

Fellowship & Fairydust

A sword with a blue blade and a silver hilt with intricate carvings is crossed with a wooden arrow with a white feather. The sword is positioned diagonally from the top right towards the bottom left, while the arrow is positioned diagonally from the top left towards the bottom right. The background is solid black.

KING ARTHUR
& ROBIN HOOD

*Fellowship
&
Fairydust*

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See page 116

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Birthright Reclaimed!

Donna Ferguson Dudley - 7

Robin Hood: Fact or Fiction?

MariaTeresa Carzon - 8

The Magical Wood

Timothy Mather - 10

Fenyw

Cariad - 13

Mordred

Elijah David - 21

The Forest Lord Series Review

Stuart S. Laing - 22

At Large with Liberty

Avellina Balestri - 26

Guinevere

Patrick W Kavanagh - 34

Sword & Bow

Kendra E. Ardnek - 36

A Tale of Sir Guy of Gisborne

Carolina Hobot - 40

Untamed

Sarah Levesque - 51

Not A Legend, Not A Flop

Kat Clements - 54

Sir Gawaine and Lady Rhiannon

Sunbow Pendragon - 57

*Table
Cont*



- Maid Marian's Proclamation of Love**
Manwaelmelwe - 69
- Sherwood at the Dinner Table**
Elizabeth Amy Hajek - 71
- The Three Heirs**
Amanda Pizzolatto - 75
- Not Less**
Keturah Lamb - 82
- Magic, Brotherhood, and Destiny**
Hannah Vincent - 88
- A Day in the Life of a Dragonlord**
Niaf - 90
- The Fall of a Hero**
Celemir Elewen - 98
- Love a Suit**
Kayla Kimberlin - 100
- Lucius Artorius**
Artem Serebrennikov - 104
- Birth of a Legend**
Ian Wilson - 105
- The Story of Lance and Elaine**
Hannah Skipper - 107
- Nothing's Forgotten**
Kevin Michael Derby - 111
- Dream of Albion**
Thomas G. Adams - 115

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Image credits may be found on pg 117

Editor's Note

Somewhere between the ages of 5 and 6, I fell in love with the legend of Robin Hood via the charming Disney animated classic depicting him, most appropriately, as a dashing, clever, and empathetic forest fox. He was undeniably my first crush. I must have subliminally committed to memory most of the lines of the film, and if called upon, can still rattle off large swathes of them. It also assured that I couldn't manage to go outside to the surrounding fields and woods around my house without picking up sticks to brandish or bend into bows. I also started collecting Robin Hood memorabilia including puppets, comic books, lunchboxes and more, all of which still sits happily on a shelf in my computer room.

On the most memorable scenes of the cartoon for me that keeps coming back to me with particular warmth after all these years was when Robin visits an impoverished rabbit family, saving a baby rabbit's birthday from being ruined by the greedy sheriff who robs them of their last coin. After cheering up the little fellow by giving him his own bow and arrow, as well as Robin's trade-mark hat, the mother rabbit, with tears in her eyes, remarks, "Oh, Robin Hood, Robin Hood, you risk so much to keep our hopes alive. Bless you, bless you." Robin himself gives her a bag of gold and tells her, "I only wish I could do more. And keep your chin up. Someday there'll be happiness again in Nottingham; you'll see."

That to me is the spiritual synthesis of the legend of Robin Hood. It's about the goodness of the human spirit that endures even in the face of cruelty and oppression, and the assurance that there is always hope, even in the simplest of things, the smallest glimmers of light at the end of the tunnel. Resistance is not futile, for a dream that is true never dies. That is the meaning of heroism, leaving behind a message that cannot be claimed by death, a song that is ceaseless and taps into the eternal root of our souls. There is a phrase that runs that the spirit of Robin Hood is in all the forests of the world. Perhaps this ties into still older pagan mythologies involving Herne the Hunter and the Green Man, maintaining the life force of the wilderness.

Yet there is something in it also shot through with a genuine sense of Christian belief that was so much a part of medieval English culture, because it appeals to the spirit of the law, to natural law, deeper than any man-made construct. As St. Augustine put it, "An unjust law is no law at all." Furthermore, the belief that even the grimmest of situations may be turned "merry" hearkens back to the notion that victory has already been gained against the forces of darkness. This attraction to Robin's "rebel spirit" soon drew me to be interested in all things involving England, and by extension the whole of the British Isles. Therefore, I owe a particularly deep debt of gratitude to the Prince of Thieves who stole my heart.

Of course, we will never know the true historical facts about either King Arthur or Robin Hood, whether they existed as singular figures or are mythological mash-ups of any number characters and themes that continue to have a universal appeal. In the case of Robin, it is likely that the legend took shape around a number of different men who defied the oppressive Norman poaching laws and took refuge in the great forests of the Midland and Northern counties of England over the course of the medieval period. Sir Walter Scott helped fix an imaginative time and date as coinciding with the Third Crusade, during the reign of Richard the Lionheart, and his struggle to reclaim his throne from his scheming brother, Prince John "Lackland." Whatever the true origin point, the spirit of resistance and

that beautiful blend of history and romance built a legend into which each passing generation has breathed new life.

While Robin Hood can be called the quintessential British hero of the common man, King Arthur can be called the quintessential British ideal of kings. Although mythologically embroidered, Arthur in his raw essence was a symbol of resistance to the Celtic tribes against the invasion of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Over time, he became a symbol of mankind striving after a perfect society in the face of extreme odds, and failing due to sin from within, making a compelling case for both the Christian belief in the fallen nature of man and the earlier pagan belief in the cycle of life, destruction, and ultimate rebirth.

Arthur's adventures contain many allegories and demonstrations of the complexity of human nature, often stepping outside of our world and drifting into the realm of the archetypal subconscious, drawing heavily from Celtic sagas and knitting together both pagan and Christian traditions. The result is a surreal, evocative, melancholic, and sometimes even horrific world where there is still the undeniable presence of some divine destiny that makes even the most despairing outcomes contain a seed of new life to grow upon the turning of the next season and the next phase of man. Alfred, Lord Tennyson wrote in his *Idylls of the King*, "The old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfils himself in many ways..."

In this way, perhaps the paramount heroes of British legend and lore fulfill each other, in that Arthur's Camelot is a place for the building of justice and equality in a structural setting, whereas Robin's Sherwood is a haven of the outcasts when all other structures have rotted and crumbled away. Perhaps it is the careful balance of obedience and resistance, lawful authority and justified defiance, that makes up the necessary tension of the human experience. We each have our own stories that fit into the cycles of rising, descending, and rising again. We are called to draw out our own swords from stones and bend our own bows made of yew.

And so in this magazine issue, we are going to take you on a pilgrimage beyond the mists of Avalon and an adventure into the depths of Sherwood Forest. There will be high action and intense emotion, as well lighter moments of fun and frolicking, and engrossing magic and mystery. It is also a call put out for all of us. In a world too often rife with injustice and tragedy, it is our duty, especially as those who wield the pen and craft our words into story and song, to take our own stand for the right and remind the world that hope is still on the horizon. Perhaps this is the meeting point for Robin and Arthur's heroism, and the potential for our own.

"Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." Proverbs 31:8-9

Many blessings,
Avellina Balestri
(alias Rosaria Marie),
Editor-in-Chief
Fellowship & Fairydust Publications

What's New at F&F

Our Tolkien Conference has been postponed until May. Keep updated by searching FB for 'More Than Memory: A JRR Tolkien Conference' or by clicking this box.

We have over 600 followers on social media and over 1000 members in our F&F Facebook Community!

Donna L. Ferguson Dudley

Birthright, Reclaimed!



*From far and wide the nobles rushed, "Excalibur" to claim,
But it was meant for one who knew not his own princely name.
Arthur, raised as bastard, by a friend of great King Uther
Was through the years tormented by Sir Kay, supposed brother.
But hidden truth was his birthright, as son of England's king,
And he'd been sent away for fear of what the years would bring,
On wise advice of Merlin, who saw the future's threat;
Thus babe, for his protection, was banished with regret.
Mere months thereafter, Uther Pendragon fell ill and met his death.
Dukes and Lords disputed right to rule, of king bereft,
So Merlin settled those disputes with test he had devised:
A stone with anvil perched atop, and sword thrust deep inside!
Who'd pull that magic sword, "Excalibur", from resting place
Was right wise King of England born, and title "King" would grace!
Merlin had been friend to Arthur throughout his growing years,
'Til Arthur, fifteen years of age, to the fated sword drew near.
As time had passed, strongest had tried, all without success
To pull the sword, "Excalibur", from its unyielding nest,
And it had languished, 'most forgotten, in its churchyard home
Since all who'd tried, throughout the years, to defeat had gone.
But Arthur, just a slender youth, from stone the sword did bring,
And took his place upon the throne as England's rightful king!*

Robin Hood: Fact or Fiction?

By MariaTeresa Carzon

Robin Hood is one of the most famous heroes of classic literature. Originally written in medieval times, the story has been loved by people, old and young, throughout the world for many years. It is a great account of honor and friendship. But who are the characters, did they actually exist, and where are they from?

At only eighteen years of age, the young Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest accidentally became an outlaw, not knowing of the many adventures to come.

The merry band of outlaws that followed Robin Hood is filled with fascinating characters. John Little – or as he is better known, Little John – is the second-in-command. He is the only man bigger than Robin, said to be seven feet tall. Will Scarlet is another member whose name was Young Gamwell before he joined the group. He is either Robin's nephew or cousin, depending on the ballad or story. In certain depictions he is an ex-mercenary with a hot temper; in others he is a musical gentleman who wears scarlet clothes. Allen a Dale is a less frequently used character who is very similar to Will Scarlet. Sometimes he is portrayed as the narrator. He dresses in scarlet and often provides musical entertainment for the group. And, of course, one can't forget Friar Tuck. The friar was recruited specifically to help rescue Allen a Dales' true love. They crash her forced wedding to a wealthy man, and Tuck officiates a marriage between her and Allen. Maid Marian appears as either a noblewoman or a villager who helps Robin Hood, usually in love with him. In some interpretations she is Robin's love interest after they meet in adulthood, but others portray her as his childhood sweetheart and a strong fellow outlaw. This female warrior or damsel proves to be an asset on more than one occasion.

Consider the villains of this bold tale. The Sheriff of Nottingham is the primary cause of Robin Hood's problems, hiring people to hunt him. For example, Sir Guy of Gisbourne, wearing a horse's hide, is sent to find and kill Robin. He manages to injure him, but is himself killed. At one time, while King Richard is away on one of the Crusades, the corrupt Prince John takes the throne. He is a greedy ruler, raising taxes and making living conditions horrible for the lower class. In some stories he conspires with the Sheriff of Nottingham in pursuit of their shared enemy. Although these crooked people are cunning in their attempts to end Robin Hood's shenanigans, it is his cousin, the Prioress of the Kirklees Nunnery, who finally defeats the formidable foe. An aging Robin goes to see her for medical assistance. Unfortunately, she has a plan to leave him bleeding instead of draining the proper amount of blood, ultimately leading to his death.

With such a rich history and undying popularity, is it possible that Robin Hood really existed? Is he more than a legend? This is a question that is asked by many fans and historians. Some researchers believe that the character Robin Hood may have been based on a real man who lived in medieval times when the story was first written. If he did live long ago,

evidence suggests it was most likely in the 12th or 13th century. According to some records, different variations of the name Robin Hood were used by vigilantes and criminals in the 13th century. Some of these include “Robehod” and “Rabunhod”. It is unknown what inspired these names; they may have been changed from a real man’s name or are personal adaptations of the character sung about in verses and ballads of the time. The hero in those songs was the original Robin Hood that led to the current fictional figure that people know and love today.

Yet, more proof of Robin Hood’s existence lies in two historical men who appear in his story: King Henry II and King Richard the Lionheart. Both kings ruled in real life, medieval England. King Richard was the ruler during the merry band’s golden age and King Henry was his predecessor. In interpretations with further detail, King Henry is the ruler at the beginning of Robin Hood’s story. While King Henry is away, the Sheriff of Nottingham takes over Sherwood. King Henry is overthrown by Richard and King Philip II in England in 1189, introducing King Richard as a new character in the tales of Robin Hood. At the end of many adaptations, King Richard comes back to Sherwood and reclaims the kingdom from the Sheriff. A lesser known part of the story is when King Richard returns; he meets Robin and brings him, Little John, Will Scarlet, and Allen a Dale and his wife to London to be royal rangers and grants the entire band full pardon. Robin Hood and Allen a Dale remain in the King’s service for many years, but after about a year, Little John goes back to Sherwood and Will Scarlet goes home. After he finishes serving the King, Robin Hood also leaves to see Sherwood Forest one last time and dies in his hometown.

Sherwood Forest, the famous location that held most of Robin’s adventures, was preserved by the kings of medieval times as a hunting ground. Just as in the story, they were very protective of their deer which were kept mainly as targets. After the kings stopped using the land for hunting, people started to build establishments in the forest. Some built homes, mills, or shops, and others built farms and pastures for their livestock and crops. In order to bring this land back to its natural form, a nonprofit fund called the Sherwood Forest Trust was created in 1995. The Sherwood Forest Trust is meant to preserve the remaining land and fix the areas that have been built on or destroyed. In 2002 the forest became a National Nature Preserve. About 400,000 people visit this celebrated attraction yearly, and they come not to see the trees but to see the place where Robin Hood may have lived a long time ago.

The story of Robin Hood has drawn the interest of innumerable readers all around the world. It has been sung, read, recited, and performed by many. It is an inspiring story of good friends, loyalty, and honesty. This tale has lovable characters, a mysterious background, and interesting locations. The outlaw known as Robyn Hode, Robehod, Rabunhod, and Robin Hood will go down in history as a well-liked figure whether he was real or only a fairytale.



Robin Hood Statue in Nottingham

A Magical Wood

By Timothy Mather



**I am the Hooded man, Herne the Hunter keeper of the forest
I am the red-breasted one who holds dominion over the green forest**

I am of the common folk and the land, I dispense justice on the finery

I live by my rules and the fine greenery of Nature

I am protector of the small and beautiful creatures, the innocent are my own

I defend the weak and poor, and punish the corrupt and deceitful.

I am a trickster, Puck of the wood, I will lead you astray, can you stay on course?

I am surrounded by merry men, legendary heroes all.

I am consort to May and Deer Queen

It is I who honours and is devoted to Dame Fortune

It is I who punishes those full of hubris

**It is I who slay the Holly King in furs and skins and returns the earth to its vibrant
green beauty**

I am the Oak King companion of Wren and sacred willow wood

I am the betrayed one, through my blood the land is renewed

I left a life of finery to follow an outlaw into the wood.

I am mammoth in size yet I am called little

I am kind and gentle yet my staff is lethal in battle

I am stern and serious yet I am one of the Merry Men

I am the right-hand man of the Hood, my name is Little John.

We met while hiding from the Sheriff, we are fast friends, I walk with a limp

I call Sherwood home, I am a kind Soul, I am Much.

I am good with a dagger, good-natured, hot tempered

I came to Sherwood after the Sheriff's cutthroats killed my Dear Meg

I took revenge, now I am a vigilante

I will kill all who are capable of savagery against the downtrodden

I am called Scarlett for the blood I am willing to spill.

**At first I was a captive but the more I preached to the Merry Men the more I became
one of them**

I am very fond of good food and drink, but giving to the poor is my goal

I am Tuck of the wood.

**I, like my namesake, am both Goddess pure and of the world and wood
I am Maid Marion, bringer of luck and fortune but what I give I can easily take away
I am a lady of justice and fate, I am the ever revolving wheel of fate
I am a Priestess, I'm good with a blade, I am your match in all ways
On Beltane night come to the forest and lie with me in Robin's bower
And consummate a Sherwood marriage
Come let us handfast and have a merrybegot under Friar Tuck's watchful eye
Come Maiden Marion, let us celebrate eternal May within the wood.
I am time without time, place without place, I am the mythical wood of Sherwood
Within my branches time stands still, I am every wood**



Fenyw

By Cariad

Editor's Note: The following vignettes are inspired by the 1998 Merlin miniseries starring Sam Neill.

* * *

Morgan le Fay had for hours been sealed within the cell of her mind and body; a casing that from its core felt mutilated and torn beyond healing. She, a lithe form composed of bones, skin and thick, clotting blood, was extracting from her wounds and womb another living being such as herself.



She wept against her wishes, and could feel and see the life-force that had once flowed through her veins now pooled around her lower body, coarsely sticking to her hips and thighs. As vapors of steam the midwife's words penetrated her mind but were ignored for the most part or soon lost.

For how much longer, she wondered, would she continue. How much more could her body withstand before it finally succumbed to a death brought on by new life. She'd endured the pain of labor for hours, witnessing through a window the moon in its eclipse make way for a scarlet sun.

In her bed of soiled sheets, her confidence was siphoned from her along with her blood, and she began to see a black crape sky of stars awaiting her. A coal map folded many times over, unfolded and pricked with pins. Behind it a lamp held by a figure great and unseen passed as if time, igniting constellations.

Frik was beside Morgan, holding her hand, but it hardly seemed to matter. Pain was foremost on her mind. Torment and the desire for its end.

The room was suddenly lit as though by a strike of lightning as Queen Mab came into being, materializing at a distance from Morgan's feet. Her majestic figure was hunched to closely view matters of interest; her sapphire cloak grasped tightly by glinting hands crossed at her waist. Her eyes narrowed as she looked to the distance, unseeingly. "It's time," she uttered.

In a matter of seconds the midwife, who was unaware of any supernatural attendance, announced that she had seen the child; that it was coming.

Persevering, Morgan gathered her strength and will, fighting until she could hear the baby's cries as it left her body. With the child finally free, she collapsed back into the bed, breathing heavily. Her eyes closed, and she saw trails of blue and gold dusts amid the black expanse. She laughed breathlessly.

"It's a boy," the midwife announced, her tone betraying her preference for the sex to which the infant belonged. Morgan was acutely aware of the child's gender. She'd known it since he had initially been conceived in thought. A maple key cast into the soil of her mind when the visiting gnome had been a stranger to her. Yet, something in her rejoiced upon hearing the reality of the situation.

Her child now lived outside of dreams.

Sweeping downwards, his hair adhering to the perspiration on her face, Frik bent to kiss Morgan's forehead and cheek. As she raised out from under the cold, ice-like surface of her weakened self, she realized with a sudden wave of shock that she could no longer hear her son.

She discovered as she moved why he had grown silent; Queen Mab had collected him into her arms and was cradling him so closely, and with such relevance, it was as though she herself had just given birth to him. From her eyes there radiated a warmth, and admiration Morgan was unused to seeing associated with the goddess, and she was for a moment stunned into silence.

"He's beautiful," Morgan heard Mab say in awe, her voice barely above a whisper.

With one hand supporting the baby's head and another at his back, Queen Mab raised the boy to the air. "This child's name is to be Mordred. He will reign as king and restore the Old Ways." The words were the same as an oath to the earth; the elements, the future. As though in their being said aloud the predictions would with certainty come to fruition. Mab's coal shadowed eyes were heavily lidded as she regarded the child, revealing that the mistress of magic had herself become enchanted.

"May I have him?" Morgan asked, after some length. She extended her hands, reaching out for the swaddled, silent infant. "My son."

Mab inhaled sharply, the spell of suspension broken. With features returned to their normal cast, Mab slowly moved to Morgan's side. Her skirt and cloak rustled with her steps. Her heels clicked against the stone floor.

Queen Mab reluctantly placed the newborn in his mother's arms, caressing his temple as she eased away. Morgan noticed Mab's gaze lower as she observed the child; a faint smile spread across her lips. "Raise him well, Morgan le Fay. Do as you have sworn: Instill in him the wisdom of the Old Ways." She stepped back, folding her arms. "I will be back soon, to visit Mordred."

With another flash of light, the Queen was gone. In her wake, Morgan brought the baby close, embracing him. She looked to his sweet, tired face and found the beauty that had the same as possessed Mab.

* * *

The floorboards protested beneath Nimue's bare feet as she came nearer the exit of her room. Through the door, she could hear the merged voices of the brothers in prayer. Her open window allowed inside the sounds of newly woken birds, waves lapping against the shore of the island, insects and the autumn wind.

Avalon Abbey filled Nimue with serenity and peace. A



drowsy sense of being and fulfillment. In it she felt closer to God.

In the absence of comfort provided by the man she loved, she was granted the love of another. Her love for God surpassed that of mortal endearment, that of the flesh and heart. This was a love that never faded. One that was giving and beautiful. Even while knowing such love, she at times felt wanting for what most took for granted. A face free of scars; a life lived with a husband.

Nimue knew Merlin would marry her as she was, her face and body covered with cloth and ruin, and he would move her to the cabin in the forest where he'd been raised. Free from the eyes of strangers, he promised, free from their whispers, but she knew it was all a dream. He was always being taken from her. They would never be alone, not while Merlin had his protege to raise and an enemy in Queen Mab.

For now, Nimue was content to dwell in the abbey, drifting through life. Each day spent in patterns of prayers, the tending of the garden and its herbs; speaking with the sisters and brothers she knew as family. She usually spent evenings alone, eating by herself; reading or viewing the world outside her window.

The land in the distance of Avalon held little promise.

News of the outside world was met with apprehension. Nimue longed to hear word regarding King Arthur and Camelot, as they were tied to Merlin. But at the same time, she feared the possible discovery of another obstruction set in their path.

Sometimes a new soul in need of healing would arrive at the abbey, and she would watch the sisters as they mended the ill. She offered aid when it was needed, and often sat by the person's side in prayer. They could not ask her name, much less comprehend a story were she to tell one, but she brought wet rags to their temples. She held their hands and whispered to them hymns and prayers that God would hear if they did not.

When they came to wake, Nimue would ask the sisters of their progress but not linger as before. She couldn't bear the judgment of those who did not know her. Unlike Nimue, the patients would leave the abbey after they were healed, and she

would never see them again through any means other than memory.

She found that her memory was now forced to serve her in conjuring the images of all of her loved ones. The war between Vortigern and Uther had taken her father's life, and in a sense it had taken Merlin's as well.

They had all, in their way, taken with their descent ties to her being. But the person she held most responsible was another woman.

The same woman who created the source of much of her happiness.

* * *

Queen Mab passed through the halls of Pendragon Castle. She was to the King's eyes a procession of shadows, though her presence was unmistakable.

She crept through the darkness to him, a hand ghosting over his back, and he discovered that the air near him was frigid.

A man of strength and determination, Vortigern could not help but feel his resolve weaken, his knees give with the thought of his surrender.

As he turned to face Mab she faded, leaving him to question if he'd been dreaming.



* * *

Vortigern began to await Mab's return as evening descended, having imagined her slow progression of the moonlit hall throughout the day. He would move from one candlelit room to another, choosing to walk in darkness when it came time to enter his room.

Weeks passed before she reappeared.

* * *

Mab would send herself to her palace in the Land of Magic after leaving Vortigern. The king's blue eyes were last to disappear from her vision as she faded from his home and into her own.

The faerie queen in a warrior's armor displayed to the king a strength she did not feel the need to show others, just as she gave him the gift of her weakness shelled in metal cuirass. The armor she wore always beneath the skin was now a visible exoskeleton.

Mab saw in Vortigern shards of the same broken mirror that made up a part of herself. Placed in his eye would she not appear? She did not believe she could say the same for herself, for out of her no speck of discarded glass would reveal to the world his face.

She came to him to invite the thoughts that as drops of rain beaded the web connecting them. To perceive them culminating in him, and to take into her palm the solution of that anticipation; making it solid as a shard of quartz. She would then scryer the images that were performed in the theater of his mind and her own. The follies of mortals and elements. The commingling of flesh and dreams.

* * *

Guinevere knew early on that her fate would be decided for her by others. As a young girl she, like all of her sex and nobility, could the same as foresee her future but not silence the wish for more than it held. Her father would arrange her marriage, and she would be made to comply with his wishes.

Marry for advancement, for power. For the betterment of one's family. Be content with the life you are blessed with and the union you make as many have in their hearts a great desire for that which you dismiss.

* * *

When it came time to marry, Guinevere did not find herself in as desolate a situation as she had imagined. For Arthur was a kind and handsome man. His company and conversation enjoyable.

Their life together was chiefly without worry; an amiable friendship that could at times feel as though it had blossomed into something more. She was content, for the

most part, aside from an awareness of another side present within the King. Another door made open, through which Arthur was weighted with sadness and regret. In this room of shadow and torment Arthur existed as a shrouded being, begging God and his son for mercy.



When he emerged, it was as his former self, though he remained fixated on redemption. From what heinous sin need he repent, she wondered. She would with subtlety ask him as such, though he never shared with Guinevere the travesties of his past.

She wished that he would feel as though he could trust his wife as no other, save God. But she was, as in other matters, cast aside in favor of a man.

Arthur's confidant and closest friend was his former tutor, the wizard Merlin. All matters of importance were discussed with him and the circle of Arthur's closest and most trusted friends; the Knights of the Round Table.

As time progressed, she learned to live within herself; she could escape through such means.

* * *

The King knew her standing; that she would rather he stay in Camelot and abandon the seemingly impossible quest for the Holy Grail. As king, his land and people required his leadership: his authority and wisdom. *She* needed him. To proceed on his quest was in her eyes, not only a fool's errand, but rather arrogant of Arthur, despite his good intentions. But he would not listen to reason.

When Merlin brought to Camelot the King's champion, Guinevere experienced a rush of exhilaration in seeing him, as if the dreams of her maidenhood hadn't been lost to her; in Lancelot they could reawaken.

And they did.

Everything in her awoke from the harsh and heavy stagnation through which she'd aimlessly been wading, and she was set on dry land. She recognized passion where before it had only been gestures, movements; all was fire to her now. Fire and

whispers in the night. Meetings behind secret doors. Lancelot and Guinevere called to one another wordlessly, as if linked by unknown means.

Guinevere never knew such unrestrained happiness. The days were balmy, and she was almost perpetually at peace.

A shadow pursued her, though, casting all around him a cloud of darkness. As wind across a field, as ripples in water so did he move. The shadow attempted to spread his oblivion to the heights of which she'd risen, but he couldn't touch her.

She wouldn't let him. As the sweep of his dark fingers reached for her, she swatted at their claws or disregarded them.

What she had committed was a sin. She knew it. He needn't inform her. She'd committed it over and over again. But she had finally attained her happiness, after so many years of waiting. No one would take it from her.



Mordred
By Elijah David

*A man's life is not his own
When all the world rewrites his story –
The tales we tell, the seeds we've sown
Twisted for another's glory.
I'd have been an obedient son, a noble nephew
And never left my rightful place,
But Monmouth opened his mouth to spew
Unseemly treacheries – treason – Absalom-faced
Debauchery – as though rebellion and a throne's
Usurpation went not far enough afield!
The marriage bed too! Then came other woes – a crone
For a mother, no loyal sister more. Now she yields
Loathing, vengeance, and ignoble conception
For brother and son. And in such villainy do I now revel –
They precurse me to Machiavelli and give me a Brutus' reception –
Or a Christ's. Does not my uncle-father-uncle
Name himself a Herod in my birth and their deaths?
Those lonely unfortunates, confederate only by the stars
Of their birth. How they would rise up on the wind's breath
Not to avenge themselves on Arthur – but on the authors
Who so callously slay them to craft in me
Mordred. Bastard. Fiend. What evil did I wreak
In my dam's womb – what perfidy
Conceive that I should be cast so? Weak
Unlawful cowardice it is. I'll not cease
To strive for better. With each new
Verse and tale my chance comes – a new lease
To become the man God made – a knight loyal and true.*

The Forest Lord Series, by Steven A. McKay:
A four book retelling of the legend of Robin Hood



Review by Stuart S. Laing

Author of the *Robert Young of Newbiggin Mysteries*

When you take such a well-known and well-loved tale as Robin Hood and his Merry Men, it would be only too easy to go down that well-trodden path so familiar to all who know the legend. "Hail fellow and well met!" greetings between rosy-cheeked outlaws who dress in green tights and short tunics like medieval transvestites swinging through Sherwood Forest, laughing like giddy schoolboys. It was therefore a delight to discover that Steven A. McKay has taken the legend, given it a good shake, and let this thoroughly enjoyable version fall out.

From the very first page of *Wolf's Head*, you find yourself in Yorkshire rather than Nottinghamshire, in the village of Wakefield rather than Loxley. Here Robin is a common man who, through a moment of anger, is forced into fleeing his home, his family, and his lover Mathilda. These changes add a genuine, fresh twist to the tale which adds so much to the book, and indeed the entire series.

While most of the regular characters appear here, they seem new, believable, and above all true to their period. Their language is robust and not for the easily offended, but will be familiar to anyone who has worked with other men as part of a team. The violence is frequent, bloody, and merciless, but again reflects how hard, unrelenting, and brutally

short life could be then.

In book two, *The Wolf and the Raven*, the reader is plunged headlong into the carnage and chaos of medieval warfare as Robin and his men (lovers of the legend can rest assured that they will find all the regular characters here: Little John, Will Scarlet, Friar Tuck, Much the Millar's son, et al) fight to win a promised pardon, a promise not fulfilled. Once again our band of less than merry men are cast aside as men outside the law.

To find and crush these so-called outlaws, the Sheriff of Nottingham calls on the services of a man who will become Robin's nemesis. His name: Sir Guy of Gisbourne. The Gisbourne of this book quickly becomes one of the great villains of fiction: a man of twisted desires and dreams who has suffered heartbreak and betrayal himself through the actions of his adulterous wife. Her betrayal, coupled with his childhood fascination with the tales of King Arthur, have convinced him he is almost the reincarnation of Lancelot, and while he is a brutal, ruthless killer you can't help but feel that there is a weird sort of chivalry at the dark heart of everything Gisbourne does. Women are to be protected (despite his wife's adultery) while the enemies of the king can be killed without thought or mercy!

The climactic scene of this book is almost Arthurian itself as Robin faces Gisbourne, a self-created modern Black Knight in single combat on a bridge. Blood will be shed and the result is not what most will hope for, but does leave things wide open for the story to continue in book three, *Rise of the Wolf*, where we return once more to the leafy expanse of Barnsdale Forest rather than the green trees of Sherwood. The change in location, a nod to the earliest ballads of where Robin lived, gives plenty of scope for the author to explore new avenues for Robin and his band of merry (and miserable) men. This is something which readers should be grateful for.

Here we have a version of Robin Hood probably closer to how a real outlaw would have lived than that familiar from TV and movie adaptations. While Kevin Costner's portrayal looked more like a 1990s AOR music video star who liked nothing more than relaxing in a trendy bar sipping Pinot Grigio and listening to George Michael, McKay's Robin Hood is the sort of man who kicks open the door of a rough pub, orders a pint of real ale in a dirty glass, then cranks the juke-box up to eleven and blasts out "Ace of Spades" till the windows shatter! He is so much the better for that!

Sir Guy of Gisbourne, after being horrifically disfigured by Robin in the previous book, is out for blood. Already dangerous, his injury has only made him all the more reckless in his quest for vengeance. Aided by the vile turncoat Matt Groves, nothing and no one is safe from their relentless pursuit to see Robin, and his men, die as painfully as possible.

This is a story for adults; the action and language are as robust as we would expect from a band of outlaws, but it is not all doom and gloom. The book is laced throughout with a wonderfully dark humour that will have you smiling one moment and grimacing the next. The Sheriff's tournament, designed to lure Robin out of hiding with the prize of an arrow of solid silver, had me laughing out loud at the hissed conversation between the Sheriff and Gisbourne as each enjoys the other's discomfort in turn.

The focus on Robin's family is also a welcome addition to the scenes around the outlaws' campfire, and the developing character of Robin's young sister, Marjorie, is a worthy addition to the tale. From being the runt of the litter, she will grow to become a vitally important factor at a crucial point later in the book. Which leads, in time to the final instalment of the series, *Blood of the Wolf*.

Reaching the end of this book, and indeed the *Forest Lord* series, is like saying farewell to a dear friend, having followed Robin Hood from his earliest days when, due to the actions of another, he is forced into the life of an outlaw – a man with a price on his head, who can be killed by anyone, at any time without fear of legal punishment.

The previous books in the series have led us through the trials and tribulations Robin has to endure until now, finally, it seems that he has achieved all he could wish for. A pardon for himself and his loyal band of men, and a new lucrative career working for the man who had hunted him for so long. It seems that he has it all.

In reality, his life is far from happy. Old friends now look at him as a turncoat, and his own wife can barely stand to be near him. The people who had sung ballads in his honour now see him as the enemy. In achieving his dreams, has Robin destroyed the happiness he has always sought?

Steven A. McKay delivers a riveting, edge of the seat page-turner. There are times you want to look away from the sheer brutality of medieval life – a cruel, blood-soaked time where life is short, and the violence is unflinching in its intensity – but it is to the author's credit that the brutality never overwhelms the reader. The action may be blunt, but it is never gratuitous.

Blood of the Wolf sinks its fangs in early, and from the first page, you are taken on a helter-skelter ride through the forests of Barnsdale. From mass insanity in Holmfirth to cruel murders on the dusty tracks of Yorkshire, you are invited to saddle up and join the merry band in the hunt for the cruellest, most heartless, and deviant foe that Robin has ever had to face. This enemy has but one aim, and that is to see Robin Hood dead! To achieve that aim, there is nothing he and his growing band of murderous villains are not prepared to do – and be warned, there is literally *nothing* they are not prepared to do!

For those who have even a passing knowledge of the Robin Hood legend, his ultimate fate is known long before you reach the end of the tale. That knowledge lends a dark cast to the closing chapters of this wonderful story; people will die, and the blood will flow in torrents. Yet even now, in this darkest of times, you are still rooting for there to be some possibility of a happy ending for Robin and his young family.

Does that possibility exist? Is it simply wishful thinking on the part of the reader?

This is a series perfect for a mature reader who enjoys engrossing stories and believable characters. Highly recommended. And alongside the main series are several spinoff novellas, all of which are just as rewarding and enjoyable to read.



AT LARGE

with

LIBERTY

By Avellina Balestri

Author's Note: This is an excerpt of a flashback that takes place in *Longbows and Rosary Beads*, a Robin Hood retelling novel-in-progress.

The shadow of a figure in simple-cut huntsman's garb cast itself along the shimmering emerald of the forest ferns. It moved swiftly between the trees, like the deer, with the agility of a boy and the lightness of a girl. Yes, in spite of the attire, the spirit of the place seemed to know a woman's soul had come to seek out the secrets of its depths.

When she came to a grove of oaks, she paused, pulled the hunting horn from her belt, and blew into it with all her might, letting the echo resound through the morning mist like a clarion call. As the last note died away, several seconds of silence passed. Then seemingly from out of nowhere, an arrow flew and stuck into a tree to her right. She whirled around.

"Is that how you face off a FitzWalter lass, shooting from the bushes at her, eh? How manly, Robin-of-the-hood!"

The archer poked his head out from the shrubbery, and his merry blue eyes were dancing in time to the grin sparkling across his face. "...of the hood?"



"That's what they're calling you, after your glorious stunt at the festival, risking life and limb for a golden arrow and a maiden's kiss." She crossed her arms. "Use it, why don't you? Christian name and outlaw name, side-by-side. Fits your paradoxical self to a tee."

"As you wish," he conceded, coming out from the brush and going over to her. He smiled, almost shyly. "You look...good, Marian."

"No, you don't!" she shot back. "Don't give me that 'looking good' nonsense, as if we don't know each other from Adam, for a mere two years in Londontown! I'll not stand for it!"

"Fine, I'll try again." He pretended to scowl. "You look...ghastly, Marian...almost as if they managed to make a lady out of you or something out there, no matter how hard you try to hide it under your current scandalous garb..."





Now she kicked him lightly in the shins, and he made as if it were a much harder hit than it was, and they both found themselves wrestling like ten-year-olds in a nearby pile of leaves. She soon had him pinned down, begging for mercy.

“Alright, alright, I surrender!” he yelped, throwing up his hands dramatically as she tossed a final handful of leaves in his direction.

“Are you sorry?” she demanded, crossing her arms.

“Surely...shall I don sackcloth and ashes to convince you?”

A slow smile spread across her face. “Oh, bother. Don’t go to such lengths.” She started picking bits of leaf out of his golden-brown hair. “Still the Locksley curls, I see,” she noted his family trademark.

“And still the FitzWalter temper, I see!” he remarked. “The Lionheart would have done himself a favor to conscript you into his ranks. Saladin and the whole Saracen host would shrink in terror at your approach, especially armor clad, swinging a battle-axe! The stuff of nightmares, I say!”

“Ha, ha,” she snorted. “It’s more fun to use it on know-it-all Saxons.”

“For shame, m’lady,” he feigned insult. “You should have been born in time for the Conquest! All that hot Norman blood just boiling inside you, without any proper direction...”

“Oh, I found my direction alright,” she decided, and glanced around her at the trees of Sherwood.

He smiled gently. “I had a feeling they’d call you back.”

“Ever talk to trees, my young lord?”

“But of course,” he replied, waving his hand broadly. “I am their prince, and they are the nobles of my hall, ever stalwart, ever true!”

She giggled, then brushed her thumb across his cheek. “Still shaving, even out here,” she commented. “You impress me. I was expecting you to have turned into a haggard wild man with whiskers down to the ground.”

“Ah, well,” he shrugged. “Why hide such facial splendor from the masses, what?”

She punched him in the shoulder. “Narcissist.”

“Hey, at least I’m not taking beauty baths for my complexion, like some London ladies do.”

“And you could use one, too,” she decided. “There is a pool out here under the falls, you know, and I might just decide to make you a grand coming home present of some soap...nice, French, scented soap...”

“Oh, God almighty...I’m not going to be smelling like a girl, you hear?”

“Not like a girl!” she protested. “Like...a flower.”

“Well, thank you for clarifying.”

“A nice, Norman flower...”

“Alright, this is your last invitation out here!”

He started to try and get up, but she pinned him back down. “You don’t mean that,” she said, suddenly in earnest.



He met her gaze with an equal measure of sincerity. “No, I don’t suppose I do.” He moved his head so it was leaning into her lap. “Remember...we used to do this...and you’d sing...”

“Yes, and you’d fall asleep on me,” she huffed. “It was very rude.”

“Aww, won’t you sing a song for me? For days gone by?”

“You’re acting like a baby!” she chided him.

He blinked, innocently. “Oh, please...just a little song?”

She exhaled, but finally relented, and started to sing about a lord of the magic seal-people who came to shore to woo the fisher’s daughter and make her lady of his ocean hall...until Marian saw Robin’s eyes close.

She tilted her head to one side. “Are you asleep again?”

“Yes,” he lied, eyes still closed.

“Oh, you...” She swallowed, considering something outrageous to say, then thinking better of it, she rather impulsively threw her arms around his neck and curled up alongside him in the leaves. “Miss me, Robin?” she murmured in his ear.

He turned his face, close enough to her that their eyelashes brushed each other. “What do you think?”

“I think you’re a rogue, an absolute rogue...”

Before she could say more, he pulled her tight against him, and their mouths met. They’d done this so many times in the forest, sneaking away from the others in the twilight, in the springtime of their youth when everything seemed so new and warm and alive. Now they were older, more experienced in the ways of the world, but it still felt...warm and alive.

They cuddled against each other like that for a little while, then she heard his heart start racing under his shirt, and he cleared his throat. “Free with your affections, aren’t you?” he twitted, starting to push her off and sit up.

“Why, Robin of Locksley!” she exclaimed. “You’re blushing as red as an autumn apple! It’s adorable!”

“We’ve, eh, not had much female company around these parts...”

“And I set you aflame?”

“Why, you naughty little daughter of Eve, I think you’re altogether enjoying this,” he pretended to scold her, but was obviously enjoying it, too.

“You and your honor code!” she cliqued her tongue.

“Eh, careful now,” he added with a wink. “Being out here so long, beyond the law, I might have a streak of Herne the Hunter in me after all...”



She squeaked as he smacked her lightly on the rump. “Oh, you naughty thing, you!”

He grinned. “Come on, get me up already!” he coaxed, and she helped pull him to his feet.

They wandered for a little while, hands still entwined, not saying anything, just drinking in each other’s company as they weaved between the trees, listening to the breeze whispering secrets in the last of the autumn leaves. “Did you think of me, when you felt the wind walking like it is today, Robin?” she asked.

He smiled, nodded. “You’re one with it, Marian.”

“I spoke to it all the time, when they wouldn’t let me write you,” she told him. “I told it to tell you all the secrets I couldn’t tell anyone else. I knew it loved to blow through the forest, and you were always there.”

“I figured that...they kept your time fully employed.” He turned to her. “So...what’s it like being the sheriff’s lady?”

He fast realized that was the wrong choice of words, as Marian vengefully yanked at his ear. “I am NOT his lady!” she shouted. “How DARE you...!”

“Och...alright, already...” he grimaced, though he was really beaming inside. “It’s just that...well...rumors have their way of traveling. And it was said you two were almost inseparable as a pair together in London...”

“And since when do you take rumors on their word?” she challenged. “And if you did, why risk so much at the tournament for...?”

“A golden arrow?” he filled in cheekily. “Gold is an outlaw’s best friend, you know.”

She eyed him dangerously.

“Not...that there weren’t other fringe benefits,” he added with a grin. “Which, tragically, I was somewhat detained from collecting, but...thankfully managed to make up for...”

“You mean because the sheriff’s men nearly riddled you with crossbow bolts, save for the fact that I was seated next to him on the dais, and managed to stall his command by spilling that wine all over his finest new doublet to give you a head start?”

“Let’s just say...I had to dash. Things come up in a busy life, and all.” He raised an eyebrow. “And has the noble sheriff been keeping you busy these days, too?”

“Have you ever heard of the lesser of two evils?” she sighed. “Had you been out in London, you’d understand... the place crawls with insects in knightly attire.”

“And he baled you out?”

“He kept an eye on me, yes,” she replied. “And I’ll admit, he was...safer for me to be with. Whatever sorry excuse of a man he is, he’s not the type to try and push a lady into a side room to debauch her. Besides...my father wanted me to hold out for the best. The more time I spent with Cavendish, further down on his list, the more unlikely it was for me to make a match. And the more likely...for me to get home...”

“I’m sorry for your father’s death,” Robin said quietly. “It must have been a shock for you...”

“Not half as much of a shock as yours,” she ground out, guilt tingeing her tone. “Being made to watch his hall burn was as good as killing him with the sword. It stopped his heart cold. I might have cause to mourn my father, but you have none! He did nothing to help yours, in his hour of greatest need. And he sent me away to...”





She turned to make eye contact, her hands bunched into fists in suppressed anger. “When I found out...what happened...what they did to you...to your father, and your home...I could have taken up a crossbow, and fired at the whole lot of them, so hot was my blood in that hour!”

“I...thought upon doing something similar myself, in the heat of it,” he admitted. “Herward the Wake tried it out in his day, you know? But then I thought...it would do no good. I’d just be giving them what they wanted. A Locksley murderer. And I...I don’t know...”

“What don’t you know?”

“I suppose...after a few weeks of wanting their blood, I started to pity the wretches. They’ve put blood on their hands they can never clean off, for all their lands and gear. It will weigh heavier by the year, especially on the one who wants me dead most dearly...your sheriff...”

“He’s not *my* anything!”

“Your...chaperone, perhaps?” Robin offered.

She groaned. “He was just out for himself, anyway...”

“But he kept wandering hands off you, and didn’t try to touch you himself,” he noted. “That’s why...you still keep his company.

You trust him in some way. You’ve...been bonded.”

“Not as far as his dirty alliances and backroom policies I don’t, damn him!” she swore.

“No, I never thought you did,” he stated carefully. “But still...I’ve seen you with him, and know...”

“Know what?” she snapped.

“You neither love nor hate him, but have found him part of your life, whether you wanted to or not. And in such a way, you are with him, and in such a way, you could not do him willful injury. No, not even in the heat of your blood. It’s another form of loyalty, Marian.”

“You know nothing of it! Do you think I could ever waver in what I am to you, for anything or anyone?” Now she just sounded more hurt than anything else.

“Erm, I’m the one who took a lucky shot at a certain tourney for your kiss this past fortnight, remember?”



She smiled knowingly and nodded at this. “Still being a show-off for the ladies, eh?”

“For *a* lady,” he clarified. “Always.”

“Then why are you asking me...?”

“I just think...you may pity him, too.” He paused. “He’s always been weak, and now he’s done a thing that will haunt him unto his death...he sees killing me as a way to undo that, but it will never work for him.





And I thought...if blood will fail to blot out the stain of a crime, then my moving on the same notion, to blot out blood with more blood, would be...equally wrong. And I could fight better not losing myself, anyway..."

"He'll never get the chance to take you, Robin," she stated, stern as a stone. "Because you see...if I stay near enough to be the ear that hears, then I will also be his foil. He's a lonesome fool with me, often enough; I'll know what he's about. He'll never catch you while I have my seat next to him, at banquet hall or May crowning."

He squinted. "Such a task would compromise you, surely..."

"It has always been my intent, should I return here," she told him. "It is in great part why I told him I'd forgive him for...what was done, after he begged it of me." She turned her eyes down. "And...as you say, blood upon blood would do no man good, including him. So I'm doing you both some service, no?"

"And what of...me, and the double tithes, and the noblemen's pouches made fat off it?"

"You know I despise such tosh as much as you!"

"So...what you're offering is...to be my...partner in crime, as it were?" He raised his eyebrow, questioningly.

"Partners, yes." Letting her inner tomboy take over, she spit into her hand and extended it to him. "But mind you, Young Locksley, I won't be taking orders from any man, and you'd better remember it, robber prince or no."

"Aww, but surely some hearty soul must set out to tame the shrew!"

"Shrews bite, you know!"

"Uh-huh," he responded numbly, biting his lip to contain his giddiness. "Just remember the old song about the wife who wouldn't do her chores and got a good thrashing in an old mare's skin?"

"And do you happen to remember what happened after that, clever one?"

"I'm sure you'll remind me..."

"The mare's soul and the woman's soul became one, and hearing the wind calling for her over the moors, said to that scum of a man, 'I won't lay down my pride!'"

"No wonder you love to be one with your horses so keenly..."

"And she got up on her fine hooves, tossed her mane, and cried, 'It's enough for me, enough for me, to live at large with liberty!'"

"And that's enough for you, my girl?" he beamed.

"Isn't it enough for you, Master of the Greenwood? And would you really keep company with any woman who wanted less for herself than you did?"

"Hell, no!" he laughed, taking her hand and then pulling her into his arms with a genial roughness, and snatching for another kiss. "But...sometimes it's a pleasure to be bound by someone else, you know..."

"You, bound?" she queried teasingly.

"Incorrigibly. What about you?"

"Well, I didn't come all the way out here to...to...feed the squirrels, did I?"

Again he burst into laughter. "So...you'll be princess of my hall, then? What do you say?"

"Like your Saxon shield-maidens?"





“Yes, exactly!” he concurred. “Like my mother...now, she was formidable to behold. Could walk into a room and stare down the hardest man with the sharpest weapon, and make him depart in peace by a mere glance. My father called her his first and last line of defense.”

“Ah, so you need defending then?”

“Maybe...just a little...most likely from my yeomen, if one of my jokes falls flat...”

“I wish I would have met her properly. We should have been soul-sisters...”

“What, wanting to be asking her all about my secrets?”

“I know all your secrets,” she huffed. “Well...most of them, I wager.”

“Oh, the men won’t like that,” he cliqued his tongue. “They’ll think you’ll go tattling to the sheriff for sure.”

Now she looked concerned. “Will they, Robin?”

“Eh, you’ll win them over with time. Besides, Cousin Will and Old Jacob will vouch for you, even if they’re convinced you’ve gotten me bewitched by some vile sorcery!”

“My goodness, how is dear Will?” she asked excitedly. “I’ve missed him!”

“Oh, still crazy,” he replied. “Still chasing petticoats. Still wearing that silly scarlet sash.”

“Oh, help,” she exhaled. “Even in the forest?”

“I’m trying to break him of it, but he’s refusing to be broken, little fool! Proud as a Christmas cardinal, that one!”

“And what about Old Jacob?” she pressed. “Is he well?”

“As fine a poacher as ever,” he replied with a wink. “Still in strapping health, too...”

“Thanks to you,” she added quietly. “Oh, yes, I heard that part, too. You wouldn’t let the forester touch him with his knife when he was caught with a buck, freshly killed. You kept him from being pilloried, even though...you knew how much it would cost you. So...that was the end of it. You passed beyond the law, and here you are.”

Robin shrugged. “Jacob’s always been a good, honest man, just trying to help others survive.”

“An apt description for someone else I know...”

“So do you remember when we were little, you and me and Will, we used to wander around here thinking we were a band of crusaders or something?”

“Yes! You wouldn’t let me at first, but I kept insisting, and I hit with mud in a sling I made!”

“And little Will, he was our standard bearer...”

“That old dish rag from Jacob’s wife!”

“She made the best gingerbread, too...”

“Those dear souls had the hardest time keeping us out of trouble!”

“Ah, they handled it alright, aye?”

“Aye,” she chortled, and smiled softly. “We’ll always be troublemakers, won’t we?”

“Oh, yes,” he agreed. “And what would the world do without troublemakers like us?”

“Probably despair,” she noted, suddenly solemn. She turned back to him again. “But we won’t let that happen,



will we?"

"Nah, we're midlanders, tenacious folk to the core," he chortled. "We scare away gloom by laughing in its face – our secret weapon, even when we can't see straight in front of us." He paused, squeezed her hand. "Besides, we're back in the pact! Double trouble to the end!"

"Oh, you mean our blood-pact when I cut my finger on a blackberry thorn bush, and you cut it on the same thorn, and we promised to get married, back when I was thirteen?"

"All that I know, all that is home, blood of my blood, bone of my bone, hands bound, hearts bound, bound by the love of one to the other..." he recited from memory.

"You still remember!"

"You thought I forgot?"

"Absence can make one's memory grow dull..."

"And one's heart grow sharp, sharp as a thorn's point. It makes the meeting ever sweeter, like the berries from the bush."

She looked up as a laverock sang. "The birds still sing in the trees. You said you'd wait for me as long as they did."

"I did. And you?"

"Even if all the birds were gone now...I'd still be waiting for you, Robin."



Guinevere

By Patrick W. Kavanagh

Would that I had never seen the sun
light up the sky at dawn,
With pink and silver clouds that bode a
better day than ever came.
Would that I'd been deaf, unheeding of
the chorus of the lark,
To live my life in silence and in dark,
and never heard your name





Bitter is the taste of finest wines, and rank the
smell of once sweet flowers on the bough,
Brandy burns my throat in fiery gulps, but
still the empty aching will not go.
What foul and spiteful fate had sent you here
to cross my path, I'll never know,
For still your beauty haunts me through my
tears – my broken spirit cannot let you go..

I wish I had the hate inside to take this blade
and thrust it into you,
To end your evil ways before you take the life
of others such as me.
So take this sword and strike me now and let
your aim be true,
And pierce this crumbling heart with all your
strength and set me free.

What is this wrong that I have done – that you
should cast aside this heart so easy won,
Have I loved too little or too much, offended
and been too tardy to atone,
Tell me now, before I die what cruel and
unforgiven deed that I have done,
And finish me before the rising of the sun – I
cannot bear to see another day alone.



Sword and Bow: Retelling England's Favorite Myths and Legends

By Kendra E. Ardnek



Robin Hood and Arthur. A thief and a king. Two of the most memorable figures in the myth and legends belonging to the fair British Isles. They're tales of hope and humanity, and as such, tales that have been told over and over, changing and evolving since the first time they were told. And so, of course, we're carrying on the mantle. Retelling one or the other of these lovely tales - or possibly both.

My debut series, *The Bookania Quests*, is a mash-up of multiple fairy tales, myths, and legends, including Robin Hood and King Arthur, so I'm here to break down what goes into retelling these age-old stories.

(And, just a disclaimer - I've actually not read a lot of retellings of Robin Hood, just classic versions, and I've not read a lot of the originals of King Arthur, just retellings. Just ... fun fact.)

First of all, know that there is no set-in-stone way to retell anything. The point of retelling is to take an old story and to make it yours. You can write a gentle retelling that follows the original version 100%, just with a few expansions here and there, or you can twist it in wild

ways. You can add magic, or you can take it out. Gender-swaps, modernizations, historic treatises. Whatever you want. Make the story yours.

However, make sure you understand the heart of the story. The reason that these stories remain with us is because they resonate with us – and their truths are universal to this day. King Arthur is the seeming nobody who was chosen by destiny and ushered in a golden age until betrayal destroyed from within. Robin Hood is the tale of a man who was cut down by an unfair king, but turned around, thrived in spite of his exile, and created a haven of freedom for the oppressed people. If you write a book that opposes those morals, then you might upset the built-in target audience for your book. You can dig deeper and tell your own story – in fact, I encourage you to do this – but don't abandon the tale entirely. Taking a core element of the story and twisting it completely is fine and fun (I'm totally down for a Robin Hood retelling where Robin is the worst archer in the history of England), but don't change the core elements. (A retelling of Robin Hood where he's not robbing the rich to give to the poor in some form or fashion is not a Robin Hood retelling.)

Remember that these tales had multiple “classic” authors, and were subject to a lot of changes over the years. English writing of Arthurian myth painted Gawain as the most noble knight, while the French made him more of a womanizer and gave the “noblest” badge to Lancelot. In Robin Hood, you might find one version where Will Scarlett is his nephew, and others where he's Robin's older cousin. So, you have a lot of options to choose from when you design your cast.

Know the characters. Both tales are filled with large casts of characters, some more developed and distinctive than others. Depending on the faithfulness of your retelling, you may decide to use more or fewer of the characters, and you can take liberties with the characters – make them their own – but I'm going to list here the characters that I feel are the most iconic to the tales. (There are tons more characters, but these are the ones that most people expect to see in one form or fashion.)

King Arthur: Arthur himself, the orphaned king who draws the sword from the stone and ushered in the golden age. Merlin, the wizard that guides him through the first few years of his reign. Guinevere, the queen, whose love affair is half the reason that Arthur's kingdom fell. Sir Lancelot, the favored French knight that the queen had the affair with. Sir Gawain, the most faithful and popular (appearing in almost every tale of Arthur, even if he doesn't play a large role), who happened to be the one who got caught up in the Green Knight incident. Sir Galahad, Lancelot's son, who was the one who succeeded in finding the grail. Morgan le Fay, Arthur's scary sorceress half-sister. Mordred, Arthur's illegitimate son and nephew who was the other half of why Camelot fell. (Moral of the story: honor the seventh commandment, and you'll get to keep your kingdom.)

Robin Hood: Robin Hood himself, the leader of the merry men, and the best archer in the land. Maid Marian, his lover, sometimes a helpless maiden, sometimes a capable tomboy.

Little John, Robin Hood's giant of a best friend and second-in-command. Allan-a-Dale, the lively minstrel who was the first married man in the Merry Men. Friar Tuck, the jolly and very round friar. Will Scarlett, Robin Hood's nephew or cousin, who is sometimes the best swordsman in the band, and who sometimes marries a princess. The Sheriff of Nottingham, the man directly trying to take Robin Hood down. Prince John, the king taxing everyone and making the rules that the Sheriff is enforcing. King Richard, the long-lost and long-awaited king.

Again, that is a short-list of characters, for both tales. There are plenty more, all with interesting stories, but those are the ones that most people think of when they are thinking about Robin Hood and King Arthur.

Take note of the iconic scenes and events of the tales:

King Arthur: His birth and orphanhood. The sword in the stone. The gaining of Excalibur. The quest for the Holy Grail. Gawain and the Green Knight. Guinevere and Lancelot's love affair. Mordred's betrayal. Arthur's death.

Robin Hood: Robin Hood's banishment to Sherwood Forest. The quarterstaff contest with Little John. The river crossing with Friar Tuck. Tricking the Sheriff in whatever way possible. The Golden Arrow contest where Robin Hood splits an arrow. Duel with Guy of Gisborne. Richard's return. Robin Hood's death.

There's a lot more that happens, especially in King Arthur, but those are the important parts, and I'm just doing a quick overview.

Don't bite off more than you can chew. Both King Arthur and Robin Hood are expansive tales that cover a lot of time, and in King Arthur's case, multiple volumes. Unless you're writing a series, you're probably not going to have space to include everything and do it justice. So, do yourself a favor and choose a focus for your tale.

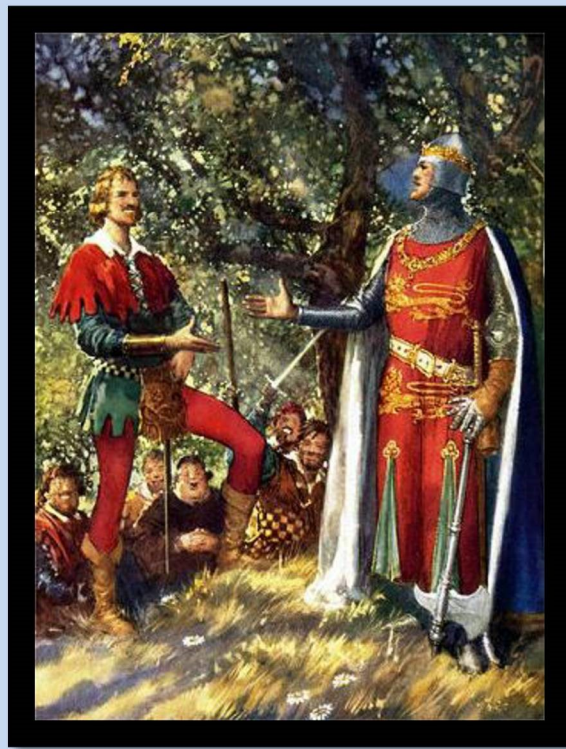
Read the originals, and read the retellings that others have written. You have to familiarize yourself with the stories to do them justice. And reading what other people have done with them will help you understand what the tale is about. Also, if you can find articles and books that break down and explain the origins of the tales, read as many as you can, they're terribly helpful. Devouring everything I can find about a fairytale, myth, or legend, is an essential part of my writing process whenever I plunge into a new retelling.

Respect copywritten content. You are retelling Robin Hood and/or King Arthur. You are *not* retelling someone else's retelling - and that includes most movies (there are some that are old enough to be in the public domain, I think, but it's better to be safe than sorry). In fact, that especially includes movies such as Disney's, as they reach a wider audience and

more people will be able to call you out if you rip them out. It's okay to be inspired by another retelling, put a new twist to their concept, or to readdress their themes, but remember that the original is the baseline.

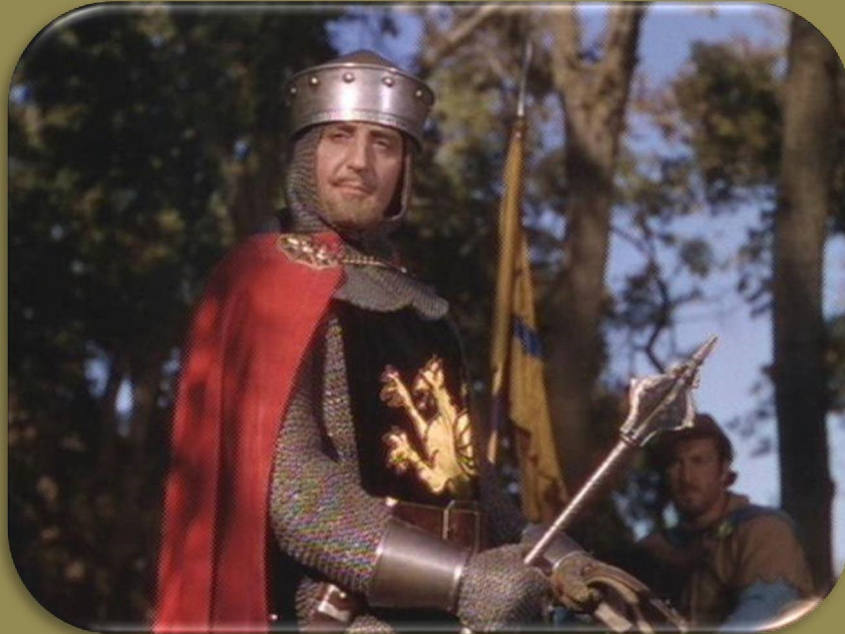
I hope these guidelines are helpful to you as you venture into the realm of retellings. And I hope you're not overwhelmed! It might seem like a daunting task to tell a tale anew, but the point is to have fun. There's no right or wrong way to retell a fairy tale or legend. After all, the point is to make it your own. Really, the only set in stone "rule" I have on this list is the one on copywrites, and that's because copying someone else's work could land you in legal issues.

So go forth. Retell. I can't wait to read what all you guys come up with!



A Tale of Sir Guy of Gisbourne

By Carolina Hobot (alias Lila Tulip)



Note: I always wondered why Sir Guy went from apparently in love with Maid Marion to happily supporting her being put to death. The 1938 film did not have time to delve fully into Sir Guy's character, so I decided to explore his character (and the question above) in my story. This is merely my interpretation and I do not claim to be correct.

His gauntlets made a satisfying clank as he threw them at the wall. Pacing up and down the hall, Sir Guy tried to control his temper, his fury coursing through him like a raging river.

“The insolent pup!” he snarled as he paced, long legs eating the length of the hall in quick strides before he turned and repeated the length. How dare Robin of Locksley interfere with the King’s justice!

He recalled that smug countenance, the sure arrogant way the green-clad man had drawn his bow to threaten him – Sir Guy of Gisbourne – when he attempted to deal justice!

Sir Guy paused under a hanging picture depicting the Blessed Virgin – a gift from some Eastern noble whose name Sir Guy could not recall. Her serenity gazed down at him, yet Sir Guy could not absorb her gentle humour.

“Did I do wrong?” he asked instead, voice harsh. “It is the King’s law I was enforcing. Do not the priests constantly utter the words, ‘Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs to God?’ The deer is Caesar’s – the King’s rightful property and Much’s life is God’s. I would have given both back to their rightful owners.”

There was no response, which did not surprise Sir Guy. The Blessed Virgin most probably would have chided him and been on the side of the starving Saxon serf. Sir Guy sniffed at the thought and the passing knowledge that Jesus would have aided the poor.

Surely even with those scriptures he was not entirely in the wrong? He was the representative of Prince John who, as a Prince of the Royal Household and brother to King Richard, was keeper of the Laws of the Land. One of those laws was the penalty of death for hunting the King’s deer. He, as the arm of Prince John, was therefore in the right legally.

Morally...well. Sir Guy averted his eyes from Mary as a flash of guilt went through him. Espying his gauntlets, Sir Guy retrieved them. Rage cooled, he glanced briefly at the hanging icon and inhaled sharply. Morally, perhaps he was not wholly in the right, but for now he would withhold that judgement. He had a Baron’s meeting to prepare for and little time to do so.

*** * ***

Sir Guy of Gisbourne carefully observed his appearance in the mirror. He had to look the perfect blend of powerful (but not as powerful as Prince John), wealthy (again not as wealthy as the Prince), and of course handsome (there, alas, he couldn’t help outstripping the Prince, surely).

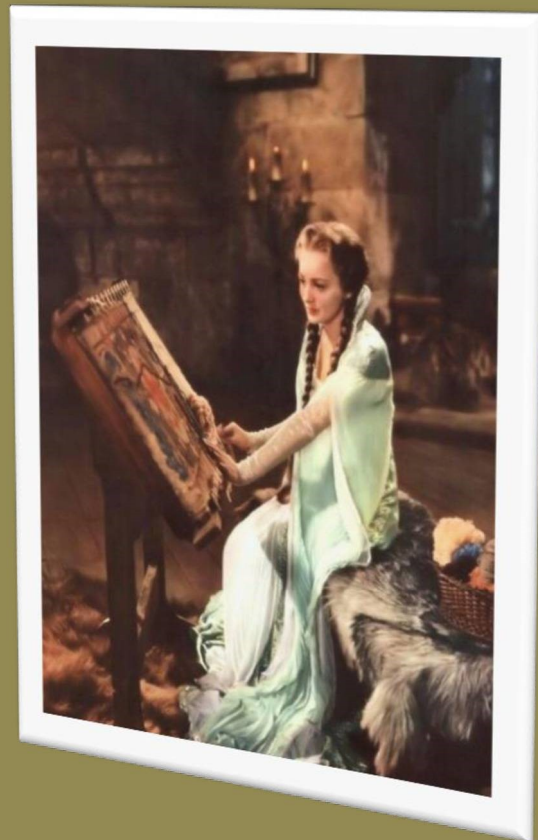
His earlier anger had dissipated and he was now concerned with the coming Baron's meeting. His manservant was fetching his cloak and would check it to ensure it was unspoiled by wear and tear, let alone opportunistic moths.

Grooming a stray strand of hair back in place, Sir Guy smiled. He was as ready as he could be for this feast. With good fortune the Lady Marion would be impressed by his appearance, adding to the hopefully favourable image conjured by their previous two meetings. They had only exchanged a few words, yet Sir Guy was intrigued by Maid Marion's beauty and her sweet and wise words. Her innocence of the world truly was the only mar, but it matched any sheltered maiden's upbringing.

Such innocence, admittedly, grated slightly on his nerves, for after witnessing so much barbarity on the field of battle, among thieves, and when criminals attacked innocents, and ah! How many times had he had to bring swift justice where there was no other recourse? When the nearest Sheriff was miles away?

He, as a Norman Baron was responsible for maintaining order no matter what the Saxon peasants thought. He would implement the law on his land, or deep in the forests, or far away in fields or rivers where, absent of assistance his sword or knife or word must be sufficient to prevent more death and disorder.

Thus, his view of the world could never be so sweet or glorious as Maid Marion's, not since he had been seven and seen a thief hanged for stealing food from a poor labourer's family. Nor since he had been in his first



skirmish at fourteen, fighting off rebellious serfs who had in their ardour destroyed the homesteads of those too afraid to rebel against Sir Guy's father.

War, thought Sir Guy as he stretched to help settle his robes, was not glorious as the minstrels insisted. War was a necessity. You fought to spread God's word and mercy, though Sir Guy wondered about God's mercy sometimes. It seemed rather absent in the world, and the priests who preached mercy did not always practice such mercy. Did mercy even have a place in a world where disease and common thieves were so prolific that you could die from a cold or be ambushed by just riding down the lane?

You thought to defend the empire and, Sir Guy laughed, to seize wealth and power for your King, your Prince, your Lord so that you may have a portion of the wealth to shield you from the harsh reality of the world.

His internal considerations were interrupted at this juncture, before he could re-judge Lady Marion in the light of his knowledge and her irritating yet compelling innocence.

"My Lord," said his manservant, Thomas, a good fellow even though he was Saxon.

"Yes, Thomas?"

Thomas kept his mismatched eyes fixed on Sir Guy's left shoulder as he spoke. One eye was a startling green, the shade of Sherwood Forest when in the bloom of spring, and the other a deep brown, the colour of rich soil in which to sow your crop.

His village had deemed him cursed and he had suffered in his short life before Sir Guy found him. Thomas had been tending the field when Sir Guy rode up demanding information on a group of bandits. Due to being ignored, Thomas was used to wandering alone and knew many of the more 'secret' – or to be precise – untrodden paths through the forest.

Enthused to be addressed directly, Thomas had willingly aided Sir Guy and had displayed intelligence, fortitude, and an understanding of his place

that had impressed Sir Guy. Afterwards, seeing how his own family treated Thomas, Sir Guy had simply taken the lad with him to his castle.

He deplored wasted talent. Henceforth, the young man had become a devoted servant, tending to the needs of his master – the one man who had given him a chance.

“The blessed Mother Mary heard my cries,” Thomas had said. “I will serve you loyally as long as I am able.”

Sir Guy held respect and fear for the Blessed Virgin, but he doubted she would send a sinner like him to aid another, unless she sought to save his soul.



Thomas spoke again, ushering them into the present. “I have your cloak, gloves, and sword on your bed, my Lord. Will you be requiring them?”

“My cloak, but not my gloves. Keep my sword close, Thomas, for while I doubt there shall be trouble, one cannot be too careful.”

“Yes, my Lord.” Thomas bowed and after helping Sir Guy with his red cloak, put away his gloves, at which point he followed his master to the Great Hall of Nottingham.

Sir Guy listened quietly to Prince John’s conversation with Maid Marion. He nearly snorted when he heard the Prince declare he loved Maid Marion, but fortunately he was experienced enough to restrain himself and continue eating his meat.

In love with the Lady?

Perhaps a little, yet it was more a love based on her beauty and her potential use to him than a love for the minstrels to sing about. That, of course, was sufficient for Sir Guy. It seemed, however, as he listened to the

none-too-private conversation, that the young lady was of a different opinion.

Sir Guy swallowed the roasted mutton with relish. He was confident that he could prevail on Maid Marion. He had the right manners, was a Norman Baron, and was wealthy and powerful as Prince John had noted. She would not make such a good match otherwise, surely?

And love...well, love would not clothe or feed her or her children. Love would not protect her from bandits or the mob. It would not grant her a home with all the comforts Maid Marion was used to, so yes, he would prevail.

Sir Guy reached for his cup.

Then of course, that insolent green-clad man, Sir Robin of Locksley, appeared *with the King's deer* and the audacity to accuse Prince John of not loving his brother enough.

This led to a proclamation that would change the mark-up of the land:

"Now I am regent."

Sir Guy stayed still, eyes watchful as the Sheriff, the Bishop, and the rest of the nobles sat stunned. Sir Robin was eating, but his eyes were burning in shock.

That was hardly surprising, and neither were the reactions of their fellow Norman nobles. Under his silent demeanour, Sir Guy was aware of how his pulse was quick and his belly twitching in readiness to leap and fight.

He kept his hands on the table, for Sir Guy knew Prince John had to carry the argument. He did naturally, for the nobles were cowards. Sir Guy wanted to speak, to shout at their shock, their craven obedience.

Yet it was Sir Robin who broke the spell with his promise to raise the people against Prince John, and chaos followed.

The man had the luck of the devil and escaped before Sir Guy and his men could seize him.

+ + +

In the days and weeks that followed, Robin Hood wreaked havoc, causing the rest of the knights and barons to complain bitterly to the Sheriff and Sir Guy. After one such meeting, just before their sojourn through Sherwood Forest with the money they had collected, they were particularly irritable.

As the Sheriff walked with Sir Guy, the cool night air caressed their faces, working to drain the red flush from the Sheriff's cheeks.

Sir Guy waited for whatever the man had to say, sensing the troubled thoughts the other possessed by the fidgeting hands and the way his eyes flicked about. It wasn't until they were alone, with the nearest guards a few yards away that he spoke. His voice was a quiet whisper which Sir Guy had to strain to hear.

"You don't think that the Prince claiming the regency has cursed us, do you?"

Little stunned Sir Guy these days, but such a question managed where others had failed. "Curses? What are you talking about, man?"

The Sheriff swallowed and leant closer, so Sir Guy bent his head, mindful of the return of the patrolling guard. "Well, Robin Hood only began in earnest when Prince John forcibly took the regency from Longshanks, and King Richard is the —"

"Ah, I see where you are coming from," interrupted Sir Guy. He sighed at the naivety from a fellow man. "Calm yourself, Sheriff. There is no such thing as the Divine Right of Kings. Do you truly believe that the first King of these lands gained the privilege through a message from Heaven? No, he was simply the toughest warrior, the cleverest or surrounded by clever men, and the most intimidating. He grabbed the power, the wealth, and



those close to him realised they would gain from supporting him. And thus, this man became King.”

Sir Guy straightened and held the nervous eyes of Prince John. “King Richard has abandoned his people to fight a crusade in a land many leagues away. We have barely seen him, and if he cared for his people he would have come sooner and sent representatives to the Holy Land. Divine Right? Pah. Under the circumstances, why shouldn’t Prince John seize power? Whether he is good or evil is another affair, but he is here and King Richard has succeeded in getting his person captured. What a King!”

Placing a hand on his sword, Sir Guy said sweetly, “His ransom is a drain on our land, even if we were willing. How could a trustworthy King who loved his people permit such a dreadful event to happen? In contrast, how does that paint Prince John’s actions in a worse light? The lust for power is all-consuming, but I do not blame the Prince. Instead, I shall benefit from them as you are.”

The Sheriff, mesmerised by his speech, nodded in acquiesce. Sir Guy swivelled on his feet and led the once more compliant man to the interior of Sir Guy’s castle.

Save him from idiots.

+ + +

A week later

Thomas carefully laid out his Lord’s clothing, smoothing the silk and cotton so that the new dark green and gold overgarment stood vibrantly against the coverlet. His hose was perfect; the deep green became his Master. It was a shame that he was under so much inconvenience due to this Robin Hood. While Thomas appreciated what the outlaw was doing for his fellow Saxons, his loyalty to Sir Guy came first.

It had not been the Saxons who had treated him kindly, but a Norman Baron usually given to little mercy for Saxons. So Thomas remained faithful and simply prayed every night that Mary, Blessed Mother, would intervene

and help save his Master's soul – either in this life or the next. If nothing else, Thomas would ensure Sir Guy ended in Purgatory and not...

Sir Guy entered, muscles flexing from his bath. A towel was wrapped around his waist as he moved to his bed to dress in his new clothes. Thomas stopped worrying and stood to attention.

"Thomas," he said.

"Yes, my Lord?"

"I am meeting the Prince tonight. You may take the evening off, but do not leave the castle."

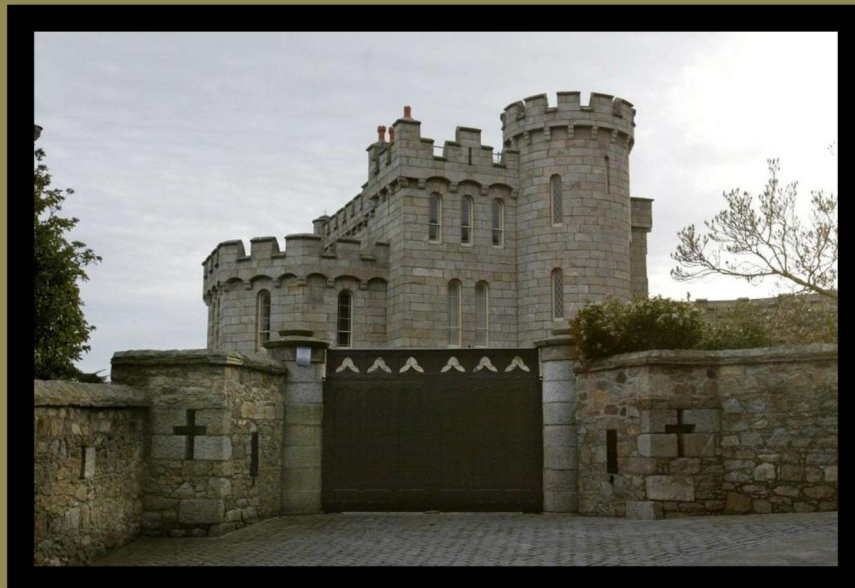
He pulled on his hose and lifted his tunic over his head. Thomas stepped forward to do the fastening. "Thank you, my Lord."

Sir Guy rolled his shoulders and raised an eyebrow. His eyes were intense. "Do not leave the castle; I do not trust the lands outside."

Thomas bowed and felt a surge of hope. Sir Guy was concerned for his safety. True evil could not feel compassion, even if it was only the concern of losing a good servant.

"I will stay inside, my Lord."

Sir Guy looked pleased and said nothing more.



Maid Marion was becoming a liability.

The thought occurred to Sir Guy as he strolled to meet the Prince. Jealousy tugged at him when he dwelled on how she gazed upon the treacherous Robin Hood.

Sir Guy paused as he passed the little chapel he maintained in his castle for his people and on the off chance he ever felt compelled to seek spiritual guidance. The candles burned in their brackets and the Father was checking the pews for prayer books that had been left behind.

The serenity was soothing and allowed Sir Guy to calm his mind with a moment of contemplation. Eyes gazing beyond the burning candles, Sir Guy could confess to himself and to God that his jealousy was a small beast, easily banished. He was more irritated by the obstacle created by Maid Marion falling in love with Robin Hood. Why she would fall in love with the outlaw was obvious. Woman seemed to have a love for dangerous men and the idea they could alter their characters.

Apparently, Maid Marion was one of these women. He was nearly certain it had been she who had arranged Robin Hood's escape, but he had no proof. So, he watched.

As of yet, Sir Guy was confident he could lure her back, because her love for Robin Hood was impossible. How would Robin provide for her? She wouldn't last a week in the conditions Robin Hood and his men survived in. Oh, the lady probably felt she could, but once it was properly pointed out to her, she would change her mind.

Of course, if he couldn't persuade Maid Marion to suppress her feelings and see the truth, Sir Guy would have to act.

To what extent, he had yet to decide.

The audacity of the woman!

Sir Guy wasn't even angry, merely disappointed. Oh, and shocked. Both Maid Marion and the Sheriff had the distinction of having surprised him in the last fortnight.

Now, because he had been foolishly confident, they were overseeing her trial. The Lady did not seem to realise her danger, her erect countenance displaying her beauty and ill-advised stubbornness to her advantage. Neither attribute would avail her now. Her indignation was amusing and Sir Guy was astounded at the woman's treachery against her own people.

Prince John promising to condemn her to death brought no guilt to Sir Guy. In fact, as he listened and observed, he was able to appreciate her bravery. Otherwise, Sir Guy was annoyed, for now he must begin again.



His main object in marrying Maid Marion had been to secure more wealth for himself, but also male heirs to succeed him and continue his lineage. Male heirs – and even daughters – would establish his own position among the nobles and the new King as an even more powerful family. Daughters could be married off to form new alliances. Maybe one daughter could even remain and provide company if required – the sickliest one in this case, that is, if such a child survived to adulthood.

Children would also ensure accommodation and protection for when he was too old to bear a sword any longer or to spar with a witty tongue and outmanoeuvre his enemies and allies with carefully executed stratagems.

Maid Marion had offered these in one convenient package, so her loss was rather an inconvenience. Never mind, he had a fortunate escape from a clearly delusional woman.

He would seek another Lady – one preferably not given to flights of fancy, but to the realisation that having a secure home provided for her with plenty of wealth, medical attention, food, and the allegiance of the new king, were values worth pursuing.

Satisfied, Sir Guy was able to say goodbye silently to Maid Marion as she walked away, and thank whoever was watching out for him.

He just prayed – and hoped – that his previous lack of action did not penalise him.

The birds sang in the trees, the stream was bubbling away merrily, and the sun shone so brightly it appeared the world was celebrating the return of King Richard.

Amid this revelry of nature, Thomas wept over the body of his master as he was transferred to the cemetery. A distant cousin had been granted Nottingham Castle, and the King had been generous enough to allow Sir Guy a Christian burial.

The Lionheart had said he did not wish to recommence his reign by evidencing the same small-mindedness of the nobles who had ruled in his absence, and when declaring this had actually spoken to Thomas.

This kindness allowed Thomas to accept the death of his Master more easily. He did not fear for his future – Sir Guy had apparently provided for him in his will, stating Thomas should work for his cousin in the same situation or, due to his loyalty, be granted money to set up a tavern.

Thomas had elected for the latter, knowing the ghosts of Nottingham Castle would be too much for him. No, he would build a tavern and live a good life.

Thomas raised tear-streaked eyes to the Heavens. He would pray and beg the Blessed Mother Mary to intercede on his Master's behalf, requesting that his soul have time in Purgatory so that he may have the opportunity to repent his deeds. She had been good to Thomas, so he would be good

back. His Master hadn't always been bad and Thomas could not believe that he had been truly evil.

Thus, as Sir Guy of Gisbourne was laid to rest, he had one mourner, Thomas, to pray for his beleaguered soul.



Untamed

By Sarah Levesque

I'll wear a dress and go to each dance,
But still will I fence and in secret wear pants.

I'll smile and wave, speak genteel, polite,
And 'scape out the window and run in the night.

I sigh at the men to stay part of the chorus –
The girls must not know my heart's in the forest.

I sit here, pretend, and try to fit in,
Wishing I was outside with my own Robin.

Today I sit in, but tomorrow I'll out –
Be gone from this place with unladylike shouts.

They own me not – my spirit is free –
And soon I'll be one with my Rob of Locksley.




Image by Chantal Tamburino

not a legend, not a flop: a review of

king arthur

LEGEND OF THE SWORD

By Hikari Katana



I will not pretend that *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* was a good movie. It was average at best, mediocre at worst. It managed to be better than *Beowulf* or *Dracula Untold*, but did not reach the level of *Lord of the Rings* or *Game of Thrones*. And yet, to my surprise, I rather enjoyed it.

King Arthur is a what I call a "popcorn film," a *Pacific Rim* in the fantasy genre. It focuses on CGI action and glib character moments rather than the deeper tales of good and evil. It has the *look* of such epic films in many respects, (the production values are quite good) but lacks something vital that keeps it from true greatness. Well, actually, it lacks a lot of things. It's filled with internal inconsistencies, plot holes the size of Miami, a magic system with no real rules, an over-emphasis on action that looks good rather than makes sense, gratuitous CGI, inability to really distinguish between characters (especially the women), and a tragic, almost *criminal* underuse of Jude Law.

Seriously. Jude Law made a *fantastic* Vortigern, a man who usurps his brother's throne by the most vicious means possible, and yet still managed to engage my sympathy. What boggled my mind was that Vortigern sacrificed his wife, and eventually his daughter, for magical power to kill his brother, sister-in-law, and nephew... yet he gets *no* good magic scenes! We see him light a candle, hold a ball of fire while looking all corpse-ified, and he turns into a big, beefy flaming skull-man at the end.

Really? That was it? You sacrificed everyone you cared about for *that*? Dude, you *totally* need to get a refund from the sea witches. I was hoping for the final confrontation between Arthur and Vortigern to be more like a pair of dragons fighting, the Red Dragon versus the White Dragon like in the story of Merlin. (The entire movie is a very, very loose interpretation of the Arthurian legend, so why not?) It would have been wicked-cool to see Vortigern turn into a red dragon, and either Arthur into a white one or go all Saint George on his now-literally draconian uncle. Or we could have seen them swordfight as men, but also see their powers struggle against one another in the background, like illusionary giants. Unfortunately, the final fight was a bit of a letdown.

However, despite its flaws, I found that I did enjoy watching *King Arthur* for several reasons:

First, the music. It may not be for everyone, but I enjoyed the traditional Welsh/Celtic sounds with a modern, almost heavy metal twist. It definitely gets your heart pumping, although in the theater it was actually *too* loud. (Our seats were shaking!)

Second, while the plot had a lot of logic flaws, I did genuinely enjoy the characters. In that way, it reminded me of *Thor: The Dark World*. That movie also was full of logic fails and plot holes, but I liked watching the banter between Loki and Thor so much that it didn't ruin my enjoyment of the film. *King Arthur* was like that. Plus, there are many genuinely heart-wrenching and emotional moments that helped the viewer through the less-than-good parts. (However, if you aren't a fan of fantasy films, this probably won't be for you.)

Third, they did some interesting cinematic tricks. Their montages were very unique and often did a weird mix between the present, past, and future in a way that advanced the story quickly, but in an amusing way, similar to *Ant-Man*, which does a kind of quick review of events with the characters in the flashback "saying" the same words of dialog as the person telling the story. (They also got a little too much like *300* with the slow-motion in some of the fight scenes, which was a little annoying, but not so egregious as to put me off entirely.)

Fourth, NO ROMANCE! There definitely is potential for something to grow between Arthur and the Mage, but it doesn't really come up. I was halfway expecting a

Romeo and Juliet kind of deal between Arthur and Vortigern's daughter, but that never materialized. (I felt really bad for her; her entire purpose in the film was to be sacrificed, and her father actually went through with it!)

Fifth, I give the film props for taking the Arthurian legend and making it their own.

It's *definitely* a fantasy approach rather than a historical one, but plays fast and loose with that as well. I liked the idea of Arthur being sent away by his parents to protect him, Moses-in-a-basket-style, and winds up being raised by the ladies of a brothel. (Mordred being killed within the first minute or two of the film did surprise me; I was expecting him to play a more prominent role. But, like Merlin, he's gone posthaste.) You can see the influences from the legend, but definitely mixed with other fantasy tropes and their own ideas.

Sixth, and perhaps the most importantly... the film was not pretentious. Let me explain. The moment I saw giant elephants attacking Camelot, I knew what kind of movie I was in for. It didn't pretend to be anything other than a fun, action-packed fantasy adventure. The characters would be closer to stereotype than fully-fleshed out people. It would have high drama, but in an almost over-exaggerated way. You just had to sit back, turn off your logic circuits, and go along for the ride. (Now, if I hadn't had to turn off my logic circuits, then it would have been an objectively better film.) I could tell what I was in for within the first thirty seconds of the film. And I was okay with that. The film delivered exactly what it promised with very little more or less. It reminded me in a way of the beginning of *The Scorpion King*, which opens with a gorgeous landscape, pulls back to reveal a guard... and then promptly sends an arrow through his throat. You know right then that this is going to be a hack-n-slash kind of fantasy with more emphasis on action than character. And I appreciate that.

This lack of pretension is something to keep in mind for writing, as well. There are many books that are not objectively "good," but they do their job well within their limits. They may rely on tropes but do so in an entertaining way. Many people read for a sense of safety and familiarity, so there's nothing wrong with people having a general idea of how your story will go as long as they enjoy the ride. I've read plenty of "sugar and popcorn" books. Some are my favorite stories, even if they aren't literary masterpieces.

In conclusion, *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* was not an objectively good movie. It has lots of problems and misses some really great opportunities. But does it deserve the 28% critic rating on Rotten Tomatoes? I don't think so. (At least the audience reviews gave it a 77%, which, while perhaps still a little high, is a more accurate representation. I'd give it between 40-50%.) So... it's worth a watch... but I'd recommend the curious to rent it from the library or stream it online.

The original version of this review was published on The Cat's Cradle (kvclements.com) June 5, 2017.

Sir Gawaine and Lady Rhiannon

A tale from The Black Knight of Avalon Chronicles

By Sunbow Pendragon

It was a beautiful summer morning as Sir Gawaine ap Lot walked into Camelot Castle, ready to take up his latest assignment. It would be a simple, routine patrol of the heavily forested area to the south of Camelot, close to the Perilous Forest. Gawaine was in the midst of planning where to stop each night, realizing that Sir Ector's keep would be the perfect place to spend a night or two after being on the road for two weeks. The patrol would be out for at least two months, he sighed, which would put a serious damper in his usual routine, including imbibing whiskey. After an embarrassing incident while on patrol, he had promised Arthur upon his honor not to drink while on duty, and had found that he preferred a clear head when work was to be done. Entering over the lowered drawbridge, he headed straight for the Castle, then to the War Room to find Sir Lancelot, so as to receive his orders and instructions for the patrol. As he entered, he saw Aaronn and Olan there already and a grin passed over his face. Perhaps this patrol would not be so bad with the two best cooks amongst the Company coming along, he thought as he walked forward to join them, seeing Arthur arriving through the King's entrance.

"M'Lord Arthur," he called out in a mock-serious tone. "I ha' coom a' yer soomons t' take oop me turn a' patrol."

"Greetings cousin!" Arthur called back with a grin, offering the grip of warriors to the huge red-haired man. "Yer patrol is assembling in the stable yard, ye have almost missed it!"

"Perish th' thought!" Gawaine chuckled. "Brother Aaronn an' Olan, good t' see ye are coomin' along."

"We are always glad to join ye on patrol, brother," Aaronn answered good-naturedly, offering the grip as well.

Gawaine grinned wide, offered the grip to the thinner man, then turned to Lancelot. "Now, tell me where ye wan' me t' go wi' this group."

"Come, and I shall show ye on the map." Lancelot grinned, seeing his enthusiasm for the task. They walked to the wall, where the great map of Britain hung, drawn in great detail and carefully colored to show all of the petty kingdoms' territories. "I want ye to take this road," he said, pointing to a route that was barely traveled anymore. There had been a town along that road in the past, but the Saxons had burnt it to the ground and Arthur had helped everyone who wished to relocate to do so. Those who remained were hardy folk indeed, for patrols rode such routes much less often than the main roads. "Keep yer eyes open for any signs of poaching through that forest, would ye? There have been rumors of a huge man in a suit of green-enameled plate armor in that area. He apparently is challenging anyone he thinks is a fighting man and killing them without mercy. Bring me what information ye can find out about him, would ye, and if ye meet the man tell him he should come to Camelot right away."

"Ye wouldn't invite a man li' tha' t' join th' Table?" Gawaine asked in a shocked tone.

"Of course not," Lancelot laughed a bit. "But Arthur does want to talk to him, most urgently."

"I'll tell 'im if I see 'im," Gawaine said seriously. Lancelot grinned and nodded dismissively to the three of them, indicating it was time for them to go.

"Coom on ye two," Gawaine chuckled.

Leading the two to the stables, he found the rest of the patrol there already, assembling to go. Aaronn and Olan simply tied their packs to the backs of their saddles and waited quietly for everyone to be ready.

Finally, the patrol mounted and Gawaine gave the order to move out. The patrol crossed the long drawbridge that kept the castle secure and made their way down the spiral roadway that led to the small town at the base of the hill. Stopping at sunset, they made a simple camp, retiring early after posting proper sentries. The next morning they had only been riding a few hours when they ran across the first person who had news of the Green Knight. He spoke in fear of a mighty warrior who had come to their village, demanding food and shelter. When it was refused, he had simply slain people until his wishes had been met, leaving the corpses where they lay while he consumed a huge meal.

“The man is as big as ye are, Sir Gawaine,” the man quavered. “No one like me could ever defeat such a person!”

“Come laddies, we’ve more ridin’ t’ do!” Gawaine said, growling a bit. He did not like it when people harmed others for no reason, a feeling shared by all of Arthur’s knights. “I wan t’ reach a good camp by nightfall. Aaronn and Oloran, go ahead a bit and see what ye can find!”

“Aye, My Lord Gawaine,” Aaronn agreed, nodding to his swordbrother. The two put spur to their horse’s flanks, speeding down the road ahead of the plodding patrol. It was not a long time before Aaronn was back to tell Gawaine the campsite had been found.

“Come laddies, ‘tis time to set camp fer th’ nigh’! My back is sore from ridin’,” Gawaine chuckled as he urged his horse to a better pace.

Sometime later, they rounded a bend and found the tidy spot, right next to a small stream. It was a natural meadow, lush with grass for the horses, and the surface of the ground was relatively level, which would aid in pitching the tents.

“Someone has camped here before,” Aaronn noted with a grin. “It looks like Lancelot’s work; see how level the area is. He likely was here a few days, otherwise he would not have gone to such trouble.”

That night, the patrol feasted on fresh, tender, and delicate trout from the stream, along with a batch of fried greens foraged by Aaronn and several others. Oloran made a batch of his famous camp biscuits to go along with the meal, too, and so everyone ate well. They set their sentry rotation and retired early, wanting to get started as quickly as possible in the morning.

They were on the road very early, due to Gawaine’s nose for food odors. He came out of his tent before the sky even lightened, sniffing the air and announcing quietly there was ham cooking just down the road. They all hurried to pack up, and left the camp clean for the next patrol, riding quickly down the road to find the source of the delicious smell. It was a large farmhouse, where the wife was preparing the morning repast for her family. When the Knights rode in, the husband stepped out to greet them, glad to see Knights of Camelot.

“Welcome to the Knights of the Pendragon!” he called out. “We are just about to sit down for breakfast! My wife is making griddlecakes and ham, if ye would like a plate? The Knights of the Realm are welcome in my home.” Bowing a bit, he added, “My name is Aed, my wife’s name is Agrona. Come, let me help ye get yer horses inside. It looks like rain. Ye must stay the day, and overnight, as well.”

“If need be, we kin sleep in th’ barn, good sir,” Gawaine offered.

“Sir Gawaine ap Lot, the Knights of Camelot will not sleep in the barn at my house,” the man told him with great seriousness. “Let us get yer horses comfortable, and then I shall show ye where ye can stay.”

Once their horses were all within comfortable stalls, bedded down on thick straw, fed and watered well, the farmer led Gawaine inside, past the kitchen, and down a short hallway. Producing a key with a theatrical flourish, the farmer unlocked the door and let it swing open invitingly.

“Will this be acceptable, or do ye still want to sleep in the barn?” he asked with a grin, waving them inside.

Stepping through the door and into the spacious room, Gwaine smiled, seeing the double bunks stacked only two high arranged around the perimeter of the room. The room held two necessity areas, and sported a small kitchen area, too. It was obvious that this was where the work crews stayed during the harvest season, and such a room would suit the Knights of Camelot very well.

“Thank ye, Farmer Aed!” Olan said with a grin. “I think ‘twill be much better than the barn, especially if the rain is going to be heavy at all.”

Gawaine rolled his eyes a bit, for it was spring in Britain, so the rain would fall heavily. Indeed, when they all emerged from the room and took a seat at the kitchen table, the heavens opened up and huge squalls of cold wet rain began to fall. It was so heavy, no one could work in it, and so Aed called for a rest day, imploring his wife to prepare a festive meal.

“I’ll need fresh meat for that,” she told him quietly. “We will have to kill one of the steers before his time.”

“Ye need not do so, madam,” Olan offered at once, having heard their quiet words despite their care to keep them private. “I am a skilled hunter, I can find game nearly anywhere.”

“Sir, the deer have long ago left this area because of poaching and over hunting,” Aed sighed. “I have not seen a deer for almost three years.”

“They are out there,” Olan insisted. “I have seen their spoor, and their droppings. Some of the piles were still warm when I found them. I shall return shortly.”

“If ye are going out there, beware of the knight in green-enameled armor!” Aed told him with alarm. “The beast of a man has terrorized us for many weeks now, demanding that we feed and clothe him without recompense. His latest act has been to kidnap one of the local girls, the daughter of the wealthiest man in the area, not knowing that while her father has a fine house, his wealth is nearly spent. We all fear for her safety when this Green Knight finds out she is the daughter of a virtual pauper. She is a great beauty, the most marriageable girl in our area!”

“Well, we will keep an eye out for this person while we search for game.”

“I shall go wi’ ye!” Gawaine suddenly decided. “Perhaps this Green Knight has a bit o’ skill wi’ a blade. I should li’ t’ fin’ oot.”

“Come along then, Brother Gawaine,” Aaronn invited.

The three made certain they had weapons intact, including Olan’s bow and quiver before walking out the door, headed for the surrounding wood. Soon the three were in the woods, their sharp eyes scanning the ground for any sign of tracks. It did not take the skilled archer long to find what he was looking for, and soon they were hot on the trail of a herd of deer. Trailing them until they sought shelter against the rain, Olan’s sharp and perceptive eyes scanned the small group, looking for any weaklings or injured animals.

Suddenly a shrill scream was heard.

Gawaine perked up at the sound, and drawing his blade, turned to Aaronn. “Ye hear tha?”

“I did, it sounds like a lady in distress, My Lord,” Aaronn answered, a slight grin on his face.

“Aye, it did indeed,” Gawaine agreed. “I thin’ I’ll go in search o’ th’ source o’ all tha’ noise. Ye two continue wi’ th’ hunt, and I shall meet ye here before we return t’ th’ farmer’s house.”

“Very well, My Lord,” Aaronn nodded. “May the Lady be with ye.”

“And with ye!” Gawaine returned, walking carefully and quietly away.

But he was not alone, for he was being observed by very watchful eyes. A large raven saw him enter the deeper part of the wood, and since the raven saw, so did his Mistress, the Lady Morgause of Orkney, Gawaine’s mother.

“O drat, ‘twould have to be ye to answer such a challenge,” she said with tight lips. “It should have been Arthur, or Lancelot, or even that bastard foundling Aaronn. My magick is strong, and my allies powerful. I shall have what I want – the throne of all Britain, as is my right! But I shall not risk my son’s royal blood now, ‘tis too valuable. I shall put him into a dream, which will leave the Green Knight free to continue his work,” she mused, stepping to her cauldron bubbling over the fire.

She worked quickly and with confidence created her spell, releasing it to work on Gawaine. The spell was simply a sleeping one, but she had added something else to make him experience intense dreams. Once

the spell was released, she sat in front of her mirror to watch it work, and was soon rewarded when she observed her son stop his search for a moment to yawn and stretch. The next thing she knew, he was down into the sun-warmed grass, sleeping peaceably while dreaming a very unusual dream, indeed.

Gawaine found himself at Camelot Castle during Yule, one of his favorite times of year. Into the midst of the feasting and fun strode a strange knight from a faraway land, wearing a set of green-enameled armor. He also carried a huge green axe on his back, instead of the usual sword worn by most knights.

“Greetings stranger!” Arthur called out within the dream. “Welcome to Castle Camelot. ‘Tis Yule. Would ye sit and eat with us?”

“I have no desire to eat with such a group of weaklings!” the Green Knight called back derisively. “I have come to offer a simple challenge to the King of Britain and his famous Knights of the Round Table, if ye have the stomach for it.”

“Ye do not need to be rude,” Arthur objected, setting down his cup. “What is yer challenge, stranger?”

“I shall offer any of ye puny men the opportunity to deal me one blow with an axe, anywhere ye would like to give it to me. If I survive, that Knight must meet me in exactly one year to receive an axe blow in return. Now who has courage among ye, or are ye all puny weaklings?” he laughed, and it did not sound very pleasant.

The baiting continued until Gawaine could stand no more, and he stood to answer the challenge. “My Lord Arthur should nae t’ play sooch a silly game,” he announced. “I shall take yer challenge, though.”

“Good, at least ye have one among ye with courage,” the Green Knight laughed sarcastically, handing Gawaine the green axe. “Go on then, do yer worst.”

Gawaine said naught, simply taking the axe and swinging it about to get the feel of it, then turning suddenly and removing the Green Knight’s head with a single powerful blow. However, he watched with dismay and horror as the man’s body rose and picked up the head, turning it to face the startled Gawaine.

“Now ye must come to the Green Chapel in one year to receive yer blow. I shall see ye then, if ye have the courage to make the journey.”

“I shall be there,” Gawaine answered fiercely. “If ye will simply tell me where I moos’ go t’ find the place.”

“Ye will find yer way,” the man laughed, putting his head back into place and walking from the castle.

Within the dream, the year passed very quickly, and soon it was time for Gawaine to mount his piebald stallion and begin his quest. As he traveled, Gawaine found himself riding through enchanted lands, and meeting all manner of strange beasts. The cold grew more intense as he rode along, and he shivered to keep himself warm. He knew now he was within the Faerie Lands, a place of enchantment and danger, so he proceeded with caution until an elegant keep could be seen far in the distance. When he arrived at the castle, he was welcomed warmly as a Yule guest, especially by the lady of the keep who recognized the device upon his shield.

“Ye are Sir Gawaine ap Lot, a Knight of the Inner Circle of Camelot’s Round Table,” she greeted elegantly. “I welcome ye to our home. Such a famous Knight to visit our humble keep, we are honored. Come, ye must be tired and hungry, and I would wager that a bath would be welcome, as well. My husband is out hunting for tomorrow’s feast, and should be home very soon.”

“Than’ ye, M’Lady,” Gawaine answered tiredly, glad to find good shelter and a Yule feast, too. “May the Good Lady bless ye fer offerin’ hospitality t’ a verra tired man,” he chuckled.

She took him to a room and left him there, to return shortly with a large wooden tub and a line of servants carrying buckets of hot water. Soon the tub was full, and she tossed in a packet that smelled of roses and lemon.

“Do ye need assistance?” she offered meaningfully. “Ye are Sir Gawaine, the Seducer of Camelot. I have heard that any virgin within the borders of Britain is not safe from yer persuasion.”

“Ah, tha’ was true in th’ past, M’Lady,” Gawaine chuckled. “However, since Tristan’s arrival a’ Camelot, I ha’ foun’ tha’ women look more to him than to me. I am ready t’ settle doon wi’ a good woman, I thin’.”

“Oh?” she asked, coming to help him off with his armor.

Gawaine backed away, wanting to be a good guest, but she was very beautiful, he noted. “Madam, I kin do this meself,” he said carefully. “I do than’ ye for th’ offer, ‘owever.”

“Oh, I see,” she said, now very close to him, and taking advantage of that nearness, she quickly kissed his cheek before leaving the room. Gawaine thought little of it, at least until later, when his host returned home.

“A guest?” the man said enthusiastically. “How wonderful, and just in time for Yule, too! I am glad I got a deer! Now, what have ye to give me?” he asked as his staff took away the carcass.

“Give ye?” Gawaine asked, confused a bit.

“Has my wife given ye anything since ye arrived?” the man asked insistently.

Gawaine thought for a moment, and decided that honesty was the best policy here. He was in the Faerie lands, where people were constantly tested for their better qualities. He walked to the man, leaned over and kissed his cheek quickly, then stepped back.

“Ah, ye are an honest man, then!” the lord of the keep remarked. “Ye may remain with us for the Holidays, but remember, if my wife gives ye anything, ye must give the same to me while ye are here.”

Gawaine thought the conditions were a bit odd, but he agreed nonetheless, especially when he looked out to see that a great blizzard was rising and that the snow was falling ever more rapidly. He thought it a great blessing to be indoors just at that moment, and the conditions of his staying seemed easy enough to meet. The next day, the lord of the keep went out on some errand, telling his wife and Gawaine he would return before dark. All throughout that day, the lady of the keep barraged Gawaine with offers of seduction, but Gawaine politely but firmly refused each one, despite her clever arguments of persuasion. She managed to give him a warm embrace and a kiss on the cheek; when the lord of the keep returned, Gawaine was waiting to give them to her husband.

“And she has given ye nothing more?”

“Nay, M’Lord. An’ I woul’nae accept anything else in tha’ way. She is yer wife.”

The next day, the lord of the keep left to go hunting again, and despite Gawaine’s insistence he would like to join the hunting party, he was told to remain inside by the fire where he was safe. “We will be hunting something very dangerous this time, something ye have never hunted before and would simply cause ye to freeze in terror. Remember our bargain.”

Gawaine found himself followed everywhere by the lady of the keep, who told him the sad tale of her lonely life. He felt badly for her, but he had no wish to engage in anything other than conversation. However, she managed to kiss him twice on the cheek throughout the day, despite every attempt to put her off.

When the Lord of the keep finally returned with his game, a wild boar of immense size, he turned to Gawaine. “Has my wife given ye anything?”

Gawaine stepped forward to kiss his cheek twice, then backed away, ready for anything.

“Ye are a very honest man, despite the reputation ye have of lying to save yer own life,” the lord of the keep told him earnestly. “I shall enjoy sharing that boar with ye, and perhaps ye will tell me a tale of Camelot?”

“I should be honored, M’Lord,” Gawaine replied with relief.

The third day he was within the keep, the lord was summoned by the nearby villagers to help them be rid of a rogue bear who was killing their cattle. He said goodbye to his wife, winked at Gawaine, and rode off with his huntsmen in search of the crazed beast. Gawaine went to the room he was staying in, entered, and locked the door, hoping that would keep him safe from pursuit. It did for half the day, until she came and used her key to unlock the door, finding Gawaine there reading a scroll from their library. She came and sat

beside him, tears running down her pretty face, until Gawaine could stand it no more.

“How may I be of assistance, M’Lady?” he asked softly.

“I love ye,” she told him in a hushed, passionate tone. “Ye will be going away soon, and I shall likely never see ye again. I have come to ask for a token by which to remember ye after ye have left, and perhaps ye will accept one from me as well. What I have to give ye is no simple piece of cloth; ‘tis enchanted and will keep the person wearing it from dying, no matter how severe the blow. Will ye not take it to use in yer quest to overcome the Green Knight ye have told me about?”

Gawaine thought quickly, and recalling the Green Knight simply replacing his severed head upon his shoulders a year ago, he smiled gently and took her hand in his. “Madam, since ye are so insistent, I shall take th’ piece o’ green silk an’ wear it as ye have asked. I ha’ naught t’ give in return, except me thanks, an’ me ‘opes tha’ th’ Good Goddess will bless ye.”

She smiled and kissed him three times on the cheek before rising and walking away from him, not looking back. When the Lord of the keep appeared with the grizzled pelt of the bear, Gawaine immediately gave him three kisses on the cheek, saying naught about the piece of green silk. Despite his anxiety, however, Gawaine slept well and rose early to dress for battle, making certain to wind the piece of green silk about his waist before appearing at the morning table in full armor. After he was done, his host came to him, offering to guide him to the Green Chapel.

“I would appreciate yer help, M’Lord,” Gawaine told him gratefully. “Than’ ye.”

Soon, they found a place where a riverbed had been, with tall stone walls on each side. As they rode along, a crevice in the rock appeared, and the sound of a grindstone could be heard clearly.

“If ye go down that crevice, ye will find what ye seek,” the Lord of the keep told him simply.

“I am mos’ grateful t’ ye, M’Lord,” Gawaine replied earnestly, watching the nobleman ride away from the place.

Gawaine took up his great Orkney war axe and set it on his shoulder before tying his horse close to the river and in the shade to wait for him. Resolutely, Gawaine walked towards the sound, finding the Green Knight in the process of sharpening the unusual weapon he carried.

“I am ‘ere,” he called out, striding into the clearing where the Green Knight stood, and kneeling, offered his neck for the blow he was due.

“I am surprised to see ye, Knight of Camelot,” he said derisively. “Perhaps ye have more courage than I thought. Very well, prepare yerself.”

Gawaine quickly offered his last prayers to the Goddess, asking for enough courage to face his death without fear. He felt the Green Knight walk around behind him, and braced himself for the blow to come. He was shocked when his adversary feigned the first blow, and he turned around to face him, both relieved to still be living and angry at being played with. Still, he knelt and waited for two more tries, growing ever more frustrated and angry until finally the Green Knights’ last blow merely scratched his neck a bit.

“I ha’ fullfilled my part o’ the bargain!” he said, standing quickly. “Now, if ye wanta go at it fer real, prepare yerself!”

Within his dream, the Green Knight began to laugh merrily as he removed his helm, and Gawaine beheld his host from the Holidays.

“I am Lord Bertilak, and ye have passed yer test! Ye told the truth well, except for the piece of green silk she gave ye, and I do not blame ye for keeping such knowledge as that to yerself. I have enjoyed testing ye, Sir Gawaine ap Lot. Ye have proven yerself to be a worthy man indeed, but ‘tis time ye went home.”

So saying, the man came to Gawaine and touched him on the forehead. The Orkneyman suddenly felt dizzy and began to fall, finding himself waking in the midst of a large field of tall grasses. He sat up and looked about with confusion, for the last thing he recalled, it had been full morning. It looked to be late afternoon by the position of the sun in the sky, and Gawaine suddenly realized that magick had been

employed. He had dreamt the entire incident with the Green Knight, but he had no idea how long he had been sleeping. In a bit of a daze, he stood and stretched, then set out in the direction of the farmhouse, his stomach rumbling a bit due to his hunger.

When Gawaine had failed to return to the farmhouse, they all waited expectantly for him to join them. Finally Aaronn and Oloran had gone in search of him, finding the place where they were supposed to have met and then fanning out from there in a coordinated search party. They found nothing, not even a footprint, which concerned them both a great deal. After sleeping fitfully that night, the entire patrol went out first thing in the morning to begin their search anew, employing a wider search pattern to do so. It was the same the next day, and on the third day they all searched for Gawaine, coming upon a very large herd of deer. Aaronn and Oloran crept on their bellies towards it, being sure to keep downwind of them while looking for the best place to secrete themselves, and finally finding it. There was more than one old member of the herd, Oloran noted, and took a moment to compose himself before felling his choices.

As they lay there in the brush, completely concealed, a tall, broad, huge man rode by on what looked like a plow horse. He was wearing plate armor, something unusual, and it was covered in what looked like green enameled. Such a suit would belong to someone very wealthy or very dishonest, Oloran considered as he watched him encounter the first deer on the ground. The sharp-eyed archer also noted the bundle draped across the front of the saddle, and he knew that must be the kidnapped woman.

“Well then,” the man’s voice boomed out. “Whoever ye are, thank ye for the meat! I was hungry, and so was my lady!” he declared with an evil chuckle, taking up the fattest one and slinging it over his saddle.

“That must be the Green Knight the lady of the farmhouse told us of,” Oloran whispered. “Did ye see that bundle in front of him on the saddle? He still has the girl with him, it seems.”

“I shall follow him at a discreet distance,” Aaronn said at once, his tone discouraging argument. “Ye’ll want to take that meat back to the farmhouse; we should have brought a horse.”

“I shall have no difficulty summoning my horse,” Oloran grinned. “Go on, and watch out over our Orkney brother. We would not want him getting in over his head, would we?”

“Absolutely not!” Aaronn agreed. “I shall see ye back at the farmhouse.”

“Go with the Goddess, my brother.”

“Ye as well.”

Aaronn sped off after the intruder, keeping a discreet distance. His intention was only to assure a fair contest between the unknown Knight and his sword brother of Camelot; if foul play came into it, he meant to be there to stop it. He had no difficulty keeping pace with the spavined horse the errant knight rode, and soon they were deep within the forest. Finally the horse stopped and the Knight slipped off, pulling the bundle with him and letting it fall to the ground. However, when he took up the carcass of the deer, he was quite careful about it – nearly reverent, Aaronn thought to himself. Noises came from the careless bundle on the ground, and the

Knight spoke roughly to make it cease. Aaronn’s mouth tightened; he did not like hearing such words directed at anyone.

He donned his mask and gloves to become the Black Knight, and was just about to act when into the small meadow strode Gawaine ap Lot, suddenly appearing after three days of absence.

“Ho there!” he called out in a friendly tone as Aaronn watched from his place of concealment, astonished to see his missing brother Knight. “I am Sir Gawaine ap Lot, a Knight of the Inner Circle o’ Camelot. Who are ye?”



“Ye can just call me the Green Knight!” the man laughed coarsely. “I have come from far away to test the swords of the Round Table. I find that ye are the biggest one of the puny lot of Camelot I have seen yet. Ye might even give me a challenge, at long last!”

“Tha’s wha’ I came fer,” Gawaine laughed, although he still felt a bit confused due to the dream he had just experienced. “Ye’ve kidnapped one o’ ours, I’ve coom t’ fetch ‘er ‘ome.”

With alarm, the Black Knight watched from his vantage point as the man walked to his horse and pulled a greatsword from the scabbard strapped to the saddle. The whistle it made as he swung through the air was sharp; it sang through the afternoon air, a wicked and dangerous sound.

Gawaine was not deterred, for he had fought those wielding such blades before. He was a skilled man who trained daily with his best weapon, the broadsword that characterized Camelot’s Knights. He pulled it in answer, taking a few swings to warm him, and put the shield on his other arm, taking the ready stance. The Green Knight laughed and advanced on Gawaine in just a few strides, standing taller than the Orkneyman before him. Gawaine saw this as a fine challenge, he had never fought anyone as big as himself, except for his father, King Lot of Orkney. This man was younger and faster, but Gawaine had spent hours with Lancelot by this time, working in the arena and using those skills at war. He was not deterred and let the man make the first few moves, studying him until he had finally learned the best course to follow. They stalked each other for a bit in a rough circle, watching each other cautiously and looking for any opportunity.

Finally, the Green Knight had enough of waiting and he launched a flurry of cuts and slices at the British Knight, finding his attack being turned aside by a furious defense. Gawaine’s blade tip penetrated the Green Knight’s perimeter, just enough to scratch his cheek and produce a thin, red line that dripped tiny droplets of crimson.

“Yer bleedin’, ye should quit now,” Gawaine called out, humor evident in his tone.

“Ye have only scratched me,” the man snarled in return. “We are not fighting in some tournament, ye know. If ye want to take my hostage, ye will have to slay me.”

“If ‘tis yer desire to die, I can grant tha’ t’ ye,” Gawaine called back easily, his breathing steady and his muscles loose and fluid. “Ye could joos’ give ‘er t’ me, an’ leave Britain! I would escort ye t’ Land’s End meself, an’ put ye on the boat.”

“Sure ye would,” the man snarled, not believing Gawaine’s offer could possibly be true.

“I am a Knight ‘o Camelot, I dinnae lie,” Gawaine answered indignantly. “Now ye have insulted me, an’ ye owe me satisfaction! Also, ye have kidnapped someone t’ hol’ fer ransom, an’ ye hae nae right t’ do so! Ye will yield, come t’ Camelot an answer fer yer crimes, or ye will die!”

“Ye cannot kill me, little man!” the foreigner called back, laughing derisively. “Many have tried, many have died.”

“I shall nae be one ‘o those!” Gawaine growled, hefting his shield, but refusing to rise to the baiting. “Coom on then, an’ let me show ye th’ way t’ the land o’ th’ dead!”

The furious Knight in green-enameled armor roared out his anger and brandished his greatsword as he ran towards Gawaine, who waited patiently for him. As he approached, Gawaine set himself, threw aside his shield, and took hold of his sword with both hands. The gigantic man roared triumphantly, thinking he had won again as Gawaine knelt, seemingly in surrender. However, as the man passed Gawaine and ducked under his blow, Gawaine swung with all he was worth at the man’s middle section, where the plate armor joined the top to the bottom section. The Green Knight howled with pain, staggered a few paces and sank to his knees, putting his hand to his waist, finding it bleeding rapidly.

“Ye’ve killed me!” the man shouted, trying to get to his feet but finding that he was losing strength. “D—n ye!”

“I’ve heard tha’ one before,” Gawaine chuckled wryly, coming to stand before the man. “I did warn ye t’ leave before ye engaged me. Now go t’ yer gods, whoever they are. Yer done, laddie,” he said, watching the man simply fall over on his side and shudder for what seemed to be a last time. “I’ll trouble ye fer tha’

blade though,” Gawaine added, pulling it from the man’s lifeless hand and walking to where his horse stood waiting.

Carefully, the Orkneyman slid the huge blade back into the scabbard, then turned his attention to the squirming bundle on the ground. As soon as he untied her hands and slipped off the gag, he understood why she had been treated so.

“Who are ye?” she demanded rudely, and in a very shrill tone.

“I am Sir Gawaine ap Lot of Orkney, m’lady,” he answered, noting she had a very fine figure, and that her face was not plain at all. “Are ye well?”

“What kind of stupid question is that?” she demanded angrily. “I have been kidnapped and treated like a prisoner for days! He wanted me to...marry him, so he could inherit my father’s property. He is nothing but an outlander, and I am glad he is dead!”

“Ye are most welcome, m’lady,” Gawaine said in a somewhat dreamy tone. “Come, I shall take ye home now.”

“Ye will?”

“O’ course!” Gawaine asserted seriously, coming to face her and noting that she stood just below his chin. “Let me help ye up onto th’ horse, so ye might ride.”

However, when he turned to help her mount, the horse startled and galloped away, headed back towards her father’s farm from where he had been stolen. Nonplussed, Gawaine picked the woman up and put her over his shoulder as carefully as possible, meaning to carry her home.

“PUT ME DOWN, YE GREAT RED RUG!!!” she screamed out angrily while her feet kicked him in the chest and her fists hammered his back.

It didn’t hurt whatsoever, and Gawaine was able to feel a fine figure under her clothing. “Ye know ye are a good lookin’ woman,” he said merrily as he carried her along. “I’ve been lookin’ fer a wife, an’ ye just might be her!”

“I shall never marry someone like ye!” she screamed out. “Now put me down! I am able to walk on my own!”

“Ah, boot m’lady,” Gawaine conversed as if they were speaking pleasantly. “Th’ grass is long here, an’ we moost make good time if we are t’ return t’ yer village before nightfall.”

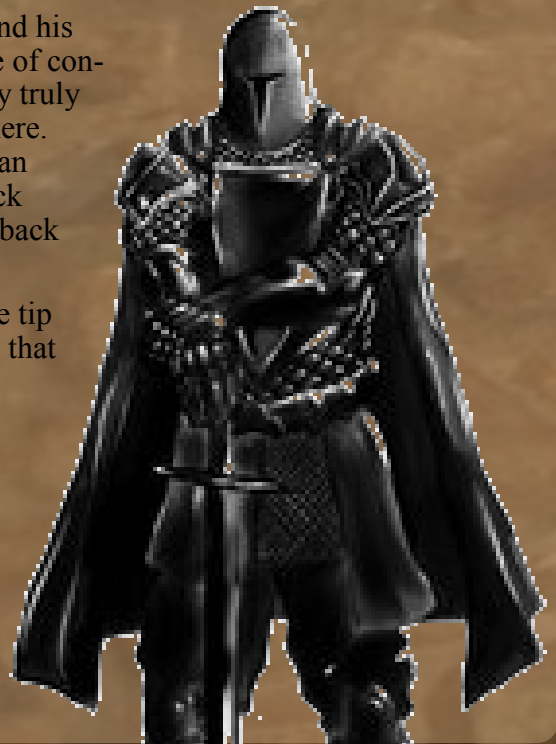
Off they went as the Black Knight watched until Gawaine and his charge were completely out of sight before emerging from his place of concealment. He wanted to be assured that this Green Knight was really truly dead; something was definitely not right about the entire situation here. He found as he approached where the man lay, however, that the man was moving a bit and a moan issued forth from his mouth. The Black Knight simply put his booted foot on the man’s chest, pushing him back onto the ground.

“Ye are not just a man, are ye?” he asked quietly, putting the tip of his blade to the man’s thick neck. “Ye are something much more that ye appear to be.”

“Begone!” he heard a strong voice say, but it was not the Knight’s voice at all. “Ye have no power over me!”

The Black Knight blanched a bit; the voice was definitely female and it sounded like Morgause’s voice, too. “So, what are ye then, a golem?” he asked in return.

“Something that will finally overcome ye, and remove ye from interfering in my plans!” the voice laughed evilly. “Rise, my servant, and kill this fool!”



Before the man could rise, however, the Black Knight thrust home with his sharp sword and waited for the gurgling of blood to choke him to death. However, where there had been a man before, now there was only a great bundle of straw dressed in green cloth. Morgause's merry and evil laughter sounded again, and then he was alone. After burning the straw bundle, he was off in pursuit of Gawaine.

"Put me DOWN! I can walk for myself!" the woman screamed at Gawaine, who appeared to think that her screaming was a pleasant thing.

"Ah now lassie, the grass is long, an' yer skirts'll git dirty," Gawaine answered in a conversational tone. "Ye'd best let me carry ye 'ome, besides, I must talk t' yer father."

"What about? Ye do not even know my father!"

"Well, if he's t' be me father-in-law, I'd best git to know him," Gawaine chuckled.

"I am NOT marrying ye!" she screamed shrilly, a harsh and strident sound in the Black Knight's ears. "Now...PUT ME DOWN!!!!"

"Nay, 'twill go faster thi' way," Gawaine chuckled. "I kin walk faster if ye'd like!"

"Oooooo!!!!!" she screamed in frustration.

The Black Knight followed him all the way back to the farm where the girl's father waited for his daughter's return. Indeed, Ceridwen's man assured that Gawaine was safely inside the building before ceasing his work, and waited for him to emerge again after shedding his working clothing and stashing them in his knapsack. His transformation back to his usual appearance only involved the mask and gloves he used to conceal his appearance, for Sir Aaronn was just as heavily armed as the Black Knight as a habit.

When Gawaine emerged from the house, he wore a huge smile and offered his hand to his sword-brother. "I'm t' be a married man a' las'!" he announced with a grin.

"Congratulations, brother," Aaronn answered, taking his hand. "And just who is the most fortunate woman?"

"Her name is Rhiannon, but I shall simply call her Rhian," Gawaine sighed happily. "Her father is a good man, he has agreed t' allow me t' court his lovely daughter. I wanna be married in the fall, I loove tha' time o' year."

"She doesn't appear to want to be courted," Aaronn pointed out with a gentle smile.

"Ah, she joos' doesn't know me well yet," Gawaine grinned wide. "She'll coom aroun'."

"Come brother, we should return to our patrol," Aaronn urged gently.

"Wha'?" Gawaine answered. "Patrol? O aye, we must finish tha' before I return 'ere t' ave' th' banns read," he answered in a somewhat confused tone.

"Come on, Gawaine," Aaronn laughed, leading the way.

It did not take long for them to walk the miles that separated the two farms, and they found a grand party in progress when they rejoined their group. The fencing was done, and Oloran had returned with several deer, which were even now being prepared for jerking and drying. The largest and fattest one now roasted over a spit, and as Aaronn arrived, a wagon pulled into the camp. It was Rhiannon's father, who had brought some of his best ale to thank the Knights of Camelot for saving his daughter. The knights were more than willing to help unload the wagon, and when they did, they found that the man had also brought baskets of food from his own storage rooms to help his neighbors. All of the Knights ceased their labors when they saw Gawaine's return, clustering around him and pressing him for the tale of his adventure. Oloran listened, a shocked look on his face when Gawaine announced that he and the red-head were going to be engaged. As the others offered their congratulations, the thin archer joined Aaronn at the ale cask.

"He is going to marry that harpy?" Oloran asked, a note of incredulousness in his tone.

"He thinks she is the most beautiful thing in the world," Aaronn pointed out.

“Our brother certainly has that calf-eyed and mooning look about him,” Oloran remarked dryly, bringing a smile to his friend’s face. “I would wager heavily his engagement will not consummate in a marriage.”

“How much?” Aaronn asked.

“A whole golden sovereign,” Oloran offered at once.

“Done,” Aaronn accepted quietly, and the two exchanged a grip of forearms to seal their bargain.

The patrol ate and feasted that night, their party taking on the air of a special occasion. It was Aaronn and Oloran who woke the senior knight in the morning early enough to depart and still make good time to their next destination.

“Here ye go brother,” Oloran said, handing the groggy Gawaine a strong cup of blackberry tea. “I’ve made a nice pot of stew to get us all going this morning, with fresh biscuits.”

“Joost ‘ow long ha’ ye two been up?” Gawaine asked, taking the tea and sipping, noting the sweetness was just right.

“Long enough to see the sun rise this morning,” Oloran chuckled. “We even woke the sentries, and they are enjoying their tea now.”

“Ye’ll keep all tha’ joost between oos, aye?” Gawaine asked with a bit of embarrassment. “Lancelot woul’ ne’er let me live it doon.”

“I shall say nothing,” Oloran told him at once.

“Nor shall I,” Aaronn put in. “Unless the King should command it of me.”

“Tha’s fair enough,” Gawaine nodded. “Ye’ll not share it wi’ t’ th’ other Outer Circle Knights, aye?”

“Aye, this part of the tale will not be shared,” Aaronn assured him.

“Yer a good brother, Aaronn,” Gawaine observed. “I’ll take soon o’ tha’ stew now. It smells divine.”

Before they left, Gawaine dispatched a rider back to Camelot to inform the King of the incident and its resolution. By the time they returned from their ride around the Kingdom, the tale was all over the Castle, and everyone wanted to hear Gawaine’s version. He was feted and celebrated, especially when it was learned he was to be engaged. Cai prepared a whole beef to honor the occasion and the Knights feasted and drank with their brother.

During the night, Arthur came to Aaronn, asking for a private talk in his chambers. “Tell me the entire tale,” he commanded, motioning to Aaronn to take the seat opposite him. “I have heard Gawaine tell it, but I feel ‘tis something missing.”

“The Black Knight encountered one of the Witch Queen’s servants, a golem,” Ceridwen’s man told him, the change occurring right there in front of Arthur. “She has grown more powerful than ever, if she can send out straw men to do her bidding. She must be stopped, or she will try again to hurt ye, or someone that ye love. What will ye do about it?”

“How dare ye speak of my family in such a way!” Arthur exploded suddenly when confronted with the truth of things. “Ye have no proof that my Aunt had anything to do with that...thing! Yer hatred of her truly knows no bounds!”

“Are ye accusing me of lying for my own cause?” the Black Knight rumbled, his own temper rising in answer. “If ye think that of me, then perhaps ‘tis time for me to stop what I do in yer name to secure the realm! I bid ye good day, My Lord Pendragon!” he said.

A knock came on the door just then, distracting Arthur for a moment, but when he turned back to continue his conversation, he found that Ceridwen’s man had simply disappeared. Only after he was gone did Arthur’s temper fade, and he realized what had been said. A feeling of depression and failure washed over him, and he remained within his chambers while everyone else was celebrating.

Aaronn returned to his room as well, finding Oloran there with wine and an empathetic ear. It took a long time for Aaronn to be able to speak at all, due to his anger and outrage.

When the thin archer heard Arthur's words, his face took on a hard and angry look. "He is such a fool sometimes! Why must we serve him?"

"He is Ceridwen's choice for the throne, and we serve Her," Aaronn sighed. "What else could we do, leave Britain?"

"Leave?" Olan asked in return, a shocked tone in his voice. "Britain is my home, I have no desire to live anywhere else."

"I feel the same, my brother."

Finis



Maid Marian's Proclamation of Love

By Manwaelmelwe



I will never forget that fateful day

When I saw his devilish grin.

Yet when I looked into his eyes,

A saint I saw within.

'Twas a nobleman, this dashing good fellow

And noble was his cause!

He always cared about the poor

Even against the laws.

This Robin of Locksley, this dashing rogue

Lost his title with John on the throne.

Yet I fell more in love

Though I was warned to leave him alone.

He was perfect with the bow,

His arrows never apart!

Though he could shoot one on top the other,

The best target was my heart!

So with the good Lord as my witness,

And Friar Tuck's words said,

Robin and I did what true lovers do.

Robin and I wed.

Now I see him in Sherwood Forest,

And when I see that grin,

I cannot help but smile

And think of when we met back then.

Sherwood *at the* Dinner Table

By Elizabeth Amy Hajek

Parts of this article were originally published on Hajek's blog, www.eleatintil.blogspot.com as "Real Nerd Life: Encouraging Personal Growth through Role-Playing Games" and "An Author Learning from RPGs")



6:45 on a Tuesday night. Time to gather up my real dice and my imaginary basket of herbs, and go off to deliver babies, redeem my unjustly outlawed husband, and outwit a Sheriff in the 'Nottingham' of my gaming room. I'm accompanied by a colorful band of characters: a young noblewoman trying to escape the confines of arranged marriage while keeping access to her books, a social recluse forester who totally doesn't poach the king's deer or trade on the black market or make bows for each of his three daughters, a hotheaded rebel who has established herself as the best blacksmith (woman) in town, a disenfranchised nobleman struggling to regain his family's honor and influence while diving into political matters headfirst, and most recently, a foreign treasure hunter come to seek a lost myth in our woods...

Okay, it's not actually "Nottingham", it's an alternative England with a bit of magic thrown in. And of course, the adventures exist only in the part-improv, part tabletop game called "Role Playing" that my husband runs for my friends and myself. In a way, it's a book come to life, with my friends playing the characters and describing the scenery, mannerisms, and delightfully hilarious dialogue of the setting and characters. Part live theater, part anxiously watching the roll of a die, it has become one of my favorite ways to spend an evening.

"Does her husband know she's a drug dealer?" my friend scribbles in the margin of his notebook after my character tries to use bribery rather than brute force to get info out of a henchman.

"Let's name him Oliver Green!" my sister and I declare of our game's pseudo-Robin Hood. (A "Green Arrow" reference, of course.)

"That's my wolf," I explain to a new player. "My kids and I have an empathetic bond with him. Basically he's my fantasy medieval baby monitor."

And of course, lots of discussion about historical facts and which of them even matter in an alternative England with a smattering of magic. "Chimneys weren't invented in the Middle Ages," I declare empathetically in regards to one of the sketches a player produces. Out come half a dozen phones, everyone scrambling to prove me wrong.

It's our playground, you see. Last year it was Star Wars, this year I got the group to agree to a setting that is more or less fulfilling all my childhood dreams. It may not be strictly "Sherwood Forest", but our made-up world is strongly structured around the tropes and characters of the Robin Hood saga. Lincoln Green, robbing the rich to save the poor, fantastic archery, and daring escapes, all with a liberal seasoning of wit – it's everything I've always loved about Robin Hood, but without the stress of exact historical accuracy. (Only the stress of yours truly occasionally annoying the rest of the group *about* historical accuracy.)

But the really wonderful thing is that this weekly gathering, this "role playing game" isn't

confined to just my house, or just Sherwood Forest. Any group of friends can do it, in any setting they like. So if you're looking for a cheap way to have some good-humored fun with your creatively-minded friends, read on. I'm going to give you the key.

What is an RPG?

Role-playing is of course where people take on characters in imaginary scenarios. Although it has a variety of cultural connotations, it also is a respectable therapy tool – psychologists often use it for helping people with a variety of disorders to build awareness of themselves, others, and create a mental toolbox for social situations.

A role-playing *game*, however, is built around a specific set of rules. Indeed, some systems have huge libraries of reference books for every detail (although they are not necessary). In addition, although the story is flexible and characters make their own dialogue, the result of their actions is governed by dice rolls and character statistics.

A Safe Place to Build Understanding

This structure means that although players can say something like "I want to scale that big wall!" they don't have automatic success. A system of numbers and dice, modified by the stats given each type of character (a thief has different abilities than a bard, as in real life), determines the outcome, just like factors of gravity and strength rule real world wall-climbing attempts. And if debate arises, there is one person (the game master, or GM, who sets, runs, and narrates the scenario) to act as arbitrator and judge.

Now all of this is not very different from a typical board game like *Risk* or *Settlers of Catan*. That's where the roleplaying comes in. Roleplaying in this setting is very much like improv acting, but with a small audience of trusted friends to support and encourage. Just as acting often gives young people confidence in themselves, so can roleplaying, if conducted in a well-constructed group (more on that later).

My Story

I've always lived a highly imaginative life. Any time I could create a story, whether on paper or in person, I did! Stories, skits, movies, acting games . . . these are the threads of my life. Before I even knew what RPGs were, my friends and I were effectively doing our own freeform RPGs, in the form of collaborative fanfiction.

Like many Christians, my first understanding of RPGs came from negative discussion of *Dungeons and Dragons*. Imagine my surprise when I started hanging out with a group of Christians that played this! And from what they discussed, it sounded super fun! Basically a combination of RISK and improv acting, both of which I loved and couldn't get enough of! Although (as I discuss further in my original blog article) I understand how D&D can become problematic for some Christians, in this setting it was a good fit for me, and the weekly interaction with a group of people of diverse faiths actually helped solidify and grow my own beliefs.

When I first met my husband, I knew he played RPGs, but never dreamed that he was actually a fantastic GameMaster. He is normally rather quiet and extremely introverted, so when we played our first session for his birthday party, and I saw his animated GM side come to life, I was stunned . . . and knew I really *had* met my dream man. Apparently my friends were too, because five years later they are all still playing regular RPGs with us.

The past few years have been excruciatingly difficult from a health standpoint for me, but my RPG group has been amazing. We have a no-pressure rule, so that any week I am feeling ill, I can cancel the group for that week, at any time, with no guilt. They never make me feel bad, but just reaffirm their understanding and prayers, and state that they are just excited whenever it *can* happen.

Role Playing and Author Life

I've also found many aspects of regular role-playing to be tremendously useful in developing my skills as an author. One of the greatest challenges for writers is developing unique characters that speak with their own voice. Observation of the world is tremendously important for this, and recently I've realized just how much I'm benefiting from my weekly role-playing game.

I strongly believe that reading other great authors is the best form of 'studying' a writer can do. However, the one weakness of this in regards to character development is that (most of the time) every character in a book is written by the same person. No matter how hard an author works at their craft, ultimately each character's motivations are being developed by the same mind.

In an RPG group, however, while you have a narrative story run by the game master, each character is developed and played by a different player. This adds an element of unpredictability and surprise that few other mediums offer. (Stage and screen have some of this, with actors contributing their thoughts, but ultimately the story is strongly run by the screenwriter and director).

The other benefit of the RPG group is that you can discuss character motivation and actions. This means that not only do I get to observe how different people play different characters reacting, but we also discuss *why* they did so. I've found this a tremendously helpful window into human nature.

For example, one time my character majorly ticked off another character in the game. Out of game, we all agreed on the action ahead of time because it would be so disruptive, and everyone thought it was an awesome narrative choice. In game, however, it was INTENSE. And then we had to wait a week for the real big drawn out fight to happen! I had several days to think through how my character would react. I knew, if I were writing the scene, how it would go. What I didn't know was how the other player was going to have their character react! It ended up being almost nothing like I anticipated, but tremendously true to the character as developed. As a result, I found myself re-analyzing (again) how different people of different personality types react to the same situation, and am thankful that the RPG group gives me the constant reminder of this!

What system to use?

If this article has intrigued you, and you'd like to see about setting up a session with your own friends, I encourage you to do some further digging! There are a wide variety of different gaming systems out there, many of them free! For our Robin Hood based game, we are using a free system called "Fate Core" which is available for free download online. It has a very simple system of stats, just four dice with only three symbols total (no numbers), and is story-driven rather than combat driven. The downside of this system is that there is very little supplemental material, so you have to do a lot of your own worldbuilding as you go. On the other end of the spectrum is the Star Wars



My husband and I met through our faith, and bonded over our mutual geekiness

system put out by Fantasy Flight Games, which has extensive worldbuilding materials. Although the books and supplementals for this system can get expensive, the company sells a variety of starter scenario packs with well-done guides that are excellent entries into learning to run a game. (Disclaimer: My husband works for Fantasy Flight Games, but not the RPG department, so I recommend this system purely out of my own enjoyment of it).

And since you're reading *this* magazine, you may be most interested to hear that there are Lord of the Rings mods for Dungeons and Dragons, so you can indeed take off on an adventure through Middle Earth.



The Three Heirs: A Crossover Fanfiction By Amanda Pizzolatto

“Arthur, are you sure about this?” asked Merlin.

“I want to see my heirs, and I’m going to choose one to rule in the future,” replied Arthur.

“Your reign ends with your life, Arthur,” began Merlin.

He paused and glanced at Merlin. “Then, if not my kingship, perhaps they will inherit my knighthood instead.”

“You will have them fight for the Light?” asked Merlin. “But all three will be perfectly capable of that.”

“I want one in particular to be the head of the warriors of Light.”

“Arthur . . .”

“Merlin, please, grant me this, at least. I will have no heir to take up my throne after I’m gone, you’ve said so yourself. But since I cannot choose an heir for that, allow me to choose an heir for the warriors of Light. Let me choose, allow me this kingly responsibility, please, Merlin.”

Merlin let out a sigh. “Very well, Arthur. Go – figure out how you shall choose among them while I bring them here.”

“Thank you, my friend,” stated Arthur with a smile.

Merlin merely grunted in reply before walking away. In a moment, he was in another room in the castle. It was his own room, piled high with scrolls and books. But three scrolls in particular were rolled out on his bed. On those scrolls were the pictures, names, and information of the three heirs of King Arthur – three adolescents who had never met, but all three had inherited something from Arthur. The teen in the middle Merlin looked at with a deep sorrow; the secret about his inheritance could no longer be kept secret from Arthur.

The three boys in question were Arthur William Wagner, Billy Bannister, and Bran Davies. Arthur William Wagner, or Will as he preferred, was a handsome, athletic brunette who became one of the best football captains for Avalon High. Billy Bannister was, surprisingly, an anthrozil, meaning he was half-dragon, half-human. His most prominent dragonoid feature was his fiery breath which, thankfully, he was getting under control. And Bran Davies. Bran was the weird-looking one of the bunch, practically all white except for his tawny eyes. He was known best for his quiet but stern personality, a personality brought about by the fact that he did not have many friends. Sure, he could have them, but his father was very protective of him, and Merlin was glad of it.

Merlin uttered a few words under his breath, the words quickly becoming a whirlwind of a chant. As his voice became stronger, the wind picked up speed, swirling around his room without lifting up anything. But that was because it was bringing something.

As soon as Merlin ended his spell, and the wind died down, three voices grunted and yelped. The three teens, the three promised heirs of Arthur – Will, Bran, and Billy – were sitting on the floor. First they stretched and grunted at the rather hard landing. But then the pain was forgotten as they looked up and realized they weren’t home. Their eyes fell on the wizened man who was looking at them with sad but loving eyes.

“Wh-where are we?” asked Will the instant he realized he wasn’t alone. And not just accompanied by two other teens, but also by the presence of the man.

“You three are in Camelot.”

Merlin's words had taken them quite by surprise, and despite spending several days in Camelot to prove his point, they were still shocked and a bit unsure about the reality of it all. Bran and Billy both began to believe in it not long afterwards, but Will was the tougher nut to crack. It took him almost a week after arriving for him to start believing. But Merlin figured it had to do with the fact that Will couldn't get back home.

Arthur had been thinking and planning the whole week for a test to put the three through, and did not know of their arrival until it was time to reveal the test. Merlin promptly introduced the king to his three heirs, giving him all the information he dared. Arthur was so happy to meet them that he held a three day party in honor of their arrival. He then told them of the test and what they must accomplish.

In order to take up the role of leader of the Warriors of Light, one of the three must complete the most tasks. The first task was to defeat a monster and bring back its head; the second was to travel to Avalon and pick three golden apples; the third was to battle the Green Knight; and the fourth was to help someone in need. Arthur made it perfectly clear that the first task could not count towards the fourth task.

The three were unsure if they even wanted that task of leading, but to humor the king, they went on the quest.

The first task, surprisingly, wasn't that hard to find, or to overcome. Billy ended up winning the day and beating the sea serpent with the aid of his fiery breath. He had never been as grateful to have it as he was then, and since no one else but Will and Bran were present, he didn't have to explain anything to the townsfolk.

The group continued on their merry way, turning their horses towards Avalon. Getting to where the island could just be seen from the shore was the easy part; shouting across the channel to ask for access and getting on the island was the hard part. With as much shouting as they did, the three thought they were going to lose their voices.

Finally, someone rowed to shore. A woman stepped out of the boat, tall, elegant, and queenly.

"Who are you, and why do you seek passage to Avalon?" she asked authoritatively.

The three quickly explained their quest and revealed who sent them.

"Arthur sent you?" she asked incredulously. "So that he can choose one of you to lead the Warriors of Light? Then come, quickly! We have been waiting for you."

"You, you have?" asked Bran.

She nodded as she waved them towards the boat. "We have. The Green Knight informed us of your quest and told us to send you on your way towards him immediately after you picked the apples."

"Um, why is that?" asked Billy as the four climbed into the boat. He took an oar while Will took the other and began rowing.

"Because the last two parts of your quest are at the same place, in the Green Knight's castle."

"Really?" blurted Billy.

"How do you know that?" asked Bran.

"Because the Green Knight told me this only last night. He is a dear friend of ours and visits us often," she replied.



“He told you?” asked William. “Why did he tell you?”

“So that I would send you in the right direction. I want my brother’s happiness as much as Merlin, or anyone else loyal to the king.”

“Wait, your brother?” asked Billy.

Bran’s eyes widened. “You’re Morgan Le Fay!” he exclaimed with a gasp.

Will and Billy seemed to shrink away from the queenly figure guiding them to a mystical island.

“If I were really that bad, do you think Arthur would have sent you my way? He knows I live here,” stated Morgan. As she said the word “here”, the boat landed on the sandy beach of Avalon. “Besides, it is my sister Morgause and her son Mordred that you have to worry about.”

“Wait, Morgause is Mordred’s mother?” asked Will incredulously as he glanced from the boat to the forests of the island. It didn’t seem like he wanted to get out.

Morgan nodded as she tied the boat to a dock.

“Yes, but the two did not know they were related until it was too late,” she replied.

“Ugh,” muttered the three with looks of disgust.

Morgan nodded. “Very much so; now, enough of that. Which of you shall pick the five apples?”

“Five apples?” asked Bran.

She gave him what the three thought was an odd glance. “Yes, five apples, you must pick five apples. The Green Knight said it was needed as a part of his challenge, as well as part of your reward.”

“Oh, um, wow, okay,” blurted Billy, glancing at Bran and Will. “King Arthur only told us to pick three.”

“Well, two more won’t kill you,” replied Morgan with a soft smirk. “So, who shall go?”

“Well, um, Billy, you defeated the sea monster, why don’t you go first,” suggested Will.

“No, only one may go.”

“What?” the three teens exclaimed.

“And choose wisely,” continued Morgan. “The dragon does not take, ah, kindly to those who are unworthy.”

“Dragon?” asked the three.

Morgan motioned for them to follow her, and led them past a stone wall. Within the center of the encirclement stood a magnificent tree covered in golden apples. An elongated dragon had wrapped itself around the base of the tree. It apparently was sleeping peacefully away, but then it tilted its head.

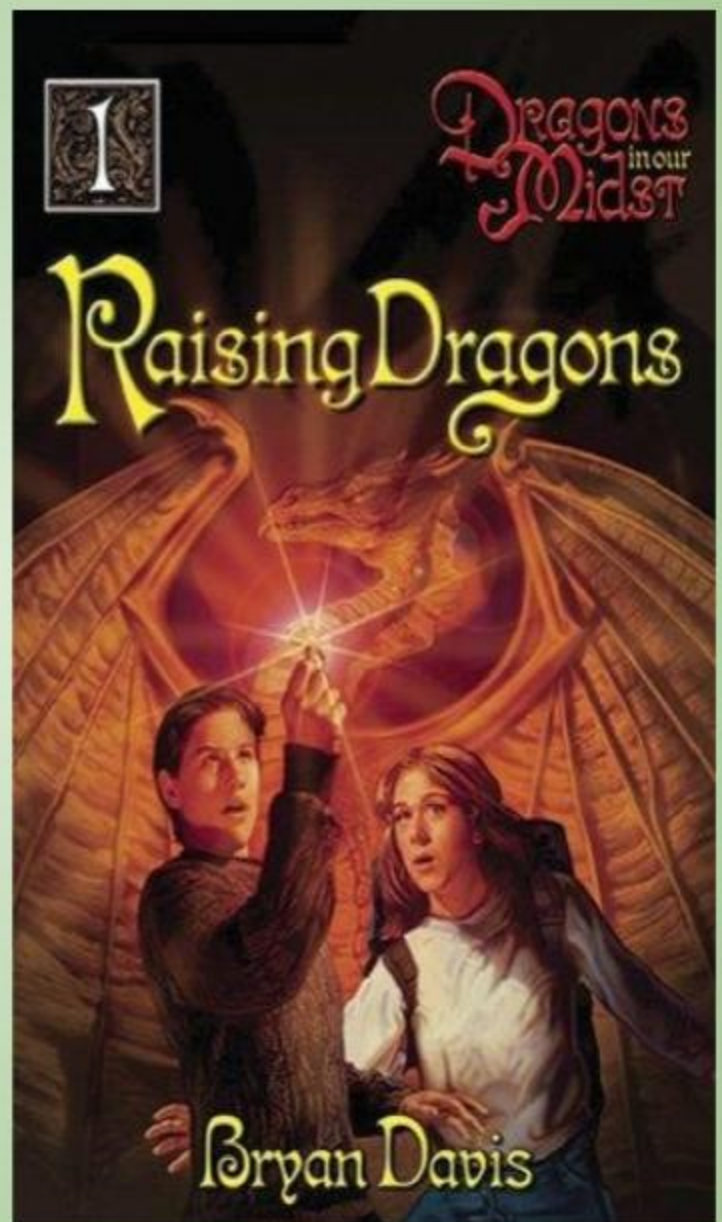
“It’s listening to us,” whispered Billy.

“Hence why only one may enter,” stated Morgan.

“These apples can heal whatever ails you, so we must take extra precaution to prevent such power from falling in the wrong hands.”

“But which of us shall go?” asked Billy.

“You, of course, you’re the half-dragon!” replied Will.



“No, Will should go,” stated Bran, startling the other two.

“Wait, why me?” asked Will.

“I don’t know how or why, but I have a feeling it’s supposed to be you, Will,” replied Bran with a shrug.

“B-but, if you’re wrong . . .”

“I don’t think I am,” replied Bran softly. He glanced at Morgan for support.

“It is worth a shot,” she stated.

Will glanced at each of the three in turn. “Okay, here goes.”

He walked slowly towards the dragon. The dragon opened its eyes, and Will paused. When the dragon made no other move, Will walked towards it even slower than before, but the dragon merely watched his progress. Will stopped only a couple of inches away from the dragon.

“If he allows you to step on his snout, then you may gather the apples. He will lift you up,” remarked Morgan.

“Uh, o-okay,” muttered Will.

He let out a shaky breath and proceeded to place a foot on the dragon’s snout. The dragon did nothing, and Will placed his other foot on the dragon’s snout. The dragon lifted its head, getting Will to the lowest branches of the tree. Billy and Bran whooped as he began plucking apples.

“Remember, Will, five apples and only five. No more, no less,” stated Morgan.

Will merely nodded as he quickly plucked the five apples. Once Will had all five, the dragon lowered its head and Will just about dashed off towards the others with a slight tremble in his step.

“Good job, Will!” exclaimed Billy as he patted Will on the back.

“Thanks man.” Will turned to Bran. “Guess you were right, after all.”

Bran nodded, seemingly perplexed. “Sure looks that way.” He glanced at Morgan. “Why is that?” Morgan shrugged, though a smile tugged at her lips. “Perhaps you may find out in your quest with the Green Knight; speaking of which, it is time for you to head that way.”

Morgan led the teens back to the dock, telling them that they could not eat the apples until the Green Knight told them what to do with them. She gave them directions on where to find the Green Knight as she rowed them back to the mainland and took leave of them there. The boys watched her leave before getting on their steeds and taking off for the Green Knight’s palace.

After a good night’s sleep and a hard day of riding, the three came upon the Green Knight’s palace fairly quickly. It was exactly as Morgan had described it – high stone walls that were nearly overtaken by vines, trees lining the inside of the walls like silent sentries, and three coppery spires rising above the trees. The melodious ringing of a bell could be heard over the sounds of birds.

“I hope that means we’re in time for supper,” remarked Will as he urged his horse on, followed by Billy and Bran.

They were greeted warmly at the gates and were led immediately to the main hall upon hearing of their mission. Everyone was just sitting down to dinner when the teens entered. The guard told them to wait before walking towards the knight sitting at the head of the table.

After the guard spoke to him, the knight rose and motioned the teens forward. “Welcome, travelers from Camelot, welcome! I have long been expecting you!”

“Yes, so Lady Morgan has informed us,” replied Bran with a bow.

“Wonderful! Come, sit and eat. You must be hungry and tired after your long journey,” said the knight with a smile.

“Um, well,” began Billy, glancing at his friends with a hint of concern.

“Oh, do not worry; while you are within my castle walls, you are safe. Your tasks take place outside the walls,” remarked the knight.

“Very well, thank you, sir,” replied Bran with another bow. “We accept and are very grateful to your hospitality.”

The teens took spots around the table, and were soon enjoying the good food and fantastic tales of heroism. After dinner, they were shown to grand rooms, where they slept soundly the whole night through.

After breakfast, the Green Knight bade them to dress in armor before taking them out of the castle. They followed him deep into the forest; every step quickened their hearts and deepened their worry. The Green Knight stopped in front of a strange structure, but upon closer inspection, the teens found it to be a church taken over by the greenery. The stone walls had refused to crack, as did several of the elaborate stained glass windows and the statues.

“Go to the altar, choose your weapon, and rejoin me outside,” stated the Green Knight. The teens walked slowly towards the altar. There, right in front of it, were five weapons – a sword, a trident, a crossbow, a flail, and an ax.

Billy stepped forward and picked up the sword.

“Billy! Are you sure?” asked Will.

Billy shrugged. “Sure, I mean, Bran’s instinct was right with the dragon at Avalon, figured mine would be right as well.”

Bran smiled and nodded as he picked up the flail.

“Okay, whatever you say,” replied Will as he picked up the trident.

The three turned, took a deep breath, and marched out of the church. The Green Knight was waiting for them, looking greener than before. The boys realized with shock, and a bit of horror, that the Green Knight had reverted to his tree-like self for the battle.

“Begin,” he said before charging them.

The boys ducked and dove away to keep from the deadly sword swinging over their heads.

“Uh, what do we do?” asked Billy as the boys regrouped after the third time ducking and diving.

“We need to work together,” replied Bran.

“What?” blurted Billy. Bran shot him a glare. “Oh, fine.”

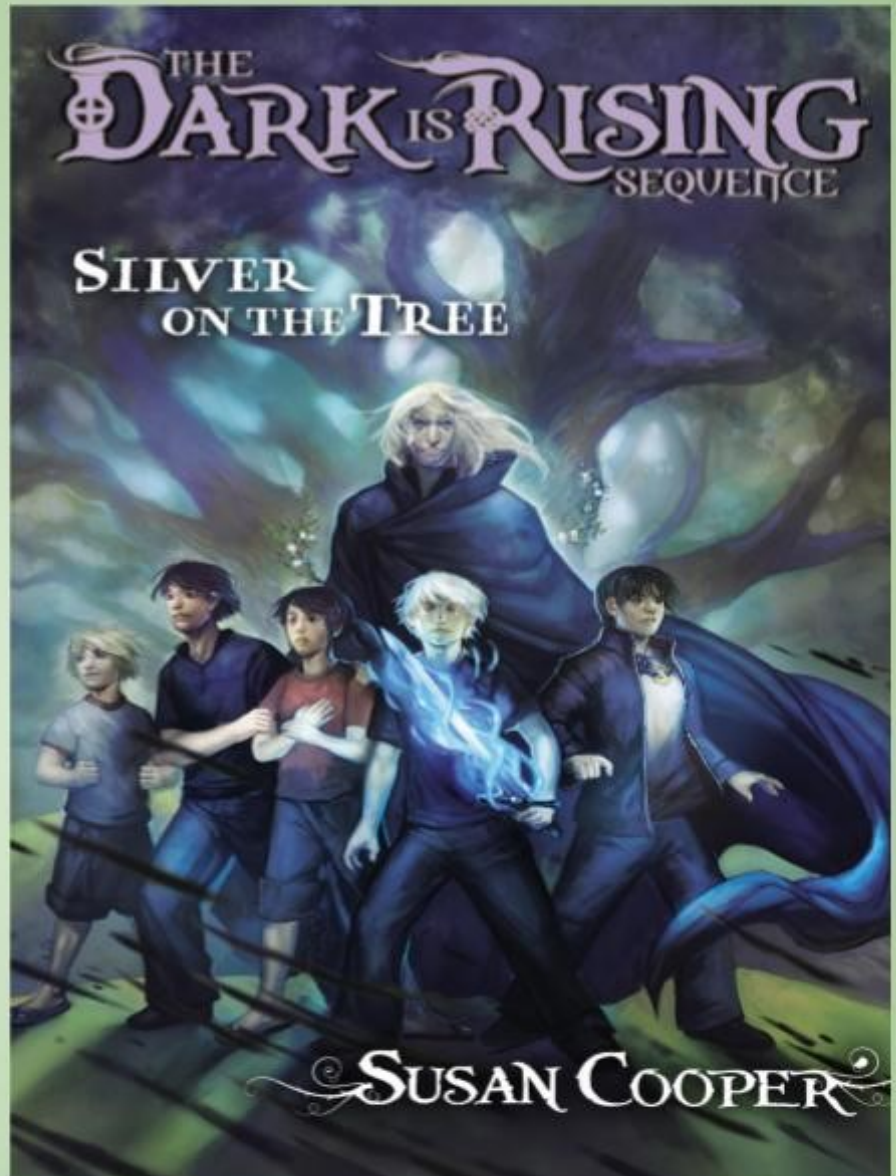
Bran turned to Will. “Will, you concentrate on his legs. I’ll go for the head.”

Will nodded. “Sounds like a plan to me.”

“Of course it does, because I’m the one having to deal with his sword,” mumbled Billy.

“Don’t worry about it. Now go!” shooed Bran.

Billy rushed out and parried blows with the Green Knight. Will jumped out a minute later and aimed for the Green Knight’s legs while Bran took to helping Billy with the sword long enough to get a good hit at his head.



The next moment, Will tripped the Green Knight with his trident, and before Bran could stop himself, the flail made contact with the Green Knight's head.

"Oh, dude! I don't think we were supposed to kill him!" blurted Billy.

"I-I didn't mean to! Will, the golden apples!"

"No!" came the Green Knight's voice, strong and clear. The three glanced down at him before jumping up and yelping. The Green Knight's face righted itself as he stood up. "You three have done well, but those apples are for you in your time of need, and only you. You are not immortal like I."

"Wh-what do you mean by that?" asked Billy.

"Raise your weapons over your heads," the Green Knight merely said.

The three glanced at each other and raised their weapons over their heads.

"Billy, repeat after me, 'fire within me'," the Green Knight said.

"Fire within me!" exclaimed Billy. The next second, a flame rushed around him, and he was dressed in golden and red armor. "Whoa!" he exclaimed, looking over the changes. The other two glanced at the Green Knight expectantly and excitedly.

"Will, say, 'water around me'."

"Water around me!" Will was soon dressed in blue armor.

"Bran, 'earth beneath me'."

"Earth beneath me!" Bran was in silvery and gold armor.

"Whoa, man, this is super cool! Are we superheroes?" asked Billy.

"You are the Mystic Knights, and you obey me. Unfortunately, on the eve of Samhain, the gates of Tir na nOg will close, and we shall be hidden from mortals for centuries, myself included. You will need this armor and these weapons not long after you return to your time. You saw there were five, correct?"

"Yes," they chorused in reply.

"There are two more, stolen from our land. Merlin saw that they would not be found for centuries and would rise in your time in the hands of evil. This is why we called you here."

"And why we must send you back immediately," came Merlin's voice as he exited the church and joined them.

"How did you do that?" asked Will. He paused and thought for a moment. "Oh, wait, right."

"But, what about King Arthur?" asked Bran.

"He was not supposed to have known about you," replied Merlin, "but I'm afraid he managed to get into my room and saw my notes. Thankfully, he only saw you three."

"Only us three?" asked Billy.

"You mean you were looking at more?" asked Bran.

"Two more, one for the crossbow and one for the axe. You must find their owners immediately upon your return," stated Merlin.

"Who were you looking at?" asked Bran.

Merlin looked specifically at him as he spoke. "The crossbow for Julia Grant and the axe for Xander King."

"And remember these words; for the crossbow, Julia must say 'air above me', and Xander must say 'forest before me' in order for these to work," stated the Green Knight.

Bran's cheeks began to redden; Julia was the girl he had a crush on! Oh, this would be fun.

"However, like you three just did, you must defeat a creature of ancient mythology, like me. Though they will most likely have to defeat a Fomorian, not a particularly easy foe to defeat."

"I'm sure they'll be able to handle it with our help," stated Billy.

"Will we ever see you again, Mr. Knight?" asked Will.

"You shall, for when you least expect it, the gates of Tir na nOg will reopen. But until I return, you may count on my friend Herne the Hunter to aid you. He alone will have the wisdom you need. Now, Merlin, if you please, send them home."

Merlin nodded and handed the last two weapons to Bran and Billy. "Good luck, to all of you. And remember, the apples are to be used only in extremely dire situations. You may cut them up and carry a piece or two with you at all times; they will not go bad."

“But, what about King Arthur?” asked Bran, more softly this time.

Merlin patted his shoulder. “I will tell Arthur the results of your quest.”

“What are the results of our quest?” asked Billy.

“That Bran is the leader.”

The three glanced at him in shock.

“But . . .” began Will.

Merlin shook his head. “No more questions, it is time.” He muttered a few words under his breath, and as before, the three traveled by wind.

Once they found themselves back home, they quickly made off to find the last two members of their team, and to begin their adventures as the Mystic Knights.

The various characters of Arthurian legend plus:

Bran Davies – *The Dark is Rising* sequence

Will Wagner – *Avalon High*

Billy Bannister – *Dragons in Our Midst* series

Julia Grant – *Aedyn Chronicles*

Xander King – *Dreamhouse Kings*





Not Less

By Keturah Lamb

On their wedding day, Maid Marian smiled. Her heart had always belonged to this man who loved others more than himself, this man who had been dubbed outlaw for doing what was right. Robin Hood, her husband, pardoned by King Richard himself.

“You are just as beautiful as the Mother Mary must be,” Robin Hood whispered in her ears, as he danced with his new bride in the woods. They were alone at last.

Marian laughed. “I am so happy.”

Robin Hood pulled her close and said, “You make me happy — a woman to bear my children and care for me.”

Marian had dreamed her whole life of marrying Robin Hood and having his children. They would all look like him, the boys just as handsome, the girls prettier. She’d teach them about when their father had been an outlaw. She’d pretend to worry when Robin took the boys out hunting. (“Oh, Robin, no poaching!”) And she’d teach her girls to have the nicest, smallest embroidery stitches.

She smiled and laid her head against his chest. How he treated her so wonderfully! He treated all women as if they were sacred...but she? Robin Hood adored her as if she were the Mother Mary. There was no better, kinder man than he. No one more worthy of being a father to her children than he.

Robin Hood found Marian crying eight months after their anniversary. “What is it, my wife?”

She didn’t want to speak her fears. What if Robin were to love her less? Or to laugh? Or worse yet, what if speaking them made them real? Speaking them might make them so.

But he held her so tenderly her heart was safe, and she was able to tell him, “What if I can’t have a child?”

Robin Hood laughed. “Don’t worry. We’ve only been married a few weeks —”

“It’s been three months, Robin. I should have a child already.”

Still he laughed, holding her closer. “Truly? Time passes fast with us! Do not worry. God will bless you soon enough. Have faith.”

Marian’s tears dried. Robin Hood knew just what to say to ease her fears.

“I just received a summons,” Robin said, after a few moments of happiness. “From King



Richard.”

“Oh?” Marian’s heart fluttered. She knew what he would say.

“There’s a group of lords that have stepped out of line. He wants me to deal with them.”

Marian’s heart filled with pride, despite not wanting him to leave. She caressed his large hands. “I don’t want you to leave, but you are the best man to deal with ornery lords.”

Robin Hood laughed, “Someday I shall be a legend.”

“And I your legendary love,” Marian returned the teasing, but her heart was not with it. “Be safe, my husband.”

“And keep your pretty eyes dry, my wife.”



At first she kept busy. Marian did not need to take care of the estates — that was Little John’s work, as Robin Hood’s steward. But she enjoyed spending time in the gardens and in the kitchen, and knowing each servants’ name. She loved to visit with them as they combed her hair or laid out her clothes.

The first time Robin Hood left, he was gone a whole fortnight. But it was not the only occasion he was called away. And over time he was needed for longer periods, more frequently. Marian grew restless for her husband, and her fears reawakened.

No child came, month after month. A year passed and Marian’s mind knew the truth. She was barren and Robin would know soon, too. If he didn’t know already.

She sat in the garden, alone with her questions, pulling at flower petals. Maybe King Richard wasn’t calling him away so much. Maybe Robin couldn’t bear to be at home with a worthless wife. These words became rooted as truths in Marian’s mind. She tried to push them away, at first. She would laugh with the servants as if nothing was wrong.

Marian found herself spending much time with Alice, the cook and Little John’s wife. Her smile was as warm as the bread fresh out of the hearth, her eyes were alight with hospitality. Her adult daughters worked with her. And each had many little ones, running around, screaming and laughing. Marian told herself to enjoy the children. Envy, after all, was a vice. But her heart pained at the sight of the tiny ones. Her midsection ached to have her own. Her hands were begging God to let them do what they were made to do — hold her *own* child. Her body was meant to create. So why didn’t she?

Alice’s daughter, Elizabeth, and daughter-in-law, Gloria, were with child at the same time. Marian watched their bellies grow over the months, imagining what they felt like each and every day and knowing that she’d gladly trade their morning sickness for the hollow ache she knew each moment.

One day, each of Alice’s daughters arrived with a new baby in their arms, laughing with pride.

“Here, Mistress, see my baby! Isn’t she so fat?” Elizabeth said, handing Marian a small, red baby wrapped in cloths.





Marian's arms quivered as she took the baby. Her stomach resisted the feeling of a baby resting on it so near. Tears started in her eyes.

Gloria said, "Oh, but I wanted her to hold my baby first. He is the largest! Weighed nine pounds when he was born, Mistress. Do look at his long curls!"

"Oh?" Marian tried to keep her tears locked away. "They are so dark."

She brought the baby girl to her lips, but couldn't kiss the soft cheek. Contact would break her sanity. She should be holding a child of her own by now. Not another's. She should be chasing around a toddler, grabbing a hold of him and tickling his fat belly. Instead she held someone else's child in her aching arms.

"Here, take her back, Elizabeth. I am feeling tired now."

"Yes, Mistress."

Both young women chanced to lower their eyes toward Marian's flat belly. They shared a look, then sent sympathy to Marian. "Don't worry, Mistress. You'll have a child of your own soon. The Good Father in Heaven couldn't do anything but bless you."

Their words were too much. Marian left, feeling like a foolish child as tears broke free. She would not return to the kitchen. She could not be around all those children again — to have her heart's desire taunted before her eyes was too much.

She had no desire to go outside... the garden was full of life while her womb was dead. How could she bear to see so much life when she was cursed inwardly? She stayed in the darkness of her room, keeping even the sunlight locked away behind heavy drapes. She lost track of her estate, letting the servants alone. New ones came and she did not know their names. Nor did she have the strength to care.

She should have never been born. Robin should have never burdened himself with such a worthless, useless bride. She prayed the Mother Mary still loved her some — enough to take her home soon.



Marion threw her covers away and sat up in her wide, lonely bed. She buried her eyes into her lap, bending her empty belly. Her stomach was too flat — it, not her eyes should be swollen. Oh, how she hated crying so much! But the tears would not stop.

"Marian?" One of the maids interrupted her weeping.

Marian raised her distraught face. She used to hide her red eyes in shame. But the servants were used to her despair.

"Would you like a fresh dress, Mistress?" The maid fumbled with a dress, changing it from arm to arm.





Marian shook her head. "I am fine."

"But you haven't changed in a week," the maid whispered.

Marian shrugged. What was the use? Though she hadn't realized it had been that long. How long had Robin Hood been away this time? She was always presentable when he returned, she kept a servant watching for him so she could be warned to gather her wits together. She didn't want him knowing how... useless she had become. "I'm tired."

"Let me comb your hair at least," the maid insisted.

Marian looked down at her black hair. It was caught up in long knots, sticking out all about her head. Once she had cared for herself, vain about her appearance. Now nothing mattered. But she complied. Marian stepped out of bed and sat on a hard chair. The wood poked at her bones. The pain felt wonderful. Better than the hollow ache that owned her middle.

Tears loosened once more.

The maid rubbed Marian's shoulders for a long moment before bringing the brush through the ends of her hair. This would take a long time.

Marian slumped in the chair and sobbed.

"There, Mistress. I'm not pulling *that* hard."

"It's not you." Marian managed a strangled laugh. "Don't mind my tears — what is your name?"

"Victoria, Mistress."

Marian sighed. "Once I knew everyone's name. I've become inept."

"No, Mistress!" Victoria gasped. "There are so many of us, you shouldn't feel that way."

"How long have you been coming to my room, Victoria?"

"Two months, Mistress."

Marian nodded. Her tears were silent... for the moment. "Long enough that I should have known your name."



Victoria continued brushing, but said nothing. Marian knew why. Because *she* was right. She was failing as the mistress of the castle. She had allowed herself to fall into despair and what would Robin say if he knew? Marian had no strength to care.

Her tears remembered her face again.

"There, there. You don't have to know my name. I only care about your beautiful locks."

Marian spoke through her tears. "Once I was the envy of all women and girls. My hair was always shiny." She pulled her ratty hair away from Victoria's brush, bringing it to her face. She let it fall behind her back once more. Victoria resumed brushing.

Marian smoothed her dirty dress over her knees. "My father made sure I owned a dozen dresses of the latest fashions. I was active in charities. I was productive with my time." She pulled away once more, letting her head fall to her lap. "Now... now... what I wouldn't give to be the poorest, dirtiest girl."





“Oh, Mistress, don’t say such things. You are still all of those things... so wonderful! With a wonderful husband!” Victoria spoke with force, pulling Marian’s head aright once more and yanking the brush through her hair.

Marion smiled at the pain and Victoria’s tone. “No,” she said, tears falling more silently. “Prestige and money mean nothing when you cannot have a child.”

Victoria said nothing. To Marian, Victoria’s silence confirmed what her heart told her. Babies were everything, and women who had none were worthless. The brush worked silently through the tangles as if also agreeing.



Her stomach remained empty. Her body ached with despair. Marian hadn’t allowed any of the servants to enter her room in...days? Time was something of the past... *now* lasted forever, and slowly so.

Today was their two year marriage anniversary and Robin Hood had been gone nearly three months — it was the only thing Marian had kept track of, every day of his absence.

She sat on the floor in a dark corner, alone in their large chambers. She could no longer cry. Her whole body was empty, desolate, separated from her broken mind.

Pain was a friend of the past.

Strength and beauty were a forgotten memory.

Her hair, her clothes, her home. None of it mattered anymore.

She was alone. She was cursed.

Her dreams were empty. Her days were dull. Not even tears could comfort her anymore.

She had prayed and plead to Heaven, “Holy Father and Mother Mary, why hath thou set me apart from all women and denied me? I pray that ye would be gracious. Forgive me for my sins, take my life if it pleases thee, but give me a child! Bless Robin Hood, at least, before ye take my life.”

But she had no strength left for prayer.

“Marian?”

Marian’s head jerked upright. *Robin Hood?* “Robin!” Why hadn’t the servant warned her? He could not see her this way. She could not bear the loss of his love.

“I’ve not been able to get her to eat for days,” Victoria’s voice squeaked, tears falling from her eyes. “She just sits there and moans and says ‘I’m worthless and my husband hates me’ and she won’t let me near her.”

Robin stood between the darkness of the room and the light that escaped from the doorway. “Thank you, Victoria. I will take care of her now.”

The maid left, shutting the room into darkness once more.

But Robin was there. A place could never be dark where he stood.



“It is not you, but me.” He awakened her tears, and they pressed against her dull eyes. “I am cursed... a dishonor to you.”

“You are not cursed. You are blessed, a daughter of Mother Mary.”

But Marian shook her head. “I will never have children.”

She looked into his eyes, to see if maybe he knew already. She saw sadness. So he hadn't suspected. And he was disappointed. Why else could he be crying? Robin Hood never cried. Marian turned her face away. He would leave her now. She would be a shame among all women. Worthless, infertile, cursed.

He stood...with her in his arms. And carried her to their bed, laying her down, slowly, gently, carefully. He kissed her forehead, brushed her hair behind her ears. He pulled the covers up to her chin. All the while tears silently fell over his cheeks, onto her own.

“You are not less of a woman, my wife. Satan has lied to you. But you are a daughter of the Mother Mary. Beautiful, kind, loving. Like so many women of old. Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth. You are as they were — blessed daughters, set apart for some Holy purpose.”

Marian's stomach lightened, as if filled with hope. “Am I truly blessed?”

“Yes, Marian. God loves you, and I do, too. Anyone that dares to say otherwise will know why I was once called the Prince of Thieves.”

“Robin?” Marian closed her eyes, feeling the strength to smile for the first time in such a long time.

“Yes, my love?”

“Am I broken?” her voice quivered.

“Nay, you are the most beautiful, *whole* woman I know. Not less.” He kissed her once more, then lay down beside her and the two of them wept together for the children they could never have.

Years passed into decades, and their love never lessened. Robin Hood stayed true to his vow — he never loved his wife less. And Marian discovered that God had another work for her as she cared for every person in her home and for all the needy Robin Hood brought to the safety of their estate. Twenty years passed and they remained as they began, two devout lovers driven by Faith and Love.



Magic, Brotherhood, and Destiny

BY HANNAH VINCENT

How many times have we read a legend and hoped it was a forgotten piece of history and not simply an idea or analogy? There's a small corner in our souls that hopes beyond hope these legends of epic duels, mystical monsters, tragic or true love, and battles between good and evil occurred. Of course, no one practices magic these days or rides unicorns, and sorcerers hardly show up on people's doorsteps saying they are on a quest to help you fulfill your destiny. But that corner in our souls still begs us to believe in the almost unbelievable because it's...exciting. Thrilling. Exhilarating. These legends remind us good can overcome the bad in this world, and more often than not, heroes are hidden under a layer of complacency and simply need a reason and inspiration to act. BBC's *The Adventures of Merlin*, or simply *Merlin* as it's fondly known, is a coming of age set before the beginning of the famous Arthurian legend. It not only showcases the positivity of magic, but the strength of brotherhood and importance of destiny.



From left to right: Guinevere, the Great Dragon, Gaius, Morgana, Merlin, Arthur and King Uther.

Merlin, played by Colin Morgan, is the typical nerd if Camelot was a high school. No one at first glance would believe he had more power in his pinkie than a seasoned knight would have in his whole body. Merlin is unassuming, humble, and quirky. His quick and easy smile showcases his friendly demeanor and willingness to lend a hand. We see him in his (probably) late teens when he first meets Prince Arthur, Guinevere (Gwen), Morgana, and a handful of other Camelot favorites. Almost right away he wields his



Colin Ford as the titular hero Merlin.

gift of magic for fun, using it to help him with chores or against Arthur in a harmless, comical fight. Despite the fact that magic is outlawed in Camelot due to fear of its presence, Merlin continues practicing and growing in it, always ready to aid a person in need or defeat a monster. Like any gift or talent we've been given, Merlin learns through trial and error how not to use magic and when it's appropriate to exercise his power. His mentor, Gaius, instructs him on its importance and

the grave consequences of misuse. While juggling the mastering of magic, Merlin also is hired as the manservant for Prince Arthur, whom he eventually (begrudgingly at first) befriends.

Arthur and Merlin's friendship is not immediate, nor is it wanted. Both tolerate one another's presence and Merlin deals with daily verbal jabs from Arthur. He retaliates by calling Arthur names behind his back and griping about it to Gaius and Gwen. For all of Arthur's arrogance and pride, he and Merlin quickly form a bond of loyalty neither recognizes. Merlin unenthusiastically watches over Arthur and saves his life numerous times with the use of magic. The



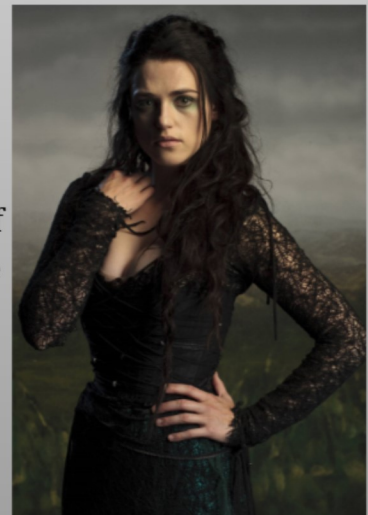
Bradley James as legendary king Arthur Pendragon.

only reason Arthur never realizes this is due to the fact that Merlin hides from view, incants under his breath, or prevents disasters from occurring in the first place.

For all Arthur's bravado, he does his fair share of rescuing Merlin as well. Whether it's slaying a monster, hoisting an unconscious Merlin over his shoulder, or sacrificing himself for his kingdom, Arthur becomes a true Prince of Camelot and a true friend. He and Merlin work together through challenges, mishaps, triumphs, battles, losses, and victories. They bring one another to their destiny.

Destiny is...funny. We can start off on one path and end up on another, or we can follow the same course our entire life. No matter what, we need to be challenged to be the best version of ourselves. Gaius pushes Merlin to broaden his perspective and be a man worthy of his gift. Merlin strives to use his magic in a way that benefits as many individuals as possible, and he desires to bring relief to those who suffer. Merlin's destiny to be Arthur's right-hand man was set before he was born, and one might say that is why he was born with magic. We can gather from the show that most are not born with it – it must be practiced and learned. Just as it is Merlin's destiny to support and protect Arthur, Arthur is destined to be the greatest king Camelot has ever known. No one does that by sitting around all day eating bonbons. Arthur takes up quests that put his life in the balance in order to prove himself worthy of being king. He defends Camelot to the brink of death numerous times and sees his subjects as his family. He grows from being a cocky teenager into a man who willingly risks his life for those he loves. Despite hardships and dire circumstances, both men reach the goal destiny sets for them.

Katie McGrath as the series' tragic villainess Morgana.



Throughout the series, the viewer's attention is captured by dialogue, costumes, action, and whether or not Merlin and Arthur succeed in their plans for saving Camelot. Merlin and Arthur's characters show there is more to the story than the mere legend – it brings to life a servant who would do anything for his master and vice versa. With family friendly dialogue and beautiful sets that depict a long lost medieval world, BBC's Merlin not only depicts a beloved legend, but the essence of magic, brotherhood, and destiny.

A Day in the Life: A Merlin Fan Fiction

By Naif

Merlin sat on the hard floor of the dungeon, the straw beneath him barely offering any comfort to the hard cold stone. The small dragon was coiled on his lap and Merlin held it tightly to his chest as he leaned back against the stone. He could sense the small creature's fear and its pain. A small mewing sound could be heard emanating from the dragon as it moved ever closer, trying to seek comfort from its dragonlord.

Merlin's hand rested on the small scaled head as he wondered just how in the world he'd ended up here to begin with...

One day earlier

Merlin looked up at Kilgharrah towering over him, a sense of deep pride and joy resonating inside his body. The thrum of reverberating energy from the egg seemed to reach out to him. To sing to his blood, to his very soul. The word the dragon had just told him reverberated in his mind.

"You must give the dragon a name."

A name... How was he to choose a name for such a magnificent creature? How was he to name her? He paused in his thoughts as that suddenly registered. Her. How was he to know that she was a she?



He paused. Maybe he didn't have to come up with a name, after all. He slowly reached towards the thrumming energy and he felt her. Felt her as he did Kilgharrah, and he knew. Deep in his chest he knew. Her name was Aithusa, it had been so since the dawn of time.

"Aithusa," Merlin said slowly in the dragon's tongue. Calling her forth to join the world. Wanting her to see the beauty and glory around him. Wanting to feel her magic resonating in his very being as he did Kilgharrah, wanting her set free.

As the egg cracked and the tiny white creature emerged, Merlin felt the resonating magic like a thick power pulsing and twirling to meet his own. Like another part of his own life was clicking into place. He felt tears drip down his face, and laughter bubbled up in his chest as his moist eyes beheld the beautiful creature. Smiling and crying at the same time, he listened to Kilgharrah's predictions of the dragon's birth, and felt his bond growing. His magic strengthening.

"A white dragon is, indeed a rare thing..."

"And fitting. For in the dragon tongue, you named him after the light of the sun."

"No dragon birth is without meaning."

"Sometimes the meaning is hard to see, but this time I believe it is clear."

"The white dragon bodes well for Albion, for you and Arthur, and for the land that you will build together."

Merlin was frozen without words as he watched the little dragon rising up on its hind legs and stretching its tiny wings out. Mewling at him almost like a purr. He could feel the joy and contentment from the dragon and he almost missed Kilgharrah's next words, but when they registered he felt frozen to his core.

"Merlin, you must take her and raise her, teach her."

"You can't be serious. I can't raise a dragon, Kilgharrah!" Merlin gasped in shock. How would he ever keep a dragon out of Arthur's sights? After what happened to Uther just days ago. How could Merlin even begin to make Arthur understand?

"It is a dragonlord's responsibility, Merlin. You cannot turn your back on your kin!" Kilgharrah roared angrily.

"Arthur would find out! We'd both be dead!" Merlin gaped at Kilgharrah as though the other had gone mad, because surely Kilgharrah was indeed losing his mind.

Kilgharrah seemed to laugh. "Do not worry young warlock. Dragonlings possess very powerful magics that insure they are hidden from all threats," he stated with a wicked grin.

"Kilgharrah..." Merlin began, intent on arguing more, but the powerful dragon beat its wings once and took to the air. Aithusa leapt from the stump and moved quickly to Merlin, coiling around his ankle. Merlin sighed as he shook his head. "What am I going to do?"

Merlin looked down at the tiny head that peered up at him from between his legs. It was such a comical sight that Merlin chuckled in spite of the fear and trepidation he held. He reached down and let the small creature climb into his hand. He would have to seek Gaius's help.

Merlin cradled the creature in his hands for a moment longer, feeling the warmth of the tiny dragon in his palms. He knelt down by his bag and slipped Aithusa inside. "I need you to stay hidden, Aithusa," he whispered to the creature and felt twin sharp teeth nip his hand. Merlin sighed and drew his hand back. "Yah, yah I'll find you something to eat." With another sigh he rose, grabbing the bag and looping it over his shoulder before walking back to Camelot.

At Gaius's chambers, he slipped the door closed and finally breathed a deep sigh of relief. He's made it this far. He was just about to call out to Gaius when the flap on his bag opened and Aithusa jumped out, landing on Merlin's shoulder with small claws dragging into his skin. Merlin squeaked in pain. The sharp cry drew Gaius's attention to him.

"Merlin..." Gaius began and caught sight of Aithusa. His hand flew up to his chest and he exclaimed, "Merlin, what are you doing bringing the dragonling back here! This is ridiculous, even for you!" His rant was stopped by the look of fear on Merlin's face, the uncertainty in his overly bright eyes, and the shadow of terror written all over his face.

"Well, sit down, Merlin, and tell me what happened," Gaius said darkly, indicating the table.

Merlin slowly lowered himself into a seat, and Aithusa jumped to the tabletop. Walking over to Gaius, he sat down and nipped at his finger before sneezing. Gaius looked at her with startled eyes. Merlin wanted to laugh, partly because of nerves and partly out of hilarity. Aithusa shook her head and sneezed at Gaius again before walking over the table and trying to eat the objects on it. Merlin began to explain what had transpired in the woods with Kilgharrah and the egg.

"So you see, Gaius, I don't have a choice," Merlin finished. He looked over at Gaius. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Did the dragon say how it is going to hide?" Gaius asked.

Before Merlin could even open his mouth to speak, the door flew open and Arthur stormed in.

"MERLIN!" he thundered and froze, looking at Gaius and Merlin sitting at the table. He blinked slowly at them. "Gaius, why do you have a cat on your table?"

"It was injured, sire, and Merlin brought it here," Gaius stated smoothly without pause. Though he did raise an eyebrow at Merlin. Who had looked at Aithusa and mouthed 'cat'?! As if Arthur had gone insane.

"Never mind that," Arthur said dismissively and turned his gaze back to Merlin, "you must prepare provisions for a week's journey; we are going to render aid to an outlying village. There was a fire that destroyed the majority of their homes and crops. They sent an envoy last night and we must hurry." Arthur turned to leave, then stopped.

"Oh, and Merlin..."

"Yes, sire?" Merlin asked nervously.

"Leave the cat." With that Arthur left. Merlin sighed in relief.

“Cat?” Merlin asked what he’d been wondering as he looked at Aithusa, who was busy trying to eat a bowl, and sneezing.

“Well, that explains how it’s hidden itself. I will see what I can do to find out what information I can before you leave,” Gaius offered.

Merlin nodded, thankful. “Thanks, Gaius,” he whispered as he rose and headed out of the room to go to the kitchen.

Aithusa jumped off the table and took off after Merlin, following him along the hallways. Merlin made it to the kitchen quickly and found the head cook.

“Merlin,” the plump woman said with a fond smile. “What can I do for you today?”

A sharp mewling interrupting what Merlin was about to say as Aithusa pounced onto the nearest counter and started to nip at the cooked chicken sitting in a plate, tearing off huge strips and gobbling it down before tearing off another strip. Aithusa was thrumming happily and Merlin couldn’t help but smile fondly until he caught sight of the cook’s wide, startled eyes.

“I’m sorry!” he called, but she waved him off with a smile of her own.

“Don’t worry about it, Merlin. Just keep your cat from tearing apart my kitchen,” the woman said as she regarded the creature eating the chicken. “And do make sure it gets rid of the rats in the castle,” she added as a gentle warning. “Now, now, what can I do for you?”

“I have to get provisions for a week’s long journey for Arthur and the Knights,” Merlin said, though he didn’t meet the cook’s eyes. Instead, he watched Aithusa to insure she didn’t eat anything else or cause any more mischief.

“Of course, come back in about an hour and I will have everything ready for you,” the woman said kindly.

Merlin walked over to Aithusa and scooped her up. A disagreeable hiss sounded. Merlin regarded the dragon that glared at him, terribly upset at being dragged away from her meal. “Oh, go on. Take the plate and feed that howling beast so it’ll shut it,” the cook said good-naturally, taking the plate and handing it to him. “It’s not like we can feed that ~~to anyone else, after all.~~”

Merlin thanked her, letting the small dragon climb out of his hand and into the plate as he sighed and headed out of the kitchen, towards the king’s chambers. So far, Aithusa wasn’t causing much trouble. For which Merlin was grateful. Aithusa resumed eating as Merlin walked towards Arthur’s chambers, making a list of what he’d need to pack. As he neared the room, he noted that Aithusa was crunching on the bones. Well, at least she would be consuming the whole thing, Merlin thought with a sigh.

He opened the door and set the plate and dragon down onto the floor. He started getting Arthur’s clothing sorted, mumbling to himself as he did. He was just finishing up when the door opened with a bang and a shout made him turn quickly.

“MERLIN, what in the world *happened* here?! Did a hoard of horses stampede through my chambers?” Arthur’s dark voice grumbled from the doorway.

Merlin looked around the room, gaping. Everything was spilled out of cupboards and the bedding was torn and scattered about the floor. The bowls and pillows were a mess. Feathers floated in the air. The room was trashed – furniture broken, keys and jewels scattered.



"Wha..." Merlin began, when Aithusa jumped onto the mattress and began to claw at it, purring and coiling in a circle.

"MERLIN!" Arthur thundered.

"I'm sorry..." Merlin began. But Arthur raised a hand and Aithusa sneezed before pouncing off the mattress and onto the floor in a cloud of feathers, sneezing again.

"Clean this mess up, Merlin," Arthur ordered darkly, "or I will have you in the stocks for six years!" He paused. "Oh, and Merlin, have it done by nightfall. I want an early night, we ride out a dawn." With that Arthur left, closing the door behind him.

Merlin sighed. Growling, he walked around the room. "Aithusa, really?!" He shook his head as he began to clean up the mess the dragon had made.

Merlin stood up after putting the last of the items back in its place. He looked up as the door opened and Arthur stood in the doorway, gazing at the room.

"Well that's better," Arthur declared. "So you can do something right, after all. Do you have everything ready for tomorrow?"

"No," Merlin began and stopped as Arthur raised his hand.

"We'll get to it then," Arthur demanded and finished coming into his chambers, going to his desk as Merlin sighed and started picking up where he'd left off gathering the clothing.

Arthur sat down slowly at the desk and started reading through the papers, picking through the fruit that sat in a tray on his desk. He heard a thrumming purr and looked down to see Merlin's cat coiling around his chair. He sighed and looked over to Merlin who was grumbling to himself as he worked. Arthur smirked and reached down, picking up the cat. He started as he set the creature on his lap. Its claws sank into his skin like tiny needles, and he frowned at it. It didn't quite feel right. All bumpy under thick fur. He had a moment to wonder just what kind of cat this was when he realized it had probably just been starved.

"You should feed your cat more, Merlin, it's all skin and bones!" Arthur said. "And clearly hungry since it keeps trying to eat my shirt."

Merlin had to stifle a laugh as he looked at Aithusa nibbling at Arthur's shirt and sneezing. Merlin gave a nod, not trusting himself to speak and perhaps break out into uncontrollable giggles at the sight of Arthur petting the small dragon on his lap. Merlin had just finished packing the last of Arthur's clothing and was turning around to ask if there was anything else Arthur needed.

Aithusa sneezed and a small flame shot out of his nose, catching Arthur's shirt on fire. Arthur felt the heat and shouted, standing up and startling the small dragon. Merlin grabbed the pitcher of water from the table and threw it at Arthur, who spluttered as the water soaked into his shirt, drenching the prince but putting out the small fire. Aithusa was hissing where she'd fallen to the table, her claws tearing into the paper and her body lengthening as she spread her wings and sneezed small bursts of fire at Arthur.

"Merlin, your cat's a dragon?!" Arthur sputtered. He looked shocked.

"Umm..." Merlin gaped at Arthur with wide eyes, taking a step back, suddenly feeling like he had to protect Aithusa. He shielded her slightly with her body, even as smoke coiled up from the burning paper. Her claws raking the wood as she hissed at Arthur. Her body coiling as she jumped and landed onto Merlin's shoulder, sneezing flames at Arthur.

"GUARDS!" Arthur shouted.

Merlin backed up quickly. Grabbing Aithusa into his arms and cradling her against his chest. "Arthur please!" he begged.

"Take him to the dungeon," Arthur declared as two guards came into his room.

Merlin whispered his plea again, but he didn't release his hold on Aithusa even as he was being pulled away. Startled, only vaguely aware that Arthur hadn't ordered the death of the small creature in his arms. Merlin was pulled by both guards down the hall and into the lowest reaches of the castle before being thrown into the cell. The very cell where he'd been sitting, contemplating how he was going to get out of this one.

He regarded the tiny creature. He was tasked with teaching her, raising her, protecting her. And yet he was destined to create Albion with Arthur. How could it be that he would die for harbouring a dragon? He closed his eyes and felt tears gathering in his eyes.

Arthur walked down the stone steps and stared at the young man cradling a dragon in his arms. He shook his head. He couldn't believe that his blubbering servant would cradle a dragon. Of all the things he'd have ever suspected.

"What am I going to do with you, Merlin?" Arthur growled, shaking his head.

"Arthur?" Merlin asked, blinking up into the torchlight illuminating the king.

"Do you realize what you've done, Merlin?" Arthur demanded.

"I don..." Merlin began, but Arthur's angry voice cut him off.

"You've brought a dragon into Camelot, Merlin. You've betrayed me. All these years, Merlin. I thought I could trust you!" Arthur angrily declared.

"I haven't..." Merlin began again, but Arthur continued.

"You will be banished from Camelot. It's the only mercy I can offer you, Merlin. That... thing will be executed." Arthur said, turning away.

"Arthur, you can't," Merlin said, rising to his feet. "Please."

"I can, Merlin. You forget that I am your king!" Arthur all but thundered angrily.

Merlin grabbed the bars of his prison and glared. "You prat! She can't do any harm! You can't kill her. Please, Arthur. I'm begging you!"

"You can't guarantee that, Merlin. That thing will grow up one day and you remember what the last dragon did to Camelot! We have no choice. It has to die." Arthur declared darkly.

"Arthur, please," Merlin begged. "I can guarantee it, I can. Just please spare her."

"How, Merlin?" Arthur demanded and Merlin stared at him, undecided.

Arthur looked at him with cold dark eyes. Anger twisted his face, but there was something – something that Merlin could barely see, and it made his decision for him.

"Because I am the last dragonlord, Arthur," Merlin whispered. "Balinor was my father."

Arthur opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again, glaring at Merlin. Realization that he should have known all along began to dawn on the man. The tears Merlin had shared. His moodiness before and after. The fact Arthur had been sure he'd missed the dragon, then seeing Merlin standing there unscathed, telling him he'd dealt a mortal blow to the beast. Never finding a corpse. It all made sense. And it made Arthur furious. He turned from Merlin and stormed out of the dungeons.

Merlin watched the torch recede, plunging him back into semi-darkness, and sighed. He slowly returned to the wall, and sitting down against it, he watched the small dragon crawling off his lap and onto the floor. Wondering if this was the moment when Albion began or if he'd just condemned himself to death with his words.

Arthur regarded his knights. All of whom he trusted. He was alone with them in a secret meeting not even his uncle Agravaine knew about. Arthur regarded them. Leon, Elyan, Gwaine, Lancelot, and Percival. All the faithful men who'd been loyal to him through many things.

"I have grave news to discuss with you. Sit," Arthur stated indicating his table. He waited for everyone to sit before he continued. "Merlin is in the dungeons. He is harbouring a dragonling and he has admitted that he is a dragonlord. I was prepared to exile Merlin, but in light of this the laws are clear. Merlin must be put to death."

"Sire, perhaps..." Leon began slowly before stopping. He hesitated. He had been there before Arthur's birth, before the purge; he had not agreed with Uther on this, but he couldn't contest Uther's decision. He let his words die at the look of anger on Arthur's face.

"You. Are. An. Absolute. Idiot!" Gwaine declared, snapping each word at Arthur. "Merlin has been a loyal friend for years and you'd burn him just because of how he was born?!"

"Magic is outlawed in Camelot, Gwaine. Need I remind you?" Arthur growled darkly.

"Maybe this kind of magic shouldn't be?" Lancelot said hesitantly. "You said that Merlin was the last of his kind, right? I mean, there are no other dragonlords, so really you'd just be sparing Merlin's life."

"I cannot undo my father's laws, Lancelot," Arthur sighed. No matter how much he'd like to, he knew he couldn't. Magic was evil. Wasn't it?

"You already have, Arthur," Elyan pointed out softly.

Arthur spun on him. "How so?"

"You knighted commoners, sire," Leon pointed out, "something your father never would have done. You are courting a servant and plan to make her your queen."

"All of that is different," Arthur started.

"No, pretty sure it's not, princess," Gwaine shot at Arthur.

"We're talking about Merlin," Percival said so quietly that everyone stopped talking and gazed at him.

"Merlin, who has placed himself in harm's way time and time again. He has come with us on every quest, when he cannot fight with sword as we can. He is no knight and yet he faces all the same dangers we do. Tell me, sire, does that sound like someone you should fear? Someone who thinks only of themselves and power?"

"No, but that is his duty," Arthur stated.

"Yet, no servant followed you into the dangers Merlin has," Lancelot countered. "He was not ordered to do so on many occasion and yet he faced grave peril alongside you. He has earned our friendship in more ways than one. Think, Arthur. Magic is a tool; like your sword, it can be used for good or for evil. It is not in itself a corruptive force. Surely you know that, deep down. Think of all the times Merlin could have harmed you, and yet instead he sacrificed himself for you!"

Arthur went to speak, but stopped as he gazed at the faces around him. At Gwaine's dark scowl. At Percival's knowledgeable eyes and blank expression, at Leon's thoughtful face, At Elyan's concerned frown and Lancelot's heated gaze. Arthur began to think about their words. He let his mind slowly pour over all the times when Merlin had faced dangers, all the times Camelot was saved by 'luck' that now he saw wasn't really luck. All the times they'd escaped disaster and Merlin had some strange excuse or he was in some strange location.

He shook his head. "We will have a trial for him. If Merlin has used his powers for harm, then he will face the same charges as all sorcerers must," Arthur said, rising. "His dragon must die."

"If Merlin really is a dragonlord, sire, the dragon poses no threat so long as Merlin lives," Leon said gently.

"You would have me spare the dragon?" Arthur asked, startled.

"I do not wish to speak ill of your father, sire; he was a great king," Leon stated.

"But?" Arthur pressed.

"But what he did caused the Great Dragon's troubles with Camelot. Before the beast was imprisoned, it did not bother with Camelot or any other village. It might have stolen some sheep, burned some fields, but it did not cause unnecessary destruction. It certainly had no quarrel with our realm. The dragonlords of old lived freely in Camelot as members of its court and thereby insured that all of Camelot and her people received protection and coexistence with the dragons." Leon continued, "It wasn't until the dragonlords were amongst the first to be accused of magic and many were the first to burn for sorcery. The start of the purge is when the dragons began to attack. Retaliation for the death of the dragonlords. It is said of dragons that they are like kin. Now, seeing Merlin with the dragon, it is evident why that happened. Had Uther spared the dragonlords, the dragons would not have attacked Camelot. Arthur, do not make the same mistakes your father made."

"The purge was not a mistake, sorcery is evil," Arthur replied.

"Sire, I know you do not wish to hear this, but I fear you must," Leon pressed.

"Then speak," Arthur said.

"Your father began the purge because of your mother's death," Leon said sadly.

"What do you know about that?" Arthur demanded, rising. Anger lacing his words again.

"I do not know much more than that, sire, but one who might is Gaius," Leon said.

"Then I shall speak with him," Arthur stated, leaving the room. The others looked uneasy as he left.

Gwaine glanced around at the others. He wasn't one to keep quiet on his thoughts and now was no different. He rose and started pacing. "If the princess insists on executing Merlin, I will not stand by and watch it," he exclaimed.

"Gwaine," Leon started, but the man whirled on him and glowered darkly.

Gwaine pointed one hand at him. "I only joined this group because of Merlin. Yes, I've come to see King Arthur in a new light, the way Merlin sees him. That doesn't matter, though; if the princess kills my friend, then he'll have lost all the respect I have for him!"

"Gwaine, you are not the only one who owes Merlin a debt," Lancelot stated to his friend, "but this will help no one."

"What else would you have me do?" Gwaine demanded.

Arthur pushed open the door to Gaius's rooms. "GAIUS?" he called out as he entered.

"What do you want, sire?" Gaius said, his face impassive, but Arthur could see the pain in his eyes. The fear.

"I have some questions for you," Arthur stated. "Sit Gaius, please."

"Will you let Merlin go?" Gaius asked, not unkindly, but his voice bore an edge of cold steel.

"I cannot say, Gaius, but if you answer these questions honestly, I might be able to do that," Arthur said softly. "I need answers, Gaius. I know you care a great deal about Merlin, but he's a sorcerer."

"Warlock, actually," Gaius said, frowning.

"Pardon?" Arthur asked.

"Merlin is a warlock, he's not a sorcerer," Gaius elaborated. His tone still sharp.

"There's a difference?" Arthur asked.

"A warlock is born with magic, a sorcerer learned magic," Gaius continued.

"So a dragonlord is always a warlock?" Arthur inquired, rather intrigued.

"No, a dragonlord is something entirely different," Gaius stated. "A sorcerer is a person with or without a gift or penchant for magic who learns enchantments and spells, either from a teacher or a book. A dragonlord is the son of a lineage who is kin to the dragons. Some believe that they were first created by a sorceress of a mortal female and dragon's blood. Now the lineages are passed from father to son. A warlock is a child born of magic, born of two mortal parents, yes, but essentially a warlock is as much magic as a man."

"So Merlin is both a dragonlord and a warlock?" Arthur asked.

"Yes," Gaius finished.

"We can't execute him twice. A dragonlord is as guilty of magic as a warlock, so it doesn't matter," Arthur said waving his hand.

"Very well, sire," Gaius said darkly. "What question do you have?"

"You knew my father before the purge, correct?" Arthur asked. Gaius nodded. "You knew my mother as well?" Arthur continued. Gaius nodded wondering where this was going. "Do you know why my father started the purge?"

"Arthur, there are some things Uther did not want you to know," Gaius said gently.

"I need to know, Gaius. Leon says that my mother's death was the cause of my father's hatred for magic. If that's true, I need to know why. Why did my mother's death cause the purge? Was she enchanted? Did a sorcerer kill her?"

Gaius sighed. "No Arthur. You must understand, magic can be used for evil or for good. There are rules, Arthur, just like for everything in life – there is balance. Igraine was unable to conceive. Uther needed an heir, but he loved your mother too much to give her up and remarry. He asked the priestess Nimueh for help. She gave him a potion and told him to have Igraine drink it on the night you were conceived. Nimueh told him there would be a price, but she did not specify that price would be Igraine's life. When a life is given one must be taken, that is the way of such magic. Everyone knew that, including Uther. After she gave birth, Igraine died and Uther blamed Nimueh."

"It was her fault," Arthur stated. He drew in a breath at Gaius's disappointed look. "Did my mother know?" he said after a pause.

"I believe she did; she was a follower of the old ways, Arthur. She believed magic could be a powerful ally. She knew the cost and willingly accepted it. It was Uther who couldn't," Gaius said gently.

"Nimueh could have chosen another to pay the price!" Arthur said darkly. "She didn't have to take my mother's life!"

"Arthur, would you have an innocent life lost so your mother could live?" Gaius asked him.

"No, of course not," Arthur said after a long pause.

"Igraine knew the cost and willingly took the potion. Arthur, she chose to give her life so that you could be born," Gaius said gently. "When magic is used to serve one's own gains, then it can corrupt, just like power can corrupt. How a noble treats his servants is a sign of the man's honour, just like when magic is used for good and for others, not for one's gain. That is the sign of true power. Merlin has never used his magic for his own gain, Arthur. He uses it for you, for the kingdom he believes in."

"Gaius, what would you have me do?" Arthur asked. "I cannot just turn a blind eye."

“You can begin to show change, Arthur. Your father banned all magic, but you could show that you are a better king. Allow those who use magic for the good of all to be free to use it, but those who use it for evil purposes should be met with the fate that now stands. Use justice as your standard, Arthur. Show justice equally to all your people, for those with magic are your people as well as those without. The druids know this; that is why they accept all who join them.” Gaius said.

The words reminded Arthur of his childhood when he was tutored by Gaius and Geoffrey. “Thank you, Gaius, you have given me much to think about,” he said, rising. Gaius nodded and watched him leave.

Arthur made his way back to his room. He hesitated at the door, wondering if the knights had left his chambers yet or not. With a sigh determined to cast them out if they hadn’t, he pushed the door open and found his chambers empty. He walked over to his window and gazed out at the darkened sky of Camelot.

Arthur looked down at the scene in front of him. He couldn’t help the small smile that turned his lips. Merlin was sprawled on the straw, curled around the tiny dragon for warmth. Sound asleep. Merlin was on his back. His knees to one side and his head to the other. He looked hardly comfortable at all. The small dragon was on his chest, and each breath kept stirring Merlin’s hair. Soot covered Merlin’s face, and both were making a chuffing sound in their sleep.

“Merlin,” Arthur called out. Merlin’s head shifted and he moved slightly, uncurling his legs and shifting away from Arthur, sending the dragon sprawling. It hissed out angrily before making its way back to curl up next to Merlin. “MERLIN!” Arthur yelled.

Merlin started and sat upright turning to face him. “Arthur?” he asked groggily. The small dragon crawled up his back, making him squirm before it settled on his shoulder.

“Many of your friends have said I should spare your life, Merlin, and the life of that creature. They tell me that you’ve used your powers only for me. Now that I don’t understand,” Arthur said. “How can it be that a sorcerer would choose to fight for me? What did you have to gain, Merlin?”

“Everything, Arthur. I had everything to gain. I knew that one day when you were king you would bring a time of peace and prosperity. It is your destiny, our destiny. We are two halves of a coin, according to Kilgharrah.” Merlin said, not knowing what else to say.

“I don’t understand you, Merlin.” Arthur sighed, took the key from his belt, and slowly unlocked the dungeon door. “I want to hear about every time you’ve used magic, Merlin, in detail.” With those words, Arthur pulled the door open and regarded Merlin.

“Do you have a couple of days?” Merlin asked, giving Arthur a wide smile as he rose to his feet and stepped out into the hallway to stand next to him.

This marked the day Albion began. A change for the better. A chance for a new beginning.



Fall of a Hero

By Celemir Elewen

Steel rang on steel, shattering the quiet serenity of the forest and startling birds from their nests. A ring of outlaws, clad in Lincoln green, circled two people in the woodland glade – one a tall, dark, bearded, scowling man wearing the coat of sheriff; the other a light-haired, laughing young man in green with a sparkle of defiant mischief twinkling in his blue eyes. Sparks flew as their blades clashed together in a duel to the death.

The sheriff gave vent to an animalistic snarl as the audacious young outlaw flicked a slice of cloth from the edge of his cloak. “You are finished, Robin Fitzooth!” He hissed furiously. “You will die before the sun sets!”

His opponent merely laughed, a merry, carefree sound. “Strewth! my good Sheriff, but you’re behind the times,” he replied gaily. “Robin Fitzooth was finished and dead a great while ago. ’Tis Robin o’ the Hood you face now, and ’tis Robin o’ the Hood that will bring you to grief.”

A quick, taunting slash to the cheek reinforced his statement, and the Sheriff’s gloved hand rose, assessing the damage even as he parried another strike from his enemy. “The rooster crows loudly indeed,” he remarked sadistically, “but what happens when his feathers get plucked?”

He fainted towards Robin’s stomach, then struck out, laying a savage cut on the youth’s arm from shoulder to elbow. All around him, the outlaw band gave a concerted cry of rage, but their leader held up his blood-drenched hand, his eyes never leaving the sheriff’s.

“Nay, lads, hold. ’Twas a fair blow – but methinks I have toyed with the prince’s lackey long enough. What say ye we finish this, my fine haughty fellow?” As he spoke, the young rogue pressed forward, attacking in earnest, and his opponent backed up, momentarily unprepared.

However, years of training and experience – as well as a certain natural, inborn skill – served him well, and he quickly reoriented himself, returning blow for blow and driving the outlaw back in turn. For several minutes the two men were locked together in grim combat, neither gaining an advantage over the other.

Then the sheriff, with a thrill of horror, realized that his movements were becoming sluggish and clumsy as his muscles began to tire. His sword was getting heavy in his hand, and he was having difficulty focusing on Robin’s quick, clean movements.

Clearly, it was time for a change of tactics.

The wicked man allowed the young outlaw to back him up again, almost into the surrounding wall of Merrie Men. A quick twist and flick of Robin’s blade sent the sheriff’s sword spinning from his hand, and he stood before his proud foe, unarmed and apparently beaten. All laughter left Robin’s voice as he placed the cold tip of his sword beneath his enemy’s chin. “And now, sirrah, here is retribution long overdue – not only for me and mine, but all those under your iron rule that you have oppressed without mercy!”

A breathless silence fell over the gathering as they all waited for their beloved leader to deal the death blow. For a moment, fear shone out of the sheriff’s dark eyes – then, in one swift movement, he snatched the sword that dangled at the side of the man behind him, batted aside Robin’s weapon, and struck.

The cruel steel blade sank into the young man's chest, piercing his heart, and he froze. For a moment he stood there, transfixed by the sword that protruded from his chest; then the sheriff withdrew it, and the legendary outlaw, the hero of Nottingham's peasantry, collapsed dead to the forest floor.

Not wasting any time, the sheriff took advantage of the pall of shock that had taken hold of the rest of the band and ran to where his horse was tied to a slender tree. Cleaving the line with one desperate stroke of his blade – still smeared bright red – he pulled himself into the saddle and kicked the horse straight into a gallop, his heart pummeling in his chest.

His victory was short-lived; an arrow from Little John's massive longbow struck him in the back, slaying him on the spot. He toppled from the stallion, further impaling himself on the wooden shaft, but nobody paid him any mind. They all gathered around their fallen leader where he lay, bathed in a pool of golden sunlight and crimson blood.

Robin Hood, England's greatest hero and Prince John's most elusive foe, had passed into the silent arms of Death.



Love a Suit

A Robin Hood Story

**By Kayla
Kimberlin**

William strode down the road whistling merrily. "It is a marvelous day to be alive," he said to himself. "And no better way could this day be spent than traveling upon the road."

Thus he went, oftentimes breaking into song. Past green fields and green meadows he went, and across merry streams; everything seemed cheery to him. As he neared a bend in the road, he heard what seemed to be the sound of a dozen men fighting. He broke into a run, eager to reach the spot. A merry fight will complete my day, he thought as he ran, for he was young and strong.

He rounded the bend, but alas, the fight was already over. The thieves, for he perceived that they were by their clothing, were running for their lives while a man stood yelling and shaking a staff at them.

"Be gone you vile thieves!" the stranger yelled after them.

The thieves had managed to break open the man's pack and its contents were scattered all over the ground, so William bent over, and picking up a set of green clothes, he strode toward the man and laughed. "I was coming to your aid, sir, but I perceive that you need it not." Then he marveled that the man did not need his aid, for he saw that the man was old.

The man turned and gazed upon the clothes that William had in his hands. Then springing forward in a fury, he gave William such a blow with his staff that it sent him tumbling to the ground.

Enraged, William leapt to his feet crying, "What is the meaning of this, sir!"

His fists were clenched and he was ready to give the stranger a clout, old though he be. For he had expected thanks and a greeting, not a blow.

"Give me that which you hold in your hands, thief!" the old man demanded, brandishing his staff to enforce it.

William handed it over to him, realizing even in his hot anger that the man had a staff and himself just his fists. "I am no thief," he said, "and I think it a shame to judge me as such, when I was but helping you."

The stranger looked ashamed and then roared with laughter. "I am sorry, my dear lad," he said, clapping William on the shoulder. "If I had known you were a friend, I would not have done it. Then again, maybe I would have, for it does a young man good to be beaten once in a while."





William's anger left him, seeing his companion so merry, and he said, "I do not know if I agree with you or not, but here let me help you." Then they both began collecting items, though the man still held the green clothing in his hand.

When they were finished, the man stretched out his hand and then chuckled again. "It seems we both have been rude this day, for neither of us have given the other his name. Mine is Tom, Old Tom they call me now."

"And mine is William."

The two shook hands.

"I have known quite a few good men who bore that name," Tom said, and his face grew wistful. "Very good men, indeed." He fingered the shirt and leggings that he held in his hand. Then of a sudden he cried aloud in a deeply distressed voice, "Alas! There is a tear in it. A curse be on those fiends, a curse!"

William looked at the tear. "It can be mended," he offered. "In fact, I know a women in the next town that can..."

"No!" Tom cried. "It cannot be mended, for it needs a patch and nothing new will be added to this shirt."

William was surprised, for he perceived that the man treasured the suit of clothing deeply. Though he couldn't understand why, for it was just a shirt and leggings, of Lincoln green color, that could be made at any tailor's.

"I see you hold these clothes at great value. May I ask why?" he inquired, hoping that a story might be here.

Tom was not angered by William's request; instead, his face grew more sorrowful. "A great man gave these to me, perhaps the greatest man who ever lived. He was the best master and friend one could wish for, but has been gone for many a year now." And at these words tears welled up in his eyes and he bowed his head and clutched the clothing.

William was surprised to see such a sturdy man cry. Yet he was touched. This man must have loved his master dear to still weep for him so many years after, he thought. He waited a while then asked, "Tom, who was your master that you weep for him so?"

"Robin Hood was his name," Tom answered, and he lifted his head up high. "The best, kindest, bravest man you could ever find."

"Robin Hood!" cried William, amazed. "I have heard great tales about him and his merry men. And you were one of them?"

Tom nodded his head. "I was and am right glad for being so."

"That means, then, that those tales were real, and that such a man actually lived," said William, still amazed.

"Of course he actually lived!" roared Tom. "Was I not with him, and did I not hunt with him, speak to him, and serve him!"

William stepped back a pace, for Tom had raised his staff again. Then Tom quieted down and lowered his staff. Grief came upon his face again.

"It has been not that long since he lived and yet they are already forgetting? Then again," he was speaking more to himself now, "I was the youngest serving him, and most of the others are gone now." He packed the green clothes and made ready to continue his journey.

William stood still while he did this. Then said gently, "Please, could you tell me of him? I have heard not enough of him, for my father did not approve of me listening to the serfs' tales. He was the one who said he was not real."

"Is your father a noble?" asked Tom, looking into William's face. "If he is, that explains it, for Robin was no friend of rich nobles who oppressed the poor."

"Yes he is," William said, "but please, sir, could you tell me more?"

William was looking very eager, and didn't seem to take offense at Tom's words. So the old man began his tale as the two traveled together along the road. One listening eagerly, the other growing more and more animated as he talked. The more William listened, the more he wished that he might join in such adventures. Oh, that he was in Robin Hood's time!

All too soon for William, they came to the crossroads. Tom, who was now his friend, said sadly, "We must go separate ways now."

William nodded sadly. "Aye, if my mother wasn't waiting for me, how gladly I would go with you!"

Tom smiled. "Thank you lad,"

"Robin Hood will be a legend for years to come," said William. "He was a great man."

Tom nodded, then sorrow came back into his face. "Yes that is how it should be, but I suspect I'm the last to truly remember him. The rest must only remember tales."

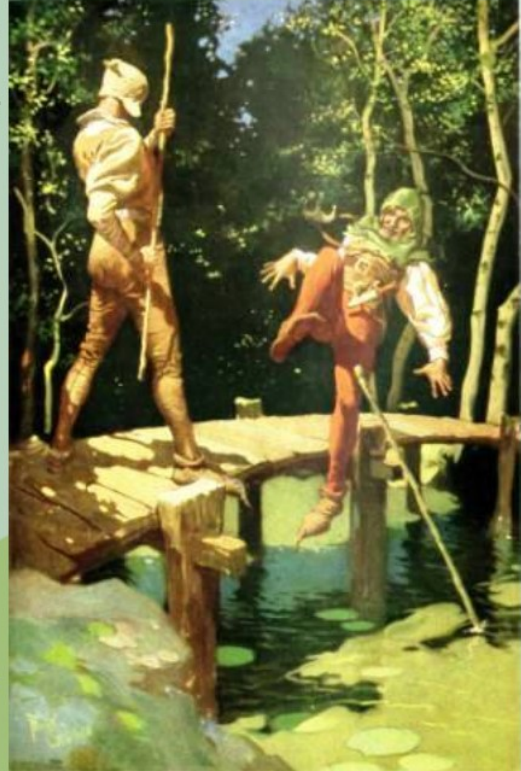
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William nodded again, then said wistfully, "I wish I could have been one of his merry men, that is if he would have had me."



Tom looked at him, then said, "I believe he would have. I must be going now, farewell." And he started down the other road.

"Farewell!" called William, then he started down his own road.

For a time he still felt wistful for the olden days and wished that he could share the love of Tom, but he was young and had his life to live. That feeling did not live long, but he always did remember Tom's tales.



Tom, when he had rested that night in a good inn, carefully got out the set of lincoln clothing. Gently he smoothed them, and gently he examined them. To his great pleasure he had found that the tear was not as bad as he first thought. He stared at them for a while, then folded them and placed them back in his pack. Then he had smiled, and slipping into his bed, had gone to sleep.

Lucius Artorius

By Artem Serebennikov



Through sundry lands, familiar and unknown,
We carried forth the eagle-sign of Rome.
We guard this land against the ills that roam -
No Hadrian can stem them with his stone.

Sarmatian, Roman, Britt - the trumpet 's blown,
'Tis time to undertake a high emprise,
Take up your swords and from this table arise,
Let treachery and vileness be o'erthrown!

Though mighty Rome be from this Island gone
And Roman reign by Roman hand undone,
New citadels will here henceforth stand.

My sword, be steadfast in this mental fight
Until it rises forth in splendour bright -
A Camelot in green and pleasant land.

BIRTH OF A LEGEND

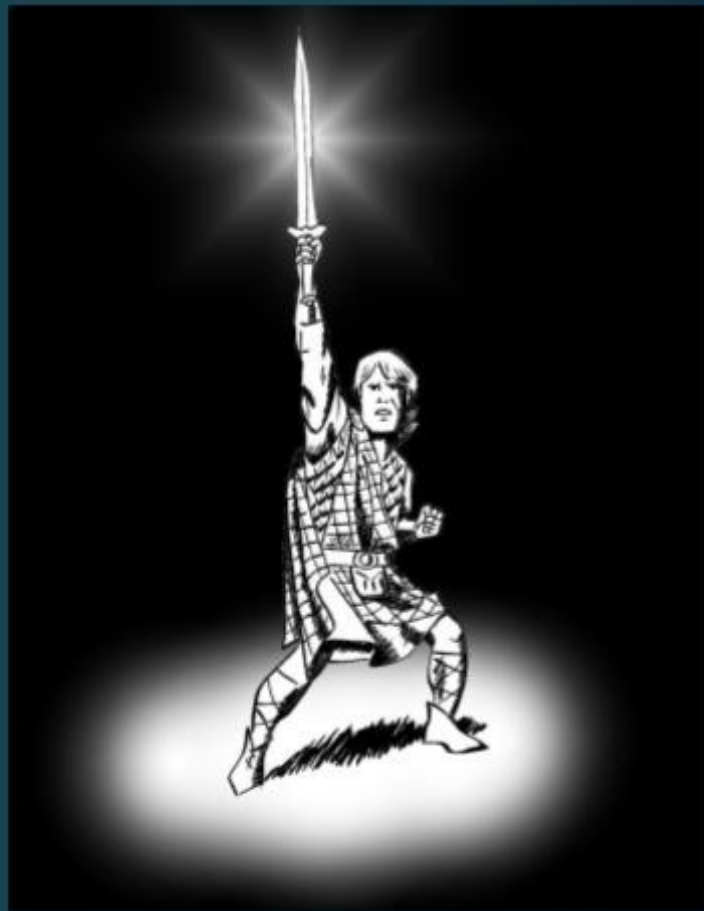
BY IAN WILSON

When I began the writing process for my webcomic *Legend of the Sword Bearer* I didn't expect it to take over my life the way it did. I didn't even expect it to be the first thing I published online. I think it must've started when I was in my mid-teens. I had been mesmerized by tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. The idea of a long-ago age of ideal kings and noble knights riding on horseback through an English countryside filled with monsters, elves and witches absolutely captivated me. I wanted to delve deeper into the legend; rediscover the "original" King Arthur, untouched by French embellishments. I even wanted to write my own version of King Arthur; the "real" King Arthur.

At the time, though, I was more interested in superhero comics. I had created a team of characters similar to Marvel's Avengers or DC's Justice League. They were heroes from all over the world; except Britain. I hadn't yet created a

British superhero, and I was wracking my brain for ideas. Then I decided to create a character based loosely off of Marvel's Thor; but instead of a magic hammer, I gave him Arthur's mighty sword. He was the Sword Bearer, successor of King Arthur.

I kept coming up with new ideas and adventures for this character, but the trouble was, they didn't fit within the world I had already created. All fictional worlds have rules by which they operate. I had already established rules for my Superhero world, but the Sword Bearer kept breaking them. So I gave him his own world with its own rules.





Now that I had a brand new world, without the constraints of trying to make it “realistic” (as realistic as a superhero comic can be) I could basically do whatever I wanted. Like all writers, I went through several plot revisions before deciding on a plot that I liked. And there it sat, on my computer for who knows how long, doing absolutely nothing. My plan was to get my superhero comics published first and the fantasy series would get published later. Then I discovered the wide world of independent webcomics. These days, you can publish a webcomic for next to nothing. Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it) my superhero comics were not yet ready for publication. The Legend of the Sword Bearer, however, *was* ready, or nearly ready, anyway. Furthermore, that’s what the public wanted. Fantasy comics were, and continue to be incredibly popular on the internet. So I decided I

would just do it. I would publish The Legend of the Sword Bearer, and put my superhero comics on the shelf for a while.

In their novels, C.S. Lewis and Stephen Lawhead wrote about the ideal Arthurian Kingdom called Logres. Logres was a kingdom where sovereignty and freedom existed side-by-side; without tyranny on the part of leadership, and without resentment on the part of the citizen. I believe Logres still exists in those whose hearts long for justice and goodness.

Arthur was an ordinary man; an ordinary teen, really, but in his chest beat the heart of a warrior king. I wanted to capture that in my character Bran McNeill. He isn’t perfect, but his heart is in the right place. I believe very strongly in the power of individuals to influence the world for good. This belief underpins all of my work. And anyone can be a hero. Arthur’s knights came from all backgrounds. Anyone can rise up out of the sea of mediocrity and inspire others to do the same. That, I believe, is part of the message of Camelot. And that is the message I am trying to convey in Legend of the Sword Bearer.

You can read Legend of the Sword Bearer on my blog at

<https://legendsandsongs.weebly.com/the-legend-of-the-sword-bearer.html>

Or on my other comic page at <http://legendoftheswordbearer.the-comic.org/>



The Story of Lance and Elaine

By Hannah Skipper

Lance, the newest Hollywood heartthrob and up-and-coming megastar, stepped out of his plush Hollywood trailer and, taking a deep breath of dry, dusty Midwest drought air, wrinkled his nose.

“How quickly I forget the feedlots,” he muttered, hopping over a crusty cow patty as he bounded down the steps, “when I can spirit myself away for a nice temperature-controlled nap and a shower.” With a resigned sigh, he added, “Hopefully we can wrap this shoot up before I become one with the smells.”

“Hey, you’re Lance, right?”

Whirling around, he saw a short pudgy man wearing a baseball cap, gray sweater, and blue jeans, jogging towards him with an eager expression.

“I am...” he answered cautiously, quickly accessing the guy as an obvious local. “You’re one of the extras, I bet, right?”

“No, no,” the man laughed good-naturedly and held out his hand. “I’m with the local historical society; you guys have me on call about whatever, in regards to the movie. Name is George.”

“Well, George, what can I do for you?” Lance cocked his head, a bemused smile tweaking his mouth upward.

“Well, ah, look,” he said, his face as red as a tomato. “This is probably gonna sound really weird to ya and I would understand if you thought I was a nutcase but, see, ah, my neighbor’s daughter, Elaine, is really head over heels about you.”

“I’m used to that...” Lance tensed, a guarded expression fleeting across his face.

“Yeah, I bet. I’m sorry,” George hurried on, “but, see, I keep hearing her talk about you with her friends and she has been saying that she is gonna kill herself if you don’t go out on a date with her while you’re in town.” Visibly cringing, he held up a hand when Lance opened his mouth. “I know, I know – kids, right? And believe me, I disregarded it the first couple of times, too, but she’s kept on and on and on about it and you know what they tell us nowadays...see something, say something...” Laughing weakly, he looked embarrassed but hopeful.

“So, what do you want me to do about it?” Lance probed wearily.

Turning red again, George swallowed the lump in his throat. “I-I-I was hoping that, ah, maybe, ah, you could talk to her...?”

A hundred thoughts raced through Lance’s mind in the next few seconds. This guy must be nuts if he thought that he was going to get anywhere near the crazy girl! Why should he worry about the wellbeing of an obsessed fan? What did he care if she threatened herself? He didn’t know her. He didn’t get a local paper. He didn’t watch the local news stations. Heck, he’d probably never even know if she hurt herself. She probably wouldn’t do it, anyways. Why would anyone do that?

Yet, oddly enough, he felt some compassion for this guy. True, he didn't care too much about the girl's suicidal ravings, but apparently George did and he had a point. See something, say something was the byword of the day and Lance felt a strange responsibility to at least humor him because he had done just that.

"Yeah, sure," he unbelievably heard himself say. "I'll talk to her. Uh, is it okay if I stop by the historical society this afternoon? We're shooting my next scene tonight so it won't interfere. You can tell her that I'm researching some stuff for a scene."

"That'll work fine!" George looked relieved. "Hey, man, thanks an awful lot. I owe ya!"

"Don't worry about it." Lance waved him off with a laugh. "Like you say, see something, say something. It's more than a lot of people do these days." He held out his hand. "I'll see you later."

Early in the afternoon, Lance was at the appointed place listlessly thumbing through an old book when a cute athletic-looking blonde teenager walked in, her gaze darting quickly around the room before settling on him. Her stifled half-gasp half-scream snapped him to attention.

"Oh, my gosh," she squeaked, "I thought Mr. George was kidding when he said you'd be here!"

"Nope." Lance's mouth twisted into a lopsided smile. Here we go, he thought. Holding out his hand, he said, "Hey! You're Elaine, right? I heard that you're a big fan of my movies."

"Uh-uh," the girl nodded dumbly, too star-struck to return his handshake, her eyes growing to saucer size.



Letting his hand drop, he smothered his annoyance and forced himself to be polite; it wasn't the first time this had happened. "Say, there are some chairs over there. Wanna sit down and talk?"

She deflated for a second, looking confused, but recovered with remarkable speed. "Okay!"

"I heard," he continued, stretching his long legs out from his chair, "that you really wanted to meet me while I was in town."

She blushed a pretty pink, answering shyly, "Well, yeah." Then, more boldly, she blurted out, "I really like you!"

"You do, huh?" he answered, having difficulty keeping a straight face. "Well, what do you like about me?"

"Oh, just everything!" she gushed, suddenly animated. "Your movies are so incredible! My favorite is the Jassasic Park remake. Remember that scene when you had your shirt off by the waterfall? Oh, I almost died! You're so hot! And you always have the best lines!" she continued. "I've memorized all of them, you know? They're so perfect!"

Wow, he thought, cringing, I don't even remember all my lines after a shoot is over!

"That's great," he laughed weakly, "maybe a little strange, but I-I guess I'm flattered."

"Strange," she echoed, "why is it strange? I mean, I love you!"

"Oh, I'm sure you love my characters," he answered gently, "but they aren't me. I'm just acting."

"But—"

"No, no, just listen!" He shook his head. "I mean, that's why I get the big bucks, right? I'm good at what I do and I'm an actor. I wouldn't be making the kind of money I do if I did a crap job, right? But that guy who had all the cool lines in my movies...he is a really great writer. Of course, he's kinda old for you..." He wrinkled his nose, thinking, "Sixty-four now, I think."

"Look at it this way," he went on, seeing her befuddled look. "I moved to Hollywood about five years ago, just after college. Then I waited on tables at a bar while I banged on doors looking for someone to hire me, and I finally got really lucky. But it could've gone the other way so easily, right? And then you never would've heard of me." He grinned. "Think of me as a knight who's won a lot of jousting matches. But I could've been the other guy. The ones that lost."

Gripping her shoulders, he stared pointedly into her eyes. "But do you want to know the real me? I'm the guy who got two of his best friends killed in a car accident and then I got into a feud with their brother." He shook his head. "I don't want to get into that, but it ended really badly and it's gonna affect me for the rest of my life. Do you love that guy? I'm also the guy," he continued, "who got caught up in one those Hollywood scandals because a rival accused me of having an affair with my best friend's wife." He wiped a tear off his eye before it slid down his cheek. "It ruined our relationship and I don't think I'll ever get over it. Do you love that guy?"

Elaine had the decency to look sober. "I'm sorry. I hadn't heard."

"Yeah, me too, especially since he passed away before we could clear things up. I didn't even go to the service because of the scandal." He shook his head sadly. "You haven't heard about it, huh? I guess you don't read tabloids."



"That's all fake news," she answered, wrinkling her nose and flicking her wrist as if to brush it away.

"I'm glad that you know that." He smiled lightly, then he cleared his throat to get down to business. "Look, I suppose this is kind of awkward for you, sitting here talking like this, but—"

"Oh, no! Not at all." She shook her head vehemently. "I like talking to you!"

"Yeah, well," he pushed on, tired of her crazy fan act, "I actually only came because your neighbor George told me that you'd been telling your friends that you were going to kill yourself if I didn't go on a date with you."

She was decent enough to turn crimson at his tone. "My friends think I'm nuts..."

"I must look like a knight in shining armor to you, don't I?" he asked, looking thoughtful. "I've got a big fancy glamorous life, everything I want, any time I want it – money, girls, anything, any time. Right?"

She stared, not comprehending, and he went on. "Then your little ole town gets picked as the site of my next big hit and blam, here's your shot to meet me. The Brothers Grimm couldn't have scripted a better fairytale. But my life," he concluded, closing his eyes as vivid memories flashed through his mind, "is not one that you want to get wrapped up in."

His eyes popped open and he smiled brightly. "You're a really special lady, Elaine; I know you must be because George came and asked my help when he heard what you told your friends. And those friends thought you were nuts because they love you and don't want to lose you over me. I'm sure that your family loves you, too. Don't hurt them by hurting yourself over someone like me."

He licked his dry lips and stared a hole in her forehead, waiting for her to answer. "Promise?"

"Okay, I promise."



Nothing's Forgotten: An Appreciation of *Robin of Sherwood*

By Kevin Michael Derby

There have been a host of bad Robin Hood shows in recent decades, but none of them ever reached the heights of *Robin of Sherwood*, easily one of the more interesting contemporary portrayals of that legendary figure.



Originally run on British TV in the 1980s and featured on Showtime in the US, *Robin of Sherwood* was one of the best series of its era. After three decades, its influence on how Robin Hood is portrayed can still be seen, from its over the top take on the Sheriff of Nottingham to including a Saracen as one of the merry men. Ever wonder why Morgan Freeman was hanging out with Kevin Costner? Turns out the people who made that movie watched *Robin of Sherwood*.

Richard Carpenter, one of the best British TV screenwriters in the last half of the twentieth century, led the efforts on this show and he offered some unique angles on the old legends, creating a haunting if somewhat grim look at the Robin Hood mythology. The directors of the various episodes also do a remarkable job, especially with the lush scenery which adds to the show. Sherwood Forest never looked as mysterious and as timeless as it did in this show.

Strangely enough, the haunting and memorable soundtrack by Irish New Age band Clannad adds to the show. The show was launched after Enya left the band to go solo, but Clannad is in good form here even if the lyrics – if not the vocals – sometimes fail to impress.

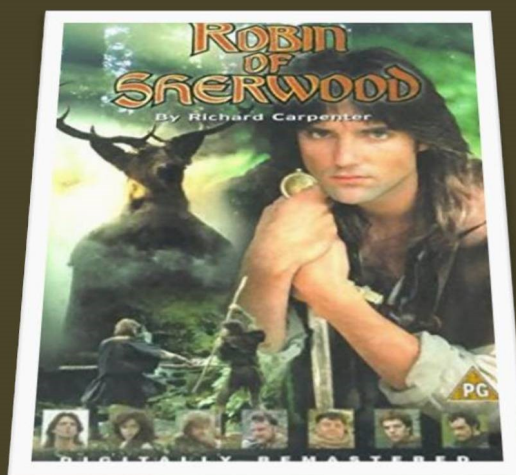
There are some interesting threads in the show as Saxons battle Normans, pagans try to keep their legacy alive (and frankly some of it is eye rolling), and distant wars and local tyranny present threats to the general populace. All of this comes together to create a fascinating tapestry. This is not the typical Robin Hood fare

where our hero tips his hat and shows deference once King Richard returns from the Crusades. There are few good guys outside the merry men and the people they try to help. Kings, crusaders, aristocrats, church leaders – almost anyone in authority proves to be a villain in the series, which raises the stakes considerably in plenty of episodes.

The show lasted three seasons and there are two lead actors playing very different Robin Hoods (the plural is intentional there). Michael Praed offers a strong and fascinating Robin of Loxley in the first two seasons. This is a different take on Robin Hood as the show presents a near mystic figure who is connected to the land and ancient powers associated with England. This Robin rises up against the corrupt foreign aristocracy which has taken over.

The mantra of the show is “nothing's forgotten...nothing's ever forgotten,” a line which is repeated over and over again in the three seasons. Robin of Loxley makes that point very clear in the first episode.

"Listen to me," he tells the merry men. "Our friends who were killed, they'll never starve, or be tortured or chained in the dark. They're here with us, in Sherwood, and they always will be... because they're free. You were sleeping. You've slept too long – we all have. It's time we woke. It's time we stopped running."



That’s a message that still resonates after more than three decades.

Praed is helped by a great cast including Ray Winstone as a driven and often bitter Will Scarlet, Nickolas Grace as the Sheriff, and the late Robert Addie as the sneering aristocratic Guy of Gisburne. Judi Trott plays a strong and feisty Maid Marion whose chemistry with Praed helps propel the first two seasons along until they reach “The Greatest Enemy,” the finale of the second season and easily one of the best and most moving television episodes I have ever come across. Most of these actors – with the exception of Winstone – have faded over the years, but they do a remarkable job on this series.

The guest stars and bit players also add to the show. Much of the story is turned upside-down, with Richard the Lionheart – played by the always wonderful John Rhys-Davies in a memorable guest appearance – shown in a far less heroic light than he usually is in the Robin Hood stories. Even Jeremy Bulloch – Boba Fett himself – appears in a minor role.

The third season, far longer than the first two, loses momentum, especially as Jason Connery (Sean’s son) takes over in the lead role as Robert of Huntington. Whatever his pedigree, Connery simply is not as strong a lead as Praed was and fails to connect with the cast – especially Trott –the way his predecessor did. Hobbled by finances despite some solid ratings, the series limped to a conclusion at the end of the third season, even though it ended on a cliff hanger.

Besides switching out the lead, there are other problems. For example, one of the best villains of the entire series comes back from the dead and promptly does nothing for the rest of the series. Carpenter kept going back to a few plot devices –



mind control, strange prophecies which immediately come true, villains deciding they want to marry Marion – a little too often. Most of the characters and their settings are properly grimy in good medieval fashion, but viewers can be pardoned if they get distracted by the amazingly 80s hair featured by the two Robins of the Hood and Trott.

Despite the missteps, there is much to ponder in this series, and the action scenes guide the show along. So do the strong cast,

wonderful music, and lovely settings. This show is certainly flawed as the actors sometimes ham it up, and there are too many strange mystical asides while major plot holes are left unresolved and sometimes not even acknowledged. However, “nothing’s forgotten...nothing’s ever forgotten”. This show has a loyal fan base for a reason after all this time, and they even funded an audio drama a few years ago.

When it was released, *Robin of Sherwood: The Knights of the Apocalypse* helped bring some conclusion to the series.

In spite of its faults, *Robin of Sherwood* provides more than its share of moving moments and exciting stories. Fantasy fans should enjoy this show even if the third season drags as the show came in for a less than ideal landing. Highly recommended.



A Dream of Albion Thomas G. Adams

Whispers of the past, haunting me forever,
dancing in my very veins, speaking to me of days long
gone, and heroes long dead.

A memory, but not my own.

Names, living only in distant memories of my people,
and fragments, some of them surviving in surnames.

Visions of places that don't exist anymore.

Faces and voices of friends and kin,
only just beyond my sight and hearing.

Skills long untapped, in my hands,
itching to be used again.

Songs bring back some glimpse of a memory, oh yes, a
memory,

a place where I once was, and yet I was never there, except in dreams.

But I was there, and yet I was not.

An enigma, something that cannot be answered by man's fallible superstitions,
for I was not born thrice, nor even twice. I was born once, as is appointed for man.

And yet, parts of me are much older than my mortal frame.

Sometimes I can almost see their faces: Arthur, Emrys, Myrddin, Gwaine, Gwlachavad,
Peredur, Kentigern, Aedan, Eogan...

How much of what I know of them is real? How much is a fantasy,
a figment of a writer's imagination?

If ever I met any of these men, would I recognize them?

Would I see them as my kinsmen?

Sometimes it is almost as if their memories are my own.

I have mourned and run with Myrddin

as he fled the battle of Arderydd,

and I have rejoiced with tears in my eyes

as Arthur and his knights succeeded
in uniting Albion in a glorious age of freedom, liberty,
justice, and truth.

Albion... my home.

The home I long for with tears,

the home I have never seen with mortal eyes,

and the home that lives now only in the hearts of her sons and daughters
who care enough to remember her.

Will we ever return to Albion?

Will we ever return to that glorious land of light, freedom, truth, liberty?

That beautiful land where the One True God is worshipped and obeyed,
where true beauty and goodness are loved and cherished?

This was the dream of the bard, Taliesin, many ages ago in Britannia,
but now that dream is reborn in me, a dreamer,
more than a thousand years younger.



About This Magazine

Fellowship and Fairydust Magazine is a publication of Fellowship & Fairydust Publications. F&F is an online literary blog and magazine that aims to inspire faith and creativity and explore the arts through a spiritual lens. F&F came into being when the blog and online magazine The Fellowship of the King merged with the online magazine Ink and Fairydust in January 2017. To learn more, visit fellowshipandfairydust.com.

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