

Enemy of God: A Novel of Arthur Study Guide

Enemy of God: A Novel of Arthur by Bernard Cornwell

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Plot Summary

Enemy of God by Bernard Cornwell continues the story of Arthur begun in *The Winter King*, showing Arthur uniting Britain to expel the invading Saxons, and Christians persecuting pagans to prepare for Christ's Second Coming. In the end, Arthur has to accept the power of kingship, which he has long rejected, without its trimmings.

Arthur, who refuses to be King of Dumnonia, is uniting the kings of Britain to expel the Saxons from occupied eastern lands and arranging for the education of underage King Mordred. Christian-Druid antagonism is growing, but Arthur will not suppress Christians as his ancient Druid Merlin demands. Nor will he support Merlin's foolish quest for the lost Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn, greatest of the hidden Treasures of Britain. Merlin takes his priestess Nimue, narrator Derfel Cadarn, and Princess Ceinwyn, who has chosen Derfel over King Lancelot, on a nearly fatal journey along the "Dead Road" to Ynys Mon, where they liberate the Cauldron.

Most of the British kings rally and march on London to fight the Saxon King Aelle. Lancelot is left to guard the southern coast to protect against an attack by Aelle's rival king Cerdic. The Britons beat their foe only to see Lancelot and Cerdic ride up as friends, having made a peace treaty without Arthur's knowledge or permission. Arthur must agree. He uses the time of guaranteed peace to bring prosperity to Britain. Derfel, writing as an aged Christian monk, debunks the legends of "Camelot" and the "Round Table." Young Mordred comes of age and quickly shows he is unfit to rule, but Arthur clings to hope and will not break his oath of loyalty. To Arthur, oaths are so fundamental to civil order that he allows the lovers Tristan and Iseult to perish because of their oaths to Tristan's father. This rigor drives a wedge between Derfel and Arthur.

Lancelot and grasping Bishop Sansum conspire to eliminate Arthur, Derfel, and Mordred to clear the way for Lancelot to usurp Dumnonia. Derfel learns of his Saxon ancestry, loses a beloved daughter to Lancelot's henchmen, and accompanies Arthur on a commando raid to release Arthur's wife and son from Lancelot's clutches. He learns that Guinevere and Lancelot are lovers, disguised as devotion to the Goddess Isis. Lancelot is allowed to go away in shame but Guinevere cannot accompany him. Mordred is reduced to figurehead monarch and Arthur becomes de facto Emperor of Britain.



Part 1: The Dark Road, pgs. 1-55

Part 1: The Dark Road, pgs. 1-55 Summary

On the Druid New Year's Eve, Derfel Cadarn, an aged Christian monk, longs for the company of long-dead comrades-in-arms, while Bishop Sansum scoffs at pagan holdovers. Sansum would forbid writing about Arthur if Queen Igraine did not conceal the project. Derfel resumes: he and Arthur stroll among the countless dead at Lugg Vale as Arthur decides Britain's political fate. Lancelot, whom Derfel hates, will become King of Siluria and marry Princess Ceinwyn of Powys, whom Derfel loves. Derfel says nothing about this but asks to join Chief Druid Merlin's quest for the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn. It is Britain's greatest treasure, and is needed in order to restore Britain to its rightful Gods. Arthur doubts that it survives 400 years and can spare no men from the final battles against the Saxons that will produce peace.

Derfel represents Dumnonia in Powys for the late king's cremation and King Cuneglas' acclamation. Cuneglas speaks of allying with his father's enemies to liberate Lloegyr, the "Lost Lands," and promises the victors great wealth. His sister Ceinwyn's marriage will cement the alliances. Derfel follows Ceinwyn to Caer Sws. She has agreed to meet Lancelot but is almost minded never to marry. Days later, Arthur arrives in force with Merlin, Merlin's priestess Nimue, Arthur's wife Guinevere, and Lancelot. At the banquet, Merlin talks with Derfel about marriage and criticizes Arthur's blindness to the true danger facing Britain: the spread of Christianity.

Late night, Derfel meets Merlin atop sacred Dolforwyn, drinks a potion, and with the help of Nimue sees terrible dreams that end with a huge black ghoul, Diwrnach, on the Dark Road. Merlin wants Derfel and a virgin to go with him to Ynys Mon Island, the home of the British Gods that the Romans have ravaged, to recover the Cauldron. Merlin uses nine rib bones from the feast to illustrate how Arthur's scheme will fail without the Treasures. Merlin gives Derfel a bone that, if he breaks it, will prevent the Lancelot/Ceinwyn marriage. Derfel pockets it, undecided.

The unnumbered second chapter opens with a boar hunt to provide for the betrothal feast. Arthur plans to make Lindinis the new capital and wants Derfel to be guardian of five-year-old Mordred, the future king. Derfel will remain part of Arthur's shield-wall, but will marry Guinevere's unattractive sister Gwenhwyvach and live on Mordred's estate. Derfel notes that he is "oath-sworn to a lady," whose objection will make this impossible. They are interrupted by sounds of a boar and a sow in the brush. Lancelot passes on the privilege of making the kill, so Arthur plunges in. Wounding the boar, Arthur finds himself holding onto the tusks for dear life until an aide kills it. Arthur laughs at the most fun he has had in years.

Derfel's second-in-command, Cavan, arrives with 40 spear men for the betrothal. Derfel hopes to reward his men with riches soon. Arthur allows them to paint Derfel's device, a five-pointed star, on their shields. On the morning of the betrothal, Issa accompanies



Derfel into the woods to a Druid shrine, where Derfel lays on a stone his sword, the bone, and Ceinwyn's brooch, and hopes to find an answer. He senses that if he breaks the bone, Arthur's plan will be shaken and he will be committed to Merlin's quest. That night, the lavish feast overflows the hall. Royalty takes its place at the head table. Last comes Ceinwyn, dressed as a peasant and carrying the ox halter that symbolizes wifely submission. Seeing Guinevere smirk in triumph, Derfel snaps the bone, Ceinwyn halts, and Nimue leads Ceinwyn away. As chaos erupts, Derfel renews his oath to protect Ceinwyn and accepts that she will not marry. Ceinwyn runs in pure delight, declaring that she is her own person. They ignore Arthur's call to return.

Part 1: The Dark Road, pgs. 1-55 Analysis

The first chapter depicts the Christian-Druid conflict that continues to simmer long after the main events of this novel. Narrator Derfel Cadarn, for most of his long life a soldier in service to Arthur, has become a Christian monk and is surreptitiously writing a history of the glorious old days. Struck with nostalgia on the traditional Druid New Year's Eve (Samain), Derfel lists the names of his late companions for whom he is leaving out the traditional food offerings for the dead who wander out of the Otherworld that night. He notes that his superior, Bishop Sansum, the only other surviving old-timer, disapproves of the practice but will conveniently forget a morsel of bread by the fireplace. Derfel still feels the pull of the old Gods of Britain as do many converts, and the transmutation of rites is frequently shown, viz., instead of making of the "sign against evil," touching metal, and spitting, Christians hurriedly and compulsively make the sign of the cross.

The open conflict between religions is also depicted. Arthur is tolerant of all religions and opposes the Chief Druid Merlin's calls to fight Christianity. Merlin sees this as a fundamental error in tactics, for without the help of the British Gods, Britons are as helpless against the constantly invading Saxons as their ancestors 400 years before had been against the Romans. Later in the novel, the approach of the half-millennium raises apocalyptic fervor among the Christians and outbreaks of fighting and persecution. Christians are inevitably portrayed as benighted and bigoted.

The framework of the novel is quickly established: Derfel has been commissioned to write the history by a royal patron who helps hide the project from Sansum. The author fears that when she has them translated from Saxon into English they are being corrupted by the legends growing up around the characters. Derfel is determined to tell the unvarnished truth, creating a conflict that is often mentioned.

Arthur has conceived a great plan for Britain. After uniting all the warring kingdoms, he will lead an army against the Saxons in the East, and establish an era of law and order. Part of this scheme involves marrying Ceinwyn (his one-time fiancée) to Lancelot, a man of great reputation whom no one has ever seen in battle. Derfel is already his sworn enemy before the marriage to Ceinwyn is announced. Derfel has fallen in love with her madly. After a priestess tells her that someone who asks to marry her will end up marrying the dead instead, Ceinwyn is minded never to marry but agrees to meet Lancelot as her royal duty. This prophecy will be fulfilled later in the novel.



Another part of Arthur's plan is for Derfel to marry his beautiful wife Guinevere's fat, ugly sister, Princess Gwenhwyfach. Merlin, who raises Derfel as a child, thinks this is a sound idea, but knowing Derfel loves Ceinwyn, comes up with a spell to break up the political marriage. As Derfel comes out of his drug-induced dreams he is lectured again on Arthur's blindness to the deadly danger of Christianity's spread. Derfel and a virgin are needed to follow the Dark Road, face a renowned monster, and retrieve the greatest national treasure. It is convenient that Ceinwyn is a virgin.

The first chapter establishes the tone of the novel, lush in detail on the geography, flora, fauna, politics, religion, and lifestyles of Wales and England in the late 5th century CE. It sketches the basics about the primary characters, building them as flawed human beings whom myths have distorted. Merlin offers his outrageous views on women, which continues throughout the novel.

The second section of "The Dark Road" centers around Lancelot and Ceinwyn's betrothal ceremony. It draws some 400 warriors, former enemies who have now joined forces to face the Saxons. Derfel is in turmoil. He talks about Arthur's vision of order and Merlin's admiration for chaos. The Gods are only needed, he reflects, when the world is in chaos. Otherwise, they are overlooked and ignored. Faced with the likelihood that he will have to marry Gwenhwyfach, Derfel contemplates the purpose of marriage—which is a male's attainment of wealth and status. If Derfel cannot have Ceinwyn, it does not matter whom he marries. The status of wives in Celtic society, symbolized by the ox's halter, continues going forward.

Several of the British Gods are mentioned: Bel, Gwydion, Manawydan, Taranis, and Lleulaw. They ignore Derfel's offerings when he begs for guidance. Bel, otherwise known as Belenos, is the Sun God, often mentioned and evoked in the novel; his blessing and that of Gwydion, God of Light, is invoked on Lancelot and Ceinwyn. Manawydan, God of the Sea reappears whenever the storyline shifts to the coast. Taranis is an evil God. Druid shrines are often desecrated by Christians, but the one in which Derfel seeks guidance for what to do about Ceinwyn is isolated in Powys, to which neither the Romans nor the Christians pay much attention.

As convenient is the naming of the devices of royalty, displayed in the banquet hall. They are often mentioned later in the novel as a kind of shorthand for naming people and forces. Arthur's is the black bear, Dumnonia's the red dragon, Guinevere's a moon-crowned stag, Lancelot's a sea eagle with a fish in its claws, Cuneglas' is a spread-winged eagle. Arthur has allowed Derfel's men to fight under a device of his own. He chooses an unorthodox five-pointed star, secretly symbolizing Ceinwyn. Lancelot's fish later in the novel is assumed by Christians to be a symbol of Christ and causes much social unrest.

The second unnumbered chapter ends with Derfel and Ceinwyn running away together. He has carefully thought through the ramifications for themselves, for Arthur, and for Britain. He concludes that Arthur's vision may be shaken, but they will remain friends and go on to eliminate the Saxon threat. More immediately, they are committed to Merlin's dangerous quest for the Cauldron.



Part 1: The Dark Road, pgs. 56-106

Part 1: The Dark Road, pgs. 56-106 Summary

The third chapter opens with Derfel gluing the bone fragments into his sword, "Hywelbane," for luck and loosing Cavan and all but 20 men from their oaths. Derfel and Ceinwyn live in a small stone house set among orchards. Ceinwyn insists on sleeping apart until the Cauldron is found, and insists on going on the dangerous mission, for her promise is the price of their being together. Merlin will protect them. Ceinwyn reminisces about her three betrothals and how she and Derfel first meet. Arthur visits, pretending anger for Guinevere's sake, and takes Derfel's vow to fight the Saxons in the spring. Arthur declares that talk of the Cauldron and the Gods is foolish, for Britain is vastly changed since the invasions. Blood lines are mingled and time cannot go back. Arthur refuses to persecute the Christians as Merlin demands and hopes that Derfel survives going with Merlin to Ynys Mon.

In Caer Sws, Derfel misses important developments. Arthur returns to Dumnonia triumphant and implements taxes that anger the rich. He assigns Mordred to his cousin Culhwch who puts down a Christian revolt led by Cadwy, who foolishly documents it. Arthur's sister Morgan rebuilds Merlin's hall on the Tor and becomes one of Arthur's closest advisers, while Guinevere supervises building a gorgeous palace at Lindinis, including a dark hall for the worship of the Goddess Isis and rooms for Lancelot. Arthur strengthens fortifications everywhere he expects the Saxon King Cerdic to attack while he fights King Aelle to the north. Arthur taxes churches, increasing the animosity of Christians who believe that they must convert all pagans before Christ returns.

Derfel and Ceinwyn enjoy a happy domestic time before Merlin and Nimue arrive at the winter solstice. Merlin curses Lancelot and warns that Guinevere has cursed Ceinwyn, killing a dog and draping its pelt on a cripple bitch named Ceinwyn. Merlin has failed to recruit any warriors while Diwrnach has 200 and has pledged to die on the Dark Road unless they find the Cauldron. Puzzlingly, Morgan has turned on Merlin, saying that a woman will kill him. Derfel and Ceinwyn choose to believe Merlin over Arthur. The small company heads north and at Caer Gei learns from King Cadwallon and his son Byrthig about the mad, terrifying Diwrnach and his "Bloodshields."

The continue through heavy snow, and as they reach the Dark Road, Merlin's physical decline begins. Galahad joins them with 15 warriors. Depending on Nimue's "charm of concealment," they continue with her in command and Merlin on a litter. The enemy watches from afar but clearly wants them to find the Cauldron. Ferryman abandon them on Ynys Mon facing a difficult bog and ringed loosely by Bloodshields. At sacred Llyn Cerrig Bach, Ceinwyn has horrible dreams and leads them, running dizzily off the path, but Nimue drags her back. Diwrnach and Derfel exchange insults and threats, leaving Derfel sure that the King will wait to attack until they find the Cauldron. Nearing a rocky knoll, they run for cover and fight a pitched battle with the Bloodshields. They dump Merlin into a central hollow.



After two failed attacks, Diwrnach withdraws. Nimue digs as Ceinwyn tells of dreaming about Rome's conquest and how the last surviving Druids bury the Cauldron on this spot. Finding it, Nimue and Issa hurry to clear it, place Merlin inside, and wait for Samain. During the bitterly cold night, Nimue tells reluctantly about the 12 Treasures and the 13th Treasure, the Cauldron, which has special power. As Derfel and Ceinwyn talk about his past, Merlin appears, craving soft cheese. As they weep for joy, he eats, admires the Cauldron, and orders Derfel to take his staff to the top and point due West. A dense Druid's fog forms while Derfel continues talking about cheeses.

Part 1: The Dark Road, pgs. 56-106 Analysis

Chapter 4 includes Derfel's long and detailed summary of what he misses while living in Caer Sws with Ceinwyn waiting for Merlin's summons to duty. The summary introduces a legion of characters and place names that will become important in the following chapters. Upon returning in triumph to Dumnonia, Arthur implements a tax policies that anger the rich because he rebates a third to help the poor. As Britain's undisputed warlord, enemies fear him. During the war, fanatical Christians led by Cadwy in Isca had revolted. So certain of victory that they document their plot in writing, they are easily eliminated. Mordred's guardian, Nabur, is among those killed, so he is reassigned to Arthur's cousin, Culhwch. Wiley Bishop Sansum survives only through friendship with Arthur's sister Morgan, Merlin's closest priestess until Nimue usurps her. Shrouded in black and hiding her fire-ravaged face behind a golden mask, Morgan rebuilds Merlin's hall on the Tor and lives in Ynys Wydryn, where Sansum is Guardian of the Holy Thorn.

Guinevere, meanwhile, supervises building a gorgeous palace at Lindinis, including a dark hall for the worship of the Goddess Isis. She provides rooms for Lancelot when he visits and take advice from his mother, Elaine. Arthur is too preoccupied with the coming war against the Saxons to spend time at Lininis. He strengthens the fortifications throughout Dumnonia where the Saxon King Cerdic is expected to attack while Arthur fights King Aelle to the north. Arthur taxes the rich churches to finance this, increasing the animosity of greedy Christians. Others, including a third of his troops support Arthur loyally. Fanatics, including a corp of preachers, believe they must convert all pagans before Christ returns in the year 500. All of these factors combine late in the novel.

Another Druid God, Crom Dugh, is introduced. He is the Black God, "a crippled and malevolent horror who gave dark nightmares," avoided by other Gods. He inhabits the Dark Road. Nimue mocks Galahad's "nailed God" who cannot stand up against Crom Dugh. Galahad several times states that he has lent his sword to the quest for the Cauldron as a fight against evil. Nimue reluctantly tells Galahad the story of the the Treasures of Britain, and Ceinwyn adds details of the Roman conquest about which she has just dreamed. Britain once has 12 tribes, 12 kings, and 12 Gods. When outside Gods invade, war breaks out in heaven and on earth. The 12 Gods each give their tribes items to serve as Treasures that once a year can be used to summon them. The Treasures are commonplace to avoid jealousy: sword, basket, horn, chariot, halter, knife, whetstone, coat, cloak, dish, throwboard, and warrior ring. The God Bel marries a human, Ceinwyn's ancestor, and gives her a 13th Treasure, the Cauldron, which has the



power of rejuvenation. The other tribes grow jealous, start a civil war, and the Gods withdraw their protection. The Treasures are disbursed, Bel's lover dies, and Bel curses Britain with foreigners. If all of the Treasures can be re-assembled and the proper rites performed, the Gods will return to help.

Merlin has dedicated his life to this task and, while Ceinwyn and Derfel enjoy domestic life, offers human sacrifice to advance his goal. If he fails, he forfeits his spirit to the shade of the person sacrifice. Human sacrifice in the old days is common. When he recovers, comically asking for cheese, Merlin wants to offer a sacrifice and suggests Derfel. Ceinwyn forbids any sacrifice. This final chapter of Part 1 richly illustrates the routine barbarity of late-5th century life in Britain, the pagan beliefs and practices, and the status of the troublesome Christians who in the pages to come will meddle far more than they already have. Watch in particular Bishop Sansum and Morgan



Part 2: The Broken War, pgs. 109-138

Part 2: The Broken War, pgs. 109-138 Summary

When Igraine objects to the story's ending, Derfel continues: under cover of fog, the party walks downhill single file not, as legend holds, disappearing or flying. They hide for five days in an Old People's grave mound, talking about pre-Briton times, waiting for Diwrnach to end his search, and then go home. Igraine asks about Derfel and Ceinwyn loving one another without marrying, feels sorry for Gwenhwyvach, hears Derfel's non-magical explanations of events, and prompts for more about Arthur, warlord and law-giver.

Spring is glorious in Cwm Isaf. Derfel make lovers' rings using stolen bits of the Cauldron. Arthur arrives, apologizes for doubting the Cauldron, and brags about his newborn son, Gwydre. He is less fond of his grown sons, Amhar and Loholt by Ailleann, who fight with Lancelot. In ten days, Derfel will ride with Cuneglas to Corinium, where Arthur wants to initiate Lancelot into the cult of Mithras. Arthur is thinking about an elite guild of warriors who have fought the Saxons. They will vow never to fight one another.

Ceinwyn moves to Caer Sws for safety against Guinevere's curse and the Warriors of the Cauldron march. In Magnis they join Tewdric's 100 men commanded by Agricola, a follower of Mithras who like Derfel has little use for Lancelot or Prince Meurig. In Corinium Derfel restores Cavan and the others to his troop. Bishop Sansum baptizes Lancelot in the river, which Culhwch realizes makes excluding Lancelot from Mithras a moot point. Sansum asks if Derfel would like to be baptized and offhandedly insults Ceinwyn, Derfel attacks and forces a retraction. The Druids, Dinas and Lavaine, introduce themselves and Dinas performs a magic trick to show his power. They suggest that Derfel faces bad luck for killing their grandfather. Dimas produces a five-point parchment star, threatening Ceinwyn.

Part 2: The Broken War, pgs. 109-138 Analysis

Part 2 opens with the Monk Derfel interacting with his patron, Queen Igraine, who wants to hear the rest of the story and complains that Derfel's version is too mundane, lacking elements of magic that characterize the folk songs. The process of mythologization is mentioned throughout the novel. Note that while Derfel considers himself a Christian, he easily lapses into pagan phrases and gestures.

Derfel continues his story with a paean to springtime as experienced by one in love. Arthur's arrival brings none of the tenseness that Derfel fears, although Arthur has to pretend to be angry because of Guinevere, who will take a long time to be win over. She has recently become a mother to Gwydre and has not lost her beauty. Arthur plans on Derfel's daughter marrying him one day. Arthur's twin sons by Ailleann are introduced as a disappointment to their father.



Arthur's true reason for visiting Cwm Isaf is to line up Derfel's vote to admit Lancelot to the cult of Mithras. This is originally a Persian religion of light and darkness and Mithras is the omniscient, fiery god of war. It becomes popular in Imperial Rome and is brought by the Legions to Britain and establishes itself in the ruling class. The sacrifice of an ox and reveling in its blood is a central rite that does not stand at odds with Celtic blood sacrifices. It has been mentioned several times already that Guinevere is a devotee of Isis, an ancient Egyptian goddess whose cult also becomes popular in Rome and spreads to Britain. While Mithras is all-male, Isis is supposedly all-female, although as the novel shows, its sexual nature requires some male cooperation. Isis brother, Osiris, is also her husband and Horus is their son. When Osiris is killed, Isis gathers his scattered body parts (this would appeal to the Druids) and resurrects him. Because of the resurrection motif, Both cults compete powerfully with early Christianity.

Derfel makes clear that he opposes Lancelot's admittance, since there is no indication that he is a warrior at heart. Arthur asks him to think about it and holds out the hope that a yes vote will restore him and Ceinwyn to Guinevere's good graces. As it is, Ceinwyn seems the target of every magician's black arts, but Merlin assures Derfel that he and Nimue have it covered. He discloses to Derfel that Druids must be properly educated, examined, and appointed. He also discloses that he has the only written document about the Treasures of Britain. The ancient Druids avoid writing lest their magic be weakened, but the Romans, fearing this potent foe, force one Druid to document their ways.

Lancelot's baptism in the river provides an interesting study. The pagans are on one bank, waiting for the campaign to open, and the Christians, led by their wily bishop, approach from the other side. Spear men mock the priest who is sent out to find a spot deep enough to immerse the candidate, stabbing with a pole tipped by a cross. Lancelot's half-brother, Galahad, an exemplary Christian fighting for Arthur, is in the uncomfortable position of watching amidst the bemused pagans. Derfel writes from his then-pagan perspective, noting that the prayers are long and demanding, Lancelot seems not too keen on the whole ordeal, but the hymns are uncharacteristically upbeat. After the ceremony, the twin grandsons of a Druid Derfel has killed and Arthur's twin sons confront him, setting up tensions for the rest of the novel. Derfel tackles and threatens the life of the bishop who is now, in old age, his monastic superior.



Part 2: The Broken War, pgs. 139-195

Part 2: The Broken War, pgs. 139-195 Summary

As the fifth chapter begins, Prince Meurig suggests at the Council of War allying with the weaker of the Saxon Kings, Cerdic, to open a second front against Aelle. Having guarded the frontier all winter, Sagramor growls that this lacks honor and guesses that Cerdic will attack Durnovaria. Arthur assigns Lancelot to block this and everyone else to march up the Thames valley to London. Merlin tells Derfel that Dinas and Lavaine are not true Druids and that his magic is protecting Ceinwyn. Merlin carries Caleddin's scroll, a unique Roman-era document about the Treasures and refuses to say why he has brought dogs.

Aelle stays a day ahead of the Britons, scorching the land as he retreats. The Britons are slowed by sickness and heavy supplies. Arthur's 50 famed horsemen lead the army of 500. Christians have again paid for the expedition. Bishop Sansum is now Lancelot's chaplain, has gotten Guinevere to tolerate him, and is defended by lonely, frustrated Morgan. After Prince Tristan joins the army from distant Kernow, they cross the Thames at Pontes on a Roman bridge. Derfel and Galahad discover a church being used as a stable and while Meurig assigns rearguard warriors to cleanse it, the Saxons plunder 18 of 40 wagons. The army is doomed to starve unless Aelle fights and loses and they break out into undamaged lands. To draw Aelle out, Merlin suggests sacrificing all of their remaining food supplies. He supervises the carving and erection of three fearsome idols, and the stacking and burning of wood, food, and the remaining oxen. Construction begins on a hall is begun to provoke Aelle. Meanwhile, the army is badly divided over strategy. Arthur, wavering, sends Sagramor's Saxon woman, Malla, to give disinformation about the Britons' plight. Arthur asks Derfel about the threats to Ceinwyn and flares, hearing it connected with Lancelot, his friend. He rejects the idea that Guinevere would do this. When Derfel mentions Dinas and Lavaine's threats, Arthur says they naturally share their master's grudges and, swearing to protect Ceinwyn, asks Derfel to take over Mordred's care.

A Saxon wizard dancing before the destroyed pillars shows that Aelle is ready to attack. The Britons conceal their readiness and Arthur dons shimmering armor and a white cloak, flamboyant only for battle. As the Saxons advance, both sides' Druids hurl curses while Christian priests call for their God's help. Merlin assures the Britons that they are safe. When the shield-walls are 100 paces apart, Aelle emerges, asking to talk. As the only king, Cuneglas leads the British delegation with Derfel as translator. Aelle demands Arthur and then postures and exchanges threats with Cuneglas. Aelle then asks about Derfel's birth mother and admonishes him for never finding her. Derfel likes him.

The Britons win the battle, but what is important is what happens after it. Derfel provides highlights for Igraine's sake. It takes an hour for the two sides to drink up the courage to attack. When the Saxons move, Merlin and Nimue release their female dogs in heat to distract the male war dogs. The British shield-line is not disrupted and drives a wedge



into the Saxons. Derfel is wounded early on. Arthur's horsemen arrive to defend the flank and Aelle's men break "like eggs under a hammer" and are slaughtered by British horsemen as they flee. Derfel finds Cavan and talks him to the Otherworld, but is interrupted in his grief by word Cerdic's horde has arrive.

The sixth chapter opens with the surviving Britons posturing on the hilltop until they see Arthur's sons and the Druid twins approach with Lancelot. Although he would rather fight it out with Cerdic, because of Lancelot's word Arthur must meet in London to discuss peace. Arthur believes that his weary, outnumbered army could prevail but would fall victim to snippers marching home across the scorched landscape. Arthur must leave Aelle alive and strong enough to threaten Cerdic. Derfel is sent to fetch Aelle to London.

The Britons act like children in crumbling but grand London. Cerdic has occupied the walls and intends to keep the ghost town. Aelle and Arthur meet secretly before sitting with Cerdic and Aelle gives up land and gold for four years of guaranteed peace and support if Cerdic fails to agree. Lancelot swears that he has promised nothing more than Aelle's defeat. Use of his name in an oath binds Dreary negotiations expand Cerdic's holding at Aelle's expense and, hours after Aelle slinks away, Cerdic yields the Belgic lands on condition that Lancelot becomes its king.

Arthur is unhappy that the Saxons continue immigrating and must be fought again, but appreciates peace. Merlin declares, "Fate is inexorable," as he and Derfel stand in the amphitheater. Merlin does not hate the Romans who stay in Rome or feed Christians to dogs and lions, but hates their taming Britain and turning Britons into taxpayers. Lancelot's escape from boring Siluria is clever, putting him near Guinevere by playing on Arthur's Christian-like sense of guilt. Guinevere is too clever not to be bored with Arthur, who—impossibly—wants everyone to be happy while Guinevere wants through him to rule Britain. She will move closer to Lancelot.

When Nimue appears, Merlin reveals Mithra's secret invocation and rituals of blood pit before being led with Derfel behind to a shrine turned into a storehouse. As Merlin taps the flagstones listening for a hollow spot, Cerdic arrives with troops to claim anything they find. Merlin and Cerdic tangle verbally over the Cauldron and Cerdic slices off a plait of Merlin's beard, humiliating him and putting him under Dinas and Lavaine's magical power. Looking into the pit, Merlin pretends to see only rubbish and makes to leave, but the twins recognize pieces of the ancient "Chariot of Modron." Merlin consoles himself with having the Cauldron, but slumps and shuffles slowly.

On the march home, the army picks up Aelle's tribute of gold but Arthur laments having again broken his oath to kill Aelle, like so many oaths. He wants Derfel in Dumnonia as Mordred's guardian. Derfel regretfully agrees. After the army splits up, Derfel hopes that a great storm is not an omen of Merlin's loss of power. Three days later he learns that Merlin's hall on Tor burns down and no Treasures are recovered.



Part 2: The Broken War, pgs. 139-195 Analysis

The fifth chapter opens with a debate over whether to ally with the weaker of the Saxon kings, Cerdic, against the stronger, Aelle. Instead, Arthur positions Lancelot to contain him on the southern coast. Derfel is happy not to have Lancelot and the twin Druids behind his back. The troops want to liberate London, but Arthur says the sole object is to draw out and kill Saxons. A spy mentions that the Saxons use huge war dogs to tear holes in shield-walls, but Merlin declares that he will deal with them. When Derfel asks if the mangy dogs Merlin has brought along will be used to search for Treasure, he tells him to mind his business. His plan, revealed later in Part 2, is intriguing: The dogs are females in heat and the male Saxon dogs instantly make love, not war.

Arthur appears to waver when the supplies are raided. Note the deference paid even to incompetent royalty. The theme of the divine right of kings is debated at length later in the novel, but is clearly presupposed. Merlin proposes a most radical solution: draw the enemy into attacking by appearing unable to resist. The Christians stand aloof from the discussion of sacrificing the remaining food and even Arthur has second thoughts, but it is done.

After discussing the threats to Ceinwyn—with Derfel carefully avoiding mention of Guinevere but Arthur still defending the woman he loves and relies on—Derfel describes in detail the battle gear he puts on and the flamboyant attire that Arthur dons only for battle. The "clergy" perform their ministrations and the two sides advance on one another, singing and drumming. Note that Cuneglas considers merciful as the cost of the Saxons' surrender Aelle forfeiting his life, treasury, weaponry, women, and slaves, and his warriors their right hands. They are granted their lives. Aelle's interest in Derfel and his mother is the first hint, not picked up on, that they are father and son. It sets Derfel thinking, however, which leads to him taking a costly side trip later.

Derfel states with wonderful simplicity, "We won the battle." To placate Igraine, however, he adds detail, showing how 5th century Britons and Saxons prepare for battle physically and psychologically, what the actual clash of arms is like, and what the aftermath looks and sounds like. Derfel takes a non-lethal wound in the shoulder and soldiers on. His second-in-command is less lucky and dies in Derfel's arms soon after the fighting ends. Derfel keeps the precursor of a stiff upper lip and falls back on the clichés of crossing the swords to the Otherworld but is profoundly moved by the human loss. There is little time to mourn, for another Saxon horde appears.

Lancelot's place in the novel shifts radically, for he has concluded a separate peace with Cerdic. Arthur is insulted at this lack of faith in his ability to route Aelle alone and at the implications it hold for the heart of England, for Cerdic now claims London. Because Lancelot has invoked Arthur's name, Arthur feels honor-bound to meet both Saxon leaders and arrange peace terms. Most of the Briton leaders are shocked by Lancelot's unilateral move and scarcely believe there are no hidden clauses. It emerges that Lancelot obtains a richer kingdom in the bargain and proximity to Guinevere. Arthur's lieutenants are quicker than Derfel to see all the machinations that succeed because of



Arthur's simple nature. Lancelot will never return to Arthur's favor, however, which is a substantial development.

Merlin and Nimue come to London not so much as the army's chaplains but to find another Treasure. Cerdic, the new Lord of London, catches them digging, however, and claims all finds. The Druid twins, with whom Derfel and Merlin have fought verbally every time they meet, are now part of Cerdic's entourage. They are given a snippet of Merlin's beard, cut by Cerdic, to give him power over the wizard. Derfel explains to Igraine how old Britons carefully burn every hair and nail clipping as a defense against magic. Cerdic claims the "Chariot of Modron." Modron is the Druid Mother of Gods and her chariot links earth and heaven. On the way home, Derfel wonders what the Gods are doing, raising a sudden electric storm. He learns that Derfel has lost the Treasures he had collected, including the Cauldron. Derfel declines to judge the cause, which will come out later in the novel. He heads home to collect Ceinwyn and move to his new responsibility.



Part 3: Camelot, pgs. 199-227

Part 3: Camelot, pgs. 199-227 Summary

Igraine is dismayed at Merlin's loss and observes that the bards say of the battle near London that Lancelot saves the day. Poets always lie, responds Derfel, and he knows that Lancelot commissions them. Arthur does not care about songs or complain. Igraine calls the glorious years of Arthur's best rule "Camelot," but that distortion is introduced only recently

Ceinwyn gives birth in Lindinis to a daughter, Morwenna, while Guinevere moves a Roman villa that she names the Sea Palace, near Lancelot. Arthur is rarely there. Mordred also moves in with a huge staff. Life there at first is awkward, but Ceinwyn re-adapts to luxury and supervises the household. Mordred is as mischievous as rumored, the only child that Derfel ever hates, clever but unwilling to learn. Even Ceinwyn eventually hits him for torturing Morwenna. Merwin blames the Christian prayers used instead of proven pagan rituals on the day that Mordred is born. Old Balise recommends putting a person with evil spirits in bed between two naked virgins; while the spirit decides which to invade, burns it in the bed-straw.

After the fire and Cerdic's violation, Merlin is slowly dying, mostly playing with cats and believes from the absence of gold in the embers that the Cauldron has survived and will make its location horribly known when someone untrained uses it. All yearn for Mordred's 15th birthday, although Arthur fears that he will undo everything. Derfel's daughters (including Seren and Dian) love Arthur's visits, sometimes bringing Gwydre. The children avoid Mordred, who hangs out with slave sons and steals, vandalizes, and rapes. Arthur shudders. When Derfel meets Guinevere on duty she is civil.

Arthur's "Brotherhood of Britain" convenes at Guinevere's Sea Palace. Mordred attends, Merlin refuses, and Galahad as Marshal presides. No weapons are allowed, banners lend dignity, and the table happens to be round. It is Roman stone work featuring a remarkable flying horse in the center. The kings' and princes' swords are crisscrossed on the table and one-by-one they lay their hands on the pile and swear Arthur's oath. After them, every great man who could be lured to the palace follows suite. If anyone breaks the peace, the other brothers must punish him. All embrace and the drinking starts.

Those who avoid embracing are summoned to the great hall to be reconciled. Arthur sets the example with Sansum and Melwas, and then forces Cuneglas, Lancelot, Derfel, and Ceinwyn to make up, however awkwardly. The twin Druids swear that they intend nothing evil towards Ceinwyn or Merlin. After the ordeal, Derfel and Ceinwyn run into Gwenhwyfach working as her sister's gardener. She leads them through a cellar to Guinevere's tawdry, black-motived temple of Isis and shows Derfel an unused outside entrance. Behind the black throne and black curtain is a big "dream-bed." They emerge to a drunken spectacle and a horrified Guinevere.



Most folk know nothing about the oath but enjoy the years of peace and prosperity it brings. Arthur heads the poorly attended body until Mordred comes of age. Bishop Sansum gains a chair on the council by marrying Arthur's sister, Morgan, in a calculated blow against paganism. Believing that Morgan has stolen the Treasure, Nimue sends Derfel to her training school for missionaries. Morgan curses Guinevere as a witch of Isis and her religion as "pure filth," reveals that men and women worship together by fornicating, and, cursing Merlin, insists that the "one true God" has burned the Cauldron with a cleansing fire. She sees it turn to smoke. Nimue, who has grown thin, crazed, and repulsive, insists that the Cauldron survives and will be found when it makes the land run red with blood. Merlin will ride again.

Part 3: Camelot, pgs. 199-227 Analysis

The first chapter of Part 3, "Camelot" (the novel's seventh), opens with the expected meeting of Monk Derfel and Queen Igraine who badly wants the romantic ballads about Camelot and noble Lancelot to be true. Derfel is opposed to historical nonsense and knows that the victor writes history (or, in those days, composes verse). It is made worse by the fact that Arthur does not care what is written.

Having declared that Camelot and the Round Table are romantic inventions, Derfel sketches what happens in his family as children are born and raising Mordred proves to be a dreadful experience. Arthur rightly fears that Mordred, when he is acclaimed to the throne, will wipe out all the good that he achieves in the interim. As expected, Guinevere moves closer to Lancelot in a grand estate that she names the "Sea Palace." To show off, she insists that Arthur inaugurate his "Brotherhood of Britain" there. Soldiers being soldiers, the reception turns into a good-natured drunken brawl, to Guinevere's dismay.

Before the strong mead (fermented honey water) flows, Arthur presides at the ritual oath taking never to fight one another again. Derfel finds it moving but of dubious value. He holds the opinions to himself at the time and is pleased that a period of peace does follow the ritual. The act of reconciliation includes what Christians call the "kiss of peace."

The most important incident in the chapter has Guinevere's unfortunate sister reveal to Derfel the Temple of Isis set up in the cellar. He has seen its layout before, at Lindinis, which Guinevere abandons to build her Sea Palace. Derfel thus knows all he needs to guide Arthur's rescue of his wife and son later in the novel. Note that Gwenhwyfach takes her sister's dogs for long walks and talks to bees. This becomes crucial at the point of the rescue mission.

Derfel spends many pages describing the amazing transformation of Morgan from a bitter pagan priestess into a bitter Christian fanatic. She marries Bishop Sansum, thereby elevating him to prominence on the Council, runs his school for missionaries and a holy sisterhood, and keeps his books. When Derfel asks about the Cauldron, she insists, cursing and crossing herself, that God has cleansed the earth of its vile presence. She claims to be an authority on fire—having been disfigured by it—and



knows that the Cauldron is gone. Derfel doubts it and Nimue, who has herself turned into a ghastly figure through self-neglect, insists that the Cauldron, pitiful Merlin, and she will rise again.

Derfel describes Bishop Sansum and Morgan's marriage as a normal event. In the fifth century, married bishops are rare but still occur, but they are by custom married before ordination. At any rate, the union energizes the Christians and religious conflict is all the more strident going forward.



Part 3: Camelot, pgs. 228-277

Part 3: Camelot, pgs. 228-277 Summary

The eighth chapter depicts Mordred's coming of age. Arthur hopes that his re-acclimation as an adult will carry the mystical power to make him responsible. He dislikes Mordred but believes fervently in the divinity of kings. Guinevere has no illusions, scarcely knows Mordred but hates him, wanting Arthur to be king whether he wants it or not. Derfel wishes that Mordred would die, but while he lives he is king. Five years after the Round Table oath, Christians alone support Mordred, reluctantly, while everyone else wants Arthur to save them from the boy.

That summer, 60-year-old King Mark of Kernow marries 15-year-old Iseult, and his 40-year-old son, Tristan, runs with her to Isca, where Culhwch grants sanctuary. When Cyllan, the Champion of Kernow, arrives, demanding the runaways' return, Derfel argues that Tristan has been a faithful friend, but Arthur fixates on broken oaths, civil war, and border raids. He takes Derfel to mediate. Along the way, they see signs of Christian militancy and in Isca attend a Christian service incognito that features flagellation, revolting Arthur. Culhwch explains that Christ is due back in five years and expects paganism to be wiped out. Arthur suggests placating them with the church that Sansum wants funded.

Tristan is blinded by love, hopes to wait out his father's death, agrees to return Mark's treasure, and reminds Arthur of past help. The foolish lovers pray to Manawydan and Iseult dances in the surf like a nymph. Next morning, Mark arrives. After consulting with him, Arthur takes Derfel aside, plunges Excalibur into the earth, shouting "Gofannon!" to rouse the Gods and laments that the Gods will not kill Mark, and that Tristan and Iseult refuse a swift, painless death. Arthur hates oaths that bind and hobble but never free. Some cannot be kept, others must be delayed, and others are mistakes that still bind. While Arthur has no oath to Mark, Tristan and Iseult do and Arthur must honor it, for otherwise, all is chaos. Derfel knows that Arthur is also thinking about Mordred. Tristan and Iseult must stand trial. Arthur admits sending for Mark as an act of justice.

As Mark knows he will, Tristan appeals to the "court of the sword." Cyllan is ready for the fight to the death. Derfel and Culhwch both insist on fighting from Tristan, but Mark insists that Tristan fight personally. Spear men immobilize Derfel and Culhwch and Arthur restrains his men. Tristan fights bravely and dies mercifully. Iseult is taken to the beach and burned alive, with Arthur refusing to intervene. Derfel leaves without talking to Arthur and as an old man still sees Iseult dancing.

As the ninth chapter starts, Derfel rates Lancelot as not a bad ruler but interested only in his own comfort. Taxes are high but the Saxons never raid and many settle in the Belgic lands. He forms a special, baptized "Saxon Guard." Arthur disapproves but does not meddle because there is peace. Galahad tells Ceinwyn that his half-brother, like many



Christians, prays but behaves badly, collecting women and visiting the Sea Palace. Guinevere has grown very devout to Isis, Arthur finds her devotion tedious.

When he cannot avoid Arthur, Derfel is "coldly polite." Derfel and Ceinwyn are drawn into the planning Mordred's second acclamation, and Derfel takes the boy to see Sansum. At the Christian shrine, Mordred gets upset at his mother's humble grave, asks about her death and love for him, and insists on building a sepulcher for them both. Derfel visits Nimue's stinking hut while boy and bishop confer and is entrusted to tell Merlin that soon "a man who is no King" will rule, the dead will be taken in marriage, and a sword will lie at a child's neck. She has seen the Cauldron in visions and when it comes, the filthy Christians will lose. Nimue exposes herself to the Christians demonstrating outside the Tor, to show that most reflexively ward her off in the pagan way rather than by crossing themselves.

On the eve of the summer full moon, Mordred is acclaimed at the stones of Caer Cadarn. As Mordred's champion, Derfel wears expensive new armor. At Mordred's first acclamation as a baby, Morgan had supervised a human sacrifice; now she wears a cross. The rite is entirely Christian. Sansum harangues God skillfully, praising Christianity and mocking paganism. Arthur leads Mordred in circling the stones and seats him on the royal stone. Signs of office and gifts are presented and the nobles kneel to swear oaths of loyalty. At Arthur's suggestion, the kings renew their Brotherhood oath. The final act is Derfel's challenge to anyone who denies Mordred's right to rule. Culhwch issues a challenge but yields, suggesting that Derfel make peace with Arthur, and swears loyalty to Cuneglas. Mordred lashes Derfel across the face for allowing Culhwch to live. Derfel and his family go home.

When Derfel refuses to move to Powys, Cuneglas says he is as bad as Arthur about oaths. Arthur and Oengus Mac Airem arrive. The Irish King jokes with Derfel about keeping his troops sharp and laughs at Pdraig preaching with a clover leaf, thanks him for trying to protect Iseult, and considers marrying another daughter, Argante, to Mordred to form an alliance. Arthur approaches Derfel and they walk into the meadow. Arthur is sorry and wants to be friends.

Part 3: Camelot, pgs. 228-277 Analysis

The eighth unnumbered chapter deals primarily with the tragedy of Tristan and Iseult, a legend once independent of the Arthurian corpus that the author in his concluding note says is too good not to include. It allows an analysis of Arthur's compulsion about oaths, which he comes later to regret. Arthur's thinking is long on casuistry and short on logic or compassion, and results in a break with Derfel.

Before Arthur allows the Iseult's barbaric punishment, he and Derfel experience the growing Christian fanaticism that marks the rest of the novel. Several things are at work. First, many Christians believe that Christ will return in the year 500 and that he wants Britain purified of paganism. Pagan sanctuaries are being desecrated and crude churches built on the holy sites. Bishop Sansum is training and dispatching armies of



missionaries, to the point that Derfel wonders why the pagans do not do likewise. Arthur sees a charismatic communion service in which devotees flagellate themselves and backs away from his reticence to proclaim them mad.

Second, many Christians see Lancelot as their deliverer. While both he and Mordred are baptized, Lancelot leads an army under a banner that includes a fish. Later it will be explained that fish in Greek (ichthys) can be interpreted as a divine title for Jesus. Stylized as two curving lines, the fish appears for the rest of the novel almost as a talisman.

Finally, Arthur and Derfel discuss a hot theological issue dividing 5th-century Christians, Pelagianism. Arthur sides with the Pelagians, because he believes in mankind more than in God. Pelagius is a British monk who travels broadly, reacting to St. Augustine of Hippo's pessimistic doctrine of predestination and original sin. Pelagius believes that humans can take the first steps toward salvation. Pelagianism has by the time of this novel been formally condemned as a heresy far away in Asia Minor, but this does not relieve the tension over how humans are saved.

Disliking the religious rancor, Arthur tries to talk to the Christians, but concludes that they are as greedy as the Saxons. He decides to placate them by financing the great church that Sansum wants to mark Christianity's 500th year. The meaning of that event also continues to be developed going forward.

The ninth unnumbered chapter brings the reader up to date on Lancelot in preparation for the battles looming in Part 4. Most of the chapter deals with preparations for and the celebration of King Mordred's second acclamation at the sacred stones of Caer Cadarn. The first acclamation, when he is a newborn, is a pagan rite, including human sacrifice. The second one takes place at the ancient pagan site but is thoroughly Christianized. Culhwch is desperate to get Derfel and Arthur back together, and this reconciliation is achieved in the last scene of Part 3. Two strong male egos finally give in.

Note the intensification of the religious conflict. Bishop Sansum sets up his shrine opposite Merlin's and his followers are busily trying to drive out the remnant of the pagans, led by a pitiful Nimue. She is defiant and passes to Merlin the visions she has seen. They form the matrix for Part 4. Mordred's talk about his late mother, who is buried in Sansum's cemetery, gets Derfel to thinking again about his long-lost mother and will in Part 4 result in a visit that plays into the hands of one of Nimue's prophecies, the child with a sword at its neck. Note Onegus' reference to Padraig, St. Patrick, preaching successfully in Ireland using a clover to explain the Trinity. Patrick is recently deceased, but his followers continue to make converts, while others flee to Onegus in Britain.



Part 4: The Mysteries of Isis, pgs. 281-333

Part 4: The Mysteries of Isis, pgs. 281-333 Summary

As she looks through texts, Igraine asks about Iseult and why Arthur does it. Derfel believes that Arthur worships order above the uncaring Gods, and the laws that keep order and the oaths that bind. Igraine observes that Derfel seems less of a Christian than before he begins writing his tales and wishes she were a pagan. Derfel says that Mordred is a Christian only for political reasons, allowing Sansum to build a church Caer Cadarn, leaving only the royal stone untouched. Mordred moves to the Winter Place and Sansum takes over Lindinis, forcing Derfel's family to move to Ermid's Hall. When Igraine mentions the Round Table, Derfel debunks it, worries about his history being distorted in translation, and says only Arthur and Galahad ever believe in the oath. Derfel resumes his story.

Everyone expects the worst under Mordred, but life continues normally. Arthur manage affairs while Mordred hunts and rapes peasant women. The next summer, when Derfel's youngest daughter Dian falls ill, Mordred dispatches Arthur and Derfel to arrest Ligessac, his mother's betrayer. Visiting retired King Tewdric, they hear about the Christian perspective and fear of a new Saxon threat. Culhwch sees the Saxons soon sweeping the Christians away. In the bleak hills at a squalid village, they are confronted by Bishop Cadoc who draws a line in the mud and refuses to give up Ligessac. Arthur encircles the village, warns against harming civilians and looting, and crosses the line. Cadoc blows a horn to summon hundreds of armed Christians who are swiftly defeated. Ligessac, surrenders calmly, revealing that the ambush is long in the making. Christian accounts of Arthur pillaging and raping are lies and Cadoc is no saint.

As Arthur leads Ligessac to Dumnonia, Derfel heads to the Severn Sea to seek his mother. After picturing a touching reunion, Derfel finds an enormous, unwashed, and decaying woman in rags. She vaguely recalls a son, Wygga, being thrown in the death pit. Linna, approaches and explains that she is Derfel's half-sister. Erce is now Enna. When the name Tanaburs rings a bell, Derfel explains his miraculous escape. Enna predicts that Wygga will kill his fine, handsome father, Aelle. Shocked, Derfel embraces Erce, gives Linna gold to buy them freedom or improve their lot, and heads home.

The eleventh chapter opens with Derfel pondering these revelations. Seeing smoke to the south, they take a shortcut across the sea and stop in Ynys Wydryn to hire a boatman. Subduing guards, they learn that Mordred and Arthur are dead and Lancelot is claiming the kingdom. They climb to see Sansum and Lancelot arrive for the latter's marriage to the corpse of Queen Norweena, to let him claim the throne. Morgan sneaks up, thanks God that rumors of them dying are false, claims Sansum is forced to do this and Mordred dies in a hunting accident—which could also be a lie.



Morgan reveals that Dinas and Lavaine have ridden south with spear men hours earlier. Panicking and thanking Morgan, who helps free Nimue from prison, Derfel races home. Nimue believes that the twins are kidnapping Merlin to learn how to use the Cauldron. Two prophecies have come true and Derfel worries about the third. He later pieces together that distant smoke in alerts Ceinwyn's guards, she refuses to flee and waits for news. No one hears the Druids' approach so they get inside the palisade unopposed. When the alarm sounds, guards bar the gate to slow Lancelot's forces and archers prevent them from setting fire to the thatch roof. Ailing Dian, who has been sleeping outside the compound, is captured.

Derfel arrives in time to see Lavaine, dressed as a priest, carry Dian near Ceinwyn. Issa restrains Derfel as Lavaine lies about his death and delivers Lancelot's demand that she and Merlin come to him. Ceinwyn must be naked as punishment. As Dian cries in pain, Ceinwyn complies—and Derfel charges. During the fight, Dinas arrives on horseback and picks up Lavaine, who slits Dian's throat and drops her. They question prisoners before Derfel hacks them to pieces. Merlin officiates at the cremation and assures Ceinwyn that children play in the Otherworld. Derfel blames himself for staying too long in Ynys Wydryn and swears vengeance on the twins. According to the prisoners, Mordred's murder may be payback for rape, Lancelot is a new John the Baptist, and houses not marked by a fish are being destroyed. Cerdic has divided Dumnonia with Lancelot. The Cauldron has clearly loosed its power on the land. They stop for the night when the beach turns to marsh.

Marsh folk convey the refugees to ships bound for Silurian Isca. With a Christian king, Gwent is less rabid. King Meurig blames Arthur for not suppressing paganism and calls Christianity the wave of the future. Declining baptism, Ceinwyn and the children leave for Powys, Merlin and Nimue seek the Cauldron, and Derfel heads to Glevum, where he finds Arthur. Arthur is outraged at Dian's murder and swears vengeance. He has no word about Guinevere, shudders at her fate, and suspects that Mordred is dead. Noting that Cerdic has driven Sagramor back badly, Arthur admits that Derfel is right about Lancelot. Derfel is sure that Sansum plans the ambush and should have been killed ten years ago. Arthur scoffs at the thought of being king over so little. He hopes the Cerdic and Aelle will kill one another, but Derfel says that as Aelle's son, he must killed him. Arthur is tempted to make an oath to retire if the Gods give him back his family. Derfel cannot stop fighting until Dinas and Lavaine are dead.

Part 4: The Mysteries of Isis, pgs. 281-333 Analysis

The opening conversation between Monk Derfel and Queen Igraine dwells on Arthur's putting order above everything. Derfel quietly agrees that while writing down Arthur's story he has grown less Christian. Igraine wishing she were a pagan reinforces the sense that something is lacking in contemporary Christianity. The bishop is a fearful figure, not a pastor. When the bishop's assistant pops in to ask about the value of a manuscript, Derfel thinks about his stash of pagan keepsakes including his sword and Ceinwyn's locket.



The lion's share of the tenth chapter is given over to the capture of the man who betrays Mordred's mother, resulting in her death. Two stops allow discussions of the state of religious unrest in Britain. Retired King Tewdric, whose precise ecclesiastical status cannot be deciphered (married monk and/or priest) can see how a king might decry social unrest, but a Christian must see it as an integral part of the preparation for Christ's Second Coming. It is an act of love to force pagans to convert, because it spares them the fires of hell. Pelagius would have hated that. If Christ fails to return in four years, Christians will cool off until AD 999, but the Saxons will want a second go at conquering Britain. When they visit Culhwch, he agrees that the Saxons will come—but to wipe out the Christians.

The small war party moves on to arrest its man, who gives up peacefully and reveals that someone has set up an ambush for Arthur and Derfel. Sending two lords on such a mission had seemed fishy to them before setting out, but Mordred had insisted. Before the peaceful arrest, the Christians fight a pitched battle in the only pre-Roman style. Derfel remarks that a few defeats at the Legion's hands had taught Britons more effective styles, but these fanatics, men, women, and children are bent on becoming heroes or martyrs. The mechanics of fighting in a shield-ring is described meticulously along with the emotions of the men who huddle inside. Before leaving the subject, Monk Derfel reacts to claims that Arthur is an "Enemy of God" and Bishop Cadoc, who leads the resistance, is a living saint. As an eyewitness, he debunks propaganda about wholesale rape and pillaging.

Derfel then seeks out and finds his mother, living in horrible conditions and largely senile. Bits of her and Derfel's story come out, including familiar names, but then a memory of Derfel's father is triggered and she reveals it is Aelle, whom he is already under oath to kill. Erce/Enna reinforces the prediction. Derfel heads home with all of this in his head, wanting to share with his family. He had left home with his youngest, most creative daughter ill. Why Arthur and Derfel had been gotten out of the picture is about to be revealed.

The eleventh chapter takes Derfel to Ynys Wydryn to witness Lancelot's macabre marriage to the corpse of Queen Norweena, Mordred's mother, which he and crafty Bishop Sansum believe will give him a claim on the throne of Dumnonia. Morgan sneaks up on Derfel during the intriguing ceremony, calls him stupid for taking the risk of being caught by the raving and rampaging Christians of Ynys Wydryn, frees Nimue who has been jailed by her husband, and tries to exonerate him as a man operating under duress. She also reveals that the Druid twins have a three-hour head start towards Ermid's Hall. Derfel sees his daughters playing a role in the third prophecy — the first two having come true before his eyes. Nimue believes that the Cauldron has been used and caused nothing but trouble. Lancelot needs her and Merlin to control the power.

Arriving at Ermid's Hall, Derfel sees that controlling Merlin has only a secondary importance. Whether Lancelot orders it or Lavaine has his own sadistic reasons, Ceinwyn must accompany him to Ynys Wydryn naked, repaying the humiliation she causes Lancelot for breaking the engagement. Ceinwyn gives it no thought if it will spare her daughter's life. Derfel, however, goes berserk and launches an attack on the



Saxon Guard. Little Dian has her throat slit in the mêlée and the twins escape. Prisoners are interrogated before Derfel slashes them to pieces. His struggle to regain sanity is brilliantly shown. He and Merlin have then to reassure Ceinwyn that her daughter is happy in the Otherworld. many details of Druid practices surrounding death are given.

That Lavaine masquerades as priest is a sign of the violence being practiced by Christians. Houses not marked by the sign of the fish are ransacked and the occupants slain. This is a clear but implicit reference to the Passover of the Jews before leaving Egyptian bondage. Pagans are pulling together to save their own. Lancelot is seen as a new forerunner of Christ, playing the role of John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness. It seems unlikely that this one will lose his head, for the only possible Herod figure is Arthur, who is despairing over what has become of his Brotherhood of Britain. He is ready to retire to farming if the Gods will give him back his family. He is also sworn to avenge Dian's murder and sees that Derfel has been right about Lancelot all along.



Part 4: The Mysteries of Isis, pgs. 334-394

Part 4: The Mysteries of Isis, pgs. 334-394 Summary

In control of most of Britain, Lancelot summons Arthur to Dun Ceinach to pass word that his wife and son are alive at the Sea Palace being guarded against the rioting Christians. They may live in Dumnonia on condition that Arthur swears a loyalty oath. Sansum reveals that the twins are Guinevere's guards. Merlin figures they have 4-6 days until the full moon deadline. Britain's Kings rally to Arthur, who only his family back, Cerdic defeated, peace for Britain, and retirement for himself. Lancelot is better for Dumnonia than Mordred and fighting him would only play into Saxon hands. Arthur's price for fighting for Lancelot is Dinas and Lavaine. Merlin reminds them of the Cauldron, which is bringing the chaos. The Gods are making trouble for Arthur. As proof, he points to the living Mordred.

Lancelot's spear men, disguised as pilgrims, have catch Arthur's men in the tavern and massacre them. Rather than stay in Durnovaria and fight, Galahad moves north and runs into Mordred, being sought incognito by Lancelot's men, who fail to assassinate him when he forces himself on a peasant girl and feasts in an unplanned town. The villagers are also after Mordred. Mordred now demands a change of clothes and that Arthur obey his oath and march south. Fed up, Derfel lashes Derfel, claiming that he has failed in his oath to guard his kingdom. Horrified, Arthur drags Derfel away, but Merlin threatens dire magic unless Mordred tells the truth. Mordred incriminates Sansum and claims that while Arthur lives, he cannot be King. Given the scope of Lancelot's plot, the kings must fight him. Meurig alone refuses. Staging an army will take two weeks. For Lancelot's ears, Arthur spreads rumors that he will not risk Guinevere's life and pledges that the Council will rule in the place of the unfit king. Mordred will keep his rank and privileges but no power. Everyone cheers, for Arthur will be king in everything but name.

With warriors, Arthur, Derfel, and Nimue head east, ostensibly for London, while, guarded and friendless, Mordred watches Ligessac die. Well on their way, Arthur announces that they are turning to the sea to save the hostages and kill the murderers. Nimue's quest is for the Cauldron. Reaching the sea on the fifth night undetected, they hide in the woods near the Sea Palace. Derfel recalls the layout from the day of the oath. They see a dozen guards and deduce their assignments. Arthur muses about marriage and the Otherworld, envies Ceinwyn and Derfel's friendship and ability to talk about things other than Britain's fate and Isis. Guinevere appears on the arcade going to breakfast, joined by Dinas and Lavaine, and surrounded by confidants and priestesses. Gwenhwyfach out walking her dogs surprises them, observes that no one pays her attention, warns that a perfect night for worshiping Isis will make a rescue unpopular, and reminds Derfel of the cellar door, which she will unbar. Nimue assures all that Dinas



and Lavaine are not proper Druids but warns of strange powers. Derfel wants them alive. They wait for Isis' full moon to ascend.

The thirteenth chapter shows Nimue leading the troops along a creek and through dark woods, circling the ethereal palace until the moon-shaft is visible. They hear eerie singing from the temple. Filing through shadows to the wall, near the spear men's huts, they are quickly admitted to the cellar. Arthur goes in search of his son, warning the others to let them finish their worship before entering the temple. Nimue shoulders her way through, carrying a moving bundle, defiantly opens the door, and goes inside. Derfel follows her into the darkness. Whispering, "Evil!" Nimue parts the curtain to reveal the mysteries of Isis. Eight men and women kneel, naked, around the two celebrants: Lavaine in a black gown and Guinevere playing Isis, naked inside a red cloak. They wait, gasping, for moonlight to come down the shaft and reflect in the black water. Derfel recalls Llyn Cerrig Bach. Chants begin, proclaiming Isis the Goddess, Osiris the God, and Lancelot the one seated on the throne. Derfel knows that learning this will destroy Arthur. Naked, Guinevere stirs the pit with her staff and orders, "Rise." Dinas emerges naked and leads her to the throne, just as Arthur enters behind Derfel and tells him to withdraw. Nimue opens the curtain for the nightmare to begin.

When Nimue throw back the curtain, people scream, Guinevere glares out, then pulls the twins behind another curtain. Arthur pushes Gwydre back, drops the flowers he brings Guinevere, draws Excalibur, and charges for the dais. In the mirrored inner sanctuary the Cauldron on a pedestal. Guinevere and Dinas cower in bed while Lavaine stands defiantly, threatening to drop a fragment of the true cross into the Cauldron to destroy everyone. Derfel sees the other Treasures gathered in the room. Nimue smiles and shakes a dozen vipers out of her cloak at Lavaine. Flinching, he loses the cross fragment. Derfel kicks him in the bell and as he falls, an adder bites his ankle. Holding Hywelbane at Lavaine's throat, Derfel offers his daughter's greetings from the Otherworld. Arthur allows terrified Guinevere to put on her cloak. Derfel tips over the Cauldron, spilling its contents. For Arthur's benefit, Derfel forces Lavaine to pronounce the names of the God, Goddess, and occupant of the throne. Lavaine and Dinas are dragged out into the moonlight. Arthur is stunned and weeps as dawn arrives.

Derfel does not consider himself cruel, but he makes sure the twins' deaths are very slow and very cruel. Nimue arranges them and all the while hisses Dian's name in their ears. The last thing they see is Dian's hair as Derfel finishes them off. Nimue recovers the Cauldron and Treasures and learns from the twins before they die that Morgan is behind it all, offering them to Sansum as a wedding gift. Sansum gives them to Guinevere to reconcile her. Had Derfel allowed Lancelot into Mithras, all of this might have been avoided, but "fate is inexorable." The shrine's doors are closed after Arthur kills all the devotees, for they do this every time the moon is right. At first, Guinevere performs the rite to put Arthur on the throne, but then switches to Lancelot in the name of religion. Remorseful, Arthur weeps.

At dawn, Derfel says they must go to complete Arthur's oath. Arthur will love Guinevere for life. Gwenhwyfach remains alone in the Sea Palace, watching for Lancelot to come to her. It is said that she dies there. Guinevere rides Llamrei with her son in her lap.



Arthur wonders if Gwydre is his. Derfel walks with Nimue, who denies that Guinevere is a whore. She is Arthur's competent and determined rival. As a woman, she cannot sit on the Council, but she listens and knows she is better than these picked men. Good kings do not need to hear what people are thinking and doing. They need spear men to keep order. Arthur should have been king and Guinevere would have been satisfied. He is so high-minded about oaths he would rather be a farmer, which she could never abide. She is not a whore for looking to other excitements. Many women break their wedding vows. She turns to an idiotic religion while he thinks his marriage is perfect and cannot see men swarming to her like flies to carrion. She beds Lancelot to get her man made High King. Dinas and Lavaine are her priests, and sex is often part of worship. Nimue tortures them because of what they do to Merlin and Dian. Guinevere has been bathing in the Cauldron weekly and stopped aging.

Catching up, looking befuddled and aged, Arthur says they must do the unexpected and go to Caer Cadarn, the key to Dumnonia, which is the key to Britain. Derfel sees this as suicidal, but then remembers the words of Ailleann, Arthur's old mistress, who once tells him that when Arthur seems doomed he will astonish and win. Derfel and Nimue fallow to "the enemy's throat." The Old People fort at Dunum has remained loyal, yielding 30 warriors. The commanders says there had been rumors of Lancelot an Guinevere doing it earlier in Durnovaria, with Arthur not suspecting a thing. She may love Arthur but she needs subtlety. Arthur continues weeping and no one dares ask Guinevere's fate.

Reaching Dumnonia, Derfel notices that the Christians are less hostile. They stop at a monastery built on a former Druid shrine, steal a dozen monk's robes, and Arthur strikes down the cursing Bishop. Carannog is said to be a saint. Arthur makes more saints than god. Warriors cut their hair and don robes. Derfel is too well known to join them. Caer Cadarn has no military value but is symbolic of kingship. The ruse works and they open the eastern gate. The next target is Sansum's building site. Scouts capture Loholt, an escaping commander, and drag him before his father in a line of prisoners, many of whom are put to death in the unfinished church. The survivors renew their oaths to Arthur and are branded as former rebels. Approaching Loholt, Arthur demands where his brother is and allows him to join him and Lancelot up north, minus the hand he has raised against his father.

Arthur waits two days to be attacked. Cerdic stands by his failing ally, who rallies his remaining fervent Christian fighters. Many, however, begin deserting. Arthur sends Derfel with a message to Lancelot at Lindinis. His court reeks of defeat. Addressing Lancelot without his royal title, Derfel speaks loudly enough for all to hear. If Lancelot personally fights Arthur's champion man-on-man, his men may go free. Otherwise, all die. Derfel is the opponent. With each spitting at the other, Derfel carries back Lancelot's reply: he will reply by midday. Guinevere calls for Derfel, who says that Lancelot sends no message and that he intends to fight Derfel and drag his naked body through the city. Guinevere controls herself to ask Derfel to ask Arthur to let her go overseas and disappear. Derfel figures he will keep her safe nearby instead. Lancelot departs rather than submit. Arthur knows Guinevere's intent and insists she stay in Dumnonia, as will Derfel as Arthur's counselor and champion. Derfel believes that Arthur should be Emperor, "Lord of Kings."



Part 4: The Mysteries of Isis, pgs. 334-394 Analysis

The thirteenth chapter, Arthur with a tiny force goes to the Sea Palace to liberate his wife and son, not suspecting that she has been having an affair with Lancelot and justifying it as the liturgy of Isis and Osiris. The chapter opens with Derfel telling what he knows from Galahad religions getting their start in the East. He notes that Isis and Mithras both require followers to be initiated, unlike Christianity, which lets anyone in.

Lancelot is at his peak, holding Arthur's wife and son prisoner surrounded by rabid Christians. He is given a few days to swear loyalty or Lancelot's protection is removed. Bishop Sansum remains true to himself by suggesting they could be baptized and find safety. He also confides that the Druid twins are the guards, so there is no safety. Arthur tries hard to justify Lancelot's usurpation and his own staying out of the coming civil war. Merlin reminds them that the missing Cauldron is the real key to why terrible things are befalling Britain. Human beings do not like living in peace. They get bored and look for trouble.

Mordred is found to be alive and as caustic as ever. His true story comes out with help from the crack of a leather belt and Merlin's threat of magic shrinking of his genitals. As expected, he incriminates Sansum as the mastermind—begging the question, why is the bishop alive and serving in his dotage as Derfel's superior?

The final chapter finds the commando team in the dark woods waiting for the moon to come up. Gwenhwyfach admits them and Arthur disappears upstairs to find his son. This sets the stage for him seeing with full force the reality of what has been going on behind his back for years, and the revelation leaves him profoundly shaken until the final pages, when he rallies. Derfel sees why Gwenhwyfach always giggles when he says men are excluded from the cult of Isis as he gawks at the backs of a line of naked men and women. Next he sees Guinevere and the twins naked and ready to proceed to the ritual bed. Arthur walks in behind Derfel and Nimue, who have been sneaking a look past the curtain, and the sorceress throws it wide open to give him a good look. Arthur goes berserk and storms the inner sanctuary.

There, they find gathered all of the Treasures of Britain including the Cauldron, which is filled with some liquid. Fast-thinking Lavaine dangles a reliquary containing a fragment of the True Cross over the Cauldron, suggesting that contact will have dire consequences. Monk Derfel remarking on all that power in one room sees an alliance between British and Christian magic. Nimue has spent the day collecting vipers and tosses a dozen of them at the celebrants. Lavaine loses his relic without causing harm and is bitten. Derfel steps in to force his confession before a stricken Arthur, who remains inconsolable for hours. Derfel sits with him while Nimue skillfully flails the twins until little life remains in them. Derfel is given the honor of the death blow, making sure they know they are being tormented because of his daughter. Note the careful burning of hair to prevent innocent souls from wandering the world—and the twins being left for the seabirds to devour.



Guinevere's fate remains in the air for days as they march toward Caer Cadarn. Arthur is in a savage mood, executing prisoners and even disowning one of his sons in a bloody fashion. Lifting one's hand against one's father is punished graphically and the young man is sent back to Lancelot's camp. The horror seeing him had is not depicted, but Lancelot's army falls apart. He tries to hold out but finally forced to choose between face-to-face combat with Derfel or dishonor, Lancelot slinks away. Arthur does not allow Guinevere to follow him into exile.

Derfel at the time is inclined to label Guinevere a whore, but others remind him that she is an extraordinary woman who cannot be satisfied with mediocrity. She wants her man to be king and he is not interested. She immerses herself in religion and finds one that has a wonderfully sexual motif. Among Isis' powers is deciding who sits on thrones. After praying for years it will be Arthur, Guinevere turns to Lancelot, who desires it with all his heart. With Lancelot's downfall and Arthur's de facto kingship — or Imperial reign in Derfel's thought — Guinevere is in no position to enjoy what she has helped happen.



Characters

Derfel Cadarn

The narrator of *Enemy of God*, Derfel is a tall, dull, flaxen-haired Saxon, born Wygga to Erce (Enna) and sired by the warlord Aelle. Mother and son are captured in a raid by King Gundleus of Siluria and his Druid, Tanaburs, survives being sacrificed in the "Death Pit," and is adopted by the Druid Merlin and his apprentice, Nimue, another fugitive. Together they escape Gundleus, eventually meet Arthur, and Derfel, bearing the sword he calls "Hywelbane" (named for Merlin's steward who trains him in sword fighting), joins his spear men. Later, Derfel rescues Nimue from the Isle of the Dead, where the insane are housed. Derfel is oath-sworn to Nimue. He fights valiantly as Lord Derfel the Mighty, Champion of Dumnonia in the desperate Battle of Lugg Vale, and partners with (but does not marry) Princess Ceinwyn. An earlier lover is Lunete. Derfel and Ceinwyn joins Merlin in his successful quest for the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn.

Derfel then rejoins Arthur, serving in the great battle near London, and then as guardian of the underage King Mordred of Dumnonia. They bear three daughters, Morwenna, Seren, and Dian, and two sons who do not survive. Mordred is horrible and refuses to learn, but Arthur is bound to him by sacred oath. Derfel cannot understand supporting someone so ill-fit for the job and splits completely with Arthur over the brutal sacrifice of Tristan and Iseult, again for the sake of an oath. He becomes reconciled with Arthur only in facing King Lancelot's rebellion. Plotting Mordred's assassination, Lancelot needs Arthur and Derfel out of the area, so he sends them on a mission up north. Derfel returns in time to find Lancelot's twin Druids attempting to kidnap Ceinwyn and Merlin, and in his failed rescue attempt sees his youngest daughter slain. Derfel swears vengeance, as do all of his friends whom he meets. He is with Arthur when Arthur discovers that his wife Guinevere is involved sexually with the twins and Lancelot. He sits with Arthur as he weeps until Nimue has nearly tortured the twins to death. Derfel steps in to finish them off. Earlier, he had slain the twin's troops with a brutality that surprised him.

As an old man, Derfel, a one-armed widower, becomes a Christian monk at Dinnewrac in Powys and befriends Queen Igraine, for whom he writes his memoirs. His superior is Bishop Sansum, the only other survivor of the times about which Monk Derfel writes and still a rigid opponent of the old paganism. Monk Derfel fears that the stories he is writing in Saxon to prevent Sansum from learning what he is up to will be distorted when translated into English, but he is determined to do his best to tell history as he has seen it.

Arthur

The eldest living son of King Uther, Warlord of Dumnonia, husband of Guinevere, and protector of the underage King Mordred, Arthur is the dominant figure in this novel.



Queen Igraine, who has commissioned Arthur's right hand man, Derfel Cadarn, to write about Arthur, sees Arthur as "our last and best hope, our king who never was a king, the Enemy of God and the scourge of Saxons." She believes the myths of Camelot and the Round Table, and Derfel tries to tell instead the historical truth.

Arthur is fastidious, gaunt, neither ugly nor handsome, but has a "singular face," long, bony, and strong. He looks thoughtful at rest and animated in conversation. He is 30 and clean-shaven as the novel opens. He is good at fighting but prefers peace because battle is so uncertain. He idealizes good order, and uses careful diplomacy whenever possible.

Arthur not superstitious or religious. He carries his beliefs lightly and does not bother with others' beliefs. Arthur does not approve of the Druid Merlin's calls to fight the spreading Christians and dismisses the legend of the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn, for which Merlin quests. Arthur does not know that his sword, Excalibur, is Rhydderch's sword, one of the twelve Treasures of Britain that Merlin is recovering. Arthur will not provide troops for seeking the Cauldron because he is raising a great army from all over Britain to drive the Saxons from the eastern lands. Arthur's horse is Llamrei.

Arthur marries beautiful, intelligent Guinevere after breaking an engagement to Princess Ceinwyn of Powys. Arthur decides to marry Ceinwyn to King Lancelot in order to solidify his power, but Ceinwyn runs off with Derfel, just as Arthur had with Guinevere. Arthur feigns anger but is pleased for them and keeps Derfel as his right hand man. They have one child together (he has two grown sons, Amhar and Loholt, by mistresses Ailleann, who honor neither of their parents) and Ceinwyn wonders why they have no more. Arthur seems lonely as Guinevere increasingly concentrates on her Goddess, Isis. He spends most of his time campaigning and running the King's Council.

When King Mordred comes of age, he orders Arthur and Derfel to capture the man who long ago causes his mother's death. They are suspicious why two top lords would be sent on such a simple mission, but obey. It is an ambush, which fails, but the militant Christians use it to blacken Arthur's reputation as the "Enemy of God." Rumors spread that Arthur is dead and that Mordred has also died in a hunting accident. This opens the way for Lancelot to claim the throne of Dumnonia in concord with Guinevere. Arthur returns to learn that Guinevere is held prisoner at the Sea Palace, mounts a commando raid on it, and discovers the terrible truth about her lovers under the guise of worshipping Isis. He is emotionally destroyed but eventually rallies to humiliate Lancelot. He refuses to allow Guinevere to leave Britain and becomes the de facto king, allowing Mordred only the title and royal privileges. Having long refused the crown, Arthur is in fact Emperor, controlling all of the crowned heads of Britain.

Ceinwyn

The Princess of Powys and sister of King Cuneglas, the lovely Ceinwyn, nicknamed "Seren" (Star) for her "pale, silvery beauty," is the life partner (but never wife) of narrator Derfel Cadarn. Ceinwyn is of average height, has a slight build, slender almost to the



point of fragility—an illusion—demure, sweet faced, with blue eyes. Early in life she is a dutiful daughter, allowing herself to be betrothed four times for political reasons. Her first betrothal is to Arthur, who abandons her at the betrothal banquet for Guinevere whom he sees in the crowd, which leads to war. She is then betrothed to the sullen Caelgyn of Rheged, but he dies of the fever; then to Gundleus, who is killed in battle, and finally to Lancelot, who would treat her as just another possession. Having heard from the priestess Maesmwyd about being asked to marry by someone who will end up marrying the dead instead, Ceinwyn is disposed never to marry.

Ceinwyn first meets Derfel when Derfel and Galahad visit her father on a failed mission of peace. Derfel promises to be her protector and she gives him a locket. After the Battle of Lugg Vale, Arthur renews his plan to betroth Ceinwyn to Lancelot, but she chooses Derfel instead. They go off together to live happily in seclusion in Cwm Isaf until the Druid Merlin and his priestess Nimue recruit them for their quest for the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn. Ceinwyn has remained a virgin because only a virgin can "see" its location. After the mission, they return to Cwm Isaf, where Ceinwyn enjoys domestic chores, constantly spinning her distaff, and ineptly killing chickens. Although Merlin thinks her too skinny in the hips to bear children, Ceinwyn becomes pregnant just before Arthur calls Derfel off to war and she moves to her brother's palace for safety.

After the war, Derfel is named guardian to the underage King Mordred and they move with him to Lindinis. Ceinwyn bears five children, but only the girls, Morwenna, Seren, and Dian, survive. Mordred is a dreadful burden, and after his acclamation, he evicts them to Ermid's Hall. In a complex plot against Arthur, Derfel, and Mordred, Lancelot surrounds Ermid's Hall and demands that Ceinwyn come to him, naked, as revenge for breaking their engagement. During the rescue, youngest daughter Dian is murdered, setting up vengeance at the Sea Palace. Long after the events of the novel, Derfel as an aged widower and Christian monk preserves Ceinwyn's locked and memories of a wonderful woman.

Merlin of Avalon

The chief Druid of the Kingdom of Dumnonia, Merlin is a "cajoling, lecturing, grumbling, and mocking" sort of fellow in old age. He has long white hair drawn back from his Druid tonsure and plaited, tied with black ribbon. His long beard is likewise plaited and bound. His face is as dark as Roman chestnuts, deeply lined, long, and bemused when he is up to mischief. Merlin loves riddles. He has spent his life gathering the twelve lost Treasures of Britain in order to restore Britain to its rightful Gods. As the novel begins, Merlin has found ten including Excalibur, the sword he has entrusted to Arthur for good luck without Arthur's knowing its origin. Merlin has replaced as his close associate and priestess Morgan, Arthur's sister, with Nimue.

The first part of the novel is largely devoted to the quest for the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn, the greatest of the Treasures. In preparation, Merlin and Nimue go to Cadair Idris to offer a human sacrifice in the old manner. If Merlin fails to find the Cauldron, he will die and the "shadow-soul" of the sacrificial victim claims his soul forever. They



recruit narrator Derfel Cadarn and his new partner (but not wife), Princess Ceinwyn, and a small troop. Ceinwyn is preserving her virginity, for only a virgin can "see" where the Cauldron is hidden for 400 years. As soon as they set foot on the Dark Path, Merlin's health and strength begin to fail. Soon he has to be dragged on a litter and Nimue takes command. By the time they reach Llyn Cerrig Bach ("Lake of Little Stones") on sacred Ynys Mon Island, Merlin appears to be dead. He is placed in the unearthed Cauldron and covered with furs, and surprisingly returns to full health, with an obsession about cheese.

Later in the novel, Merlin suffers two setbacks. First the Saxon King Cerdic cuts off a portion of his beard, a massive violation, and then a fire apparently destroys the Tor and all of the Treasures it contains. While he does not believe the Cauldron is gone (not having found gold in the embers), Merlin withdraws from life, becoming a man slowly dying, who mostly plays with cats. He believes that when someone untrained uses the Cauldron, it will spill horror across Britain, letting him reclaim it. Merlin snaps out of it again towards the end of the novel and recovers all of the treasures, but there is no indication of what he does with them afterwards.

Aelle and Cerdic

Rival kings over the hordes of Saxons constantly invading eastern Britain, Aelle rules the environs of London and northward, while Cerdic rules the southeast corner. They hate one another.

Aelle is a tall, broad-chested man with a flat, hard face and dark eyes. His face and hands show battle damage. He wears a bearskin robe over his armor. He is older than Cerdic, richer, stronger, and more famous, calling himself the "Bretwalda" (Ruler of Britain). Late in the novel, the narrator, Derfel Cadarn, who has sworn to kill Aelle, learns that Aelle is his father. No one is surprised, having seen the obvious physical resemblance.

Cerdic by comparison is a short, slight man with thin hair combed straight back into a knot. He has a broad forehead, narrow, shaved chin, thin lips, sharp nose, and pale eyes. Cerdic possesses great self-control. Cerdic becomes an ally of King Lancelot, without Arthur's knowledge or permission. Because of it, Arthur reaches a truce with Aelle, which frees Arthur to promote the peace of Camelot in Briton, while Aelle and Cerdic fight. A secret agreement gives Lancelot the throne of the Belgic Lands.

Ailleann, Amhar, and Loholt

One of Arthur's mistresses, Ailleann is mother to his twin sons, Amhar and Loholt, who badly mistreat her. At the end of the novel, Arthur cuts off Loholt's right hand for having dared to rebel against him and then sets him free. The twins, who adore Lancelot, are spoiled, tempestuous, selfish, greedy, resentful of their parentage, and despicable.



Cadoc

A Christian bishop and recluse, Cadoc defies Arthur by hiding the runaway Ligessac. Called a saint, Cadoc's behavior is unsaintly when he draws a line in the mud against which the pagans may not advance and curses the enemy when he is thumped on the forehead and knocked down in lieu of being killed for raising his sword against Arthur.

Culhwch

Arthur's cousin, Culhwch serves as one of his warriors. For a while he is the underage King Mordred's guardian but takes little interest in the nasty boy, being preoccupied with suppressing a revolt that starts in Cadwy of Isca. Culhwch discovers letters from the Christians describing how God ostensibly was leading Arthur to defeat at Lugg Vale and plotting in his absence to kill Mordred and submit to Gorfyddyd. Several Christians are martyred in retribution. Culhwch is a "vulgar, funny, cheerful, bigoted, ignorant, and coarse" person, and a superior man to fight alongside. He has three wives, all pregnant and fighting one another. As Mordred's guardian, Culhwch beats the "little bastard" bloody but fails to make him learn. He is glad when Arthur assigns the task to Derfel. Culhwch refuses to swear an oath of allegiance to Mordred when he comes of age, but backs down from the required fight to the death with Derfel, Mordred's champion. He gives his allegiance instead to King Cuneglas of Powys.

Cuneglas and Helledd

The King and Queen of Powys after the death of King Gorfyddyd at the Battle of Lugg Vale, Cuneglas is also brother to Ceinwyn, narrator Derfel Cadarn's companion. Cuneglas has a guileless young face with long, plaited mustaches. He has no reputation for fighting when he ascends the throne and talks on the day of his acclamation of peace between Powys and Dumnonia and the reclamation of the east from the Saxons. Cuneglas is a patient, sensible man, unlike his father. Helledd is a grumbler who, with her aunts, gossips about Ceinwyn and disapprove deeply of her actions. Cuneglas is lonely as king and visits often, becoming Derfel's close friend.

Dinas and Lavaine

Silurian Druids, Dinas and Lavaine are the identical twin sons of Tanaburs, whom narrator Derfel Cadarn kills after the Battle of Lugg Vale. The brothers serve the rebel Lancelot. Lavaine has a battle scar on his cheek. Both have deep, grating voices. After Lancelot's baptism, when they first meet Derfel, Dinas "magically" produces a thrush egg. Throughout the novel, Merlin and Nimue insist that Dinas and Lavaine are not true Druid, carefully trained and tested before being confirmed in the sacred office. They are capable, however, of some nasty tricks. They later insult Merlin by cutting off a piece of his beard to use in black magic. Later, they attempt to kidnap Derfel's wife Ceinwyn and Merlin, but are driven off by Derfel. As they flee, Lavaine slits Derfel's daughter's throat.



Finally, they are employed as guards at Guinevere's Sea Palace, where they also take part in the sexual rituals of Isis. For their treachery, they are brutally tortured on the beach at the Sea Palace by the Druid Nimue and dispatched by Derfel when there is little left to their bodies. They are left lying on their left sides on the beach as carrion.

Diwrnach

The Irish King of Lleyn, Diwrnach has a reputation for bloodthirstiness and ingenuity in his means of tortures. He forces his neighbors to provide 40 slaves a year as tribute, mostly young girls for whom he has a special appetite, believing that their tanned skin makes shields invincible. This earns his troops the name "Bloodshields." Middle-aged Diwrnach has a broad forehead, wide mouth, and a strong jawline, making him unexpectedly good-looking, despite one red eye. As Merlin and his party search for the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn on the sacred island of Ynys Mon, Diwrnach faces narrator Derfel Cadarn to trade threats of the horrible deaths that they will inflict on one another. Diwrnach launches attacks after it is clear that the unwanted visitors have found the Treasure but are repulsed. He contents himself to wait for them to leave their defensive position. Merlin conjures up a great fog and they elude capture.

Erce / Enna

Narrator Derfel Cadarn's mother, Erce is a Saxon slave by King Aelle. She is kidnapped by Tanaburs and believes that her son is stolen put to death as a sacrifice. Towards the end of the novel, Derfel searches for her, remembering a pretty, thin woman, and finds a great, slovenly hulk who does not believe the Derfel is her son Wygga. She appears to be suffering dementia but the name Tanaburs sparks a memory of handsome, kind Aelle. Derfel gives money to his half-sister, Linna, to buy their freedom and/or improve their lifestyle

Galahad

Fair haired and with a broad, strong face, the former Prince of Benoic, Galahad is an exemplary Christian who nevertheless remains loyal to Arthur and joins Merlin's quest for the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn. Galahad's half-brother, Lancelot, leads the rebellion. Having killed the Druid Tanaburs, Galahad is under the curse of his twin grandsons who serve Lancelot. Galahad never marries, but keeps busy as Arthur's envoy, traveling, mediating, and trying to keep the Brotherhood of Britain alive.

Guinevere

Arthur's beautiful, intelligent, frustrated wife, Guinevere is a princess of lost Henis Wyren (Lleyn) currently ruled by the savage Irish King Diwrnach. She is penniless when Arthur sees her in the crowd attending his betrothal to Ceinwyn, Princess of Powys, and calls off the marriage. Guinevere dresses as a conqueror or goddess, highlighting her



"springing red hair." After the suppression of Cadwy's revolt, Guinevere undertake supervision of a grand new capital at Lindinis, from which anything ugly—including the deformed Mordred—is banished.

As a devotee of the Goddess Isis, Guinevere builds a great dark hall for devotions at Lindinis and provides a suite of rooms for Lancelot with help from his mother, Elaine. Finding Lindinis too far from Lancelot on the coast, Guinevere moves to the Sea Palace near the Belgic Lands, strips Lindinis, and decorates the new palace. She installs a temple to Isis where Dinas and Lavaine, the identical twin grandsons of Tanaburs, play Osiris to her Isis. Guinevere is used by Lancelot to obtain Arthur's oath of allegiance in his claim of Dumnonia. Arthur at the time does not know that Lancelot and Guinevere are lovers under the mask of religion. When Arthur sees it with his own eyes, he does not know what to do beyond kill all of the participants except Guinevere. He refuses her request to live abroad, preferring to keep her in Dumnonia.

Gundleus

A King of Siluria, Gundleus is killed the Battle of Lugg Vale by Nimue just before this novel opens, slowly as revenge for raping her and taking one of her eyes. Gundleus had earlier married Norwenna, mother of Mordred, and treacherously killed her at Merlin's hall and dream-tower as she knelt before him. Gundleus is often mentioned as Princess Ceinwyn's third unlucky fiancé.

Gwenhwyvach

Guinevere's sister, a former princess of lost Henis Wyren, Gwenhwyvach is as unattractive as her sibling is beautiful. Arthur proposes that the narrator Derfel Cadarn marry Gwenhwyvach, but he and his true love, Princess Ceinwyn, instead run off together. Guinevere detests her sister as graceless and boring, but wants to marry her off to get her out of her life. Gwenhwyvach becomes a recluse, serving her sister's whims, but admits Arthur's force to the Sea Palace to rescue his Guinevere and their son—only to find out that Guinevere is having sexual relations as part of the cult of Isis. The price of her cooperation is to be left alone at the Sea Palace with her dogs and bees.

Igraine

Igraine is the Queen of Powys, wife of King Brochvael, to whom the elderly Derfel Cadarn, by then a Christian monk, narrates this story. She is protector of the small monastery and conspires with Derfel to prevent Bishop Sansum from finding out that Derfel is talking about Arthur, the "Enemy of God."



Lancelot

The exiled King of Benoic in Gaul, Lancelot enjoys a reputation for bravery that has never been witnessed by his comrades in arms. The son of Queen Elaine and half-brother of Galahad, he is described as darkly handsome but also somehow "almost reptilian" in the face. He wears a helmet adorned with a pair of spread swan's wings. His device is a sea eagle clutching a fish in its talons. Christians see this as a sign of faith and deliverance. A narcissist, Lancelot collects mirrors. He never marries but has bastard son Peredur by Ade, who dies giving birth.

Lancelot and narrator Derfel Cadarn are mutual enemies, but both are friends of Arthur, who above all seeks peace. Arthur plans to marry Lancelot to Princess Ceinwyn, to gain Powys' support for Lancelot, with whom he expects no trouble. Without prior consultation with Arthur, Lancelot arranges a truce with the Saxon King Cerdic, which allows for the time of peace later called Camelot in Britain. Ceinwyn runs away from the engagement and lives her life with Derfel, intensifying their animosity.

A turning point comes when Arthur wants to enroll Lancelot in the cult of Mithras but Derfel and other members object. Lancelot therefore, converts to Christianity to make it a moot point. He then begins enlarging his territories, first reclaiming the lands of Benoic in Britain and, moving to assassinate Arthur, Derfel, and young, inept King Mordred. Not knowing that the coordinated plots have failed, Lancelot goes through a marriage ceremony with the long-dead Queen Norwenna in order to establish a claim to the throne of Dumnonia. His henchmen kill Derfel's youngest daughter and guard Arthur's wife and son from the Christian violence that his bishop encourages. Having the upper hand, Lancelot demands that Arthur swear an oath of loyalty. Instead, Arthur leads a successful commando raid that rescues Guinevere and reveals Lancelot's role in the cult of Isis. When Arthur demands that Lancelot personally fight for his honor, Lancelot slinks away.

Ligessac

The man who kills young King Mordred's mother, Ligessac flees to the wilds of Powys and is taken in by Bishop Cadoc. Mordred's order for Arthur and narrator Derfel Cadarn to arrest Ligessac is an attempt to eliminate them both. At the same time, King Lancelot intends to assassinate Mordred and take over the kingdom. Bishop Sansum of Dumnonia is the mastermind. In the end, Ligessac accepts his fate placidly, saying he is glad to meet God face-to-face. He is slowly strangled, much to Mordred's delight.

Mark, Tristan and Iseult

The Royal Family of Kernow is tragic. The King, 60-year-old Mark marries 15-year-old Iseult, and his 40-year-old son, Tristan, runs off with her to Isca, where Culhwch grants sanctuary. Mark has married eight young wives, each of whom mysteriously dies after four years of marriage. When Cyllan, the Champion of Kernow, arrives, demanding the



runaways' return, the narrator, Derfel Cadarn, argues to Arthur that Tristan has been a faithful friend and should be protected, but Arthur fixates on broken oaths, civil war, and border raids. Arthur informs Mark, who seen his son killed rapidly by the sword but burns Iseult to death slowly on the beach. Narrator Derfel Cadarn is so repulsed by Arthur's inhumanity that he avoids him for a long time and never fully forgives him for this act. Iseult's innocent beauty haunts him for the rest of his life.

Mordred

The King of Dumnonia, Mordred is the son of the slain Queen Norwenna and grandson of Uther, the late High King of Dumnonia. He is acclaimed king as a newborn, but is kept in guardianship until he comes of age. Mordred's first guardian is Nabur, a Christian magistrate who for joining the plot against him and Arthur is crucified. Mordred is next assigned to Culhwch, Arthur's cousin, who is too busy suppressing the revolt in Cadwy to be bothered with the boy. Finally, Mordred is entrusted to narrator Derfel Cadarn and his wife, Ceinwyn. All of his caretakers consider him a "little bastard" and resort to beatings when he will not listen. Mordred limps with a twisted left foot and has odd hair that earns him the nickname "Brush-Head." As a youngster he enjoys tormenting and torturing others; as a teenager he advances to rape and assault. Everyone argues that he is unfit to rule, but Arthur (and Derfel) hope that the weight of responsibility will improve him.

Instead, Mordred orders Arthur and Derfel to find and arrest the man who causes his mother's death. It turns out that he is being steered by Bishop Sansum, his chaplain, who wants the two men to be murdered by Christian extremists and Mordred eliminated in what will appear a hunting accident. Mordred is not at the ambush site because he is wenching and partying in another town on a whim. When he hears rumors of his murder—and is pursued by the rape victim's father—Mordred flees incognito and is found by Galahad. As details of the plot emerge it becomes clear that Mordred will not keep his oath to protect his kingdom, and Arthur on behalf of the Council declares that Mordred will enjoy royal honors but no power.

Morgan

Arthur's elder sister, Morgan serves as the Druid Merlin's chief priestess before he turns to Nimue. At some point before the novel grossly disfigured in a fire that leaves her having to wear a golden mask and completely cloak her body. She is close friends with the wily Bishop Sansum, a factor which saves Sansum's life during retribution or the revolt in Cadwy.

Morgan shocks Arthur and his band by converting to Christianity, marrying Sansum, and forming a holy sisterhood. She adopts a new gold mask adorned with a Christian cross. As a Christian she remains shrewish and bitter. She defends her husband's participation in assassinations and a morbid marriage as forced by higher powers. She perhaps is kept in the dark that Sansum is the mastermind of coordinated assassination attempts.



She also steals the Treasures of Britain from Merlin and covers it with arson. Her object is to reconcile with her sister-in-law Guinevere.

Nimue

The Druid Merlin's lover and chief priestess after he drops Arthur's sister, Morgan, Nimue is the childhood playmate and later lover of narrator Derfel Cadarn, and at the time of the novel still owes her a life-oath. Nimue is missing one eye, plucked out by King Gundleus while raping her. At the Battle of Lugg Vale, just before this novel opens, Nimue kills Gundleus slowly in revenge. As the novel begins, she wears a golden orb in the shrunken socket, but later, when she wants to horrify people, she leaves the socket open.

Nimue is thin with black hair tied back. She normally shrouds herself in a vast black cloak. She is "dark and intense and forever trembling on the narrow divide between madness and anger." She has earlier been committed to the Isle of the Dead, fifth-century Briton's version of an insane asylum. She uses a "charm of concealment" early in the novel to get the searchers for the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn in dreaded Diwrnach's territory and later to get Arthur's commando force to the Sea Palace. In the first exploit, she takes over leadership when Merlin comes close to death.

After the battle near London, as Merlin declines in health again and moves away, Nimue lets herself go, hocking her gold eye, ceasing to bathe, and living in a hut with a "mephitic stench" from rending the miscellaneous "objects of cultic power" that she collects. Merlin convinces her to clean herself up for the final attack on the power of Isis. Nimue takes charge of torturing and flaying the Druid twins Dinas and Lavaine for insulting Merlin and killing Derfel's daughter. She makes it last an exquisitely long time.

Oengus Mac Airem

The Irish King of Demetia, Oengus changes sides in the Battle of Lugg Vale, giving Arthur victory. In return, he demands a share of slaves and wealth from dead King Gundeleus' kingdom. Arthur grants him 100 slaves and a third of the treasury, knowing he will take more. Oengus appreciates narrator Derfel Cadarn's efforts to save the live of his daughter, Iseult, when King Mark of Kernow demands her execution for running away with his son, Prince Tristan. Oengus scarcely remembers which one she is and considers marrying another off to King Lancelot to solidify an alliance.

Sagramor and Malla

Arthur's Numidian commander, Sagramor is Lord of the Stones (Stonehenge). He has a great, chilling stillness in battle, the opposite of restless Arthur. At Arthur's Council of War, Sagramor in atrocious English (Numidia is the region of Algiers in Northwest Africa) opposes Prince Meurig's proposal of alliance with the weaker Saxon king to make common cause against the stronger. For Sagramor, it is a matter of honor. Sagramor



has a reputation as fearsome as he looks: tall, very thin, fast, long-faced, scarred by war, perpetual scow that hides a droll, generous character. He is a great story teller. Sagramor initiates narrator Derfel Cadarn into Mithras and fights beside him at Lugg Vale.

Malla is Sagramor's Saxon woman, tall, muscular, flat-faced, with golden hair. She is alluring but not attractive, slow, robust, and as taciturn as Sagramor. Arthur sends her into London to convince Aelle that the Britons facing him are vulnerably weak.

Sansum

The Bishop of Dumnonia, Sansum has two roles in the novel, first as an illiterate, power-hungry young cleric, and second, in old age, as the narrator Derfel Cadarn's superior when Derfel converts to Christianity and becomes a monk. Derfel pretends to be translating gospels into Saxon when, in fact, he is narrating his life's story for Queen Igraine, Sansum's patroness. Sansum is a skinflint about fuel during the cold winters and kidney stones make him crankier than ever. In both he is called behind his back "the "mouse lord" because of tufts of hair that stand up

Sansum comes from Gwent, a Christian kingdom. The son of a tanner, he rises in the priesthood under Tewdric, gains prominence by marrying Arthur and Guinevere as they flee from Caer Sws. He becomes a bishop and Mordred's chaplain, but loses the latter position by conspiring with Nabur and Melwas against Arthur. Saving Lancelot from humiliation over Mithras by baptizing him in the river earns Guinevere's gratitude but not admission to Dumnonia's Council. Taking in marriage Arthur's sister Morgan, the pagan priestess, does gain him a seat however, the position of Bishop of Lindinis, and restoration as Mordred's chaplain. He has, since the Cadwy fiasco, been guardian of the shrine of the Holy Thorn at Ynys Wydryn, where he confronts Merlin and the pagans.

Sansum masterminds the assassination of Arthur and Defel by Christian fanatics and murder of King Mordred. Both fail and he disappears. Morgan claims he is a dupe of other powers. He encourages Christian fanaticism, never misses an opportunity to preach the virtues of Christianity and perdition of paganism and is very skilled at "haranguing" God for his own purposes.

Tewdric, Meurig, and Agricola

The Christian King of Gwent, Tewdric is Arthur's ally but fails to send troops to the Battle of Lugg Vale, believing defeat is inevitable. Arthur goes to him after victory to request men for a great war to expel the Saxons. Before this campaign, however, Tewdric suffers a fistula of the groin. His son, the Edling Meurig, takes titular command, but severe old Agricola actually runs the army, which dresses in Roman style. Agricola is a follower of Mithras and has no use for Lancelot.

Simpering Meurig inherits his intelligence but none of his wisdom. He is short, pale, and thin, a famed opponent of the Pelagian heresy, an expert genealogist, a great



rhetorician, and the prime reason for Gwent staying out of the Battle of Lugg Vale. At Arthur's Council of War, Meurig, who dresses in Roman toga and cross, proposes an alliance with the Saxon King Cerdic in order to divide and conquer. When Lancelot moves to seize power in Dumnonia, Meurig is the only royal to refuse to fight him.

Tewdric finally abdicates in favor of Meurig and becomes a Christian recluse in the Wye Valley, living with his grumbling wife, Queen Enid.



Objects/Places

The Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn

Britain's greatest treasure, the Cauldron disappears 500 years before this novel takes place, and the Druid Merlin's purpose in life is to collect the treasures and restore Britain to its rightful Gods. Arthur doubts that the Cauldron survives the Roman occupation and cannot spare men to search. Wider in diameter than a man's outstretched arms and as deep as the blade of a hunting knife, the Cauldron is made of silver and gold. It has three golden hoops at the rim for hanging over a fire. Warriors, Gods, and deer are used for decoration. It is buried and hidden by the last three surviving Druids when the Romans take the island. Merlin is nearly dead when his companions find the Cauldron and lay him in it, covered with skins, but it restores him.

Later, the Cauldron is stolen when vandals burn down Merlin's center, the Tors. He knows it survives because he finds no melted gold in the ashes. He is also certain that when the thief tries to use the Cauldron without his specific knowledge, it will loose a torrent of blood on Britain. As the Christians battle pagans, Merlin is sure that this is why. The Cauldron shows up in Guinevere's Sea Palace, where it sits on a pedestal in the innermost sanctuary of her shrine to the Goddess Isis. Guinevere bathes in it regularly and stops aging. Merlin takes control of the Cauldron and the other Treasures.

Cwm Isaf

The "Lower Valley" northeast of Dolforwyn in Powys, Cwm Isaf is where narrator Derfel Cadarn and his partner Ceinwyn after their elopement and before setting off on the Dark Road with Merlin. They live in a small three-room stone house with a thick thatched roof, surrounded by fields of apple trees. Derfel's remaining 20 men and their families live in huts among the trees. The farm had belonged to Ceinwyn's father, King Gorfyddyd. They always remember that home fondly and wish they could return to its simplicity.

Dinnewrac

A fictional monastery in Powys, Dinnewrac is where the elder pagan warrior Derfel Cadarn, the novel's narrator, becomes a monk and records on parchments stories of Arthur. The monastery's superior, Bishop Sansum, had been an ardent foe of Arthur, and would forbid the work if he did not think that the Monk Derfel is writing a Saxon gospel for Queen Igraine, the monastery's patroness.



Dumnonia

The dominant Kingdom on the peninsula in modern day southwest England, Dumnonia is home to many of the major events in the novel because Uther, the late High King of Dumnonia, has no living son and, while some would argue Arthur should inherit, he serves loyally as the de facto leader on behalf of the minor Mordred. The Romans build roads, forts, towns, and villas in Dumnonia, and Christianity has made deep inroads into the old religion, building churches over Druid groves and holy wells to provoke them. Bishop Sansum encourages missionary activities and the outright persecution of pagans. Mordred matures and is acclaimed as king in his own right but is so unsatisfactory that an assassination attempt is made on him. Neighboring King Lancelot marries Mordred's late mother in an attempt to claim the throne. Eventually Arthur agrees to depose Mordred from practical rule.

Ermid's Hall

Near Street, Somerset, England, Ermid's Hall is the fortress to which narrator Derfel Cadarn and his partner Ceinwyn move after being evicted by King Mordred from Lindinis. While Arthur and Derfel are ordered away to facilitate Lancelot's coup d'etat against Mordred, his wife and daughters are held prisoner in Ermid's Hall. During the rescue, Dian is murdered, setting up vengeance that ends in the brutal killing of the Druids Dinas and Lavaine at the Sea Palace.

Gwent

A kingdom lying southeast of the Powys, Gwent is ruled by Christian kings who restrain their subjects from the ecstatic practices that plague Dumnonia. King Tewdric is Arthur's ally but fails to send troops to the Battle of Lugg Vale, believing defeat is inevitable. Arthur goes to him after victory to request men for a great war to expel the Saxons. Before this campaign, however, his son, the Edling Meurig, takes titular command, but severe old Agricola actually runs the army, which dresses in Roman style. Meurig refuses to fight Lancelot when he tries to usurp power in Dumnonia. His father retires to a monastery, glad that the burdens of governing are gone.

Kernow

The claw-like tip of the peninsula separating the Western Sea from the English Channel, Kernow (modern Cornwall) is ruled by King Mark, a dirty old man who goes through a series of young brides at a rate of one every four years. He pursues his son, Prince Tristan and latest wife, Queen Iseult, who have run away together, and demands their execution.



Lindinis

Arthur's new capital of Dumnonia, Lindinis is adorned with a gorgeous new palace built under Guinevere's supervision. She tires of it when she wants to be closer to her clandestine lover, Lancelot, who lives on the southern coast.

Lloegyr

The Eastern portion of Britain occupied by the Saxons, Lloegyr forms the "Lost Lands" that center on London. Arthur's goal is to unite all of Britain to fight a war of liberation for Lloegyr.

London

Called by the Romans Londinium and before that Londo, London is "a wild place" to Britons and the goal of Arthur's thrust against the Saxon occupiers. The once-great city is decaying. The British inhabitants are cowed and few. Still, to British troops used to the countryside, it is a marvelous place to see. A crucial battle between united Britons and Aelle's Saxons takes place within view of London. Aelle is replaced by his rival, Cerdic, who intends to hold on to London.

Lugg Vale

Now known as Mortimer's cross, Hereford and Worcester, Lugg Vale is the site of a major battle that occurs just prior to this novel. The alliances and deaths that occur prior to and during that battle set up the book's conflicts. Arthur wants never to go back to the divisiveness that marks pre-Lugg Vale Britain.

The Otherworld

The afterlife imagined by Druids, British pagans, the Otherworld has apple trees and a great table of food under the four-towered Annwn. One reaches it by crossing the "sword bridge." Narrator Derfel Cadarn, as an aged Christian monk, looks back on his old pagan comrades and longs more to be with them in the Otherworld than enjoying the Christian heaven—and believes his sins will consign him to the Christian hell. When his youngest daughter is murdered, Druid Merlin assures Derfel and his wife that children play happily in the Otherworld.

Powys

A kingdom extending through the hinterlands of modern Wales and England, Powys lies north of the coastal kingdoms of Demetia, Siluria, and Gwent. Powys is only lightly touched by the Roman occupation. Its capital, Caer Sws, is a Roman fort, but there are



fewer roads, villas, or towns than in Dumnonia. The old Gods have survived and Christianity has made few inroads. Powys' most sacred place is the summit of Dolforwyn, a four-hour walk from Caer Sws. There, the late King Gorfyddydd is cremated and his son, Cuneglas, is acclaimed king at a sacred circle of stones. Ratae, a great fortress on the eastern frontier, falls to the Saxons, a victim to Arthur's politicking to win that crucial Battle of Lugg Vale. Powys' chief Druid is Iorweth. Its Princess, Ceinwyn, is set up for a series of political marriages culminating in Lancelot of Siluria, but she elopes instead with narrator Derfel Cadarn, intensifying the hostility between the two men.

Siluria

The southern coastal region of Powys, Siluria lies between Demetia and Gwent on the Severn Sea. After the Battle of Lugg Vale, Arthur promises Siluria's throne to Lancelot, although he would have preferred to divide it between Gwent and Powys. The Druid Merlin considers Siluria wretched: "grubby valleys, stony beaches and ugly people" blackened from burning coal and apparently not knowing how to wash. Lancelot is, predictably, not satisfied ruling just Siluria and wrangles his way into ruling the Belgic Lands, and then focuses on Dumnonia.

The Stones

Stonehenge is mentioned several times in the novel. It is guarded by Arthur's Numidian commander, Sagamor. Near the end of the novel, the Druid Nimue senses that the magic in the stones is waning, requiring the restoration of the powerful Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn.

The Tor / Ynys Wydryn

Ynys Wydryn is the modern Glastonbury, Somerset, the site of the Druid Merlin's tower in which he hides the Treasures of Britain including the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn. The Bishop Sansum sets up a rival sanctuary and Christians harass the pagans even after the tower burns down and all artifacts disappear. The bizarre marriage of King Lancelot and the long-dead Queen Norweena takes place in Ynys Wydryn.

Ynys Mon

An island off the coast of northwest coast of Llyn in northern Wales, Ynys Mon is sacred to the Druids, considered like Rome and Jerusalem combined for Christians. It is where the Gods come down to earth. Llyn Cerrig Bach ("Lake of Little Stones") is the most sacred part of the island, so there that the Druids Merlin and Nimue and a party go searching for the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn, lost during the Roman conquest. The island would be a rich agricultural region if the people were left to farm, but their King, Diwrnach, is a grim, bloodthirsty tyrant.



Themes

Religion

Religion is woven throughout *Enemy of God*, as the title would suggest. Traditional Druidism and Christianity have locked horns in a fight to the death. Isis and Mithraism, also introduced to the island by the Roman occupiers centuries before have smaller followings. Arthur believes in live and let live, but this is strictly a minority view. The Druids, voiced by Merlin, want him to massacre the Christians before they get more dangerous, and the Christians feel obliged to convert all pagans before the expected Second Coming of Christ, which most are sure will occur in a few years, in AD 500. Because the unconverted, even if virtuous, will be consigned to hell without baptism, any means bringing about conversion—including violence—is an act of love. A more elevated vision of human nature, Pelagianism, is mentioned but gets no play. Arthur suggests that if he were to convert, he would be a Pelagian, because he believes more in human beings than in God(s). Most British Christians pray and then behave as badly as they like. Christians use the sign of the cross as Druids using spitting and touching iron to ward off evil. The new faith appears to be a thin veneer.

The Druids are in a crisis of faith. Merlin explains the myth of how the twelve tribes once have one God and the Gods give each tribe a Treasure by which to summon them. Civil war leads to additional Gods invading and the original British Gods wash their hands of the situation. Merlin spends his life collecting the Treasures, hidden from the Roman invaders, and manages to rescue the most important, the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn, which is sure to bring about a renaissance. With a touch of irony, when the Cauldron is recovered a second time, a renegade Druid dangles a fragment of the True Cross over it, assuming that if they touch something on the order of a nuclear blast will occur.

Oaths

Oaths are to Arthur the linchpin of civilization. Without them, there is necessarily chaos. One may fail to fulfill an oath promptly, circumstances may make ever fulfilling it unlikely or impossible, but an oath can never be simply broken with impunity. It resembles the "Domino Theory"—once a subversive movement gains a toehold, nothing can stop its total victory. The worst example of this theory comes when Prince Tristan runs away with the latest of his father Mark's teenage brides, Iseult. Everyone knows that Mark's wives die mysteriously after four years and he takes a new one. Tristan and Iseult are blinded by love. They ask and receive sanctuary from King Culwhch, Mark demands them back, and Derfel argues that Tristan, not Mark, has been a true friend to the rest of Britain. Arthur, however, fixates on broken oaths and possible civil war and border raids. Arthur dramatically appeals to the Gods to let things change, but watches as the lovers die. Arthur has no oath to Mark, but Tristan and Iseult have, so it must be honored. Otherwise, all is chaos.



Derfel knows that Arthur is also thinking about the underage King Mordred to whom they have both sworn loyalty as a baby and are responsible to training to assume full royal power. The boy has shown no aptitude or inclination for learning, is surly with everyone, and graduates from cruel childhood pranks to assault and rape. Because of the oath, Arthur hopes that Mordred will grow into responsibility. Only a series of crises inspire him to find a legal loophole, allowing Mordred to be limited to royal treatment but no hand in government. His Council—meaning its leader, Arthur—assumes practical power. The oath is circumvented but chaos does not ensue.

Marriage

Various views of marriage obtain in *Enemy of God*. The royal half-brothers Lancelot and Galahad never marry, but Lancelot has an illegitimate son and comes close to becoming betrothed to Princess Ceinwyn of Powys. Arthur earlier is betrothed to Ceinwyn, but abandons her for Guinevere, whom he sees in the crowd at the betrothal banquet. Arthur falls deeply in love forever. Guinevere bears one son and turns her interests to the Goddess Isis. Because of sexual nature of the cult, this leads to promiscuity to which Arthur alone is blind. All wonder why Arthur and Guinevere have no more children.

Arthur envies narrator Derfel Cadarn's non-marriage to Ceinwyn, which is based on an easy friendship as well as sex. They have five children together, of whom three survive. Ceinwyn refuses to marry because she has been the dutiful daughter accepting four proposals for political reasons. She hears a sorcerer's prophecy that convinces her never to marry. She hates the ox's halter that brides must carry into the betrothal as a sign of their wifely submission. She and Derfel agree that that will not be her role and they live an idyllic life together.

Other marriages depicted in *Enemy of God* are bizarre. Crafty Bishop Sansum marries Arthur's disfigured sister, a Druid priestess, Morgan (after baptizing her). King Mark of Kernow marries one beautiful teenage girl after another and each mysteriously dies after just four years. When his son falls in love with the last bride, Iseult, Mark hunts then down and insists on both their deaths. He fortunately dies before he can marry another victim. Derfel later in the story meets Iseult's father, King Oengus Mac Airem, who thanks Derfel for trying to protect Iseult, and considers marrying another daughter, Argante, to Mordred to form an alliance. He claims to have too many daughters to picture Iseult. The worst travesty of marriage comes when Lancelot "marries" the decomposed remains of Queen Norwenna, which have to be staked upright for the ceremony. This Lancelot and Bishop Sansum, who officiates, will establish a claim to the throne of Dumnonia.



Style

Point of View

Enemy of God is told as a memoir by an aged Christian monk, Derfel Cadarn. Derfel is a contemporary of Arthur, the so-called "Enemy of God," and indeed serves as his right-hand man in war. He writes as a key figure in the great drama of late fifth-century Britain, employing the first-person past tense, and frequently quoting prodigious amounts of dialog. Derfel resents Arthur being dubbed an "Enemy of God" and spends a good deal of time showing how as a pagan, Arthur shows only toleration to Christians. In return, Christians defile him and taunt all "non-believers" that they will inevitably go to hell. As a Christian this harsh attitude is hurtful. At one point Derfel has to admit to himself that while writing his stories, he feels less Christian than before and several times slips up, swearing by the Gods rather than the Christians' one true God. Still, he considers his conversion sincere, although he does not mention how or when it might have come about. He writes throughout with great nostalgia and sympathy for his former faith.

The novel's point of view is distorted by the fact that Monk Derfel at the beginning of each of the four parts into which it is divided, interacts with Queen Igraine, the young wife of King Brochvael of Powys, who is the protector of the small monastery. He knows that she wants to hear the same romantic pablum that is being sung by the minstrels but hopes that what he writes in the Saxon language is not being twisted during translation into English. He also is forced to interact with Bishop Sansum, the old and cranky superior in the monastery with whom as an impudent young pagan warrior Derfel had often clashed. Sansum would like nothing better than to catch Derfel in some heresy for which he could burn him at the stake. Even as he is interacting with these people contemporary to his old age, he is suggesting to unseen readers his feelings about the present and the more precious past. After a few pages, Monk Derfel settles back into straight narration, in which he seems to lose himself as Lord Derfel, warrior.

Setting

Enemy of God is set in England in the closing years of the fifth Christian century. The timing is particularly important because "millennialism" is rampant. Based on the Book of Revelation (chapter 20), this doctrine holds that Satan will be bound for a thousand years and Jesus Christ will return to earth to resurrect those who have not worshiped the Beast. They enjoy a thousand years reigning with Christ before the final judgment. British Christians are shown in this novel cleansing Britain of paganism, sure that Jesus will return in AD 500. A bishop comments that the fervor will lag if this does not happen, and resume in AD 999.

As for places, the action is spread across most of southwest England and Wales. The maps on the end pages are invaluable in keeping track of all the place names.



Dumnonia is the dominant kingdom, home to Arthur, narrator Derfel Cadarn, and the underage King Mordred. Arthur's Druid Merlin and Bishop Sansum operate in this kingdom. At the tip of the peninsula to the west lies the Kingdom of Kernow and at the eastern end is an enclave of exiles from Normandy, the Belgic Lands. Close by that border stands Sea Palace, site of a dramatic confrontation between Arthur and Guinevere and the forces of King Lancelot.

Lancelot also reigns in Siluria, the middlemost of three kingdoms bordering the Severn Sea in present-day Wales: Demetia, Siluria, and Gwent. Gwent is the only Christian kingdom in which believers are not crazed. North of these stretches Powys, ruled by Arthur's staunchest ally, Cuneglas, whose sister becomes Derfel's life partner. North of Powys lie Gwynedd and Lleyn. The sacred island of Ynys Mon lies off the coast of Lleyn. These territories provide the setting for much of the first part of the novel, ending with the finding of the powerful Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn.

Finally, to the east lie the "lost lands" of Lloegyr, centering on London. These have been captured by Saxon tribes crossing the German Sea. This immigration is continual, and Arthur's goal is to unite all Britons in throwing the Saxons out. In this novel, the two feuding Saxon kings, Aelle and Cerdic, are neutralized by a peace treaty, allowing the so-called "Camelot" to flourish.

Language and Meaning

Bernard Cornwell masterfully depicts life in late fifth-century Britain. He captures delightfully the fauna, flora, geography, and weather that form the British people. He also describes in graphic detail the horrors of early medieval warfare, capturing how the men arm and armor themselves, the tactics they have learned from the hated Roman Legions who have come and gone from their island. He imparts the beliefs of the Druids about the Otherworld, how warriors pass over on swords, and the pleasures they enjoy. He shows life at court and in the squalid villages. In his brief afterword, Cornwell says that he retains most personal and place names in Welsh in order to deepen the mood of the narrative.

Cornwell uses a narrator, a participant in the crucial events of what later is labeled "Camelot." Derfel Cadarn is Arthur's right-hand man. He is born a Saxon but is stolen by Druids as a young boy, offered as a sacrifice, but survives. He is taken in by the great Druid Merlin and grows up with his future priestess Nimue. The Saxon boy identifies fully with British life and becomes a true Briton. He accepts the British Gods, with all the superstitious gestures and utterances. The key to the novel is that this great warrior of the so-called "Round Table" late in life becomes a Christian monk and is commissioned by the current Queen of Powys, Igraine, to tell of his adventures with Arthur. The old monk writes in Saxon to avoid censure by his superior, Bishop Sansum, who is also a major figure in the era about which Derfel writes. Derfel worries that translators into English will turn his historic truth into legends.



The Monk Derfel wants to show that Arthur does not deserve the title "Enemy of God." He also seems eager to point out how the Christians of that earlier time are incredibly unchristian in their behavior, trying to cleanse Britain of any trace of paganism before Christ returns, as they are sure he will, in AD 500. The Monk Derfel's determination to make clear all he has lived through, knowing what Queen Igraine wants to hear, forces him to write with great clarity and precision, which also benefits the present-day reader.

Structure

Barnard Cornwell's *Enemy of God* is the second novel in the Warlord series. The Foreword summarizes the preceding volume, *The Winter King*. It is concise and dense to the point of confusion, but brings the reader up to the Battle of Lugg Vale. It is followed by an extensive list of characters and places, which are nominally helpful. By contrast, the details maps on the end pages are invaluable references to the myriad of places. Following the novel is a brief "Author's Note" in which Cornwell talks about how he manipulates the Arthurian legends and why he has chosen to retain the awkward Welsh personal and place names for mood.

The body of the novel consists of four numbered and titled parts: 1) "The Dark Road," 2) "The Broken War," 3) "Camelot," and 4) "The Mysteries of Isis." Each of these is broken into unnumbered and untitled chapters. Each part begins with the aged Monk Derfel Cadarn, long ago Arthur's right-hand man in the thick of the events he narrates, talking about his writing project and interacting with his delightful patron, Queen Igraine, and sometimes with his cranky superior, Bishop Sansum, the only other survivor of those times. After he talks a while with Igraine and answers direct questions, he slips back into reverie and describes.

The novel generally proceeds in chronological order, but Derfel regularly pauses to explain the relevant past: the Roman conquest and occupation, the twelve Treasures of Britain and ultimately powerful Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn, which are hidden from the Romans and are being reassembled by the Druid Merlin in an effort to attract the British Gods back to battle the encroaching Christians. He fills in information on the major characters, including himself.

"The Dark Road" establishes that Arthur is rallying the kings of Britain to expel the Saxons. It takes its name from Merlin's nearly fatal quest for the Cauldron. "The Broken War" depicts the march on London and Lancelot's treacherous separate peace treaty with Cerdic. "Camelot" shows Arthur making the best of the time of guaranteed peace to bring prosperity to Britain. Arthur has grave doubts about Mordred's fitness to rule but has given his oath. Allowing Tristan and Iseult to die over an oath shows how adamant Arthur is on this fundamental principal of society, and creates a wedge between Arthur and Derfel.

Finally, "The Mysteries of Isis" has Lancelot and Sansum conspiring to eliminate Arthur, Derfel, and Mordred in order for Lancelot to usurp the Kingdom of Dumnonia. Derfel learns of his Saxon ancestry, loses a beloved daughter, and accompanies Arthur on a



commando raid to release his wife and son from Lancelot's clutches. He learns that Guinevere and Lancelot are lovers, disguising it as devotion to the Goddess Isis. Lancelot is allowed to go away in shame but Guinevere cannot accompany him. Mordred is reduced to figurehead monarch and Arthur becomes de facto Emperor of Britain.



Quotes

" 'I want you to come with us to Ynys Mon,' he said, indicating Nimue, 'with us and a virgin.'

" 'A virgin?' I asked.

" 'Because only a virgin, Derfel, can find the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn. And none of us, I think, qualifies,' he added the last words sarcastically.

" 'And the Cauldron,' I said slowly, 'is on Ynys Mon.' Merlin nodded and I shuddered to think of such an errand. The Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn was one of the thirteen magical Treasures of Britain that had been dispersed when the Romans had laid waste Ynys Mon, and Merlin's final ambition of his long life was to reassemble the Treasures, but the Cauldron was his real prize. With the Cauldron, he claimed, he could control the Gods and destroy the Christians, and that was why, with a bitter tasting mouth and a belly rank with sourness, I was kneeling on a wet hilltop in Powys. 'My job,' I said to Merlin, 'is to fight the Saxons.'

" 'Fool!' Merlin snapped. 'The war against the Sais is lost unless we regain the Treasures.'

" 'Arthur doesn't agree.'

" 'Then Arthur is a fool as great as you. What do the Saxons matter, fool, if our Gods have deserted us?'" Part 1 The Dark Road, pp. 29-30.

"We came to a fork in the road and there we found our first sign of Diwrnach. It was a skeleton, bound together with horsehair ropes and hung from a pole so that its dry bones rattled in the brisk west wind. Three crows had been nailed to the post below the human bones and Nimue sniffed their stiffened bodies to decide what kind of magic had been imbued into their deaths. 'Piss! Piss!' Merlin managed to say from his litter. 'Quick, girl! Piss!' He coughed horribly, then turned his head to spit the sputum towards the ditch. 'I won't die,' he said to himself, 'I will not die!' He lay back as Nimue squatted by the pole. 'He knows we're here,' Merlin warned me.

" 'Is he here?' I asked, crouching beside him.

" 'Someone is. Be careful, Derfel.' He closed his eyes and sighed. 'I am so old,' he said softly, 'so horribly old. And there's badness here, all about us.' He shook his head. 'Get me to the island, that's all, just reach the island. The Cauldron will cure all.'" Part 1 The Dark Road, p. 84.

"Merlin had raised me after that, and I had become a Briton, a friend of Arthur and the man who had taken the star of Powys from her brother's hall. What an odd thread of life, I thought, and how sad that it would be cut short here on Britain's sacred isle.

" 'I don't suppose,' Merlin said, 'that there is any cheese?'

"I stared at him, thinking I must be dreaming.

" 'The pale sort, Derfel,' he said anxiously, 'that crumbles. Not the hard dark yellow stuff. I can't abide that hard dark yellow cheese.'

"He was standing in the pit and peering earnestly at me with the cloak that had covered his body now hanging about his shoulders like a shawl.



" 'Lord?' I said in a tiny voice.

" 'Cheese, Derfel. Did you not hear me? I am hungry for cheese. We did have some. It was wrapped in linen. And where is my staff? A man lies down for a small sleep and immediately his staff is stolen. Is there no honesty left? It's a terrible world. No cheese, no honesty and no staff.'" Part 1 The Dark Road, pp. 103-104.

"The main part of the army was composed of five hundred spearmen. Arthur had decided to take no levies with him, for such farmers rarely carried adequate weapons; so we were all oath-sworn warriors and all carried spears and shields and most possessed swords too. Not every man could afford a sword, but Arthur had sent orders throughout Dumnonia that every household possessing a sword which was not already sworn to the army's service should surrender the weapon, and the eighty blades so collected had been distributed among his army. Some men—a few—carried captured Saxon war axes, though others, like myself, disliked the weapon's clumsiness.

"And to pay for all this? To pay for the swords and new spears and new shields and wagons and oxen and the flour and boots and banners and bridles and cooking pots and helmets and cloaks and knives and horseshoes and salted meat? Arthur laughed when I asked him. 'You must thank the Christians, Derfel,' he said.

" 'They yielded more?' I asked. 'I thought the udder was dry.'

" 'It is now,' he said grimly, 'but it's astonishing how much their shrines yielded when we offered their guardians martyrdom, and it's even more astonishing how much we've promised to repay them.'" Part 2 The Broken War, pp. 144-145.

"I bowed my head briefly. 'Greetings, Lord King.'

"He spat. 'You think, because you are polite, that your death will be easy?'

" 'My death has nothing to do with you, Lord King,' I said. 'But I expect to tell my grandchildren of yours.'

"He laughed, then cast a mocking glance at the five leaders. 'Five of you! And only one of me! And where's Arthur? Voiding his bowels in terror?'

"I named our leaders to Aelle, then Cuneglas took up the dialogue that I translated for him. He began, as was customary, by demanding Aelle's immediate surrender. We would be merciful, Cuneglas said. We would demand Aelle's life and all his treasury and all his weapons and all his treasury and all his weapons and all his women and all his slaves, but his spearmen could go free, minus their right hands.'" Part 2 The Broken War, p. 165.

"Issa stood close beside me, his honest face lit by those distant spits of fire. 'Is someone dead?'

" 'We can't tell, Issa.'

" 'Are we cursed, Lord?' he asked.

" 'No,' I replied with a confidence I did not entirely feel.

" 'But I heard that Merlin had his beard cut?'

" 'A few hairs,' I said dismissively, 'nothing more. What of it?'

" 'If Merlin has no power, Lord, who does?'



" 'Merline has power,' I tried to reassure him. And I had power, too, for soon I would be Mordred's champion and would live on a great estate. I would mould the child and Arthur would make the child's kingdom.

"Yet still I worried about the thunder. And I would have worried more had I known what it meant. For disaster did come that night. We did not hear about it for three more days, but then at least we learned why the thunder had spoken and the lightning struck.

"It had struck on the Tor, on Merlin's hall where the winds made moan about his hollow dream-tower. And there, in our hour of victory, the lightning had set the wooden tower alight and its flames had seared and leapt and howled into the night and in the morning, when the embers were being spattered and extinguished by the dying storm's rain, there were no Treasures left at Ynys Wydryn. There was no Cauldron in the ashes, only an emptiness at Dumnonia's fire-scarred heart.

"The new Gods, it seemed, were fighting back. Or else the Silurian twins had worked a mighty charm on the cut braid of Merlin's beard, for the Cauldron was gone and the Treasures had vanished.

"And I went north to Ceinwyn." Part 2 The Broken War, pp. 195-196.

"The garden was reeling with drunken men. They had been kept too long from the feast so now they were offering each other elaborate embraces and flowery promises of eternal friendship. Some of the embraces had turned into wrestling matches that rolled fiercely over Guinevere's flower beds. The choirs had long abandoned their attempts to sing solemn music and some of the choirs' women were now drinking with the warriors. Not all the men were drunk, of course, but the sober guests had retreated to the terrace to protect the women, many of whom were Guinevere's attendants and among whom was Lunete, my first and long-ago love. Guinevere was also on the terrace, from where she was staring in horror at the wreckage being made of her garden, though it was her own fault for she had served mead brewed especially strong and now at least fifty men were roistering in the gardens; some had plucked flower stakes to use in mock sword fights and at least one man had a bloody face, while another was working free a loosened tooth and foully cursing the oath-sworn Brother of Britain who had struck him. Someone else had vomited onto the round table.

"I helped Ceinwyn up to the safety of the arcade while beneath us the Brotherhood of Britain cursed and fought and drank itself insensible.

"And that, although Igraine will never believe me, was how Arthur's Brotherhood of Britain, that the ignorant still call the Round Table, all began." Part 3, Camelot, pp. 219-220.

" 'Justice is done, Lord King,' Cyllan said bleakly as he pulled his blade free from Tristan's neck and walked away. The spearmen who surrounded me, none of whom had dared meet my eyes, drew back. I raised Hywelbane and the sight of its grey blade was misted by my tears. I heard Iseult scream as her husband's men killed the six spearmen who had accompanied Tristan and who now took hold of their Queen. I closed my eyes.

"I would not look at Arthur. I would not speak with Arthur. I walked to the headland and there I prayed to my Gods and begged them to come back to Britain, and while I prayed the men of Kernow took Queen Iseult down to the sea-lake where the two dark ships



waited. But they did not carry her home to Kernow. Instead the Princess of the Uí Liatháin, that child of fifteen summer who had skipped barefoot into the waves and whose voice had been a shadowy wisp like the seamen's ghosts who ride the long sea winds, was tied to a post and heaped around with the driftwood that lay so thick on Halcwm's shore, and there, before her husband's unforgiving eyes, she was burned alive. Her lover's corpse was burned on the same pyre." Part 3, Camelot, p. 256.

"Erce, I gathered, had been a servant in that house and the Saxon Lord had taken her to his bed and so given me life, the same life that Tanaburs had failed to take at the death-pit. 'He was a lovely man,' Erce said of my father, 'such a lovely, handsome man. Everyone feared him, but he was good to me. We used to laugh together.'

" 'What was his name?' I asked, and I think I knew the answer even before she gave it.

" 'Aelle,' she said in a whisper, 'lovely, handsome Aelle.'

"Aelle. The smoke whirled about my head, and my brains, for a moment, were as addled as my mother's wits. Aelle? I was Aelle's son?

" 'Aelle,' Erce said dreamily, 'lovely, handsome Aelle.'

"I had no other questions so I forced myself to kneel before my mother and give her an embrace. I kissed her on both cheeks, then held her tight as if I could give back to her some of the life she had given to me, and though she succumbed to the embrace, she still would not acknowledge that I was her son. I took lice from her." Part 4, The Mysteries of Isis, p. 306.

" 'Derfel?' Ceinwyn called from behind me. 'Derfel?'

"I abandoned my curses and turned to her. 'I live,' I said, 'I live.'

" 'Oh, Derfel!' she wailed, and it was then that I saw that Ceinwyn was holding Dian and that Ceinwyn's white dress was white no longer, but red.

"I ran to their side. Dian was cradled tight in her mother's arms, and I dropped my sword, tore the helmet from my head and fell to my knees beside them. 'Dian?' I whispered, 'my love?'

"I saw the soul flicker in her eyes. She saw me—she did see me—and she saw her mother before she died. She looked at us for an instant and then her young soul flew away as soft as a wing in darkness and with as little fuss as a candle flame blown out by a wisp of wind. Her throat had been cut as Lavaine leapt for his brother's harm, and now her small heart just gave up the struggle. But she did see me first. I know she did. She saw me, then she died, and I put my arms around her and around her mother and I cried like a child.

"For my little lovely Dian, I wept." Part 4, The Mysteries of Isis, pp. 322-323.

"Merlin waited. No answer came so he raised the staff towards the hall's high roof. 'In the name of Bel,' he intoned sonorously, 'and his toad-Lord Callyc, and in the name of Sucellos and his worm-master Horfael, and in the name of ...'

" 'They would be killed!' Mordred squealed desperately.

"The staff was slowly lowered so that it pointed again at Mordred's face. 'He promised to you what, dear boy?' Merlin asked.



"Mordred squirmed in his chair, but there was no escape from that staff. He swallowed, looked left and right, but there was no help for him in the hall. 'That they would be killed,' Mordred admitted, 'by the Christians.'

" 'And why would you want that?' Merlin inquired.

"Mordred hesitated, but Merlin raised the staff high again and the boy blurted out his confession. 'Because I can't be King while he lives!'

" 'You thought Arthur's death would free you to behave as you like?'

" 'Yes!'

" 'And you believed Sansum was your friend?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'And you never once thought that Sansum might want you dead, too?' Merlin shook his head. 'What a silly boy you are. Don't you know that Christians never do anything right? Even their first one got himself nailed to a cross. That's not the way efficient Gods behave, not at all. Thank you, Mordred, for our conversation.' He smiled, shrugged and walked away. 'Just trying to help,' he said as he went past Arthur." Part 4, The Mysteries of Isis, p. 347

"Dinas and Lavaine died then. They died at the creek's edge. I am not, I think, a cruel man, but their deaths were very cruel and very long. Nimue arranged those deaths, and all the while, as their souls gave up the flesh, she hissed the name Dian in their ears. They were not men by the time they died, and their tongues had gone and they had just one eye apiece, and that small mercy was only given to them so that they could see the manner of their next bout of pain, and see they did as they died. The last thing either saw was that bright piece of hair on Hywelbane's hilt as I finished what Nimue had begun. The twins were mere things by then, things of blood and shuddering terror, and when they were dead, I kissed the little scrap of hair, then carried it to one of the braziers on the palace's arcades and tossed it into the embers so that no fragment of Dian's soul was left wandering the earth. Nimue did the same with the cut plait of Merlin's beard. We left the twins' bodies lying on their left sides beside the sea and in the rising sun gulls came to tear at the tortured flesh with their long hooked beaks." Part 4, The Mysteries of Isis, p. 375.

Topics for Discussion

How are dogs used in battle by the Saxons and how does Merlin defeat them?

What does Merlin mean by his favorite dictum, "Fate is inexorable?" Discuss two examples of inexorable fate in the novel.

How does the Roman legacy in each given British kingdom affect the flavor of the Christianity that is practiced there?

How is egotistical male posturing depicted in the novel?

Does any of the Christian characters in the novel live according to the precepts of Jesus Christ? How is the "typical" Christian portrayed?

Why do people want to control the Cauldron of Clyddno Eiddyn?

Fallen Guinevere is viewed in various ways by various characters. Describe the variants and defend the one with which you most identify.