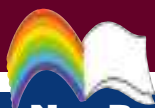


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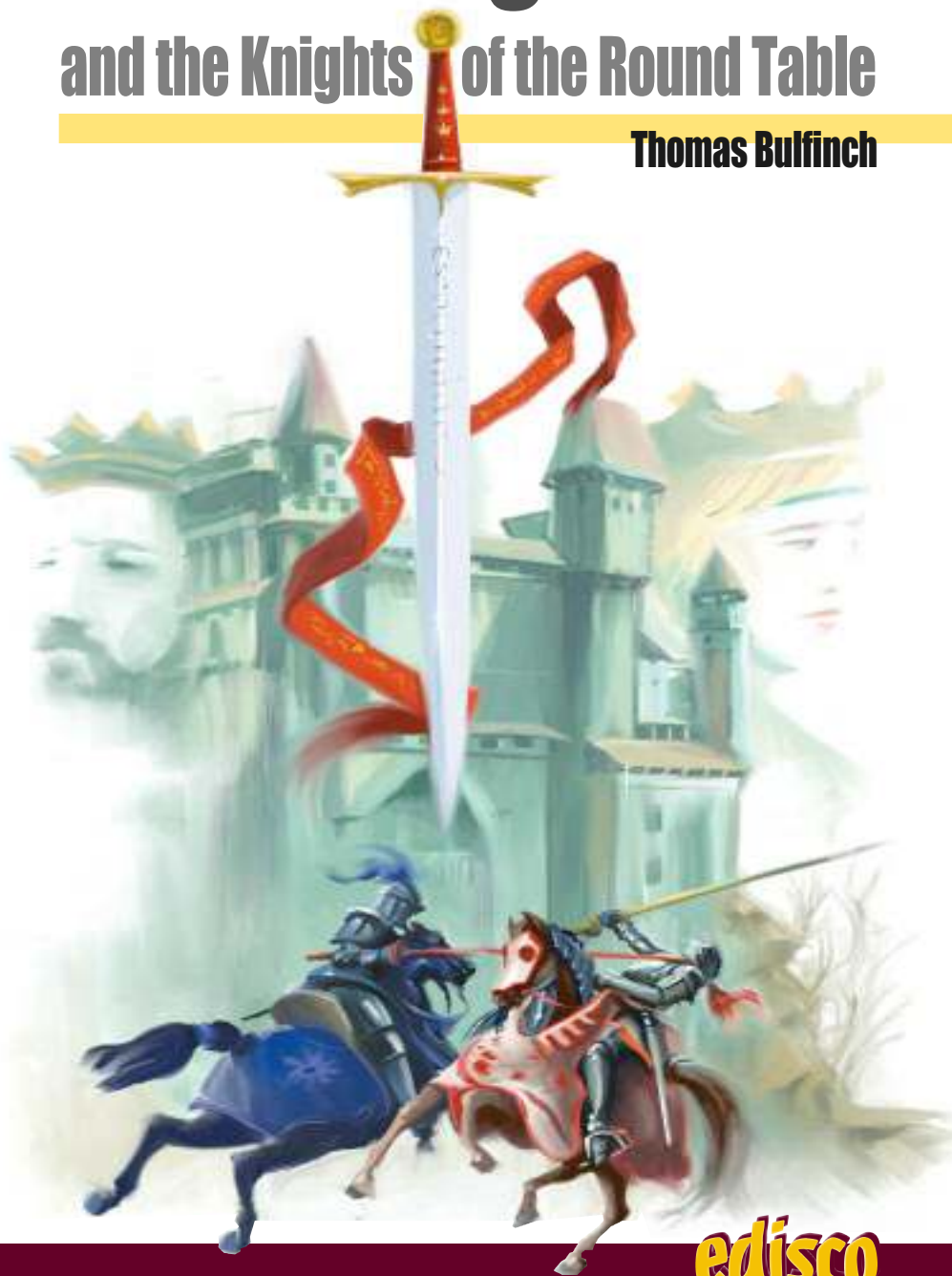
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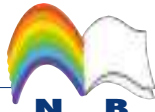
King Arthur

and the Knights of the Round Table

Thomas Bulfinch



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R A I N B O W S

Thomas Bulfinch

King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table

Adaptation, dossiers and activities by
Isabella Bruschi and Roy Palmer



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and the Knights of the Round Table

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The Legend of King Arthur



The story of King Arthur with his lovely Queen and noble knights, with the Round Table, Excalibur and the Holy Grail, is probably more than 1,500 years old.

According to¹ the historians, Arthur was a war leader in post-Roman Britain who fought against² the invasions of the Saxons. The Romans left Britain around 410 A.D. Some time later the Saxons started to raid³ and invade Britain, pushing its Celtic population to the west and the north of the island.

Gildas, a monk⁴ who lived in the sixth century (after the time King Arthur probably died), wrote a book about the Saxon invasions. He speaks of a battle at a place called Mt. Badon. That battle stopped the Saxons' advance for a long time. Gildas did not specifically name King Arthur but he, or someone similar, was fighting the Saxons at that time.

1. *according to*: following.

2. *fought* (*fight-fought-fought*) *against*: opposed (the Saxons) with arms.

3. *raid*: make sudden attacks.

4. *monk*: member of a community of religious men.



Glastonbury Tor is considered the castle where King Arthur died.

According to the legend, Arthur gained⁵ twelve victories over the Saxons; the last was that of Mt. Badon and after it Arthur reigned in peace until the revolt of his nephew Modred, twenty years later. During their last battle, Modred was killed and Arthur, mortally wounded⁶, was brought by sea to Glastonbury, where he died and was buried⁷. According to another popular belief, King Arthur did not die but was carried to Fairy-Land⁸ and will come back to become King of Britain again.

So Arthur's existence is still very uncertain. Some modern critics say that there was a prince of this name and find proof⁹ in the frequent mention of him in popular ballads; others think that he is just a mythological character.

5. *gained*: obtained.

6. *wounded*: injured, hurt.

7. *buried*: put into a grave and covered with earth.

8. *Fairy-Land*: country where small beings with magical powers live.

9. *proof*: evidence.



BEFORE READING

1 What images come into your mind when you think of the Middle Ages? Choose from the following alternatives and add some if you want.

- castles
- kings and queens
- big cathedrals
- bloody battles
- knights and horses
- other



2 Listen to the CD and complete the following sentences choosing from the words below (the knights on the cover of the book will help you).

helmet – stirrups – sword – visor – lance –
saddles – shield – armour

- a. The and the are used to fight.
- b. Every knight had a to protect himself.
- c. Medieval knights had heavy
- d. are used to mount horses and are used to ride them.
- e. Every knight had a with a on his head.

3 Look at this map of Great Britain in the Middle Ages. What is different from present Great Britain?

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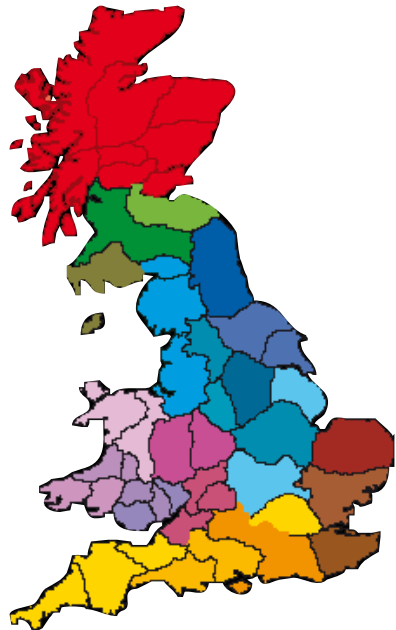
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King Arthur

Arthur, King of Britain

A long time ago the British Isles were divided into many kingdoms¹ that were often at war. One of the most important of these kingdoms was Britain. Its King, Moines, was attacked by the Saxons and defeated².



Some months later, Uther and Pendragon, Moines' brothers, conquered Britain again and Pendragon became its new King. He chose Merlin as his counsellor because of his great wisdom³ and magical powers. In fact Merlin was the son of a mortal mother and of a supernatural being.

Soon, a new war between the Saxons and the Britons started. Merlin called the royal brothers, Uther and Pendragon, and told them, "Britain will win the war but one of you will die in the first battle."

The prediction was frightening⁴, but the two brothers went to war. They defeated the Saxons, but Pendragon died. By magical art Merlin carried enormous stones from Ireland to form the tomb of Pendragon; this monument was called Stonehenge.

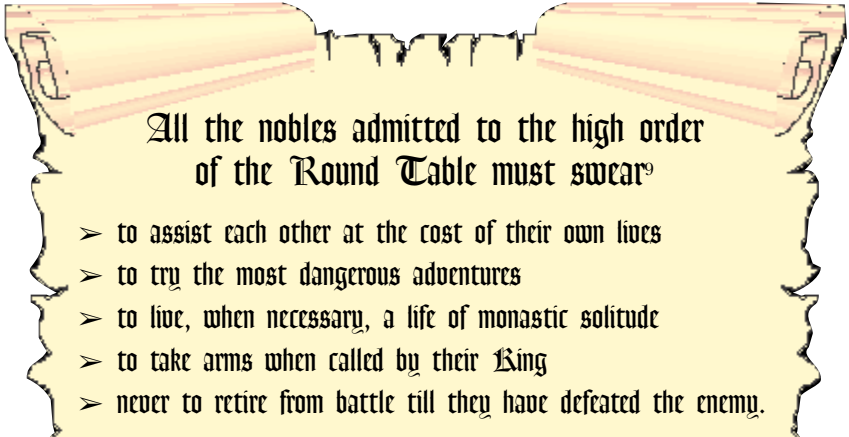
Uther became King and decided to form an assembly of the bravest⁵ nobles of his country to celebrate their courage in the war against the Saxons. For this reason he asked Merlin to create the Round Table. Merlin prepared thirteen seats around the table, in memory of Jesus and the twelve Apostles. Only very famous knights⁶ could sit there. When a Knight of the Round Table died, another one was called and his name

1. *kingdom*: community ruled by a king or a queen.
2. *defeated*: beaten.
3. *wisdom*: experience and knowledge together with common sense.

4. *frightening*: very scaring.
5. *brave*: not afraid, very good.
6. *knight*: medieval soldier riding a horse.



appeared on the seat⁷ by magic⁸. Merlin also established the first rules of the Round Table.



Soon after the creation of the Round Table, the King invited all his barons¹⁰ to the celebration of a great festival. The knights brought their ladies and, among them, there was the beautiful Igerne, wife of Gerlois, Duke of Tintagel. The King fell in love with the Duchess and confessed his passion to her; but Igerne refused his advances and revealed everything to her husband. The Duke became very angry and left the court with Igerne immediately.

Uther considered his departure an act of rebellion and declared war on his vassal¹¹. Thanks to Merlin's magical powers, Uther met Igerne secretly and when her husband died in battle, he married her. Arthur was born from this union.

Arthur was only fifteen years old when his father died. He was proclaimed King at a general meeting of the nobles but

7. *seat*: place where you sit.

8. *magic*: the use of special powers to make impossible things happen.

9. *swear*: promise solemnly.

10. *baron*: member of nobility.

11. *vassal*: in the Middle Ages, a man who received land from a Lord in return for promising to work or fight for him.

he was strongly opposed by many ambitious rivals, who considered him too young to become a king. On Christmas day Bishop¹² Brice spoke to the nobles and told them,

“On this solemn day let’s pray all together so Providence will show us our true king.”

An extraordinary event was the result of this prayer; in fact, outside the church, just in front of the door, they found a stone and a sword¹³, firmly fixed in it; on its hilt¹⁴ the following words were written:

**I am noble Excalibur,
The sword for an excellent King**

Bishop Brice went down on his knees and said, “Let’s thank God!”

Then he proposed a law:

“Whoever¹⁵ is able to draw the sword out¹⁶ from the stone will be recognized as King of the Britons.”

Everybody accepted his proposal. All the nobles and the most famous knights of the country tried to draw the sword out of the stone, but the miraculous sword resisted all their efforts¹⁷.

At Easter the best knights in the kingdom met for the annual tournament¹⁸.

At that time Arthur was serving Sir Kay, as a squire¹⁹. Sir Kay fought with great valour and success, but during the tournament he broke his sword, so he ordered Arthur,

“Quick, run home and ask my mother for a new sword.”

12. *bishop*: priest with a high position.

13. *sword*: see Activity 2 page 6.

14. *hilt*: part of sword you keep in your hand.

15. *whoever*: any person who.

16. *draw out*: to take something out of something.

17. *effort*: act of trying something requiring great energy.

18. *tournament*: competition to show courage and fighting skills in the Middle Ages.

19. *squire*: in the Middle Ages a man who learnt how to be a knight serving another knight.