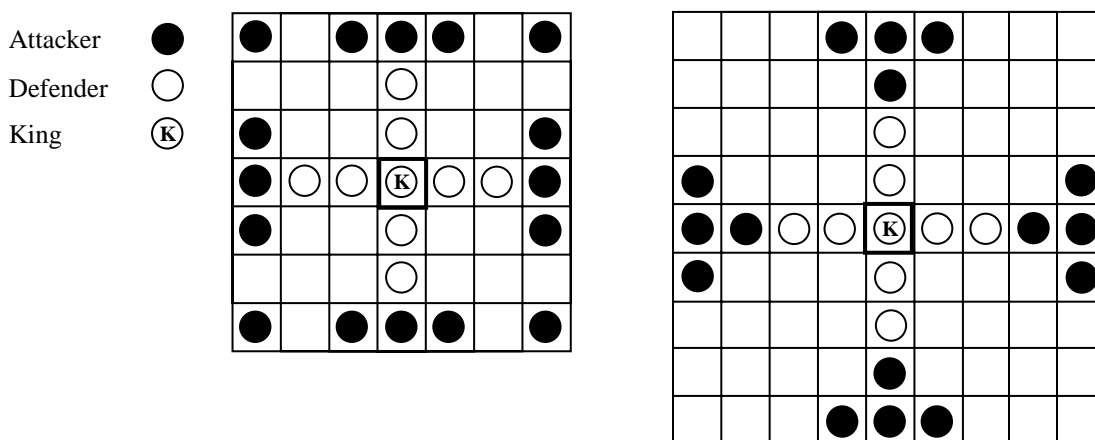


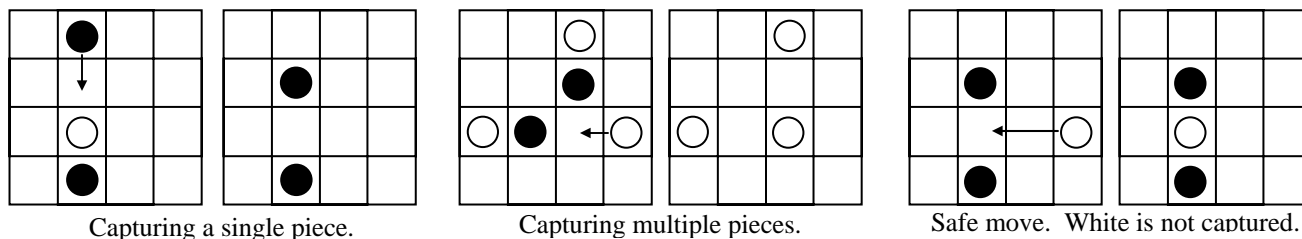
Tafl Games

The Tafl (pronounced Tabl) family of games date back to before 400 AD. They are believed to have originated with the Scandinavians and were brought by the Norsemen to Iceland, Britain, Ireland and Wales as well as to anywhere else they traveled. For many centuries Tafl games were the game of choice for these people until they were displaced by Chess during the 11th and 12th centuries. The games did not die out at that time, since records exist of them still being played as late as the 18th century (and of course we are playing them now). Most of what we know about how the game is played comes from a 1732 account from Lapland.

Tafl games are for two players and use a square board with odd numbered sides. We know it was played on 7x7, 9x9, 11x11, 13x13 and 19x19 boards. The game is set up with the pieces placed in the squares of the board; the king is in the center, surrounded by his defenders. The attackers take positions along the outer edge of the board. The two examples shown below are for a 7x7 board (called Fitchneal by the Irish) and 9x9 board (called Tablut by the Finnish). On larger boards, the number of attackers and defenders is increased, but always kept at a 2:1 ratio.



In these two versions, one player controls the king and eight defenders, the other player controls 16 attackers. Players take turns moving a single piece, with the attacker moving first. Each piece can move as many squares as desired in a straight line like the rook in chess. The center square (where the king starts) is known as the throne. The king is the only piece that may stop on the throne, although other pieces can cross over it. The object of the defender is to get the king to safety off the edge of the board, while the attacker tries to stop the king by surrounding him on all sides, or on three sides and the throne. A piece is captured by trapping it between two enemy pieces in a straight line. Captured pieces are removed from the board. Multiple captures are permitted. The King may participate in a capture. If a piece moves into a space between two enemy pieces it is not captured. If the defender creates one or more openings for the king to escape, they must announce the openings. Failure to announce the openings means the king may not use those moves on his next turn. Game ends when the defender gets the king to safety or the attacker captures the king.



Variants:

The standard method of play gives the advantage to the king and the defenders; as a result there are many variants that attempt to even the game play. (Note: not all of these variants will even the game).

Escape to Corner – Instead of the king needing to get to the edge of the board, this variant requires that he get to a corner. Because it would be too easy for the defenders to block the corners by just sitting pieces on them, these spaces are usually treated like the throne, and only the king may land in them (for the 7x7 board the starting arrangement would be different, so that no pieces start in the corners). Also the King can be captured by three attackers if he is surrounded on an edge row (no space for a fourth attacker to be).

Hostile Throne – Because no piece but the king can land on the throne, sitting a piece next to the throne gives it some additional protection. In this variant such a piece could be captured by allowing an empty throne to “participate” in a capture for either side. So a piece caught between the empty throne and an enemy piece would be captured. An additional rule that can be added says that once the king has left the throne, he may not return. When playing with Escape to Corner, the corner spaces can also be designated as hostile.

No Safe Move – In this variant, a piece may not land in between two enemy pieces without being captured. This move could either be considered illegal or could automatically capture the piece making the move. (Note: if the move results in the capture of one or both of the enemy pieces, then it should be allowed.)

Single Space Move – On the 7x7 board, one variant restricts all moves to a single space.

Sources:

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Variants:

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