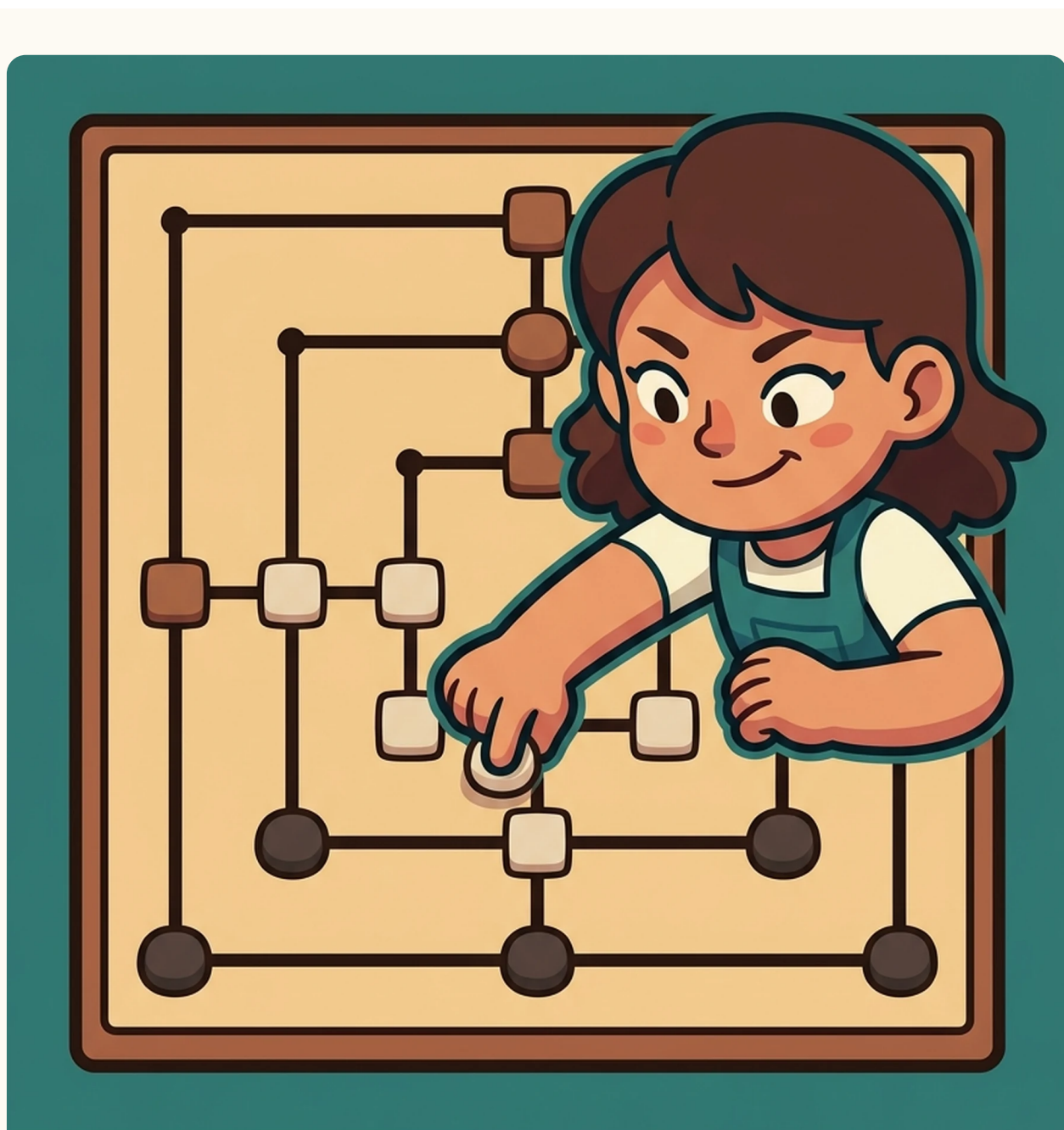




MillSong

Big Ideas on the Board

A SPARK & ANVIL STRATEGY BOOK

MillSong – Big Ideas on the Board

A Spark & Anvil companion book – free to download and share.

Ages 9-14. Game: nine men's morris.

Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Learn and play free at spark-and-anvil.org.

This volume teaches strategy through the app's cast – 6 big ideas, one per chapter.

Contents

1. Chapter 1 – Take the Strong Points
2. Chapter 2 – Build Toward a Mill
3. Chapter 3 – The Double Threat
4. Chapter 4 – The Running Mill
5. Chapter 5 – Capture and Block
6. Chapter 6 – The Flying Endgame

*The other MillSong books teach how each move **works**. This one teaches how to **play well** at nine men's morris – the ideas above the moves – through the cast you know.*

Chapter 1 – Take the Strong Points

Spoke Sami stands on the midpoints of the board – the spots where the spokes meet the rings. Corner Cato sits out on the corners. They look similar, but they are not worth the same. Spoke Sami's midpoints each sit on **three** possible mill lines; Corner Cato's corners sit on only **two**.

"A point that touches three mills," said Spoke Sami, "gives you three ways to line up. A corner gives you two. Which would you rather own?"

So the very first idea of playing well is *where you place your stones in the opening*. Strong players grab the midpoints first – they are the busy crossroads of the board, the squares that keep the most threats alive. Fill the corners only when you must.

Say it out loud: *Take the midpoints first – three mill lines beat two.*

Your turn: The "Strong Points" workbook pages mark the midpoints and corners. Where do your first stones go?

Placing well in the opening is quiet work – no captures yet. It is what makes the mills come easily later.

Chapter 2 – Build Toward a Mill

Miller Mila's whole joy is the **mill** – three of your stones in a row on a line. Placer Pell lays the groundwork in the placement phase, dropping stones so that two of them already share a line, one step from a mill.

"Two on a line is a promise," said Miller Mila. "The third stone keeps it."

The skill is not just making one mill – it is placing your stones so they *overlap*, sharing points between several possible mills. A stone that sits where two of your almost-mills cross is doing double the work. Strong players build a little network, not a single line.

Say it out loud: *Line up two, then place the third – and share points between mills.*

Your turn: The "Almost a Mill" pages show two of your stones on a line. Find the point that completes the mill – and the point that helps two mills at once.

Building a mill network is patient work. Every shared point you place makes the next mill easier.

Chapter 3 – The Double Threat

Here is the winning idea in every game with pieces, told in mills. Sometimes you can place or slide a stone so that you threaten **two** mills at once – two different lines, each needing only one more stone. Your opponent can block one line. They cannot block both. Next turn, you close the other.

"Two open mills, one enemy," Miller Mila smiled. "They cannot be in two places."

This is the fork of nine men's morris. It is how strong players force a capture the opponent cannot prevent – and forcing captures is how you grind down their nine stones.

Say it out loud: *Threaten two mills at once – they can only block one.*

Your turn: The "Two Mills" pages ask you to find the move that leaves two mills each one stone away.

A double threat feels clever the first time you land one. It is a habit of looking for the move that opens two lines – keep hunting for it.

Chapter 4 – The Running Mill

Swing Sena has the single strongest weapon in the whole game: the **running mill** (some call it a swinging mill). Swing Sena builds a mill, then slides one stone *out* of it and – next turn – slides it right back *in*, closing the mill again. Every time a mill closes, you capture an enemy stone. A running mill captures **every single turn**.

"Open, close, capture. Open, close, capture," Swing Sena sang. "There is nothing they can do."

The setup takes planning: you need a stone that can step out to an empty point and back, with the line staying yours. But once a running mill is turning, the game is usually won – the opponent loses a stone a turn while you lose none.

Say it out loud: *Build a mill you can open and re-close – capture every turn.*

Your turn: The "Running Mill" pages show a mill with one stone free to swing. Find the point it steps to so it can come back and close again.

Setting up a running mill is the highest skill in this book. Spotting one takes practice – and it wins games when you find it.

Chapter 5 – Capture and Block

When a mill closes, Snatch Nadia gets to remove one enemy stone – but *which* one matters. Guard Gwen knows the rule: a stone that is already inside an enemy mill is **safe** and cannot be taken (unless every enemy stone is in a mill). So capture the loose stones first, and grab the ones that are about to

become part of *their* mill.

Block Bodhi plays the other half: when the opponent has two stones on a line, drop your own stone onto the empty third point to **block** the mill before it forms.

"Take the stone that hurts them most," said Snatch Nadia. "And," added Block Bodhi, "never let them build a mill you saw coming."

Say it out loud: *Capture the stone that matters most; block the mill you see coming.*

Your turn: The "Take or Block" pages show a closed mill (pick which enemy stone to remove) and an almost-mill (pick where to block).

Choosing the right capture is a small decision that adds up. So is a well-timed block. Both are the quiet skill of playing well.

Chapter 6 – The Flying Endgame

Flyer Faye waits for the very end. When a player is reduced to just **three** stones, a special rule wakes up: those three stones may **fly** – hop to *any* empty point on the board, not just an adjacent one. Suddenly a losing position has one last escape.

"Down to three," said Flyer Faye, "and I can land anywhere. Do not count me out yet."

Reduce Remy knows the goal that ends it all: get the opponent down to **two** stones (or leave them with no legal move), and you win. So the endgame is a race – keep your running mills turning to reduce them, while watching that their flying three-stone escape cannot build a mill of its own.

Say it out loud: *At three stones you fly – win by reducing them to two.*

Everything meets here: strong points (Chapter 1), a shared mill network (Chapter 2), double threats (Chapter 3), a running mill (Chapter 4), smart captures and blocks (Chapter 5) – all to grind the opponent down to two, while never letting their flying stones surprise you.

Your turn: The "Endgame" pages show positions near the finish. Find the move that reduces the opponent – or the flying move that saves you.

The flying endgame can flip a game at the last moment. Learning to press your advantage without letting them escape is exactly what getting good feels like.

Keep playing at spark-and-anvil.org – the trainer runs these ideas as live positions, with the cast beside you.

Keep playing

- Play every idea in this book as a live puzzle: <https://sparkanvil.org/play/millsong>
- Find more free companion books: <https://sparkanvil.org/books>

(Scan the QR codes on the printed edition, or type the links above.)