

Stacktrices, designed by Gregory Lattanzio

For a highly evolved but impassioned warrior species on Mars, war is a part of every day life. However, this fighting is enacted in the civilized space of a digital matrix. Children and adults alike are “plugged in” as “stacks”, competing in an arena, using whatever limited resources they can afford (specially designed pyramids that work as software patches). Luckily for them, all battles are virtual, and, at the end of the day, it’s only fame or shame that they earn. This is a simulation of their simulation, designed for earthbound players.

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1. Requirements:

7X7 board.

At minimum, an 8house combination of Xeno and Rainbow (four of each). This includes:

A white stash (three queens and four drones)

A black stash (three queens and four drones)

A clear stash (four pawns, four drones, and three queens), these are **skill** pieces.

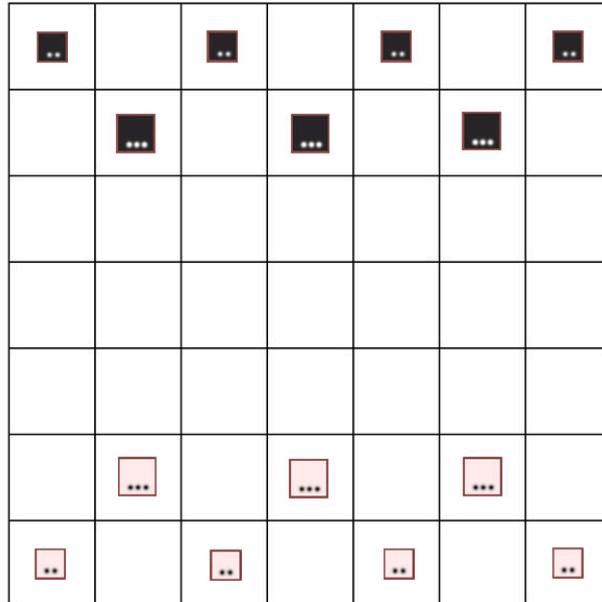
One stash of another color (four pawns, four drones, three queens), the **movement** pieces.

Two pawns of some other color. These are called the **vulnerability** pawns.

A stash pad/space, the “Digital Trading Post.”

2. Setup:

- i. The drones and queens are arranged on each player's side of the table per this illustration (fig. 1).
- ii. Unseen by the other player, each player places a vulnerability (pawn) under one of their drones.
- iii. Each player gets one clear and one colored queen, two clear and two colored drones, and two clear and two colored queens.
- iv. The players then cap their opaque pieces as they wish—using all of the pieces but without stranding any clear pieces (see below). Some opaque pieces may remain uncapped for now.
- v. The two remaining queens go into the stash.



3. Stacked pieces:

- i. When they have a colored piece over their opaque the number of spaces a given stack can moved is altered. Each stack is limited to a single movement piece at any time. This **movement** piece is always the lower or second to bottom piece on a stack if capped by a skill piece.

- a. **Movement** abilities are as follows.

Pawn=One space

Drone=Two spaces

Queen=Three spaces

Stacks with movement pieces, but without any skill pieces, are called **adult** stacks, and may only move forward diagonally (the number of spaces determined by their size per above).

b. The clear pieces determine the types of movement a stack may make. This **skill** piece comprises the zenith of a stack. Clear pieces can only be placed on stacks that have a color movement piece.

Note: Usually pieces can be slid during the movement phase. However, this isn't always the case. If need be, put one finger under your drone stacks when picking them up, to maintain the mystery of whether it has the vulnerability or not.

c. **Pupils** (stacks without any movement or skill pieces) may only be moved to attack a stack in any adjacent square.

ii. When there is at least one clear piece on top of a stack, the stack is called a **skilled stack**. Such stacks have added movement abilities.

a. **Skill** abilities are as follows.

Pawn: Stack may move in any diagonal direction

Drone: Stack may move orthogonally (in any direction)

Queen: Stack may move diagonally or orthogonally and may (unlike the other stacks) move through a friendly stack.

The following rules apply to moving a queen skilled stack.

Moving through the friendly stack does not count as a space when counting.

Adult stacks pass on the moving stack in the direction it is headed in.

A friendly skilled stack may redirect the moving stack if the player chooses, to the left or right one square relative to the direction that the stack is moving from (i.e., if the stack is moved diagonally, the stack may be redirected to the orthogonal directions on either side). Otherwise, the moving stack can pass through as with an adult stack.

Pupils cannot assist in transporting a stack with a queen movement piece. They end up blocking the skilled stack.

b. A clear pawn may be placed on a clear drone to offer a stack both orthogonal and diagonal capabilities.

4. Movement/Attack Phase:

i. Any stack may move per its limits and capabilities. It may eliminate any opposing stack that it can reach.

ii. Stacks are not allowed to pass through or beyond other stacks unless the moving stack contains the queen skill piece.

iii. Attacked stacks are removed from play, with all non-base pieces put in the trading stash. Any stealing or salvaging that may occur must be performed.

iv. Passing is not allowed.

5. Trading Phase:

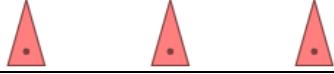
i. After the moving phase, the active player may make an upgrade. Only one upgrade is allowed per round. This may involve trading up to three non-opaque pieces for up to three pieces (examples shown in fig. 2). The trade is done with a third, uninterested party, and the bank assesses a fee of one pip point per trade. Thus the value of what you receive back will be one pip point less. Both skilled and movement pieces may be involved in a trade. The new piece or pieces must be placed on stacks that were in on the trade or on any pupil. Pieces not in on a trade remain with their stacks.

ii. After the trade, the pieces traded in are added to the stash.

6. Vulnerabilities (the thief):

i. The drone with a hidden pawn is called the **thief**. It is permissible within the matrix to punish thieves when they are captured and removed from the game (they were probably using pirated software anyway). The attacking player will steal one of its powers.

Whenever a drone is attacked, the opposing player must reveal whether it is the thief. After losing one of its pieces to the other player or stash, the thief stack is removed from the board. The attacked player then hides the vulnerability under one of her or his remaining drones.

Trade in:	Receive:
	
	
	
	
	

7. Home Row:

i. If, at any point, your thief lands on the opposing player's home row (the row that the drones started in), you may take an unprotected piece from the opposing player or any piece available from the stash. This piece may be given to any of your stacks. Clear pieces may be stacked. If there are no legal options for a movement piece to be added to a stack (including pupils), a single piece may be upgraded for the new one. The old piece is put in the stash and the new one is put in its place.

You may return the vulnerability to the same stack it was already under. However, if you do so, or if there is only the one drone stack remaining, that stack must end one turn in its own home row before it can return to the opposing home row to capture further pieces.

ii. Any stack that reaches the opposing home row may warp over from their position in the opposing player's home row to any unoccupied space of their own home row on a following turn. This constitutes the player's move for that round.

8. Protected Pieces:

i. The movement piece from a skilled stack cannot be removed, as it would strand the skill piece on a stack. If a skilled stack has both the skilled drone and pawn, either may be taken.

9. Variable Player Powers:

During the set up of the original rules, the clear and colored drones and pawns were put into the trading stash, and the players took turns choosing a piece from the stash until all pieces are assigned. This seemed tedious as the only way that the opening assortment of pieces would differ is if players allowed each other to build up an extra colored or clear piece. Such an arrangement could have always been agreed upon without the hassle of picking. Variable play can be a lot of fun with Stacktrices. However, this can almost occur on its own if a player trades in for a queen near the start of the game, a move that the other player could counter by obtaining the other queen from the trading stash on her next turn.

10. Victory: Eliminate all of the opposing matrix stacks from the arena.

11. Example of Queen play:

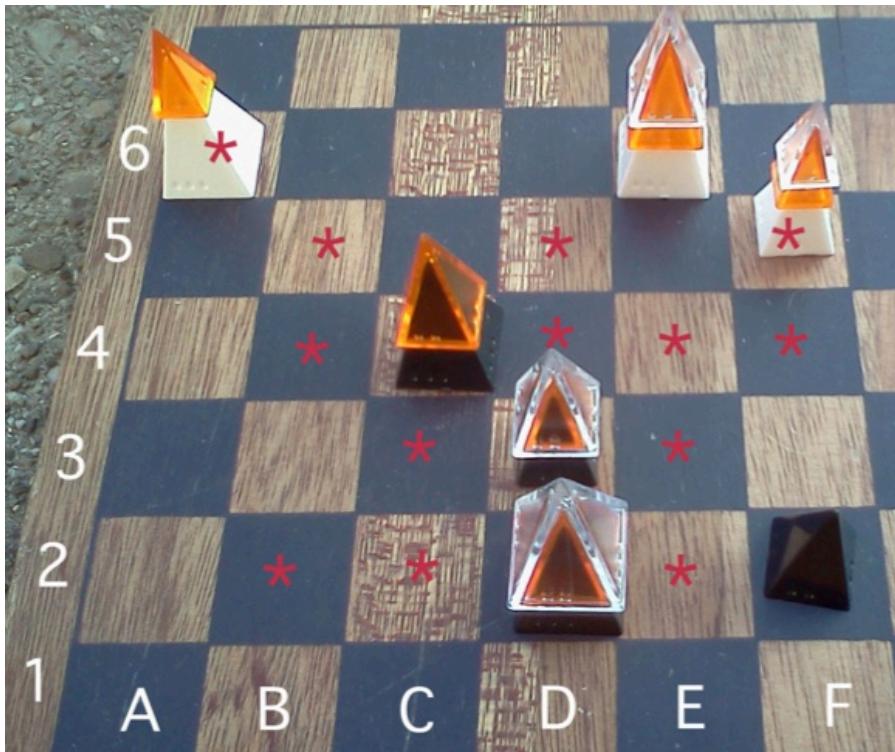
(Fig 3) In this example, the skilled queen with a drone movement piece (d,2) can move into any of the marked squares. It can use the skilled drone stack (d,3) to redirect itself into (c,4), (d,4), or (e,4). It may then use the adult stack (c,4) to attack the piece at (a,6). Notice that it moves through its friendly stacks without expending any of its movement points.

12. Rule Variant 1: The thief may also be able to steal during an attack. However, a player doing so has to make the call. They will expose the vulnerability (not being allowed to change it until the stack is captured). Of course, this would give an advantage to a player in the weak position of having a single drone stack, who might as well steal with each attack at that point. This optional rule may have unwanted consequences.

Rule Variant 2: A playtester recommended that, after the initial set up, we allow movement pieces to be stacked as well as skilled pieces. Such stacks could only be accomplished through trades or captures, and the movement points would be accumulative.

Notes: One of the key concepts behind this was to make a game that actually used the opaque pieces in a stack. It was important the use of hidden information not seem gimmicky or overly chancy; the little chance that is in the game is more about deception and bluffing than anything else. At its heart, it remains a strategy game. When designing the powers and resources within the game, I've tried to keep things simple and intuitive.

See the wiki on possible strategies, and contribute ones that you have discovered. The arrangement of pieces at the start is important. There are many different strategic approaches that one could take, so there could be diverse styles of play that might work well. Also, the importance of the thief will vary from player to player—including whether to engage in offensive or defensive play with them.



(Fig 4) Pictured, examples of stacks: pupil, thief (tipped), adult, skilled drone, dual skilled, skilled queen.