Tak™

A Beautiful Game

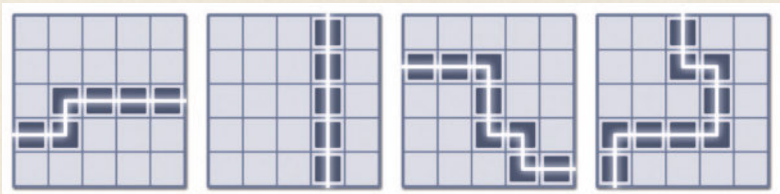
Tak is a board game from Patrick Rothfuss' bestselling novel, *The Wise Man's Fear*. It is an elegant two-player game of perfect strategy, a refined diversion from the court of Vintas:

> *"Tak is the best sort of game: simple in its rules, complex in its strategy. Bredon beat me handily in all five games we played, but I am proud to say that he never beat me the same way twice."*
>
> *-Kvothe*

When the book was written, Tak was intriguing but imaginary. Now, Patrick Rothfuss and James Ernest have teamed up to make it real. Introducing ***Tak: A Beautiful Game***.

Object of the Game

The goal of Tak is to build a *road*, which is a string of pieces that connects opposite sides of the board. Some examples:



A winning road connects opposite sides of the board.

The game also ends if either player runs out of pieces, or if the board is completely full. In that event, the winner is the player with the most flat stones on top. More details on this below.

The Board

You can play Tak on many different sizes of board, from 3x3 to 6x6 and even larger.

This game includes a double-sided Tak Board: an elegant **Selas Flower** board on one side, and a **Tavern** board on the other.

Selas Flower Board

Tavern Board

The Selas Flower board is a 6x6 "Hybrid" board. You can use this design to play any size game up to 6x6.

To play 6x6, use the 36 diamonds. For a 5x5 game, use the 25 squares. For a 4x4 or 3x3 game, ignore the outer ring.

The Tavern Board is a simple 5x5 design, but you can play 6x6 or 4x4 by playing on the intersections rather than the squares.

Connections: Spaces on the Tak board are connected only by their edges. Spaces are not adjacent diagonally, and pieces do not move diagonally.

The Pieces

There are two types of piece in Tak: *stones* and *capstones*. Stones can be played in two ways: *flat* or *standing*.

Flat Stones: Usually, stones are played flat, as shown here. Flat stones can stack up, and they can count as part of a road.

Note: The dark and light stones in this set have different shapes. This is purely decorative.

Standing Stones: You can place a stone on end, as shown here. Nothing can be stacked on a standing stone, but standing stones don't count as part of your road. This makes them good for blocking, so they are sometimes called "walls."

Capstones: Capstones combine the best aspects of standing and flat stones: they *do* count as part of a road, but they *can't* have another piece stacked on top. In addition, a capstone by itself has the power to *flatten* a standing stone.

When flattening a standing stone, the capstone must act by itself. You'll see more about that in the movement examples.

How Many Pieces?

The number of pieces in the game depends on the size of the board. Each player has the following:

Board Size:	**3x3**	**4x4**	**5x5**	**6x6**	**8x8**
Stones:	10	15	21	30	50
Capstones:	0	0	1	1	2

Calling "Tak": *You will typically call "Tak" in a friendly game, but it isn't strictly required. Like "check" in chess, this is a warning that you are one move away from winning.*

Setting Up

The board starts empty. Check that each player has the right number of stones and capstones for your chosen board size.

In the first game, determine randomly who will go first. After that, you will take turns going first.

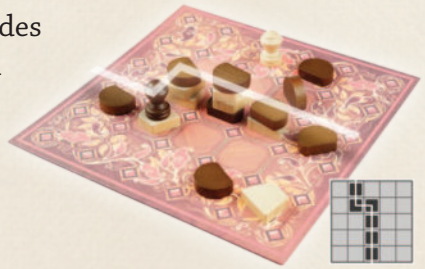
On the first turn of the game, each player places one of their *opponent's* stones. You may play this stone in any empty space, and it must be flat. After this, play proceeds normally.

For example, if White goes first, White plays a Black stone, then Black plays a White stone, then White takes the first normal turn.

The Goal

The object is to create a *road*, which is a string of your pieces connecting opposite sides of the board. A road does not have to be a straight line. Diagonal spaces do not connect. Standing stones cannot be part of your road, but your capstone can.

In this illustration, Black has won by connecting two opposite sides of the board with a road. Each space along this path has a stack with a black flat stone or capstone on top.



Other Ways to Win

Flat Win: If either player runs out of pieces, or if the board is completely full, then the game ends immediately and the player with the most flat stones wins.

Count only the flat stones on top of stacks, not those buried within stacks. If this count is tied, then the game is a draw.

Double Road: If a player creates a winning road for both players in the same move, then *the active player* is the winner. (This is possible, but very rare.) *For example, if White makes a move that creates a white road and a black road, then White wins because it is White's turn.*

On Each Turn

On your turn you may either *place* a piece in an empty space, or *move* one of the stacks under your control.

Place: You can place a flat stone, a standing stone, or your capstone in any *empty space* on the board. (You never play a piece directly on another one. Stacks only form because of movement.)

If you place your last piece, or if you fill the last space on the board, the game ends immediately.

Move: You can move one or more pieces in a stack that you control. A "stack" of pieces can be any height, including just one piece. "Control" means that your piece is on top.

To move the stack, take any number of pieces off the top, up to the *carry limit* (see below), and move them in a straight line, dropping *at least one piece* off the bottom in each space along the way. The pieces that you drop will cover up any stacks that are already there.

The simplest move is to take one piece and move it one space, as shown in the first movement example. Taller stacks can move farther, dropping pieces as they go.

Additional Movement Rules

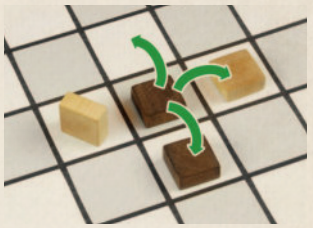
Carry Limit and Stack Height: There is no limit to the height of a stack, but there is a limit to the number of pieces that you can *move*. This "carry limit" is equal to the width of the board, so for example in a 5x5 game, you can carry no more than five pieces. That means if you start with a stack of 7, you must leave at least 2 of those pieces in the starting space.

Insurmountable Pieces: Standing stones and capstones cannot be covered, which means that all the spaces in your path must either be empty or contain flat stones.

Flattening Walls: A capstone can, by itself, move onto a standing stone and flatten it. The capstone may be part of a larger stack that is making a longer move, as long as the final step (crushing the wall) is done by the capstone alone. *Aside from flattening it with a capstone, you cannot lay down a wall.*

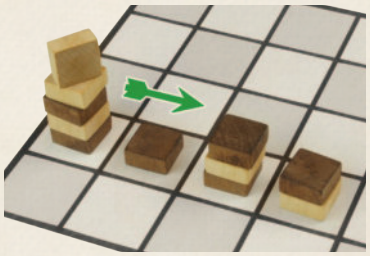
Movement Examples

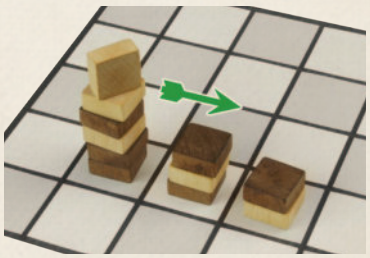
Moving One Piece: You must drop at least one piece in each space as you go, so a single piece can move only one space. The black piece in this diagram can move to three of the four adjacent spaces, as indicated.

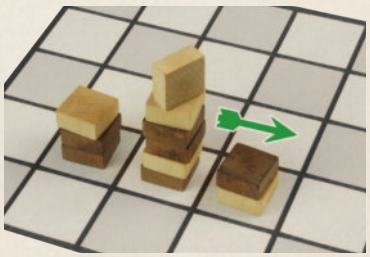


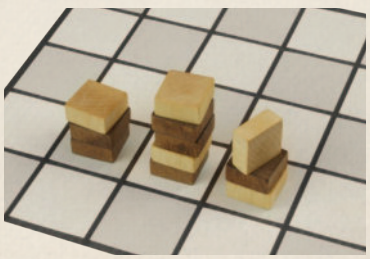
If it moves *up*, it moves into an empty space. If it moves *right*, it covers a white piece. If it moves *down*, it covers a black piece. It cannot move *left*, because that space is occupied by a standing stone.

Note: Standing stones and capstones move by the same rules as flat stones. If this piece were a capstone, it would also have the option to move left, flattening the standing stone.









Moving a Taller Stack: White controls this stack, with a standing stone on top.

Assuming that this is a 5x5 board, the carry limit is *five*. That means White is allowed to move this entire stack of five pieces, or she could choose to leave some behind.

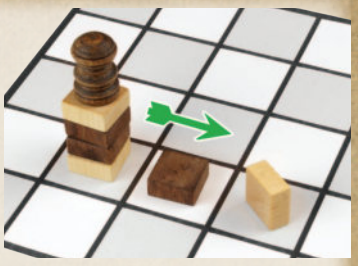
Moving in a straight line, White must drop *at least one piece in each space*. These pieces come off the bottom of the stack.

In the first space, she leaves two pieces. On the second space, she leaves two pieces again.

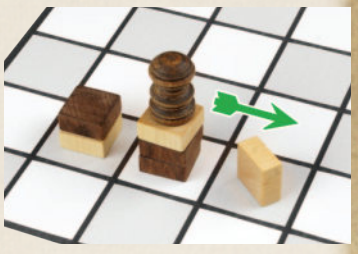
The standing stone, by itself, goes into the last space. The end result is shown in the last step.

This single move has given White control of three spaces that just belonged to Black!

Moving a Capstone: Capstones can move like any other piece. In addition, a capstone can *flatten* a standing stone, if it does so by itself. In this example, Black will move his capstone two steps, to flatten White's standing stone.



In the first step, Black could move up to five of these pieces, but he chooses to leave two pieces behind, and move just three pieces to the next space. (This leaves a black stone in control of the starting space.)



To flatten the standing stone, the capstone must act *alone*. Black leaves the rest of the pieces on the second space, and moves the capstone by itself onto the standing stone.

With this move, Black has flattened White's standing stone, but has left White in control of the middle stack. This is not perfect for Black, but this type of result is fairly common, as capstones often end up on top of pieces of the opposite color.

Note that capstones can flatten stones of *either color* (not just the opponent's color).

Basic Strategy

From the examples, you can see that movement is the key to the game. A tall stack has many options and a long move can seriously change the balance of power.

You can learn the basics of the game by playing a few quick games at 4x4. Because there are no capstones at this level, standing stones are more powerful and you'll use them for offense as well as defense.

Be careful not to make moves too early; you need to get pieces into play, and not just move the pieces you already have. In the late game, don't be afraid to "run out the clock" and run out of pieces if you're ahead on the flats!

Scoring

Because there is a slight advantage for the player who goes first, you should keep score over multiple games.

Your score for winning is equal to the size of the board (for example, 25 points in a 5x5 game), plus the number of pieces that remain unplayed in your reserve.

For example, in a 4x4 game, if you win the game with 4 unplayed pieces, you score 20 points. This is 16 points for the board, and 4 for the pieces.

For fairness, take turns going first. In the long run, you will score more points by winning more efficiently.

Scoring Variants

For a little variety, you can try these scoring variations:

Downings Rules: "Double the Line." If the winning road is a straight line, the winner scores double points for his pieces.

Middletown Rules: "Double the Cap." If a player wins without playing her capstone, the piece score is doubled.

Tarway Rules: "Low Road, High Road." If the winning road is entirely stacks of one piece (a "low road"), then the winner scores double points for her pieces. If the winning road is entirely stacks of more than one piece (a "high road"), then the piece score is tripled.

To learn more about Tak, including history, customs, and two more complete games in the same family, look for the Tak Companion Book, *by James Ernest and Patrick Rothfuss.*

Tak was created by ***James Ernest*** *and* ***Patrick Rothfuss****. Playtesters included Boyan Radakovich, Paul Peterson, Rick Fish, Jeff Morrow, Jeff Wilcox, and Joe Kisenwether. This edition was made possible by 12,000 backers on Kickstarter, who contributed more than $1.3M to its success! Boards by Echo Chernik, illustrations by James Ernest and Nate Taylor. Edited by Carol Monahan and Cathy Saxton.* ***Tak: A Beautiful Game*** *is a trademark of Cheapass Games, LLC. Tak was made entirely in the USA.*

Learn more about Tak at ***jamesernest.com/games/tak***