Zola

by Mark Steere

INTRODUCTION

Zola is a two player game, played on a 6x6 (or 8x8…) checkerboard initially filled with red and blue checkers as shown in Figure 1.

The two players, Red and Blue, take turns moving their own checkers, one checker per turn, starting with Red. If a player has a move available, he must make one. If a player has no moves available, he must sit the game out until he does have a move available. At least one of the two players will always have a move available.

Draws cannot occur in Zola. Mark Steere designed Zola in February 2021.

MOVE TYPES

There are two types of moves in Zola:

1. Non-capturing.
2. Capturing

NON-CAPTURING MOVES

The non-capturing move is a king-like, single square move to an adjacent (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) unoccupied square. A non-capturing move must increase the straight line distance from the checker to the center point of the board. See Figure 2.

CAPTURING MOVES

The capturing move is a queen-like move along a straight (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) sequence of zero or more unoccupied squares terminating with an enemy occupied square. The enemy checker is removed and replaced by the capturing checker. A capturing move must maintain or decrease the straight line distance to the center point of the board. See Figure 3.

OBJECT OF THE GAME

To win you must capture all enemy checkers.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Feel free to publish this rule sheet and to program the game of Zola. No licensing fee or royalties are expected. However please don’t change the name or the rules, and please attribute the game to me, Mark Steere. My other games can be found at Mark Steere Games.

Zola is a crown jewel of my games. It is at once Simple, Robust (little or no advantage in moving first [or second]), and Strategic (not just tactical). Zola’s SRS index is exceedingly high.

Nobody designs games like I. Not to suggest that my games are superior. Just unique. All of my games are finite. I.e., draws can’t happen. They can’t be forced or cooperatively induced. Draws simply can’t happen. Why? Because I like the tension. Gameplay marches inexorably toward a decisive conclusion. Players can’t shake hands and agree to both be “winners”. Someone has to be defeated. Crushed. Annihilated. No deflating realization that you’re caught in an endless move cycle. Such a game has failed you. I also don’t like games where you have to calculate the score after play has concluded. There’s no climax. “Yippee I got 182 points!! Three more than you!!” F\*\*\* that.

My only design imperatives are originality and architectural beauty. I’m not overly concerned with gameplay except that my games should be robust. However, as fate would have it, Zola is a very interesting game to play.

I don’t like knock-offs, spin-offs, or “with a twist” games. I especially dislike piece of s\*\*\* “designers” like Nick Bentley who “borrow” from my games without attribution (Bug employs a bastardized version of the highly original and unique Oust mechanism).

I use the simplest of equipment - the Checkers set and the Go set. What the Checkers set lacks in size, it makes up for with stacking and sliding. Classic engineering tradeoff. I don’t particularly like the game of Checkers though, being draw prone, or its innumerable variants.

Speaking of variants, my initial influences included variant master Christian Freeling, though ultimately I grew weary of his tireless, incessant self-promotion. But that’s probably why I heard about him in the first place. So maybe it’s a good thing.

FIGURE 2

Red has only 3 available moves. Both moves are non-capturing and move his checker to an adjacent square which is further from the center of the board.

FIGURE 3

Blue has only two available moves. Both moves are capturing. Move A moves his checker to a square equally distant from the center of the board. Move B moves his checker to a square closer to the center.