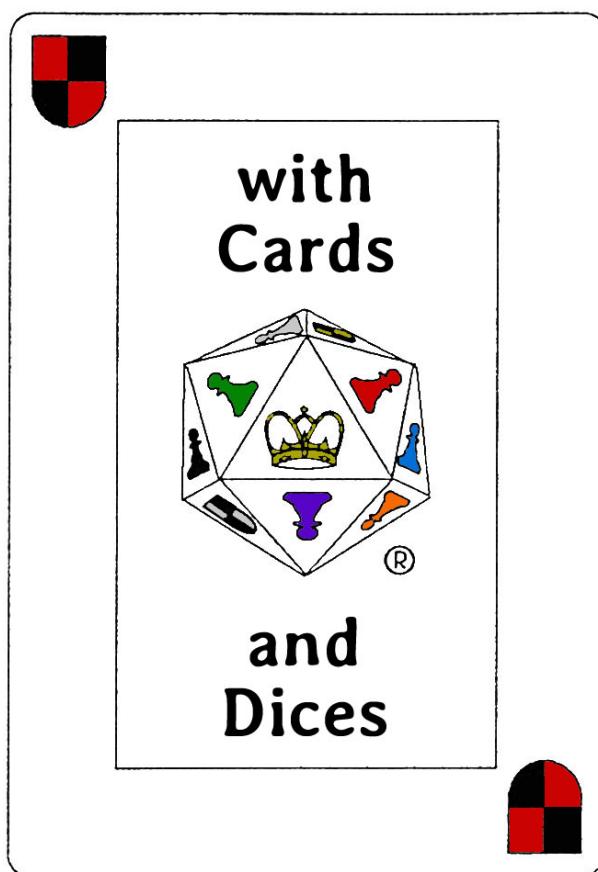


# Heraldic Chess Games



To chess lovers,  
especially for all those who,  
although liking chess, never dare play it

*Módest Solans Mur*

These pages are a summary —sufficient as directions for use— of *Chess games with cards and dice*, of various articles published in the magazine *Wadi-as* and especially of *Battler King and other chess games...*

Translation to English: Theresa Liddle  
Revision: Juanjo Martín de Argüeso

Copyright © 1993, by Modest Solans

Under Berne and Universal Copyright Conventions

---

This  
infinite game,  
which crosses the history  
of humanity illuminating it,  
has covered its same path,  
from the mists of the myth  
to the calculated  
loneliness  
of computers,  
and like Man,  
has enjoyed and suffered  
reductions and developments,  
and also successive rules.

---

God moves the player, and the player, the piece.  
Which god behind God begins the weave?

Jorge Luis Borges, *Chess*

Right from the start there is a game of possibilities  
and probabilities, of good and bad luck,  
which appears in every thread of the weave,  
thus of all the branches of human activity  
War is that which most resembles a card game.

Carl von Clausewitz, *Of War* (Book I)

Breiskol says that chess and card games correlate.  
In his view, the card game retained not more than half  
the pieces of the chess game: King, General, Elephant,  
Horse, Dromedary, Pawn, converting the Pawns  
into single cards consecutively numbered.

Cesare Cantu, *Universal History*

## In favour of Reunited Chess Games

It is by accident that within  
the development of normal chess  
our attention has been distracted  
by a thousand years, rather more than sufficient,  
away from other varieties of chess.  
In times to come, Ordinary Chess will settle back  
naturally to its logical place  
as a particular kind of chess  
in the midst of an infinite number of others.  
Thomas Rayner Dawson, *The Chess Amateur*

Chess, the king of games and, in earlier times, the game of kings, has gradually, by sheer intellectual prestige, stopped being a game, especially in the Western world, to become, let's put it that way, something else.

This, taking a closer look, deprives de facto the great majority of people from enjoying one of the great creations of the spirit.

But the question 'Shall we have a game of chess?' has hundreds of replies if one has available all the necessary components.

A few of these replies allow one to enjoy games which are as entertaining as any other, and of a singular beauty.

In these games —and without strategic intelligence having to renounce from standing solidly on the board— the fact that chance, adjustable, intervenes, endows risk and boldness with wings, two qualities which are inseparable from any worthwhile game.



## Applied Heraldry

Scuta lectissimis coloribus distinguunt  
Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum*

Heraldry has occasionally been associated with chess, although always in an ornamental sense or for historical reference or evocation. Here we propose its use and claim its original functional character, a system of 'in' signs, of 'insignia' or 'banners'. A language, in fact, which is applied to the individualisation, with a new effect, of the pieces of those so-called 'board games', which simulate or reproduce a strategic combat, and especially of the most illustrious and widely divulged of them all, chess, in any of its variant forms, known or yet to be known, so that the system of signs of the pieces is referred back to cards (or dice), of which the possession (or position in which they fall) determines to a greater or lesser degree the way the pieces are played and their luck on the field.

## **How to play using cards**

All games go by rules which are commonly accepted, rules which may be varied at any time —before beginning the game— by mutual agreement the players.

Moreover, the joining of these two games, cards chess and board chess, both of which have a great deal of history and variations behind them, allows such an amount of game modalities that the variations here announced are merely indicative and are open to changes, as well as any other possibilities preferred and agreed on.

The standard pack of cards consists of sixty-four playing cards (each piece is depicted on four cards) and eight jokers of optional use. It is left to the players' decision whether or not to add a second pack. On the one hand, the increase in the number of cards widens the uncertainty; on the other hand, it avoids having to shuffle again if the game is prolonged.

### **Playing by drawing cards**

This is the simplest way to play using cards, and although it may seem rather uninteresting, it may be useful for learning, for playing solitaires, and also for some games where the player is obliged to move according to the card drawn.

In each turn, the player draws a card from the pile and has to move the piece which is represented on it. If they cannot move it or no longer has that piece, the turn goes to the next player. Castling is done by the King.

The main inconvenience of this system lies in the fact that in the first few movements of the game, if it is played starting in the current established initial positions, there are many pieces which remain immobile.

The beginning can be speeded up by agreeing on freedom to position each piece, or placing all the pawns, or some of them, on the third line, before starting.

### **Cards in hand**

At the start of the game, the cards are dealt out (a minimum of six and a maximum of sixteen is recommended per player) and the remaining cards

are left on the table for drawing or, when appropriate, for replacing the discarded ones.

Once each player has seen their own cards, the one whose turn it is to start, decides which piece s/he wishes to move, of those displayed in the cards s/he possesses. They must place the card face upwards on the table, move the corresponding piece, draw a card and then the turn passes on to the other player, who goes through the same procedure, and so on, until one of the players manages to achieve the capture or surrender of the opposing King.

If at any point in the game, as a result of successively losing pieces, one of the players does not have a card which allows to move any piece, they will then put down any card without moving any piece, draw a card and the turn goes to the other player. If this happens (it may do so frequently if the game is close or it carries on for a certain length of time), it is suggested that specific rules be agreed upon before the game is started, such as discarding and replacing various cards with or without losing a turn or other rules which may be agreed upon.

If the cards for drawing run out, they should be shuffled again and the game continued.

### **Two moves for each card**

Another interesting way of playing chess with cards is exactly the same as previously explained, except that each card allows the piece it represents to move twice.

For the first move, the player must place the card of the piece to move face upward in a predetermined place on the table for each player, and to make the second move—which may be delayed to the convenience of each player—the card must be placed in the area where both players put their discarded cards. In this variation of the game, a card would only be drawn when the one previously put down had been definitely got rid of, that is, after the second movement.

Two other ways of playing are possible—and we do not want to be lengthy stating the possibilities—if the game is played as previously stated but instead of drawing a card when one is discarded, the cards are only replaced once all of them have been used up.

Other ways of playing are establishing multiple discarding of cards at any time during the game, by mutual agreement, at the request of one of the players, with or without losing a turn, etc.



## **Free strategies**

If the players agree to place the pieces on the board after dealing out the cards, each player can lay out his or her pieces according to a strategy based on the cards dealt out to him and each game will be a different battle even before the first move.

Placing the pieces on the board should be done in turns, if observed by both players, otherwise a separating board can be placed in between to prevent the players from seeing each other's deployment (secret mobilisation).

## **Compulsory moves and mixed forms**

All the mentioned ways of playing, and other possible ones, can be played establishing every  $x$  moves one or various rounds of free play—that is, thinking and playing without needing to have or draw the card. Also vice versa, playing basically the ordinary way.

It is even more interesting, due to being unpredictable, when the obligation is, by some means, imposed by chance; or when it is the opponent—to this end both players have available a quota of orders per game—who compels his adversary to move using a card or throwing the dice, when appropriate.

A curious mixed form is one we could call 'progressive release' or 'detaching mode'. It consists in each piece being played freely from the moment in which a player possesses one representative card, two or a number established prior to starting the game. The released piece should be marked (or unmarked, if detachable insignia are being used) with, for example, unstickable labels or badges of office, in order to show that it is being played freely.

Another way of playing is the so-called 'with a combat card'. The chessmen are moved freely, but the player needs to have the representative card of that piece in order to be able to take piece. To do this, the player has to put down the card face upwards and draw another card from the pack.

## **Non-heraldic games with cards or dice**

Using ordinary chess sets—without individualising—we can also play with cards or dice: any Pawn card represents any one of the eight Pawns, a

Knight card either of the two Knights, etc. Chess has been played with dice in a similar way in India from time immemorial.

## How to play using dices

Playing with dice implies that chance intervenes to a greater extent in the game.

The ancient Hindus played a game called *Chaturanga* (a primitive variation, or perhaps the original chess) for four players, using elongated dice to move the pieces.

In the illuminated codex *The Book of Chess, Dice and Board Games* (Seville, 1283), edited by King Alphonse X the Wise, the author relates the use of dice with eight and seven sides to play Great Chess, similar to those known as Tamerlane Chess and Decimal Chess, so that the game is 'más ayna', which means quicker and easier.

Now in this game we are not talking about dice with numbers or marks in the various sides represented in approximate proportion of dice to pieces, like in the above-mentioned game, but instead, we mean dice on whose sides all the pieces in the game are represented in exact proportion, individually.

The individualisation of the pieces —especially by heraldic fields of one colour, like in this edition— and their representation on the cards, is applicable to the dice, substituting the cards for the faces of the die, although the limited number of existing regular polyhedron shapes, five, will condition the possibilities for the current chess set of sixteen chessmen per side.

We consider that four-sided or tetrahedron dice are of no use here, since their excessively-angled sides and virtual incapability of rolling over makes them impractical, as well as the fact that four of them would be needed.

The complete game of dice is composed therefore of one icosahedron, two dodecahedrons, three hexahedrons and two octahedrons, thus enabling the players to practise numerous variations by using different combinations, as well as mixed forms with or without cards, with a combat die, intercalating compulsory moves or turns, etc.

## Some ways of playing

If we decide on the regular icosahedron (twenty-sided solid), we dispose of twenty triangular faces, which means that once all sixteen pieces are represented, there are four faces left over which could be used as jokers which allow the player to move any piece they wish.

Another possibility consists in using two regular octahedrons, one for example, for the eight main pieces, and the other for the pawns. Once the dice have been thrown, the player chooses which one of the two pieces represented on the dice to move. Or, if it is agreed to play two pieces per turn, and both pieces are on the board, then to move both of them (an application of Albert Fortis's Marseillaise way).

The use of two dodecahedrons allows the game to be played as with the octahedrons, but moreover each dice has four free faces left over, which can be occupied with jokers, allowing free moves if one or two jokers turn up on the dice.

On the eighteen faces of the three cubic dice, or hexahedrons, there is room for the sixteen pieces and two jokers. The way to play is obviously similar to that mentioned for the octahedrons and dodecahedrons.

## Variations into pieces' way

At midday the King put on his armour  
and placed his men in four corps or squadrons,  
which contributed to the victory

Jose Maria Lacarra, *Alphonse I the Battler*

### King Battler

The King Battler moves and takes pieces at any distance diagonally, vertically or horizontally, that is, in the same way as that of the Queen from the latter part of the 15th century (until then named Alfferza: Ancient, Ensign, Standard-bearer, which moved only one square diagonally).

Obviously, some limitations have to be imposed on this King, so quick and strong, otherwise he would be practically invulnerable upon the board.

When checked, the King Battler, on fleeing, he can only move one step or square in any direction, the same as the Classic King, unless he decides to take a piece, whether it be the one threatening him or another one.

In any case, in his following turn in the game, all his strength for moving and taking is recovered, unless of course he is checked again.

Said limitation is unnecessary and therefore optional, playing either with cards or dice.

Note also that, when playing chess with cards, the player whose King —Classic or Battler— is in check, can (risking a great deal, and more so if jokers are being used, or turning his necessity into boldness) sustain the threat speculating on the possibility that it is a bluff, and that his opponent does not have the necessary card to carry out the checkmate. It is even possible to win —and of course to lose— King against King, face to face.

### Manoeuvring Bishops and Rooks

In 1948, Ejnar Kristensen proposed a variation in the Bishop's move, which consisted in the Bishop being able to move, without taking any piece, to an adjacent square perpendicularly; this manoeuvre constitutes the player's move and allows the Bishop to play over all the diagonals on the board. We have tested this variation, which is interesting in itself, in chess

with cards and dice, and do not doubt about recommending it, since the Bishop's game is made much more agile in this way and at the same time is more powerful.

This manoeuvre without taking can be extended to the Rook, in relation to the contiguous diagonal squares.

### **The Pawn's mobility**

As for the Pawn, and in order to avoid its being immobilised, we think it should be allowed to move and take pieces as it does normally and moreover to move freely to the two squares which at present it can only occupy by taking a piece.

Going a little further, we propose that the Pawn should move a square in any direction and take pieces diagonally. If this variation is chosen, its queening on reaching the 8th horizontal line can be left out, since its moves in any direction allow it to continue playing as such.

In the same way, the Pawn's way two steps forward in the column is optional at any time from any square of the first and second lines of its field, even if it has been moved previously; likewise it is consequently possible to be taken en passant by an enemy Pawn in the immediately following move.

### **Light cavalry**

The ever dangerous Knight is converted into a fearsome piece (more fearsome!) if it is agreed to add to its peculiar move that of moving to any distance, both perpendicularly and diagonally, without taking or jumping pieces: a true light horse.

---

And always and always and again  
like those heroes of Walhalla  
to the board return the chessmen  
to revive anew into the battle

---