[những phần được gói trong kí hiệu **[ ]** là phần dành riêng cho designer đọc, không xuất hiện trong bản final]

[size chữ chính là 11. Các dòng có chữ *Note: là size 10 & italic*. Phần chữ minh họa hình ảnh dùng font Candara và size 10]

Near the end of the first millennium, the kingdom of Vanecia was enjoying peaceful days under the rule of Lee dynasty. The people–mostly peasants–were having an undisturbed, albeit underdeveloped life, when everything suddenly changed. A rebellious clan ambushed king Lee and took the throne. A general loyal to Lee named Juan helped defeat the usurper, but then he was poisoned by his own son-in-law, Tykei, in revenge of Lee’s blatant disregard of his major deeds on the battlefield to help king Lee. To further consolidate power into their hand, the Tykei clan killed Juan’s oldest son. His younger son managed to flee to the Outer Land, an uncharted territory of Vanecia that’s infamous for its harsh climate and dense jungle with dangerous animals lurking inside.

Tykei couldn’t press on the Juan clan because he was busy pursuing the remnants of the usurper scattering all around the Inner Land. Being spared for some time but having few options, the Juan clan had to initiate friendly relations with foreign people sailing into the area from the west. These westerners helped them explore and cultivate a lot of new lands. Meanwhile, the Tykei clan also created trading posts to welcome merchants, and along with them, new technology from the northeastern kingdoms. Both the Outer Land and the Inner Land of Vanecia experienced expanding wealth and prosperity, because even though there are occasional clashes between the two clans, the Giant River that divides them proved to be an obstacle too difficult for big military maneuvers.

More than a century has passed. It’s now the year 1088. The Lee dynasty is still the de jure ruler of all Vanecia, but real power lays with the heads of Tykei and Juan clans, now called Lords. Advances in warfare methods are making the Giant River less and less of a problem. Both Lords are amassing their armies in preparation for a big final battle, where they will lead their troops across the river and defeat the opponent once and for all, and unite the two Lands again. Who will emerge victorious?

Welcome to Cota! What you’re reading is the player’s manual. It being on your hands means that you’ve opened the box – great! You’ll find these components of a full set:

* 42 symbol-engraved pieces, with name on the sides and both red and green symbols on opposite faces. Also, there are 2 bland pieces [icon] that can act as backup, or can be designed as whatever your creative mind wants them to be! They are manufactured to be writable and erasable.
* 2 rectangle disks to put pieces in during play. [minh họa]
* 6 little insignias [icon] in a small box. Again, 2 of them are actually backups.
* A 9x10 board, which also acts as the container when folded close.

Let’s get to know the board.

* On its edge, you can find letters 1→10 and a→i, representing a total of 90 circles, also called ***tiles*** [2 icons], making up 10 ***rows*** and 9 ***columns***.
* The tiles’ colors are black and white, alternately arranged in a way so that when we say a piece moves ***diagonally***, it’s going to a new tile of the same color as the tile it was standing on, as illustrated. [minh họa] When a piece moves ***orthogonally***, it’s staying in the same row or column.
* The red and green outlines are the ***walls*** (of the castle) of the corresponding armies. [minh họa]
* The area of 9 tiles inside the wall is the ***castle*** area. [minh họa]
* The blue strip is the ***river***. [minh họa] This special terrain imposes the River Law that some pieces have to respect.
* During the match, each piece should be placed on the board in a way that fully cover 1 circle. [minh họa]

Now moving on to the pieces. Each piece has a particular range of movement (***step*** count) that allows it to traverse on the board’s terrain. For example, the chariot has a range of {1-7}. The first number indicates its minimum number of steps allowed, the second number its maximum. So, you can choose to use only 1, 2 or 3 steps… all the way up to 7.

There are some ways to classify pieces. If you count how many of each type of piece are within an army when the battle begins, then we have:

* Common pieces: those numbering 2 or more. They include Chariots, Horses, Guns and Troops [4 icons]. They have to obey the ***River Law***, which states:

**Crossing the river costs 2 steps. In case a piece has only 1 step left at the river bank, it can cross if the destination tile is vacant.**

*Note: even if during the battle, some particular type of common pieces is reduced to only 1 in its army, it still counts as common and has to follow the River Law. Some examples of the River Law will be shown when we come to individual pieces.*

* Unique pieces: those that each army has only 1. They ignore the River Law altogether, and see the river just as normal terrain.

*Note: if during the battle, for some reason, an army has more of a unique piece, elevating their count to 2+, they are still considered unique.*

Another way to categorize the pieces is:

* ***Commanders***: Lord (shortened as **L** in notation), Marshall (**M**) and Advisor (**A**). Commander pieces are thicker than lower ranks, you can feel it with your fingers.
* ***Officers***: Spy (**S**), Band (**B**), Pigeon (**P**), Elephant (**E**), Kite (**K**), Horse (**H**), Gun (**G**) and Chariot (**C**).
* ***Soldiers***: normal Troop (**T**) and special Ranger (**R**). Soldier pieces are smaller than higher ranks, and have hollow parts on both faces to hold the insignia.

Or you can differentiate the pieces by their methods of moving:

* Flyers (Kite [icon], Pigeon [icon]) and jumper (Band [icon] and to some extent, Gun’s [icon] firing move) can’t be blocked.
* Walkers are all the other pieces, which move on foot and will be blocked if there is an obstacle (most of the times, an ally piece) on the way.

Here are some buzzwords that you may encounter frequently when playing Cota:

* The ***collateral*** damage, generated by the Gun’s [icon] and Kite’s [icon] killing move, affects the ranks differently. While soldiers are killed within the area of effect, commanders and officers are only ***immobilized***, which mean they lose any active aural effect and can’t move for 1 full turn (the next ply and the ply after that).
* Another condition: ***tied***, is used to describe when a piece can still move but can’t kill, due to either its innate limitation or another piece’s effect.
* There’s the ***crossing maneuver***, which is done by Gun [icon] and Troop [icon] (and Ranger [icon]). In general, they move orthogonally, but whenever crossing the river, they must move diagonally. As the name implies, this maneuver are enforced only across the river. After crossing, if they have steps left, they can continue going but have to move like normal. Illustrative examples are at those pieces’ sections.
* Cota also have a mechanism called ***surround***. If a piece is encircled by 4 enemies symmetrically (making a square shape with the surrounded piece in the center, right at the intersection of the 2 perpendicular diagonals), and all 4 enemies have clear line of sight to that piece (i.e. no obstructing pieces sitting on the diagonal lines), then the distance between it and the enemies will dictate its fate: [minh họa]
* 1 tile: it’s captured, becoming an enemy piece. (flipping it over will do the trick!)
* 2 tiles: it’s destroyed and removed from the board, somewhat similar to a normal kill.
* 3 tiles: it’s immobilized as long as there’s no change to the situation.

When an enemy piece is on the edge of the board, only 3 pieces are needed to surround it. Likewise, if it’s in the corner then 2 pieces will do.

*Note: when a player moves their piece right into the opponent’s existing surround formation, that piece is put under the effect right away. Don’t fall into such obvious trap!*

Finally, let’s talk about the setup before getting a game started!

Cota is best suitable for 2 players, taking opposing sides of Red and Green, representing the Juan and Tykei factions. At the beginning of the match, the pieces are arranged as shown in the diagram, with Spy [icon], Band [icon] and Pigeon [icon] not yet deployed. Red moves first, then players alternate moves. Action(s) of a single side, Red or Green, is called a ***ply***, and their 2 moves combined is called a ***turn***. It’s possible to skip a ply, and if both opponents skip 2 turns, the game is declared a draw. Each type of Cota piece has its own method of movement, but they follow the simple rule that says:

**A piece moves to a vacant tile except when killing an enemy. In that case, the opponent’s piece is removed from the board and the attacking piece replaces it in that position without moving any further.**

The moves of different pieces are as follow:

* Lord [icon, bỏ hình thang bao bên ngoài, chỉ dùng symbol viền đen] {1-1}: moves 1 tile orthogonally, always within its castle. If Lord is next to Advisor [icon] (in any direction), they can ***swap*** positions. This swapping move can’t be used consecutively, or when both pieces are immobilized. Lord is the most important piece on the board, losing it equals game over. That also means to officially win a match, you actually have to go for the kill, removing the enemy Lord – don’t just stop at checkmate.
* Advisor [icon] {1-1}: moves 1 tile diagonally within the castle. When at least 6 pieces in the player’s army – a Chariot, a Gun, a Horse [3 icons] and 3 of the following: Marshall, Spy, Kite, Elephant, Band, Pigeon [6 icons] – are dead, Advisor {1-2} can now move 2 tiles and get out of the castle. If during a ply, it enters the enemy castle, then at the end of that ply Advisor can be ***promoted*** to any piece, except Lord [icon].
* Marshall [icon] {1-2}: moves 1 or 2 tiles orthogonally or diagonally.
* Band [icon] {2-2}: is permanently tied. Band jumps (can’t be blocked) to any position that is 2 tiles distant from it. ***Moral*** effect: all ally pieces within Band’s 1-tile radius get +1 to their maximum step limit; and enemy pieces get -1 to theirs. Pigeon [icon], Kite [icon] and Gun’s [icon] firing move are not affected by Band. An enemy having only 1 step maximum can’t be reduced to 0, but it is tied. When 2 opposing Bands are next to each other, both their aural effects are negated.

*Notes: when 1 of the 2 mentioned adjacent Bands is immobilized (and thus loses its effect), the other will enjoy a functional aura for 1 full turn. On the other hand, in rare cases when a piece is boosted by 2+ Bands of the same color, their effects* are *cumulative. If a piece –say, Horse* [icon]*– is discouraged by 2 enemy Bands, its step count becomes {2;1} and as a result, it won’t be able to move at all, because the maximum allowed step is smaller than the minimum number.* [thêm minh họa]

Band is not deployed on the board when the match begins. Instead, it can be placed on any vacant tile on the upper 6 rows from the player’s point of view. For Red, they’re rows 5 to 10; for Green, 1 to 6. [minh họa bằng pattern gạch chéo bằng màu của 2 bên, 2 loại chéo khác nhau]

*Notes: the act of deploying any piece on the field equals a full move, and the player’s ply will end right afterward.*

* Spy [icon] {2-3}: is permanently tied, but can kill enemy Spy. It moves diagonally and is the only piece that can change direction after each step. During the move, Spy has to make at least one 90° turn, like a zigzag. ***Sabotage*** effect: when on enemy soil (and not immobilized by collateral damage), it can’t be surrounded and can only be killed by an opponent’s Spy or commander [3 icons]. Moreover, in its 1-tile radius, enemy officers are tied and enemy troops are immobilized. When 2 opposing Spies are next to each other, both their effects are negated.

Spy is not deployed on the board when the match begins. Instead, it can be placed on any vacant tile on the upper 4 rows from the player’s point of view.

*Note: A band* [icon]*-buffed Spy, having its new range of {2-4}, can’t move in a circle using its 4 steps and return to its original position. That’s illegal, period.*

* Elephant [icon]: has 2 sets of steps. It can move {1-3} tiles diagonally, or {1-1} forward or to the sides. ***Double piercing*** ability: Elephant can kill a maximum of 2 pieces on its path, provided that the last piece killed is an enemy one. Also, it can stop anywhere on its path, i.e. it doesn’t have to stay on the tile it kills.
* Chariot [icon] {1-7}: moves orthogonally 1-7 steps.
* Horse [icon] {2-3}: moves 2 or 3 tiles to the opposite vertex tile of rectangles with sizes 1x2 or 2x3 (or 2x4 when Band-buffed) **squares**. The moving sequence must follow the DODO order: diagonal – orthogonal – diagonal (– orthogonal), toward the destination.

*Note: remember, Horse can be blocked, and it has to obey the River Law!*

* Gun [icon]: has 2 types of moves, both orthogonal. Normally, it goes {1-3} steps without the ability to kill, and has to use the crossing maneuver when passing the river. The firing move {2-9} is done by jumping always **a single** piece along the path of attacking and killing an enemy piece. ***Collateral***: when Gun fires, all pieces – ally or enemy alike – within a 1-tile radius of where it lands are affected (soldiers killed, commanders and officers immobilized). The castle wall blocks Gun’s collateral and protect any pieces on the other side of the wall.

*Note: Gun’s firing move is of jumping nature, and thus isn’t affected by the river at all.*

* Kite [icon] {?-?}: whenever Kite has clear orthogonal or diagonal line of sight to an ally piece (the ‘controller’) of any distance, it can fly to another tile in mentioned 7 remaining directions, provided that the distance (number of tiles) from Kite to its target equals to that from Kite to controller. ***Collateral***: when Kite kills, all pieces 1-tile forward and 1-tile backward on its path of attack are affected.

*Note: unlike Gun’s* [icon]*, Kite’s rain-of-fire-from-above collateral affect those inside and outside the wall equally.*

* Pigeon [icon] {2-?}: is permanently tied. Pigeon flies (can’t be blocked) any distance orthogonally or diagonally over at least 1 piece, to land next to an ally. That piece can move right within that ply on the condition that the ***express*** move must be identical to Pigeon’s one but on the opposite direction. That piece has to retain its method of moving, i.e. pieces that don’t fly or jump can still be blocked and therefore can’t express at all. In other words, Pigeon helps bypass the **directional**, **step** and **terrain** limitation temporarily, but the other piece has to observe its own, other rules. For example, Advisor [icon] which is still restrained within the castle and Lord [icon] can’t express outside.  
  Pigeon is not deployed on the board when the match begins. Instead, it can be placed on any vacant tile on the upper 5 rows from the player’s point of view, except inside enemy castle.  
  *Note: an expressing Gun* [icon] *can execute their firing move and jump over 1 piece to kill, if the target is positioned right at the destination of the express. In case you wonder.*

Special move: when a side has Kite [icon], Pigeon [icon] and less than 8 other pieces on the board, they can ***sacrifice*** both K and P to bring back a piece from the dead! The procedure is as follow:

* The player removes Kite and Pigeon from the board.
* The opponent now has 2 options: to choose which piece among those they have killed to be returned; OR to choose the vacant tile that it is to be placed.
* Whatever their choice is, the opponent will do it first. Then the player will make the remaining choice. Their ply ends after the resurrected piece is positioned on the board.
* Troop [icon] {1-1}: moves orthogonally. On home soil, it goes 1 step forward. On enemy soil, it can also move sideways. Generally, Troops can never go back, but once a soldier reached the enemy’s last row, it becomes a veteran and from then can move backward. Troop has to use the crossing maneuver (move diagonally) when passing the river.

During a match, each player has 3 ***charges***, which will temporarily give a particular soldier +1 to its maximum step for 1 ply. To use charge, they have to shout “**HURRAH!!**” loudly and punch decisively upward into the air – only then will the charge be acknowledged and the piece will have its extra step. They also have the option to use all 3 charges at once: just shout and punch 3 times and a soldier will get +2 to its maximum step number.

*Note: if someone decides to charge but doesn’t shout enthusiastically, their soldier won’t receive +1 step but they will still lose a charge all the same.*

* Ranger [icon] {1-1}: before the match, each side secretly put ***insignias*** on the underneath of 2 Troops. If and once revealed, these 4 special ops, called Rangers, can move diagonally and ignore the River Law, i.e. crossing it only costs 1 step. They still have to observe general rules for Troops – for example, they can’t move diagonally backward until becoming veteran Rangers. A player uncovers their Ranger by removing the insignia on the backside and place it in the hollow on the front side to let the opponent know.

*Note: Ranger and Troop, like Marshal* [icon]*, Gun* [icon]*, Elephant* [icon] *and many other pieces, can’t change the direction of their movement once started moving. That said, the diagonal crossing maneuver is a movement of different nature from a Ranger (or a Troop)’s normal move. Therefore, if after crossing the river, a Ranger still has movement(s) left, it doesn’t have to continue going diagonally.*

Some notes on game recording: Cota employs a very similar notation system to chess’. However, there are some novel moves that doesn’t exist in chess:

* Swapping move between Lord [icon] and Advisor [icon] uses the symbol ⇋ (Unicode 21CB) and includes both in notation. Example: 11. Cf6+ Le8⇋Af9
* Unlike chess where one can *only* double checks, in Cota you have the ability to do triple, quadruple, and even quintuple check with just 1 move! Therefore, the + symbol after a checking move is not formally needed, but if you want to fully record all the brilliance of your glorious move, feel free to add as many + as it deserve! Example: 23…Pe4+++++

*Note: win 7 (yes,* ***seven****) free Cota sets and forever inscribe your name on the Cota Hall of Fame by being the first to figure out the details of a quintuple check! Just email a picture or description of the board situation to* [*CotaFeedback@StefenLonginspired.com*](mailto:CotaFeedback@StefenLonginspired.com) *and you will get them! I haven’t found a way to manage a sextuple check, but if you do, then tell me right away, OK? I promise even better things tantamount to such nutty move. Also, feel free to send questions and feedback to that address!*

* The surrounding mechanism uses letters c for a capture, and d for a piece’s destruction. They are added right after the move, along with the position of the ill-fated piece. Example: 12. Mc6dd4, or 17…Cg4cf5
* While chess pieces can only kill one other at a time, Cota’s Elephant [icon] can make 2 piercing kills, Kite [icon] 3 and Gun [icon] potentially 9(!) kills with just a single attack! Again, you can add as many x as you see fit. Example: 8. Gxxxxb7
* The express move uses letter e between Pigeon’s [icon] movement and that of its ally. Example: 25. Pg1eHxh8
* The sacrifice move is described by letters S or s, placed between pk (short for the ingredients of the sacrifice) and the name and position of the returning piece. In case the opponent chooses the position, use uppercase S. If the opponent chooses the piece, use lowercase s. Some examples: 39…pkSMi10, or 42. pksTd8+
* The veteran status can be optionally denoted by letter v before the piece name. Example: 50. vTg9
* Advisor [icon] promotion and Ranger [icon] revelation both use the symbol / to depict. Example: 36…Ac2/H+, or 5. T/Rxf6!
* Using charge can be optionally denoted by letter h before the piece name. Triple charge in 1 ply is hh. Example: 2… hTb5?!, or 18. hhRxd8+
* The winning move that kills Lord [icon] is noted by the letter W after it. Example: 27. Kxe10W
* In official tournaments, a draw match should give each player 1 point, a win by killing move 3 points, a win by the opponent forfeiting 4 points, and a win by capturing the enemy Lord (leading to the board having 2 Lords [icon] of the same color) 6 points!

And that’s it! Let’s have a lot of fun with Cota ☺