

🚩 *SPLAY* 🚩

A Stacking Game of Territorial Conquest

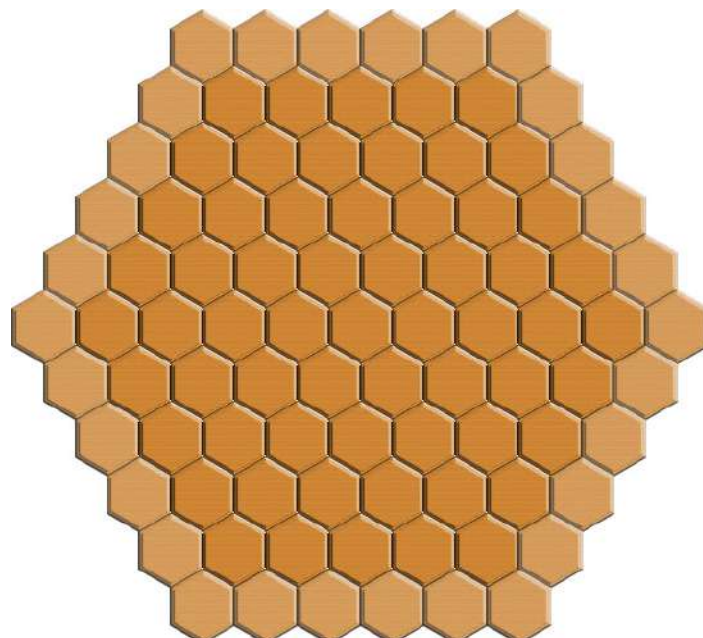
© Greg Schmidt, 2011

INTRODUCTION:

Splay is a two player abstract strategy game. The object of the game is to acquire more territory than your opponent. The two players, called “white” and “black”, alternately take turns placing their pieces on the playing field, or stacking them on their previously played pieces. Once a piece is played, it is never removed from the board. Splay is a game where the players are constantly battling for territory acquisition. A space which has a player’s piece(s) on it represents a unit of territory which is owned by that player. A “tower” consists of one or more like-colored checkers stacked on top of one another. A tower represents potential for acquiring additional territory. Players who utilize their towers effectively will gain a territorial advantage. Towers can also pose a liability so they must be developed with care. Splay was inspired by the process by which borders are formed between competing entities.

EQUIPMENT:

Splay is played on a hex-hex board with 91 spaces. Note the lighter colored hexes along the edges. These spaces are referred to as the “border”. The darker spaces are referred to as the “interior”.



Each player is supplied with a sufficient number of pieces of their color. The blank piece is called a “checker”, the piece with the flag symbol is referred to as a “territorial marker”.



Note: In a physical playing set, material can be conserved by having two-sided pieces, one side is blank, and the other side displays the flag symbol.

RULES:

After the players have agreed upon their respective color, and beginning with white, the players take turns placing a single checker on the board. When placing a checker on an empty space, the piece must be placed on an interior space. Players are not allowed to place a checker on the border (only territorial markers can be placed on the border).

The number of checkers in a stack is called the tower’s “height”. A single checker is considered a tower of height 1. A checker can always be played on a friendly tower without restriction. If, after placing a checker on a tower and the tower’s height is now equal to the number of surrounding empty spaces, the player acquires the empty spaces as new territory. To indicate such, territorial markers of the player’s color are placed on those spaces. This move is called a “splay” and is an effective way to acquire new territory. Note that in order to make a (future) splay move possible, a tower **MUST** always be surrounded by more spaces than its height.

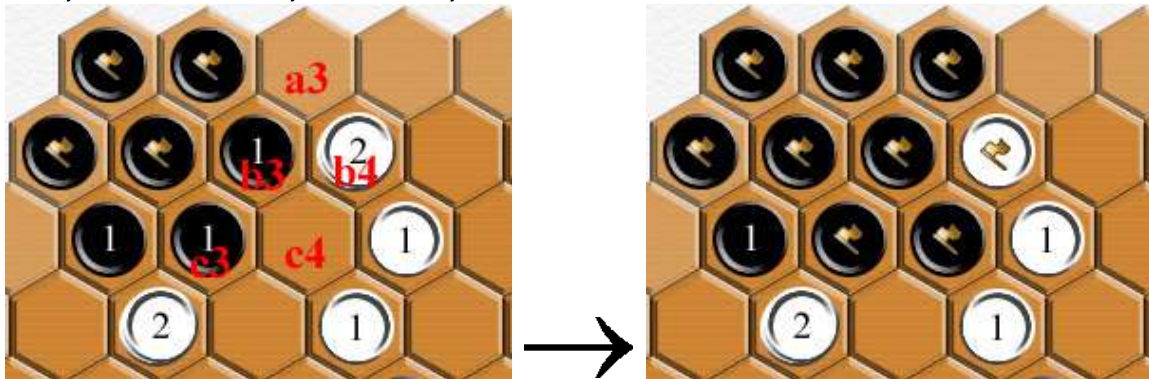
Below, white places a checker on the central tower, thereby making a splay, and acquires the 4 surrounding spaces. The central tower has served its purpose and thus collapses. As such, it is removed from the board and replaced with a single territorial marker of the same color. Notice that white ends up with 5 units of territory at the cost of only 4 checkers. This is just one advantage of utilizing towers.

An example splay move:



A splay move can also cause other nearby towers, of either color, to collapse if the newly acquired territory eliminates the possibility of ever making a splay move with that tower. This is best illustrated via an example:

An example of tower collapse due to splay move:



Here black plays at b3 and makes a splay which acquires a3 and c4. The effect of this move is to reduce the empty spaces surrounding the friendly tower at c3 and the enemy tower at b4. Since the tower at c3 now has a single empty space, the tower can no longer make a splay (because placing a checker on that tower in a subsequent move would require at least 2 surrounding spaces to make a splay) and thus it collapses. A similar situation occurs to the enemy tower at b4 since it now has only two surrounding spaces and requires at least 3 surrounding spaces in order to make a future splay.

The tower at b3 which caused the splay also collapses as mentioned before. Recall that when a tower collapses, it is replaced with a territorial marker of its color.

Towers can only collapse due to the crowding caused by adding territorial markers resulting from splay moves. It is not allowed to place a checker on an empty space that could cause a nearby tower to collapse. For example, the following placement moves are illegal:

An example of illegal placement moves:



The white tower of height 4 requires at least 5 surrounding spaces and the black tower requires at least two surrounding spaces, thus it is illegal to make any of the above placements marked with an X.

Note that any legal placement of a single checker on an empty space can still result in a splay, if after placing it, there is only a single surrounding space (since the single checker represents a tower of height 1).

If a player does not have any legal moves, then they must pass.

GAME CONCLUSION:

The game concludes when either:

- Both players have no remaining moves.
- One player occupies more than half (46 or more units) of the territory.

At this point, if any remaining stacks exist, they are collapsed (replaced with like-colored territorial markers). The player with the most territorial markers of their color wins.

Draws are possible, although infrequent.

AUTHORS NOTE:

When I designed Splay, my goal was to create a territorial game which utilizes a stacking mechanic. The main idea was to create an exchange system between stack height and local territory. I was also inspired by the varied border patterns found on maps. I hope I have been successful.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to all those involved in the rec.games.abstract stacking games contest of 2011. Without the contest, Splay (both as a game concept and Axiom computer game) would not exist.