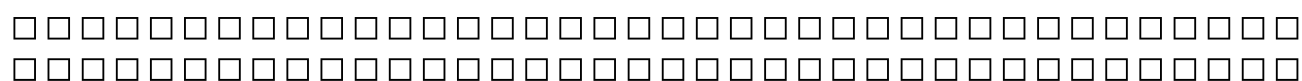


HOLLOW

BY COREY L. CLARK

Hollow is a capricious game of heightened strategy for two players, red and blue. The invention of Hollow came about as a simple musing on how large conglomerations of stones could be emptied out and form an ever-increasing set of regions which would in turn be filled in but never nullified; a clever finitude mechanism or in laymans terms, a game mechanic which would allow space to be reused while always drawing the game to an inevitable conclusion. This game boasts a massive amount of emergent complexity from its very economical rules. Corey Clark invented Hollow in the winter of 2024



Rules

Materials: Any Hex-hex board (nothing higher than 127 or side 7 is recommended as the game is constantly reusing cells) and an unlimited collection of counters in two colors, representing each player. You will also need some object to be off the board, called the *button* which exchanges hands throughout the game.

Objective: The Objective of Hollow is to have more points at the conclusion of the game. this is when no moves of any kind remain. Each counter (“stone/s” from hereon) is worth one point, while the *button* affords the player in possession of it half a point.

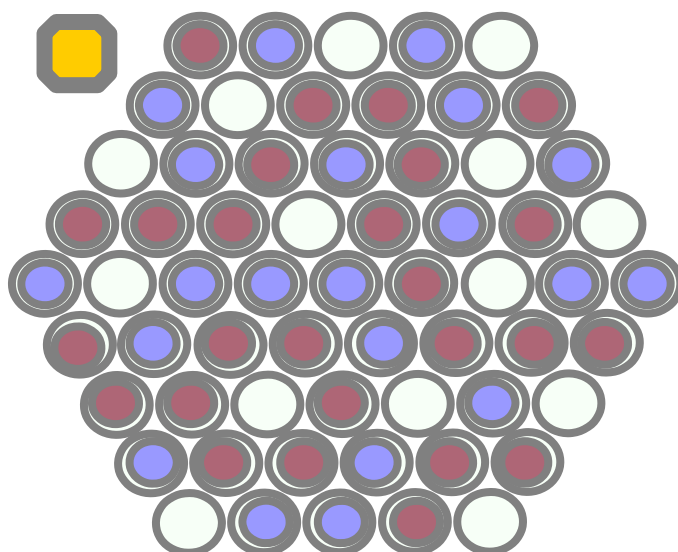


Fig 1. A game of Hollow won by Red with 26 points. Blue has 21.5 because he has possession of the button (seen in gold)

Definitions:

Hollow: A *hollow* is any distinct region of the board outlined by board edges and/or stones of any composition. The board itself is considered to be a *Hollow*.

Button: The *Button* A piece kept off the board , which represents half a point.

Gameplay: On a turn a player may either place a stone in his or her color on any cell, such that it does not alter the number of *hollows* on the board, or the player may create a single new *hollow*. *Hollows* are created by removing the maximal set of stones, regardless of which player these belong to, and leaving behind only the stones of any color, outlining the newly created region along with any board edges that may be involved. Passing is never permitted in Hollow and the player whose turn it is will always have a legal move. The *button* starts out in a neutral position between the players and is brought over to the side of the player who first creates a hollow, it then is always in the possession of whichever player last made a hollow.

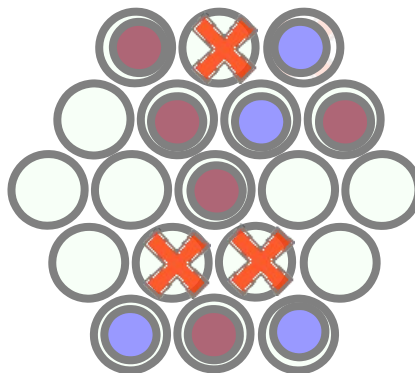


Fig 2. Neither player can play in these cells, for the time-being as they all either create a hollow or remove one from the board

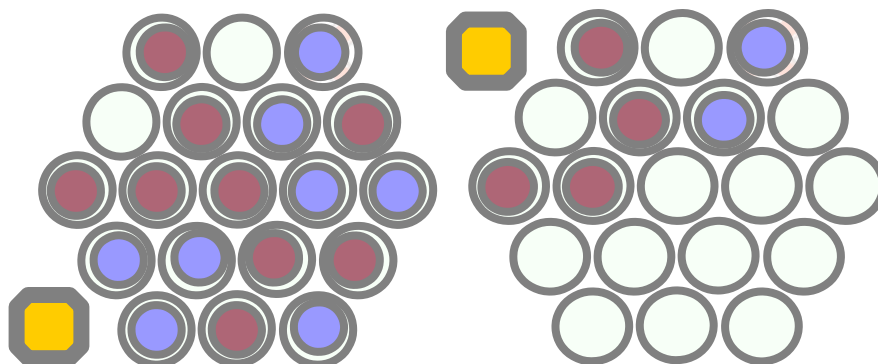
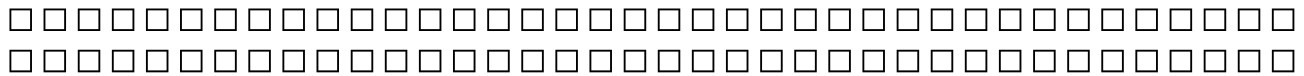


Fig 3. An example of the creation of a new hollow. Blue is forced to capture 6 of his own pieces and only 5 red, he finally receives the button concluding his turn



Strategy

Strategy in Hollow is defined by capturing races, where players keep upping the ante of a potential hollow by surrounding more of the other player's pieces until a disparity in the comparative count occurs. Two things keep this very interesting, the existence of channels, including forking channels and anchor-points. An anchorpoint is simply a one cell hollow and stones around these are invulnerable to capture, which means they can help to trap enemy pieces without getting surrounded themselves. Yet more interesting are channels: narrow hollows of cells that must be filled in from either end because placing at some midpoint would create a new hollow, players can threaten to move the anchor-point of these chains by how they fill them in, thus securing their pieces and possibly winning a capturing race in the process. Yet more interesting are forking hollows which can set up critical decision points for players to choose how to best fill them in and where the anchor-point will end up. Generally taking stones out of tied hollows is a bad idea because making a hollow costs a placement and will only get you the button. If you already have the button, its probably best only to make hollows like this as a move to bide time. The end game can get very cold and its good to have moves that simply wait out the opponent. The opening is very hard to crack but its worth noting that just as in Go, attacking a stone first deprives your own piece of liberties, so be sure to have some back up when you go in for the kill.

special thanks to Luis Bolaños Mures for the suggestion of changing a rule where you must only place into the uniquely largest region, to placements cannot change the number of hollows. A much less obtuse, albeit less subtle, approach that opened up a lot more options for play. I am reminded that good technical writing is at the heart of great game design.