

SENET

OFFICIAL RULEBOOK

Ancient Egyptian race game (c. 3500 BCE), reconstructed from archaeological evidence

2

PLAYERS

15-30
min

MINUTES

8+

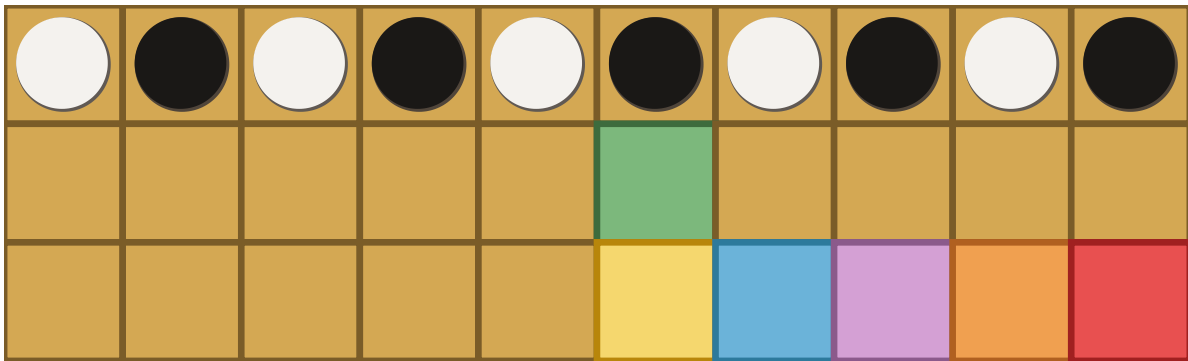
AGE

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SENET

Reconstruction notice: No complete ancient ruleset for Senet survives. These rules follow Timothy Kendall's 1978 reconstruction (*Passing Through the Netherworld*, Kirk Game Company), supplemented by R.C. Bell's 1979 starting position and Piccione's standard square numbering. This is the most widely implemented scholarly reconstruction, used by museums and commercial editions worldwide.

Senet is a race game for two players, played on a board of 30 squares arranged in three rows of ten. Players race their pieces along a winding path, attempting to bear them all off the board. The game dates to predynastic Egypt (c. 3500 BCE) and remained popular for over three thousand years, eventually acquiring religious significance as a symbolic journey through the afterlife.



Senet – starting position (Kendall reconstruction)

<https://engine.moddable.games/play/?game=senet&variant=standard>

COMPONENTS

- ♦ One board of 30 squares (3 rows × 10 columns)
- ♦ 5 cone-shaped pieces (one player)
- ♦ 5 spool-shaped pieces (other player)
- ♦ 4 flat throwing sticks (one side light, one side dark)

THE BOARD

The 30 squares are numbered along a boustrophedon (S-shaped) path:

- ♦ **Row 1 (top):** Squares 1–10, left to right
- ♦ **Row 2 (middle):** Squares 11–20, right to left
- ♦ **Row 3 (bottom):** Squares 21–30, left to right

Six squares have special properties:

SQUARE	NAME	EFFECT
15	House of Rebirth	Target square for pieces sent back from the House of Water
26	House of Happiness	Mandatory stop. Every piece must land here before proceeding
27	House of Water	Piece landing here is sent back to square 15 (or the nearest empty square before 15 if occupied)
28	House of Three Truths	Piece is protected from capture. Bears off only with an exact throw of 3
29	House of Re-Atoum	Piece is protected from capture. Bears off only with an exact throw of 2
30	House of Horus	Bears off with an exact throw of 1. Piece can be captured here

SETUP

Place all 10 pieces alternating on squares 1–10 of the first row: Cone on 1, Spool on 2, Cone on 3, Spool on 4, and so on. The cone player moves first.

THROWING STICKS

Four flat wooden sticks are thrown simultaneously. Count how many land light-side up:

LIGHT SIDES UP	MOVE VALUE	BONUS TURN
1	1	Yes
2	2	No
3	3	No
4 (all light)	4	Yes
0 (all dark)	5	Yes

Throws of 1, 4, or 5 grant an immediate extra turn after moving.

MOVEMENT

Move one piece forward along the path by the number of squares indicated by the throw. A piece may not land on a square occupied by a friendly piece.

Mandatory stop: Every piece must land exactly on square 26 (House of Happiness) before continuing. A throw that would carry a piece past square 26 without first stopping there is illegal for that piece.

CAPTURE

Landing on a square occupied by an opponent's piece swaps their positions: your piece takes the square, their piece moves back to the square you came from.

Exceptions:

- ♦ Pieces on squares 28 and 29 cannot be captured (protected)
- ♦ A pair of adjacent same-colour pieces protects both from capture (but does not block movement past them)

BLOCKADES

Three or more consecutive squares occupied by the same player form a blockade. Opponent pieces cannot pass a blockade. If no legal move exists, the turn is forfeited.

BEARING OFF

Pieces bear off the board (are removed and scored) from the final squares:

- ♦ From square 28: exact throw of 3
- ♦ From square 29: exact throw of 2
- ♦ From square 30: exact throw of 1

A piece cannot attempt to bear off until it has passed through square 26 (House of Happiness).

FORCED BACKWARD MOVEMENT

If your only legal move would land on a square occupied by your own piece, you must instead move one of your pieces backward to the nearest empty square.

WINNING

The first player to bear off all five pieces wins.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Senet boards have been found in tombs dating to the First Dynasty (c. 3100 BCE). The game appears in tomb paintings, and complete sets were found in Tutankhamun's tomb (c. 1323 BCE). By the New Kingdom, Senet had acquired religious overtones: the journey across the board symbolised the soul's passage through the Duat (underworld), with the special squares representing divine trials. The name "senet" means "passing" in Egyptian.

ATTRIBUTION

Reconstruction: Timothy Kendall, *Passing Through the Netherworld*(1978). Starting position: R.C. Bell, *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*(1979). Square numbering: Peter A. Piccione's academic standard. This synthesis represents the most widely implemented version in museums and commercial editions.



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