

PROTEUS™

In *Proteus*, two players duel across a regular chessboard – but their chessmen are six-sided dice. The piece that each die represents is determined by the symbol on top. And each die can be turned. So the bishop that just took your rook could be transformed into a knight next turn . . .

Components

This rulesheet, sixteen custom dice (eight black and eight white), and a puzzle-cut chessboard.

Object of the Game

Players gain points by capturing their opponent’s dice. The player who captures the most pieces will not necessarily be the winner; it depends on the value of the captured pieces.

Whoever has the most points at the end of the game is the winner.

Setup

Each player starts with eight *Proteus* dice. Decide who will play white, and who will play black, in any way you like. Each die starts as a pawn. Each player places their dice on the eight black squares closest to them.

Sequence of Play

White moves first, and turns alternate.

On each player’s turn, they must do two things: *move* one die and then *rotate* a *different* die. A player who cannot move any of their dice loses the game, regardless of points. Otherwise, the game ends when one player has only one die left.

Moving a Die

Each die moves according to its current “identity” – the piece shown on top of the die.

Pyramid: This special piece is purely defensive. It cannot move or be taken! Only a Knight can jump over a Pyramid.

Pawn: may move one space forward, and capture by moving one space in either of the two forward diagonal directions. A Pawn on one of its color’s eight starting squares can move two spaces forward, regardless of its previous history. A Pawn that reaches the opposite edge of the board does not promote.

Bishop: may move any distance in any diagonal direction.

Knight: may move to the diagonally opposite corner of a rectangle three squares by two, “jumping” over pieces (both friendly and enemy) that might be in the way.

Rook: may move any distance up, down, left, or right.

Queen: may move any distance up, down, left, right, or diagonally.

King: There is no King! A game of *Proteus* is won by gaining the most points, not by checkmate.

Rotating a Die

After moving a die, a player rotates a different die one step up or down. Rotation uses the following sequence; the “point value” of a die goes up or down by 1 each time it is rotated:

▲ **Pyramid** (cannot be captured)

♟ **Pawn** (worth 2 points)

♗ **Bishop** (worth 3 points)

♘ **Knight** (worth 4 points)

♖ **Rook** (worth 5 points)

♚ **Queen** (worth 6 points)

So, for instance, a Rook could become either a Queen or a Knight. A Pawn could be rotated “down” to become an immobile, uncapturable Pyramid, or “up” to promote to a Bishop. A Pyramid can’t be rotated down, and a Queen can’t be rotated up.

Capturing

A piece is captured when an opposing piece moves to its square. Note that pawns cannot capture *en passant*.

Backstabbing: The Queen is a special case. While she can be captured in the standard way, it is also possible to capture the Queen by moving a piece to the square directly *behind* her. This weakness makes your Queen – or Queens, should you decide to play with more than one – much harder to protect. Be careful.

A Queen is captured when:

- An opposing piece moves to the Queen’s square.
- An opposing piece moves to the square directly *behind* the Queen (that is, the square between the Queen and the first rank on her side of the board). Thus, a Queen cannot be captured this way if she is on her first rank.

A Queen is NOT captured when:

- She moves to a new square, and the square directly behind her is already occupied by an opposing piece.
- A Rook rotates to become a Queen and the square directly behind her is already occupied by an opposing piece.

In other words, the only time a Queen is captured because of her “back square” is when an opposing piece moves to that square.

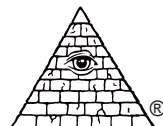
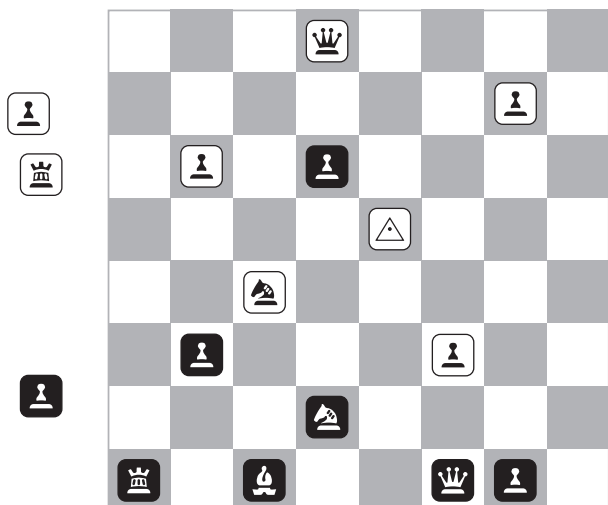
Winning and Ending the Game

If one player cannot move, the other player wins. Otherwise, when one player has only one die left, the game ends. Both players add up their points, and the one with the highest total wins.

Captured pieces are worth points according to their rank (see above). Set captured pieces aside to keep track of your points. Make sure you don’t accidentally rotate them!

Basic Strategy

- Be very careful with your Queens. They are powerful indeed, but much more vulnerable than in regular chess. And each time you lose one, you give your opponent 6 points!
- Forks are easier to set up in *Proteus* than in regular chess. A seemingly unthreatening die might change into a piece that will threaten two of your pieces next turn. This is one reason why it is generally not a good idea to have several valuable pieces on the board at the same time!
- Don’t forget that if one of your pieces is doomed, you can always rotate it one step down to give your opponent one less point. If you change it from a Pawn to a Pyramid, it can’t be taken at all!



VARIANTS

Trade-Off

On any turn, a player may decide to trade their movement phase for a double rotation phase. The player rotates the chosen piece *two* steps up or *two* steps down.

In order to take advantage of this option, however, it must be possible to perform a full 2-step rotation with the target piece. A Rook can't rotate up, because it only has one step to go.

Strategy

With this rule, you have to trade off “tempo” against the configuration of your pieces. Strong pieces can be built faster, but only at the expense of your overall position.

Sometimes you're in a situation where you wish you *didn't* have to move a piece – just double-rotate a piece, and you're free of your obligations. Until next turn, of course. And it's a great defensive move when one of your pieces is cornered and you want to surrender as few points as possible to your opponent.

To defend against an opponent who's determined to build up an army of Rooks and storm your territory, try to position your own pieces in a way that forces your opponent to move. If they *have* to move, they won't be able to perform a 2-step rotation.

Russian Roulette

Every capturing piece is rolled (we're playing with dice, after all . . .) and put back in the same position on the board. Decide at the beginning of the game whether you will roll the capturing piece before, or after, your rotation for that move. It makes a big difference – try it both ways!

Strategy

This variant forces players to think twice about attacking with a strong piece – because it might be rolled back to a weaker piece. Meanwhile, they are tempted to attack more freely with weak pieces. Trading Pawns suddenly becomes a heart-thumping proposal: unless you're capturing a strong piece, you might not want to risk giving a Rook or Queen to your opponent. Even on a normal capture, players will find themselves double-checking their piece's “rear” square just in case they roll a Queen.



Wall Street

Players are given a budget to “buy” their starting pieces. The number of pieces remains fixed at 8 for each player, but they may be worth a total of 20 points. (By comparison, in a standard game of *Proteus*, the budget is fixed at 16 points, forcing players to start with 8 Pawns.) There are two ways to do the setup:

Open Setup

After choosing their pieces (in secret), each player rolls a die. The one with the highest roll places a piece on one of their eight starting squares. Then the other player places a piece, and so on until all 16 pieces are on the board. The player who placed a piece first also plays first.

Secret Setup

Each player rolls a die: the one with the highest roll will play first. A screen is then placed across the board, and the players choose and set up their forces in secret. When they're done, the screen is removed and play begins. In this version, you know whether you'll be moving first or second when you select your pieces!

Strategy

Your strategy will obviously be different if you're going to play first or second. With the open setup, careful study of your opponent's placements will let you fine-tune your own setup. Even at this early, static stage, threats and feints are not uncommon, as players try to con each other into anticipating a wrong piece placement. Things are quite different with the secret setup. The guessing game can be very dangerous here!

Polarity

“Odd” pieces (Bishop and Rook) can only capture “even” pieces (Pawn, Knight, and Queen), and “even” pieces can only capture “odd” pieces. This variant takes a little getting used to, but once you get the hang of it, it becomes quite fascinating. It's not a fast game: it promotes taking a little time to build your army rather than attacking aggressively. Note that the Queen may only be backstabbed with an “odd” piece.

Warhorses

The rotation sequence is changed so that the Knight comes before the Bishop. Knights are now worth 3 points, and Bishops are worth 4.

This brings the game into line with traditional chess thinking that a Bishop is slightly more valuable than a Knight. It also slows play, as the far-ranging Bishops are harder to get. Endgames may be similar, but your openings will become very different!

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This game is dedicated to my dear friend Alexandre “Le Brown” Boivin.

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