LARP CHESS

DESIGN DOC

THE GAME

This game is an attempt to harness two horses to one cart: LARP and CHESS into something new. We are inspired by a few previous attempts: Dancing Chess" (Nausika 2018), "The Rocky Road to Checkmate" (Larpifiers 2019), but this time we want to go one step further. The movements of chess pieces are preserved, but personal objectives of the players should modify the strategy towards the psychological and narrative dimensions.

The constructive idea of LARP CHESS is to base the narrative story on popular culture-texts (books, songs, games, myths) in order to make it easier for the players to feel their narrative roles and get a bit immersed into the imaginary world while remaining focused on the strategic part of the game.

The game combines strategic thinking with acting and negotiation. Chess skills are not obligatory to play the game, however, it would be more fun for the players who at least know the moves of the pieces and have played chess a couple of times. The acting part demands no preliminary skills. Communicative level of common language is obligatory.

Each scenario has a precisely designed number of players, around 8-12 people, which is the optimum (less would be not enough to role-play group decisions and more would take too long to let everyone speak.

LINKS

scenario nr 1 - Lord of the Rings

scenario nr 2 - The tragedy of Hamlet

scenario nr 3 - The school of Athens

printable Traitor Cards

RULES

There is a human-size chess board (around 4x4m²), on which two teams meet to play a game of chess. Each player is a single chess figure, which has to stand on its field. All standard moves and rules of chess apply to the game.

There is a narrative story attached to the game, each player is given a fictional character which fits into the story. While the game is going on, the players are encouraged to talk and interact with each other as fictional characters. The game is moderated by GM ("game master"), who is not a part of any team (like a referee).

The decision about each move is done by the team, according to the rules specified below.

Most of the players have an additional personal objective which is defined by certain position of figures that may happen on the board (f.e. "kill a target figure" or "make sure that target figure survives the game"). This means that some of the players will try to suggest certain moves which are not strategically most profitable for the team (that's where storytelling and acting will be useful). Surviving as a character (standing on the board while the game ends) is not needed to get personal points, so tactical sacrifices can be easily made and dynamic game-play is encouraged.

The game ends when one of the kings is checkmated. At the end, the players reveal their objectives and count their points.

1. WHAT DO YOU NEED

1. A board big enough for the players to walk on (c.a. 4-5 meters each side). The board can be made of anything - draw it on the ground, cut it from a vinyl banner, arrange it from rope - be creative. The easiest way is probably to buy 100 meters of painting tape and mark the chessboard on the floor.

2. 1 GM who knows the chess rules and can lead the players strong-handed. If there are 2 organizers, it would be easier - one can be a technical referee while the second does the storytelling and puts some music around.

3. Scenario Cards (2-sided print, preferably on hard paper) - for the GM to see the narrative introduction, players' objectives and starting positions.

4. Character Cards (2-sided print, preferably on hard paper) - necessary for each player, available to print from the design docs of each scenario, the Character Cards contain: Persona Description and Objectives on one side, Name, Symbol and Affiliation on the other

5. Traitor Cards - small pieces of paper or cardboard with words "traitor" (x3) and "loyal" (x12).

6. 2x Mace or other prop indicating the King and functioning as a talking stick.

7. Additional cards and props - if mentioned in the particular scenario (for example, Message Cards in the scenario "School of Athens").

2. STEP BY STEP

1. Read carefully the whole Design Doc (this document, c.a. 7 pages).

2. Print all cards and prepare props listed above, preferably on high quality paper.

3. Prepare the board before the players come to play. Try to make it visible (f.e. contrasting colors of the tape and the floor). Make sure there is good light in the place.

4. Gather the players.

5. Choose the first scenario (or let the players choose it) and distribute the appropriate Character Cards. Choose a player you can count on to be the King in each of the teams, other cards may go at random.

6. Tell the players to stand on the positions described in the Character Cards of their King. Tell them that from now on they can only stand on the positions of their chess pieces on the board.

7. Explain the rules clearly and aloud, repeat it two or three times. Perform 1-minute workshops - ask the teams to demonstrate how the decision (giving the Mace) process goes. Take your time, it's better to make this part longer now than have chaos during the game.

8. Remind the players that the GM can modify any rules of the game anytime, but must communicate it clearly to all players. This includes putting additional players on the board or killed characters magically coming back to the game.

9. Distribute Traitor Cards at random to all players except the King in each team. Tell the players to hide it in their pockets and keep it secret (see: "TREACHERY").

10. Read aloud the narrative introduction written on the Scenario Card.

11. Start the game.

12. Facilitate the game:
    - speed it up by either speaking or playing some music
    - motivate the players - talk to those who speak the least
    - try to comment the moves on the chessboard as if they were narrative actions of the characters
    - be mindful, improvise, balance the game

13. When the game is over, carry on a short debriefing:
    - who managed to get 2 points and what strategies they used?
    - what was the narrative summary of the situation between the characters?
    - what did they like or dislike about the game? (collect the feedback)

3. OBJECTIVES

- Each player has 1 personal objective and 1 group objective in their Character Card.

- Each player can get 2 points during the game, 1 for the personal objective and 1 for the group objective.

- The players who collect 2 points are the winners of the game. Please explain to them clearly that their aim is to individually get 2 points.

- The group objective is achieved when the player's team wins the game of chess (exception for "traitors" - see below).

- The players whose characters are killed during the game, will as well receive the point for the group objective if their team wins the game of chess.

- The personal objective of each player is written in their Character Card and should be kept secret from other players.

- The Kings don't have a specified personal objective. Instead, they get 2 points for achieving the group objective (winning the game of chess).

- It is possible that achieving 2 points would be harder for certain characters in certain scenarios; those roles may be distributed by the GM to experienced players (in either larp or chess).

4. LIST OF PERSONAL OBJECTIVES

- KILL. You get 1 point if you kill a target character by your own move.
- GET KILLED. You get 1 point if a target character is killed before the end of the game.
- SURVIVE. You get 1 point if a target character remains alive at the end of the game (may be a character from the opposite team).
- MESSAGE. You get 1 point if you deliver a Message Card personally to a target character and survive the next move. You need to stand directly field-to field (horizontally, vertically or diagonally) in order to deliver a Message. Try to do this in secret, otherwise other players will figure out your objective.
- PROMOTION. You get 1 point if you promote yourself to something better (only for pawns).
- WIN. You don't have a specified personal objective, because you get 2 points for winning the game of chess.
- The list may be expanded along with new scenarios.

5. STARTING POSITIONS

- Each scenario contains a pre-set starting position. It is printed on the GM's Info Card and also on each of the Kings' character cards.
- Order the Kings to deploy their teams exactly on the pre-set position.
- Remember to explain the other rules before you start the game!

6. TREACHERY

- Once the players are standing on their fields, the GM should select the Traitors at random in each of the teams.
- Use Traitor Cards to do that. You may distribute the cards in such a way that it is possible that none of the players have drawn the card with "Traitor" on it.
- Every player EXCEPT THE KING may become a traitor. The kings simply do not draw Traitor Cards at all.
- The Traitor has a mirrored group objective - he/she receives the point if the opposite team wins the game.
- The personal objective of the Traitor remains the same as on the character card.
- Being or not-being a traitor is valid for the whole duration of the game.
- A traitor who is killed in the game walks away from the board and does not reveal his/her identity until the game is over.

7. MOVEMENT OF PIECES

- The moves are 100% the same with standard international chess.

- Each character may occupy 1 field only at a time.
- The game is designed on purpose in a way that a single player cannot see clearly the whole of the board.

8. DECISION MAKING

- Each turn, the king nominates a chosen player from his team to make the decision for the team about the chess move.
- The King must use the Mace (or other kingly prop) - give it to the chosen player to show that you nominate him/her.
- If the players are far from each other, they should throw the Mace and remain standing on their fields. If the Mace falls on the ground, the GM should pick it up.
- The same player cannot be nominated two times in a row.
- The decision made by the nominated player is irrevocable and performed immediately.
- The players should talk and try to convince the king to nominate them as often as possible (so larping and playing is important to achieve personal objectives).
- The players are allowed to lie about their intentions for the move and then, when nominated, make a different move (however, then they will probably be perceived as traitors and not be nominated again).
- It is suggested that the team which awaits its turn is talking about the next nomination - to make the game run faster.
- When there is only one player except the King left in the team, they are making decisions in turns.
- When there is only the King left in the team, he/she makes decisions on his own.

9. TIME MANAGEMENT

- GM is conducting the time, often forcing the players to speed up the game.
- Total duration of the game should be no more than 1 hour, including briefing (explaining the rules, distributing the cards, choosing starting positions) and debriefing (revealing objectives, counting points).
- In case of any disagreement between and inside the teams, GM is the judge and his/her decision is final.
- The GM is encouraged to wrap his/her decisions into the narrative story of the game.
- The GM has got a 15-seconds music theme recorded on the phone. When a team is delaying the move, the GM turns on the music (loudly). If the team does not make the move before the music is over, it has to skip this move. Then, the opposite team will make two moves in a row, which gives a big strategic advantage.

10. ADDING NEW PLAYERS

- The Game Master(s) may decide to add additional players to the board, either at the start of the game or during the game. It is the decision of the GM and should be only done if it makes the game

better for other players. We suggest adding new players as pawns with a personal objective to get promoted. But the GMs can decide otherwise.

- This part of Larp Chess may be developed in the future to provide more flexibility, now it's only a hint.

11. BEHAVIOUR ON THE BOARD

- All the players must stay exactly on the fields occupied by their characters within all duration of the game.

- People outside the board, including the characters who had been killed, should not give any suggestions to the players who are currently on the board.

- It is illegal to break any rules of the chess game.

- The players who are in the game can freely talk with each other.

- It is legal to talk with members of the opposing team (but everyone needs to stand on his/her field).

- It is legal to lie about anything as a character to other characters inside the game.

- It is legal to eavesdrop on the opposing team.

- It is legal to establish secret alliances between any group of players.

12. ACTING AND ROLE-PLAYING

- This game is designed for 15% immersion, so it's important not only to play for points but also to keep the storyline and the role-playing.

- The players are their characters within the game - standard LARP bleeding rules apply.

- The players may use only character-names or chess-names (king, rook), the player-names should not be used during the game.

- Movements and killings can be played in a spectacular or funny way (Mothy Python style is possible).

- Please note that a player who smartly sacrifices his/her character for a strategic advantage of the team has a bigger chance to get the point for the group objective.

- Please note that eliminating the character played by the strongest chess player of the opposite team raises the chances of your team to win.

CREDITS

Designed by:

- Zbyszek Janczukowicz

Copyrighted by:

- Zbyszek Janczukowicz
- Nausika Educational Foundation

Play-tested:

- 2020-08-20 - Rabka-Zdrój, Poland ("DiveIn Larp Project, Erasmus+ strategic partnership)
- 2021-08-19 - Rabka-Zdrój, Poland ("Compos Mentis" Project, Erasmus+ training course)
- 2021-09-10 - Athens, Greece (Portal 9 Larp Convention)

CONTACT

phone: +48 518 584 244

www.nausika.eu/larpchess

biuro@nauika.eu

https://www.facebook.com/FundacjaNausika

https://www.instagram.com/edunausika

We'll be grateful for your feedback :)

INVITATION

New authors are welcome to join and add more scenarios :) The rules of the game may be developed and expanded. New authors will be included in the Credits and receive the right for non-commercial use of all scenarios of LARP CHESS.

Preferred number of players is from 8 to 12 - less players is not enough to play with negotiation and treachery and more players would be too hard to govern.

Each team must contain 1 king, the rest of the setting is up to the author. The total value of starting figures should be more or less equal between the teams (values of the chess pieces: queen - 9, rook - 5, horse - 3, bishop - 3, king - 3, pawn - 1)

New scenarios must include full content:

SCENARIO CARD - must fit 2-sided A4 paper

- few general sentences as the narrative introduction
- excel/spreadsheet table with summary of players, points and objectives

CHARACTER CARDS - must fit 2-sided A4 paper

- personal description (and optionally lore: citations, photos, paintings)
- personal objective with narrative motivation
- a brief description of the group objective (copied from other scenarios)
- character's name and big chess symbol on the second side of the paper

 Larp Chess