

FOX & GEESE

by Damian Walker

FURTHER INFORMATION

Players wanting to learn more about fox & geese, and its variations, would find reward in consulting the following books.

Bell, R. C. *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, vol. 1, p. 76-77. New York: Dover Publishing, Inc., 1979.

Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Board-Games Other than Chess*, pp. 101-104. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp. 188-189. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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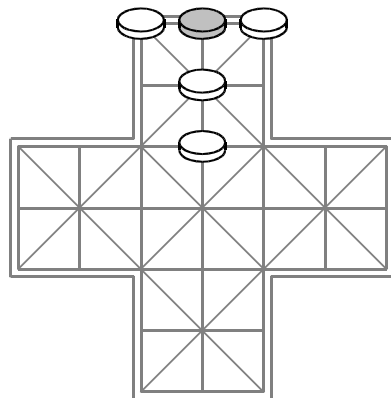
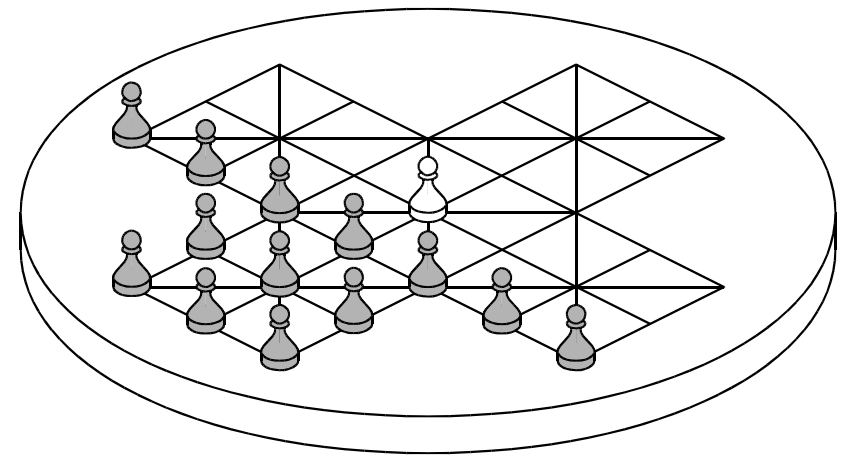


Illustration 3: four geese have trapped the fox.

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

It is said that an imprisoned French count invented *solitaire* as a game for one player on the fox & geese board. *Solitaire* is well known, but what of the earlier game of fox & geese? Fox & geese is in England the most well-known example of a hunt game, a type of game where one player takes the role of the prey, and the other the role of the hunters.

Fox & geese was first mentioned in the accounts of Edward IV of England (reigned 1461-1483), but was given the name "marelles", normally associated with nine men's morris. The game of merels is often mentioned earlier: could some of these be talking about fox & geese?

Certainly, some fox & geese boards are earlier, those scratched into stone seats at Gloucester Cathedral being from the fourteenth century.

As time wore on, people experimented with the rules of the game, to try and balance out a perceived advantage of the geese, which in this game are strangely the hunters. Different variants were adopted in different places, resulting in a rich variety of games now played under the name of fox & geese. It is interesting that in some later variations, the diagonal lines were removed, these variations being perfect for play on a modern *solitaire* board, if a distinct piece may be found for the fox.

HOW TO PLAY

Later games diversified to the point that no one of these variants can claim to be the standard. Nor did any of them realise their particular aims of balancing the game with any great success. The version reproduced here, then, is the original,

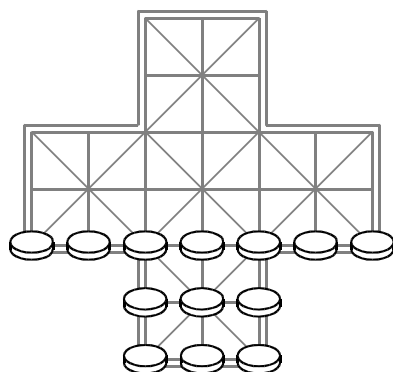


Illustration 1: the board with the geese set out for play.

which is one of the simplest, and is not too unbalanced as to preclude enjoyment.

Beginning the Game

1. Fox & geese is played on a cross-shaped board of 33 points, joined by horizontal and vertical

lines, and by diagonal lines in certain places (see Illustration 1).

2. One player takes the part of thirteen geese, which start the game on the bottom three rows of the board (again see Illustration 1). The other player takes the part of the fox, which may start on any empty point he pleases.

Moving the Pieces

3. The geese take the first turn, the player moving any one of them from its point, along any marked line, to an adjacent empty point. Some examples are shown in Illustration 2.

4. The fox then takes a turn, moving in exactly the same manner as the geese. Play then alternates between the two players.

Killing the Geese

5. Instead of moving as already described, the fox may kill an adja-

cent goose by jumping over it onto the empty point beyond, providing that the points are linked by a marked line. The goose is then removed from the board.

6. If the fox, having jumped, is in a position to kill a second goose in the same manner, he can do so immediately. Any number of subsequent geese can be so killed during the fox's turn, if their player is foolish enough to leave them so arranged. An example of a double capture is shown in Illustration 2.

7. No goose can kill the fox.

Ending the Game

8. The geese win the game by trapping the fox, so that he is unable to move at all in his next turn.

9. The fox wins by capturing enough geese to prevent them winning as per rule 8 above. In theory, four geese could trap the fox (see Illustration 3).

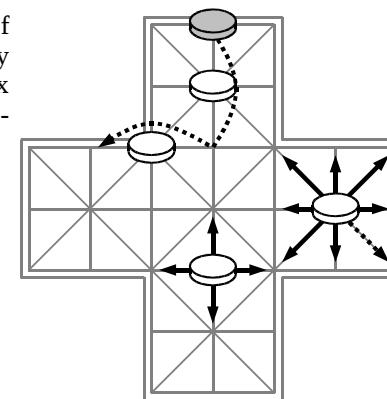


Illustration 2: examples of moves and captures.