

# **Sword at Sunset Study Guide**

## **Sword at Sunset by Rosemary Sutcliff**

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# Plot Summary

*Sword at Sunset*, by Rosemary Sutcliff, has been created by the author by doing extensive research into the Arthurian legends. Her research took her to some strikingly similar accounts of a warrior king named Artos, the Bear. It is from this research that the author has crafted this pre-Arthur tale. Readers will note that much of the basic Arthur tale is very much intact, lending credibility to the fact that this may have been the real person that the legend was based on.

The tale begins with a very old warrior lying on his bed. He is gravely wounded and ill. As he drifts in and out of consciousness, he begins to flash back to his life and exploits. The reader learns that this warrior has kept his promise to his adopted father, to keep Britain united. As the first section ends, the reader learns that this wounded warrior, is, in fact, Artos, High King of Britain.

The next section begins at the beginning of Artos's adult life. He is a young man, in his early twenties, and living in King Ambrosius's court. His father, Utha, was the brother of the King, and had gotten a country wench pregnant 20 years previously. Unlike many nobles of the time, Utha had taken Artos in when the boy's mother died. Though he does not acknowledge him as anything other than his bastard, it has become clear to everyone at court, that noble blood runs in Artos's veins. Utha, the reader learns, has died in a hunting accident many years prior, when Artos was in his pre-teen years. Ambrosius saw to his upbringing since then, and the two have become closer than Artos had ever been to his real father. The reader is told that his name, Artos, is the Roman version of the name, Arthur.

Since Artos has come of age, Ambrosius has trained him to the sword and the horse, and Artos has excelled at it. He has a way about him that draws men to his side. He straddles two worlds, the reader learns. His mother was Pictish, one of the 'dark people', while his father was a Briton. While he was raised in Christianity, he also respects and honors the religion of his mother's people as well. People respect him for this, but the Catholic church considers him to be bordering on heretical.

Ambrosius's greatest concern is that the Sea Wolves, joined by the Scots, have been harrying some of the outer lying villages. It is Ambrosius's vision to not only bring all of the smaller fiefdoms into one large kingdom, but to raise it up into a greater whole. But the Sea Wolves threaten to undo this. He sends Artos to purchase war horses so that he can bolster his armies to go and confront the Sea Wolves when they next make landfall. Artos willingly agrees.

He and his men, foremost among them a large burly warrior named Cei, travel by boat to an area known for its horses. Once there, Artos begins looking for the horses that will make the foundation of Ambrosius's horse farm. He spies a large, fiery, black stallion, but seeing how wild it is, passes it by. There is a small man standing nearby that suggests that the black stallion would behave for the right person. Challenged, Artos asks him to prove it. The man, who gives his name as Bedwyr, grins and approaches



the horse. True to his word, the black stallion calms and performs magnificently as the small man puts him through his paces. Artos is impressed but is still not convinced. Bedwyr states that he will personally come back with the horse, and if he and the horse arrive safely in Venta, then Artos must be bound to keep both him and the stallion. Artos laughs at the boldness of the offer, and accepts. Both the black stallion and Bedwyr make it back in one piece. Bedwyr is also a minstrel and his music is most welcome.

Ambrosius gives the war horse development program over to Artos entirely, something which he takes to readily. Word arrives that the Sea Wolves have made landfall once again, and this time Ambrosius sends Artos out with a band of his chosen companions to keep them at bay. Artos is so successful that news of his victory reaches Ambrosius before Artos does. Ambrosius calls him into his chambers and presents him with one of the royal gems with the seal of Britain on it. Artos, at first, refuses stating that he is just a bastard, even if half of him is noble. Ambrosius tells him that this particular seal is not the official one and that his father would have wanted him to have it. He also gives him the royal armband, declaring him the Prince of Britain. Artos is overwhelmed by the gift and immediately has it set into the pommel of his sword.

Ambrosius begins sending Artos on numerous campaigns and each time Artos's legend grows. Companions come out of the hills and hollows to meet with him and to join him. He and his men often stop at friendly villages on their way to and from the coast. When the weather turns bad, they take sanctuary in the hills of Badon. He takes refuge in the home of a woman that looks vaguely familiar to him, though she assures him that they have never met. She drugs him, seduces him, and in the morning, in horror, finds that this woman, named Ygerna, is his half sister. She is bitter that Utha should have favored him with a place at the court, but not her. She says that if a child comes of the union she will raise him, call him Medraut, and when he is a man will send him to Artos. Shaken, Artos flees, finds his men, and they make for the coast to continue their campaign.

Artos forgets the incident, though he now views all women as suspect. In fact, he cannot lie with another woman because of it. He makes it a rule for his inner circle of companions that they refrain from marrying, though they may seek comfort where they will. Families and wives will only complicate things, he suggests to them, and they will not have their full focus on the tasks at hand. They go to a neighboring fiefdom where Prince Cador has had a son, named Constantine. While Artos is viewing the child, the royal seal falls from his sword into the child's cradle. Artos acts as if it is nothing, but he is very superstitious and feels that it is an omen of some kind.

There are many campaigns, most of the brutal and bloody. After one skirmish, he and his companions find a destroyed village where a small pictish woman has been brutally savaged by the Saxons. They are all very appalled, and to honor the poor woman's spirit, Artos buries her according to her people's customs. Her people come for her body later in the evening, but finding that Artos has honored her, they again, pledge their loyalty to him. They give him the name Artos, the Bear. Another incident, after another brutal battle, leaves Artos and his men into a fortress that has been taken. There, in the inner sanctum, is the young prince, Cerdic, who is keeping guard over the body of his mother, who has died. The boy tries to fight them off, but Artos pins his arms back until



he yields. Bedwyr urges Artos to kill the boy as he will only come back to haunt him later. Artos can't kill a child, and he sets the child free.

As they make their way back to Venta and the court of Ambrosius, they stop to celebrate a May Day festival. There Artos sees a woman that completely captures his attention. Her name is Guenahara (Guen). Her father, seeing that they are attracted to one another encourages the match, and cleverly maneuvers Artos into a situation where he may cause a political incident if he does not marry her. He and Guen discuss the situation and they decide to marry. This temporarily upsets Artos's men, but in the end, since she brought a large dowry, many horses, and many fighting men, they are satisfied that Artos has only done this to make their group stronger.

Guen will not be parted from Artos, though he tells her the war trail is no place for her. She is adamant, so he allows her to stay. Durim Dhu, the ambassador from the dark people, comes out of the hills in the fall to warn Artos that the coming winter would be extremely harsh and that he should move most of his horses further south. Artos agrees to do so, sending some of his men with them. Durim Dhu is correct and the winter nearly kills Artos, Guen, and the rest of the troops that had overwintered in a fortress half way to Venta. Eventually, several men volunteer to try and get through to Venta to have more supplies sent. One of them does make it through and supplies arrive just in the nick of time. It is during this time that Guen learns that she is pregnant.

The spring arrives and as soon as the snows disappear, they make leave to travel the rest of the way to Venta. By this time Guen is very pregnant, but is adamant that she will give birth to her child either in Venta, or under her father's roof. They stop for the night at Durim Dhu's village and Guen is horrified. She thinks that the people are fairies and will steal her child. This is only reinforced when she goes into early labor that night. The midwife delivers the child, a girl, whom they name Hylin. The midwife warns Artos that the child has been born under the wrong star and should be set out on the hills for the wolf people. Artos will not hear of it.

They make it back to Venta and Ambrosius calls for him. He tells Artos that he could not be more proud of him if he were his own son. Ambrosius does not have an heir, and he would like to make Artos his formal heir, but he explains that he can't do that because based on blood there are others in the kingdom that have a greater claim. The only way Artos will be king, which is what Ambrosius wants, is if the people are so supportive it would be madness to proclaim another in his place. He tells Artos how to accomplish this. Artos doesn't have long to consider all of this before the Sea Wolves land again. Once more, he must leave Venta. This time Guen stays behind with the child. Bedwyr, who has been injured, stays behind in her care as well, upon Artos's suggestion.

In this campaign, he meets the grown child, Cerdic, whose life he has spared so many years ago. Cerdic intends to kill Artos if he can. He fails, but Artos manages to kill his Uncle and leaders that had rallied to his cause. Cerdic flees, once again. Cei tells Artos that he should have pursued Cerdic, instead of still leaving him alive, but Artos has received word that Hylin is gravely ill. There is one more battle that must be fought, and he feels that if he leaves, his men will fall to the sword of the enemy. He waits until after



the battle is won the next day to leave for Venta. When he arrives his daughter has died. Guen blames him for leaving them alone. She angrily tells Artos that in the end, all she did was cry for Bedwyr's harp playing.

It is as Artos is leaving the death chambers and crossing the courtyard that a young man approaches him from the shadows. He knows that this is the child that Ygerna told him would come. He gives his name as Medraut and Artos acknowledges him, though he does not have any feelings for the boy at all. Medraut states that he only asks to be made a part of Artos's companions. Artos agrees.

Meanwhile, King Ambrosius's health is failing. He has the wasting disease and knows that he won't be alive much longer. He calls Artos to his chambers and tells him that he wants one last hunt with his closest friends. He invites Artos, Aquilla, and several others to go with him to Spain to hunt stag. While there, Ambrosius jumps from his horse, wades in to deliver the killing blow to the stag, and is gored to death. Artos and the men knew that this was Ambrosius's plan all along, to choose the date and time of his own death, rather than dying a slow and agonizing death indoors.

Meanwhile, the Sea Wolves are back. Artos sets out with a large contingency to fight them once more. Bedwyr, however, has recovered, but left the castle to tend to his own lands. Artos misses his best friend, but does not begrudge him some time. Guen seems as distant as ever, and it has become clear to him that Medraut is a destroyer, whose enjoyment of killing has not gone unnoticed by Artos's inner circle. They warn Artos that he should put Medraut aside. Artos can't do that. Artos knows, thanks to Ambrosius's shrewd statescraft, that if he can win this largest battle with the Sea Wolves that the people will demand that he be king.

It is hard fought, but he does win. He is so excited by the victory that he urges the men to ride with him through the night so that they might be back at Venta before morning. They all begin calling him Caesar, and they go with him back to Venta. Unfortunately, when Artos arrives back early from the campaign, he finds Guen and Bedwyr together. He exiles them both, and is heartbroken.

Meanwhile, the council convenes and wonders if Artos should not be the next High King. With his decisive victory, he is crowned within the week. Artos tries to turn his mind and his heart to leading the fledgling country, but he is heartsore. His betrayal is twofold where Guen and Bedwyr are concerned, and he doesn't seem to be able to focus. He receives word that Cedric has returned with reinforcements and that at this time the Scots have regrouped to join them. He also learns that Medraut has betrayed him and joined forces with Cedric against him. Though he is ill, he mounts his horse, gathers his men, and sets out to meet the Sea Wolves.

While he is camped, on the eve of the battle, his tent flap is pulled back and a man enters. It is Bedwyr. Artos forgives everything and is glad to see him. Artos learns that Bedwyr and Guen did not live happily ever after, and for his part in hurting Artos, he is sorry. They discuss Medraut, and Artos says that his one and only goal for the battle



the next day, aside from victory, is to meet Medraut and put an end to the curse once and for all. Bedwyr agrees.

The next day Artos and Medraut do face one another. Artos knocks Medraut from his horse, into the water. While Artos is trying to figure out where Medraut has gone, Medraut surges up from the water and runs his sword through Artos's hip, leg, and into his chest. Artos reacts by slitting Medraut's throat. As the boy slips into the water, Artos wonders that Medraut had not known that the only way the curse would be lifted would be if they both died at one another's hands. Everything goes black.

Artos wakes in strange chambers. The first face he sees is Bedwyr's. Artos is surprised that he is not dead yet. Bedwyr tells him that they have brought him to the island of apples, a type of monastery. Artos tells him not to tell anyone of his death, and to send for Constantine, Cador's son, who is now a man. Constantine arrives and Artos names him his heir to the throne. He tells them to shroud his disappearance in mystery, so that Britain might remain united, and that his men might continue to fight as if he were still commanding them from a distance. Everyone agrees. Artos dies.



# Chapters 1-5

## Summary

### Chapter 1

The reader meets an unnamed 40-year-old warrior who has been wounded in battle. He is lying in a bed, attended by monk physicians. His great sword lies next to him and it gives him great comfort to have it near. He is recovering from a wound to his groin and side and drifts in and out of consciousness.

His first dream is a memory. The warrior recalls when he was a young man and had approached Ambrosius the King as he sat next to a brazier. The King had only been crowned for three days, but already, the man recalls, he looked regal. The King greeted him, calling him Artos. The boy, Artos, had approached and asked for his freedom. The King agrees to give him his freedom, make him the Duke of Britain, and to grant him 100 hundred mounted men to use as he wished. King Ambrosius called him 'bear cub' then, the son that he'd never had.

Then, Ambrosius had given him a sword, the very sword lying now at his side. It had been Ambrosius's sword, but the pommel had been altered. It bore the seal of Maximus, their distant ancestor. He recalls that his mother had died, and he had been placed with Ambrosius's brother, Utha. But later, after Utha died at the tusks of a boar, had gone to live with Ambrosius.

The sword with the seal had caused Artos to become concerned. He was, after all, a bastard, and only a true born prince should have the seal. He had said as much to Ambrosius, who brushed that aside. He had told Artos that there were two seals. He had given Artos the private seal, and not the official one. Artos feels somewhat better about owning it at this point. Then, Artos rolls over, and the sleep of the wounded takes him once more.

### Chapter 2

It is two months later and Artos is examining horses that he's requisitioned from Ambrosius. Because he opts to fight with the heavier armor, the horses he will need have to be bigger. He's engaged some of his most trusted horsemen to breed and raise the best. He's overseeing the project and likes what he sees. One of the men that he's engaged to work with the horses, is named Hunno.

This is the land that he was born to, and yet, now that he has returned, he finds that he feels as if he has become a stranger to it. The next day he takes to the hills of his youth with Cabal, his dog. They wander until they are tired, then lie down for a nap. The fog rolls in while they are asleep and Artos is afraid that they will be trapped on the mountain. He looks for a stream and aims to follow it down the hill. He makes it half way down and stumbles upon a farmstead. He asks to spend the night. There is an older





man, a boy, and a young woman of about 27 years of age. She looks familiar to him, but he can't recall how he might know her.

### Chapter 3

After dinner, the servants leave, and Artos and the woman remain. He rises to leave, to find a place to sleep in the barns, but the woman tells him to stay a while longer, that she has better beer to drink. He does and when he drinks it he notices that it tastes sweeter than the earlier brew. He begins to realize that he's been drugged to some extent, and that the woman means to seduce him. The woman tells him her name is Ygerna. They have sex through the night.

In the morning, she asks him what she should name the child, if one should come of the union. He is appalled and tells her that he was drugged and didn't think about a child. She hands him a band of gold with red woven through it. Artos's blood runs cold. The match to it was on Ambrosius's arm. He realizes that this girl is related to him in some way.

When he confronts her, she does not deny that Utha was her father and that Utha basically raped her mother. This was years before Utha laid with the woman that would become Artos's mother. Ygerna is upset because even though Artos's mother was not married, and Artos was officially a bastard, Utha still brought the boy into his household to raise. He had never offered this to Ygerna, even though she was also his child. She says that she will name the child Merdaut and that when he is older, she will send him to Artos.

Artos and Cabal quickly leave the steading and head back down the hill toward the horses and his men. Both he and the dog stop before long, both of them sick from the drugs. When they were feeling better they made it back to camp. However, the feeling of dread, of what he had done the night before haunts him. He has a feeling that it will come back in an evil way at a later time. He wishes that he had given in to his desire to kill the woman.

### Chapter 4

Artos leaves with his men the next day and arrive in Venta. It is there that he learns that Ambrosius has also arrived and is staying with the cloistered brothers at a monastery. He goes to visit him, but dreads it because of his encounter with Ygerna. However, when they are back together again, it is warm and familiar. Still, Ambrosius can tell that something is wrong with Artos. He asks, but Artos does not feel that he can tell his adopted father what is bothering him. Instead they talk business. Artos is going to take a few men to go and collect his horses. In the meanwhile, he will leave his remaining forces to work for Ambrosius in keeping the peace.

As they are talking, the great purple amethyst seems to shift in the pommel, causing Artos to become concerned. However, when he examines it, it seems secure enough. He states that when he gets a chance in the next town that he will have a blacksmith



look at it. He would not remember the loose stone until a day later when he is reminded in the worst way.

He and his men will be sailing to pick up the horses, and stay for a while with a friendly prince. They hunt and fish, and play at games. The prince has had his first son and they go to visit the infant. The child is wearing a coral necklace against the evil eye. Artos is reminded of Yegerna and her prediction of a son. Cabal noses the infant and as Artos pulls the dog back from the child the seal with the amethyst falls out of the sword and lands in the crib next to the child. Artos laughs it off, but the incident chills him. He goes the next day to have the sword repaired.

## Chapter 5

Artos and his men arrive at the horse fair. He has in mind to purchase only dun colored horses, or dark browns with stars or flashes of white on their faces. However, he also spies a massive black war horse that takes his breath away. He walks away from that horse because it seems the black will be too difficult to tame. The boy that demonstrates the horse for him has a very white shock of hair in front and it catches Artos's attention, that and his skill with the horses. Later, the same boy comes to their camp as a minstrel and sits at their fire, singing for them for a meal.

The song is one from their own homeland and in their native tongue, which shocks Artos. Later, the boy asks why Artos refused the black. Artos tells him and the boy shares that the black is not a killer, but a horse with an angry heart because he was mistreated as a colt.

Several days later Artos meets Bedwyr in the forest and the boy asks that Artos take him with the company. Artos does not want to take an untried young man into his Circle of Companions, but Bedwyr tells him that if Artos will purchase the black stallion, that he, Bedwyr, will make sure the horse does no harm to anyone. If he can manage that, then he will have proven himself. Artos agrees. Some time later, all of the horses, including the Black, arrive back across the waters...not a soul or horse, lost. Bedwyr is accepted into the group.

## Analysis

These initial chapters establish several things for the reader. The entire tale is being told as an ancient wounded warrior lies on his deathbed. The warrior's name, the reader learns, is Artos, and through a series of events, the bastard child of a war chieftain would rise to become the King of the Britons.

The act of receiving a sword from Ambrosius is significant because, later, he will literally hand down the kingship to Artos, just as informally. Ever the statesman, Ambrosius knows that he can't declare Artos his heir because his blood claim isn't as just as others who are in line to rule. It is notable that Utha, Artos's true father, was killed by the tusks of a boar, and later on in the novel, Ambrosius seeks a similar death when he knows



that his time is nearly at hand. This indicates that these men like the sense of control over their own destiny and that most likely, so too, will Artos.

A bit of foreshadowing is offered in Chapter 3 when Artos wakes from being with Ygerna. He wishes that he'd given in to his first initial inclination to kill her. He fears that the child that will result from the union will be cursed and will come back to haunt him. He isn't wrong. Ygerna is an interesting character in that she has been raised in hate, and so in turn, will raise Medraut to be the same way. Unfortunately, in contrast to Artos, though they were both conceived under similar circumstances, Ygerna is just not able to reconcile her beginnings and to embrace or live life at all. This emphasizes and sets up the theme of the struggle between Good versus Evil, Light versus Dark. The armband that Ygerna has is a symbol of their kinship and later defines the ruler. As of this moment in Artos' life, Ygerna rules over him.

That Artos does not give in to his gut instinct to kill the woman when he'd first met her, gives the reader some insight into his basic nature. Despite being a warrior and a man of violence on the battlefield, Artos, himself, is a decent and kind man. Throughout the novel, this tendency toward compassion both works for and against him. It is the one main reason that he is able to draw people to him, however, because people like to be around him. Because he understands the two cultures that are subtly at war with one another in the land, he physically acts as a bridge between both of them. He understands this innately and does what he can to foster this image.

When Artos visits Cador, a prince near the area where Artos will pick up Ambrosius's horses, the amethyst given to him by Ambrosius, the same stone he has now fit into the pommel of his sword, falls out of its setting and into the crib of the infant, named Constantine. This is foreshadowing by the author, as several decades later Artos will name Constantine his heir. At the moment that it happens, Artos recognizes it as being significant, and the theme of Superstition is introduced. This chapter also furthers this theme with the fact that Constantine is wearing a necklace made of coral as many infants did during this time to ward off the evil eye.

The first subtle hints of the theme of Friendship and Devotion are offered in Chapter 5 with Bedwyr and Artos meeting one another. In the Arthurian legends, Arthur and Lancelot become fast friends after a chance meeting. In this pre-cursor to the story, Bedwyr plays the same role for Artos. They eventually develop a lifelong friendship that even survives Bedwyr's affair with Artos's wife. Additionally, the symbolism of the black stallion is significant because in many ways, when Bedwyr is describing the horse, he's actually giving Artos and the reader, information about himself. Artos notices that a small portion of Bedwyr's face is disfigured, as if some long ago accident might have happened. The author of the story seems to be suggesting that Bedwyr was most likely abused when he was younger.

Though Bedwyr is younger than Artos, it is clear that he is more world-wise than the young warrior. Bedwyr is more widely traveled, and is obviously very advanced in the techniques of human behavior, or behavior in general. This is what makes him so good with the horses because he understands the way they think. He brings this ability to



Artos, and becomes a large reason why Artos continues to be so successful for many decades.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What makes Artos take notice of Bedwyr in the first place?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the themes of Good versus Evil as presented so far, indicating which characters seem to typify each one.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss the symbolism of the amethyst falling into the child's cradle.

## **Vocabulary**

radiance, coverlet, amethyst, pommel, spurt, draught, pumice, amphorae, mishaps, distorted, assuredly, fidget



# Chapters 6-10

## Summary

### Chapter 6

It is two years later, and Artos's group has doubled in size. Bedwyr is now his most trusted aide and confidant. Artos recounts various raids, his war tactics (take no prisoners), and the fact that his horses and his breeding program have proved time and again that he has some of the best horse flesh in the land.

During these two years, Artos added to his ranks a man named Cei, a red headed Saxon. He now counts him as his second lieutenant. After a two years' raid, the group return to the monastery where Artos had spoken with Ambrosius several years before. They are given a hero's welcome. The wounded are tended, and Artos takes notice of a young surgeon's apprentice named Gwalchmai. Later, Lucien, the leader of the monastery pulls Artos aside and tells him that he worries that their supplies will not hold out long enough to continue to feed and house the more than 300 men that Artos has brought with him.

Artos goes to speak to the abbot. The abbot explains that they don't have enough food to spare to feed the men. Angered, since it has been his men that have been protecting the entire region, Artos demands that the abbot share what he has with them. Artos suggests that the father sell some holy relics which really upsets the abbot to the point that he calls Artos a 'despoiler'. He says that the Sea Wolves might as well be at their door.

The abbot relents, stating that he has no way to make them leave even if he wanted to. He says he will pray that Artos will see what trouble he has brought upon the brethren and not visit it upon another monastery in the future. Satisfied, Artos leaves. A few days later they strike camp. The reader learns that the big black warhorse that Bedwyr tamed, is now named Arian. As they make to leave Artos sees the young surgeon, Gwalchmai. It is clear that he wishes to go with them. Artos asks him if he can ride and he says that he can. The abbot protests, but since Gwalchmai is a novice, he has not sworn to the brotherhood, and Artos knows this. He asks the boy to choose. Gwalchmai chooses Artos.

### Chapter 7

Before Artos arrived in Lindum the abbot had sent word of complaint to the Archbishop in Lindum, who had words with Artos. Artos reports that he handled it quite well and that the Bishop was a small man with no real power. However, he also tells the reader that this was the root cause of all his future problems with the church.

Six years have passed since he left the monastery, and for most of that time he and his men were on hire to a chieftain whose lands had been continually harried by a Saxon



warlord named Octa Hengestson. Artos shares that his heart is sick because his faithful dog, Cabal, has died. Gwalchmai, he writes, thinned out and became an amazing horseman, and an incredible surgeon. He is thankful that the boy agreed that many years ago to come along with them.

That evening a scout returns and says that he needs to speak with Artos immediately. Octa has gathered his forces and joined with that of his son and have been seen moving toward Lindum. Artos leaves the scouts and finds his Companions, telling them of the news. It is late in the season, nearly winter, but they all fear that if they leave them too long that they will only strengthen their positions. Artos leaves to speak with the prince of Lindum, Prince Guidarius. The Prince is not happy that they are leaving, and is even more upset at Artos's request for 400 men to go with him. In the end, a bargain is struck and he is given 200 men.

## Chapter 8

It is mid-winter and Artos and his men have been victorious against the Saxons and the Sea Wolves. They go to Deva to winter, where Artos has a friend in Prince Kinmarcus. Kinmarcus comes into the town a few days later, bringing venison and other provisions. He asks to speak with Artos. He tells Artos that for many months he and the other chieftains had been feeling some unrest along the borders, near Caledonia. Now, he has received word that the Saxons have recruited the painted blue men from the north. If the Sea Wolves manage to organize and combine, then Britain, the Prince suggests, will fall.

Artos agrees to make ready. He heads to his old homeplace in Arfon where his horse farm is. He walks through the pastures and speaks with the head man, Hunno. He finds a colt that will one day be all white and claims it for his own. He names it Signus for a white swan. That evening many of the young men from the village and surrounding farms come and offer their allegiance to Artos, offering to join them in the campaigns in the Spring. Artos says that he has two types of men that are part of his company. The first is his Companions and they may not have any responsibilities outside of the regiment, including families. The other type of man that joins his forces serve as auxiliaries, scouts, archers, and take to other necessary tasks. They may have wives and after a short time return to the land of their birth if they choose. By the end of the winter, Artos's ranks have nearly doubled in numbers.

## Chapter 9

Artos and his men spend a bitter winter in Deva. In February Flavian, Artos's squire asks if he might take a girl to wed. Artos tries to talk him out of it, but Flavian will not budge. Artos makes sure that Flavian understands what type of life he will be offering to the girl, but Flavian is unflinching. Artos gives his blessing and while he listens to the fading footsteps of his former armor bearer, he realizes that the boy has more wealth than he, Artos, does. He feels, suddenly, very, very, alone.



Artos meets Cei on the ramparts and they count all of the Beltane fires that are blazing in the night. It is the early part of May, and the snows have all melted. They see new fires on the horizons, but realize that those fires are the celebratory fires of Beltane. It is the Saxons on the move again. By their estimations it will be four days before they reach Deva. They begin to make war plans. A scout arrives with the information that there are 1,500 Saxons on their way.

Artos does not like those odds so he sets his men to digging 'bear' traps. These are deep pits with sharpened poles at the bottom. He aims to continue to ambush the riders as they make their way toward Deva. This, he hopes, will lessen their numbers and find them weakened when he finally engages them.

## Chapter 10

Artos receives words that Hengst is marching closer and Artos determines that he will harry them through the hills. He wakes his men up early and feeding them only hard cheese and bread, they all ride slightly after dawn to an area that overlooks a valley to wait for the Saxons. Noon comes and goes and still Hengst does not make an appearance with his troops. Just at the point where it was becoming unbearable for everyone, Artos spies the Saxon war host at last.

As they draw nearer Artos sees that Hengst is traveling with his son, Octa. Artos makes his men wait and let the pits that they'd dug the week before take its toll on the Saxons. Many Saxons do fall to the pits, but still many spill past them. The archers take out some of the Saxons that advance despite the pits. It is nearly dusk when the battle began to come to an end. The Saxons that still remain take to the hills and Artos sends Cei and his mounted warriors after them. The rest turn back toward Deva.

Back at the lodge there is a large fire and food served. Artos consults with Bedwyr and finds out that Old Hengst, himself, has been killed. Still, the son, Octa, was to be reckoned with. Cei returns and gives word of the whereabouts of the remaining Saxons. The next day they all set out to rout them out. As they follow the ragged bands of Saxons they come upon burned out villages, the townsfolk slaughtered, their fields and homes burned.

## Analysis

In these chapters the reader sees Artos continuing to grow into his responsibilities as a peacekeeping force for Ambrosius. He has made it his goal and task to create some of the finest war horses for Ambrosius. With Aquila's help, and with the help of several good alliances and friends that he's made, Artos is well on his way to accomplishing his goals.

The theme of Friendship and Devotion is demonstrated in this section as the reader sees the camaraderie that Artos enjoys with his companions. He has established a few rules for the men he invites to work with him. Foremost among these rules is that they





should all remain unwed and single. This is significant because it is when he breaks this rule, himself, that the beginning of the end occurs.

The Sea Wolves are introduced as the criminal element and the main threat to Ambrosius's vision of having and maintaining a united Britain. Artos has several skirmishes with the Sea Wolves and is successful. He credits a great deal of his success on his horses. Before winter, and on his way back to London (Londinium), he stops at Arfon, his horse farm, to speak with his master of horses, Aquila.

He learns that an all white horse has been born, whose father was the black stallion from many years before. The theme of Good versus Evil and Light versus Dark is suggested in the two colors of the horses. Artos requests that the white colt be kept for him, and be named Signus, after the white swan. That the white colt should come from the dark one is also representative of the fact that something 'good' has come from something 'bad'.

Utha, Artos's father, had basically taken Artos's mother to sate his lust, then left her with a child. However, since he had no male children, after his mother's death, he did give Artos a small station at his brother's castle. From these humble beginnings the ugly duckling became a swan. Thus, even the name of the new white colt has significance.

What follows is a detailed description in the last two chapters of the battle against Hengst, the leader of the Sea Wolves, and their defeat. The author particularly notes and gives graphic detail about the devastation that Hengst and his men leave in their wake as they retreat. This sets up the story and the Sea Wolves as being completely without honor or character, whereas Artos' group take the moral ground. This also gives a nod to the theme of Good versus Evil. And, during the battles and skirmishes, the reader sees that Artos, and his men, show tremendous courage, bringing in that theme.

Artos inspires courage in his men, and in particular, Cei, who is focused upon in this battle. Both Cei and Bedwyr are involved in this battle and more than once, they work as a team to defeat the enemy. The idea of a united front winning out over the evil swords of the invaders is evident in the almost prose-like description of the battles. Even the horses are trained to fight with their hooves and teeth, and in one scene Artos watches Bedwyr's horse move as if he is literally an extension of the man.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the significance of Artos's white colt, named Signus.

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Artos have the rules that he does for himself and his men?





## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Friendship and Devotion in these chapters, in particular involving Cei and Bedwyr.

## Vocabulary

fringed, meres, harping, reedbeds, monastery, hummock, insubstantial, keen, scorched, clotted, shackled



# Chapters 11-15

## Summary

### Chapter 11

In this chapter Artos and his men are still pursuing the Sea Wolves. From the original 1,500 invaders that there had been, now, Artos figures, there are only about 200 left. They have retreated across the mountains to their own stronghold and Artos knows that soon he and his men will have to leave off. He knows that pursuing them into the fortress could turn the tide of the battle. Unfortunately, when they reach the fortress, many of his Companions rush headlong into the fortress and it leaves Artos no other option than to make sure that the gates remain open and that they aren't cut off from the rest of the regiment.

At one point Artos feels that the battle might be lost as their front line flags. But then, out of nowhere, scantily clad folk come over the walls to fight the Saxons alongside them. They are the Dark People, related to Artos's guide. Having seen the devastation to the settlements, they have joined Artos to rout the Saxons. Artos locates Octa and charges forward. The fight is over quickly as Artos runs Octa through with his sword. With Octa's death the fight went out of the rest of the survivors.

As the men rest after the battle within the fortress, Flavian approaches Artos and tells him that they have found a boy, most likely one of the 'great ones'. Artos asks that the boy be brought to him but Flavian says that Artos should go to the boy. This makes Artos curious and he complies. In a well appointed room there is a raised altar. On this is the figure of a woman, dressed for burial. His arm flung protectively over her is a 14-year-old boy. He bares his teeth at all of them and speaks in the Britain tongue. He tells them not to touch his mother, and Artos agrees. Artos recalls the tales of the lady Rowena who was a sorcerer, and of the son that she bore to Vortigern the Red Fox. This must be his son, Artos reasons. The boy gives his name as Cerdic. He tells them that he won't let them defile the body of his mother and he flings himself at Artos, intending to stab him.

Artos catches him and pins his arms back. Cerdic bites him, but gets nothing but leather. Artos tells him to calm down, and eventually the boy nearly passes out from lack of air. When he regains his feet, Artos tells him that he will send the boy away, unharmed. The boy is shocked and asks why Artos did not kill him. Artos says he does not kill boys. Bedwyr argues and states that the boy should be killed, but Artos sends the boy away. Later, Bedwyr tells him that the boy will come back to face him as his claim on the throne of Britain is more sure than is Artos'. Artos sees Bedwyr's meaning, but tells him to stay his hand anyway.

### Chapter 12



This chapter chronicles the slow passage and the painstaking grounds that are gained by Artos and his men. He reports that the hordes living in the hills use guerrilla tactics and that just when they beat them back, they seem to pop up farther down the road. After three weeks' worth of hard fighting, and a loss of 1/5 of their men (they started out with 700) Artos and his group reach Trimontium, the Place of Three Hills. Artos receives word that the Saxons have joined with the Scots ahead of them. Under cover of night and fog, he and his men ambush the camped enemy and quickly subdue them. They begin the task of going through the dead to see if Huil Son of Caw might be among them. He is not. But, there is the body of a girl that has been found. The sight of her body makes even the strongest warrior ill.

### Chapter 13

The woman, one of the dark Pictish people, is naked and it is evident from the state of the body that she had been gang raped. The men around Artos are outraged and vow to unman the men that have done this to the woman. Artos calms them down and says that they will give her a decent burial. Because of her cultural heritage and the beliefs of her people, the men agree that she should be buried near the camp, but not in the same mass grave as their own dead. Artos sees to the arrangements and burial himself. Later, however, a woman and seven warriors come down out of the hills to claim the girl's body. They thank Artos for his kindness towards her. She wants to see her sister's body, but Artos has already buried the girl, and placed nine war horses over top of her. He can't dig her back up, he explains.

The woman tells him that it is for Artos the Bear to now come to her camp and tell the old woman of the hills what has happened, and to drink a drink to peace. The men argue and try to talk Artos out of going with the woman, but he waves them off. He feels that it is not a trap and that it is something that he must do.

Arto arrives at their village and is taken to see the old woman. She searches his eyes, asks him questions, and tells him that she senses that he has a touch of the Old Wisdom in him. The Old Woman is satisfied with his answers. She tells him if he ever has need of their people, that they will stand with Artos the Bear. When he has need of them he is to hang straw from the large Alder tree about the pool.

### Chapter 14

The winter comes and goes and Artos spends the winter readying for the spring raids against the Sea Wolves. True to their word, the little dark people, the Pictish, come periodically to give him intel about the Sea Wolves and their locations. In the spring, an emissary from the Pictish camp approaches and tells Artos that the Sea Wolves have begun to muster. Artos plans with his Companions to set a trap for the Saxon horde.

Early the next morning, the war horns of the Sea Wolves are sounded and Artos and his men lie in wait. With the help of the dark people, with their deadly poisoned arrows, Artos and his men are able to rout the Sea Wolves, and in the melee capture Huil, the



Saxon warlord. He is delivered wounded, but alive, to Artos. Artos attempts to question him, but it is of no use. They execute him and bury him in an unmarked grave.

## Chapter 15

Artos and his Companions rightly assess that the back of the horde has been broken, but that the attacks would be more along the lines of guerrilla attacks. From now on they will have to be very wary and look twice around every hill, bend, and forest clearing. Strengthening his hold on the lands, he spends his time as they move forward, to meet and win over the many chieftains of the areas lowlands.

Summer comes and the mid-summer fires are celebrated. Artos takes a liking to one of the chieftain's daughters, but before he can entertain any more thoughts the cry to arms is taken up. The Scots have taken advantage of the celebration to attack. They manage to drive back the Scots. In the aftermath, Artos spies a large Hibernian war dog standing over the dead body of his master. Artos admires the dog and his loyalty. He wants to convince the dog to come to his camp. He will not allow any of the men to rope the dog and drag him from his dead master. Artos will wait with the dog until the dog is done grieving and comes of his own free will. Artos has suffered a shoulder wound and his men are worried, but he swears at them and makes them leave. Many hours pass and eventually the dog comes to Artos. As Artos walks away with the dog at his side, he makes it only a few yards before he collapses.

Artos rests and becomes stronger, then goes to the dog, which he has named Cabal after his former dog. The dog remembers him and allows Artos to come near him. Artos can see that the dog has refused to eat or keep himself clean since being separated from Artos. The dog leans against him and sighs. The dog is the largest that Artos has ever seen, the size of a small pony. He makes a great impression when he walks beside Artos.

Maglaunus, the war chieftain and Guenhumara's father, offers her hand to Artos in marriage. Artos manages to buy himself some time, stating that it is his people's custom not to think of women for a long period of time each year. This only serves to buy him five days' time, at which point he has to give his decision. Guenhumara is the woman that he'd taken a fancy to during the mid-summer fires, and the only one that had been able to feed the hound while Artos was ill. He just doesn't like to be forced into a commitment by someone.

## Analysis

In these chapters there are many instances of foreshadowing of events to follow. Namely is the act of mercy that Artos shows to Cerdic, the 14-year-old son of Vortigren. Bedwyr advises him to kill the boy as when he is a man in a few short years he will come to put forth his claim on the throne, and he has more blood claim than does Artos. Artos can only see a child, and he won't kill Cerdic. As it turns out, later on in the novel, this prediction comes true.



Most notably, too, is the condition of the young Pictish girl who has been ravaged by the Saxons as a spoil of war, then killed. Her death illustrates the savage nature of their enemies, while it also serves to give the reader insight into the type of person Artos is. He respects the customs of her people and buries her in the camp, under nine horses. His act of kindness does not go unnoticed, and it is established that he is a kind and culturally sensitive leader.

When the young girl's people come to the village to claim her body, and then discover how she's been honored, they are impressed and shocked by Artos's understanding of their ways. They speak with him and then give their fealty to him. It is this act of Friendship and Devotion, a major theme in the novel, that emerges out of this tragedy. Throughout the novel, these people of the hills, often called The Dark People, will serve as scouts, advanced intelligence, and clandestine assistance whenever it is needed. More than once, they come to Artos and his men's rescue when the elements almost kill them all.

The theme of Courage is chronicled in Artos's interaction and discovery of the dog that will not leave his dead master's side. His devotion and steadfast resistance to them touches Artos. This is the same type of devotion that Artos eventually receives from all of those that follow him (except Merdraut). The theme of Good Versus Evil is also notable in these chapters as the reader is shown the graphic and savage nature of the enemy, and the noble and kind nature of Artos and his men.

The reader is introduced to Guenhumara (Guen), who is the Gwenivere that emerges in later versions of the Arthurian legend. She is a beauty and captures Artos's eye during a celebration. However, he is still very much committed to his vow to remain unmarried as he requires of all of his men. The pressure to wed, however, is great because politically it would benefit him, as well as giving him a huge boost in fortune. He tries to postpone giving the King his answer, but in the end, he knows that his back is against the wall and he will most likely have to go through with it.

As a character, the reader learns that Guen is also in an awkward position. She is attracted to Artos, and he to her, which seems promising, but she, too, doesn't like being used as a bartering chip (even though that was the custom of the day), nor does she really want to lose face by being rejected. She wants to make sure that Artos is fully aware of the consequences for them both if he should refuse her. The reader can tell that not only is Guen very beautiful, but that she understands politics, and is highly intelligent. She will never be content to be shut away from involvement in the life of whomever her husband is.

## Discussion Question 1

How is the theme of Good Versus Evil illustrated in these chapters?



## Discussion Question 2

What does it tell the reader about Artos' character that he ignores Bedwyr's advice and does not kill Cerdic?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do the Pictish People (The Dark People) come to assist Artos the Bear inside the fortress?

## Vocabulary

sprawling, smoldering, graybeards, summoned, engulf, cunning, lair, despot, despoiled, rampart, latrine, smithy



# Chapters 16-20

## Summary

### Chapter 16

It is morning and Artos decides to go for a hike in the mountains to do some thinking. He takes his new dog, Cabal, with him. He is worried about the impending confrontation between himself and Maglaunus when he must somehow find a way to refuse Guen's hand in marriage. Artos comes upon a grouping of stone monoliths. From between them steps the figure of a woman.

It is Guen. She tells him that she has been waiting for him. What will he tell her father in a few days time, she wants to know. He hesitates and she guesses that he does not want her. She urges him to reconsider as the shame would be hard for her to bear. She confides that her father will offer a 100 men with the finest horses for her dowry. Artos argues that this is not the right reason to take a wife, and besides, he has urged his own Companions to remain unmarried.

It begins to rain and he throws his cloak over her to keep her dry. In that moment she reaches up and kisses him, then, as if frightened at her own response, she runs away, leaving Artos confused and staring after her. He returns to his men and asks for their insight into the predicament that he is in. He finally tells Flavian, who calls his actions unjust, that he will have Guen at winter camp only, but that other times she will live at her father's hearth.

### Chapter 17

The wedding takes place and there is a great feast and much drinking. The celebration lasts long into the night and the bonfires are lighted. Artos and Guen make their getaway and spend the night in a long abandoned keep, belonging in earlier times to the elder chieftains of the lands. All newly married couples spend the night there as a rite of passage. It is to here that Artos brings Guen.

He attempts to have sex with her, but he begins to remember the ten years before when he made love to Ygerna and how it had affected him afterwards. He desperately wants to do his duty by Guen on their nuptial night, but he just can't. She asks him to tell her what has happened to make him this way and he tells her everything. She vows to keep his secret, and comforts him until he sleeps.

### Chapter 18

Word of Artos' marriage has run ahead of him to Trimontium, the winter quarters. The fort is abuzz by the time Artos arrives. Gwalchmai the camp's physician is the first to enter Artos's tent when he arrives. He voices his concern over having a woman in camp. Then, Cei blusters into the tent but is placated when he realizes that Artos did it just for



the horses and warriors that she brought as a dowry. However, Artos realizes that he is jealous when Cei says that he'll have to set to trying to seduce her right away. This surprises Artos that he should care.

The Fourth Squadron arrives, but they have been ravaged. Gault, one of Artos's most trusted men staggers in, starts to give his report, and falls dead. The second in command, Levin, comes in, sees Gault dead on the floor and is instantly overcome with grief. It is clear to Artos that they shared a closer relationship than most. He makes Levin the squadron commander, and counsels him. Then, later that evening, Guen arrives.

## Chapter 19

The white colt that Artos had chosen three years previously arrives in the spring. It is nearly time for Guen and her lady in waiting to return back to her father's hall. Artos takes the two of them to the Hall of the Holy Ladies. Instead of making the treacherous trip to her father's hall, Guen and her lady will live within the walls of the abbey until the Fall. Artos is reasonably assured that the Abbess is a woman of her word and that all will be well. After the summer's campaign, he comes for Guen and it is evident that they are both deeply in love. And yet, Artos still cannot make her his.

## Chapter 20

Back in the winter quarters one of the dark people comes to tell Artos that the coming winter will be a very bad one. He urges Artos to move his horses farther south for the winter. Artos isn't sure whether he wants the horses out of his sight. But, the dark people have the understanding of the area more than he does, so he calls his Companions to talk it over. They agree to send them south. The winter is very bad.

A fire is started inside the fort and threatens to grow larger, and in the end half of the food that had been stored goes up in flames, and two men lost their lives trying to put out the fire. It is determined that they will now have to go on half-rations in order to make it through to February. Everyone moved into a large, collective hall to conserve heat. February comes but the snows don't recede. They have eaten almost all of the camp dogs, one pony, and even some wolves that they lured in close to the walls. They are below half rations and disease has started to sweep through the camps. The next day Levin is gone and it is discovered that he has taken with him his whole squadron's allotment of food for the day. Everyone is furious and becoming more desperate. Artos half wonders if Levin has taken it upon himself to go for help. Nonetheless, Artos feels that it is a suicide mission at best.

Three more weeks pass and Levin does not return. The snow is starting to melt and Artos believes that he can risk sending someone out for help. They draw straws. Two men are sent out. That night Artos and Guen find themselves in a storage shed and in an act of desperation they make love and this time Artos is able to claim her. He believes that Ygera's hold over him is broken because they both face death shortly. For a short moment, he is happy.





## Analysis

What is established within the first couple of chapters in this section is who Guen is as a person. She is dutiful, aware of social customs, and is also someone who is intelligent enough and compassionate enough to understand what has happened to Artos, and the position that they are both in concerning the marriage. She assures him that she will be his best friend, and she makes good on this offer on their wedding night by not judging Artos when he tells her about Ygera.

In Guen, Artos has found another trusted companion and confidant, second only to Bedwyr. It is clear that in the morning, after their wedding night, that she intends to make good on her promise. This indicates that she is a woman of her word, and it would only be under extreme duress that she would ever break her word.

In Chapter 18, the first of several insinuations about homosexual activity is offered. The author has worked in some of the commonly assumed actions of men who campaigned on the war trail for nine months out of the year. That Artos does not judge, but is sympathetic also gives his character depth. It also offers insight into the day and age that this type of activity was not spoken about, but it was also more or less condoned within certain institutions. It would only be when the Catholic Church gained more influence over the land that such relationships would be openly outlawed.

Artos's continued impotence with Guen is of note. Ygera's curse has worked on him so that even with the woman he is in love with, he cannot be intimate. This illustrates the theme of Superstition and the amount of power it held in the lives of those living during this time. It is only when he believes that they are going to die from the winter's cold that he believes that the spell is broken and he is able to be intimate with Guen.

The theme of Sacrifice is evident in the chapters committed to depicting the harsh winter conditions. Levin sacrifices himself to go for help, against impossible odds. Several other men also offer to try and go for help. All of them are willing to go to half rations in order to make their food last. That they are willing to make this sacrifice indicates their intense devotion and loyalty to Artos and to the life they've agreed to live.

### Discussion Question 1

Why is Artos having trouble being intimate with Guen?

### Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Superstition and how it has affected Artos and Guen.



## Discussion Question 3

Describe Guen and Artos's marriage, and their arrangement.

## Vocabulary

flecked, byrny, scrupulous, attentive, striven, lief, scornful, discreetly, carcasses, prowling, gales, pithy, pickets



# Chapters 21-25

## Summary

### Chapter 21

Guen is pregnant with their first child and Artos urges her to stay with her father until it should be born. She tells him that their child will be born under the protection of his father's sword and no others. Artos gives in and allows her to stay. A bad storm comes upon them after they are three days down the road and Guen regrets her staunch decision to follow him on the road with the war host. She starts to go into labor and they are no where near their usual settlements. However, they are near Druim Dhu's village (The Dark People) and he takes her on Signus his stallion to Dhu's village for help.

When they arrive Guen is terrified, thinking that the earthen lodges are fairy mounds. She won't have her babe born there, but Artos stands up to her. She gives birth to a little girl, but the child is two months premature. She manages to survive with the druids' midwife to help. However, the midwife pulls Artos aside outside of the tent and tells him that the portents are not good and that the child should be left on the hills for the wolf people. Guen will not hear of it and is so ill that Artos can't bear to upset her.

### Chapter 22

The baby is not well and for many days it seems that the child may die anyway. Then, on the ninth day, Artos visits Guen again, as is his usual routine, to find Guen in a much better mood. The child, she tells him, will live. The midwife has now told her that it will live and she believes it to be true, too. They name the child, Hylin.

Druim Dhu comes to visit one evening, just after the Winter Stores have been delivered. He has come to wish the Sun Lord good bye. After dinner they walk among the hills and Artos is stricken with the parting. He knows that he will never see his friend, or enjoy this way of life, ever again.

They leave and reach Ambrosius' fortress, where Artos introduces Guen and Hylin to him. Later, Ambrosius tells him that the Sea Wolves are back again and harrying the outlying settlements. He asks if Artos and his men will ride out to meet the Sea Wolves and hold them back. Artos tells him that he and his men will require a couple of weeks to settle their affairs and rest, and then they are at his command. He hands Ambrosius an ivy leaf as a gesture to show him that he's given him the entire northern territory. However, the ivy leaf, when Ambrosius takes it, crumbles in his hand. Both men dismiss the occurrence, but Artos can tell that it bothered his adopted father. Ambrosius tells him that the next day Artos and Guen should move into the palace, where they will be given royal apartments. Artos is stricken and grateful.

### Chapter 23



Artos goes to Guen in their chambers, the same room he had when he was a boy there. He tells her that tomorrow they will be moving into better apartments. Bedwyr comes in and says that Cei is giving the horse masters grief for not housing their horses properly. Artos leaves to get a bath and to make sure Cei doesn't cause trouble. He doesn't want to leave Guen alone, so he asks if Bedwyr will stay, have a cup of wine, and sing for Guen until he returned. Bedwyr agrees and Artos leaves.

When he returns many months later, Hylin is looking normal, is a year old, and Artos wants to give her a gift. He finds a puppy to give to her and has the leather maker create a beautiful collar with flowers on it. He is surprised that he is so excited to make something pretty for anyone. Winter comes and goes, and afterward, with the spring, Artos has to ride out again to hold the Sea Wolves off once again. When Artos returns many months later, Hylin is sick with a cough and Guen is terrified. Artos sends for Gwalchmai to look at the child, but he says there is nothing he can do for it. He suggests Ambrosius' physician. The child has a fever off and on for the entire season and the only comfort that she derives is from Bedwyr's harp. Artos must leave once again to take to the war trail. He is afraid of what he will find when he returns. In another month, a messenger arrives to the war camp. Hylin is dying. It is the eve of a great battle and Artos knows he can't leave his men to face the host alone. He decides to delay his departure until after the battle. After the battle he rides toward home. Artos arrives but Hylin has just died, only an hour previously. Guen can barely speak.

#### Chapter 24

When Guen does speak she asks him why he didn't come sooner. He says he came as soon as he could, but she doesn't believe him. She accuses him of choosing war over his own daughter. Artos goes to the body of his child and weeps. Afterward, he tells Guen that he rode as hard as he could as soon as he could, but Guen brushes it aside saying that in the end it wasn't Artos that the babe cried for, but Bedwyr and his harp. She tells Artos that it is because Hylin was born in the house of the dark people, that they somehow poisoned the baby. She accuses Artos of killing their baby. He is astounded at her irrationality. She tells him that she wants him to leave her and the child and that she never wants him to touch her again. Stricken, Artos leaves.

The next day they bury Hylin and after the funeral, Artos is making his way across the courtyard when a young man hails him. He says that he has come from the hills seeking his father's house. Artos feels a chill run up his spine and he knows that this must be Ygerna's child...his child. The young man introduces himself as Medraut and Artos acknowledges him as his son. He says that Ygerna has died, and when Artos tells him that he's sorry for his loss, Medraut says that there was no love lost between them; that his mother taught him more of hate than of love. He asks to join Artos' forces and Artos agrees. He takes him to meet Guen. After Medraut has left, Guen tells Artos that there is something dark and twisted about the boy and that he should be sent away. Artos brushes it off as Guen's emotions still being unsettled after the child's death.

#### Chapter 25



The next day Artos gives a sword and a good war horse to Medraut. They ride back to the ramparts where Artos had left his men a week before. When he and Medraut arrive Bedwyr rushes to them to see what had become of the baby. He is heartbroken that the child has died. Artos tells him about Medraut and asks if Bedwyr will take him under his wing. He says that the way that Bedwyr had ridden the big black horse all those many years before spoke to the kind of man that could handle a boy that had been raised with nothing but hatred. Bedwyr agrees. Three years pass and Artos notices that his son does well and the men tend to like him.

He receives word from a messenger that Ambrosius is gravely ill. Since the winter is coming, he stops the campaign trail and brings all of his troops back to the palace. The winter passes and Artos learns that Ambrosius has a wasting disease that will eventually kill him. After the winter is almost over, Ambrosius tells Artos that he wants to take him and a few close friends and go hunting in Spain. Artos knows that Ambrosius wants to go off like a good hunting dog, and die amongst friends. He agrees to go with him.

## Analysis

The theme of Superstition is evident in Guen's assessment of Druim Dhu's village. They desperately need shelter and this is the nearest friendly place, and yet, because of the stories she was told as a child, she is terrified that she and her unborn child will be devoured by the fairies living in the homes. In fact, it is one of these little dark people who helps to deliver her child.

The midwife from the village pulls Artos aside and suggests that the child will not live, that it was born under bad signs and should be left for the wolf people. Artos can't bear to do that to his wife, and ignores her advice. Had he taken her advice, some of the problems that occur later between Artos and Guen might have been avoided.

Through this interaction between the two cultures it is evident that Guen will not easily overcome the stories that she has heard about the hill people. That they are willing and more open minded than she is, is telling. Guen, in some regards, is very inflexible when it comes to her belief system. Unfortunately, it is her stubborn nature that eventually will cost her dearly.

The ivy leaf that crumbles in Ambrosius's hand is symbolic of several things. First, it indicates that Ambrosius's time is near. He is, like the leaf, used up, brittle, and almost lifeless. Additionally, since it was handed to him along with the remark that the northern territory is now his, given to him by Artos, it is clear that while it might belong to them now, it will not remain theirs for long.

Ambrosius has been of major influence on Artos and he has ordered his life, in many respects, around what Ambrosius would think of him, or would have him do. Artos has been extremely grateful for the position of trust and responsibility that Ambrosius has



always given him. He is very aware that Ambrosius could have at any time cast him aside as a bastard of his long deceased brother.

Artos, unlike Bedwyr, is not always a good study of human nature or behavior. By asking Bedwyr to stay behind and make music for her and the child, he is setting into motion a series of events that will eventually cause his two best friends and most trusted advisers to betray him. This is indicative of Artos being sometimes a bit naive about those around him. He truly expects, demands, and assumes the best of those he surrounds himself with. For the most part, this works for him, until his son joins them.

The theme of Devotion and Friendship is illustrated in Artos's understanding of Ambrosius's desire for one more hunting trip. He knows that Ambrosius is choosing the time of his own death, and Artos respects that. His devotion to this man that has been like a father to him is also paralleled with the way his own men look up to him. This also sets up the foundation for Artos, himself, determining how his death will happen, and how it will be perceived.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Discuss the significance of the ivy leaf.

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the theme of Devotion and Friendship, especially as it is represented by Guen and Bedwyr.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss the situation between Guen, Hylin's illness, and Artos.

## **Vocabulary**

restive, roan, leaden, lingered, harshly, burnishing, brandished, lament, quirk, handling, saddlebag, revenged, flare



# Chapters 26-30

## Summary

### Chapter 26

Artos, Ambrosius, and a small band, travel to Spain and stay at a hunting lodge that had belonged to Ambrosius' father. That evening Ambrosius tells Artos and Aquila by the fireside of his times there as a young man. He recalled eating roasted chestnuts. Artos goes to fetch some chestnuts and a roasting shovel for them to enjoy them. After a while of enjoying the chestnuts, Ambrosius leans forward on his elbows and says that he wanted to bring him here for another reason.

Ambrosius intends that Artos should be the next high king of Britain, and Artos is aghast. Ambrosius says that if he were to die suddenly without naming an heir, most likely all of the men would turn to Artos as the natural leader, though there are others who would have a blood claim. He warns Artos that there would be a few that would rise against him, but that this would be up to him to quell. Artos tries to talk him out of his foolish notions, stating that he never, for even once, assumed he would be the next king, since he was never fully acknowledged by his father, the king's brother. Ambrosius waves this aside. It is plain the king has made up his mind.

### Chapter 27

They make plans to continue with their hunting trip the next morning and ride for many hours until the hounds pick up a scent. Over the crest of a ridge there appears a huge 12 point stag and everyone gives chase. Ambrosius rides as if he were a younger man, Artos notes, and hopes that the man's feeling that his death was imminent was wrong. Soon the hounds trap and surround the stag, who turns to fight them. Ambrosius reaches the melee first and leaps from his horse, claiming rights to the kill. Artos now knows what his adopted father plans to do and does not leap from his horse to assist. None of the other men do either. Ambrosius rushes into the middle of the hounds and faces the stag, then lunges for the stag. The stag impales Ambrosius, tossing him into the air. Ambrosius lands on the ground, and suddenly the stag shudders and falls on top of him. Ambrosius had managed to cut its throat, but not before it had dispatched the king. Artos and Aquila rush to him, Artos gathering him into his arms. There is blood everywhere.

Artos knows that this is what Ambrosius had wanted, and yet he is still grief stricken. Aquila takes charge of sending some of the men back to get a wagon to carry the king's body back. Artos knows that Ambrosius had known that the good kill he had wished upon them the night before, was for his own death.

### Chapter 28



The former king is buried and three days later a council is convened to determine who should be the new king, since Ambrosius died without naming a successor. Artos receives his invitation to come to the council chamber, which was not an unusual occurrence. Anytime that he'd been in Venta he'd always been included informally at these meetings. This time, however, when he enters the chamber room, all of the gathered nobles rose to their feet. Artos is surprised, but does not allow it to show on his face.

The debates ensue and it is decided that there will be no king appointed at this time because the Saxons are on the move and the in-fighting that would most likely result from an appointment at this time would divide the kingdom and the loyalties of their armies. Artos leaves the council and returns back to his quarters.

He finds Noni of the dark hill folk waiting for him. He brings word of the Saxons moving into the hills with massive armies, led by Cerdic. He also states that three war boats had come through the great water and were landing, even now, at Dubris. And off of these boats came new war weapons, iron clad with balls and barrels, as well as chain mail and war skins.

## Chapter 29

Artos has gathered his men and they meet in the evening at camp to discuss the upcoming war with the growing Saxon hordes. After all of the men have left his tent, Aquilla stays behind. In a while, he pulls his signet ring from his finger and hands it to Artos, asking him to make sure it gets to Flavian should he fall in battle the next day. Artos agrees.

Bedwyr enters shortly after Aquilla leaves. They make the rounds of the camp and discuss Medraut. Bedwyr is concerned because in all of the time they've now spent with the boy, it is clear that he enjoys killing, for killing's sake, not for the sake of anything larger than the act. Bedwyr offers to dispatch Madraut in the confusion of the battle the next day, but Artos tells him that he wouldn't place that burden on his best friend. They part. The night passes.

The battle begins. The first wave is an even draw, but when Artos sends in his cavalry the tide turns in their favor. Artos is in the middle of the campaign when a berserker comes at him, aiming to disembowel his great war horse. Artos signals to his horse to rear up and strike with his hooves, which he does, and Cabal, Artos's dog lunges for the mans' throat. Artos continues on, but he fears that Cabal has given his life. Cerdic, son of Vortigern, meets him shortly after this in hand-to-hand combat. Before they can finish it, the retreat is sounded, and the Saxons withdraw, leaving Artos panting and grateful for the break.

## Chapter 30

Artos and some of the remnants of his own war troop give chase to the Saxons, killing the stragglers. But, finally, they, too retreat to regroup and tend to the wounded. Artos is worried because he doesn't see Bedwyr. Cei catches up to him, and Artos is glad to see





him. Cei has not seen Bedwyr either. Everyone calls about to see if anyone knows about Bedwyr, and Flavian says that he did see him dragged from his horse, but what came of him after that he could not say.

They made their way back to camp and Artos is glad to see it. Some of the men have already gotten there ahead of him, and oddly enough, all gather to reach out and touch his boot as he rides in. Someone starts the chant "Hail Caesar!" Soon the entire camp is saying it. Some good natured men pull him from his horse, and in a drunken celebration carry Artos up the hill to a naturally made throne. There in the moonlight amidst his men, war drunk though they were, they crown him their rightful king. Then others came and took part, placing their swords point down in the ground before him. Each group of men, according to their own rituals and traditions pledge their fealty. After he has left them all to their celebrations he is directed to the field hospital where he's learned Bedwyr has been taken. Before he can get there, Noni finds him and tells him that Cabal has been gravely injured. Noni had hoped he might be saved, but now knows that he cannot.

Artos detours from the hospital and goes to a wagon where Noni has placed Cabal. Cabal wags his tail, but is clearly in pain and is dying. Artos thanks him and speaks kindly to him, then ends his suffering. He leaves Noni to bury him, then goes to the hospital. When he arrives it is filled with the wounded and dying. Gwalchmai is clearly tired and overwhelmed. He learns that Bedwyr is injured but should make a recovery if he lives the next three days.

## Analysis

The theme of Friendship and Devotion is heavily emphasized in these chapters. Where Artos is concerned, Ambrosius knows that his foster son has the love, hearts, and minds of the men that he leads. Thus, he has the hearts and minds of the people of Britain. He knows that if any other should claim the throne that the unification that he had envisioned will never happen. It must be Artos.

Artos's devotion to his surrogate father is shown by his act of retrieving the chestnuts for Ambrosius to enjoy one last time. It shows his character and his desire to be compassionate toward people, in general. The chestnut, itself, represents the kernel of a larger object, and in fact, this is why Ambrosius has brought Artos there....to instill the first seeds of thought toward Artos claiming the throne.

When the stag is cornered and the death blow is to be dealt, most of the men there realize what the king intends to do. As a sign of fealty, of friendship and devotion to their friend, they do not intervene when Ambrosius faces the stag. This underscores the theme of Friendship and Devotion, once again.

The stag, himself, is representative of the king, Ambrosius. That he is white, makes him significant, and that they both die together indicates that they are symbols for one another, with courageous hearts. In the end, Ambrosius died under his own terms, and



Artos is grateful that he was able to do so. The theme of Courage is demonstrated in both the stag and Ambrosius as they both have the understanding at the end, that they will both die, and they both choose to die fighting.

When the gathered council members rise to their feet, it startles Artos, because they've never shown him this courtesy before. Without saying so, they are acknowledging that he is most likely going to be their next ruler. This further cements the idea that Ambrosius has planted in Artos' mind when they were in Spain. Even at this point Artos is not certain that he wants to be the King. He was very honest when he said that he never considered it. That he now is being forced to consider it weighs heavily on him.

The theme of Courage is offered, again, through the death of a dog. Cabal (the third) is killed on the battlefield, defending Artos, taking a spear that was meant for Artos. Cerdic, the boy that he had spared decades ago, is in this battle and Bedwyr's words come back to him in regards to what he should have done. He begins to have regrets for some of the choices he has made. This is an instance where Artos's compassionate nature is working against him. The very characteristic that draws men to his side, is also part of his own undoing.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the various instances and examples of Courage throughout these chapters.

## Discussion Question 2

Give examples of the theme of Devotion and Friendship, as demonstrated by Cabal.

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the character of Medraut.

## Vocabulary

husk, cluttered, silvering, nightingale, buckler, loomed, battered, bedraggled, lurch, hoarse, kindled, dazed, frenzy, blood-soaked, breadth



# Chapters 31-37

## Summary

### Chapter 31

The Saxons admit defeat and call for a council of truce and treaty. Artos goes and is surprised to see Cedric still alive, the scar around his neck still healing. The treaty is hammered out and they all agree to allow what is left of the Saxons to live on the shores with their crops and animals, but that in return they will become defenders for Britain on the coast, even against those of their own kind should they return by sea. But, this treaty does not extend to Cedric. Artos cannot forget the heinous acts against the innocent by his hands and the hands of his men. He banishes Cedric from his shores, and gives him nine days to make it happen.

Later, after everyone has eaten and come back to their tents, Artos is visited by Medraut. He is upset that he had not been included in the treaty council. As a Prince of Britain he feels that he should have been invited to be there. Artos tells him that he assumes that the throne would be his after Artos' death. Medraut doesn't deny it and Artos reminds him that the crown is not always determined by birthright. Medraut begs Artos to just love him as a son. Artos hesitates and this hesitation whips Medraut into a fury. He insults and screams at Artos, then storms away. Artos shivers as he believes that Medraut will be his undoing. Meanwhile, though he has told no one save the two involved, he has already determined that Cador's son, Constantine, should be his successor.

### Chapter 32

Artos goes back to the palace at Venta where Guen has been taking care of Bedwyr, who had moved into their chambers at Artos's request. Artos had feared that his sword brother was not going to heal properly in the hospital and had asked Guen if she would tend to him, as she had for him when he'd been so gravely wounded. She had agreed, but this night, with Artos's return, he finds Bedwyr packing to leave the chambers. Though Artos argues with him, he states that it would be best if he did go. Artos cannot fathom what has happened to create a distance in his best friend.

The official coronation takes place and the bishop sets the coronet of gold on his head. He loses himself in the day-to-day whirlwind of decisions that are now coming at him at rapid speed. Guen is a large help to him, he believes, as her perception in many matters became invaluable. Though they were still not as they were in their youth, they are still friends, and for now, he thinks, it is enough.

There is a festival at Christmas and the cavalry put on a performance. Having healed better, Bedwyr ends the night with a display of horsemanship that makes Artos proud. As he stands in the shadows on his old warhorse, Signus, he overhears some young



men laughing. At first he is taken back to when he was young, but then he actually starts listening to what they are saying. They are insinuating and laughing drunkenly about how Bedwyr and Guen look at one another, suggesting that they were lovers. Artos dismisses this as drunken gossip as young men might do, but it bothers him all the same.

### Chapter 33

The next day Bedwyr asks leave of Artos to go to his own land and homestead in the next county. Artos gives him leave, and part of him is glad to see him go. The winter ends and spring comes, and with it the need to patrol the borders. Artos takes his companions and makes the rounds with them, but still, Bedwyr has not returned. After the inspection, instead of spending the night and making the rest of the ten mile push into Venta the next day, they all opt to ride through the night to surprise their wives.

They arrive and Artos goes into his chambers to find them empty. He asks his wife's maids where she is and they tell him that she couldn't sleep and went for a walk in the gardens. As he is drinking some wine, planning to go out to the garden, Medraut enters the room and tells him that he is glad that Artos has returned early. He wants Artos to come with him immediately. Artos demands to know why. Medraut tells him that it is for Guen's sake. The maid begs Artos not to go with Medraut, but Artos ignores her.

Artos comes to a small storage shed at the edge of the garden. Medraut's men have surrounded the shed. Artos asks what this is about, but Medraut walks past him and pounds on the door, demanding that the door be opened in the name of the King. The door opens to reveal Bedwyr, naked, and there standing behind him, hurriedly dressed, is Guen. It is clear what has happened. Artos turns on Medraut and sends him and his men away. He places his sword against Bedwyr's throat and backs him into the shed, then shuts the door behind him.

Bedwyr does not try to deny it, tells Artos that he left so that he would not be in this situation, and had only returned the day before to find Artos gone. Then, he offers, he and Guen renewed their feelings for one another. Artos can't breathe. Guen asks for his forgiveness, but Artos can't begin to see how. He thinks he would not have begrudged either of them taking a lover, but to take each other is too much, because now, he has not lost one, but both of his dearest and closest friends. Quietly, he banishes them both, giving them until noon the next day to be gone from his sight and his kingdom forever.

### Chapter 34

Several years pass uneventfully, but then, Artos is stricken with an illness. Unfortunately, it is bad timing because news arrives that Cedric has come back to Britain with a war host. Artos is feverish but tries to get out of bed. Cei and the doctor wrestle him back into bed. He grants Cei command of the troops, and falls into a deep sickness that lasts for a month. When he wakes, he hears that the Saxons have been held off for the time being. He receives a dispatch from Cei and reads between the lines. The victory might



have been assured had Medraut not faltered in holding his lines. Artos calls for Medraut immediately.

Medraut enters Artos's chambers, walking with an assurance of something that Artos can't quite imagine. Artos confronts him, suggesting without saying it overtly that Medraut allowed Cedric's forces to retreat and regroup. He is suggesting that Medraut is in league with the enemy. His point is to warn Medraut that he is going to be watching him closely from now on. He dismisses Medraut. He receives word that Gwalmachi has died, and Cei and the host return from their campaign. Guen's clansmen, who had been serving him faithfully, leave his court as well. Regretfully, Artos remarks that his ranks are thinning too fast.

### Chapter 35

Artos's suspicions are correct when the next Spring, after Cei has ridden out to continue to wage war against Cedric, Artos receives word that Medraut has betrayed them, joined forces with Cedric, and taken a third of their ranks with him. Artos is angered and devastated at once. He makes ready to lead a contingency, himself, to the battlefield to join his old captain, Cei.

### Chapter 36

Artos rides for the coast, telling some of his men to call all that can come to arms. Artos realizes that it is harvest time and that many of the men will be loathe to leave their crops in the fields. He also realizes that this has been Medraut's plan all along.

That night in camp, Artos cannot sleep. The fold of his tent draws back and standing there is his old friend, Bedwyr. Artos gets to his feet and they stand staring at one another for a while. Bedwyr asks to come back to his service, and after a time, Artos agrees to allow him to. They sit and talk, and Bedwyr confesses that he and Guen did not live happily ever after, that Artos's ghost and the wrong they'd done him had always been between them. Before coming on the war trail, he'd set her aside at the nunnery as she had requested.

Sunrise comes very soon and Artos takes great care with his appearance. He's come to a decision, Ambrosius's final moments on his mind. He has determined that, if the Fates allow, he will find and kill Medraut so that his old sin might be wiped out and Britain spared.

### Chapter 37

The battle starts in earnest. It is one of the bloodiest that Artos can ever remember. He watches men he has fought with for decades dying around him. Eventually, he spots Medraut across the battlefield. He gives Cei the command of the troops, takes Bedwyr and heads for Medraut. Bedwyr and Artos's close companions harry Medraut's cavalry allowing Artos to round on Medraut. They engage in combat on horseback until Artos lands a blow that knocks Medraut from his warhorse. It does not harm Medraut but does unseat him. Artos waits for him to come up out of the water, but is shocked when



Medraut emerges from the water underneath his horse, sword leading they way. The sword pierces Artos through the groin and the sheer pain seems to reach his heart.

Artos knows that he has the strength for one last blow and aims his blade at Medraut's exposed throat. He slices it cleanly, noting the half amused look on Medraut's face. Artos realizes that his son has not worked it out, but that the fulfillment of his mother's curse was that each should be the death of the other. Everything goes black.

Artos is confused. Instead of being dead he wakes to the sound of whispers and shadows. Finally, one shadow is recognizable. It is Bedwyr. He asks where they are and Bedwyr says that it is an island called the Island of Apples. Bedwyr tells Artos that Constantine arrived in time and that the usurpers and the Saxons have been defeated.

Artos tells Bedwyr that he knows that he has been given a death blow, but that he wants the burial place of his body to be kept secret, so that the men might fight on, even after he has died. Bedwyr agrees. Artos asks him to bring Constantine. When Constantine arrives Artos formally recognizes him as his heir. He tells him that he and his successors will have the throne until he, Artos, should come again. Constantine wonders how he will know that Artos has passed away if they are to keep it a secret. He tells him that at the moment of his death, Bedwyr will cast his sword into the lake as a sign. Constantine agrees. Bedwyr sits by Artos's side. Bedwyr tells him that there are songs to be sung about what they did and the lives they led, but that it would not be they who sung them.

## Analysis

The stress and tension between Medraut and Artos is palpable in the first few chapters of this section. It is clear that both Artos and Medraut have dispensed with attempting to become close. Medraut has too many years at his mother's hearth to change his mind about Artos at this point, that is evident.

These chapters show that Medraut is full of hate, most likely sociopathic, and doesn't care for anyone but himself. He craves fame and fortune, and he doesn't care how he obtains them. Most of all, he goes out of his way to emotionally hurt his father whenever he can. This demonstrates the theme of Good Versus Evil. In particular, Medraut is depicted as having dark features, while Artos has light features, and blonde hair.

This is particularly true the night of the cavalry demonstrations. Medraut knows that Artos is within hearing distance when he and his men start talking loudly and lewdly about the gossip surrounding Bedwyr and Guen. Artos tries to rise above the idle gossip, but it has already begun to affect him. The next day Bedwyr leaves so Artos puts it out of his mind.

When Artos eventually finds Guen and Bedwyr together, he has not just lost his wife (estranged as she may be at that point), but also his best friend. It is more likely that he feels the pain of betrayal more toward Bedwyr than toward Guen, but in the end, he



loses them both. Banishing them, he turns himself toward maintaining Ambrosius's vision of a united Britain.

Artos's sickness is physical, but it is evident that he is suffering emotionally, too. He misses Bedwyr and Guen, and with the exception of Cei, there are no faces around court that he knows or trusts. Leaning on Cei when Cerdic attacks makes things worse on Artos. Later, when he learns of Medraut's treachery, he manages to rally his strength enough to once again command his troops. This demonstrates the theme of Sacrifice, because in the end, he knows that this fight will be his last.

Most notable is that Bedwyr returns, even though he knows that he has wronged his friend, he also knows that Artos needs him and he can't sit idly by. This demonstrates the theme of Friendship and Devotion. They are reconciled. Artos tells him that he intends to kill Medraut.

Without saying it, they both know that they are at the end. Artos kills Medraut and it is with some satisfaction that he sees the look of astonishment on Medraut's face as he dies. Medraut had never figured out his mother's curse...which was that both should be the death of the other. Artos has the courage to face this, while Medraut does not. The theme of Good versus Evil comes full circle in their epic battle, and the fact that Artos lingers on a little while longer after the battle suggests that Good will eventually triumph.

Artos does not want anyone to speak about his impending death, but rather to keep the rumor going that he is recovering on the island, and that one day soon he will return to lead them again. He begs them to continue to keep the rumor going for as long as they can, as he believes that this will allow Britain to remain unified. In the end, his last thought is for Britain and the people living there.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Discuss the final battle between Medraut and Artos, and how are their battle styles different?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why doesn't Artos want anyone to spread the word about his death?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why did Artos decide that he must kill Medraut?



## Vocabulary

squalls, blustering, formidable, saffron, whinnied, sorrel, marigold, heartening, flanked, brightening, waterways, mizzle, pricked, blurred





# Characters

## Artos

Based on the Arthurian legend, Artos IS Arthur. The author has based the story upon known facts and archaeological evidence found in Europe to support the story of the legend of Arthur and the Knights of the round table.

Artos is shown to be very much aware of his heritage, both from his Roman influenced father, and his mother, who was of the dark people. Through his mother's blood he gains an understanding and compassion for the land and the people that work the land. This makes him a fair leader and men flock to him, not because they particularly believe in his cause, but because they like him.

Artos gains the wisdom and logical nature of his Roman father, Utha, and this makes him, under Ambrosius's tutelage, a formidable force against the Saxons and the Celts (blue painted men). However, no one prepared him for matters of the heart, or women, and so, without knowing it, he fathers a child with his half-sister. The child eventually returns to exact revenge upon him.

He also falls for the daughter of a chieftain, Guenhumara (Guinevere), and is so taken with her beauty that nearly all thought goes from his mind. This is a trait that continues throughout the novel, despite his desire that it should not be so.

Lastly, Artos, called Artos the Bear, by the native peoples, is shown to be a man who appreciates the careful and skillful breeding program of both dogs and horses, understanding that the great war horses are a crucial key to winning his battles against the Saxons.

## Bedwyr

Bedwyr starts out as a minor character but quickly emerges as a major secondary character. He meets Artos at the annual horse sale. Bedwyr is one of the only men in the area that can ride all of the horses, regardless of their temperament.

At first Artos believes that Bedwyr is a plant by the horse trader who is trying to get him to take the large and ferocious black warhorse off of his hands. However, after he watches Bedwyr ride the horse, he knows that he must have the horse, if only to use the horse as a stud to improve his own stock.

Later, he runs into Bedwyr who tells him that he is also a musician, and that he has never worked for the horse trader. Artos makes a deal with Bedwyr; if Bedwyr can remain alive for as long as it takes to transport the wild black stallion across the ocean, then Bedwyr may join his Companions. Not only does Bedwyr do this, but he becomes an



invaluable friend and confidant to Artos. In the Arthurian legend, he would represent the figure of Lancelot.

## Ambrosius

Ambrosius is a mentor and father figure to Artos. At the beginning of the novel it is made clear that he is Artos's uncle, even though Artos, himself, was considered a bastard son to Ambrosius's brother, Utha.

Ambrosius is shown to be a fair and intelligent man, who recognizes a greatness in Artos that even, at the time, Artos does not see. This is why he bestows on Artos the gem and seal of the royal house of Britain. Ambrosius supports Artos's campaigns both financially and emotionally.

## Flavian

Flavian is the son of old Aquila, the horse breeder from Artos's home village. He agrees to go in Aquila's place to look after the horses and continue to improve the stock. He is killed in an ambush by Huil Son of Caw.

## Ygerna

One of the first encampments shortly after Artos begins his campaigns against the Sea Wolves, is near where Ygerna lives in the mountains. She is considered a medicine woman among her people. Artos finds himself lost on the heather one night and takes refuge in her home along with his friend, Cei. They are given a strong drink that makes Cei pass out, but only arouses Artos. He has sex with Ygerna who reveals to him, while he is still in a drugged state, that she is his half-sister.

She vehemently tells him that the child they have created will grow to hate him and that when he is of age, their child will exact revenge for Utha choosing to raise one child over another. Artos tries to argue with her, but he cannot. In the morning he finds himself alone and cold among the heather on the mountain. Cei finds him a little later and they make their way back to camp.

## Utha

Utha is Artos's true father, even though Artos was a child born out of wedlock. Utha fathered many children, the reader learns, but it was only Artos that he officially claimed and brought into the castle to live with him. This caused resentment among many of the other illegitimate children, namely Ygerna, Artos's half-sister.



## Cei

Cei is a very large and brash warrior that is one of the first to join Artos in his campaigns. It is implied that he and Artos have known one another longer than many of the other men. Artos trusts him implicitly, though Artos also knows that Cei is given to drinking and whoring too much.

However, in a battle Cei is fearless and men follow him. Artos relies upon him when he needs to discuss battle strategies. Cei is a simple man, however, and does not understand why Artos would want to take the time to gently break a horse or a hound, or why it would be a good idea to honor the death and burial rites of a fallen foe.

## Kinmarcus

Kinmarcus is the chieftain of Deva, one of the larger settlements. At first Kinmarcus does not want to join or support Artos, but over a winter they bond and begin to realize that their goals are more aligned. He continues to send provisions and supplies to Artos during all of his campaigns in the area.

## Guenhumara

Guenhumara is the chieftain's daughter that Artos fancies. She is stunning and has long wheat colored hair. She cares for Artos after he takes a spear wound and finds the Hibernian Dog. She is also the only one that can touch the dog. Her father, Maglaunus, negotiates for her hand in marriage to secure the bond between himself and Artos, a union that benefits everyone in the end.

## Maglaunus

A war chieftain of a sizable group, his alliance was considerable to Artos. His daughter is Guenhumara, whom Artos marries in order to cement their bond and pledge to aid one another.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Arm Band, King of Britain

This armband was given to Ygern's mother by Utha after he bedded her. Ambrosius owns the mate to this arm band.

## Coral Necklace

The Coral Necklace keeps away the evil eye and all children in the area wear them.

## Amethyst Stone

This is the precious gem that is in the hilt of Artos's sword.

## Circle of Companions

This is what Artos calls his handpicked warriors. They are comparable to Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.

## Sea Wolves

This is a name for the Saxons and Celts. They are called the Sea Wolves because they come from the sea and they work in packs, like wolves, to ravage and plunder.

## A Nine Horse Burial

When a girl from the Dark People is found after a battle, Artos buries her beneath 9 horses in an abandoned grainery to keep her spirit from wandering after death. Artos later speaks to the leader of the Dark People and is given some herbs to burn on the dead girl's grave. The next year a small white flower grows from the seeds of the herbs.

## Gentle Breaking

In contrast to most of the men that he knows, Artos does not agree with breaking the spirit of the animals that he uses and works with, even the dogs. This is evident in the way he treats the Hibernian Hound after the battle with Huil. This is also representative of the way that he treats all living beings, animal or human, which also indicates the type of man that he is.



## The Nine Sisters

This is a grouping of stone monoliths, much like Stonehenge. This is where Guen first meets with Artos privately to discuss their potential marriage.

## Ivy Leaf

When Artos returns from the hills, he comes to Ambrosius' palace. He hands him an ivy leaf to signify that he's given the northern territory to Ambrosius. But, when Ambrosius takes the leaf, it crumbles in his hands. This represents the fact that though Ambrosius controls the north, he will not be able to hold it; that it will be Artos who will secede him and rule in a way Ambrosius could not.

## The Crown of the North

These are the Northern Lights that Artos, Aquila, and Ambrosius see just shortly after Ambrosius has stated that he would like Artos to be his unnamed successor. It is a good omen, they all declare. Ambrosius also states that in the future, they will call it Ambrosius' dragon as it foretold his death.

## Empty Wine Cup

After Ambrosius has told Artos that he feels his time to die is coming, Artos notices that Ambrosius has stood in the doorway of the room for a long time, his wine cup empty. This represents that the cup of life, so to speak, for the king, is also empty and foretells Ambrosius' death.

## Hawthorne Bush

When someone was born under the 'hawthorne bush' it indicates that they were created out of wedlock. Artos was conceived under a hawthorne bush when his father went wenching with the local maid.

## Moon Daisy

This is the badge that both Bedwyr and Artos wear into the great battle with the Saxons. It bridges the gap between Christian and Pagan as it is a sacred flower to both. This is also who and what Artos, himself, acted as. He was a commoner, but was also accepted by the nobility. He had a pagan mother, and a Christian father.



## Humblebee

After Artos catches Guen and Bedwyr together, he banishes them. The next day he is sitting in the audience, listening to the commoner's grievances, and acting as a judge, when a humblebee flies into the room. It keeps banging its head against the wall trying to find a way out. Artos thinks to himself that he feels like the bee, with no escape from the pain of his double loss.

## Chestnuts for Ambrosius

Artos races out to get some chestnuts for Ambrosius when they are hunting in Spain. Artos knows that this will be Ambrosius' last hunt, and that possibly Ambrosius will die while on the hunt. He wants his last experience to be eventful and happy. However, the chestnuts also represent the small seed of something larger. Ambrosius hands the first roasted chestnut to Artos, thereby suggesting that he is not only planting the idea in Artos's mind that he be the next High King, but that Artos accept this mantle from him.



# Settings

## Arfon

This is a rural settlement in the mountains and where Artos was from originally. This is where he meets and is drugged by Ygerna.

## Venta

This is a city just at the foot of the Afron mountains. This is where Artos first meets with Ambrosius after he's been with Ygerna.

## Lindum

This is the ancient name for London. It is one of the larger settlements that Artos comes to and liberates from the Sea Wolves. As a result, they honor him and send him provisions throughout the winter.

## Deva

This is where Artos has his breeding farms for his war horses. He has his old friend, Aquila, a Roman horseman, who is in charge of the program. His son, Flavian, agrees to come with Artos on his campaigns.

## Island of the Apples

This is the equivalent of Avalon in the later Authurian legends. This is the island that Bedwyr takes Artos to after he is critically wounded by Medraut. He instructs Bedwyr not to tell anyone where he is buried, and to shroud his life and death in mystery.



# Themes and Motifs

## Friendship and Devotion

Of all the themes in the novel, the theme of Friendship and Devotion is perhaps the strongest of them all. It is Artos's devotion to Ambrosius's vision for a united Britain, that governs and colors most of the decisions that Artos makes, both as the captain of the guard, and as the High King. He believes what Ambrosius does in regards to Britain, in large part, to the fact that Ambrosius treated him kindly when he had every reason not to after Utha's death.

The theme of devotion is not limited to people, either. Artos's first dog, named Cabal (as all dogs after him are also called) was killed defending Artos in battle. Later, when Artos takes another dog as a companion, he finds the dog because of its devotion to its dead master. Artos acknowledges this in the dog, and instead of forcing the dog to do something he doesn't want to do, offers understanding to the dog. It is from this willingness to understand others, and to empathize with them, that drew people to Artos's side.

Many of the men that Artos called his 'companions', which correlate to the knights of the round table in later lore, were hand picked by Artos, not because of their prowess, but because of their character and nature. He surrounded himself with people who were 'good' people, at heart; who were much like him in their outlook on life. This, in turn, made those who were in his inner circle fiercely loyal to him. In stark contrast, is Medraut, who is so unlike Artos that this type of devotion is never able to be established.

In the end, it is this ability to draw men to him, to win their hearts and minds, that allows Ambrosius to in good faith delegate Artos to reign after him. He knows that Artos will continue his work, and that he will be a well-loved ruler. This is most notably true when Bedwyr comes back at the end to support Artos in one last battle, and Artos forgives him. This devotion and friendship is stronger than their desire to hate one another.

## Courage

Courage is shown numerous times throughout the novel, through both the men, and the animals that serve them. Notably, is Artos's courage. Though he was a bastard child, early on the reader learns that after his mother's death, he took himself to the palace and managed to get an audience with his father, Utha.

Never daring that he would be anything more than a bastard child, Artos tries to make himself useful, so that Utha might not judge his gratefulness. In doing so, he takes on the job of learning to defend Utha's brother's kingdom.





Utha dies, but Ambrosius, perhaps seeing Artos's worth more than Utha did, begins to give Artos more responsibilities. In situations where most men would have lost their lives, Artos's courage to continue to fight, and to inspire those around him to do the same, helps the king to achieve his dream of unity.

Artos's courage is shown when he trusts the dark people, and because of this courage, wins the hearts and minds of the Pictish people, who assist him for the rest of his life, in particularly providing intel on the movement of the Sea Wolves.

When Artos could have, and according to his advisers, should have killed various refugees and prisoners of war, he spares them. Additionally, Artos recognizes true courage when he sees it, such as when he finds the Hibernian hound that refuses to leave his master, and later this same dog takes a spear that was meant for Artos.

## Sacrifice

Artos often makes sacrifices for the greater good. He more often than not demeans his own value and worth to Ambrosius, not wanting the king to ever consider that Artos would try and take the throne, or make a claim for it at all. Ambrosius notes his sincerity and rewards it.

Artos, for many years, sacrifices his own happiness by giving up the idea of having a wife or children. He believes that he will be of more benefit to the kingdom if he focuses solely on its protection.

Later, this sentiment is what makes him stay to finish a battle when he receives word that his daughter, Hylin, is gravely ill. By the time he arrives, she has died. And with her death, his relationship with his wife.

Instead of immediately killing Bewyr and Guen for their betrayal, he simply exiles them, sacrificing both his wife, and his best friend to their own fates. He gives up both of their relationships with him in order to focus on protecting and preserving the nation.

Additionally, King Ambrosius sacrifices himself when he knows he is about to die because he knows that if he lingers he will be forced to name an heir. Since he wants to name Artos, and can't, if he were to die suddenly without naming someone, most likely the choice would be Artos. Therefore, he stages his own death, in his own way, on his own terms, on a hunting trip in Spain. He sacrifices himself to make Artos king.

Not all sacrifices are good, however. Ygerna sacrifices her own happiness and that of her child, Medraut, in order to exact revenge for Utha's indiscretions, and her jealousy of Artos. She gives up any chance at happiness for both her and her child by raising him with hate and coldness, in effect making him sociopathic.



## Light versus Dark, Good versus Evil

There are many instances where there are blatant overtures to the theme of Good versus Evil. Most notably there are the British versus the Saxons. The British are shown to be the more morally forthright and noble, while the Saxons are depicted as lawless despoilers, without honor.

Artos, himself, is depicted as having fair skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, and rides a white horse. Medraut is shown to have dark coloring, ride a dark horse, and have Artos's blue eyes (only darker). Therefore, the reader is being offered the visual clue as to the fact that they will eventually face one another in a grand showdown of good versus evil. Artos builds up and encourages those around him, while Medraut is labeled by those around him, the destroyer. Medraut kills for the joy of killing.

Early on Artos learns that the black stallion that he bought, through Bedwyr's urging, has produced the white stallion. This is the author's way of suggesting that something good and pure can come from something dark and dangerous. Likewise, Artos names this horse, Signus, after a white swan, indicating that he understands that he has risen from his humble beginnings, just like the horse has.

Ygerna and Artos are polar opposites and are also Light versus Dark. Though Artos is unaware of who Ygerna is, she knows right away who he is, and sets about to entrap him for the sole purpose of a long tended and well laid plan for revenge and destruction. In the end, she does not win.

When Artos catches Bedwyr with Guen, the play of light versus dark is also employed. The dark deed has been exposed, but Artos reacts leniently by allowing them to simply leave his presence. Most of the surroundings that accompany Artos are described in brighter colors, such as saffron, pale blue, and purples. Whereas, the darker colors seem to surround Bedwyr and Guen.

## Religion

Religion plays a subtle role throughout the novel. During the time period in which this novel is set, the Catholic Church does not have a complete hold on the souls of the people. There are still many people who are considered Pagans, and who continue to follow the religions of their ancestors. This clash of ideologies sets up a considerable amount of tension for Artos, who is placed squarely in the middle of it all.

Artos makes an enemy of the Bishop of Londinium when he demands that his troops be feed and given supplies from the church in return for protecting them from the Sea Wolves one winter. His men are starving, the horses suffering, and the Bishop was about to turn them away summarily, despite their help. Artos calls him out, embarrasses him, and demands that they give him the supplies that they need. Because of this incident, the Catholic Church only limitedly supports Artos throughout the rest of the novel.



Artos respects all of the cultures and religions that he finds himself encountering. His mother, who was one of the dark people, had taught him her people's ways, and it is this religion that he draws upon when he buries the girl that was so savagely treated at the hands of the Saxons.

Artos also considers bad omens, as part of his mother's religion, and often acts accordingly. He and Guen are not married in a church, but in a Pagan ceremony out of doors. When they return to Venta, the 'official' marriage is sanctified by the church.

## Superstition

Since many of the people living during this day and age did not have the benefit of science or advanced technology, much of the happenings around them were relegated to superstition. Spirits, evil demons, fairies, magic, and gods/godesses were all very real.

When Artos is drugged by Ygernna, he attributes the entire encounter to sorcery and magic. That he could have turned her away, fought her off, just walked away, doesn't occur to him. In his mind, she bewitched him, and the resulting child was born of an 'evil' deed.

When the royal gem drops from his sword into the baby Constantine's cradle, he sees this as an omen about the child. What that could be he can't fathom, but at the time, he does not like it. Later, he realizes that this must have been the gods telling him that Constantine would be his heir.

Before riding into battle, Artos and his inner circle would find an indigenous flower to the area where they were fighting, and place it on their armor as a tribute to the Earth, harnessing and asking for her strength in battle. From seeing the Northern Lights, to the appearance of certain types of flowers, superstition is a large part of Artos's decision making process.

# Styles

## Point of View

The point of view is first person, singular, as seen through the eyes of Artos, the Bear. The author does give a very omniscient view of the surroundings and incidents, however, so that the reader comes into the scene with as much knowledge as Artos does.

Artos is often an unreliable narrator, but this is compensated for by the omniscient point of view of the author. This offers a very well rounded understanding of Artos's circumstances and how the series of events shaped and motivated Artos.

## Language and Meaning

The language used is old English, with many types of old Gaelic, Germanic, and Latin/Roman words, as would have been utilized during this period of history. Many of the words, such as 'bothy' for tent, have long gone out of use in the common contemporary language, but the author's use of them, and other such words, are easily discerned using context clues. It does not detract from the read, and actually makes it feel more authentic.

## Structure

The book is comprised of 37 chapters, rich in detail, historical accounts, and descriptions of battles, battlements, architecture, and is the author's interpretation of the King Arthur legend. It is very linear in progression, with certain flashbacks to Artos's younger years on occasion. No other character experiences flashbacks, or has much of their background given, only alluded to (especially in the case of Bedwyr).



## Quotes

However unknowingly, I had sinned the Ancient Sin, the Great Sin from which there is no escaping. I had sown a seed, and I knew that the tree which sprang from it would bear the death apple.”

-- Artos (chapter 3)

**Importance:** Artos thinks this after he’s spent the night with Ygerna. He realizes that she is probably right about having a child by him, and equally as right about some evil being brought into the world.

Your true killer slays for pleasure like a wildcat,” Bedwyr said. “This one’s heart is angry, that is a different thing. He is what he is because he was mishandled in his colt days.

-- Bedwyr (chapter 5)

**Importance:** Bedwyr says this about the black stallion that Artos fancies, but will not buy. In many ways, Artos feels that the boy is also speaking about himself.

I have always been a follower of the Christos, because it has seemed to me that the Christian faith is the strongest and best fitted to carry the light forward into the darkness that lies ahead. But I have prayed to too many different gods in my time, to set any very great store by the names that men cry out to for aid, or the form of prayers they use.

-- Artos (chapter 9)

**Importance:** Artos says this about the services that the monks hold during the winter at Arfon. He doesn’t dare say it out loud to the kindly priest that holds the weekly services, but he knows that in battle not all of his men call out to Christ.

To go into battle drunk is a glory worth experiencing, but it does not make for clear and detailed memory.

-- Artos (chapter 15)

**Importance:** The mid-summer fires have taken place and Artos and his men are almost caught unawares by the Scots. He has been drinking and talks about going into battle under the influence.

It is cold outside my mother. I know now why the newly born draw their first breath in weeping.

-- Medraut (chapter 24)

**Importance:** He says this when he first meets Artos and they discuss Medraut’s unhappy childhood living with Ygerna.

I liked to watch them so, for it seemed to me good that the two people I loved best in the world should be friends, that we should be a trinity; the clover leaf or the yellow iris, not merely three in row, with myself in the center.



-- Artos (chapter 25)

**Importance:** He is talking about Guen, Bedwyr, and himself as they overwintered together in Ambrosius' palace.

I suppose there must have been something in his ending, of the man who goes out to meet a quick death rather than wait for the slow and hideous one that he knows is coming to him.

-- Artos (chapter 27)

**Importance:** Artos thinks this to himself just after Ambrosius has purposely placed himself in harm's way on the hunt.

Yet when there is no dream left worth dying for, that is when the people die," Bedwyr murmured, "and there is the advantage to it, that the dream can live on, even when hope dies. Yet hope has its value too. . . .

-- Bedwyr (chapter 32)

**Importance:** Bedwyr says this just after Artos has become the King of Britain. Artos is recalling something that Ambrosius had told him many years before about fighting the Saxons in the hope of a dream...the dream of an united Britannia.

But they had turned to each other, the two people I loved best in the world, and doing so, each had taken the other from me, and I was left outcast and alone, and betrayed.

-- Artos (chapter 33)

**Importance:** This is his thought after he finds Bedwyr with his wife, Guen.

The first humblebee of the year had strayed in from outside and was bruising its head against one of the windows that still had glass in it, in futile attempt at escape, and the sound teased and tangled at the edges of my attention.

-- Artos (chapter 34)

**Importance:** The next day after finding his best friend with his wife (and exiling them both) Artos has to offer audience to the commoners. When Artos observes the Humblebee he identifies with it.

God help me, I was still fool enough to cling to that old hopeless dream of a Britain strongly enough bonded to stand with shields still linked, when I was no longer there."

-- Artos (chapter 35)

**Importance:** At the end of his lifetime, he reflects upon Ambrisus's desire for a united Britain, and he hopes that he will leave a legacy of strength so that it can continue.

That was the moment when he understood that the doom between us demanded for its fulfillment, not that he should kill me or I him, but that each should be the death of the other."



-- Artos (chapter 37)

**Importance:** Artos realizes this as he delivers the killing blow to Medraut. This is significant because Artos understood the sacrifice that was being called for, and Medraut, who was always wrapped up inside his own hatred could not. Thus, when death came for him, Medraut was surprised, and Artos was not.