



The Rules of Senet

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Senet was a game played by the ancient Egyptians and is an ancestor of Backgammon. It is not known how the game was played exactly but they can be deduced to a certain extent and the following is a popular conjecture.



Masters Traditional Games sells a nice wooden **Senet game** based on those found in Egyptian tombs that are more than 3000 years old.

Equipment

A Senet board consisted of three rows of ten squares set in a rectangle. In one corner, the square that is assumed to be the final square has a single stroke, the next one along in the row, two strokes, the next one three strokes, the next a diagonal cross and the fifth one along a symbol with a circle and cross. It is assumed that these were squares 26 to 30 of a 30 square track that started in the opposite corner, went along one row, travelled back down the middle row and finished along the row ending in these special squares. Square 15 also often contained a symbol and was called the House of Rebirth while square 26 with a cross and circle symbol is known as the House of Happiness and square 27 with the cross is known as the House of water.

Each person has five pieces of contrasting hue or contrasting pattern. The movements of the pieces are determined by the throw of four split twigs with a dark face on one side and a light face on the other (binary lots).

Preparation

Pieces are placed on the first ten squares of the first row with the colours alternating.

The Play

Players take turns to move a single piece per throw of the split twigs viz:

- 0 light faces up - 5 and an extra throw
- 1 light face up - 1 and an extra throw

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- 2 light faces up 2
- 3 light faces up 3
- 4 light faces up 4 and an extra throw

A square can only be occupied by one piece at a time. If no pieces can move, the turn is passed. If a piece lands on an opposing piece, the opposing piece is moved back to the square that the attacking piece started the move from.

The House of Happiness cannot be passed over. Every piece must land upon it before preceding onward. The House of water is to be avoided - when a piece lands on this square, the piece is returned to the House of Rebirth.

Pieces can only bear off the final three squares by throwing the number indicated on the square.

The first player to bear all pieces off the board wins.

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