

# A look at Chess 2: The Sequel through Simpsons quotes

[January 14, 2014 Mark McAvoy](#)

Where does someone get off making a sequel to chess, tabletop's beautiful game? Well, it happened, and that game is *Chess 2: The Sequel*.

**“You’ve got some attitude, mister.”**

“It’s directly addressing the problems of too many draws, too much memorization in opening books and end games, and a lack of asymmetry,” says *Chess 2*'s designer, David Sirlin.

Save for the asymmetric part, these aren't just personal gripes of Sirlin's. Grandmasters of chess have lamented the issues of too many stalemates and predictable openings and endgame for years. Bobby Fischer said in a 2006 radio interview, while referencing Capablanca, that chess had become all memorization and prearrangement— uncreative.

Even with chess' most renowned player making these arguments, it's pretty bold for Sirlin to try to fix chess. According to play tester David Britt, or Rodeo, it was that boldness that drew him to the game.

“It was the audacity more than anything that got me to click through it and read about it,” says Britt.

Britt, who is more of a *GO* player than a chess player, was so interested in *Chess 2* that he actually printed the rules off and play tested by himself using a real chess board with real pieces.

## “Tie game? What the hell?”

In 2011 grandmaster Rustam Kasimdzhanov wrote an open letter to the world of chess arguing that chess will never be mainstream with its current rules. Nobody likes a tie game and short draws are unavoidable, he says, particularly among strong players.

In fact, more than half of all chess games played at the highest level end in a draw.

Kasimdzhanov’s suggestion is simple: if there is a draw, play again with a shorter time limit. David Sirlin took it much further than that.

*Chess 2* is played with a chess board and standard chess pieces, but it features six different armies and two paths to victory: traditional checkmate and the mid-line invasion. As well, Sirlin has introduced a double-blind bidding mechanic called duelling, in which players bid ‘stones’ to take or defend their pieces. Stones are a resource you gain by capturing the opponent’s pawns. If an opponent tries to take one of your pieces, you can choose to duel. If you outbid your attacker, you can actually take their piece.

The armies are: Classic, Nemesis, Empowered, Reaper, Two Kings, and Animal. Classic is, of course, the traditional chess army. The Reaper army’s queen can teleport anywhere on the board except the backrow, and can’t be used to put the opponent in check. As well, the Reaper’s rooks, which are called ghosts, can teleport but they can’t capture or be captured. Without those three pieces for checkmating, the Reaper army is best suited for a victory through mid-line invasion. Each army fits a certain style of play.

Six different armies allow for 21 different match-ups. And although the game is designed to be asymmetric, developer Zachary Burns of Ludeme Games says there weren’t any major balance problems during playtesting.

“I will say that different armies have different strengths and weaknesses and some work better in different situations. I wouldn’t go so far as to say the game is actually unfair,” says Burns.

### **“There is one more way to kill a man...”**

And speaking of fairness, Burns says sometimes chess can be unfair. Draws often happen even when one player demonstrates superior play. *Chess 2*’s new path to victory, the mid-line invasion, is meant to deal with those situations.

The mid-line invasion is quite simple: if you bring your king past the centre of the board, or the ‘mid-line’, you win.

Mid-line invasion means draws are all but impossible. It also makes for quicker games, and basically eliminates memorized endgames.

Britt says there was one game during play testing in which there was a possibility of a [threefold repetition draw](#), but one army had enough of an advantage they could attack in a different direction to avoid it.

Britt thinks *Chess 2* achieves what it set out to do, but admits he’s never been a strong enough chess player to memorize openings and endings, so he’s not sure what that particular change feels like.

“Who knows, maybe there could be dominating opening books for a particular match-up that end up the standard of play. But to have 21 different match-ups, you’re never going to be able to rely on using an opening book at the highest level of play,” says Britt.

### **“Now it belongs to the ages.”**

Sirlin admits *Chess 2* will be a hard sell for highly competitive chess players, but says his focus is on making a game as good as he can rather than how people feel about it.

“Hopefully there’s a lot of people willing to give new things a chance. The players who have been trying the game seem to like it!” says Sirlin.

*Chess 2: The Sequel* is launching on the OUYA, and may later come to other platforms.

Sirlin says the game was specifically designed to be playable with a standard physical chess set– something that Britt proved is possible.

“There is never something like ‘and you need five bishops’ or any other extra pieces. All the new pieces are things like ‘now your rooks do X thing differently,’” says Sirlin.

The only extra pieces you need to bring are the stones for duelling, which really can be anything from pennies to cupcakes. But with six different armies, are people going to have to keep referring back to the rules as they play?

“Just starting, I needed to refer to the rules. But once I played a game with an army, it came pretty naturally,” says Britt.

It remains to be seen whether *Chess 2* is best played on a board or online. Chess, like poker, is a game in which you must read your opponent. This is especially true in *Chess 2*, where bluffs are possible through the duelling mechanic.

For Burns, an online community may mean sacrificing face-to-face interaction, but it gains so much more: access to a broad community.

### **“Twenty dollars can buy many peanuts.”**

To play with this community you will need Crowns. Crowns are like quarters for an arcade machine. They allow you to play ranked matches online. Offline mode is free, whether you’re playing a bot or local multiplayer.

Burns actually left a company where he was working partly because he didn't approve of exploitative freemium models. The idea of paying Crowns to play online sounds pretty similar, but Burns argues it's the exact opposite.

"It's pay-to-play. Crowns are made with the players best interests in mind. A player can try for free first—" you are given a free bag of Crowns to start. "After playing the game for a while, each player can decide what kind of player they are, from casual to hardcore, and spend according to how much they enjoy the game," says Burns.

The *Chess 2* forums have shown some resistance to the pay-to-play model, though most say the price is fair. One said that although it's certainly better than paying \$60 for a game, it just feels wrong. Burns admits there may be some psychological barriers to the model, but says the prices are reasonable.

"For your first buy at \$5.99 you get 720 crowns; plus the 240 free starting crowns, that equals 960 crowns. Eight crowns per game means 120 games. At half an hour average per game, this comes in at a whopping 60 hours!" he wrote on the forums.

Burns and Sirlin will be able to gauge the effectiveness of the Crowns system over the next while. The OUYA launch is a soft launch to see if the online servers will hold up, and as Burns says on the forums, it will also serve as a test for whether the pay-to-play model will be accepted.

*Chess 2: The Sequel* is launching on the OUYA January 21. Of course, if you can't wait until then, [you could always go here and download the rules to play at home on your chess board.](#)