Game Design Project

'Cell'ular Tag

- Mohan Subramanian

Table of Contents

Goal:

Create a new variant of the 'Tag – You're it' game which interests adults as well.

Background:

'Tag' is a fast paced, fun game involving chasing and tagging players. The game is one of children's all-time favorites because of its simplicity and ease to play. It has many variants involving different gameplays (Refer the link - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tag_(game) for a long list of variants).

Motivation:

As I grew up, like any other adult, I started losing interest in games that lacked strategy. For an adult, a game would be fun when it has

- A mix of Strategy and skill
- Rewards and punishments based on his/her performance.

On this note, it's not surprising to see adults losing interest to play Tag for a long time because they grow tired of just running around. I wanted to create a variant of Tag that gives the players a choice between just running hard and applying a little strategy. So this way both kids and adults could have fun playing this game together.

Brainstorming:

I first sat down to analyze the existing game, penning down the things I liked and did not like about the game.

- The game had an interesting balance between chance and skill. The first chaser is chosen by chance and its upto his skill to tag his friends.
- Everybody loves being chased. The gameplay of running to evade tagging is the core fun element of the game.
- Interest curve increases with the challenge posed by chaser. The players get bored easily, if the chaser does not chase well. On the other hand the players have higher satisfaction and fun if they feel they evaded a tough chase by the chaser.
- The game is basically structure-less, as there are not many constraints on the main goal of tagging players. Variants like Cop and robbers, Chain tag and Pirate's base have succeeded in bringing structure, thereby bringing a strategic element into the game.
- Difficulty is determined by the vastness of the play area. Obstacles also play an important role.
- A closed smaller play area leads to players getting tagged easily. Yet surprisingly, this is found to be more fun as the game becomes more dynamic and responsive.

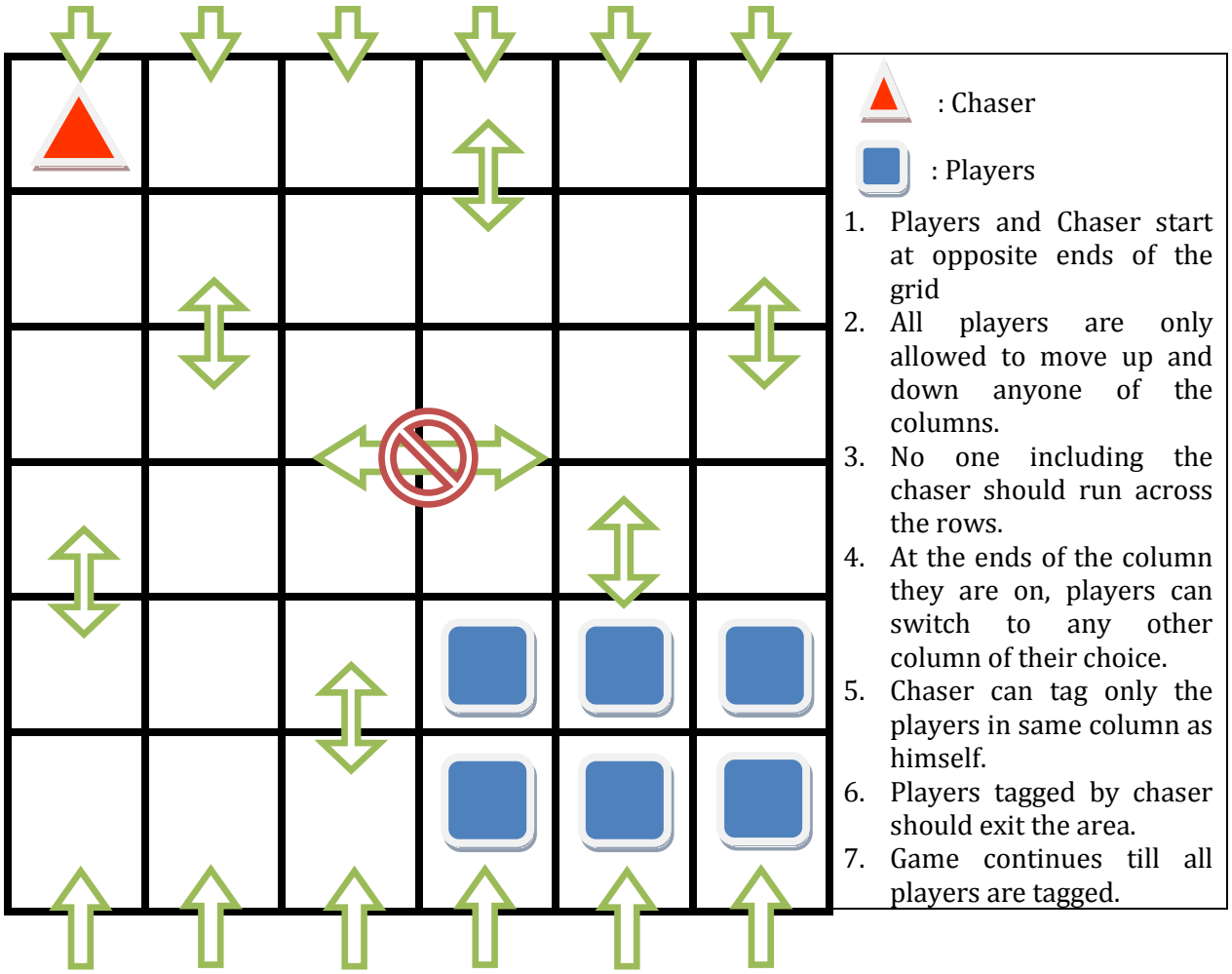
Development:

This initial analysis gave me a direction to proceed. I focused on changing two major elements of the original tag game. The first change being to limit the play area and the second being an application of structure based on the same. Instead of running in all directions, if there were fixed destinations to run to and only limited paths to take, the chaser has a higher chance of tagging players. At the same time, the players get to choose their paths and destination, being rewarded or punished based on their strategy.

As I was brainstorming for an idea for a simple yet interesting play area, I was inspired when I was working on a Excel worksheet. I liked the simplicity and structure of a table with rows and columns. I noticed the tile-like pattern on the portico of my home in India which had a similar Table-cells-structure. So I decided to use this simple table structure as a playing arena for my game. The main reasons were

- The rows and columns in a table offer a closed, structured area with each row and column being a path.
- At any given time, a player could occupy only one of the cells and vice versa was valid too - only one player could occupy a cell - almost like a chess board.

The visual representation of the playing area and the rules of my new variant can be found below.



I play-tested this game with my friends and also some kids in the neighborhood. I took turns in joining them as well as being just an observer . Some of the pros and cons I got from their feedback are below.

Pros:

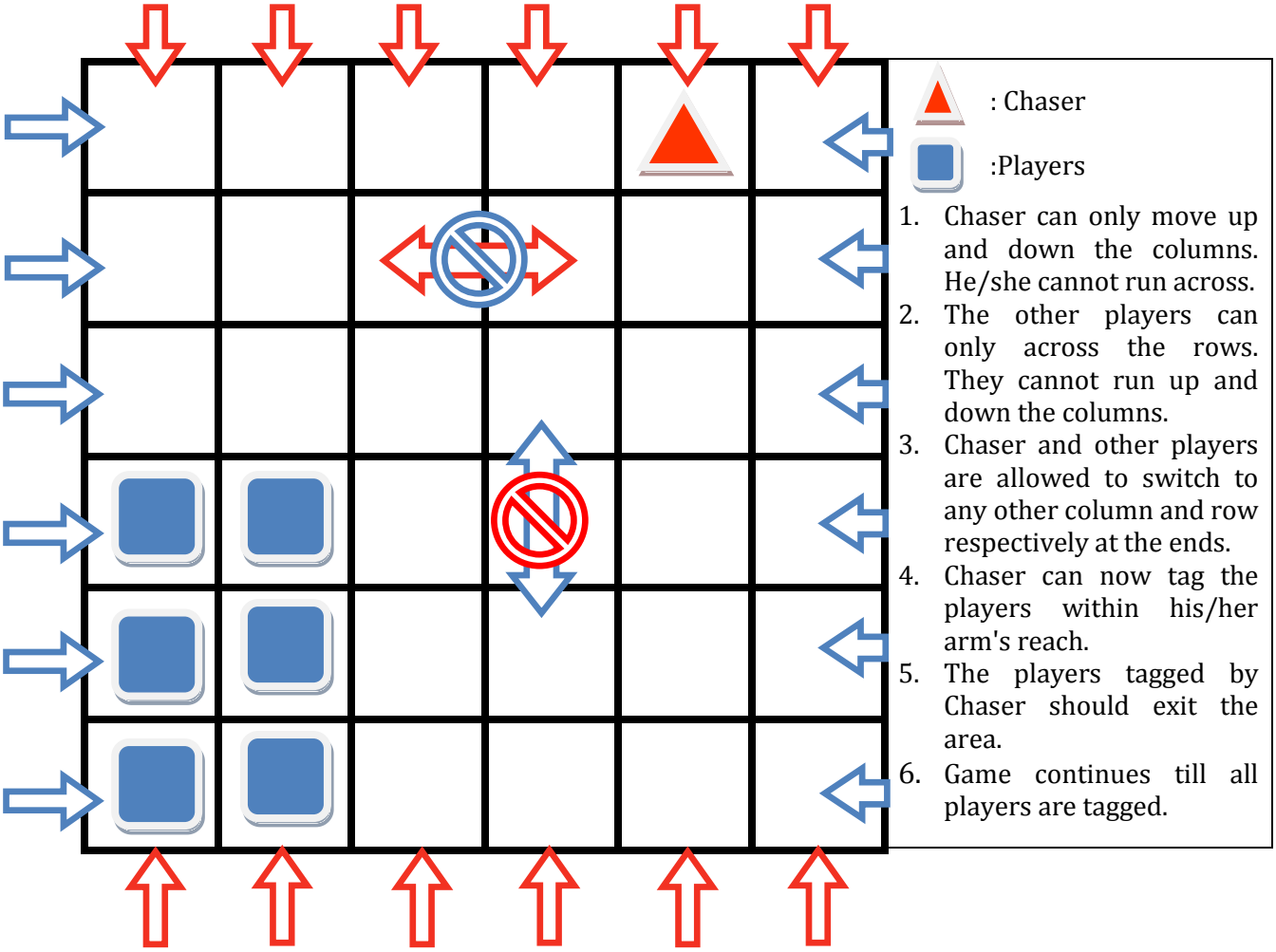
1. Game is different and fun in a simplistic way.
2. The new rules worked out well for the most part.
3. Unnecessary frantic running was avoided. So players did not tire out soon
4. Both adults and kids enjoyed!

Cons:

1. With the chaser chasing the player down the same column, it became very similar to the normal variant of tag. Not much of strategy could be applied at that point.
2. With all players running in the same paths, it felt overcrowded with players bumping against each other often.
3. If the play area was too big or too small, the game was not as interesting.

Iteration process:

I wanted to retain the elements that were good while eliminating some of the cons. Since bringing a fair amount of strategy had been my major aim, I concentrated on modifying the rules for the same. Soon I came up with the following changes.



The major improvements made from the previous version were

- As the chaser and players take up different paths, they did not bump against each other much.
- This version definitely brought out a fair amount of strategy from both the chaser and the players.

On play-testing the new rules, the observations made were

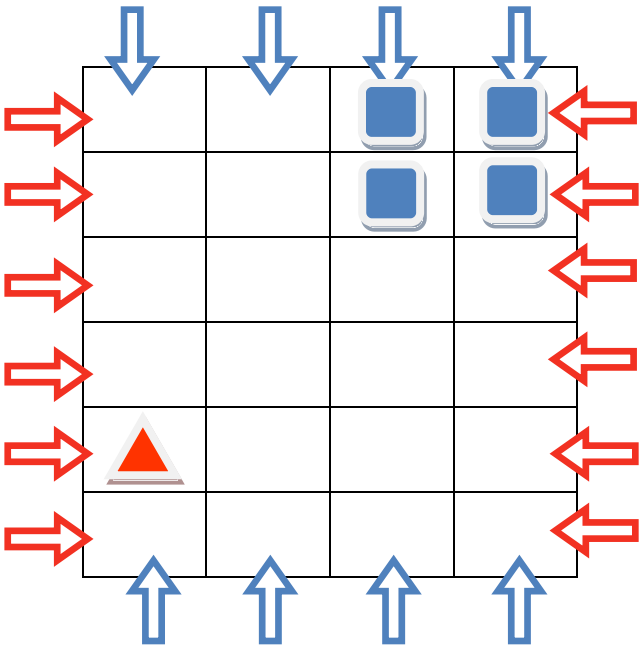
- With the chaser running down the columns and the players running across the rows, the points of interest were when their paths collided.
- When kids and adults played together, it was noticed that the kids kept running frantic, whereas the adults did not run much. They moved just enough to evade the chaser's arms.

- For 'n' number of players, the right size of the play area would be if atleast one of the dimensions was 'n' or above, while the other was atleast half of 'n'. The game lost balance if the dimensions were above '(1.5) * n'.

for instance, if number of players, n = 7
then a grid of dimensions like 7x7 would ideal.
Also dimension varying from 7x4 till 10x10 would be fun.

- When the space is limited and only a grid with asymmetrical dimensions can be formed, then chaser should choose to move along the dimension with the higher value - for a balanced game.

for instance, if the grid available was only of dimensions 6x4,
i.e rows = 6, columns = 3, then the chaser should choose to run across the rows, while the players choose to run down the columns.

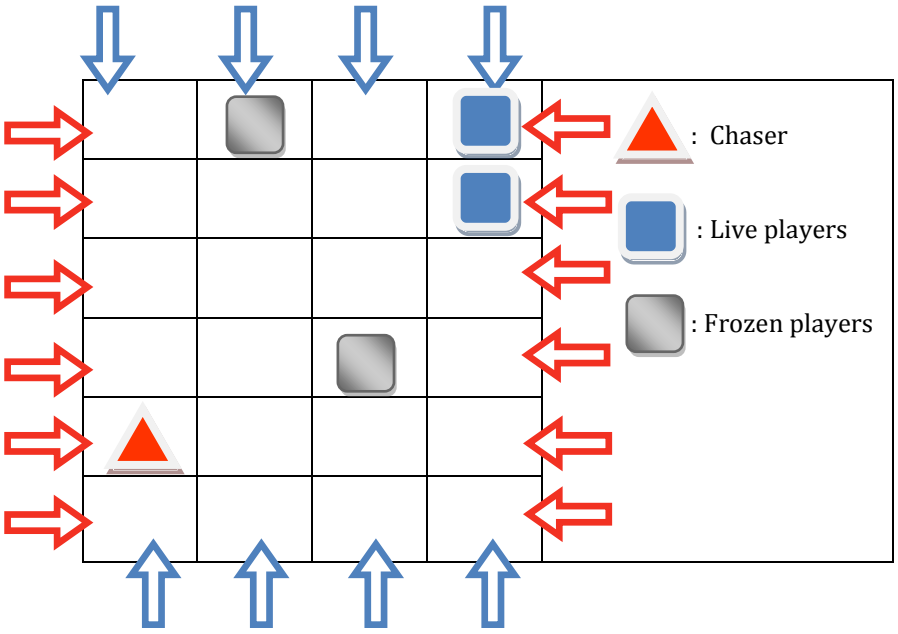


- This variant would not be the right choice , if the number of players is less than 4.

Future scope:

Some of the ideas that can be interesting to playtest before being added to the game rules

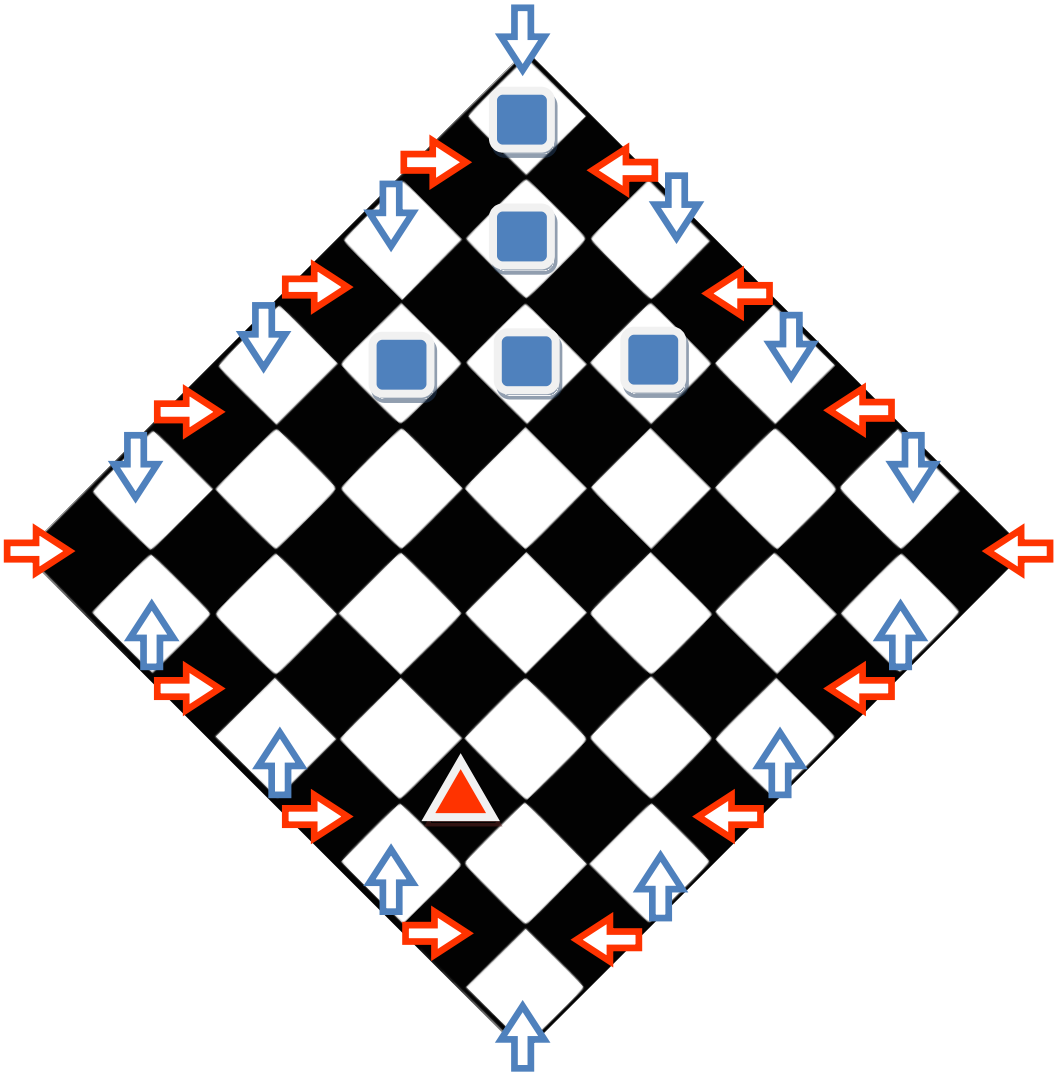
- What if the tagged players froze in the cells they were tagged in, thereby blocking the players from using that path?



In the figure, the two players who were tagged are made to freeze at their respective cells.
They are now occupying the cells [1,2] and [4,3]
The chaser cannot use the 1st and 4th row efficiently.
The players cannot use the 2nd and 3rd columns efficiently.

- What if the play area was a giant chess board and chaser/players are allowed to move only perpendicular to each other?

In the figure below, the chaser can move only across a single black row.
He cannot move up and down any black column nor can he move into a white space.
On the other hand, the players can move only up and down any white column.
They cannot move across a white row nor into a black space.
The chaser and the players can change their row and column respectively at the ends.



A giant Chess board!