

take-back-toe

A groovy little game
by James Ernest

Take-Back-Toe was the winner of Daniel Solis' "1000-Year Games" contest in 2011.

Based on its average play time of six minutes, it falls short of the suggested 1000-year length by approximately 525 million minutes.

We suggest that you use the extra time to play every game in the world. You may then state with confidence that this one is awesome.

Or at least above average.

Components and Setup:

Take-Back-Toe is an abstract game for two players. You will need the following components:

40 objects: stones, poker chips, coins, etc.
One 6-Sided Die

The playing area is an imaginary 3x4 grid. You can use a printed board if you wish, but it's completely optional.

Put a stack of 10 chips in each of the four spaces across the middle row, as shown below. We say "stack of chips" but if your objects don't stack, that doesn't matter. All that matters is the number of objects in each space.



Player 1's row

Neutral Row

Player 2's row

Rules:

Players take turns.

Start your turn by rolling the die.

You must now move *that number of chips* from one space to an adjacent space (orthogonally, not diagonally).

You can move the chips from any single space.

No Short Moves: You must move exactly as many chips as the number you roll. If you can't move (for example, you roll a 6 and all the stacks are 5 or less), you skip your turn.

No Take-Backs: You cannot make a move that reverses your opponent's last move. You don't have to remember any farther back than this; revisiting older game states is legal.

Winning: To win, you must have three stacks of the same size, anywhere within your row.

Extended Play:

Alternate who goes first.

After each game, the winner scores points based on the height of his winning stacks. For example, if you won with stacks of five, you earn five points.

Strategy:

Try to arrange your side of the board so that several different rolls will give you a winning move. Prevent your opponent from doing the same.

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Free? Seriously?

Tell me a little more about that.

Okay, here's the deal. If I made a great game and sold it to you for ten bucks, I'd probably keep about a dollar. If I sold it to a big game company, they'd probably make a nicer version for thirty bucks, and I'd still get about a dollar.

The rest of your money would go to printers, distributors, retail stores, and freight companies. And most of those guys don't know anything about what makes a great game.

Mass-producing entertainment is a gamble. It's a convoluted way for creators to protect their intellectual property, by selling it in a way that is prohibitively expensive to counterfeit. And it's getting a little old.

Why do you pay \$30 for a board game? The story goes like this: the retail price of a game covers the cost of manufacturing it, and there is no way you could make your own copy for that price, to say nothing of the hassle of finding little wooden men in six colors. So, it's worth \$30 because it costs \$30, *QED*.

But the value in a board game isn't the manufacturing cost. It's the play value. Unfortunately, this means that some games are priced way out of whack with what they are worth. And because the big gamble doesn't always work out, some of your money helps pay for the stuff that goes straight to the dump.

I've decided to try a different gamble. I'm giving my games away for free. This way, you can read the rules, make a copy, and even play the thing, before you decide what it's worth.

If you do like my games, I hope you will send me some money. But I'm also hoping you will share this experiment with your friends. You are my sales force, my marketing department, my demo team.

You're also my testers, so if you can think of ways to improve my games, please share them with me. I'm easy to find at big gaming conventions, and even easier online. Look for Cheapass Games on Facebook, or drop me a line at cheapassjames@gmail.com.

If we do this right, we will get famous and do shaving ads. But more importantly, we will prove that there is a better way for a creator to profit from his work.

And nothing has to go to the dump.

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