



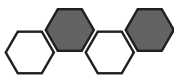
by Luke Weisman

Introduction

Hex Nut is a two-person strategy game in which you are trying to build a chain of your pieces in a slowly growing blob of hexagons. No board is needed as the pieces are always stuck together in a single blob. The object of the game is to be the first to build a chain eight pieces long.

Setting up

Each player gets one set of ten colored hexagons. The starting configuration of the board is four of the hexagons arranged as follows:



The Turn

During a turn a player can either add a single piece or move one of her already played pieces, possibly causing a clump of other pieces to also move. A player cannot do both. When a player runs out of pieces to place, the player must move every turn.

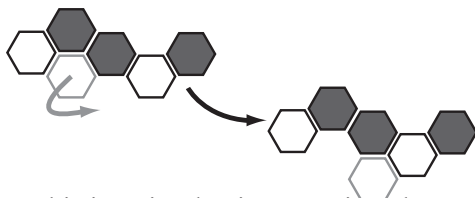
Adding a piece

An added piece must touch more of the opponent's pieces than friendly ones. Here are all the possible ways the white player could add a piece given the starting setup.



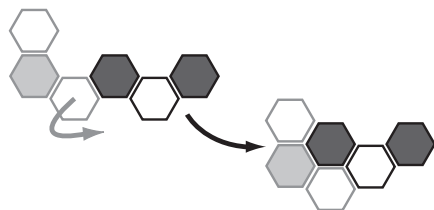
Moving a piece

A piece moves along the outside of the blob of played pieces. It moves one space along the edge, and can be moved into contact with any number of friendly or opposing pieces. The piece to be moved must be able to slide out freely and not be locked in by the surrounding pieces. If there is a separate cluster of pieces stuck to the moving piece and the moving piece only, that cluster moves with the piece. If the pieces hanging off the moving piece would end up overlapping (although touching is fine) other pieces after the move, the move is invalid. Here are a few examples of movement:



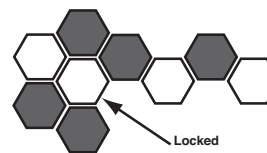
This is a simple piece moving along the side of the main clump.

Here is a piece carrying a clump of two pieces along with it. Notice how the clump's orientation does not change.

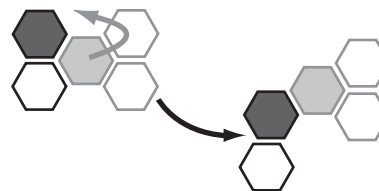


Being Locked In

Here is an illustration of a piece being locked in and unable to move.



If you are locked in by two clumps that are not connected, you are not locked in, and you can move over one clump, dragging the other one behind you. Witness:



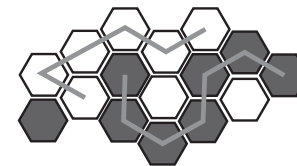
The above is a valid move.

Who moves over what

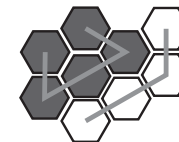
Blob size makes no difference as far as dragging pieces along when you move a piece. Consider a giant blob of pieces with a single white hexagon hanging off of a black hexagon. You can either move the black hexagon along the blob, dragging the white hexagon with it, or move the white hexagon along the black hexagon, dragging the giant blob with it.

Winning

The player to first form a chain of eight pieces wins the game. A chain is a line of pieces that does not cross over itself. Branches can be going off the chain, but they do not count for the total. Here are two illustrations of chains:



First we have white with a chain of six and gray with a chain of seven. Notice how white's extra piece is a branch and so does not add to the chain.



Next we have white with a chain of four and gray with a chain of five. Notice how a blob of pieces can be a rolled up chain, as long as the chain does not cross over or count any piece twice.

Strategy Tips

The main thing I tell people, but which they rarely follow is: never split your pieces! If your pieces get divided, and your opponents do not, then you have lost. Consider if you have 3 pieces separate from your main clump. You cannot win unless they rejoin, and in the process of rejoining, they always cause a spot where your opponent can extend. In fact, once this happens to you, you should resign.



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