

Rules for the Game of Fist

by ALYSA WISHINGRAD and JAMES ERNEST

[open beta version](#)



Welcome! This is an open beta version of the Game of Fist, from Alysa Wishingrad's upper middle-grade novel, *The Verdigris Pawn* (HarperCollins, 2021). Like chess, Fist is a two player abstract strategy game. You can make your own Fist set with pieces from one set of chess and checkers pieces.

Designers James Ernest and Alysa Wishingrad have developed the complete set of rules for Fist, and now we are asking for feedback from players like you! We hope you'll enjoy the game, and we'd also love to hear your thoughts, to help us make it even better.

Background: In the world of *The Verdigris Pawn*, Fist is a forbidden game. It tells the story of a challenger struggling to unseat the king, and it is well known as an allegory for rebellion. The king's side has more pieces, but the challenger has a few extra tricks to help level the field. The most important piece is the verdigris pawn, a powerful attacker that can fall under the control of either player!

The name "Fist" comes from the idea that an army is stronger when it works together, like the fingers of a hand coming together into a fist. The message is that strategy and planning, not sheer numbers, will always win the day. Like chess, the game of Fist offers many options for strategic thinking and clever play.

James and Alysa are pleased to bring you this working set of rules for Fist. We expect frequent updates throughout the period of the beta test, which starts November 10, 2021. Please visit the [Verdigris Pawn page](#) at Crab Fragment Labs to find the latest rules and information, and to fill out the playtest feedback form.

And look for the book: [*The Verdigris Pawn*](#), by Alysa Wishingrad. Available from HarperCollins, at harpercollins.com.

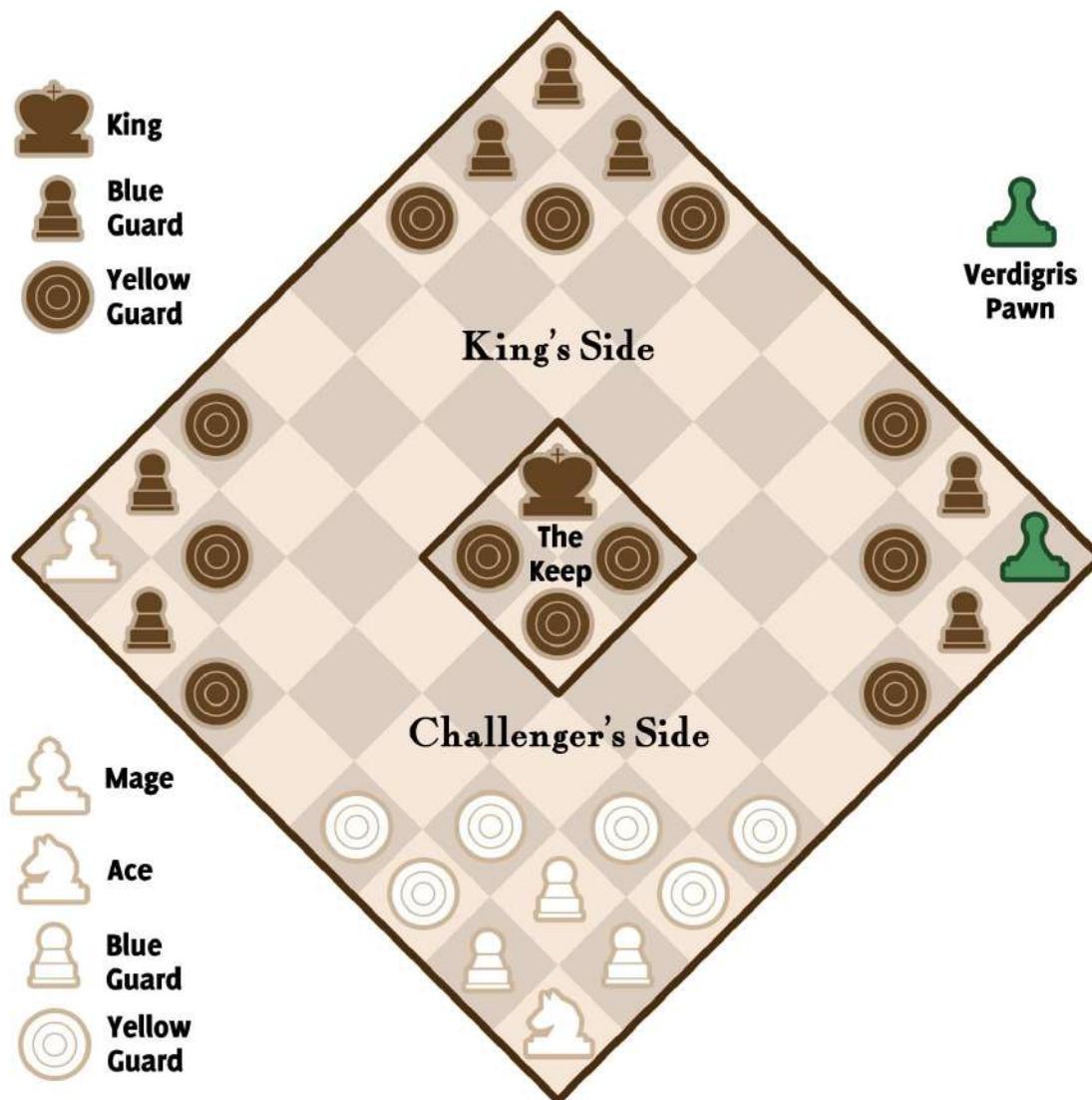
Thanks for playing, we hope you enjoy the game!

How to Play Fist:

Summary: Fist is a two-player game similar to chess. The pieces on either side could be any color, but in these rules we use white as the challenger's side, and black as the king's side. Players take turns, as in chess, and the challenger always goes first. The objectives are:

- The king's side wins by capturing *all of the challenger's blue guards*.
- The challenger wins by capturing *the king*.

Game Board: The board is an 8x8 diamond, as shown below. This is the same as a chess board, turned to the side. (An actual Fist board would also have a line around the Keep.)



The pieces and starting setup

Piece List:

You can use the pieces from one set of chess and checkers to play Fist, plus any special piece (or a white queen) for the verdigris pawn. The pieces are as follows:

• King's Side:	Value	Stand-in Piece
○ 1x king,	4	black king
○ 7x blue guards	2	black chess pawns
○ 12x yellow guards	1	black checkers
• Challenger's Side:		
○ 1x ace	3	white knight
○ 1x mage,	3	white bishop
○ 3x blue guards	2	white chess pawns
○ 6x yellow guards	1	white checkers
• Special:		
○ 1x verdigris pawn	4	queen or any unique piece

Note on “Blue” and “Yellow” Guards: Fist players are accustomed to hearing “blue” and “yellow” as game terms instead of colors. These colors don’t typically appear on the pieces. Instead, these terms distinguish the stronger, elite guards (blue) from the weaker, rank-and-file guards (yellow). The guards are also sometimes called “tall and short,” or “heavy and light.”

Definitions:

The Keep: The Keep is the 4-square area at the center of the board (see diagram on page 2). This zone is usually outlined or raised on a traditional Fist board. The king begins in the north corner of the Keep, protected by three yellow guards.



Sight Lines: Some rules, such as control of the verdigris pawn, depend on lines of sight. All pieces can “see” in all eight directions, as shown in the diagram at right. All pieces can see forever, but not through other pieces. In addition, any piece standing in the Keep can always see the verdigris pawn.



Moving: All pieces can move in straight lines in all eight directions, like the queen in chess, but with limited range. Pieces cannot move through other pieces, although some pieces can jump. Rules for moving and jumping are described below.

Touching: Two spaces are “touching” if they share an edge. Spaces do not touch diagonally. This rule is important for *pinning*, which is described below.

Pinning: Some pieces, including yellow guards, the king, and the pawn, can capture enemy pieces by *pinning*. Pinning a piece is like walking up beside it and stabbing it. (The capturing piece *does not* move into the same space with the target.)

For one piece to pin another, the attacking piece must first move at least one space, and into a space that is touching the target. Spaces touch edge-to-edge, but not on the diagonal. Pinning only works on enemy pieces, and it is always optional.

- **Move Before Capture.** The pin must follow after a normal move of at least one space.
- **Capture Adjacent Piece.** The attacker *does not* move into the target's space.
- **Compare Values:** Pieces can only pin enemies of *equal or lower value*. For example, a piece of value 1 can capture another value 1, as shown here.
- **Divided Attention:** If an attacker moves into a space with multiple targets, it has “divided attention.” In the diagram at right, the king has moved into a space where it could pin any of three white pieces.

In this case, the attacker cannot capture *anything*, unless it has enough strength to capture *everything*. If it does, it may capture *just one target*.

In this example, the king (value 4) is adjacent to targets of value 1, 1, and 2, which also totals 4. So it could capture any one of them. If the total was 5 or higher, the king could not capture.

- **Allied Assistance:** If the attacker has allies that are touching the target(s), each of those pieces adds its value to the attack. In this way, several pieces could capture a larger piece, or help it to succeed in a divided attack.

In this example, black’s yellow guard moves in for a capture, and gets assistance from the blue guard, which is already touching the mage. This gives the yellow guard a total attack of 3, and therefore the yellow guard can capture the mage.



Note: Allies and divided attacks can sometimes create complicated situations. Just remember that the attacker gains power from *all the allies* that touch *any of the targets*.

Jumping: Some pieces, including blue guards, the ace, the mage, and the pawn, can move and capture by jumping. “Jumping” means moving exactly two spaces, in a straight line, in any direction. There must always be a piece to jump over, and an empty space to land.

- **Legal Jumps:** A piece cannot jump over a piece of higher value. Only pieces of equal or lower value can be jumped.

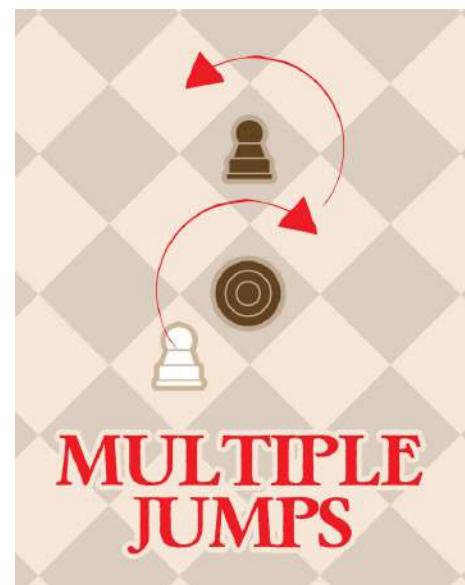
In the example at right, the mage (value 3) can jump over the enemy guards (1 and 2) or the allied guard (3), but not over the king. The king has a value of 4, so the mage cannot jump over it.

(Note that in this example, the white guard’s value is 3, because the mage *Empowers* it. The mage’s Empower ability is explained below.)

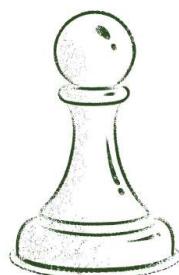


- **Capturing:** When one piece jumps over another, it *may choose* to capture that piece. If a piece jumps multiple times, it can capture every piece it jumps. Each capture is optional.

Note: Typically, players will choose to capture only enemy pieces, not their own, but sometimes you may wish to remove your own pieces from play, and sometimes you might want to leave an enemy piece where it stands.



- **Multiple Jumps:** If a piece makes multiple jumps, it may change direction between jumps, as shown at right. However, each individual jump must be in a straight line, and the piece *cannot visit the same space twice* (including its starting space).
- **Combination Moves:** A piece *cannot* make a normal move and jump in the same turn.



Moves and Rules for the Pieces:

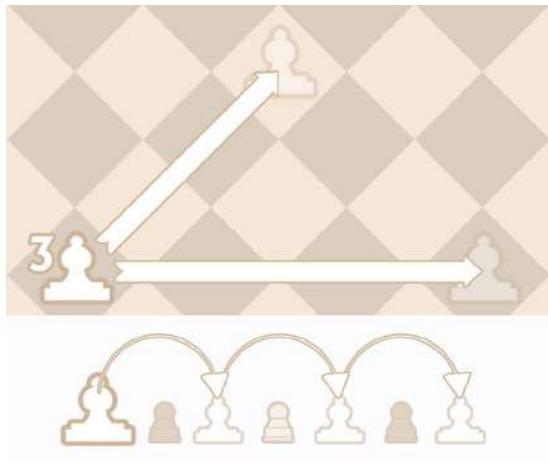
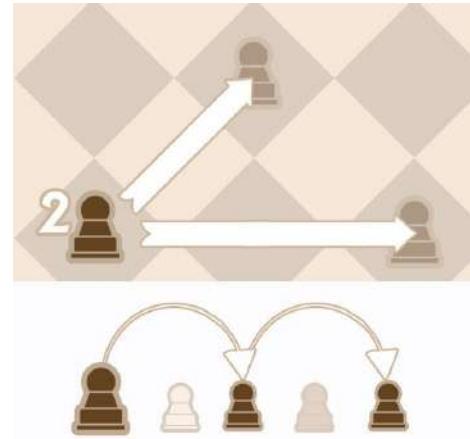


Yellow (Light) Guards: These pieces have a value of 1. They can move one space in any direction, orthogonally or diagonally, exactly like a king in chess. Yellow guards capture by *pinning*. (See pinning rules above.)

Yellow guards are the slowest and weakest pieces, but they can still be effective, especially when they work together. Pinning with yellow guards can sometimes be the only way to break up a cluster of enemy pieces, or to capture pieces standing at the edge of the board.

Blue (Heavy) Guards: These pieces have a value of 2. They can move up to two spaces in any direction, or they may jump up to twice. Blue guards capture by *jumping*.

Because they can jump twice, blue guards can have tremendous range. They are stronger than yellow guards, but they can't always capture, because jumping can be harder than pinning. In addition, the challenger must be careful to protect their blue guards, because if all of those pieces are captured, the king's side wins!



Ace and Mage: Both the ace and mage move the same way, as shown here. They can move up to 3 spaces in any direction, or they can make up to 3 jumps. They capture by *jumping*.

In addition, the ace and mage have unique special abilities, which are described below. Together with the verdigris pawn, these pieces can be a powerful force. Using the ace, mage, and pawn as a team is the challenger's best way to victory.



Ace Special Ability, Convert: Whenever the ace captures an enemy piece, it may replace that piece with an ally of the same type, but only if the replacement is available (i.e., that piece is out of play). Conversion is always optional. For example, if the ace jumps two of the king's blue guards, but only one of the challenger's blue guards is out of play, the challenger may decide where to make the substitution.



Mage Special Ability, Empower: The mage adds 1 to the value of all allied pieces *that it can see*. The rules for each empowered game piece are detailed below. Empower is a very strong ability, but be careful: If the mage is captured, this ability transfers to the king!

Note: Establish each piece's Empowerment status only at the *beginning* of the turn. A piece cannot gain or lose power in the middle of a turn, even if the pieces move, or the mage's sight lines change.



Yellow Guards: Empowered yellow guards have a value of 2. They can move up to 2 spaces. They still capture only by pinning, but they do it with a value of 2.



Blue Guards: Empowered blue guards have a value of 3. They can move up to 3 spaces, or jump up to 3 times.



Ace: The Empowered ace has a value of 4. It can move up to 4 spaces, or jump up to 4 times. With a power of 4, the ace is strong enough to jump the king!



Pawn: The Empower ability does not affect the verdigris pawn.



King: The king has a value of 4. However, it can move only one space in any direction. The king captures by *pinning*. Despite moving only one space, the king is a formidable piece. With a power of 4, it is strong enough to capture any one of the challenger's pieces.

Empower Ability: When the king's side captures the mage, the king gains the Empower ability (see above).



Verdigris Pawn: The verdigris pawn belongs to neither player. It has a value of 4, and it can move up to 4 spaces in any direction, or jump up to 4 times. It can capture by either *pinning* or *jumping*.

Either player may control the pawn, if at least one of that player's pieces can see it at the beginning of the turn. (Remember that pieces can see in all directions, and that any pieces in the Keep can *always* see the pawn.)

The pawn is the only piece that can capture by pinning and jumping. However, it cannot do both in the same turn. Other rules for the verdigris pawn are as follows:

- The pawn cannot be captured (it can only be controlled).
- A player cannot move the pawn back to the space where it started the previous turn (reversing the last move), whether or not the board has changed.
- The pawn gains assistance from its allies when it is pinning, but it *does not* provide such assistance to other pieces when they are pinning.

The pawn is the strongest piece in the game, and its divided loyalty makes it both an asset and a liability for both sides. Both players can control it, and once the pawn has entered play, it can be a serious threat. The King's side has no trouble controlling the pawn in the early game, but even so, the king often leaves the pawn trapped in the corner, safely out of the Challenger's control. Once the pawn is in play, one false move can give the challenger a path to victory!

Winning the Game:

The challenger's goal is to *capture the king*. There are many ways to do this, but the easiest is by jumping or pinning it with the pawn. The pawn has a value of 4, so it can move 4 spaces, and can pin or jump the king without any help.

The king's objective is to capture all of the challenger's *blue guards*. This can be trickier than it sounds, since the ace can rescue captured guards and bring them back into play. The king's side wins only when all three of the challenger's blue guards are out of play!

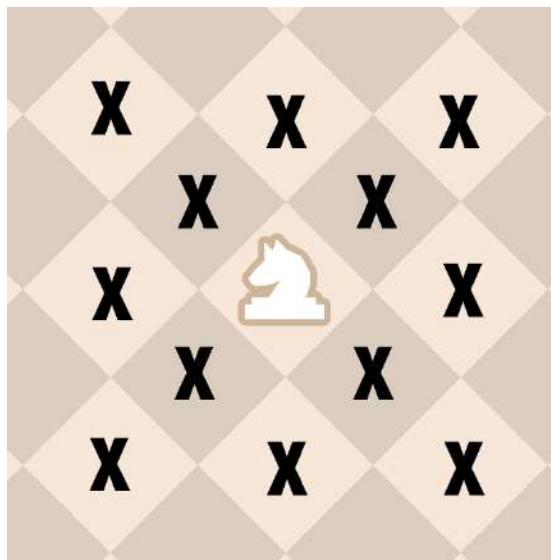
The player who achieves their goal wins the game immediately, even if their opponent could win on the next turn.

Winning as the king's side can be fairly simple if the challenger is struggling. To win as the challenger takes forethought and strategy, and a skill for using all of your special pieces as a team. Try playing both sides, and see if you can win as both challenger and king!

Variations:

Champion's Rule: Under this optional rule, the ace has a second special ability, called "Subdue." When the ace is in the Keep, it can sacrifice itself and remove a large number of the king's guards from the board. The ability works like this:

- **Subdue:** When standing in the Keep, the ace may sacrifice itself instead of moving, to capture (not convert) every King's Guard within a 2-space radius, as shown in the diagram below. Other pieces in this zone are not affected. This action removes the ace from play.
- The ace performs this action *instead of moving*. The ace cannot move and Subdue in the same turn.



The Ace's "Subdue" action, area of effect

The Champion's Rule is a powerful option for the challenger's side, and can be used in early games to help new players win as the challenger. Some teachers let the student move the ace before performing the Subdue action. An even more generous option allows the ace to perform the subdue action from anywhere, not just inside the Keep.

None of these variations are typically used in high-level play.

Try "Hens and Chicks": While developing Fist, we came up with a second game called Hens and Chicks. It's not mentioned in the books, but it is a similar game with some similar rules. Find Hens and Chicks at the Verdigris Pawn information page at Crab Fragment Labs.

Strategy: As the common wisdom goes, if you control the pawn, you control the game.

While the pawn is by far the most powerful piece, it is possible for other pieces to capture the king. For example, when the mage can see the ace, the ace is large enough to jump the king. In fact, with the right moves and plenty of help, even a yellow guard can pin the king. But this is very difficult indeed.

The challenger needs to get the ace and mage working together. With the mage's help, yellow guards can pin larger targets, and the ace becomes strong enough to threaten the king.

The challenger should also try to gain control of the pawn, either by breaking it free, or by getting pieces into the Keep. The king's side must therefore protect the Keep, if they want to retain control of the pawn.

The ace can only rescue pieces that have been captured, so the challenger should not shy away from losing a few guards. Look for opportunities to convert several enemy guards at once, especially if you can get multiple allies to occupy the Keep.

It can be tricky to free the mage from its starting corner. If the mage jumps out immediately, the king can pin it from the Keep. If the mage's middle guard moves away, the space left behind is surrounded by guards, and the mage could easily be pinned here. The trick for freeing the mage is either to clear a path, or to give the mage a second piece to jump, so it can escape the reach of the king.

Other Notes:

Thanks for playing! We hope you enjoy this playtest version of Fist. But be aware that we are still working on the rules, so nothing is final, and we're eager for help in improving the game.

Please send us your feedback at crabfragment.com, and keep checking back there for news and updates for this ongoing project.

And look for [*The Verdigris Pawn*](#), by Alysa Wishingrad, available from HarperCollins at harpercollins.com.

