StrongChess:

The evolution of Chess

By

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Dedicated to

My brother Vani who I enjoyed playing chess with.

May your soul rest in peace, brother.

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Preface to the 1st Edition

"Chess is thriving. There are ever less round robin tournaments and ever more World Champions." - Robert Huebner

I am a lifelong fan of chess. I used to play avidly when I was in university, a long time ago. I have seen the game become increasingly more predictable and too well analyzed. Openings are memorized 15 moves deep, and computer analysis has made even the middlegame predictable. The mystery, joy and just human interest have gradually diminished- replaced by deeper and deeper trees of analysis by computers and people polishing their technique until it's a lifeless exercise. Watching games now is almost like watching two machines play.
I wanted to infuse creativity, randomness and bold play back into chess. So I invented a game called StrongChess. StrongChess consists of a board with 10 columns and 8 rows. The first row (for the white pieces) consists of a rook, a knight, another knight, a bishop, a queen, a king, a bishop, another bishop and a rook. The second row consists of 10 pawns. The setup for black matches the white setup.

The extra pieces add a lot of spice to the game. The openings are uncharted, the middle game is complex and there are no existing computer programs that can defeat you. StrongChess returns chess to its roots - a match of intellect and personality between two human beings with a lot of tension, drama and fun.

I introduced this idea a few years back in my book "Just a Bunch of Crazy Ideas." .My book had mixed reviews- in contrast the idea of StrongChess received almost universal praise. The idea of returning chess to its roots as a conflict between two people with ups and downs, mistakes and twists during the game struck a chord with people.

Read and enjoy.

Chapter 1 StrongChess

"I consider chess an art, and accept all those responsibilities which art places upon its devotees." - Alexander Alekhine

Chess started out as more of an art than a science. Technical proficiency at certain tactics were always a part of the game, but since all positional principles were not well understood, there were a lot of flaws (looking at it retrospectively) in the early recorded games. Somehow the flaws don't spoil the games though. You can still enjoy them, despite the flaws- in some ways the flaws enhance the suspense because you never know when one side or the other would commit a massive blunder.

In order to return to that state, I invented a game called StrongChess. The idea behind StrongChess is very simple. You expand the number of columns to ten and keep the number of rows at eight still. To populate the additional squares you add a knight and a bishop to the mix. The number of pawns increases to 10. The board now consists of 8 ranks (rows) still, but consists of 10 files (columns). The initial setup would be rook, knight, knight, bishop, queen, king bishop, bishop, knight and rook along the first rank. Pawns would occupy the second rank. You mirror the setup for black. The rules stay the same- castling short means king goes to h1 and rook goes to g1. Castling long means king goes to c1 and rook goes to d1. This proposed configuration is shown in Diagram 1.
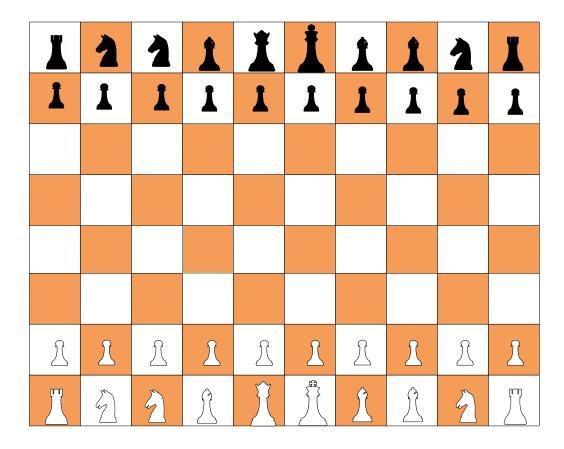
Diagram 1- StrongChess initial position

The rules for StrongChess will be very similar to regular chess and will be familiar to anyone who understands the rudimentary aspects of chess. These rules attempt to cover every situation on the board, but where there is doubt, a study of the rules and the spirit should be achievable. Any situation which cannot be resolved should be referred to the inventor of the game, the author. The following is a formal description of the rules, mostly for the sake of completeness.

There are two opponents in StrongChess who move alternately on a rectangular board which has 8 rows (ranks) and 10 columns (files). The board consists of white and black pieces. The play alternates between the white player and the black player until the game is concluded. The game can end in a draw or with one or the other king checkmated. A player may also resign on his/her turn or offer a draw. A threefold repetition of positions automatically results in a draw. If neither player can possibly checkmate, the game is a draw.

A StrongChess game is played on a board consisting of 8 rows (ranks) and 10 columns (files). The squares alternate between light and dark. At the beginning of the game each player has 20 pieces. The white player has light colored pieces and the black player has dark colored pieces. All of this is illustrated in Diagram 1 above.

The structure of the board is as follows, with algebraic notation for the squares:

a8	b8	c8	d8	e8	f8	g8	h8	i8	j8
a7	b7	c7	d7	e7	f7	g7	h7	i7	j7
a6	b6	c6	d6	e6	f6	g6	h6	i6	j6
a5	b5	c5	d5	e5	f5	g5	h5	i5	j5
a4	b4	c4	d4	e4	f4	g4	h4	i4	j4
a3	b3	c3	d3	e3	f3	g3	h3	i3	j3
a2	b2	c2	d2	e2	f2	g2	h2	i2	j2
a1	b1	c1	d1	e1	f1	g1	h1	i1	j1

Diagram 2 – Algebraic notation for StrongChess

The 10 vertical columns of squares are called files. The eight horizontal rows are called ranks. A straight line running from one edge of the board to an adjacent edge is called a diagonal. The files are designated from left to right as a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i,,j, The ranks are labeled 1-8. The initial position is shown in Diagram 1 above.

 No square can be doubly occupied by pieces of the same color. If a piece captures a piece of the opposite color, the captured piece is removed. The bishop moves diagonally but cannot leap over any other piece. The rooks move vertically and horizontally on ranks and files but cannot jump over any existing piece. The queen can move along any diagonal and also vertically and horizontally. It too cannot jump over pieces. The knight moves in an "L" shape in any direction, and can jump over other pieces. These rules for StrongChess are identical to normal chess rules. The presence of the extra pieces adds a lot of complexity to the game and increases the number of possible moves considerably.

The pawn can move forward one spot vertically if the spot is unoccupied. On the first move it may move 2 spaces if the space is unoccupied. For captures, the pawn can move diagonally across one space. A pawn crossing two squares which crosses the opponents pawn on the way can be captured as if it only moved one space (en passant capture as in regular chess). When a pawn reaches the eighth rank in the opposition territory, it can be exchanged for a bishop, knight, queen or rook (promotion as in regular chess). The king can move to any adjoining square not

attacked by an opponent's piece or pieces. Diagram 3 and 4 show the kingside castling mechanism.
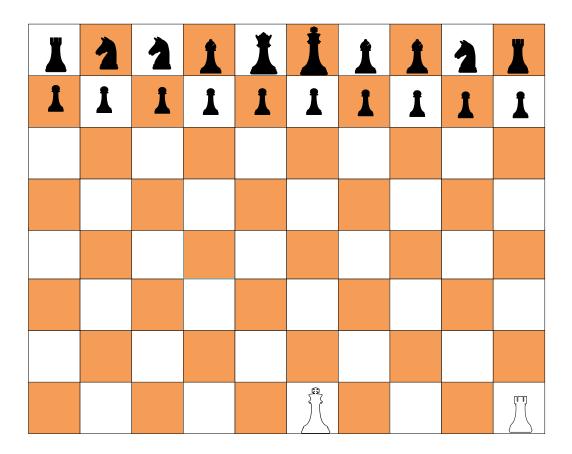

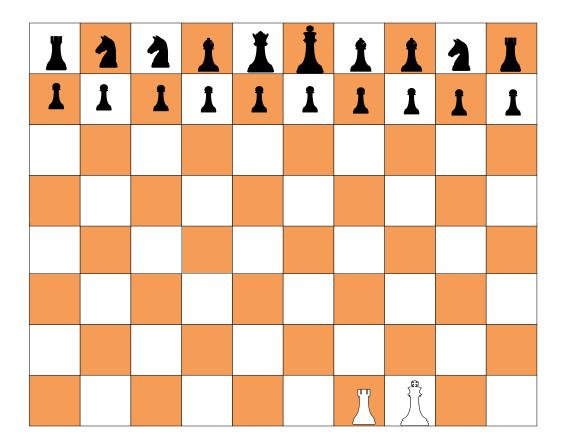Diagram 3– Position before White king side castle

Diagram 4 – Position after White king side castle

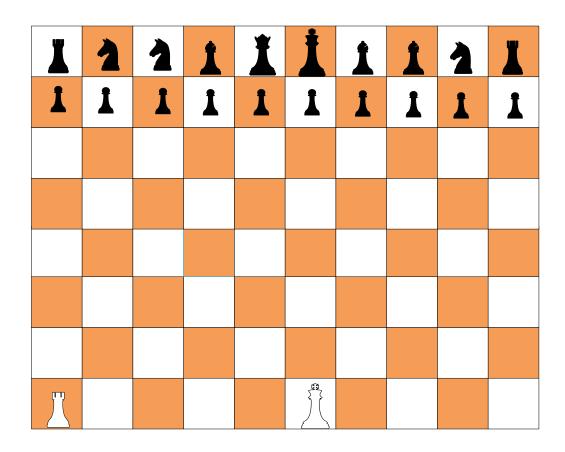Diagrams 5 and 6 show the castling mechanism for queenside castles.
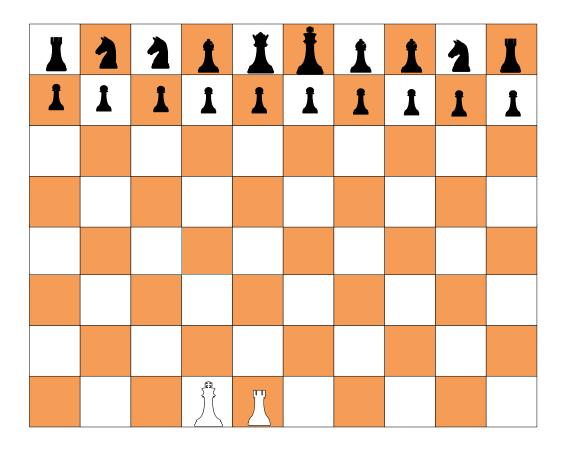
Diagram 5 – Position before Queen Side castle

Diagram 6 – Position after Queen Side castle

Symmetric rules apply for black. This again is very similar to the standard chess rules. If either the king or the rook has already moved, castling cannot be done. Castling is prevented if the king has to cross through the scope of the opponents pieces and is in check. The line between the king and the rook must be clear to execute a castling maneuver
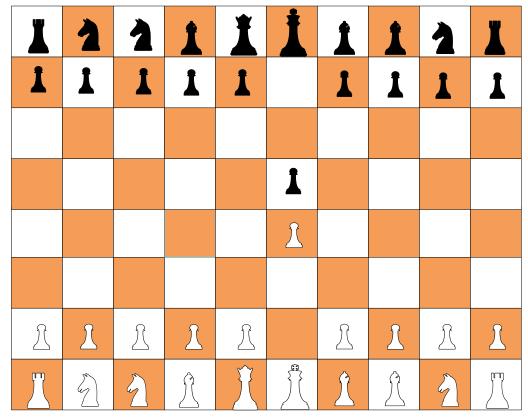
The king is "in check" if an opposing players piece attacks it. No piece can be moved that will expose the king of the same color to check or leave that king in check. This is the same as standard chess rules. The remaining rules are all identical to standard chess rules in regards to checkmate, draws, resignations and stalemates. Wherever a rule is not explicitly stated, the rules from standard chess are meant to be applied to StrongChess.10. Each move must be made with one hand only. A player may adjust a piece if he/she expresses his/her intention of doing so. An example would be by announcing "I'm going to adjust".

Chapter 2 Illustrative Game

"When a chess player looks at the board, he does not see a static mosaic, a 'still life', but a magnetic field of forces, charged with energy - as Faraday saw the stresses surrounding magnets and currents as curves in space; or as Van Gogh saw vortices in the skies of Provence." - Arthur Koestler
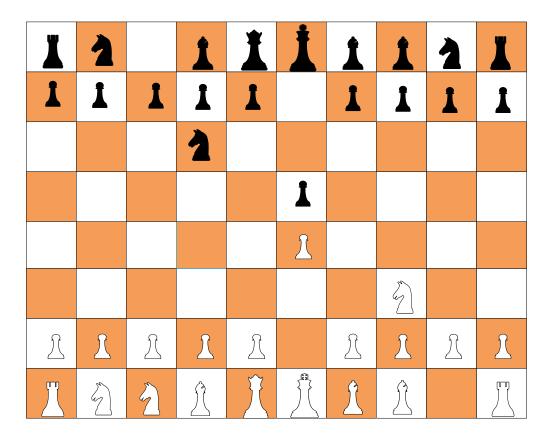
In this chapter, I'm going to illustrate the richness of StrongChess with a relatively short game. I intend to expand on this in the future with multiple illustrative games. The main purpose is to get the idea across of what sort of positional and tactical considerations come into play in this version of chess.
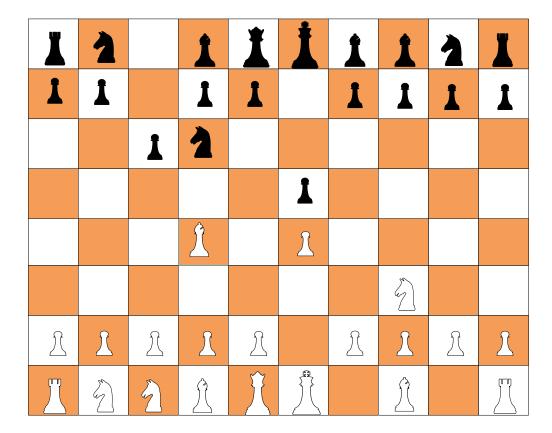
Move 1: f2-f4 f7-f5

The first move is a standard King pawns opening- it's immediately apparent that there is an expanded center in StrongChess, which includes squares d4,d5, e4,e5,f4,f5,g4 and g5. Pieces placed there have greater scope for action. Also, there are a rich number of opening variations. d2-d4 (Bishops pawn), e2-e4 (Queens pawn), g2-g4(Kings Bishop pawn), i2-i3 (aiming at a fianchetto of the Kings bishop, and b2-b3 (aiming at a fianchetto of the Queens bishop). This is just a minor sampling of what I'm sure will be many opening systems that will emerge.
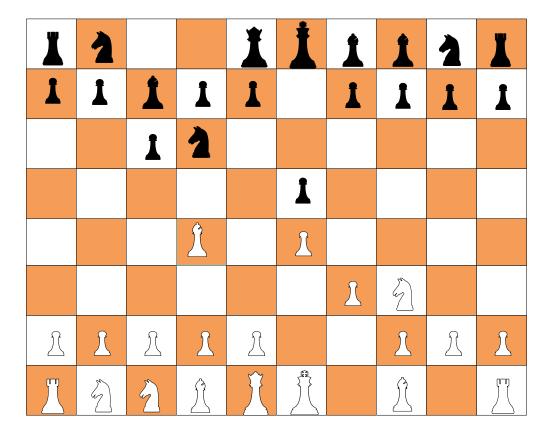
Move 2. i1-g3 c8-d6

The second move is a struggle to grab the center. White's knight now controls the e4 and g5 squares, and black replies by exerting pressure on e4 and protecting f5. One disadvantage of black's reply here is that it locks up the d7 pawn, which could be active in supporting the center.
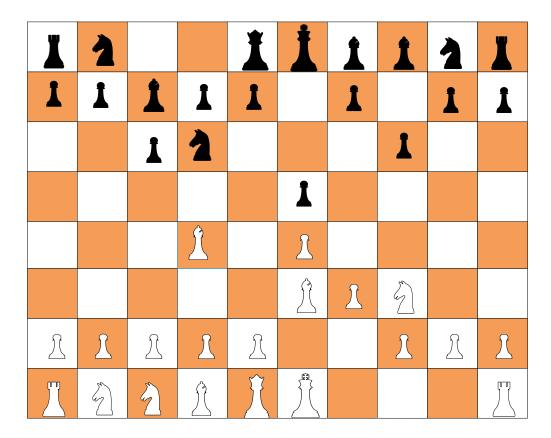
Move 3. g1-d4 c7-c6

Move 3 for white brings out one of the Kings bishops. Note that the square g7, which is normally weakly supported in regular chess and can lead to blitz attacks, is actually well defended in this version. Both a knight and a bishop support it. The purpose of bringing out the bishop is to castle. I think the principle of getting your King to safety still holds, but the extra square hanging at the end of the board means there's a lot of scope for attacks with the rooks- more so than in regular chess.

Move 4. g2-g3 d8-c7

White continues with development, making a pawn move to get his other Kings bishop into play and castle King side. Black develops his Queens bishop and looks like he is preparing to castle Queenside. Games like these usually lead to great tactical duels with attacks along the wings.

Move 5. h1-f3 h7-h6

White continues preparing for a King side castle. Black makes a move to reinforce the center and get his King side bishop out. He might have been better off continuing with his Queen side castle preparation.

Move 6. 0-0 b8-a6

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