



## Chapter 1

**I**n ancient days there lived a king named Uther Pendragon. Two men greatly assisted King Uther in all that he did. One was the powerful wizard Merlin, who gave Uther political advice. The other was the famous warrior Sir Ulfius, who gave Uther aid and advice in battle. With the help of Merlin and Ulfius, Uther overcame all of his enemies and became king of Britain.

After Uther had ruled Britain for some years, he married a gentle, beautiful lady named Igraine. This noble lady was the widow of Gorlois, Duke of Tintegal. Igraine had two daughters from her marriage to Gorlois: Morgause and Morgan le Fay, a famous sorceress. After marrying Uther, Igraine brought her daughters with her to his court. Morgause married King Urien of Gore, and Morgan married King Lot of Orkney and the Isles.

Uther and Igraine had a son. He was beautiful, large, and strong. While the baby was still in his cradle of gold and ultramarine, Merlin said to

Uther, “Lord, I foresee that you soon will fall sick with a fever and die. This baby will be in great danger; many enemies will want to hold him captive or kill him so that he can’t become king. I beg you to permit Sir Ulfius and me to take the baby to some safe place where he can be hidden until he grows to manhood and is able to protect himself.”

Uther replied, “Merlin, when my time comes to die, I believe I’ll accept my end with good grace. However, if your prophecy about my son is true, the danger is great and he should be taken to a safe place. My son is the most precious thing that I’ll leave to my people.”

Merlin and Ulfius took the baby away at night to a secret place. Shortly after, Uther died of a fever, as Merlin had foretold. Britain fell into disorder. Every lesser king contended against every other to be king of Britain. Wicked knights and barons attacked travelers on the roads, holding them for ransom if they were wealthy and killing them if they weren’t. It was common to see dead people lying by the roadside.

Nearly eighteen years passed in great affliction. Then the Archbishop of Canterbury summoned Merlin and said, “Merlin, people say that you’re the world’s wisest man. Can you find some way to heal this ailing realm? Choose a king who will be a good ruler, so that we can be happy again, as we were when Uther Pendragon ruled Britain.”

Merlin said, “My lord, Britain soon will have a king who will be wiser, greater, and more praiseworthy even than Uther Pendragon. He’ll replace disorder and war with order and peace. This king will be of Uther Pendragon’s royal blood.”

“Can you foretell when this king will come?” the archbishop asked. “How will we know him? Many unworthy men proclaim themselves to be the rightful king.”

Merlin said, “If I have your permission to practice my magic, I’ll arrange a challenge. If anyone can meet it, the world will know that he’s the rightful king.”

“You have my permission,” the archbishop said.

Merlin magically caused a marble block, four feet long on each edge, to appear in the square in front of St. Paul’s cathedral in London. He placed an anvil of solid iron on top of the block and thrust a sword into the anvil to a depth of half its blade. This sword was the most wonderful that anyone had ever seen. Its blade was of glistening blue steel, its hilt of beautifully fashioned gold set with many gems. The sword shone with wonderful brightness in the sunlight. These words appeared in gold letters on the marble block: “Whoever pulls this sword from the anvil is the rightful king of Britain.”

When Merlin had accomplished this magic,

he asked the archbishop to summon the country's leading men to gather on Christmas day and, one by one, try to pull out the sword. The archbishop did as Merlin advised. The summons caused a great stir throughout the land. Everyone asked everyone else, "Who will pull out the sword? Who will be our king?" Most people thought it would be someone who already was a king.

As Christmas approached, the whole world seemed to head to London. The highways and byways became filled with travelers. Kings, lords, knights, ladies, squires, pages—all headed to see the attempts to pull the sword from the anvil. Every inn and castle was filled with travelers. Tents and pavilions were set up along the wayside to accommodate those who couldn't find shelter indoors.

When the archbishop saw the multitudes that were assembling, he said to Merlin, "It would be strange if no one among all these great kings and noble lords was worthy to be king."

Merlin smiled and said, "Don't be surprised, my lord, if none of those who appear so worthy turn out to be worthy. And don't be surprised if someone unknown proves worthy."