# Ludus Latrunculorum

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 manufactures as sets in workshops, others were made in a ad hoc fashion from recycled materials. Common games included *duodecim scripta*, *ludus latrunculorum*, Rota and Nine Men's Morris.

Ludus Latrunculorum is an ancient Roman strategy game similar to draughts. The name means 'Game of Mercenaries' often shortened to 'soldiers'. The earliest reference to the game is in the 2nd century BC.

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 there have been various attempts to reconstruct how the game was played. The following rules were reconstructed by Ulrich Schädler in 1994.

You will need a standard draughts board and black and white counters that have two different sides, the game is for two players.

1. Before the game begins players must decide how many pieces each of them is going to use. The allowed range is 16-24 pieces per player.

2. The pieces start off the board.

3. The first turn is decided by lot, such as toss of a coin. Then, each player takes a turn to place one piece onto any empty square on the board. In this phase, no captures are made. The individual pieces placed in this phase are called *Vagus* (plural *Vagi*).

4. Once all of the pieces have been placed, the players take turns to move their pieces. Pieces can be moved horizontally and vertically, but not diagonally to any adjacent square (see below). The pieces moved in this phase are called *Ordinarius* (plural *Ordinarii*).
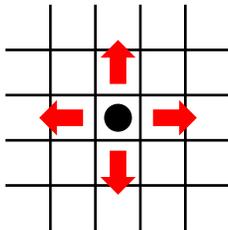

5. A piece can jump over another piece of either colour, if the square behind the piece being jumped over is unoccupied.

6. A player can trap enemy pieces between two of their own pieces. A trapped piece cannot be moved, but stays on the board. The trapped piece is called *Alligatus* (plural *Aligatii*) or *Incitus* (plural *Incitii*). To make it clear that a piece became *Alligatus* it is turned upside down.

7. Once an enemy's piece became *Alligatus*, on their next turn, the player can capture it and remove it off the board, as long as both pieces that are trapping it are still free and did not become *Alligatii* themselves on the opponents following move. Once a piece is removed off the board it does not return into the game.

8. If the opponent surrounded one of the enemy pieces trapping their *Alligatus*, then their *Alligatus* is made free and flipped back to its original side, where as the enemy trapped piece becomes *Alligatus* and is flipped over.

9. A player can move their own piece between two enemy pieces only if by doing such a move will trap one of the enemy pieces. Such a move is called Suicide.

10. The player who only has one remaining piece on the board loses the game.

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

Latrunculi found at Housesteads Roman Fort or Roman Corbridge on Hadrian's Wall, complete with pottery counters and dice containers. 2nd-3rd century AD. Corbridge Roman Town and Museum, English Heritage.
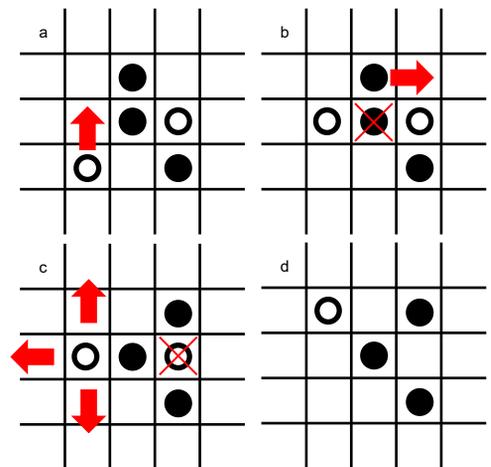
a) The central black piece is in danger of being trapped if the white piece to the left moves one step forward.

b) Black traps the white piece on the right, so the black piece, which was trapped by White's previous move, will be free again.

c) White has enclosed the black piece in the middle but by trapping the white piece to the right, Black has set their piece free again. White can only move the piece on the left.

d) In their next move, Black captures the White piece by removing it from the board. White loses as they only have one counter remaining.