



Above: The weathered Tavern Board, also by Echo Chernik, found on the back of the Selas board.
Below: Pieces from the boxed set.



The Game, in Brief:

Tak is a simple two-player strategy game played on a square board. Boards can vary in size, from 3x3 to 6x6 or larger. The goal is to build a “road,” which is a line of pieces connecting opposite sides of the board.

(This page isn’t big enough for the complete rules, but you can download them from jamesernest.com/tak.)

In brief, players take turns either placing a new stone on the board, or moving an existing stone or stack of stones. “Moving” a stack means taking some or all of the pieces off the top, and taking them in a straight line, dropping pieces as you go. This is similar to a move in mancala, or in the James Ernest - Mike Selinker game *Veritas*.

To be allowed to move a stack, you must own the top piece. As you move the stack, you will drop stones on top of other stacks, possibly changing their ownership as you go. Over time, as more pieces are played and moved, the board becomes populated with more and more interesting stacks.

Some pieces can’t be stacked. You may play a new piece as a *standing stone*, by placing it upright. Standing stones can’t have other pieces stacked on them, but they also don’t count for completing your road.

Each player also has one *capstone*. This piece counts as part of a road, and can’t have another piece stacked on it. In addition, it can flatten standing stones. The only drawback to the capstone is that you only have one!

A winning road must connect two opposite sides of the board. It doesn’t have to be a straight line, but it must connect orthogonally (diagonals don’t count). As described above, the road may contain flat stones and capstones, but standing stones do not count as part of a road.

The game can also end if either player runs out of pieces. If there is no road, then the winner is determined by counting the flat stones.

There are many versions of the game, from the beginner’s 3x3 and 4x4 games (played without capstones) to the tougher 5x5 and 6x6 “master” games, to the complex University gambling rules described in this insert.

Praise for Tak

“Tak has a very unique character which isn’t a surprise because it was made by genius James Ernest.” —**Tycho, Penny Arcade**

“Good for a family event, or board game night or anywhere... many thumbs up.” —**Andrew and Jess, Gamesity**

“I’ve only had Tak on my table for a few days, but it’s already become a bit of an obsession.” —**Dave Banks, GeekDad**

“Tak somehow lives up to its fictional origin as a timeless, ancient game of effortless elegance and deep strategy. It’s instantly engaging and only becomes more engrossing as you begin to grasp its depths.” —**Tom Harrison, Gaming Trend**

“Tak manages a lot of challenging play in a very uncomplicated package.” —**David Miller, Purple Pawn**

“This is an artistic representation of what Rothfuss had in mind when he imagined Tak in his novel, and if you’re a fan of the series, I can’t imagine a better piece of memorabilia to own.” —**Mick Joest, GameTyrant**

The US Tak Association

Ben Wochinski, President USTA

The first year of Tak has been truly exceptional.

Long before its first commercial release, the game of Tak has attracted a wealth of fans and players, starting with the release of the beta rules in the fall of 2015.

By the spring of 2016 there was already a large community on Reddit, as well as an online version with multiple AI players at playtak.com. The idea for a national Tak organization arose from within that group of dedicated fans.

The **US Tak Association** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the game of Tak and its community of players. The association was launched on July 1, 2016.

Our first official event was the Gen Con “Year Zero” Tak Championship, a small but successful tournament that helped us establish a presence at Gen Con.

This year, the US Tak Association is working to increase awareness of the game, arrange official tournaments, and help establish Tak clubs.

During the game’s first year in retail stores, most of the USTA’s objectives will fall under two primary goals: To spread the word, and to advance competitive play.

Spreading the Word

Tak’s rules are simple and easy to teach. Sharing the game with family and friends, or running a Tak demo event at your local game store, is a joy well worth the effort.

The USTA is helping establish Tak clubs throughout the US, and we are looking for people who are interested in participating. Anyone can become a member of the USTA, and start an affiliate club. No club is too large or too small!

There’s no better way to encourage the growth of the Tak community than establishing a place to play regularly, in both friendly and competitive games.

The US Tak Association provides its affiliate Tak clubs with a listing in their club directory, which will help new players find a local club, plus free hosting of a club information web page.

Advancing Competitive Play

To encourage and advance competitive play, the USTA will maintain a national rating system. A member’s rating can be used to determine eligibility for or placement in events. An official player rating is also great for bragging rights within a local club.

Recommendations are available on the USTA website for tournament directors regarding tournament structure, match scoring, and rules of play and conduct. Anyone is free to use this information to run their own tournaments to ensure a smooth and fair event. Official USTA affiliate events will be required to meet our standards, to ensure a quality experience for players.

The USTA already runs a regular national championship tournament, the US Tak Open. The inaugural run of this event took place online at the end of 2016. 149 players signed up for the qualifying rounds.

In future incarnations we intend that all official events, including the qualifiers, playoffs, and finals of the US Tak Open, will be held in-person. Expanding tournaments into more regions is a direct step towards this objective.

Though we are currently focused on the United States, the US Tak Association is willing to help members of the Tak community organize worldwide.

Join the USTA!

Joining the US Tak Association is the perfect way to help share the game and improve your own Tak experience. If you want to get involved with the larger community, or just love sharing the deep strategy of the game, please consider becoming a member.

Tak has strategy and depth hidden beneath its simplicity, and even a novice will begin to grasp the concepts in only a handful of games. The US Tak Association is working to make games fun, fair, and available to all.

For a list of benefits and more information about the US Tak Association, please visit us at www.ustak.org. Welcome to a beautiful game!



Tak™

A Beautiful Game

by James Ernest & Patrick Rothfuss

After two years of design and development, Tak is shipping this month.

Tak is “a beautiful game,” a two-player strategy game based on Patrick Rothfuss’ best-selling novel, *The Wise Man’s Fear*.

From the descriptions in the book and notes from the author, designer James Ernest has brought the fictional game to life.

Read more about this amazing new game in the pages ahead.



“My next several hours were spent learning how to play Tak. Even if I had not been nearly mad with idleness, I would have enjoyed it.”

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
The Wise Man’s Fear

Tak’s Origins

Patrick Rothfuss and James Ernest met in 2007 at VCON, a convention in Vancouver, BC. For many years they were distant acquaintances with a wealth of friends in common.

In 2013, Patrick petitioned James for a cameo in *Get Lucky*, the Kill Doctor Lucky Card Game. He landed the role of murderer Meymun Smelt. During that project, James described an upcoming game project, the Pairs card game, in which Patrick’s world and characters could take a more central role.

Although Pairs was a new game, not featured in the books, it seemed like a perfect fit for the Kingkiller universe. Patrick agreed, and collaborated on three variant decks with Kingkiller artwork.

While promoting that game, James and Patrick promised to work on the rules for a game that was actually in the books: the board game Tak.

However, despite his respect for James’ design chops, Rothfuss was not sure it could be done.

“Tak is supposed to be my world’s version of chess or mancala or go,” says Patrick. “I couldn’t ask James to make a game like that. It’s like saying, ‘You know those games that have stood the test of time for hundreds of years? The best games ever? Do that thing, but in my world.’”

The two agreed that if the design was a failure, they would remain friends and never speak of it again. That was in December 2014.

Three months later, in February 2015, James and Patrick met for Patrick’s first demo.

“I was stunned,” says Patrick. “This game is everything I wanted. The rules are simple. The strategy is deep. It’s more elegant than chess. It’s more lively than go.”

“I learned to play Tak in about five minutes and I had a blast. More than a year later, I’m still learning. The strategy is unfurling like a flower as I understand more and more about the play of it.”

“It is, in brief, a beautiful game.”



From the Box: Echo Chernik’s gorgeous selas flower board.

Tak™

University Rules

Adapted from the
Tak Companion Book
by James Ernest and
Patrick Rothfuss

The game of Tak has recently undergone a renaissance among players at the University. Over the last decade, we have seen a great upwelling of interest.

Scrivs and scholars have unearthed old variants and attempted to decipher lost rule sets from anecdotal evidence. Students specializing in advanced maths are inventing new ways to play, while rhetoricians are developing new gambits and questioning conventional modes of play.

The hub around which this activity revolves is the inestimable Maris Cintor, Re'lar. Maris became enamored of Tak a decade ago, while attempting to reconstruct the rules to one of its precursors, *Trio*, from the scant textual evidence.

Maris' most recent endeavor has been an attempt to calculate the ideal number of standing stones and flat stones, based on her theoretical rules for another precursor game, *Taket*. She believes that in *Taket*, they were two distinct kinds of piece.

About the Gambling Rules:

While many at the University admire Tak as a thing unto itself, there are those among us who cannot thrill at a purely abstract pursuit. Indeed, these players routinely exhibit the compulsion to associate their prowess with some sort of material gain.

One might expect this sort of behavior to be confined to those from merchant families, tradesmen, and those of Yllish descent. But the regrettable truth is that even the sons and daughters of highly regarded families take delight in finding new ways to gamble on this noblest of games.

While several methods have been devised for wagering on Tak, one system in particular has risen to primacy since its introduction in Gerad Femr's embarrassingly titled: "Arithmetical Assessments of Tak: Strategy, Solutions, and Schema."

I include the rules here in an effort to be as thorough as possible, and to perform my duty as a scholar, for the benefit of future generations, setting aside my personal distaste for their author.

Re'lar Daramin Centes Esq.
Fourth Tier Scriv, Order of the Yew



This page: Alternate board
and pieces from the private
collection of James Ernest.



University Gambling Rules

In an effort to thwart the game's first player advantage, as well as to keep it more interesting than a strictly intellectual pursuit, Gerad Femr has codified the gambling rules below, which are generally accepted as the standard University rules. They are also known by the unflattering nickname "Femr's Folly."

To play, you will need a Tak set as well as some coins for betting. You might also want a token to signify who owns the right to *reverse* (see below).

Definition: A "row" of coins is equal to the width of the board. So in a 5x5 game, a "row" is 5 coins.

Starting Wager: To begin, each player makes a wager equal to the size of the board. Typically the University game is played on a 5x5 board, so the starting wager is 25 coins.

Starting Player: The first player is always chosen at random. To counteract the first player's advantage, which Femr postulates as 10%, the second player is allowed to deduct one row of coins from his bet.

First Tak Award: The first player to call "Tak" takes a row from the pot.
Note: Calling "Tak" is never required, except to claim this award.

First Standing Stone Penalty: The first player to play a standing stone must pay one row to the pot.

First Cap Penalty: The first player to play his capstone must pay two rows to the pot.

Reversing Moves: A player may take back one move, but must pay one row to the pot. Once a player takes back a move, the privilege to do so passes to the other player. This is tracked with a marker or token.

Endgame Award: The winner of the game takes the pot, as well as a penalty from the loser equal to the number of pieces left in the winner's reserve. (This is equivalent to the usual "board and pieces" rule.)

Flat Win Penalty: If a player wins on the flats, he must refund one row to his opponent.

Note: The full rules for Tak are available at jamesernest.com/tak.

