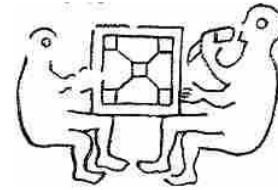


How to

Play Hnafltafl

The Historical Background

Boards to play games on are found everywhere the Vikings settled. Playing pieces made of bone, amber or glass are found as well. No one is certain what the rules of this game were, and there may have been several different versions of it played in different places. They all seem to be two player games where one player has a chief piece who is trying to escape a battle, defended by his hearth troop. The attackers outnumber the defenders two to one, and try to capture the king. The boards vary in size though, so have different numbers of pieces. Some may even have used dice as well



Detail of Rune Stone from Ockelbo, Sweden



Ballinderry Game-board, Ireland



Modern Reproductions The Jorvik centre in York sell a version like this.

This version of the game uses a board which is a square marked with seven squares along each edge.

The center square is where the Chief (or King) starts. The kings side are the defenders, and they win if the King can escape to one of the four corner squares which are also marked as special.

Is the game the story of a king standing in his shield wall at the end of a battle, surrounded by his enemies? Or is he in a longhouse and has to escape the fire by getting out of a door? Or is he on a longship being attacked by four other longships closing in on all sides?

Making Pieces

You will need 8 light pieces (Vikings used white, or antler which is almost white!)

4 dark pieces (Vikings usually used black or red)

1 Chief piece (this belongs with the dark pieces, but is slightly different so that he stands out)

Make Pieces from Clay

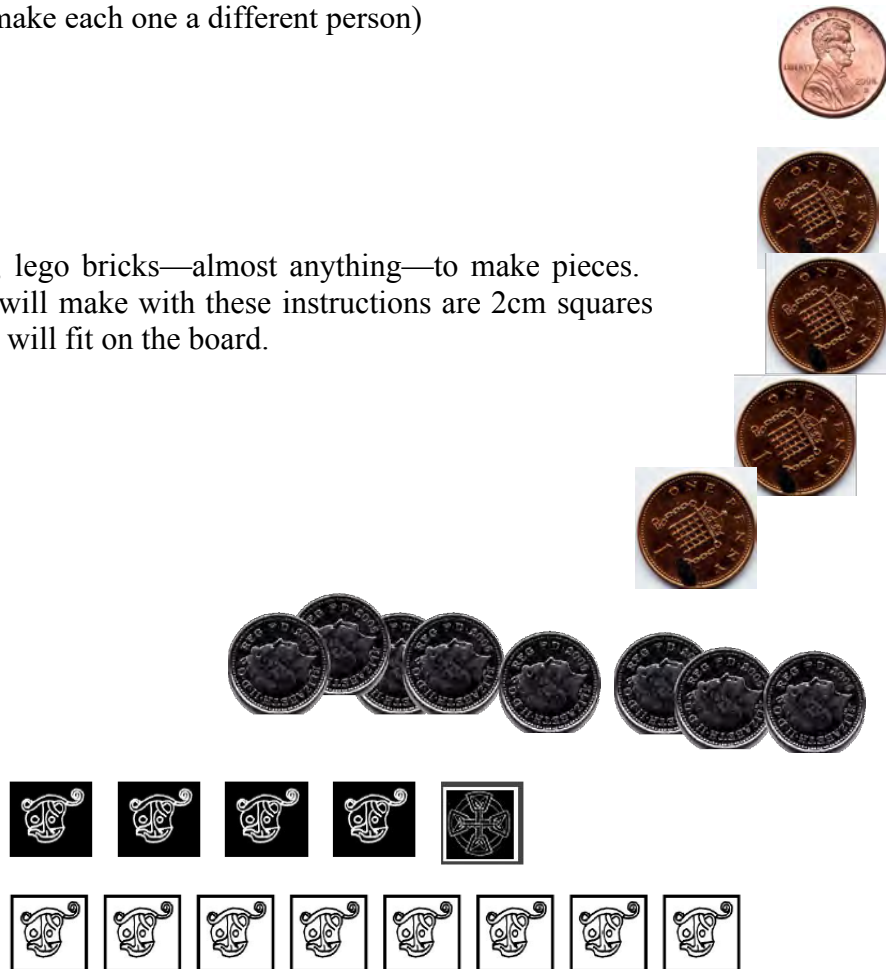
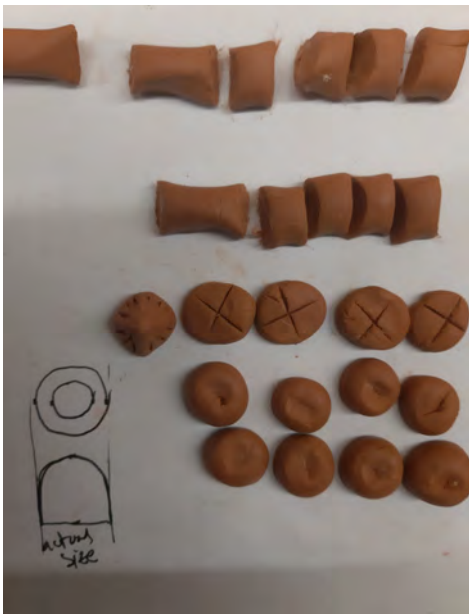
- Roll out a long sausage of clay in each colour. The white sausage should be almost twice as big as the red one. They should be just smaller than 2cm in diameter.
- Use a tool to cut across the sausage and make little discs (8 white and 4 red) and one taller red disc
- Use tools to decorate the pieces, perhaps you could give the king a crown?

Using Paper or card

- Use a 1p, or a 5p piece to draw circles on coloured card or paper
- Decorate them - (you could make each one a different person)
- Cut out the pieces

Other ideas

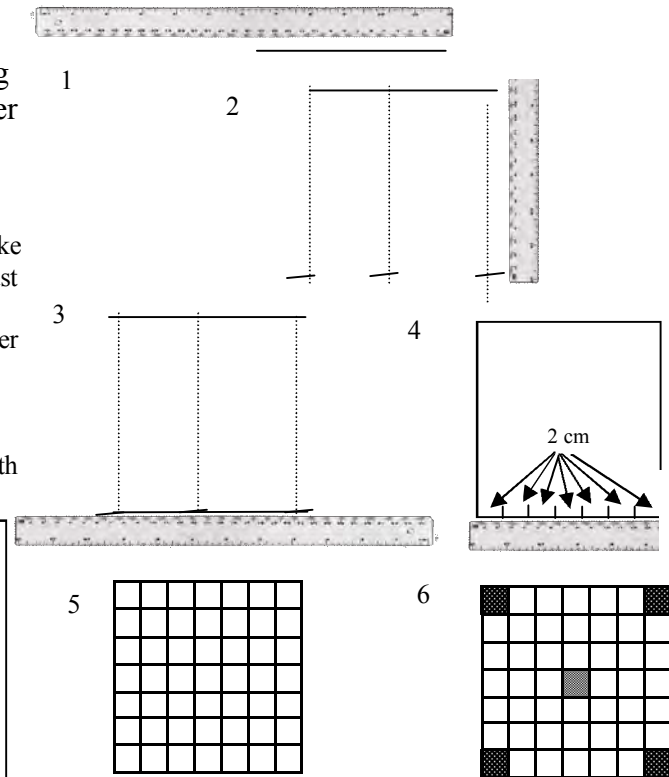
- You could use coins, pebbles, lego bricks—almost anything—to make pieces. The squares for the board you will make with these instructions are 2cm squares though, so choose pieces which will fit on the board.



The board

- Use a ruler to draw a straight line which is 14cm long
- Make three marks 14cm from the line using the ruler to measure
- Draw a straight line through the three marks
- Draw in the other two sides of the square
- Use the ruler to make a mark 2cm from the edge, then make marks every two centimetres until you run out of line. The last mark should be 1cm from the opposite edge
- Do the same on all the other edges, then join the marks together to make a grid.
- Decorate the center square and the four corner squares

You could also decorate the space round the outside of the grid with Scottish or Viking designs



Playing the game

Layout:

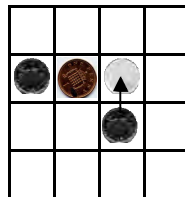
The King is placed in the centre. He is surrounded by his men in a cross formation. The opposing pieces start on the illustrated squares at the edges

Moves:

All pieces move like rooks in chess – in straight vertical or horizontal lines. Pieces cannot jump each other or occupy the same square as another piece. Only the king may occupy the centre square, although others may pass over it.

Captures:

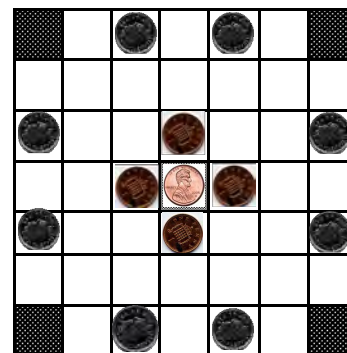
A piece is captured and removed when it is surrounded by two opposing men on opposite adjacent squares. This must be done by the opponent; it is safe to move between two enemy pieces. The King can participate in captures



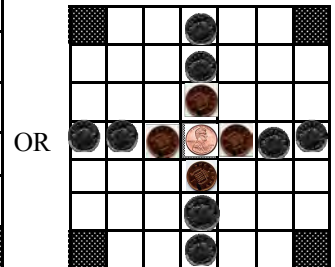
Winning:

The Kings side wins when the King reaches any of the four corner squares (optionally for a much easier game, when he reaches any edge). The opposing team wins if they capture the king.

Layout of the pieces at the start



8 vs 4+king on a 7 by 7 board



Optional rules (these change the strategies you need to use to win)

A: The king can only be captured if he is surrounded on three or four sides

B: Only the king can sit on the corner squares and the square in the middle. These squares can also be used like an extra piece by any player wishing to capture an enemy piece.

12 vs 6+king

C: All the edges of the edge of the board counts as an enemy piece for the purpose of a capture

D: The king wins by reaching any edge square on the board

E: Every time you want to move the king, you roll a dice and move a maximum of that number of squares in a straight line in any direction.

Some combinations of these rules will mean that one side wins much more easily than the other! Perhaps by playing them you will be able to work out what sets of rules the Vikings found fun.

Playing the game

Layout:

The King is placed in the centre.

He is surrounded by his men in a cross formation.

The opposing pieces start on the illustrated squares at the edges

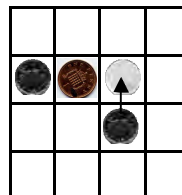
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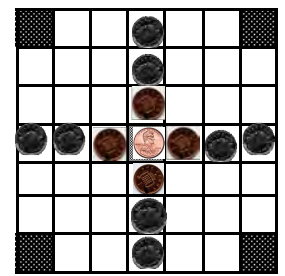
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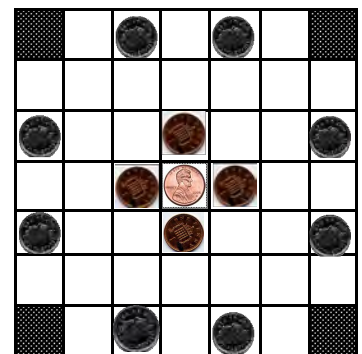
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8 vs 4+king
on a 7 by 7 board



Layout of the pieces at the start



Optional rules (these change the strategies you need to use to win)

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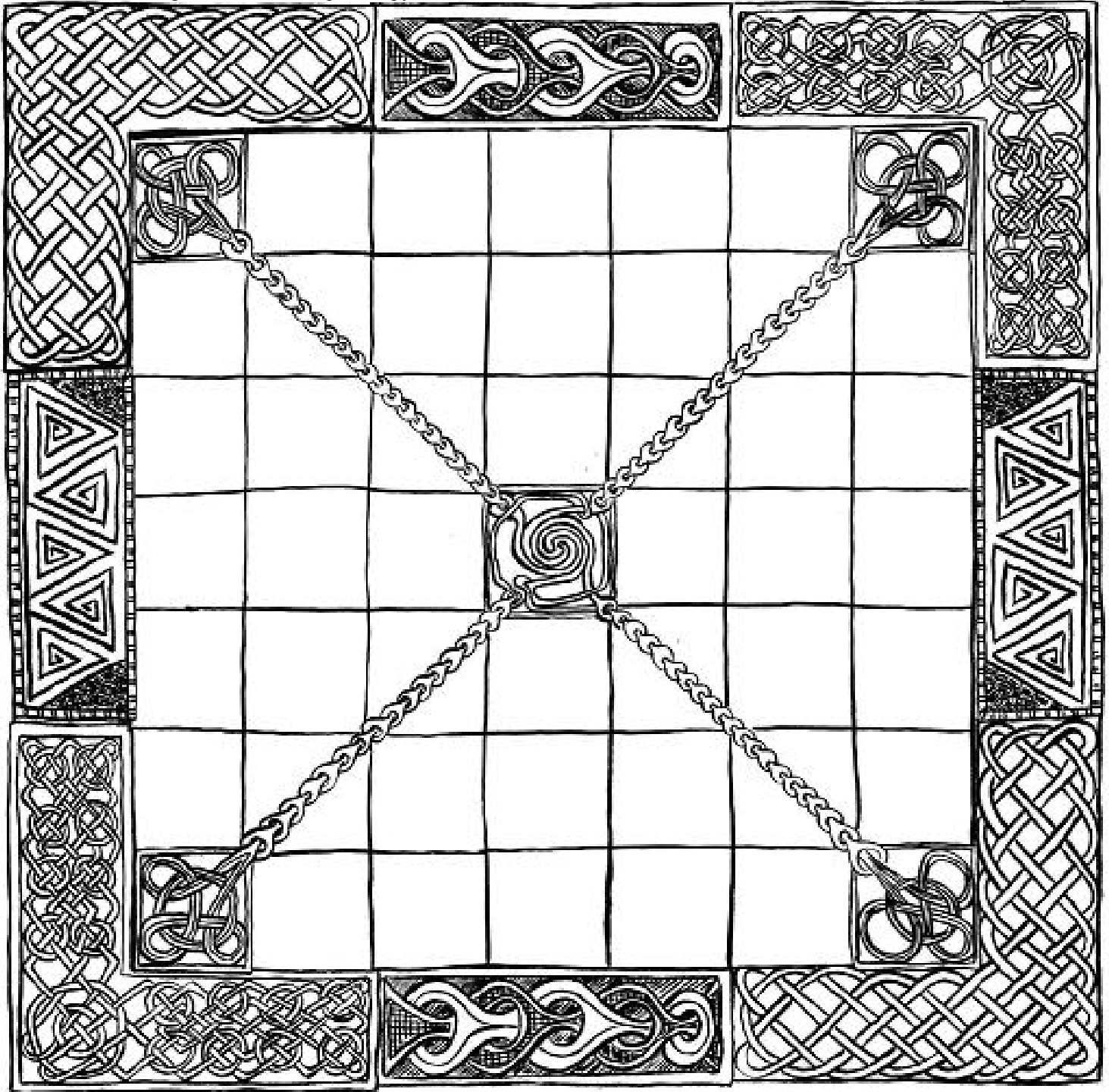
12

B: Only the king can sit on the corner squares and the square in the middle. These squares can also be used like an extra piece by any player wishing to capture an enemy piece.

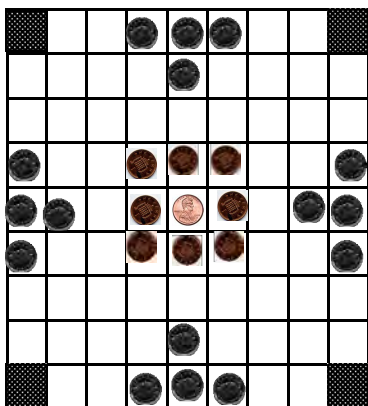
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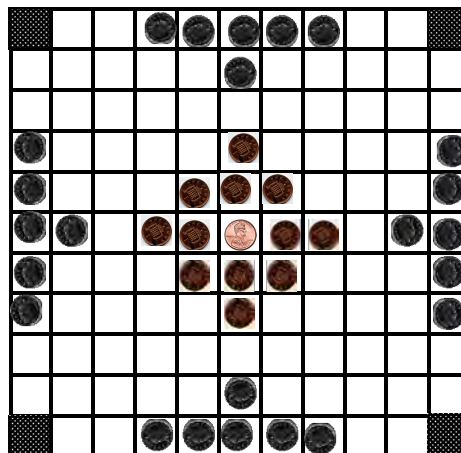
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Other possible versions with bigger boards



9 X 9 board
16 White
Vs.
8 Black
(plus King)



11X 11 board
24 White
Vs.
24 Black
(plus King)