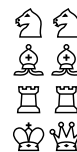
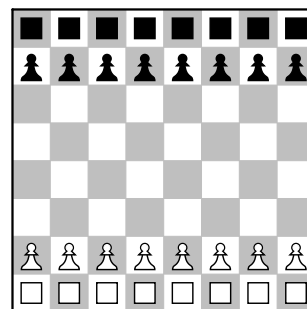


Surprise Chess

Adapted from Jieqi by [Alain Brobecker](#)

Jieqi description from the book [A world of Chess](#)¹

Material: A chess set. 16 cards with the 8 white officers and the 8 black officers depicted on one side and blank on the other side (see on page 3).



Setup: Players place the pawns on the board but leave their officers aside. Each player takes the 8 cards depicting the officers of their colors. They shuffle those cards face-down, then put one card with the blank side up on each square of their officer's rank.

Play: as normal chess except for the pieces still replaced by a face-down card. When a player wants to move the (unknown) officer still represented by a face-down card, they make a regular move the officer at this position would do, even a capture or castling (eg: b1-c3 for the card on b1, even if both kNights are already visible). This card is then turned face-up and replaced with the depicted officer that is still aside the board. This card is removed from play and the revealed piece from now on plays as it should. If a player attacks one or multiple cards not yet revealed, these cards are turned face-up and replaced by the depicted officers that are still aside the board.

Sometimes a player will reveal their king into check, the game is then lost (even if their move checks or mates the opponent king, because opponent plays first and will capture the king).

Also, it may happen during the game that you know the nature of a card (eg: because only the knights were not revealed, see example game after white's move 19 on page 2), but you must still play the card as the officer at this position would do, and not as the piece it really is.

Rex exclusive variant: The same rules apply, but the card depicting the kings are removed and the kings are placed on e1/e8.

We played a blits tournament of Surprise Chess during the **French gathering of chess problemists 2025 (RIFACE)**. It's a fairy variant only at the beginning of the game, but the surprise element works well, and hearing Dirk Borst roaring "absurd" with a laughter was a delight! Overall I think the players enjoyed themselves.

Once you have most of the information, it's normal chess with really uncommon positions, and quite often one player (or both) gets out of the opening with a weak position.

Below is the cross table for the tournament, two players tied for the first place and a final game was played between both, which saw the victory of **Joost Michielsens**.

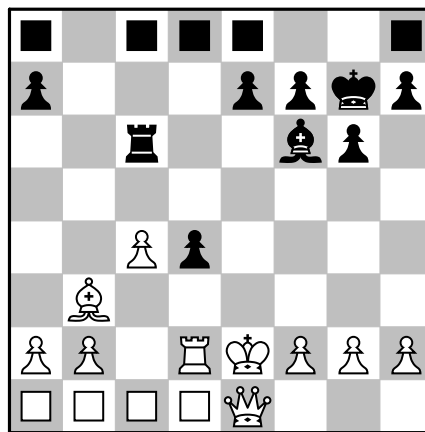
		1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	Joost Michielsens		1	0	1	1	1	4
2	Sven Charmeteau	0		1	1	1	1	4
3	Dirk Borst	1	0		0	1	1	3
4	Antti Parkkinen	0	0	1		0	1	2
5	Alain Brobecker	0	0	0	1		1	2
6	Axel Gilbert	0	0	0	0	0		0

¹A world of Chess is a beautiful and instructive book about history of chess and some chess variants written by [Jean-Louis Cazaux](#) and [Rick Knowlton](#) ISBN (print) 978-0-7864-9427-9 ISBN (ebook) 987-1-4766-2901-8

Below is the only recorded game from the event, the final between the two strongest chess players who finished with 4 points out of 5 in the main tournament.

Sven Charmeteau (FM) - **Joost Michiels** (IM), 2×5 minutes

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. e2-e3 | g7-g6 |
| 2. ♖g1-f3=♔? | ♚f8-g7=♚ |
| 3. ♖f1-c4=♘ | ♚g8-f6=♘ |
| 4. ♔f3-e2 | d7-d5 |
| 5. ♘c4-b3 | c7-c5 |
| 6. d2-d3 | b7-b5 |
| 7. c2-c4 | b5×c4 |
| 8. d3×c4 | d5-d4 |
| 9. e3×d4 | c5×d4 |
| 10. ♖e1-d2=♖ | ♚b8-c6=♚ |
| 11. ♖h1-e1=♔ | ♚c6-e6 |
| 12. ♔d2-f1 | ♚e6×e1+ (♖d1=♘) |
| 13. ♔f1×e1 | ♚c8-b7=♚ |
| 14. ♘d1-f3 | ♚b7-c8 (♚a8=♘) |
| 15. ♖d2-d3 | e7-e5 |
| 16. ♘f3×a8 | ♚c8×a8 |
| 17. ♔e1-e1 | e5-e4 |
| 18. ♖d3-d1 | ♚d8-d6=♚ |
| 19. ♖c1-f4=♖ | ♚e8-d7=♘ |
| 20. ♖b1-d2=♘ | ♘d7-c5 |
| 21. ♖d1-e1 | e4-e3 |
| 22. f2×e3 | d4×e3 |
| 23. ♘d2-f3 | ♘c5-d3 |
| 24. resigns | |



After 11. ♖h1-e1=♔, oops!

Having the standard chess opening theory useless is good, but there probably is a kind of more general and specific opening theory for Surprise Chess. My own idea was to play 1.e2-e3 2. ♖f1-e2=? aiming at a quick short range castling, but it needs to move again the piece on e2 to play ♖g1-e2=?.

Probably a more sensible idea is Joost's way of handling the opening: 1.g2-g3 2. ♖f1-g2=? will remain strong whatever the piece appears (see example game), and can be strengthened by 3.f2-f4 4.g1-g3=?.