

IMPERIAL CONTEST

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

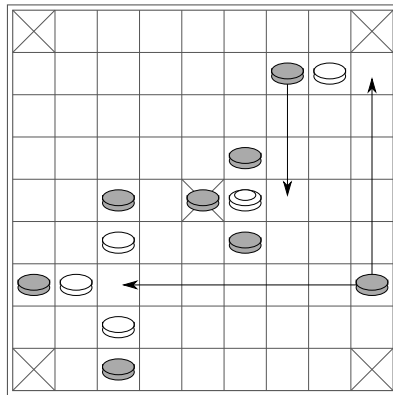


Figure 3: The white pieces may be captured by any of the moves shown.

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, hnefatafl 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.

Imperial Contest was the first commercial version of hnefatafl. Created by Jaques in 1855, it was adapted from *tablut*, the eighteenth-century hnefatafl game played in Lapland. Set in the Crimean War, Imperial Contest pits the Russian emperor and his army against a coalition of British, French, Prussian and Sardinian forces.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The game is played by two players, one taking the side of the Russian emperor and his eight armies, the other taking on the sixteen armies of the allies. They start the game laid out as shown in Figure 1.
2. The players decide at random who takes the first turn.
3. In each turn, a player may move a piece as far as desired along a row or column, as shown in Figure 2.
4. The exception to this is the emperor, whose move is limited to a maximum distance of four squares.
5. Pieces may not jump over each other, nor can one piece land on a square already taken by another.
6. The emperor is captured by surrounding him by allies on all four sides along a row and column.
7. Any other piece is captured by surrounding it on two opposite sides along a row or column by two enemies.
8. Only one piece may be captured at a time; if two or three become separately surrounded at once, a single victim must be chosen to be taken from the board.
9. An ally is *not* captured when sandwiched between the emperor and one of his armies; the emperor may not be used to capture allies.
10. These methods of capture are illustrated in Figure 3.
11. The defenders win the game when the emperor reaches any square on the edge of the board.
12. The pirates win the game when they capture the emperor.

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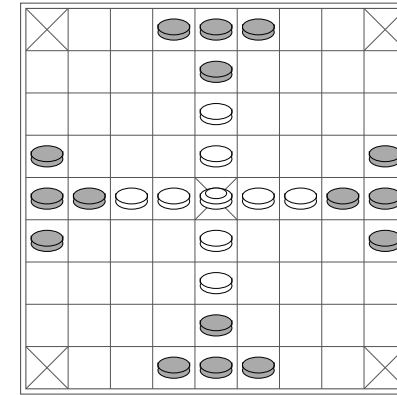


Figure 1: The initial layout for Imperial Contest.

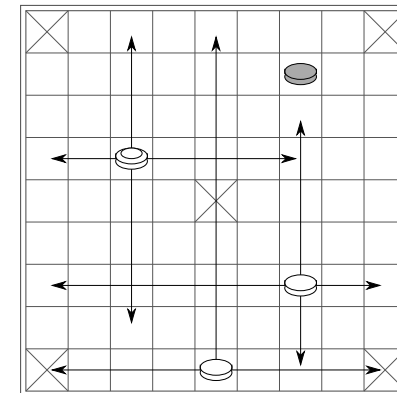


Figure 2: Examples of movement for the emperor and defenders. Note the shortened move of the emperor.