

Presentation of the rules of Combo Chess

by IM Silas Esben Lund

Introduction

This variant of chess is played as normal chess, with one addition: It is possible for a player to merge 2 own pieces on one square and combine their powers. This is done by moving one piece to a square where there is already another piece. Such a 2-piece is called a combo piece.

Each player can only have one combo piece on the board at the same time. The current combo piece must be dissolved first if a player wishes to create another combo piece.

If a combo piece is captured on its square, both pieces are lost.

Further important rules:

- All pieces can be combined into a combo piece, except for the ♔ that cannot be combined with any piece.
- It is allowed to dissolve a combo piece to **immediately** create a new one thereafter, by moving a piece away from a combo piece, and into a new combo piece, as long as the player has only one combo piece on the board at all times.
- It is possible to combine 2 identical pieces into a combo piece, for instance ♖♖.

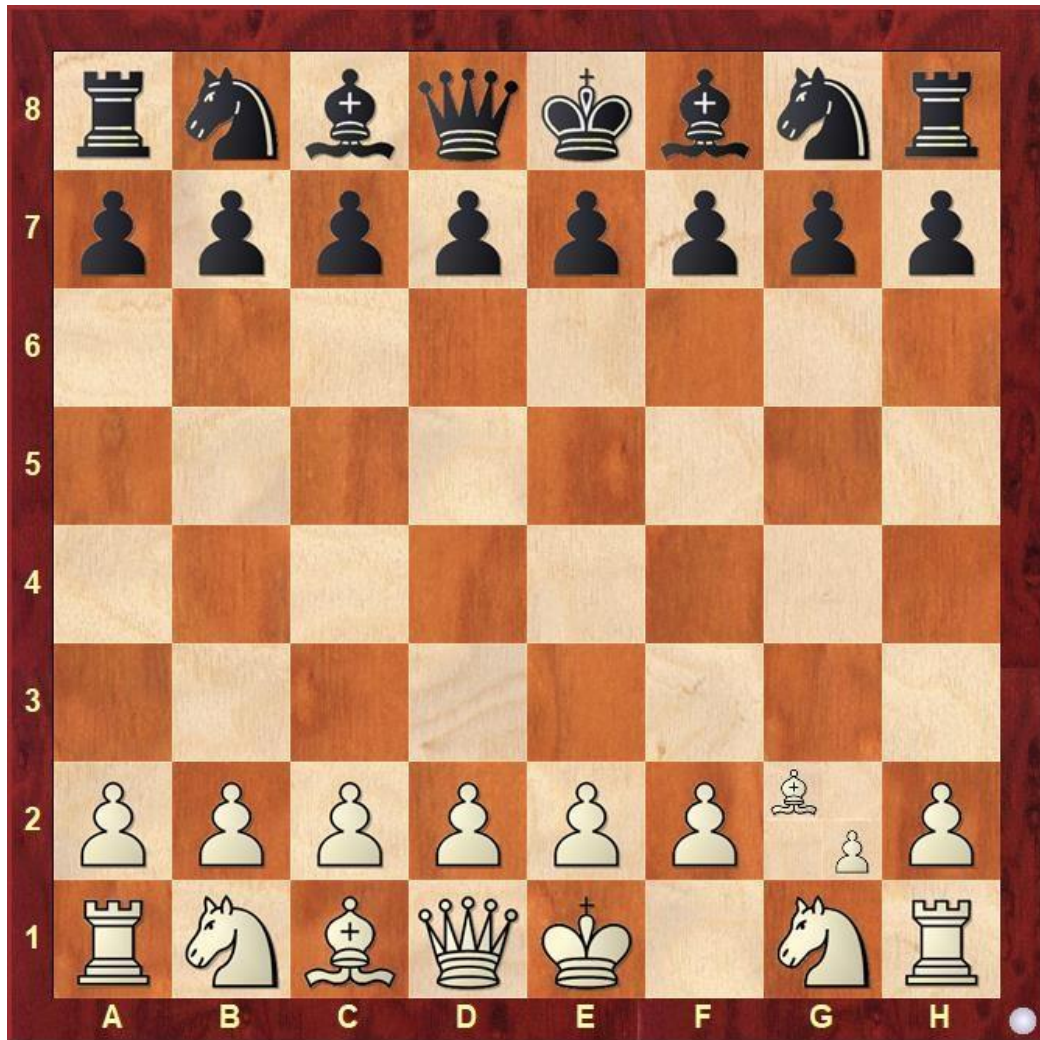
Here is a quick overview of the special rules of chess, and how they still apply to Combo Chess:

- **Castling** is the same as in normal chess. It is possible to castle even if the ♖ is combined with another piece. The player has the choice to dissolve the ♖+Piece while castling (leaving the other piece on the corner square) or move the combo piece as a unit while castling.
- **En passant** is the same as in normal chess. It is possible to do en passant even if both ♖s in question are part of a combo piece. The player who captures en passant can choose to dissolve his ♖+Piece while capturing (by moving only the ♖) or capture en passant with the combo piece.
- **Promotion** is the same as in normal chess. In the curious case of ♖♖ on the 7th rank, this combo piece can promote into any 2 pieces, such as ♖♖, ♖♗, ♖♘ etc. It is of course possible to dissolve this ♖♖ and only promote one ♖ while leaving the other ♖ on its initial square on the 7th rank.
- **Pawns** can move backwards if they are part of a combo piece that make a backward move. However, pawns are not allowed beyond the starting position on the 2nd/7th rank. In other words, own pawns are not allowed on a player's first rank.

In Combo Chess, ♖ promotion is more likely to happen than in normal chess, so it is suggested that a maximum of 2 ♖ for one side is allowed on the board at the same time. If additional promotions occur beyond that, it must be to a ♗, ♘ or ♙.

Game Example

In the following game example, I will use letters instead of figurines to imitate how the moves are notated by hand.



Position after **1. Bg2(2)**

Here, the suffix (2) is for clarity as it indicates that a combo piece has been created.



Position after **1.Bg2(2) b5**

On the second move, White has multiple options if he wishes to move the ♖-piece on g2:

- A) Move ♖ as a ♗ with ♜ attached
- B) Move ♖ as a ♜ with ♗ attached
- C) Move ♗ from g2, leaving ♜ on that square
- D) Move ♜ from g2, leaving ♗ on that square

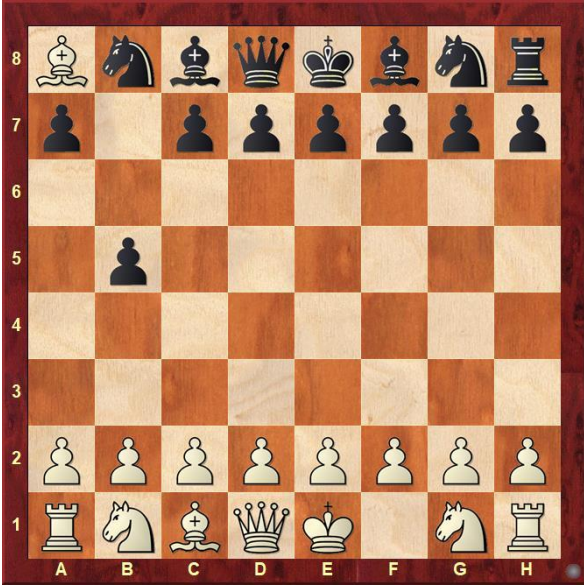
Here are the 4 options in action:



A) **2.BPx8=QB**. The notation reflects that the combo piece moves as a ♖, hence BP (and not PB). For clarity, promotion is written with =, and all pieces on the promotion square are named, in ranking order. Hence =QB, as ♚ is stronger than ♜.



B) **2.PBg4**. Here, the notation begins with PB as the combo piece moves as a ♜. When a ♜ is involved in a combo piece, P is always written for greater clarity.



C) **2.Bxa8**. The ♚ moves out of the combo piece on g2, leaving the ♜ on that square.



D) **2.g4**. The ♜ moves out of the combo piece on g2, leaving the ♚ on that square.



As for option B) **2.PBg4**, Black can create a combo piece on his own with **2...Rh7(2)**

For each of the combo pieces, the placement of the 2 pieces within the square doesn't matter.

In the above position, each player has created a combo piece and needs to dissolve it first if they wish to create another combo piece.

First recorded game with Combo Chess. Annotations by Silas Esben Lund:

Correspondence game, November 5-7, 2022.

White: Silas Esben Lund

Black: Ivan Dirkx

Playing this game took me back to my youth in the 80's and 90's before the appearance of strong chess engines, and where you were left on your own when analyzing a position – no Stockfish to check for blunders!

That is, until Combo Chess can be played online...

1.Bg2(2) d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3

Here, I considered a quick attack against d5 (and b7) with moves like Nb1-c3 and Qd1-b3, mainly due to the combo piece on g2 that has sped up my development. However, I reckoned that it was fairly easy for Black to defend. And: temporary passivity is not necessarily a problem in Combo Chess, as the pieces can combine to get out if necessary. In general, the action is built up like in normal chess, and one can expect things to happen in the early middlegame.

**3...Nf6 4.b3 c6 5.Bb2 Nc6(2) 6.Ne5 c5 7.Nxc6 bxc6 8.Nc3 Be7 9.Qc2 O-O 10.PBg3(2) Bf6(2)
11.0-0-0?!**

A careless move that allows Black to take the initiative.

11...Qa5?!

11...BNd4(2)! is awkward for White. 12.Qd3 e5 and Black has a fine position with good central control.

12.Na4 NBe4(2)

This fork of the queen and rook is very tempting but turns out to be a mistake. In fact, I believe this to be the decisive mistake of the game.



13.Qxe4!! dxe4 14.BPe5!(2)

The point of the queen sacrifice: to start an attack on the dark squares with the 2 bishops already lined up on the long diagonal. It is hard for Black to develop, even the move ...Be6(2) gives a BP that is inflexible to work with and doesn't halt White's initiative on the dark squares.

14...f6

14...g6?? 15.BPh8=QB#(2) is mate!

15.exf6 gxf6?

15...g6 was a better try, to close the position for now and hope that the queenside can be developed and the kingside re-enforced in time.

16.Rdg1+ Kf7 17.Rh2!(2)

Much stronger than the straightforward 17.Bxf6. A follow-up idea here is 18.Nb2(2) with the further 19.BNe5+(2), but Black can counter this with 17...e5!, vacating the light square e6 that is hard for me to control. Also, the pawn sacrifice opens up for the bishop on c8.

With the game move, White instead brings in the other rook, combined with a dangerous pawn.

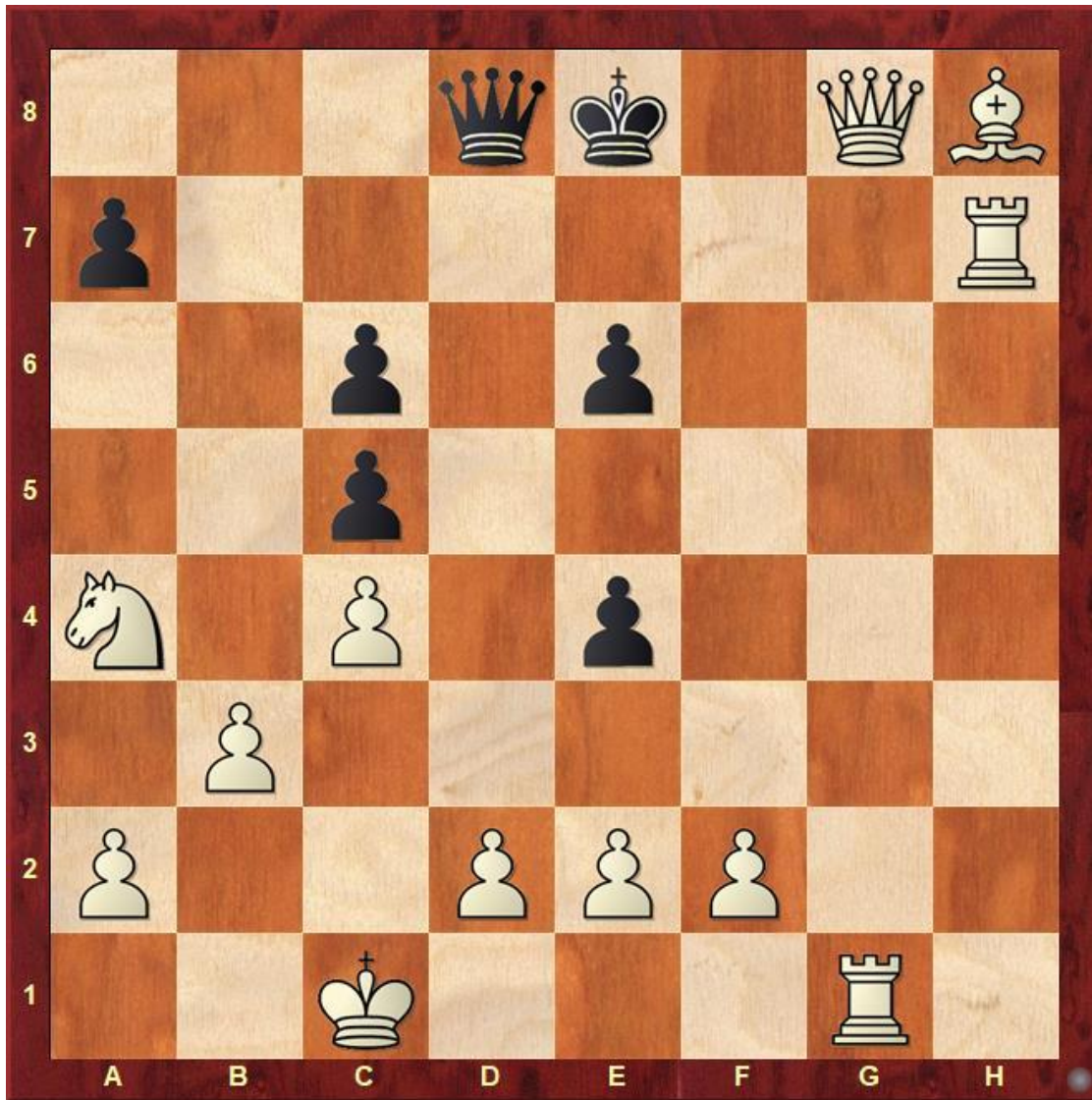
17...Rh8

17...fxe5 loses to 18.RPxh7+(2) Kf6 19.Rg8 and the h7-pawn will promote, one way or the other. No better is 18...Ke8 19.Rg8, also with imminent promotion.

18.Bxf6 Be6(2) 19.Bxh8 Rxh8 20.Bxh8 Qd8 21.RPxh7+(2) Ke8 22.Ph8=QB+(2)

Not the only winning move, but it's nice to dissolve a combo piece to immediately create a new one, with promotion!

22...Bg8 23.Qxg8# 1-0



The final position.