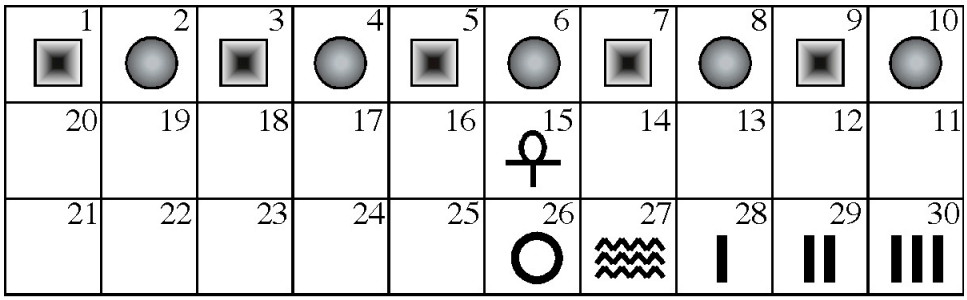
The Ancient Egyptian Game of Senet



Start: Each player has 5 pieces, initially placed alternating on squares 1 to 10.

Move: Players alternate throwing a set of 4 two sided paddles to move forward:

1 white side up = move 1 square and throw again
2 white sides up = move 2 squares
3 white sides up = move 3 squares
4 white sides up = move 4 squares and throw again
4 black sides up = move 6 squares and throw again

Attack: Landing on an opponent's piece is an "attack", and you exchange places; you may not land on your own pieces.

Restrictions:

- FIRST MOVE: First throw of the game must move the piece on square 10.
- SAFETY: Squares 15, 26, 28, 29 cannot be attacked.
- DEFENSE: Two or more consecutive opponent pieces cannot be attacked.
- BLOCKADE: Three or more consecutive opponent pieces cannot be passed; however, blockades may not turn corners (10 to 11 or 20 to 21).
- TRAP: Land on 27 and go back to 15 (or the first empty square before it)..
- EXIT: You may not move past 30. A piece on 30 can be removed at the *start* of your turn if all of your other pieces are out of the first row.
- NO MOVE: If you can't move forward, you must move backward (according to the same rules). If no move is possible your turn ends.

Win: You win by removing all of your pieces.

Game variations:

- You must land on square 15 and 26 exactly before moving on.
- 30 is a safety square and/or make up different rules for removing pieces.
- Start with pieces off the board and throw to enter them on to the first row (you cannot land on a square with your piece or one that is part of 2 or more consecutive opponent pieces); count 4 black sides as 5 points, and you can choose to double your throw value.

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Other Ways to Play Senet

Senet was played in Egypt over 3,000 years ago. King Tut was buried with 4 Senet boards. The exact rules are not known; scholars have studied old drawings to speculate on the rules.

Rules close to *Jequier's Rules* have been presented here and are most common (start with 5 pieces each, swap with an opponents piece when you land on it, 2 in a row are safe, 3 in a row are a blockade, etc.). Other proposals for Senet rules include those of *Kendall*, *Tait*, and *Bell*. Kendall has 7 pieces each (starting on squares 1 through 14). Both Bell and Tait start with all of the pieces off the board and throw to enter them on the board. Bell's rules move 10 pieces backwards and winning is by getting them arranged in every other square of the first two rows.

Here are ideas for rule variations, some coming from these other rule sets:

- The game begins by the first player moving from 10 to 11 and then throwing again.
- Designate some or all of squares 15, 26, 28, 29, and 30 as *stopping* squares, where you must land on them exactly before moving on.
- Different rules for square 27 (e.g., land on square 27 and go back to the lowest numbered empty square, or end your turn and in subsequent turns have to move it before moving another piece).
- Pieces do not have to be out of the first row before you can take a piece off, or alternately, make the lowest square that can have a piece a higher number such as 15 or 21.
- Backward moves may only land on an empty square and / or may pass blockades.
- Limit or eliminate extra throws; can also count 4 blacks as 5 points.
- Start with pieces off the board and move them on according to throws; you can change the rule of an attack to be that it bumps the opponents piece off the board.

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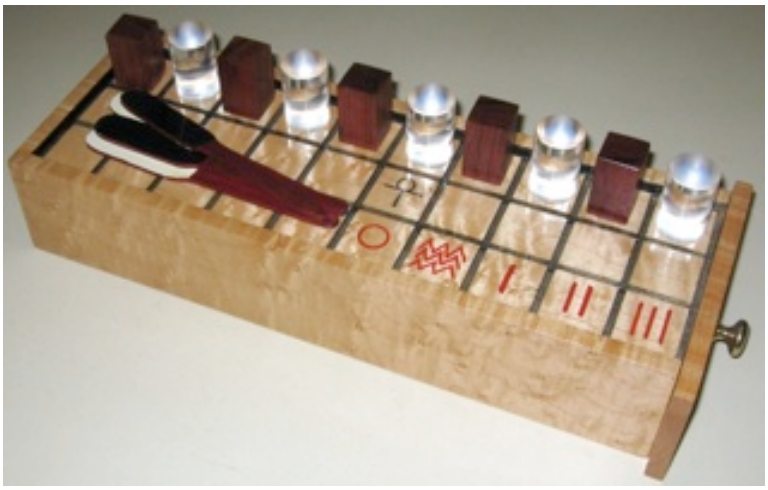
A Senet Set



Made by J. A Storer, 2005.
(birdseye maple box and wood drawer,
5 rectangular purpleheart pieces, 5 cylindrical plexiglass pieces,
painted mahogany black and white paddles with red handles,
3 x 6 x 15 inches)

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Further reading:

Walker's Page, from: http://psion.snigfarp.karoo.net/senet
(Includes the rules of *Jequier*, *Kendall*, *Tait*, and *Bell*.)
King Tut House Page, from: http://www.kingtutshop.com/freeinfo/SenetGame.htm
Game Cabinet Page, from: http://www.gamecabinet.com/history/Senet.html
Humanities Interactive Page, from: http://www.humanities-interactive.org/ancient/tut/senet
Fortune City Page, from: http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/lion/193/Senet.html
Master Games Page, from: http://www.mastersgames.com/rules/senet-rules.htm
Terry's Page, from: http://wesheb.tdonnelly.org/esenet.html
Private Moon Page, from: http://www.privatemoon.com/artists/toys/senet/senet.html
Think Quest Page, from: http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0210200/ancient_egypt/senet.htm
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