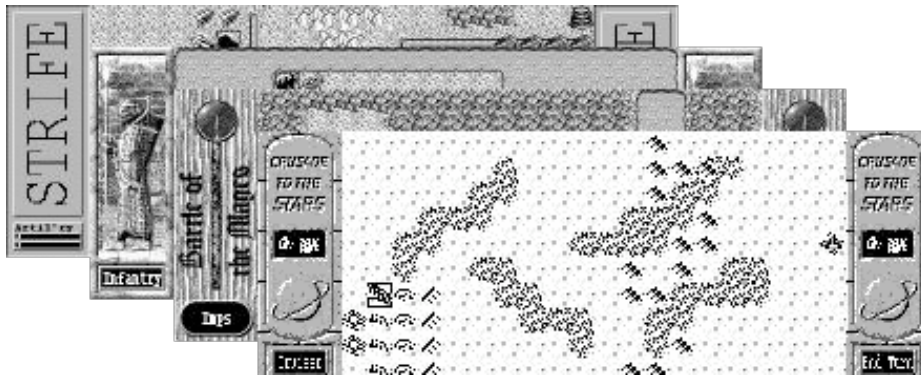
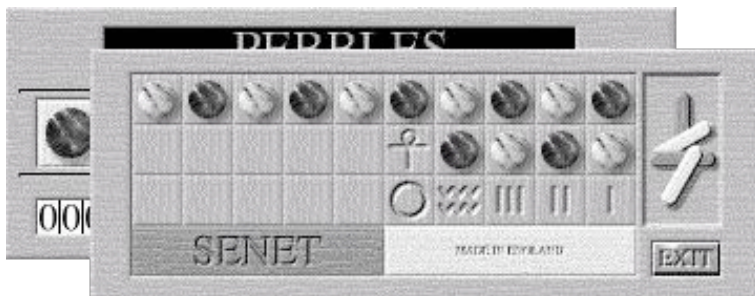


Damian Walker's Psion Software



The STRIFE Series

Command a host of forces into battle, in almost any era.



BOARD GAMES ON THE MOVE

Test your skill at traditional board games anywhere, any time.

SENET: A GAME OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Welcome to Senet, a game of ancient Egypt! This site was created as a home for my implementation of Senet for Psion handheld computers, but I hope that fans of the game in general will also find it interesting.

INTRO

Click on the **intro** button for an introduction to the game of Senet.

RULES

Click on the **rules** button to find out how to play the game.

HISTORY

Click on the **history** button to read a bit about the history of the game.

PSION

Click on the **Psion** button to find out more about my electronic version of the game.

SITE MAP

Click on the **site map** button to navigate quickly around this site.

LINKS

Click on the **links** button for links to other sites about Senet.

SITE MAP

[HOME](#)

[INTRO](#)

[RULES](#)

[KENDALL](#)

[JEQUIER](#)

[TAIT](#)

[BELL](#)

[HISTORY](#)

[PSION](#)

[NEWS](#)

[SYSTEM](#)

[SCREENS](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

[SITE MAP](#)

[LINKS](#)

INTRODUCTION

Senet is a game from Ancient Egypt, and is a relative (perhaps a direct ancestor) of Backgammon. It is played on a board of thirty squares, and is often called *The Game of Thirty Squares*. The squares are arranged in three rows of ten but are treated as a single course, as are the two rows of twelve points in Backgammon. Senet differs from Backgammon, however, in that the pieces of the two players travel in the same direction. The following numbering scheme is used to identify the squares on the board:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30

The original rules of Senet are no longer known. The game probably underwent many changes during the three thousand years it was in fashion in Egypt. Various authorities have put forward suggestions as to how the game could have been played, and four of these suggestions have been reproduced on this web site.

A HISTORY OF SENET

The game of Senet had a long and distinguished history which began over 5000 years ago. Boards with three equal rows of squares have been found dating from between 3500 and 3100 BC, which resemble Senet but have a number of rows on each square other than ten.

The first evidence of Senet as a game of thirty squares takes the form of wall paintings, dating to about 2600 BC. At this time, Senet was simply a pastime like many other games before and since.

By about 1300 BC, Senet began to take on religious significance. It was used to represent the soul's journey into the underworld, and it was believed that skill in the game would ensure success on the soul's final journey.

Boards from this time often have funerary inscriptions, implying that they were made especially for the tomb. The emphasis of wall paintings depicting people playing Senet also began to change. Instead of representing Senet as an everyday activity they were more religious in character, often depicting the deceased playing against an invisible opponent.

It is apparent that Senet was still played as a pastime, as improvised boards have been found scratched into stones during this era.

Senet died out not long after the beginning of the Christian era, the last evidence of it dating from about 400 AD. It may have died out because of Christian objections to its religious aspects. Or it may have simply fallen out of fashion when the Romans imported similar games like Tabula and Duodecim Scriptorum, forerunners to modern Backgammon (the importation of Chess into Northern Europe had a similar effect upon the older game of Hnefatafl around 1000 years later).

Many paintings and examples of Senet boards have been found in archaeological excavations in Egypt. The boards found share certain characteristics in addition to the size. For instance, the last five squares seem to have been vaguely standardised, with markings that could be identified as Good, Bad, 3, 2 and 1. Square 15 was often marked, and boards have been found with markings on squares 1 and 16.

Many boards were made in the form of a box, with the board on the top and the pieces stored inside, like many modern chess sets. Also like modern chess and backgammon sets these were sometimes a compendium of two games, with the inside of the lid containing different board on which the same pieces could be used.

Archaeological finds show that the number of pieces used in the game underwent a change over the game's history. Early finds and paintings have seven pieces per player, while by the time the game acquired its religious significance the number was reduced to five per player. However, some games have been found with ten pieces per player.

Pieces were often distinguished by shape as well as colour, with cones and reels being common shapes found in surviving game sets and in wall paintings.

With the deciphering of the hieroglyphics a wealth of information about life in Egypt became available to scholars, and interest and knowledge of the game of Senet has increased over the last 100 years. Before

this time, the games in the paintings had been mistaken for draughts or checkers, a game we now know was not invented until around 1000 AD!

A large number of ancient texts deal with the game of Senet, but none of them give a clear and exact description of the rules. Instead, there are plenty of hints about the game's objectives, the skill and luck required, and the pitfalls to be found on the board. It is from these that the various reconstructions of the rules of Senet have been made.

None of the reconstructions given on this site give a complete representation of all we know about the game. However, given that the game was popular for about 3000 years and underwent many changes, it would not be possible to resurrect the "definitive" Senet today, even if proper sets of rules were found. But the four sets provided here are the most popular attempts to create a playable revival of the Senet experience.

A yellow, rounded rectangular button with the word "HOME" in black, bold, uppercase letters.

RULES OF THE GAME

As the original rules of Senet are no longer known, we have to rely upon reconstructions if we want to play the game. The reconstructions reproduced here are the four which I have found most often in printed publications and on the Internet.

KENDALL

These rules are based on the work of Timothy Kendall in *Passing Through the Netherworld: The Meaning and Play of Senet, an Ancient Egyptian Funerary Game*, 1978 Belmont, The Kirk Game Company.

JEQUIER

These rules were devised by the Swiss Archaeologist Gustave Jéquier, and this text was based on the description from the book *The World Of Games* by Jack Botermans et al.

TAIT

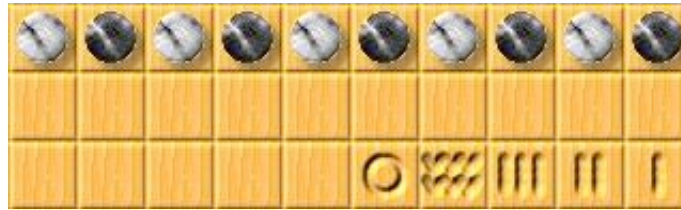
This set of rules was proposed by Professor John Tait, a leading authority on Egypt based at University College London.

BELL






These rules were formulated by R. C. Bell and are based on the description from the book *The World Of Games*, by Jack Botermans et al.

RULES OF THE GAME: JÉQUIER

These rules were devised by the Swiss Archaeologist Gustave Jéquier, and this implementation was taken from the book *The World Of Games* by Jack Botermans et al.



Each player has five pieces, which start the game on the board. White occupies square 1, black occupies square 2, and the remaining pieces alternate white then black along the first row of the board. The last five squares of the board are marked:

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|
|  | Square 26 is the House of Beauty, marked with a circle. |  | Square 27 is the House of Humiliation, marked with water. |  | Square 28 is the House of the Three Truths, marked with a III. |
|  | Square 29 is the House of Re-Atoun, marked with a II. |  | Square 30 is the last square, marked with a I. | | |

To start the game, the players take turns to throw the casting sticks. With each throw, the score is counted as the number of light sides showing, with no light sides indicating 6. The first player to throw a 1 takes the black pieces, and moves the piece on square 10 by one square. Black throws again and may move any piece on this and subsequent throws.

A piece may move by the number of squares indicated by the casting sticks with certain limitations. Firstly, it may not jump over a row of three or more of the opponent's pieces. Secondly, it may not land on a piece of its own colour. Thirdly, it may not land on an opponent's piece if that piece is part of a row of two or more of the opponent's pieces. If no forward moves are possible, then a piece must move backwards, but backward moving pieces can land only on an empty square. If no forward or backward moves are possible, the turn is lost.

When landing on an isolated opponent's piece, that piece is bumped, and moves backwards to the square previously occupied by the piece that bumped it. Pieces on the marked squares are safe from bumping, even when they are isolated from other pieces of the same colour.

Pieces landing on The House Of Humiliation suffer a penalty, and are immediately moved to the first unoccupied square on the board, to begin their journey again. Pieces landing on the last square of the board are automatically borne off, and removed from the board, but this may only be done when all of that player's pieces are on the last row of the board.

After moving on a throw of 2 or 3, play passes to the opponent. However, after moving on throws of 1, 4 or 6, the same player throws and moves again.

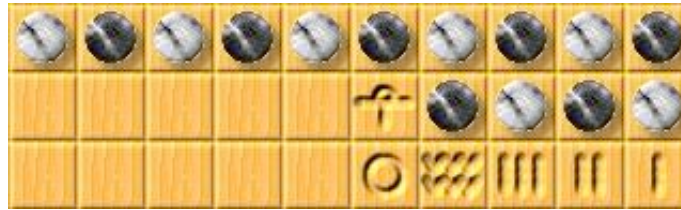
The winner of the game is the first player whose pieces are all borne off the board.

As there are not enough spaces on the last row of the board for all of the pieces, there is a considerable amount of jostling and falling in the water before the first piece can be borne off the board.







RULES

RULES OF THE GAME: KENDALL

These rules are the work of Timothy Kendall in *Passing Through the Netherworld: The Meaning and Play of Senet, an Ancient Egyptian Funerary Game*, 1978 Belmont, The Kirk Game Company.



This variant of the game gives seven pieces to each player. At the beginning of the game, all the pieces are on the board, starting with white on square 1 and alternating with black along the first fourteen squares of the course. Some of the squares are marked as follows:

 Square 15 is the House of Rebirth, marked on our board with an Ankh.	 Square 26 is the House of Beauty, marked with a circle.	 Square 27 is the House of Humiliation, marked with water.
 Square 28 is the House of the Three Truths, marked with a III.	 Square 29 is the House of Re-Atoun, marked with a II.	 Square 30 is the last square, marked with a I.

Black goes first in this game, and starts by throwing the casting sticks. The light sides of the sticks are counted as the score, but if no light sides are showing then the score is five.

After throwing the sticks, a piece is moved forward by the number of squares that the sticks indicate, if possible. A piece may be moved thus if it will land in an empty square, or on an isolated opponent's piece (an isolated piece is one that is not stood next to other pieces of the same colour). A piece may not be moved if it would land on a piece of the same colour, or on a protected piece of the opponent (a protected piece is one that is stood next to at least one other piece of the same colour).

If a moving piece lands on an isolated piece of the opponent, then the opponent's piece is bumped back to the square from which the moving piece came.

If (and only if) no forward moves are possible, then a piece must be moved backwards instead. Upon landing on an isolated piece of the opponent when travelling backwards, the opponent's piece is bumped forwards to the square from which the moving piece came.

There are further restrictions on movement. A piece cannot move past the House of Beauty without landing on it first. From the House of Beauty a piece may continue, depending upon the throw of the sticks, to the four squares beyond.

If a piece falls on the House of Humiliation, its owner incurs a penalty. The current turn is finished, and during subsequent turns, no other piece of that player may be moved until the piece is rescued from the water. A piece may be rescued from the water by moving it to the House of Rebirth instead of throwing the sticks. Alternatively, the sticks may be thrown and the piece may be borne off (see later) on an exact throw

of four. The latter option is normally advisable only when the piece is the player's only remaining one on the board. However, if the House of Rebirth is occupied (by any piece, protected or not) then the piece cannot be moved there and the sticks must be thrown.

Pieces may bear off (be removed from the board) from the last five squares of the board on an exact throw. Pieces on the House of the Three Truths and the House of Re-Atoun may not advance any further on the board, but are instead borne off on exact throws of three or two respectively. If bearing off is not possible, and there are no other pieces on the board to move, then a piece on either of these squares will move backwards to the House of Humiliation. A piece may bear off from the last square of the board on any throw.

There are some special cases regarding bumping of pieces. Firstly, if a moving piece lands on an isolated piece on the last three squares of the board (only possible when moving from the House of Beauty), the isolated piece does not move back to the House of Beauty but is moved to the House of Humiliation; only if the House of Humiliation is already occupied will a piece be bumped back to the House of Beauty. Pieces in the House of Humiliation are never protected no matter what pieces are sat next to them. If a piece is bumped when sat in the House of Humiliation it will exchange places with the attacking piece as normal: this is a nice bonus for pieces stuck in the water!

A player's turn is over after moving on a roll of two or three. It is also over if a player's piece lands in the House of Humiliation, or if the player rescued a piece from the House of Humiliation instead of throwing the sticks, or if the player failed to rescue a piece from the House of Humiliation by throwing a four. But after otherwise moving on a throw of one, four or five, the player gets to throw again.

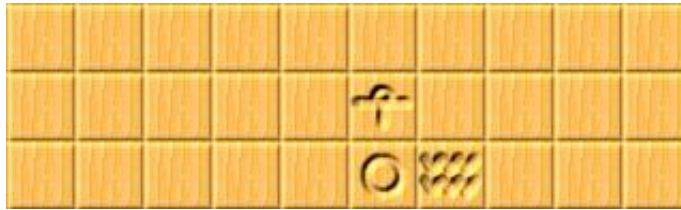
The winner is the first player who bears off all his pieces from the board.

For much of the game skill is rewarded by these rules, but the tide can turn quickly when a player is down to only one piece, and is then at the mercy of the casting sticks.




**RULES**

RULES OF THE GAME: TAIT

This set of rules was proposed by Professor John Tait, a leading authority on Egypt based at University College London.



The game starts with all the pieces off the board, and each player has five pieces. The board is marked with the following squares:

 Square 15 is the House of Rebirth, marked on our board with an Ankh.
  Square 26 is the House of Beauty, marked with a circle.
  Square 27 is the House of Water, marked with water.

In this game Player 1 takes the black pieces and throws the casting sticks. The number of light sides showing is counted as the score, but if no light sides are showing then the score is six. After seeing the score a player may do one of the following things.

(i) A new piece can be moved from the plinth to the board, (ii) a piece already on the board can be moved, or (iii) a piece can be borne off the board. There are conditions on each of these actions, described below. If none of the actions are possible, the throw is lost.

New pieces can be placed on the board on a throw of four or six. The piece is placed on square four or six, depending upon the throw. This move cannot be made if the appropriate square is already occupied by a piece of the same colour. However, if there is an opponent's piece on that square, then it will be bumped, that is, it will be removed from the board back to its plinth and must start its journey again.

A piece already on the board may be moved the number of spaces indicated on the casting sticks, if the destination square is not already occupied by a piece of the same colour. If the square is occupied by an opponent's piece then the opponent's piece is bumped, as described above. A piece cannot be bumped from The House of Rebirth, however, as that is a safe square. A piece landing on The House Of Water will be removed immediately from the board, and put back on its plinth. Note that a move to The House Of Water may only be made if there are no other legal moves available.

A piece may be borne off the board on an exact throw. A piece on the last square requires a throw of one, a piece on the next to last square requires a throw of two, and so on up until square 25, from which a throw of six allows a piece to bear off.

Usually, after one player throws the sticks and makes a move, play passes to the other player. However, a player may make an extra throw under the following circumstances: (i) when that player's last throw was six, (ii) when that player's last move was to move a piece on The House Of Beauty, or (iii) when that player's last move was to bear a piece off the board. Extra throws are not cumulative, so throwing a six to

bear off will not give a player two extra throws.

The game is won by the first player whose pieces have all been borne off the board.

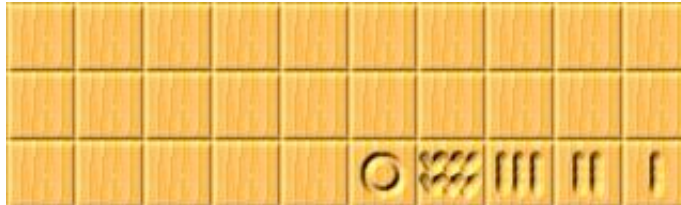
These rules rely more on luck than the others, and for much of the game a player will have no real choices to make.

RULES

RULES OF THE GAME: BELL

These rules were formulated by R. C. Bell and taken for this implementation from the book *The World Of Games*, by Jack Botermans et al.

Each player has ten pieces, which start off the board, sat on the plinth. There are four casting sticks, and when thrown the score is counted as the number of light sides facing up, with none counting as five.



This version of the game is played backwards, with pieces starting their journey on the last five squares of the board and travelling towards square 1. The five squares are marked:

Square 26 is marked with a circle, and pieces may enter the board here on the throw of 5.



Square 27 is marked with water, and pieces may enter the board here on the throw of 4.



Squares 28-30 are marked with III, II and I respectively, and pieces may enter the board here on the relevant throw.

Players take turns to throw the casting sticks and enter or move a piece, starting with black. After throwing the casting sticks, a piece may be entered onto the relevant marked square (as described above) if that square is empty. Alternatively, a piece already on the board may be moved by the number of squares indicated by the casting sticks.



The game is won by lining up pieces on alternating squares along the first two rows of the board, and the first player whose pieces are all in position is declared the winner. The first player to put a piece on square 1 takes the odd squares, with the other player taking the even squares.

Movement of pieces on the board is subject to some limitations. A piece may not land on another piece of the same colour, nor may it progress beyond its final square in the winning sequence. It may land on an opponent's piece provided that (i) the opponent's piece is not on one of the five marked squares, and (ii) the opponent's piece has not reached its final square in the winning sequence. When landing on an opponent's piece, that piece is bumped off the board and returns to its plinth to begin its journey again.

SENET ON THE MOVE

Senet on the move is my implementation of Senet for Psion handheld computers and compatibles. It can play the game using all four sets of rules given on this web site, and you can play against another person or against one of three computer opponents (Novice, Average and Expert).

NEWS

Click on the *News* button for information about recent developments to the game.

SYSTEM

Click on the *System* button for a list of systems that the game will run on.

SCREENS

Click on the *Screens* button to see what the game looks like on various machines.

DOWNLOAD

Click on the *Download* button to download a copy of the game for your Psion.

LINKS

Contacting the Author

You can send comments about the site and the computer game to me, at damian@snigfarp.karoo.co.uk. Please include the word **Senet** on the subject line to ensure the message gets past my spam trap.

Other Psion Software By The Same Author

There is an expanding range of software for Psion computers produced by the author of *War In Ancient Times*, visited by clicking on the icon on the right.



Other Good Senet Web Sites

[The Game of Senet](#)

[Welcome to Senet](#)

[Senet - A game of Ancient Egypt](#)

[Rules from Masters Games](#)

[Terry's Egyptian Page - Senet](#)

[Good German Senet page](#)

[Senet rules](#)

[Senet](#)