

Preface

I am in no way saying “this is the best way to implement K&W into your game”, this is merely a rough outline of how I planned and implemented K&W into my homebrewed world using Roll20.

As a group we’ve played D&D on and off for about 10 years now, starting back at university. We now play on Roll20 since we all live so far apart and just wanted to keep telling stories, make silly puns and have doors open in weird and wacky ways (it’s a long story!). This made K&W even easier for me to consider since I didn’t have to print anything and Roll20 can store everything I created; at last count I have 90+ unit cards spread across 12 NPC Domains and then another 20+ for the PC’s Domain.

There’s a lot to learn with this system, but it can be easily broken down and taught to players in three parts: Warfare, Kingdoms, Intrigue. But as a DM, there’s a couple of extra steps for you to deal with first!

Planning and Preparing

Before reading through the K&W book I already had a rough idea of the story-arc I wanted to take my players through next (see The Backstory) but I wasn’t sure how well the system would mesh into my world.

Fortunately the system is simple enough to grasp and gave me a great starting off point to create Domains and army units for all the major factions in [my world](#). I started by making the Domains for the largest factions, all size 5 with the occasional tweak to their abilities/powers, I also noted down the Martial Advantages for each of their leaders. This also gave me ideas for some of the smaller Domains the players could encounter along the way.

I then used the rather excellent form-fillable [PDF templates](#) created by Langedrosa_Blauszorn and copied over the book’s units with some minor tweaks to match my homebrew world’s factions and then created a few extra unique units. I then uploaded these into Roll20 and linked NPC sheets to each unit card to handle the rolling, you can see how [I did that here](#). In case I forgot to mention, the character sheet needs to be set to be controlled by all players, this allows them to make the token action rolls.

Here are the macros I used:

- Attack

```
@{selected|character_name} attack  
/r 1d20+5
```

- Power

```
@{selected|character_name} test power  
/r 1d20+6
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- Morale

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@{selected|character_name} check morale  
/r 1d20+2
```

- Command

@{selected|character_name} check command
/r 1d20+4

Since I figured the players would likely muster a wide variety of units I left making those cards until later (after they decided what they wanted to muster). I did however create a unique unit for each of them, adding +1 to a stat to carry their niche in the party across to the battlefield and also make best use of their starting Martial Advantages. This meant that when it was time to introduce Warfare to the players, they had a unit that was uniquely theirs.

Lastly, I saved the Domain sheet pages from the K&W book I thought the players would most likely use and uploaded them into the Roll20 page I would use to track everything; you can take a [look at it here](#) in full action after a couple of Intrigues and a few battles.

The Backstory

To properly introduce the K&W system I figured it was easiest to use the pre-existing plot hook in a player's backstory that had also been used by the BBEG in the last Campaign arc. This gave the players extra incentive and motivation to learn and use these new rules as it was clearly an important part of the PC's story.

The PC in question is the third son of a double-duchy Duke from the dwarf Kingdom of Amaranth who inherited nothing when his father died. His older brothers inherited a duchy each and were already married with sons, so with no hope of inheritance he went off adventuring instead. Fast-forward a few years when the last BBEG (a PC-NPC from another game) had his minions sow chaos in the Kingdom by killing the PC's nephews and pinned it on the other ducal brother, thus sparking a Fraternal Civil War which erupted after the BBEG was defeated and his schemes of "Chaos Reborn" thwarted.

After the extended downtime (during which I sowed the seeds of several plot hooks and Campaign arcs) I asked each player privately which story point they wanted to look into more and all of them said: the Fraternal Civil War. Great!

Introducing Warfare

It was at this point I introduced the K&W system to the players as a **potential** add-on to the game which would allow them to run a Domain with an army and fight larger scale battles as a part of the Campaign arc. I ran through the basics and between sessions sent them the Youtube links to Matt's videos on how the system works. They all agreed to try the system out and see how they found it.

I already had their unique units ready, so at the start of the next session I was able to surprise them with a short cutscene for each PC. This covered (without spoilers in some cases) what they did in downtime for the other players who were not present and introduced them to their unique unit and why they were receiving it. I won't go into the full details but here's how I linked things together for each PC:

- Franduin, noble Dwarf Fighter. Returned to his middle brother Merdtha's duchy to find it under attack by the older brother, Ordain. Gathering up a band of knights, he drove the scouts of Ordain's army away from the city.
- Skarboda, clan crafter Dwarf Fighter. Deposed her mother as the family's Matriarch and put a stop to her corrupt practises. Handing control over to a more competent cousin, she mustered a group of soldiers with the intention to hire them out to one of the brothers in the Fraternal Civil War.
- Keafaren, hermit Elf Monk. Went exploring in the Dragon's Ridge foothills and made some unnerving discoveries. Knowing that something bad was coming, he returned to his homeland and banded together a group of his kin, ready for battle.
- Argisheb, outlander Orc Sorcerer. Hid himself away in the wilds to learn new spells from his looted scrolls. Reunited with his tribe who decided to follow him out of the wilds, back to the Orc Horde.
- Uulin, folk hero Orc Ranger. Handed in a spy/scout report on the other faction's political situation to her superiors in the Horde. Gained a promotion along with a squad of scouts to train in the ways of stealth.

With their new units to tow, the players all congregated on Franduin when he called for their aid (he did actually light a beacon when doing this) in defeating his brother Ordain. It was now that I dropped them into their first battle, a 5v5 against Ordain's vanguard.

The players had one cavalry, three infantry and one artillery, so I used the same composition for the vanguard. This made the battle as balanced as possible, save for the player's named units having a +1 in one stat which I decided made their starting unit stand out from the rest of the units they'd be mustering later. They lost these starting units in later battles which was a blow for everyone, this is certainly a downside to giving them such a unique starting unit.

For the battle itself, I made an insanely large map (90x70 cells) and uploaded the [upscaled VTT battlefield](#) made by ReubenHung, leaving space on the right for cavalry and aerial units. I've also made this [1 column wider](#) battlefield for when larger armies get involved. I turned the grid off on Roll20 because nothing lined up properly and it allowed for easier movement of unit tokens. If you're looking for fortifications and bridges to go with your battlemat, then look no further than 2minutetabletop's [excellent tokens](#). I just copied and cropped the images down to each individual token then uploaded and resized them in Roll20.

After that first battle I then dropped the bombshell that Merdtha was dead at Ordain's hands, making Ordain the ruler of both duchies. Not if the players had anything to say about it! They took their small army and occupied Merdtha's city which allowed me to start their first Intrigue. They had a clear goal in mind: defend the city; and knew how to do it: raise a bigger army. What they didn't know was how that actually worked!

Introducing Kingdoms

While it might seem slightly counter-intuitive to introduce the first part of the “Kingdoms & Warfare” system second, it actually worked far better than I had anticipated. By starting with a battle it gave the players a taste of what the system could provide: big exciting battles between armies. So when I started going into detail about how Domains and Intrigue worked the players didn’t get bored by the technical bits, they only saw how it allowed them to build a bigger, better army and fight other big armies.

That’s not to say the rest of the system didn’t interest them, it’s just that battles were a very big plus for everyone involved!

After explaining the basics of a Domain (Skills, Defences, Powers, Features, Power Dice) I then revealed that they’d be running a Noble Court as per the Backstory, but they still got to decide which Specialisation it would have. After reading through each option they very quickly picked Regent State because, and I quote: “Heavy Levies under a Monk? Hell yes, conscript the masses!” Like I said, big Paradox fans.

From there I explained how they can spend Development points on their Domain and that they get more by increasing their Domain Size. It’s around this point I should have explained that Domain Size isn’t directly linked to how much physical land their Domain controls, rather that it’s an abstract number for their overall power, experience, reputation **and** land control. Instead, when asked how they could increase the Domain Size I simply told them they had to defeat another Domain in Intrigue. Which to a bunch of RTS gamers translated to: beat someone up, take their land, grow stronger.

During Intrigue

The board was set, the pieces were moving. It was time for Intrigue!

After the initial battle against Ordain’s vanguard, the players occupied the city of Viggran, the late Duke Merdtha’s capital. After setting up their Domain I introduced a few important NPCs to them:

- Commander Normek, leader of Viggran’s garrison and now de facto head of the army. He explained the supply chain (Unit Dependencies) and listed out what units the players had available to muster. He also acted as a mouthpiece for me to encourage the players to work on the Domain Defences as well as Muster units.
- Steward Ulthain, the go-to guy who deals with the finances and running the Domain while the party adventures. I added in a once per Intrigue RP encounter where the party could hold court, collect taxes and potentially meet new allies. Ulthain allowed me to explain all of this.
- Agent Kellas, the Domain’s spymaster who provided the players with an Intelligence Report (more on that below). He explained that there’s only so much he could tell them about the opposed Domain without them ordering his spies out to gather information, or collect some themselves.

The Intelligence Report was laid out very similarly to one given in the Regent of Bedegar adventure at the end of the K&W book. It gave a little information about the opposed Domain, its Leader, his enemies and his allies as well as a few quest hooks for each one. In Roll20 it was very easy to create a handout for this and the players can always refer back to it with ease. I could also go in and edit some of the hooks as the Intrigue progressed, as well as add in new ones as new opportunities arose. Just make sure you tell the players (via your NPCs) that there's been an update! I didn't do this the first time and wondered why they weren't talking about this new quest I'd added...

I used another handout to keep track of the opposed Domain's information and did my best to convey only vague information about what they were doing, such as: "Ordain musters a unit" or "They fail to improve a Domain Defence".

Since the players never decided to send spies out to gather information, they got a nasty surprise when their newly mustered Heavy Levies were suddenly (and brutally) captured and disposed of by Ordain's Despotism Regime ability: Work the Prisoners to the Bone. While it did feel a little mean to use it as the next Intrigue Action, it did teach them a couple of lessons though: to spend time learning more about the opposed Domain in the future; and that increasing Domain Defences can be very beneficial during battles.

The end of their first Intrigue culminated in the defence of Viggran, I chose to forgo the recommended Officer battle in exchange for a different encounter inside the city against one of Ordain's lieutenants. He escaped on an armoured Hippogriff (adventure hook!) and that concluded the Intrigue. The players forgot to use any of their Power Die up until this fight so I made sure that the lieutenant used his to show off that particular system.

A second Intrigue was immediately called for by the players; they wanted Ordain and his officers defeated for good. In their minds Ordain's army was soundly beaten and now was the time to press their advantage. It was clear they were hooked and ready to keep going, so into the second Intrigue we went, I wrote up another intelligence report between sessions with some new hooks and adventures and presented it to the players after their first Intrigue Action.

When the players at last faced Ordain and his officers as they were attempting to flee his besieged capital of Thimdhor, they made full use of the Power Die at their disposal to give them an edge in the fight. As did Ordain by executing one of his officers, it made for a great moment in the battle and really put the party on edge, fearing their own execution. Again, surprise is very useful when the party doesn't know what the villain can do and what the limitations of his abilities actually are!

Keeping Things Spicy

As with most things in D&D, eventually the players will know enough about the different NPC domains and martial advantages to ignore Espionage and other forms of information gathering about their opponent. Things might also become stale if they fight yet another Domain's army using one of the same 3 NPC martial advantages.

So when in doubt: improvise, adapt and make stuff up!

When I started creating the 6 different ducal Domain within a wider kingdom Domain, I realised very quickly that using the PC class martial advantages would give me a lot more flexibility in distinguishing the different Domains. I even started combining different sets together, one of the Domain leaders is now a Bardbarian, it will certainly make for an interesting final encounter! When combining different sets, make sure you keep the traits at the same level, don't bring a DS 5 trait down to DS 4! I have put lower DS traits in higher slots where it seemed to fit with the general theme I was going for.

As for the Domains, there are lots of options to choose from, especially when you pick a Hero Domain for the villain! Another thing I tried was taking one or two abilities from other Domains and replacing their equivalent in the main Domain. So if you're grabbing in a bonus action ability, you'd better remove the current bonus action ability! This is particularly important for abilities that increase a Domain's Defences, it's hardly fair when the villain's Domain can increase its Resources to 3 using bonus actions!

Lastly, make your own unique units! I've adapted some of the example units by switching out traits and ancestries. I've also made some from scratch with help from the wider community, just share what you've come up with and you'll quickly get tips on balance. If you just need something quick or just the thought of making your own makes your head spin (gods know DMs have enough to plan and think about!) you can check out the [Community Unit Barracks](#) assembled by the legendary ReubenHung! You'll find a few of the units I've made for my campaign in there too, word of warning, there are some nasty critters in there.

Summary

That just about covers everything from my group's first foray into Kingdoms & Warfare. We had a blast using the system and the players got a kick out of leading an army into battle. We're already well into our third Intrigue and we've certainly learnt a lot from the first two.

My takeaway of the system as a whole is that it works very well for groups who enjoy RTS and grand-strategy games. Everyone in my group is familiar with the Paradox games EU4 and CK2 which provided a lot of inspiration for me when figuring out how I wanted to work Domains into the game.

It can get very easy however for the party to get so caught up in running their domain that they forget they're actually a party of adventurers and not go on, y'know, adventures! From discussions I've had with the players, they feel that since they are running a Noble Court and one of them is the Duke, it feels thematically off to take the leadership away from the Domain for a week or two at a time.

Things may change at the end of this arc when the Kingdom is reunited after a widespread rebellion and the Duke PC becomes King Consort (again, long story!). My plan is to ask that player to retire the PC which would allow the party to switch Domains away from the Noble Court to something not as attached to a preexisting nation-state, where one PC is very clearly in charge and really shouldn't be risking himself going off on adventures.

Let me know if this has at all been helpful or if I haven't explained something well enough, I rambled my way through a lot of this! Hopefully, you've had a kick reading through some of the things my group has been through and that you found at least some of what I've said to be helpful for your upcoming Kingdoms & Warfare campaigns!

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