



BOOK REVIEWS

From the Archives

Hosted by
Mark Donlan



CHESSTHEATRE
Play through and download
the games from
ChessCafe.com in the
[DGT Game Viewer](#).



From the Archives...

Since it came online many years ago, ChessCafe.com has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the ChessCafe.com home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

Beyond the Basics

by Glenn Budzinski

Bishop versus Knight: The Verdict, by Steve Mayer, 1997 International Chess Enterprises (American Batsford Chess Library), Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 224pp., \$22.50 (ChessCafe Price: \$16.95)

One of the more difficult concepts to understand in chess is the relative values of the bishop and the knight. Of course, both assume the same numerical value in the world of statistics, but across the board, the situation is seldom so cut and dry. Virginia master Steve Mayer takes a hard look at the current status of the minor pieces in his book *Bishop versus Knight: The Verdict*.

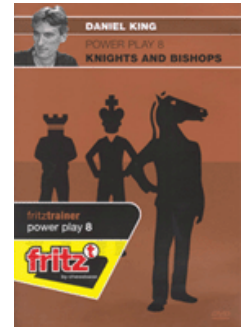
Essentially, Mayer's approach is to examine certain middlegame and endgame positions and themes, each of which is segregated into one of the book's seventeen chapters. There are also indexes of players, openings, and endings.

Summarizing the chapters, one finds the following: a short discussion on the basic movements of the bishop and the knight; additional characteristics of both, together with Steinitz' method; Chigorin's successful and unsuccessful use of the two knights; the Problem Knight; the Problem Bishop; the Over-rated Knight; Changing the Color of a Bishop; speeding one's development through exchanges; the Bad Bishop; sacrifices to open the position for the bishops; timely exchanges of minor pieces; shattered pawns and minor piece play; The Ruy Lopez Ending; rook and bishop versus rook and knight endings; queen and knight versus queen and bishop endings.

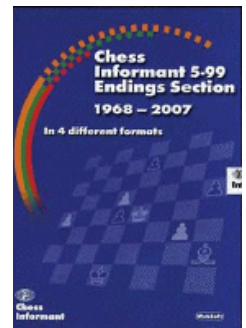
Since the book is "meant primarily as a middlegame primer on the topic of bishop versus" according to Mayer in the Preface, it seems appropriate to initially review some basic bishop and knight concepts as addressed by a few other authors of note. Pachman, in his classic work *Modern Chess Strategy*, devotes about twenty-seven pages to the "Minor Pieces," where he discusses such topics as good and bad bishops, the importance of a well-posted knight, the two bishops, etc. He also offers clear examples of bishop versus knight endings, showing the superiority of one piece versus the other.

Euwe and Kramer in their two-volume set *The Middle Game* include three chapters and about twenty-five pages on the study of the bishop and knight. Similar to Pachman, they discuss the active bishop, as well as the good and bad bishop, and that bishops like open positions and knights generally do best in closed games. They also offer an interesting theory about knights: a knight

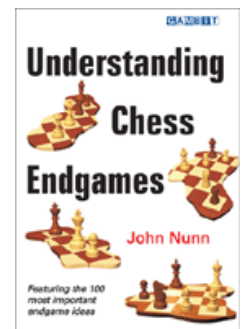
Purchases from our [shop](#) help
keep ChessCafe.com freely
accessible:



*Power Play 8:
Knights and Bishops*
by Daniel King



*Chess Informant
5-99 Endings Section*
by Chess Informant



*Understanding
Chess Endgames*
by John Nunn

on the sixth rank is usually a winning advantage; on the fifth rank, it offers good attacking chances and on the fourth rank, it offers good prospects for eventual attack but also serves a defensive role. They assess the two bishops as clearly stronger than bishop and knight or two knights in the endgame, but suggest that prior middlegame positions may not be so easily assessed.

Looking at a more recent work, Silman's *How to Reassess Your Chess* (Expanded Third Edition) from 1993, one finds nearly eighty pages devoted to the study of bishop and knight. Many of Silman's concepts, however, are quite similar to those elucidated by Euwe and Kramer, including the aforementioned knight maxims.

In light of the respected sources, Mayer appears to have hit all of the basic minor piece fundamentals that one would expect to find in a book that purports to concern itself with such matters.

Beyond the basics, the next question is what has he added? The book contains a number of good examples of the concepts being addressed. For example, a clear example of the "superfluous piece," a phrase coined by noted Russian teacher and author Mark Dvoretsky, can be seen in the game **Larsen-Donner**, Beverwijk 1960. Thus, after the moves **1 g3 e5 2 Bg2 d5 3 Nf3 Bd6 4 0-0 Ne7 5 c4 c6 6 d3 0-0 7 Nbd2 Nd7 8 e4 dxe4 9 Nxe4 Bc7 10 b3 Re8 11 Bb2 Nf5 12 Re1 Nf8 13 Qd2 f6 14 Rad1 Ne6 15 b4 a5 16 b5 Bb6 17 bxc6 bxc6 18 Qc1 a4 19 c5 Ba5 20 Bc3 Re7 21 Bxa5 Rxa5 22 Nfd2 Ned4 23 Nc4 Raa7 24 f4**, all four knights are well-placed.



[FEN "2bq2k1/r3r1pp/2p2p2/2P1pn2/p1NnNP2/3P2P1/P5BP/2QRR1K1 b - f3 0 24"]

The black knight on f5, however, is considered to be superfluous, since it can only go to one other good square, which is already occupied by the other black knight (pp.90-91).

Mayer's "Problem Bishop" (similar to a bad bishop) is depicted by the following position from **Bronstein-Beliavsky**, Erevan 1975: **1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bf5 5 Nc5 Qb6 6 g4 Bg6 7 f4 e6 8 Qe2 Be7 9 h4 h5 10 f5 exf5 11 g5**



[FEN "rn2k1nr/pp2bpp1/1qp3b1/2N2pPp/3P3P/8/PPP1Q3/R1B1KBNR b KQkq - 0 11"]

The black bishop remained entombed behind its own pawns for the remainder of the game (pp.77-79).

Interesting is Mayer's discussion of Chigorin's supposed preference for

knights over bishops. Mayer's opinion is "that neither Chigorin nor the major commentators on his play believed that he favoured knights over bishops. Instead, certain lesser and less attentive writers jumped from the special case of Chigorin's Defence [1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6] to the much broader claim that Chigorin favoured knights over bishops" (p. 30). In fact, Chigorin wasn't even particularly adept with the two knights against the two bishops, as indicated by his less than inspiring record of five wins, four draws, and fifteen losses with the knights (p. 47).

One could argue, however, that this is more a book of "don'ts" than it is a book of "do's." For instance, at least half of the chapters deal with what *not* to do with a bishop or knight. Additionally, when one considers that there are three chapters that concern strictly endgame themes and one chapter on fundamentals, the book is suddenly reduced to about six chapters or seventy-five pages of material on minor piece, middle game strategies, or what one should do with a bishop or knight.

By Mayer's own admission in the Preface, he "assumes a certain amount of knowledge on the part of the reader. It is possible that some readers will feel a bit lost at times." Frankly, this writer, a veteran of twenty-five years of tournament play, felt a bit lost at times. Perhaps the problem is that the author never really made up his mind about what kind of book he wanted to write. Although he identifies the work as a bishop and knight "primer," there are not a lot of detailed explanations provided for basic concepts. There is also a good chunk of material that one would not expect to find in an introductory book about minor pieces: such rather esoteric topics as the Ruy Lopez ending, queen and knight versus queen and bishop endings, the Unexpected Exchange (the finer points of exchanging a well-placed minor piece for a less active one), and the Steinitzian Restriction Method are probably not going to go anywhere but over the head of a less experienced player buying this book to learn the fundamentals.

On the other hand, there's no doubt that the author put forth a serious effort. And, in fact, it does provide coverage of all of the basic bishop and knight knowledge that could reasonably be expected to be found in a primer. As long as the less experienced player realizes that certain chapters might not be appropriate for his skill level at the present time, Mayer's work is different enough (and good enough) to warrant a second look by most anyone looking to improve his play with the minor pieces.

[Order *Bishop versus Knight: The Verdict*](#)
by Steve Mayer

This article first appeared at [ChessCafe.com](#) in March, 1998.

 [TOP OF PAGE](#)

 [HOME](#)

 [COLUMNS](#)

 [LINKS](#)

 [ARCHIVES](#)

 [ABOUT THE
CHESS CAFE](#)

[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

© 2010 BrainGamz, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
"ChessCafe.com®" is a registered trademark of BrainGamz, Inc.