

■ How to play...

Tablaaza

by Andrew Perkis

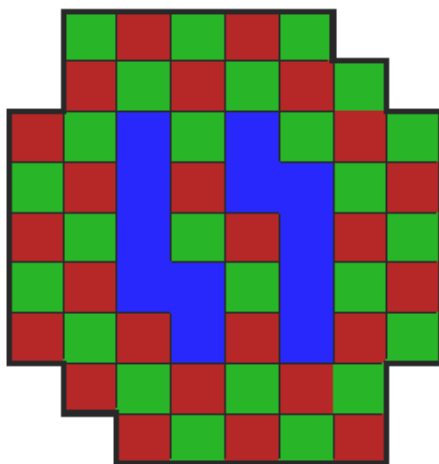
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Theme

Two neighbouring tribes, attracted to each other by a mixture of friendship and rivalry, decided to found a new City. A checkered system of plots was marked out around the lakes of Indigo and on the isthmus between them. The tribes were to take alternating turns in occupying these plots — and, in the process, play a game which would decide which of these plots would be given over to public buildings, which, for convenience, we call "Pavilions." Within the rules of the game, a special way of surrounding a plot belonging to the other tribe would oblige them to donate what would have been their own living space as a site for a Pavilion. As a mark of respect for their public-spiritedness, the losing tribe was to be accorded the honour of naming the city. After a close game, the losers named the city Tablaaza.

Players

Tablaaza is a game for two players.



Tablaaza gameboard. The inner areas, shaded blue, are the lakes around which the city was settled.

Equipment

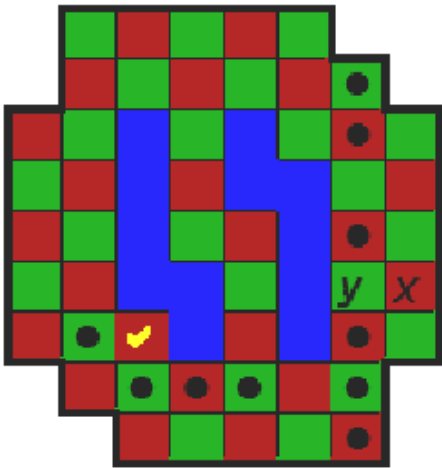
The board, composed of fifty playing squares, checkered red and green and arranged around two central non-playing areas representing lakes, is shown above. Forty-nine black Go stones make a more than sufficient supply of pieces, together with white Go stones to represent Pavilions.

Play

The game starts with no pieces on the board. Red moves first, and then players make alternate moves. A move for Red consists of playing a Go stone onto any red square. A move

for Green consists of playing an identical Go stone onto any green square (but see "Neighbourly Move" rule, below). Players may never pass a turn.

A player places a pavilion on one of the opponent's playing squares (provided it is, as yet, unoccupied), if, after the move just played, all the squares of his or her own color that share a "corridor" with that square are occupied. A "corridor" means a row or column of two or more playing squares. Sometimes more than one pavilion can thus be raised on a turn of play. Once a pavilion has been placed on a square, there is no further play on that square.



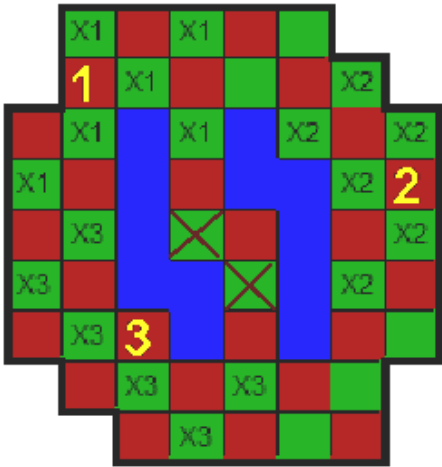
Red plays at X and raises a Pavilion at Y. Green has already raised a Pavilion (shown as a tick) on the other side of the board. Notice that, in raising Pavilions, aligned squares on the other side of lakes do not need to be occupied.

Objective

The objective is to be the last player able to play a move. Once a player no longer has a space to play into, s/he has lost.

The Neighbourly Move Rule

There is one exception to the general rule that a player may, on a turn of play, choose to enter a piece onto any vacant square of their own color. Green's first move must be onto a "neighbourly square." This means either adjacent to or a "knight's move" away from the square occupied by Red. A space a Knight's move away does not count if it would be a leap over one of the lakes. This is made clear in the figure below. [This prevents a winning Green strategy based on rotational symmetry.]



1, 2 and 3 are three of the twenty-five possible first moves for Red. In each case all the legal Green replies, onto a

"neighbourly square," are shown (1x in reply to move 1, 2x in reply to 2, etc.). The squares marked with a large X are not neighbourly moves for Green, since any Knight's leap from 3 would have to cross the water.

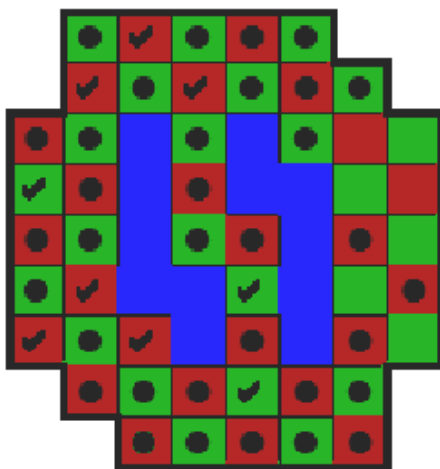
Strategy

Raising Pavilions is a way of "capturing" your opponent's space. As the end of the game approaches, it can, however, be dangerous to have raised too many more Pavilions than your opponent. In the position in the next diagram, Green has raised three more Pavilions than Red, and thus has five spaces left to play in, whereas Red has only two. However, the policy backfires. It is easy to see that Red, to play, wins comfortably. In all possible variations, Red's final move will raise Pavilions in all the remaining green squares—thus running Green out of moves. This is, in fact, a remarkably straight-forward endgame in which only one field of action is left. More commonly there are several separate ones.

The dynamics of play are such that if, at the end of play, an odd number of Pavilions have been raised, this will always mean that Red has raised one more than Green and that Red has won. If an even number are raised, then the players will have ended with an equal number of Pavilions, in which case Green will be the one to have played the last move.

If it were not for the "Neighbourly Move Rule," Green would always be able to play to an equivalent (opposite) square whenever Red played in the main board area, and, by combining this with careful play in the isthmus, would be able to ensure that an even number of Pavilions were raised, guaranteeing a Green victory. Although that is disallowed, the Green player should still focus on there being an even number of Pavilions raised during play, just as Red should aim for an odd number.

Perhaps in a further article we can explore the dynamics of play more fully, thus paving the way to a deeper understanding of strategy.



A lost endgame for Green. Red to play.

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[Andrew Perkis](#) is a British game designer.

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