

Skyscrapers

A Solitary Confinement game for the piecepack by Michael J. Schoessow

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2 players, 15-30 minutes

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Equipment Needed One standard piecepack

Introduction

Skyscrapers is a solitaire city-building game. The player works to construct the most lucrative combination of commercial and residential zones, by clever movement and inspired planning.

Setup

Separate the coins into four suit-side-up color groups of six coins each. Turn all the tiles suit-side-down and shuffle them, or place them in an opaque bag to mix them up. One tile at a time, form a 5x5 board of randomly distributed **suit-side-up** tiles with a hole in the center. Tiles should all be spaced approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from their neighbors, to facilitate easy sliding. Tile orientation is of no concern. Place the four pawns on top of their color-matched null tiles. The pawns are called *work crews*. Keep the coins, suit side up and handy in their groups, off to the side of the board. The dice are not used and may be left in the box. In the rare circumstance that the four null tiles boarder the four sides of the center hole, the crowns null tile is exchanged with the crowns ace tile.

Object

The object of the game is to arrange the tiles and coins into the highest point scoring configuration. This means developing the commercial zones of the city by building upward, while arranging the residential zones for high property value, which means placing them away from the commercial zones. The tiles represent commercial zones in the city, and coins represent residential zones.

Game Play

There are three types of plays allowed:

- 1) Stack a tile onto an adjacent tile of the same color.
- 2) Slide a tile or coin already on the board into the hole in the board.
- 3) Move a pawn orthogonally, landing on a tile or coin of the pawn's color.

Stack a Tile

A tile may be stacked on top of an orthogonally adjacent tile if, *and only if*, the two tiles are the same suit **and** there is a work crew adjacent to the tile that is being moved. The

pawns are work crews, and a work crew (of any color) must be setting adjacent to *the tile that is going to be moved* (not the tile that is going to be stacked onto). Whenever a tile is stacked, the resulting empty space is immediately filled with a coin *of the same color as the tile that previously occupied that space* (the tile that was just moved). Once a stack is formed, its position is frozen in place; stacks may never be moved. Stacks may not be deconstructed; once a tile is part of a stack, it remains there permanently. Tiles may not be added to a stack that has a pawn setting on it.

Slide a Tile or Coin

There will always be exactly one empty space (or hole) on the board, and its position on the board will shift as tiles and coins are slid. At the start of the game, the hole is in the center of the board, and there are no coins on the board. Any tile orthogonally adjacent to the hole may be slid into the hole. The new hole is then at the space formerly occupied by the tile just slid. Later in the game, some of the spaces will be occupied by coins instead of tiles. Coins may also be slid into the hole in exactly the same way as with tiles. By sliding tiles and coins in this way, the board configuration may be altered. Tiles and coins may not be moved if they hold a pawn. Stacks of tiles, and individual tiles within stacks, may **never** be moved. All movements must be within the original 5x5 outline of the city.

Move a Pawn

Pawns represent work crews in the opening and middle game. They move orthogonally, and may move any number of spaces as long as they land on a tile or coin of the same color as themselves. Pawns may **not** move over or through other pawns. Pawns may **not** move over the hole in the board. Pawns may **not** move over tile stacks. A pawn freezes the tile or coin beneath it (i.e., a tile or coin that holds a pawn may not be moved). Pawns may be moved onto tile stacks *if they match the color of the top tile on the stack*, but a pawn on top of a stack is frozen for the remainder of the game. Once a pawn is placed on top of a stack, no additional tiles may be added to that stack. Stacks represent city zones containing numerous multi-story buildings, and when a pawn is moved onto such a stack it becomes an architectural feature that enhances the attractiveness of that city zone. *A pawn that is an architectural feature setting on top of a stack may **no longer be used as a work crew.***

Scoring

Unimproved commercial zones (single tiles, not stacked) score no points.

Developed commercial zones (stacks of 2 or 3 tiles) score points equal to the number of tiles in the stack.

Skyscraper zones (stacks of 4 or more tiles) score points equal to twice the number of tiles in the stack.

Placing a pawn on top of a stack doubles its score. Thus, artistic architecture is rewarded.

Residential zones (coins) each score 3 points if, *and only if*, they are not orthogonally adjacent to any commercial zones, and they don't hold a pawn. Thus good city planning is rewarded.

Note From the Author

Some readers will have noticed that the tile and coin sliding mechanic reveals that Skyscrapers shares some ancestry with the old 15 Puzzle, in which square tiles numbered 1-15 were slid around in an effort to achieve a specified numerical sequence. Players who excel at the 15 Puzzle will also do very well playing Skyscrapers. If the locations of tile stacks are chosen wisely, the game may always be completely solved with sufficiently clever play. This does not mean that Skyscrapers will be an easy game for many players. However, for those players who desire more of a challenge, and who prefer a game in which it is not always possible to win, some more challenging variants are provided. Please note that as of version 1.4 of the game, the variants have not been well play-tested.

Rules Variants for Increased Challenge

Variant #1 Same rules as regular game except for the following. After initial setup, but before commencing play, any null tiles bordering the hole in the center of the board are swapped with their suit-matching ace tiles. During play, null tiles may never be moved.

Variant #2 Same rules as regular game except for the following. No more than three tile sliding operations may be made in succession. Then some other operation (tile stacking, coin sliding, or pawn movement) must be made before further tile sliding is done.

Each of these variants is made slightly easier if pawns are allowed to move over stacks.