

Ashes

Ashes is an annihilation game for two players played on a hexhex board with stackable pieces of two colors. The board starts out empty. Still, all you ever do in Ashes is move stacks. This is accomplished by the help of a very liberal understanding of "stack": A single piece is considered a stack of size 1, and an empty cell is considered to contain a stack of size 0.

The basic principle of movement is simple: A stack may move to a cell it can see – i.e. one that is adjacent or joins it in flanking a line of empty cells – if this cell is not occupied by a bigger stack.

It is important that, every time you remove a stack from the board, whether it was one of yours or an enemy stack, you keep one of its pieces in a designated area (off the board) as a reminder. I'll get back to why you need to keep count of removed stacks.

There is an economy to moving whole stacks, which is responsible for stack's coming into and going out of existence (rules for moving proper parts of stacks are given farther down):

Outward movement gains you:

When a move increases the number of steps away from the center cell the moved stack is, it grows by the addition of 1 piece per step further away it ends up. Pieces initially only come onto the board by moving a stack of size 0 at least 1 step away from the center cell.

Non-outward movement costs you:

When a move does not increase the number of steps away from the center cell the moved stack is, it shrinks by the removal of 1 more than 1 piece per step closer it ends up. This means that a stack not moving outward can travel no farther inward than 1 less than its size.

Reproduction tax:

If you increase the number of stacks you own, the resulting size of the newly created stack must be big enough to pay a reproduction tax equal to the number of stacks you have removed from the board (whether friendly or not). For each removed stack, you must subtract a piece from the newly created stack, and the gross size of the stack must be bigger than the number of stacks you have lost, so that its net size is at least 1. If white's reproduction tax is 2, moving a 0-stack three steps away from the center will only result in a 1-stack.

Splitting stacks:

Instead of moving a whole stack, you may move a proper part of a stack. Only the

reproduction tax applies to the moving of proper stack parts. This means that a splitting move can get you places a whole stack move can't.

Splitting a stack can (and normally does) increase the number of stacks you own. When it does, a reproduction tax must be paid.

There is no free passing in Ashes. If you can move, you must. This ensures that stacks must eventually (if they are not captured before that) spend all their pieces moving "non-outward", and the reproduction tax will eventually be too high to enter a new stack on the board. The game is over as soon as one player has no stacks on the board and is unable to grow a new stack.

[BGG description, Michael Amundsen, 2021]