

There and Back Again

A Hopscotch Tale

A playground game for 1-9 players aged 8 and up
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Version 3

Darkness is falling on Middle-Earth. The dark lord Sauron seeks the One Ring to restore his reign. It's up to you, a brave band of adventurers, to carry the ring to its destruction in the fires of Mt. Doom!

Contents

- A **hopscotch board** representing Middle-Earth, with spaces for locations from the book in the following sequence. Boards can be improvised. *The Shire (start), Bree, Weathertop, Rivendell, Moria, Lothlorien, Falls of Rauros, Dead Marshes, Gates of Mordor, Ithilien. Minas Morgul, Shelob's Layer, Cirith Ungol, Mt. Doom (end)*
- The **One Ring**: A weighty metal ring, about 6cm in diameter.
- **Sacrifice Markers**: A way to designate which territories are safe. A commercial release would use 3cm metal coins with a shield engraved on each side.

Overview

Nine players take turns attempting to cross Middle-Earth by casting the **One Ring** into progressively further territories, then jumping from one territory to the next. If the players can get the ring into the final territory without being corrupted, they are victorious!

Set-up

Lay out the **hopscotch board** as specified in the diagram, allowing space for safety. Have the **sacrifice markers** nearby. Players should pick a turn order, and the first player should take the **One Ring**. The first target territory is Bree.

For fewer than nine players, see the "Alternate Set-ups" section at the end of the rules.

Definitions

- *Ringbearer* – The current player.
- *Target territory* – This is the space that the players are currently trying to throw the **One Ring** into. The target territory at the beginning of the game is Bree.
- *Sacrifice marker* – A token used to note that a territory is safe.
- *Unmarked territory* – A territory that does not contain a sacrifice marker. All territories are unmarked at the beginning of the game.

One does not simply hop into Mordor

Players take turns in order. On a player's turn, they take the following actions in order:

- The player must stand (on two feet) in the Shire.
- The player must throw the **One Ring** into the target territory. If the Ring does not land touching the target territory, the player is *corrupted* (See details on corruption, below).
- The player must then cross from the Shire to Mt. Doom by hopping on one foot through the territories, one at a time. All unmarked territories between the Shire and the **One Ring** (including the one containing the **One Ring**) are forbidden. If the player ever lands in a forbidden territory, on a line, or outside the board, the player is *corrupted*. If the player switches feet, the player is *corrupted*.
Note: You may not hop in two spaces at once, even if they are side by side.
- Upon reaching Mt. Doom, the player must turn around and return, following the same rules. On this return trip the player should stop and pick up the **One Ring**, at which point no territories are forbidden.
- If the player completes this round trip without being corrupted, the target territory advances to the next territory sequentially, skipping marked territories.
- This ends the player's turn. The **One Ring** is passed to the next player.

*Important! Unlike ordinary hopscotch, you don't just skip the space containing the **One Ring**. You skip everything between the Shire and the **One Ring** too! This will make some jumps impossible as the game proceeds. But there's hope – see the section on Corruption, below.*

Corruption

When a player is *corrupted* (by failing their **One Ring** throw or during the traversal of the board) they are immediately eliminated from the game. However, they may aid the remaining players with one last courageous act.

- The corrupted player must stand (on two feet) in the Shire.
- The player must jump into an unmarked territory. They may jump in marked territories on their way to an unmarked one. If they successfully land with *both feet* in the territory, place a **sacrifice marker** in the territory. That territory is now safe for other players, even when the **One Ring** is thrown beyond it.

Defeat

If all players are corrupted, the game immediately ends in defeat.

Victory

When the target territory is Mt. Doom, the ringbearer must successfully cast the **One Ring** from the Shire to Mt. Doom. If they are successful, then the players are victorious!

Alternate Set-ups

When there are fewer than nine players, the following adjustments can be made to keep the game balanced.

For Seven or Eight Players

At the beginning of the game, mark Rivendell as a safe territory.

For Five or Six Players

At the beginning of the game, mark Rivendell as a safe territory. Once the Falls of Rauros round is successfully completed, that territory also immediately becomes a safe territory.

For Three or Four Players

At the beginning of the game, hand each player two sacrifice markers. Each player may be corrupted twice before they are eliminated from the game (unlike once, per standard rules).

For Two Players

Give each player three sacrifice markers, and mark Rivendell as a safe territory.

For One Player

In a solo game, the player may use eight sacrifice markers. The goal is to reach Mt. Doom with the most markers still in hand.

The Board

This is an example of a possible themed board. An elaborately detailed board could either be painted onto the pavement (it is conceivable that some schools would approve of a literature-themed hopscotch board!) or sold in a collector's edition as a mat that could be rolled out to play. The board should be about 3.5 meters long. Should such a board be unavailable, the game can be adapted for almost any configuration of hopscotch board.

The Theme

Without straying too far from traditional hopscotch, the game is designed to reinforce themes from *Lord of the Rings* such as cooperation, companionship, and self-sacrifice. The game is nigh-unwinnable by a single player. Instead, it is designed to guarantee failure for most players, but they are given a chance to turn their failure into a stepping-stone for another player's success – almost literally. The Ring, though not literally carried, becomes a greater and greater burden as the game proceeds, and is the factor most likely to defeat players in the end.

The pacing is likely to reflect the story as well. The players' fellowship is likely to stay together (no corruption) until Moria, or maybe the Falls of Rauros if they are very talented. But after that point, failure is likely, and in fact a group with fewer remaining players going into Mordor may have more success. In fact, the corruption mechanic is designed to resemble Boromir's sacrifice near the Falls of Rauros.

