



ICE TOWERS



2-6



FAST



MEDIUM

EQUIPMENT

- Three Trios of one color per player (if you have more pyramids, you can add them for a longer game)



OVERVIEW

Ice Towers is a fast-paced game of pyramid stacking, played without turns on any flat surface. If yours is the top piece on a tower at the end of the game, you control that tower, and you get points for each piece it contains. As the towers grow taller, you can sometimes take your pieces out and replay them, or even split some towers in two. The game ends when no more plays will be made.

GOAL

Score the most points by capping the most valuable towers.

SETUP

Everyone's pyramids are gathered together, then randomly scattered across the tabletop. Stand all pieces upright in place.

READY SIGNAL

As soon as all players show they are ready to start, by touching (but not lifting) one of their pyramids, the game officially begins.

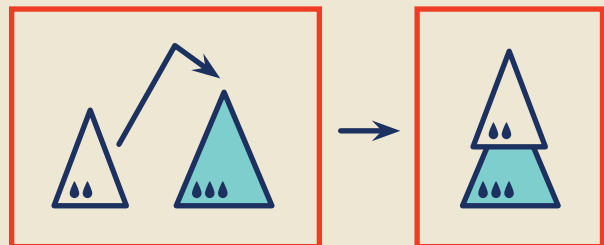
NO TURNS

In Ice Towers, everyone plays at the same time. You may take any legal action at any time you choose. You can take several actions in quick succession or do nothing for awhile as other players continue making moves at their own pace. Things usually happen quickly at the start of the game, then slow down as the options melt away. Sometimes it will be a race to see who manages to take a particularly crucial action first.

HOW TO PLAY

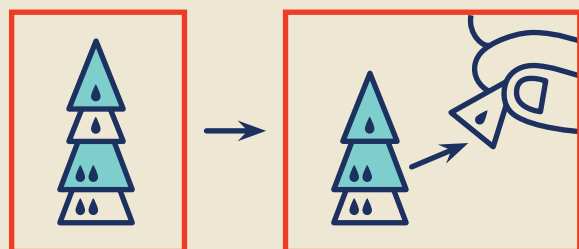
There are three possible actions: Capping, Mining, and Splitting. You may only perform one action at a time.

CAPPING



- Capping: Stacking one of your pieces on someone else's to take control of it is the most common action. You may only pick up and move single free-standing pieces of your own color. In order to cap, your piece must be the same size or smaller and a different color than the topmost piece in the tower you are capping.

MINING

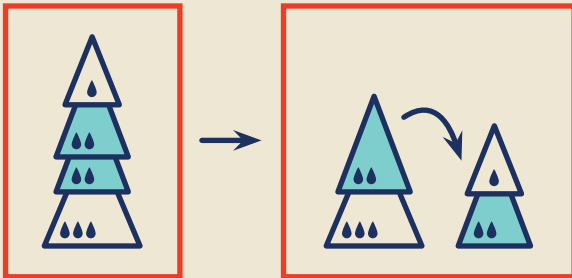


- Mining: If you don't control a tower (i.e. you don't have the top piece), but two or more of your pieces are inside the tower, you may open up the stack and remove one of your pieces (your choice). Reassemble the rest of the tower and continue playing (but see the rules below about Minebacks and Carry-Overs).

ICE TOWERS (CONT.)



SPLITTING



- **Splitting:** Whenever two pieces of any other player's color are next to each other in a tower, you may split the tower in two, by separating the pair of same-colored pyramids. However, you cannot split your own pieces. Splitting is optional. Some towers may remain unsplit at the end of the game, typically when a splittable pair is at the top of a tower.

NO MINE BACKS

When you mine out a piece, you must immediately use it to cap a different tower. If there are no legal plays available, just set the piece down; it becomes a free-stander.

NO CARRY-OVERS

When you mine out a piece, you must re-assemble the tower before doing anything else. It might seem OK to carry the upper half of a tower away briefly as you carry out the mandatory replay, since you'd soon be back with the upper stage after replaying the piece you are mining, but in a game without turns, "soon" isn't fast enough. Resist the urge to "carry over," and fully reassemble the tower you've mined before recapping.

POST-MINING ETIQUETTE

It's fine to take a moment after mining to consider your options, but you aren't allowed to stall. You can't just hold onto that piece, waiting for a good spot to open up; if you take too long, others may insist that you play a mined piece before they take their next actions.

ENDING THE GAME

The game ends when all players agree that no more plays will be made. Often this will happen automatically, when no more moves are possible, but generally the players will need to agree that the game is over, since not all splitting opportunities will be used.

COUNTING SCORES

When adding up the scores, feel free to dismantle and re-stack the towers you captured. We find that it's fastest if you stack the pieces back up into 10-point towers. (Just make sure everyone has the correct towers first!) Anything over 18 is a good score.

HOW TO WIN

When no more plays will be made, everyone counts the number of points in the towers they controls. Each Small scores one point, each Medium two points, and each Large three points. Highest score wins!

OTHER NOTES

REMINDERS AND CLARIFICATIONS

- When capping, no piece can be fully hidden (no larger pieces on top of smaller pieces).
- You can't cap a tower if your piece is already on top.
- You can only mine if your color is NOT on top, and you have at least TWO pieces in the tower.
- When mining, you can remove ANY ONE of your pieces, but you MUST replay the piece elsewhere.
- You cannot split your own color; only others can.
- Splitting is NOT mandatory. The game can end with many splitting options untaken.
- You DON'T have to be on top of a tower in order to split it. There just has to be a different color than yours at the split-point.
- If you have free standers when the game ends, they're not worthless – they're just short towers.
- If you have a piece in your hand, you CANNOT split a tower! You must first do something with the piece you are holding!
- It is NOT necessary to finish all capping before starting to mine.
- You can play your pieces in ANY order.
- You get points for ALL of the pieces in the towers you capture.



ICE TOWERS (CONT.)

FINAL PIECE SHOWDOWN

If two players with no other moves left each end up with an unplayed piece in their hands, with nowhere they can be played and neither player wanting to set their piece down because it would just be capped by the other, then both players set their pieces down simultaneously, and the game ends.

TOWER WARS

Players can sometimes get into mine & recapture exchanges that can seem endless, but these usually resolve themselves, often faster than you might think. Keep playing until you can split a tower, or create a new tower by fleeing (see Strategy Tips).

TIMED ENDINGS

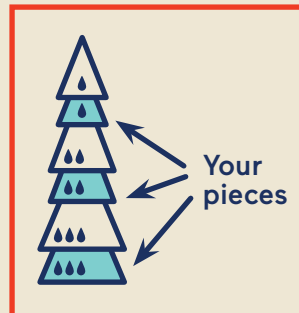
During high-pressure games like tournaments, "analysis paralysis" may cause the game to drag. If necessary, you can add a timer to the game: when it rings, anyone holding a piece must set it down. Towers are scored as they are.

STRATEGY TIPS

- **Start Big:** The most powerful pieces are the smalls, which can cap anything, so save them until the end. Play your Larges first, then play your Mediums.
- **Invest in the Future:** Set up mining opportunities by getting at least two pieces into every tower you join.
- **Limit Your Opponents' Options:** Think through the mining opportunities you'll create for others when you cap a tower. Look for towers where the top piece is the only one of its color, and try not to cap towers that will allow someone else to mine multiple pieces.
- **Mine to Create Splits:** Splitting a tower can often stop your opponent cold, so look for chances to remove a piece that will create a splitting situation.
- **Mine to Prevent Splits:** Look for situations where a split of pieces you own might occur. Unless such a split would be good for you (which is rare), then hurry, mine out a piece before someone splits you!
- **Think Before You Split:** Make sure it's best for YOU before you choose to split a tower. (Just because you can doesn't mean you should.) Be cautious about splitting off singleton pieces, since you'll just give control of that piece back to its owner. Why give the enemy a free play?

- **Diplomatic Splitting:** Splitting off a singleton can be a great maneuver if you make a deal with someone else to do the same thing to your piece elsewhere. Making a deal can be as easy as saying "I'll split you here if you split me there, OK?"
- **Look Before You Mine:** The No Minebacks rule says you must cap a different tower after mining, and you need to do so without too much delay. So, figure out your plan BEFORE you get that piece into your hand.
- **Fleeing:** When you mine out a medium or large piece, you may find that no towers are available for you to cap it with, since most towers will be topped by small pieces as the game draws to an end. If so, you must re-play the piece by just setting it down. Doing this deliberately (i.e. mining out a large when you know it can't cap anything) is called "fleeing" (or "running away") and is often a good move.
- **The Triple-Cap Split:** Two of your pieces in one tower is good, but three is better. (This is particularly true in a two-player game, where this trick becomes a trap you can set for your opponent.) After you get capped, mine twice to leave your opponent with three pieces stacked up together at the top of the tower. You can then split the tower, creating a big tower (ripe for capture) and a small tower (which you can ignore).

THE TRIPLE CAP SPLIT TRAP



ICE TOWERS (CONT.)



HAUNTED ICE TOWERS

Ice Towers is better when played with more than two, so to increase the complexity and excitement of a two player game, we suggest summoning up a ghost player. Since ghosts have no physical form, such players can only move their pieces by mentally commanding the other players to carry out their moves for them. The ghost can even win!

SPECIAL RULES FOR THE GHOST

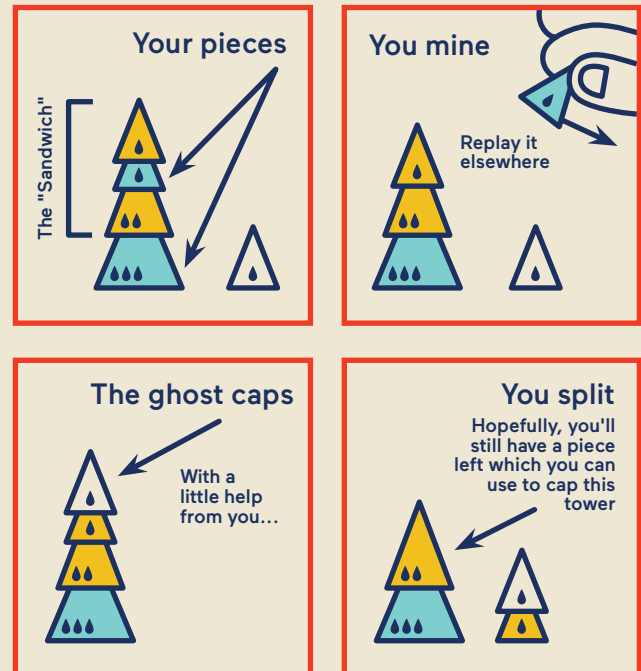
Begin by naming your imaginary friend and selecting a color for the ghost to use. (The ghost can be any color, but white or clear are the obvious best choices.) During the game, either player may move for the ghost at any time, with the following restrictions:

- The ghost never caps a free-standing piece.
- The ghost never splits a tower.

HAUNTED STRATEGIES

If there's a ghost in the game, look for a spot where there's a "sandwich" (with your piece as the "filling") at the top of a tower. Make sure the ghost still has a small available, then mine out your piece, creating an empty sandwich. Replay that piece as fast as you can, then cap the empty sandwich with a ghostly Small. You can then immediately split the tower – without even letting go of the piece! This leaves the bottom of the tower ready for recapping while squandering one of your enemy's strongest pieces. The counter to the Empty Sandwich is as follows: After your opponent mines out the sandwich "filling" and is busy replaying it, cap for the ghost yourself and immediately mine out one of the "bread" pieces.

THE EMPTY SANDWICH



OTHER NOTES

HISTORICAL NOTES

Ice Towers is my own version of Icehouse, the imaginary game I described in the short story that spawned this whole system. Although the actual game known as Icehouse was based on my ideas, it's really a John Cooper game. I revisited my original concepts with this game, which I designed after many years of playing John's game, and learning to design games myself. Ice Towers fixes (or designs around) many of Icehouse's imperfections and in some ways is more like the game I originally envisioned than Icehouse itself. Ice Towers was the first game invented for stackable pyramids, and was designed before we had any such pyramids in hand, but had started to get them made. Ice Towers is protected by US patent #6,352,262.

