



## ***Linos: The Game of Twelve Stones***

Rules V 1.4, 5/18/2024, James Ernest

**Introduction:** In the *Dew Point* Universe ([Shipwrights of Marino](#), [After the Fog](#)) there is a forgotten game called *Linos*. Sets of these twelve stones have been found in all corners of the map, but with no record of the rules.

We are fortunate to be able to share Galliard Gaspar-Ewen's best approximation of the method of play for *Linos*, collected through years of travel across the forty skies.

*Linos* is still in open beta at Crab Fragment Labs, and we're pretty happy with it so far. We hope you'll try it out, and please [send us your thoughts](#).

**Summary:** *Linos* is a classic-style abstract game played with twelve stacking pieces. Over the course of the game, each player will play six pieces, scoring points for each.

**The Name:** Some scholars believe that "*Linos*" gets its name from the linen sack that holds the pieces. Others believe "*Linos*" refers to the stones themselves. Some claim that the word *Linos* refers to the "line" of stones. These guesses cannot all be right, but they might all be wrong.



**The Pieces:** *Linos* is played with a set of twelve oblong pieces called stones, six dark and six light. Each piece has the proportions 1 x 1 x 2. Our standard sets are roughly 20 x 20 x 40 mm, and our smaller “travel” sets are approximately 17 x 17 x 34 mm. You will also need one 6-sided die and 25 coins or other tokens for scoring.

**The Goal:** Players take turns drawing stones from a line and playing them into a stack in the center of the table. Each play scores points, and the goal is to finish with the most points. Because there is a disadvantage for going first, the final move scores only half points. A fair match is composed of two games, with each player starting once.

**The List:** In the earliest forms of this game, players drew stones from a sack. However, due to the many opportunities for cheating, this method was replaced with a formal dice-driven mechanic, in which the pieces are taken from a line called *the list*.

**Setting Up:** Clear a space in the center of the table. Build the list, a line of stones, to one side, in an order as shown below: One white stone (O) at the front of the list, then alternating two of each black (X) and white (O), finishing with one white at the back.

**Front** → **O X X O O X X O O X X O**

**The Pot:** Place 25 coins or other tokens into a *pot*. These will be used for scoring.

**On Each Turn:**

**Roll:** Roll the die and count into the list from the front, pulling that stone to play. Close up the space where the piece was removed. If you roll *beyond the end of the list*, take the *first piece*.

**Note:** *When all remaining pieces are the same color, there is no need to roll.*

**Place:** Add your piece to the stack. The rules for placement are as follows:

**General:** A new piece can be played in any orientation, standing up or lying down, as long as it conforms to the grid of the existing pieces, with the exception of the *royal plays* described below.

**The Basket:** All pieces must be contained within a 3x4 footprint called the “basket,” the boundaries of which are established through play. New pieces cannot exceed this area.

**Touching:** Pieces are not required to touch. Early plays can be separated from the others, as long as they don't break the basket. Later on, contact will be inevitable.

**Stacking:** You may stack a new piece on other pieces. The new piece must be entirely supported by existing pieces, and it must conform to the grid.

**Royal Plays:** Two types of parallel plays are not permitted unless no other plays are available. These are called the “royal plays” or “royals.”

- **Jack:** Two pieces in a line, either standing up or lying down, is a *Jack*. If the square ends of two stones are touching, this is a Jack.
- **Bales:** Two pieces alongside each other, with their entire side faces touching, is a *Bale*. As with a Jack, this is a royal play in any orientation.
- Royal plays are permitted only when there are *no other options*.

**Closed Boards:** When only royal plays are available, this is a “closed board,” on which royals may now be played. Such plays can often be very high-scoring. It can be to your advantage to force your opponent to leave a closed board, though this can be difficult to achieve.

**Score:** You score points based on two elements of the piece you play: its *neighbors* (pieces it touches) and its *height* (distance off the table).

**Neighbors:** The basic value of a play is calculated by adding the total number of *squares* where the new piece touches another piece of a *different color* (each long face has two squares, and each end is one square).

The table (“the ground”) counts as a third color, which means that each square where a piece touches the table is also worth one point. For example, if a piece lies flat on the table, it scores two points from the ground.

**Height:** The basic value is multiplied by the *height of the piece*, which means the level of the highest part. Pieces that are flat on the table are at level 1, a piece standing up on the table is at level 2, and so on. If you play a piece that scores 3 points, and it reaches level 3, this earns a total of 9 points.

**Note:** The first play of the game will always score 2 points. It is either lying flat, and worth two points on level 1, or standing up, and worth 1 point on level 2.

**Tracking Your Score:** When you score points in the early game, you take coins from the pot. Once the pot is empty, you take them from your opponent instead. If you ever score more points than your opponent can provide, the game ends immediately. (This is a “bust.”)

**The Final Play:** The 12th move scores only *half value*, rounding down. This exception helps balance the disadvantage of going first, though a perfect balance still requires two games.

**Winning:** Take turns until the last piece is played, or until a player scores more points than their opponent can surrender. For a fair game, play twice, with each player starting once, and compare your total scores. (A bust always counts as 25 points.)

**Origins:** *Linos* is a forgotten game in the *Dew Point* universe, a world in which ancient cultures lie buried in an ever-rising fog. The game will appear in *The Conscript*, an epistolary novel by naval officer Galliard Gaspar-Ewen. Someday. Maybe.

**Design Notes:** James Ernest created the first prototype of *Linos* in 2019, but was stymied in his attempts to bring the game to life. This version was created in July 2023, and we're excited to see it working at last.

### **Variations:**

*Linos* has several regional variations which you should also try out.

**Pot Size:** Caches between 21 and 31 coins have been discovered along with full sets of *Linos* stones, suggesting regional variations. The number is almost always odd, since an odd number of coins guarantees that an individual game cannot end in a tie. The main difference between these pot sizes is that larger pots reduce the chance of a bust.

**Basket Size:** *Linos* can be restricted to smaller baskets of 3x3 or even 3x2. We consider these modes more difficult, but they are no less interesting.

**Scoring:** The scoring method described above is widely known as the "fire point" system, referring to the point at which players start taking points away from each other instead of the supply. You can also track your points on a simple score sheet, or give each player their own bank of coins and take points away from each other from the beginning (this is how the game is played for money). In all cases, alternate who goes first to ensure the disadvantage of going first applies evenly to both players.

**Multiplayer:** Because no one owns individual pieces, it is possible to use exactly the same rules and pieces for a larger group. There would be an equal number of turns for all players in a group of 3 or 4 (or 6), though we're not sure how to reduce the final score(s) to account for the disadvantage of going first. As above, it's considered most fair to play a series of games and alternate who goes first.

This is still a preliminary rulebook. We hope to create something prettier once we have absolutely nailed down the rules. Meanwhile, please enjoy this rough version, and consider showing your support for Crab Fragment Labs by becoming a member on Patreon:

<https://www.patreon.com/crabfragment>

**Playtesters Included:** Tim Beach, Jessica Blair, Debbie Guskin, Joe Kisenwether, Roman Kutuzov, Lauri Miller, Carol Monahan, Lauren Tozer-Kilts, Shel Tozer-Kilts, Greg Whitehead, Jeff Wilcox

The fire point scoring system was developed with help from Greg Whitehead, whose analysis shows the first player with an *almost* 50% win rate.