

SINGLE-STEP HNEFATAFL

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

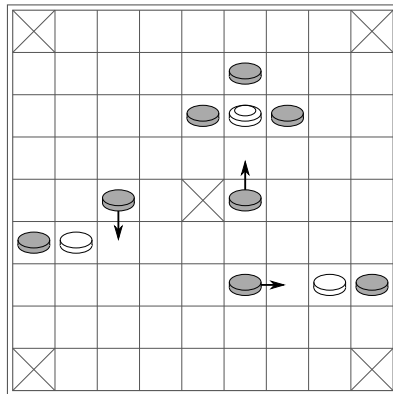


Figure 3: Some examples of how the pieces are captured.

Hnefatafl is a game invented by the Norse, often referred to as the Vikings. A king at the centre of the board, with his band of faithful defenders, faces a horde of attackers twice their number, who are lined up at the edges ready to attack from all sides. The king must escape from the board, while the attackers must capture him.

It was first played in the first millennium; boards and pieces from that era have been found in all parts of Scandinavia. As the Norse raiders, adventurers and settlers spread further afield, the game was introduced to other cultures: the Sami in the north, and the English, Scots, Welsh and Irish in the west. Norse traders took the game east with them to Russia and Ukraine.

From the east, however, hne-

fatafl would have come face to face with another game, one that would eclipse it and drive it from fashionable tables in all the lands it had invaded. By the twelfth century, chess had replaced hnefatafl in Scandinavia itself. Only in remote lands did the game survive, in Wales till the sixteenth century, and in Lapland till the eighteenth century.

Some modern versions of hnefatafl have adopted a slower pace. While most versions have the pieces moving as far as they like along a row or column, like rooks in chess, the alternative games allow pieces only to move to adjacent squares. It is not certain where this variation came from, but it is found in commercial versions like *Papillon's Escape*, and in a number of books.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The game is played by two people on a 9x9 board, with 25 pieces: a king and eight defenders on one side, and sixteen attackers on the other.
2. At the start of the game, the king sits in the centre, with his defenders forming a square around him; the attackers are in T-shaped formations around the edge of the board, as shown in figure 1.
3. The king's side makes the first move.
4. In a turn one piece is moved to an adjacent square along a row or column (i.e. not diagonally), as shown in figure 2. All pieces move in this way.
5. Attacking pieces may not sit on a corner square.
6. The king is captured by surrounding him with four pieces, one in an adjacent square on each side of him, as shown in figure 3.
7. Any other piece is captured when the opponent moves to occupy two opposite sides of it along a row or column, as shown in figure 3.
8. A piece may safely move between two enemies. If the enemy wishes to capture it, one of the enemy pieces must be moved away and back again to effect the capture.
9. The king wins the game by reaching one of the four corner squares.
10. The attackers win when they capture the king.

© Damian Walker 2014. All rights reserved.
<http://tafl.cynningstan.com/>

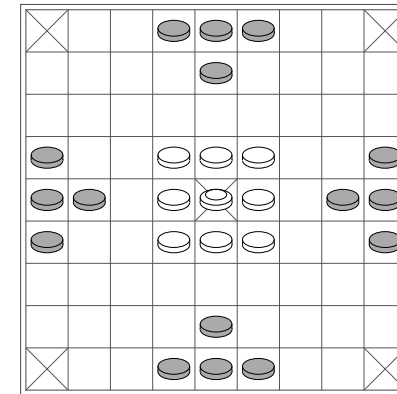


Figure 1: The initial layout of the board.

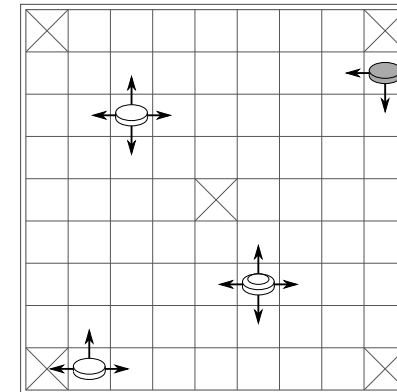


Figure 2: How the pieces move.