

# Lines of Action

## Strategic Ideas -- Part 1

**L**ines of Action is a game for two players using readily available equipment, a checkerboard and pieces. It was invented around 1960 by Claude Soucie and described by Sid Sackson in his famous book *A Gamut of Games* in 1969. Since then, LOA has attracted a small but dedicated following among game players as it is one of the very best of modern strategic board games, combining simplicity, elegance and originality.

### Rules

I expect many readers will be familiar with LOA, so I will pass over the rules quickly. LOA is a game for two players using a checkerboard and pieces. The pieces are initially set up as shown at the top left of this page. One player controls the twelve black pieces and the other the twelve white pieces. Black moves first and then play alternates, with each player moving one of his pieces each turn. A player cannot pass his turn. A piece moves in a straight line, including diagonally, exactly as many squares as there are pieces, enemy or friendly, including the piece moved, in that straight line.

A piece can move over friendly pieces, but may not finish its move by landing on a friendly piece. The pieces passed over are not effected in any way. A piece may not move over enemy pieces, but may finish its move by landing on an enemy piece, which is then captured and removed from the board.

A player has a winning position when all his pieces are in one connected group. The connections within the group may be either orthogonal or diagonal. If a player is reduced by captures to one remaining piece, then this constitutes a winning position. If a player, by making a capture, creates a winning position for himself and at the same time, by eliminating an isolated piece, creates a winning position for his opponent, then the victory goes to the player making the move.

It is unlikely, but possible, that the same sequence of moves or the same board position may occur over and over because to deviate from this sequence would be disadvantageous for the players. This situation is not covered in the rules given by Sid Sackson, but we may assume that if an identical position occurs three times during a game, the game may be declared drawn by repetition.

### The Opening

Allowing for rotations and reflections, there are nine possible opening moves in LOA: b1h1, b1b3, b1d3, c1:a3, c1c3, c1e3, d1b3, d1d3, d1f3.

Four of these moves, b1d3, c1e3, d1d3, d1f3, allow the moving piece to be captured. Black cannot recapture, and he has

no compensation in terms of better position, so these move are disadvantageous.

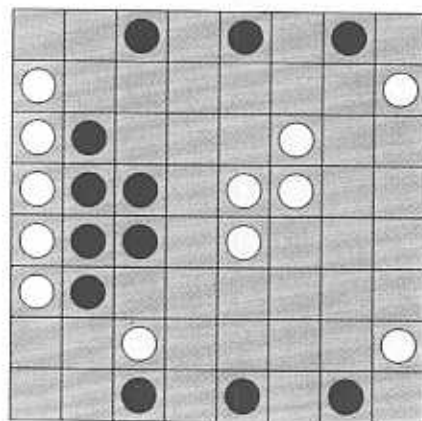
Likewise, the move b1h1 is a wasted move as it does nothing to develop black's position.

The move c1:e3 is what I call a cross-corner capture. 1. c1:a3 is generally not thought to be good because white can reply 1...a2c4. The accepted wisdom is that being able to centralize an end piece like this is good. (If 2. f1:c4 a6:c4, whereas if c1 had not been moved then black could simply capture with c1:c4 to gain a piece.) However, as we will see later on, a centralized position is not always to be considered good. Black does, moreover, gain a piece, which usually is good. The opening move 1 c1:a3 deserves more serious consideration.

This leaves the three popular opening moves, c1c3, b1b3 and d1b3. 1. c1c3 is the most central of the three moves, although it allows white to centralize too with 1...a2c4.

A more forceful move is 1. b1b3, threatening d1:a4. White will usually answer 1...a2c2, defending against this threat while bringing the man out from under the piece on b3 and pressing down on c1. However, this is an even exchange, the position is still symmetrical, and black has gained nothing yet from the advantage of the opening move.

My favorite opening move is 1. d1b3, and the reason for this is that black now has the moves b1b4 and b8b5 to block the white pieces on the a-file behind a wall of black pieces. He also has other excellent moves to follow, such as f8c5, f1c4 and d8b6, all of which solidify the wall and further blockade the white pieces, while making of his wall a focal group around which to build a strong position. I call this opening The Wall. The diagram below shows a position where white has let black get away with this plan. White does not, however, have to sit back and allow this to happen; in fact, he has a number of strategies available to him.



White's options are as follows.

- Attack the black wall

There are three ways for white to immediately attack the black piece on b3: h7f7, h5f7 and h3e3.

If 1...h3e3, black can reply 2. b3:e3 h6:e3, 3. c1:e3, and white has sacrificed a piece in order to halt construction of the black wall. However, maybe the better move for black is 2. c1:c3, after which b1b4 creates a very solid formation. White's threat, in other words, has forced black to actually improve his position. In answer to 1...h7f7, black can simply capture with 2. b3:f7, which is not bad as it threatens e8:h5 as well as puts him a piece up. Otherwise, black can defend with 2. g8g6, after which he can continue to build his wall. The third possibility, 1...h5f7, may be slightly better for white as 2. b3:f7 is less attractive because black does not then have the threat e8:h5. In addition, 1...h5f7 starts a white wall (with h7e7 and a7d7 to follow) if black defends with 2. g8g6.

- Bring his pieces from behind the black wall

The pieces most likely to be trapped are the central four on a3, a4, a5 and a6.

The ten possible moves of these pieces are a3:c1, a3c5, a4c4, a4c6, a5c7, a5c3, a5c5, a6c4, a6c6 and a6:c8. All of these except a3:c1, a5c7, a6c6 and a6:c8 lead to capture of the moving piece without compensation. The two cross-corner capture moves are not at all popular at this stage of the game, although perhaps they deserve some attention. This leaves the two possibilities a5c7 and a6c6, both of which are good. In particular, 1...a5c7 has the additional advantage for white of starting off his own wall. It is my favorite reply to 1. d1b3.

- Build a wall himself

Rather than extricating his pieces from behind the potential black wall as fast as possible, white can go ahead and build his own wall. Since black has already started to vacate the first rank, it is best for white to build his wall in the top half of the board with either a5c7 or h5f7. Both of these moves are good because they accomplish dual purposes.

With 1...h5f7, white is also attacking the black piece on b3 and, as mentioned above, if black captures with 2. b3:f7 white has sacrificed a piece to sabotage the black wall. If black defends with 1. g8g6 white has gained a tempo in the construction of his own wall.

With 1...a5c7, white is also moving a piece from behind a potential black wall, as mentioned above.

### Sample Game

These considerations regarding the opening few moves spring from my ideas for a strategic framework for LOA. Before going any further, however, it might be a good idea to have a look at an actual game.

Kerry Handscomb vs. Hartmut Thordsen, played by email  
March to May 1999

1. d1b3                      a6c6

2. b8b5                      a2c2

White has few options to move a3, a4, a5 without capture. This move also blocks c1, allowing his following move.

3. b1b4                      a7c5

4. d8b6

Continues to build the wall and prevents a5c7.

4...                      h2f2

5. g8g6                      h6:f8

Example of a good cross-corner capture, as it gets the piece from under g6 while threatening f8:b4 and therefore pinning the defensive piece on e1.

6. g1g3                      f2d2

Blocks the defense e1:b4 if f8:b4.

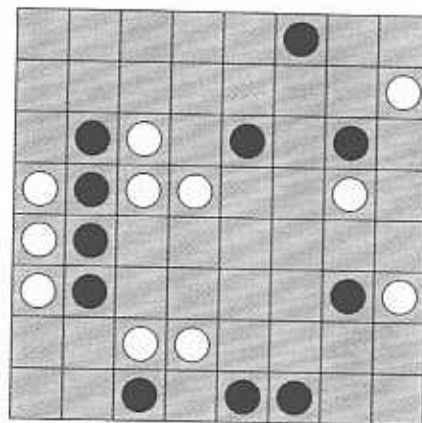
7. e8:f8

Simply removes the attacker.

7...                      h5d5

Threatening d5:c3, which is blocked by the next move.

8. e8e6                      h4g5 (diagram)



Subtle move. On the face of it, white's only threat is g5:b5, which black can defend against with 9. f1d3. But then 9...h7h5, creating what I call a "shotgun" threat, as white is aiming at b5 with both barrels. White is threatening h5:b5 and then g5:b5 when black recaptures with d3:b5. Black could not defend against this. Therefore:

9. g6h5                      h3:f1

10. c1:a3

This is a pair of good cross-corner captures. Black's move continues to hem in the white pieces. The point of white's move is the following:

10...                      f1f3

Threatening f3:b3, but black defends by eliminating a dangerous white piece.

11. g3:g5                      d5d3

Again threatening f3:b3, but this is risky as black in turn now has a shotgun threat aimed at c5. (So the one white defender on c2 is not enough.)

12. b5:d3

Black feels confident enough now to open the prison door a crack. His material advantage gives him greater flexibility than white.

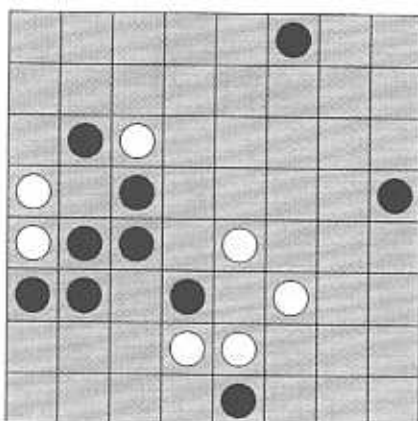
12...                      h7e4

13. e6c4

White is running out of options. By threatening e4:b4, he allows black to defend by solidifying his position and blocking the white defense of c2:c5 in case of g5:c5.

13...  
14. g5:c5

c2e2  
Resigns (diagram)



Black has a solid position and a large material advantage, while white's pieces are scattered and ineffective. All black has to do is calmly connect his stragglers one by one into the main group.

In the second part of this article we will look in more detail at some concepts which form a strategic framework for LOA.

In the meantime, Dave Dyer's LOA Homepage is at <http://www.andromeda.com/people/ddyer/loa/loa.html>. It contains some interesting information. A large number of LOA players are active through Richard Rognlie's play-by-email server. (See opposite.) Otherwise, the two organizations listed below hold regular LOA tournaments and can put you in touch with people for play by email or by regular mail. ■

## Postal and E-mail Gaming

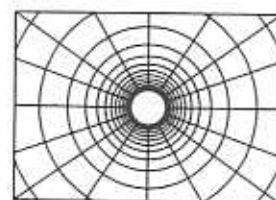
The kNights of the Square Table is a postal (and latterly email) gaming club which has been in existence for nearly 40 years. Most of the members play Chess, but there is a sizeable contingent interested in Chess variants or non-Chess games, such as LOA, Amazons and Reversi. They publish a magazine and hold annual conventions.

kNights of the Square Table (NOST)  
Donald cotton, 13393 Mariposa Road  
248 Victorville CA 92392, USA  
email: doncotten@aol.com  
<http://members.xoom.com/knightsost>

AISE is an Italian postal and email gaming organization devoted to Chess variants. Mostly the members play the various types of Progressive Chess, but they also play a number of other games, including LOA. AISE publishes a magazine and organizes regular tournaments.

Associazione Italiana Scacchi Eterodossi (AISE)  
Alessandro Castelli  
C. Da Potenza n. 11  
62010 Villa Potenza (Macerata), Italy  
email: mc4839@mcclink.it  
<http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/lodge/2483/>

## Games on the Internet



The worldwide web has been a great boon for game players. There is a great deal of information about games on the web, as well as many opportunities to find opponents, even for some of the more obscure games. No doubt everyone has their own list, but these are some of the sites I find interesting.

Sometimes I find a website interesting even when I do not play the game featured. This is certainly true in the case of the homepage of the Renju International Federation at <http://www.lemes.se/renju/>. Although my personal opinion--not shared by thousands of devoted Renju fans, I might add--is that the rules of Renju are an inelegant solution to the imbalance in the primitive five-in-a-row game, I find the whole Renju world fascinating. Here, after all, is a game refined by the Japanese, organized out of Sweden, and spanning Scandinavia, the Baltics, Russia, China and Japan. The top ranked player is Japanese Shigeru Nakamura, but the world's number two, Ando Meritee, is an Estonian. The website is sprawling and idiosyncratic.

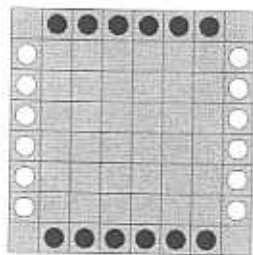
Another website that I find myself looking into now and then, even though I do not play the game, is that of the *Federation Modiale du Jeu de Dames* at <http://www.fmjd.nl/>. The game here is International Draughts, most popular in the Netherlands, although there is a globe-spanning collection of national organizations. What I find most interesting is that the FMJD is promoting Christiaan Freeling's hexagonal version of their game, Hexdame, as a replacement to the traditional game on a 10x10 square board. Apparently Hexdame is less drawish. I am sure this is an unprecedented action by an otherwise conservative organization. Just imagine an announcement from FIDE that they were promoting Glinski's Hexagonal Chess!

This brings me to the website of the great Dutch games inventor Christiaan Freeling at <http://www.mindsports.net/>. Of course Hexdame is included, but also a large variety of his other games. I like these games a lot. Although they tend not to involve totally new concepts, many of them are excellent and sophisticated adaptations of existing game ideas. An example of this is Emergo, which takes the column checkers concept in a new direction. One of the most original of Freeling's games is the modern classic Havannah. You can play these games online at this website.

A great way to play games on the internet is by email through Richard Rognlie's server. The website can be found at <http://www.gamerz.net/~pbmserv>. The server sends an updated board position to both players after each move, which eliminates a lot of paperwork. A large number of games are now available on this server, including some pretty obscure ones as well as the old favorites. (One of these days I just have to find the time to play Philosopher's Football!) Because it is well known and easy to use, a number of the major email tournaments are organized at this venue, including Lines of Action, Trax, and Renju. It is an amazing resource for gamers.

Surfing the net is a personal thing, and these are just some of my thoughts on a few sites which caught my eye. I would welcome comments from other people on their own favorite game websites. ■





(See Abstract Games Issue 1 for rules.)

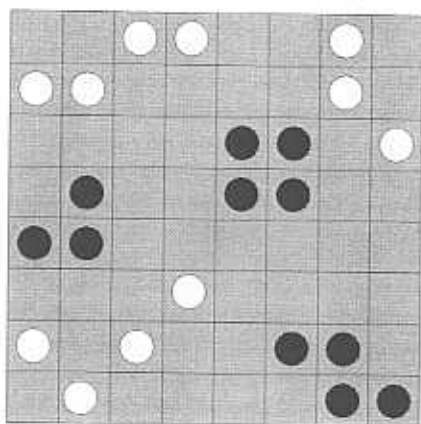
# Lines of Action

## Strategic Ideas -- Part 2

by Kerry Handscomb

The first article in this series dealt briefly with what I refer to as the Wall opening. If a player is allowed to proceed with this strategy unhindered he will develop a wedge formation separating his opponent's pieces. He merely has to connect the remainder of his pieces into this tight group.

In most games one player does not usually let the other pursue this kind of strategy early on. However, the type of formation that arises during the Wall opening is an example of a more general type of strategy: pick a region of the board as a focus and aim to connect all of your pieces into that focal region. This has the advantage of naturally creating a main group that is tightly connected. I refer to this type of formation as "compact." The black groups in the diagram are examples of compact formations.



You will note that the removal of any one member of these compact groups does not disconnect the group. This makes a compact group difficult to attack effectively. Through some experimentation with these groups individually on an otherwise empty board, it is easy to see that with a compact group there are often many ways to move the individual members of the group without disconnecting the group. This flexibility of movement means that the group has the ability to shift position in order to block or evade attack or to connect up with a straggler.

In another popular LOA strategy, the player aims to quickly string together a connected group of pieces over a wide area of the board. I call this kind of formation "strung out." The white groups in the diagram are strung out. I find this to be an appropriate term because it nicely describes the tension in the position—in the same way that a "strung out" individual may easily fall apart under stress, a strung out group can easily fall apart under attack. Very often a strung out group has just one piece holding it together, which can easily become a target of attack. The other disadvantage with a strung out group is that a move by one of the pieces in the group can easily disconnect the whole group,

meaning there is less flexibility. The concept of flexibility as applied here is a property of groups of pieces, but it has wider implications which will be covered in a future article.

Many players believe a central position is important in LOA and will therefore choose the center of the board when picking a focal region. I do not believe having a central position is of primary importance in LOA, and it may even be a disadvantage early on as it can be an object of attack.

Another advantage of the focal region/compact group strategy is that a player will often have a few stragglers some distance from the main group. These can be valuable attackers because of their distance from the main action and because of the ease with which they can be shifted to aim at different targets. Again, this will be dealt with in a future article.

Here is a game in which white tried to play the Wall opening and black put him under considerable pressure. It is a rare example of a win by the player behind on material and was achieved in large part because of the flexibility of white's compact position.

Hartmut Thordsen vs. Kerry Handscomb, played by email,  
January and February, 2000.

1. d1b3 a5c7  
2. g8d5

A little surprising, as I had expected 2. b1b4 or 2. b8b5. Black is giving priority to taking a central position over blocking white's pieces.

2.... a7d7  
3. b8b5 h7c7  
4. f1c4 h3e6?

This connects into the focal group. In this case, however, it is not a good move as white has overlooked black's next move, which is a powerful attack.

5. b1c2!

Black has abandoned the Wall strategy, but it is difficult to see how white can defend c7. Perhaps 4....a2c2 or 4....h2f4 would have been the better move for white.

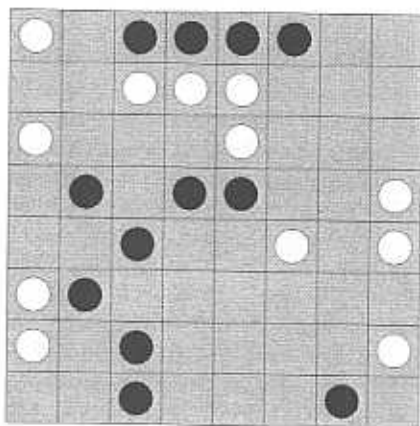
5.... h6f4

This move allows black a good next move to neutralize this defense of c7, but it is difficult to see what else white can do now. For example, 5....c7e5 dodges out of the way of attack and counterattacks d5, but it allows black the powerful defensive move 6. c1c5. White's chosen move does at least give him some counterplay.

6. c1c5

Black's pieces are effectively splitting white's forces now over a broad area of the board, and c7 is still under attack. White has to do something urgently.

6.... a4a8!? (Diagram)



This attacks c4 and precipitates a series of exchanges. Quite often a good move into the corner is overlooked because it is contrary to the accepted wisdom that central positions are best.

7. c2:c7      f4:c4  
8. c8:c4      h2:e5  
9. c7:e5

White has given up a piece at the cost of eliminating the tension on the c-column and opening up the position. His next move should probably be 9....h5f7 to continue to hem in the black pieces. Instead he chose

- 9....      a6c6?

White is making this move before a3d6 in order to make the latter a stronger connection after black defends against a8:d5. White had not seen that black's obvious defense is actually a very strong counterattack. An attack against which your opponent can defend by improving his position is often a bad move.

10. g1g2

Threatening, of course, g2:c6, which is a very good for black. After the recapture e6:c6, white's position separating the two black forces is looking quite strung out. Since white has no defense against this threat he decides to continue with his focal region/compact group strategy.

- 10....      h5f7  
11. b3d3

Black decides to make the capture g2:c6 even stronger because white's only defense against d3:d7 blocks the recapture e6:c6. It is questionable, however, whether this is really the right move for black, as white's defense does in fact allow him to continue to consolidate his compact group. Perhaps 11. g2:c6 e6:c6, 12. f8b8 f7c7 (preventing b8d6 or e5c7), 13. b3d3 is a better plan because white no longer has the move a3d6 and he cannot defend with c6d6 because of c4:c7.

- 11....      a3d6  
12. g2:c6      h4h5

White plans h5:e8 to isolate the piece on f8.

13. f8b8      f7c7

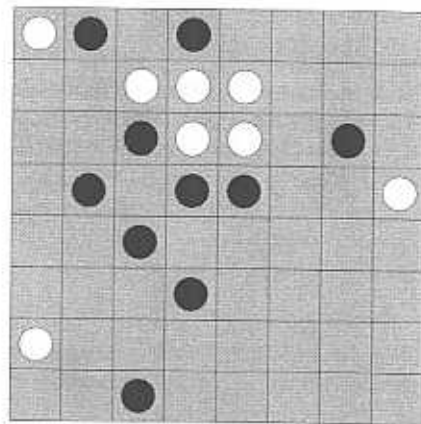
Black's c4c7 would be decisive. The flexibility of white's compact group is starting to show.

14. e8g6 (diagram)

Black prevents the strong white move h5f7. White is now two pieces down, which is usually a big disadvantage in the endgame; he has a strong compact focal group, but three stragglers which will be difficult to connect to the main group. His next move is the obvious first step.

- 14....      a2a4  
15. b8b6

Perhaps it is a little too early for this move as it allows white an



excellent connection for his piece on a8. Black may be concerned about e7b7, but then d8e7 is a good move for him. Good combinations would be 15. c1c5 a4:c4, 16. g6e4 or 15. c1c5 a4a6, 16. b5b7. Note that c1c5 would set about strengthening his own compact focal group.

- 15....      a8c8

White is looking at c8f5 to block both of black's strong moves d3f5 and g6e4.

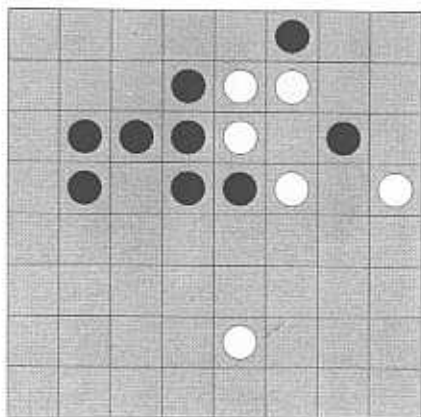
16. d8f8      c7f7

Necessary before c8f5, otherwise f8f6 is winning for black.

17. c1d1?

Yes, this sets up an unstoppable attack on the d-column, but much more important at this stage is g6e4, which would probably win; white cannot prevent the piece on f8 from breaking out and his own piece on a4 is now completely isolated. Even the combination 17. c1c5 a4:c4, 18. b6d4 gives black better chances. White's next move gives him the advantage.

- 17....      c8f5  
18. d1:d6      a4:c4  
19. d3:d7      c4c2+ (diagram)

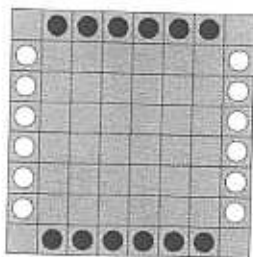


This begins an unstoppable winning combination. Note how white's compact group flows toward the center right edge of the board. Black's moves are the best moves to delay the inevitable.

20. d5f3      e7f6

White is threatening e2:e5+.

21. f8e8      f6g5  
22. d7:f7      c6g4+  
23. c6e4      e2f2+  
24. e5g3      f2g2+  
25. c4:g4      h5h4+  
26. f3h3      g2f3++  
27. b6c6      f3f6 wins ■



# Lines of Action

## Strategic Ideas -- Part 3

(See Abstract Games Issue 1 for rules.)

by Kerry Handscomb

In games like Chess the benefits of a material advantage are quite clear: even the loss of a pawn without compensation can be decisive between experienced players. With LOA, on the other hand, it is not obvious that a material advantage is necessarily good: fewer pieces on the board surely means fewer pieces to connect. In this article I intend to look at the topic of material in LOA, broadening the concept of flexibility introduced in the previous issue with respect to compact groups. Before looking at material, however, I would like to mention some early flawed LOA strategies to put the discussion into context.

### Early Strategies

One of the earliest strategies used by players of LOA was The Bridge, whereby players tried to string together a loose connection across the middle of the board between their two opening groups. This strategy can be beaten easily because the bridge structure is a strung-out position which can be cut to pieces by a player using the compact focal group strategy outlined in the previous issue.

Another early strategy was the Cross-Board Rush. The reasoning behind this strategy is that one group of six pieces starts off connected, so the player should rush his other six pieces across the board to join them. In fact the fastest constructed game uses a Cross-Board Rush: 1. d1b3 h5g4, 2. b1b4 g4g1, 3. b4e7 a3:c1, 4. b3e6 h3:f1, 5. e1e5 wins (devised by Mannis Charosh, 1973). Of course, in a real game your opponent will not be so accommodating; the Cross-Board Rush is seen to be a flawed strategy as soon as you realize that the initial group of six pieces is a strung-out position which can easily be attacked: it can be broken up by cross-corner captures or by longer-range attacks.

### Material Advantage

Perhaps the most primitive LOA strategy involved sacrificing as many pieces as possible with the reasoning that the fewer pieces you have the less work it is to connect them up. I call this the Suicide Strategy. The fact of the matter is that with a smaller force it is more difficult to attack because you may lack the manpower to block your opponent's pieces or threaten captures to break his connections. It also is more difficult to defend because you have fewer pieces to shift around to foil threatened blocks and captures. Just as importantly, having a large number of pieces allows you to connect over a broader area of the board. What these observations boil down to is that with a material advantage you have more options to defend, attack and connect—in other words you have greater flexibility.

Most players these days are careful not to lose too many pieces, but I would go further and emphasize the primary importance of material. In an otherwise closely contested game a

two-piece advantage in the endgame usually is decisive. Often the marginal advantage in flexibility conferred by even a one-piece difference can be enough to swing the game.

It is surprisingly difficult to construct artificial positions to illustrate this point. Even in an actual game in which the player with a small material advantage wins it is not easy to directly attribute the win to the extra flexibility conferred by the larger force. For this reason, attributing such great strategic importance to material is likely to remain controversial, with many players believing that a one- or two-piece difference is unimportant provided their remaining pieces remain maneuverable. Nevertheless, from my own experience, small differences in material are important, and I am sure that statistical analysis of a large database of games would bear this out.

The following is a game in which I think the advantage conferred by the difference in material is fairly obvious.

Kerry Handscomb vs. Philip Cohen, by email, Oct. – Nov. 1999

1. d1b3 h3e3

This move is questionable because of black's next move: a threat that can be defended by improving position is not a threat.

2. c1c3 a2c2

3. b1b4

Already black has a strong compact formation.

3.... a5c7

This move threatens c7:c3 and could be the beginning of a block of black's top-row pieces, but again black can defend by improving his position.

4. f8c5 h4e4

White threatens e4:c4, but provokes an exchange which removes the possibility of white's blockade of the top row. The quiet strategic move 4....a7d7 is another alternative.

5. e8:e4 h7:e4

6. c8:a6

Black tries a cross-corner capture, looking at a6c4, which then makes g8d5 a strong move. If white had moved 4....a7d7 this would not have been a good move as a3:a6 would recapture and get a white piece from under the black blockade.

6.... h6f4

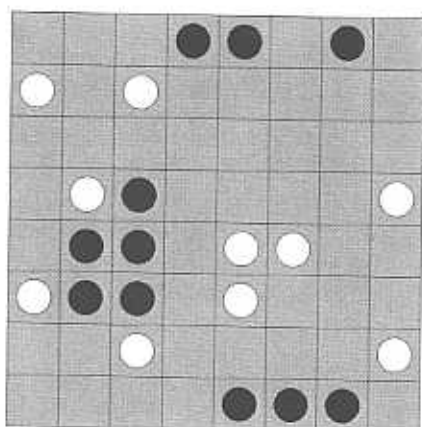
Again this is a threat which allows black to improve his position. Moving 6....a4b5 right away is another alternative, blocking b8b5 and a6c4 and looking at a3:a6 while getting a piece from under the blockade. Play may proceed 7. f1c4 a3:a6, 8. b3:c3 (threatening b8:b5, which white blocks) a6b7, and white has chances.

7. a6c4 a4b5

8. b8e8(diagram) h2e5

This move defends against the threat of e8:e4, but allows black to achieve a two-piece advantage. Other possible defenses are h5e5, c2e2, e3e7 and e4:e8. None of them look particularly good. After 8....c2e2, for example, play may proceed 9. e1b1 (threatening b1:b5 and e8:e4) b5d7, 10. e8:e4 h2f2, 11. g8d5 a3a5 threatening h5:d5,





which is difficult to defend against. White is still two pieces down, but he has chances for counterplay while black extricates his stragglers from behind white's pieces.

9. c3:e5

Black is now two pieces up—a winning advantage, especially with his tight formation. He's now looking at e1c3 to improve his cohesion.

9.... b5d7

Capturing with 9....e3:b3 is another possibility for white, although it allows g1d4. White's actual move leaves black with the option b3:c3, but black prefers to consolidate, perhaps still tempting white to capture e3:b3.

10. g8d5 f4d2

This is a good move, blocking e1c3 and threatening c7:e5, but black simply captures, putting him three pieces up.

11. e5:c7 h5e5

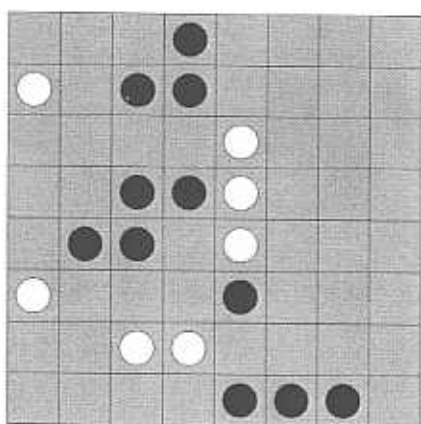
White is tempting black to capture again with 12. c7:e5. At this stage, however, black does not mind e5:c7—instead he intends to work on connecting his three pieces on the first rank.

12. b3:e3

Black is four pieces up.

12.... d7e6

13. e8d7 (diagram)



This prevents a7:c7 and sets up the good move d8d4. Black's material advantage and compact group together with white's strung-out position give black an unassailable advantage now, but it is interesting to watch how the game finishes.

13.... e5d4

White's flexibility is severely constrained now. This defensive move allows black's next move (otherwise e5:c3 would be good).

14. c7c3 c2c2

This move prevents f1d3.

15. d7c6 e4d3

White defends against d8:d4.

16. c6:c6 a7b7

Black could even allow b7:d5 now—for example, 17. e6:e2 b7:d5, 18. c5c2 a3a4, 19. g1:d4 a4:c2++, 20. b4e4, and white cannot win because black's extra pieces give him a solid block. Black's extra material also affords him a number of ways to defend against b7:d5.

17. g1g2 a3b2

If White defends against e6:e2 with 17....d3e4, then 18. d8:d4. White's few defenders are spread too thinly.

18. e6:e2 b7:b4

19. e1e4 Resigns

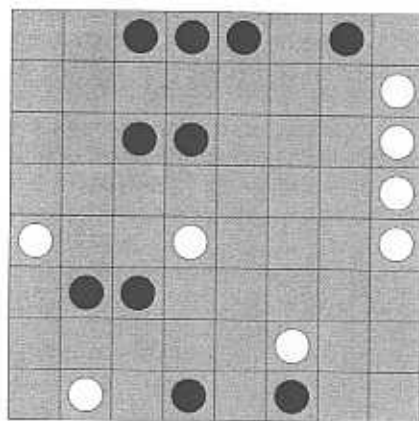
White cannot prevent the piece on d8 connecting in two moves and has no connection threat himself which is fast enough. Note how black's ten remaining pieces have allowed his final connection to be spread over a large part of the board.

One warning should be given about the strategy of pursuing material gain: you can carry it too far. It is quite possible to thoughtlessly capture so many pieces that your opponent suddenly has a quick winning connection. Consider the following game.

Kerry Handscomb vs. Ragnar Wikman, by email

Jan. 2000 – Mar. 2000

1. d1b3 h3e3, 2. c1c3 a6c6, 3. c3:c6 e3:b3, 4. b8d6 a3:d6, 5. f8:d6 h2f2, 6. b1:b3 a7d4, 7. g1d1 (black is already two pieces up and by this move he aims to win the exchange 8. d8:d4 a4:d4, 9. d1:d4 and go three pieces up) a5c3, 8. e1:c3 a2b1 (diagram)



Rather than defending against black's attacking 7. g1d1, white has cleverly sacrificed another piece, setting a trap for black. Now if 9. d8:d4 a4:d4, 10. d1:d4 b1d3+, white has a winning series of threats. For example, 11. b3d5 h7h3+, 12. d5f3 d3:f1+, 13. d4d2 h6h2++, and black cannot defend.

Black saw the danger, and the game continued 9. e8b5 a4a5, 10. d8:d4 (now this is safe because white has the isolated piece on the a-column) a5:c3, 11. f1d3 h7h3, 12. d3d7 f2:d4, 13. d1f3 b1c1, 14. f3d5 e1c3, 15. b5c4. Resigns. Black's material advantage won him the game eventually anyway because of crucial blocks he was able to make and because of the spread of his connection. Note how white's row of pieces on the h-column was very weak because he had few options to move without disconnecting them.

In conclusion, although it is necessary to be careful, pursuing a strategy of material gain has real merit. There are still some questions to be answered, however, such as when to make cross-corner captures purely for material gain. I am not sure. This investigation will have to continue another time. ■