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E.T.A. Hoffmann's original *Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, from 1816, was translated into English by Ralph Manheim and, with [illustrations by Maurice Sendak](#), was published in 1984. This Sendak image, of the Mouse King with his seven heads, is from that work. Copyright, Maurice Sendak Estate, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with Sendak's work.

Imaginative worlds like the Shire, Hogwarts, Narnia, Mordor—all created many years after E.T.A. Hoffman wrote his *Nutcracker* tale—are like the worlds children create in their own minds.

Are those places, and their inhabitants, any different from the *Nutcracker* and the Mouse King (and his armies) who come alive on Christmas Eve after the midnight stroke of a clock?

"Sound the advance, faithful drummer!" cried Nutcracker, and the drum roll made the glass cabinet rattle furiously.

Then, as Marie watched, there was a strange clattering inside. All the lids on the boxes of Fritz's toy soldiers suddenly burst open and out sprang the little army. The soldiers jumped down to the bottom shelf and formed up neatly, as Nutcracker rushed boldly along their ranks.

"Why don't any of you blasted trumpeters sound the call?" shouted Nutcracker angrily. He turned to the commander, who was looking very pale.

"General, you are brave and experienced," Nutcracker said solemnly, "and we need to master the situation quickly. Take command of the cavalry, and artillery, and do your duty!"

The General whistled louder than a hundred trumpets and Marie heard a tramping and neighing from the cupboard.

The regiment of hussars, glittering in their brand new coats, came trooping out to face the mice. Their band played and their banners waved as they marched past Nutcracker.

Next, Fritz's artillery swung into action, drawing up on the floor in front of the waiting cavalry. Boom, boom! went the guns, as a shower of sugar plums shot from the cannon and plastered the mouse battalions in white powder.

But the heavy guns did the most damage, from the best position on top of Mama's footstool. Poom, poom, poom! they blazed, mowing down the mice in a murderous barrage of ginger nuts.

Everyone fought bravely, of course, and the advancing mouse battalions kept bringing up more reserves. They even captured a few guns. For a long time it was unclear which side was winning.

Marie could hardly see anything for the smoke and sugar dust, and the noise of the cannon blasts was deafening. Skillful mice peppered the hussars with little balls of silver shot. The evil-smelling shot made horrid dark spots on the hussar's uniforms, or it whizzed and whistled past and smashed into the glass cabinet.

"To die so young," wailed Miss Clara, "and the loveliest doll in all the world!" And she clung to Gertrude who sobbed bitterly, "Am I to be shot in my own drawing-room after preserving myself so carefully all these years?"

Above the fierce din came Nutcracker's powerful voice, issuing orders and shouting encouragement as he strode bravely back and forth in the thick of battle. However, the dragoons and cuirassiers were suffering so much that they suddenly wheeled round and marched back to their own quarters. This exposed the footstool which, under attack from a very ugly bunch of mice, fell into enemy hands.

Nutcracker was so disconcerted that he ordered his right wing to retreat, threatening disaster for the whole army. But then ... something else happened! The left wing was still holding up gallantly. Reinforcements arrived from an elite battalion of motto figures, made up of wonderfully uniformed harlequins, darling cupids, monkeys and lions, tigers and unicorns. Who could have believed it?

Two Chinese emperors commanded them to advance and form a square. They fought bravely and with cool heads.

They would have won the battle, but for a vicious mouse captain. He bit off one of the Chinese emperor's heads. The victim's fall knocked over a tiger and unicorn and made a gap through which the mice rushed. Then ... the whole battalion was bitten to death.

The bloodthirsty mice from that squadron bit off more than they could chew, however, for every time one of them gnawed through the neck of a motto figure, the mouse chocked to death on the piece of paper inside. One of the mottos read:

Don't let your eyes be bigger than your stomach!

During the hottest part of the battle, members of the mice cavalry were emerging from under the chest of drawers. Now, squeaking horribly, they charged the left wing. Once the retreat started, there was no stopping it. Nutcracker was pushed back and soon found himself pressed right up against the cupboard. He hardly had a man left to fight.

"Generals, drummers, where have you all gone?" he cried desperately. "Bring up the reserves!"

A small contingent of gingerbread men advanced, but they fought so clumsily that the enemy soon bit off their legs.

Nutcracker was in terrible danger. He tried to leap into the cabinet, but his legs were too short. And since Gertrude and Miss Clara had fainted, they couldn't help him at all.

"A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!" cried Nutcracker [borrowing a line from Shakespeare's play, Richard III], as the King of Mice came charging at him, squeaking from all of his seven throats.

"Oh, my poor Nutcracker!" gasped Marie. She tore off her shoe and flung it straight at the Mouse King.

Instantly ... everything ... vanished! Marie felt her arm stinging again, and she fainted on the floor.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/The-Battle>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/The-Battle>