

VALIANT BRITONS

Tribal warfare in Celtic Britain



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Introduction

This is a wargame set in ancient times, somewhere between the 4th Century BC and 1st Century AD about tribal warfare.

Very little is known about the detail of Celtic Society or the conduct of tribal wars. Such evidence that exists consists of three kinds:

- a. Accounts by their enemies the Romans. Julius is a famously unreliable reporter, second only to the Blair government in his ability to 'sex up' his accounts. It is generally accepted that he exaggerated the British Threat to Gaul and there was no evidence of 'chariots of mass destruction' or that they could 'invade within 45 minutes'. Tacitus writes convincingly, but his is not a primary source, and relies on the accounts of others.
- b. The archaeological remains. These provide clues as to the technology available – but archaeologists' analysis of their significance is largely conjecture and should be treated with caution. A good example of this is the controversy over the function of hill forts.
- c. Later writings on Irish Celtic life from early Christian writers in the 7th century and later. This assumes that Ireland in the 7th century is the same as the mainland over 600 years early. There may be some commonality but it is again a matter of conjecture as to how much one can draw from these sources.

So this is my version of events. It is based on a distillation of all the above sources, and is not inconsistent with them. It differs from the conventional wargame in that it is mainly about the culture of the Celtic warrior class – which is in my view the most relevant focus.

I have added a section on fighting the Romans. The Romans are not absolutely unbeatable – but they are very tough and usually outnumber the tribesmen on the field. So far as the tribes are concerned that isn't important – the Romans are just another tribe.



Game Structure

In this game each player is a Big Chief in a Celtic tribe. The tribe is organised into a 'King' who is the first among equals, and his Big Chiefs. There is also usually a Druid – who is also from the warrior caste, but has additional insight into the mysteries of the gods.

The King will have called out the Warband, provided the council have agreed. This usually only happens in very serious cases.

The game is as much about the player's status within the tribe as it is about fighting a battle. Status is measured in one of several ways:

HEADS : Heads taken in battle or when raiding. Obviously, only the head of another warrior counts (massacring women and slaves carries no honour). Start with 1d6 heads.

CATTLE : This is the main measure of financial wealth. The unit of currency in the tribe is a head of cattle. Start with 4d6 heads.

FOLLOWERS : Other, lesser, warriors are attracted to you as a result of your standing as a warrior and your reputation. Similarly, followers will leave you if you turn out to be a pathetic wimp. Start with 1d6+3 bases

KUDOS : Basically force of personality - 'presence'. Start with 10 Kudos

Scales

for 15mm figures	for 25mm figures	for 6mm figures
1 figure = 30 men	1 figure = 30 men	1 figure = 10 men
1 cm = 5m	2 cm = 5m	1 cm = 5m
10cm = 50m	10cm = 25m	10cm = 50m

Base sizes

Britons:

6mm or 15mm : 40mm front x 30mm deep with 3 figures spread about unevenly on the base (15mm figures) or 10 (in 6mm figures).

There are no homogenous 'units', so a good mixture of figure types is important. Bases should also be rounded to discourage forming into regular formations.

Romans and Auxiliaries:

6mm or 15mm : A Roman cohort has a frontage of 16cm and in theory should be 12mm deep - though depth can be more to accomodate figures. This represents a six-deep line.

To reflect formation changes, it is suggested that a cohort is 4 bases, each of 40mm front x 15mm depth, with 4 figures on each (15mm figures) or 10 x6mm figures.

A legion drawn up in battle formation would therefore be around 176cm frontage.

For 25mm figures, double the frontages involved.

Game Sequence

There are two distinct phases to the game:

PHASE I: the Tribal Council - players meet and whip up the tribe prior to forming the Warband. In some cases, this might involve diplomatic negotiations where more than one tribe is operating in concert.

PHASE II: The Warband Assembles for battle and the fight occurs.

The Tribal Council

The players sit round and discuss how the battle is going to be fought. It takes the following form:

1. The Druid Reads the Runes (See below) to determine the overall prospects for the enterprise.

2. The Chiefs discuss their main decisions, which are

a. Whether to fight at all - realistically this would be a big part of the discussion. However, since you're all hoping to play out the rest of the game it's probably not worth discussing unless the players are very keen on roleplaying it.

b. Which of the Big Chiefs go where in the battle line. The Right of the Line is regarded as the Attacking part, and the Left of the Line the Defensive part – so depending on the tribe's style either the left or the right will be positions of prestige. The King is usually in the Centre where everyone can see him (or her).

c. The battle 'plan'. This is largely deciding on the signal for attack, and possibly agreeing in advance how much



psyching up the chiefs plan to do before getting stuck in.

3. The then Druid Reads the Runes once more to see how the gods have viewed the plan.

The non-played minor chiefs of the tribe are watching the discussion with interest. If the reason to fight or the plan are not convincing then some will vote with their feet and not turn out for the battle. Also Big Chiefs can add to their personal followers by good performance in the Council.

For each Stirring Speech to the Council +1 base to the speaker's personal following.

If a big chief's plan is adopted by the council +1 base to the speaker's personal following.

If a big chief loses face to another big chief – he must transfer one base of followers to the other chief.

Ideally the Council section of the game should be accompanied by food and drink and a certain amount of shouting to get the right atmosphere and to reflect the fact that War Councils were always accompanied by feasting.

Reading the Runes

To simplify the whole complex business, the rune are read using a pack of ordinary playing cards.

The pack is cut by the Druid, and the card interpreted. Here are some general guidelines – the Druid player is expected to make this as colourful as he can.

If he is particularly good at this he too might gain followers.

Hearts	The Tribe. Family. Courage.
Clubs	Battering. Heavy things. Fighting.
Diamonds	Rare. Valuable. Shining. The Earth.
Spades	Digging. Hard work. Shovelling. Building.

Ace	The Best. Alone.
King	The King. Leadership.
Queen	The Tribe. Defensiveness
Jack	The Chiefs. A warrior.

Other numbers – the Druid can try to read significant into the number.

Note that Chiefs may not challenge the Druid's interpretation; neither can they offer their own interpretation. Non-Druids have not been initiated so cannot know what to look for.

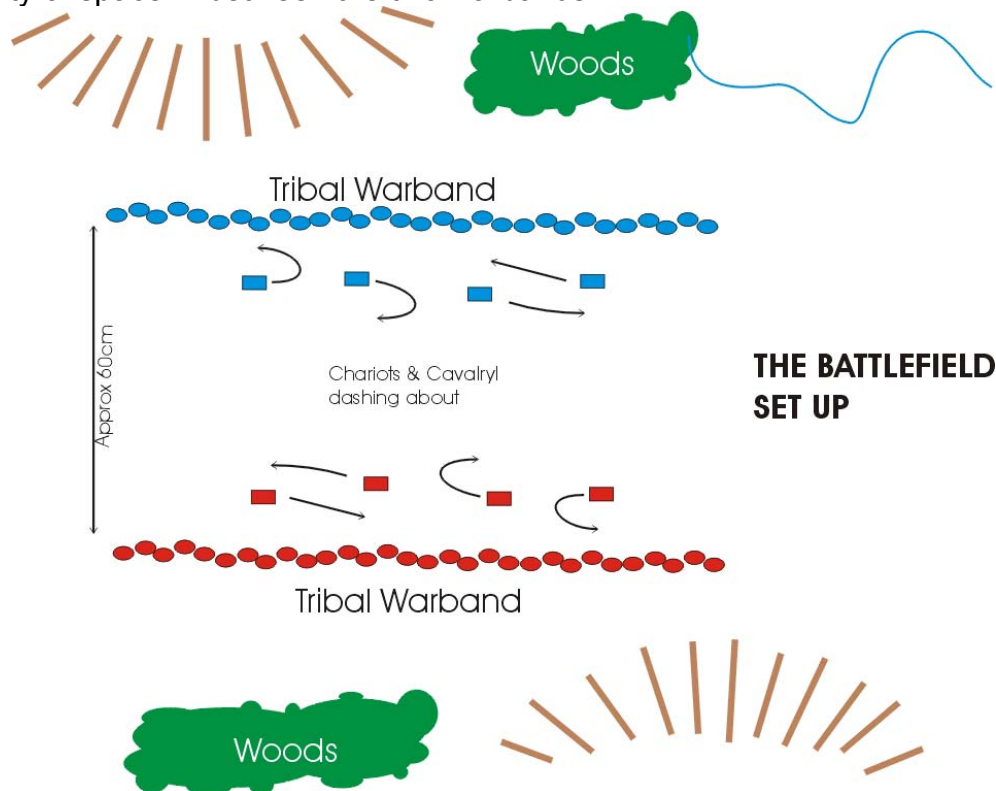
Forces

The size of the tribe's warband depends on the response to the raising of the King's standard. If the cause is unpopular, only the direct followers of the Big Chiefs (=the players) will turn out.

If the reason is good and popular then many more warriors will turn out from the non-aligned chiefs (not played).

COMBAT SYSTEM

The game is laid out with the two sides lined up around 60 cm apart with plenty of space in between the two warbands.



Distances:

There are no movement rules as such - players choose how far away from the enemy they are during the Psyching up phase (see below) and the battle phase consists of a single move to combat.

The distances that matter are:

within long bowshot = 25cm

within slingshot = 15cm

javelin range = 5cm

STAGE I: PSYCHING UP

The number of bases of warriors that move closer to the enemy depends on how Psyched Up they are.

Just shouting 'Charge' isn't really enough.

There is therefore a period before the main fighting starts where the Big Chiefs attempt to psych up their followers.

This period can go on indefinitely until one or other side feels its hard enough and launches the battle.



There are two basic criteria -

1. The Leader's current reputation with the Tribe - this is set out at the start of the battle and does not change.

Highest number of heads on the battlefield	+1
Largest number of followers	+1
Did something spectacular at the Council	+1
Is King	+1

2. The Leader's Presence on the Battlefield - this will change according to what he does on the field.

Successful Chariot Stunts	+1 per 5 points of kudos
Demonstrating Insane Bravery	+1
Successful Taunting of the enemy	+1

Roll 1d6 and add the bonuses above to create your 'Psycho points' for the battle.

CHARIOT STUNTS

There is an element of risk involved here and an element of competitive bidding.

Basically the chariot careers around and the warrior shows off.

Before rolling all Chiefs, on both sides, announce publicly the stunt they are going to attempt.

If someone else is attempting the same stunt then they only gain the kudos if one succeeds and the other fails. If both succeed it must be because the stunt was easy so there is no kudos gain.

The first person on the field (both sides included) to attempt a given stunt gets double kudos if they succeed and no loss if they fail.

If there are multiple first attempts, then dice to see who goes first if they can't agree.

Nobody loses kudos on a failure until a given stunt has been successfully completed once.

Cunning Stunts	Risks / Consequences										
	D10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Jumping on/off chariot in motion	P2	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1
Jumping on/off the chariot horses in motion	P1	P1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y2
Running up and down the chariot pole	P2	P1	P1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y2	Y2
Standing on the horses' backs	P2	P2	P1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y2	Y2	Y2	Y2
Charging enemy line at high speed and turning away at the last minute without rolling the chariot.	Big Ouch ROLL P3	ROLL P3	Yawn	Y1	Y1	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y5
Dismounting over the front of the chariot.	Big Ouch	P2	P1	P1	Y2	Y2	Y2	Y3	Y3	Y3	Y3
Closing pass with another chariot without collision	CRASH P3	CLIP P2	Yawn	Y1	Y1	Y2	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y5
Successfully jumping from chariot to chariot during a high speed closing pass.	Oh No	Big Ouch	P1	Y2	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y6	Y8	Y10	Y10

Yawn = Nothing happens

Pratfall P1 = Fall over and lose 1 kudos

Pratfall P2 = Fall over and lose 2 kudos...and so on

Big Ouch = Fall over and lose 1 kudos and become wounded

Oh No = = Fall over and gain 1 kudos and become incapacitated (out of the game)

YES 1 = successful stunt gain 1 kudos

YES 2 = successful stunt gain 2 kudos...and so on

ROLL = Chariot rolled. Takes 2 turns to recover it.

CRASH = Chariot collision. Roll again 1d6 1= chariot written off.

Combination stunts score double the total benefit **if** they are all successful.

INSANE BRAVERY

This is risking your life as an individual. Announce how close you plan to go to the enemy on your own.

The closer to the enemy main line you choose to go, the greater the risk, obviously. Enemy reaction is automatic – someone in the line might chuck a javelin or take a swipe.

Distance	Risk	1d6 = score to be	Kudos Gain
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		wounded	
Far	Close enough to pick out individuals, but not within bowshot.	No risk – but you might get a nasty taunting from your own side	0
Close	within long bowshot and shouting distance	1	1
Very close	within slingshot	1, 2	2
Too close	within javelin range	1,2, 3	4
Up Close and Personal	able to touch their shields	1, 2, 3, 4	8

If someone else is exhibiting Insane Bravery closer to the enemy than you at the same time then you get no kudos, but the same risk.

TAUNTING

Use your imagination to think up a suitable taunt. Simply swearing isn't enough – it has to be imaginative and colourful.

Quoting the French Knights from Monty Python and The Holy Grail verbatim loses you 10 kudos automatically.

If, on the consensus of those playing it is a particularly good taunt then you get the credit. Scoring is by a show of fingers, either none, 1 or 2.

Add up the total fingers of all present for the kudos score.

To taunt you have to be within shouting distance of the tauntee.

Best targets for taunting are specific enemy Big Chiefs – preferably ones with personal feature you can make fun of.

Please remember that this is role playing and that insults are 'in character'. If necessary, de-role after the game.

INJURY

Each time you get wounded, take a wound badge. With 4 or 5 wounds you cannot fight and move at half speed (but can still shout commands), at 6 wounds you are out of action completely

STAGE II : BATTLE

The player can use his Psycho Points as follows:

Move one of his own follower groups to contact = 1 PP

Move a non-aligned group to contact = 1 PP

Give a single group of personal followers a +1 bonus in combat = 1PP

Intimidate the enemy by giving them a -1 on combat = 1PP

Personal Leadership - the player can lead the charge, but then becomes embroiled in combat for the remainder of the battle - though this give a big bonus to the combat and gives the opportunity for head-taking. He also runs the risk of being wounded (roll 1 or 2). If another Big Chief is leading from the front in the same place - they will automatically engage in personal combat.

The Leader that does not get embroiled can use PP to try and control the battle by issuing orders to unengaged units or rallying groups that are running away. He also runs the risk of being wounded if he gets within Javelin range of the action (roll 1)

Combat is by rolling 1d6 for each group in base-base contact. Add various factors, highest score wins. Total all the wins and losses and the side with the most wins, wins the battle.

All the Big Chiefs on the Winning side get 2d6 cattle in loot, +1 follower group and some personal kudos.

Big Chiefs leading an attack personally get 1d3 heads (win or lose).

The Campaign Game

This battle system can be expanded into a club campaign, with players carrying over their reputations from game to game as they fight neighbouring tribes.

After a battle one chief will be acclaimed 'Hard Man'. This will usually be the one who gained the most Kudos. The Hard Man has a reputation to maintain – especially at the next battle where all the warriors will be expecting him to perform even more outrageous feats.

FOOTNOTE ON THE ROMANS

These are included just for contrast.

There is no need for a Roman Player in the battle phases, and the Romans do not have a Psyching up phase.

However, the area in front of the Roman line is a more dangerous place to perform psyching up actions - particularly within Javelin range or in front of their auxiliary archers.

In a battle phase against the Romans, each attack is adjudicated in the same way as the tribal battle, except:

Romans win or draw die roll - remove follower base from play.

Romans lose die roll - push back Roman base 2cm

It is possible for second and subsequent waves to be sent against the Romans if enough PP are available.

The Roman line will always reform if it can - so if a push back result is not followed up by a second wave, the Roman base will move back into position. If they cannot, then flanking bases will be moved back to conform with them. Romans in the line may not 'shuffle sideways'.

It is possible to make a hole in the Roman line by repeatedly pushing a section back - if a gap of more than 3cm opens between two bases a gap has opened, and the Roman Line has been broken and they have lost.

This is a victory for the Tribe with the following gains:

All the Big Chiefs on the Winning side get 3d6 cattle in loot from the Roman baggage, +1 follower group and some personal kudos.

Big Chiefs leading an attack personally get 1d3 heads.

If the Romans are not broken they win. If the Romans have cavalry they can pursue the remnants of the tribe and Roman foragers can steal stuff. - each Big Chief loses one follower group and 1d6 cattle.