

Tafl

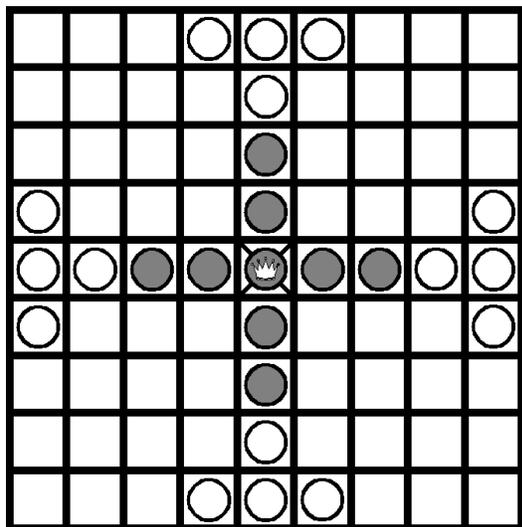


About the Game

Tafl [TAH-fl], also known as Tablut [tah-BLOOT] dates back to before 400 AD, and was played throughout Scandinavia, Iceland, Germany, England, Wales and Ireland. It remained popular until the 17th. century, when it was gradually supplanted by chess. The word tafl is probably derived from the Latin tabula, which also referred to a board game. The game was also sometimes called *hnefatafl* meaning 'king's table'

Historical tafl boards could have anywhere from 49 (7 x 7) to 324 (18 x 18) squares. Most tafl rules refer to either a 9 x 9 or 11 x 11 board. The squares were sometimes checkered, while other boards had only the center and corner squares distinguished. Some tafl boards placed the pieces on the intersections of the lines rather than in the squares themselves. Others had holes for pegged pieces to be placed in.

Little more was known about the game until the discovery of a 18th. century manuscript by Linnaeus, containing a detailed description of a Lapp game. The game was called Tablut, and the description of the rules was consistent with other references to Tafl.



How to Play

The rules and board layout provided here are based on Linnaeus's account of Tablut. However, tafl is an ancient game that had many variations, so feel free to make any changes you feel might make the game fairer or more interesting.

For this version of tafl, we'll use a 9 x 9 board. Tafl is an unbalanced war game. The black King, occupying the throne square, attempts to reach the edge of the board. He is aided by his eight guards, and opposed by 16 white enemies.

The king is placed in the center. His men (the 8 dark pieces) are arranged around him in a cross. The opposing men (the 16 light pieces) are arranged in four 'T' shapes in the middle of each of the four edges of the board (see diagram).

All pieces can move forward, backward or sideways any number of squares (the 'rook's' move in chess). Pieces cannot 'jump' each other, or take over another's space. Only the King may occupy the center square, although others may pass through it.

A piece is captured and removed when it is enclosed between two opposing pieces in a row or a column. This must be done by the opponent - moving a man between two opposing pieces does not result in a capture. The king may participate in captures. The king may only be captured when he is surrounded on four sides, or else on three sides with the throne as the fourth side

The black player wins the game when the king reaches the edge of the board. The white player wins the game when the king is captured. When the King has one clear route to the edge of the board, his opponent must be warned by saying "Raichi" (check). If he has two clear routes open and thus must win the game, the word is "Tuichi" (checkmate).