

FURTHER INFORMATION

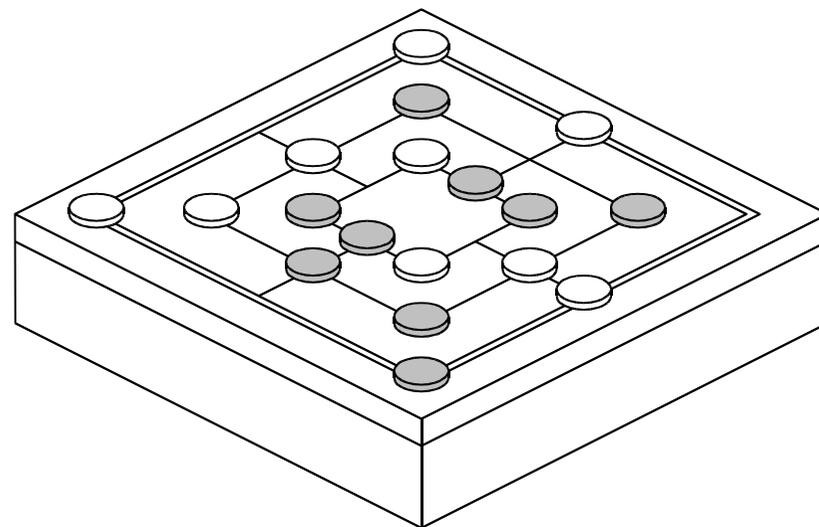
Further information on the game may be gained by consulting the following books.

- Bell, R. C. *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, vol. 1, p. 93. New York: Dover Publishing, Inc., 1979.
Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Board-Games Other than Chess*, pp. 43-48. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.
Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp. 118-120. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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NINE MEN'S MORRIS

by Damian Walker



INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

The game of nine mens morris is so ancient that we do not know its origin. From the stones of ancient Kurna in Egypt, to the stone- or bronze-age burial sites of Cr Bri Chualann, in County Wicklow in Ireland, the pattern for the board has been found in many ancient contexts.

By mediaeval times it had spread far across the three continents of the old world. It was the game of choice for many, particularly bored monks and priests, who carved its board into the stones and

seats of their magnificent abbeys and cathedrals. In the renaissance it was taken with the settlers to the Americas, and there the natives adopted it as their own.

Before Nine Mens Morris could complete its domination of all the inhabited continents of the world, its popularity declined. But the game is fondly remembered today, and it often makes its appearance in those more adventurous games compendia that look beyond chess and backgammon.

HOW TO PLAY

The rules of the game have undergone remarkably little change since they were first recorded. Rule 5 is perhaps the only contentious one, not being universal, and it does not affect the game greatly, but it gives some hope for that player who is lagging behind his opponent.

Starting the Game

1. Nine mens morris is played

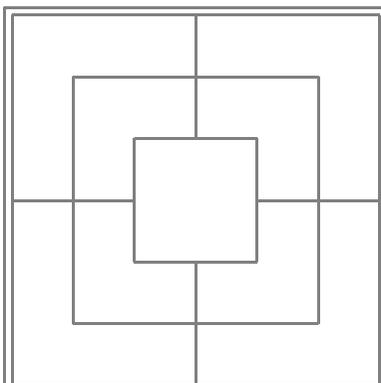


Illustration 1: the empty nine men's morris board.

on the board illustrated, which starts empty of pieces. Each player has his own colour, and holds nine pieces of that in his hand.

2. Black starts the first phase of the game by placing a black piece on any vacant point. White follows suit, and play alternates in this way until both players have placed their pieces. Play then progresses to the

second phase.

3. After all pieces have been placed, the black player begins the second phase of the game, in which pieces may move around the board. White follows, play alternating until the game is over.

Moving the Pieces

4. A player may move one of his pieces from its point, along a marked line, to the next point, if that point is vacant. Pieces cannot be stacked.

5. A player reduced to three pieces may instead move one of his pieces from its point to any other vacant point on the board.

Capturing Enemies

6. A row of three pieces of the same colour, along a marked line, is called a *mill*.

7. A player who forms a new mill is entitled, or in fact obliged, to

take one of his opponent's pieces as a capture. Any opponent's piece may be captured which is not itself part of a mill.

8. If all of the opponent's pieces are forming a mill, then no capture is made.

9. Only a newly made mill entitles a player to capture a piece. To use the mill again, its owner must break it and reform it on subsequent turns. A mill left idle, therefore, does not guarantee an automatic capture every subsequent turn.

Ending the Game

10. The game is over when one player is reduced to two pieces, making it impossible for him to form a mill. His opponent is then the winner.

11. The game is also over if a player is trapped so that he cannot move at all; his opponent is likewise declared the winner.

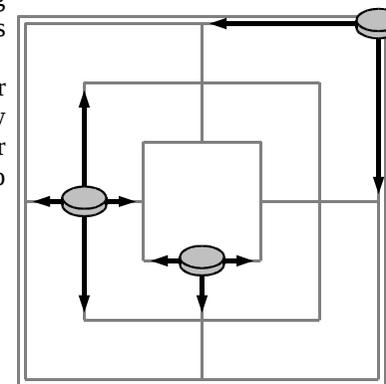


Illustration 2: moves of the pieces, from various parts of the board. Once a player is reduced to three pieces, these restrictions do not apply (see rule 5).