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Pulling Strings

An entry in the 2003 Simultaneous Movement Game Design Competition

Designed by Clark D. Rodeffer
For 2 players

Rules

Pulling Strings is a game of simultaneous movement for 2 players, Eks and Oh.

The game is played on the intersections of a 5 by 5 grid of orthogonal lines called strings. A supply of about 20 stackable pieces such as checkers, poker chips or coins are also needed.

The game begins with a stack of 5 pieces on the center intersection. The end of each string is designated by a letter, and each player has 4 home intersections as shown in Figure 1.

The first player to pull stacks with a total of at least 5 pieces onto any combination of his home intersections wins. Ties are decided by continuing play, either until one player has pulled more pieces home than the other, or both players mutually agree to a draw.

Figure 1: Initial setup

```
  a b c d e
y . X . O . f
x O . . . X g
w . . 5 . . h
v X . . . O i
t . O . X . l
  s r o n m
```

Using a mutually agreeable finger spelling alphabet, each player simultaneously reveals (rock-scissors-paper style) the string end he intends to pull. The letters shown minimize discrepancies when the American Sign Language finger spelling alphabet is used. Alternatively, players may write their intended moves on pieces of paper which are then simultaneously revealed, or for a totally randomized game suitable for children, try using a twenty-sided die with letters on each face like the one provided with Scattergories.

Movement Details

Between turns, stacks of pieces rest on the string intersections. These stacks are moved, split and/or combined when the ends of the strings connected to that intersection are pulled. Stacks stop when they are pulled against the edge of the grid.

If the same string end is pulled by both players, all of the stacks of pieces on that string move one intersection in the direction of the pull, but the extra stress caused by two people pulling the same string causes that string to break. After such a move, that string cannot be pulled for the duration of the game. An example is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Both players pull "c"

```
   Before              After
 a b c d e           a b   d e
y . X . O . f       y . X . O . f
x O . . . X g       x O . 5 . X g
w . . 5 . . h       w . . . . . h
v X . . . O i       v X . . . O i
t . O . X . l       t . O . X . l
   s r o n m           s r o n m
```

When two different string ends are pulled, all of the stacks of pieces on both strings move one intersection in the direction of the pull as shown in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3: Eks pulls "g", while Oh pulls "i"

```
   Before              After
 a b c d e           a b c d e
y . X . O . f       y . X . O . f
x O . 3 . X g       x O . . 3 X g
w . . . . . h       w . . . . . h
v X . 3 . O i       v X . . 3 O i
t . O . X . l       t . O . X . l
   s r o n m           s r o n m
```

Figure 4: Eks pulls "b", while Oh pulls "i"

```
   Before              After
 a b c d e           a b c d e
y . X . O . f       y . 3 . O . f
x O 3 . . X g       x O . . . X g
w . . . . . h       w . . . . . h
v X . 3 . O i       v X . . 3 O i
t . O . X . l       t . O . X . l
   s r o n m           s r o n m
```

Stacks pulled in two different directions are split into two equal stacks, with extra pieces added as necessary when odd stacks are split. This is true even when stacks at the edge of the board are pulled both along and toward the edge. Each split is considered to occur simultaneously. Examples are shown in Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Figure 5: Eks pulls "c", while Oh pulls "h"

```
   Before              After
 a b c d e           a b c d e
y . X . O . f       y . X . O . f
x O . . . X g       x O . 3 . X g
w . . 5 . . h       w . . . 3 . h
v X . . . O i       v X . . . O i
t . O . X . l       t . O . X . l
   s r o n m           s r o n m
```

Figure 6: Eks pulls "c", while Oh pulls "o"

```
   Before              After
 a b c d e           a b c d e
```

```
y . X . O . f     y . X 2 O . f
x O . 3 . X g     x O . . . X g
w . . . 3 . h     w . . 2 3 . h
v X . . . O i     v X . . . O i
t . O . X . l     t . O . X . l
  s r o n m         s r o n m
```

Figure 7: Eks pulls "w", while Oh pulls "h"

```
   Before            After
  a b c d e         a b c d e
y . X 2 O . f     y . X 2 O . f
x O . . . X g     x O . . . X g
w . . 2 3 . h     w . 1 2 1 2 h
v X . . . O i     v X . . . O i
t . O . X . l     t . O . X . l
  s r o n m         s r o n m
```

Figure 8: Eks pulls "y", while Oh pulls "c"

```
   Before            After
  a b c d e         a b c d e
y . X 2 O . f     y . 1 1 O . f
x O . . . X g     x O . 2 . X g
w . . 2 3 . h     w . . . 3 . h
v X . . . O i     v X . . . O i
t . O . X . l     t . O . X . l
  s r o n m         s r o n m
```

Stacks pulled together or into a stack against the wall combine into a single, larger stack. Examples are shown in Figures 9 and 10.

Figure 9: Eks pulls "o", while Oh pulls "w"

```
   Before            After
  a b c d e         a b c d e
y . X . O . f     y . X . O . f
x O . 3 . X g     x O . . . X g
w . . . 3 . h     w . . 6 . . h
v X . . . O i     v X . . . O i
t . O . X . l     t . O . X . l
  s r o n m         s r o n m
```

Figure 10: Eks pulls "c", while Oh pulls "h"

```
   Before            After
  a b c d e         a b c d e
y . X 3 O . f     y . X 5 O . f
x O . 2 . X g     x O . . . X g
w . . . 3 . h     w . . . . 3 h
v X . . . O i     v X . . . O i
t . O . X . l     t . O . X . l
  s r o n m         s r o n m
```

Sometimes, stacks split and recombine on the same turn. Again, all splits happen simultaneously, then all combinations happen simultaneously. An example is shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Eks pulls "c", while Oh pulls "o"

```
   Before            After
  a b c d e         a b c d e
y . X 2 O . f     y . X 1 O . f
x O . . . X g     x O . 2 . X g
```

```
w . . 2 3 . h    w . . . 3 . h
v X . . . O i    v X . 1 . O i
t . O . X . l    t . O . X . l
  s r o n m        s r o n m
```

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