

CHESS · VARIANT 62 OF 153

Four-Handed Chess (Chaturaji)

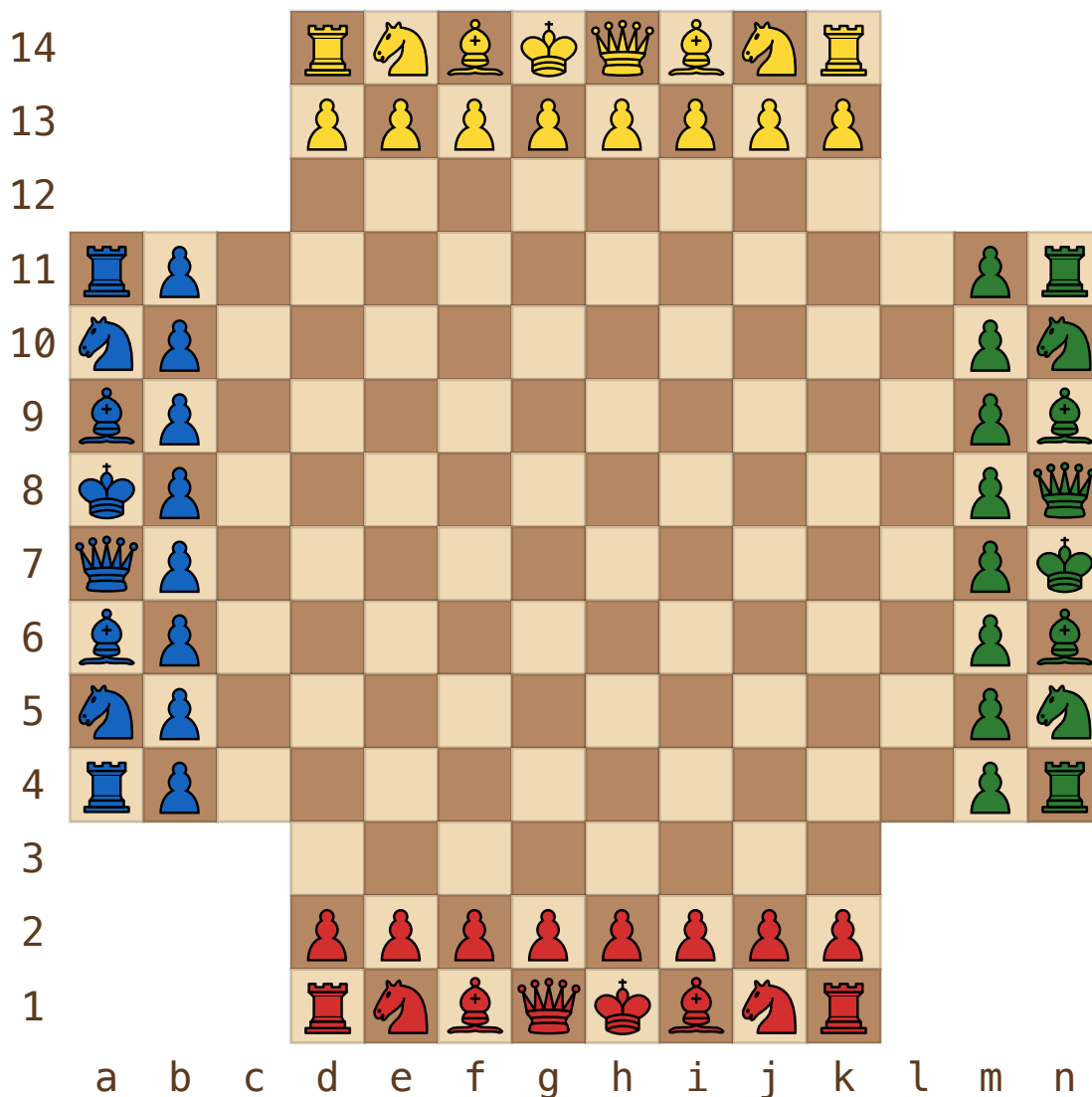
8×8

BOARD

4

PLAYERS

OVERVIEW



Four-Handed Chess (Chaturaji) – starting position

<https://engine.moddable.games/play/?game=chess&variant=four-handed-chess>

Chaturaji (Sanskrit: चतुरजी, “four kings”) is a four-player chess-like game first described in detail by Al-Biruni around 1030 CE in his book *India*. It is one of the oldest documented multiplayer board games. Originally a dice game, a diceless form was still played in India at the close of the 19th century.

Chaturaji is distinct from the two-player game Chaturanga despite the similar name. Historians debate whether Chaturaji preceded or followed Chaturanga; the Cox-Forbes theory (18th–19th century) that Chaturaji was the ancestor of modern chess was rejected by H.J.R. Murray in 1913 and is not accepted by modern scholars.

BOARD AND SETUP

Played on a standard 8×8 board. Four players each occupy one corner with a small army of 8 pieces. Player positions and army colours:

- ♦ **Red** — South (bottom)
- ♦ **Yellow** — West (left)
- ♦ **Green** — North (top)
- ♦ **Black** — East (right)

Each player's army occupies 2 ranks × 4 files in their corner. The back rank (2 squares wide by 4 squares, reading from the corner toward the center) holds 4 pieces; the next rank holds 4 Pawns.

Back rank piece order (corner to center): **King — Elephant — Horse — Boat**

Pawns occupy the rank directly in front of the back rank, on the same 4 files.

PIECES

King — moves one square in any direction. The King can be captured like any other piece; there is no check or checkmate rule.

Elephant — moves any number of squares orthogonally (like a FIDE Rook). Despite the name, this piece functions as a Rook.

Horse — moves in an L-shape: two squares in one direction, one square perpendicular. Leaping — cannot be blocked.

Boat — jumps exactly two squares diagonally in any direction, jumping over the intervening square (the Alfil move). Permanently color-bound.

Pawn — advances one square forward (toward the opposing side). Captures one square diagonally forward. No initial double-step. Each player's Pawns advance in the direction toward the opposite player: Red's Pawns advance northward (toward Green), Yellow's advance eastward (toward Black), etc. Promotion: upon reaching the far rank, a Pawn promotes to the piece type that originally started on the same file — but only if that piece has already been captured. If the required piece has not been captured, promotion cannot occur.

DICE RULES

On each turn, the active player rolls two dice and makes one move for each die result. The same piece may be moved twice, two different pieces may be moved, or one or both moves may be skipped.

DIE VALUE	PIECE MOVED
1 or 5	Pawn or King
2	Boat
3	Horse
4 or 6	Elephant

Historical sources disagree on whether six-sided or four-sided (stick) dice were used; H.J.R. Murray believed cubical dice were a substitute for oblong dice.

SCORING

There is no check or checkmate. The King can be captured like any other piece. The winner is the player with the most points at the end of the game:

PIECE CAPTURED	POINTS
Pawn	1
Boat	2
Horse	3
Elephant	4
King	5

Perfect score: A player who captures all three opponents' Kings while keeping their own King on the board scores 54 points — the sum of all pieces in three complete armies. This is the game's highest achievement.

SPECIAL RULES

Boat Triumph (Vrihannauka): When a Boat moves such that a 2×2 square is formed consisting entirely of Boats (one from each player), the player who completed the formation captures all three other players' Boats.

Sinhasana (Throne): If a King moves onto the original starting square of another player's King, it claims the Sinhasana. If the throne entered belongs to the allied player (the player across the board), the claiming player takes command of both armies.

TURN ORDER

Players take turns clockwise: Red → Yellow → Green → Black → Red...

ATTRIBUTION

Rules documented from Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaturaji), citing H.J.R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (1913); Al-Biruni, *India* (c. 1030 CE); D.B. Pritchard, *The Encyclopedia of Chess Variants* (1994).