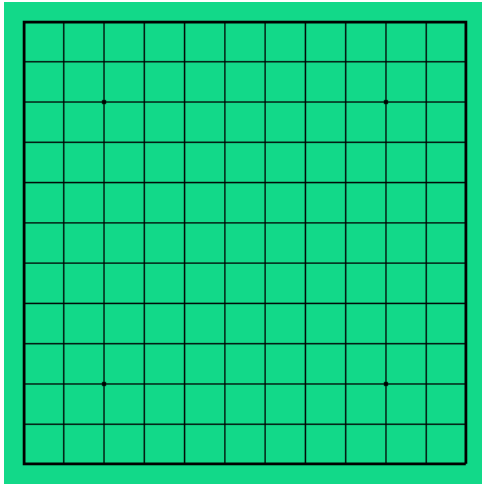


XODD

by Luis Bolaños Mures

Introduction



12x12 Xodd board

Xodd is an elegant **connection** and **territory** game for two players: Black and White. It is played on the intersections (from now on points) of a square board, which is initially empty. The suggested size is between 9x9 and 14x14. Both players must have access to a sufficient number of black and white **stones**.

The **goal** of the game is to end up with the least groups on the board. Draws are not possible.

Luis Bolaños Mures designed Xodd in August, 2011.

Yodd, the hexagonal version of this game, is an entry in the 1,000-Year Game Design Challenge. More information here:

<http://www.thousandyeargame.com/>

Definitions

A **group** is a set of like-colored, orthogonally connected stones. A single stone is also a group.

Play

Starting with Black, players take turns placing one or two stones of *either* color on empty points. This is called **dropping**. On his first turn, Black can only drop one stone.

At the end of each turn, there must be an **odd** number of groups on the board, i. e. the sum of Black and White groups must be an odd number. Here is how you can easily check it:

- Parity changes when you create a new group or join two or four groups.
- Parity doesn't change when you join three groups.
- If your first drop of the turn changes parity, you must change it again with your second one.
- If your first drop of the turn doesn't change parity, you can't change it with your second one.

Players can **pass** their turn at any moment, unless it violates the previous rule (this means Black can't pass on his first turn).

When both players pass in succession, the game ends. The player with *less* groups on the board **wins**.

Examples

Normally, a Xodd board will be much larger than the tiny ones shown here.

Example 1:

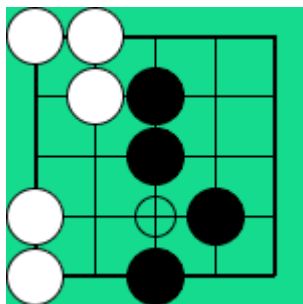


Figure 1.1

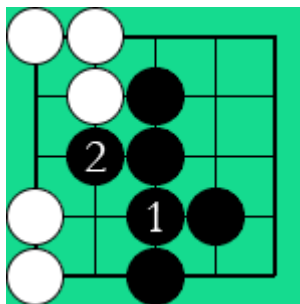


Figure 1.2

In Figure 1.1, there are 5 groups total. If a black stone is played at the marked point, there will be 2 groups less on the board, so parity doesn't change. Figure 1.2 shows a legal move for any of the players. Note that the second placement doesn't change parity, either.

Example 2:

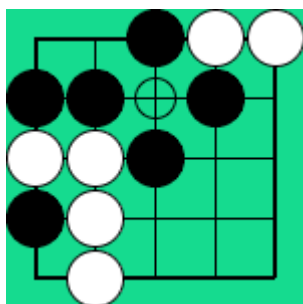


Figure 2.1

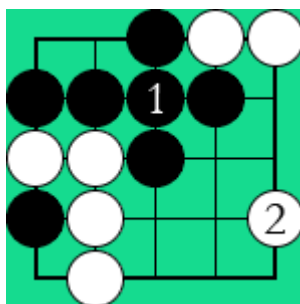


Figure 2.2

In Figure 2.1, there are 7 groups total. Playing a black stone at the marked point reduces the group count by 3, so the total number of groups will be even. The second move of the turn must change the number of groups back to an odd number, as in Figure 2.2.

Example 3:

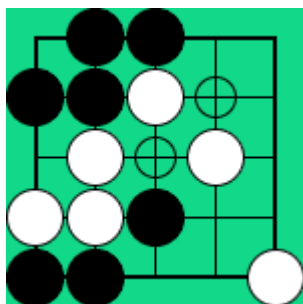


Figure 3

In Figure 3, Black may want to play two black stones at the marked points to prevent White from connecting his groups, but he can't. That would increase the total number of groups by 1, and he would need another move to restore the group count to an odd number.

Example 4:

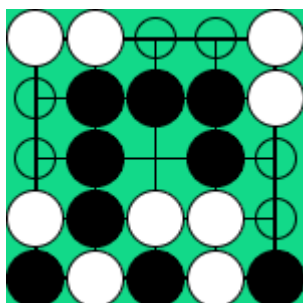


Figure 4

In Figure 4, both players have passed, as there are no more useful moves available. Black has 4 groups to White's 5, so Black wins. Note that White would need to play at a pair of consecutive marked points to join any two of his groups, but that would only reduce the group count by 1. If he plays at two non-consecutive marked points, Black would immediately take the adjacent ones.

Variants

- *Yodd*: It's simply Xodd played on a hex-hex board. Joining groups becomes easier, and the game is less tactical.

Author's notes

In Xodd, allowing players to place two stones per turn serves both as a first move **equalizer** and a way to make the game playable under the group restriction rule.

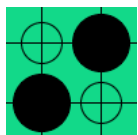


Figure 5

Meanwhile, apart from the intended goal of eliminating draws (they would be common otherwise), forcing an odd number of groups at the end of a turn has some interesting **tactical** implications. For example, groups separated by two empty points can't be joined on a single turn, since the player runs out of stones to restore the group count to an odd number. Also, the **diagonal** connection (Figure 5) is safe if the opponent has exactly one or three groups adjacent to the marked points, and unsafe otherwise.

Endgames are also quite tricky under this rule: you'll often want to join two of your own groups or create another opponent group, but you'll be unable to do it because you can't restore the group count anymore!

Finally, here are some basic insights into Xodd strategy:

- In the **opening**, you should try to create enemy groups in the edges of the board, so that they are likely to remain unconnected, and find a place in the center for your own groups. Outlining **frameworks** is also important, because:
- In the **middle-game**, it should be customary for the players to try and surround **territories** at least three points wide to secure the creation of at least one opponent group there. As this group is already doomed, while your surrounding chain can still expect to join other groups, the local result will favor you. Of course, the bigger the territories, the more opponent groups you can accommodate there. Your opponent will have a hard time either connecting said groups to each other or, even worse, creating groups of your color, as you will likely be able to connect them to your surrounding chain.

Last update: 26th August 2011.