Contents

6 Knight Fork

The knight is considered to be the least powerful piece in chess (besides the pawn, of course). As the great world champion Jose Raul Capablanca taught us, the other minor piece, the bishop, is better in 90% of cases. However, due to its specific qualities the knight is a tremendously dangerous piece. It is nimble and its jumps can be quite shocking. That is why a double attack by a knight is usually distinguished from other double attacks and called a fork.

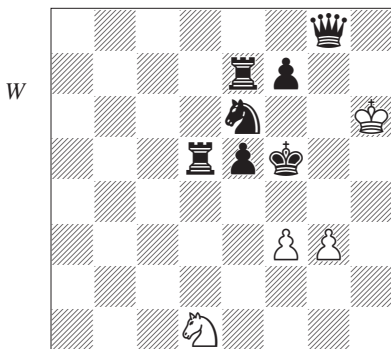A single knight may cause incredible damage in the right circumstances:
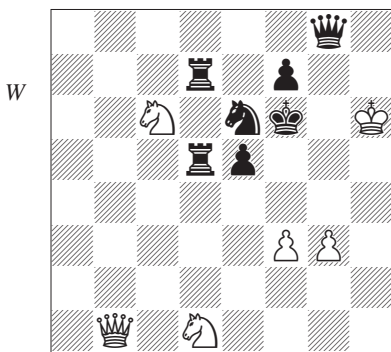
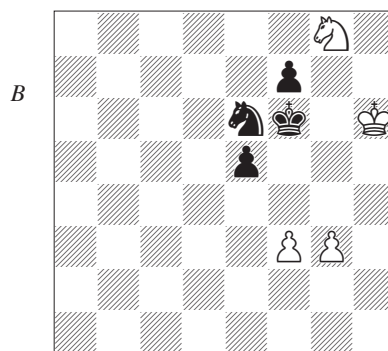**Alb. Beliavsky**
1st Prize, *Korolkov-100 Jubilee*, 2008

First White decoys his opponent's pieces into forks:
1 ♕f5+!! ♔xf5 2 ♘e7+!! ♖xe7 *(D)*

White is now a queen and two rooks down – a deficit of approximately 19 'pawns'. His only remaining piece is a knight. But a brave one...
3 ♘e3+ ♔f6 4 ♘xd5+ ♔f5 5 ♘xe7+ ♔f6 6 ♘xg8+ *(D)*

The knight has managed to remove most of Black's army. Now it is the king's turn to suffer:
6...♔f5 7 ♘e7+ ♔f6 8 ♘d5+ ♔f5 9 g4#

Our opponent will not be very eager to walk into a fork, so we may need to force it. Deflection and decoy are very common methods:
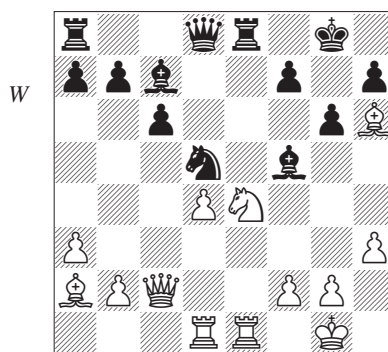
Ligterink – Pachman
Donner Memorial, Amsterdam 1994

21 ♗xd5 cxd5
White seems to be in an unpleasant pin, but he has fully appreciated the power of his horse.

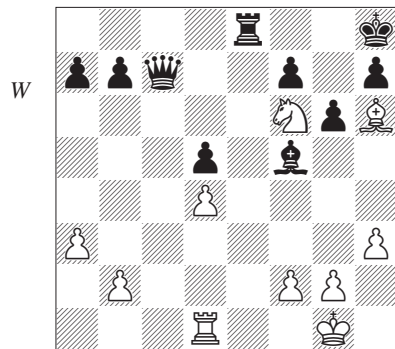**22 ♕xc7!**

Deflection from the vital f6-square.

22...♕xc7?

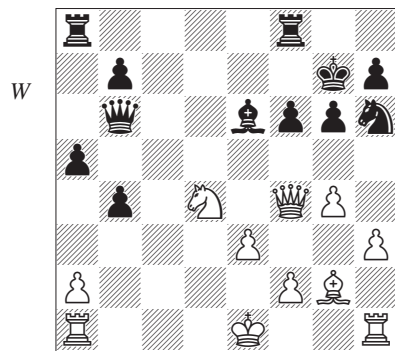Black had to settle for 22...♗xe4 23 ♕xb7 with some chances for a draw.

23 ♘f6+ ♔h8 24 ♖xe8+ 1-0

Black realized what was coming after the forced 24...♖xe8 *(D)*:

25 ♗g7+!! decoys the king to g7, after which the knight picks up a rook and a queen.

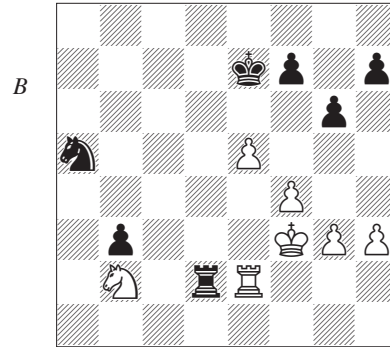Deflection is especially effective in conjunction with decoy.

Pashikian – Ozturk
Istanbul 2007

24 ♕c7+! 1-0

It suddenly becomes clear that Black's queen is overloaded.

A far-advanced pawn may also be bait for a piece to be forked (*see following diagram*):

The passed pawn on b3 is well blockaded '*à la* Nimzowitsch' with a knight. However, Black can force a change of guard:

Semionova – Alexandrova
*Alushta (Women's Zonal) 1999*

53...♖xb2! 54 ♖xb2 ♘c4

The knight will usher the b-pawn through to promotion. Because of the possible fork on d2, the pawn is invulnerable.

55 ♖e2 b2 56 ♖e1 b1♕ 57 ♖xb1 ♘d2+ 58 ♔g4 ♘xb1 59 ♔g5 ♘d2 60 ♔h6 ♘e4 61 g4 ♘f2 62 ♔xh7 ♘xh3 63 f5 g5 64 ♔g7 ♘f2 65 ♔h6 ♘xg4+ 0-1

One last fork before the curtain falls.

A dominant position of a rook and knight duo can even overpower a queen, as in the following group of diagrams.
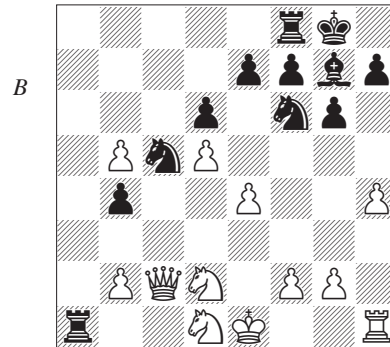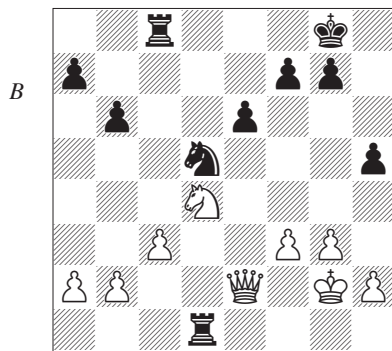

Raetsky – Avrukh
Biel 1996

18...♖c1! 0-1

The next diagram features a similar motif, with the knight executing the fork on a slightly different square. In the second diagram overleaf, the decoy is prefaced by an exchange sacrifice.
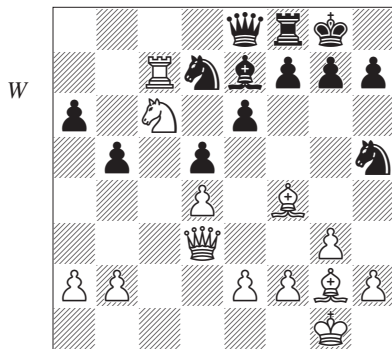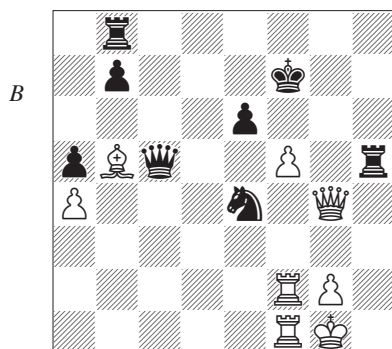
Fedorowicz – Pieterse
Ostend 1987

21 ♖c8! 1-0

Kounalakis – Mastrovasilis
European Ch, Plovdiv 2008

23...♖xd4! 0-1
24 cxd4 ♖c2 25 ♕xc2 ♘e3+ 26 ♔f2 ♘xc2 nets a knight for Black.
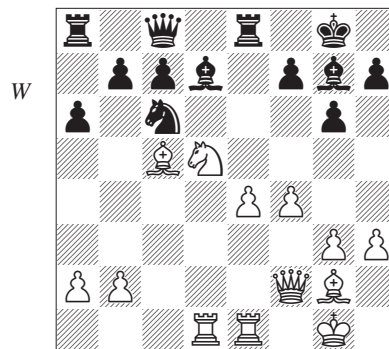
Felgaer – Peralta
Argentine Ch, La Plata 2008

In this position it looks like Black is in trouble, but the tricky knight decides the game by carrying out the decoy on a totally unexpected square.

44...♕xf2+! 45 ♖xf2 ♖h1+!! 0-1

The forking threat may be useful in attacking weak points.

Rogozenko – Voigt
2nd Bundesliga 2006/7

Black's troops are awkwardly placed. In this case forking will give White an option to attack on c7 for free.
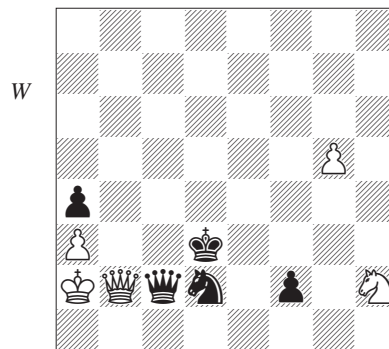
21 ♗b6! ♗xh3
21...cxb6 22 ♘xb6 nets at least a pawn for White.

22 ♘xc7
Another fork.

22...♗xg2 23 ♔xg2 1-0

We should also examine the **fork as a defensive method**:

**E. Pähtz – Stefanova**
Reykjavik 2008

Elisabeth Pähtz could have saved a half-point here, if she had made the most of her tricky knight.

67 ♔a1?

She had to exchange queens first, and advance her passed pawn as far as possible: 67 ♕xc2+ ♔xc2 68 g6 ♘e4 69 g7 ♘f6 and now 70 ♘g4! is an excellent multi-purpose manoeuvre – the knight is attacking the pawn, deflecting the knight, and in fact is still controlling the f1-square due to the fork on e3! After 70...♘xg4 71 g8♕ f1♕ 72 ♕c8+ ♔d2 White has the choice between a simple draw with 73 ♕xg4 or stalemate after 73 ♕c2+ ♔xc2.

67...♕c6 68 ♘f1 ♘xf1 69 ♕xf2 ♕c1+ 70 ♔a2 ♕c4+ 71 ♔a1 ♘e3 72 g6 ♘c2+ 73 ♔b2 ♕b3+ 74 ♔c1 ♕xa3+ 0-1

Chess-players are often advised not to play for traps. And it is a good piece of advice in those cases where the move that lays the trap does not have any other useful purpose. But if you have a chance to set a trap while furthering your constructive ideas in the position, you should do not hesitate to do so. Even if the chances that your opponent will fall into it are small, you are losing nothing.
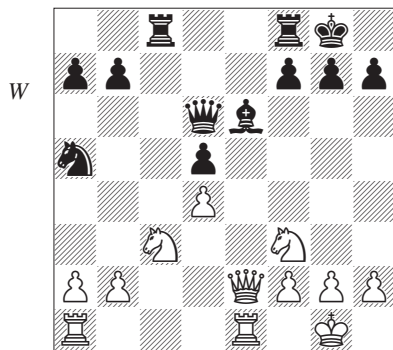
Bojkov – Schaufelberger
2nd Bundesliga 2007/8

Black's obvious plan is to occupy the e-file with his rooks and initiate simplifications. If I want to keep my slight advantage I need to find the correct way to hinder his plans.

16 ♘g5!

I spent quite a lot of time on this move. Little by little I realized that if he chooses the most natural reply his queen might be hanging!

16...♖ce8!

Correct! To his credit, my experienced opponent sensed or most probably saw the danger: 16...♖fe8? 17 ♕h5 h6 18 ♖xe6! fxe6 19 ♕f7+ ♔h8 20 ♕xe8+! ♖xe8 21 ♘f7+ +–. My trap did not bring immediate victory, but I benefited from the fact that Black's rook abandoned the open c-file. I kept a slight edge and went on to win fairly quickly after some errors by my opponent:

17 ♕d3 g6 18 ♕b5 ♘c6?! 19 ♖ad1 ♖e7 20 ♕c5 ♕d8?! 21 ♖e3 ♖fe8 22 ♘f3 f6 23 ♖de1 ♔f7? 24 ♘b5 1-0

Nisipeanu discovered that Black missed a wonderful and unexpected knight fork in the next position:
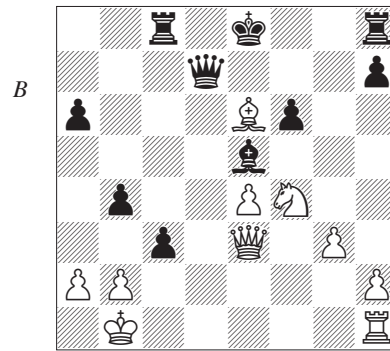
Zhadanov – Tutulan
Romania 2003

What? You do not believe him? You do not see a black knight on the board? There, he will show you:

1...♕d1+!!

Transposing with 1...c2+ 2 ♔c1 ♕d1+! also works.

2 ♖xd1 c2+ 3 ♔c1 ♗xb2+! 4 ♔xb2

4 ♔d2 c1♕+ 5 ♖xc1 ♗xc1+ 6 ♔e2 ♗xe3 7 ♗xc8 ♗xf4 8 gxf4 a5 is also winning for Black.

Now rather than 4...cxd1♕ Black plays:

4...cxd1♘+!! 5 ♔b3 ♘xe3 and when the smoke clears, we see that Black is winning: 6 ♗xc8 a5 7 ♔a4 ♔e7 8 ♗a6 (8 ♗b7 ♘f1 –+) 8...♔d6 9 ♔xa5 ♖b8 10 ♗b5 (10 ♔a4 ♘g4 11 h4 ♘f2 –+) 10...♖a8+ 11 ♔b4 ♖xa2 12 h4 ♔e5 13 ♗c6 ♘f1 –+.

Unfortunately for Black, he did not appreciate the greatness of the underpromotion and