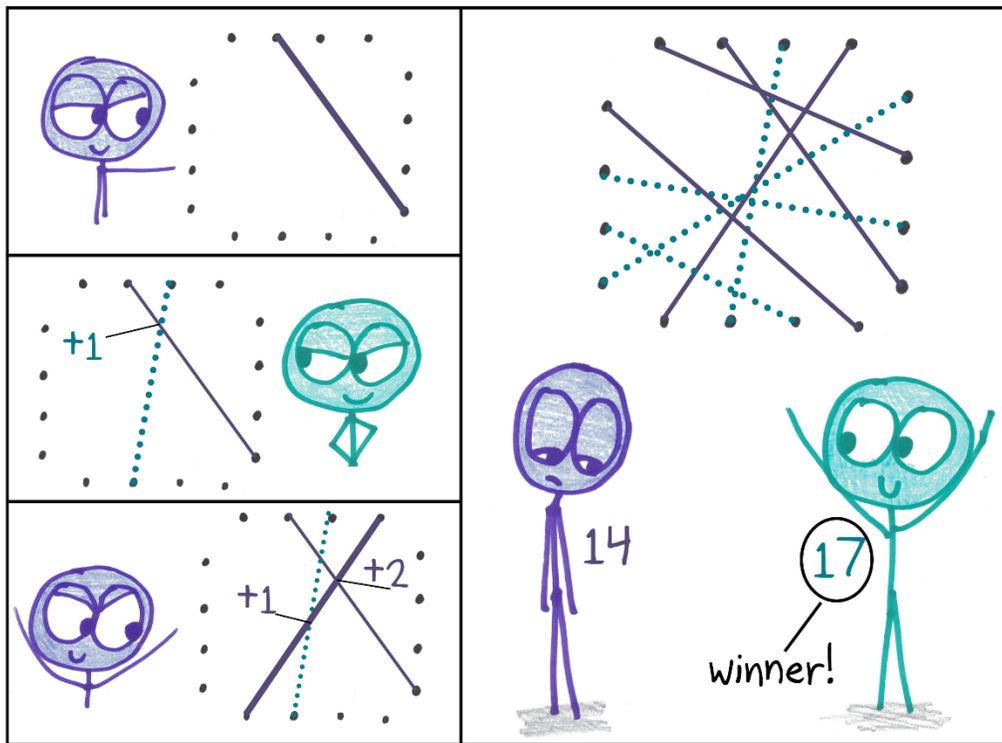


Crossed

I found this jewel in the teeming pages of Ivan Moscovich's *1000 Playthinks: Puzzles, Paradoxes, Illusions & Games*. (Specifically, it's #216.) In a fun and wholly unnecessary DIY project, I later created my own physical prototype, played by stretching rubber bands between 16 nails driven into a piece of wood. All you need, though, is two players, two colors of pen, and paper.

To begin, draw sixteen dots in a square as below. Then, take turns **connecting two unused dots with a straight line**. The dots cannot be on the same side of the square.

You score **one point for every time you cross an opponent's line**, and **two points for every time you cross one of your own**. Make sure to keep score as you go.



Keep playing until no more moves are possible (either because all dots have been used, or because the only unused dots are on the same side of the square). **Higher score wins.**

Lasting only eight moves—one less than the famously bland tic-tac-toe—Crossed may feel overly simple. Yet with dozens of choices on each of the first few moves, its game tree branches rapidly outward, like cracks in shattered glass. Also, the elegant scoring system means that short moves deprive you of the chance to self-cross, while long moves leave you vulnerable to an opponent's cross. This creates a pleasing tension, like a rope being pulled from both ends.