

Free excerpt Realm of the Bear by S R Sorel

Swords and Souls

Part One Volume One

Realm of the Bear

S R Sorel

Chapter One

Realm of the Bear

The stars were shining in the world of men, but all were sleeping, oblivious to this wondrous night and what would unfold.

The lake was vast, with small settlements scattered around its reedy banks, quiet and still. Not even the many trees moved in the still night air as darkness surrounded the villages. This was the heart of Dumnonia, where men worked the fields and grazed their cattle and sheep. A peaceful township, saved from raiders of the Pict tribes and their like, for around the whole lake was a thick forest, which was not so easy to break through from warrior tribes. The place was secluded and protected only by the trees themselves, for men did not take up arms here.

The men slept, the women and children slept, but it was not a natural slumber for the 'Fair Folk' and gods known as the 'Ancient Ones' had enchanted them all. Horses, cattle, dogs and even the smallest of creatures slumbered, save one.

Rhys was a tall thin young man of a long lost tribe, dressed in tattered leather trousers, tunic and an old grubby bear skin. His eyes were dark blue and his hair was all matted and curly for it had not seen a comb for days. His young face was quite handsome and many a young maid had shown an interest in him, but their fathers never approved, for he was a traveller amongst men with no fixed abode and very little wealth. He sat by the lake contemplating upon his life thus far as he drew circles in the waters with a stick. He watched the ripples form as he stirred and he could see his reflection distort as he gazed into the darkness of the water.

The powerful sleeping enchantment had escaped Rhys, for he was not present when the gods and 'Fair Folk' sent man

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to his slumber. Rhys had stumbled upon the township in the dead of night and he thought to eke out a living from village to village using his self taught skills as a carpenter. He liked to sing also and he had carved out a small harp, forming it from the best cuts of wood himself and it was made with love and passion. He sang well for his young years, but his desire to become a great bard one day was pushed to the back of his mind, for he had to feed his empty stomach with his carpentry.

Cupping water in his hands to drink, he began to feel unnerved. He had found animals sleeping in the surrounding fields and dogs a slumber where they fell and in the chiefs house he saw that no one could be woken. He had tried to rouse the sleeping household and even pulled hard upon the chiefs' arm but it was as if they were all dead. Fear had gripped his soul and his imagination began to run riot as he thought of the comatose chief. Superstition and dread sent shivers down his spine and he thought to leave this place for fear of being hexed for surely this was the reason every creature slept. Grabbing his water skin he quickly filled it up to overflowing as his gaze danced upon the lake.

He stood to leave the serenity of the black still waters when he noticed a light, a dim light at first, which became brighter with every passing moment under the surface of the waters. Ripples formed upon the dark water shimmering as it illuminated from under the waves making Rhys drop the skin and step back a pace fearing as all men do, the unknown.

The glowing light suddenly became blinding, forcing him to look away from it, and he glanced up at the night sky, which also became bright as blue spherical lights danced in the heavens above him. Rhys gasped in terror as he tried to turn and run away but he was suddenly pushed back by unseen forces making him fall hard upon his back and trapping him on the ground. A strange pressurising wind surrounded him and hissed in his ears with tremendous volume, which became unbearable.

‘By the gods, what does this?’

Rhys screamed in horror as the wind took his voice away and also his breath.

In fear he gripped onto a large clump of grass with one hand and with the other he shielded his eyes from the glare of the spectacle before him. Desperately, he tried to stand but the wind pinned him down fast.

Forced to watch, he saw the bright light in the centre of the lake dim but it seemed to be forming some kind of shape. Still unable to move under the hissing winds pressure, his heart pounded inside him as though it would burst at any moment. Chanting, he prayed to the old gods to protect him as both curiosity and anguish filled his soul but another sudden wind gathered speed and pushed him harder upon the ground, making it impossible to hear anything else. He glanced up at the sky and saw the bright blue light was now directly above him, making him tremble with fear.

In an instant, the water in the lake seemed to boil and the earth under him shuddered and rumbled. Rhys clung onto the clumps of grass with both hands as he felt he was being pulled into the lake. The bubbling waters grew in strength and turned into waves which came crashing into the lake’s banks splashing over Rhys’ body, covering him in their wetness. He realised the water was not hot, in fact it was as cold as ice, as the earth cracked and groaned underneath him. His breathing quickened for unbeknown to him, he was witnessing the birth of an ‘Otherworld’ creation, for the ‘Fair Folk’ of the ‘Ancient Ones’ would join the world of men this day. Rhys could hardly believe his eyes as he witnessed, rising out of the lake and joining with the stars in the heavens above, a wondrous sight and one that he knew he would never see again.

Suddenly all became still as a mist formed around him and he could no longer see the stars and strange lights that shone down upon him just moments ago, but he could just make out through the fog, an island rising from its depths that seemed to join with the sky. Strange glowing balls started to

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move in front of him circling about him and he watched as what seemed to be hundreds of tiny stars hovered all about him then faded one by one as they whipped around his body then vanished. He could see in the distance other large balls of light gather as he gazed in awe, for he witnessed the creation of a tower, a tower of light, which shone as bright as the full moon, and the tower stood on what seemed to be a hill made of glass.

Staring at this image he could hardly blink, for the tower and the structures under it became almost invisible and he could see through the crystal like buildings to the sky and stars behind it.

‘By the gods...’ he murmured, ‘...it is beautiful, an ‘Isle of Glass,’ and crystal castle, how could this be?’ he voiced as he stared in wonderment but still in fear.

The fog around the ‘Isle of Glass’ began to settle at its base as the ground no longer shook. The tower stood higher than Rhys had ever witnessed in this worlds realm. It was suddenly peaceful, beautiful and serene and Rhys realised that he was now standing, no longer pressed to the ground by a force unseen.

He knew not what he had witnessed, but stared wide eyed at the sight of it.

‘I must tell someone...’ he thought ‘...but who, for the entire village sleeps, I must raise the alarm for the people must see this!’

Before he turned to run and tried to rouse the chief again, something caught his eye, a shape, a shadow upon the lake. He could make out its darkness against the shimmering tower and he could see a figure in what seemed to be a tiny boat, a small vessel the size of a coracle and a man dressed in black rowing, pulling hard upon the oars.

Wise Merlin of the 'Fair Folk' and Rhys



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Rhys watched the boat, but it seemed to take forever to reach him. If he looked away for a second the boat seemed to be

further away. Watching it approach, again coming towards him, he thought it would reach shore any minute, but if he looked away for but a moment the boat was again further away than before.

This continued for some time and Rhys knew that who ever was upon this vessel must be a god who could move time in a way that he could never understand.

Suddenly, much to his alarm, the figure was upon him, he had looked away for but a moment when the man stood in his coracle in front of him.

‘Greetings Rhys...’ he called, ‘...help me ashore, for I have an aversion to getting my feet wet,’ smiled the unknown man.

The strange being held out his right hand for help, but Rhys was dumbstruck, unable to move, for he saw a tall man, wearing a long black hooded cloak with gold symbols upon the hem and sleeves, leather trousers and finely made black leather boots. Upon his torso he was clothed in exquisite chain mail that looked almost feathery, but yet it shone like silver. He wore on his hands black fingerless gloves and a thick torc of gold nestled around his throat. The man had long dark black hair which strangely shone blue when he moved and it came to his waist, hanging loosely around his strong shoulders. He was a handsome man with a comely face yet strong dark features, but this is not what made Rhys freeze, for he had seen the stranger’s eyes.

His eyes! Rhys could not look away, for the stranger had bright golden eyes, the colour of the sun. Two gold discs likened to a magnificent wolf or eagle seemed to bore into Rhys’ very soul, but no one possessed eyes of gold in the world of men.

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His eyes were in stark contrast to his long black hair and eyebrows and Rhys knew this man, if he was a man had power and all who encountered him would come to know it also.

‘Rhys. Stop gaping at me boy, and help me from this boat.’

‘Lord I was.....’ Rhys stuttered, ‘I was.....’

‘Never mind,’ the stranger said as Rhys fell to his knees in honour and also in fear.

‘No need for that, lad.....’ remarked the being as he allowed a brief smile. ‘....I will alight from this boat myself.’ Still on his knees Rhys gazed at the being that stood tall in front of him.

‘Please lad, stand, I am not a king, I am not even a lord, for my name be Merlin. I am a bard, but not a bard, I am a druid, but not a druid, I am an enchanter, but not an enchanter. I could go on about who I am and who I am not, but I have little time for the telling, the only time I have is for the life of a man. So time being short to me we must go, come Rhys, seeing thou have witnessed all and eluded my brethren’s enchantment, thou shall be my man.’

So saying, Merlin took up his rowan staff from the coracle and walked past Rhys, who quickly gathered his water skin from the lake and was prepared to follow Merlin to the ends of the earth.

As Merlin walked past each hut and dwelling he grinned at Rhys then he tapped his staff upon the doors, whereupon the occupants started to wake, all the while uttering in a tongue that Rhys could not comprehend.

He followed his master amazed; ‘truly he was a god’ he thought, but Rhys would understand more about Merlin as time went by.

As they passed the last hut along the lake’s banks, Rhys turned and looked behind him and he witnessed all of the townspeople standing by the shore, gazing in awe at the sight of the ‘Isle of Glass’, shining against the low morning sun. The huge tower was truly magnificent and the sun’s rays caught many strange angles upon the structure, which sent

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out rainbows of colour upon the lake. In the world of men this could not be, but there it was, standing tall and proud upon the island of glass.

And so Merlin the Enchanter entered into the world of men from the 'Fair Folk' world known as Avalon.

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'Where do we go, lord?' Rhys asked, while running along side Merlin, for the enchanter walked fast.

'To find a King who is not a King,' came a quick reply.

'Where shall we find this king who is not a king?'

'Oh, questions, questions my friend, thou asks too many. I am on a quest, as this king will be one day. We travel to South Kernow, but first we are in need of some horses.'

'I have no coins, or anything to barter lord to buy horses,' Rhys uttered sadly.

'Fear not Rhys, we have no need of coins or such like, not far from this place there be a sacred stone circle; we will walk there this day, for do thou know what this day is?'

Rhys shook his head and lowered his shoulders.

'It is Lunasa; does this day mean anything to thee?'

Rhys looked up in despair, as he did not understand the meaning of the important festival and he was ashamed to admit it.

The Romans had left the island of Lloegres on which Rhys lived but a short time ago; leaving the isle alone to defend itself, but the Romans had left their mark upon the land and also its religion. Many people of Lloegres had turned to Christianity and shunned the old gods, the 'Ancient Ones' who had protected them well till now.

The old rituals and festivals were fast disappearing and turning into a distant memory. The Brotherhood was all but disbanded in favour of the new god and Christianity spread throughout the 'Isle of the Mighty', spreading its fingers like

tendrils across the land, turning everyone it touched, filling their souls with the message of God.

Merlin hated it, no, despised it, but knew there was little that could be done. He knew how weak willed men were, and how easily they would follow, nonetheless, he also knew that the 'Ancient Ones' are not so easy to disregard, for man in his infinite wisdom would slowly turn again to his protector, for Mother Earth would not abandon her children.

Merlin spoke no more to Rhys of Lunasa; all he would say was that one day he would understand. And so, they journeyed on, speaking little, across hills and valleys and over meadows and glens, but Rhys did not ask his burning question of how Merlin came to be here and who he really was, even though it pressed hard in his mind. Finally they came to the sight of the sacred stone circle. The sun was setting low upon the western sky, and the first of the stars was just beginning to shine. Rhys had never seen such stones before and he went to approach them but he felt a tight grip upon his shoulder.

'Not a step closer Rhys, my young fellow, if thou please.'

Rhys turned and caught Merlin's gaze, those golden eyes, he felt them piercing through his own and he could almost feel Merlin inside his head, searching in his mind, finding his spirit, his very soul, and it hurt.

Merlin dropped his gaze and freed Rhys who once again knelt upon one knee before him and clasping his hands to his chest he cried.

'Master if I offend thee then send me away but please, I am a simple man and only know of carpentry and prows.'

'Fear not Rhys, the time is not right for thou to enter the spirit and soul of thy Earth Mother. We will break bread here and camp the night, but do not enter the stones until day break when I tell thee it is safe to do so.'

Rhys already knew what Merlin would say as he was sure he heard it in his mind but a moment ago when he was caught by Merlin's gaze.

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Rhys collected some dry twigs and bracken to make a fire and he used his Jasper Stone to light it. The evening was warm and the stars were now shining brightly, like tiny fires lit by the gods, and Rhys picked up the water skin and passed it to Merlin.

‘Nay lad, drink first...’ Merlin pushed the skin back to Rhys then he added ‘...and also drink to thy fill.’

Rhys drank the water; it was sweet and tasted good, and he drank it down, taking huge gulps, and then much to his alarm he realised he had downed every last drop.

‘Lord, I am sorry, for the skin is empty, I did not mean to...’ he placed the skin upon the ground before him ashamed where upon Merlin picked it up and shook it.

‘There is plenty of water in here, why do thee say it is empty?’

Rhys then picked up the skin and sure enough it was full to the brim.

‘Say not a word...’ Merlin interceded ‘...and drink to thy fill,’ he grinned.

Thoughts raced through Rhys’ head, for how could this be? ‘What enchantment is this?’ Filled with puzzlement the expression upon Rhys’ face was as clear as crystal as he stared at Merlin bewildered.

‘Mother Earth will always provide for her children, never forget that my young brother.’

Finally Rhys began to relax a little as the sage grinned showing a human face even though on many occasions he was unnerved by Merlin’s great sorcery thus far. As time passed he grew more confident and took from his leather bag his harp carved by his own hand.

‘My lord would thou like to listen to my sonnet? I have taught myself mostly, but in time I hope to learn the words and prows of a true Bard, one day, and sing in many Great Halls, for it be a dream I treasure.’

‘I should like that very much my friend, please play thy harp and sing, for I am sure I will enjoy it and if I do not then I shall turn thee into a toad!’

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Rhys looked into Merlin's face and saw the enchanter tried not to laugh, but he could hold it back no longer and both of them began laughing in earnest as Rhys understood that Merlin spoke in jest.

Finally, when both had calmed, Rhys made the first stroke upon the harp. He had composed his own melody and prows to accompany it and Merlin enjoyed his sonnet. He sang well and his voice even though untrained was strong yet soft. His tune was pleasing to the ear and Merlin knew there was great potential in the young fellow, for never had he heard the sweet tones and melodic tune from anyone other than his own people of the 'Fair Folk'.

'I would train thee Rhys for thy pitch is near perfect. I know a little of melodies and harmonies. I shall turn thy dream into reality if it pleases thee?' voiced Merlin as the last chord of the harp was strung.

'My lord, I wish it greatly, I thank ye wholeheartedly.'

Rhys could hardly contain his excitement as he broadly smiled for he thought Merlin could do anything.

'So be it, he who eludes my enchantments,' he grinned as he warmed his hands by the fire.

The flames looked like they reached the sky with tiny sparks and embers dancing around them and Rhys watched the firelight light Merlin's face and make shadows first one way then the other. Rhys knew Merlin to be an 'other' worldly being with eyes as gold as the flames themselves, then he shared his barley cakes with Merlin and once again there were more cakes than Rhys had carried upon their journey and they all but had a feast through Merlin's sorcery.

Rhys glanced at the stone circle, almost too afraid to look at it, for fear of Merlin's gaze still kept him in check. Their fire had lit up the monoliths as he watched the shadows, making strange shapes moving in an eerie dance around them and even though Merlin had shown his human side, Rhys was still afear of the 'Fair Folk' he saw before him sharing his fire.

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Rhys felt afraid, he thought the place inhabited by demons or serpents, and a feeling of loneliness fell over him. He did not like it here, but he knew Merlin had a reason to come even though he did not speak of it to him.

The night wore on and they were both weary, resting their heads upon pillows of grass, and Merlin fell asleep. Rhys kept watch over the colossal stone uprights, with lintels capping each one, forming a huge circle of stone with yet another stone circle inside.

Tiredness overtook him, his eyes closed; he felt a strange warmness for the first time since coming here which was totally unexplained. He remembered the last time he felt like this, for it was when his mother cradled him in her arms when he was a small child.

A teardrop formed in his eyes as he thought of his mother, so long had it been since he last saw her. He was only eight summers old when she was taken by the Picts – the barbarians of the wilderness in the Northern lands, and that was half his lifetime ago. With the fire dancing and crackling before him, he stared at it until finally his eyes grew tired and he fell into a secure and restful asleep.

*'Milab Lugh mas chonuil I
Milab Lugh mas chonuil I
Sheal Bridgit mas crade I
Sheal Bridgit mas crade I'*

Wise Merlin called as he spoke melodiously in his 'Fair Folk' tongue.

*'Brave Lugh will endow me
Brave Lugh will endow me
Bright Bridgit will aid me
Bright Bridgit will aid me'*

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Rhys woke with a start, it was not yet dawn, and the goddess of darkness still held her black cloak over the night sky. He looked at the stones and saw Merlin standing in the centre, chanting words he did not understand.

He held his rowan staff high above his head, with the other hand palm upwards to the sky, and his staff seemed to be illuminated in a soft glow, as did the colossal stones upon their front facing surfaces.

The place hummed, a noise like that of a bee, but thousands of them, the giant stones vibrated and it felt to him the world would shake itself apart. He did not know what to do but watch in awe.

The deep resonating humming grew louder as Merlin's voice grew less audible. Rhys rose to his feet and approached the stone circle, slowly and gently he extended his hand to touch one of the great stone monoliths that towered over him.

Its vibrations seemed to emanate stronger still, but, his fingers inches away, he could feel nothing. Then with the braveness of his heart and curiosity of mind he finally took courage and touched it.

In a rush of unending noise and commotion the great stone vibration ran through his fingers, into his hand and along his arm. He could not move, for he was stuck fast. In an instant Merlin turned his head and saw him squirming in agony, screaming in pain. He managed to look towards Merlin for help then he caught sight of his eyes, for now they were even more golden than before and he witnessed pure light emanating from them.

His magic all but done, Merlin lowered his rowan staff and his eyes grew dimmer, and in an instant all stopped, the noise, the vibration, everything ceased.

Rhys fell back, landing awkwardly upon his arm, in great pain he scrambled to his knees as tears formed in the corner of his eyes for he was in agony.

'Lord I am sorry; I beg thy forgiveness I only meant to.....'

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‘Save thy breath, little man, or I will turn thee to the dust whence thou came,’ hissed Merlin as he suddenly picked up a set of horses’ reins from the floor of the great stone circle, whereupon a large black horse came from nowhere, through the gap in-between the huge monoliths.

‘There would have been two horses had thou not interfered; now I will ride and thou will walk, did I not tell thee not to enter the sacred circle until dawn? Had thou forgotten my request so quickly?’

Speechless at seeing the horse and still cradling his arm, he managed to stand as Merlin passed him by leading the horse to their makeshift camp.

‘Merlin, Wise Merlin, what must I do for thou to favour me once more?’

‘Obey my commands, thou who art mortal, thou who have forgotten the old ways. Did thou not know that something can come out of nothing? Obey me, little brother.’

Merlin looked at the young man standing before him still cradling his arm, shoulders low and his eyes looking down at his feet and Merlin became less angry.

‘Little brother, if it is thy will, I will teach thee the old ways, for thou art but sixteen summers. While I live amongst thee and if it pleases the ‘Ancient Ones’, a new Brotherhood may yet begin. I shall teach thee the way of the Bard, but understand that I may use sorcery in the world of men and I am unaccustomed to thy simple life. I am the one who is sorry, my friend, for I should not have so chastised thee.’

‘It pleases me greatly lord that thou would teach me the old ways and the way of the Bard. Though I am a simple man, my lord, I also possess courage and honour and will protect what I consider to be right. I am no fool, Wise Merlin, and do not think otherwise, for a man will fight as well as love. This is the world to which thee have come.’

Rhys spoke beyond his years and Merlin felt humbled by his words and took each one to his heart, but then he noticed that Rhys was cradling his arm for he was still in great pain.

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‘Here, let me take a look, we will find herbs for thy pain and make an elixir. Be still, little brother, our destiny awaits and so does a baby yet to be born.’

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On the eve of Samhain, in the darkness of night, a child was born to the beautiful Igrayne. Sadly, the tiny baby girl was ugly, for her left eye was squinted and looked inwards and her eyelid was lazy and fell over her dark eyes, but Lady Igrayne did not notice this as she lay exhausted upon her pallet of reeds, blood-soaked and wet.

Her husband was the Duke to the King of Dumnonia. The King had allowed the birth to take place in the ‘Castle of Kings’ which was called Camelot, for the king was in love with the fair Igrayne.

Camelot was a high, commanding fortress of stone, which was built on the ruins of an old Roman fort. Its steep walls were impenetrable from all sides, as the castle was built along the rocky peninsular looking out to sea.

The people called their village Tintagel and they served Camelot well, for it protected them from any kind of invader or enemy, including the Picts of the Wilderness Lands.

Duke Gorlois paced up and down the castle’s Great Hall, waiting for news of his beloved wife Lady Igrayne and the pending birth of their baby, when suddenly the midwife swung open the door and rushed out. The duke grabbed her by the arm and in a raised voice he questioned her.

‘Be there news, woman?’

Looking at him in horror she put her hand to her mouth so as not to speak, but he pressed her more as she gasped.

‘Tell me news, or I will have thy tongue and feed it to my wolf hounds!’

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The woman stopped and glared at him,

‘Lord, thy wife is well, though blood loss is great, but the babe be born on Samhain, and it is a curse, for she is possessed, and all can see. In short, my lord, she has the mark of the devil upon her face.’

He let her go; his mind was in turmoil as he looked out of the castle window. The rain pressed hard upon the window and through small openings in the cloudy sky the moon shone full as grey and black clouds rushed across its surface.

Below, he caught sight of a steward pulling two large wolf hounds by the collar as best he could with all his might, but they would not move as they struggled against him. Suddenly both of the wolf hounds looked up at him and howled in unison as they bayed at the moon. They then howled towards the tower as though marking the loss of a noble lord, but this time marking the birth of a child.

Still further off, he saw ravens flying in circles in the sky, and knew this was a bad sign as they squawked and crowed and it seemed to him they stared at him as they flew. Duke Gorlois turned on his heels, not wanting to believe the omens he had seen, his cloak swirled about him and as it did so it caught upon his small dagger. In an attempt to free the cloth, the dagger slipped and cut his wrist.

Blood flowed freely over the white cloth and dripped to the floor, then, filled with horror at this third omen, he decided to kill the child at once.

Striding forcefully up the myriad of steps to his wife’s chamber and resting his hand upon the pommel of his sword, he heard a deep strong voice behind him.

‘Gorlois...’ the voice called, ‘...how goes it, is the babe yet born?’ Turning, he saw his King.

Uther Pendragon stood tall and broad before him. His colossal frame seemed to fill the very hall he stood in. His eyes were bright blue but possessed a stare so stark that many feared his gaze alone. His fair hair hung loosely around his strong shoulders and he wore the finest chain mail

that could be forged, with a long purple robe sloped upon one shoulder, held by a huge golden pin.

‘Lord the babe be born, if thou can call it that, for it is possessed by the devil. I have seen the signs and omens; fear not great King for I am on my way to kill it.’

‘My Duke, this cannot be so, let us see the babe and decide upon its fate, do not be so hasty.’ King Uther spoke with clear authority and Duke Gorlois could only obey his lord and master.

‘My lord, all I have seen...’ he pressed ‘...’tis true, it be the night of the living dead, for it be Samhain. I have seen my lord’s wolfhounds baying and howling towards my lady’s chamber, ravens fly in circles above us and my wrist has been cut with my own dagger. Three omens my King, I need no more, the child be afflicted and I pray that I might end it here and now, before my lord’s kingdom is turned to ashes by the demon child.’

King Uther forced a thin smile, for he was in love with Lady Igrayne and sought not to harm her child.

‘Enough...’ he voiced in a harsh tone, ‘...we will go and see this babe.’

With that, both King and Duke climbed the twisting stone steps until reaching Igrayne’s chamber in the high tower of Camelot.

‘My love’, she spoke as she gazed into her husbands dark brown eyes but then her smile quickly faded as Duke Gorlois came towards her. His hand was resting upon the hilt of his sword and without warning he snatched the infant from her breast.

‘Lady thou have given birth to a demon, for I have seen three omens; this child has already drawn blood and yet it has only just drawn its first breath. Rest you lady, for the child be dead.’

‘No husband!’ she screamed, but it was near too late, for he held the infant upside down by one of its ankles as he pulled his sword from its scabbard.

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‘Stop!’ commanded King Uther there is another way that can be found, the child need not be killed.’

‘And what is this way O’ King?’ snapped Gorlois as his blade’s tip rested upon the babies heart.

‘The child shall be sent to a nunnery, I will see to it personally....’ he voiced in a harsh tone, ‘...the good sisters will nurse her and exorcise her; she will be a saved spirit within the nuns’ tender care. God shall take the demons from her soul Gorlois; now place the babe with her mother at once.’

Stricken with grief, but realising the child would be saved, Lady Igrayne wept with relief.

‘The King has spoken my lord, we must obey our King,’ she sobbed.

Duke Gorlois reluctantly dropped the infant down upon the bed as he glared at his wife and also his king.

‘This be a disaster....’ he snarled as he turned and left the chamber, ‘...for the child is a demon and only demons will she know, all her life. Mark my words my king, for this misfit shall become the scourge of Lloegres.’

He did not even look at the child, who was crying pitifully, but Lady Igrayne forced a smile as the King stood before her and he placed the child in her arms once more. Uther then looked into the babe’s face, and she gazed up at him and he saw her squinted eye and loose eyelid.

‘The babe was misfortunate for a female’ he thought, then he turned his attention to Lady Igrayne.

‘The child will be sent to the sisters the morrow; rest thee now my lady and lament not, for all shall be well.’

He stared at the baby one last time but strange feelings overcame him and he began to feel a weakness in his heart as he looked upon her.

The very next day Lady Igrayne named her baby; being a Christian woman she called for Brother Lefodd from the nearby abbey to perform the ceremony. He was a stout man and plumb with short grey hair and wore the undyed wool

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cloth with a rope to hold it tight. Wearing only thin leather sandals upon his feet, even though it was cold and raining, he proceeded to baptise her, naming her Morgan Le Fay.

The rain still continued to pour outside the castle of Camelot and Morgan cried and screamed as she was Christened and she nearly fell from Brother Lefodd's arms as she wriggled so fiercely when he marked the sign of the 'One True God' upon her tiny brow.

After the ritual, the monk hastily took her away with the babies' wet nurse, to be bought up in the finest nunnery in the King's realm, as Lady Igrayne wept bitterly.

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