



The Mists of Avalon

Marian Zimmer Bradley

Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

Prologue

Morgaine prefaces her story by saying that there are many conflicting opinions of the events that she will recount, and that truth has many faces.

Book One: The Mistress of Magic

CHAPTER 1

Igraine, the wife of Duke Gorlois, is surveying the sea from her home at Tintagel Castle, in Cornwall. Igraine is the nineteen-year-old half-sister of Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, high priestess and Queen of the Druids. At fifteen, Igraine was married to Gorlois, a Roman more than twice her age, in a political alliance engineered by Viviane. Though grateful that he is, by his culture's standards, a kind husband, Igraine resents the forced marriage and chafes at patriarchal rules so at odds with the freedom she experienced growing up in a matriarchy. However, since the birth of her daughter, Morgaine, a year ago, Igraine no longer cries for home.

While the duke is away at war, Igraine (gifted with the Sight) has a vision of Viviane. Viviane subsequently arrives for a visit, accompanied by Taliesin, the "Merlin" (magician and prophet) of Britain. They are Druids and detest the Christians, whose religion is driving theirs out. Viviane tells Igraine that she will bear the Great King who will unite Britain, rout Christianity, and maintain the Druid heritage.

CHAPTER 2

While Igraine contemplates this bombshell, Viviane drops another one: the father will be the warlord and next High King, Uther Pendragon, not Gorlois. Igraine rejects this prophecy, believing that to ful-

fill it will require her to betray Gorlois and compromise her honor. She is also angry at being used as a pawn. Viviane and Taliesin chide Igraine for putting personal considerations above the Goddess' will and the good of Britain. They order her to travel to Londinium with Gorlois to attend the High King's selection, even though Igraine thinks Gorlois won't take her. Igraine asks why Viviane cannot perform this service to the Goddess; Viviane

explains she has been pledged to King Ban of Less Britain—her last opportunity to bear a child before she retires into the role of wise woman. Igraine suggests Morgause (who, like Viviane, is her sister), but Viviane says no: Morgause would use such power for evil.

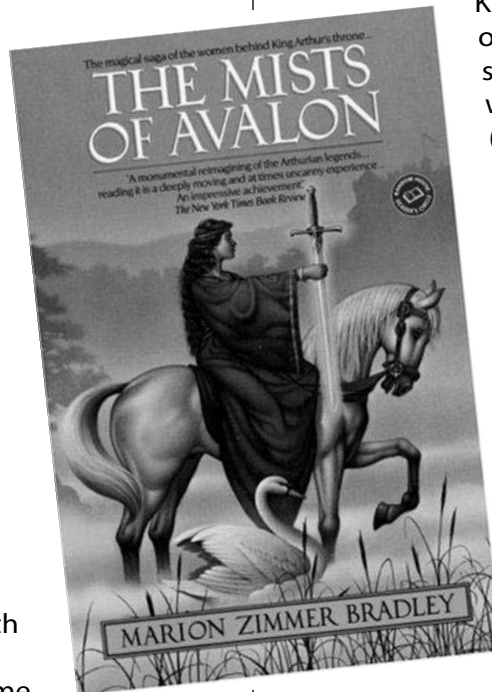
CHAPTER 3

On the road to Londinium, Igraine has a vision of Gorlois' death. A new High King must be chosen to replace the dying Ambrosius Aurelianus. Gorlois tells Igraine that Uther, Ambrosius' protege and kinsman, is the logical successor, though Gorlois disdains him as a coarse, opportunistic womanizer. In Londinium, Viviane has a blue moonstone pendant delivered to Igraine,

with a message to remember her "promise." Igraine puts it on. Later, Igraine meets Uther. Igraine is unimpressed, regarding him as coarse. However, the next day, Igraine encounters Uther weeping outside the funeral mass for Ambrosius, and they discuss religion and the afterlife. Gorlois finds them, and strikes Igraine for speaking to Uther without a chaperone. That night, Gorlois leaves her so he can fast and pray with his men.

CHAPTER 4

Igraine decides that henceforth, while she will be respectful of Gorlois' faith, she will cease pretending to be a pious Christian herself. Gorlois tries to atone for striking her by giving her money to spend at the great market at Londinium; she



accepts the gesture. Meanwhile, the council choose Uther as the next king. An erotic dream involving Uther leaves Igraine shaken. In despair, she takes to her bed, professing illness. Taliesen visits her; she suspects him of using magic to cause her to miscarry Gorlois' child. After the visit, Igraine meets Uther in a vision, and they share memories of bonding and priesthood in ancient past lives. She comes back to the present, now convinced that she has known Uther before and that it is truly her fate to bear his son in this life.

CHAPTER 5

Igraine and Gorlois attend Uther's coronation and the subsequent festivities. Taking her aside, Uther reveals that he has had a dream matching her vision. They feel connected, but Igraine weeps because she fears the Merlin has bewitched them. Gorlois interrupts this scene, humiliating Igraine and accusing Uther of "lewd" behavior. Later, Gorlois calls Igraine a whore, and the two have a violent fight, culminating in Gorlois' departure to confront Uther. He returns after breaking his alliance with Uther over the latter's demand that Gorlois "give" him Igraine. Gorlois' action is political suicide and treason, potentially imperiling Britain, since Uther needs backing to repel the Saxons. Gorlois' group sneak out of Londinium in the night. The second night on the road, a vengeful Gorlois tries to rape Igraine, but he has become impotent.

CHAPTER 6

The estranged couple arrive at Tintagel. Igraine notices Gorlois making overtures to Morgause. Concerned for her sister, Igraine appeals to Morgause's ambition, convincing her that sleeping with Gorlois would ruin her chances of marrying a powerful man. Gorlois departs to fight Uther, leaving Igraine under house arrest. She seeks visions to learn of Viviane and Uther. In the first, Viviane, who seems to be dying, tells her not to despair. In the second, Uther promises to visit at Midwinter.

CHAPTER 7

Gorlois returns home with news: Uther has made a pact with the Druids, and has told Gorlois to put his forces under Uther's command or face a fight on Gorlois' home soil. Gorlois swears to battle Uther if he sets foot in Cornwall. Igraine despairs, knowing this could put Britain at the mercy of both the Saxons and the Scots. That night, Gorlois is again impotent; he cruelly beats Igraine, claim-

ing she has bewitched him. The next day, he leaves to fight Uther. In autumn, a peddler woman arrives with a message that Viviane is well, and has given birth to Galahad, the son of a king, who is destined to serve Igraine's son. When a storm leaves Uther at Gorlois' mercy, Igraine magically warns Uther. She is stricken with fever as punishment for this forbidden use of magic.

CHAPTER 8

On Midwinter-night, Uther arrives at Tintagel, accompanied by the Merlin and disguised as Gorlois. Alone, he and Igraine pledge their mutual love and recall more details of the shared vision/dream. He claims her as his queen. Gorlois dies in the night, and Uther marries Igraine the same day. A boy named Gwydion (later Arthur) is born as a result. Morgaine is six or seven years older than Arthur; until he is fostered (sent away for training) at the home of a nobleman, she cares for him as if he were her son. When Morgause marries King Lot of Orkney, Morgaine meets Viviane for the first time since toddlerhood. She instantly loves Viviane as a mother. Recognizing that Morgaine has the Sight, Viviane promises that one day she will take her to Avalon.

CHAPTER 9

In the seventh year of Uther's reign, Viviane sees troubling images in a scrying mirror, including Morgaine weeping over the body of a fair-haired child who appears to be dead. She hastily makes ready to travel to Uther's court to save Arthur.

CHAPTER 10

Viviane arrives at Uther's court of Caerleon to discover that Arthur has had a riding accident under suspicious circumstances. A skilled healer, she treats Arthur's wounds, predicting a full recovery. She then visits the eleven-year-old Morgaine. Through the girl's fragmentary memories and her own Sight, Viviane learns that Morgause and her husband, Lot of Orkney, have been plotting to kill Arthur so they can become Uther's heirs. To insure Arthur's safety, Viviane convinces Uther to send Arthur to his most trusted and obscure vassal for training. She also persuades Uther to let her take Morgaine to Avalon for training.

CHAPTER 11

Morgaine begins her training on the beautiful island of Avalon. Viviane loves Morgaine as her

own daughter, but knows that the Goddess will require terrible things of them both in the future. After seven years, Morgaine has become a priestess. Two years later, Galahad returns to Avalon.

CHAPTER 12

Sixteen-year-old Galahad (who now prefers to be called Lancelot) arrives in Avalon. He and Morgaine are cousins and were childhood playmates. When Morgaine sees him, she realizes he is the first man she has ever desired. He seems to feel the same way. During a free day, Morgaine and Lancelot walk on the lakeshore. Morgaine is having a wonderful time, until they meet a beautiful, lost girl who has wandered away from her convent. She is Gwenhwyfar, a nobleman's daughter, whose fair hair and "respectable" subservience contrast with Morgaine's dark coloring and strong leadership skills. Lancelot is instantly smitten. Morgaine is crushed, but hides behind a mask of priestly dignity.

CHAPTER 13

Taliesen brings Viviane a message that Uther is dying. They plan to test Arthur's readiness to rule.

CHAPTER 14

Morgaine is chosen by Viviane to sacrifice her virginity by sleeping with Arthur in the Great Marriage, a Druid ritual to be conducted at Avalon. Both are disguised, and neither is aware of the other's true identity. Under the influence of the ritual, which includes mind-altering herbs, they assume the persons of deity: she is the Virgin Huntress, and he is the Horned One.

CHAPTER 15

Arthur and Morgaine both lose their virginity. The following morning, they make love again, no longer as deities but merely as individuals, and both are deliriously happy until they recognize each other. Arthur is crushed, and Morgaine soothes him as if he were a child, even though she is full of despair at the way they have been used.

CHAPTER 16

Morgaine struggles with sorrow, betrayal, and rage at Viviane. She is tortured by memories of childhood sermons about the sin of incest, even though this Christian worldview is at odds with her more recent learning as a Druid. After ten days spent alone, she is summoned by Viviane and Taliesen to meet Kevin the Bard, a gifted singer and harpist

who was horribly disfigured in a fire. The meeting is to discuss strategies to put Arthur on the throne. Viviane is genuinely perplexed by Morgaine's anger, and chides her for her "Christian sense of sin." Viviane further explains that, though the mating was dictated by the Goddess, it is also true that she could not give her beloved Morgaine, a Druid princess, to a commoner. Viviane plans to establish Arthur as the rightful king, abetted by the magical sword Excalibur and its scabbard. In return, she will make him swear allegiance to Avalon.

CHAPTER 17

During a vigil on a moonless night, Viviane worries about the future of Avalon and Britain if she dies before Morgaine is ready to become the Lady of the Lake. Viviane deeply loves Morgaine and regrets her pain, but believes it was necessary to save Britain from horrific Saxon barbarity. At dawn, she sees a cloud shaped like a gigantic red dragon, pierced by a comet, indicating Uther has died. She is visited by Uther's shade. He tells her she is the only one who can insure that Arthur becomes the next High King and saves Britain from the Saxons. Just before disappearing, he changes form, and Viviane realizes that she, like Igraine, had known Uther in a past life, and that they had loved each other. Viviane sees visions of the future: Kevin the Bard becoming the Merlin, and Morgaine weeping on a funeral barge. Back in the present, Viviane sends for the Merlin to bring Arthur to her.

CHAPTER 18

Morgaine makes the enchanted scabbard, so imbued with magic that Arthur's blood can never be shed while it is on his person. The Merlin and Viviane make Arthur swear to deal fairly with all people, Christian and Druid, and always to reverence the gods of Avalon, emphasizing the Druid belief that "all the Gods are as one God, and all the Goddesses but one Goddess." Arthur, raised as a Christian but aware that he owes his victory to the old gods, agrees. In addition to the scabbard, Arthur receives the sword, an ancient blade made from meteorite metal. Taliesen dreams of a day when Druid and priest worship together. Morgaine prophetically warns Arthur that this will come to pass, but not as he expects. She has been experiencing nausea and headaches. Arthur introduces Morgaine to his knights, Lancelot and Cai. She regrets missing the chance to be with Lancelot.

CHAPTER 19

At Arthur's coronation (in Glastonbury, on the Isle of the Priests), Morgaine is reunited with Igraine (from whom she is estranged) and Morgause. Morgaine realizes her sickness is due to pregnancy, sparking more anger at Viviane. Morgause sees, but agrees not to tell Igraine. Morgause is with her husband, Lot; their son, Gawaine, is to be Arthur's heir. Lot is bitterly disappointed that Arthur is king. Morgause and Lot claim to have a marriage of equals. At the coronation, Arthur wisely gives equal place to the Merlin and the Bishop. He acknowledges Morgaine as his sister, as a priestess, and as the Duchess of Cornwall, and offers to find her a husband or make her a lady in waiting. She declines. She realizes Arthur longs for her as she longs for Lancelot. Arthur makes Gawaine, Lancelot, and Cai his new Companions. Later, Morgause comforts Morgaine and offers to foster her baby, but Morgaine plans to abort it.

CHAPTER 20

Back on Avalon, Morgaine prepares to end her pregnancy. She could take the necessary herbs from the temple stores, but gathers them alone to avoid notice. She becomes magically lost. In an enchanted hazel grove, a fairy woman appears to dissuade her from the abortion, and suggests Morgaine to stay with her: she will make her sleep for a painless delivery, then raise her baby so he can live long in nature and become an enchanter. The fairy warns of an evil fate for the boy if Morgaine keeps him. Either way, she foretells that Morgaine will never bear another child. Morgaine runs away in a panic. That night, a heartsick Viviane sends for Morgaine after seeing a death omen with the approaching dawn. Though Morgaine claims to have aborted the baby, Viviane knows the truth, and orders her to keep it. Morgaine leaves angrily. Later, she heads to Orkney, abandoning her priestly role. Viviane tells herself Morgaine is safe and will someday return. She seeks a confirming vision, but sees only her son, Balan, holding a sword.

Book Two: The High Queen

CHAPTER 1

After spending her pregnancy with Morgause, Morgaine and her son survive a horrific labor that renders her unable to bear more children. Before the delivery, Lot suggests infanticide to Morgause, pointing out that Morgaine's son will be closer to the throne than their own. Morgause, who loves

Morgaine, refuses to do this. However, right after the birth, she uses magic to discover who the father is. Morgaine makes Morgause swear not to tell anyone. Even though Morgause regrets the oath, she knows she must abide by it or face a priestess' curse. Instead, she decides to foster the baby, both to hide it and to keep it as a bargaining chip. To break the mother-son bond, Morgause denies Morgaine a chance to hold the baby.

CHAPTER 2

Lancelot is sent as Arthur's emissary to King Leodegranz, Gwenhwyfar's father, whose horses and men Arthur seeks in pledge for his armies. Gwenhwyfar is shy, fearful, and neglected; she misses the safety of the nunnery. Pious and naive, she believes the priestesses of Avalon are evil sorceresses. She remembers Lancelot (as well as Morgaine, whom she thinks of as "that terrible Fairy woman") from the time she got lost near Avalon. Lancelot demonstrates his horse-taming skill to the amazed Gwenhwyfar, and later flirts with her while making Arthur's case to her father. Leodegranz agrees to an alliance, but Gwenhwyfar's hopes are dashed when she is given in marriage not to Lancelot, but to Arthur himself. Still, she dutifully acquiesces to her father's wishes.

CHAPTER 3

Igraine now lives in the convent. With hindsight, she feels guilty for neglecting her children, and she is frightened for Morgaine, having had visions of her screaming in agony. However, Igraine refuses to use her Sight to learn more, since she now believes it is a sin to do so. Arthur visits, accompanied by Taliesen and the fanatic, Druid-hating Archbishop Patricius, to consult Igraine about his marriage plans, and to request she visit the girl. He brings news that Morgaine is safe at Lot's court. Igraine agrees to help Arthur.

CHAPTER 4

A year passes; Gwenhwyfar is nearly eighteen. Igraine and Lancelot accompany her to Caerleon for the wedding. During the journey, Igraine tries to reassure the terrified girl, and is shocked to see that Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar are as passionately in love as she and Uther were. Igraine wonders if the marriage can be stopped. At court, Arthur meets Gwenhwyfar. Though courtly and kind, he is more interested in the number of horses she brings with her dowry than he is in her.

CHAPTER 5

Nobles and dignitaries swarm Caerleon for the wedding, which is to include a High Mass followed by a great feast and other festivities. Lancelot escorts the ethereally beautiful bride to the Mass, and cannot take his eyes off her. Gwenhwyfar realizes she wants to marry Lancelot. The Merlin confirms Igraine's fears: it is too late to call off the wedding, since to do so now would dishonor both Gwenhwyfar and Arthur, and cause war with Leodegranz. They must trust the gods to work it out. Later, at the Mass, Igraine feels the presence of Morgaine in the chapel, and is surprised to see her standing behind Morgause and Lot. Morgaine is thinner and more beautiful, and exudes magical power and skepticism. As Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar gaze at each other, Igraine sees that Arthur's eyes are fixed on Morgaine.

CHAPTER 6

After the wedding, Arthur and Gwenhwyfar receive well-wishers and cement political alliances. Gwenhwyfar agrees to make Morgaine her chief lady-in-waiting, despite their mutual distrust. During the night's revelry, Morgaine seeks out Lancelot, telling herself it is to save Arthur from rumors he is a cuckold. They sneak off to the stable, but are interrupted; Morgaine knows their moment has passed. Later, when Lancelot receives a head wound after being thrown from a horse, Morgaine volunteers to watch him through the night. At least, she thinks, his injury will prevent thoughts of the king and queen on their wedding night. When Arthur checks on Lancelot that night, he tries to tell Morgaine of his feelings for her; she cuts him off, telling him to do his duty by his wife. He accepts this rebuke, and seeks Morgaine's blessing. Later, a guilt-ridden Gwenhwyfar watches Arthur sleep, and prays to the Virgin Mary to help her love him as he deserves. She wonders why the castle is so filled with sadness.

CHAPTER 7

Morgaine's son is now three and firmly a part of Morgause's large brood. Although Morgaine longs for him, she believes this arrangement is best. While spinning with the other court ladies, she has a terrible vision of blood on the hearth. Morgaine is notably single, having rejected an advantageous marriage to Cai. Meanwhile, Gwenhwyfar is miserable because she has miscarried again. Arthur and his men have been patrolling for months.

Morgaine senses their return, so Gwenhwyfar prepares a feast. Arthur now loves Gwenhwyfar and is eager to try again for a baby. Gwenhwyfar begins an anti-paganism campaign, which Arthur backs to please her, though he stands by his oath. Morgaine and Lancelot have another failed encounter, this time in the orchard; Lancelot is overcome at the last minute by his newfound Christian scruples. Morgaine, shamed by what she sees as a huge betrayal of both herself and the Goddess, gets Arthur's permission to return to Avalon.

CHAPTER 8

Arthur and his men spend a year pursuing the Saxons, whom they narrowly defeat in battle during the summer. Arthur is wounded, and must convalesce for months after infection sets in. Meanwhile, Gwenhwyfar miscarries again. She suspects God is punishing her for loving Lancelot, and seeks priestly absolution. Arthur, thinking he is barren, gives Gwenhwyfar permission to produce an heir with Lancelot. She is both mortified and tempted. She fails to see that Arthur loves both her and Lancelot, and wants to keep them close.

CHAPTER 9

Viviane's friends, Gawan and Priscilla, have fostered her son, Balan. Priscilla is dying in agony; with the consent of both Priscilla and her husband, Viviane gives her herbs to hasten death. Balan is grateful for Viviane's actions, but Priscilla's natural son, Balin, is furious. Meanwhile, Viviane is desperate for news of Morgaine, but the Sight has left her. Back at Avalon, she sends for Niniane, the fourteen-year-old daughter of Taliesen; she hopes the girl can be trained as the next Lady of Avalon. Though their interview is unsatisfactory, Niniane learns, in a vision, that Morgaine will not return to Avalon for many years. In desperation to find a successor, Viviane asks Raven to be the new Lady, but Raven refuses. Overcome with weariness and grief, Viviane breaks down, and Raven comforts her.

CHAPTER 10

Igraine is dying in the convent in Cornwall. Arthur, still ill, sends Gwenhwyfar in his stead. Igraine is worried about Morgaine, who has disappeared. Igraine seems to have returned to the religion of her youth, and now insists that she still has the Sight; in fact, she knows Gwenhwyfar is pregnant. She is dubious about Arthur's marriage, and is sad that she had to send her children away, even

though she believes she spared her beloved Morgaine a lifetime of self-loathing induced by the misogynist “black (Christian) priests.” Igraine now claims she only adopted Christianity to keep the peace, and joined the convent so she could be near Tintagel. After chiding Gwenhwyfar for disparaging the Goddess, she dies.

CHAPTER 11

Igraine’s death stokes Gwenhwyfar’s fanatical piety to new heights; she dreams that Morgaine is mocking her, and fears Igraine is in hell. However, buoyed by the good news of her pregnancy, Gwenhwyfar now seeks to leave the convent immediately after the burial, despite the danger from a long-foreseen Saxon invasion. Against her attendants’ advice, she heads for Caerleon. Near the castle, Gawaine appears to escort her to safety. The upcoming battle, he says, will mean Britain’s victory or utter destruction. At Caerleon, the queen learns that women and children are to move to Camelot; her attendants have already packed her things. She sees Lancelet, who assures her that wise preparation and Arthur’s leadership will help them defeat the Saxons.

CHAPTER 12

Gwenhwyfar announces her pregnancy and refuses to leave Caerleon, but miscarries anyway. Elaine stays with her. Gwenhwyfar urges Arthur to set aside his pagan banner of Pendragon and carry the Christian banner instead. He agrees; his knights and subject kings are outraged by this decision, but they acquiesce because they need Arthur’s leadership. Lancelet even tries to carry the Pendragon banner, but Arthur refuses to let him. This is a turning point in the spread of Christianity and the decline of the pagan Druids.

CHAPTER 13

Morgaine returns to Avalon to see Viviane, but when she arrives, the magic prevents her from entering. Avalon, she believes, has abandoned her, just as she abandoned it years before. In truth, she is not yet ready to return. As she wanders in the mist, she is met by a fairy prince, who leads her to a feast, where she sees the fairy woman she’d met years before during her pregnancy. The woman calls her “Queen Morgaine.” In the fairy land, Morgaine spends her time feasting, reveling, learning, and lovemaking; she also has visions, and is able to forgive Lancelet and others. After what

seem like a few weeks in this dreamlike existence, she has a vision of women weeping over Arthur’s betrayal of Avalon, and knows she must return to the real world. Her horse has disappeared—long dead, she later realizes—and her clothes, though clean, seem faded. Later, she surmises that about five years passed in what felt like a few weeks.

CHAPTER 14

Morgaine begins walking to Caerleon to confront Arthur; she will do her duty, though she’d prefer to return to the fairy land. In an abandoned cottage, she kills and eats a stray chicken. The next day, she meets Kevin Harper on the road. He is surprised to see her, and more surprised to learn that she has not heard of the great battle three years before, or of Igraine’s death. She, in turn, is shocked to realize how long she has been gone, grieved by her mother’s death, and aghast at Arthur’s betrayal. His decision to fight under the cross nearly caused a mutiny, she learns: only the need to defeat the Saxons held his coalition together. Kevin is now heading to court to confront Arthur on Avalon’s behalf. If he is ignored, Viviane herself will charge Arthur with oath-breaking at Pentecost. Morgaine and Kevin become lovers after she realizes he loves her for herself, not for what she symbolizes.

CHAPTER 15

Morgaine and Kevin arrive at court for the annual mock battles. Gwenhwyfar relentlessly pushes Arthur to forsake the old ways. He acquiesces to please her, but is gloomily certain he will be punished for oath-breaking. Morgaine is re-established at court. Kevin and Taliesen speak privately with Arthur. In the spring, Lancelet gets a fever, and Morgaine nurses him. She still loves him. Later, he declares himself to Gwenhwyfar, and asks to leave Camelot so he will not betray Arthur. She agrees.

CHAPTER 16

Leodengranz dies. Balan arrives with news that a dragon has been seen in the north. Kevin once again confronts Arthur privately, telling him (from Viviane) that if he does not honor his oath, the hand that gave him Excalibur will smite him with it. Arthur still will not relent. Therefore, Viviane will arrive at Pentecost with one final warning.

CHAPTER 17

Pentecost coincides with the older pagan fertility festival of Beltane, which most Britons still observe.

Gwenhwyfar, who especially resents her childlessness at this time, begs Morgaine for a fertility charm. She gives it, but warns that it may have unintended consequences; she also reveals that Arthur is not barren, but swears Gwenhwyfar to secrecy. That night, after hours of festivities and drunk on wine, Arthur, Gwenhwyfar, and Lancelot stagger to Arthur's bedchamber, where Arthur confesses his love for both, and suggests Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar make love in his bed, with him in it; that way, they can truthfully claim that any resulting child was conceived in the king's bed. They do so, but at the last minute, Gwenhwyfar rips the charm off her neck.

Book Three: The King Stag

CHAPTER 1

With Lot dead, Morgause rules her kingdom alone. Though she enjoys a succession of lovers, she misses the crafty and intelligent Lot. However, she is very close to Morgaine's son, Gwydion, who is devious, frighteningly intelligent, and gifted with the Sight. Viviane arrives at Lothian with Kevin (who is now the Merlin of Britain) and Niniane, Morgause's half-sister. While Gwydion secretly eavesdrops, they discuss the fate of Britain, including ways to have Gwenhwyfar removed from the throne. They also discuss Gwydion, who learns his true identity when Viviane asserts that he must leave Lothian, since, as Arthur's son, he is too important to be left with the untrustworthy Morgause. They decide that Gwydion will go with Viviane to Avalon for priestly training.

CHAPTER 2

Arthur's court prepares again for the Pentecost feast. Morgaine is anxious to see Kevin, though she still loves Lancelot. Taliesen tells Morgaine that Kevin wants to marry her, but though it is a good match, Morgaine has no desire to marry. Kevin arrives, telling Morgaine of the events at Lothian and the plans for Gwydion, who he believes will be a bard and notable wise man. At the feast, Arthur agrees to make Gareth a knight. Meanwhile, Lancelot flies into a rage at a harmless jest about his devotion to the queen; only Morgaine's intervention prevents bloodshed. Later that night, Morgaine listens in horror as Lancelot guiltily confesses to the threesome at Beltane, his love for the queen, and his even greater love for Arthur. Lancelot is more strongly considering Christianity, whose God, he hears, will forgive homosexuality.

After he leaves, Morgaine's Sight returns with a vision. She wonders if this means she will one day be welcomed again into Avalon.

CHAPTER 3

Morgaine arrives after the Pentecost Mass. She and Morgaine have a loving reunion, and Morgaine eagerly accepts Viviane's invitation to return to Avalon. When it is time for petitioners to approach Arthur, Gwenhwyfar's brutish half-brother, Meleagant, appears, demanding the Summer Country as Leodegranz's only surviving son. He is sent away dissatisfied, leaving his battle axe behind. Next, Viviane confronts Arthur. As she begins to state her case, Balin suddenly rushes up and murders her with the discarded axe. Morgaine realizes this is the fulfillment of her horrible vision of blood on the hearth. Everyone wants to kill Balin, but Arthur instead decrees he shall be banished after first accompanying Viviane's body to Glastonbury to be buried by the priests; her burial site will become a shrine, a monument to Christianity and the king's justice. Morgaine is furious at this blasphemy against the Goddess; she breaks with Kevin when he supports Arthur.

CHAPTER 4

It is spring, and Meleagant has set himself up as king of the Summer Country. Waiting until Arthur and his knights are away on patrol, Meleagant sends a messenger under a flag of truce, begging Gwenhwyfar to negotiate with him for the land. Ignoring the warnings of Cai and Morgaine, she sets out with only a few retainers. Meleagant imprisons and rapes her, intending to claim the land under the old laws that grant rule to the Queen's consort. After a day, Gwenhwyfar is rescued by Lancelot, who kills Meleagant. At her request, he makes love to her to erase the memory of rape. Still, she begins to doubt God and her own faith. On the way home, she rides openly with Lancelot, resolving never to hide her love again.

CHAPTER 5

On the day of Arthur's scheduled return, Morgaine and the Lady Elaine must wait for Lancelot to leave the queen's bed before they can attend her. This shocks the naive Elaine, who wishes to marry Lancelot. Morgaine—realizing that the affair will compromise Arthur's reign if it becomes known—agrees to make Elaine a love charm to catch Lancelot. Morgaine also has a vision of Lancelot

and Elaine's son, and realizes that the Goddess wants the two to be together. She warns Elaine about likely unintended consequences, and makes her promise her first daughter to Morgaine to be raised as a priestess. For the charm to work, Lancelot must be away from court, so Morgaine convinces him to leave for his own safety. Accordingly, that evening, Lancelot begs Arthur for a quest; he is allowed to accompany Elaine to the court of her father, to hunt a dragon.

CHAPTER 6

Lancelot has returned to court with King Pellinore, Elaine's father. To everyone's astonishment, Pellinore's dragon was real, and the men have been burned while slaying it. Morgaine helps Elaine dress their wounds, and gives Elaine another chance to back out of her bargain, but Elaine refuses. Morgaine creates the potion, which will cause Lancelot to mistake the virginal Elaine for the queen and be overcome with desire, after which King Pellinore will discover them and insist they be married. Morgaine pities Elaine but sticks with the plan, herself exposing the lovers to Pellinore. Though ashamed, Morgaine believes this is necessary to save both Lancelot and Arthur from the disaster that is Gwenhwyfar. Lancelot and Elaine are married immediately, and Elaine bears a son, Galahad, nine months later.

CHAPTER 7

It is Pentecost, two years later. Arthur is to announce that Lancelot's son, Galahad, is his heir. Gwenhwyfar, gnawed by bitterness and guilt, picks a fight with Arthur during which she accidentally reveals Gwydion's existence. He immediately sends for Morgaine, who reluctantly tells him that Gwydion is safe in Avalon. Arthur weeps with pity and remorse, mainly for Morgaine; he is deeply sorry she has borne such a burden alone. Nevertheless, he gives in when Gwenhwyfar nags him to make penance for the "sin" of incest, even though he does not believe he is guilty. He does not realize it yet, but this easy capitulation to Gwenhwyfar's selfishness and religious hysteria is the beginning of the end for him, the final betrayal of Avalon that will lead to his downfall.

CHAPTER 8

Morgaine meets Accolon, whose father, Uriens, is the widowed, elderly king of North Wales. Accolon and Morgaine act on their instant attraction, miss-

ing Mass. A follower of the Goddess, Accolon bears the serpent tattoos of a priest. Morgaine realizes that Arthur loves her and that Gwenhwyfar fears her power over him. At the high feast, Lancelot confesses to Gwenhwyfar that he thought he was meeting her the night he was trapped into marrying Elaine. Arthur hears petitions, including one from Uriens asking permission to remarry. The vengeful Gwenhwyfar persuades Arthur to promise Morgaine to Uriens, and Morgaine agrees, mistakenly thinking she is being pledged to Accolon. Now, to her horror, she is trapped as Lancelot was, with no escape and no chance to explain to Accolon. She comforts herself that he would have wanted a younger wife. Uriens is kind, and Morgaine returns the kindness. He already has children and does not need any from her. The two have a pleasant life in North Wales, and Uriens' youngest son, nine-year-old Uwayne, comes to treat Morgaine as a mother.

CHAPTER 9

Accolon returns to North Wales before Midsummer. A family dinner highlights the cultural conflict between Christianity, espoused by Arthur, and the old ways. The Saxons have converted and sworn allegiance to Arthur, and Arthur continues to do a mysterious penance. Accolon confronts Morgaine, who regrets not resisting the match to Uriens, and worries that she should have tried harder to undermine Gwenhwyfar's influence on Arthur. She resolves to once again take up the work left by Viviane. The next day, at Midsummer, Accolon and Uwayne both see the image of the Goddess in Morgaine as she and Uriens lead the people in festivities. That night, with Uriens away, Accolon and Morgaine renew their love under the stars, an act witnessed and blessed by the fairy people. Morgaine sees this as a priestly reconsecration, and subsequently relearns the priestly lore and begins observing the pagan calendar. She finds an ancient stone circle and begins leaving food for the fairies, who give her gifts of dried fairy flowers and priceless hallucinogenic mushrooms. The latter she regards as tools to regain the Sight, as well as a sign that her prayers to the Goddess are answered and her penance is done.

CHAPTER 10

Kevin visits Niniane in Avalon. Now Lady of the Lake, as well as Gwydion's lover, she feels deeply that she is unfavorably compared with Viviane and

Morgaine, since she lacks their power and was chosen for her family ties to Taliesen. Gwydion, Kevin says, has gained battle experience with Arthur's Saxon allies, without Arthur's knowledge. For his excellence in combat, the Saxons have nicknamed him "Mordred," or "Evil Counsel," a reference to the "bad news" he deals to enemies. Niniane claims he is ready to become king of Avalon, but Kevin disagrees; he believes Arthur represents the spirit of Great Britain, which has shifted from Avalon to Camelot. Later, Gwydion persuades Niniane to be the Spring Maiden to his King Stag, even though the ritual requires a virgin. She wonders if his persuasive ability is a dangerous heritage from Arthur and Uther. Elsewhere, Morgaine is shaken by a dream. In it, she performs the Great Marriage with a young man resembling Lancelot, who says he wishes she didn't look like his mother.

CHAPTER 11

Once again, it is Pentecost at Arthur's court, a time Gwenhwyfar hates, since it reminds her of her inadequacies, her outsider status with Arthur's knights, and her lost youth. Though there is peace in the land, Arthur wants to show his military might, since he is being challenged by the upstart Lucius of Less Britain, who claims to be the new emperor of Rome. Gwenhwyfar is angry that Arthur continues to acknowledge Avalon for political reasons, and her infertility is a source of misery for her and discontent among subjects who think Arthur should find a new, fertile wife. Arthur's clear longing for Gwydion (whom he cannot acknowledge) also gnaws at the queen. Meanwhile, Lancelot has forgiven Morgaine for entrapping him with Elaine, and thinks he is now "over" Gwenhwyfar (although Morgaine sees this is false). Kevin makes peace with Morgaine, though he fears her, having foreseen brutal acts she will commit. At the feast, Roman guards representing Lucius burst in, demanding tribute. Arthur kicks them out and begins planning a counterattack.

CHAPTER 12

Morgaine travels to Elaine and Lancelot's castle to collect their eldest daughter, Nimue. Elaine at first refuses, but relents when Morgaine threatens blackmail. Returning to Avalon with the five-year-old child, Morgaine is relieved that the mists once again part for her. On Avalon, she sees her old friend and fellow priestess, Raven, and speaks with Niniane. As Lady of the Lake, Niniane tells

Morgaine that Accolon, and not Avalloch, must succeed Uriens as king of North Wales; she sees that Morgaine will kill for Avalon, though Morgaine denies it. Niniane further tells Morgaine that it is not yet time for her to return to Avalon, and that she must take Excalibur from Arthur if he will not honor his vows. Before she leaves, Morgaine meets Gwydion for the first time. Now a Druid priest, he is the image of Lancelot as a young man. He asks that she introduce him to Arthur in five years. Though he reveals a hint of his hatred for his parents, it is quickly covered by his suave facade. Morgaine agrees to his request, and gives him her blessing before leaving.

Chapter 13

A homesick Gwydion travels to Lothian to visit Morgause, the only mother he has ever known. He tells her of Morgaine's visit. Gwydion, though young, is already weary of his fate, bitter and sad and tired. In a moment of weakness, he tells Morgause that he wishes he could have been reared in ordinary circumstances, with Morgaine as merely his mother and Arthur as merely his father, not saddled with the legacy of Avalon and the burden of having a priestess mother and a father who is king. He has foreseen that he will be Arthur's undoing, and he regrets this as well, wishing he could simply love Arthur. Gwydion drinks to forget his sorrows, then falls asleep. Morgause, who loves Gwydion more than her own sons, strokes his hair and listens to him moan in his sleep.

Book Four: The Prisoner in the Oak

CHAPTER 1

Uwaine goes home to North Wales for a visit. Uriens has been sick in bed for weeks. He remarks to Morgaine that, unaccountably, the old ways of worship seem to be regaining a foothold (he is unaware that she and Accolon have restored them), and the local priest has been pestering him to cut down the sacred oak grove. Morgaine is outraged, but hides her anger, instead persuading him that the oak trees are useful and beautiful, yielding food for pigs and a source of acorn flour in years of poor harvest, a lifeline for some of his subjects. He relents, but warns her that when he dies, Avalloch will be free to cut down the groves. After performing her day's duties, she goes off to spend the night with Accolon, with whom she shares a true, though doomed, love.

CHAPTER 2

Avalloch accosts Morgaine in the early morning as she returns from Accolon's room, threatening to expose her infidelity to Uriens if she does not sleep with him, too. He also brags that he will raze the oak grove. Morgaine realizes that she will, indeed, fulfill Niniane's prophecy of murder. She uses magic to get Avalloch killed in a hunting accident, falling ill herself as a result. Accolon realizes what has happened, but sees it is the Goddess' will.

CHAPTER 3

During an interlude in the woods, Morgaine explains some of her purpose to Accolon, and asks him if he is willing to challenge Arthur for Excalibur. He says yes, though he has a premonition of his own death in the attempt. In a sacred hazel grove, Morgaine and Accolon enter the supernatural realm, coming face to face with the fairy queen and the Horned One, the King Stag. Accolon undergoes, and passes, a mysterious king-making test. There is an eclipse, and the hazel grove shifts back to normal. On the way home, Morgaine realizes that although Accolon has been accepted, there is no guarantee he will survive.

CHAPTER 4

It is once again the eve of Pentecost. Arthur and Gwenhwyfar prepare for a private family dinner. Ironically, Arthur speaks of the danger of hubris—pride—that brought down the caesars of Rome. Gwenhwyfar notes that Lancelot is now free, since Elaine is dead; she also sees the attraction between Morgaine and Accolon. Lancelot's son, Galahad, is to be knighted. Morgaine tells Lancelot that Nimue is on Avalon, not in a nunnery as he had supposed. He seems to think this amounts to the same thing, and is content. Morgause shocks everyone by presenting Gwydion as Morgaine's child. Though he cannot officially recognize him, Arthur receives him gladly and proclaims that his "nephew" will be treated as a son in his court. When Morgaine asks Gwydion why he appeared at court before she called him, he tells her it is so he can see his competition (Galahad). He also reveals that Nimue, now about fourteen, has been taken into seclusion by Raven, raised in silence and away from men. Morgaine is alarmed when Gwydion remarks that Galahad looks like someone who will not survive to be High King. However, he swears that Galahad will not die by his hand or by hers; it is in the hands of the Goddess.

CHAPTER 5

During the games, Accolon receives a prize from Morgaine's hands, and someone in the crowd hisses and calls her a witch and a harlot. Arthur's men search vainly for the heckler. Later, Gwydion surprises Morgaine and Morgause by challenging Lancelot to a mock battle, forcing Arthur to permit him to be knighted, too. Lancelot knights him as Sir Mordred, since he gained the honor through craftiness. Everyone sees that Gwydion strongly resembles Lancelot. In the feast hall, an unknown malefactor has draped the thrones with garish banners containing pornographic caricatures of Arthur, Gwenhwyver, Lancelot, and Morgaine. Again, no one can discover the culprit. After the banners are removed and purifying incense is burned, the celebration resumes, to be interrupted by the arrival of three Saxon warlords, who swear allegiance to Arthur and vow to convert; he has them swear on Excalibur, deliberately making the magical sword cast the shadow of a cross. Morgaine is outraged by this blasphemy, and seeks a private meeting with Arthur to once again remind him of his duty to Avalon.

CHAPTER 6

The meeting includes Uriens, Gwydion, Accolon, Gwenhwyfar, and Kevin. Morgaine accuses Arthur of making the Saxons foreswear their gods and substitute his own. Although he denies it, this is exactly what he has done. In the ensuing argument, only Gwydion takes Morgaine's part; even Kevin supports Arthur. Morgaine, however, reminds Arthur that the sword does not belong to him, but to Avalon; Arthur angrily retorts that it is now his, and if the Goddess wants it back, she will have to take it herself. Morgaine now knows Arthur is doomed, and realizes the Goddess will wear her face when she takes the sword. Later, Arthur tells Gwydion privately that he is sorry he cannot publicly acknowledge him; he does, however, admit that he will be king if Galahad dies, and makes him his chancellor and representative to the Saxons, as well as Duke of Cornwall. This clever move both acknowledges Gwydion and gets him safely out of the way. Thereafter, Morgaine creates a ruse to travel to Cornwall with Arthur to resolve a land dispute. However, she is really planning to find a way to take Excalibur back.

CHAPTER 7

Morgaine is horrified to find herself pregnant at

nearly forty-nine. She is also afraid, remembering how she almost died giving birth to Gwydion. It is Accolon's child, although Uriens will congratulate himself on his virility. She is sick, but conceals it from everyone while she plots to return Excalibur to Avalon. In a meeting, Kevin warns her not to confuse her own will, pride, and ambition with the will of the Goddess; he also tells her she must return to Avalon. Both he and Morgaine see a portent of his death. Although Kevin claims to be a Druid, he speaks like a Christian, justifying Arthur's actions. Morgaine flies into a rage when he suggests that the time of Avalon may be past, and her time with it.

CHAPTER 8

Several days after the audience with Arthur, Morgaine and Uriens head to Tintagel by way of Avalon. Before she leaves, she confers with Accolon. He is to meet her at the Lake, where they plan to lead Arthur into the fairy world and take Excalibur from him, making Accolon king. Arthur will stay in the fairy realm for three days and three nights—five years of human time—emerging only after Accolon is well established and the danger of priestly rule is past. Morgaine has tried to engineer things so Arthur will not be harmed; she loves him despite everything. Morgaine uses magic to gain access to the fairy world. There, they are met by fairy men who take them to Castle Chariot to meet the fairy queen. Arthur becomes confused. As the men lead Arthur away, the fairy queen presents Accolon to Morgaine, telling her he was found wandering lost by the shores of the lake. The queen commends Morgaine's choice of Accolon. She shows them Arthur, asleep in the arms of a fairy woman who looks exactly like Morgaine; the queen explains that here, Arthur has his heart's desire, but when he awakes, he will think it was an evil dream sent to tempt him. Arthur, she says, has always loved Morgaine most, and always will.

The fairy queen bemoans Arthur's newfound piety, warning that if he prays when he awakes, the illusion will be broken and the plot will be revealed. Morgaine, magically transformed into her younger self, realizes that if Arthur wills it, they can return in time and avoid the whole subsequent series of entanglements and sorrow, including the Lancelet-Gwenhwyfar situation. However, this would require that Arthur admit his feelings for her. In another moment of betrayal, he awakes and cries out a prayer to Jesus and Mary against the enchantment,

breaking the spell. Morgaine sends Accolon away to his fate. She believes she will never be happy again after this, since one of the two men she loves must die in the impending struggle. Later, after returning home with Uriens, she takes herbs to make her miscarry, then joins the castle women in needlework and gossiping. While spinning, she has a vision of the battle between Arthur and Accolon, and begins to miscarry when the struggle turns against her lover. She is tended by the women and comes close to death. She prepares for Accolon's return, but gets a horrible surprise: a messenger from Arthur, bearing Accolon's shrouded corpse. A terrible scene follows with Uriens, who finally realizes what has gone on and denounces her. She nearly stabs Uriens, but is restrained by Uwayne. Only the good-hearted Uwayne treats her with love and sympathy, though he too is grief-stricken by what she has done.

That night, Morgaine, still sick and bleeding, leaves Camelot permanently, knowing she will return only once more in her life. She travels to the convent in Glastonbury, where Arthur is recovering, to retrieve the sword and scabbard. However, she finds Arthur asleep, clutching Excalibur, and is unable to physically harm him to recover the sword. Instead, she takes the magical scabbard and throws it in the lake of Avalon. Arthur wakes and pursues her but she is hidden by fairies, and he leaves. She goes to Tintagel, where she wills herself to die during a months-long illness brought on by deep mourning. She is near death when Kevin arrives to persuade her to return to Avalon. He uses the magic of his music to begin her healing and to induce a vision of a shining God of light whose name she does not know, and whom she refers to as the "eternal One." She responds to this God's insistence that she return to life. After resting for several days, she returns to Avalon, becoming the Lady of the Lake. She teaches children and seekers. Christians who have been persecuted by the priests take refuge there as well, and she comes to realize that her quarrel is not with the Christ, but with bigoted men who claim to represent him. Years pass. Finally, Morgaine is recalled to the world beyond Avalon by a prophecy from Raven.

CHAPTER 9

In Raven's vision, Kevin steals the remaining Holy Regalia from Avalon and reunites the pieces with Excalibur so the power of Avalon may reside in the world, in the hands of the priests. (The Regalia consist of Excalibur, a spear, and a cup.) Morgaine,

Niniane, and Nimue witness a similar vision in the scrying mirror. They are shocked at this supreme act of treason against Avalon. The traditional penalty for this crime is to be flayed alive, then sealed into the island's holy oak, with a small air-vent so the prisoner's death is slow and agonizing. The women shudder at what they must do, but prepare to bring Kevin to justice nevertheless. Nimue, now a beautiful young woman, is to travel to Arthur's court and serve as one of Gwenhwyfar's ladies in waiting, asking that her association with Avalon be kept secret. There, she is to seduce Kevin—whose great weakness is his belief that he is repugnant to women—and bring him back to Avalon for punishment. As part of the plan, Morgaine and Raven are to go to court disguised as beggar women, and use magic to retrieve spear and cup. Before the Pentecost feast begins, they witness Bishop Patricius preparing for Mass, the cup of Avalon at the ready; Morgaine realizes Kevin has committed a further betrayal by giving Patricius secret Druid knowledge that allows him to touch the holy item and still live. As Patricius begins, Morgaine calls on the power of the Goddess to take the cup into her own hands and serve the crowd in the hall, beginning with Patricius, Arthur, and the knights. In the person of the Goddess, Morgaine appears differently to everyone, and nobody recognizes her; instead, most think they are participating in a Christian Communion with the best bread and wine they have ever tasted, administered supernaturally by the Virgin Mary herself. When it is over, the Holy Regalia are gone, whisked back to Avalon using the Great Magic. As the knights come to themselves, they begin to proclaim a quest to retrieve what they believe is the Holy Grail—the cup from which Christ drank during the Last Supper. Back in the hall, Morgaine grieves to see that Raven has died from the strain of using such tremendous magical power. Arthur sees Morgaine. She does not know if he recognizes her, but he gives her a token so his men will help transport Raven. She returns to Avalon with Raven's body.

CHAPTER 10

As Gwenhwyfar ponders the meaning of what she has experienced, she is free from fear and hatred for the first time in her life. The knights set off on the Grail quest. All have seen the Goddess in a form suited to them: some as a mighty angel, some as the Virgin Mary, some as a bright light.

Mordred asks Arthur's leave to stay behind.

CHAPTER 11

In accordance with the plan, Nimue enchants Kevin by having him fall in love with her. Her magic rebounds, however, and she falls deeply in love with him. Through her efforts, he is magically returned to Avalon. There, he faces his death with courage. He prophesies the end of Avalon, telling Morgaine that his actions were prompted by the Goddess, so her power could go forth in the world and touch many at Arthur's court. Morgaine sees this is true. Filled with pity and sorrow, she orders a swift and merciful death. At the moment of Kevin's death, a lightning bolt splits the great oak. Nimue disappears in the ensuing storm, and is discovered afterwards, having drowned herself to be with Kevin. Morgaine orders him buried in the oak.

CHAPTER 12

Avalon's population dwindles; many have died, and others have returned to the world or disappeared into the Fairy lands. The remainder are joined from time to time by both old Druids and old Christians who are being persecuted by the advocates of the new, more narrow interpretation of Christianity. Morgaine sees Avalon retreating further into the mists, and sees she must look inward for guidance—the Goddess will no longer manifest in the world. Morgaine has occasional visions of the questing Companions' fates: some are living and some dying. Lancelot goes mad and is imprisoned in a dungeon. After a year, Lancelot arrives on Avalon's shores. He tells Morgaine the story of his madness and restoration, when he was found by some of the Companions and slowly regained his wits. He also reports that Mordred is too close to Arthur. As foreseen, the Grail quest has scattered the Round Table. Lancelot asks after Galahad, and Morgaine leads him to the chapel, where the Grail appears. As if in a vision, Lancelot sees Galahad approach the Grail, but, unprepared to touch the holy thing, he dies on contact. Morgaine tells a grief-stricken Lancelot to take Galahad's body back to Camelot, and to leave the Grail forever outside the world.

CHAPTER 13

Morgause learns that her lover, Lamorak, has died on the Grail quest. She is a practitioner of dark magic, which she has used to promote her political ends, and has lost all decency. She has been the

cause of Gwenhwyfar's infertility all these years, since she has had one of her ladies put abortifacient herbs in the Queen's wine every night. Morgause has a vision of her son, Gareth, begging Lancelot to bring Galahad back to Camelot. Sensing a threat to Gwydion, she prepares to leave for Camelot at dawn. On the way, she and her company become magically lost, and for a time Camelot seems to disappear. This, combined with disturbing visions of Viking and Saxon invaders, frightens Morgause. The spell is broken when Lancelot appears, bringing Galahad's body. Nearer the castle, they are greeted by Gareth and Mordred. Morgause regrets coming to the court.

CHAPTER 14

At court, Gwydion is named Arthur's heir. Gwenhwyfar has a deep foreboding about Arthur's growing reliance on Gwydion and Niniane, but realizes there is no other way, now that Galahad is dead. Arthur has been in power for thirty-one years. Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot are still in love. Seeking to comfort him, she invites him to her chambers for the night, and he accepts.

CHAPTER 15

The knights go to war against the invading Northmen. Gwydion is outraged that no one has prevented the Saxons from hunting the sacred deer on Dragon Island. He sees Arthur's kingship weakening, and attributes it to the contempt the Saxons feel toward a cuckold. Gwydion hates Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot, and wants to expose their adultery in a way that Arthur cannot ignore. He desires to purge the court to restore the integrity of the kingship. Niniane refuses to betray Gwenhwyfar; in a moment of rage, Gwydion strikes and accidentally kills her. Morgause appears at this moment, finding Niniane dead and Gwydion distraught. Savoring her power over Gwydion, Morgause agrees to help hide the crime.

CHAPTER 16

One night, Gwydion and several Companions—including Gawaine and Gareth—hide in Gwenhwyfar's chambers to trap her and Lancelot so they can present them to Arthur as traitors. They confront Lancelot, and a fight ensues in which Gwydion is hurt, and Gareth and another man are killed, as the lovers escape the castle. Gwydion is overcome with real grief over Gareth, whom he loves as a brother. He blames Morgause

and her monstrous ambition, and reminds her that her adulteries are worse and more varied than Gwenhwyfar's. Cast away by Gwydion, a shaken Morgause retreats to her chambers, where she makes a pass at one of her men-at-arms. He rebuffs her, saying she is "not herself" after the night's horror. She suddenly realizes that she is an old woman whose plotting has come to nothing.

CHAPTER 17

After a brief romantic interlude, Gwenhwyfar declines Lancelot's request to run off with him, realizing they will never be accepted anywhere. She enters a convent instead, allowing Lancelot to make peace with Arthur. As a result, she herself feels genuine peace and love for all, and is now able to forgive and pray for everyone, including Morgaine. Later, Lancelot returns to court to find Camelot is damaged irretrievably, the fellowship of the Round Table broken. More than half the knights, and many of the Saxons, now follow Mordred. In a final battle on Avalon's shores, Mordred is killed and Arthur is mortally wounded. At Morgaine's request, Lancelot throws Excalibur in the lake despite Arthur's objections. A hand rises out of the water to catch the sword, brandishes it three times, and sinks again. Morgaine returns to Avalon on the barge with Arthur, where she forgives him for everything. As he dies, he remembers her as she was in youth, and confesses that he will always see the Goddess with her face. He asks her not to leave him, and she holds him as he dies.

EPILOGUE

Much later, Morgaine dreams of Lancelot, and realizes he is dead. She ventures to the abbey, where she discovers that he has indeed died; he had been a monk for years, and had only been made a priest a few days before. She is happy for him, realizing he has found his Grail at last. She goes on to the convent so she can plant a sprig of Holy Thorn on Viviane's grave. There she encounters nuns, and worships with them in the chapel of St. Brigid, feeling the power of the Goddess once again. In a moment of insight and revelation, she feels forgiven, and realizes that she and Arthur did not fail—they unwittingly fulfilled the Goddess' work by bringing her from Avalon into the world, where she is needed. Full of peace and love at last, Morgaine returns to the Lake to part the mist and enter the true Avalon, her work finally done.

Timeline of Medieval English History

ca.450-525	Anglo-Saxon conquest
ca.600	Goddodin (earliest reference to Arthur)
ca.800	Nennius, <i>History of the Britons</i>
ca.950	<i>Annals of Wales</i>
1066	Norman Conquest
ca.1136	Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>History of the Kings of the Britons</i>
1139	Civil War between Stephen and Matilda
1154-89	Reign of Henry II
1155	Wace, <i>Roman de Brut</i>
ca.1160-80	Romances of Chretien de Troyes
ca.1190	Arthur's grave dug up
1215-35	Arthurian vulgate prose romances
1327-77	Reign of Edward III
1337	Outbreak of Hundred Years' War
ca.1380	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>
1400	Death of Chaucer
1454-85	Wars of the Roses
ca.1469-70	Malory completes <i>Le Morte D'Arthur</i>
1485	Henry VII becomes the first Tudor king Caxton prints <i>Le Morte D'Arthur</i>

Author Sketch

Marion Zimmer Bradley was born to an impoverished family in Albany, New York, in 1930. Her father was a carpenter and her mother, a historian. Bradley attended the State University of New York at Albany from 1946-48, then married Robert Alden Bradley in 1949, the same year she began writing professionally. The marriage lasted until her divorce in 1964. She married numismatist Walter H. Breen (to whom she remained married until 1990) the same year. The following year, she earned a B.A. from Hardin-Simmons College in Abilene, Texas, and subsequently moved to California to pursue graduate studies at the University of California-Berkeley, where Breen received a Ph.D. She was one of the cofounders of the Society for Creative Anachronism.

Bradley was a writer from the very start: before she could even form letters, she was dictating stories to her mother to write down. Bradley penned her first novel in high school, based on a libretto of the

opera *Norma*. This early work served as the basis for a novel she was to publish nearly fifty years later, *The Forest House*. Before Bradley had finished high school, she became fascinated with science fiction, which became her lifelong interest.

Bradley's first published stories appeared in the pulp science fiction magazines of the 1950s. Her novel, *Planet Savers*, began the popular *Darkover* series, which has since become one of the most popular series in science fiction and fantasy. The more than twenty *Darkover* novels have inspired their own fan magazines. *The Mists of Avalon*, Bradley's first mainstream best seller, is a retelling of the legend of Camelot. Bradley used similar themes and approaches in *The Firebrand*, a reworking of the fall of Troy. Speaking about *The Mists of Avalon*, Bradley said: "One of the main problems I had, in writing the Arthurian novel, was the fear that Christians would feel I was attacking the basics of Christianity, rather than the enormous bigotry and anti-feminism that have become grafted onto Christianity."

After Bradley's death, other writers finished some of the manuscripts she had begun. For example, *Priestess of Avalon*, completed by Diana L. Paxson, is a prequel to *The Mists of Avalon*.

In the 1950s, Bradley published several lesbian novels under a variety of pseudonyms, and later, under her own name, two bibliographies of gay and lesbian literature and a gay mainstream novel, *The Catch Trap*. Writing a remembrance of Bradley in the *Lambda Book Report*, Lawrence Shimmel observed: "While she is best known for her science-fiction and fantasy novels, lesbian and gay readers also know her for her innumerable contributions to gay literature." A neopagan until fairly late in life, by the 1990s Bradley had converted to Christianity and become a devout Episcopalian. She died of a heart attack in 1999, and was survived by three children—a son with Bradley, and a son and a daughter with Breen.

Critic's Corner

Bradley received many awards for her writing, including the Locus Award for best fantasy novel in 1984 for *The Mists of Avalon*. *Mists* itself offers a uniquely feminist interpretation of Arthurian myth in which the main characters and driving forces are

representatives of the matriarchal druidic culture who are fighting to preserve Britain in the face of the twin threats of marauding Saxons and a harshly patriarchal, misogynist version of medieval Christianity imported from Rome. Arthur and his knights are merely peripheral figures in this struggle, tools of the workings of Fate and the divine.

"*The Mists of Avalon* ... is probably the most ambitious retelling of the Arthurian legend in the twentieth century," Charlotte Spivack asserts in *Merlin's Daughters: Contemporary Women Writers of Fantasy*. Spivack adds that this novel "is much more than a retelling. ... It is a profound revisioning. Imaginatively conceived, intricately structured, and richly peopled, it offers a brilliant reinterpretation of the traditional material from the point of view of the major female characters," such as Arthur's mother Igraine; the Lady of the Lake Viviane; Arthur's half-sister, the enchantress Morgaine; and Arthur's wife, Gwenhwyfar. In addition, Bradley presents the eventual downfall of Arthur's reign as the result of broken promises to the religious leaders of Avalon; while Arthur gains his crown with the aid of Viviane and the Goddess she represents, the influence of Christian priests and Gwenhwyfar lead him to forsake his oath. Thus, not only does Bradley present Arthur's story from a different viewpoint, she also roots it "in the religious struggle between matriarchal worship of the goddess and the patriarchal institution of Christianity, between what the author calls 'the cauldron and the cross.'" In presenting this conflict, Spivack says, Bradley "memorably depicts the inevitable passing of times and religions by her use of the imagery of different simultaneous worlds."

Maude McDaniel, writing in the *Washington Post*, noted that Bradley "compares head-on the pre-Christian Druidism of Britain and the Christianity that supplants it, a refreshing change from some modern writers who tend to take refuge at awkward moments in cryptic metaphysics." Science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon said of Bradley, "one of the Big ones ... writes science-fiction."

Selected Other Works

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

The Door through Space (1961)
Seven from the Stars (1962)

The Sword of Aldones and The Planet Savers (1962)
Falcons of Narabedla and The Dark Intruder and Other Stories (1964)
The Brass Dragon (1969)
The Winds of Darkover (1970)
Hunters of the Red Moon (1973)
The Parting of Arwen (1974)
The Endless Voyage (1975)
The Ruins of Isis (1978)
The House Between the Worlds (1980)
Web of Darkness (1983)
The Inheritor (1984, 1997)
Night's Daughter (1985)
The Fall of Atlantis (1987)
The Firebrand (1987)
Warrior Woman (1988)
City of Sorcery (1988)
The Forest House (1994)
Lady of the Trillium (1995)
Witchlight (1996)
The Gratitude of Kings (1997)
Gravelight (1997)
Lady of Avalon (1997)

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San Francisco Examiner, February 27, 1983.
Staicar, Tom, editor, *The Feminine Eye: Science-Fiction and the Women Who Write It*, Ungar New York, 1982.
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General Objectives

1. To understand the ancient cultures of Britain
2. To assess the effects of clashing religions
3. To recognize the themes of loyalty and determination
4. To appreciate the role of magic in the novel's world
5. To understand the novel's title
6. To appreciate the elements of fantasy
7. To find examples of bravery and courage
8. To describe the novel's setting
9. To analyze unusual characters
10. To see the different manifestations of evil

Specific Objectives

1. To evaluate the battle to preserve the past against the changes of the present
2. To probe the clash of good and evil
3. To appreciate determination and stubbornness
4. To explore the power of Druid magic
5. To contrast Morgaine and Arthur
6. To assess the roles of women during this era
7. To understand how King Arthur unified Britain
8. To understand the "Sight" and how it is shown
9. To differentiate between fantasy and reality
10. To engage in a heroic quest

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Marion Zimmer Bradley's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Fantasy: writing that incorporates elements of

magic, illusion, and unrealistic events. Often, fantasy novels are set in the distant past, in the future, on far-away planets, or among alien races. *The Mists of Avalon* is set more than 1,600 years ago in England, around the year 400. Bradley uses the Arthurian legend as a jumping-off point for her exploration of religion and women's rights. Woven in are elements of fantasy, including the magical island of Avalon, a dragon, various kinds of magic, and unrealistic occurrences.

Archetype: an original model or type after which other similar things are patterned; a prototype. For example, *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are the archetypes that have influenced all subsequent horror stories. In *The Mists of Avalon*, Bradley works with the archetype of the iconic hero, Arthur; the loyal friend, Lancelot; the brave Knights of the Round Table; and cunning, powerful wise women. Archetypes lend heroic dimensions to the novel.

Description: a word picture made up of sensory details that help readers form images in their minds. *The Mists of Avalon* is rich in such descriptions: "Gwydion, in his saffron holiday tunic, came and sniffed appreciatively as the scent of the honey cake, rich with spices, began to drift through the room" (page 460). Notice that this passage appeals to both sight and smell.

The Importance of Setting

The Mists of Avalon is set primarily in early medieval (historical) Britain, and in the mythical locales of Avalon and Camelot. According to legend, Avalon is the ancient home of the Druids and other mystical people; Camelot is the seat of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. The setting is absolutely essential to this novel, because the events and characters are completely of their time, place, and mythos. Little is actually known about Avalon or Camelot—or the extent to which they correlate to actual places—but that has not stopped the proliferation of myths about them.

Avalon in particular has become associated with the Glastonbury Tor in England, now a popular site for New Age practices and pilgrimages. In medieval times, Glastonbury Abbey was one of Europe's greater pilgrimage sites, and the town grew up to service it. Medieval legend claimed Glastonbury as the burial place of Arthur and

Guinevere (Gwenhwyfar), and many early saints actually lived there, including Patrick, David, Bridget, Benedictus, and Dunstan. According to legend, Joseph of Arimathaea and his early Christian followers found refuge on Avalon, to establish the world's first structure built expressly as a church. Glastonbury Abbey was destroyed in 1539 by king Henry VIII. In recent times, Glastonbury has been a haven for spiritualists, healers, artists, and musicians.

The location of Camelot is subject to much speculation and analysis. Possible sites include Camelford and Celliweg in Cornwall; Caerleon in Newport; Carlisle on the western edge of Hadrian's Wall; Colchester; Falkirk; the hill fort at Cadbury Castle in South Cadbury; and Winchester. To further complicate the issue, scholar Norma Lorre Goodirch suggests that Camelot simply means "Castle of the Hill." Thus, Camelot could be any castle at which Arthur temporarily made his base.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Books

Mike Ashley, *The Mammoth Book of King Arthur*
 Peter S. Beagle, *The Last Unicorn*
 Susan Cooper, *The Dark Is Rising* series
 Roger Green, *King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table*
 Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*
 C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*
 Robin Lister, *The Story of King Arthur*
 Patricia A. McKillip, *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*
 Michael Miller, *Camelot, The True Story*
 Michael Moorcock, *Elric of Melniboné*
 Howard Pyle, *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights*
 J.K. Rowling, the *Harry Potter* series
 Mary Stewart, *Merlin Trilogy*
 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*
 Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*
 T.H. White, *The Once and Future King*

Audiocassettes

Mists of Avalon (1989)

Videos/Films

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1949)
A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1970)
A Kid in King Arthur's Court (1995)

King Arthur (2004)
King Arthur's Britain (2005)
King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend (2004)
Knights of the Round Table (1954)
Merlin (2004)
Mists of Avalon (2001)
The Return of the King (1989)
Sword of the Valiant (2004)

Internet

"King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table,"
<http://www.kingarthursknights.com/>
 "Marion Zimmer Bradley Literary Works Trust,"
<http://www.mzbworks.com/>
 Marion Zimmer Bradley, <http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/b/marion-zimmer-bradley/>
 Marion Zimmer Bradley,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marion_Zimmer_Bradley
The Mists of Avalon, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mists_of_Avalon

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *The Mists of Avalon* should include these aspects:

Themes

- Bravery
- Magic
- Determination
- Ambition
- Fear and terror
- Friendship
- Individuality
- Innocence and experience
- Loyalty
- Spirituality

Motifs

- Following paganism (Druidism) vs. following Christianity
- Getting entangled in ill-advised relationships
- Plotting against friends and relatives
- Going on quests
- Facing danger head-on
- Living in a world infused with magic
- Trying to distinguish good from evil
- Choosing sides
- Seeking the Holy Grail, or any heroic quest

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. ...and all her rage melted into sorrow so great that for a moment she thought she would break into the fiercest weeping. (p. 186)
(Morgaine is deeply touched by the music Kevin plays on his harp. It unleashes her feelings about the loss of trust she experienced when Viviane mated her with her half-brother Arthur. This mating will have serious repercussions in the novel.)
2. "The sword of the Sacred Regalia of the Druids," she said quietly. (p. 203)
(When she gives Arthur the holy sword Excalibur, Morgaine makes him promise that when he comes to the throne, he will deal fairly with the Druids as well as the Christians. He breaks his promise, setting into motion the demise of the Druids and the rise of Christianity in England, as well as his own doom.)
3. "So far as I am concerned, any child you bear, I will acknowledge it mine and bring it up as my heir." (p. 334)
(In this shocking scene, Arthur gives Gwenhwyfar permission to take a lover because he believes that he is sterile. The lover she takes is Lancelot, Arthur's closest friend. No child comes from the union.)
4. "If I bear this banner of Christ and the Virgin into battle over my troops, will you cease to mourn, and pray to God for me with your best heart?" (p. 393)
(Gwenhwyfar convinces Arthur to set aside the Pendragon banner—the symbol of the Druids—for the Christian one. Despite some initial resistance, especially from Druid-raised Lancelot, the Knights go along with Arthur's new allegiance. This is the final shift to Christianity and the public announcement of the end of the Druid faith. It is a betrayal of the Druids, who set Arthur on the throne, and sets Morgaine squarely against her half-brother Arthur.)
5. I have loved none but you, and ever will, since first I set eyes on you in your father's house." (p. 432)
(Lancelot declares his love for Gwenhwyfar. They cannot marry—or even love each other

openly—because she is the wife of Lancelot's best friend and king, Arthur. However, there are also strong hints in the novel that Lancelot loves Arthur as much as he loves Gwenhwyfar, and that their love is expressed physically.)

6. With shaking hands, she undid her gown. (p. 449)
(Arthur, Lancelot, and Gwenhwyfar sleep together. Later, Arthur will blame this on drunkenness, but all seemed sober at the time. Bradley was a pioneer in twentieth century gay literature.)
7. In later years when all that had befallen that day was talked of far and wide, no two in the hundreds in that hall could agree on what had happened first. (p. 498)
(In this dramatic scene, Balin murders Viviane—another blow to the Druids. Now, Morgaine must assume her place as the Queen of Avalon and work to restore the Druids to power. Her efforts prove unsuccessful.)
8. "Lancelot," she whispered, "my love, my dearest—take away from me the memory of what was done to me." (p. 519)
(After she is raped by Meleagant, Gwenhwyfar begs Lancelot to make love to her to wash away the brute's touch. Lancelot agrees. From this moment on, Gwenhwyfar vows to love Lancelot openly. This leads to a plot against his life, and, ultimately, the breakup of the Round Table.)
9. "Lady, I said it to you once before this—the day of Avalon is ended." (p. 800)
(Kevin is telling Morgaine the truth: Christianity has overrun England, supplanting the Druid faith. However, this isn't the whole story: in the end, Morgaine realizes that she has helped release the spirit of the Goddess into the world.)
10. In the first light of the rising sun I saw Lancelot raise Excalibur in his hand, then fling it as hard as he could. (p. 868)
(With Arthur's sword in the lake, his reign is truly over. So is the reign of Avalon. King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Druids have entered the realm of myth.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important, and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. Where does the novel take place?
(It is set in Britain around 400-500 A.D., largely in Camelot, North Wales, and the island of Avalon.)
2. Why do Arthur and Morgaine sleep together?
(The mating has been arranged as part of a sacred Druid ritual by the Queen of Avalon, Viviane, to produce an heir to the throne. That child is Gwydion, also called Mordred.)
3. What role do Viviane and Merlin play in Arthur's rise to the throne?
(As directed by the Goddess, they have manipulated events to ensure his birth and subsequent protection from murder attempts, and their Druid magic has given him the power to accede to, and hold, the throne.)
4. Why does Morgaine arrange Kevin's death?
(He has stolen the Holy Regalia of Avalon and given them to the Christian priests, an act of sacrilege and treason punishable by death. She has also been furious that he has backed Arthur and the rise of Christianity over the Druid faith. However, before his death, she understands his pure motives, and that his actions were dictated by the Goddess. As a result, she orders a quick and merciful execution for him, rather than the agonizing one required by Druid law.)
5. How does Britain change during the course of the novel?
(It rejects the Druid faith and embraces Christianity. It becomes united in one kingdom under a central king rather than being a series of little kingdoms under individual lords.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What does Avalon represent?
(It represents the old, pre-Christian ways: the matriarchal Druid religion, the worship of the Goddess, and human closeness to nature and magic.)
7. What is the central conflict in the novel?
(Students may argue that the central conflict is Christianity versus the Druid faith. They can also say that the conflict is between love and duty, as shown in many examples: Viviane, whose love for Morgaine is often in conflict with her duty as Lady of the Lake; Morgaine, who must also choose between love—for Arthur, Lancelot, and Gwydion—and duty to Avalon; Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar, who first choose duty, then succumb to love; Arthur's love for Morgaine,

which duty forbids him to express. The conflict is carried out in many secondary characters and situations as well.)

8. Describe the relationship between Gwenhwyfar and Morgaine.
(Initially, Gwenhwyfar hates Morgaine for her hold on Lancelot, as Morgaine dislikes Gwenhwyfar for her influence over Arthur. Yet hatred and distrust gradually give way to understanding. In the very end, they are able to forgive each other and be at peace. This is especially significant for Gwenhwyfar, whose sojourn at the convent enables her to finally love Morgaine.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Did Morgaine fail? Why or why not?
(Students can argue that she failed in her life-long goal, since the faith of Avalon was supplanted. On the other hand, like Morgaine herself, they may conclude that she succeeded: as is suggested when she joins the nuns in worshipping the Virgin Mary—and as she herself concluded—the Goddess was not lost, but was incorporated into Christianity, and Morgaine herself was instrumental in this task.)
10. What does Excalibur symbolize?
(On one level, it stands for the power of the king and his immortality. It can also be seen as a phallic symbol, representing his virility.)

Questions 11-13 (Creative Level)

11. Working with a small group of classmates, debate whether or not Gwenhwyfar is a sympathetic character. How does the author treat physical beauty in general?
12. Decide how responsible Arthur was for the spread of Christianity.

Across the Curriculum

Art/Music

1. Nearly all the women in the novel desire Lancelot. Make a collage of modern movie stars who you think have the same allure that Lancelot had.
2. Draw or embroider the scabbard that Morgaine makes for Arthur's sword, Excalibur.
3. Draw a picture of the dragon that the knights slay. Use the descriptions in the novel to spark your creativity.

4. Choose background music for an especially dramatic scene. Read the scene to a group of classmates as you play the music in the background.
5. Write a ballad celebrating Arthur's long and glorious reign. Perform your ballad for your classmates.

Geography/Social Studies

1. The man who inspired the Arthurian legend would have been a leader of the Britons, a Celtic tribe that dominated ancient Britain, and whose members converted to Christianity after it became Rome's official religion. Explain basic early Christian beliefs.
2. During Arthur's reign, the Britons were making a temporarily successful stand against the Anglo-Saxon invaders who already occupied Britain's southeast corner. Make a map showing the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain.
3. Not until the twelfth century did Arthur enter quasi-history as Britain's greatest king, in the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Layamon. Find out who the great warriors were before Arthur achieved cult status.
4. Explain the idea of courtly love, which governed male-female relationships at Arthur's court.
5. Even after Arthur's historicity had been discredited, his legend continued to fuel English nationalism and poetic imagination. Give several reasons why this might be so.
6. Write a report on the ancient Druids and what they believed. Determine how, if at all, the beliefs of modern neo-Druids relate to those of the ancients.

Math/Science

1. Find out what people ate in Britain in the year 500. Which of these foods do we still eat today?
2. There's a lot of feasting going on in Arthur's court. Calculate how much meat, drink, and bread it would require to feed 500 people.
3. Morgaine's husband has "lung fever" and is ill all winter. What would we call "lung fever" today? How is it treated?
4. Make a chart showing the average life expectancy in the year 500, or as close to that year as you can get. Then compare this chart to the life expectancy for men and women today. To what do you attribute the changes?
5. Morgaine and her fellow priestesses are skilled

in herbal cures. Make a chart showing some verified herbal cures.

Language Arts

1. Writing about Marion Zimmer Bradley's themes, a critic said: "The first is the reconciliation of conflicting or opposing forces—whether such forces are represented by different cultures or by different facets of a single personality. The second is alienation or exile from a dominant group." Explain how these themes are shown in *The Mists of Avalon*.
2. Write a ballad celebrating Sir Lancelet.
3. Read the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Compare and contrast it to the portrait of Sir Gawain in *The Mists of Avalon*.
4. A critic noted that "Bradley peoples her worlds with characters representing many types of gender roles and relationships." Explain how this is true in *The Mists of Avalon*.
5. Writing as Morgaine, send a letter to Arthur evaluating his character and reign.

Speech/Drama

1. Around the twelfth century, Arthur began to be regarded by some writers as a figurehead. Considered weak, stories in this tradition depict him as ruled by, and sometimes bailed out by, one of his knights, especially his nephew Sir Gawain. With some classmates, debate whether or not Bradley portrays Arthur as a strong king or a weak one.
2. In a roundtable discussion, decide whether or not *The Mists of Avalon* is a feminist novel. How are women portrayed?
3. What stereotypes does the book present? In a speech, explain at least two of these stereotypes, and discuss how Bradley reinforces or demolishes them.
4. Working with some classmates, enact Arthur's coronation.
5. In a roundtable discussion, explore which elements of *The Mists of Avalon* your classmates liked the most, and which elements they liked the least.
6. Give a speech in which you decide what stance Morgaine should take regarding the future of Avalon and Christianity.

Alternate Assessment

1. Make a character list, and explain the strengths and flaws of each individual. Include ten different characters.
2. Using scenes from the novel, create a mural that shows its main themes.
3. Analyze Bradley's writing style in this novel, focusing on word choice, sentence structure, figures of speech, and description.
4. Working with some classmates, perform a skit in which each major character sums up his or her life and accomplishments.

Vocabulary Test

Match each word on the left with its synonym on the right. Write the letter of your answer in the space provided.

- | | | |
|-------|----------------|---------------------------|
| _____ | 1. feral | a. minor |
| _____ | 2. repine | b. wrong |
| _____ | 3. gnarled | c. ancient religious cult |
| _____ | 4. advocate | d. weird, mysterious |
| _____ | 5. furtive | e. loyalty |
| _____ | 6. fortnight | f. insipid |
| _____ | 7. jocular | g. irritable |
| _____ | 8. taboo | h. twisted |
| _____ | 9. audible | i. sneaky |
| _____ | 10. amiss | j. sigh |
| _____ | 11. wrath | k. sorry |
| _____ | 12. trivial | l. floppy skin by the jaw |
| _____ | 13. revulsion | m. anger |
| _____ | 14. sullen | n. humorous |
| _____ | 15. allegiance | o. two weeks |
| _____ | 16. contrite | p. repugnance, distaste |
| _____ | 17. uncanny | q. savage |
| _____ | 18. vapid | r. forbidden |
| _____ | 19. Druidism | s. able to be heard |
| _____ | 20. jowls | t. supporter |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| A. Morgaine | F. Kevin the Bard |
| B. Igraine | G. Arthur |
| C. Uther Pendragon | H. Morgause |
| D. Mordred | I. Lancelet |
| E. Gwenhwyfar | J. Excalibur |

- _____ 1. Gwenhwyfar's lover and Arthur's best friend
_____ 2. Morgaine's lover, a skilled singer and harper
_____ 3. Morgaine's sister and Lot's wife
_____ 4. Arthur's half sister and mother to his only child
_____ 5. Arthur's son
_____ 6. Arthur's beautiful blond wife
_____ 7. The King of Britain
_____ 8. Igraine's second husband and great love; father of Arthur
_____ 9. The woman first married to Gorlois; Morgaine's mother
_____ 10. Arthur's magical sword

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. When the novel opens, Igraine lives at a castle called Tintagel.
_____ 2. Viviane tells Igraine that Igraine shall bear the Great King who will unite the land, reject the Christians, and maintain the Druid heritage.
_____ 3. Gorlois, like most Romans, is a pagan.
_____ 4. In general, women got married very young in the novel, usually by age fifteen to sixteen.
_____ 5. When he was a child, Lancelet falls off a horse and is badly injured. Suspecting treachery, his parents hide him in Camelot until he is a man.
_____ 6. Arthur's son is so kind and sweet that everyone loves him.
_____ 7. Arthur's son looks very much like Lancelet.
_____ 8. Morgaine gives Gwenhwyfar a charm to make her pregnant.
_____ 9. Elaine marries Lancelet and bears him three children.
_____ 10. Nimue is so heartbroken at Kevin's death that she drowns herself.

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each is important in the novel.

1. Christianity

2. Druids

3. the Merlin

4. the Sight

5. scrying

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain the enduring appeal of the legend of King Arthur and the Round Table.
2. Which character in *The Mists of Avalon* did you find most evil? Why?
3. Describe how the novel changed your idea about the legend of Arthur and the Round Table.
4. Argue that *The Mists of Avalon* is or is not a feminist novel.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Circle the correct word or phrase to complete each of the following statements.

1. Igraine is the sister of Viviane, the Lady of the (*Mountain, Lake*).
2. Young Arthur, still called (*Lancelet, Gwydion*), falls off a horse and is badly injured.
3. Morgaine is chosen to sleep with Arthur in a Druid ritual at Avalon. She is the Virgin (*Queen, Huntress*) and he is the Horned One.
4. As part of her dowry, Gwenhwyfar gives Arthur a huge (*table, chair*).
5. Arthur and his knights fight against fierce invaders called (*Saxons, Irishmen*).
6. Gwenhwyfar persuades Arthur to set aside his pagan banner of (*Camelot, Pendragon*) and carry the banner of Christianity into battle.
7. Balin murders (*Viviane, Nimue*) in full sight of everyone in court to avenge what he sees as her murder of his mother.
8. (*Balan, Meleagant*) rapes Gwenhwyfar at his castle.
9. Gwenhwyfar contrives to have Morgaine married off to (*Pellinore, Uriens*), a kindly lord who is old enough to be Morgaine's grandfather.
10. The knights set off on a quest to recover the Holy (*Sword, Grail*).

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Match the following descriptions with the names of characters from the list below. Place the letter of each response in the blanks provided at left.

- | | | |
|-------|--|--------------------|
| _____ | 1. The Merlin | A. Uther Pendragon |
| _____ | 2. Gwenhwyfar's father | B. Morgaine |
| _____ | 3. King Arthur's father | C. Gorlois |
| _____ | 4. Son of Morgaine and Arthur | D. Mordred |
| _____ | 5. Conspires with the Merlin to place Arthur on the throne | E. Lancelet |
| _____ | 6. Igraine's first husband | F. Viviane |
| _____ | 7. The woman who fosters Mordred; Lot's wife | G. Kevin the Bard |
| _____ | 8. King of Britain | H. Arthur |
| _____ | 9. Igraine's daughter; Druid priestess | I. Morgause |
| _____ | 10. Arthur's dearest friend | J. Leodengranz |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each is important in the novel.

1. Excalibur

2. Avalon

3. the Chalice

4. the scabbard

5. blue serpent tattoos

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe the novel's theme or main idea.
2. *The Mists of Avalon* made several best-seller lists. Explain its tremendous appeal.
3. Explain what the Goddess is and how she is manifest in the Druid religion and in Christianity.
4. Trace the novel's plot. Include the rising action, climax, and resolution.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

1. Q	6. O	11. M	16. K
2. J	7. N	12. A	17. D
3. H	8. R	13. P	18. F
4. T	9. S	14. G	19. C
5. I	10. B	15. E	20. L

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

1. I	6. E
2. F	7. G
3. H	8. C
4. A	9. B
5. D	10. J

Part II: True/False (20 points)

1. T	6. F
2. T	7. T
3. F	8. F
4. T	9. T
5. F	10. T

Part III: Identification (20 points)

1. England's conversion to Christianity, which was brought to the country by Rome, is one of the major themes in the novel. The Druids fight fiercely against the new religion, but the Christians, led by Gwenhwyfar and Arthur, triumph.
2. The Druids are the mystical people who live in Avalon. They worship the female Goddess and possess magical abilities.
3. "Merlin" is a generic name for the magician who hails from Avalon. There are two Merlins in the book: first the elderly Taliesen, and then the crippled bard, Kevin.
4. The Sight is the mystical power possessed by some of the priests and priestesses of Avalon. The Sight enables them to see future events in visions or dreams.
5. Scrying is one of the chief methods of accessing the Sight. It involves gazing into a reflective surface, such as a mirror or pool of water, to obtain visions.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

1. Lake	6. Pendragon
2. Gwydion	7. Viviane
3. Huntress	8. Meleagant
4. table	9. Uriens
5. Saxons	10. Grail

Part II: Matching (20 points)

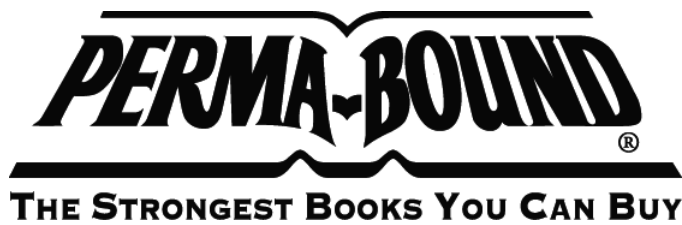
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|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. C |
| 2. J | 7. I |
| 3. A | 8. H |
| 4. D | 9. B |
| 5. F | 10. E |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

1. Excalibur is Arthur's magical sword—the symbolic link between Arthur's kingship and the power of Avalon, which put him on the throne and keeps him there.
2. Avalon is the mystical home of the Goddess and her followers. An island, it can only be reached by magic. Morgaine, for example, has the power to part the mists and summon the barge. As Christianity takes over the land, Avalon gets more and more difficult to reach. It fades away.
3. The Chalice, or the Holy Grail, is the cup that Christ drank from during the Last Supper. It sets off the knights' quest.
4. The scabbard is a magical sheath made by Morgaine to hold Excalibur. As long as Arthur has the scabbard on his person, he can be wounded but he cannot die. On page 750, Morgaine takes the scabbard and throws it into the Lake of Avalon.
5. The blue serpent tattoos are one of the marks of the Druids. Accolon, Lancelot, and Arthur bear them on their arms.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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