Gounki

**For 2 players
8 years old - Adult
10 to 30 minutes**

A game by Christophe Malavasi

Starting position

*White victory
After they put a double circle beyond
the opposite side of the board*

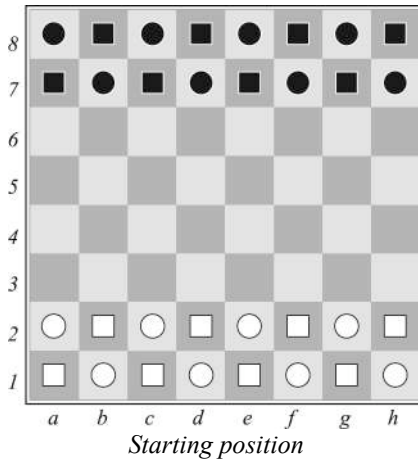*Possible movements
for a simple piece*

Objective

Using strategy and careful thinking, be the first to get through your opponent's lines and place one of your pieces beyond the other side of the board.

Material

> An 8x8 board
> 16 white pieces (8 circles and 8 squares)
> 16 black pieces (8 circles and 8 squares)

Preparation

Each player chooses one colour and places his pieces as illustrated: squares on dark spaces and circles on light ones.
The player with the colour white begins.

Game description

During each turn, players choose a piece and play it according to the rules specific to that piece.
He has the choice **to move or to deploy** that piece (i.e. separate it into several pieces if it was a compound piece). During that move, he may have the opportunity to **stack** his own pieces or to **capture** one of his opponent's pieces.

In any case :
> you **cannot move backward**, toward your own side,
> you **cannot jump over other pieces**.

The winner is the first player who places a piece beyond the opposite side of the board.

Movements

Simple pieces

Simple circles move one step diagonally, always forward.

Simple squares move one step on the side or forward.

Stacks

During a movement, the player may choose to stack his pieces to form a compound piece. For instance:
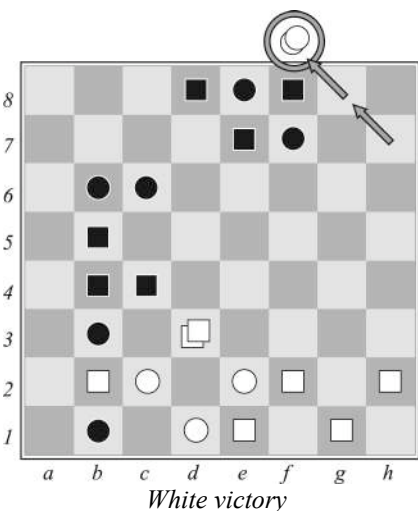
Stacking a **square** with a **square** gives a **double square** ;

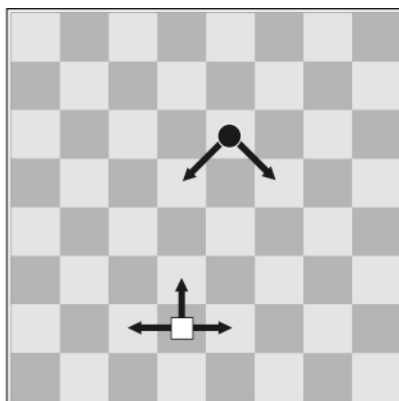Stacking a **double circle** with a **square** gives the compound piece **circle-circle-square**.

Pieces are composed of a **maximum of 3 simple pieces**.

The stacking order of squares and circles has no impact on the compound piece's movement possibilities.
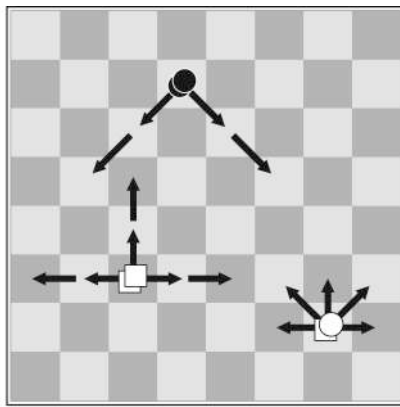
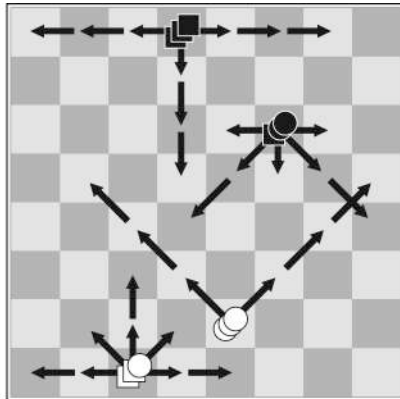**These three compound pieces are equivalent.**

*Possible movements
of double pieces*

*Possible movements
of triple pieces*

Movements of compound pieces

Important: during a movement, a compound piece is **always taken as a whole**, like one "big piece". To separate that piece again into 2 or 3 simple pieces, you must **deploy** it (see below).

A **double circle** moves like a simple circle in 1 or 2 steps.

A **double square** moves like a simple square in 1 or 2 steps.

A **square-circle** moves either like a square, or like a circle.

A **triple circle** moves like a simple circle in 1, 2 or 3 steps.

A **triple square** moves like a simple square in 1, 2 or 3 steps.

A **square-square-circle** moves either as a double square, or as a simple circle.

A **circle-circle-square** moves either as a double circle, or as a simple square.

During a movement, a compound piece **cannot** :
- ➤ **be split into several pieces,**
- ➤ **change direction,**
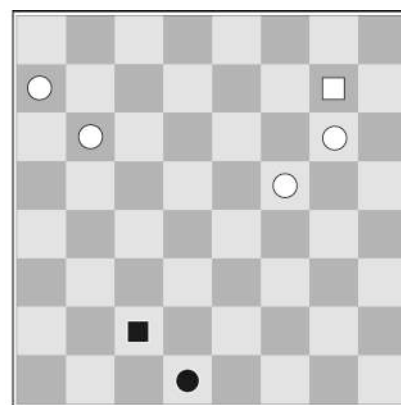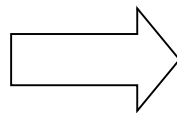- ➤ **jump over other pieces.**

Deployments

To split a compound piece into 2 or 3 simple pieces, you must **deploy** it.

To do so, the player takes the compound piece in his hand. He places his hand above a neighbouring space, drops a simple piece on that space, then continues this way until all the simple pieces of the compound piece have been placed (or deployed).
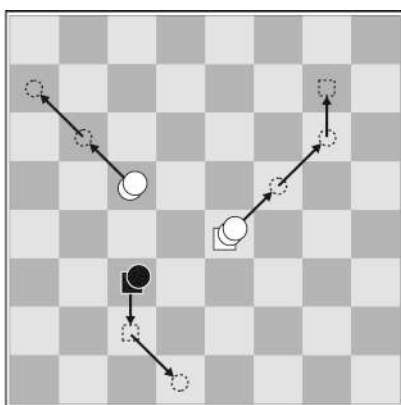
Some possible deployments before…   *… and after : deployment results.*

Rules concerning **the order** of deployments and the **choice of destination spaces** are the following**:**
- ➤ If a compound piece includes both circles and squares, you deploy all circles first, or all squares first. One cannot, for instance, deploy in the order 1-circle, 2-square, 3-circle again.
- ➤ The destination space of a simple piece is always chosen according to its normal possible movements: forward diagonal for a circle, on the side or forward for a square.
- ➤ If one deploys 2 or 3 circles, he has to deploy them in the same direction: one cannot slalom during deployments. In the same idea, 2 or 3 squares are always deployed in the same direction.

Example 1: Regardless of the real order in which the simple pieces of a circle-circle-square are stacked, the player may deploy:

- Either a square (one step forward or on the side), then two circles (two steps one after the other in the same diagonal)
- Or two circles (two steps one after the other in the same diagonal), then one square (one step forward or on the side).

Remember: keep in mind that **these 3 compound pieces are equivalent:**

Figures below illustrate the different ways to deploy a **circle-circle-square**, starting with the circles (left figure), or with the square (right figure).
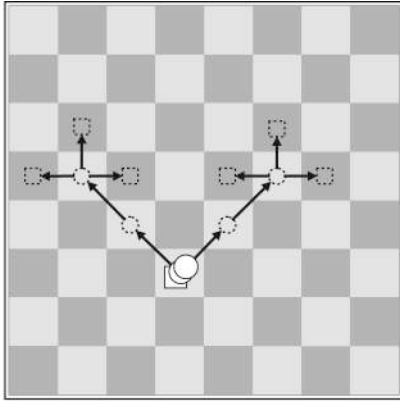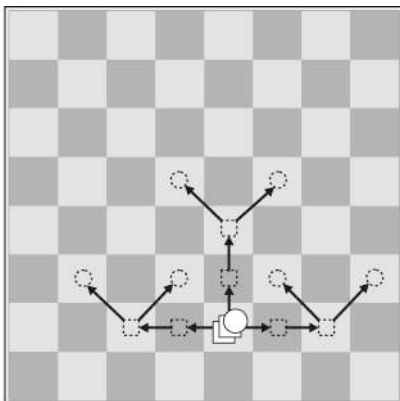

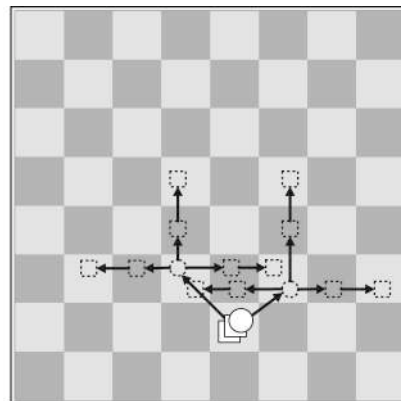*Possible deployments for a circle-circle-square, starting with the circles.*
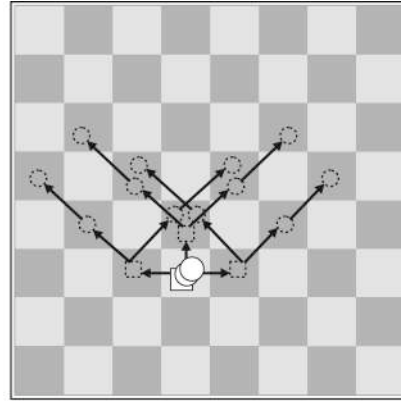
Possible deployments for a circle-circle-square, starting with the square.

Example 2: the figures below illustrate the different ways to deploy a **square-square-circle,** starting with the squares (left figure), or with the circles (right figure).

Possible deployments of a square-square-circle starting with the squares

Possible deployments of a square-square-circle starting with the circle

The deployment of a **square-circle** works like the deployment of a square-square-circle with only one square (or like the deployment of a circle-circle-square with only one circle).

Triple square and **triple circle** deployments follow the same principle.

Important: During a deployment, **one cannot**:
- **Deploy over a space occupied by an opponent's piece**,
- **Stop the deployment** before the piece has been completely deployed.
  Note: a winning deployment ends the instant a piece has been placed beyond the opposite side of the board.

Deploy over your own pieces

You can deploy a compound piece over your own pieces, as long as no piece made up of more than 3 simple pieces has been formed after the deployment is complete.
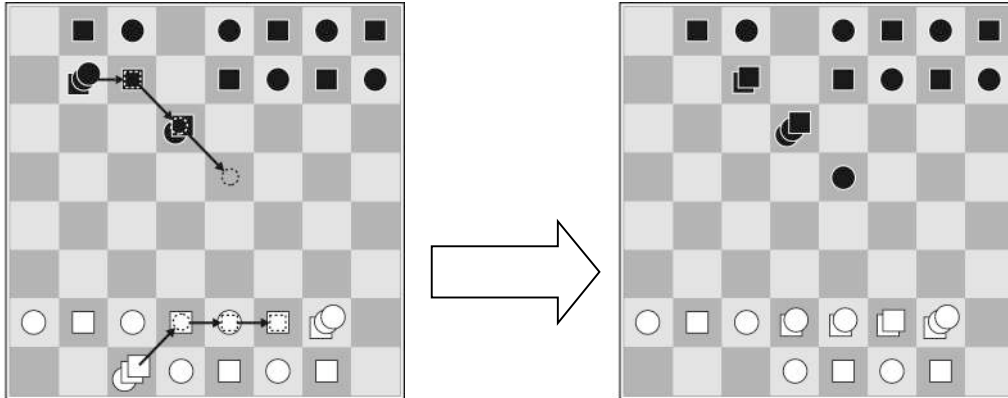

Examples of deployments over other pieces, before…   … and after: result of deployments.
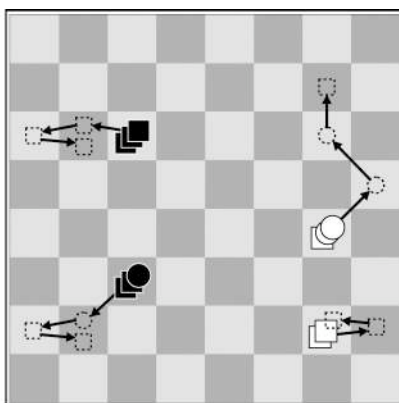
Rebounds

Composed pieces can bounce against the sides of the game board during their movements or deployments. This is not considered as a change of direction.
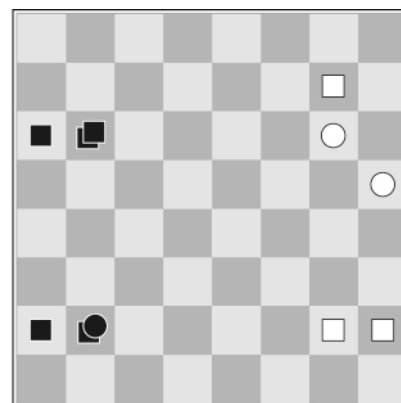
Rebound principle: if a piece cannot continue its movement because it meets the side of the board, it bounces like a tennis ball against a wall.
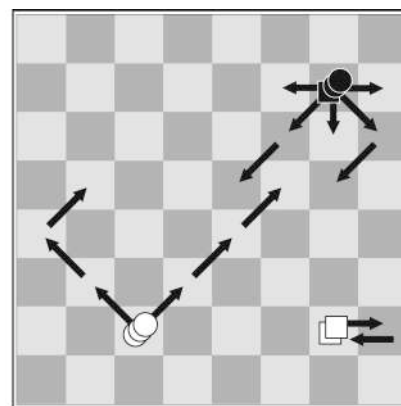
Some possible movements with rebounds

Some possible deployments with rebounds, before…   … and after: deployment results.

Captures

When a player moves one of his pieces onto a space which is already occupied by an opponent's piece (simple or compound), that opponent's piece is captured and removed from the game.
You can capture a piece during a movement, but not during a deployment.

If a player captures all his opponent's pieces, he wins the game, but this rarely happens. Be careful, "gluttony is a deadly sin!"

Some strategic advice for beginners

By Matthieu Walraet

Before you start to read about strategy, my advice is for you to play a few games to make sure you really understand the rules. That's already done? Great, let's begin!

The fundamental aspect in Gounki is that it is a race. The goal is to be the first to place a piece beyond the other side of the board. Most of the time, you've got to choose position over capture, and play moves that make you quicker than your opponent.

In the beginning

A good way to start a game is to build triple-mixed-pieces: circle-circle-square or square-square-circle. These are the most powerful pieces of the game because of their speed and flexibility.

The **circle-circle-square** is a very offensive piece. It can go sideways or forward, and can change its target side in only one move, thus exploiting possible weaknesses without giving the opponent time to organize his defence.

The **square-square-circle** is mostly defensive in the beginning of the game: when deployed, it can turn into a wall of mutually-defended pieces. On the other hand, because it includes two squares, it can mostly lead straight attacks, which is not very efficient in the beginning when most of the defensive pieces are still in the game.

Triple circles and **triple squares** are the quickest pieces but they have a lower number of possible movements or deployments, which makes them easier to block for the opponent. I wouldn't advise building them at the beginning of a game.
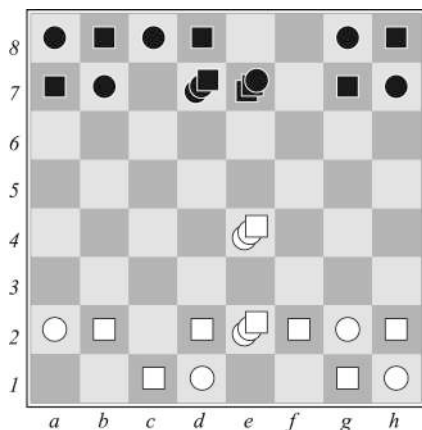

In this example, **white** has taken a very good start. He has built **two circle-circle-squares** and has moved one of them forward to control the center. Furthermore, he kept a solid square structure for his defence.

Black has chosen to build **two different triple pieces**, which gives him more possibilities. Unfortunately his defence has big holes! He will have to keep his **square-square-circle** backward to fill in the gaps.

Capture vs. Speed

Because Gounki is a race, don't waste time in capturing pieces if this does not help you cross the board before your opponent does!
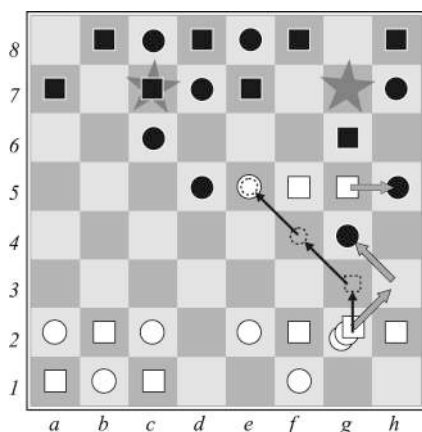
Here, it's **white** turn to play. He could **capture the circle in h5** with **g5**, then **g4** with **g2** (with a rebound), But he prefers **deploying g2** in **g3, f4** and **e5**. Thus, he builds in **e5** a **double circle** that **threatens c7 and g7** at the same time. After that, he can win in 3 moves.
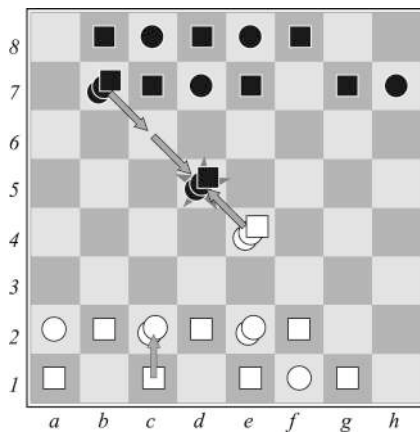
Another example: **white** could make an exchange by **capturing d5** with **e5**. **Black** would then recapture with **b7**.
Those pieces are identical, aren't they?

Actually, **that exchange would be bad for white**, because the action takes place in the second half of the board. **White needs 4 moves** to build a **circle-circle-square** and put it in **d5**, while **3 moves do the job for black**.
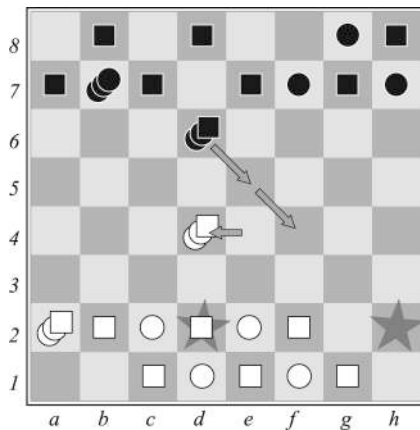
If he makes that exchange, **white loses one move**, which is the advantage he gained when playing first at the beginning of the game.
Rather, he should move c1 onto c2.
Now, if black makes the exchange, this is good for white.

End of the game: some skillful moves

Fork

Beware of a circle-circle-square quietly sleeping on a black space in its 3rd line…

Threatened by the **black triple circle**, **white** has moved is **circle-circle-square** from **e4** to **d4**.
Oh no! **Now black can win the game** thanks to a **fork**.
Indeed, **black moves d6 to f4**.
Doing so, he threatens both positions **d2** and **h2**.
**If white defends on one side, black takes the other one.**

Most of the time, one should not make forks just to capture opponent pieces (again, capturing is not the main issue), but to win the game or to gain decisive advantage.

The **circle-circle-square** is very good for making forks, especially when placed on a black space. Indeed, the starting position defends white spaces very well, but not black spaces at all.
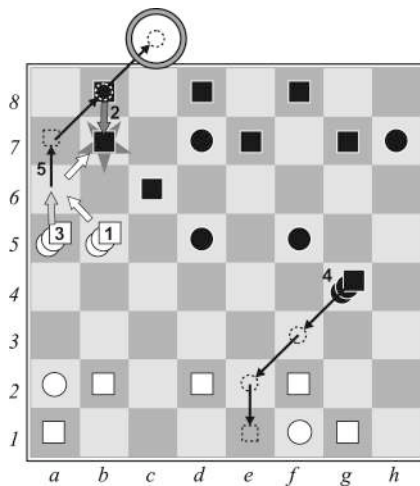
Winning deployment
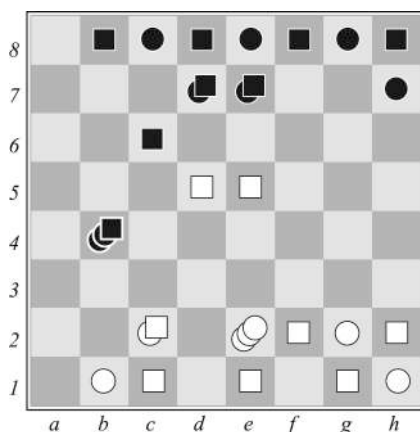
Black to play:
he can win with his piece in b4.
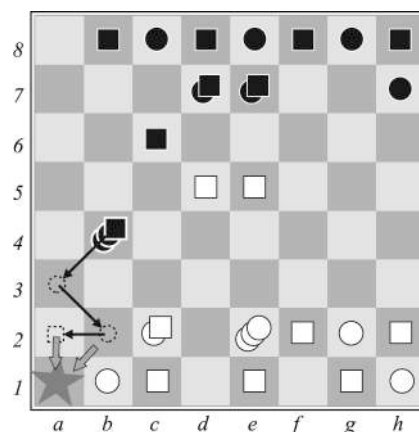
Solution: The black bouncing deployment (b4 * a3, b2, a2) creates a fork for the occupation of the a1 position.

Sacrifice

Often, one triple piece is not enough to go though the opponent's defence.

Here, the **black defence** is just solid enough to prevent **white** from going through with only one **circle-circle-square**. **White** has thus called for some reinforcement.

Be careful, this is a little complicated!

White to play. **He has to be quick** because the **black** piece in **g4** can win in two moves with the **g4 * f3, e2, e1 deployment**. The only solution for **white** is to be quicker.

The **sacrifice** works for **white**: he captures **b7** with **b5**, even if black can recapture with **b8**. Then **white** moves his second triple piece from **a5** to **a6** and wins on the next turn by deploying **a6** on the **a7** and **b8** cases. He wins when he goes off of the board in the **c** column when he deploys a6 * a7, b8, out.

Handicap

The player with the least experience takes white, which is an advantage.
Nevertheless, if the black player wins too often, you can decide to give him a handicap to balance your games.

For instance:
  ➢ Black has to reach the other side of the board only in the C, D, E or F columns, or
  ➢ White can play two or three times in a row during the first turn.

Your turn to play!

Written and illustrated by
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