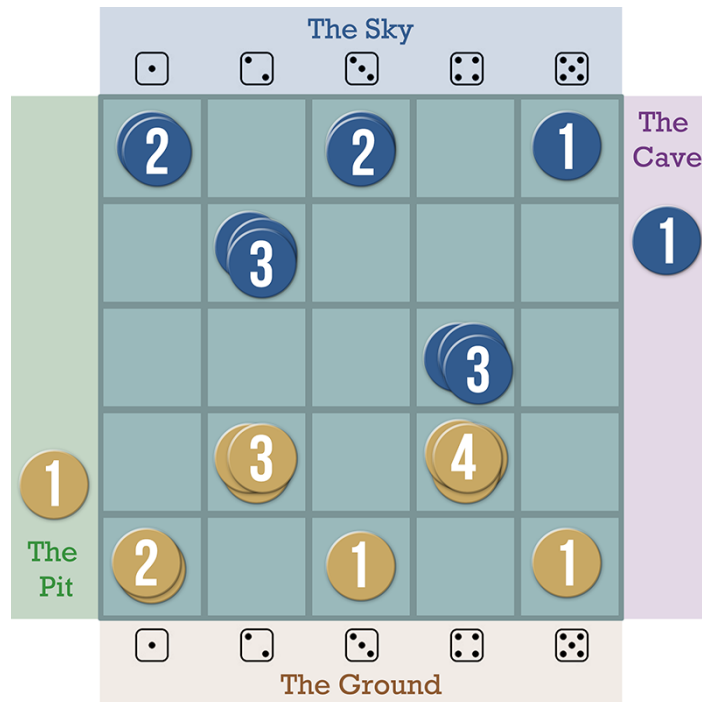# El Oso (The Bear)

Solitaire Board Game

By James Ernest / Crab Fragment Labs
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Introduction: El Oso, also called "Rain," is a solitaire board game. Your opponent is the Bear. The player's moves are deliberate, and the Bear's moves are random. The player's goal is to move at least ten pieces off the top edge of the board.

Equipment:

You need a 5x5 game board, shown above, 12 stacking pieces for each side (this is the same as a checkers set), and at least one 6-sided die.

Setup: The player's pieces start along the bottom row, and the Bear's pieces along the top, in stacks of random height. Start by placing one piece in each space in these rows, and then roll dice one at a time to add the remaining pieces to the stacks, as follows:

> For each piece, roll a 6-sided die. Stack the piece on the space in the column that corresponds to that roll. If you roll a 6 in this step, roll again. If that stack has five pieces already, do not stack it higher, and roll again. Continue until all pieces are placed.

This will result in a set of random-sized stacks for both the player and the Bear, between 1 and 5 pieces tall, in their respective starting rows. The player takes the first turn.

Player's Turn:

On each turn, you may move one of your stacks, by the following rules:

Distance: A stack can move a maximum distance equal to its size, so for example a stack of 3 pieces can move up to 3 spaces.

Direction: A stack can move diagonally forward or backward, or laterally (side to side), but it cannot move straight forward or straight back.

Clear Path: A stack can move only in a straight, open path. Player stacks do not capture or jump, and cannot move into occupied spaces. (By contrast, the Bear's stacks always move one step at a time, forward towards the ground, no matter what is in their way.)

Moving Off the Board: You can move a stack from the top row off the top of the board, and into the Sky. The player's goal is to move as many pieces as possible into the Sky. Stacks can not move to the Sky unless they start in the top row. When the player's last piece leaves the board, the game is over.

Passing: If you wish, you may "move zero," passing your turn. You might choose to do this if all of your stacks are hemmed in, or if you think moving would be more dangerous than staying put. When you do this, you still designate which stack "moved," because this will affect the Bear's turn.

Bear's Turn:

The Bear rolls a number of dice equal to the *height of the stack* that the player just moved. For example, if the player moves a stack of 2 pieces, the Bear rolls 2 dice. (It doesn't matter how far the player's stack moved, only how tall it is.)

Order: Arrange the Bear's dice in ascending order, and follow them one at a time, checking the board state after each. Treat any roll of 6 as a blank, and do not re-roll it. The results of each roll depend on the current state of the board, as follows:

Basic Result: If there is exactly one stack in the indicated column, move that stack down one space towards the Ground. For example, at the start of the game, if the Bear rolls a 3, advance the stack on the 3 column one step towards the Ground.

Capture: When a Bear's stack moves into a space with player pieces, chips of opposite colors destroy each other one by one, pairing off and leaving the board. Any remainder from the taller stack, if there is one, remains in the space. For example, if a Bear stack of 2 meets a player stack of 3, then 2 pieces from each side are removed, and one of the player's pieces remains on the board.

The Bear's pieces are removed to the right side of the board, called the Cave. The player's pieces are removed to the left, into the Pit. The player's pieces can not return from the Pit, but the Bear can bring pieces back from the Cave, as described below.

Empty Column: If you roll a die indicating a column with no Bear's pieces in it, then make a new stack in the top row, using all the Bear's pieces from the Cave, up to a maximum of five. If there are no pieces in the Cave, treat this roll as a blank. If there are more than five pieces in the Cave, leave the rest in the Cave. Note that it is sometimes possible to fill an empty column with one die, and then move that stack with the next.

Double Column: If a column has more than one stack of the Bear's pieces in it, advance only the highest stack (the one closest to the Sky). In this way, stacks can move down and merge with lower stacks. When two stacks merge, there is no height limit.

The Ground: When a Bear's stack moves off the bottom of the board, these pieces are temporarily on the "Ground." They will rain back onto the board after all moves are complete.

Raining Pieces Back: After making all the moves indicated by the Bear's roll, redistribute any pieces on the Ground into the top row. This is similar to the method used during setup; however, if you roll a 6, or if a stack would become higher than five, send those pieces to the Cave.

Bear pieces that land on player pieces during this step act like other capturing pieces, destroying the player's pieces (and themselves), and removing them to the Pit and the Cave.

Objective:

When the player's last piece leaves the board, the game is over. The player's score is the number of pieces that have been moved to the Sky.

The player's goal is to move as many pieces into the Sky as possible. Ten pieces or more is considered a "win," and eleven and twelve are superior wins. Nine or less is a loss.

For a competitive game, players can take turns as the player and the Bear, and compare their final scores. You could decide to keep a total score over any number of games.

Design: EL Oso was designed by James Ernest and Crab Fragment Labs. Testers included Nora Miller, Carol Monahan, Jimm Stout, Anthony Westbrook, Jeff Wilcox, and many others.

Design Notes: If you have a comment or a question, reach out to us at Crab Fragment Labs. Thanks for playing and we'll see you at the table.