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Tablut: a Scandinavian board game

Board games were already played in Scandinavia by the Vikings, but the playing rules of the board game we know today as "Tablut" were only recorded in the 18th century by Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus



Tablut is an ancient board game derived from the Hnefatafl of the Viking sagas. This computer version of Hnefatafl was programmed by Joseph Crowe.

A Scandinavian board game

Board games or *Tafl* games (*Tafl* is a word which means "table" in the Old Norse language) were a popular past-time in medieval Scandinavia. The Norse sagas do actually mention a board game called *Hnefatafl* and tell us that those who could play it well were highly regarded in society.

Although none of those Viking sagas left us ever any description of the game rules, in 1732 Swedish biologist Carl Linnaeus mentioned about a board game called "Tablut" that was still played in northern Scandinavia and wrote down some of the playing rules. Thanks to Carl Linnaeus' description, today we can play a game which dates back from the Viking times.

Playing instructions for Tablut

Tablut is a board game for two players where two armies of unequal strength are confronted. The largest army, with dark pieces, is called *Muscovites*. The smaller army, with white pieces, is called *Swedes*. The object of the game for the *Swedes* is to bring their king to safety off to any of the four corner squares of the playing board, while the object of the game for the *Muscovites* is to capture the king of the *Swedes* before he escapes. The game ends when the king of the *Swedes* reaches a safe corner (*Swedes* win) or when the king of the *Swedes* is captured by the *Muscovites* (*Muscovites* win).

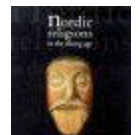
There are several interpretations of Tablut playing rules, all of them very similar to another, this being to the fact that Carl Linnaeus' description of the game was not very extensive. It is also likely that there were many different versions of the game during its time. The rules that follow are the rules of the *Hnefatafl* computer game programmed by Joseph Crowe that you can [download](#) for free at Scandinavica.com.

The starting move in every new game is made by the *Muscovites*. All pieces can move horizontally or vertically along the board, like a chess rook does, as many spaces as wished as long as the moving spaces are free of other pieces, and bearing in mind that the game does not allow a piece to jump over another piece. Pieces can not move into the corner squares or into the king's throne, in the centre of the board, although they may cross over it. Only the king can stay over the corner squares and over the throne.

«The Norse sagas mention a board game called *Hnefatafl* and tell us that those who could play it well were highly regarded in society»

The Norse Sagas at The Viking Shop

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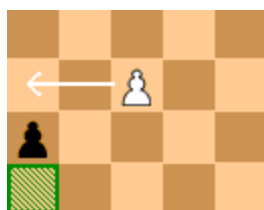
Like in chess, you may capture an opponent's piece as part your strategy. A captured piece will be removed from the board. Rules for capturing an opponent's piece are:



You may capture an opponent's piece by sandwiching it between two of your pieces as shown in the picture, either in a horizontal line or in a vertical line. The king may also be used to trap and capture an opponent's piece.



You may move between two opponent's pieces without being captured. The opponent will have to move one piece out and back again if he wants to capture your piece.



You may capture an opponent's piece by sandwiching it between a corner square and one of your pieces, either in a horizontal line or in a vertical line.



You may capture two opponent's pieces in one move as shown in the picture.



You may also capture two opponent's pieces in one move as shown in the picture. The corner square will work as if it was one of your pieces.



You may even capture three opponent's pieces in one move as shown in the picture.

To move a piece, click on it. The squares that piece can move to are highlighted - click on one of the highlighted squares and the piece will move there. Pieces that are captured are shown on the right pane underneath the text showing the player whose turn it currently is to move.

The game ends when the king of the *Swedes* reaches a safe corner (*Swedes* win) or when the king of the *Swedes* is captured by the *Muscovites* (*Muscovites* win).

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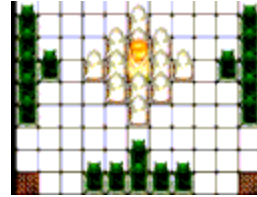
Download the game here:
(File: hnefatafl.zip)



(Size: 1.20 MB)

(Author: Joseph Crowe)

- You will need a screen resolution of 1024 x 768 min to play this game



Downloading instructions:

- 1) [Right-click on the board >>](#) (1.20 MB)
- 2) Select "Save Target (or Link) As"
- 3) You will be prompted to save your file on your hard drive. Choose a location and click the "Save" button.

Unzip Instructions:

- 1) Once you have downloaded the zipped file (hnefatafl.zip), double-click on file.
- 2) Use the Browse button to navigate to the location where you wish to unzip the installation files.
- 3) Click Unzip to begin the unzip process. There are many utilities that can be used to unzip files, like [WinZip](#).

Enjoy Tablut!

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