

# Bobail – African Strategy Board Game

## Summary

Bobail is a two-player African strategy board game played on a square board arranged in a 5x5 grid. Each player has 5 tokens which all start on their home row (i.e., the back row closest to the player). The first player uses the green tokens, and the second player controls the red tokens. In addition to each player's own colored tokens there is an extra yellow communal token called the Bobail which begins the game in the center square of the board. Players alternate turns by first moving the Bobail one space to any unoccupied adjacent square (including diagonally) and then moving one of their tokens the complete distance it can go in any direction (including diagonally). Tokens cannot jump over other tokens so any move will end when an obstruction (e.g., wall or token) is in the way. For recording games, one can adopt a notation structure similar to Chess (e.g., instead of rows/columns A-H and 1-8, use A-E and 1-5 where A1 is the green player's left corner square and E5 is the red player's left corner square). Notation\*\* would indicate token movements via their starting and ending points (e.g., green player moves their corner token from B1:E4 to start the game).

## How to Win

The object of the game is to either move the Bobail token to your home row (baseline), to force your opponent to move the Bobail token to your home row, or to prevent your opponent from being able to move the Bobail token at the start of their turn by surrounding it against a wall and with other tokens\* (e.g., this is considered capturing, trapping, or smothering the Bobail as it can no longer be moved during your opponent's next turn).

\*Note – You can actually use the positions of your opponent's tokens to help you capture the Bobail.

The winner is the player who captures (e.g., traps or smothers) the Bobail (e.g., making it impossible for your opponent to move it during the start of their turn) or to have the Bobail moved to your home row.

## Game Play

On each turn, a player must perform the following two actions in this specific order\*:

1. Move the Bobail (The Bobail can move one space in any direction, including diagonally).
2. Move one of your player tokens (Player tokens can move in any direction to the furthest unoccupied square in that direction. Tokens cannot hop, jump, or leap over other tokens that are in their way).

\*For the first move by the starting player (green tokens), they only perform the second action of moving a player token. Play then proceeds where each player takes turns moving the Bobail first and one of their player tokens second.

## Strategy

Below are a few basic principles to consider when playing.

### Bobail Movement

Although it is ideal to have the Bobail on your side (closer to your home row) this may limit your ability to move your tokens across the board (e.g., sometimes it may help to keep the Bobail in Row 3 to allow you to move your tokens out, Fig. 1). This same logic can be used to try block your opponent from being able to move out their tokens as well (Fig. 2 and 3) but it has a tradeoff as it does put the Bobail closer to your opponent's home row.

Fig. 1

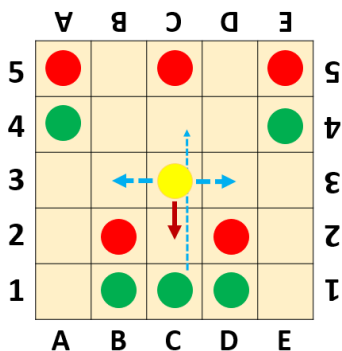


Fig. 2

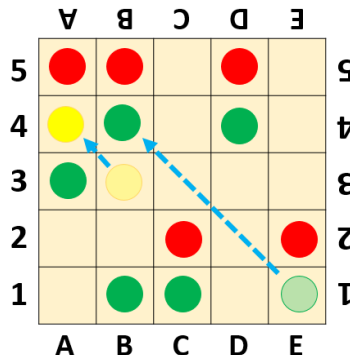
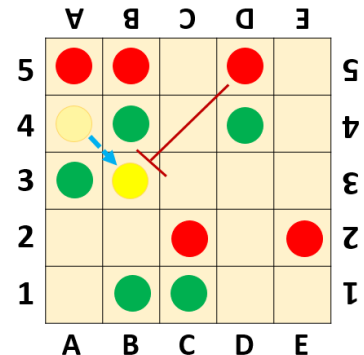


Fig. 3



### Player Token Positioning

In order to force the Bobail towards your side of the board it helps to have your player tokens behind the Bobail. The more tokens you can get on the far side of the Bobail the more options you have to help push or guide the Bobail to your home row (Fig. 4 versus Fig. 5).

Fig. 4

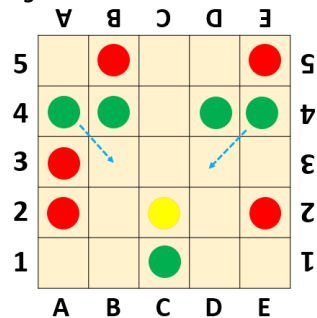
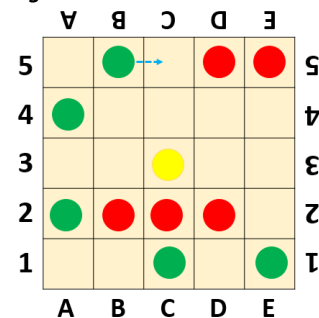


Fig. 5



### Center Press

Controlling the center C3 with one of your player tokens can sometimes force the opponent to move the Bobail into positions that will allow you to trap it or force it to your home row (Fig. 6-8). From there Fig. 9 shows how once the Red player moves the Bobail up to A3 there is no way to avoid the inevitable Green player move of the Bobail to Row 2 and then closing off the third row with A4:A3.

Fig. 6

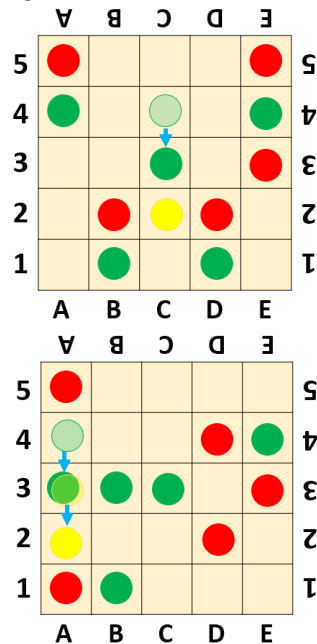


Fig. 7

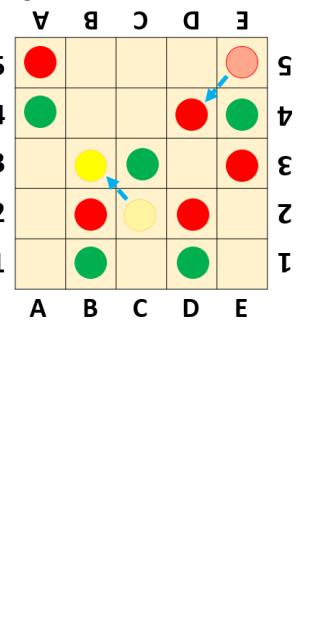


Fig. 8

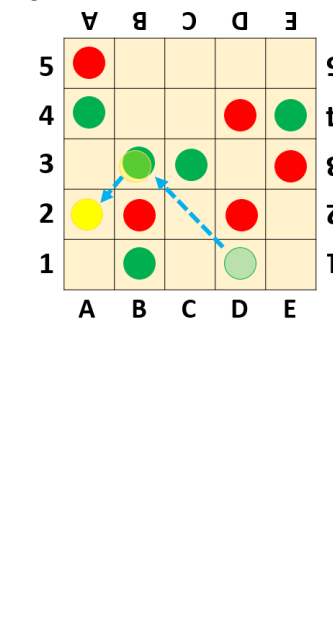


Fig. 9

### Center Three

This formation (Fig. 10) allows the player to try forcing a Center Press (Fig. 11). It can be both defensive and offensive and allows the player to quickly respond to either direction the opponent moves the Bobail.

Fig. 10

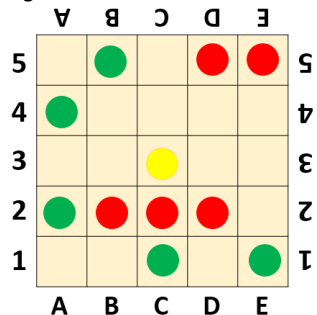
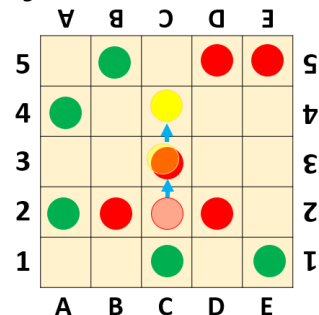


Fig. 11



### Side Wall Trap

Be careful when moving the Bobail near a side wall as both players can take advantage of this trap (Fig. 12 versus 13-14).

Fig. 12

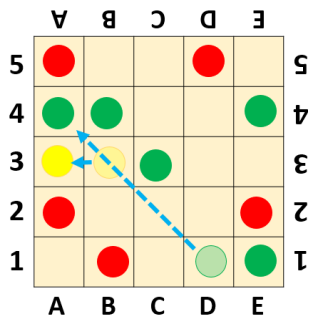


Fig. 13

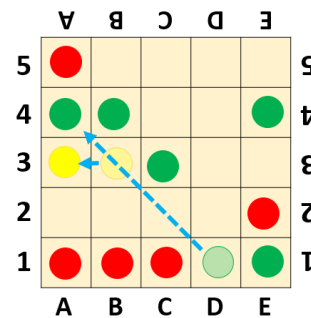
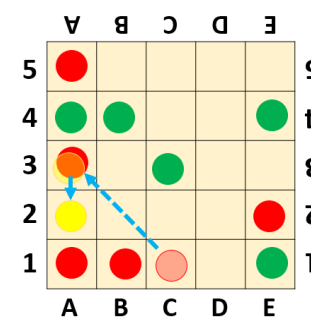


Fig. 14



Three Prong Attack

This is a useful opening as it secures both edge walls and the center with your tokens which enables you to be perform a center press of the Bobail while also having a potential for side wall traps. (Fig. 15 = Green, Fig. 16 = Red)

Fig. 15

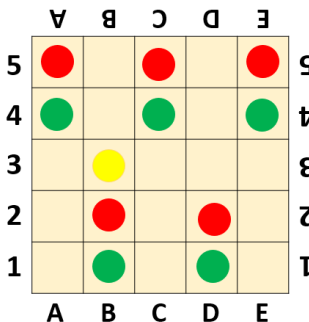
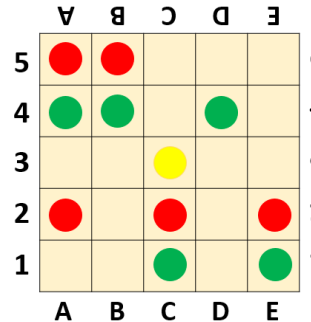


Fig. 16



Opposition and Tempo

Last but not least, these two concepts borrowed from Chess highlight the importance of using your token moves as wisely as possible. When you are the one who can move the Bobail into the center of the board or against the side wall you have a better chance of avoiding traps. Positioning your pieces in a manner that blocks the opponent from being able to move the Bobail to these spaces can also make their moves less effective. Additionally, by having the Bobail closer to your home row you can cause your opponent to spend more token moves in a defensive manner rather than expanding more of their tokens across the board.

Although these strategies can help, each board position may have subtle differences that should be fully evaluated prior to committing to a particular move combination. Good Luck and Have Fun! – Alex

\*\*Notation Example

Move	Bobail	Green	Bobail	Red
1	-----	A1:A4	C3:B4	C5:C2
2	B4:A3	E1:B4	A3:A2	E5:A1
3	A2:A3	B1:A2	A3:B3	B5:E2
4	B3:A3	C1:B2	A3:B3	D5:D2
5	B3:A3	B2:B3	A3:B2	C2:B1
6	B2:C1#			

