



BRANDUBH



ireland

Brandubh, meaning “black raven” in Old Irish, is a traditional game with deep roots in Celtic culture. For centuries, it was played as a symbolic reenactment of siege warfare, where a king and his defenders must escape an encircling force.

The game appears in early Irish manuscripts like the Codex Sangallensis and is referenced in medieval literature. Its mechanics mirror the tension of historical conflicts, offering insight into strategic thinking of the time.

We imagine a Viking warband landing on Irish shores, seeking to capture a Celtic stronghold. The King and his guards brace for the assault, relying on clever movement and unity to resist the invaders.

We chose Brandubh for its dramatic asymmetry and cultural depth. It offers a tense, thematic experience echoing the struggles of the Viking Age.

Krisztina & Tamas, Lemery Games

A Viking warband has landed on the Irish shore, their eyes set on a Celtic stronghold. The King and his guards prepare to defend their territory. The Vikings, driven by the desire for land and wealth, aim to capture the King and seize control of the stronghold. This ancient game of Brandubh reflects the harsh realities of the Viking Age in Ireland.

Will the Celtic guards hold their ground, or will the invaders prevail?

- Narrative based on the imagination of Lemery Games -

Brandubh is an asymmetric war game in which one player controls 4 Celts and their King, and the other controls 8 fierceless Vikings.

OBJECT OF THE GAME

- The Celtic player (Defender) wins if they move the King to one of the four corner squares of the board.
- The Viking player (Attacker) wins if they prevent the King's escape by surrounding and capturing him.

GAME CONTENTS

- 1 travel bag
- 1 game mat
- 1 blue King piece
- 8 beige Celtic pieces* (Defenders)
- 16 magenta Viking pieces* (Attackers)
- 1 rulebook



*4 Celtic and 8 Viking pieces are only used in the Tablut game variant.

SETUP

1. Lay out the game mat as shown in Fig. 1.
2. To decide player roles, one player takes 1 Viking piece (magenta) and 1 Celtic piece (beige) in each hand. The other player chooses a hand. This reveals their role. Players may alternate roles for a rematch.
3. Place the King piece, 4 Celtic pieces and 8 Viking pieces as shown (Fig. 1) and return all other pieces to the bag.



HOW TO PLAY

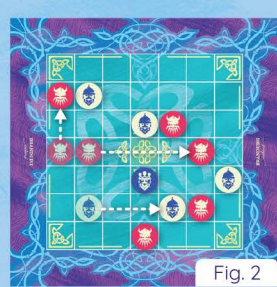
The Viking player goes first. Then players alternate turns.

Moving

All pieces move vertically or horizontally any number of empty squares (like rooks in chess). No diagonal movement and no jumping over other pieces is allowed (Fig. 2).

Throne restriction: Once the King leaves the throne, he may not return to it. Other pieces may move through the throne square as part of their path, but may not end their move there.

Corners: Only the King may end a move on a corner square (if he does, the game ends). Corners are “hostile” to all other game pieces (see Capturing below).



Capturing

Custodian capture: A piece is captured when pinned (sandwiched) horizontally or vertically between two enemy pieces (Fig. 3A) or between an enemy piece and a corner (Fig. 3B). Remove the captured piece immediately. Both Attackers and Defenders can perform captures in this way.



Multi-capture: Up to three enemy pieces can be captured in a single move if the closing move creates multiple pinches (Fig. 3C).

You cannot be captured on your own turn: You may move one of your pieces into a square that's already pinched between 2 enemy pieces, or between an enemy piece and a hostile square. This will NOT capture your piece. Captures are only made when a pinch is created by the active player's move.

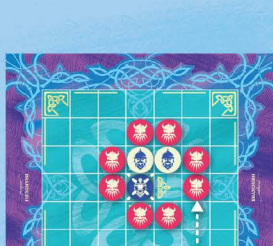
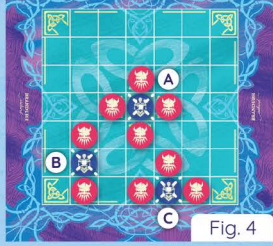
King's role in capture: Any friendly piece can participate in capturing, including the King.

Corners: Besides being restricted, corners are also “hostile” squares, which means that it can replace one of the two pieces involved in a capture (Fig. 3B).

GAME END

The game ends immediately if:

1. The King reaches any one of the four corner squares. Celtic player wins
2. The King is captured. Viking player wins. This can happen in 3 different ways:
 - **On the throne:** If the King is positioned on the central throne square, he can only be captured when all four orthogonal adjacent squares (North, South, East, and West) are simultaneously occupied by attacking pieces (Fig. 4A).
 - **Elsewhere:** The King is captured like any other piece (custodian capture between two enemy pieces) (Fig. 4B).
 - **On the board edge:** If the King is on an edge square and is surrounded by 3 Viking attackers (Fig. 4C). This can happen if the King had previously reached the central square between the two attackers. Pieces other than the King cannot be captured in this way.



3. The Vikings fully surround the King and all the remaining Celtic pieces (without using the board edges) so the King cannot reach a corner and escape (Fig. 5).
4. A player is unable to move. That player automatically loses the game.
5. A position repeats for the third consecutive time (threefold repetition). The player who chose to repeat that pattern loses (typically the Celtic defenders).

MATCH FORMAT

Two-set match: Play two sets, switching sides in the second set.

TIPS AND TRICKS



Vikings: Avoid impulsive captures. Removing enemy pieces too early can open escape paths for the king or disrupt your own defensive structure.



Celts: Use the throne as a tactical anchor. While the King is on the throne, he cannot be captured unless surrounded on all four orthogonal sides. Use this to your advantage by stabilizing your formation and forcing attackers to overextend.



Protect the King's mobility: Keep escape routes open. Avoid clustering defenders too tightly around the King as this can block his movement and make him vulnerable to encirclement.

GAME VARIANTS

Choose to modify the game with any or all of these variations:

1. **King's Escape Objective:** Instead of reaching a corner, the King may win by reaching any square on the board edge.
2. **Capturing the King:** The King is stronger now and must be surrounded on all four sides (or three sides plus the throne) to be captured.
3. **Unarmed King:** The King cannot take part in capturing enemy pieces.
4. **Hostile Throne:** The throne is now always hostile to the Vikings; hostile to the Celts only when the King is not occupying it; never hostile to the King. (i.e: the throne replaces one piece involved in a capture.)

Fun Tip: Try combining Variant 1 or 2 with Variant 3 to help balance the powers!

The most representative variant of Brandubh is a Lapland game called **Tablut**, which is a traditional Nordic strategy game, member of the Tafl family of asymmetric strategy games, documented by Carl Linnaeus in 1732 during his travels in Lapland, where he described it as a battle between a central "Swedish King" and surrounding "Muscovite" attackers.

TABLUT

SETUP

1. Lay out the game mat with the variant side up (Fig. 6).
2. Place the King piece, 8 Celtic pieces and 16 Viking pieces as shown (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6

HOW TO PLAY

The Viking player goes first. Then players alternate turns. Movement is performed in the same way as in Brandubh. Captures are made between two enemy pieces or between an enemy piece and a corner or the throne, also known as "hostile" squares (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7

King Capture

On the throne: The King must be surrounded on all four sides.

Adjacent to the throne: The King may be captured by three attackers plus the throne.

Elsewhere: The King is captured like any other piece (between two attackers).

GAME END

Game end conditions remain the same with the addition that the Celtic player also wins if the King reaches any square on the board edge (not just the corners).

Advanced rule

Once off the throne, the King can only be captured if it is surrounded on all four orthogonally adjacent spaces by any combination of friendly and enemy pieces. The final piece that completes this surrounding formation must be an enemy piece making the capturing move.

These rules of Brandubh and Tablut were inspired by the World Tafl Federation Brandubh rules, also by the 1952 book *A History of Board-Games Other Than Chess* by H. J. R. Murray and also by Carl Linnaeus's 1732 travel journal *Iter Lapponicum*, as interpreted through Murray's research.

MINI EXPANSIONS

HEROES OF EUROPE

Coming soon.

CHALLENGES OF EUROPE

Coming soon.

ORACLES OF EUROPE

Coming soon.

Publisher: Lemery Games

Illustration: Tímea Kőszegi

and Livia Varga

Rulebook editing and

proofreading: Emily Willix

and Jeremy Rozenhart

THANK YOU

We would like to thank all 2891 Kickstarter backers who helped LUDOS Africa come to life. Your contribution is key in preserving this game for future generations. Spread the word, and have fun!

To follow our journey and see all of our games,

visit LemeryGames.com

