

# The Sword in the Stone

In which a kingdom is lost and another is gained

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The days of the old king were numbered.

Where once, long and costly wars had raged throughout the land, the rule of King Uther Pendragon had brought a time of a peace. Yet the peace had been hard won and was fragile. Should Pendragon fall, then a time of chaos and lawlessness would return.

This was the future foreseen by the great wizard, Merlin. And so, with grim purpose, he ventured forth to Tintagel Castle and an audience with Uther Pendragon.

Uther heard the sorcerer's prophecy and a dark mood fell upon him. "So, my death is soon," he stated flatly. "Is there nothing which can be done?"

"Nothing, sire," said Merlin and he spoke the truth; once a future has been seen it cannot be changed, "but there is some hope."

Uther listened as the mage told of a child – his son – who would be born in the coming year. The boy would be heir to the crown but, long before he became of age, his father would die. With the king dead and the throne empty, many battles would be fought for control of the kingdom. In the quest for power, few lords would hesitate to dispatch Uther's heir, even one who was young and defenceless.

"What must I do?" Uther asked.

"He must be taken and secluded in a place of safety, where none can find him," Merlin answered. "Only when he is a man will he be ready to assume the crown and only then can he begin to restore peace to your lands."

"Then see that it is done," Uther said.

The following year, as Merlin had foretold, an heir to Uther was born. His name was Arthur. In keeping with the king's wishes, the boy was borne away by Merlin to the furthest corner of the kingdom.

The wizard came to the door of a modest house. Here a brave and noble knight by the name of Sir Ector lived with his infant son, Kay.

"Merlin!" Ector exclaimed, "what brings you to my humble abode?"



“I have with me a young boy,” Merlin replied, drawing Arthur out of the recesses of his grey cloak. “I entrust his life into your safe keeping. There are many who would wish him ill should they learn of his existence.”

Ector took the child from Merlin’s hands. “But why?” he asked. “Who is this?”

“His name is Arthur,” Merlin replied, “and in time you will learn his truth.”

In the months which followed, the remainder of Merlin’s prophecy was proved correct. Uther died and immediately a contest for power began. Lords and knights hurled armies at each other, desperate to win the right to rule through the might of the sword and the spilling of blood. Much life was lost, but no ruler emerged who was strong enough to unite all of the land. It was a dark time.

Merlin’s trust in Sir Ector was also proved to be correct. Although Arthur knew he was not of Ector’s blood, he was raised and loved as if he was Ector’s own. A strong bond grew between Arthur and his new family.

By the time Arthur was almost full grown, the struggles for the throne showed no signs of fading. Many were the men and women unable to recall a time where one king had brought peace. Soon, this would change.

At this time, jousting tournaments were a common sight. Here men would pit themselves against each other in contest; a man who could prove himself a worthy opponent in a jousting competition could easily find work fighting for a wealthy lord.

At one such tournament, a mysterious event was to occur. In the dead of night, a huge stone anvil, too heavy to be transported without great effort, appeared at the centre of a clearing. Thrust deep within the stone was a sword. Though little more than the hilt was visible, it was clear this sword was one the like of which had not been

seen before. The silver steel blade shone like a sliver of polished moonlight. The golden handle had been crafted with a greater care than any known blacksmith possessed. Most intriguing of all was the message carved into the side of the stone anvil. It read: **WHOEVER PULLS THE SWORD FROM THIS STONE AND ANVIL WILL BE THE RIGHTFUL KING OF ALL BRITAIN.**





News of the sword and its message spread far and wide. Many were the nobles who stood before it and tried to wrest the sword from the stone's hard grip. Each of these men were convinced that theirs was the destiny to rule Britain. Yet their belief was not enough; each time the rock held hard and the sword did not move.

After the nobles, knights, warriors and other strong men took their turn. One after another, they pitted their strength against the blade. One after another, they failed.

Some time later, when it seemed that every man had tried to remove the sword, Arthur chanced upon the clearing and the curious stone. In his haste, he saw not the inscription on the side but simply noticed a blade ownerless and at hand.

The truth was, Arthur's brother Kay was now of an age where he was ready to find work as a knight in employ to a powerful lord. Accompanied by his father and, with Arthur as his page, he had arrived at the tournament to discover he was without his sword. The blade must have been left behind in the camp they had made close by. Kay dispatched Arthur to return to the camp and return with his sword. On seeing the mysterious stone, Arthur reasoned that rather than returning to the camp, he could best help his brother by taking this weapon. It was closer.

Placing both hands on the blade, Arthur began to pull. Where before, hundreds of the land's strongest men had each taken the blade and fought to free it, they might as well have tried to move the sun or moon. Now, in the hands of a young boy, the sword effortlessly and silently slid from the stone. Relieved that he would be in time for his brother to take part in the contest, Arthur raced back to the tournament.

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Upon his return, the eyes of all men present turned in Arthur's direction. The sword was seen before he was, for there was not a fighter there who had not studied it full of envy.

"Where did you get that sword?" one of the knights asked Arthur.





## Fact Sheet

Believing he had somehow done wrong, Arthur felt shame burn through his body but answered truthfully. “I - I found it in the clearing yonder,” he said pointing.

Another knight grasped Arthur rudely, “You lie! Where did you get this? Whom did you take it from?”

Arthur could only repeat his earlier explanation but this simply served to anger many of the knights further. “Liar!” came many of the calls over Arthur’s protests.

“My son is no liar!” called out Sir Ector. “If he says he found the sword in the clearing, then he found it!”

“Talk reason,” argued one knight, “the sword is promised to a king.”

“Him?” came a jeering voice, “a weak and tiny sapling like him? This base boy is all skin and elbows. He would lose a battle against a good wind.”

“And yet - ” a voice cut across the crowd, “the sword is moved, is it not?”

All turned to face the new arrival. The figure was tall, grey and pale, wrapped in grey robes and grasping an ancient wooden staff. Despite his apparent great age, the man held himself as if a greater power than any knight’s was his. Even to those who knew him only as a legend, he was recognised. This was Merlin.

Merlin turned to face Arthur and his voice was the low rumble of distant thunder: “Return to the stone and return the sword.”

At Merlin’s command, Arthur turned and moved towards the stone anvil. All thoughts of the competition were forgotten and every man followed in his wake.

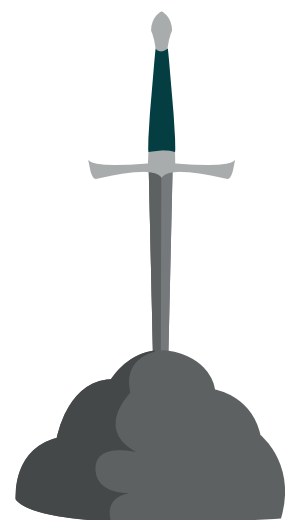
The stone was as Arthur recalled; only a thin incision near the top betrayed the fact that it had once held a sword.

“Return the sword,” Merlin commanded.

Feeling all eyes upon him, Arthur did as Merlin bade him. The blade slid into the stone and came to a rest with only its magnificent hilt remaining.

“That is the sword,” said Merlin, “and that is the stone! The challenge remains the same! Let any man who can claim the sword know that he is the true and rightful king of us all!”

None moved until Merlin’s gnarled finger came to a rest, pointing at one of the men who had challenged Arthur.





“You,” Merlin said, “take the sword. This boy who would lose a fight against a strong breeze took it. Surely, it will be no great feat for you to do so.”

Feeling all eyes upon him, the knight stepped toward the anvil and then paused.

“Merlin -” he started, but one look from the sorcerer cut him dead. The man grasped the sword with both hands and began to pull. He strained until his breathing became harsh and laboured and then stepped back, panting and red-faced. The sword remained.

“You!” Merlin called, pointing at the first knight to question Arthur, “take the sword.”

“B-but my lord,” the knight protested.

“You will grasp the hilt,” Merlin countered, “and you will try with every fibre of your being to take the sword.”

The knight did as he was told, for he found that he could not do otherwise. Despite his greatest exertions, he failed to move the sword.

“And now you,” Merlin commanded. This time, his finger pointed not at any armored knight. Instead it pointed towards the young man, Arthur.

Arthur stepped forward and took the blade. He did not strain. He did not struggle. He pulled, and the sword left the stone.

Once, there had been quarrel and discontent. This vanished as if a shadow had lifted from the clearing. Arthur turned to see that only the wizard Merlin was standing, a wild grin drawn across his ancient face. Every other soul in the clearing had dropped to one knee, head bowed in Arthur’s direction.

“Father,” Arthur said, “Kay, what are you doing?”

“We are kneeling,” Ector replied, “kneeling in the presence of the King of Britain.”

Moments earlier a young boy had stood before them. In his place, stood a king: King Arthur.

Arthur would go on to rule England, returning to it a peace which had long since departed. Many tales of his wisdom and bravery were to be forged in the years which followed, but perhaps none would be as wondrous of how Arthur proved himself the once true and future king.

