

TALL TALES OF CONQUEST

A game of light-hearted competitive storytelling for three or more players

Three forces stand against each other. Whose tale will you tell? And can you tell it better than anyone else?

Tall Tales of Conquest is a game of entertainment and tactics for three or four players. In the game, players tell the story of a major conflict between three factions. Every turn, players have a chance to tell the story of one of the factions, and build up that faction's strength in their chosen territory. Players gain points by choosing their factions and territories wisely, and by telling stories that the other players find compelling.

There are two scenarios in the game: "Charles the Bald" and "Xorph Invasion". Each scenario details three factions, and has a board representing the areas those factions want to control. The scenarios are meant to showcase the possibilities inherent in the system. You can pick a scenario that suits your tastes, or design your own if you want!

"Charles the Bald" is set in 9th-century France, where the Frankish king Charles the Bald is in trouble. His Breton vassals are rebelling, and Norman invaders are sailing up the rivers of France and sacking his cities. With desperate bribes and alliances Charles tries to keep his part of the empire intact.

"Xorph Invasion" is set in the distant future. The galaxy is being invaded by alien Xorphs. The Caliphate, with its faithful robot army, have never been friends with the followers of charismatic king Clodwin. Will they unite, or will the galaxy erupt in total war?

RULES

"Floating in space between the alien ships, dressed in a suit of gold, is king Beowulf. He unfurls the black veil of Fatima, the Prophet's second wife, and wraps the entire alien fleet in its darkness."

Setup

To play the game, you need:

- These rules
- One of the game boards, depending on what scenario you want to play (alternately you can make one yourselves, which I heartily recommend)
- Around 50 tokens pr. player, one color for each

The board consists of six areas. Each area has boxes for the tokens of the three different factions. Lay the board in the middle of the table. Give each player 3 tokens of his color, and put the rest in a cup where everyone can reach them.

The round

The game is played in ten rounds. Each round consists of the following:

- All players compete for control of factions
- Each player narrates an episode in the story of a faction, possibly placing a token on the map
- All players award and receive tokens for good narration

Control of factions

Each player decides secretly which faction he want to *control* this turn. You may want a specific faction just because you like telling their stories, or because you want to place a token for that faction. When everyone has decided on a faction, show the sign (paper, stone or scissors) for the faction you want. You all reveal your sign at the

same time.

Now, one of three things can happen.

- You picked the same faction as two or more other players. If this happens, you all have to do it again - and again, until no more than two pick the same faction.
- You picked a faction nobody else picked. If this happens, you get the *control card* for that faction.
- You picked the same faction as someone else. If this happens, you both pick a new sign, and this time, you pick a winner. Paper wins over stone, stone over scissors, scissors over paper. The winner gets the control card for the faction you both wanted, *and* the *twist card* for the sign he made when he won. The loser gets the *cliffhanger card* for the sign he made when he lost.

Example: Adam, Beverly and Chris are playing the "Charles the Bald" scenario where stone is the Breton faction, scissors the Norman faction and paper the Frankish faction.

Adam wants to narrate the Normans, so he picks scissors. Both Beverly and Chris want the Bretons, so they both pick stone. Adam gets control over the Normans, but Beverly and Chris have to fight it out over the Bretons.

They enter a new contest: Beverly picks scissors, Chris picks paper. Chris loses, so he gets the cliffhanger card for the paper faction. Beverly wins, so she gets the control card for the stone faction, and the twist card for the scissors faction.

Your turn: Tall tales

Now you get to tell your stories, in the order given below.

Players with *only a control card* go first. They tell a short story about how their chosen faction does something dramatic and cool. How long the story should be depends on the tastes of the other players, since they'll be your judges. About five to ten sentences is usually enough. The story should be from the viewpoint of the

chosen faction, and not focus too strongly on other factions.

Players with *both a twist and a control card* tell a story with a twist. They start out telling how the faction on their twist card seems to be successful, but have to end their tale with success for the faction on their control card.

Players with a *cliffhanger* go last. They tell a story about the faction on their card that ends up in an unresolved, dramatic situation. Then they put the card on the game board, as a reminder that the next player narrating that faction has to continue where the cliffhanger left off.

Example of a story for the Normans: "The Norman boats are low in the water, but still manage to make their way upriver towards Paris. There's a low rumble in the distance, as the thunderstorm draws nearer. Silently, the invaders leave their ships and run towards the abbey. The loud screams go on for only a short while... and then there's silence. The Norman leader smiles. "

Example of a twist where the player has a Norman (scissors) twist card and a Frankish (paper) control card: "The Norman boats are low in the water, but still manage to make their way upriver towards Paris. There's a low rumble in the distance, as the thunderstorm draws nearer. Silently, the invaders leave their ships and run towards the abbey. But the Frankish soldiers that lie in ambush aren't silent. Shouting war cries they rush towards the Normans. Within minutes, those invaders that survived have retreated to their ships."

Example of a Norman cliffhanger: "The Norman boats are low in the water, but still manage to make their way upriver towards Paris. There's a low rumble in the distance, as the thunderstorm draws nearer. Silently, the invaders leave their ships and run towards the abbey. Then, a silhouette appears in one of the windows and shouts in their own language: 'Do you not recognize your true leader?'"

Example of a Norman story on the turn following the cliffhanger above: "The invaders stare up at the

window. One of them, a tall, skinny, scarred man, shouts: 'Liar! You aren't the King's son!' But when the man steps forward into the light, the invaders cheer loudly. 'Hail Sverre! Hail the King's son!' Their hearts fill with strength and joy as they march inland, led by their true leader."

Your turn: Conquest

After telling his story, a player that controls a faction may place *one* of his tokens on the map. He places it in the area where his story took place, in the box reserved for the faction he controls. This is done right after narration, before the next player tells his story.

Example: The player narrating the Norman episode above places his token in the Norman box in the area named Paris.

Awarding tokens for storytelling

At the end of the round, all players must award tokens to the other players. Each player grabs some tokens from the cup. Then, secretly, each player picks out a number of tokens equal to the number of players, and allocates them to the players that told the most compelling story on his turn.

Example: Adam gets to allocate four tokens, since there's four players. In his opinion, both Chris and Beverly told very good tales; however, Drake was uninspired and incoherent, and even narrated events that went against what others had narrated before, unintentionally resurrecting a king that died last round. Adam picks two red tokens (Chris' color) and two blue ones (Beverly's color).

Chris thinks Adam was all right, but Beverly's story was much better. He kind of liked Drake's story. He gives Drake the benefit of the doubt and picks one green token (Adam's color), two blue ones (Beverly) and one yellow (Drake).

Beverly liked Chris' story a lot, and Adam's too. However, she didn't like Drakes rambling. She picks three red (Chris) and one green (Adam) token.

Drake liked Chris' and Beverly's stories the best, but thinks Adam deserves a token as well. He picks one green (Adam), one blue (Beverly) and two red (Chris) tokens.

All in all this round, Adam gets 3 tokens, Beverly 5, Chris 7 and Drake 1.

Ending the game

After ten rounds, the game is over. In each area, find out which faction has the largest stack of tokens - that's the winning faction in that area. Remove the losing factions' tokens in each area. If there's a tie between two winners in an area, return the tokens to their owners.

In each area with a single winning faction, if the stack has more than three tokens in it, remove the upper tokens - those that were placed there last - so there's only three left. If the stack has three or less tokens, don't remove anything.

Then return the remaining tokens to their owners along with an additional return on investment, as follows:

- For 3 players, each token invested gets 4 in return (the original one plus 3 more).
- For 4 players, each token invested gets 5 in return.

Example: In Paris, the Breton faction has three tokens (two red and one yellow), the Franks have four (three blue and one green), and the Normans two (both yellow). The Breton and Norman tokens are removed; only the winning Frankish stack remains.

Since it has four tokens, one must be removed. Green was the last player to place one there, so the three blue ones remain.

There are four players, so each token gets five in return - the original one plus four more. Blue gets his three tokens back, and twelve more, for a total of 15.

The player with the most tokens - both from narration and conquest - wins the game.

SCENARIOS

Abandon all reverence. When playing Tall Tales of Conquest, feel free to get as silly or weird as you want. What's established as fact in the scenario or in play can't be changed, of course. But things that are just implicit, or expected, or even probable, you can just toss out the window when you feel like it. For example, if you're playing Charles the Bald, the Breton king Erispoë might decide during the first turn that he wants to leave the country and get a harem in Spain. Or the Normans could decide to establish a permanent settlement in Paris.

With that in mind, here's the scenarios. I strongly recommend making your own if you feel like it.

Scenario 1: Xorph Invasion

Xorph Invasion is a weird and silly scenario set in the far, far future. It's very setting light, and suitable for insanely epic stories with huge space battles and impossible plot twists.

The Clodwinians, a proud people of Breton descent, and the Caliphate, a techno-Moslem empire, have controlled the galaxy for a long time. Now, however, the evil alien reptiloid Xorphs have appeared, their fleet spewing out of a black hole at the galaxy's edge.

Factions

Xorph (scissors): The Xorph just want to destroy everything. Their ships are black, dripping blood into the void. There's thousands of them. The Xorph look like reptiles, though their spawn are insect-like.

Clodwinians (stone): The Clodwinians love their leader Clodwyn, a superhero-like figure who can fly through space in a golden suit.

The Earth Caliphate (paper): The Caliph rules the Earth with his advisors and his army of faithful Moslem robots.

The areas

Earth: The Caliphate's home base. Mecca is, of course, the capital, with its cloud-piercing minarets.

Clodwinia: That's right, home of the Clodwinians. A culture that loves TV, especially historical recreations of their former Breton glory.

The Black Hole: The Black Hole is a gateway to the Xorph dimension. Xorph ships are constantly streaming through it. Nobody knows whether it's a one-way Black Hole or not.

Triaster: An unstable three-star system at the centre of the galaxy.

The Ice-free Moons of Saturn: A strategically important area, the moons are used as bases for the fleets of the galaxy.

The Wharfs of Slupp: An industrial planet on the outskirts of civilization.

Scenario 2: Charles the Bald is superf*ed**

It's a fine day in the mid-9th century. Charles the Bald, king of West Francia, isn't happy. His grandfather Charlemagne made an empire. His dad Louis managed to keep it together. But now it's all falling apart.

His oldest brother Lothar, that twat, inherited the empire. So Charles and his two other brothers (well, half-brothers, really - they all have the same mum, except for Charles) had to plot, scheme and declare a few wars to get their fair share.

It all seemed to work out in the end. Lothar got the Holy Schmoly Roman Emperor title, Pippin got the lands of Aquitaine, Louis got East Francia, and Charles got West Francia. Far away from those eastern barbarians. With a ready-installed, good old-fashioned feudal structure complete with vassals and everything. "Breton vassals." Why did Lothar and Louis giggle when they said that?

Apparently, the Bretons were hell-bent on independence, the right to run their own lives etc etc. Well, kings don't usually give

away bits of their land for free, and Charles wasn't about to. But then the Breton leader Nominoë started getting nasty. Charles had given him some limited power to grease him, but that didn't work as planned. To the contrary - he started grabbing land and winning battles over the Franks. "Not enough grease?", thought Charles, and tried making him a Duke.

Then, the Bretons decided that Nominoë's son Erispoë should be king. King of the Bretons. "Perhaps I've been greasing in the wrong place?", thought Charles. He started bribing Erispoë's cousin and foster brother Salamon with land. That should have made the Bretons fight among themselves, but the result so far is that Salamon just wants - that's right - more power.

A fairly stable, fucked up situation. His brothers ignored him, his vassals hated him; all in the life of a medieval king. Then the Normans arrived. Barbarian invaders are mostly all the same - they make a lot of noise at your borders, you beat them with overwhelming force and do nasty things to their leaders' corpses, they go away.

But the Normans didn't stop at the borders. They just sailed straight up the rivers in their low boats and sacked and pillaged. On holy days, always, so they could be sure that all the Frankish soldiers were in a church somewhere, which the Normans proceeded to burn.

And then they took Paris. Cost a hell of a lot of gold to buy it back.

Charles the Bald isn't happy.

In fact, Charles the Bald is superf***ed.

Factions

<to be fleshed out>

Normans (scissors): Invaders out for loot. Can sail their ships up all major rivers. Nonbelievers, aggressive, violent, greedy. Can be bribed.

Franks (paper): Remnants of the once-mighty Carolingian empire, ruled by Charles the Bald, whose half-brothers got better deals.

Bretons (stone): Rebellious people who want their leaders to be kings, not vassals of Charles.

Areas

<to be fleshed out>

Britain: Has been invaded by countless peoples and tribes over the last centuries. The northern part, called the Danelaw, is currently under Viking administration. The rest is Anglo-Saxon.

Rennes: Major battles between Franks and Bretons have found place here.

Nantes: Another Frank/Breton battle area, under Count Lambert, a Breton nobleman and one of Charles' vassals.

Paris: Once the capital of the Carolingian empire, now merely the Frankish capital. Recently taken by Normans, and bought back for a hefty bribe.

Bordeaux: Major city on a major river; previously taken by Moors.

Spanish Marches: A buffer zone between Frank and Moorish rule, governed by the Count of Barcelona.

Some historical names and characters you can use

FRANKS

Charles the Bald

King of West Francia

Ermentrude

Charles' wife

Louis the Stammerer

Charles' four-year-old son

Louis the German

King of East Francia, Charles' older half-brother

Pippin II

King of Aquitaine, Charles' nephew

Lothar

Holy Roman Emperor, Charles' oldest half-brother

Louis II

King of Italy, Lothar's oldest son

Lothar and Charles

Lothar's younger sons

Drogo

Bishop of Metz, Charles' uncle, Charlemagne's illegitimate

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son, Patron of the arts

BRETONS

Nominoë

Rebellious Breton king, Count of Vannes

Erispoë

Breton prince, Son of Nominoë

Conan

Erispoë's son

Saloman

Breton noble, Nominoë's nephew and foster son

Lambert

*Count of Nantes and a competent army leader, Neustrian
aristocracy*

Gurwant

Count of Rennes

Pascweten

Count of Vannes, Saloman's son-in-law

Almaric

Saloman's murderous vassal

Robert the Strong

Marquess of Neustria, Warrior

Conwoïon

*Abbot and founder of the abbey of Redon. Noble, possibly
Nominoë's brother*

Anweten

*New bishop of Quimper after Nominoë kicked out the
Frankish ones and replaced them with Bretons*

Courantgen

New bishop of Vannes

Retwaalar

New bishop of Aleth

Cltwoïon

New bishop of Saint-pol

NORMANS

Ragnar Lodbrok

Earl of Denmark and Sweden. Pagan, pirate and raider

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Ragnar's armies
5000 warriors and 120 ships
Aslaug Sigurdsdatter
Ragnar's wise, cunning and beautiful wife
Hvitserk
Ragnar's chess-loving son
Bjørn Jernside (Ironside)
Ragnar's son
Sigurd Orm-i-auga (Snake-eye)
Ragnar's son
Ivar the Boneless
Ragnar's vengeful son
Godfrid
Independent raider and settler
Sigtryggr
Independent and treacherous raider

Making your own scenario

A scenario is made up of three factions and a map with six areas. The three factions should be in opposition to each other. The areas on the map represent important arenas that all the factions might want to control.

To make a scenario, get all the players together to talk. This is important - it's much more fun to play a home-made scenario when everyone has the chance to add their input.

First, decide on a very general setting. "War in the Galaxy", "Wizard Guilds in the Empire's Capital" or "Courtesans at the Court of the Sun King" are examples. Keep it short.

Now, take turns suggesting factions. If your group already knows each other pretty well and can run with just about any idea, this won't take long - use the first three factions you come up with. If you're not so sure, have each player suggest a set of three factions, talk about how they might work, and vote on which set to use.

Finally, the map. Again, if the players know each other well, just take turns making up areas until you have six. Otherwise,

you can let everyone suggest one area, vote on which one to use, then suggest a new area and so on until you have six.

Example: These players know each other well. They throw out ideas in random order.

One of them says, "I'd like something historical."

Another says, "Hmm, okay, but... no fantasy at all?"

"Maybe a little."

"Historical - how about the renaissance?"

"Okay. Are they painters?"

"Yes! Painters competing for models and patrons!"

They've got a setting, so now the factions.

"I don't know any renaissance painters."

"We'll just make some up. One fat, bald one, with a moustache."

"Is he magic?"

"No! No, he's just a fat old painter."

"Okay, then a young, thin one, who does magic."

"And a female painter!"

"She's the King's daughter!"

"No... perhaps a countess?"

"Okay, a countess."

That's the factions. They draw up a map, taking turns putting in areas:

"The King's court."

"The haunted atelier where the Master used to work."

"The pretty young things of the city."

"Powers of magic."

"Class, style and technique."

"Money!"

Hey presto, a scenario!

Pitfalls

Here are a few things to remember when making a scenario.

Every faction should be an active, even aggressive force in the game world. In playtest, we tried out a scenario where God, Buddha and the Devil were fighting; it was very hard to make a good story for the Buddha players.

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Make sure all the factions can affect the game world directly. In the scenario mentioned above, the three factions controlled the actions of one single person, who in turn affected the areas on the board - job, money, love life etc. That single person changed her mind and life like a flipper ball being smacked from wall to wall, and we got frustrated trying to make a coherent story while watching her do weird and inconsistent things.

Make sure there are relationships of some sort between the areas. On a geographical map, you know which areas are neighbors, which are far apart, divided by oceans and mountains, etc. On a map of a court, where each area is a noble, you can figure out how they inter-relate and interact.