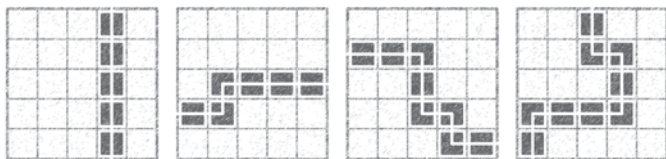


Game Rules I:

How to Play Tak

by James Ernest

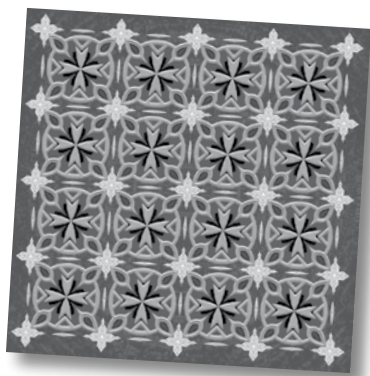
Tak is a simple two-player strategy game. The goal is to build a *road*, a line of pieces connecting opposite sides of the board.



Some examples of winning roads

The Board

You can play Tak on different sizes of board, from 3x3 to 6x6 and higher. The board on the back of this book is a “hybrid 5x5” board, meaning that it can be used for any size game up to 5x5.



To play a 5x5 game, use the 25 diamonds. For a 4x4 game, play on the 16 squares. For a 3x3 game, use just the inner nine diamonds.

Tak boards can be 3x3, 4x4, 6x6, 8x8, or even larger. The “Classic Set,” the first retail edition of Tak, includes a double-sided 6x6 board.

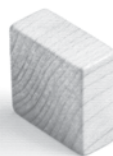
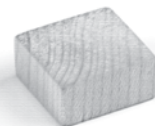
Connections: Spaces on the board are connected only by their edges. In Tak, things are not adjacent diagonally, and pieces do not move diagonally.

Cardinal Directions: In examples, it is sometimes helpful to use cardinal directions (north, south, east, west) to describe movement or placement. These directions are not actually on the board.

The Pieces

In a 5x5 game, each player uses 21 standard pieces called “stones,” plus one special piece called the “capstone.” Stones can be played in two ways: *flat* and *standing*.

Flat Stones: Most stones will be played flat. In this orientation, they are called “flat stones” or just “flats.” Flat stones can stack up, as a result of movement (see below).



Standing Stones: If a stone is played on end, like this, it is a “standing stone” or “wall.” Nothing can be stacked on a standing stone, and it does not count as part of a road.

Capstones: Capstones embody the better aspects of both 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 ability to *flatten a standing stone*.



Setting Up

The board starts empty. All pieces begin in the player's "reserve," which just means the pieces that are not yet on the board.

The number of pieces each player uses is based on the size of the board:

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

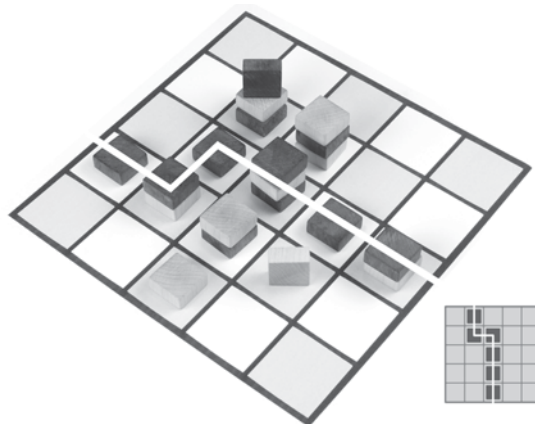
Note that capstones are used only on boards of size 5x5 and higher. Also, there are no numbers for 7x7, because it is rarely played.

Starting Player: In your first game, determine randomly who will go first. In subsequent games, take turns going first.

The First Turn: On the first turn, each player will place one of their *opponent's* stones. You may place this stone in any empty space, and it must be played flat. After the first turn, play proceeds normally. *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 line of your pieces, called a *road*, connecting two opposite sides of the board. The road does not have to be a straight line. Below is an example of a winning road.



A winning road for Black

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

Other Victory Conditions

Flat Win: If either player runs out of pieces, or if the board is completely covered, then the game ends immediately and the player with the most flat stones (on top of stacks) wins. If this count is tied, then the game is a draw.

Double Road: If a player creates a winning road for both players with the same move, then *the active player* is the winner. (This is quite rare.)

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.

If you place your last piece, or if you fill the last space on the board, the game ends immediately. See *Winning the Game*, below.

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 form only as a result of movement.)

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*, defined below), and move them in a straight line (but not diagonally), dropping *at least one piece* off the bottom in each space along the way.

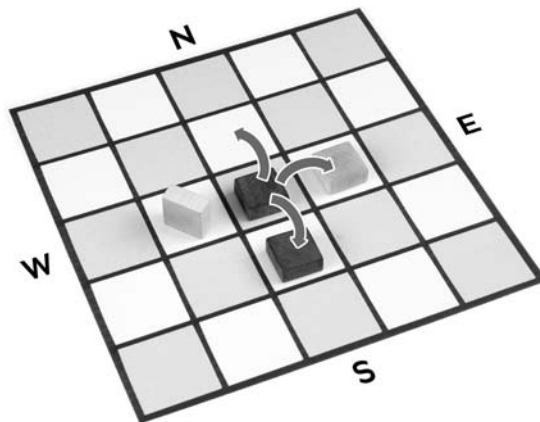
The pieces that you drop will cover up any stacks that are already there.

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

A capstone can, by itself, move onto a standing stone and flatten it. An example of this type of move is given below.

Movement Examples

Understanding movement is the key to the game, so below are three examples of how pieces move.

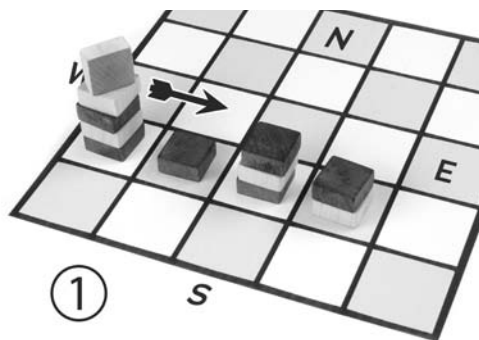


Moving One Piece: The black piece in the example above can move to three of the four adjacent spaces as indicated.

If it moves *north*, it moves into an empty space. If it moves *east*, it covers a white piece. If it moves *south*, it covers a black piece. It cannot move *west*, because that space is occupied by a standing stone.

Standing stones and capstones move in the same way as flat stones. If this piece were a capstone, it would also have the option to move *west*, flattening the standing stone there and covering it.

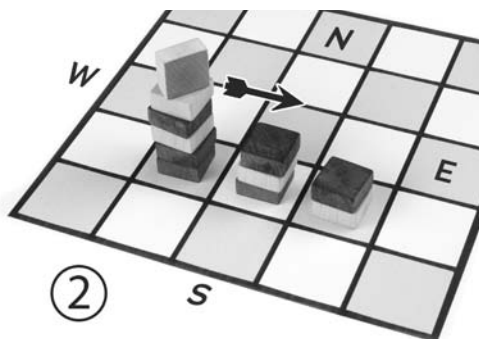
Because you must drop at least one piece in each space as you go, a stack of a single piece can move only one space. Taller stacks can move farther, as shown in the next examples.



Moving a Taller Stack: At left is an example of making a move with a taller stack. White controls this stack, with a standing stone on top. She decides to move east. (Movement is always in a straight line.)

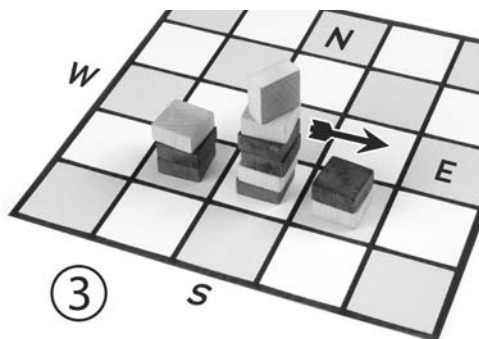
1: White can take as many as five pieces off the top of this stack. (See *carry limit*, below.) That's the whole stack, and she decides to take it all. She could also have left one or more pieces behind.

In each space along the path, White must drop *at least one piece*. These pieces come off the bottom of the stack.



2: In the first space, she decides to drop two pieces, which will leave her in control of that space. She carries the remaining three pieces onward.

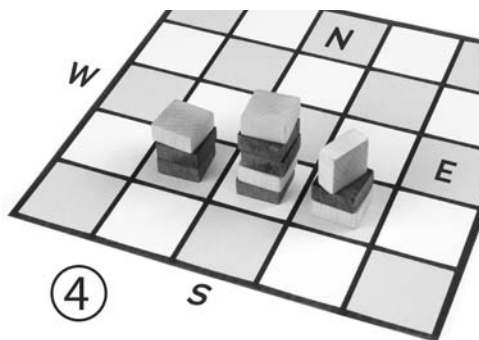
3: On the second space, White decides to drop two pieces again. This will give her control of this stack as well.



4: She moves only the top piece, the standing stone, into the last space. The end result of this move is shown in figure 4.

This single move gave White control of all three spaces, leaving Black in control of no spaces at all!

The rest of this board is empty, to make the example more clear. In a normal game, Black would probably still have control of some other spaces.



But it's not impossible for a move like this to happen in a real game. If that were the case, Black could not *move* on the next turn, since he controls no stacks; he would have to *place* a new piece.

Tall stacks are quite versatile. White had *many* other options with this stack. She could have moved it to the north or south, or she could have left different numbers of pieces in each position.

Moving Capstones: Capstones move like any other piece, except that they have one extra option: By itself, a capstone can *flatten* a standing stone. In this example, Black will move his capstone two steps, to flatten White's standing stone.

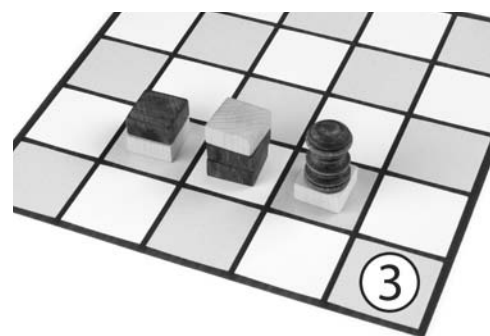
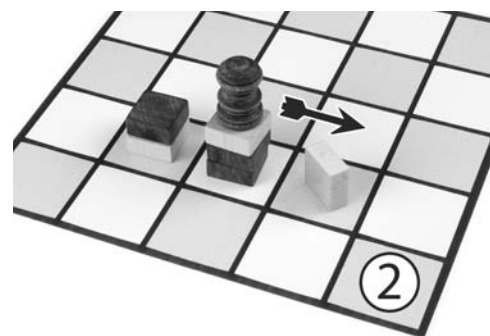
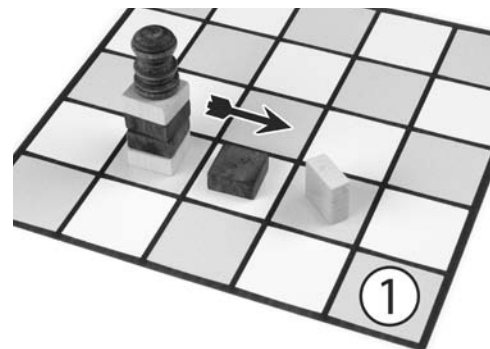
1: Black could move up to five of the pieces in this stack, but he elects to leave two pieces behind, and move just three pieces (the capstone and the two beneath it) to the next space. This leaves a black stone in control of the original space.

2: To flatten the standing stone, the capstone will have to act alone. So Black leaves the other pieces on the middle space, and moves the capstone by itself onto the standing stone.

3: Figure 3 shows the end result of 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 is fairly common, because capstones often end up on top of pieces of the opposite color. The end position shows why: Black has flattened White's standing stone, so he again finds his capstone atop a White flat.

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

As in the previous example, the player had many options for what pieces to leave where. The only requirement was that in order to flatten the standing stone, the capstone had to finish alone.



Calling “Tak”: There are two schools of thought on calling “Tak.” This is simply a warning to your opponent that you are one move away from winning. Some players believe it is unnecessary, and even counterproductive. Others believe it is an essential courtesy, and that not calling “Tak” goes against the fundamental spirit of the game.

Neither of these opinions is completely without merit, and the decision falls to the style of each player group as to what is best for your game. For more, see “Courtly vs. Street Tak” on page 29.

Additional Movement Rules

Carry Limit and Stack Height: There is no upper limit to the height of a stack. However, there is a limit to the number of pieces you can move *off* of a stack, called the “carry limit.”

The carry limit is always equal to the width of the board. So, in a 5x5 game, the largest number of pieces that you can carry is five. That means if you start with a stack of 7, you must leave at least 2 of those pieces in the starting position.

Insurmountable Pieces: Neither a capstone nor a standing stone can have a piece stacked on top of it (except that a capstone can flatten a standing stone). These pieces place and move normally, but can’t be stacked upon. Therefore, it’s illegal to make a move that would place a piece atop these types of pieces.

Flattening Stones: The capstone can move onto a standing stone, flattening it. A standing stone can be flattened only by the capstone by itself, not by a taller stack with the capstone on top.

A capstone can make a longer move (with a taller stack) before flattening a standing stone, as in the example on page 7, but the capstone must be the only piece that moves onto the standing stone.

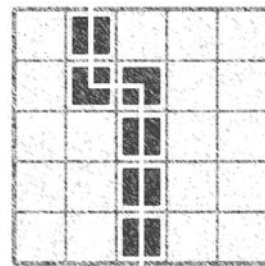
A capstone can flatten a standing stone of either color.

Aside from flattening it with a capstone, you cannot lay down a standing stone.

Winning the Game

The goal of the game is to create a *road*, which is a line of pieces that joins opposite edges of the board (north to south or east to west). This is called a “road win.”

A road is mainly composed of flat stones. Your capstone can also be part of a road, but standing stones cannot. If either player has a road, the game is over and that player wins.



Flat Win: The game also ends if the board is *full*, or if either player runs out of pieces. “Full” means that there are no empty spaces on the board.

As soon as either player fills the last board space, or plays their last piece, the game is over. If no one has a road at this point, then the winner is determined by counting the flat stones. This is called a “flat win.”

Count only the flat stones *on top* of all the stacks on the board. Standing stones and capstones are not counted, nor are flat stones that are covered.

If this count is tied, then the game is a draw.

Double Road: If a single move completes a road for both players, then the active player wins. 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.