

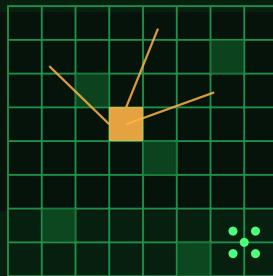
DIGITAL DAWN STUDIOS · TABLETOP DIVISION PRESENTS

BLACK SWAN CHESS

ANALOG PROTOCOL

a chess variant about navigating uncertainty · the tabletop edition

△ CONTAINS: METEORS · DESERTIONS · UNPLANNED PROMOTIONS △



2 PLAYERS · 1 CHESS SET · 3 DICE · 1 NOTEPAD

30–60 MINUTES OF UNSOLICITED NARRATIVE

By Dionicio Galarza

A TABLETOP TRANSLATION OF THE VIDEOGAME «BLACK SWAN CHESS — CHAOS PROTOCOL»

DIGITAL DAWN STUDIOS · THE GAME STUDIO OF ALBA DIGITAL · MMXXVI

§00 · WHY THIS GAME EXISTS

FROM THE DESIGNER'S NOTEBOOK · DIGITAL DAWN STUDIOS

Being good at chess is treated as proof of something larger: strategic thinking, planning, the ability to occupy positions of power. Many people relate to chess as a metaphor for plotting — for moving others around like pawns until the scheme completes.

There is a fundamental omission in that thinking, and this game exists to correct it. Unlike the board, **in real life things are happening all the time which you cannot control.** Things move and change constantly. Life is not a fixed set of conditions that waits patiently until you change it.

This omission has consequences for those who believe they can plan like Machiavelli with other people's lives — who behave like gods of their own little worlds. It only brings them pain, because inevitably, it all falls apart.

So: chaos. In this chess, some of your pieces will act on their own — out of anger, inspiration, or stupidity. A piece you order forward may refuse, too afraid or too rebellious to comply. A pawn may be very, very lucky and cut down the knight that came for it — sometimes the underdog wins. And every now and then, someone you were counting on simply vanishes: people die, people leave, and there is nothing you can do about it. Strange events will occur that go against the rules of chess. In real life, illegal things happen all the time; so should they here.

Everything else is the chess you know. Strategy still wins games. You just also have to survive your own army.

This game is a small vaccine against the fantasy of control. May your plans be beautiful — and may you learn to smile when they do not survive.

§01 · WHAT YOU NEED

- **A standard chess set and board.** Any set. Keep captured and removed pieces beside the board — this is the **reserve**, and the game borrows from it.
- **Three six-sided dice:** two matching (**the Order dice**) and one of a different color or size (**the Fate die**). One die works fine — roll it twice for Order, once for Fate.
- **A notepad and pen — the Chronicle.** It records moves, catastrophes, and (in the Souls module) the personalities of your army. *The Chronicle is the truth; the wood is just a reminder.*
- **A handful of coins or buttons** (6–8): turncoat rings and transformation markers.
- *Optional:* a second chess set makes promotions and betrayals physical instead of marked.

THE SUBSTITUTION KIT

Chaos transforms pieces faster than a single set can represent. When a piece changes rank or color:

1. Borrow the exact piece from the reserve, if it exists there.
2. Upside-down rook = queen (the classic).
3. Otherwise, slide a coin under the piece, announce aloud what it now is, and write it in the Chronicle.
From then on the wood is a token; the Chronicle line is the law.

A defector that cannot be swapped for its other-color twin wears a **turncoat ring** — a rubber band, a paper ring, a coin under its base. Agree on your markers before the first move.

§02 · THE THREE LAWS

LAW I — IT IS STILL CHESS. Every rule of standard chess applies at all times, unless a die says otherwise: movement, castling, en passant, promotion, check, checkmate, stalemate, and all the ordinary draws. There is no chaos so deep that it excuses an illegal move by a *player*.

LAW II — THE DICE OUTRANK YOU. When a die contradicts the rules of chess, the die is right. Chaos happens *to* the board, never *by* a player: neither player ever chooses what chaos does or whom it strikes — the procedures choose. You may not decline a result you dislike, including your own good luck.

LAW III — THE GAME MUST SURVIVE ITS OWN CHAOS. Two protections keep catastrophe from becoming nonsense:

THE CROWN ENDURES

Kings are immune to every chaos event. A king is never removed, transformed, turned, or struck by anything the dice do, and a king never dies attacking. If a king could roll snake eyes and die, the game would end by dice instead of by story — *a kingdom without a king is not chaos; it is a broken save file*. Checkmate remains the only death a crown can suffer.

THE VOID'S VETO

After resolving any chaos event, check: does it leave **the player who just moved** in check? If so, the entire event is undone — the void reconsiders, and nothing happens. The player *about* to move enjoys no such mercy: chaos may leave *you* in check on your own turn — even checkmated. *The void owes you nothing.*

§03 · THE TURN

Touch-move is replaced by **declare-to-move**: handle pieces freely while thinking, but the moment you state a move aloud, it is committed to the dice.

STEP	WHAT HAPPENS
1 • DECLARE	Say your move aloud (“knight takes on e5”). It must be a legal chess move.
2 • TOSS	Roll all three dice at once — the two Order dice and the Fate die.
3 • ORDER DICE	Read their sum against the danger band for your kind of move (§04). Low results go wrong: a refusal, a repelled attack, or a doomed assault. Anything above the band obeys.
4 • RESOLVE	If the piece obeyed, make the move — a perfectly normal chess move in every respect.
5 • FATE DIE	Only if your turn was spent (a resolved move, a repelled attack, or a doomed assault — a refusal spends nothing): on a 6 , the void stirs — roll one die on the Event Table (§05) and resolve it. Then play passes.

Grace of the first move: skip the Fate die during each player's first move of the game. Even the void lets you develop one piece.

Re-declaring: if a refusal sends you back to step 1, re-Toss all three dice with the new declaration — only the final, resolved move's Fate die counts.

§04 • OBEDIENCE — THE DANGER BANDS

Every declared move risks a low roll on the Order dice (2d6). What a low roll *means* depends on the move. Under the default **TEMPEST** doctrine:

DECLARED MOVE	2	3	4	5	6–12
Quiet move (no capture)	Refusal	Refusal	—	—	obeys
Capture	Doomed	Repelled	Refusal	—	obeys
Capture, punching up	Doomed	Doomed	Repelled	Refusal	obeys

Punching up: the defender is worth more points than the attacker, on the classic scale **P 1 • N 3 • B 3 • R 5 • Q 9**. A rook taking a queen punches up; a bishop taking a knight does not.

THE THREE FAILURES

REFUSAL — the piece will not go. Maybe it is too afraid; maybe it is rebelling against you; who knows. It stays where it is and **sulks**: you may not order that piece again this turn (next turn, all is forgiven). Your turn is *not* spent — declare a different piece's move and Toss again.

REPELLED — the attack bounces. Your piece lunges, the defender holds, and both stand where they stood. Nothing changes on the board, but your **turn is spent**. The blow was your move; you simply missed.

DOOMED — the attacker dies in the attempt. Sometimes the underdog wins. Remove *your attacking piece* from the board; the defender survives, untouched. Your **turn is spent**. *This is the pawn cutting down the knight that came for it — the game's whole philosophy in one die face.*

EXCEPTIONS AND GUARDS

- **Royal Dignity.** A King refuses a quiet move only on a **2** — royalty barely deigns to disobey. A King is **never Doomed**: treat any Doomed result for a King as Repelled. And a King **in check never rolls at all** — he obeys absolutely when the crown is threatened.
- **A pinned attacker never dies.** If the attacker's death would leave its own King in check, it miraculously survives: treat Doomed as Repelled. Nerve fails; the piece does not.
- **While in check,** desperation focuses the mind: captures can be neither Doomed nor Repelled — for any piece except the King, every danger-band result becomes a plain Refusal instead. Your pieces may still panic; their blades do not slip.
- **A refusal may never leave you without a move.** If the declared piece is your only piece with a legal move — or every other piece is already sulking — it cannot refuse: it grumbles and obeys. Skip the obedience roll entirely when only one of your pieces can legally move.
- **Spent is spent.** A Repelled or Doomed result counts as your move for every timing purpose: en-passant windows close, and the move number advances.
- **Castling** is a King move (roll with Royal Dignity). Flavor insists it is the rook that refuses to leave its tower; the law does not care.

§05 · THE FATE DIE AND THE SIX EVENTS

When the Fate die fires, roll one die on the Event Table. Events strike **both armies impartially** — chaos does not check whose turn it is. *Move numbers are full moves — the numbers in your Chronicle's notation column.* If the rolled event is still locked, **the void hesitates**: nothing happens. The early game is merciful; it does not stay that way.

D6	EVENT	UNLOCKS AT MOVE
1	WANDER	2
2	PROMOTION	4
3	DEMOTION	4
4	VANISH	4
5	METEOR	2
6	BETRAYAL	6

HOW THE DICE CHOOSE A VICTIM

- **SCAN ORDER:** read the board like text from White's side — a1, b1 ... h1, then a2 ... h2, up to h8.
- **COUNT-OFF:** roll 2d6 and count that many *eligible* candidates in scan order, starting from a1 and wrapping around. The piece you land on is chosen. With 13 or more candidates, roll 3d6 instead.
- **THE COMMONER SPLIT** (used by Vanish, Promotion, and Betrayal): first roll one die — **1-4: the pawns** of both armies are the pool; **5-6: the pieces** (never kings). Commoners are struck more often than royalty; it has always been so. If the indicated pool is empty or has no eligible member, use the other.

1 • WANDER – *somebody acts on their own*

Out of anger, inspiration, or stupidity — who can say. The player **about to move** suffers this: one of their pieces moves itself, and the whim **is that player's turn**.

- Candidates: every piece of that army with at least one legal move. **Count-off**.
- List the wanderer's legal moves by destination square in scan order; roll **one die** and count off (wrapping) to choose the move.
- If the chosen move is a capture, re-roll once; the second result stands, whatever it is. Wanderers mostly stroll; occasionally they rampage.
- Play it as a real move in every sense. It can give check — even checkmate. A wandering pawn that double-steps can be captured en passant. A wandering pawn that reaches its last rank **crowns itself Queen** — no one chooses this; it simply happens.
- That player's turn is **spent**; the other player moves again. No obedience roll is made for a wander — it already *is* disobedience.

2 • PROMOTION – *the universe promotes the unready*

Commoner split, then count-off among eligible pieces: pawns, knights, bishops, and rooks (queens have nowhere left to rise; kings are the ceiling).

Pawn → roll: 1–3 Knight, 4–6 Bishop • Knight → Rook • Bishop → Rook • Rook → Queen

Swap the physical piece (Substitution Kit). The army did not earn this, and it does not matter.

3 • DEMOTION – *rank is a rumor*

Count-off among **all** knights, bishops, rooks, and queens on the board (no split — pawns can fall no further).

Queen → Rook • Rook → roll: 1–3 Bishop, 4–6 Knight • Bishop → Pawn • Knight → Pawn

If the fallen piece stands on its own last rank and would become a pawn, the void reconsiders — the demotion fizzles (a pawn cannot exist there).

4 • VANISH – *people leave*

Commoner split among all non-kings, then count-off. Remove the piece from the game. It was not captured; it is simply **gone** — died, deserted, dissolved; the Chronicle may speculate. There is nothing you can do about it.

5 • METEOR – *the sky does not check rank*

Count-off among **all** non-pawn, non-king pieces of both armies — no split, no bias, pure chaos. Remove the piece. *The sky never wastes a rock on a pawn*. The square remains playable; the crater is cosmetic (unless you adopt the *Craters* variant, §06).

6 · BETRAYAL – *nothing is yours*

Commoner split among all non-kings, then count-off. The piece **changes armies where it stands**: swap in its other-color twin from the reserve, or collar it with a turncoat ring.

- A pawn that defects while standing on its *new* army's final rank becomes a **Knight** of that army (a pawn cannot exist there).
- You may never castle with a rook that has ever changed sides. You don't trust it, and neither does the King.

AFTER EVERY EVENT – THE CHECKS OF LAW III

Kings untouched? The player who just moved *not* left in check? If either fails, the event is wholly undone. Then log the event in the Chronicle — chaos that is not written down never becomes a story.

§06 · DOCTRINES

How much uncertainty can you live with? Agree on a doctrine before the game. **TEMPEST** is the game as designed; the bands below replace those in §04.

	SKIRMISH (<i>mild</i>)	TEMPEST (<i>default</i>)	MAELSTROM (<i>the void is hungry</i>)
Fate die fires on	6, then confirm 4–6	6	5–6
Quiet move	refusal on 2	refusal on 2–3	refusal on 2–4
Capture	2 doomed · 3 repelled	2 doomed · 3 repelled · 4 refusal	2 doomed · 3–4 repelled · 5 refusal
Punching up	2–3 doomed · 4 repelled	2–3 doomed · 4 repelled · 5 refusal	2–4 doomed · 5 repelled · 6 refusal
Event table	4 → Wander · 6 → Meteor	as printed	as printed
Feels like	a rumor of chaos (~5–6 events/game)	the designed game (~10–11 events/game)	~20+ events/game; plans are a joke

THE TABLE DOCTRINE – TUNING THE VOID BY HAND

The videogame's Chaos Configuration panel, translated to dice. Adjust any dial and note it in the Chronicle as your **house doctrine**:

- **Frequency** = which faces fire the Fate die (6 · 5–6 · 4–6 ...).
- **Extremity** = which events are unlocked. Cross a face off the Event Table to ban an event (a banned roll = the void hesitates), or re-map it to a neighbor.
- **Gates** = the unlock move numbers. Raise them for calmer openings; drop them to zero for madness from move one.

- **Sway** = how much *personality* steers chaos: Sway 0 is the plain game above; Sway 1 is the **Souls module** (§07); Sway 2 is Souls with its effects doubled (band shifts of two faces; Vanish and Betrayal *always* stalk the lower-Spirit army).

OPTIONAL VARIANTS – BEYOND THE VIDEOGAME

These exceed anything the digital version does. You were warned.

- **CRATERS:** a meteor scorches its square — place a coin there; no piece may end a move on it for the rest of the game. The board slowly shrinks.
- **DOUBLE DOOM:** doubles on the Order dice also trigger a Fate roll. Chaos rides in on your own hand.
- **THE LONG NIGHT:** from move 30, all gates open and the Fate die fires on 4–6. Endgames refuse to be quiet.

§07 · THE SOULS MODULE

The notepad game. Optional, and the heart of the thing: your pieces stop being wood and start being people.

In the videogame every piece carries hidden Loyalty, Morale, and Intelligence that steer the chaos. Paper cannot hide numbers from the hand that writes them, so the Analog Protocol tracks souls in the open, at two scales: one number per army, and marks on individuals.

ARMY SPIRIT

Each army has a **Spirit track** from 1 to 10, **starting at 6**. Adjust it the moment things happen:

EVENT	SPIRIT
Your Knight, Bishop, or Rook leaves the board (any cause: captured, vanished, meteor, doomed)	–1
Your Queen leaves the board	–2
One of yours defects (Betrayal)	–2
Any promotion of yours (pawn crowning, or the event)	+1
Your piece survives an enemy assault (their attacker Doomed)	+1

Pawns come and go without moving the needle — the void's cruelest joke.

SPIRIT	STATE	EFFECT
8–10	EXALTED	Your army believes. Ignore Refusal results entirely (Doomed and Repelled still stand — fate outranks faith).
4–7	STEADY	Play as written.
1–3	SHAKEN	Every refusal band of yours widens by one face (quiet 2–4; capture refusal 4–5; punching up 5–6). Worse: Vanish and Betrayal draw their victims only from a Shaken army (if both are Shaken, the lower Spirit; tie → normal pools). Despair invites the void.

MARKS — GRUDGES AND LAURELS

- **GRUDGE** ✕ — when a piece **refuses** an order or **wanders**, mark it. A piece with **2+ Grudges** widens its personal refusal band by one face, permanently — disobedience is a habit. And when **Betrayal** strikes an army, it takes the **most-Grudged** piece (skip the count-off; tie → count-off among the tied). The void recruits the resentful.
- **LAUREL** ★ — when a piece **captures**, **gives check**, or **survives an assault**, mark it. A piece with **2+ Laurels never refuses** (it believes; Doomed and Repelled still apply). When the **Promotion** event strikes, it raises the **most-Laurelled** eligible piece of the chosen pool (tie → count-off). The universe occasionally promotes the deserving, too.

NAMES

A soul needs a name. Name pieces at setup, or use **battlefield naming**: the first time a piece earns any mark, name it. Names from the old kingdom — the same banks the videogame draws from:

PAWNS	Wat · Hob · Tom · Dickon · Alf · Cubb · Nold · Perkin · Snell · Wilkin · Oddo · Brom
KNIGHTS	Sir Caradoc · Sir Brandel · Sir Yvo · Sir Mellor · Dame Rouncey · Sir Galfrid
BISHOPS	Frater Lux · Canon Orbis · Abbot Hale · Vicar Moone · Prior Comet · Deacon Voss
ROOKS	Warden Grift · Castellan Ord · Keeper Stane · Bastion Hugh · Warden Mott · Castellan Brakk
QUEENS	Queen Vela · Queen Lyra · Queen Carina · Queen Noct
KINGS	King Aldric · King Osric · King Theldane · King Morcar

THE CHRONICLE AND THE PIECE OF THE MATCH

Keep the move list as usual, and give every catastrophe its line: “14 ... *the void takes Frater Lux from c4.*” When the game ends, before anything is put away, hold the small ritual:

- Reread the event lines aloud.
- Crown the **PIECE OF THE MATCH** — the piece, surviving or fallen, whose story moved the most: most marks, most chronicle lines, best tragedy.
- The winner writes its one-line epitaph or eulogy in the Chronicle.

Chronicle pages accumulate. After a few game nights you own something the videogame keeps in RAM: a saga.

THE REFEREE VARIANT — A THIRD PLAYER AS THE VOID

With three people, one plays **the Void**: they keep the rosters *hidden*, roll secretly behind a book, and apply per-piece souls exactly like the videogame does — nudging count-offs toward the demoralized, the resentful, the brilliant. The players see only outcomes and must *read* their armies' moods from behavior. The Void never invents results — they follow the procedures — but they alone know why the knight hesitated.

§08 · ENDING THE GAME

Checkmate wins, as it has for fifteen centuries. Stalemate and all standard draws apply — including the fifty-move rule and threefold repetition, which your notepad enforces better than the videogame currently does (the table beats the terminal; savor it).

Chaos can deliver check, and chaos can deliver mate. If the void checkmates you — a Vanish that opens a file, a wanderer that strolls into a killing square — that is not unfair. That is the point. In real life, the plan does not fail politely, at a moment of your choosing.

Resigning mid-catastrophe is always legal. The Chronicle will remember.

§09 · DESIGNER'S NOTES – THE FIDELITY MAP

For the curious: how faithfully the dice reproduce the videogame's constants (from *js/chaos.js* and *js/stats.js*). Deviations are small and deliberate.

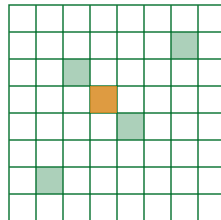
VIDEOGAME CONSTANT	ANALOG MECHANIC	DIGITAL	ANALOG
Chaos frequency, Tempest 0.15/move	Fate die = 6	15.0%	16.7%
Chaos frequency, Skirmish 0.08	6, confirm 4–6	8.0%	8.3%
Chaos frequency, Maelstrom 0.35	Fate die = 5–6	35.0%	33.3%
Refusal base 0.08	2d6 ≤ 3	8.0%	8.3%
King refusal (×0.5)	refuses only on 2	4.0%	2.8%
Attacker perishes, base 0.04	2d6 = 2	4.0%	2.8%
Capture fails, base 0.06	2d6 = 3	6.0%	5.6%
Total capture interruption	2d6 ≤ 4	17.0%	16.7%
Perish scaled by value ratio (cap ×2.5)	punching-up band 2–3	6.7–10%	8.3%
Commoner bias 1/√value (pawns at start)	1d6: 1–4 = pawns	69.3%	66.7%
Wander prefers quiet strolls (75%)	re-roll a capture once	≈	≈
Event gates (minMove 2/4/4/4/2/6)	unlock move numbers	exact	exact
Kings exempt · wander spends the turn · capture-in-check uninterruptible · pinned attacker survives · king never perishes · sanity veto	stated verbatim as law	exact	exact
Hidden per-piece Loyalty / Morale / Wits	Spirit track + Grudges / Laurels (the Referee Variant restores hidden stats exactly)	—	—

Monte-Carlo of the analog rules (20,000 simulated games, ~35 full moves): **Skirmish ≈ 5.6 events/game, Tempest ≈ 10.8, Maelstrom ≈ 21.6** — matching the videogame's expected cadence of ~5.6 / ~10.5 / ~24.5 firing rolls.

Two deviations. *Betrayal* lands on a flat d6 face (16.7%) versus the videogame's weighted 11.1% — at the table, the most dramatic event earns its extra screen time, and its move-6 gate still keeps it out of the opening. And *punching up* is interrupted slightly more often than digitally (27.8% vs 22.2% all-in) — the table is a touch kinder to underdogs and a touch crueler to bullies, which is the philosophy anyway.

One deviation runs the other way: the analog *doomed* floor (2.8%) is higher than the videogame's floor for *punching down* (≈1.2%). At the table, a queen butchering pawns is never quite safe. She should not feel safe.

The one-page **Quick Reference** and the **Chronicle sheet** ship as a separate printable — keep the first beside the board and burn through copies of the second.



BLACK SWAN CHESS – ANALOG PROTOCOL

*a tabletop translation of the videogame created by Dionicio
Galarza in Digital Dawn Studios, the game studio of Alba Digital*

Play loud, write everything down, and do not trust the knight.