The Icehouse Handbook Online

ICEHOUSE RULES

EQUIPMENT AND SETUP

The game can be played with two or more players, with virtually no upper limit. However, with only two players the game is not as challenging, and with five or more, it can get pretty confusing. Four players is considered optimum.

Each player gets 15 square-based pyramids, all of one color. The pyramids come in three distinct sizes: small, medium, and large. In addition to the pyramids, each player must also have a "stash pad" on which to store his pyramids. They are called stash pads since each player's supply of unplayed pieces is called his "stash." This pad must be large enough to comfortably hold all of your pyramids.

There's nothing magic about what you use for stash pads. You can use almost anything as a stash pad, as long as it separates your unplayed pieces from the pieces that have been played. Therefore, if you're playing in a restaurant, you can use napkins as your stash pads. If you're playing on the beach, you can just draw a square in the sand with your finger. The thing about Icehouse is that it can be played almost anywhere, from the floor of a subway station platform to the lunch counter of a diner. The only requirements for a playing surface are that it be flat and free of clutter, and that each player can reach across it conveniently. A small area is considered best. If, however, play occurs on a large surface without distinct natural borders, like a floor, legal plays can technically be made at any point upon that field.

To setup the game, each player sets down his stash pad and sets his 15 pyramids out onto it. The exact location of the stash pad is unimportant, it can be put anywhere on the playing field. Once placed, the stash pad is not moved for the duration of the game.

STARTING THE GAME

To begin playing the game, each player signifies that he or she is ready to start by placing a finger upon one of the pieces on their stash pad. As soon as all players are touching (but not lifting) a piece on their pad, play can begin. Note that the player is not required to use the piece he or she touched as the first piece played; this is merely a universal signal for being ready to start playing. Remember also that the game runs in real time - each player can play at any time they choose. This means you can play all of your pieces in the first 30 seconds of the game, or that you can wait 10 minutes before playing any pieces at all.

DEFENDING VS. ATTACKING PIECES

A pyramid can be played in either of two ways: standing upright or lying on its side. Standing pyramids are "defending," while pyramids that are lying down are "attacking." Defensive pyramids can be placed anywhere upon the playing field. Attacking pyramids, however, can only be placed such that they are pointing at a defensive piece of a different color. Attacking pyramids cannot attack other attacking pyramids. Once a pyramid is placed on the playing field, it cannot be moved or removed except under special circumstances (which will be covered later).

The size of the pyramids is important, both for strategy during the game and for scoring at game's end. The small sized pyramids have a value of 1, the medium pieces have a value of 2, and the large pyramids have a value of 3.

The object of the game is to neutralize as many of your opponents' defensive pyramids as possible, via attack, while keeping as many of your own defensive pyramids free from attack as you can. The game starts with all pieces held in storage on their stash pads. During the game, players select pieces from their stashes and place them out in the playing field, in either the Defending position or the Attacking position. The game continues until all of the pyramids in the game have been played. At the end of the game, players only get points for their pyramids that are either successfully attacking or successfully defending. The player with the highest score wins.

SUCCESSFUL ATTACKS

A successful attack is any attack in which the value of the attacking piece(s) exceeds the value of the defending piece being attacked. Several attack pieces, even attack pieces belonging to different players, can work together to successfully attack a single defending piece. When an attack is successful, the defensive piece is said to be "iced." For example, to ice a 2 point pyramid, you need to attack it with at least three points. You could use a single 3 point pyramid, or a 2 pointer and a 1 pointer, or even three 1 point pyramids.

For an attack to be valid, its tip must be pointing directly at the standing piece, and it must be within range. "Pointing directly at the standing piece" means that if you draw a line straight out from the tip of the attack piece, perpendicular to its base, the first

thing the line hits is the defending piece. "Within range" means that the distance between the attack piece and the standing piece must be less that the length of the attack piece. Note that larger pieces have a greater range.

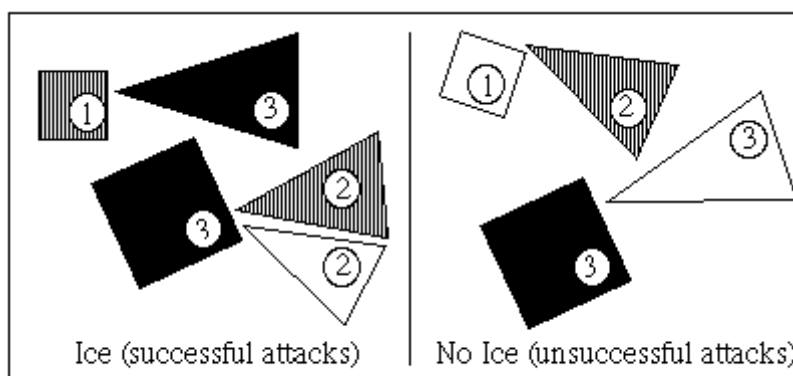A few sample attacks are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: A Few Examples of Ice and No Ice

SUCCESSFUL DEFENSES

Any defending piece that survives attack is a successful defending piece. A defensive piece can succeed because either 1) no one attacked it or 2) the combined attacks against it failed.

FAILED ATTACKS

There are several ways in which an attack can fail. Attacks can fail simply by being poorly played. (For example, if a 2 point attack piece is pointed at a 3 point standing piece, and no other attacks are made on the 3 pointer, then the 2 point attack piece will fail.) Attacks can also start out as successful attacks but then become failed attacks later on, due to placement of subsequent playing pieces. This is an important strategy, and will be dealt with in detail later on. Failed attacks are commonly referred to as "squandered attacks."

FAILED DEFENSES

A failed defending piece is any standing piece that has been iced by one or more successful attacks.

ILLEGAL ATTACKS

When playing Icehouse, you can play pieces in the defending mode at any point in the playing field that you wish. However, you can only play pieces in the attacking mode such that they attack a defensive piece belonging to an opponent. You may NOT play an attack piece such that it is pointing at 1) another attack piece 2) a piece of its same color or 3) nothing at all. Attack pieces played this way must be taken back.

However, it IS possible for an attack piece to be affected by other plays such that it makes an illegal attack. If a valid attack is made, and then other pieces are played such that the original attack piece points at another attack piece, or at a piece of its own color, or even at open space, then that attack piece stays where it is and gets zero points. An example of how a valid attack piece can become squandered in this way is shown in Figure 2. Plays such as this are an important and useful strategy.
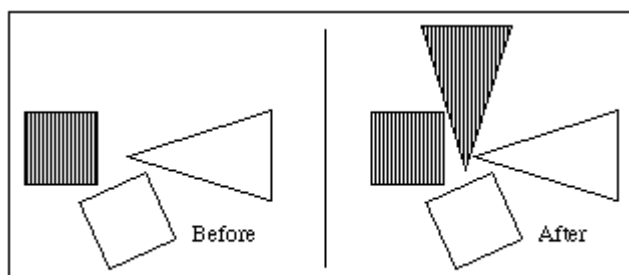

Figure 2: Neutralizing an Attack

NO TWO FISTING

You may never have more than one unplayed piece off of your stash pad at one time. Each play you make must be a single, discrete action, i.e. no two fisted playing. You cannot be placing one piece down with one hand while grabbing at the next with the other hand.

Note, however, that this does not compel you to use only one hand during the course of a game. You can use two hands to place or remove a piece in a difficult spot. You can also change hands, as long as you do so only by passing a pyramid from one hand to the other. You may not alternate hands in order to play quickly.

MELTING DOWN

The first two pyramids of each color that are placed onto the field MUST be defensive pieces. If any player forgets this rule and plays an attack piece before playing the required two defensive pieces, they must take back all of the attack pieces of their color, put them back on their stash pad, and then play the required number of defensive pieces. Play does not suspend while they are doing this. This mistake is called a "meltdown."

SCORING

When all of the stash pads are cleared, the game ends. Each player's pyramids are then counted. Each player gets 1, 2, and 3 points for each of his small, medium, and large pyramids, respectively, that are either successfully defending or are successfully icing other pieces. This gives a total possible score for each player of 30; often it is easier to count the points a player lost and subtract this amount from the total possible. In counting the scores, it is easy to make a mistake; the usual etiquette is to go through the colors, counting each player's points as a group, settling any disputes as they arise.

A piece is legally iced even if the attack it suffers is jointly made by more than one player. For example, a red 3 point pyramid may be iced by a blue 2 point pyramid and a green 2 point pyramid. In this case, blue and green each get 2 points. Red. of course, loses 3 points.

The winner is the player with the most points. Sometimes a group will play a match of 5 games, keeping score and totaling the scores at the end.

PUTTING A PLAYER IN THE ICEHOUSE

Philosophically, it is important for each player to maintain some un-iced defensive pieces. Defending pieces are like the civilians back home that the troops are fighting to protect. If all of the civilians are dead or captured, the troops have failed at their job.

Therefore, if a player has no un-iced defenders, they can automatically lose the game. This is called "being put in the icehouse." If this happens, the player loses control of all of his or her unplayed pyramids and gets a score of 0. It can't happen right away, though. There is a grace period during which players can build up their defenses before being vulnerable to this sort of instant death. You can only be put in the icehouse if all of your defensive pyramids have been iced and you have less than eight pieces on your stash pad. This safety limit is called the "stash limit."

If at any point, a player thinks an opponent has no "free standers" (un-iced defensive pieces) and is below the stash limit, the player can call "icehouse." Whenever anyone says "icehouse," play suspends. Any incomplete plays must be retracted. (A play is only complete when you have placed a pyramid on the field and let go of it. If you are still touching it, it isn't considered played and must be returned to the stash pad when someone calls icehouse.)

During an icehouse call, the status of all players is examined. If no one is in the icehouse, then the person who made the call was wrong and pays a [penalty]. The player who made the false call takes any piece from his stash and gives it to any other player. It is treated as a captured piece by whoever receives it. (See "Things You Can Do With Captured Pieces.") There is no need (and no way) to give away a piece if none exist in your stash.

If someone is in fact in the icehouse, that person gives all of the pieces left on their stash pad to the person who called "icehouse." The pieces are transferred to the other player's stash pad, leaving the person in the icehouse with an empty stash pad.

The person in the icehouse is not completely out of the action. He or she can still watch the board, and if any of their pieces get over-iced, they can make captures and play those captured pieces (see "Over-Icing"). Also, they can make icehouse calls, and can use any pieces they receive as a result.

Play resumes as soon as the results of the Icehouse call are determined. Players not involved in handing over victory spoils or penalty pieces can resume playing whenever they wish.

If you have no free standers and are under the stash limit, and you call "icehouse," then you yourself get put in the icehouse. Your score will be zero. However, you don't give away your pieces. You get to keep your pieces and continue playing, and even though your plays won't count towards your score, at least no one will have a vast number of prisoners. This gives a person who knows he is vulnerable to an Icehouse call a tough choice. He can just hope that no one notices it or he can call "icehouse" on himself.

Occasionally, two people will call "icehouse" at the same time. In this case, the players (or other observers) who did not call Icehouse must decide who called it first. They are expected to be as impartial as possible in making this judgement.

When scoring, a player who was put in the icehouse gets 0. However, other players still get points for attacking the pieces belonging to the player who was put in the icehouse.

ICE FORTRESSES

Since a failure to keep defensive pieces un-iced can net you an instant defeat, there must be some strategy for protecting defensive pieces from attack. You can do this by building an ice fortress. An ice fortress is any structure of pieces that builds unbreachable walls around defensive pieces. Both attack pieces and defensive pieces, belonging either to you or to your opponents, can be used as ice fortress walls. (See Figure 3.) Natural boundaries, such as the edge of the table, can also serve as ice fortress walls.
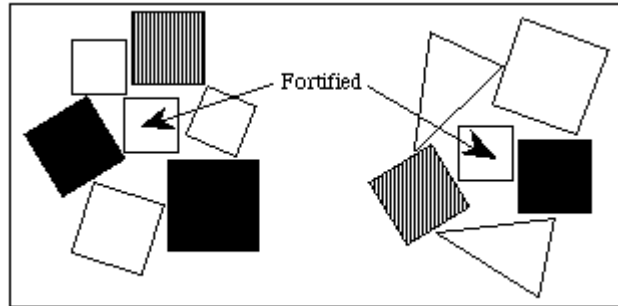

Figure 3: Ice Fortresses

Attack pieces only ice the piece they point directly at. Therefore, any piece that is entirely surrounded by other pieces is safe from attack. However, if the pieces forming the fortress walls aren't right next to each other, it may be possible for an opponent to point an attack piece at the piece inside of the fortress instead of the pieces forming the fortress walls. Therefore, when building a fortress, beware of gaps. If your fortress has no gaps, you'll be safe, because attack pieces only attack the front most object in their path.

OVER-ICING

In order to ice a pyramid, you need to attack it with at least 1 point over its own value. It is legal to use more force than is required, but this is not necessarily wise. If you use so much force in icing a piece that any single attack piece is redundant, you have "over-iced" the piece. For example, if you are attacking a 2 point pyramid, and you use two 3 point pyramids, you have over-iced the opponent, because one of those 3 point pyramids could be removed from the structure, and the 2 point pyramid would remain iced.

What does this mean? It means that the person whose piece has been over-iced can remove one of the redundant attack pieces (in this case one of the 3 point pyramids) and place it on his stash pad for later use. He can remove any of the attack pieces he wishes, as long as the defensive piece remains iced. He can do this at any time he wants, not necessarily when he first notices it. It is, however, considered good form to say something like "my piece is over-iced" just before capturing a piece.

The game ends as soon as the last piece is played. Any over-ice situations that are noticed after the last play, or even created by the last play, do not count.

Over-icing may seem like an unlikely occurrence at first, but it frequently happens, especially in games with more than two players. A player can easily attack an opponent's piece without realizing that he or she is not the only one doing so. More importantly, over-icing can also be intentional. Strategically, over-icing is the key to the entire game.

CRACKING AN ICE FORTRESS

If your opponent has a fortress in which one or more of the walls are made by attacking pieces, it may be possible to remove one of.the walls of his fortress via over-icing. Suppose the fortress wall is formed by an attack piece which is icing a piece that belongs to you. If you can convince a third player to over-ice your piece, you can then capture the attack piece that was forming the wall. Your ally can quickly slide an attack piece into the busted fortress. (See Figure 4.)
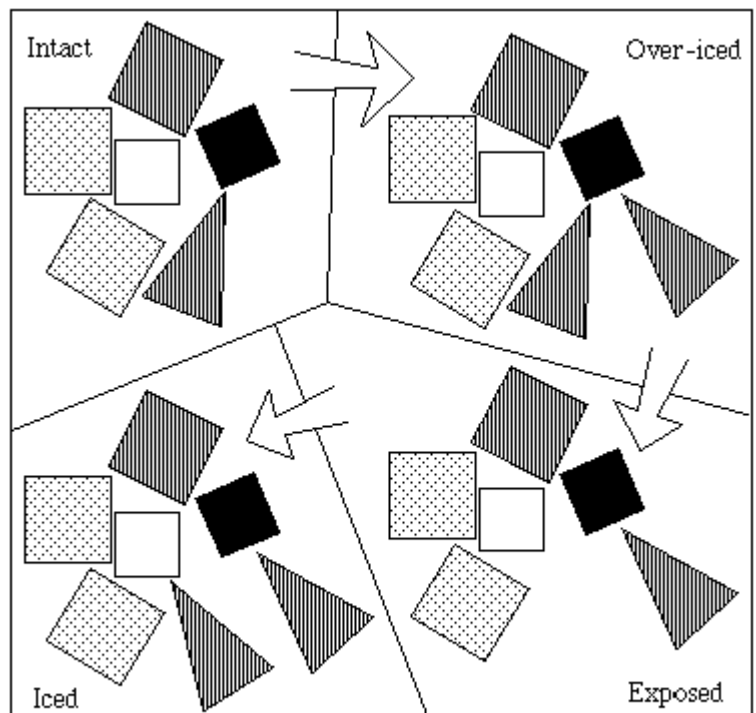

Figure 4: Using Over-Icing to Crack an Ice Fortress

If this was your opponent's only fortress and he's below the stash limit, the word "icehouse" will be on the tip of everyone's tongue. Intentional over-icing can be a key action used during player diplomacy.

4

THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH PRISONERS

In addition to the sheer joy of depriving another player of his pieces, captured pieces can be very useful. The most obvious thing to do with a captured piece is to place it out in an open, undefended area of the playing field and then ice it immediately thereafter. This is called "executing a prisoner."

If you have a large number of captured pieces, often the result of a successful icehouse call, you can use these captured pieces as the walls of your own ice fortress. This is called "using slave labor." When playing these slaves in the defensive position, you can also execute them as soon as your fortress is built. (Though your opponents will probably try to beat you to this.)

Best of all, you can use prisoners to over-ice your own defensive pieces, and thereby perform maneuvers such as cracking a fortress without calling upon the help of an ally. See the section in the strategies chapter entitled "Restructuring an Attack" for more details.

Because the captured piece belongs to an opponent, you should be thinking of ways to keep the captured piece from being worth points for your opponent at the end of the game (unless of course the piece belongs to someone in the icehouse). Executing prisoners is obviously one way of doing this; however, in the last stages of the game you may not have enough of your own pyramids to achieve this. One solution to this problem is to squander the value of the captured piece by having it attack another pyramid without enough strength to ice it. Thus, as a final move, you could squander a captured 2 point piece by using it to attack your own free standing 3 point piece.

Captured pieces DO count towards your stash limit.

CRASHES

Frequently it is the case that a player wishes to squeeze a piece into a place where it won't easily fit. Sometimes the player will manage to do this without jarring any of the pieces already in place, and sometimes he won't. If a player moves any of the pieces on the board while attempting to play a piece, it is called a "crash."

This is bad. The object of the game is to build a complex strategic structure which can be scored at game's end. Accidental changes to the setup will not only affect the final score but may also alter the current strategic situation. A player who crashes the setup must therefore pay a penalty. He must give away the piece he was trying to play, to the opponent of his choice. Also, the pieces that were jarred should be put back the way they were (subject to agreement by all concerned players).

If a crash is so disastrous as to make recovery impossible, the players have the option to beat the tar out of the player who crashed the game. (This is particularly true in the case of a player who keeps losing and turns over the table in a fit of frustration.)

THE TIMER

While seemingly just a board game, Icehouse is also rather like a sport. The physical elements of the game (a steady hand, good coordination, etc) reward more skillful and adept players, and just as sports are often bounded by a clock, so too is Icehouse. To prevent a slow player from attempting to wait until all others have played before getting involved, the game will have a definite (though unknowable) ending point, after which unplayed pieces will be worthless.

Before starting, all players must agree upon when the game shall end. The timer can be an actual timer, set to ring after a certain length of time (10 minutes is the standard used in [tournaments](#)). The timer can also be the next occurrence of an arbitrary event, such as the arrival of a waitress, train, or phone call. Whatever method of marking the time is used, the clock must be invisible to the players. When the timer goes off, immediately stop the game. Recall to the stash pads any pieces that were being played when the timer sounded. Any pyramids left on stash pads don't count towards your score.

A FEW FINAL REMINDERS

You can place a defensive piece anywhere; however, you cannot place an attack piece such that it is pointing at: 1) another attack piece, 2) a piece of the same color, or 3) open space.

The only player who may capture over-icing attack pieces is the player who owns the defending piece under attack.

There are only three cases in which a piece that has been played can be moved. They are: 1) capturing pieces used in over-icing, 2) re-placement of pieces after a crash, and 3) removal of attack pieces after a meltdown.

The stash limit is 8. If you have less than 8 pieces left, and no free defenders in play, you are vulnerable to an Icehouse call.

Your first two pieces must be played standing up.

ICEHOUSE RULES OVERVIEW

- First, players put all of their pieces into storage areas called stash pads.

- The game starts when everyone indicates (by touching one of their pieces) that they are ready to begin.

- During the game, players move their pieces from their stash pads into the playing field, playing them either defensively (standing upright) or offensively (lying down and pointing at a defender).

- Players may play at any time, without taking turns.

- Large pyramids are worth 3 points, medium sized pyramids are worth 2, and small pyramids are worth 1 point.

- Attacking pieces can either succeed or fail. For an attack to successfully "Ice" a defender, the combined value of the attacking pieces pointing at a defending piece must exceed the value of the targeted defender.

- To succeed, an attacking piece must point in an unobstructed fashion at a defending piece, from no further away than its own length.

- Players are not allowed to position attack pieces such that they point at other attack pieces or at their own color defending pieces. However, it is legal for this type of situation to occur if the sequence of play is reversed.

- The game ends when all pieces have been played. At the end of the game, points are awarded for all successfully attacking pieces and for all defending pieces that survived attack. The player with the highest score wins.

- Players may not use both hands at once, nor use alternating hands, in order to play more rapidly.

- The first two pyramids of each color must be played defensively. Failure to do this is called a Meltdown, and is penalized.

- All players should attempt to keep at least one defender free from successful attack at all times. If a player has less than 8 pieces on his stash pad, and all of his defenders are iced, he can be put "in the icehouse." This happens when somebody calls "icehouse." A player in the icehouse gets a score of zero, and loses control of his unplayed pieces to the person who made the call. Icehouse calls made in error are penalized.

- If an excessive number of attack pieces are brought to bear on a single defending piece (a condition called over-icing), the owner of the defending piece can capture the redundant attack pieces, so long as the defending piece remains iced.

- Once played, pieces cannot be moved except under specific circumstances. Care must be taken to avoid accidentally shifting the locations of pieces that have been played. Such an accident is called a crash, and is penalized.

- Players can gain control of opponent pieces, via over-icing or penalties. These "prisoner" pieces can be played in whatever way the controlling player chooses. The player looses control of the piece when they play it. The original owner always retains the point value.

- The game will have a fixed end point, usually indicated by the sounding of a hidden timer, after which all unplayed pieces will be of no value.

ICEHOUSE MYSTIQUE

MYSTIQUE?

As you hopefully have realized from playing Icehouse and reading Andrew Looney's novel, *The Empty City*, there is more to Icehouse than learning the rules and trying to win. There is the mystique: the way to play, the set of attitudes and ideas involved. The mystique of a board game is not a new idea. It is what gives a game personality and keeps people interested; it's what keeps a game from fading into obscurity. Go, a 5,000 year old board game from China, has mystique. That's why it's still played today. Chess has mystique. Even Checkers does, although it's quite different from Go or Chess. Go is to ancient Chinese territorial disputes as Chess is to medieval positional warfare as Checkers is to... Snuffy Smith. This section lays the groundwork for the ever-growing mystique behind the game of Icehouse.

ETIQUETTE: THE NOTION OF "COOL"

A good Icehouse player not only uses clever strategies and diplomacy, but is also skilled at the art of being "cool." "Cool" is a playing style only achieved by those who realize that the rules of etiquette in Icehouse are just as important as the technical rules of play. Playing in a cool way mostly means to keep the game going; limit arguments and strategies that make the game less enjoyable. This does not mean that a cool player is wimpy, or mellow to the point of being boring. It means that no matter what kind of player he is (from nice diplomat to evil executioner) he plays with a style that will make others enjoy playing with him, even if he wins a lot.

Below is a list of cool and uncool methods of play. This is by no means a complete list, but it should give you an idea of accepted Icehouse conduct. Also, remember that just because one tactic is cool does not necessarily mean that its opposite is uncool.

COOL

Cool Diplomacy - Trying to achieve difficult diplomatic maneuvers (like breaking an ice fortress with another player, making allies, etc.) with a minimum of talk. Hand signals, facial expressions, and cryptic messages such as "Enact Plan A!", followed by movement of pyramids make the game more enjoyable by creating an air of tension and secrecy.

Cool Crash - Giving your piece to another player after you have crashed, before (or without) being told. It is the cool Icehouse player who casually admits failure, hands it over, and continues the game. The other players will remember your coolness.

The Sneak Attack - Waiting until a player leaves the table (to get a drink, or go to the bathroom, for instance) allowing you to create or break ice fortresses, ice his pieces, and/or put him in the icehouse. No, this is not in the wrong column. The sneak attack is cool. Ice-cool. So is saying "Hey! Look over there!" and placing pieces.
The Long Meltdown - Pointing out a player's meltdown well after you have recognized its existence, but before he has placed standing pieces. This means that the player who has created the meltdown must remove all of his attack pieces, giving you lots of time, space, and opportunity to really mess up the rest of his game. This is not a cool move if done to a beginning player who barely knows what a meltdown is.

Conversation - Unlike chess, Icehouse is not necessarily a quiet game, even during the most formal matches. Discussing trivial, non-Icehouse related topics during a game (such as whether your Braunschweiger sandwich tastes like cat food) is more pleasant than discussing the game itself, and has an added bonus of distracting opponents. Of course, keeping quiet is sometimes a better strategy, and is just as cool.

Instruction - When new players question a strategy or action during a game, stop whatever you are doing and educate the players. It is also cool to inform someone he's about to be put in the icehouse (provided he is a beginning player).

UNCOOL

Uncool Diplomacy - Having tedious arguments and long conversations over something like whether or not a piece should be over-iced in order to break an ice fortress. This not only can slow the game down, it can also display tactics or options that you might rather keep secret.
Uncool Crash - It is very tempting (and of course, uncool) to continue playing after crashing, hoping that no one has seen your mistake. It is also uncool to announce loudly that an opponent has crashed, especially when it is a small crash that doesn't disturb anything (some call this a "near-crash" or a "jiggle").

Quitting - Quitting a game is fine, so long as you transfer all your pieces that are on your stash to the playing field (technically this is not "quitting," it's "playing quickly"). Quitting during a five game match unless you have a very good reason is considered uncool.

Uncool Conversation - Arguing for a long time over whether a piece is iced (or squandered). If you must argue, save it for the end of the game when players are counting their scores.

Intentional "Bad Play" - This includes: crashing on purpose, calling icehouse without believing someone is in the icehouse, creating an intentional meltdown, and deliberately placing your own attack piece so that it is squandered. At times it may be very

strategic to "accidentally" make a bad play. It is not against the rules to do this, and it can be faked well enough that no one will notice the "mistake" was done on purpose. However, it is contrary to the spirit of Icehouse, and extremely uncool. Anyone who plays this way should be maimed - I mean should play some other game, instead.

Obstructing Placement - Blocking an area by covering it with your hand, thereby keeping other players from placing or removing pyramids. It is okay to take back a piece that you are placing, as long as you are still touching it. However, holding a piece over a certain area just to keep others from playing there is uncool. And anyone who is reading this should not have to be told that pushing another player's hand out of the way is moronic.

ICEHOUSE QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Below are some of the problems that many Icehouse players (both novice and advanced) come up against. The rules handle most of these situations, but you might have to dig and interpolate a bit for the solution. Some questions are included because they are frequently asked; others are here because they present such interesting situations, or have peculiar answers.

Q: When I capture a piece, may I play it immediately (without putting it on my stash pad first)?

A: Yes, the piece can be played immediately, even turned in place. But once you let go of it you may not touch it again, unless it still over-ices one of your own pieces.

Q: Can I point my attack piece at an attack piece? How about at its own color standing piece?

A: Not on purpose; not even if the piece you are placing is a captured enemy. If you did this by accident, your attack piece would have to stay where it is -- squandered. It is, however, quite all right to do this in a backward way; that is, block an attack piece by putting an attack piece (or a standing piece of the same color) in its line of attack. (See Figure 11.)
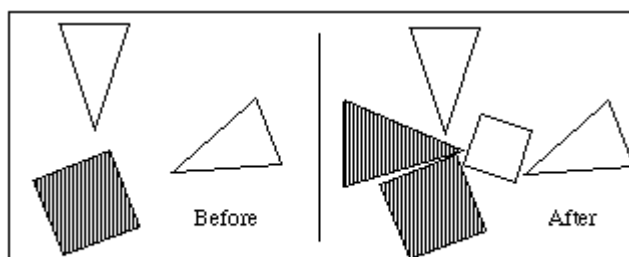

Figure 11: Squandering an attack with a captured 1-point piece, then blocking another attack with an attack piece.

Q: If a player accidentally places his first several pieces in the attack position and no one calls "meltdown" until after the player has corrected it by placing two standing pieces, does a meltdown situation exist? Does the player have to return all of his attack pieces to his stash?

A: Technically, the meltdown is no longer valid after the two required standing pieces are on the field. However, if a player recognizes that he has not placed his two standing pieces, and no one has yet called "meltdown", he should not place standing pieces to compensate. The cool Icehouse player will call for a meltdown on himself, and return his attack pieces to his stash pad.

Q: Suppose I set out a defending piece but I don't let go of it, you know, I've got my finger on it and I'm trying to decide if I really want to play it where I've got it. What happens if someone sets out an attack piece and lets go of it while I'm still holding onto my defender? Can I take my defender back and leave his attack piece sitting out there, attacking nothing?

A: Yes, you can. If your opponent is dumb enough to let go of his piece while you've still got your finger on yours, he deserves what he gets. The attack piece is squandered, and stays where it is. Unless someone puts a defender in front of it, he'll get zero points for that piece.

Q: Could you please clarify the difference between a "Crash" and a "Jiggle?" My friend says that anything that moves the pieces is a crash, and he's always yelling crash for even the tiniest of changes, but I say it isn't a crash unless you really mess up. What do

you say? Also, what do you do if you crash when you are attempting to remove a piece, like when you're capturing a prisoner? How about if you crash when you aren't doing anything with a piece at all, like if your elbow accidentally bumps something?

A: Let's think about the reasons behind the crash rule. The placement of pieces upon the playing field is not supposed to change during the game. If something disrupts the arrangement, you must pay a penalty.

Ok, so a "Crash" is a play that actually changes the arrangement of pieces on the field. You might do this if you are trying to squeeze a piece into a tight spot and the pieces around the spot move out slightly, enlarging the area, or you could bump a piece and it make it move to another position. If things really do change, you should give up the piece as a penalty.

A "Jiggle," however, is a crash that doesn't really change anything. If you bump a piece and it tips up but then falls back to the exact same position, then nothing has really changed and no penalty is needed. Here's another way of thinking about it: when a piece is played, the space it occupies is its "footprint." If it's a crash, then the piece's footprint will be different; if it's just a jiggle, the piece will have the same footprint.

The crash rule is not meant to penalize mere clumsiness, but to penalize actions that change the way pieces are positioned on the board, and therefore the inherent strategic situation. If nothing changes, no penalty should be paid.

Finally, remember that if you're just playing for fun in your own home, you should be a little more forgiving about crashes than you might be in a tournament or in a game where high stakes are being gambled.

If you crash while attempting to remove a piece, then you give away the piece you were trying to remove. If you crash when you aren't playing or capturing anything, you pay no penalty; just put things back the way they should have been.

Q: Suppose my standing piece is over-iced, and one of the pieces attacking it happens to be my own color. Can I capture my own attack piece? My standing piece would still be iced.(See Figure 12.)
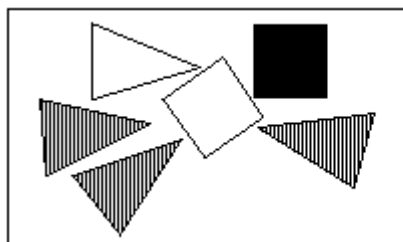

Figure 12: The standing white piece is over-iced, but the white attack piece isn't participating, and cannot be captured.

A: No, you cannot capture your own attack piece. Even though your attack piece is pointing at a standing piece, it is not participating in the icing of anything. Removing it would be like removing any squandered attack piece on the board: illegal. Also remember that when scoring, this attack piece has a value of zero.

Q: I'm a bit confused about the role of squandered pieces in over-icing. In Figure 13, (c) is squandered. However, if (b) were removed, (c) would be icing (a). Does this mean that (a) is over-iced? (a) would still be iced if (b) were removed.

Also look at Figure 14. Now (a) is definitely over-iced. Can I remove (b), or is (d) the only piece that can be captured? Again, if (b) were removed, (a) would still be iced.
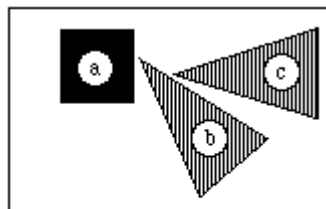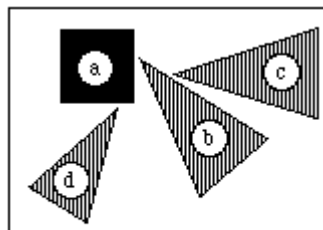

Figure 13: Is (a) over-iced?

Figure 14: (a) is over-iced, which attack pieces can be removed?

A: In Figure 13, (c) is squandered and is therefore not participating in an attack on anything. The standing piece is not over-iced, and nothing can be captured.

The situation in Figure 14 is similar, if slightly more complicated. The main point to remember in any potential over-ice situation is this: A piece is over-iced when the attack force is so redundant that one or more of the participating attack pieces are not needed to ice the standing piece.

Only pay attention to the participating attack pieces. In this particular case, ignore (c) completely. Now the situation is much easier to deal with. I will assume that (a) and (d) are worth 2 points each, and that (b) and (c) are worth 3 apiece. Now, (d) can be captured. However, (b) cannot be captured because the strength of (d) alone is not enough to ice (a). We are ignoring (c) because it is not participating, and therefore we cannot capture it.

There are sometimes ways for the defending player to get at those fat juicy (b) and (c) pieces, with a minimum of sacrifice. Let's look at the second picture again, and indulge ourselves in some imaginary play. It should be noted that if another attack piece (e) is pointed at (a), the standing piece will be over-iced enough to warrant capture of (b). (The other two attack pieces (d) and (e) now have enough strength to continue icing.) After (b) is captured, (c) is once again attacking (a) and is now a participant in over-icing. Players who are into tip blocking should be wary of this maneuver; a spare prisoner (or some diplomacy) and a little ingenuity can suddenly turn your enemy's stash pad into a prison camp.

Q: Suppose you get a prisoner before you've played your first two pieces. If you play the prisoner standing up, does it count as one of your two required defensive pieces?

A: No. Keep in mind that prisoners are not your pieces, but are merely under your control. Once you have played a prisoner, you have no claim to it at all; it belongs completely to the owner. Therefore, playing a prisoner defensively would only help your opponent meet his meltdown quota. Meanwhile, you are still accountable for having your own two defenders on the table.

This question brings up an interesting situation. Suppose you crash while trying to play your first piece. After giving it away, you decide to wait for a few seconds to see how the other players start off the game. What happens if the person who got your prisoner plays it defensively? More importantly, what happens if they use it for an attack?

As we've already seen, if they play it defensively they're just helping you meet your meltdown quota. You are then only required to play one more defensive piece. However, if they play it as an attack piece, then, well... you've had a meltdown. That's right! You've melted down without putting a single piece on the table. And guess what! You get to take your own piece back! As a player who has melted down, you must put all of your attack pieces back on your pad and then play your two required defenders.

Remember, the meltdown rule requires that two pieces of any given color be played defensively before any pieces of that color are used for attack. It is just as wrong for someone else to play an attack piece of your color before you've played your two defenders as it is for you to play such an attack piece yourself. So beware! If you find yourself with a prisoner very early in the game, be careful not use it as an attack piece until after the owner meets his meltdown quota.

Q: What happens if you set out a piece and it ends up resting partly ON TOP OF another piece, like if you're trying to block an attack with a prisoner and the prisoner winds up sitting on the tip of the attack piece?

A: All pieces played must sit completely on the playing field. Playing a piece so that it's sitting on another piece is illegal. Such a play, if it doesn't cause a crash, must be taken back. This is important to remember when two people are trying to place pieces at the same time in the same spot, as in the case of one player attempting to ice a piece while another player is attempting to block the attack with a defender. If the blocking player is too late, they'll be trying to place their piece on top of the tip of the attacking player's piece. Since this is an illegal play, the blocker would have to yield to the attacker.

Q: What happens if I successfully call Icehouse on someone who has a prisoner on his (or her) stash pad? Do I get the prisoner as well as the player's unplayed pieces?

A: Yes. Note, however, that the player gets to keep any prisoners that she (or he) gets later in the game, i.e. after the call has been resolved.

Q: Suppose I crash, but before I've actually given away the piece in my hand, someone calls Icehouse. Do I give the piece away before the Icehouse call is resolved, or do I put the piece back on my pad and give it away after we figure out if anyone is in the Icehouse?

A: You give it away first. As soon as it is recognized that you crashed, the piece in your hand no longer belongs to you, even if you take a moment to decide who gets it. If you have no un-iced defenders and that piece was your eighth piece, you are open to

being put in the Icehouse, and the vultures you're playing with may not want to wait to find out who gets that piece before calling Icehouse.

This leads to an interesting strategic situation. If a crash and an Icehouse call occur simultaneously, and you are the one who crashed, but you aren't in danger of being put in the Icehouse, and there's a player with 7 stashed pieces and no un-iced defenders, then you might want to give that player the crashed piece. This would keep the poor player out of the icehouse and, more importantly for you, keep the person who called Icehouse (invalidly, at this point) from getting a whole squad of prisoners.

Q: Please clarify the rules regarding placement of illegal attacks. Suppose I'm trying to attack a piece in a hard-to-get-at area, and after I've done my best at positioning it and I've let go, the other players tell me that I'm actually pointing at a nearby defender of my own color. According to the rules, this is an illegal attack. Do I take it back, or leave it where it's played?

A: In this case, it stays where you put it, and it is squandered. Remember that, according to the rules, a piece cannot be moved once you've let go of it (unless it's over-iced). Since you believed you were making a legal play, the piece cannot be moved even if closer examination reveals that it wasn't a legal attack after all.

Your confusion probably stems from the fact that it also says in the rules that an illegally placed piece must be taken back. However, this line is primarily directed at new players, who often forget, during their first few games, that you cannot attack other attack pieces, or their own defenders. For a new player who hasn't quite learned all of the rules, an illegal attack should be taken back. But a skilled player who believes that he or she is making an acceptable attack must live with the consequences if it turns out to be an illegal play.

Q: Can I give another player a prisoner outright (i.e. can I just hand it to them)?

A: No. To give someone a prisoner, you need to do it via the mechanisms provided in the standard Icehouse rules, i.e. over-icing them, or giving a piece away as a penalty. This means that someone who wants a prisoner may need to sacrifice a piece by playing it defensively in order to leave room from someone to over-ice them. And don't forget that faking a crash in order to give someone a prisoner is extremely uncool.

There is one exception to this. In the variation called Casino Icehouse, prisoners can be directly bought and sold.

ICEHOUSE STAGNATION

Here is an awful situation which you may have come up against: you're in the middle of a rip-roarin' game of Icehouse, when suddenly everything comes to a screeching halt. No one is placing or taking pieces. No one is trying to make allies, break fortresses, or devise plans. Only one thought occupies every player's mind: "I'm not moving until someone else does."

It's okay that no one is playing pieces. In Icehouse, players often pause to review the layout or revise their strategies. But in this case, the game has not paused; it has stopped. All the tension, devious planning, and pure enjoyment of the game have stopped as well. The game has stagnated. What can one do to get out of this limbo?

In order to successfully combat icehouse stagnation, we must first analyze its existence. We must try to understand why it occurs, and what flavors it comes in. Once we know these things, it will be easier to devise plans to loosen a stagnating game.

THE CAUSE OF STAGNATION

Strangely enough, the stickiest kind of stagnation occurs because all players are playing well. Each player has achieved two incentives to stop playing: a good position, and the belief that placing pieces will only result in attacks on him from other players.

If a player has only one of these incentives, he should not stop. Pause, maybe, but not stop completely, deciding that there are no more advantageous plays. For instance, if you have achieved a strong fortress (a good position), but see plenty of places to attack, you should want to play on. If you have, on the other hand, a lousy position, and nowhere to attack, you should still want to attempt to build fortresses, even if it means that several of your pieces will be iced. Better to be iced than be put in the icehouse.

So, stagnation begins to set in because most everyone is fortified and there are hardly any attacks available on the field. When there are fewer opportunities left for strategic moves, many players decide to wait until one becomes obvious.

THE TYPES OF STAGNATION

There are two types of stagnation: "true" and "false". It is sometimes difficult to determine which category a certain stagnation falls into.

False Stagnation occurs when every player is waiting for any other player to place a piece. This is called "false" because the situation does not necessarily have to exist. Safe plays can probably still be made. It is, however, easy for each player to get stuck in the frame of mind that "as soon as Joe makes a move, I'm gonna ice the hell out of him," or, "Sue has hardly placed any pieces; I'd better wait." False stagnations are generally easier to break than true stagnations, because they are more imagined than real.

True Stagnation occurs when: 1) all players have built impenetrable fortresses; 2) no player has any captured pieces sitting in his stash; 3) there is nothing that can be attacked without over-icing; 4) all players realize this, and decide to wait. This kind of stagnation is very difficult to loosen, and should be considered a challenge by all involved.

STRATEGIES TO BREAK STAGNATION

Below is a checklist of things to look for and tactics to try (and also tactics not to try) should you suddenly find you and your friends stuck in these dreaded icehouse doldrums. It is designed with both true and false types of stagnation in mind. If all players keep these tips in mind, games will not stagnate for long. Instead, there will hopefully only be tense pauses, followed by a quick resolution to the problem.

Keep Looking - Search very carefully for anything that players are overlooking. Are there any pieces you can attack? Are any of your pieces being over-iced? Can you easily protect another piece from being iced? Can you block off another player's attack piece? Is it possible to use an ally to break a player's fortress? And, no matter how ridiculous it seems, check to see if anyone is in the icehouse.

Deal Attack Pieces - Example: During stagnation, a green 2-point piece happens to be iced by two 2-point blue pieces. Red over-ices green with a 1-point piece. Green will probably capture one of the larger blue pyramids. Stagnation has ended while everyone scrambles to over-ice, squander, and execute pieces.

Who's Winning? - Silently add up present scores. You may find that you are winning by a helluvalot. If you are, put out standing pieces. If you have enough, you may be able to build another fortress. That's cool. At any rate, using your pieces as cannon fodder will cause others to use theirs, thereby ending the game sooner and allowing you to win.

Check Your Stash - If you only have a pyramid or two left in your stash, what the heck; play them. Now you're finished, and are not part of the stagnation. Likewise, if you notice that your stash has a mess of pieces, while everyone else has only a few -- build another fortress.

Don't Horde - Anyone who has a stash full of captured pieces and allows false stagnation to go on is being uncool. Use those prisoners!

Build If You Have To - Anyone who has absolutely no fortress and allows false stagnation to go on is also being uncool. Wait long enough to think of a good plan, then play.

Don't Nag - It is not nice (and uncool) to demand that other players play when the game is stagnating. See if you can pull off one of the tactics above.

Try Variations - Timer Icehouse and Kidnapper Icehouse were both designed primarily to combat the Stagnation Problem. So, give 'em a try!

Take A Break - Lastly, remember that there is always something to do to end stagnation, provided you have pyramids in your stash. Take a break -- you might as well. Then calmly take out this checklist (either mentally or physically), and go over it carefully; perhaps with an ally. If you think of any additional strategies that are not in this list, try them. You might find them rewarding.

ICEHOUSE RULES GLOSSARY

Air Lift: To place a piece on the field using primarily vertical motion, as in, "Let's see if I can air lift this one-pointer into that cozy little fortress."

Attack Piece: A piece that is lying on its side rather than standing up. As such it is usually pointing at, that is, attacking, a defensive piece.

Cheeseball: The strategy of building a self contained fortress away from the center of the playing area, against the edge of the table or the stash pad. Widely regarded as Uncool.

Crash Trap: A space on the field that appears to big big enough to hold a piece, but, most often, is not. Any player trying to place a piece into the space will most likely crash. Some crash traps arise naturally from play, but others are created puposefully to try and get more prisoners into the game.

Crash: Any action that noticeably alters the existing form of the playing area.

Defensive Piece: A piece that is played standing up rather than lying down. Such a piece is open to attack. Also called a standing piece.

Floss Call: There are some situations in which it it's difficult to figure out which piece a given attack piece is pointed at. In tourmaments, judges will usually have a piece of thread with them that they can hold over a game in progess, to make an official determination. That's what a Floss Call is.

Free Standing Piece: Any defensive piece which is not iced.

Ice Fortress: A structure on the playing field in which a defensive piece is surrounded by other pieces such that all attacks are blocked.

Iced Piece: A Defensive Piece which has been defeated in an attack. That is, there are more points worth of successful attack pieces being brought to bear on the defensive piece than that piece is worth.

Icehouse: The word a player speaks when he believes another player is below his stash limit and has no un-iced defensive pieces.

Meltdown: Failure to play 2 defensive pieces before playing any attack pieces.

Over-Iced Piece: An iced defensive piece that has so much attack force brought to bear upon it that an attack piece can be removed from the structure and still leave the defensive piece iced.

Pawn: A one-pointer.

Prisoner: A pyramid belonging to an opponent which for any of several reasons you have captured and added to your stash.

Signature: A player's Icehouse signature is the way in which they arrange their pieces on their stash pad prior to play. Different people have different styles.

Snowball: It the beginning of the game, many players place their initial defensive pieces in a group in the middle of the table. The adoption of the Snowball had a great effect on game play, moving most of the game to a central cluster. If you watch a game develop around a Snowball opening, you can really see the true meaning of the term. The opposite of Cheeseball.

Squandered Attack: An attack which fails to ice a defensive piece.

Stash Limit: The minimum number of pieces you must have in your stash in order to be safe from an Icehouse call. (Usually 8.)

Stash Pad: The zone in which a player's unplayed pieces are stored.

Stash: A player's supply of unplayed pieces.

Victim: A defending piece which is under attack.

Wall: A theoretical barrier that attack pieces must breech in order to be successful. A wall is a line described by the shortest distance between 2 pieces, across an open space. If this line separates an attack piece from its target, then the attack piece must cross this line in order for an attack to succeed. See Figure 15. (The rules for Walls were dropped from the rules for Icehouse long ago, but some veteran players may still use them.)
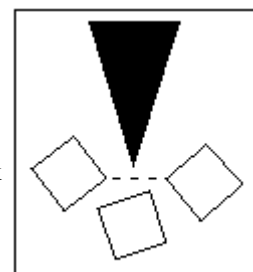

Figure 15: A Wall

ICEHOUSE SAMPLE GAME

Part 1

What follows is a step by step look at a complete game. This sample game includes concrete examples of many rules and strategies that may not be entirely clear after just reading the rules. The final stage of this game serves as a scoring exercise. The correct scores appear at the end of the game notes; we suggest you try counting the score yourself before looking at the answers.
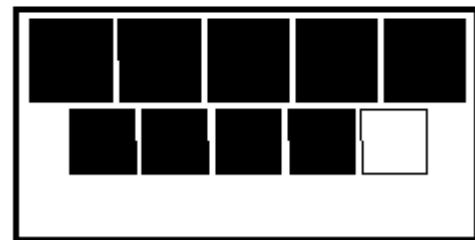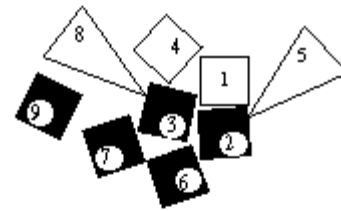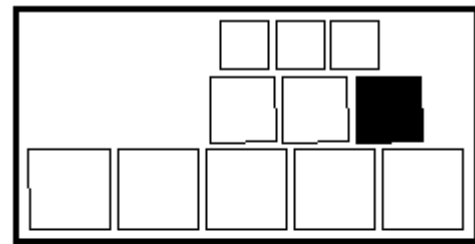
Here's how the notation works: Whenever a piece is played, it is assigned a sequence number. This number indicates the order in which each piece is played, and never changes. If a piece that has already been played is moved, then this change is indicated by adding an extension to its sequence number. Thus, if piece 7 is captured and immediately replayed, it will become 7-2. If it moves again, it will become 7-3. This allows you to track the progress of each piece during the game. The diagrams show the playing field at various stages during the game; the commentary provides an explanation of what happened and why during each maneuver. Also, after the first diagram, all pieces played or moved since the previous diagram are marked with a diamond shaped symbol.

For the sake of clarity, this sample game assigns a different sequence number to each piece, even though in reality two pieces may be played at the exact same time. The commentary will make note of plays that were actually simultaneous.

This game uses standard Icehouse rules, along with the handicap variation. Before the start of the game, each player gave a 2 point pyramid to their opponent.

To really understand what's going on in this example game, you may want to get out your game set and duplicate the sample game in three dimensions, working through each play to see how and why it happened.

This game was created by playing Icehouse on top of a photocopying machine and pressing the "copy" button at various intervals.

Sample Game: Diagram A

---

[1] Maria plays a small defender.

[2] Torrence plays a small defender.

Note: Plays 1 and 2 were simultaneous.

[3] Torrence plays his second defender, another 1 pointer.

[4] Maria plays her second defender, also another 1 pointer. Both players have now met their meltdown quota.

[5] Maria uses a two point piece to ice piece 2. She's playing offensively. She's currently more concerned with icing her opponent's pieces than with building up her own defenses.

[6] Torrence however is working on a defense. He plays another 1 pointer. His plan is to set up a line of defenders around piece 3, enclosing it in a fortress.
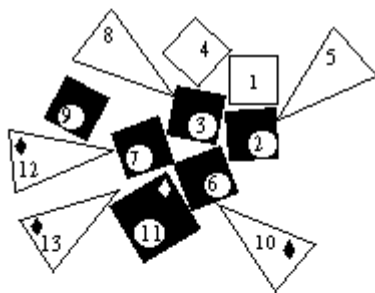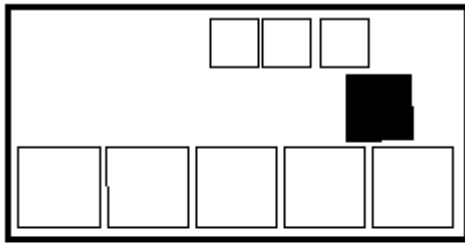
[7] Torrence plays yet another 1 pointer defensively. He's closing the gap. All he needs to do is get one more small piece out there, in the gap between 4 and 7 (the piece he just played) and he'll have piece 3 safe and sound inside a fortress.

[8] Maria, continuing her offensive effort, sees what Torrence is up to and quickly slides piece 8 (a 2 pointer) into position, attacking piece 3.

[9] Torrence is ready with the final piece needed to enclose 3 in a fortress... but he gets there too late. Dazed and confused, he sets the piece out anyway.

Sample Game: Diagram B

Sample Game: Diagram C

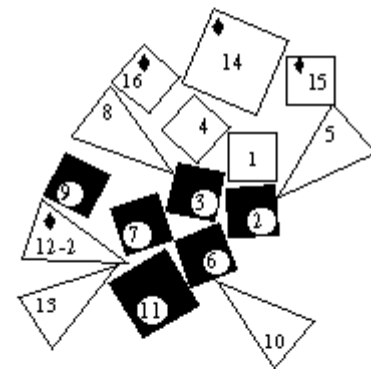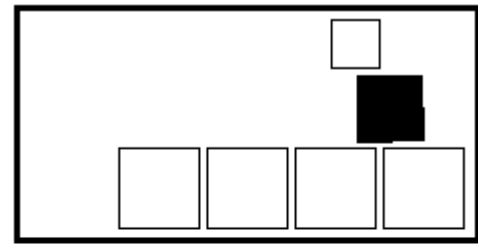[10] Maria continues her wave of attacks, icing piece 6 with a 2 pointer.

[11] Torrence regears his fortress construction plans. He sets out a 2 point piece defensively, planning now to encircle piece 7 in the same way he attempted to encircle piece 3 earlier.

[12] Maria again sees what Torrence is up to and again attacks the piece which Torrence is attempting to isolate inside a fortress.

[13] Now Torrence shifts gears entirely. Instead of continuing to build fortress walls by sacrificing his own defenders, he decides to restructure an attack. He brings out his prisoner (given him before the game as a mutual handicap) and over-ices himself in the attack on piece 7. Since he owns piece 7, and piece 7 is now over-iced, he can capture either piece 12 or piece 13.

[12-2] Torrence captures piece 12. He doesn't put it on his pad though, he just repositions it. He turns it so that it attack piece 11, thereby blocking the attack of piece 13 on piece 7. Torrence finally has a fortress now (piece 7) and he got it by squandering an enemy attack.
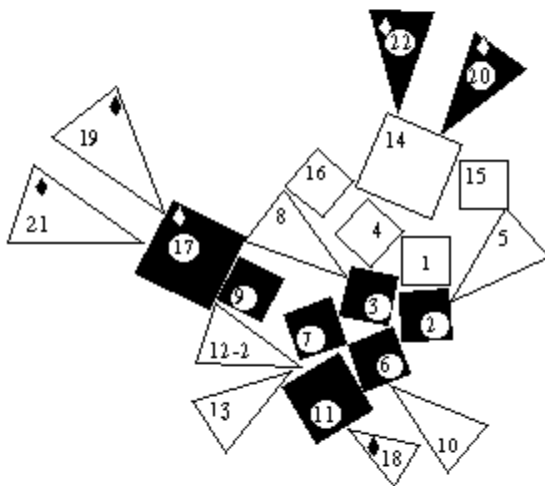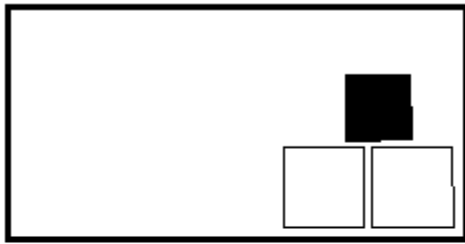
[14] While Torrence is busy tinkering around with piece 12, Maria decides to build a fortress of her own. First she puts down a big piece to wall off a lot of territory.

[15] Moving as quickly as possible after playing 14, Maria plays a small piece to finishing walling off a fortress containing piece 1.

[16] Looking things over, Maria quickly realizes two things. Piece 4 is wide open, but it can easily be protected by putting a piece into the gap between 14 and 8. Furthermore, the fortress she just built to contain piece 1 is vulnerable; all Torrence needs to do to crack her fortress is to over-ice piece 2 and capture piece 5. Of course, Torrence used his only prisoner a minute or so earlier, but if he got another one she'd be in trouble. Therefore another fortress would be prudent. After realizing all of this, Maria plays piece 16 to protect piece 4.

Sample Game: Diagram D
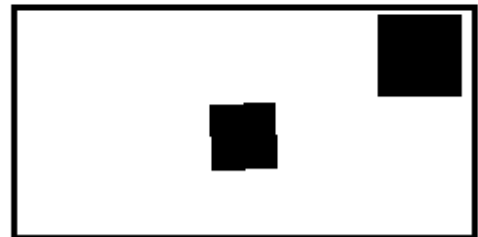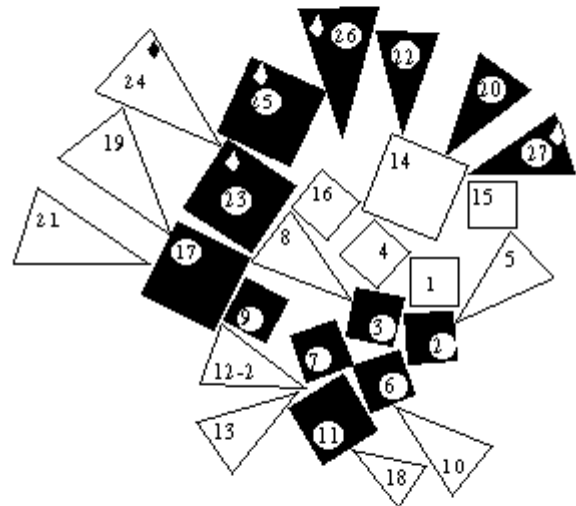
Part 5

Sample Game: Diagram E

17] After restructuring the attack on piece 7, Torrence now realizes that he can easily block off all attacks on piece 9 by playing a single piece. He uses a 3 pointer.

[18] Meanwhile, Maria has examined Torrence's handiwork and observed that although piece 12-2 is squandered (2 points vs. 2 points, ties go to the defender) she can salvage the attack by bringing more firepower to bear on piece 11.

[19] Next, both Torrence and Maria see big, juicy 3 point enemy pieces standing helpless and unassailed. They each launch attacks. Maria attacks piece 17.

[20] Torrence attacks piece 14.

Note: Plays 19 and 20 were simultaneous.

[21] Since 17 is a three pointer, more firepower is needed to ice it. Maria attacks piece 17 again.

[22] Same deal for piece 14. Torrence attacks piece 14 again.

Note: Plays 21 and 22 were simultaneous.

[23] A brief lull occurs. Maria still has her prisoner, but see's no good uses for it. Torrence does have some good attack possibilities, but he's got another maneuver on his mind. After studying the terrain for a short bit, he decides to attempt an ice trap. He plays piece 23, a 3 pointer, deep inside an alcove.

[24] Maria falls for the trap, and slides a big attack piece into position, attacking the bait, piece 23.

[25] Torrence closes the trap, blocking all other attacks on piece 23 with piece 25. Attack piece 24 is squandered. Maria groans. She wishes vainly for a way to get another attack piece in at piece 23. She picks up her last 3 pointer and tries to sneak it into a spot that will work. She tests a few positions, holding the piece this way and that but never letting go of it, until at last she concludes that she can't do it. There's just not enough room to get the piece in without crashing. Maria reflects glumly that if she had a one point piece, she'd be able to fit it into the required space with no problem... but since she has nothing left except a big three pointer, she can't get at piece 23. She gives up, and puts her piece back on her stash pad.
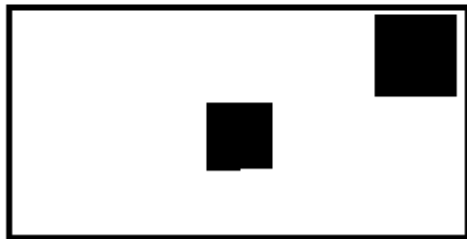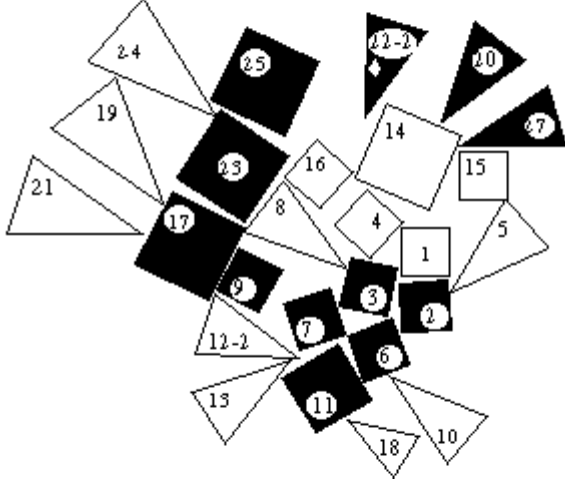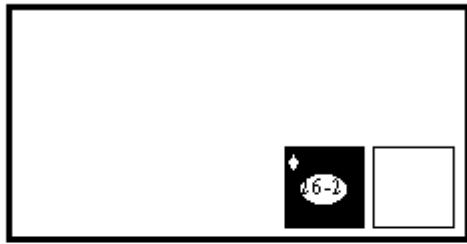
[26] Torrence, having watched all of this, puts attack piece 26 into position, attacking piece 16 and closing off all access to piece 23 once and for all.

[27] Maria now decides it's time to use her prisoner. She plays it so that it over-ices her piece 14. She now can capture either 20, 22, or the one she just played, 27.
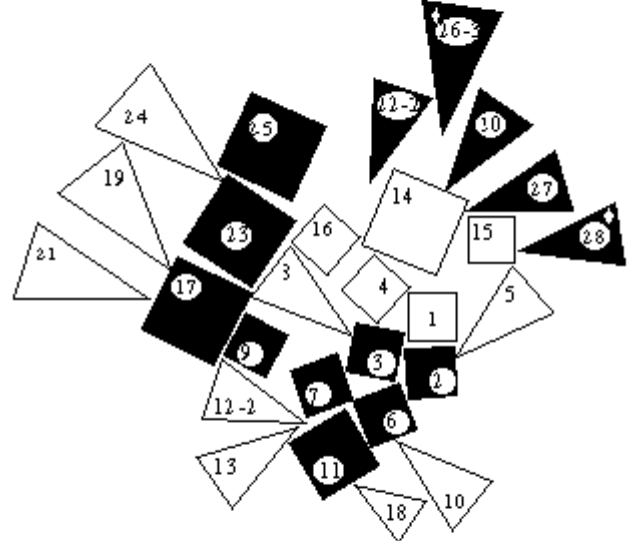
ICEHOUSE SAMPLE GAME

Part 6

Sample Game: Diagram F

ICEHOUSE SAMPLE GAME

Part 7

Sample Game: Diagram G

[22-2] Maria captures piece 22 and repositions it so that it over-ices piece 16. Piece 16 is a 1 pointer; it is now being attacked by a 2 pointer (22-2) and a 3 pointer (26). Maria can capture either one.

[26-2] Maria captures piece 26 and puts it back on her stash pad for later use. This maneuver is called trading up. By using it, Maria was able to turn a 2 point prisoner into a 3 point prisoner.

[28] Torrence attacks piece 15.

[26-3] Maria decides to use her newly acquired 3 point prisoner to restructure the attack on piece 14. She over-ices piece 14 with prisoner piece 26, now called 26-3. She places the attack piece within range of piece 14, but far enough away from the piece to give her some elbow room for her next play.

ICEHOUSE SAMPLE GAME

Part 8

Sample Game: Diagram H

[20-2] Since piece 14 is over-iced, Maria can capture any of the following pieces: 20, 26-3, or 27. She chooses piece 20. She picks it up, and then sets it back down, this time in the defending position. She places piece 20-2 in the line of attack of piece 26-3. This leaves piece 26-3 pointing at a piece of its own color (piece 20-2) and therefore squandered. It also leaves piece 27 squandered (2 points attacking 3 points) and gives freedom back to previously iced piece 14.

[29] The only thing attacking piece 20-2 is piece 26-3. Since they are the same color, piece 26-3 is squandered and piece 20-2 is un-iced. Maria solves this problem by attacking piece 20-2 with her last piece.

[30] Torrence looks around the setup, searching for something useful to do with his last piece. Unfortunately, there are no un-iced enemy pieces available for him to prey on. After checking it all twice, he sets his last piece out in the open, defensively.

The final score for this game was twenty three points for Maria (white) and fifteen points for Torrence (black).

ICEHOUSE STRATEGIES

ICING LOW, DEALING ATTACK PIECES, & TRADING UP

These are all simple strategies that might not seem so obvious. "Icing low" is attacking with low value pieces that won't be so tempting to take as prisoners later on. So, ice a 1 point piece with two 1 pointers, a 2 with a 3, and a 3 with two 2's. Icing a large piece with two large pieces is asking for trouble.

"Dealing attack pieces" is taking advantage of times when other players have failed to ice low. If someone is iced with high valued pieces in a place where lower valued pieces would do fine, then over-ice them using pieces that probably won't be captured. For example, if you see a spot where someone has iced a 3 point piece with two 3 point pieces, over-ice him with a 1 point piece. The over-iced player will almost certainly capture one of the large pieces instead of your small piece.

"Trading up" is a way of turning a low valued prisoner into a high valued prisoner. It works the same way as dealing attack pieces, except that you are entirely in control. Here's an example. If you have a 2 point prisoner, and you see a spot where one of your 1 point defenders is being iced by a 3 point attacker, you can over-ice yourself with the 2 pointer and capture the 3 pointer, thus giving you a more powerful prisoner to work with.
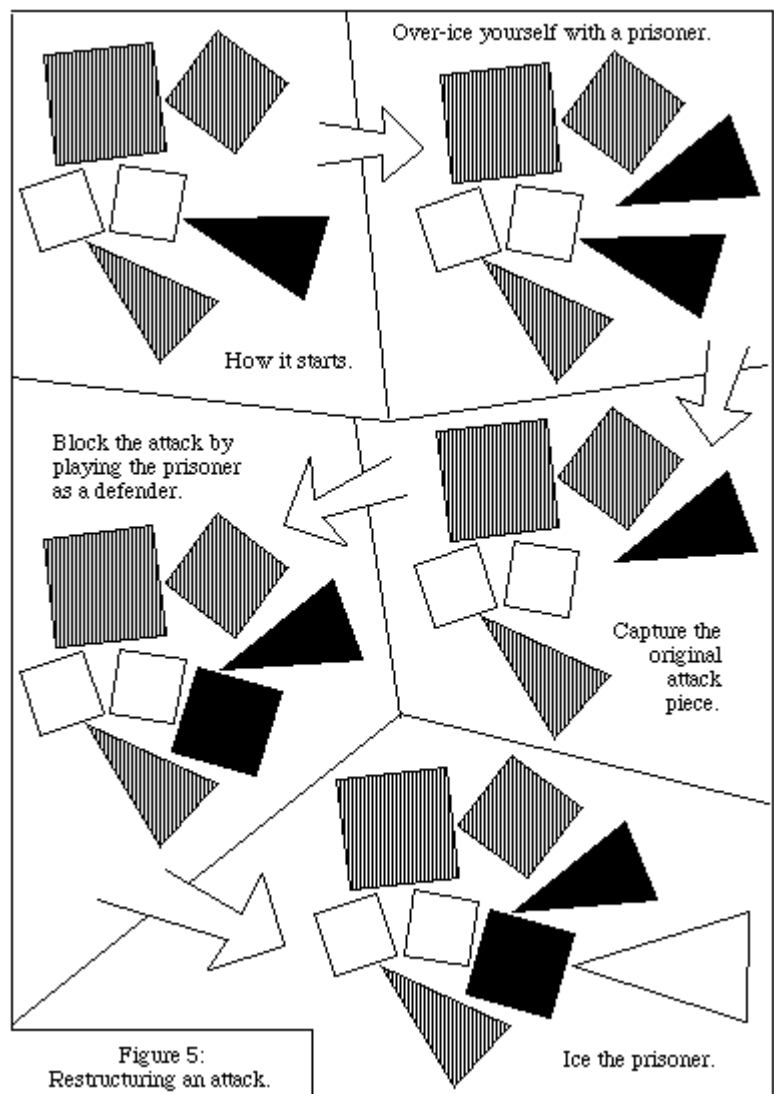
THE RESTRUCTURED ATTACK

Prisoners are extremely valuable, but some of the best strategies for their use may not be immediately clear just from reading the rules. When you have a prisoner, you can use it to over-ice your own piece and then remove whichever attacker you wish. Given this, you can perform over-icing strategies entirely on your own, without having to recruit the aid or win the trust of another player. Consider the example in the Rules section of cracking a fortress via over-icing. You can do that maneuver by getting a third player to over-ice you so that you can remove the wall, but that requires negotiation, which takes time, during which the player can be building new fortresses. However, if you've got a prisoner, you can do the maneuver entirely on your own, quickly and ruthlessly. Finally, if you've got a prisoner, you can often use it to save one of your pieces by changing the arrangement of attacking pieces, via over-icing.

That's what this strategy is all about. Take a look at Figure 5. You are playing white, and let us assume that you have a black piece as a prisoner. The first thing to do is to play the black prisoner so that it is over-icing your own piece. Place the attack piece back a bit from the target, but make sure it's still within range.

Now you can remove the other attack piece. Capture it - but don't waste time putting it back on the pad. Replay it immediately as shown in the fourth step, positioning it between the new attacker and your piece.

Now, note that black is left attacking black. The attacking black is squandered and the defending black is ripe for attack. You can finish the whole thing elegantly by attacking the piece you just put

Figure 5: Restructuring an attack.

into position. However, if the attack piece you blocked had been a different color, this final step might not be advisable. The situation could end at step four with the newly placed defending already iced, so be careful not to inadvertently over-ice it.

There! You have restructured the attack to save your own piece, and squandered an opponent's piece in the process, all thanks to one prisoner. Don't forget that as soon as the last piece is played, the game ends, even if the final play created an over-ice situation. If you're not careful, you can find yourself starting a big maneuver and then not getting to finish it because the game has ended.

OVER-ICEM INTERRUPTUS

This is any action which abruptly halts over-icing maneuvers by another player. For example, suppose an opponent of yours is busily restructuring an attack that will ultimately cost you points. You have one piece on your pad, and the prisoner your opponent is using for his over-icing maneuvers is the only other unplayed piece in the game. If you play your piece, your opponent's prisoner will be the last piece, which means he'll get stuck in the middle of an over-ice maneuver he can't finish. (Remember that the game ends when the last piece is played, and no more over-iced pieces can be captured at that point.)

Another way of interrupting an over-ice maneuver is by dropping a defender in front of a retreated attack piece. Frequently when someone is restructuring an attack, there'll be a moment when an opponent's piece is over-iced and one or more of the attacking pieces are positioned at a distance from the victim. You have to act quickly, but you may be able to halt your opponent in his tracks by sacrificing one of your own pieces. Pop your piece in front of one of the redundant attacks just as your opponent is reaching over to re-capture it. His piece will then no longer be over-iced, and he won't be allowed to take the prisoner. Considering the enormous usefulness of prisoners, it is often advantageous to force a mutual sacrifice of a piece of your own and an enemy prisoner in this way.

DRAWING ENEMY FIRE

If you've got a prisoner or two and nothing much is going on, try playing a couple of your pieces defensively, out in an open area. After your opponents fall for the trap and ice these "target" pieces, you can use your prisoners to restructure the enemy attacks and rescue your targets. This can work extremely well if your opponents don't have much firepower available.

THE PRISONER EXCHANGE

Prisoners are extremely valuable. Finding fun and useful things to do with prisoners is usually easy. On the other hand, obtaining a new prisoner when you need one is usually a bit more difficult. Here is a strategy that can help bring in fresh inmates. It can also be very useful in loosening up stagnant games. However, it requires a bit of diplomacy, so it only works in games with 3 or more players.

Suppose Dr Cool, Number 12, and The Emperor of the Universe are involved in a game of Icehouse. They hit a slow point. Everybody has a secure fortress, there aren't any available attacks, and no one has a prisoner.

Dr Cool looks over the situation. He finds a spot where one of his 2-pointers is being attacked by a 3-pointer belonging to the Emperor. He then finds a spot where Number 12 has a 2-pointer that has been iced by the Emperor. Both 2-pointers are out in the open enough that they can be over-iced. Dr Cool quietly says to Number 12, "If you over-ice me here, I'll over-ice you there. Then we can each capture one of the Emp's pieces." Number 12 nods in agreement, then they both follow through with the scheme. Now Number 12 and Dr Cool each have a prisoner. Naturally, the Emperor is very upset by this, and threatens to have them both shot.

This maneuver is called a "Prisoner Exchange."

TIP BLOCKING

This strategy can be risky, but can also be effective. To use it, you need to find an attack situation in which the tip of an attack piece is some distance away from the victim piece. Then all you do is steal the attack - you place your attack piece in front of the other attack piece, blocking its attack and allowing yours alone to succeed. To see how this works, look at Figure 6. If (a) and (c) were the only pieces in position, you could slide in piece (b), squandering piece (c) and enjoying the attack on piece (a) all by yourself.
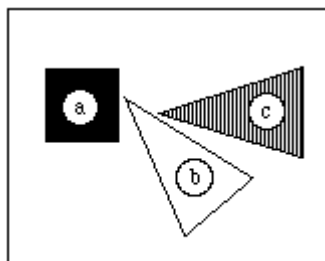

Figure 6: Tip Blocking.

The danger here is that if the victim piece gets over-iced, the owner of that piece could first capture your piece, then go on to capture the original attacking piece. If the player has a prisoner he can do the over-icing himself; but even if he needs an ally, he probably won't have much trouble finding one, since the player whose attack piece you squandered will almost certainly be willing to help. Better his piece should be a prisoner than simply sit there squandered. Therefore, exercise caution when using this tactic.

THE FORCED RETREAT

This is a good tactic to use when a game has hit a slow point and you want to shake things up. For this maneuver to be really effective, you'll need a high value prisoner and several locations where pieces belonging to you are iced, out in the open.

Here's how it works. You take your prisoner and over-ice your own piece. Then you reposition the original attack piece so that it's back a short distance from the victim (but is still within range). In other words, you force the original attack piece to retreat. Then, you recapture your prisoner. Next, do the same thing to all of your other defensive pieces, at least to as many as you can get at.

Then, sit back and see what happens. This tactic should shake up the players whose pieces you've forced to retreat. All of the retreated pieces are open to squandering, by tip blocking (shown above), or by neutralizing the attack (as shown in Figure 2).

THE ICE TRAP

This strategy is shown in **Figure 7**. Put a 3 point standing piece into a niche. Wait for the attack, then block off any more attacks with another standing piece. If done correctly, you can build a fortress and squander someone's attack piece at the same time. (A single attack piece will not have enough points to successfully ice a three point piece.) This strategy takes a little practice and some guts, but it works.

STEALING A FORTRESS

This tactic won't win you many friends, but it may keep you out of the Icehouse. Timing is everything. Often, a player will build a fortress by first building a shell and then dropping a piece into the enclosed space. If you see another player building such a shell, you can get your piece ready while they're building the fortress walls. Then, you can drop your piece into their fortress shell while they are reaching for the piece they plan on putting in. Nasty...but effective and deliciously evil.

Figure 7: The Ice Trap

THE SLANTED ATTACK

The way you position an attack piece can sometimes determine whether or not an attack gets over-iced. If you are making an a attack and you don't want the victim piece to get over-iced, try slanting the attack (as shown in Figure 8). Head-on attacks can be over-iced, which can sometimes result in the squandering or capturing of your attack piece. Slanted attacks, on the other hand, are sometimes safer.

Note however, that while some strategic situations call for the slanted attack, you should NOT get into the habit of making all of your attacks slanted attacks. This type of piece placement requires exact precision and is easy to screw up. If you slant the attack too much, your line of attack can end up missing your victim piece entirely, and your attack piece won't be pointed at anything. Because of this, slanted attacks tend to create confusing attack configurations which can lead to arguments about what's really being attacked. Also, it's a lot easier to crash while attempting to play a slanted attack. And finally, there's really no point in positioning your attack piece in this way unless the situation calls for it, and doing so just makes things needlessly complex. Unless you are able to block off all potential over-ice locations, don't bother with the confusion of the slanted attack. Attacks made on pieces standing out in the open, for example, should never be slanted.

Figure 8: Slanted Attacks

GANGING UP

Quickly look over the playing field and mentally tally the scores. If one player is beating the living daylights out of everybody else, then the losers might want to pool their resources in order to defeat the common enemy. Three players working together can do a lot of damage to one player, no matter how good he or she is. If you're lucky, the scores will balance out - with yours on top. Tip: The Prisoner Exchange works very well together with this strategy.
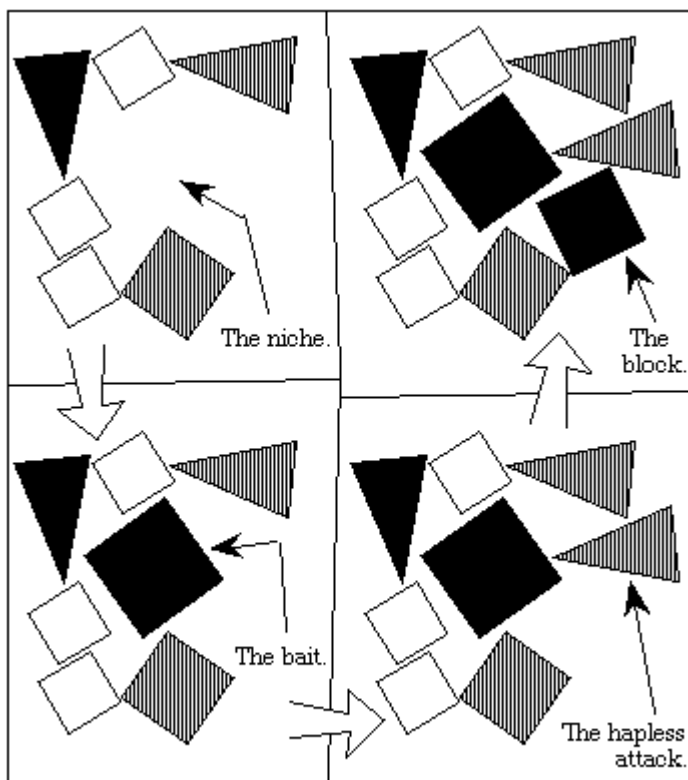
THE CHEESEBALL MANEUVER
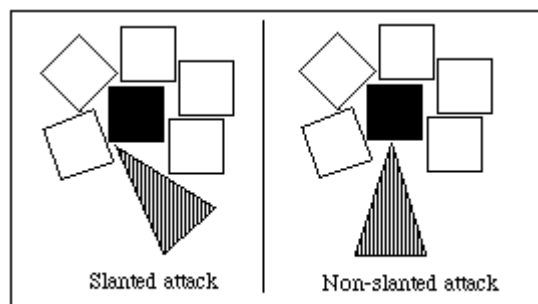
Ok, so you're tired of getting put in the Icehouse, and it seems like you can never get a fortress built in time to prevent it. And so, you get this great idea. When the game begins and everyone is playing pieces in the middle of the table, you instead play several pieces over to the side, using the edge of the stash pad or the edge of the table or even both as defensible locations. And you stand up several defensive pieces quickly, gaining a safe and secure fortress early on in the game. (See Figure 9.) You now don't have to worry about getting put in the Icehouse. The only problem is that the other players seem to be annoyed with you. Why is this?
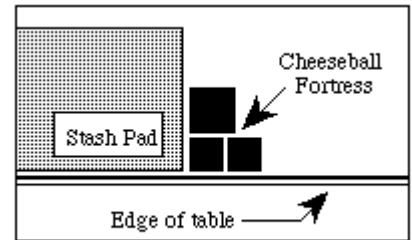

Figure 9: A Cheeseball Fortress

This rather poor strategy is known as the "Cheeseball Maneuver." Why is this a poor tactic? Simply because it's a cop-out. It's a way of meeting a game goal without using any clever strategies or tactical skills. Also, since this maneuver is conducted on the side, away from the real arena of play, it smacks of cowardice.

This leads to a commonly asked question: Is this tactic Uncool? Well...it's Cool to play to the center, but that doesn't make it Uncool to play to the side. The thing to understand is that the Cheeseball Maneuver is typically used either by inexperienced players, or by desperate players. Inexperienced players use it because they aren't yet skilled enough to find more interesting and equally safe ways of building fortresses. Desperate players use the Cheeseball not at the beginning of the game, but when they are approaching their stash limit and feel they can't get a fortress any other way. There's nothing uncool about using the Cheeseball in this kind of situation, since even the most experienced player can get desperate.

The real problem with Cheeseballing is that it leads to boring, stagnated games. As players get better at Icehouse, they soon realize that a cop-out tactic like the Cheeseball Maneuver quickly leads to lackluster games.

The fun of Icehouse comes from struggle. It's not unlike a movie or a book; there must be conflict - without it, there's nothing to hold one's interest. Players who use the Cheeseball are depriving themselves of the stress and excitement of trying to eek out a fortress in a hostile world. This is a major part of the fun of Icehouse... and what's the point of playing the game if isn't fun? After players use the Cheeseball for a while, they will either evolve to better strategies or will simply stop playing, because their games are always dull.

THE 2-FOR-1 EXCHANGE

This strategy plays on a very common situation: A 3 pointer being iced by a 1 pointer and a 3 pointer. If done successfully, this will allow you to save a 3 point piece (at the expense of a 1 point piece) and you'll wind up with more prisoners than you started out with.

Figure 10 show how the 2-for-1 Exchange works. One important thing to keep in mind: You need a one point piece of your own color. If you have a tendency to play all your small pieces early in the game, you won't be able to do this maneuver.

Also note that at the end of this maneuver, you'll have a 1 point piece that's being iced by a 3 pointer - a situation that's perfect for Trading Up or Dealing Attack Pieces.
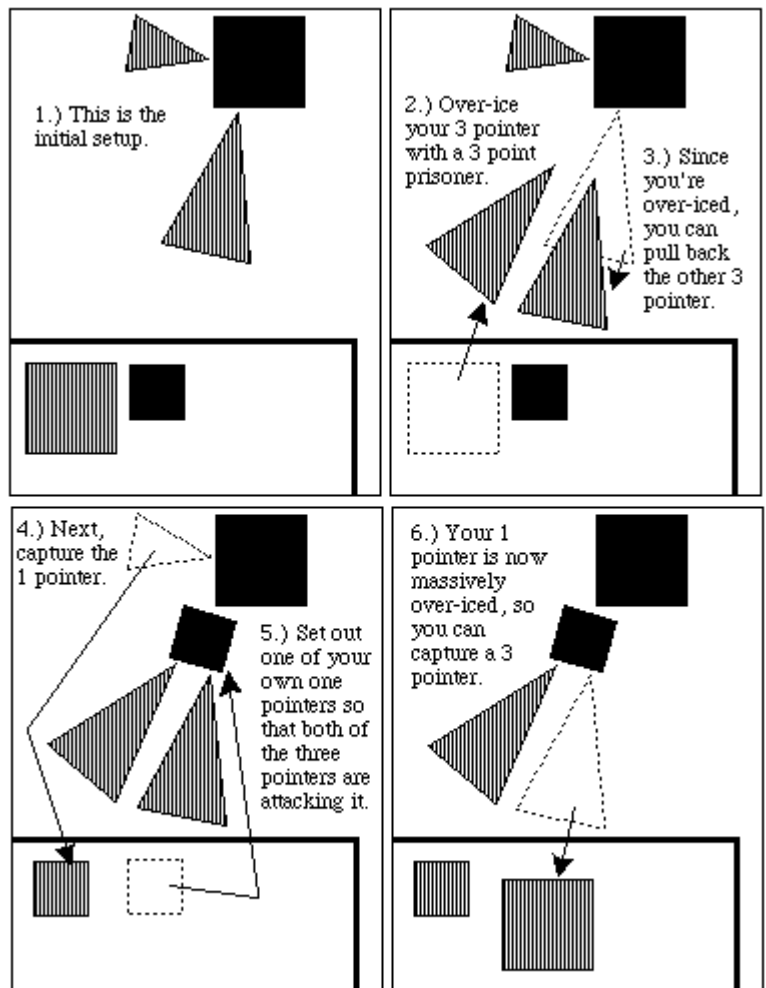

1.) This is the initial setup.

2.) Over-ice your 3 pointer with a 3 point prisoner.

3.) Since you're over-iced, you can pull back the other 3 pointer.

4.) Next, capture the 1 pointer.

5.) Set out one of your own one pointers so that both of the three pointers are attacking it.

6.) Your 1 pointer is now massively over-iced, so you can capture a 3 pointer.

Figure 10: The 2-for-1 Exchange

STEALING A PRISONER

This strategy is a response to the 2-For-1 Exchange. It's basically a special version of the Over-icem Interruptus strategy. Here's how it works: when you see an opponent setting up a 2-For-1 Exchange, get a 1 pointer into your hand. Then, when they reach for their own 1 pointer, quickly drop your 1 pointer into the spot your opponent has prepared. If you do it right, you'll get to capture the 3 pointer, and your opponent will have ended up trading a 3 point prisoner for a 1 point prisoner. And if you didn't have any prisoners of your own prior to this, doing this may let you really turn the tables.

THE SMALL PIECE FEINT

The Small Piece Feint is basically a defense against the strategy called "Stealing a Fortress." However, you may not be able to get away with this in games with more than 2 players.

Suppose you see a niche where you could close off an area with one piece and then get a fortress by dropping a 1 pointer into the enclosed space. You have 2 options. Option 1 is to close the space off first, and then drop in your small piece. However, your opponent may steal the fortress from you by dropping in a 1 pointer while you're reaching for a small piece of your own. Option 2 is to place the 1 pointer into the niche and then set out the blocking piece to create the fortress. Again, this may fail because your opponent can probably attack your 1 pointer while you are reaching for a piece to block off the attack.

The Small Piece Feint is a combination of the 2 options. What you do is this: Act as if you are using Option 2. Pick up a 1 pointer and hold it over the niche, as if you are trying to see if it will fit. You might even set it down in the niche - just don't let go of it. While you're doing this, keep an eye on your opponent's hand. Wait until he or she picks up a 2 pointer. Your opponent will obviously try to attack the 1 point piece you are using to bait the trap. Once they've got an attack piece in their hand (and they're in an attack-oriented mindset) then quickly pull the 1 pointer back and switch to Option 1. Set the decoy piece on your pad, pick up a 2 pointer, block off the niche, then pick up the 1 pointer again and drop it into the enclosed space.

This will usually work because your opponent will be 1 step behind you during the entire maneuver. They won't know what you're up to when you take back the piece you were getting ready to play, and when they see that you've got an empty fortress shell, they'll have the wrong size piece in their hand and they won't be able to steal it from you.

Be warned that if you try to use this strategy against the same person too many times, this strategy may lose its effectiveness.

THE STEALTH PIECE

This is a simple little strategy that often works surprisingly well. Although it involves playing a piece near your stash pad, it should not be confused with the Cheeseball Maneuver, which is a very different kettle of fish.

What you do is watch for a moment when no one is looking at what you are doing, like when someone's breaking a fortress and everyone else is concentrating on the pieces in the middle of the table. Then, just slide one of your pieces off of your stash pad and onto the table right next to the stash pad. With luck, the other players won't look closely enough at your stash pad to notice that the piece has been played. Sometimes, of course, you'll get caught right away and the piece will get iced, but often it will go unnoticed for a very long time, sometimes until the very end of the game.

The good thing about this maneuver is that if you get nabbed, it's no big deal, but if you survive undetected you have a small insurance policy against being put in the Icehouse. It's a blast when someone thinks they've got you and they call Icehouse, and you then point to your stealth piece and say "You missed this one!" Of course, they'll soon be scrambling to ice it and make the call again, leaving you in Icehouse Panic mode, tossing out the last of your pieces defensively, hoping they run out of ammo - but the fun of revealing your hidden piece can almost make up for the pain of being put in the Icehouse. Or perhaps the diversion will allow you to build a fortress while they're icing your stealth piece.

On the other hand, if you get to the end of the game without anyone noticing it, then it got you some hassle-free points.

THE SHOTGUN

At the Eighth [Tournament](), [Jake]() Davenport confounded and confused his opponents with a never-before-seen strategy. His new approach so disrupted conventional Icehouse thinking that Jake found himself with a big target on his forehead at the Ninth Tournament. In the post-tournament discussions on the internet maiing list, the strategy was identified, dissected, and labeled "The Shotgun". Here's how it works, but be warned, it may not win you many friends.

It's a passive strategy:

> 1. Don't attack.
>
> 2. Play defenders with space around them.
>
> 3. Use a prisoner to squander any attacks.

The Shotgun calls for expertise in the undoing of attacks through the use of prisoners, something Jake is highly skilled at. If prisoners cannot be obtained (a problem Jake ran into as his strategy was recognized and opposed), Jake would switch to this aggressive strategy:

1. Attack someone who is close to being in the icehouse.

2. Icehouse him and get his pieces.

3. Switch back to the passive strategy.