

# **The Mists of Avalon Study Guide**

## **The Mists of Avalon by Marion Zimmer Bradley**

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## Plot Summary

*The Mists of Avalon* is an epic tale of love, loyalty, betrayal, kingship, and magic. It takes place over several decades and two generations. It tells the fabled tale of Camelot and the Knights of the Round Table. Taking a different view from the legend, it is told from the perspective of the women of Avalon. These powerful women use their magic and their wiles to fulfill the will of the Goddess and place a king on the throne of Britain, as well as later take him down from it.

Every event in the story is laced with some element of magic. As the Lady of the Lake seeks to place Uther Pendragon on the throne as the High King, she upsets the lives of many. Those such as Igraine, who are living quiet lives, are thrown into the fray as part of the master plan. Igraine gives birth to Arthur, who eventually becomes the High King when Uther dies. Before Arthur can become king, he needs to be tested by trials that Avalon puts him through. As part of these trials, he makes a marriage with the land and has a son from the union which he does not learn of for many years.

Arthur swears an oath to Avalon to always defend it and its old ways and rituals. In turn, Viviane and the Merlin place Arthur on the throne and give him his charmed sword, Excalibur, as well as the Holy Regalia of Avalon. While he swears this oath to Avalon, it will, in turn, continue to support him in fighting for peace for the land.

Shortly after Arthur becomes king, he takes Gwenhwyfar as his bride. There is trouble from the beginning as it is apparent that she and Lancelot are in love with each other. Still, Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot do as they must and live apart from each other in agony. Years later, when Gwenhwyfar fails to produce an heir for Arthur, Lancelot's son Galahad is named heir to the throne. It is also in later years that Arthur gives in to Gwenhwyfar's demands to put aside the old ways of Avalon for the newer, Christian ways. This embracing of Christian ways is at the heart of the action, because Avalon now seeks to take Excalibur and the Holy Regalia back. If Arthur will not support them, they will no longer support him.

Years later, Arthur's son, Gwydion, grows up and becomes powerful in the Sight as well as the ways of Avalon. As the prophecy decrees, Gwydion challenge Arthur for the throne, once he discovers Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot's affair. It splits the Companions, and Gwydion's challenge for the throne is the undoing of Camelot. The quest for the Grail and the return of Excalibur lead to several deaths and the end of an era.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 1

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 1 Summary

*The Mists of Avalon* is an epic tale of love, loyalty, betrayal, kingship, and magic. It takes place over several decades and two generations of families. It tells the fabled tale of Camelot and the Knights of the Round Table. Taking a different view from the legend, it is told from the perspective of the women of Avalon. These powerful women use their magic and wiles to fulfill the will of the Goddess and place a king on the throne of Britain, as well as later take him down from it.

With a vision from the Sight, Igraine expects a visit from her sister, Viviane. While Igraine waits, she briefly details the history of her marriage and the birth of her daughter. Igraine appears to feel serenity about her marriage, which she at one time opposed. Her husband, Gorlois, appears to be a patient man by the way Igraine describes him; although, he is more than twice her age.

Viviane and the Merlin come to visit and tell Igraine that she is to deliver a son, who will save their old religion. Igraine's husband, the Duke of Gorlois, cannot be the father, since he is a Christian. One again, Igraine feels betrayed by her family. She feels that she has already done her duty by giving up her life to enter an arranged marriage and live far from home and the things she knows.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 1 Analysis

There is obvious tension between Igraine and Viviane. It also seems as though the Church and Old Way are prevalent as two different, distinct, and equally strong religions, where in the past, it has always been the Old Way with the Goddess at the top of the hierarchy. The Church and Old Way are at odds with each other. Igraine and Viviane both seem to be down on the Christian Church. The Romans, who are largely Christian, are anti-woman in their religious sentiments; whereas, the Old Faith is very pro-woman with the Goddess at the center of everything. The woman is celebrated as the feminine Divine.

At this point, Igraine still clings to convention. She considers all the things she is supposed to do out of obligation and honor. Her marriage is one of these things. She also recognizes also that, due to convention, she needs to bear her husband a son. The news that Viviane and the Merlin tell Igraine upset her greatly because this upsets the new life that she has resigned herself to living. In her eyes, bearing her husband a son is the greatest thing she can do as a woman.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 2

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 2 Summary

Igraine discovers that she is to bear a son that will save the old religion and heal old wounds in the country. It upsets her when Viviane and the Merlin explain to her that this son will not be from Gorlois but from someone else. They tell her the father will be Uther Pendragon. Merlin uses what he knows to convince Igraine that this momentous change is necessary. Merlin makes Igraine feel guilty when he asks if Igraine would let the Goddess and her work fade from the world when Igraine could prevent it. Igraine gets upset because she feels like a pawn in a game that she is not allowed to play, yet the game cannot be played without her. If it were up to her, she would go back to the Holy Isle and live out her life in Avalon as a priestess. Viviane and the Merlin remind her that that is not Igraine's destiny. They tell Igraine that she will not be able to run from fate. Igraine is to take part in the salvation of the land, but Avalon is closed to her forever. This makes her feel trapped.

Igraine wonders why Viviane does not take this role, but Viviane explains that Uther needs to have a son, and Viviane is too old to bear him one. Soon, Viviane will have to retire and hand over her office to someone younger. There is a sense that Viviane regrets not being a mother. Although Viviane has given birth, she has not raised any children in a traditional sense.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 2 Analysis

Not only does Igraine feel betrayed, but she continues to feel a strong sense of honor. Although she does not truly love Gorlois, she recognizes how well he treats her and how good she has things. Igraine accepts her life and has let go of childish dreams of choosing her own path. She feels that she needs to fulfill her current path to the best of her ability. Since, as a woman she cannot do much else with her life, she tries to defend this one thing fiercely. In many ways, she senses that Viviane treats her like a child. In a way, Viviane is doing just that, as well as manipulating Igraine. Igraine reads Viviane's exchanges with Merlin as her saying that she will get Igraine to do what they want her to. Igraine also feels that in addition to betraying Gorlois, she will be betraying her own honor.





# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 3

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 3 Summary

Igraine travels to Londinium with Gorlois. While on the journey Igraine recalls a vision that she has of Gorlois, which occurs right after the messenger arrives to alert her of Gorlois' trip home. The vision is of him wounded and dying. She sees it as an omen of his death. Gorlois tells Igraine that their journey to Londinium is because Ambrosius's death is expected soon. The kings of Britain are gathering to choose the next High King and war leader. For all the plotting with Viviane and the Merlin, Igraine does not have to coax Gorlois into taking her with him to Londinium.

When they arrive, they attend mass with the High King and the other kings. After they first arrive, Igraine receives a package from Viviane, which is the moonstone that Igraine wears when Viviane first comes to visit her in chapter one. Igraine ultimately sees Uther during mass, since he arrives late. When the two of them meet after mass, Igraine notices that he is entranced with her moonstone gem. Gorlois thinks he is staring at Igraine's breast and is uncomfortable with the meeting. Gorlois automatically thinks that Uther is after his wife.

Right after the mass, they join Ambrosius for a banquet. When Uther and Igraine meet again, she finds him staring at her moonstone again. The men gather around and talk about war and their revulsion toward the Saxons. Igraine refuses to consider that her sister's and the Merlin's predictions are true about Uther. She does not see how she would turn her life upside-down for this man. Before the end of the day, Ambrosius dies and, thus begins a period of mourning and deliberation over who will be the next High King. They go back to church for services. Afterward, Igraine and Uther meet one another outside and talk about the differences in the way their religions view death. Uther confides in her about what will happen with impending war. When Gorlois comes upon them, he is instantly outraged. His anger and jealousy are apparent. Without listening to his wife, Gorlois believes that their intentions were not pure. He doesn't believe what she tells him of their discussion. Igraine now views her husband with contempt over his inability to trust her.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 3 Analysis

Igraine compares this journey with her husband to the one she took four years earlier when she was sent off to marry him. The time has changed her. On this journey, she is no longer a frightened child. Again, Gorlois' gentle demeanor is displayed here. She describes him as eager to please her, clumsy at times, but mostly eager to please.

Mist is used several times in this chapter; each time it is associated with travel and far away places. At one point, the rain is so persistent that Gorlois and Igraine cannot see the distant hills. They rode on in a circle of mist. Igraine wonders if they can get lost in



the mist and wander into the realms of Fairy, never return to this world. Igraine mentions the mist to Gorlois as they are riding, saying they risk not finding Londinium. Mist is also mentioned again as part of a dream that Igraine has. She sees the Holy Isle receding further and further into the mists. As she makes her way toward Avalon in the dream, she sees Christian symbols instead of the familiar sights of the Holy Isle.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 4

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 4 Summary

The chapter starts with the funeral ceremony for Ambrosius. Afterward, Gorlois attends the council while Igraine goes to the market. When he comes back he tells her a little of what transpired, but decides to forego the details and heads to sleep instead. Igraine has disturbing dreams of Uther. Still in denial about the prophecy, Igraine is disappointed when she discovers that she is not pregnant yet. She then falls ill and begins to despair over Uther. Merlin pays her a visit and soothes her by sending her a dream that will set things right in her mind. That night she has the dream, which explains it all to her. The dream, which is more like a memory, is a story of how Igraine and Uther are bound to each other from a previous life. They need to come together to save the land they love. Their love is an eternal love. When she wakes from the dream she understands why this course of action is necessary. She is also comforted by it and no longer concerned about Gorlois.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 4 Analysis

Igraine's dream of Uther expresses what she feels for him. In this dream she grows up as she realizes what true love feels like. She realizes all along that she is still a child in so many ways because she has never experienced this type of love. She makes the choice this time. However, since she is still married to Gorlois, she feels trapped. At nineteen, she believes her life is over. It is not until the Merlin comes to her that she gets over this. He tells her that dreams are the remedy. Many times she has dreams and visions that send her the messages that she needs. The Merlin sends her a dream that is intended to cure her.

This dream, as Igraine sees it, is more like a memory, since it is clear in its message, not garbled the way dreams usually are. In it, she and Uther meet, but they are not Igraine and Uther; they are people from a former life. It is revealed to her that their connection is one that spans time. Given the importance of a male heir, Igraine understands the prophecy more and more. She also knows that she will be the one to give Uther the son he needs.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 5

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 5 Summary

Gorlois and Igraine prepare themselves for Uther's anointing and the party afterwards. Igraine encounters Uther at the party, and he notices that she is not wearing the moonstone. As they talk, they realize that they have both had the same dream. Igraine realizes that Merlin worked magic on Uther as well. Igraine knows that Uther is her destiny. She is not upset by the thought of being with him now. She gets upset since they're stuck. If she's married, there is nothing they can do to be together.

It is at this point that Gorlois shows up and is immediately enraged and jealous all over again. Gorlois humiliates Igraine in public thinking she is cheating on him. He drags her back to their lodgings where he beats her in anger. His pride is hurt once again. He has completely shut her out now. He knows that he is too old for her and that she did not choose him, but he is still hurt by her seeming willingness to go along with Uther. He goes back to Uther's castle and proceeds to tell him off. Gorlois then goes back to their room and sees Igraine's things packed; He doesn't know she is attempting to run away. They leave that very night for home. On the way, Gorlois discovers that he can no longer perform sexually with Igraine. This is another sign to her that Viviane and Merlin were correct with their prophecy that she will not give Gorlois a son.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 5 Analysis

Pride is a recurrent theme in this chapter. Gorlois cannot abide his wife taking off after another man, or another man coming after his wife. While this is a perfectly acceptable reaction, Gorlois' jealousy starts to spin out of control. It is this defect in his personality that will ultimately be his downfall.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 6

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 6 Summary

When Gorlois and Igraine arrive back at Tintagel, it is obvious to the household that something is amiss between the two of them. After a few short days, Gorlois leaves again. This time he has the castle well guarded so that Igraine will not be able to leave. This upsets her, not just because she is trapped, but because Gorlois accuses her of a crime she has not committed. There is no way Igraine can even get news from the outside world. Igraine finally convinces the guard to allow her women and Morgause to go to the market. When Morgause comes back, she fills Igraine in on what is happening in the world.

Igraine uses an out-of-body experience to find Viviane and find out what is going on. When Igraine does, she sees that Viviane is in labor. Igraine fears for Viviane's life, since Viviane is past safe childbearing years. So now she is worried about Uther and her sister. Viviane gives Igraine a message not to worry and that things are happening as they are supposed to and that it will all work out for her in the end. Igraine also has a vision of Uther telling her that he will come for her at Midwinter, and Igraine needs to be ready for him then.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 6 Analysis

Morgaine's wisdom, although she is so young, comes through. When she discovers that they are not allowed out, she asks if it is because Gorlois does not trust them. Igraine agrees that yes, that is why. Morgaine is a strong-willed, little girl. She stands up unflinchingly to Father Columba when he berates Igraine. From the start, Morgaine proves that she will grow into a force to be reckoned with.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 7

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 7 Summary

Gorlois comes home and tells Igraine about his uprising against Uther. He and his men are going up against him over Gorlois' hurt pride. He also implies that the Saxons are arriving on their shores. Gorlois will continue to fight Uther, despite their country about to be overrun by Saxons, all because of his wounded pride. A peddler woman comes to the castle in rags. Igraine takes care of her, and in return the woman gives Igraine news of the world. Through their conversation, Igraine learns that the woman is from the Holy Isle. She tells Igraine that Viviane is alive and well and has given birth to a healthy boy that she named Galahad.

Igraine attempts another out-of-body experience. This time she sees Gorlois and learns that his men are preparing to attack Uther. Igraine appears to Uther and relates the information to him so he can be prepared. When she comes back to her body, she pays the penalty in the form of a serious illness. For days she runs a high fever, then recovers.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 7 Analysis

Viviane says cryptically that one son will serve the other. As Igraine listens to the peddler woman's story, she has a vision of their two sons in the future. Igraine more and more has visions and dreams. She is just starting to allow herself to finally be who she really is. After she starts to recover from her out-of-body experience, she has a vision of the future with Morgaine. In it, she sees her daughter wearing the robes of a priestess, similar to the ones Viviane wears.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 8

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 8 Summary

It is Midwinter-Eve, and the weather is improving. Igraine anxiously awaits Uther's arrival. In the vision Igraine had, this is the day Uther said he would come for her. That night, men with Roman cloaks appear in the courtyard at Tintagel along with the Merlin. Thinking that it is the master of the house, Gorlois, the guards allow them entrance. Igraine however, knew at once that it was Uther because of the serpents tattooed on his arms. She leads Uther to her chambers where Uther tells Igraine that the Merlin cast a spell on Uther so that he appeared to look like Gorlois, which enables Uther to gain entry. Deep into the night, Igraine wakes up and goes into the great hall. It is there that she sees a vision of Gorlois. It is the same vision she has had previously where he dies.

Igraine is shaken from her reverie as more men show up at the castle. She is further distressed when she sees that they have Gorlois' dead body. Everyone at the household wakes up due to the commotion. Uther orders Father Columba to marry him and Igraine immediately. The chapter ends with Morgaine's journal entry several years later. She looks back on her childhood and resents her mother for ignoring her, and Uther for taking her mother's attention from her. When her brother, Gwydion, is born, Morgaine further resents her mother, since Morgaine becomes saddled with the responsibility for taking care of him.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 8 Analysis

The prophecy that Viviane and the Merlin foresaw now unfolds. At first, Igraine continues to shun Father Columba. With much persistence, he convinces Igraine to attend mass, which sets the example for others in the household. Father Columba encourages Igraine to receive the sacraments. After Gorlois's men show up with his dead body, Igraine has a change of heart toward the priest. As everything in the prophecy has so far come true, Igraine fears that she will be damned for her part in the matter. She fears that it is her fault that Gorlois is dead, since it was her vision that spared Uther in the battle against Gorlois. Igraine is done with magic and sendings. She asks the priest for a confession before the wedding ceremony takes place.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 9

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 9 Summary

As Viviane meditates, she has a vision that Gwydion, now named Arthur, is in trouble. She gets a sense that he is very ill and might be dying. Since it is crucial that he lives to be king, Viviane leaves Avalon and goes to him. Viviane panics, since they put so much effort into making sure that the prophecy is fulfilled; she needs to make certain that the boy is fine.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 9 Analysis

Through Viviane's eyes, the reader sees how the Christian world is rising and how Avalon is falling. Avalon is now completely shrouded in mists, concealing Avalon to everyone but the faithful. The Christians have built a monastery in the same spot where the Temple of the Sun lay. However, the Christians never see the Temple of the Sun. Long ago, Christians and Druids worshiped the One side by side, since it is all one God. However, when the Romans arrive on the isle, they kill many of the Druids and desecrate their sacred groves. The Druids make their last great change by removing the Island of Avalon from the world of mankind.





# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 10

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 10 Summary

Viviane arrives at Uther's court and goes directly to Arthur. She determines that he will be fine. However, she thinks that someone is plotting against his life since he has had a few brushes with death. Morgaine ends up waiting on Viviane at the castle; she mentions the close calls with Arthur. Viviane tosses around the idea that Morgause is possibly behind these incidents. Morgaine admits that she still possesses the Sight, so Viviane promises to show her how to use it. She gives her a taste of what is possible by using Morgaine to bring on a vision. Viviane makes up her mind to take Morgaine with her back to Avalon for training but needs to go through Uther first. She also knows that Arthur needs to be anonymously sent elsewhere, so that he will grow up safely. She knows he is in too much danger staying at home. Viviane successfully pleads the case for both children to be fostered elsewhere.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 10 Analysis

When Viviane talks to Uther about sending both children away, she thinks to herself that she wishes she had been young enough to have Uther for herself rather than for Igraine. She sees Uther as being her equal, a challenge to her in every way she could want. She challenges Uther when he argues with her over sending Morgaine to Avalon. She reminds him that the Tribes swore to obey the Pendragon. He owes some allegiance to them. She knows that Morgaine cannot go away to a convent. Viviane's intuition about Morgause foreshadows cause for concern over Arthur's safety down the road as he grows older.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 11

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 11 Summary

Viviane and Morgaine make their way to Avalon in order for Morgaine to begin her journey to become a priestess. Viviane clears the mists and Avalon appears. The whole thing impresses Morgaine immediately. They go to Viviane's quarters where Viviane explains to Morgaine how things will go for her in the beginning. She warns Morgaine that the training will be difficult, to which Morgaine assures her that this is what she wants, and she will do whatever she is told. She will be obedient. Viviane explains to Morgaine who her parents are.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 11 Analysis

When Morgaine approaches Avalon with Viviane, she is filled with hope for her future. She had been so miserable in her earlier life at court that she was dying to get away. After feeling rejected from her mother, she seems overjoyed at Viviane taking an interest in her and her future. Viviane becomes a mother figure for Morgaine. There is an element of foreshadowing when Viviane tells Morgaine that she may come to hate Viviane. Only Viviane knows what really lays in store for Morgaine, since Viviane is responsible for fulfilling the prophecy for the land. Morgaine is still young and too naive to believe that she would be used as a pawn in that prophesy.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 12

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 12 Summary

Viviane's son, Galahad, also known as Lancelot, approaches Avalon for a visit. Viviane calls Morgaine to join them and allows her to take the day off from her usual chores, so that Morgaine can spend time with Lancelot, who is her kinsman. Viviane instructs Morgaine to go to the barge to bring Lancelot to Avalon. When Morgaine meets Lancelot, he does not recognize her immediately. However, when he does, the two of them form an instant connection.

Lancelot, Morgaine, and Viviane break their fast together and Lancelot talks of life in Britain. He explains to his mother that he has no wish to live in Avalon, but rather prefers life in Britain. Lancelot feels that he would rather live in a world where people do not have to run at the beck and call of a woman. Rather than pursue a debate with him, Viviane gives Lancelot and Morgaine leave to spend the day as they wish.

Although they are first cousins, there is a mutual desire for one another. At the end of the day, however, things change. When they hear the sounds of a young girl crying, they seek to investigate the source. What they find is Gwenhwyfar standing in the water up to her ankles. The mists that cover Avalon from the outside world thinned out in some spots, and Gwenhwyfar somehow manages to go through and emerge on the Avalon side. This is where Lancelot and Morgaine find her. The minute Lancelot sets eyes on Gwenhwyfar, he falls in love with her. Morgaine sees the change in him and knows what is happening. She feels intense hatred toward Gwenhwyfar for ruining their day. They return Gwenhwyfar to the convent and go their own ways.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 12 Analysis

Morgaine uses her powers as priestess several times during Lancelot's visit to Avalon. When she goes to the barge to meet him and he does not recognize her, she uses a priestess trick in order to keep her voice steady. She does this so that her true feelings are hidden. At the end of the day, she does this again when she and Lancelot find Gwenhwyfar in the waters, as Gwenhwyfar stumbles upon the mists of Avalon. While Morgaine keeps her feelings of anger and hatred in check, she uses her powers to appear intimidating to Gwenhwyfar. In both instances, her powers are used to shield her true emotions. The only other time her powers come across is when Lancelot calls her beautiful. It is not Morgaine he sees but the glamour of Avalon manifesting itself through Morgaine. However, although it may not be intentional, the spell lasts throughout the day until Gwenhwyfar appears and Lancelot experiences love at first sight with her and forgets Morgaine.

Gwenhwyfar's entrance into Lancelot and Morgaine's life is significant for the way they each see the other in the future. Lancelot is immediately enamored of Gwenhwyfar



when he sees her, and his shunning of Morgaine is something that will haunt Morgaine for the rest of her life. From then on, Morgaine harbors nothing but hatred toward Gwenhwyfar for stealing Lancelet from her. While Lancelet will always have warm feelings for Morgaine, his heart remains with Gwenhwyfar for the rest of his life. Gwenhwyfar returns Lancelet's feelings and views Morgaine as nothing more than a pagan and sorceress.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 13

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 13 Summary

The Merlin pays a surprise visit to Viviane in Avalon. He comes to tell her that Uther Pendragon is dying from a fatal wound in battle, which Igraine refused to allow the Merlin to use his healing powers on. As a result of Uther's dying, the Merlin tells Viviane that they need to step up Arthur's training for his kingmaking in Avalon. If he is to be High King in Uther's place, he needs to be ready for it. The Merlin expresses concern over Arthur's age and if Arthur can survive the rituals, but Viviane remains firm in her belief that Arthur cannot fail. Avalon needs him too badly; it is also in the prophecy that Arthur will be the one to right the wrongs. The Merlin reminds Viviane that if Arthur succeeds at his trials, it is because the Goddess has allowed it, not as Viviane will have it. Their meeting ends with Taliesin agreeing to bring the boy to Dragon Island to see if he is indeed ready to become king.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 13 Analysis

Once again, Viviane's calculating personality shines through. As the time approaches for Arthur to take the throne, Viviane steps up her involvement. Although the prophecy says that Arthur will rule, and he will be the king to right the wrongs, Viviane does what she feels she must to be certain that it happens. This sets the stage for future events that involve Morgaine and shape the future of Arthur's reign. Viviane's interference in others' lives also sets an example to Morgaine as she later on manipulates events to happen as they need to be for Avalon.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 14

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 14 Summary

Morgaine and Raven take mind-altering substances and take part in a nighttime ritual that enhances the Sight. The hallucinations they experience are visions of the future. Raven, who has taken a vow of silence, has such a violent vision that she speaks out about it. What she sees is the upcoming kingmaking for Arthur. She is describing the rituals involved with his trials and how the Virgin Huntress must lay down her maidenhood for him. This is part of his trials.

Days after the ritual with Morgaine and Raven, Viviane calls Morgaine to see her. When they sit down to talk, Viviane explains to Morgaine that it is time to lay down her maidenhead for the Goddess. Since Morgaine knows she is promised to the Goddess, she consents. What Morgaine does not know is that it is Arthur, her half-brother, is the Horned One in that ritual.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 14 Analysis

During the ritual when Raven speaks, she foreshadows Arthur's kingmaking as the Horned One. Raven's vision can also be interpreted to mean that Morgaine is the one who will be the Virgin Huntress during the ceremony. Raven is sobbing over what she sees as happening after the ritual is over, and Morgaine and Arthur are left to live with what has happened. When Viviane sends for Morgaine a few days later, she confirms for Morgaine that Morgaine is appointed to be the Virgin Huntress in the next great marriage of the earth. Although Viviane knows who the consort will be, she does not mention this to Morgaine. This also exhibits Viviane's constant manipulation of others as she chooses Morgaine for the ritual instead of someone else.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 15

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 15 Summary

Morgaine embarks immediately on her journey from Avalon to Dragon Island where the ceremony will be. As she begins her journey, she starts to go into a trance state. She pays no attention to where they are taking her. When she reaches her destination, she is taken to a small house and prepared for the ceremony. The women prepare Morgaine by painting her body. As they lead her outside, she notices a young man being lead from another house. Although she cannot get a good look at him, she watches the men as they paint him and crown him with the symbolic antlers. She does notice that he is not one of their own people, meaning, not a villager. Morgaine sees that the youth is strongly built with a shock of blonde hair.

After the initial blessing, the young man who now symbolizes the Horned One goes out to kill a deer. Morgaine, who does not go out with them, sees what they do through the trance she is still in. It is while in trance that she sees the Horned One slay the King Stag. She sees the blood spilled and the blood on his hands as foresaw by Raven previously. The village people take the dead animal and feast upon it. It is that night that Morgaine as the Virgin Huntress and the Horned One are brought together to complete the ritual. Morgaine gives up her maidenhead just as she knew she had to, as she lay with the Horned One.

The next morning Morgaine wakes up and recognizes Arthur lying next to her. They are immediately shocked and upset to discover that they had made love. It is also in this moment that Morgaine knows Viviane has set this up purposefully. As Morgaine tries to soothe Arthur, she asks over and over in her mind why this had to happen.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 15 Analysis

As the ritual ensues, neither Morgaine nor Arthur recognizes the other with the costumes and paints they each wear. Morgaine gives up her maidenhead to her half-brother as Viviane has decreed. Viviane set this up regardless of what either of them might have to say about it or what might come of it. The next morning as Morgaine and Arthur lie side by side, they make love again still not knowing who the other is. When they find out they are with their sibling, they both despair and feel guilty over what has happened. Morgaine is outraged that Viviane has done this knowing exactly what would happen. This event, however, puts into motion the tension that will always exist between brother and sister for the rest of their lives.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 16

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 16 Summary

Morgaine goes back to Avalon in a rage and asks to see Viviane, who denies her and audience. Viviane makes Morgaine wait ten days before she sends for her. By this time, Morgaine is furious. As Morgaine makes her way to Viviane's home, she hears unique harp playing, which she knows is not Viviane. This is when Morgaine meets Kevin the Bard for the first time. Kevin's playing is entirely unique and somehow by listening to his music, Morgaine's temper is calmed. After he finishes playing, both Morgaine and Viviane start crying.

When Kevin stops playing he asks why he has been called to a meeting in Avalon with the Merlin, Viviane and Morgaine. The Merlin says that the time has come that the Pendragon's son, Arthur, must now come to the throne. In order to ensure that Arthur does so and does not get killed in upcoming battles with the Saxons, Viviane devises a plan to construct a sword imbued with a spell to keep him safe.

It is not until later when Viviane and Morgaine speak alone that Morgaine finally unleashes her anger at Viviane for setting her up with Arthur. Viviane explains to Morgaine that Viviane could not just let Morgaine give up her virginity to just anyone. Almost anyone else would have been below Morgaine's station which was unacceptable to Viviane. She goes on to explain to Morgaine that regardless of her feelings or of Arthur's, what is done is done, and the hope of Britain is more important.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 16 Analysis

The seed is planted with Morgaine permanently now that she is merely a pawn in the greater plan for the good of Avalon. Still, she feels tremendous anger and betrayal by Viviane over Viviane's choice of consorts for the ritual. The events that Viviane has set in motion will continue to play out over decades. Morgaine feels that Viviane has played upon her as though she would play upon the harp. Morgaine's resentment grows to the point where it interferes with the delicate plan that Viviane has mapped out. However, since Viviane has chosen as she has, Morgaine decides to rebel against it and pave her own way.





# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 17

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 17 Summary

Viviane thinks long and hard about what Morgaine says to her about her abuse of power. She wonders whether or not she is truly acting out of the benefit for Avalon and Britain or whether she truly is power hungry. While she thinks on this, she thinks about Uther, who still lies dying after almost six weeks from when he was first wounded. Viviane knows that he will die shortly. When she gets up to go outside, she has a vision, which she sees in the sky as the image of Uther appears before her. He tells her that he has died in a battle with the Saxons. Viviane discovers that he went in when he did not have to; it is his pride that gets him killed.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 17 Analysis

Viviane feels a sense of regret over what she has done to Morgaine. She knows that if Morgaine hates her, it will be the heaviest price she will pay. Saying this foreshadows the uncertainty of Avalon's status, as well as Britain's. If Viviane would only call on Morgaine and attempt to right the wrong done to her, then things might continue to work out as Viviane plans. Viviane however, is too proud to acknowledge her wrong to Morgaine, but Viviane does not realize that this failure is the one event that will change the course of the prophecy. Viviane feels that whatever is done is done and nothing can alter that. She does not think forgiveness plays any role in this.

With Uther's passing, there is another reminder of what Viviane has given up--love. Again, she feels jealousy over not being chosen to be his queen, although she was too old to have been Uther's wife. Viviane feels she relates to Uther better than Igraine does. This may be true; when Uther displays his own pride by going into battle one final time, which kills him. Likewise, pride does Viviane in, as she pleads with the Goddess to keep the Sight a little while longer, so she can continue her plan; Viviane is too proud to realize that it is time to step down.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 18

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 18 Summary

Morgaine notices that the moon has gone through another cycle, yet she did not break the moon-dark fast. She begins to suspect that she is pregnant from Arthur's kingmaking on Dragon Island. Viviane sends for Morgaine and asks if she wants to go to her mother for Uther's burial. Morgaine declines because she had no love for Uther, then Viviane brings up the real reason for summoning her. She tells Morgaine that Morgaine needs to construct the magic scabbard for the sword that Arthur will carry into battle.

Morgaine sets to do the task at hand and make the magic scabbard for the sword. She does what is needed by using the Sight to guide her. Through her, the Goddess tells her exactly what needs to be done. As she works on the scabbard, she goes into a trance that lasts for three days until the work is complete. When she is done, she is exhausted and sick from the ritual and prolonged use of the Sight. Viviane comes for the scabbard and is greatly impressed by Morgaine's work on it. Through the use of the Sight Morgaine is told the name of the sword: Excalibur. It is made of meteorite iron and worth the price of a kingdom.

Viviane, Taliesin, and Morgaine go to Arthur to bring him Excalibur. They bestow upon him the sword and bid him take an oath to defend Avalon. Viviane tells Arthur that this is no sword for a king, who is bound to hear only the Christian priests. If he does not swear, then he is required to walk away. He must swear to always reverence the Gods of Avalon and deal fairly with all men. Arthur swears to the oath and takes the sword. They tell him that the sword is imbued with special powers, that he who bears it shall not shed so much blood in battle as to cause death.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 18 Analysis

Viviane tells Morgaine that there will come a time when a sword must be lifted in defense of Avalon and of Britain. She goes on to tell Morgaine that it is Morgaine who will make the scabbard for this magical sword. Although she is a priestess and knows nothing of battle, she fashions a scabbard from using her ability with the Sight. The powers come from her and transfer into the scabbard so that the one who carries it will be charmed in battle and will never lose enough blood to cause a mortal injury. As she works on it, she realizes that this will go to Arthur.

Arthur receives the Sacred Regalia of the Druids. Before he is allowed to accept the sword, Viviane tells him that it is death to touch it unprepared. Viviane makes him swear allegiance to Avalon. There is some element of foreshadowing here as Arthur says that he will not be ruled from Avalon but does not heed Viviane's remark about not being ruled by the priests who would make him a pawn for their dead God. Although he

swears allegiance to both Avalon and the Christian realms, Arthur's remark about not being ruled from Avalon goes largely unheeded. This sets up future events that lead to end of Arthur's support for Avalon.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 19

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 19 Summary

People from the various kingdoms came forth for Arthur's crowning. Morgaine sees her mother for the first time since Morgaine journeyed to Avalon several years before. Igraine, who is now fully Christian, belittles Morgaine's status as priestess in Avalon. Morgause joins them for their family reunion. The more Morgaine thinks about her pregnancy, the more she feels the need to abort it. She worries about Arthur being on the throne and what this child might do to him. However, she also knows that it is impious to cast out a child conceived in the Great Marriage Ceremony. Despite Morgaine's struggle to hide her pregnancy, her aunt Morgause sees right away that she is pregnant and offers her home to Morgaine for when she ready to give birth.

During the crowning ceremony, Arthur bows to both the Bishop of Glastonbury and the Merlin of Avalon. He does this as a token that he will be advised by both. When Morgause notes this, she comments that it is a wise move by Arthur and says that Uther has no fool for a son. After the ceremony, Arthur goes through the receiving line and addresses his cousins, who will become the first of his Companions. Later on, Arthur sits with the bishops and elder kings of his father's Council. To Morgaine's delight, she sees the Merlin among them.

Morgaine and Morgause once again discuss Morgaine's pregnancy. Morgaine hints that she may abort the child, and Morgause tells her it will not be good for her health to cast out the first child. Morgaine lies saying that she does not want the pregnancy or the child to interfere with her duties at Avalon. In truth, she knows that the women of Avalon usually work till the end of their pregnancies. Morgause however, understands that Morgaine is feeling angry and trapped by being pregnant and confesses how Morgause felt the same when she was first pregnant years before. Morgause again extends the invitation to Morgaine to stay with Morgause when she has the baby.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 19 Analysis

Morgaine sees her mother and feels as though she is seeing a stranger. Since Igraine sent Morgaine to be fostered at Avalon at a young age, they grew apart. This foreshadows future events when the same thing happens to Morgaine when she has her son. Only Morgaine chooses to leave her son behind for fosterage rather than sending him away. Although she sees her situation as different from that of her mother's, it does not change the situation that affects the child. When her son, Gwydion, grows up, he sees Morgaine, his mother, as a stranger.

At Arthur's crowning, Morgaine has a prophetic vision of a robed priest raising the cup of the Mysteries before the altar of Christ. This is an event yet to come many years in the future that indeed involves the Mysteries. The Mysteries are the Holy Regalia of Avalon.

It is telling because Arthur so recently vowed to defend Avalon and agreed to be struck down should he ever break his oath.



# Mistress of Magic, Chapter 20

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 20 Summary

Once Morgaine returns to Avalon, she sneaks out early one day to find the herbs she needs to abort the pregnancy. She knows she can take them from the House of Maidens, but they will notice her taking them, so she prefers to find them on her own. Morgaine goes out and finds them but wanders too far and she suddenly realizes that she is no longer in Avalon. She finds herself surrounded by marsh and not forest as she should be. Whichever direction she chooses turns out to be the wrong way. A woman appears before her that Morgaine knows is no one from Avalon. The woman speaks to Morgaine and asks her what she is doing, although the stranger already knows the answer. She advises Morgaine to think twice about what she wants to do. Then she makes Morgaine drop the herbs and tells her that Morgaine does not really want to go through with an abortion. The woman then extends an offer to Morgaine for her to stay in the fairy land to have her child and raise it. A clear path is laid before Morgaine, so she follows it back to Avalon running from the strange woman.

Later that night, Viviane steals into Morgaine's room and watches her as she sleeps. She acknowledges how she loves Morgaine more than she did her own children and sees her as the daughter she never had. Viviane notices that Morgaine had been crying before she fell asleep and knows deep down that Morgaine's suffering has not yet begun. The next day Viviane sends for Morgaine and asks her if the child has quickened in her womb. Morgaine lies and says that she cast it forth, but Viviane knows Morgaine is lying. She demands that Morgaine carry the child full-term but Morgaine says she will not. Viviane then realizes that she can no longer over-awe Morgaine into submission. Morgaine will do what she will. A heated argument ensues and Morgaine leaves. The next morning Morgaine leaves Avalon without telling a soul. She decides go to Morgause to have the baby in Morgause's kingdom.

## Mistress of Magic, Chapter 20 Analysis

Morgaine's parting words to Viviane is indeed a curse upon her. She is tired of being played as a pawn in Viviane's scheme to rule Avalon and Britain. She says to Viviane that the Goddess should deal with Vivian as Vivian has dealt with Morgaine. She feels that this is about her and does not yet have the foresight to know that Viviane is truly committed to the future of Avalon. Morgaine vows that the day will never come where Morgaine does not give reasons for what she does either. However, those words come back to haunt her decades down the road, when she does exactly that.



# The High Queen, Chapter 1

## The High Queen, Chapter 1 Summary

It is now wintertime in Lothian, and Morgaine is heavy with child. Morgause constantly chides Morgaine for not taking better care of herself and forces her to eat fresh meat at dinner. After the meal, Morgaine's water breaks and Morgause sends her off with the midwives to begin the lying-in. After Morgaine leaves, Lot reminds Morgause that Morgaine's child will be competition for their son, Gawaine, to be next in line to the throne of the High King. With much persuasion, Lot convinces Morgause to keep Morgaine's child from her once it is born. Morgause knows that if someone else fosters the child, Morgaine will never form a bond with it and will be able to let it go.

Morgaine's labor lasts for many hours, and it is very painful and difficult for her. During the many hours of Morgaine's labor, Morgause tries to get information from her regarding the baby's father. Morgaine had all along been tight-lipped about it, and Morgause can not understand the secrecy behind it. Still, Morgaine would say nothing about the father. After Morgaine has her son, Morgause notes how like Lancelot he looks, and she wonders if indeed the child is Lancelot's. Still, Morgause did not understand why Morgaine would have Lancelot's child in secrecy, since it would have been no great scandal.

After Morgaine wakes, she asks to see her son and Morgause refuses her and whisks him away, claiming that Morgaine needs all her strength to recover. Morgause takes Gwydion to a wet nurse and decides to foster the boy herself. Later when she's alone, she uses what she has of the Sight and makes a spell to see for herself who Gwydion's father is. She is startled to see that it is Arthur and understands instantly why Morgaine is so secretive about it; it would be scandalous if anyone found out. Morgaine discovers Morgause is using the Sight and demands that Morgause swear not to say a word about his heritage to anyone. Since Morgause does not want to be cursed by a priestess of Avalon, she agrees.

## The High Queen, Chapter 1 Analysis

Morgause's ambition for her son Gawaine outweighs her maternal instincts. After a conversation with Lot makes her think about Gawaine's position to the throne, Morgause decides not to let Morgaine nurse Gwydion. She knows that if Morgaine raises her son, then she will fight for him to take the throne in the event that Arthur dies. If this happens, then it will displace Gawaine from his position. Morgause insists that Gwydion be raised under her supervision, so that she and Lot can keep a close eye on him and influence him as he grows. This is exactly what happens when, in the future, it is Morgause that Gwydion turns to, not his natural mother. Since Morgaine never nurses Gwydion a bond is never formed. This foreshadows future events where Morgaine's sinister side emerges.



# The High Queen, Chapter 2

## The High Queen, Chapter 2 Summary

Gwenhwyfar sits on the garden wall and is terrified to be outside. All her life she has been terrified of being outside and can remember the only time she felt safe was when she was at the convent growing up. As she sits, she watches as Lancelot gallops on horseback into the courtyard below her. He puts on a display for her father, King Loedengranz, to show how the horses can be trained and ridden into combat. The king will not, however, allow Lancelot to train the horses for battle because he has not sworn allegiance to Arthur as he had to Uther.

Gwenhwyfar changes into her best gown to impress Lancelot as she goes in to serve the wine. Lancelot remembers her immediately from the day he and Morgaine rescued her from the waters. King Loedegranz beseeches Lancelot to have Arthur himself come and look at the horses. When Lancelot leaves, her father tells Gwenhwyfar that he is trying to arrange a marriage between her and Arthur. The thought terrifies her only because she is afraid to be High Queen. Her father then reminds her that she is afraid of everything anyway.

## The High Queen, Chapter 2 Analysis

During a conversation with Lancelot, Gwenhwyfar suggests that she is not wise. She says that the women on Avalon are evil witches, which Lancelot says is rubbish. He feels that only ignorant women would say that they are sorceresses. Although Gwenhwyfar admits to being ignorant, it seems that Lancelot pays the comment no mind. Unfortunately, this comment is very telling since in the future, this argument continues to arise and Gwenhwyfar's feelings on the matter do not change. Gwenhwyfar remains so steadfast in her beliefs about the priestesses of Avalon that it is because of her that Arthur eventually forsakes Avalon.





# The High Queen, Chapter 3

## The High Queen, Chapter 3 Summary

Arthur and the Merlin go to visit Igraine at the convent where she has lived since Uther's death. Before their arrival, Igraine uses the Sight and hears Morgaine calling out to her during labor. She does not know where Morgaine is, but she can tell she is not at Avalon. When Arthur arrives, Igraine asks him where Morgaine is, and he tells her that she has gone to Lothian, but he knows nothing about the birth of their child. Since Archbishop Patricius is also present with Arthur and the Merlin, she does not ask any further questions.

Arthur goes on to explain that he is to marry Gwenhwyfar, although he cannot remember her name at that moment. He is not as concerned about the marriage as he is about the dowry he is to receive, which are horses and men from King Loedegrantz. Arthur needs this dowry in order to launch a successful offensive against the Saxons. Arthur asks his mother if she is willing to go with Lancelot to bring Gwenhwyfar to Caerleon for the wedding. Igraine agrees to go once the abbess gives her permission.

## The High Queen, Chapter 3 Analysis

Archbishop Patricius makes a comment that Arthur would not be able to wed one of Morgause's daughters if she had any, since it would be like wedding one's sister. Patricius says it is not to be thought of. Arthur remarks that he would be interested in Gawaine's sister, if he had one, though it would not be allowed. Little does Arthur realize that his own sister did give birth to his child. He is devastated when he finds out later, since he knows that his son will not be able to ascend to the throne because of his parentage. Arthur then says that he is set to marry Gwenhwyfar, though he does not remember her name at that time. He asks Igraine to go and escort his bride to Caerleon for the wedding. He offers to send Lancelot as a guide, since he feels that Gawaine might try to take advantage of the girl. It is ironic that Arthur makes this decision, since it is Lancelot who is enamored of Gwenhwyfar and she of him. Gawaine would be the better choice.



# The High Queen, Chapter 4

## The High Queen, Chapter 4 Summary

Igraine goes to meet Gwenhwyfar and bring her to Caerleon for the wedding. As they start out, Igraine sees how terrified Gwenhwyfar is to travel and mistakes it for wedding jitters. Gwenhwyfar is partially nervous about the wedding, but she is also afraid of traveling outside her home. With Lancelot along for the journey, Gwenhwyfar begins to loosen up a little and relax. Igraine notices the spark between the two and has immediate suspicions about what will happen in the future. Gwenhwyfar does confess to Igraine that she is nervous over whether or not Arthur will love her for more than just her dowry, and if she will please him. From the beginning, though, the seeds are planted that create doubt in Gwenhwyfar's mind over whether Arthur really loves her, or if he is only marrying because he has to. Secretly, Gwenhwyfar wishes she were marrying Lancelot.

They reach Caerleon and Arthur warmly welcomes his bride. He feeds into Gwenhwyfar's doubts when he mentions the rich dowry that comes along with her. As he brings her into the castle and they talk, he expresses his desire to have her rule at his side. This thought terrifies Gwenhwyfar. Igraine asks that they have some time to rest and freshen up. Arthur introduces Cai and tells Gwenhwyfar to give whatever orders she sees fit on where to place her belongings. When she does, she gathers enough strength and calm to do so with authority, which surprises even her.

## The High Queen, Chapter 4 Analysis

Lancelot showers Gwenhwyfar with lavish flattery that Igraine is witness to. She immediately senses that there is love between Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot and is rightly worried about her son and the throne. Igraine's sense of foreboding is an accurate one, since this banter between Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot set the stage for emotional turbulence later. Igraine also feels that the love between Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar is going to be the downfall of Arthur's reign. It may be so; if Arthur marries someone else, then his allegiance to Avalon may never come into question later on.



# The High Queen, Chapter 5

## The High Queen, Chapter 5 Summary

Igraine prepares Gwenhwyfar for the wedding and wonders momentarily if Arthur chose this bride wisely. Gwenhwyfar is young and beautiful, but Igraine finds her to be too shy and retiring for such a demanding role as High Queen. As Lancelot walks Gwenhwyfar to the church for the ceremony, Igraine once again sees the connection between Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar and gets a bad feeling over it. She has a premonition that the marriage will only come to misery.

Balan comes to relieve Lancelot to go to Arthur for preparation. Gwenhwyfar sees in Lancelot's eyes that Lancelot does not want to leave her side. In the few days she has spent with him, she already feels connected to him in a way that she does not understand. Igraine excuses herself to speak with the Merlin before the mass. When she approaches Merlin, Igraine asks if there is any way for Arthur to gracefully break the marriage promise to Gwenhwyfar. Igraine explains about Lancelot, which comes as no surprise to Merlin. Merlin knows, however, that there is no way for Arthur to honorably bow out of the wedding. Things will have to go as they will, and they need to accept it. When the services begin as scheduled, Igraine catches a glimpse of Morgaine next to Morgause on the other side of the church.

## The High Queen, Chapter 5 Analysis

Igraine's sense of foreboding continues. She still feels the despairing awareness that Arthur and Gwenhwyfar's marriage will come to no good and there will only be misery. This again foreshadows the future. Since Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar feel this strongly now, it will only grow stronger in the future. Not only is this a source of Igraine's distress, but the marriage is also doomed as it is because it is due to Gwenhwyfar that Arthur forsakes Avalon. Igraine seeks the Merlin to put a stop to the wedding, but it is too late, and he is unable to do anything. Arthur must marry Gwenhwyfar.



# The High Queen, Chapter 6

## The High Queen, Chapter 6 Summary

Morgaine is bored as she sits with Morgause during the wedding mass. She does not know who Arthur's bride is but wishes Arthur nothing but happiness. As she looks around the church, she sees Kevin the Bard and her mother, who she is happy to see. After the service, Morgaine approaches Arthur on the receiving line and comes face-to-face with Gwenhwyfar after several years. They immediately recognize each other. Morgaine also notices the way Lancelot looks at Gwenhwyfar--like a hungry dog looks at a dripping bone. Gwenhwyfar, however, charms Morgaine into forgetting about Lancelot for the time being. She also graciously accepts Morgaine into service as a lady-in-waiting.

When speaking to Kevin, Morgaine asked how Viviane is doing. He tells her that she is fine, but aging. He also tells her that he mourns Morgaine's absence from Avalon and beseeches her to return. She tells him that she cannot. Kevin tells her how the Merlin spoke to Arthur about backing out of the wedding, though he did not know why. Morgaine, however, knew what the Merlin was getting at; she had seen the way Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar looked at each other. After all these years, Morgaine still feels the pangs of jealousy from the day that she feels Gwenhwyfar stole Lancelot from her. Morgaine still has a soft spot in her heart for Lancelot.

Later, Morgaine accompanies Lancelot to check the horses for Arthur and Gwenhwyfar's departure. Together they reminisce about their days in Avalon. Morgaine tries to keep his mind off of Gwenhwyfar. He seeks an unbroken horse to take out as a demonstration, and Gawaine warns him, but Lancelot pays him no mind. He and Morgaine find a quiet spot to be alone. She knows he is only trying to take his mind off Gwenhwyfar, but Morgaine accepts this. They are interrupted, and Lancelot swears to Morgaine that they will meet again later in the night. However, when Lancelot is injured by the unbroken horse, the plans are ruined. Morgaine spends the night caring for Lancelot's wounds.

## The High Queen, Chapter 6 Analysis

Morgaine discovers that Arthur's bride is none other than Gwenhwyfar. Although she still feels the old hatred toward Gwenhwyfar, she is happy to see her marry someone other than Lancelot. Morgaine does, however, see the glances exchanged between Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar and knows something is going on. Still, Morgaine feels relief that Arthur is married now to another, and the feelings Arthur has for Morgaine will hopefully go away once he beds Gwenhwyfar. What Morgaine does not realize is that it is this hold she has over Arthur, which is crucial to his keeping his solemn oath to Avalon. Morgaine can take advantage of these feelings, but she chooses for Arthur to be rid of

them permanently. Strangely, she does not have the foresight to know the hold she has on Arthur as she should.



# The High Queen, Chapter 7

## The High Queen, Chapter 7 Summary

It is now two years after Arthur and Gwenhwyfar's wedding. Morgaine sits with Gwenhwyfar's other ladies-in-waiting at Caerleon late in the summer, as the men are off fighting the Saxons. She and the ladies are spinning and Morgaine begins to drift off into a trance. When the women try to snap her out of it, Morgaine is saying that there is blood on the hearth, before the King's high seat, slain like a slaughtered sheep. When she comes to, she has no recollection of what she saw.

Using the Sight again, Morgaine sees the men coming home from their latest battles. When the men come home, the feast is already prepared. Morgaine sits with Balan and they talk of Lancelot. Balan mentions that Lancelot looks like he has a heavy heart. Though Morgaine knows why, she does not tell Balan. Balan says lightly that Lancelot should get married and why not to Morgaine? When Morgaine answers enthusiastically, it surprises Balan. The conversation shifts when Arthur talks of building a new castle for them. It would be a place bigger and better than Caerleon.

Later that night as Arthur and Gwenhwyfar go to their chamber, he suggests to her that Lancelot should get married to Morgaine. Gwenhwyfar immediately protests, to Arthur's surprise. To cover up her jealousy, Gwenhwyfar speaks of Lancelot marrying a pagan if he marries Morgaine, and she does not want that at her court. Arthur then lets the issue drop. While Arthur and Gwenhwyfar are discussing Morgaine and Lancelot, Morgaine uses the Sight to find Lancelot and goes to him outside. They find themselves at the point that they were at during Arthur's wedding. However, at the last minute, Lancelot changes his mind and sees that making love to Morgaine would be a sin. This angers Morgaine to the point that she decides to leave Arthur's court. Shortly after that, Morgaine leaves with the intention of returning to Avalon.

## The High Queen, Chapter 7 Analysis

After two years of marriage, Gwenhwyfar still shows no sign of bearing Arthur a child. Gossip suggests that Morgaine supplies Gwenhwyfar with a charm that will make her conceive. The rocky start to Gwenhwyfar's childbearing issues leaves deeper roots than is originally understood. This signals the start of serious trouble to come, as Gwenhwyfar fights off accepting any kind of charm from Morgaine, who she views as a sorceress and a pagan. Morgaine knows that barrenness for Gwenhwyfar is a heavy burden to bear, or any queen for that matter. Arthur must have an heir to his throne. Thus begins Gwenhwyfar's desperation.



# The High Queen, Chapter 8

## The High Queen, Chapter 8 Summary

During the next summer, Arthur and his soldiers fight against the Saxons, and Arthur is wounded. Since he carries Excalibur, the wound does not bleed heavily, but it festers for months afterward. As the winter approaches, Arthur still lies in bed convalescing. Gwenhwyfar still feels the sting from her own miscarriage months before. This is not the first time she has miscarried. Now she feels guilty for it, as though it is her fault. Since she feels it might be punishment for her feelings towards Lancelot, she goes to confession to be absolved of the sin. The priest forgives her and lets her go unpunished.

After a day when Arthur is well enough to be out of bed, Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar both help put him in bed. The feelings between Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar are as strong as they have ever been, and the tension is great. Lancelot helps Gwenhwyfar with Arthur, then leaves. Arthur pulls Gwenhwyfar aside and gives her permission to go to bed with Lancelot, if that will mean she bears a son for the kingdom. Since Gwenhwyfar has been unable to have a child successfully with Arthur, he thinks that it might be his fault and they need have an heir. It doesn't matter to Arthur who the father is; he will love the child regardless. That night as she goes to sleep, Gwenhwyfar secretly wishes for Morgaine to return to the court so that Morgaine can give her a charm to help her conceive with Arthur.

## The High Queen, Chapter 8 Analysis

The pressure continues to mount for Gwenhwyfar to conceive, as Arthur now joins in by giving her permission to bed Lancelot. Although Gwenhwyfar sees this as Arthur wanting a son more than he wants her, it also shows how much he does love his wife. He explains that he sees the way she and Lancelot look at each other and feels that this would be something they would both want. Since he loves the both of them dearly, he would openly accept a child of that union as his own. The three of them share a unique love, and, for Arthur, if Gwenhwyfar has a child by Lancelot, it would bind them even tighter. So Arthur does not only see this as a way to have an heir, but as a way to keep those he loves even closer to him.



# The High Queen, Chapter 9

## The High Queen, Chapter 9 Summary

Viviane goes on a journey and thinks about Morgaine. Viviane does not know where Morgaine is, and this disturbs Viviane. The Sight is erratic in her now. She continues her trip going to visit Gawan, since Priscilla is sick. They are the foster-parents to her son, Balan. Priscilla is very ill, and Viviane knows she will die soon. With Priscilla's permission with the family present, Viviane gives Priscilla something to end her pain and suffering. Their own son, Balin, is too grieved to understand what Viviane is doing. After Priscilla dies shortly thereafter, Balin explodes in rage against Viviane and is convinced that she is a murderer and sorceress. Balan tells Viviane that Balin just needs time to grieve his mother's loss, and in time he will come around.

Viviane does not stay for Priscilla to be buried. She explains to Gawan and Balan that she needs to return to Avalon right away. As she rides, she thinks of Morgaine and how it is Morgaine's rightful place to be the new Lady of the Lake, since Viviane knows she is long overdue in giving up the position. When Viviane arrives in Avalon, she tells one of the attendant priestesses to send for Taliesin's daughter, Niniane, in three days' time. When Niniane arrives, Viviane questions her about the Sight. Niniane does not know if she has it. Viviane then takes Niniane to the Sacred Well to test the girl's Sight. What Niniane sees is a garbled image of Morgaine returning to Avalon once Morgaine is old and grey. After they go back, Viviane sends for Raven. She asks Raven to put aside her vow of silence and take the position as Lady of the Lake but Raven declines.

## The High Queen, Chapter 9 Analysis

Balin is a hot-headed man, who feels that the ways of Avalon are wicked. Even though his own mother's health deteriorates rapidly, he refuses to believe she will die. When Viviane assists in Priscilla's death with Priscilla and Gawan's permission, Balin sees this as a wicked act that must be punished. As Balin storms off, it is clear that there is unfinished business he will need to settle with the Lady of Avalon in the future.





# The High Queen, Chapter 10

## The High Queen, Chapter 10 Summary

At Arthur's request, Gwenhwyfar goes to the convent at Cornwall to visit with Igraine, who is dying. Arthur is unable to go, and nobody knows where Morgaine is, so Gwenhwyfar goes. To her surprise, she was glad that she did. Igraine frets that she does not know where Morgaine is, and that Morgaine has not come to see her. She also tells Gwenhwyfar that Gwenhwyfar is pregnant, which she did not even know yet.

During Gwenhwyfar's visit, Igraine says many things to her. She admits that she spoke to Taliesin to see if there was an honorable way out of Arthur's marriage to her. Then she leaves out the reason why she did so. Igraine also admits that the Sight still comes to her every so often, and Igraine declines to have a priest come to her when Gwenhwyfar suggests it. Finally, she despairs that Morgaine has not come to her, and Igraine loves her so dearly. She ultimately succumbs to a heart condition.

## The High Queen, Chapter 10 Analysis

Gwenhwyfar continues to wrestle with the guilt she feels over not yet bearing a son for Arthur. As she visits with Igraine, who is sick and dying, it is Igraine who asks whether Arthur reproaches her for her inability to have a child. When Gwenhwyfar answers no, Igraine assures her then that Arthur truly loves her for herself; although, Gwenhwyfar still feels some doubt about Arthur's love for her. She discovers that Igraine's retirement in the convent is just a ruse because Igraine is not truly a Christian. When Igraine predicts correctly that Gwenhwyfar is pregnant, Gwenhwyfar, although happy about the news, fears it is through sorcery that she was given this information. Gwenhwyfar is so guilt-ridden, that she finds guilt in every aspect of her life. She does not believe she is good enough to not be doing penance for something. Whether it is for Arthur's love or bearing him a son, she feels she is always at fault.



# The High Queen, Chapter 11

## The High Queen, Chapter 11 Summary

Igraine is buried. Gwenhwyfar sees Igraine's retirement at a convent a lie, that she was never a Christian. She is becoming overly pious at this point. If Igraine was right about the pregnancy, then her child will be born around Eastertide. Gwenhwyfar seeks to leave the convent as soon as possible, since she is now eager to return home to tell Arthur her good news. However, the Saxons are invading, and the roads are not safe to travel. Her attendants want her to go to Tintagel and stay till the danger passes, but she insists on pressing on.

As they get closer to home, they encounter Gawaine, who is on his way to the convent where he believed Gwenhwyfar still was. He does not know that Igraine has already died. He is on his way there to give Gwenhwyfar more protection, since the Saxons are coming. This is the great battle that the Merlin foretold, where they either die or drive the Saxons out once and for all. Before he trots off, Gawaine mentions to Gwenhwyfar that Morgaine is no longer at Lothian, and it seems that no one then knows where she is.

When they arrive at Caerleon, the people cheer for their queen. Gwenhwyfar also discovers that it is on Arthur's orders that all the women and children are being packed up and sent off to the new castle, Camelot. After all the trouble she goes through to get home, and now she has to pack up again? This troubles Gwenhwyfar a great deal. When she gets to her quarters, her attendants have already packed up her things for the upcoming months. Gwenhwyfar is now determined not to be shipped off like chattel. Now that she knows she will have Arthur's son, she means to stay where she is.

## The High Queen, Chapter 11 Analysis

Gwenhwyfar's piety jumps up several notches after Igraine's burial. She gets on her righteous high horse that she never quite comes down from. She looks down on Igraine as a pagan and sees Igraine's life at the convent as a lie. Not only that, Gwenhwyfar is haunted by strange dreams of Morgaine, which she feels are mocking her. The urgency to get home is upon her as is the priority high for her safety as Saxon's invasion grows more perilous. Gwenhwyfar feels that everything will be set right, once Arthur knows that she carries his child. She thinks God is looking down on her favorably for her faith. As she approaches Caerleon and sees the Pendragon banner, she is chilled to bone at the sight of it. She believes that it goes against her Christian God to have the banners.



# The High Queen, Chapter 12

## The High Queen, Chapter 12 Summary

Gwenhwyfar goes into the Great Hall to greet her husband and inform him of Igraine's passing. Arthur is upset that she didn't stay in Cornwall at Tintagel. To Gwenhwyfar's annoyance, Arthur and his Companions talk of nothing but the upcoming battle and war strategy. They speak of this upcoming battle as the one they have waited for all their lives. This is what Arthur says Excalibur is for. Now all the people of Avalon are rallying beneath the banner of the Pendragon.

It is at the mention of the Pendragon that Gwenhwyfar seizes her moment and says that it does not seem proper for the pagans of Avalon to fight on the side of a Christian king. Lancelot speaks up and says that Britain is also the land of the people in Avalon and the Pendragon is their sworn king. Gwenhwyfar is stirring up a lot of anger. Lancelot is from Avalon, and Arthur is sworn by oath to protect Avalon.

When Arthur attempts to send Gwenhwyfar off to bed, she uses this opportunity to tell him of her good news. Even though she tells him, he is adamant that she leave with the remaining women to a place where she will be safe. Arthur relents and allows two of her waiting women to remain with her at Caerleon. He tells Gwenhwyfar that since the rest of the castle is now a camp, she must keep to her chambers at all times with the women. The Merlin visits Gwenhwyfar in her chambers, and the whole time Gwenhwyfar does nothing but bait the old man into arguing for argument's sake. She shows him the new banner they are working on.

Arthur then pays Gwenhwyfar a visit in her chambers, and she excitedly shows him the banner and asks him to carry it into battle. Although Arthur sees that she is getting sick, he declines to carry the banner, reminding her of his oath to Avalon. When Kevin comes to visit shortly thereafter, and Gwenhwyfar miscarries, she blames the presence of a Druid "pagan" for it. As she recovers and her house priest comes to visit with her, she explains how she believes it her fault and wonders if she has any unconfessed sin, but she knows of none. The only explanation she has for the miscarriage is that she failed to convince Arthur to carry the new banner into battle and get rid of the old one. She fears that this may be an affront to God, so Gwenhwyfar renews her plea to Arthur. He reluctantly agrees to carry the new banner but does so because he believes his wife believes his refusal to carry the banner is the cause of her miscarriages. Although Arthur's subject kings and Companions are outraged by the decision, as will be the people of Avalon when they learn of Arthur's decision, they, too, agree, since they have sworn allegiance to Arthur.



## The High Queen, Chapter 12 Analysis

Gwenhwyfar overreacts over every detail. Perhaps being pregnant has made her overly sensitive to everything. She thinks Arthur reproaches her for not going to Tintagel, when he is only concerned about her safety. She gets angry and jealous knowing that Morgaine does as she pleases, when women normally are not allowed to do so, and, most of all, she is beside herself that Arthur should still carry the banner of the Pendragon. On the eve of the biggest battle in the war against the Saxons, Gwenhwyfar sees it only fit that Arthur should carry the banner, which she and her ladies are making. It gets to such a point that she even convinces Arthur that God is punishing them by not giving them a son because of the Pendragon banner. Arthur ultimately acquiesces, which sets a new series of events in motion that will eventually divide his court.



# The High Queen, Chapter 13

## The High Queen, Chapter 13 Summary

The chapter details Morgaine's trip back to Avalon to see Viviane. After all this time, Morgaine still feels shame over Lancelet. She does not know if she can get back to Avalon, since she had left it without permission so long ago. She approaches the mists and waits for the barge, but it never comes. She knows of another way to Avalon and attempts it but finds herself in a strange place. Morgaine hears no sounds; all is still. She feels as though she is moving through an enchanted country. As she moves around and still cannot reach Avalon, she begins to feel a sense of panic that she has truly been cast out.

She stops, however, when she sees a man with a torch standing before her. Morgaine follows him as if in a dream. They give her something to drink, which begins to make her head swim and confused. Everything appears as though inside a dream, and she can no longer tell if she is awake, in a trance or sleeping. Morgaine spends what feels like days to her in this place that she now knows is the fairy land. Then she hears the voice of Raven telling her that Arthur has betrayed Avalon. At once, she realizes that she needs to leave as soon as she can. She sneaks out and begins to wonder exactly how much time has gone by. When she does find her way out, she knows she can no longer go to Avalon.

## The High Queen, Chapter 13 Analysis

The time has not yet come for Morgaine to return to Avalon. She approaches the lake and sees the Tor in the distance and waits for the barge, which never comes for her. Avalon has abandoned her the same way she abandoned it years before. The time she spends in the fairy land heals her to an extent and allows her freedoms she would not have in the real world. This land appeals to those desires that Morgaine has that are unfulfilled. However, she immediately knows her place when she hears Raven's agonizing cry. Something within Morgaine snaps back to attention and gives her the will she needs to get back to her life. When time ceased to move forward for Morgaine while in Fairy land, her life's work defines itself, and she knows what she needs to do.



# The High Queen, Chapter 14

## The High Queen, Chapter 14 Summary

Morgaine leaves the fairy country, and, for a moment, considers returning but remembers Raven's voice telling her about Arthur's betrayal. She has no idea how long she was away, and she's desperate to find out. As she travels closer to Caerleon, she encounters Kevin Harper. From speaking with Kevin, Morgaine discovers that she has been away two years. Still, she does not tell Kevin where she was; she only tells him that she has lived in solitude.

Kevin tells her of the great battle with the Saxons, and how Arthur won. All the land is in peace under Arthur. When Kevin hears that Morgaine is going to Caerleon, he tells her that it is no more and that Arthur's court is now at Camelot. He explains how the court was moved on Pentecost, and therefore the Christian holiday is celebrated as its anniversary. Morgaine does not like this. She tells Kevin about Raven's prophecy, but he already knows about it. He tells her that although the Tribes came close to deserting Arthur, they never did. Morgaine wishes to speak to Arthur about his betrayal and Kevin agrees, though he says that Viviane will do so at the next Pentecost feast. Viviane will stand before Arthur as a common petitioner, so he will have to listen to her.

Before Kevin and Morgaine go on to Camelot, they make love in the forest. It is unexpected for them both. Kevin asks Morgaine again where she has been, and she confesses that she does not really know, but she thinks it was the fairy land. Kevin does not reproach her but instructs her not to tell anyone when they get to Camelot. As they prepare to leave, Morgaine has a moment of the Sight and she sees Kevin in flames.

## The High Queen, Chapter 14 Analysis

When Morgaine encounters Kevin Harper on the road, she experiences love for the first time. In Kevin, she finds someone who loves her just for who she is, not because she is a priestess or the king's sister or because of anything she can do for him. He asks nothing of her. Although she cannot get back in to Avalon, he still views her as a priestess of Avalon, who will one day be Lady of the Lake. Morgaine feels a little lost since Avalon will not yet take her back, but what Kevin says helps to spur her on and do whatever work she can in the name of the Goddess. Since she has been out of Avalon so long, she needs to gradually find her way back. Arthur breaking his oath is the perfect place for her to start, so this becomes the focal point of her mission.



# The High Queen, Chapter 15

## The High Queen, Chapter 15 Summary

Gwenhwyfar has troubling dreams of Morgaine and the Beltane fires. Months earlier at Christmas, Arthur promises to put the fires out, despite the Merlin's protests. Taliesin feels it is good for the people to do something which gives them pleasure, but Gwenhwyfar sees it as a pagan act. Cai interrupts Gwenhwyfar's thoughts to bring her outside to where Arthur is observing a young boy in the exercise fields. Cai and Gwenhwyfar notice the resemblance to Gawaine and discover that he is Gawaine's younger brother, Gareth, who wants to be made a knight at Pentecost.

After Gareth's display in the fields, Arthur and Gwenhwyfar take a walk to one of Arthur's favorite view points over the land. From there, they spy Kevin riding in on the road with a companion whom they do not recognize. When they greet the visitors, they discover it is Morgaine come back to them. Morgaine only says that she had a hard time on the road and makes no more of it. The next day, Kevin and the Merlin have a private audience with Arthur to remind him of his oath to Avalon.

That spring there is fever at the court, though it claimed no lives. Lancelet, however, is lucky to be alive and takes a long time to recover. Morgaine uses her knowledge of medicines and herb lore to heal him and everyone else who has fallen sick. While Lancelet convalesces, Morgaine comes to visit him and even plays her harp for him. She leaves so he can rest, and Gwenhwyfar comes to see him. Lancelet voices his desire for her after so many years. He wants to take her away from court and be with her, but he loves Arthur too much to hurt him. Since Lancelet is stuck in such a conflict, he asks Gwenhwyfar to give him leave to go somewhere where he cannot be tortured by her presence.

## The High Queen, Chapter 15 Analysis

Gwenhwyfar continues to weave her web of manipulation around Arthur. Although Arthur speaks of his oath with scorn, he does nothing to stop Gwenhwyfar's pushing him to put the old ways down. Arthur's love for Gwenhwyfar bends him to her will. Later, Morgaine will regret not taking advantage of the hold she once had over Arthur because she knows he would not break his oath were she still close to him. At this point, Arthur's pliability is evident. He knows, too, that he may be punished for oathbreaking. When he talks like that, it makes Gwenhwyfar feel a sense of regret about pushing him so hard, but she never goes back on her word or changes her mind on the issue. She only pushes ever harder. She needs to be convinced of love, and she sees these acts that Arthur does for her as love.



# The High Queen, Chapter 16

## The High Queen, Chapter 16 Summary

Kevin arrives at Camelot once again. Morgaine goes out to meet him and hear his news. He tells her that Viviane is still coming to Pentecost to petition Arthur. He also tells her that Avalon will not have him rule as a Christian king. Once again, Arthur must be reminded of his oath to Avalon or be forced to relinquish his sword. Later, the hand that gave Arthur the sword will smite him for breaking his promise. All Kevin mentions to Morgaine later about his conversation with Arthur is that Arthur would not listen. Arthur chooses to stand with the priests and the church because they had stood by his throne.

## The High Queen, Chapter 16 Analysis

Gwenhwyfar is still convinced that she is being punished for something, which is why she has not borne the king any children. Her is still overly zealous in her adherence to the Christian church. She still believes that ridding the kingdom of pagans and the old ways will please her God - whom she believes is vengeful - and give her a child. The more she urges Arthur to put down the old ways, the farther he moves away from supporting Avalon. This, in turn, makes his eventual fall a big one.





# The High Queen, Chapter 17

## The High Queen, Chapter 17 Summary

Everyone at Camelot is preparing for the Pentecost feast. In Gwendhwyfar's mind, she knows Pentecost also marks the Beltane fires, which celebrate the fertility of land by the people who farm it. She feels resentment over the fact that the day should symbolize such fertility, yet she does not bear any children to the king. This is something that preoccupies her so much that she even goes so far as asking Morgaine for a charm that will aid in her ability to conceive. Morgaine warns her about what she wishes but grants the queen this wish and promises to make something to give Gwendhwyfar later. Morgaine also tells Gwendhwyfar that Arthur has the ability to get her pregnant, since he already has a son elsewhere. However, Morgaine has sworn Gwendhwyfar to the strictest secrecy over it and begs her not to mention it to Arthur, since he does not know.

At the Pentecost feast, everyone is in a festive mood and drinks too much wine. As everyone staggers to bed, or out to the Beltane fire, Gwendhwyfar and Lancelot struggle to carry Arthur to his bed. While the three are in Arthur's chamber, Arthur tells Lancelot and Gwendhwyfar how much he loves them both and wants to give Gwendhwyfar whatever she wants. Over the years, he has seen the way the two of them look at one another, and he gives them permission to make love in his bed, with him there. By this time, Gwendhwyfar is wearing the charm around her neck that Morgaine made for her, but she thinks twice about keeping it on. Before she climbs into bed with Lancelot, she rips it from her neck and throws it away.

## The High Queen, Chapter 17 Analysis

Remarkable events always seem to happen on Pentecost. One such event occurs at the end of this chapter when Arthur, who is drunk on wine, pulls Lancelot and Gwendhwyfar into bed with him. Although Arthur had previously given permission to Gwendhwyfar to sleep with Lancelot to conceive a child, she did not take him up on it. Now, however, it seems as though Arthur would have both of them in his bed. The main reason for this is so that Gwendhwyfar can bear a child. However, the underlying reason is because Arthur, too, loves Lancelot. Although there is no reason to suggest that Arthur is enamored of men sexually, Lancelot being invited into Arthur's bed is merely an exhibition of the strong bond that connects the three of them. It is a love triangle. Arthur and Lancelot would die for each other. Lancelot and Gwendhwyfar are soul mates of love, and Arthur and Gwendhwyfar love as a proper husband and wife. All three are bound by honor and duty and truly wish to make the others happy. This unique event does little to dull the heat between Lancelot and Gwendhwyfar, and does not change anything between Arthur and Lancelot and Arthur and Gwendhwyfar.



# The King Stag, Chapter 1

## The King Stag, Chapter 1 Summary

Gwydion tricks Morgause into throwing a feast and putting on her finery. All day long she senses Gwydion is up to something. What he does not tell her is that, with the Sight, he knows there will be visitors. As he expects, Viviane, Niniane, and Kevin, who is now the Merlin of Britain, come to Lothian to visit with Morgause and Gwydion. When Viviane sees Gwydion, she thinks he resembles Lancelot.

Kevin talks about the news at Arthur's court and tells Morgause how her sons are doing. Viviane comments that she knows Gwydion has the Sight. In conversation, Kevin hints that Gwydion has much to learn in the ways of a priest or a Druid. This gets Gwydion very excited. Then Gwydion overhears a comment by Viviane about there being two royal lines. She goes on to tell him that it takes more than royal blood alone to make a good king, who also needs courage, wisdom, and farsightedness. They speak, however, of Gwydion being the answer for the future, since Arthur is not working out as they hoped. It is during Viviane's visit that Gwydion puts the pieces together and realizes who his father is. Once Viviane sees how strong the Sight is with Gwydion, she decides that he must leave with them at once to go to Avalon.

## The King Stag, Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter sets the stage for Gwydion showing his true colors. Morgaine's child is fast growing into a man. Although strong in the Sight, he keeps this information hidden. This is suggestive that the rest of his personality is quiet, calculating, and manipulative. The only time he is humbled is when he learns that those from Avalon can see right through his act. Gwydion proves to be a smart boy with hints that his intelligence and wit will come to use down the road. However, there is a sense of trepidation over Gwydion being schooled in Avalon given his personality. If he is schooled in Avalon, then he will learn to use the powers he already has; this, mixed with his secretive side, may lead to something climactic years down the road.



# The King Stag, Chapter 2

## The King Stag, Chapter 2 Summary

Arthur's court prepares for the Pentecost feast. Morgaine is anxious to see Kevin, but still has feelings for Lancelot. Kevin arrives and tells Morgaine that he rode with Gwydion to Avalon. He tells her that he will be schooled in Avalon as a Druid. After his training, things must go as they will, but Kevin believes that Gwydion will make a bard and a notable wise man. Kevin and Morgaine go to the feast on Pentecost eve, where Gareth is preparing to become knighted by Lancelot.

The fanfare at the feast table becomes boisterous, as Gawaine makes a jest about Lancelot's devotion to the queen. Arthur settles the dispute, but Lancelot walks away, his feathers ruffled. Later in the evening, Morgaine stops to speak to Lancelot and asks him what is bothering him. He confesses everything to Morgaine--his love for Gwenhwyfar and the night he spent with her and Arthur in bed. Since he cannot be with his true love, he feels tortured to the point where he wants Arthur to send him away on some quest.

## The King Stag, Chapter 2 Analysis

When Morgaine leaves Avalon while pregnant with Gwydion, she first works through her anger at Viviane, but then needs to work through her guilt over leaving Avalon. For a time, the two emotions are conflicted within her. She still feels anger over Viviane's actions that gave Morgaine this pregnancy. She also knows that she left Avalon of her own free will but feels guilty because she knows that her place is back there. In the same token, it is not yet time for her to return, and so she thinks about marriage because it is refreshing to love someone so simply. However, a vision comes to her later, which causes her to question her future. If the Sight has returned to her, she feels it must be a sign that Avalon will eventually welcome her. Time will tell.



# The King Stag, Chapter 3

## The King Stag, Chapter 3 Summary

It is Pentecost and everyone at Camelot is preparing for the day's festivities. The day begins with a church service, and immediately afterward, Lancelot knights Gareth. When Morgaine approaches Gareth to give him a gift, he slips and makes a comment to her about how her son Gwydion has grown. Gwenhwyfar overhears the comment but promises Morgaine she will not say anything to Arthur. Nothing is mentioned as to who is Gwydion's father.

As Morgaine leaves the games and goes inside, where she sees that Viviane has arrived, so Morgaine goes to her immediately. It is at this moment that Morgaine realizes that she does indeed have the Sight, and that it never really left her. They catch up on each other's lives, and Viviane tells Morgaine about the visit Viviane had with Gwydion in Lothian before he came to Avalon. Viviane hints that Gwydion can be used to threaten Arthur and that there is another with the Pendragon blood that will uphold the oath that Arthur has broken. Viviane goes on to say, however, that it is still too early to know what will happen. Viviane then asks Morgaine to return with her to Avalon to fulfill her role as the Lady of the Lake. Morgaine is happy for the invitation and agrees to go with Viviane the next day.

That night at the feast, there is commotion in the hall as Maleagant, Gwenhwyfar's half-brother, petitions the king to let him rule in King Loedengranz's stead, since the king is dead. Arthur and his Companions urge Maleagant to come back at another time for this petition. Viviane takes her place as the next petitioner before the king and starts to remind Arthur of his oath to Avalon. Another commotion breaks out, as Balin steps forward, and, using the sword that Maleagant left behind, swings at Viviane's head and splits it wide open at the foot of Arthur's throne. He exclaims that he is doing justice, since he feels that Viviane murdered his dying mother. Arthur is furious and casts Balin out of his court. As his penance, he is instructed to make a pilgrimage to Rome and the Holy Lands, but he never makes it. Balin intercepts him on the way and kills him with one stroke of the sword, and he, too, takes a wound that causes his death later the same day. Arthur has Viviane laid to rest at Glastonbury on the Holy Isle, but this infuriates Morgaine because this is a Christian site. When Kevin upholds the decision, it causes a rift between him and Morgaine.

## The King Stag, Chapter 3 Analysis

Morgaine's journey back to Avalon does not come without cost to her. Each step she takes toward it only adds to her loneliness. Viviane's death is merely one part of that, although it hits her very hard. Kevin's decision also baffles her. Morgaine sees this move by Kevin as traitorous. While Kevin's move to support Arthur creates a rift between him and Morgaine, it also symbolizes the start on his path of destruction. Viviane's death



can also be seen as timely, since Morgaine was not pressing Arthur to honor his promise to Avalon. While in years past, Taliesin and Kevin had approached Arthur about it, Viviane, too, is now unsuccessful with it. However, this both gives Morgaine the mission carry on and a solid reason to return to her priestess roots.



# The King Stag, Chapter 4

## The King Stag, Chapter 4 Summary

Maleagant invites Gwenhwyfar to go to him to settle their dispute. Arthur is currently away, so she seeks to go alone with one lady and a chamberlain. At Cai's urging, she also brings along Ectorius and Lucan. Morgaine senses that something is amiss and wants to go along for added protection, but Gwenhwyfar will not allow it. They proceed and arrive at her old home after the brief journey. Maleagant manages to separate Gwenhwyfar from her party and locks her into her old room, which is in a state of disrepair, since no one has lived in it since before she was married. Now she regrets not taking more attendants with her, and she knows that Morgaine was right to be afraid for her.

Hours later, Maleagant bursts into the room and rapes her with the intent of begetting an heir and ruining Gwenhwyfar for Arthur, so he will cast her aside. Shamed and beaten, Gwenhwyfar panics over her now uncertain future. After several more hours, Gwenhwyfar hears a commotion in the courtyard below, and Maleagant comes once more into her room to take her to a more secure location. Before he can do so, someone hits his head from behind, and he is killed instantly. As he drops to the floor, Gwenhwyfar sees Lancelet standing there. Lancelet is broken hearted when he sees how Gwenhwyfar is so badly beaten. In a rare guilt-free moment, Gwenhwyfar decides to make love to Lancelet and feels no remorse for it. She feels that if her prayers go thus unanswered and bad things still happen, then she can give in to this sin with no regrets.

## The King Stag, Chapter 4 Analysis

Gwenhwyfar has an interesting change of heart, although it is only temporary. Gwenhwyfar has spent her entire life praying and doing penance to keep her conscience clear of any wrongdoing. She is an over-pious Christian and believes that God will give her all that she prays for, if she is free of sin. This makes her current predicament under Maleagant's imprisonment that much more baffling to her. All the praying and confession does nothing to avert this situation for her. It is her futile effort at praying that leads her into Lancelet's arms at the end of the chapter. She figures that if she lives by God's laws and prays and is devout, then God would protect her, but this is not the case. This event is momentous for Gwenhwyfar because when it comes to Lancelet, she decides that she will never again hide her love for him.



# The King Stag, Chapter 5

## The King Stag, Chapter 5 Summary

It is the day after Gwenhwyfar returns home from her ordeal with Maleagant. Morgaine and Elaine are preparing for the start of their day. Elaine wishes aloud that Lancelot were her husband. Morgaine tells her that it is not a good idea to go after him, since his heart is so committed to Gwenhwyfar. Elaine coaxes Morgaine into making a spell that will turn Lancelot to her, so that he will marry Elaine. After trying to talk her out of it unsuccessfully, Morgaine agrees to make the charm provided Elaine offers her first daughter to be brought up in Avalon. In a rush of emotion and excitement, Elaine agrees.

Morgaine knows that in order for this spell to work, she needs to get Lancelot away from court. When she has the opportunity to speak with him alone, she convinces him that his pining for Gwenhwyfar will be the end of him, and that he really should go from court. Lancelot finally agrees that going on some quest would do him some good. At dinner that night, he suggests this to Arthur, who chooses that he join King Pellinore in slaying the dragon they have been hunting for years. Lancelot believes the dragon is folly and is afraid that he is being kept from court indefinitely, but Arthur assures him a spot whenever he is ready to come back. As Arthur permits Lancelot to leave, Elaine asks to go home to be with her father, and Morgaine asks to go with Elaine, claiming that the area in the vicinity of Elaine's home has herbs that are useful to her. Arthur grants permission for them to all go as they wish.

## The King Stag, Chapter 5 Analysis

There are those in Arthur's court who write off Avalon as a place where witches and sorcerers live, although those same people have double standards. This can be said of Elaine, who, after talking with Morgaine, asks Morgaine to cast a spell that will entrap Lancelot into marrying her. On the one hand, Elaine sees Morgaine as a witch, who comes from the evil land of Avalon, but on the other, she sees Morgaine as someone that Elaine can use. This does not come without its price, however. As payment, Elaine agrees to hand over her first daughter to Morgaine for schooling at Avalon. This is an arrangement that comes back to haunt Elaine.



# The King Stag, Chapter 6

## The King Stag, Chapter 6 Summary

Morgaine tries to talk Elaine out of going through with her plan about Lancelot one more time before Morgaine makes the love potion. Elaine assures Morgaine that she Lancelot as her husband, so Morgaine continues. She blends herbs into some wine that Lancelot will drink later. It will make him believe that Elaine is Gwendhwyfar, and, when he goes to Elaine, he will make love to her. Once that is done, he will see that it is Elaine.

Morgaine's plan is then for King Pellinore to discover them, so that Lancelot will be forced to marry Elaine. Before Morgaine has the chance to finish the potion, Elaine alerts Morgaine that Lancelot and her father have slain the dragon, but they were both burned by it. Morgaine tends to the two men and then sets her plan into motion with Elaine. The plan works, and Elaine and Lancelot are married shortly thereafter.

## The King Stag, Chapter 6 Analysis

There are several instances of irony throughout this chapter. When Morgaine mentions that Gwendhwyfar was raped by Maleagant, Elaine finds it scandalous that a man would sleep with his own sister. Little does she realize, or anyone for that matter, that Elaine is talking to someone who did exactly that and bore a son from it. Elaine's reaction is only a fraction of the backlash that Morgaine would experience if the news about Gwydion's parentage was known in Arthur's court. Also, by Morgaine creating a spell to use on Lancelot, she is playing a similar role that Viviane played when it came time for Morgaine to take part in Arthur's kingmaking on Dragon Island. So, while Morgaine rebelled against Viviane for her manipulative ways, Morgaine now does the same thing when she plays matchmaker.





# The King Stag, Chapter 7

## The King Stag, Chapter 7 Summary

It is Pentecost once again, and today Arthur will announce as his heir, Galahad, who is Lancelet's son. This is something that Gwenhwyfar is particularly sensitive about, since she cannot give Arthur an heir. A fight ensues between them Gwenhwyfar and Arthur, and Gwenhwyfar accidentally mentions Arthur's son. Arthur demands to know more, and Gwenhwyfar admits that Morgaine told her. They call Morgaine forth, and she says that it is true that Arthur has a son and that it is their child from his kingmaking on Dragon Island so many years ago. Gwenhwyfar is appalled to hear that brother and sister had a child together and demands that Arthur makes amends for this sin. Although he does not believe he committed any sin, he consents to confessing to a priest and doing penance.

## The King Stag, Chapter 7 Analysis

It is in this climactic chapter that Arthur finally discovers that he has a son, and Morgaine is the mother. It is a bittersweet moment for him. He is joyful at the news and sympathetic to Morgaine, who bore the weight of this knowledge all these years. But, at Gwenhwyfar's urging, he is pushed into penance for an act he does not believe a sin. This act of Arthur acquiescing to Gwenhwyfar's urging for his penance is symbolic of his permanent move to separate himself from Avalon, although he does not realize it at this time. For all the reminders and nudges he has had over the years about deserting Avalon, when it is Avalon who put him on the throne, he seems to easily walk away from that which truly supports him. Gwenhwyfar only shows her support when she gets her way, which is usually done by guiltting Arthur into submission.



# The King Stag, Chapter 8

## The King Stag, Chapter 8 Summary

Morgaine meets with Accolon and misses mass. After the service, Arthur seeks out the bishop for confession. The high feast is held up until Arthur gets back, which is noticeably late. When he returns, he appears worn, and Lancelet sees it and comments to Gwenhwyfar about it. She brushes it off and says that he is brooding about doing penance. She asks Lancelet if he is happy, and he says as happy as he can be. Lancelet tells Gwenhwyfar that his marriage was a mistake, and that he had believed that Elaine was Gwenhwyfar and then found himself trapped.

As part of the usual Pentecost feast, Arthur also hears petitions from the people. One person who steps forward is King Uriens, who seeks permission to marry again. Arthur suggests Morgaine, and this delights Uriens. When they call Morgaine forth to ask her if she wishes to live in North Wales, Morgaine assumes Arthur is asking about Accolon, Uriens' son, not for Uriens himself. In the confusion, Morgaine agrees to marry the king and is horrified to discover it Urien she will be marrying.

## The King Stag, Chapter 8 Analysis

Morgaine sees Accolon outside the church on Pentecost. As they are speaking casually, Accolon talks of his father's wish to remarry, which foreshadows later events of the day. The two of them hit it off splendidly, and there is a distinct attraction between them. Accolon convinces Morgaine that he isn't as young as she thinks he is in an attempt to be with her. It is ironic, then, how the events turn later that same day when Morgaine unwittingly agrees to marry his father, King Uriens.



# The King Stag, Chapter 9

## The King Stag, Chapter 9 Summary

Morgaine has now been in North Wales for about a year. It is almost Midsummer. Accolon returns home, and Morgaine tries to explain about the mix-up at Pentecost. This argument between them, however, is not settled. The household sits down for dinner, and there is robust debate over Britain as a Christian land deposing the pagans. The family is split on the issue of either worshiping the old ways of the Goddess or following Christianity, as much of the land is beginning to do. A large part of the change to Christianity has to do with Arthur publicly renouncing Avalon in support of the church. This sends a clear message to the land. It is a sore spot for many that still follow the Goddess, such as Morgaine, Uriens, and even his son Accolon.

Later that night, Morgaine goes to Accolon in his chambers. After spending the night together, Morgaine feels as though Accolon has aroused in her an anguished memory of her years in Avalon. The next day at Midsummer's, Morgaine and Uriens make their appearance for the festivities and present gifts to the revelers and the spring maiden. Between Accolon's presence and the Midsummer's rituals, Morgaine wants to renew her priestess ways and return to Avalon to claim her rightful place as Lady of the Lake. Little by little, she relearns the ways of Avalon that she forgot from years of neglect.

## The King Stag, Chapter 9 Analysis

Morgaine's figurative journey back to Avalon continues. The sight of Accolon once again rouses Morgaine's anguished memory of her years in Avalon. She notices more around her that motivates her to make right all the wrongs that are occurring across the land as it becomes Christian. All these things spur Morgaine toward her goal of reacquainting herself with the ways of Avalon. It is also evident to see how passionate she is about her feelings toward it. It is this passion that she will take with her as she carries out the Goddess' wishes in the future.



# The King Stag, Chapter 10

## The King Stag, Chapter 10 Summary

Kevin visits Avalon and mentions to Niniane that he saw Gwydion fighting alongside the Saxons allied with Arthur. Gwydion wants the battle experience but does so in a way that will avoid Arthur's eyes. The Saxons give Gwydion the name Mordred which means "Evil Counsel." He proves himself to be very good in combat. As Kevin and Niniane continue to talk, it comes out that Niniane has very little of the Sight. She also fights for Gwydion when Kevin questions whether Gwydion is ready to be king of Avalon. Kevin thinks that Niniane is promoting Gwydion because they are lovers. When Gwydion arrives at Avalon a few days before Beltane, he persuades Niniane to be the Spring Maiden to his King Stag. She does not think it is proper, but he talks her into it telling her he has seen it with the Sight.

## The King Stag, Chapter 10 Analysis

Niniane's resents being the Lady of the Lake. It is tough for her to know that she is only in her position because of family ties. Though she completed the necessary trials for priestess of rank in Avalon, she rules Avalon without having the Sight, so she is at the mercy of those who do have it. Gwydion is called Mordred which means "Evil Counsel" by the Saxons... it is very telling.



# The King Stag, Chapter 11

## The King Stag, Chapter 11 Summary

It is Pentecost once again at Arthur's court. He reminds Gwenhwyfar that Avalon stands behind him because he bears Excalibur, and she gets angry at him because she thinks he has given up his ties to Avalon. They talk of Lancelot coming to this year's Pentecost, and Gwenhwyfar is once again jealous when she hears that Elaine has given Lancelot yet another child. Gwenhwyfar reflects on the trick that Morgaine played on her and Lancelot when she set Elaine up for marriage with him. It has been years since Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot have been alone together, yet their feelings for each other remain.

At the feast that night, King Uriens asks Arthur to make Uwayne a knight of the RoundTable. This makes Gwenhwyfar jealous that Morgaine has two sons to call her own; it seems an affront to Gwenhwyfar because she is barren. Lancelot talks of his children, and Morgaine expresses her wish to go north to visit them, although Lancelot does not see them very often. Morgaine also suggests to Lancelot that after so many years, and since he is now married, he should leave Gwenhwyfar in peace. He explodes at her and calls her jealous and accuses her of hating Gwenhwyfar ever since they were young girls. Morgaine apologizes for the comment, and they change the subject as Gareth comes over to greet them.

A little later during the feast, there is an interruption when Roman guards burst into the hall. It causes a great deal of unrest amongst Arthur's Companions, and several of them move to attack the intruders, but Arthur stops them. He threatens Lucius with death if he harms any of his Companions. When the Romans depart, Arthur and the knights gather and plan an attack to take Lucius out.

## The King Stag, Chapter 11 Analysis

Gwenhwyfar's jealousy permeates this chapter. Given her protected upbringing, she is jealous of women such as Morgaine, who can come and go as they wish. She is jealous of other's appearances and tends to pay close attention to things such as wrinkles and graying hair in others. Most of all, she is jealous of anyone with children. As High Queen, she never gets used to the pressure of not bearing children for Arthur. Whether it is from her upbringing, her faith, or a combination of both, she always sees herself as inferior and is insecure. It is not an uncommon belief among the people that Arthur should put Gwenhwyfar aside for someone who can give him children.



# The King Stag, Chapter 12

## The King Stag, Chapter 12 Summary

Morgaine journeys to Pellinore's castle to visit Elaine and her children. She tells Elaine of the business with the Romans that Arthur and his men are putting down. She also brings up the agreement that she and Elaine had made for her daughter to be schooled in Avalon. Elaine is devastated by Morgaine's insistence that Nimue be schooled in Avalon and had hoped that Morgaine would forget they had made the deal. However, a deal is a deal, and Elaine does not want to become entangled with an Avalon priestess, so she allows Nimue to leave with Morgaine.

This is the first time Morgaine has been in Avalon since before Gwydion was born. As she sleeps, Raven comes into her room and welcomes her back with a silent gesture. The next day, Morgaine goes to see Niniane. Niniane tells Morgaine that Morgaine's work is not finished, and it will be some time before Morgaine can come back permanently to Avalon. Niniane goes on to say that Morgaine will kill for Avalon, and when Morgaine denies it, Niniane sends her forth with a warning. The plans to happen without a struggle. Niniane reminds her of this.

Before Morgaine leaves Avalon again, Gwydion pays her a visit. This is the first time she has seen him since his infancy. She immediately sees a resemblance to Lancelot. Gwydion agrees that he does not take after his father. Rather, he says, he bears the blood of Avalon, and it is apparently so. He predicts that Morgaine will introduce him to Arthur five years into the future, though he knows and understands that Arthur cannot acknowledge him as his heir. She prepares to leave but first gives him her blessing.

## The King Stag, Chapter 12 Analysis

While Elaine has to pay the price of her promise, the reader sees the Elaine's influence on her children. Her marriage to Lancelot is a direct result of a love potion; however, Elaine clearly runs a Christian household, which is contrary to the beliefs of Avalon. This is a double standard. She teaches her children that the ways of Avalon are wicked, although she only has children because of a spell by an Avalon priestess. Elaine's children are as pious as she is as though they are trying to make good the sin that Elaine did in tricking Lancelot to marry her.



# The King Stag, Chapter 13

## The King Stag, Chapter 13 Summary

Feeling homesick, Gwydion goes to visit his foster-mother, Morgause, in Lothian. He tells her of Morgaine's visit, and how he thinks that Morgaine looks much older than Morgause. He flatters his foster-mother almost relentlessly. Gwydion feels very much attached to Morgause and seeks her out as a confidant. As he guzzles the beer in front of Morgause, he tells Morgause about his apprehensions of unseating Arthur from his throne. Gwydion sees no good way of doing so, when the people love Arthur so much. If Gwydion succeeds Arthur, he will not be loved, rather, he fears he will be seen as a traitor. He does not look forward to taking on this challenge. He tells Morgaine that he would choose a normal life like everyone else.

## The King Stag, Chapter 13 Analysis

Gwydion's words and actions speak volumes about what he is thinking and what the future holds for him. His usually-confident demeanor is shaken, when he learns what is in store for him. Even though he knows little of Arthur, he is taken in by Arthur's spell. The idea that he needs to replace Arthur overwhelms him, and he desires nothing more than to be like everyone else. He also knows that he is going to be the one to rule after Arthur and will have to move the moon and the stars in order to make this possible. This sets the stage for calamitous events to come, i.e., the killing of Niniane and planting of the seeds of doubts in the minds of the Companions.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 1

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 1 Summary

Uwaine goes home to North Wales for a visit. Morgaine informs Uriens, who has been sick in bed with the lung fever for most of the winter, of Uwaine's impending visit. When Uwaine arrives, Morgaine discovers that Accolon is with him. Uwaine shows up with a festering injury that Morgaine attends to after their dinner. Morgaine cares for Uwaine and puts the king to sleep, then sneaks off to see Accolon in the night.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 1 Analysis

Morgaine sets up a liaison, the success of which is dependent upon it remaining completely secret. The elements of foreshadowing include the comments Morgaine makes to herself, pointing out how she does not do anything to shame her husband. However, the passion that ensues between her and Accolon indicates that this is not merely a one night stand; rather this is an ongoing relationship that is doomed.





# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 2

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 2 Summary

Morgaine slips away during the night to return to her chambers, but Avalloch surprises her in the halls. He fondles her and propositions her. When she refuses him, he tells her that he knows where she has been and threatens to tell Uriens. Morgaine knows that Avalloch is serious. If Avalloch tells Uriens, everyone in the household will be questioned, and the sacred grove will be cut down. As Morgaine returns to her room, she realizes that Avalloch must die. Avalloch is next in line for his father's throne, if he were to become king, it would mean little, if any help for Avalon. Avalloch will burn the groves and keep the fires out for the Old Folk in the kingdom. Nor will he uphold any oaths for Avalon, since he believes that they are sorcerers and pagans.

Morgaine's words come back to haunt her, as she plots Avalloch's death. Her plan is to send him out hunting and meet a grisly death by a wild boar. She knows that Uriens will remain in bed since he is ill. Uwaine will also be resting to heal his wound, and Morgaine will keep Accolon inside at his father's side. Accolon will have to trust her. Accolon cannot go along with Avalloch in case anyone accuses him of wrongdoing when Avalloch dies. Accolon's hands must be clean of any crime. He does as Morgaine wishes and visits with his father.

During that day, Morgaine sits with the women and spins. As she does so, she is casting a spell, which will make the boar attack Avalloch and render him helpless. This takes a lot of her power to perform. The Goddess moves through her. At the moment that Avalloch falls, Morgaine nearly passes out from the trauma of feeling him fall. She is taken to her room and is unable to move or speak, because she has used so much of her power to perform the spell. It is Accolon who later comes to her to tell her of the news, which he knows right away was Morgaine's doing. He understands it is the will of the Goddess and leaves her alone.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 2 Analysis

Morgaine is reminded of the words she said to Niniane at Avalon that Morgaine will not kill for Avalon. Not only does she kill in order to carry out her mission, the precedent is set for it to happen again. This chapter is also proof that Morgaine is becoming more and more the way she saw Viviane, which is manipulative and calculating in order to carry out the will of the Goddess. As Viviane loved Morgaine and used her, so does Morgaine love Accolon and will use him in the future. It is ironic that this happens, though she is unaware of the similarities between her and Viviane.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 3

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 3 Summary

As the activity settles, Morgaine sits with Accolon to explain that there is a reason behind her deeds. She reminds him that there is a purpose to everything that they have been doing. They are more than just lovers. She asks the big question, which is: Will he challenge the betrayer for the sword he holds by betrayal? He answers yes and says that he is ready to die for the cause. Morgaine explains that Gwydion cannot be the one to challenge Arthur. Accolon questions how the challenge will come about, and Morgaine explains that he will have all the help possible. She tries to explain as best she can without having a firm idea herself of exactly what will happen.

She leads Accolon to a hazel grove, and there the world begins to shift around them. As if in a vision, the lady of the fairy kingdom is standing with them. Through this vision, it becomes time for Accolon's testing. Morgaine sees Accolon crowned and robed with leaves and antlers. Accolon's kingmaking is invoked with Morgaine's powers, but she is not to know exactly what takes place. During this vision, there is an eclipse. When it is over, Accolon asks if any of it was real. Morgaine tells him that he knows the answer to that question himself. As they go back to the castle, she knows that his acceptance does not mean that he will triumph.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 3 Analysis

Morgaine now, for the first time, sees her actions mimicking Viviane's. She realizes how using Accolon is similar to Viviane using Morgaine so many years before. In order to prepare Accolon for what he must do, he has to go through the same trials as the druids do, and as Arthur did at his kingmaking. When Accolon repeatedly asks Morgaine if it is necessary that he dies for this cause, she hesitates to answer him. In some way, although it is not through the Sight, the nature of the hesitation suggests that, indeed, he may die. When Morgaine finally does answer him, she tells Accolon that he may die.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 4

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 4 Summary

It is the eve of Pentecost, and Lancelot's son, Galahad, will be knighted at the feast. Arthur's family gathers for the pre-holiday dinner. Morgaine confesses to Galahad and to Lancelot that she was behind the marriage to Elaine by the use of a love potion. Lancelot also discovers that his daughter, Nimue, is at Avalon, when he thought she had been in a nunnery all this time.

During dinner, Morgause presents Gwydion, who no one knew was attending the feast. Although he does not recognize Gwydion as his son, Arthur says that he will be received as a son at his court. Morgaine is completely caught off guard by Gwydion's presence there. Galahad and Gwydion meet for the first time, and there is no match of wits. Where Galahad is reserved, Gwydion is witty. They are opposites. After their conversation ends, Gwydion speaks with his mother before Galahad starts his vigil. Gwydion tells Morgaine that he wants to see who his competition is, and goes one step further to say that he thinks Galahad does not look like one who will live long enough to rule. He says it is not the Sight that tells him so, it is common sense.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 4 Analysis

The darker elements of Gwydion's personality shine through in this chapter. The differences between Galahad and Gwydion are quite remarkable. When placed side by side, it is like seeing good versus evil. Galahad represents the light and Gwydion the dark. Compared with Galahad, Gwydion is certainly seen as a darker individual with a hint of something sinister beneath the glossy veneer of his physical appearance. It is clear that something will happen that will bring all of Gwydion's darker characteristics to the forefront. There is an additional element of foreshadowing when Gwydion mentions to Morgaine that Galahad will not live long enough to rule. This makes it obvious that something bad is going to happen.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 5

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 5 Summary

It is Pentecost, and the festivities with the games are about to begin. Gwydion is tempted to challenge Lancelet in the games, but Accolon talks him out of it. He says that Lancelet may be old, but he has all his skill and strength. Gwydion and Uwayne go off to join in the games. Before the mock battle is set to begin, Gwydion rushes out onto the field and addresses Arthur. He asks for a challenge fight with Lancelet. As they fight, Lancelet draws first blood and Gwydion second. As the fight ends, the crowds hissed their displeasure at Gwydion. Lancelet bows to him and Gwydion asks to be knighted. They know that under the circumstances, Gwydion cannot be refused, so Lancelet proceeds to knight Gwydion and formally calls him Mordred. The stunt completely catches Morgaine off guard.

As the revelers enter the great hall for dinner, they are met with a cruel joke. Someone has left garishly painted banners for all to see, that depict the king and queen as devilish and Morgaine as a sorceress whore. No one knows who has done this. Once the banners are removed, the mood returns to normal, and, as Arthur is hearing petitions, the doors open and three Saxons enter. They pledge their allegiance to Arthur and vow to convert to Christianity. Arthur holds Excalibur above his head for all to see, and it casts a shadow of a cross. This infuriates Morgaine, who demands a private audience with Arthur to remind him once again of his vow. He agrees to meet with her after dinner.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 5 Analysis

Arthur's magic act of transforming Excalibur into the shadow of a cross draws a predictable response from Morgaine--fury. This is merely another step for her on her journey to take drastic measures to do the will of the Goddess. It is clear from her reaction that something dramatic will occur. It is also clear from Arthur's actions that he has no intention of honoring his oath to Avalon. This places more drama on future events, since both Arthur and Morgaine are so set in their positions.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 6

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 6 Summary

As Morgaine, Uriens, Accolon, and Gwydion meet with Arthur for the audience, Morgaine begins by commenting about how distressed she is at the welcome Arthur extends to the Saxons. She feels Arthur has made them give up their gods for Arthur's. When he denies it, she calls on Kevin to confirm that Arthur did just that, and that Arthur also transformed the holy sword of Avalon into a cross for the oath. Kevin remains neutral and answers that the cross is older than Christ and is just a symbol.

Morgaine goes on to remind Arthur that Avalon has set him on the throne, and Avalon can remove him also. Morgaine entreats Arthur to offer Excalibur back to the Holy Regalia. Arthur refuses and asks Uriens to stand by him. Uriens agrees to do so, and Morgaine is outraged, especially since Uriens had said that he would stand by Morgaine during the audience with Arthur. Arthur goes further to say that he intended no desecration, and that Kevin is right--the cross is merely a general symbol that people understand. In Morgaine's eyes, it is wrong, and she does not believe that Arthur even knows why he is wrong. In order to avert another heated dispute, Morgaine contrives a plan to get the sword from Arthur. To do so, she creates a ruse to go to Tintagel over a land dispute, but she has other things in mind.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 6 Analysis

Uriens accompanies Morgaine to the audience with Arthur because he says that as her husband, he supports her. Also, since he bears the serpents of Avalon, she expects that he will side with her, especially since all their conversations about Avalon and the old religion are in line with each other. However, what happens is the opposite; Uriens sides with Arthur. Although Uriens loves his wife and believes as she does in Arthur's oath to Avalon, his pride comes through as Arthur pressures Uriens to keep his wife in line. This is a little surprising because Arthur is not usually one to put his wife, Gwenhyfar, in her place. The usual situation is Arthur giving in to her every whim.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 7

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 7 Summary

Morgaine discovers that, although she is advanced in years, she is pregnant. She immediately knows that it is Accolon's child and not Uriens'. At her age, she also knows that bearing a child will most likely kill her. As she is deciding whether or not to abort the baby, she is also devising a plan that will return Excalibur to its rightful place in Avalon. Morgaine does her best to conceal the pregnancy from everyone. Although she says she does not care what people say, she wonders to herself what people will say if they do actually find out about the baby.

Kevin pays Morgaine a visit and tells her that she is wrong to condemn Arthur about Excalibur. Kevin does not agree that it was wrong to get the Saxons to convert. Morgaine feels that there should not have to be one God that everyone worships. Kevin says that Excalibur is the sword of the Gods, and all the Gods are one. He wants it out where people will follow it rather than in Avalon, where no one will see it. He also urges Morgaine to go back to Avalon, but she is not ready. Then he warns her about her own will, pride and ambition, and that Avalon's day may be past, and hers with it. When Morgaine hears this, she throws him out of the room.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 7 Analysis

Kevin's visit to Morgaine is very telling of the path he is taking. Although Morgaine has questioned his loyalties before, it is becoming more evident that his stance is further and further away from where Morgaine's is in the defense of Avalon. While Kevin denies that he is becoming a Christian, his actions speak louder than his words. As Morgaine continues her plan to reclaim Excalibur for Avalon, there is now another task she has, which is to keep Kevin in his place.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 8

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 8 Summary

Several days after the audience with Arthur, Morgaine, Uriens, and Arthur set out for Tintagel. On the way, Morgaine calls forth mists that will cloud their journey, so that they have to rely on her to continue onward. As part of her plan, Morgaine leads them to the fairy world. She meets with the fairy queen and explains why they are there. While Arthur sleeps off a drunken stupor, the fairy people take Excalibur, only to replace it with a fake.

Accolon is there as planned as well. Once the fairy queen hands Morgaine Excalibur, she belts it around his waist. He agrees to take the sword, and if Arthur can fight his way into taking it back, then he is welcome to it. Morgaine knows now that their destiny is in Accolon's hands. She hears Arthur wake up and call for his sword. As she sends Accolon forth, she knows that either he or Arthur will die, and she will lose one of them for certain. The fairies bring Arthur the replacement Excalibur. Morgaine takes Uriens back to Camelot, and she knows for certain now that she must abort the babe she carries.

Morgaine makes a potion of herbs that would force her to miscarry and drinks it. Although she dislikes spinning, she goes to join the women in the castle, who are spinning and passing the time. As she spins, Morgaine begins to go into a trance and sees Arthur and Accolon fighting over Excalibur. Arthur takes a bad hit and bleeds profusely. Since he does not hold his charmed sword, he is just as any other mortal man. Accolon battles valiantly, but falters and loses his hold on Excalibur. Once Arthur gets his sword back into his hand, he kills Accolon and is victorious. As the vision dissipates, Morgaine begins to bleed and miscarry. It is too soon for the potion to have worked, so she realizes she was going to miscarry anyway. The women tend to her and realize what is happening. Given her age, the women are very sympathetic and do not fault her for aborting the child. Morgaine does not realize just how close to death she is from the abortion.

After several days in bed, Morgaine gets up and prepares for the visitor on the way to Camelot. As the rider approaches, she knows something is wrong because neither Accolon nor Arthur is there. The rider reveals Accolon's body under the sheet and says that Arthur is recovering at the monastery at Glastonbury. The loss of blood in the sword fight has left Arthur very weak. Meanwhile, Uriens and Uwaine are devastated about the loss of Accolon. Right away, Uriens blames Morgaine because he knows she has been up to something. During the night, Morgaine sneaks out and, weak as she is, travels to Glastonbury to get Excalibur herself.

She arrives at Glastonbury before daybreak when everyone is sleeping. Arthur keeps Excalibur so close to him now that Morgaine is unable to get it; although, she does take the enchanted scabbard. She flees, though not without Arthur waking. He pursues her



through the forest with some of his knights but is unable to catch her. The Old Folk of the forest help her hide. As Arthur goes back to the monastery, Morgaine tosses the scabbard into the lake, so no one will be able to find it again. From there, she travels to Tintagel and begins to wallow in self pity.

Kevin pays her a visit at Tintagel and urges her to go back to Avalon. Morgaine goes back and spends a lot of time healing her wounds, though she does not know how much time actually goes by. She mourns the failure of her plan, the loss of Accolon, the loss of her unborn child, and the loss of her relationship with Arthur. Although Niniane is the official Lady of the Lake, Morgaine is seen as the true Lady of the Lake, and Niniane serves her. Time goes by quietly for Morgaine; however, the peace is broken one night when Morgaine hears Raven's cry.

## **The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 8 Analysis**

Morgaine's failure very much parallels Viviane's failure during the time when Morgaine fled from Avalon. All of her calculating and manipulation are for naught. Almost everyone who Morgaine loves is now lost, and she keenly feels alone. She also feels a profound sense of regret over not doing things the right way the first time around. She sees now the hold that she used to have over Arthur after his kingmaking, and she did nothing to keep that hold. If she had, then Arthur would never have forsaken Avalon. This is what Viviane fought hard to do, and Morgaine upset the entire plan.





# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 9

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 9 Summary

In Raven's vision, the Holy Regalia disappears. This disturbs Raven and Morgain, so Morgaine devises another plan. Nimue is called from seclusion. Morgaine tells her that she is to seduce Kevin and bring him back to Avalon. They send her forth and instruct her to become one of the queen's ladies-in-waiting but never to say a word to Kevin about her time in Avalon. Kevin is now seen as a traitor, since he joins forces with the priests and brings about the profanity of the Holy Regalia. The Merlin of Britain is a traitor. Such an act must be punished. Raven speaks and tells Morgaine she will go with Morgaine to Camelot. Although Morgaine does not like the idea, she allows it and the two women depart, dressed as beggar women, so as to go undetected.

The peasant people are invited to join the Pentecost feast at Camelot, so Raven and Morgaine join them. Before the feast begins, Bishop Patricius begins mass and brings out the Holy Regalia of Avalon to use. Morgaine takes this opportunity to use the powers of the Goddess and remove the Holy Regalia. Raven uses her powers in support of Morgaine. Approaching the altar, Morgaine takes the chalice and brings it to those sitting on the dais. No one recognizes Morgaine because she has taken on the appearance of the Goddess and appears differently to each person. When it is over, the Holy Regalia is gone. As Morgaine goes back to her seat, she sees that Raven is dead from the strain of using such tremendous power. Arthur sees a commotion in the back of the hall, tends to it and sees Morgaine. Neither makes any move nor acknowledges any recognition of the other. As Morgaine sees that her work is done, she leaves with Raven's body and returns to Avalon.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 9 Analysis

The groundwork is laid here for yet another series of events to come. Raven's vision of the Holy Regalia is a foreshadowing of the downfall of Arthur's court. More importantly, Raven's actions are about to play a much bigger role. The previous mentions of Raven as not being as strong as Morgaine are very telling. It is especially apparent when Raven insists on traveling with Morgaine to Camelot. On the road, Raven is clearly the inferior character, although others perceive that her powers are strong. Physically and mentally, her capabilities are questionable. It raises questions about what will happen to her once she reaches their destination.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 10

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 10 Summary

When Arthur goes back to his table, he sees that his knights are invigorated by what they have seen and pledge to seek the Holy Grail, which is what they believe they saw during the vision. It distresses Arthur to see his Companions scatter to the winds, but they feel very strongly about pursuing a quest to return the Grail, which is the cup they believe Christ used at the Last Supper. It breaks Gwenhwyfar's heart that Lancelot, too, wants to go, and she openly declares her love for him. Arthur takes the moment to do the same and declares his love also for Gwenhwyfar. Whatever each person experiences, they all feel love and inspiration. For many, that means leaving Arthur's court. Mordred however, asks permission not to go on any quest. With everyone going away, Mordred wishes to stay with Arthur. This is all part of the Goddess' plan to take back the Holy Regalia and none at Arthur's court realizes it.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 10 Analysis

The events of the chapter foreshadow what is to come in Arthur's court. Once the Goddess works through Morgaine, a vision appears to everyone present in the Great Hall. The vision is different for everyone, but the common thread is that each person experiences a vision that appeals to that individual. For Arthur's Companions, the vision of the Holy Grail inspires them to leave on a quest and essentially desert Arthur's court. This desertion can only mean the arrival of a new, more sinister force, since his Companions, which represent that which is good, are now going to be gone.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 11

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 11 Summary

Nimue does as she is told and weaves an intricate web of seduction, ensnaring Kevin. As she works the spell, she gets caught up in it as well. Although she feels guilty over what she must do, she knows that it is for the greater good of Avalon that she brings the traitor to justice. She tricks Kevin into seducing her, and, as they make love outside, he is completely caught in her spell and at her mercy. She then takes him to Avalon, where Morgaine meets them on the shores as the barge comes in.

Before Kevin is sent into the grove for the execution of his sentence, he tells Morgaine that he has only done what the Goddess has willed him to do. Since Avalon is moving farther into the mists, the Holy Regalia is brought out, and the Goddess manifested herself for all to see. This is the legend that will be remembered long after they are gone. The Goddess sends her verdict through Morgaine that Kevin be killed swiftly and not tortured. He is lead into the grove and at the moment of his death, lightening strikes the Sacred Oak and splits it. Morgaine decrees that he should be buried with the tree and she seeks out Nimue. No one has seen her until after the storm, when her body is floating in the lake.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 11 Analysis

Nimue's life of seclusion is over, and she now knows why she was forced to live alone for so many years. The seduction begins, and, as she weaves her web around Kevin, she too becomes entangled. Since the spell only works when both parties are committed, Nimue's downfall is expected, and a dark future for her is no surprise.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 12

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 12 Summary

With the Sight coming to her occasionally, Morgaine sees the Companions scattered to the winds. She sees them on their quests as some of them die and some of them live. By a strange twist of fate, Lancelot ends up on the shores of Avalon and visits with Morgaine. He asks her where Galahad is, since Galahad needs to go back to Camelot. Morgaine leads him to the chapel where the Grail appears. As if in a vision, Lancelot sees Galahad in the chapel as Galahad approaches the Grail. However, it is death to touch the holy things unprepared, and thus, Galahad dies upon contact. Morgaine instructs Lancelot to take Galahad's body back to Camelot.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 12 Analysis

The world is shifting beyond the mist, moving at an ever-accelerating pace. Morgaine realizes the Goddess is within her, and with everyone now gone, she becomes her own guide. As a result of the events in this chapter, things in Camelot are shifting as well. Galahad's death brings about a new era to Camelot. As is hinted, Gwydion's influence with Arthur is increasing. There is a new sense of foreboding as darker events are foreshadowed, and a cloud of uncertainty hangs over Arthur and Camelot.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 13

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 13 Summary

Morgause, who was never very gifted with the Sight, begins to use dark magic to have her will done at Camelot. She is now doing what she must to ensure the throne for Gwydion. It is also discovered that she is the one behind Gwenhwyfar's inability to carry a child to term, as she has had one of Gwenhwyfar's waiting women put herbs in Gwenhwyfar's wine at night. Morgause uses her dark spell to find out if Mordred is indeed close to the king and trusted. In the vision, she sees her son, Gareth, begging Lancelot to bring Galahad back to Camelot because Lancelot's place is with Arthur and not on a quest. Morgause senses a threat to Gwydion and insists on going to Camelot at dawn.

As Morgause and her retinue travel towards Camelot, their path changes, and they become lost. Although Morgause and her servant man have made this trip several times, they are unable to find their way, as though something is preventing them from getting to Camelot. They make camp at night, and as they continue the next morning, they encounter Lancelot, who is traveling back to Camelot with the body of his son, Galahad. Once Morgause sees that Galahad is dead, she begins to wonder why she is traveling to Camelot.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 13 Analysis

Morgause's evil side is revealed. Her use of dark magic foreshadows more evil events to come. This sets up the true peril at Camelot; whereas, before evil was incorrectly perceived because of Avalon's influence, but Morgause's intent is true malice in the form of witchcraft and sorcery.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 14

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 14 Summary

Camelot is deserted with so many of Arthur's Companions away on the quest for the Grail. Both Gwydion and Niniane are becoming comfortable at court, and Arthur and Gwenhwyfar come to trust them both. Lancelet arrives a few days before Pentecost, and delivers the sad news of Galahad's death. Arthur then names Gwydion as his heir. While this infuriates Gwenhwyfar, she knows it must be. She and Lancelet sit together as they normally do at the Pentecost feast, and she asks Lancelet if she should send away her women, so that he can come to her in the night, and he agrees. After many years of their love for each other, Gwenhwyfar is finally becoming more comfortable with taking Lancelet as a lover right under Arthur's nose.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 14 Analysis

Gwydion still carries with him the resentment that his father cannot recognize him at court. This is especially apparent when he emphasizes the word "nephew" with Arthur when it really should be "son." However, Gwydion does not have to wait long for Arthur to recognize him as son and heir, once Lancelet comes home with the bad news. There is a sense of foreboding, though, since Gwydion is seen as quiet and calculating. The reader wonders what will befall Arthur and his court now that Gwydion's star is now rising. Gwydion knows he has to unseat Arthur to ascend the throne, so there is the sense that something big is coming. It is still a puzzle, though, at what it is he is planning at this point.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 15

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 15 Summary

Gawaine admits to Morgause that he suffered injuries in a fight with someone over a comment that Arthur was a cuckold. It is becoming widely known that not only are Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot lovers, but that she sends her women away so Lancelot can come to her at night. This is making Arthur the laughingstock of the realm. Gawaine takes offense to it and fights back, although he knows it to be true. This also greatly distresses Gwydion, who is violently opposed to such a threat to the country. He feels that something must be done to put an end to the talk, and if that means Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot need to be cast forth, then so be it. Gwydion later argues with Niniane over the problem when she refuses to go along with his plan to spy on Gwenhwyfar. In the heat of anger, he strikes out at her and kills her with a blow to the head. Morgause witnesses the murder but agrees to cover it up for his sake.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 15 Analysis

The meaning behind Mordred's name, "Evil Counsel" becomes a reality. It is apparent now what it will take for Gwydion to take Arthur down. Gwydion's temper also comes to the forefront as he kills the only woman he has loved. With Morgause's offer to help, it is now obvious that the two of them will only do evil to get where they want.



# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 16

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 16 Summary

As Gwenhwyfar waits for Lancelot to come to her in her chambers, she discovers that she is not alone. Gwydion slips in, as well as several of Arthur's Companions. When Lancelot arrives, the visitors make themselves known. They threaten to take them both to Arthur and tried as traitors. A struggle ensues and Lancelot kills Gareth as Lancelot grabs Gwenhwyfar and escapes from the castle. They take a horse and gallop off into the night.

Gwydion wails over Gareth's body in grief. He accuses Morgause of being at the center of Gareth's death and exposes her ambitions to get Gwydion on the throne. Gwydion accuses her of doing the same thing as Gwenhwyfar at Morgause's court from the time he was a child. He casts Morgause away and threatens her if she ever comes near him. As she goes to her chambers, Morgause makes a pass at her serving man, who shuns her advances. For the first time she truly feels her age.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 16 Analysis

Gwenhwyfar feels the guilt of her adultery when Morgause makes a comment about her lover and also when the bishop preaches a sermon against adultery. This foreshadows the events that come very quickly as Gwenhwyfar lies in her bed, awaiting her lover. Unfortunately, they are discovered by Gwydion and the Companions. As Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar ride off into the night, Gwenhwyfar realizes that she is now free from Arthur and the trappings of court. They can never return as Arthur's friend and wife. This marks the end of Camelot's peaceful reign.





# The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 17

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 17 Summary

Gwenhwyfar asks Lancelot to bring her to the convent in Glastonbury, so that he will be free to make amends with Arthur. He does as she asks, and they say their final goodbyes. The damage to Camelot is permanent, though. Arthur no longer has the power to rally his men to him, since so many of them now follow Gwydion. As prophesied, Gwydion challenges Arthur for the throne. When Arthur asks him why, Gwydion answers him that he has never had anything more than hatred for him, as well as for Morgaine.

Morgaine appears just as Gwydion challenges his father, Arthur; Morgaine begs them not to fight. She knows that once the two of them battle it out, there will be none to succeed to Arthur's throne, and it will be the start of a new era. They do not heed her call, and, as a result of the fight, Gwydion dies, and Arthur is fatally wounded. As Arthur makes his way on the barge to Avalon, Morgaine forgives him everything and reminisces the way it used to be between them as children. At her request, Lancelot throws Excalibur into the Lake, so that no one will ever be able to retrieve it.

## The Prisoner in the Oak, Chapter 17 Analysis

Arthur and his Companions are now gone. Despite all the visions and prophecies, the true fate of Britain comes to pass. Britain discovers that what happened is as the Goddess willed it. The world is coming into a new era. As Arthur lay dying, Morgaine discovers that she always had her hold over him. It is likely that most of her plotting and planning did not even need to take place; things were going to happen as the Goddess willed it.



# Characters

## Morgaine

Morgaine is Igraine's daughter from her first marriage with Duke Gorlois. When Igraine marries Uther, Morgaine has to care for Arthur, her half-brother, whose father is Uther. As a result, she feels resentment toward her mother and Uther. She does not love her real father, but neither does she like Uther. She feels that Uther takes her mother away from her, which, in essence, he does. Although Morgaine loves her brother, she is somewhat jealous of the attention he receives as a small child. Viviane comes some years later and takes Morgaine to Avalon to be schooled as a priestess. Morgaine is supposed to be Viviane's successor as the Lady of Avalon.

When Morgaine surrenders her virginity to the Goddess, she is horrified to discover that she has slept with Arthur. She is even more horrified to discover that she is pregnant. Angered at Viviane, who has played her for a fool, Morgaine flees Avalon and spends years away, until she discovers that she must do the will of the Goddess and return. In later years, she sees herself becoming more like Viviane in her determination to do what she must to defend Avalon, regardless of the cost. At the end, she does what she feels is the Goddess' will but ends up all alone because everyone who is important to her has died. However, at the end, she sees that things have happened as they were supposed to and lives in peace.

## Arthur

Arthur, originally named Gwydion, is Igraine and Uther's son. Taking after Uther's fair complexion and good looks, Arthur is often sick or hurt as a child. When Viviane finds this out, she believes someone is sabotaging Arthur's ascension to the throne as High King. Arthur is therefore sent to live as King Ectorius' foster son until he is old enough and strong enough to go through trials and kingmaking rituals necessary in order for him to be king. From a young age, he is conscientious of what it takes to be a good soldier. It is not until he receives Excalibur that he truly begins to lead a charmed life. Arthur is not a remarkable fighter; it is only because he carries Excalibur that he never receives, an injury bad enough to kill him.

As part of his kingmaking, Arthur receives Excalibur, the magical scabbard and the Holy Regalia of Avalon, as he swears to defend Avalon. It is later, when he breaks his oath to Avalon that Viviane, and then Morgaine, work to take these holy items back. At his wife's urging, Arthur rejects the ways of Avalon and becomes a Christian. Arthur gives in to Gwenhwyfar's every whim, which goes against the current convention where men tell their women what to do. Arthur is easily ruled. It is this trait that Morgaine fails to take advantage of when it comes to honoring his oath to Avalon. During a ritual at his kingmaking, Arthur and Morgaine sleep together, not knowing who the other is.



Morgaine has a son from this union, who it is prophesied to challenge Arthur for the throne.

## Gwenhwyfar

Gwenhwyfar is King Loedengranz's daughter. As a young woman, she is easily scared. Because of her younger years of being confined in a convent, she prefers to be indoors. Even as she makes the trek to Caerleon for her wedding to Arthur, she panics when she leaves her home because of the great expanse of sky above her. From the time she is very young, Gwenhwyfar is insecure. There seems to be nothing she is certain of throughout her life. She questions both Arthur's love for her and Lancelot's, when they both would move the sun and the stars for her.

When Gwenhwyfar meets Lancelot for the first time, it is love at first sight. This love stays with them for the remainder of their lives, but it causes many problems along the way. She is also plagued with the pressures of bearing a child as Arthur's heir. This causes a great deal of grief for both her and Arthur. Since she remains childless after a few attempts at getting pregnant, Gwenhwyfar feels that there must be a great sin she is guilty of, which is why God punishes her. As a result, she becomes pious beyond normal reasoning and eventually convinces Arthur to give up the ways of Avalon. It is because of her that Arthur breaks his oath and he, and so many others die. Gwenhwyfar is selfish and not particularly bright. In instances involving Kevin Harper, she is even downright hostile.

## Lancelot

Lancelot, originally named Galahad, is Viviane's son. A prophecy tells Viviane that her son will serve the High King. He is born in Avalon and fostered by King Ban of Less Britain, who is his father. Lancelot has no inclination to become a priest or a Druid. He feels that men should be responsible for their own destiny and not the playthings of women. This notion fits in with the common feeling of the day. However, he falls hopelessly in love with Gwenhwyfar from the moment he sees her in the water between Glastonbury and Avalon. For decades they love each other until Camelot is no more.

Lancelot also shares a strong bond with Arthur; the two of them are as brothers, ready to die for one another if necessary. It is this love that tortures Lancelot and renders him incapable of betraying him by having an affair with Gwenhwyfar. On the few occasions that Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot do sleep together, he is torn apart by guilt, even though they do so with Arthur's blessing. With the use of a love potion that Morgaine uses, he is tricked into marrying Elaine and therefore moving away from Camelot. Lancelot is a man who believes strongly in honor and loyalty. This comes through very clearly in the telling of this story.



## Gwydion/Mordred

This is Morgaine and Arthur's son from the kingmaking on Dragon Island. After a difficult birth, Morgause tricks Morgaine into letting a wet nurse take care of him, so the connection between mother and child is never formed. As a result, Morgaine freely leaves Gwydion with Morgause to raise as her foster-son. He has Lancelot's looks and Morgaine's wit. However, there is something sinister beneath his cool exterior that tends to put some people off. He grows up in Lothian under Morgause's tutelage and grows shrewd to her ways. As he grows up, it is discovered that he is strong in the Sight. He keeps this information to himself until the day that Viviane, Niniane, and Kevin go to Lothian to meet Gwydion and take him back to Avalon for training. Unlike Morgause's other sons, Gwydion is like a cat--silent, sleek, fastidious, and watchful.

Gwydion realizes that his father is Arthur and this tends to overawe him. The prophecy says that he will unseat Arthur, and Gwydion is nervous about this because Arthur is beloved by all. Eventually, as he grows closer to Arthur, he discovers Gwenhwyfar's affair with Lancelot, which makes his blood boil. To prevent Arthur from becoming the laughingstock of the kingdom, Gwydion vows to expose Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot's affair, thus upsetting the Companions and causing a rift at court. Gwydion, now called Mordred, meaning "Evil Counsel," takes this opportunity to battle Arthur for the crown. During their battle, Gwydion/Mordred dies, and Arthur sustains a mortal wound, which he dies from shortly after. Gwydion/Mordred, in effect, puts a permanent end to Camelot.

## Viviane

Viviane is the older sister of Igraine and Morgause. She is a priestess and carries the prestigious title of the Lady of Avalon. Although she is born in Avalon, she was fostered on the Druid Isle, far to the north, in the Islands. Although she and Igraine have the same mother, Viviane's father is a priest who was "overshadowed by the power of the God;" therefore, she does not have a father. She is a charming and manipulative woman. When she makes her first entrance in the story, her manipulative side is evident as she tells Igraine that her entire future is about to change.

As Morgaine gets older, Viviane discovers that she possesses the Sight, so Viviane wants to take Morgaine to Avalon to learn the ways of the priestess. Viviane takes Morgaine to Avalon and lays the foundation for her future. It is through her manipulation that Morgaine ends up sleeping with Arthur and bearing a son from that union. Viviane does whatever is necessary to defend Avalon and will not let anything get in that way, even when it causes her own death.

## Kevin

Kevin is both wise and traitorous. He is a man trained in the ways of Avalon as a druid and becomes the Merlin after Taliesin passes the title to him. Kevin makes his entrance



into the story as a young bard, badly scarred from an accident he endured as a child. Since there are few options for someone as crippled as he, he learns to play the harp and has a very unique one constructed for. It is designed for his fingers and body type, which are badly misshapen. Kevin refers to his harp as "My Lady." He says that as the gift of a king, she is the only woman, whether maiden or matron, whose caresses never weary him and of whose voice he never tires. When he is old enough, he goes to the Druid isle to study bardcraft and is then sent to Avalon. He is described by most as an ugly and grotesque man, except when he plays his harp. When he makes music, he is seen as graceful, and his music is unlike any other.

In later years, he is seen as a traitor when he supports Arthur's decision to bury Viviane on Glastonbury, a Christian site. Years after that, he allows the bishop to use the Holy Regalia in mass, which outrages the people in Avalon. This is seen as profanity and must be punished. He is tricked by an Avalon priestess and brought back to Avalon to pay for his crime by being put to death. Before he dies, he explains to Morgaine he has done only what the Goddess has wished, which she later finds out is true.

## Morgause

Morgause is the younger sister of Igraine and Viviane. Her mother dies giving her birth. As a result, Viviane is the mother figure in her life, since Viviane is the one who raised Morgause. As a young teenager, Morgause is precocious and flirtatious. She is seen as a loose woman. Gorlois recognizes that she is dangerous around men and should be married off as soon as possible. He is afraid she will disgrace his family. In later years, after Morgause's husband, King Lot, dies, Morgause does, indeed, keep a string of lovers on hand and eventually takes a much younger man as a husband.

Morgause is cool and calculating, never swayed by emotion or impulse. She meets her match when she marries Lot. The two of them plot to keep Arthur from ascending to the throne of High King, although these plans do not work. As an older woman, Morgause turns to the dark side of magic. Although she is not as gifted in the Sight as her two sisters or Morgaine, she is able to tap into the Sight by practicing dark magic. By the end of the Camelot era, she discovers that her machinations were a waste of time, and she ends up old and alone.

## Igraine

Igraine is married at a young age to Duke Gorlois of Cornwall and has a daughter, Morgaine, by him. Although she is married with a child, she views herself as a child in many ways. She hints that she has always relied on Viviane for direction as a child would. It is not until she encounters Uther that she begins to feel like a woman. With Uther, she finds true, "adult" love. It takes her a long time before she learns to rely on herself for guidance. Long after she is married to Uther, she continues to mourn the children she has lost either through miscarriage or shortly after birth. Igraine sees this loss as her penance for both doing wrong to Gorlois and lying with Uther before Uther's



and her wedding ceremony. Even as Uther lies dying, she refuses to allow the Merlin to use his healing spells on him because she has become Christian.

After Uther dies, she agrees to retire to a convent. Igraine does not want to live near Avalon to be closer to Morgaine because she feels it is unseemly for a Christian queen to do so. She only leaves the convent once, to accompany Gwenhwyfar to Caerleon for her wedding ceremony to Arthur. Igraine is the first to see the attraction between Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot. She tries to stop the wedding between Gwenhwyfar and Arthur from occurring, but it is too late to do so. Years later, Gwenhwyfar travels to see Igraine as she is dying from a heart condition. It is on her deathbed that she mourns Morgaine's absence from her life and wishes she had done things differently. She dies never knowing where Morgaine has gone.

## Uther Pendragon

Viviane's prediction from the Goddess is that Uther is the future father of the great king, who will save the old religion and heal old wounds. He is nephew to the popular Ambrosius Aurelianus, who is the High King of Britain at the beginning of the story. He was a Briton of Britons, with "no taint of Roman blood;" therefore, many tribesmen followed him. Everyone knows that when Aurelianus dies, Uther will be named High King.

Uther is a competent commander and popular with his men because he takes good care of them. He is also smart and persuasive. Years later, he listens to Viviane when she advises him to send Arthur to another kingdom for safety and Morgaine to live with Viviane to study to be a priestess. He does, however, suffer from the sin of pride. It is this flaw in his character that is his undoing. As he recovers from a battle wound, he leads his men out into another battle, even though he does not have to. He does so in order to be seen. However, he takes a mortal wound and falls down in the field. He dies before Arthur ever gets to know him.

## Nimue

Nimue is Lancelot and Elaine's second child and first daughter. In exchange for a love spell, Elaine promises her first daughter to Morgaine to be schooled in Avalon. Morgaine comes to settle this debt when Nimue is only five years old. Shortly after Nimue arrives in Avalon, Raven and Niniane decree that she is to live in seclusion, as told them by the Goddess, so she grows up alone with no one setting eyes on her. As Morgaine's final plan unfolds, Nimue is called forth from seclusion to go to Camelot to seduce Kevin Harper. The plan is to trick Kevin into coming to Avalon one last time, where he will face punishment as a traitor of Avalon. When she goes to Camelot to meet with Kevin, everyone sees her as a beautiful young woman, perhaps more so than when Gwenhwyfar was her age. Nimue becomes so ensnared in the love spell that she works on Kevin that she is just as affected. After Kevin is taken to the grove to be executed, Nimue commits suicide by drowning herself in the lake.



## Accolon

He is King Uriens' second son and an initiate of Dragon Island with the blue serpents tattooed on his arms as proof. He is agile and well built, moving with the natural ease of a man to whom exercises (such as the ones at Pentecost) come readily. He has been handling weapons since his boyhood. Accolon's charm is infectious and Morgaine falls for him instantly. Fully entrenched in the ways of the Goddess, Accolon bends to Morgaine's will and makes himself available to do whatever she needs to take Excalibur back from Arthur. Although he is a strong man and pure of heart, Arthur defeats him in a crucial sword fight and he receives a mortal wound.

## Raven

Raven is a priestess at Avalon by the time Morgaine arrives. Since she has taken a vow of silence, very few ever hear her speak. The only times she speaks is during a trance, when the Goddess works through her. She is seen as the prophetess of Avalon. Her dedication to her vow of silence is complete. Even when she receives severe burns once, she never uttered a sound. She remains in Avalon until she decides to travel with Morgaine back to Camelot for a Pentecost feast where the Holy Regalia is scheduled to be used in a Christian service. After so many years in Avalon, Raven is terrified of the outside world. She speaks only sparingly and is afraid of everything. When people see Raven with Morgaine, they often believe that Raven is mute or dumb and pay her no attention. She is not as strong as Morgaine, and after she pushes her power to its limit in helping Morgaine appear as the Goddess, she dies from the shock and exhaustion.

## Niniane

Niniane is Taliesin's and Branwen's daughter conceived during the Beltane fire. Niniane, though not very talented with the Sight, takes Viviane's place as Lady of the Lake, since Morgaine is nowhere to be found to take her rightful place. Before she takes this honored role, she is a young and insecure girl. She goes through the training that the priestesses do and passes all of the same trials. Although she does not have the Sight, she is approved by the Goddess and possesses wisdom that makes her an able leader for Avalon until Morgaine can take her rightful place. Before Gwydion goes to Avalon for training, she is the only one, besides Viviane, dwelling there who is of the old royal blood.

## Duke Gorlois

Duke Gorlois is Igraine's first husband. At the beginning he appears as a compassionate man because he allows Igraine to raise their daughter and does not pressure her to bear a son right away. At first glimpse, Gorlois seems to be a patient and kind man, although he is more than twice Igraine's age. He is kind to her when her family seemingly abandons Igraine. However, there are moments where he speaks





condescendingly to her; he does not treat her as an equal. He honors her as required through custom, law, and religion, but he does not truly see his wife as an equal. It becomes evident on their trip to Londinium that Gorlois is insecure as Igraine's husband. He is proud and jealous. He knows he is old for her and is quite afraid he will lose her. These traits come out more and more as Igraine's destiny becomes intertwined with Uther's.





# Objects/Places

## Castle Chariot

This is the fairy land where the fairy queen dwells. Morgaine spends time here as she attempts to go back to Avalon.

## Dragon Island

This is where the initiates go before they become full-fledged druids and priestesses. Arthur and Morgaine go there for his kingmaking ritual.

## Mount Badon

Mount Badon is the site of the great battle between Arthur and his troops against the Saxons.

## Caerleon

Uther Pendragon resides in this castle. Arthur's court is here until the time of the great battle with the Saxons, when everyone moves to Camelot.

## Camelot

This is the castle that Arthur builds which represents the new era of peace once the Saxons are driven out. It is home to Arthur, Gwenhwyfar, and his Companions of the Round Table.

## The Round Table

This is the fabled table, which accompanies Gwenhwyfar as a wedding gift from her father. It is so large it does not fit in the hall at Caerleon. When the court moves to Camelot, Arthur has a special hall built for it.

## Sacred Well

The well in Avalon from which priestesses drink. They also use it to conjure up the Sight.



## **Tintagel**

This is the castle where Igraine lives with her daughter and husband. It is later passed on to Morgaine.

## **Igraine's Moonstone**

It was given to Igraine while she was still in Avalon before she married Gorlois. Its magical qualities attracted Uther's attention.

## **Londinium**

This is a main city where the High King Ambrosius Aurelius lives. Early in the story, it is where the drama plays out with Igraine, Uther, and Gorlois.

## **Lothian**

King Lot rules with Morgause at his side in the kingdom of Lothian. This becomes Gwydion's home when Morgause raises him as her foster son.

## **Glastonbury**

This is the Isle of the Priests where there is a convent. Gwenhwyfar is schooled here as a young girl and retires there as an old woman.

## **My Lady**

This is the name of Kevin Harper's harp. It is specially designed for his use, since he is crippled. It makes music unlike any other harp in the land.



## Social Sensitivity

Arthurian legend, perhaps more so than any other long-lasting myth spawned in the Middle Ages, has adopted the medieval attitude toward sexuality and religion as an integral part of the stories themselves. After all, Camelot falls in the end due to Arthur's participation in what Christians would call the most diabolic sin—incest. Mordred, conceived incestuously by Morgaine and Arthur, must come back to destroy the golden city. A land ruled by a king with such a grave sin on his conscience cannot possibly survive; Camelot cannot survive because the sins of its king have become the sins of the land (the notion of the land carrying the sins of its king is also seen in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and the Fisher King stories of this century). Marion Zimmer Bradley's feminist publication *The Mists of Avalon* introduces Camelot to its reader by recreating the female characters associated with the mythical kingdom. In so doing, Bradley moves radically away from traditional male-centered plots and instead puts at the forefront the women of Camelot. Bradley portrays Avalon as a matriarchal island ruled by woman. Further, the politics and social history of Avalon are dominated by a long heritage of powerful and aggressive women. While Bradley addresses some of the same motifs as her predecessors (religion, temptation, adventure, loyalty, and kinship), it is clear from both the perspective of the narrator and the treatment of these themes that contemporary attitudes toward these issues have radically changed. Although Bradley's story takes place in a medieval period and her characters are part of a medieval society, she consistently invokes modern attitudes and social concerns (specifically regarding religion, sexuality, and gender). She introduces a new voice and a new experience that has not yet been heard in this legend— that of woman. Her text supports a strong opposition to social and political hierarchy and patriarchy, she confronts issues of power and sexuality, and she challenges negative female sexual stereotypes and offers a matriarchal arena for the women in the text.

Moreover, *The Mists of Avalon* intersects with a growing interest in the cultural phenomenon of goddess worship in contemporary society. In depicting the influence and power of pagan women, the text attempts to reconstruct medieval pagan religious practices through its fiction.

In *The Mists of Avalon* the social perception of the court and life in Camelot is juxtaposed with sexuality, evil, and religious freedom. The lack of choices given to women within the period and the legend itself may be attributed to the code of gender roles and labels during the Middle Ages.

*The Mists of Avalon* challenges these labels as they give voice to the women who have previously been unheard or misunderstood in Arthurian legend. Bradley does this primarily by providing the option of a matriarchal society within the text. Avalon is juxtaposed with Camelot just as Christianity is juxtaposed with paganism; Christianity is equated with patriarchy as paganism is equated with matriarchy. In providing this option of a matriarchal society within the fiction, Bradley creates a vehicle by which the silence of women ends.



Building upon the ideas of feminism and speculating about early Celtic and pagan religions, Bradley uses *The Mists of Avalon* and the legend of King Arthur to bring feminist ideals to the forefront. She advocates anti-Christian religions, arguing for paganism, female spirituality, and sexual freedom. The text sees Christianity itself as the oppressor of women—it is the source of patriarchy in Britain and is thus used to impose oppressive social structures.

Christianity in the Middle Ages had strict rules for the conduct of women. Woman as a sexual being was viewed as sinful and filthy, while the image of a nonsexual woman (the Virgin Mary) was revered.

Medieval attitudes toward sex were colored by feelings of guilt and anxiety as original sin permeated a woman's existence. These views are clearly seen in the teachings of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and St. Jerome (c. 340-420). Consequently, women who rejected this Christian attitude toward sex were viewed as evil. Quite simply, according to popular opinion at the time, no self-respecting medieval Christian woman should be interested in sex beyond the purpose of procreation.

Marion Zimmer Bradley challenges the view that female sexuality is something to be ashamed of, and that aggressive or non-Christian women are socially unacceptable.

*The Mists of Avalon* is unique, and perhaps revolutionary, in its treatment of Arthurian legend because it presents a dynamic reconfiguration of matriarchal versus patriarchal agis in the two religions; the notion of goddess worship is central to the plot of *The Mists of Avalon*. We are presented with a story told from the perspective of woman, and even more unusual, narrated by Morgan le Fay (Morgaine) herself. Yet all of the main female characters in the text who reject their expected female roles are rejected by the world of Camelot: Viviane, Lady of the Lake, and later Morgaine, are seen by society as devil-worshipping sinners for their refusal to be silent in social and political arenas. Morgause, sister to Morgaine and Queen of Orkney, is similarly shunned by society for expressing her sexual freedom, speaking out against patriarchal reign, and ruling the kingdom of Orkney equally by her husband's side. Significantly, all of these women also reject Christianity and God in favor of paganism and the Mother Goddess.



## Techniques

In keeping with the genre of fantasy, Bradley invokes elements of the fantastic in *The Mists of Avalon*—several marvelous elements assist the various characters throughout the text. These fantastical events are most profound in the practice of magic which is attributed to Morgaine and Merlin, and in the magical phenomena embedded within the plot: dragons lurk in forests, hands emerge from lakes bearing swords, magical islands suspend time, and people are granted immortality. Fantastic elements are at the base of all Arthuriana, no matter which author writes or rewrites the myth.

What does differ, however, is the treatment of magic within distinct texts; the notion of magic takes on different meanings within individual artistic representations. Moreover, these meanings are central to the issues addressed as magic often plays a central role in visual representations of women, sexual transgression, and gender stereotypes. Thus, through the use of magic (and in making *The Mists of Avalon* "Morgaine's story" instead of "Arthur's story"), Bradley is able to put women's issues, concerns, and developments at the forefront, ultimately challenging this male-centered traditional tale.

One of the most important examples of this can be seen in the treatment of the Grail Quest. The male-centered physical quest to be reunited with the Grail is not a focus of *The Mists of Avalon*. Instead, Bradley reinforces her female focus of the text (traditionally there is no place for women in the quest for the Holy Grail which is the subject of so many Arthurian texts) by diverting the magic associated with the Christian Grail to the Goddess. Thus, *The Mists of Avalon* denies the physical quest any substantial plot consideration and bypasses Christianity by attributing the Cup, the Sword, and the Dish to the Goddess. They are the Holy Regalia of Avalon, not the holy regalia of Jesus Christ. As Baring and Cashford note in a popular mass market study of the legend *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*, "The chalice, vessel, cup, dish, and stone that are the primary images of the Grail evoke the archetype of the Feminine, which becomes the inspiration, guide and goal of the knight's inner quest." In an attempt to restore the Grail legend to its pre-Christian origins, Bradley invokes the notion of the Goddess by altering the mystical Grail legend and its association with Christian tradition. In *The Mists of Avalon* the Grail originates in Avalon and is therefore associated with the matriarchal magical power of the Goddess (the Christians obtain the regalia only by thievery). Using her magical power from the Goddess, Morgaine reclaims the stolen regalia from the priests and returns it to Avalon where it remains. In addition to the Grail, *The Mists of Avalon* claims that the sword Excalibur originates in Avalon. More importantly, however, it is the magical scabbard woven by Morgaine herself and induced with all the power and magic of the Mother Goddess which keeps Arthur safe from fatal injury. This is an important challenge to the legend. Traditionally it is the powerful, masculine, and phallic sword Excalibur which is responsible for Arthur's safety. However, in Bradley's text, she diverts the attention from the sword and ascribes the feminine image of the scabbard with the powerful ability to heal all wounds.



# Themes

## Themes

Perhaps more than anything, the text of *The Mists of Avalon* juxtaposes Morgaine and Gwenivere, thereby setting up a powerful dichotomy between religion, sexual freedom, lifestyle, and choice. While Gwenivere is a queen, trapped without choice in a patriarchal kingdom, Morgaine is a freespirited priestess who works against the laws of her growing Christian world. However, Bradley does incorporate aspects of medieval history (for example], in the Middle Ages women were often forced to enter into marriage against their will). Thus, while Morgaine is able to live freely in Avalon, she is exposed to the laws of man outside in the patriarchal world of Camelot. She is manipulated by both the men and women around her for social and political gain. For example, Morgaine leaves Avalon and gives up her station as priestess when she discovers that Viviane sent her to her brother's bed. As well, she accepts her fate when she is manipulated by Gwenivere into marrying Uriens, who is old enough to be her father, instead of Accalon, the man she truly loves.

The *Mists of Avalon* begins dramatically with a note from Morgaine in the prologue of the text: In my time I have been called many things: sister, lover, priestess, wise-woman, queen.

Now in truth I have come to be a wisewoman, and a time may come when these things may need to be known. But in sober truth, I think it is the Christians who will tell the last tale. For ever the world of Fairy drifts further from the world in which the Christ holds sway. I have no quarrel with Christ, only with his priests, who call the Great Goddess a demon and deny that she ever held power in this world. At best they say that her power was of Satan. Or else they clothe her in the blue robe of the Lady of Nazareth—who indeed had power in her way too—and say that she was ever virgin. But what can a virgin know of the sorrows and travail of mankind?

Clearly the argument put forth in this text is not that the worshiping of Jesus Christ is oppressive. Rather, Morgaine questions the male priests who reshape and deliver the message of Christ and who consequently create onerous social structures.

For the most part, Morgaine's world revolves around Avalon. Morgaine, like all priestesses in *The Mists of Avalon*, is a sexually free woman. She has the freedom of choice made possible by her sincere devotion to the Mother Goddess. She participates in the rites of Beltaine where she chooses her lovers: in the outdoors, before Mother Nature, she lets herself go freely to Lancelot, and she chooses to lie with Kevin, Merlin's successor. This freedom has a price to it, however. The Christians within the text consider Morgaine to be a seductresswitch working under the guise of Satan.

Her rebellious nature and devotion to the Goddess alienate Morgaine from society.



In *The Mists of Avalon*, Morgaine's paganism is a means of freedom and choice, whereas Gwenivere's devotion to Christianity and consequently her perceptions about sexuality are compared with imprisonment. Gwenivere is jealous of both Morgaine's freedom of speech and her sexual indiscretion. Trapped between her deep feelings of unity with Morgaine, and her proper Christian/social upbringing, Gwenivere can not help but be resentful of Morgaine.

It is only when she finally realizes that her love for Lancelot is the first thing in life she has chosen that Gwenivere can allow herself to go freely to him. For a time, Gwenivere abandons her religious piety and questions whether God exists. After she is savagely raped by Malagant, she feels ashamed and used. Since God could not save her from such a fate, she finds comfort in Lancelot's arms. Even then, however, she is haunted by heavy Christian feelings of guilt and eternal damnation.

The juxtaposition of Christianity with paganism is one found in several versions of the Arthur story. Although it is not always the prevailing motif, religious struggle is nevertheless always present. The religious struggle presented in *The Mists of Avalon* depicts a metaphorical tug-of-war.

Throughout the text, it is the relationship between Morgaine and Gwenivere which experiences such an exchange—while the two women grow to have an unexpected and perhaps strange love for each other, both are jealous, fearful, and resentful of the other. From the very beginning of the text, Christianity and paganism are diametrically opposed. Bradley makes it quite clear that Gwenivere is oppressed by the Christian Church; she becomes jealous of the freedom Morgaine experiences as a result of her goddess worship. Gwenivere believes that it was a woman's proper business to be married and bear children. . . . Women had to be especially careful to do the will of God because it was through a woman that mankind had fallen into Original Sin, and every woman must be aware that it was her work to atone for that Original Sin in Eden. No woman could ever be really good except for Mary the Mother of Christ; all other women were evil, they had never had any chance to be anything but evil.

This was [their] punishment for being like Eve, sinful, filled with rage and rebellion.

The ridiculous nature of Gwenivere's thoughts depicts the narrator's outrage against the institution of Christianity; just as a great variety of feminist voices have spoken out on religion in the past two centuries, Bradley uses her fiction to bring the women of Camelot out of their silence.

To this end then, *The Mists of Avalon* exposes the patriarchy of Christianity in favor of the Goddess. We are told by Morgaine that the Christians believe that "there is no Goddess; for the principle of woman is the principle of all Evil" and that women should not presume to read the divine scriptures for they will not know how to understand them properly and should thus "listen to their priests for the true interpretations." In contrast, Viviane, Lady of the Lake, looks upon men with scorn as "the natural prey of the Goddess in the form of her priestesses to be taken or denied as seemed right at the moment."





The Christian tradition embedded in this legend has, in literary history, ensured that powerful women were portrayed as evil.

Thus, stories by early authors often portray Morgan le Fay and Gwenivere as evil whenever they assert political or social power.

Additionally, the concept of original sin enhanced this subversion of women with a holy and legitimate basis which people were too frightened to challenge in the early stages of Christianity. In *The Mists of Avalon*, however, the main theme is to challenge this primary stage of the religion. The text presents powerful women who confront and oppose the "mindless" Christian priests.

Not surprisingly, Gwen is tempted by the notion of goddess worship throughout *The Mists of Avalon*. She is presented as a woman who struggles to find a place for herself in the male-dominated world of Camelot. From the beginning of her relationship with Arthur, Gwenivere recognizes her secondary status in the world and reflects that she is only Arthur's "prize of war" and a "broodmare for the High King's stud service." When she begins to fear that she is barren, she goes to Morgaine for a "charm" to help her conceive: "I think perhaps God cares nothing for women—all his priests are men, and again and again the Scriptures tell us that women are the temptress and evil—it may be that is why he does not hear me. And for this I would go to the Goddess—God does not care." In addition when she fears for her life at the hands of Malagant, it is Morgaine and the Goddess to whom Gwenivere appeals: "God did not reward me for virtue. What makes me think he could punish me? ... Perhaps there was no God at all.... Perhaps it was all a great lie of the priests so that they may tell mankind what to do, what not to do, what to believe, give orders." However, Gwenivere's temptation to practice goddess worship is fleeting and short-lived; as tempted as she is at times, Gwenivere is not strong enough to oppose those around her. Bradley portrays a comparable struggle for freedom in the character of Morgan le Fay. Moreover, in juxtaposing Gwenivere and her Christian belief system with Morgaine's character, Bradley emphasizes the social ramifications which women like Morgaine faced.

The feminist visions found in Bradley's text are meant to illustrate how patriarchy oppresses and silences women. Although the plot of her fiction revolves around the legend of King Arthur, her message is one that reaches any contemporary female audience. The patriarchy that is embedded within religious organizations has been magnified over the years and has continued to be negative for women. In her attempt to remove such patriarchy from the legend, Bradley turns to the concept of the Goddess. The story of Arthur (his birth, his reign, his relationship with Morgaine and with Camelot) becomes one which revolves around the power of Avalon and its attempt to save the worship of the Goddess in Britain.

## Double Standards

Throughout the story, there are two lands that are increasingly at odds with each other: Britain and Avalon. Britain is ushering in the newer, Christian ways of the land, while





Avalon still pays homage to the Goddess and the old ways of the land. As Christianity spreads through the country, more and more people believe that those from Avalon, or schooled in the ways of Avalon are witches, sorcerers, or pagans. While those that practice the old religion are true to their ways, those that call themselves Christians have double standards. While the Christians are quick to put down the pagans and be pious, they are also the first ones to seek a love potion or a charm of some sort.

Gwenhwyfar is the most noted character who has double standards. She is overly pious to the point where she convinces Arthur to abandon his heathenish ways and completely embrace Christianity in order to be absolved of sins. In addition, she is fiercely determined to obtain a charm from Morgaine that will enable her to conceive a child to ensure the succession of the throne. Another person who stands out as having double standards is Elaine, Gwenhwyfar's cousin. Elaine sees herself as a good Christian woman and is quick to put down those who practice the old religion. However, she convinces Morgaine to create a love potion for her that will trick Lancelot into marrying her. It is interesting to note how it is largely the Christians that have such double standards.

## Predictions of the Future

The power behind the story works through the women, and some select men, of Avalon, as they use the Sight to know what the future holds in store for them. This is something that many cling to as a useful tool. It is sometimes an innocuous vision of a visitor approaching, so that people may be prepared for them and offer a warm welcome. Examples of this are when Viviane and the Merlin came to visit Igraine in the beginning of the story, or when Viviane, Kevin, and Niniane go to visit Gwydion in Lothian years later. Sometimes predictions signal that dangerous times lay ahead, so caution must be exercised, such as when the fairy queen warns Morgaine while she is pregnant with Gwydion. It is also sometimes just mystifying, as though the messages do not yet make sense.

It is interesting to note that each time someone has a vision or a telling dream, it brings specific events to light. However, as the end of the story demonstrates, all the actions taken as a result of these visions could have gone been left undone because things turn out as the Goddess has willed it anyway. It appears as though individuals such as Viviane and Morgaine believe that it is up to them to make the predictions come true when they have an experience with the Sight. This hardly seems to be the case. Again, as the book's ending suggests, they could have saved much of their energy by doing nothing and allowing nature to take its course. It seems as though the will of the Goddess happens no matter what machinations humans use to change outcomes. For example, Viviane believes the prophecy that Arthur will restore Avalon and right the wrongs done to Avalon, so she does everything in her power to ensure that Arthur will rule. However, the prophecy does not come true, and Arthur does nothing to help Avalon. Although, regardless of what he does or does not do, it is meant to be that Avalon goes further back into the mists, and the two worlds separate for good.



## Male Dominance

Many times throughout the story it is demonstrated that men are more important than women in the age of Camelot. In various conversations between Gorlois and Igraine, Arthur and Uriens, Lancelot and Viviane, the men say that there are things woman just can not understand because their minds are not like men's minds. There are several disadvantages to being a woman in Arthurian times. For instance, most marriages are arranged, and, therefore, the women have no say as to who they marry. They are treated as chattel to be bought off or sold for a dowry to the highest bidder. They are told what to do and are compelled to be obedient. It is their duty to go along with what they are told. In cases where the women do speak out, they are either broken into submission or other men remind their husbands to keep their wives in check.

Over and over it is mentioned how important it is for men to have sons. Even if women give birth to a daughter, they are not as recognized as having produced an heir unless there is a son. The feeling that comes across is that having a boy is good, but having a girl is useless. Even in the case of the High King, there must be a male heir or another male will inherit the throne. Yet another matter is the way women are looked down upon because Eve is looked down upon as the first sinner. In Arthur's day, women are seen as sinners. This is because Eve is guilty of the first sin, and women are therefore forever tainted by that original sin.



# Style

## Point of View

*The Mists of Avalon* is a story told from the perspective of the women, although it is told from a third person omniscient point-of-view. Different chapters are told by different female characters: Igraine, Viviane, Morgaine, Morgause and Gwenhwyfar. Each one of these characters has a distinct voice, so that none of them sound like another. With the different perspectives, a well-fleshed picture takes shape early on. Although the times indicate that women are not respected for their opinions, these women, whether or not their opinions are respected, shape the story and influence the actions that ensue. It is also easy to see how their backgrounds affect their perspectives. Viviane and Morgaine are powerful with the Sight and do the work of the Goddess; therefore, their perspectives are peppered with visions and priestess work that is related to Mother Earth. Morgause is full of ambition and is therefore very direct. Gwenhwyfar is the embodiment of Christian piety; therefore, her view is guilt-ridden and full of images of a vengeful God. Although they do not know it, the men truly are at the mercy of the women in their lives.

It is critical to see how important these women are in shaping the history of Camelot and King Arthur. If this story had been shared by the men, it would have a very different feel to it. The men during Arthur's time were hardened by battle and naturally domineering. The story as told by the women gives the tale a nurturing and heartfelt quality that would otherwise have been lost on the reader.

## Setting

The setting for this story is important. It is during the Dark Ages in Britain at a time when Arthur and his men won a decisive battle that gained peace for Britain for many years. Half this story takes place in a castle setting--in the beginning it is Caerleon, and for the last half, Camelot. The other half of this story takes place in Avalon. These are two worlds that come together only to come apart at the end: the civilized world of kings and soldiers and maidens, and the pagan world of those dedicated to the Goddess and earth worship.

## Language and Meaning

The story takes place in Arthurian England. The flare for the times truly comes out in each character's portrayal. The language is mostly proper and archaic. This also can be discerned from the way the characters phrase some of their sentences. There is a definite distinction between the way different characters speak and their status. For instance, King Arthur speaks differently from the Saxons, who make a visit during a Pentecost feast. Also, Gwenhwyfar's language is particularly distinct as High Queen from Morgaine's, who becomes the Lady of Avalon. At the time of this story, Britain is



undergoing a transformation from its older, "pagan" ways to a more civilized, Christian realm. The characters' language clearly depicts this evolution; there is a discernable distinction between the old tongue of Avalon and the new Christian land.

## Structure

The book is separated into four sections, or books: Mistress of Magic, The High Queen, The King Stag, and The Prisoner in the Oak. Each book marks specific points in Camelot's history from before the creation of Camelot to its demise at the end. Each section also simplifies the story by breaking it down into these four parts. The first part leads up to Arthur's ascension to the throne as High King. The second section begins with Gwydion's birth and ends in the culmination of years of frustration and sexual tension between Arthur, Gwenhwyfar, and Lancelot. The third book starts with Gwydion's tutelage at Avalon and ends with his knowledge of how it is up to him to challenge Arthur for the throne and take it from him. The fourth book brings Accolon to the forefront to battle Arthur for Excalibur and ends with Morgaine, all alone, in Avalon. The story takes decades to come full circle; i.e., it ends where it began before the interference of those schooled in the ways of Avalon, with Avalon receding into the mists.



## Quotes

"She had heard her sister say it often enough when Viviane still believed Igraine would become priestess of the Mysteries: If you seek to avoid your fate or to delay suffering, it only condemns you to suffer it redoubled in another life." (Mistress of Magic, Chapter 2, p. 6)

"It is written in the stars, child, that only a king who comes of two royalties, one royalty of the Tribes who follow the Goddess, and one royalty of those who look to Rome, will heal our land of all this strife." (Mistress of Magic, Chapter 2, p. 6)

"And then, in one great act of Druid magic, to protect the last precious refuge of their school, they had made the last great change in the world; that change which removed the Island of Avalon from the world of mankind. Now it lay hidden in the mist which concealed it, except from those initiates who had been schooled there or those who were shown the secret ways through the Lake." (Mistress of Magic, Chapter 9, p. 14)

"Ah - seven times the Wheel, the Wheel with thirteen spokes, has turned about in the sky...seven times the Mother has given birth to her dark son..." (Mistress of Magic, Chapter 14, p. 67)

"I died as a warrior would die; the treaty troops broke their faith again, and my armies could not stand against them until I had myself carried, to show myself on the field. Then they rallied, but Aesc, the Saxons' chief - I will not grant that wild savage the name of king - broke through, and slew three of my guard; and I killed him before his bodyguard could kill me. But we won that battle. The next battle will be for my son. If he comes to the throne." (Mistress of Magic, Chapter 17, p. 93)

"...there were times when it seemed that needle and thread moved through her own flesh or through the flesh of the land, piercing earth and sky and her own blood and body... sign upon sign and symbol upon symbol, each marked with her blood and with the water of the Holy Well." (Mistress of Magic, Chapter 18, p. 98)

"Choose whether or no you will take this sword, or refuse it and rule in your own name, despising the help of the Old Gods." (Mistress of Magic, Chapter 18, p. 04)

"For all the peoples of Britain, he had said, my sword for your protection, and my hand for justice." (Mistress of Magic, Chapter 19, p. 14)

"Our lord may fight like Pendragon himself on the field of battle, but this morning when he is being readied for his bride, he seems no more than the boy he is!" (The High Queen, Chapter 5, p. 77)

"Kevin's voice was respectful but also amused. "There is an old saying in the wisdom of the Druids... beauty is not all in a fair face, but lies within. Morgaine is indeed very



beautiful, Queen Morgause, though her beauty resembles yours no more than a willow tree resembles a daffodil." (The King Stag, Chapter 1, p. 66)

"The memory of that moment of ecstasy and revelation, when she had borne the Grail in the form of the Goddess, would remain with her until her death; and of those who had experienced the vision, whatever they might have seen, none of their lives would ever be the same." (The Prisoner of the Oak, Chapter 11, p. 00)

# Adaptations

The Mists of Avalon is set to be released in 2001 as a miniseries directed by Ulrich Edel.



## Key Questions

Religion, sexuality, and magic are important components of the Arthurian legends. Closely connected, all three of these motifs reflect cultural attitudes and social value systems experienced by the society of specific periods. Christianity has traditionally played a central role in the legend of King Arthur; however, for contemporary literature, as well as contemporary culture, the notion of a goddess figure has once again become important. The concept of woman as deity is becoming more acceptable as popular interest in Goddess Worship, Wicca, and Neopaganism continues to grow. Whether the literature of the period dictates cultural attitude and change, or whether cultural attitude and change affect literature is less important than the fact that these changes have occurred. Aided by feminist thought, progressive cultural perceptions now exist concerning sexuality, gender, and religion. The treatment of female characters has changed a great deal over the years, leading authors such as Marion Zimmer Bradley to reconceptualize prominent women such as Morgaine le Fay and further reaffirm notions of the powerful female.

1. Marion Zimmer Bradley's account of the story of Arthur differs greatly from traditional tales. While there are several contemporary versions of the legend of King Arthur, *The Mists of Avalon* seems to be unique in its feminist focus.

Why do you think Bradley chooses to set up Christianity and paganism in opposition as a major theme of her story? Moreover, why does she choose to set Morgaine and Gwenivere against each other? Is her feminist vision the only factor that should be considered in this case? Or does she display elements of antifeminism in pitting these two women against each other?

2. The legend of King Arthur is a prominent myth that has been the starting point for literary fiction for centuries.

Why do you think this is so? What is it about this particular story which is so appealing for audiences?

3. *The Mists of Avalon* has been criticized for its radical deviations from traditional works. In particular, Bradley's treatment of Lancelot and Arthur's homoeroticism, as well as the incestuous encounter between Arthur and Morgaine has been called "vulgar." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

4. Are Morgaine's actions when championing for the cause of the Goddess any less tyrannical than those performed by the Christians? Why or why not?

5. How do you think sexuality and morality are depicted in this text? Why do think that sexuality is such a prominent theme?





## Topics for Discussion

The role of religion plays a large part in the lives of the book's characters. If those who held onto the old religion still worshiped one deity, albeit a female one, what elements of their religion caused the Christians to call them pagans? Could these two groups have continued to coexist? Why or why not?

Loyalty and honor are two common themes throughout the book. What are examples of when loyalty and honor is upheld or destroyed over the course of this story?

Throughout the book, it is mentioned on several occasions that women in Christianity are the root of all evil in the world. Do you believe this is the case? Do you think that times have changed this notion? Explain.

Avalon hands Excalibur and the Holy Regalia to Arthur. Why, if these items are used in the holy Christian mass, would these items be considered profaned in the eyes of Morgaine and those at Avalon?

There are years of prophecies in place by the time Gwydion is born and throughout his life. How do the events that have taken place before his birth affect Gwydion? Describe the positives as well as the negatives.

Arthur is a flawed man. What is that flaw and what could he have done to change it? How did outside influences shape him into what he becomes?

The mists of Avalon exist throughout the book, in order to shroud Avalon from the rest of the world. How else is the symbol of mists used in the story? What do they represent?

# Literary Precedents

The literary history of Arthur is a complicated one. While the sources are obscure, the English tradition begins in 1136 with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Arthur becomes ruler of the Western world in Monmouth's text, a hero among the men and women of Britain at a time when they needed one. Although his work was met with some skepticism at the time of its publication, in general it was believed to be true and scholars once used it as their basis for an account of the early history of Britain.

In 1155, Wace, a Norman clerk who followed Monmouth's work closely, produced *Roman de Brut*. In this book, Wace adds a detail familiar to modern readers of Arthurian Legend—the Round Table. His work was translated into English by a Worcestershire priest, Laymon. Laymon was pro-British and anti-Saxon. As a result of his Christian faith, he identified strongly with the British who represented Christianity in their fight to suppress the heathen Saxons.

Arthur reached his greatest fame when early twelfth- and thirteenth-century French writers began to show an interest in his story. Around 1179, Creteien de Troyes wrote *Lancelot, or The Knight of the Cart* and *Yvain, or The Knight with the Lion*. It is in *The Knight of the Cart* that Creteien introduces, for the first time, the idea of courtly love. In this tale, Lancelot is rebuked by Gwenivere when he hesitates to ride in an executioner's cart in order to rescue her from the evil Malagant.

According to the rules of courtly love, the lover must be completely submissive to the lady and unconditionally obedient. Although Lancelot rides in the cart to complete the rescue, he is nonetheless rebuked for shaming himself by arriving in a cart. Full of adventures, marvels, and magic, the story centers on the important motif of Lancelot as lover and rescuer which has marked and followed his character to the present day. As well, Creteien's work set a tradition for Gwenivere's character as central female figure in Arthurian legend. However, his stories are male-centered, as are Malory's and other early works; they revolve around the activities of men.

Between 1370 and 1390, an unknown English poet produced *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The story hinges on two motifs: the beheading game and temptation, both Celtic in origin. Dean notes that, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is not the usual romance poem in which a knight follows a quest in alien lands but rather is a testpoem designed to teach us something about chivalry and human nature through the trials that the hero experiences." In addition to the fact that this poem is brilliant in poetic form and content, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* contributed two important things to the legend as it is known today: first, Gawain, who was introduced as a character in Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, became an important figure in Arthurian legend known for his honor and strength; second, the "Gawain poet" reinforced the notion of temptation which permeates the tradition of Arthuriana. Temptation from sin of all sorts (mainly Christian) has become a motif strongly linked with almost every version of the Arthur story.



Most complete contemporary versions of Arthuriana have their roots in the collection of stories or "novel" written by Thomas Malory in 1460. While different versions foreground distinct issues and place emphasis on varying aspects of the legend, they also rely heavily on Malory and the earlier works by Cretien de Troyes, Wace, Laymon, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and others for "historical" background and events within the story.

Malory's version of the legend focuses heavily on male activity with a marked Christian subplot. His story is primarily concerned with Arthur and the knights of the Round Table. Thus, the plots in each "tale" throughout the "novel" center around the men. Among this male activity, camaraderie, loyalty among knights, kinship, honor, battle, and a strong Christian motif can be found in Malory's work. He also changes Lancelot's character. Previously he was known primarily for his role as Gwenivere's lover; in Malory, Lancelot is a military master and first knight of the Round Table. Malory's priority is clearly to tell a story about what he deems the most important aspect of Arthur and his court—the men. Thus, the most detailed accounts found throughout the text focus on battles, preand postwar activity, and quests.

For a time after Malory, interest in Arthur's story fades. In fact, with the exception of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, there is no major Renaissance work produced on Arthurian material.

Although the story of Arthur lost appeal for almost four hundred years, it was revived in the Victorian period when Alfred Lord Tennyson produced *Idylls of the King*.

In *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*, Michael Mason argues that "Victorian middle-class wives ... suffered an actual deprivation of sexual pleasure because of the moralistic ignorance about women's sexual responses."

While Mason questions the moralism of the period, he maintains that behavior is closely tied with belief systems and, further, that although the "professed moralism of the period was actually only uttered by a minority of people," it was these people who "commanded the organs of opinion." Consequently, there is a strong Christian thread that follows all twelve of Tennyson's poems and a clear lack of sympathy for the female characters within *Idylls of the King*.

Arthur is the absolute Utopian hero who does constant battle with sin, including temptations of the flesh. Unlike earlier authors, Tennyson had no sympathy for Lancelot and Gwenivere, and so he casts them as weak characters. Sin and temptation are major motifs of *Idylls of the King*; Arthur misjudges both Lancelot and Gwenivere, whose adultery eventually brings down Camelot. Tennyson uses the legend as a vehicle to reflect the values and concerns of the period. Thus, like other versions of the Arthur story, Tennyson's women of Camelot are morally responsible for the fall of the kingdom.

## Related Titles

Although *The Mists of Avalon* was written first, Bradley wrote two prequels to the text after its publication in 1985. The first, *The Forest House*, concerns itself primarily with a pagan Britain and its first introduction to Roman authority. Similarly, *Lady of Avalon* follows the story of *The Forest House* and depicts the island of Avalon and the various Ladies who ruled there. In addition, *Priestess of Avalon*, published posthumously after the author's death in 1999, is the concluding volume in the Avalon series.

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