

BOMBALOT

Bombalot is a chess variant designed by Bruce Harper and Duncan Suttles in 1972, conceived during some down time at a war convention.

The game plays very differently than chess as the pieces are all wildly over-powered, giving the game a chaotic, zany feel, where — unlike chess — dramatic comebacks are possible even when a player is down to their last few pieces.



Game design: Bruce Harper, Duncan Suttles 1972
Rulebook graphic design and text: © Paul Ruane 2022
Chess piece illustrations: © Colin M. L. Burnett (CC BY-SA 3.0)

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THE BOARD



Bombalot is played on a regular 8×8 chess board, but the game utilises two extra goal squares on each side, at d0/e0 and d9/e9.

You can either just remember these are there, draw them on a piece of paper and tuck it under the board, or even 3D print yourself some board extensions.

THE GAME

The game was first described in the *Chess Federation of Canada* bulletin 19 November 1976, and was also published in the book *The Classified Encyclopedia of Chess Variants* (D. B. Pritchard & J. D. Beasley).

The rules described in this document however are slightly different as they are based upon the ruleset as implemented in *Sir Bombalot*, a computer game implementation of Bombalot published by Earth Gaming in 1998.

Variations from the original bulletin rules are mentioned in breakout boxes like this one.

There are three ways to win a game of bombalot:

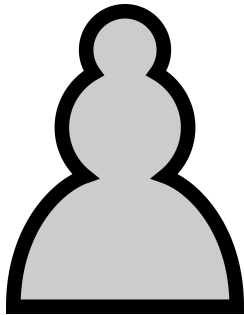
- Removing all of the opponent's pieces from the board
- Immobilizing all of the opponent's remaining pieces
- Moving two of your pieces into the opponent's goal squares

Your pieces can be moved into the opponent's goal area with normal moves, including diagonally.

Once you have moved a piece to the goal area it is locked out of play for the rest of the game and cannot be removed, even by an exploding bomb or by the tank.

You can never move your own pieces to your own goal area.

THE PIECES



TWEKE

pawn

The tweke can make either a regular move or a jumping move, but the two types cannot be combined on one turn.

- Move one space in any direction into an empty space (like a chess king)
- Jump over adjacent pieces

When making a jumping move:

- Each jump must be over a single piece into a vacant space (like a draughts man)
- Each jump can be in an independent direction and previously jumped pieces may be jumped again
- If the jumped over piece is an opponent's piece it is removed from play (except the bomb, which is not captured by jumping)
- In a single turn all jumped pieces must be of the same colour: you cannot jump over friendly and opponent pieces in the same turn



SUPER-TWEKE

bishop

The super-tweke moves exactly like the regular tweke, but may jump both friendly and opponent pieces in the same turn.

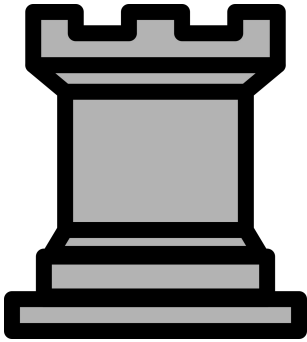
- Move one space in any direction into an empty space (like a chess king)
- Jump over adjacent pieces

When making a jumping move:

- Each jump must be over a single piece into a vacant space (like a draughts man)
- If the jumped over piece is an opponent's piece it is removed from play (an exception is the bomb, which is not captured by jumping)
- You may jump a mix of friendly and opponent pieces in the same turn
- Each jump can be in an independent direction and previously jumped pieces may be jumped again

THE PIECES

CONTINUED



TANK

rook

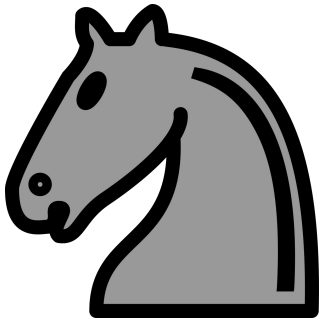
The tank is able to push along a whole line of pieces, and even push pieces from the board. Combined with the freezer or detonator its effect can be quite devastating.

- Move one space orthogonally into an empty square (like a chess rook)
- Move one square orthogonally into an occupied square, causing the occupying piece to be moved one square in the direction of travel (this cascades until a piece ends up in an empty square or is forced from the board)

A piece forced from the board is removed from play or, in the case of a bomb, detonated.

Pieces in the extra, goal areas at the ends of the board are undisturbed by pieces pushed from the board, but your own pieces may be pushed into the opponent's goal area with the tank.

The bulletin describes the Tank as moving like a chess king, so is able to move and push in any direction, rather than just orthogonally.



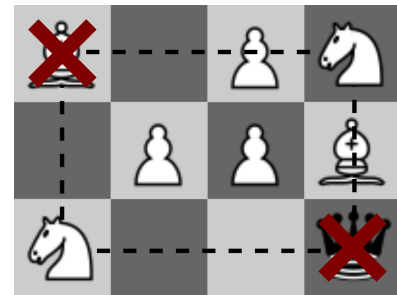
DETONATOR

knight

The detonators work as a pair, destroying pieces — friendly or foe — on the other corners of the rectangle made by their locations. They are also able to individually land on a bomb to detonate it directly.

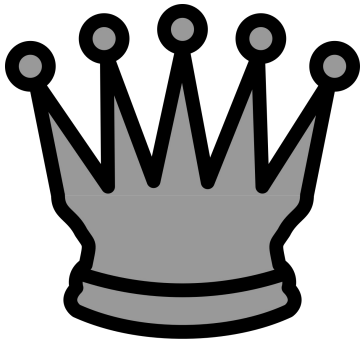
- Move three spaces in an L-shape to an empty space (like a chess knight)
- Move three spaces in an L-shape to a space occupied by a bomb

Whenever a detonator moves then any pieces that are on the co-squares are removed from play or, in the case of a bomb, detonated.



When the detonator is moved directly to a square with a bomb, the bomb is detonated.

The bulletin describes the Detonator as moving like the super-tweke, but without capturing the leapt pieces.



IMMOBILIZER

queen

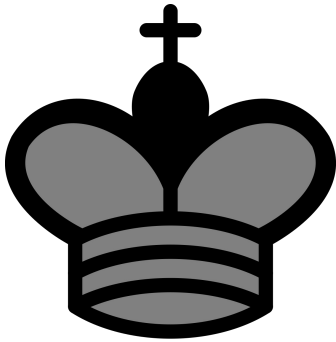
The immobilizer prevents any opponent piece on the surrounding squares from moving.

- Move one space in any direction into an empty square (like a chess king)
- Jump over a friendly or opponent piece into an empty square

The immobilizer is unable to capture any pieces. Instead any adjacent enemy piece cannot be moved. However, a piece that is adjacent to both a friendly and enemy immobilizer is not immobilized and can be moved as normal.

A piece is only frozen by the immobilizer at the end of the turn. Thus it is possible for a tweke that starts its turn away from the immobilizer to jump adjacent to the immobilizer and then capture it on a turn. Similarly a bomb may move adjacent to the immobilizer and then detonate without first getting immobilized.

The bulletin does not mention any rule regarding pieces that are adjacent to both friendly and enemy immobilizers.



BOMB

king

The bomb can be moved in three different ways, two of them explosive.

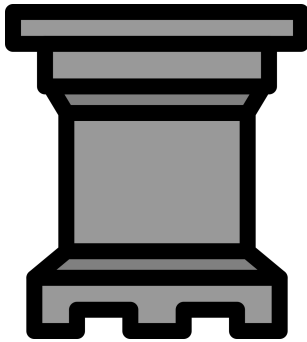
- Move one space in any direction into an empty square (like a chess king)
- Move one space in any direction and then detonate
- Detonate on the spot

When a bomb detonates it destroys itself and every piece on the (up to) eight surrounding squares. If any of these pieces should be another bomb then it, too, detonates in a cascade.

A bomb cannot be captured by a leaping tweke or super-tweke.

Any pieces in the extra goal squares at the ends of the board are unaffected by exploding bombs.

The bulletin describes the bomb as destroying all pieces up to *two* squares away, i.e. within a 5×5 grid!



IMITATOR

inverted rook

The imitator has no properties of its own but, when moved, takes on all of the characteristics of the piece the opponent last moved.

- Moves like the piece last moved by the opponent
- Retains properties of piece moved as until moved again

The imitator retains all properties of the piece it was last moved as until moved again:

- When moved as a bomb it will be immune to capture by twekes and super-twekes, but liable to detonation by a detonator
- When imitating a detonator, the co-squares should be evaluated between the moving detonator and the other two detonators (i.e. four co-squares across two rectangles)

Whenever a player moves the imitator, they should write down what it is now imitating on a piece of paper, to resolve any later arguments. (It is more fun to keep this information hidden so that the current state of the opponent's imitator must be remembered, but the game can also be played with this information on show.)

INTERACTIONS

TANK AND IMMOBILIZER

When the tank pushes an immobilizer or an immobilized piece — either directly or by pushing a column of pieces — the whole frozen group including the immobilizer is pushed together. This may mean that two or three columns of pieces are shunted along.

TANK AND BOMB

When a bomb is pushed from the board it detonates before leaving, destroying itself and the (up to) five surrounding pieces. If any destroyed piece is another bomb this detonates in a chain-reaction as normal.

TANK AND DETONATOR

When a detonator is pushed by the tank, its co-squares are re-evaluated and any pieces in them destroyed.