

# Morelli

## A game of pure skill for two players

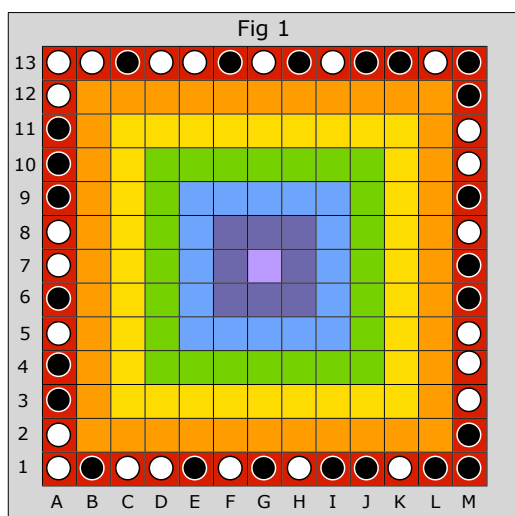
“Is it true that there is an Indian chess game with sixty pieces on each side?”

“It’s possible,” Oliveira said. “The infinite game.”

“The one who conquers the centre wins.”

Julio Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, Chapter 154

### 1) Equipment



**1.1** The 120 pieces posited by Cortázar’s Morelli would require, at this game, a 31x31 matrix – which in terms of time and sanity might as well *be* infinite. 13x13 is quite challenging enough. The board [Fig 1] is coloured, in the concentric manner of a square archery target, with the successive shades of the rainbow: Red (outermost band, 48 squares) through to Violet (single square – the Centre, or **Throne**).

**1.2** There are 48 reversible black/white pieces – plain and circular.

**1.3** Also a black and a white **King** (or a single reversible one), clearly distinguishable from the other pieces.

### 2) Setting up

**2.1** At the beginning of the game, Black and White have 24 pieces each on the board.

**2.2** These are randomly disposed on the outermost band, with the sole proviso that every piece must have a piece of the adverse colour diametrically opposite [see Fig 1, for example]. Even discounting rotations and reflections of the same position, this gives rise to over two million distinct set-ups – for all practical purposes unlimited replayability.

**2.3** In online play, a set-up will usually be generated automatically. Face to face, it is arrived at as follows:

**2.3.1** The players determine by any mutually-acceptable method which of them is to be Black; *then*

**2.3.2** Black places, anywhere on the outermost band but diametrically opposite each other, a black and a white piece; *then*

**2.3.3** White places *two* such pairs wherever he wishes; *then*

**2.3.4** The players alternate in repeating **2.3.3** until only one pair of vacant spaces remains; *then*

**2.3.5** Black chooses which way round to place the last two pieces.

**2.4** Neither King is on the board at start of play.

### 3) Winning

**3.1** At the start of the game the Throne is vacant, but it may in the course of play be occupied by either King. Once occupied, it may subsequently change hands any number of times from Black to White or vice versa.

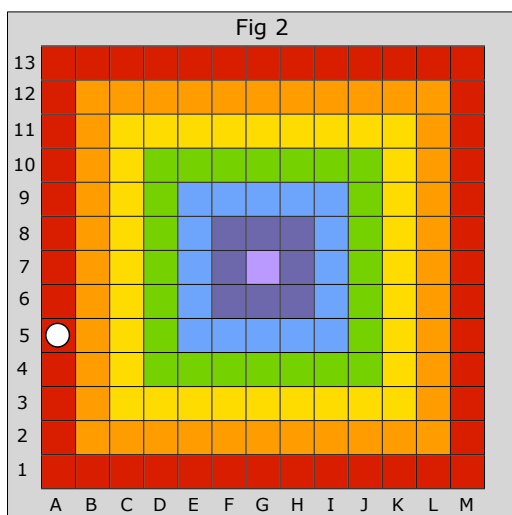
**3.2** The winner is the player whose King is on the Throne at the moment when the game ends.

**3.3** If the Throne remains vacant from start to finish, the game is drawn.

### 4) Moving

**4.1** Players take turns to move one piece of their own colour, Black moving first.

**4.2** A piece may move any distance and in any direction along an orthogonal or diagonal line, subject to the following conditions:



**4.2.1** It must land upon a coloured band nearer the Throne than the band on which it stood before the move, though it may cross an axis of the board in so doing. Thus, in **Fig 2**, the white piece at A5 may move to B5, but equally to L5 (or any square in between); likewise, to anywhere on the diagonal from B6 to H12 or from B4 to D2. But the squares I13, M5 and E1 are unavailable to it, as are all those along the A file.

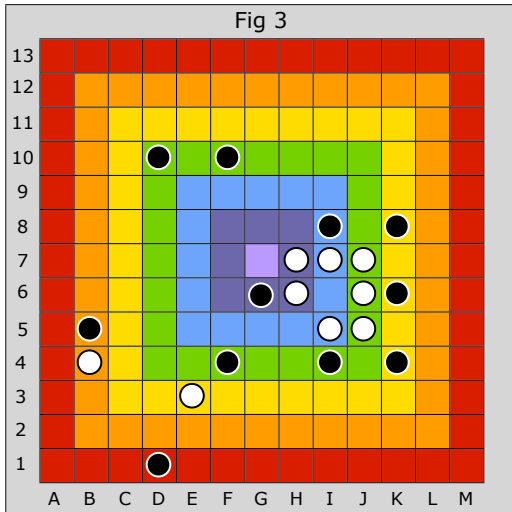
**4.2.2** It cannot cross or land upon any cell occupied by another piece, whether friendly or hostile.

**4.2.3** It may cross the Throne while the latter is still vacant, but not once it is occupied.

**4.2.4** It cannot in any circumstances land upon the Throne.

**4.3** Kings do not move at all. They simply occupy the Throne.

## 5) Capturing



**5.1** Capture in **Morelli** is custodial capture. That is, it takes place when a moving piece comes to rest next to an adverse piece whose immediate neighbour on the opposite side, either orthogonally or diagonally, is a piece (*not* a King) also belonging to the mover. In **Fig 3**, the black piece at D1 would capture the white piece at B4 by moving to B3, or the one at E3 by moving to D2. If it moved to I6, six white pieces would perish at one fell swoop.

**5.2** Captured pieces defect to the captor, changing colour accordingly.

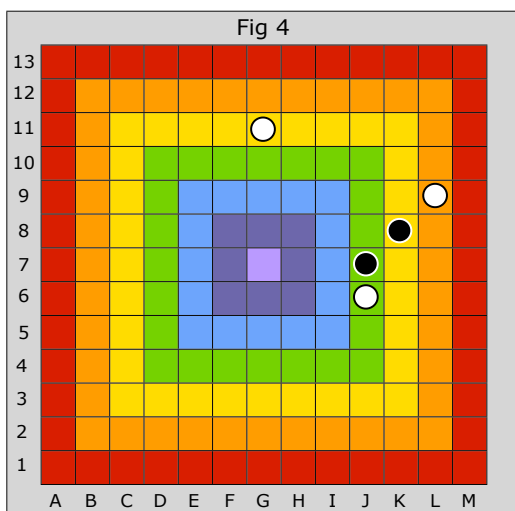
**5.3** A capture must be the immediate result of an active move by the captor during open play. Hence:

**5.3.1** Pieces on the outermost band are at all times immune from capture (consequence of **4.2.1**).

**5.3.2** A piece may be inserted with impunity between adverse pieces already in place. In **Fig 3**, for instance, the white piece at E3 could, if so desired, escape to E10 in perfect safety.

**5.4** Captures are effected as part of the turn which gave rise to them.

**5.5** Any capture arising from a given move (including multiple captures) *must* be effected.



**5.6** ['Ripple Rule'] Even if a captured piece completes, by virtue of changing colour, what would otherwise be the conditions for the capture of a further piece, that secondary capture is not permissible. In **Fig 4**, the White move G11-J8 captures the black piece at J7, but the latter's change of colour does *not* trigger a 'knock-on' capture at K8.

## 6) Completing a frame

**6.1** A frame is an arrangement of four pieces:

**6.1.1** all belonging to the same player; *and*

**6.1.2** forming the corners of a perfect square; *and*

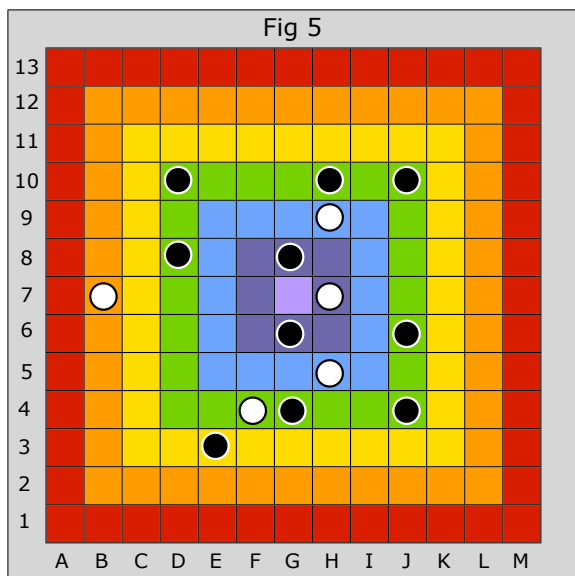
**6.1.3** centred upon the Throne.

**6.2** A frame may be completed by a move in various ways – namely:

**6.2.1** where a missing corner is supplied by the moving piece; *or*

**6.2.2** where a corner of adverse colour is converted by capture; *or*

**6.2.3** both of the above at once.



Thus, in **Fig 5**, the Black move E3-D4 completes a frame at the Green corner. E3-E4, on the other hand, completes, by capture, a different and

less obvious Green frame. And, spectacularly, the White move B7-F7 conjures an Indigo frame out of thin air by adding three corners at a stroke.

**6.3** As with capture, the completion of a frame must be the immediate result of an active move during open play. Hence:

**6.3.1** No frames can be formed on the outermost band (indirect consequence of **4.2.1**).

## 7) Occupying the Throne

**7.1** Where a player's move completes a frame, he *must*, as part of the same turn, enthrone his King, evicting his opponent's if applicable.

**7.2** Where the mover's King already occupies the throne, no action results from the completion of a frame.

## 8) Ending

**8.1** The game ends when either player, *on his turn*, has no legal move – or at any earlier moment by agreement between the players.

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