

How to Play Mancala

All three complete games the 1894 paper contains, on one sheet. Keep it with the board.

Three complete games come out of these thirteen pages, and this is the only book in the series where that is true of everything in it. Culin's rules are set out as prose in the middle of an argument; here they are set out to be played from. Everything below is his, and where he leaves something unsaid it says so.

You need a board of two rows of seven cups and about a hundred counters for the Syrian games, or four rows for Chuba. An egg box, a muffin tin or two rows of holes scratched in the ground all work, which is how the game has always been played. Printable boards are on the companion sheets.

La'b madjnuni — the crazy game · Syrian, as played in New York in 1894

The board. Two rows of seven holes, called *bute*, “houses”. Ninety-eight cowrie shells or pebbles. **The opening.** One player distributes all the pieces among the fourteen holes, putting not fewer than two in any hole. How he distributes them is the whole game. **The move.** That player lifts everything from the hole at the right of his own row — *el ras*, “the head” — and drops the pieces one at a time into the holes on the opposite side, then round into his own row if any are left. When the last piece falls, he lifts everything from the hole it fell in and goes on sowing. He continues until his last piece falls either into an empty hole, when his turn ends, or into a hole holding one or three, making two or four. **Taking.** When his last piece completes a two or a four he takes those pieces and the contents of the hole opposite; and if the next hole along also holds two or four, and the next, he takes those and their opposites too, stopping at the first hole that holds anything else. **The reply.** The second player begins from the head of his own row. If a head is empty the player starts from the nearest hole in his row that is not. **Winning.** When the board is cleared, each counts what he has taken above his opponent.

HOW COMPLETE CULIN'S ACCOUNT IS

Yes, completely — and Culin adds the joke that no skill is needed or of any use, because once the opening distribution is made the result is fixed. Play it once to see that he is right. Culin also names a children's variety of it, *la'b rosēya*: seven cowries in every hole, and “the first player invariably wins”. That is the same determinacy seen from the other end — with the layout fixed, so is the winner.

La'b hakimi — the rational game · Syrian, the companion game to the above

The board. The same board and the same ninety-eight counters as the crazy game. **The opening.** Seven pieces in each of the fourteen holes — “it is customary in Syria to put seven pieces in each hole”, which is exactly the ninety-eight. Nobody chooses the layout, so nobody has decided the game before it starts. **The move.** The sowing, the capture on a two or a four, and the sweep along the row are as in the crazy game. **The one difference is the whole game:** a player, “instead of first taking from the hole on their right, may select any hole on their side of the board as a starting place”. Every turn is now a choice. **What you are actually doing.** Culin: “They calculate the hole in which the last piece will fall, and the result depends largely upon this calculation.” Count the counters in a hole, count that many holes on, and see what your last piece lands in. **Winning.** As before: when the board is cleared, each counts what he has above his opponent.

HOW COMPLETE CULIN'S ACCOUNT IS

Yes. Culin gives the opening count, the free choice of starting hole and what the players are calculating; everything else is shared with the crazy game, which he has just set out in full.

Chuba · published in the United States in 1891; Culin prints the maker's rules entire

The board. Four rows of eleven pockets, two rows to each player, and sixty counters. Each player plays only in his own two rows: the one at his edge is his *outer* row, the one beyond it his *inner*. **The opening.** One counter in every pocket of your outer row and two in every pocket of your inner row, “except that the pocket on his extreme left in the inner row is kept vacant and the one next to it holds but one man”. That is thirty a side. **The move.** Choose any pocket in your inner row holding more than one man and sow them one at a time — inner row right to left, outer row left to right, and on round the course as far as they go. If the last man falls into an occupied pocket, lift that pocket and go on. If it falls into an empty pocket your turn ends. **Taking.** If that empty pocket is in your inner row and the opponent's inner-row pocket opposite holds men, you capture them, and the men in the outer-row pocket behind it as well. **Then you take a second pair:** choose any other pair of opposite pockets in his two rows and remove whatever is in them. If the pocket opposite was empty, you capture nothing at all. **Three restrictions.** The outer row is noncombatant: a man there cannot move until a man from the inner row has been played onto it. A move may not begin from a pocket holding a single man while you still have one holding more. And a move that does begin from a single man may not be played into an occupied pocket. **The forfeit.** When all a player's men have become single, whatever is left in his outer row that has not been played on is forfeited to his opponent. **Winning.** Capture all your opponent's men.

HOW COMPLETE CULIN'S ACCOUNT IS

Yes. Culin reproduces the printed rule sheet in full, including the maker's advice on tactics and the detail that native players say “chee” at the end of each move to signal that the opponent may proceed. Read those paragraphs knowing they are a toy company's words, not Culin's — the register says why that matters.