

UNRAVEL

by Mark Steere

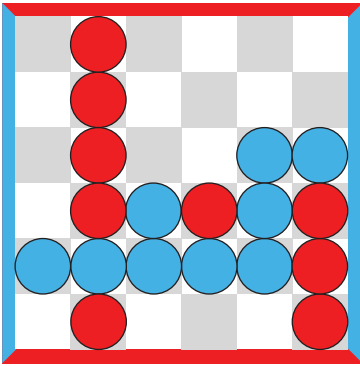


Figure 1

INTRODUCTION Unravel is a two-player game played on a square board of any size, initially empty. The top and bottom board edges are colored red. The left and right edges are colored blue. The two players, Red and Blue, take turns placing their own checkers onto unoccupied squares, one checker per turn, starting with Red. Both players will always have a placement available. Mark Steere designed Unravel in April 2024.

Unravel is predated by two similar games: Resolve (2020) by Alek Erickson, and Dissolve (2020), a Resolve variant by Luis Bolaños Mures.

OBJECT OF THE GAME Red must form an orthogonally (horizontally and/or vertically) interconnected path of red checkers connecting the two red board edges. Blue must connect the two blue edges. In **Figure 1**, Blue has won.

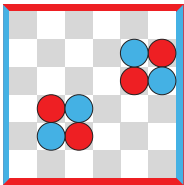


Figure 2

CROSSCUT A crosscut is comprised of four checkers, two of each color. Each checker is orthogonally adjacent to its two enemy checkers. **Figure 2** shows the two possible crosscut formations.

PLAY If your placed checker forms a crosscut, you must immediately "unravel" the crosscut by swapping your other checker in the crosscut with one of the enemy stones in the crosscut. **Figure 3** shows an example of this.

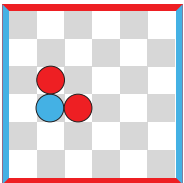


Figure 3a

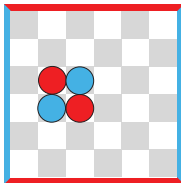


Figure 3b

If the swapped checkers create new crosscuts, do likewise with them. Swap two opposite color checkers in the new crosscuts, not including the swapped checkers that completed the new crosscuts. **Figure 4** shows an example of this.

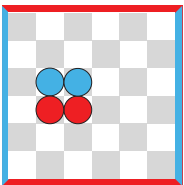


Figure 3c

If your placement creates multiple crosscuts, you can choose any one of them to unravel. Sometimes a swap will neutralize two crosscuts simultaneously. After you unravel a crosscut, check to see if there are any remaining crosscuts on the board, and choose any of them to unravel, but never by swapping the swapped checkers that completed the crosscuts. And so on until no new crosscuts are formed, concluding your turn. The original crosscut propagates, fans out, and eventually dissipates.

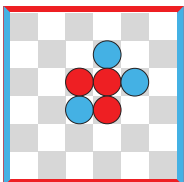


Figure 4a

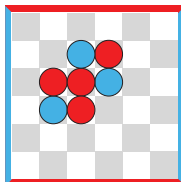


Figure 4b

DESIGN NOTES Crosscut dissipation is a beautiful concept. Resolve, Dissolve, and Unravel all implement this concept with similar mechanisms. When I learned of the other games, I initially decided not to write an Unravel rule sheet. But after studying and discussing the games, I realized that Unravel brings something significant to the table: natural finitude. There's no possibility of a cycle of moves in Unravel, either by one player acting alone during his turn, or by both players in successive turns.

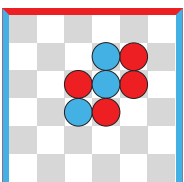


Figure 4c

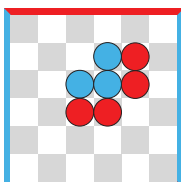


Figure 4d

AUTHOR'S NOTE Feel free to publish this rule sheet and to program the game of Unravel. No licensing fee or royalties are expected. However, please don't change the name or the rules, and please attribute the game to me, Mark Steere. My other games can be found at marksteeregames.com.