Escape Senet v1.1

Materials: Modified senet board, five tokens of one color, five tokens of another color, one token of a third color, one six-sided die.

> The five tokens of each color represent Player 1 and Player 2.
> The single token of the third color represents the Monster.

Setup

> Roll the die to determine which player goes first.
>
> Players begin with their alternating pieces each on the top row of the board beginning with the first blank space on the upper left; the first player to go places his or her pieces first.
>
> Place the Monster on the space 'M2'.

Movement

> A single die is rolled to determine movement.
>
> > Pieces may land on an empty space.
> > Pieces may land on an opponent's piece that is not adjacent to another one of their pieces.
> > Pieces may not jump over three of an opponent's pieces. (See *Blockades*)
>
> Pieces begin by moving left. Once a piece reaches the end of a row, that piece moves down one space and then begins moving in the opposite direction. Arrows on the board help indicate movement.
>
> If a player lands on an opponent's piece, that player may:
>
> > Send the opponent's piece back the number of spaces just moved.
> > Cooperate by "Doubling-up" with the opponent's piece by stacking on top. (See *Doubled-up Pieces*)
>
> After *any* player's turn has ended, the Monster moves! (see *The Monster*)

Doubled-up pieces:

> Any player whose color piece is in the double may move the two pieces in unison.
> > Movement is the same as the number rolled on the die.
> The player may also choose to 'abandon' the opponent's piece and move away from it. The opponent's piece does not move back any spaces.

Blockades

A piece of the opposite color may not jump over three consecutive pieces of the same color.

Other Spaces

The river space is a bad spot. Whenever a piece or pieces lands here, it gets sucked into the river and moves back ten spaces. If the piece or pieces would have to move through the monster space to go back, they are eaten by the monster and removed from play.

The other marked spaces are 'safe spots'. You cannot double up or push a token back that is on a safe spot.

Rolling

The player who rolled must make a legal move. If no legal move is possible, that player ends their turn.

A player who has no tokens on the board must still roll the die on their turn.

Once a piece has reached the final space on the board, it may be moved off by a single roll – no exact roll is required. That piece has reached the Goal and has successfully escaped the Monster!

The "Monster"

The 'Monster' symbolizes any disaster. The Monster may be a dragon, an alien, a crocodile, a fire, or a war – your imagination decides!

When the Monster lands on a piece, that piece is 'eaten' (removed from play).
        (However, if Legos are used, the pieces may be stacked).

The 'Monster' begins play on space M2.

After any player has taken their turn, the Monster moves.

        The person who's turn ended moves the monster.

The Monster moves as follows:
        If the Monster is on the top row, it moves forward only one space.
        If the Monster is on the second or third row, it moves forward one half the number
            rolled, rounded down.
            If a 1 is rolled, the monster will only move one space.

If the Monster lands on a piece, that piece is 'eaten' and removed from the game.

Winning Conditions

Once each player no longer has a piece on the board, the game is over.

If fewer than 8 pieces reach the goal, the player with the most pieces in the goal wins...
However, if 5 or fewer pieces made it to the goal, the Monster will be the true winner!
To prevent this, if 8 or more pieces reach the goal, both players win: the Monster is defeated!

One final note: It is possible to completely defeat the Monster by getting all the pieces to the Goal safely! However, this will take lots of luck and cooperation!

Commentary

Escape Senet was designed as an investigation into games and competition. Its design followed a process similar to that involved with the creation of Colonialist Tic-Tac-Toe of exploring simple games to view the effects of changes to the rules. I began investigating the rules and structure behind one particular category of games that is strictly about competition, racing board games.

Race games, as defined by David Parlett as games where the "board represents a linear race track with one or more starting and finishing points, and the aim is to be the first to get one's piece or pieces from Start to Home."[1] Race games are one of the most common forms of board games, whose structure may be seen in modern games like *Chutes and Ladders*. Modifications on this theme include 'item hunt' games like *The Amazing Labyrinth* and *Trivial Pursuit* where players have the goal of gathering special tokens before the other players, though they might be genealogically considered to have evolved into a separate category of games.

Because race games are so directly and simply about competition (who will be first to the finish line?) they are a perfect challenge for creating games that undermine the concept of competition to encourage cooperation among players.

Games About Cooperation

In a game about cooperation, all players are working towards a common goal. This is distinctly different from team-based games, where teams of players cooperate together against each other. However, in a game about cooperation, *all* players are not competing but working together.

Because Senet is a race game where players compete against each other to be the first to the finish line, the rules of the game had to be changed to encourage cooperation. However, some form of conflict would need to be present to prevent the game from being simply an exercise in moving pieces around the board. For this reason a third element controlled by the rules of the game, the Monster, was added.

The Monster is a third party that is a threat to both players but not controlled by either of them. The Monster constantly moves, devouring any piece in its path. The Monster could represent anything: a

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[1]   Parlett, 10. It is notable that race games are most likely evolved as a form of tracking dice totals and player progress visually as opposed to adding large numbers together (Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. P. 19-21)

dragon, an alien, an alligator, a lion, a fire – even a war. Because the Monster eats anything in its path, both players have a reason to fear it. They will quickly discover that if they play the game as a normal competitive race game that the Monster will win – by fighting amongst themselves, the Monster has a chance to catch up and eat everybody.

Players will also realize that if the Monster eats enough of the pieces, the Monster will win the game. As a result, the players are encouraged to cooperate with each other so that the most pieces will survive and reach safety.

Though the presence of the Monster means this game is still about competition and the 'Other' it importantly means that all *human* players are cooperating together for a common goal that is not destruction.

On the other hand, a more ideal design would be along the lines of *Rivers, Roads, and Rails*, a dominoes-inspired game by Ravensburger where players connect pieces to create continuous rivers, roads, and railroads. I often played this game with my sister many years ago as a child. We played against the rules – instead of simply trying to be the first to run out of pieces, we interpreted the game's goal as trying to build large landscapes, using all the tiles in the process and telling stories about a journey through the world we had created. What resulted was a more sandbox form of play, a game of construction where pieces were placed according to game rules and each player took turns placing pieces, but where the explicit goal of using up all one's own pieces first as in dominoes was not important. Escape Senet, on the other hand, is still firmly entrenched in the realm of competition, though it encourages cooperation among players against a common threat, retaining a system of opposition that was not present in *Rivers, Roads, and Rails*.

Symbolism in Future Variants

Currently the game pieces and map are abstract and use colored stones or Legos, not unlike the black and white stones found in Go or the green and blue pieces of the British Museum's Flash version of Senet.[2] As such, the game is an abstraction and encourages the player to imagine what the pieces and the game board represent if they wish to find representative meaning.

However, there is certainly room for symbolism in future versions of the game. One approach I have considered is to draw figures of people of all ages and types on each piece. As a result, the player might place different values on each piece based on what type of person was represented. When the Monster is within striking distance, will the player attempt to save the mother with child over the village elder? Or will he or she instead choose to save the grown warrior?

By making the pieces represent individuals rather than abstract 'pawns', a new layer of meaning is produced leading to new types of play strategy and interpretation.

Digital Escape Senet

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[2]   http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/life/activity/act_main.html

I am also developing a digital version of Senet in Stagecast Creator. Due certain to limitations in the software platform, I had first thought it was impossible to build a game of this type using Stagecast, but I have recently discovered new methods by which the game might be produced. A central component of this is how race games may be considered abstractions of dice games – the racetrack simply provides a visual representation of the relationships between the scores of each characters and is a lot easier than adding numbers together in one's head.

By adding dice numbers, we get a representation of the total roll value of each player but also gain the opportunity to display these numerical values visually on a racetrack. As a result, like in *Chutes and Ladders*, each space on the board may be given a numerical value and the relationship between the piece and the space may be considered a total of all previous roll values. At this point it is a simple matter of comparing a piece's roll value with the value of a space on the game board and telling the program to move that piece to the corresponding space.

As I write this, I realize an early step to building a digital Escape Senet may actually be the creation of a *Chutes and Ladders* game in Stagecast first. This is because *Chutes and Ladders* uses only one piece for each player, whereas Escape Senet uses five. Such a program could be submitted to the Stagecast database as an example of how to build board games of this sort, including Backgammon and Parcheesi within Stagecast. Thus, the central problem to this game's design should not be considered simply a problem of creating art assets, but rather of making the program function properly. As a result, abstract pieces will work very well for these initial designs.