

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS CHESS

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Through the Looking Glass Project Explanation

For this project I wanted to do a variation on the traditional game of chess that reflects some of the motifs, themes, and absurdities of *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* by Lewis Carroll. The structural, conceptual differences between the two *Alice* books are interesting to explore—the first book’s complete absence of plot until effectively the last two chapters versus *Looking Glass*’s deliberately-designed, if not entirely logically conceived, chessboard plot. The goal stated at the front of *Looking Glass* is for the white pawn (Alice) to check the king in 11 turns. Because that is set up as the objective of the book, I wanted to create a modified version of chess which catered to red on the defensive and white on the offensive. The goal is for the white player to win in 11 turns, if possible. As the game progresses beyond 11 turns, it becomes more complicated, with pieces being resurrected or transformed, and the reliability of the white queen problematizing the game, just as the character of the white queen in the book acts similarly illogically.

The modified rules draw from themes, concepts, and motifs from *Through the Looking Glass* with a callback to *Alice in Wonderland*. The central concepts explored in these modifications are duality and the characteristic nonsense madness of Lewis Carroll’s writing. Many pieces have special moves that involve reflections of themselves in the enemy’s same pieces. The addition of the coin flip determining the queen’s ability to move is characteristic of her inherent bizarreness as a character. The other uses of a looking glass are for the knight’s

ability to travel to the other side of the board by “going through a looking glass” on the edge of the board and coming out the other side, and the “looking glass” being the threshold which separates the playable from unplayable pieces.

This project was of personal interest to me because I have always enjoyed board games and strategy games. I’m not particularly good at them, but I like to play online chess and hone my strategy. I have made some board games in the past for class projects, but the most enjoyable part of this project was transferring the thematic elements of *Through the Looking Glass* onto chess. Creating the augmentations involved researching some special chess moves like en passant and castling. This is different from much of my traditional academic activity, which involves lots of essays and technical writing. Thinking about the rules of a game was a lot of fun and was a really interesting intellectual challenge. I was also able to determine different degrees of endings. Since Carroll presents a goal of winning in 11 moves, not completing that goal yields different possibilities for how to categorize the ending. What really counts as a win? And what if the red player wins in the way the white was supposed to?

This relates most profoundly, as I am prone, to Lewis Carroll, and his use of chess as the overarching structure of *Through the Looking Glass*. The mirrors from the book come up in many ways. Additionally, Carroll’s choices in *Through the Looking Glass* do not reflect how a person would logically play chess on many occasions. Incorporating Carroll’s characteristic madness and nonsense into a rulebook of a game was particularly challenging.

Of the Honors Program Connections, this project related most closely to “Research and Creativity” and “Willingness to Explore New Areas of Knowledge.” I was able to explore a casual hobby of mine and put a personal spin on it, resulting in myself having a better understanding of the game, and look very closely at *Through the Looking Glass*.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS CHESS, OR (SOMEWHAT) MAD(DENING) CHESS

By Camille Arnett

To preface, most of the existing rules and standards of chess exist in this version of chess. The pieces are expected in the way they have always moved, that is:

Pawn—moves forward one space at a time; its first move can be two spaces, but no others; takes pieces diagonally

Knight—moves three spaces in an L-shape

Bishop—moves exclusively diagonally

Rook—moves exclusively forward/backwards and left/right

Queen—can move any direction any distance; she cannot move in an L-shape like the knight

King—moves one space at a time

Check is defined as when the king is under threat of being taken by an enemy piece. If the king has no escape from check, then he is in checkmate, and that player loses.

The ultimate goal is, like in *Through the Looking Glass*, for the white player to win with a pawn in only 11 moves. This version of the game sets up more defined conflict between red and white by making red explicitly defensive and white explicitly offensive, thus color choice for the players at the beginning is determinant of how each player will conduct themselves in the game.

The following are some rules and modifications which can apply to this version of chess:

NEW CASTLING: If there are no pieces in between them and neither pieces has moved, the king and either castle can switch places. This is different from traditional castling, in which the king moves two spaces and the castle three.

MIRRORED PAWNS/ L'UN EN PASSANT DE L'AUTRE: Mirrored variation on the traditional En Passant move which, in this case, potentially benefits both players. If a pawn on its

first turn could only move one space forward because an enemy pawn is blocking it from moving two spaces forward, it can take the spot of the enemy pawn and bring the enemy pawn one space forward.

A second modifier to pawns: if two enemy pawns are facing each other down, they can switch places, as if one passed through the other.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS ONE: This modification ONLY applies to knights. If a knight is near to or up against the edge of the board, they can move off the board that side, and come back on the other side, as if they were being transported through a sort of film.

11 MOVES: After every 11 turns, a red pawn becomes a different piece (excluding queen or king). The white player selects which pawn will transform, then the red player gets to choose if the pawn becomes a rook, knight, or bishop. This is incentive to the red player to prolong the game and prevent the white player from winning in 11 turns, which is the primary goal.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS TWO: Every 5 turns a lost pawn can be resurrected. The resurrected pawn is placed at any place in its original row

ANSWER TO THE UNIVERSE: If the game goes on for 42 turns, the player with the most remaining pieces wins. The number 42 references the motif from the first *Alice* book.

WHITE RABBIT RULE: If an enemy takes more than two minutes to decide on a move, the enemy gets to resurrect one piece.

THE WHITE QUEEN: Once the white queen is able to move, the white player flips a coin. If heads, the queen can move logically for the next two turns. If tails she becomes confused and can only be moved in reverse/unproductive ways. If the white player lands on tails, it is recommended that the queen sit out for those two turns until they have another chance to have a

functioning piece. Reference to the white queen in the book, who experiences time in reverse and misses multiple opportunities to check the red king.

THE GOLD QUEEN: If the white player raises a pawn to a queen, that queen is not a second white queen, rather a gold queen. The gold queen does not have the same logical troubles as the white queen, even though she is a white piece, and her ability to move is not determined by a coin flip.

WINNING:

--If the white player wins in 11 turns or less, that is considered the “true good” ending.

--If the white player wins in more than 11 turns, that is a positive, but it is a partial victory, because the red player successfully prevented the white player from completing their central objective.

--If the red player wins in more than 11 turns that is a “true” red victory.

--If the red player wins in 11 turns or fewer, then it is a “mirror red win,” or, in its own way, a crisis of identity.