

# FACTION BRIEFING: BARBARIANS



Grande Ludovisi sarcophagus, with battle scene between Roman soldiers and Germans.

## Historic Context

The Romans had long interacted with the various *barbarous* tribes across the frontier, both peaceful trade and warfare. Perhaps the most famous incident, was the destruction of three Roman legions in an ambush in the Teutoburg Forest in 9 CE, which ended the attempt to conquer Germania under Emperor Augustus (reigned 27 BCE to 14 CE). The borders of the Roman Empire in Europe were finalised by Emperor Trajan (reigned 98-117 CE). The conquest of Dacia (101-106 CE) was the last major annexation of territory by the Roman Empire. Marcus Aurelius (reigned 161-180 CE) fought the Marcomannic Wars (166 CE to 180 CE) against the various Germanic, Sarmatian, and Gothic peoples living north of the Danube River.

Trade flowed both ways across the border, with Baltic amber and slaves being sent to Rome in exchange for silver, weapons, and luxuries like pottery, glass, and textiles going back to tribal leaders. Barbarian tribes could be given permission to settle inside the Roman Empire, and barbarian warriors often served in the Roman military. Batavian mercenaries were famous bodyguards for the Julio-Claudian Emperors.

During the third century individual tribes and warrior warbands began to coalesce into larger coalitions, especially the Alemanni (“all men”), Franks (“free” or “fierce”), and Goths (“humans”). These confederations should not be confused with modern nation states. Borders were fluid, and membership fluctuated constantly, as individuals and groups could easily move around. Even where strong leaders are identified as Kings, they did not command the authority over their subjects that a medieval King commanded.

During the Barracks Emperor period (235-285 CE) the barbarians launched many successful raids across the frontier, raiding as far south as Cyprus, Greece, and Spain, and invaded Italy several times. Under severe pressure, the Romans eventually abandoned the province of Dacia, and the Agri

Decumates. The strength of the raiding warbands lay in rapid movements and sudden strikes. Their weakness was a lack of long-term cohesion. Roman attacks or defensive moves were often slow and ponderous, but thorough and relentless. Roman endurance often defeated warrior heroism.

Barbarian warriors often took service in the Roman Army, and were generally loyal to Rome. The third century did not see the “barbarisation” of the Roman army that took place in the fourth century.

### **Barbarian Confederations**

On the Gaul Map, the Franks represent the strongest confederation of barbarians east of the Rhine. Major tribes include the ALAMANNI, BATAVI, and FRANKS. Minor tribes include the SAXONES and PICTI.

On the Danube map, the Goths represent the strongest confederation of barbarians north of the Danube. Major tribes include CARPI, GOTHs, and JUTHUNGI. Minor tribes include the HERULI and SAMARTIANS.

### **Player Goals**

The primary goal of each Barbarian player is to accumulate wealth, represented by Wealth Points (WP). There are three main sources of WP: pillaging, bribes, and tribute.

- Pillaging happens if your warbands win a battle in Roman territory;
- Bribes can be negotiated with other players (although more polite words like “gift” or “subsidy” might be used);
- Tribute is an official payment by the Roman Empire to a tribal King, negotiated as part of a treaty. Kings may then choose to redistribute that wealth among the tribal chieftains.

### **Faction Goals**

In addition to any secret ambitions that individual players have, the general goals of each Barbarian confederation are to:

- Sack Rome is possible;
- Stop Roman invasions of your homelands;
- Settle two or more Roman provinces, and have Forts in those provinces at the end of the game;
- Increase your faction Prestige score to be greater than the other factions in the game;
- Have a treaty with Rome at the end of the game, where the Romans agree not to attack you, to make regular tribute payments, and to employ your warriors as foederati fighting under your leadership.
- To avoid having a treaty with Rome, where you agree not to attack the Romans, are identified as a Client of the Roman Empire, are forced to pay tribute to the Romans, or are required to provide your warriors as permanent auxiliaries fighting under Roman leaders.

### **Barbarian Roles**

One member of each faction will be identified as the King. All other faction members are Chieftains, each with command over one tribe in their confederation. There is no formal diplomacy role – all barbarians are free to negotiate deals as they see fit.

The King acts as the faction leader and determines policy options and recruitment. The leader in each confederation with the most WP is King. This role may change hands several times during the

game, but not more than once per game round. The former King becomes Chieftain of the tribe that just had its Chieftain replace them as King. This mechanic reflects the fluid nature of leadership in the barbarian confederations.

### **Barbarian Control**

Each Barbarian tribe has tokens in a different colour (see main rulebook). Chieftains can only move tokens from their own tribe. The King can move tokens from any tribe in the Confederation.

You can trade control of your tokens to other Chieftains and Roman leaders.

### **Resources at Start**

Each barbarian confederation has an initial RP income of 10 plus 1d4 variable income. If the Roman Empire mints coins on your map, you gain one bonus RP.

Each Chieftain starts with 4 WP, and each King starts with 6 WP. On the map each leader has one small infantry cube in each homeland region.

### **Recruitment**

Your recruitment improves as Roman imperial unity declines. Famine and plague events also increase your recruits, as hungry people migrating off their land join your warbands and hordes.

### **Strategy Guide**

Barbarian tribes and confederations can attack each other. Roman provinces, however, have better opportunities for pillaging than the barbarian homelands.

Barbarians need to do three things:

1. Recruit warbands.
2. Raid Roman territory, win battles, and pillage provinces.
3. Return home with your WP – you only get to keep the WP if your warbands come home with it!

This cycle of action means that there will be turns where you are very busy on the map, and times when you are quietly building up for your next set of raids across the border.

The best time to attack the Romans, is when an Usurper takes half the local legions off to invade Italy.

Any time you can persuade the Romans to bribe you to do what you were going to do anyway is a good day.

Settlements and improving your discipline die for battles will both help you achieve your goals for the game. These come at the cost, however, of reducing your RP income for the rest of the game.

