

Yūgen

by Stefan Karamanov

Yūgen is a simple abstract tile placing game for two players. There is a bit of strategy and a bit of chance involved. A player wins by achieving more points than the opponent, but the game can also end in a draw.

COMPONENTS

- A game board
- 15 unique game tiles
- A bag
- 3 philosopher figures

Board: The game board is a 5x5 grid. The black box in the middle is where the first game tile is placed before the start of each game (*see Setup*). Most of the other boxes are marked with a number – this is the point value of the box at the end of the game (*see Scoring*). The Yūgen board is placed diagonally between the two players, the darkest and the brightest corners (point values 3) pointing to the “Ocean” player and the “Sun” player respectively. The two borders at each player’s half of the game board are also referred to as “his” borders.

Tiles: Each game tile has 4 sides and each side is either marked with one of 3 different triangular marks or empty. In the middle of each tile, there’s also a small printed name of that tile. Those names are not important - their sole purpose is easier memorization of each of the 15 unique tiles.



Example: The “Forest” tile and the “River” tile.

Note: Each of the four types of tile side also symbolizes an element: The left-oriented triangle is Water, right-oriented triangle is Fire, the empty (blank) side is Earth and the big triangle is Air or Wind. Take a quick look through the 15 tiles with this in mind, as it may help you to remember them.

The bag: This is where the tiles are drawn randomly from during the game. Keep the tiles that you draw hidden.

The three philosophers: All three philosophers are the same. They start the game in the middle of the board, on the tile that is placed there at the beginning of each game (*see Setup*). The goal of the game is to push the philosophers over your borders, although the game may end with any of them stuck somewhere on the board (*see Scoring*).

SETUP

Take the “Ocean” and the “Sun” tiles out of the bag and randomly choose one of them. Place that tile face up in the middle of the board and all three philosophers on it. If this is the “Ocean” tile, the player in the dark corner will have the first turn in the game. If the “Sun” tile is placed this way, the player in the bright corner will have the first turn. Put the other tile back in the bag and mix the tiles a bit. Each player draws one tile in his hand, hidden from his opponent.



Example: A setup with the dark corner player going first.



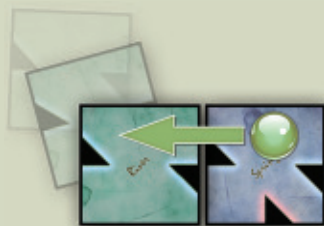
PLAYER'S TURN

The player starts his turn by drawing another tile from the bag and adding it to his hand. Then, he chooses one of the tiles in his hand and puts it face up on the board. The orientation of the tile is chosen freely, but it must touch another tile already on the board with at least one of its sides.

Then, the players check if there's an interaction triggered by placing this new tile, at each of the four sides where it touches an old tile (a tile that is already on the board).

There are two kinds of interaction: “pull” and “push”.

Pull: If both the triangles at the touching sides are small and are the same, thus opposing each other and not making one big triangle, there's a pull happening. If there are any philosophers on the old tile, pull one of them, moving it immediately on the new tile you've just placed.



Example: A River tile pulling the philosopher out of a Spring tile.



Example: A Sun tile pulling one of the philosophers out of a Lightning tile.

Note: If you consider the elements symbolized by the different sides, a pull is achieved by continuing the flow of Fire+Fire or Water+Water. A philosopher cannot be pulled from an Earth side (blank one) and can only be pushed when interacting with an Air side (big triangles, *see Push*).

Push: If at least one of the triangles touching is big and the other side isn't empty, the newly placed tile "pushes" the old one or "blows" it away. First, if there are any philosophers on the old tile, move one of them one space away on the board. If this makes it fall outside the board, the player whose border it crosses scores 5 points, keeping the philosopher as a token until the end of the game. If it moves the philosopher on another old tile, the philosopher stays there. If it pushes the philosopher someplace where there is no tile, the player whose turn is draws another tile from the bag, places it on the board at that place, choosing the orientation freely, and places the philosopher on that tile.

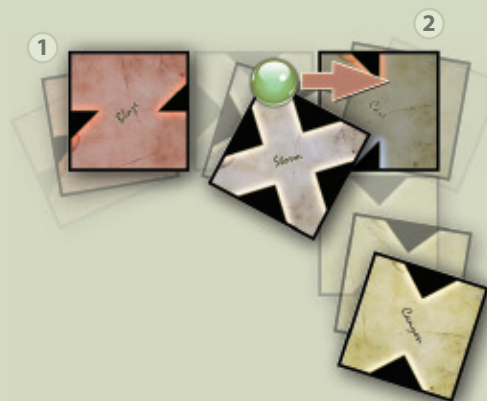
Then, before you check for any new interactions, if there are no more philosophers on the old tile, remove it from the board and put it back in the bag. Now, if you placed a new tile on the board during this push, check again for interactions caused by this new tile and resolve them.



Example: The Lightning pushing the Philosopher from the River tile, blowing the tile afterwards.



Example: The Human tile pushing one Philosopher out of the Storm tile, while another one stays on the tile.



Example: The Blaze tile pushes the Storm tile, blowing it and starting a chain reaction when a Cave is placed.

Note: If you consider the elements symbolized by the different sides again, a push could be Air+Air, Air+Fire or Air+Water. Earth side (a blank one) cannot be pushed and an Air side (the big triangle) is pushed by anything but an Earth side.

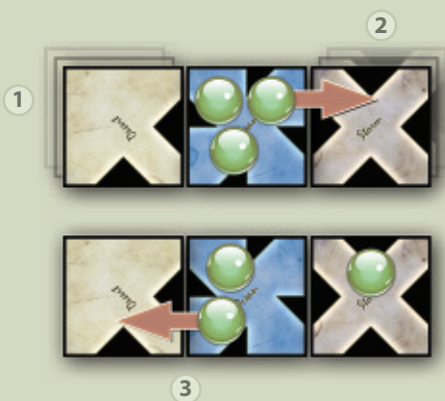


The new tile can interact with up to four old tiles and trigger several pushes and/or pulls simultaneously. The order in which multiple triggered interactions happen is up to the player whose turn it is.

Only pushes remove tiles from the board. When a pull takes the last philosopher from a tile, nothing else happens.

A philosopher can never be directly on the board – there should be always a tile under. If there are no more tiles in the bag when you push a philosopher to an empty space (*see Empty bag, Yügen*), just slide the whole pushed tile instead of removing it from the board. You can then choose new orientation of that tile, turning it before checking for interactions.

The newly placed tile is never pushed as a result of the interaction it triggered and the pulls are always towards that tile. The only way to push a philosopher from a tile you placed this turn or pull a philosopher from it is during a chain reaction.



Example: The Desert tile pushes a Philosopher from the Ocean tile into an empty space. The newly drawn tile is the Storm, forcing the player to push another Philosopher back to the Desert tile, although this moves it farther away from his half of the board.

It is forbidden to place a tile that will trigger a push during the very first turn of the first player in a game.

It is also forbidden to place a tile at the same place that tile has been pushed from during the opponent's last turn. If you have only that tile in your hand, you must place it elsewhere.

When a tile is placed and all triggered interactions are resolved, this turn ends and the turn of the other player begins.

EMPTY BAG, YÜGEN

Eventually, when more tiles are placed on the board than blown away by pushes, the reserve of tiles in the bag will be depleted. When, for the first time in a game, a player must draw a tile at the beginning of his turn and the bag is empty, he declares "Yügen". This means that his opponent must also skip his next draw, even if there are new tiles in the bag by then. This way, the rest of the game continues with players playing the single tile they draw at the beginning of their turn. Once the game enters the state of Yügen, the players can never have two tiles in their hands again.

Note: In Yügen, it becomes easier to manipulate the options your opponent has, because you know exactly which tiles are in the bag (based on those you see on the board and the one in your hand). You can also decide which tiles to push from the board - sometimes, you want to finish the game in this state (see **Scoring**) and force full tile depletion, sometimes you want to keep the game going until you succeed in moving some philosophers, so you push as much unstable tiles (Storm, Desert, Canyon, Lightning) as you can.

If, at the beginning of a player's turn, both the bag and his hand are empty, that player skips his turn.

If, at the beginning of a turn, the bag and the hands of both players are empty, the game ends and there is scoring.

SCORING

The final scoring can be reached in several ways. The simplest way to win is to succeed in pushing 2 philosophers beyond your borders. This way, you already have 10 points - there's no way your opponent can match that with that one final philosopher still in play, so you win.

When there are no more tiles in the bag and anybody's hand, nothing can change in the game anymore, so each player scores the philosophers in his half of the board - each philosopher contributes as much points as the value printed on the space he finished the game in. This, in addition to the 5 points of a claimed philosopher, if there's one, is the player's final score. The player with more points wins.

There are also other ways the game can reach a state where no philosopher can be moved anymore, even if there are still tiles in the bag. If all the remaining philosophers are on the Mountain, for example, nothing can budge them, so a scoring happens to determine who wins (or maybe the game will be a draw).



Example: The Ocean player pushes his second philosopher out of the board, so he wins decisively.



Example: The Ocean player has a philosopher for 5 points, but the Sun player aptly pushes the remaining philosophers on the Desert in his corner. Nothing can happen to them anymore, so there is scoring: The Sun player wins, because he has $2 \times 3 = 6$ points now.



Example: The Sun player succeeds in placing the Storm tile somewhere, where it doesn't push anything. The bag and the Ocean player's hand are empty, so the game ends. The Sun player has $2 + 1$ points, while the Ocean player has only 2. If that philosopher was one step closer to the dark corner, the Sun player probably wouldn't have stopped the Storm, playing for victory instead.

Yügen is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.