.exd4 Bb7 18.Qe2 Nf8 19.Nd1 Ra7
20.Nf2 Qb8 21.Nh3 h6 22.Ng5 hxg5 23.fxg5 N8d7 24.Nxf7 Kxf7 25.g6+**

White has just sacrificed 2 knights for a mating attack. It is important to note that knowing the exact sequence of moves all the way to mate on b2 is absolutely necessary. Otherwise white would just be 2 pieces down.

25...Kg8 26.Qxe6+ Kh8 27.Qh3+ Kg8 28.Bf5 Nf8 29.Be6+ Nxe6 30.Qxe6+ Kh8 31.Qh3+ Kg8 32.Rxf6 Bxf6 33.Qh7+ Kf8 34.Re1 Be5 35.Qh8+ Ke7 36.Qxg7+ Kd6 37.Qxe5+ Kd7 38.Qf5+ Kc6 39.d5+ Kc5 40.Ba3+ Kxc4 41.Qe4+ Kc3 42.Bb4+ Kb2 43.Qb1#

1-0

In our last game white manages to flush out Black's King from his domicile only for the Black monarch to march all the way to the White King's palace with his army in tow!

[Hansen,Lars Henrik Bech \(2040\) - Hansen,Evgenia \(2205\) \[B33\]](#)

Politiken Cup 11th Copenhagen 1989

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Nd5 Nxd5 8.exd5 Ne7 9.c4 Ng6 10.Bd3 Be7 11.0-0 f5 12.Kh1 a6 13.Nc3 e4 14.Be2 Ne5 15.f4 Nf7 16.Be3 0-0 17.Rc1 Bd7 18.b4 Rc8 19.Rg1 Kh8 20.a4 Bf6 21.a5 Nh6 22.Na4 g5 23.Nb6 Rc7 24.c5 Bb5 25.Bxb5 Ng4 26.Qe2 axb5 27.g3 Rg8 28.fxg5 Bxg5 29.Bd4+ Bf6 30.Qb2 Rg6 31.c6 Kg8 32.cxb7 Bxd4 33.Qxd4 Rh6 34.Rge1 Nxe2 35.Kg2 Nf3 36.Qe3 Rh2+ 37.Kf1 Nxe1 38.Qg5+ Qxg5 39.b8Q+

Check! Your majesty!

39...Kg7 40.Rxc7+ Kh6 41.Qf8+ Kh5 42.Rxh7+ Kg4 43.Rg7

And finally, the Black King completes the mating net of the White King

43...Kf3 44.Kg1 Qh5

0-1

What do we learn from these games? The King can be a fighting piece in the middle game as well but you have got to create the right path for it.

Also, just because there is a pawn cover does not mean the king cannot be flushed out with an opportune sacrifice.

