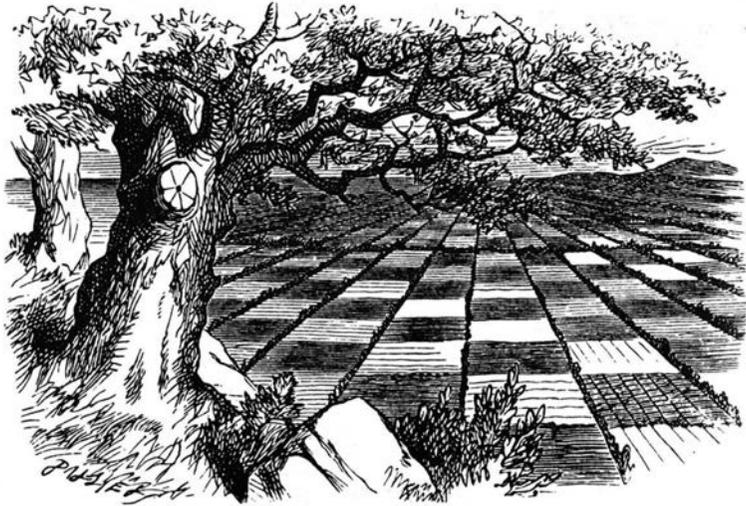


The Chess Game

Alice Through The Looking-Glass is based on a chess game in which the queen is established as the dominant piece on the board, although often operating from a distance.

Alice



Looking-Glass chess board. John Tenniel (1870).

The story is dominated by a virulent Queen who dispenses arbitrary justice with a shrill “Off with her head.” This includes several attempts to do so with Alice, who has the role of a pawn progressing through seven squares to become a queen herself.

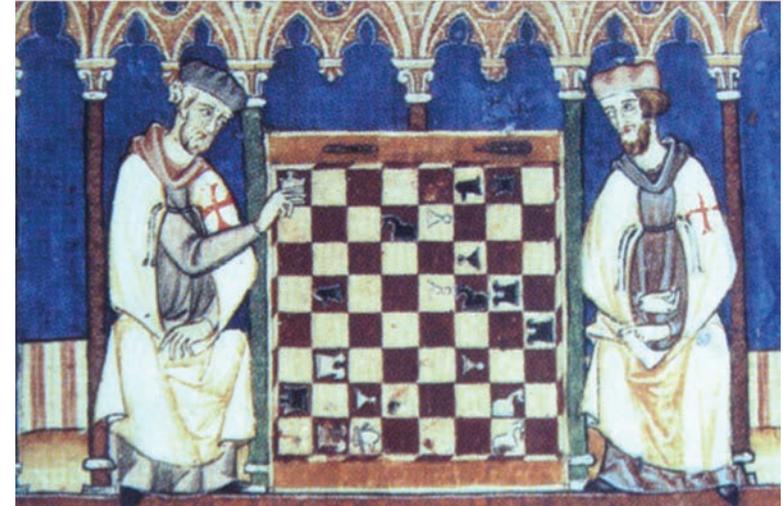
The encounter with the Red Queen is one of many in the *Alice* books that challenge us to explore her literary identity. In the second chapter, as Alice looks over the land in front of her, chequered like a large chessboard, she perceives the analogy between the game of chess and the game of life:

“ ‘I declare it’s marked out just like a large chess-board!’ Alice said at last. ‘There ought to be some men moving about somewhere — and so there are!’ she added in a tone of delight, and her heart began to beat quickly with excitement as she went on. ‘It’s a great huge game of chess that’s being played — all over the world — if this is the world

The Chess Game

Eleanor of Aquitaine was a great catalyst in introducing games of chance and chess from the cultures of Spain and Southern France into the castles and palaces of Northern Europe.

Eleanor



Mediaeval Knights Templar playing Chess (13th century).

The regions of Spain and Southern France, where chess and games of chance were popular in the 12th century, were among the realms through which Eleanor extensively travelled. In its original Arabic form, the chess king’s companion was the vizier, or prime minister, which had only a subsidiary function in support of the king. Although the chess queen may have been known a century before her time, Eleanor is reputed to have played a major role in the replacement of the vizier piece of Arabic chess games with the now-ubiquitous and all-powerful queen piece.

Eleanor spent a great deal of her time racing around the countryside on ‘progresses’ to re-establish her dominion over her various lands, from Aquitaine in Southern France to Wales and Northern England. Working with her Chief Justice, Richard of Luci, she would hold court in each town she visited, dispensing justice as the arbiter in local disputes through a stream of generally appreciated legal decisions, some of which still survive as writs. It seemed that she often had to keep repeating these efforts in order to retain effective influence over the populace.

at all, you know. Oh, what fun it is! How I wish I was one of them! I wouldn't mind being a Pawn, if only I might join—though of course I should like to be a Queen, best.'

She glanced rather shyly at the real Queen, as she said this, but her companion only smiled pleasantly, and said 'That's easily managed. You can be the White Queen's Pawn . . . you're in the Second Square to begin with: when you get to the Eighth Square you'll be the Queen.'

Alice

Then the Red Queen and Alice take off at a run with the Queen continually crying,

'Faster! Faster!' And they went so fast that at last they seemed to skim through the air, hardly touching the ground with their feet."

Alice Through the Looking-Glass, Chapter 2.

For all the irrationality expressed by the inhabitants of Looking-Glass Country, Alice follows the laws of the game, moving like a pawn across the board, encountering and eliminating various pieces before reaching the eighth square to be queened. Ultimately, she checkmates the Red King. Reunited with the Red and White Queens, she tries out her newly acquired authority on them and ends up violently shaking the Red Queen, who turns into her kitten as she awakens from her dream.



Eleanor

Territory of England and Western France under the domain of influence of Eleanor of Aquitaine (12th century).