

GO

FOR BEGINNERS

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO
LEARNING THE GAME OF GO

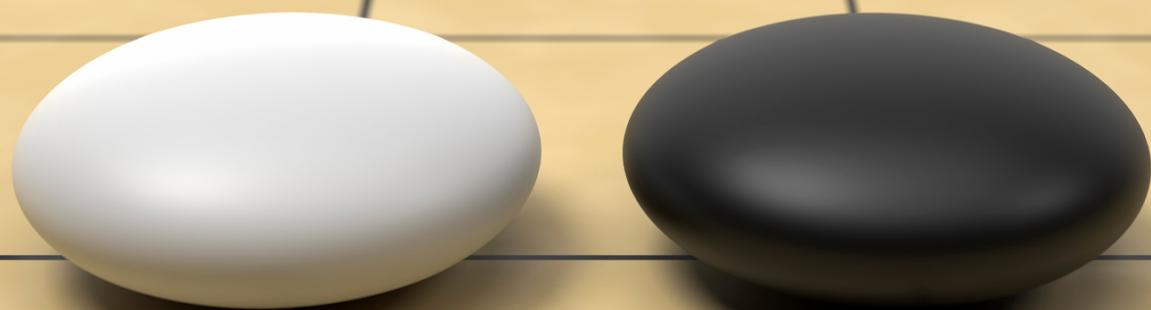


BARTON PRESS

GO

FOR BEGINNERS

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO
LEARNING THE GAME OF GO



BARTON PRESS

Go for Beginners

A Step-By-Step Guide to Learning the Game of Go

By Barton Press

Copyright © 2021 by Barton Press

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: the publisher and the author make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this work and specifically disclaim all warranties, including without limitation warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales or promotional materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every situation. This work is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering medical, legal or other professional advice or services. If professional assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. The fact that an individual, organization or website is referred to in this work as a citation and/or potential source of further information does not mean that the author or the publisher endorses the information the individuals, organization or website may provide or recommendations they/it may make. Further, readers should be aware that the websites listed on this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read.

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1: A Brief History of Go](#)

[Chapter 2: Game Materials](#)

[The Board](#)

[The Stones](#)

[Chapter 3: Setting Up](#)

[Chapter 4: Playing the Game](#)

[Terminology](#)

[Placing Stones](#)

[Capturing Stones](#)

[Atari](#)

[Restriction: The Self-capture Rule](#)

[Restriction: The Ko Rule](#)

[Eyes](#)

[Ending the Game](#)

[Passing](#)

[The Last Turn](#)

[Chapter 5: Scoring Points](#)

[Casualties](#)

[Dead Stones](#)

[Komi](#)

[Chapter 6: Strategies](#)

[False Eyes](#)

[Cutting](#)

[Balancing Aggression](#)

[Committing Resources](#)

[Ladder](#)

[Net](#)

[Snapback](#)

[Shape](#)

[Ponnuki & Tortoise Shell](#)

[Mouth and Choke Point](#)

[Bad Shapes](#)

[Connections](#)

[Stretching with Diagonals](#)

[Knight's Move and Two-point Jumps](#)

[Sente: Forcing Action](#)

[Chapter 7: Go's Ranking System](#)

[Kyu and Dan Ranks](#)

[Achieving a Dan Rank](#)

[Handicap Stones](#)

[Chapter 8: Go Etiquette](#)

[Before Playing](#)

[During Play](#)

[Conclusion](#)

Introduction

Welcome to Go! This is a simple to learn yet extremely difficult to master the game, with origins over 4,000 years old. It is one of the earliest games in human history that could stand the test of time and remain relevant even today.

The game is for two players. Each player takes their turn by placing their color's pieces, known as stones, onto a shared game board. The board comprises horizontal and vertical lines, forming a grid for the players to share. Most boards are 19x19 with 361 points, but beginners may find that a 13x13 or even 9x9 might be more suitable for faster play.

The game's goal is to place your stones, so they surround and section off a larger board area than your opponent. The area you control is known as your Territory. You may also capture your opponent's stones by surrounding them with your own pieces, but be warned, they may do the same to you! The player with the most Territory at the end of the game is declared the winner.

This book will take you, the soon-to-be player, through the exciting history of Go, how it is played, and how to master its complex strategy for competitive play.

Chapter 1: A Brief History of Go

According to legend, in 2356 BC, Chinese Emperor Yao was deep in thought one warm morning in spring. He wanted to devise a way to prepare his son, Danzhu, for an emperor's duties by teaching him discipline, concentration, and balance. Using some cloth and stones from the garden, he created rules for a game where his son would be tested in these three areas.

As the years passed, Danzhu studied the game. Eventually, Go became one of the four cultivated arts for a scholarly gentleman, alongside calligraphy, painting, and playing a musical instrument known as Guqin.

Some even used Go for interpersonal divination to determine relationships and future events. Others used it as a war game to strategize military conquests. No matter how it was used, Go became very popular in Chinese day to day life before making its way into Japan in the 7th century, and finally to Western culture in the 19th century.

Go is a game that shows the intricacy of planning, the value of contingencies, the balance between action and decision, and the power of sacrifice. The simplicity of its mechanics masks the underlying complex strategies required for consistent victory.

Chapter 2: Game Materials

The Board

The Go board is typically made of wood, following the game's classical origin. However, one can certainly find plastic or even glass variants of the board. Usually, it is a square board consisting of 19 horizontal lines and 19 vertical lines (19x19) to form a playing grid. Smaller sizes are also common for newer players or those who prefer a faster-paced game with quicker scoring.

On the 19x19 board, you will find 9 emboldened points in various strategic positions equidistant around the board. These are called "Hoshi" or star points, and they help the players orient themselves on the grid, much like stars in the sky.

You should play on a flat surface with plenty of room on the side of the board for your stones. Two small cups or dishes work well for housing the playing pieces, so make sure there is enough space for them as well.

The Stones

The playing pieces of Go, known as stones, are ordinarily available in two colors: Black and White. In a traditional Go set, there are 361 stones, one for each open intersection in a 19x19 grid. Of the total stones, Black has 181, whereas White has 180. This is because Black goes first and has an added advantage. Only the most advanced players will be able to use all of the stones of their color in a single game, as most of the time, players will pass and end the game before all stones are used.

The player with the most surrounded territories and captured stones wins. Komi points are also provided to the White player as compensation for playing the second turn.

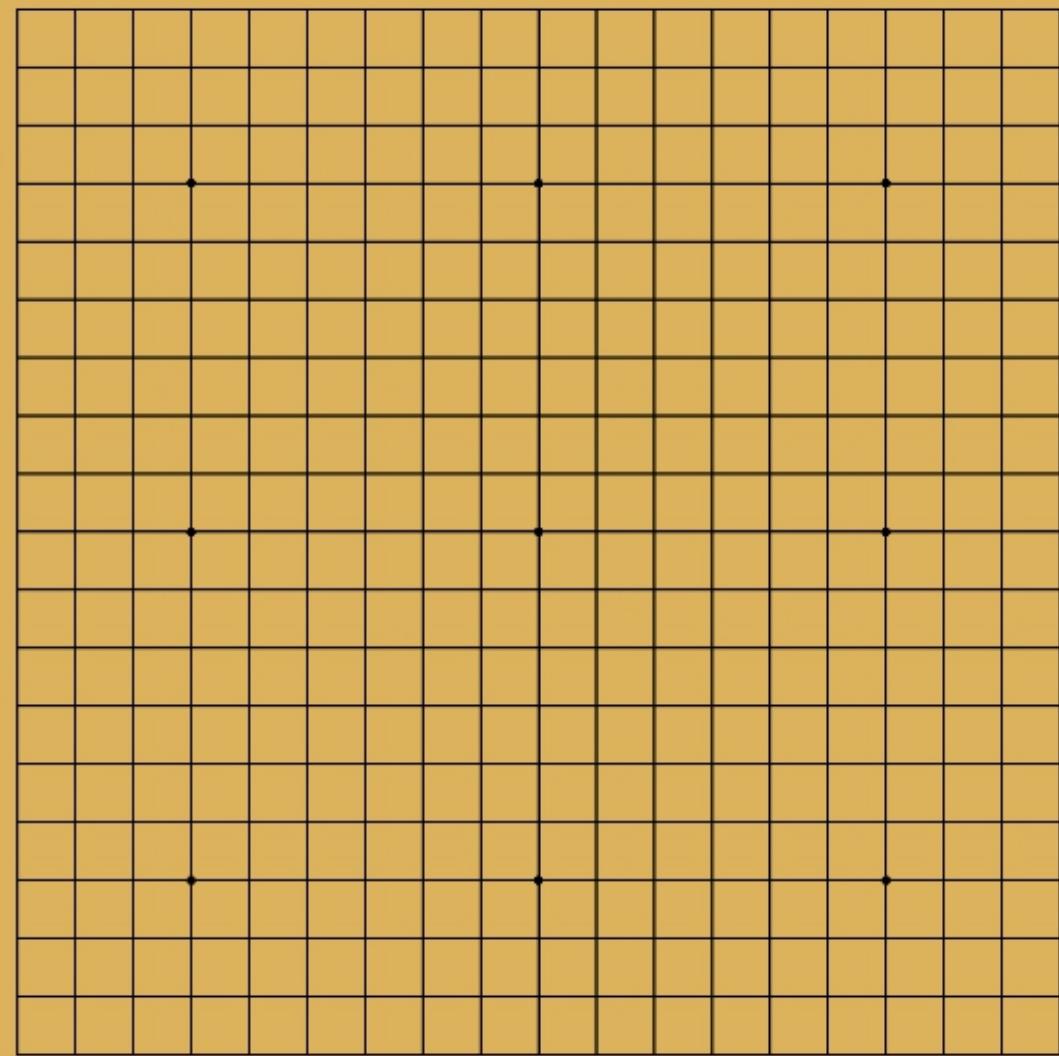
Chapter 3: Setting Up

With Go, setup is quick and easy:

- 1) Place the game board between two players with gridlines facing up.
- 2) Separate the stones into black and white piles.
- 3) Give the least-experienced player the black stone pile to have the advantage.
- 4) Give the second player the white stone pile.



White Player



Black Player



Chapter 4: Playing the Game

Terminology

There are some standard terms that will be used when explaining the game of Go. This table will help with the most commonly used terms.

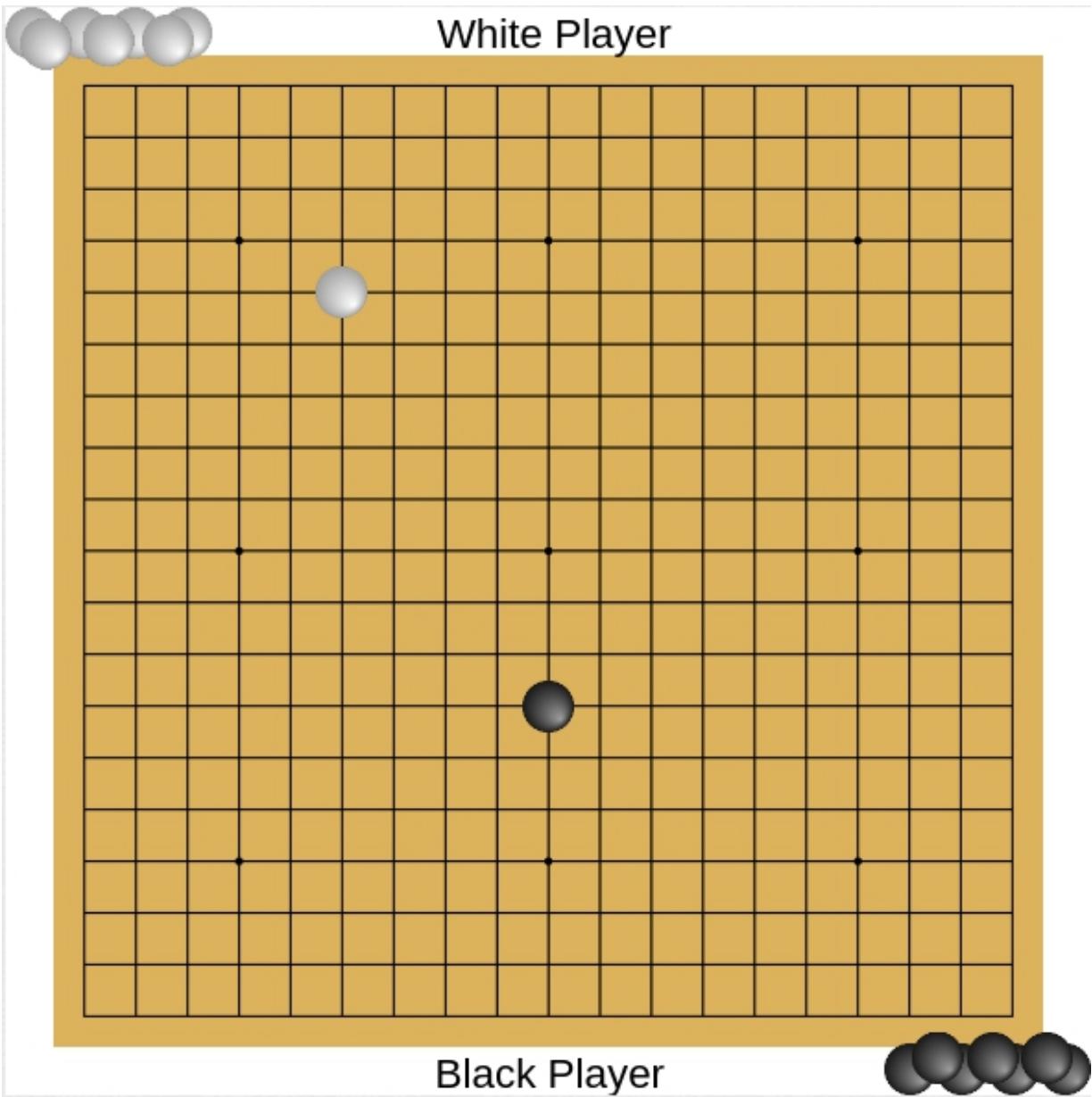
Term	Definition
Black	The player that controls the black stones.
White	The player that controls the white stones.
Stone	The round playing pieces that consist of two colors. Each player controls his/her own color.
Intersection	The various points on the playing board where horizontal and vertical line cross. Stones may be placed here.
Territory	An area of the board that is surrounded or sectioned off by a solid color of stones.
Liberty	The empty Intersections around a placed stone.
Adjacent	The Intersections to the top, bottom, left or right of a placed stone.

String	A connection of two or more adjacent stones of the same color.
Self-capture	When a stone is played and is immediately subject to the capture rules.

Placing Stones

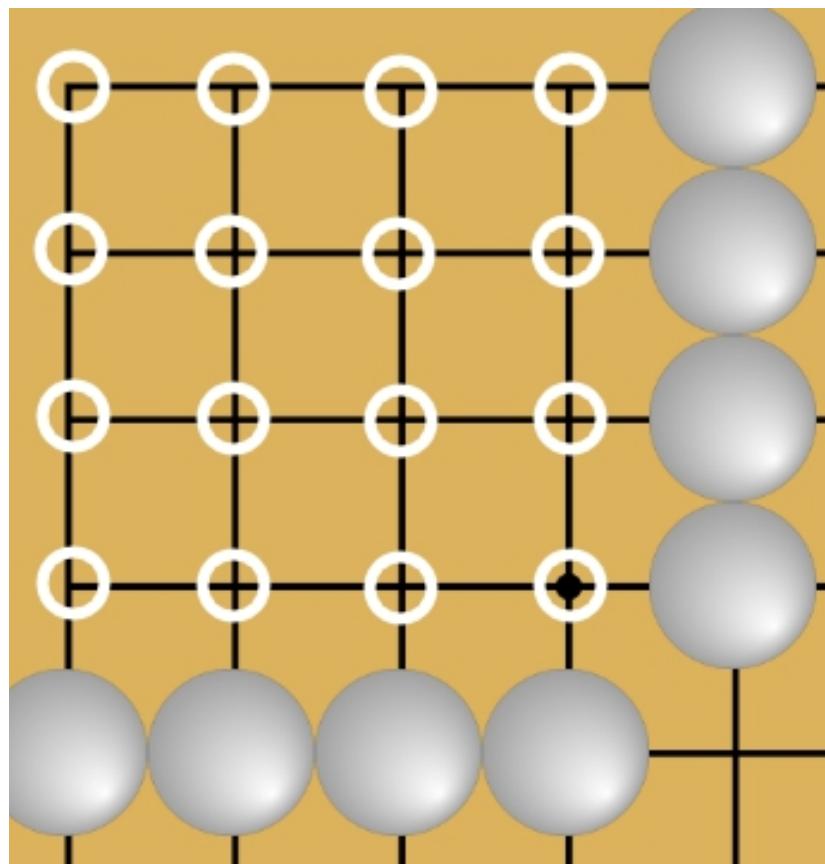
After setup, the play starts with the Black side. Black takes a stone from their pile and places it on the board. Stones may not be placed inside the grid cells but only where the horizontal and vertical lines intersect, including the grid's edges. You may not place a stone on an already occupied Intersection, and you may not move your stone once it is placed on the board (unless to remove it from the board when it is captured).

After Black goes, it becomes White's turn to place a stone. Play continues back and forth between the two players until there are no moves left to make, and both the players pass.

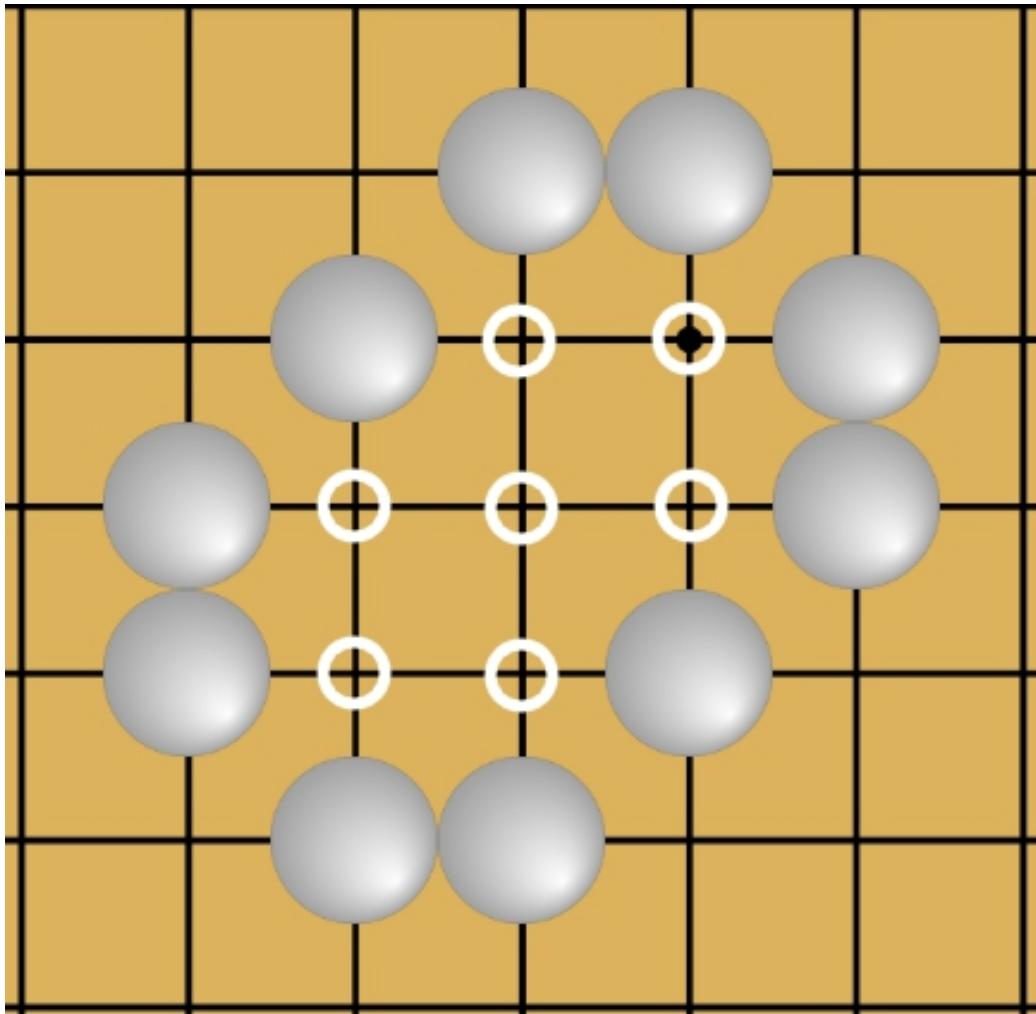


Black places their first stone on the central vertical axis on an Intersection in the southern half of the board. White responds by placing a stone in the northwestern quadrant ,thus securing Territory.

The main objective of Go is to have the most Territory by the end of the game. Territory is defined in Go as a vacant area that has been surrounded by stones of a single color. There are a few things to consider with this definition, so let's discuss them.

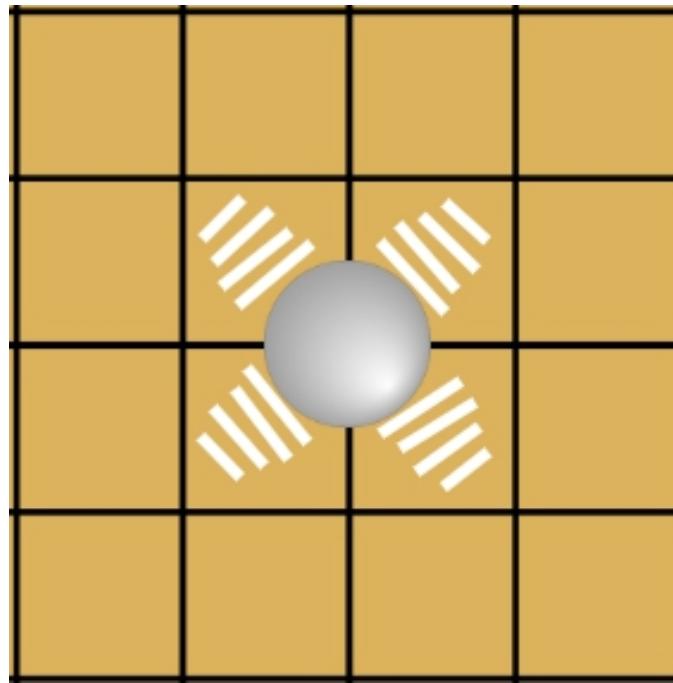


White has surrounded 16 Intersections, including the outer border with a String of 8 stones. White will have scored 16 points.



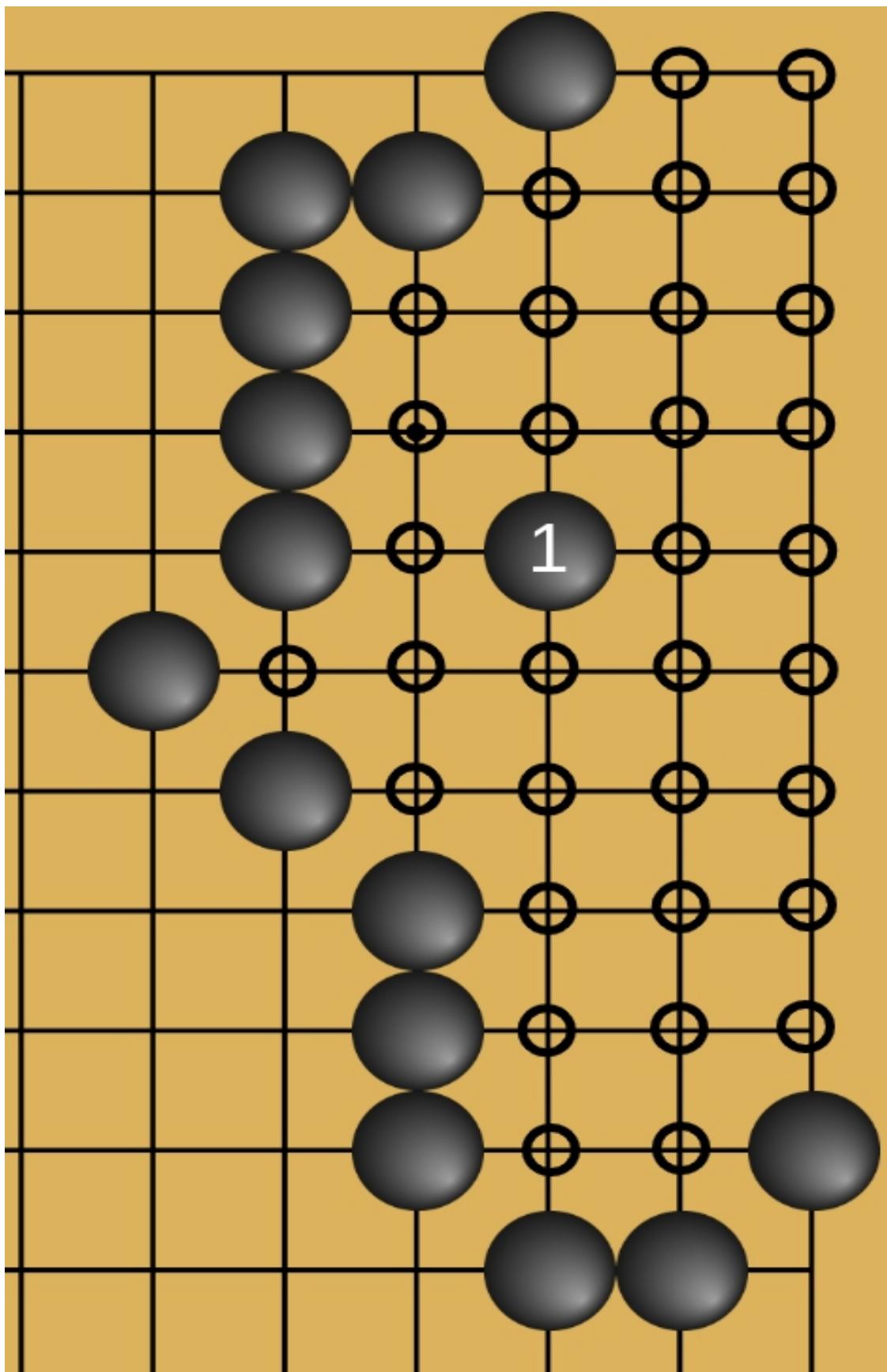
You may also surround Territory entirely with your stones without using the borders of the playing area. In the example above, White scores 7 points for 7 Intersections.

When you place a stone at an Intersection, you open up 4 areas where you can begin to grow the Territory. You can then strategize which direction you want to go to expand your Territory and react to your opponent's moves. There is also a good deal of strategy in playing along the borders, but not actually on them to use the borders of the game board to help section off Territory.



This White 's stone created potential Territory starters in the northwest, northeast, southwest, southeast corners of the piece known as Liberties.

Remember that any occupied Liberty will take away from your Territory size. Therefore, it is essential to plan ahead and choose the bounds of your Territory first before placing stones on the board. Once they are placed, they cannot be moved unless captured.



Black has sectioned off the Territory of 33 Intersections. They would have 34 if they did not place the stone marked (1), which occupies 1 Liberty.

Capturing Stones

In the game of Go, you can capture your opponent's stones to open up more Territory options for you and to further reduce their score. To do this, you must remove all of the opponent's Liberties and surround them with your stones. This can also free up Intersections for your own pieces.

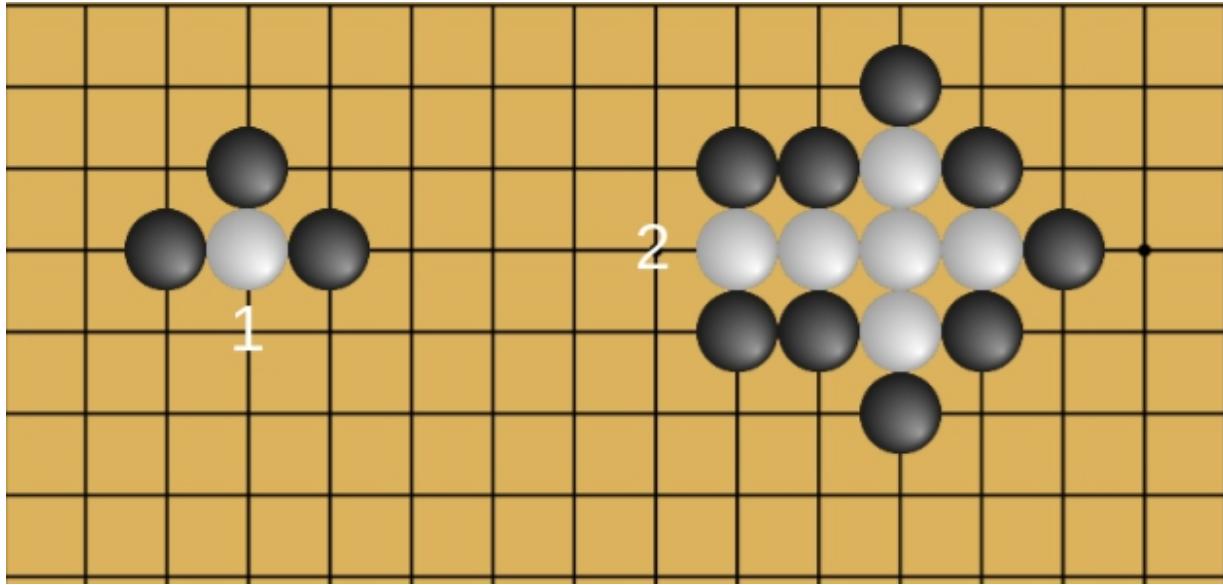
You may capture a stone by surrounding it on all 4 sides. If you can place your stones surrounding the opponent's stone, then you may remove it from the board. You gain a point for every piece you capture.

You don't have to surround a piece if it's on a border. You only need to remove all of its Liberties, i.e., all of the surrounding Intersections. So, if an opponent's stone is in a corner, then it has only 2 Liberties. Placing stones in those 2 Liberties will remove the stone as a capture. In a similar way, placing stones on the sides will have 3 Liberties.

One may also remove groups of stones. Simply remove all available Intersections from the String of stones, and those stones can be removed from the board as captures.

Atari

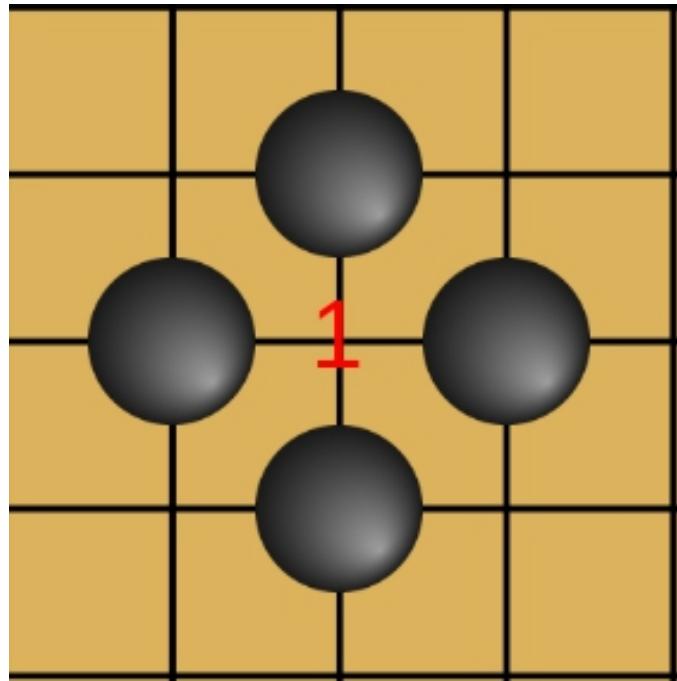
When a stone is placed where only 1 Liberty is left to capture an opponent's piece, it is sometimes customary to call out an "Atari." This is like Chess, where one might call out "Check" if the King is totally surrounded with no safety moves left. Unlike Chess, in Go, the opposing player is not obligated to react to the Atari and may allow the piece to be captured in future turns. This is a common practice for newer players, but this is rarely done when you play as more advanced players.



In the diagram above, the groups on the left and the right show White in an Atari. If Black plays at (1), the White's piece will be captured and removed from the board, as that Black's stone will have occupied White stone's last Liberty. In the group on the right, White has 1 remaining Liberty at (2). If Black plays at (2), all White's stones on the right will be captured and removed from the board. In both examples, White can defend against the capture by placing another White stone adjacent to their existing White stone, thus creating additional Liberties that Black will have to spend multiple turns surrounding.

Restriction: The Self-capture Rule

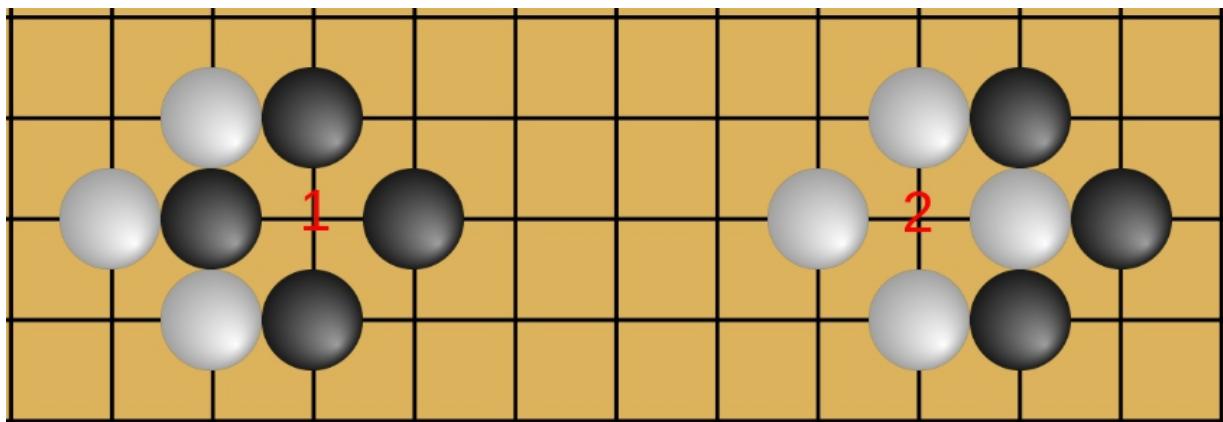
A player may not place a stone where it will be immediately captured. This rule is in place because it is against the spirit of the game and is not a tactical maneuver. Therefore, most players prohibit self-capturing (self-sacrificing) stones.



With the self-capture rule, White cannot place a stone at (1) because it would be immediately surrounded and therefore captured.

Restriction: The Ko Rule

To better explain the Ko Rule, consider the diagram below.



In the setup on the left, if White plays a stone at (1), the leftmost Black stone will be captured and create the setup shown on the right. Now, if Black plays a stone at (2), the rightmost White stone will be captured and

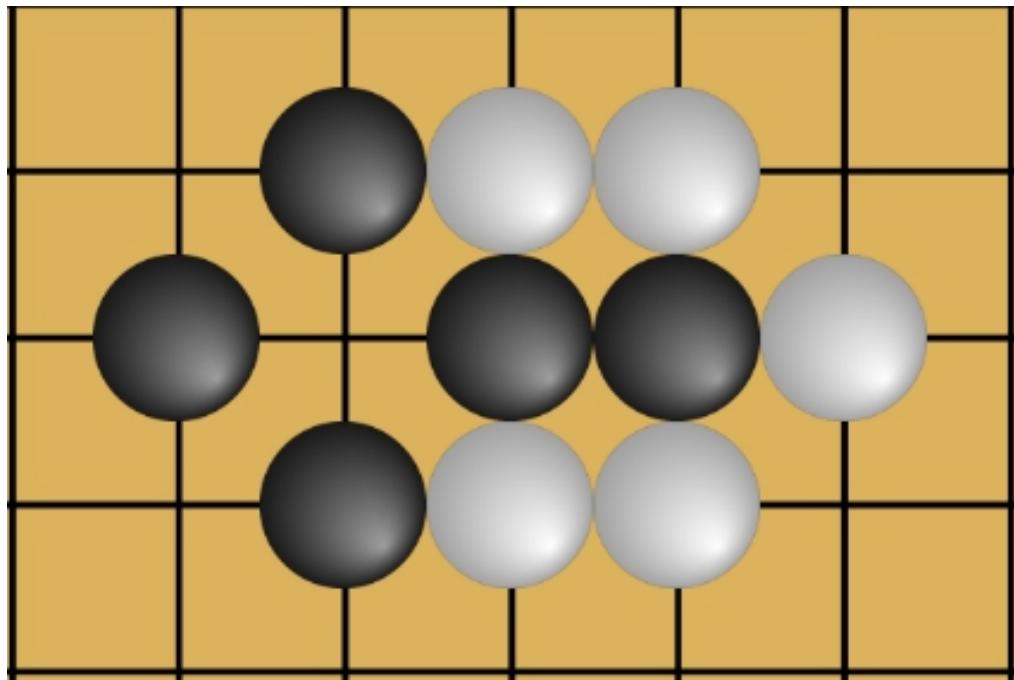
go back to the previous setup on the left. This will create an indefinite cycle. This never-ending repeating move is prevented by the Ko Rule. With this rule, players are prohibited from playing a stone that will result in this endless repetition.

For this example, White would be making capture on the setup on the left, and then Black would capture on the right setup. However, after that, White would be unable to recapture Black in the same.

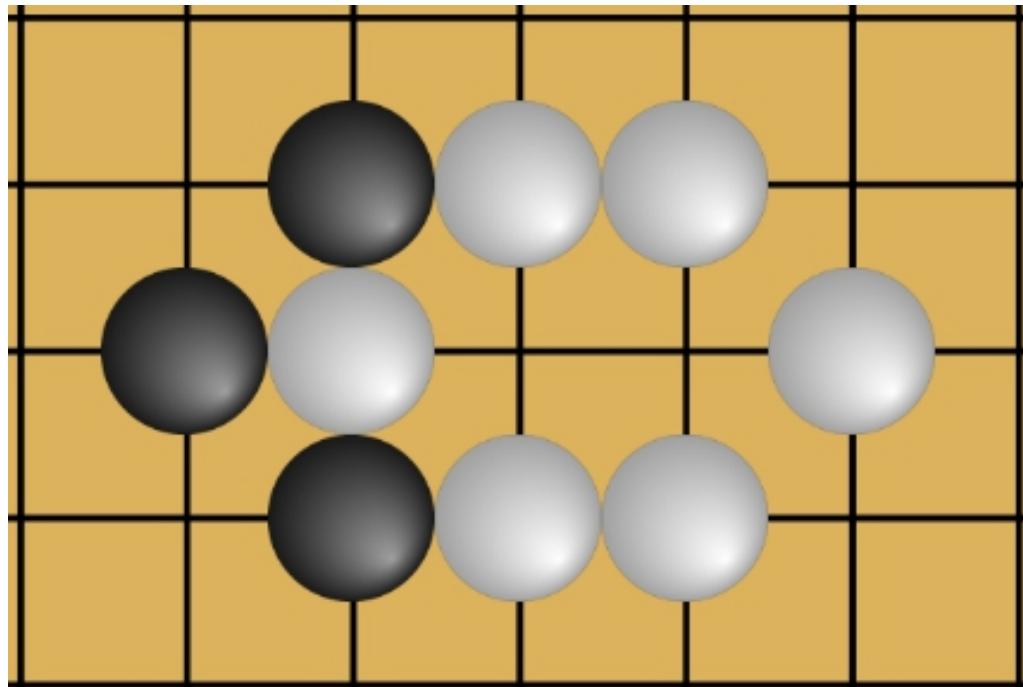
This rule thwarts a never-ending chain of captures, preventing players from losing their stones much more quickly, thus avoiding a stalemate. Many Go players consider the Ko Rule a necessity and integrate it into their matches.

Keep in mind that the Ko Rule prevents the same pattern on the board to be repeated over and over again. However, after a move or two goes by, you may repeat the move again because the board pattern changes by then. The Ko Rule simply averts the vicious cycle of repeating the same move over and over on consecutive turns, but future turns are fair game to play the move.

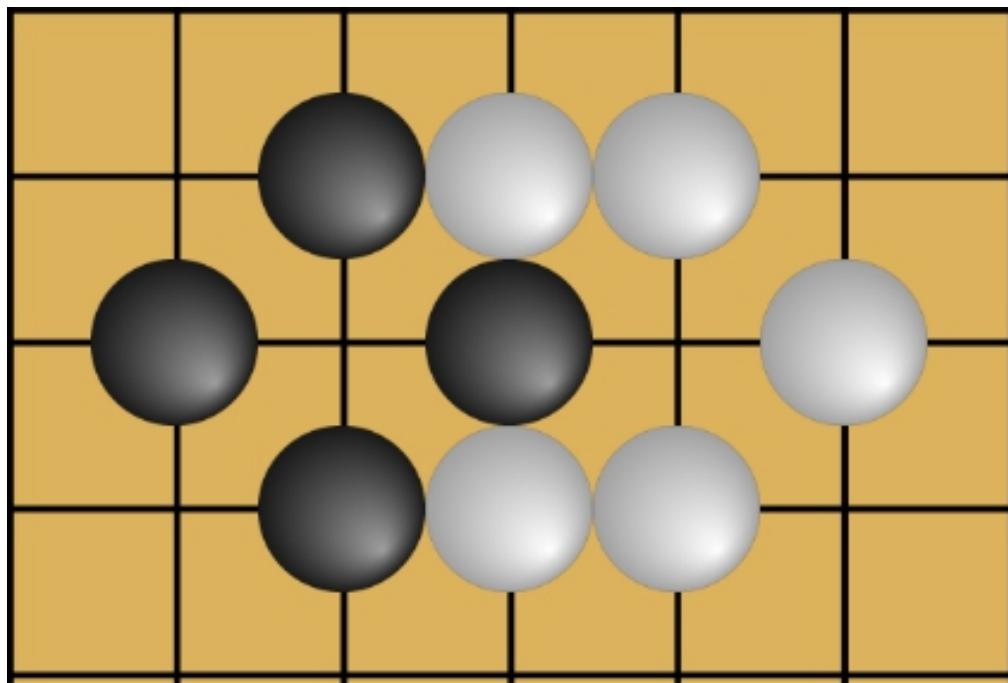
Speaking of board pattern, let us consider the example below, elaborating the basic Ko Rule from earlier to include a two-stone capture.



Black and White are set up in an exaggerated Ko example here. White places a stone to the vacant slot to the left of Black's two-stone chain.



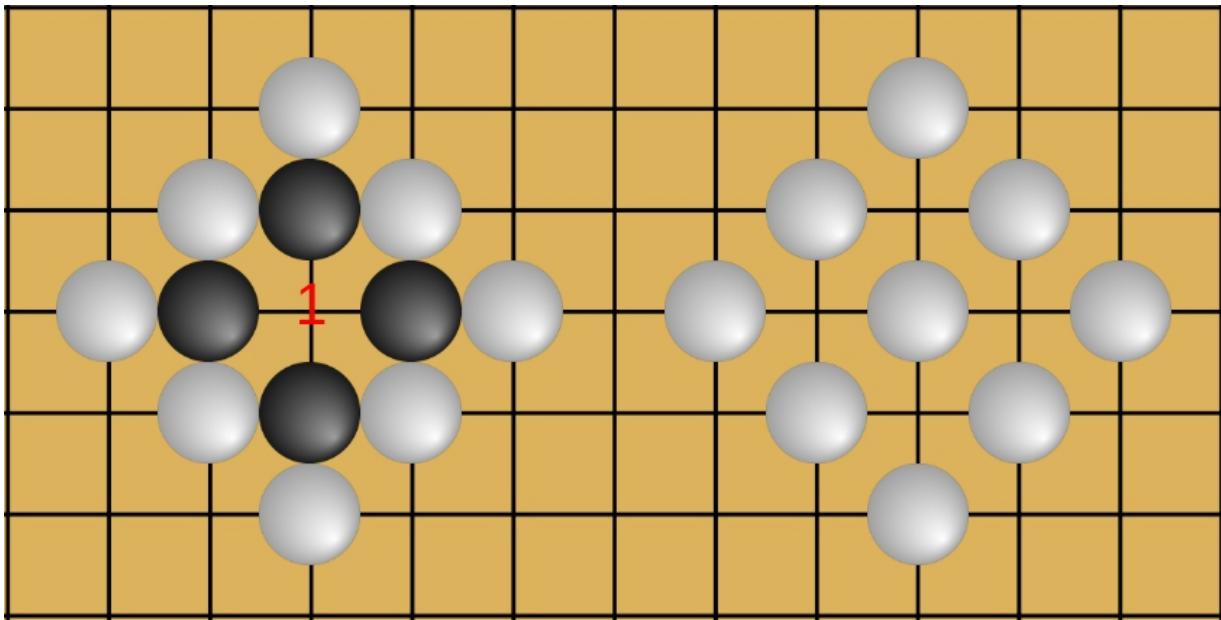
White takes Black's two stones, and now Black can respond with another capture.



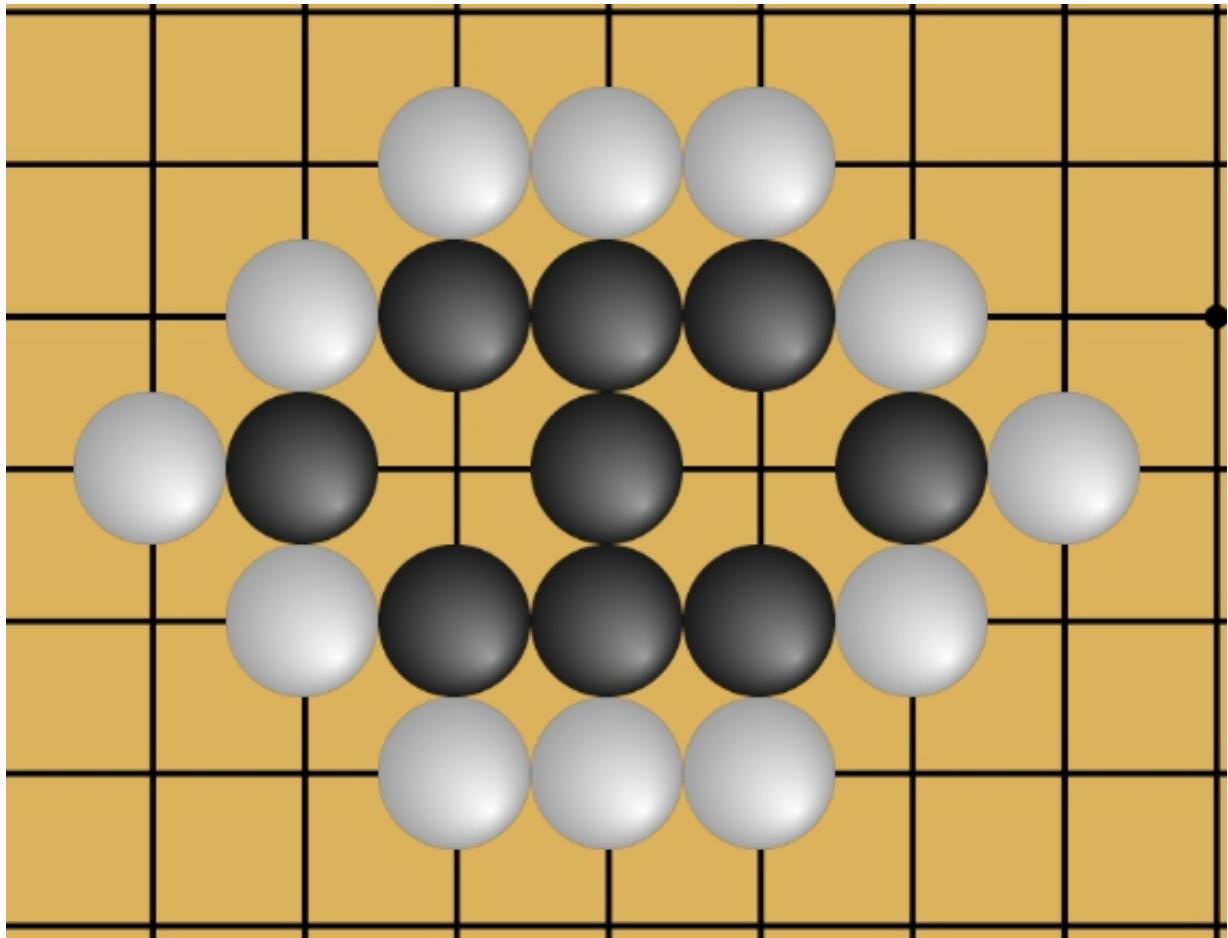
This is a perfectly valid move and does not violate the Ko Rule because the board pattern has changed, and only one stone was taken the second time instead of two. It is important to keep in mind the Ko Rule caveat is that the board pattern must not repeat between consecutive moves.

Eyes

Eyes are an essential concept in Go. Eyes are formed when you have a String of connected stones that have a single open Intersection in the middle of it. In a normal situation, the opposing colored stone cannot play inside this String as they would be immediately captured. This would violate the self-capture rule. However, they can play on this Intersection if the outside has already been surrounded. Since players can only play one stone at a time, if the String contains more than one Eye, then the String cannot be captured.



In the example above, consider the group on the left where Black has been surrounded by White. If White plays in the Eye (marked 1), it will form the group shown on the right where all of the Black stones will be captured.



Black has formed 2 Eyes with their String, so White is unable to capture the String by playing inside the 2 Eyes.

Ending the Game

Passing

During your turn, if you believe you can neither expand your Territory any further nor capture any of your opponent's stones, therefore, reducing their Territory, you may pass your turn. To do this, you hand your opponent one of your stones from your pile as a prisoner. This stone will be used to fill your own Territory at scoring, so it is important not to pass too frequently.

The Last Turn

Since Black played first, they have a suitable advantage. The game will only end when both players pass, ending with White having the last turn. In other words, the game will end when Black passes, then White passes immediately after. When this happens, the scoring phase begins. The winner is the player with the most points.

Chapter 5: Scoring Points

When both players cannot place any more stones and have both offered to pass, scoring begins. Dead stones are removed (explained below), and all captured stones (casualties) are placed into the territories of their respective color.

Players total up the number of Intersections located inside their territories after negating spaces from captures. The player with the most Intersections is declared the winner.

Casualties

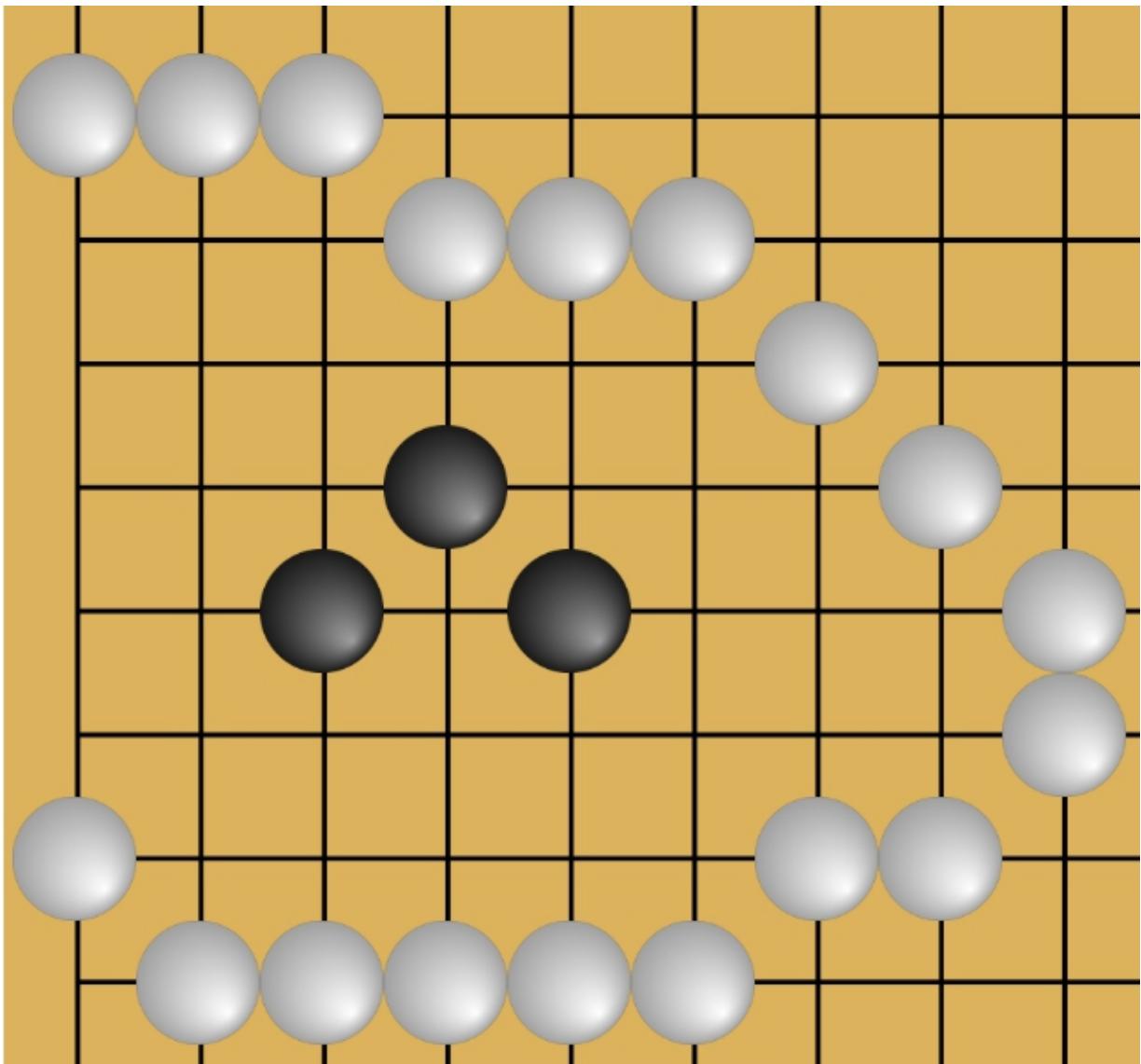
Captured stones can reduce your score. When all moves have been played and both players have passed, then all stones captured by the other player are placed back into your Territory, thus decreasing your total score. For example, let's say that you have a Territory of 10 Intersections, but 5 of your stones were captured throughout the game. Those 5 stones will be placed back into your Territory on any available Intersections. Now your score is only 15.

This is the casualties rule. When you lose a stone to a capture, you are in effect losing 2 points: the Intersection you lose when the stone was captured, and the Intersection in your Territory where the captured stone will be placed upon scoring in the end. This is why keeping your stones from being captured is so important.

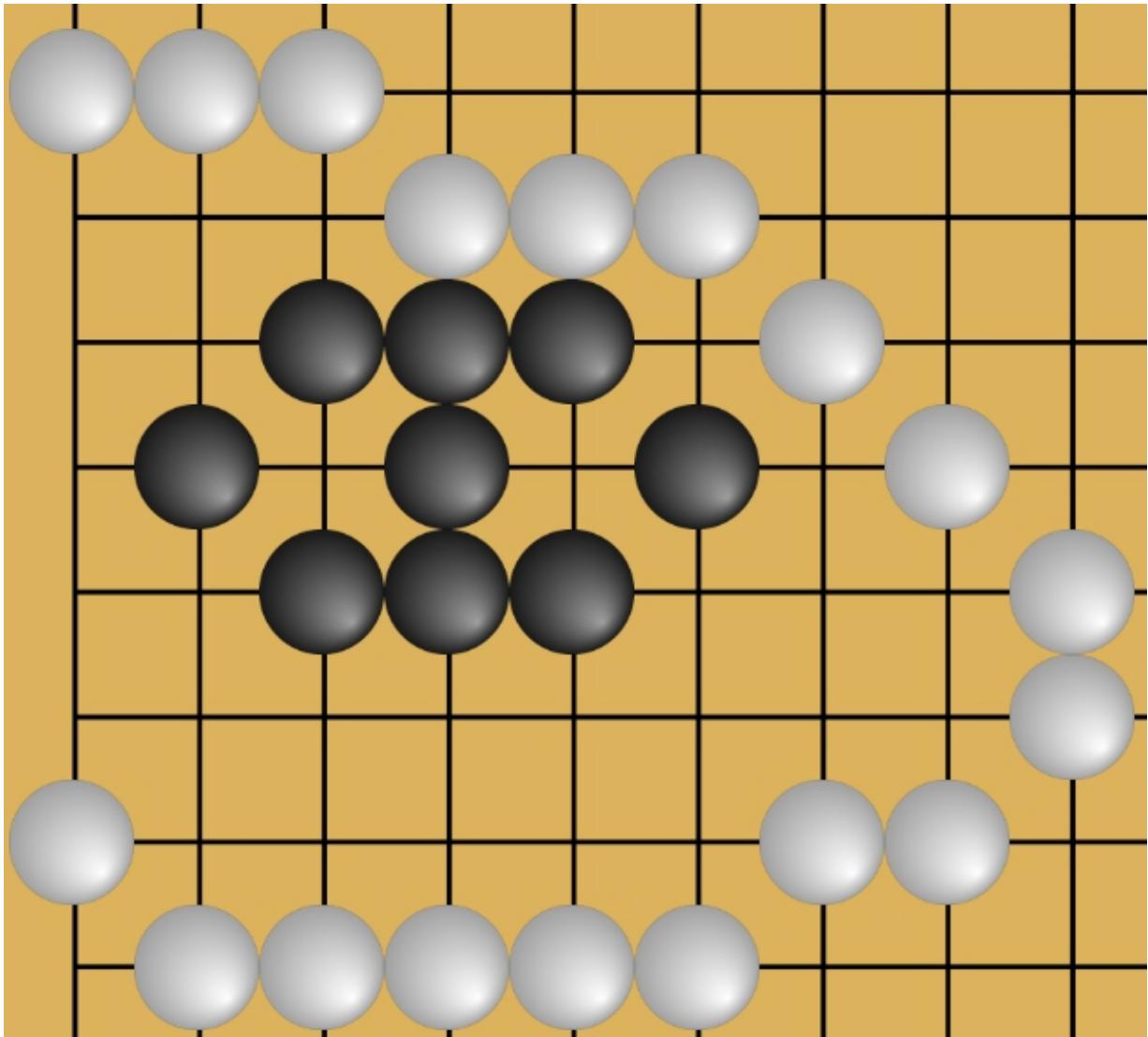
Dead Stones

Imagine you have a large Territory carved out that contains 20 Intersections. That's 20 points at the end of the game. However, your opponent can needlessly place pieces in your Territory, reducing your Territory size.

This is where dead stones come into play. Before points are scored, Strings of stones inside another Territory with less than 2 Eyes (single Intersections surrounded by stones) of Territory are removed as captures for the parent Territory. The example below explains the concept of dead stones.



White has a large Territory containing some errant Black stones. Black has not formed a Territory containing at least 2 Eyes. Therefore, those 3 Black stones will be taken as captures at scoring time.



White has a large Territory, with Black holding a Territory with at least 2 Eyes inside. This time, Black will not have these stones removed as dead stones.

Rather than closing in and removing the Black stones one group at a time, which would further reduce your own Territory, keep in mind that undeveloped territories within your borders will be taken as captures. However, if those stones inside your walls form their own Territory, then those stones will be kept as valid pieces and can have a significant impact on your score.

Komi

One may have guessed that Black has a modest advantage by going first. Many players of Go consider this first move to be equal to about 6.5 points, the half point being a tiebreaker in case of a stalemate.

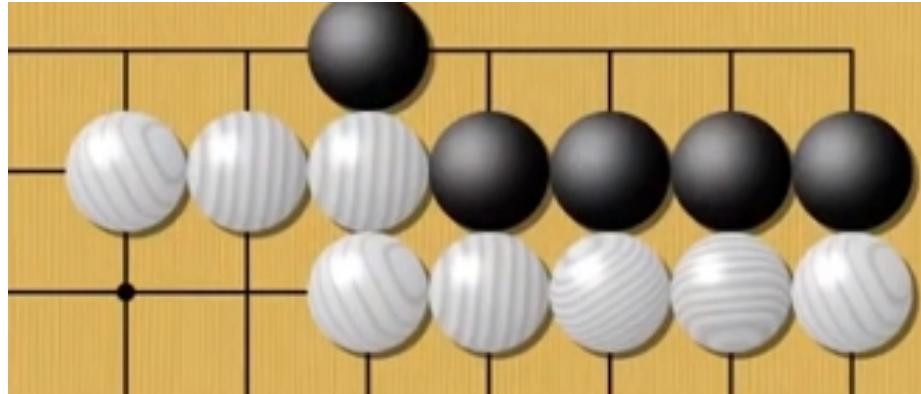
This is called Komidashi, or Komi for short literally meant as compensation. It is the score awarded to the White player at the end of the game to compensate for this first-turn advantage. So, if you are playing the game as a White player, going second after Black, you would get 6.5 points added to your score at the end of the game.

Chapter 6: Strategies

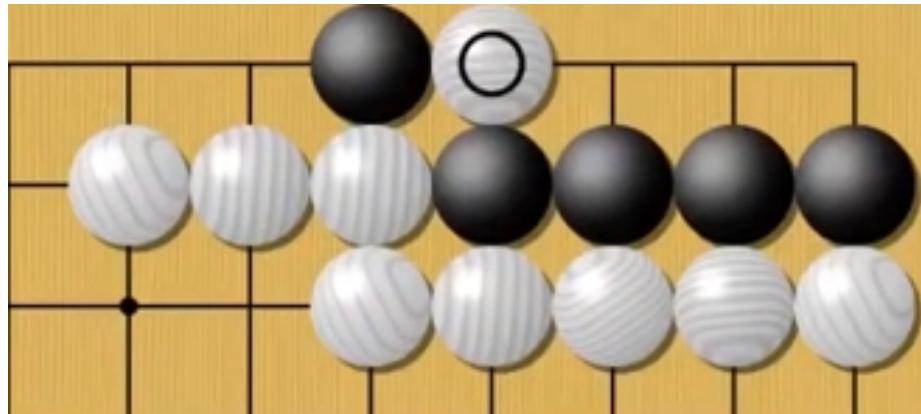
Go is a game that is easy to learn yet difficult to master. The game mechanics are simple, and yet there are many clever gambits and ploys you can use to muscle or otherwise outwit your opponent. The essence of Go is that players are plotting out a grand war, always staying vigilant of the enemy's moves while building their own offensive line to route enemy soldiers. Victory hinges on both balance and might. In this section, we will go over some advanced techniques and moves that are popular in Go.

False Eyes

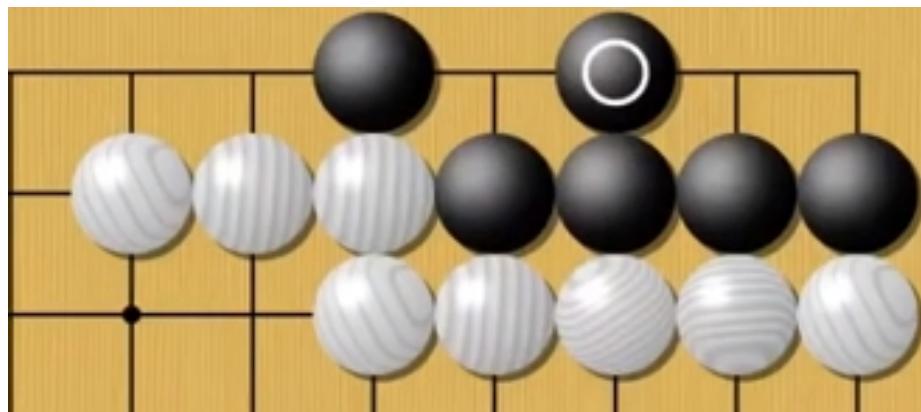
Sometimes when playing Go, you can create what is called a False Eye. It looks like an Eye, but by capturing other stones, you can remove the Eye. Consider the example below.



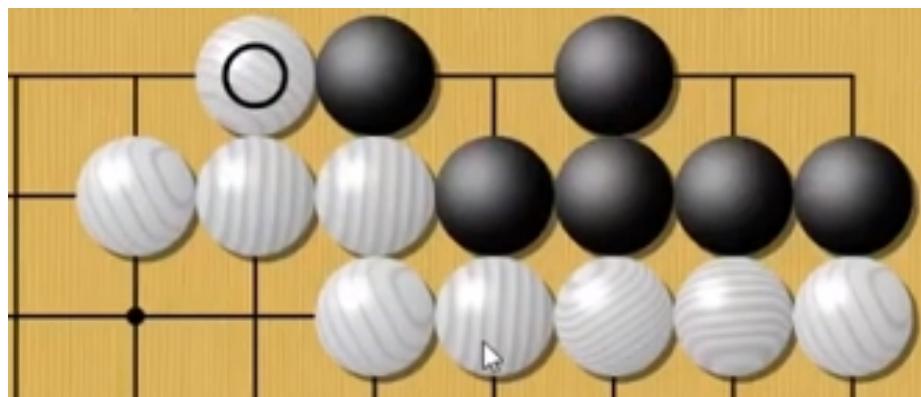
Black has secured 4 Liberties in the upper right. Now, if White places a stone as shown below, they will put themselves into an Atari. Under normal circumstances, it would not be a smart move.



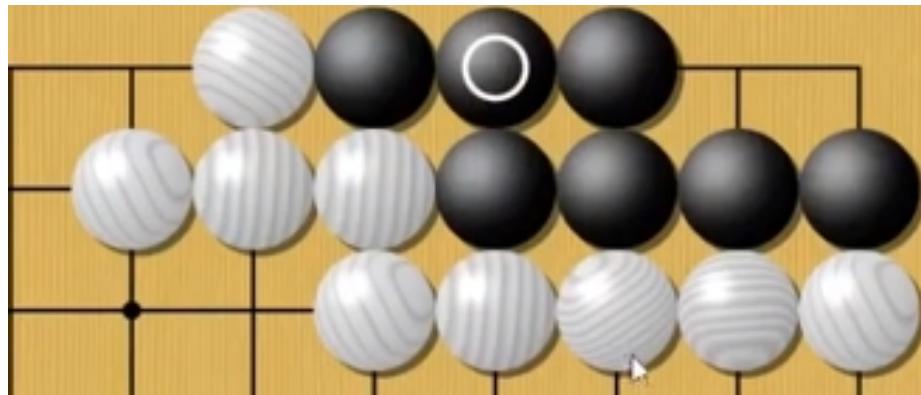
However, this sets White up for an advantage for the next 2 moves. Black will take White's newly placed stone, now creating 2 Eyes on either side.



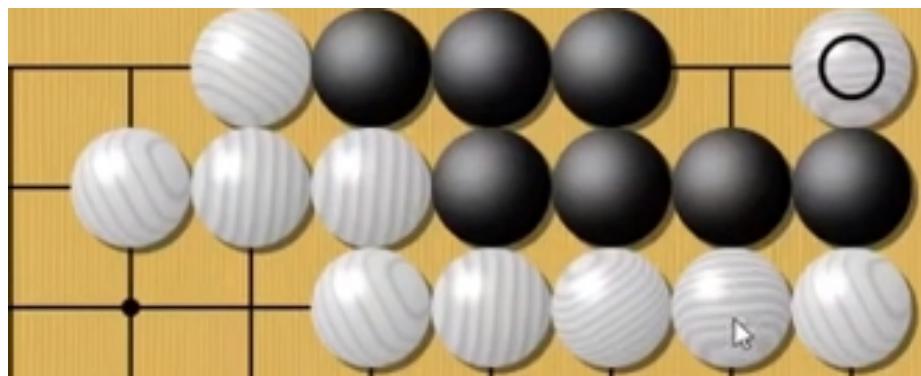
But now the question remains, is the Eye on the left a true Eye? Let's look at the next couple of moves.



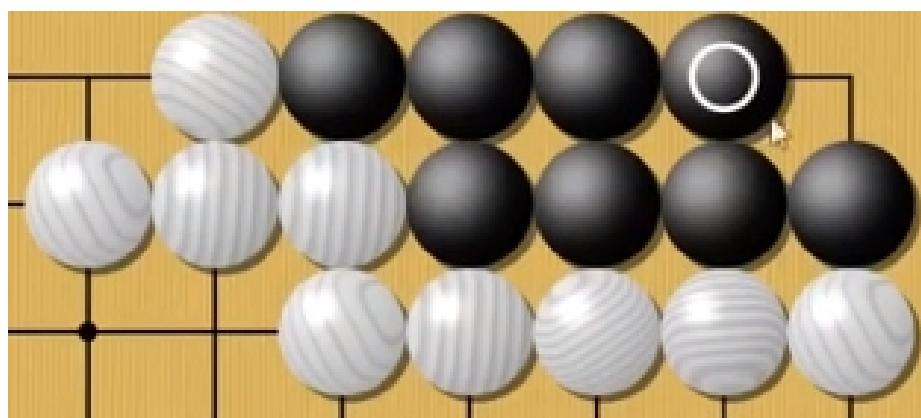
White's new stone makes Black into an Atari. Black responds by defending and filling the left Eye, leaving just one Eye on the right.



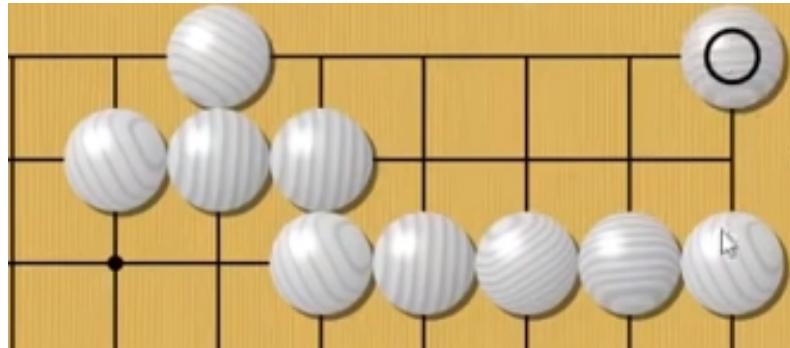
White places a stone in the upper right.



Black takes White's stone because it was denied all its Liberties.



White follows by placing in the upper right in the Eye, therefore taking all of Black's stones for a massive capture.

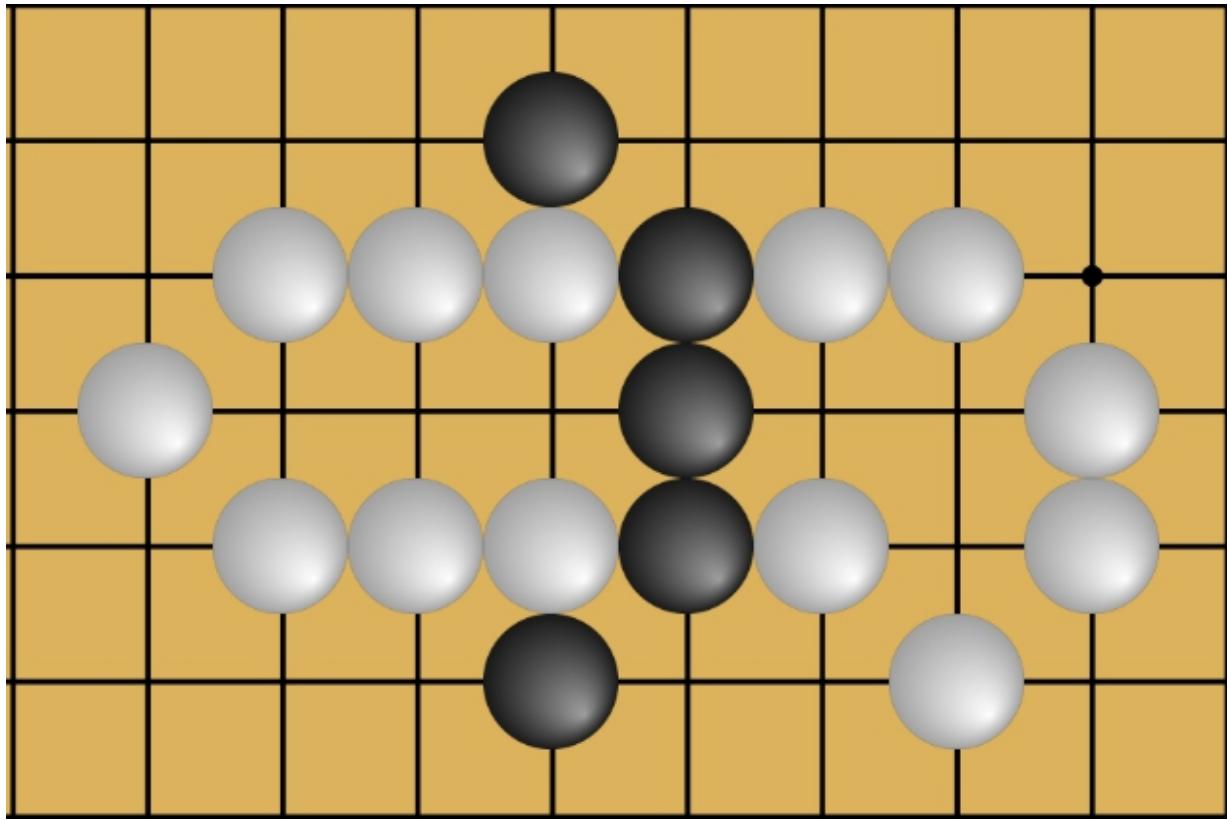


As you can see, sometimes, if an opponent's Eye exists near some of your own stones, some clever play can take out the False Eyes and capture many stones at once.

Cutting

When a player has more than one String of stones on the board that are near each other, they may try and concatenate them to try and wrestle more Territory away from the opponent. This is similar to joining and splitting troops in a war, further lending this game to the military symbolism.

Placing stones between these two Strings, preventing the join, is known as Cutting. Cutting is particularly useful to create False Eyes, capture parts of a String and invade Territory. Consider the example below.



Black has cut the 2 Strings of White, and set up several Ataris to capture White's stones in the left group.

Dividing and conquering by Cutting Strings on the frontlines can help break up an opponent's territories and force them to react in defense. Pressing just enough into the opponent's chains without over-extending becomes the balance one must strike when playing an offensive game.

Balancing Aggression

Go is a game of balance. Every stone placed will either be a defensive or offensive move. That is, the move will be intended to mark off Territory or capture a stone (offensive) or to prevent the opponent from filling Territory or capturing your stones (defensive). It is important not to over-extend either side.

Playing too offensively and leaving yourself open for Cutting or capture is seen as reckless and can quickly lead to a defeat. Likewise, never going to

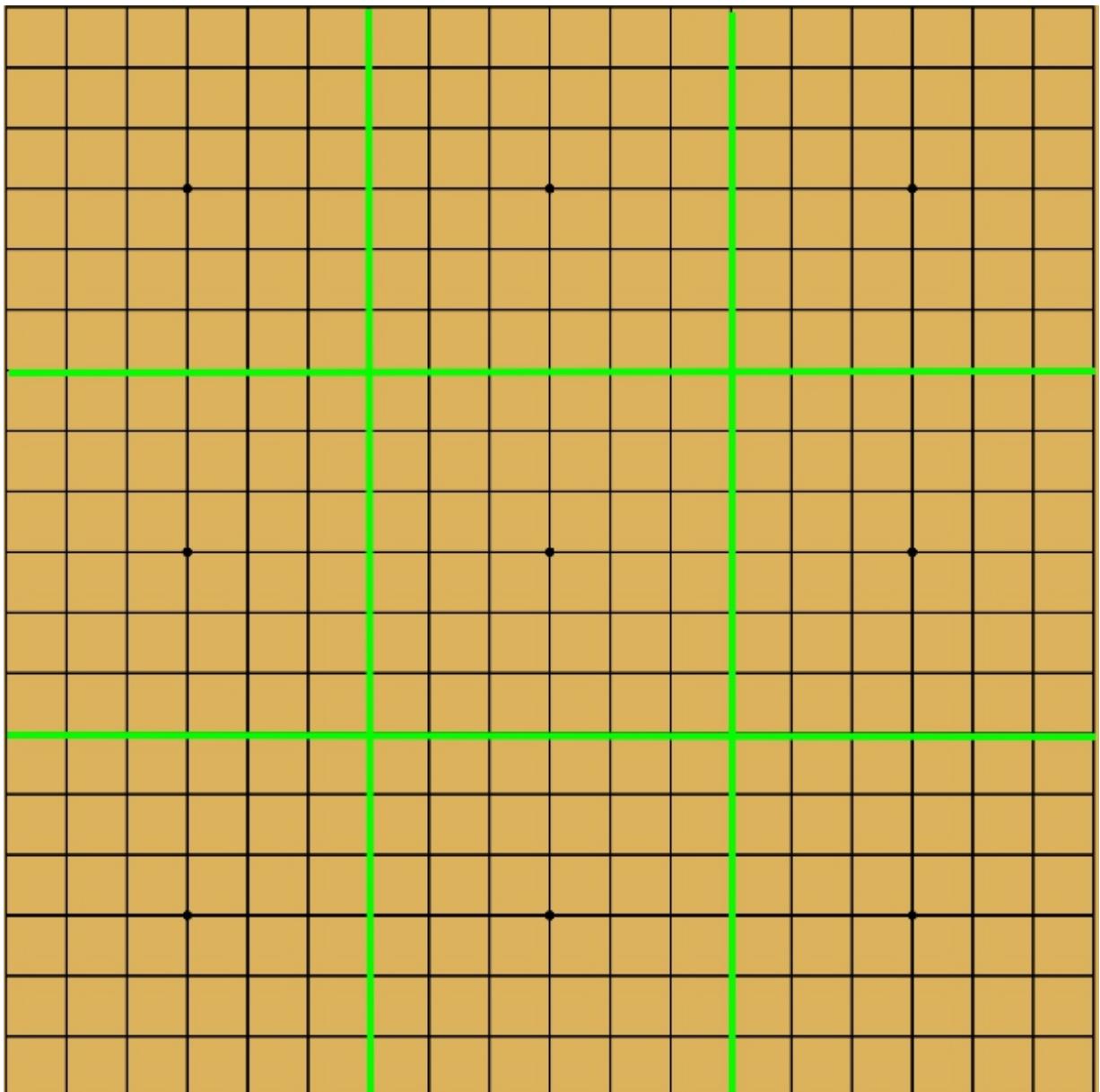
capture or expand your Territory will be met with an overly aggressive player taking all of the available Liberties. One must equally balance both play styles.

Committing Resources

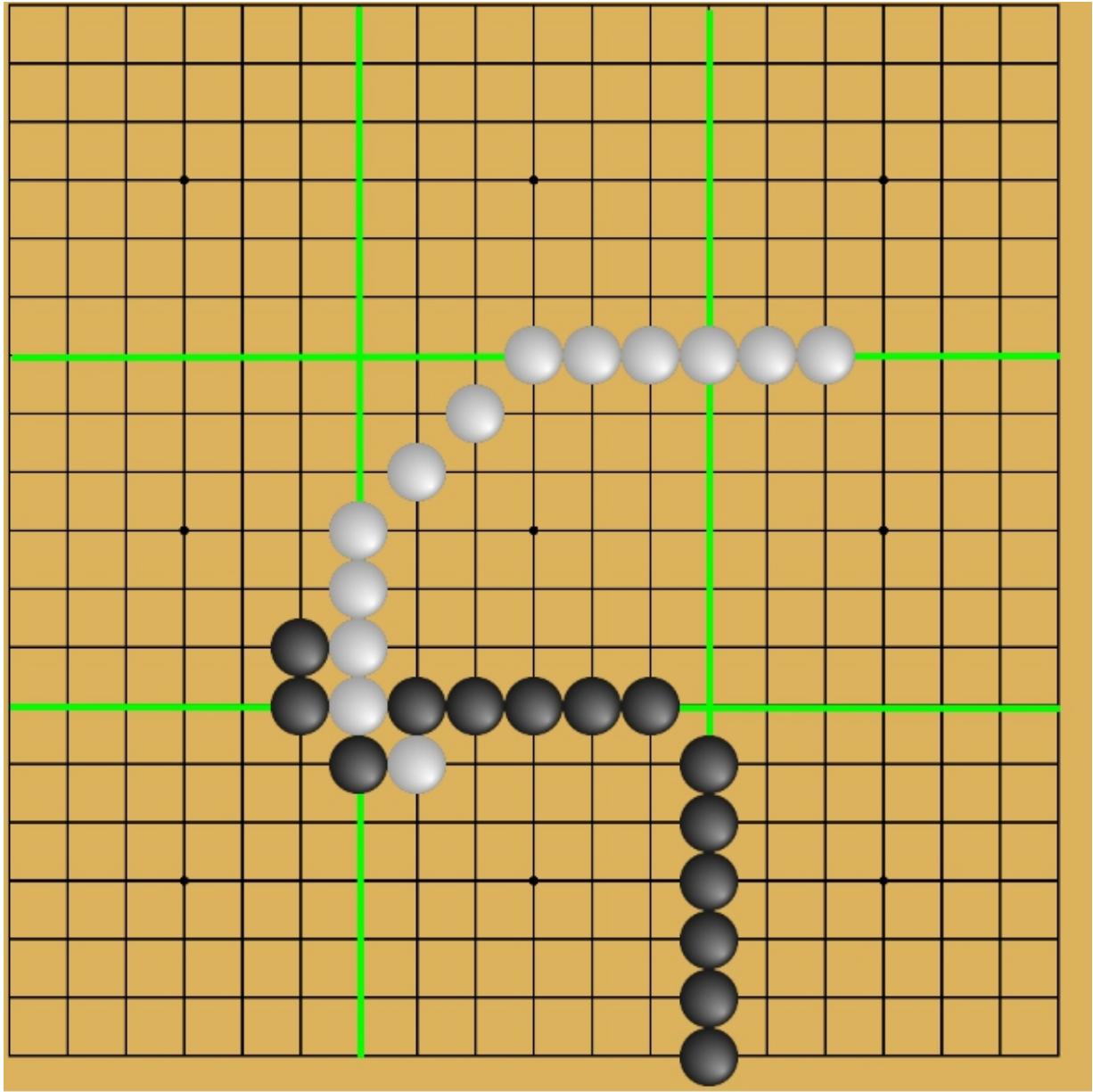
When going on the offensive, one must consider the balance between staking out Territory and capturing the opponent's stones. A solid offense consists of the right balance of these two mechanics. Because of the number of available spaces on the board, it is difficult to capture a perfect winning strategy every time. One must focus on the balance of the moves rather than the individual moves in a vacuum. This is fairly traditional in Eastern games, as they focus on empowerment of the system rather than empowerment of the self—a common component of Western games.

From the beginning of the game, you will be considering Territory, determining where to cut territorial lines and how to effectively use the board's edge. The early game comprises mostly staking claims, Stringing Stones together to form territorial walls, and cutting into your opponent's marks. The idea is like the game Snake or lightcycles in Tron. One must outmaneuver their opponent and cut them off.

It is generally a good idea to commit to the rule of thirds. Imagine the board as a 3x3 grid, with nine available sectors. Take control of one sector with a solid String of Stones, then expand into a neighboring grid.



Rule of thirds divides the board into manageable sectors.



Black has partially surrounded the southern central sector and has started to branch into the southwestern sector in an attempt to slice off more Territory. Black has cut into White's String of stones but must now take care that White doesn't loop around and take the northernmost stones.

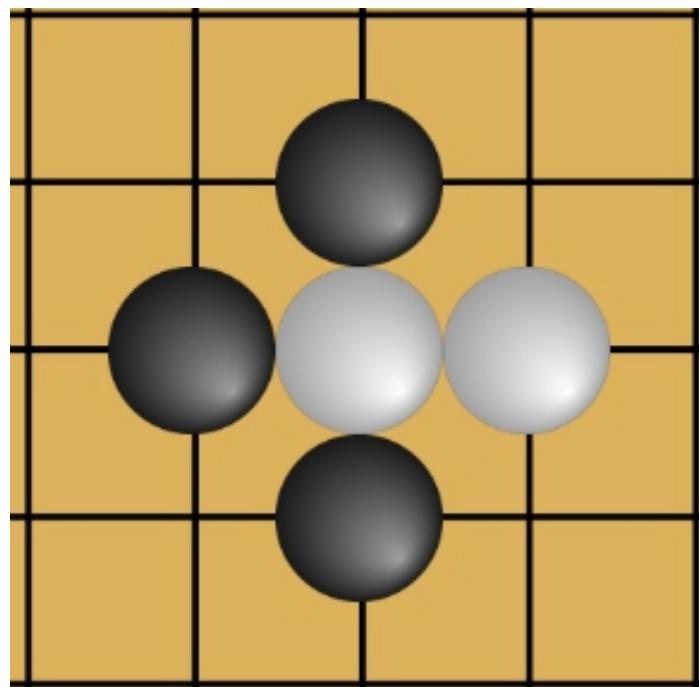
As the game progresses, you will be thinking more about the captures than carving out Territory. Making this transition of strategy is absolutely essential. In the example above, Black will be able to transition from outlining Territory to capturing White's stones that threaten their territorial

expansion. Black should move to cut off White's Liberties in the southernmost end.

Ladder

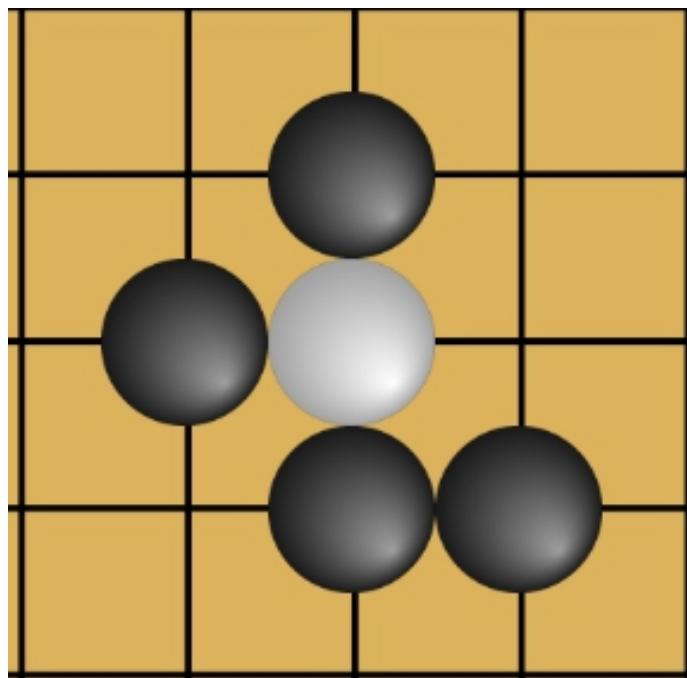
The Ladder is one of the most commonly used techniques to capture stones. Imagine that there is a lone White stone in the middle of the board somewhere. On three sides, above, to the left, and below, you've surrounded it. The stone has a single Liberty left, which means it is in imminent danger of capture. The White player now has two options. If they have another move that will be more valuable and give more points, they can choose to sacrifice the stone. The other option is to try and save the stone.

If the White player was to play a stone to the right of the original, it would save it, and it would now have 3 Liberties for this chain of 2 stones. To surround this second stone, Black must now play 3 more stones, and additionally catch a group of 2 and is now easily guarded against that. Black is at a loss, and since Black is going to lose a lot of stones for such a small gain, there's not much point in pursuing this seizure. Now how can Black counter this?



*White was nearly captured but escaped creating 3 Liberties on the right.
How will Black catch this chain?*

What Black can do is create a place where the White's piece or pieces can be captured by the formation of a "Ladder." Imagine the original location, surrounded by Black stones on 3 sides, with a lone White stone. Black has had time to better set up their place in this situation, and there is an additional Black stone in play. Another Black stone is to the right of the lower Black stone. White only has only 1 Liberty and is in danger of being captured on the next move.

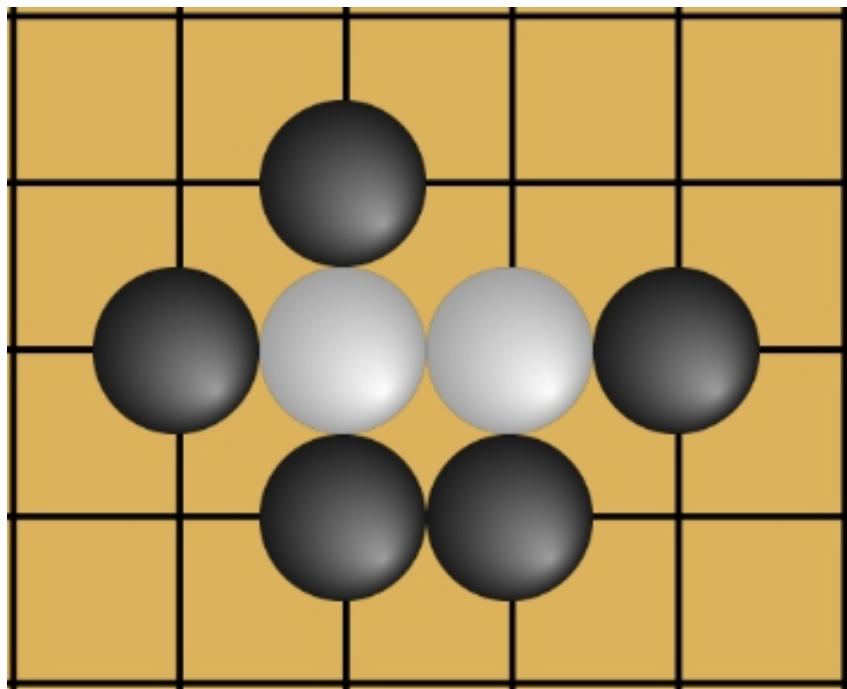


Black sets up for the Ladder by blocking off a Liberty, which otherwise, White would have taken by recovering to the right.

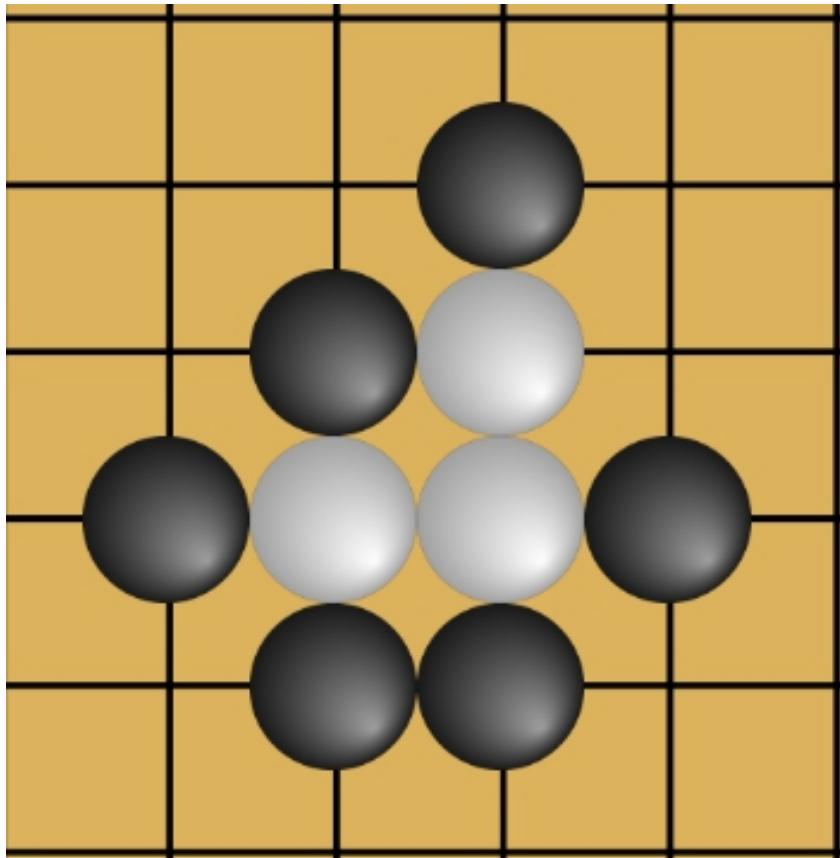
If White wants to avoid capture, then they will play a stone to the right of the original, creating a group of two, but this time, it only has 2 Liberties since Black has set up their position in anticipation for this move. Black can now play a stone to the right of the second White stone. The group of two is reduced to 1 Liberty and is in threat of capture again. If they do not want to be captured, then they need to play a third White stone on this Liberty to prevent this. Because of the position of Black's stones, the group of three

will have 2 Liberties, and Black can play another stone above the third stone, to cut the number of Liberties to 2 only.

If White wishes to escape, then they can play a stone to the right of the original, making a group of 2 stones. However, since Black has set up their position for this to happen, this time White only has 2 Liberties. Now Black can play a stone on the right side of the 2nd White stone. The chain of two is reduced to 1 Liberty and is once more in danger of capture. Once again, to avoid capture, they need to play a 3rd White stone on this Liberty. The chain of three will have 2 Liberties because of the location of Black's stones, and Black will play another stone, above the 3rd stone, to cut the Liberties down to 2 only.



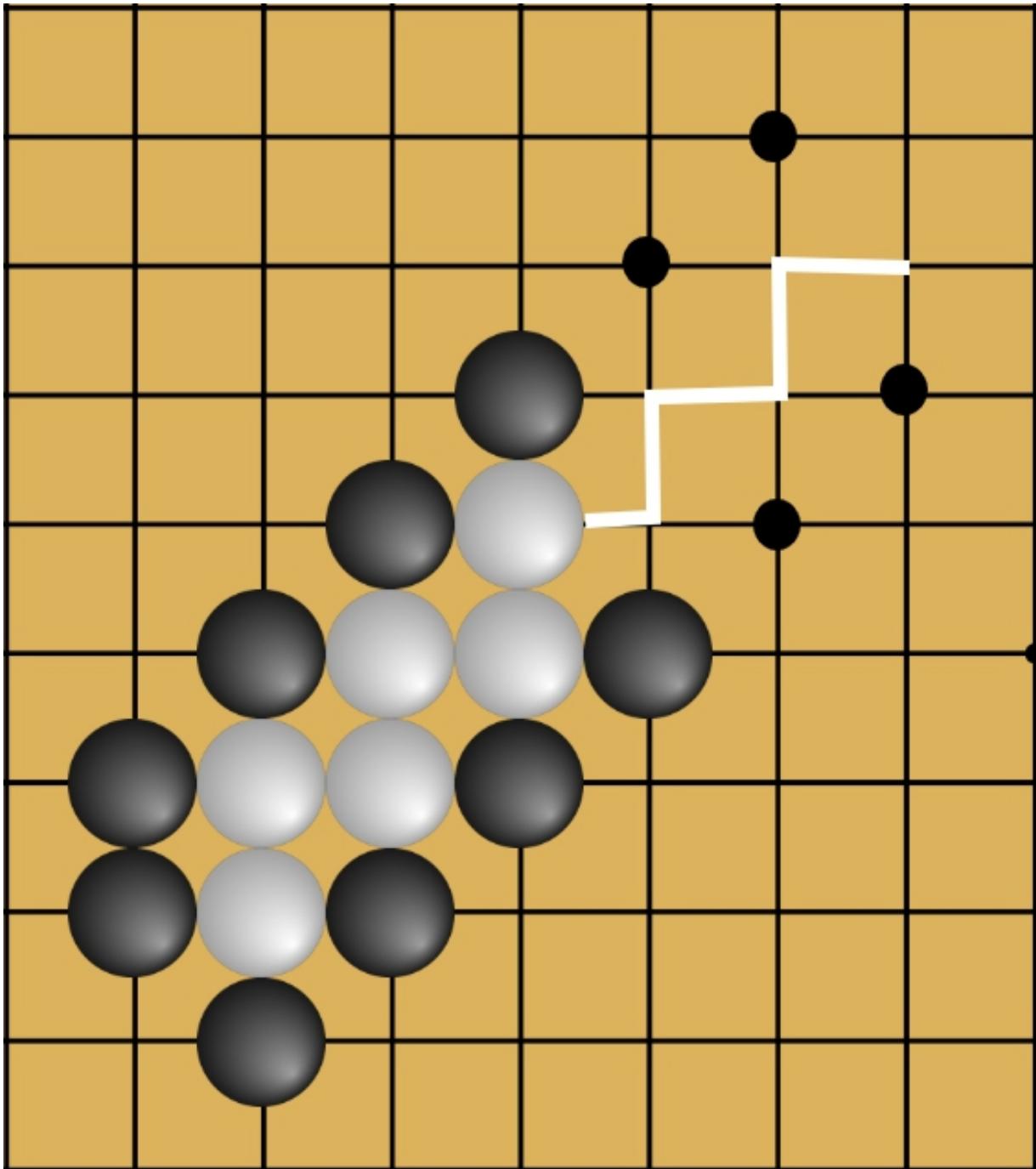
White attempts to escape to the right, but Black counters with a wall, forcing White upwards.



White escapes upwards, but Black blocks it, forcing White to escape to the right during the next move.

Suppose White repeatedly attempts to save this group. In that case, it will inevitably be pursued to a board edge where Black can use the edge to surround the group. Skilled players will always be looking for ways to take advantage of the position and build a Ladder to trap a fairly large group. Likewise, a good player will also be on the lookout to defend against an opponent's Ladders.

Sacrificing a single piece is always better than falling for the chase. The more stones you throw away and sink into the Ladder, the less you will have for other strategic moves on the board.



Example of a Ladder. White can continue to climb upward to save its stones, but Black can retaliate by forming an outer barrier called a Ladder.

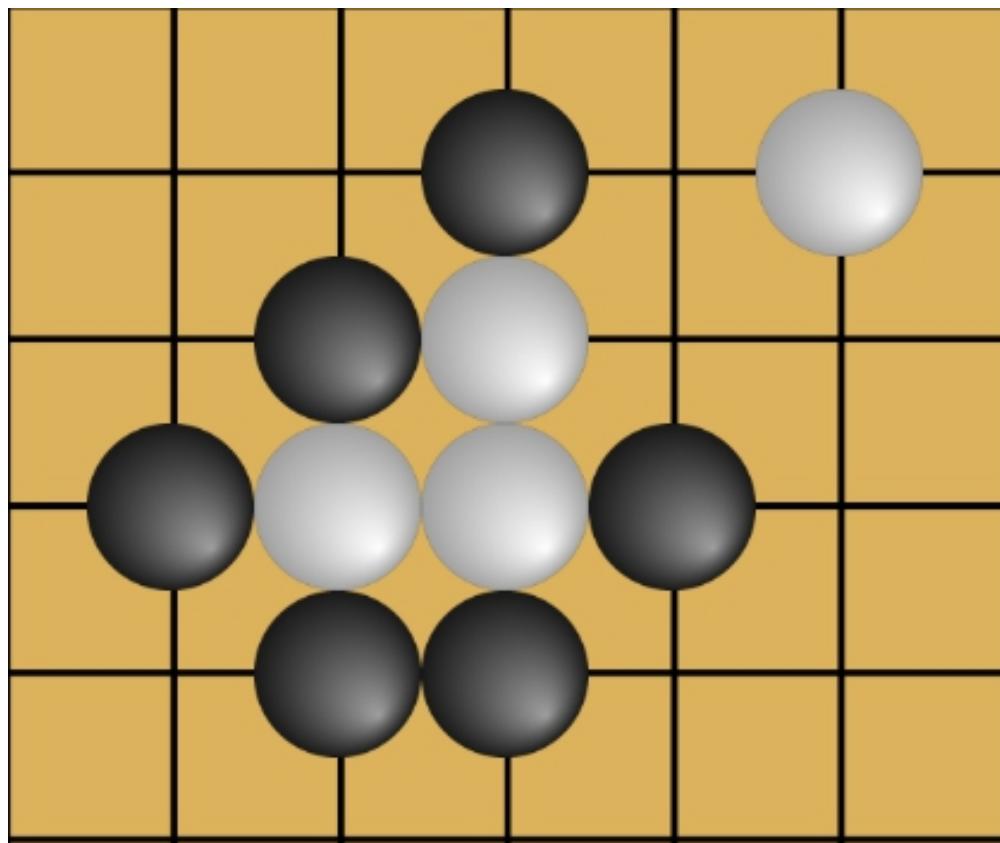
There is a way to stop a Ladder from trapping your pieces, and that is by setting up an interrupt. If you can force a position where your opponent may be trying to create a situation where they are going to trap you with a

Ladder, then look at the board and the path the Ladder will take. If the path is clear, then there is a danger of you being chased to the edge of the board.

There is a way to keep your stones from being entangled by a Ladder with the help of setting up a break. If you can force a situation where your opponent will try to establish a Ladder to trap you, then you can look at the board and observe the direction that the Ladder will take. If it is open, then there is a danger that you will be chased to the edge of the board and lose stones.

To stop an opponent from capturing you this way, you can play a stone in the path of the Ladder. If your opponent begins to chase you with a Ladder, your group will eventually join up with this piece and you will add Liberties to your chain or blocking where your opponent can form the Ladder.

Remember, a group with more Liberties is harder to capture and easy to protect. It is smarter to place a stone closer to the Ladder's start than further away to interrupt it sooner.

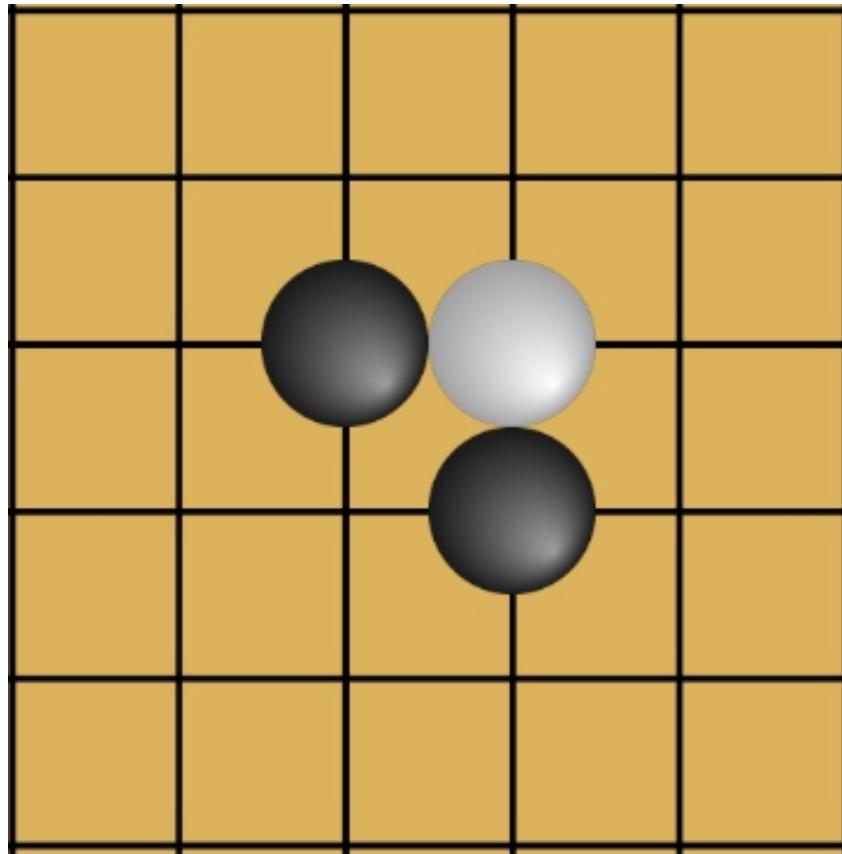


White places a defensive stone in the path of the Ladder to prevent Black from carrying this group all the way to the edge. Now White will have additional Liberties and can stop Black's Ladder when it reaches the defensive White stone.

Net

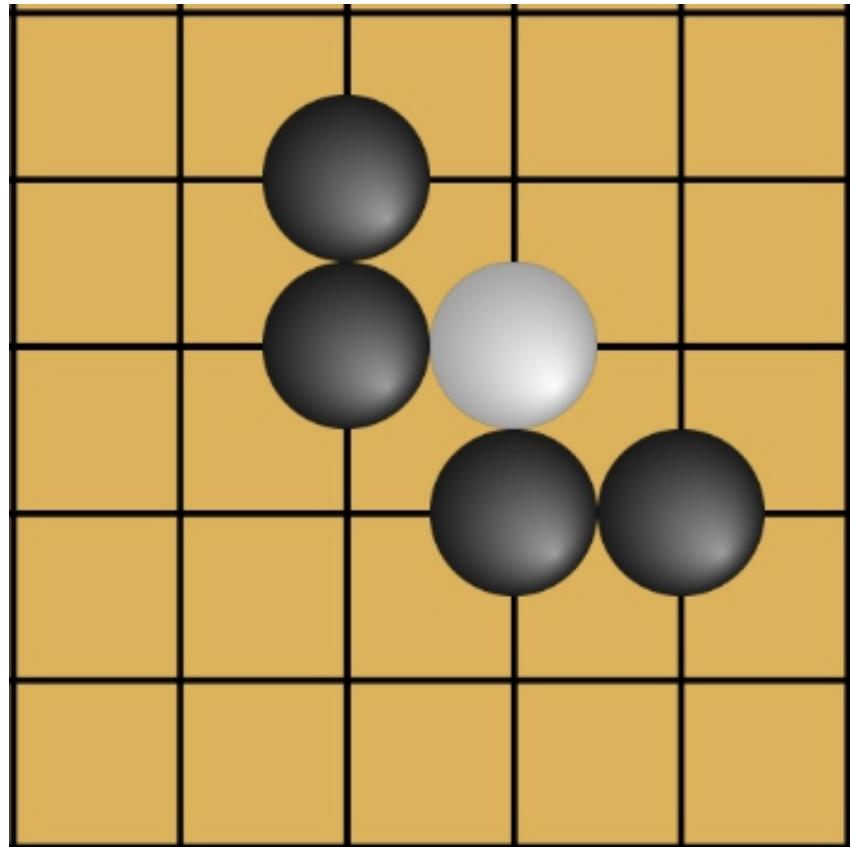
You should try using a Net in circumstances where a Ladder cannot be formed to capture your opponent's stones. Look for positions where a Net would be useful on the board. You will not only acquire prisoners by capturing opponent pieces, but you will also win territories and earn points for both.

Let's consider this example where you are playing as Black. Your opponent in this situation has a single stone on the board. You have 2 stones surrounding this White stone: one below and one to the left of it. The White stone is not in Atari, as it has 2 Liberties and cannot be captured with a single move from Black.



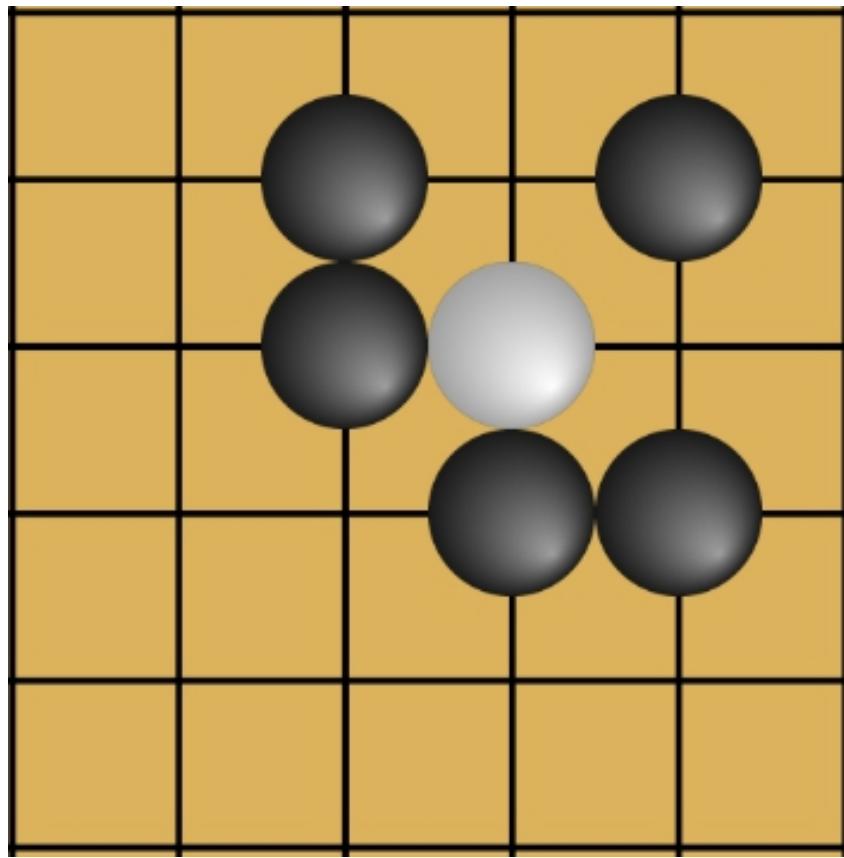
Black has stones below and to the right of White. White is still safe from capture.

Now, let's say you have 2 more pieces in this case. One is above the leftmost stone, and the other is to the right of the bottom stone. These extra pieces do not surround White's lone stone, but they are vital to constructing a Net that will be used to capture your opponent's String of stones and to secure that Territory for your own. The White stone still has Liberties above and to the right, so it can easily escape from your stones. Soon we can play the final piece of the Net, which will seal White's fate.



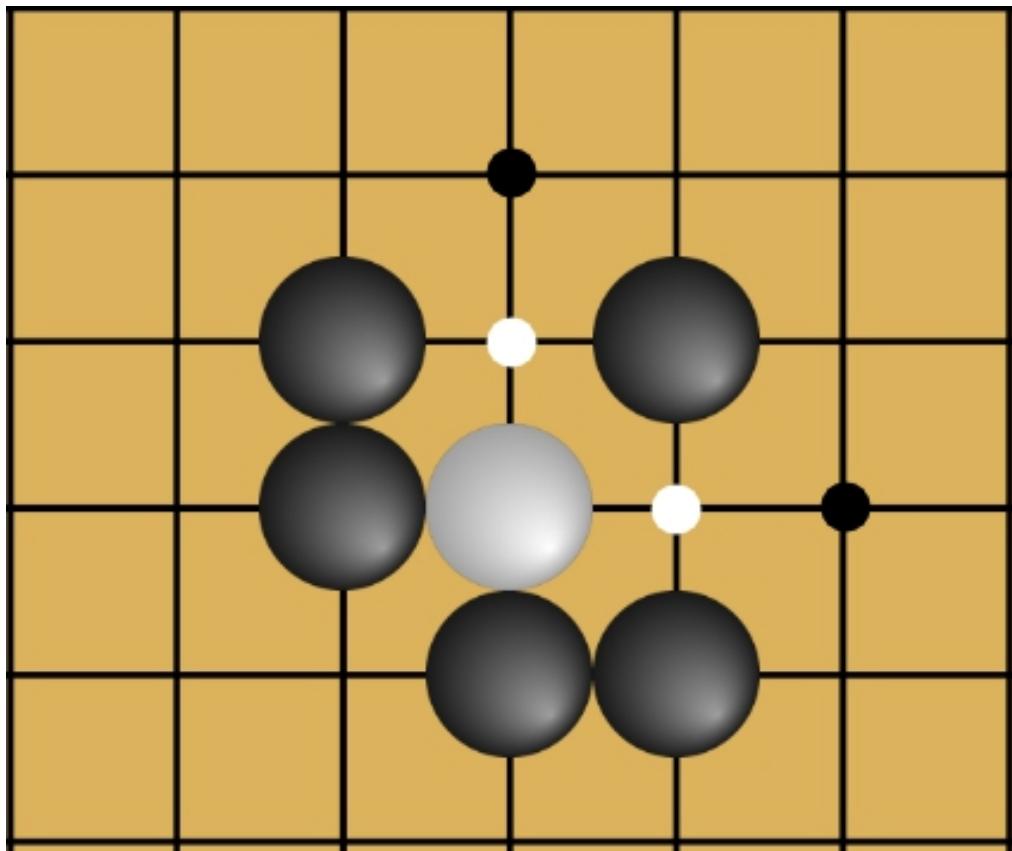
The Net is further constructed by Black, who plans to trap White. White still has 2 Liberties and can escape upward or to the right.

The next piece you can play as Black is diagonal to the lone White stone. It will be located above and to the right of White's stone. Again, this stone is not sitting next to it. Moreover, the Liberties of the White stone are not reduced but are now stuck nonetheless.



The Net has been completed, and White will be unable to continue the chain more than 2 Liberties, provided above and to the right of its original placement.

If the White player plays above its original stone, then this new stone has only 1 Liberty and can be cut off in a single move from Black. Likewise, if White plays a stone to the right of the original stone, the new site would have only 1 Liberty and be stuck in one move from Black as well.



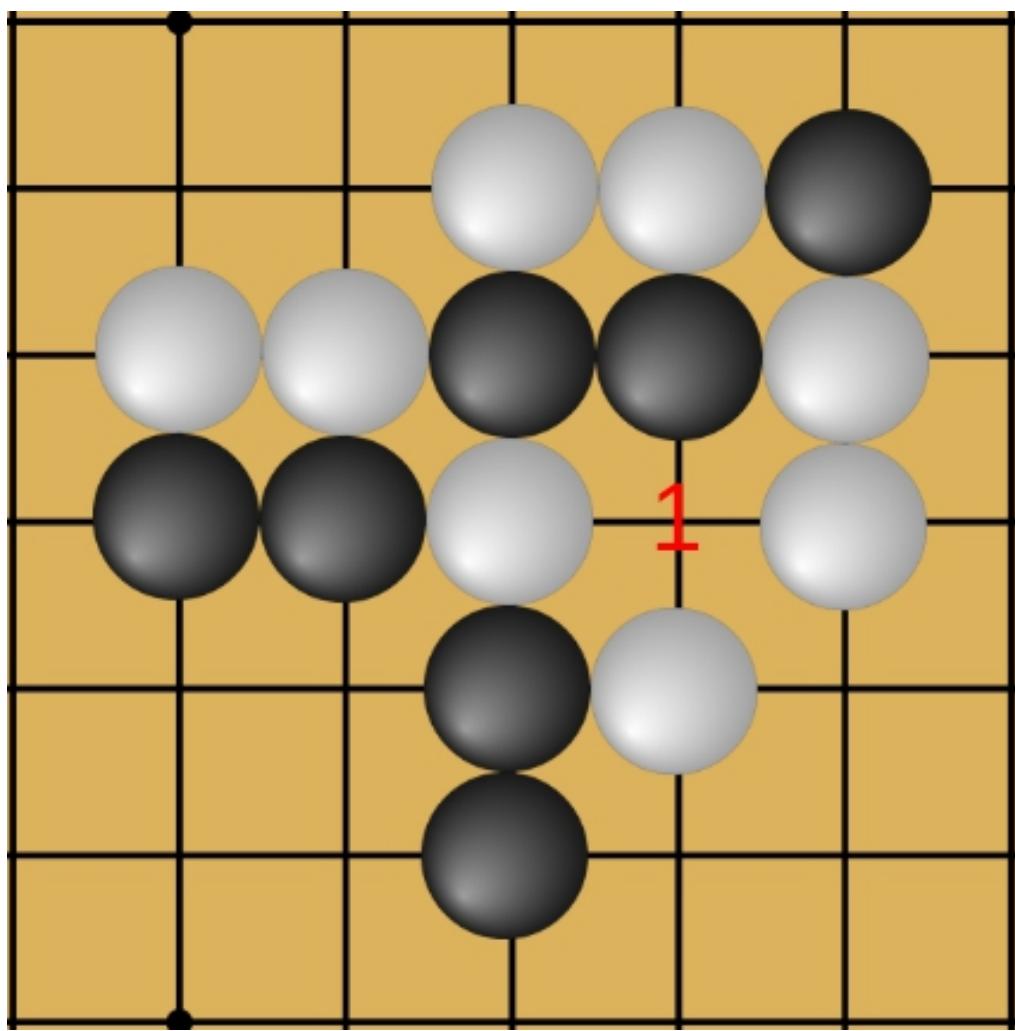
If White proceeds above or to the right, Black can intercept and close the Net, capturing all of White's stones.

Look for naturally interconnected positions on the board that are formed from the barriers created by chains of stones. The best thing about these Nets is that to capture your opponent, you can instantly play stones, or you can wait for your opponent to play extra stones and then trap them too. You can monitor those groupings and capture them before you run out of stones yourself. That is where the real skill comes into play; remembering all of the gambits you have staged during the course of the match and then cashing in on them to ensure your staged stones are not wasted.

Throughout your game, continue to track the board and attempt to identify natural patterns and positions that you can use to your advantage. To capture them, you can always just surround a stone or group of stones, but if you can use the Ladder or Net, then you will have an easier time capturing stones.

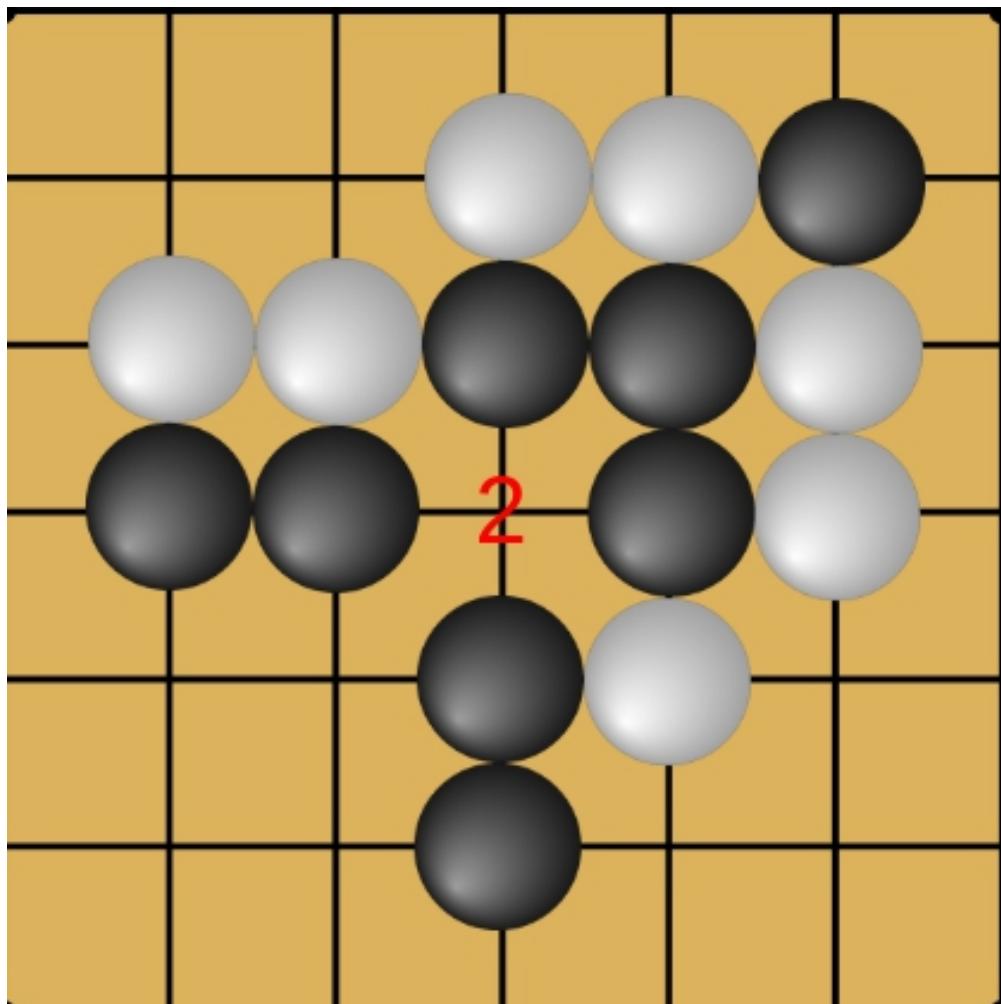
Snapback

While there are many strategies that exist for capturing stones, you should always be cognizant of the position of stones after they are captured and how the board will look later on. This largely depends on the shape your stones create on the board. Perhaps it will not be such a good idea to capture stones just yet, as your opponent could potentially recapture those stones, creating an even bigger Territory or capture. This is called a Snapback. Let's consider an example below.

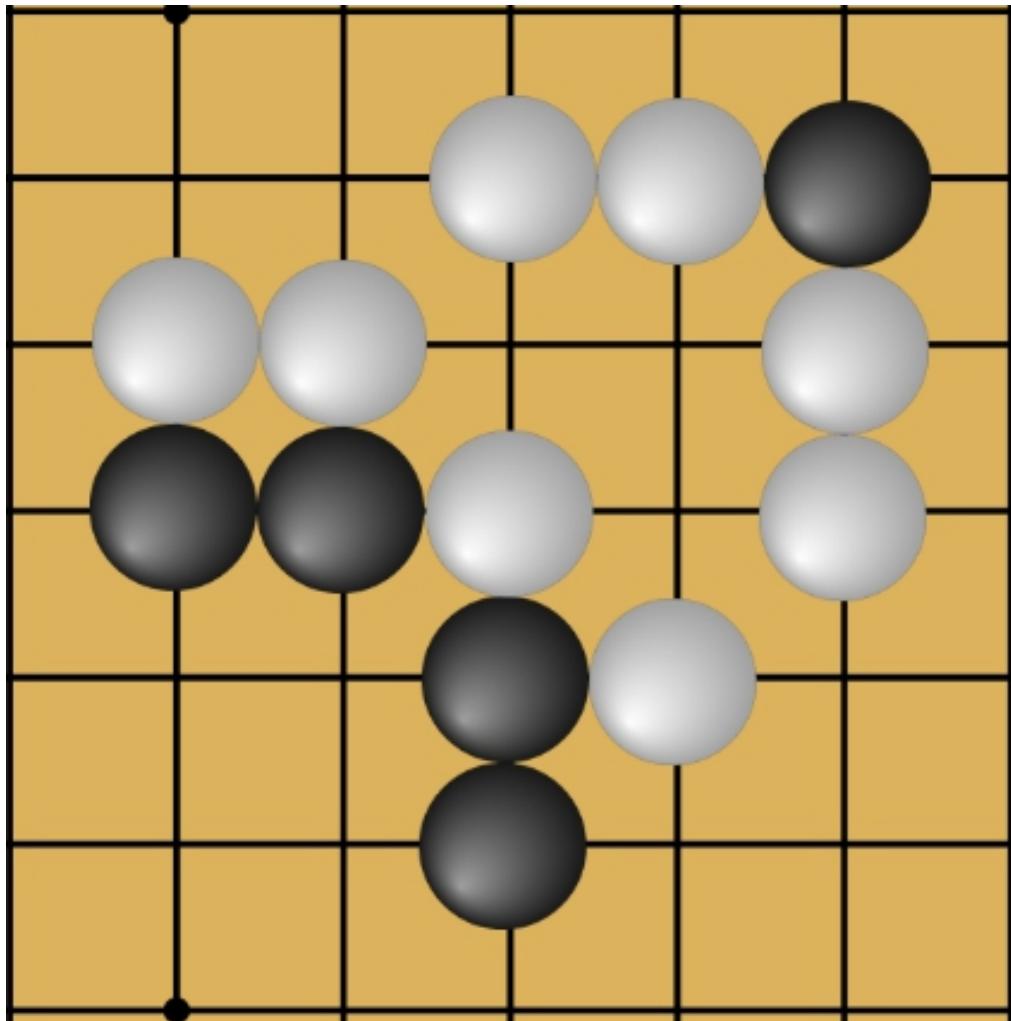


There's a complicated fight going on in this Territory where White and Black are fairly well intertwined. It is now Black's move. Black spots a

single stone capture and decides to play at (1), taking the White's stone to the left.



Black, feeling confident with their capture, has overlooked White's newly available Snapback. White plays at (2).



This does not invalidate the Ko Rule, as this is a much grander capture. The board shape will have changed outside of what was shown in the previous move. Therefore, the Ko Rule is respected.

Be on the lookout for potential Snapbacks. Sometimes it is worth sacrificing a single stone to bait your opponent into a small capture so you can close the trap and play a Snapback.

Shape

The position of your stones on the board is essential, but what is more important is your strategic shape, meaning the relational distance and pattern of your stones laid on the board. If your stones are in a poor

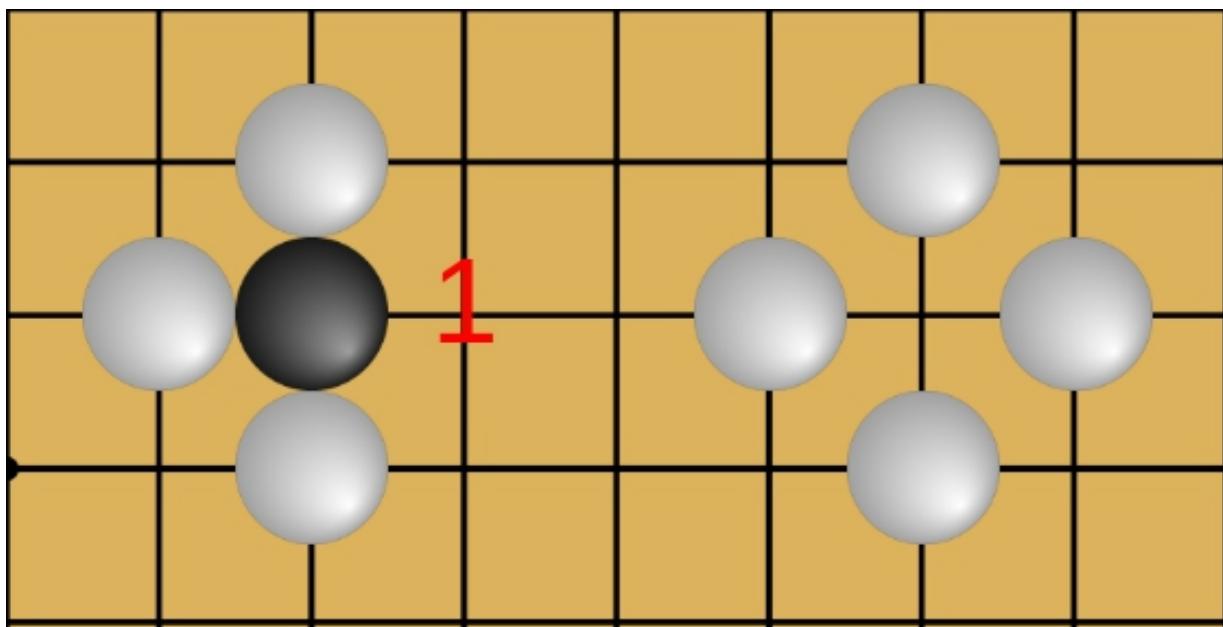
position, then they can become vulnerable to capture or cutting.

Alternatively, suppose your stones are positioned well. In that case, they can be valuable tools for overtaking Territory or used as control points to defend your Territory.

Most of the times, a shape can use an edge of the board as valuable sides of a strategic shape. Skilled players will use these edges to construct their shapes quickly, with corners being even more valuable for providing two perpendicular edges.

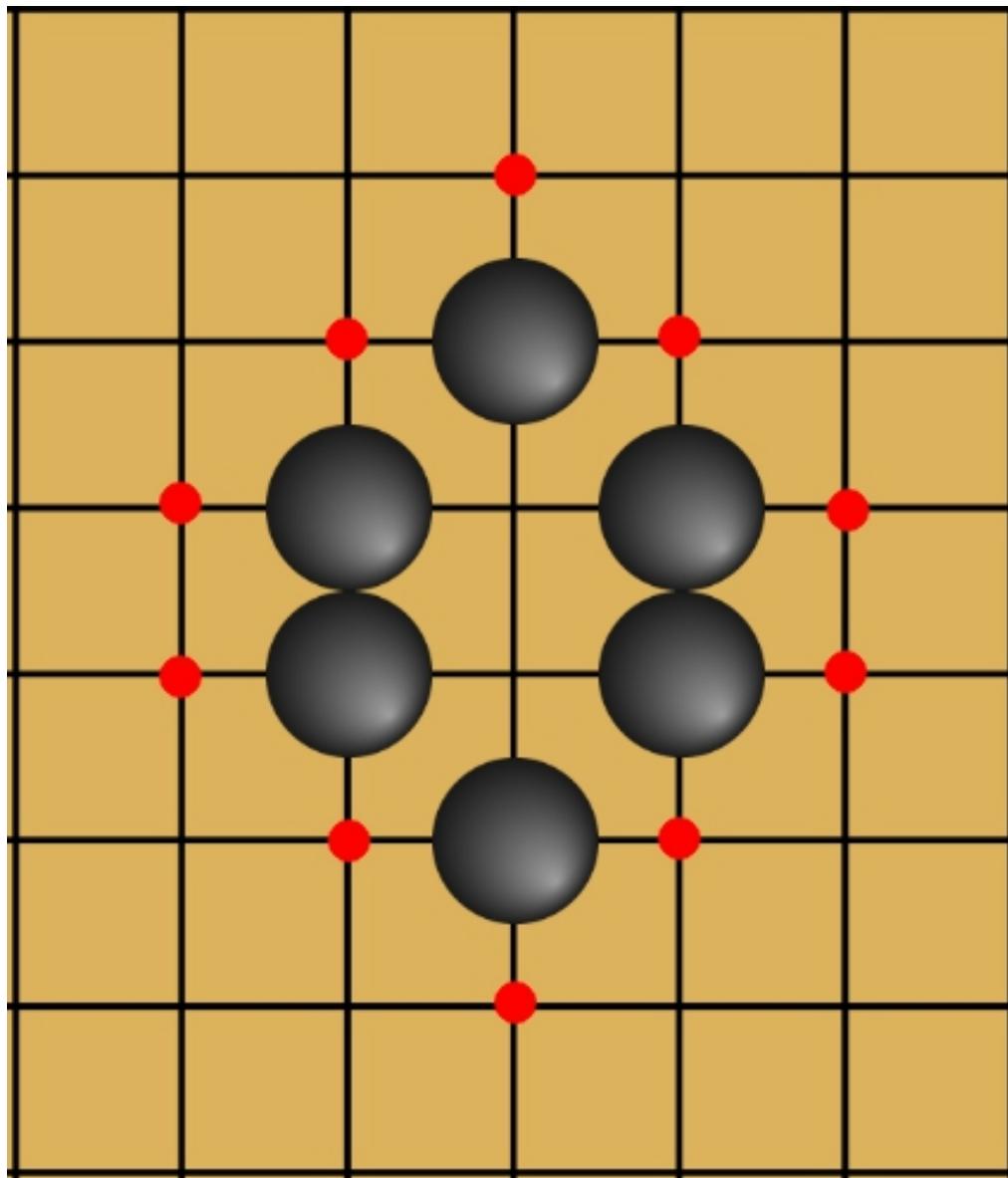
Ponnuki & Tortoise Shell

When playing Go, through the course of capturing stones, one might or unintentionally create a diamond pattern called a Ponnuki. This diamond shape is made up of 4 neighboring Intersections at each point of the compass surrounding a vacant central Intersection. An example of a Ponnuki is shown below.



If White plays at (1), they would capture the Black stone and create a Ponnuki. A Ponnuki forms 8 potential points of growth.

Tortoise shells are practically double the Territory. They are harder to form (more stones needed), but they provide much more flexibility in terms of controlling Territory. They are created by merging 2 Ponnukis together without the joining wall's stones.



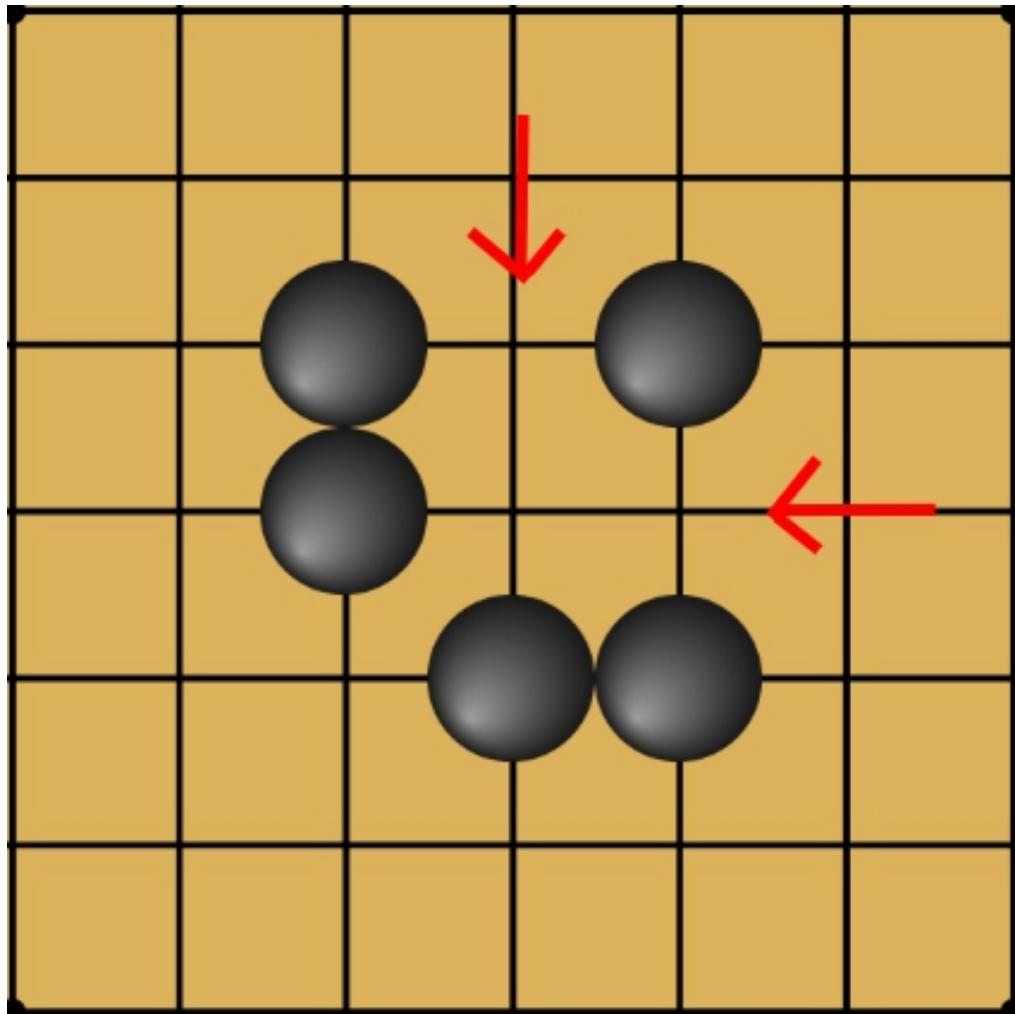
Black has formed a Tortoise Shell, granting 10 potential growth points to form Strings off of the controlled zone. Any White stone placed inside the Tortoise Shell would be illegal because of the self-capture rule. Therefore, this formation is very strong to establish control.

There's an old Go adage that states, "a Ponnuki is worth 30 points, but a Tortoise Shell is worth 60." The reason for this is both the Ponnuki and Tortoise Shell provide a territorial node where the controlling player can expand in any direction without the fear of being captured. The Self-capture Rule prevents the opposing player from dismantling the secured position.

The only thing the controlling player would need to look out for is surrounding Strings that could uproot the Ponnuki or Tortoise Shell String. However, adding in a couple of Eyes will prevent the capture and lock the position down for the rest of the game.

Mouth and Choke Point

If you think back to the Net section, you will undoubtedly recall the 5 stones required to make the Net.



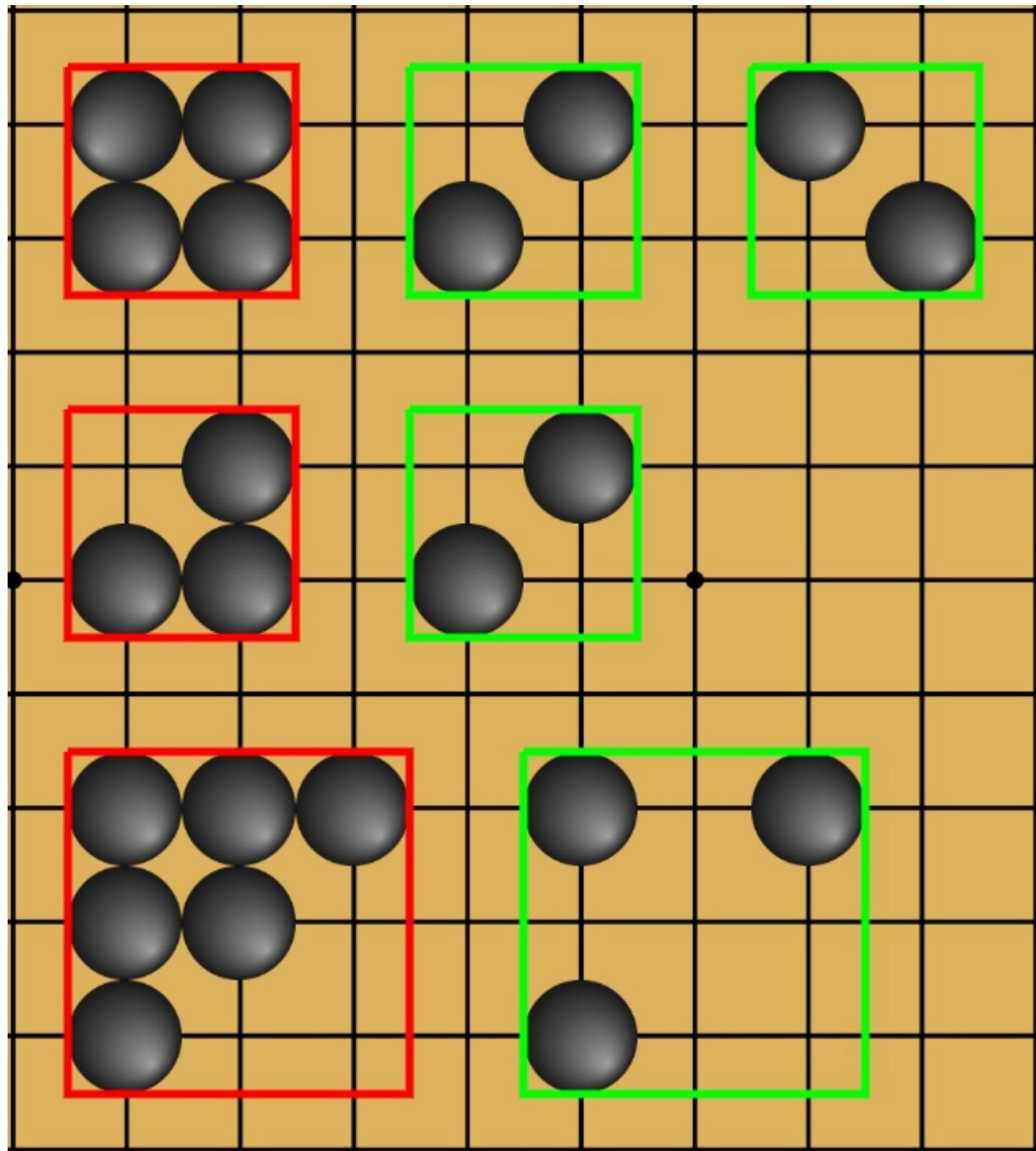
These two entrances marked by the red arrows in the diagram above outline the mouths of the Net. The stone that separates the two entrances in this example is called the Choke Point.

When looking for Nets on the board, it is easy to look for the combination of these two landmarks being close to each other. Generally, if they exist and there's a backing of stones on the opposite wall of the mouth, you may have a Net on your hands. However, if you are smart, you can spot this Net and begin plans on a Snapback. Be careful not to reveal your plan to your opponent though!

Bad Shapes

When placing stones, it is important to manage the shapes you create. Since your stones are limited in number, you will need to place them carefully and surgically carry out your tactics. Recall that these stones do not move once placed, so it is vital that players think about the shapes they are making before they place them. Otherwise, they will just be wasting stones and moves.

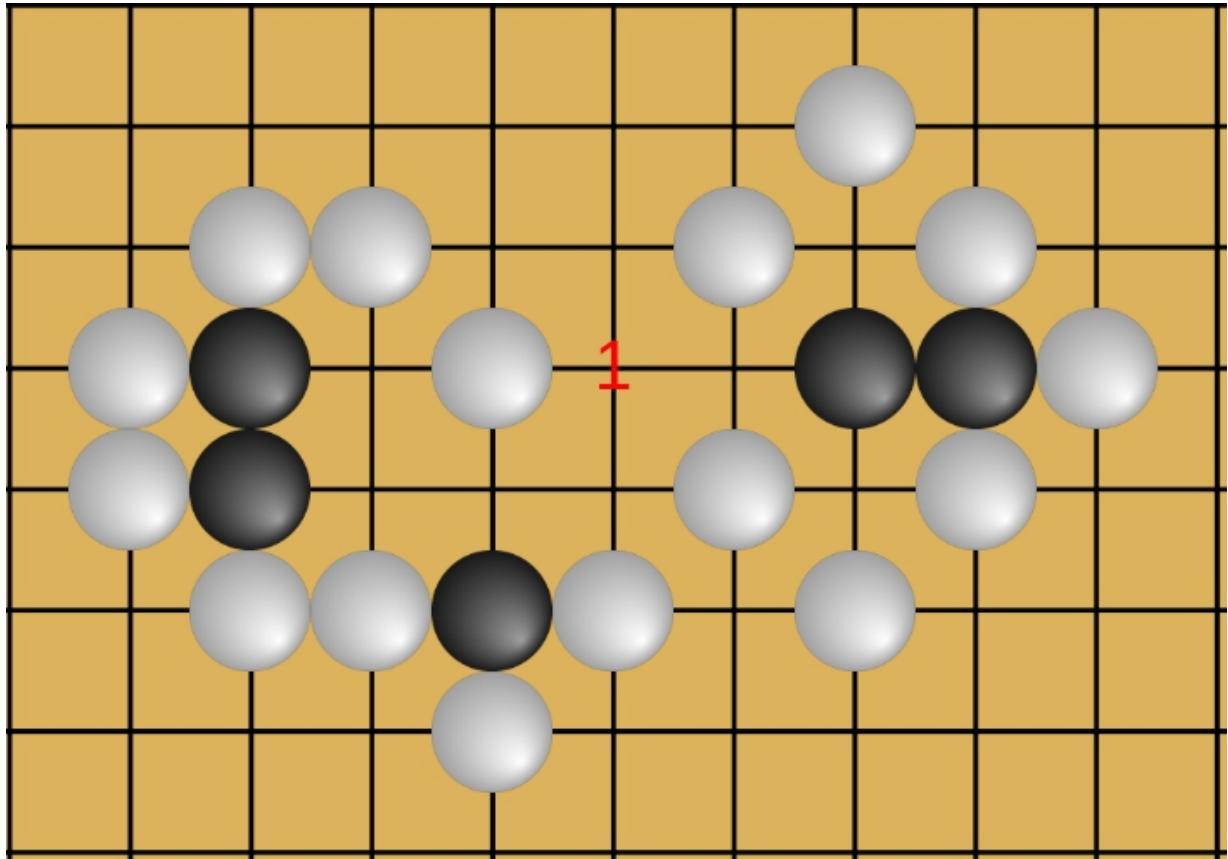
Carefully consider avoiding "bad shapes" or even stones that have been placed but not required. Consider the stone patterns which follow.



The patterns outlined in red contain stones that are not necessary for carving out Territory or defending capture. Their counterparts to the right of each red figure show how to efficiently mark Territory with fewer stones. Empty triangles, squares, and filled in polygons (called dumplings) are prone to capture and waste stones.

Connections

As the saying goes, there is strength in numbers. The game of Go is no different. Part of the defensive strategy tool kit is to establish connections between your various chains. By linking the chains together, you can create a larger Territory that will make capture more difficult for your opponent.



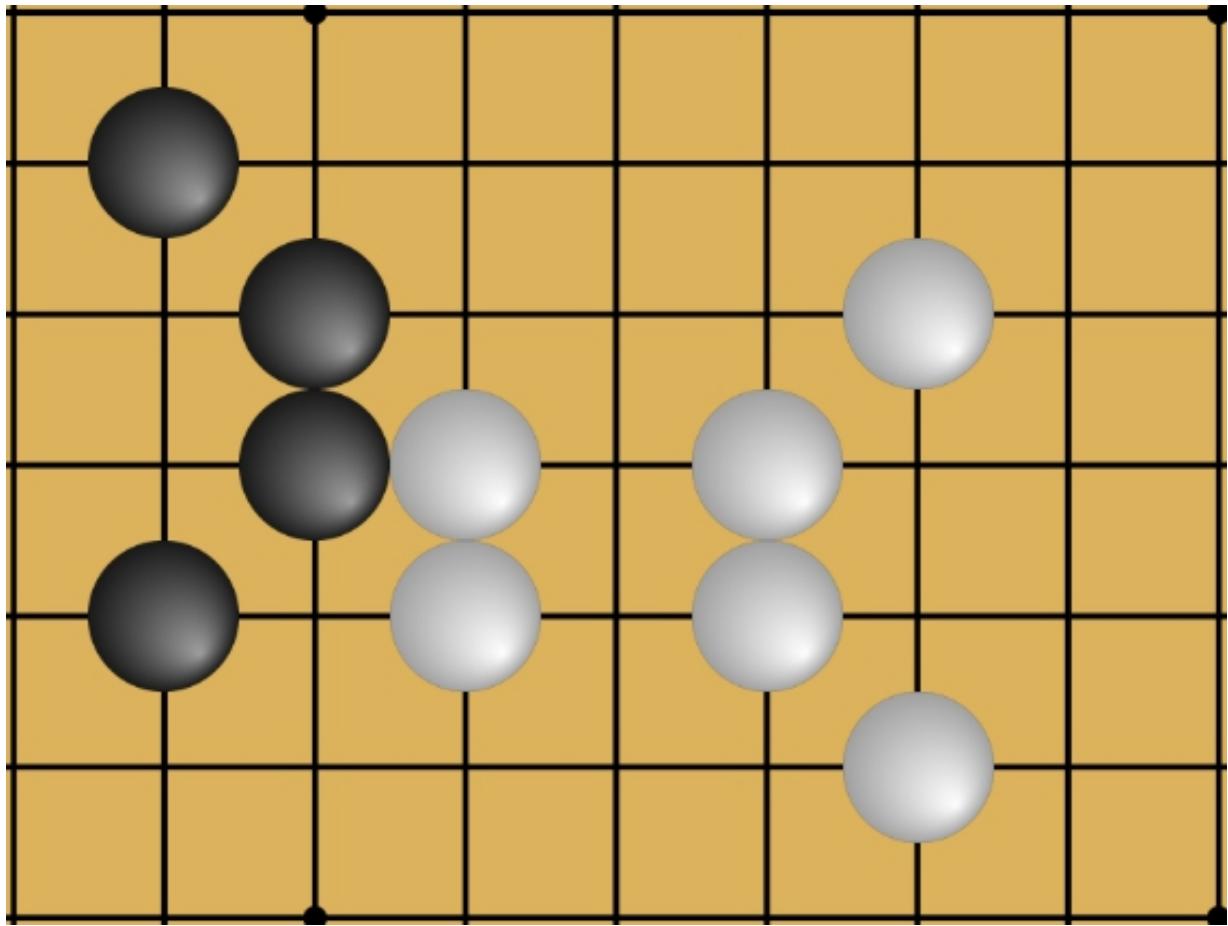
White can play at (1), closing the loop on two territories and linking them together. Then they can deny the Liberties for Black's stones and capture them or leave them for Dead Stone removal.

The chain of White stones at the bottom of the above figure is called a Double Turn. Essentially, it is a diagonal line meant to traverse the board quickly but is prone to Cutting. It is generally meant as a defensive back-line strategy, as using it as an offensive tactic will frequently be subject to counters or invasion.

In the above image, any of the two stone-lines, either vertical or horizontal, can be called Pole Connections. These are slower to cover the board but allow for better solidarity and influence over the controlled Territory. These can and should be, used for an offense to wall off territories on the front lines of fights.

You can link Strings together by placing stones that physically connect them, but that can take a lot of stones and time, especially if the groups are spread out. Instead of physically linking them, you can soft-link groups, meaning you can place smaller groups of stones near them as outposts to have a place where stones can retreat if they are under aggression from the opponent.

One example of a soft-link is a formation called a Bamboo Joint. It is a set of parallel poles one step away that allows a connection with a single move in case more Liberties are needed to avoid capture. Bamboo Joints are basically a one-point jump that can be used as a contingency plan if an invasion happens. A diagram of this formation is shown below.

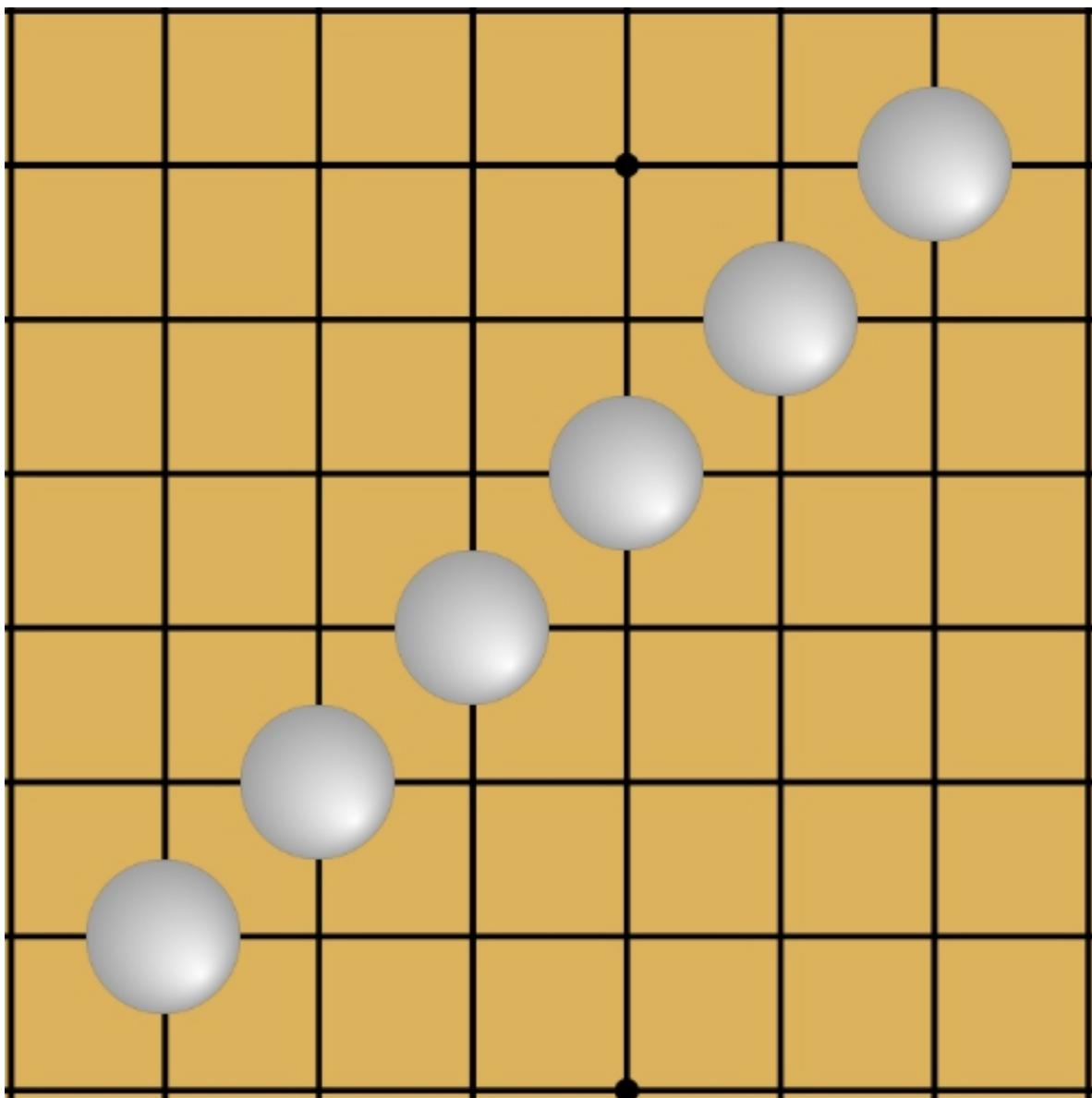


White has created a Bamboo Joint, where on the right is one of their chains. One space away is another vertical wall they can connect and add more Liberties in case Black invades from left to right.

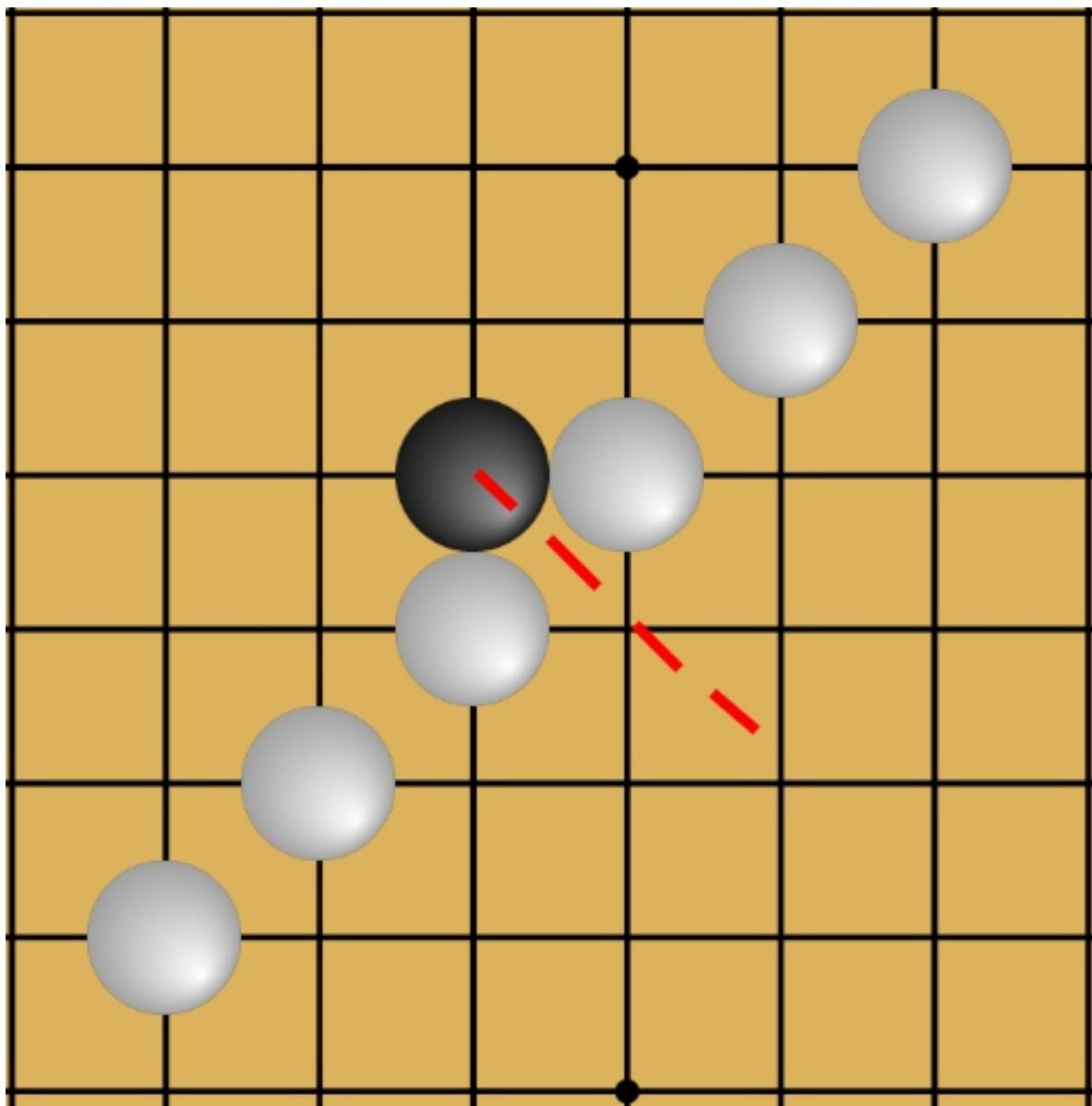
Stretching with Diagonals

When you need to cover a lot of ground on the board to make connections, you might consider stretching by using diagonals. This was mentioned in the previous section when discussing double turns and the fragility of being exposed to Cutting. However, this can be used to your advantage.

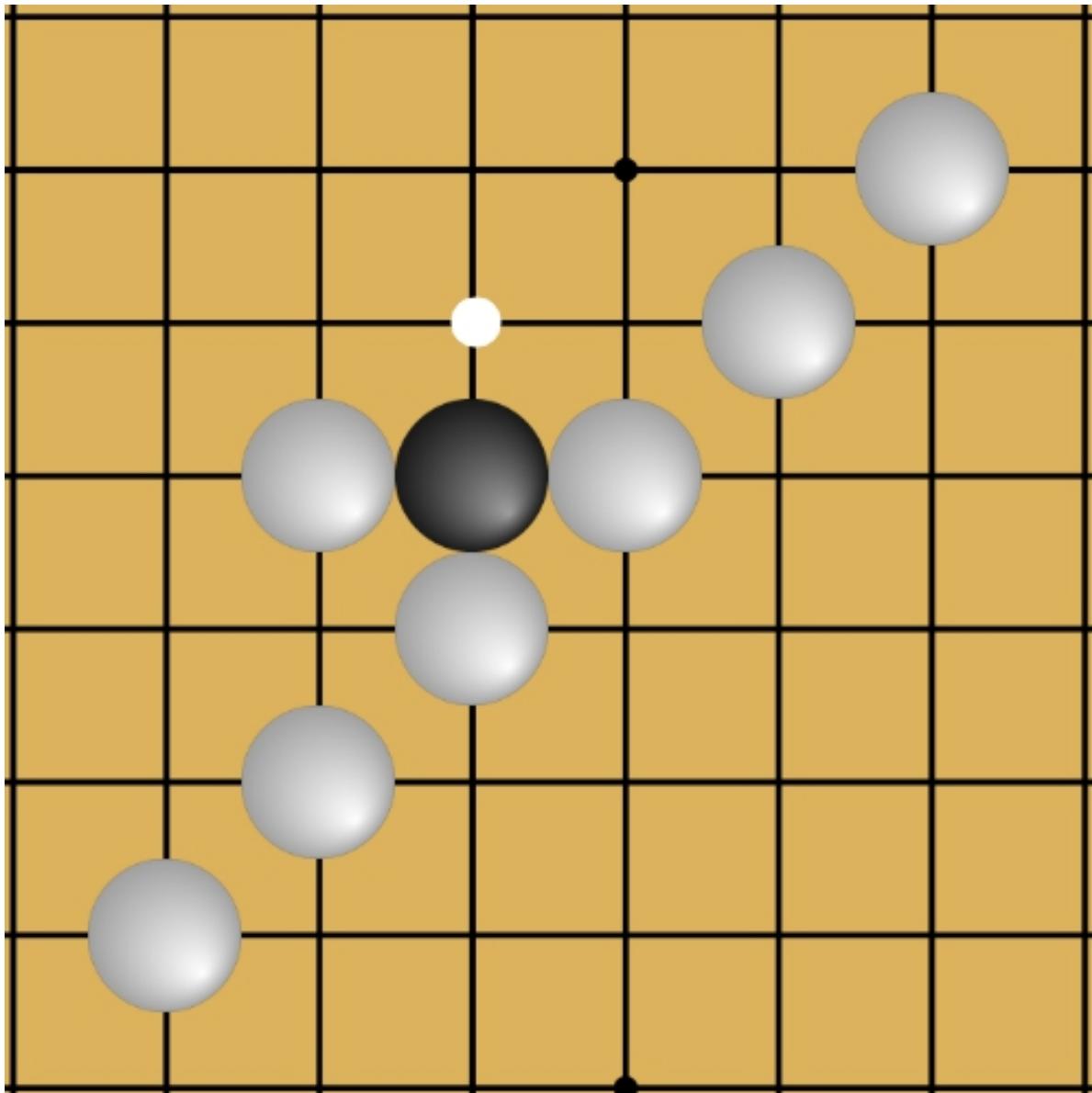
A skilled opponent will note that a long continuous diagonal or multi-turn can be cut at any interval. But you, as the defending player, can surround the cut attempt and only be 1 Liberty away from putting your opponent in Atari. An example is shown below.



White has a long continuous multi-turn diagonal to cover a lot of ground to connect a group presumably at the lower left and upper right of the board. It also sections off the Territory shown into two parts. However, this formation is prone to Cutting, as previously mentioned.



Black attempts to cut through this multi-turn to divide the Territory along the red dashed line. But White is prepared!



White counters by placing a stone to the left of Black's stone. If White places one more above the Black's stone, they will create a diamond, which is quite secure and easy to defend. This will further bolster White's defense in the middle of his diagonal stretch .

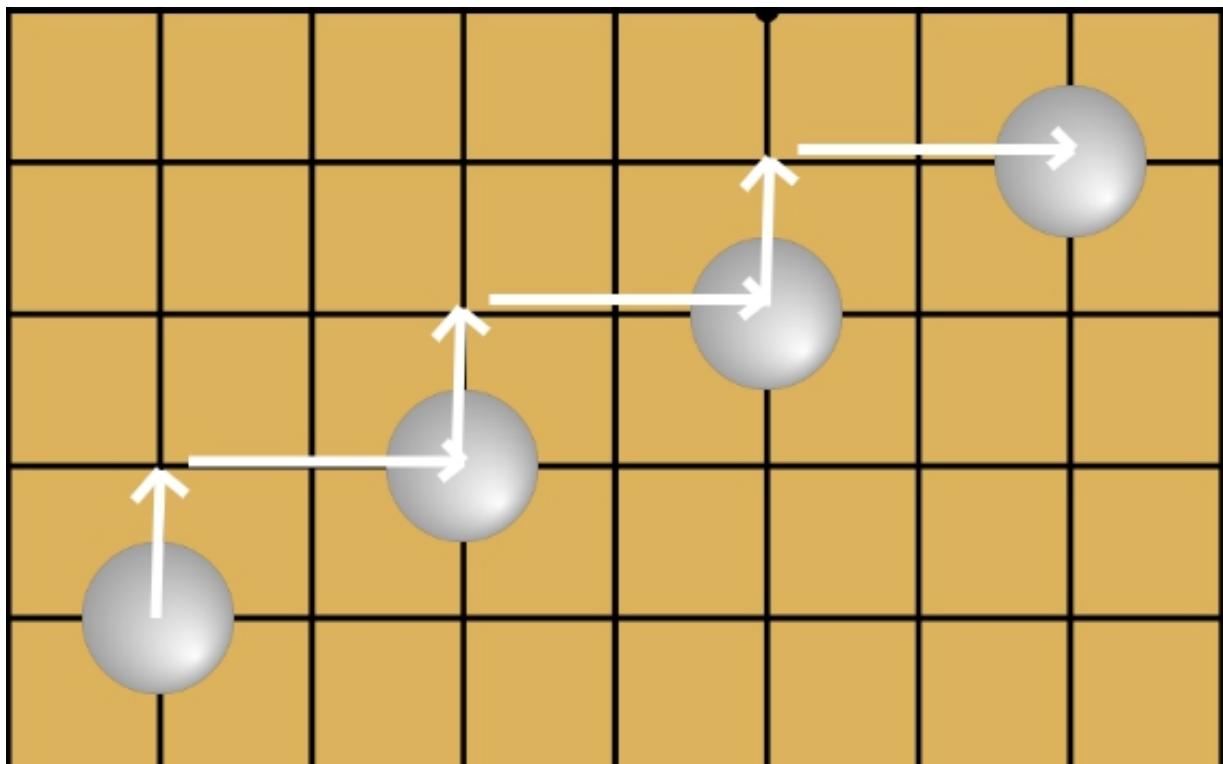
Knight's Move and Two-point Jumps

Players familiar with the game of Chess will know that the Knight piece will move in an "L" shape. Two spaces in any direction, followed by one in

a perpendicular direction.

Executing a chain of Knight's moves in a diagonal will cover even more ground than a multi-turn but is even more prone to Cutting and capture. Since each individual stone placed in a series of Knight's moves is separated by more than one space, they are each individually isolated and vulnerable to being surrounded.

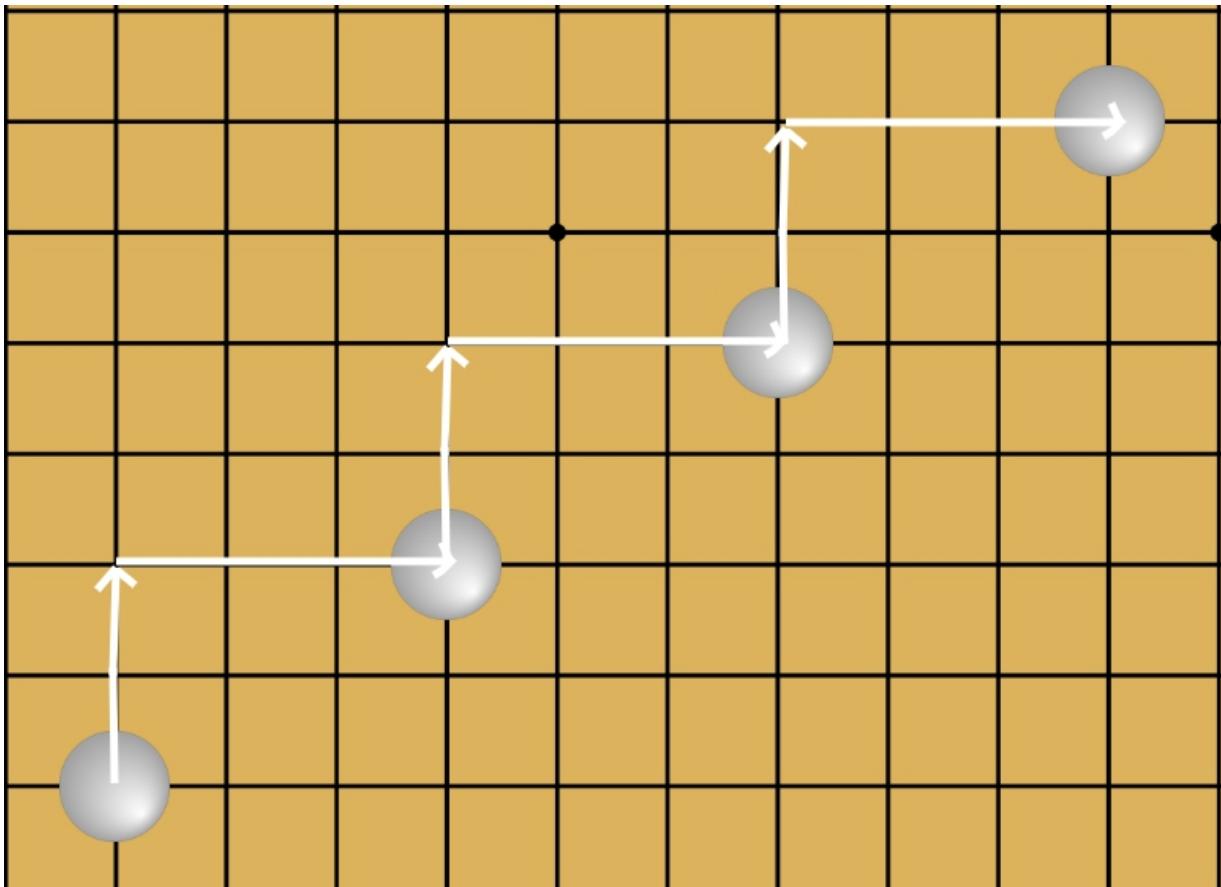
As you can see, the benefit of mobility does not come without the cost of fragility. Knight's moves are best used to loosely outline Territory or to invade an opponent's chain while still staying close to the chain's Liberties.



White has chained together a stretch involving Knight's moves, moving up one and two right for subsequent steps. Black will be able to cut or capture any node of this stretch, so White better take care to defend their pieces.

These stones are considered two-point jumps as they are two points away from the previous stones. One could also execute larger versions of the Knight's move, such as the large Knight's move, which is moving two spaces then three or vice versa. Again, the more you space out your stones,

the farther you can travel, but the more vulnerable each individual stone will be.



White extends further with a large Knight's move. When they are this spaced out, the line's defense isn't as necessary, and the stones can be treated as individual nodes. Handicap stones can be placed in the same way.

Sente: Forcing Action

An important and well-used strategy in Go is the idea of Sente. Sente is the concept of playing aggressively to force an opponent to react defensively. With an opponent on the defensive more often than not, you can control where they will play, and therefore, lock down the game.

Some examples of this have already been explained with the Ladder and Net strategies as well as explaining the concept of Atari. Less experienced players can be pushed into reacting more to offensive plays, but expert players will not be baited into the ploy for early control.

The critical point to remember is that once you get a lead where your opponent is reacting to a move you played in a defensive way, you can push back and force them to continue playing reactively. This is an excellent way to maintain a point lead and control Territory.

Chapter 7: Go's Ranking System

Kyu and Dan Ranks

In professional Go settings, a ranking system is used to determine the skill level of the players. These originated in the 2nd century China in the book Classic of Arts describing the "9 Pin Zhi" ranking system for Go. These rankings can be thought of similarly to belt colors in Karate, where the major ranks become harder and harder to obtain.

Beginning ranks are called Kyu ranks, whereas the professional ones are called Dan ranks. Someone who has recently learned how to play Go would be a 30 Kyu, whereas the most skilled Go player might be a 7 Dan. Kyu players gain skills and bring their number to 1, where they gain the Dan rank and then jump the rank.

Rank Range	Stage
30 - 20 Kyu	Novice
19 - 10 Kyu	Adept
9 - 1 Kyu	Journeymen
1 - 7 Dan	Master

Achieving a Dan Rank

In most settings, players in the Kyu ranks can set their own number, but Dan ranks tend to be regulated. Most of the time, players who wish to achieve Dan ranks must show their skills in tournaments and place in the top number of players. Only then can they be officially registered as Dan-ranked players.

Handicap Stones

In Go tournaments, each player will have a Kyu or Dan rank as described above. For a given match of two players with different ranks, the ranked lower player will receive a number of stones as handicap stones equal to the difference in rank from the higher player.

For example, let's say there is a match between a Kyu 20 and a Kyu 15. The Kyu 15 player, being more favorably ranked, would give 5 stones to the Kyu 20 player as handicap stones.

At the start of the game, when it is Black's first turn, they will place their handicap stones all at once, instead of playing their first stone like they normally would. Then White would have the first "normal" move after, and play would resume as usual until the game is over.

Chapter 8: Go Etiquette

In this guide describing the game of Go, it has often been compared to planning and fighting a great war. Just like in war, this game is to be played with precision, order, and control. Given the game's history and mysterious origins, playing Go can be made into a tradition or ritual, much like playing Chess or practicing fencing. There are do's and don'ts of playing Go, and we will go over them here.

Before Playing

Before playing Go, it is traditional to bow to your opponent to show respect and reverence for the great battle and worthy adversary. You would then ask your opponent if it would please them to join you in Go. If they accept, you will both sit simultaneously. It is customary for the more senior player to choose their color first and be gestured with an upturned, open hand in a waving and offering motion.

If two players of equal skill are matched together, the colors are chosen by the practice of "Nigiri." One of the players should take a handful of stones from the pouch or bowl. The other player should guess if the handful contains an even or odd number of stones. If they guess correctly, they may choose the color of stone to play. If they guess incorrectly, the player holding the handful of stones may choose.

Of course, if you are playing at home with a close friend, there is no need to go to such lengths. However, in Go tournaments, especially those in the Eastern parts of the world, showing respect and following customs of inner and communal unity is seen as mandatory.

During Play

Once both players are seated and colors have been chosen, the play may begin. The most important rule to follow is to be harmonious with the game

and its players.

Consider the following example.

Black is tapping the table or stirring the stones in the bowl while he considers his next move. This breaks the rule of harmony because the noise may break White's concentration. Harmony is also broken because the playing pieces are not being shown respect.

Here are some additional things to consider while playing Go. Remember to follow the rule of harmony.

- Sit quietly and do not stir or squeak your chair.
- If you must be excused from the table, apologize to your opponent, bow, and be quick to return.
- Only extend an invitation to play if you can commit the time.
- Be courteous, even if you lose the game. Bow again, and thank them for the experience.
- When handling stones, take them between your index and ring finger instead of between your index finger and thumb. This is considered an Eastern practice, similar to using chopsticks.
- When placing stones on the board, place them carefully and directly on the Intersection.
- Do not adjust other stones on the board, especially if they are not your color.
- Do not stir the stones in the bowl. Treat the stones with respect.
- Players should play to the best of their ability. Do not "throw" the game. This is seen as an insult not only towards your opponent but to your own honor.
- Sit up straight when you play at the board.

- Do not hold a stone over the board when playing. Visually select a space, then quickly place your stone.
- A stone laid is a stone played. Do not "take back" your move.
- When the game is concluded, players should take turns removing dead stones and placing captures. The more senior player should go first.

Conclusion

The game of Go is simple in its concept. Black against White, stones are the weapons in their war, and the board is a giant grid. But under the simple, easy to comprehend surface is a web of complicated strategy and nuance.

The game truly does represent the balance and mindset of planning and executing a war. If one is to master the game of Go, they must be prepared to embrace the teachings of the game's creator and think like an emperor or empress.

Grab a board, two colors of stones, and a friend, and practice today. Despite being thousands of years old, Go still holds a very relevant foothold in modern culture. Best of luck in your matches to come, and welcome again to the game!