
FIT3077

Software Architecture & Design

Composite

Basic Architecture

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Chosen Advanced Requirement

Players are allowed to undo their last move and the game client should support the undoing of moves until there are no more previous moves available. The game client also needs to be able to support saving the state of the currently active game, and be able to fully reload any previously saved game(s). The game state must be stored as a simple text file where each line in the text file represents the current state of the board and stores information about the previously made move. It is anticipated that different file formats will be required in the future so any design decisions should explicitly factor this in.

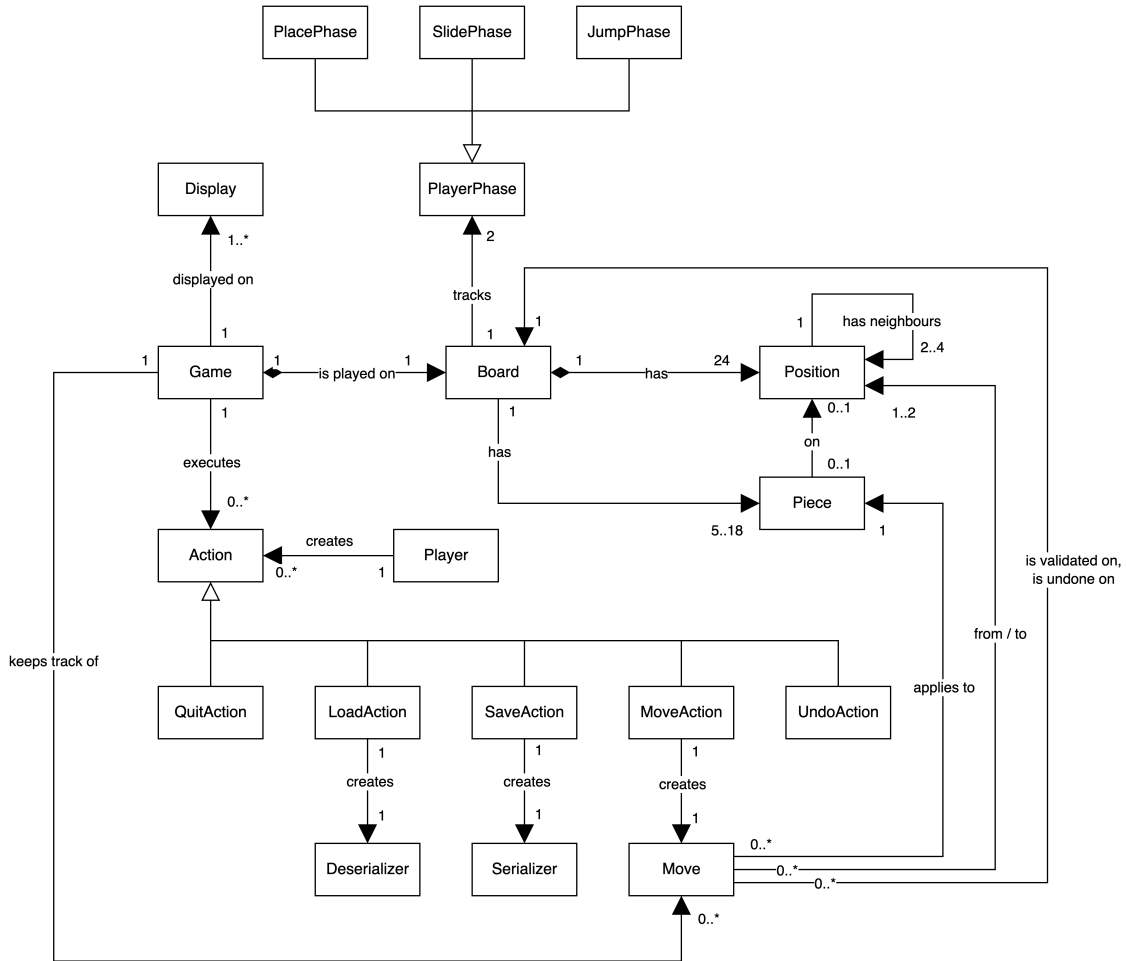


Figure 1: *Domain model*. It captures all the entities and the relationships between them for both the basic Nine Men's Morris gameplay and the chosen advanced requirements.

1 Design Rationale

This section will outline the rationale for each chosen domain and their relationships, the design choices we had to make in modelling the problem domain and why.

1.1 Entities

1.1.1 Player and Action

The Player entity represents an individual participating in the Nine Men's Morris game.

Players do not directly manipulate the game state, but instead communicate their intentions through spawning Actions. This is analogous to the way players interact with console games through a controller by pressing buttons rather than directly changing the game's state from within. This way, the Game can focus on executing the Actions without considering the specific identity of the Players. The Game only needs to distinguish between the two players and the Action is responsible for keeping track of which Player initiated it.

The primary responsibility of the Player is to interact with the Game by submitting Actions to be carried out. There are 5 types, or generalisations of Actions that could be created by the Player:

- *QuitAction* - The player submits this Action when they wish to end the current Game.
- *LoadAction* - The player submits this Action when they wish to load a Game. In executing this Action, a Deserialiser will be spawned. The Deserialiser is responsible for converting a stream back to a Game. The game will continue from there. The Deserialiser is a generalised entity. For example, the Game could be loaded from a simple text file (TextFileDeserialiser) or from a JSON file (JsonDeserialiser).
- *SaveAction* - The player submits this Action when they wish to save the current active Game. In execution, a Serialiser will be spawned and it is responsible for converting the current game state, i.e. the current board configuration and the series of moves played (in order) into a stream. It is also generic - the Game could be saved to a simple text file (TextFileSerialiser) or to a JSON file (JsonSerialiser), for example.
- *MoveAction* - The player submits this Action when they wish to move one of their pieces on the board or take an opponent's piece. The Move is always applied to a Piece (see Section 1.1.4), and will move the Piece from a Position X to Y. The validation is done on the Board (see Section 1.1.4).
- *UndoAction* - The player submits this Action when they wish to undo the previous Move they have made. It is the Move's responsibility to know how to undo themselves; the most recent Move will undo itself on the Board.

The Player entity is also decoupled from the other entities for generalisation of the Player to be introduced. For example, there could be a HumanPlayer and an AiPlayer, each capable of submitting Actions based on the current game state they see, but they achieve this task with different behaviour. Do take note that implementing a bot player is not our chosen advanced requirement.

Keeping the Action generic allows for specific player actions to be added later as a specialisation, and the Game is kept generic without knowing any of the logic how the Action will be carried out. It just needs to execute it - no questions asked.

1.1.2 Display

The Display is responsible for displaying the current state of the game for the players to see, and to react by submitting Actions.

The Display is nicely decoupled from the rest of the game as it does not need to interfere with the game logic. The computations that go inside the game engine are irrelevant to it. The Game will tell it when it needs to perform an update on the UI side.

Generalisations can also be added to the Display. For example, the Display can be a terminal GUI, or even as sophisticated as a 3D GUI.

1.1.3 Game

From looking at the diagram and reading the sections above, you should have a general understanding of the architecture. The Game represents the game engine, it orchestrates all the operations that needed to be performed for the game to be played. To reiterate, it takes inputs from the user in the form of Actions, executes these Actions, and updates the Display whenever needed to ensure a smooth gameplay.

The only responsibilities the Game handles are:

- Decides whether to execute the Action submitted by the Player, usually by asking the Board.
- Ensures the Moves are played out by each Player alternatingly.
- Tells the Display to update itself with the latest game state whenever needed.
- Keeping track of a series of Moves played out in order (to be serialised together with the Board configuration, but again, not its responsibility).

Notice that it is generic and extremely decoupled. It is unaware of the actual operations that go under the hood - it merely orchestrates them. This means we could swap out the Nine Men's Morris game with another board game that has a similar structure, and the Game engine could still be used to orchestrate the operations for that game.

1.1.4 Board, PlayerPhase, Position and Piece

The Board is what enforces the rules on how the game should be played out on the Board. In our context, it represents the Nine Men's Morris game board. If needed, it could also be converted to a generic and be swapped out with other games' boards (see Section 1.1.3).

It holds several key information: the 24 Positions on the board, the 18 Pieces that could be moved around the board, and two PlayerPhases, each representing a player's current phase in the game. The two players do not share the same PlayerPhase.

- *PlayerPhase* - PlayerPhase functions like a finite automaton. It has an initial state, and can move between states depending on a condition. In Nine Men's Morris, each player starts out with the PlacePhase, of which each player takes turns to place their pieces on the board, until all 18 pieces are placed on the board. Then, the PlayerPhase would transition from the PlacePhase to the SlidePhase, where players slide their Pieces along a line to another vacant Position on the Board. Finally, when a player's number of pieces fall below 3, the SlidePhase notifies the Board to transition to the JumpPhase, and the player can jump their Pieces to whichever vacant Positions on the Board he wants. When the Board validates whether a Move is valid, it will consult the PlayerPhase to test whether the Move is valid for the current game phase for that player. This model allows more game phases to be added in the future, and even reordering the phases, if the development team decides to extend the classic Nine Men's Morris rules. The reason we do not adopt the Strategy pattern approach discussed in the workshop for modelling chess moves is, in chess, each Piece has a unique behaviour. However, in Nine Men's Morris, all Pieces of the same player will share the same behaviour. It makes more sense to abstract it this way.

- *Position* - The Position entity represents an occupiable spot on the Board. Additionally, each Position is linked to its neighbouring 2-4 Positions, and this gives the Board a structure. It is otherwise structureless and there is connection between the Positions.
- *Piece* - The Piece represents a piece (or man) owned by a player. The Move is responsible for recording from which Position, to which Position, a Piece should be moved. It is also responsible for reversing this procedure. However, it is the Board's responsibility to decide whether the Move should be allowed. If the Move is allowed, it is executed and tracked by the Game.

1.2 Relationships

Generalisation relationships are omitted as they are already discussed as entities.

1.2.1 Player → Action

Player does not interact directly with the Game, but instead creates Actions, analogous to a button press on the game controller, to interact with the game. Therefore, each Player can create zero or more Actions, but each Action is created by only one Player. Player would not own an action but would have a reference to an action performed. It is an association.

1.2.2 Game → Action

The Game has to execute the Actions, and they are associated by that relationship, allowing greater modularity in the game design. An Action is specific to a Game, but a Game can have a lot of Actions to be executed.

1.2.3 Game → Display

The Game notifies the Display of any state changes, so the Display can update itself to reflect those changes. The human player can then react to those changes by submitting Actions. The Display can only show one game at a time, but the Game can be mirrored to multiple Displays.

1.2.4 Game → Board

The Game must be played on one and only one Board. The Game cannot be played without a Board, and a Board will not exist without a Game. There is no point in keeping the Board after a Game as it has to be reconfigured anyway, so a Board only belongs to one Game. This implies a composition relationship.

1.2.5 Game → Move

As mentioned in Section 1.1.3, the Game needs to track a series of Moves for saving and loading games. The Game starts with no Moves being made, and at any point of time during the game, an arbitrary number of Moves have been executed and tracked. This suggests the presence of an association relationship between these two entities.

1.2.6 Board → PlayerPhase

As mentioned in Section 1.1.4, the Board will record the current phase the two players are in. In order to do that, it tracks two PlayerPhases, and each PlayerPhase is only relevant to one Board. The board will have a reference to each current player phase, implying an association relationship.

1.2.7 Board → Position

The Nine Men's Morris Board has and always will have 24 Positions. If there are fewer than or more than 24 Positions on the Board implies that it is not a Nine Men's Morris game board. Therefore, they are related by a whole-part relationship, where the Board is the parent and the Positions are the children. When either one of the Board or any of the 24 Positions ceases to exist, the other will too. The Positions are also specific to the Board only. Therefore, they are related by the stronger, composition relationship.

1.2.8 Board → Piece

The Board is responsible for holding the Pieces. It is an association relationship between Board and Piece. The game starts with each player having 9 Pieces each, so there are 18 Pieces. The Pieces are destroyed when they are taken out by a player when a mill is formed, and it can go as few as 5, where one of the player has 3 Pieces and the other has only 2 left, losing the game.

1.2.9 Position → Position

Each Position on the Board is neighbour to two to four other Positions, implying an association relationship. This is an important relationship that enforces the structure of the Board. Without this relationship, there is no linkage between the Positions, the Board is structureless and there is no way to move the Pieces around.

1.2.10 Piece → Position

Each Piece is either placed on a Position on the Board, or not when it is not yet been placed. Each Position is either occupied by one Piece, or it is vacant (zero Pieces). It is the Piece's responsibility to know where it is, not the Position's.

1.2.11 LoadAction → Deserialiser, and SaveAction → Serialiser

As mentioned in Section 1.1.1, the LoadAction will need a Deserialiser to convert a stream back to update the Game; while the Serialiser needs a Serialiser to convert the current Game state to a stream. They will create these tools as needed, and they only need one of them each.

1.2.12 MoveAction → Move

MoveAction will create an appropriate Move (and only one) based on the information the Player provided when creating it. The Move will then be executed on the Board. Each Move is only relevant to only one MoveAction.

1.2.13 Move → Piece, Move → Position, and Move → Board

It is already mentioned that the Piece is responsible for knowing where they are. Therefore, to Move a Piece, the required information are the Piece (one Piece) to be moved, the starting and ending Positions (two Positions) of this Move, and the Board to apply the Move on (one Board). The Pieces, the Positions and the Board can be involved in arbitrary number of those Moves.

2 Discarded Alternatives

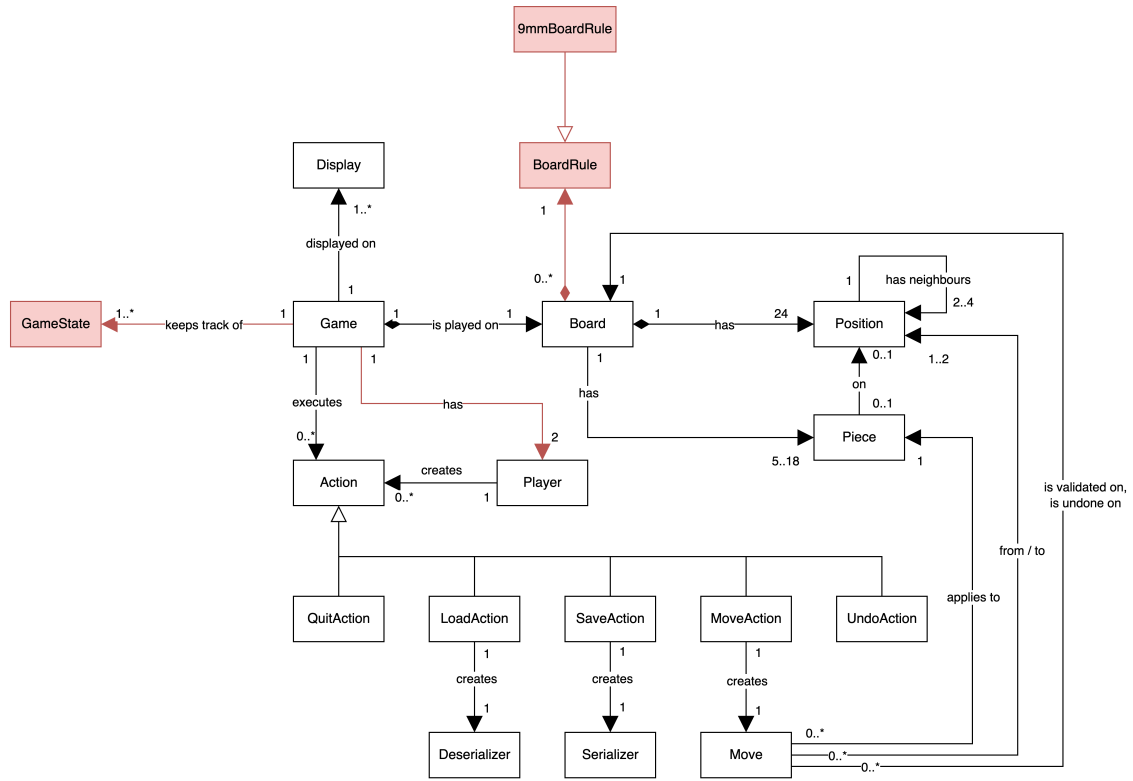


Figure 2: *Discarded alternatives*. This is the previous iteration of our current domain model. Highlighted in red are the discarded entities and/or relationships.

2.1 GameState Entity

Initially, we considered modeling the game save and load requirement by only serialising and deserialising the current GameState, that is only the current Board configuration, the current turn, and other necessary information. However, this model does not allow the loaded game to undo actions until no previous moves remain. To resolve this issue, we had to abandon this design and chose to track all executed Moves, rather than just the latest GameState. As the Moves have also been abstracted into entities adhering to the Command pattern, they can be serialised along with the board configuration at the time of saving to represent a complete game. Loading this game file will allow undoing of moves until no more previous moves are available.

2.2 BoardRule and 9mmBoardRule Entities

In our previous model, a BoardRule entity was held by the Board, which was responsible for all rule checking. Whenever a Move needed to be validated, the Board will delegate the task to the BoardRule entity. After executing the Move, the BoardRule entity is responsible for determining if a mill had formed. In each round, the BoardRule is used to check if any player had won.

This design is modular enough to allow the Board and BoardRule to be swapped with another game's, such as Chess and ChessBoard for the Chess game, while still functioning within the Game entity.

However, this approach had some drawbacks. The Piece and Position entities served no purpose and the model does not display distributed intelligence. On the contrary, the BoardRule handles everything, which breaks the Single Responsibility Principle (SRP). Furthermore, the BoardRule had to rely on case analysis for condition testing, violating the Open-Closed Principle (OCP).

2.3 Game \rightarrow Player Relationship

In the early stages, the team included a Game \rightarrow Player relationship to enforce that the Nine Men's Morris game must be played by two players. This is similar to how the teaching team modelled the Chess game.

However, we eventually discarded this relationship, as the number of players is irrelevant to the Game. For instance, two people could play as a single 'player' in the game by sharing the 'controller'. The important thing is that there can only be two 'controllers' sending input (in our case, the Action entity) to the game. As long as this condition holds true, the Nine Men's Morris game can be played without errors. The game does not need to know the specifics of the players - it only needs to distinguish between the inputs submitted by the controllers, i.e. Actions. The Actions already carry this information with them.