

Hnefatafl

King Harald is holding a great feast in his hall. The mighty nobles of his kingdom are gathered around him. And the nobles of his vassals have joined him in a celebration of the ongoing peace among their kingdoms. The celebrants are enjoying meat, mead, sagas, and songs well into the evening.

But all is not as it seems. For the vassals are jealous of King Harald's ascendant position. Far from enjoying the peace he has imposed upon them, they are anxious to regain their independence from him, and the freedom to settle, raid and plunder where they will. And, they feel, their opportunity is at hand.

The vassals' nobles outnumber the nobles of King Harald by two-to-one. The signal has been given. The vassals must seize and kill King Harald to bring an end to his hegemony. King Harald's last chance is to escape from his hall by one of its four exits. His nobles are prepared to sacrifice their lives to aid his escape. Which side will win the tussle?

This is a setting for the game of Hnefatafl, designed by the Norse people and is therefore commonly referred to as "Viking Chess". The modern variant is called Copenhagen Hnefatafl. This is used in tournaments and is a favorite of many of the best Hnefatafl players. Rules for this version of the game are printed on the other side of this paper.

Hnefatafl

1. The game is played by two players on a board of 11x11 squares, one player taking control of the King and 12 Defenders (usually white), the other taking control of 24 Attackers (usually black).

2. The pieces are set out as shown in the diagram with the King placed on the board's center tile, called the Throne, his Defenders surrounding him, and Attackers on the four board edges.

3. The Attackers make the first move. Players alternate moving a single piece each turn.

4. In his turn a player can move a single piece any number of spaces along a row or column; this piece may not jump over nor land on another piece.

5. The four Corner Exits and the Throne are special tiles; only the king may land on them. Other pieces may pass over the Throne in the course of their move, as long as they do not end their move on it.

6. A piece other than the King is captured when it is caught between two enemies along a row or column. A piece is only captured if the trap is closed by a move of the opponent, not simply moving between two enemy pieces.

7. The King is "armed" and may be used like other pieces to perform capture moves.

8. Multiple enemies may be captured with a single move as long as the capturing move closes the trap on all pieces simultaneously.

9. A piece, other than the King, may also be captured by trapping it between an enemy and one of the Corner Exits or the central Throne.

10. A row of pieces at the edge of the board may be captured using a "Shield Wall" by completely surrounding them against the board edge, so that none of them have room to move.

The capturing move must be a flanking move to a square at the edge of the board. The King can't be captured this way; if the King is with pieces surrounded by a Shield Wall all other pieces will be captured except the King.

Copenhagen Rules

11. If no capture happens within 100 moves (50 per player) then the game ends in a Draw.

12. The King is captured by surrounding him on all four sides by attackers. This also means that when the King is touching a board edge he can't be captured unless he is the last piece and can't move.

13. The king may also be captured by surrounding him on three sides, if the fourth side is the Throne.

14. The Defender wins the game if the King reaches one of the corner squares. The Attackers win if they capture the king. The attackers also win if they surround all of the king's forces, so that none can reach the board edges.

15. The Defender will also win the game by constructing an "Edge Fort": a layout of defenders at the edge of the board which cannot be captured, and which allows the king free movement inside.

16. A player who can't move immediately loses.

17. Perpetual repetition is illegal. If the same board position is repeated three times, the Defender must make a different move or they immediately lose.

