

SOLOMON

A CONSTELLATION OF GAMES, PUZZLES, AND SOLITAIRE DIVERSIONS

★
by Martin Gardner

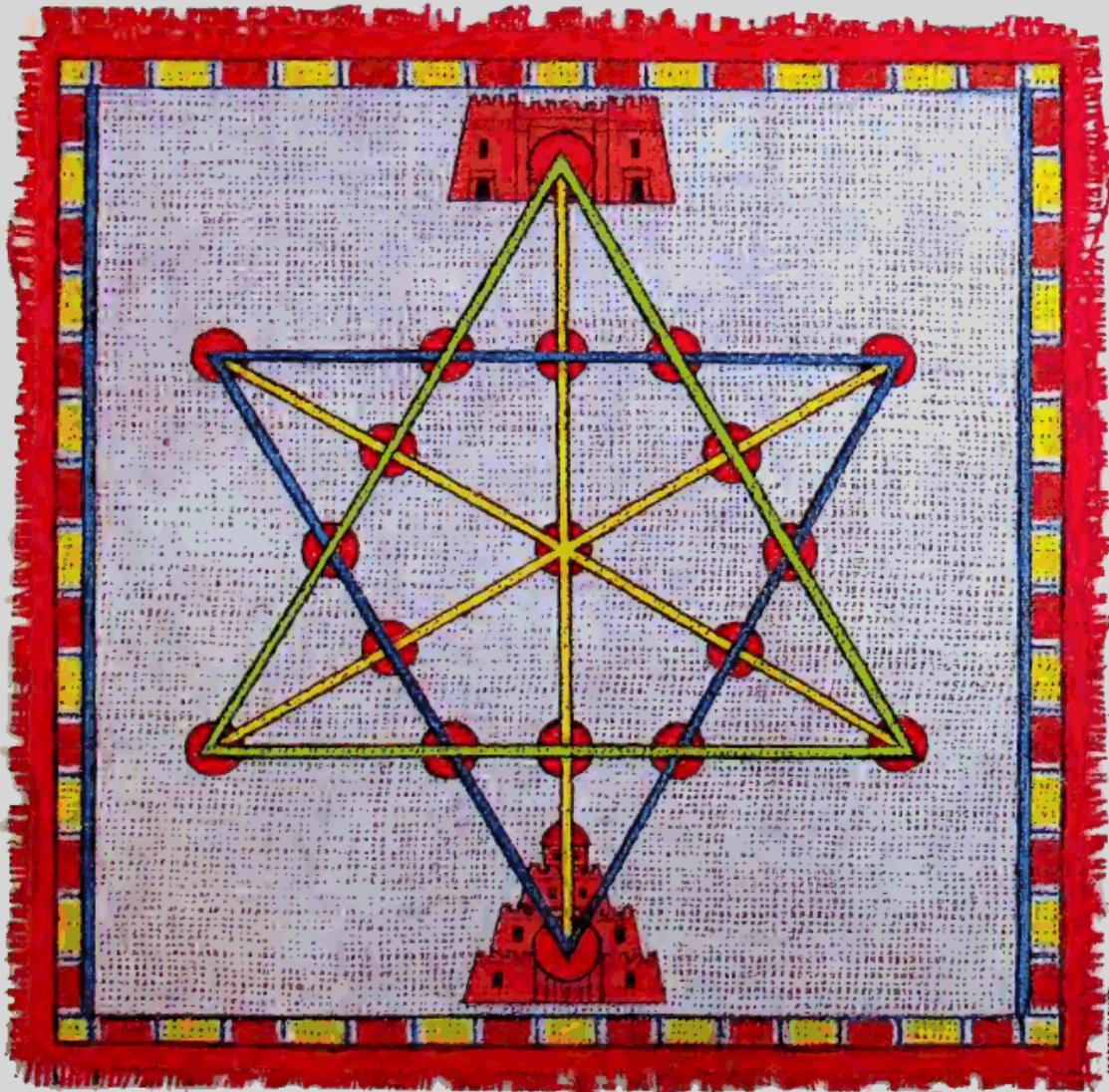
This game was devised by King Solomon, who based the board on his famous seal. According to a usually unimpeachable source (the scholar-archeologist Wisconsin Jones), he used the game as a means of occupying his 1,000 wives and concubines, who were otherwise prone to quarreling; for this reason, Solomon is also known as the

Game of Peace. Solomon is no doubt the forerunner of modern checkers, and is still played in remote parts of Yemen. At least, that's what Jones was told by a used-camel salesman.

Over the centuries, other games using the same board have been invented, as well as numerous Solomon puzzles. A selection of these, along with

the rules of the original game, are given at right. To play, you will need the board below and 19 flat pieces (not all of which are used in all games), which may be coins or other counters.

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THE BASIC GAME

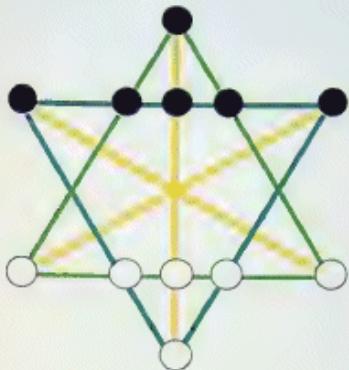
If you know how to play checkers, you will find that you can play Solomon at once, and that many of the stratagems and traps of checkers apply to Solomon as well.

Equipment

Two contrasting sets of six pieces each. (If coins are used, one player can play heads, the other tails.)

Setup

Players position their pieces on the board as shown:



Rules of Play

1. The first player (chosen by any random method) opens by moving a piece along a line to an adjacent vacant point (the red circles). Thereafter, each player moves either by sliding a piece to an adjacent vacant point or by making a jump. As in checkers, a jump consists of leaping over an adjacent opposing piece and landing on a vacant point immediately beyond it on the same line. The jumped piece is captured and removed from the board.

2. No piece may move or jump backward. On each of the two horizontal lines, a piece may move or capture in either direction.

3. If a jump is available, it must be played. If there is a choice between two or more jumps, any one may be played. If, after making a jump, the same piece is in position to make another jump, it must do so as part of the same turn, and it must continue to make jumps until it can make no more.

4. When a piece reaches the "palace" on the opponent's side of the board, it becomes a king. As in checkers, a king is "crowned" by stacking on top of it one of the same player's previously captured pieces. A king moves and jumps like an ordinary piece, except that it may move or capture backward as well as forward. A king may capture, or be captured by, both kings and ordinary pieces. Note: When a

piece enters the palace by means of a jumping move, it may not make another jump in the same turn even if one is available; that is, it may not jump as a king until the next move, after it has been crowned.

5. A player wins when the opponent either has lost all his pieces and kings or has no legal move. A draw occurs when each player has only a single king left, neither of which can immediately capture the other; or when players repeat a position until they agree that further play is useless.

Strategy Hints

1. It is usually best not to move the piece that begins the game on your palace too early.

2. Look for ways to give up a piece or a king in exchange for a chance to jump two or more pieces or kings on the next move. In an endgame of two kings versus one king, the two kings will always win (although the winning method is a bit trickier than the same endgame in checkers).

SOLITAIRE PLAY

Solomon Peg Solitaire

Place a piece on every point on the board except one. By making a series of single jumping moves, with as many different pieces as you like, can you remove all the pieces but one? No sliding moves are allowed; jumping moves are as in the game of Solomon, except that you do not have to continue jumping with the same piece, even if you can.

This solitaire game is solvable no matter which point you leave empty; if you solve it one way, try it again using a different empty point. A solution beginning with the center point empty is given in the Answer Drawer, page 60.

The Crowning Problem

Place a piece on every point except the one in the center. The task is to crown nine kings—by moving one piece on top of another single piece—in the fewest moves possible. Each move must consist of moving a single piece in a straight line, passing over points occupied by exactly two other pieces (either two single pieces on different points or a stack of two pieces on a single point), and landing on either a vacant point or a single piece. Any number of vacant points may also be passed over during a move.

(a) Can you crown nine kings in no more than 11 moves?

(b) Using the same rules, but starting with the vacant point somewhere other than the center, can you crown nine kings in just nine moves?

Answer Drawer, page 60

PUZZLES

- How many different triangles can be found in the Solomon board?
- How many different quadrilaterals (four-sided figures) can be found?
- Can you label the points of the Solomon board 1, 2, 3, and so on up through 19, in such a way that the five numbers on every line add up to the same sum?

Answer Drawer, page 60

TWO-PLAYER GAMES

Son of Solomon

(Invented by Sid Sackson)

This game requires two contrasting sets of five pieces, each set numbered 1 through 5, and the Solomon board.

Rules are as follows:

1. The board is initially empty. Players take turns placing a piece anywhere on the board. Players must first place their "1" pieces, then their "2" pieces, and so on in numerical order.

2. After all 10 pieces are on the board, players take turns moving one of their pieces. Players must move their "1" pieces on their first turns, then their "2" pieces, and so on, repeating the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 throughout the entire game.

3. A move consists of sliding a piece along any line to a vacant adjacent point.

4. If on its turn to be moved a piece is blocked so that no sliding move is possible, the piece is forced to make a jumping move along a line to a vacant point. The shortest available jump (determined by counting the number of points jumped, and not by measuring the distance moved) must be chosen; thus, if a piece must jump over two occupied points in some directions but only one occupied point in others, it must choose one of the one-point jumps. Jumped pieces are not captured.

5. The winner is the first player to get four of his pieces in a straight line, with no vacant points separating them. The pieces do not have to be arranged in numerical order.

Solomon Nim

Place a piece on each of the board's 19 points. Two players take turns removing as many pieces as they like, provided the pieces are all adjacent to one another (no gaps between them) and all lie along the same line. The person who takes the last piece loses.

A variation is to make the player who takes the last piece the winner, but in this case the game becomes trivial. Do you see why?

Answer Drawer, page 60