

HISTORY OF THE PYRAMIDS

You hold in your hands the culmination of 25 years of game design effort, entrepreneurial drive, and my unrelenting obsession with pyramids.

In the summer of 1987, I wrote a short story. One of the plot devices was an imaginary board game which had no turns, used colorful pyramid-shaped game pieces, and was played with no additional equipment on any flat surface. I called this game Icehouse, and imagined a world where it was as commonplace and widely played as chess and playing card games. The characters in this world carried pyramid sets everywhere and used the game not just for fun but to settle disputes. Popular night spots would have pyramid gaming spaces built right in, just as backgammon tables were sometimes found in lounges back in the eighties.

We didn't have the internet to share ideas back then, but we did have photocopiers, so I made booklets of my stories and gave them to all my friends.



Everyone was intrigued by my imaginary game, but the idea really caught fire in the brains of two of my best friends: John Cooper, a buddy since childhood, who designed an actual game like the one I described, and Kristin Wunderlich, a co-worker at NASA, who wanted to start a company to publish my cool new game.

Within a couple of years, we were manufacturing and selling the first run of 100 handmade Icehouse game sets, featuring solid (non-stacking) plastic pyramids, and packaged in a stark black box.



This was our first foray into becoming a game publisher, and the first step towards the eventual founding of Looney Labs. Around that same time, Kristin and I got married, and John was the Best Man at our wedding.

With that first game we got our feet wet learning what it takes to start a business and launch a product. The challenge of getting custom-designed game pieces made was bigger than I had realized, and it wasn't until we'd started making money from Fluxx that we could even afford to pay the injection-molding setup costs required. Indeed, it was frustration with this manufacturing challenge that famously caused Kristin to challenge me to invent a much-easier-to-publish card game, which is how I was first inspired to invent Fluxx. But that's another story.



Icehouse is a fascinating game and we really got into playing it. We ran annual tournaments, we published a photocopied newsletter (called Hypothermia), and we sold short runs of game sets, in your choice of deluxe, color-stained wood pyramids, or cheap, punch-out-and-fold-together cardstock pyramids. We didn't quit our day jobs.

After years of enthusiastically teaching people to play Icehouse, we finally had to concede that our first game for the system was subtly flawed in fundamental ways and that, intriguing though it was, Icehouse would never become the Next Big Thing. But everybody loved the pyramids... so, what if there were some entirely new game that could be played with the set?

Amazingly, it took us eight years to think of this. But once we had that mental breakthrough, my friends and I quickly started having other ideas for games (and we haven't stopped yet).

HISTORY OF THE PYRAMIDS

My first intentionally designed pyramid game was Martian Chess, which I adapted from Monochrome Chess, a twisted version of chess I had recently come up with, which was played with a chess set consisting of pieces that are all the same color. I used the name Martian Chess because Mars was already baked into the pyramids.



The Mars connection goes back to the beginning. Technically, it was the second story I wrote with characters playing Icehouse that triggered the creation of the real game, and that story was called "The Children of Mars." In 1988 I mailed that story out to a few dozen friends as a series of five postcards. (Again, no internet.) This caused renewed interest in making real my imaginary game, and that's when things really started to happen.

But that was also when I first advanced the idea that Icehouse was a relic of the long-dead Martian civilization, which we knew about via race memories carried in the subconsciousnesses of the descendants of survivors of that ancient civilization, who'd fled their dying planet to live among humans eons ago. (You could identify people of Martian lineage by their red hair.) By 1991, I'd combined both of the original Icehouse stories, and others I'd been working on, into my first novel, called *The Empty City*.



The "100,000 year-old game from Mars" was a marketing angle we often talked about, back in our earliest days of starting a game company. So it was only natural to embrace the Martian theme when I designed Martian Chess. I also wrote a new short story to help promote it, called the Martian Archeological Society, about a secret society you could only join by winning a game of Martian Chess against standing members of the group.

In 1996, we started selling a little booklet called *More Icehouse Games*, featuring the first five games beyond the original. Other than Martian Chess, they've all been forgotten or superseded, but even if some of them weren't very good, it was incredible to suddenly have so many new games to play with the pyramids!

But none of those early games featured stacking, since hollow pyramids didn't exist until 1999. It seems absurd at this point, given the number of amazing games that depend on stacking, but we used to be actively opposed to the idea of hollow pyramids. We desired the heft of a solid pyramid and feared hollow pieces would feel chintzy. However, once we realized how much more versatile stackable pyramids would be, we once again wondered why it took us so long to see the light.

As we continued to invent new games, we learned other lessons. We gradually realized that the full "stash" size of fifteen pieces is really more than is needed for most games. In 2006 we introduced a scaled-down pyramid game set with just one Trio of each color, called a *Treehouse* set.



This relaunch introduced the first special die for the system and also established the two color schemes were available for many years: the "Rainbow" colors (red, yellow, green, blue, and black) and the "Xeno" colors (purple, orange, light blue, clear, and white).

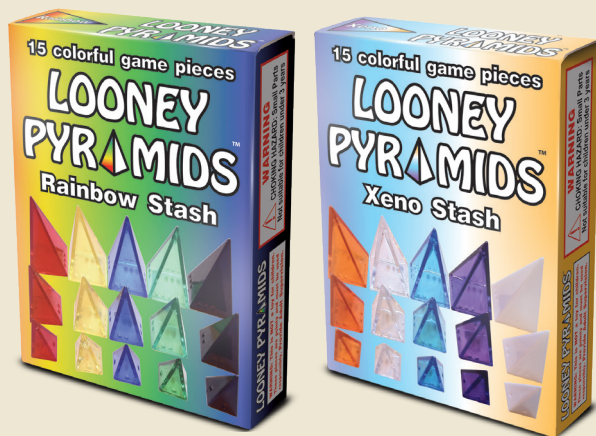
HISTORY OF THE PYRAMIDS

The launch of Treehouse shifted the paradigm again, and opened up our brains to the world of games you could play with a single Trio of each color. But as I kept on inventing new games for the pyramids, I found that the “just right” Goldilocks spot is actually three Trios of each color. Many of the best games in Pyramid Arcade use the 9-piece stash. And yet, the 3-Trio grouping still lacks an accepted name. (For awhile I was championing 3HOUSE as a naming convention, but it was just too weird.)

Terminology has always been tricky. Naming things is never easy, and even when you find the perfect name, getting it to stick can sometimes be a challenge. Awhile ago we switched to the more generic name Looney Pyramids, but even I sometimes forget and call them Icehouse pieces. On the other hand, with Martian Chess I gave each piece a formal name — the Pawn, the Drone, and the Queen — but those names never stuck. It’s just more natural to call them Smalls, Mediums, and Larges.

As the system continued to develop, we needed to invent other equipment to be used along with the pyramids. The original vision, of a game played ONLY with pyramids, is difficult to achieve. Most pyramid games require other equipment, such as gameboards, cards, tokens, and most importantly, dice. One of the big ways in which the pyramids are unlike playing cards are that the latter are better at hiding and randomizing information, so dice are often used to add a luck factor to pyramid games. All of the special dice we’ve created over the years are included with this set.

As the library of games I’d invented for the pyramids grew, I found that the most optimal set for my needs included three-trios in the full range of Rainbow and Xeno colors, along with all the other stuff required for all

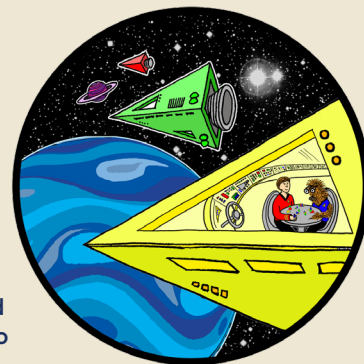


my favorite games. And as that ideal set emerged, I even found that games which traditionally called for fifteen pieces per color, such as Ice Towers and Volcano, could be adapted to work with 9-piece stashes. On the other hand, some games just can’t be down-scaled, including rather sadly, the game that started it all, Icehouse.



I’ve been continually inspired and re-inspired by these pyramids. Sometimes it feels more like I’m discovering, not designing, these new ways to play games. I like to let a new game go where the rules want to take me, and some of these games have seemed almost to invent themselves, popping almost fully formed into my brain. Over the years, we’ve refined and re-invented many games, creating some of the best in the process:

- Zark City was inspired by Gnostica, which was itself a redesigned version of Zarcana, one of the first games after Icehouse and the biggest hit of the post-Icehouse phase.
- Homeworlds evolved from an earlier game John created called Ice Traders.
- Ice Towers was designed as a fresh interpretation of the original imaginary game, incorporating all the lessons learned from years of trying to teach people to play Icehouse.



HISTORY OF THE PYRAMIDS

As a game's designer revisits a set of rules and starts tinkering with it, the game sometimes changes into something different enough to need a name of its own. And sometimes the new game ends up just replacing the existing game. The rules to Volcano presented in this set are, technically, a variation known as Fiesta Caldera.

The most recent format we'd been selling the pyramids in, prior to this boxed set, was a series of cute little pyramid-shaped zippered bags, each featuring a headliner game: Ice Dice, Treehouse, and Hijinks, which we called Pink Hijinks, since it featured special pink pyramids. (We plan to keep Pink Hijinks in print, while the other two are going into the Vault.)



There have been many other important helpers along the way, from Chort Montrie, who made the first plastic Icehouse pyramids as a gift to inspire me to design the game I'd imagined, and Charles Dickson, who engineered the first hand-poured pyramid making system we used, to all the game designers who've come up with their own games for our pyramids, some of whom are now close friends of mine, including Kory Heath, Jacob Davenport, Dave Chalker, Keith Baker, Kristin Matherly, Zarf Plotkin, and others too numerous to list. It blows my mind how many pyramid games have been invented now — approaching 500 at last count, judging by the pages at the fan-run online database at IcehouseGames.org.

I also want to thank all of the playtesters who've suffered through in-progress versions of these games over the course of the past 20+ years, including Josh Drobina, Davy Kramer-Smyth, Wil Allyn, Shel West, Tom Eigelsbach, Robin Vinopal, Russell Grieshop, Ryan Hackel, Greykell Dutton, and so many others, but most importantly of course, my lovely wife Kristin.

Thanks to everyone who supports Looney Labs in every way, and to everyone who's helped fund or otherwise support our efforts, recently or long-past. Thanks to all fans of the pyramids everywhere, whatever game they discovered first or like best. This set wouldn't be possible without so many others, and I thank them all for helping make what we're doing possible.

A few other thanks in order. Big thanks to Eileen Tjan, and her associates at OTHER Studio, Abe and Rosa, who created all the packaging designs, logos, final gameboard illustrations, and so on which make this boxed set so beautiful. Amber Cook also deserves a shout-out for connecting us with Other and otherwise helping shape our marketing direction.

Going further back, I'd like to thank Randy & Tim, formerly of KLON corporation, who were the first to make injection-molded pyramids for us, and whose input influenced certain aspects of the final design, including the tear-drop shape of the pips. Thanks to Dawn Robyn Petrlik for painting Martian landscapes for us along with the cover of The Empty City. Finally, after years of struggling with what to call this set, it was Laurie Menke who suggested the perfect name, Pyramid Arcade. (Like so many parts of this story, it seems so obvious now, why didn't anyone think of it sooner?) Laurie also had a lot of great proof-reading advice for me as I wrote this book, as did Kristin, Alison Frane, Jeff Wolfe, Jacob Davenport, Leila Zucker, Sarah Boyle and many others.

Plus we couldn't do any of this without the help we get from the incredible group of employees we have working for us at Looney Labs!



With more than two decades of history behind this box, there are other stories I haven't told here yet and other people I'm probably forgetting to acknowledge, such as financial backers and legions of play-testers too numerous to list... but I sincerely appreciate everyone's help during the last two decades. Thanks for helping me create this beautiful dream.

— Andrew Looney, April 2016

