

'The Royal Game of Ur' Help Contents: Version 1.0s

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Version Change Log:

Version 1.0s -- Initial Release, May 1996.

Prolog . . .



2254 BC*. The Third Dynasty of Ur. A prosperous time, a rich time, a happy time, but a time near the very end of the Sumerian Civilization; only a fortunate man's life-time before the coming Elamite hordes, when the poet would lament: "When they overthrew, when order they destroyed. Then like the deluge all things together the Elamite consumed. Whereunto, Oh Sumer! did they change thee?"

Arphaxad neared the end of his journey from Eridu** to his home in Ur. "My wife and child will be glad to see me and I them," he mused, as he stepped along the narrow path through the barley fields, bag over his shoulder, his sword slapping his thigh, and his spear firmly in his hand. Not too far away, the life-giving Euphrates river flowed, one of the twin rivers, the gift of the Gods, an arm of which protected and encircled the city. Across the water lay a bustling Ur, fires lit, music and hubbub wafting through the evening air over the city wall, and towering over, reaching into the sky, the ziggurat of Nanna, the moon god, proclaimed civilization and safety to the horizon, as it glistened in the light of the afternoon sun. "Almost there now . . . I haven't been eaten by the lions yet . . .," he laughed nervously to himself, for within sight of the city, and walking on this well traveled and guarded route, a mishap with a lion would be very unlikely . . .

More than 4000 years later -- on the evening of Feb. 25th, 1991, at a remote listening post on the northern edge of the Allied 'Desert Storm' thrust into Iraqi territory***.

"Lord help the men that lie under that!" declared Carter as he extinguished his cigarette and shielded his eyes from the shimmer and thunder of the exploding skyline. In the distance a luminescent Hell of FAE (Fuel Air Explosives) lit the night skies over the Iraqi positions and their hurried retreat to Baghdad. Blindingly bright, deadly, near atomic in destructive force, the huge fireballs seemed to reach their thermal tentacles out to even this distance to singe his face and mute his unintentioned prayer.

"She's down!" the Jackson yelled. 'Again?!" cursed Carter. Strung out from the listening post toward the Iraqi lines stretched a thin spider web of wires and listening devices that could hear and locate the slightest hint of enemy movement coming back from the frontier toward the Allied positions. But now #30 was down. It had been so before and its intermittent failure made it totally unreliable. The post was 'blind' in front of a narrow, but important slice of the web. "Okay, we've no choice now!", snapped Carter as he turned toward you. "We can only spare one man. Get out there on the double. Take your low-light and I.R. gear -- it will be useable at least after that pounding stops. We'll begin repairs but in the meantime we can't be blind. The Iraqi's seem to be retreating but don't let that fool you. Keep Sharp! Watch those ruins carefully. If you see anything, sing out, then get out!!" "Aye, Sarge," you hear yourself mumble as you don your gear and begin your bold advance into the desert night. .

Near the end of the 'blind' zone, you drop and prepare for a lonely vigil. Creeping over a sand dune you scan the horizon with your electronic eyes . . . "Nothing . . .," you mutter, "nothing but desolation, dunes, rocks, sand . . . and silence . . . that's good . . ." You inspect the small hill and ruins in the distance very carefully. A few short walls -- some ragged bricks really -- and a restored pyramid of some sort, are all that meet your eyes. The Iraqi's had stored ammo, fuel, and based some planes there a few days earlier**** . . . some kind of archaeological site . . . at least that's what the others said . . . now it's utterly desolate and abandoned. The night wears-on with you on careful watch . . . morning

nears and the eastern sky begins to lighten a bit with the coming of the dawn and colors the dunes in the faintest of pinks. "Soon this low-light gear will be useless," you think to yourself, "better get ready to switch to . . ." But you don't finish your adjustments, for from behind you comes the unmistakable sound of footsteps. Very near!!!

You whirl; weapon ready. There upon you is a man with a spear. He looks up suddenly -- surprise and fear in his eyes. You are startled; hesitant -- this is not an Iraqi soldier. He screams, and thrusts his spear through you. Instinctively, too late, you fire a burst from your weapon. The man falls back trembling in the sand. "Please Lord, Please . . . I have made libations faithfully at the temple . . . have mercy on your servant" the man sobs, and crouches over on the sand. You expect searing pain but there is none. Groping your torso you find nothing . . . the man's spear has passed right through you and beyond -- no wound, no blood . . . as if the spear was never there. Nor have your bullets harmed your cowering assailant -- they seem to have passed through him harmlessly. You rip off the low-light gear. "What the #@!&! . . .," you exclaim.

"Who are you? How did you get here?!" you yell as the man stumbles to his feet. You reach out to steady him but your hand passes right through his body. He rises. The two of you stand face to face. He reaches out to touch your shoulder but grasps only air. Hand passes through hand as you both attempt to touch the other.

"You are not there -- a being of the mist" the man utters.

"Strange!" you reply, "It is you that are not here. Even stranger that we understand one another's language."

The man looks closely at your face, sees your humanity and realizes that you are not the demon he thought. "I am Arphaxad of Ur." he replies shakily, then with more courage demands, "Who are you, that lies in the fields on his belly, in the guise of a goggle-eyed demon?"

"I'm a soldier . . . fighting to free Kuwait," you counter, "How did you get here? Surely you would have been stopped by Allied troops behind me. No one could have gotten through."

The man seems puzzled. "Your words are strange, they mean nothing to me. I travel to Ur. There," the man points.

"THERE?!", you blurt out, "There is nothing there but sand and desolation!".

"What! . . . Can you not see?" counters Arphaxad. "Even from here I see the river encircling the city . . . the boats enter the harbor still . . . I see the smoke from the many fires . . . do you not hear the music from Nanna's great temple? . . . do you not see the great ziggurat rising to catch the fleeing sun?"

"No," you shake your head, "all is in desolation. The city you speak of is long gone . . . the river is 15 miles to the north . . . no one has lived here for thousands of years."

"Impossible! Friend, your words cannot be. Do we not stand in the barley fields of Ur at this very instant?", implores the Sumerian.

"I see only sand and rock" you murmur.

"From the future? You say you are from the future then?," he muses.

"Yes, yes, . . . apparently many years from your time," you counter.

"I say you are from the past, before the great deluge. What year is it?," asks Arphaxad.

"1991" you flatly reply.

"By my father Shem!", swears the Sumerian, "But in the reign of what king? Only an anti-deluvian king could have ruled such a long time. I say it is year 4 of the Great King Shulgi's reign, the mighty warrior, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad . . . may he reign a thousand years or more as your king must have done."

"No, it is you that are from the past," you say, "Can't you see the dust of tanks in the distance? Can't you see planes overhead and hear the explosions to the north as their drop their loads? You are on the battle front. Come with me back to my squad. You will be safe there, we'll protect and help you."

"No, No . . . surely you are wrong," answers Arphaxad, "For I see everything as it should be. Please come with me to my home in Ur, it is only a little way, and I will seek help from a physician for you."

You laugh nervously. "Is there nothing I can do to convince you?", you ask.

Sit for a little while," he beckons, "and we will pass a small portion of time with a game, for I have made many to sell in Ur . . . Please! . . . Come tell me how you live****. While we play, you will tell me of your time, and I will tell you of mine, and in this way we will decide who is of the past and who is of the present . . ."

* I have used the dates and Kings List from Woolley pp. 21-26 to construct this story. Some may not be pleased with this and believe that the dates should all be some 200 years later. In any case, no one really knows. I have also assumed that Abraham was born in 1996 BC -- a totally arbitrary date but one in agreement with most Biblical scholars who put the date 'around 2000 BC.'

** Eridu had the distinction in Sumerian tradition of being the very first city and thus was an important religious center.

*** Allied troops did in fact come very close to the ancient site of Ur on this night. I was not there but looking at the map, soldiers of the 82nd Airborne, the 101st Airborne, the 24th Mechanized Infantry, and possibly the 1st Armored Division, rumbled right over the top of it.

**** This is very true. The Iraqis did base supplies and planes there and the ziggurat did sustain strafing damage during the conflict.

***** This phrase 'Come tell me how you live' is straight from Agatha Christie. She visited the digs at Ur in 1927 and fell in love with the place and Woolley's assistant, Max Mallowan. She married Mallowan and worked with him at the site at Ur -- and later wrote some of her stories, at Nineveh, on the only table around for hundreds of miles. Of her experience at Ur she wrote:

"I fell in love with Ur, with its beauty in the evenings, the ziggurat standing up, faintly shadowed, and that wide sea of sand with its lovely pale colours of apricot, rose, blue, and mauve, changing every minute. I enjoyed the workmen, the foremen, the little basket boys, the pick men -- the whole technique and life. The lure of the past came up to grab me. To see a dagger slowly appearing, with its gold glint, through the sand was romantic."

What is 'The Royal Game of Ur'?



The Most famous of the 'Royal Game of Ur' boards and the board used as a guide in constructing our computerized version. It was found by Sir Leonard Woolley in 1927 in the tomb of a nameless king of Ur, where it had been either abandoned or overlooked by robbers looking for more lucrative spoil. Hollow, to allow a place for storing the pieces, it is made of fine inlays of shell, bone, lapis lazuli, and red limestone. The board dates from about 2500 BC, and was one of five such boards (albeit the most richly decorated one) found by the famous archaeologist in various tombs of the royal cemetery of Ur.

'The Royal Game of Ur' is the most ancient board game known -- predating even Egyptian Senet by about 300 years. It appears to have been very popular among the Sumerian rulers and to have spread from Sumer to sites all over the ancient world from India to the Mediterranean. The ancient Egyptian game '20-Squares' (dating from about 1800 BC), for instance, is very likely a version of this game.

'The Royal Game of Ur' is of course not the game's real name -- Its actual name is lost in antiquity, but because of the examples of it found in the royal cemetery of Ur, the game soon came to be called 'The Royal Game of Ur' among archaeologists.

The game is played with fourteen markers -- seven to a side -- with two sets, one for each player, of three curious pyramidal dice. The boards the markers move on are variously made but all share distinct rosette markings on strategic squares.

'The Royal Game of Ur' was played in ancient Sumer and Mesopotamia since at least 2500 BC. Now it is here again in the present, re-created through the magic of electrons and phosphorus, for you to play. Welcome to a game of the ancient Sumerians -- Noah, Sargon, Shulgi, Abraham, and now you!

How do you play the game?

Okay now, don't be intimidated by this game -- it is really pretty simple and easy to learn.

To learn the game, you need to know some things about the playing equipment (the board, the pieces, etc.) and something about the rules of the game.

These topics are discussed in some detail in the following two sections. You can learn about the equipment, if you want to, right now by clicking on the jump text below:

[The Equipment . . .](#)

The rules are pretty simple. You can explore the rules of the game by clicking on the jump text below (I hate reading rules too, but you might want to read them just once).

Note: Actually, this computerized 'Royal Game of Ur' version automatically enforces all the rules, so it's really not necessary to memorize them; you just need to be generally familiar with them so that you can understand why the game does what it does.

[What are the rules?](#)

The rules of 'The Royal Game of Ur' say that a special throw is needed for each piece to enter the race. To start a game, the contestants alternate throws until one is able to enter a piece on the board. This version of the game automates this process (saving time) through a facility called 'Demon Cast'. By Demon Cast we mean an automated way (entirely fair, by the way) of determining the next mover (The term Demon Cast is taken from the term 'Demon Dialer', a tool hackers use to search quickly and automatically for access numbers into networks).

Remember that entering a piece on the board requires a throw of -1-. This means that at times (infrequently) neither player has any pieces on the board (all that -were- there have been borne off but some are still waiting 'in the wings' to enter). and each player is trying to roll a -1- so the next piece can enter. At these times also, Demon Cast takes over and quickly processes a series of dice throws until someone -can- move. Bottom line: Demon Cast saves a lot of frustration and time and lets you get quickly to the action.

What about strategy? Five things:

--Watch the rosettes! You cant afford to jump a lot of them and still expect to win --the penalty (reward to your opponent) is too great.

--Take every chance you can to get a piece on the board. A piece 'in the wings' cannot block, bump, or win the game.

--Two or more of your pieces occupying a non-rosette cell prevents the opponent from landing there -- a 'block', in effect, since to land there means certain 'bumping'. These blocks can be very important.

--Stabbing your opponent in the back is fun :-) If you wait on a rosette square, or on a non-rosette square with a partner, until the opponent passes you can often pounce on 'em from behind and 'bump' 'em back 'to the stone age'. And don't tell me you won't enjoy this! ;-)

--A single, lone piece is in danger of being bumped (as long as it is on a non-rosette cell). It is better to double-up if you can.

The average 'Royal Game of Ur' contest usually takes less than 10 minutes so it is not a long process. Make sure you run the 'Tutorial' menu option if any of this confuses you. Don't be afraid to experiment -- the game isn't breakable (at least it is not supposed to be).

I hope you enjoy your electronic game. It may not have the 'pizzazz' of a modern arcade game or the intellectual challenge of a pure strategy game like 'Chess', BUT it was played and enjoyed for thousands of years by millions of ancient Sumerians -- there must be something to it.

What do the items on the menu do?

The menu items are very simple. The top-level menu consists of only three real menu items. See below:

Welcome to 'The Royal Game of Ur' – A game of			
Options	H elp	E xit	G o ahead and make your move G old

'Options' , which allows you to control the game, is discussed below.

Help has four sub-menu options: 'Tutorial' lets you re-run the tutorial whenever you wish, 'How do you play' lets you access the help file you're reading now, 'Take the 'Standard of Ur' tour' runs a short introduction to the borders, cylinder seals, and cuneiform fragments of the game background. 'About' lets you view the program copyright statements.

H elp	E xit	G o ahead and make your
R un T utorial?		
H ow to P lay (and a whole lot more)		
T ake the 'Standard of Ur' tour?		
A bout		

'Exit', of course, lets you leave the game. 'Exit' is the 'normal' method of leaving the game -- two others, the space bar and the 'Esc' key, act as Boss Keys for emergency shutdown. The area on the menu to the right of the 'Exit' item is the game feedback area. The feedback area offers instructions, comments, and advice as the game progresses.

Options	H elp	E xit	G o al
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> G ame Sounds?			
<input type="checkbox"/> M IDI Background Music?			
<input type="checkbox"/> S umerFacts?			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> P lay Arphaxad?			
<input type="checkbox"/> S witchSides?			
<input type="checkbox"/> N ew Game?			

The Options sub-menu items are as below:

The first section of this sub-menu allows you to control some basic options of the game -- do you want game sounds?, do you want background music?, and do you want SumerFacts, from time to time, to pop-up in the upper center of the screen. SumerFacts are interesting facts about the ancient Sumerians that will pop-up every couple of minutes or so if this option is checked.

The 2nd section of this sub-menu lets you play the game on manual mode (play a friend, or play against yourself) or, more commonly, against the computer. If 'Play Arphaxad' is checked, you are playing against the computer. The computer always takes the current turn and piece type if this option is checked during a game in progress. In other words, if it's Gold's turn to move at the time this option is checked, then the computer will play the Golds and vice versa. You can always click the 'SwitchSides' option anytime to turn the

tables on the computer and play the other side -- of course the 'SwitchSides' option is only active when your playing against Arphaxad rather than yourself or a friend.

Clicking the 'New Game?' sub-menu option immediately resets the board and starts a new game.

The 'Game Sounds?' option turns on and off the games sounds.

Note: WAV sound file vs. MIDI sound file volume can be a problem. I've tried to set the relative volumes between the MIDI files and the WAV files at a good spot. Because of the maddening difference between the many sound cards out in the world, this might not be right for everyone. If you find your Music too loud compared to the Game Sounds, or the Game Sounds too loud compared to the music, look for and use your 'Mixer' application (it came with your sound card for sure), before playing or even during play, to adjust the relative volumes.

The UR.INI file.

'The Royal Game of Ur' uses the information in the UR.INI file in the Windows directory to record information for start-up. This is the only file that the game creates automatically on your system. If you ever want to delete the game from your system, you should also delete UR.INI in addition to the files in your UR directory.

Yah sure! Your grandfather walks out of an FAE maelstrom, in the middle of a battle to comfort you, and leaves you with a game he has made, and later you throw it in the 'bit bucket' to be taken out with the trash. This younger generation -- ;-) --- Just wait till your father gets home!

The 'Boss' Keys

I am sensitive to the fact that you might want to play 'The Royal Game of Ur' in private at times.

To that end, if you hit the 'Space Bar' or the 'Esc' anytime during play, the game will instantly end and clear itself from the screen.

How to contact the author.

If you have comments or suggestions, you can contact me by:

Internet: 74212.1123@compuserve.com

or

CompuServe E-Mail: 74212,1123

or visit my homepage at:

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/PSNeeley>

or by letter to:

**P. S. Neeley
248 W. 3325 N.
North Ogden, UT 84414**

Credits (or where did all this stuff come from anyway?).



'The Royal Game of Ur' was written in Microsoft's Visual Basic for Windows 3.0.

All the background information, the raw materials for the images, and the SumerFacts(tm), came from the following sources (all 'mined' at the local Library):

"Board and Table Games From Many Civilizations" by R.C. Bell, Oxford University Press, 1960.

"Board Games and Fortunetelling: a Case from Antiquity" by Irving L. Finkel, part of the proceedings of the International Colloquium Board Games in Academia, held in Leiden, April 9 -13, 1995 and sponsored by the Research School CNWS and the IIAS.

"The Sumerians" by C. Leonard Woolley, W. W. Norton & Company, 1965.

"History Begins at Sumer -- Thirty-Nine Firsts in Man's Recorded History" by Samuel Noah Kramer, The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.

"Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth -- Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer " by Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, Harper & Row, New York, 1983.

"Sumer: Cities of Eden" Lost Civilizations Series, Time-Life Books, 1993.

"Cradle of Civilization" by Samuel Noah Kramer, Great Ages of Man Series, Time-Life Books, 1967.

"TimeFrame 3000-1500 B.C., The Age of God Kings", Time-Life Books, 1988.

"The Greatness that was Babylon" by H. W. F. Saggs, Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1962.

"The World of Games: Their Origins and History, How to Play Them, and How to Make Them" by Botermans etal., Facts on File Inc., New York and Oxford, 1989.

I have used five sources and sets of rules for comparison purposes in coming up with the rules you find in this version of the game. These source are:

"Board Games and Fortunetelling: a Case from Antiquity" by Irving L. Finkel, part of the proceedings of the International Colloquium Board Games in Academia, held in Leiden, April 9 -13, 1995 and sponsored by the Research School CNWS and the IIAS.

"Board and Table Games From Many Civilizations" by R.C. Bell, Oxford University Press, 1960.

"The World of Games: Their Origins and History, How to Play Them, and How to Make Them" by Botermans etal, Facts on File Inc., New York and Oxford, 1989.

The Royal Game of Sumer. A board game marketed by S&R Games Inc. in association with British Museum Publications, Ltd., 1977.

A set of rules found on the Internet which had been summarized from 'Games of the World' by Val Kartchner, 1994. (the URL is: <http://www.kdcol.com/~val/games/rules-my/Ur.html>)

All these good people and their books have been my 'teachers of things Sumerian ' -- I have tried to learn well. Any errors are, of course, my own.

Beauty and Art were breathed into this game through superlative tools -- my Microtek-II HR scanner, Adobe Photoshop 3.0, Kai Power Tools 2.0, Andromeda series II filters, and Paint Shop Pro v3.0. Some extremely smart people made these tools to empower the 'artistically challenged' of the world (like me) to create something worthwhile in spite of 'handicaps'.

All of the icons used here (some of which were subsequently converted to BMP files) were created using IconWorks -- an application furnished with Visual Basic.

This Help file was written with the aid of Craig Villalon's shareware help authoring system -- VB Automatic Help Author v.1.32 .

A number of the game sounds in this game are greatly shortened and modified versions of sound files found on Interactive's "1000 of the World's Greatest Sound Effects" CD-ROM. A couple are mixed and shortened WAV files from BeachWare Inc.'s Music Tracks CD. The rest are either from those 'collected' over the years from various BBS's and On-Line services or were recorded using the Microsoft Windows Sound Recorder Applet and my trusty Radio Shack microphone.

Ur1.Mid was created with MidiSoft's Recording Studio software using 'Rain Song', a sample MIDI piece that came with my Gravis UltraSound Card, as a starting point. Ur2.Mid and Ur3.Mid are modified versions, again using Recording Studio, of selections on Cambium's Sound Choice Volume I and II. Ancient Sumerian music relied on a variety of instruments -- especially the harp and the lyre -- but it also drums, tambourines, and flutes of reed and metal. It is recorded in an ancient hymn that even King Shulgi 'knows how to play the sweet three-necked lyre' and 10 other musical instruments too. Interestingly, although know one really knows how Sumerian Music sounded, we do have the words to some of their hymns and the earliest known instance of recorded music, scales, and tuning information (via cuneiform tablets) date to 1500 B.C. in Mesopotamia -- not too long after the Sumerians. In any case, all three of these beautiful and haunting pieces represent music that perhaps could have been played by them albeit with some modern musical tastes.

The knowledge and interest in Mathematics and programming is due to my father Pat's influence and the fine education I received from the many Math and Science teachers and professors who taught so very well (obligating a debt I can never repay).

The time to complete this programming project was largely 'stolen' during the late evening and wee morning hours when more normal people would be asleep. However, inevitably, some of the time was donated by my wife, Barbara and my children, Jon, Melissa, Christie, Patrick, Nick, and James.

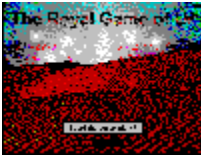
Some day they may come to understand that while other fathers were tinkering with the family car, mowing the lawn, doing woodwork in the garage, etc. -- tending to normal business -- their father, high in the dark castle tower, and bathed in the soft glow of the electron's fire, was practicing modern-day sorcery. For he was building something that would never really grow old and decay, that could be copied exactly many times with almost no effort, that could be used and enjoyed by many, many people at the same time, and that could be scattered on the electronic winds to the ends of the Earth. Yet, this something was made out of nothing but an idea, diagrams in the air, and glowing bits of phosphorus. Can there be anything more magic than that?

The images -- what are they?

The images used in this game are as follows



The 'Royal Game of Ur' icon is made from an image of one of the very first Sumerian art works found. Diplomat turned archaeologist Ernest de Sarzec found this statue during his 1880 dig at the site of ancient Girsu. The statue portrays a princess of Lagesh (Girsu was a part of the city-state of Lagesh during a portion of Sumerian history). For 10 years before Sarzec's diggings, the very existence of the Sumerians had been hotly debated and this statue was one of the first tangible pieces of evidence.



The Splash screen image is of the desert on the Allied front looking towards the Iraqi lines. FAE (Fuel Air Explosives) light the night sky. I'm sure that Photoshop's gradient and lens flare filters combined with my paltry skill haven't done them justice. FAE's are truly impressive weapons in which an explosive vapor is released by a bomb and then ignited, producing a force several times that of a conventional explosive. The bombs weigh around 15,000 lbs. and are dropped, in the case of the gulf war, from Combat Talons (Hercules MC-130's). The fireballs produced are on the order of 500 meters in diameter with tremendous and very destructive pressure waves. Their stated use is for 'mine clearing'.

Note: I have never personally seen one of these weapons -- all of this information comes from Scott Belgarde, William Cole, Anthony Lattanzio, and Roland Wolfe of CompuServe's Military Forum.



The 'Footsteps, then a scream, then weapons fire' lead-in sequence and screen represent a view through your low-light gear as you are surprised by Arphaxad. In that garb, you - surely- must have looked like a 'goggle-eyed demon'.

The final image you see of Arphaxad through the low-light scope is really that of a bronze statue of Sargon the Great (or possibly his grandson, Naram-Sin). Sargon founded the Akkadian dynasty and united Sumer and northern Mesopotamia. He was a remarkable military leader whose exploits and legends were talked about a full 1000 years after his death. He was born around 2350 B.C. of Semitic origins and legends tell that, as Moses' mother did, his mother placed him in a pitch-covered basket and trusted him to fate on the Euphrates river. A humble farmer, drawing water for his fields, pulled the basket from the river and raised the baby as his own. Sargon, through unknown but surely remarkable circumstances, rose to power and embarked on the path of conquest. There is evidence that his armies may have even invaded the distant lands of Egypt, Ethiopia, and India. Interestingly, he built his new capital, Agade, in the south-central Mesopotamia region known as Akkad, and although it was known as one of the most splendid cities of the ancient world, its site has never been found. An inscription from that time records: "The dwellings of Agade were filled with gold, its bright-shining houses were filled with silver . . . Its walls reached skyward like a mountain . . ."



The beautiful 'Royal Game of Ur' playing board is patterned, quite closely, from the most ornate of those found by C. Leonard Woolley at Ur. That board, however, is a wonderful mosaic of lapis lazuli, shell, bone, and red limestone, this board, on the other hand, is made of marble, and intricate workings of Gold, Electrum, and Silver -- all courtesy of Photoshop and Kai Power Tools.



The background of the board is the sand of the desert, imbedded in which are various cuneiform writings and cylinder seal stamp impressions. The legend below will introduce them to you:

- 1 - an account of food stores from around 3000 B.C. The characters here are picture symbols rather than the later (ca. 2400 B.C.) cuneiform script.
- 2 - Inanna, the Sumerian Goddess of Love and War, as found on a cylinder seal. She stands beside her insignia -- gateposts hung with streamers.
- 3,4,6,8,10, and 13 - are various portions of one of the 12 tablets from Nineveh that

contain the Tales of Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, and also the story of the flood. These are Assyrian tablets and cuneiform characters but the stories they tell are based on the ancient Sumerian tales.

5 - a tablet fragment found at Nippur which bears of copy of an even earlier literary text.

7 - The Sumerian Mother Earth Goddess Ninhursag, who was the source of all life, as found on a cylinder sea impression.

9 - The Sumerian Sun God, Utu, who lit the world with his rays and also acted as the god of justice, as found on a cylinder seal impression.

11 - a Sumerian tablet from 2350 B.C. containing an accounting of livestock and offerings to the temple at Lagesh.

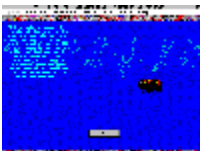
12 - an elaborate cylinder seal impression showing Enki, the Sumerian God of Water, with fish streaming around his shoulders. Inanna is also shown, as is Utu.



At the top and bottom borders stand the figures from the Royal Standard of Ur and although it is hard to get much detail in a band 17 pixels wide, they are all there, some twice, and fairly visible. As you play your game, every game, the Armies of Ur and the Nobles of the Kings court watch your every move -- :-) This 'standard' formed the sides of a wooden box inlaid with shell and lapis lazuli that was found, like our playing board, in the royal cemetery at Ur.

Be sure to take the 'Standard of Ur' tour from the Help menu -- you'll see some larger images of portions of these panels.

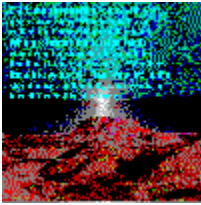
The images of the playing pieces and pyramidal dice were fashioned with PhotoShop and are an accurate representation of those used anciently (albeit of much more precious substances -- gold, silver, and electrum).



The 'Noah's Ark' winning sequence begins with rain droplets created via PhotoShop, followed by the flood and the ark. The water panel of the flood was created via Kai Power Tools Seamless Welder and Photoshopped.

Lines from either the Sumerian Flood Story (Ziusudra = Noah) or the Babylonian Flood

Story (Utnapishtim = Noah) will appear. In both cases these are lines from the Gilgamesh epic with the Babylonian version being ultimately based on the Sumerian version.



The 'farewell' screen is an image the site of Nippur -- the cultural hub of ancient Sumer -- as it would have appeared before 1890. You can see the ruins of the great ziggurat quite clearly. In the 1890's a fortress was built on top of the ziggurat mound to protect American archaeologists from hostile desert bandits. The desolation of this image is astounding and very real, but in ancient times the city stood on the banks of the Euphrates and was surrounded by verdant fields. Today, the river has shifted some 40 miles to the west and the fields, splendid palaces, and temples of Nippur are dust and sand.

The beautiful gradient sky of this image was created with Kai Power Tools in conjunction with PhotoShop's lens flare. The light source emanates from the position of the top of the shrine to Enlil that would have been atop the ziggurat in ancient times. Faintly in the sky you can see some of the actual cuneiform text from a Nippur tablet -- 'A Hymn to Enlil' -- that is now found in the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient (see Kramer, p. 90)

Over all of this will be a translated section from this tablet ('A Hymn to Enlil') -- chosen randomly from a set of 12.

As final examples of the words of the ancient Sumerians, I offer the following passages which express their heartfelt desire for peace, though besieged and vexed by war on every side. They longed for a land of peace, a day of peace.

The great King Shulgi envisioned that day and wrote:

On that day, in my inscriptions,
That no city was destroyed by me,
no walls were breached by me,
That like a frail reed no land was crushed by me,
The singer will put to song.

Another poet described that day:

A day when man abuses not man, the son fears his father,
A day when humility pervades the land, the noble is honored by the lowly,
A day when the younger brother defers to the older brother,
A day when the young sit attentive to the words of the learned,
A day when there is no strife between weak and strong, when kindness prevails,
A day when any chosen road can be traveled, the weeds having been ripped out,
A day when man can travel where he wills, when even in the steppe he will not be harmed,
A day when all suffering will be gone from the land, light will pervade it,
A day when black darkness will be expelled from the land, and all living creatures will rejoice.

What are the rules?

The 'object' of the game . . . How do you win?

Get all 7 of your pieces on the board, around your path, and off the board first -- you win!

Starting a game . . .

At the beginning of a contest, one player takes control of the seven gold pieces, the other player takes control of the 7 silver pieces.

At the beginning of each game, a series of casts ensues until one player has thrown a -1- and is able to enter a piece on the board.

The Dice . . .

The game uses a throw until you 'lose the turn' philosophy:

3 marked corners up = 3 and another throw
2 marked corners up = 2 and the turn ends
1 marked corner up = 1 and another throw
0 marked corners up = 0 and the turn ends

In other words, throw an odd number (1 or 3) and you get another throw, throw an even number (0 or 2) and the turn ends after your move.

The turn also ends when you receive a penalty for 'jumping' a rosette cell (see below).

Entering a piece on the board . . .

Entry into the race can be made only on a throw of -1-.

Moving pieces . . .

Pieces do not move backwards; only forwards

A dice throw cannot be split among pieces. The result of a given throw must apply to only one piece.

If it is possible to move, you must make a move. If no move is possible then you lose your turn (even if the move is a reward gotten from an opponent's poor move or bad luck -- sorry! -- see 'rosettes' below)

The Markings on the Board . . .

The rosettes are the only markings on the board of interest in the game:

If you land exactly on a rosette:

Your reward is that you may move any one of your pieces, already on the board, ahead 5 squares, ignoring the penalty for passing any rosette(s), but taking the gain if the piece happens to land exactly on a rosette. (Note: If such a move would result in the 'bumping' of the moved piece then so be it -- be careful when you move :-).)

You must take the reward if it is at all possible (in other words, if you have pieces that can be lawfully moved). If it is not possible then the reward is lost and you lose your turn -- sorry!

If you 'jump over' a rosette:

Your penalty is that your turn ends and your opponent is given the reward above.

(Note: The rosettes are also safe squares. Pieces of any color, in any number, may rest without fear of being 'bumped'. These squares are the only ones on the board that may be occupied by both sides at the same time.)

Occupying squares (Blocking and Bumping) . . .

Any number of pieces of one color may occupy a non-rosette square.

If you move onto a square occupied by only 1 of your opponent's piece, the opponent is 'bumped' and he or she must remove the piece to be started over in the race.

If you move onto a square occupied by more than 1 of your opponent's pieces then you are 'bumped' and you must remove your piece and start it over.

(Note: The rosettes are safe squares. Pieces of any color, in any number, may rest without fear of 'bumping'. These squares are the only ones on the board that may be occupied by both sides at the same time.)

Bearing off . . .

Bearing-off is by exact dice throw -- You must land exactly on the terminating rosette of your path to take your piece off the board. Since the end square of your path is a rosette, you also gain the reward for landing on a rosette (see above).

That's It! Pretty simple Huh?

The Equipment . . .

The equipment for 'The Royal Game of Ur' is as follows:

There are 7 gold and 7 silver pieces that are used as markers. Each game is a race between these two sides to see who can get their markers onto the board, around the 'race track', and off the board first.

The board these pieces race on is patterned just like the most ornate one found by Woolley at Ur. Each side has 4 beginning squares to itself, free from battle and the threat of bumping. The fifth square is shared and marks the beginning of a 'battle zone' where each side blocks, bumps, and races the other side to the finish.

There are 5 special positions on the board -- rosette squares -- that when landed on give a reward. Jump over these same rosette squares, however, and you pay a corresponding penalty to your opponent. These are the real key to the game. The winner will be the one who uses the rosettes to his or her advantage and cunningly blocks, bumps, and harasses the opponent. :-) This will be fun!

Pieces start off the board. When a piece is borne-off the board it takes no further part in the game.

Three curious pyramidal dice -- a gold set for the gold side, a silver set for the silver side -- determine the game moves. Each pyramid has two of its four corners marked. After a throw, the number of marked 'pyramid-tips' determine the throw value as follows:

3 marked corners up = 3 and another throw
2 marked corners up = 2 and the turn ends
1 marked corner up = 1 and another throw
0 marked corners up = 0 and the turn ends

In other words, throw an odd number (1 or 3) and you get another throw, throw an even number (0 or 2) and the turn ends after your move.

SumerFacts? . . .

If the 'SumerFacts?' menu item is checked, every 2 or 3 minutes, interesting facts about the ancient Sumerians will appear over the game screen. All these 'facts' were mined from the references noted in the 'Credits' section of this help file. They only appear during a game while waiting for someone to roll the dice, and they will disappear as soon as the 'dice' are rolled. Stop and read them once in a while.

These facts are intended to educate as well as entertain -- few people really know much about the Sumerians, even though the knowledge may be readily available at the local library. If you grow tired of this feature, simply un-check the 'SumerFacts?' menu item and they will no longer bother you.

You control the Dice . . . !

Let me just say, up front, right here: The dice are not rigged! Arphaxad would not cheat, especially not in this situation -- you are in fact possibly his grandson, or at least his confused friend. The computer logic *does not* 'mess with' the dice throws in any way. You roll'em and you weep -- just like in real life.

Then again, you, the human player, actually have full control over the dice. But we had to provide that capability for you. Let me explain:

'The Royal Game of Ur' uses a random number generator to obtain 'random' throws of the dice. Random number generators use a 'seed' number to get them started and then a complicated algorithm to generate a sequence of random numbers. These are often called 'pseudo-random' numbers because given the seed number, the same sequence of 'random' numbers will always be generated. Also, the algorithm eventually loops back on itself so that you'll start-over generating the same numbers in the same sequence again at some point. This is called the 'period' of the random number generating algorithm. A typical period may be in the 40,000 range, so you have to go through a lot of random numbers before you loop back on yourself.

Okay, sorry about the dry, overly complicated explanation above, but here's why we went through it:

The game uses a random seed number. In other words, each time you start up, it uses a random seed number to 'seed' the algorithm, and thus you should never really notice the same sequence of throws -- unless you watch and correlate for a long, long time.

This means that the sequence of throws generated from 'The Royal Game of Ur' is as random as practical.

Now I personally believe that one random number is as good as the next, but you may not. You may be uncomfortable with just accepting the next 'random' throw that the game generates as YOUR throw. After all, you are the thrower of the dice, right? 'The Royal Game of Ur' has been programmed so that if you hold the mouse button down over the dice, they 'roll' and 'rattle' in your hands (you'll be able to hear them if you have a sound card) for as long as you hold the mouse button down. All during this 'rolling' process, the logic is going through the next, and the next, and the next, etc., etc., random numbers at the clip of 150 per second or more (depending on your processor). When you release the mouse button, 'The Royal Game of Ur' uses the random number from wherever it stopped in the 'rolling' process as the throw amount.

Bottom line: You actually have as much control over the 'dice' as you would in real life.

If you are blessed with ESP, or are just an extremely lucky person, you can really make a killing here because if you release at just the right millisecond you'll have the 1, or the 3, or whatever it was you wanted. So if you don't trust the program, or don't want to just accept the next random number the game happens upon, roll those dice before you throw.

Tips, Tricks, and Trouble Shooting . . .

[I don't want to go through the 'I hear footsteps . . .' prolog screen anymore . . .](#)

If you click on the prolog screen when it first comes up (or anytime really) you will quit the prolog and go right to the game.

[I don't want to wait 10 seconds for the 'farewell' screen to disappear . . .](#)

Sheesh! Its only 10 seconds! Okay, Okay. If you click on the 'farewell' screen it will immediately disappear and you will be out -- finished as it were.

[I can't get the SumerFacts to show up . . .](#)

First, make sure you have the SumerFacts menu option checked, otherwise you won't get any SumerFacts.

However, If you find that the SumerFacts menu option is 'grayed-out' then that's another matter. This means that the program could not find the SUMERFAC.TXT file that holds all of the SumerFacts. The most likely cause of this is that SUMERFAC.TXT is not in the working directory, and let me tell you from personal experience, it's very easy in Windows to get yourself mixed up as to what the working directory is. Here's how you make sure that 'The Royal Game of Ur' is never mixed up about it.

1st: Activate the 'Royal Game of Ur' icon by clicking on it once from Program Manager (This will highlight its title).

2nd: Choose 'File|Properties' from the Program Manager menu and make sure the Properties box for the 'The Royal Game of Ur' icon reads:

Command Line: RUR.exe

Working Directory: C:\RUR (or whatever is your directory)

3rd: Make sure that SUMERFAC.TXT exists in the C:\RUR directory.

Do these three things, and everything should work fine.

[I can't get any MIDI music to play . . .](#)

You have to have a sound card that supports MIDI 'Extended' format to get the music to play -- 99.99% of them do.

First, make sure you have the 'MIDI background music?' menu option checked, otherwise you won't get any MIDI music.

Next, make sure it isn't a simple volume problem. Turn-up the volume on the speakers and see if that helps at all.

Didn't help? Okay then maybe the relative sound volumes of the WAV and MIDI files are 'out of whack'. I've tried to set the relative volumes between the MIDI file and the WAV files at a good spot. Because of the maddening difference between the many sound cards out in the world, this might not be right for everyone. Look for and adjust your 'Mixer' application (it came with your sound card for sure), to adjust the relative volume of MIDI files upward a little to see if that helps.

Still not working? Dang! This calls for drastic measures. I hate to inform you of this,

BUT, you are most likely suffering from what the MIDI people call 'The MIDI problem from Hell!' (their words, not mine). Not to worry though -- here's what to do:

Since all three 'Royal Game of Ur' Midis are in extended MIDI format you have to make sure that channels 1 - 10 are active. Go to the Windows Control Panel, MIDI mapper section, and choose edit on your MIDI mapper. Then make sure that channels 1 through 10 are active. If one of these channels (that hold the extended MIDI sequences) is not active, then you are essentially mapping that sequence into 'oblivion'.

Please consider registering . . .

Please consider registering. 'The Royal Game of Ur' is not freeware, it's shareware; even though it is not 'hobbled' in any way, nor are there pesky 'nag' screens to bother you.

If you want to continue to legally use this software, you must register this program after 21 days. To register, send \$15 to:

**P. S. Neeley
248 W. 3325 N.
North Ogden, UT 84414**

This shareware version of 'The Royal Game of Ur' was meant to be distributed on the 'electronic winds' of the Internet, BBSs, on-line services, etc., and so it was important to keep the file sizes as small as possible. In a practical sense, you do this by cutting back on color depth (16 color images instead of 256 color images) and eliminating as many game sound files as possible (.WAV files are large and not very compressible). I hated to do this but it was the only way.

However, extra bytes add nothing to the weight of a diskette.

I will send registered users the 256 color, registered version in the mail. The 16 color images you see in this shareware version are good, but the 256 color images of the registered version are breathtakingly beautiful. The registered version also features more sounds and three times as many SumerFacts (tm).

If you enjoy 'The Royal Game of Ur' at all, or have interest in the ancient Sumerians, you'll want the registered version.

Epilog . . .



Arphaxad begins to fade. Slowly, intermittently, his form becomes transparent. He must notice the same in you for he remarks, "Friend, you grow faint . . . you dissolve into the fields."

"I suspect the FAEs have caused this . . . this joining of two times, yours and mine . . ." you reply, "They say they are near-atomic on a small radius -- they seem to have ravaged time as well as space . . . but the rift is healing itself".

"Soon we will see no more of one another then" he replies. "Sad, we have not yet determined which of us stands in the past and which in the future."

"I suspect we have done both, together" you murmur.

"It was good meeting you friend!" offers Arphaxad.

"It was good meeting you too grandfather," you reply.

"Grandfather!," exclaimed Arphaxad, "How so since my only child is yet young!".

"But you could be my grandfather from many generations ago -- I will imagine it so at least," you say with a smile. Arphaxad smiles too.

"Yet we have not resolved our question" he says with a twinkle in his eye, "Perhaps you are in fact -my- grandfather!". You laugh.

"I must be going . . . my squad will soon move toward Basra; it's almost 8:00," you say as you look at your watch and feel the rising sun's heat on your back.

"I too must go. Soon it will be dark and I must cross the great bridge into Ur before the city gates close for the night. Good-bye my friend."

"Good-bye" you smile as Arphaxad's image fades one final time into the shifting sands.

4245 years earlier, in the rapidly coming twilight, Arphaxad watched your image fade into the fields of Ur. "A strange man," he mused, "friendly, if a bit confused. Little Salah would have liked his strange stories . . ." Happily he put his game board and pieces into the bag, hefted his spear, and headed for home.

And Arphaxad worked his craft, took care of his little family, and thought to himself often of his strange, confused friend who had faded like the morning mist into the barley fields. Little Salah grew straight and strong, eventually married, and when 30 years old

begat Eber. And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg. And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu. And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug. And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor. And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah. And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Now these [are] the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife [was] Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the

father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she [had] no child. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran. NOW the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great . . .

Why these Rules? . . . Does anyone really know how the game was played?

Don't be so cynical! Why not these rules? :-) Actually, believe it or not, I did not just 'make-up' these rules -- we do know a little about them. Finkel writes:

"In 1990 the writer had the fortune to discover that one of the Babylonian cuneiform texts from ancient Mesopotamia now housed in the British Museum in London was inscribed with the rules of a board game. Subsequent efforts led to the eventual decipherment of this inscription, and the realization that the rules concerned an identifiable game, and indeed that this is the game sometimes known as 'The Royal Game of Ur', or the 'Game of Twenty Squares'. We know from good archaeological evidence that this basic race game was played all over the ancient Near East from at least as early as 2600 BC., and very probably earlier, down until the end of the first millennium BC. Many boards, some ornate and fancy, other ephemeral graffiti, have been recovered to testify to its enduring popularity, and it is evident that in its distribution and general role it was the most popular game of the ancient Near Eastern World."

"This remarkable cuneiform tablet is dated to the year 177-176 BC. On the second side, or reverse, the scribe itemizes for the modern reader the pieces, dice, and special throws that are needed to play the game in the form popular at this period. From these rules it can be seen that a simple race game, which must have been the original form, had evolved into a highly competitive race game. The essential elements concerning how the game developed and worked are illustrated in Figs I-II.

Note especially the slight change in lay-out, in that the original block of six squares at the end of the board came to be straightened out, after about 2000 BC, into the form shown in Fig. II, which was the pattern that lasted for the next two thousand years or so. Here the pieces have a central aisle to fight over consisting of twelve uninterrupted squares.

The rules tell us that a special throw was needed for each piece to start the game, and that the fortunes of each sided depended directly on whether a given piece landed on a marked square, or not. For each there was a special benefit if it did manage to land on a rosette, with a corresponding penalty if a particular throw forced a player to move his piece right over a rosette without landing on it. The rules are quite tersely expressed, but they produce an exciting and rapidly-changing game if the suggested route of play is adopted, and the pieces subjected to this obstacle-ridden course. It seems probable that there was a pool of tokens into which each player placed an agreed initial deposit. As the game progressed, if a piece could be maneuvered into landing on a rosette, the player would collect the appropriate number of tokens from the pool, but if forced by unlucky throws to bypass such a square he would have to pay out the equivalent number of tokens."

Most would agree that the game may (must) have changed between 2600 BC and 176 BC and so the cuneiform tablet mentioned above may not reflect, entirely accurately, the ancient game as played in Ur. In addition, the other side of this same tablet concerns using the game in fortune telling and the rules as stated may have more to do with this than game play. In any case, I decided not to pursue the gambling aspect Finkel alludes to (although near one of the board found at Ur by Woolley were 21 small white balls that could have been used as gambling markers). I -did- decide to keep the two main aspects of the game the cuneiform tablet reveals:

- (1) A special throw is needed to enter a piece in the game.

(2) The role of the rosettes: land on them and you gain a reward, jump over them and you pay a reward to your opponent.

As far as I know, this is the first version of the game to implement rule #2 above per Finkel's findings and the cuneiform tablet.

In addition, authorities agree that the rosettes also acted as safe cells where pieces could rest, free from capture (bumping) and in the diagram mentioned in Finkel's article above, the rosettes are marked with the tag "immunity from capture".

I decided to take the position that any number of pieces of the same color may occupy a cell at the same time (this is present in some of the rules sets I have seen). In addition the 'bumping' rules I've used in the game are like those commonly found in other rule sets.

The direction of play of this rule set is slightly different from other rule sets in that each side 'loops around' the set of 6 squares near the end to reach the final square. I feel this is more likely and more consistent with the final 'Twenty Squares' form of the game where the final rows were 'straightened out'. This also preserves the symmetry of the rosette squares being 4 cells apart -- something that I think is important.

Some will be disappointed that I didn't attach meaning to the variously decorated non-rosette squares of the board -- which are all very beautiful. But the simple facts are that the rosettes -are- the -only- feature that is common to most of the boards found in the Near East. Some have inlays of animals on the non-rosette squares, others present simple blank cells. Even boards found in Egypt have the rosette squares in these same positions (although in some, like on one of Tutankhamun's boards for example, the rosettes are replaced by hieroglyphs). It seems most likely that the non-rosette cells were decorated for artistic effect rather than as an integral part of the game.

