

## Rota

Entertainment on a day-to-day basis, at home or at the bath-house centred on board games. Archaeologists often find game counters on sites in Leicester. These were usually made of bone and occasionally glass, stone and recycled pottery. Some were manufactured as sets in workshops, others were made in a ad hoc fashion from recycled materials. Common games included *duodecim scripta*, *ludus latruncularum*, Rota and Nine Men's Morris.

Rota is a Roman strategy board game. Its board has been found carved into stones and buildings across the Roman Empire. Its original Roman name is unknown.

Many of the Roman game counters and dice found in Leicester would have been used in games like this. Detailed rules have not survived but Elmer Truesdell Merrill recreated the game in 1916, based on other similar games.

**You will need the game board on this sheet and 6 game counters, 3 black and 3 white, the game is for two players.**

1. The board consists of a circle of 8 cells connected to each other with lines, with a 9th cell in the centre.
2. The game begins with each player having 3 pieces, one player black and the other white. All pieces are off the board. The players decide who goes first by a lot, such as a toss of a coin.
3. The players alternate placing their 3 pieces on any of the 9 cells of their choice, including the centre cell.
4. Once all 6 pieces have been placed on the board, players alternate moving them around the circle trying to form a line of 3 pieces in a row across the diameter of the circle by occupying the centre cell and two opposing cells on the perimeter.
5. Players cannot jump over their opponent's pieces and cannot knock them off the board or off of their cell. The pieces can only be moved onto unoccupied cells. Two pieces cannot occupy the same cell. Players cannot skip turns and must always move a piece.
6. The first player to form 3 in a row across the diameter wins.



A rota board carved onto a paving stone in the Old forum, Leptis Magna, Libya.



Roman stone and bone gaming pieces and bone die from Leicester.

### Strategy

The player must position their pieces such so that they do not get blocked in and yet block the centre cell. The player who goes first will naturally always try to capture the centre cell first. It is the opponent's job to try to prevent the first player from positioning the 3rd piece in a row with the other two.

