

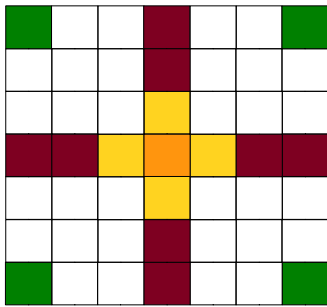
Rules for Brandubh



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7 x 7 Irish Tafl

Equipment, Preparation and Objective



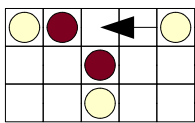
Brandubh is played on a board consisting of a 7 x 7 grid of squares. Accompanying the board, there should be 8 dark pieces and 4 light pieces usually in the form of round counters plus an additional King piece. The King is usually taller, sometimes in the same colour as the light pieces and sometimes in a more regal hue such as gold.

Brandubh is a game of unequal sides and different objectives. The aim for the defending light coloured side is to get the King to a corner square of the board. The aim of the attacking side is to kill the King before he escapes to a corner. For this reason, it is usually best to play an even number of games so that both players get the same number of chances to defend.

The King is placed in the centre of the board and the light defending pieces surround him in the pattern shown. The dark pieces are placed in 4 pairs at the middle of each edge of the board.

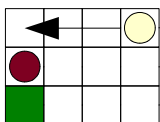
Basic Play

The attacking side moves first. All pieces move like the rook in Chess – in a straight line for as many empty squares as the player chooses. Pieces cannot hop over other pieces and cannot move diagonally.

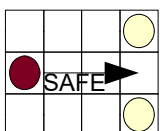


Capturing only happens when a piece is moved so that a single opposing piece ends up trapped between two of the players pieces. A captured piece is immediately removed from the board. It is possible to capture more than one piece at once as shown in this example.

The King is unarmed and cannot capture.



A piece that is next to the corner square can be captured by a single opposing piece. The piece is moved so that the opposing piece is between the corner and the piece moved - the corner square acts as the second capturing piece.



A piece can safely move to a square between two of the opponent's pieces without being captured.

The King is harder to capture because opposing pieces must surround him on all four sides or, if the King is at the edge of the board, on the 3 sides available. Only the King is allowed into the corner squares – and, of course, such a move wins the game.

Variations

Variations of Tafl games abound. Some versions say that the King can be captured in the same way as any other piece. A good variation is that the King's player must say 'Check' if he can get the King to the edge of the board on his next turn. Clues from the Nordic Sagas hint that the King cannot take part in captures but many versions have an armed King who can capture.

History

Brandubh means 'Raven Black' and 7 x 7 Tafl boards have been found predominantly in Ireland including at Downpatrick (12th C.), Waterford (12th C.), Ballinderry (10th C.) and in a peat bog near Knockanboy, County Antrim (similar to Ballinderry board). Similar boards have also been found in Scotland where 8 defenders and 16 attackers were played under the name 'Ard Ri'.

Other sizes of Tafl board have been discovered in Great Britain, Ireland and Scandinavia and it appears that people across Northern Europe played on boards ranging from 7 x 7 to 19 x 19 squares. There are claims for a history going back to Roman times but firm evidence dates it back to at least the 9th century. There are multiple Tafl references in the Icelandic Nordic Sagas which take place during 930–1030. Vikings played the game and aided its distribution. A 9 x 9 version of Tafl called Tablut was discovered being played in Lapland in 1732 and it is likely that the game was played until the late nineteenth century.