

The Wicked Day Study Guide

The Wicked Day by Mary Stewart

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| The Wicked Day Study Guide..... | 1 |
| Contents..... | 2 |
| Plot Summary..... | 3 |
| Prologue, Book I, Chapters 1-4..... | 5 |
| Book I, Chapters 5-7..... | 8 |
| Book I, Chapters 8-9..... | 10 |
| Book I, Chapters 10-12..... | 12 |
| Book I, Chapters 13-14..... | 14 |
| Book I, Chapter 15..... | 16 |
| Book II, Chapters 1-3..... | 17 |
| Book II, Chapters 4-6..... | 19 |
| Book II, Chapters 7-9..... | 21 |
| Book II, Chapters 10-12..... | 23 |
| Book III, Chapters 1-2..... | 25 |
| Book III, Chapters 3-4..... | 26 |
| Book III, Chapters 5-6..... | 27 |
| Book III, Chapters 7-8..... | 28 |
| Book III, Chapters 9-10, Epilogue..... | 29 |
| Characters..... | 30 |
| Objects/Places..... | 35 |
| Themes..... | 38 |
| Style..... | 40 |
| Quotes..... | 42 |
| Topics for Discussion..... | 43 |



Plot Summary

The Wicked Day by Mary Stewart is a work of fiction inspired by the legend of King Arthur and his Round Table. This novel is about Mordred, the bastard son of King Arthur born as a result of an incestuous union between Arthur and his half-sister Morgause, a witch.

Mordred is born in a time of turmoil, when his mother is very powerful and is causing rifts in the kingdom, especially between her half brother Arthur and her new husband King Lot. Lot orders a massacre of all infants in hopes of eliminating a problem between Lot and Arthur, but one child is saved. The child is Mordred, and Morgause, his mother, whisks him off to a poor fishing family on the Orkney Island. Over the years, she provides sustenance to the family on a limited scale, and almost forgets about Mordred until he is eleven and is instrumental in saving one of her other sons, Gawain.

Mordred is brought to live with the other princes, who are sons of Lot and Morgause, and led to believe he is the bastard son of Lot. Morgause sends her current lover, Gabran, to destroy all traces of Mordred's foster family so he is forced to be dependent upon her for the future. Morgause does not count on Mordred's inner strength, and the boy continually resists her attempts to manipulate him. Mordred joins the princes Gawain, Agravain, Gaheris and Gareth, but always feels as if he does not truly belong in their company. Gawain becomes his closest friend in the group.

When Mordred and the princes have lived together a few years and have been training to become leaders of kingdoms, a ship arrives with a messenger, and the boys learn that they and Queen Morgause have been called to Camelot. Morgause has been instrumental in the illness and near death of Merlin, Arthur's trusted advisor, and it is time to face the consequences of her behavior. Morgause believes this is a ruse to bring Mordred nearer to Arthur, as he has somehow learned of the boy's existence.

Mordred is confused by the summons, thinking Arthur is calling him to Camelot to punish him for some reason. During the journey, Mordred overhears Morgan and Morgause talking privately, and learns that he might be in danger. Mordred almost escapes the travelling party, but Nimue senses his presence and orders the guards to be especially vigilant. As a result, Mordred does not escape, but arrives at Camelot and is presented to King Arthur immediately upon their arrival.

King Arthur learns that night of Merlin's possible recovery and it is several months before Arthur once again speaks to Mordred. This time it is when Mordred kills Gabran, revealing him to be the killer of his foster parents. As Gabran dies, he implicates Morgause as well. That night, Mordred learns he is not Lot's son, but Arthur's, and his mother is not some peasant woman, but Morgause. Mordred also this night learns of the prediction by Merlin that Mordred will be the downfall and bane of Arthur.

In the years that follow, Mordred learns more about becoming a leader, and is favored by his father. Mordred falls in love with Guinevere, but knows that as long as Bedwyr



and Arthur are still alive, she will never be able to love him. Mordred yearns for a throne of his own, but is willing to wait and see what the future brings. He and his father often talk about strategy, diplomacy, and their mutual respect for each other. Mordred is still bothered by the question of fate versus personal choice, and is greatly comforted by a conversation he has with Nimue, and then a trip to Merlin's home.

As the country faces difficulties from outside invasions and internal struggles, Mordred and Arthur keep the lines of communication open, and Mordred progresses towards ultimately replacing his father as High King of England. As Arthur turns over more and more responsibility, there is talk about an affair between Bedwyr and Guinevere, and one fateful night the Orkney princes lead a surprise visit to the Queen's bedchamber where it is known Bedwyr is with her. In the altercation, Gareth is killed, Gaheris is injured badly and Agravain is knocked out. Gawain is far away in Orkney, but Mordred was there, trying to defend the Queen from Gaheris' attack. Bedwyr misunderstands and when the attackers are cleared, he turns on Mordred and he is badly injured by Bedwyr.

Mordred believes himself to be hunted by Arthur, and when Gaheris uses him to escape the city and dumps Mordred at a monastery, Mordred uses the time to return to Orkney and lose himself as a fisherman. Years later he is discovered by Gawain, told the truth about the Queen defending him, and returns to the court of Camelot. Yet the turmoil continues, fueled by the Orkney princes, Mordred's doubts about fate stealing his future, Mordred's love of Guinevere, and more threats of invasions from surrounding countries.

Again Mordred is trusted as head of state while Arthur goes off with the army to fight a new threat. Separated and beset by rumors and a series of misunderstandings, the King and his son find themselves on the battlefield fighting each other. The prophecy of Merlin is fulfilled, and the two men cross swords, with Mordred losing his life.



Prologue, Book I, Chapters 1-4

Prologue, Book I, Chapters 1-4 Summary

In the Prologue, Brude, a simple and poor fisherman, is telling his wife Sula, about the rumor he has heard that Merlin the great magician is dead. This news shocks Sula more than most people of the distant land of Orkney, for she knows that Merlin is the enemy of her Queen Morgause, and therefore of the child sent to her by that queen. Brude and Sula are raising this child with the economic assistance and silent protection of the Queen. They learn not to ask questions, but learn also of the Queen's reputation as a witch and that her enemies are King Arthur and his Wizard Merlin. If Merlin is dead, they decide this is a good sign and perhaps they can allow Mordred to play with other children and have a normal life. Sula does not think that is true, and believes that the boy she is raising is not the bastard son of King Lot, as they have been told, but the son of the Queen Morgause and her half brother Arthur. Queen Morgause has also heard this day the news of Merlin's death, but she has heard these rumors before. She consults her magic and knows instinctively that he is not dead at all, only gravely ill, hopefully as a result of her manipulations. King Lot is dead now, but she carries his last son. Morgause begins a spell of protection against Merlin and Arthur.

In Book I The Boy from the Sea, Chapter 1, Mordred is alone one summer day, watching the gulls fly along the cliff while taking a break from peat gathering for his family. As a youngster in tune with nature, he can tell when the normal sounds of the gulls is interrupted. Upon examining the surroundings, he sees a youth about his age trapped on the cliffs with an injured leg. Mordred saves the young man, who turns out to be Gawain, Morgause's oldest son of her marriage to King Lot. Gawain is very grateful, and as the two boys are recovering from the rescuing climb, the prince's men come to their aid. Gawain says he will send tokens of his appreciation to Mordred, who returns to his duties for his family.

In Chapter 2, it is the next day, and a messenger accompanies Gawain to arrive at the home of Brude and Sula, with a command from Queen Morgause for Mordred to come to the castle to be thanked personally. Sula is very afraid, and Mordred does not understand why. Sula advises him to keep his own counsel and never repeat anything he has heard at their home. Mordred is taken to the castle which is not luxurious by Camelot's standards, but certainly more breathtaking than anything the young man has ever seen in his life. He is overwhelmed, but maintains a dignified and almost royal bearing that amuses and startles the Queen's court. When Mordred kneels before Morgause, he is not aware that he is meeting his own true mother, and does not understand the pleasure he sees in her eyes. She is pleased to see how much he favors Arthur, and she begins plans to use her son to regain access to her hated half-brother and wreak the revenge she lives for. Morgause has her current lover, Gabran, show Mordred the fine fabric and silver trinkets she is sending to Brude and Sula in appreciation of Mordred's rescue of Gawain. She promises to send these gifts to them



before dusk, but now tells Mordred she requires a private word with him. Morgause and Mordred leave the court and go to the Queen's private residence.

In Chapter 3, Mordred follows Morgause from the palace to the house, and he notices everything, especially a low door that he realizes leads to an underground chamber, like many he has seen on the island. When they arrive at her chamber, Gabran moves to the side of the room and begins playing a harp, while Morgause asks Mordred questions. She tells him of the story of King Arthur, who, upon hearing a prophecy from Merlin that a bastard of an unknown king might be the reason for his downfall in his later years, had all the infants rounded up to be killed. There was only one survivor and it was Mordred. Morgause manipulates the story to make Mordred think he is King Lot's son of an unknown mother. As he struggles to accept this news about himself, Morgause tells him he must come live in the castle with his half-brothers, the Princes of Orkney. Before he leaves with Gabran, Morgause reminds Mordred that he is in danger from King Arthur and Merlin, and they are his enemies. Mordred knows now that he is the bane of Arthur, foretold in legends. He does not know the true prophecy or any details of it, as Morgause is content and pleased to toy with anyone's emotions for her own gain.

As Chapter 4 begins, Mordred returns home with the gifts from the queen, and suddenly realizes how pitiful his previous home is. He rushes in with the news he has been commanded to live with the queen and the princes, and of his true heritage. Mordred promises that Brude and Sula will always be his true family and he will be back, but begs her to understand why he must go, must realize his destiny. Sula is wracked with grief, but does not try to stop him from leaving. That night, in bed with Gabran, Morgause asks if Gabran has carried out her orders to murder Brude and Sula. He has done so, and as he falls into her seductive arms, Gabran realizes his future is dependent upon this witch who cares for no one but herself.

Prologue, Book I, Chapters 1-4 Analysis

These chapters introduce most of the major influences in Mordred's life: his loving foster parents and the womb of their simple home. His parents teach Mordred the basic exchanges of life. Gawain, a prince of the realm, is introduced as well dressed but incapable of traversing the cliffs that Mordred can scale in his sleep. Morgause sweeps into Mordred's life, bringing finery, luxury and death.

The author foreshadows the influence Merlin will have in the young boy's life via his dire prophecy, and the stark difference between the simple poverty of Brude and Sula compared to the opulence of Morgause's castle symbolizes the drastic change Mordred undergoes on an emotional level in this chapters.

Mordred in these chapters goes from a poor but honest existence to a palace full of intrigue, half brothers who resent him, and a mother who is a murderer, liar, adulteress and manipulator. By turning this boy's life upside down and erasing his past, the author

has created a series of questions in the reader's mind concerning how this boy will handle the challenges presented to him.



Book I, Chapters 5-7

Book I, Chapters 5-7 Summary

In Chapter 5, Mordred wakes in the room with the other princes: Gawain the eldest, Gareth the baby, and the twins, Agravain and Gaheris. They are all still asleep so he gets up, dons his new fine clothes, and heads back to his foster family's home so he can tell his foster father about his new experiences and reassure Sula that he will never abandon them. As he approaches the home, he smells smoke, and when he arrives he sees that the place is nothing but ashes, his foster parents surely dead. Two hours later, Gawain finds him there and takes him back to the castle. Gabran meets them there, and they send Mordred to clean up in preparation to tell the queen this horrible news. Back in the bedchambers, Mordred finally meets the other princes. The reaction of the boys, and later of Gawain, make Mordred realize he must be careful about what he says and who he trusts, especially where the queen is concerned. His future is uncertain, and without his foster family, he has no one.

In Chapter 6, Mordred faces Morgause that evening, and has somewhat regained his composure. He is still pale and horrified at the memory of finding his dead foster family. Her words of sympathy are short and clearly false. She then lies to Mordred, telling him that in the days before his rescue of Gawain, she saw something in her crystal that indicated something like this would happen. She tells him that his home is now here, but even though he is a king's bastard, he must still earn his place. She challenges him to forget his past and learn how to be a prince. Mordred begins his life as a prince, learning how to fight, ride, and find his way into the pecking order of the princes. One night, because of Gareth's ejection from the bed of the twins, Mordred finds himself with no place to sleep, as Gareth joins Gawain in his place. Mordred fights with the twins to sleep in peace there, and gains some of their respect, as well as their resentment. As the years go on, Mordred ponders his place as a leader, and wonders what lands he has inherited as a bastard of King Lot. He decides to go to Arthur and find out what he plans for Mordred.

In Chapter 7, Mordred's intentions to take the next ship to the High Kingdom are delayed, and he realizes he needs to use this time wisely to become trained and strong. Three years after his decision, a ship arrives in the harbor with the news, once again, that Merlin is dead. The ship has borne a messenger with a letter for Morgause from her sister Morgan, a witch whose powers far exceed those of Morgause. The sisters are not close, except when they are scheming to manipulate Arthur and Merlin. The letter bears news that King Arthur's wife is yet to bring an heir, so Morgause knows that Mordred is indeed her greatest asset, although Mordred still does not know that Arthur is his father. Morgause employs a goldsmith and sets him to making a lot of jewelry, which she plans to take with her to see King Arthur. Of her plans to go to the High Kingdom, she shares with no one. One day, another ship bearing news arrives in the harbor.



Book I, Chapters 5-7 Analysis

Mordred is trying to find a place for himself in this new life with his half brothers and the woman who says she is his protector. Events and statements do not make sense to him, and he feels no real connection with his half-brothers. He wonders, as King Lot's bastard, what his future will bring and what lands he will eventually rule. The years are filled with training for all of the princes, and an uneasy peace settles between the five boys. Suddenly, Mordred's life is again turned upside down when King Arthur sends for Morgause and the princes to come to Camelot.



Book I, Chapters 8-9

Book I, Chapters 8-9 Summary

In Chapter 8, the princes see that the ship in the harbor is a royal ship, bearing the standard of the High King, and they set about speculating as to the purpose of the visit. They conclude that King Arthur has sent for them to claim their inheritances and become Knights of the Round Table. The twins are eager to begin fighting. The news is that Merlin is truly dead and there has been an elaborate funeral. His replacement is Nimue, and she is reputed to have all his powers, all his memories, and the king's devotion. When the princes reach the castle, the queen is behind closed doors with the messenger for many hours. At last, the messenger leaves and the queen sends for her five sons. Morgause has set the stage for a dramatic revelation, and it is clear she is unhappy with the news from the messenger. As the princes wait for her to speak, she stares at Mordred for a long time before beginning. Finally, she tells the princes they are all to go to Camelot, at the request of King Arthur. They are confused by her anger, then she reveals that she wanted to leave Gawain at Orkney as regent, but she cannot because all five are requested. Then they are confused that Mordred, the bastard son of King Arthur's enemy, is also required to go. As the plans are laid out to depart on the Queen's ship, the Orc, Queen Morgause sends all of the princes from her room, and only Mordred stays.

In Chapter 9, Morgause is deeply troubled as she wonders what Arthur knows about Mordred. She stands there in her room with Mordred, wondering if she should tell him who his biological parents are. She wonders at how Arthur would have found out about this son of his, and questions Mordred about who he speaks with and what about. Morgause reminds Mordred that she is a witch and he would do well to be afraid of her. She asks him if he wonders about his mother, and then becomes concerned that he might have inherited some of her magical powers. She takes him to her conjuring room and orders him to stare into the water of the pool where she receives her visions. He has no dreams, no visions. Before they return to the palace, Morgause kisses Mordred, her son, passionately on the mouth. Although he does not know she is his mother, Mordred nevertheless recoils and feels as if evil has brushed him. She feels his resistance and sends him to bed with the other "children" while she goes to Gabran. Mordred, troubled and confused, flees her presence.

Book I, Chapters 8-9 Analysis

Morgause's true evil nature is revealed as she tries to seduce her own son. Mordred instinctively knows her intentions are evil, even when she is only asking him if he sees anything in the water of her enchantment pool. The Orkney castle is in turmoil, with Morgause wondering about Arthur's summons, rumors of Merlin's death, and resentment among the princes against Mordred for Morgause's favoritism towards him.

These chapters are heavy with impending change, and even the youngest of the Orkney princes is aware of the tension and underlying turmoil in the castle. Morgause is unsure of her powers and of what Arthur knows. Her carefully laid revenge plans are in danger of being upset.



Book I, Chapters 10-12

Book I, Chapters 10-12 Summary

In Chapter 10, preparations are being made for the trip, and it is clear Morgause intends to travel in splendid luxury and to bring sumptuous gifts to her half-brother. She has gathered together gold jewelry, hounds and even a wildcat captured and caged, as presents for the King and for her sister Morgan. The first landing is at Rheged, where King Urbgen and Morgause's sister Morgan rule. As the party makes its way to the castle, Mordred is astounded by the countryside, which is so different from the island where he grew up. Once arriving at the castle, the princes hear of all the court gossip. Queen Morgan has taken a young lover, one of Arthur's Knights (called Companions) and persuaded him to steal Arthur's famous sword and replace it with an inferior one. Queen Morgan is not loved by her king or by Arthur, but her witch powers keep them from doing her much harm. Queen Morgan's lover Accollon was killed by Arthur, and Nimue is on her way to retrieve the sword. As a result, the castle at Rheged is in turmoil.

As Chapter 11 begins, Mordred is wandering about the vast castle and its gardens. As the light is fading, he is crossing back to the path when he overhears Queen Morgause and Queen Morgan talking in a room with the window open. Mordred decides to eavesdrop. The two sisters are discussing the past and arguing about it. Morgause refers to Arthur's slaughter of the infants, and Morgan laughs, saying that it was not Arthur who caused it. Morgause changes the subject, saying she is on her way to take her rightful place in the High Kingdom. Morgan interjects that it the bastard that Arthur wants, not her. Mordred knows Morgan is referring to him, and feels he is traveling towards certain death. He decides to escape the guards and flee into the countryside. As he tries to sneak away, Merlin's successor Nimue senses his presence and alerts the guards to lock the gates. Instead of escaping himself, Mordred is hiding near the captured wildcat and releases the feral creature.

In Chapter 12, it is the next day, and the voyage to the High Kingdom begins again, and the next stop is on the coast of Wales. They rest there for four days, and Mordred sees that their guards have tightened security to make it impossible for him to escape. The party is then instructed to reside at the castle of King Melwas until King Arthur sends for them. Queen Morgause decides to present herself to King Arthur immediately, and she and the princes go to Camelot.

Book I, Chapters 10-12 Analysis

Mordred's character is being challenged once again as his life is in turmoil and his fate uncertain. His insecurity about his place in the world is displayed when he overhears a conversation and immediately believes it is him who is at fault, and decides the only recourse is to flee. The scene where Mordred frees a wildcat is symbolic of his spirit, which will never be free to return to the wilds.

The author uses the conversations between the witch sisters to bring the reader up to date on the Arthurian story to this point, and to partially explain why Arthur does not trust these two women. The level of animosity the sisters have against their brothers is shown, but never fully explained. Mordred's walk through the gardens of Morgan's castle is symbolic of a young man surrounded by beauty but unable to appreciate it because of the presence of evil everywhere in his life.



Book I, Chapters 13-14

Book I, Chapters 13-14 Summary

In Chapter 13, when Morgause and the princes arrive at the gates of Camelot, they are at first turned politely away, but the queen makes demands that cause the guards to send a message to King Arthur. Mordred is surprised to see the High King come unaccompanied to the gate to meet them. He is even more surprised when Queen Morgause takes Mordred with her to see the king. Mordred listens to the queen talk and thinks she is telling only lies. Before anything can be done, a courier arrives and the king rides off with some of his Companions to handle a situation in the countryside. The queen is taken into the castle and the princes are left outside. Presently, a man comes along to take them to their quarters, and tells them that the situation requiring King Arthur was a sighting of Merlin.

In Chapter 14, the princes are put under the guidance and tutelage of Cei, King Arthur's foster brother. Word arrives that Merlin is indeed still alive, and King Arthur goes to him and brings Merlin to Caerleon for Christmas. The court joins him there, including the boys. Queen Morgause is sent to a convent in another part of the country. When the twins demand to know what their mother is being punished for, they are told it involves her attempted murder of Merlin years ago. The princes are indignant, but care mostly about themselves and are somewhat relieved to be away from their mother's rule. Mordred continues to see himself as different from his brothers, and is aware that the twins have become especially violent and impulsive as they are growing up. Mordred spends his time contemplating his future, but suddenly it is thrust upon him.

On Christmas Eve, the princes and the rest of the queen's court are in the castle, and has been snowing all day. Gabran has been removed from his lover's side and is now with the princes. Tonight he is playing a game of chance with a local man, and the princes are watching. Gabran had been drinking and finally ran out of money. He shook his purse for emphasis and a charm fell out on the table. Mordred recognizes it as the charm he carved for Sula, his foster mother, and realizes the only way Gabran could have obtained it was from her dead body. Mordred kills Gabran in a brief sword battle, but as he lies dying, Gabran tells Mordred the queen had sent poison to Sula and Brude. Mordred is taken directly to the High King.

Book I, Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Morgause's ploy to present Arthur with his son Mordred is ineffective when she finally sees her half-brother in person. Mordred is confused at her behavior, and when the princes are separated from their mother, their relief is evident. The kindness and fairness of Arthur is shown in these chapters, as he opens his castle to the offspring of one of his most evil enemies.



Mordred's character development and maturity is fast forwarded in these chapters, as he confronts the murderer of his foster family and takes his first life. Immediately after that he learns the unhappy truth about his biological parents and of the curse that he has carried since birth.

The theme of Arthur waging peace not war is evident in this section on a personal level. Faced with the embodiment of a long known curse, Mordred, Arthur welcomes the boy into his home. Arthur accepts the sons of Morgause and provides a place for them in his castle and as knights of the realm, even though he must realize Morgause has poisoned their minds against him.



Book I, Chapter 15

Book I, Chapter 15 Summary

In Chapter 15, Arthur is looking at a litter of puppies when Mordred is brought in by his guards. After a brief explanation of what happened, the guards leave the two men alone. Mordred is sure now he will be put to death or imprisoned. Arthur asks him what happened and listens carefully as Mordred tells not only of the murder of Gabran, but of his foster family and the stories he grew up with, and how he ended up with the Orkney princes, as the bastard son of King Lot. In the discussion, Mordred expresses his belief he is the rightful heir to at least one of Lot's kingdoms and is told by Arthur that he is not, because he is not Lot's son. Arthur tells Mordred that he is the son of Arthur, not Lot. It takes a moment for this truth to sink in, and then he is told that Morgause is his mother. Mordred is shocked and feels betrayed, and it makes the kiss Morgause gave him even more confusing. Arthur says he has been the subject of Morgause's manipulations and lies as well. Arthur is clearly proud of the man his son is becoming, and sees much of his own father in him. He is pleased by the way Mordred is dealing with this new information and the questions he is asking. Arthur promises to do right by his son, Mordred, and promises him the royal status of nephew. Out of respect for Queen Guinevere, he cannot openly accept Mordred as his son. The two men agree that this is a new beginning, and they will see what the future brings.

Book I, Chapter 15 Analysis

Mordred's world view and his future has changed, but again it is not a full acceptance or a clear future. He and his father have agreed to live with the curse, try to overcome it somehow, and face whatever comes. This is much easier on Arthur, who is the High King and has fulfilled most of his destiny as a leader with an established reputation. As Mordred goes forward, his official status is vague, and his ability to inherit lands is even more so.



Book II, Chapters 1-3

Book II, Chapters 1-3 Summary

Book II, *The Witch's Sons*, Chapter 1, begins with Gawain now knowing that Mordred is not Lot's eldest son, so Mordred will not be in contention for any of Gawain's kingdoms. With this knowledge and apparently the court's knowledge of Mordred's status as the king's son, Gawain has taken a pragmatic approach to Mordred and the friendship is restored, albeit somewhat cautiously. The twins' attitude towards Mordred, with the lack of knowledge concerning his parentage, is that of respect for his killing of Gabran, whom they had come to resent as a rival for their mother's affections. In February the princes are told they will be allowed to see their mother before she is moved to another convent. The trip is taken in April, with some trepidation on the part of the Orkney princes, and much resentment on the part of Mordred, who now knows the truth she has kept from him. The boys have been away from her, on their own, but as soon as Morgause is sighted, they return to their boyish attitudes of gaining their mother's approval by showing off and bragging.

In Chapter 2, Morgause continues to weave her spells of manipulation, creating an illusion of her cruel imprisonment for the sake of the boys, to earn their loyalty back. The Orkney princes are hurt and angry when she sends for Mordred first. When he walks into the room where Morgause has been living he is surprised at its starkness, but he gets a glimpse into a room that reveals the luxurious items have been stored, and he realizes this is all part of the act. Her stories and attempts at pity are now lost on Mordred. He tells Morgause that he now knows she is his mother, Arthur is his father, and it was King Lot who was duped into ordering the massacre of the children so long ago. He tells her Gabran is dead, and that he told of her treachery in killing Brude and Sula before he took his last breath. Morgause is taken aback, but recovers enough to remind Mordred that she is a witch, and that Merlin's prophecy is that Mordred will be the doom of Arthur. He swears he will never harm Arthur. Mordred leaves her in anger and she is laughing at him as he walks out the door.

In Chapter 3, on the way back to Camelot, Gaheris complains to everyone about the pitiful condition his mother is in, but few are sympathetic. Crimes against Morgause and her crimes against Merlin are forgotten as the years pass and the Orkney princes become young men, and become Companions, or Knights of the Round Table. Morgause did not forget, though, and continued to plot and scheme, all the while retaining her legendary beauty through creams and spells. The Knight Lamorak, charged with serving as her warden, falls in love with her and wants her to marry him. A few years later, Arthur is garrisoned nearby and Morgause sends word for him to come see her as she is dying. Arthur sends Lamorak to tell her he will send Mordred the next day. Mordred distrusts the Queen and decides to go immediately to see her. As he approaches the convent, he finds Gaheris' horse tied up nearby. Mordred enters the house and finds the handmaidens drugged and Gaheris in the antechamber. The two



men hear a noise in the bedroom. Mordred knows the queen is with a lover, but Gaheris believes it to be an intruder and charges in.

Book II, Chapters 1-3 Analysis

In these chapters, the true characters of the Orkney princes is becoming clear. Gawain is the strongest, and has the best chance of being a good leader. Agravain and Gaheris are consumed with unhealthy love and jealousy about their mother, and have tendencies towards violence and impulsive selfish behavior. Gareth is the baby of the family, and never seems to stand on his own. Mordred spends this time wrestling with the prophecy and how it will affect him. Morgause pounces on this confusion to drive home her evil influence and create doubt in the boy's mind that will never fully depart.



Book II, Chapters 4-6

Book II, Chapters 4-6 Summary

In Chapter 4, Lamorak and Morgause are entwined in lovemaking when Gaheris bursts into the room. Gaheris is mad with shock and grief. Mordred tries to hold him back but cannot, and Gaheris breaks free and kills Morgause in an unbridled frenzy. Mordred bundles Lamorak off and then takes Gaheris back to his horse. Gaheris swears to kill Lamorak, and justifies his killing of his mother through babbling logic and nonsense.

In Chapter 5, Morgause is dead, Gaheris is banished and Lamorak is relieved of his command and sent away. Gawain swears to kill them both. Agravain missed his twin and Gareth retreated into silence. Mordred's cool handling of the situation has gained him stature and distanced him from the Orkney princes. He is in favor with the king and his queen as well. King Arthur calls a Council, and Gawain, Gareth and Agravain attend as full knights. Mordred appears and is shown the seat to the right of Arthur, a seat traditionally held by the king's favorite companion, Bedwyr. Bedwyr is a childhood friend of King Arthur and often serves as regent when Arthur is away from the throne. Evil gossip holds that Guinevere and Bedwyr are lovers. During the council, Mordred notices that Agravain is especially interested in the courier reports from Northumbria, and Mordred wonders about that. Other couriers carry word that there have been murders and turmoil in some of the distant lands, and this trouble could open the kingdom up to an invasion from Burgundians or Franks. Arthur proposes an alliance with their previous enemies, the Saxons, to fight against this invasion. He announces, to the council's surprise, that he has already arranged a meeting with Cedric, King of the West Saxons, to discuss a merger.

In Chapter 6, Mordred decides to visit Nimue, Merlin's pupil, to discuss the prophecy with her. On his way there, he encounters King Arthur, who has just come from her counsel. When Mordred arrives, he finds Nimue working with paper and a telescope. She remembers feeling his presence when he was going to escape from the traveling party of princes long ago, and he asks her why she did not let him go. He asks her if she sees the vision as well. She responds that she is Merlin, and he is the one who made the original prophecy. Mordred says he will leave the court and never return, in order to keep the prophecy of his being Arthur's downfall from coming true. Nimue sighs, saying this will not prevent it, because there is really no way of knowing the form the doom will take. Nimue encourages Mordred to live his life as it happens, and to die when death comes, not spending all his life worrying about how to avoid the prophecy.

Book II, Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Morgause's evil ways have returned to her in a fatal moment, when the sons she kept in sexual tension explode and she is murdered by Gaheris. A feud between the Orkney princes and the family of Lamorak begins the wedge between the Companions that is



never healed. The Orkney princes left at the castle carry Morgause's evil even further by creating rumors and suspicion about Bedwyr and Guinevere. In these chapters, the reader can see the concept of Camelot and a united Britain unraveling, due to the actions of Morgause and her sons. Mordred, on the other hand, is unconcerned about the rumors and evil, and dwells on the subject that has plagued him since his first knowledge of it: is he the man destined to bring down the High King, his own father?

Book II, Chapters 7-9

Book II, Chapters 7-9 Summary

In Chapter 7, Arthur decides to take Mordred with him to meet with Cedric, and the men depart soon after Mordred's visit with Nimue. Agravain is going with the one hundred soldiers with Mordred and Arthur, while Gawain and Gareth have gone to the north country for reasons unknown. Arthur and Mordred suspect it is to revenge against Lamorak, but they could not stop them. Mordred speaks with Agravain, who is impatient that he is on a mission of peace and not a fight. Agravain admits to knowing where Gaheris is, but will not share that information with Mordred. Agravain continues with talk about Bedwyr and Guinevere, and Mordred is concerned to hear his half brother speak so strongly against King Arthur. Agravain reveals himself to be an impulsive vicious man who listens to rumors and is committed to revenge above all. Mordred is at Arthur's side as the Saxons meet the Britons for the first time in a mission of peace. He is surprised to realize he understands a great deal of the language, and that other than the Saxons physical differences, the two tribes are very much alike. During a break in the talks, Mordred discovers Agravain speaking against the king with some of the other men, and vows to warn the King about his half-brother. As peace is discussed, and in this strange land, Mordred considers his loyalty to the king and his own future. He realizes Nimue's advice was the best for him at this time, to wait and see what the future brings.

As Chapter 8 begins, Arthur and Mordred are back in Camelot, and Arthur asks Mordred to keep an eye on his half-brothers who are still living at court, since Lamorak will most likely return to the court soon. Arthur decides to rescind Gaheris' banishment and send Agravain to retrieve him, with Mordred accompanying Agravain. Mordred and Agravain ride to Northumbria, and find Gaheris living there as if he were a wild man. They tell him of his return to Camelot and the men retire for the night. Mordred is shown a room in a tower nearby, and when he awakes the next morning he is alarmed to see the twins have departed without him, presumably to go find and kill Lamorak. Mordred chases after them.

In Chapter 9, Mordred arrives too late, and Lamorak is attacked by the twins and killed. Lamorak's blood brother, Drustan, had ridden to meet Lamorak and encounters the brothers. Gareth is with him. As Gareth is leaning over Lamorak's body, the twins speak to him and Drustan returns to his guards. Suddenly Gaheris runs after Drustan, and Gareth warns the man of impending attack. Drustan arrests both Gaheris and Agravain and will return them to Camelot for the king's decision about their fate. Mordred witnesses it all but does not come forward. Instead he travels to Merlin's home in Wales to find answers. Arriving at the wizard's home he does not see anyone, but is calmed by the surroundings and feels he has his answers. He returns to the court of King Arthur.



Book II, Chapters 7-9 Analysis

The feud between the Orkney princes and the Lamorak family accelerates as the twins escape from Mordred and attack Lamorak. So much violence and treachery has been committed that Mordred decides to go find Merlin rather than go home to Camelot and deal with the turmoil. Mordred's physical journey to Merlin's house is a time of emotional journey as well, as the young man tries again to come to grips with this prophecy and predestiny. When he reaches Merlin's house, he finds no one to talk to and realizes the answers lie within him.



Book II, Chapters 10-12

Book II, Chapters 10-12 Summary

In Chapter 10, Gareth is sent to King Arthur to explain the death of Lamorak, and he pleads with the king to forgive the twins because the blood oath has been satisfied. Bedwyr is firmly against returning the Orkney twins to the castle. The twins are returned, along with Gareth, but are not trusted by the king. Gawain is sent to the north to keep him from siding with his brothers. Mordred is once again asked by his father to serve as spy on the Young Celts, as the band around the twins is called. Mordred hears with increasing alarm the statements made by this band about Bedwyr and Queen Guinevere, and of other disparaging remarks against the king's politics. Agravain and Gaheris are still violent and itching for a fight. Mordred realizes his true loyalty is not only to his king, but that Mordred has fallen in love with Guinevere as well.

In Chapter 11, King Arthur plans a trip to Brittany to meet with King Hoel. He decides to leave Mordred to work with the regent Bedwyr as his deputy. Mordred reports the rumors of Bedwyr and Guinevere to Arthur, with considerable sadness. He is concerned that Bedwyr will be regent and therefore suspect to the rumors again. Mordred is worried at the power of the Young Celts and their talk. Arthur thanks Mordred for his concern, but says there are some subjects that he will not discuss. Mordred works alongside Bedwyr and sees no evidence of love between the knight and the queen. The Young Celts are waiting for an opportunity to find Bedwyr and the queen together, but there are no such occasions. Then one night, Bors, one of the faithful knights, enter the chamber where Mordred and Bedwyr are working and tells Bedwyr the queen wants to see him about a letter she has received.

Bedwyr goes to the queen, and as they are together talking, the Young Celts decide to attack. Mordred tries to prevent it, but gets swept up in it instead. Inside the queen's chamber, Bedwyr is there, but so are some ladies-in-waiting and everyone is decent and clothed. Gaheris and Agravain are drunk and impulsive though, and swords are drawn in anger. The first attacker, a young man named Colles, attacks Bedwyr, who quickly dispatches him with a fist to the throat. Gaheris leaps over the body and tries to attack the queen. Mordred defends the queen by hitting Gaheris on the temple with the end of his sword and knocking him out. Agravain is killed by Bedwyr, and Gareth, who stood behind his brother, is next to fall dead. After killing these two men, Bedwyr turns to defend the Queen and mistakes Mordred for an attacker rather than a defender. Bedwyr, a more experienced fighter, runs his blade through Mordred's arm and then knocks him out. As Mordred is losing consciousness, he sees the letter the queen had referred to and knew she had been telling the truth. He expects her to defend him against Bedwyr, but hears nothing as his world turns black.

In Chapter 12, Mordred is seriously wounded, and his head is not clear. When Gaheris finds him at his home and volunteers to help him escape from the guards, Mordred believes that he is a wanted man and allows himself to be taken away. Gaheris drops



him anonymously at a remote monastery and never returns for him. Arthur and Bedwyr try to sort out what really happened, and realize that Mordred was actually trying to defend the queen. They search for Mordred, but cannot find him. To keep peace in the kingdom, Bedwyr is sent to Brittany, and Gawain is brought back to the castle. Gawain swears an oath to kill Bedwyr, and is sent to the Orkneys to take over his kingdom. Mordred, believing that he has been betrayed by the queen, and hunted by his father, decides to return home to his islands and forget about his dreams of his own kingdom.

Book II, Chapters 10-12 Analysis

Arthur's sense of fairness and desire for peace is not deserved by the Orkney princes, who are forgiven for their betrayal and allowed to resume their places in Camelot. Instead of remaining at Camelot and guarding his interests there, Arthur leaves on another mission, with Bedwyr and Mordred left to deal with the Orkney princes and their continuing attempts to tear Camelot apart. Everything comes to a head; poor Gareth is killed and the castle is torn asunder. Mordred has found a solution to the terrible conundrum of his participation in Camelot by running away to Orkney. The princes are carrying on the evil influence of their mother without even realizing they were her unloved pawns. Arthur's policy of making peace and not war is ruined by these princes.



Book III, Chapters 1-2

Book III, Chapters 1-2 Summary

At the beginning of Book III *The Wicked Day*, Chapter 1, Mordred has taken a wife and has some children on the island when he is discovered by Gawain one day. The two men catch up on their lives and Mordred learns that Gaheris died from neglect of his wounds, and that the king knows Mordred was defending the queen. Mordred must return to Camelot to regain his previous titles. Mordred is welcomed by king and queen, and catches up on the politics and news. Bedwyr is ensconced in Brittany, and has a wife and a child. The Romans have a renewed interest in Britain, and were on their way to reclaim it for Rome. Mordred and Arthur leave to join King Hoel and make plans for defense. In Chapter 2, Arthur and Mordred arrive in Brittany, and find that a madman rapist has captured Princess Elen and taken her away. Arthur, Mordred and Bedwyr join forces to chase after her, but she has been murdered. The men track down the crazed giant and kill him.

Book III, Chapters 1-2 Analysis

Mordred's life continues to change radically, and he is yanked from a peaceful existence in his old home back to Camelot and Britain, both of which are in serious trouble. Arthur's once peaceful kingdom is in tatters, with Rome and other countries hovering on the borders, and his Companions divided irrevocably. The chapter about the quest to recover Princess Elen is confusing to the reader, diffuses the building tension and does not move the plot forward. It is assumed the chapter was inserted here to return somewhat to historical legend.



Book III, Chapters 3-4

Book III, Chapters 3-4 Summary

In Chapter 3, Mordred, Hoel and Arthur sit down to discuss the demands from Rome regarding Brittany. They decide to send Valerius Guerin and Bors to the Romans as a peace envoy. Gawain has been sent for, and he will join the envoy as well. The king decides to send Mordred back to Camelot to serve as regent and handle matters that the Council does not have authority to handle. Before he leaves, Mordred and Arthur talk well into the night. Mordred leaves, welcoming the opportunity to serve as king and, more personally, to spend time with Guinevere. He has reservations regarding the ability of Gawain to conduct the peace envoy successfully, but turns his horse and thoughts towards Camelot. As the peace mission begins with the envoys discussing issues with the Romans, Gawain loses his temper, kills a soldier and war begins. The Britons flee, and the Romans send for reinforcements.

In Chapter 4, Mordred is enjoying his time with the queen when the news of Gawain's folly arrives. War has begun, and Arthur is directing his troops for the defense of the land. When Mordred tells Guinevere, he learns that she is afraid of what will happen should Arthur be killed. She is reassured by Mordred that she will retain her status as queen by his side. He is determined to keep her from all others if Bedwyr and Arthur are killed in the war.

Book III, Chapters 3-4 Analysis

In these chapters, the author is making an attempt to bring the story back to historical facts, and the characters are in danger of being lost in the muddle of factual history. The conversation between Mordred and Arthur, taking place before Mordred returns to Camelot to be regent, is critical to the story as it outlines what the men agree upon regarding the action to be taken by Mordred. Mordred does exactly as the king requested, but his actions are shadowed by his deep love for Guinevere.



Book III, Chapters 5-6

Book III, Chapters 5-6 Summary

In Chapter 5, Mordred is consumed with the business of keeping the country running while war is being waged. News comes rarely, but one day a courier arrives with the unbelievable message that Arthur's ring has been found after a battle, but that the king is missing and presumed dead. Mordred has to give Guinevere the news, and Bedwyr, badly wounded, says the regent Mordred must take command. Guinevere joins Mordred at his side in front of the council. Back at the battlefield, Arthur is not dead, but the messenger he sent to Bedwyr with the news has been killed. Arthur heads back to his headquarters to retake command of his army.

In Chapter 6, Mordred meets with Cedric, the King of the West Saxons, in an effort to enforce the alliance. Cedric initially says the treaty is void. After a war of words, Cedric decides to remake the alliance. Mordred returns to Camelot where there is no courier advising him that Arthur is still alive; the weather has prevented ships to come to England, but ships from England to Arthur's location are able to sail, and those contain letters from Constantine the Duke, advising Arthur that Mordred has not only taken over the throne, he has the queen as well.

Book III, Chapters 5-6 Analysis

In these chapters, the author is justifying every move Mordred makes, based upon the directions the regent was given from his father. These chapters begin the building of a combination of misunderstandings, lack of communication, mistakes and confusion that the author is presenting to show that Mordred was not the betrayer the legend makes him out to be. The reader is meant to wonder if these events are happening because it was a logical progression, or was it all due to the prophecy being fulfilled?



Book III, Chapters 7-8

Book III, Chapters 7-8 Summary

In Chapter 7, Arthur receives the news about his son at a bad time. He is recovering from injuries and his best friend Bedwyr is dying from wounds received in the battle. All of those close to him are either dead or dying and at his side is Gawain, who foolishly caused the war but has since redeemed himself as a fighter and supporter. Arthur is trying to separate fact from fiction and rumor, but Gawain persists in painting Mordred as a traitor. His words are rebuffed by the king, but they remain in his thoughts. Bedwyr recovers from his wounds, and the king, acting more and more like an old man, heads back to Camelot to find out the truth.

In Chapter 8, Mordred receives word that there is fighting on the southern coast, and mindful of his obligation to the Saxons, he raises his army and travels there. What he does not know is that the fighting is actually a misunderstanding between the Saxons and the returning army of King Arthur. When Mordred arrives at Cedric's side, Arthur's troops call out, recognizing Mordred and calling him a traitor. Cedric and Mordred try to figure out what happened, and send a courier to Arthur to seek a meeting, but first there is a fierce battle and Arthur is closer to Camelot.

Book III, Chapters 7-8 Analysis

The true scope of the evil produced by Morgause's life is evident in these chapters as her steps to destroy Arthur are shown. Morgause's sons have caused the Companions to question their king. Morgause's poisoning of Merlin has prevented his wise counsel at Arthur's side during this, his most perilous time. Arthur has always surrounded himself by loyal and wise counsel and now he is facing the possible betrayal of his son Mordred, he is injured, and he is alone. Arthur is questioning his lifelong choice of peace over war. The author moves the two men, Mordred and Arthur, towards each other for this fateful battle.



Book III, Chapters 9-10, Epilogue

Book III, Chapters 9-10, Epilogue Summary

In Chapter 9, Mordred finally gets a meeting with Arthur. Arthur's kingdom is falling apart, along with his personal life. His son is said to be a traitor. Some of the minor kings to the north are riding to Mordred's aid. Bedwyr is on his way to support Arthur, and Duke Constantine the trouble maker is also coming. Both men, Mordred and Arthur are being propelled to the brink of war, and neither wants it to happen. Guinevere, instead of going to either Mordred, Bedwyr or Arthur, goes back to her convent.

In Chapter 10, Mordred wakes on the day of the parley, convinced he is losing the queen, his love, no matter what. Arthur dreams of Merlin, and of the advice he dreamed the old man had given him through the words of Nimue. As the two kings meet at the designated place, their officers and troops are told that they will not attack unless there is a clear signal. Mordred and Arthur talk, argue and explain themselves. As Arthur finally accepts Mordred's reasoning he reaches out to hold his son to him. At that moment, a poisonous snake enters the area near the kings and an officer pulls out his sword to strike it dead. The other officers and troops see this as the sign and the war begins. At some point, Mordred and Arthur find themselves in the fog of war, fighting each other. The wicked day of destiny has finally arrived. In the Epilogue, Mordred is drifting away from reality, and knows his wounds are fatal. He thinks of the goals of his childhood, and then dies.

Book III, Chapters 9-10, Epilogue Analysis

The dream of Camelot is over. Another series of misunderstandings, confusion and betrayal. Mordred and Arthur are involved in a battle that neither wanted but that neither could have stopped. The final scenes are written to blur the lines even more between prophecy and choice.



Characters

Modred

Mordred is the son of King Arthur and Queen Morgause. When he was born, he was the sole survivor of an infant massacre conducted by King Lot, then was rescued by Morgause and sent to a poor fishing family to be raised with some support from the queen. When he is eleven, he is brought back to the queen's castle, his foster family is murdered, and he is told a series of lies about his own heritage. When the queen and her princes are called to Camelot, King Arthur tells Mordred the truth, and Mordred learns of Merlin's prophecy that he, Mordred, will be the downfall of his own father. Mordred contemplates this prophecy and dedicates his life to fighting pre-destiny and fate so he can keep his beloved father alive. Mordred grows up to be a strong and good man who is constantly misunderstood. Mordred is destined to love a woman who belongs to another man, take the throne of a man who is not really dead, and die as a result of a huge mistake on the battlefield.

Mordred's role in this novel is to serve as the main character. Traditionally reviled as the person who brought King Arthur's Camelot to an end, Mordred's character is handled differently in *The Wicked Day* by this author. This story is about his coming of age, and of a man facing the fate that has been decided for him before he was born, and how he deals with that pressure and challenge.

Merlin, Nimue

Merlin is alluded to in this book but not ever presented to the reader as being in a scene. Instead the reader is introduced to Nimue, a woman who reportedly has Merlin's powers and memories. Merlin is reputed to be dead at the beginning of the novel, when Mordred is but a tiny child, then again when Mordred is a teenager. Mordred goes to visit his home, but never meets the man; he leaves, however, with a feeling that he has the answers he sought. Nimue is in several parts of the book, serving as a sage advisor to Arthur and to Mordred both. Nimue is a slight woman who is married to a king of the realm, yet retains her independence and mystery.

The role of Merlin and Nimue in this novel is to display how the Celtic religion involved belief in magic, and how Merlin's wisdom and insight was interpreted as magic and spells, as he and Nimue advised Arthur so well during his reign. Mordred comes to Nimue and to Merlin asking how he can be freed from the prophecy, and is given good advice: to live what life brings, and die when death comes.

King Arthur

King Arthur, High Ruler of Britain, is the commander of all forces in England and undisputed king of the Brits. He is married to Guinevere, and a devoted disciple of



Merlin the Wizard. Under Arthur, the various kings and lords of the land have united to form a peace between them so they can be together to fight the Saxons, the Germans, the Romans, and whoever else invades their country. When Arthur was younger, he was seduced by his half-sister Morgause, and she bore a son, Mordred. Merlin foretold that this child would be the bane, or the downfall of Arthur, but when Arthur meets the boy, he welcomes him into his home and gives him the status of royal nephew. Arthur's life is difficult during this novel, with allusions to the problems of Guinevere and the Companion Bedwyr, failed alliances with the Saxons, and dealing with the Orkney princes. Among these days, he finds himself losing Merlin and gaining Nimue as his advisor and friend. Because of these distractions and a series of misunderstandings and mistakes, Arthur finds himself fighting his own son, Mordred, in a deadly battle, where Arthur is seriously wounded and Mordred is killed.

Arthur is Mordred's long lost father, adult friend, teacher, competitor for Guinevere's affections, and ultimately Mordred's killer in this novel. Arthur's kindness and diplomacy are a calm foil to Mordred's reserve and desperation in facing the prophecy.

Brude and Sula

Mordred's foster family, Brude the fisherman, and Sula, his wife, raised him from an infant and taught him all he knew about honest work, respect, and honor. Brude is a simple fisherman who does not question the decisions of the royal family or the magic. Sula, an older woman with pale blue eyes, knows there is more to the story of the child's birth than she has been told. They work hard, live off the land, and have no luxuries, and seldom look beyond the day at hand. The couple appreciate the gifts sent regularly by the queen, and raise the boy as if he were their own child; however, when Mordred comes to the attention of the queen after assisting one of the princes, Sula knows it is the end of everything for her and Brude. Gabran, the queen's current lover, is sent to Brude and Sula's small shack to murder them as soon as Mordred has set up residence in the Morgause's castle. Brude and Sula are poisoned, and then their home is burnt around them.

Brude and Sula's role in this novel is to display how the formative years of Mordred's life were good and simple and strong, even though he was the son of a cruel and uncaring mother. Throughout the novel, Sula's love for Mordred is compared to the manipulations and selfishness of Morgause. Brude, Mordred's foster father, is surprisingly similar to Arthur, although the men are worlds apart in a socio-economic comparison.

Morgause

Queen Morgause is the wife of King Lot. She is a scheming woman who uses her dark powers to create poisonous potions, manipulate people and cause distress and pain to others. She is vain and selfish, and her beauty is skin deep and kept together with her famous lotions and spells. She does have the skill of some visions, but is hampered from ever being as great as Merlin because of her evil nature. She is completely amoral:



she seduces her half-brother, she is unfaithful to her husband, and when she is reunited with her son Mordred, attempts to seduce him as well. Morgause is exiled to the Orkneys as a form of punishment for her attempts to kill Merlin, but this does not stop her scheming. When Mordred comes to her attention as an eleven-year-old boy, she brings him into the castle where she can keep an eye on him, and has his faithful foster parents murdered so they will not divide the boy's devotion to her. She is committed to revenge upon Arthur, and restoration to the greatness of being at the High Kingdom castle, at whatever cost. Morgause cares for no one except herself, and uses everyone in her path. The sons she has with Lot are devoted to her, even though they resent her interference in their lives. The twins are especially connected to Morgause, and ironically, it is Gaheris who finds her naked with Lamorak and slays her in his mindless fury.

Morgause, with her poisons, wicked ways and machinations, is the decided villain of this novel. Her behavior propels the plot, and she and her sons are the true downfall of Camelot.

Gawain

Gawain is the eldest son of King Lot, and is the wisest and best of the Orkney princes. He is rescued from the cliffs by Mordred when the two are mere boys, and stay lifelong friends. Gawain is especially kind to his younger brother Gareth, defending him against the rough and vicious twins Agravain and Gaheris.

Gawain is the best of the Orkney princes, and is the closest thing to a best friend that Mordred has in his life. Gawain behaves maturely and kingly throughout his life, only to spoil everything when he loses his temper on a peace mission and causes a war. It is as if Gawain returns to the evil influence of his mother after his brothers are all killed, and becomes a spiteful, bitter man, using every power he has with Arthur to make the king and the king's troops view Mordred as a traitor.

Lamorak

Lamorak is a Knight of the Realm and a devoted Companion of King Arthur, and falls in love with Morgause after she has been confined to the Abbey. Lamorak is seduced and manipulated by Morgause in her attempts to cause problems for Arthur, and is caught in bed with Morgause by her sons Gaheris and Mordred. Lamorak is forced to resign his titles and leave Camelot as a result of this incident, and is hunted down by Morgause's twin sons, Gaheris and Agravain, and killed. Lamorak's blood brother swears a blood oath to kill the twins and this increases the bad feelings amongst the Companions of Arthur.



Morgan

Queen Morgan is the wife of King Urbgen, the sister of Morgause, and the half-sister of King Arthur. Morgan plays a limited role in this novel, having been banished to live far from Camelot and under supervision. She has continued to conspire against Arthur, and her witching powers are far stronger than those of Morgause. Morgan has rejected her husband for a younger man, and manipulated this younger man into stealing the famous sword of King Arthur. Morgan's lover is killed in a battle with Arthur, and at the time of this novel, is almost powerless to do more than resent Arthur, and work with Morgause on further schemes to divide the realm and take power back from Arthur and Merlin.

Guinevere

Guinevere is the wife of King Arthur. She is beautiful and in love with both Arthur and Bedwyr, while being faithful to Arthur. In this novel, she is in the background, the object of love and desire for Mordred as he begins his ascent to the throne of England. The conversation with Mordred towards the end of the second Book reveals her main concerns in life are about what will happen to her when Arthur finally dies. At the end, she chooses none of the men who love her, and rather than going to side of one of them in their final battle, she returns to her convent.

Gareth

Gareth is the youngest of the Orkney princes, and struggles to find his way in the melee of his older brothers and in the shadow of Mordred. Not a strong character, Gareth is always following his older brothers around and being confused about his own position. As a child, he is protected by Gawain, and as an adult, he falls more under Mordred's protection. No one is able to protect him as he is swept up in the mob that storms Queen Guinevere's bedchamber expecting to catch Bedwyr in her arms, and Gareth is killed in the heat of battle. Gareth is killed just days before he is to marry.

Gabran

Gabran is one of a series of young lovers that Morgause takes to entertain herself while she schemes against King Arthur. He willingly kills at her command and performs at her will. When Morgause is sent to the convent by Arthur, Gabran is subjected to the scorn and ridicule of the Orkney princes, who are actually jealous of his position with their mother. In a game of chance one night, Gabran accidentally drops a souvenir he kept from the murder of Mordred's foster parents, and Mordred sees the charm and kills Gabran immediately.



Agravain

Agravain is the twin of Gaheris, son of Morgause and King Lot, and half brother of Mordred. He is impulsive, craves violence and does not appreciate anything given to him. Agravain always wants more, is not committed to his position as a Knight, and like his mother, works against Arthur and his policies. Agravain behaves seditious, and when the opportunity arises to free his twin from banishment and use the chance to kill Lamorak, he does so without regret

Gaheris

Gaheris is the twin of Agravain, son of Morgause and King Lot, and half brother of Mordred. He is a vicious psychopath who kills his own mother out of sexual jealousy, treats all women as lower life forms, and takes no responsibility for his actions. He is injured by Mordred when he attacks Queen Guinevere, and later dies of those wounds.



Objects/Places

Orkney Islands

Orkney is the island where Mordred grew up, and where Morgause is banished when she is caught trying to kill Merlin. Orkney is at the very northern edge of the British Isles, a wild and primitive place with few people of education or royalty, and a land where ships other than fishing vessels seldom arrive. It is a brutal land, with treacherous cliffs, and occupied with people who are barely able to survive on its rough shores.

Orkney symbolizes the distance between Morgause, her princes by King Lot, and Mordred himself begin from Camelot. When Mordred feels he has fallen out of Arthur's favor, it is Orkney that he goes to. Mordred, whose name means "boy from the sea", is symbolically brought from a faraway land to the center of the British kingdom.

Camelot

Camelot is the home of King Arthur and his legendary knights. At the time of this novel, Camelot has been long established, and Arthur's rules and regulations are well accepted even to the far reaches of his kingdom. The drama of Guinevere's barrenness, her love for Bedwyr, and even Arthur's innovative ideas of forming alliances and bonding with former enemies are accepted without much protest because Arthur's reputation as a good and fair king are established and confirmed.

Camelot is a city set on a hill, well guarded and fortified, and occupied by citizens true to their king. Arthur feels comfortable walking through the city unaccompanied. Mordred yearns to hold the position of power in this city, and it becomes his home. Camelot represents the true destiny for Mordred, and in this novel, it is the city he finally calls home and finds his true love. For Mordred, though, this is yet another dream that escapes him.

Mordred's Foster Home

The house of Brude and Sula is the only home Mordred knew until he was returned to the royal family when he was eleven. It was a simple and poor existence, but Mordred was happy and content, surrounded by the love of the fisherman and his wife.

The symbolism of a king's bastard son living in relative poverty in a far away island emphasizes the dramatic change in Mordred's life. One day he is a simple fisherman's son, clad in his only tunic with no shoes, and within a relatively short span of years he is sitting on the throne of England, recognized as King Arthur's son and ruling as regent.



Morgause orders the foster home burned to the ground, which symbolized to her an end to that phase of Mordred's life, and forced him to look only forward to the future she planned for him.

Sula's Handmade Necklace

This is a crude charm, carved by Mordred for his foster mother Sula, when Mordred was a young boy living on the island. Sula treasured this simple gift, and wore it every day of her life. When Gabran murdered Brude and Sula, he kept the charm as an amusing souvenir, and carried it in his purse for years. His downfall was emptying his purse at a game of chance to illustrate he had no coins left, and Mordred recognized the charm. Gabran lost his life, Mordred knew the real story of his foster parents' death, and also knew the true killer, Morgause. The charm's role in this novel is to reveal all of these long kept secrets to the main character, and ultimately lead him to a private audience with King Arthur, where even more secrets are revealed.

Morgause's Belongings

Morgause surrounded herself with riches and only the best fabrics and jewelry. Her belongings are symbolic of the woman's selfishness and concern for material things. She loved riches more than she loved her sons, her lovers or her husband.

The Orc

This was a splendid ship that Morgause had outfitted with the finest embroidered sails and best wood so she could travel to see her brother in style and elegance.

Mordred's Clothes on Orkney

Mordred had only one good tunic, homespun, and no shoes on the day he rescued Gawain from the cliffs. Two days later when he returns to his foster home from the castle, he is wearing a fine tunic edged with gold, strong shoes, and a warm cloak.

Morgause's Enchanted Room

At her castle in Orkney, Morgause has used one of the ancient chambers that exist on the island to serve as her conjuring room, and there is a pool in which she seeks visions.



Arthur's Gloves

These gloves had been handmade by Guinevere, and lovingly decorated with pearls from her native land. They are symbolic to Arthur of the love of his queen, and remind him that it does not matter what the rest of the kingdom thinks about her loyalty.

The Companions

This is the term used in the novel to describe what is traditionally known as the group of Knights known as the Knights of the Round Table. These men and their commitment and loyalty to King Arthur were the basis for his kingdom, and the men who upheld his principles, his regulations, and kept the kingdom together.

Rome

Rome possessed and ruled Britain before King Arthur became its ruler. Rome represents the large enemy who has temporarily forgotten this faraway land of England, but turns its enormous eyes upon the land towards the end of the novel, creating a substantial threat to King Arthur's existence.

Merlin's Home

Located in Wales, this home is surrounded by mystery and magic. Mordred travels there looking for answers and finds them, even though he does not even see the wizard.



Themes

Does Fate Rule our Lives?

There is a continuing theme of questioning a fate someone else has decided for us. Mordred lives his entire adult life with Merlin's prophecy of doom hanging over his head. Almost at the same moment Mordred learns he is the son of the High King of the country, he learns his mother is a liar, that he was born of an incestuous union, and that the most famous wizard in the land has predicted that he, Mordred, will be the downfall of his father's kingdom. This gives Mordred a great deal to consider as he plans his future.

Mordred represents any person who faces seemingly insurmountable odds as they face the future. Handicapped emotionally with this damaging prediction, Mordred must decide if his fate is already sealed, or if he can overcome the prophecy and live a good life. Mordred consults wizards, then turns the problem over and over in his mind. Mordred loves and respects Arthur, and the feeling is mutual, but at every step Mordred wonders if his presence in Camelot is beneficial or harmful to his father.

The story is woven with many circumstances and events that were out of Mordred or even Arthur's control, as everything seems to conspire against the wishes of the father and son to be open to what the future brings them. The treachery of Morgause and then by her sons, the unfortunate fact that Arthur and Mordred fall in love with the same woman, and the fear of losing the country to bitter infighting and/or invasion from other countries - all of these factors work to prove that Merlin's prophecy is, indeed, correct. But the question remains for the reader to decide: is our fate decided for us, or do we have a choice in our future?

Waging Peace Not War

The theme of choosing peace as a method of resolving conflict is shown throughout the novel, as Arthur constantly attempts using peace envoys, alliances with former enemies and communication to turn a crisis into a resolution. Before Arthur's rules and regulations, fighting and bloodshed were the only courses of action if two kingdoms, two countries, or even two people had a disagreement. Through his example, the British learned to look at conflict as an opportunity to strengthen their alliances and live in peace in a country once torn by war.

Arthur and Guinevere have found peace in the difficulty of their childless marriage, and it is hinted that Arthur became willing to share her with Bedwyr to keep her in the marriage. Another example of Arthur's peacemaking is when he works to keep the Orkney princes occupied and at Camelot until the young men cause so many problems they must be banished.



Arthur expands this policy in his dealings with his countrymen. His regent, his Companions and his family all support his decisions to reach out to old enemies in the spirit of cooperation and a peaceful coexistence. In the face of challenges to fight, Arthur sends carefully chosen envoys to discuss terms and negotiate treaties that will avoid war.

Arthur is a mighty fighter, and has never lost a battle. Rather than exploit that strength and conquer neighboring countries and lands, Arthur expends his intelligence and power making England a united country that is able to grow and expand and become an industrial and economic power. Perhaps the legend of Arthur persists over all these centuries because the message of a strong man advocating peace it represents.

The Power of Evil

In this story, there is great evil and a thirst for revenge. Two sisters spend their entire lives manipulating people and circumstances, poisoning minds and bodies, and using their beauty and influence to crush the dream of Camelot. The power Arthur represents to them is unacceptable, and they devote every waking moment to perfecting their black arts so they can bring him down.

Evil pervades, and the author suggests the Orkney sons receive this evil through the blood of their mother that runs through their veins. Even Gawain, the eldest and the one closest to Mordred, turns evil and disloyal at the end. Gaheris and Avagrain are especially vicious and murderous, and their upbringing does not account for this level of cruel behavior. Most of the magic used in the novel is for evil and trickery, with Nimue's powers limited to sound advice and timely warnings.

The reader must decide if Mordred is fighting the evil he has inherited from his mother, the witch Queen Morgause, or if he is really free to make his own choices for good.



Style

Point of View

The author primarily presents the point of view from that of Mordred, the main character. It is told in third person narrative, with most of the action happening within Mordred's view and hearing. At times, the thoughts of Morgause enter into the description, but it is limited to her reactions when speaking to Mordred; as the story progresses, Morgause is more distant and assumes the role of just another character in Mordred's life.

By presenting this man, Mordred, who is traditionally the arch villain of any story concerning Arthur, as a man who deserves consideration and sympathy for his story, the author has to substantiate this premise with a series of misunderstandings, confusion and mistakes by others regarding the reputation and actions of Mordred. By keeping the story focused on this man and his reactions to the prophecy, the author is able to make the reader see his side of the events.

Setting

The story is set mostly in the British Isles, and some in Brittany, which is the home of Bedwyr and located on the coast of what is now France. The time is the medieval period of England, when transportation was by horse and wagon, and communications were through couriers carrying letters sealed with wax. England was divided and ruled by many kings, and King Arthur united them all for a short period of time, under his rule as High King, and enforced by his hand-picked knights, or Companions, as this novel calls them.

All seasons and all weather are used in this story, with the heavy snowfall of winter creating the mood when conspiracies and murders are hatched, and long summer days for traveling about the kingdom. Mordred's homes range from the hovel of his foster family to the grandeur of Camelot. The countryside of England is used to enrich the descriptions and to bring a sense of place to the reader.

Battlefields obviously represent conflict, and the end of the novel is on a battlefield, which ironically was meant to be a place to solve a misunderstanding between a man and his son.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is clear, with standard daily vocabulary. This is necessary because most of the place names and personal names are unusual, being Welsh and Latin in origin. Character names such as Morgause and Urgan are uncommon and difficult to pronounce, so the use of a vocabulary that involves several syllables and may not be easily recognized by high school readers was a wise choice.



Many of the traditional terms for items and people in the King Arthur legend are changed, in keeping with the vast research that Mary Stewart did with regard to this legend. Arthur's best friend in this novel is not referred to as Lancelot, but Bedwyr. Arthur's sword is not Excalibur, but Caliburn. This causes some confusion with those readers who are used to the more familiar terms for the legends of King Arthur.

The author explains some of the terms used by the characters in the next sentence, e.g., when a knight claims he is naked, he does not mean he is without clothes, but rather without weapons.

The author is attempting to stay true to the legend of Arthur, for which she appears to have tremendous respect.

The title of the book refers directly to the prophecy of Merlin, that there will be a Wicked Day of Destiny for Arthur, brought on by his bastard son, Mordred. This title is a constant reminder to the reader of Mordred's lifelong battle to overcome the destiny cast for him, but eventually, through no fault of his own, succumbing to it.

Structure

The Wicked Day is a novel separated into three main books, with an Epilogue and a Prologue. At the end of the novel are the Author's Notes and The Legend, sections relating the work of fiction to the legend of King Arthur. The novel is 359 pages long,

Book I has fifteen chapters of varying lengths, Book II has twelve chapters, and Book III has ten chapters. Each book concentrates on a period of time and action that builds to the conclusion and epilogue. Each chapter is only a few pages long and begins with a natural segue from the previous chapter

Book I is the story of Mordred and his foster family, and takes him from these lowly beginnings to a meeting with his true father, King Arthur. In Book II, the story of the princes of Orkney is told, and the differences between each boy: Gawain, Gareth, Agravain, Gaheris and Mordred. As this Book progresses, the boys grow farther apart, and their life choices decide their destiny. In Book III, the young men are grown and playing out their lives in the history of England.



Quotes

"With Merlin gone, that was our enemy to our King Lot, and by all accounts to this boy of his as well, who's to harm him now, or us for keeping him?" Brude, Prologue, p. 5

"A witch, Mordred. Indeed, I am a witch. I have powers. Go, say it." Queen Morgause, Book I, Chap. 9, p. 86

"Men! By Hecate, how I despise them! They have all of the power, and none of the courage." Queen Morgan, Book I, Chap. 11, p. 105

"He deserved it. He killed my parents. That charm was my mother's. I made it for her and she wore it always. He must have taken it when he killed them. He burned them." Mordred, Book I, Chap. 14, p. 138

"Of the prophecy of Merlin, that the boy would cause his downfall and death, he never thought of all. The moment was for him one of joy, unspoiled." Arthur, Book I, Chap. 14, p. 147

"I am my own man, beholden neither to her or the High King. I shall listen to her, then go." Mordred, Book II, Chap. 2, p. 166

"If I have to leave court and stay away from him I shall do it. No power on earth can make me life a hand to kill unless I wish it, and this death I swear to you I shall never undertake." Mordred, Book II, Chap. 2, p. 172

"All that we have,' she said, s to live what life brings. Die when death comes." Nimue, Book II, Chap. 6, p. 201

"You realize that I am asking you to be a spy? To watch your own kinsmen? Is this something you can bring yourself to do?" Arthur, Book II, Chap. 8, p. 217

"Gawain! The Orkney fools again! Always that cold north wind, like a blighting frost that blasts everything that is good and growing!" Queen Guinevere, Book III, Chap. 4, p. 308

"So il shall attend the Council. With Arthur's Queen at your side to support you, there will be no man in the kingdoms who will not have to accept Arthur's son as his rightful ruler." Queen Guinevere, Book III, Chap. 5, p. 319

"It was war. This was the day. This was the wicked day of destiny." Narrator, Book III, Chap. 10, p. 355



Topics for Discussion

At a young age, Mordred's entire world is turned upside down and all he has ever known is destroyed in a fire. What must have been going through his mind as he faced an uncertain future by moving to the palace?

What was home to Mordred, and where do you think he felt the most at home: his foster family home, the Orkney castle, Camelot as a boy, Camelot when he is regent and with Guinevere, or the makeshift home he had when he escaped for a time back to Orkney?

What sort of dangers did Arthur embrace by acknowledging Mordred as his son?

Nimue said many times in the novel that she was, in fact, Merlin. What does that mean?

Discuss the symbolism of Mordred setting the wildcat free.

Why do you think Morgan and Morgause harbored so much resentment against their half brother, King Arthur?

Did Mordred connect on any level with any of his half brothers? How and when?

Why did Mordred travel to Wales to see Merlin and what did he learn about himself in the process?

What do you think really happened between Mordred and Arthur at the final battle?

Did Mordred have any control of his own life?