

Mehen

Text taken from Masters Traditional Games: <https://www.mastersofgames.com> & Ancient Games: <https://www.ancientgames.org> and modified slight by myself.

The Rules of Mehen or The Game of The Snake

Mehen or the Game of the Snake was a game played by the ancient Egyptians until around 1000BC. It is not known how the game was played and indeed more than most ancient games, theories for game play have varied quite considerably.

A game called 'The Hyena Game' was found being played on a Mehen-type board in the Sudan in 1921. This is a game for several players. Each player tries to get their 'mother' piece to the centre and back whereupon their 'hyena' piece is released. The Hyena piece then also travels to the centre and back but has the additional perk of being able to terrorise and eat the other player's mothers en-route. In lieu of few clues as to how Mehen was played, most modern reconstructions of the game have used the rules of the Hyena Game as their basis.

Equipment

A Mehen board was in the form of a coiled snake partitioned into dozens of playing squares along the length of the snake's body. The head of the snake was often carved into the board and lay in the centre while at the outer perimeter of the playing area the tail was sometimes drawn from the final playing square tapering to complete the board. The number of partitions or playing squares varied enormously depending on the board.

A typical Mehen board came with 3 pieces in the shape of a lion, 3 pieces in the shape of a lioness and 6 sets of differently coloured marbles - 6 of each colour. While the game is accepted as a race game, the accompanying accessories lie at the heart of controversy surrounding gameplay. Some archeologists believe that the marbles and the lions were playing pieces and the game was therefore for up to six players - these theories tend to use the Hyena Game as a model for game-play although some of the inconsistencies are troubling. A more recent viable theory proposes that the marbles were used as dice and that the lions alone were the playing pieces - this would make it more likely that the game was for 2 players. But this theory is belied by the fact that tomb artwork shows at least one instance of Mehen being played with marbles for the playing pieces.

The Hyena Game

The board should be a coiled snake with 60 - 100 playing squares. Irving Finkel's rules published in 1996 has a board with 88 playing squares.

Each player has 1 small piece representing a 'mother' (Scarabs in this pdf) and 1 larger piece representing a hyena (Lion Head).

Three throwing sticks are used for dice (although any binary dice will do including 3 coins). (The printable sticks are plain on one side representing the flat sides and pictured on the other representing the rounded side.) The dice score as follows:

Throwing Sticks	If 3 coins are used	Mother Moves (Scarab)	Hyena Moves (Lion)
1 flat, 2 rounded	1 head	1	1
2 flat, 1 rounded	2 heads	2	4
3 flat	3 heads	4	8

3 rounded	0 heads	6	12
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1. The goal of the game is to obtain a lion piece and then use it to eat as many as possible scarab pieces.
2. The pieces move from the outside (snake's tail) in to the centre (snake's head) along the spiral, and then backwards to the outside (snake's tail).
3. Each player takes a turn after the other and turns cannot be repeated.
4. The game is divided into two phases:

Phase 1: All scarab pieces start off the board.
Players move the scarab pieces one by one towards the centre of the board.

Once all the scarab pieces of a particular player make it into the centre of the board and then return to the beginning of the path at the tail, that player gets a lion piece.

Phase 2: Eating the scarab pieces using the Lion Piece.

The lion together with its scarab pieces starts moving back from the tail to the centre and then back to the tail.

On its way the lion tries to eat as many of the opponents' scarab pieces as possible.

5. The lions move twice as fast as the scarab pieces. Whatever the dice score is it is doubled for a lion.
6. In order to place a scarab piece on to the board the dice score must be 1.
7. The scarab pieces continue to move along the path on the board with dice scores 2, 4 and 6 only. If a player scores 1 then he "saves" that score for later. (*Before game starts, players could agree to us three plain sides for a move of 3 instead of a move of 4.*)
8. In order to enter the central cell the player score must be exact. Over scoring does not allow for the player to enter the central cell. If the player over-scores then they can subtract as many of their saved ones they have from the total score in order to achieve an exact score to enter the central cell.
9. After the player enters the central cell in order to exit it on the way back, the player must subtract 4 ones that they have saved. If they don't have enough ones then they must wait to throw the sticks each time it is their turn until they save 4 ones.
10. Once the first scarab piece of the player reaches the beginning of the path at the snake's tail the player gets a lion.
11. The lion starts moving towards the centre and enters the central cell in the same way as regular scarab pieces. In order for the lion to exit the central cell he must subtract 10 saved ones in the same manner the scarab pieces must subtract 4 saved ones.
12. On its way back the lion can eat opponent's scarab pieces.
13. When scarab pieces land on a cell occupied by an opponent's scarab piece, the opponent's scarab piece gets knocked off. The knocked off scarab piece switches places with the scarab piece of the player that knocked it off, just like in Senet. The scarab pieces do not get taken off the board.
14. When a lion lands onto a cell occupied by an opponent's scarab piece, then it depends in which direction he is going. If he is going towards the centre, then the lion switches places with the scarab piece as a regular knock off. If the lion is going

back to the tail and then he eats the scarab piece, then the scarab piece gets removed from the board permanently.

15. If the lion knocks off an opponent's lion they swap places just like scarab pieces.
16. Once the lions reaches the beginning of the board the game does not stop. Each player should bring all of their remaining scarab pieces back to the beginning of the path, to the tail of the snake, so that the other opponent's lions do not get to eat them.
17. The game ends when all lions reach the beginning of the path at the snake's tail, even if some scarab pieces remain on the board.
18. The winner is the player whose lion eats the most opponent's scarab pieces, even if their lion reached the beginning of the path last. However, if all scarab pieces get eaten before any of the lions reached the snake's tail, then the lion who reaches the tail first wins.

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Page 5: Printable playing pieces. Stick to card and cut out.

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Page 7: Scoring cards for 1's thrown. Mark a 1 in each box and cross out as used.









