



Camelot's Blood

Sarah Zettel

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An evocative and highly engaging romantic fantasy set in the evocative time of King Arthur. Laurel Carnbrea, Queen of Cambryn, arrives at Camelot to marry a man she has never met -- Sir Agravain, the brother of the renowned Sir Gawain. Laurel has heard that Agravain is a reserved and cold man, but marriage to King Arthur's nephew will give vital protection to her own lands. However, before the marriage can be consummated, Laurel's new husband receives news that his father, King Lot, is dying, and he must return to his homeland of Gododdin in the north. King Lot has been mad for many years -- tormented by the sorceress Morgaine, Arthur's half-sister and deadliest enemy. Agravain and Laurel arrived to find the land of Gododdin in disarray and under threat of invasion from the Picts -- led by Morgaine. Laurel has powers of her own, inherited from her grandmother, the Sea, and is prepared to use them to save the land of the new husband she is learning to love. By pitting herself against Morgaine she will face the gravest danger; and Agravain risks losing the woman who has finally managed to reach his heart!

Camelot's Blood Details

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From Reader Review Camelot's Blood for online ebook

A.M. says

Apparently, this book is one of a series. And it's not even the first in the series. It's a credit to the book that I was able to pick it up and enjoy it without knowing anything about what had happened before.

Let's be honest: I felt faintly ridiculous carrying this book around town. It has the word "Camelot" in the title. It has a woman in a medieval dress on the cover. And swirly things.

Some romances are so unbelievably ridiculous that you've got to laugh while you read them. (Like, for example, Baby Bonanza. Yes, I read it. It was free!) But Camelot's Blood doesn't fall into that category. It was a fast, entertaining read, despite some of the expected clichés. Great escapism, with original retakes on classic fantasy creatures, and an interesting clash between pagan magic and Christianity.

The plot expands far beyond a simple romance. As a matter of fact, I thought the romance portions a little flat and formulaic: knight and lady are arranged to be married, lady breaks through the knight's hard shell, they fall in love, yaddayadaa. What drew me in was the bigger story: the impending war, and, most of all, Laurel's struggles with her not-entirely-human bloodline, a plot thread that actually made me cry at one point.

As for the setting, I'm not much of a history buff, so am not particularly knowledgeable or critical of Arthurian reworkings, but I did get a sense of the period, and it appeared well-researched to me, blending both history and legend. I liked the details: the descriptions of Londinium, of people's clothes, the cultural attitudes and expectations.

The writing is not the greatest, but it is pretty solid throughout. I was sceptical at the beginning due to the numerous scene jumps in the first few chapters, but that settled down quite quickly. Unfortunately, there is quite a lot of head-hopping throughout the book, and whilst it is done pretty smoothly, point of view switches are one of my pet peeves.

In sum, it's easy reading, and fun. It's not going to change the world, but would you want every book to do that?

Nikki says

See the first book of this series, Camelot's Shadow, for my full review of this series.

Reread in February 2010.

I really love this book. I don't remember how strongly I felt about it the first time, but I have a thing for second sons in fiction, second sons like Agravain -- the quieter, grimmer ones, the dutiful ones with their hidden passions and their determinations. Agravain is a perfect example, and it's also interesting that in this story, he and Laurel fall in love after their marriage, which comes of necessity and politics more than anything else. The four romances are much more differentiated than I remembered. In this one, I genuinely felt pain for Agravain and Laurel when they were separated, which is possibly because I found their situation

more real.

The romance is still a little hurried in places, but I do like what we get of it. I also love the magic of this -- Laurel's magic, as she becomes unafraid and throws herself into it, doing what she has to do. I like how a lot of hints come together -- the stain on Guinevere's palm, for one thing, just that one tiny repeated detail finally finding meaning and explanation. Not something I noticed, on a single reading.

I found this somewhat unsatisfying as an end, the last time I read it. Morgaine is defeated, but Mordred is not killed, he flees. Reading it again, his defeat is pretty conclusive, and he runs like a child, but mostly I'm reminded of the fact that it's still prophesied that he will bring down Camelot, and the threat of him isn't neutralised at all. In one way, ending like this is very appropriate, because the quartet follows the sons of Lot, not the court of Arthur -- but the court of Arthur and the importance of Arthur's kingdom is important throughout the books, so it's kind of odd that it ends without a real conclusion for that.

Michelle O'flynn says

I really enjoyed this. Not having a real yearning for a lot of Arthurian legendary novels, but have read a few different takes on this famous tale, I found that Zettel blended a lot of what if beleived to be ture, but put her own perspective to how things were/could have been, which is what you want. Great rea, and I hope I like the others in the series too.

Apricity says

I wouldn't categorize this book as a romance because its entire plot depends on family - what it means to have a sibling, whether those siblings get along (Laurel and her sister), do not get along (Agravain & Gawain) or feel both emotions (Morgause & Morgaine), and what it means to sacrifice for family or for one's people without recognition or any gain.

Agravain

Agravain met his brother's eyes and saw there none of Gawain's pride, and very little of his hero's certainty. For once, there was only his brother there. Old habit warned Agravain to keep his own counsel. Old anger all but sealed that, but Agravain mustered his strength. Setting aside the heavy weights of the past and the future, he made himself speak. "I ... I am ill-acquainted with the ways of a lady." There. He had said it, and to Gawain, of all men, whose deeds among women were still the stuff of legend six years after his marriage. Agravain waited for his brother to laugh, and make some wry jest. His anger pulled at its weakening tether, ready to charge forward in an instant. He almost hoped he could be angry. The boyish nervousness he felt now sickened him. Anything must be better than this. But Gawain kept his countenance, not even smiling in the depths of his eyes. [...] Gawain laid his hand on Agravain's shoulder, a touch of friendship such as he rarely suffered. Then, Gawain drifted away, leaving Agravain his private thoughts rather than risk drawing this moment out to become something either of them might regret.

The understanding of history was Agravain's special study. He pursued it whenever his other duties gave him leisure. He studied to understand the minds and movements of men as well as of armies. Without

Gawain's happy talent for making friends, he must gather his knowledge of his fellow beings as best he could. [...] Each movement Agravain made was careful and competent, spare and deliberate. He was comfortable in this place, inside these walls, sitting at this desk like a cleric, without servant or squire. Yet he bore the title of knight given by a king who did not give honour without merit. She had already seen danger in him, felt the raw strength of his arm, but neither was his power, nor his personal study. This was. This patient concentration over ink and paper which most men-at-arms would scorn.

But as he stared at his brother, Agravain saw Gawain was not thinking like a man of Gododdin. He was thinking like the one who must be the next High King. As Arthur's heir, Gawain must consider all the lands and peoples that had entered into the Pax Arturus. Gododdin was but one piece in that puzzle. Would you sacrifice our north to save your south, Gawain? It was not a question he had permitted himself to ask before, and in that he had clearly been foolish. When Gawain had left Gododdin, he had left the whole of it behind. He was fully a man of Camelot now, and would not be anything else. It occurred to Agravain then that Gawain and Arthur might have spoken on this very subject. Spoken on it, and not told me. He felt anger take hold. Its grip enfolded his reason, cold and unyielding. He looked at his brother and his king, and saw how their plans hid behind their calm eyes. What was his kingdom to them? What care had they for the men of Gododdin? Leave them to the wolves, and while the wolves worry their bones we stay safe.

"I answered I would not leave him to her. 'You must,' he said. 'You and your brothers must grow to be men. It is only as men you will be able to defeat her. She means to destroy us all. While I live, she stalks me. While I live, you have some shield. Go. Live and keep our secret. She must never hear how much you know.' "I left him at dawn the next day." These last words were spoken in a rush. This was the real pain, the knife that dug most deeply: that there had been no other choice. "You never told anyone," she murmured. "That your father was standing between you and Morgaine. Not even your brothers." "How could I?" He flung out his hands. "The very wind could be her spy. And even if I could speak in safety, what then? Gawain would go charging back and get killed for his pains. Geraint would follow because his sense of duty would override his judgment. Gareth was little more than a child."

Morgaine:

She had not thought to understand Morgaine. She knew to hate her, to beware her, but she had not thought herself capable of feeling as the sorceress felt. Father, dead on the stones, the murderer there, in reach, yet out of reach. Her own failure to stop him. Her own shame. That was what birthed it. That shame at having not seen. Shame and blood begat revenge and revenge begat madness. Oh, yes. She understood this all very well.

She never died. Not really. Of course not. Morgaine needed her alive. Here was half her power, half her spirit. The blessing and the curse of those born twinned. That bond made closer by Morgaine herself, thinking she could win her sister over by bestowing some of the power she gained upon Morgause. But when the time came, she found that the link she had forged could not be broken. Morgause had learned that lesson earlier. That was why Morgaine had never died. Guinevere and Merlin between them were ready to undo Morgaine, but not to kill Morgause in the doing. So, she was imprisoned only.

Lucia says

My favourite book in the series. I love the perspective of the plot. arranged marriage, cold and flawed characters...

Nikki says

When I first read this series, I mostly dismissed it as romance — back when I felt pretty dismissive of romance in general, I'll admit. Reading it now, I've been impressed all over again by the work Zettel did to bring together different Arthurian threads and weave them all into a cohesive story. Reading the end of this book, I kind of want to read her version of how the story plays out.

On the other, I really don't, because this is a good ending to the story of the four brothers from Gododdin, which lets you imagine they stay happy. And maybe they could, in this version... after all, who could stand against Rhian, Elen, Lynet and Laurel? Forget the men: they're really the stars of these stories.

In terms of this book alone, I adore how Zettel humanises Agravain, after the rather unflattering portrait of him we get in the other books (apart from the odd moment where his concern and love for his brothers really shows through). And I love the insight on how Arthur and Gawain are both devoted to their whole kingdom, while Agravain only cares about his own land — and that's why he makes a good king of it.

All in all, a worthwhile series, though if you're not a fan of romance you probably won't enjoy them as that is the main thread.

Reviewed for The Bibliophibian.

Jessica says

Reading from Agravain's view was interesting and better than I expected. Favourite Paths to Camelot book yet!

Nikki says

In some ways, I think Laurel and Agravain are my favourite couple of the four, at least on this go round. They have a slightly different storyline -- an arranged marriage, a slower path to love, two coldly political partners -- and both have had build-up in previous books. It's especially good to see the human side of Agravain; in a way, he's more believable than his brothers because he's not perfect, he's damaged and rough around the edges, but he's still good.

I've always enjoyed Zettel's willingness to make the stories her own. You can identify influences, but she isn't afraid to do her own thing and introduce new elements.

Lynn Calvin says

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