# Backgammon, or "Tables" Games

# History

An early variation of Backgammon called "Nard" seems to have appeared prior to 800AD in southwest Asia or Persia. There are other ancient games that are sometimes considered related to Backgammon, in the sense that landing on an opposing piece knocked it back to the beginning. But an ancient writing describing Nard makes it clear that it had the same lay out as a modern board. The description claims the symbolism of the board represents a the calendar; each side contains twelve points for months of the year; the twenty-four points represent the hours in a day; the 30 pieces represent days of the month; the sum of opposing sides of the die represent the 7 days of the week; the contrasting colors of each set of checkers represent day and night.

Backgammon games traveled to the Near East from India, and may have been imported to Europe by the Romans. Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54) was fond of an early version of Backgammon called Tabula. Emperor Zeno (A.D. 475-81) once had such bad luck playing Tabula that the positions of his men on the board were described a century later by Agathias, a scholastic of Myrine, in Asia. This 6th century record has enabled scholars to recreate the game of Tabula with what is believed a fair degree of accuracy. We have included the rules for Tabula as well as many other national and historic variations on Backgammon, which can be played on a standard board.

The <u>Book of Games</u> manuscript of King Alfonso X of Spain (circa 1280 A.D.) contained no less than 15 versions of "Tables" as Backgammon was called at that time. The "Games within the Tables" - games played on what we think of as a Backgammon board - were an entire family of games. "Backgammon" is simply the variant that ended up as the primary modern survivor of this family. During the Middle Ages the church waged a loosing battle against Tables because it often included gambling. However, by the 1700's it had become a favorite of even country vicars and was commonly know by its modern name. In colonial New England it continued to be a very popular game for gambling. In 1768 an Englishman wrote home to a friend:

*"They have a vile practice here, which is peculiar to the city (New York). I mean that of playing at back-gammon (a noise I detest) which is going forward at the public coffee-houses from morning till night, frequently a dozen tables at a time."*

In the Middle Ages magic spells were used in Iceland to help insure a player's success at Chess, or Tables. One preserved in the archives of the Icelandic Literary Society translates as: *"If thou wisheth to win at Backgammon take a raven's heart, dry it in a spot on which the sun doth not shine, crush it and then rub it on the dice."* *Another option was to: "take the tongue of a wagtail, and dry it in the sun; crush, and mix it afterwards with communion-wine, and apply it to the points of the dice, then you are sure to win."*

## Standard Rules

Backgammon is an obstacle race between two armies of 15 men each, moving around a track divided into 24 triangular divisions known as "points". The board is divided down the center by a partition, known as the "bar," into an outer and inner (or home) board or table. The side nearest you is your outer and home tables; the side farther away is your opponent's outer and home boards. The arrows indicate the direction of play.

Diagram #1 shows the board set up ready for play. Note that play proceeds in opposite directions. The object of Backgammon is for each player to bring

**Diagram # 1: Standard set-up**

Black Direction of play

White direction of play



White off
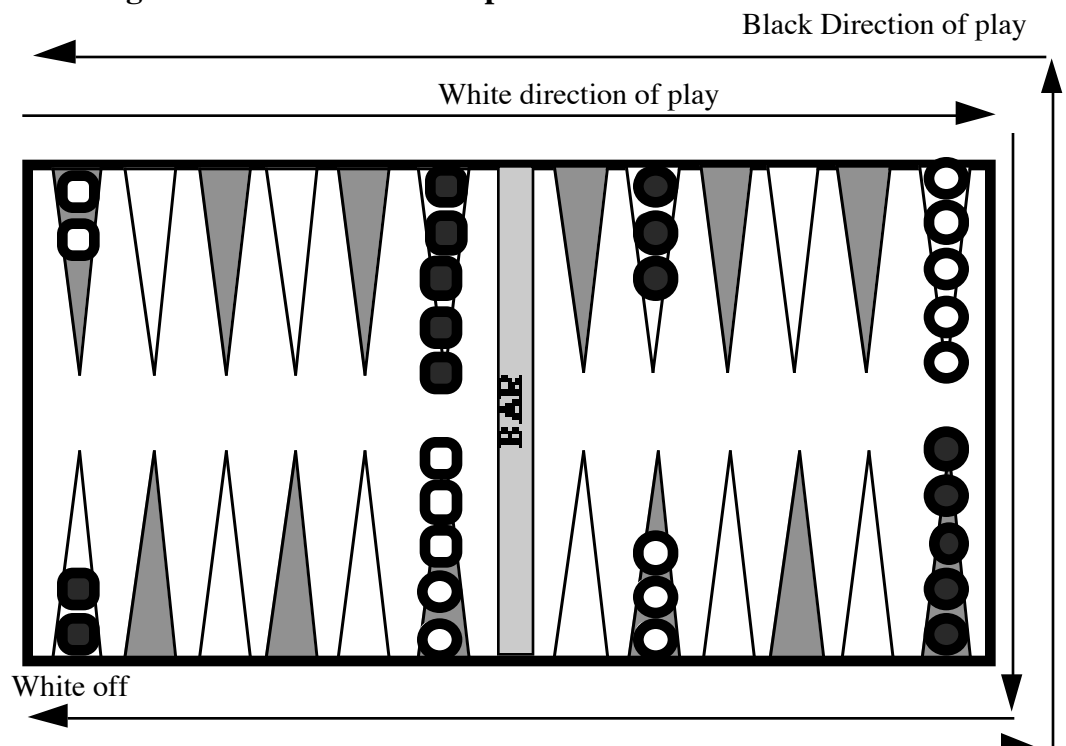
all his men into his home board, and then to bear them off the board. The first player to get all his men off the board is the winner.

To begin, each player rolls a single die. The player with the higher number takes the first move, using the two numbers cast by his die and his opponent's. In the event that both players roll the same number, each rolls again to determine the first move.

The players each roll two dice, and move one or more men in accordance with the numbers rolled. For example, if you roll 4 & 2, you can move one man six spaces, or one man four spaces and another man two spaces. When moving a single man the total shown by the two dice, you are actually making two moves with the one man-each move according to the number shown on one of the dice. The players take turns casting the dice and moving their men alternately throughout the game, except in the case where a player blocked by opponent's pieces, and therefore forfeits his turn. Whenever possible, try to have more than one man on a point. If a player positions two or more of his men on a point, he has "Made" or owns that point, and the opponent can neither come to rest on that point, nor even touch down on it when taking the combined total of his dice with one man.

Doublets If the same number appears on both dice, for example, 2-2 or 3-3 (known as doublets), the player is entitled to four moves instead of two. Thus, if he rolls 3-3, he can move up to four men three spaces each (or 1 man, 12 spaces, or 2 men, 6 spaces).

Blots A single man on a point is called a blot and is vulnerable to being hit. If you move a man onto an opponent's blot, or touch down on it in the process of moving the combined total of your roll, the blot is hit, and the man that was hit is removed from the board and placed on the bar. All men on the bar must re-enter on the opposing home table, and a player may not make any other moves until he has brought all men on the bar back into play. Re-entry is made on a point equal to the number of one of the dice cast. If the points corresponding to the throw are blocked by opponent's pieces, the man cannot be moved back on the board and the player may skip his turn. Single opponent's men, or Blots are vulnerable to being hit by a man coming off the bar.

Closed board A Player who has covered all six points in his home board is said to have a closed board. If the opponent has any men on the bar, he will not be able to re-enter it since there are no vacant points in his adversary's home board. Therefore, he forfeits his rolls, and continues to do so until the other player opens up a point in his home board, thus providing a point of re-entry.

Compulsory move. A player is compelled to take his complete move if it is possible to do so. If he can move either of the numbers, but not both, then he must move the higher number. In other words: If a player rolls a 2-5, but there are no open

points to move the total roll of 7, then he must move the five, and ignore the 2. The 2 can be taken if there are no open points to move the 5.

Bearing off Once a player has brought all his men into his home board, he can start bearing them off. Men borne off the board are not re-entered into play. The player who bears off all his men first is the winner. A player may not bear off men while he has a man on the bar, or outside his home board. Thus, if in the process of bearing off, a player leaves a blot and it is hit by his opponent, he must first re-enter the man in his opponents home board, and bring it round the board into his own home board before he can continue the bearing off process.

In bearing off, you remove men from the points corresponding to the numbers on the dice cast. However, you are not compelled to remove a man. You may, if you can, move a man inside your home board, closer to the end. This can have strategic advantages by allowing you to protect a blot with another piece.

If you roll a number higher than the highest point on which you have a man, you may apply that number to your highest occupied point. Thus, if you roll 6-3 and your 6-point has already been cleared but you have men on your 5-point, you may use your 6 to bear off a man from your 5-point.

Gammon and Backgammon If you bear off all 15 of your men before your opponent has borne off a single man, you win a "gammon," or double game. If you bear off all 15 of your men before your opponent has borne off a single man, and he still has one or more men in your home board or on the bar, you win "backgammon," or a triple game.

Cocked dice It is customary to cast your dice in your right-hand board. Both dice must come to rest completely flat in that board. Commonly, if one die crosses the bar into the other table, jumps off the board, does not come to rest flat, or ends up resting on one of the men, the dice are "cocked" and the whole throw, using both dice, must be retaken.

Doubling cubes? We have not included a doubling cube because it is a modern innovation to Backgammon. The introduction of the doubling cube is largely responsible for the leap in popularity of modern Backgammon. Each face of the doubling cube bears a number to record progressive doubles and redoubles of wagers, starting with 2, and going on to 4, 8, 16, 32 & 64. At the start of play, the doubling cube rests on the bar, or at the side of the board. At any point during the game, a player who thinks he is sufficiently ahead may as part of his turn, and before he casts his dice, propose to double the stakes by turning the cube to 2. His opponent may decline the double, in which case he forfeits the game and loses 1 unit, or accept the double, in which case the game continues with the stake at 2 units. The player who accepts the double now ``owns'' the cube, which means that he has the option to

redouble at any point during the rest of the game, but his opponent (the original doubler) may not. If, at a later stage he exercises this option, his opponent is now faced with a similar choice. He may either decline the redouble and so lose 2 units, or accept and play for 4, and he now ``owns'' the cube. A player may double when he is on the bar even if his opponent has a closed board and he cannot enter. Although he does not roll the dice, for he cannot make a move, he still has the right to double. Note that a gammon doubles, and a Backgammon triples the stake of the cube. Although the doubling cube is not required to double wagers of a game, it is a convenient way to keep track of the current wager, doubling cubes can be obtained from almost any game store that carries a selection of dice.

# Variations on Backgammon

## Tabula

Three dice are used in Tabula, and the roll can be used to move, 1, 2, or 3 pieces during the turn. For example, a roll of 2-4-5 can be used to move a single piece the total of 11 spaces, or two pieces could be moved: 1 moving two spaces, and the other nine spaces (4+5). Any similar combination could be used also. Or the men could be moved 2, 4, and 5 spaces each.

Pieces start off of the board, and both players start in the same corner of the board, and is unusual in that and both travel counter clock-wise around the board to bear off. A player may not advance his men until all of them are on the board. Blots are hit as in modern Backgammon, and hit men must re-enter the board before any other men can move. A player must use the all of his throw even if it endangers his men. Any part of a throw is lost if it is blocked by the other player's pieces.

An optional rule is that no piece may be borne off of the board until all of the player's pieces are in the home table. If a blot is hit, no more pieces may be borne off until that man has re-entered the home.

## Irish

The name Irish is mentioned in Cotton's <u>Complete Gamester</u> in the 17th century, but the rules are essentially the same as those known in versions from a variety of countries dating back centuries earlier. It is similar to Toutes Tables in French, and Tavole Reale in Italian. Use the standard set-up. Moving of men is the same as in standard Backgammon; however rolling doubles has no advantage.

"Binding the Tables," is a strategy sometimes used to block your opponent. (See also "Closed Board" under standard rules). One period source (Willughby's Volume of Plaies, c. 1665) describes a rule in Irish that makes an interesting variation, and changes endgame strategies. If you have two or more men on all of the points of your

Home Table, you have "bound up the table," and your opponent cannot re-enter any blotted men. (Since his blots must enter through your Home Table, and no spaces are available to him.) If you have bound up the table, and your opponent has men to re-enter, you must "break" or "open" the table for him. Breaking the table means that all but one of the men on one of your home spaces are removed, just as if they were blots that were hit, and must be re-entered from your opponent's home. To choose which point must be broken, both players throw two dice. The player with the higher throw gets to choose which point will be broken. If there are no blots to be entered, then you can bind up your Tables with impunity. But beware the danger of blotting your opponent.

Bearing Off - When all of your men are in your Home Table, you may bear them off. It appears an exact roll was not required to bear men off the board, but if you are "hit" by your opponent you must bring that man home again before you can resume bearing men off.

## Snake

Snake is a variation primarily used as an easy method of handicapping to give a beginning player practice, or to give a more experienced player exercise at playing a back game. The stronger player takes the white men. Black starts with his men in the standard set-up. White places his stones as illustrated, and with nine men on the bar. White must enter all his stones before he can begin moving.

Snake Set-up
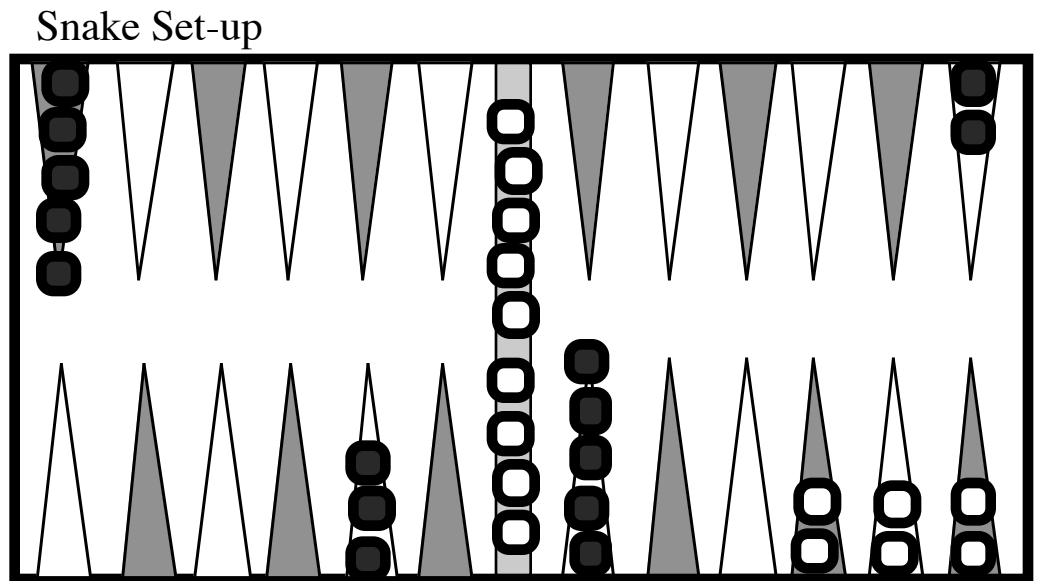


## Chasing the Girls

An Icelandic version of Backgammon believed to date from the Roman era along with Tabula. Each player has six pieces. Two standard dice are used, but only rolls of 6, 1 and doubles count. A throw including a 6, or a 1 allows the player to move a piece that number of spaces. On rolling a double, the player wins another throw as in standard Backgammon. A double 6 gives the player 4-sixes -the player may move four pieces six spaces each. Players move counter-clockwise, and hitting an

opponent's blot kills that piece, and it is removed from play. Doubling up men on a point to protect men is not allowed. Players continue to circle around the board until one of the players has lost all his men.

When a player is reduced to just one man on the board, called a *hornaskella*, or corner-rattler, the corner-rattler can only land on the corner points. A roll of 1 moves it to the next corner. 6 moves it two corners. Double 1's, or double 6's count allow double moves for the corner-rattler, No other doubles enable the corner-rattler to move, but he still receives a second throw.
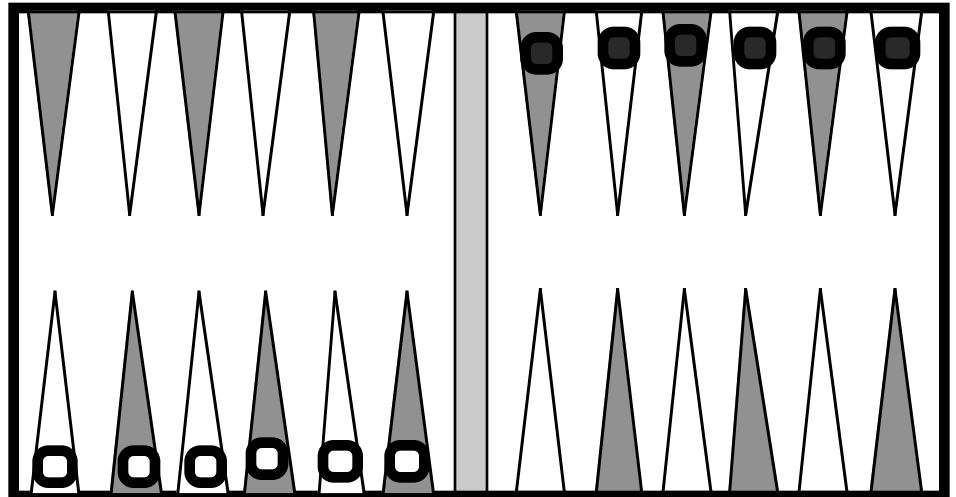
## Tourne-Case

This is a French game from the 17th century played with two dice. Each player has three men and travel across the board in a straight race from one end to the other. The first player with all three men in his home wins. When wagering, if a player wins before the opponent has any pieces home, it is counted as a double win. Pieces must remain in the order they were entered on the board -no piece can pass the one in front of it, and only one man can be on a point at a time, except for the home point. If a player lands on the same point on his side of the board, as a corresponding piece on the opponent's side, the enemy piece is "hit" as in standard Backgammon, and must attempt to re-enter the board on the next roll. Doubles are counted as half the total value: a roll of 3-3, only counts as 3, not 6. Similar games are played France: *Toc*, Italy: *Toccateglio*, Germany: *Tokkadille* and Sweden: *Schuster*.

## Six-Ace

Opening Position for Six-Ace, for two players

An English dice game similar to the games played with a dreidel, or Teetotum. A Backgammon board has sometimes been described as being used to help keep score. But this is because some authors have mistakenly connected it with the backgammon game *El Seys, Dos e As* in the Alphonso MS.

POOL   POOL
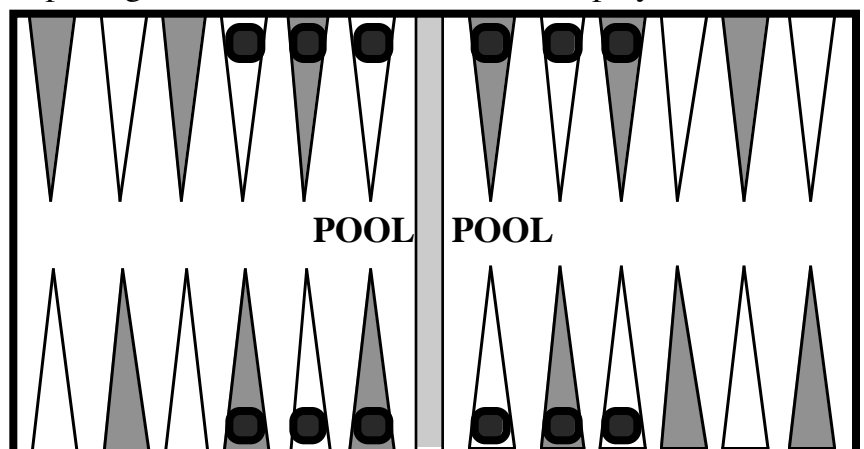
The object is to bear off all of the men from your side of the board. Each player starts with a stake of six pieces, or coins. Two dice are used and are scored separately, not totaled. The scores tell the player what they must do:

1 = Pay one piece to the opponent's side of the board.
2 = The "pool" pays your side of the board.
3 & 4 = Do nothing.
5 = Put a piece in the pool.
6 = Win a piece off your side of the board and set it aside.

Thus a roll of 1 & 2 requires the player to pay one piece to the opponent, as well as take one from the pool. Doubles are also counted separately. Players receive another roll if they throw doubles, with the exception of double "2's". (An alternate version was that double wins the entire pool, AND received a second roll.) When a player has cleared his side of the board, he must then roll a six to win.

Variations on Six-Ace.
Four players: On rolling an ace, the player pays the player on his right. A drinking version of the game also dates from 1674 in The Complete Gamester, by Charles Cotton. Up to five people can play (using the 30 pieces in a Backgammon set) Scoring is as above except on rolling a 2 the player must drink and roll again. The last two players on the board (or sometimes the last one) pay for the drinks.

Opening for Six-Ace with four players



POOL   POOL
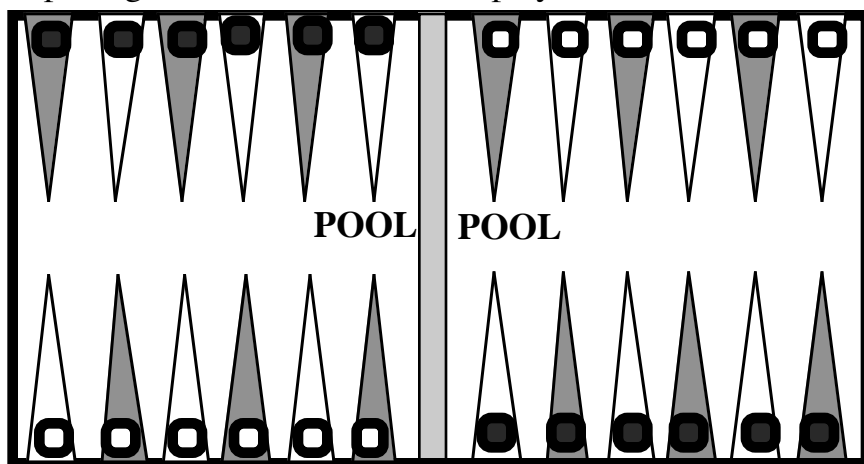
**Fayles**

In English Fayles, or Fails also appears in the Alfonso MS under the name Fallas, and continued to be played as late as the 1600's. Also spelled Faille in French. See illustration for set-up. Three dice were normally used. If there were only two dice, then on each roll the smaller score was counted twice, e.g. a roll of 6-4 is counted as 6-4-4. Blots that are hit are knocked back to the

Set-up for Fayles

13 men stacked



13 men stacked
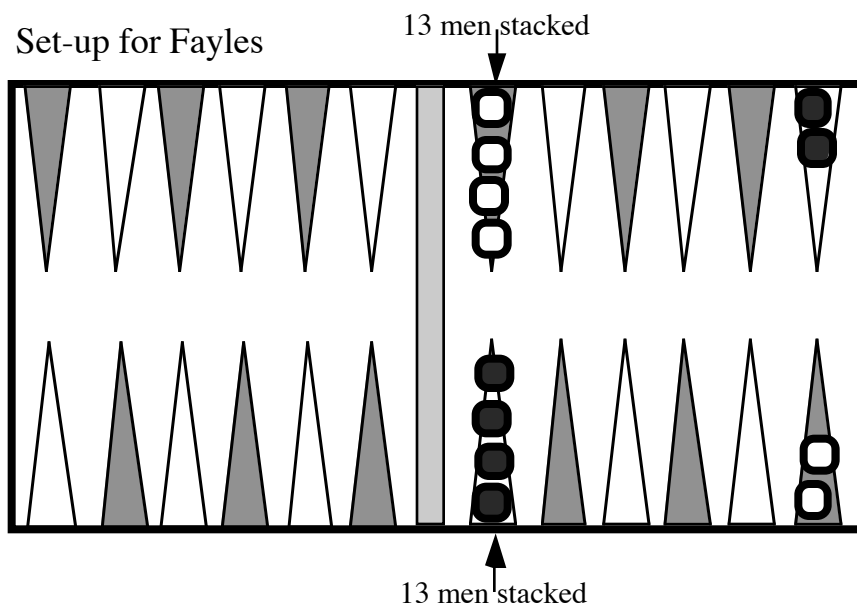
beginning of the board rather than off the board.

If at any time a player rolled a number that could not be played, he immediately lost, otherwise the first to bear off all of his men wins

## Dutch Backgammon

The rules here are the same as in standard Backgammon with the exceptions that:

• Players start with all their men on the bar, and must enter all 15 of their men on to the board before they can advance around the board.

• Players cannot hit blots, until they have at least one man in their own inner table.

### The English Game

Three dice are used. (Or, two dice can be used with an imaginary extra throw of six for each turn.) The players both place all fifteen of their men at one end of the board. The players' men are moved opposite directions around the board as in standard Backgammon, and then borne off.

Set-up for the "English Game", "Plakato," and "Gioul."
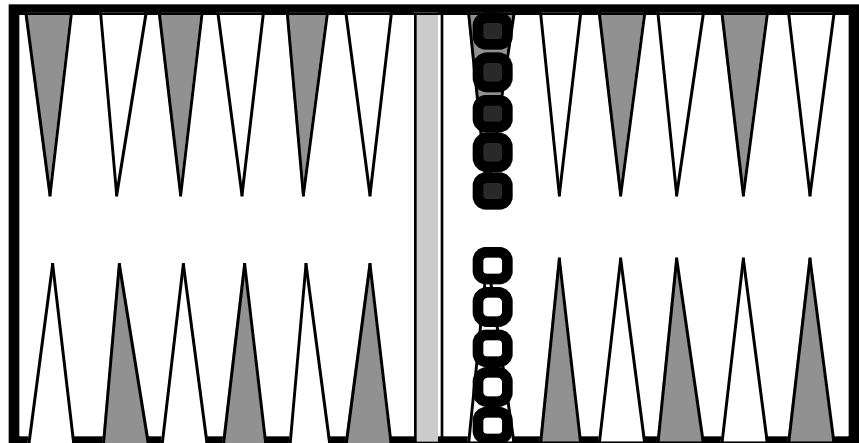
All 15 black stacked
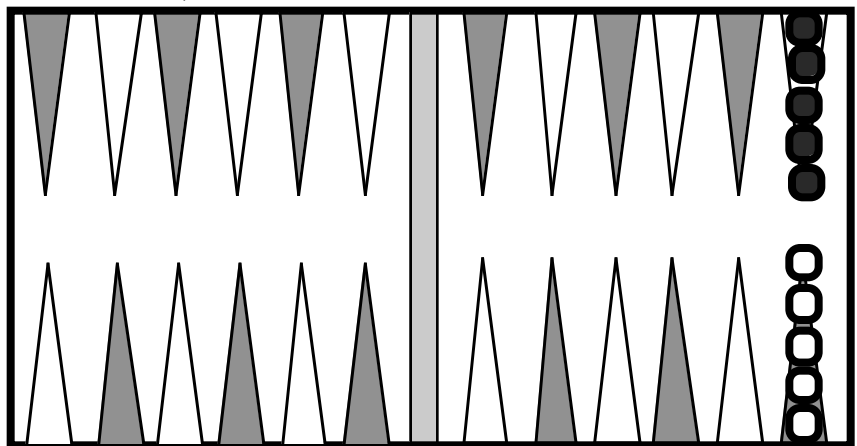
All 15 white stacked

### The Lombard Game

The Lombard Game is similar to the English game, except that the players start one point off the bar of the board, making it a slightly shorter game.

The Lombard Game

All 15 black stacked

All 15 white stacked

## The Imperial Game

Three dice are used. Players start with five men on each of 3 points on the board as illustrated. It is a simple race to the far end of the board. Men stay on their own side of the board and there was no hitting of blots.
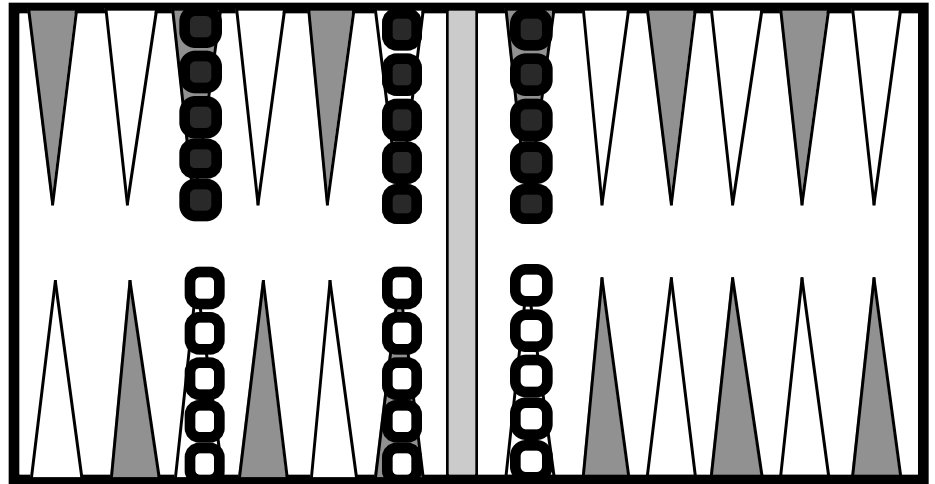
## The Provincial Game

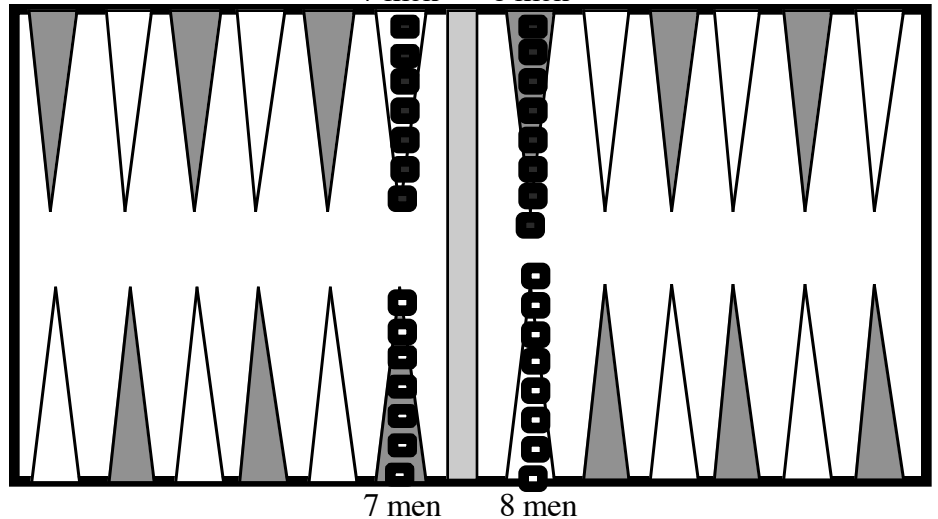Merely a variation in starting position from the Imperial Game.

## The Queen's Game

This variation is a simple game of luck. Two dice are used. The players stack their fifteen pieces as illustrated, and un-stack them according to the rolls of the dice. If a player rolls a 6-4, the top pieces of stacks 4 and 6 are removed from the stacks. When all pieces are un-stacked, the player must re-stack them again according to the roll of the dice. Once they are all stacked again the pieces are moved to the players' left and then borne off the end of the board. Exact rolls are required to bear off men. The first to bear off his men wins. If the thrower cannot use a roll, the opponent can use it if possible. If neither player can use the roll, the throw is ignored and the rolls continue to alternate.
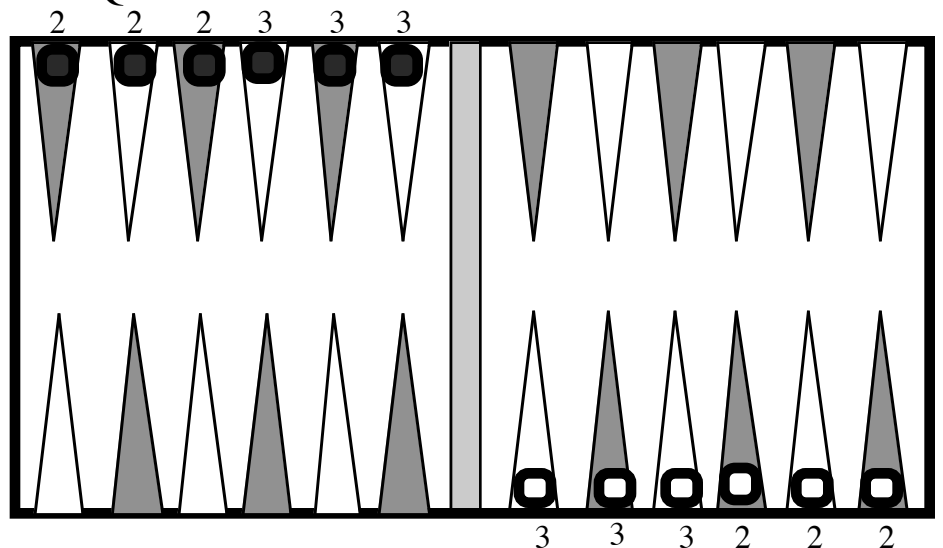
The Imperial Game

The Provincial Game   7 men       8 men

7 men     8 men

The Queen's Game

2      2      2      3      3      3

3     3     3     2     2     2

## Kotra / Icelandic Backgammon

Icelandic Backgammon (Kotra)                     All 15 white



All 15 Black

Also know as Kotra, Icelandic Backgammon is similar to the Swedish game *Svenskt braspel*. Both are survivals of forms of Tables that were played in Europe towards the end of the Middle Ages. Each player starts with 15 men placed on the farthest points. Two dice are used, and scores may be used separately to move 2 men during the turn, or combined to move a single man in two steps.
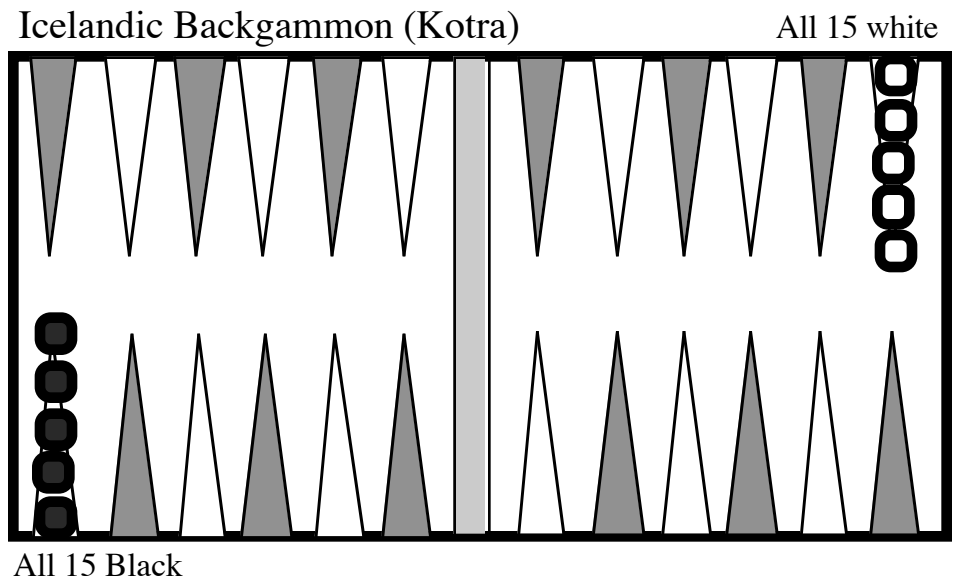
1. If either player rolls a double on his first roll, only one piece can be moved. The exception is a 6-6, where four pieces can move six points. These four pieces are vulnerable to being hit all at once as if they were a single blot, sending all of them off the board. Once one of these men is moved, the other three are safe from being hit, except according to the following.

2. Players cannot place more than one man on a point (except under rule 1) until they have a man on the farthest point of the opposing side of the board.

3. If it is possible, a player rolling a double after the first roll must move the indicated number 4 times.

4. Blots are hit, and must re-enter the board as in standard Backgammon. No other pieces can move until the hit men are re-entered onto the board.

5. A player may not place a piece on a point which contains two or more enemy pieces unless it is impossible to pass a block of hostile men. If the opponent has six points in a row all covered by two pieces, then the opponent can land on any of those points, as indicated by the dice, as well as capture the two opposing men on that point.

6. A player cannot move any of his pieces from the opponent's side of the board until he has moved at least 5 men from the starting point.

The game can be won in several ways:

By bearing all men off the board: Men can only be borne off once they are all in the home table. If the player rolls higher than the number of points to bear off, the farthest men are borne off. If a blot is hit while bearing off, no further men can be

borne off until the hit man has arrived in the home table.

Winning by a "*Jan*": When a player has more men captured than there are empty points on his entry table he is *Jan*, or blocked. For example: if black has five blots in his entry table, and white hits two more men, then black can only re-enter one piece before he blocks himself from re-entering the other piece. This ends the game and white scores 15

Winning by *Janstork*: If there are no vacant points on a players entry table,   the player immediately loses if a blot is hit since it is impossible for him to re-enter the hit piece.
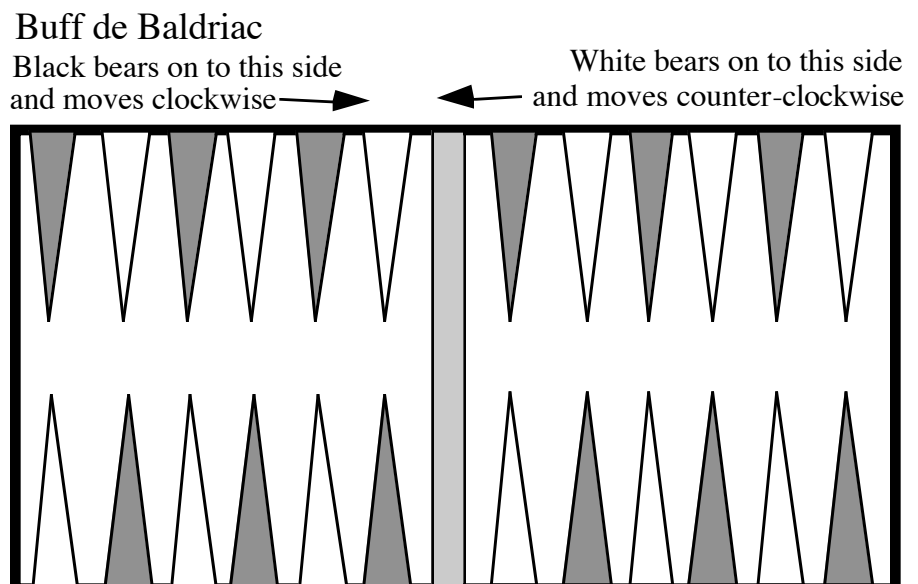
## Acey Deucy

Acey Deucy has been very popular in the U.S. Navy for some time and originated from a German version called *Gegenpuff*, or *Contrabuf*. It is also known in Great Britain as "French," "Dutch," or "Double" Backgammon. Players start with all their men on the bar as in Dutch Backgammon. If a player roles an ace-deuce (1 & 2) they take their move and take an additional double of their choice (double 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6) -whatever is most to their advantage, and is not blocked by the other player's pieces. The player who rolled the ace - deuce then gets a second roll, and the same rule applies if they roll another ace-deuce. On their third roll, if they get a third ace-deuce, their turn ends.

In the Navy version players may move pieces on the board even if you have one on the bar that needs to re-enter the board. When gambling, stakes are usually doubled when an ace-deuce is thrown. Players also may agree on a value for each man, and at the end of the game the winner collects an amount an equal to the number of men the loser has left on the board.

## Buff de Baldriac

An even older forerunner of Acey Deucy listed in the Alphonso MS. Players start off the board. It is unique in that the players enter and bear off from adjacent tables. The result is a game in which the players are constantly in conflict potentially always able to hit each other's blots.

Buff de Baldriac
Black bears on to this side and moves clockwise ⟶        White bears on to this side ⟵ and moves counter-clockwise

# Around the World / Exact-off

In this version you have to roll the exact roll to bear a man off of the board. If your roll goes over the number needed, the man circles "around the world" and finishes the move back at the beginning, and then has to make the entire trek around the board again to try to get off.
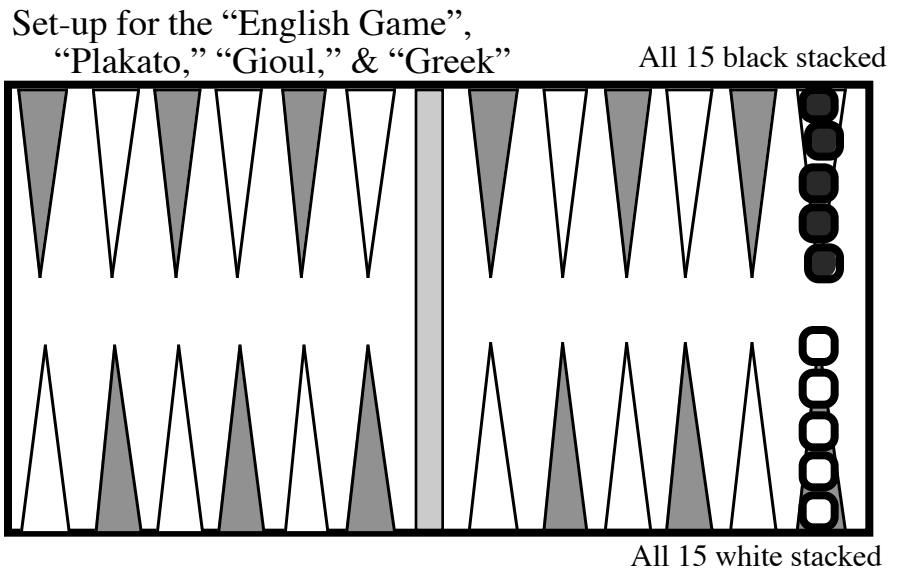
## Plakato

Plakato, or Plakoto is a form of Backgammon widely played in Greece. It is the same as standard Backgammon except for:

Set-up for the "English Game", "Plakato," "Gioul," & "Greek"

All 15 black stacked

All 15 white stacked

- The beginning layout is the same as the "English Game", with all men stacked on one end of the board.

- Blots are not hit, but are prevented from moving as long as an opposing piece is one the same point.

- Players must also move all their men to their home *point* of the board before they can start bearing them off.

If you are able to trap one of your opponent's men on the last point of your home, the game is an automatic forfeit.

## Gioul

A Middle Eastern variation. Set-up is as in Plakato, or Greek Backgammon. The exceptions from standard Backgammon are:

- Blots are not hit, but block an opponent from landing on that point.

- If a player rolls a double, he moves his men for the double thrown. He then continues to move for each subsequent double up to 6-6. (For example: If you roll a 4-4, you get to move for the 4-4 as well as for a 5-5 and 6-6. Thus, a 1-1 begins a series of 24 moves.)

- However: If the player is unable to use any of the series moves from a double, the opponent may take all of the remaining doubles in the series. If the opponent cannot take the whole series of moves, he takes them as far as he can and play returns to normal.

# Greek

"Greek" is a game of blocking, instead of hitting. The starting position is having all the men stacked as shown in the diagram above. Rather than being bumped off the board, a "blot", or single man sitting on a point is vulnerable to being blocked by the other player landing on that point.

# Russian I

All men start off the board. Players enter in the same home table, and move around the board toward the same bearing-off point. A player must enter two pieces onto the board before he can begin to advance men around the board. Once he has two men on the board, if he is unable to enter additional men on the board, he must use his full roll to move men already on the board. Blots that are hit must re-enter the board before any other men can be moved.

Doubles are counted twice, and then (except on the first roll) the player moves the complementary doubles as well. Complementary doubles are those on the opposite side of the dice. Thus a roll of 3-3 allows a player to move 4-sets of 3, and then turn the dice over to move 4-sets of 4 from the opposite side of the dice. (Opposite sides of a die always add up to 7.) The player who rolls a double may then roll again, assuming he was able to take all eight moves. If any portion of a double ends up blocked, the player loses the right to use of the rest of that double, and does not receive an extra roll.

# Russian II

Set-up is as in standard Backgammon. Players must always move the lower number of a roll first. Thus with a roll of 3-6, the 3 must be used first. If the first number is blocked, the player loses that turn. Doubles are played as in Russian variation I, but again, the lower number of the complementary doubles must be played first. If the lower of the doubles is blocked, the turn is lost.

# Chouette

Although Backgammon is normally a two-player game, more players can join by forming a "chouette". A chouette is a team that shares a betting interest in one side of what is normally a two-handed game. To determine the order of play, each player casts a die. The player with the highest roll is the "Man in the Box," and competes against the other players. The player with the next highest roll is the captain of the team and rolls against the Man in the Box.

Team members may freely advise the captain, but the captain makes the final decision on moves. If the Man in the Box wins the game, he stays in the box. The team member who had the next highest roll then replaces the captain. The captain

goes to the bottom of the team rotation.

When doubling, the team acts as a unit: all double at the same time, or not at all. If the Man in the Box doubles, each team member has the option of accepting the double of the wager, or passing. Members who drop out lose to the Man in the Box the number of points on the doubling cube, and they can no longer advise the captain. If the captain drops out while the others wish to play on, the captaincy is passed to the next player in the rotation. A player does not lose his place in the rotation if he drops out of a game. The player who wins the game is always the next Man in the Box.

## Ticktack

A fun, fast gambling game that is described in Charles Cotton's <u>Complete Gamester</u>, but appears to date at least to the mid-1500's. It is considered by some to be possibly the best betting man's version of backgammon, but almost pointless in a non-gambling environment. The game runs only a couple of minutes, so it is best to choose fairly small stakes, and play a number of games in succession. It's almost closer in dynamic to a card game, than to most Backgammon games. The name of the game may refer to a standard rule: if you touch a piece, you must play it. So think before you reach for the board.

The first space, on the starting side, is called your "ace point", or "first point." The other points are counted around, so you go from first to twelfth point, across to the 13th point, and ending with the 24th. "Taking a point" means putting two or more pieces on that point, so that it is not vulnerable to blotting, or capture.

Start with all 15 pieces on your ace point. Play is like standard 2-dice tables with no advantage in rolling doubles. The game usually ends before bearing off any pieces. Instead, there are five ways to win:

1. If you hit a blot (that is, take a piece), you win. Yes, really. This is the basic game, and wins a single stake.

2. If you take all the points in one table (that is, cover an entire quadrant with two pieces each), the play wins a double stake. If you take your entire home quadrant, it is called "tootes" (French?). This isn't too difficult, but requires a fair amount of luck in rolling small numbers. If your opponent seems to be going for tootes, you need to play forward quickly, to try to hit a blot before he can finish.

3. If you get one man each on the 12th and13th points, and you have no other men out, it is called "Rovers", or "Boveries," and counts for a double stake. This is both difficult and dangerous.

4. If you can get two men on both the 12th and 13th points, or the 1st and 24th, the player wins a double stake. The former is difficult, the latter very difficult.

5. If you can get all of your men around to the 24th point, and bear them all off,

you win a double stake. This happens perhaps one time in a thousand, and it should probably be worth a higher stake. Period sources do not specify exactly how one bears off. Because it is so rare to reach that point we recommend keeping simple and not requiring the exact number to bear off.

There is an advantage in going first in Ticktack, and therefore it is fairest to alternate first move every game.

There are two very interesting twists in early accounts of Ticktack. The first is an extreme form of huffing. If you could win on a turn, and you do not (either by oversight or deliberation), and your opponent catches you, they can say, "Why not?" point out the move that could have won, and win himself instead. If the move would have won a double stake, then he wins double. So, in general, you must take a blot if you have the opportunity. (This can lead to situations where, if you are in danger of losing a double stake, the best strategy may be to force the opponent to win a single one instead.)

The second twist is a version of doubling. If you think that you are going to win, you can say, "I vie the game". Your opponent may at this point either concede the game (and lose the single stake), or say, "I see it". If he sees it, then you increase the stake by one. This may be repeated, once per turn. So the first vie-and-see will double the stake, the second will triple the original stake, and so on. (Incrementing each time, rather than doubling as in modern backgammon.) If the stake is multiplied, and you win double, then you win twice the entire current stake.

Pay very close attention at all times, and don't get too caught up in your strategies. Beginners often get caught by a "Why Not?" because they do not pay enough attention to the ways they could winning single stakes quickly. In general, most games will win single stakes, rather than doubles.

## Paumecary

A 14th century English game. It is only played on the six points of one quarter of a standard board, and can be played either by two players, or equal teams. Each side has twelve pieces that start from off of the board. The aim is to enter all your pieces on to the board and then bear them off again. During team play, all of the players on one team make a roll before the other team has its turn. Two dice are used and rolling a double allows the player to roll again. Blots may be hit and must be re-entered on to the board. According to H. J. R Murray, (A History of Board Games other than Chess) when one team has borne all of its men off the board, it proceeds to begin "helping" the opponent bear off their men, and may smack the losers' hands for each of their borne off by the winners.

## Catch-Dolt

(Also Ketch-Dolt) A 16th century variation. Black must enter his 15 pieces on the northeast corner and white to the southeast corner. The first to bear off their pieces wins. Charles Cotton in his work <u>Complete Gamester</u> explained that while entering men if you duplicate either, or both, of the numbers rolled by your opponent in his previous turn, you cannot enter a man. You must take the piece your opponent has just entered. If you fail to do so you are "dolted" and forfeit the game.

## Jacquet

Jacquet is distinct in that a player must get one piece, their courier, or postillon around the board to their last table before they can move any other pieces. Also, players may not have more than two of the points of their entry table doubled, and may not pile more than two pieces on their 12th points. Traditionally a win counts double if the opponent has failed to bear off any pieces.

Jacquet
All 15 Black



All 15 White
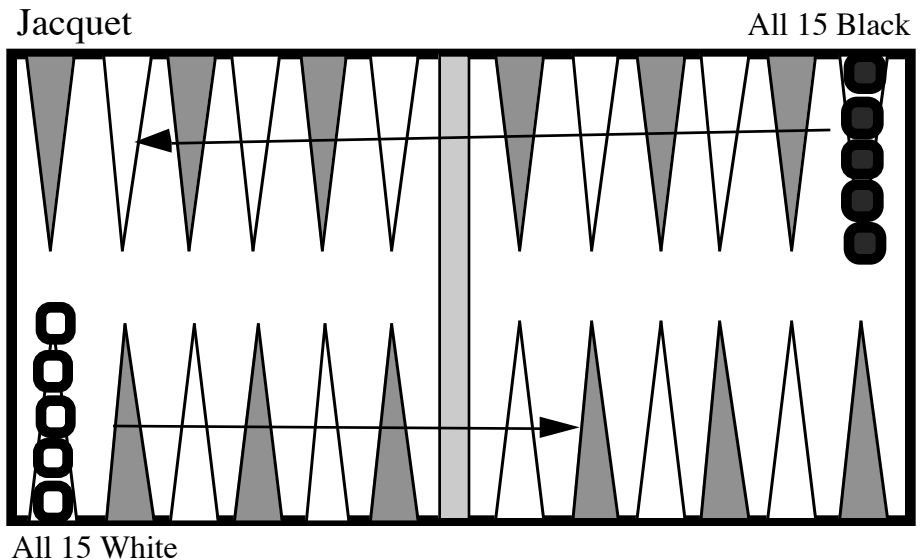
## Asymmetrical Set-ups

The following versions all use starting set-ups that are not symmetrically arranged on the board (see diagrams). In order to balance the difference, the opponents play two games, exchanging colors between games. Both players move in a clock-wise direction, but otherwise, they are played as standard Backgammon. Three dice are used unless otherwise indicated.

Mylis Set-up



## Mylis

An English game using two dice, and both players move counter-clockwise.
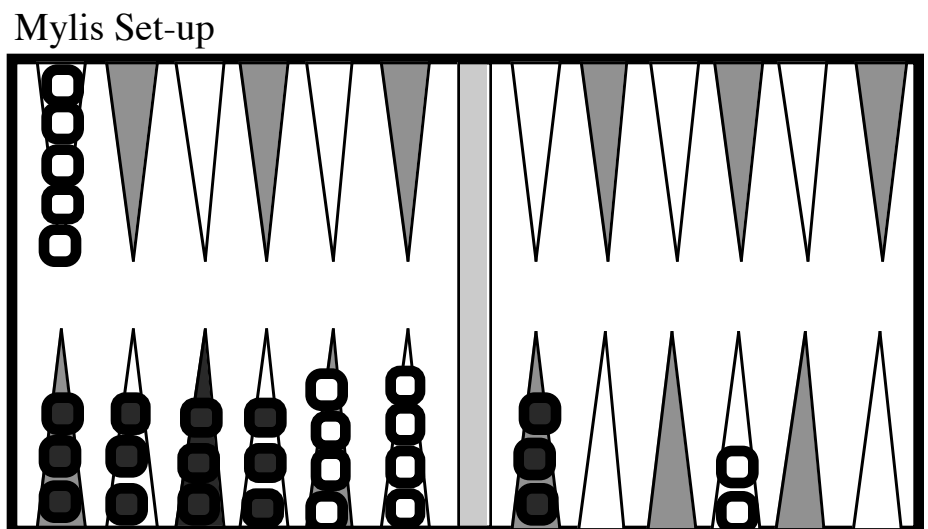
## Cab e Equinal

*Cab e Equinal* appears in the Alphonso MS. Both players have all of their 15 pieces stacked on the point illustrated in the diagram. A variation has both players with 14 pieces stacked as shown and a single piece placed on the points indicated by the "B" and "W" on the diagram.
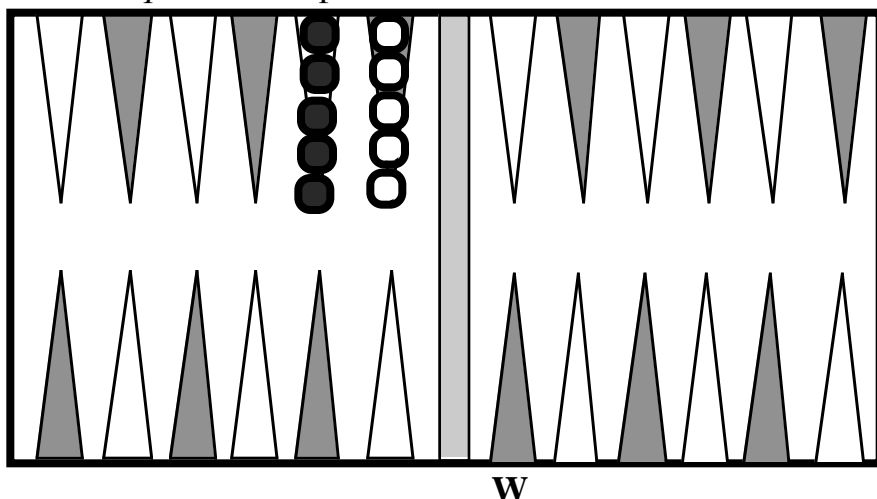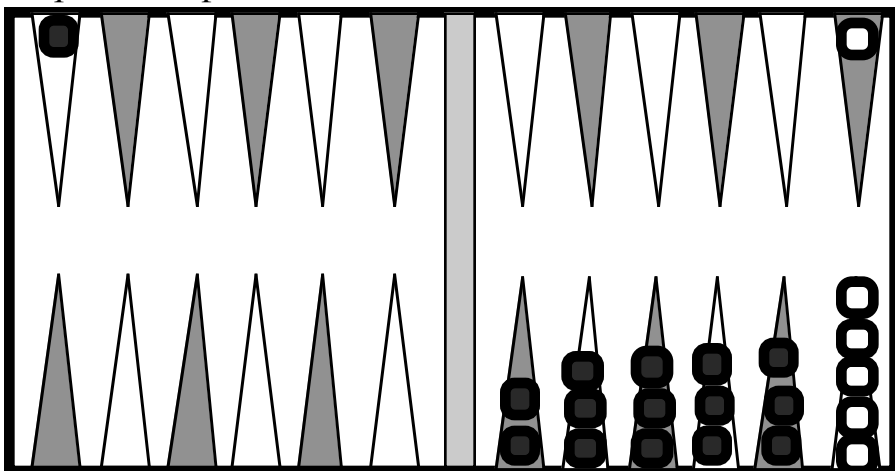
## Laquet

This version was said to be "recently" invented (as of the 1280's) in the Alphonso MS. White has 14 pieces stacked on one point and a single pieces as illustrated. Black has his pieces distributed as shown. Two dice are used and the opponent can use any unusable rolls. Blots cannot be hit.
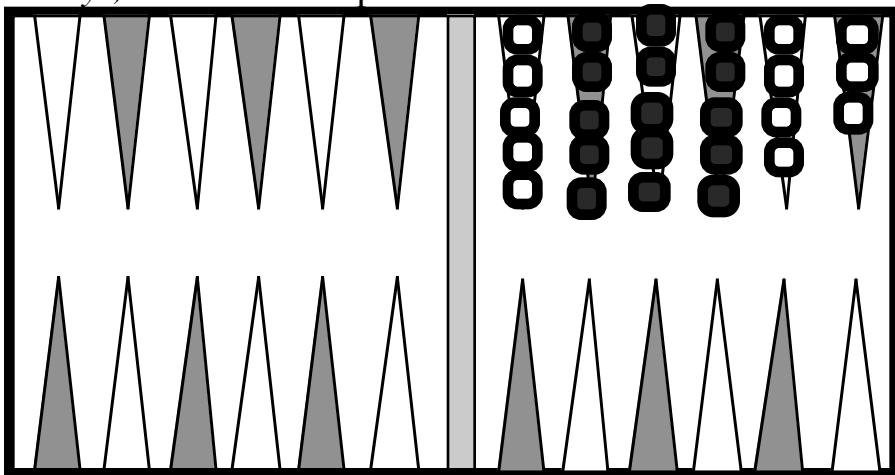
*Laquet* Set-up



## El Seys, Dos e As

From the Alphonso MS. Named (six-deuce-ace). Because white starts with his pieces on the first, second and sixth points (with eight men stacked on the sixth point). A captured piece is re-entered in the table diagonally opposite from the one in which it was hit.
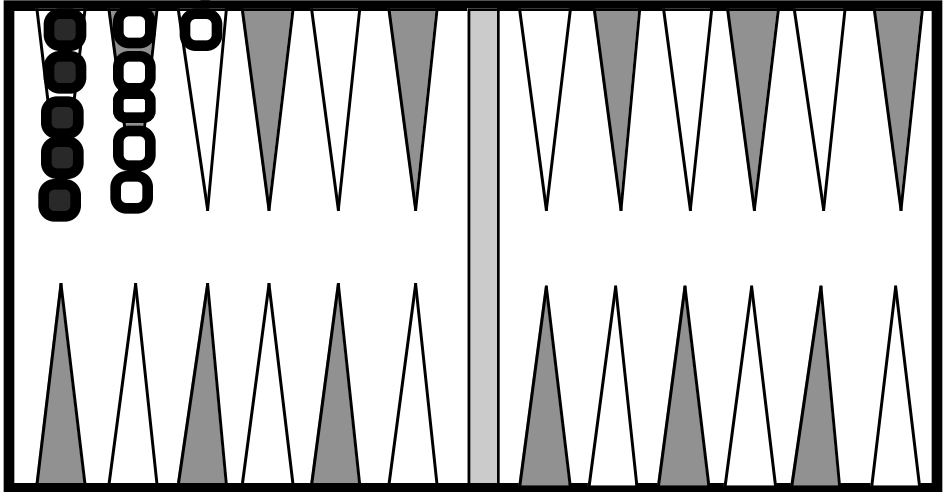
*El Seys, Dos e As* Set-up     8 white

## Barail

An Italian game from the 1500's. White starts with 14 men on one point and a single on the next point. Black has all 15 men stacked on the point illustrated. (An English manuscript calls it "Baralie" and describes it being played with 2 dice, plus an imaginary third die with a roll of six for each turn).

*Barail* Set-up



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