ANIMAL GAME

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Overview

The **Animal Game** is of Chinese origin. How old it is, or how widely played, I do not know. I have in my possession a cheap set of wooden pieces with a paper board, purchased in a Chinatown shop in the 1970s. For the rules of the game I have relied on R.C. Bell's *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations* (Oxford, 1960), the only book where I have seen the game mentioned. Bell calls it the Jungle Game, but this is not an accurate translation of the Chinese name, *Shou Qi*, nor does it truly reflect the variety of animals represented by the pieces.

It is possible that the game developed from *Xiang Qi*, the Chinese variety of chess, as the two games have much in common. Both are games of capture played on boards with a river running through the center and a goal at each end. (The king in Xiang Qi is confined to his castle, where he is flanked by guards much as the den in Shou Qi is flanked by pitfalls.) Both games have a piece called the elephant. Shou Qi is the easier game and does not lend itself to brilliant combinations; but it is fun, and some interesting tactical situations can arise.

How to Play

In this version of the game, you play against the computer. You control the pieces on the left.

By default you have the first move. If you want the computer to move first, click the New Game button and then answer No in the dialog that appears.

The Board

The board represents the territories of two warring packs of animals. Between them lies a river spanned by three bridges. At each end of the board is a den surrounded by three pitfalls.

Object

The object is to get one of your animals into the enemy's den. The computer will announce a win when either player cannot be stopped from capturing the enemy den on the following turn.

Movement

To move, click on a piece to select it. Then click on the destination square. If you change your mind about moving a piece, deselect it by right-clicking or by selecting another friendly piece.

The pieces move one square at a time in any non-diagonal direction. The lion and tiger can also leap in a straight line across the river, or from bridge to bridge. An animal cannot enter its own den, and no animal except the rat can enter the water. A rat in the water blocks the leap of a lion or tiger (whether friendly or enemy) along its rank or file.

Capture

A piece can capture any other piece that has the same or a smaller number, by moving onto the same square. An exception is that the elephant is weaker than the rat, because the rat can kill the elephant by running into its ear and gnawing its brain. However, the rat cannot attack the elephant from the water.

An animal in an enemy pitfall can be captured by any other animal. Otherwise pitfalls do not affect movement or capture.

The rat can attack the enemy rat from the water, though it cannot capture the elephant in this way. On this point <u>Bell</u> is not clear, and I hope I have made the right assumption.

Drawn games

<u>Bell</u> also fails to mention what is done in the case of repeated positions. A situation often arises where a player has a single piece guarding a pitfall that is threatened by a stronger enemy piece. The attacker can end up chasing the defending piece back and forth endlessly, with a constant threat to the den. This maneuver is somewhat like perpetual check in chess.

This computer version of the game allows repeated positions, but the computer player will not try to escape defeat by employing "perpetual check".

In the event that a position does keep repeating itself, you can declare a draw and start a new game.

Undo

    In the <u>registered</u> version of the game, you can take back any number of turns, after the computer has made its move, by clicking the Undo button.

New Game

    To abandon the current game, click the New Game button.

Options

To select or deselect an option, click on the menu item. Your choices become the default for future games.

Sound

If this menu item has a checkmark, you hear an alert when the computer has moved. If you have a sound defined for the "asterisk" event in Windows Control Panel, this is the sound you will hear. In Windows 95 you can have a little fun by assigning one of the sounds in the Jungle Sound Scheme to this event.

Show strengths

When this menu item is checked, the relative values of the pieces are shown on the board. For the meaning of these numbers, see **Capture** under <u>How to Play</u>.

Show legal moves

When this option is checked, each time you select a friendly piece you will see an outline around every square where that piece can move.

Skill

Assign one of the available skill levels to the computer by clicking on it in the menu.

Higher levels cause the computer to look further ahead and thus think longer.

If you have the shareware version of the game, some skill levels are not available. You must <u>register</u> to get the full-featured version.

Benefits of Registration

The **ANIMAL GAME** is being distributed as shareware. If you like the program, and intend to continue using it beyond a reasonable evaluation period, you are expected to pay for it.

In return for your registration fee of **$10.00**, you will receive a version of the program that has the following features:

1 Two more skill levels, Expert and Master.

2 Undo button that allows you to take back any number of moves.

3 Ability to save and restore games.

Here's How

If you have a CompuServe account:

GO SWREG and search for registration ID **9307**. As soon as we receive notice of your registration, we will e-mail the enhanced version to you. This generally happens within a day. The price will be billed to your CIS account.

If you don't:

Send a check on a U.S. bank for $10.00, or an equivalent postal money order or bank draft in U.S. funds, to the address below. Canadian customers may pay by a check for $13.50 in Canadian funds.

Be sure to specify that your order is for **ANIMAL GAME**, and please allow two to four weeks for delivery of the diskette.

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