Ngoo Kin Hang / Tail-Eating Snake

Site of Documentation

Bangkok, Thailand

Description

Tail Eating Snake is a game of ‘Catch’ played by children living in Bangkok, Thailand. The aim of the game is for the Father Snake to try to outwit the Mother Snake and catch one of the Baby Snakes that she is trying to protect. A very old game, Tail Eating Snake is traditionally played during the Songkran festivals and other special cultural events.

Who Plays?

This game requires at least seven participants and can be played by both boys and girls, aged 4 to 7 years old.

Time and Place

This game usually takes about 20 minutes to play. It can be played at any time of the day as long as there is plenty of room to maneuver and the weather is cool. The game is best played on a smooth, flat surface.
so that players don’t accidentally injure themselves if they fall down. A game area of approximately 5 x 5 meters is ideal for groups of 7 players or more. The more players that participate in a game, the larger the required space

**Skill, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player**

This is a game of speed, mental alertness and agility. As the Father Snake, players need to move quickly if they are to catch the Baby Snake at the end of the line. As the Mother Snake, players need to be aware of the Father Snake’s impending attacks and be quick enough to fend them off as they occur. Players with long, strong arms that can be used to prevent the Father Snake from getting closer to the Baby Snakes will always have an advantage over others. The Baby Snakes need to be good at running and be able to hold each other's waists at all times, no matter how quickly their team mates move.

**Popularity**

*Tail Eating Snake* is a popular game among children and is played both in school break times and traditional festivals and cultural events. Many schools all over Thailand have attempted to conserve the game by incorporating it into the school curriculum.

**History of the Game**

The exact origins of this game are unknown; however, the first recorded evidence of it dates back to a Songkran festival in 1937 in the Ayutthaya province of Thailand. *Tail Eating Snake* is full of symbolism and represents the traditional archetypal father and mother figures. The father on one hand representing authority and needing to be feared, appeased and respected, while the mother, is the provider of food, water, comfort, love and protection. A story tracing the demise of a family is woven throughout the game, culminating at the end with the child being asked to choose between their parents.

**How is the Game Played?**

**Step 1.** First, two players must volunteer to play the roles of the “Father Snake” and the “Mother Snake”. The remaining players will become the “Baby Snakes”. 
Step 2. Once the roles have been determined, the players have to take their positions. The Baby Snakes line up behind each other and place both their hands around the waist of the player in front, forming one long, linked line. The Mother Snake then stands at the front of the line, facing the Father Snake.

Step 3. Next, the Mother Snake and Father Snake have to say to each other,

Father Snake: “Ma Ngu Aei” (Dear Mother Snake)
Mother Snake: “Aei” (Yes. Father Snake?)
Father Snake: “Kin Nam Bor Nai” (From which well do you drink?)
Mother Snake: “Kin Nam Bor Sai” (We drink from the sandy ground)
Mother & Baby Snakes in unison: “Yai Pai Yai Ma” (Round and round we go)

As they say this, the long line of Baby Snakes, headed by the Mother snake starts to move from side to side, imitating the movement of a winding snake.
Step 4. Once the Mother and Baby Snakes stop moving the players say to each other,

Father Snake: “Kin Nam Bor Nai” (From which well do you drink?)
Mother Snake: “Kin Nam Bor Hin” (We drink from the stone well)
Mother & Baby Snakes in unison: “Bin Pai Bin Ma” (Here and there we fly)

Once again, the long line of Baby Snakes starts to move from side to side, imitating the movement of a winding snake.

Step 5. Once again, when the Mother Snake and Baby Snakes stop moving the players say to each other,

Father Snake: “Kin Nam Bor Nai” (From which well do you drink?)
Mother Snake: “Kin Nam Bor Soak” (We drink from the well of sadness)
Mother & Baby Snakes in unison: “Yok Pai Yok Ma” (Left and right we sway)

Once again, the long line of Baby Snakes starts to move from side to side, imitating the movement of a winding snake.
Step 6. Once again, when the Mother Snake and Baby Snakes stop moving the players say to each other,

Father Snake: “Kin Hua Kin Harng” (Which part is edible, head or tail?)
Mother Snake: “Kin Klang Talod Tua” (The middle part is my weakest spot)

With those words the game’s action commences. The Father Snake stands facing the Mother Snake and runs forwards and backwards, lunging to either side to try to get past the Mother Snake and catch the Baby Snake at the end of the line. The Mother Snake must do all they can to stop the Father Snake from getting past, moving backwards and forwards with each of the Father’s attempts. Finally, the Father has to catch the Baby Snake at the end of the line.

Step 7. Once caught, the Father Snake takes the Baby Snake to the front of the line and they say,

Father Snake: “Yoo Kab Por Rue Yoo Kab Ma” (With whom do you want to stay, your Mother or Father?)
Baby Snake: “Yoo Kab Por” (I’ll stay with my Father)
Father Snake: “Hak Kor Jim Nam Prik” (I’ll dip your ripped off head in chilli sauce – you rascal!)

Alternatively the players can say,

Baby Snake: “Yoo Kab Ma” (I’ll stay with Mother)
Father Snake: “Loy Pae Pai”(I’ll cast you away on raft down a jungle river – my little friend!)
Step 8. The Baby Snake is now out the game and the players repeat from the beginning until all the Baby Snakes have been caught or they are too tired to play any longer.

Rules

1. The Father Snake can only try to catch the Baby Snakes after the Mother snake has said, “Kin Klang Talod Tua” (The middle part is my weakest spot)

2. The game ends after the Father Snake speaks to the Baby Snake. Afterwards the Baby Snake is eliminated and the game begins again.