



Queen Pins Queen

by June LaLonde and Sean Nitter

Overview

The 1960s. Students on college campuses protest the Vietnam War. The Cuban Missile Crisis begins. Shift dresses and kitten heels are in fashion. President Johnson's Civil Rights Bill passes in the senate. And all eyes are on exactly one place: the World Chess Championship. The names Nona Gaprindashvili and Alla Kushnir are on everyone's lips. The world holds its breath and then... pawn to d4.

PRINCIPLES

The Pin Is Mightier Than the Sword

Everyone knows about chess and everyone plays. Traditional conflicts that might be resolved by arguments or fights are often settled instead by games of chess. You might play chess at a party, a cafe, a hotel lobby, or in a park. Clerks in grocery stores read the Chess Times. Administrators in high office auger the outcomes of political machinations on the chess board. As a chess player you are always regarded highly, if not idolized.

We Win Together

After matches, sometimes even in the middle of them, members of the Chess Learning Empathy Organization (CLEO) work together to strategize, play out possible scenarios, and most importantly, encourage each other. When we play each other in chess it may be to win, but it's also to teach and learn. We congratulate the winner and both players look back at the game for what they can learn for the future.

Chess is Life in Miniature

Chess is a metaphor for life and vice versa. When you play a game of chess it may be set dressing for a scene that has nothing to do with the game. Describe your game as it fits the conversation. Taking pieces and performing maneuvers are innuendos for something else, whatever is really on your mind. Chess may be used as an instrument to perform another move, but the winner of the game is not important.

When the stakes of the game are high, however, chess is the platform for you to enact life. Through play you can **Figure Out a Person, Fight, and Entice**, carrying on a conversation that only your opponent and those who know the subtleties of your styles can understand.

Setting

The Chess Learning Empathy Organization (CLEO) is a grassroots international group started in the 1930s to support people from marginalized communities learn and excel in the field of chess. CLEO is unified in creating opportunities for its members to learn, travel, and compete in chess matches throughout the world.

Members of CLEO celebrate chess and the people who play it. Their games of chess are not silent and somber events. Sometimes one or both players are locked in focus, but usually they spend as much time talking about the game—and other things—as they do playing.

CLEO may be the organization that brought the PCs together across national borders, or the PCs may all be from a single country, encountering their international counterparts for the first time.

Two organizations commonly challenge members of CLEO to either fit into a mold or cease to exist all together. They often use political figures in world governments, who are vying for their own political power, as instruments to enact their agenda.

✦ **The Religious Chess Coalition:** The RCC offer much-needed financial support and social clout to chess players, but require they play by a moral code that follows the RCC's divine guidance. They have a charge to root out and expose players who dabble in the "occult" practices of chess.

✦ **National Association of Ranked Chess:** NARC is the internationally renowned chess program of Warbarly College, which is focused on teaching chess methods that are brutally efficient. They keep their own rating systems, which hold incredible clout, and can often be used to prevent a player from playing in a tournament, if NARC deems they're not worthy. It's rumored that they're creating an automated processing machine that can best any human chess player.

Due to your fame, your words and actions may be scrutinized by any of these groups as they make proclamations about what you stand for. Will you entertain their offers, ignore their accusations, or openly rebuke them? Let's play chess to find out.

CAMPAIGNS

The Defectors

The PCs operate as special agents inside CLEO that offer refuge for players who seek to defect from their current political, religious, or institutional affiliations. They use chess games to exchange encoded messages and use tournaments as the rare opportunity to face their rivals and offer aid face to face.

To their detractors, these members of CLEO are suspected spies and infiltrators. To the people they help, they're a lifeline in dangerous waters.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

- ✦ **The Ross Gambit:** The Interzonal Tournament, held this year in Stockholm, is extremely expensive to attend even if you're invited. Can the PCs borrow, bluster, or sneak their way into the tournament and make contact with the Scottish player Doublec Ross? Does her recent change in style, which moves away from NARC's brutally efficient methods to a more playful game, mean she's interested in joining CLEO? How can you be sure she isn't part of a nefarious plot from NARC to infiltrate CLEO's ranks and plant a poisoned pawn?
- ✦ **The Absolute Pin:** Venezuelan chess master Adriana Rojas Diaz just lost a game in the Paris Open, which would have qualified her to become a grandmaster. Immediately after the game, she was escorted away by intelligence agents and has since disappeared from the chess scene. You've studied the game countless times and can come to only one conclusion: she threw the match! Through play-by-mail games, long-distance phone calls, and international favors owed, can you find out who pressured her to throw the match? Will it be in time to convince the judges to re-invite her to the South African Open in Cape Town?
- ✦ **Chess Mate:** The RCC filed a petition that banned one of your members from competing in the circuit for openly carrying on a romantic relationship with a rival opponent, claiming that you've traded information, cheated in matches, and sullied the good name of chess. The RCC has convinced the judges to invite their sponsored player Chastity St. Rose to play in the next tournament in your place. Can you debunk their false claims and restore your place in the tournament? Can you discredit their influence on the judges for the future?
- ✦ **Hidden Score:** A singer is roped into becoming a spy, with the chessboard serving as the medium through which secret information passes, and her girlfriend is being held as collateral should she fail. She's meant to play in a Parisian café once a week to receive and convey the necessary information, but others are starting to notice her erratic moves during the game. More ominously, others that recognize that the moves are, indeed, not erratic in the slightest. Can you sniff out who has her trapped? Can you avoid the suspicion of all parties in piecing out your plan? Can you free them both and save the game? (Based on the story of Adrienne Risa.)

Chess Masters of the Universe

In ancient tombs there are spells...spells that can unravel the universe or protect it from destruction...spells that can only be cast through the perfect game of chess. While most onlookers see chess as the ultimate sport, few know of its occult power, and fewer still seek to master it!

ADVENTURE IDEAS

- ✦ **The Magician from Riga:** The PCs travel to Latvia, where they're magically whisked away by a dark force to a world ruled by a new form of chess: Fairy Chess. Imbued with magic, new animal pieces, circular boards, and new rules, can the PCs escape with the help from a quirky wizard pal, Tal?
- ✦ **King's Walk:** Deep in the snowy forests of Sweden during the dead of winter, a ritual takes place at midnight that can give you a glimpse of the future (based on the Swedish ritual Årsgång). The PCs are alone in the woods at night, carrying no light to guide them, having gone without food or water. To know their futures, they must find their way out following the rules of the ritual. The Brook Horse, a mythical creature of the woods, lurks there too, waiting to challenge the PCs to a game of chess where the position of the back row pieces are randomized.
- ✦ **The Lunar Construct:** The first televised event on the moon: a chess tournament to win the blessing of Luna, goddess of the moon. The winner will be granted a year of uninterrupted access to the moon and the never-before held title: Silver Knight of the Moon. Agents of NARC, however, have other plans. The final missing components of their Chess AI computing machine are moon rocks. If they can harvest them in secret, the stones will guide their machine to best every human at chess and then threaten the world! Can you earn the blessing of the moon goddess and prevent NARC from stealing her stones?

CHARACTERS

Chess Learning Empathy Organization (CLEO)

Jande Chernev (she/her): A senior member of CLEO that has a warm, scholarly air to her. Deeply intelligent not just on the game but on people. Her lackadaisical demeanor and wry humor belies this intelligence. Understated, subtle, but deeply effective as a mentor.

Buck Cas (she/they): A new player that grasps the game uncannily well but lacks the refinement of knowledge and experience. Buck is extremely excited about the game, making new friends and seeking new challenges. They're absolutely ruthless over the board and reckless in having fun and getting into trouble—but will throw a game if their opponent isn't having fun. She's missing a front tooth.

Religious Chess Coalition (RCC)

Don Fischer (he/him): President of the RCC and former World Champion. Fischer left the circuit years ago when he was bested by Isabella Knight, but has continued to use his sizable fame and fortune to influence the game and prevent future players from employing immoral plays like Isabella's "Queen Pins Queen."

Chastity St. Rose (she/her): Current champion player for the RCC. Chastity is known for her patient and surgical style, calculating her moves perfectly and often trapping her opponents with no other option but to surrender. She wears a rose pendant handed down from her grandmaster grandmother.

National Association of Ranked Chess (NARC)

Doublec Ross (she/her): A French-Scottish player renowned for her rapid turn-taking and equally swift victories. Her smoldering stare is enough to unnerve even the most sanguine opponent. Though she is a registered player for NARC, in recent matches, she seemed to be drawing out games, eschewing her brutalist techniques for a more playful style.

UNAFFILIATED AND SUPERNATURAL

Sandra Vogelfield (she/her): Reporter for the Chess Times. Famously well informed about the comings and goings of even the most reclusive players. Sandra can't resist discovering secrets and has burned many bridges to get the scoop on a story. She has the phone number of every notable chess judge in her little black book.

The Brook Horse (he/him): A mythical and curious horse that can take the form of a man called Näckén. Should he choose you, his back will extend to carry as many as needed. However, should you vex him, he will take hold of you with his tail and drown you in the icy waters of his river. He can be thwarted by a piece of steel held fast in your pocket, or enticed into a game of chess. He always uses the King's Knight opening.

Luna (she/her): Goddess of the moon. She's a prankster, but doesn't lie. Her speech and demeanor are decidedly formal and aloof. Plays with a silver and obsidian chess set, set with living stars. Challenging and besting Luna in chess usually comes with the bestowed rank of Silver Knight of the Moon. Luna controls the moon and its resources.

Misha Tal (they/them): A human who has been abandoned in the fey realm, reared by nymphs in the world of the fantastical and supernatural. They have learned the art of survival. They're young, pragmatic, and unused to social norms the PCs may introduce them to. They carry a bow (called *Bishop's Bow*) as a weapon, and perform daring, imaginative attacks on their prey, readily willing to sacrifice for the advantage. Prefers the Ruy Lopez and Modern Benoni openings.

CHESS RANKS

From highest to lowest:

- + Grandmaster
- + International Master
- + World Champion
- + Silver Knight of the Moon
- + Bishop of Dreams

NAMES

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| + Aaliyah Price | + Koneru Polgar | + Sofía Pérez |
| + Amani Álvarez | + Lei Zhongyi | + Veronica Capablanca |
| + Ira Lane | + Louise Flores | + Victoria Lasker |
| + Iris Robinson | + Michele Ashley | + Xu Yifan |
| + Jada Williams | + Mikhaila Nakamura | + Zhao Yifan |
| + Jean Taylor | + Nia Krush | + Zoe Castillo |
| + Judit Botvink | + Pat Morphy | |

Chess Aesthetics

Every player has an edge that sets them apart. It may be determined by their style, their favored openings, or their tactics. In place of your demeanor, clothes, or sword, choose from the following:

Style (Demeanor): Surgeon, Romantic, Technician, Assassin, Escape Artist, Professional, Grinder, Mad Scientist, Magician, Mastermind, Natural, Prodigy

Openings (Clothes): The Queen's Gambit, The Caro-Kann, The London System, The King's Indian Attack, The Sicilian Defense, The Catalan, The Grand Prix Attack, The French Defense, The Ruy Lopez

Tactics (Sword): En Passant, Zugzwang, Mating Patterns, Poisoned Pawn, Simplification, Overloading, Alekhine's Gun, Windmill, Discovered Attack, Double-Check, Forks, Pins, Skewers, Queen Sacrifice, Decoy, Back Rank, Desperado, Interference

Custom Moves

ADJOURN

After you have made a roll for a move but before the results are declared, any player may call to **Adjourn** and take time to reflect and prepare for what is about to come. During that time, any other character can offer **Emotional Support** to the player whose move was interrupted. Time passes, and they return to the original situation, hopefully better prepared to deal with the consequences.

CHECK

When you make a move in game to send your opponent a coded message, give them a String on you and roll **+Heart** or **+Wit**:

10+ Choose 2

7-9 Choose 1

- ✦ You alone understand the coded message in their next move
- ✦ Through the threat of a finishing move, you inflict a Condition
- ✦ You intrigue your opponent and gain a String on them
- ✦ You win the game, and they ask you a question from **Figure Out a Person**
- ✦ They win the game, but know you held back

On a down beat, some possible outcomes: You opponent takes advantage of your play and makes you Stagger, your secret message is understood by others, or they are not the person you thought they were (lose all Strings on them; if you had none, they gain a String on you).