

The History of the Kings of Britain Study Guide

The History of the Kings of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth

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Plot Summary

In *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Geoffrey of Monmouth proposes to set forth the history of the British kings starting with Brutus and ending with Cadwallo. Geoffrey undertakes this endeavor at the request of the Archdeacon of Oxford who presents Geoffrey with an ancient text to translate from British into Latin. The history of the British kings shows how fortune, jealousy, and betrayal can lead to the demise of an entire nation. On the other hand the text also details the qualities that are necessary in a good ruler who unites his people in peace. While Geoffrey's account reads like a novel, the basis for the book is historical and gives the reader a generalized view of British history.

Britain's history begins with Brutus, an exiled Trojan accused of killing both his mother and father. During his time in exile, Brutus frees enslaved Trojans and secures ships to sail the seas in search of a new home. Brutus' travels finally bring him to an island formerly inhabited by giants and he names it Britain after himself. Brutus quickly sets about establishing cities, appointing dukes and earls, and building a capital city. While Brutus battles his share of enemies, the majority of his reign is lived out in peace and prosperity. After Brutus come a series of kings who alternately raze Britain and then raise it back up again. There are many kings who are so horrible that their crimes are unimaginable.

As the story evolves the reader begins to see patterns. An excellent ruler possesses certain characteristics including military skill, a strong sense of justice fueled by love of his country, and generosity. These kings are loyal to their countrymen and seek to expel all foreign invaders. They foster civic works that increase national pride and provide for the welfare of their constituents. On the other hand are the kings who are motivated out of personal greed or jealousy. While the righteous rulers work diligently to build their kingdom up, the immoral can very quickly decimate the entire nation. Dunvallo Molmutius spends his forty year reign working to establish laws that keep the island free of thieves and offers sanctuary to those in need. When Dunvallo dies his sons take over the kingdom and immediately engage in a battle over which one should assume the throne. Their battle brings foreigners back to the island and opens the door to the ruin of all that their father worked so hard to build.

Geoffrey's chronicle tends to speed through the various rulers as he notes their name, the length of their reign and whether they were a good or bad ruler. He may divulge a few extra details regarding any important work the ruler accomplished or if a particular king was exceptionally heinous. Geoffrey does spend considerable time discussing the lives of Brutus, Constantine, and Arthur. The choice of kings to detail is interesting because Arthur is typically considered a legend not a historical figure. However, each of these kings is a prominent example of the values that make an excellent ruler. Geoffrey probably chose these three in order to subtly make a point to his intended benefactor, Alexander, on how to rule effectively. The fact that the book ends with Cadawallader and the deteriorating British nation is another clue that Geoffrey's text is meant to serve a lesson to the current ruler. Geoffrey maintains a relatively light narrative style so as not

to openly offend Alexander but the veiled implications are noticeable to the educated reader.



Dedication and Part One: Brutus Occupies the Island of Albion

Dedication and Part One: Brutus Occupies the Island of Albion Summary and Analysis

Geoffrey's dedication is a request that his benefactor, Alexander, receive the text favorably. Geoffrey speaks highly of the ruler and asks that Alexander ignore the base language in which Geoffrey writes. He refers to himself as an inadequate writer attempting to do what little he can for Alexander's glory. The dedication is a necessary part of ancient texts as writers need a benefactor to promote their work. However, the book is probably intended for Alexander as a warning against pursuing personal glory and Geoffrey needs a way to sugar-coat the truth of his text.

The first part opens with a description of Britain as an idyllic island. The rich soil provides a bounty of crops, while the clear running streams and beautiful forests give up fish and game. Britain boasts "three noble rivers": the Thames, the Severn and the Humber, which bring goods and trade from all over the world. There are five races of man that populate the isle: the Norman-French, the Britons, the Saxons, the Picts and the Scots. The Britons are the original inhabitants that have been driven into the minority by the invasion of the others. Geoffrey of Monmouth says he will relate to the reader exactly how Britain became overrun by outside forces.

At the end of the Trojan war Aeneas flees to Italy where he marries King Latinus' daughter, Lavinia. Aeneas' grandson impregnates a niece of Lavinia. Soothsayers correctly predict that the child, a boy, will cause the death of both his parents. The child is given to a midwife and the name Brutus is bestowed upon him. Brutus goes into exile following the accidental slaying of his father and finds himself in Greece. In Greece Brutus learns that a large number of Trojans are being kept in captivity. Brutus stays with these people and soon becomes a leader well respected for his battle prowess, wisdom and generosity. Aided by a Greek man named Assaracus, Brutus assumes a leadership role and begins planning to undertake the freeing of the Trojan slaves. Brutus sends a letter to King Pandrasus asking for the freedom of the slaves, but Pandrasus follows the advice of his counselors and begins plotting war.

Brutus surprises Pandrasus' forces and drives them to slaughter in a nearby river. Pandrasus' brother, Antigonus, courageously opposes Brutus but is eventually captured along with his companion, Anacletus. Brutus secures the castle and leaves 600 soldiers to guard it while he goes out to tell the Trojan people of his recent victory. Pandrasus decides to attack the fortress by night and succeeds in wearing down the Trojans inside. Brutus decides to surprise Pandrasus' forces by night but will need the help of one of the Greeks in order to carry out his plan. Brutus brings Anacletus before him. Holding the Greek at sword point Brutus explains the details of his plan. Anacletus will approach the Greek encampment saying he has escaped with Antigonus, who has collapsed a



short distance away. After Anacletus draws the guards away Brutus will sneak into the camp with his soldiers to steal through the tents, killing as they go. Only Pandrasus is kept alive. The rising sun reveals the bloody carnage that Brutus and his men have wrought. Brutus allows his men to divide the spoils among themselves while he consults with his advisers on what to do with Pandrasus. One man, Membritius, stands up and says that the only sensible course of action is to wed Pandrasus' eldest daughter. In this way Pandrasus will be bound to uphold his word and have to release the slaves, provide an abundance of gold, silver, ships and grain, and grant Brutus permission to sail to other lands. Pandrasus is brought before Brutus and told of the council's decision. Pandrasus agrees to the plan against his will but issues a long speech extolling the brilliance of Brutus.

Pandrasus remains a captive until all Brutus' demands have been met. Three hundred and twenty-four ships loaded with grain are assembled and each man is given riches according to his rank. Brutus marries Ignoge, Pandrasus' daughter, and the Trojans set sail. After sailing for two days, the ship lands on an island named Leogetia. Brutus and three hundred men disembark to assess the land. The island is devoid of people but is extremely plentiful in game. There is also a temple of Diana to whom Brutus sacrifices in hopes of learning where the men will finally make home. After performing the sacred ritual, Brutus falls asleep. In a dream Diana tells the leader that they will come to an island once inhabited by giants that will serve as a second Troy. The Trojans continue to sail on until they encounter descendants of exiles from Troy. Brutus takes their leader, Corineus, as a comrade and they all sail on together. At Aquitaine the ships take anchor and disembark to search for food. An encounter with messengers sent by the King results in a bloody battle. King Goffar retreats to seek aide from the other eleven kings of Gaul. In the meantime, Brutus marches through Gaul conquering one city at a time. Goffar and Brutus finally meet near the city of Tours for a final battle. Brutus emerges victorious after Corineus and his men mount a sneak attack from the rear. The Trojans board their ships and continue searching for the land Diana promised them.

The Trojans land on the island of Albion which Brutus renames Britain in honor of himself. The leaders divide the land amongst themselves and begin establishing a life on the new island. Corineus calls his corner of Britain Cornwall. Corineus enjoys his part of Britain because it has the highest number of giants living in the hills. Corineus enjoys fighting with one giant in particular. Gogmagog is twelve feet tall and decides to attack Brutus during a festival. Brutus orders all the giants killed except Gogmagog. Corineus faces Gogmagog in a wrestling match. After a fierce battle, Corineus succeeds in throwing Gogmagog off a cliff into the sea where the giant is dashed to pieces. Now free of giants, Brutus sets about establishing a capital city. He chooses a site near the River Thames. There he builds Troia Nova which later is known as Trinovantum. After Lud takes control, the city is called Kaerlud. Brutus gives the new city to the people of Britain along with a code of laws to enable the people to live peacefully together.

The first chapter establishes the background of Britain. The reader is interested to learn that Britain is founded by a outcast. However, the reader immediately understands where the strength of the British people originates. Brutus is an extraordinary leader who is a brilliant strategist. While Brutus' slaughter of the Greek warriors is terrifying, his



treatment of Anacletus shows levelheadedness, wisdom and courage. Brutus takes a huge risk by trusting that Anacletus will not reveal the Trojan plan to the Greek guards. This calculated risk shows Brutus' bravado. Furthermore, he is wise to follow the counsel of his advisers and marry Pandrasus' daughter rather than kill the king outright. Brutus secures items he needs for his own goals and gains an ally at the same time.

Brutus continues to show diplomacy as he befriends Cornieus, who will become a significant member of Brutus' retinue. Brutus is also well aware of the need to please his people in order to continue his reign. He works to create a city for the people and to establish just laws with which to govern. Brutus exemplifies the perfect ruler. He is a man able to balance cruelty and justice. Brutus sets a high precedent for the rulers who come after him and establishes Britain as an idyllic land. The challenge to following generations is to attempt to match Brutus' benevolent yet strong rule.



Part Two: Before the Romans Came

Part Two: Before the Romans Came Summary and Analysis

Brutus has three sons by Ignoge: Locrinus, Kamber and Albanactus. When Brutus dies, his sons bury him in the walls of the city and divide the rule of the country amongst themselves. Kamber takes the part which is now Wales, Albanactus rules what is now Scotland, and Locrinus oversees the rest. Humber, the king of the Huns, lands in Albanactus' lands and kills the ruler. Locrinus and Kamber join together to face Humber. The Huns' leader is driven back to the river and drowned. The river is thereafter called the Humber River. Locrinus divides the battle spoils among his men, keeping treasure found on the ships and three beautiful women for himself. Estrildis is the daughter of the German king and was captured by Humber. Locrinus is infatuated with the girl and desires to marry her. Corineus becomes enraged when he hears of this because Locrinus had promised to marry his daughter. Corineus, brandishing his battle-axe, confronts Locrinus. Locrinus relents and marries Corineus' daughter, Gwendolen, but cannot forget Estrildis. Locrinus has a cave dug beneath the town where he hides Estrildis away, visiting her in secret. Both Estrildis and Gwendolen become pregnant. Estrildis gives birth to a daughter, Habren, and Gwendolen bears a son called Maddan. When Corineus dies, Locrinus abandons Gwendolen and makes Estrildis his queen. An indignant Gwendolen gathers an army from Cornwall and harasses Locrinus. Locrinus is killed and Gwendolen assumes control of the kingdom. She orders Estrildis and Habren thrown into the Severn river which comes to be called the Habren River.

Gwendolen reigns for fifteen years before handing the kingdom over to Madden who rules for forty years. When Madden dies, his two sons, Mempricius and Malin, argue over control of the kingdom. Mempricius kills his brother and begins a tyrannical rule. He deserts his wife and practices sodomy. After twenty years of rule, Mempricius is killed by ravenous wolves after being separated from his hunting party. Mempricius' son, Ebraucus, takes over control of Britain and reigns for thirty-nine years. Ebraucus sails to Gaul where he ransacks city gaining great wealth for himself. In Britain, Ebraucus builds several cities. He is also the father of twenty sons and thirty daughters begotten by twenty wives. Ebraucus' grandson, Leil, eventually succeeds to the throne, but he proves a feeble ruler, leading the kingdom into civil war.

Geoffrey lists several rulers after Ebraucus' death and notes some of their more prominent contributions to Britain. Hudibras restores peace and establishes several cities. Bladud builds the famous hot baths in the town of Bath. The story of King Leir and his three daughters is then told. Many readers will already be familiar with this story due to Shakespeare's play, King Lear, based on the historical figure. King Leir asks his three daughters how much they love him in order to fairly divide the kingdom among them. When his favored daughter, Cordelia, gives an answer that angers him, Leir banishes her to be married to a foreigner. Leir grows sick in his old age and seeks



shelter with each of his other two daughters. Both Regan and Goneril put up with their father for a short time before tossing him out of their home. Finally, penniless and reduced to a starving beggar Leir travels across the sea to Gaul. When Cordelia learns of her father's pitiful condition she sends gold and silver to him with instructions that he go to a nearby town and outfit himself as befits his proper station in life. Leir finally arrives at his daughter's home where he is welcomed by Cordelia and her husband, Aganippus. Together the three of them return with an army to fight the husbands of Regan and Goneril. After regaining control of his kingdom, Leir reigns for three years before his death. Aganippus also dies and Cordelia inherits control of the realm. Cordelia rules for five peaceful years before Marganus and Cunedagius, the sons of Regan and Goneril, begin harassing their aunt. A battle ensues and Cordelia is captured and thrown in prison where she eventually kills herself. Marganus succumbs to the advice of evil men and makes war on Cunedagius. Marganus is slain and Cunedagius rules all of Britain for thirty-three years.

Britain once again falls into a state of civil unrest following a string of ineffective rulers. Finally, a man named Dunvallo Molmutius assumes control. He wages war with the kings of Kambria and Albany. The fight is not going in Dunvallo's favor and he decides to mount a surprise attack. Dunvallo and six-hundred of his men put on the arms of their fallen enemies. In this way the contingent manages to infiltrate enemy lines and reach the spot where the two kings are fighting. Dunvallo overcomes the enemy kings and gains complete control of Britain. Dunvallo sets forth the Molmutine Laws. Dunvallo establishes the concept of sanctuary in temples and ends the terror wrought by bandits. Dunvallo reigns for forty years before his death. Dunvallo's sons, Belinus and Brennius, fight over the rule of Britain. Brennius sails to Norway where he marries the king's daughter and returns with a fleet to fight his brother. On the way back to Britain, Brennius is attacked by the Danish king, Ginchtalacus, who is in love with Brennius' new wife. The Danish king captures the woman but is blown off course by a storm. Ginchtalacus lands in Northumbria where he is met by Belinus. A battle takes place between the two brothers and Brennius flees on a ship to France and Belinus makes a bargain with the Danish king. Belinus is finally left alone to rule Britain by himself. Belinus re-establishes Dunvallo's laws and builds a series of roads so that the laws of sanctuary can be better enforced.

In the meantime, Brennius finds an alliance with Segnius, the leader of the Allobroges. The two men become so close that Brennius is married to Segnius' daughter and assumes control when Segnius dies. Brennius distributes the leader's wealth and food among the people in order to ingratiate himself to them. Brennius outfits a fleet and sails to take revenge on his brother. As Brennius sets foot on British soil, his mother arrives and pleads with her son not to make war with Belinus. His mother's words are so moving that Brennius puts down his weapons and embraces Belinus. The two brothers then combine their forces and wage war on Gaul. After conquering Gaul, the brothers move on toward Rome. The Romans make a treaty with the brothers but break it as soon as the British army enters Germany. Brennius sets out to lay siege to Rome while Belinus battles the Roman army in the field. When Belinus overthrows the Roman army, he hurries to aide his brother. The battle goes back and forth between the two sides until the brothers manage to capture the Consuls, Gabius, who is killed, and Porsenna.



Brennius stays in Italy, ruling with savagery. Belinus returns to Britain where he maintains a peaceful rule. Belinus dies and his son Gurguit Barbruc succeeds him. Gurguit gives the island of Ireland to a group of refugees from Spain. When Gurguit passes on, his wife Marcia rules until her death. Their grandson, Morvidus, eventually comes to power. Morvidus is extremely cruel and commits outrageous acts of bestiality. Morvidus is killed by a sea monster off the Irish coast. His son Gorbonianus takes over rule and is a benevolent and just leader. When Gorbonianus dies, his brother Archgallo wears the crown. Archgallo is deposed because of his wicked ways and replaced by his brother Elidurus. Elidurus meets Archgallo in the forest one day and brings him home where he devises a plan to restore his brother to the kingship. Archgallo rules justly the second time and Elidurus regains the crown upon his brother's death. Ingenius and Peredurus, Elidurus' remaining brothers, wish to rule the land and imprison their brother in the tower at Trinovantum. When both brothers eventually die, Elidurus is restored to the kingship a third time.

A long list of rulers follows Elidurus. Most of these kings prove themselves worthy of the position and those who are not are quickly killed or deposed. Finally, a man named Lud comes into power. Lud is skilled in the planning of towns. He re-builds Trinovantum and instructs the inhabitants to build their homes with great style. This city becomes Lud's favorite and is eventually called Kaerlundein or London. When Lud dies, his brother Cassivelaunus assumes the throne because Lud's sons are too young to rule. However, Cassivelaunus gives each nephew a portion of Britain to oversee so that they are involved in the ruling of the country.

The fair rule that Brutus established is immediately broken by his own sons. Locrinus is overcome with lusty intentions toward a foreign woman and cares little for a promise made to one of his own countrymen. Even worse is the fact that he wishes to break an agreement made with his father's best man. Locrinus does not possess the same sense of national pride that his father worked so hard to restore to the Trojans. The idyllic country established by Brutus is quickly damaged and the rest of Geoffrey's history lists the turn-over of rulers—some good, some horribly bad.

The story of King Leir is probably familiar to most readers because of William Shakespeare. The reader is not surprised by anything that Geoffrey reports except perhaps that Leir was a historical figure and not something drummed up by Shakespeare's brilliant imagination. At the same time the reader wonders if Leir is not built by Geoffrey's own imagination since the author is fairly free in his treatment of history.

The accounts of the different sets of brothers who rule Britain is interesting. The interplay of sibling rivalry is undeniable. There is the desire to be the child loved best, only in this context it takes the form of controlling an entire nation. The younger brothers are never content to accept their fate never to rule and so seek to obtain the kingship by any means necessary. The idea of co-rule appears to be foreign and unacceptable. Only Elidurus shows the even temperament required of a good king. He shows extreme patience as he restores Archgallo to power and marks time in the city tower. He does what is just without desiring more for himself. Cassivelaunus continues this sensible

method of ruling by sharing the kingship with his nephews. Cassivelaunus represents the chance for Britain to once again become a strong nation united under one just ruler.



Part Three: The Coming of the Romans

Part Three: The Coming of the Romans Summary and Analysis

Julius Caesar looks across the sea towards Britain. He says that the Britons descend from the same stock as the Romans but because they live so far away figures that they must be degenerates. Caesar assumes these lost relatives will know nothing about modern warfare and be an easy target for him to subjugate. Caesar sends a letter to King Cassivelaunus which is indignantly received. Cassivelaunus dispatches a reply, warning Caesar that the Britons are not as backward as he assumes and will fight to the death for their liberty. Caesar launches a fleet and arrives in Britain where he is immediately engaged in battle by Cassivelaunus and several other British lords. Nennius meets Caesar in the fray and manages to wrest Caesar's own sword from the ruler. Caesar calls a retreat and sails back to Gaul. Nennius dies fifteen days later from a wound inflicted by Caesar and is buried with Caesar's sword.

Two years later Caesar once again gathers a fleet and sets sail for Britain. When Cassivelaunus learns of Caesar's approach, he garrisons his cities and has iron tipped stakes implanted in the bed of the River Thames so that Caesar's ships will be impaled on them. Thousands of Caesar's soldiers are lost to the water, while the rest suffer grievous wounds at the hands of the British armies. Caesar once again retreats, this time to a tower he built in case he was forced to flee Britain again. Cassivelaunus holds a great feast to celebrate his second victory. During the games held at the festival, Cassivelaunus' nephew, Hirelgdas, is slain. Cassivelaunus goes on a rampage against Androgeus, the uncle of Cuelinus who killed Hirelgdas. Androgeus drafts a letter that is sent to Caesar pleading for aide. Caesar's advisers counsel the ruler not to go into Britain on Androgeus' word alone and insists that hostages be sent in good faith. Once Caesar receives the hostages, he gathers his army and hastens into Britain again. Androgeus strategically places Caesar's forces so that Cassivelaunus will be caught between the two armies. Cassivelaunus retreats to a rocky hill where his army successfully defends itself for two days. Cassivelaunus becomes worried that his army will starve to death and petitions Androgeus to intervene with Caesar on his behalf. Caesar agrees to accept homage and tribute from Cassivelaunus after Androgeus threatens him with harm. Caesar winters with Cassivelaunus and returns to Rome the following spring with Androgeus accompanying him. Cassivelaunus dies six years later and is eventually succeeded by his great-nephew Guiderius.

Guiderius refuses to pay the tribute agreed upon by Cassivelaunus. Claudius Caesar, who is now in power, gathers an army and sails for Britain. Guiderius manages to beat Claudius' forces back but is killed by Claudius' right hand man, Hamo. Hamo disguises himself in British armor and slowly works his way toward the King and slays him. Arvirargus, Guiderius' brother, puts on the King's armor and extols the troops who have not realized that their leader is dead. Under the leadership of the disguised Arvirargus,



the Britons chase Hamo and slay him in the area now known as Southampton. Arvirargus then turns to battle Claudius. Rather than face a fierce battle, Claudius sends envoys to Arvirargus to arrange for a treaty. Arvirargus is married to Claudius' daughter and Arvirargus agrees to re-establish the tribute to Rome. Together Claudius and Arvirargus build the city of Gloucester in honor of the marriage. Claudius returns to Rome and without the Roman presence Arvirargus rebuilds cities and his own arrogance. Claudius is eventually forced to send another envoy to seek reconciliation with Arvirargus. As Arvirargus grows older, he becomes more calm and peaceable. After Arvirargus' death, his son Marius succeeds him.

During Marius' reign he battles Sodric, the King of the Picts. Marius kills Sodric but grants Sodric's followers a parcel of land called Caithness to inhabit. Marius has a good relationship with Rome and willingly pays the tax. Marius' son Coilus takes the kingship after his father's death. Coilus was raised in Rome and so has a great affinity for them. Coilus' son Lucius becomes king after his father. Lucius imitates his father's good deeds and is held in very high esteem. Lucius seeks to be indoctrinated into the Christian faith and the local tribes follow his example. Rome sends two missionaries to aide in the conversion of Britain to Christianity and before long all idolatry and paganism has been eliminated from the island. Lucius continues to do great works for the religious life of Britain and is buried in the church of the Archdiocese. Lucius leaves no heir so Britain erupts into dissension.

Rome sends Severus to Britain to restore Roman authority. Severus drives the Britons who oppose him into Albany. In order to prevent Sulgenius from leading the Britons closer, Severus has a wall built between Deira and Albany. Sulgenius sails across the sea to seek the aide of the Picts. With his newly assembled army, Sulgenius returns to Britain to engage Severus in battle. At the very beginning of the battle Severus is killed and Sulgenius is mortally wounded. Severus leaves behind two sons, Bassianus and Geta. Because Geta was born of a Roman mother, the Romans raise him to power over his brother. Bassianus is chosen by the Britons because he was born of a British mother. A feud erupts between the brother and Geta is killed.

A certain man named Carausius sails to Rome to beseech the Senate to grant him a fleet of ships to defend the British coast. Carausius leads the Senate to believe that he aspires to this undertaking in Rome's name. Carausius uses his fleet to wreak havoc on the coastal towns of Britain until he has grown to such power that he forces the Britons to make him king. With the help of the Picts, Carausius overthrows Bassianus. Rome learns of Carausius activity and sends three legions to kill the tyrant. The leader of these legions is Allectus, who wastes no time killing Carausius and massacring Britons. Allectus is eventually killed and the Romans subdued by Asclepiodotus. Asclepiodotus restores peace to Britain for ten years until the persecution of Christians by Emperor Diocletian. Maximianus Herculius is sent by Rome to enact unthinkable horrors on the Britons. Churches are torn down, priests are slaughtered enmass as they run for their lives, and the more prominent religious leaders are subjected to atrocious deaths. Constantius is sent by Rome to strike an agreement with the British leader Coel. Constantius marries Coel's daughter and has a son, Constantine, by her. Constantine is found to be a leader of remarkable courage who maintains justice among his people.



At this time a great influx of people comes to Britain from Rome. The people are seeking freedom from the tyrant, Maxentius. Constantine journeys to Rome, subdues Maxentius, and becomes "overlord of the whole world." While Constantine is gone, Octavius gains control of the royal throne. Constantine sends his uncle Trahern to attend to matters in Britain. Octavius flees to Norway while one of his men seeks to assassinate Trahern. With Trahern out of the way, Octavius returns to Britain and regains control of the country. As Octavius grows older he begins to make arrangements for an heir. A messenger is sent to Maximianus in Rome with an offer of Octavius' daughter's hand and the kingship. Maximianus accepts the offer in the hopes of gaining control of both Rome and Britain. Maximianus' head swells with power and he gathers an army to sail the seas in order to conquer Gaul. As Maximianus marches through the country slaying any who cross his path, word quickly spreads of his savagery. Maximianus steadily conquers more and more land. As he moves through Gaul and Germany, Maximianus establishes men to rule for him. Furthermore, he sends for British women to marry his soldiers established in Gaul, in order to prevent intermingling of races. The ships of women are blown off course and the vast majority are slaughtered by the Huns and Picts. When the kings of the Huns and Picts learn that Britain's military is severely depleted, they board ships and sail to the island. Maximianus sends a contingent back to Britain and they succeed in routing the enemy out of Britain and into Ireland. Maximianus is killed shortly thereafter and the rule of Britain lays dormant as the Huns and Picts return to ravage the country.

Rome sends a legion to destroy the army and then announces that they are finished saving the Britons from invaders. The Roman leaders order another wall to be built dividing Albany from Deira. The Britons are encouraged to become soldiers and fortify their riverbanks and cities against invaders. In exchange for the knowledge to perform such an operation, the Romans relieve the island from the duty to pay taxes. Since Maximianus takes the whole army and any available males of fighting age with him, Britain is devoid of the means to protect itself. As soon as the Romans leave, the Picts, Huns, Scots, Danes, and Norwegians seize Albany and then press on with little resistance. Britain is left open to slaughter as pleas to Rome fall on deaf ears.

The hope that Cassivelaunus will restore Britain to the glory Brutus imagined appears to be on the horizon. He possesses the same cunning in battle as Brutus and shows it by placing iron tipped stakes in the river. This move is a stroke of military genius as Caesar never expects an unseen attack from the water. However, Cassivelaunus loses focus when his family is insulted by the unsportsmanlike death of his nephew. Distracted by this familial matter, Cassivelaunus opens himself up to an attack by Caesar and risks starving out his own troops. Cassivelaunus is backed into a corner and has no choice but to make a deal that once again lays Britain open to foreigners.

At first Guiderus appears to be a pompous youth bent on having his own way. However, the reader soon realizes that Guiderus has the same heart as Brutus and desires only to drive out foreigners and free Britain from Rome's grasp. Arvirargus continues his brother's mission but does not achieve the desired goal. Both Arvirargus and his son Marius appear to maintain a defeatist attitude in regards to Rome. Despite numerous attempts to remove Roman presence, the rulers are inevitably forced to accept the



original treaty with Rome. Britain's spirit has been broken by the series of ultimately unsuccessful battles and they have yet to find a leader capable of bolstering the nation to complete victory.

The reports of Constantinus, Octavius and Maximianus show how tenuous life is for the Britons. There is the constant fear of invasion and foreign rule. Deals are constantly made in the heat of battle to relieve an uncomfortable situation. Most of the deals eventually lead to a worse situation and a large loss of life. The reader begins to wonder what makes Britain such a desirable conquest to such a variety of invaders. The isle seems remote in relation to the nations seeking to overrun it. There seems to be little available on the island that is not also found on the mainland.



Part Four: The House of Constantine

Part Four: The House of Constantine Summary and Analysis

Guithelinus, the Archbishop of London, is sent to Aldroenus in Armorica to seek aide from the transplanted Britons living there. Aldroenus is not interested in ruling Britain because of its ruinous state, but offers to send his brother Constantine with two thousand soldiers to aide the Britons. Under the skillful leadership of Constantine, the Britons manage to repel the enemy. Constantine is established as king and given a noble-born wife who bears him three sons: Constans, Aurelius Ambrosius, Utherpendragon. Constans is given over to the Archbishop to be raised in the monastic order. Aurelius and Utherpendragon are fostered by Guithelinus. Constantine is killed by a traitorous Pict serving in his kingdom. An argument breaks out over whether Aurelius or Utherpendragon should be made king after their father. While the disagreement rages, Vortigern counsels Constans to leave the church and take the kingship.

Constans' religious training does not prepare him to be an adequate ruler and so he turns rule of the island over to Vortigern. Vortigern revels in his new status and begins plotting how to obtain the kingship for himself. All the old counselors have died and young inexperienced boys have replaced them. Vortigern slowly begins stealing money from the royal treasury and placing his own supporters as rulers in neighboring towns. Vortigern ingratiates himself to the Picts, utilizing their rash temperament to his advantage to slay Constans. This event prompts the caretakers of Aurelius and Utherpendragon to flee with the small boys to Armorica, leaving no resistance when Vortigern assumes control of the throne for himself.

Three longships arrive from Saxony, a province in Germany, bearing two men of huge stature: Hengist and Horsa. Vortigern draws up a treaty between himself and the heathens and the newcomers take up residence at the palace. In the meantime, the Picts assemble an army and march on Vortigern. Vortigern, with the aide of Hengist and Horsa, march against the Picts and quickly dispatch the enemy. Hengist asks for permission to send messengers to Germany to summon more soldiers to protect Vortigern and to be given land and the title of Earl or Prince. Vortigern grants the request to send messengers but denies Hengist the title because he is a pagan. Hengist accepts Vortigern's decision but begins building a fortress of his own.

When Hengist's army arrives from Saxony, his daughter Renwein is also on board. Vortigern falls madly in love with the girl and desires to wed her even though she is also a pagan. Hengist agrees to the marriage only if Vortigern will give him the province of Kent. Renwein gives Vortigern three sons: Vortimer, Katigern and Paschent. Now that Vortigern is married to his daughter, Hengist counsels the King to bring more Saxons into Britain. The British people soon become afraid of the swelling number of Saxons and turn to Vortimer for aide. Vortimer successfully rids Britain of a large number of Saxons, but his behavior upsets his mother, who has him poisoned. Vortigern sends



messengers to bid Hengist to return to Britain with a small company of men. Hengist instead sails with three thousand men and Vortigern decides to oppose them. An agreement is made to discuss a peace treaty but Hengist plots betrayal. Hengist orders his men to hide daggers in their boots and on his command kill the British lord nearest him during the meeting. Vortigern is allowed to escape with his life in exchange for handing his lands over to Hengist.

At the advice of his counselors, Vortigern builds a large tower for himself. However, whatever is built in one day is swallowed by the earth at night. Vortigern consults his magicians who tell him to search out a child born without a father and sacrifice him so that the stones will cease sinking. Messengers are sent in search of the boy and one is finally found at Kaermerdin. The child and his mother are brought before Vortigern who asks the identity of the boy's father. When the mother explains that she has never seen his face and does not know his identity, Vortigern becomes intrigued. Merlin then steps forth and asks why Vortigern has brought him there. When Vortigern explains the reason for the boy's presence, Merlin turns to the magicians and asks if they know why the stones sink into the ground. Merlin then says that if the workers dig into the ground they will find a pool that, once drained, will reveal two hollow rocks, each containing a dragon. The workers do as Merlin says and reveal the pool and then the two rocks. Vortigern realizes that Merlin holds a great supernatural power.

Britain continues to be invaded by foreigners. There seems to be no stopping the influx of enemies and so it appears to be inevitable that an alliance must be formed between Britain and an outside force for survival. There are numerous possibilities for a peace treaty to be made but the right rulers need to be in place for a sustainable agreement to be reached. Vortigern is not a desirable ruler. He does not possess the strength or courage that Brutus first brought to the island. Vortigern is a puppet master working the strings of Constans until the rightful heir can be destroyed. However, Vortigern does not know how to rule—he only knows how to be a greedy snake. When things become too intense for Vortigern to handle, he strikes a deal with the enemy. While Vortigern hopes that the alliance will bring about great fortune for himself, the fear of Hengist results in an unrealistic influx of Saxons. Vortigern's own desires prevent him from seeing the treachery happening before his own eyes. He thinks he is a master deceiver but is the one being deceived.

The arrival of Merlin appears to signal the salvation of Vortigern from his own stupidity. The child shows great promise that Vortigern mistakenly thinks he can harness and utilize for his own purposes. Many readers will already be familiar with the stories of Merlin and know that he will not prove to be the aide Vortigern needs.



Part Five: The Prophecies of Merlin

Part Five: The Prophecies of Merlin Summary and Analysis

Geoffrey interrupts his narrative in order to write down the prophecies of Merlin at the request of the bishop Alexander.

The two dragons emerge from their slumber and engage each other in battle. One is white and one is red. The white one forces the red one back toward the pool before the red one asserts itself. Vortigern orders Merlin to speak what the dragons mean. Merlin falls into a trance and begins to speak.

The red dragon represents Britain which is nearing its end. The white dragon represents the Saxons who Vortigern has allowed to overrun the island. Britain will soon see its rivers run with blood and the mountains leveled. The Boar of Cornwall will bring relief from the invaders and become so great that his deeds will be told for many years. There will be years of bloodshed and atrocities exacted as countries battle for control of the island. The Thunderer will bring revenge until the White dragon rises again with the aide of Germany. The German worm will be overcome by Normandy. The children of the white dragon will be decimated and two more dragons will come, followed by the lion of justice. In the time of the lion, gold and silver will flow and the land will flourish. One of the lion's cubs will level the forests of Ireland and unite the many parts into one whole. Cadwallar and Conanus will unite to drive the foreigners from Albany and the island will again be called Britain. Conanus' descendant will decimate the older forests of Gaul and strike fear in the Arabs and the Africans. A ram from the castle of Venus will bring an era of decadence that will eventually bring about a time of famine and death. A tree will be planted on top of the Tower of London and grow three branches that cover the entire island. One branch will be torn away by the North Wind and one of the remaining two will kill the other. The remaining branch offers solace to many foreign birds. London will witness the death of thousands and the Thames will run with blood. Three springs will erupt in Winchester. Those who drink from the first will be granted long and healthy life. Those who drink from the second will die of insatiable hunger. Those who drink from the third will die an immediate death. A girl from Canute's forest will arrive to end these evils. A hedgehog will rebuild the island, increase fortifications, and construct pathways beneath the earth. A heron will give birth to a fox, a wolf and a bear. The fox will drive its brothers away to Normandy and wound the boar. The boar will seek the aide of the wolf and the bear, who will return to face their brother. The fox will kill the boar and then use the skin to betray and kill his brothers. Another time of debauchery will come and sons will not recognize their fathers and women will leave their husbands to become prostitutes. A giant of wickedness comes and the dragon of Worcester will try to destroy the giant, but will instead succumb to the giant's evilness. The boar of Totnes will succeed the giant to rule the people with tyranny. The island will be in turmoil as a series of rulers try to obtain control until a roaring lion unites the parts into a whole.



When the people become bloodthirsty, one man will overthrow another and march to the East. He will mate with a snake and produce three bulls who battle each other for control. A farmer will plant poisoned crops that will cause the population to decrease until a daughter of Rome comes with healing medicine. Men will continue to fight for the throne of Britain until even the heavens avert their eyes. The land will dry up and the light of the Sun will diminish. The planets will be become confused and the moon will run wild. The seas will rise and the winds will do battle.

Merlin's prophecies are astounding for one so young. The reader may at first wonder if they are the words of a mad man but close reading will reveal that Merlin speaks of the rise and fall of the British nation. The animals that Merlin references are the kings and queens who rule the island. His words appear veiled so as to soften the blow to Vortigern's ears. However, the message of his prophecy is no less dire. Britain will be continually invaded and tortured by foreigners bringing pestilence and terror. The world itself seems to be in danger of disappearing if Britain cannot emerge as and remain a united whole.

Merlin's words are very similar to the Book of Revelation in the Bible. He mentions deformed creatures rising to battle one another. The land begins to shift of its own accord so that rivers alter their course, seas shrink and land masses move closer together. Even the heavens are affected and thrown forever off course, seemingly as a result of Britain's chaos.



Part Six: The House of Constantine (continued)

Part Six: The House of Constantine (continued) Summary and Analysis

Vortigern is amazed at Merlin's prophecies and wishes to know how his own future will turn out. Merlin tells the king that two possible deaths stand before him. Vortigern will either be killed by the Saxons who are plotting against him or by Aurelius Ambrosius and Utherpendragon who seek revenge for Constantine's death. Merlin further states that Aurelius is sailing toward Britain as they speak and will land the next morning. Merlin's prophecy proves true when Aurelius lands at day break the next day. As soon as Aurelius sets foot on the island, the clergy anoint him king. Instead of heeding the advice of his counsellors Aurelius heads for Kambria and the stronghold where Vortigern is hiding. Aurelius' army sets fire to the castle and burn Vortigern inside.

Hengist learns of Aurelius' coming and the defeat of Vortigern. The Saxon leader is not anxious to meet Aurelius in battle and retreats across the Humber river. At his back sits Scotland, the land of foreigners, and his hope of victory. Hengist proposes to trap Aurelius in a valley but Aurelius stations his army around the ring of the valley to launch an assault on Hengist's forces. The battle rages fiercely between the two sides with great loss of life for both armies. Hengist retreats and regroups but a secret calvary contingent of Aurelius' army surprises Hengist. Hengist is captured by Eldol and the Saxons scatter to the woods. Aurelius spends three days burying the dead and tending his wounded. A council is convened to determine what should be done with Hengist. In the end it is decided that his head will be cut off but his body buried according to pagan custom.

Aurelius then turns to the pursuit of Hengist's son, Octa, who has taken refuge in York. When Octa sees Aurelius advancing toward York he emerges from the castle with a length of chain and gravel on his head. Octa says that he and his people submit freely to Aurelius' will and will live as slaves if Aurelius sees fit. The council grants Octa and the remaining Saxons a part of Britain that is uninhabited to live in as subjects of the King.

Aurelius then calls the princes of the island and sets to work rebuilding the churches of the realm. Aurelius himself begins to rebuild the city of York. After seeing to the reconstruction of York, Aurelius sets out for London to begin the restoration of that city. Aurelius rules from London and works to restore old laws, renew peace, and deal out justice. Once London and the surrounding lands have been properly rebuilt, Aurelius moves on to rebuild the town of Winchester. After successfully rebuilding that city Aurelius visits the monastery at Salisbury where all the great leaders are buried. Aurelius orders a special building to be built to commemorate the spot. Merlin is summoned to instruct the workers in the construction of the monument. Merlin tells



Aurelius that he should send for the Giants' Ring which stands in Ireland. The Giants' Ring is a circle of large stones which were brought by the giants from Africa. Aurelius does not know how he will move the stones but sends Utherpendragon, fifteen thousand men and Merlin to fetch the circle.

When the fleet lands in Ireland, they are met by a contingent of Irish. The Britons quickly beat the Irish back and advance to Mount Killaraus where the Giants' Ring sits. Merlin tells the men to try moving the stones but every attempt proves fruitless. Merlin laughs at the men's efforts and quickly dismantles the stones. The fleet arrives back in Britain and Aurelius summons nobles and clergy from the entire island to attend a re-dedication of the burial site. As part of the festivities, Aurelius gives the City of York to Samson and the City of Legions to Dubricius because these two areas were without leaders. Merlin then assembles the stones around the graves in exactly the same configuration as they stood in Ireland.

Vortigern's son Paschent begins mounting an army to march against Aurelius. Paschent joins forces with the Irish and the Saxons who both desire to overthrow Aurelius. Utherpendragon assembles a force of armed men and marches to meet the invaders at Kambria. Aurelius does not join his brother because he is lying ill at Winchester. Eopa, a Saxon, makes an agreement with Paschent to kill Aurelius in exchange for land and a position in Paschent's kingdom. Eopa gains access to Aurelius' bedchamber and gives the ailing King a poisoned medicine. Aurelius dies quickly and Eopa sneaks away unnoticed. In the meantime, Uther is hunting the enemy when he witnesses a spectacle in the sky. A star shines so brilliantly that it projects a ball of fire that spreads out into the shape of a dragon. The dragon's mouth spouts two rays of light, one extending toward Gaul and the other toward the Irish Sea. The second ray of light shatters into seven smaller rays. For three nights this star appears in the sky. Uther summons Merlin and asks him to explain the star's appearance. Merlin tells Uther that Aurelius has died and all Britain will be lost unless Uther defeats the enemy. The star and the dragon represent Uther. The beam of light stretching to Gaul is Uther's son and the ray arching toward Ireland is his daughter and her children. Uther is skeptical of Merlin's prophecy but marches out to engage the enemy. Uther is ultimately successful and hastens back to Winchester for the burial of his brother.

After Aurelius is buried in the Giants' Ring, Uther is appointed King. Uther has two dragons made out of gold. He keeps one for himself and gives the other to the church at Winchester. Since Aurelius is dead, Octa considers himself free of the treaty proposed by the former King. Uther gathers an army and marches to York where he engages Octa in battle. Octa is victorious and forces Uther to take refuge on a rocky hill. Under the cover of night, Uther and his army mount an attack on the enemy. The enemy is caught off guard and Uther manages to capture Octa and imprison him in London. The following Easter Uther holds a large festival. Uther becomes infatuated with one woman at the feast, Ygernna, the wife of the Duke of Cornwall. When the Duke realizes what is going on, he abruptly leaves the King's hall which angers Uther and brings about a battle between the two men. Uther summons Merlin who, seeing the King's torment, agrees to change Uther into the form of the Duke so that the King may visit Ygernna.



While Uther makes love to Ygerna, his army attacks the Duke who is killed in the fray. Uther weds Ygerna who bears him a son, Arthur, and a daughter, Anna.

Uther falls ill and the wardens guarding Octa escape to Germany with their charge. Uther appoints Loth, who is married to Anna, to rule in his stead. The battle between Loth and Octa destroys a large portion of the island. Uther commands a litter built for him to be carried on and leads the army toward the Saxon army. Uther's army is ultimately victorious but the enemy continues to harass the northern provinces. The Saxons decide to pollute a local spring with poison and kill Uther. Uther is buried with his brother in the Giants' Ring.

Vortigern has worked himself into a corner. His free relationship with Hengist opens the way for the Saxons to overrun the country, forcing Vortigern to seek refuge. Along with the threat of Hengist, Vortigern is threatened by the return of Aurelius and Uther, who seek vengeance for the death of their father. Vortigern is the ultimate example of the disease affecting British rulers: his personal desires have usurped the needs of the country. Aurelius, on the other hand, strives to set Vortigern's wrongs right. Aurelius does not rest until all the invaders have been repelled and then sets about restoring the ruined country. Aurelius also shows compassion to his bested enemy by having Hengist buried in the pagan tradition. Aurelius utilizes the advice of his council to act justly throughout his rule.

The appearance of the brilliant star is interesting. Not until the arrival of Merlin does Geoffrey note such paranormal phenomenon. The red and white dragons are the first extraordinary event to appear in the text but following them are several mystical happenings. Uther uses Merlin's knowledge of the magical arts to gain access to Ygerna and make love to her. Apparently Merlin needs to intercede if the prophecy he pronounced at the sight of the star is to come true. The reader wonders if Merlin aides Uther only to ensure that his momentous prophecy does prove correct. Merlin is also the only person capable of moving the Giants Ring. These magical stones are then linked with Merlin as physical proof of his own magical ability. Merlin and the turn toward fantasy signals the departure from the historical into the fictional.



Part Seven: Arthur of Britain

Part Seven: Arthur of Britain Summary and Analysis

Following the death of Uther, the leaders of the Britons urge Dubricius to anoint Arthur king. Arthur is only fifteen years old but possesses great strength of courage and wisdom. Arthur assembles an army and decides to march on the Saxons so as to procure more treasure to bestow on his nobles. The leader of the Saxons, Colgrin, gathers the Picts and Scots to him and meets Arthur at York. Arthur sets siege to the city but must abandon his attack when Cheldric arrives from Germany with aid for the Saxons. Arthur retreats to London and seeks advice from his council. At their suggestion Arthur sends to his cousin Hoel for help. Hoel quickly assembles an army and meets Arthur in Kaerluideoit. Together the two armies manage to route the Saxon forces into Caledon Wood where Arthur besieges them. An agreement is finally made between the Saxons and Arthur whereby the enemy is allowed to return to Germany after forfeiting their treasure and agreeing to pay tribute to Britain. The Saxons set sail but quickly break their treaty and land near Totnes.

Arthur mounts an attack on the invaders, vowing to dispatch every last one of them. Dubricius extols the troops with a pronouncement of glory in heaven for the vanquishing of the enemy. Calling on the name of God, Arthur slays hundreds of the enemy by himself. Colgrin is slain and Cheldric flees with his warriors. Arthur then hurries to aid Hoel who is ill and besieged by the Picts in Alclud. Arthur orders Cador to pursue the Saxons and cut them down. Cador positions his men on the Saxon ships to prevent their retreat and then pursues the rest on foot. Arthur first routes the Picts and Scots and then the Irish. When the enemy is so beleaguered that they have little hope of victory, they present themselves before Arthur and plead for his mercy. Arthur takes pity on them and accepts their offer of servitude. Arthur then turns his attention to restoring the cities decimated by the numerous battles. After restoring Britain to its proper glory, Arthur takes a wife for himself. He marries Guinevere who is of noble Roman blood and was fostered by Cador.

The following year Arthur subdues Ireland and Iceland until all the surrounding lands have submitted to Arthur's rule. Arthur rules for the next twelve years in total peace. Arthur soon learns that he is feared by leaders the world over. As a result he desires to conquer these other lands. Arthur first conquers Norway and appoints Loth to power. Arthur then turns his sights on Gaul currently ruled by Frollo. Frollo has no hope of victory since most of his soldiers have been bought by Arthur with lavish gifts. Frollo flees to Paris where Arthur besieges him. After a month Frollo proposes that the two men meet in single-handed combat. The fight is intense and Arthur suffers a severe blow to the head but emerges victorious. Arthur then gifts Normandy to Bedevere and Anjou to Kay. After nine years abroad, Arthur finally returns to Britain. Upon his return, Arthur arranges for a festival to be held in the City of Legions.



From every land which Arthur has conquered come high-born nobles. When all are assembled as required, Dubricius places the crown on Arthur's head during a lavish ceremony at one of the churches in the City of Legions. At the same time Guinevere is conducted to the second church and the music issuing from both cathedrals is so exquisite that attendees do not know which to enter first. As Arthur sits distributing wealth, twelve envoys come bearing a letter from Lucius Hiberius. Lucius scolds Arthur for his deplorable behavior toward Rome and failing to pay the tribute due them. Lucius orders Arthur to appear in Rome and receive punishment for his crimes. Arthur immediately retires to his chamber with his council. Cador is excited by the idea of going to war because he is frustrated with a life of leisure. Arthur stands before the assembly and states that he feels Rome should pay Britain tribute by virtue of the fact that Belinus once conquered that nation. Arthur reasons that what Rome asks of Britain can also be asked by Rome of Britain. One by one, the members of his retinue stand and voice their agreement and pledge troops to the cause. The Roman emperors learn of Arthur's plan and call together kings from the orient to march against the British king. Arthur readies his army, places his nephew Mordred and Guinevere in control of the kingdom, and sets sail.

On board ship, Arthur has a dream about a bear and a dragon who meet in battle. The dragon wins the battle and the bear's scorched body falls to the ground. Arthur tells his dream to those on board with him. The men say that the dragon represents Arthur and the bear some giant that Arthur will defeat in battle. Arthur is not so sure of this interpretation but acts accordingly when, having landed in Barfleur, he learns of a giant who has kidnapped Hoel's daughter, Helena. That night Arthur steals away from camp taking only Kay and Bedevere. Bedevere is ordered to scale the giant's hill from the seaward side. When Bedevere reaches the top of the mount, he finds an old woman lamenting the death of Helena. The woman says that the giant will come soon to have intercourse with her and that Bedevere will be killed if the giant finds him. When Bedevere reports his findings to Arthur, the king orders the other two to hang back and let him battle the monster alone. The giant deals Arthur a mighty blow on his shield. Arthur continues to hew at the monster until he deals a mortal blow and Bedevere severs the giant's head to take back to camp.

Arthur sends an envoy to Lucius to see if the leader will withdraw or fight. Gawain, Arthur's nephew, is among the messengers. At Lucius' camp Gawain slays one of the Romans after the man makes a snide comment about the Britons. As the Romans give chase to the British envoy, six thousand Britons emerge from the wood to challenge the advancing Roman army. One of the Britons encourages the troops to fight boldly and win the day so that Arthur will not be ashamed. The battle wavers back and forth until the Britons are successful in routing the Romans. Arthur is pleased with the victory and with the captives brought back by his army. Arthur decides to imprison the captured Romans and commands Cador and Bedevere to lead a contingent to Paris where the hostages will be kept. The Romans get wind of this plan and lay a surprise attack for the Britons. The Britons are greatly out-numbered but manage to secure the victory with the assistance of reinforcements. The captives are sent on to Paris while Cador and Bedevere return to Arthur. After these events, Lucius decides to seek refuge in Autun. Arthur learns of this plan and moves through the night to get in front of his enemy.



Arthur carefully arranges his army in battalions. Lucius finds out about Arthur's strategy but decides to travel through the valley anyway. As the battle rages on both Bedevere and Kay are killed. Both sides are losing large numbers of men until the secret contingent of Arthur's attacks the Romans from the rear. This attack sends the Romans into a frenzy and they scatter. Once assured of his victory, Arthur sets about seeing to the dead. The body of Lucius is transported back to Rome with the message that this is the only tribute Britain will pay.

Arthur spends the winter subduing more cities and is on his way to Rome when word comes that Mordred has taken the crown and is living adulterously with Guinevere. Mordred has made an alliance with the Saxons, Picts, Scots, and Irish. When Arthur lands at Richborough, Mordred's large army marches to meet him and Gawain is slain in the ensuing battle. Mordred flees to Winchester where Guinevere is staying. When the Queen hears of Mordred's coming, she flees to the City of Legions and joins a nunnery. Arthur soon arrives to engage the enemy but Mordred soon retreats again. Arthur is frustrated that Mordred keeps escaping him and gives chase. At Camblam the two sides prepare for a final battle. The fight is fierce and Mordred is slain. Arthur is mortally wounded and carried away to the Isle of Avalon to recover. Before his departure Arthur hands the crown over to Constantine, Cador's son.

Arthur is the consummate king from the very beginning, even at fifteen years old. Arthur's extraordinary abilities appear linked to the fantastic announcement of his impending birth by the brilliant star. Arthur is not an average person and his personal character is far above that of the rulers who preceded him. Arthur's military intelligence is astounding. He capitalizes on it quickly and uses it to establish himself as a strong force to be feared. Part of Arthur's wisdom comes from his willingness to accept the advice of his council. Arthur is fair and just in his distribution of the law and gifts. His national pride is quite evident when he refuses to submit to Lucius' request. Here finally is the king that Britain has been seeking. Arthur is unstoppable in his conquest of foreign lands and for the first time Britain is revered as the strong nation that Brutus first established.

Geoffrey focuses heavily on Arthur's military activity and skims over his personal life. This decision is in accordance with the rest of the book's emphasis on the differences between good and bad rulers. The reader may feel that Geoffrey purposely shies away from discussing Arthur's personal life in order to make a point that a king's life should be dedicated to his people and nation instead of motivated by his own desires. However, Arthur is not perfect. His fatal mistake occurs because of his pride and his obsession to prove himself conquerer of all. Mordred is able to steal the throne and Guinevere away from Arthur because the King fails to maintain contact with Britain while away in Rome. The damage is already done and Arthur's frantic race to right the wrong is too late to be effective. Geoffrey's focus on these events alerts the reader to two lessons. The first is that even the ruler who appears perfect can still suffer from faults. The second lesson is connected to the first—pride can consume anyone and so effective rulers must be careful to guard against it.



Part Eight: The Saxon Domination

Part Eight: The Saxon Domination Summary and Analysis

Soon after Constantine takes the crown, the Saxons and two of Mordred's sons march in battle against him. Constantine defeats them, sending one son fleeing to Winchester and the other to London. Constantine continues to harass Mordred's offspring. He cuts each one down in turn. Several years later Constantine himself falls dead by God's hand because Constantine slew the brothers in churches. Aurelius Conanus rules next, followed by Vortiporius. Malgo succeeds Vortiporius and Keredic after him. Keredic is a fickle ruler and the Saxons quickly amass an army to march against him. Aided by the Africans, the Saxons manage to run Keredic out of the city.

Gormund, king of the Africans, makes a treaty with Isembard of the Franks. Gormund then burns the city where Keredic has taken refuge and ravages the neighboring cities. Geoffrey then interjects his own thoughts into the story. He preaches about the stupidity of the British people who appear incapable of holding their nation together. As a result of the Britons' civil unrest, they will continue to see their country divided and continually invaded. Gormund destroys the larger part of the island and hands out tracts of land to Britain's enemies. For many years the Britons are under the control of the Saxons and other foreigners.

Pope Gregory sends Augustine to Britain to preach the message of Christianity. Augustine is not received kindly by the British bishops who have no desire to indoctrinate their enemies. Ethelfrid and Brochmail join one another in battle. Ethelfrid is eventually forced to flee and Cadvan is made king of the Britons. Cadvan, accompanied by several other kings, marches against Ethelfrid. In the end, Cadvan and Ethelfrid reach an agreement where each rules one portion of Britain. Ethelfrid impregnates his wife but dismisses her from his kingdom. Cadvan takes in the woman and raises her son alongside his own boy, Cadwallo. When their parents pass on, Cadwallo and Ethelfrid's son, Edwin, co-rule the isle of Britain. Edwin eventually asks Cadwallo for a crown of his own. One of Cadwallo's advisors reminds the King of the Saxons, deceitful actions of the past. Cadwallo tells Edwin that he cannot give him a separate crown and this greatly angers Edwin. A war begins between the two men in which Cadwallo is made to flee and Edwin begins burning the countryside. Cadwallo continually tries to return to Britain but, through the aid of a magician, Edwin is always able to thwart Cadwallo's plans. Cadwallo sets sail for Brittany but is blown off course and lands on an island named Guernsey. Cadwallo spends several days on the island before continuing on his way to Brittany.

When Cadwallo arrives in Brittany he is greeted by King Salomon who gives a great speech berating the British Britons for being unable to maintain control of their homeland. Cadwallo replies that it is no wonder that Britain has suffered at the hands of so many invaders since most of the nobles followed Maximianus to Armorica while the



island was left with only the baser people. These people soon began to give themselves airs and to war amongst themselves for the right to rule. Cadwallo then appeals to Salomon's sense of family by reminding the Armorican King that they share a common ancestor. During the winter months, Salomon and Cadwallo plot how best to overthrow Edwin. Brian, Cadwallo's nephew, is sent to attempt and assassinate Edwin's magician. Brian meets his own sister outside the city gates and she points the magician out to him. Brian moves closer to the magician and then stabs him in the chest with his walking staff, killing him instantly. Brian then sends word to Cadwallo and sets about garrisoning the city of Exeter. Once Cadwallo arrives in Britain, he gathers the scattered nobles and marches against Edwin. Edwin is quickly defeated and Cadwallo marches through the land, laying waste to all the Saxons he can find. Cadwallo sets about subduing all the remaining kings. After ruling for forty-eight years, Cadwallo dies and is succeeded by his son Cadwallader. Cadwallo's body is embalmed and placed in a golden statue set on top of London's West Gate.

Cadwallader rules for twelve years before falling ill. His illness sends Britain into a terrible civil war. Those not killed in the war face death from a horrible pestilence and many emigrate across the sea. Cadwallader is among the many fleeing to Brittany. As he sails across the sea, Cadwallader laments the terrible state of Britain and the irresponsible manner in which the Britons have acted. For eleven years Britain remains deserted and ravaged by the plague. When the plague finally abates, the Saxons establish themselves on the island. Some time later Cadwallader decides to sail for Britain to re-establish himself as king but is turned aside to Rome by an angelic voice. The voice says that the Britons are not to rule Britain until Arthur returns according to Merlin's prophecy. Cadwallader heads instead to Rome where he dies many years later. The Saxons keep peace and begin to cultivate the island.

This final chapter details the final downfall of the British nation. There appears to be little hope for the survival of the Britons at this point in history. Up until now the nation has been lead by a string of irresponsible rulers who have allowed invasion by too many foreigners seeking to conquer the island. The British kings have made ill advised decisions that have continually worn down the country's defenses and the spirit of the native inhabitants.

Edwin's magician serves as a representation of the evil that has overwhelmed Britain. Hundreds of years of constant struggle against outside forces have demoralized leaders and inhabitants alike. The foreigners have been allowed free reign of the country and in essence have become the natives, while the original Britons have been driven out like refugees. The hope that Arthur will return from the Isle of Avalon is a fantasy. Arthur's historical reality has never been proven and so the hope here is either a fanciful one or a veiled desire for the current king, Alexander, to raise himself to the same height as the revered mythical king.

The abrupt end of the book contributes to the hopelessness felt by the Britons. There is no more that Geoffrey can say on the subject. He has spent several hundred pages chronicling the deterioration of the nation and it is now up to the reader to pick up the storyline to alter history. If the reader fails to understand the message of the text then

Britain will continue to be ruled by invaders with no hope of recovering their lost national pride.



Characters

Brutus

Brutus is the son of Silvius. When Brutus is born a prophecy is issued stating that he will kill both of his parents. Brutus inadvertently fulfills this prophecy when his mother dies during childbirth and his father is killed in a freak hunting accident. Although Brutus does not intentionally kill Silvius, the lords of the land decide that Brutus must be banished for his actions. Brutus is promptly expelled from Italy and left to wander where he may. He ends up in Greece where he finds enslaved Trojans. Brutus leads the slaves in a rebellion against King Pandrasus and defeats the king to gain the captives' freedom. This victory results from a bold risk taken by Brutus. Brutus sends a captured Greek to draw the guards away from the Greek camp so that Brutus' army can gain entry to the camp and slaughter the sleeping soldiers. Once Brutus has captured the king, he arranges a deal with Pandrasus to secure ships, treasure, and the king's daughter as a wife. Brutus then sets sail for distant lands with the freed captives, with the hopes of starting a new nation. A chance landing on an island brings Brutus to a temple devoted to Diana. In a dream the goddess Diana tells Brutus that he will come to an island formerly inhabited by giants and claim it as his own. Brutus eventually lands on the promised island and names it Britain—a name derived from his own. Brutus sets about appointing rulers to the various districts of the island. He also builds a capital city and dedicates it to the people of the island. Brutus reigns for twenty-three years before his death. He leaves three sons to succeed him: Locrinus, Kamber, and Albanactus.

The account of Brutus shows a battle savy warrior who is also wise and just in his dealings. Brutus seeks and heeds the advice of trusted counselors in order to increase his kingdom. Brutus is also willing to take risks to ensure a victory. Brutus not only establishes Britain but is the example against which future rulers will be judged and to which they should aspire.

Arthur

Geoffrey's Arthur is the same one featured in the fairy tales. Arthur's inclusion in Geoffrey's historical account is interesting considering that no proof exists to show that King Arthur was ever a real person. However, his story is no less intriguing despite his historical ambiguity and his reign represents a brief return to the idyllic Britain established by Brutus.

Arthur's birth is foretold by a brilliantly shining star which appears in the heavens three nights in a row. Arthur is the son of Utherpendragon and Ygerna conceived out of wedlock and under the guise of mistaken identity. Arthur is only fifteen years old when he assumes the throne, but he has already proven himself to be courageous and generous. Britain is overrun by the Saxons and suffering from civil turmoil following his



father's death. Arthur is appointed king and sets out to rid the island of invaders and re-establish unity.

Arthur's military power soon becomes evident and with few leaders willing to oppose him, Arthur quickly ascends to a high ranking official. Arthur is emboldened by the ease with which he conquers nation after nation and does not hesitate to amass a large holding of various lands. Arthur is not without his faults however and the greatest of these is pride. Arthur holds an extravagant coronation for himself and chosen queen, Guinevere. Arthur appears a little arrogant in the staging of his ceremony. He utilizes two churches—one for his crowning and another for the crowning of Guinevere. When the festival is broken up by the appearance of a messenger from Rome demanding the tribute agreed upon so many years ago, Arthur becomes enraged. Arthur rushes off to battle the Romans, leaving Mordred as temporary ruler. Arthur, like his father before him, acts rashly and seals his own fate. Mordred quickly usurps the throne and takes Guinevere as his queen. Arthur is summoned back home to retrieve his throne. Mordred is killed and Arthur mortally wounded in the battle. Arthur is taken to the Isle of Avalon to recover from his wound and never heard from again.

Leir and his three daughters: Regan, Goneril and Cordelia

Leir rules the country for sixty years. He has three daughters and he decides to test their love in order to fairly divide his kingdom among them. His youngest and favored daughter, Cordelia, gives her father an unsatisfactory answer. As a result she is cut out of her father's "will" and married to a foreign man. Regan and Goneril, Leir's other daughters, profess their love exuberantly and are given equal shares of the kingdom. However, once Leir hands over the land to his eldest daughters, they turn on him and refuse him a home. Both girls successively strip their father of his wealth and pride until he is a penniless beggar. Leir manages to secure passage across the sea to the home of Cordelia. When she sees her father in such a state, Cordelia immediately provides for her father's return to glory. Along with her husband, Cordelia overthrows her sisters and repositions Leir on the throne. When Leir dies, Cordelia takes over control of the throne.

Cassivelaunus and Julius Caesar

Cassivelaunus rules instead of his two nephews. However, he does place each of his nephews in the position of duke. Cassivelaunus battles with Julius Caesar who comes to claim Britain for himself. Twice Cassivelaunus is able to repel Caesar. The third time the two armies meet, Caesar manages to corner Cassivelaunus on a rocky hill, cutoff from supplies. A deal is finally made where Cassivelaunus agrees to pay tribute.



Belinus and Brennius

Belinus and Brennius are Dunvallo's sons. They fight over the right to rule and the fight becomes so intense that they are about to kill one another when their mother intervenes. She settles the argument and the brothers sail together to Gaul intending to conquer it. Belinus eventually returns to Britain and rules until his death. Belinus establishes new cities and restores others, bringing a temporary peace to the island. Brennius stays in Italy after their victory and treats the people with savagery.

Claudius Caesar

Claudius travels to Britain in order to force Guiderius to pay the tribute owed by Britain to Rome. Guiderius refuses to pay the tribute because he wishes to restore Britain to its former independent glory. A treaty is arranged with Guiderius' brother, Arvirargus, who takes over after his brother's death. As part of the deal Arvirargus is married to Claudius' daughter.

Severus

Severus is a Roman delegate sent to restore order to Britain after Lucius' death. At the Emperor's bidding, Severus constructs a wall between Deira and Albany. The wall is meant to prevent Sulgenius, the leader of the Britons, from gaining access to the larger population outside of Albany. Severus is killed in combat by Sulgenius. He leaves behind two sons: Bassianus is born of a Roman mother, while Geta is born to a British woman.

Sulgenius

Sulgenius is the leader of the Britons who leads the opposition against Severus. He allies with the Picts in order to overthrow Severus. Sulgenius ultimately kills Severus in battle but is mortally wounded at the same time.

Emperor Diocletian

Diocletian orders the persecution of the Christians in Britain during Asclepiodotus' reign. He sends Maximianus Herculus to Britain to enforce the persecution. Herculus knocks down churches, burns the Holy Scriptures and butchers the priests.

Octavius

Octavius takes the crown of Britain while Constantine is in Rome. Constantine sends Trahern to confront Octavius but Trahern is killed during the battle. Octavius returns to claim the throne for himself and marries his only daughter to Senator Maximianus.



Constantine

There are several Constantines in this text. This is the first, the son of Constantius. He possesses remarkable courage. Constantine invades and conquers Rome at the request of the Romans fleeing Maxentius. This Constantine is not mentioned again after page 133.

Constantine

The second Constantine mentioned by Geoffrey. Constantine is raised to power after his brother Aldroenus refuses the throne. Aldroenus rules Armorica and has no desire to return to rule Britain. Constantine has three sons: Aurelius Ambrosius, Utherpendragon, and Constans. Constans is sent to a monastery to be raised in a religious order but is made king by Vortigern. Vortigern later has Constans murdered by the Picts.

Vortigern

Vortigern persuades Constantine the Second's eldest son Constans to forsake the priesthood to rule the kingdom. Constans has no leadership abilities after being raised as a monk and so acquiesces to Vortigern's counsel. Vortigern plots with the Picts to have Constans killed. Vortigern then joins forces with the Saxon leader, Hengist, to drive out the Picts. Vortigern forms an open relationship with Hengist, permitting the pagan to bring boatloads of Saxons to Britain. Hengist slowly gains more and more control until Vortigern's own life is in danger. Hengist betrays Vortigern in order to gain control of the country. Vortigern is forced to flee and seek refuge elsewhere. He attempts to build a tower for safety but the stones sink into the earth as fast as the workers can place them. Vortigern's advisers tell him to sacrifice a fatherless boy so that the stones will cease to sink. Vortigern has messengers sent to find such a child and Merlin is introduced to him. However, Vortigern becomes enamored with the precocious young boy and saves his life when Merlin reveals the true cause of the sinking stones. Vortigern asks Merlin to foretell his future and learns that he faces death at the hands of either Aurelius or Hengist. Vortigern is burnt alive inside his castle by Aurelius who arrives the day after Merlin's prophecy.

Hengist

Hengist is the leader of the Saxons who forms a close alliance with Vortigern. Hengist marries his own daughter to Vortigern in order to gain favors from the British king. He plots against the Britons and murders hundreds of their leaders during a peace treaty meeting. Hengist gains control of the country after bringing a large number of Saxons over to drive Vortigern into hiding. After Aurelius takes his revenge on Vortigern, he turns his sights on Hengist. The two sides battle back and forth until Eldol is finally able to capture the Saxon ruler. Aurelius allows Eldol to exact revenge on Hengist for the



murders at the peace meeting by cutting off the Saxon's head. Aurelius does pay respect to Hengist by allowing him to be buried in the Saxon tradition.

Eldol

Eldol is at the peace meeting where Hengist betrays Vortigern and slays hundreds of Britons. Eldol is able to escape the massacre with his life after using a wooden pole to kill seventy Saxons. Eldol takes revenge on Hengist by capturing him in a later battle with Aurelius. Aurelius allows Eldol to cut off Hengist's head, thereby ending the Saxon warrior's terrifying reign.

Aurelius Ambrosius

The second of Constantine's sons. He is taken to Armorica along with Uther when Vortigern comes to power. When he comes of age, Aurelius returns to Britain to seek vengeance on Vortigern for his father's death. Aurelius burns Vortigern alive inside his stronghold.

Aurelius is skilled in battle and greatly feared by his enemies. He is also liberal with his gifts and grants the Saxons sanctuary near Scotland after defeating Hengist. Aurelius methodically works his way through Britain, restoring towns destroyed by the Saxon invaders. At the advice of Merlin, Aurelius sends Uther and a contingent of soldiers to retrieve the Giants Ring from Ireland and establish it as a monument to the deceased kings buried at Mount Ambrosius.

Vortigern's son, Paschent, plots with a Saxon named Eopa to murder Aurelius. Aurelius has fallen ill and the kingdom is in search of a remedy. Eopa says he will disguise himself as a Christian and a Briton to gain access to Aurelius' chamber. Once this has been achieved, Eopa gives Aurelius a poisoned elixir and the King dies that night in his sleep. Aurelius' brother, Uther, is away on a mission to route out the enemy but quickly returns home when he learns of Aurelius' death. Aurelius is buried inside the Giants Ring.

Utherpendragon

Utherpendragon is Constantine's youngest son. He and Aurelius are sent away to Armorica as young children when Vortigern assumes the throne. Uther and Aurelius return as young men to exact vengeance on Vortigern for Constantine's death. Uther is as strong as his brother in battle but can be rash in his actions. After Aurelius' death, Uther dutifully assumes the throne. His first order of business is to drive Hengist's son, Octa, out of Briton. After this Uther sets about restoring the churches which the Saxons destroyed.

Uther falls into heavy lust for Ygerna, the Duke of Cornwall's wife. His desire is so strong that he cannot function as a proper ruler until Merlin helps Uther spend the night



with Ygerna. Merlin uses his magic arts to transform Uther into the likeness of the Duke so that the King can gain access to Ygerna while the Duke is away from the castle. The Duke is killed not long afterwards and Ygerna becomes pregnant with Uther's son, Arthur.

Uther falls seriously ill and can no longer lead his soldiers in battle. When Octa hears about Uther's failing health, he seizes the opportunity to invade Britain. Uther becomes enraged and orders a litter built to carry him to the battlefield. Uther manages to lead his troops to victory despite his illness. The defeated Saxons conspire to murder Uther and do so by poison. Uther is buried alongside his brother Aurelius in the Giants Ring.

Corineus

Corineus is the leader of the exiled Trojans Brutus encounters in Mauretania. He is a man brave in battle and enjoys wrestling giants. Corineus quickly becomes Brutus' right-hand man and trusted friend. The area of Cornwall is named after him.

Merlin

Merlin is born to a woman who says she has never lain with a man. Vortigern acquires him after being told by his council that such a boy's blood is needed to stop the stones of his tower from sinking into the ground. Merlin openly challenges Vortigern's council and reveals the true reason for the sinking stones. Merlin possesses supernatural abilities and can foresee the future. He prophesies the history of Britain and its eventual downfall. Merlin becomes revered for his quiet wisdom. He is matter of fact in his pronouncements and appears to follow his own path without being completely ruled by any particular king.

Merlin provides more advice to Vortigern and Aurelius than to Uther or Arthur. By Geoffrey's account, Merlin is all but lost by the time Arthur takes the throne. The mystical quality surrounding Merlin in other stories is not prominent in Geoffrey's text. Merlin is merely a means to an end without being significant.

Mordred

Mordred is Arthur's nephew. Arthur places Mordred in control when he must travel to Rome for a warring mission. Mordred is full of personal desire and seizes the crown for his own head. He also takes Guinevere as his own wife, even though no word has been received that Arthur is dead. When Arthur learns of Mordred's treachery, he returns home to put his nephew back in his place. The battle between the two leads to Mordred's death and the mortal wounding of Arthur.



Objects/Places

Britain

Britain is the name given to the island by Brutus. Brutus was told about this particular island by the goddess Diana and it is here that he makes a home for himself and the freed Trojans.

Albany, Kambria, and Loegria

Albany, Kambria and Loegria are three parts of Britain. Each part is named after one of Brutus' sons: Albanactus, Locrinus, and Kamber.

The Giants' Ring

Merlin tells Aurelius to fetch the Giants Ring from its original place in Ireland and place it around the graves of the honored nobles at Mount Ambrius. The large stones were originally brought from Africa by giants and placed in a circle. The stones are so large that no man can lift them and only Merlin is able to move them by his mysterious arts. The Giants' Ring is more commonly known as Stonehenge.

Arthur's Dream

Arthur is on his way to Southampton to engage Lucius in battle when he dreams of a dragon and bear fighting in the sky. The dragon overcomes the bear by scorching the animal with its fiery breath. When Arthur asks his advisors about his dream, they interpret it to mean that Arthur will soon battle a giant and emerge victorious. Arthur is not so sure of this interpretation but does not argue. Arthur's dream is reminiscent of Merlin's explanation of the two dragons.

The Rivers

The three noble rivers of Britain are the Thames, the Severn, and the Humber.

Molmutine Laws

The Molmutine Laws are established by Dunvallo Molmutius. The law provides sanctuary in churches and on the roads to churches. The law also enables Dunvallo to keep the land free of bandits.



The Five Races

Britain is inhabited by five races of people. These races are: the Norman-French, the Britons, the Saxons, the Picts, and the Scots. The Britons are the original inhabitants of the island descended from Brutus.

Troia Nova

Troia Nova is the capital city built by Brutus. Troia Nova is also called Trinovantum, which eventually becomes known as London.

Billingsgate

Billingsgate is a gateway constructed at Trinovantum by Belinus. A tower is built on the top and a watergate below allows for ships to pass. Belinus' ashes are placed in a golden urn and housed in the gate tower.

Pridwen, Caliburn, and Ron

Pridwen is the name of Arthur's shield. The shield is circular and painted with a picture of Mary. Caliburn is the name of Arthur's sword which was made on Avalon. Ron is the name of Arthur's spear. The spear is long and has a broad blade.

Merlin's Prophecies

Merlin speaks out a lengthy prophecy at the urging of Vortigern. The prophecy is meant to reveal the meaning behind the two dragons found beneath a pool where Vortigern is trying to build a tower. The entire prophecy lays out the history of Britain. Merlin speaks in veiled terms and the reader will have to be a close reader to decipher the boy's words.

Cablam

The River Cablam is the site of Arthur's final battle. It is here that he fights with Mordred. Mordred is killed and Arthur is mortally wounded.

The Giant of Mont Saint Michel

When Arthur arrives in Southampton on his way to do battle with Lucius, he learns of a giant who is harassing the countryside. Most recently the giant has abducted Helena, the daughter of Hoel. Helena has been murdered by the giant. Arthur decides to face the giant alone, perhaps as a means of fulfilling the dream he had, while on board ship,



about the bear and the dragon. Arthur manages to defeat the giant and carries the head back to his camp in order to embolden his army.

Armorica

Armorica is also referred to as the New Britain or Brittany. The country is near Gaul and was established by Maximianus and Conanus Meridiadocus who stock the land with Britons.

The Red Dragon and the White Dragon

The red dragon and the white dragon are found beneath a pool uncovered by Merlin. The two dragons battle each other in the sky. The white first pushes the red back towards the pool but the red gains strength and repels the white one. Merlin tells Vortigern that the red dragon represents Britain which is nearing its end and the white dragon represents the Saxons who are quickly overrunning the island.

The Isle of Avalon

The mythical island that Arthur is taken to in order to recover from the mortal wound inflicted during battle with Mordred.



Themes

Military Intelligence

One cannot be a great leader without a complete knowledge of the battlefield. This knowledge must include an understanding of battle strategy, troop placement, the wisdom to listen to council, and the realization that retreat does not always mean defeat. A strong military leader knows how to manipulate the situation to his advantage in order to gain the upper hand. He is not afraid to take risks and lives by the motto that death on the battlefield is better than death in one's bed.

All of the great kings of Britain who were successful in establishing themselves as strong military leaders possessed these characteristics. Brutus took a giant risk by using a Greek captive to gain access to the Greek camp. Although the captive acted out of his own fear of death, he could have easily betrayed Brutus and sought refuge from his own king. His willingness to take this risk gains him victory and an alliance with the Greek king through marriage. Cassivelaunus beats Julius Caesar because he plants iron tipped stakes in the Thames River. The knowledge that Caesar would sail his ships directly up the river to attack prompts Cassivelaunus to prepare himself ahead of time. Aurelius, Arthur, Cadwallo and many others pursue their fleeing enemies until they have all been routed or killed. While this act appears barbaric, it is prudent in order to prevent the immediate regrouping of the enemy.

As Geoffrey chronicles the numerous kings to rule Britain, he mentions over and over again the excellent battle tactics of the leaders successful in regaining control from foreign hands. These kings are prudent in their treaties with invaders and do not openly invite trouble from across the sea. Threats from Rome, Gaul, the Saxons, and all others are met with immediate force before the foreigners have time to gather momentum. The wisdom of these actions results in a strengthened Britain, nearly invincible from outside attack. When enemies are successful in gaining a foothold on British soil it is the result of a leader who lacks military intelligence. Unsure actions in battle result in a weakened country, while firm choices and follow-through renew the country's national pride.

Women as Currency

History is full of examples of women being used to mediate agreements between men. The women are silent partners to the business transaction, used as currency instead of a valuable asset. The instances where women exert their voices are rare but not unheard of in Geoffrey's text.

Most often women are handed over from a father to a foreign prince in order to seal a peace treaty. Brutus is given Pandrasus' daughter in exchange for the Greek king's life and the freedom of the Trojan slaves. Geoffrey mentions that the girl stands on board Brutus' ship crying as her homeland fades from sight. There is no mention that she



protests the trade or voices her discontent at being taken abruptly away from her family. Her opinion does not matter and so is not noted. Love is not a factor in these agreements. Locrinus falls in love with a German princess but is duty bound to marry Corineus' daughter. Locrinus circumvents the situation by keeping the German woman as his mistress and divorcing his wife as soon as Corineus dies. Perhaps love should not be a factor in such marriages. Corineus' daughter has the mistress and her daughter drowned in the river following Locrinus' death. Passion overwhelms the senses and clouds judgment so that a ruler can easily lose focus. Mordred is overcome with lust for Arthur's crown and wife. His presumptuous taking of both items results in the end of an idyllic era that will never be seen in Britain again.

Although women are not party to agreements about marriage, they are expected to contribute to the outcome of the transaction. Alliances are made on the assumption that the woman will bear a viable heir that will carry on the lines of both nations. Failure to do so can result in a broken agreement and ultimately war.

Women are treated as currency throughout Geoffrey's chronicle. The world of war, conquering foreign nations, and brokering deals is not for women. Their voices are not asked for during peace talks. The only good a woman can do to prove her own worth is to provide a suitable heir to carry on the family line. This is the most a woman can hope for in life and failure to do so erases her name from the face of history.

Shooting Oneself in the Foot

The idea that someone can act in such a way as to bring about his own destruction is usually applied to individuals. However, Geoffrey's text shows very clearly that an entire nation can continually work against itself. Brutus founds Britain on the principles of securing a homeland for the misplaced Trojans. He takes great care to secure a land that will provide for the physical, spiritual, and national needs of his people. Brutus founds cities and establishes a capital to oversee the laws of the island. When faced with encroachment from outsiders, Brutus quickly attacks and drives out the enemy. Unfortunately, the kings who follow Brutus do not all share his commitment to the preservation of the Britons.

Personal ambition is the most common cause of a ruler's downfall. Vortigern is so hungry for power that he aligns with the Saxons in order to overthrow Constans and defeat the Picts. Vortigern's desire for the crown prevents him from seeing that his open relationship with Hengist will be his eventual downfall. By allowing the Saxons to flood Britain with their army, Vortigern aides his enemy in mounting a force against him. Vortigern unwisely backs himself into a corner with death as his only escape. The result of Vortigern's actions leave the country ravaged by the Saxons and open to attacks from the Picts and Scots. It is Aurelius' commitment to his family and his country that restores Britain to the peace and glory that Brutus began.

Vortigern is not the only ruler to fall prey to his own ambitions. However, he is possibly the most salient example of shooting oneself in the foot. When men in positions of



power fail to keep the entire picture in focus, complete destruction is the only outcome. The same sentiment can be applied to the modern era. Geoffrey's text is not only a warning to the current king of Britain but to political leaders the world over. A man who favors himself over the common good will not succeed in anything but the downfall of himself and his nation.

Style

Perspective

The dedication of the book explains how Geoffrey came to write this history. The Archdeacon of Oxford approached Geoffrey with an ancient text written in the British tongue. Since the preferred language of Geoffrey's time was Latin, the archdeacon's goal is that this apparently important text be translated into a language more appropriate for noble consumption. There is also an underlying reason for writing the text. Geoffrey is a writer, an occupation not widely known for its income. Geoffrey hopes that some high born nobleman will find favor with his writing and give the work his stamp of approval.

The reader is intrigued by Geoffrey's history. His narrative provides a user-friendly historical text. The book reads more like a novel than a non-fiction work which increases the reader's sense of scrutiny. It is difficult for the reader to completely believe everything that Geoffrey reports but the style of writing is so enjoyable that the reader wishes to believe Geoffrey's account. Whether Geoffrey's account is truly factual from beginning to end is subject to debate, but at the very least he provides a historical text that brings more readers familiarity with British history.

Tone

The reader would suspect that Geoffrey's history would be completely objective. Since Geoffrey tells the reader that his intention is to lay forth the history of Britain and its kings, there seems little room for embellishment. However, the reader soon realizes that the base narration Geoffrey apologizes for in the dedication is actually an admission that he has tweaked the stories to his own liking. Geoffrey admits that he does not lay forth every detail as it happened but omits parcels that are handled by other authors. It appears that Geoffrey wishes to put down only those tales which he can spin in his own way and does not desire to relate those things which can be checked in other sources.

Although Geoffrey tells the reader that he does not include all the facts, he does appear to follow history as closely as he can. The reader must also keep in mind that Geoffrey is not strictly writing history according to his own memory but is translating a text given to him by the Archdeacon of Oxford. There is a sense of reverence for the events Geoffrey relates but he does not attempt to disguise his feelings for certain rulers. The reader immediately knows whom Geoffrey finds worthy and whom he considers a waste of flesh. The fact that Geoffrey is translating the text from the British tongue, which is traditionally considered a base language, into Latin, the language of the learned, shows that he has respect for the material.



Geoffrey does his best with the material at hand. As a writer he desires to make his own style and voice heard by his audience. In order to do so, Geoffrey cannot be completely objective.

Structure

The book is divided into eight parts and a dedication. The dedication is basically a letter from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Robert, the Earl of Gloucester, asking the noble man to look favorably on Geoffrey's book. It was often customary for a writer to seek the approval of a high born noble so that a book would be more readily accepted into the culture. Geoffrey downplays his skill as a writer and asks forgiveness for his base method of writing.

The eight parts of the book are given titles that describe the events of each section. Each part is further broken down into subsections although these distinctions are not marked within the text and are only known to the reader by small headings at the top of each page. These headings act like chapter titles without being intrusive to the text itself. The headings do not break each part into distinct chapters but serve only to situate the reader within the extensive narrative.

The flow between the eight parts is nearly seamless. The author interrupts himself at various points to explain why he does not go into more detail about specific characters or events and to direct the reader to further reading on these missed points. The most noticeable digression comes in Part Five when the author relates the entire prophecy of Merlin. It is interesting that Geoffrey chooses not to truncate Merlin's words. Geoffrey insists that the chapter is the result of a request from Archbishop Alexander but the reader will notice that Merlin's prophecy lays forth the outline for the entire book. The reader must take some time to consider the prophecy in order to gain a full understanding of its meaning since it is not told in the same straightforward style as the rest of the text. As with most prophecies, Merlin's words are veiled and require concentration to unveil them. Besides this slight departure, the rest of the text is easy to read and understand, although the sheer number of names can be a little confusing for the reader.



Quotes

"As soon as they had made sure of the truth of the matter, the soothsayers said that she would give birth to a boy, who would cause the death of both his father and his mother; and that after he had wandered in exile through many lands this boy would eventually rise to the highest honour," Part One, p. 54.

"The spirit of discord is, however, perpetually on the watch for a chance to put an end to a state of prosperity," Part Two, p. 90.

"Then they promoted in his place his brother Elidurus, who was afterwards called the Dutiful because of the compassion which he showed to Archgallo," Part Two, p. 103.

"All the same, unless I am mistaken, they have become very degenerate when compared with us, and they can know nothing at all about modern warfare, living as they do beyond the deep sea and quite cut off from the world. It will be a simple matter to force them to pay tribute and to swear perpetual obedience to the majesty of Rome," Part Three, p. 107.

"Human beings are conditioned by the chance happenings of history: it follows that those who have been enemies sometimes become friends and that those who have run away may yet achieve victory," Part Three, p. 115.

"All that Gildas set out in a treatise which is so lucidly written that it seemed to me unnecessary that it should be described a second time in my more homely style," Part Three, p. 126.

"The priests who had been elected and the faithful who were committed to their care were butchered side by side, hurrying off, as it were, in a thronged and eager fellowship, towards the joys of the Kingdom of Heaven, as if to their own appointed resting-place," Part Three, p. 130.

"You made a fatal mistake when you betrayed their father and invited the Saxons to your island. You summoned them as your protectors, but in effect their coming ensured your own violent death," Part Six, p. 186.

"The man was so brave and hardy that while he was living in various places in Gaul no one had dared to meet him in single combat," Part Six, p. 188.

"Merlin obeyed the King's orders and put the stones up in a circle round the sepulchre, in exactly the same way as they had been arranged on Mount Killaraus in Ireland, thus proving that his artistry was worth more than any brute strength," Part Six, p. 198.

"Arthur was a young man only fifteen years old; but he was of outstanding courage and generosity, and his inborn goodness gave him such grace that he was loved by almost all the people," Part Seven, p. 212.



"The fact that he [Arthur] was dreaded by all encouraged him to conceive the idea of conquering the whole of Europe," Part Seven, p. 222.

"Indeed, by this time, Britain had reached such a standard of sophistication that it excelled all other kingdoms in its general affluence, the richness of its decorations, and the courageous behaviour of its inhabitants," Part Seven, p. 229.

"For eleven years Britain remained deserted by all its inhabitants, except for a few whom death had spared in certain parts of Wales," Part Eight, p. 282.



Topics for Discussion

How factual do you feel Geoffrey's account to be? Why?

Pick one of the prominent leaders (Brutus, Constantine, Arthur, for example) and discuss the attributes that make them great.

The reader constantly learns about the rise and fall of kings. Some are extremely bad while others are extremely good. Discuss why you think this polarity exists, and include any clues Geoffrey offers.

Geoffrey marks the passage of time by noting other world events, particularly mentioning Christian prophets. Why do you think he marks time in this way?

Is there any significance to the six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six men Arthur keeps back with himself during the battle with Lucius en route to Autun? Explain your answer.

Scholars have long debated the existence of King Arthur. There is little support that such a man actually lived and most believe Arthur was a legend amassed from other British heroes. Do you feel that Geoffrey's account proves or disproves Arthur's existence? If you feel that Arthur is not a historical figure, then why do you feel Geoffrey chooses to include him in this text?

Compared to most of the other kings listed by Geoffrey, the author spends the most amount of time discussing Arthur. Why do you think Geoffrey focuses so heavily on a king that may not have even existed?

As the narrative progresses, Geoffrey interjects with more and more of his own opinions. Near the end of the text he rails against the stupidity of the British people. How do you feel about the author "talking" to the reader throughout a historical story?