



**THE WINTER
KING**
QUICK START GUIDE

Shadowbands



THE WINTER KING

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A tabletop roleplaying game about the Dark
Britannia under High King Mordred's iron rule

for the ESTIRPE game system

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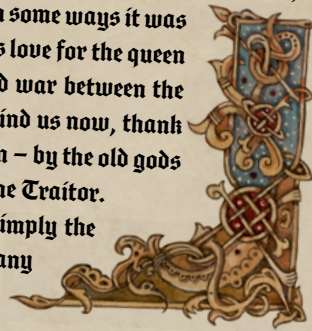
❧ A Twenty-Year Winter ❧



remember as if it were yesterday. We departed Camelot in full knowledge of what awaited us at Camlann. It would be far more than just another battle, a struggle for dominion over land. Our king had brought the Kingdom of Summer to Britannia. He was the embodiment of prophecy, the once and future king, and he had transformed Camelot into a bastion of light, a beacon of hope for a world sliding into darkness after the fall of Rome. But Camelot had been wounded by hatred and betrayal and was teetering on the brink of collapse. Merlin was no longer with us, nor were Galahad and Perceval. Many of the Knights of the Round Table – Arthur's brave dragons – had perished or were lost in their eternal pursuit of the Holy Grail. And yet, as we marched into battle, we drew strength from the knowledge that many of the greatest warriors to set foot in Britannia were still by our side.

On that fateful day, as Camelot's armies advanced through the Kingdom of Summer towards the place our enemies had gathered, we beheld Gawain, his red hair flowing, the torc of Orkney around his neck and the colours of the old North on his cloak. There was Kay, the king's stepbrother and Britannia's finest horseman. The brothers Lucan and Bedivere rode forth too, alongside Aglovale, Geraint, and Bors – the sole survivor of the Grail quest. Leading us were our resplendent king and queen. And riding at the king's right hand was Lancelot, the greatest of us all. His presence stirred our hearts, although we knew that in some ways it was he who had brought us to the edge of the precipice. His love for the queen had caused the death of young Gareth and unleashed war between the Benoic clan and the Orkney clan. That war was behind us now, thank God. Gawain and Lancelot had made peace and sworn – by the old gods and the new – to fight shoulder to shoulder against the Traitor.

In those days, no one spoke his name. He was simply the Traitor. He had been one of us, our brother in many ways. The king's firstborn son, born of what the



old religion deemed sacred but the new religion called sin. Mordred, offspring of the king and his sister, the accursed Morgawse, whose malevolence had inflicted such suffering upon the kingdom. But the serpent turned upon itself, with Mordred murdering his own mother. May God forgive me, but many in Britannia rejoiced at the demise of Morgawse. We knew there was a special place in Annwn for the Queen of the Orkneys, a place where she would suffer immeasurable torments for the evils she had caused. But her venom lived on in Mordred. He was our enemy now. He laid claim to the crown of Britannia, bolstered by those who had thrived in Camelot's shadow, allying himself with the barbarous Saxons, the cruel Angles, and the tenacious Cruithni. Frankish, Vandal and Goth mercenaries had also joined him to plunder Britannia.

And yet, as I have stated, our struggle transcended territorial disputes. We were fighting for a dream, for the dream, for Arthur and Merlin's vision of Camelot. They had brought the kingdom of Summer to Britannia, and we were not ready to lose it. Ahead of us, Mordred's forces assembled on the coast, between the kingdom of Summer, the wilds of Cymru, and the lands of the Cornovii.

That place was called Camlann.

The songs recount how the battle commenced, how, for three days, Arthur and Mordred measured the strength of their forces, and how the Traitor brought forth the old druid Blaise – Merlin's mentor and a grandfather to all – and had him brutally dismembered before our eyes. Oh, the stories tell how one of Mordred's men raised his sword to kill a snake, but what had the Romans and Christians called druids if not snakes? This savagery was more than Arthur could bear, even from his own son, and so the battle began in earnest.

The king led the charge, Excalibur ablaze like lightning in a thunderstorm. The queen rode beside him – Boudicca reborn – leading her people into battle. Lancelot, Gawain, Bors, and the last of Arthur's Dragons thundered behind them. Their power was such that not even the Saxon berserkers could withstand their onslaught. The enemy's lines collapsed and soon our horses waded through their blood.



LON

40 Miles

CORNUALLES

SEPTENTRIO

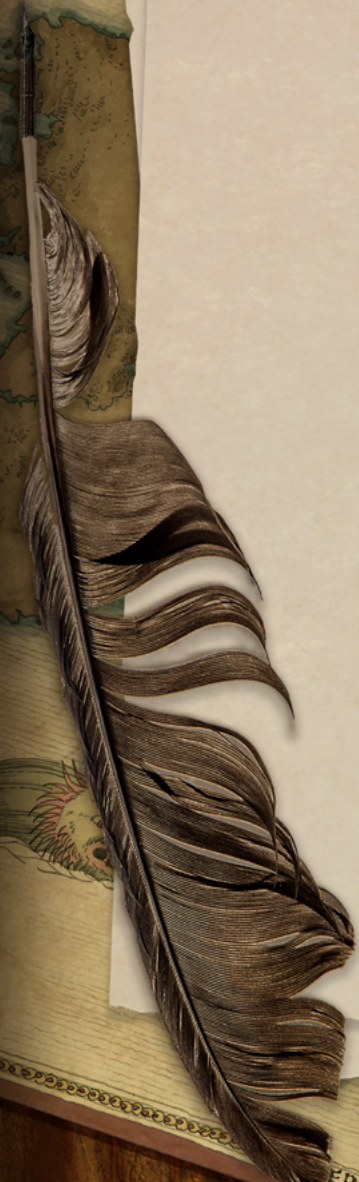
I will not retell the battle in its entirety, for much has been said and sung of the heroics that transpired. How Gawain put the northern tribes to flight before succumbing to a poisoned javelin through his neck; how Bors and Kay saved the king from certain death at the hands of Bretwalda Cerdic's soldiers; and how Queen Guinevere fought in single combat against the Goth chieftain whose laughter at having to face a mere woman was cut short when his severed head tumbled to the ground. Yes, much has already been said about Camlann.

And yet, there are still some truths untold. Nobody has been able to express the depths of our terror when we realised that we had been deceived, that it had all been a ruse, a trap more terrible than we could ever have imagined. Because there, among Mordred's ranks, lurked entities not of this world. No, I do not mean the denizens of the Otherworld, nor those with the blood of the fairies. Nor do I speak of the Saxon valdaermen, savage Pictish sorcerers, or renegade druids who had fallen under Mordred's control. I speak instead of beings of dark, terrible magic; the magic of the ancient gods who roamed these lands long before the Tuatha Dé Danann had set foot in Jerne. Dead warriors rose again to continue fighting. Creatures made of darkness, fire and blood wreaked havoc on our ranks. Kay fell, as did Lucan and Aglovale... only to rise again under Mordred's banner. Despite it all, Arthur, wielding Excalibur, fought his way to his son. The world held its breath as they came face to face – the Summer King and the Winter Prince, the Lord of Light and the Herald of Darkness. Arthur of Britannia. Arthur the Great. Arthur Pendragon. Arthyr ap Uthyr, Ard Reigh de Prydein.

There, before our anguished eyes, Arthur fell by his own son's hand. Excalibur shattering beneath his body as he fell. The sun vanished from the sky and the truth revealed itself: Queen Morgause was still alive. She was there too, wielding her dark magic – the Queen of Air and Darkness. All this time, while we had thought her dead, she had been delving deeper into dark, forbidden magic. She had deceived Nimue, just as she had once deceived Merlin; and now she had attained ancient, dreadful powers. She unleashed a desiccating, poisonous wind that reduced the last of Camelot's forces to ash. Thus perished Bors of Ganis, Lancelot of the Lake, and Queen Guinevere. Only the timely arrival of Arthur's



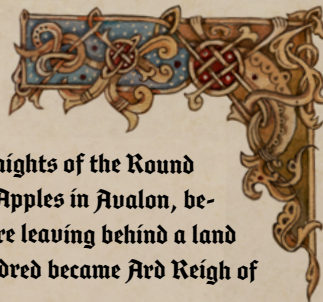
Ag...
Darn...
An...
Las Piedras Colgan...
La Isla de Crista...
Founta Belgaram...
Clauentum...
Sorviodunum...
Caerhyd...
Londinium...
Norwich...
Deva Victrix...
Via Parisorum...
Calle Blanco...
Segontium...
Carbonet...
Emry...
Flowe...
Eidyn...
Camlann...
Tara...
Mordred...
Mistencia...
Lirio...



Eboracum — 1
Lygocallium — 2
Tintagel
Exeter
Carlion
Toenes
ae Salis
Ameloe
varia — 9
bry — 10
ter
— 11
— 12
— 13
— 14
— 15
— 16
— 17

other sister, Morgan le Fay, from Avalon prevented our utter annihilation.

The power of Avalon had waned, but Morgan's magic was still powerful enough to disperse Morgawse's malevolent wind, allowing Bedivere and the remaining knights of the Round Table to retrieve Arthur's body and retreat to the Isle of Apples in Avalon, beyond Morgawse's reach. As we departed, we knew we were leaving behind a land that had fallen into shadow. For there, at Camlann, Mordred became Ard Reigh of Britannia – the Winter King.



Some of Arthur's followers chose to remain in Avalon with Morgan le Fay.

Others yielded to the rule of King Mordred.

Some of us vanished, going into hiding because we knew that Mordred would never stop hunting us. Even today, the Winter King will not rest until he has murdered us all: the few survivors of Camlann, the sons and daughters of the knights of the Round Table, and the druids and bards who remember that time and who whisper of the Storm King to come.

Some of us sought refuge in a new life, wandering the roads under the banner of Christ, living under false names. Weathered by age and adversity, we now find solace in the belief that martyrdom leads to salvation. We recognise that the world today has a greater need for love and comfort than it does for the warrior gods of old.

But each of us remembers.

We shall never forget.

And we know that one day...

One day, King Arthur will return.

Brother Athelred
formerly known as Gwydre ap Arthyr





WHAT IS THE WINTER KING?



It is an epic alternate history, drawing inspiration from millennia of Arthurian myths. Camelot has fallen. Mordred reigns as king. Excalibur has been shattered into pieces, and the Knights of the Round Table have all perished or vanished. Every ideal that our High King – Arthur Pendragon – once championed has been extinguished in this Dark Britannia.

But you will battle to achieve victory against the odds. You embody the next generation, inheriting the bloodline and bravery of the old heroes and heroines of the Round Table. You will defy the tyranny and oppression of Mordred and his mother, Morgawse – Queen of Air and Darkness.

You are warriors, scholars, sorcerers, druids, bards... Might you one day earn the privilege to call yourselves knights?

WHAT IS A ROLEPLAYING GAME?

A roleplaying game (RPG), such as *The Winter King*, is an immersive exercise in collective imagination. It entails embarking on adventures with companions, collaboratively shaping the narrative through shared decision-making. One participant assumes the role of game master, while the others play as protagonists. When confronted with uncertainty, the roll of dice, coupled with a character's Abilities, determines the outcome.

The best way to understand how it works is to simply play a game. However, for those who would like to get a better idea beforehand, there are plenty of sample games to watch on the Shadowlands YouTube channel.

THE STORIES IN THE WINTER KING

Welcome to Dark Britannia. Arthur has fallen, and the Kingdom of Summer has died with him, marking the end of a utopian era. Under the rule of the High King, the Isle of the Mighty had stood as a beacon in the chaos that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire. Arthur, Guinevere, Merlin, and the Knights of the Round Table had established a realm of justice and tranquillity, warding off war and affliction, yielding bountiful harvests.

Alas, the Kingdom of Summer lies in ruins. As the traditional stories recount, Arthur met his end fighting his son Mordred in Camlann. But in this version of the legend, Mor-

dred did not die alongside Arthur. Instead, he is alive and well and wearing the crown that once belonged to his father. Mordred now rules Britannia as High King from his throne in the city of Venta Belgarum. His is a Kingdom of Winter.

Mordred's mother, Queen Morgawse, has forged a terrible pact with long-forgotten gods, bolstering her son's rule with her formidable dark magic, earning her the title of Queen of Air and Darkness. And so the Otherworld seeps into Britannia, spawning an array of monstrosities – the undead, spectres, and other nightmarish creatures roam the island. With Queen Morgawse ruling the north, Mordred dominating the south, the Saxons wreaking havoc in the east, and the Welsh chieftains at each other's throats in the war-torn west, this is Dark Britannia.

As the title suggests, this is a game of dark fantasy. It is fantasy because while it is grounded in historical reality – the collapse of the Roman Empire – the narrative intertwines with folklore and legend. Saxon warriors, Brythonic priests, and Welsh hunters cross paths with fairies, enchanted forests, bridges made of swords, castles rooted in the Otherworld, horned deities, and even dragons. And it is dark because the world forged by Mordred and Morgawse is steeped in shadows, where the dead rise from their graves to serve their former foes; where creatures of blood and lightning roam the skies and punish any who stray from safety; where sacred sanctuaries dwindle amidst encroaching peril. Dark Britannia teeters on the brink of eternal darkness, as both the High King and the Queen of Air and Darkness harbour a singular ambition: to obliterate Arthur's legacy – Camelot, the Round Table, Avalon, the champions of the Kingdom of Summer and their descendants. Those erstwhile paladins of light must now adopt disguises and conceal themselves to stay alive.

Ultimately, the extent of the fantasy's darkness is determined by the collective narrative forged by those seated around the gaming table. Some tables may tread a sinister and macabre path, where characters are beset by storms, haunted by spectres, bereft of refuge. Conversely, others may revel in the epic grandeur of the world, where heroes engage in titanic struggles, surmount divine challenges, and uphold the beacon of light against encroaching darkness. The spirit of *The Winter King* is that of a lost utopia, a world lamenting the fact that any point in the past was better than this terrible present. And indeed, nothing could be truer.

A NEW GENERATION OF HEROES

Following the clash at Camlann, those who defied Mordred, who remained faithful to Arthur and became stewards of the Kingdom of Summer's memory, were relentlessly tracked down and slaughtered. The few who survived have vanished, their names – Bors, Tristan, Aneurin, Morgan le Fay, and Nimue – mere whispers, for revealing their whereabouts could spell a fate worse than death.

And yet, despite all their efforts, Mordred and Morgawse have not managed to extinguish the light of Britannia completely. Hiding in remote regions, wandering the wilds of the west or the north, or holed up in distant monasteries, the descendants of the warriors who served the Kingdom of Summer bide their time, ready to rise up and lift their swords – or their voices in spell and song – to confront the darkness.

These heroes shall be your characters – the children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and allies of Arthur's champions. They carry within them the bloodlines of Lancelot, Perceval, Gawain, Culhwch, Kay, and even the Lady of the Lake. From their midst shall emerge heroes, anointed by destiny, will, or divine providence. Thus, the player characters in *The Winter King* shall always be hailed as The Heroes. For that is what they are: the courageous few who have chosen to fight against fear and damnation, who hold the seeds of the Kingdom of Summer in their hearts, even if many are too young to have experienced it for themselves.

And maybe, just maybe, they are Britannia's greatest hope.

Among these heroes, four primary bloodlines stand resolute, driven by an unyielding determination to confront and defeat Mordred and Morgawse.

THE BLOODLINE OF LOTHIAN

Descended from the once formidable King Lot of Lothian and the Orkneys, whose sons defied their father to take their places at the Round Table and fight beside Arthur, this bloodline embodies the noble virtues of the Kingdom of Summer. The names of each of the four princes of Lothian – Gawain, Agravain, Gaheris and Gareth – are etched in history and legend. While their descendants share blood ties with Morgawse and Mordred, their allegiance to the light fuels their relentless opposition to the encroaching darkness. From warriors to priests, bards to hunters, the descendants of Lothian stand among the fiercest adversaries to the evil forces of Dark Britannia.

THE BLOODLINE OF BENOIC

Hailing from the lost Armorican kingdom of Benoit, the royal lineage of Benoit found sanctuary in Britannia after their homeland fell to the Franks, portending the fall of Britannia to the Saxons. This bloodline included Lancelot, prince of Benoit, who would come to embody Arthur's government and the Kingdom of Summer.

His bastard brother, Hector, and his cousins, Bors and Lionel, also became pillars of support for the

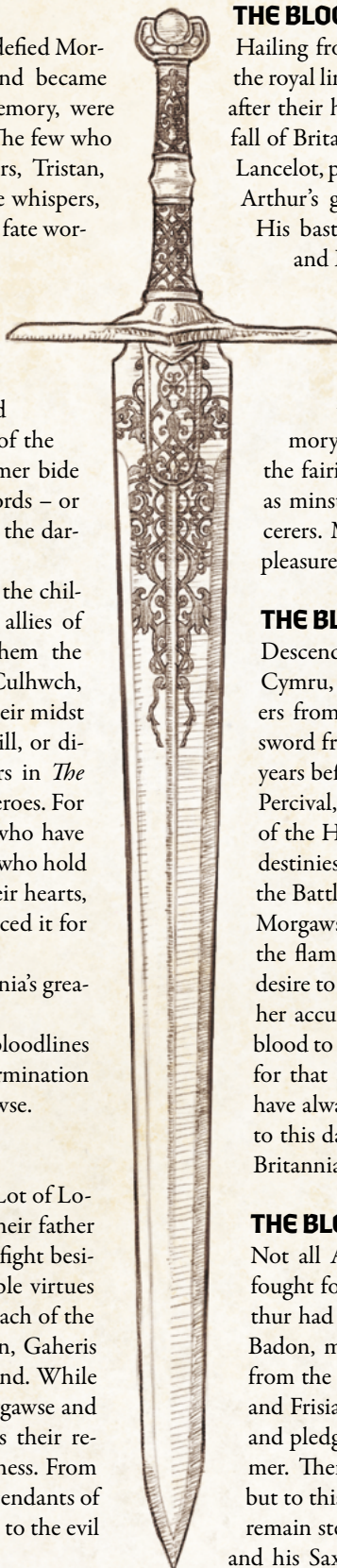
High King. The family's distrust of Mordred and Morgawse long predated Britannia's descent into darkness. After the calamity of Camlann, the family decided to remain in Britannia and preserve the memory of Camelot. Their blood is intertwined with the fairies of the Broceliande Forest and they excel as minstrels, leaders, noble lords, prophets and sorcerers. Members of the Benoit bloodline relish the pleasure of company and the adoration of admirers.

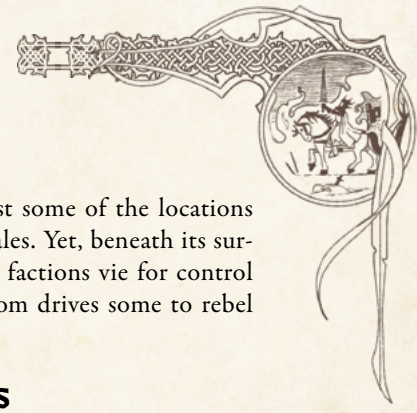
THE BLOODLINE OF WALES

Descended from King Pellinore of Gwynedd, Lord of Cymru, who was one of Arthur's most loyal supporters from the moment he pulled Uther Pendragon's sword from the stone into which Merlin had sunk it years before. Pellinore's sons, Lamorak, Aglovale and Percival, and his daughter, Dindrane, became some of the High King's closest allies. All knew that their destinies were entwined with Arthur's. Even before the Battle of Camlann, they had crossed swords with Morgawse, and her subsequent actions only fanned the flames of their hatred. The Welsh clan's fervent desire to defeat the Queen of Air and Darkness – and her accursed son – borders on obsession. Bound by blood to the kings of the Holy Grail and to their quest for that sacred object, the minds of the Welsh clan have always flirted with madness, and so it continues to this day as they strive against the turmoil of Dark Britannia.

THE BLOODLINE OF AELLE

Not all Arthur's allies were Britons. Not all Saxons fought for Cerdic at Camlann. Years earlier, after Arthur had defeated the Saxons at the Battle of Mount Badon, many of the barbarian tribes who had come from the continent – including Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians – took up the banner of Bretwalda Aelle and pledged their allegiance to the Kingdom of Summer. There were Saxons on both sides at Camlann, but to this day, many still bear the banner of Aelle and remain steadfast in their opposition to King Mordred and his Saxon ally, Cerdic. Above all else, they detest





the darkness imposed on the land by Queen Morgawse. The songs might not remember Arthur's Saxon warriors, but even today, there are Saxon shamans, warriors and explorers who remain faithful to the memory of Aelle. They are ready to take up arms to defend the ideals of Camelot – against their fellow Saxons if need be – no matter how much blood must be shed.

KINGDOMS OF WINTER

Dark Britannia has fallen into shadow. From the cliffs of the Saxon shore in the east to the rugged wilds of Wales in the west; and from the wide southern plains to the craggy northern coasts. But the Darkness extends beyond earthly Britannia, reaching into the realms of the Otherworld. At places like the Hanging Stones, Avalon, Celyddon Forest, the peaks of Eryri, and other mysterious sites where ancient stone monuments stand as silent witnesses to forgotten times, the boundaries between worlds blur. The wise tread carefully amidst mushroom circles and enchanted streams, wary of the reflections of willows, oaks, and hazels in the calm waters of lakes. The brave may seek aid from gods and kings who dwell in the Otherworld, but they must beware, for allies of the Queen of Air and Darkness lurk in those shadowed realms as well.

VENTA BELGARUM

Located in the south, it was a vital hub of trade during Roman times when its privileged position gave it dominion over land and sea routes. Today, it is the capital and stronghold of Mordred, the usurper king determined to erase the memory of Camelot. Here, Mordred gathers his forces – loyal Britons, Saxon guards, and fierce Pictish warriors from beyond The Antonine Wall. Probably the most important city in Britannia, Venta Belgarum may also be the only one that recalls what Rome once meant to the Isles of Britannia. But it is also the icy heart of the Kingdom of Winter, and the second most dangerous place for the descendants of Arthur's warriors to venture.

WALES

A land unto itself. Arthur never actually defeated the Welsh in battle. Instead, from the times of Pellinore, they had accepted his rule. Today, many lords of Wales claim that they had never kneeled before the High King, although others would remark that they never stood against him either. Wales is a mosaic of small kingdoms and realms where pre-Roman and pagan traditions persist. From the fertile lands of Dyfed to the pirate-infested Demetian Coast and the snow-capped highlands of Eryri in Gwynedd, Wales is a land of diverse landscapes and hidden wonders. Magical places like the Grail Castle and

the ruins of Dinas Emrys are just some of the locations that the heroes might visit in Wales. Yet, beneath its surface lies a simmering conflict, as factions vie for control and the memory of a lost kingdom drives some to rebel against Mordred's tyranny.

LOTHIAN AND THE ORKNEYS

Many claim that King Lot was a Pict from the Orkneys who gained control of Lothian (the land formerly known as Gododdin, realm of the Votadini) through cunning and betrayal. The kingdom of Lothian, its capital in Dun Eidynd, encompasses the land between the two Roman bulwarks – Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall. It includes the ancient and magical Celyddon Forest, where Merlin sought refuge after the death of his beloved Gwnieda, and where Arthur fought the Great Boar, Twrch Trwyth. The Orkneys are a group of islands off the coast. To some, they are merely stone crags; to others, they are sacred. After Lot's death, Gawain chose to keep his place at the Round Table, so Agravain ruled these lands as steward. The Orkneys now serve as the personal domain of Lot's wife, Queen Morgawse. The mound of Maes Howe is her centre of power, and no one in their right mind would approach it unless they intended to kneel before the queen. Some say that the true power of Britannia has always been found in Lothian and Wales, and perhaps there is some truth to that claim.

CAMELOT

Once the heart of the Summer Kingdom, Camelot has been reduced to a haunted wasteland, testament to the triumph of darkness over light. King Arthur's Palace, St. Stephen's Cathedral, the Forest of the Ancient Gods, the Great Hall of the Round Table... all lie in ruins. The Queen of Air and Darkness cast the most terrible of curses on this place, and the dead of Camlann who fell fighting for Arthur have risen from the blighted ground to become the malevolent guardians of this desolate place, under the command of the undead King Rience. In an insult to the memory of the Summer Kingdom and the Round Table, many of the warriors who gave rise to Britannia's most noble bloodlines now stalk Camelot's thorny wasteland as servants of Darkness, alongside all manner of undead creatures and malicious spectres.

RHEGED

Amidst the chaos of Dark Britannia, the realm of Rheged stands as a beacon of resistance against Mordred's tyranny. Once, this kingdom counted itself among Arthur's enemies. King Urien fought alongside Lot of Lothian against the High King. But Urien came to accept Arthur, marrying his sister, Morgan le Fay. Urien has long since

died, and Morgan le Fay went on to become Lady of the Lake after Vivienne's death, but Rheged has remained faithful to the Summer Kingdom. After Camlann, Urien and Morgan le Fay's son Owain – known as the Knight of the Lion – withdrew to *Caer Lial*. There, with the aid of his wife, Lady Lawdys, and the sorceress Lunette, Owain rallied his forces to defend Rheged against Mordred's relentless onslaught. Owain then relocated his capital to *Eboracum*. During the last twenty years, Owain has made Rheged one of the few places where those loyal to Arthur can find refuge. It is known to all that Lord Bedivere, one of the warriors closest to Arthur – and he who cast *Excalibur's* remains into the lake to keep it from Mordred and Morgawse – now rules *Caer Lial*, keeping watch over *Hadrian's Wall*. There may be other survivors of *Camlann* guarding the kingdom's borders... for much vigilance is needed. Everyone knows that Rheged is a realm under siege, caught between Mordred's anvil and Morgawse's hammer. Only time will tell if Rheged can withstand the darkness that threatens to consume *Britannia*.





QUICK REFERENCE RULES



ere you'll find a quick reference guide to the rules of *The Winter King*. It doesn't cover all the mechanics included in the Corebook, but it will help you play your first games.

TASK RESOLUTION

A player character (PC) in *The Winter King* is defined by five **General Abilities** and two **Combat Abilities**, which will determine most of the rolls in the game.

When there is uncertainty about the outcome of what you're trying to do, roll the dice to test one of these Abilities. In *The Winter King*, only six-sided dice (referred to as 'd' from now on) are used. Roll the number of dice indicated by your Ability. Don't add up the results; read each die individually. Each 5 counts as a success, and each 6 counts as two successes. If you have at least one success, you achieve what you set out to do. Each additional success can enhance the result of your action.

Additionally, each of the five General Abilities may have associated **Specialities**; these are actions that your character excels at. If what you're trying to do falls within one of your Specialities, you can roll any dice that did not yield successes one more time.

Combat Abilities do not have Specialities. Instead, they have Masteries, which unlock special mechanics for your PC. These are included in the Corebook.

THE SEVEN ABILITIES

These are the Abilities that define your character. In parentheses, we indicate some of the most common Specialities for each, if they have them:

General

- ☛ **STRENGTH:** Physical power, endurance, stamina, and anything related to pushing your body (Specialities: *Feats of strength, Resistance, Climbing, Speed...*).
- ☛ **DEXTERITY:** Balance, stealth, hand-eye coordination (Specialities: *Discretion, Acrobatics, Lockpicking, Sleight of hand...*).
- ☛ **WISDOM:** Knowledge accumulated by the character (Specialities: *Detecting lies, Streetwise, Cartography, Politics, Religion...*).
- ☛ **CHARISMA:** Anything that involves influencing other people or beings (Specialities: *Oratory, Persuasion, Deception, Intimidation...*).

- ☛ **DEDUCTION:** Drawing conclusions from data (Specialities: *Archives, Orientation, Tracking...*).

Combat

- ☛ **FIGHTING:** Melee fighting, armed or unarmed.
- ☛ **RANGED WEAPONS:** Use of bows or thrown weapons.

Difficulties

If the game master decides that there are external factors that could alter the chance of success, they may add or subtract dice from the player's roll. Factors to consider include time constraints, the difficulty of the action, the attitude of the person the character is interacting with, and so on.

If the difficulty reduces the dice to 0d, the player can still try but will need a lot of luck. In such cases, roll 2d and keep the worst result.

Difficulty	Roll
Easy Task	Roll +1d / +2d
Difficult task	Roll -1d / -2d
Extremely difficult task	Roll -4d

EXAMPLE ROLL

Gwendolen tries to convince one of Mordred's guards that she is not the rebel they seek. Her Charisma is level 3, so she rolls 3d and gets 1, 4 and 5. One success is enough to make the guard leave her alone, although he might remember her face later.

The game master may determine that, since there is an active search for Gwendolen underway, the guard has been given a description of her, making her task more difficult and reducing her Charisma roll by 2d. Left with just one die, she rolls a 3: failure.

If Gwendolen has the Deception Speciality, she can re-roll. If she does so and gets a 6, she's achieved two successes and the guard will walk away without giving her a second glance.

OTHER RELEVANT RULES FOR TASK RESOLUTION

Opposed Rolls

Each contender rolls as many dice as their level in the Ability they are using, potentially rerolling if they have Specialities. Whoever gets more successes wins, with a tie resulting in neither side achieving their goal.

Extended Rolls

A task may not be able to be accomplished “all at once”, due to its magnitude or complexity. In this case, the game master must determine how many separate successful rolls are needed to consider this task completed. Any “extra successes” will allow this task to be completed faster than previously assumed.

If it makes it easier, you may think of extended rolls in terms of “it requires X number of successes”, and make the player roll as many successive turns as may be needed in order to achieve that number of successes.

Chain Rolls

You can make one action influence another in a variety of ways, depending on the goal you seek. There are three ways to invest the extra successes in a roll (i.e. all successful rolls beyond the first) to boost the next roll:

- ☛ **QUALITY:** Any successes from the first action are added as extra dice in the second. For example, examining armour with Wisdom before repairing it with Dexterity.
- ☛ **SPEED:** The first roll’s successes set the maximum number of dice you can roll for the second. For example, when combining two actions in a single combat turn, like leaping behind cover with Dexterity before shooting your bow with Ranged Weapons.
- ☛ **HINDRANCE:** The first roll’s successes subtract dice from the second. For example, distracting a soldier with Charisma to hinder his Combat action against your ally.

PERCEPTION ROLLS

In traditional roleplaying games, characters possess scores in ‘passive skills’, which are not triggered by the character but by the game master. These skills primarily serve for player characters to gather information, with examples like Perception or Listen.

In *The Winter King*, we prefer these situations not to rely on dice rolls but rather on the game master’s discretion based on the narrative’s value. The decision of whether characters hear a noise or not hinges on what makes more sense or adds greater dramatic impact to the story.

If a player attempts to use one of these passive skills (e.g., ‘I approach the door, put my ear to it, and listen to what’s happening inside’), it is up to the game master to determine

if the character receives the information and to what extent, always adhering to logic and rewarding clever ideas.

COMBAT

A conflict in *The Winter King* unfolds as a series of combat turns where two or more sides pursue competing interests. Each player character (PC) acts once per turn, with timing determined by their Initiative score, as detailed below (the values of which will already be noted in your Character Sheet):

What are you attempting?	Initiative
Engaging in melee combat?	Initiative = Dexterity + Fighting
Opting for ranged combat?	Initiative = Dexterity + Ranged Weapons
Was your ranged weapon ready at the start of the turn?	Initiative = Dexterity + Ranged Weapons + 2
Performing a non-combat action?	Initiative = Dexterity x 2
Casting magic?	Initiative = Dexterity x 2
In case of a tie?	PCs always act before NPCs

COMBAT CHOREOGRAPHY

A combat sequence initiates when one character attacks another. On a combatant’s Initiative turn, they may take a deliberate action and move up to 7 metres. They can do this in any order they choose: moving and then performing the action, performing the action and then moving, or performing the action while moving.

A combatant targeted by an opponent’s Melee Attack (see next section) must choose how to react, effectively taking their Initiative turn at that moment. Consequently, characters with low Initiative are often limited to reacting to faster opponents.



MELEE ATTACKS

A combatant within 7 metres of an opponent can opt for a melee attack as their deliberate action. The target responds with an opposed roll. Both choose from the following manoeuvres:

- ✱ **DAMAGE:** Fight roll. If you succeed, you deal the Damage indicated by your weapon.
- ✱ **DEFEND:** Can only be used as a reaction to aggression. Fight roll and, if desired, reroll as many dice as your Fighting value. If you succeed, you take no Damage.
- ✱ **SHOVE:** Fight roll. If you succeed, you displace the target a distance (in metres) equal to half your Strength. If the target collides with something solid, it takes half your Strength value in non-lethal Damage (see 'Damage' section).
- ✱ **INCAPACITATE:** Fight roll – 1d. If you succeed, roll for non-lethal Damage. Reroll odd-numbered dice. Only mark Incapacitation (see 'Damage' section).

MULTIPLE ATTACKS

A character who has more than one engagement per turn (e.g., they have attacked an enemy and then been attacked

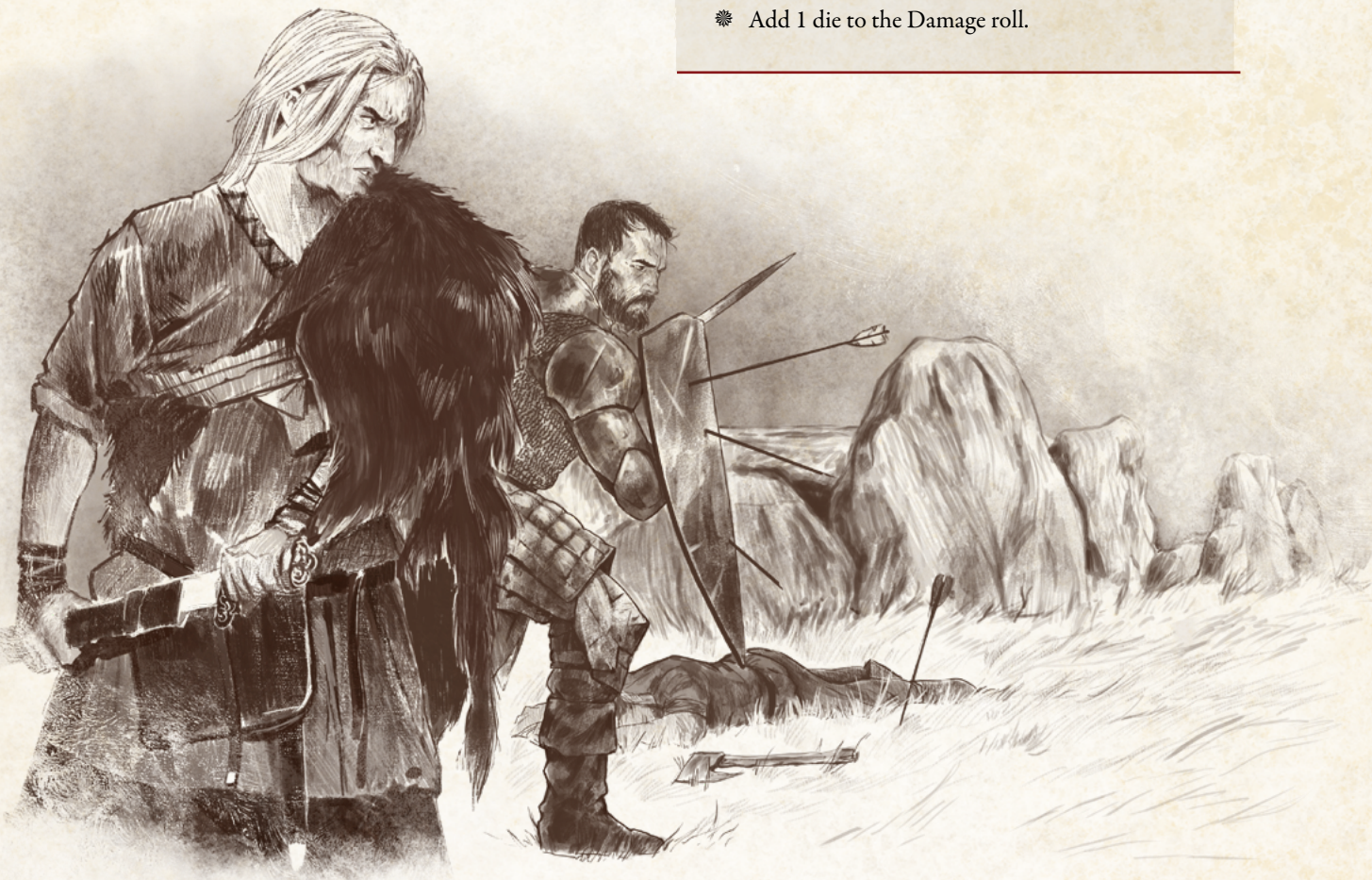
by another opponent) rolls 2d fewer in each successive engagement, cumulatively. This means that in the second engagement of the same turn they would roll 2d fewer, in the third they would roll 4d fewer, and so on. If this results in 0 dice or a negative number, refer to the 'Difficulties' section. However, regardless of how many engagements a character may have, they can only choose the Damage manoeuvre once per turn.

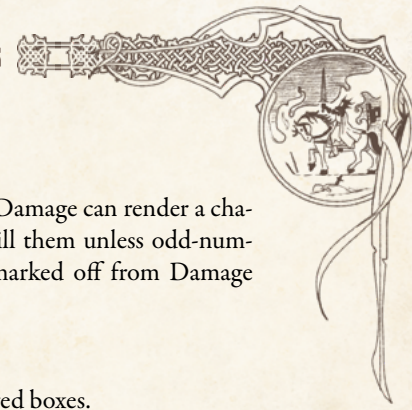
ADVANTAGE POINTS

If you outperform your opponent in an opposed combat roll, you will cause the intended effect, according to your chosen manoeuvre. And what are additional successes used for? Additional successes in opposed combat rolls grant Advantage Points, which can be used as follows:

USE 1 ADVANTAGE POINT TO:

- ✱ Gain Initiative against the same opponent next turn.
- ✱ Add 1d to the next opposed Fight roll against the same opponent.
- ✱ Allow an ally to add 1d to their Fight roll against the same enemy.
- ✱ Add ½ metre to a successful Shove result.
- ✱ Add 1 die to the Damage roll.





RANGED ATTACKS

Upon reaching their Initiative turn, a combatant more than 5 metres away from any opponent can opt for a ranged attack. They select a target and roll dice equal to their Ranged Weapons value.

The game master may add or subtract dice based on factors such as distance, cover, and visibility (see the 'Difficulties' section above).

If at least one roll is successful, the Damage indicated by the weapon is dealt. Every additional success aside from the first one will allow you to add 1d to the Damage value.

Shooting at a Target Engaged in Melee Combat

When shooting at multiple individuals grappling, the player should roll to hit as normal. If successful, randomly determine who suffers the Damage, with equal chances for all. If any combatant is Massive (see next page), each point of Massiveness increases their chances of being hit. For example, if a human PC is grappling with a Massive 1 creature, there's a two in three chance that the creature will be hit, and a one in three chance that the human will be hit.

DAMAGE

Once an attack has landed, it's time to determine the wound inflicted. Each weapon specifies the number of Damage dice to roll. If fighting unarmed, only 1d is rolled.

To interpret the Damage roll, consider each die separately and mark the corresponding boxes on the Character Sheet's two registers.

VITALITY TRACK

This track contains eight numbered boxes: **1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 4, 5, 6**.

When a Damage die matches a number, mark off the corresponding box. If it's already marked, disregard it as a minor wound or a previously damaged area. When all boxes are marked off, the character dies.

Penalty for Wounds: Once a character is injured, they cannot roll any more dice than the highest unmarked number on the Vitality Track. For instance, if the 6 box is marked, they cannot roll more than five dice, and so on.

Trauma: Some weapons have a Trauma value, typically 6, which means that they cause severe wounds. Attacks made with such weapons directly mark that Trauma number off the Vitality Track, as well as one Incapacitation Track box (if it is an even number). Since Trauma values act as extra Damage points, remember to mark Damage rolls as usual.

Non-Lethal Damage: Unarmed attacks cause non-lethal Damage. The Damage roll is carried out as usual, but only even results are considered, marking both the Vitality and Incapacitation boxes simultaneously. If the entire Inca-

pacitation box is filled, non-lethal Damage can render a character unconscious, but it won't kill them unless odd-numbered Vitality boxes are already marked off from Damage received previously.

INCAPACITATION TRACK

This track contains four unnumbered boxes.

The Incapacitation Track doesn't measure how close you are to dying, but rather your ability to keep fighting and enduring. Mark off one box for each even number on the Damage dice. If all boxes are marked, the character is incapacitated.

VITALITY AND INCAPACITATION FOR NPCs

Some adversaries in *The Lay of the Green Knight* have Vitality multipliers. The weakest may have a Vitality of x0.5, meaning that they only have four Vitality boxes (1-2, 3-4, 5 and 6) and two Incapacitation boxes, while the most formidable may have a Vitality of x1.5, totalling twelve Vitality boxes and six Incapacitation boxes. In the corebook you will find even tougher monsters, with a Vitality of x2 or higher.

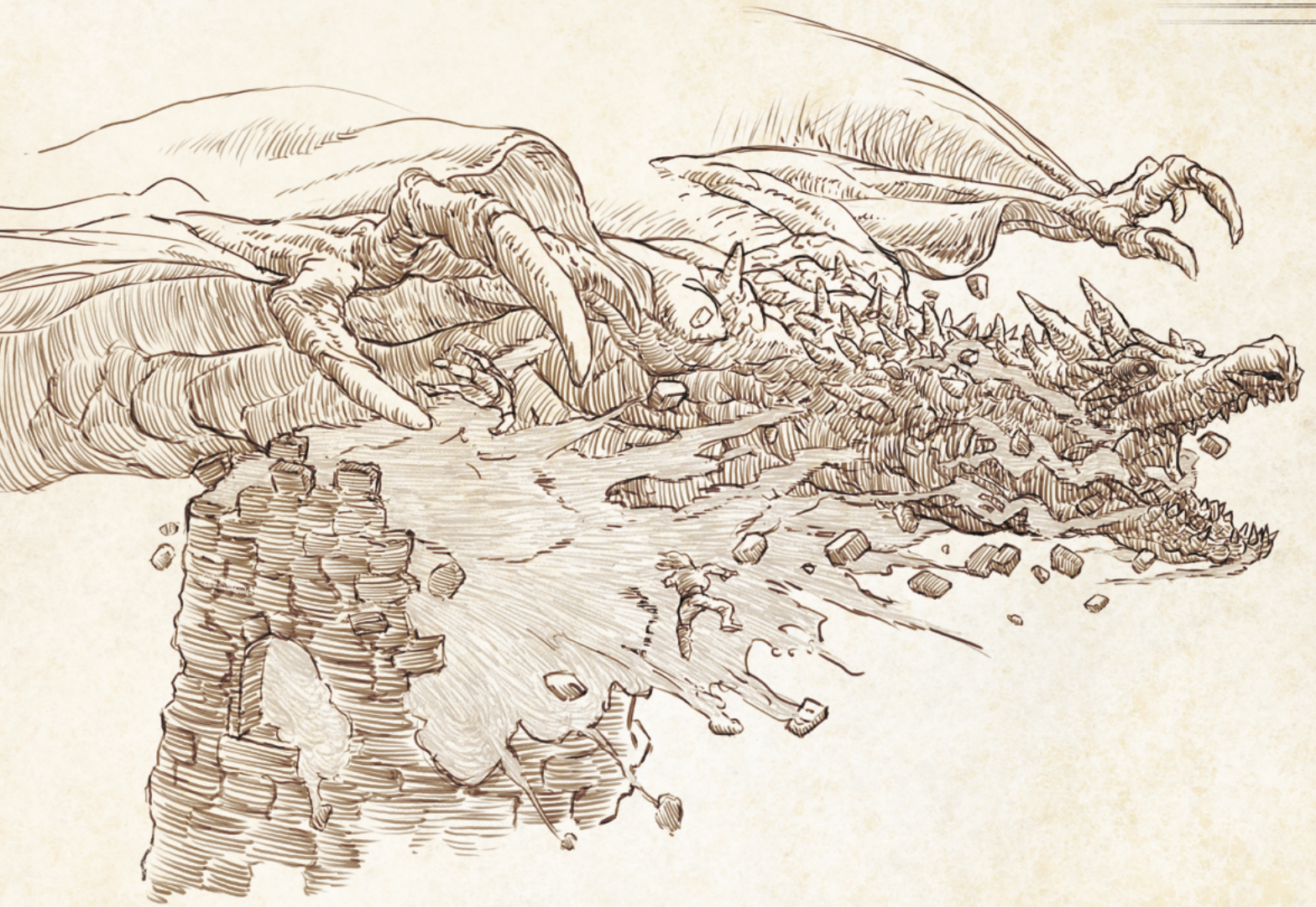
PROTECTION ARMOUR

Putting layers of protection between you and your enemy is a good way to increase your chances of survival. The most common type of armour in *The Winter King* is **flexible armour**, such as leather and chainmail, which directly subtracts Damage from the opponent's roll before it is made, typically -1d or -2d.

There is also **rigid armour**, which includes breastplates and full armour. This type of armour reduces the strength of an attack while adding an extra Resistance Track, which works like Incapacitation. However, if all the armour's Resistance boxes are depleted, the protection will become a hindrance. From then on, all Incapacitation Damage is doubled (Vitality Damage continues to function normally).

SHIELDS

Shields subtract -1d from incoming Damage, added to the armour's reduction. However, using a shield leaves the character off balance. In their next turn, the PC may only choose the Defend manoeuvre.



MASSIVE OPPONENTS

Any creatures significantly larger than humans possess the Massive characteristic, indicated by a numerical value. Subtract this value from Capacity, Manoeuvre, or Damage rolls targeting the creature.

The exception to this rule is when attempting to hit a Massive creature with a ranged weapon. The target's large size

makes a ranged weapon more likely to hit it, so add as many dice to the roll as the creature's Massiveness value.

In melee combat, the creature adds as many dice to its Damage roll as its Massiveness value.

You can use the following table as a reference:

MASSIVE OPPONENT TABLE

MASSIVENESS VALUE	CREATURE/OBJECT
Non-Massive	<i>Person, wolf, door</i>
Massive 1	<i>Horse, bear, wardrobe</i>
Massive 2	<i>Giant boar, large wagon</i>
Massive 3	<i>Twrch Trwyth, the Howling Beast, peasant's hut</i>
Massive 4	<i>Dragon, giant, wealthy merchant's house</i>



EXAMPLE OF COMBAT

Selwyn, a seasoned warrior, and Deochan, a skilled hunter, are up against two undead knights corrupted by Morgause's dark magic. The companions' quest hangs in the balance as they fight for their survival.

Turn 1

Selwyn is unyielding. Her Dexterity value of 3 and Fighting value of 4 combine to give her an Initiative of 7. She acts first, choosing to move and strike one of the undead with her sword in a Damage manoeuvre. She rolls 4d – corresponding with her Fighting value – but is not too lucky this time, getting 1,3,3 and 5: just one success. Her elusive opponent rolls 2d for his Fighting value and gets a 4 and 5, meaning that they tie. Their weapons clash, with neither fighter prevailing.

Deochan has a Dexterity value of 2 and a Ranged Weapons value of 2, but he readied one of his javelins before the fight, so he can add +2 to his Initiative for a total of 6. He sets his sights on the opponent, who has not yet engaged, and hurls his javelin. He can roll 2d for his Ranged Weapons value, and the game master allows him to add another 1d as his target is out in the open and running in a straight line (showing the disregard for self-preservation typical of the undead). Deochan gets a result of 2,5 and 6: a very good hit of three successes.

It's time to roll for Damage. 2d are rolled for the weapon's base Damage value. Another 2d are added for the two additional successes achieved. The result is 1,5,5 and 6. Three of the opponent's Vitality boxes are marked off (discounting the repeated 5), as is one Incapacitation box (since there's only one even number, the 6). The being is wounded but remains a threat.

The undead knights have a Dexterity value of 2 and a Fighting value of 2, making their Initiative value 4. The first has already used his deliberate action to react to Selwyn, so cannot act. The second undead knight charges at Selwyn with a Damage manoeuvre. Since Selwyn has already acted this turn, she must opt to Defend, subtracting -2d from her roll. The undead gets 3 and 6 (two successes) and Selwyn gets 1 and 4 (no successes). Our PC must prepare to receive Damage, while her opponent generates two Advantage Points in Melee Attacks (one for each roll, unlike with Ranged Attacks).

The spectral knight rolls 5d: three for his sword's base Damage value, and two for his Advantage Points. He could use the Advantage Points for another purpose, like gaining Initiative, but the undead are not known for their strategic thinking. Selwyn is protected by rigid armour, so -2d are subtracted from the roll. Result: 2, 3 and 6. Selwyn marks off three boxes on her Vitality Track, including the 6, meaning that she won't be able to roll more than 5 dice until she has healed. And, because she obtained two even numbers, she must also mark off two boxes on her armour's Resistance Track (though thanks to her armour she won't have to mark off any Incapacitation boxes).

Turn 2

Once again, Selwyn is the first to act. Determined to finish off her wounded foe, she opts for the Shove manoeuvre. She rolls her Fighting 4d and gets 3 successes (and 3 Advantage Points) against 0 from the enemy. She displaces the opponent 1.5 metres (half Selwyn's Strength value). She decides to save the Advantage Points for later.

Deochan is out of javelins, so he takes his spear and charges into melee combat. He uses a Damage manoeuvre against the undead knight who was just pushed by Selwyn, rolling 2d for his Fighting value. Selwyn uses her 2 Advantage Points to aid her companion, adding 2d to their attack against their unbalanced opponent. The hunter gets two successes, while his opponent, who responds with -2d due to it being his second encounter of the turn, again gets 0 successes. The Damage roll yields an even number, so the undead warrior's second Incapacitation box is marked off. Since he is a minor enemy with 0.5 Vitality he is now out of the fight. Deochan's spear pierces the creature's corrupted flesh, doing severe damage.

One undead warrior remains standing, but his chances against these heroic opponents are slim indeed...



MAGIC

Magic exists in Dark Britannia, with diverse cultures harnessing it in a variety of ways. There are Welsh druids, Saxon shamans, Christian miracle workers, sorcerers of high magic, and so on. Each magic tradition yields distinct effects, but all magicians essentially derive their powers from similar sources. Every magical effect results from performing an Arcane Action and directing it towards a Target.

On the pre-generated Character Sheets you'll find a list of spells and their effects, including the number of dice that must be rolled for each spell, as well as their Action and Target values. As with Ability rolls, a 5 indicates success, while a 6 indicates two successes. The number of successes in a roll determines the Magnitude of the spell. The greater the Mag-

nitude, the more powerful the magic, and the higher the toll on the spellcaster's body (see next section).

The Winter King: Corebook includes rules for crafting your own spells on the fly by combining Actions and Targets.

MAGIC FATIGUE TRACK

This track contains six unnumbered boxes.

Manipulating the energies required to perform magic takes a toll on the body. This is represented in the Magic Fatigue Track. Each time a magic practitioner rolls a 5 or 6 when casting a spell, they must mark off a box in their Magic Fatigue Track. Some Scholars or magic creatures only cross out boxes when they roll a 6, but such cases are rare.

If you should mark off a Magic Fatigue box, but can't, mark off the box with the lowest value still available in your Vitality Track instead. If that box is an even number, mark off a box in your Incapacitation Track as well.

When all your Magic Fatigue boxes have been marked off, you can no longer invoke magic. All boxes are recovered at dawn after a night's rest.

Overexertion: You can voluntarily mark off Magic Fatigue boxes to enhance a spell. Add one die to cast the spell for each box marked off.

RULES YOU'LL FIND IN THE COREBOOK

In this Quick Start Guide we've outlined the basics of *The Winter King* system. This should be enough for your first test games. However, in the Corebook you'll find advanced game mechanics for resolving complex situations and adding greater richness to your adventures, including:

- ✿ **BLOODLINE POWERS:** The protagonists of *The Winter King* have inherited abilities from the heroes of yore, meaning they can invoke powers beyond the reach of normal humans. To do so, however, they must adhere to the code of conduct of their bloodline.
- ✿ **MASTERIES:** These are skills associated with different types of weapons, marking the difference between an accomplished warrior and someone wielding a sword for the first time.
- ✿ **NEW USES FOR ADVANTAGE POINTS:** Make your successes more spectacular with special manoeuvres that require 2, 3, or 4 Advantage Points.
- ✿ **LIMITLESS MAGIC:** More spells, more examples, and a magic system that allows you to craft your own spells on the fly... assuming your body can pay the price.
- ✿ **JOUSTING RULES:** What would a story of chivalry be without the spectacle of two worthy contenders testing their skills with a lance? We've created detailed mechanics for replicating a jousting tournament, including rules for determining which way the crowd's favour is leaning.
- ✿ **RULES FOR BIG BATTLES:** Relentless sieges, pitched battles, and charging armies. These are all an essential part of the Arthurian myth and play a prominent role in *The Winter King*, which uses a system designed to give prominence to the Heroes while the conflict rages around them.

