

# KING BEOWULF

## OF KINGDOMS AND RING-GIVERS

"The present life of man upon earth, O king, seems to me, in comparison with that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the house wherein you sit at supper in winter, with your ealdormen and thegns, while the fire blazes in the midst, and the hall is warmed, but the wintry storms of rain or snow are raging abroad."

— St. Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People

In *KING BEOWULF* you will find advice, procedures, and rules for transitioning your game from one centred around a higher-level adventurer, who travels the Whale Road, seeking glory and monsters to slay, to one of rulership, where troubles come direct to the ring-giver who sits alone upon the treasure seat. The Hero will become the Ruler, and have to contend with far greater stakes than mere monsters in an attempt to write a far greater story of their deeds.

This chapter takes a first look at the basic premises underlying what follows.

### THE DESIRE TO RULE

An initial word: the most important factor in all this is the player. They must want to put down their life of adventure and nomadic glory-seeking. They need to be ready for this new challenge of rulership, with its new demands, and different rules. They must want to settle and put down roots.

They may be tempted to temporarily give up the treasure seat and return to a life of adventure in their ship, with their band of Followers, and that is always available to them. But this book aims to ensure that the player gains a sense of ownership of their new kingdom, and invests themselves in it. We want them to

experience joy and heartache, victories and reverses, from the position of a Ruler: to build something they care about, and want to see flourish through times both good and bad. But most of all we want them to enjoy it, so that they don't quit this new role, and when your shared campaign comes to an end you will have a mighty tale to look back upon.

### THE KINGDOM

We most often call the territory, land, or country, being ruled by the player, a **kingdom**.

In *KING BEOWULF* the kingdom is considered as a character in its own right. A kingdom has its own character sheet, its own set of familiar attributes which are used when the kingdom is tested. It has skills, in the form of advisors, which help it succeed. It even has the equivalent of a class and a background, determined by the way it was founded, which guides how it will develop.

The player will make decisions which govern the development their kingdom, levelling it up and gaining new features within it, enlarging it and helping it prosper. Not every aspect of a kingdom corresponds to a Hero's character sheet, but it is useful to understand that taking on a kingdom as a Ruler is to undertake a mighty adventure on a whole new scale.





## “KINGDOM?”

The Old English word for a territory, ruled over by a high ranking ruler, is: *cyningdōm*.

“*Cyning*” meaning “king”, and “*dōm*” which has many meanings, but most relevant to us here is the sense of *dōm* as a dominion, a right, or place where judgement is passed, from which we could infer the contextual meaning: “land”.

In the twenty-first century, the word “king” is not without baggage - first and foremost, due to the gendered nature of the word, is the implication that all Rulers are men. This is certainly not the case.

During the development of *KING BEOWULF*, we tried out various other words in place of “kingdom” which had less inherent gender bias. These were either an unwieldy, self conscious synonym, or a linguistic compromise, veering into other root languages that were not appropriate for *BEOWULF*.

After much thinking, we realised that the Old English word “*cynn*” isn’t so far from “*cyning*”. And “*cynn*” means “people”. And so *Cynndōm* would give us something approximating “people-land”. And this is from where we’ve chosen to derive the word “kingdom” in the Age of Heroes.

## “PEOPLE-LAND”

This book and these rules concern themselves very much with the relationship between the ruler and their people, and it is important to note the difference between the Age of Heroes and a later high medieval kingdoms under feudal rulership.

While poor subsistence farmers do exist in the Age of Heroes, most of the population are families of warrior-farmers who work the land, are self sufficient, and provide military power to their ruler. Such people are ruled with their consent, rather than by some notion of divine right. Likewise, succession is not necessarily pursued along family lines, and the strongest candidate will inherit the treasure seat.

A Ruler is continually judged on their generosity, bravery, wisdom, and the prosperity of their people. While “bad” Rulers, both inept and malevolent, certainly exist within the Age of Heroes, the role that the player will undertake will rely on being good stewards of their land and people. And so “people-land” is an accurate word for us to use.

While we use the word “kingdom”, we’re very clear that a queen might just as easily rule what we call “a kingdom”. We have evidence of this in history with the successes of Aethelflaed, Lady of Mercia, or more mythically, Queen Olof from the saga of Hrolf Kraki, who is presented as a strong ruler without any comment on her gender.

And so we look to “*Cynndōm*” as a more informative and setting-appropriate word. For ease of use, it is most frequently pronounced “kingdom”.





## THE ROOTS OF THE KINGDOM

Just like a Hero, a kingdom has attribute scores for Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma. These attributes are the very roots of the kingdom, and they will grow deep and strong if things go well. These represent different aspects of the character of the kingdom, and will be tested in different ways.

The kingdom ability scores correspond to similar but not identical characteristics that a Hero enjoys:

- **Strength:** measuring ability in war and the excise of military power
- **Constitution:** measuring health, fecundity
- **Dexterity:** measuring ability to facilitate travel and the movement of goods, measuring ability to produce art and crafts
- **Intelligence:** measuring the ability to plan and formulate tactics, trade and diplomacy
- **Wisdom:** measuring spiritual aspects of the kingdom and its moral centre
- **Charisma:** measuring leadership, popularity, and ability to use lines of communication

Just like a Hero's ability scores, the GM and the player are free to negotiate on the precise application of these ability scores in each situation, and creative play is of course always encouraged!

The would-be Ruler will discover their starting kingdom ability scores as they undertake a kingdom-founding adventure in their transition from Hero to ruler.

## THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

A kingdom has a class, or Tale, chosen as part of the founding adventure. The Tale represents how the kingdom will progress over time, and what advantages it will enjoy as it grows in power. The Tale is declaration of intent on the part of the would-be Ruler, whether it is to raise a mighty military power, a hub of the arts, a great trading nation, a broker of peace between other nations, a religious community, or something else.

## THE TRUNK OF THE KINGDOM

Central to the whole kingdom is the meadhall, the cultural and social centre of the community, as well as the Ruler's new home. As part of their transition from Hero to Ruler, your player will get to build their hall, making key decisions that will reflect and impact the nature of their kingdom. Meadhalls come in many different designs, reflecting the nature of the people who rely on it, and the ruler themselves.

In *KING BEOWULF*, the nature of the meadhall maps to a Hero's *background*, providing modifiers to the Kingdom's character sheet.

## THE BRANCHES OF THE KINGDOM

Kingdoms are made up of **scires**, (*pronounced "shire", but possessed of an older spelling*). A scir is an area of land which can provide wealth, military power and well-being to the kingdom. Under the stewardship of the Hero, their collection of scires might prosper, becoming comfortable, able to provide the ruler with ample gifts of produce, craft goods, timber or mineral ores, along with hale and hearty warriors to defend the kingdom in times of strife.

Or a scir might struggle: misfortune and poor stewardship might cause a scir to be unable to give the traditional gifts to their ruler as a sign of their loyalty and devotion. In such cases the ruler will have to work hard to regain the people's faith and restore their prosperity so that the natural order is regained, and everyone benefits.

Each scir has a Prosperity score, which ranges from 1 to 3, 1 signifying poverty, 2 being a level of prosperity at which a scir is comfortable, and 3 representing a wealthy scir. Most kingdoms will have roughly 6 scirs, allowing their combined Prosperity to match the spread of other ability scores. Prosperity, can reach both higher and lower totals than a regular ability score, but this is indicative of exceptional circumstances.

Prosperity as a singular measurement represents several aspects of a scir, and can be interpreted in several ways. It is a literal measure of wealth, but also of happiness and morale of the people who live there. Prosperity is also the root of military power in the Age of Heroes. A content and wealthy scir can provide well-equipped and well-fed warriors who have time to train.

At each season's turn, the Ruler holds a festival at their meadhall, at which time representatives of the scires gather to bring their gifts, and demonstrate their prosperity. The granaries are refilled, the treasure horde is replenished, craftspeople bring their best goods to display their loyalty and skill, and the ruler can make decisions on what to do next for their people. If the player enjoys the idea, they may put significant time and resources into the planning of their seasonal festivals.

This two-way flow of loyalty, hospitality and gifts in return for protection and inclusion is an essential part of a kingdom in the Age of Heroes. Make no mistake: these are not the later-seen feudal kingdoms, where farming peasants are tied to the land, literally the property of a tyrannical, tax-extracting baron.

The farmers of the Age of Heroes are *warriors*, with their own longhouse or hall and an extended family group. They are not owned by the ruler, but rather choose to be led by them. They pay their respects for good rulership in the form of surplus goods and armed service, and in return the ruler looks after them, coordinating the defence and future prosperity of the kingdom for the good of all. If a scir suffers a lack of prosperity, everyone knows that it is the sign of a poor Ruler.



Rather than having hit points, a kingdom as a character takes “damage” in the loss of Prosperity, which is the fundamental characteristic desired by any kingdom. If a Ruler makes too many poor decisions their kingdom will eventually be ruined, unable to provide any surplus goods, military power or provide a reason to exist as an organisation.

## NO RING-GIVER RULES ALONE

Where a Hero relies on their Followers, a Ruler leans on their Advisors for support and council. In *KING BEOWULF* Advisors occupy the position of *skills*. Each having their area of expertise to aid the Ruler in overcoming challenges that arise. Like Followers in *BEOWULF: Age of Heroes*, they can be recruited, they need to be rewarded, and they become spent as part of their duties: carefully selecting the right Advisor to support them at the right time is a key skill that each Ruler must master. And keeping a loyal band of sage advisors around them could be the difference between riches and starvation.

## THE HEART OF THE KINGDOM

At the heart of the kingdom, binding together its roots, its trunk and its branches, is the Ruler, and this is the role which the player choses to undertake. Giving up the freedom of the monster-slaying Hero, and settling down to steward not just their ship and a small band of Followers, but an entire kingdom.

The Ruler can still undertake active adventures as they have always done, albeit at a potential cost to their kingdom. Leave the treasure seat empty for too long, and who knows what will occur? There will however be plenty of opportunity to roleplay, to investigate the sources of problems, travel to other kingdoms, both allied and opposed, and on occasion take to the field of battle as they once did in their role as Hero. Rulers will undertake a new kind of scenario, a *kingdom adventure*, where instead of them moving actively through a map, events will move through their kingdom. A kingdom adventure is tied

to the turning of the seasons, with the ruler choosing their route through the arising events that trouble and bless their rule. A kingdom will gain experience points, and might even level up, gaining new features from the Tale chosen at its founding.

When it comes to large-scale conflict, the Hero will no longer fight in a small band of warriors, with each blow measured with the role of a die. In *KING BEOWULF* the Ruler will direct the flow of battle, making decisions on how to bring their resources and expertise to bear in order to win the day, having the very abilities of their kingdom tested on the battlefield. How far will they go? How much will their kingdom suffer in order to endure? Will you empty your treasure hoard and sacrifice the things you have built in order to win? And if you lose, will you even escape the crowfield alive? Such is the wager a Hero makes upon climbing the benches to the treasure seat!

## SUMMARY

- A kingdom has its own character sheet
- A kingdom operates on a wholly different scale to a Hero.
- Like a character it has a class (Tale), a background (the Meadhall), attribute scores, skills (Advisors), a level, and gains XP
- A kingdom can make skill checks and saving throws like a character
- A kingdom is composed of subdivisions of territory called Scires
- Scires provide Prosperity to the kingdom. Each Scir is rated 1 to 3 for Prosperity
- At the end of each season the Ruler holds a festival, to which representatives of each scir bring gifts
- The Ruler decides how to spend the income from these gifts on improving and protecting their kingdom
- Events occur each season, and the Ruler chooses which ones to address
- These events occurring through the year form a kingdom adventure



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