

Royal Game of Ur

· Race game · 2 · 10–20 min

BEFORE YOU START

Ur's boards date to c. 2600–2400 BCE; **their original rules are lost**. Here we play the modern simplified Finkel reconstruction with seven pieces and a 14-square route. A much later tablet from 177 BCE describes a related game with additional details; it is not a direct rulebook for these earlier boards.

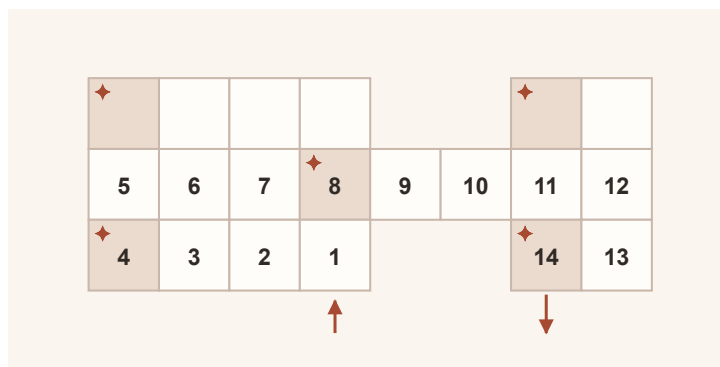
GOAL

Get all 7 of your pieces along the path and off the board. First to do it wins.

YOUR TURN

Roll all 4 dice and count the marked corners. That is your move, from 0 to 4. Move one piece that many squares along your path, or enter a new piece onto the board.

Every piece travels 14 squares: inward along your own row, across the shared middle row, and out again. Roll 0 or have no legal move and you skip. You cannot land on your own piece.



The default 14-square Bell/Finkel route. Stars are rosettes; the middle row is shared.

Rosettes, capturing and bearing off

Rosettes. There are 5. Landing on one gives you an immediate extra roll, and the piece is safe there and cannot be captured. You cannot land on an occupied rosette, not even the opponent's.

Capturing. Land on an opponent's piece in the middle row and it goes back off the board to start again. Your own row is safe, and the opponent cannot reach it.

Bearing off. A piece needs an **exact roll** to leave the board. If it needs 1 more square, you must roll exactly 1. Too high does not work. First to bear off all 7 pieces wins.

Setup

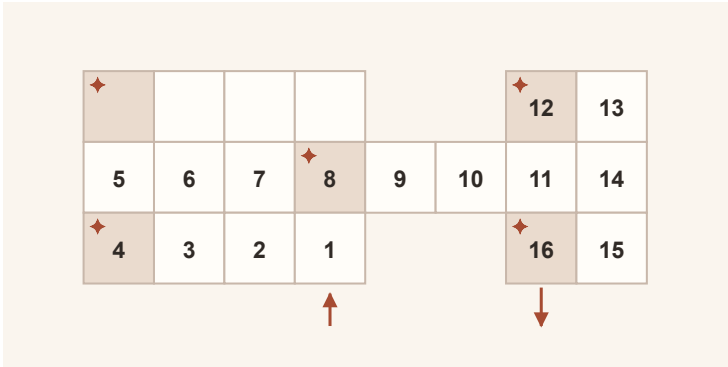
A 20-square board · 7 light and 7 dark pieces · 4 tetrahedral dice, each with 2 marked corners out of 4.

All pieces start off the board. Roll to see who goes first, highest starts. With no dice, use 4 coins: heads counts 1, tails counts 0.

One board, different routes

Numbers show route positions, not square values. Entering counts as moving to square 1; bearing off is one step beyond the last square. The other player mirrors the route. Choose a **complete** ruleset before playing: route and dice rules belong together.

Profile	Route and key difference
Finkel	14 squares; 4 binary dice; 7 pieces; shared centre rosette is safe. Default here.
R. C. Bell	Same 14-square route, but an older profile uses a different three-dice mapping and entry on 5. Same route does not mean same rules.
J. Masters	16 squares; turns at the penultimate centre square around the upper block. With 3 binary dice, no marks means 4.
H. J. R. Murray	27 squares; circles the end block, returns along the middle row and exits near entry. A historical proposal, not proof of the original route.



J. Masters alternative: 16 squares, bearing off on step 17; upper numbers show the end-block detour.

Reconstruction comparison: [Masters Traditional Games](#). These proposals do not establish one original route.

Sources: [British Museum, the Ur board](#) · Irving Finkel, "On the Rules for the Royal Game of Ur", in: Ancient Board Games in Perspective, British Museum Press 2007 · [royalur.net](#). The diagram is original.