

### FURTHER INFORMATION

To learn more about hnefatafl as played in Ireland, the reader might like to refer to the following books:

Bell, R. C. *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, vol. 2, pp. 45-46. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979.

MacWhite, E. "Early Irish Board Games", *Éigse: a Journal of Irish Studies*, 1946, pp. 25-35.

Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Board-Games Other than Chess*, pp. 55-64. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp. 196-204. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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## BRANDUB

by Damian Walker

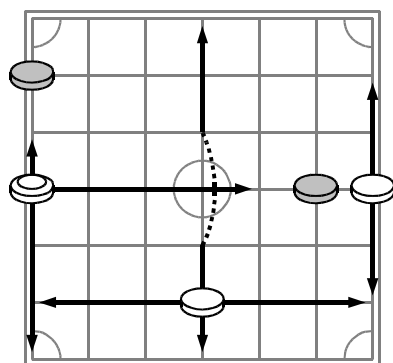
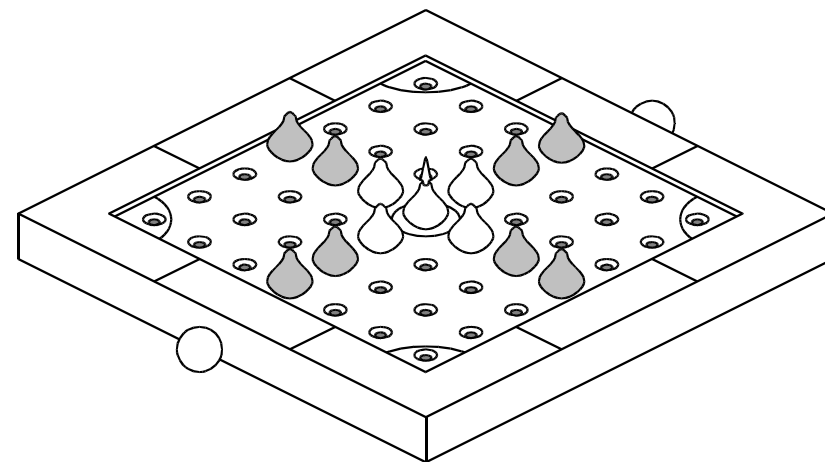


Illustration 3: some example moves and captures. The king may capture either attacker; the top left attacker would be trapped against the corner.

## INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

Ireland is one among many countries to which the Norse raiders and settlers took their arms, their culture and their game of *hnefatafl*. There has been confusion about what the Irish called this game, but literary evidence settles on the name *brandub*, or *brannumh*, which means, inexplicably, “black raven”.

While the size of *hnefatafl* boards varied from place to place, archaeological finds show that the Irish had a preference for the smallest of the boards, 7 squares by 7. Boards found at Downpatrick, Waterford, Antrim, and a famous board from Ballinderry, are all of this size.

Poetry also suggests that they played with 13 pieces: a *branan*, or chief, with 4 guards against 8 attackers.

The game may have been played in Ireland by the 9th century. It was certainly played by the 10th, when the Ballinderry board was made. Some of the poetry dates from the admittedly vague period of 1200-1640, showing the game was enjoyed in Ireland for at least 300 years, possibly as much as 800. In all probability, the coming of chess to Ireland would have eventually put an end to *brandub*'s popularity.

## HOW TO PLAY

Most of the popular books have been unusually reluctant to propose a set of rules for playing *brandub*. The rules proposed here are based on the poetic and archaeological information from an article by Éoin MacWhite in the journal *Éigse*, from 1946.

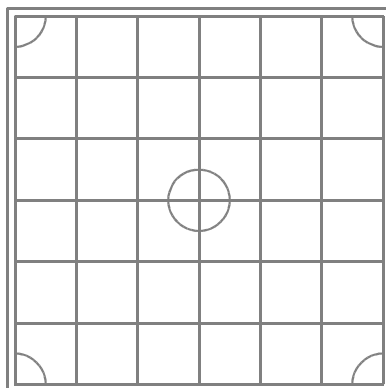


Illustration 1: the empty *brandub* board.

### Beginning the Game

1. *Brandub* is played by two players, on the points or intersections of a board of 7 lines by 7, using 13 pieces: a *king*, four *defenders* and eight *attackers*. The central and corner points of the board are marked, as shown in Illustration 1.

2. The pieces are placed with the

king in the centre, the defenders adjacent to him, and the attackers beyond, all forming an orthogonal cross reaching to the edges of the board, as shown in Illustration 2.

3. The attackers make the first move, followed by the king or defenders, play alternating thereafter until the game is finished.

### Moving the Pieces

4. A player may move a piece by sliding it along a line in any direction to another point, as far as the player pleases, providing that it does not turn a corner or jump over another piece. See Illustration 3.

5. Only the king may come to rest on the central point or one of the four corners, though other pieces may pass the centre.

### Capturing Enemies

6. An enemy is captured by surrounding it on two opposite sides, along a marked line, by two of one's own pieces. The enemy is then removed from the board.

7. The king

may act with a defender in making captures, and may himself be captured by two attackers, or two defenders may take an attacker.

8. If a piece simultaneously traps two or three enemies in different directions, all of the trapped enemies are captured.

9. A piece may move between two enemies without harm. One of the enemies must move away and back again to capture it.

10. Either side may capture an enemy by trapping the enemy between one of its own pieces and a marked corner square. The central square does not have this effect.

### Ending the Game

11. The king and defenders win the game if the king reaches one of the marked corner squares.

12. The attackers win the game by capturing the king.

13. If play becomes repetitious, if one player has no legal move, or if the players otherwise desire it, then a draw may be declared.

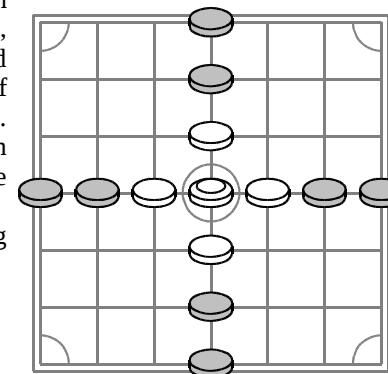


Illustration 2: the pieces set out for play.