



COLUMNISTS

ChessOK
Cafe

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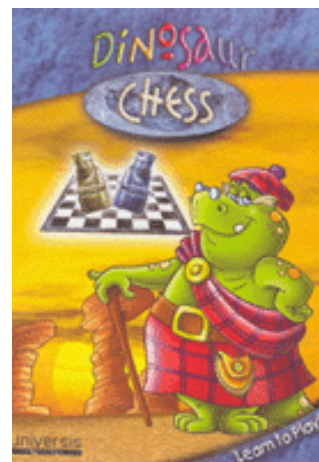
Dinosaur Chess

In last month's [column](#) we discussed Rybka, the World Computer Chess Champion. This month we visit the other end of the spectrum and discuss *Dinosaur Chess*, a multimedia game for helping children learn how to play chess.

Dinosaur Chess is for absolute beginners, and it can easily be used by parents who wish to teach their child how to play chess. Its main advantage is that it turns learning chess into a game of its own, making it a truly fun and inspiring activity.

The Basic Premise

As the name indicates the game is set in the age of the dinosaurs. Each player starts out as a very small dinosaur, either male or female, fresh from the egg.



But being a very small dinosaur in a jungle full of very large dinosaurs has some severe disadvantages, so the goal is to grow as quickly as possible. In this game there is only one way to get bigger and stronger: by learning something new about chess.

Fortunately, for the small but ambitious dinosaur, help is provided by Professor MacDinosaur.

ChessCafe.com is pleased to invite readers to a game of chess at Convekta's ChessOK Playing Zone!



Click here for the [Flash](#) version or here to download and install the [Full](#) version.



This friendly English speaking dinosaur with a Scottish name, outfit and accent will guide you through the basics of chess and help you grow and get stronger until you can successfully take on the terrible Tyrannosaurus Rex. But, as the professor himself says, it's not only about getting bigger and stronger – it's also about getting smarter!

There are rumors that Professor MacDinosaur is hiring and will be offering his lessons in many different languages later this year: Spanish, German, French, Russian, etc.

Dinosaur Chess offers four main modes:

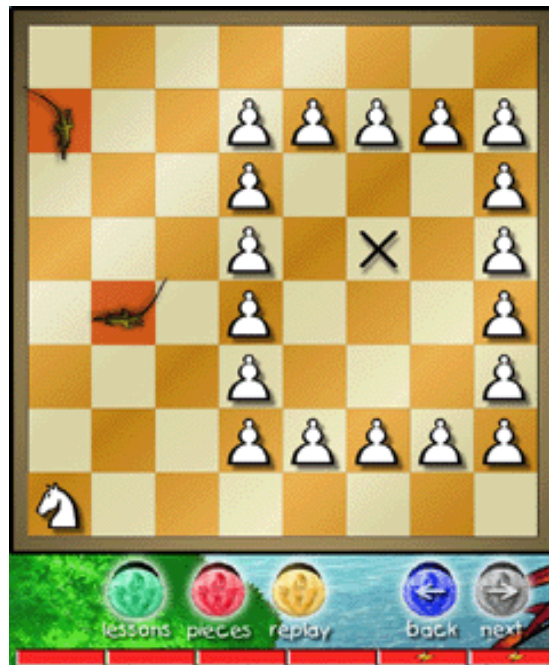
- *Learn* – Here you attend Professor MacDinosaur's classes.
- *Play* – Play a game of chess against a dinosaur.
- *Dino Fight* – Have the chess lessons really made you bigger, stronger and smarter?
- *Progress* – Keeps track of your triumphs.



Learn

This is where you attend Professor MacDinosaur's classes. He offers eleven different interactive lessons. The first one teaches you about the board and the squares. Next are six lessons that teach about the pawns and pieces, how they move and capture, etc. Then there is a special lesson about castling. The final three lessons involve winning, losing and drawing;

the values of the pieces; and tips to help you with your game. The lessons cover everything needed to play a game of chess.



The above image is taken from the lesson about knights and shows the part of the screen where all the action takes place. I will use it to explain how the lessons are structured and what options are available during them.

In this particular lesson there are six buttons on the red bar at the bottom of the screen and each one represents a section of the lesson. This allows you to go back to a previous section and review that part of the lesson if necessary. The first four buttons are solid red, meaning that Professor MacDinosaur was lecturing. The last two buttons display a small yellow lightning bolt. This means that you will be presented with exercises to solve, but of course Professor MacDinosaur will be present to guide you if needed! The chessboard actually displays one such exercise, but we'll get to that later. Note that the red buttons are displayed only as you begin each new section of the lesson. There are five round buttons displayed above the red buttons:

- *Lessons* – This lets you choose another lesson from a list of all available lessons. The first time you go through the lessons you must take them sequentially, although you can review a completed lesson at any time.
- *Pieces* – This allows you to select from several different piece and board designs.
- *Replay* – Restarts the current section of the lesson.
- *Back & Next* – The back button switches to the previous section of the current lesson and the next button starts the following section. You'll be using the latter frequently, because the next section doesn't begin until you click the button. The button flashes when it's time to continue, so you'll always know when the current section has ended.

In addition to these five buttons, there is a "Hint" button that is displayed only when you are solving an exercise. Click on it and Professor MacDinosaur will come to your rescue.

The chessboard in the above image shows an example of a simple exercise. Your task is to find a way for the knight in the corner to reach the square marked with an X. So this exercise reinforces how the knights move and how they can jump over other pieces and pawns. The two creatures on the chess board are raptor guards patrolling the board looking for chess pieces trying to enter the pawn fortress. You better keep away from those fellows, as a knight is no match for them. So you need to solve the exercise as quickly as possible.



Play

The playing mode allows you to play a game of chess against a dinosaur. The level of play is deliberately weak enough so as not to discourage the beginner. There are six dinosaurs to choose from with varying knowledge of the game. Let's take the Ankylosaurus as an example. He is the weakest of the dinosaurs and only knows how to move the pawns and the king. So when he sets up the board to play a game it will look something like this:



The limited knowledge of the different dinosaurs can be very helpful for the absolute beginner. He or she only needs to learn about the pawns and the king before playing against the Ankylosaurus. Other dinosaurs are handicapped in different ways, so as you learn more you will always be able to find a suitable opponent. Only Tyrannosaurus Rex, the king of the dinosaurs, has mastered all the pieces.

You move the pieces on the board by clicking on them and dragging them to the destination square. There are five buttons below the board:

- *Restart* – Abandons the current game and starts a new one.
- *Pieces* – Selects a new board design.
- *Undo* – Takes back your last move.
- *Hint* – Suggests a move.
- *Score* – Shows the pieces that you and your opponent have captured.



Dino Fight

As the goal is to get bigger, stronger and smarter, it is natural for the dinosaur-in-training to test himself against other dinosaurs. That's what Dino Fight is for. It is the only part of the program that is strictly non-chess. You will find that fighting against the stronger dinosaurs is hopeless until you've attended most of the lessons from Professor MacDinosaur. However, after you have learned all the tricks from the professor, you will see that even the terrifying Tyrannosaurus Rex is not invincible.



Progress

Progress mode displays an overview of what you have achieved so far. For instance, if you

have managed to beat some of the dinosaurs at a game of chess, images of the opponents you have beaten are displayed floating around in the frame "dinosaurs beaten." It also shows how many lessons you have successfully completed, how many pieces you have captured and how many fights you have won.

One of the nice features of *Dinosaur Chess* is that it can keep track of several different players. So if you want to use the program to teach more than one child, they can be registered separately and the program will track their progress.

Dinosaur Chess makes learning chess fun. Consequently, it is more likely that the child will want to continue playing, learning and improving.

All the Chess Assistant software described by Dadi in this column, as well as many more Chess Assistant programs, are available in the [USCFSales Online Catalog](#).

Dadi wants your questions!! Send it along and perhaps it will be answered in an upcoming column. Please include your name and country of residence. [Yes, I have a question for Dadi!](#)

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