

home row must be occupied in order, starting with the furthest square.

21. Other moves onto the last row are therefore not allowed.

This variation makes initial oc-

cupation of the last row more difficult, and lengthens the game. Pieces stay much longer in play, and are therefore more prone to capture, and pieces on a player's home row are a little bit safer.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on the game of tablan can be gained from the following books.

Bell, R. C. *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, vol. 1, pp. 87-89. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979.

Bell, R. C. *The Boardgame Book*, pp. 58-59. London: Marshall Cavendish Ltd., 1979.

Bell, R. C. *Discovering Old Board Games*, pp. 61-63. Aylesbury: Shire Publications, Ltd., 1980.

Bell, R. C. *Games to Play*, pp. 26-27. London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1988.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp. 133 & 229-230. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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TABLAN

by Damian Walker

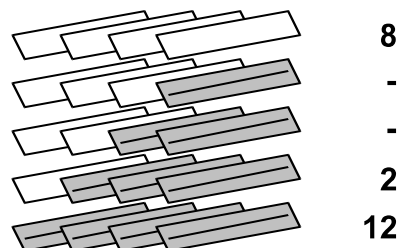
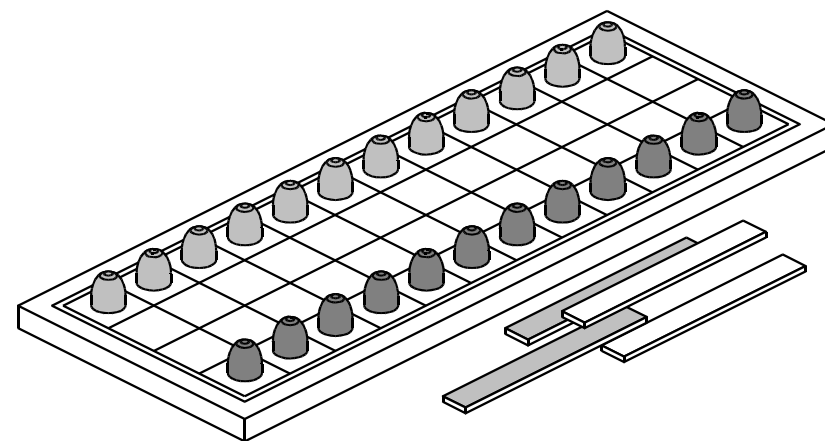


Illustration 3: scores given by the various throws. Any but null scores allows another throw after moving.

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

There is a class of games known as *running fight* games, in which two players advance towards each other on a straight course according to the throw of dice or casting sticks. But instead of being a race, the winner of a running fight game is decided by the capture of pieces when the game ends.

Tablan is a running fight game. Although the board is two-dimensional, it represents a single track which has been folded in on itself.

The game is a traditional one

from India, of unknown antiquity. It is apparently related to a smaller, but more complex, game called *tab*, which was first described in the west in 1694. Whether *tablan* is the ancestor or descendant of *tab* is not currently known.

According to R. C. Bell, *tablan* was still being played in the villages in Mysore, southwest India, in the second half of the twentieth century. It has been made known in the west partly by Bell's own books.

HOW TO PLAY

Tablan is played by two players on a board of four rows of twelve squares, each player beginning the game with twelve pieces of his colour. Four casting sticks influence the course of the game, each having one side marked and the other plain.

Beginning the Game

1. Players sit opposite each other, each taking the row of squares closest to him as his *home row*.

2. The game starts with all pieces on the board, each player having his twelve pieces lined up, one in each square of his home row

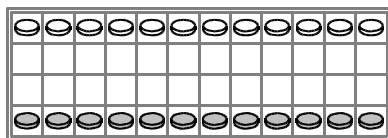


Illustration 1: *tablan* board and pieces set out for play.

(see Illustration 1).

3. Players throw the casting sticks alternately, counting the plain sides showing; the player who throws 1 starts the game.

Moving the Pieces

4. Pieces are moved according to the throw of the casting sticks, along a set course.

5. For each player the course starts at the left of his home row, moving right along it, progressing to the second row then moving left, then moving right again along the third row, and left again on the fur-

thest row. The path is shown in Illustration 2.

6. Note that the courses of the two players follow slightly different lines, and opposing pieces therefore move alongside each other in the same direction on each row of the board.

7. The player who threw a 1 at the start of the game makes his first move according to this throw; subsequent moves by either player require a further throw of the casting sticks.

8. The sticks are scored according to the number of plain sides showing: one scores 2 points, two or three score nothing, four score 8 and none (i.e. all marked sides up) score twelve. See Illustration 3.

9. On scoring nothing, a player ends his turn and passes the casting sticks to his opponent.

10. On any other score, a player may do one of the following:

(i). move a single piece along the course by the number of squares equal to his score (2, 8 or 12);

(ii). move two pieces along the course, each by half his score (1, 4 or 6).

11. A piece that has moved to any square on the last row ends its journey and cannot move further.

12. There is no doubling up of

pieces; only one may sit in any square.

13. A throw must be used in full unless there is no way of doing so. Otherwise it is lost.

14. Having moved a piece, the player throws again and moves or passes according to rule 8 onwards.

Capturing Enemies

15. If a piece comes to land on an enemy, the enemy piece is captured and removed from the game.

16. A player cannot capture an enemy piece on his home row; however, his own pieces on that row may themselves be captured.

Ending the Game

17. The game is finished when one of the players has moved all his remaining pieces to the last row of the board.

18. Each player scores points equal to the number of pieces he has moved onto the last row, i.e. the enemy's home row.

19. The winner of the game is the player who has the *most* pieces on his enemy's home row.

Variation

Some extra optional rules change the flavour of the game.

20. Squares on the enemy

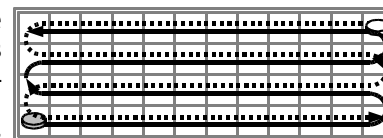


Illustration 2: the direction of movement for each player, starting from the home row.