

GENNADIY LOGINOV

KNIGHT'S TOUR



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Sometimes life puts us in a stalemate situation. Pawns dream about the Queen status but instead, they fall victims of the tough struggle for the honour of the chess crown. The King is tired of intrigues and machination but he is forced to follow the rules of the game. Everyone understands that a shaky truce cannot last forever. The last hope is assigned to reconnaissance before the battle. And that's the task for a true chess Knight.

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Knight's Tour

All of the local nobility gathered to see the White Knight off on his long journey. The traveller had a knight's title, so everyone addressed him accordingly. Actually, he had very equine features, and although it was obvious to any observer that he was more likely a knight-horse than a horse-knight, calling him simply the Horse was considered somewhat disrespectful. Traditions existed for a reason, and everyone present would agree with that. The White Queen led the parade, and between two White Rooks, a column of White Pawns in their ceremonial vestments walked accompanied by two White Bishops. They honoured their hero, and His Majesty the White King personally presented him with a new hat, since the weather was quite cold.

The White Knight's twin brother even shed a single tear of joy, being touched by what he saw. More recently, their enemy, the Blacks, had plotted, ending in an attempt on the White King's life. Retreating with his loyal pawns, who willingly gave their lives for the honour of the chess crown, the White King had snivelled and prayed while his foes had followed on his heels, driving him into a corner. But the White King had been saved by the sudden appearance of the White Knight, who had violated the cunning plans of the enemies.

Some called him «Upstart». One possible cause was the fact that he appeared where no one expected him and stuck his nose where no one asked him. Another reason was his ability to jump effortlessly over any pieces, allied or enemy, who stood on the intermediate squares on the trajectory of his move. Of course, other chessmen secretly envied him for being unattached to the board. He was easy-going, swift and courageous, he wasn't afraid of adventure and risk, and that's why even the Black King couldn't hide from the White Knight's attack behind the backs of his vassals. Enemies involuntarily respected and feared the White Knight who dared to threaten the Black Queen alone, without the risk of counter-attack. No one else could do it.

Black Pawns hunted him, Black Bishops and Black Rooks chased him, and the Black Queen attempted ambushes, but the White Knight left a trap again and again and made fools out of them, prancing victoriously on the board.

White Bishops, proudly marching along their diagonals, never altered their once determined political course: they often accused the White Knight of frivolity, recklessness and ideological inconsistency, since he changed the square colour at each turn. But the White Knight acted as he considered necessary, forcing to reckon with his choice both allies and aliens.

He stood alone in closed positions, where the possibilities of long-range pieces were greatly limited. Rushing like a whirlwind, he could beat anyone without fear of retaliation. And his star turn was the famous «fork,» when the White Knight threatened to attack two or more chessmen at once. Only Black Knights could kick him back for his impudent raids, but, realistically calculating the possible chances and risks, they usually didn't bring the matter to an open confrontation.

These days, a temporary ceasefire was planned between the parties of the conflict, because they needed rest before a new battle; therefore, having made fifty bloodless moves, the opponents declared a draw. Naturally, no one had any illusions, and the White Knight, who had repeatedly proved his courage and devotion to the White Cause, was given the task of scouting the theatre of future military operations under the guise of a peaceful tour. The optimal route also implied that the White Knight would visit each square of the chessboard no more than once. All in all, he had to examine sixty-four

squares without repetition, which was possible, but still wasn't an easy task to perform. However, the White Knight had no doubt – he could handle it.

The history of the confrontation between the two conflicting groups rooted in hoary antiquity. Numerous political scientists, historians and philosophers could give numerous reasons for its beginning, blowing away a century-old layer of dust from ancient chronicles that kept records of old openings, middlegames and endings, study each zugzwang turn by turn and make assumptions about whether it had been possible to avoid this or that checkmate which had been announced to the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the present Kings. In the White Knight's opinion, things were much more straightforward and banal.

Firstly, White and Black pieces had different colours. And secondly, they lived in different parts of the world, occupying opposite sides of the chessboard. And for the vast majority, these reasons were more than enough for the emergence of persistent hostility and the outbreak of armed conflict.

Indeed, in the depth of the heart, each Pawn (no matter, White or Black) cherished the hope of walking through all squares, overcoming all obstacles on the way to the opposite end of the board, and being promoted to the Queen or at least to the Knight in some cases. When other chessmen stood up the path to success, conflict was inevitable.

Of course, only a few reached the opposite side. Many of them sincerely believed that it was better there than at home. Whether it was or not is the topic of a separate conversation.

Strong pieces wanted to get as much influence and space as possible, that's why they sought to occupy the board centre, possibly freeing it of all enemy pieces. And realizing that they could never control their enemies alone, the pieces united on the principle of kinship and resemblance with others of the same colour and starting position.

Although some meticulous researchers tried to find a certain natural similarity between multi-coloured pieces, insisting on their common origin from monochrome pieces (presumably, the united Grays, who had migrated along the length of the entire playing space in time immemorial). They traced an analogy in the similarity of the initial setup and appearance of the pieces living on different sides of the board, but not everyone believed this theory. For the majority, it had absolutely no value: well, maybe they once had common ancestors, but now they are enemies – so what's the difference?

Of course, there were pacifists and cosmopolitans who periodically claimed that lined boundaries should be abolished, letter and number coordinates should be cancelled, all squares and pieces should be painted in the same colour, and chessmen had to forget all past offences, living in one big friendly family; but this romantic nonsense wasn't taken seriously, and if someone pushed for this too persistently, he was silenced.

Some saw the reasons for the current situation in the shortcomings of the political regime, but it also seemed to the White Knight quite far-fetched: yes, chess pieces had a monarchy, with kings, queens, strong and weak figures, pawns; but at the same time, in formally democratic draughts, for example, despite the loud statements that all men were equal, everybody still wanted to become kings.

Proponents of the conspiracy theory traced the system in the periodic repetition of certain moves and situations, others attributed everything to historical regularity, and believers stated that behind all the moves and events on the playing board, including the most insignificant, someone's

higher will could be seen – but since the chess party had entered the Age of Enlightenment, such views were denied and ridiculed.

Anyway, all these questions were eternal and couldn't be resolved just like this, on the ride. The White Knight liked to think in his spare time whether there was a game outside the board, but now he was too busy by current concerns. After marking some time on the original square, he warmly said goodbye to all of those who had come to see him off, and began his long and arduous journey of sixty-three moves.

The first few turns were easy for him and brought almost nothing worth mentioning. The White Knight had not yet had time to yearn for a home in a foreign land, but was full of energy and vigor, appreciating the trust of the White King himself. He realized the importance and significance of his mission and believed that he wouldn't fail his banner.

Later, passing through uncharted paths, he saw a nightingale for the first time. Of course, the White Knight had never seen these birds before and, moreover, had not heard their song, knowing only something vague about it from tall tales. Therefore, he could be mistaken. But he really wanted to believe that he was looking at a nightingale. Let it be so, he decided. This nightingale, green and fat, circled gracefully above the board, and then landed right before the White Knight and buzzed, rubbing its front pair of feet.

The White Knight wasn't well versed in music and singing. Chess composers were incomparably closer to him than musical ones, after all. But he knew that all normal nightingales sang delightfully by definition, bringing the trembling admiration to any sophisticated connoisseur, so he also tried to fill himself with high and bright feelings, being ready to absorb all the best from nature.

The nightingale's body exuded subtle and delicate aromas of blooming spring. Perhaps the White Knight had nothing to compare it with, but, adding two and two, he made a reasonable assumption: the delicate spring aromas should smell just like this. What else could one expect from a nightingale, after all?

Having finished its song, the green nightingale flew away, gracefully fluttering its translucent wings, and the White Knight, inspired and filled with bright feelings, resumed his interrupted journey.

Occupying one of the light squares, he found the Man from draughts nearby. He was in a hurry going somewhere for his business. Of course, they were from different kins and, despite good neighbourly relations and partnership in several fields, they had different goals and purposes. But still, they had the same colour, sharing the Great White Idea, even if they understood it differently.

Therefore, pausing for a friendly conversation, the White Knight persuaded the White Man to deliver his message to home, and the White Man assured him that his path would lie not far from the position of the White King, and in a few moves, he would give him the letter.

The message said that the loyal servant missed home, his native square and all the familiar pieces, but, despite this, his tour was going well, and he would tell all in great detail personally after his return. In fact, the White Knight wanted to say a lot more, but at the same time, he couldn't find the words, because sometimes emotions and feelings are more important than the most expressive phrases.

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