ルートバウンド- ROOT BOUND

BY CHRISTOPHER FIELD

In Root Bound, living plants expand across the board in a struggle for territory. With each advance, future options dwindle, and careless growth can leave a plant tangled, cut off, and withered away.

Root Bound won the BoardGameGeek Abstract Games Forum's "Best Combinatorial 2-Player Game of 2024".

As an abstract strategy game, Root Bound requires only a hexagonal board and pieces in two colors. The official board has 7 intersections to a side, but it may also be played on a centerless hexagonal board or on hexagonal boards of different sizes. Pieces are unlimited, but for the official board size 60 pieces per color should be sufficient to play a game. A printable board can be found on the last page of this document.

DEFINITIONS

CLAIMED REGION

A Claimed Region is an area of one or more empty intersections that is adjacent only to pieces of a single color.

ROOTS

A Root is any group of one or more same-color pieces that is adjacent to a Claimed Region. Roots are never removed from the board once formed.

RUNNERS

A Runner is any group of one or more same-color pieces that is not adjacent to a Claimed Region. Runners may be removed during the game or during the cleanup phase before scoring depending on their situation.

PLAY

During play, players take turns placing pieces of their color onto the board.

As a mnemonic, play is divided into four phases, named after the seasons. Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter represent the first turns, the main game, the cleanup, and the scoring, respectively.

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Spring

- Spring is the first three turns of the games.
- During this phase no Runners can be removed.
- On the first player's first turn, they must place one piece onto any empty space.
- On the second player's first turn, they must place two pieces onto empty intersections that are not adjacent to each other.
- On the first player's second turn, they must place two pieces onto empty intersections and at least one of their three pieces must be non-adjacent to their other pieces.
- At the end of Spring, both players must have at least two distinct Runners.

Summer

- Summer is when most of the game takes place, starting from the second player's second turn.
- On a player's turn, they may pass, place one piece, or place two pieces onto empty intersections, respecting the placement restrictions below. Note, it is almost always better to place two pieces whenever possible.
- No piece may ever be placed into a Claimed Region.
- No piece may be placed adjacent to two or more friendly pieces if those pieces are also adjacent to each other. i.e., Do not form a small triangle of three same-color pieces.
- When placing both new pieces adjacent to each other, they may not be placed in line with a third pre-existing piece of their color. Rapid growth cannot go in a straight line.
- During this phase, at the end of each turn, the active player checks whether enemy Runners have a path through empty intersections connecting them to another of their Roots or Runners. The path does not need to be a straight line and is allowed to include intersections that are not legal plays for the opponent. The active player immediately removes all enemy Runners which lack such a path.

Fall

- Fall is the cleanup phase and begins after both players pass consecutively.
- Runners that do not have a path to a friendly Root are weak and wither during this phase. But the smallest wither first. In this phase, merely having a path to another Runner is not good enough.
- Runners that have a path to a friendly Root are considered healthy and do not wither.
- Remove all of the smallest weak Runners simultaneously. This gives larger Runners a chance to become healthy or to become Roots themselves.
- Repeat this process until there are no weak Runners remaining.

Winter

- Winter is the phase where players count their scores and determine a winner.
- Players score the number of their pieces remaining on the board plus the number of empty intersections in Claimed Regions adjacent to their Roots. The highest score wins.
- If the score is tied, the player who was first to pass is the winner.

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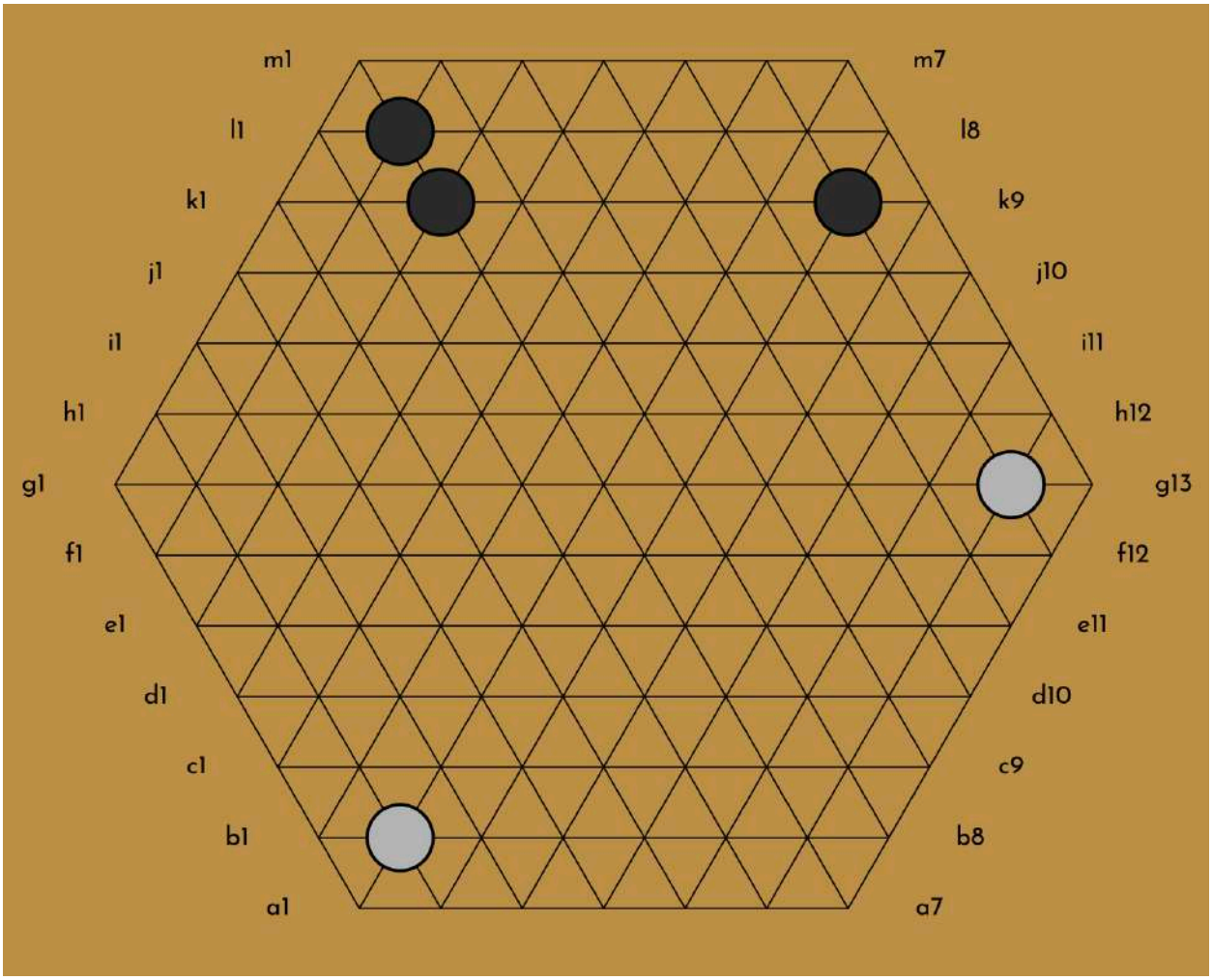
EXAMPLES

Ex. 1



Players must make at least two Runners by the end of Spring (the third turn of the game). They have played near the corners, where it is easiest to make a Claimed Region.

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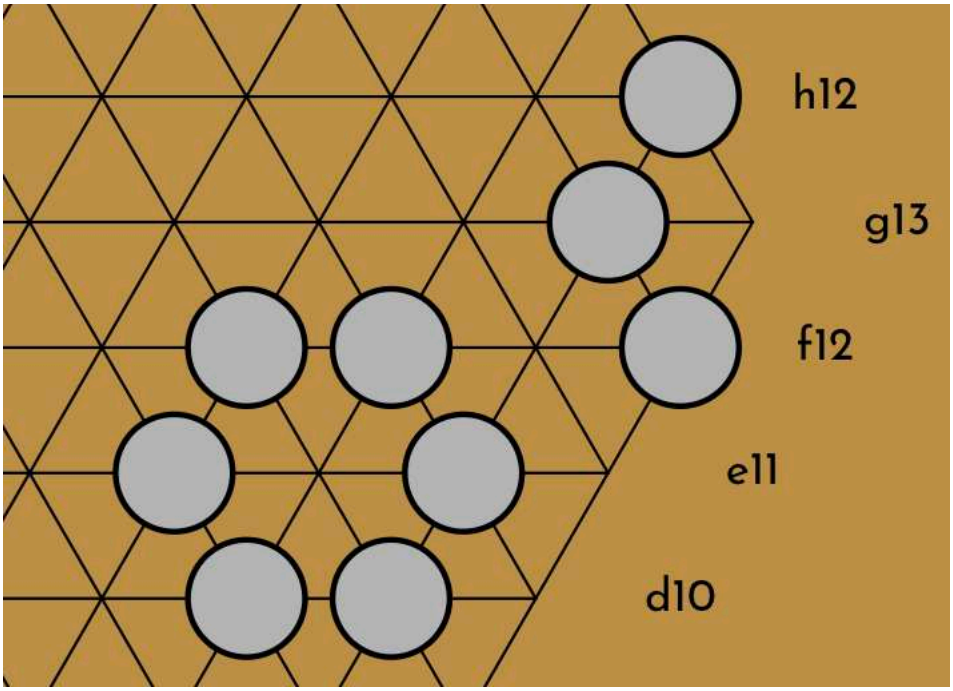
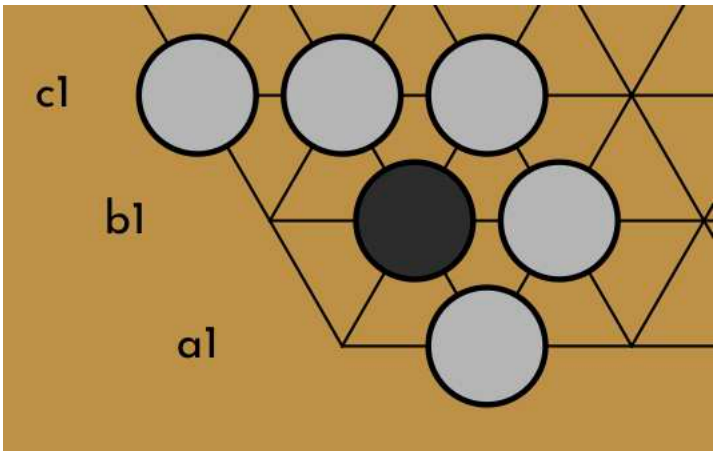
Ex. 2



Players may make Claimed Regions against the edge or corners of the board, or in the inner part of the board. It is much more difficult to make Claimed Regions in the inner part of the board.

Ex. 3



The Black Runner at b2 does not have a path to a friendly Runner or Root and will be removed at the end of the turn. The corner will become a Claimed Region, and the White pieces will become a Root.

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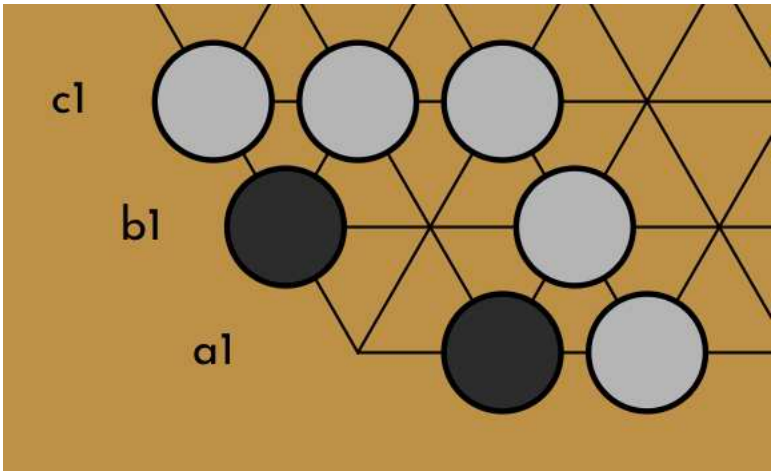
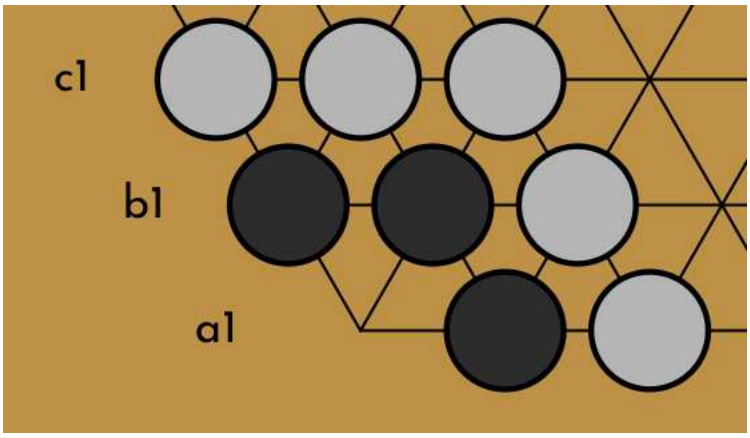
Ex. 4



The Black Runners at b1 and a2 have a path to each other and will not be removed at the end of the turn. If nothing changes, they would be removed during Fall cleanup.



However, a placement at b2 will create a Claimed Region at a1, the Black Runners will become a Root, and they will not be removed during Fall cleanup.

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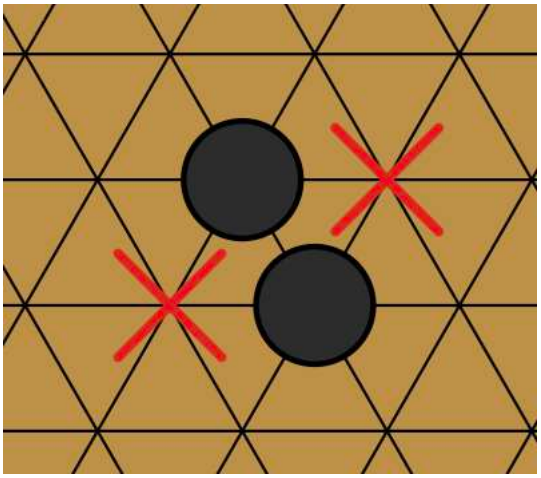
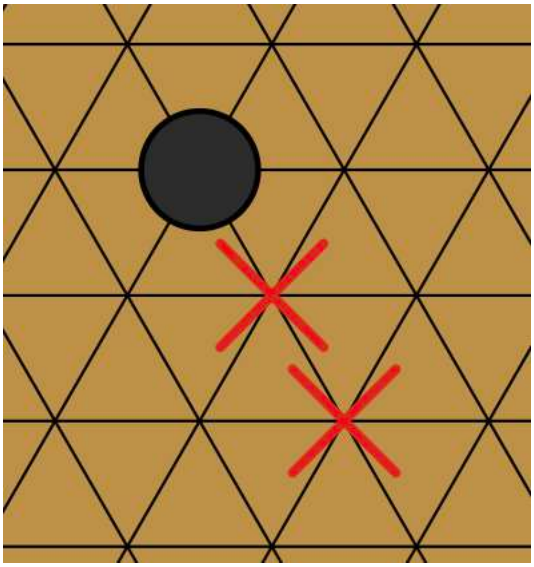
Ex. 5



The same color pieces may never form a small triangle. Black may not play on these intersections. But White can.

Ex. 6



Two pieces may not be placed in a line with an existing piece of their color if they are on the same side of the piece. Black may place at one of these intersections, but not both on the same turn. They can place at the other on a later turn.

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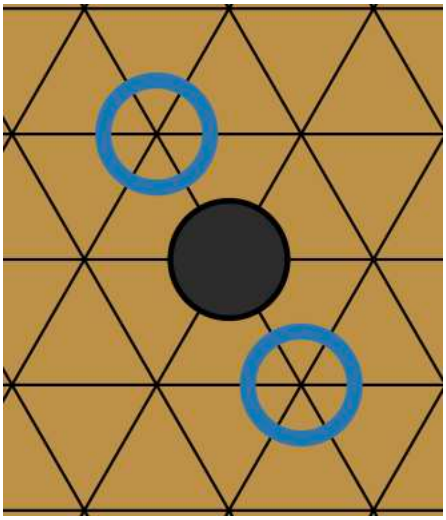
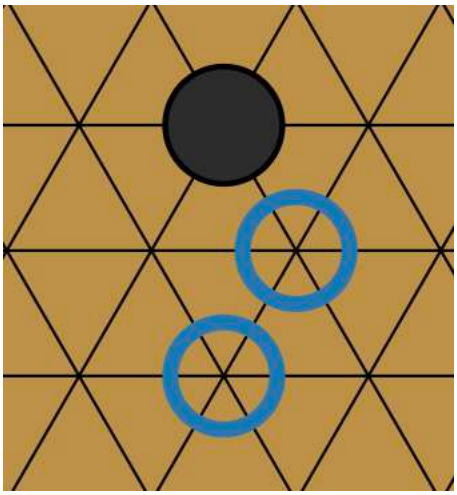
Ex. 7



Two pieces may be placed in a line with an existing piece of their color if they are not on the same side of the piece.

Ex. 8



Two pieces may be placed next to an existing piece of their color if they form a bend.

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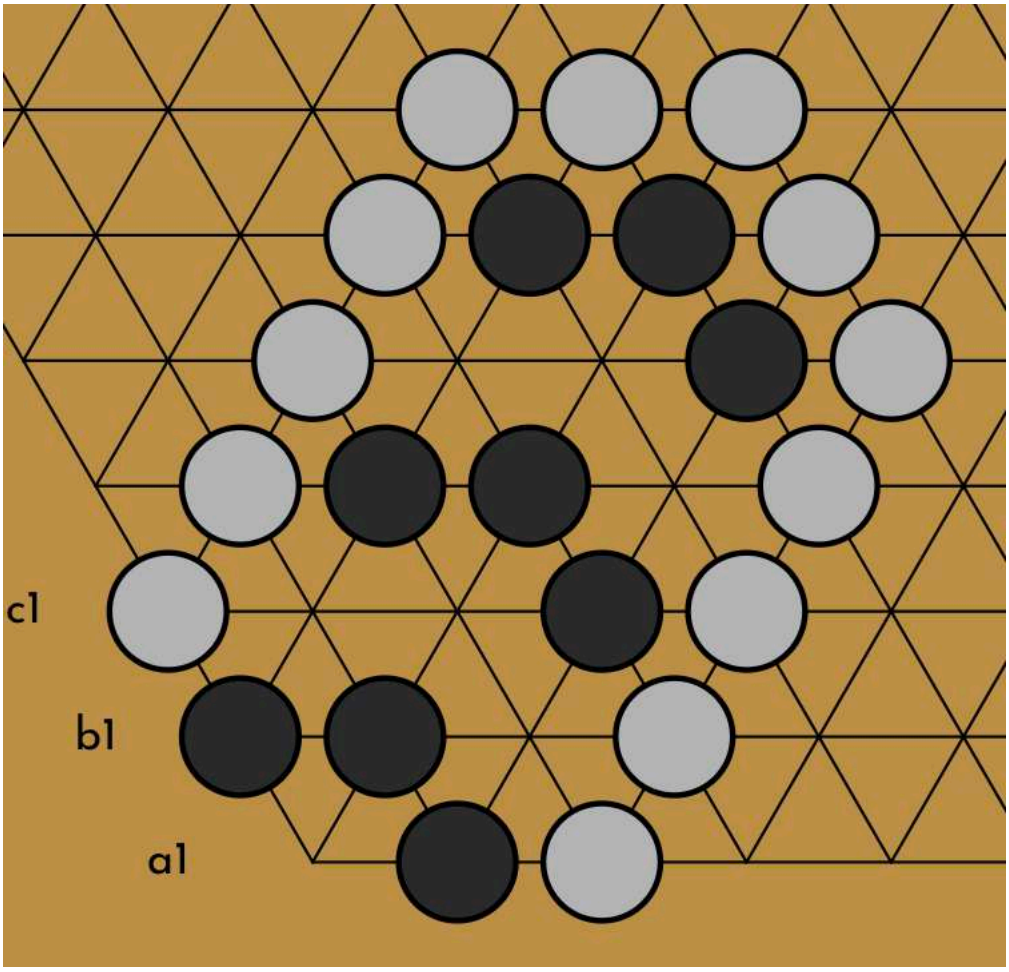
Ex.9



Runners cannot have a path to a Root through another Runner. The middle Black Runner has a path to the bottom Black Root, but the top Black Runner does not and would wither during Fall cleanup. The top Black Runner does not have a path through *empty intersections* to a Root.

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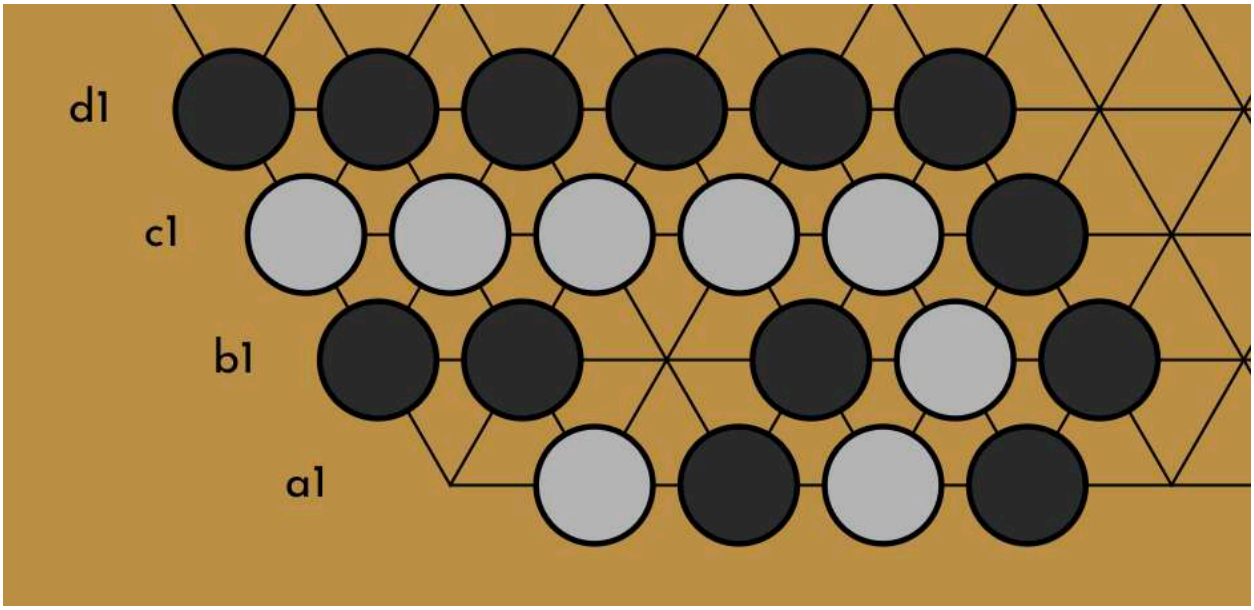
Ex. 10



Runners are only removed because of a lack of a path to another same-colored Runner or Root during Summer. During Fall, Runners are only removed because of being weak and withering, and this always happens in a specific order based on size. For example, the Runner at a2 would wither first and be removed, then the Runners at b1/b2 and a3/b4 would wither and be removed. The empty intersections in the corner would then be a Claimed Region and White's remaining pieces would become a Root.

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Acknowledgements

Root Bound draws inspiration from the game of Go, Mark Steere's *Take*, Michael Amundsen's *Cavity*, and Michael Amundsen and Luis Bolaños Mures's *Lifeline*.

Additionally, thank you to Matt Curtis for helping play test as the game evolved.

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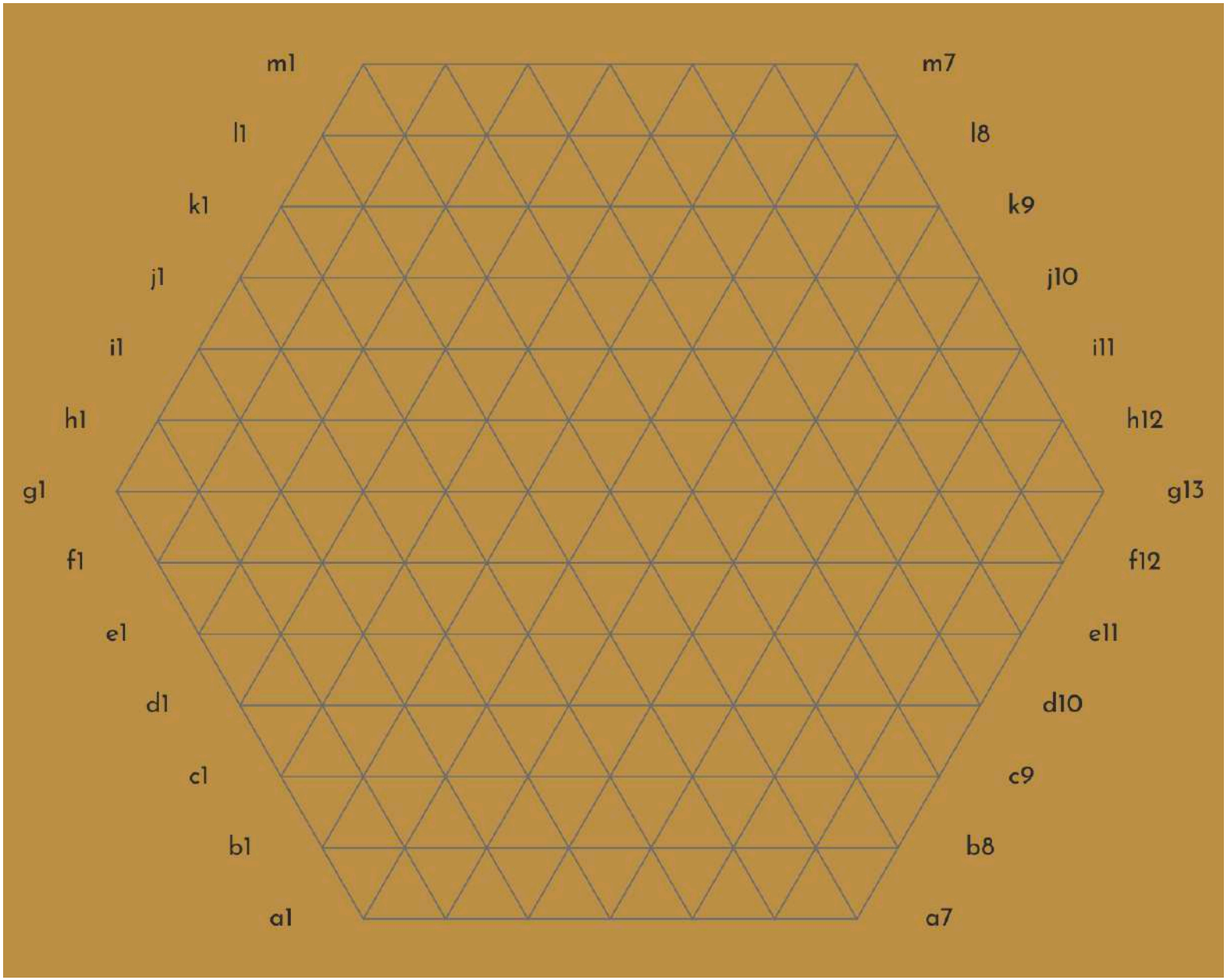

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