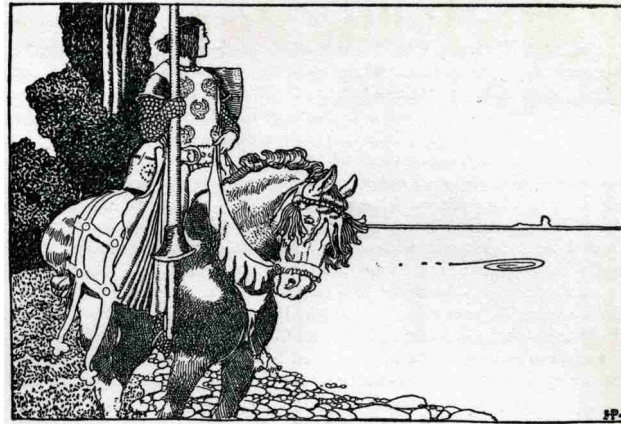


The Hollow Hills and the Sea



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Practicalities and thanks

The game is for four players and a game master (GM), and playing it takes about five hours.

Read and understand the entire game before playing. It can be run from Merlin's run-through, the scene catalogues and the play aids.

You'll need a printout of the game (printed single sided), one or two ten-sided dice, and possibly a couple of pens in different, non-black colours, and tape or poster putty for putting up pedigrees.

Credits: Howard Pyle, George & Louis Rhead for illustrations and Oliver Nøglebæk for cartography. Geoffrey af Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes and Thomas Malory for inspiration. D. Vincent Baker for the apocalypse and Avery Alder for the idea of letting moves interact with systemless play. Thanks to the writers' collective Working Title for sparring, particularly Mads Egedal Kirchhoff and Michael Lentz. Thanks to Brand Robbins for poetic assistance.

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Introduction

King Arthur is dead, and beyond the sea the barbarian Saxons are mustering under their queen Kriemhild to invade Britain again. The Saxons in Britain, who Arthur subdued many years ago, and who have learned to imitate their British neighbours, are now restless. In the Hollow Hills, the terrible Elves plot revenge for their expulsion from the court, and their human servants and sorcerers are scheming. The prophet Merlin has foreseen doom for the Britons, but perhaps the noble house of Arwyr has a chance to defy the prophecy?

The Hollow Hills and the Sea draws upon chivalric histories and romances, both fantastic and tragic. Perhaps the most tragic thing about the game is that the players have a chance to avert disaster, but they'll probably fail. The conflict between love and disagreement is central. The style of play is drama rather than intrigue – the player characters often act secretly, but all actions are open at the table. The players are fighting the same disaster, but they'll be pulling in different directions unless some of them change their minds.

Savage Saxons and awful Elves

The players, and the inhabitants of Britain, are caught between two threats – Kriemhild's Saxons beyond the sea, and the Elves in the Hollow Hills. The Saxons who cross the sea under their red and white sails are savage and violent and threaten the civilized, chivalric norms of society. The Elves stand for murderous ideals of ethnic purity, self-destructive submission and seduction into limitless

cruelty. In practice, both threats will mostly be present through minions and the fear of their coming. Present on the scene we find the British Saxons who have lived in the country for a generation or two and assumed elements of the local culture, and the Britons whose ancestors served the Elves, but who now try their best to be ordinary, decent people. Ethnic identity looms large in the game, and gender is an important part of how the ethnic identities work.

The Hollow Hills and the Sea is not a historical game. The Britons of the scenario are based upon Twelfth Century French/Norman court culture, while the Saxons are fantasy Vikings. None of them have much to do with people who actually lived in Sixth Century Britain.

Roles

The player characters are the members of House Arwyr: Lord and Lady, daughter and Saxon foster son. They love each other but desperately disagree about what to do – ally with the British Saxons against the new invasion, or call upon the Elves of the Hollow Hills. They're all in doubt, but they've all chosen a side. The game master plays Merlin, imprisoned by sorcery but able to appear as a vision to prophesy and maybe help. Aside from their primary voice as Merlin, the GM also plays NPCs (non-player characters) and has responsibility for the consequences of actions. The prologue is tightly scripted, but the rest of the game is driven by player choices under time pressure.

System vs systemless

Most of the game will play out systemlessly. In this context, it means that Merlin judges outcomes based on what seems believable, and what best serves the tragic prophecy. However, each player has access to game mechanical moves with which they can fight against the prophecy and try to force other outcomes from situations, and also seize NPCs for their side – though it can go wrong if the dice are inauspicious. As long as the players pursue opposing agendas two against two, they will tend to block each other, and thus their struggle against the prophecy is an uphill one.



Structure and outcomes

The scenario consists of a prologue, two acts and an epilogue. There are two kinds of scenes, *main scenes* in which the players do great and terrible things to avert the disaster in their own way, and little *family scenes* in which we see two of the family members together and take our measure of their relationships and feelings. Merlin sets main scenes based on player choices and obvious consequences of their earlier actions. The story unfolds over several months, and the consequences of each scene are given time and space to unfold.

In the ***prologue*** Merlin prophesies darkly to the players, and they each get a scene to learn the use of their starting move, while at the same time the setting and NPCs are introduced and the game gathers pace.

In ***the first act*** the conflicts between the players have yet to come out into the open, and they oppose each other secretly.

The second act starts either when the actions of the players bring the conflict into the open, when a player changes sides, or when it is clear that the Saxons will cross the sea very soon. The scenes get more drastic and it is clear that the outcome is being decided now.

The epilogue starts just before the decisive battle against the invading Saxons and lays out the outcome based on the achievements of the players – whether that means victory over the invaders, the return of the Elves or that Merlin's prophecy unfolds as foretold, both for the country and for the Arwyr family.

System and systemlessness

The core of the game is the tension between game mechanics and systemless play. You play systemlessly most of the time, until the players interrupt with their mechanics and try to force specific outcomes. The players' mechanical moves are fairly specialized and not fit for general handling of the fiction – they start with one move each and the possibility of acquiring one other. But first, something about what systemless play is in this context.

Systemless play

In systemless play, the players decide what their characters say and do, and the GM decides what NPCs say and do and what the outcomes of actions are if they're not totally obvious. The GM decides based on two primary considerations:

A *What seems believable in the context.* For example, a strong knight will always defeat a weaker knight in a fair fight. It also means that NPCs are true to the core of their personality – no matter what, a proud person won't take humiliation well.

B *What best serves Merlin's prophecies.* If for instance an NPC can respond in different believable ways, the GM must pick the one that best serves the prophecies. For NPCs this will usually mean that they'll try to make sensible choices but fail because of pride, greed and resentment. If chance decides (for example the outcome of a reasonably equal fight), you pick the outcome based on your prophecies.

As GM you set the scenes, in character as the visionary Merlin, with dramatic speech and gesture. The scenes in the prologue are scripted, but after that Merlin will mostly set scenes in two ways, by ***asking the players what they do*** and by ***confronting the players with the consequences of previous actions***. When the scenes are set based on player initiative, their attempts will often be influenced by the consequences of their own and others' previous actions. When you set scenes (more on this under "Merlin and the art of setting scenes") and when you round them off, you should talk openly about motivations and what consequences they imply, f. ex. that an NPC is angry about being insulted by a player character and will seek restitution or revenge.

One of the things that players can do with moves is to win over NPCs for one agenda or the other, ethnic coexistence or the return of the Elves. When making choices for thus affected NPCs you must still remember **A** (believability) but instead of **B** (the prophecies), you must consider the agendas, thus:

C *What best serves the return of the Elves*, no matter if it is because their dreams are haunted by Morgan le Fay, because they fear Elf sorcery or because they lust for fairy gold. NPCs in the power of the Elves will act erratically and in ways that harm the social bonds around them, usually in accordance with their ethnic ideals.

D *What best serves ethnic coexistence*, that is, a succesful alliance between Britons and British Saxons. This means that they can actually rise above their petty concerns and do what is necessary to save themselves and their society, if it otherwise makes sense for them to do it (**A**). They will also be positively interested in the abilities and ideas of the other people.

There is a final agenda, in practice a variant of B:

E *Conflict between Elf power and coexistence.* If an NPC is brought under the influence of both player agendas, they are conflicted and tormented. They realize that alliance and coexistence are the best and most sensible way, but they are incapable of mastering their fears and desires long enough to do as they should. The most important thing for you as GM is to ***hold up the NPCs as a mirror to the doubt and conflict of the player characters.*** Generally NPCs in this condition will fuck up and serve the prophecies, but if it makes sense, the player characters can influence them through personal relations.

Mechanics

This brings us to the mechanics that the players have access to. There are two mechanics that the players can use to deviate from systemless play. One is to invoke the prophecy, the other is moves.

The prophecy

By ***invoking the prophecy***, Merlin's dark prophecy for their own personal fate, once in the game each player can avoid death, mutilation or capture – misfortunes that would prevent their personal fate from unfolding. Then Merlin (i. e. the GM) saves them by an obvious and scary magical intervention, like black birds that carry them off or black needle and thread that stitches up mortal wounds. Merlin doesn't undo bad outcomes in a wider sense, only things that would take the player character out of play. This trumps even moves.

Moves

With game mechanical ***moves***, the players can force particular outcomes and win over NPCs for an agenda other than the prophecy, and thus have a chance to escape their doom. Each player starts with one unique move that supports the agenda that they pursue from the beginning. In the course of the game they can acquire another move, a unique "shadow move" which supports the opposite agenda. The moves are described on page 3 of each character and consist of the following parts:

Name – for example **The Sword of Rage**.

Background – a brief explanation of which parts of the character's nature and history the move grows from.

Sacrifice – only for shadow moves. It indicates what you have to do to gain access to the move. F. ex. Lady Ginevel must cut off her long, pretty hair to gain access to the move **The Sword of Rage**.

Requirements – says what you have to do in the fiction to get to roll the die and use the mechanic. F. ex. Lady Ginevel can use **The Sword of Rage** when she *furiously strikes with a sword to avenge a wrong against herself or another*. So, it does not count as using the move if she uses an axe, acts in cold blood or defends herself against someone who has committed no previous wrong. Then it is systemless play and unfolds as such.

Mechanics – says what to roll on the die and what happens. This is pretty much the same for all moves; the significant difference is what the attached menu of three items holds. F. ex. **The Sword of Rage** says: Roll 1d10. On 1-2 you have failed, and Merlin says what happens (that is, the likely fraught situation is resolved systemlessly).

On 3-10 you are succesful and can choose two of the three items below. NOTE that there will be consequences if you DO NOT pick item two.

Menu – all moves have three items, and if you succeed you get to pick two. Thus you never get everything that you want, and even success requires hard choices. * denotes that the item can be used on other player characters, † denotes that you AVOID misfortune by picking the item, and ♥ denotes that the item can claim an NPC for an agenda. The menu for **The Sword of Rage** looks like this:

1: * You wound or kill your enemy, your choice. *(If you don't pick this, you don't defeat your opponent. It can make sense to pass this over in favour of the other items. This move works against an individual, not an entire army.)*

2: † You are not wounded in the fight. *(If you DO NOT pick this item, you ARE wounded.)*

3: ♥ A Briton or Saxon respects and admires your strength and righteous anger. *(This item wins over an NPC for the coexistence agenda, and works on the Britons' lack of respect for female violence and the Saxons' lack of respect for the Britons' strength.)*

It is still Merlin who determines the **consequences** based on the player's choices from the menu, but as GM you must be absolutely true to the player's choices and intent, and believability and likelihood are secondary. For instance, with The Sword of Rage, Lady Ginevel can kill the strongest and most heavily mailed knight, though she herself has a broken left arm and is in her petticoat, if she meets the requirements, rolls 3+ and chooses to kill her opponent. The player and Merlin work out together which NPC is captured if ♥ is brought into play.

When determining consequences, you should always move the fiction forward – the moves are not for round-by-round combat and other fine details!

If two moves collide head on in **conflict**, typically two combat oriented moves, they cannot both succeed. In this case both players roll, and if both have 3+, the higher roll wins. If they're tied, both lose and Merlin decides the outcome. Game mechanical conflict is not typical, though. In the rare case that players use moves directly against each other, it will ususally just be one player using a mechanic against the other.



Setting

We find ourselves in the Britain of chivalric romance. In theory it is 6th Century England, but the game world has very little to do with the people who actually lived there at that time, both Britons and Saxons. The Britons of the game are based on French-Norman court culture in the 12th and 13th centuries (the culture that brought forth the first flowering of chivalric romance), while the game's Saxons are fantasy Vikings with a bit of chivalric culture.

The Hollow Hills and the Sea is pseudo-historical fantasy. At first glance it looks like low fantasy, but there's Elf magic that can come into play when the players use it, and though it is a bit subtle from the beginning, it can go to people ripping stars out of the night sky and throwing them like flaming thunderbolts at their enemies. Merlin's magic can also intervene in drastic and scary ways, if the players ask him for help. It is worth noting that practically all fantastic interruptions are set off by the players.

Technology? It is something with knights in chainmail, and not something you need to be concerned about.

You can read the full background in the **History** play aid, p. 25.

What we're ignoring

Like the chivalric romances, the setting tones down class so strongly that it is almost as if only nobles and their servants exist. There was a village in a previous version, but it was cut. The scenario completely ignores religion in order to keep the focus on ethnicity and gender.

The two peoples – and the Elves

Britons value grace, restraint, tasteful finery, wine, the virtue of ladies and the honour of knights. Some Britons admire the Saxons' lust for life. British women are not warriors. They bear names such as Elad, Merin, Olwen and Valhaut.

Saxons value strength, glory, fun, mead and impressive belt buckles. Some Saxon's admire the beauty of the Britons. Particularly strong and aggressive Saxon women can be warriors. They bear names such as Coelred, Ortheld, Raedburh and Wolfreid.

The Elves cannot tolerate iron and sunlight and live hidden in the Hollow Hills. They cloak themselves in illusions and appear as wondrously beautiful and noble folk. The Elves are manipulative and cruel, and because of their weaknesses typically act through human agents. Morgan le Fay is their queen. Perhaps she was once human.

On the handout **Peoples** (p. 30) these are repeated for the players.

The four houses

For simplicity, in *The Hollow Hills and the Sea*, the southeast of Britain has been boiled down to four noble houses. The game only lasts five hours, after all. There are two British noble houses (of which the player characters are one) and two Saxon ones. All houses have a style and a political alignment from the start, but have doubts and the potential for changing course – just like the player

characters. They're presented as pedigrees in the play aids (pp. 32-33), and on the aid sheet Merlin's NPCs (p. 48). If both of a house's knights die, just make up another. They have an army, after all.

House Arwyr is the player characters (see p. 12). As a House, they've been very pragmatic in the twenty years that have passed since Arthur's death. Some might say that they've lost a part of their honour with compromises and tactical retreats, but on the other hand they're alive and stronger than ever, which is more than you can say of most British Houses. Arwyr's orientation from the start is clearly coexistence and alliance with the British Saxons, as this is Lord Ambrose's policy. Read the player characters and the section "Arwyr's conflict" to get to know them. Some names of knights and servants are given on the House pedigree. They can be filled out as needed, by you or by players, but shouldn't be too distinctive.

House Bedrydant are stubborn, conservative Britons. From the start, House Bedrydant's orientation is conflict with the Saxons, but Lady Elaine's hopes for a future for the family could bring Bedrydant to support coexistence. They believe strongly in pure British blood.

Lord Bedivere is a former knight of the Round Table; now a bitter old man who leans on his younger wife in most matters.

Lady Elaine is a proud and beautiful middle-aged woman, pregnant with her husband Bedivere's child. She mostly runs the House.

Sir Lanval is Bedivere's heir and son from a previous marriage. He is better as a poet than he is as a knight and has not quite recovered

from a sickness last winter. Lanval is aggressively nostalgic for the lost Golden Age, and fears his stepmother Elaine's ambitions.

Lady Ursula is Elaine's younger sister. Ursula is young, pretty, gentle and fearful of a future without room for people like her.

(**Sir Aglomar** is middle-aged and grieves for the good, old days. He's open-mouthed when drunk, which is often the case.)

House Hengist are glory-seeking, ambitious Saxons. House Hengist's orientation from the start is alliance and coexistence, but their pride could easily bring them into conflict with Britons to the point where they go to war.

Lord Esk has recently become Lord of the House after the death of his father Octa, and Esk is still unmarried. Esk is proud and very ambitious, but also pragmatic. His end goal is to become King of Britain. He is Sir Hengist's older brother.

Lady Reinhild is aunt to Esk and to the player character Hengist. She works for the greatness of her House, and fears British plotting and sorcery. When she was younger, she had an affair with the famous, British Sir Gawain and had the son Dietheld by him.

Sir Dietheld is son of Lady Reinhild and Sir Gawain, and now perhaps the strongest knight in all the land. He is impulsively violent but also concerned with what chivalry means – his father's legacy.

(**Sir Oswulf** is a cheerful Saxon knight who despises weakness.)

Heir: Technically Sir Hengist, but Reinhild and Dietheld will seize power if Esk dies and House Arwyr are in any way suspected of involvement.

House Horsa are violent Saxons, close to pure robber barons. House Horsa's orientation from the start is conflict, but they can be brought to support coexistence if Arwyr's gain their respect, and perhaps play upon Lord Saewin's fears for his future under Queen Kriemhild.

Lord Saewin, middle-aged grandson of Horsa, is greedy, unscrupulous and worried about his family's future.

Lady Giselle was once a young, British noble lady whom Lord Saewin seized and married to claim her family's lands. Now she has born his heir Hrotwald and served as the Lady of the House for fifteen years, so she's given up the Britishness that failed to protect her and is now more Saxon than the Saxons.

Hrotwald, 12 years old, is Saewin's heir. He's busy growing up to become a dangerous, Saxon knight.

Sir Adelheid is a female knight, and Saewin's strongest fighter, feared for her combination of coolheaded cunning and bloodthirsty ferocity. She's proud of her strength and jovially brutal, but secretly she longs for the beauty of the Britons. She is however not clear on whether she wants to be pretty herself, plunder pretty things or sleep with pretty Britons.

(**Sir Goswin** affects British chivalry but fights incredibly dirty.)

Political marriages are important. Lord Esk, for instance, wants to marry Ginevel and thus become heir to Arwyr's lands and power. Lady Ursula Bedrydant, on the other hand, is not heir or particularly important – she's simply not good enough for a man who would be

King of Britain. Esk would rather court the barbarian Queen Kriemhild if he can't have Ginevel... All this is to say that it is really important for the game's believability that NPCs care about political and status issues when it comes to marriage. Remember point A from the systemless section.

Geography is of lesser importance. At the back of the scenario is a Medieval-style map. It takes some days to a week to travel between the castles. If someone asks about the town on the island off the South coast, it was burnt down by Saxon raiders last year.

Funny NPCs?

It is OK for a funny situation to sometimes occur, but basically you should take your NPCs seriously. Especially Sir Adelheid and Sir Lanval have comical potential if they survive the prologue scenes. However both Adelheid's confused longing for beauty and her callous brutality win by being portrayed as real things, and Lanval is fundamentally a tragic figure – not strong enough for the brutal times in which he lives, with a talent that would have made him a star in a more peaceful age. He is at one and the same time heir to the glory of the Round Table, and socially and physically exposed, and this has made him gloomy and self-destructive. And THEN he is given a confusing hope in the form of sorcerous strength.

Arwyr's conflict

This section outlines the central conflict between the player characters. You can piece it together by reading all of them and comparing, but here is an overview. The characters are:

Lord Ambrose the pragmatic, father. The official leader of the House, but this can change in play.

Lady Isoré the conservative, mother. She schemes behind her husband's back.

Lady Ginevel, the daughter who used to be a tomboy, but has now become if possible even more British-conservative than her mother.

Sir Hengist the Younger, foster son and originally a hostage from House Hengist, but now a valued member of the family, and mad about all things British and chivalric.

Ambrose and Hengist strive for coexistence, Isoré and Ginevel for the return of the Elves. However everyone is in doubt and can potentially change sides, and it is important for the game that they love each other no matter their differences.

As the game starts, it is Ambrose's plan to get Ginevel married to Lord Esk. This marriage would be an important step towards cementing the alliance between Britons and British Saxons. Both Esk and Hengist are sons of Lord Octa of House Hengist, who died recently.



Isoré is bitterly opposed to this plan, and has raised Ginevel to oppose it. The reason is that Isoré had an affair with Octa eighteen years ago when he was captive at Castle Arwyr. This means that Ginevel is sister to Esk and Hengist, and marriage would be incestuous. However, Isoré can hardly explain this without confessing her affair and soiling her honour, so instead she schemes and brews Elf sorcery. Isoré's secret is the driving force behind the plot, whether it is exposed or not – which it probably will be, and if not it'll come out in the epilogue.

Merlin and the art of setting scenes

As GM, Merlin is your way to dramatize the bureaucracy around plot and scene setting. This will give you opportunities to have fun, and will also help the players stay in character when they're not on.

Merlin! You're the mad, brilliant prophet and enchanter who raised up Arthur to be King of the Britons, and who yourself fell victim to the Elf magic of a sorceress who seduced you, tricked you out of your secrets and trapped you in a holly tree in an enchanted forest. There you are now, in a magical sleep going on thirty years. But even in your sleep you are mighty, for as a prophet, you dream true. ***The Hollow Hills and the Sea*** is your dream. Because you see by means of your prophetic gift rather than your eyes, you have difficulty seeing things that do not point towards your dark prognostications, however much you hope that they won't come true – if they do, it would mean that your legacy, and that of your King, would be crushed. And so, you have chosen Ginevel, Hengist, Ambrose and Isoré of House Arwyr, as these are four people for whom you have seen a terrible future, and in whom you sense a potential for defying your prophecy. Perhaps with their strength and love, they can make a difference.

Setting scenes

You set the scenes in the game. Basically that means that you say *where* the scene plays out and *who* is there. If the scene starts in motion – if something is happening from the start that forces the players to act (often a good idea!) – you say this too.

In ***The Hollow Hills and the Sea*** there are two kinds of scenes. **Main scenes** are the "normal" scenes in which people do great and important things with decisive consequences for the future. We play these to find out what happens. **Family scenes** are little interludes where we very briefly see family members talk, or possibly be silent. These we play to put events into perspective, and to remind ourselves that the player characters are a family. You should set a family scene once every two or three main scenes, when you need time to think as GM, OR when you're curious about a particular relation or the opinions of particular player characters about what happened in a main scene. There is a single hybrid between the two, the family council, and main scenes can involve clashes between family members in the second act. See the aid sheet Merlin's guide to scenes, p. 46.

Main scenes

These we play to find out what happens. A main scene contains a number of particular elements. Normally you set scenes based on two criteria, *what the players intend to do* (you're welcome to ask) and *urgent consequences of their previous actions*. It is also often a good idea to think about players who weren't in the last main scene, and certainly if they weren't in the last two. If a couple of players drop the drama and go into problem-solving mode for more than a single scene, it can be an idea to emphasise dramatic consequences of previous scenes for the next scene or two, so that they can't just move

political pieces around the board in peace and quiet. The main scenes in the prologue are quite well defined, and their outcomes (especially when disastrous) give shape and direction to the following, freer play. At the back of the scenario you find a catalogue of ideas for main scenes for the rest of the scenario – as well as a brief guide to scene setting. Here are the elements of a main scene.

Where. A place, with a brief description that includes at least one element of colour. Not necessarily a lot of words, just something to stimulate the players' imaginations. And the weather, as this is great at setting the mood and makes a scene feel more real.

Who. Which player characters and NPCs are present? With a brief description or reminder of who they are and how they fit in, and an element of colour that might hint at Merlin's opinion of the NPCs. The clearly most important thing about the NPCs is their *motivation*, which you show through how you introduce them, or state outright if showing it doesn't come easily. After all, you're a prophet and know these things. And the most important thing about their motivation, once you're really going, is how it connects to the player characters' influence and previous actions.

What is about to happen. If Lord Bedivere shows up with his retinue to seek restitution or revenge, no one at the table should be in doubt. If the scene is set based on player intentions, it should be done in a way that makes it possible for the players to get at the things they want to do. Maybe with challenges and constraints, but they shouldn't have to do a ton of legwork before they can try to do what they came to do.

Main scenes should be focussed on things happening, with clear forward movement, whereas family scenes can be more contemplative. When things have happened, especially if players have rolled the die to use mechanics, it is almost always time to round off the scene. In rare cases two, or even three, players might use moves in a scene, but only make space for it if it simply doesn't make sense to cut the scene after the first move. Then you settle the accounts.

You cut main scenes by saying something like "And so it happened that..." while gesturing in a prophet-like manner.

Consequences of the scene. First and foremost, the consequences must flow naturally from what happened in the scene, and under no circumstances should they be toned down. The game lives when actions have consequences. Also, it is really important that if players have successfully used moves, the consequences must be faithful to the choices they made from their move menus, both positive consequences that they've chosen and negative consequences that they HAVEN'T chosen to avoid. If they've used moves and failed, you must uncompromisingly choose consequences based on your agenda and those of relevant NPCs, and what is believable – in what is likely a fraught situation. Don't hold back, but what best serves the agendas is not *necessarily* total defeat and failure for the players, even if they have failed a roll. It is also quite possible that you must juggle multiple agendas, such as when consequences flow from both the reactions of an agenda-influenced NPC *and* a random outcome such as the result of an equal fight, which by definition serves your prophecies.

You should however be careful with regard to two topics: *Directly portrayed sexual violence and humiliation*, and *violence against small children*. These ruin the day for too many players, and I'm sure you can find something else that's both meaningful and drastic.

Consequences can play out *over time*. The game should play out over several months of game time, and if it makes sense to tell the aftermath of the scene in a way that establishes that a week or two pass by, it is fine. It may be that a scene unavoidably follows hot on the heels of another, but if you can manage it, you should never have more than two main scenes in the same day.



Family scenes

Set one for every 2-3 main scenes to put things in perspective, or simply to play for the time to consider the next main scene. Family scenes are about the player characters and their relationships and remind us that they're family who love each other. As far as possible, they should be both short and a bit contemplative. You set and cut them a bit more simply, like this:

Where. A place where it makes sense to have the "who" below be present in a situation in which they can talk freely. Put a single element of colour in the place, but spare the extensive description. Remember the weather.

Who. Typically two player characters that you have an interest in seeing together. Maybe players will ask for a family scene?

Finally, an important part of the art of setting a family scene is reminding the players that they can say what they like or describe their silent characters; that nothing much needs to happen and that it is totally OK if the scene is very brief. Sometimes you'll get a conversation of some length (that you can cut if it starts repeating itself), and sometimes it'll be very brief or simply meaningful silence.

You cut by saying "thanks" and setting the next main scene.

The family council is a family scene variant that comes up if the whole family actually get together to discuss their problems. If that happens and the conversation doesn't just repeat itself, it should have room to unfold. This might well mean that the conflicts move into the open (if they haven't already), thus starting off the second act.

The Great Example

Here's an example of how a main scene might play out, here prologue scene 3, with two different endings. Note that Where and Who aren't presented separately, but both are addressed. Stage notes in *[italics]*.

[Background: in prologue scene 1 in this game, Lord Ambrose failed his roll to defeat Sir Adelheid, and she humiliated and robbed him, and he didn't rescue the British boy that she'd kidnapped. Adelheid is strong, so generally she wins fights. She isn't influenced, and serves the prophecy. In prologue scene 2, Lanval won a joust against the Saxon favourite by means of sorcerous help from Lady Ginevel, who also chose to have Morgan le Fay haunt Lanval's dreams. Lady Giselle hasn't had contact with player characters before, so she serves Merlin's prophecies, and like her House in general, she's not kindly inclined towards the Britons – though she is of British blood, she now considers herself a Saxon.]

Merlin: *[Dramatically holding one hand to his head and the other one up.]* I see a vision! **Sir Hengist**, Lord Ambrose has sent you hunting with **Sir Lanval**, heir to House Bedrydant, to maintain the friendship between your houses. He's more gloomy than usual, but doesn't say that his dreams are haunted by Morgan le Fay. *[Here, Merlin reveals Lanval's dreams.]*

[Ginevel's player smiles very cunningly.]

Hengist: I do my best to best to be encouraging company.

Merlin: In your charming company, he has trouble keeping up the glum face, but keeping the mood light takes work. In bright sunshine *[here came the weather]* you ride through a great, wild forest

hunting for deer and come to a clearing in which you find a couple of pavilions, fur-trimmed as the Saxons like. Above them, the banner of House Horsa flies.

Ambrose: House Horsa? Wasn't that the nasty robber Sir Adelheid? *[Ambrose isn't in the scene, but his player is at the table. In practice, sometimes players talk, and a bit is OK.]*

Merlin: It is true. And just then you see her jumping into the saddle, so she won't be defenseless against you. From the pavilions, **Lady Giselle** of House Horsa steps forth, in a slightly rough dress but with a large belt buckle that flashes with gold. Fifteen years ago she was taken from her now fallen British family by Lord Saewin of House Horsa, but now she's his Lady and has born his heir. Giselle glares at you rather suspiciously, but then curtsies and invites you into the camp. Adelheid is here as Giselle's bodyguard, and her hand isn't far from the hilt of her sword. Sir Lanval also puts his hand to his sword...

Hengist: Come now, Sir Lanval, it would be rude to answer such an invitation with arms. Let us be courteous like proper Britons!

Merlin: Hesitantly and with a dark expression, Sir Lanval takes his hand from the sword and dismounts. You enter the camp, where Lady Giselle personally serves you bread and mead.

Hengist: I ignore Adelheid. Excellent mead, Lady Giselle!

Merlin: Lanval makes a bit of a face. If you hadn't forgotten your British heritage, you'd have served a decent wine. Giselle pales with anger. I've come to value Saxon honey drink over sour, British swill.

Hengist: I try to interrupt them! The weather bodes well for both grapes and honey bees!

Merlin: The two raise their voices in bitter argument, and soon Lanval has offered to free Giselle from her Saxon captors, and she has answered that he must be out of his mind. To which Lanval replies that then she's a robber baron's whore. Then she challenges him to single combat, with Sir Adelheid as her champion. [*Here, Merlin fast forwards through a conversation between two NPCs.*] Adelheid is known for strength and ferocity, Lanval for the elegance of his rhymes – though of course he did defeat Sir Dietheld in the tournament. [*Merlin suggests the outcome if it comes to a fight.*]

Hengist: Stop! I use my move!

Merlin: Then you have to meet the requirement.

Hengist: Right! Let's see... is Giselle Saxon enough that I can make her and Lanval make peace? I have to ask a Briton and a Saxon to make peace, and say my sentence.

Merlin: Sure!

Hengist: My name is Hengist, and I'm a son of the British Isles! Now give each other your hands and be at peace! [*Rolls 1d10, gets 3.*] YESS!! Then I have to pick two off the menu, right?

Merlin: Yes.

Hengist: OK, of course they must refrain from strife. Hmm, someone considering me a traitor doesn't sound great, but on the other hand it would be pretty cool to get someone to play along with the alliance game and all that. I choose the one with admiring each other because of me. Can it be Giselle? It would make sense if I reminded her that British can be hot stuff.

Merlin: That makes good sense. OK, so just as Lanval and Adelheid are about to start fighting, you interrupt, and under the influence of your charm and will, Giselle and Lanval shake hands and take back their harsh words. As you and Lanval continue on your way later, Adelheid looks after you in disappointment, almost like she's hungry. [*Note the fast forward to the end of the scene after the move has resolved the tension.*] Lanval is rather quiet, and mumbles something about dark days when Britons dress up like Saxons and Saxons like Britons, and anyway he could surely have beaten that Saxon sow [*showing that Lanval now considers Hengist a Saxon disguised as a Briton*].

Hengist: Ouch! Well, I need to get home to Dad and discuss making peace with House Horsa. I try to be cheerful until it gets too awkward.

Merlin: [*Raises his arms in a gesture of invocation.*] And thus it happened that Sir Hengist sowed the seeds of longing for peace in the mind of Lady Giselle. It'll be exciting to see what comes of it, now that Sir Lanval's mind is full of anger and Elf dreams...

[ALTERNATIVE OUTCOME: *What if Sir Hengist had failed in his use of the move? We rewind a bit and take it from there.*]

Hengist: My name is Hengist, and I'm a son of the British Isles! Now give each other your hands and be at peace! [*Rolls 1d10, gets 2.*] CRAP!! What now?

[Merlin *thinks for a bit and notes that because of Ginevel's magic, Sir Lanval is marked by the Elves and inclined to act unpredictably and in ways that harm the social bonds around him, preferably in accord with his ethnic ideals.*]

Merlin: Suddenly Sir Lanval leaps forward and seizes Lady Giselle,

dragging her to his horse. Sir Adelheid draws her sword with an angry cry and attacks you.

Hengist: Wait! What?!? I'm trying to stop Lanval!

Merlin: So you turn your back on Sir Adelheid as she attacks you?

Hengist: No! Fuck! I defend myself and shout, let's work together to stop the madman Lanval!

Merlin: Sir Lanval rides off into the woods with Lady Giselle. Sir Adelheid considers you Lanval's accomplice and doesn't trust you, driving you back with furious attacks. You've never faced such brutal savagery before, and you're not sure you can resist for long. *[Thus hinting that Hengist will lose the fight if it goes on.]* She hisses, surrender, you dog!

Hengist: Maybe that does make sense from her point of view. It doesn't sound like I can take her on, and I don't have a combat mechanic like Dad. Can I force her to make peace?

Merlin: No, we're playing out the consequences of your failed roll, so you can't roll again. Will you surrender and let yourself be captured, or will you try to win the fight?

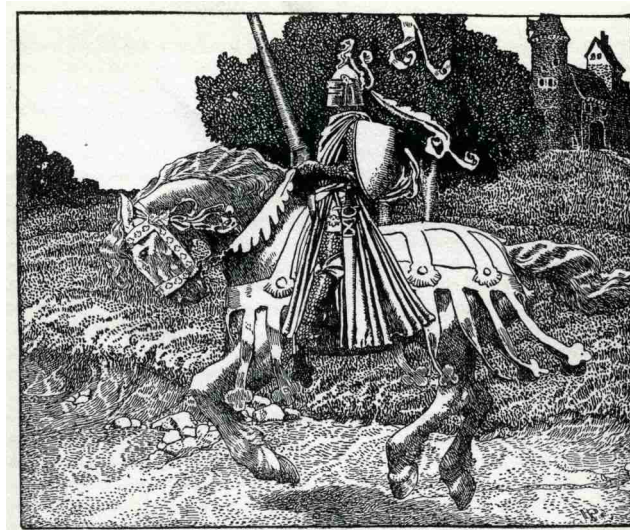
Hengist: I don't feel like getting maimed, and being a hostage at this point sounds tiresome. Can't I use that prophecy mechanic?

Merlin: Sure, you just have to ask me for help.

Isoré's player: Save yourself, my son! *[Isoré isn't there either, but commentary can occur, and is OK within limits.]*

Hengist: Merlin, this is not the fate to which you have doomed me!

Merlin: Very well. Great, black birds descend on you and carry you off, away from the surprised and angry Sir Adelheid. They eventually put you down in the woods not far from the Castle Arwyr. And so it happened that Sir Lanval of House Bedrydant kidnapped Lady Giselle of House Horsa, and in doing so created open strife. And Sir Adelheid very much feels cheated of her rightful prey!



Game run-through

For a summary, see Merlin's run-through (p. 24).

History

The history is best presented in advance. At Fastaval it'll be read out at the playgroup muster, and if you play elsewhere, the text should be sent to the players in advance. Otherwise, read it out as the very first thing, before people set about chit-chatting. The history is a separate sheet under play aids (p. 25).

Welcome

Take a moment to greet each other nicely. Before the conversation wanders too far afield, ask the players to each briefly tell what they associate with King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table. Use the time while they're talking to organize your play aids, preferably on a side table. If you aren't blessed with a strong sense of timing, consider setting an alarm (on buzzer) for two hours before the five hour timeslot runs out, to remind you to move on to the second act if the players haven't already brought this about.

Introduction to the drumming exercises

When the players have all presented their expectations, present the drumming exercised to them based on Drum 0, which is fiction free training in the form. Use it to focus them with a concrete activity, to find the form yourself (it is important that you raise your voice

incrementally) and to check with them that they can actually hear and understand you all the way through. Briefly told, the exercises involve the players closing their eyes and you telling them things. Along the way, you start them humming, then drumming on the table with two fingers, and then you end it by slapping a palm on the table. The drumming exercises are found amongst the play aids (pp. 26 to 29).

Introduction to setting, map and peoples

The players have already been served the history, but now it is time to present the setting more systematically. Lay out the map (at the back of the scenario) on the table and say that it is pseudo-historical fantasy. Then introduce Britons, Saxons and Elves, working from the play aid Peoples (p. 30), outline that there are four Houses, two Briton ones and two British Saxon ones, threatened by Queen Kriemhild beyond the sea. The players are House Arwyr.

Casting, reading and break

Introduce the characters based on the casting aid (p. 31) and let the players choose for themselves. If anyone snatches a character very quickly, you can ask them to put off making a final decision until everyone has expressed an opinion. Once the characters are distributed, hand out the first two pages of the characters and ask them to read. At the same time, you'll be taking a break here so that they have time to read properly and take care of needs. And if you sense that anyone has reading problems, you can discreetly and gracefully ask during the break if they need help.

Name game

Arthurian names don't come easily to everyone, but it is not great for the mood if everyone is named Tom and Jane – so, time for a little name game. Think of it as a weird dream where you're all sitting together at a meal, but instead of talking, you only address each other by character name (you're Merlin, and take part as such). Keep on until everyone has said everyone else's names without messing up. It shouldn't take more than a few minutes.

Introduction to the four Houses

Briefly introduce the four Houses and explain that they are the human landscape in which the scenario plays out. They'll be further introduced in the prologue scenes, here's just the overall idea. As you introduce them, hang up their pedigrees or lay them out on the table (pp. 32 and 33).

Style of play and introduction to the mechanics

First, you're not playing out intrigues to actually outmanoeuvre each other, you're playing out *drama* which happens to be about intrigues. This means that you'll be hearing about each other's plans and actions, even if they're deep secrets in the fiction. So play for the drama, and for your characters' beliefs and doubts, and play with love and hate, actions and consequences – then, it'll be good.

Second, you're *not* a party, and some of the time you'll be onlookers. Hang on and enjoy the tension and the story. You'll get your turn, and you'll have a better time of it if you invest yourselves in the events and in the other characters.

Third, play is *systemless* as long as no one uses mechanics, and in this context that has a quite specific meaning. It means that Merlin decides what happens, and if there are multiple believable potential outcomes of a situation, Merlin will always choose that which points towards Merlin's prophecy.

Mechanics: There are two mechanics, moves and the prophecy. First explain the prophecy mechanic and then the moves.

Of the moves, you each have one to start with, and access to a shadow move that you can acquire in play by making the required sacrifice. The moves consist of two important parts, a *requirement* which must be met in the fiction before you're allowed to roll dice and a *menu of three items*, of which you can choose two if you roll 3-10 on a d10.

The first item on the menu is always the obvious main purpose.

The second item is always something bad that DOESN'T happen if you pick the second item, i. e. you avoid misfortune with item two.

The third item in most moves, and in all starting moves, is that you can influence an NPC permanently with the move's agenda.

Now ask everyone to read page 3 of their characters, focussing on the starting move and on the sacrifice for acquiring the shadow move. Tell them not to worry too much about the details right now, as they'll each get a prologue scene to get to know their starting move, and then give them a couple of minutes to read. Ask them to signal when they're done, and interrupt and drive on the proceedings if someone spends lots of time deeply reading their shadow moves.

Drum 1

Run Drum 1 off the play aid (p. 27). This is where you start producing fiction, and you establish the Elves as a threat.

Prologue scenes 0-4

Run the prologue scenes off the scene catalogue for the prologue, pp. 34-37. In these, you can be a little helpful in pointing out the obvious possibility for using a move without forcing them, and you can help them meet their requirements. There's a Merlin's overview of moves, so you can follow easily (p. 47).

First act

Played with the scene catalogue for the first act as support, pp. 38-42. Do use the overview of scenes on p. 38 for yourself.

Start out by asking the players what they do, taking as point of departure what happened in the prologue scenes. Ensure them that the ladies are NOT stuck at home in the castle – they can go with a male character, or grab one of House Arwyr's NPC knights as escort and ride off if they like.

If you need something to happen that's not in the scene catalogue, or if the scenes need a hard twist to make sense in relation to how the game unfolds, go right ahead. There's a risk that play might be a little hesitant early in the first act, so if the players do not of their own accord do drastic things that change the situation in the first two main scenes or so, you should challenge them as hard as you can with the consequences of scenes already played in the prologue

or first act. The scene *Lord Esk woos Lady Ginevel* (1D) serves the purpose well. Remember to rotate the spotlight, and if a player hesitates or sits out for a long time, you can set family scenes with them or you can let NPCs try to involve them in schemes. If such a scene doesn't seem meaningful, or if you really feel like rocking the boat, you can use the scene *An enchanting visit* (1E), where Morgan le Fay directly tries to recruit or activate a player character in dreams.

The first act ends when at least one of the following three things has happened:

The conflict between the players breaks out into the open, and they're forced to talk (or at worst fight) directly about the problems.

A player changes side. In concrete terms, this means that someone brings the sacrifice and gains access to their shadow move.

Time passes. When there's about two hours left of the timeslot, you should in any case move to the second act.

When this happens, after the current scene you should do Drum 2 and then the second act. Note that the length of the first act can vary quite a lot, and that's OK. Before Drum 2 might be a good time for a break, if needed.

Drum 2

You mark the transition to the second act with Drum 2, which you run off the play aid (p. 28). It shows the menace of Kriemhild's imminent invasion.

Second act

In the scene catalogue for the second act (pp. 43-45) the scenes are a little more drastic and stakes are higher than in the first act – several of them are extreme versions of the scenes from the first act. You might want to use the overview on p. 43.

In the second act it must be clear that they're running out of time, as Kriemhild is coming. The NPCs act more drastically, as they know it too. Seek inspiration in the scene catalogue for the second act, but don't let it constrain you if it isn't what you need. The scene *An enchanting visit* (1E) from the first act can still be used to prod people, and in general you're welcome to use the first act scene catalogue – just remember to escalate.

The second act ends when the drama is resolved, and we can see how the family relations and the political struggle will fall out, or when you're running out of time. About 45 minutes before the timeslot ends, you should in any case start rounding off. End the current scene, and if they have concrete intrigues unsettled which are decided by how a player character feels, these things need to be resolved quickly. Then you go to Drum 3 and the epilogue.

To run Drum 3 you must decide for yourself the outcome of the game. Have they built an alliance capable of stopping Kriemhild, and do the Elves have enough support to seize power?

Can they stop Kriemhild? Count how many Houses commit their full forces to stopping the invasion. Count a House as half if they hold back forces or if they're already damaged by serious fighting with another House. If the British resistance numbers less than three Houses, Kriemhild wins a clear victory and her horde seizes

Southeastern Britain. If just one House sides directly with Kriemhild in the battle, she wins. If the Britons can muster more than three Houses, they crush Kriemhild's Saxons with an army that reminds older people of King Arthur's day. House Horsa will side with Kriemhild if they haven't been actively and convincingly recruited for the alliance (or wiped out). House Hengist might side with Kriemhild if their royal ambitions have been humiliated.

Do the Elves seize power? If Morgan le Fay has power over or support from important people in all four Houses, the Elves will seize power in the dead of night. Even if Kriemhild has won the battle, the new Saxons cannot withstand the Elves without civilized laws. You can decide on your intuition alone, or you can see if in each of the other three Houses there's at least one named NPC who is marked by an Elf move and not by a coexistence move, and if there's at least one player character who can answer yes to the question, "if Morgan le Fay came to the Castle Arwyr with her retinue at night, would you open the gates to her?"

Drum 3

Unsurprisingly, you run Drum 3 off the play aid on p. 29, and use what you've decided at the end of act two. Here, Kriemhild's landing is portrayed, the intrigues and position of the Elves, and the decisive battle against Kriemhild.

Epilogue

As Merlin, this is where you pass judgment on whether the players have succeeded in escaping your predictions. Say clearly if Kriemhild is stopped, if Morgan le Fay is stopped and if Lord Esk becomes King as he so desires (if he isn't mad or has reason to hate and murder everyone, he'll make a decent King). If Isoré has kept her secret all the way through the game, you can ask her if she takes to her grave the secret of who is Ginevel's blood father.

If the prophecy is in force, you say so and tell them that their personal prophecies come true each and every one. If they're free of the prophecy, the players get to tell a bit about how things turn out for them. Do they fall with glory in the decisive battle? Or what else happens? The overall framework must hold, and if the Elves seize power, those are the conditions. Don't fall into lengthy storytelling, just let each player say one or two things.

FINIS

If it seems relevant, you can conduct a brief debriefing. For instance there may have been strong conflicts between the players, or you may sense a need for talking about the game that isn't better satisfied by telling war stories in the bar.

First take a round where you each briefly state how you're feeling right now, without anyone interrupting or arguing. Say that it is OK to not feel all that much, and it is also OK to feel a lot of strange feelings. Start out yourself.

Then do a short conversation about the game. Make sure that everyone gets a turn, possibly by prompting with questions. Then round off and say thank you for the game.



Merlin's run-through

Here's an overview of the course of the game that you can use for basic support along the way.

History (preferably told in advance, see p. 25)

Welcome

Introduction to the drumming exercises (Drum 0, see p. 26)

Introduction to the setting (Peoples, see p. 30)

Casting, reading and break (casting sheet for the players p. 31)
...read pp. 1 and 2 of the characters, combine with a break.

Name game ...like a conversation, you only say character names.

Introduction to the four Houses (Pedigrees pp. 32 and 33, Merlin's NPCs p. 48)

Style of play and introduction to the mechanics ...the players get p. 3 of their characters (your overview of moves is p. 47)

Drum 1 (see p. 27)

Prologue scenes (scene catalogue is pp. 34-37) ...play closely off the scene catalogue.

First act (scene catalogue is pp. 37-42) ...play off the consequences of the prologue scenes. If the first act hasn't been very short, a break right after can be good.

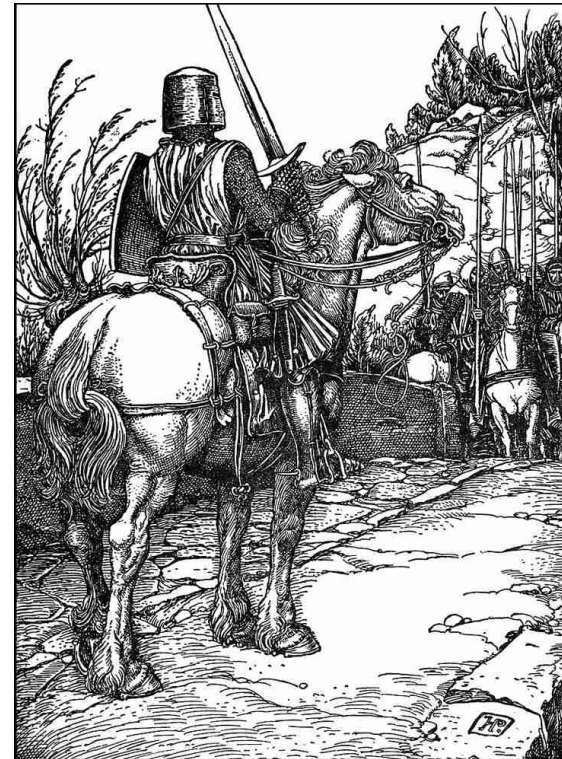
Drum 2 ...no later than two hours before the end of the timeslot (see p. 28)

Second act (scene catalogue is pp. 43-45) ...you can still use scenes from the first act, but with more pressure. Decide the final result before starting Drum 3.

Drum 3 (see p. 29)

Epilogue ...do the prophecies come true? If not, then what?

Debrief as needed.



History – for everyone

Preferably served up before play starts.

Long ago, the cruel Elves ruled over the Britons with wonderful and terrifying illusions and sorcery. Then the Romans came over the Channel from the south and drove the Elves back into the Hollow Hills with iron and human laws, and by exploiting that the Elves cannot stand the light of the Sun. Most Britons were happy, but a few secretly missed the wonders of the Elves. Many years later, about 100 years ago, the Romans were weakened and left Britain again.

The now civilized Britons fell into strife with each other and with the Franks to the south and the Picts to the north. Beyond the North Sea, the Saxons heard that a rich land lay poorly defended, and flocked to Britain. The leaders of the Saxon horde were the brothers **Hengist** and **Horsa**. First, the Saxons came as mercenaries of the Briton lords, then as settlers and finally as conquerors.

The prophet **Merlin** elevated the young squire **Arthur** to be King of the Britons. Together they united the Britons and made an alliance with the Elves. The representative of the Elves at the court of Camelot was Arthur's half sister, the sorceress **Morgan le Fay**. Some say that she was a changeling, an Elf child laid in the crib instead of a stolen human baby, some that she sacrificed her soul and her mortality in a magical fire for power. Certainly, she is now the Queen of the Elves. With magical help, Arthur united the Britons and drove back the Saxons, and did many glorious deeds with his knights of the Round Table. The Saxon lord Horsa fell in

battle against Arthur, while Hengist made peace and settled in the southeast corner of the country. Hengist's son **Octa** became lord after the death of Hengist. Hengist and Horsa's descendants are still the leaders of the British Saxons.

However, the Elves still played cruel games with high and low alike, and when he was secure on the throne, Arthur broke the alliance. He ruled gloriously for many years, but the Elves plotted revenge. A sorceress seduced the prophet Merlin and imprisoned him in a holly tree. The knighthood was divided and weakened by questing for the Holy Grail, and by jealousy at court. In the end, the Elves struck through **Mordred**, Arthur's bastard son. A terrible civil war broke out, and Arthur and Mordred wounded each other mortally in the final battle. This is twenty years ago now.

After the fall of Arthur, the Saxons in Britain saw a chance to defeat their British neighbours, and it came to several years of strife. **Lord Ambrose Arwyr** put a stop to this by capturing the Saxon leader Octa, and after a year of captivity exchange him for one of his sons as hostage and foster son.

Britons and Saxons live side by side in Britain, but not easily, now that the Britons are divided and weakened. And in Saxony, beyond the North Sea, **Queen Kriemhild** is mustering a mighty horde which is soon to cross the sea and end the Britons' dreams of freedom and greatness once and for all.

From his captivity, Merlin has foretold that the Britons and the British Saxons will try to unite against Kriemhild, but they'll fall into strife and weaken each other, so that Kriemhild will be able to take Britain with hardly a sword raised. As an apparition, Merlin has appeared to some people and told darkly of the future.

Drum 0 – Merlin

Drumming on the table is an exercise in togetherness and immersion, specifically directed at the table in tabletop roleplay. This is a fiction free exercise, but it fosters togetherness and helps you master the form. Read out the following, or say something close to it. [*Stage notes.*]

1. Sit at ease in your chairs by the table with the tips of your index fingers on the edge of the table, then close your eyes and focus on the sound of my voice.
2. [*Low voice.*] You can open your eyes when I slap the table to signal the end. The exercise will help you focus both on the story and on each other, and in later versions of the exercise, you'll be asked to imagine things. When I start humming quietly, you should do the same. You can take little breaks from the humming to breathe.
3. [*Hum quietly and evenly for a few seconds to get them going. Speak in a clear voice and medium volume.*] You must listen to the sound of your voice and understand your words. In a moment, I'll start you drumming on the edge of the table with two fingers. You must keep humming. Once you're going strong, you'll talk some more, and they shouldn't drum and hum so much that they can't hear you.

4. [*Start drumming on the edge of the table to start them drumming. Now you must speak very loud and clear. Discreetly instruct as needed – some people don't keep their eyes closed, and this isn't something you should enforce, but ask them to hum and drum if they fall out.*] Now that you're all humming and drumming, listen to the sound of my voice and check if you can understand my words. In a moment we'll be done, and you can open your eyes again.
5. [*Slap your palm on the table to make a loud smack. This ends the exercise.*]

Afterwards check with the players if they could hear you clearly all the way through. If you yourself found it difficult to keep track of the text while you drummed, in the future just start the players off, and then hold the text with your hands.

Drum 1 – Merlin

This drumming exercise starts the fiction of the game with powerful images of the sea and the Hollow Hills, and how the elves are both wonderful and awful. You don't have to use the exact words, but the images are important. [*Stage notes.*]

1. Sit at ease in your chairs by the table with the tips of your index fingers on the edge of the table, then close your eyes and focus on the sound of my voice. Start humming and drumming on my cues.
2. [*Low voice.*] You're flying over the sea in the evening sun. The sea glitters beneath you like silver and gold. On the horizon you can make out the red and white sails of a couple of Saxon ships. Then you turn your gaze towards the coast of Britain and fly over the white cliffs and the green hills dotted with little white sheep. You fly over little villages and over proud castles. Some of the castles are in ruins, while banners fly over others.
3. [*Hum quietly and evenly for a few seconds to get them going. Speak in a clear voice and medium volume.*] You look across enormous, wild forests where you can meet both deer, boar, wolves and bears. Then you dive beneath the treetops into the gathering dusk, as night is falling. A couple of common, British peasant girls are out a bit late gathering mushrooms.
4. You leave the forest and come to a great, grass-clad hill in the last rays of the evening sun. As the rays of the sun disappear and the side of the hill falls into shadow, suddenly you can see an entrance that wasn't there before, and a cool, blue light spills out. The gateway is arched, and the arch is human skulls. The way leading out of the hill is paved with thighbones.
5. [*Start drumming on the edge of the table to start them drumming. Now you must speak very loudly, without shouting.*] Out of the gate comes a procession of Elves riding on spirited horses. They're divinely beautiful men and women in fine garments, cheerful, all bearing a torch in one hand. As they ride into the darkness under the trees, you can see that one side of their beautiful, laughing faces is lit up with the glow of the torches, but the other side, which should be in darkness, shines as if with the light of the moon above the treetops.
6. The elves are hunting. The two peasant girls are out too late, and they try to run, but the Elves surround them in the dark forest. One girl throws herself facedown in terror, but the other defiantly raises a small iron knife against the elves, who shy back from it, hissing. But their Queen, with hair like the star-strewn night sky, makes a gesture of command and the girl drops the suddenly red-hot knife. And then the Elves fall on them.
7. [*Slap your palm on the table.*]

Drum 2 – Merlin

This drumming exercise marks the transition to the more hectic second act, and shows that Kriemhild's Saxon army is coming. The precise words are not important, but the images are. *[Stage notes.]*

1. Sit at ease in your chairs by the table with the tips of your index fingers on the edge of the table, then close your eyes and focus on the sound of my voice. Start humming and drumming on my cues.
2. *[Low voice.]* In the early, misty dawn you're hovering over one of the Hollow Hills, from which sounds are coming of enchanting musical notes and distant laughter, but the sounds fade as the rays of the sun hit the green grass. From here you fly high above the wild woods, past the slender towers and stout walls of Castle Arwyr, until in the distance, you can see the sea glittering in the morning sun.
3. *[Hum quietly and evenly for a few seconds to get them going. Speak in a clear voice and medium volume.]* You see a village, from which the peasants are fleeing into the green hills while Saxon robber knights under the banner of House Horsa are emptying the cattle enclosure, and flames are licking one of the thatched roofs.
4. Then you fly out over the white cliffs of the coast. A couple of ships with red and white sails are riding the sun-glittering waves, scouting. And then you fly fast over the waves, towards Saxony beyond the North Sea.
5. *[Start drumming on the edge of the table to start them drumming. Now you must speak very loudly, without shouting.]* Under the midday sun you approach the green coast of Saxony, and on the beach the building of a mighty fleet is almost done, over a hundred ships. Whole pigs are roasting on spits over big fires, and the cabbage is bubbling in great cauldrons to feed the enormous Saxon army.
6. A hush goes through the camp as Queen Kriemhild arrives with her bodyguard to inspect the preparations. The sun flashes in rubies and emeralds on her belt buckle, and in the great, cruel axe heads of her fur-clad bodyguards.
7. *[Slap your palm on the table.]*

Drum 3 – Merlin

In this drumming exercise you reveal the final outcome of the game, so you must have decided how things go with both Kriemhild's invasion and the plans of Morgan le Fay. This time you will have to improvise a good deal of the speech based on the events in play. [Stage notes.]

1. Sit at ease in your chairs by the table with the tips of your index fingers on the edge of the table, then close your eyes and focus on the sound of my voice. Start humming and drumming on my cues.
2. [*Low voice.*] It is afternoon, and you're hovering over the coast, looking out over a sea showing white teeth under tattered, grey clouds. From the sea comes Kriemhild's great fleet under red and white sails. They go ashore on a beach, and the Saxon army marches inland. As darkness falls, flames spring up from a couple of British villages that unwillingly feed the invaders.
3. [*Hum quietly and evenly for a few seconds to get them going. Speak in a clear voice and medium volume.*] Light shines into the night from a Hollow Hill in the southern downs. [*Now describe the named NPCs who are under Morgan le Fay's power and hers alone, and what they're doing on this night. Indicate whether the power of the Elves is great and perilous, or whether they are too weak to seize the country.*]
4. As the sun rises, the Saxon army starts moving further inland like an unstoppable wave, but in the green hills they soon find themselves face to face with a British army.

5. [*Start drumming on the edge of the table to start them drumming. Now you must speak very loudly, without shouting. Briefly describe the British army based on what Houses have joined, if it is mighty or a hopeless attempt. Say whether Britons and British Saxons have united or not.*]
6. The earth trembles as the two armies collide, and a wedge of the bravest knights of Britain crash into the Saxon shield wall. [*If any House betrays and backstabs the Britons, tell of it now.*]
7. [*If the Britons lose:*] The knights are surrounded by the horde and their horses killed under them by Saxon spears. A small handful of heroes fight their way on foot almost to Kriemhild's banner before they fall under the great axes of her bodyguard.
8. [*If the Britons win:*] The knights fight their way to Kriemhild's banner. A desperate and bloody struggle ensues as Saxons and Britons fight heroically and with murderous rage, before the banner first wavers and then falls.
9. [*Slap your palm on the table.*]

Peoples – for the players

Britons value grace, restraint, tasteful finery, wine, the virtue of ladies and the honour of knights. Some Britons admire the Saxons' lust for life. British women are not warriors. Think French/Norman 12th Century court culture.

They bear names such as Elad, Merin, Olwen and Valhaut.

Saxons value strength, glory, fun, mead and impressive belt buckles. Some Saxon's admire the beauty of the Britons. Particularly strong and aggressive Saxon women can be warriors. Think fantasy Vikings rather than historical Anglo-Saxons.

They bear names such as Coelred, Ortheld, Raedburh and Wolfreid.

The Elves cannot tolerate iron and sunlight and live hidden in the Hollow Hills. They cloak themselves in illusions and appear as wondrously beautiful and noble folk. The Elves are manipulative and cruel, and because of their weaknesses typically act through human agents.

Morgan le Fay is their queen. Perhaps she was once human.



Casting – for the players

Lord Ambrose, father

Lord Ambrose is a large, old knight of about 50 years, strong and with the years quite fat. His hair is greying, his face is ruddy and his laughter is friendly and infectuous.

Play Ambrose if you want to fight a desperate rearguard struggle for compromise and common sense.

Lady Isoré, mother

Lady Isoré is a tall, stately British lady in her late forties, with grey-streaked hair and a serious face.

Play Isoré if you want to be tormented by guilt and impossible ideals.

Lady Ginevel, daughter

Lady Ginevel is a young lady of 17 years, tall and severe, famous for her very long, night-black hair and her bright blue eyes.

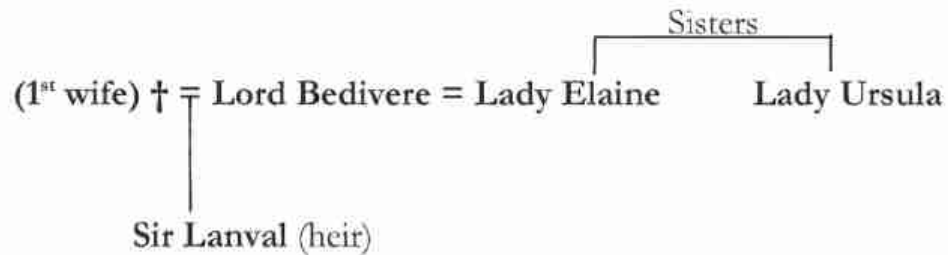
Play Ginevel if you want to be aggressively ladylike and passionately idealistic.

Sir Hengist the Younger, foster son

Hengist is a slender, athletic young man of 19 years with beautiful blue eyes and a charming smile. His pale blond hair clearly shows him to be Saxon, his clean-shaven face and dignified manner clearly show him to be Briton.

Play Hengist if you want to be desperately in love with a culture that doesn't really love you back.

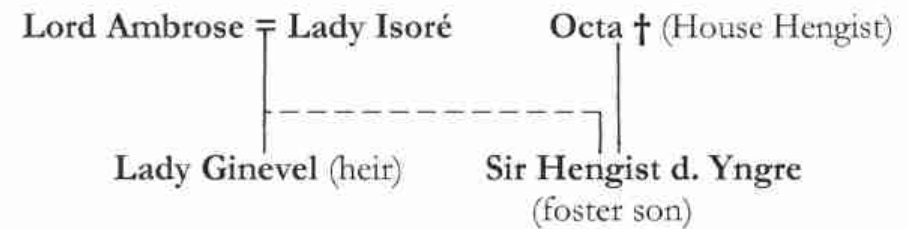
House Bedrydant



(Sir Aglomar, knight)

Britons, proud & stubborn traditionalists

House Arwyr



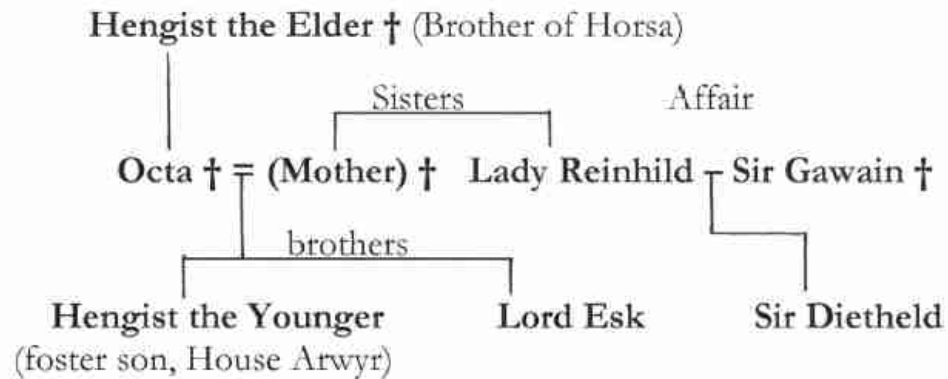
(Sir Aeron, knight)

(Sir Burcan, knight)

(Servants Ceinwen, Dilys, Ethaine)

Britons, pragmatic survivors

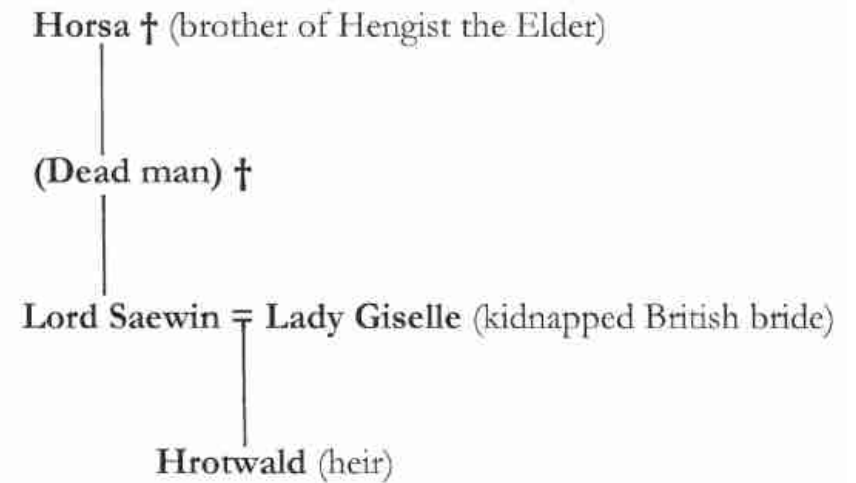
House Hengist



(Sir Oswulf, knight)

British Saxons, glory-seeking and ambitious, fond of British culture

House Horsa



Sir Adelheid (knight)

(Sir Goswin, knight)

British Saxons, robber barons, believe in Saxon traditions

Scene catalogue: Prologue

The scenes of the prologue are a sequence to be played in order. The prologue scenes are more specific and detailed than those for the acts. If a knight is dead, use a replacement from the House, or make one up.

Scene 0: The prophecies of Merlin

Where: A tower room in the Castle Arwyr, with a large fireplace there the family are sitting together on a stormy spring evening.

Who: *All the player characters*, Merlin

What: Merlin appears and prophecises, both generally and for each of them in turn. Then they get a moment to react.

Suddenly a scary swarm of big, black birds burst out of the fireplace and gather into a black-clad old man with a long, white beard. It is the mad prophet and enchanter Merlin! (feel free to use your own words, and more of them, in the following) From his magical prison, he can see with his prophetic gift, and what he sees is the terrible Saxon Queen Kriemhild's imminent invasion of the British Isles. Britons and British Saxons will try to get along and unite, but they will fall into strife and spill each other's blood, and Kriemhild will be able to take Britain hardly raising a sword...

But there might be hope. He can see the family of Arwyr, as he has dark prophecies about them, but he also senses in them the strength to break out of his dark visions. Then he tells them their fates:

Ambrose will surrender to Kriemhild to spare his people, and she will let her dogs rend him for the amusement of her men.

Isoré will lead refugees from the violence of the Saxons into the woods where she will die of cold and hunger when winter comes.

Hengist will get an ally's spear in the back in the decisive battle and die a week later in terrible pain, discarded like garbage by the victors.

Ginevel will die giving birth to her third child by a Saxon conqueror.

And then Merlin explodes into birds that fly into the fireplace. Give the players a moment to react before you cut.

Consequences: The game's afoot...

Prolog 1: The bridge – intro to House Horsa

Where: An old Roman stone bridge over a river on the outskirts of House Arwyr's territory. It is a grey and windy day.

Who: *Lord Ambrose*, Sir Adelheid (here as a robber knight). Briefly tell of House Horsa, ruled by the pragmatic scoundrel Lord Saewin.

What: Lord Ambrose (with a nameless retinue) is on his way home to Arwyr, but as he's about to cross the bridge he runs into Sir Adelheid and a handful of warriors coming the other way, heading out of Arwyr's territory. They're bringing along a herd of obviously stolen cattle as well as a weeping, British teenage boy with a rope around his neck. Sir Adelheid asks Lord Ambrose nicely to get off the bridge so she can bring home her spoils.

It'll probably come to a confrontation in which Ambrose uses *The Sword of Compromise*. If he needs prodding, you can have the captive boy look imploringly at him. Perhaps the player will need help meeting the requirements of their move – after all it is the first use of a move in the game.

If Ambrose fails, she defeats, wounds and humiliates him, but she neither kills nor maims him. If Ambrose makes the roll but doesn't kill her, she tries to bargain – they can split the cattle, he gets the boy. She tries to weasel her way out with bonhomie (being cunning).

Consequences: If Ambrose loses, House Horsa will be quite aggressive, disrespecting Arwyr. If Ambrose kills Adelheid, Lord Saewin will respect his personal strength but seek revenge. If Ambrose teaches Adelheid to value coexistence, she won't have her entire House with her, but she'll consider Ambrose a friend – and that might come in useful.

Prologue 2: The joust – intro to House Bedrydant

Where: The joust takes place on a green field near Castle Bedrydant, with common folk having a party and a stand for the finer audience. It is bright sunshine. Perhaps the last tournament before the war?

Who: *Lady Ginevel*, Lady Ursula, Sir Lanval, Sir Dietheld. Briefly tell of House Bedrydant under Lord Bedivere and Lady Elaine.

What: Lady Ginevel and Lady Ursula sit in the stand waiting for the next joust, which is to be between the British Sir Lanval of House Bedrydant and the Saxon Sir Dietheld of House Hengist, in which Dietheld is the overwhelming favourite. Ursula complains about the

terribly unequal fight, and Ginevel easily has time to offer Lanval a drink of water or wine from a cup before the fight begins...

Lady Ursula, younger sister of the Lady Elaine of House Bedrydant, is young, pretty, gentle and fearful of a future without room for people like her and her kinsman Lanval (heir to Bedrydant), who is a fine poet but not the strongest knight, and who is still troubled by a sickness from last winter. She also willingly includes Ginevel in the circle of beautiful Britons who will become prey to thugs. Thugs like Sir Dietheld, who might be half British and a bastard son of the renowned Sir Gawain, but it is still terrible to think how he'll crush and humiliate the poor Sir Lanval, who enters out of duty and to live up to his famous father Lord Bedivere, who was a knight of the Round Table.

If Ginevel fails, Sir Lanval drops his helmet just before the joust and loudly recites poetry as if he were drunk. Everyone is quite confused, Sir Dietheld unhorses him with a gentle prod at low speed. Sir Lanval is humiliated, and the talk in the stand is that it is either madness, Lord Bedivere's blood being thin and the House weak, or it was black arts at work. Who knows if the Lady Ginevel bewitched him for the sake of the handsome Saxon Sir Dietheld?

Consequences: Does Lanval lose? A minor scandal for Bedrydant, a personal humiliation for Lanval and a cloud of suspicion over Ginevel. If Ginevel gives Lanval the strength to defeat Dietheld, it is sensational! And Lanval falls in love with Ginevel. If rumours of sorcery come out of it, Sir Dietheld (and his mother Reinhild) are bitter and want revenge on both Lanval and Ginevel. If Morgan le Fay gains power over Lanval's dreams, he'll try to use his newfound strength for the downfall of the Saxons.

Prologue 3: The hunt – intro to consequences

Where: In the great, wild forest, one sunny day.

Who: *Sir Hengist*, Sir Lanval, Lady Giselle, Sir Adelheid. Call attention to consequences – how has *The bridge* affected Adelheid & House Horsa, how has *The joust* affected Sir Lanval? Lady Giselle was once a young, British noble lady whom Lord Saewin seized and married to claim her family's lands. Now she's borne his heir Hrotwald and served as the Lady of the House for fifteen years, so she's given up the Britishness that failed to protect her and is now more Saxon than the Saxons. Her dress is a little rough, but her belt buckle flashes with gold.

What: Sir Hengist and Sir Lanval are out hunting – by Lord Ambrose's request, to maintain the friendship between the houses of Arwyr and Bedrydant. In the forest they run into Lady Giselle and Sir Adelheid of House Horsa, and Lanval and Giselle get into a fight that threatens to become open strife ...unless Sir Hengist can pour oil on the troubled waters with his move *My name is Hengist*.

In a clearing in the woods, Hengist and Lanval see a couple of pavilions, fur-trimmed in the Saxon style, as well as Sir Adelheid of House Horsa leaping into the saddle to be ready for combat. Lady Giselle comes out of the camp and offers them mead and bread, hospitably if a little stiffly.

In the course of the conversation that follows, Sir Lanval and Lady Giselle start fighting, and soon words fly that are so hard that they lead to a challenge to single combat, with Sir Adelheid as Lady Giselle's champion. As the argument is here a conversation of Merlin with himself, you should escalate fast. You can refer to earlier

events, and if you feel like having Lanval be a bit extreme, you can have him offer to free Giselle from her kidnappers – and call her a robber baron's whore when she refuses and calls him equally bad names.

It should be quite obvious that Sir Hengist can stop the disaster with his move, and you can point this out and help, but he's free to do as he likes and live with the consequences.

Consequences: Adelheid is a strong warrior, so if Hengist doesn't do something she'll kill Lanval (or beat and defeat him if she's influenced by coexistence). If Lanval and Hengist dishonourably gang up on her, they can beat her. The results of failure depend both on Hengist's choices and on the agendas of the NPCs. Note well who he makes peace between and if someone considers him a traitor to their people. If he "only" makes peace, Giselle and Lanval will still hate each other and want to hurt each other directly or indirectly as soon as they can.

Prologue 4: Dowry – intro to House Hengist

Where: Castle Arwyr, one gray and quietly rainy day.

Who: *Lady Isoré*, Lady Reinhild. Reinhild is mother's sister to Sir Hengist and Lord Esk of House Hengist, and mother of Sir Dietheld whom we saw in *The joust*. Briefly tell of House Hengist, ruled by the ambitious, young Lord Esk.

What: One day when Ambrose, Hengist and Ginevel are out riding, Lady Reinhild comes visiting the Castle Arwyr with her retinue to discuss marriage between Esk and Ginevel. She considers the marriage as such obvious and a done deal, and really mostly wants to discuss the size of the dowry. Lady Isoré is at home and as the Lady of the House she's in a position to receive guests and discuss such matters – but Isoré knows that Ambrose comes home in just an hour or two!

It would be disastrously rude to send Reinhild away in the rain, and if Isoré tries to call off the marriage on behalf of her husband and daughter, Reinhild will be suspicious and demand to speak with Lord Ambrose. All in all, things are looking grim for Lady Isoré's plans if she doesn't do something drastic to make Lady Reinhild go away in some way that doesn't make Isoré lose face completely...

Serious discussions can be had by the fire in the great hall, but Isoré could also invite Reinhild to talk in a tower chamber, where they would only have a single maid along each.

Consequences: Whatever happens, servants will tell Lord Ambrose about drastic events – if they can remember them. If Isoré doesn't use *The Thrice Blasted Wand*, she probably can't stop Reinhild and

Ambrose from making a deal. If she tries and fails, Reinhild will react very strongly, possibly violently. She will then probably storm out into the rain and tell Esk that House Arwyr are terrible sorcerers who lie and disrespect the sanctity of hospitality. This will leave Ambrose and Hengist with a terrible political mess, and Lady Isoré with more than a little explaining to do.

If Isoré transforms Reinhild, she flies away, and if Reinhild is driven mad, she flees screaming into the woods. In both cases her retinue leave in great haste, and eventually she'll make her way home, quite confused. If Isoré erases the memory of witnesses, there might be rumours of Elf sorcery, but they won't implicate House Arwyr. If Isoré strikes Reinhild with awe (and marks her with the power of the Elves), it'll make it possible to manipulate her with well-chosen words – and then, it depends on the words spoken. Lord Esk himself, however, won't be inclined to give up on the marriage, as it represents his best way to the throne of Britain, whatever Reinhild says.

Scene catalogue: First act

Now, the scenes need no longer be played in order, and you're welcome to improvise and adapt them, or simply make things up if it makes more sense. They're aids more than constraints. Remember, follow up on the players' initiatives and the consequences of their actions. Scenes can be reused, but of course subsequent events must be taken into account. If a knight is dead, use a replacement from the House, or make one up.

1A: At House Bedrydant (where Britishness is supreme)

1B: At House Hengist (in which political pressure is applied)

1C: At House Horsa (which is menacing)

1D: Lord Esk woos Lady Ginevel (if a challenge is called for)

1E: An enchanting visit (Morgan le Fay)

1F: A poet in love (Sir Lanval)

1G: Trial by combat (if differences must be settled sword in hand)

1H: The village (briefly on the work of robber knights)

1I: The family council (in which we might see the cards laid out on the table)

1A: At House Bedrydant

Where: Castle Bedrydant – fine, old, not that large. A village is sheltering at its foot. The weather matches your mood.

Who: *Visiting player characters*, Lady Elaine (visibly pregnant), Lord Bedivere, Lady Ursula, Sir Lanval. Who are marked by agendas? Who have reason for gratitude or anger? Remember both *The joust* and *The hunt* from the prologue.

What: House Bedrydant are polite hosts, carefully emphasizing the friendship between Arwyr and Bedrydant. Lady Elaine is clearly in charge and seeks military support against House Horsa, Lord Bedivere expresses bitter mistrust of Lord Esk and his desire to step into Arthur's shoes. Lady Ursula asks about Ginevel if she isn't there, or seeks connection if she is. What does Sir Lanval do?

Based on these things they react to whatever the player characters' errand is. Though they're disinclined to support coexistence, they don't trust Elves and magic either. Lady Elaine can be reasoned with, if it really IS undeniably rational.

Consequences: Does anyone come into conflict? Is anyone recruited for an agenda?

1B: At House Hengist

Where: Castle Hengist, a couple of crenellated towers from an old, British castle, from which mighty earthworks with palisades have been built. It is raining, unless you disagree.

Who: *Visiting player characters*, Lord Esk, Esk and Hengist's aunt the Lady Reinhild, Sir Dietheld. Who are marked by agendas? Who have reasons for gratitude or anger? Did rumours of sorcery come out of *The Joust* in the prologue? What bout *Downry*? Esk is richly and tastefully dressed, AND his belt buckle is quite impressive. Play Lord Esk as a strong ruler and an intense person.

What: Reinhild is probably scared and angry, and Esk is very impatient to have clarity regarding alliance and marriage. If the guest is Hengist they'll be fairly forthright and assume that he's one of theirs, in a way that piles on a lot of pressure. If there are other guests, House Hengist is impressively hospitable in quite British style, with sumptuous dry clothes and fine, French wine. If the visitors support Esk in his ambitions and marital plans without pressing him too hard for promises, he's generous and helpful, and speaks of making Ginevel Queen. If they're vague or hesitant, he says how unfortunate it would be if he were to be forced to try to get along with the Saxon Queen Kriemhild. Think iron fist in velvet glove. However, even if things go moderately wrong, hell let guests leave, as he's not without honour.

Consequences: Esk wants concrete promises and action in the near future, and he's dangerous if he's thwarted. Does anyone come into conflict? Is anyone recruited for an agenda?

1C: At House Horsa

Where: Castle Horsa, a single tower from an old British castle and a great fortress of earthworks and palisades. There's a tent camp and houses being built outside. The weather is just the opposite of your mood.

Who: *Visiting player characters*, Lord Saewin, Lady Giselle, Sir Adelheid. Who are marked by agendas? Who have reasons for gratitude or anger? What happened in *The bridge* and *The hunt*? Lord Saewin's belt buckle is the jewelled clasp of one of the royal court chronicles of Camelot.

What: The guests are received with bread and mead in great, gem-studded cups, and an intimidating display of the strength and ferocity of the Saxon warriors. Lord Saewin is willing to talk, but wants to act from a position of Saxon strength and its contrast in British weakness. He'll try to wave off House Horsa's raids against the territories of Arwyr and Bedrydant as details of little significance.

Consequences: For now, Saewin respects the rules of hospitality, but he's hard to get concessions from without either pressure from House Hengist or proof of House Arwyr's strength. He values flattery but is unlikely to let himself be manipulated. It might help a bit if Lady Giselle has been won for coexistence and the players draw on her. The players will be able to walk away from conflicts of more or less polite words, but if they openly insult or attack Saewin, they'll be thrown in a dungeon or killed. Is anyone recruited for an agenda?

1D: Lord Esk woos Lady Ginevel

This scene is mostly relevant if the marriage negotiations are thrown into chaos in the prologue scene Dowry, and the players then fail to follow up on it.

Where: Castle Arwyr. It is a beautifully bright but windy day.

Who: *One or more player characters who are at home*, Lord Esk, Sir Dietheld. Play Lord Esk as a strong ruler and an intense person. He's richly and tastefully dressed, AND his belt buckle is quite impressive. What has Lady Reinhild said to them?

What: Lord Esk turns up with a numerous and richly equipped retinue. It would be extremely rude to be so suspicious as to not let him in, but his retinue is strong enough that he might be able to take the castle if he's let in.

He's come to ask for Lady Ginevel's hand in marriage, with a combination of whirlwind courtship, promises to make her the Queen of Britain and massive political and personal pressure. Among other things, he'll be able to pressure House Horsa into behaving. If *Dowry* went really wrong, he'll find excuses not to be alone with (or close to) Lady Isoré, and with Lady Ginevel he will insist, in the name of honour and modesty, that there be witnesses present – he'll have no problem accepting a drink from her hand, though.

Consequences: Open conflict with Lord Esk and House Hengist could have quite drastic consequences. Unless ONLY Sir Hengist is home, Esk will be hard to satisfy with words alone. Is anyone recruited for an agenda? Lord Esk would be quite a lot of trouble under the power of the Elves.

1E: An enchanting visit (Morgan le Fay)

EITHER if player characters seek out the Hollow Hills OR if Morgan le Fay visits someone in a dream. ANYONE can be a target of this. Morgan le Fay is immune to moves – she can be neither defeated nor influenced.

Where: By one of the Hollow Hills – to be found within an hour's ride and a half of Castle Arwyr, or anywhere people dream. It is a dark and magnificently starry night.

Who: *One dreaming player character, or as many as seek out a Hollow Hill, and Morgan le Fay.*

What: The gates of the Hill open and light shines out, and song and the sweet notes of the harp waft into the night. The gateway and the road out are made of human bones. Morgan le Fay emerges with a torch-bearing retinue of Elf knights clad in grand bronze armour.

If the player characters come to her, she answers what she thinks will best motivate them to follow her agenda, and she is no bad judge of character. In general she won't lie, but she might pick her words so they could be misunderstood as less terrible than they are. If she provokes a dream in a player character, it'll be to recruit them or win them back, and she will (again without *quite* lying) say what you as GM think will influence them most strongly to her advantage. If the player characters attack, she, the retinue and the gate will disappear with a flash and a crash, and her voice will curse them ...possibly with Merlin's dark prophecy for them.

Consequences: Whatever the players decide. But remember that they can't touch her.

1F: A poet in love (Sir Lanval)

If Lanval is alive and in love with Lady Ginevel.

Where: A place where Lady Ginevel is, and where it makes sense for Sir Lanval to seek her out. The weather is a thunderstorm.

Who: *Lady Ginevel*, Sir Lanval (here, a replacement probably doesn't make sense). Is he marked by an agenda?

What: Cunningly, perhaps even disguised as a wandering troubadour, Sir Lanval seeks out Lady Ginevel to declare his love and his intention to save Britain.

Here's a bit of poetry, you can put in his mouth:

*Had I the Heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue, the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet*

He's no renowned knight like his father Sir Bedivere, but with the strength that Ginevel gave him, he'll have heroic deeds in him. Together, they might have a chance to do something, or at least save the honour of the British people as they meet their doom. Do your best to play both his infatuation and his desire to do something as convincingly as possible.

Consequences: For Sir Lanval and for Lady Ginevel's inner life. Will they become allies?

(The poem is a part of W.B. Yeats' *He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*)

1G: Trial by combat

If two parties have irreconcilable differences, they can settle them in a trial by combat in front of witnesses. It can be player character vs. NPC, or player characters getting involved as witnesses to single combat between NPCs.

Where: A field of grass, either in front of one of the castles, or in front of a grassy hill. The weather matches your mood.

Who: The combatants, witnesses, agitated spectators. Who are marked by agendas? What are they fighting for, each of them? Is it honour and hurt feelings, or a more tangible prize?

What: The norms of civilized society have yet to break down, so it is possible to settle the conflict without a bloodbath between armies, which would make Kriemhild's victory certain. However, the conflict is worth spilling blood over, and not much would have to go wrong for open fighting to break out. Of course, the combat is settled systemlessly unless a player (or more than one) use mechanics.

Consequences: With a true and uncompromising heart, follow your agendas, and such mechanics as the players use.

1H: The village

If it seems like a fitting occasion to prod the players with Merlin's prophecy. Keep the scene brief.

Where: A humble British village, some place where one or more player characters pass by. A house is burning to the ground, and the livestock fold is empty. The weather is the precise opposite of your mood.

Who: *One or more player characters*, a peasant (who's named Owen if it is relevant, but you don't need to present him by name).

What: This morning, five or six hours ago, the village was attacked by Saxon robber knights. They stole the pigs and sheep, and they set fire to a house to press the villagers to hand over the animals that they'd driven into the forest. The robber knights are long gone. The villagers are aggrieved, but what can you do? If Sir Adelheid is alive and a player asks, she was the leader of the robber knights – whether or not she believes in coexistence, Lord Saewin still sends her out to plunder.

Consequences: Mostly for the attitude of the player characters. The situation of the peasants is what it is.

1I: The family council

When the whole family actually gathers to discuss important matters, there should be room for it. Set the scene based on the circumstances, and do ask the players where they are.

Make space, and keep an eye on whether the conflicts move into the open to a degree that sets off the second act.



Scene catalogue: Second act

You can still use the scene variants from the first act (especially, remember *An enchanting visit*), but remember that there should generally be more pressure in the second act – everyone knows that the end is nigh. If a knight is dead, use a replacement from the House or make one up.

2A: At House Bedrydant (where Arthur's memory is treasured)

2B: At House Hengist (where they demand submission)

2C: At House Horsa (where guests might turn into hostages)

2D: Ambush (a sidelined House might turn out to be a threat)

2E: Battle (in which Merlin is sadly likely to be proven right)

2F: The village (which has been plundered by Kriemhild's scouts)

2A: At House Bedrydant

Where: Castle Bedrydant – fine, old, not that large. A village is sheltering at its foot, and there's a camp of refugees from villages near the coast, who have fled the marauding scouts of Kriemhild's invasion. The weather is precisely the opposite of your mood.

Who: *Visiting player characters*, Lady Elaine (visibly pregnant), Lord Bedivere, Lady Ursula, Sir Lanval. Who are marked by agendas? Who have reasons for gratitude or anger?

What: Depends completely on what has happened until now, but nearly regardless of circumstances, Lady Elaine will be a polite hostess. She and Lord Bedivere demand of the player characters confirmation of their loyalty to Arthur's memory, and support for British supremacy over the saxons – unless Elaine is marked by the coexistence agenda. Ursula is in a state of anxiety and despair.

Consequences: As it makes sense, based on what happens.

2B: At House Hengist

Where: Castle Hengist, a couple of crenellated towers from an old, British castle, from which mighty earthworks with palisades have been built. The whole fortress is alive with preparations for war and there are both knights, soldiers and peasants with pointy sticks training for battle. The weather matches your mood.

Who: *Visiting player characters*, Lord Esk, Lady Reinhild, Sir Dietheld. Who are marked by agendas? Who have reasons for gratitude or anger? Esk is richly and tastefully dressed, AND his belt buckle is quite impressive. Play Lord Esk as a strong ruler and an intense person.

What: Pretty much no matter what else has happened, Esk will demand submission and support for his ambitions regarding the throne of Britain, if Arwyr aren't already clearly behind him.

Consequences: As it makes sense based on what happens, but do NOT let people use vague words to weasel their way out of declaring clearly for or against Esk as king – then he'll cut through the bullshit and demand a clear answer. Esk as potential king will be VERY different based on the agendas affecting him, but he'll go for the crown no matter what.

2C: At House Horsa

Where: Castle Horsa, a single tower from an old British castle and a great fortress of earthworks and palisades. There's a tent city outside with both refugees and captives, and the place is alive with preparations for war. It is overcast and the air is heavy with thunder soon to break.

Who: *Visiting player characters*, Lord Saewin, Lady Giselle, Sir Adelheid. Who are marked by agendas? Who have reasons for gratitude or anger? Lord Saewin's belt buckle is the jewelled clasp of one of the royal court chronicles of Camelot.

What: If Lord Saewin ISN'T marked by coexistence, he'll turn up when the player characters have been offered mead, but not yet bread, and ask if they've had bread. When he gets a no, he remarks that then he can take them prisoner without violating the customs of his ancestors, and orders his people to seize them. If he IS marked by coexistence, he's still a worried scoundrel trying to strengthen his position, but he does it by seeking rewards and guarantees out of his participation in the alliance against Kriemhild.

Consequences: As it makes sense based on what happens. Do NOT hold back!

2D: Ambush

Some miles from another House that one or more player characters have left, they're confronted by an armed force from a different House, with political demands or simply with violence.

If a House is truly, desperately pressed or sidelined, you can use this scene. The weather is splendid.

2E: Battle

Open warfare between two or more Houses.

Where: A grassy field surrounded by rolling hills and small stands of trees. In the distance, a steep, grass-clad hill stands tall. The weather is the precise opposite of your mood.

Who: The fighting armies, including all *player characters* who wish to be there. It is OK for ladies to look on (or scandalously take part). Who are marked by agendas? Why is the battle (nearly) inevitable?

What: The armies face each other, and there's only a moment to prevent a battle that most here are determined to fight. No matter the outcome, it'll be bloody. Skip logistical details – unless it is Sir Hengist trying to cunningly maneuver the enemy into taking up position on a hilltop after sundown. That's OK and should work if the plan isn't completely foolish.

Consequences: If it isn't stopped, this in reality means death for the resistance against Kriemhild. It does not, however, rule out triumph for the Elves.

2F: The village

If it seems like a fitting occasion to prod the players with Merlin's prophecy. Keep the scene brief.

Where: A humble British village, near the coast or a river, some place where one or more player characters pass by. Several houses are burning. The weather matches your mood.

Who: *One or more player characters*, a peasant (who's named Rhys if it is relevant, but you don't need to present him by name).

What: Two hours ago, the village was attacked by one of Kriemhild's Saxon scout ships, and they just left. The peasants are just coming out of the woods again to save what they can.

Consequences: Mostly for the attitude of the player characters. The situation of the peasants is what it is.



Merlin's guide to scenes

Main scenes

- * *What the players intend to do* (feel free to ask)
- * *Consequences of their previous actions*
- * *Keep the spotlight moving*

Set them like this:

Where – with one or two bits of colour. And the weather.

Who – who, and what the NPCs' motivations are.

What – what is to happen. Say it, or play your way to it quickly.

Cut with **"And so it happened..."** ...and after the scene:

Consequences – what makes the most sense; NPCs will act based on the scene or as affected by an agenda. Over time is good.

Stay away from...

- * *Sexual violence and public, sexual humiliation*
- * *Violence against small children*

Family scenes

- * *Put the main scenes into perspective*
- * *Remind us that the player characters are a family*

Short is good. The players can speak freely, and don't have to.

Set them like this:

Who – typically two player characters.

Where – do ask the players, then add a little colour.

Cut with **"Thank you"**, and set the next main scene right away.

Systemless outcomes

A) It must be *believable* in the context. Always.

B) Subject to **A)**, it must serve the *dark prophecy* of reluctant strife.

...or, instead of **B)**...

C) Subject to **A)**, it must serve *the Elves*, with uncompromising, destructive and ethnically stereotypical reactions.

D) Subject to **A)**, it must serve *coexistence* and mutual respect, if it can be done without unreasonable personal sacrifice.

E) If both **C)** and **D)**, it must serve to *illustrate inner conflict* and doubt. Hold up a mirror to the players.

Merlin's overview of moves

Ambrose, starting: *The Sword of Compromise*

Requirement: "Then I'll teach you to compromise!", *strike with sword to stop unreasonable person*

Menu: Wound/kill *, not wounded †, compromise not weakness ♥

Ambrose, shadow: *Fairy Gold*

Requirement: *Under four eyes, offer twigs/leaves/pebbles to work your will*

Menu: Control (not suicide), doesn't boast †, hides from sun and wants more ♥

Isoré, starting: *The Thrice Blasted Wand*

Requirement: *Show wand to witnesses, declare its magical power*

Menu: Bird/mad until dawn *, witnesses forget sorcery *†, awe ♥

NB: Isoré can use any length of wood whose magical power she declares.

Isoré, shadow: *The Grail of Hospitality*

Requirement: *As guest or host, hand a cup of liquid, and they drink (socially normal)*

Menu: Respect and peaceful departure, no favour asked †, coexistence ♥

Ginevel, starting: *The Grail of Shadows*

Requirement: *As guest or host, hand a cup of liquid, and they drink (socially normal)*

Menu: Strength/poetry for one deed/artistic endeavour before dawn *, no rumours of sorcery †, Morgan le Fay in their dreams ♥

Ginevel, shadow: *The Sword of Rage*

Requirement: *Strike with sword in rage to avenge a wrong*

Menu: Wound/kill *, not wounded †, respect ♥

Hengist, starting: *My Name is Hengist*

Requirement: 'My name is Hengist, and I'm a son of the British Isles', *ask Saxon and Briton to shake hands and keep peace. Can count as either himself.*

Menu: Stops strife, noone sees him as traitor †, mutual admiration ♥

Hengist, shadow: *Lance of Starlight and Darkness*

Requirement: *At night, invoke Morgan le Fay, stab enemy with spear*

Menu: Wound/kill *, not wounded †, star from the sky hits the highest point nearby *

Merlin's NPCs

House Bedrydant

Lord Bedivere – bitter old man, lets Elaine rule

Lady Elaine – middle aged, pregnant, proud

Sir Lanval – heir, poet, not that strong, nostalgic, self destructive, fears stepmother Elaine

Lady Ursula – much younger sister of Elaine, beautiful, gentle and fearful of the future

(Sir Aglomar) – middle aged, nostalgic, drinks, runs his mouth

House Hengist

Lord Esk – older brother of Hengist, proud, intense, really wants to be king

Lady Reinhild – mother of Sir Dietheld, aunt to Esk & Hengist, fears British sorcery and scheming

Sir Dietheld – Son of Reinhild & Sir Gawain, STRONG, impulsively violent, cares about chivalric heritage

(Sir Oswulf) – cheerful, despises weakness

House Horsa

Lord Saewin – greedy, unscrupulous, worried about the future of the family

Lady Giselle – kidnapped British bride, now more Saxon than the Saxons

Hrotwald – heir, 12, wants to be a dangerous Saxon knight

Sir Adelheid – woman, STRONG, jovially brutal, cunning, longs a bit vaguely for British beauty

(Sir Goswin) – affects British chivalry, fights dirty

House Arwyr

These are just the names of convenient knights and servants.

Knights: Sir Aeron, Sir Burcan

Servants: Ceinwen, Dilys, Ethaine (*gender by need & mood*)

Lord Ambrose Arwyr page 1 (story)

Lord Ambrose is a large, old knight of about 50 years, strong and with the years quite fat. His hair is greying, his face is ruddy and his laughter is friendly and infectuous – but often, his eyes seek the horizon, heavy with worries. On his arm, the gold ring that he got from King Arthur when he was made a knight of the Round Table still glitters.

Family: You're the lord and head of House Arwyr. *Lady Isoré* is your wife and the mother of your daughter *Lady Ginevel*. *Sir Hengist* the Younger is your Saxon foster son – once a hostage, now one of the family. You love them all dearly, in very different ways. Even if you come to hate them, you will always love them.

Beliefs: You've always fought to bring the House safely through war and crisis, no matter what compromises you had to make. You were a knight of the Round Table when Arthur fell, and in the chaos that followed, you fought many battles with the Saxons that had previously submitted to the power of the king. Where others might have gotten into deadly blood feuds, you wounded and captured the Saxon lord *Octa*, whom your wife tended while you were out fighting. You exchanged him for his infant son Hengist, whom you have raised as a good, British squire, and as your own son. If the Britons are to have any hope of resisting the invasion of the Saxon Queen *Kriemhild*, it will require cooperation with the Saxons who have been living here for years. Unlike other Britons who are too proud and stubborn to face the facts, you've always had an eye for necessity. If you can get your daughter engaged to marry Hengist's older brother *Esk*, the new lord of House Hengist, it will make the core of an alliance that has a chance against the Saxons from the sea.

Doubts: Once in a while you think back to the brave, honourable knight that you used to be, and cringe a little at what you have become. As a young squire, you were in love with the King's sinister half sister *Morgan le Fay*, now Queen of the Elves, and it was with a broken heart that you followed your King when he renounced the sorceresses and banished the Elves to the Hollow Hills. These days everything is a little shabby, and sometimes you catch yourself thinking that it was a mistake to get rid of enchantment, and with it perhaps the core of Britain's beauty. While you've clad yourself in showy belt buckles and vulgar furs to impress Saxons, your wife and daughter have guarded their dark and dramatic British beauty, and you're concerned that you might be selling out and sullying the very things that you're telling yourself that you fight for most of all.

But then you grasp your golden ring and remember that if you don't keep your head cool and lead your House in forging the great alliance, it will subject your loved ones and all the people under your protection to the violence of the new Saxons. And at most, they consider British beauty something to plunder.

Lord Ambrose Arwyr page 2 (agenda)

Your family:

Lady Isoré, Lady of House Arwyr and your wife.

Lady Ginevel, your daughter with Isoré.

Sir Hengist, originally hostage from the Saxon House Hengist (named after his grandfather), now your beloved son in practice if not by blood.

Important non-player characters:

Lord Esk, son of Octa, Lord of House Hengist and the most powerful Saxon in Britain. The older brother of Sir Hengist. If you get your daughter Ginevel married to Esk, it would make for a mighty alliance against the Saxon invasion. Esk wants to be king of Britain, which would make Ginevel queen.

Kriemhild, Saxon Queen. Her invasion from Saxony threatens to destroy all that you hold dear.

Morgan le Fay, perhaps once a mortal, but now Queen of the Elves. A youthful infatuation of yours, now a dangerous enemy in the shadows.

Agenda:

Have Ginevel married to Lord Esk to create a firm and reliable alliance. You'll need the help of your whole family.

Promote friendship and peace between Britons and British Saxons. You will need the help of your foster son Hengist most.

Follow your heart – your agenda is your starting point, not necessarily your end goal. That is up to you.

Merlin's dark prophecy for you

You will surrender your weapons and your people to the mercy of the new Saxon Queen, and her bounds will rend you to death for the amusement of her men.

RULE: Once, you can save yourself from death, mutilation or definitive captivity by **stating Merlin's dark prophecy for you** – then you get out of your present trouble.

Lord Ambrose Arwyr page 3 (moves)

- * can affect a player character
- ♥ can win an NPC for the move's agenda
- † you suffer harm if you do NOT pick this item

Starting move: *The Sword of Compromise*

Background: You are that knight of the lost Round Table who chose to fight and live for a practically possible future, rather than fighting and dying for beautiful but impossible dreams.

Requirements: You can roll when, *to stop an unreasonable person, you say "Then I'll teach you to compromise!" and strike them with your sword.* Note that compromise and reasonableness aren't about justice, but about avoiding conflict.

Mechanics: Roll 1d10. On 1-2 you have failed, and Merlin says what happens. On 3-10 you are successful and can choose two of the three items below. NOTE that there will be consequences if you DO NOT pick item two.

- 1: * You wound or kill your enemy, your choice.
- 2: † You are not wounded in the fight.
- 3: ♥ A stubborn Briton or a brash Saxon realizes that compromise is not weakness.

Shadow move: *Fairy Gold*

Background: As a young knight at the Round Table, you were secretly in love with Morgan le Fay, and it was with a broken heart that you followed your King Arthur in rejecting the bloodthirsty madness of the Elves. Many a time, you have fantasized about regretting that choice...

Sacrifice – if you bring the sacrifice, you get the move: In front of witnesses, trample the golden ring that you got from Arthur's hand, and condemn his betrayal of the Elves. When you do it, Morgan le Fay hears you and grants you her power the next time you dream or visit one of the Hollow Hills.

Requirements: You can roll when, *under four eyes, you offer a person a handful of leaves, twigs and pebbles to work your will.* If the sorcery succeeds, it will of course appear to be treasure.

Mechanics: Roll 1d10. On 1-2 you have failed, and Merlin says what happens. On 3-10 you are successful, your dross appears to be treasure as long as it isn't struck by the light of the sun, and you can pick two of the three items below. NOTE that there will be consequences if you DO NOT pick items 2 and 3.

- 1: Your target is spellbound by the fairy gold and will do literally anything you ask until dawn, save suicide.
- 2: † Your target will NOT boast of their "treasure" of fairy gold, and therefore noone will suspect the truth or plan to rob you.
- 3: ♥† Without wondering why, your target will hide their fairy gold from the sun, never give it away and lust for more.

Lady Isoré Arwyr page 1 (story)

Lady Isoré is a tall, stately British lady in her late forties. Her grey-streaked hair and serious face still bear the memory of her youthful beauty, and her rare smiles are like the sun breaking through the clouds.

Family: You come from ancient British nobility, all the way back to the darkness before the Romans. Now you're lady to **Lord Ambrose**, knight of the fallen Round Table, mother of **Lady Ginevel** and foster mother of the young, Saxon nobleman **Sir Hengist** – once a hostage, now one of the family. You love them all dearly, in very different ways. Even if you come to hate them, you will always love them.

Beliefs: As British lady, you're the keeper of the home and the soul. Though Ambrose is your lord and master, his soul is your responsibility and love, cunning and sorcery your weapons. When you were young, eighteen years ago, you let yourself be misled. Your husband took the Saxon lord **Octa** prisoner, left him at the castle in your care and went to war again. You tended the wounds of the beautiful Octa, and you fell in love with each other. Ginevel is his daughter, not Ambrose's. Then Octa was set free in exchange for his infant son Hengist whom you raised as both son and hostage. For years you were tormented with doubt and guilt, but in the end you realized two things: If you do not prevent it, Ambrose will marry Ginevel off to a Saxon, probably one of Octa's blood, and that must not happen. And both you and Ambrose have failed the heart of what it means to be a true, British noble, that is purity – he with a thousand compromises and you with your one, great betrayal. You secretly studied the sorcery of your foremothers to have weapons to

fight your fight in secret, and in one of the Hollow Hills, the Elf Queen **Morgan le Fay** bestowed upon you **The Thrice Blasted Wand**. You have initiated your daughter as well – she now masters **The Grail of Shadows**. You do not go unarmed to fight for the fate of the people.

Doubts: You love your husband and acknowledge that his ability to bend his code of honour has spared you much pain. You see Octa's traits in your daughter in spite of her dark beauty and sizzling, British intensity, and before you taught her to be a British lady, she fought with wooden swords with beautiful abandon. And for every day that passes, you see more of Octa in your foster son Hengist – and his lovable nature and burning love for all things British make it impossible to reject him as an unworthy barbarian. Purity is hard. And no matter that Elf sorcery is your family heritage, the Elves are terrible and without human decency, and a future in which they're lords of the Isles is a frightening thought.

But Octa died last year, and your husband is planning your daughter's marriage to Octa's eldest son **Esk** – whom only you know to be her half brother. This must be prevented at any cost. And unless you're willing to reveal your crime, destroy your daughter's ignorance and see your reputation and entire life collapse, there's only one way forward, and that's sorcery and intrigue, if necessary open war between Britons and Saxons. Living side by side with the Saxons has cost you dearly in honourless deals and in temptation and sinful betrayal. Now you stand side by side with your daughter in your secret war. You have taught her well.

Lady Isoré Arwyr page 2 (agenda)

Your family:

Lord Ambrose, lord of House Arwyr and your beloved husband and protector. Old knight of the Round Table.

Lady Ginevel, your daughter by Octa, though she believes that she's of Ambrose's blood. Has abandoned her wild, sword-swinging tomboy habits, and is now a sorceress like you. She masters The Grail of Shadows which can both bless and curse.

Sir Hengist, son of Octa and originally a hostage from the Saxon House Hengist, now your foster son. He loves all that is fine, chivalric and British, and is a very beautiful young man.

Important non-player characters:

Lord Esk, son of Octa, lord of House Hengist and the most powerful Saxon in Britain. The older brother of Sir Hengist. Your husband plans to have your daughter married to him. Esk plans to seat himself on the empty throne of Britain.

Morgan le Fay, perhaps once a mortal, but now Queen of the Elves. She has bestowed upon you The Thrice Blasted Wand.

Agenda:

Prevent the marriage between Lord Esk and your daughter that your husband is planning. Your daughter will help, but who else can help?

Win hearts for the Elves, Britons as servants of the Elves, Saxons to doom the Saxons. You can do it both by talking to people and by means of the terrifying power of The Thrice Blasted Wand. Your daughter will help, though she doesn't know the shameful secret of her origin.

Follow your heart – your agenda is your starting point, not necessarily your end goal. That is up to you.

Merlin's dark prophecy for you

You lead other refugees from the Saxons' murderous ways into the woods, where you die of cold and hunger in the mud when winter comes.

RULE: Once, you can save yourself from death, mutilation or definitive captivity by **stating Merlin's dark prophecy for you** – then you get out of your present trouble.

Lady Isoré Arwyr page 3 (moves)

- * can affect a player character
- ♥ can win an NPC for the move's agenda
- † you suffer harm if you do NOT pick this item

Starting move: *The Thrice Blasted Wand*

Background: You sought out the Elf Queen Morgan le Fay in one of the Hollow Hills and she bestowed upon you a wand of rowan wood thrice blasted by lightning, with which you can work terrifying sorcery.

Requirements: You can roll when you *proudly present a wand and declare its magical power to one or more witnesses*. This means you can't use it while you're alone.

Mechanics: Roll 1d10. On 1-2 you have failed, and Merlin says what happens. On 3-10 you are succesful and can choose two of the three items below. NOTE that there will be consequences if you DO NOT pick item two.

- 1: * Until dawn, a witness is either struck by dramatic madness, or turned into a bird fitting their personality – clothes do not change.
- 2: *† The wand erases the memory from all witnesses of having seen you work magic, and no rumours spread of your fearsome Elf sorcery.
- 3: ♥ A witness is seized by terrified awe of the power of the Elves (and doesn't necessarily realize why).

Shadow move: *The Grail of Hospitality*

Background: You've always admired the rough beauty and appetite for life of the Saxons, even if you haven't always been willing to admit it. And one ideal that Saxons and Britons have in common is the sanctity of hospitality.

Sacrifice – if you bring the sacrifice, you get the move: In front of witnesses, confess your affair with Octa and name him the father of your daughter Ginevel.

Requirements: You can roll if *as guest or host, you pass another person a cup of liquid, and they drink of it*. There will be many social situations in which refusing would be unthinkable.

Mechanics: Roll 1d10. On 1-2 you have failed, and Merlin says what happens. On 3-10 you are succesful and can choose two of the three items below. NOTE that there will be consequences if you DO NOT pick item two.

- 1: The drinker respects you, and will leave in peace or let you and yours leave.
- 2: † The drinker does NOT ask a favour of you. If the drinker asks a favour and you refuse, you both lose face and the drinker will seek revenge.
- 3: ♥ A stubborn Briton or a brash Saxon realizes that friendship and peace are better than revenge and war.

Lady Ginevel Arwyr page 1 (story)

Lady Ginevel is a young lady of 17 years, tall and severe, famous for her very long, night-black hair and her bright blue eyes. By widespread opinion the very image of what a young, British, noble lady ought to be.

Family: You are the only child by blood of **Lord Ambrose** and **Lady Isoré** of House Arwyr. **Sir Hengist** the Younger is your foster brother, a couple of years older than you. Your Saxon foster brother, once a hostage but now a son of the family. You love them all dearly, in very different ways. Even if you come to hate them, you will always love them.

Beliefs: The Saxons must be thrown back into the sea, and you would never marry and have children by one! Father is amazing at solving immediate crises, but mother has an eye for the long game. If the Britons are one day to rise from the ruins of King Arthur's fall, there must BE Britons left. Pure Britons, unmixed with the animal savagery of the Saxons. In this regard, Lady Isoré has raised you well. The Romans are gone, and the ferocity of the Saxons is strong, but one source of British strength remains available – the Elves of the Hollow Hills. Your mother has initiated you into Elf sorcery, and **Morgan le Fay** has granted you the power of **The Grail of Shadows**, like your mother has her wand. Of course, it is a deep secret, but with feminine wiles and sorcery, the two of you work to prevent the mixing with the Saxons, and to gather support for the Elves for when they come riding forth from the Hollow Hills to sweep the Saxons into the sea. It is terrible, but your mother has shown you that it is necessary.

Doubts: It pains you to undermine the work of your beloved father, Lord Ambrose. You realize that you have survived several crises with life and prosperity intact thanks to his ability to adapt his code of honour to the reality at hand – and at the same time, he can still swing his sword like the knight of the Round Table that he once was. You also care deeply for your two years older Saxon foster brother Hengist, who is full of admiration for everything about British civilization. Until a couple of years ago, when you had yet to lay aside the joy of using your own strength, as befits a young, British lady, he taught you swordfighting. You were really good at it, especially when you let loose in a delighted rage, and it felt good and true, even though you've learned that it is un-British for a woman. These things can make you waver in your dedication to the doom of the Saxons.

But your mother has raised you better than that, and she loves you too much to see you condemned to a Saxon's bed. Together, you'll manage to prevent it, and hopefully save your father from himself. And perhaps, Hengist can be exiled from the country alive?

Lady Ginevel Arwyr page 2 (agenda)

Your family:

Lord Ambrose, Lord of House Arwyr and your father. Former knight of the Round Table.

Lady Isoré, Lady of House, and your mother and accomplice. Sorceress, secretly bears The Thrice Blasted Wand.

Sir Hengist, originally hostage from the Saxon House Hengist (named after his grandfather), now your beloved brother in practice if not by blood.

Important non-player characters:

Lord Esk, son of Octa, lord of House Hengist and the most powerful Saxon in Britain. The older brother of Sir Hengist. Your father wants you to marry Lord Esk, your mother is against it.

Morgan le Fay, perhaps once a mortal, but now Queen of the Elves. She has bestowed upon you The Grail of Shadows, a mighty sorcery.

Agenda:

Avoid marriage to Lord Esk, which your father is planning. Your mother will help, but who else can help?

Win hearts for the Elves, Britons as servants of the Elves, Saxons to doom the Saxons. You can do it both by talking to people and by means of the blessings and curses of the Grail of Shadows. Your mother will help.

Follow your heart – your agenda is your starting point, not necessarily your end goal. That is up to you.

Merlin's dark prophecy for you

You will die giving birth to your third child by a Saxon conqueror.

RULE: Once, you can save yourself from death, mutilation or definitive captivity by **stating Merlin's dark prophecy for you** – then you get out of your present trouble.

Lady Ginevel Arwyr page 3 (moves)

- * can affect a player character
- ♥ can win an NPC for the move's agenda
- † you suffer harm if you do NOT pick this item

Starting move: *The Grail of Shadows*

Background: You sought out the Elf Queen Morgan le Fay in one of the Hollow Hills and she granted you the power of the Grail, which you can call into any cup that you give another person to drink from. This truly is the Grail that broke the brotherhood of the Round Table.

Requirements: You can roll if *you pass another person a cup of liquid, and they drink of it*. There will be many social situations in which refusing would be unthinkable.

Mechanics: Roll 1d10. On 1-2 you have failed, and Merlin says what happens. On 3-10 you are succesful and can choose two of the three items below. NOTE that there will be consequences if you DO NOT pick item two.

- 1: * The drinker gains supernatural strength for one drastic deed or poetic inspiration for one artistic endeavour, before the next dawn. You decide which, but not how it is used.
- 2: † No dark rumours about your magic spread over this matter.
- 3: *♥ From now on, the dreams of the drinker are ruled by Morgan le Fay.

Shadow move: *The Sword of Rage*

Background: When you were a child and tomboy, your Saxon foster brother Hengist taught you swordfighting, and you were a natural. Especially when you unleashed feelings and fought in a joyful ecstasy.

Sacrifice – if you bring the sacrifice, you get the move: Cut off your long, beautiful hair, and in doing so reject the British ideal of womanhood that forbids you to fight.

Requirements: You can roll when you *furiously strike with a sword to avenge a wrong against yourself or another*.

Mechanics: Roll 1d10. On 1-2 you have failed, and Merlin says what happens. On 3-10 you are succesful and can choose two of the three items below. NOTE that there will be consequences if you DO NOT pick item two.

- 1: * You wound or kill your enemy, your choice.
- 2: † You are not wounded in the fight.
- 3: ♥ A Briton or Saxon respects and admires your strength and righteous anger.

Sir Hengist Arwyr page 1 (story)

Hengist is a slender, athletic young man of 19 years with beautiful blue eyes and a charming smile. His pale blond hair clearly shows him to be Saxon, his clean-shaven face and dignified manner clearly show him to be Briton.

Family: You're the foster son of *Lord Ambrose* and *Lady Isoré*, and you've lived with them since you were a couple of years old as a part of the Arwyr family, and they've loved you and raised you as a proper Briton. *Lady Ginevel* is your foster sister, a couple of years younger than you, whom you taught swordfighting, but now she's put aside such pursuits to become a proper, British lady. You love them all dearly, in very different ways. Even if you come to hate them, you will always love them.

Beliefs: You have two fathers, *Octa* and Lord Ambrose. Octa was a Saxon lord and son of *Hengist*, one of the leaders of the original Saxon invasion of Britain – Octa died last year. Lord Ambrose is a knight of the Round Table and had his knight's gold ring from King Arthur himself. Ambrose has raised and loved you as if you were his own son even though you came to him as a hostage, and you're now the living example of Britons and Saxons standing side by side, as friends and family. It is a dream worth fighting and dying for. Lord Ambrose plans to build a grand alliance between the old Britons and all the Saxons who already live here to resist the new invasion of Saxons under Queen *Kriemhild*, and one of the most important parts of the plan is getting your foster sister Ginevel engaged to your older brother *Esk*, the new lord of House Hengist. You can help with this. In your heart you'd rather marry Ginevel yourself, so the

family could remain fully British in spirit (you aren't blood siblings, after all), but you understand that the engagement to your brother serves the alliance better.

Doubts: You know your blood family, the descendants of Hengist the Elder, and you know the Saxons in general. And the sad truth is that they're brash, brutal thugs whose attraction to British values first and foremost comes from greed, lust and bloodthirsty ambition, and only then comes a shadow of a dream of something beautiful and noble. Sometimes you can't help but wonder if it wouldn't be better for true Britons of the soul (you count yourself as such) to die fighting nobly for what you hold dear, rather than sell out everything and muddle through until you only have wretched, honourless beggars' lives to defend. Perhaps it would be better to seek an alliance with the terrible but amazing Elves that Lady Isoré has told you wonderful stories of? Even though it would eventually lead to ruin? The thought of a Saxon's brutal paws grabbing your noble, true sister certainly pains you.

But Lord Ambrose is wise, and life is better than death. It is better and more honourable to protect those of whom you are protector, than to die prettily and leave them defenseless. And if a Saxon of the blood such as yourself can become as British in their soul as you feel yourself to be, who knows? Maybe the rest of your father's family can become quite decent Britons in time, if they get the chance?

Sir Hengist Arwyr page 2 (agenda)

Your family:

Lord Ambrose, lord of House Arwyr and your foster father. Former knight of the Round Table.

Lady Isoré, lady of House Arwyr og and your foster mother. Though strict, she has taught you to value British customs.

Lady Ginevel, your foster sister. Once a wild tomboy and a natural with a sword, now she's turned into the very embodiment of everything that a good knight should fight to defend.

Important non-player characters:

Lord Esk, son of Octa, lord of House Hengist and the most powerful Saxon in Britain. Your older brother by blood. Your foster father Ambrose's plans depend on getting Esk married to Ginevel. Esk is ardently ambitious, and has his eye on the empty throne of Britain.

Lady Reinhild, your mother's sister. She's regularly visited you at Arwyr and reminded you of your Saxon family. She had an affair with the renowned Sir Gawain, and had the son **Dietheld** by him, now House Hengist's strongest knight.

Morgan le Fay, perhaps once a mortal, but now Queen of the Elves. A terrible monster and a beautiful dream.

Agenda:

Help get Ginevel married to Lord Esk to create a firm and durable alliance. Your father Ambrose is convinced that it is the safest way forward, and he's a wise man. Your head agrees, though your heart protests.

Promote friendship and peace between Britons and British Saxons. Smouldering strife threatens to break out, and you're uniquely qualified to help keep the peace and create bonds.

Follow your heart – your agenda is your starting point, not necessarily your end goal. That is up to you.

Merlin's dark prophecy for you

You'll get an ally's spear in the back in the decisive battle and die a week later in terrible pain, discarded like garbage by the victors.

RULE: Once, you can save yourself from death, mutilation or definitive captivity by **stating Merlin's dark prophecy for you** – then you get out of your present trouble.

Sir Hengist Arwyr page 3 (moves)

- * can affect a player character
- ♥ can win an NPC for the move's agenda
- † you suffer harm if you do NOT pick this item

Starting move: *My Name is Hengist*

Background: You're named after your grandfather Hengist, a Saxon warlord who fought King Arthur and became lord of many of the Saxons in Britain. All Saxons respect the courage and deeds of Hengist, though he couldn't defeat Arthur. And yet, you're British in your soul.

Requirements: You can roll when you say *"my name is Hengist, and I'm a son of the British Isles"* and then ask a Briton and a Saxon to shake hands and make peace. You yourself can count as either the Briton or the Saxon, or it can be two different persons.

Mechanics: Roll 1d10. On 1-2 you have failed, and Merlin says what happens. On 3-10 you are successful and can choose two of the three items below. NOTE that there will be consequences if you DO NOT pick item two.

- 1: The Briton and the Saxon shake hands and refrain from open strife at this time.
- 2: † Noone considers you a traitor to their people on account of this matter.
- 3: ♥ On account of you, a Briton admires the Saxons' passionate lust for life, or a Saxon admires the grace of the Britons – you decide.

Shadow move: *Lance of Starlight and Darkness*

Background: Ever since you were a little boy, you've dreamt of the Elf Queen, Morgan le Fay, and about sacrificing yourself as chivalric champion of something greater and more beautiful than yourself.

Sacrifice – if you bring the sacrifice, you get the move: In the presence of witnesses, declare your allegiance to the Elf Queen, and swear to strive for the destruction of all Saxons, yourself as the last one... When you do it, Morgan le Fay hears you and grants you her power the next time you dream or visit one of the Hollow Hills.

Requirements: You can roll when *at night, and with loud invocation, call the power of Morgan le Fay down into a spear for the doom of the enemies of the Elves, and strike in combat.*

Mechanics: Roll 1d10. On 1-2 you have failed, and Merlin says what happens. On 3-10 you are successful and can choose two of the three items below. NOTE that there will be consequences if you DO NOT pick item two.

- 1: * You wound or kill your enemy, your choice.
- 2: † You are not wounded in the fight.
- 3: * A star falls from the heavens and hits the highest point nearby like a flaming thunderbolt capable of bringing down towers.

BRITANIA

ARWYR

HORSA

BEDRYDANT

HENGIST

SAXONES

