



The Pendragon

Catherine Christian

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The story is told through the eyes of Bedivere, Arthur's milk brother and first companion, and covers the period from Arthur's childhood to his King-making and inevitable death.

The Pendragon Details

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From Reader Review The Pendragon for online ebook

Janet says

No matter how close I got to the end, it seemed I would never actually finish the book. More pages kept popping up out of nowhere. I enjoy King Arthur legends, and this was one of the best. For the first time I saw how Arthur spent his years before the great sword in the stone debut. The spelling of the names was different, and it took me forever to realize that the name Cai was pronounced "Kay" and did not rhyme with "sky." One I tumbled to that little clue, the rest of the names were easy to figure out. I definitely recommend this to any Round Table aficionado.

Paul Glenn says

I first read this book many years ago, and upon revisiting, I find that it remains my favorite telling of the Arthurian legend. This book moves me in ways I can't easily explain, but Christian's framing of the story (recounted to historical-minded monks from the deathbed of Bedivere) is powerful. Her narrator is a soldier and a practical man, who views the mystical with a reverent but distanced eye, and his grounded nature makes the story feel immediate and real. It's a melancholy tale, but then all the Arthurian legends are. Highly recommended.

Emily says

It was so good to read an un-messed about version of the Arthur story, telling it straight and giving explanations for the magic that could go either way. And the end was beautifully done, very light touch (I still cried a bit).

Jack says

I love this book. I've read it a couple of times before, it was one of those things that my dad found for me in the church basement, with all the stuff for the church fair tag sale (he knows I'm into this kind of thing, and he's found me some real gems in there).

This is a fictional retelling of the King Arthur legends/myths that incorporates some of the more recent evidence from historical and archaeological research regarding the times and places that birthed the stories we've become familiar with.

As told by Bedivere, Arthur's childhood friend and closest companion, the story takes place when the Celtic Britons and some Roman colonials are having to cope with the withdrawal of Roman legions and the incursions of Saxon settlers, and tells how Arthur leads both to forge an independent kingdom.

Similar to Michael Crichton's "Eaters of the Dead," the author's intention is to "retell" the "actual" events that were built up into legends through endless retellings and embellishments down the centuries.

Kurt Keefner says

This is not your usual Arthur. In this telling, there is no magic. The sword in the stone was a gimmick rigged by the merlin. (The merlin is an office, the chief of the Celtic spies, named after the bird.) Arthur is a Celtic nobleman raised in a Roman household during the end of the Empire. He represents the best of both worlds in a climactic fight against the invading Saxons.

It's all situated in the real world and it's all quite plausible. It isn't fantasy; it's history.

Howard Wiseman says

A well structured retelling of Arthur's story in a dark-age setting. But it had quite a lot of anachronisms, chronological inconsistencies, and unrealistic achievements. Supposedly the story related by Bedvyr to brother Paulinus, but what we are reading is clearly not what Paulinus would have written, which I find annoying. Some clever inventions regarding the Grail quest.

Julie says

Interesting story of King Arthur from a friend's point of view. I am not really familiar with this story other than the Disney cartoon of "The Sword in the Stone". This is not what I wanted my kids to be reading as it had treated men and war and desires in a way not respecting of virtue and principles, so I figured I'd spend my time better elsewhere. Anyone know of a good version of King Arthur that 8-year-olds could enjoy...the Magic Tree House has Peter interested in the story.

Hanna says

This is an INCREDIBLE book.

The seamless blending of legend and fact makes for the most accurate representation of The Arthurian Story that I have discovered thus far.

It is a historical type text, similar to the style of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit, in that it chronicles events with limited pathos.

Highly recommended for anyone interested in:

- 1) The Arthurian Story
- 2) History
- 3) Legend and Folklore

And for any one who enjoyed The Hobbit.

Nikki says

I didn't end up finishing this. Perhaps because it was a book I read for my dissertation, and I was just reading

for certain details, perhaps because it just feels dated and too much like everything else I've read. The closest comparison is with *The Mists of Avalon*, which I also disliked, if that helps.

There's nothing wrong with it as such, it's just the whole Celtic nostalgia thing doesn't work for me, particularly when you un-Celticise the most Celtic character of the lot (Cai).

Chris says

Now, I've read a few (read: every) novel dealing with Arthur over the years and this is by far THE best retelling of the Arthur stories since Mallory. I thought it when I first read this book 35 years ago and I think it still, having rediscovered it now.

THE.
BEST.
ARTHUR.
EVER.

Kerry Hennigan says

While following the often-told tale of King Arthur and his companion knights, and of the court of Camelot, *The Sword and The Flame* (also published as *The Pendragon*) is an intelligent compromise of history and legend.

Intelligent because it is set in the right time for a historical Arthur, if indeed he existed, while incorporating the later Medieval trappings of courtly romance and betrayal and the quest for the Holy Grail.

Yet Catherine Christian's skills as a novelist bring Dark Ages reality (what we know of it) and fable together in a believable narrative - which is no mean feat when it comes to the Grail quest in particular.

So, we have a post-Roman Britain where the habits and influence of Rome still lingers, particularly in the lives of 'colonials' like Arthur's trusted companion since boyhood, Bedivere. It is Arthur who brings the native Celts and the colonials together under the Pendragon banner, to hold back the Saxon raiders who continue to threaten Britain's shores.

But the most dangerous foe of all is one who has been included as a companion knight and entrusted with important duties of the court and kingdom. But Medraut's personal ambition goes far beyond being a mere bookkeeper for the king.

I loved this book when I first read it many years ago. Re-visiting it all these years later I find I still enjoy it as a relatively 'realistic' re-telling of the story of Arthur based on the tales of Sir Thomas Malory.

Nancy says

While the core story of Arthur, Guinevere and Camelot is the same, there are variations as this book proves.

It is well-paced and elegantly written with characters who seem real.

The tale is told by Bedivere, Arthur's friend from childhood and his constant companion, confidant and self-appointed protector.

There are some surprises in what we traditionally think of as the Camelot legend, and this is a more gentle telling in many ways.

Quotes: Bedivere: "I was not happy. I had never known loneliness before, so I did not recognize the heaviness of it, but blamed the dark forest, and wished, through a mist of discomfort and weariness that we were riding back towards home, and not, as it seemed to me, half, a world away from it."

Bedivere: "Much has been sung by harpers of Arthur's sword, Excalibur, Next to the Grail itself it will live for ever in song as one of the Chief Hallows of Britain. Bards tell how its hilt flashed with jewels and the blade glimmered with runes, wrought in gold. I Bedivere, who saw its final tempering, know these tales are folly. No soldier who knows his trade would choose such as weapon for use in a day-long battle. For parade, perhaps. Not for us. No, Excalibur was of an altogether different quality - one of those rarest swords only our Outland smiths know the secret of making - a sword forged from metal that does not grow on earth, but falls out of the infinite distance of the sky, when a star dies. The iron that, if it takes the third forging and does not shatter at cooling, turns darkly blue as the sky of midnight and has a strength and a temper to it that no other metal will blunt or bend in the striking."

Merlin: "Three things no man can rule: the flight of the wind; the rise of the tide; and the fate written in his stars."

Merlin: "No ocean is deep enough to drown a man's appointed destiny. This life or another, we must face the enemy we left behind us."

Susan says

This was a wonderful book - I've been trying to find a copy again, for ages. Now that I've found it on this site, I'm going to try again.

I read Mists of Avalon some time after reading this book - and I was convinced that the author, Zimmer-Bradley, basically used Catherine Christian, and used The Pendragon heavily for her idea. In fact, there's one spot, where Lancelot is bringing Guinevere to Arthur, where one paragraph is extremely similar, but I'd have to have the books again to check.

The Pendragon was written well before Mists. I think it is a real shame that Catherine Christian didn't get the fame that Zimmer-Bradley did, and that SO MANY new-age sites will use Mists as some sort of backup. It's basically the only book that Z-B wrote that was really successful - try reading her other books. Mists fed on the ideas presented in Pendragon.

Thalia says

This one started out quite strong for me. I liked the characters, I liked the story lines, I liked the twist on the

usual. I was annoyed however at, although using a side character to relay the story is often clever and fresh, it also does just that...puts you on the sidelines and very often not privy to certain things. Consequently, I felt more and more removed from the story and felt a little bored with the character we were following. He never married, he rarely dallied (and certainly did not recount it for the most part) and didn't even argue with people very often. He gave a good speech here and there. The author, in my opinion, really has something with this story, I'm only disappointed with her choice to tell it from this POV.

Arthurian Tapestry says

Unfortunately, this book is a lost gem among the plethora of Arthurian novels, many which attempt to follow the exemplary Mary Stewart first person narrative style and falling woefully short of the mark. I remember picking this novel up right after I had read through Barbara Leonie Picard's juvenile rendition of the Arthurian legends, followed up by T.H. White exquisite tetralogy on the matter. Aching to find a copy of Malory or some Penguin editions of Arthurian classics Malory, I devoured whatever I could find. In the early 80's, this novel often sat beside T.H. White in the fantasy sections of bookstores.

At the time, I was a wee bit immature for the wonderfully wrought prose style of this version that manages to capture landscape and characters in a deft balance that matches Sutcliffe's "Sword at Sunset" and Mary Stewart's Merlin series. I have since lost the original paperback and recently procured another, which I have read with older eyes that once were enchanted with the wit and whimsy of T.H. White and now were enthralled by a darker, almost October-like atmosphere of this novel. The story is told from the point of view of Bedivere, which is an exciting choice as he is among Arthur's first companions and according to many versions, including the ubiquitous Malory, one of the very last companions to witness what has been referred to as "the wicked day."

The novel was ahead of its time, and I think an inspiration of novels that later would explore religious and eco-feminist perspectives, except Catherine Christian has the writing chops to deliver themes in a subtle weaving that work with you long after you have set the book down. There is no preachiness or overt agenda, but rather lines that describe the Grail as a "A mystery symbolized in all faiths by the Cup, which, held elevated in human hands, can only be filled from above."

Still, the book is not perfect; the beginning is a bit of a slog in terms of engaging me as a reader and takes some warming up to—this is a pity because it deters many from enjoying the richness that unfolds later in the novel. This is a book that has satisfied me on so many other levels now that I have read countless versions. Why is this book has not been digitized floors me, especially in light that anyone searching for this particular title will pull up countless inferior versions baring the same title before anyone can even find this book.

Amazon, please bring this book to Kindle readers! It deserves to be rediscovered for those hungering for more Arthurian lore.
