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Chess Cards

by Edward Lovett

INTRODUCTION

I found the essence of this game in Sid Sackson's *A GAMUT OF GAMES*, Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., Second edition 1982. It is the first game discussed (entitled *MATE*), and played with a particular subset of 20 playing cards from a regular deck.

According to Sackson: 'In Hanover, Germany, in the year 1915, G. Capellen published a small booklet entitled *Zwei neue Kriegsspiele!*' (that is, *Two New Wargames!*). Sackson infers that the timing was not right for the emergence of new war games "...while the reality of World War I occupied the center of the stage", as the booklet subsequently passed into obscurity. One of the games in the booklet was *MATE*, the heart of this article. ¹

Note that this card game is *not* a game of chance; there is a unique playing mechanism to *eliminate* the 'luck of the draw' no matter how the cards are dealt.

In this game we have:

- Perfect Information
- Elimination of Chance
- Out-thinking your opponent as a major component of the game
- Relatively simple to learn (really!) while having considerable depth

I have added the concept of using 'Chess Cards' in place of regular playing cards to give the game more of a chess 'flavour'. Further, the concept of 'foreplacing' a card (as specified in the original article) has been replaced by a more general concept of 'sacrificing' cards, and minor changes have been made to scoring, terminology and gameplay. I would refer the reader to the original article in Sid Sackson's book if a more definitive comparison is required.

Other than these 'cosmetics', it is G. Capellen who deserves credit for the mechanics of this rather unique and interesting card game.

The Chess Cards for this game consist of a set of 20 cards comprising 5 piece types (Queen, Rook, Bishop, Knight and Pawn), each in 4 suits (Black, Red, Yellow and White). The King is imaginary, but subject to 'threats' by the Chess Cards in play.

You may wish to obtain your own set of Chess Cards [here](#) (colour printer required).

¹The other game was called *Free Chess*, and noted to be a 'chess variant', although no rules were specified in Sackson's book.

GENERAL PLAY

- A dealer is chosen (in any manner you wish). The dealer has *no* advantage.
- The 20 chess cards are shuffled, and 10 cards are dealt to each player in groups of 5 at a time.
- The dealer opens with any card he wishes; this is deemed a 'threat' (to an imaginary King) that the opponent *must* counter in his next turn (else *mate* will have been given). This card is placed face up in front of the dealer. Note that as cards are played they are kept face up in respective piles in front of each player, rather than playing to a common pile in the centre of the table.

- To counter a threat, the opponent *must* reply with a card of the same suit (colour) - if he has more than one card of that particular suit, he may reply with any of these cards (but note 'winning the initiative' below).

Lacking a card of the same suit, the opponent *must* then reply with a card of the same rank (that is, piece type), for example queen countering queen, bishop countering bishop etc. This card, the opponent's 'reply', is placed face up in front of him.

Failing to have a legal move in reply to a threat is deemed *mate* and the game credited to the player with the initiative.

- **WINNING THE INITIATIVE**

The player who played the highest piece type (within a suit), or the highest suit (when piece type is played) has the *initiative* and leads for the next move.

- **SUIT AND PIECE RANKINGS**

Piece rankings are (from highest to lowest):

Queen > Rook > Bishop > Knight > Pawn

Suit rankings are (from highest to lowest):

black > red > yellow > white

- Play continues in this manner until a player is unable to reply to a card lead by the player with the initiative. The player with the initiative has given *mate* to the opponent and play stops.

- Further rules pertaining to advanced play, namely *Queen's Privilege*, *Sacrificing* and the concept of

Overmate will be discussed later.

- SCORING A MATE

For purposes of scoring a mate, each card is considered to have a value as follows (note that the particular suit is irrelevant for scoring purposes):

Queen=11 Rook=10 Bishop=4 Knight=3 Pawn=7

In case of a draw, neither player scores.

In its most elementary form (that is, no sacrifices have taken place), the value of the mating-card is multiplied by the move number to obtain the score:

Score = Mating Card Value x Move Number

For example, mating with a knight on the first move: Score = 3 x 1 = 3. Mating with a Queen on the 10th move: Score = 11 x 10 = 110.

Note that, in advanced play (see below), additional parameters are used to calculate the score.

- GAMES AND MATCHES

At the conclusion of the first game, the players cards are *exchanged*, and another game is played with each player now playing with the other player's cards (note that this effectively *eliminates the luck of the draw* and makes the card game one of pure strategy).

The player who was the non-dealer of the first game opens the second game.

Playing two games as such constitutes a match. It is the player who has accumulated the greater score at the end of the match that is deemed the winner. The difference between the two players scores at the end of the match may be used as a relative measure of victory.

Note that games can be played quite quickly; a match typically lasts < 30 minutes.

ADVANCED PLAY

- QUEEN'S PRIVILEGE

As befitting her role as the most powerful piece in FIDE chess, the card-queen has a special privilege associated with her; on playing a queen, the player may announce 'Queen's Privilege' (an optional move) in which case the queen *must* be followed by another queen, if that player possesses one; if not, he follows with a card of the same suit. Note that this privilege can have a dramatic effect on the outcome of a game - please refer to the [sample games section](#)

- SACRIFICING CARDS

To sacrifice a card, a player announces at the beginning of his turn that he wishes to sacrifice a card; he clearly shows it to his opponent and places it face down in front of him. The card does not enter into play. The player *must* then make a normal move.

The opponent at this or any subsequent time, also has the opportunity to sacrifice.

- THE VALUE OF SACRIFICING

Sacrificing cards has strategic value and allows the greatest possible extraction of score from play. However, sacrificing too many cards inevitably leads to mate by your opponent!

Examples of play are examined in the [sample games section](#), but for the moment, let us consider some calculations of score when sacrifice(s) have taken place as we will need to understand this in relation to the discussion of *overmate* which will be considered shortly.

The player who has sacrificed a card(s) and succeeds in giving mate has the multiplying number of the move increased by one for each card sacrificed.

(A common motif, when you know that you can force mate, is to sacrifice a card just prior to delivering the mating card).

For example, a mate given in the seventh move by a bishop would score as follows:

Score = $4 \times (7 + 1) = 32$ for one card sacrificed, and

Score = $4 \times (7 + 2) = 36$ for two cards sacrificed.

Note that the 'multiplying number of the move' (the calculation that occurs within the brackets) = move number + number of cards sacrificed.

Please note that these are but trivial examples of what may be achieved.

• THE CONCEPT OF OVERMATE

If players sacrifice different numbers of cards and the game proceeds to the point where the player who has sacrificed the *greater* number of cards has run out of 'cards in hand' to play, he must (and can only) use his last played card for all subsequent turns (depending on how many cards the opponent still holds) until the game is resolved.

I would refer the reader once more to the [sample games section](#) for illustration.

The term *overmate* pertains to the situation where a player who has sacrificed one or more cards succeeds, (by employing his 'last played card' as mentioned above), in giving mate *and the 'multiplying number of the move' is then calculated to be greater than 10*. Remember that the 'multiplying number of the move' is incremented by '1' for each card sacrificed, i.e.

'multiplying number of the move' = move number + number of sacrificed cards.

Thus, if a player has sacrificed, say, 2 cards and succeeds in mating on the *tenth* move, his 'multiplying number of the move' is going to be greater than 10 (10 plus '1' for each card sacrificed). Anytime the 'multiplying number of the move' is calculated to be *greater than 10*, this situation is known as *overmate* and attracts further bonuses. The *overmate number* (see table below) is the number of units above 10; in the previous example, the overmate number would be 2.

Overmate Bonuses

Overmate Number	Score is Multiplied by
1	2
2	3
3	4
4	5
5	6

Since there is a maximum of 10 moves per game, and since each card sacrificed must be followed by a 'normal move', then it follows that a maximum of 5 cards could possibly be sacrificed by a player in a game.

Theoretically then, if *move 5* by Player A was a *Queen*, and *mate* was given on the *tenth* move by this player, he having played his fifth card also as his sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth cards, then his final score would be:

Score=mating card value x (move number + number of sacrificed cards) x bonus
 = 11 x (10 + 5) x 6 = 990 (theoretical maximum mate score), although it has yet to be demonstrated that this can be achieved in actual play.

Please refer to the [sample games section](#) for an example of overmate.

• SUGGESTED NOTATION

- A printed scoresheet for recording and analysing games is suggested. It is certainly not necessary to record games, however if a record is desired where one can review game-play and strategy, then printing [this sheet](#) may help.

- The score sheet contains a printed 5 x 4 grid containing all possible cards ranked in order of suits and piece types. When your cards are dealt, simply circle the cards in your hand on the grid. By default, the uncircled boxes indicate the cards your opponent has in hand. The hand of cards as dealt needs to be recorded only if retrospective analysis of the game is desired.

- Note that, in the grid, suit colour is in lowercase, and piece type in uppercase. For example, rR=red rook and yB=yellow bishop.

- There is a maximum of 10 possible moves in a game, and cards as played are recorded next to the corresponding move number. The player with the initiative has his card underlined so that play can be followed more readily. A card that is sacrificed is simply placed in brackets next to the card played at that time. Remember though, that a card is sacrificed *first*, followed by a normal move.

- If the game is a draw, simply record draw on the sheet. If mate has occurred, record mate in the column of the player delivering the mating card. If overmate has occurred, record mate and a "!" representing the number of units overmate (5 "!" possible) next to the card delivering mate.

- Record game score and match score in the boxes indicated.

All [sample games](#) have pictorial and text-notation representation.

PLAYING SUGGESTION

Initially, or whenever space allows, players may place their cards face-up in a row in front of them, ordered in suits and pieces if desired, so that all cards are in view during play.

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