THE REGENCY CHESS COMPANY
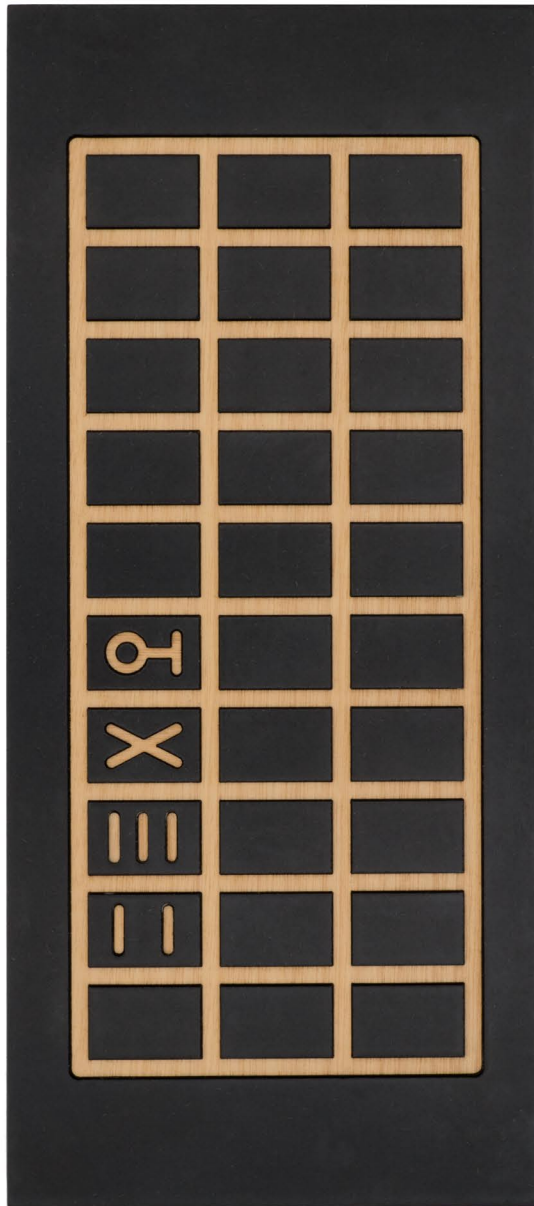
THE RULES
OF SENET

The origins of the Senet game lie with the ancient Egyptians, among whom it was the most popular and important board game played by all the social classes; even the Egyptian religious texts state that Senet was played in the afterlife by the spirits of those who had died. The rules by which it was played have not been uniformly or precisely recorded for posterity, and it is today played according to rules that have since had to be conjectured with some imagination. An intuitive format of rules has been approximated that allows for a straightforward yet worthwhile game as an alternative to longer, more complex games.

Setup

The Senet setup comprises:

  • a rectangular table of thirty squares;
  • five white and five black counters;
  • four split reed dice, each with a flat and a curved side, thrown such that:
  • One curved side facing up yields 1 point;
  • Two curved sides yield 2 points;
  • Three curved sides yield 3 points;
  • Four curved sides yield 4 points;
  • Four flat sides yield 6 points.
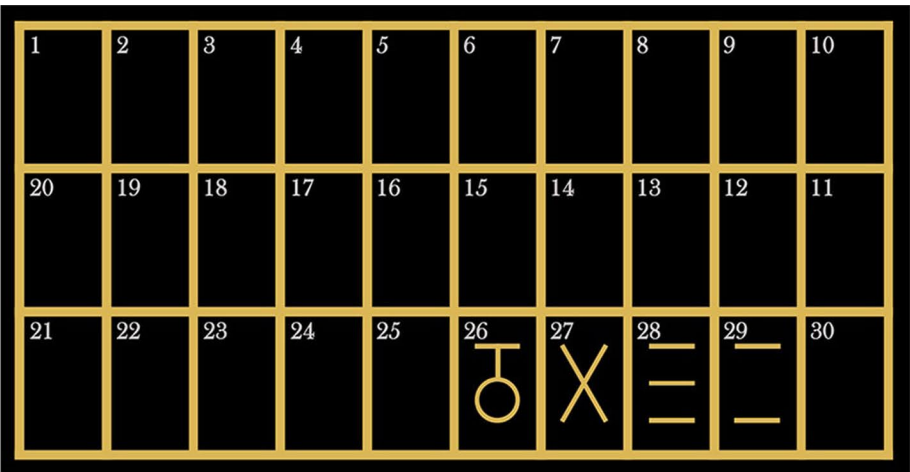
How to play Senet

The counters are arranged in an alternating format along the first ten squares, with white occupying the odd squares and black the evens.

The objective is to be the first to remove all one's pieces from the board; the counters move along the numbered squares in ascending order, according to the number indicated by the dice.

Each player throws a die, repeating the process if and as necessary until one (and only one) of them obtains a one: this player is assigned blacks and moves the black counter on the tenth square to the eleventh square. The player continues rolling and moving any black counter of their choice until a two or three is rolled, at which point the opponent, playing with whites, rolls.

The white player opens by moving the counter on the ninth square. In following throws they may move any legal white counter, until they cede their turn after rolling a two or three in the same way.
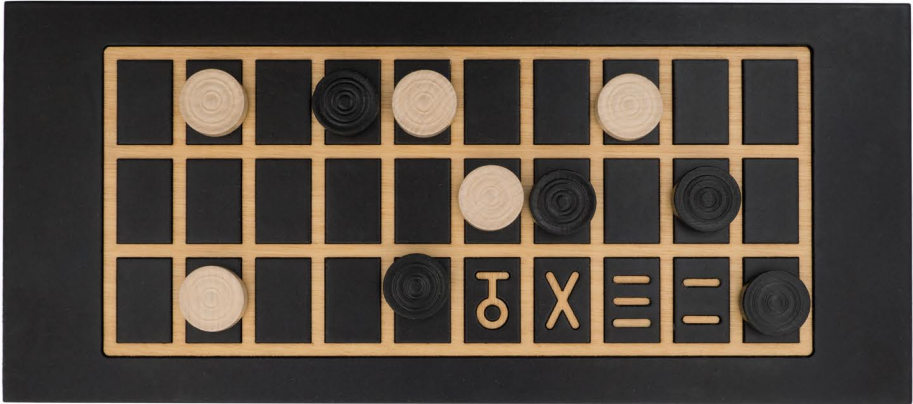
Each counter:

  • may not move onto a square occupied by the same colour;
  • may move onto a square occupied by the opposite colour, swapping the positions of the two counters, unless:
    • the destination square is one of two adjacent squares each occupied by the opposite colour, in which case both are safe from capture;
    • moving onto one of squares 26, 28, 29, and 30, each of which are 'refuge' squares;
  • may not move beyond three adjacent squares each occupied by the opposing colour;
  • may move onto the 27th square, denoted with an 'X', and must then move to the lowest unoccupied square.

The player must make a legal move if available; if the player cannot legally advance, they cede the turn.

End of the game

To remove counters from the board, the player may remove a counter only when all as yet unremoved counters are on the third row, or by moving it the exact number necessary to reach the thirtieth square.

The player to first remove all their counters from the board wins:

  • a point for each counter of opposite colour in the final row;
  • two points for each in the second row;
  • three points for each in the third row.

Rule variations

Due to the ambiguous interpretations of the original game, an array of alternative rule sets exist. In particular, many boards equip special decorations and associated functions onto some squares; in particular:

  • the 26th square is the House of Happiness, which must be landed on exactly before progressing onto the final four squares;
  • the 27th square is the House of Water, which redirects the counter instead onto the 15th square;
  • the 15th square is the House of Rebirth.

Additionally, the process for exiting the board is sometimes altered, whereby a counter:

  • may exit from square 28 by rolling a three;
  • may exit from square 29 by rolling a two;
  • may exit from square 30 by rolling a one.