

## Traps in the Three Knights Opening

*Richard Westbrook, 2004*

The Three Knights Opening is a popular way to begin a game of chess. It consists of the moves **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 ...** (Note that White's second and third moves are transposable.) If Black plays 3 ... Nf6, the game is called the Four Knights Opening.

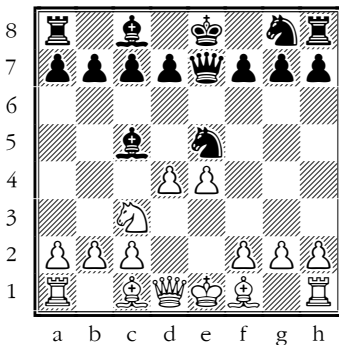
We will look at **3...Bc5** and **3...Bb4**. Both of these moves are good as long as Black follows up correctly. The problems which arise for Black are caused by later mistakes.

**Trap One:** White uses a pin and knight fork to win decisive material. This theme is common.

**1.e4 e5**  
**2.Nf3 Nc6**  
**3.Nc3 Bc5**  
**4.Nxe5! Nxe5**

Black can play 4...Nf6  
 5.Nxc6 dxc6  
 6.Be2 Ng4  
 7.Bxg4 Qh4  
 with equal chances.

**5.d4 ...**



**5... Qe7?**

Correct is 5...Bd6.

**6.Nd5! Qd6**  
**7.dxc5 Qxc5**  
**8.Bf4! d6?**  
**9.b4! Qc6**  
**10.Bb5! Qxb5**  
**11.Nxc7+ 1-0.**

**Trap Two:** Black tries 5...Bxd4?

**1.e4 e5**  
**2.Nf3 Nc6**  
**3.Nc3 Bc5**  
**4.Nxe5 Nxe5**  
**5.d4 Bxd4**  
**6.Qxd4 Qf6**

Better is 6... d6  
 7.Bf4 f6 (7...Qf6 8.Nb5)  
 8.0-0-0 but White has an excellent game.

**7.Nb5 Kd8**  
**8.Qc5 1-0.**

White threatens Qf8#, and Nc7 (Reti-Dunkelblum, Vienna, 1914.)

**Trap Three:** Black tries 5...Bb6?

**1.e4 e5**  
**2.Nf3 Nc6**  
**3.Nc3 Bc5**  
**4.Nxe5 Nxe5**  
**5.d4 Bb6?**  
**6.dxe5 f6**  
**7.Bc4 ...**

Also strong is

**7.Nd5 fxe5?**  
**8.Qh5+ Kf8**  
**9.Qxe5.**

**7... fxe5??**

Better is 7... Qe7 but White is still winning.  
**8.exf6 Nxf6**  
**9.0-0.**

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**8.Qh5+ Kf8**  
**9.Qf7# 1-0.**

Soares-Pinho, Lisbon (1.1), 2001.

**Trap Four:** Black tries 5...d6?

**1.e4 e5**  
**2.Nf3 Nc6**  
**3.Nc3 Bc5**  
**4.Nxe5 d6**  
**5.Nxc6 bxc6**  
**6.Bc4 Nf6**  
**7.d4! Bg4?**

This allows White to attack two pieces with pawns. Better is 7...Bb6.

**8.f3 Bh5**  
**9.dxc5 dxc5**  
**10.Qxd8+ Rxd8**  
**11.Bg5 Rd7**  
**12.0-0 0-0**  
**13.e5 1-0.**

Suarez-Garcia, Asturias, 1997.

**Trap Five:** Black avoids the Center Fork Trick, but opens up the game too soon.

**1.e4 e5**  
**2.Nf3 Nc6**  
**3.Nc3 Bb4**  
**4.Bb5!?** ...

This move is "OK," but better are either

**4.Nd5 Ba5;** or  
**4.Bc4 Nf6 (or ...d6).**

**4... Nge7**

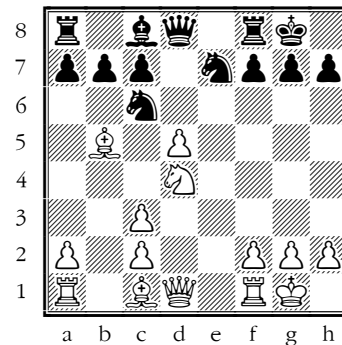
This is better than ...Nf6 even though the knight is not on its normal square. If White takes on c6, Black can recapture with the Ne7 and later may be able to attack with f7-f5.

**5.0-0 0-0**  
**6.d4 exd4**

**7.Nxd4 d5?**

Black is not yet ready to open up the game, but has a good game after the simple 7...d6.

**8.exd5 Bxc3**  
**9.bxc3 ...**



**9... Qxd5?**

Correct is 9...Nxd4.

**10.Nxc6! bxc6**

If **10... Qxb5?**

**11.Nxe7+ Kh8**

White has won a piece;

and if **10... Qxd1??**

**11.Nxe7+ Kh8**

**12.Rxd1 ...**

White has won two pieces!

**11.Qxd5 cxd5**

**12.Ba3 ...**

White will win the exchange and should win the game. For example,

**12... c6**

**13.Bxe7 cxb5**

**14.Bxf8 Kxf8 1-0.**