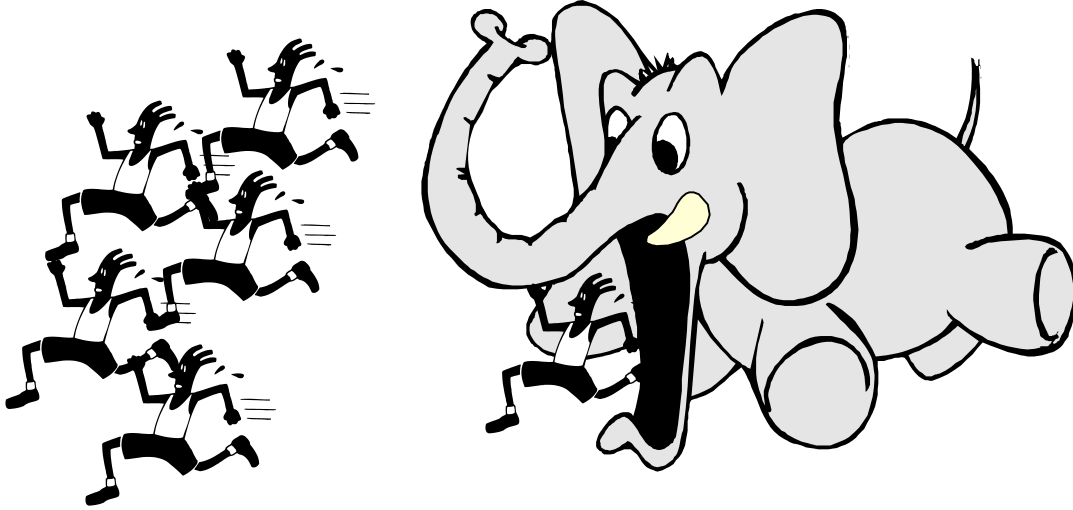


Elephant Run



Elephant Run

A game for the piecepack by Jim Adams and Amy Enge

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Two players, 10 minutes

Equipment: piecepack

Background:

What's the funniest thing about elephants? Their poop! Especially if it is on the loose side. But not everyone is into classic humor. Besides, we'd then be talking about *Elephant Runs*, which we clearly are not. So, what's the second funniest thing about elephants? The way they squash anyone who doesn't get out of the way fast enough! This, too, is classic humor, but will not be offensive to the scatologically challenged. So, let's enjoy a few minutes of elephants squashing people!

In *Elephant Run*, one player is an elephant that's big, strong, and equipped with a good memory and a huge appetite. The other player controls a group of six rice patty farmers in India trying to eke out enough sustenance to support their huge households. Things are tough enough for the farmers until one day the elephant decides to use the shared rice patty as the lunch buffet. While local statutes prevent the farmers from hurting the elephantine freeloader, it is perfectly legal for the farmers to starve to death should they not find some nonviolent way to save their crop. So, they run into the patty and try to herd the elephant out. Assuming they can avoid getting stepped on, will they be able to save enough of their rice patty for the upcoming harvest?

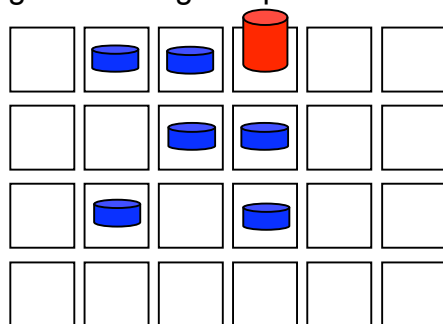
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Components:

- *Elephant Run* uses the basic piecepack set.

Setup:

- Lay out all the tiles face-down in a 4x6 grid. You may want to leave a little space between each tile, as you will be removing tiles throughout the game.
- The elephant player takes a pawn and places it on any tile they wish.
- Next, the farmer player takes six coins and places them face-down anywhere on the board, one coin per tile.
- Be sure each player has read the rules before making their initial placements because it is possible to lose on the first move due to a poor setup! See the figure below for a good starting setup.



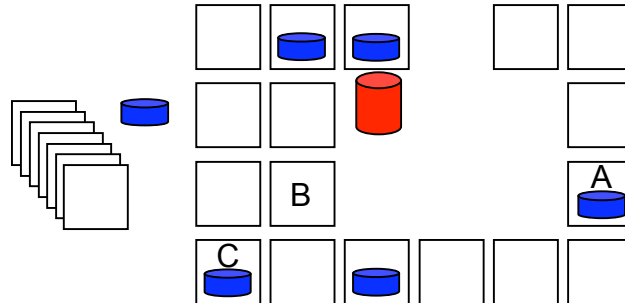
- You are now ready to play *Elephant Run*!

Rules:

- *Elephant Run* is played in turns. The elephant always moves first, followed by one of the farmers.
- Any piece may move horizontally, vertically, or diagonally onto any vacant adjacent tile.
 - When the elephant takes such a move, the destination tile is removed and placed in a scoring pile in front of the elephant player. (This represents eating a patch of the rice patty.)
 - When a farmer takes such a move, the destination tile is left undisturbed.
- Any piece may also jump an adjacent farmer piece in any direction as long as the tile beyond the farmer is vacant.
 - When an elephant jumps a farmer, the farmer is removed and placed in the elephant player's scoring pile as the elephant has just stampeded through the farmer and left him a little worse for wear. 😊
 - When an elephant jumps a farmer, the destination tile is *not* consumed! (The elephant was too busy stampeding.)
 - A farmer jumping another farmer simply allows the jumping farmer to move more quickly than normal.
 - Farmers cannot jump the elephant.
 - Multiple jumps are not allowed.

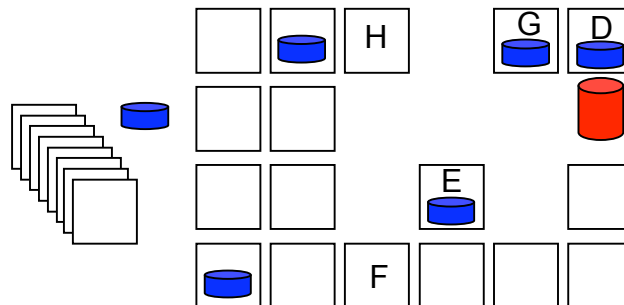
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- Farmers have a special ranged move capability.
 - A farmer may move an unlimited number of spaces in a straight line through regions where the tiles have been removed. (The lack of rice patty allows them to run unhindered.)
 - They must start and end on a tile.
 - This is really like their normal move with empty spaces inserted between their current and destination tiles. See the figure below.



In this figure the farmer on A may move to B by using his special ranged move capability. Note that at B he is safe from immediate stampeding because of the farmer on C.

- Compound moves (any combination of a normal move, a special ranged move, and/or a jump in the same move) are not allowed. See the figure below.
 - D may not combine a special ranged move and a jump to make a “special ranged jump” over E to land on F. (There is no such thing as a “special ranged jump”. However, see “Balancing/Handicapping the Game” below.)



- D may not combine a jump and a special ranged move to jump over G to land on H. This is different version of the “special ranged jump”, which, again, does not exist. (However, see “Balancing/Handicapping the Game” below.)
 - As stated before, D cannot jump over the elephant.
- The elephant will only move onto vacant tiles, either by a normal move or by jumping a farmer.
- If at any time the elephant cannot reach a vacant tile, it loses interest and wanders away and the game is over.
- In the extremely unlikely cases of either the entire rice patty being consumed or all the farmers being captured, the game also ends.

Winning the Game:

- Each consumed tile and captured farmer is worth one point to the elephant player.
- If the elephant player scores 10 or more points, the elephant wins. Otherwise, the farmers win.
- It probably goes without saying that if all the tiles and/or all the farmers are captured by the elephant, the elephant wins. Yep, I was right. 😊

Designer Notes:

Anyone familiar with traditional board games will recognize *Elephant Run* as based on Fox and Geese. One of the most interesting possibilities of the piecepack is that a tile game board allows the game board to be changed throughout play. Hence, we have a version of Fox and Geese with a game board that is constantly changing, though in a predictable way. This adds an extra dimension of strategy to manage and a resulting richness to the game. One of the most interesting strategic options available for the farmer player is to sacrifice one farmer in return for placing the elephant in a position where the game can be ended before the elephant can accumulate enough points to win. Of course, the elephant player can refuse the gambit, but when offered early enough in the game, an exhaustive analysis of the resulting board situation can be difficult to perform. In the beginning of the game, the elephant can go pretty much where it pleases. However, with each removed tile, a new potential obstacle to future movement is created as well as potentially a new tile where a farmer is safe from capture. Breaking the board into separate segments immediately requires the elephant to commit to one segment, leaving the others safe for the rest of the game. While the farmer player can generally sustain losing one farmer with best play, they probably cannot lose two farmers and win the game unless the resulting win is immediate. So, it is usually advisable for the elephant to jump farmers whenever possible. As a consequence, the farmers spend most of their time avoiding capture while simultaneously trying to cordon off the elephant. Six farmers by themselves are no match for the elephant. However, with the removal of each tile, the farmers become more powerful, and therein lies the race for points.

Balancing/Handicapping the Game:

- The easiest way to balance or handicap the game is to vary the number of points needed for the elephant to win. You will not need to change the number of points very much.
 - Anything outside the range of 8 to 12 is usually (but not always) an automatic win for one side or the other.
- A more severe change to the balance is to either increase or decrease the number of farmers by one.
 - Changing this starting number by two or more will probably result in automatic wins for one side or the other, though the farmer player will never feel like he has enough farmers to start!

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- Oh, all right! If the farmers really need the help, special ranged jumps (compound moves) are allowed. (See “Rules” above.)
 - Be prepared for the farmers to be bouncing around the rice patty like an angry swarm of gnats!
 - Also be prepared for questions like “Can I run move, jump, and move all in the same move?” Decide up front on how complex a compound move is allowed.

Solitaire Variant:

- This game is a great one for analysis!
- Commit the elephant to a given strategy and try to stop it.
 - A die roll can be used for making arbitrary decisions for the elephant.
- Note that, ignoring symmetries of the board, there are six possible starting locations for the elephant.
 - A corner square is an immediate loss for the elephant. (Can you see why?)
 - Of the remaining squares, which ones are stronger starting squares?
 - Be sure to play test each theory, as it seems that the starting square is less important than the subsequent strategy of the elephant.

Useless Trivia

- This game had nothing to do with the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona. I think. See http://www.sanfermin.com/guia/in_encierro1.shtml.

Who Did What:

It is always bad business to keep track of who did what in a creative partnership because the result is always greater than the sum of the parts. Regardless, here is a recollection of who did what.

- The graphics and rules set were originated by Jim and perfected by Amy.
- The first game concept was Jim’s and completely different from this version. It also proved to be almost completely devoid of strategic play. ☹
- The idea of a Fox and Geese game with disappearing tiles was also Jim’s. Fortunately, it proved to be a somewhat better idea.
- The final movement/capture rules were Amy’s, especially the farmers’ special movement capability.
- Scoring points per tile and per farmer, as well as the number of points to win where determined by Jim and Amy jointly by tons of play testing.
- Most of the strategic analysis is Amy’s, though Jim had the occasional insight. ☺