

50 Rules for Playing the Senet Game

(Based on Kendall's Rules)

There are several sets of rules for playing games on the **Senet** Game Board. Here is one set that is based on rules developed by Timothy Kendall. You can find others on the Internet or invent your own.

The Game of **Senet** is played on a rectangular checkerboard consisting of 30 squares arranged in three rows, each with ten squares. Two players each have a set of 5 pawns (5 black and 5 white) and compete to be first to bear off their pawns (that is, move them beyond square 30). Modern chess pawns, checkers, or other suitable tokens can be used for playing pieces.

The game begins with the pawns arranged along the top row alternating black and white pawns on the squares that match their colors. (Some boards have alternating colors like a checkerboard. Most boards have no illustrations or only a few on special squares.)

Who goes first and the pawn moves are determined by tossing a set of four coins. You can also toss flat throwing sticks such as “popsicle” craft sticks as long as each side of the sticks is colored differently (e.g., one side is white and the other side is black). The Egyptians used similar sticks, sometimes made to look a bit like fingers.

The pawns must travel a Z-shaped course across the Game Board left-to-right along the first (top) row, right-to-left, back across the second (middle) row, and then left-to-right along the third (bottom) row to bear off at the end of the bottom row.

If you use four coins they have the following values: 1 head = 1, 2 heads = 2, 3 heads = 3, 4 heads = 4, 4 tails = 5. The throwing sticks work the same way using the colors as guides. Players toss coins or sticks, and player with highest number gets white pawns and moves his pawn on square 10 to square 15.

When it is your turn, you may move any of your pawns that are able to move.

Special squares

15. **House of Rebirth:** Destination of the first move and of any pawns that die and then choose the path of rebirth. (See details below.)

26. **House of Beauty:** All pawns must stop here on an exact count before they can move to the final squares.

27. **House of Death:** The final great test. A pawn dies if it stops on this square or is thrown onto this square. (See rule below for “throwing pawns”. The dead pawn and all other pawns of that color are frozen until the dead pawn is either reborn in the **House of Rebirth** or is borne off the Board with an exact throw of 4 (which has a low probability).

28. **House of the Emperor:** You are ready to become pharaoh.

29. **House of the Tower:** This marks the coronation of your pawn as a pharaoh and his ascending of the royal throne.

30. **House of the Hero:** Horus mounts his chariot to ascend beyond the Game Board. When he is born off the Board, he becomes Osiris the Magician and the Higher Self of Amen Ra.

Play of the Game and Strategies

A player must move one of his pawns the number shown on the throw of the coins. If he is unable to move, he forfeits his turn to the other player who may either use the number shown by the forfeiting player's coins or throw the coins again to try for another number. If the other player chooses to throw, he must use the number that comes up.

Each square can only hold a single pawn at a time. If a square is occupied by an opponent's pawn, the player's pawn swaps positions with the opponent's pawn. Thus the player's pawn moves forward and the opponent's pawn moves backwards. For example, if a player throws a 3 and his pawn is on square 17, but his opponent has a pawn on square 20, the player can move his pawn to square 20 and move the opponent's pawn from square 20 back to square 17.

If a player has no way to move a pawn forward he must move a pawn backward the number of squares shown by the count of his coin throw.

All pawns must stop at square 26 by an exact count before moving on to the final squares. If a pawn has passed square 26, but then has to move backward to a square previous to 26 for some reason, then he must revisit 26 again before moving ahead.

A player can only bear off a pawn with the exact count from his coin throw. For example, a pawn on square 30 needs a 1, a pawn on square 29 needs a 2, and a pawn on square 28 needs a 3. A pawn on square 26 needs a 5 to bear off directly.

If a pawn lands in the **House of Death** (square 27), then it is frozen there and all the player's other pawns may not move until it is freed from square 27. At his next turn a player may choose to move his dead pawn back to square 15, the **House of Rebirth**, in lieu of tossing the coins. He may only do this if square 15 is unoccupied. Otherwise, he may toss the coins and try for a 4. If he does not get a 4, he forfeits his turn. A 4 allows the dead pawn to bear off the Board in a single jump directly from the **House of Death**. Since a 4 is fairly hard to obtain, he may try several times before getting a 4, during which time his pawns are all frozen and his opponent may continue moving forward on his turns. After several vain tries for a 4, a player may opt to place his dead pawn in the **House of Rebirth**. If he does so, that constitutes his turn, and he does not throw the coins.

If a pawn falls into the **House of Death (square 27)** and an opponent's pawn is already there, his pawn dies and the opponent's pawn resurrects to the position from which the player's pawn fell. An event such as this can completely reverse the course of the game, causing an almost certain winner to suddenly lose. For example, suppose a player has a dead pawn in the **House of Death** and his opponent has a single remaining pawn on square 30, but throws a 3. He can not bear off and must retreat to square 27. This resurrects the player's dead pawn and sends it forward to square 30 with a new lease on life.

If a player attacks an opponent's pawn that is in the final squares (28-30), he tosses it into the **House of Death**. For example, if a player has a pawn in the **House of Beauty** (square 26) and tosses a 2, he moves forward to square 28. If his opponent already has a pawn on square 28, that pawn does not move back to the **House of Beauty**, but goes to the **House of Death**.

The player who first bears off all his pawns wins the game. [See images with examples at end of text below.]

Recommended Optional Rules

Two pawns of the same color in a row are safe from attack but may be passed.

Three pawns of the same color in a row are not only safe from attack but may not be passed.

As in Backgammon, all the pawns of a player must be on the final row in order to begin bearing them off. This rule can result in a considerable amount of jockeying about and falling in the Water of the **House of Death** when the pawns reach the final stages of the game.

Other Optional Rules

Each player may use 7 pawns. The extra four pawns are placed on squares 11-14.

If a player with a pawn on square 17 throws a 3, he can move that pawn to square 20 and also move any two other pawns anywhere else on the board to occupy squares 18 and 19, simultaneously attacking any opponent pawns that are on squares 18-20. He also then blocks his opponent from advancing as long as he retains pawns from such a move in these three squares.

You can invent your own house rules. Other ways of playing are available on the Internet. For example, see the rules according to Timothy Kendall, P.S. Neeley, R.C. Bell, and John Tait. There probably are other variations out there.

Bak-Amen, the Invisible Hawk (Ba-k Amen, “Your Invisible Soul”)

You can play a modified version of Backgammon on the **Senet** Oracle Board. Because there are only 10 squares in a row, each player only has 12 pawns, and the start-up pawn positions are as follows. The “right-hand” side of the board with Sun and the High Priest represents the Home Board. The “left-hand” side is the Outer Board. White has 2 pawns on the Sun, 4 pawns on Temperance, 2 pawns on Devil, and 4 pawns on Wheel of Fortune. Red has 2 pawns on High Priest, 4 pawns on Lovers, 2 pawns on Chariot, and 4 pawns on World.

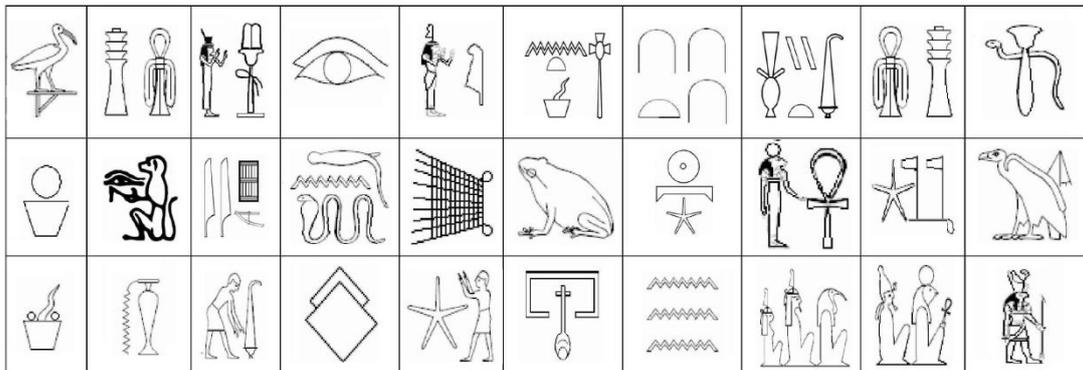
The middle row represents the Nile. It serves the function of the Backgammon “bar”. The top and bottom rows represent ports along the

East and West banks of the Nile respectively. The purpose of the pawns is to travel downstream to the Delta of Lower Egypt (Temperance and Lovers) and then return upstream to Home in Nubia.

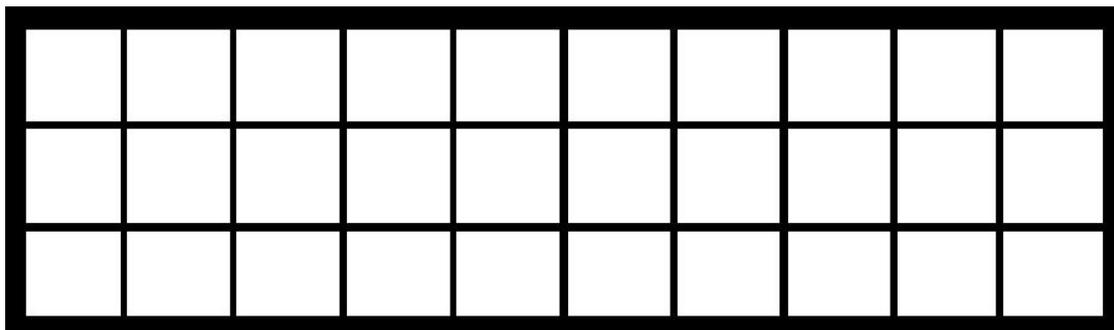
Pawns have passports to travel, but can not travel alone. They must be in groups of two or more. Otherwise they are arrested and deported back to Nubia from whence they must begin the journey again.

All of a player's pawns that have not completed the Tour must be on the Board (not on the "bar") in order to make any other forward moves.

The rules of the game and use of the dice are the same as Backgammon with all its variations, except that the Board has fewer "points" along the Tour, fewer pawns are used, and the middle row serves as the bar.



A Senet Game Board reconstructed with a full set of glyphs.



A Blank Senet Game Board (You can print one and use it.)

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



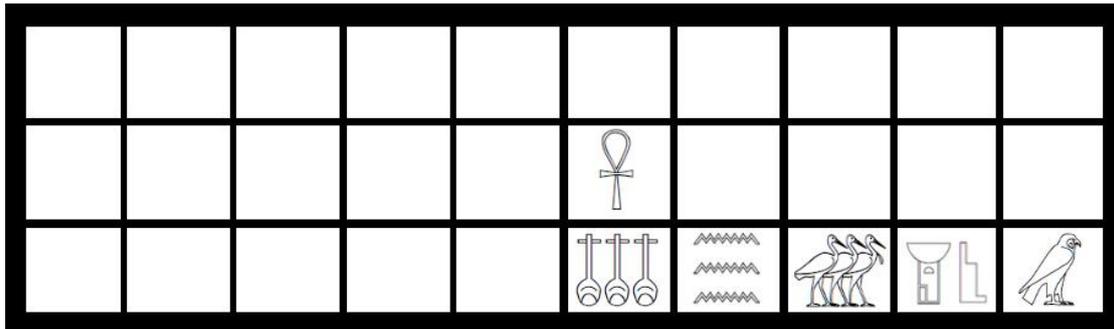
Path for movement on pawns on the Game Board toward bearing off at square #30.

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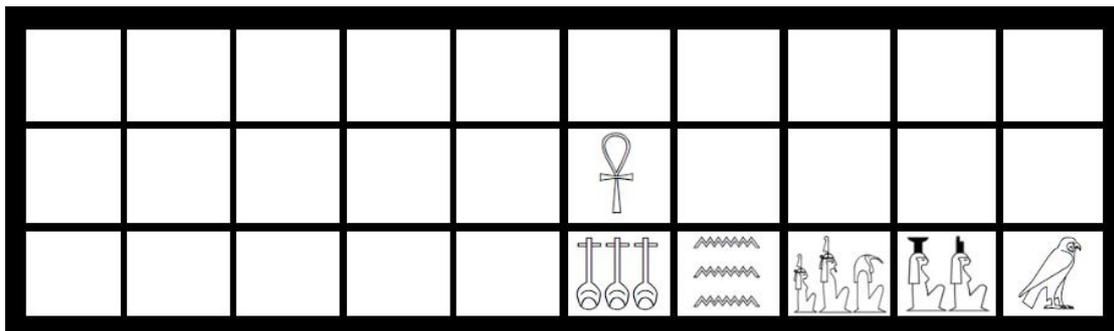
A Senet Game Board with pawns set up to start game. Only the 6 special squares are marked with glyphs. The last three squares have “neter” glyphs suggesting a “final countdown” to bearing off.

●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○
					☩	○	●	○	●
					☩☩☩	⚡⚡⚡	☩☩☩	☩☩	☩

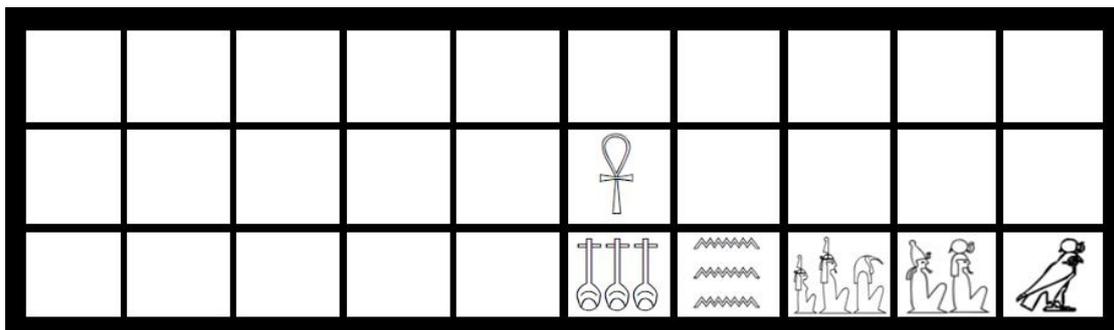
A Senet Game Board set up with 7 pawns for each player.



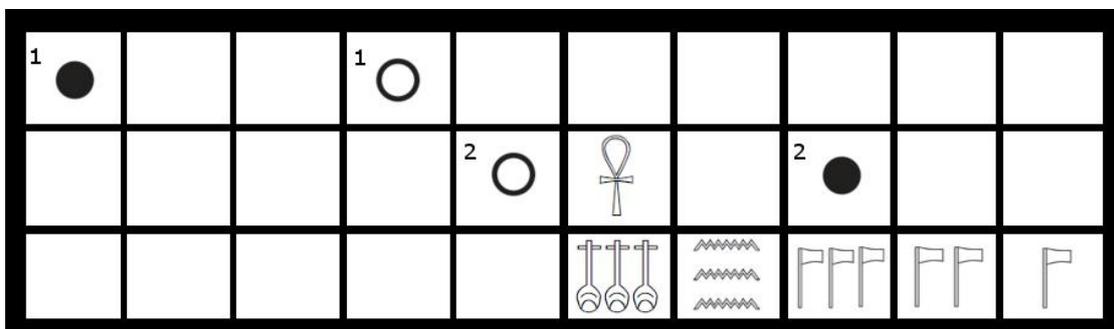
A Senet Game Board with the last three squares showing variant glyphs.

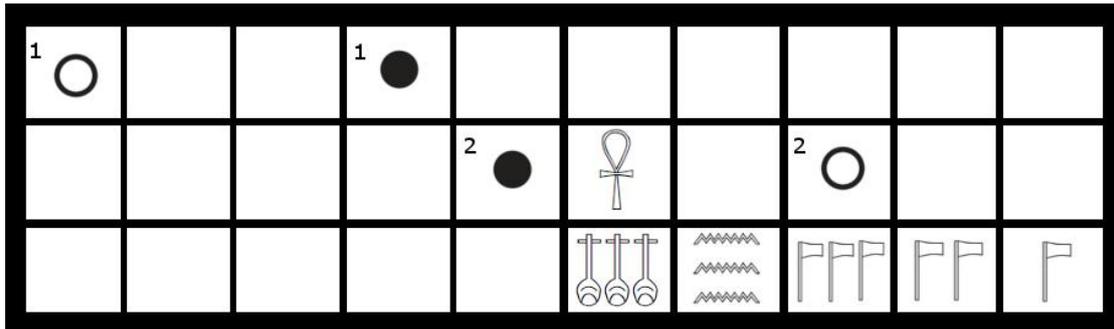


Another Senet Game Board with variant glyphs in the last three squares.

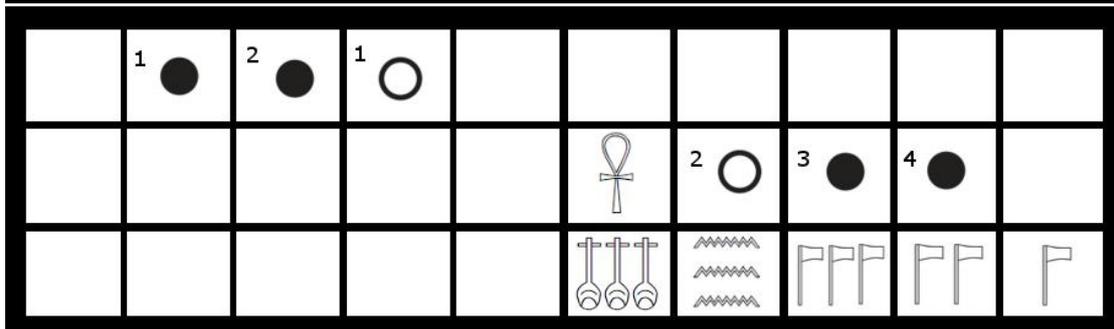
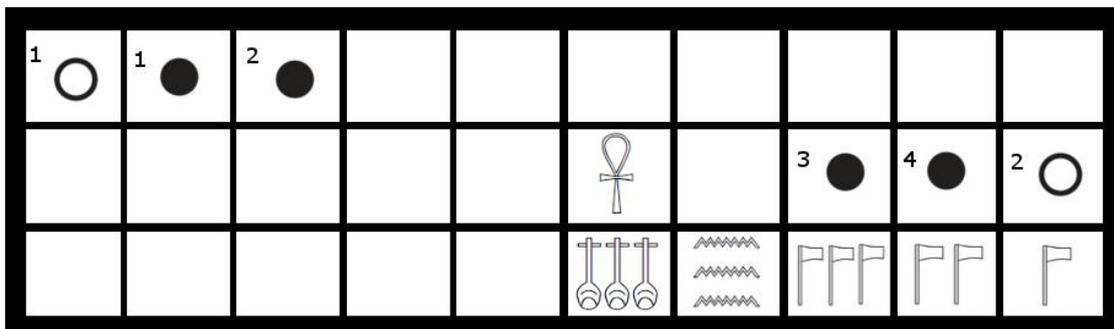


Yet another Senet Game Board with variant glyphs in the last three squares. You can print any of these blank samples to use.

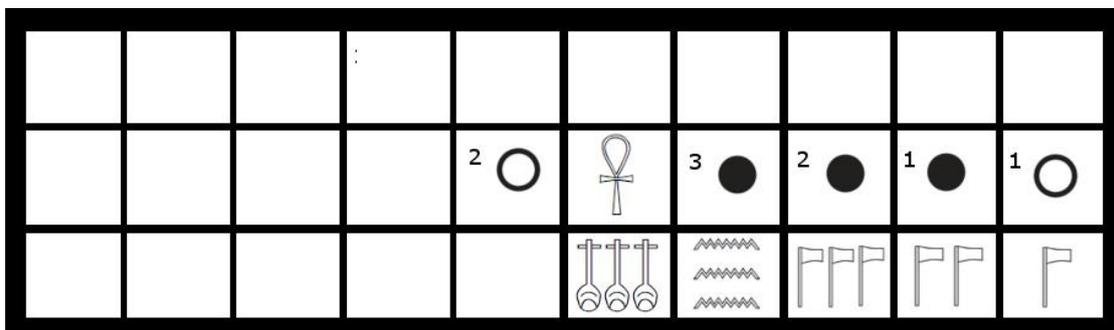


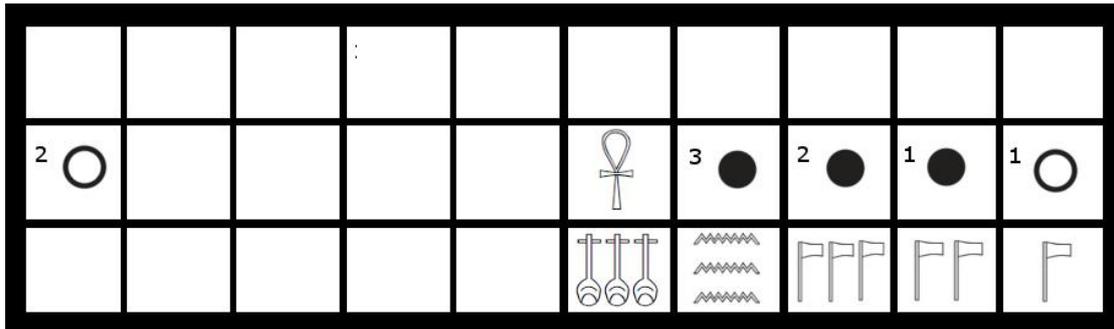


The above two boards show how pawns can swap positions on a throw of “3”.

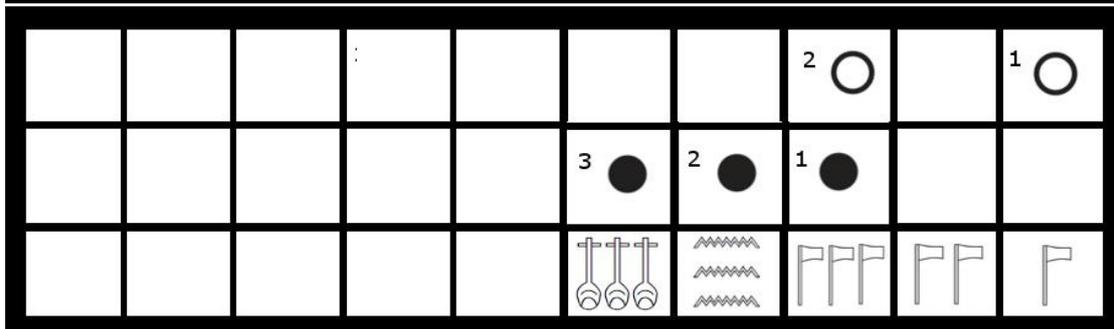
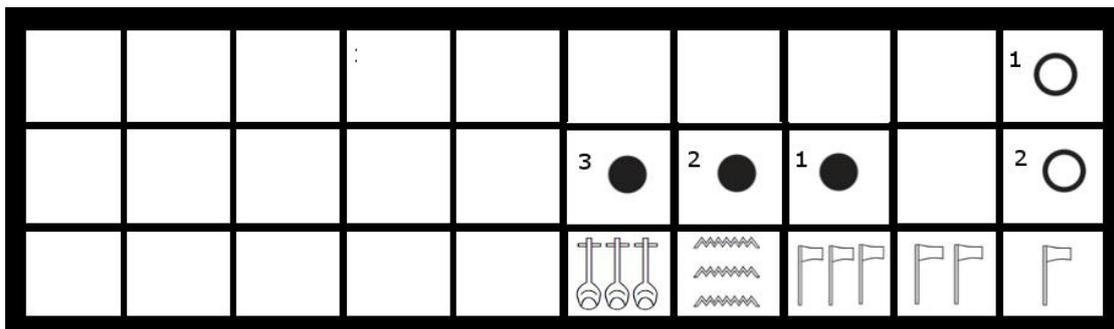


The two white pawns may pass the black pawns only on a throw of “3” or higher.

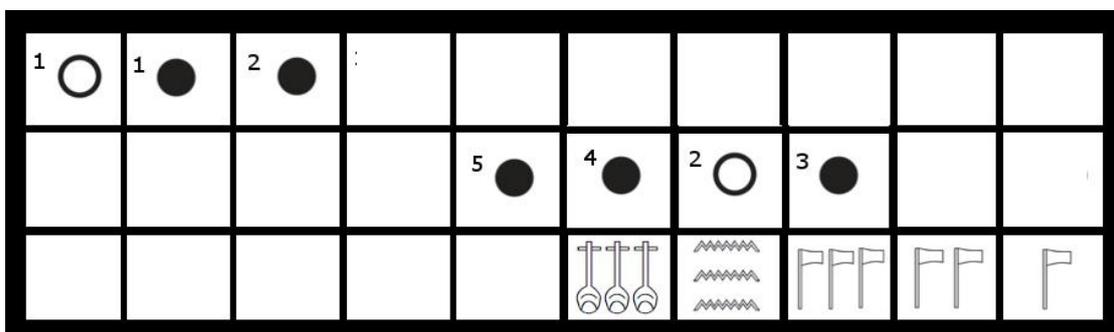


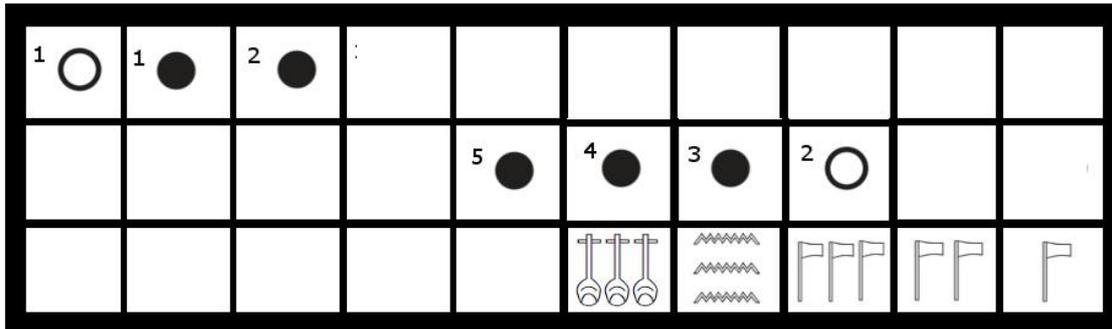


White pawn #1 is blocked by the black pawns. Only white pawn #2 may move forward.

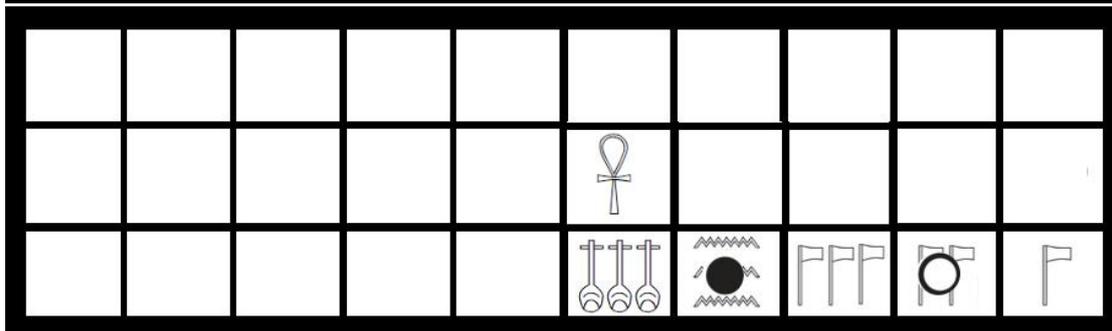
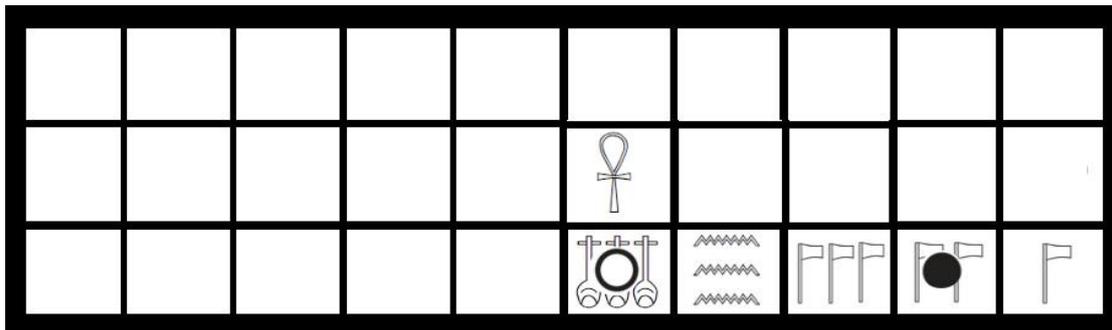


On a throw of “3” or higher, neither white pawn may move forward. One of them must move backward.

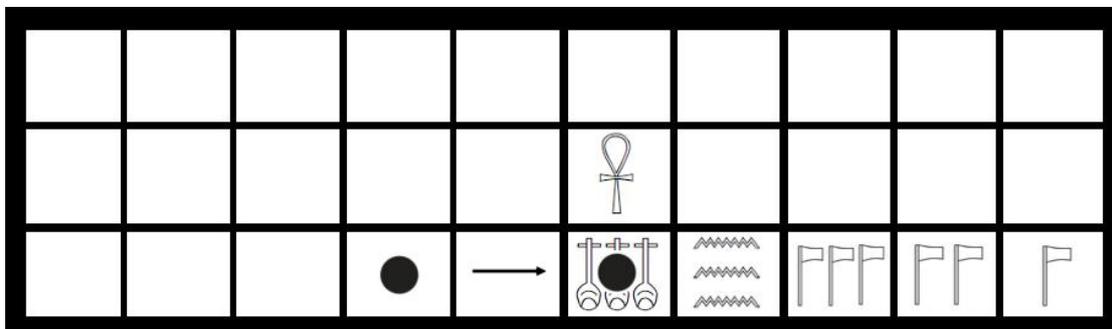


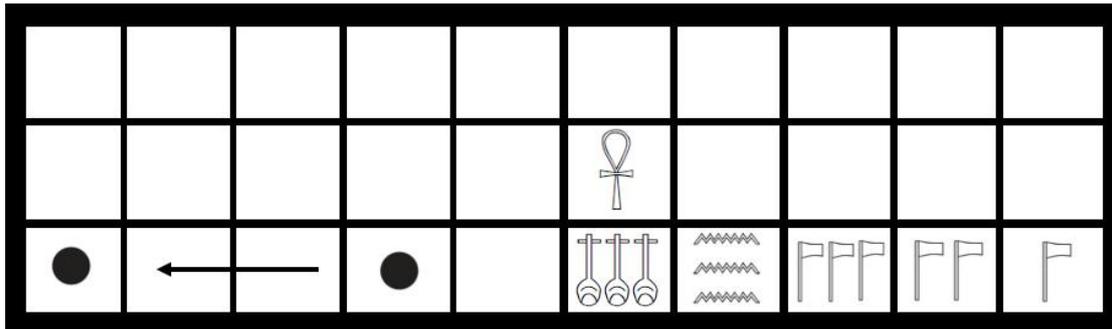


On a throw of “1”, white pawn #2 moves back 1 square and black pawn moves forward one square, now fully blocking white pawn #2.

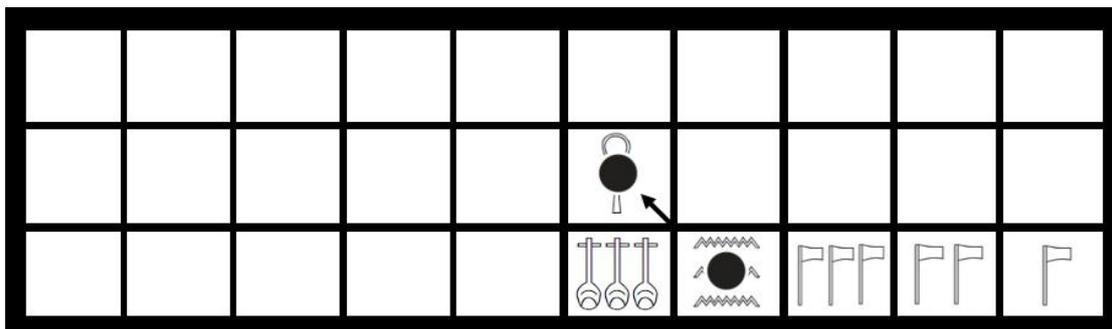


On a throw of “3” the white pawn moves forward and throws the black pawn into the House of Death. Black’s pawns are now frozen until the dead pawn moves to the House of Rebirth or a throw of “4” allows it to be borne off.

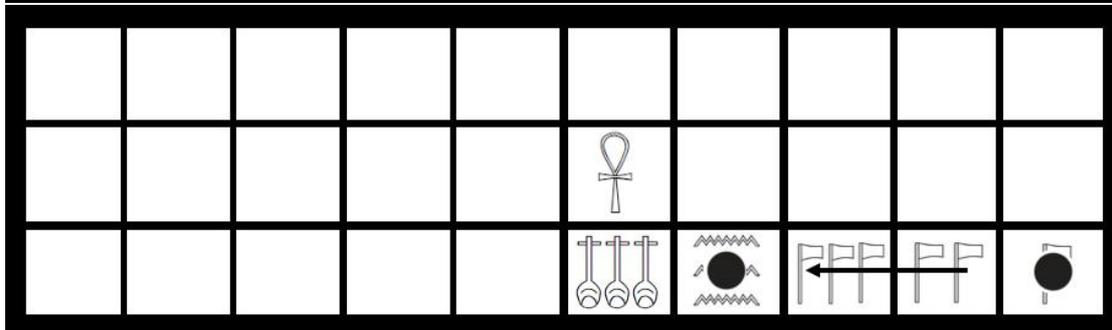
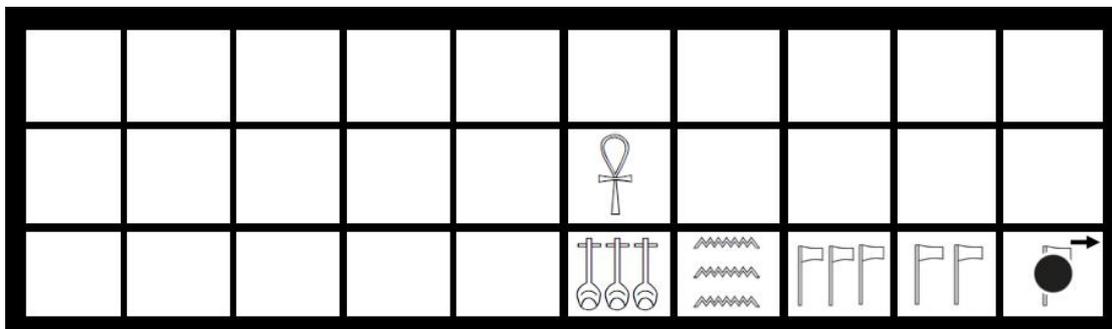




Black needs to throw a “2” to enter the House of Beauty. If he throws a “3”, he must move backward 3 squares.

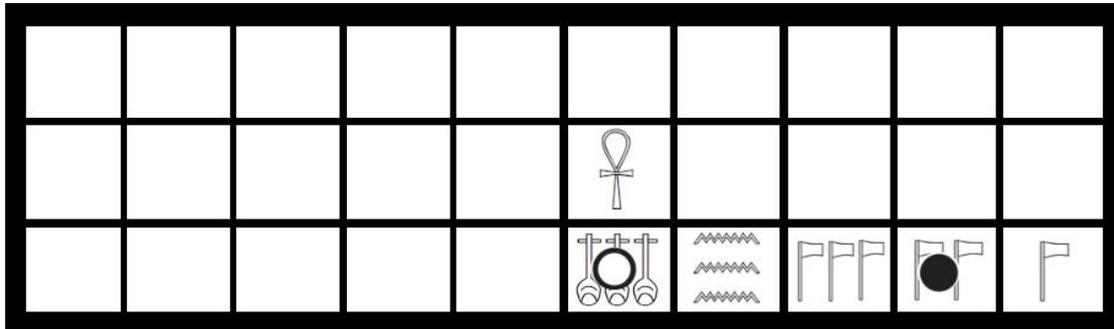


A black pawn in the House of Death has the choice to move back to square #15 and be “reborn” or else he must wait until he throws a “4” to bear off his dead pawn. Until either choice is made, all black pawns are frozen and moves are forfeited.

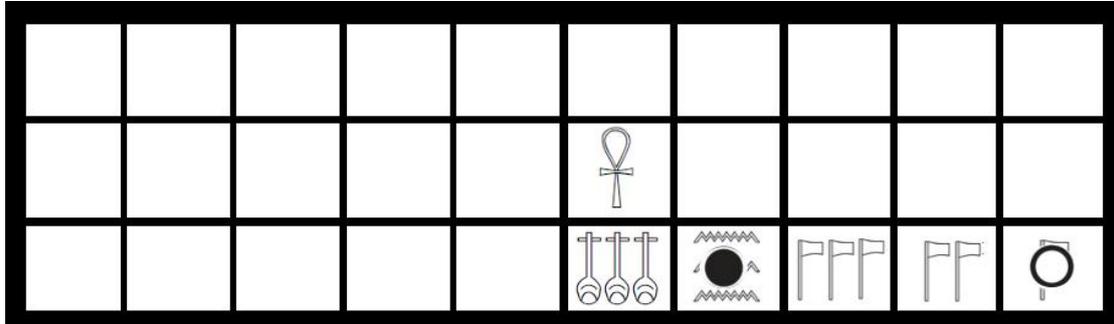
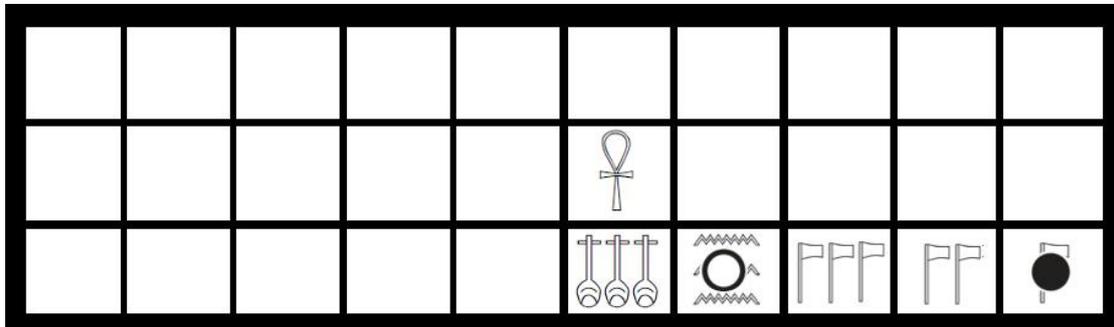


Black with a black pawn in square #30 needs to throw a “1” to bear that pawn off the board. If no other pawns can be moved, any other

number forces black to move backward that number of squares. A “3” puts him in the House of Death.



If black throws a “3”, then he goes to the House of Beauty and the white pawn goes to the House of Death.



If black throws a “3”, then he goes to the House of Death and white moves to square #30. This can bring a sudden reversal of fortune in the game.



Reconstructed copy of the Senet Game Text based on photographs of the version on the wall of Theban Tomb of Inherkhau (TT359).



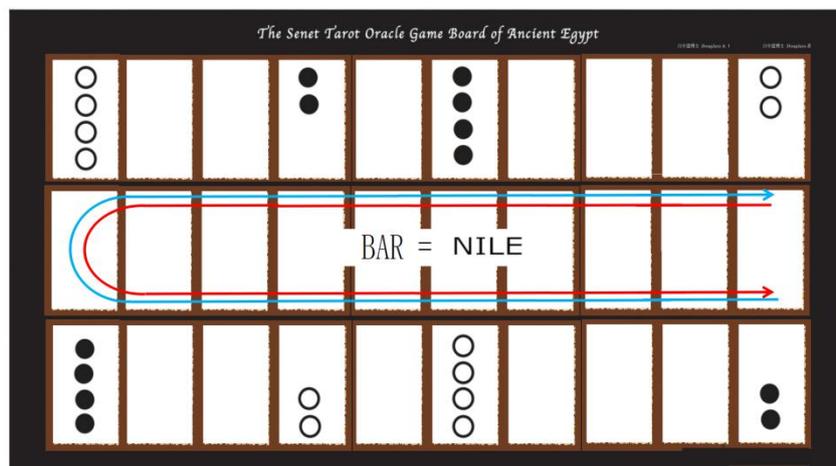
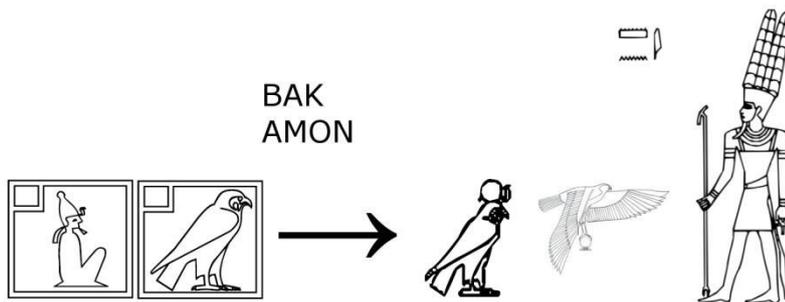
Asians playing variations of Backgammon.



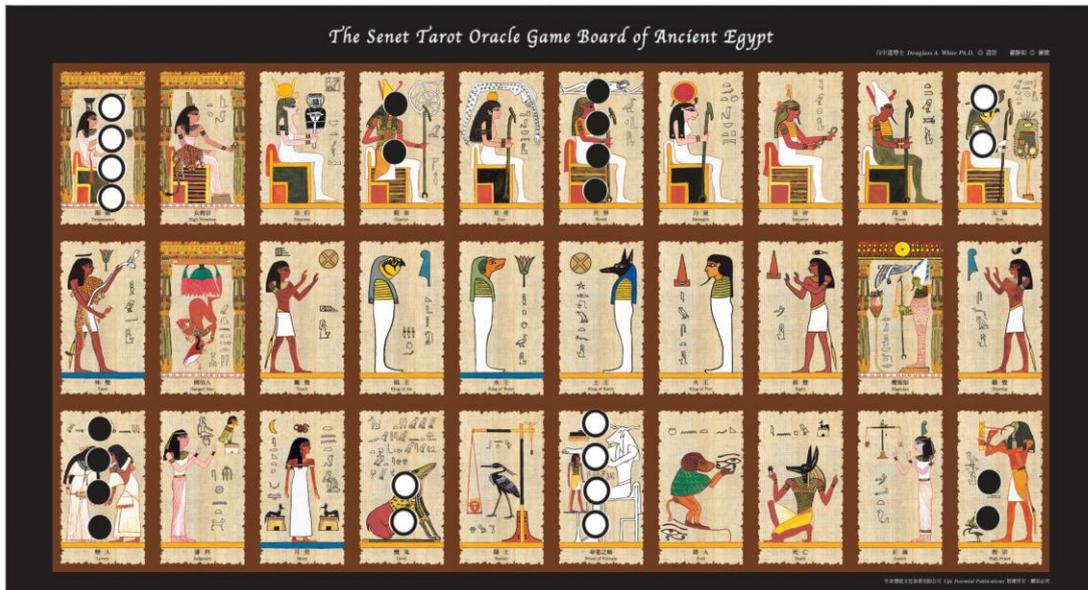
Backgammon in China.



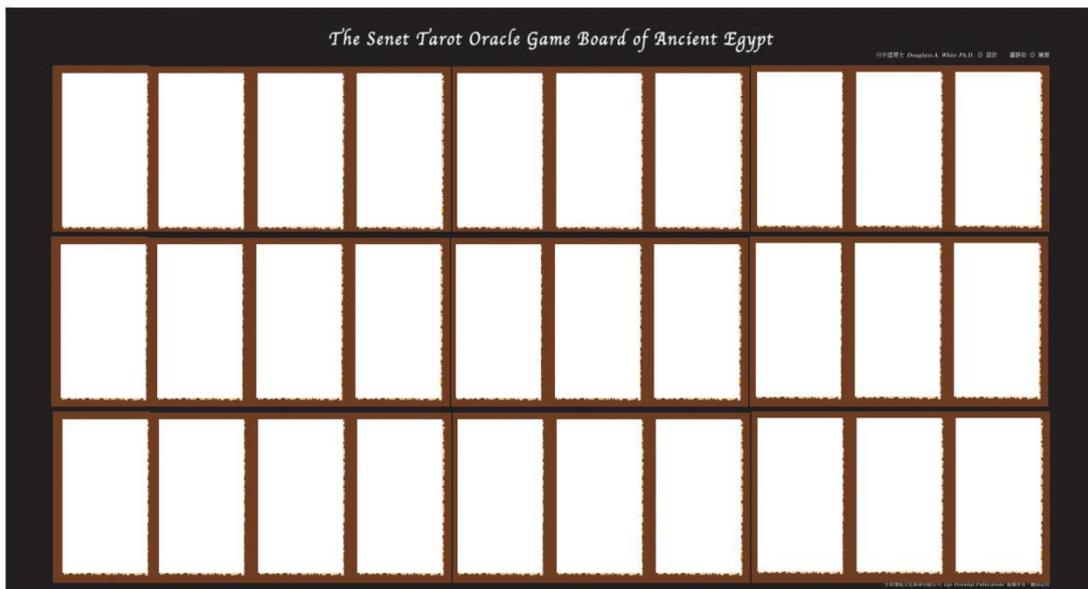
A standard modern Backgammon Board set up to play.



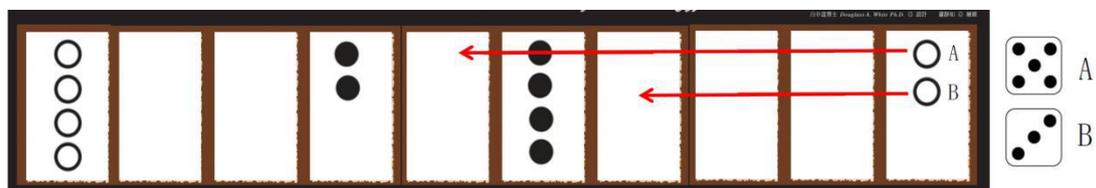
A Senet Oracle Board set up to play Backgammon. White's Home is above on far right, and Black's Home is below on far right. Black follows the blue path, and White follows the red path.



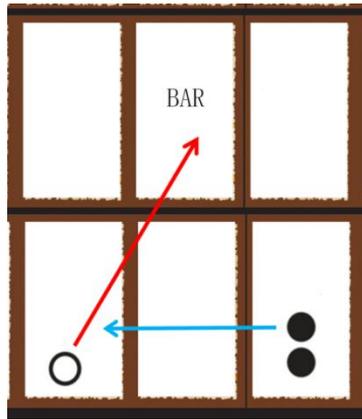
A printed Senet Oracle Board set up for Backgammon play.



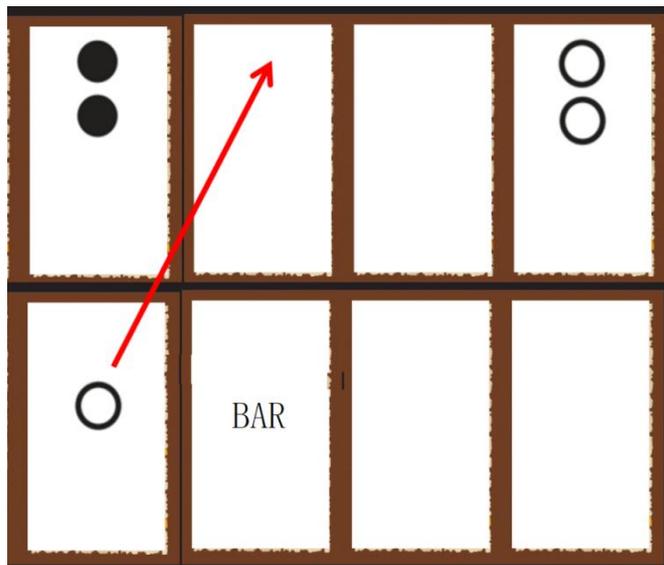
A sample blank Senet Backgammon Board.



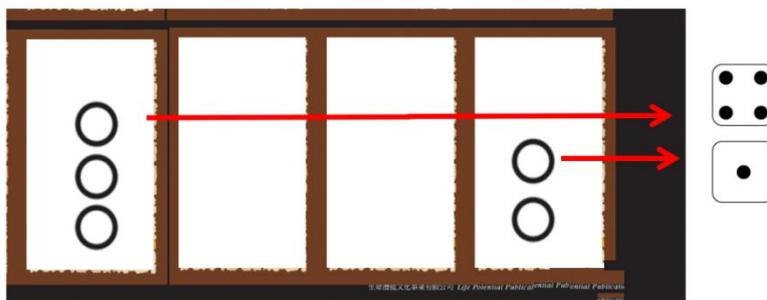
Possible moves by white from the dice throw shown.



A black pawn tosses a white pawn onto the bar with a move of "2".



White moves his pawn back onto the Tour with a throw of "3".



White can bear off 2 pawns into his Home with the above throw of the dice.

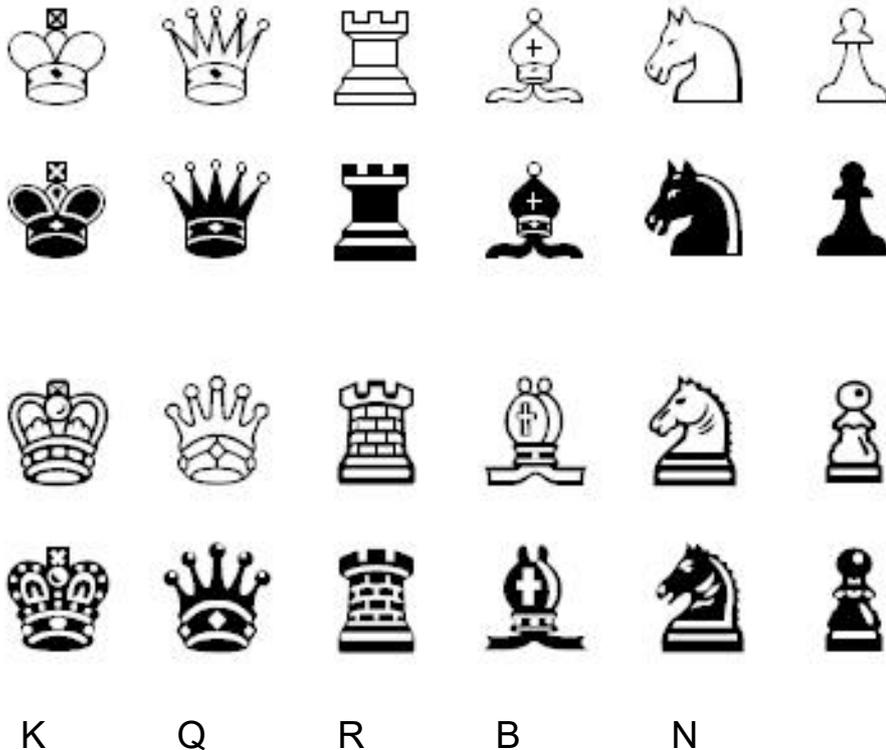
50 Study Questions

- * Senet is a race game between two players. What is the aim of the race?
- * The layout of the Senet Game Board tells a story. What is the story?

* In the short game each player has 5 pawns, and in the long game each player has 7 pawns. What do the 5 pawns represent, and what do the 7 pawns represent?

* Play the various versions and options. Experiment.

* One optional version involves using chess pieces to represent the 5 gods of Egypt who were the children of Newet (Star). Osiris is King (K), Isis is Queen (Q), Horus is Knight (N), Nephthys is Bishop (B), and Set is Rook (R). K starts on 2 (top row, 2nd square from left and only moves on a throw of 1. Other pieces have to enter on throws. N moves on a 2, B moves on a 3, R moves on a 4, and Q moves on a 5. You can make up your own rules for their interactions, such as ways to keep Osiris close to Isis, situations where Osiris interacts with Nephthys and that complicates things, and then Set has ways to throw Osiris into the Waters and attack Horus, and how Horus interacts with Set to thwart him. Each player has these “deities” as components of his own personality that he has to organize in order to get Osiris and then Horus past square 30. The winner becomes the founder of a new “dynasty”.



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