Cicada

2023, Prelican, https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/3159246/article/46927888

A 5x5 square grid and a sufficient supply of black and white stones (or the like).

Definitions

- The first player is the **placer**, the second player is the **mover**.
- A **group** is a set of orthogonally adjacent black stones.

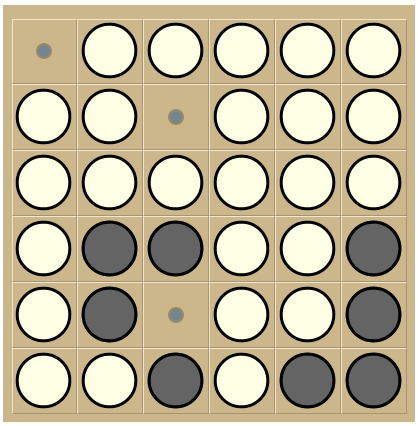
On the placer's turn, they must place one black stone on any unoccupied square.

On the mover's turn, they must move one black stone to an adjacent empty square in any direction, orthogonal or diagonal.

If, at the end of either player's turn, there is a pentomino (a group of exactly five pieces), those stones are replaced with white stones, which remain immobile for the rest of the game.

It is illegal to form a group of black stones that is larger than a pentomino. (There aren't any limitations on white stones; they're more "terrain" than pieces, just the empty shells left behind when the nymphs molt.)

The last player to make a legal move wins.



placer to move: he can drop at c2, making a pentominoe and winning, since mover will have no valid move

Author notes: Since it's an asymmetrical game, I'll assume its imbalanced until I can prove otherwise. At first I thought the placer had the advantage, then I figured out the strategy for the mover, then I figured out how the placer could counter that strategy, and now I suspect that the placer has a significant, though not insurmountable, advantage. I think it's still a complex enough game to be enjoyed by human players. I was able to win in both roles against my friend, so there's definitely scope for a skillful player to win as the mover, but among players of equal skill it might be tricky. I suspect scaling it up to a 6x6 board could help. I'd like to run some tests in Ludii or another program, but its going to take me some time to get proficient in coding games, and I figured I might as well post it in the meantime.