

The game of **Penultima** is a chess variant for 3-8 people; 5 is ideal.

Rules:

2 of the people involved are referred to as Players, the others being called Spectators. The 6 classes of piece (king, queen, bishop, knight, rook and pawn) are allocated to the spectators in some manner: the way we have done this is by taking one piece of each class, putting them in the middle of the board and then taking turns to claim them. This is rather informal; if some spectator particularly wants, say, the bishop and rook, they can request this; most of the time spectators won't mind which pieces they're allocated.

The spectators then devise a rule for their pieces: most commonly, a movement and capture rule akin to those in chess or its fairy variants, but more complex ideas can be used---there are no restrictions on the rules, except that all the spectators should be attempting to produce a playable game. To indicate that the rule is decided, the spectator returns the piece to the board; they do not tell their rule to anyone else, player or spectator.

Each spectator should also think of a name for their pieces, which may be a helpful hint or not; when all the pieces have been returned, the names should be announced and the game can begin.

The board is set up as for a game of chess between the two players, except that a spectator may for the purpose of their rule place their pieces in other positions. (For example, a spectator who owns both king and queen may arrange them so the board has rotational symmetry; one of the rooks may be placed upside-down; the bishops might start on vertices of the board rather than in the squares, etc.) Black moves first.

The players are attempting to check-mate the king, just as in chess, but of course a preliminary aim must be to work out enough of the rules to achieve this.

On a player's move, they make some chess-like move of a piece. The spectators whose rules apply (in particular, but not only, the spectator who owns the moved piece) then examine the proposed move, and do one of three things: (i) allow the move to stand, as a legal move according to the rules; (ii) allow the move, but modify the position to complete the side-effects of the move (for example, other pieces might be captured, or moved); (iii) declare "illegal move" and restore the position before the move was made.

If, in the position after the move, the moving player's king is in check, the spectator who can see this (this might need consultation between spectators ---see below) should simply say "illegal move". If, as a consequence of side-effects in accordance with (ii), the position becomes illegal according to some other spectator's rule, that spectator should say "illegal move".

Further side-effects might occur as a result of side-effects that move other pieces. If, after a legal move has been made and all its side-effects effected, the opponent's king is in check, one of the spectators should say "check".

When a move has been declared illegal for whatever reason, the player who made it shall lose their move, and the other player move next, except that if a player's king is in check and they make an illegal move, then after the position has been restored they shall attempt to move again. The game is only lost if there is no legal move out of check. Since a move that allows the game to continue might be of a type that has never occurred to either of the players, it must be allowed for the player, having tried every conceivable move and failed, to ask the spectators to determine whether check-mate has been found, and if not to show a legal move. This should only be done in extreme cases, however.

The game ends when the spectators agree that check-mate has been achieved, or that stale-mate (no check, but no legal move for either player) has occurred, or when all those involved agree to call it a draw (or, I suppose, when one of the players resigns). After the game the rules can be revealed and discussed, but if a rule never really came into effect, its inventor might reserve it for future games and not reveal it.

If situations occur as a result of one spectator's rules that were not envisaged by another rule-maker, or in other circumstances where rules seem to conflict, the concerned spectators should leave the room to settle the matter, explaining such parts of their rules as are needed. The spectators also are involved in the fun of attempting to determine each other's rules, so this discussion should be kept to a minimum. Of course, situations might arise wherein it becomes clear that earlier moves in the game were illegal as a result of a combination of rules that were only known separately; in that case (or in the case of check being missed, or check being called wrongly or (rarer) moves being wrongly disallowed) the previous decisions should stand and perhaps the players should be informed---this is up to the spectators' judgment.

There may be rules in which it is hard to guess a legal move for a piece; for example, the bishop might move exactly 13 squares starting in any direction and bouncing off pieces and board edges in some complicated way. In this case, the spectator might wish to take an attempt to move the bishop one square in a particular direction as an incomplete move rather than an illegal move, and "complete" the move by moving the bishop to its actual legal destination square. The spectator must use their judgment to decide how nice to be about this. They should, of course, be fair to the two players.

(as written by Michael Fryers)