

FOUR SEASONS CHESS

by Damian Walker

cannot escape as specified in rule 9, then the player has been checkmated and drops out of the game.

11. The conquered player's king is removed from the board and his pieces fall under the control of his conqueror.

12. The last player remaining in the game is declared the winner.

13. It is usual for each player to attack the player to his right and defend against the player to his left, but the rules of victory do not enforce this. This order may, however, be used to determine who is the conqueror in rule 11 if two play-

ers simultaneously checkmate another.

A Variant with Dice

14. Though usually played without dice, the game can be played with an ordinary six-sided die, rolled before each move.

15. A throw of 6 dictates the king be moved, 5 a queen, 4 the rook, 3 the knight, 2 the bishop and 1 a pawn.

16. If the player has none of the specified pieces on the board, the turn is lost.

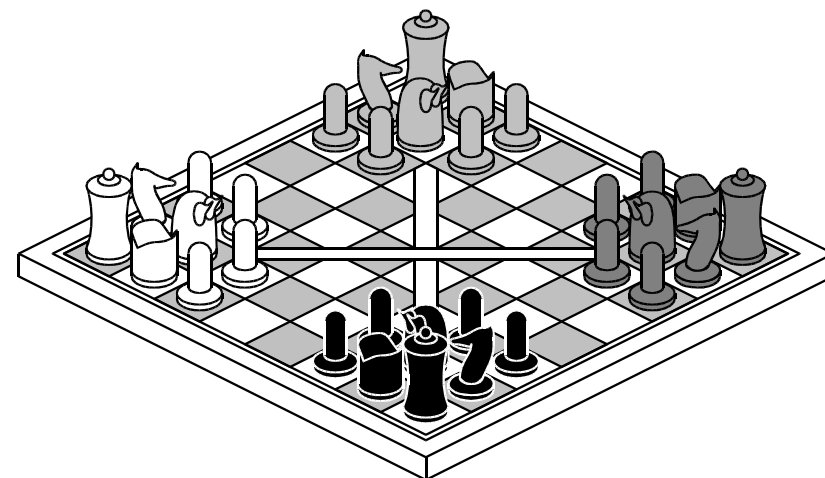
FURTHER INFORMATION

Information on Four Seasons Chess can be obtained from the following books:

Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Chess*, pp. 347-348. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, p. 326. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

Multi-player variants of chess are nothing new. Chess has been subject to these experiments since the time it was invented, and versions for three and four players have been developed throughout the centuries between then and now.

One interesting version is found in a manuscript from 1283, the *Libro de Juegos* commissioned by Alfonso X of Castille. This has each player representing one of the seasons, each attacking the season that follows. It is also said to have

represented other groupings of four that were ever present in the mediæval mind: the four bodily humours of blood, choler, melancholy and phlegm; and the four elements of earth, air, fire and water.

The game was often played for stakes. The *Libro de Juegos* specified amounts for captures, checks and mates, which had to be paid into a pool that was to be given to the eventual winner of the game. There was also a dice variant.

HOW TO PLAY

Four Seasons Chess is played by four people on a modified chess board. The main diagonals of the board are marked in the middle, to help make the moves of the pawns clear.

Each player starts with a king, a rook, a knight, a bishop and four pawns. As pawns can become queens in the game, some way of marking the pawns should be kept in hand (e.g.

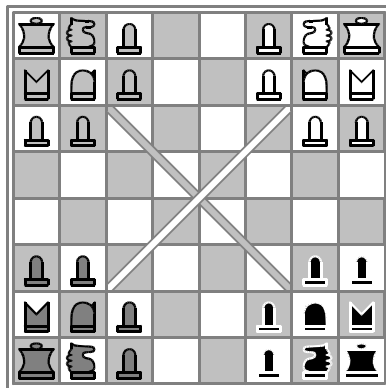


Illustration 1: the pieces set out for play with green at the top left, red beneath, then black to the right and white above.

coins to place underneath).

Beginning the Game

1. At the beginning of the game the pieces are set out with green (spring) in one corner, red (summer) to his right, then black (autumn) followed by white (winter). This is shown in Illustration 1.

2. Players decide at random who will take each side.

3. Spring begins the game, with play passing anti-clockwise around the board in the same order as the seasons.

Moving the Pieces

4. In his turn a player moves a single piece according to the following rules:

(i). a pawn may move one step forwards in the direction that it has faced since the start of the game (roughly along the board edge);

(ii). the rook moves as many squares as is convenient in one of the four horizontal or vertical directions, though without jumping over any piece in the way;

(iii). the knight moves one square horizontally or vertically,

and one further diagonal step away from its current square, jumping over any piece in its way;

(iv). the bishop moves exactly two squares diagonally, jumping over any piece in its way;

(v). the king moves one step in any direction, horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

(vi). a queen

(see rule 6) moves one square in any diagonal direction.

5. Only one piece can occupy a square at a time.

6. A pawn reaching the far row of the board is promoted to a queen.

Capturing Enemies

7. A pawn may capture an opponent's piece by moving one square diagonally forwards to land on its victim. The captured piece is removed from the board.

8. Other pieces capture by moving in their normal manner to land on the victim.

9. A king cannot be captured, but may be threatened with capture. A king so threatened must on his next turn deal with the threat in one

of the following ways:

(i). by moving the king out of danger;

(ii). by capturing the piece that poses the threat;

(iii). by interposing another piece between the king and the piece that threatens him.

Ending the Game

10. If a player's king is threatened and he

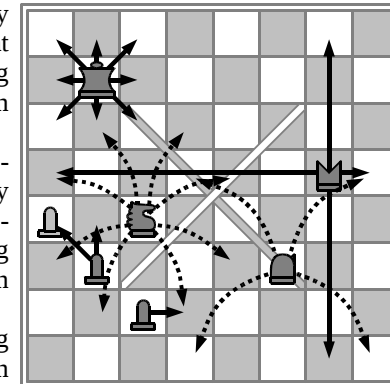


Illustration 2: moves of the pieces. The dark pieces began at the bottom left, and the pawns are moving away from this position. Note also that the pawn moves straight ahead, but captures diagonally.