

## THE COURIER GAME

by Damian Walker

each, the game is considered a draw.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

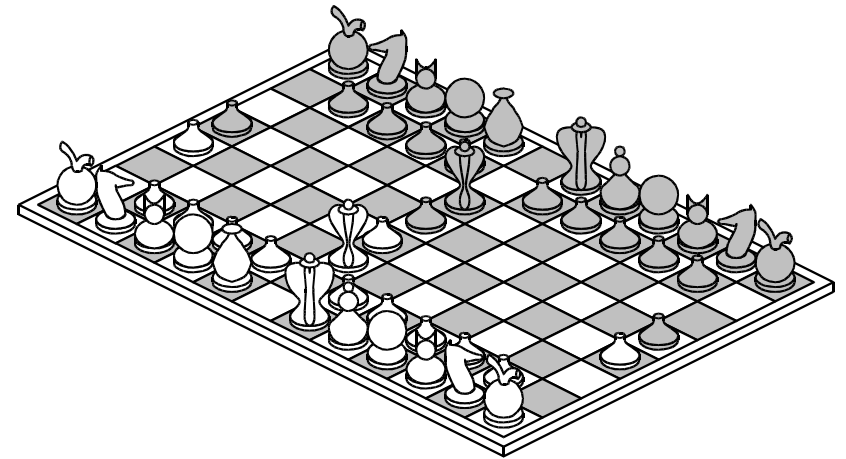
This interesting variant of mediaeval chess is further described in the following books:

Bell, R. C. *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, vol. 1, pp. 62-65. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979.

Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Chess*, pp. 392 & 483-485. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp. 314-315. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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## INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

The twentieth century has produced literally thousands of variations on chess, as people attempt to stamp their individuality on the game. The very profusion of these prevents the popularity of any particular one. More interesting, perhaps, are the historic attempts to vary the game, one of which is the *courier game*.

This is a variant from north Germany, and is noteworthy for its longevity. First mentioned in about 1205, it survived until the beginning

of the 19th century. The modern game has yet to achieve this life span. Stranger still for a game of such longevity is that the courier game was confined to a small area, being particularly associated with the village of Ströbeck. The game was revived by the villagers as a curiosity in 1883, but by the twentieth century it had been forgotten again, the villagers eventually getting fed up of being pestered about the subject.

## HOW TO PLAY

A few details of the rules have not survived. But since the courier game resembles *shatranj*, or medieval chess, in many particulars, missing rules have been borrowed from there.

### Beginning the Game

1. Courier is played on a chequered board of 12 rows of 8 squares, the bottom right squares being white.

2. The game is played with 24 pieces per side:

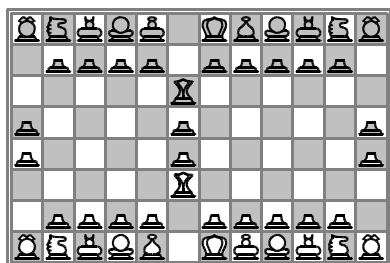


Illustration 1: pieces set out for play. From the bottom left they are: rook, knight, bishop, courier, sage, queen (ahead), king, fool, etc.

*knights, two bishops, two couriers, a sage, a fool, a king, a queen and twelve pawns.*

3. Players begin by advancing their rooks' pawns and queen's pawn to the fourth rank, and moving the queen to the third rank, as in

Illustration 1.

Play then commences with white moving a piece, then black, turns alternating thereafter.

### Moving the Pieces

4. The pieces move as shown in

Illustration 2, and described as follows:

(i). the king moves horizontally, diagonally or vertically to an adjacent square, but not to a square which would expose him to *check* (see rule 8);

(ii). the queen moves diagonally to an adjacent square;

(iii). the sage moves as the king, but is *not* restricted from moving to a threatened square;

(iv). the fool moves horizontally or vertically to an adjacent square;

(v). the courier moves any number of squares diagonally, as a modern bishop does, without jumping;

(vi). the bishop moves exactly two squares diagonally, jumping over any intervening piece as the knight does;

(vii). the knight moves one square orthogonally and one square diagonally away from its starting point, jumping over any intervening piece;

(viii). the rook moves any number of squares horizontally or vertically without jumping over other pieces.

(ix). a pawn moves one square forwards.

5. If a pawn reaches the last row, it immediately becomes a queen.

### Capturing Pieces

6. A piece is captured by landing upon it in the course of a move.

7. A pawn cannot capture as it moves; instead it captures by moving one square diagonally forwards to land on its victim.

8. The king cannot be captured, but if he is threatened with capture (called *check*), the player must protect him by:

(i). moving him out of danger;

(ii). moving another piece to block the threat;

(iii). capturing the piece that threatens the king.

### Ending the Game

9. A player wins if he threatens his opponent's king with capture, and the opponent can do nothing to protect his king. This is checkmate.

10. A player wins if his opponent has no legal move.

11. A player wins if he captures all of his opponent's piece apart from the king.

12. However, if the opponent could on the next move reduce both sides to just a king

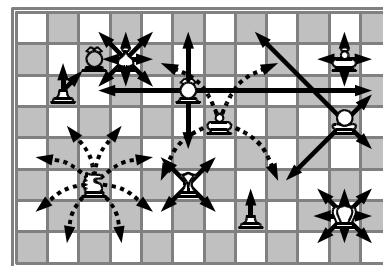


Illustration 2: moves of the pieces.