

Martian Quilting

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Introduction

Martian Quilting is a strategy game which uses Icehouse pieces, for two to six players.

Equipment

Martian Quilting requires a board in the form of a 4×4 grid, and a stash of fifteen Icehouse pieces for each player. Each player must use a different colour. In addition, a token representing the needle is used — a single Icehouse piece of an additional colour is ideal.

Enthusiasts will want to use a board illustrated with quilt designs, such as the one pictured below. A simple grid of lines also works, or if nothing else is available, the game can be played without any board at all, by simply placing pieces on a flat surface according to an imaginary grid.

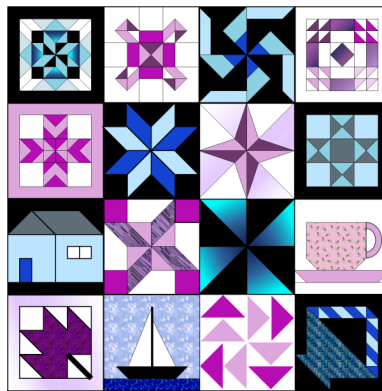


Figure 1: A *Martian Quilting* board

Setup

Each player must choose one of the colour stashes available, and then take possession of all pieces of that colour. The board is placed between the players, and the needle token is placed on one of the four central squares. Choose a player to move first. (In a series of games, the player who scored the least in the most recent game chooses who moves first in the next.) Play proceeds clockwise after the initial player has moved.

How to Play

A turn consists of two optional phases, *piecing* and *sewing*: each time it is her turn, a player may piece, sew, both, or neither. If the player decides to do both, the piecing must precede the sewing.

Piecing

To *piece*, a player chooses one of the pyramids he holds, and places it flat (that is, on one side) on one of the squares of the board. The square may not contain the needle, nor may it contain an existing flat pyramid (though it could hold any number of upright pyramids). If there is no suitable square on the board, then it is not possible for the player to piece on this turn.

Sewing

A player *sews* by either *moving* the needle, or *stitching*. At most one of these two actions may be performed in a single turn.

Moving

The needle may be moved into a horizontally or vertically adjacent square. However, it is never legal to move the needle back into the square from which it was last moved, regardless of how many turns have elapsed since.

No more than seven consecutive turns may be used to move the needle: if seven turns in a row have included needle moves, then whichever player has the eighth turn is not permitted to move the needle (but may still piece or stitch). To keep track of the number of needle moves, it can be helpful if players announce the move count following each turn in which they move the needle.

Stitching

A player may elect to *stitch* a piece by taking a flat pyramid in the same square as the needle, and re-orienting it into an upright position. If there is already one or more upright pyramids of any colour in that square, the new pyramid is placed on top of the stack. If there is no flat pyramid in the square containing the needle, the player may not stitch this turn. A player may stitch a pyramid

of any colour, as long as it was previously pieced onto the square which now contains the needle.

Ending the Game

There are two ways in which the game can end: one occurs when each player in sequence makes no play on her turn (that is, she neither pieces nor sews); and the other when all fifteen pieces of some colour have been pieced onto the board (whether or not they have been sewn).

Each player then counts his score, by adding up points for every stack of one or more pyramids whose topmost pyramid is their colour. The stack counts for three points if the topmost pyramid is large; two points if medium; or one point if it is small. The player with the highest score wins the game. In case of a tie, compare the players' points for any pieces of their colour directly below the topmost pyramids; if the score is still tied, count any pyramids two below the top, and so on. Pyramids which are still lying flat because they have not yet been sewn do not affect the score.

Strategies

Piece onto squares with big pyramids: It is well worth your while to piece a pyramid onto a square containing a large enemy, because if you can sew it later, you will not only score points for your pyramid, but also negate the opponent's score for the original piece. It can be worthwhile piecing onto a square which you have already sewn, to prevent an opponent from sewing on top of you, but be careful piecing a small pyramid onto a square where you have a large one on top of the stack — you will lose points if the small pyramid is later sewn.

Always make a move when you are behind: Be sure you make some sort of move (piecing or sewing) whenever you don't have the highest score. If you don't move, and none of the other players make a play either, then the game will be over, and you will lose! Only the winner has the luxury of passing.

Use up pieces if you are ahead: If you have the highest score, then try to piece whenever you can; it will be to your advantage to use up all your pyramids, so you can end the game before anybody else catches up to you. Conversely, if you are behind, it might pay to conserve your pyramids (depending how many pieces other players have saved); it will give you more flexibility in placing them in the future.