

# MURUS GALLICUS

Phillip Leduc, 2009

Murus Gallicus is a two-player breakthrough game in which players try to create impenetrable walls of stone as menacing formations approach, reminiscent of Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars.

## Components

The game of Murus Gallicus requires:

- Two sets of 16 tokens (referred to as stones); one light set (Romans) and one dark set (Gauls)
- One rectangular game board consisting of 8 x 7 cells.

## Setup

Set up the board between players so that there are seven rows and eight columns. Each player takes a set of stones and stacks two stones on each of their eight home cells – their nearest row. See Figure 1.

## Basic Units

Two stones of the same color stacked in one cell are referred to as a **tower**. Towers can block movement and can be disassembled into stones and redistributed. The stacking limit is two and opposing stones may not occupy the same cell.

A single stone occupying a cell is called a **wall**. Walls do not move. Their main function is to block the opponent's movement. Walls can be built up into towers.

## Rules of Play

Starting with the Roman player, the players alternate taking turns.

On a player's turn he or she must perform one of the following actions:

- Move a tower by distributing its two stones from its initial cell into the two nearest cells in any *one* direction (orthogonal or diagonal). Each destination cell must be empty or contain a friendly wall.
- Sacrifice a tower stone to remove an adjacent (orthogonal or diagonal) enemy wall. Sacrifice is not forced by the presence of an adjacent enemy wall.

A player may not pass a turn.

A player wins by reaching any cell of his or her opponent's home row, or by stalemating his or her opponent. An opponent is **stalemated**, if at the *start* of his or her turn, he or she cannot move or sacrifice any towers stones.

This completes the basic rules. At this point you know enough to try playing Murus Gallicus. If you have any questions, detailed movement rules, strategic goals, tactical formations, game variants and a solitaire puzzle follow.

Enjoy the game. Many surprises await you.

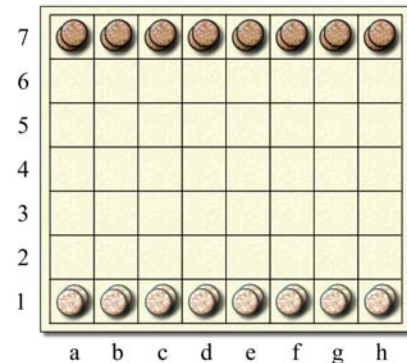


Figure 1. Initial setup

## Moving Towers

Towers are distributed or sown in any of the eight standard directions (orthogonal or diagonal) into the two nearest cells. Each of the destination cells must be empty or contain a *friendly* wall. Any combination of these two occupation requirements is valid. The first token goes in the adjacent cell and the second goes in the next cell in the *same* direction. When a tower stone is sown into an empty cell, it becomes a wall. When a tower stone is distributed into a cell containing a wall, a new tower is created.

Within these rules, the notation for a move is the alphanumeric for the tower's cell followed by a hyphen and the alphanumeric for the most distant destination cell. In Figure 2, the Roman player has played d1-d3, e1-e3 and f1-d3, while the Gaul player has played d7-d5, f7-d5 and h7-f5.

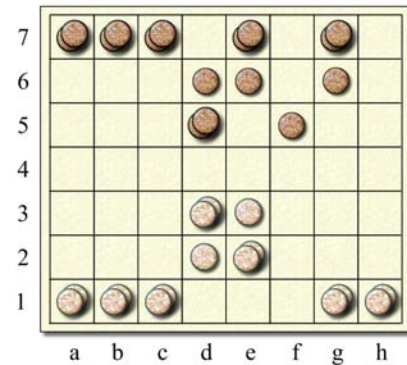


Figure 2. Movement

Tower stones may not be sown off the board, onto any towers, friendly or otherwise, or onto any opponent walls. In Figure 3, the Roman tower at the highlighted cell, b4, cannot move in any of the eight directions; all directions are blocked. The tower stones cannot move left since the final destination cells would be off the board. The moves b4-b6, b4-d6, b4-d4 and b4-d2 are not possible because of the presence of the opponent's units. The move b4-b2 cannot be made because of the presence of a friendly tower at b2. Note that the tower at b2 cannot move either. The Roman player is close to being stalemated but there is an escape that requires sacrifice.

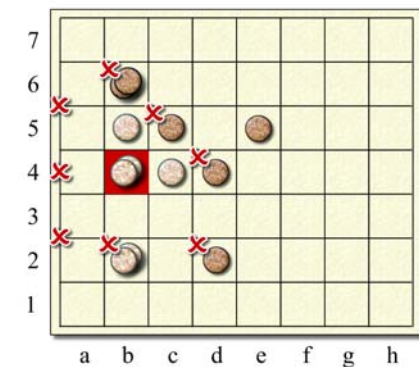


Figure 3. Movement obstacles

## Sacrificing a Tower Stone

If a player has a tower adjacent (orthogonal or diagonal) to an opponent's wall, the player can remove the opponent's wall by sacrificing one of the tower's stones. This is done by removing one stone from the tower (leaving behind one friendly wall) and the opponent's wall (the cell becomes empty). The removed tokens are put aside and are permanently out of the game.

If there are no adjacent walls belonging to the opponent, a tower stone may not be sacrificed.

Within these rules, the notation for a sacrifice is the alphanumeric for the tower cell followed by an "x" and the alphanumeric for the opponent's wall cell. In Figure 3, the Roman player is unable to move a tower but can sacrifice a tower stone at b4. Figure 4 shows the resulting position after b4xc5.

## Winning the Game

A player wins at the end of his or her turn,

- If the player has sown a stone onto his or her opponent's home row.
- If his or her opponent is stalemated.
- If his or her opponent resigns.

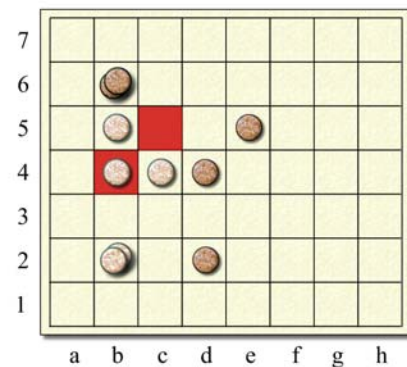


Figure 4. Sacrifice result

## Strategy

Murus Gallicus is a game of balance, space and timing. You cannot win by material advantage since the sacrifice action guarantees players have an equal number of stones through out the game. Instead, you must balance your offensive and defensive units, gain space for better movement options, force your opponent to sacrifice tower stones to squelch threats and find the right moment to render the last of your opponent's towers useless.

Keep a healthy balance of tower and wall units. Too many towers make it easy for your opponent to rush to your side of the board but they also make it harder for the opponent to predict your next move. Too few towers bring you close to a loss by stalemate but the preponderance of walls limits your opponent's mobility.

As in most abstract board games, playing for control of the center cells is a good strategy because this improves your mobility and offers the possibility of dividing your opponent's forces. Unhampered, a tower on a center cell can move in all eight directions while a tower on a corner cell can only move in three.

One way to gain the upper hand is to force your opponent to sacrifice a tower stone. This reduces your opponent's mobility and options. It is possible to regain a lost tower but this gets more difficult as the game progresses.

When your opponent is down to one or two moveable towers, stalemate is a good possibility. Don't be afraid to go "flat out" to win in order to stalemate your opponent. You can still win the game even if you have no towers left at the *end* of your turn.

## Tactics

There are a few basic combinations of towers and walls that can create problems for your opponent.

### *The Gallic Wall*

Murus Gallicus is Latin for Gallic Wall, a formidable barrier in its day. In this game, an orthogonally connected chain of like-colored walls is a barrier that must be circumvented or breached using a sacrifice move. However, using towers as blockers is not such a good idea since they cannot move at least for a short time and in some cases are forced to move leaving a hole in your formation.

### *The Chariot Formation*

The most mobile formation is the chariot which consists of a tower and a friendly wall in line with an empty cell. By moving the tower in the direction of the wall, the formation itself moves forward one cell. Figure 5 shows the movement of a chariot formation. In column a(1), if a1-a3 is played, the results would be what is found in column a(2). Move a2-a4 would result in position a(3).

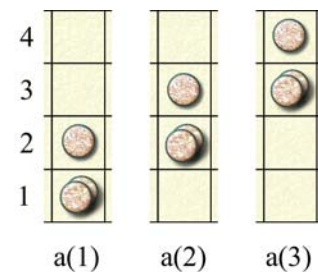


Figure 5. Chariot

### *The Battering Ram Formation*

Another useful formation is the battering ram which consists of two friendly towers in line with an adjacent enemy wall. By sacrificing a tower stone, the player can create a chariot formation with an option to move onward next turn. Figure 6 shows the effect of a battering ram formation. In column a(1), if a2xa3 is played, the results would be what is found in column a(2). Move a1-a3 would result in position a(3).

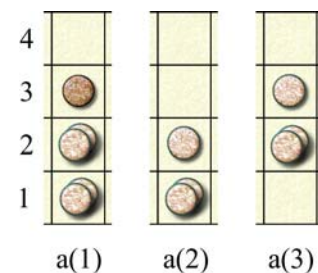


Figure 6. Battering Ram

## The Siege Tower

A tower built within striking distance of the opponent's home row (i.e. the opponent's third row) is a significant advantage since this will pin two or three of the opponent's units. This greatly reduces the opponent's mobility and options.

## Variants

### Pie Rule

On the Romans first turn only, instead of using the normal tower movement, the player must select one of his or her home row towers and distribute its stones as walls (not as a tower) anywhere on his or her second row. The Gaul player can then decide to switch sides and play as the Roman or not. Whatever is decided, the Gaul player also uses the same special tower movement rules on his or her first turn. The rest of the game continues using the standard rules. These special movement rules increase the number of possible opening moves from 20 to 224 (only 10 to 112 when considering symmetry) and make the second player's decision a bit more difficult.

### Escape

Murus Gallicus becomes a more challenging game when the winning conditions are reduced to stalemate and resignation only. All other rules apply. The strategy here is to divide, isolate, and conquer.

### Multi-player Escape

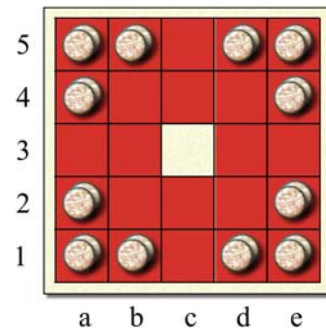
The escape variant can be played with four players around a square game board, for example a checkerboard. During the initial setup, players do not put towers on the four corner cells. When a player is stalemated, he or she is eliminated and his or her stones remain on the board. The escape variant rules also apply well to regular hexagonal game boards, making three-player games feasible.

## Murals

Murals are solitaire puzzles in which players try to move stones from a given starting position to a final highlighted position. The tokens are moved using the tower movement rules. The puzzles are solved when all the highlighted cells and only the highlighted cells are covered by walls.

In Puzzle 1, distribute the towers so that walls cover all the cells except for the center cell. Be careful not to leave towers on b2, d2, b4 and d4 simultaneously as that would make the puzzle unsolvable. Just before completing the puzzle, what cell must contain the last tower?

Mural puzzles can use several colors of stones and can allow removing stones by using the sacrifice rules.



Puzzle 1.

## Author's Release

The rules for Murus Gallicus and Murals may be duplicated and distributed in hardcopy or electronic form and this game, variants and puzzles based on these rules may be *programmed* for online play provided the game's name and rules are not altered and the author, Phillip Leduc, is given credit for the design of the game. If you have any questions or comment, the author can be reached at [p.leduc@cox.net](mailto:p.leduc@cox.net).