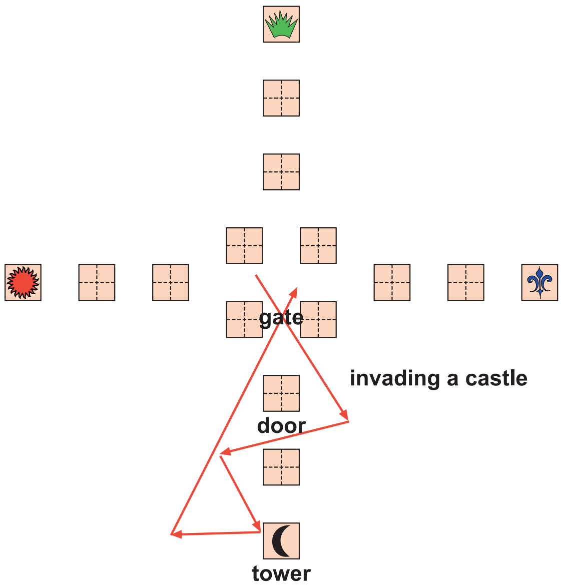
Castle Croquetnole

Adapted for the piecepack
from Lewis Carroll's game of Castle Croquet
by Ron Hale-Evans (`rwhe@ludism.org`)

Version 0.3.3, 2002-10-12

4 players.
Approx. 30-45 minutes.
Requires: one standard piecepack, card table or similar.



> *The ingenuity of man has never conceived anything better calculated to bring out all the evil passions of humanity than the so-called game of Croquet. It is not long before every honorable feeling, every dictate of morality has been obliterated. The hoop is the gaping jaws of hades.*
>
> —Anonymous, *Living Age* magazine, 1898, quoted in *The New Games Treasury*, Merilyn Simonds Mohr, 1997

Object of the Game

Each player brings his knight out of his castle by playing it through its castle's gate, and "invading" the other castles with it in the proper sequence. He then re-enters his own castle and hits his tower, while his own guard is "on duty". The first player to do so wins.

Setup

The original game of Castle Croquet, as played on lawns, requires eight balls (two balls per player), eight hoops or wickets, and four pegs. In the piecepack game, the balls have been replaced by coins, the wickets have been replaced by pairs of tiles, and the pegs have been replaced by stacks of two tiles. In the lawn game, each gate consisted of a single wicket; in the piecepack game, in order to conserve space, each player shares the left tile of her gate with the player to her left and the right tile of her gate with the player to her right. Consult the diagram above if you find this description confusing.

Four of the coins are called "knights"; the other coins are called "guards". The tiles are set up as in the illustration above, making four "castles", each of which consists of a gate, a door, and a tower.

Each player has one castle, one knight, and one guard, as follows:

CASTLE	KNIGHT COIN	GUARD COIN
1	Moon	Ace
2	Sun	2
3	Crown	3
4	Arms	4

Each gate and each door is formed from two face-down tiles that are one tile-width apart, which equals 2 inches for most piecepacks. Each tower is a stack of two tiles with the Ace tile of the same suit as the player's knight on top, face up. (For example, Player 2 would use the Ace of Suns.) The distance from each castle's gate to its door, or from its door to its tower, should also be one tile-width. Card tables are about the right size for the playing field, and because they are usually square, you can put one castle in each corner or on each side.

Before the game begins, each player places his guard within a single coin-width of his tower.

Starting the Game

To begin the game, the Moons player places his knight within a coin-width of his castle's tower, plays it, and then plays his guard (which was placed during setup). Next, the player to his left (the Suns player) places and plays his knight, and so on, clockwise.

To "play" a coin is to flick it, possibly taking bonus flicks if permitted. As of this writing, the definition of "flick" in the Piecepack Glossary is still being hashed out, but probably will resemble the following:

> *v. to propel a game piece (such as a piecepack coin) across the playing area with a single finger. While a flick is more of a push than a strike, it is not a sustained motion, but a sudden one. A proper flick is performed by resting a single fingertip on the playing surface with the fingernail against the game piece, then either (1) straightening the finger with the hand held motionless, or (2) straightening the whole hand at the wrist with the arm held motionless.*

After the first round, each player has the option on her turn of playing her knight (as long as it is not a prisoner), and then her guard.

Entering and Leaving Castles

If a guard goes through the gate of its castle, in the direction *from* its tower, it is said to "leave" the castle; the next time it goes through it in the opposite direction, it is said to "re-enter" it, and so on. A guard that has not left its castle is said to be "on duty"; if it leaves it, it is said to be "off duty"; if it re-enters it, it is "on duty" again, and so on.

In general, a coin is only said to have entered a castle if it passed in through that castle's gate, and it remains within the castle until it leaves through the castle's gate. The only exception is a coin's own castle; in certain circumstances (such as the beginning of a game or after it has been freed from prison), a coin may start a turn within its own castle.

If a coin is not within any castle, it is considered to be outdoors, in the Wasteland.

Invading Castles and Scoring

To "invade" another player's castle, the knight must enter its gate, pass through the door (either way), hit the tower, and go out the gate again. It does not need to leave through the door on the way out; presumably the denizens of the castle are in hot pursuit, so the knight jumps out a window or something.

For your knight to "score" a gate, door, or tower, it must go through it (in the case of gates and doors) or hit it (in the case of towers), in the sequence given above. In order to score, it must visit the castles in the proper sequence as well. The proper castle sequence starts with the castle to your left and runs clockwise.

Example: The knight of the first player, Moons, must first enter the Suns castle gate, then pass through the Suns door, then hit the Suns tower, then leave through the Suns gate, then enter the Crowns gate, pass through the Crowns door, and so on.

Prisoners

If an invading knight hits, or is hit by, the guard on duty in the castle it is invading, it becomes a "prisoner", and is placed on top of the castle's tower. It is released from prison when the castle's guard goes off duty, or when its own guard on duty comes and hits the tower in which it is imprisoned. In the latter case, its guard is immediately returned to its starting position. The released knight is placed on its own tower to recover from the enemy's brutality until its next turn, when it is also returned to its starting position.

Note: Your guard *must* be *on duty* to release your knight from prison. That means if it left your castle through its gate on the way to rescuing your knight, it must go back on duty by returning to your castle through its gate, then leave the castle some other way, before it can release your knight.

Although Lewis Carroll's rules are unclear on this point, in Castle Croquetnole, after a knight has been released from prison and returned to its own castle, it must restart the scoring sequence (gate, door, tower, gate) for the castle in which it was imprisoned (leaving its own castle via the gate first, of course).

Bonus Flicks

Under certain circumstances, you may be entitled to flick a coin more than once per turn. Coins receive the following "bonus flicks" under the following conditions:

CONDITION	BONUS FLICKS
Knight scores a gate, door, or tower.	Knight receives one bonus flick.
Guard takes a prisoner.	Guard receives one bonus flick.
Guard leaves or enters its castle by the gate.	Guard receives one bonus flick, but may only receive one bonus flick for each of the actions per turn.
One coin strikes another coin, and neither is a guard on duty.	First coin receives two bonus flicks, but may not strike the same coin again, unless it scores a gate, door, or tower first (in which case it does receive the two bonus flicks).
Knight hits its own off-duty guard.	Knight may take croquet of any kind. (see below).

A "croquet" is one of five kinds of bonus possible when your knight strikes its own guard:

1. You may take two regular bonus flicks.
2. You may pick up your knight and place it anywhere within a coin-width away from your guard, then take two regular bonus flicks.
3. You may pick up your knight and place it in contact with your guard (without moving the guard), then flick the knight. This is called a "loose croquet". The knight then receives another bonus flick.
4. You may pick up your knight, place it in contact with your guard (without moving the guard), then hold the knight down with one finger while flicking it with another, so as to propel the guard away but leave the knight where it is. The knight then receives another bonus flick. (If the knight happens to move, there is no penalty.) This is called a "tight croquet".
5. You may play your knight so as to move it only slightly, then flick it in the direction of the guard and drive it some distance away on your *second* flick. This has nearly the same effect as a "loose croquet".

Errors and Penalties

If a player somehow flicks his coin off of the playing surface (card table, etc.), he returns his coin to the spot on the edge of the table where the coin fell off, and loses the rest of the flicks available to that coin. If he hits another player's coin off the table, it is simply returned to the spot where it fell off.

For a coin to be flicked into the gate of a castle before it has left the castle it is already in is illegal. The coin must be replaced where it was before it was flicked, and may not be flicked again that turn.

You can make Castle Croquetnole arbitrarily complex by adding penalties from the official rules of both Croquet and Crokinole. (Did you know Croquet has a dress code in the US?)

Alternatively, you can play a looser game, for example, by adding the Croquet rule that players may replace balls a mallet-head away from the edge of the field if they are too close or have crossed the border. (I have generally translated a mallet-head as a coin-width where necessary.)

You can even play the game with flamingoes and hedgehogs if you like. . .

Strategy

There are two distinct strategies, the defensive and the offensive, each with its own advantages. In the defensive strategy, your guard is usually on duty; in the offensive strategy, it is usually off duty.

Defensive Strategy

In the defensive strategy, your guard remains at home on duty, except when your knight is in danger of being taken prisoner. In that case, it is flicked up to the tower of the castle you are invading, so it can release your knight if necessary.

In this strategy, the best position for your guard most of the time is just behind the center of your gate, so that if a knight trying to invade your castle hits it, it has already passed through the gate and is automatically taken prisoner. From this position, it is also easy to take a prisoner in any part of your castle in the following way:

1. Play your guard just out of the gate; this gives you another turn.
2. Play the guard back in, as close as possible to the invading knight; this gives you another turn.
3. Take the knight prisoner.

Don't do this when you have a prisoner in your castle, though, as it would be released by your guard's exit.

The defensive strategy is best against better players, as it enables you to delay them by preventing their invading your castle. As soon as all the better players have passed through your castle, though, take your guard off duty to support your knight.

Offensive Strategy

In the offensive strategy, your guard stays with your knight; you carry the guard along by taking “loose croquets” or “split flicks”. (In split flicks, two coins are touching, and one is flicked so that the other coin moves in a different direction from the first one.) When your knight runs out of flicks, either play your guard close to it, ready for the next turn, or, if your knight is in danger of being taken prisoner, take two bonus flicks for hitting it with your guard, getting as close as possible to the enemy’s guard with the first flick, and driving the enemy guard safely away with the second.

The offensive strategy enables you to make rapid progress in invading the other castles. You can also take prisoners almost as easily as in the defensive strategy, by taking two bonus flicks for hitting your knight with your guard, getting near your gate in the first flick, and entering your castle in the second. This gives you another turn, in which you can try to take a prisoner. However, it has the disadvantage of wasted time if your knight is imprisoned, as your guard must then go home, get back on duty, and return, before it can release your knight.

Miscellaneous

If your knight is taken prisoner, and you release it by hitting the enemy’s tower with your guard, you are often in a position in which you can delay the other players. First, immediately after your knight is released, place your guard in a line between your tower and an invading knight aiming at it; second, place your knight close to your guard on your next turn, then drive your guard in the direction of an invading knight and take it prisoner.

It follows that when you have taken a prisoner, and are invading the castle from which it came, you should not wait until the enemy’s guard has hit your tower and released the prisoner. Instead, release it yourself when the enemy’s guard has nearly reached your tower, by playing your own guard out through your gate and back in again. In this case the guard, which was on its way to your tower, can’t be returned immediately, but must be played all the way home.

If an invading knight is near your gate, you may take it prisoner as follows: first, play your guard out, near the invading knight; then hit the knight with your guard, and take two bonus flicks for hitting it. Leave the invading knight in a line between your guard and your gate with your first flick, then drive both in together with your second flick. This gives you another turn, in which you may take the knight prisoner.

Credits

Thanks to Mark Biggar and his piecepack game Tabletop Croquet for showing the way to turn Croquet into a tabletop flicking game. I have adopted some of his rules on player errors.

Thanks to the (very) late Lewis Carroll for his game Castle Croquet, the text of which is now in the public domain (I have cribbed from it heavily). I have attempted to make these rules a straightforward adaptation of Carroll's game to the piecepack.

Thanks to Tim Schutz, himself a designer of many fine piecepack games, for the sharp illustration of the layout of the board. With any luck, you will soon be able to buy plans and kits for Crokinole-style boards for Castle Croquetnole, as well as finished boards, from his Penny Games website.

Thanks also to Bruce Whitehill for his modification and modernisation of Castle Croquet. Although this ruleset is an adaptation of Carroll's game, not Whitehill's, I have adopted some terms from Whitehill's version (such as "knight", "guard", and "tower", where Carroll used "soldier", "sentinel", and "peg"), since more people may be familiar with Whitehill's version. (I like Carroll's "door" better than Whitehill's "archway", however.) I have also adopted Whitehill's nice clarification of when a knight or guard is in a castle and when it is outside.

Thanks to my wife and usual collaborator in game design, Marty Hale-Evans, for editing this document.

Finally, thanks to my playtesters: Tim Schutz, Chris Sjoholm (a Crokinole fiend who first suggested building a custom board), Steve and Nat Dupree, and Jason, whose surname I didn't catch, but who won the very first game of Castle Croquetnole.

Links

Penny Games website of tjgames.com (soon to carry Castle Croquetnole boards, plans, and kits):
`http://www.tjgames.com/`

Bruce Whitehill's Big Game Hunter site (contains abridged version of his modified rules for the Castle Croquet lawn game):
`http://www.thebiggamehunter.com/`

Official USCA rules of Croquet:
`http://www.croquetAmerica.com/gams-rls.asp`

Two good Crokinole sites, including rules and FAQs:
`http://www.crokinole.com/`
`http://www.frontiernet.net/~crokinol/`

Official piecepack site:
`http://www.piecepack.org/`

Latest version of this ruleset in several formats, including HTML, PDF, and LaTeX :
`http://www.ludism.org/piecepack/ccroq/`

History

0.3.3, 2002-10-13: Re-organised. Edited by Marty Hale-Evans. First public release.

0.3.2, 2002-10-12: Added "Links" section. More definitions. Clarified rules about guard releasing imprisoned knights, fifth kind of croquet, inside/outside, etc.

0.3.1, 2002-10-08: Clarified rules for bonus flicks and croquets.

0.3, 2002-10-06: Converted to LaTeX . Now includes Tim Schutz's snazzy illustration of the board instead of my lame one. Changed some tile distances to make the board smaller; made castles share gateposts for the same reason. Included link to future site of handmade Castle Croquetnole boards. Expanded Credits, and added this History section.

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