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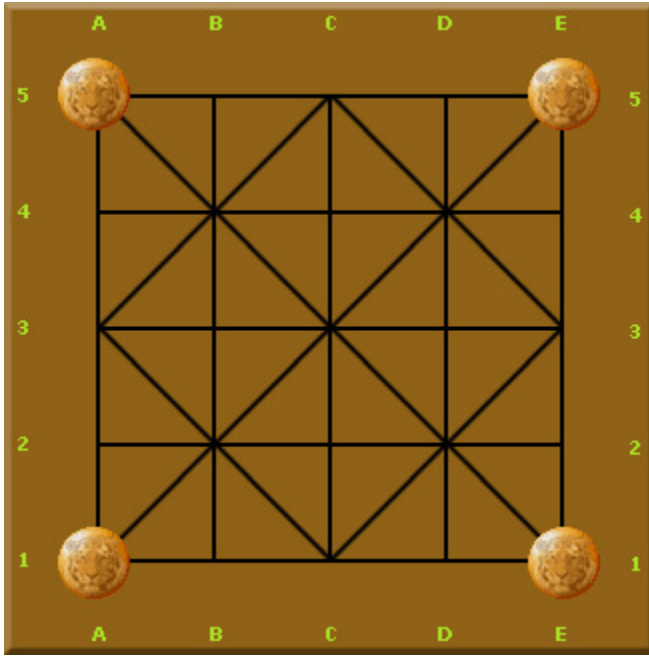
Analysis : Bagh Chal

Intro: I would like to take a moment here to state that while I did not use an interview to reconstruct the rules of the game, I did use my grandmother as a resource in a way. My grandmother died just over two years ago and her belongings are still being sorted out. Among them was a package from the Maryland Historical Society that my father thought I would appreciate given my interest in games and how much this class covers board games. Inside the package was a beautiful all brass set of Bagh Chal pieces and a brass plate gaming board. It also included rudimentary instructions, although my research online has led me to believe that there is some variation in the rules that can deviate from what is printed. Given that the stated purpose of the project was to find and document a game that is uncommon in America, I feel that going off the written rules is appropriate, however, given that using a physical person as a source is listed as part of the assignment, I will not challenge any related grade reductions.

Setting: The game is played on a board between two people, thus it can be played anywhere so long as pieces and a board are available and the two players can sit comfortably. Given that the game can stretch on a bit if both players are skilled (much like chess), spectators and gambling are probably not present.

Arrangement: Players sit on opposite sides of the board in a comfortable position or on the ground should the board be drawn in the dirt. The Tiger player should start out with each of his four pieces on a corner of the board and the Goat player should start with a pool of 20 pieces off the board.

Equipment: One Bagh Chal board (often replaced by drawing a pattern), one set of 4 pieces, and one visually different set of 20 pieces. The pattern can be seen below.



A Bagh Chal board in the starting position (due to the tigers on the corners)

Definitions (underlined words are defined later):

Bagh Chal: The name of the game. Nepalese for “Moving Tigers” or “Change of Tigers”

Tigers: The four pieces under the first player’s control. Their goal is not to be blocked by the goats. Tigers are the only pieces on the board that can capture other pieces. They start with one piece on each of the board’s four corners. Only one tiger may move one space or capture each turn.

Goats: The twenty pieces under the second player’s control. Their goal is to block the tigers before having a set number of pieces captured. Goats may only be placed one at a time during the Placement Phase and only moved one at a time during the Movement Phase.

Block: When uncapturable goats block a tiger's movement so that it cannot move in any direction.

Movement: All pieces "move" by following a single line segment to the next intersection provided that it is unoccupied. Aside from this, the only restriction on movement is the non-repetition rule. Note that some intersections have more segments than others meaning that there are fewer possible moves on some intersections.

Capture: When a tiger "jumps" a goat in a manner similar to checkers. A tiger may capture a goat along any of the game board's lines but only if the space on the opposite side of the goat is empty.

Turn: In a single turn, the tiger player will either capture with or move a tiger and the goat player will either place or move a goat (depending on the phase).

Placement Phase: The first 20 turns of the game in which a goat is placed on the board every turn. Goats may not move at this time, they may only be placed.

Movement Phase: The rest of the game turns 21 and above in which all the goats are placed and may now only be moved.

Tiger Victory: When the tigers have captured a set number of goats, usually four or five.

Goat Victory: When the goats have blocked all the tigers without losing five goats.

Non-Repetition Rule: The rule by which no piece may be moved so that the pieces are arranged on the board in a way that has previously occurred in the game. This is designed to prevent "back and forth" moves that could otherwise continue ad infinitum should both players be inclined. This rule only takes effect during the Movement Phase.

Rules:

1. The players decide however they wish who will play tigers and who will play goats.
2. The game starts in the Placement Phase.
3. The goats start first by placing a goat.
4. During the Placement Phase, the players alternate between the goat player placing a goat and the tiger player either moving a tiger or capturing a goat.
5. When the goat player runs out of goats to place, the game enters the Movement Phase on the tiger player's turn.
6. The Movement Phase is similar to the Placement Phase, however the goat player instead moves a goat once each turn instead of placing one and the Non-Repetition Rule goes into effect.
7. The game ends either when a Goat Victory or Tiger Victory condition has been achieved when either the goats successfully block all the tigers or the tigers capture five goats.

Critique / Analysis:

Bagh Chal is a pure strategy game that contains elements similar to those found in checkers, go, and especially the more ancient alquerque with which it shares a board. It is also unique in that each player has a unique play style. This also means that tournaments and other game competitions might be severely unbalanced by having players that are good at only playing one side of the field. Thus, for a tournament to be

completely fair, two games would have to be played with each player playing the game once as goats and once as tigers.

However, this also means that the game offers something new to players who become tired of playing the same side over and over again. This type of variety is rarely seen in games as old as Bagh Chal, but it definitely adds to the replayability of the game. It may also lead to balancing issues with the game since it is easy to call two players with the same pieces equal, but not two players with different sets of pieces entirely. I found while researching the game that the number of goats that could be captured was either four or five which might suggest that the rules were tweaked at some point to give the tigers a bit more of an edge. This only occurred in one or two instances, however, and the vast majority of rules that I have found specify five goats to be the number that must be captured to win.

The theme of the game seems to be one of rebellion. The tigers, who in the wild are ferocious killers, can be thought of as highly trained soldiers or guards while the goats, unthreatening farm animals, could represent rioting peasants. While the tigers are much better equipped to fight the goats one on one, the goats have the advantage of ever increasing numbers, possibly a reference to an insurrection. If the goats can muster enough forces, they can overwhelm the tigers, however, if they lose enough of their overwhelming numbers, then they become incapable (literally) of blocking all of them.

Strategy:

For the tiger side, the strategy should be to capture goats as quickly as possible during the Placement Phase while not being captured in the process since goats cannot retreat at this time. However, tigers will need to be aware that goats can be placed

anywhere and that a seemingly free capture might be a trap. To best prepare for the goat's offensive, the tigers should be spread out on the board such that it would take the maximum number of goats to capture them all. This means that by the Movement Phase, the tigers would ideally be away from all the edges and corners on the board, be spread out, and be placed in spaces with 8 potential moves. Edge spaces with 5 potential moves are a viable and more common alternative, although they pose a greater risk of capture.

During the Movement Phase, the tigers should attempt to lure single goats away from the pack (possibly by exploiting the Non-Repetition Rule) while not being captured in the process. Keep in mind that when a goat moves to capture a tiger, this may create a hole in the goats' defenses. Thus, intentionally allowing a piece to be captured is a viable strategy, though tigers should focus on maximizing the number of moves that they have available so that they are not caught by the goats forcing them into submission by using the Non-Repetition Rule to their advantage on a lone group of tigers.

Goats should employ the opposite strategy entirely. To prevent capture, goats should put themselves in positions such that capture is impossible for the tigers. Given that tiger players will want to leave the corners in the beginning to pursue goats and avoid being blocked early, they make great starting points from which to build a wall of goats. Goats will also want to avoid losing any of their numbers early on as this makes it harder to imprison tigers later on as goats that are "guarding" it cannot be used for anything else. Goats should not focus on offense so much, but on building their pieces into impregnable walls and forcing the tigers into spaces with fewer possible moves to make them easier to capture.

During the Movement Phase, goat movement will be limited due to the sheer number of goats on the board. Having already isolated a tiger by now will be a huge benefit. The best way to capture the remaining tigers is to force them all into one cluster and then close in around them while not accidentally releasing any previously imprisoned tigers. Goats should keep an eye on how many possible moves their spaces have as this translates into possible capture positions for the tigers. The first piece placed directly next to a tiger in anticipation of a push should be on a space with a low number of moves, preferably one from an edge of the board or a piece that is already defended from attack.