

## ***Who was Merlin?***

King Arthur's most trusted advisor, prophet, magician, and friend, Merlin was almost certainly the creation of Geoffrey of Monmouth, who writes extensively about Merlin in his twelfth century work *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Geoffrey combined tales and stories of a bard and wizard named Myrddin, who was created by a ninth century mystic named Nennius. Nennius chronicled that Myrddin had been born of no earthly father and used his wizardry and powers to foretell the defeat of the British by the Saxons.

During the Middle Ages, Merlin became very popular. Not only does he figure prominently in the French Vulgate Cycle, but he shines in the French and English romances. Sir Thomas Mallory is the first to really showcase him as the advisor and guide to King Arthur in his work *Le Morte d'Arthur*. And ever since the Renaissance, Merlin the magician has remained popular in all Arthurian legends and tales. In *The Idylls of the King*, Alfred Lord Tennyson makes him the architect of Camelot, and Mark Twain uses him in his works as a villain. Numerous novels, poems and plays center around Merlin, and in American literature and popular culture, Merlin is perhaps the most frequently portrayed Arthurian character.

### ***Who was Mordred?***

Geoffrey of Monmouth informs us that Mordred was Arthur's nephew, the son of Arthur's sister Anna and her husband, Lot of Lothian.

The incest motif in the story of Mordred's birth appears only latterly. The earliest occurrence is in the *Mort Artu*. In Malory's version, Arthur slept with his half-sister Morgause, not knowing they were related and, as a result, Mordred was born. When Arthur discovered the whole truth, in an attempt to kill Mordred he had all children born on the day of Mordred's birth set adrift. The ship carrying Mordred was wrecked, but he survived and was fostered by Nabur.

As an adult, Mordred became one of Arthur's knights and was for a time a companion of Lancelot. He took the part of the Orkney family against the family of Pellinore, slaying Pellinore's son, Lamorak. When Arthur went to fight Lancelot, Mordred was left as regent in his absence. He proclaimed that Arthur was dead and then laid siege to Guinevere, so Arthur's return became necessary.

In *Wace*, Mordred is not Arthur's son, but Guinevere (whom he seized and made his queen) was his sister. In the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, he and Guinevere had a child. In Welsh tradition Mordred married Cywyllog, daughter of Caw, and they had two sons. In the earliest Welsh sources he seems to have been regarded as a hero rather than a villain.

### ***Who was Queen Guinevere***

Variouslly portrayed in literature, in all cases, she is surpassingly beautiful and desirable. She is either forced into or conceives and engineers an extra-marital relationship with Sir Lancelot and is condemned, according to law. She either was a willing accomplice to Mordred's treachery against Arthur, as suggested in Wace and Layamon, or was forced into it against her will as stated in John Hardyng's "Chronicle" (1457). Early mentions of Queen Guinevere, in the *Triads of the Island of Britain*, give tantalizing glimpses of her original relationship with Mordred: he is shown forcing his way into Arthur's Court, dragging the Queen from her throne and striking her, but the reasons why are unknown. The incident may have been related to quarrels between Guinevere and her sister, Mordred's wife, Gwenhwyfach, which are said to have been the eventual cause of the Battle of Camlan.

Whatever Guinevere was or was not, she has been a useful tool in the hands of the romancers throughout the centuries and has greatly enhanced the legends of King Arthur.

### **Who was Morgan le Fay?**

Morgan le Fay is, in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Arthur's half sister, the daughter of Arthur's mother Igraine and her first husband, the Duke of Cornwall. She is also presented as an adversary of Arthur's: she gives Excalibur to her lover *Accolon* so he can use it against King Arthur (a story retold in Madison J. Cawein's poem *Accolon of Gaul*) and, when that plot fails, she steals the scabbard of Excalibur which protects Arthur and throws it into a lake.

Her enmity towards Guinevere has its origin in the *Vulgate Lancelot*, where Morgan is having an affair with Guiomar, Guinevere's cousin, and Guinevere puts an end to it.

Morgan proclaims that she can heal Arthur if he stays with her for a long time. Morgan is also said to be the wife of King Uriens and the mother of Yvain or Ywain. Morgan rarely appears in post-medieval works—until the twentieth century when there is a renewed interest in her character. Sometimes she is conflated with Morgause and made to be the mother of Mordred, as is the case in John Boorman's movie *Excalibur* and a number of modern novels.

One of the most interesting modern portrayals of Morgan appears in Thomas Berger's *Arthur Rex* where, after a life devoted to evil, she decides to become a nun because of her belief that "corruption were sooner brought amongst humankind by the forces of virtue."

### **Who was Lancelot?**

Sir Lancelot du Lac or *Sir Launcelot* was the son of *King Ban of Benwick* and Queen Elaine. Lancelot was the *First Knight* of the Round Table, and he never failed in gentleness, courtesy, or courage.

It has been said that Lancelot was the greatest fighter and swordsman of all the *Knights of the Round Table*, and yet he was also extremely intelligent and known for his charm and humor. Legend tells us that as a child, Lancelot was left by the shore of *The Lake*, where he was found by Vivien, *the Lady of the Lake*.

# Arthur



## Character Traits:

- *Brave*
- *Fearless*
- *Leader*
- *Fair*

## Relationship to Arthur:

- *Self*

## Defining Moment:

*He is the only person, young or old, to be able to pull the sword from the stone, proving he was meant to be king.*

# Mordred



**Character Traits:**

**Relationship to Arthur:**

**Defining Moment:**

# Lancelot



**Character Traits:**

**Relationship to Arthur:**

**Defining Moment:**

# Guinevere



**Character Traits:**

**Relationship to Arthur:**

**Defining Moment:**

# Merlin



**Character Traits:**

**Relationship to Arthur:**

**Defining Moment:**

# Morgana Le Fay



**Character Traits:**

**Relationship to Arthur:**

**Defining Moment:**