# Rampart by Corey L. Clark

Rampart is a unique game of annihilation in which players grow a predetermined number of groups. Rampart features very capricious tactics within an accessible strategic framework leading to very engaging and rewarding play. It should be noted rampart is actually two games in one as there is a slight rule adjustment in scaling the game to larger boards. This will be discussed in depth later in this document. A game of Rampart cannot end in a draw.

Set up: There are two official initial set-ups for Rampart, one for an 11x11 board and another for a 13x13 board. In addition to these, players may endeavor to create their own arrangements. The suggested method for this will be discussed at the end.
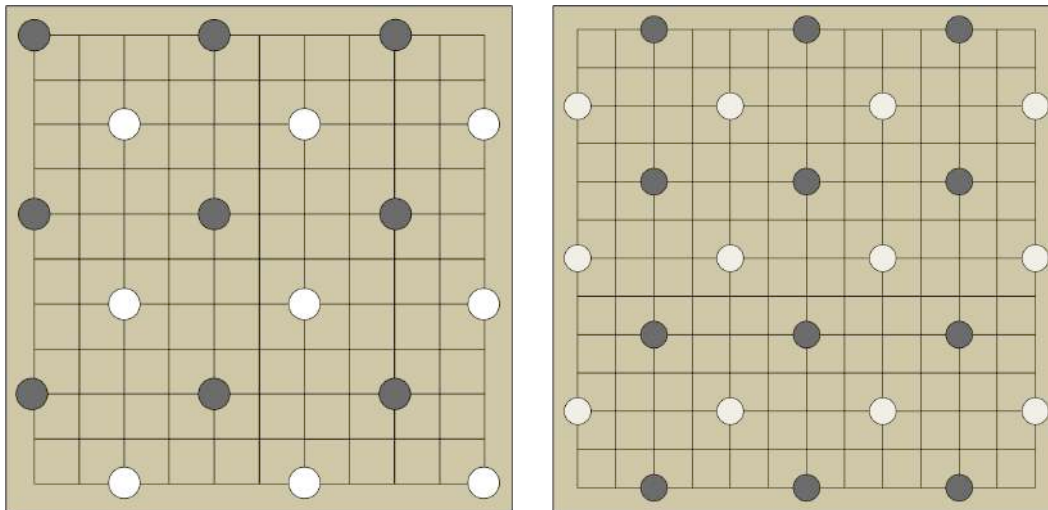
Objective: The objective of Rampart is to clear the board of all enemy groups.

Gameplay: Black plays first. On a player's turn he may choose to either place a stone on the board or remove a dead enemy group. In the event that a player does not have a legal move he must pass. Passing is otherwise prohibited. A group consists of any number of orthogonally contiguous stones of one color. It is never legal to place a stone such that it creates a new group, it must be placed adjacent to one of the player's own stones already on the board.

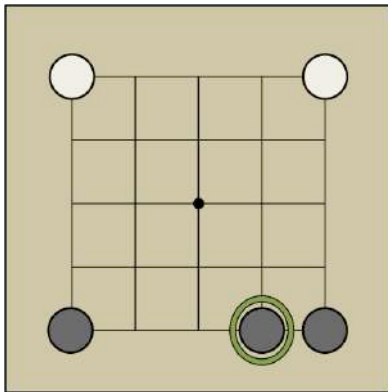Below are some examples of legal and illegal moves.
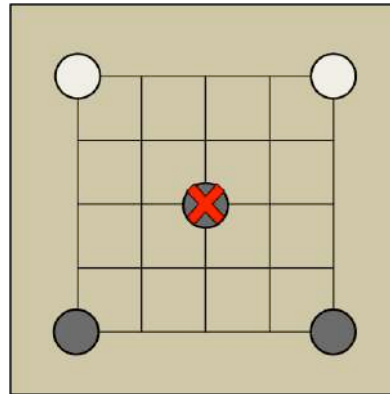

Fig 2.1: A basic first move in Rampart

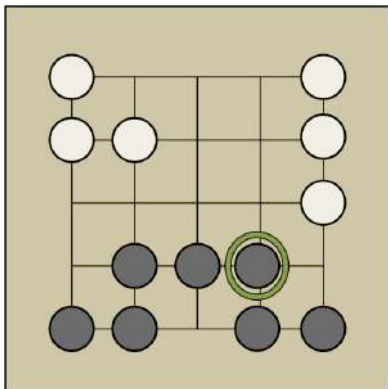**Fig 2.2:** This is an illegal move for black as it is not contiguous with any black stones

Fig 2.3: Another example of a legal move connecting two black groups

Alternatively a player may remove a dead enemy group on his turn. Note that the removal of a group consumes a whole turn. On any turn on which a player removes a group he is not permitted to place a stone. Removing own dead groups is strictly forbidden.

Life and Death: A group is considered dead if any stone within it meets the following 2 criteria.

a) The stone has no orthogonally adjacent empty points
b) The stone has at least one enemy stone adjacent
(note for boards larger than 11x11 only the first criterion applies)

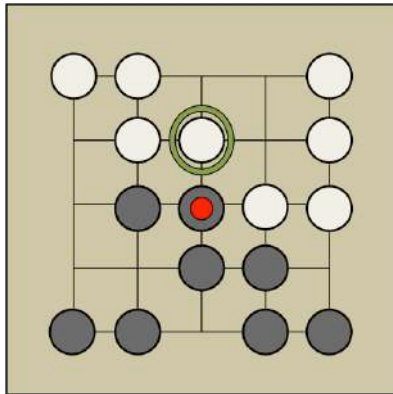Below is an example of a group being rendered dead and its subsequent removal.

Fig 3.1: White's placement deprives the marked black stone of its neighboring empty points and the whole group is considered dead, however white may not remove it until his following turn.
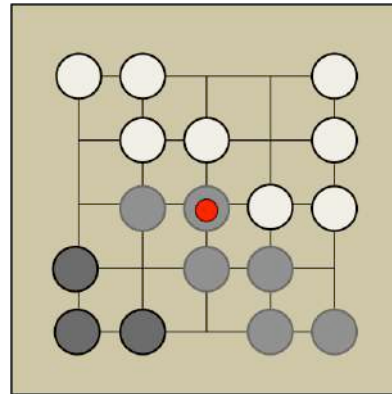
Fig 3.2: White removes the dead black group.

Because capture isn't automatic, in rendering an enemy group dead you may also mutually kill your own group. Below is an example of such a move.
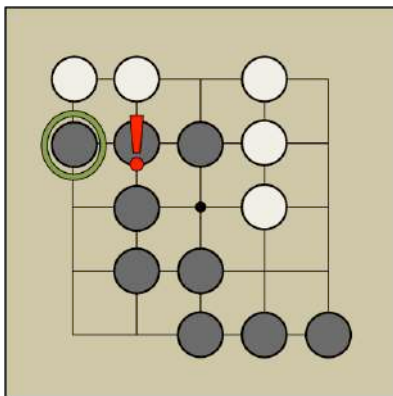

Fig 4: Black has effectively committed suicide here. Even though he has rendered the white group dead he has also killed the black stone adjacent to his placement.

Rules variation: Playing rampart on boards larger than 11x11 requires a slight rule adjustment in determining whether or not a group is dead. Whereas on boards of base 11 and smaller there are two criteria for determining whether a stone and therefore its respective group are dead or not ie,

a) The stone has no orthogonally adjacent empty points
b) The stone has at least one enemy stone orthogonally adjacent

Only the first criterion applies for games played on boards larger than 11x11
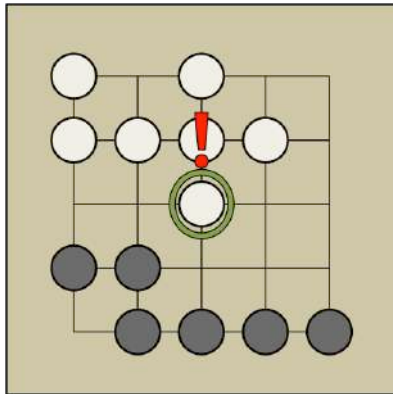
You can see the distinction here.

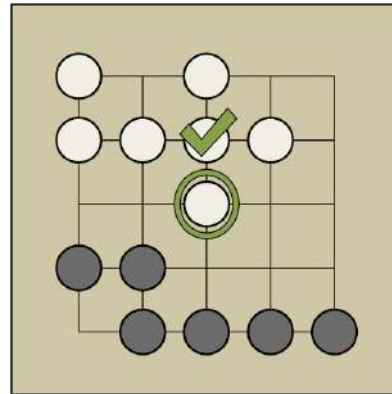**Fig 5.1:** If this were a 13x13 Rampart game White's move would result in the death of his own group.

Fig 5.1: If this were a game played on a board of 11x11 or smaller the white group would be safe.

Alternative Board Set-ups: Players might want to play around with alternative initial positions for their groups, especially when scaling for other board sizes. There are a few rules to follow when doing this.

1. Ensure the position of the stones is entirely symmetrical. The arrangement can either be symmetrical along a line or rotationally symmetrical.

2. Ensure the position is impartial (unless intentionally handicapping the game to compensate for disparity in skill). The position of the black stones should mirror that of the white stones.

3. Maintain a distance of at least 3 moves between opposite colored groups.

Below is an example of a potential alternative board set up.
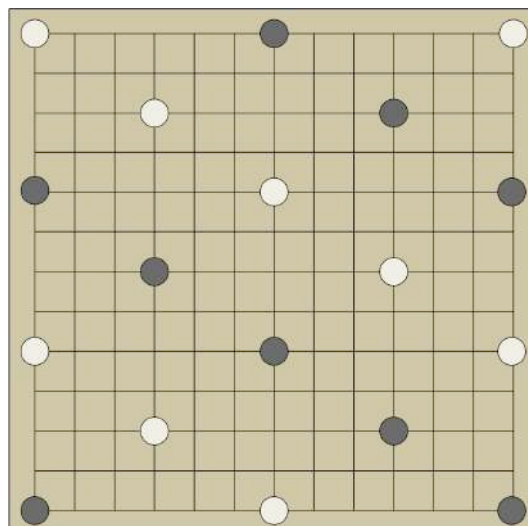
Strategy: Rampart strategy is multileveled. Although it is a highly tactical game there is a major territory component to it. The early game will consist almost entirely of groups racing to create stable structures to create life. In the throws of these tactical skirmishes a few groups will inevitably turn out dead leaving the remaining groups to secure and maintain territory. Players should probably approach the early game by trying to reconcile as many groups as possible while playing aggressively enough to create significant threats to the opponent's position. Players shouldn't focus too much on overall group size or cordoning off areas of the board too early. The reason is that a very large group with the wrong shape can be destroyed It is generally a bad idea to connect groups as this is effectively the same as losing a whole group and the resulting size/territory advantage may not be worth it. Also its important to note removing a dead group isn't mandatory and holding a dead group hostage over a number of turns can significantly reduce the opponent's mobility.

Authors Note: It had long been a curiosity of mine to design a game for standard equipment that would maximize conservation of board space through a capturing mechanic while being theoretically finite. However on that front I borrowed a core mechanic from Mark Steere's Tanbo, which also involves growing a set number of groups and capturing these groups in whole. However my policy is that I will only borrow a mechanic if I believe I could have conceived of it myself and this felt like just such a mechanic. I will also mention as I aspire to originality I had a lot of reservations about borrowing the mechanic in the first place. I decided to fiddle around with the concept and before I knew it Rampart was emerging from this process and there was certainly no turning back at that point.

Other than this finitude mechanic, Rampart is a remarkably original design. I haven't seen such a capture mechanic as the one in Rampart before. I call the mechanic "ghost capture", since capturing is typically initiated by some action a player takes on his turn in other games, here it constitutes a move in itself. This is fundamental to how Rampart works; because it takes a whole turn to remove stones from the board, this allows the other player to gain tempo elsewhere. Defining liberties and life/death of a group on the basis of single stones is also as far as I know an unprecedented mechanic. In fact my whole approach in conquering the issues, which immediately present themselves from this core mechanic, was wholly divergent from Mark's approach. The main issue being the potential to create large compact configurations of stones and avoid having to engage the opponent. Mark's approach was to ban moves that would allow this by prohibiting placement beside more than one like-colored stone. My approach was to discourage such play by making it disadvantageous. In rampart indeed every move is a potential liability and yet there is no option for passive play. And even the effects are vastly divergent as well. While compact formations are disadvantageous in Rampart sometimes these moves are outright necessary to maintaining a good position. I don't believe this sensation of being backed into a corner and having no other option than to go on the offensive has been captured any better in an abstract before.

For those wondering why the rules vary depending on the size of the board, it was a case of me trying to have my cake and eat it too. Both versions of Rampart are essential to providing an interesting game on their respective boards. The main issue was backfilling. In Rampart no moves are off limits as long as they expand one or more of your own groups and this means that once

players trying to avoid playing certain points which would cause the immediate removal of their groups. On the 11x11 board when these areas are established it is generally determined who will have to make such a move first and win the game. At larger sizes however there is still much to be decided if there are smaller friendly groups within these regions. It would become quite tedious to fill them in. Because the variant for larger boards doesn't require direct influence from the opponent in order for groups to be captured the number of these backfilling moves is significantly reduced. However the large board variant doesn't work on smaller boards because the number of options is significantly reduced as more fatal moves arise. I didn't find this solution ugly but rather found two mandated variants of the same game a creative solution for a perplexing problem.

I will say while Rampart is an original game I will give Mark Steere credit where credit is due. I did explicitly use his base mechanic as a starting point for my own game. Rampart very probably would not have come into existence in Tanbo's absence. At any rate Rampart is out there now and I have every confidence it has the potential to become a game enduring centuries of serious play if only it garners a large enough audience.

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