About this Booklet

How to Print:

This booklet will print best on card stock (110 lb. paper), but can also be printed on regular (20 lb.) paper.
Do not print Page 1 (these instructions).
First, have your printer **print Page 2**.
Then load that same page back into your printer to be printed on the other side and **print Page 3**.
When you load the page back into your printer, be sure that the top and bottom of the pages are oriented correctly.

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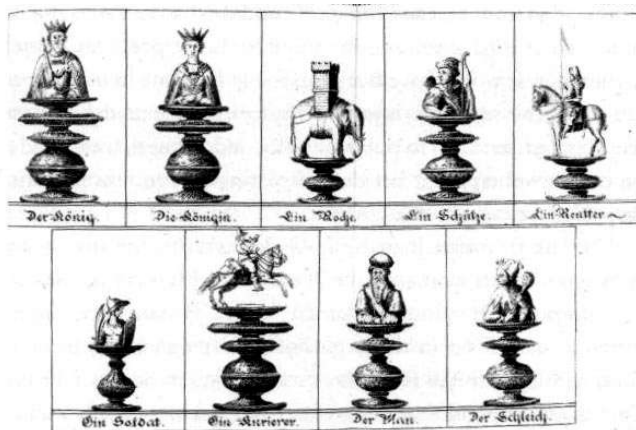
Playing the Game

The game begins with each player making four peculiar moves: The three pawns in front of the rooks and queen move two spaces forward; the queen also moves two spaces directly forward, to stand right behind the advanced queen pawn. The two players then play alternately, each time moving one piece in accordance with its normal move.

Captures are made by moving a piece onto a square occupied by an enemy piece. All pieces except the pawn (previously described) capture by using their normal moves.

If a player's King is threatened with capture, "**check**" is declared, and the player must move so that his King is no longer threatened. If there is no possible move to relieve the King of the threat, he is in "**checkmate**" and the game is over. Even if the King is not in immediate threat, but any possible move would subject him to capture (stalemate), he has lost the game.

If a pawn reaches the opposite side of the board, it is immediately **promoted**, being replaced by a medieval queen (a relatively weak piece).

A **draw** occurs when it can be demonstrated that neither player has sufficient means to win the game.

Figurative courier chessmen
depicted by Gustav Selenus, 1616

Cover Photo: Lucas van Leyden's "The Chess Players" 1508

For further Explorations in Courier Chess
go to CourierChess.com

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Courier Chess

Also known as
The Courier Game

The Great 8 x 12 Chess
Of Medieval Europe

For information about Chess Variants throughout the world
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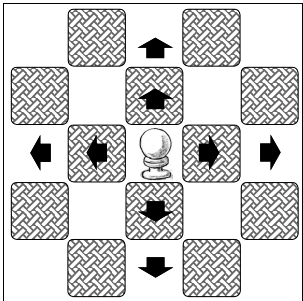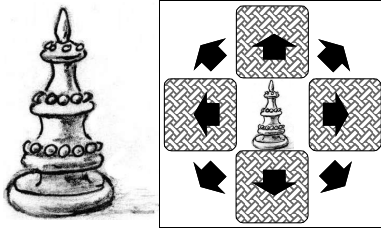
Courier Chess

Courier chess thrived in central Europe, especially in Germany, from the 12th through the 18th century. It was played alongside the medieval form of chess brought in from the Islamic world, and persisted well into the modern era, alongside the chess we play today.

The novel piece in this game was the courier, which moved like our modern bishop. It was considered so important that it stood among the tallest pieces, and was said to be the most powerful.

In addition, two other pieces were added: the sage and the jester.

The Pieces and Their Moves

The pieces shown here are taken from Lucas van Leyden's famous painting of 1508, known as "The Chess Players."

Here is a picture of each piece, with its English name, its old German name, and the move it makes on the chessboard. We'll begin with the pieces more familiar to modern chess players:

The **King** (König) moves one space in any direction. He does not have the power to castle, and must always move so that he is not threatened with capture ("in check").
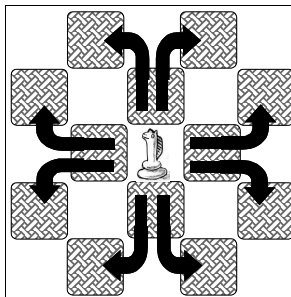
The **Rook** (Roche) moves as many squares as it wishes, forward, backward, left or right, until it reaches another piece, or the end of the board. Exactly like the modern Rook.
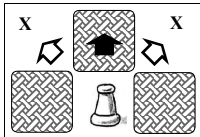
The **Knight** (Reutter) moves in a peculiar L-shape: two spaces forward, backward, right or left, plus one square at a right angle. It can not be blocked by another piece. This move also is exactly like its modern counterpart.
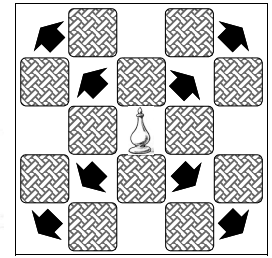
The **Pawn** (Soldat) moves one space forward, but captures forward/diagonally, like a modern pawn. It does not move two spaces forward (except as explained later), and promotes only to a medieval queen (see following page).
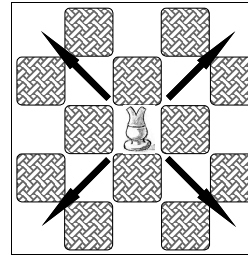
Now let's look at some more ancient and unusual pieces and moves.

The **Courier** (Kurierer), for which this game was named, moves exactly like our modern bishop: as many spaces as it wishes diagonally, but not able to jump over pieces in its way.
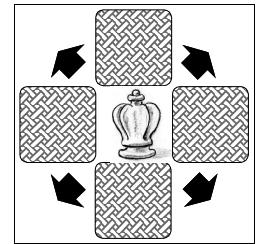
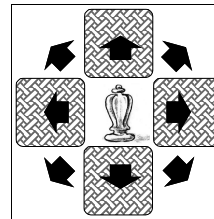The **Medieval Bishop** (Schütze) — not to be confused with the courier — has a move rather strange to the modern chess player. He moves two spaces diagonally, no more and no less, and has the power of jumping over a piece if it stands in his way. This peculiar move can only take him to 12 possible squares on the entire 8 by 12 chessboard.
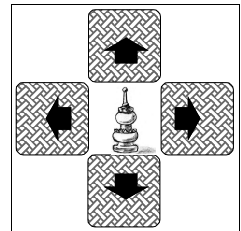
The **Medieval Queen** (Königin) moves only one space diagonally. Very different from the modern queen, but typical of chess before the 16th century.

The **Sage** (Man) moves exactly like the king, but is able to be captured like any other piece.

The **Jester** (Schleich) moves only one space forward, backward, left or right.

Here is the initial array of the pieces (K=King; Q=Medieval Queen; S=Sage; J=Jester; C=Courier; B=Medieval Bishop; Kt=Knight; R=Rook; P=Pawn). Notice that the sage, king, queen and jester all face each other directly across the board. The white king stands on a white square, and the black king stands on black.