A•G•O•G

~A Game of Golems~
by Christopher St. Clair

In a secret complex deep in the mountains, the Ancient Guild of Golemancy plies its trade, creating life where before was only base matter. Two journeyman golemancers feverishly prepare their master works, for there is but one position available among the Golemancery Elect. Both know that if they could but obtain their rival's research, they would surely be able to create the greater work. The night before their creations are to be judged, each plots to infiltrate the other's sanctum of knowledge, using their legion of early prototypes to subtly outmaneuver the other.

In A•G•O•G, players attempt to be first reach their opponent's sanctum, or failing that, to take their opponent captive and in so doing keep them from completing their masterpiece. If one of your golems manages to enter their sanctum, they may bring you back some sundry inventions with which to better equip your remaining creations, but your eyes alone will know what to look for within their volumes of research. Will you have what it takes to outwit your rival and take your place among the Masters of Golemancy?

SETUP

A•G•O•G is a game of subtle strategy for two players. Played on a standard 8x8 checkers board, players sit at opposite dark-colored corner squares. The square closest to each player is their "sanctum." One player's units are white and the other's are black.

Each player starts with 20 golems, shaped like checkers pieces, and 1 journeyman golemancer (journeyman for short), comprised of a stack of 3 checkers: white-black-white for White; black-white-black for Black. The journeyman starts on the player's sanctum with the golems filling the 5 rows of squares in front of them, leaving the three middle rows unoccupied between the two players' ranks.

White goes first. On their turn, the acting player must move one unit or make a capture with one unit. Players alternate turns until one of them is victorious.

UNITS

All unit movement in **A•G•O•G** is orthogonal relative to the squares; diagonal relative to the players. Units can only move forward (towards the enemy sanctum), but can capture enemy units forward or backward.

Units capture by jumping over an enemy unit and landing on an unoccupied square beyond them. Units cannot jump over more than one enemy at a time, and cannot move or jump off the edge of the board. If a unit making a capture lands on a square from which they can make another capture, they are compelled to do so and continue the capturing sequence until they land on a square from which no further captures are available. Captured units are immediately removed from play. All jumped units remain on the board until the sequence is complete, and no unit can be jumped twice in the sequence.

If a capture is available on the acting player's turn, they are compelled to take it instead of moving a unit, and if multiple captures are available, they are compelled to take the capturing sequence that will capture the most enemy units. For example, if the acting player could either capture two enemy golems or capture the enemy journeyman alone, they are compelled to capture the two golems even though capturing the journeyman would win them the game.

The Golem: The basic unit of **A•G•O•G.** Golems can move forward one square at a time and can capture only adjacent enemy units, landing on the square immediately beyond them.

The Hulk: If a golem ends the turn placed on the enemy sanctum, its player may choose either to place it atop any of their other golems or remove it from play. If the player chooses the former, the two stacked golems become a new unit: the hulk.

Augmented with stolen inventions from the enemy sanctum, the hulk is the most powerful unit in the game. They can move forward any distance in a straight line, and can capture at any distance in a straight line, landing on any unoccupied square beyond the captured unit (provided they do do not jump over more than one unit at a time and that they land such that they can capture the most possible enemy units in the sequence).

As with a golem, if a hulk ends the turn placed on the enemy sanctum, its player may either create a new hulk with the top golem of the stack and remove the bottom from play, or may remove both stacked golems from play. If they have no other golems in play when one of their units ends the turn on the enemy sanctum, that unit cannot promote to a hulk and must be removed from play.

The Journeyman: The most important unit. If captured, their player loses the game, whereas if a journeyman ends the turn on the enemy sanctum, their player wins the game.

The journeymen move and capture the same as golems. However, when jumping over an enemy unit, they may choose to corrupt the jumped unit instead of capturing it, changing it into a "corrupted hulk". To do so, the acting player places one of their golems that has been removed from play atop the jumped unit. This new corrupted hulk is now under the control of the player that corrupted it. If an enemy hulk is jumped by the acting player's journeyman, it can be corrupted by removing the top stacked enemy golem and replacing it with one of the corrupting player's that has been removed from play. If the acting player does not currently have any golems that have been removed from play, they cannot corrupt units with the journeyman and must capture instead.

Corrupted hulks behave the same as regular hulks of their color, including being able to promote to regular hulks if they end the turn on the enemy sanctum (in this scenario, the acting player discards the bottom stacked enemy golem from play). However, a corrupted hulk cannot be corrupted again and must be captured if jumped by the enemy journeyman.

WINNING

A player wins immediately under any of the following conditions:

1. Win by Capture: The player captures the enemy journeyman.
2. Win by Sanctum: The player's journeyman ends the turn on the enemy sanctum.
3. Win by Immobilization: The player's opponent has no legal moves on their turn.
4. Win by Resignation: The player's opponent resigns.

Draws are not possible in **A•G•O•G.**

If desired, players may keep a game record while playing. Each pair of turns for White and Black is denoted with a numbered move, with White's turn recorded on the left and Black's on the right. The board is labelled with coordinates the same as a chess board, with the squares to White's right labelled alphabetically "a" through "h" and the squares to White's left labelled numerically "1" through "8". The units and actions are labelled as follows:

The journeyman is denoted as "J".
Standard hulks are denoted as "H".
Corrupted hulks are denoted as "C".
Golems require no unit label, and their movement is indicated by the coordinates alone.

When a golem moves, it is often only necessary to record the coordinates of the square they moved to. If two golems could move to the same square, record the distinguishing row or column from which the golem moved before the coordinates. For example, an isolated golem moving from a6 to b6 would be recorded as "b6", but if there was a another golem of the same color on b5, it would be necessary to record "ab6" to clarify which golem was moving.

When another unit moves, record the unit and the coordinates of the square they moved to. As with golems, it is not necessary to record the row or column from which they moved unless two or more of the same unit could have moved to that square. For example, if corrupted hulk is on a6 and another is on b5, the corrupted hulk moving from b5 to b6 would be recorded as "C5b6".

When a unit makes a capture, record "x" between the unit label and the coordinates of the square they jumped to (when capturing with a golem, always record its starting row or column before the x). To record a journeyman creating a corrupted hulk, record "+" instead. For example, a journeyman making a capturing sequence from a1 to a3 to c3, capturing the first unit and creating a corrupted hulk from the second, would be recorded as "Jxa3+c3".

When a unit ends its move on the enemy sanctum and the acting player chooses to create a hulk, record the coordinates of the promoted unit and "=H". If the acting player chooses to remove the unit from play instead, no additional record is needed after the final coordinates. For example, a corrupted hulk moving from a3 to a1 and then promoting a golem on h1 would be recorded "Ca1 h1=H".

If White wins, record "1—0". If Black wins, record "0—1".

HANDICAPPING
If players of differing skill levels wish to play an even game, the stronger player can be given a handicap by removing 1 or more of their golems from the board before play starts. The handicapped player always plays Black, and the golems must be removed such that the remaining forces are symmetrically arranged and are removed from the squares closest to the center of the board. For example, for a handicap of 1 remove the golem on f6; for a handicap of 2, remove the golems on e6 and f5; for a handicap of 3 remove the golems on e6, f5, and f6, etc. If the weaker player wins the majority of their games at a particular handicap, reduce the handicap by 1.