

Le Morte d'Arthur



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SIR THOMAS MALORY

Little is known about Malory's early years, until he was knighted in 1441 and served in a number of public positions, including as a Member of Parliament. After 1450, however, he seemingly became a professional criminal, accused of assassination, extortion, and rape, among other things. Malory escaped from prison twice and was pardoned several times, showing how powerful his former status as a member of the gentry was. Malory probably wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur* while imprisoned between 1469 and 1470—some of the prisoners were allowed access to the nearby library, where Malory could have compiled his sources. He died the year after his release.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the 15th century, a cult of chivalry arose obsessed with the kind of individual battles and jousting tournaments whose descriptions could be found in the popular prose romances of the time. In 1348, Edward III had established the Order of the Garter based consciously on the Knights of the Round Table, and other chivalric orders flourished as well. At the same time, however, England was facing a century of disorder—not only civil war between Henry VI's house of Lancaster and the rival dynasty of York, but also a series of complex, constantly shifting rivalries and local feuds that, in many ways, are reflected in the factions constantly battling each other in the book. As for the historical veracity of King Arthur himself, this has been widely debated among historians, and there simply isn't enough evidence from the time period (450-550 CE) to conclude whether or not he and the Knights of the Round Table ever really existed at all. (Citation for this section: Cooper, Helen. "Introduction." In Malory, Thomas, Sir. *Le Morte D'Arthur: The Winchester Manuscript*. Ed. Helen Cooper. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Malory is not so much an original author as he is a successful collector of much older tales about King Arthur, a mythical British hero. The earliest references to Arthur—especially to his death at the battle of Camlann—appear in the sixth century, and he is alluded to in Welsh poetry and other documents over the next few hundred years. Geoffrey of Monmouth's 1130s *History of the Kings of Britain* fixed Arthur as a conqueror supported by many knights and ultimately betrayed by his regent Mordred. The tales of the Knights of the Round Table, meanwhile, appear in more fleshed-out form in Chrétien de Troyes' romances in verse, written around the

1160s. For the next few centuries, writers throughout Europe translated and adapted these stories, making Mordred into Arthur's illegitimate son and adding the tradition of the Holy Grail from early Christian history. Malory's version shifted the tales from poetry to prose at a time when the old French romances were enjoying renewed popularity. He was thus perhaps fitting his own work into an older English tradition of prose works dealing with disaster or tragedy, as his title ("The Death of Arthur") makes clear. William Caxton edited and published Malory's work, adding a preface.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Le Morte d'Arthur*
- **When Written:** 1469-1470
- **Where Written:** Newgate Prison, London
- **When Published:** 1485
- **Literary Period:** Medieval English
- **Genre:** Arthurian romance
- **Setting:** England ("Logris") and France
- **Climax:** Arthur's illegitimate son, Mordred, prepares to usurp the throne while Arthur is away fighting his formerly loyal knight, Launcelot.
- **Antagonist:** Arthur and his knights face various antagonists throughout the collected stories. They are often foreign kings, especially King Claudas and the King of Northgalis, but the very rules of knighthood make for constantly shifting alliances and enemies, as one battle triggers a cycle of revenge and retribution. Ultimately, it is two Knights of the Round Table that cause the kingdom's downfall: Mordred—Arthur's illegitimate son, and the product of sleeping with his own sister—and Launcelot, through his affair with Queen Guenever.
- **Point of View:** A first-person narrator, apparently the author, relates a number of events to which he has only second-hand or third-hand knowledge.

EXTRA CREDIT

Creative Editing. Although Malory adapted his work from many different sources, some of the most striking scenes—including the longest speech in the work, in which Launcelot defends Guenever's honor—are his own.

New Findings. While most editions of *Le Morte d'Arthur* rely on Caxton's edits, in 1934 a manuscript was discovered in the library of Winchester College—now known as the Winchester Manuscript—which had an entirely different structure, leading to debates about Malory's intentions for the work.



PLOT SUMMARY

Le morte d'Arthur begins with the story of King Arthur of Camelot's birth. King Uther needs to find an heir to his throne, and he has an eye on Igraine, the wife of the Duke of Cornwall, when they come to visit the court. Together with the wizard Merlin, he hatches a plan to lay siege to the Duke's court while Igraine is at another castle. The Duke is killed in the siege, and Uther (whom Merlin has made to look like the Duke) sneaks into the castle. Uther manages to sleep with Igraine, who only later finds out that her husband has died. In exchange for his help, Merlin asks Uther to hand over the son that he will conceive with Igraine. Uther and Igraine marry, as Igraine is convinced this will be best for the kingdom, and she gives birth to a boy: Arthur. Merlin sends him to be raised by a knight, Sir Ector, alongside Ector's son Kay.

After Uther's death, the kingdom is in a precarious state, left without a king. Merlin, sharing his plan with the Archbishop of Canterbury, has an enchanted sword, **Excalibur**, placed in a stone by the great church in London. All the lords gather and each attempts to draw the sword out, but none proves able. Sir Ector comes to London for a New Year's Day tournament and brings Kay and Arthur. Kay has just been made knight, but he's forgotten his sword at home, so he asks Arthur to retrieve it for him. Hurrying home, Arthur sees the sword in the stone and easily pulls it out. But when he comes back, Ector recognizes it, and they return to the stone so that Arthur can prove he managed to pull it out himself.

Everyone present agrees that Arthur is the proper king of England, and he is soon crowned king. But it doesn't take long for other kings to become skeptical about such a young king of England, and wonder if they can take advantage of Arthur's inexperience to gain some lands for themselves. Merlin warns Arthur of the threat, and suggests Arthur ask for help from two kings, King Ban and King Bors, and then return the favor by fighting in their wars. Together the kings come close to routing King Lot and his allies, but they stop once Merlin counsels Arthur to quit while they're ahead. Then Arthur's men defeat the enemies of Ban and Bors. While abroad Arthur first meets Guenever, who will later become his queen, but he also meets and sleeps with Margawse, wife of Lot and father to Gawaine, Gareth, Agravaire, and Gaheris, though Arthur he does not realize she is his half-sister. She will give birth to a son by Arthur, Mordred, who is fated to kill his father and overturn the kingdom. Merlin counsels Arthur to send all the children born in May (the month of Mordred's birth) onto a ship that will be shipwrecked—he does so, but Mordred is the only one to survive, while the senseless deaths of the other children make many in the kingdom angry with Arthur.

Arthur does what he can to bolster his kingdom's strength by establishing the fellowship of the **Round Table**, in which dozens of knights take up a place around a huge physical table and

pledge to seek honorable quests, grant mercy to opponents, and defend ladies wherever they might find them. Arthur will need this fellowship, especially since Merlin fades from the story—he falls in love with Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, who learns sorcery from him and then, once she grows tired of him and afraid of his power, entraps him in a cave forever. Arthur also has to deal with the trickery of Morgan le Fay, his sister and a sorceress, who is always trying to either kill him or trick him into doing her will.

Although Arthur has defeated Lot and his men, he soon has to face more threats when Emperor Lucius of Rome demands tribute from him. Believing this to be a shameful demand that would threaten his sovereignty, Arthur refuses and takes his knights onto the European mainland, where they have a number of adventures, including the slaying of a dangerous giant, before defeating the Roman armies and returning in triumph. Launcelot du Lake, one of Arthur's knights, performs particularly well in Rome. He accomplishes a number of adventures back in England as well, and proves himself as the world's greatest knight.

At Pentecost every year, the knights of the Round Table reunite to share stories of their exploits and regroup before returning to their quests and adventures. One year, an unknown squire arrives to court to try to prove himself. He's dressed shabbily and no one knows who he is, so Arthur has him help out in the kitchen. Kay makes fun of the boy, calling him "Beaumains" or "Fair-hands," though the other knights rebuke Kay for his teasing. When a damsel, Linet, comes to court asking for a knight to rescue her sister Lionesse from the Knight of the Red Launds, Beaumains asks to fulfill this quest. He rides out, pursued by Launcelot, and asks Launcelot to be made knight. Once he shares his true identity with Launcelot—Beaumains is actually Gareth of Orkney, brother of Gawaine—Launcelot agrees. But no one else knows Gareth's true identity, and Linet continues to harangue him for his shabby clothes and lack of noble identity, even when Gareth strikes down many knights and proves to have great prowess. Finally Gareth defeats the Knight of the Red Launds, and "wins" Lionesse. Only after Gareth proves himself at the Pentecost jousting, however, does Linet stop preventing him from sleeping with Lionesse, and the couple is married.

For a large part of the book, the narration then switches to a knight outside of King Arthur's court—Tristram, son of King Meliodas. Tristram's stepmother tries to poison him out of jealousy, and while Tristram forgives her—establishing his knightly honor—his father sends him out of the country. When he grows up, he proves himself by defending King Mark of Cornwall against King Anguish of Ireland, and by fighting a knight of the Round Table named Marhaus. Tristram wins but is wounded, and Anguish's family takes care of him, not realizing who he is. He falls in love with the king's daughter, La Beale Isoud. Before long, Isoud's mother learns who Tristram really is,

and while Anguish understands that Tristram had to defend Mark on account of his honor, he sadly sends Tristram from his court. Tristram stays at King Mark's court, but after they both fall in love with the same lady—Isoud, who loves Tristram—Mark grows wildly jealous and begins to plot Tristram's downfall. Mark decides to order Tristram to fight and “win” La Beale Isoud so that Mark can marry her himself. As a good king's subject, Tristram does so, though he and Isoud continue to love each other. One knight of Mark's eventually tells the king of their mutual infatuation, and he locks Isoud away. Tristram escapes to King Howel's land, where he briefly falls in love with (and marries) another woman, Isoud La Blanche Mains. He ends up leaving this Isoud and meets up with a knight of Arthur's court, Lamorak de Galis, to defeat a tyrant together.

Meanwhile, back at Arthur's court, another unknown knight, Breunor le Noire (La Cote Male Taile) comes to court anonymously, proves himself through his knight's prowess, and is made a knight of the Round Table. A number of the Round Table knights meet and joust with Tristram, who still resists being made a knight of the Round Table, since he thinks he's not worthy enough—besides, Launcelot, who has learned of Tristram's infidelity to La Beale Isoud, is angry with him. Tristram sneaks back to Mark's court, but once again is found out. After a fight with Isoud he flees into the forest, where he seems to lose his sanity for a time. He is eventually brought back to court as a madman, but eventually Isoud recognizes him—once his identity is revealed, Mark banishes Tristram from court. Finally Tristram, after proving himself on the battlefield in Arthur's tournaments, is made a knight of the Round Table. Mark hears of this and is jealous, so he sneaks into England—though not before killing two of his knights who refuse to help him kill Tristram. A few knights of Arthur's court then come across Mark (though he hides his identity). Finally one, Dinadan, learns who he is, and Mark is brought to Arthur. Arthur has him swear not to plot against Tristram any longer, and Mark does so, and brings Tristram back to court with him. Meanwhile, Gawaine and his brothers lose out to Lamorak at a tournament. Jealous, they kill their mother Margawse—Lamorak's lover—and eventually Lamorak too. Back at Mark's court, Mark is forced to ask Tristram to help him in defeating enemies. Mark's brother also performs very well, so Mark grows jealous and kills him. But the brother's wife and son, Alisander, escape.

Mark continues to plot to destroy Tristram, but Launcelot is back on Tristram's side, and together they manage to imprison Mark for a time. Free to have adventures on his own, Tristram joins with several other knights, including Gareth, Palomides, and Dinadan, and they pursue a number of quests. But Palomides is also in love with La Beale Isoud, and after Tristram gains glory at a tournament, Palomides grows nearly sick with jealousy. The two prepare to fight for their honor, but Tristram

is wounded and so cannot battle Palomides. Meanwhile, Launcelot—who maintains an affair with Queen Guenever, to whom he is loyal for the entire book—is tricked into sleeping with Elaine of Corbin, who gives birth to Galahad, a knight fated to surpass even his father in greatness.

Later, Galahad arrives at court without sharing his identity, but it soon becomes clear that he is holier than any of the other knights when he pulls yet another sword out of an enchanted stone. With great fanfare, his arrival means the start of the quest for the **Sangreal** or **Holy Grail**—a vessel that is able to grant limitless food and drink, and also reveal spiritual mysteries, though only to the one who is holy enough. Arthur is sorry to see so many of his knights leave on the quest, since he knows most of them will not be worthy enough to achieve it. Galahad's adventures on the quest are detailed first, as he frees several castles from evil knights and defends several damsels. Percivale, another knight on the quest, tries to find Galahad, but instead has to confront his own quests, which involve temptations from and battles with the devil in various guises. Launcelot too is confronted with such temptations, and while he battles well as always, he is told by a number of figures that because of his earthly sins—like sleeping with Guenever and embracing earthly pride—he will never be able to achieve the Holy Grail. Sir Bors also faces a number of spiritual tests, first having to choose between saving a lady and saving his brother Lionel. He chooses the lady, thus showing his knightly honor, but Lionel grows furious and, possessed by the devil, tries to kill his brother. However, Bors manages to flee and join Percivale. They meet up with Galahad, where they have many adventures together. They meet Percivale's sister on an enchanted ship, where there is a sword and scabbard invested with holiness because of their connection to a Biblical figure and early guardian of the Holy Grail, Joseph of Arimathea. Galahad turns out to be fated to take this sword and scabbard. Eventually, the three knights reach the Castle of the Maimed King, Pellam, where Galahad heals the king, thus fulfilling a prophecy. Another king throws them into prison, but the Holy Grail ensures that they are kept fed and healthy, and when the king dies Galahad is crowned king of the land. After some time, Galahad finally is granted the right to see the spiritual mysteries of the Holy Grail, and is raised to heaven. Percivale becomes a holy man and dies not long after, while Bors returns to Arthur's court, where many of the original knights of the Round Table have died.

Back at court, Launcelot soon forgets the vow he had made to become a holier man, and resumes his affair with Guenever. Soon, however, one knight Pinel tries to poison Gawaine out of jealousy at Guenever's feast, but accidentally kills a knight Patrise. Everyone thinks it is Guenever, but Launcelot defends her against Pinel. Several tournaments are held, and Launcelot proves himself mightily. At one point he stays with a lord Bernard and his daughter, Elaine le Blank, who falls in love with

him, although Launcelot continues to be loyal to Guenever—Elaine eventually dies out of grief. After another great tournament, the kingdom is at peace for a time.

Soon, however, a knight named Meliagrance tries to take advantage of Launcelot's absence from court to kidnap Guenever, whom he is in love with. Launcelot is captured and thrown into prison, but finally, thanks to a damsel's intervention, he escapes and kills Meliagrance in battle. But another knight, Agravaine, is jealous of Launcelot and decides to plot against him. Launcelot's affair with Guenever has always been an open secret at court to everyone but Arthur, and Agravaine finally shares the secret openly and proves it to Arthur by surrounding Guenever and Launcelot when they are in bed one night. Launcelot escapes, and Guenever is sentenced to death. Launcelot manages to ride in and rescue Guenever before she is burned at the stake, though in the mayhem he accidentally kills Gareth and Gaheris. Their brother Gawaine has always been loyal to Launcelot, but this is the last straw, and he vows to destroy Launcelot. Arthur sorrowfully agrees to fight against his best knight and friend. At one point Launcelot, who has taken Guenever to his tower, returns her to Arthur, who would happily end the civil war, but Gawaine refuses to be satisfied until Launcelot is killed. Launcelot flees to Benwick with some knights loyal to him, and Gawaine and Arthur, with their knights, depart to lay siege there. While they are away fighting, Mordred hears of Arthur's death and crowns himself king, making Guenever his wife. Even after he finds out Arthur is still alive, he refuses to give up his position. Arthur and Gawaine are forced to return. Gawaine is mortally wounded and on his deathbed tells Arthur he forgives Launcelot and is sorry for ever starting the war. Arthur is told to sign a truce with Mordred until Launcelot can return to fight for him, but at the last minute an accident renders the truce null, and Arthur and Mordred mortally wound each other. Only then does Launcelot return, though it's too late. Guenever retires to a nunnery, and many of the other knights become holy men or hermits, giving up a life of battle. A new king, Constantine, is crowned, ending the story of the Round Table.

requirements of his position. In the later books, he is even more of a passive character, partly because his knights take turns in proving *their* own honor and prowess, and partly because he is cuckolded by Launcelot through his affair with Arthur's wife, Queen Guenever.

Queen Guenever – Arthur's wife and the lover of the knight Launcelot. Guenever seems to love Arthur as well, remaining politically loyal to him throughout the book, though until the downfall of the empire she refuses to give up her affair with Launcelot even when it appears she might be burned at the stake for treason. Guenever also enjoys the support and love of the knights of the **Round Table**, for whom she serves as a symbol of the feminine honor that they claim to fight for. In fact, it is only once some of the knights definitively turn away from Guenever, no longer worshipping her as their beloved queen because of their jealousy of Launcelot, that the kingdom begins to unravel—suggesting that it was Guenever who managed to hold competing interests together for so long.

Sir Launcelot du Lake – By most accounts the knight of greatest prowess in the kingdom, Launcelot is only matched by Tristram. Launcelot always adheres to knights' code of honor: defending ladies in distress, granting mercy to knights whom he conquers, and never fleeing from a potential battle, no matter how risky. However, the book is ultimately ambivalent regarding Launcelot's character, especially since due to his affair with Guenever, he does not have the kind of spiritual purity required to achieve the **Holy Grail**. Launcelot's jousting glory may be unparalleled, but he is also limited to earthly success, unlike, for instance, his son Galahad.

Merlin – A sorcerer who arranges for Arthur to be brought up outside the royal court, in exchange for providing Uther with the means of attaining Igraine as his wife. Merlin's powers include foretelling the future and enchanting mortals to follow his command. But his powers are also partial and limited, and ultimately he succumbs to the very mortal weakness of desire, which leads to his death.

Morgan le Fay – A sorceress and Arthur's half-sister, who often attempts to trick the knights of the **Round Table**. Morgan symbolizes all that is both alluring and frightening about women for the men in this story. She is beautiful and often is involved with one affair or another, but she is also bent on getting what she wants, whether it is plotting to replace Arthur with her own lover on the throne, or trapping Launcelot in a castle for her own purposes. There is a near-constant slippage in the book between women characterized as witches and women who just "use" witchy, magical tools to gain their will—another way of describing the peculiar kind of power to which women, barred from so many other elements of knightly life, have access.

Tristram (Tramtrist) – The son of a king from Liones, Tristram is destined to become one of the kingdom's greatest knights,



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

King Arthur – The son of Uther and Igraine, and raised by Sir Ector, Arthur was always destined to pull an enchanted sword (**Excalibur**) out of the stone and prove his worthiness to be king. Arthur becomes one of the kingdom's youngest kings, though he quickly establishes himself in military prowess and conquers many lands. Arthur considers loyalty a virtue almost above all else, and is often willing to grant mercy to knights who swear allegiance to him. Throughout the book, Arthur often seems to be acting not entirely of his own will, but rather to be following steps laid out for him long ago by fate or by the

matched only by Launcelot. Tristram is initially not one of the knights of the **Round Table**, though Arthur makes him one later on, and the tales of his exploits—which seem to make up a massive digression in the middle of the book—provide a counterpoint for some of the book’s themes from an outsider’s perspective, including honor, chivalry, the ambivalence of love, and revenge.

Sir Mordred – Arthur’s illegitimate son by Margawse. Mordred is destined to kill his father someday, and Arthur attempts to have him killed as a child by sending all children born in the month of his birth on a ship to be sunk, but Mordred alone survives. He participates (along with his brothers) in the killing of Lamorak, and finally turns against Arthur when Arthur is off fighting Launcelot abroad. Mordred’s very existence is a testament to the book’s fascination with royal lineage and destiny, especially when tied to the omnipresent tendency to competition and jealousy—seeming to make it inevitable that a son will rise up against his father.

Isoud (La Beale Isoud) – The daughter of King Anguish, and Tristram’s one great love. Isoud is married off to King Mark, but she never forgets Tristram, even forgiving him when he briefly forgets about her and marries someone else (Isoud les Blanches Mains). Isoud is subject to the desires of men, who are physically stronger and politically more powerful than she is, but she is also clever enough to find a way to fulfill her own wishes whenever she can. Her love story with Tristram provides a parallel to that between Launcelot and Guenever, and at one point these four are referred to as the only true “lovers” in the kingdom.

Sir Galahad – Son of Launcelot and Elaine of Corbin, destined to surpass even his father in knightly prowess. Galahad comes to court as a young, untested knight, but he soon proves himself fated to become an unequalled knight in a similar fashion to King Arthur—by pulling a sword out of a stone. Galahad is contrasted to his father Launcelot in that the son is pure in body and mind in addition to being a knight of great prowess. As a result, only Galahad, among all the knights of the **Round Table**, is allowed to see the mysteries of the **Holy Grail**.

Sir Gawaine – A knight in Arthur’s court, and nephew of Arthur. Gawaine often fails to live up to courtly ideals, such as when he refuses to grant a knight mercy and then kills the knight’s lady by mistake. But he seems to strive to be a good, worthy knight, and pledges total loyalty to Launcelot, who serves as his idol for the kind of knight he’d like to be. However, Gawaine’s temper and obstinacy ultimately contribute to the downfall of the empire, as he refuses to forgive Launcelot for mistakenly killing Gareth in battle, and this leads to an intractable conflict between members of Arthur’s court.

Sir Gareth (Beaumains) – Also known as Beaumains, Gareth proves himself at court under an unknown identity: he comes from noble blood, but would rather be known for his actions

than for his illustrious lineage. He is the brother of Gawaine, Gaheris, and Agravaine, but he refuses to participate in his brothers’ murder of Lamorak, distancing himself from his family ties and instead aligning himself with Launcelot. Launcelot nonetheless accidentally kills him in battle, underlining just how much the court has gone tragically awry by the end of the book.

MINOR CHARACTERS

King Uther Pendragon – The true father of Arthur. Uther is the king of England until his death before the beginning of Arthur’s reign.

Queen Igraine – Arthur’s mother, originally wife to the Duke of Cornwall. She is tricked into sleeping with Uther only hours after her husband’s death and then is convinced that marrying Uther will be best for the kingdom.

Duke of Cornwall – Originally Igraine’s husband, until Uther and his men lay siege to the Duke’s castle, and he is killed when attempting to escape.

Sir Ector – A good, faithful knight whom Merlin chooses to raise Arthur.

Sir Kay – The son of Sir Ector and Arthur’s foster brother. He later becomes one of Arthur’s knights, although he is often a foolish or hotheaded figure.

King Leodegrance – An ally of Arthur and the father of Guenever.

King of Northgalis – A sometime enemy of Arthur.

King with the Hundred Knights – Another sometime enemy of Arthur.

King Mark of Cornwall – Tristram’s uncle and husband to La Beale Isoud, King Mark is one of the major villains of the book. Although Tristram saves Mark’s kingdom, Mark marries Isoud knowing of his nephew’s love for her, and for much of the book is plotting Tristram’s downfall out of jealousy and spite.

Nimue (The Lady of the Lake) – A sorceress who enchants and traps Merlin but often helps Arthur and other knights. In one story, it is she who gives Arthur **Excalibur** and its scabbard. However, it is sometimes unclear whether the Lady of the Lake is one lady or if the name refers to multiple characters.

Sir Meliot – Nimue’s cousin and a knight of Arthur’s court.

King Pellinore – An ally of King Arthur. He first appears in pursuit of a strange beast (the “Questing Beast”), and later defeats and almost kills Arthur before Merlin reveals Arthur’s identity to him.

Sir Percivale – A knight in Arthur’s court, and the son of King Pellinore. He is found worthy enough to be permitted to seek the **Holy Grail**.

King Lot – King of Lothain and father of Gawaine, Gaheris, Agravaine, and Gareth. He is a rival of Arthur and is killed by Pellinore.

Queen Margawse – Wife of King Lot and mother of Gawaine, Gaheris, Agravaine, and Gareth. Margawse is also the half-sister of Arthur and mother to their son Mordred.

Sir Lamorak – Son of King Pellinore and brother to Aglovale and Percivale. He is killed by Gawaine and his brothers.

Sir Nabon le Noire – The lord of the Isle of Servage whom Lamorak fights in revenge after Nabon kills his cousin.

Sir Frol of the Out Isles – A knight who joins some of Lamorak's adventures, but is later killed by Lamorak.

Belliance le Orgulus – Frol's brother, who fights with Lamorak in revenge.

Sir Gaheris – A knight in Arthur's court who participates (along with his brothers Gawain and Agravaine) in the slaying of Lamorak and Margawse. He is exiled from court, but then returns and is accidentally killed (with his brother Gareth) by Launcelot.

Sir Agravaine – A knight in Arthur's court who finally reveals to Arthur the details of Guenever's affair with Launcelot, setting off a series of events that lead to the realm's downfall.

King Rience – An enemy of Arthur's.

King Nero – An enemy of Arthur's and brother of Rience.

Sir Balin le Savage – A knight who kills the Lady of the Lake and is banished for it. He is otherwise an excellent knight and staunch ally of Arthur's, and goes on several quests early in the book.

Sir Balan – Balin's brother. Balin and Balan kill each other when they don't recognize each other.

Sir Uriens – The husband of Morgan le Fay.

Sir Accolon of Gaul – The lover of Morgan le Fay. Morgan gives him **Excalibur** to fight Arthur.

Hemison – Another lover of Morgan le Fay, killed by Tristram.

Griflet – A young squire whom Arthur makes a knight. Griflet immediately challenges another knight to fight, and is struck down.

Uwaine – The son of Uriens, a knight in Arthur's court.

Lady of the Rock – A lady whom Uwaine defends against Sir Edward and Sir Hue.

Sir Edward – A knight whom Uwaine fights and kills.

Sir Hue – Sir Edward's brother, whom Uwaine also fights and kills.

Lanceor – A knight who is killed by Balin. His lover then kills herself with his sword.

Garlon – A knight who can become invisible. He is the brother of King Pellam and is killed by Balin.

King Pellam – The brother of Garlon. He is wounded by Balin and later healed by Galahad.

Garnish of the Mount – A knight whom Balin tries to help, though Balin ultimately ends up contributing to his death.

Sir Damas – A treacherous knight who briefly imprisons Arthur.

Sir Ontzlake – The younger brother of Sir Damas. He becomes one of Arthur's knights.

Manassen – Accolon's cousin and a member of Arthur's court. Morgan le Fay saves his life.

Marhaus – A knight rumored to hate women. He adventures with Gawaine and Uwaine, and is later killed by Tristram.

Duke of the South Marches – A knight who fights with Marhaus and, after losing, has to pledge allegiance to King Arthur.

Taulas – A giant whom Marhaus fights and kills.

Earl Fergus – He hosts Marhaus and tells him about the threat of the giant Taulas.

Sir Howell – Arthur's cousin, whose land Arthur saves from a giant.

Sir Cador – A knight in Arthur's court, who assists in the battles against the Romans.

Sir Phelot – A knight who attacks Launcelot while Launcelot is assisting his wife, whose hawk has disappeared. Launcelot kills him.

Sir Peditvere – A knight who kills his unfaithful lover and whom Launcelot conquers. Guenever sends him to Rome in penance.

Gouvernail – Tristram's tutor and servant.

Andred – Tristram's cousin. He often works against Tristram on behalf of King Mark.

Lionors – A woman Arthur briefly falls in love with. She bears him the son Borre.

Borre – Arthur's son by Lionors. He becomes a knight of the **Round Table**.

Bersules – A knight of Mark, whom Mark kills when he refuses to kill Tristram.

Amant – A knight of Mark who witnesses Bersules' murder and accuses Mark of treason.

Berluse – A knight whose father was killed by Mark and who tries to avenge this death, but is wounded.

Sir Bliant – A knight who nurses Launcelot back to health after Launcelot goes mad.

Emperor Lucius – The Roman emperor who fights against Arthur and is killed by him.

Priamus – A man from Tuscany, descended from Alexander the Great, who fights Gawaine and then allies himself with him.

Sir Ector de Maris – A knight in Arthur's court, and half-brother to Launcelot.

Sir Bors de Ganis – A knight in Arthur’s court, the brother of Lionel and son of King Bors. He is one of the three knights to achieve the **Sangreal**.

Pridam le Noire – A knight that Sir Bors fights against in his quest for the **Sangreal**.

Sir Colgreance – A knight in Arthur’s court who is killed by Lionel while trying to save Lionel’s brother Sir Bors.

King Mordrains – A king associated with the mystical ship that holds the sword belonging to Galahad.

Sir Lionel – A knight in Arthur’s court, the brother of Sir Bors and the nephew of Launcelot.

Aglavale – A knight in Arthur’s court.

Sir Turquine – A knight who imprisons many of the knights of the **Round Table**. He is finally killed by Launcelot.

Sir Belleus – A knight whom Launcelot fights but who then becomes one of the knights of the **Round Table**.

Meliodas – Tristram’s father, king of Liones.

Elizabeth – Tristram’s mother and sister to Sir Mark.

Dinas the Seneschal – A knight and supporter of Tristram.

Isoud la Blanche Mains – Tristram’s wife and daughter of King Howel in Brittany. Tristram leaves her when he recalls his true love for the other Isoud (La Beale Isoud).

Kehydus – The brother of Isoud la Blanche Mains. He comes to fall in love with La Beale Isoud.

King Howel – A king in Brittany, and the father of Isoud la Blanche Mains.

King Anguish of Ireland – A king whom Tristram fights on behalf of Mark, but who is later reconciled with Tristram.

Dame Bragwaine – Isoud’s maid.

Sir Palomides – A Saracen (Muslim) knight who is in love with Isoud. He later converts to Christianity and joins the **Round Table**.

King Hermance – A king murdered by his two sons, a murder that Palomides avenges.

Sir Helius – Hermance’s son, killed by Palomides.

Sir Helake – Hermance’s other son, also killed by Palomides.

Sir Ebel – A knight of Hermance.

Sir Galihodin – A knight who jousts with and loses to Palomides.

Epinogris – A knight whom Palomides defends after Epinogris loses his lover to Helior le Preuse.

Helior le Preuse – A knight whom Palomides defeats.

King Ban – The King of Benwick, and father of Launcelot.

King Bors – The brother of Ban, and father of Sir Bors de Ganis.

Bleise – Merlin’s master and biographer, who writes down

details of all of Arthur’s battles.

Elaine of Corbin – A woman who sleeps with Launcelot and gives birth to Galahad.

King Pelles – The father of Elaine of Corbin.

Brisen – A lady of Elaine of Corbin, who tricks Launcelot into sleeping with Elaine.

Sir Bromel la Pleche – A knight in love with Elaine of Corbin.

Elaine le Blank – A woman who falls in love with Launcelot and dies of lovesickness.

Sir Bernard – The father of Elaine le Blank.

Lavaine – The brother of Elaine le Blank and a follower of Launcelot.

Sir Ulfius – A knight in Arthur’s court. He serves Uther before him, and helps Merlin carry out his plans.

Sir Brastias – A knight in Arthur’s court.

Sir Pelleas – A knight of Arthur. He first loves Ettard, but later is a lover of Nimue.

Ettard – A lady whom Sir Pelleas loves. She rejects all his advances and sends knights to fight him.

Dinadan – A knight in Arthur’s court.

Breunor le Noire (La Cote Male Taile) – A knight, and brother to Dinadan.

Breunor – A knight whom Tristram must fight while taken prisoner.

Plenorius – A knight that fights with La Cote Male Taile.

Sir Carados – A knight that captures Gawaine, and is killed by Launcelot.

Sir Pellounes – A knight whom Tristram lodges with.

Sir Persides – Pellounes’s son.

Maledisant – A damsel whose name (or nickname) means “Ill-speaking.” She travels with La Cote Male Taile and mocks him constantly.

King Claudas – The enemy of Ban and Bors, as well as of Arthur.

Sir Aglovale – A knight in Arthur’s court, and son of Pellinore.

Sir Tor – The illegitimate son of Pellinore.

Abelleus – A knight that fights with Tor.

Linet – A woman who travels with Gareth and constantly insults him, though he saves her many times.

Lionesse – Linet’s sister and Lady of the Castle Dangerous.

Gringamore – The brother of Lionesse and Linet.

Duke de la Rowse – A knight whom Gareth fights and conquers.

Knight of the Black Launds – A knight who jousts with and is defeated by Gareth.

Green Knight – The brother of the Knight of the Black Launds. He jousts with and is defeated by Gareth.

Red Knight – The brother of the Green Knight and the Knight of the Black Launds. He jousts with and is defeated by Gareth.

Persant (the Blue Knight) – Also known as the Blue Knight, a protector of Gareth. He is the brother of the Green, Black, and Red Knights.

Knight of the Red Launds – A knight who besieges Lionesse at her castle. He jousts with and is defeated by Gareth.

Bagdemagus – A knight who is angered when he isn't chosen to be a part of the **Round Table**, but who later proves his worth.

Meliagrance – Son of Bagdemagus, a knight who kidnaps Guenever.

Sir Sagramore le Desirous – A knight in Arthur's court who fights against Tristram.

Sir Dodinas le Savage – A knight in Arthur's court who also fights against Tristram.

Sir Segwarides – Palomides' brother. His beautiful wife is fought over by several other knights, including Tristram.

Sir Safere – Brother to Palomides and Segwarides.

Sir Adtherp – A knight who tries to defend La Beale Isoud against Palomides.

Sir Brandiles – A knight of the **Round Table**.

Sir Bedivere – A knight in Arthur's court who is with Arthur at his death, and throws **Excalibur** into the river.

Sir Lucan the Butler – The brother of Bedivere.

Breuse Sauce Pité – A villainous knight who often flees rather than fighting. His name means "without pity."

Sir Fergus – A knight who witnesses Tristram's descent into madness.

Tauleas – A giant killed by Tristram.

Sir Dinant – A knight whom Tristram saves from the giant Tauleas.

Annowre – A sorceress who enchants Arthur out of love for him, and whom he eventually kills.

Nacien – A hermit and holy man.

Archbishop of Canterbury – A historical figure, the leader of the Church of England based in London.

Dagonet – The fool or court jester in Arthur's court.

Joseph of Arimathea – The first keeper of the Sangreal (**Holy Grail**), a Biblical figure who helped carry Jesus's body down from the cross.

Evelake – A man converted to Christianity by Joseph of Arimathea. He lives 300 years until meeting Galahad.

Melias de Lile – A knight who accompanies Galahad on the **Holy Grail** quest.

Sir Lavaine – A knight and follower of Launcelot.

Sir Urre – A knight healed by Launcelot, who then becomes loyal to him.

Sir Bleoberis de Ganis – Launcelot's cousin.

Sir Blamore de Ganis – Bleoberis's brother.

Elias – The leader of the Sessoins, King Mark's enemies. He is killed by Tristram.

Prince Boudwin – King Mark's brother, whom Mark kills in jealousy after Boudwin performs well in battle.

Anglides – Boudwin's wife, who escapes after Mark kills her husband.

Alisander – King Mark's nephew. Mark kills his father (Mark's own brother) but Alisander and his mother escape.

Constable Bellangere – The husband of Anglides' cousin. Anglides and Alisander live with him after escaping from Mark.

Alice – A damsel who falls in love with Alisander.

Bellengerus le Beuse – The son of Alisander and Alice, who kills Mark.

Corsabrin – A Saracen (Muslim) knight who imprisons a damsel. Palomides cuts off his head and frees her.

Sir Galahalt – A prince who holds jousting tournaments, and becomes jealous of Launcelot.

King Estorause – A king who imprisons Galahad, Percivale, and Sir Bors.

Pinel – A knight who tries to poison Gawaine.

Patrice – The knight who mistakenly dies from Pinel's poisoning.

Mador – Patrice's cousin who tries to avenge his death.

Constantine – One of Arthur's governors, and the man who becomes king after Arthur's death.

Sadok – A knight of Mark's, who disobeys his king's dishonorable orders.

Darras – A lord whose sons are killed by Tristram.

Sir Driant – A knight of Arthur.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



HONOR AND CHIVALRY

Every year, at the Christian feast of Pentecost, the Knights of the **Round Table** renew their oaths to

follow the code of chivalry as proclaimed by King Arthur. Chivalry includes showing mercy, fighting for good, and protecting ladies whenever they may be in harm. This is a code that is meant to govern the knights' actions throughout *Le morte d'Arthur*—however, Malory also takes care to show just how difficult, if not impossible, this code proves for many of the knights, as well as how it can be easily corrupted through circumstance and human folly.

Malory's collected stories contrast the results of following the code of chivalry with what happens when a knight breaks that code or succumbs to temptation. Sir Gawaine, for instance, refuses to grant mercy to a man who asks for it (thus breaking part of the code) and, as his lover hurls herself forward to protect him, accidentally kills the lady—carrying the shame of this act with him for the rest of his adventures. Conversely, Launcelot always grants mercy to a knight that asks for it, underlining his characterization as an honorable knight—in battle, if not in spiritual purity.

Indeed, Malory's view of the knights and of Arthurian society in general often verges on the cynical, as he shows how various knights succumb to the temptations of lust or of the selfish search for glory. For instance, only Galahad, who steers clear of both (mostly because he is so young and is also divinely fated to do so), can attain the **Holy Grail**, while the other knights are not “pure” enough—that is, they lack the greatest honor and chivalry. Malory thus shows how deep of a gap there is between the chivalric ideal and the sorry morals of those inhabiting it. Besides, even this chivalric ideal is internally contradictory: the ideal of chastity is somewhat at odds with the ideal of defending a lady, for instance, and Malory never explicitly condemns Launcelot's affair with Guenever—even though it leads to a tragic end—simply because their love is so strong and “pure,” and because Launcelot is such a skilled knight in other aspects. Instead, Malory seems content to describe these contradictions as they are without reconciling them, and without explicitly condemning them to hypocrisy.



JEALOUSY, COMPETITION, AND REVENGE

The book largely supports and defends the ideals of honor and chivalry, but these ideals are then often contrasted with the actions of many knights who fail to live up to them. As part of the requirement of maintaining their honor, the Knights of the **Round Table** must either defend a woman—or one's “ownership” of a woman—or else defend their land and property from rivals. Malory gives us an unflinching view of the petty jealousy and rivalry of many of the knights, although his tone shifts regularly from gravity to irony, depending on the situation.

Launcelot, for instance, is usually a more tragic than comic character in his wholehearted desire to compete for

Guenever's heart, and to defend her against any other rivals (even though she is married to King Arthur). The lust between Launcelot and Guenever—and the increasing lack of subtlety in their affair—ultimately leads to the downfall, not only of Arthur, but also of the kingdom itself. The affair sets in motion a series of circumstances, from Arthur's sentencing of Guenever to death to the murder of several knights to the declaration of war between the two camps, that seem to lead inevitably to a tragic conclusion. The code of honor that the knights follow, indeed, seems to make revenge a never-ending affair, as each side continues to declare an act of revenge for the other side's prior act. This is also true in the realm of politics, as with King Arthur's knights' battles with Rome, just as much as it is in love.

Other subplots in the book emphasize just how extensive these so-called values of competition and revenge can become. The love triangle between Sir Tristram, Isoud (whom he loves), and King Mark, who marries Isoud, is shown as tragic but also, as with Guenever and Launcelot, immoral, given that it rests on adultery. In this case, too, competition and jealousy are part of an unending process of battle and response, one in which secular desire and pride are portrayed as just as powerful, if not more so, than the Christian and courtly ideals the knights are supposed to follow.



TRICKERY AND MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Le Morte d'Arthur begins with a search for an unknown king, one who, by the workings of fate, will be the only one able to pull the enchanted sword **Excalibur** from the stone. In this case, enchantment ensures that the true king will be properly identified, but as is often the case in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, trickery—magical and otherwise—also disrupts social norms and confuses more than it reveals.

Like Arthur, Sir Gareth, another knight, is also seemingly without a past as he first makes his appearance, and his several quests can be understood as an attempt to prove himself—that is, prove his true identity as an honorable, chivalrous knight (and one with noble blood). The book shows just how much many will risk in this society to prove their identity to themselves and to others. At other times, however, identity cannot be so easily pinned down—and this is especially the case among the knights, who in battle are covered with armor and only identified by their shields or “colors,” which can be easily changed. Because of the various levels of concealment at work in the kingdom, Arthur does not really know where he comes from even after being anointed king. He unknowingly sleeps with his half-sister Margawse as a result, leading to a whole host of fated complications. The tragic element of mistaken identity is also evident in Balin and Balan's fight to the death: they both kill each other and realize only at the moment of death that they are brothers.

While mistaken identity can often be an element of tragic fate,

at other times such mix-ups are a consequence of conscious trickery. The book seems to hold the view that men are particularly vulnerable to the tricks of women: Launcelot, for instance, is tricked into sleeping with Elaine of Corbin, while Merlin is tricked into being magically sealed in a cave by the woman he loves, Nimue.

With all these examples of trickery and mistaken identity, the reader is on constantly shifting ground, never quite knowing which characters are which and who means what in the book. As a kind of literary masked ball, these stories show such trickery to be entertaining, to be sure, especially as Malory's characters often purposefully disguise themselves in order to confuse or impress others. But Malory is also writing at a tumultuous moment in English history, when the members of warring dynasties often switched sides and alliances, so Malory's emphasis on trickery also reflects a broader insecurity with people's identity in society.



JOURNEYS AND QUESTS

The most obvious journey in the book is the quest for the **Holy Grail**, a holy cup with powers to grant eternal food, youth, and happiness. For most of the characters in the book, the Grail is no more than a seductive, distant goal, as they lack the spiritual purity and chivalric perfection necessary to attain it. Sir Galahad is the only one of the knights who manages to truly attain the Holy Grail, as he remains a chaste virgin, an honorable knight, and also a skilled fighter. A number of knights are deemed worthy enough to embark on a quest to seek the Grail, but only Percivale, Sir Bors, and Galahad are permitted to actually enjoy the fruits of the Grail, and only Galahad is worthy enough to actually see the spiritual mysteries that it holds.

For the rest of the knights, in the Holy Grail section and in others, journeys and quests are not entirely meant to achieve something specific—instead, they form a way of life for the knights. Every scene of feasting and quiet contentment at Arthur's court is soon interrupted by the desire or necessity to undertake another journey or “adventure.” The knights may technically have their home around the **Round Table**, but their true home is on the streets and in the forests where they follow the commands of Arthur, pursue the code of chivalry, and also attempt to constantly test their own strength and skill. This image of the wandering errant knight pursuing adventures would, after Malory's time and in no small part thanks to him, become a nostalgic ideal that many others would turn to in literature. This emphasis on journey as ethos, rather than a means to an end, can be picked up and reinterpreted even in a very different context than that of King Arthur's court.



WOMEN: WEAKNESS AND POWER

In many ways, women are left out of the exciting adventures that the knights of the **Round Table** embark upon throughout Malory's tale. While their husbands, lovers, and brothers seek glory and honor in combat, they are more likely to stay at home—indeed, when we encounter women it's most often inside, in domestic settings, and if they are out in the world, it tends to be because they're in need of rescuing by some errant knight. Many of these knights tend to think of women as potential or actual possessions: they often talk of getting the “right” to a woman, or of “gaining” her, just like a horse or shield. Much of this language, though jarring to a modern audience, would have been quite normal in the historical period of writing. Even so, the apparent powerlessness of women in the book is somewhat deceptive: some women in *Le morte d'Arthur* also gain agency by seducing men, plotting their downfall, or even using “sorcery” of some kind to get their way.

GuenEVER and Isoud, for instance, both manage to successfully carry on affairs outside marriage, despite prevailing social and religious customs. For GuenEVER, it is not necessarily her affair with Launcelot that leads to the kingdom's downfall (since everyone has always known about it) but rather Agravaine's insistence on breaking with discretion and *revealing* that affair to Arthur. Nimue manages to spirit Merlin away into a cave when she grows tired and afraid of him, and Morgane le Fay, as a queen and sorceress, uses a number of plots against far more powerful men. However, “magic” and “sorcery” have an uncertain status when applied to women in the book. Some women, indeed, are identified as enchantresses or witches, but “magic” also seems to be used to describe any woman who manages to assert her will—actions which, when taken by men, are too routine to even be noted. Men in the book can be deeply suspicious of the women in their life, even if (and perhaps especially when) they fall in love with them, fearing that the privileged gender position they enjoy might not be as all-powerful as they'd like.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE ROUND TABLE

Midway through the book, we learn that Arthur's Round Table is a creation of Merlin, who made the table shaped like the world, which it reflects and symbolizes. Arthur fills the seats of the Round Table with the most worthy knights in the land, and every year at Pentecost, he chooses to fill any seats made empty by a knight's death. In literal terms, then, the Round Table stands for the fellowship and kingdom of

King Arthur, which at the time is one of the greatest in the world.

The Round Table also stands for certain ideals, though—those of chivalry and honor, which the knights swear to at Pentecost every year. Knights of the Round Table can often recognize each other when they meet throughout the kingdom (though at other times they have difficulty recognizing each other before they identify themselves). The circular structure of the Round Table suggests a lack of hierarchy and an emphasis on friendship and camaraderie rather than competition—though in reality the knights often fail to live up to this ideal, among others.



EXCALIBUR

King Arthur is raised by a relatively unknown knight, Sir Ector, rather than in the splendor of a royal court, as his lineage might predict. It is only by pulling the enchanted sword from the stone—a task at which all the best knights of the realm fail—that he proves both his blood and his worthiness to be king.

In many ways, Excalibur stands for the highest status of glory and honor that a knight can hope for, since the king of England himself has achieved it. But the sword also stands for divine fate, which human beings cannot hope to change. Arthur was always destined to pull out the stone and fulfill the prophecies set centuries before. In this way, Excalibur actually undercuts human pride and desire for glory, in its suggestion that humans must ultimately submit to what is already written for them. Arthur did not win Excalibur through any real merit or action of his own, but only because he was always *destined* to do so.

It should also be noted that there are two origin stories for Excalibur: the first is that this is the sword Arthur pulls from the stone, and the second is that Excalibur is given to Arthur by the Lady of the Lake some time after Arthur is already king. Malory includes both of these tales in his work and makes no attempt to reconcile them, which could lead to some confusion regarding how Arthur gained one Excalibur and then seemingly gains another with no explanation.



THE HOLY GRAIL (SANGREAL)

The Holy Grail is a silver vessel that, according to much more ancient legends, originally held the food Jesus Christ ate at Passover dinner on the night before he died. In Malory's book, the Holy Grail has been held in England at a castle, where it holds the power to give people around it unlimited, sumptuous food and wine. The Holy Grail's powers, however, are directly tied to the spiritual goodness of those around it. Indeed, by the end of the book, it has been proclaimed that the Holy Grail will no longer rest in England, since its citizens are no longer holy enough.

In addition to its physical powers, the Holy Grail also allows the one who can “achieve” it to see spiritual things that are normally barred to mere mortals—to reach a level of spiritual wholeness unparalleled while still on Earth. In Malory's book, one must be entirely pure in order to “achieve” the Grail—that is, one must be both a virgin and lacking other major sins. The quest for the Holy Grail, then, is also a quest amongst those of the **Round Table** to prove their spiritual worth. Like **Excalibur**, the Grail is a symbol of glory and honor, though one relating to spiritual rather than physical prowess.





QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Le Morte D'Arthur* published in 1970.

Book 1 Quotes

☛ And when matins and the first mass was done, there was seen in the churchyard, against the high altar, a great stone four square, like unto a marble stone; and in midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword naked by the point, and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus:— Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightful king born of all England.

Related Characters: King Arthur

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: Vol 1, 16

Explanation and Analysis

Not long after King Uther's death, Merlin has told the Archbishop of Canterbury to gather all the knights of the kingdom together for a great tournament: he declares that God will reveal who should lead the kingdom, though he doesn't give any other details than that. After the attendees celebrate Mass, the first miraculous event takes place - the appearance of a grand sword sticking out of a stone. It is significant that the miracle meant to herald and establish the next rightful king of England is based on a sword, since in this society the ability to fight well and to triumph in jousting is a sign not just of physical might but also of spiritual honor and worth.



The path by which the next king of England is decided also depends on an understanding of identity particular to this time, place, and culture. According to this, one may be the

rightful king of England even without knowing it: it is by completing a task set out in advance that one does not just become worthy of a label, but proves that he bore this identity (i.e., royal bloodline) all the while.

Book 4 Quotes

☝☝ I have promised to do the battle to the uttermost by the faith of my body, while me lasteth the life, and therefore I had liefer to die with honour than to live with shame; and if it were possible for me to die an hundred times, I had liefer to die so oft that yield me to thee; for though I lack weapon, I shall lack no worship, and if thou slay me weaponless that shall be thy shame.

Related Characters: King Arthur (speaker), Sir Accolon of Gaul

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Vol 1, 132

Explanation and Analysis



With the help of his lover Morgane le Fay, Sir Accolon of Gaul has managed to get his hands on Arthur's sword, Excalibur, which is why he is able to fight so successfully against the king. Now, Arthur's sword is broken, and two possibilities arise: either Arthur yields to Accolon and asks for his mercy, or he accepts death, since he has lost. By choosing the latter, Arthur reiterates his commitment to the chivalrous code, vowing to remain honorable even if it means he must die. Paradoxically, Arthur takes pride in granting mercy to others whom he conquers himself, but he considers it shameful to ask for this same mercy.

Arthur thus claims that he considers certain values more important than simply triumphing against enemies. He is left without a weapon, but this fact is far less a cause for shame than yielding to Accolon would be. Still, he acknowledges at the end that Accolon must adhere to the same values that he does, and it would be shameful for Accolon to kill Arthur without a weapon, just as it would be shameful for Arthur to seek to avoid death.

Book 5 Quotes

☝☝ Then the king wept, and dried his eyes with a kerchief, and said, Your courage had near-hand destroyed you, for though ye had returned again, ye had lost no worship; for I call it folly, knights to abide when they be overmatched. Nay, said Launcelot and the other, for once shamed may never be recovered.

Related Characters: King Arthur, Sir Launcelot du Lake (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Vol 1, 180

Explanation and Analysis

Sir Launcelot and Sir Cador, in charge of thousands of Roman prisoners, find themselves met by a massive army of 60,000 men sent by Lucius to rescue the prisoners. Even though Launcelot and Cador are with only 10,000 men, they still fight and successfully hold off their enemies. When they return to Arthur to tell him of what happened, the king is shocked but also impressed at how valiantly his knights have fought. It is perhaps Arthur's love for his men, especially Launcelot, that causes him to modify his fierce sense of honor here - he claims it would not be shameful for them to have withdrawn, since they were so unequally matched. Launcelot, however, won't accept any kind of modification of the code of chivalry. For him, strict consistency is necessary for a knight to maintain his glory - if he is even "once shamed," he can never recuperate that former glory. As a result Launcelot feels it necessary to welcome and even to seek out whatever battles he can.

Book 7 Quotes

☝☝ I took none heed to your words, for the more ye said the more ye angered me, and my wrath I wrecked upon them that I had do withal. And therefore all the missaying that ye missaid me furthered me in my battle, and caused me to think to show and prove myself at the end what I was; for peradventure though I had meat in King Arthur's kitchen, yet I might have had meat enough in other places, but all that I did for to prove and assay my friends, and that shall be known another day; and whether that I be a gentleman born or none, I let you wit, fair damosel, I have done you gentleman's service, and peradventure better service yet will I do or I depart from you.

Related Characters: Sir Gareth (Beaumains) (speaker), King Arthur

Related Themes:     

Page Number: Vol 1, 251

Explanation and Analysis

Beaumains has traveled much of the country with the anonymous damsel, attempting to prove himself and help her on her "adventure." Beaumains has conquered a number



of knights quite impressively, but has still been subject to the damsel's regular insults and mockery. Finally, the damsel begins to acknowledge that she is somewhat impressed that Beaumains has endured all of this berating so stoically. Here Beaumains attempts to explain himself. He claims that he transferred his anger and frustration towards her onto the men against whom he fought. Indeed, her dismissal of him made him more eager to prove what a strong and chivalrous knight he was.

For Beaumains, this kind of test is similar to what he put himself through as a menial kitchen boy at King Arthur's court - although he comes from a powerful family, it was important for him to prove his worth on his own, by setting a series of challenges and quests for himself, and completing them under a false identity, without the help of others or his own noble name. As a result, Beaumains has only underlined how he was worthy of great worship all along, even if his true identity remained unknown to others. Finally, he may be frustrated by the damsel, but as a woman she is particularly prized as someone whose admiration and respect he wants to provoke.

Book 9 Quotes

♥♥ Queen Morgan loved Sir Launcelot best, and ever she desired him, and he would never love her nor do nothing at her request, and therefore she held many knights together for to have taken him by strength. And because she deemed that Sir Launcelot loved Queen Guenever paramour, and she him again, therefore Queen Morgan le Fay ordained that shield to put Sir Launcelot to a rebuke, to that intent that King Arthur might understand the love between them.

Related Characters: King Arthur, Queen Guenever, Sir Launcelot du Lake, Morgan le Fay

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Vol 1, 464

Explanation and Analysis

As will be the case for much of the rest of the story, everyone but Arthur seems to know about the love between Launcelot and Guenever, and various characters, out of jealousy or plotting, seek to reveal the truth to Arthur. Morgan, one of these plotters, is motivated by her own lustful feelings for Launcelot (and so she is seemingly jealous of Guenever), and also has long hated Arthur and devised various schemes against him.

Morgan le Fay is one of the consistent villains of the book,



but she is also one of the best examples of a powerful, independent woman—she is a queen by her own right, seemingly commands the loyalty of many knights, takes and discards her own lovers without marrying them, and has access to powerful and dangerous magic.

Book 10 Quotes

♥♥ Sir, she said, wit you well that ye be a prisoner, and worse than ye ween; for my lady, my cousin Morgan le Fay, keepeth you here for none other intent but for to do her pleasure with you when it liketh her.

O Jesu defend me, said Alisander, from such pleasure; for I had liefer cut away my hangers than I would do her such pleasure.

Related Characters: Alisander (speaker), Morgan le Fay

Related Themes:  



Page Number: Vol 2, 74

Explanation and Analysis

Morgan le Fay has spirited Alisander away to her castle and has given him a sleeping potion. When he wakes up, he meets the rightful owner of the castle, Morgan's cousin, who shares Morgan's evil plans with Alisander. Alisander is shocked and angry - he vows never to accede to Morgan's desires. While other women in the work are shown to be naturally seductive to men, who fall in love with them without any power over their feelings, Morgan is portrayed as actively scheming in her personal relationships. In a similar way, she renders men powerless against her tricks and schemes, but the power she has over them is described not as romantic but as frightening and suspicious. As a result, Morgan becomes an extreme case of the power women can have over men in general. Despite their relatively marginalized position in a world that values physical strength and a patriarchal royal line, women in this culture are able to exert a certain amount of power in private affairs - something that many men find threatening.

☞ But wit ye well Sir Palomides had envy heartily, for all that night he had never rest in his bed, but wailed and wept out of measure. So on the morn Sir Tristram, Gareth, and Dinadan arose early, and then they went unto Sir Palomides' chamber, and there they found him fast asleep, for he had all night watched, and it was seen upon his cheeks that he had wept full sore. Say nothing, said Sir Tristram, for I am sure he hath taken anger and sorrow for the rebuke that I gave to him, and La Beale Isoud.

Related Characters: Tristram (Tramtrist) (speaker), Isoud (La Beale Isoud), Sir Gareth (Beaumains), Sir Palomides, Dinadan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Vol 2, 166

Explanation and Analysis

During the tournament, Palomides, who has long been jealous of Tristram because he is also in love with La Beale Isoud, had hatched a plan to dishonor Tristram. He had borrowed a wounded knight's armor and had ridden out to fight against Tristram anonymously, making many at the tournament impressed with his skill. However, Isoud had been watching from a window in the castle, so she saw everything, and found Palomides' behavior shameful.

Now Palomides recognizes that his plan had backfired. Not only did he fail to win Isoud's admiration, but now she actively dislikes him, and Tristram - whom Palomides still admires despite his jealousy - is also irritated with him. Palomides' jealousy mingles with his sense of shame in a way that is so acute that he weeps all night long. Palomides is not even able to hide his feelings: Tristram, Gareth, and Dinadan witness his state of sorrow, and Tristram easily guesses where it results from. Palomides may be a valiant fighter in a tournament, but the opinion of a woman can easily triumph over him in other spheres.

☞ For an it happeth an envious man once to win worship he shall be dishonoured twice therefore; and for this cause all men of worship hate an envious man, and will shew him no favour, and he that is courteous, and kind, and gentle, hath favour in every place.

Related Characters: Queen Guenever (speaker), Sir Palomides

Related Themes:   

Page Number: Vol 2, 172

Explanation and Analysis


Guenever has been recovering from sickness at a seaside castle when Bleoberis and Ector de Maris leave the tournament and come find her, telling her about everything that has happened there. Guenever's statement critiques the behavior of Palomides in particular, but it is also a general declaration regarding the unsuitability of envy for a chivalrous knight. Competition and revenge may be central aspects of this society, but even though it is justifiable to desire to avenge one's losses, what is not defensible is to sulk about those losses or to actively act jealous and upset rather than graceful. In some ways, then, this taboo is about appearances more than true feelings - but this doesn't mean that the taboo is any less powerful. Indeed, actions like those of Palomides can, according to Guenever, cast unforgivable shame on a knight, causing him to be shunned by others. Guenever's statement also underlines the portrayal of women as subtle, careful judges of behavior and of the correct way to live and act.

Book 13 Quotes

☞ Ah Gawaine, Gawaine, ye have betrayed me; for never shall my court be amended by you, but ye will never be sorry for me as I am for you. And therewith the tears began to run down his visage.

Related Characters: King Arthur (speaker), Sir Gawaine

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: Vol 2, 250

Explanation and Analysis

A number of the knights of Arthur's court have vowed to seek the Holy Grail along with Galahad, including Gawaine, whom Arthur holds particularly dear. Although this is a moment of great honor and pride for these knights, it is a time of sorrow for Arthur, since he recognizes the danger perhaps better than many of his men do. Only the most worthy knights will be permitted to achieve the Holy Grail, and while Arthur cares deeply for his knights, he knows that most of them have sinned and that it is likely that he won't see many of them ever again.


This scene of farewell, then, underlines the treacherous

nature of quests, even as it also foreshadows greater troubles to come. This is the first time that Arthur's court has been broken up for a significant amount of time (and indeed, the Sangreal was prophesied as the object that would "break the Round Table"). Much of Arthur's sorrow stems from the fact that he realizes that the unity the court enjoyed for so long will perhaps never be regained again, or at least not to the same extent as before. Ironically, it is the greatest journey that a knight can take – the Sangreal quest – that threatens to break this strong connection.

☛ My sin and my wickedness have brought me unto great dishonour. For when I sought worldly adventures for worldly desires, I ever enchieved them and had the better in every place, and never was I discomfit in no quarrel, were it right or wrong. And now I take upon me the adventures of holy things, and now I see and understand that mine old sin hindereth me and shameth me, so that I had no power to stir nor speak when the holy blood appeared afore me.

Related Characters: Sir Launcelot du Lake (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: Vol 2, 270

Explanation and Analysis

Half asleep, Launcelot has seen a knight be blessed by the vessel of the Holy Grail, but a voice has told him to leave this place, since he is not worthy to achieve the Sangreal himself. Now, Launcelot seems to have a total epiphany regarding his prior actions. He recognizes that, although he is perhaps the greatest knight of the Round Table, his motivations have been worldly, if not selfish. He has pursued triumph and glory for his own interests, rather for the inherent goodness of the challenges themselves. As a result (and because of his affair with Guenever), he has been physically barred from even remaining close to the holy vessel.

Launcelot's epiphany underlines the complexity at the heart of the book's attitude towards chivalry, fighting, and spirituality. Winning at tournaments and triumphing over enemies is shown to be a good in itself, a source of great honor for knights; however, the book also signals that there is a greater good in being holy and selfless and acknowledging a religious rather than earthly hierarchy. It is in this latter category that Launcelot has failed, showing his only weakness. His love for Guenever is alternately


portrayed as chivalrous and as weak or wrong, since it is an adulterous love. Without definitively abandoning this love, it is difficult to see how Launcelot will fulfill the terms of his vow to be a better person—at least according to the dogmatic Christian rules of the Sangreal.

Book 14 Quotes

☛ Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right, for all the world, Christian and heathen, repair unto the Round Table; and when they are chosen to be of the fellowship of the Round Table they think them more blessed and more in worship than if they had gotten half the world; and yet have seen that they have lost their fathers and their mothers, and all their kin, and their wives and their children, for to be of your fellowship.

Related Characters: King Arthur, Merlin

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: Vol 2, 276

Explanation and Analysis



Merlin has been rather absent in the story for a long while, since he was trapped in a cave by a woman's magic. Now a bit of background information clarifies the origin of the Round Table, which was created by Merlin. The narrator explains the importance of the symbolism of the table, which is meant to represent not just a particular corner of England and the fellowship of the knights, but the entire world. The Round Table is technically limited to those who are Christian and who show enough prowess to prove themselves worthy of being a part of this limited group; however, part of their task in joining the Round Table is to defend all who need defending, and thus to truly represent all others who are absent from the Table.


In addition, the narrator stresses that despite all that the knights of the Round Table gain from their fellowship, they also lose a great deal as well. They must abandon their parents and their wives and children in order to live a life that is in some ways more artificial, restricted to the purely physical challenges of battle and jousting.

Book 17 Quotes

☞ He called to Galahad, and said to him: Come forth the servant of Jesu Christ, and thou shalt see that thou hast much desired to see. And then he began to tremble right hard when the deadly flesh began to hold the spiritual things. Then he held up his hands toward heaven and said: Lord, I thank thee, for now I see that that hath been my desire many a day. Now, blessed Lord, would I not longer live, if it might please thee, Lord.

Related Characters: Sir Galahad, Joseph of Arimathea (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: Vol 2, 369


Explanation and Analysis

Joseph of Arimathea has called to Galahad in order to reveal to him all the secrets of the Holy Grail – “spiritual things” that are denied to most humans, who are deemed not worthy enough to receive them. Galahad, however, has been destined all along to “achieve” the Holy Grail, which here is shown to mean seeing what others cannot. Indeed, even the narrator refrains from describing exactly what Galahad sees, emphasizing how no one on earth can know such mysteries unless one is specifically chosen by God. While other knights desire earthly pleasures and worldly triumphs, Galahad’s only desires all along have been related to the spiritual satisfaction linked with the Holy Grail. It is this limitation of desire, indeed, that has allowed Galahad to complete the quest that he and so many others of the Round Table have pursued. For Galahad, seeing the mysteries of the Holy Grail does not just mean the end of the quest, but also the end of his life, since he believes he no longer needs to live longer; there is nothing more he needs to do.

Book 18 Quotes

☞ For ever, said Arthur, it is a worshipful knight’s deed to help another worshipful knight when he seeth him in a great danger; for ever a worshipful man will be loath to see a worshipful man shamed; and he that is of no worship, and fareth with cowardice, never shall he show gentleness, nor no manner of goodness where he seeth a man in any danger, for then ever will a coward show no mercy; and always a good man will do ever to another man as he would be done to himself.

Related Characters: King Arthur (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Vol 2, 425

Explanation and Analysis

During a tournament called by Arthur, Arthur’s knights had begun to perform quite well against those of Launcelot, so Gareth had decided to disguise himself and fight with Launcelot’s group, helping to regain some of the ground lost. After the tournament, when Arthur learns what Gareth had done, he is gracious rather than angry. He takes the opportunity, indeed, to make a general proclamation on the proper behavior of knights during a fight that turns out to be unequal.

Arthur considers it proper for a knight to join his friend (or indeed, any knight deemed “worshipful” in his reputation) when he sees that the friend is in danger or fighting against unfair odds. For an honorable knight, the possibility for any other honorable knight to be shamed – not just himself – should be enough motivation to help. Such knights are to be contrasted with more cowardly knights, and Arthur claims that the shamefulness of such knights is only confirmed by the fact that these knights fail to show mercy to or come to the aid of others. His final statement – that one should act towards others as he would want to be treated himself – seems to stem from the “Golden Rule” of the New Testament of the Bible, where Jesus’s teachings expressed the same sentiment.

☞ For it giveth unto all lovers courage, that lusty month of May, in something to constrain him to some manner of thing more in that month than in any other month, for divers causes. For then all herbs an trees renew a man and woman, and likewise lovers call again to their mind old gentleness and old service, and many kind deeds that were forgotten by negligence. For like as winter rasure doth always arase and defase green summer, so fareth it by unstable love in man and woman. For in many persons there is no stability; for we may see all day, for a little blast of winter’s rasure, anon we shall deface and lay apart true love for little or nought, that cost much thing; this is no wisdom nor stability, but it is feebleness of nature and great disworship, whosomever uses this.

Related Characters: Queen Guenever, Sir Launcelot du Lake

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Vol 2, 425

Explanation and Analysis



This is one of the few points in the book when the narrator does not closely follow the actions of the main characters, and instead takes the chance to express some opinions and beliefs of his own. We have learned that the court has been at peace through Easter and into May, and it is suggested that this calmness stems from the very nature of the spring season—but also that spring will lead to the end of such peace. The narrator grafts an understanding of romantic love onto the cyclical aspect of the seasons: during the winter, love can grow dangerously cold or unstable just like the weather. However, in the spring, the season of rebirth, lovers recall the vows they made to each other and remember the proper way to treat each other. In terms of the story, however, the problem with this "season of love" is that it rekindles the romance between Launcelot and Guenever—the love affair that will eventually bring down Arthur's kingdom.

Unlike at other moments in the book, here women are not shown to be more scheming and treacherous than men: instead, both men and women are portrayed as similarly vulnerable to weakness, but also similarly capable of regaining strength and honor. However, the narrator also seems to suggest that the problems of love have something unexpected and uncontrollable about them, merely developing as a result of greater forces than the lovers themselves.

Book 21 Quotes

☞ Through this man and me hath all this war been wrought, and the death of the most noblest knights of the world; for through our love that we have loved together is my most noble lord slain.

Related Characters: Queen Guenever (speaker), King Arthur, Sir Launcelot du Lake

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Vol 2, 523

Explanation and Analysis

Launcelot has pursued Guenever who, after learning of the death of Arthur, has shut herself into a convent. Here Guenever is forced to reckon with her profound responsibility for the disintegration of the kingdom and the

death of her husband. This is the first time, indeed, that she truly comes to terms with the implications of her adulterous love for Launcelot, a love that had long seemed able to coexist with her responsibilities and proper place as queen. The book has refrained from explicitly judging or condemning the affair between Guenever and Launcelot, although various characters have not refrained from doing so (even if usually for their own benefit or in their own interests). By putting an expression of regret into Guenever's voice, the narrator continues to espouse more of an ambivalence than a condemnation. However, there is no doubt that Guenever feels deeply ashamed of her actions, as well as struck by the tragic power of love, which has wrought such destruction.

☞ Then Sir Launcelot saw her visage, but he wept not greatly, but sighed.

Related Characters: Queen Guenever, Sir Launcelot du Lake

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Vol 2, 526

Explanation and Analysis

Even after Guenever, having recognized the destructive power of her affair with Launcelot, had chosen to live in a convent rather than go away with him, Launcelot had not failed to be loyal to her. Now, at her death, Launcelot makes one last pilgrimage to his former lover in order to see her body and to carry it to be buried next to Arthur's.

Throughout the book, many knights have expressed sorrow, pain, and anger loudly and with great fanfare, weeping and tearing at their hair and in general calling great attention to their feelings. It thus makes for a powerful contrast and telling change that Launcelot does not weep at his sorrow – instead, he merely sighs. Although a sigh might seem to express less emotion than tears, for Launcelot the sigh bears within it the burden of his responsibility and guilt for the destruction and death he has caused, and also for the love that has been called the most powerful in the kingdom. While Guenever was alive, Launcelot could at least share the responsibility with her, even if the two of them remained apart until her death. Now, however, only he is left alive and thus entirely alone with the remnants of the once great King Arthur's court and Round Table. The sorrow he feels is shown to be too great even for tears.

●● Thou Sir Launcelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courteoust knight that ever bare shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrad horse. And thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman. And thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights. And thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest.

Related Characters: Sir Ector de Maris (speaker), Sir Launcelot du Lake

Related Themes:    

Page Number: Vol 2, 530

Explanation and Analysis

As Launcelot had paid a visit to Guenever's body to honor

her at her burial, so too does his brother Sir Ector de Maris make his own pilgrimage to see Launcelot's tomb and to honor his life. Ector's words serve to recall Launcelot's greatness – even if this greatness was marred at the end of his life by guilt and tragedy – through a series of superlatives, from “most curious” and “truest” to “meekest” and “gentlest.” Launcelot's might, of course, largely lay in his powerful skill in jousting and in his chivalry among other knights. But Ector also acknowledges his qualities off the battlefield, at peacetime and among friends. Ector even suggests that his relationship with Guenever had much that was defensible and honorable about it, since his love for her was so powerful and he remained loyal to her at all costs. Ector's final declaration thus underlines all the paradoxes and contradictions of Launcelot's life, as the knight fought valiantly to fulfill the values of honor and chivalry, even as these values sometimes contradicted those of loyalty and love.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

BOOK 1

Chapter 1 The narrator begins during the reign of king Uther Pendragon in England. Uther sends for the Duke of Cornwall, who has been warring against Uther, and also for the Duke's wife Igraine. Uther falls in love with Igraine and propositions her, but she refuses him and tells the Duke what Uther has done. They soon depart. Uther then sends for the Duke again. When he doesn't return, Uther is incredibly angry, and decides to use this an excuse to make war.

Once he's received Uther's beckon, the Duke of Cornwall furnishes two of his castles, Terrabil and Tintagil. The Duke hides in Terrabil and hides his wife Igraine in Tintagil. Uther and his men besiege Terrabil for many days, and Uther falls sick from anger and lust. A knight named Sir Ulfius offers to seek out the wizard Merlin to help him. Ulfius comes across Merlin, who is disguised as a beggar. Merlin reveals himself, and says that if Uther promises to fulfill Merlin's desire, he will do the same for Uther.

Chapter 2 Ulfius returns, with Merlin not far behind him. Merlin asks Uther to swear to fulfill Merlin's desire, and he does so. Then Merlin says that Igraine will conceive a child the first night Uther sleeps with her, and he wants that child to be delivered to him to raise. Uther agrees. Merlin then tells Uther that he'll sleep with Igraine that night, as Merlin will make Uther look like the Duke of Cornwall, and will make himself look like the Duke's knight Sir Jordanus.

Merlin knows that Igraine is at Tintagil, so he and Uther travel there. The Duke of Cornwall spies Uther leaving Terrabil, however, so he leaves the castle himself, and is killed. After his death, Uther, disguised as the Duke, sleeps with Igraine. She conceives Arthur (Uther's son) that night. Only the next day does she learn that the Duke is dead. Igraine mourns, confused about who she slept with the night before. Ulfius approaches Igraine and convinces her that it will suit everyone for Igraine to wed him. She and her advisors accept, and the marriage takes place, along with the weddings of a number of other couples who will go on to give birth to important knights.

From the start, women are treated as prizes and pieces of property, just another element that can lead to tension and war among the men in these stories. Kings are used to getting their way, even when another's will is involved—but women like Igraine still do all they can to actively resist and maintain some agency of her own.



For the Duke, Uther's attempt to steal away his wife is an affront to his honor, and can only be met with battle. The appearance of Merlin here (in disguise, as he usually is) is significant, since this is the first of many instances in which he'll take the side of Uther and his descendants and followers—though usually in a circumstance like this, when one favor begets another.



Here we learn more about Merlin's powers, which seem to include foreseeing the future in addition to casting spells and enchantments to twist someone's will. The price Merlin asks is a high one—Uther must hand over his first-born son—but the power of Igraine over Uther is such that he can only agree.



This is one of the places where the strangeness of this historical culture is most evident, as Malory merely reports facts instead of exploring characters' interior emotions and struggles (a convention that is much more modern than this work). At stake is less Igraine's feelings about her husband's death than the problem that could arise from her being left without a husband and potential heir—marriage decisions are thus left to a council to decide.



Chapter 3 As Igraine's due date approaches, she confesses to Uther that she had slept with an unknown man, thinking it was her husband. Uther reveals that it was him, and Igraine is relieved.

Having a child out of wedlock is such a scandal that Igraine is relieved more than she is upset that Uther had tricked her (in what seems to us to be a despicable way, but is considered valid because he's a king).



Merlin comes to Uther to remind him of his promise. Merlin says that he knows a good man named Sir Ector, who will be given the son to raise. Ector, on Merlin's advice, comes to court and Uther gives him gifts. When the child is born, they give it to Merlin, who brings the baby to Ector and names him Arthur.

Merlin's plan moves into action, as Uther—as an honorable man (when it comes to promises, at least)—agrees to follow up with his end of the bargain, even though Merlin's desires and motivations remain unclear.



Chapter 4 After two years King Uther falls ill, and his enemies take advantage of this to wage war. Merlin advises Uther to come to the battlefield even if on a stretcher. Uther does so, carried in on a horse-litter, and his men vanquish their enemies. The king returns to London to celebrate victory, but then falls ill again. Merlin says there is no other remedy for him—it will be God's will. Though Uther has been unable to speak, Merlin asks him if his son Arthur should be the new king of the realm. Uther says, with all around him hearing it, that he wishes that this be so.

The decline in health of a king can often be an occasion for instability and tension in the kingdom—especially, in cases like this, when there is no apparent heir (as many of the kings fighting Uther do not know about Arthur, and therefore believe that the path to the throne is suddenly open). Uther's declaration makes Arthur's position as heir official, even though Arthur himself is currently absent.



Chapter 5 Despite the king's last words, many want to be king after Uther's death. Merlin tells the Archbishop of Canterbury to gather all the lords of the kingdom to London by Christmas, so that Jesus might show by a miracle who should be king. After the lords arrive and attend church, they see in the churchyard a massive stone with a **sword** stuck into it: letters in gold around the stone say that whoever pulls the sword from the stone is the rightful king.

Clearly, even a declaration assigning an heir cannot fully negate the instability that comes from the death of a kingdom's leader. Here we also see the importance of the Church, which is directly present in the characters' lives, which for them are full of signs that have to be read and miracles to be sought out. In the world Malory portrays, Christianity mingles with seemingly pagan magic (like Merlin's) and on the whole is a very martial religion that seems to have no problem with the constant wars and bloodshed going on.



Some of the lords try, but none can move the sword. The Archbishop says that the man who can is not there. On New Year's Day the barons and knights gather for a grand tournament. Sir Ector arrives at this festive jousting with Sir Kay, his son, and Arthur. As they're riding to the jousting area, Kay realizes that he's left his sword at his father's lodging. He asks Arthur to go back and get it. Arthur sees the **sword** in the churchyard stone and thinks he'll get that instead to give to his brother. No knights are guarding it, since everyone is at the tournament, and Arthur easily pulls the sword out. He brings it to Kay, who immediately recognizes it. Kay declares to his father that he (Kay) should be king of the land.

Tournaments and joustings come up again and again throughout Le Morte d'Arthur, giving characters a chance to practice and prove themselves in faux battles, and giving kings a chance to make a cause for celebration. That Arthur pulls out the sword alone, without great fanfare, when so many others have failed, suggests that pride and glory are best achieved through modesty rather than public vanity—something that Kay, unfortunately, displays in his own reaction.



Sir Ector brings Kay into the church, and makes him swear on the Bible how he got the **sword**. Kay tells him the truth, and when Ector asks Arthur how he came upon it, Arthur tells him what happened. Ector has Arthur put the sword back in the stone. Ector fails to pull it out, but Arthur does so easily.

Chapter 6 Kay cannot pull the **sword** out either. Sir Ector then kneels before Arthur, saying that he is not Arthur's father, and that Arthur is of a higher kinship. Ector then tells him the story of Merlin. Arthur is sorry to learn that Ector is not his true father, and swears to continue to be loyal to him. Ector asks only that Kay be made senecal (steward) of the kingdom, and Arthur agrees. They all go to the Archbishop to tell him what's taken place, and in front of everyone Arthur again pulls the sword out of the stone.

Chapter 7 At the Christian feast of Pentecost, many try to pull the **sword** out of the stone once again, but only Arthur succeeds. The commoners cry that they want Arthur as their king. At the London cathedral, Arthur is sworn in and crowned as king. Many come to complain about the lawless seizing of lands since Uther's death. Arthur restores these lands to their proper owners. He appoints Sir Kay senecal (steward) of England and Sir Ulfus chamberlain. The narrator says that within a few years, Arthur will conquer the north of England, Scotland, and much of Wales, together with his knights of the

Round Table.

Chapter 8 In Wales, shortly after his coronation, Arthur proclaims a great Pentecost feast in celebration. Many other kings attend, but it turns out that these kings are skeptical of a boy ruling the kingdom and want to take it from him. On his advisors' advice, Arthur brings 500 men to a stronghold, where they defend themselves against many of these kings. After two weeks, Merlin speaks to the kings, telling them about Arthur's holy birth and lineage from Uther and Igraine, and predicting that Arthur will long be king over England and many other realms. Some laugh scornfully at this prediction, but eventually they accept Merlin's reasoning. Merlin goes to Arthur to tell him to emerge and speak with the kings, for it is now safe to do so.

Still, Kay is devout enough that he fears lying on the Bible. Sir Ector is cautious when he hears the story, preferring to have direct, eyewitness evidence that Arthur is who he has proved himself to be.



In this first case of mistaken identity, Arthur is revealed to be not merely a ward of a knight but—as he has proved through his ability to pull the sword from the stone—someone whose lineage is much higher. Only now does Ector realize the identity of his adopted son, who had previously just been a boy Merlin asked him to raise.



Finally, Arthur's legitimacy as future king of England is established among everyone, who treat this miracle as properly identifying who should rule them. Malory jumps ahead here and summarizes what the next (very many) chapters will be about—Arthur conquering other rulers and uniting a divided kingdom. Arthur is still very young, but he immediately must settle into his role as chief leader and war commander.



Still, Arthur's identity and legitimacy as proper king is not yet entirely established among the kings outside his own realm, for whom the miracle of the sword in the stone doesn't seem to mean much (it's also suggested that the realm had never been truly united even under Uther). Prowess and glory in war seems to mean more to these kings than a religious and miraculous symbol. Merlin's conversations with them appease many of them, negating the immediate threat to Arthur's kingdom, but it isn't certain that this menace has entirely been stamped out.



Chapter 9 King Arthur, with the Archbishop, Sir Kay, and other knights, meet the other kings, but when Arthur says that he will subdue them by force, they grow angry again and re-arm themselves. Arthur retreats back to the tower, and Merlin admonishes the kings that they were wrong to be angry, since they will never prevail even though there are many of them. Then Merlin vanishes and returns to Arthur, telling him to make an offense, but not to draw his miraculous sword until the very end. There are many great deeds in this battle, but finally King Lot (one of Arthur's enemies) breaks through the line and approaches Arthur, killing his horse beneath him. Arthur then draws his sword, "**Excalibur**," which gives off great light to his enemies. Arthur kills many people and is able to pursue the kings until they flee.

It doesn't take long after Merlin's attempt to dissuade the kings from fighting that they forget his advice, and grow angry at Arthur's presumptuousness in claiming he'll defeat them in battle. Again, Merlin seems both able to foretell the future and, to a certain extent, to modify it, telling Arthur exactly what he needs to know in order to establish his proper authority. Excalibur, the sword in the stone, possesses almost magical powers, and will remain one of the signs of Arthur's legitimacy and ability as a fighter throughout his reign.



Chapter 10 When King Arthur returns to London, he gathers his barons and asks Merlin to come advise them. Merlin warns them that the rival kings are recouping and preparing to fight again. He says that two great brother kings across the sea, King Ban of Benwick and King Bors of Gaul (France), are fighting a third, King Claudas. Merlin suggests that the court should propose to help them in their fight against Claudas, if the brothers will in turn help Arthur in his war. Ulfius and another knight Brastias are appointed messengers. They ride to the sea at Benwick, but they are attacked by knights who turn out to be in Claudas's pay. They fight until Ulfius and Brastias kill these knights, along with two more pairs of knights they encounter along the way.

Here, Merlin's magic seems to have to do less with telling the future and changing it than with a kind of limited omniscience, knowing much of what is taking place outside the kingdom at any one time. In this sense, he becomes a war strategist for Arthur in his suggestion that one honorable favor—fighting on an ally's side—will be repaid by another. However, major diplomatic affairs take place at the same time as more minor examples of knightly jousting—but these two kinds of competition often intermingle, as personal vendettas lead to larger conflicts.



Ulfius and Brastias find both King Ban and King Bors in Benwick. The kings welcome them as they deliver Arthur's letters, and say that they will agree to ally themselves to Arthur. The kings are cheered by the tale of Ulfius and Brastias slaying Claudas's knights. The two knights return to Arthur to tell him the news. By the holiday of All Hallowmass the two kings arrive with 300 knights. They have a great feast.

Here a pact of solidarity and alliance is made on the occasion of a Christian feast. Such feast days and renewals of vows will often serve as a kind of signature between kings and their knights as they promise to defend each other, especially in an environment of tense and constantly shifting borders and allies.



Chapter 11 There are now 700 knights altogether. Arthur and the two kings put on a tournament for them. Griflet, a French knight, jousts with the English Ladinus, so hard that their shields shatter and people fear they've been killed. But they continue, and Sir Kay receives the prize for best knight. Then Arthur decides to send Merlin to King Ban and King Bors's subjects across the sea to update them on how the kings are faring, and to prepare for war. Through his magic, Merlin brings 10,000 soldiers back to England and hides them in the forest of Bedegraine.

It may seem strange that knights who are allies joust even to the point of death, but this only underlines the importance of honor and competition in the culture—values that the kings believe will serve them well as they fight abroad. Merlin's powers seem to shift again, now to spurring thousands of knights from one place to another, again in the service of Arthur.



Chapter 12 The three kings go to Bedegraine. Meanwhile, eleven other kings meet and swear to destroy Arthur, each pledging thousands of men for a total of 50,000. They prepare and then divide, some going to Bedegraine and some to Arthur's castle.

Chapter 13 One enemy, the King with a Hundred Knights, dreams two nights before the battle that a great wind has blown down all the allies' castles and towns, followed by a huge flood. All believe this is a sign of a great battle. Merlin warns Arthur's alliance of the approaching enemies, and they prepare to fight.

Chapter 14 Arthur, King Ban, and King Bors lead the charge, but 10,000 men are killed on the first day. Merlin suggests that Ban and Bors lie in wait with their men the second day, so that the enemies might think there aren't as many men and become emboldened. That is what happens: Sir Ulfius has his horse slain beneath him, but survives, and though Sir Kay shines in battle, the enemies manage to steal many of the knights' horses. At that point Arthur enters, kills the Welsh king, and gives his horse to Ulfius. The battle continues to go back and forth.

Chapter 15 The battle continues to rage, though Arthur is pleased to have "re-horsed" (that is, regained a riding horse for) many of his knights. When Arthur realizes that the battle is at a standstill, he enters again into battle. Some of the enemies withdraw to rest, leaving six kings and their men. At that point King Ban and King Bors enter into battle, and King Lot, one enemy, marvels, realizing Merlin must have spirited them into the country.

Chapter 16 King Lot knows that King Ban and King Bors are the most renowned brother knights in the world, and he weeps at the death he knows will ensue, but he and his allies continue fighting. The King of the Hundred Knights fights with Ban and Bors, finally killing Ban's horse. Arthur rides into battle, though no one recognizes him since there is so much blood on his body and sword from those he killed. He conquers another horse for Ban. As they rest that night Ban and Bors tell Arthur that their enemies are highly skilled, and if they were only to pay allegiance to Arthur they would be excellent allies.

The eleven kings meet that night, and King Lot suggests that they start to sacrifice any man that loses his horse, rather than wait for him, because that will only weaken them. They swear loyalty to each other.

The narrator sets up the stakes for what will certainly be a significant war, as different sets of alliances prepare to battle against each other with their knights.



Dreams are important in these stories, often foretelling major events, but almost always they are ambiguous and open to interpretation (here it's not clear, for instance, who will win).



Merlin now acts as a war strategist, and suggests and recommends rather than foretells (though it's not entirely clear whether he knows exactly what will happen or not). Arthur seems to mostly watch and observe how his allies are doing, and he only intervenes if help seems needed. As is typical in Malory, though thousands of men might be fighting, he focuses on the exploits of a few chosen knights.



Arthur continues to serve as a back-up support to his knights, given that as king he is probably considered too valuable to be constantly in the thick of the fighting. The importance of horses in this kind of fighting is often emphasized, as a knight without a horse is at a huge disadvantage.



King Lot's tears point at something more complex behind all these wars—most of these men (and even kings) aren't necessarily true enemies, and they might easily be allies under different circumstances. However, certain rules of combat and honor decree that at this point, they are obligated to fight and kill each other. Knights riding into battle unknown—whether because they're wearing different armor or shields, or disguised in some way so as to trick others—will be a common trope throughout Le Morte d'Arthur.



The precarious status of the kings is made clear by the fact that the eleven kings agree to give up a key element of knightly honor—loyalty—in order to increase their chances at victory.



Chapter 17 Arthur, King Ban, and King Bors meet their knights the next morning and praise them for their chivalry. The battle begins again. Ban and Bors are at one point driven back over a small river. Then Merlin arrives on a black horse and asks if Arthur has not had enough: only 15,000 remain of the 60,000 original fighters. Merlin says it is time to stop, or else the eleven kings will see fortune turn their way. He tells Arthur to withdraw and reward his knights. Merlin says that the eleven kings will have something to distract them, since the Saracens have arrived to their lands and are laying siege to their castles. Merlin departs to see his master Bleise in Northumberland, who records the battle just as Merlin relates it, as Bleise does with all battles of Arthur's court.

Then Merlin disguises himself in sheepskins, boots, and a bow and arrow and goes to see Arthur. He asks Arthur to give him a gift, and Arthur asks why he should. Still disguised, Merlin says that Arthur should give him the gift or else lose great riches, since great treasure is hidden in the earth beneath their feet—Merlin told him so. Arthur is ashamed for being brusque with him.

After the battle a lady named Lionors arrives to give Arthur homage, and he falls in love with her. She gives birth to his child Borre, who will become another knight of the **Round Table**. Then Arthur hears of a war between King Leodegrance, an ally, and King Rience, and prepares for another battle.

Chapter 18 Arthur, King Ban, and King Bors depart for the country of Cameliard where they rescue Leodegrance against King Rience. They celebrate with a feast, which is when Arthur first meets and falls in love with Leodegrance's daughter Guenever, whom he will later marry. King Claudas is continuing to wage war in Ban and Bors's lands, but the two brothers tell Arthur to go home, since he has much to do in his own land. They say they'll call upon him if they ever need. Merlin foretells that the eleven kings shall all die in one day by the hand of two great knights, the brothers Balin le Savage and Balan.

The eleven kings, meanwhile, learn of the Saracens' siege against their lands, and regret that they had turned against Arthur, who could have helped them. They return to their countries, leaving a few kings in Britain to keep watch and prepare for revenge.

At this moment, when it seems that the two sides are reaching a stalemate, Merlin chooses not to give Arthur a way of conquering his enemies, but rather to declare an end to the fighting on both sides. It seems that he magically foresees that Arthur will lose if they continue, so he can only stop him rather than change his fate. This is the only mention of Bleise in the book, though he does appear elsewhere in legends of Merlin. Here he may simply serve as a reference to the many different versions of these stories in various lands.



Merlin's disguise is meant to portray him as a humble shepherd, rather than the powerful sorcerer Arthur knows him to be. Merlin seems to delight in trickery and disguise for its own sake, and he often appears as someone he is not. Here he may be trying to teach Arthur a lesson about making hasty judgments.



This anecdote, somewhat disjointed from the rest of the narrative, also exemplifies the varied and multiple nature of these tales (which come from many different sources), though the theme of courtly love and lust continues to be present here.



This allied battle seems much more easily accomplished than the prior one. It also shows the intermingling of battlefield honor and courtly love, since knights and kings often meet and marry women who are somehow related to their allies in battle. Now Arthur is secure in knowing that he has at least two certain allies, whom he will be able to call upon if he ever needs to fight against other enemies.



The kings realize just how arbitrary their decision to fight Arthur was—it was based on illegitimate concerns and jealousy about his proper place on the throne (and also a simple desire for more power).



Chapter 19 King Arthur leaves King Ban and King Bors and rides to Carlion, where Queen Margawse, the wife of King Lot, comes to see him with her four sons Gawaine, Gaheris, Agravaine, and Gareth. Arthur lusts after her and they sleep together, though he doesn't know that Margawse is his half-sister—Igraine's daughter. Margawse conceives a son Mordred. King Arthur then dreams that griffins and serpents have come into his land to do great destruction, though finally he slays them.

To put the dream out of his head, Arthur decides to go hunting with his knights. He sees a great hart (stag deer) and decides to chase him, which takes so long that Arthur's horse finally falls down dead from exhaustion. Arthur falls into thought about this strange event. Then he thinks he hears the noise of many hounds. He suddenly sees a strange-looking animal, who drinks in front of him and then departs. Lost in thought, Arthur falls asleep. When he wakes up, a knight is asking him if he saw a strange beast: the knight has been on a quest to kill it for a year, and asks Arthur for another horse to achieve this quest.

Chapter 20 Arthur asks the knight, King Pellinore, to entrust the quest to himself for the next year. But Pellinore says that only he or his sons must follow the quest. Arthur sends for a horse. Lost in thought about what he has seen, Arthur sees a 14-year-old child (Merlin disguised) come to him and ask why he is so pensive. Arthur says he's seen a marvelous sight. The boy says he knows that: he knows everything about Arthur, including that he is the son of Uther and Igraine. Arthur says the boy's not old enough to know such a thing, and he doesn't believe him.

Then Merlin returns in the likeness of an 80-year-old man, who seems wise to Arthur. Arthur confides in the man that a child has told him things that he could not have known. But the old man says that the child was right, and would have told him more had Arthur believed him. But God is unhappy with Arthur, he says, because he has slept with his sister and begotten a child that will destroy him and his kingdom's knights. Arthur asks who the man is: he reveals himself as Merlin, and says that he was the child as well. Merlin says that it is God's will for Arthur to be punished—but Merlin himself will die a shameful death in the earth, while Arthur will die in glory. The two ride back to Carlion, where Arthur asks Ector about his parents, and confirms his lineage. Arthur asks Merlin to send for his mother Igraine, and she arrives with her beautiful daughter, Morgan le Fay.

Incest is both a serious sin and a constant threat in Le Morte d'Arthur: the kingdom is relatively small, especially in the royal and knightly circles, and hidden identities make an attempt to tell the true lineage of possible mates complicated at best. Once again, dreams are highly significant, and can be ominous, but are also difficult to interpret precisely.



A series of odd, seemingly meaningful events begin to pile up, which are difficult for Arthur to interpret. In these passages, his confusion and disorientation are exemplified not by any kind of interior monologue but rather by the external event of falling asleep as a result of mental disorder and labor. This is also the first example of a knight who is on a quest, meaning he must do nothing else but follow his goal (the "Questing Beast," which will appear again later) until he achieves it.



Here we learn one aspect of how quests work: they are the property of the knights who have taken them up, and can only be transferred to another knight under certain special circumstances. Merlin again appears in the guise of someone who seems to have less authority, and again Arthur judges this identity and refuses to legitimize Merlin's comments as a result.



Merlin plays on Arthur's prejudices by returning in the form of an old man who, in the culture, would have been thought to be wise and trustworthy. He thus shows Arthur one more example of Arthur's moral failings—though, of course, not quite as bad as Arthur's unwitting incestuous relationship with his sister, which will now lead to a son and to his kingdom's destruction. Here, Merlin shows that while he can foretell the future and change some aspects of it, he is powerless to change God's will—he can only warn Arthur of what is to come, and it remains to be seen what Arthur will do with this knowledge. This again shows the interesting mix of Christianity and pagan magic that is present throughout the book.



Chapter 21 Ulfius arrives and proclaims that Igraine is the greatest traitor in the world, the causer of the great wars, since she never revealed that Arthur was her son, thus leading the other kings to be suspicious and fight against him. Igraine asks that another knight defend her. She tells the story of Ulfius coming to her disguised in Tintagil, and says that Merlin took her son away and she never saw him. Ulfius says that Merlin is thus more to blame. Merlin has Arthur and Igraine meet and embrace, and then they all feast.

Chapter 22 A young squire named Griflet asks Arthur to make him a knight, and Merlin advises him that Griflet will become a strong fighter, so Arthur does. Griflet goes out and sees a beautiful shield lying next to a tree. He strikes it with his sword, and tells the knight who owns it that he wishes to joust with him. The knight says that Griflet is only a child, but agrees to fight, and strikes down Griflet.

Chapter 23 The knight fears that he's killed Griflet, and he hoists him onto his own horse and brings him to Arthur's court, where Griflet is tended to and saved. Then twelve knights arrive from the Emperor of Rome asking for truage (a kind of tax) under threat of war. Arthur refuses and pledges to fight. He rides out to find Merlin, and they go to sit by a fountain, where Arthur sees an armed knight in a chair. They agree to joust, and the knight knocks Arthur off his horse. Then Arthur grows angry, and a more serious battle begins. Finally Arthur's sword is broken in half, and the knight tells Arthur to surrender or he'll be killed. Arthur leaps upon the knight, who we learn is King Pellinore (the man questing after the strange beast), and Pellinore throws Arthur down.

Chapter 24 Merlin arrives and tells Pellinore not to kill his enemy, revealing that it is Arthur. Merlin casts an enchantment over Pellinore, who falls to the ground asleep. Arthur reproaches Merlin for killing Pellinore, but Merlin says he's only asleep. He says that Pellinore will have two sons named Percivale and Lamorak, and that Pellinore will tell Arthur the name of his own son—who will destroy his kingdom.

For the first time, Arthur gathers together all the characters that relate to his past, which remained shrouded in mystery for so long. Ulfius reveals a common prejudice against women's wily ways in accusing Igraine of being the one at fault, even though Uther and Ulfius did the actual tricking and deceit. No one accepts ultimate blame, and in fact proof of noble blood seems far more important to everyone than evidence of some kind of treachery.



This is an example of the hubris common to knights, especially young knights. Though Arthur has followed Merlin's advice about Griflet's potential, at this point Griflet has not yet learned all the elements of the knightly code of chivalry and honor, which is shown by his defeat.



Briefly, it had seemed that Arthur had settled into a period of calm at court, aware of his lineage and family history, and watching over young knights develop. But now we sense that Arthur's fights against foreigners seeking to disrupt his authority are far from over. Riding out in search of Merlin, Arthur fights against a purported ally, and strangely—given that Excalibur is supposed to be a magical, enchanted sword—Pellinore comes close to defeating the mighty king. The relative prowess of Malory's knights always seems to be shifting.



Merlin intervenes in this case in favor of Arthur, mainly because Arthur's armor hides his true identity from Pellinore, who otherwise would not dream of jousting killing his king. Merlin also shares another important prophecy that will come from Pellinore.



Chapter 25 Arthur goes to a hermit who cures his wounds, then returns to Merlin. Merlin gives Arthur a new sword. They ride together to a clear lake, in the middle of which is a silk-clothed arm grasping a sword. A lady enters the lake: Merlin calls her the Lady of the Lake, and tells Arthur to speak well to her so that she will give him the sword. The Lady tells Arthur that she will give the sword to him if he gives her a gift when she asks for it. He agrees, so the Lady permits him to row out to the lake and take the sword and scabbard: she'll ask for her gift when she sees fit.

Arthur decides to return to avenge himself against Pellinore, but Merlin tells him not to, as Pellinore is weary of fighting, and besides, he will do Arthur a good service in time. Arthur tells Merlin that he prefers the new sword to its scabbard. Merlin says he's wrong, since while he has the Lady of the Lake's scabbard upon him, he cannot be killed. They pass by Pellinore, whom Merlin enchants so that he doesn't see Arthur, and they return home.

Chapter 26 King Rience, a rival king, sends a messenger to Arthur saying that he has overcome eleven kings, and they have each given Rience homage by cutting off their beards and sending them to him. The messenger asks for Arthur's beard, but Arthur says he owes Rience no homage, and that this request is shameful. The messenger departs.

Chapter 27 Merlin tells Arthur that he should destroy all children born on May-Day, as this is the birthday of his son who will destroy the kingdom. Arthur sends for all these children and puts them in a ship, which is shipwrecked. All the children die except for Mordred, who is then raised by a stranger. Many lords are upset with Arthur for this, but they tend to blame Merlin more.

BOOK 2

Chapter 1 King Arthur must fight many battles in order to conquer all of England, which is currently divided under many different kings. Arthur is in London when he hears from a knight that King Rience of Northern Wales has gotten many fighters together to prepare for battle against Arthur. Arthur decides to call all his lords and knights to a castle called Camelot for a council and jousting. A lady comes to Arthur, sent from the great lady Lile of Avelion, equipped with a sword. She says that only a good, faithful, and not treasonous knight will be able to pull the sword from the sheath. Arthur cannot, so he asks all the knights of the **Round Table** to do so, but none can. The lady is disappointed, having thought that these were the best knights anywhere.

The Lady of the Lake (who is perhaps also the character Nimue) will appear in multiple ways throughout these tales, and she seems to operate under a similar favor-exchanging logic as Merlin does. This is another popular origin story for Excalibur (along with the sword in the stone), and Malory simply includes both of them in his book without trying to make them fit together—so it can be confusing for a reader looking for a linear narrative. Arthur has already pulled Excalibur from the stone, but here he also receives the sword and its magic scabbard from the Lady of the Lake.



Revenge is one of the most important values in this culture, and it is crucial for maintaining one's honor, but Merlin, able to foresee at least some elements of the future, shows Arthur that revenge isn't always to be sought out. Arthur's ignorance in this regard is further underlined by the scabbard's revealed magic.



Rival kings are constantly trying to one-up each other and prove their power through both physical and symbolic shows of authority. The other side of power and authority, of course, is shame and dishonor, as Arthur shows in his response.



Merlin's advice may strike us as odd: he has predicted that Arthur's son will be the empire's downfall—which seems to be unchangeable fate—and yet he advises an attempt to challenge that fate, in a move of shocking cruelty (echoing the act of King Herod in the Bible) that has the added drawback of angering other kings.



While Arthur has proved himself as the rightful king of England, he still has not managed to secure a stable hold over the areas beyond his immediate purview. Arthur's decision to set a tournament when he hears of the impending threat from Rience highlights the intermixture of game and war at the heart of this culture. The sword that only a worthy knight can pull out of its sheath is an obvious echo of Arthur's first claim to kingship (the sword in the stone), but is also a trope that will appear again in Malory.



Chapter 2 Meanwhile a knight called Balin has been imprisoned for several months for killing another knight. Because he is a good man, he is released into court. As the lady is preparing to leave, Balin asks permission to try and draw the sword, even though he is shabbily dressed. He draws the sword out easily. The lady cries out in joy. She asks Balin for her sword back, but Balin refuses, saying he'll keep it. The lady warns him that if he does so, he will kill his best friend with that sword, which will also be his own destruction. It may be God's will, but he will keep the sword, Balin says. The lady leaves, sorrowful about Balin's fate. Balin prepares to leave for an adventure, and Arthur says he'll be welcome back any time.

Chapter 3 The Lady of the Lake arrives at court and asks for her gift. Arthur asks her what the name of his sword is, and she says **Excalibur**. The Lady then asks for the head of Arthur—since he killed the Lady's brother—or else for the head of the woman that brought Balin's sword, since she caused the Lady of the Lake's father's death. Arthur refuses. Balin sees the Lady of the Lake, who had killed Balin's mother, and strikes off her head. Arthur cries that Balin has shamed him, since the Lady came to him in peace, and Arthur will never forgive him. Balin explains that this lady has, through her sorcery, caused despair to many knights, but Arthur says that Balin must be exiled. Arthur buries the Lady with great riches.

Chapter 4 A knight named Lanceor is jealous of Balin for having achieved the sword, so he asks permission from Arthur to avenge himself. Arthur, still angry at Balin, agrees. Merlin comes to court, and explains that the lady who brought the sword to court was a treacherous lady. Her brother, a knight, had killed her lover, so she sought a way to avenge herself on her own brother.

Chapter 5 The grieving lady had gone to Lady Lile of Avelion, who had given her the sword, telling her that whoever succeeded in pulling it out would kill the grieving lady's brother. Merlin says he pities Balin for drawing the sword, because whoever do so will be destroyed by it. Lanceor rides out against Balin and they take their spears and fight. Balin kills Lanceor.

Chapter 6 A lady rides up, crying that she was Lanceor's lover, and, wailing, she takes Lanceor's sword and kills herself. Balin cries that he regrets having killed Lanceor. Then he turns and sees his brother Balan, and they embrace. Balan says he has come to find his brother, having heard of his deeds at Arthur's court. Balin is upset that Arthur is angry at him, he confides, and he suggests they go to fight against King Rience so that he can be forgiven.

This scene seems full of contradictions: Balin, by pulling the sword out successfully, proves himself to be a "good" and "faithful" knight, and yet he immediately refuses to listen to the lady's careful warning because he simply likes and wants to keep his new possession. All the knights in Arthur's court possess this mix of virtue and vice, honor and goodness combined with petty jealousy and pride, which if nothing else makes them more complicated (although often inscrutable) as characters.



Unlike Merlin, the Lady of the Lake asks for a return favor that proves abhorrent to Arthur—who, unlike his father, is forced to refuse to fulfill this end of the bargain. While Balin breaks the stalemate by killing the Lady of the Lake, Arthur cannot bring himself to celebrate this turn of events. Though he knows the Lady was in the wrong, and though he has loved Balin as one of his knights, the rules of honor—in which killing a guest (especially a lady) is a great sin—forces him to exile Balin.



While revenge is a common theme throughout the book, Arthur may well have denied the request for two of his own knights to fight against each other, if he were not himself already angry because of Balin's open defiance of the rules of court.



Merlin here helps contextualize the scene of the lady with the sword. As is often the case, women are shown to be untrustworthy and even dangerous: men have to remain on their guard against their wily ways or else suffer, as Balin will.



Here Balin's requirement of fighting with anyone who wants to joust with him clashes with his avowed duty, as a knight, to protect women. It's also a reminder of the difficulty of predicting the ultimate result of any action. The brothers' decision shows how battle prowess can be intertwined with loyalty.



Chapter 7 Balin and Balan come across a dwarf from the city of Camelot, who reproaches Balin for having killed Lanceor, a great knight. A king, Mark, rides forward and grieves Lanceor and his lover's deaths, and finds a great tomb in which to place the two.

Dwarves are other characters in these stories who seem both subservient to knights and to often possess greater knowledge than they do, serving as both servants and messengers in the realm.



Chapter 8 Merlin comes to see King Mark and prophesies that in this place there will be a greater battle than there has ever been between two knights, but neither knight will slay the other. Merlin writes the two knights' names in gold on Lanceor's tomb: Launcelot du Lake and Tristram. King Mark asks Merlin's name, but he refuses to tell. Merlin tells Balin that he did wrong in not trying to save Lanceor's lover's life. Balin protests that it was too sudden, but Merlin says Balin will pay by one day hurting the truest knight of the realm, which will send three kingdoms into twelve years of poverty and misery. Balin says if he knew this to be the case, he'd kill himself right away. Merlin vanishes.

Merlin's numerous prophecies set up, in many ways, the plan for the rest of the book—already we know how things will end. But much will have to happen before that, including the famous battle between Launcelot and Tristram. We also see in action how people's flouting of honor and virtue will have direct consequences, as Merlin warns Balin of what will happen to him. While Merlin is respected, it is difficult for proud knights like Balin to believe what they don't wish to hear.



Balin and Balan ride towards King Rience and meet Merlin, who is disguised. Merlin refuses to tell Balin his name, but Balin guesses, and asks for his counsel.

Once again Merlin decides to disguise himself for no particular reason—a common trope in many cultures' myths.



Chapter 9 Merlin shows the brothers how to find King Rience, who is riding. They meet him and wound him severely, killing forty of his men. Rience asks them not to kill him, and they deliver him to King Arthur's porters. Arthur asks Rience who has defeated him, but Rience doesn't know the knights' names. Merlin shares that it was Balin and his brother Balan, who will not be alive for long, he says. Arthur is sorry for this, since they have done him such a great service by capturing Rience. Merlin says that Balan will help him again, and he warns Arthur that Rience's brother Nero is preparing to fight him.

The fight against Rience to win back Arthur's friendship and trust seems easily enough accomplished, a quest aided by the support of Merlin, who is never afraid to choose sides in knights' battles. Though he is able to prolong the success of Balin and Balan somewhat, he seems unable to prevent their ultimate fate and downfall—one that Arthur also seems to accept as inevitable, given Merlin's warning.



Chapter 10 Arthur prepares for battle. Though Nero has many more fighters, Arthur's knights perform better than all. Balin and Balan do better than anyone, and Arthur marvels at them. Meanwhile Merlin distracts King Lot through sorcery, keeping him from helping Nero until a knight comes to share that Nero is being destroyed. Lot laments that he was distracted by Merlin. Merlin had known that one king would be killed that day, and he had rather Lot die than Arthur. The knight then tells Lot to set upon Arthur, and they ride to join the battle. Pellinore joins the fight and strikes King Lot, killing him (which, years later, Sir Gawaine will avenge by killing Pellinore). All the dead are buried in Camelot.

On one hand, Arthur's knights really do seem like they're more successful than anyone else on the battlefield. On the other hand, Merlin obviously has a hand in keeping Arthur and the knights of his court out of harm, and ensuring that the decks are stacked against Arthur's enemies as much as possible. Merlin's powers are very ambiguous here: he can tell that one king will die, but he doesn't know which king, and he still seems to be able to affect which king dies, even if he's not able to prevent the death itself.



Chapter 11 For the burial of King Lot his wife Margawse comes with her four sons, as well as King Uriens and his wife Morgan le Fay, Arthur's sister. Merlin through magic covers the tombs with golden images and a taper of burning wax. He tells Arthur that the wax will cease to burn at Merlin's death, soon before the adventures of the **Sangreal**. Arthur asks about Pellinore, Balin, and Balan. Arthur will soon meet Balin and Pellinore, but he will never meet Balan again, Merlin says. He reminds Arthur to keep his scabbard with him. Arthur takes it for safekeeping to Morgan le Fay. But she loves another knight and disdains her brother, so she makes a copy and gives the real scabbard to her lover: Sir Accolon of Gaul.

Chapter 12 After a day or two Arthur grows sick and lies down. A knight in mourning comes by him, refusing to tell Arthur why he's sad. Arthur sends Balin to find out. Balin finds the knight with a damsel (a young, unmarried woman of noble birth) in the forest and asks him to accompany Balin to Arthur. On their way, an invisible knight strikes down Balin's companion. On the verge of death, the companion says it was the invisible knight Garlon. He asks Balin to ride with the damsel and take up his quest (which the damsel will help him with), avenging his death when he can. Balin swears to do so.

Chapter 13 Balin and the damsel ride into the forest and meet a knight who joins them. But Garlon slays that knight. Balin and the damsel continue to a castle. Balin enters but the gate shuts behind him, and many men surround the lady. Balin races to the tower and leaps down to fight the men. They say their queen has been sick for many years, and can only be cured from a dish of blood from a maid and king's daughter. Balin collects some blood from the damsel, but it doesn't help. They rest that night in the castle.

Chapter 13 Balin and the damsel ride for several days before lodging with a rich man. Their host says he had jousted with King Pellam's brother and struck him down twice: the man wounded the host's son in revenge, and his son cannot be cured until the host has the blood of Pellam's brother. The knight is invisible, he says, and he doesn't know his name: Balin recognizes this as Garlon. The host shares that King Pellam will hold a great feast in twenty days for all his knights and their wives or lovers, so Garlon will surely be there. They all ride there together.

At the feast Balin asks another knight to point out Garlon. He does so, saying that he's the greatest knight alive, since he can become invisible. Garlon sees Balin staring at him, and strikes his face. Balin rises up and asks the damsel for a stick, with which he strikes Garlon down and kills him. He then calls to his host to retrieve Garlon's blood, so as to heal his son.

Funerals and burials are the occasion for great ceremonies throughout these stories: they also are often the site of prophecies, as the end of one knight's quest prompts the beginning of another. Merlin seems able even to foretell his own death—though perhaps, again, not to prevent it—and able to invest Arthur's scabbard with magic, or at least see that magic is there. At the same time, however, Merlin is unable to foretell that Arthur will not keep the scabbard with him, but will entrust it to his treacherous sister. Morgan le Fay is an important character, and appears here for the first time.



These encounters in the forest are typical of the knightly adventures recounted in Le Morte d'Arthur, in which adventures are always available, and unknown knights conceal hidden pasts and mysterious relationships (and there are many literal "damsels in distress"). It's worth noting that in Malory, the idea of an "adventure" is more along the lines of a dangerous task that must be undertaken, rather than its modern meaning of something exciting or novel.



Balin's adventures continue, as he continues to confront different kinds of obstacles in his attempt to maintain his honor, to avenge the knight's death, to protect the damsel, and to continue on the path of the dead knight's quest—a quest he knows little about but is bound by honor to pursue. The castle men, meanwhile, have their own agenda, and seek to defend their own queen.



By chance, as often tends to happen on these adventures, Balin learns the true identity of the invisible knight Garlon, along with another tale of just how dangerous Garlon, brother to King Pellam, can be. A feast will surely be an opportunity for Balin to figure out who Garlon is and to fight him, thus fulfilling part of the quest he is now on. In the tale of Garlon the invisible knight, magic seems to serve as a kind of metaphor for great knightly prowess, but also for deceit and trickery.



Garlon can only imagine, seeing Balin look at him, that Balin has guessed his secret and is about to reveal his identity. But there is nothing like a difficult battle here: instead Balin draws on the damsel's help to immediately kill Garlon.



Chapter 15 King Pellam rises fiercely, exclaiming that Balin has killed his brother Garlon and must now die or depart. Pellam strikes at Balin, and Balin defends himself, but his sword breaks in two. He runs from room to room looking for a sword. He finally grasps a magnificent spear from a richly wrought bedchamber and strikes Pellam. Then the whole castle crumbles to the ground, and Balin and Pellam remain under the rubble for three days.

Chapter 26 Merlin arrives and saves Balin. But the damsel is dead, and King Pellam will lie wounded for many years (and will later be healed by Galahad in the quest of the **Sangreal**). It's revealed that the blood of Jesus Christ was in the castle, and the spear was that used by Longnus to strike Jesus. Balin rides forth and sees people dead in all the surrounding cities and countryside, and those that are alive cry that Balin has caused great damage, and will have to be avenged.

Balin rides for a week before finding a horse tied to a tree and a knight in great mourning. The knight cries that his lover has promised to meet him in that place at noon, and has betrayed him: he prepares to kill himself with his sword. Balin promises to help the knight find his lady. He gives the man his knight's name, the Knight with the Two Swords, and the man says he is Garnish of the Mount, a poor man's son made knight by Duke Hermel, whose daughter he loves. They ride to the Duke's castle, which Balin enters. He finally finds her in a garden, in the arms of another knight. He quickly returns and tells Garnish.

Chapter 27 Garnish goes to the couple and, in grief, cuts off both their heads. Then he cries that Balin has given him great sorrow by showing him the truth. Balin insists that he wanted to give Garnish courage by showing him the truth, but Garnish suddenly drives his sword into his own heart.

Balin quickly leaves so that no one believes he has killed the three. After a few days he sees a cross that says no knight should ride towards this castle. An old man warns Balin to turn around, and then vanishes. But Balin continues, approaching a crowd of ladies and knights who seem to welcome him cheerfully. They lead him into the castle. Then the lady says he must joust with a knight on an island nearby, as this is the only way for Balin to pass by.

Balin seems to have gotten into a habit of disregarding the usual customs of hospitality in kingly courts—here it is even more egregious that he's killed the king's brother in front of everyone. Balin's quest is also full of mysteries and magical events—here it seems clear that the spear has some powerful quality to it.



This spear, also known as the Holy Lance, was an important part of Christian symbolism, as the spear used to strike Jesus in the side as he hung on the cross. In these stories, such holy objects exert material power seemingly entirely separate from their religious significance, and anyone who presumes to take their power for himself, as Balin does, will have to face the consequences.



Knights in mourning seem to be scattered throughout these landscapes: as a motif, they suggest small, individual tragedies that knights like Balin can avenge in support of their quests. But here, as has happened before, Balin's lofty intentions backfire, as his attempt to find the knight's lady only results in exposing her infidelity to Garnish, in another example of female treachery.



By accusing Balin, Garnish suggests that blame lies not so much in the betrayal as in the exposure of betrayal, especially since it involves here being shamed by another man taking one's lover. This theme will be more prominent later in the "love triangle" between Arthur, Guenever, and Launcelot.



Balin is usually warned about the consequences of his actions, as he is here and in his taking of the sword at Arthur's court, but his inability to obey suggests both his embrace of adventures and quests, and his questionable virtue, since he seems to believe that normal rules for a questing knight do not apply to him.



A knight lends Balin his shield, and Balin leaves his own behind. Balin rides to the island, where he meets a damsel, who says he was wrong to leave his shield: it's the only way he can be recognized. He regrets it, Balin says, but now it would be shameful to turn back.

Chapter 28 A knight rides out of the castle. It's Balan, and he thinks he sees his brother, but since Balin isn't carrying his shield Balan decides he must be wrong. The brothers each strike each other again and again, wounding each other heavily. At last Balan gains the upper hand. Balin asks who his enemy is. Balan tells him his name, and Balin cries out and faints. Upon awakening he exclaims that he is Balan's brother and they have slain each other. Balan relates that he had killed the knight who had kept this island, and so now was condemned to live there: now neither will escape.

The lady of the tower rides down, and Balan asks her to bury them in the same place. She sends for a priest. Balan dies shortly, and Balin dies the night after.

Chapter 29 The next morning Merlin writes Balin's name on the tomb, since the lady had only known Balan's. Merlin takes Balin's sword, and asks a knight he comes across to try to handle it. The man cannot, and Merlin laughs, saying that only the best knight in the world will be able to handle it, either Sir Launcelot or his son Galahad. Launcelot will, with this sword, kill the man he loves best, Sir Gawaine, Merlin foretells. Merlin constructs an iron and steel bridge onto the island, and enchants it so that only a good knight can ever cross. He leaves the scabbard of Balin's sword on the island for Galahad to find. Then Merlin goes to Arthur and tells him the whole tale.

BOOK 3

Chapter 1 After some time as king, Arthur asks Merlin for counsel, since his barons are harassing him to choose a wife. Merlin asks if there is any woman he loves, and Arthur responds with Guenever. Merlin warns Arthur that she and Launcelot will fall in love, but he also understands that when a man's heart is set there is little to be done.

Merlin goes to King Leodegrance to tell him of Arthur's love for the king's daughter. Leodegrance is pleased and sends his daughter with Merlin.

It's important to remember that with all their armor, knights are often recognizable only through identifying features such as a shield.



The theme of mistaken identity becomes an occasion for the first major tragic event of the story—the tragic irony of two brothers fighting to the death because they don't recognize each other. Because of the nature of battles by sword, it often takes awhile for the knights involved to die, even if they're wounded. This gives them the chance to make discoveries and final speeches before they die.



Merlin's prophecy has been tragically fulfilled as the brothers die together.



Merlin enters here to, in a way, tie up the loose ends of this tale, ensuring that all proper identities are restored, and—by sharing the story with Arthur—that the story of Balin and Balan won't be forgotten, as indeed Malory's book shows it was not. Merlin also shows how the various plot strands in Le Morte d'Arthur never stand alone, but are always interrelated. Here, they are connected to later stories of Launcelot, Galahad, and Gawaine through the same sword.



Choosing a wife and establishing a lineage is, as we've seen, highly important for a king. Here Merlin's ambivalent powers become evident again, as he can give counsel but seems unable to change some things, including love. It's also telling that Arthur is warned even now about Guenever's future affair, but he seems to entirely forget or disregard this prophecy.



Merlin gains another role, here, as mediator for important royal decisions, like a political marriage.



Chapter 2 Arthur is overjoyed to hear that Guenever is on her way. He asks Merlin to collect 50 of the most skilled knights in the land, but Merlin can find only 28. The Archbishop blesses the men, and Merlin tells them to pay homage to Arthur.

Chapter 3 A poor man comes into court riding next to a young man of 18 years and asks for King Arthur. The poor man says he has heard that Arthur has sworn to give any man the gift he asks, as long as it is reasonable. He asks that Arthur make his son a knight. Arthur says that this is a great thing to ask. The young man says his name is Tor. He is one of thirteen sons, and Arthur has them all brought to him. They are all alike to each other, but Tor looks different and superior to them all. Arthur asks Tor to pull out his sword, and Tor kneels, as Arthur lays the sword over Tor's neck, proclaiming him a knight.

Merlin says that Tor will be a great knight, since he is of kings' blood: Aries is not his real father—it's actually King Pellinore. Merlin has Tors's fetched, who tells Merlin and Arthur that when she was a maid, a knight had slept with her by force, and she had conceived Tor. Tor asks Merlin not to dishonor his mother, and Merlin says that there is nothing to be ashamed of, since his father is a king.

Chapter 4 The next day Pellinore comes to Arthur's court and is pleased to meet his son. There are two empty places among the knights' seats at the table, and when Arthur asks why, Merlin says that only the most worthy men shall sit there. He takes Pellinore by the hand and gives him one seat. Sir Gawaine (who has just been knighted alongside Tor) is furious at this, since Pellinore killed his and his brother Gaheris's father King Lot. Gawaine prepares to kill Pellinore and avenge the death, but Gaheris, a squire, says to wait until he is knighted to make revenge.

Chapter 5 Arthur and Guenever's wedding takes place and a high feast is prepared. As all are seated, a white hart (stag) runs into the hall, along with a white brachet (female hunting hound) and 30 black hounds behind them. The brachet bites the hart on the buttock and rips off flesh, and the hart leaps up over a knight, who grabs the brachet and runs away with it. Then a lady on a white horse cries to Arthur that the brachet was hers. An armed knight rides in and steals away the lady, crying. When she is gone, Merlin advises Arthur to call Gawaine to bring back the white hart, and call Tor to bring back the brachet and knight or else slay the knight. Pellinore must also bring the lady and her knight or else slay him as well.

A royal marriage is shown to be both significant and closely tied to the knights of the land, whose prowess in battle is another aspect of a king's and his kingdom's identity.



In a society where hierarchies are incredibly important, it is shocking and even perhaps insolent to demand such a thing of a king. However, Arthur has been schooled by Merlin to know—and, of course, he knows from his own case—that someone's initial appearance does not necessary define his identity. Still, Arthur relies mainly on physical markers of strength and might in deciding whether or not to knight Tor.



Usually, rape is an occasion for social shame and dishonor: here it becomes justifiable because of Tors's true identity—a judgment that we may find abhorrent today, but which would have seemed justifiable and even merciful at the time.



There is no sense that Pellinore should feel guilty for having raped Tors's mother, who recedes into the background as more "important" questions of identity and legitimacy come to the fore. While revenge is a notable part of court life, it also tends to be seen as more justifiable as a long-term commitment rather than a sudden act of rage. The problem is this leads to a very tangled web of personal vendettas.



In the middle of what should be a calm celebratory feast, a number of events take place to disrupt the status quo. The main result of these events is to assign a quest to knights, here Pellinore, Tor, and Gawaine. They will now have to follow their assignment until either they achieve it or are killed. Here it's more clear than at other times why exactly the quests are assigned, since a lady in distress is involved, as well as a need to avenge an important interrupted royal feast. The pursuit of some kind of special deer is another trope common to many of these tales.



Chapter 6 Sir Gawaine rides out with his brother Gaheris and they come across two brothers fighting. The elder says that a white hart, many hounds, and a white brachet had run by them: since they knew this was an adventure made for Arthur's high feast, the elder wanted to chase them to win glory, but the younger claimed he was a better knight, so they fell to fighting. Gawaine admonishes them for fighting so, and tells them to go to Arthur's court themselves.

Gawaine follows the cry of the hounds to a river, which the hart swims across. On the other side is a knight who tells Gawaine not to cross or else they'll have to joust. Gawaine says he must follow his quest, so he crosses the river and they clash with spears. Gawaine strikes the knight off his horse and kills him.

Chapter 7 Gawaine and Gaheris continue chasing the hart and send three greyhounds after it into a castle, where the dogs kill the hart. A knight emerges from one chamber and kills two of the greyhounds. He mourns over the white hart, which his lover had given him. The knight meets Sir Gawaine, who asks why he's killed the hounds. The knight says he's avenged the hart's death on the hounds, and will do the same for Sir Gawaine. They fight, and finally the knight surrenders and asks for mercy, but Gawaine is angry for the killing of his hounds and refuses. As Gawaine is about to cut off the knight's head, the man's lover emerges and throws herself on him, so Gawaine cuts off her head by mistake. Gaheris says that Gawaine will never outlive this shame. Gawaine tells the knight to arise, for now he'll have mercy, and Gawaine tells him to go to Arthur and tell him what happened.

Chapter 8 That night, four armed knights besiege Gawaine in the castle, saying that he's shamed his knighthood for not showing mercy and for slaying a lady. Gawaine and Gaheris fight against the two, becoming seriously wounded. But then four ladies come and at their request the men are granted mercy.

One lady comes to Sir Gawaine the next morning and asks for his name. She cries that he must be Arthur's nephew, and she tells the four knights, who give him the white hart's head as part of his quest. Gawaine rides back to Camelot with the dead lady's head hung around his neck, and tells Arthur and Guenever the story, upsetting them deeply. Guenever decrees that Gawaine's eternal quest shall be to protect all ladies.

While Gaheris is not yet a full knight, as a squire he is able to assist in knightly quests, serving as a kind of apprentice. Here we also learn that the "adventure" was not an accident but was somehow created by or for Arthur, most likely in order that knights might show their prowess and win glory for Arthur.



Gawaine knows that part of what a quest means is that he must accept any challenge that confronts him, mowing down any obstacle in his path that might prevent him from reaching his goal. As is often the case, many smaller "adventures" come up in the course of one larger quest.



Greyhounds are common hunting animals in the book, assisting the knights in their quests and, as is still the case today, serving as friendly companions. Gawaine thus grows angry at his hounds' death just as the knight is furious at Gawaine's killing of the hart, since both are meaningful animals to them. It is telling that Gawaine's anger is such that he refuses to give mercy to the knight. Mercy is an essential part of the knight's code of chivalry and honor, and Gawaine's inability to grant it becomes even more shocking once it results in the tragic accident of the lady's death, an even greater dishonor.



The armed knights would seem to be in the right here, given that they are avenging the dishonorable actions of Gawaine, but the stories often seem to be biased in favor of Arthur's knights.



Ultimately Gawaine does succeed in bringing back the hart, but it's at a great cost. It is generally considered necessary to share all details of a quest with the king and queen, who, although they are upset with Gawaine, are able to grant him the mercy that he refused another.



Chapter 9 Meanwhile, Sir Tor rides after the knight with the brachet. He meets a dwarf, who strikes Tor's horse, saying that Tor cannot pass this way without jousting against the knights at a nearby pavilion. Tor says he must follow his quest. The dwarf blows his horn, and a knight rides out to fight Tor. Eventually Tor conquers and the knight begs for mercy, which Tor grants him—with the condition that he go as prisoner to King Arthur. Then the dwarf asks Tor if he might do him service, since he no longer has a master. Tor gives the dwarf a horse to ride with him.

Chapter 10 Tor rides with the dwarf to a pavilion where he sees a lady lying asleep next to the white brachet. Tor seizes the brachet and the woman wakes up, saying that Tor won't make it far with the brachet without some mishap. Tor and the dwarf stay at a hermitage that night, and the next day continue toward Camelot. Then a knight calls out that Tor has stolen his lady's brachet. They fight and wound each other: finally Tor has the man, Abelleus, beneath him, but Abelleus won't ask for mercy.

Chapter 11 A damsel comes riding towards the men and asks for a gift from Tor: the head of the "false knight" Abelleus, who has killed the lady's brother. She requires this gift or else she will shame Tor in front of the entire court. Abelleus now asks for mercy, but Tor refuses, and strikes off his head.

The damsel invites Tor to lodge at her house that evening. The next day he leaves and arrives at Camelot a day after, where he is greeted with joy and shares his adventures with the court. Following Merlin's counsel, Arthur gives Tor an earldom.

Chapter 12 Pellinore, meanwhile, rides after the lady stolen by the knight at Arthur's feast. He comes across a lady sitting by a well in the forest, who asks for help, but Pellinore is so eager in his quest that he pays her no attention. The lady then prays to God that Pellinore might one day need as much help as she, as she is currently trying to tend to a wounded knight, who would later die. But Pellinore continues and asks if a poor laborer on the way has seen the knight and damsel. The man points him to a pavilion where two knights are fighting over the damsel.

Another dwarf serves as a kind of messenger or mediator between different groups of knights, here attempting to interrupt Tor in his quest against the knight with the brachet. A general result of battles between knights is that the one who loses must offer himself as prisoner to the other knight's king and queen: the code of honor is so crucial that it is assumed that the defeated knight will go freely.



It initially appears that Tor has easily won his adventure, seizing the brachet without much trouble. But when women are involved in this story, trouble tends not to be far off. Indeed, soon enough Tor has to defend his newly gotten prize from a man attempting to defend his lady's honor (another knightly virtue).



Tor is now strung between two competing knightly virtues: either he grants Abelleus's call for mercy, but in doing so fails to defend a lady, or he chooses the lady's honor over the requirement for mercy. This kind of dilemma is a common one in the book.



In choosing the lady, Tor reveals that he knows how to successfully navigate among the complicated, often competing commitments of a knight on a quest.



We now move to the third knight who began a quest as a result of Arthur's ceremonial feast. Pellinore, like Gawaine, finds it difficult to weigh the claims of this quest with other claims on him that have to do with his order of chivalry as a knight. That he refuses to help a lady in need is meant to be seen as a shocking failure of knightly virtue, which Pellinore will probably have to pay for.



Pellinore rides to the pavilion and cries out to the lady to accompany him back to Arthur's court. He asks why the knights are fighting: one says she is his cousin, so he's fighting for her honor, and the other, says he gained the right to her through his jousting prowess at Arthur's court. Pellinore knows this isn't true, and he tells them to stop fighting or he'll defend her himself. The false knight kills Pellinore's horse, and Pellinore strikes him dead in revenge.

Chapter 13 The cousin turns to Pellinore and tells him to take the lady to court, but that Pellinore should lodge with him that night. He asks Pellinore's name, and is glad that his cousin will be in the care of such a noble man. His name is Sir Meliot and his cousin is Nimue, the Lady of the Lake. The next day they ride through a valley full of stones, and the lady's horse stumbles and she falls, hurting herself. They stop to rest, and stay there that night.

Chapter 14 In the darkness Pellinore hears two knights meet nearby, one from Camelot and one from the north. The one from Camelot is traveling north to tell chieftains there about the fellowship of the **Round Table**. The other is bringing a poison that a so-called friend of Arthur's will feed to him. The Camelot knight warns him of Merlin's all-knowing powers. The two knights depart, and Pellinore continues on. He comes across the lady he had ignored earlier, who has been eaten by lions and beasts, and he regrets having continued on without helping her. Pellinore takes her lover's body to a hermitage to be buried.

Chapter 15 Pellinore and the lady arrive at Camelot the next day and he tells his adventures. Guenever laments that Pellinore didn't save the other lady's life. Merlin says the lady was Pellinore's own daughter, Elaine. Since Pellinore would not help him, his own best friend will fail him in his time of greatest need.

The quest of the white hart, brachet, and lady are now finished. Arthur grants various lands to the knights and tells them never to murder or betray their realm; to give mercy rather than cruelty to whomever asks it; to always protect ladies; and to only battle for righteous causes. The knights of the **Round Table** swear on this code, renewing it each year at Pentecost.

Having come from Arthur's court himself, Pellinore knows that one of the knights cannot be telling the truth, but he's not quite on the side of the cousin either, wanting to gain the damsel for himself. He is also vulnerable to temper, and we see again how ubiquitous death is in this world of constant competition and revenge.



It is unclear whether this Lady of the Lake is the same as the prior one—the stories may be out of chronological order (since Balin had presumably cut off the Lady's head in an earlier Book) or there may be multiple characters by this name. In any case, Pellinore now shows himself to be more chivalrous with this lady.



By a lucky chance, Pellinore happens to hear about a potential treason against Arthur—always a possibility in this kingdom, even now that Arthur seems to have secured a more stable hold over his realm. In this scene, Pellinore also sees the direct result of his defiance of chivalry in refusing to help the lady, who is now dead along with her lover—by burying him Pellinore attempts to make up for the wrong he committed. It seems unlikely now, but lions did once inhabit Europe and even the isles of the UK.



Again, Pellinore is bound by honor to tell exactly what happened. In this case, Merlin is again able to predict the future, in an oracle that suggests Pellinore will indeed have to pay for his crime.



Though we've heard much about the fellowship of the Round Table, only in this scene does Arthur explicitly detail what should be involved in any knight that pledges himself to this code of honor and chivalry. The code (again associated with a Christian feast day) is one that will come to define Arthur's knights.



BOOK 4

Chapter 1 After these quests, Merlin falls in love with one of the ladies of the lake, Nimue. He follows her everywhere, and she entertains him as she learns magic from him. Meanwhile, Merlin continues to tell Arthur what will happen, including that Merlin himself will not long be with him. Arthur says that since Merlin knows what will happen, he should work to prevent it, but Merlin says that won't happen.

Nimue makes Merlin swear that he'll never enchant her with his magic, and he does so. Merlin travels with her to the land of Benwick, where he speaks to King Ban and his wife Elaine, as well as his son Launcelot. Merlin foretells that Launcelot will take revenge against King Claudas (who had warred against Ban previously) and will be the greatest knight in the land. Then Merlin departs with Nimue. Nimue slowly grows tired of Merlin, but she's afraid since he is a "devil's son." One day Merlin shows Nimue an enchanted cave. She tricks him into entering the cave, uses his own magic to trap him inside, and leaves him.

Chapter 2 As Arthur is preparing a great feast in Camelot, he learns that five kings are preparing war against him. He laments that he hasn't had one month's rest since he was made king. Arthur writes to Pellinore and asks him to prepare his men. The next day he leaves with Guenever for a forest near Humber. An enemy knight counsels the five kings to be quick in making war, since the longer they wait the stronger Arthur grows.

Chapter 3 The five kings agree and slip towards the forest by night, as Arthur and his men lie unarmed, thinking they are safe. But someone betrays their location, and a wounded knight slips into Arthur and Guenever's pavilion and tells them to flee, for many have been killed already. They ride towards Humber and reach a large river, wondering whether to risk death by crossing it. Meanwhile, Sir Kay, Gawaine, and Griflet see the five kings riding towards them with spears, and though they are three against five, they decide to ride and meet them. Kay kills one, Gawaine another, and then Arthur joins and kills a third: Griflet kills the fourth and Kay the fifth. They place Guenever in a barge to cross the river for Humber, and ride into the forest to tell their men that the five kings are dead. They decide to wait until daylight in order to conquer the rest, who will be confused and weakened by the kings' deaths. Arthur and his knights kill 30,000 men the next day, and after the battle Arthur thanks God and sends for his queen.

In this scene, the tragedy of Merlin's limited omniscience comes into clear focus. Merlin may know exactly what awaits him—at least he seems to know that his downfall is approaching—but he cannot seem to act against it, just as Arthur will be unable to undo his ultimate fate.



As Merlin follows Nimue around, trapped by the binds of love that seem even more powerful than magic, he continues to foretell the future, preparing the way for many of the tales that will follow in this book. We are also reminded here that Merlin's magic has an uncertain status: he can use it for good, and he has a relationship with the Christian Bishop, but it's also suspected that his magic (as all non-Christian magic is, according to the Church) is related to the devil.



Arthur's lament is an understatement: only in the quest of the hart and brachet have we had an interlude between a more serious kind of competition in the form of inter-kingdom wars. But now Arthur has developed strong alliances, including with Pellinore, which will surely aid him.



Although the entire Arthurian society is structured around values of honor and chivalry, its characters also have to remain on constant guard against dishonorable behavior by those who cannot hope to conquer them by remaining within the bounds of honor. This shameful act of refusing to do battle honestly and face-to-face is contrasted to the bravery of Kay, Gawaine, and Griflet, who decide to fight even though the numbers are against them, and whose rescue of Guenever should be considered especially worthy of praise within this framework. One lesson seems to be that dishonor rarely pays off in the end, as Arthur and his men deal a devastating blow to their enemies.



Chapter 4 King Pellinore finally arrives and learns of the victory. They celebrate and Arthur founds the Abbey of La Beale Adventure on the site of the battle. But the inhabitants of the five kings' lands are upset and angry, so Arthur quickly returns to Camelot and asks Pellinore for advice on replacing the eight knights of the **Round Table** who were killed in battle. Pellinore recommends Gawaine, Griflet, and Kay.

Chapter 5 For the fourth knight, Pellinore says that Arthur should choose between his son Sir Tor and Sir Bagdemagus. He doesn't want to be biased, but Arthur believes that Tor has proved himself, so he will choose him for now. Bagdemagus, greatly angry, leaves court with a squire. He prays before a cross in the forest and then finds written upon it that he will not return to court until he has won the body of a knight of the **Round Table**. The squire tells Bagdemagus he should return straightaway, but Bagdemagus says he must seek out this adventure.

Bagdemagus rides out and comes across the cave where Merlin is trapped. He tries to lift up the stone but cannot, and Merlin tells him to leave, since it's in vain. Bagdemagus departs and does a number of adventures (not described), proving himself as a knight before he returns and joins the **Round Table**.

Chapter 6 Arthur, Uriens, and Sir Accolon of Gaul begin a hunt after a great hart. Their horses grow exhausted so they kill them and continue on foot, growing weary themselves. Finally they find the hart resting by a waterbank, and Arthur kills it. He sees a small ship in the river. The ship is empty but hung in rich silk. Suddenly twelve beautiful damsels emerge and a hundred torches on the ship's sides light up. The damsels call Arthur by name and welcome him, serving the three men delicious food and leading them to beautiful bedchambers.

The next day Uriens awakens next to his wife (Morgan le Fay) in Camelot, though they were two days away; Arthur awakens in a dark prison cell.

Chapter 7 Arthur hears mournful clamor around him, and the other prisoners tell him they have been kept here for years by Sir Damas, a false, treasonous knight who is jealous of his younger brother Sir Ontzlake, a successful knight. Damas cannot get any knight to fight for him willingly, so he has trapped a number of them in this prison, though they continue to refuse to fight for him.

Though Pellinore has arrived too late, Arthur knows that he is still a proper ally and worthy of giving Arthur advice. The workings of the Round Table are also clarified for us here: there are seemingly a limited number of seats, and so new knights can be added only when there are "vacancies."



Bagdemagus seems to believe that Arthur has, in fact, been biased in preferring the son of his friend and ally over another knight. However, Bagdemagus seems at least somewhat less inclined to immediate revenge and jealousy than other knights we've seen, as he goes into the forest alone to pray instead of immediately starting a fight. It is not clear if this writing is a commandment or a prophecy.



Bagdemagus is witness to Merlin's tragic end, as he has been trapped here by Nimue with his own magic. Merlin can also still seemingly foresee the future, so he knows that he will never escape. We don't learn how Bagdemagus won against a Round Table knight, but only that he's proved himself somehow worthy.



In periods of calm between great battles, other warlike activities come to take their place. Here, hunting is a way for Arthur to prove his prowess as a knight without risking his own life in a real war. Though Arthur easily kills the hart, he is entirely vulnerable to the wiles of beautiful women, following them without questioning who they are or why they're there.



This story is yet another example of women's power and trickery over men in the book.



The other prisoners here, like Arthur now, have been caught between a brothers' feud. Fights between family members seem, in this book, to be particularly vehement. For the knights, it's the very character of Damas (or lack thereof) that makes it a principle for them not to fight for him.



A damsel comes to tell Arthur (who is not recognized as the king) that he will be delivered from prison if he fights for Damas. Arthur agrees, and says he recognizes the damsel from Arthur's court. She denies it, though in reality she is one of Morgan le Fay's damsels. Damas sends for Arthur, and agrees to free the other knights if Arthur fights for him. All twenty knights are brought out of the prison to see the battle.

Chapter 8 Sir Accolon, meanwhile, awakens by a deep well, close to his death. He realizes that the ship's damsels have betrayed them. A dwarf arrives sent from Morgan le Fay (Accolon's lover), saying that she has sent Accolon **Excalibur**, Arthur's sword, along with its magical scabbard, with which to fight against a knight the next day. The dwarf says Morgan asks Accolon to do battle tomorrow without any mercy, and that the damsel who brings Morgan the head of the knight whom Accolon fights against will be made queen. Accolon agrees to do this.

Sir Damas tells his brother Sir Ontzlake to prepare for battle with a good knight. Sir Ontzlake is a little wounded. Morgan le Fay has made Accolon lodge with Ontzlake, so he volunteers to fight for him. The next day Arthur mounts on horseback, and a damsel from Morgan sends him a likeness of his sword and scabbard, which he believes is real.

Chapter 9 The two men fight strenuously against each other. Nimue, who had enchanted Merlin arrives for love of Arthur and to save his life through her magic. Arthur, seeing the blood-splotted ground, realizes that his sword has been changed and that Accolon's sword must be **Excalibur**. Arthur loses a great deal of blood, but Accolon doesn't, though all marvel at Arthur's continued valiance.

Chapter 10 Finally Arthur's sword breaks, and Accolon cries that his enemy is overcome and must yield to him. Arthur refuses, since he says he must die with honor rather than yield. Accolon strikes him, but Arthur presses his shield against him and strikes him with the handle of his broken sword. At the next strike, by the Lady of the Lake's enchantment, Accolon's sword falls to the ground. Arthur leaps and grabs it, rushing upon him and striking Accolon on the head. Accolon invites Arthur to kill him rather than have mercy, for he sees how strong a knight he is. Suddenly, Arthur thinks he recognizes him, and asks his name. When Accolon reveals himself, Arthur is dismayed and asks him how he got this sword.

It seems that Arthur is somehow exempt from the other knights' decision not to fight for the "treacherous" knight Damas. Once again there is a case of mistaken identity, as no one recognizes Arthur as the king, and Arthur doesn't recognize the damsel.



Sir Accolon, too, realizes that he and Arthur have been tricked by the women that they so guilelessly followed into the ship. Luckily, Accolon does not seem in such dire straits as Arthur, especially now that his lover Morgan has equipped him with the scabbard (as we're meant to remember, this is the scabbard Morgan told Arthur she would take care of, and put into safekeeping).



Now it becomes clear just to what extent Morgan le Fay has planned and plotted this entire scheme—making it so that Accolon and Arthur will unknowingly fight each other, and that Accolon will certainly have the upper hand. Morgan le Fay is perhaps the best example of a woman taking power and manipulating even kings themselves through trickery, "sorcery," and seduction. She is portrayed as a negative character, but the agency she finds is admirable in a world where women are supposed to be powerless.



Arthur had been told by Merlin that his scabbard would prevent him from ever losing blood, so he realizes the treachery pretty early on. While in another context Nimue has been portrayed as a trickster, here she is considered a loyal subject of Arthur.



When one knight conquers another, the conquered one can either "yield" and ask for mercy, or refuse this mercy and die—which is always considered the more honorable choice (though it is also considered more honorable for the conquering knight to grant mercy). Just as Morgan had done all she could to ensure that her lover would triumph, here another lady, Nimue, uses her own powers of enchantment on the side of Arthur, leading to their identities being revealed.



Chapter 11 Accolon says he got it from Morgan le Fay to kill King Arthur, her brother, since she hates him and loves Accolon, and wants to kill her husband Uriens and make Accolon king. Arthur reveals who he is: Accolon cries for mercy, and Arthur agrees, though he says Accolon is a traitor, even if Morgan le Fay bewitched him. They gather the observers around and Accolon reveals that the knight is Arthur.

Chapter 12 All kneel and ask for mercy from Arthur, who grants it, though he asks for a little rest. He orders Sir Damas, since he is a villainous, proud knight, to give his brother Sir Ontzlake the manor, and orders him never to capture any other knights. Arthur tells Ontzlake to come to his court to become one of his knights. Ontzlake says he would if he were not wounded. Arthur shares that he has also been wounded, and Ontzlake says there is a rich abbey nearby. The men go there to rest. Accolon has bled so much that he dies within four days. Arthur sends Accolon's body to Morgan le Fay, telling messengers that he sends it as a present.

Chapter 13 Morgan believes Arthur is dead, so she prepares to kill Uriens in his sleep. She tells her maiden to fetch his sword, but the maiden instead goes to Sir Uwayne, Morgan and Uriens's son, and tells him what is about to happen. The maiden then brings the sword to Morgan as per her instructions, but as Morgan lifts the sword to kill the sleeping Uriens, Uwayne leaps onto her and stops her. Morgan asks for mercy, saying she was tempted by a devil. Uwayne spares her, on the condition that she not do anything like this again.

Chapter 14 Later Morgan sees Accolon's body, which is brought to a church, and though she feigns nonchalance she is actually in great mourning. Morgan asks Guenever permission to leave on a ride, and she goes in search of Arthur, thinking to steal away his sword. Morgan finds him asleep with **Excalibur** in his hand, so she only manages to steal the scabbard. When Arthur awakes his servants say that Morgan has been there, and that they could not disobey her commands.

Arthur arms himself and Sir Ontzlake and they ride out in search of Morgan. Arthur catches sight of her and chases her, but she comes upon a lake and throws the scabbard into the water. Then she enchants herself and turns into a great marble stone, so that Arthur cannot find her or the scabbard. He departs, and then Morgan turns herself back into a human.

Little by little Morgan's treachery is revealed—though a woman, and lacking concrete political power, she has been able to hoodwink both these powerful men. Still, Arthur has grasped that Accolon probably knew Morgan was up to no good, and still sought glory through her anyway.



This story of treachery and betrayal begins to draw to an end, as Arthur regains his royal power by commanding knights under him to obey his will, basing his judgment on the perceived characters of Damas and Ontzlake. Although Arthur has forgiven Accolon—the proper action for a worthy knight—Accolon is still ultimately punished for his treachery by dying of his wounds. Arthur's sole show of spite is in his sending of Accolon's body to Morgan.



Meanwhile, Morgan begins to put into action the rest of her plan to switch husbands and gain power over her brother Arthur. Uwayne's action of pardoning his murderous mother foreshadows a similar scene with Tristram—both show the young knights' virtue, and reinforce the idea of women as treacherous.



Morgan begins to realize that her grand plan is unraveling: since Accolon is dead, his sword and scabbard that she gave to him must have been stolen away. Again, Morgan is able to at least temporarily trick men like Arthur obliquely, if not in direct battle like men face each other. Even the servants are too afraid of her to forbid her anything, or else she has enchanted them with her "sorcery."



This story bears a striking resemblance to the Greek myth of Apollo and Daphne, in which the god chases Daphne, who ultimately transforms into a tree to save herself. In this case Arthur isn't pursuing his sister out of lust, but rather to punish her for her treachery, but the motif is the same.



Chapter 15 Morgan rides on away from Arthur, and encounters one knight about to lead another bound hand and foot to drown in a fountain. The man found this knight with his wife, but when Morgan asks the culprit about it, he says it's not true. He says he is Manassen of Arthur's court, Accolon's cousin. Morgan says she will save him, and she binds the other man, upon which Manassen drowns him in the fountain. Manassen asks if she has a message for Arthur. She says to tell him that she saved Manassen out of love for Accolon, not Arthur, and that she doesn't fear Arthur as long as she can turn herself into a stone—and she can do many other things besides.

Arthur rides to Camelot, where everyone marvels at Morgan's treachery. When Manassen returns and tells Arthur the story, he swears to be avenged on Morgan. The next day a lady brings a beautiful mantle from Morgan to the king, saying it is a gift to make amends. Arthur is pleased, but says little.

Chapter 16 Nimue comes to Arthur and tells him not to put the mantle on until he commands the messenger to put it on herself. Arthur does so, and the messenger falls down dead and burns to a crisp. The king is furious, and tells Uriens (Morgan's husband) that he will have to expel their son Uwayne: he trusts Uriens, since Morgan wanted to kill him, but he's still suspicious of Uwayne, who might be allied with his mother. But Gawaine says that since his cousin Uwayne is expelled from the court, he will leave too, and the two ride away together. Arthur and all his court mourn the loss of these two knights. Meanwhile Uwayne and Gawaine come to a place where there is a white shield hanging on a tree, and twelve damsels go back and forth, spitting and throw mud at it.

Chapter 17 Gawaine and Uwayne ask why the damsels are doing this to the shield, and they say it is because the owner, Marhaus, hates all women. Uwayne has seen him joust and knows he is a good knight, and they do not want to see his shield dishonored. Then Marhaus comes riding up and the damsels all flee into a tower. Two knights leave the tower to fight Marhaus, but he kills them both.

Chapter 18 Marhaus asks Gawaine and Uwayne what they're doing there, and they say they've come to seek adventures. Marhaus is willing to join any adventure they propose. Gawaine suggests they joust together. Marhaus and Gawaine joust all afternoon, but finally Gawaine's strength wanes and he surrenders. The knights swear to love each other as brothers.

Having once again slipped out of Arthur's grasp, Morgan encounters other adventurers. At first, she seems to act here as a loyal member of Arthur's court, preventing another member of his court from dying shamefully. Only afterward do we learn that Morgan's seemingly kindly actions were a result of her love for Accolon, and her bitterness over his death. Morgan here makes a direct statement challenging Arthur's power and affirming her own—an important moment in the book.



Now the rest of the court knows just to what extent Morgan will go to make sure her will is achieved, even at the expense of family ties. Arthur seems optimistic but wary of this gift.



Once again, Nimue reveals her feelings for Arthur by saving his life—a life, of course, that is considered far more valuable than that of the messenger who is sacrificed in order to prove Morgan's treachery. Now Arthur is faced with some complicated choices, since many people in court seem to be in some way related to Morgan—including himself—and yet it is difficult to tell who is loyal to whom. For Gawaine, for instance, loyalty to Arthur might be an obvious necessity, but loyalty to his cousin trumps it.



Gawaine and Uwayne are immediately suspicious of the women, not because they know anything about Marhaus's relationship to women, but simply because they've seen him fight—a telling example of the way battle prowess stands in for general character virtue in the book. No knight who fights so well could also be wicked.



Here, jousting is less a way for one knight to triumph over another than for knights to play a game, like hunting (yet sometimes these jousts end in death for one of the knights). Fighting is in this case a prerequisite to swearing loyalty, now that all parties respect each other's prowess. This kind of scene is repeated numerous times in the book, and it seems entirely foreign and even humorous from a modern perspective.



Marhaus says that the damsels are wrong to say he hates women: he only hates *those* women, since they are enchanters and bewitchers. The knights ride together to Marhaus's estate and lodge there for the night. Marhaus then leads them for a week until they reach the forest of Arroy, a country where strange adventures are to be found. They see a stream of water and a fountain with three ladies sitting nearby. The eldest has a gold garland and white hair—she's at least 60. The second is 30 and the third 15. The ladies say they sit here in order to involve any passing knights in adventures. Each one should choose a lady and they will each lead the men to three highways, until after a year they should meet here again.

Chapter 19 Uwaine, as the youngest and weakest chooses the eldest lady, since he believes her to be wise. Marhaus chooses the middle woman, and Gawaine thanks him for leaving him the youngest and most beautiful. Uwaine goes west, Marhaus south, and Gawaine north. Gawaine rides until he comes to a manor housing an old knight. Together they ride into the forest until they find a cross, next to which is a handsome knight in great distress. Gawaine wishes him honor and glory, but the knight says that for him, sorrow and shame come after glory.

Chapter 20 Gawaine then sees ten knights preparing to fight against the one knight. He fights valiantly but is finally bound by the ten. The damsel with Gawaine says that he should help the knight. They then catch sight of another knight fully armed coming from one side, and from another side comes an armed dwarf. Both are meeting the same lady in the wood, and they begin to fight over her. The knight and the dwarf then decide to ask Gawaine, who's watching, which one he thinks is more worthy. Gawaine tells the damsel to decide, and she chooses the dwarf.

Two armed knights then come shouting to Gawaine to joust with them. While he fights with one, the other asks the damsel to follow him rather than Gawaine. Gawaine and the knight end in a draw, and the knight invites Gawaine to lodge with him that night. On the way, Gawaine asks who the distressed knight who was fighting the ten others is. The knight says it's Sir Pelleas, who loves a lady named Ettard. Pelleas was the best knight at a recent joust, and so won the prize of a gold circlet, which he gave to Ettard.

In the context of this story, Marhaus's explanation for why the women hate him is meant to be perfectly justifiable (though modern readers might question whether or not there is more to the story of the women's "enchantments"). However, Marhaus, Gawaine, and Uwaine are now as good as brothers as they ride out seeking new adventures. This quest seems to have little purpose other than to allow the knights to fulfill their desire for adventure—but in the world of Malory's tale, there are always "damsels in distress" in need of an errant knight.



These choices map onto the general ways women are considered, with beauty ranked the highest, but with age and wisdom also greatly respected. The three directions taken by the knights represent their differing destinies for the course of the next year. Crosses tend to be scattered throughout these forest haunts, in many cases revealing possible adventures for knights that pass that way.



While Gawaine begins by simply witnessing the fight, duties of chivalry—as well as prodding by Gawaine's companion—convince him to enter the fray. But he's soon distracted by yet another strange battle. The forest, in the book, is a place ostensibly meant for contemplation but actually packed with activity and competition, a true jackpot for a knight seeking adventure.



Yet another group of jousting knights enters here, such that it becomes difficult to distinguish all the different fights taking place. However, Gawaine's new host begins to fill in the gaps for him, sharing a classic story of the love of a knight for a lady—a story that is, as is often the case, closely tied to the prowess of a knight on the battlefield.



Chapter 21 Pelleas chose Ettard as his wife, but she was proud and said she'd never love him. But Pelleas vowed to follow Ettard until she did. So every week, lodged in a priory, she sends knights to fight Pelleas, bind him up, and bring him to her, all in an attempt to shame him and make him leave her. Gawaine says he will help Pelleas. In the morning he rides out, and Pelleas confides that he still believes Ettard will have pity on him. Gawaine swears to do all in his power to get him his lady's love. Gawaine says he will ride to Ettard's castle and say that he's slain Pelleas: he'll then find a way for Pelleas to gain her love.

Chapter 22 Gawaine comes to Ettard's castle and declares that he's killed Pelleas. He identifies himself as a member of King Arthur's court. Ettard says that this is a pity since Pelleas was a good knight, but she never loved him or could get rid of him. She offers herself to Gawaine now, but he says he loves another lady who doesn't love him. Gawaine asks Ettard to do all she can to earn his lady's love, and she promises.

Gawaine and Ettard sleep together in a pavilion outside the castle. On the third day, Pelleas arms himself, according to their plan, and comes to the pavilion, where he sees Gawaine lying in bed with Ettard. He bemoans Gawaine's treachery, but he says that he can't, as a true knight, kill the two when they are sleeping. Pelleas tries to leave, though he goes back and forth several times. Finally he lays his sword over their throats and rides away. He returns to his knights and tells them he'll never get out of bed until he dies. He tells his knights that when he dies, they should bring Ettard his heart on a platter and tell her that he saw her lie with Gawaine.

When Ettard awakes she realizes it's Pelleas's sword on her throat, and she says to Gawaine that he's betrayed both Pelleas and herself. Gawaine departs and goes into the forest. Meanwhile the Lady of the Lake, Nimue, meets a knight of Pelleas, who tells her that his master has been betrayed. Nimue tells the knight to bring Pelleas to her so that he might not die for love, and so that Ettard may be punished for her pride. Nimue brings the Lady Ettard to Pelleas, whom she has enchanted into sleep, and Nimue enchants Ettard into loving him. Pelleas awakens and looks at Ettard, and angrily tells her to go away and never come into his sight. Ettard weeps and is sorrowful.

Chapter 23 Nimue tells Pelleas to accompany her out of this country. He tells her the whole story and thanks her. Ettard dies of sorrow, and Nimue and Pelleas love each other for the rest of their lives.

For these knights, it does not matter too much that Ettard is not interested in Pelleas: Gawaine is happy to help him win her over, considering her love as another prize to be won through jousting success. Ettard is portrayed as simultaneously alluring, clever, and deceitful—in another situation, such an act of shaming would make a knight want to kill the perpetrator in revenge, but Pelleas continues to love her.



Gawaine begins a tale not necessarily of mistaken identity, but certainly of trickery, as he plots a way to get Ettard together with Pelleas. The virtue of honesty and honor in this culture coexists, as we continue to see, alongside a fascination with deceiving others.



It is not entirely clear throughout this story exactly what the plan between Pelleas and Gawaine was: what is clear is that Pelleas was not suspecting to find Gawaine asleep with Ettard, when he believed his friend was supposed to help him conquer Ettard's heart. Still, Pelleas shows more mercy than Gawaine did when he accidentally cut off a lady's head, even if Pelleas is now doomed to what seems like endless grief.



Nimue enters here no longer as someone who loves Arthur and will complete any number of enchantments (learned, we recall, from Merlin) to save him. At first it seems that she is simply taking pity on Pelleas, and is righteously angry at Ettard, who is considered "proud" and lacking virtue for failing to love Pelleas back. Still, it is meant to be satisfying comeuppance when we see that Ettard is now suffering just what Pelleas suffered for love of her.



Though perhaps jarring to a modern ear, this ending is meant to show how people's virtue or vice ultimately leads to "just" and proper results.



Chapter 24 Marhaus, meanwhile, rides south into a forest and reaches a lodge, where the porter says the knight and the damsel need to fulfill an adventure in order to be lodged there. Marhaus says they only want rest, and the porter brings them in with torchlight, where they're welcomed by many men and a Duke in the hall. When Marhaus says who he is, the Duke of South Marches says that he is no friend of the **Round Table**, and he with his six sons will fight Marhaus together, in revenge for Gawaine once killing seven sons of his. Marhaus and the damsel rest that night and then prepare to battle the next day.

Chapter 25 Marhaus defends himself against several of the sons, and finally strikes the Duke of South Marches to the ground. Marhaus tells him to surrender or he'll kill him. The Duke tells his sons to yield, and they kneel down to Marhaus, and promise not to be enemies of Arthur.

Marhaus rides on and his damsel brings him to a great tournament, where Marhaus wins and is awarded a golden circlet. Then the damsel brings him to the castle of Earl Fergus, who tells Marhaus that a giant named Taulas is destroying all his lands. Marhaus vows to fight him on foot. He cuts off the giant's right arm and then the giant flees. Marhaus hurls stones at the giant to kill him, and then delivers 24 ladies and 12 knights out of the giant's prison. He stays with Earl Fergus for half a year to recover from the battle.

Chapter 26 We now turn to Uwaine, whose damsel brings him to a tournament in Wales, where he is given the prize of a gerfalcon (a large bird of prey). Among his many adventures, Uwaine is brought by the damsel to the Lady of the Rock. Two brothers, Sir Edward of the Red Castle and Sir Hue of the Red Castle, had disinherited the Lady of many lands. Uwaine says this is against the order of knighthood, so he will speak to them. But they refuse to yield, and they say they will battle him two against one.

Chapter 27 Uwaine fights against Sir Hue and Sir Edward, each wounding the other, for over five hours. Finally he kills Sir Edward, and Sir Hue yields. Uwaine restores the lands to the Lady of the Rock, and sends Sir Hue to Arthur's court. Uwaine recovers at the castle for half a year, and then meets Marhaus and Gawaine at the crossway as had been promised.

Marhaus's adventure, in turn, returns to the register of the battlefield rather than of courtly love. Usually, knights on quests must rely on hospitality as they venture through unknown lands. Here, this hospitality and the rest accompanying it are thwarted, when the Duke learns of Marhaus's identity. It would seem that the Duke's threat of a seven-against-one fight is dishonorable, but at the same time the Duke waits until the next day to allow Marhaus to rest up.



Here is another example of one option when one knight conquers another: the losing knight must pledge allegiance to the conqueror's master, in this case Arthur.



The damsel seems to know exactly where to lead Marhaus so that he can meet with great adventures and prove his own glory and knightly skill. Fighting giants is a particularly powerful achievement, given the disparity in strength and power between a giant and a normal knight, so Marhaus is portrayed as an even more glorious knight as a result.



After the long saga of Gawaine, both Marhaus and Uwaine seem to have a much easier time gaining the glory and honor due to them by following the code of chivalry, which here involves protecting ladies that they may find along the way. Instead of yielding, the knights choose the option of fighting to the death—perhaps the more honorable one.



Although both brothers had vowed to fight rather than yield, it is not too uncommon in these stories to see knights' courage waver once they realize just how close to death they can come—something all three of Arthur's knights have witnessed.



Chapter 28 After they meet again, the three knights ride through a forest and meet with a messenger of King Arthur, who wants to bring Gawaine and Uwayne back to court. They arrive at Camelot with Marhaus, where they share all their adventures. For Pentecost Nimue brings Sir Pelleas with her. Pelleas gets the prize at the annual jousting, followed by Marhaus. The two are both made knights of the **Round Table**, since two knights had been killed that year. Much later, Sir Tristram would fight against Sir Marhaus on an island, and Marhaus would be killed. Pelleas would be one of the four to achieve the **Sangreal**, and the Lady of the Lake would make it so that he never had to fight against Sir Launcelot.

The tale of the adventure of the three knights, Gawaine, Uwayne, and Marhaus, comes to a close, as it seems that Arthur has forgiven Uwayne for any potential treachery related to his mother, Morgan le Fay, or at least has accepted Uwayne's innocence in the matter. Pentecost, as we've learned, is the time of the year when all knights return to court to relate the stories of their adventures, and for Arthur to replenish the Round Table after having inevitably lost knights due to battles over the course of the year. Once again Malory steps back here and summarizes some future events of his tale (although Pelleas doesn't really appear again, and certainly isn't mentioned as a part of the Sangreal quest).



BOOK 5

Chapter 1 King Arthur rests after many long wars. Then, during a feast, twelve old men come as messengers from the Emperor Lucius at Rome, commanding Arthur to send tribute. If he refuses, Lucius will make a great war against Arthur's land. Arthur respects the Romans, so he treats the messengers well, and draws his council together. Arthur says he'll never pay tribute to Rome.

Once again, Arthur is given little chance to rest between wars before he once more finds himself needing to defend his honor. This is a touchy subject, since at this time England is still ruled by the Catholic Church, but religious and royal sovereignty are already seen to be clashing.



Chapter 2 King Anguish of Scotland says that when the Romans reigned over his lands they extorted the people unfairly. He says he'll pledge 20,000 soldiers to Arthur to fight against Rome. The other kings and knights at the feast agree and pledge thousands of men themselves. Arthur returns to the messengers and tells them he won't pay tribute, since he has sovereignty over his own empire: he will take his army to Rome to fight. Emperor Lucius is furious when he hears, but one of his senators says that he is worried they have provoked Arthur's wrath: Arthur is the noblest king of all and is likely to conquer the world. Lucius decides to send for all the subjects and allies of Rome to fight with him, as well as 50 giants.

Already it seems that other realms near England have started to feel repressed by the far-away forces of Rome. Emperor Lucius (and this entire following sequence) is entirely mythical (there is no historical evidence for it), though Lucius is certainly based upon other Roman emperors of the time, who saw all the lands outside of Rome as belonging to "barbarians." This huge impending war essentially boils down to a matter of honor, as Lucius cannot turn back now that Arthur has insulted him.



Chapter 3 Arthur gathers his army together, and ordains two governors, including Sir Constantine, to govern the kingdom while he's gone, along with his Queen Guenever, who faints away in sorrow when Arthur leaves. Before departing, Arthur names Sir Constantine as his heir.

Guenever and Arthur both know that, while Arthur has vowed to defend his kingdom's honor, this might be at the cost of his life, in which case he would want to leave the kingdom more stable than it was when he inherited it. Constantine doesn't appear again until the end of the book, when he does indeed become king after Arthur's death.



Chapter 4 In his ship, Arthur dreams of a dragon that kills many of his people and bathes the land and waters in flame. Then a black boar seems to rise from the east, a hideous beast, and fights against the dragon until both are bloody. Then the dragon strikes the boar on a ridge, exploding it into nothing more than a powder that spreads over the sea. Arthur sends for a philosopher, who tells him that the dragon is himself, with the colors of his wings the kingdoms he's won, and his tail the knights of the **Round Table**. The boar is a tyrant whom Arthur will have to fight against.

Chapter 5 A man comes to Arthur and tells him that a giant has been killing people in the country of Constantine for seven years, and now has kidnapped the Duchess of Brittany, the wife of Arthur's cousin Sir Howell. He points to two great fires in the distance and says he'll find the giant there. Arthur calls for Sir Kay and Sir Bedivere, and tells them to prepare themselves. Armed, they ride fast to Saint Michael's mount, where Arthur finds a sorrowful widow. She says there is a devil nearby whom no one can conquer. Arthur says he comes from King Arthur's court, and she says the giant lusts after Guenever.

Arthur continues onto a hill where he sees the giant gnawing at a man's limb, and baking damsels and young children on a skewer. Arthur yells out insults at him, and the giant rises up and strikes at the king with a club. Arthur carves out the giant's belly, but then the giant catches Arthur in his arms and crushes him. Writhing, Arthur strikes him with a dagger, killing him. Kay and Bedivere cut off the giant's head and bear it on a platter to Sir Howell, who thanks God and the knights. Arthur tells Howell to build a church on the same hill. As he is resting, two messengers say that the Roman emperor Lucius has entered France, and is destroying many people and towns.

Chapter 6 Arthur sends Sir Gawaine, Sir Bors de Ganis, Sir Lionel, and Sir Bedivere to Lucius to tell him to stop, or else to prepare to battle Arthur's own men. Lucius tells them to tell Arthur that he will subdue all of Arthur's men. Gawaine angrily says that all of France should fight against Lucius. A Roman knight mocks him, saying that Britons are proud and boastful: this angers Gawaine even more, and he cuts off his head. Gawaine and the others race off with the Romans chasing after them.

Arthur often seems to have powerful and enigmatic dreams like this, dreams that are used as mysterious symbols for what may follow. A philosopher can be an interpreter of dreams in this society, able to define what the strange elements of the dream might mean. The philosopher parses out much of the dream, but still cannot foretell Arthur's ultimate destiny in the war.



Although Arthur has been preparing to fight the armies of Rome, he is quickly sidetracked by another adventure—a quest that he feels himself obligated to fulfill, especially because of his family ties. They move to France (Mont Saint-Michel is the present-day name of the mountain), and are further instructed by a woman in mourning, a common motif throughout these stories as Arthur's knights must intervene to avenge women's lost lovers.



This is the first scene since the early books when King Arthur, rather than remaining at court in his throne and watching over his knights, actually participates in an adventure and a quest of his own—proving that he is still the worthy king of England who pulled the sword from the stone as a young boy. The church to be built is a typical way for Arthur to commemorate his prowess, balancing both his royal might with his sense of holiness as a Christian.



After the interlude with the giant, Arthur is aware that Lucius is beginning to gain momentum and hubris and must be stopped. But once again, Gawaine's hot temper gets the better of him, as he proves unable to be a coolly diplomatic player and instead embraces revenge—which now only puts the group into greater danger. Gawaine's stubbornness and temper will ultimately contribute to the downfall of the kingdom, and he seems like a “dishonorable” knight in many ways, but he is still Arthur's nephew and so one of the more important knights in the book.



The Romans gather their army and capture Sir Bors de Ganis, but Gawaine and another knight rescue them. Gawaine sends for Arthur for help. Before Arthur arrives, Gawaine and the others manage to make the Romans flee, though Gawaine himself is wounded. Over 10,000 of Romans are slain, so the Britons rejoice. They send many prisoners to Paris.

Chapter 7 Lucius learns of the route the Roman prisoners are taking, so he sends 60,000 men to rescue them. Sir Launcelot and Sir Cador, in charge of the prisoners, send a knight to scout the woods, and he sees the massive Roman camp. Launcelot and Cador have only 10,000 men, but they kill many Romans. Arthur praises them for their courage in fighting despite being overmatched, and Launcelot says that it would be shameful not to fight.

Chapter 8 Meanwhile, one of the Roman soldiers had escaped to tell Lucius that it would be better to withdraw, but Lucius says this would be cowardly. He tries to restore confidence in his men before another massive battle, and meanwhile Arthur does the same. The battle lasts a long time, with bloodshed on both sides, until Arthur catches sight of Lucius and rides to him, cutting off his head with **Excalibur**. The Romans begin to flee, but the Britons chase them down and kill them all: over 100,000 men. Then Arthur buries Lucius—as well as the senators of Rome, the Sudan of Syria, and the Kings of Egypt and Ethiopia—with extravagant funerals. Arthur asks three surviving senators to carry the bodies to Rome, and to report that this is his tribute and he will pay no other, not now or ever. The senators go to Rome and advise the Potestate (military tribunal) and Senate not to wage war against Arthur any more.

Chapter 19 Arthur and his men ride through Lorraine, Flanders, and into Tuscany, which they besiege since the inhabitants refuse to obey Arthur. Arthur sends several knights, led by Gawaine, to find food in the forest. Gawaine, seeking adventure, steals away and comes across an armed man with a gold and silver shield. In response to Gawaine's demand, he says he is from Tuscany, and boasts that he can easily take Gawaine prisoner. Gawaine prepares to fight him.

As a result of Gawaine's heady actions, the battles between the Britons and Romans begin more abruptly than was expected. Despite lacking their king (and despite Gawaine being wounded) the English manage to hold off Lucius.



Although Launcelot and Cador are outmatched six to one (a situation in which, for Arthur's knights, the most honorable thing would be to wait until they were evenly matched), it is just as honorable for them, in opposite circumstances, to embrace this unequal match as an opportunity to prove themselves. This is the first time Launcelot appears in person in the book, and he is already an important knight.



Lucius now finds himself in a difficult position: he most likely recognizes that he should have listened to the senator who warned him against fighting Arthur, but now that he's in the thick of battle he retains too great a sense of pride and honor to withdraw and ask for mercy. Instead, he rides into battle and gives Arthur a chance to kill him. The numbers at stake here are staggering, and rather than a purely realistic account are meant more to underline just how remarkable Arthur's (mythical) victory was, and to what extent he has spread his might over lands far beyond the British Isles. In this section, particularly, Arthur becomes a larger-than-life figure, defeating even the most powerful empire on earth at the time.



Now buoyed by their great victory against Rome and the Romans' allies, Arthur and his knights seem entirely unafraid of facing more challenges, especially when the conquered populations refuse to yield to the new conquerors, who are, to them, still no more than foreign invaders.



Chapter 10 The two men run at each other with their spears, and Gawaine deeply wounds the knight, who nevertheless manages to wound Gawaine as well. The knight cries that anyone wounded with his blade will never be able to stop bleeding. He says that if Gawaine helps him and christens him, he will tell Gawaine how he can be healed. His name is Priamus, descended from Alexander the Great, and he has never believed anyone could fight better than he could. Gawaine shares where he comes from, and Priamus, impressed, warns him that the Dukes of Lorraine and Lombardy and the Saracens of Southland, 60,000 in all, are close by preparing for battle, so they should slip away.

Priamus and Gawaine ride to a distant meadow, where Priamus takes out a vial full of waters from Paradise (the Garden of Eden). He washes all their wounds with the water, healing them. They then return to Gawaine's companions, and Gawaine suggests they prepare to fight against the Saracens.

Chapter 11 Gawaine goes with an earl, his knights and Priamus's knights to join the forces against the Saracens. A giant kills many Britons, but they kill many more, finally conquering: they return to Arthur with prisoners and treasure.

Chapter 12 Gawaine introduces Priamus to Arthur and tells him of their adventure. Arthur makes him a knight of the **Round Table**. Then they lay siege to a city until a duchess with other ladies come kneel before Arthur and ask for mercy. Arthur calls for a halt, and the son of the city's duke brings Arthur the castle keys. Arthur seizes control of the town and sends the duke to Dover to be a prisoner there. Then, he appoints lords to rule over that land and continues on to Rome.

On the way they lay siege to the city of Urbino, though Arthur orders his men not to do harm to any women. When the people of Milan hear about Arthur and his conquering armies, those inhabitants send Arthur money and promise to be his subjects. Arthur and his men also gain many towns and castles in Tuscany. Finally the cardinals and senators in Rome ride out to meet Arthur and ask for peace, agreeing to crown him emperor. Arthur is crowned emperor by the pope in Rome and establishes his kingdom from Rome into France. He appoints dukes and earls, then gathers all of them and says that the conquest is achieved and it is time to return home. They must not rob or do harm along the way. They return via Sandwich, where Guenever greets Arthur joyfully.

This scene shows yet another possible outcome of a battle between two unknown knights. Priamus only reveals his identity once both he and Gawaine are wounded, but it is this identity that gives both knights a possibility of surviving. Sharing their lineages, both Gawaine and Priamus respect each other even more, since they know they each come from noble blood. Gawaine's new ally also shares that Arthur's men are hardly out of danger already.



Christian symbolism and magic are again closely tied: here, the Garden of Eden serves as a material, historical, and symbolic site with such a holy and magical status that it retains the power to heal deadly wounds.



Though the gathering enemy troops had sounded ominous, with Gawaine's new allies they are relatively easily subdued, helping to cement Arthur's hold over the region.



Arthur and his knights are not yet finished with laying siege to any castles they can—they consider it their right as conquerors—but the book also takes care to show how to the inhabitants of the conquered castles these actions are seen as unjust. Yet "might is right" is essentially the rule in Arthur's world.



Little by little, Arthur seems to recall the code of chivalry that he had instilled in all his knights, but which seemed to fall by the wayside somewhat when what really mattered was to conquer the Romans and others at all cost. But it is by slowly taking over various Italian towns that Arthur manages to make the Roman leaders realize that they must come to some kind of peace with Arthur, especially now that they no longer have Emperor Lucius. With this peace treaty the present "book" comes to a close.



BOOK 6

Chapter 1 Soon afterward there are many tournaments, in which Sir Launcelot du Lake proves his prowess above all. Queen Guenever favors him above all other knights, and he falls in love with her. Launcelot decides to try to prove himself with adventures, and leaves court with his nephew Sir Lionel. They stop to rest under an apple tree and Launcelot falls asleep. Meanwhile three knights come galloping along, followed by one other, who overtakes them and strikes them to the ground and binds them. Lionel sneaks up to the knight to try to surprise him, but the knight turns and strikes Lionel to the ground, binds him, and takes all four to a castle, where they are imprisoned with many others.

Chapter 2 Sir Ector de Maris (Launcelot's half-brother) had decided to follow Launcelot to join him. On the way Ector meets a forester, who says that adventures are to be found at a nearby manor, where there is a tree above a ford from which many knights' shields are hanging. If Sir Ector strikes on a copper basin hanging there three times, he will be given directions. Ector sees the place, and notices that one of the shields is his cousin Lionel's. He vows to seek revenge, and beats on the basin. A knight sneaks up behind him, but Sir Ector strikes him with his spear. The knight congratulates him, but quickly and with great strength picks Ector from the saddle, carries him into the manor hall, and throws him to the ground.

The knight, Sir Turquine, says he'll grant Ector de Maris his life if he promises to be his prisoner, but Ector refuses. Turquine beats Ector and throws him into prison, where he meets Sir Lionel, who tells him of having left Launcelot asleep.

Chapter 3 Meanwhile, four queens approach Launcelot asleep under the apple tree, and begin to fight over who will win his love. Morgan le Fay, one of the queens, decides to enchant him to remain asleep and take him to her castle, where he can choose one of the women. When they arrive he awakens, and the queens tell him that they know that he and Guenever cannot have each other, so he must choose one of them, or else die in their prison. Launcelot declares he'll have none of them but Guenever. They leave him alone in prison.

Chapter 4 A damsel comes bearing Launcelot's dinner, and he confides his despair in her. She says that if Launcelot comes to her father's upcoming tournament and helps him win, she will free him. Her father is Bagdemagus, so Launcelot agrees. The next morning the damsel sneaks out and prepares a horse for him. Launcelot rides towards Bagdemagus, and rests to sleep at a pavilion on the way.

Although we have heard this love story prophesied by Merlin, this is the first time that we see Launcelot's love for Guenever explicitly discussed. In many ways, this is a hopeless love, since Guenever is bound to the king, whom Launcelot also loves and has pledged allegiance to. Thus leaving court for a quest seems the far easier move than pursuing an affair—although Launcelot hopes to “win” Guenever's love through his knightly prowess. Barely do the knights depart than they meet with a more serious adventure than they'd asked for.



Launcelot had left court largely because of his love for Guenever, whereas Ector de Maris seems more generally interested in whatever adventures he might meet with. Throughout these tales, scattered through the forests and on the paths are characters that seem placed precisely to direct knights towards such adventures, as if they were waiting for the questers to arrive. In this case, Ector's ambivalent journey soon turns concrete when he has a chance to avenge Lionel.



It seems that Turquine has been successful in kidnapping a number of Arthur's knights, all of whom have met with this rather unpleasant adventure in their travels.



Morgan le Fay often seems to turn up when it is a matter of tricking men into doing her will. Launcelot, as we will see, tends to be popular among women, most of whom have heard of his infatuation with Guenever, but who believe that that affair is doomed anyway. This is the first time we see proof of just how loyal Launcelot will remain to the queen, despite the illegitimate nature of his love.



Although other women have succeeded in keeping Launcelot confined, they cannot account for the independent will of someone like this young woman, who is eager to offer a favor to Launcelot in exchange for assistance in another matter.



Chapter 5 The knight to whom the pavilion belongs arrives, slips into the bed and begins to kiss Launcelot, who springs up and wounds him with his sword. The knight says that his lady was supposed to have met him in this bed, and Launcelot apologizes for hurting him. The lady arrives and cries out at realizing that her lord, Belleus, is wounded. But Belleus reassures her that Launcelot is a good man. The lady asks Launcelot if Arthur can make Belleus a knight of the **Round Table**. Launcelot agrees, and in the morning he rides to Bagdemagus' Abbey.

Chapter 6 The daughter of Bagdemagus meets Launcelot and sends for her father, who embraces him. Since there will be some of Arthur's knights fighting against Bagdemagus, Launcelot says he'll use another shield so as to remain unknown. On Tuesday the tournament begins, and twelve of Bagdemagus' men are killed, while only six of the King of Northgalis' men are killed.

Chapter 7 Launcelot du Lake then enters the fight and strikes down the King of Northgalis. Launcelot and Sir Mordred (one of the knights fighting against Bagdemagus) joust together, and Launcelot hurls him off his saddle. Then Launcelot strikes down twelve more knights, and the others yield to Bagdemagus. Each party departs, and in the morning, after much celebration, Launcelot leaves to seek out his brother Lionel. Before he does, he tells Bagdemagus' daughter to tell him if she ever needs another favor.

On the way Launcelot meets a beautiful damsel and asks what adventures there are in this area. She tells him that there is a knight in these parts, Sir Turquine, whom no one has ever conquered. He has about 64 knights of Arthur's court imprisoned. The damsel asks Launcelot, after he goes after Turquine, to return and help her and other damsels who are dealing with a false knight. Launcelot agrees, and she leads him to the ford with the copper basin, which Launcelot strikes. From the distance rides Turquine, with Sir Gaheris, Gawaine's brother, tied and bound beside him. Launcelot says Turquine has shamed the knights of the **Round Table** and must pay, but Turquine says he defies the entire fellowship of the Round Table.

Chapter 8 The two men race at each other and draw their swords, striking and wounding each other for hours. Finally they stop to rest, and Turquine says that he only knows of one jousting knight who is so skilled: his mortal enemy. Turquine declares that if this man (Launcelot) is not his enemy, he will deliver all his prisoners to him and will make peace. Turquine then says his enemy's name is Sir Launcelot du Lake, since Launcelot killed Turquine's brother Sir Carados, and Turquine has vowed to avenge this death.

This is another case of mistaken identity, though in this specific instance the effect is more comic than tragic, even if a certain amount of bloodshed seems unavoidable. Belleus shows himself to be level-headed (unlike Gawaine, for instance) in understanding that Launcelot's actions were not of evil intention, so he does not think he needs to avenge himself against the knight.



Now that he has been freed from the queens' prison, Launcelot must fulfill his end of the bargain to Bagdemagus's daughter by fighting for him—even though, in this case, this might mean fighting against some of his allies who are also knights of the Round Table.



While Launcelot has appeared in these stories before, only now do we get a true sense of just how successful he is on the battlefield (something that Merlin, as we recall, had predicted in one of his prophecies). Here he uses such prowess for good, even though it is against his own allies: we are meant to privilege his defense of a lady above all.



Having crossed one adventure off his list, Launcelot continues on to another. While the knights of the Round Table go off to the forest in search of adventure, presumably to test their own strength and courage, it is hardly the case that they are alone in a wild land. Instead they are constantly encountering each other, and having to come to the rescue of each other—which turns out to be just another opportunity to both prove one's chivalry, prowess, and loyalty to the fellowship.



We have grown accustomed to such revelations of secrets, given that it is so difficult for knights to determine each other's identity from beneath their armor. In that sense, it is surprising that Turquine would even confide in the unknown knight about his mortal enemy, though the possibility that this knight might help him against Launcelot is probably too great to pass up.



Launcelot declares that he is indeed Launcelot, and will defy Turquine. Turquine says they won't depart until one of them is dead. They fight for hours and hours until all the ground is blood-spattered.

Chapter 9 Finally Turquine stumbles, and Launcelot leaps upon him and slices his neck open, killing him. Launcelot then goes to Gaheris and asks to borrow his horse, which Gaheris permits, thanking Launcelot for saving him. Launcelot tells Gaheris to free the prisoners and to wish them well from him, until they all meet again at court. Launcelot departs and Gaheris easily takes the keys from the porter, and he opens the prison door and shares the story of Launcelot with the prisoners. Sir Lionel, Ector de Maris, and Sir Kay leave immediately to try to find Launcelot.

Chapter 10 Launcelot returns to the damsel (who told him about Turquine), and she tells him that a knight in these parts is robbing and raping women. To Launcelot, this is against the order of knighthood. He tells the damsel to ride forward as if she's alone, and he'll rescue her if need be. After a while the knight rides up and snatches the damsel from her horse. Launcelot overtakes him and they both draw their swords, but Launcelot kills the knight quickly. The damsel thanks Launcelot and blesses him. Before she leaves she says she's heard that Launcelot only loves Queen Guenever and that Guenever has enchanted him not to love anyone else. He tells her that it will not suit him to leave the life of a traveling knight and remain home with a wife. On the other hand, he doesn't want to anger God by sleeping with many women and not getting married.

Launcelot continues alone into the forest until he comes across a troll ("churl") under a bridge, who lashes at him with a club. Launcelot cuts off his head, but on the other side of the bridge the inhabitants of a village cry that he's killed the porter of their castle.

Chapter 11 Launcelot ignores them and continues to the castle. Two giants approach him, but Launcelot kills them. He enters the castle, where dozens of ladies kneel and thank him for saving them from their imprisonment. They've been forced to work night and day weaving silk. Launcelot tells them his name so that they might spread the news of his glory. They tell him that the castle is named Tintagil, and it belonged to the Duke of Cornwall, the man who had married Igraine before she married Uther and had Arthur.

Launcelot does not allow the ruse to go on for too long, and instead reveals his true identity with a flourish, leading to a great battle.



Throughout the book, it will be the sign of a great test for a knight to attempt to battle against a knight whom no one has ever conquered before. This is a test that Launcelot often takes up, and whenever he does so the winning streak of the other knight seems to end, as Launcelot is generally considered the "greatest knight." Turquine has temporarily stopped other knights of the Round Table from pursuing their own adventures, but now they can all resume their quests.



Having pointed out a possible adventure to Launcelot, the damsel now requires a related task of him—not only that he save other knights but that he defend women, as the order of chivalry requires him to do. Launcelot is nothing if not a chivalrous knight, and he will never refuse such a favor. However, this society's intermingled relationship between courtly love and battlefield defense grows complicated for Launcelot, who wants to defend ladies' honor without winning their love as a result. Remarkably, he ends up confiding some of his doubts about a relationship with Guenever—or anyone else.



Venturing into unknown lands, Launcelot at times finds it difficult to distinguish between true enemies and legitimate defenders: his strategy seems to be to kill first and ask questions later.



We don't learn what Launcelot is thinking here, and instead we (along with the narrator) follow him into the heart of the castle. Launcelot seems unwilling to let a potential quest go without following it to its logical endpoint. We then learn that in fact this is not an unknown land, but rather home to the first husband of Arthur's mother.



Launcelot continues on into many strange, wild lands. One night he lodges with an old woman. Late at night he sees through the window three knights overtaking one man. He emerges and realizes the lone knight is Sir Kay. Launcelot defeats Kay's attackers so that they ask for mercy. Launcelot agrees on the condition that they yield to Sir Kay: they initially protest, but then agree, and Launcelot tells them to go to Queen Guenever and say they were sent from Kay to be their prisoners. Kay kneels down and thanks Launcelot for saving his life twice. They rest together, but in the morning Launcelot departs early alone, disguising himself Kay with Kay's harness.

Chapter 12 Launcelot rides out of the forest and into some meadows, where he sees a long bridge and pavilions on which three white shields and spears are hanging. One knight at the pavilion thinks Launcelot is Sir Kay and rides out to joust with him. They clash and Launcelot strikes him to the ground, upon which the knight realizes that this is not Kay. His companions come to help him, but Launcelot succeeds against them. He has mercy on them instead of killing them, and tells them to go to Guenever as prisoners, and to say that Kay sent them.

Chapter 13 Launcelot rides into the forest and encounters knights of Arthur's court, Gawaine, Uwaine, Ector de Maris, and Sagramour le Desirous. Sagramour decides to test the strength of Kay (whose shield Launcelot still wears), but Launcelot evades him and strikes him down, as well as Ector after him. Uwaine decides this knight must have slain Kay, as Launcelot strikes down Gawaine as well. Gawaine says the knight must be Launcelot, and they decide to let him go on.

Chapter 14 Launcelot continues into the forest and sees a black brachet, which he chases over a bridge into a manor. In the manor the brachet comes to lick the wounds of a dead knight lying in the hall next to a weeping woman. The woman says the knight is her husband, Sir Gilbert the Bastard. Launcelot then departs into the forest and meets a damsel, who asks him to help her wounded brother, who has just killed Sir Gilbert. A sorceress had told her that her brother's wounds could only be cured if a knight went into the Chapel Perilous and took from it a cloth covering a corpse and a sword. The damsel says her brother's name is Sir Meliot de Logres, and since he is of the **Round Table**, Launcelot says he'll help her.

Launcelot's adventures are portrayed as too numerous to recount them all in detail. What we do learn tends to be related to other knights of the Round Table, here Arthur's adopted brother, whom Launcelot is able to rescue in a typical case of luck and circumstance (as well as knightly prowess). It is also typical for Launcelot to send conquered knights to Guenever instead of Arthur, which is justifiable but also suggests his feelings for her.



Disguised as Sir Kay, Launcelot is able to court various other adventures, taking advantage of the relationship between shield and identity as a shorthand for knights to determine who other knights are. Here Launcelot also shows his graciousness in choosing not to gain greater glory for himself but instead for his fellow knight Kay, still as a gift to Guenever. All this seems rather embarrassing for Kay, however, especially as he is usually portrayed as a knight who isn't especially skilled.



Interestingly, the knights' suspicion that their mighty opponent is Launcelot does not lead to any moment of revealed identity, but rather to the knights of Arthur's court allowing Launcelot to pass on undetected. Perhaps they want to collude in this game of mistaken identity, or perhaps there is some jealousy at work here as well.



Here the pastime of hunting converges with that of questing. Often animals like brachets are less innocent than they appear, and they seem to lead knights to greater knowledge and to reveal possible adventures. It is also typical in these stories for knights to encounter one isolated event that turns out to be closely related to other events that follow—here, for instance, the battle between Sir Meliot and Sir Gilbert—that a knight like Launcelot has to slowly piece together.



Chapter 15 Launcelot continues on to the Chapel Perilous, where he sees many knights, who all charge towards him. But as Launcelot approaches them they scatter and leave a path for him to enter the dimly lit chapel, where he takes the cloth and sword lying by a dead knight. On emerging, the knights say he must lay down the sword or die, but Launcelot refuses and passes right through them again. Then he comes to a damsel, who likewise orders Launcelot to lay down the sword, or he'll never see Guenever again. The damsel orders Launcelot to kiss her, and he refuses. She says she's loved him for seven years, and confesses that if he had kissed her he would have died, and she could have cared tenderly for his body and kept it close to her. Frightened, Launcelot rides away quickly. The woman dies of grief in two weeks.

Launcelot meets Sir Meliot's sister, and she weeps with joy as they approach the wounded man. Launcelot touches his wounds with the cloth and sword, and he is cured. He departs the next morning, vowing to meet again at Pentecost at Arthur's court.

Chapter 16 Launcelot rides through valleys until reaching a castle, where he sees a falcon above him. The bird gets caught on a branch, and a lady emerges. She asks Launcelot to help her get the hawk, or else her husband, Sir Phelot, will be furious. Launcelot takes off his armor and climbs into the tree to free the hawk. At that moment Phelot emerges and declares that he'll kill Launcelot. Launcelot says that Phelot should be ashamed to kill an unarmed man. Phelot attacks him, but Launcelot cuts off a branch from the tree and strikes Phelot on the head. Launcelot takes Phelot's sword from his hand and cuts off his head. The lady swoons, and Launcelot quickly leaves.

Chapter 17 Riding away, Launcelot sees a knight chasing a lady with a sword, and the lady calls to Launcelot to rescue her. Lancelot puts himself between them, saying if the knight, Pedivere, wants to kill the lady, he will have to kill him first. Pedivere says the lady has been unfaithful, but she says it's a lie. The lady asks Launcelot not to trust Pedivere, since he has no mercy, but Pedivere swears to obey Launcelot. They all ride together, but then the knight points to the distance and cries that armed men are approaching. As Launcelot is distracted, Pedivere lops off his lady's head. Launcelot shouts that Pedivere is a traitor and strikes the man to the earth, at which Pedivere begs for mercy. Launcelot has him swear to always keep his lady's head with him and not to rest until he arrives before Guenever. When Pedivere reaches Arthur's court, Guenever exclaims that what he did was a shameful, horrible deed. She tells Pedivere to go to Rome for penance, which he does.

The group of knights charging towards Launcelot seems to be more of an opportunity to test his courage than a fellowship meant to stop Launcelot from entering the chapel at all costs. The fact that Launcelot is able to pass right through them without being harmed suggests that they may even be a mirage or enchantment. Both these knights and the damsel seem bent on tricking Launcelot into either leaving or remaining in the chapel to die. The damsel's pained vow is another example of the book's obsession with the strange, sorcerer-like powers (or at least desires) of women.



Though Launcelot has agreed to help Meliot's sister since he is of the Round Table, what is more important to him is to assist ladies in distress whenever he can.



Launcelot's preference of helping ladies in harm rather than being cautious about his place regarding the other men in their lives is clear here. Phelot is acting pretty rationally within the logic of the time, since another man has dared to assist the lady that is his rightful "property." Launcelot, however, feels justified in killing Phelot, given that the latter has broken any kind of order of chivalry by threatening to kill Launcelot unarmed.



A number of different codes of ethics and moral action come to clash here. On the one hand, adultery is considered utterly shameful, and Pedivere's desire to kill his unfaithful wife has a number of precedents in the legal, ethical, and even religious systems of the time. At the same time, Launcelot is portrayed as similarly justifiable in wanting to defend the lady's honor. What ultimately makes Pedivere's behavior in need of profound repentance is his trickery, which is portrayed as an utterly shameful dishonor—rather than fighting Launcelot for the life of the lady, Pedivere tricks him and fulfills his will anyway. Launcelot's merciful actions are a great contrast to such behavior.



Chapter 18 Launcelot arrives in Camelot for Pentecost, reuniting with all the other knights. They all share stories of their adventures, all bearing witness to Launcelot's greatness.

Pentecost is a natural ending and beginning point in these stories, marking a time in the calendar year when the knights can regroup and rest.



BOOK 7

Chapter 1 Arthur's tradition at Pentecost is not to eat until he's heard of or seen a great marvel. That day, Gawaine sees three men and a dwarf approaching the castle, and he tells Arthur that they can now eat. Two men then enter into the feasting hall, bearing on their shoulders a handsome young man, and everyone marvels at his appearance. The young man greets Arthur and asks him to give him three gifts, one now and two a year from now. Arthur tells him to ask, and the man asks for food and drink for a year. Arthur grants this gladly, though the man refuses to give him his name. Sir Kay suspects that this is a villain, and names him Beaumains ("Fair-hands").

It's suggested that the three men and a dwarf that Gawaine sees are the same as those who enter the hall, as a dwarf will later be associated with Beaumains, and probably just isn't mentioned the second time. Pentecost, as well as being a time for the knights to recoup, is also a chance for adventures to come to Arthur's court, rather than having the knights go off in search of them themselves. One common way that these adventures take place is through the appearance of an unknown person at court, often to ask for favors. This is an opportunity for Arthur to show his generosity to strangers, increasing his own honor and status. Sir Kay appears as hotheaded and rather foolish, as he does several times.



Chapter 2 Gawaine is angry with Kay for mocking Beaumains, who is now eating sadly. Launcelot and Gawaine invite Beaumains to their chambers afterward, but he refuses. He remains meek and mild throughout the year. Finally, a year later, Arthur is awaiting some marvel when a squire tells him a damsel is approaching. She enters the hall and asks for help for her lady, who is besieged by a tyrant, the Knight of the Red Launds. Gawaine says this man apparently has the strength of seven men. Arthur says he cannot allow his knights to go unless he learns the name of the damsel's lady and where she lives.

The narrative sometimes makes large chronological jumps, skating past a full year spent without many adventures, when the knights are settled at court. This time lapse serves the purpose of letting the knights get to know Beaumains, and—except Sir Kay, whose teasing is not considered kindly among the others—recognize that he is a good knight. At Pentecost, a natural time of transition, the adventures will begin again.



Chapter 3 Beaumains says he must now ask for two more gifts. First, he asks to undertake the damsel's adventure, and secondly, he asks to be made a knight of Launcelot du Lake. Arthur agrees, but the damsel is upset that she is only granted the "kitchen page" to help her, and she departs. A dwarf then arrives bringing a horse and fine armor to Beaumains. Beaumains and the dwarf ride out after the damsel.

As is often the case, external factors like dress and position are considered to represent internal character as well as social status and honor. Arthur may recognize Beaumains' legitimacy, but the damsel refuses to look past these external signs and accept him.



Chapter 4 Sir Kay rides after Beaumains, against the wish of Launcelot and Gawaine. Beaumains sees him and says he is an ungentle knight. Kay runs toward Beaumains with his spear, but Beaumains hits him with the blunt edge of his sword so that Kay falls down as if dead. Beaumains takes Kay's sword and shield. Launcelot comes up behind Kay, and the two fight on foot. Launcelot marvels at Beaumains' strength, and finally suggests they call a truce.

This is the first time Launcelot has not actually conquered a knight with whom he's fought: the truce reveals just how remarkable Beaumains is on the battlefield. Kay's desire to pursue him stems from petty considerations like jealousy and suspicion, as once again Kay appears in an unfavorable light.



Chapter 5 Beaumains asks Launcelot to give him a knighthood: Launcelot says he must know his true name. He says he is Gareth of Orkney, Gawaine's brother. Launcelot is pleased, and makes Gareth a knight before fetching Kay and returning home, where the others scorn Kay.

Finally Beaumains reveals his identity, one that helps to explain his great prowess, and that situates him as a proper knight worthy of praise among the others of Arthur's court. It's naturally assumed that no one could be a true knight and have such skill without also being of noble blood. Gareth is another important example of someone purposefully disguising themselves in order to prove their merit.



Gareth (still referred to as Beaumains) continues with the damsel, who complains of his shabby clothes and ignoble demeanor. However much she might insult him, Beaumains says, he has sworn to undertake her adventure, so he won't leave. Suddenly a man comes racing towards them, saying that six thieves have kidnapped and bound his lord. They ride together towards the captured knight, and one by one Beaumains kills all the thieves. The knight thanks him and asks how he can reward him, but Beaumains says he has already been made knight, so he needs nothing else. He and the damsel lodge at the knight's estate that night, and the knight feels ashamed at the damsel's continued complaints about Beaumains.

While the revelation of Beaumains's identity to Launcelot has solidified his reputation at court, this damsel is apparently unaware of their conversation, and Beaumains prefers to withstand her constant complaints and ridiculing rather than reveal to her exactly who she is. The narrative shows that Beaumains's actions should stand as a proxy for his identity, and the fact that the damsel refuses to accept this puts her in the wrong. At the same time, the damsel's insults also add elements of comedy to the tale.



Chapter 6 The next morning Beaumains and the damsel ride out across a river, which two knights are guarding. Beaumains kills them both and leads the damsel across, and she is grudgingly impressed, though she says his victory was from luck. They ride towards a black laund (field), next to a black hawthorn and black shield and spear.

The damsel's continued refusal to accept that Beaumains is a worthy knight characterizes her as stubborn and ungrateful, especially as he continues to defend her against marauding knights along the way.



Chapter 7 There is the Knight of the Black Launds, who asks the damsel about this knight of Arthur. She says Beaumains is only a kitchen knave: she'd be grateful to be rid of him. Hearing of his jousting success, the Knight says he will not kill Beaumains, but will have Beaumains leave his horse and harness with him. Beaumains declares he is a born gentleman and will prove it. They fight and Beaumains is wounded, but eventually kills the Black Knight. The damsel despairs that Beaumains has killed such a good knight, and tells him to flee, but Beaumains refuses to do so.

The damsel is apparently on Beaumains's side, since she is leading him to her mistress to be saved, and yet here she casually submits him to the will of the Black Knight, who, with his menacing armor and stellar reputation, seems much more valuable to her than a "kitchen knave" could be. Even Beaumains's ability to kill him is an opportunity not for the damsel to change her mind, but rather to bemoan the other knight's death.



Chapter 8 A knight approaches and asks after his brother, the Knight of the Black Launds, which the damsel says Beaumains has killed. This knight, the “Green Knight,” cries that Beaumains is a traitor, and, arming himself with a green shield and spear, races towards Beaumains. They joust and wound each other. The damsel says it is shameful for a kitchen knave to do so well against the Green Knight. Beaumains is ashamed of her outburst, and he strikes the Green Knight even harder until he begs for mercy. Beaumains says only a word from the damsel will save him. She refuses several times, but as Beaumains makes as if to kill him, she asks him not to slay the Green Knight, and Beaumains frees him. The knight invites them to his estate to spend the night.

Finally the damsel's unrelenting criticism of Beaumains seems to reach him. Losing his calm demeanor, he threatens to kill yet another of the knights that the damsel so admires and respects. Now the damsel is in an uncomfortable position: she doesn't want to have to show any submission to Beaumains, but she still wants to save the life of the Green Knight. The Green Knight, for his part, seems suitably impressed by Beaumains' willingness to show mercy to him, leading to his hospitality.



Chapter 9 The damsel continues to complain about Beaumains, but the Green Knight says he must be a noble knight. In the morning the Green Knight leads them through the forest, and offers his thirty knights if they ever need help. Again, the damsel tells Beaumains to leave her, and again he refuses.

Other people that Beaumains and the damsel encounter on the way are more willing to judge Beaumains as a result of his actions, and not based on his clothing (unlike the damsel). She becomes more and more of a comic caricature as she grows more unreasonable in her disdain for Beaumains.



Chapter 10 They come across a white tower overlooking a meadow with many knights and squires at a tournament. The lord, the Red Knight, looks out the window and decides to joust with the approaching knight (Beaumains). The damsel says that Beaumains has killed the Red Knight's brother, so the lord says he will kill Beaumains. They joust for hours, until again Beaumains conquers him, and the Knight begs for mercy. Again he says the damsel must ask for mercy on his behalf, which she does. They lodge at the Red Knight's castle, and they leave the next morning, the damsel continuing to insult Beaumains.

A tournament is normally the opportunity for knights to test their strength and prowess in a friendly way, but it also is quite possible for adventures to come up like an unknown knight arriving to fight. Once the Red Knight learns what happened to his brother, he is doubly committed to fighting Beaumains. Nonetheless, Beaumains' prowess in battle is such that the Red Knight offers him hospitality even though Beaumains killed his brother.



Chapter 11 Beaumains says it is uncourteous of the damsel to keep insulting him, and asks her to stop unless he is beaten or shamed. Soon they see a great city, before which lies a meadow with many pavilions. The damsel says that the lord who owns the city holds many tournaments here. The damsel brings Beaumains to the lord, Sir Persant of Inde (the Blue Knight), who she says is the greatest knight of all, and Beaumains had better flee than fight him. Beaumains says he will prove himself rather than be shamed, and she exclaims that she doesn't know what kind of man he is, having suffered her so courteously. Beaumains says that her insults only made him want to prove himself more, just as he came disguised to court in order to prove himself.

In some ways, the damsel's constant criticisms show her to be a woman of her own mind, who refuses to subscribe to the opinions of others (even if this more positive interpretation coexists with the book's emphasis on her ungenerous, even shameful attitude towards Beaumains). But her skepticism about Beaumains' abilities also gives him the chance to prove himself as much as he can, since she leads him to and fro, meeting various knights with great reputations, and thus he can establish his identity more strongly.



Chapter 12 Beaumains meets Sir Persant and they prepare to joust, first on horseback and then on foot for hours. Finally, Beaumains conquers him, and Persant asks for mercy, which he grants him. Persant realizes that this is the man who has killed one of his brothers and won against two others. Persant says he will pay homage to Beaumains. He gives him a feast and then sends his daughter to sleep with him. But when Beaumains sees her, he tells her to leave his bed so as not to be shamed. She leaves and tells Persant, who marvels at Beaumains' noble spirit.

Chapter 13 In the morning Persant asks the damsel where she's leading Beaumains, and she says to the siege of the Knight of the Red Launds in the Castle Dangerous against her sister. Persant realizes that the damsel is Linet, and her sister is Dame Lionesse. When he learns that Launcelot has made Beaumains knight, he is impressed and praises him. Beaumains shares that his real name is Gareth of Orkney. His father was King Lot, and his brothers are Gawaine, Agravaine, and Gaheris.

Chapter 14 Meanwhile Beaumains' dwarf goes to the lady Lionesse and tells her that a knight is coming to save her, and he has already killed and defeated several knights. Lionesse sends the dwarf to a nearby hermitage to fetch wine and bread to send to the knight and to her sister Linet. The dwarf does so and then returns to the castle, where the Knight of the Red Launds asks where he's been. The dwarf tells him of the arriving knight, though he doesn't share the knight's real name. The Red Knight scorns this news, and says the knight will soon meet a shameful death.

Chapter 15 The next morning Beaumains and Linet ride towards the castle. Nearby there are 40 armed knights hanging by the neck from trees. Linet tells him not to let this scare him away, and Beaumains exclaims at this shameful custom. There is an elephant's bone horn hanging by another tree, that any invader is meant to blow to invite battle with the Red Knight. Linet suggests that Beaumains wait until noon, since now the Red Knight's seven-man strength is at its peak, but Beaumains says that would be shameful, and blows the horn.

Chapter 16 Linet points out the silhouette of Lionesse in a distant castle window, and Beaumains vows to fight for her. The Knight of the Red Launds approaches and calls out that the lady is his of right, but Beaumains replies that he will rescue her or die, and that he is not afraid of the shameful sight of hanged knights. Beaumains sends Linet away, and the knights come together, their shields clashing. They both fall, then draw their swords and begin to fight.

Even after Beaumains wins out against so many of the knights whom the damsel had so admired, she doesn't truly believe he'll conquer the renowned Persant. Although losing in battle is shameful, Persant is honorable enough to recognize Beaumains' prowess and respect it. While women are clearly treated as mere possessions here, there's also a sense that refusing such an offer is noble too.



Although Linet has done all she could to sacrifice Beaumains to any knight along their path, she also is meant to lead him to the ultimate test of his prowess—perhaps a test he is only worthy to fight if he wins the earlier ones. Only after proving himself through actions does Beaumains share his illustrious lineage with Persant. It's unclear if Gawaine and his brothers recognized Beaumains and kept his identity secret, or if they have been raised apart and don't know each other.



Dwarves are often used as messengers, shuttling between people and places in order to bring news and prepare people for the coming of others. While this dwarf "belongs" to Beaumains and is working in his service, he does not think it important to conceal the news of Beaumains' coming from the Red Knight, perhaps since it would be dishonorable to arrive in secret.



It is common for knights to seek glory by winning over others, but the Red Knight's penchant for both boasting and scaring off any potential combatants is portrayed as not just beyond good taste but as unworthy of a true knight. Still, Linet and Beaumains are both aware of just how much of a challenge the Red Knight will pose to Beaumains, though Beaumains embraces this challenge.



Linet now points out to Beaumains the true reason for his coming: temporarily, at least, she gives up on haranguing him for his poor appearance and prepares him to fight. When knights knock each other off their horses, it's usually a sign that they are evenly matched and will have to continue on foot.



Chapter 17 They fight until past noon, panting and bleeding, battling until evening. Then they agree to rest, and Beaumains looks up to the castle window and is cheered by the sight of Dame Lionesse. His energy renewed, he begins fighting again, but soon the Knight of the Red Launds strikes the sword out of Beaumains' hand and he falls to the ground. Linet cries out that Lionesse is sobbing, so Beaumains leaps up and grabs his sword again, redoubling his stroke and finally striking the Knight to the earth. He is about to slay him when the Knight asks for mercy.

Beaumains reminds the Knight of the Red Launds of the shameful deaths of the 40 others. The Knight explains that he once loved a lady whose brother was killed, she said, either by Launcelot or Gawaine, and she had him promise to fight daily until meeting with one of those two knights and killing him.

Chapter 18 Many earls and knights arrive and ask Beaumains to spare the Knight of the Red Launds. Beaumains, though reluctant, admits that the Knight is less guilty since a lady made him act the way he did, so he says he will grant mercy. He decides to send the Knight to Arthur's court to ask mercy from Launcelot and Gawaine. For 10 days they rest and recover, and then the Knight goes to Arthur's court and tells of the adventures. Everyone marvels at Beaumains' successes, saying he must be noble.

Chapter 19 Beaumains asks Linet to bring him to her sister, but guards are blocking the castle entrance. From the window, Lionesse tells Beaumains to depart without her love until he is one of the knights of the **Round Table**. Beaumains cries that he doesn't deserve this, but Lionesse says she'll be true to him until he returns. Beaumains then departs with his dwarf and rides to a great lodge, where he sleeps restlessly. Meanwhile, after much thought, Lionesse sends her brother Gringamore after Beaumains to take his dwarf and find out what Beaumains' true name is. Gringamore rides out and finds Beaumains asleep, so he steals away the dwarf back to the castle.

In many earlier cases, Beaumains easily knocked a knight down or chopped off his head: that the battle lasts for hours suggests that both knights are evenly matched. Beaumains, by seeing Lionesse, has a renewed commitment to conquering the Red Knight, and in addition knows just how shameful it would be to fail to rescue a lady. This trope of a warrior seeing or thinking of a lady and then gaining renewed strength is one repeated elsewhere in the tale, and is a cliché still present in many modern stories and films.



Here we learn a little more about the identity and past of the Knight of the Red Launds, who is humanized through these details, though they still fail to entirely excuse his shameful actions.



The one thing that makes Beaumains relent is something that is a generally accepted fact in this society: that a woman, though usually lacking political or social power, can still exert a terrifying, powerful influence on a man. Letting the Knight go free also gives Beaumains a chance to prepare his own reputation at Arthur's court. The use of the word "noble" to describe Beaumains is especially telling here. Modern readers might think of the word as just meaning brave or chivalrous, but it is inextricably tied to one's bloodline as well—something totally normal for Malory's time. Those with "noble" blood were indeed expected to be more "noble" than others.



Although Beaumains has done all that he could to prove himself through his brave and impressive actions, the fact that he does not have that final status symbol—membership in the fellowship of the Round Table—seems to discount all these other aspects of his identity (a discounting that the book seems to disapprove of). Still, Lionesse also appears to reconsider, as she seeks to figure out who Beaumains really is.



Chapter 20 As Gringamore rides away, Beaumains wakes up and follows him. Gringamore arrives to the castle quickly, and Lionesse and Linet ask the dwarf about his master's lineage, on pain of imprisonment. The dwarf says that Beaumains is a king's son, Sir Gareth, and he asks the ladies to dismiss him or else his master will be angry. Linet tells her sister that it must be true, for Beaumains bore all her insults with such noble meekness.

Meanwhile Gareth arrives angrily, sword drawn, and orders Gringamore to return his dwarf. At first Gringamore refuses, but from within the castle Lionesse says to obey. Gringamore invites him inside.

Chapter 21 Lionesse greets Gareth, and the two fall deeply in love. Gringamore, after discussing with Lionesse, goes to Gareth and says he may sleep with Lionesse each night that he is there. Gareth goes to her chamber and she promises to love him.

Chapter 22 Linet is a little displeased that the lovers are being so hasty, so she uses subtle witchcraft to make it so that they cannot sleep together until they are married. That night, Lionesse comes to Gareth's bed, but when they begin to kiss, he sees an armed knight approaching. Gareth leaps out of bed and they fight, until Gareth cuts off his head. Gringamore arrives, awakened by the clamor and, displeased, tends to Gareth's wounds. Then Linet arrives and puts an ointment on the armed knight's head, sticks it back on his body, and the knight rises up. Gareth realizes that Linet must have sent the knight. He rebukes her, but she says she acted for the sake of Gareth's honor.

Chapter 23 The next night the armed knight returns, and Gareth and he fight through the whole hall until Gareth cuts off his head and slices it into a hundred pieces, which he throws out the window. He then swoons and falls, but Gringamore arrives again and heals him with a drink. Linet, meanwhile, gathers all the fragments of the knight's head and pieces them together. Gareth cries that he doesn't deserve this treatment, and Linet defends herself again.

Meanwhile, Arthur prepares to hold his Pentecost feast. The Green, Red, and Blue Knights arrive to tell of Beaumains' prowess. Then the Knight of the Red Launds comes with 600 knights to tell him that Beaumains won him in battle, and to pledge his allegiance. Arthur makes him a knight of the **Round Table** on the condition that he never again employ such shameful customs against knights.

Finally Linet, along with her sister Lionesse, find out who Beaumains really is—not by him revealing himself, but through the mediation of his dwarf. Now Linet's insults and impatience with Beaumains take on a new meaning, as she sees just how gracious he is.



Now, with all the characters aware of Beaumains' "noble" identity, the narrative switches to using his true name, Gareth of Orkney.



It is telling that only upon learning who Gareth truly is does Lionesse lose her suspicions and fall in love with him. Her feelings were not so sure when she wasn't aware of his status.



Being able to sleep with a lady outside of marriage is a touchy subject in the book, and one considered in different circumstances as an honorable gift, a shameful action, and a questionable but ultimately defensible show of love. While Linet considers this shameful, she has not entirely accounted for Gareth's agility in fighting. Linet's witchcraft here serves not so much to expose her as a sorceress but rather to suggest the wily ways that many women have to assert their own will.



Though there is something quite comic about this scene, Linet's dogged determination to stop the lovers is also meant to show just how powerful a woman can be, using the peculiar kind of "witchcraft" limited to the female sphere—though here in support of the supposedly universal values of honor and chastity.



Gareth/Beaumains' adventures are wrapping up together with the year as measured by the annual Pentecost celebration. It is in many ways remarkable, though perhaps a sign of his mercy, that Arthur bestows such an honor on the Red Knight even after his shameful actions.



Chapter 24 After granting pardons to the knights, Arthur asks where he can find Beaumains, but they don't know. Arthur says he'll make them his knights once he finds Beaumains.

Once again Arthur shows his graciousness in acknowledging the knights and even making them part of his own fellowship.



Chapter 25 They all feast, and the Queen of Orkney (Margawse) arrives. Gawaine, Agravaine, and Gaheris greet her. Margawse rebukes Arthur for having made her son, Gareth, a kitchen knave, and asks where he is. Arthur renews his commitment to find him, saying he hadn't realize who Gareth was. Margawse says she sent him with gold and silver, sumptuously dressed, but Arthur says Beaumains arrived in poverty. The day he left, though, a dwarf had brought him a good horse and armor, and they'd wondered where the riches came from.

The case of mistaken identity grows slightly more complicated, as we learn that, in fact, Margawse had sent Gareth to court with all the trappings of a nobleman. It becomes clear that it was Gareth's choice to dress in rags rather than in splendid costume, so that he would be judged by his "noble" actions rather than simply by where he came from.



Chapter 26 Launcelot says they should send a messenger to Lionesse to come to court, so that they might find Gareth. When the messenger arrives, Lionesse tells Gareth to ride forth to court, and she'll come after them. But Gareth says Lionesse should go first and suggest a tournament, whose winner will gain her heart. Lionesse goes to court and says she doesn't know Gareth's whereabouts, but suggests the tournament, since someone there will surely know of him. When she returns to her castle, however, Gareth realizes that he's too wounded to participate in the tournament. Linet vows to make him whole with her craft and ointments. They then send for the Knight of the Red Launds and Sir Persant to fight with Gareth against the kings of Arthur's court. Knights come from many lands to take part in the tournament.

Finally Arthur and the other knights have realized just how precious their supposed "kitchen knave" is, but now that they know his identity, they've lost him. Gareth is obviously plotting his return to court cleverly, ensuring one final move to prove his nobility and battlefield prowess to the knights that had looked down on him earlier. Linet seems to change her mind about Gareth, or perhaps she's simply content that Gareth and Lionesse are more concerned with planning a tournament than with finding a way to sleep with each other.



Chapter 27 Lionesse prepares for the tournament. Lionesse tells Gareth she will lend him a ring for the tournament. The ring can make things change colors, and prevents the loss of blood. Lionesse wants the ring back after the tournament, though, since it also increases her beauty. On Assumption Day, the trumpets blow to announce the start of the tournament. Knights from all over arrive to fight.

Like Linet, Lionesse possesses some of her own examples of feminine "sorcery," here in the form of a magical ring that prevents harm and increases beauty. Knights in these stories will often ride into tournaments wearing a symbol or token from the women they love.



Chapter 28 We hear of various battles between knights and of who won each jousting. Finally Gareth begins fighting, and strikes down a number of knights with a single spear. One king marvels that Gareth seems to change color at every turn, so that he cannot easily be recognized. Gareth continues to strike knights down, and Arthur himself is impressed by the "knight of many colors." He asks Launcelot to joust with him, but Launcelot says that the knight has proved himself well enough already, so he declines.

Now Gareth puts his plan into action, riding into the tournament disguised both under his armor and because he is constantly changing "colors" (probably the colors on his shield) thanks to Lionesse's ring, which is a suitable symbol for the unstable nature of Gareth's identity up until now. Launcelot, though the most successful knight in court, is content to let Gareth shine (while also proving his own graciousness and confidence).



Chapter 29 The tournament lasts a long time, and though Launcelot strikes down other knights, when he meets Gareth, Gareth does his best not to hurt him or any of the other knights of the **Round Table**. Gawaine asks Sir Tristram who the knight of many colors is. Tristram goes to the Knight of the Red Launds, who says it is the knight who won him: Beaumains, also known as Gareth of Orkney. Tristram, the Red Knight, and Sir Persant go out to help Gareth. Gareth rests to drink, and the dwarf tells him to give him his ring for safekeeping. Then all see that Gareth is in yellow colors.

Chapter 30 Arthur sends heralds to approach the yellow knight, and one cries that this is Sir Gareth. When Gareth realizes he's discovered, he lashes out more strongly, even striking down his brother Gawaine. Gareth angrily demands the ring from his dwarf, accusing him of treachery, and, disguised again, rides with him into the forest. The dwarf suggests that Gareth send the ring back to Lionesse, and ask her to be true and faithful to him. The dwarf goes to Lionesse and then returns to Gareth, and they travel through the forest together.

Chapter 31 Gareth arrives at a castle and asks for lodging, but when they learn he is of Arthur's court, they say that the duke who owns this castle is not a friend of Arthur's. Gareth promises to yield to the duke (Duke de la Rowse) should he meet him, or else joust with him to prove himself. The duchess agrees to let him in to sleep. In the morning Gareth thanks her and rides to a mountain, where he meets a knight who orders Gareth to joust with him: Gareth does so, and kills him. He then arrives at that knight's castle, where 30 are waiting to avenge their lord's death.

Chapter 32 The knights fight until only four are left alive, and these flee. Gareth continues on until he comes to a castle where he can hear many ladies weeping. A page tells Gareth that the Brown Knight without Pity is keeping them trapped: he is powerful and Gareth should flee. Gareth refuses, and goes to meet the Brown Knight, and slays him. He then lodges with the ladies in the castle. The next day he sees the ladies kneeling at tombs, and deduces that these must be their husbands' bodies. Gareth tells them to go to Arthur's court for the next Pentecost.

Continuing on, Gareth meets the Duke de la Rowse, and says he had promised to fight with him. They joust for an hour before Gareth wins. He orders the Duke to go to Arthur's court and say he sent him.

Gareth is in a bit of an uncomfortable position, since only he knows that the knights of the Round Table are not only his former hosts but also in several cases his brothers. Then begins the process of determining who this mysterious knight could be, knowledge that is limited, but is not entirely unknown, as the Knight of the Red Launds is able to share Gareth's identity with Tristram.



Gareth wanted to reveal his identity to the group slowly, and on his own terms (though it's not clear what those were), rather in the way his identity is actually exposed. But Gareth soon recuperates his agency and is able to sneak away with the dwarf. That he sends the ring back to Lionesse underlines his loyalty to her and his noble spirit in general, since he's capable of keeping promises.



Gareth now is in even a more uncomfortable position: he does not feel that he can return to Arthur's court, but at the same time he remains tied to Arthur such that any of the king's enemies can refuse Gareth lodging or force him to fight with them. Still, Gareth seems to remain largely unfazed by this new set of challenges, and is able to keep striking down enemies in his path.



As we continue along in the book, not only many of the same themes but even many of the same anecdotes will be repeated: this is a reminder of the varied nature of these stories, collected from many different places and at different times into one book by Sir Malory. Gareth shows that he is still loyal to Arthur even though he is not yet ready to return to court.



Gareth begins to accumulate a number of victories in his adventures, once again sending news of his prowess ahead of him.



Chapter 33 The Duke de la Rowse departs, and as Gareth rests, an armed knight races towards him. Gareth takes the Duke's shield and prepares himself, and they fight for two hours. Then Linet comes riding forward, and cries to Gawaine to stop fighting with his brother Gareth. Each realizing who the other is, the brothers embrace. Gawaine says that Gareth has sent more conquered knights to Arthur than the best of the **Round Table**, except Sir Launcelot. Linet comes and heals the men's wounds, then Gawaine sends her ahead to Arthur's court. Arthur rides out himself to meet Gawaine and Gareth, and they are joyfully reunited. When Margawse comes to meet them and sees Gareth, she swoons, but Gareth revives and comforts her. They all rest there for eight days. Arthur then sends for Linet's sister, Lionesse, who arrives with Gringamore and 40 knights.

Chapter 34 Arthur asks Gareth and Lionesse if they would like to marry each other: each swears eternal love. They fix a day of marriage for Michaelmas (a Christian holiday), and announce it throughout the realm. Gareth grows close to Launcelot, but avoids Gawaine, who is growing jealous of him.

Chapter 35 At Michaelmas all join for the wedding. The Green Knight arrives with 30 knights to pay homage to Gareth, as do the other conquered knights. They prepare a jousting for only unmarried knights. Arthur makes Persant, his two brothers, and Sir Ironside (the Knight of the Red Launds) knights of the Round Table. Gareth's brother Gaheris also marries Linet here. After all the jousting Launcelot and Tristram depart suddenly, displeasing Arthur.

BOOK 8

Chapter 1 Sir Tristram is the son of King Meliodas of Liones and Elizabeth, King Mark's sister. Another lady had been in love with Meliodas, so one day she enchanted him to chase a hart until he came to a castle where she took him prisoner. Elizabeth, sick with worry, followed Meliodas into the forest. There Elizabeth gave birth, but died soon after. Before she died, she told her maid to christen her son Tristram.

Once again there is a case of mistaken identity, though this time Gareth is just as unsuspecting of his enemy in armor as Gawaine is. While Linet's role has largely been one of arrogance, complaining, and trickery, she now comes in to save the brothers from each other. Gawaine is dutifully impressed by his brother's prowess, having seen the long procession of defeated knights come to court. In this happy scene, all rightful identities are restored, and the mistakes and tricks that had characterized Gareth's adventures now yield to a calmer, more joyful reunion of family and fellowship.



As Book 7 draws to a close, more loopholes are tied up, and the love between Gareth and Lionesse finally becomes legitimate—though Gawaine's jealousy suggests that more remains to be told, and the complicated web of jealousy, competition, and revenge will never be truly resolved.



With two weddings and a tournament, Arthur uses all his power of ceremony to celebrate the knights, and especially Gareth, who has done all he could to prove his identity through his actions, not heritage—the value that served to structure this section of the book and acted as its most explicit theme.



Though Tristram's name has come up in the context of various adventures of Arthur's knights, only now do we hear the story of Tristram's family (since one's lineage and blood like are still considered highly significant). Tristram's story seems like a large digression in the middle of the work (as he isn't associated with Arthur until much later), but it also acts as a further exploration of Malory's general themes of honor, love, jealousy, and knightly prowess.



Chapter 2 Merlin delivers Meliodas out of prison the morning after Elizabeth's death. In mourning, the king prepares a lavish burial for her. After seven years Meliodas marries King Howell's daughter, and has several children with her. She is jealous of Tristram, and one day decides to poison Tristram through a drink in the children's room—but one of her children drinks the poison instead and falls down dead. The queen grieves but again puts poison into another silver chalice, which Meliodas finds. As he's about to drink it, the queen suddenly seizes the chalice from him. Then the king recalls how his child died of poison, and he cries that his wife is a traitor. He pulls out his sword, but she cries that she'll reveal everything. The king orders her to be burnt at the stake, but at the last minute Tristram asks that his father grant her mercy, as Tristram himself forgives her. Meliodas agrees to spare her, but he never again shares a room with his wife, and he sends Tristram from his court.

Chapter 3 Tristram is sent into Cornwall, France to be raised by a tutor named Gouvernail. Tristram stays there seven years and learns falconry, to play the harp, and to hunt, until he is 18 years old.

Chapter 4 Meanwhile King Mark of Cornwall has grown behind in his tribute to King Anguish of Ireland, so one year he declares he won't pay. Angered, Anguish calls for Sir Marhaus, the queen of Ireland's brother, and orders him to do battle in Cornwall. Marhaus rides to Cornwall and Mark, knowing of Marhaus's prowess, is worried. His barons counsel him to seek Sir Launcelot du Lake to fight, though others say that no knights of the **Round Table** will fight against each other. Tristram hears of this, and he grows angry and ashamed that no knight in Cornwall will dare fight Marhaus.

Chapter 5 Tristram asks permission from Meliodas to fight, and though his father warns him of Marhaus's skill, he agrees. Meanwhile a squire arrives with a letter and a little brachet from King Faramon of France's daughter to Tristram, as she is in love with him, but Tristram has no interest in her, so she dies of sorrow. Meanwhile Tristram rides to Mark and asks him for a knighthood in exchange for fighting Marhaus. Mark agrees, despite Tristram's youth. But Marhaus tells a messenger that he will only fight with a knight of royal blood. Tristram replies through the messenger that he is the son of King Meliodas and Elizabeth (Mark's sister). Marhaus is glad to fight with such a gentleman, and they decide to fight at a nearby island.

Merlin reappears briefly in this section, in a flashback to the time of Tristram's death, when he used his limited powers to restore Meliodas to his proper place on the throne. Meliodas's new queen is a classic example of the jealous, conniving woman—like Morgan le Fay—portrayed as so cold that she would even risk her children's death more than once. Tristram's character, in turn, is shown to be that of a true knight, since he follows the Arthurian order of chivalry in protecting women and granting mercy. Meliodas accepts, but at the price of having to send Tristram away. It's unclear if Meliodas does this to keep Tristram safe, or if Meliodas is essentially choosing to be loyal to his wife instead of his son.



Raised in a foreign place by a man not his father, Tristram's childhood bears remarkable similarity to Arthur's, suggesting a similar nobility.



As the nephew of King Mark, Tristram feels directly implicated in the sense of dishonor that stems from the refusal of any knights in the land to defend their king. Tristram is not one of Arthur's knights at this point, and instead decides to give his loyalty entirely to his uncle.



The interlude with the daughter of King Faramon of France is meant to highlight Tristram's commitment to a cause that he has promised to fulfill: he may find himself tempted by a woman's love, but that he'll let her die of sorrow rather than yield to her underlines his single-mindedness in pursuing glory and honor both for himself and for his family. Marhaus, as is usual for characters throughout these stories, puts a high premium on where someone comes from: an enemy's royal blood will only increase the honor of fighting him.



Chapter 6 Tristram arrives at the island, where Marhaus is waiting, spear in hand, on a nearby ship. Tristram sends Gouvernail to greet Mark and tell him that he will neither flee nor yield, only win or die.

Chapter 7 Marhaus meets Tristram and warns him that he has conquered the best knights of the land. Tristram declares that he is of noble blood and has promised to deliver Cornwall from the need for tribute. He is happy to fight against such a renowned knight. The two take their spears and fight, and soon Marhaus wounds Tristram in his side. But they continue fighting fiercely for over half a day. Finally Marhaus is more tired than Tristram, and with a great strike Tristram smites Marhaus down through his helmet, so that Marhaus falls on his knees. Marhaus then rises, slowly, throws his sword and shield from him, and flees to his ships.

Tristram calls after Marhaus, saying it is shameful for him to flee. Tristram yells that he will take Marhaus's sword and shield for himself.

Chapter 8 Marhaus departs to Ireland to tend to his wounds, but a piece of Tristram's sword is lodged in his head, and it cannot be extracted, so he dies. His sister, keeping this sword piece, vows revenge. Meanwhile, Gouvernail arrives and he and Tristram return to the castle of Tintagil, where King Mark weeps over Tristram's wounds. Marhaus's spear had been poisoned, and they fear Tristram won't recover. A wise lady arrives and says that Tristram can only be healed in the same country where the poison is from. Mark, Tristram, and Gouvernail sail to Ireland, where Tristram stays in bed playing the harp. King Anguish, hearing of the knight's skill, sends for him. Tristram says his name is Tramtrist: he's been wounded in a battle. Anguish agrees to help him, saying he recently lost the world's best knight, Marhaus, in battle.

Chapter 9 Anguish puts Tristram (now referred to as Tramtrist) in his daughter's keeping, since she is a good surgeon. Her name is La Beale Isoud, and she is the fairest lady in the world. Tristram teaches her to play the harp and falls in love with her. But a Saracen (Muslim) named Sir Palomides is also in love with her and gives her many gifts, so Tramtrist is jealous.

The two knights appear to be similarly honorable as they prepare to fight as proxies for the kings. They seemingly have nothing but respect for one another, but are about to fight to the death because of the complicated rules of honor, loyalty, and war.



As we've seen before, a general motif in a knight's coming-of-age story seems to be that he must fight against a knight who is known to have conquered many worthy men. That Tristram continues fighting even after being wounded highlights his honor and commitment. Marhaus, in turn, has claimed to be illustrious, but by fleeing Tristram rather than refusing to yield he proves himself inferior. Arthur's knights are usually portrayed as naturally braver and more skilled than others, but in Tristram's story they are often the ones who come out looking bad.



Tristram is frustrated by this behavior, which he seeks to punish by taking Marhaus's armor.



Marhaus's death seems to be proper comeuppance for his apparent inability to either yield or face death once Tristram conquered him—the book often ties up such loose ends in this way, suggesting a kind of divine justice even when human beings are refused earthly justice. As this section of the book continues, we arrive at another, even more remarkable case of mistaken identity. Tristram fails even to modify his name that much, but Mark is not suspicious, and seems to accept Tristram as a proxy for his lost knight, tending to his wounds properly as a result.



The love story between Tristram and La Beale Isoud will come to structure the rest of the section, as—like the relationship between Guenever and Lancelot—it is made more difficult by competing interests, in this case Palomides and Tristram's slaying of Marhaus.



Anguish announces a tournament for his cousin, the Lady of the Launds, whose winner will marry her. La Beale Isoud tells Tramtrist of the tournament, but he says he's too weak to fight. Isoud says if he doesn't go, then Palomides will surely win. Tramtrist agrees, but says he'll go disguised. On the day of the tournament, Palomides strikes down many men. Then the same squire who had come from the king's daughter of France (the lady who had died of love for Tristram) sees Tramtrist, and falls kneeling before him. Tramtrist races over to the squire and begs him to tell no one his name.

Chapter 10 La Beale Isoud is impressed by this and loves Tramtrist more, seeing how the boy worships him. The next day she gives Tramtrist a white horse and harness to fight against Palomides with his black shield. Sir Gawaine and others watch and marvel as Tramtrist strikes down Palomides. Tramtrist then makes the squire a knight and equips him to fight as well. Palomides withdraws quietly, ashamed, but Tramtrist overtakes him and tells him to turn and fight. He then strikes down Palomides, and tells him to yield to his wishes or die. Tramtrist orders Palomides to abandon La Beale Isoud and to refrain from jousting for a year. Palomides swears.

Tramtrist turns back to the castle and meets a damsel who asks if he is Sir Launcelot, since no other man could have conquered Palomides so successfully, but Tramtrist convinces her that he is not. Shortly afterward the king and queen realize that Tramtrist had conquered Palomides, and they praise him.

Chapter 11 While Tramtrist is in the bath one day, the queen of Ireland comes across his sword, and sees a piece of the sword missing—the same that was lodged in Marhaus's head. She cries to her daughter that he is a traitor, though Isoud is ashamed of this cruel cry. The queen rejoins the fragment to the sword and races with it to the bath. She would have killed Tramtrist had not the former squire caught her.

The queen races to King Anguish and reveals what she knows. The king is sorrowful that it is such a noble knight, and he says it would be shameful to kill Tramtrist. If Tramtrist tells him who his father was, what his name is, and if he killed Sir Marhaus, he will let him depart court safely.

Chapter 12 Tristram then reveals the truth to King Anguish, who realizes that Tristram was only doing what was proper for a knight. But Anguish cannot allow Tristram to stay, given his wife's grief. Tristram thanks him for his hospitality and pledges to do him service at some point—and to defend his daughter.

La Beale Isoud's desire for Tristram to participate in the tournament is in some ways odd, since Palomides' victory would mean that he would marry the Lady of the Launds and free her to be in love with Tristram. Perhaps she simply doesn't want Palomides to gain the kind of glory that comes from triumphing in a tournament like this one. Tristram's compromise is to do battle in disguise, a usual tactic.



For La Beale Isoud, Tristram's decision not to reveal himself to others—as well as the noble way he's considered by people like the young squire—make him a worthier candidate of love in her eyes. Tristram fulfills another one of the requirements of courtly prowess by insisting that his opponents fight him face-to-face, rather than withdraw quietly and seek to avoid shame. In this way, Tristram seeks to secure Isoud for himself.



It is essential to Tristram's success at court that people eventually realize it was he who performed so well at the tournament, though it is also necessary that he not be the one to reveal his own identity.



Directly after Tristram gains honor and glory at the tournament—and after one part of his identity is revealed—it appears that he cannot cherry-pick which aspects of his identity will become evident at court, as the queen pieces together clues to his past.



Anguish is in a difficult position, strung between his wife's desire to avenge her brother Marhaus's death, and his admiration for Tristram as a successful knight.



Even though Anguish recognizes Tristram's noble character, the tragedy of this scene is that Tristram's honor is not enough to discount the painful effects of his battle against Marhaus.



Tristram goes to La Beale Isoud (now usually just referred to as Isoud) and shares everything with her. She is devastated by his leaving, and promises not to marry for the next seven years without his consent. They give each other rings and Tristram departs.

Chapter 13 Tristram leaves for Cornwall and reunites with his parents. He stays at Mark's court for a long time happily, until he and Mark both fall in love with one lady, the wife of Sir Segwarides. She prefers Tristram, and one day she sends a dwarf to Tristram to invite him to her chamber that night, but warns him to be armed. Mark, spying the dwarf, sends for him and orders him to reveal the plan. That night, as Tristram approaches the chamber, Mark and two knights race towards him. Tristram kills the two knights and strikes Mark down (not recognizing his uncle), though Mark wounds him first.

Chapter 14 Tristram continues to the lady, and they sleep together, but he hasn't bandaged his wound from King Mark, and he bleeds over the sheets. Tristram quickly departs as Segwarides is returning. But Segwarides finds the bloody sheets and realizes that a wounded knight has been there, and that his wife has betrayed him. He orders her to tell him her lover's name or else he'll kill her, so she does.

Segwarides rides after Tristram and, when he finds him, orders him to fight. They draw their swords and Tristram strikes Segwarides down. Tristram then rides to Tintagil and enters secretly so that no one will know he is hurt. Segwarides recovers and never jousts with Tristram again, since Tristram is Mark's nephew. But Mark never loves Tristram again.

Chapter 15 One day Launcelot's cousin, Bleoberis de Ganis, comes to King Mark to ask a gift: the fairest lady in his court. Mark tells him to choose, and Bleoberis chooses Sir Segwarides' wife. When her husband hears, he rides after Bleoberis. The court ladies know Segwarides' wife loves Tristram, and they say Tristram is a coward for letting her be taken away. But he says it's for her husband to deal with.

Then a squire returns, saying that Sir Segwarides is wounded to the point of death. Tristram, ashamed, rides out with Gouvernail. On the way he meets his cousin Sir Andred, who says he was sent by King Mark to fetch two knights of Arthur's court, but they beat and wounded him. Tristram vows to revenge him if he meets these two knights: Sagramore le Desirous and Dodinas le Savage.

It is difficult to see how Tristram and Isoud will be able to live together peacefully in love, but they reveal their noble characters in pledging loyalty.



It doesn't take long until Tristram seems to forget all about his vow of loyalty to La Beale Isoud. However, the book does not seem to pass judgment on this inability to remain loyal. Instead, we're meant to see this woman's love for Tristram as yet another piece of evidence in favor of his honor (women "can't help" falling in love with him), and we also start to see the jealous nature of Mark in contrast to Tristram.



Tristram's attempt to sleep with Sir Segwarides' wife is yet another example of how closely tied the worlds of love and battle are, especially when the prize he and Mark have fought over is a living, breathing human being. Now Segwarides' own honor is at stake too.



After fighting on behalf of his own honor with Tristram, Segwarides is forced to admit that his opponent is of greater prowess than he, so there's not much he can do to defend his wife. Mark's changed opinions towards Tristram are ominous.



Sir Segwarides' wife seems to be in high demand among the knights of the land. Tristram's responsibilities in terms of defending ladies are not entirely certain, since after all the lady is not his wife—but for the other ladies at court, his lover's status reaches the status of a husband.



Tristram still owes no loyalty to Arthur, and he doesn't hesitate to vow to fight against knights of Arthur's court, especially when they seem to have shamed some of Tristram's own allies.



Chapter 16 Tristram does encounter these two knights, and declares that he will do better than Sir Andred. Tristram strikes them both down, then tells them it was shameful to dishonor a knight of Cornwall. Sagramore asks Tristram to share his name, and he does, before leaving towards Bleoberis.

Tristram's triumph over Sagramore le Desirous and Dodinas le Savage seems almost nonchalant, and is yet another reminder of how his prowess exceeds that of any knight except Launcelot.



Chapter 17 Tristram calls to Bleoberis to release the lady. Bleoberis says he fears no Cornish knights, but Tristram says he's won against Sagramore and Dodinas, and this impresses Bleoberis. But he vows to fight, and they do so on foot for over two hours. As they rest, Bleoberis asks for his name, and Tristram shares it, so that Bleoberis realizes he is the killer of Marhaus and the conqueror of Palomides. When Bleoberis says he is Launcelot's cousin, Tristram says that he will fight no more for Launcelot's sake. Bleoberis suggests they have the lady choose between them, and Tristram agrees, saying she'll choose him.

"Cornish" is the adjective form of "Cornwall," and among the knights of the Round Table there are often unfavorable stereotypes associated with Cornish knights, as they are seen as somewhat lazy and unsuccessful fighters. Tristram, of course, does his part in undoing this stereotype. While he's not of Arthur's court, Tristram has great respect for Launcelot, causing him to refuse more battle.



Chapter 18 The lady says that she loved Tristram above all others, but he failed to rescue her when Bleoberis led her away, so now she'll choose Bleoberis instead. Tristram is furious. The lady tells him to leave, and asks Bleoberis to return her to the abbey where Sir Segwarides is recovering. Tristram rides to Tintagil, while Bleoberis delivers the lady.

Now Tristram's uncertainty about his duty towards a woman who isn't his wife has unpleasant, even shocking ramifications, as Sir Segwarides' wife seems to have no doubt about what Tristram should have done.



Chapter 19 King Mark now actively plots to destroy Tristram. He decides to send Tristram to fetch La Beale Isoud so that he, Mark, might marry her, thinking that Tristram might be slain that way. Tristram agrees and departs with many knights on a ship, but a storm drives them onto the coast by Camelot. That day two knights of Arthur's come to their pavilion and ask Tristram to joust. He wins against them both, and they are ashamed.

Mark's desire to marry La Beale Isoud (a decision he can make as king) seems largely one born of hatred for his nephew. We don't learn why Tristram agrees to fetch Isoud, but the journey will at least give him the chance to see her again, and perhaps he will find a way to rescue her from Mark's hand afterward.



Chapter 20 Bleoberis had summoned King Anguish to Arthur's court for treason. Arthur was abroad at the time, so he assigned King Carados and the King of Scots as judges. Bleoberis's brother Sir Blamore de Ganis accuses Anguish of killing a cousin of his. The judges give Anguish three days to respond.

While kings are usually due the greatest respect among knights, here the hierarchy seems to be challenged, as Anguish is on trial for killing a knight below him in the courtly hierarchy.



Meanwhile, a lady in great anguish comes by Tristram's pavilion. She tells him that a great lady had given her the child of Launcelot to take care of, but a knight had thrown her from her horse and stolen the child. Tristram vows to ride after the knight. He finds him and orders him to give back the child.

On the way to fetch La Beale Isoud, Tristram is held up by a number of distractions and other adventures. This is another case in which he vows to defend Launcelot, though they belong to different courts.



Chapter 21 Tristram strikes the knight to the ground and he yields. Tristram leads him and the child back to the lady and Tristram lets him go. Then Gouvernail comes to tell Tristram of the charges brought against Anguish. Tristram rejoices at the chance to serve Anguish, and sends Gouvernail to bring the king to him. They embrace and Anguish says he is afraid to fight against such skilled knights. Tristram says he will fight in exchange for a reward, and Anguish agrees.

Chapter 22 King Anguish tells Carados that he has found a champion, and he brings Tristram. Bleoberis reminds his brother Blamore that none of their family has ever been shamed in battle, and that he should die rather than be shamed. Blamore and Tristram face each other. Tristram kills Blamore's horse, and they fight marvelously on foot, as two knights never fought before. Finally, Tristram strikes Blamore so hard that he falls to the ground.

Chapter 23 Blamore cries to Tristram to slay him rather than make him yield, but Tristram is reluctant to kill him for Launcelot's sake (Blamore is Launcelot's cousin). Tristram kneels before the judges and asks them to take the matter into their hands. Anguish says he will give mercy to Blamore, but Bleoberis says that Tristram should slay him rather than shame him by granting mercy. The judges, however, tell the parties to reunite and be friends, and after that Launcelot's family is always loyal to Tristram. Anguish and Tristram leave for Ireland, where the king shares what Tristram has done for him, and La Beale Isoud is wildly happy.

Chapter 24 Tristram then asks King Anguish for his reward: that he might give him La Beale Isoud to wed his uncle Mark, as he has promised. Anguish is surprised that Tristram won't wed her himself, but Tristram says it would be shameful to break his promise. The queen gives Gouvernail a drink for Isoud and Mark to drink on their wedding day so as to love each other forever. But as Isoud and Tristram return on the ship, they see the drink, think it's wine, and drink it. This means their love will never fade.

They sail by a castle called Pluere where they are taken prisoner. According to the castle's custom, they will only be released once Tristram fights Breunor, the lord of the castle. If Breunor wins, the stranger and his lady are put to death, and if the strange knight wins, then Breunor and his lady will die.

For the moment, we don't hear any more about Launcelot's supposed child, as Tristram has to turn to more pressing concerns. He had, as we remember, vowed to serve King Anguish in any way he could in return for Anguish's kindness to him. Now Tristram seems to have the chance to gain what he wants in exchange for this service.



Bleoberis may have courted shame in stealing away Sir Segwarides' wife, but on the battlefield the rules of courtly honor are of high significance both to him and to his brother. This is one of the many battle scenes that Malory seems to take great pleasure in describing, especially when two knights are almost evenly matched.



Tristram is once again strung between competing desires and competing duties as a proper knight. On the one hand, he respects Blamore's wish to be killed rather than seek mercy, as this is what Tristram would do in his place, but on the other hand, Tristram always attempts to refrain from causing any kind of shame or dishonor that would affect Launcelot even indirectly. His choice will be important later on, as Launcelot's family now admires Tristram's loyalty.



We as readers are also meant to be surprised, and impressed, by Tristram's commitment to keeping his promise to Mark, despite the risks he took in fighting for Anguish, and despite his own love for Isoud. The love potion they drink cements the tragic irony in this situation, ensuring that Tristram and Isoud are doomed to love each other despite all obstacles.



Various foreign castles that the knights in these stories meet have strange and often cruel "customs," traditions that seem to stand in for law, and which always require courage, honor, and skill to be overcome.



Chapter 25 In prison, a knight and lady come to cheer up Tristram and Isoud, and Tristram remarks at the incomprehensible custom of the place. The knight says that another custom in the castle is that the weaker knight between two must lose his head, and the less beautiful lady lose hers. Tristram says it's a shameful custom, but his lady would never lose her head. He prepares to do battle the next day.

Sir Breunor arrives with his lady, a muffle covering her head, and asks Tristram where his lady is. Tristram says his lady is fairer, and he will prove it by fighting. When Breunor sees Isoud, he realizes no lady is fairer, but fears his own lady's head should be cut off. Tristram vows to kill them both in revenge for their shameful custom. Breunor says he repents, and will slay Tristram and take Isoud. Tristram strikes off Breunor's lady's head, saying he is only fulfilling their custom, and vows to fight Breunor to the death.

Chapter 26 Tristram strikes Breunor from his horse, but then Breunor kills Tristram's horse, and the two fight on foot for two hours until both are wounded. Tristram finally lunges at Breunor and strikes off his head. All in the castle pay homage to Tristram, but meanwhile one knight rides to Breunor's son, Sir Galahad (not Galahad, Launcelot's son), and tells him what happened to his parents.

Chapter 27 Galahad comes to fight with Tristram, and it lasts nearly half a day. Finally Tristram drives Galahad down, but then the King with the Hundred Knights comes upon Tristram. Tristram realizes he will not conquer them all, and he says to Galahad that it is shameful to fight so unequally. But Galahad says he must yield or die. Galahad tells the hundred knights to cease, as he admits his father's custom was shameful. Galahad asks Tristram his name, and tells him to go to Launcelot du Lake and pledge allegiance to him: Tristram agrees to do so, saying he desires Launcelot's fellowship.

Chapter 28 Tristram departs over the sea. Meanwhile Launcelot, riding, encounters Gawaine bound up by Sir Carados. Gawaine says that only Launcelot or Tristram can rescue him. Launcelot tells Carados to fight with him, and they clash for an hour. Finally Lancelot conquers Carados and strikes off his head, and he unbinds Gawaine. Tristram is told this story, and says he must find Sir Launcelot himself.

There often seems to be little purpose to such customs, other than that they give the castle inhabitants (and the prisoners) an opportunity to raise the stakes in judging which of the men is more powerful, and which of the women more beautiful—a custom that Tristram finds dishonorable.



Breunor's custom now backfires on him, as he finds himself unable to continue to insist that his own lady is the more beautiful. Now his "custom" seems more slippery, as Breunor is eager to change it so that he can take Isoud as his own wife rather than cut off her head: Tristram finds this inability to keep to one's custom even more shameful than the custom itself.



Breunor and Tristram are clearly evenly matched, but ultimately Tristram proves his greater honor in that he is more powerful. However, just when he thinks he has established his success over this castle, the rules of revenge, especially for family, come into play.



Finally, Tristram seems to have met his match—only that for him, his match in battle is equaled by a hundred knights. Galahad's choice to end the battle with Tristram shows that he, despite his loyalty to his father, also subscribes to the order of honor and chivalry more broadly. After remaining loyal to Launcelot from afar, Tristram now appreciates the possibility to spend time with him and pledge loyalty to him in person.



Gawaine's declaration that only Launcelot or Tristram can save him reflects the general belief at court that these two knights are the greatest in the kingdom. Tristram, indeed, is properly impressed by this story, which has reached him through the kinds of rumors that spread easily in the realm.



Chapter 29 Mark and Isoud are married, though she and Tristram still love each other. Two of Isoud's ladies decide out of envy to destroy Isoud's maid Dame Bragwaine. She is sent into the forest to fetch herbs, and then is bound to a tree for three days. Sir Palomides comes across her and saves her. Isoud meanwhile worries about Bragwaine. Walking through the forest, she meets Palomides, who says he will bring Bragwaine to her if she grants his wish. When she agrees, Palomides fetches Bragwaine, and then asks to state his wish before the king.

Chapter 30 Palomides goes before King Mark and asks to take his wife, Isoud, away with him. The king thinks that Tristram will surely rescue Isoud, so he agrees to let Palomides take her. Mark sends for Tristram, but cannot find him since he's hunting in the forest. Mark is ashamed and furious. Then a knight of Tristram offers to go after Palomides. After a while he overtakes Palomides, but when they fight, Palomides strikes and wounds him.

Meanwhile Isoud has escaped: she reaches a forest well, and is about to drown herself when a knight from a nearby castle, Adtherp, comes to her. He takes her to his castle and vows to seek Palomides in revenge. But when they meet, Palomides wounds him and orders Adtherp to bring him to the castle. He does, but Isoud sees Palomides from a window and shuts the gates. Palomides sits down outside to wait.

Chapter 31 When Tristram returns from hunting, he feels ashamed and immediately rides out after Palomides. He finds Adtherp wounded and learns what has happened. Adtherp points him to his castle, where Tristram sees Palomides asleep. Tristram sends Gouvernail to wake Palomides up and bring him back to fight. They battle for hours. Finally Isoud says that though she doesn't love Palomides, she wants him, a Saracen, to be baptized before he dies. She goes down to ask Tristram to spare Palomides. Tristram agrees, and Isoud tells Palomides to go to Arthur and recommend Isoud to Guenever. Isoud says to tell Guenever that there are only four true lovers in this land: Launcelot and Guenever, and Tristram and Isoud.

Chapter 32 Tristram brings Isoud home to King Mark, and they all recover. But one day Sir Andred, Tristram's cousin, sees Tristram and Isoud talking at a window, and he denounces Tristram to Mark. Mark calls Tristram a traitor in front of the court, and charges his men to slay him, but no one moves. Tristram takes his sword and chases after Mark, finally hitting him and making him fall down.

Though it appears that the love story between Tristram and Isoud has failed, in fact—especially thanks to the magic potion they both drank—Isoud's marriage to Mark hasn't changed anything. From this scene, it seems like Palomides is a proper knight, who like many other knights assumes he deserves a reward for noble behavior.



Though Mark has never loved Tristram since they fought over Segwarides' wife, he still has faith in Tristram's ability as a knight, so he makes what soon turns out to be a terrible calculation. That Mark won't go out himself to defend and bring back his wife suggests that he's on a lower level of chivalry, and his cowardice makes him more of a clear-cut villain in the story.



Isoud seems to be so overcome with shame at being stolen away by a man not her husband (or lover) that suicide is the only answer. Luckily not all knights are as treacherous as Palomides, and Adtherp seems to align with the code of honor with which we're familiar.



Shame is a motif common to several characters in this anecdote: Isoud for being stolen away, Mark for being unable or unwilling to pursue her, and Tristram for being absent at the moment when his lover really needs him. Isoud's decision to ask Tristram to spare Palomides is meant to underline her gracious, Christian behavior—revenge might be an ideal that this society embraces, but it is often not one that usually applied to women, for whom mercy and grace are considered more vital attributes.



Sir Andred, unlike Isoud, is shown as petty and jealous, eager to stir up drama at court—even though objectively speaking, Tristram is going behind the king's back in maintaining a relationship with Isoud. Nonetheless, the rest of the court, respecting Tristram, is on his side. Mark seems hated even by his own men, but he is still a king by birth, and so retains all his power.



Tristram takes his horse and squire to the forest. Soon he meets two brothers who are knights of Mark. Tristram kills one and wounds the other, and tells the wounded knight to take his brother's head to the king. Mark convenes his council, and they suggest that he make amends with Tristram, for should he defect to Arthur's court he will be strengthened even more. Mark agrees and welcomes Tristram back home.

Chapter 33 The king and queen prepare a jousting, and Sir Lamorak de Galis proves himself to be a remarkable knight. Mark orders Tristram to joust with him. Tristram says it would be against the chivalric code to fight against Lamorak when the latter is much more exhausted than he, but he obeys. Tristram knocks Lamorak from his horse, but when Lamorak asks to continue on foot, Tristram refuses, saying it would be shameful to continue. Lamorak insists, but Tristram refuses again, frustrating him.

Chapter 34 Lamorak departs with a companion, and on the way they meet a knight with a gold horn: if a woman is true to her husband she can drink it, but if she is false it will spill. Morgan le Fay, knowing of the affair between Guenever and Launcelot, is sending the horn to Arthur. Lamorak orders the knight to send it to King Mark instead, so as to test Isoud. Mark has Isoud and a hundred other ladies drink it: only four prove true. Mark orders them to all be burnt, but the barons gather and protest that the horn is made from false sorcery. Tristram is furious, knowing that Lamorak must have sent the horn.

Tristram often spends the night with Isoud, and one night Sir Andred, who often spies on him, gathers twelve knights and comes upon him naked in bed, binding him until day. Mark orders Tristram to be led by barons to a chapel upon the sea. Tristram cries to the barons to remember what he has done for Cornwall, when all the barons refused to fight against Marhaus. But Andred cries that he is a false traitor and draws his sword. Suddenly Tristram manages to unbind his hands and he wrests Andred's sword away. Tristram kills ten knights and locks himself in the chapel, still naked. As a hundred knights prepare to lay siege to the chapel, Tristram jumps out the window onto the rocks of the sea.

Forced to face this terrifying symbol of Tristram's might, as the conquered knight bears the head of his brother to court, Mark once again makes a pragmatic decision that has less to do with his forgiveness towards Tristram and more with the politics of knighthood and his desire to preserve his own power.



Having been brought back to court, Tristram at least temporarily seems to have adopted a more meek and docile attitude towards the king, agreeing to his orders even when he doesn't agree with them. Lamorak asserts his own honor by continuing to fight Tristram, but Tristram's honor is shown to be even greater in his showing of mercy.



Though Morgan le Fay has been absent from the story for a while, we learn that she has hardly been free from her usual scheming and plotting against her brother Arthur. But the interception of her gold horn underlines a parallel that was already pointed out—Launcelot's affair with Guenever, and Tristram's affair with Isoud. This somewhat comic scene suggests that the ideal of female purity does not exactly hold up in reality.



Despite the danger of continuing his relationship with Isoud—particularly after the event of the golden horn—Tristram seems unafraid of courting greater danger. As a result, he faces more shame than he ever has on the battlefield. For Tristram, his devout loyalty to Mark as a knight more than makes up for his disloyalty to the king in terms of love. The book doesn't necessarily seek to excuse Tristram, but rather simply reports the marvel of his ability to escape even the knottiest of situations.



Chapter 35 Gouvernail seeks out his master and pulls him up from the rocks. Tristram asks after Isoud, who he says has been put in a lazar-cote (a leper's house). Tristram fetches her from there and brings her to a manor in the forest. He tells his men, except Gouvernail, to leave. As Tristram is sleeping, a man whose brother Tristram had slain arrives and shoots Tristram with an arrow in the shoulder, so Tristram springs up and kills him. Meanwhile Mark learns where the couple is. He arrives but only finds Isoud, and he brings her home and locks her away.

Isoud sends a lady to Tristram to tell him that, since she cannot help him, he should go to King Howel in Brittany, where his daughter, Isoud la Blanche Mains, will nurse him back to health. Tristram and Gouvernail do so.

Chapter 36 An earl is laying siege against King Howel, and Howel asks Tristram to fight for him. Tristram kills the earl and over a hundred knights, and is received with great praise. With the encouragement of Howel and his son Kehydius, Tristram begins to fall in love with Isoud la Blanche Mains, such that he forgets La Beale Isoud. Finally they are married, but only once in bed with his new wife does Tristram remember La Beale Isoud, and he refuses to sleep with Isoud la Blanche Mains.

Meanwhile a knight from Brittany comes to Arthur's court and tells of Tristram's marriage. Launcelot cries that Tristram is untrue to his lady, and Launcelot sends the messenger to say that he once loved Tristram above all, but from now on they are enemies.

Chapter 37 The knight reports back to Tristram, who is ashamed. La Beale Isoud writes to Guenever about Tristram's falseness, but Guenever writes that he has surely been tricked by female sorcery, and will soon come to hate his wife and love Isoud again.

Meanwhile, Sir Lamorak de Galis is traveling on a ship that sinks and kills all but him. He washes ashore on the Isle of Servage. Fishermen tend to him and tell him that the lord of the Isle, Nabon le Noire, hates Arthur's knights, and recently killed Lamorak's cousin. Lamorak decides to fight Nabon in revenge.

Miraculously, Tristram has evaded death yet again. While he had been condemned to death, Isoud's lot was to be shut away in a place considered unfit for the healthy and with connotations of great shame. Tristram's enemies do not just include Mark and his men, we learn, but also many others who have been in some way slighted by Tristram or have lost family members to his sword.



Names are often repeated in this story, and it will be important to keep in mind that there are now two Isouds in Tristram's life (though they're linked in several ways).



Once again Tristram proves himself to be a noble knight through his battlefield prowess. But he also proves again unable to restrain his wandering eye. It is a tragic irony that La Beale Isoud sent him here for safekeeping under Isoud la Blanche Mains, only for Tristram to forget about Isoud and marry this new love.



For Launcelot, whose loyalty to Guenever is unparalleled, there is little more shocking or unworthy of a true knight than an inability to stay true to one's beloved.



Isoud and Guenever are now friends as well as occupying similar love stories. Even Guenever seems to assume that Tristram's infidelity somehow isn't his fault, but must be the result of "female sorcery."



The narrative shifts briefly to Lamorak, who we last saw sending Morgan le Fay's golden horn to Mark's court out of spite for Tristram. Despite this, Lamorak is generally portrayed as one of the greatest knights in the kingdom, though he never achieves the popularity of figures like Launcelot or Tristram.



Chapter 38 Tristram meanwhile takes Isoud la Blanche Mains and Kehydus to go boating, and they are driven by wind to the Isle of Servage, where the barge is washed to the shore and Isoud is hurt. They go into the forest, where Tristram sees Segwarides with a damsel, and he agrees to forget their past conflicts. Segwarides brings Tristram to a lady nearby, who says that a knight of Arthur's has been shipwrecked. The lady brings Lamorak, who doesn't recognize Tristram. Lamorak reveals his name, as does Tristram, who says that his kindness in not fighting Lamorak was betrayed when Lamorak sent Morgan le Fay's horn to Mark's court. But Tristram proposes they lay aside their differences to figure out how to conquer Nabon.

Chapter 39 Nabon has ordered all his citizens to meet at his castle in five days for the knighting of his son and a joust. Nabon lends Lamorak a horse and armor and everyone marvels at his deeds. Nabon proposes they fight, but as Lamorak begins to win, Nabon tells him to stop, saying that he'll show Lamorak great courtesy. Tristram steps forward and offers to fight Nabon on foot. He shares his name, and Nabon says he has long wished to fight with either him or Launcelot. They clash, and Tristram kills Nabon, and then cuts off his son's head. The citizens clamor for Tristram to become their lord, but he proffers Lamorak, who demurs and says it should be Tristram. They agree to give the title to Segwarides, who agrees, frees all prisoners, and governs the land well.

Chapter 40 Lamorak rides out to a hermitage, where the hermit marvels at the fact that he hasn't seen a knight pass this way without being killed for 20 years: Lamorak says that the tyrant Nabon has been killed. The next day Lamorak departs and sees four knights fighting against one. He rebukes the four for this and says he'll save the victim. Lamorak kills two and the others flee. The knight, Sir Frol of the Out Isles, thanks Lamorak and accompanies him on.

They see a knight in white riding along, and Frol says that this knight recently won against him in jousting, so now Frol wants to joust with him again. The knight agrees but again wins. Lamorak rides after him and asks his name: he is Launcelot du Lake. Lamorak shares his name, and they embrace as fellow **Round Table** knights. Launcelot says he is on a quest that he must do alone, so he departs. Lamorak refuses to tell Frol who the knight was, so Frol, put off, leaves.

We learn the reason for the brief digression that explained how Lamorak ended up on the Isle of Servage. This passage reveals how difficult it can be to keep all the alliances and enemies of each knight straight in the book, as they are constantly shifting, sometimes due to knights' actions, but often simply for strategic reasons. Tristram, for instance, still believes that Lamorak was in the wrong, but since they both come from Mark's court they are natural allies in fighting the lord of the island, Nabon.



At first, in an example of trickery more than mistaken identity, Lamorak pretends to be a friendly foreign knight simply eager to join in Nabon's jousting, which is a celebratory affair. Tristram's name has evidently spread even to this remote island. Among knights, the more renowned an opponent the more glory one can gain from conquering him—and such glory is appealing enough for someone like Nabon even to risk death in pursuit of it. Lamorak and Tristram cement their alliance by each proposing the other as ruler.



It appears that Tristram and Lamorak have made a noble decision in seeking to conquer Nabon, since he seems to have oppressed the island's inhabitants for many decades. Lamorak, as a properly honorable knight, finds it dishonorable for many knights to fight an unequal battle against one.



Somehow Launcelot has found his way to this remote island as well, where he has been busy proving himself not through his name—which is even more famous than Tristram's—but rather by his prowess as a knight (in yet another incarnation of this trope). While Lamorak might have been able to guess Launcelot's identity, the other knights often have trouble recognizing each other.



Chapter 41 After a few days Lamorak finds a knight sleeping next to a lady. Then Gawaine rides up and takes the lady with him. Lamorak calls after Gawaine, who says he is Arthur's nephew, so Lamorak cannot do anything to him. Gawaine runs toward the sleeping knight, who awakens and mightily strikes down Gawaine. But Lamorak says to himself that he must defend Gawaine, who will otherwise speak ill of him at court. Lamorak fights with and kills the knight (who, it's implied, is Sir Frol).

Gawaine shows himself to be proud and hasty as usual, this time using his family connections (his relationship to the king) to take advantage of a lady and to prevent being punished. While Lamorak doesn't agree with this dishonorable behavior, in this case friendship as knights of the Round Table wins out over the protection of ladies.



The lady then tells the slain knight's brother, Belliance le Orgulus, of the killing, and Belliance comes to fight Lamorak. They draw their swords, fighting for two hours. When Lamorak shares his name, Belliance says there is no one he hates more, since he killed his own sons to save Lamorak's life, and now Lamorak has killed his brother Frol. Lamorak kneels down and asks for his grace and forgiveness. But Belliance orders him up or else he'll kill him, so they fight again. Finally Belliance, faint from bleeding, withdraws, and Lamorak kneels again and grants him mercy. Lamorak tends to Belliance's wounds, and they swear never to fight again.

It is unclear exactly what the back story is concerning Belliance's murder of his sons to save Lamorak's life—this may be part of a Round Table tale that did not make it into Malory's collection. Lamorak will not yield to Belliance in fighting, and Belliance too is prepared to continue battling. They nearly reach a draw, though Lamorak refuses to fully claim his victory, probably because he knows he is in the wrong. This is yet another example of two characters switching from enemies to friends simply through the act of fighting each other honorably.



BOOK 9

Chapter 1 A young man, Breunor le Noire, comes to Arthur's court in a gold but oddly fitting overgarment. Sir Kay nicknames him La Cote Male Taile, "the ill-shapen coat." Breunor says that while his father, a knight, was hunting one day, he lay down to sleep, and an enemy knight had killed him. Breunor's father was wearing this coat, which Breunor now vows to wear until he is avenged. He asks to be made knight. Lamorak and Gaheris recommend it, recalling that even Launcelot du Lake was unknown when he first arrived.

Kay seems to have a penchant for making fun of newly arrived knights at court, especially those who diverge from the norm of dress and demeanor—and he hasn't learned from his mistake with Gareth. The other knights treat Breunor with more respect, considering that his story suggests he is noble and worthy: still, we see how difficult it is to judge an unknown person's identity.



The next day Arthur rides out to slay a hart with some knights, and Breunor is left behind with Guenever. Suddenly a lion kept in a stone tower escapes and hurtles after the queen and her knights. They all flee, but La Cote Male Taile springs after the lion and kills him. The king is pleased and makes him knight, and Breunor asks that he only be referred to by Kay's scornful name, La Cote Male Taile.

La Cote Male Taile's story bears many similarities to that of Gareth: both prove themselves through their courageous actions, and both respond to teasing and insults with meekness and calm, even embracing being humbled in such a way.



Chapter 2 That day a damsel arrives to court with a shield painted with a white hand holding a sword. She says that a good knight had owned this shield. He had fought with another knight and ended in a draw, so he decided he must die, and asked this shield to be brought to Arthur's court for another to fulfill the quest he was on. Sir Kay takes it, but the damsel says it must be a better knight than he. Then La Cote Male Taile offers himself, and the damsel agrees, saying she hopes his skin is as strong as his coat.

As usual, Sir Kay acts quickly and brusquely, but even this unknown damsel understands that he is not as worthy a knight as others. She does not pass judgment on whether La Cote Male Taile will be able to fulfill this quest or not, instead accepting him as worthy enough to at least join the quest and do his best to fulfill it.



Chapter 3 Sir Kay orders Arthur's fool, Sir Dagonet, to follow after them armed. He does so, and calls out to La Cote Male Taile to joust. La Cote Male Taile strikes Dagonet down, but the damsel mocks La Cote Male Taile, since a fool has been sent to joust with him. After awhile, they come across Sir Bleoberis and the two joust. Bleoberis strikes him down off his horse. La Cote Male Taile rises up and draws his sword, but Bleoberis refuses to fight anymore. The damsel, Maledisant ("Ill-Speaking"), rebukes La Cote Male Taile for the shame of falling off his horse.

They then encounter Sir Palomides, who also knocks La Cote Male Taile off his horse, and who also refuses to fight on foot. Maledisant mocks La Cote Male Taile again, though he insists that he could have fought them well on foot. Sir Mordred comes along and joins the two, and together they come to the Castle Orgulous, where any knight must joust or be taken prisoner. A knight strikes Sir Mordred off his horse, and then fights with La Cote Male Taile. Both knock each other off their horses, and then La Cote Male Taile kills the knight.

Chapter 4 A hundred knights come towards La Cote Male Taile, and he thinks he'd rather die fighting there than abide the mocking of Maledisant anymore. One of the castle's ladies then takes his horse and quietly ties it to a nearby postern (side door). She then sneaks into her chamber and whispers from a window behind La Cote Male Taile that he only needs to reach the postern and he'll be free. La Cote Male Taile charges through the crowd, killing twelve knights and leaping back onto his horse. He arrives back at Maledisant and Mordred, but she doesn't believe he killed the knights—she rather thinks that they've let him pass as an unworthy fool. Maledisant sends a courier, who learns that La Cote Male Taile was telling the truth, and returns. Maledisant hangs her head, and Mordred rebukes her.

Chapter 5 Meanwhile, Launcelot comes to Arthur's court and hears of La Cote Male Taile's exploits. Launcelot decides that Maledisant must be searching for a proven knight and decides to follow them. When he reaches them, Mordred leaves. Maledisant mocks Launcelot too, not knowing who he is.

The parallels between the story of Gareth and that of La Cote Male Taile begin to pile up: the latter too is saddled with a damsel who subjects him to ridicule and dishonor, refusing to see past his ill-fitting coat and lack of official honors and appreciate him for his actions. It seems that the two tales may just be different incarnations of one original story, but with different characters involved.



Unfortunately for La Cote Male Taile, he is unable to prove himself fully, since these knights all refuse to continue fighting on the second stage of battle, that is, on the ground rather than on horseback. Mordred, though—King Arthur's illegitimate son, as we are supposed to recall, and the one destined to kill his father—seems to have greater sympathy for La Cote Male Taile, though perhaps he's simply joined him temporarily on the road.



Unlike Gareth, La Cote Male Taile is now letting the rebukes and insults of Maledisant (whose name, like that of many characters in the story, is meant to underline a crucial aspect of her character) affect him—here it has the effect of making him take greater risks than he would normally, in ways that can either be characterized as heroic or as reckless (or both). Maledisant is even more infuriating after this adventure, since she refuses to even acknowledge the possibility that La Cote Male Taile is more noble than she thinks: finally she is justifiably shamed herself.



Perhaps it is simply in Maledisant's character to act in such a way—as we've seen, women are often assumed to be either angelic and graceful or, conversely, conniving and deceitful.



Meanwhile, Tristram sends a letter to Launcelot claiming that he has never slept with Isoud la Blanche Mains, and asking to renew his friendship, and for Launcelot to send his apologies to La Beale Isoud from him. Launcelot leaves Maledisant and La Cote Male Taile, who then ride on to the castle Pendragon, where La Cote Male Taile fights with and strikes down a knight. Five others quickly ride up and capture him, taking him prisoner. In the morning Launcelot gives letters for Tristram to a damsel, and then follows after La Cote Male Taile. He jousts with and conquers a knight, who says he was made knight by Launcelot. Launcelot reveals who he is, and the knight falls to the ground, repenting. He tells Launcelot not to go to the Castle of Pendragon, since he's heard there's a prisoner there.

Chapter 6 Launcelot says he must go rescue that man. He fights against six knights outside the castle, but conquers them all and races into the castle. The castle's lord is an enemy of Arthur. He comes to meet Launcelot, and they fight until Launcelot conquers him, at which the lord yields and asks for mercy. Launcelot orders him to free all his prisoners, which include 30 of Arthur's knights.

Chapter 7 Launcelot and La Cote Male Taile ride forward with Maledisant, who asks Launcelot for forgiveness for having mocked him. She says that she had met Tristram at Camelot, and he had rescued her black shield from Breuse Saunce Pit , who had taken it from her. Launcelot tells her to no longer mock La Cote Male Taile, and she says she only did so out of love for him, since she thought him too young for such adventures. Launcelot says he'll now call her the Damsel Bienpensant ("Well-Thinking").

The three ride to the country of Surluse, to a village with a fortress-like bridge. They are barred from crossing because of the black shield they bear, and the villagers say only one may enter first. La Cote Male Taile asks to go in first, and while Launcelot is reluctant, he eventually yields. La Cote Male Taile meets and jousts with two brothers whom he conquers and makes yield. Then he meets a third brother, Plenorius, with whom he fights for hours.

Tristram is upset that Launcelot has (justifiably) broken off his friendship with Tristram on account of the latter's disloyalty to Isoud—it is unclear whether the fact that he has remained sexually pure will be enough for Launcelot to consider forgiving him. But for the moment, Tristram is a distraction, as Launcelot seems to want to accompany La Cote Male Taile, who is only a budding knight, to help him in case of danger. Once again, the difficulty of ascertaining a knight's true identity can have shameful consequences, as Launcelot's embarrassed knight shows.



Launcelot is not yet able to save La Cote Male Taile since he finds himself occupied with another minor quest, having to save another prisoner. Launcelot is shown to have little trouble battling against anyone in his path, as his accolades continue to pile up.



Suddenly, Maledisant's very character seems to shift—it isn't entirely clear whether this is a result of knowing more about her true feelings, or if she is simply attempting to undo the shame of mocking Launcelot, one of the greatest knights in the land. Launcelot, at least, seems ready to believe her, granting her a new nickname to recognize her newly honorable status.



Launcelot has continued in his self-appointed role as protector of the young La Cote Male Taile, though at this point he agrees to allow the knight to prove himself. La Cote Male Taile fights against what seems like another family dynasty of knights, the kind that we've grown used to seeing in Arthur's court.



Chapter 8 La Cote Male Taile finally falls to the ground, wounded. Plenorius has pity on him since La Cote Male Taile was tired and he was fresh, so Plenorius leads him into the tower. La Cote Male Taile tells Plenorius to meet a better knight than himself back at the bridge. Plenorius meets Launcelot and they joust until Launcelot strikes him down and forces him to yield all his prisoners. Then Launcelot fights with his three other brothers, and strikes them all down. In the castle he finds many knights imprisoned. Launcelot tells Plenorius to go to Arthur's court next Pentecost. They rest and recover.

Chapter 9 Sir Kay and another knight arrive at the castle too, and they all depart after 10 days. They ride back to Arthur's court, where La Cote Male Taile and Plenorius are made knights of the Round Table. La Cote Male Taile marries Maledisant, who is called Beauvivante ("Beautifully living") afterward.

Chapter 10 Meanwhile, La Beale Isoud has been sending pitiful letters to Tristram, and finally asks him via her maid Bragwaine to come to her court with his wife. Tristram, Bragwaine, Kehydus, and Gouvernail secretly leave on a ship, but are blown to the coast of Wales by Castle Perilous. Tristram tells the others to remain there for 10 days, and to leave for Cornwall if he's not back by them.

Tristram and Kehydus leave and come across a knight sitting by a well, next to a man leading a spear-laden horse. Tristram asks what the man is doing, and he silently makes as if to joust. First Kehydus fights, but is wounded. Then Tristram fights, but loses his horse. They fight on foot for hours. Then they pause and Tristram asks his name.

Chapter 11 Tristram shares his name, and the other knight says he is Lamorak de Galis. Tristram reminds him of the enchanted horn, and says they must fight to the death, though Lamorak reminds him how he promised friendship on the Isle of Servage. But they fight to a draw, and then Lamorak says he will yield. Tristram decides to yield himself, but now Lamorak refuses. They swear never to fight again.

Unlike Launcelot (or Gareth), La Cote Male Taile is hardly portrayed as invincible: he is courageous and courts danger and battle, but he loses just as often as he wins. Launcelot is another story, as La Cote Male Taile well knows, and by sending Plenorius back to fight with Launcelot he's sure that the duo will ultimately win out. Indeed, Plenorius becomes another symbol of Launcelot's might to be sent ahead of him to Arthur's court.



La Cote Male Taile's story wraps up satisfactorily, as he is shown to be worthy of a knighthood of the Round Table, and as Plenorius's mercy on La Cote Male Taile is rewarded with his own knighthood. This ending even feels like a modern "romantic comedy," in which the man and woman fight and seem to dislike each other throughout, but then end up married in the end.



Isoud seems to have recognized that Tristram may well forget all about her, and instead of growing angry she decides to risk great danger—the reason she sent Tristram away from court in the first place—to bring him back and regain his love.



The unknown knight's silence makes him more mysterious, especially when he shows himself to be a competent joustier—to Tristram and Kehydus his lack of a clear identity is even more intriguing after fighting against him.



Tristram clearly has trouble deciding if Lamorak is an enemy or a friend, an uncertainty that throws into sharp relief the shifting alliances and fellowships among knights of this society. Their fight is portrayed as a clear draw, which perhaps will end their hostilities for good.



Chapter 12 Meanwhile Sir Palomides rides by, following, as his quest, a beast with a head of a serpent, a body of a leopard, the buttocks of a lion, and the feet of a hart: Galtisant, or the Questing Beast. Palomides strikes down Tristram and Lamorak with one spear, but then continues on after the beast, and the two are furious that he won't fight on foot. Tristram and Lamorak bear Kehydus to a forester's lodge and then leave. Tristram says that if Lamorak finds Palomides he should tell him to find Tristram at the same well where they met before.

Lamorak rides to a chapel to rest his horse. Soon Bagdemagus' son Sir Meliagrance arrives. He isn't aware of Lamorak's presence, and spends all night moaning about his love for Queen Guenever. In the morning Lamorak rides into the forest and meets two knights, who say they are awaiting Launcelot, who killed their brother. Lamorak says they'll never win.

Chapter 13 Launcelot comes riding towards them, and he and Lamorak salute each other. Lamorak rides off, then finds the two knights, who have hidden from Launcelot in the wood: Lamorak calls them cowards. Lamorak departs and then encounters Meliagrance, and asks him why he loves Guenever so. Meliagrance says she's the fairest queen of all, but Lamorak says that title belongs to Margawse, Gawaine's mother. Meliagrance wants to prove he's right by fighting, so in anger they ride towards each other and wound each other deeply. Then Launcelot and Bleoberis come, and Launcelot asks why they're fighting—they're both knights of Arthur.

Chapter 14 Meliagrance explains the quarrel, and Bleoberis says that this is no reason to fight. They all leave each other. Later Arthur comes and jousts with Lamorak, wounding him with a spear before riding away. Lamorak is furious, unaware who it is.

Chapter 15 Meanwhile Tristram rides with Sir Kay, who reveals his name. Tristram says that Kay is known as a shameful knight who is too quick with his tongue. They then come to a bridge, where Sir Tor refuses the crossing. Tor fights with Kay and forces him off his horse. They all lodge together with Sir Brandiles, and the three of them speak ill of Cornish knights, so Tristram stays silent.

In the morning Tristram jousts with and wins over Brandiles and Tor. Brandiles and Kay decide to ride after Tristram and ask his name. They find him drinking at a well, and Tristram reveals he is Tristram from Cornwall. Brandiles says he is the knight whose company the **Round Table** most desires. Tristram thanks him, but says that he is not yet worthy enough.

As we'll see for the rest of the book, Sir Palomides is condemned to follow the Questing Beast (which King Pellinore had first appeared as pursuing) wherever it may go—an adventure whose goal or ultimate purpose we never learn, but which nonetheless helps to define Palomides as a knight. For Tristram, the necessity of this quest seems less important than the other rules of knightly honor, which require that a knight stay to fight.



This initial introduction to Meliagrance suggests the one most important element of his character in the story—his love for Queen Guenever, which begins benignly enough but will later turn jealous, spiteful, and even dangerous to the realm.



Lamorak has already shown his skepticism regarding whether the knights can actually triumph over Launcelot, but for him it's shameful all the same to hide rather than to fight. The battle between Lamorak and Meliagrance is portrayed as petty and silly, but also as another example of women's peculiar power over men, in that they can even make sworn fellows of the Round Table forget their fellowship and turn against each other.



Arthur rarely goes out in search of adventure himself, and when he does he seems to enjoy maintaining the same mysteriousness of identity as other knights (and Merlin).



Though Tristram is not a knight of the Round Table himself, he has heard stories of Kay's shameful behavior with Gareth and with Breunor le Noire (La Cote Male Taille). Still, their differences are not enough to make them fight rather than lodge together. The prejudice against Cornish knights continues to present itself among Arthur's knights.



The next morning, a friendly joust gives Tristram the chance to make his prowess more well known. It seems that word of his success has reached the Round Table, even if he doesn't feel himself ready to join this fellowship.



Chapter 16 Arthur, meanwhile, is enchanted into the Forest Perilous by a sorceress, Annowre, who is in love with him. She brings him to his tower and tries to sleep with him, but he refuses to be unfaithful. So she makes him ride into the forest each day with his knights, in the hopes that he'll be killed. Nimue seeks out Launcelot or Tristram to help Arthur. She finds Tristram first, they ride to a castle, where a knight (Arthur) is fighting two others, who strike him down. One unlaces his helmet to slay him, and then Annowre (who is also present) grabs Arthur's sword to cut off his head. Tristram races down and strikes both knights down dead. Nimue calls to Arthur not to let the traitoress escape: Arthur overtakes Annowre and cuts off her head.

Arthur thanks Tristram heartily, but Tristram refuses to share his name. They ride together until they meet Sir Ector de Maris, who recognizes neither and wants to joust. Tristram strikes down Ector. Tristram then points Arthur to his knight, and departs.

Chapter 17 Tristram and Lamorak meet at the designated well, fetch Kehydus, and ride to the ship where they'd left Bragwaine and Gouvernail. Then they all sail to Cornwall. They land and ride to Sir Dinas, a friend of Tristram's, and Bragwaine and Dinas ride to Mark's court to tell La Beale Isoud that Tristram is close. She asks him to be brought secretly to a chamber in court. Tristram and Isoud meet there, and they are overjoyed and sleep together. Kehydus, meanwhile, has fallen in love with Isoud himself, and writes letters and ballads to her, a few of which she responds to with pity.

Isoud secretly lodges Tristram in a turret (little tower atop a castle). One day Tristram, Kehydus, and Isoud are all in a chamber above where King Mark is playing chess, when Tristram finds letters between Kehydus and Isoud. Tristram accuses both Isoud and Kehydus of being ungrateful and false. Tristram draws his sword, and Isoud swoons. Kehydus leaps out of a bay window. King Mark sees him and exclaims at what he's doing. Kehydus says he fell asleep by a window and fell out.

Annowre is a classic example of a powerful and dangerous woman, whose love seems to have a great deal in common with hatred, given that she'd rather see Arthur killed than have him alive and refusing to sleep with her. Once again, Nimue, whose love for Arthur is portrayed as much more pure, uses her form of feminine sorcery to figure out what's happened to Arthur and to seek out rescuers for him. Launcelot and Tristram are the obvious choices here, and Tristram proves his prowess once again in aiding Arthur.



Though Tristram has defended the king of the Round Table, he still prefers to keep his identity hidden. As with many of the disguises in the book, this decision seems somewhat inexplicable, but it also allows Tristram to join any fellowship at will.



After this brief interlude, Tristram and Lamorak leave off their adventures and return to the quest they'd begun with, which is to return to La Beale Isoud despite the danger of Tristram's being seen at Mark's court. The fact that many men fall in love with Isoud is meant to show just how admirable of a lady she is, and the fact that she has chosen Tristram signals his greatness as well.



The lovers' idyll doesn't last long before the suspicion of treachery and betrayal returns, now on Tristram's side (ironically, since he is the one betraying King Mark himself). Tristram's suspicions are also shown to be unfair, since we as readers know more about Isoud's true loyalties than Tristram does. Kehydus still is eager to protect Tristram.



Chapter 18 Tristram fears his discovery by Mark, so he sends for his horse and spear from Gouvernail, and rides out of the castle at night. He meets Gawaine's son by the gate and knocks him out with his spear before riding into the forest, where he meets a knight, Sir Fergus. Tristram is in such sorrow that he faints off his horse and is unconscious for three days. Fergus travels back to court to get news for Tristram, and on the way he meets a damsel sent from Palomides to find out how Tristram is doing. Fergus continues on and finds that Isoud is, like Tristram, in an extreme state of grieving. Meanwhile Palomides' damsel finds Tristram and is upset that she cannot heal him. Several times Tristram escapes from her, once riding by the same castle where he had fought Palomides. There the damsel finds him again, and she and the lady of the castle try to feed him, but he eats little. The lady gives him a harp, which he plays sorrowfully in the forest. This period lasts for several months, and Tristram begins to dress like and spend time with herdsmen and shepherds.

Chapter 19 One day Arthur's fool Dagonet comes into Cornwall and passes by a well where Tristram is resting. Tristram throws Dagonet and his squires into the well, then lifts them out, making the shepherds laugh. Tristram continues to stay in the forest for six months. Meanwhile, the damsel sent by Sir Palomides returns to him and reports. Palomides meets Kehydus, whom Isoud has sent out of Cornwall, and they share that they both loved Isoud. They decide that they should now seek Tristram, who is similarly forlorn for a woman's love.

The two come across Sir Mark, whom Palomides calls a destroyer of worshipful knights, including Tristram. Mark refuses to fight, since he did no wrong and is in fact sorry for Tristram's lovesickness. They agree to be friends and all depart from each other. Meanwhile Dagonet races to King Mark and tells him of a dangerous fool (Tristram) he met in the forest. Mark says that it must be another knight, who has lost his lady and gone mad.

Chapter 20 Sir Andred, Tristram's cousin, has his lover spread a rumor that she saw Tristram die, and that Tristram had asked Mark to make Andred king of his own country of Lionnes. At this news Mark weeps and Isoud goes nearly out of her mind. She prepares to kill herself with a sword, saying Tristram was her first and last love. Mark, who's seen all of this, races to her and takes her away to keep her in a tower, where she lies sick.

Little by little, Tristram descends into madness, all as a result of his love for Isoud and his feeling that, either because of King Mark or because of further competition from people like Kehydus, their ability to love each other in peace is doomed. A number of people at court seem concerned about Tristram's well-being: as we'll remember, the court had always held him in higher esteem than Mark, even refusing to follow Mark's orders to kill Tristram. In any case, we are meant to view Tristram's slow disintegration as a tragic result of loving a woman too much, and his despair and insanity are meant to be signs of the depth of his passion and the "greatness" of his soul. He seems to lose his reason and even his identity, a loss underlined by his movement into the forest and time spent with shepherds.



Tristram's behavior has grown extremely erratic: he no longer is eager to joust with approaching knights, but instead plays tricks on them for no apparent reason. Although in a different circumstance Palomides and Kehydus could be rivals, they now realize that they, along with Tristram, actually have much in common in being hoodwinked by a woman's power. Palomides continues to be a complex character, one who is sometimes portrayed as a formidable and noble knight, and sometimes as a coward who is murderously jealous of Tristram. Here he seems to be taking the "high road."



Here King Mark plays the innocent, pretending to love Tristram as much as he once did, though the reader is meant to see through Mark's deceitfulness, since having once sentenced Tristram to death he can only be glad of Tristram's sorrow. Still, it's unclear whether or not Mark knows that the "fool" is actually Tristram.



Andred, meanwhile, is taking advantage of Tristram's madness for his own benefit, at the expense of Isoud as well. Only now does Mark show true feelings for Tristram, who after all was once his favorite protégé. He also is faced with direct proof regarding just how much Isoud preferred Tristram to Mark himself.



Meanwhile Tristram remains wandering naked in the forest. A giant named Tauleas has avoided the forest for years in fear of Tristram, but upon learning of his supposed death he wanders back. One day he comes across a knight, Sir Dinant, and a lady, and he seizes Dinant. As he prepares to strike off his head, the herdsmen watching call to Tristram to help. Tristram takes the knight's sword and cuts off Tauleas' head.

Chapter 21 Dinant takes the giant's head to King Mark and tells him how a naked man saved him. Mark prepares to go out and find this man with his knights. Mark sees him lying by a well, and orders his men to capture him and take him to the castle. They throw a blanket over him and lead him to Tintagil, all ignorant of who he is. Isoud, hearing of the tale, goes to see him, resting in the garden. He looks familiar to her but she doesn't recognize him, though Tristram recognizes her, and he turns away and weeps.

Isoud always keeps a small brachet with her, a gift from Tristram, which never leaves her side unless it is to go to Tristram himself. Suddenly the brachet springs towards Tristram, and Isoud cries that it's her love. But she says that if Mark recognizes Tristram he'll banish or kill him, so she begs him to go to Arthur's court, where he is loved, and she'll send for him when she can. Tristram, angry and upset, tells Isoud to leave him.

Chapter 22 Because of the brachet's actions, Andred realizes that the man is Tristram, and he tells Mark. Tristram admits it himself. Mark asks his barons to condemn Tristram to death, but they refuse. Instead they banish him for 10 years. Many barons prepare a ship. Sir Dinadan comes from Arthur's court to joust with Tristram before welcoming him. Tristram knocks him from his horse, and then Dinadan asks that they be in fellowship, which Tristram agrees to. Tristram sarcastically tells the barons that he is well rewarded for saving the country, fighting Marhaus, and delivering Isoud from Ireland.

Chapter 23 Tristram lands with Dinadan, Ector de Maris and Sir Bors de Ganis, along with Bleoberis and Driant. They all joust together, and all admire Tristram's prowess. Tristram and Dinadan enter a forest, where they meet a damsel who is in love with Sir Launcelot, and has come to seek some knights to rescue him from 30 knights whom Morgan le Fay has ordained to lie in wait for him. Bors de Ganis, Bleoberis, Ector de Maris, and Driant have already agreed. Dinadan is afraid of fighting 30 knights, but Tristram says he'll kill Dinadan if he doesn't fight, so he yields. Tristram and Dinadan alone encounter the thirty knights, and they kill all but ten, who flee.

Tristram may have gone insane, but part of him seems to still retain the knowledge of the code of honor and knightly conduct that he had once so successfully espoused—here using both his strength and courage to rescue another knight and his lady from harm.



In a highly coincidental chain of events, Tristram is brought back to the very castle that he left in sorrow, though this time as a prisoner and a curiosity rather than as either a secret lover or respected knight. Even Isoud is unable to see Tristram for who he really is, suggesting that his changed demeanor has impacted his very identity as a knight.



The brachet retains the ability to see people's true identities under their various masks, a skill consistently possessed by very few (if any) of the humans in the story. Still, this is hardly a scene of joyful reunion between two lovers. Instead, Tristram still believes Isoud to have been treacherous (a remarkable double standard, considering his various infidelities).



Sir Andred's rumors have gone nowhere, and it is not long before the brachet's actions set up a revelation of Tristram's identity to the entire court. Now, of course, Mark's troubles with Tristram and his treachery begin once again. Banishment is considered a compromise, since the other barons consider Tristram such a noble and successful knight that it would be against their own honor to condemn him to death.



This group of more or less loyal knights leaves Cornwall together to begin another series of adventures. First, Tristram reasserts his prowess, which may have been in question after he spent time in the forest as a madman. Then he grows eager to also reassert his loyalty towards Launcelot, who, though he has not yet lost in battle, seems just as vulnerable as any other knight to the wily ways of women, especially the powerful Morgan le Fay.



Chapter 24 Tristram and Dinadan ride towards shepherds to ask if they know of any lodging. They say there is a castle nearby, but they must joust with two knights first. Dinadan says he won't lodge there, and Tristram chides him for being cowardly, even though he is of the **Round Table**. Reluctantly, Dinadan follows Tristram. They manage to defeat the two knights, and are lodged well in the castle.

Sir Palomides and Sir Gaheris then arrive at the castle gate, requiring Tristram and Dinadan to emerge and joust again. They fight on horse and then on foot, but Dinadan is too wounded to succeed. Dinadan says Tristram is a madman, and he curses the day he met him, since he has never had any peace since then. Tristram says he'll fight both knights on his own then, but Gaheris and Palomides say it's shameful to fight two against one. Tristram invites them into the castle, but Sir Dinadan doesn't want to lodge there. Cursing them all, Dinadan departs. That night, Bors de Ganis, Bleoberis, Ector de Maris, and Driant lodge where Tristram had fought the 30 knights, and there they meet Launcelot.

Chapter 25 Launcelot, hearing of Tristram's exploits, praises him. Meanwhile, Dinadan is lodged at a priory, where he tells a knight there, Pellinore, of his companion's deeds, though he refuses to share his name. Pellinore decides to ride out after him, though Dinadan warns him that he might regret it. Pellinore meets Tristram and asks him to joust: Tristram wounds him in the shoulder and continues on.

The news spreads that there will be a tournament between King Carados of Scotland and the King of North Wales. Many knights meet there, including Tristram, who performs splendidly. He rides away and meets a damsel who tells him about a knight he can win glory by fighting against. They ride and encounter Gawaine, who knows the lady is of Morgan le Fay, and is leading Tristram to mischief. Gawaine warns him not to follow her, then pulls out his sword and orders her to tell him why she leads the knight away. Frightened, she says Morgan le Fay has ordered 30 ladies to spy on Launcelot or Tristram and bring them to her castle to be killed by 30 knights who are lying in wait there. Gawaine rebukes her.

Dinadan's behavior contrasts, of course, with Tristram's, as we are meant to see and judge two distinct and opposing ways of taking up one's responsibilities as knight. For Tristram, Dinadan's actions are an affront to the reputation of the Round Table, even though Tristram himself isn't a knight of Arthur.



Having left Cornwall, Tristram and his companion are now back in the realm of Camelot, packed with King Arthur's knights of the Round Table. Dinadan is not the greatest of a sidekick to Tristram—he lacks Tristram's courage, which seems to him to be overly reckless and even foolish. Finally, Dinadan gives up on accompanying the illustrious knight. Bors de Ganis, Bleoberis, Ector, and Driant are also circling the same territory as Tristram, as their adventures seem to be overlapping.



Launcelot seems to have forgiven Tristram for his lack of loyalty to Isoud, though perhaps he is simply won over by Tristram's knightly exploits, which make up for this behavior. It's not entirely clear whether this Pellinore is the same as the king and ally of Arthur.



Tournaments organized by kings of the various realms are opportunities for knights to prove themselves and to practice jousting in a contained environment. However, even Tristram's success at the tournament doesn't seem to make him invincible to other kinds of power, particularly Morgan le Fay's sorcery. It is not entirely clear why Morgan has turned against Launcelot and Tristram in addition to Arthur, except that they are two other powerful knights allied with her brother.



Chapter 26 Gawaine and Tristram agree to ride to Morgan le Fay's castle. When they arrive, Gawaine calls out for Morgan to send out her 30 knights, since he knows her treason. The knights inside say they won't come out, not because of Gawaine but because they are scared of his companion. Gawaine and Tristram then ride off and meet Kay and Sagramore le Desirous. Then they see Breuse Saunce Pité chasing a lady to kill her, as he's just killed her lover. Gawaine rides between them and tells Breuse to fight him. Breuse throws Gawaine down and tries to ride over him with his horse, so Tristram, seeing the shameful deed, rides out to defend him. Breuse sees the shield of Cornwall, knows who it is, and flees. Tristram follows him for hours until reaching a well, where he rests.

Although Morgan le Fay has prepared knights to fight against Tristram or Launcelot, she doesn't seem to have chosen particularly courageous ones, since they immediately show themselves to be frightened. Breuse Saunce Pité has appeared several times so far in these stories, but this scene helps us understand his character, which will remain constant through the book—he is always chasing after women with some sinful, dishonorable goal in mind, but he is also cowardly, and will always prefer to run away rather than to stand and fight. Indeed, his name means “without pity.”



Chapter 27 Tristram falls asleep. Dame Bragwaine comes upon him and, when he awakes, gives him letters from La Beale Isoud. Tristram is pleased to see how much she misses him. He tells Bragwaine to accompany him to the Castle of Maidens Tournament before returning with a reply. They lodge with an old knight, Sir Pellounes, whose son, Sir Persides de Bloise, has just returned after two years. Persides and Tristram talk of their exploits. Persides confides that he was once, in Cornwall, overthrown by a knight Tristram: he knows he's a good and noble knight, but has no goodwill for him. As they're talking, they see a knight riding on a black horse with a black shield: Persides says it is the heathen Palomides, one of the best knights in the world.

Tristram seems to have given up on pursuing Breuse Saunce Pité, at least for now, especially now that another tournament awaits him—a chance for Tristram to show off in front of Bragwaine, who will surely share the news of Tristram's exploits with her mistress Isoud. Once again, Tristram takes advantage of his inability to be identified here—he is well known from his exploits, but remains largely unknown by appearance. Persides' statement about Palomides can only be a provocation for Tristram.



Chapter 28 Persides and Tristram ride to the tournament, where Palomides sends a squire to ask Persides to joust with him. Persides falls first, and then Palomides strikes against Tristram before Tristram is ready to fight, knocking him off his horse. Tristram asks Palomides to fight again, but Palomides says he won't, since he knows Tristram better than Tristram thinks. Other knights begin to arrive before the official tournament starts, including Launcelot and a Welsh knight. They joust and Launcelot strikes the Welshman down. Others challenge Launcelot, who wears a shield of Cornwall. He beats them all. Tristram, impressed, doesn't recognize him.

Tristram has forged a temporary but still strong alliance with Persides, at least for the duration of the tournament. Palomides, perhaps given his long history with Tristram, seems to be the only one able to recognize Tristram. Launcelot joins Tristram's game of unknown identity by putting on a shield of Cornwall, in a move that also has the effect of suggesting his renewed friendship with Tristram.



Chapter 29 Launcelot (still in disguise) jousts with Palomides as Tristram and Dinadan watch, and Tristram predicts Palomides will fall—and he is right. Launcelot rides to a well to rest, and 12 knights follow and spring on him, in order that he might not win the tournament. Launcelot defends himself, killing four knights and wounding the rest. He then escapes to wait until the 2nd day of the tournament.

It's not yet clear whether or not Tristram is aware of Launcelot's true identity, but perhaps it's a combination of national pride and sophisticated judgment that allows Tristram to predict the result. Launcelot is not yet ready to reveal who he is to the crowds.



Chapter 30 Tristram gets Gouvernail to bring him a black shield, and he rides to the tournament with Persides and fights against many knights from all over the kingdom. After the first day, many marvel at Tristram with his black shield, wondering who he is. Arthur gives him the first day's prize.

Tristram, too, takes on a new persona in this tournament. While Launcelot had performed well, Tristram jousts more times with a greater variety of other knights, so he gets the prize.



Chapter 31 In the morning Palomides rides to Arthur's side, and he sends a damsel to Tristram to ask his name. Tristram says he won't tell until they've fought, and that they'll have to be on opposite sides. Since Palomides has moved to Arthur's side (from the King of Northgalis), Tristram will thus fight against Arthur's knights. Tristram fights against Bors de Ganis, Ector de Maris, Blamore, and others, wounding many. Launcelot arrives and asks one of the wounded who hurt him: he says a devilish knight with a black shield. Launcelot decides to meet with Tristram, but seeing him wielding his sword and shield in wild prowess, he decides not to.

As we can tell, the sides and alliances at this tournament are constantly being shaken up, as knights try to gauge where they have the best chance of winning, or, conversely, which position would give them the greatest challenge and therefore the most glory if they won. Launcelot would be the perfect candidate to fight against the knight who wounded his comrades, but Launcelot can also be careful not to choose battles recklessly.



Tristram sees the King with the Hundred Knights fight against 20 members of Launcelot's family, and, ashamed, he tells the King not to fight so unevenly: instead Tristram will go out to meet them alone.

Tristram seems to relish fighting against uneven odds, especially as this offers him the chance to win greater glory.



Chapter 32 The King withdraws his knights, and suddenly Tristram, Dinadan, and Gouvernail ride into the forest. Arthur blows the horn to end the 2nd day, and gives the King of Northgalis the prize since Tristram was on his side. Arthur comforts his men: he says he'll fight himself the next day in revenge.

For the moment, we leave Tristram and his companions and remain with Arthur, who is a fair judge of the tournament, in that he gives the prize not to his own men but to the person that deserves it.



Dame Bragwaine arrives at the tournament from La Beale Isoud, pretending it's to ask after Guenever, but actually looking for Tristram. Bragwaine rides through the forest and sends her squire before her. The squire comes to a well and finds Palomides bound to a tree, sobbing. Palomides breaks his bonds, and races after the squire as if to kill him. The squire flees to Bragwaine, who tells Tristram what happened. Tristram rides into the forest to find Palomides wailing and raging: he throws his sword into a fountain and then goes to dive in for it, but Tristram (whom Palomides doesn't recognize) holds him fast. Palomides cries that he wants to fight Tristram, who has shamed him. Tristram comforts him and leads him to his lodging. In the morning Palomides takes his horse to Gaheris and Sagramore.

The last time we left Palomides, he had just been defeated by Launcelot, who went on to triumph against many other knights at the tournament. While Bragwaine's squire is apparently in pursuit of Tristram, as often happens in these stories he is first diverted to another adventure, this one involving Palomides—though the sagas of Palomides and Tristram end up being intertwined. It is ironic, of course, that Tristram is the one who ends up comforting Palomides, as Palomides is only distraught because of Tristram himself.



Chapter 33 On the third day Tristram and Palomides fight, and Tristram wins—and he even strikes down Arthur as well. Tristram jousts with Palomides, who almost beats him, but finally Tristram strikes him 3 times, saying each time that it's for Tristram's sake. Palomides springs up again and they fight again and again. Tristram also strikes down 11 other knights.

Palomides may not know who Tristram is, but Tristram still proves able to conquer him and make up for the fact that he doesn't feel like he can bring himself to reveal his identity. But Palomides, to his credit, does not shrink from the challenge of fighting.



Chapter 34 Finally Launcelot prepares to joust. Tristram's spear breaks as they meet, and Launcelot accidentally wounds Tristram deeply, but before withdrawing Tristram strikes him on the helmet as well. Tristram goes into the forest to wash his wounds, and Dinadan follows. Palomides rides out to joust with Tristram, who doesn't let Dinadan fight for him. Instead Tristram strikes down Palomides, who loses consciousness. Tristram and Dinadan then ride to an old knight's palace for lodging.

This is probably the first time that Tristram and Launcelot fight against each other, though neither knows who the other is—that they reach a draw is meant to underline just how well-matched they are in terms of knightly prowess. Between Tristram and Palomides or Tristram and Dinadan, however, the outcome is more certain. Malory seems to enjoy listing his heroes' many easier victories.



Meanwhile Launcelot becomes the star of the tournament. Arthur is refreshed and joins in. Finally he gives the prize to Launcelot, though others are clamoring for Tristram to receive it.

Launcelot and Tristram are again presented as equal in prowess, and also as far greater than any other knight in the kingdom.



Chapter 35 Launcelot is praised and honored. But he is ashamed and goes to Arthur to suggest they find the Knight of the Black Shield: since he had said that he was fighting for Tristram, they suspect it is Tristram himself, and are sorry that he has escaped. Arthur hears from Gaheris how Tristram had struck down Palomides even while wounded, and Arthur remarks at how noble he is. Launcelot says that Tristram has done much for him, and he vows that Palomides should repent his shameful actions. Meanwhile, Palomides follows Tristram in a rage.

Although Launcelot has been lauded for his exploits, as an honorable knight he is not satisfied because he knows that another knight just as mighty and honorable as he exists without receiving the praise he deserves. Their suspicions about the knight with the black shield's true identity suggest that, though knights' identities are difficult to discern, their actions are one way of matching reputation to person.



Chapter 36 Mordred is lying sick in the same old knight's home where Tristram is staying, having jousted with Persides. Gawaine sends a damsel who meets Palomides on the way. When she arrives she describes his shield to Tristram, and he realizes that it's Palomides: a good, strong knight, he says.

Several strands of the story coincide at this point, from Arthur's son Mordred and Tristram to other knights of King Arthur's court and also Palomides, who is again presented as a respected, honorable knight.



Meanwhile, Launcelot suggests that he and ten other knights swear never to rest until they find Tristram. They all depart and ride together, before coming to a cross and heading four ways. Launcelot meets Bragwaine, who is fleeing on her horse from Breuse Saunce Pité, who wants to kill her. Launcelot waits for him, cries out that he's a traitor, and Breuse, recognizing the shield, flees.

We have already encountered Breuse Saunce Pité enough to have an adequate understanding of his character, and again he appears here as an entirely wicked knight, pursuing yet another damsel and again fleeing instead of fighting.



Chapter 37 Sir Lucan, a Round Table knight, rides to where Tristram is staying to ask for lodging himself. The nephew of the castle's lord Darras refuses and tries to fight Lucan, who strikes him down. Dinadan goes after Lucan, who beats him too. Tristram goes to avenge Dinadan, and wounds Lucan himself. Uwaine comes along and orders Tristram to fight him. Tristram wounds Uwaine in his side, and finally returns to the castle. Uwaine carries Lucan to the Castle of Ganis, which is where Launcelot and the others would swear to their quest for Tristram.

A damsel comes to tell Darras that three of his sons were killed at the tournament by a noble knight with a black shield—she points to Tristram as the one. Darras then imprisons Tristram, Palomides, and Dinadan. Every day Palomides reminds Tristram of the wrongs he has done him. Tristram falls deeply ill.

Chapter 38 Meanwhile, some of the questing knights come to Cornwall, and Gaheris tells King Mark of the knight with the black shield. Mark guesses it was Launcelot or Tristram. Mark is afraid when Gaheris tells him it was Tristram, but Isoud is glad of it. Uwaine then comes to court and challenges all the knights. Sir Andred volunteers, but Uwaine strikes him down: Mark orders Sir Dinas to replace him, but he too is struck down. Gaheris volunteers, but Uwaine sees his shield and, since they are both of the **Round Table**, he refuses to fight.

Mark himself then rides to Uwaine, who doesn't see him. Mark strikes him down and leaves him. After a while Kay comes along and sees Uwaine on the ground. Uwaine says he doesn't know who hurt him, but that it was shamefully done. Kay accuses Andred of it and carries Uwaine to be healed. Gaheris prepares to leave, and rebukes Mark for banishing Tristram, who would have remained his best knight.

Chapter 39 Kay follows King Mark's orders to seek adventure in the forest of Morris. He finds Gaheris there, who warns him not to trust Mark. Kay suggests they continue together to the Perilous Lake. Meanwhile Mark calls for Andred to arm him, and the two leave quietly for the lake. Kay sees the two and offers to joust. Mark strikes down Kay's horse, angering Gaheris, who strikes Mark down and then does the same to Andred. He demands their names, and Andred reveals it is he and King Mark. Gaheris angrily calls out their treason. Mark says that he will make amends if Gaheris saves his life, and asks him to consider that he is a king. Mark yields to Gaheris, kneels down and makes an oath never again to be against knights, and to be friendly to Tristram should he ever return to Cornwall. Kay prepares to slay Andred, but Gaheris tells him not to. They ride out together, and then meet Launcelot.

This scene is a somewhat confusing jumble of jousting scenes, in which it is not always easy to tell who exactly is fighting against whom. In general, the knights of the Round Table—Lucan and Uwaine—remain allied to each other, in this case against Tristram, Darras's nephew, and Dinadan, who lack an official fellowship but seek to defend their honor anyway.



Tristram and Palomides are once again thrown together as both competitors and allies, especially as they now find themselves in similar straits, both imprisoned because of Darras.



Mark has believed himself to be free of Tristram's prowess by banishing him from court, but his renown is great enough that rumors of him spread from abroad, preventing Mark from ever feeling fully safe. Gaheris is not a Cornish knight, but given Mark's hospitality to him, he feels justified in volunteering to fight against the invading knight—but then his and Uwaine's shared allegiance to Arthur wins out.



Although no characters learn that it was Mark himself who deceitfully fought Uwaine, we as readers are given this information as yet another example of Mark's lack of honor. Another example of this dishonor is his insistence on banishing Tristram.



Even though Gaheris hadn't seen Mark's shameful actions against Uwaine, he still feels that Mark was in the wrong in banishing Tristram from court, since Tristram could have gained much greater glory for Mark if he wasn't sent away simply to assuage Mark's ego. It turns out that Gaheris was right to warn Kay not to trust Mark, who takes advantage of the possibilities for hidden identity that are afforded by armor and shields in order to try to kill knights who have been staying with him in apparent hospitality. Usually, a knight's vow proves difficult to break, but we are meant to be skeptical in the case of Mark.



Chapter 40 Meanwhile, Sir Dinas is keeping a lover in his castle, but she loves another knight better, so she escapes when Dinas is out hunting. Furious, he goes out, finds, and strikes down the knight. The lady begs Dinas for mercy, promising to love him. Dinas says he'll never trust her again and returns to the castle.

Women in the book are portrayed as often inconstant: knights may do all in their power to keep them by force, but women like Dinas's lover will somehow find a way to fulfill their own will—and here she is shown to be justifiably punished.



Launcelot, Kay, and Gaheris go out to seek Tristram in the country of Surluse. Meanwhile Dinadan, Palomides, and Tristram remain in prison. A damsel comes to visit and sees Tristram ailing, which she tells to Darras. He has Tristram brought before him, and apologizes for his sickness, since he sees Tristram is a noble knight. Though Darras was furious about his sons, he now sees that Tristram had acted according to honor, and he agrees to set Tristram and his friends free. They depart, leaving each other at a crossroads.

We return now to the three imprisoned knights. At least Darras, unlike some of the castle lords we've encountered, is shown to be an honorable knight. He follows the code of knightly conduct himself, and is able to overcome his personal feelings, his loyalty to his sons and desire for revenge against their killer, in favor of a more "honorable" understanding of right and wrong.



Chapter 41 Dinadan rides by a well and sees a mournful lady. She says that Breuse Saunce Pité has killed her brother, and has kept her prisoner: she asks him to avenge her. Breuse returns and they fight, but when Dinadan wounds Breuse, he flees. The lady asks Dinadan to bring her to a castle, and he continues on.

Breuse Saunce Pité has cropped up again, continuing to wreak havoc as he marauds through the forest—but he is also dishonorable enough that he never embraces a face-to-face fight.



Tristram meanwhile goes to a castle for lodging, but the castle happens to also be hosting Morgan le Fay. In the morning she won't let him leave until he tells her who he is. She sets her lover on one side of her and Tristram on the other. Tristram finally tells her who he is, and, having promised she'd let him go, she says he must now promise to take a shield to the castle of the Hard Rock, where Arthur has decreed a tournament, and to perform well for her there. The shield depicts Guenever and Launcelot, and Morgan wants Arthur to guess that Launcelot is having an affair with Guenever. It's rumored that Morgan loves Launcelot, and is jealous that he only loves Guenever, so she wants to destroy him.

Morgan le Fay, like many others, cannot see beneath Tristram's armor to determine his identity, but unlike others she will not stop at guessing and instead must have her way—another reminder of how the book portrays certain women as particularly stubborn and powerful. Once Morgan learns Tristram's identity, she immediately hatches another plan, this time not to hurt her brother but rather to avenge her unrequited love for Launcelot by revealing his affair with Guenever.



Chapter 42 Morgan's lover Hemison decides to follow Tristram against Morgan's will and kill him. They fight, and Tristram slays him.

Hemison has his own desires for revenge, but these are easily thwarted.



Chapter 43 In the minutes before he dies, Hemison asks Tristram to have him sent back to Morgan's castle, where she is greatly sorrowful. Tristram continues and stays with a knight, and they speak of the realm's greatest knights. In the morning he continues on to the castle of the Hard Rock.

Morgan is in fact shown to be more than an entirely cold, conniving woman, since she is able to grieve over her lover's death (as she did with Accolon of Gaul). Tristram, for his part, remains committed to pursuing this part of his quest.



Chapter 44 There Tristram does many great exploits with Morgan's shield. Arthur doesn't understand what it means, but Guenever does and grows anxious. A damsel of Morgan goes to Arthur and tells him that the shield warns of his shame and dishonor. Arthur is sad and angry. Guenever tells Ector de Maris that the shield was surely made by Morgan against her and Launcelot. Arthur continues to gaze at the knight and his shield and this frightens Guenever. Arthur and Uwayne come to Tristram and ask him where he got his shield: he tells them.

Tristram is not actually aware of what the shield means, but in any case he has promised Morgan to use this shield. Meanwhile, the others at Arthur's court slowly become aware that this trick of Morgan le Fay's could easily lead to infighting and the disintegration of the knightly fellowship—even if Arthur continues to keep himself blinded to the truth. As is the case in many places throughout the work, revealing the secret of Launcelot and Guenever's affair is portrayed as being just as bad as the affair itself.



BOOK 10

Chapter 1 Tristram says he doesn't know what the shield means but has promised to carry it. Arthur asks his name, and he refuses to give it. Arthur says he'll battle the knight, but Tristram wounds him. Uwayne calls out to Tristram that he'll avenge the wound. They each break their spears, and Tristram hurls Uwayne off his horse. Tristram says that he won't fight any more. He departs, asking after Launcelot everywhere he goes, though no one has heard from him. Tristram rides by a forest and sees one knight fighting against nine. Tristram rides towards them and calls out for the nine to cease their shameful act. Their master, Breuse Saunce Pité, says it's not his business to meddle, which angers Tristram.

Tristram, disguised as he is, is in a difficult position. He is forced at one point to fight against Arthur for his honor, though he knows that it is usually frowned upon to battle and wound a king. It's perhaps for this reason that Tristram, after fulfilling his immediate knightly obligation (to his honor as well as to his promise made to Morgan), soon leaves. Tristram is righteously indignant that nine knights would fight against one, an unfair and dishonorable match-up, which makes sense once he learns Breuse is involved.



Chapter 2 Tristram strikes at all nine of the knights, who begin to flee with Breuse Saunce Pité to a tower, and shut out Tristram. Tristram returns to the knight, who he realizes is Palomides, his enemy. Since Palomides is wounded, they set another day to do battle. Palomides tells Tristram that he was trying to avenge the murder of a lady's lord by Breuse Saunce Pité, who also then killed the lady.

Although Breuse Saunce Pité is Tristram's enemy, so is Palomides (in this scene at least), so Tristram has to decide how to balance these competing oppositions. Though the two were imprisoned together, now that they are free Tristram and Palomides can settle counts honorably, in a way impossible before.



They ride together to a well, where a knight is lying under a tree asleep. Tristram nudges him awake, and he immediately hurls himself at Tristram and strikes him off his horse, then wounds Palomides, and flees. Tristram vows to follow the knight. Palomides decides to stay, and Tristram warns him not to miss their appointed battle.

Since both Tristram and Palomides are honorable knights, they know they can set a later battle day and not have to worry that one of them will betray the other now—in some ways they become temporary allies against this unknown knight.



Chapter 3 Tristram rides after the knight, and comes across a lady mourning next to a dead knight. Apparently another knight had ridden up and asked who the lady's lover was, and when he said he was from Arthur's court, the strange knight said he hated all from Arthur's court, and he fought with and killed the lady's lover. Tristram departs and, on the third day, meets Gawaine and Bleoberis at a lodge, both wounded. Both had met this knight too. They each tell each other their true names, and then Tristram departs. Tristram happens to meet Kay and Dinadan in a meadow: they've also fought with the same knight.

This unknown knight seems to have left death and destruction strewn behind him in his maraudings. Tristram does not necessarily have any obligation to this lady, but the rules of knightly conduct require that he pursue her lover's killer as far as he can. On the way, as usual, other knights assist each other's quests, serving as allies in a forest where danger is often to be met around each corner.



Chapter 4 Tristram sends Gouvernail to fetch him a new harness. Suddenly Tristram meets with Sagramore le Desirous and Dodinas le Savage, but he refuses to joust with them since he has set a date to joust with a strong knight soon. Sagramore refuses to accept that, so they fight, and Tristram strikes them both off their horses, and rides on. When they come to, they follow after Tristram in revenge. He asks that according to knighthood they depart since he's meeting Palomides soon. He tells them his name. They say he is the object of much glory, and depart.

Chapter 5 Tristram rides towards Camelot, to the place where Balin slew Lanceor and where Lanceor's lover was buried, where Merlin had prophesied that the best knights in the land would fight one day. Tristram waits for Palomides, but then sees a knight coming all in white. They fight fiercely, wounding each other and battling for hours. They stop to rest, and ask each other their names. Launcelot reveals himself, and Tristram exclaims that he is Tristram: Launcelot is the man he loves best in the world. They embrace and then ride together to Camelot.

Chapter 6 Launcelot brings Tristram to court, where he is welcomed joyfully. He shares that he was meant to fight today with Palomides. Arthur takes Tristram by his hand and introduces him to all the knights, and then makes him a knight of the **Round Table**.

Chapter 7 Mark hears of the great prowess of Tristram at Arthur's court and is jealous, so he sends a messenger, who reports that Tristram can vanquish all knights but Launcelot. Glad to hear it, Mark sneaks into England with two knights, Bersules and Amant. He tells them that they will try to kill Tristram however they can, even by trickery or treason. When Bersant refuses, Mark strikes and kills him. Amant cries out that he will no longer serve Mark, and will tell Arthur of his treason. Mark goes to slay Amant but is held back by their two squires: finally he tells Amant he'll defend himself before Arthur, but asks him not to tell Arthur his name.

Chapter 8 Mark rides to a fountain, where he rests and comes across a knight bemoaning how he loves Margawse, Lot's wife and mother to Gawaine and Gaheris. Mark goes to him and asks his name, which is Lamorak de Galis. Lamorak hears his Cornish accent and says that the king of Cornwall is the most shameful of all kings for chasing out Tristram for envy of his queen. It is a pity, he says, for such a man as Mark to be with the glorious Isoud.

Both these knights are from Arthur's court, where Tristram is held in great esteem, though initially they're unaware of this and treat him as just an anonymous knight against whom they can prove themselves. Though Tristram is often reluctant to reveal his true identity, here he does so because he doesn't want to risk being wounded in advance of his battle with Palomides.



Before the battle, we are again reminded of Merlin's prophecy, which initially is confusing, as we know Palomides is not supposed to be one of the world's greatest knights. That Launcelot and Tristram should fight makes much more sense: in fact, this will be the only time they truly fight (instead of just in a tournament), and only because neither of them recognizes the other before coming to a draw.



No longer will Tristram occupy an uncomfortable position, admired by the Round Table knights but not truly one of them. Finally his long side-tale truly reconnects with the overall saga of the Round Table.



Mark seems to be cheered by the knowledge that Launcelot can conquer Tristram, simply because it suggests that Tristram isn't invincible—thus, especially if Mark ignores the agreed-upon rules of knightly conduct, he might have a chance at finally ridding himself of his rival. However, Mark has not entirely accounted for the honor of his own knights, who refuse to align themselves with Mark's conniving ways and treacherous plans.



On his way to Arthur's court, Mark is waylaid by another kind of adventure, as often happens. A more courageous knight than Mark would have ordered Lamorak to fight upon hearing such an insult, but that Mark stays hidden and says nothing is meant to be a sign of his shameful, cowardly character. Lamorak's love for Margawse will become important later.



Sir Dinadan comes and salutes the two. Then Lamorak jousts with Mark and strikes him down, but Mark rises up and they fight. Mark is now very angry, but Lamorak beats him down again. Finally Lamorak says it would be shameful for him to continue. Dinadan mocks Mark as a true Cornish for not being able to match Lamorak. But he does agree to take Mark to Arthur's court.

Chapter 9 Mark, Lamorak, and Dinadan ride to a bridge next to a tower, where two brothers require any passersby to joust. Mark, still shamed by Dinadan, fights, and both break their spears, after which Mark refuses to fight anymore. Then they come to the castle, where they feast. A knight named Berluse recognizes Mark, and declares that Mark killed his father. He will not kill Mark within the castle out of love for the castle's lord, but when he leaves Berluse will follow and avenge his father's death.

Chapter 10 Lamorak and Dinadan are upset to have traveled with Mark. The next day Mark and Dinadan ride together before meeting Berluse and his two cousins. Dinadan asks Berluse to hold off since he has promised to take Mark to Arthur's court, even though he now regrets this promise. Berluse says Dinadan should not remain with Mark: he attacks Mark and knocks him out of the saddle. Dinadan does the same to Berluse's two cousins, and they begin fighting. Mark is about to kill Berluse when Dinadan stops him, and they leave him there wounded.

Then they come across another knight, and Mark refuses to joust, so Dinadan does. He's knocked off his horse and the knight refuses to fight Dinadan on foot. Dinadan is angry as the knight leaves, and wonders if it is Sir Tor.

Chapter 11 Mark begins to mock Dinadan for losing against the knight. Dinadan calls him a coward and murderer, but they continue on together. They rest at a knight's house, who reveals that the knight who won against Dinadan was in fact Sir Tor. The next day Dinadan sees six knights of Arthur and decides he'll trick Mark into jousting with one of them. He proposes they fight two against six, but as he rides towards them Mark rides away. The six recognize Dinadan and welcome him.

The knights of the Round Table seem pleased to see that the general stereotypes about Cornish knights—weak, jealous, cowardly—seem to line up with their experience of Mark (who is of course still disguised, so he can't draw on his authority as king to silence them).



At first, Mark seems to want to make up for his loss against Dinadan by proving himself successful and brave—however, as soon as he thinks he is in any kind of danger, that bravery immediately disappears. Finally Mark's identity is revealed, not in the context of honoring a once-disguised king, but rather of revealing the extent of Mark's treachery.



Lamorak and Dinadan now realize that they have not only been traveling with a sorry Cornish knight, but with the dishonorable king of the Cornish realm, who has banished and thus dishonored Tristram, now a fellow of the Round Table. Still, as an honorable knight, Dinadan doesn't believe he can renege on his promise to take Mark with him to King Arthur's court.



Once again, Mark is careful not to take any risks of injury or death, a sense of caution that the book considers as cowardly and unworthy of a true knight or king.



The relationship between Mark and Dinadan is quickly deteriorating, as Mark hypocritically insults Dinadan for his loss against a knight that Mark himself refused to battle. Dinadan further provokes Mark, knowing he will be too much of a coward to fight two against six: in any case, Dinadan takes a rest from his charge in meeting his friends.



Chapter 12 Dinadan tells them that it was a cowardly knight of Cornwall who just ran away from them: he doesn't know his name. They rest in a castle, where Dinadan comes across Mark in a chamber and rebukes him for fleeing. To scare him, Dinadan tells him that Launcelot is the leader of the group. Dinadan then returns to his friends, and says that he told Mark that Mordred's shield is the sign of Launcelot. Mordred is currently wounded, so he offers to give his shield to the fool Dagonet to set on the Cornish knight. They ride toward Mark, who sees the sword and, terrified, flees. Dagonet chases him through the woods, with Uwaine and Brandiles laughing hard.

Chapter 13 Mark comes flying past a knight on horseback, who offers to protect Mark, and strikes Dagonet down. Brandiles, coming after, is angry and tries to strike the knight, but the knight smites him down as well. The same happens to Arthur's other knights. They ask the knight's name, but he won't tell.

Mark rides after the knight, praising him, though the knight only sighs sadly. The knight sends a valet to a nearby manor to ask for food and drink. He says the request come from the knight that follows the questing beast. When the valet tells the lady, she cries that it is her dear son Palomides. The valet shares Palomides' name with Mark, who is pleased but says nothing. Mark falls asleep, and Palomides leaves him.

Chapter 14 Dinadan suggests that the unknown knight is Lamorak, and rides after him. Dinadan then hears weeping in the forest at night and approaches it, finding a knight sorrowfully exclaiming about his unrequited love for La Beale Isoud, who only loves Tristram, and whose husband is the falsest king in the world. Mark is there hiding and, terrified that Dinadan will reveal his identity, flees fast to Camelot. There Mark kills Amant, who is waiting to declare Mark's treason to Arthur. Mark leaves again from court, frightened of Dinadan's knowledge.

Chapter 15 Amant, about to die, goes to Arthur and tells him how the cowardly Mark has slain him and Bersules, all because they refused to kill Tristram. Arthur is furious, and Tristram weeps for the knights' deaths. Launcelot asks permission to go out to seek Mark and bring him back to Camelot. Launcelot overtakes Mark, and orders him to return to Arthur. When Mark realizes it is Launcelot, he tries to yield, but Launcelot charges at him. Mark tumbles out of his horse on purpose and lies still, crying for mercy. Launcelot picks him up and takes him to Arthur, where he falls at Arthur's feet and begs for mercy, swearing to make amends and pay homage and service to Arthur.

Although Dinadan clearly despises Mark, he is honorable enough not to share Mark's name, as he knows the knights would probably want to kill him, and Dinadan has promised to transport him safely to Arthur's court. Still, Dinadan can't help himself from fanning the flames of Mark's cowardice, since Mark is clearly terrified by Launcelot's prowess. For Arthur's men, making the Cornish knight flee in terror from Dagonet, the court fool, is a hilarious joke.



This unknown knight soon drives a wedge into the game established by Arthur's knights, as they are no longer in a position of such power over Mark, who now has a protector against them.



Palomides returns to the story yet again. As a Saracen, he is loyal to no British king or fellowship—only to the mysterious questing beast, whom he is fated to follow until fulfilling this quest. Mark is relieved to have such a strong knight protecting him, and doesn't seem to know that Palomides is in love with Isoud (his wife).



Palomides shares Mark's unrequited love for Isoud, though in Palomides' case this doesn't lead to treason and destruction. It's unclear if Mark recognizes that this weeping knight is Palomides, or if he thinks it is Lamorak (who only recently was heard weeping over Margawse). Mark continues his treasonous behavior by killing Amant, but he has failed to fully calculate the implications of his actions, since Dinadan by chance knows his true identity.



It turns out that Mark did not need to fear Dinadan's revelation of his identity as much as his own knight, who has just enough time before he dies to reveal the extent of Mark's treachery. It is meant to be a sign of the honor of Arthur's knights that Launcelot does not kill Mark immediately—instead, he brings him back to Arthur to be judged. Arthur's honor and mercy is also shown in his willingness to forgive Mark, who in contrast appears as simpering and cowardly.



Chapter 16 Meanwhile Dinadan comforts Palomides, who asks him if he's seen Tristram. He was meant to meet with him to fight, Palomides says, but he was kept prisoner. Dinadan learns the day of their fixed meeting, realizing that this was the day of Tristram's mighty battle with Launcelot. Dinadan promises to keep Palomides from harm, and to ensure that he is welcomed to Arthur's court.

Chapter 17 They pass a castle, where Dinadan says Morgan le Fay lives and keeps many knights of Arthur prisoner. Everyone who passes this way must joust with a knight or two of the castle, and if he loses he is kept prisoner in the castle. Palomides vows to destroy this shameful tradition. A knight with a red shield, Sir Lamorak, comes up behind the two, and asks Palomides to let him fight first: if he loses Palomides can avenge him. Lamorak fights four knights of the castle and strikes them all to earth.

Chapter 18 After Lamorak strikes down another knight, Palomides offers to take over, but Lamorak cries that he is not weak or weary, and will prove it by jousting with Palomides himself. Lamorak indeed strikes and wounds Palomides, and then knocks Dinadan off his horse as well. Over and over again Lamorak jousts with and strikes down the castle knights, making each one swear that they will never follow the castle's evil custom. Finally an unarmed knight emerges and tells Lamorak to leave, for he has ensured the end of the castle's tradition. Lamorak departs. Palomides tells Dinadan that he must avenge his shameful performance against the Knight with the Red Shield (Lamorak).

Chapter 19 Palomides catches up with Lamorak and declares his intention of revenge. They fight on foot for over an hour, bloodying their armor and the ground. Finally Palomides grows faint with his wounds. He asks for his enemy's name. Lamorak shares who he is, son of Pellinore and half brother of Tor. Palomides kneels down and says that Lamorak is known for his glory. They embrace and rest.

Chapter 20 Meanwhile Brandiles comes to Arthur's court to tell of how Dagonet chased Mark through the forest. Mark says that he was saved by the Knight who followed the Questing Beast, that is, Palomides. Meanwhile Lamorak, Palomides, and Dinadan ride until reaching a castle on a mount, home to Galahalt. Palomides says he will rest there since he is wounded. Lamorak says he'll stay too, but Dinadan desires to see Tristram, so he continues to Arthur's court. On his way a knight orders him to joust, but Dinadan refuses. He continues on to court and greets Tristram, who loves Dinadan more than any other knight other than Launcelot. Dinadan tells Arthur of Lamorak's prowess, and Arthur hopes he comes to court soon.

Dinadan has been occupying a privileged place of knowledge recently, able to learn knights' identities and piece together elements of events that remain mysterious to others. Fortunately, Dinadan is gracious in handling such knowledge, as he invites Palomides to Arthur as a guest.



By forcing any knight that passes by to joust with the castle knights, Morgan le Fay takes advantage of Arthur's knights' willingness to do battle, in order to continue her fight with her brother Arthur by proxy. Lamorak and Palomides join in an informal alliance against what they consider to be a shameful tradition.



Soon enough the temporary alliance between Lamorak and Palomides dissolves, due to Lamorak's own pride (which the book disapproves of as a corruption of correct, courageous knightly behavior). Nevertheless, we are meant to admire Lamorak's prowess and his ultimate ability to put an end to the shameful tradition at Morgan le Fay's castle. Now, however, Palomides must joust against Lamorak again, in order to defend his own honor.



The length of a jousting battle is often used to indicate whether or not two knights are well matched against each other. While it seems that Lamorak may have ended up winning, it is portrayed as proper that, as two honorable knights, they end in a friendly draw.



Though Mark has been staying at Arthur's court, he has apparently been unwilling to share all the details of the shameful events that befell him in the forest—luckily, another of Arthur's knights does not refrain from explaining things to Arthur. Lamorak and Palomides are now allies on a more profound level. The same is true of Dinadan and Tristram—not so long ago Dinadan was cursing Tristram for being too reckless and bringing Dinadan into danger, but now it seems they are close friends.



Chapter 21 Arthur announces a jousting tournament. Tristram, Launcelot, and Dinadan decide not to joust. Gawaine wins at first, but then a knight with a red shield arrives riding and strikes down Gawaine's brothers and Gawaine himself. Tristram guesses that this is Lamorak: he strikes down 20 more knights and wins the prize. Arthur, Launcelot, Tristram, and Dinadan ride after him into the forest, where they all embrace. But Gawaine and his brothers are jealous and angry, and they vow to be revenged.

Chapter 22 One day Arthur asks Mark to give him a gift: that Mark will take Tristram to Cornwall, let him see his friends, and keep him safe there. Mark vows to do so, and Arthur says if he does this he will forgive Mark everything. Mark swears on the Bible, but is lying through it all. They prepare to leave Camelot, and many of the **Round Table** are upset, believing that Mark will treacherously kill Tristram.

Launcelot goes to Mark and tells him to beware of treason, for if he betrays his word, Launcelot vows to kill him himself. Mark insists he is true.

Chapter 23 A week after Mark and Tristram leave, a knight, Aglavale, arrives to court with a young squire, whom he asks Arthur to make a knight. Aglavale says the squire is Pellinore's son, a brother of himself and Lamorak—his name is Percivale de Galis. Arthur makes Percivale a knight. The next night a maiden of the queen, a woman who usually cannot speak, takes Percivale by the hand and tells him to come with her, and to take the seat next to the Siege Perilous (a seat at the **Round Table** kept empty for one who will eventually achieve the **Holy Grail**), saying the seat belongs to Percivale. The maiden dies soon afterward, and the court praises Percivale highly.

For the rest of the book, it will be a delicate matter to determine when Tristram and Launcelot joust, since it will be important that, as the kingdom's two greatest knights, they do not fight against each other. Lamorak battles and proves his honor in a fashion typical of these tournaments, keeping his identity hidden.



Arthur seems to believe that Mark has repented, and that swearing on the Bible is a potent enough vow to ensure that Mark will keep Tristram safe. The other knights, however, are more skeptical about the ability for people's characters to truly change over time.



Mark is afraid of Launcelot, but it is uncertain whether this fear will curb his treachery.



In this case, Arthur does not require proof of battle prowess or an important quest or adventure: knowing Percivale's identity and his relation to an illustrious family that includes Lamorak and Pellinore, among others, is enough to make him a knight. The maiden's action suggests that Arthur was right in making Percivale a knight of the Round Table: while Percivale is not the knight who will achieve the Holy Grail, he is only one step removed from this honor, and has seemingly been chosen by fate and God.



Chapter 24 Gawaine and his brothers send for their mother, Margawse, to go to a castle next to Camelot, all with the intent to kill Lamorak. Lamorak (who is in love with Margawse, and she with him) arranges to sleep with the queen at the castle one night. When he goes into her bed, unarmed, Gaheris sneaks in and lops off his mother's head. Lamorak leaps out of bed, dismayed, and cries out at Gaheris, asking why he didn't slay Lamorak instead. Gaheris claims that Lamorak's father slew theirs, and for Lamorak to sleep with their mother is too great of a shame. Lamorak claims that it was Balin le Savage, not his father Pellinore, who killed the brothers' father, and furthermore, Pellinore's death has not been revenged. Gaheris says he won't kill Lamorak when he's naked and unarmed, he but orders Lamorak to leave. Angry and grieving, Lamorak leaves Arthur's court. But when Arthur learns Gaheris has killed his mother (who is also Arthur's half-sister), he is furious and orders Gaheris out. Launcelot tells Arthur that he will surely lose Lamorak to Gawaine and his brothers.

Chapter 25 Gawaine's brothers Agravaine and Mordred ride along and meet with a wounded knight who is fleeing from Breuse Saunce Pité. They agree to rescue him, but Breuse wounds them himself. Dinadan comes along and, angry, strikes him off his horse. Breuse flees. Dinadan shares with the brothers his name, but they're angry, since they hate Dinadan as a friend of Lamorak. The knight wounded by Breuse says that Dinadan killed his father, and he draws his sword. But Dinadan throws him from his horse, breaking his neck, and strikes down Mordred and Agravaine as well. Dinadan rides to the castle where Palomides is resting with Lamorak, and tells them of all that has happened.

Chapter 26 A knight comes from Cornwall to Arthur's court, and shares tidings of Tristram. Launcelot sends a damsel with a letter to Tristram warning him to be wary of Mark. She also brings letters to Isoud from Arthur and Launcelot. But Mark intercepts these letters and is angry, supposing that Tristram is planning treason against him. Mark sends letters to Launcelot, Guenever, and Arthur.

Chapter 27 Mark's letter to Arthur hints at Guenever and Launcelot's affair, but Arthur thinks that this is only a rumor started by Morgan le Fay, so he puts it out of his mind. The letter also says that Mark takes Tristram for his mortal enemy, and will be avenged on him. Guenever's letter shares what Mark knows of her affair with Launcelot. She sends the letter to Launcelot, who lies down on his bed to think. Dinadan reads the letter while Launcelot sleeps, and then tells Launcelot upon awakening that he will write a song to teach a harp-player, and send him to Cornwall to sing it to Mark.

Ever since Lamorak achieved honor at Arthur's tournament (and since his love for Margawse was made known), Gawaine and his brothers have been plotting to destroy him out of envy—a common enough trait at the king's court, but hardly promoted as a virtue among the knights. The treachery of Gawaine and Gaheris, in particular, is shown to be especially despicable: not only do they betray the Round Table code by killing a lady, but that lady is their own mother. Their actions are even more indefensible given that it turns out it was not Lamorak's father but Balin le Savage who killed Gawaine and Gaheris's father. Arthur is deeply troubled by these actions, which seem to suggest trouble, treachery, and infighting brewing amongst his beloved knights.



Breuse Saunce Pité is an enemy of all and friend to no one among the knights—and yet he always manages to escape. Although Dinadan saves Agravaine and Mordred, these two prove to be ungrateful, retaining a deep prejudice against anyone who is friends with their enemy Lamorak. Together with the wounded knight, they both seek to destroy Dinadan, who is forced to defend himself three against one, before returning to the castle to share news of the knights' treachery.



Mark is shown to be continuing in his treacherous ways, intercepting private letters and seeming to be on the lookout for any excuse to fight against Tristram and betray his promise to Arthur. Slowly, he begins such a plot by writing letters to Arthur's court.



It seems that everyone at Arthur's court except for the king himself, who perhaps is in denial, is aware of Guenever's affair with Launcelot. Mark, conniving as ever, is eager to use this knowledge against the knights of Arthur in any way that will benefit him. Launcelot may be unparalleled on the battlefield, but in more subtle tricks such as these, even he cannot immediately figure out how to counter Mark's plots. When one isn't bound by the rules of honor, it's easy to manipulate those who are.



Chapter 28 Tristram, meanwhile, is wounded at a tournament, and goes to the castle of Sir Dinas to rest. Then enemies of Mark, the Sessoins, led by Elias, lay siege to the Castle of Tintagil. Mark's council says he must send for Tristram: he is reluctant, since he hates Tristram, but finally agrees. Tristram agrees to fight after a week of resting. Dinas and Mark fight in the meantime, but finally, after much slaughter, have to withdraw to the castle. Mark sends for Tristram, who is recovered and rides to Tintagil. He kills several knights and manages to sneak into the castle.

Chapter 29 The next morning the captain Elias calls out to Mark to tell him to do battle, now that Tristram is there. Tristram tells a messenger that they will meet in the morning. Mark makes Tristram the battle commander. Tristram burns the Sessoins' ships, then gathers his men. The next day they meet, and Tristram wounds Elias along with many others, before finally they withdraw to rest. When Elias realizes how many men he's lost, he suggests via a messenger that Mark send a knight to fight him alone.

Chapter 30 No knight dares fight Elias. Tristram says that though he is wounded, he will fight himself. The next day they meet on the battlefield. They fight on horseback, then knock each other to earth and then continue on foot. After an hour Tristram grows faint and stumbles. Elias wounds him, and Tristram begins to fade. All the Sessoins begin to laugh, and Mark bemoans the loss. But then Tristram thinks of La Beale Isoud, and rises up again, his strength renewed, and strikes Elias many times, until Elias staggers and dies. Elias's men flee, but Mark takes many prisoners.

Chapter 31 Mark makes a great feast. The harp player arrives and plays the song written by Dinadan, which tells of Mark's treason. When he reaches the end Mark is furious: the player claims that he was only following Dinadan's command. Mark orders him to leave. He thinks this was all Tristram's doing.

Chapter 32 Soon Saracens (Muslims) land in Cornwall, and Mark's brother Prince Boudwin courageously sets fire to their ships and, with his men, kills all 40,000 of them. Mark is furiously jealous. He sends for Boudwin, his wife, and their young son. They eat, and then Mark asks why Boudwin sought the glory of battle rather than sending for him, Mark. Boudwin says there was no time to delay, but Mark cries that he is a liar, and kills him. Anglides (Boudwin's wife) swoons in grief. Isoud sends a messenger to Anglides and tells her to leave court with her son Alisander as quickly as she can.

Tristram now occupies an uncertain position at King Mark's court: secretly, Mark is plotting against him, but on the surface Tristram continues to be a loyal knight that must be called upon to fight whenever Mark's kingdom is in danger. Mark, as we well know, would far prefer Tristram to risk his life in battle rather than Mark himself continuing to fight on his own.



Although Mark hates and is jealous of Tristram, he is also a savvy enough commander to know that his best chance of conquering the Sessoins is to take advantage of Tristram's prowess in battle. Just as he planned, Tristram proves a successful commander, so much so that Elias believes his only chance is to fight one-on-one.



Tristram, as we recall, was already wounded and recovering when Mark sent for him from Dinas's castle. That he is able to face Elias despite this is meant to underline both his remarkable prowess and his bravery as a knight. Tristram's love for Isoud is treated here almost as a physical layer of armor, cheering him and making him stronger, finally giving him the extra push he needs to defeat Elias. This echoes other similar scenes of knights being inspired by ladies to fight harder.



It is not entirely clear what Dinadan hoped to accomplish through this song—which only makes Mark angrier and more suspicious of Tristram—unless it was to shame Mark in return for Mark's own letters.



Mark's jealousy and lack of honor seem to know no bounds. Not only does he stew in envy for his own brother, who after all protected the entire kingdom from invaders, but he slowly and surely plots to kill his brother and his family out of pure jealousy. Isoud, knowing of Mark's treachery, does what she can to help the surviving members of Prince Boudwin's family to flee before Mark tries to kill them as well.



Chapter 33 Mark goes from room to room searching for Anglides and her son. He orders his knight Sadok to ride after her. Sadok catches up and orders her back. When she protests, he says that he'll let her leave if she promises to have her son avenge his father's death when he grows up. She swears that Alisander will wear his father's doublet and blood-spattered shirt, which Anglides has taken with her. Sadok returns to Mark and says that he's drowned Alisander. Anglides rides to the castle Magouns, in Sussex, where she and Alisander live for years with the Constable Bellangere, her cousin's husband.

Chapter 34 When Alisander grows up, Bellangere proposes to make him knight. The day of the ceremony, Anglides takes the doublet and bloody shirt and tells Alisander the story of his father's death.

Chapter 35 Anglides asks Alisander to avenge his father's death, and he swears to. Alisander jousts that day with 20 knights and wins against them all. One of them goes to Mark and tells him of Alisander's skill. Mark hurries to Sadok's chamber to slay him for treason: Sadok says he won't repent, for Mark was the traitor. Mark's four knights draw their swords, but Sadok kills them all, then escapes from the castle.

Tristram sends for Alisander to come to King Arthur's court. Mark sends a knight to follow Alisander, who meets and kills him. Mark writes to Morgan le Fay and the Queen of Northgalis, praying they'll find a way to kill Alisander.

Chapter 36 Alisander, on the way to Camelot, stops by King Carados' castle and strikes down many knights. Morgan le Fay hears of this and vows to find him. Meanwhile a damsel at Carados' castle asks Alisander to fight for her honor against a knight, who won't allow her to marry anyone else. They fight on horse and by foot for many hours. Morgan arrives to watch. As they rest, the knight says he's killed 10 knights by accident, and another 10 in anger. Alisander cries that this is shameful, and with renewed strength strikes him down and cuts off his head. Alisander sends for a valet to carry him away, since he is greatly wounded.

Although Mark is portrayed as increasingly ruthless and cruel, the book makes clear that not all knights in Cornwall share his failings—indeed, knights like Amant, Bersules, and now Sadok risk treason and even death in working against their master. Sadok knows that eventually the truth will have to come out, but by rescuing Alisander and Anglides he hopes to rid the kingdom of its dishonorable king in the future.



Like other characters in the book, Alisander grows up unaware of who he really is, and eventually has to learn what his responsibilities (like revenge) entail.



Although years have now gone by (the relation of this anecdote's chronology to the rest is not entirely clear), Mark remains just as stubbornly vicious as ever. We are meant to see the clash from Sadok's perspective, agreeing that the treachery is on Mark's side, not his.



Having heard of the tale, Tristram is eager both to protect Alisander and to unite Mark's enemies against him. Mark, meanwhile, now enlists the help of treacherous women to assist him in his wickedness.



As Alisander travels to Camelot, he, like many young knights, develops a reputation along the way by jousting and conquering other reputable knights. Morgan le Fay doesn't seem to have chosen a side quite yet, though she is clearly interested in this young knight (and knows about him from Mark's letter to her). Already Alisander has a well-developed understanding of the values of honor and shame, which he applies unfavorably to the knight's actions.



Chapter 37 Morgan heals Alisander's wounds. The damsel asks Morgan to tell Alisander she wishes to marry him, since he has won her. Morgan tells him to refuse, and he does. Alisander then agrees to give her to a man that she loves, Gerine le Grose, and they are married. Morgan gives Alisander a sleeping potion for three days. When he awakes, Morgan tells him to promise not to leave the castle for a year, and he'll be made whole. He agrees, but then repents of this decision, since he won't be able to fight Mark. Then the rightful owner of the castle, a damsel who is Morgan's cousin, enters and finds Alisander asleep.

Chapter 38 Alisander sadly tells the damsel that he's imprisoned, and she tells him it's so that Morgan can sleep with him: but if Alisander agrees to love *her* instead, she'll deliver him. The damsel says that her uncle hates Morgan, so she'll send for him to destroy the castle, and she'll have Alisander escape. She sends for her uncle, and on the appointed day of battle shows Alisander how to hide in a garden. Her uncle arrives and burns down the castle. Alisander declares he'll stay within the piece of earth that was his room for a year, as per his promise to Morgan.

A certain Alice, daughter of Duke Ansirus the Pilgrim, declares in Arthur's court that whoever can overcome the knight that keeps that piece of earth will have her and her lands. One knight, Sagamore le Desirous, comes and fights with Alisander, who beats him. Alice asks him to take off his helmet, and when she sees Alisander's face, she declares she loves him.

Chapter 39 When Alisander sees Alice's face unveiled, he declares he loves her too. As they speak, several knights come to fight: he trounces them. The damsel who helped Alisander out of the castle tells her story to Alice, who says that he is beholden to her.

As Alisander gazes at Alice, enthralled in love, Mordred comes and tries to sneak Alisander's horse out of the castle to shame him. But the damsel who had helped him knocks Alisander with a sword, disturbing him from his trance, and Mordred flees into the castle. Over the course of the next year, Alisander fights with many knights, and wins over them all. Then he leaves with Alice for Benoye.

Chapter 40 Alice has a son named Bellengerus le Beuse, who would become a knight in Arthur's court and avenge his father's murder (and Tristram's) by Mark. But we leave this tale aside for now.

Alisander does not seem to fully recognize what kind of a sorceress Morgan is. While he attempts to follow correct conduct, ensuring that the damsel he saved is happily married, and agreeing to Morgan's requirements for being healed of his wounds, he is now faced with the choice of whether or not to keep his promise to Morgan. Breaking promises is not part of the code of honor, of course, but neither is Morgan's trickery.



It is not left entirely clear whether or not Alisander actually promises to love the damsel instead of Morgan, in exchange for being freed from the castle—this is another example of the power that women, especially in love, can wield over men, even manipulating other men in their lives to act out their wishes. Alisander's moral dilemma is temporarily resolved as he decides to keep his promise.



Now another woman enters Alisander's life, again seeking to wield her power over knights by making them joust with each other for her and her possessions. But her love for Alisander does seem genuine in this case.



This is the only moment at which there is some doubt regarding whether Alisander continues to have a responsibility towards the damsel who saved him.



After a brief moment of doubt, there seems to be no more of a problem with Alisander abandoning the damsel who saved him and instead leaving with Alice (after a brief interlude with Mordred, who is another son brought up away from his father).



Though we will not see this slaying in action, the book shows us that ultimately evil actions are righteously avenged.



Sir Galahalt, the lord of Surluse, comes to Arthur's court to suggest he hold a joust. Arthur tells Guenever to go without him. She says she'll take Launcelot.

Chapter 41 Launcelot comes to the jousting disguised, and strikes down his own half-brother, Ector de Maris, as well as Bleoberis, and the King of Northgalis. When he strikes down the king, a great fight begins between the two parties. Sir Meliagrance, Bagdemagus' son, realizes who Launcelot is, but he is beaten by another knight before the first rest. A damsel then comes to court complaining that a knight there is withholding all her lands. Someone suggests she ask for help from Sir Palomides, who is in a nearby hermitage. Palomides fights with the knight and strikes off his head. The lady falls in love with Palomides, though they are of the same family. Galahalt declares that whoever wins against Palomides will win the damsel.

Chapter 42 On the second day of the tournament, Galahalt fights with Palomides. His sword slips and he accidentally cuts off the head of Palomides' horse, and quickly asks Palomides' forgiveness for this dishonor. Palomides grants it, and Galahalt grants Palomides the lady. They leave, and Galahalt fights with Dinadan, who has come disguised, and who nearly beats Galahalt, but then tells him to take another jousting partner. Then many from Northgalis come and begin to fight, before the day ends.

Chapter 43 As Palomides prepares to sleep, the brother of the knight he killed declares he'll avenge his death. After dinner, Galahalt sends them to a field, where Palomides strikes off the knight's head.

Chapter 44 On the third day, King Bagdemagus fights against another king, and conquers both him and a knight coming to avenge the king's defeat. Then men of Northgalis fight against Bagdemagus' men. Palomides meets with Bleoberis' brother Blamore de Ganis, who falls and almost breaks his neck. Bagdemagus is given that day's prize. At dinner, a valet comes bearing four spears to Palomides, saying that a knight has asked him to take one half of them and meet him in the field. They meet, and the strange knight strikes Palomides from his horse. Then they fight on foot. As the knight advances on Palomides, Galahalt cries for them to stop. The knight reveals himself to be Lamorak. Guenever praises him, then asks Launcelot not to fight others of Arthur's men.

Guenever continues to court risk despite the fact that Arthur has come perilously close to finding out about her affair with Launcelot.



Launcelot's disguise means that he will not immediately be adding to his own glory and honor by being recognized. However, it also means that other knights will be less afraid to fight against him, and Launcelot will even feel justified in fighting against his relatives, including Ector de Maris. Normally, Palomides would rightfully "win" the lady as his property, but in this case the context of the tournament (and the fact that they are related, perhaps) means that more jousting and competition is necessary to determine the prize.



Galahalt's behavior with Palomides is another reminder of what proper knightly behavior looks like: not only does he apologize, but Palomides graciously accepts the apology rather than losing his temper. While the men of Northgalis are often considered Arthur's enemies, here their opposition is largely in good fun.



This knight may not be in the wrong in wanting to avenge his brother's death, but Palomides' victory underlines his prowess yet again.



By the third day of the tournament, the regular alliances and oppositions have begun to lose their interest, so the groupings begin to realign. This rearrangement suggests that competition, always a vital part of life in this society, is not only a serious value but also a kind of entertainment for everyone involved. Lamorak's actions suggest that, before revealing his own identity, he wanted to prove himself to be just as worthy as Arthur's other knights. Guenever, however, as the guardian of the knights, never likes them to battle each other.



Chapter 45 On the 4th day, the fighting resumes, and Lamorak wins against many knights. Many others gang up against him, so Launcelot and Bagdemagus ride out to help him. At the end of the day Lamorak gets the prize and they go to feast.

As a certain favorite emerges at these tournaments, the other knights often band together and do what they can to ensure that the favorite doesn't win for too long in a row.



Chapter 46 On the 5th day, the fighting begins again, and a Saracen strikes down three brothers of Gawaine: Mordred, Gaheris, and Agravaine. Arthur hears of this and is angry, so he decides to fight himself. Lamorak and Palomides fight in defense of Arthur, who praises them and asks Lamorak (still disguised) who he is. When he learns, he swears never to fail him. Arthur confides that it is horrible that Lamorak couldn't marry Margawse (Gawaine and his brothers' mother, Arthur's sister), since Gaheris killed her. Lamorak asks permission to avenge her death, and Arthur agrees.

Arthur's opinion towards Mordred, Gaheris, and Agravaine is ambivalent: on the one hand, he finds their slaying of their mother Margawse despicable and unknighly, but on the other hand, they remain his knights of the Round Table, and he is reluctant to see them shamed in battle. By agreeing that Lamorak can avenge his lover Margawse's death, Arthur puts off having to deal with this conflict himself.



Chapter 47 A daughter of King Bades, meanwhile, is trapped by a Saracen knight Corsabrin, who refuses to let her marry anyone else. The damsel sends for Palomides and asks him to fight for her love with Corsabrin. They fight together on horseback and on foot, and are equally matched. Palomides begins to mock Corsabrin, who grows enraged, and Palomides manages to strike him down. He asks him to yield, and Corsabrin refuses, so Palomides cuts off his head.

Palomides wanders outside the tournament in pursuit of other adventures in his path. Although Palomides has been in love with Isoud, he is still eager enough to defend any damsel's honor against a knight holding her captive. This is a fairly typical jousting scene, in which a refusal to yield leads to a justifiable slaying.



Since Corsabrin is a pagan, his body begins to stink. Galahalt tells Palomides that Palomides himself must be baptized as well, but Palomides says he must do seven battles for Jesus' sake before this.

The myth of only pagan bodies smelling bad after death suggests the ubiquity of a Christian mindset at the time, as well as suspicion about non-Christians.



Chapter 48 On the 6th day, two brothers of Lamorak, Dornard and Aglovale, are stricken down, so Lamorak, enraged, fights in their defense. After many other jousts, the horn blows to rest for the day. Dinadan is merry and joking all dinner: he hands Galahalt the fish entrée and says that Galahalt is like a wolf, who will only eat flesh, not fish. When Dinadan tells Launcelot that he fears ever meeting him in battle. Launcelot says he hopes it will only be over a dish of meat. They all laugh and are merry.

This is a relatively rare scene of pure enjoyment, friendship, and contentment, even though it is only a pause before the more "honorable" games of jousting begin again. In the exchange between Dinadan and Launcelot we get a greater glimpse into their personalities and identities, apart from the noble (and violent) actions that usually serve to identify them.



Chapter 49 On the 7th day, Launcelot puts on a maiden's dress over his armor. He goes to the field and charges towards Dinadan, who suddenly realizes that it's Launcelot. Launcelot strikes him down and, dragging him into the forest, dresses him as a damsel. That night they bring him in to dinner, and Guenever falls down laughing. In the morning Guenever and Launcelot depart for Camelot. But Lamorak refuses to go, although Arthur has promised to protect him against Gawaine and his brothers. Lamorak pledges allegiance to Arthur, even as he hates the brothers.

Chapter 50 Soon after, Galahalt and Bagdemagus call for a tournament in Cornwall, with the desire, out of envy, to kill or at least shame Launcelot. Mark decides to disguise Tristram so that Galahalt thinks he's Launcelot. Seeing Tristram's jousting, everyone the first day believes that he's Launcelot, but finally he survives Galahalt and Bagdemagus' attacks and reveals who he is. Mark tells Tristram he will tend to his wounds with care. That night, however, he spirits Tristram off to another castle, where he puts him in prison. Isoud, wondering where Tristram is, asks Sadok to find him. Sadok learns he's been imprisoned by Mark and the traitors of Magoun, Mark's nephews. Sadok fights against these traitors with his cousins as Mark flees. Sadok goes to the castle Arbray in Lionnes, which holds Sir Dinas. They gather an army.

Chapter 51 Mark rides to the Castle of Tintagil, and prepares to raise a great army. He writes counterfeit letters from the Pope and has a messenger give them to him, with the order to come to Jerusalem to help fight against Saracens. Mark sends for Tristram and says that if he joins this war, he'll be let out of prison. Tristram says Mark should go himself: he won't go at Mark's order, since he knows Mark doesn't keep his word. Tristram suspects these letters are counterfeit.

Sir Percivale de Galis comes to seek Tristram, and rescues him out of prison. Percivale then rides to Mark and declares that he's saved Tristram, and he says that Mark is shameful for imprisoning a knight of such great renown. Mark sends for Dinas to tell him to put down his arms, since Mark is preparing to fight for the Pope, a noble battle. Dinas tells his men to go home. Mark finds Isoud with Tristram, and imprisons him again. Isoud sends for Dinas and Sadok to have them imprison Mark so that she might escape with Tristram to England. Tristram is rescued, Mark imprisoned, and they escape.

Launcelot's merry, trickster-like behavior continues the next day, as he and Dinadan fight earnestly but also in good fun. Launcelot's tricks also seem directed towards Guenever, whom he continues to try to impress. Lamorak, for his part, continues to be strung between loyalty to his king and his vow to avenge Margawse's death by killing the brothers, who are also Arthur's nephews.



Envy motivates many of the characters in this story, though their jealousy is almost always portrayed as a weakness unworthy of truly knightly behavior. That Tristram and Launcelot are difficult to tell apart from their actions alone suggests just how closely identifiable the two knights have become, especially since their identities are so closely tied to their actions. Mark, always plotting a way to rid himself of Tristram, takes advantage of Tristram's weakness to imprison him, though it's not clear what the extent of his plan is.



Mark's plan turns out to be even more complex than it first appeared, involving an international-scale ruse. Tristram, however, has known Mark long enough to be suspicious of anything Mark might tell him to be true. Still, it remains the case that he is trapped with little hope, it seems, of escaping.



Soon, however, Mark's complex plan begins to unravel, as it seems Tristram was not as securely imprisoned as Mark thought—and, in addition, Tristram possesses many more allies than does Mark, who has done little but sow suspicion and distrust among people throughout various kingdoms. But Mark continues to trick others, this time Dinas—though finally, at least temporarily, Mark himself is subdued.



Chapter 52 Tristram and Isoud arrive to England, where Tristram joins a jousting of Arthur's in disguise. Launcelot prepares to fight him, but Isoud sends him a ring and warns him it's Tristram, so Launcelot refuses to joust. Launcelot brings Tristram and Isoud to his castle and joyfully hosts them there. Launcelot shares the news with Arthur, who declares that there should be a celebratory May Day tournament, with the knights of England, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland against those of Gore, Surluse, Listinoise, and Northumberland. Launcelot warns that there are many knights that envy Arthur's knights, and he puts Isoud into a safe place in the castle. Tristram and Isoud pass many days in contented love.

Chapter 53 Isoud warns Tristram not to go out hunting unarmed, since he should be wary of Mark and his men. One day Tristram rests in the forest and sees the Questing Beast come to a well. Then an armed knight, Breuse Saunce Pit , comes and greets Tristram, followed by Palomides. Then they see another knight dressed to joust, and Breuse Saunce Pit  fights him. Then the knight, Bleoberis, cries that he'll avenge those that Breuse betrayed: Breuse flees, followed by Bleoberis, until he encounters several knights of the Round Table, including Ector de Maris and Percivale. He asks them for protection. Bleoberis comes and, though he is afraid, begins fighting the five. But when Bleoberis is knocked off his horse, Breuse strikes him again and again without letting him rise. One knight cries that this is shameful behavior. He prepares to fight Breuse, who flees.

Chapter 54 Palomides arrives and prepares to fight Bleoberis. But Ector de Maris says Palomides will find his match in Launcelot or Tristram. Palomides says that only one person has been his match: Lamorak, but Gawaine and his brothers killed him. Upon hearing this, Percivale (Lamorak's brother) swoons in grief. Then a valet arrives from Arthur to tell them of the tournament.

Chapter 55 Tristram, meanwhile, has encountered Dinadan, but refuses to share his name. Dinadan declares that he'll fight him in that case. A knight comes riding towards them, whom Tristram recognizes as the son of the king of Northumberland. Dinadan prepares to fight him, and Dinadan is struck down. Tristram refuses to avenge this, so Dinadan leaves him in frustration.

Tristram rides to Launcelot's castle, where Launcelot is gone, and several knights have been killed. Tristram rides out to meet their killers. They prepare to do battle, and Tristram learns their names: Agravaire and Gaheris, Arthur's nephews. Tristram says he'll let them pass for Arthur's sake, though they are murderers, as he's heard they killed Lamorak.

Isoud does her part in ensuring that the two greatest knights in the land, Tristram and Launcelot, do not have to face each other in battle and risk wounding each other. Launcelot and Tristram seem to have made up entirely, especially now that Tristram has gotten over his period of infidelity and is now only loyal to Isoud (not the greatest fidelity, but it seems good enough to Launcelot). This upcoming tournament seems both friendly and potentially fraught with danger.



Isoud, having been imprisoned herself by Mark for quite some time, now seems to be on the verge of paranoia regarding her worry that Tristram will meet with Mark. Instead, he comes across a different set of jousting knights. Where the Questing Beast is, of course, Palomides cannot be far behind. The behavior of Breuse Saunce Pit  is maddening as usual. He does not seem to care at all about the code of knightly honor, nor does he fear the shame of cowardice in fleeing. His attitude suggests how ultimately fragile the code that dictates all the knights' behavior in Camelot and elsewhere is.



This is the first time that we as readers have learned that Gawaine's brothers have killed Lamorak, after a prolonged period of opposition and revenge. Palomides seems to say this off-hand, not realizing how closely tied to Lamorak others, including Percivale, are.



Dinadan is usually a decent knight, though not as brave as Tristram, as we've seen before when Dinadan had proved reluctant to enter into risky battles. Now it is Tristram (though still disguised) who for unknown reasons seems uninterested in picking certain battles.



Tristram encounters knights who are fellow knights of the Round Table, though as we've begun to see, this distinction is starting to mean less and less. Tristram, for instance, thinks it wrong not to avenge a murder simply because of an existing alliance.



Chapter 56 But after Tristram leaves, the brothers overtake him again and vow to fight. Tristram strikes down Gaheris and Agravaire. Then he returns to the castle and tells Isoud of his adventures. Isoud says that Dinadan is the one who had the harp song against Mark written. A valet says that Dinadan is riding into town, so Isoud sends for him to rest there. He arrives and says that he's seeking Tristram, the good knight. Dinadan tells Isoud that he can't understand men who are besotted by women. Isoud says he must quarrel for a lady to be a true knight. She asks him to fight for her love against three knights that have done her wrong. Dinadan says Isoud is the fairest lady he's seen, but he won't fight against three knights at once. She laughs, and they retire. The next morning Tristram swears to Isoud that he'll meet Dinadan at the tournament, and he slips away alone.

Chapter 57 Dinadan rides to overtake Tristram, and orders him to joust. When they do, Tristram avoids striking Dinadan down, so finally he gives up and they continue riding. They come across another knight and Tristram again refuses to joust, so Dinadan does so, before learning that it's Gareth. The three meet another knight and Tristram goads Dinadan into jousting: Dinadan refuses, since he knows the knight has been proven stronger than he is. Tristram finally goes after the knight himself and strikes him down mightily. This knight reveals himself as Palomides, who declares, when Tristram asks him which knight he hates most, that it's Tristram. When Tristram declares that *he* is Tristram, Palomides is astonished. He asks Tristram to forgive him, since he sees how good a knight he is. Tristram does so.

Chapter 58 They ride to the Castle Lonazep where the tournament is being held. They recall the death of Sir Lamorak, once the best knight after Launcelot, and Tristram cries that he would kill the brothers who did it if they weren't relatives of Arthur. Gareth says that he doesn't meddle with his brothers' affairs, and he's cut himself off from them after they fought four against one and killed Lamorak.

Chapter 59 The knights rise until coming to Humber Bank, where they see a red silk-covered ship. Tristram enters: a wounded knight is lying on a bed with a letter in his hand. The other sailors say that the letter reports how the knight was slain, but whoever takes and reads it must vow to avenge his death. Tristram takes the letter: it is from Hermance, king of the Red City, who says that two brothers have killed him, and that he who avenges his death will have the Red City and all Hermance's castles. Tristram says he would accept, but has already promised to be at Arthur's tournament. Palomides offers to take it, and Tristram says they should meet at the joust in a week.

Tristram easily strikes down the two brothers, but it is relatively clear that his quarrel with them is far from over. Isoud seems sympathetic to Dinadan, even though the harper he sent to Mark put Tristram and herself in even greater danger—she feels he attempts to be a good knight. Isoud's conversation with Dinadan, though, suggests just how much Dinadan fails to live up to the image of a "true" knight, who would never question the necessity of picking a quarrel over a lady. Still, Dinadan's stubbornness hints at a certain arbitrariness in this code.



Tristram knows he is a better knight than Dinadan, and so doesn't need to prove himself by fighting and possibly wounding this fellow knight of the Round Table. Still, Tristram seems often somewhat amused by or mocking to Dinadan in his goading attempts to make Dinadan fight even when he knows Dinadan won't be an equal match to another knight. Tristram and Palomides only meet now, after having set a date of jousting long before—the date at which Tristram and Launcelot fought for the first and only time. Finally Tristram proves himself greater than Palomides once and for all.



It is interesting that we do not witness Lamorak's death in a book obsessed with battles and revenge: here, the effect is to create an uncanny absence where Lamorak once was, and to rearrange the sets of alliances based on Gareth's brothers actions.



Sometimes certain adventures or quests come to these knights against their will, though they are always alluring to those who seek to gain glory and honor. Here, there is the additional benefit of gaining a city and a number of castles. Tristram's acknowledgment that he must fulfill his promise to Arthur underlines his ability to withstand most kinds of sinful temptations (though perhaps not those involving women, as we've seen with the two Isouds).



Chapter 60 Tristram, Gareth, and Dinadan leave Palomides and come across an unarmed knight, who offers to bring them to his castle. As they're eating, one knight comes and declares that Tristram has slain his brother, and he'll kill Tristram whenever he finds him at large. After dinner the three leave, but the knight soon rides after them. Tristram strikes him down and hits him on the helmet. He tells the knight to leave, but when he refuses, Tristram strikes him harder so that he falls down, possibly dead.

They ride on and meet the King with the Hundred Knights and Sir Segwarides. The king looks at Dinadan's helmet (which is actually Tristram's), which the Queen of Northgalis had given to Isoud, and Isoud to Tristram, and asks where he got it. The king declares he'll joust with Dinadan for the love of the helmet's owner (the Queen of Northgalis). He strikes Dinadan down and orders his valet to take the helmet. Tristram then intervenes, saying he won't give up the helmet, so they fight until Tristram knocks the king out. The knights then continue on, Dinadan cursing his bad luck in wearing Tristram's helmet.

Chapter 61 Palomides, meanwhile, sails to Hermance's castle. A knight named Sir Ebel tells Palomides how much the entire court is grieving for Hermance's death. He says that the king had brought up two children in charity, but they betrayed him and mortally wounded him while he was hunting.

Chapter 62 Ebel says that he had dispatched sailors to find a knight to avenge the king's death. Palomides says that he has come here to do so, so Ebel says that he must sail to the Delectable Isle by the Red City. As Palomides departs, a knight comes up to him and says that this is his quest, and he'd be shamed if he didn't complete it. Palomides suggests they fight and the stronger will fulfill the quest: Palomides wins.

Chapter 63 The knight says he is Hermance's brother. He departs to the Red City to tell the inhabitants of Palomides' quest. The city rejoices and sends the sons (those who killed Hermance) a messenger to tell them to prepare to fight. The sons are less worried, however, once they learn that Palomides is not of Launcelot's family. Palomides arrives to the city a few days later and is greatly praised, even though he's not Christian (which he had vowed not to become until finding the Questing Beast). Helius and Helake, the two sons, come to the Red City with 40 knights.

Here it's unclear who the knight is, much less his brother whom Tristram supposedly killed. While this is certainly possible (as Tristram has seemingly killed hundreds of nameless knights), Tristram cannot be bothered to figure out these identities.



This helmet has apparently seen a number of owners. As it is so difficult to ascertain who is who in armor, helmets such as this one end up being more of a marker of one's identity than a cover-up for one's face. Although Dinadan is not particularly courageous, he often enough, humorously, ends up paying the price for being a sidekick in Tristram's reckless adventures.



A notable aspect of the theme of jealousy and revenge in this book is how often such competition takes place between fathers and sons (or parents and children more generally).



Quests have a particular currency throughout these stories: they are treated almost as concrete possessions, which can be won, lost, and traded, but only at the high price of jousting. Knights must battle even for the honor of simply attempting to fulfill a certain quest.



It's not entirely explained why Ebel had dispatched sailors to find a knight to avenge Hermance's death when his brother had offered to, but now the inhabitants are certain they have their best chance at revenge. That the narrator points to Palomides's religion suggests just how surprising we are meant to find the fact that he is such a successful knight, even though not a Christian.



Chapter 64 The brothers meet Palomides, who declares his intention to avenge the king's death. They race together on their horses, and Palomides immediately wounds Helake. Helius strikes Palomides from his horse, and they begin to fight on foot for two hours, never resting. Palomides stumbles, but seeing the commoners weeping behind him, he tells himself not to be shamed: he rises up and strikes Helius again and again, finally cutting off his head.

The whole city celebrates, but Palomides promised to go to Arthur's tournament, so he leaves. He meets Tristram at Joyous Gard, Launcelot's castle, and Tristram and Dinadan rejoice at Palomides' return.

Chapter 65 The next day Tristram and Palomides ride into the woods and meet a knight who asks who the castle belongs to. When they refuse to answer, the knight races towards Palomides with his spear, but Palomides strikes him to the ground. He's about to kill the knight, but Tristram prevents him, saying he's only a fool. The knight comes to and flees the scene without telling his name. Then another knight arrives, saying that he's been pursuing the most treacherous knight in the world, Breuse Saunce Pité. Palomides cries that this is the man he hates most.

Tristram and Palomides ride back to the castle, and the next morning they ride to Lonazep with Isoud and Dinadan. On the way they meet the knight Galihodin with twenty others around him. He offers to joust for their lady, and Palomides offers to do so.

Chapter 66 Galihodin and Palomides fight, and Palomides strikes him to the ground. Galihodin's knights come up to avenge him, and Palomides strikes them down one by one, until Galihodin bids his knights to stop. They continue on until Palomides sees Gawaine, Uwaine, Sagramore le Desirous, and Dodinas le Savage, all ready to joust. Palomides defeats them all, and they depart again.

Then Galihodin meets Gawaine and they compare notes, saying that the people they encountered must be Tristram, Palomides, and Isoud. Meanwhile Tristram leaves the others at a pavilion and rides on Palomides' white horse to Lonazep. A loud horn blows: a knight tells Tristram that it announces those fighting against Arthur at the tournament, including Marhalt, the father of Marhaus killed by Tristram.

Just as Tristram, on the point of losing a battle to Mark's enemy, had drawn strength from thinking of Isoud relying on him, so too does Palomides feel reinvigorated by the sight of the commoners, who are relying on him to avenge their beloved king's death and vanquish the traitorous sons who killed him.



Palomides does not rejoice for very long in his victory before returning to fulfill the other promise he had made—the adventures rarely cease.



So often, battles between knights are instigated when one party is seeking something—a "possession" like a woman, access to a castle, or even something like knowledge of identity—and the other refuses what the first party considers his rightful ownership. Palomides and Tristram also lack knowledge here, however, as they fail to realize that Breuse has fled them yet again.



Only a great confidence in his ability to win could lead Palomides to gamble on Tristram's lover in such a way, risking her entrapment by another knight.



Some of the characters are new here, but the story is not. What keeps the adventures and jousting events going in these stories is the hope that, even though few others have succeeded against a certain knight, one knight might finally do so, thus winning even greater honor for himself. Palomides was a somewhat negative character when he first appeared in the book, but by now he is presented as a truly great knight.



Even lacking clear identity markers, knights can make certain deductions based on battle style, prowess, and the number and kind of party that a group is known to be traveling in. More adventures await Tristram at the tournament, where his past will come back to haunt him.



Chapter 67 Tristram continues to Lonazep, but Gawaine and Galihodin arrive to Arthur first and tell him about the knight with the white horse that smote down so many. Tristram arrives but refuses to tell Arthur his name: he says he'll decide which party he'll fight for on the field the next day. In the morning the jousting begins. Gareth is wounded, and Tristram and Palomides, dressed in green, help Gareth up and bring him to their pavilion to rest.

Chapter 68 Palomides suggests to Tristram that they fight against Arthur, since Launcelot and many other worthy knights will be on his side, so they will gain great glory if they win. The next morning Isoud watches everything from a bay window, veiled so as not to be known. Arthur wonders who the knights in green could be, supposing that they might be knights of the **Round Table** fighting against his side. A number of jousts take place, and Arthur marvels at Palomides (still disguised). Then Tristram is even more successful, causing the entire party to marvel.

Chapter 69 Palomides strikes down 20 knights, and Tristram 30, mostly of the house of Arthur. Arthur tells Launcelot that this is shameful, and Launcelot offers to fight them alongside Bleoberis and Ector de Maris: Arthur will be the fourth. Launcelot and Tristram meet and fight: Launcelot strikes Tristram down. Bleoberis, Ector, and Arthur win against Palomides, Gareth, and Dinadan. The King of Northgalis rides to Tristram and tells him, though he doesn't know who he is, to take his horse since he's been so noble. Tristram thanks him and re-mounts. Then he meets with Arthur and strikes him down.

Chapter 70 Isoud had wept upon seeing Tristram unhorsed, but now delights at seeing him recovered and fighting again. Palomides happens to look to the window and see her laughing, and he's emboldened by his love for her and doubles his strength. Tristram marvels at his prowess to Dinadan, who thinks to himself that Tristram might not like the real reason for Palomides' renewed strength. Palomides is given the prize that day. But at that moment Launcelot rides into the field and tries to strike down Palomides, but Palomides strikes and kills Launcelot's horse, and Launcelot falls down. Many knights are angry at Palomides, thinking his actions to be unknighly.

Thanks to his disguise, Tristram is at greater freedom than just any knight of the Round Table: he can choose whose side to fight for without claiming his allegiance beforehand, instead watching the field to choose the battles when he'd like. Still, Tristram feels somewhat responsible for comrades like Gareth.



As usual, knights like Palomides and Tristram have to weigh the likelihood of winning against the possibility of gaining greater glory, even if they run a greater risk of being defeated as a result. Still, while Arthur doesn't know exactly who these successful knights are, their identities can't remain hidden for long—as only so many knights in the kingdom are so skilled.



For the first time since their famous battle, Launcelot and Tristram meet again, though this is less in the context of proving who is the greater knight, than of joining a team-based competition, meant to be in good fun—though the stakes seem to be rising, especially when Arthur's sometime enemy, the King of Northgalis, gives Tristram a horse that he uses to strike King Arthur down, a substantial dishonor.



As has happened both to Tristram and to Palomides before, support from a watching and anxious audience often proves to be just the added piece of strength necessary for a knight to vanquish another. Dinadan shrewdly grasps what is at stake in Palomides' renewed strength, stemming as it does from an unrequited love for Tristram's own lover. This is perhaps the first time that the mighty Launcelot is struck off his horse.



Chapter 71 Ector de Maris then strikes down Palomides in revenge, so Tristram does the same to Ector. Launcelot gets up and cries that Palomides has done him more wrong than any knight has ever done in a tournament, so he will be avenged. Palomides has no more strength, so asks that Launcelot spare him and he'll pledge eternal allegiance to him: he's never had such glory as he has now. Launcelot recognizes that Palomides won such glory for love of Isoud, but he tells Palomides not to let Tristram find out.

A great fight then begins between the two sides, and that day Palomides receives the prize again. Tristram orders Dinadan to fetch Isoud and bring her to his pavilion. Launcelot says to Arthur that he suspects Palomides is the green knight, and marvels that he began first and lasted longest without tiring.

Chapter 72 Dinadan cries that Tristram has been fighting sluggishly all day. Tristram grows angry, though Dinadan is just trying to provoke him into doing well the next day, so Palomides won't get the prize yet again. The narrator calls Launcelot and Tristram the greatest knights ever seen.

Chapter 73 In the morning Launcelot departs and Tristram prepares to ride in with Isoud, Palomides, and Gareth. Watching from a window, Launcelot remarks at the woman's beauty, and Arthur tells him that it's Isoud, who is fairer than anyone but Guenever. Arthur suggests they fight for her, though Launcelot warns that it will be difficult to defeat her protectors. They go to the forest and Palomides, angry at the intrusion, rides to Arthur and strikes him down. Launcelot says to himself that if he fights Palomides, he'll have to fight Tristram too, which might be too much. But he knows he must avenge Arthur, so he rides to Palomides and strikes him out of the saddle. Launcelot tells him that he cannot let Arthur's shame go unavenged, but he has no pleasure in fighting now. Tristram realizes that this is Launcelot, and that the other is Arthur. Tristram puts away his arms, and the two depart. Tristram shares with Palomides that Launcelot has always shown him great kindness, and is the most chivalrous of all knights. Palomides regrets having struck down King Arthur.

Chapter 74 Then the jousting begins again, and Palomides and Gareth do especially well. Tristram watches, meanwhile, but then Gareth reminds him of Dinadan's rebukes of the day before. Tristram, his pride enflamed, rides into the thick of the fighting and does just as well as Palomides. Launcelot tells Arthur, as they watch, that this must be Tristram.

Launcelot seems not quite able to believe that he's been struck down by a foreign knight, especially since he still doesn't know who. This is a rather poignant moment, as Palomides pleads with Launcelot, essentially asking him to allow Palomides to enjoy his moment of glory. Launcelot seems to easily guess how Palomides fought so well—a woman and her "sorcery" must have been involved.



Little by little, Launcelot begins to piece together shield color and identity, as Tristram, meanwhile, seems to suspect that Isoud might be safer in his pavilion, where he can watch over her.



Launcelot and Tristram remain in many ways parallel knights with parallel tales, on and off the battlefield.



By this point it appears that Launcelot and Arthur have deduced the identities of at least several of the disguised knights. Although Arthur is largely loyal to Guenever (as is Launcelot, although Arthur of course does not know that), "fighting for" a woman is an element of jousting that is granted to any knight, regardless of the woman he's attached to. This time, it is Palomides and Tristram who are initially unaware of their opponents—and once again Arthur faces the dishonor of being a king struck off his horse as a result. Launcelot then finds himself in an uncomfortable situation, strung between his loyalty and need to avenge Arthur's shame, and his friendship towards Tristram (as well as his awareness that Tristram is his greatest opponent).



This time, it is not the realization of someone else relying on him, but the recollection of someone mocking his abilities, that spurs Tristram to action, leading him to such prowess that Launcelot manages to recognize him.



Chapter 75 Launcelot enters the fray and performs well, but refuses to fight against Tristram. Arthur remarks that Palomides seems to be envious of Tristram. Tristram rides to the pavilion to rest, and finds Dinadan asleep. He orders Dinadan to fight, and Dinadan says Tristram has taken his words to heart.

Chapter 76 Palomides hatches a plan: he rides to a wounded knight and asks to borrow his armor. He rides out disguised, and then meets Tristram to fight. Tristram marvels at this knight's prowess, and wonders who he is. Only Isoud, watching from the bay window, sees everything, and begins to weep in anger at Palomides. Launcelot rides between them and asks if he might replace Palomides. Not realizing it's Tristram, Launcelot fights him (though Tristram does know it's Launcelot). Then Dinadan tells Gareth that the knight is Tristram, and they agree to strike down Launcelot together. They do so. Tristram cries that it's shameful to fight two against one.

All of them continue to fight, but finally Dinadan gets Tristram's horse and calls out his name on purpose. Launcelot exclaims that's he's dishonored for having fought Tristram, and asks Tristram to forgive him. That day all are divided between giving the prize to Tristram or Launcelot. Launcelot says Tristram fought longer and beat more knights, so Tristram is chosen.

Chapter 77 The fighting ends, and Isoud goes to the pavilion, still furious with Palomides. Tristram, Gareth, and Dinadan meet there, and when Palomides arrives, still disguised, Tristram tells him to leave. Palomides refuses, but Tristram recognizes his voice, and exclaims that Palomides was overly harsh. Palomides pretends he thought Tristram was the King of Ireland, and Tristram forgives him. But Isoud tells Tristram what she saw—and yet Palomides swears that he didn't know it was Tristram. Tristram says he believes him, and Isoud only hangs her head.

Chapter 78 Two armed knights arrive at the pavilion to see Isoud. They take off their helmets, and Dinadan tells Tristram that they are Launcelot and Arthur. They all embrace and disarm. Arthur praises Isoud's beauty and Tristram's prowess. Arthur asks why Tristram has fought against them, and Tristram says it's the fault of Gareth and Dinadan. Arthur cheerfully accepts it. That night, Palomides stays awake all night in tearful envy. The next morning Tristram, who can tell Palomides has been crying, assumes he was upset by his and Isoud's rebukes.

Dinadan's relationship to Tristram seems to have grown more familiar and teasing. Now, Tristram uses some of Dinadan's own rallying cries against him to force him back into the fray.



Palomides' envy of Tristram seems to have suddenly spiraled out of control, as he loses all sight of his allies' strategy, and instead seeks to strike down his own friend—even though if he hadn't gone mad he would know that Isoud can see him, as he had drawn strength from her sight before. Little by little, the sporting, jocular atmosphere of the tournament begins to unravel, as Dinadan and Gareth also lose their sense of sportsmanship in fighting Launcelot two against one.



Interestingly, Tristram does not seem as wary of fighting Launcelot as vice versa, perhaps because the latter retains a slight edge over Tristram—even if Launcelot acts honorably in handing the prize to Tristram.



Palomides' envy has reached such a state that he finds himself lying to his friend and ally, Tristram. Tristram, for his part, does not suspect the kind of trickery from Palomides that he has grown to expect from Mark, for instance. Given that women are so often treated with suspicion by knights in these stories, it isn't surprising that Tristram doesn't believe Isoud (though we're shown that that's mistaken, and Tristram should have trusted his beloved).



Though the tournament has not yet come to an end, it has reached the point when the helmets come off and the knights' true identities are revealed. Arthur reacts good-naturedly to the discovery that knights of the Round Table have fought against him. His ease of manner should be contrasted to the wild jealousy of Palomides, which Tristram, nevertheless, fails to truly understand.



Chapter 79 Tristram and Palomides ride to the field and the fighting begins again. Palomides does well at first, but then Tristram performs even better. Arthur disguises himself with Launcelot, and Tristram strikes Arthur down without knowing. Launcelot strikes down 30 knights, though his side is still weaker. But Tristram marvels at Launcelot's prowess.

Chapter 80 Tristram tells Palomides, Gareth, and Dinadan that he will switch to Arthur's side, so that the king isn't dishonored. The others agree except for Palomides, who refuses to change sides. But with Tristram and the others, Arthur's side is reinvigorated, until all the opposing side begins to flee. Palomides escapes to the woods, where he rests by the well, in tears, bemoaning his lost honor. The prize for the day is shared between Tristram and Launcelot. Bleoberis and Ector de Maris come upon Palomides and bring them along with him. When they pass by Tristram and Isoud's pavilion, Palomides goes to Tristram and declares him a traitor—he says he'll kill him if he gets the chance. In the morning Tristram, Bleoberis, Ector de Maris, Gareth, and Dinadan bring Isoud to Joyous Gard, Arthur returns to Camelot, and Palomides rides away with the two foreign kings, sad to lose both Isoud and Tristram.

Chapter 81 After a week Bleoberis and Ector de Maris leave the others and meet Guenever, who is recovering from illness at a seaside castle. They tell her about the tournament, and Guenever criticizes Palomides' envy, which will only dishonor him.

Chapter 82 Palomides lodges with the kings of Ireland and Scotland and then leaves alone. In the woods he comes across a weeping knight, Epinogris, and says that that knight's sorrow cannot be greater than his own. He shares that he's in love with La Beale Isoud, and fears he's lost her love and Tristram's friendship forever. He never thought Isoud was really in love with him, but she criticized him severely the last time he saw her. Besides, Palomides has now lost any glory he had.

If Palomides' envy stems from Tristram's agility in combat, this day of jousting will only deepen the wound. Launcelot and Tristram's mutual admiration for each other's characters and prowess is held up as an alternative to Palomides' jealousy—although the two knights' admiration also comes from a position of supreme confidence.



Palomides's final decision in the tournament seems to be made largely out of spite, refusing to align himself with the norms of knightly honor that the others so easily agree to. It turns out he's made a doubly wrong decision once the opposing side loses against Arthur's. Palomides is now portrayed as having descended into self-pity, hardly an admirable or honorable position for a knight. Palomides uses the word "traitor" against Tristram not as a meaningful marker of shame, but rather as an insult to be thrown at an opponent. Palomides now returns to being a more negative character, as his jealousy and pride overshadow his nobler qualities.



Guenever may not have been present at the tournament, but she possesses her own discerning judgment regarding knightly behavior and courtly values.



Palomides has lost the friendship and fellowship of the knights of the Round Table, and now seems instead condemned to wander around the kingdom, bemoaning his lost friendship and love. In that regret, of course, he is not without companions, as knights like Epinogris are equally eager to share their stories of lost honor.



Chapter 83 Epinogris says that his story is worse: he loved an earl's daughter, but an errant knight, Helior le Preuse, challenged him to fight for her, and Helior wounded him and took his lady. Palomides offers to fight Helior if he ever finds him. They ride together to a hermitage, where Palomides goes walking and finds a knight (who is carrying a shield that Ector de Maris had carried earlier) riding after a knight with a green shield who is leading a lady on a horse—Sir Helior. Those two knights fight, and finally the knight with Ector's shield conquers Helior, who asks for mercy. Palomides runs to the lady and asks if she knows a knight named Epinogris. She cries that she's suffered greatly for him. First Palomides has to fight the knight that conquered Helior. The knight reveals that he's Safere, brother of Palomides and Segwarides. Palomides reveals himself as well, and they embrace.

Chapter 84 Palomides brings the lady to Epinogris, and they ride together with Safere to Epinogris's castle. In the morning Safere and Palomides depart. They hear weeping coming from a manor, and meet knights crying over the death of the castle's lord. One of them recognizes Palomides as the one who killed him, so they all charge towards Palomides and Safere, overwhelm them, and imprison them. They determine Palomides guilty and Safere not guilty, and Safere departs in sorrow. In the morning the knights bind Palomides and take him to the slain knight's father. They pass Launcelot's castle, where Palomides calls out to a knight to send his best wishes to Tristram. The knight races to Tristram, who weeps.

Chapter 85 Tristram is still angry, but vows not to let Palomides die shamefully. Meanwhile the knights pass by Launcelot, who recognizes Palomides. The knights tell him not to meddle, but Launcelot says he's too good a knight to die a shameful death. Launcelot strikes down all twelve of the knights and leaves them wounded, taking Palomides with him to the castle, where they meet Tristram.

Chapter 86 Tristram doesn't recognize Launcelot until he takes off his helmet, and they embrace. Launcelot leaves after a few days, and Palomides begins to grieve again at seeing Isoud. He goes to sit by a well and make up a song about Isoud. Tristram, riding along, hears the song and is initially troubled, then angry. He thinks to kill Palomides: he comes to him and says Palomides is a traitor, and he'd kill him were he not unarmed. Palomides reveals that he's only had any glory from thinking of Isoud, so now he doesn't care whether he lives or dies. He's not a traitor since love is available for all men, he says.

Palomides seems somewhat cheered by Epinogris's story, if only because it gives him the opportunity to follow a new quest, attempting to win back his new companion's lover from the errant knight Helior. The next scene is somewhat confusing, as Palomides enters into an already existing battle between Helior and Safere (though he only later learns the identity of each). Safere conquers Helior, and Palomides begins to fight Safere before realizing it is his own brother. Now, luckily, Palomides has a ready-made companion to replace some aspects of his lost friendship with Tristram.



It initially seems that Palomides has successfully secured the lady's release and the lord's death in revenge. But of course, knights never act entirely alone in these stories: they are always clustered within other groups, even if those alliances may never be entirely stable. Soon after being reunited with his brother, Palomides loses him once again, as Safere doesn't seem to be willing or able to save Palomides in turn. Palomides' ability to alert Tristram seems his only hope.



Tristram's anger with Palomides can still coexist with his sense of honor: they have been allies and friends before, and though Tristram is angry with Palomides he doesn't desire his death. However, Launcelot gets there first.



Although Palomides's near-death experience in some ways seems to shock him out of his lovesickness, this interlude does not last long before he descends back into sorrow. Tristram must know that Palomides' love for Isoud is not reciprocated, but even so Tristram considers Isoud his own possession, unable even to be coveted by someone else. Palomides clearly has a different, more romantic conception of love than that.



Chapter 87 Tristram vows to fight Palomides, who suggests they meet in two weeks, when Palomides is recovered. Tristram reminds Palomides of his broken promise to meet him to fight, but Palomides says he was in prison at the time. Palomides rides to Arthur's court to be given knights and sergeants. A few days before the battle, Tristram is wounded while hunting, and is distraught, knowing he must keep his promise.

Tristram and Palomides had been supposed to meet long ago—the time when Tristram ended up fighting with Launcelot instead, as per Merlin's prophecy—and now, though the reasons for fighting have changed, their suspicions towards each other are stirred up again.



Chapter 88 On the 15th day Palomides comes to the well with his sergeants. He sends a squire to get Tristram and finds him in bed, with a wound six inches deep: Palomides is glad that he won't be shamed. In a month Tristram is healed and goes in search of Palomides, but can never find him. Instead he fights other battles: people begin to marvel at him rather than Launcelot, annoying his kinsmen. But Launcelot orders them never to hurt Tristram.

It seems that Tristram and Palomides are both more pleased at avoiding the battle and missing the chance to be shamed than they are sorry not to defend themselves. Tristram and Launcelot, of course, are friends and allies, but their friends cannot help but see the two most successful knights as rivals.



BOOK 11

Chapter 1 We move from Tristram to Launcelot and his son, Galahad. Around the time of Galahad's birth a hermit comes to Arthur's court and predicts that the knight who will occupy the empty Siege Perilous (one of the seats at the **Round Table**) will be born that year, and will win the **Sangreal (Holy Grail)**.

The Sangreal is a chalice that, in Christian tradition, was used in Jesus Christ's Last Supper and also to catch his blood as he died. In medieval times, it was thought to give access to many spiritual mysteries (and physical ones as well, like providing endless food), but only if one was holy enough.



After the feast Launcelot rides to the bridge of Corbin, where people gathered around a tower ask for help. They tell him there is a lady trapped in the tower being tortured with scalding water. Morgan le Fay and the Queen of Northgalis had trapped her, since she was the fairest lady of the land. Launcelot rescues her, and the people ask that he rescue them from a serpent in a tomb as well. Launcelot goes to the tomb, where gold letters are written saying that a leopard will come here, slay the serpent, and engender a lion that will surpass all other knights. Launcelot draws his sword and fights with the dragon before slaying it.

Launcelot once again proves himself to be a knight adept at judging where and when people need rescuing, and at defending ladies' honor even while he remains loyal to Guenever. Morgan le Fay's jealous and conniving nature, here, seems less to do with major political rivalries than with an envy of other women who may be considered more beautiful than she—another example of her questionable character.



Chapter 2 The king, King Pelles, cousin of Joseph of Arimathea, asks Launcelot his name, and brings him to the castle to praise him. A young, beautiful lady enters with a vessel of gold, and all kneel and pray. The king says that this is the richest thing in the world: the **Sangreal**, the object that will break the **Round Table**. The king knows that if Launcelot conceives a child with his daughter Elaine of Corbin, his country will be brought out of danger. But a lady, Brisen, comes to the king and tells him that Launcelot loves only Queen Guenever, so she will trick him. Brisen has a knight bring a ring that looks like one from Guenever. The messenger tells Launcelot that Guenever is in the Castle of Case. Brisen then sends Elaine to this castle, and Launcelot rides there and asks where the queen is. Launcelot is led into his chamber, and Brisen brings him wine until he is drunk and mad. He goes to bed and believes Guenever is in his arms. Elaine knows of the prophecy and is glad.

Chapter 3 When Launcelot rises in the morning the enchantment is gone: he gets his sword and cries that Elaine of Corbin is a traitor. Elaine kneels and asks for mercy, for in her womb is now the child that will become the noblest knight in the world. Since she is young and beautiful, Launcelot forgives her, but he vows to find Brisen and kill her for witchcraft. After a time, Elaine gives birth to a child and calls him Galahad. Later, Sir Bromel la Pleche desires to marry Elaine, and finally she tells him she will only ever love Launcelot. Bromel vows to wait for Launcelot by the bridge to kill him.

Chapter 4 Launcelot's nephew Sir Bors de Ganis comes by the bridge of Corbin and jousts with Bromel, striking him off his horse. They fight on foot until Bromel, on the ground, cries for mercy. Bors orders him to go to Launcelot and yield to him. Bors continues to the castle and Elaine of Corbin and Pelles treat him well. Bors tells them that Launcelot has been imprisoned by Morgan le Fay. Bors notes how alike the baby Galahad looks to Launcelot. A damsel brings the **Sangreal** and tells Bors that the child will sit in the Siege Perilous and achieve the Sangreal, and exceed even his father's skill.

Sir Bors tells King Pelles that many adventures seem to be found around this castle, and Pelles says they are only for glorious, God-fearing knights, so Bors goes to confession before seeking any adventures. That night Bors lies down on his bed, and then a knight enters and wounds him with a spear. Another knight enters and bids Bors to fight, though he is wounded.

Joseph of Arimathea is a Biblical figure (the man who took Christ's body down from the cross) who, according to myth, lived for centuries as the caretaker of the Sangreal. As a result of being related to him, King Pelles has the right to watch over the Sangreal at his court: in addition to revealing its mysteries to the person who is worthy enough, it also gives endless, delicious food and drink. It is important that the holy Sangreal is immediately presented as the "object that will break the Round Table"—the quest for it will splinter Arthur's knights. Here, the process of tricking Launcelot is not only a matter of women's witchcraft—King Pelles is also eager to trick Launcelot in order to get what he wants out of him—but it is the lady Brisen who thinks up, plots, and puts into action the plan.



Launcelot's reaction to Elaine of Corbin's excuses is telling. It seems that youth and beauty will excuse even the specifically feminine kind of sorcery and witchcraft—as well as royal blood, since Launcelot turns his wrath on Brisen instead, who is apparently also young and beautiful, but lacking the royal connections that will save her. Elaine has also won what she wanted (and also what was apparently fated), at the cost of loving Launcelot while he doesn't love her back.



Although Launcelot does not claim ownership over Elaine of Corbin, Bors seems to consider any of her attempted lovers as fair game to submit to Launcelot's might. "Achieving" the Sangreal means something different than eating the food it gives or even going off in quest of it—it means being permitted to see the divine mysteries that the Sangreal hides, mysteries usually hidden to mere mortals.



In this, the most explicitly Christian (and fantastical) of the book's sections, knightly prowess is closely linked to holiness and worthiness as a Christian. Bors seems to be tested through these strange nightly adventures.



Chapter 5 Sir Bors strikes down the knight, whose name is Pedivere. Bors orders him to go to Arthur's court to yield himself as prisoner. Pedivere leaves and Bors lies down to rest, but soon a lion enters and knocks away Bors's shield. Bors cuts off the lion's head. Then he fights against a dragon, who finally spits dozens of small dragons out of his mouth, who tear the old one to pieces. Then an old man comes into the hall and sings an old song about how Joseph of Arimathea came into his land. The old man tells Bors to depart, for he has proven himself here and will have no more adventures. Bors sees a white dove with a gold censer in her mouth, and then a great storm seems to shake the castle. When it stops, Bors sees four children carrying four tapers, and an old man in the middle with a spear: the Spear of Vengeance.

Chapter 6 The old man tells Sir Bors to go to Launcelot and tell him of his adventure. The old man says that even though Launcelot has more prowess than anyone, because he has sinned, he will not be the greatest in spiritual things. Bors then sees four fair ladies enter a brightly lit chamber and kneel before a silver altar. But he hears a voice saying that Bors is not yet worthy enough to be here, so he returns to bed. In the morning Bors leaves and rides to Launcelot to tell him of his adventures. A rumor spreads about Launcelot's child by Elaine de Corbin. This angers Guenever, but when Launcelot tells her how he was tricked, she forgives him. Then Arthur returns from France and prepares a great feast.

Chapter 7 Elaine of Corbin gets permission from her father to ride with Brisen to the feast. Arthur and Guenever welcome her, as do all the knights but Launcelot, who is ashamed and refuses to speak to her. Elaine tells Brisen how hurt she is, and Brisen says she'll trick him into sleeping with her again. Elaine and Guenever are outwardly cordial, but hate each other. The queen tells Launcelot she'll send for him that night, since otherwise he'll go to Elaine.

Chapter 8 That night Brisen comes to Launcelot's bed, disguised, and says Guenever is waiting. She brings him to Elaine of Corbin's bed. Guenever's lady finds Launcelot's bed empty, and Guenever is enraged. Launcelot, as usual, talks in his sleep about Guenever, so loud that the queen hears him from her chamber. She coughs so loud that Launcelot awakens and realizes he's not in the queen's bed. He races into the hall, meeting Guenever, who orders him as a traitor out of her court. Launcelot swoons. When he awakens he leaps from a bay window into the garden, scratching himself on thorns. He races away. For two years no one will hear of him.

This first challenge reveals itself as a typical one of jousting, but this is not so for the subsequent challenges, in which strange creatures attempt to overcome Bors while he sleeps. Old men in the book, of course, are often used as proxies for great wisdom and knowledge: it seems that Bors has performed well, but also that he must have the humility to know when to no longer seek the adventures that the castle holds. Other images, like that of the four children and man carrying the Spear of Vengeance, are more difficult to interpret.



This is one of the first times, besides the prophecies about Galahad, when we are explicitly told that Launcelot's worldwide prowess will have an expiration date—and this not necessarily because he will be bested in battle, but because he will prove to be not worthy enough of a knight. The book seems greatly ambivalent about his love affair with Guenever, both admiring his loyalty to her, and suggesting that this love will ultimately prove him unworthy of achieving the Sangreal.



Elaine of Corbin, still lovesick over Launcelot, relies on Brisen's wily ways to try to entrap Launcelot once again, perhaps thinking that her love for him will ultimately be enough to win him over. Guenever and Elaine compete just like knightly rivals, though in the inner, domestic sphere of courtly love.



Brisen pretends to be a lady of Guenever, taking advantage of the cover of night and the difficulty of distinguishing between ladies' maids (often considered more or less invisible to the knights) to gain what Elaine wants from Launcelot. Launcelot is clever and always on his guard outside the castle walls when he's on an adventure, but he does not seem able to employ a similar sense of discernment in more domestic affairs.



Chapter 9 Elaine of Corbin sees all of this, and rebukes Guenever for driving Launcelot mad, and for betraying her own husband, whereas she (Elaine) has no one else to love. Guenever orders Elaine to leave her court. She departs and, on the way, tells Bors de Ganis, who has accompanied her, what happened. Bors says the two women have destroyed Launcelot. Elaine protests that it was Guenever's fault. Bors orders Elaine to tell him if she ever sees Launcelot, and rides to Guenever, who weeps, though Bors berates her for losing their best knight.

Chapter 10 Guenever falls, fainting, and when she awakes she asks Bors de Ganis, Ector de Maris, and Lionel to find Launcelot, since she believes he's gone mad. They ride all over the land for months, but never find him. They meet a knight, Melion de Tartare, who is on his way to Arthur's court, and ask him to tell them of their failure. Gawaine, Uwaine, Sagramore le Desirous, Aglovale, and Percivale all ask Arthur to go out searching as well.

Meanwhile Launcelot suffers hunger, cold, and thirst. Aglovale and Percivale stop at their mother's home, who weeps in joy to see them, since she has also been grieving her other son Lamorak's death. But they say they cannot stay: they must seek out noble deeds.

Chapter 11 The knights' mother sends a squire after them, asking them to return home to comfort their mother. On the way the squire happens upon the castle belonging to a man whose brother was killed by Aglovale. The lord orders his men to kill the squire. The next day Aglovale and Percivale come upon him and learn how he was killed. Aglovale vows to avenge his death and goes to meet the lord. They fight, and Aglovale strikes the lord down and kills him. They depart and bury the squire.

Chapter 12 The knights then arrive at the castle Cardican. Percivale departs secretly in the middle of the night and rides until he finds a knight bound to a stone bridge. He says he is Persides of the **Round Table**: in that castle is a lady who, when he refused to be her lover, set her men upon him and bound him. Percivale cuts through the chain and frees Persides. A knight runs out of the castle, and Percivale strikes the knight down. With Persides he goes to the castle and commands the lady to free Persides' servants. Persides brings Percivale to his own castle. In the morning Percivale tells Persides to go to Arthur's court and tell him how he rescued him. He also tells him to remind Kay and Mordred how they mocked Percivale when he was made knight: Percivale won't return to court until he's achieved great glory.

Elaine of Corbin is not wrong in rebuking Queen Guenever, although we as readers are supposed to sympathize more with the queen—at the very least her tragic flaw is romantic and fascinating for readers. Bors de Ganis, for his part, seems rather fed up with the women's quarrels. Like most of the knights, he values knightly prowess and allegiance above love or emotional issues.



We may recall that Tristram, in a similar situation to Launcelot, went mad himself after being driven from Mark's court, and wandered in the forest until finally regaining his senses and returning. It is not clear whether the same fate is to be suffered by Launcelot, or if he is actively resisting capture by other knights.



This brief domestic scene reminds us that, to join the Round Table, one has to give up a number of other ties, even family ties, in exchange for a new fellowship.



Aglovale and Percivale may not have agreed to remain at home with their mother, but they show their loyalty to her by defending the squire whom she sent. Aglovale and Percivale are shown to honor this squire's life both by avenging his death and by burying him, which is highly important religiously in this society.



Percivale has been fighting together with Aglovale, but at this point, Percivale seems to want to seek adventures on his own and win greater glory on his own account, without sharing it with his brother. He begins to do so by freeing Persides and working to destroy the knights of the castle. Although Persides is a friend and ally, not a conquered enemy, Percivale still finds it necessary to send him to Arthur's court, where Persides will be able to bring news of Percivale's prowess before Arthur and make up for the other knights' mocking tones towards him.



Chapter 13 At court, Persides shares Percivale's news. Meanwhile, Percivale comes across another knight. They fight for hours. Finally Percivale asks the other's name: it's Sir Ector de Maris, Launcelot's brother. Percivale says he's on a quest to find Launcelot. Ector asks Percivale to bring him to a monastery since he is wounded, but Percivale is equally wounded.

Once again, knights of the Round Table seem to possess little ability of discernment, not even able to identify each other in battle—it would seem that it was a waste for them to wound each other, although battles like this do serve to train knights for greater enemies.



Chapter 14 Percivale kneels and prays to Jesus. Then the knights see the vessel of the **Sangreal** approach, borne by a maiden (Ector de Maris cannot see her: only virgins can). At once the two are healed. They remount, amazed, and discuss their adventures.

Another magical element of the Sangreal is its healing powers, which seem only able to be accessed based on a miracle of God and humble chivalric qualities. Percivale's virginity will make him one of the few to be found worthy of the Sangreal.



BOOK 12

Chapter 1 Launcelot meanwhile is wandering from place to place. He comes across a meadow where he finds swords and a white shield leaning on a tree. He takes one sword and lashes at the shield, making a great noise. A dwarf comes and throws himself on Launcelot, who nearly kills him before another knight approaches, realizing Launcelot is mad. Launcelot shouts that he'll kill the knight. The knight approaches anyway, and Launcelot swings wildly at him, wounding him gravely. Launcelot rushes into a nearby pavilion, where a lady jumps up and cries when she sees her lord on the ground. Another knight, Bliant, marvels at Launcelot, whom he recognizes from the Lonazep tournament, and sends the dwarf to fetch a stretcher to bring him to his castle.

It does appear that Launcelot, like Tristram, has begun to go mad following his leap from the castle and escape from his two quarreling lovers, Guenever and Elaine of Corbin. However, Launcelot is even more dangerous as a madman: he does not seem to have lost any of his strength, but only the ability to modulate and control it. Still, unlike in Tristram's case, Launcelot's identity seems apparent at least to some in the forest. Bliant shows himself to be a truly worthy knight by recognizing rather than fleeing from Launcelot.



Chapter 2 Bliant's brother comes and they bring Launcelot to Castle Blank, where they feed Launcelot and bring him back to strength over the course of 18 months. One day Bliant rides out to seek adventures and meets Breuse Saunce Pité and his brother. They fight long together, but finally Bliant is wounded and flees to the castle. Launcelot has seen everything from a window, so he breaks off the chains that hold him and races down, leaping upon Breuse and knocking him down. He strikes Breuse's brother's hand off, and then the two brothers race away.

Launcelot's recovery is slow and gradual, and what we see of it is only the end, when Launcelot has regained his strength and his sense of knightly honor enough to do all he can to defend his caretakers from the shameful Breuse Saunce Pité, who, as always, would much rather flee when it seems that he's about to lose, rather than fight face-to-face.



The brothers praise Launcelot, and Bliant feels sorry for having bound him. Launcelot stays there half a year more. One morning a great boar approaches Launcelot in the woods, and hunters blowing their horns follow him.

Bliant, while respecting Launcelot, had still thought him to be too dangerous not to tie up: now that Launcelot has proved a more successful knight than he, he repents.



Chapter 3 Launcelot finds a horse, spear, and sword tied to a tree and rides after the boar. Launcelot fights with the boar and strikes off its head. A hermit comes out of his hermitage nearby and offers to help, but Launcelot nearly kills him out of anger since he's been wounded. He tells the hermit to leave, and he does. The hermit encounters a knight and tells him about a wounded knight nearby. That knight helps lead Launcelot, now weakened by his wound, into the hermitage, where they nurse him back to health.

Launcelot wanders into the city of Corbin, home to Elaine of Corbin. All the youths of the city run after Launcelot and throw rocks at him. Then knights and squires come out of the castle and see the wounded man. They suspect he was once a man of glory. They give him new clothes, a little hut, and food.

Chapter 4 King Pelles' nephew is made knight one day, and sends for the town's fool—Launcelot—to give him a scarlet robe. Launcelot goes into a garden to sleep. Elaine of Corbin and her maidens enter the garden, and when Elaine sees the fool she recognizes him as Launcelot. She begins to weep and sinks to the ground. She races to her father and tells him she's found Launcelot. Pelles initially doesn't believe her, but then he sends Brisen, who agrees with Elaine. Brisen enchants Launcelot so that he won't awake for an hour. They take him to a chamber next to the vessel of the **Sangreal**. The Sangreal cures Launcelot, and he wakes up.

Chapter 5 When Launcelot recognizes Elaine of Corbin and King Pelles, he is ashamed and asks how he's come here. Elaine says that he's been mad, but is now cured by the **Sangreal**. Launcelot asks that they don't tell anyone else of his shame. He rests for two weeks. Then he asks Elaine to ask her father if he might have a place in his court, since he's now banned from Arthur's. She swears to do so, and Pelles agrees to place him in the Castle of Bliant, with Elaine and other knights.

Chapter 6 Pelles' nephew goes to see Launcelot, who calls himself "Le Chevalier Mal Fet," that is, the knight that has trespassed. Castor knows it's Launcelot, but promises not to tell. They ride to the Castle of Bliant on an island called the Joyous Isle. But often Launcelot looks back to England and weeps.

Launcelot seems to have vaguely recalled the importance for a knight of following quests wherever he might find them. However, this is a somewhat twisted picture of what a quest should look like, and Launcelot seems to realize that too, growing furious in his madness about being wounded just for the sake of a boar.



This is perhaps the moment of Launcelot's greatest shame, when he is treated like a beggar by the town's children rather than as a conquering knight who can save others, as has so often been the case.



This part of the story continues to bear notable parallels to the events leading up to Tristram's recognition by La Beale Isoud at Mark's court, once again underlining the parallel lives and destinies of these two knights, both subjected to shame and dishonor at some points (though never as a result of their own knightly actions). The Sangreal is once again used for its healing powers—even proximity to the vessel seems able to cure people.



Not only is Launcelot cured of his wounds, but he immediately seems restored to his reason as well—and together with this reason comes the eminently rational sense of shame. Now, however, Launcelot is faced with other problems, since Guenever has banned him from Arthur's court and he needs to find another king to be loyal to.



Launcelot seems to want to make a new life for himself on this new land, away from (though still visible to) England, but his past continues to haunt him, as he regrets his banishment by Guenever.



Chapter 7 Launcelot calls for a tournament on the Joyous Isle, and Launcelot defeats 500 knights. Percivale and Ector de Maris arrive to the castle and ask a lady who it is who lives there. She says Elaine of Corbin, together with a mighty knight, Le Chevalier Mal Fet, who arrived to the land like a madman but was cured by the **Sangreal**. Percivale tells Ector to wait while he fetches the knight, for them both to do battle with him. Percivale tells the porter he and Ector want to fight, and they enter the jousting fields. Percivale and Launcelot fight mightily. Finally Percivale shares his name, and Launcelot cries that he has been fighting a friend.

Chapter 8 Launcelot kneels and reveals who he is. Percivale says he and Ector de Maris have been seeking Launcelot for years. Ector, Launcelot, and Percivale embrace, and Launcelot shares what has happened.

Chapter 9 Meanwhile, Sir Bors de Ganis and Lionel have also been seeking Launcelot. They come to the house of Brandegore, where Bors had conceived a child with the king's daughter 15 years before. Bors asks the king to take his son with him to Arthur's court, where Helin is made knight.

Meanwhile, Ector de Maris and Percivale ask Launcelot to return with them to Arthur, but Launcelot says he cannot. Ector says that Arthur and Guenever are distraught at his absence, and reminds him that he has more glory than any other knight but Tristram. Launcelot agrees, and leaves with them. Elaine of Corbin tells him that Galahad will also come to court to be made knight.

Chapter 10 Within five days they arrive at Camelot, where all rejoice at Launcelot's return. Arthur says he's assumed that Launcelot left because of love of Elaine of Corbin, but everyone else knows the truth.

Chapter 11 Meanwhile Tristram has gained even greater renown. Tristram and Isoud speak of Launcelot's return, and decide to go to court for the celebratory feast. Isoud, though, says she will stay, so that no seeds of discord are sown on her account.

Perhaps to distract himself from his lovesickness for Queen Guenever and homesickness for Camelot, Launcelot plans a tournament, always a decent opportunity for intrigues to arise. No one from Arthur's court, however, is aware of Launcelot's true identity, especially now that the isle seems to be led by a mysterious unknown knight, a "madman" with the name of a "trespasser." Only in the midst of battle is this mystery of identity resolved.



Versions of this scene, in which knights seek someone who is disguised but right in front of them, crop up again and again in the book.



The search for Launcelot seems to have become its own kind of quest, a chance for knights of the Round Table to prove their honor and prowess by finding the greatest knight in the land.



Launcelot only gives in when he realizes that Guenever seems to be mourning his absence just as he's been mourning hers. Elaine must content herself with the fact that her son will be one step closer to glory by being knighted at Arthur's court.



Arthur, as usual, remains deluded about the true nature of Launcelot's love and his relationship with Guenever.



Isoud is sensitive to the trouble that her beauty has wrought on other knights in court, especially on Tristram's relationship with Palomides, so she is sensitive and meek.



Chapter 12 Tristram leaves Isoud and comes across a knight who has been wounded by Palomides. Tristram regrets aloud that he has no armor on, and Palomides recognizes him and cries that now they'll get a chance to fight. Tristram strikes Palomides on the helmet, and cries that he'll continue to fight even though he has no armor. Palomides, ashamed, says he won't continue.

Chapter 13 Tristram marvels that Palomides won't be christened (baptized as a Christian), and Palomides explains that he still has one more battle to fight. Tristram declares that he will provide this battle. They ride together back to the wounded knight, and Tristram asks him to lend his armor. Finally Tristram and Palomides fight, first on horse and then on foot.

Chapter 14 They fight more than two hours. Palomides eventually wounds Tristram, who grows enraged, and rushes mightily at Palomides and wounds him through the shoulder. Finally Tristram doubles his strength and knocks Palomides' sword out of his hand. Tristram cries that he won't shamefully kill a weaponless knight, so he tells Palomides to retrieve his sword. Palomides says that he no longer wants to fight, and asks only that they be friends: he meant no dishonor by loving Isoud. He asks Tristram to forgive him, which he does. He offers to bring Palomides to be christened at a nearby chapel, and Palomides is baptized there. They then return to Camelot, where they have a great feast.

This is one of the first times that a knight seems able to recognize another even without taking off their helmets and revealing themselves—here, it is a sign that Tristram and Palomides know each other well enough to recognize each other's voices.



After constantly missing the opportunity to battle each other, now Tristram and Palomides finally seem able to face each other honorably and equally. Furthermore, this battle becomes a part of Palomides' desire to prove himself as "worthy" of being a Christian.



The length of the battle, once again, is a sign that the knights must be somewhat equally matched—however, it was never really a question of Palomides defeating Tristram, who has gained prowess as the land's greatest knight other than Launcelot. Although Palomides had vowed not to be baptized until gaining greater glory, now he yields to Tristram's wish. Finally the awkwardness of having a great knight also be a non-Christian is eased, as Palomides is fully welcomed into the fold. The complicated relationship between Tristram and Palomides now seems more resolved as well—as usual, all it took was a long battle.



BOOK 13

Chapter 1 At the feast of Pentecost, a damsel comes from King Pelles to seek Launcelot. Launcelot rides with the damsel into a forest and valley where there is an abbey. All welcome Launcelot and lead him into a chamber, where he finds Bors de Ganis and Lionel. They embrace. Meanwhile 12 nuns bring in Galahad, saying that they've brought him up: now they ask Launcelot to make him a knight. Launcelot does so.

Chapter 2 Galahad refuses to accompany Launcelot to Arthur's court, however, instead leaving with Bors de Ganis and Lionel. At court, new letters in gold are written in the seat of the Siege Perilous, saying it will be filled 454 winters after Christ's death. It seems, Launcelot says, that this is the day. As Arthur prepares the feast, a squire comes and says he saw a sword sticking in a stone beneath a nearby river. They all go see it: letters on the stone read that only the best knight in the world can take it. Arthur tells Launcelot that it must be his, but Launcelot gravely says it's not his. Thus the adventure of the **Holy Grail** begins.

Launcelot is shown to be a prominent knight since he, along with King Arthur, is given the power to choose to knight men himself. The abbey scene is a family one, in which various relatives of Launcelot join in celebrating Galahad's entrance into knighthood.



Galahad seems to be acutely aware of his role in fulfilling the prophecy properly. The Siege Perilous, as we're meant to recall, was created by Merlin to hold only that knight who would "achieve" (that is, find and perceive the spiritual mysteries of) the Sangreal. The sword in the stone recalls, of course, Arthur's own miraculous ability and eventual crowning as king, though now another must take up the challenge.



Chapter 3 Gawaine attempts to take the sword from the stone but he cannot, nor can Percivale. They all return to the feast. Once all seats but the Siege Perilous are filled, all the palace doors and windows shut by themselves. An old man enters with a young knight in red: he has brought a knight of Joseph of Arimathea's kin, who will accomplish marvels.

Chapter 4 Arthur welcomes the two, and the old man leads the child to the Siege Perilous. Letters in gold on the seat now say that this is the place of Galahad. Galahad (the young knight in red) sits down, and asks the old man to depart and send his best wishes to his grandfather King Pellès. All the knights of the **Round Table** marvel, saying that this is who must achieve the **Sangreal**. They notice how much he looks like Launcelot, and Guenever says he must be the son of Launcelot and Elaine of Corbin. Arthur tells Galahad that he is welcome, and he brings him to the sword and stone.

Chapter 5 Arthur points to the sword by the river, saying that many knights have failed to take the sword from the stone. Galahad easily draws it out and puts it in his scabbard. The sword had belonged to Balin le Savage, who had given it to King Pellès as he was dying. Then a lady on a white horse comes, weeping, to tell Launcelot that from now on he will not be the best knight in the world, as will be proved by his inability to fulfill the **Sangreal** quest.

Chapter 6 Arthur orders all his knights to have a great tournament. Galahad wins against every knight, except for Percivale and Launcelot.

Chapter 7 Guenever asks Galahad to take off his helmet, and says this must be Launcelot's son. They are distantly related to Jesus Christ, she says, so they must be the greatest men of the world. All return home to Camelot, where suddenly a sunbeam lights up all their faces, and they all look at each other, struck dumb. The **Holy Grail** then passes through the hall, and is immediately filled with delicious food and drink—but no one manages to see the Grail itself, as it is covered in white silk. Gawaine swears to go in quest of the Sangreal for a year and a day before returning. All others swear too, and Arthur realizes that many of his knights may die in this quest.

An old man, the usual index of wisdom and knowledge, shares that he has brought someone related to the caretaker of the Sangreal (through Elaine of Corbin's side, as we recall), who thus is already expected to be holy and worthy—the miraculous aura of the scene at court confirms this.



Now we understand why Galahad had refused to return with Launcelot, Bors de Ganis, and Lionel to the court: his entrance is meant to be much more dramatic and meaningful. Here the knights, for once, seem to pick up on elements of shared identity, piecing together who Galahad must be from his resemblance to his father, Launcelot. This is probably painful for Guenever, but Malory doesn't mention it.



We may recall that Balin le Savage, as he and his brother lay dying after having killed each other in battle, had bequeathed this sword (which he kept against the damsel's warning after winning it at court) to Pellès. Launcelot's worldly power and might are now shown to be not enough to be called truly "worthy."



Even as a young knight, Galahad's exploits suggest greatness.



Joseph of Arimathea, in addition to being the caretaker of the Sangreal, was also a relation to Jesus Christ himself according to this particular myth—one that joined a traditional emphasis on royal kinship and lineage to the Christian religious tradition. The Sangreal appears briefly to the knights, but only as if to tempt them—the knights do not have true access to it yet. They can only gain such access by proving their worth in physically questing for the Grail.



Chapter 8 Arthur's eyes fill with tears as he prepares to bid farewell to his knights, and the ladies of the court grieve as well. An old man warns the ladies not to follow their lovers, for only a knight clean of sin can see the mysteries of Christ. Guenever asks Galahad where he comes from, and praises his lineage. In the morning Arthur goes to Launcelot and asks if there's a way for the quest to be undone so his knights remain. Launcelot says they can't break their vows. A total of 150 knights have chosen the quest.

Launcelot follows Guenever into her chamber, where she says he's betrayed her by leaving. Launcelot says he'll return in glory as soon as he can. The knights depart, the streets thronged with weeping people. They ride to a castle, then each takes his own path.

Chapter 9 On the 4th day, Galahad comes to a White Abbey and comes upon Bagdemagus and Uwaine. They say that within the abbey is a shield whose bearer must slay another in three days or be forever wounded. Bagdemagus wants to try, but Galahad says he has no shield. Bagdemagus tells him he'll attempt first. He rides to a valley where a knight in white armor comes riding against him, strikes Bagdemagus down, and takes his shield. The knight tells a squire to take the shield to Galahad, who is its rightful owner.

Chapter 10 Galahad takes the shield and goes off alone, meeting the White Knight by the valley, who tells him that 32 years after the Passion of Christ, Joseph of Arimathea, who had taken Jesus down from the cross, had ridden to the city of Sarras to meet a king, Evelake, fighting against the Saracens. Joseph had revealed the Christian truth to Evelake, and through the Holy Spirit he had gained victory, along with the help of the shield now belonging to Galahad. The shield has the power to heal wounds.

Chapter 11 Later, when Joseph of Arimathea lay dying, he asked Evelake to bring him his shield, and Joseph painted a cross of his own blood upon it. He said that none should bear this shield until Galahad. Now, the squire that had brought Galahad the shield asks to be made knight, and Galahad agrees. Suddenly they hear a great noise from a churchyard tomb.

Chapter 12 Galahad goes to the tomb and lifts it up, seeing a terrifying figure leap out. A voice says that there are too many angels around Galahad for him to be harmed. In the tomb is an armed body, and Galahad says that this must have been a false Christian, so they remove it from the tomb.

Arthur's sorrow underlines just how serious of an affair it is to seek the Sangreal—as the old man says, in order to truly “achieve” it, that is, see the holy mysteries that it contains, one must be entirely sinless, and those who are not clean of sin may well risk death in the attempt. For Arthur, who knows how unlikely it is for many of his knights to achieve it, this is a devastating loss.



While women are central to the story, of course, they are barred from certain crucial aspects of knightly life, like the honor of pursuing spiritual mysteries.



Although all the knights have already technically seen the Sangreal when it passed through the court, their quest to “find” it involves pursuing any adventures that may appear, and seeking to prove themselves through these adventures. The knight rightfully restores the shield from Bagdemagus, whose pride blinded him.



The White Knight shares some of the history behind the Sangreal, here again involving Joseph of Arimathea, who (according to the Bible) was actually present at the death of Jesus. Other things associated with the Sangreal, like this shield, are similarly imbued with magical powers. It is a telling example of the values of this time period that Christian faith is generally associated with greater prowess in battle, rather than the usual “Christlike” values of meekness, love, and charity.



Joseph is portrayed somewhat ambiguously, as a powerful knight but also with some of the same mystical powers that Merlin, has, like the ability to foresee the future. This is another example of Galahad's fate in the Holy Grail quest.



The strange adventures of Galahad have great religious and traditional relevance: he is considered holy and worthy enough to be able to remove a false Christian knight from his tomb.



In the morning the squire knight tells Galahad his name, Melias de Lile, and asks to accompany him in the **Sangreal** quest. The two ride to a crossroads, where a cross says that only good and worthy knights will successfully emerge if they take the right way, but if they take the left they'll soon meet enemies. Melias says he'll take the left to prove his strength, though Galahad warns that it would be better not to.

Chapter 13 Melias rides into a forest and then into a meadow, where he sees a lodge, and inside is a chair with a gold crown upon it. Melias takes the crown, but a knight follows him and demands it back. The knight charges at Melias and knocks him down, as if dead. Galahad comes along and finds Melias wounded. He fights against the knight, and Galahad strikes him down. Then another knight comes, and Galahad strikes off his arm. Galahad turns back to Melias and brings him to an abbey. An old monk comes and says he will heal Melias in 7 weeks.

Chapter 14 The old man says that Melias was wounded on account of his sins: pride, covetousness, and theft. Galahad departs on his quest, and comes to a mountain where there is an old chapel. He kneels to pray, and a voice tells him to go to the Castle of Maidens and rid it of a wicked custom.

Chapter 15 Galahad rides to the castle and rests by the river Severn. Seven maidens come and tell him not to pass the water. Then a squire comes and says that the knights in the castle will defy Galahad. Seven knights, all brothers, emerge to fight. Galahad breaks the neck of the first, and sets upon the others, chasing them into the castle. An old man gives Galahad the castle keys, and inside many people welcome him, saying that the knights have fled but will return at night to reenact their evil custom.

A priest comes to Galahad and tells him how the brothers had been lodged at this castle, which belongs to the Duke Liamour, and out of lust for his daughter had killed the Duke and his son and had taken the lady and treasure captive. Seven years before, the daughter had prophesied that a knight would overcome them. The brothers decided that no lady or knight who passed by their castle would escape alive, and killed many passers-by. The lady has now died, but they brothers have kept her younger sister. In the morning Galahad learns that Gawaine, Gareth, and Uwayne have slain the brothers.

Melias de Lile, as a young and untested knight, seems a bit overly eager to pursue whatever risk and adventures he can. While Galahad warns him against this lack of caution, Galahad also knows that courage and sprightliness are necessary to a successful knight.



Melias's hubris as a young, untutored knight comes into clear relief here, as he wanders into a lodge and picks up what must be an incredibly valuable crown, obviously belonging to someone else. The book's logic of battle allows such behavior only if one defends his honor in order to retain a stolen possession. Instead, it is Galahad who has to come to Melias's rescue.



Within the context of the Holy Grail quest, the questionable behavior of knights that we've seen before takes on new, more tragic resonance, suggesting that sin can have eternal costs in addition to worldly ones, and that figures previously lionized because of their physical prowess are not necessarily forgiven their sins because of this.



The voice that Galahad hears is a heavenly one, taking the place of the usual custom in which a knight pursues his own adventures and answers only to himself and to his king. While Galahad is also a knight of the Round Table, God is his only real master, and this fact sets him apart from many of the other knights also on this quest.



A castle's "custom" is the term often used to describe a way of life, often an evil one, by which certain people seek to justify their behavior by suggesting that it is simply how they do things—a tradition. Galahad has done his part in ridding the castle of its evil custom, though Gawaine, Gareth, and Uwayne have, unbeknownst to him, also played a part in this aspect of the quest (showing that they, while not as holy as Galahad, are also noble knights).



Chapter 16 Gawaine, meanwhile, has ridden to the abbey where Melias lies sick. Gawaine wants to find Galahad, but a monk says that Galahad is pure while Gawaine is sinful. Gareth comes riding in, and they embrace. They depart the next morning and find Uwayne, who joins them. Then they come across the seven brother knights who declare that they'll destroy any knights of Arthur who love Galahad, since he is the one who has driven them from their castle. So the three knights fight and kill the seven.

Each one then departs alone. Gawaine rides to a hermitage, where Gawaine confides to the hermit that a monk had called him wicked. The hermit agrees that Gawaine has lived in sin, and since Galahad has not lived in sin he will achieve the **Sangreal**. The hermit tells Gawaine he must do penance, but Gawaine says knights often suffer: he doesn't need to suffer more.

Chapter 17 Meanwhile Galahad departs from the Castle of Maidens and, disguised, meets Percivale and Launcelot. Galahad strikes them both down. A woman nearby marvels, saying this knight is the best in the world. Launcelot and Percivale realize who it is, and ride after him, but cannot reach him. Launcelot continues to a wild forest and then to a crossroads, where there is an old chapel with an altar covered in silk inside, and a silver candlestick. But Launcelot can find no way to enter, so he unhappily rests outside.

Chapter 18 Half asleep, Launcelot sees two horses bearing a sick knight, who asks when he might be blessed by the Lord's holy vessel. Then Launcelot sees the candlestick move towards the knight, though he cannot see who holds it, and the vessel of the **Sangreal** is brought as well. The knight touches the vessel and is healed. But Launcelot, since he is sinful, cannot move and seize the vessel. The knight, seeing Launcelot, remarks that he must have some sin that he never confessed, and he leaves with his squire.

Chapter 19 Launcelot wonders if he dreamed this. Then he hears a voice telling him to leave this place, since he is harder than the stone and bitterer than the tree. His helmet, sword, and horse are no longer where he left them, and Launcelot cries that his sin and worldly desires have brought him great dishonor. He vows to only be holy and pure from now on.

Launcelot continues to a hill where there is a hermitage, and enters for mass. The hermit asks who he is, and he says he is of the **Round Table**, but he is a wretch. The hermit says Launcelot should thank God for having given him beauty and strength, and that he should love and dread God from now on.

In a short flashback, it turns out that Gawaine, Gareth, and Uwayne slew the brothers in the context of trying to find Galahad. Throughout this quest, the other knights will face continual admonishment by monks, old men, and other characters in the forests and fields who remind them that Galahad is the worthiest of them, and that their past sins have rendered them unworthy of the Sangreal.



Earlier in the book, there seemed to be some ambivalence about whether or not it was justifiable for knights to sleep with the damsels they "won." Now, however, it is clearly forbidden, as per the official Christian doctrine.



This is the first time that Galahad meets with his own father to fight, and we see just how powerful he has become—few knights have succeeded in striking down Launcelot. As Launcelot departs, he fails both to catch up with his son and enter the alluring chapel—it certainly seems that his once mighty power is beginning to ebb.



Launcelot seems to be in some ways enchanted: he is described as "half-asleep," preventing him from fully seeing and understanding the scene before him. Launcelot's past and his insistence on sleeping with Guenever—sinful both because it is out of wedlock and because it is adultery—is beginning to count against his prowess.



Launcelot recognizes, after a brief moment of confusion and immobility, that only he is responsible for his own sin and dishonor. He had embraced honor in terms of knightly conduct on the battlefield, but now understands that this extends to other spheres.



Launcelot pauses in the midst of his quest in order to fulfill his promise to himself to become a better, holier man—a process that first involves embracing the humility of one's own weakness.



Chapter 20 Launcelot, weeping, tells the hermit all about how his glory was accomplished for a woman whom he loved too much. He asks for the hermit's counsel, and the hermit agrees as long as Launcelot promises never to sin with the woman again. Launcelot agrees, and the hermit says on Palm Sunday, Jesus Christ found no one who would host him, and he came across a fig tree with no fruit. When the **Holy Grail** was brought before you, the hermit says to Launcelot, God found no fruit in you: this is why you were told that you were bitterer than the tree. Launcelot repents greatly.

Guenever had chuckled at Dinadan's opinions regarding the strangeness of loving someone too much, but now it appears that his sense of moderation, though perhaps less interesting to readers, probably gives a greater chance of happiness and holiness. The hermit's explanation of Launcelot's vision is quite evocative of Jesus's parables of the New Testament, and is similarly meant to impart a moral lesson.



BOOK 14

Chapter 1 Meanwhile, Percivale stays with the old woman, a recluse, and tells her his name. The woman is his aunt, the Queen of the Waste Lands, and happily welcomes him. In the morning he asks if she knows the knight with the white shield, so that he might fight with him. She says he has red armor, and has no peer.

Knights are often meeting relatives in the forest by chance, especially women, since the female characters in the book are relatively static in location, while the knights are much more mobile.



Chapter 2 Here we learn that Merlin made the **Round Table** shaped like the world, since it reflects and signifies the world. Merlin had ordained that the fellows of the Round Table should know the truth of the **Sangreal**. He said that three white bulls would achieve it: two virgins, and the third chaste, and one of them should exceed his father like the lion exceeds the leopard. Merlin crafted the Siege Perilous for this knight, Galahad, to sit in. Now Percivale's aunt tells him to find Galahad in a castle Goethe, where he has a cousin. If he knows nothing, Percivale should continue to the Castle of Carbonek, where a wounded king is lying, who will tell him news of Galahad.

In a brief flashback, we learn a little more about the Round Table and how the Sangreal quest is not peripheral but actually central to its foundation. (The fact that this is revealed only now also shows some revisionist history—this probably involves later, more Christian myths incorporating earlier, more pagan ones.) The book is not exactly consistent on the matter of who will “achieve” the Holy Grail: usually Galahad is considered to be the only one who will, but sometimes three is the total number given. This confusion may stem from ambiguity concerning what “achieve” means—whether just seeing the Grail again or actually perceiving the holy mysteries it entails.



Chapter 3 Percivale rides on to a monastery, where there is an altar by a richly adorned bed. An old man with a crown of gold is lying there, wounded, and crying that Jesus Christ might not forget him. A priest takes communion to the old man, who orders his crown to be set on the altar. Another man there tells Percivale that this is King Evelake, who was converted by Joseph of Arimathea and who had asked God not to die until he could see and kiss his distant relation who would achieve the **Sangreal**.

As the knights continue on their quest, they begin to encounter characters and adventures that are much more religiously inflected than before. We have heard the name Evelake before—Galahad learned about him as the man whom Joseph of Arimathea fought and converted, and who only now is about to die, as the quest will soon be fulfilled.



Chapter 4 Percivale introduces himself to Evelake (who is three hundred years old) and vows that his wish will be done. Percivale leaves and meets twenty men of arms carrying a slain knight. When he says he comes from Arthur's court, they prepare to kill him, but Percivale fights back. They are about to overtake him when Galahad, in red colors, rides forward and strikes every man down. Percivale cries to Galahad to allow him to give thanks, but Galahad rides quickly away. Percivale follows him on foot, since the 20 knights had slain his horse. He comes across a farmer riding on a horse and leading a magnificent black horse. Percivale asks to borrow the black horse, but the farmer refuses, saying that the man who gave him this horse would kill him if he did so. Percivale sits down in sorrow, and then sees a knight riding on the black steed in the other direction.

Chapter 5 The farmer returns and says that knight has stolen his horse. He lends Percivale his other horse, and Percivale rides to the first knight, who kills the horse. Percivale calls him a coward, but the knight rides off with the black horse. Percivale sadly lies down to sleep. That night, a woman wakes him up and says that if he fulfills her wish, she'll lend him her own horse. Percivale agrees, and she returns with a great horse, which he rides for several days.

Chapter 6 Percivale arrives at rough waters and makes the sign of the cross. The horse shakes off Percivale and charges into the water roaring. Percivale realizes the horse is a fiend, and prays to God to protect him from evil. Then he sees that he's on a wild mountain surrounded by the sea, crossed by wild beasts. Percivale goes into a valley and sees a serpent battling with a lion. He decides to fight the serpent, giving it a deadly wound. The lion meekly approaches Percivale and stays with him for a few hours.

Percivale, we learn, is one of few in these days who perfectly believed in God, so he comforts himself with faith. He sleeps next to the lion all night. He dreams that two ladies meet with him, one sitting on a lion, and the other on a serpent, and they say that the next day he'll fight with the world's strongest knight.

Percivale must now realize, if he didn't know it before, that it will not be he who achieves the Holy Grail. Instead, as an obedient and worthy knight, he goes out in search of the one who has been prophesied to achieve it. It is Galahad, however, who finds and rescues Percivale. Once Galahad gallops away, Percivale realizes that his best chance to fulfill his promise to Evelake and bring Galahad to him has been lost. Soon enough, however, Percivale is distracted by another adventure, as strange events continue to unfold throughout this quest, many of which seem connected.



Percivale now attempts to both avenge the farmer's loss and to honor himself, but he is hardly even permitted to joust before the knight with the black horse rides off. Without a horse, Percivale has no hope of getting very far, or of finding Galahad and fulfilling his promise, so the woman's offer is appealing.



The strange elements of these adventures begin to pile up, and there also seems to be an allegorical component to these fights and adventures. Serpent often stand for the devil in Christian mythology, and lions are seen as more valiant, holy animals.



In a brief intrusion into the plot, the narrator contrasts contemporary faith and behavior to Percivale's faith: though Percivale may not be a perfect knight, he is shown worthy in his faith.



Chapter 7 Then the other lady in the dream says that Percivale has killed her serpent, and she'll only forgive him if he pledges allegiance to her, but he has refused. Percivale wakes up, troubled, and sees a ship sailing toward him. An old man clothed as a priest greets him, and says that if he is a true, chivalrous knight, he won't be harmed. Percivale shares with him his dream, and the man says that the lady on the lion signifies faith, hope, and belief, and came to warn him of a battle. The lady on a serpent signifies the devil, and Percivale killed a devil when he leapt off the horse. The old man leaves. Percivale goes to the lion who keeps him company.

Chapter 8 Percivale sees another ship riding towards him, with a beautiful, richly clothed lady on it. She says she comes from the waste forest where she found the red knight with the white shield (Galahad), and Percivale cries that he's been looking for this knight. If Percivale fulfills her wish, she says, she'll bring him to Galahad. When Percivale says he was cheered by an old man a few days earlier, she says that this man is an enchanter, but she will help him. She tells Percivale that she used to dwell with the greatest man in the world, but one day she said something that displeased him, so he drove her out of court. Now many of his servants have followed her, and they help her, as she is asking Percivale to do.

Chapter 9 The lady asks for a pavilion and stands it over the ground. She sets out food and strong wine for Percivale. Drunk, he proffers his love, but she refuses him. Once she sees just how drunk he is, she tells him to swear to be her servant, and he does so. Then the lady has a bed prepared, and she lies down naked upon it. Percivale is about to lie down beside her, but then he sees his sword on the ground with a red cross on it, and he makes the sign of the cross. Suddenly the pavilion is turned into smoke and black cloud.

Chapter 10 Frightened, Percivale cries to God, then sees from afar the lady on the ship, crying that he's betrayed her, as the water roars and envelops the ship. Percivale strikes himself through the thigh with his sword, asking God to forgive his sin. Moaning in pain, he sees the ship with the old man approach. Percivale cries to him that a lady has led him into sin. The man says this was the devil, the great champion he was meant to fight against, who almost defeated him. The old man leads Percivale onto his ship.

Now Percivale's reality really does begin to meld with his dreams, as the lion and serpent reappear while he's asleep. One lady with a serpent seems to continue to court Percivale's loyalty, though it's uncertain who she is or whether he should believe her. We are, as usual, meant to trust an old man, especially when in the guise of a priest. The lady and serpent indeed stood for the devil: the lion often symbolizes courage and goodness, as well as faith (and again women are portrayed as either saintly and pure or wicked and seductive).



Percivale seems to be once more agonizingly close to Galahad, and yet again there is some kind of mediating presence blocking him. Percivale continues to meet people, ladies in particular, who want something from him. This lady freely offers advice to Percivale as well, although this advice directly contradicts that of the old man. Still, the damsel paints a sympathetic picture, one of abandonment by a knight only counteracted by continuing loyalty from his servants. In general, it seems we are supposed to trust the old men and be suspicious of damsels and ladies.



As usual, alcohol in the book is used more often than not as an element of trickery, a way especially for women, who may be physically weaker, to force men into doing what they wouldn't have wanted to do otherwise. For Percivale, the night is quickly spiraling out of his control, and it seems mostly by chance that he remembers his faith and makes the scene suddenly disappear.



The devil is shown to be adept at using any tools in his arsenal—including the most effective one of a beautiful woman—to win a vulnerable knight over to his side. Percivale only now realizes that he was close to being conquered, not through honorable jousting but through the subtle ways of devils (and women!).



BOOK 15

Chapter 1 Meanwhile Launcelot departs from the hermitage and sees a chapel, with an old man lying inside in a fine white shirt. Then a “good man” tells Launcelot that this old man should not be in such fine clothing, since he broke the oath of his order. They enter the chapel, and the good man makes an enchantment on the Bible, and they see a horrible fiend who says that the man who lies dead is saved: his nephew Aguarus fought against the Earl of Vale, and this man helped him take the earl and his lords.

Chapter 2 Then, the fiend continues, the earl and Aguarus made peace, but the earl sent his nephews to kill the man lying here. They put on the white shirt and cast him into the fire, but after a day he was not dead, and even now he does not look burnt. The fiend says that he is frightened by this man’s goodness.

The good man and Launcelot marvel at the story. When Launcelot tells the good man of his quest, he says that Launcelot will have no more power to see the **Sangreal** than a blind man can see a bright sword. The next day, after they bury the dead man, the good man tells Launcelot to take the man’s hair and put it next to his skin. He tells Launcelot also not to drink wine or eat meat. Launcelot departs and meets a maiden, who tells him he will soon find rest.

Chapter 3 Launcelot goes to sleep and has a vision of a man coming to him with a crown of gold, leading seven kings and two knights with him, all worshipping God. In the vision an old man then comes down from the clouds and gives everyone his blessing. Then he tells one of the two knights that he has betrayed him, preferring the pleasures of the world. When Launcelot wakes up he rides and meets the knight who had taken his horse. They joust, and Launcelot strikes him down and takes back his horse. He continues on and meets a hermit, whom he asks to counsel him about the vision he’s had.

Chapter 4 The hermit says that it has to do with Joseph of Arimathea’s battles. The kings are the rulers of various countries. One of the knights was Galahad, whom none will equal. The hermit counsels Launcelot to let it be known that Galahad is his son, and to never fight with him.

We had left Launcelot sorrowful and seemingly unable to accomplish much, remaining immobilized outside the alluring chapel. Chapels, though, are scattered throughout the lands that Launcelot is traveling through on this quest. This particular mystery is resonant with Launcelot’s own life, since it has to do with payment for sin.



In this case, it is the Earl of Vale who failed to fully succeed in his sinful betrayal of the peace treaty. Goodness, here and elsewhere in the book, often has physical, material manifestations.



The story seems to have been shared with Launcelot only as a contrasting tale to his own impossibility of redemption through achieving the Holy Grail. But Launcelot still seems committed to changing his life and becoming a holy man, perhaps even making the achievement of the Grail possible.



The crown of gold bears a notable resemblance to the crown that Melias de Lile thoughtlessly seized: at least on a symbolic register, it represents both earthly and divine power, which humans may be tempted to try to seize. God’s presence in this dream suggests the ultimate decisions of Judgment Day, when the good acts and sinful acts of each person on earth are to be judged.



At least according to the hermit (often a trustworthy character), Launcelot’s dream was not just exemplifying a religious credo but also a specific prophecy about the sins of particular knights.



Chapter 5 Launcelot leaves the next day and rides into a plain next to a castle, where 500 knights are riding on horseback, half of them belonging to the castle and riding on black horses, and the other half on white horses. Launcelot decides to help those with black horses, since they seem weaker. He does many great deeds, but finally grows weary: his side is overcome. Ashamed, he continues on. He rests by an apple tree and sleeps. Then he dreams that an old man comes to him and asks why he slips so easily into sin. Launcelot awakens, and continues to a chapel where he sees a recluse who calls to Launcelot to enter.

Chapter 6 Launcelot tells the recluse of his vision and of the tournament. She tells him that he was the most marvelous man in the world for a long time. But at this tournament, the earthly knights were clothed in black, since they had secret sins, and the chaste, virgin knights were in white. Launcelot had inclined towards the sinful knights out of pride. God was angry with him for fighting against the good, white knights, so he sent this vision to signify that Launcelot was of evil faith and pride. They eat dinner, and then Launcelot rides over a mountain, and comes to an armed knight. Both the horse and the man are black, and this man strikes Launcelot's horse to the earth.

BOOK 16

Chapter 1 Meanwhile Gawaine rides along without finding any adventure. Then he meets Ector de Maris, who is also bored. They ride together and come across an old chapel, where they pray. They fall asleep. Gawaine dreams he comes to a meadow full of flowers, where a rack of black bulls—except for three white, one of which has a black spot—are tied. Some black ones go to seek better pasture, but many grow so thin that they cannot keep upright.

Chapter 2 Ector de Maris, meanwhile, dreams that he and his brother Launcelot are riding, and a man beats Launcelot and drags him to a well. Launcelot stops to drink, but the water sinks from him. He and Ector then go to a rich man's house, where they are told there is no space for them. When the two knights wake up, they tell each other of their dreams and marvel. As they're talking, they see a hand covered with red silk holding a great candle: it enters the chapel and then vanishes. They hear a voice saying that they are of poor faith, and have failed, so they will not be able to achieve the **Sangreal**.

As usual, Launcelot espouses his typically courageous, honorable knightly behavior. But unlike in earlier parts of the book, his prowess alone is no longer enough to achieve miraculous victories—in fact, this may be the first time that Launcelot actually is said to grow too tired to continue on. Meanwhile, he continues to be berated for his sins, even as he is trying to atone for them and to change the way he has lived.



Though knights often are clothed in various colors, the recluse suggests that these knights were revealed to Launcelot for their symbolic significance. Even though Launcelot thought he was helping the weaker side, in fact he could not even help but choose the more evil side, since a kind of worldly pride and desire for glory is part of his nature. We are meant to understand this scene as tragic: Launcelot seems almost helpless in his attempt to be good.



Moving from Launcelot to Gawaine and Ector de Maris, we now go from a series of adventures to a pair of knights that does not seem to have much to do. However, the mysterious, symbolic visions and dreams that have been occurring to the other knights recently finally do reach Gawaine and Ector as well.



The dream of Ector de Maris is more realistic and perhaps less enigmatic than that of Gawaine, in that we can understand some of the implications of being turned away from a rich man's house, for instance. This may or may not be the same chapel as the one where Launcelot stopped and could not enter, but in either case it serves a similar purpose, warning the knights of their lack of worthiness to achieve the Sangreal.



They depart to a valley, where a squire tells them they can find Nacien the hermit, a holy man, on a nearby mountain. They meet with an armed knight who offers to joust with Gawaine, and Gawaine strikes him down and orders him to yield. The knight says he will die anyway from his wounds, so he asks Gawaine to take him to an abbey. He says he is Uwaine les Avoutres, son of Uriens, and he was questing after the **Sangreal**. Gawaine realizes this is his brother.

Chapter 3 Gawaine cries out in sorrow. Uwaine asks him to recommend himself to Arthur and the court. Gawaine and Ector de Maris begin to weep as Uwaine dies. They bury him, and then depart, their hearts heavy. They come to Nacien, and say they must confess their dreams. The hermit tells Gawaine that the meadow is the **Round Table**, founded for humility and patience. But most of the knights are blackened by sin and wickedness: only Galahad and Percivale, as virgins, are white, and Sir Bors de Ganis only broke his chastity once.

Chapter 4 Then Nacien tells Ector de Maris that he and Launcelot both go in search of what they will never find. Launcelot falling off his horse means that he has left pride for humility. The well signifies the high grace of God, which Launcelot still cannot fully receive. Nacien also says that the hand with the candle signifies the Holy Ghost, whose clearness and sight shows the right way of Jesus Christ. The voice meant that the two knights cannot achieve the **Sangreal**.

Chapter 5 Gawaine asks why they have not met with many adventures: Nacien says that they have been too great of sinners. Launcelot, he says, will die a holy man, since he has not murdered anyone since repenting. Gawaine and Ector de Maris depart, and ride without meeting adventure.

Chapter 6 Bors de Ganis, meanwhile, has met with a religious man since departing from Camelot. They ride to a hermitage. Bors confesses and they eat. The man tells him to eat none other than bread or water until sitting at the table where the **Sangreal** will be, and Bors agrees. The man gives him a scarlet coat to wear until fulfilling the quest of the Sangreal. Bors departs and sees a great bird on an old, dry tree, with young chicks dying for hunger below. The bird kills itself with its own beak, and its blood gives life to the young birds.

Nacien will come up again in the story: like old men in general, hermits or holy men are considered trustworthy, good, and prophetic. The constant theme of mistaken identity takes another tragic turn here, as it turns out that Gawaine has unknowingly wounded his own brother, who is on the same quest as Gawaine.



Uwaine is the first casualty among the knights of the Round Table in the quest of the Sangreal, not even in fighting honorably against an enemy, but in mistakenly jousting with his own brother. However, this is the kind of death that the book's ethics will not necessarily blame Gawaine for, as it is an inevitable part of being a knight: his sexual sins are considered greater.



Over and over again, the knights are told that their quest is useless and that they will never achieve the Holy Grail. The fact that they continue nonetheless may simply be a sign of pride and stubbornness, but there is also a sense in which there is honor to be found in pursuing a goal, even if one knows it to be impossible.



Nacien sets up a kind of hierarchy of sin and goodness: Launcelot may have erred and thus will not achieve the Holy Grail, but his repentance makes him more likely to meet interesting adventures.



Sir Bors de Ganis, to whom we now turn, seems to have had a relatively quieter time of questing since he left Camelot, compared to the other knights. But he too is now faced with strange visions and events, in which the behavior of animals often seems to act as a clear symbol that is directly relevant to knights and their quest.



Chapter 7 Sir Bors goes to a high tower where a lovely young lady tries to feed him richly, but Bors eats only bread. Then a squire arrives and says that the lady must find a champion, for her sister will take her castle unless she finds a knight to fight against Pridam le Noire the next day. The lady tells Bors that a king Aniause used to live here, and he loved a woman who had evil customs, putting to death many of his relatives. He later chased her out of the castle and married herself (the lady telling the story), but now the first lady is fighting to have it back. Bors offers to fight for the lady.

Chapter 8 When Sir Bors falls asleep, he sees a vision of two swans, one white and one black. The white bird asks him for meat and says that if he serves her she'll give him all the riches of the world. The black bird tells him to serve her instead, for blackness suits him better. In another vision, Bors goes to a chapel and sees a worm-eaten tree on his left, and on the right two flowers. He hears a man say that these flowers should not perish to save a rotten tree.

Sir Bors wakes up and greets the lady. A company of knights arrives to lead Bors to battle. Bors meets the rival knight Pridam, and they fight, each wounding the other. Then they fall to earth and fight on foot. Finally Bors strikes Pridam's helmet off and cries that he must yield, or he'll kill him. Pridam asks for mercy, and the enemy lady flees with her knights.

Chapter 9 Sir Bors reinstates peace in the land, and the lady thanks Bors greatly, but he refuses all her riches. He departs and rides to a forest, where at a crossroads he sees two knights leading his brother Lionel, naked and bound to a horse. Bors prepares to save him, but then sees a knight leading a fair lady into the thicket, and she cries for him to defend her honor. Bors is torn, and asks God to forgive him for choosing the lady over his brother.

Chapter 10 Sir Bors fights the knight and strikes him to the earth, where he faints. The knight is her cousin, the lady says, and took her from her father. Twelve knights arrive and she tells them how Bors has saved her. They praise him and invite him to their castle, but Bors has to ride after Lionel. He comes across a religious man, and asks him if he's seen a wounded, bound man. The man says that he is dead, pointing to a slain body in a bush, who indeed looks like Lionel. Bors falls down in grief and takes the body into his arms. He carries it to a chapel with a tomb.

Bors de Ganis remains obedient to the holy man, refusing to eat anything other than bread. He then faces another chance to prove himself in the classical way, by defending a lady that has had some wrong done to her. This is also, however, a story about rivalry between women—the kind of rivalry that, as we've seen, can be as fierce as rivalries between men.



Once again, the colors white and black appear in dreams: by now we can guess that each color will have a certain ethical status associated with it. In the second vision, the typically Christian imagery of trees, buds, and flowers is employed in a slightly more enigmatic way.



Pridam and Bors are relatively equally matched, since they fight both on horseback and on foot, and both wound each other. However, Bors manages to make Pridam yield to him, granting him mercy as Arthur's code requires of him.



Bors barely has time to take a breath before another quest quickly appears to take the place of the earlier one. Choosing between saving his brother and a lady, Bors is strung between two important and competing values of a knight: kinship and protection of ladies. We have seen this dilemma before, and it's not clear what the right decision is.



It appears that for the lady's cousin, the importance of honor in kinship gave way to lustful desire, something looked down upon. Bors once again has to refuse any kind of celebration or hospitality, since yet another quest awaits him—though this time it seems that it might be too late, and that in exchange for saving the damsel Sir Bors has lost his brother.



Chapter 11 At the chapel Sir Bors tells the priest about his dream. The priest says that the white swan signifies a lady who loves Bors, and if he doesn't return her love she'll soon die. But if he goes to her then his cousin, Launcelot, will die. He must choose one or the other. The priest leads Bors into a high tower, where ladies and knights give him a fur mantle and celebrate with him so much that he forgets Lionel and Launcelot. A fair lady comes to him and they all say she loves Bors more than anyone in the world. They sit down and speak of many things, but Bors is troubled, and refuses to break his chastity.

Chapter 12 Sir Bors refuses to sleep with the lady, who is in great grief. She says she will die for his love. She goes up to a high battlement, and one of the ladies cries that the lady and all her maidens must jump off the tower and die if he doesn't change his mind. Bors, distraught, makes the sign of the cross. Suddenly he hears a great noise and cry, and the tower and ladies all disappear. He holds up his hands to heaven and thanks God for his escape.

Sir Bors goes to an abbey, where he is led to the abbot in a chapel. Bors tells him of his adventure, and the abbot says he'll counsel him the next day.

Chapter 13 In the morning, the abbot says that Jesus gave Sir Bors a sign of himself in King Aniause and the lady he fought for. Bors battled for good and against evil in the form of the jealous lady. What seemed to be a holy man (the priest who pointed at Lionel's body) was actually a fiend, who lied in saying that Lionel was killed, so that Bors might lose faith. Referring to an earlier dream, the abbot says that the two flowers signify two virgins, one the wounded knight and one the lady Bors rescued: the wounded knight would have "deflowered" the lady.

Chapter 14 Sir Bors leaves the abbot and rides to a castle in a valley, where he meets a farmer who tells him there will be a great joust here. Bors goes to a hermitage, and there finds his brother Lionel, and is thrilled to see him. Lionel is furious, though, saying that Bors left him to die. Bors asks for mercy, but Lionel says he will kill him for being such a traitor—he refuses to have mercy. He strikes Bors off his horse, and, possessed by the devil, is about to strike off his head, when an old hermit runs forward and puts himself in the way.

Once again, Sir Bors must face a difficult, some might say impossible choice—and again it is between saving a lady's honor (and, here, her life) or acquiescing to the requirements not only of the fellowship of the Round Table but of family bonds as well. Bors finally seems to slip somewhat in his dogged honor and commitment to his quests, but soon he retrieves this sense of honor by refusing to sleep with the lady.



This final decision is perhaps the most difficult one of all for Bors, since it is thrown into sharp relief through the lady's despair—either he sins with her or he lets her die. That the sign of the cross saves him (as it did Percivale) suggests that only by putting his faith in God can Bors hope to emerge from a challenge of faith.



Bors is left with much to think about after this accumulation of fantastical adventures.



In this book abbots, priests, and hermits often possess the powers of dream interpretation that we usually don't think of as particularly belonging to the Christian tradition. But part of the interest and intrigue at play in the importance of quests for these knights is the sense that there is something more symbolic and meaningful at stake in their adventures, a plan which can only be revealed slowly.



Having learned what his dreams and his adventures mean, Bors is relieved to know that he did not end up sacrificing his brother's life in exchange for saving the lady in distress. Lionel, however, seems to be in the midst of his own spiritual challenge as part of his quest for the Sangreal—his question is whether or not he will let revenge get the better of him.



Chapter 15 The hermit asks Lionel to have mercy on his brother. Lionel warns him to get back, but the hermit refuses, and Lionel kills the hermit. Again he's about to kill Sir Bors when a knight of the **Round Table**, Colgrevice, arrives and grabs Lionel by the shoulders, begging him to stop. When he won't, they begin to fight. Bors, wounded, watches them in horror, and once he regains his strength, he arises.

Chapter 16 Colgrevice cries to Sir Bors that he only wants to die for the sake of a worthy man. Lionel knocks off Colgrevice's helmet, and Colgrevice begins to pray to God. Lionel strikes him down dead, then races after his brother. Weeping, Bors draws his sword, saying that Lionel is evil to have killed two good men in trying to kill his own brother. Bors asks for God's mercy, and lifts his sword.

Chapter 17 Sir Bors then hears a voice telling him to flee rather than kill Lionel. A marvelous light appears, and the two brothers fall to the ground in a swoon. Then Bors hears a voice telling him to go to the sea to meet Percivale. Bors asks his brother to forgive him, and Lionel does. Bors departs and rests at an abbey. A voice in the night tells him to go to the sea: there he finds a ship, enters it, and it races across the water. He falls asleep, and when he awakens he sees Percivale on the ship deck. They embrace, and Bors tells him all that's happened.

Lionel's wrath exceeds even the greatest scenes of jealousy and revenge that we have seen thus far—but as is fitting for this section of the book, his action are blamed on “the devil,” who has suddenly possessed him (perhaps as another test for Bors himself).



Having killed an ally of the Round Table, it seems that Lionel could easily continue on his rampage and kill even his brother Bors. Bors, meanwhile, is horrified, and begins to realize that the only way of stopping this murderous rampage is to kill his brother himself.



It is not entirely apparent what allows Lionel to escape from his enchantment by the devil, though the white light suggests that God's power seems to be at work here. In any case, we are not given any space or time to contemplate what Bors and Lionel just went through, but instead immediately continue to follow Bors as he is led by authoritative voices to complete his quest. Those who have been found worthy of the Sangreal (thus far, only these two) are now being reunited.



BOOK 17

Chapter 1 We return to Galahad, who, after many adventures, passes by a castle where a tournament is taking place. Galahad does many great deeds there. Gawaine and Ector de Maris are also present, and they recognize Galahad's shield. Galahad strikes Gawaine down, and his horse's shoulder is cleaved in two. Gawaine says to Ector that he's never received such a beating: now his quest is done.

Galahad rides on to the Castle of Carboneck, where he stays in a hermitage. A damsel knocks on his chamber and asks him to accompany her to the greatest adventure he's ever seen.

We return from the sobering story of betrayal and violence regarding Bors and Lionel to the exploits of Galahad, who as we know is faring far more successfully on the quest than many others among the Round Table knights. Even Gawaine is awed rather than angry and jealous (which is unusual for him).



Once again a lady introduces a knight to an adventure awaiting him, though we know to be wary of these ladies.



Chapter 2 Galahad rides with the damsel to the sea and a castle called Collibe, where the damsel's lady lives. This lady takes Galahad to the seaside, where they find the ship holding Sir Bors and Percivale. They all recognize each other and embrace, sharing their adventures. The ship goes from Logris (England) to a place between two great rocks, but it's too dangerous to land. Another ship is nearby, so they approach, but it's empty. Letters at the end of the ship, however, declare that the ship is Faith, and anyone who enters without belief will fail. Then the lady declares that she is Percivale's sister, and she warns Percivale not to enter if he lacks faith, since she loves him more than anyone.

Chapter 3 Galahad, the lady, Sir Bors, and Percivale enter the ship. They find a bed with a crown of silk and a beautiful sword on it. Percivale tries to grip the sword, but both he and Bors fail. There are letters on the sword that look like blood, which that whomever draws this sword will never fall to shame or be wounded to death. Galahad is too prudent to try. The lady tells them that there was once a war between King Labor and the Saracen Hurlame, who later became a Christian. Hurlame struck Labor down with this sword, an event that created great drought and misery for both realms. Hurlame had put the sword back into its sheath on his ship and then fell down dead: since then no one has drawn the sword without being wounded or killed.

Chapter 4 Written on the sword's scabbard is that the wearer will never be shamed while wearing the girdle (belt for the sword): the only person who can get rid of the sword is a king's daughter, a virgin, who will die a horrible death if she ever loses her virginity. It also reads that whoever praises the sword most will find most to blame in it. Percivale's sister shares that Nacien, brother-in-law to King Mordrains, had found this ship 40 years after Christ's death. He failed to draw the sword, but when a great giant came to kill him, he ran to the sword, praised it, and was able to draw it—but then the sword broke in the middle of the battle. Nacien then jumped out of the ship to fight and he killed the giant. He later came to Mordrains' ship and told him how the sword failed him at his time of greatest need. Mordrains said he must have some sin for this to happen, and then they heard a voice telling them to leave this ship for the other. As they did so, Nacien felt himself slashed by a sword in the right foot, and a voice told him this was his punishment for drawing that sword unworthily.

The particular powers associated with women seem to extend here to orchestrating the knights' adventures throughout their Sangreal quests, either forcing them to approach adventures alone or reuniting them to face such adventures together. This particular aspect of the quest seems to be symbolic more than anything, as the physical temptation of entering the ship is equated with the challenge of having enough faith—a challenge that it isn't clear all the knights of the Round Table can handle. The three worthiest knights are now united in one place.



The status of the narrator/Malory in this passage is interesting. Often he gives us helpful information from outside sources, such as sentences written on the sword like this one, but the narrator also intrudes here to share the story of King Labor and Hurlame. The story is useful for us readers insofar as it allows us to understand just how significant the possession of this sword is, and just how much it depends on the faith and honor of the one who bears it.



The sword and scabbard in this ship open the story up to much broader temporal and geographical contexts. At first, the notion that whoever praises the sword most will find the most to blame in it is enigmatic, of course, but makes sense when we learn the history behind the sword—as well as the extent to which the greatness of the sword is closely tied to the greatness and honor of the individual who bears the sword. Material objects in this book are often more than just things, and more, even, than symbols of certain values—instead, they actively participate in the construction of human character, which is proven through the manipulation of these objects, and also forged by the objects themselves. The magical sword is also, of course, another echo of Excalibur and other swords reserved only for the worthy.



Chapter 5 The lady (Percivale's sister) says that King Pelles also came upon this ship and drew the sword, and was instantly wounded through the thigh. The knights then behold two white spindles (rods used for spinning wool), and one red spindle, and one green. The lady says that the colors stand for the Genesis story of the Bible: Eve plucked the apple (red), turning its tree from white to green when she sinned with Adam. This tree endured until the time of King Solomon, who had an evil wife, but who heard a voice saying that a man, the last of his blood, would come bring him joy as a virtuous knight.

Chapter 6 Solomon's wife made him a ship and told him to take it to the temple and to take King David's sword. When the ship was ready to sail, the wife made a marvelous bed and put the sword at its foot. She ordered a carpenter to carve spindles for the sword out of Adam and Eve's tree, which he did after protesting. Drops of blood came out of it as he did so, and then the wife fastened the spindles onto the bed.

Chapter 7 That night a group of angels visited Solomon and baptized the ship with holy water. Then Solomon heard a voice saying that only those with the highest faith and belief should occupy the ship, including the last knight of Solomon's lineage. Solomon himself was abashed, and left the ship.

Percivale's sister says she will make a new girdle for the sword, and she takes from a box a golden girdle made partly out of her own hair. She sets it on the sword. Then they all tell Galahad that the sword belongs to him. He grasps the sword, and tells the lady that he'll pledge allegiance to her forever. They then leave the ship and come to Scotland. The lady says that if the inhabitants learn that the knights are from Arthur's court, they'll fight them. Galahad says that God shall deliver them from their enemies.

Chapter 8 A squire comes and, learning who the knights are, blows a great horn. Armed knights arrive and order them to yield. Instead, they drive against the knights and fight, killing many, though they then are sorry to have killed so many. A priest comes and, as the three take communion, tells them that this castle used to belong to Lord Earl Hernox, whose daughter was loved by three knights. One day they raped her and then imprisoned her father and killed many priests, burning down many chapels. God, therefore, is pleased at Arthur's knights, he says.

Percivale's sister gives yet another example of a knight (a knight, additionally, who is otherwise presented as holy and just, and descended from Christ himself) who was proud but ultimately humbled by the sword's discrimination between the truly honorable and the lowly. Other objects in the ship are also an occasion for Percivale's sister to share a significant historical narrative with the knights, one that joins Biblical tradition to their own quests.



The ship where the knights now find themselves is folded into a history much larger than themselves, one that is closely tied to the Biblical tales of the Old Testament. In some ways, the knights are reliving the Biblical mysteries and story of the Christian faith through their quest.



Solomon is an important king in the Jewish and Christian traditions, a ruler known particularly for his wisdom, so it is notable that he understands even himself to be ultimately unworthy of occupying the ship.



We realize now that Percivale's sister has been relating this entire story in order to equip Galahad with knowledge about his lineage and proper place, apparently as the last of Solomon's line—another example of how Galahad is fated to succeed in the quest of the Sangreal. His faith in God is shown to be more unshakeable than that of others.



The spiritual status of killing others in battle is uncertain—the book seems to suggest that it is honorable and justifiable for knights to defend themselves, but preferable not to kill others gratuitously, or if they do so to seek penance for it afterwards. Still, the fact that the knights killed by the Round Table fellows were evil and dishonorable does, in the priest's eyes, justify their actions.



Chapter 9 They take the earl out of prison. Then they all hear a voice telling Galahad that he has performed well, and now must go to the Maimed King to heal him. The three knights depart with Percivale's sister. They follow a white hart and four lions who lead them to a hermitage. In the chapel the hart becomes a man, and the four lions become a man, a lion, an eagle, and an ox. A voice says that thus entered the Son of God into Mary's womb. Astonished, the knights go to the priest and ask him what this means. He says that the hart is Jesus, who is transformed from death to life as both man and God. The four with him are the four evangelists of the Gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). The knights rest there and depart the next day.

Chapter 10 The three knights then meet a man who grasps the lady's bridle and says she won't escape until she has performed the castle's custom. Percivale orders the man to release his sister, but ten armed knights come out of a nearby castle with a dish of silver, saying they require blood from the lady's right arm. Percivale, Sir Bors, and Galahad race towards the knights and kill them all. Then 60 knights emerge and tell them they will not be harmed as long as they grant the custom. Galahad fights with them and kills many, and then a good knight comes and offers to tell them of the reason for the custom.

Chapter 11 The knight says that the lady who owns the castle fell sick long ago. Finally an old man said she must have the dish of a worthy virgin's blood in order to heal. Percivale's sister says it will be of great glory for her to help the lady, even if she dies as a result. In the morning they bleed Percivale's sister, who cries that she will die to make the lady whole. She asks Percivale to put her coffin in a boat, which will lead her to the City of Sarras, to be buried in a holy place. Percivale agrees, weeping. The lady is healed, and Percivale's sister dies. Percivale puts her in a barge, and a great storm rocks the castle all night. Then they see from afar a wounded knight who asks for help. Sir Bors takes his horse and rides after him.

Chapter 12 Galahad and Percivale remain in the castle all night. After the storm they emerge and see that many have died, and they hear a voice saying that this is God's vengeance for the bloodshed of maidens. They find a churchyard with a chapel full of the bodies of maidens who had bled to death for the old lady's sake: twelve of them are kings' daughters.

Here it is animals rather than damsels who lead the knights to a specific place—in both cases, those who are not knights seem to possess a special form of knowledge to which knights don't have access. Here, the animals serve both as guides for the knights and also as spiritual symbols. However, as usual, a priest—someone that traditionally has privileged access to God's will—is needed in order to interpret the mysterious images of these encounters.



Once again a "custom" of a certain castle and its knights is used as an excuse for seemingly unjustified behavior. We may be meant to link this castle to one that came up in an earlier story, in which there was a similar custom requiring blood from a virgin, but this similarity may also be a function of the varied nature of these stories, which were compiled by Malory into a single edition from many sources.



Suddenly the knights' attitude shifts, thanks to the intervention of the "good" knight, through whom they learn of the tragedy of the lady's inability to heal without a virgin's blood. The actions of Percivale's sister may not be exactly following the code of knightly honor, which is inaccessible to women, but they are meant to show just how honorable and impressive women's own form of heroism can be—sacrificing oneself for the good of another person, the ultimate selflessness. This also further associates Percivale himself with the idea of holiness and sacrifice.



It appears that Percivale's sister's death, rather than the battling of knights, put an end to what is revealed to us as a truly shameful custom, the "bloodshed of maidens." God's wrath here is meant to remind us of similar Old Testament stories, and be yet another affirmation that any kind of tragedy or suffering is probably a punishment for sin.



Chapter 13 Percivale and Galahad leave each other. Meanwhile, Launcelot has heard in a dream to seek out a ship. He does so, and when he enters it he feels great sweetness and joy. In the ship is the body of a lady: Percivale's sister. In her hand is a document, in Percivale's hand, which tells what has happened. Launcelot remains on the ship for a month. One night he stops at a port, and Galahad comes to meet him. They embrace and tell each other of their adventures. Launcelot marvels at Galahad's sword (the sword from the ship). They perform many adventures on and off the ship for six months.

Guided by what we are meant to consider as holy direction, Launcelot is brought into the element of the Sangreal quest begun by Percivale's sister, and ended with her death. Perhaps the last part of the quest she orchestrated was in reuniting Launcelot with his son Galahad, who, as we have seen, has begun to supersede even his father in knightly ability, in addition to spiritual purity. This is a pleasant interlude in which we finally get to see father and son—two of the greatest knights in the world—doing normal “knightly” things, like pursuing adventures that don't have to do with the Grail.



Chapter 14 One Monday Galahad and Launcelot find a knight in white armor, who asks Galahad to leave his adventures with his father and return to the quest of the **Sangreal**. Galahad kisses his father and departs. Launcelot sails on the ship for a month and prays to see the Sangreal. He then arrives at a castle, which is guarded by two lions. He draws his sword, but a dwarf arrives and knocks the sword out of his hand. A voice says that Launcelot has had poor belief for failing to trust in God's will. Launcelot repents, and goes up to the lions again without trying to kill them. They let him pass, and he enters the castle. He comes up to a locked chamber inside.

The time spent by Galahad and Launcelot is a pause during which both knights can rest and restore themselves before continuing on their proper quests. It is telling that they are not permitted to continue the Sangreal quest together—clearly because Launcelot, as no one ever fails to remind him, is not as worthy as his son. Launcelot's wariness regarding the lion is just another example meant to chastise him for failing to be faithful enough to God.



Chapter 15 Launcelot hears a sweet song from inside, and he realizes the **Sangreal** must be there. Finally the door opens. The chamber is lit up, but a voice tells Launcelot not to enter. He sees the Grail on a silver table with angels around it, with a priest next to it saying Mass. Suddenly it seems that the priest is about to swoon, so Launcelot, asking God's forgiveness, decides to enter and help. But as he goes in, he feels a breath of fire and falls to the ground. Then he feels many hands lead him out of the chamber, and he loses consciousness. In the morning the residents of the castle find Launcelot and take him to a bedchamber where he remains unconscious for 24 days.

Launcelot is brought tantalizingly close to the Sangreal, though we do not learn (until later) exactly where it is that Launcelot has stumbled upon it. As usual, Launcelot's first reaction to any sign of weakness among others is an attempt to help them. Usually, this is held up as evidence of his worthiness as a noble, honorable knight. Here, however, we learn that mere earthly honor is not enough to attain something as spiritually lofty as the Holy Grail.



Chapter 16 On the 25th day Launcelot's eyes open, and he tells those gathered around him that he has seen great marvels, but he also realizes he's been punished by God. They tell him that he will never see more of the **Sangreal** than that, since he is not worthy enough. As he recovers, he is recognized as Launcelot, and King Pelles joyfully meets him (Launcelot realizes that he is in the castle of Carbonek in Corbin). The Sangreal is brought to the castle hall and it gives all a great feast. Then a knight comes and knocks on the door, ordering them to open it. The king says he may not enter while the Sangreal is here. The knight says he is Ector de Maris, and Pelles says his brother Launcelot is here. Ector both dreads and loves Launcelot, and he cries that his sorrow and shame is great. He leaves in haste.

The more impressionistic tone of the earlier scenes yields to greater clarity as we are given context regarding where Launcelot is—unsurprisingly, it is where the Sangreal has been all along. Indeed, the fact that each of the knights has had to depart in search of the Sangreal, only to find it where they always knew it to be located, suggests the symbolic significance of the quest: it is not necessarily as important to go off and find something (the Sangreal or anything else) in a distant place, but rather to learn through the journey whether or not one is worthy enough.



Chapter 17 Launcelot then departs for England. He comes to a white abbey and sees an altar with a tomb, on which is written that here lies Bagdemagus, killed by Gawaine. Launcelot mourns this death. In the morning he arrives to Camelot, where he learns that over half the knights of the **Round Table** have been killed. Launcelot tells Arthur that out of Galahad, Percivale, and Sir Bors, he will only see one again.

Chapter 18 Meanwhile Galahad rides to the abbey where King Mordrains is held. Mordrains asks Galahad, as a pure virgin, to embrace him, and cries that he is now ready to meet God. Mordrains dies, and Galahad buries him. Galahad goes into the land of Gore and sees the tomb of Bagdemagus. Then he sees a great, flaming tomb, and the caretakers say that only the greatest knight of the **Round Table** might achieve this adventure. Galahad approaches the tomb and hears a voice—the speaker says that he is of Galahad’s kindred, and has dwelled in fire for 354 years to pay penance for his sin against Joseph of Arimathea. Then the fire goes out, and Galahad takes the body to the minister to be buried properly.

Chapter 19 Galahad rides on to the Maimed King. He meets Percivale and Sir Bors, and they ride together to the castle of Carbonek, where King Pelles greets them happily. Pelles’ son offers them the broken sword that had pierced Joseph through the thigh, but neither can mend it. Galahad is able to set the pieces together, and the sword suddenly seems like new. He gives it to Bors, since that adventure has been achieved. Then many of the knights depart, since the **Sangreal** vessel is about to feed the castle residents, but the pure knights are welcomed in. A sick knight in a crown of gold then enters the hall, and he greets Galahad and says only Galahad can cure him.

For Launcelot, the quest for the Sangreal has ended: he has come as close as he ever will to achieving this elusive knightly prize. Arthur’s fears about the danger of sending his knights out to the Sangreal quest seem to have been justified, given how many have been killed.



Galahad is one of the only knights of the Round Table left who is both alive and still permitted to continue seeking the Holy Grail. Before fulfilling the commandment regarding the Maimed King, Galahad does the important work of mourning the dead, from Mordrains to Bagdemagus to this unknown relative of Galahad. Although this man has sinned, a proper burial is considered an essential endpoint to a Christian life for all but the worst of sinners.



The book is, as we have seen, full of stories in which a sword is imbued with mystical powers, including powers of discerning the character of knights that attempt to handle it. Swords, of course, are central to the culture and the values of this culture, so it does make sense that they are given such significance. The Sangreal is another spiritual and mystical object that seems able to discern which knights are worthy to even be in the same room as it.



Chapter 20 King Pellès and his son then leave the hall, as they are not on the **Sangreal** quest. Then a man comes as if from heaven, clothed like a bishop, and on his clothing is writing saying that this is Joseph, the first bishop of Christendom. The knights marvel, since he had died 300 years before. Angels enter the room and place candles on the table, then a bloody spear, and then the Sangreal, covering it with a vessel. The bishop performs Mass, and then kisses Galahad, telling him that all will be fed with great food and drink. A man that looks like Jesus Christ emerges from the Holy Vessel, telling those present that they will see a part of his secrets. He brings the vessel to Galahad, who kneels down and receives communion, as do the other knights. Christ tells Galahad that the vessel is the dish from which he had eaten at the Last Supper. Galahad, Christ says, will see this vessel more openly in the spiritual city of Sarras, so he must depart with it. It will never again be in England, since its inhabitants do not worship it. He tells Galahad that the spear will cure the Maimed King. Percivale and Sir Bors will accompany him: two will die in his service, and one will survive to bear tidings. Jesus gives a blessing and then vanishes.

Chapter 21 Galahad touches the spear's blood and then anoints the Maimed King, making him whole. Galahad, Percivale, and Bors then depart. They reach a ship, where they find the **Sangreal** covered with red silk. They pray, and Galahad asks to be delivered to heaven when he asks. A voice tells him that this shall be granted. They sleep, and when they awaken they see the city of Sarras, and then the ship holding the body of Percivale's sister. They go into the city, where they see a crippled man. Galahad asks him to help bear the heavy vessel, and he does, and is cured. The knights take the tomb of Percivale's sister and bury it richly. But then the King Estorause asks them why they've come, and, learning of the Sangreal, he imprisons them in a deep hole.

Chapter 22 Though the knights are imprisoned, the **Sangreal** feeds them and keeps them safe. After awhile King Estorause falls ill and calls for the three knights, asking them for forgiveness. When he dies, the whole city council decides to ask Galahad to be king. He makes a table of silver on which to place the Sangreal. All the knights pray before it every day.

This event introduces the climactic scenes that will end with the achievement of the Sangreal. Joseph of Arimathea is now not only a mythical figure, but a present character in the Sangreal quest and in this book—showing just how much history, faith, and the knightly quest are intertwined in Le Morte d'Arthur. Each element in this scene possesses great spiritual significance, from the Sangreal to the bloody spear. Even Christ, the son of God, appears in the scene in order to guide Galahad in the last steps before he officially “achieves” the quest. Christ's words are also meant to have broader significance beyond Galahad's individual spiritual worthiness. As we've seen, the quest has made most knights act in dishonorable, shameful ways, underlining what Christ says about the wickedness of the English in general, and their unworthiness to keep the Sangreal safe. This final condemnation of England as losing its faith is perhaps meant to explain how Malory's present society (which he seems to be criticizing) could have stemmed from the “glory days” of Arthur.



As his quest nears an end, Galahad seems to become endowed with some of the same spiritual powers to the Holy Grail itself—not to mention the power to choose one's own time of death. The Sangreal in its physical form has accompanied these knights throughout their quest, though this does not necessarily mean that they have “achieved” the Holy Grail, which usually means seeing the spiritual mysteries within (though this word is sometimes applied as a simple measure of holiness, as with Percivale and Bors, who have in one sense been successful in their quest).



The Sangreal continues to accompany the knights, here ensuring that they will not come to too much harm as prisoners of the king—who is portrayed as less evil than some we've seen, since he ultimately repents before dying.



One day they see a man clothed like a bishop praying before the vessel, and then beginning to say Mass. The holy man tells Galahad to come forth and see spiritual things as no man has before, which he does, trembling. He thanks God for this miracle. The man reveals himself as Joseph of Arimathea: he tells Galahad that he (like Joseph himself) has been blessed to remain a virgin, and also to have seen the marvels of the **Sangreal**. Galahad goes to Percivale and Bors and kisses them, asking them to send his blessings to Launcelot. Galahad kneels down and prays to God, and then a great number of angels bear his soul to heaven, along with the vessel and the bloody spear.

Chapter 23 Percivale and Sir Bors weep over Galahad's death, and they bury his body. Percivale then becomes a holy man and lives in a hermitage for a year and two months, until he dies as well. Bors then leaves Sarras and rides to Camelot, where everyone rejoices over his return. Bors tells of the **Sangreal** adventures: the stories are written down into books and placed in the Salisbury libraries. Bors gives Launcelot blessings from Galahad, and Launcelot thanks him, swearing to be loyal to him forever.

BOOK 18

Chapter 1 Some time after the quest of the **Sangreal**, Launcelot forgets his promise and begins to sleep with Guenever again. Many in the court gossip about this, but many other ladies ask Launcelot to be their champion too, and Guenever grows angry with him, saying he seems to have no time for her. Launcelot protests that he's only been away from her when he had to, for his quest. He tells her he's worried about Agravaine and Mordred, who know of their affair and could dishonor them: he tries to spend time with many damsels to suggest that he simply loves women.

Chapter 2 Then Guenever weeps and calls Launcelot false. She sends him out of the court, saying she never wants to see him again. Grieving, he goes to Sir Bors, Ector de Maris, and Lionel. But Bors says Launcelot shouldn't leave, since he's needed here: besides, women often make hasty decisions and then repent. He tells him to go to a nearby hermitage and stay with a knight until Bors sends word of what's happened.

Chapter 2 The queen holds a private dinner with 24 knights. One, Pinel, poisons some apples in the hopes of killing Gawaine, who often eats them. But instead a knight named Patrise takes an apple and falls down dead. All the knights suspect Guenever, though Gawaine says he's known to love fruit, so he must have been the target. Guenever weeps and swoons.

The ability of Galahad to see these spiritual things—described only vaguely, since we are told that no human has been permitted to see them—is what is usually meant by “achieving” the Holy Grail. Percivale and Bors come quite close to this, since they have accompanied Galahad through to the end of his quest, but they are barred from this last, greatest element of the Sangreal quest, before Galahad ascends to heaven (reminiscent of Jesus’s own ascension, according to Christian tradition).



It had been predicted that Arthur would only see one of these three knights back at court, a prophecy that holds true (as they always do). Once again, it is considered essential that these stories are related, written down, and preserved for future generations—suggesting that the book we are reading comes directly from Bors’s own telling.



The quest of the Sangreal had forced Launcelot to come to terms with his own sinfulness and lack of honor in spiritual, rather than earthly, affairs. But we now are meant to understand just how difficult it is for Launcelot to remain committed to his earlier promises. The book now brings Guenever and Launcelot’s affair to the fore, as the primary cause of the titular “death of Arthur” and the collapse of the kingdom. After the Grail quest, the only major event remaining is this tragic finale.



Guenever is growing increasingly jealous and protective of her lover. Bors’s loyalties are to Arthur and his fellow Round Table knights—it’s difficult for him to sympathize with Launcelot’s reliance on a woman, though his loyalty to Launcelot makes him agree to help.



The equilibrium and trust at Arthur’s court further unravels, as infighting between the knights continues—here with Pinel’s desire to kill his fellow knight Gawaine (it’s unclear why, but Gawaine has certainly committed enough sins to make some enemies). The knights even begin to suspect their own queen of treason and fraud.



Chapter 3 Patrise's cousin Mador goes to Arthur to accuse the queen of treason. Arthur says he will allow her to choose a knight to battle against Mador for her honor—but the other knights suspect her too. Arthur says that Mador will fight this knight in 15 days, and if none steps forward, she'll be burnt at the stake. Arthur thinks Launcelot would do it, but they don't know where he is. Arthur tells Guenever to ask Sir Bors.

Chapter 4 The queen sends for Sir Bors, who says he cannot fight: he too was at the dinner, so the others might suspect him. The queen kneels before Bors and begs him. Arthur enters and cries for Bors to have mercy on her, for Launcelot's sake. Bors promises to do so for his sake, unless another comes forward. Bors then departs secretly for the hermitage, where he tells Launcelot everything. Launcelot tells him to draw out the battle until he can arrive. Upon his return, Bors tells the other knights that they shouldn't let their queen be shamed. They say they honor their king, but the queen is a destroyer of knights. Bors says she has only ever been honorable. He says she must be innocent, but only some of the knights agree.

Chapter 6 The day of the battle arrives, and the queen is put in the Constable's ward, with a fire and stake prepared. Sir Mador arrives and makes an oath of the queen's guilt, while Sir Bors swears to her innocence. They begin to battle: then an armed knight on a white horse races onto the field and asks Bors to withdraw.

Chapter 7 The strange knight asks permission to fight for the Guenever's honor, but only if he may leave afterwards. The two knights fight, and Mador's horse tumbles to the ground. They fight eagerly on foot for an hour, and Mador proves nimble. But finally the strange knight strikes Mador to the ground, and wounds him in the thighs. Mador asks for mercy and yields to him, releasing the queen from his accusation. Arthur and Guenever thank the knight, and ask him to take off his helmet and take a sip of wine. When he does, all see that it's Launcelot, who says it's to his honor to prevent shame on his king and queen. The queen weeps out of sorrow that he's repaid her unkindness with such goodness.

Chapter 8 The damsel of the lake, Nimue (Pelleas' wife) comes to court, and reveals that it was Sir Pinel who caused the death of Patrise. Pinel flees the country, and the story of the treason and Guenever's accusation is written on Patrise's tomb. For the feast of Assumption, a great tournament is prepared, and many kings come from other countries. The queen says she is sick and cannot go, which many assume is because Launcelot is still wounded and won't attend.

The knightly code of honor, which includes a clause about the justification of revenge, is now used in a perverted way against the knights' queen herself. Arthur in many ways has his hands tied, as to deny Mador the right of battling for Guenever's life would be hypocritical.



Initially, even the loyal and holy Bors is wary of helping Guenever, since he realizes just how dangerous it would be to have all the knights at court turn against him. But Guenever's desperation and Bors's ultimate loyalty to Arthur win out against his worries about his own safety. Meanwhile, Launcelot prepares to battle. For Bors, Guenever's potential innocence is what justifies fighting for her, but for Launcelot her innocence matters less than the fact that he will always remain loyal to her.



In cases like these, a jousting between knights is meant not only to prove one knight's honor over another, but actually to serve as a proxy for justice, determining the innocence or guilt of someone not directly involved in the battle.



As usual, the curiosity and intrigue caused by the entrance of an unknown knight is enough for the other knights (and for Arthur) to accept a change in plans. Of course, Launcelot has never yet been fully defeated in battle, so it is not too much of a surprise when he strikes Mador down and, in his generally honorable tradition, agrees to grant him mercy. Now Guenever realizes how jealous and petty she has been in ordering Launcelot out of court despite his loyalty to her.



Nimue, as we'll recall, had achieved some magical powers thanks to the teaching of Merlin, powers that she uses here to set things straight regarding who was actually guilty (though her intervention comes a little late, as it could have prevented the battle between Launcelot and Mador).



Chapter 9 Launcelot, after Guenever tells him of these rumors, says he'll go to the tournament himself, but will fight against Arthur and his group. Launcelot departs to Astolat, where he stays at Sir Bernard's manor. Arthur catches sight of him entering, and, smiling, tells the other knights that he's seen one knight who will surely do marvels at the tournament.

Launcelot has barely had time to rest and recover from his wounds when he finds himself once again needing to defend his honor, given that the rumors about the relationship between himself and Guenever will not let up. This reluctant division between Launcelot and Arthur (neither of whom considers the other an enemy, and who are in fact still friends) foreshadows the more tragic division to come.



Launcelot asks the baron to lend him a shield, so that he might not be known, and Sir Bernard gives him his son's shield. His daughter, Elaine le Blank, falls in love with him, and asks him to wear her token at the jousts. Launcelot agrees to wear her red sleeve, thinking this will prevent his recognition.

Launcelot often has to consider whether or not agreeing to a lady's wish would constitute a betrayal of his love and loyalty to Guenever. Here, he decides that the possibility of people recognizing him is too risky.



Chapter 10 In the morning all ride to Winchester (another name for Camelot). Launcelot lodges secretly with Sir Lavaine. Many different battles begin, and the knights of the **Round Table** largely succeed against the foreigners.

Launcelot is preparing to fight against the knights of the Round Table, which as we'll see will probably lead to significant battle scenes and conflicts of interest.



Chapter 11 Launcelot asks Lavaine to help him chase the **Round Table** knights back. They strike down many of these knights, forcing them to withdraw. Gawaine marvels at the prowess of the knight, and thinks it must be Launcelot, but then he sees the red token and assumes it isn't him. Launcelot's brothers and cousins race towards him, but he strikes them down again, until Sir Bors punctures Launcelot's side with his spear, and Launcelot falls. Lavaine pulls Launcelot onto his own horse, and they strike down many more, though Launcelot is wounded.

Gawaine often seems to possess better powers of discernment and recognition than other knights, but like the others he too relies on external indicators of identity in order to determine who knights are under their armor. Launcelot appears to pay the price for fighting against his own kinsmen once he is seriously wounded by Sir Bors, whose Sangreal quest has perhaps strengthened his prowess.



Chapter 12 The king blows the day-end's horn, and the foreign kings ask Launcelot to receive the prize for them. He begs them to allow him to leave, since he is wounded, rather than steal any of their honor. He goes to the forest, where Lavaine pulls out the spear, and Launcelot lies on the ground as if dead. When he awakens, Launcelot asks Lavaine to take him to a nearby hermit, a surgeon, and they ride there.

Having fought on the side of the foreign kings rather than Arthur, Launcelot still does not feel any loyalty to them, even though these knights are impressed enough with their temporary ally to want to grant him the prize even without learning his identity.



Chapter 13 The hermit doesn't recognize Launcelot initially, but then realizes who he is. The hermit staunches his blood and forces him to drink good wine. Meanwhile, the foreign knights tell Arthur that the unknown knight has left, wounded. Arthur asks Gawaine to find him and help him heal. Gawaine rides and lodges at Astolat, where he tells Bernard and Elaine le Blank about the unknown knight with the red sleeve. Elaine says she loves this man, though she doesn't know his name.

Hermits are, in addition to being holy men, often recognized to be medically adept: they remain secondary characters in the story, but they are often vital ones, ensuring that the quests, adventures, and battles of the knights that make up the core of the book can continue. Meanwhile, Gawaine comes quite close to discovering Launcelot.



Chapter 14 Elaine le Blank tells Gawaine how they met, and how the unknown knight asked for a new shield so as not to be recognized by his. When she shows Gawaine this shield, he recognizes it as Launcelot's, and he marvels because Launcelot has never worn a lady's token. Now he worries that he may never see Launcelot alive again, and exclaims that the man who most loved him in the world wounded him. In the morning, Gawaine rides to Arthur and tells him what he found out, then shares to all at court that it was Launcelot.

Chapter 15 Sir Bors grows sorrowful when he hears this, and Guenever is furious when she learns of Elaine le Blank and the red sleeve. She sends for Bors and says Launcelot is a traitor, and refuses to listen when Bors says Launcelot must have worn the sleeve so as not to be recognized. Bors just says he'll hurry to find Launcelot. Meanwhile Elaine rides in search of Launcelot, and encounters Lavaine, who brings her to a hermitage. She swoons when she sees Launcelot wounded. When she comes to, Launcelot kisses her and tells her he'll soon be cured. He hears that his name has been discovered, and realizes that many will soon be angry.

Chapter 16 Sir Bors rides out until he finds Lavaine, who brings him to the hermitage. Bors is distraught at seeing Launcelot pale and weak in bed, and he begs Launcelot for forgiveness for wounding the noblest knight in the world. Launcelot says that he too was overly proud, since he came close to killing his friends and kin, so he can easily forgive Bors. Bors tells Launcelot about Guenever's wrath, and Launcelot is sorry about it, saying that he cannot rid himself of Elaine—though Bors says he would do better to love Elaine than Guenever.

Chapter 17 Once Launcelot is recovered, Sir Bors tells him of a great tournament that is taking place between Arthur and the King of Northgalis. They remain at the hermitage a month longer, with Elaine le Blank caring tenderly for Launcelot. One day Launcelot sends her to gather herbs for his bath, and meanwhile arms himself and prepares to leave. But as he is straining to get on his horse, his wound bursts and he begins to bleed, falling to earth. Bors and Lavaine hurry to him, as does Elaine, who cries that they were traitors to allow Launcelot to leave her. The hermit comes to see Launcelot, and angrily orders the knights to bring him inside. The hermit begins to tend to him, and when he awakens asks why he risked his life. The hermit tells Bors to leave for the tournament alone, and allow him to care for Launcelot himself.

Elaine le Blank is, of course, unaware both of Launcelot's true identity and of the high stakes in revealing who he is to Gawaine. Gawaine is now faced with incontrovertible proof that the knight of great prowess at the tournament—not to mention the knight who wounded Gawaine, his friend—is Launcelot himself. Gawaine has promised to find the knight and relate all he learns to Arthur, so he does.



Launcelot's grand plan of participating anonymously in the tournament begins to unravel (as such plans usually do in this book). Although Guenever has just recently repented for her jealousy towards Launcelot, she does not seem to remember this now, and instead grows almost wild with jealous anger. Meanwhile, Launcelot pities Elaine's love for him even while he does not reciprocate it. Elaine shares a plight similar to many women, who always seem to be falling for the unavailable Launcelot.



Sir Bors, of course, had no idea that the knight he wounded was Launcelot: for him, wounding Launcelot causes great shame, since Bors properly should admire and venerate Launcelot's greatness. Launcelot, though, understands that he was probably in the wrong as well. Bors recognizes the tragic irony of Launcelot's love for Guenever rather than Elaine, whom he could love freely.



To make up for what he considered to be his own shameful actions in wounding Launcelot, Sir Bors remains with him and Elaine le Blank—a month-long stay that underlines for him just how much better it would be for Launcelot (not to mention for the entire court) if Launcelot loved Elaine rather than Guenever. Nonetheless, Bors recognizes that this is not the case, although their attempt to sneak away without telling Elaine soon backfires. Launcelot, as usual, is far too eager to get back to the battlefield rather than remain with a woman who loves him unrequitedly.



Chapter 18 Bors leaves for Arthur's court and shares news of Launcelot, telling the queen that Launcelot was in such a hurry and risked his life for love of her, to see her. All the foreign knights arrive, and the battle begins: Gawaine and Bors win the first day's prize, though Gareth and Palomides also do well.

Then Bors departs again and meets Launcelot, who is much improved. Bors tells him news of the jousting, and then they leave with Elaine le Blank for Astolat.

Chapter 19 When Elaine le Blank realizes Launcelot is leaving her at Astolat, she asks him to have mercy on her and to marry her rather than letting die out of love. He refuses, even when she asks him only to be her lover. Launcelot says he's sworn not to marry, but that once she chooses a husband, he will give a thousand pounds every year to her and her heirs while she lives. She refuses this, and then falls down in a faint. Bernard comes to Launcelot and says that Elaine may die for his sake. Launcelot says he wishes she didn't love him so, but can't do anything about it. He leaves with Lavaine for Camelot, where all rejoice at their return except Agravaine, Mordred, and Guenever, who refuses to speak with Launcelot.

Meanwhile Elaine le Blank falls into a deep depression and refuses to eat or drink. 10 days later, before dying, she says she only loved Launcelot: loving him too much was her only sin. She dictates a letter to her father, asking it to be put in her hand, and her body laid in a barge to sail down the Thames.

Chapter 20 One day Arthur and Guenever are at a window, when they see a black barge riding down the Thames. The king orders a few knights to find what's there. They see a beautiful corpse lying in the bed, and return to alert the king, who leads Guenever by the hand to the barge. The king takes the letter in the corpse's hand and, among many knights, reads it aloud: it identifies the lady as Elaine le Blank and asks for a mass and burial, as well as for Launcelot to pray for her soul. Launcelot grows sorrowful when he learns of the lady's death. The queen rebukes him for not showing Elaine more goodness, and he protests that he could not be her husband or paramour, and could not be forced into love. They bury her the next day, and then Guenever sends for Launcelot and says she was wrong to be angry with him. He says that this isn't the first time she was angry with him for no cause, but he must endure whatever she throws at him.

Sir Bors tries to pacify Guenever's jealousy by sharing with her just how eager Launcelot has been to see her again (even though that now means that Launcelot won't see her for a longer period of time).



Finally, Launcelot is ready to reunite with Guenever, though he stays with Elaine just a bit longer.



Elaine's love for Launcelot grows increasingly desperate as she realizes that she is on the verge of losing him—even to the extent that she offers to be his lover (rather than his wife). This is a shameful proposition for Launcelot, but ironically so, since of course that is the status of his relationship with Guenever. Launcelot is shockingly callous about Elaine's feelings—of course he did not force them, but he also did not refrain from kissing her, for instance, when she asked him.



Bernard's warning to Launcelot was true, as Elaine le Blank becomes another of the several women in this story to be ultimately destroyed because of relationships with men that they cannot control.



Arthur and Guenever, as per Elaine le Blank's wish before her death, are the ones to find her body. We are not told initially how Guenever feels about this discovery—it could easily increase her jealousy upon realizing the extent of Elaine's feelings for Launcelot, or it could simply allow her to recognize that whatever took place between Elaine and Launcelot is now irrevocably finished. In either case, Guenever does realize that Elaine's death was a tragedy that Launcelot was in many ways responsible for—but then she repents of rebuking Launcelot. Their relationship is, we can tell, growing increasingly tumultuous.



Chapter 21 Many jousts take place during that Christmas: Launcelot jousts rarely, but Lavaine always joins in and does better than almost all. Arthur decides to anoint him knight at the next feast of Pentecost, and prepares a great tournament. Guenever orders Launcelot never to disguise himself at a joust, and to always wear her sleeve of gold.

Launcelot and Lavaine decide to travel to a hermit to rest before the tournament. Every day Launcelot goes to a nearby well to sleep. In this forest a great lady hunter often goes hunting with her bow and female servants. One day she and her ladies chase a hind (female deer) through the forest: finally she shoots at it from afar, but accidentally shoots Launcelot, who is asleep, in the buttocks. He awakens, shouting.

Chapter 22 The lady hunter protests that her hand swerved, and she leaves Launcelot, who limps to the hermitage. The hermit gets the arrow out, and Launcelot, though still wounded, swears he'll still participate in the joust. Many foreign kings arrive, as well as many in Arthur's party.

Chapter 23 The horn blows and the kings of Ireland, Scotland, Northumberland, and Northgalis all joust. Arthur strikes down many other kings and knights, and the knights of the **Round Table** begin to triumph over those of Launcelot's kin. Then Launcelot comes and strikes down Gawaine, Agravaine, Gaheris, and Palomides. Arthur is angry, and calls together knights to fight back. Gareth disguises himself and performs well: Launcelot marvels, not recognizing him.

Chapter 24 The tournament lasts until night. Gawaine tells Arthur that he assumes Launcelot is the knight with a gold sleeve, and the knights next to him must be Lavaine and Gareth. After the horn is blown, the king rides after Launcelot, and tells him how well he's done. There is a great feast, and Arthur tells Gareth that although he's sorry that Gareth fought against, he's seen how much glory Gareth has achieved.

Chapter 25 The court is at peace until after Easter into May, the month of love. The narrator notes how unstable love can be in many people, yielding easily to betrayal and weakness. Guenever is one among few in history to remain steadfast and loyal in love.

No longer is Launcelot constantly eager to prove himself in battles, given that he has other things to worry about, but the feast of Pentecost is the most important of the year (the time when the knights of the Round Table gather to renew their vows).



Sometimes the tonal register of the stories shifts rapidly, as here the tone is more one of a farce than of an epic. This anecdote is also a reminder that, while women rarely can triumph over men in battle, they have plenty of other ways of asserting their power (even if accidentally, as here). The powerful female hunter seems reminiscent of Classical Greek figures like Artemis.



After having failed to participate in many other jousts and tournaments, Launcelot is now forced to deal with an entirely unnecessary wound, which may well compromise his performance.



Here, Arthur's knights of the Round Table are not united with but rather fight against the knights of Launcelot's relation—since this is a friendly tournament, the sides and alliances can easily shift, although Arthur does take the events of the tournament quite seriously, seeking to avenge any loss. Yet again this “friendly” division between Launcelot's allies and Arthur's knights foreshadows a more serious division to come.



Gawaine, once again, shows himself to be marginally more successful at identifying his fellow knights than other people are. His ability seemingly relies on the fact that identity is so closely tied to prowess in battle. Arthur, meanwhile, has his usual good sportsmanship despite his loss.



In one of the rare narrative intrusions, the narrator/Malory muses on broader themes that arise from the characters' actions, especially the affair between Launcelot and Guenever.



BOOK 19

Chapter 1 One May morning Guenever orders the knights to prepare to ride into the woods with her ladies. Sir Meliagrance is in love with the queen, but fears to approach her when Launcelot is there. Now Launcelot is absent, so he thinks he'll try his luck.

Chapter 2 Meliagrance, with over a hundred armed men, sneaks up to Guenever and orders her 10 unarmed knights to fight for her. Guenever calls him a shameful traitor, but he cries that he's loved her for many years and now he has a chance to take her. Guenever's knights draw their swords and they fight. Many of the **Round Table** knights are wounded, so finally Guenever offers to go with Meliagrance if he stops fighting.

Chapter 3 As the knights recover from battle, Guenever whispers to a child of her chamber to take her ring to Launcelot and tell him what's happened. Meliagrance takes Guenever to his castle. Meanwhile the child finds Launcelot in Westminster, and Launcelot cries that he must rescue his lady.

Chapter 4 Launcelot rides as quickly as he can. He reaches the place of battle, and then follows the track to a wood. There 30 archers lie in wait, left by Meliagrance to watch for Launcelot. They strike his horse from under him. Launcelot tries to fight them on foot, but they flee into the brambles, and he gets caught on them. Suddenly a chariot goes by with two men in it fetching wood from the forest, and one of the two refuses to give Launcelot a ride. Launcelot leaps to him and strikes him down dead, so the other driver offers to bring him wherever he'd like, his wounded horse following behind.

Guenever spies an armed knight approaching in a chariot. She realizes it's Launcelot, who races to the castle gates, calling for the treacherous Meliagrance, and killing the porter as he enters.

Although everyone at court is well aware of Launcelot and Guenever's affair, until recently they have been wary of doing anything to provoke Launcelot or upset the peace of the court. Meliagrance's love for Guenever, which in a previous section was only briefly mentioned (and was part of a semi-comic scene), now has dangerous repercussions for the kingdom.



In another perversion of the code of knightly conduct, Meliagrance believes that if he can manage to triumph over Guenever's knights, then the queen will be rightfully his. Since she cares so much about her knights' wellbeing, Guenever chooses to sacrifice herself instead.



Launcelot's absence once again leads to an opportunity for him to prove his loyalty to Guenever by rescuing her (an opportunity that she does not, tellingly, offer to her husband Arthur).



Meliagrance has planned in advance for Launcelot's pursuit of him and Guenever by setting the archers to lie in wait behind him, but as usual, even large numbers of men are no match for Launcelot when he is angry. Launcelot's flaws and weaknesses have been made increasingly apparent, but his vigor in defending Guenever is undiminished.



It doesn't take long after Guenever's secret cry for help for her lover to arrive to avenge her kidnapping.



Chapter 5 Meliagrance hears that Launcelot is approaching, and quickly falls to his knees before Guenever to ask for mercy. He offers to host Launcelot in peace, and to allow them all to return to Westminster together. Guenever agrees, thinking peace is better than war. She tells the agreement to Launcelot, who says Meliagrance is still a coward, and if he'd know she would so soon make amends with him he wouldn't have rushed to her. Guenever takes Launcelot to his wounded comrades, and together they seethe over Meliagrance: they would like to enact revenge if it weren't for the queen's will.

Chapter 6 That night, Launcelot takes his sword and sneaks into the garden, where he can speak to Guenever from her window. The queen wishes he could come to her. Launcelot says he'll prove his love with strength, and he pulls out the iron bars over her window. He hurts his hand doing this, but still leaps into the room, and they spend the night together. In the morning Sir Lavaine tends to the wound, but when Meliagrance enters Guenever's room in the morning, he sees the blood marks from Launcelot's wounded hand, and cries that he has proof of her betrayal to Arthur. When her ten knights hear his words, they cry together that Meliagrance is wrong, and any of them will avenge that accusation. But Meliagrance points to the blood, convinced that it is from one of the wounded knights. They are ashamed.

Chapter 7 Launcelot comes in as Meliagrance is triumphantly making his point, and says that it was shameful for Meliagrance to touch a queen's bed while its curtains were. Meliagrance still insists that one of the ten wounded knights had to have slept with the queen, and he'll prove it in battle. Launcelot agrees to fight in eight days. In the meantime, Meliagrance will let them depart. First, though, Launcelot agrees to have Meliagrance show him the castle. But as he goes through the house he steps on a trapdoor, and Launcelot falls ten fathoms into a cave of straw. Meliagrance puts away Launcelot's horse, so everyone thinks that Launcelot has left suddenly. They return to Camelot and tell Arthur of Launcelot's agreement to defend the queen of treason.

Chapter 8 Launcelot lies in the cave in pain, and every day a lady brings him food or drink and tries to sleep with him, saying that only she can help him escape: but he always refuses. Finally she asks him to kiss her, and she'll deliver him to freedom. Launcelot decides he won't lose honor by doing so, so he kisses her. She brings him to a stable to choose a horse.

Although Meliagrance had drawn inspiration from the code of knightly conduct to then pervert it in the service of his own desires, he now shows himself to be entirely uninterested in following the code of honor, instead shamefully begging for mercy in order to save himself. While this act is considered shameful from the victim's side, Launcelot knows that a victor must also take the honorable tack of granting such mercy.



Launcelot and Guenever have failed to be chastened even by Guenever's attempted kidnapping, not to mention the fact that everyone at court knows about their affair—instead, Launcelot applies his usual loyalty and fearlessness to his relationship with the queen. Meliagrance, in fact, is still at court and seething from Launcelot's rescue of Guenever, so he'll take any chance he can get to avenge his defeat and dishonor (though at this point he does not know for certain that it was Launcelot bleeding on the bed, just that it was a wounded knight).



The ten knights had been wounded in the course of the battle between Launcelot and Meliagrance, so Meliagrance immediately assumes that it was one of them who slept with Guenever (not realizing that Launcelot immediately would have resumed his relationship with the queen). Meliagrance has not grown any more honorable since Launcelot granted him mercy, and he does not worry about the moral implications of tricking Launcelot and imprisoning him. Without Launcelot, the danger is that no one will again defend the queen's honor.



Launcelot's encounter with this lady is another test of his loyalty to Guenever, a test that he largely passes—although it involves careful consideration of what romantic “loyalty” actually means, and if it does not include, for instance, a kiss.



Chapter 9 Meanwhile, Guenever is brought to a fire to be burnt, since Launcelot has not appeared at his battle with Meliagrance. Lavaine asks Arthur's permission to fight instead, since Launcelot must either be dead or trapped in prison. But as he prepares to fight, Launcelot rides in, and tells the king and queen what had happened. Launcelot and Meliagrance fight and strike each other many times. Finally Launcelot strikes him down, and Meliagrance begs him to have mercy as a knight of the **Round Table**. Launcelot wants to kill Meliagrance but is conflicted. He looks up at Guenever, who seems to nod as if to say, kill him. Launcelot tells Meliagrance to rise and battle to the death. Launcelot offers to unarm his head and parts of his body, and then Meliagrance agrees. They fight again, and finally Launcelot strikes him on the helmet and splits his head in two.

Chapter 10 A knight in Hungary, Sir Urre, has recently fought a Spanish earl's son, Alphegus, and killed him, but is recovering from wounds. Alphegus' mother is a witch and has cursed him such that he will never be cured until the best knight of the world looks after his wounds. Urre's mother takes him to many lands and finally to Arthur's court. Arthur welcomes him, encouraging his knights to try to heal Urre.

Chapter 11 Arthur and other kings try but fail to heal the wounds, as well as many knights of the **Round Table**: the narrator lists over a hundred. They all fail.

Chapter 12 Arthur asks himself where Launcelot is. Finally Launcelot arrives to make his attempt, but he's afraid of the shame if he fails. Still, when Urre himself asks, Launcelot prays to God to give him the ability to cure Urre. As Launcelot touches the wounds, they miraculously heal. The knights all kneel to thank God. Launcelot weeps like a child.

Chapter 13 Arthur prepares two parties, each of 100 knights, for a joust. Lavaine and Urre joust the best that day: Arthur gives them each a barony. Urre and Lavaine swear to defend Launcelot forever. There is a time of peace at court, though Agravaire continues to wait to dishonor Guenever and Launcelot.

Lavaine here takes the place of Sir Bors, who had previously been the one to fight instead of Launcelot at an earlier test against Guenever. Now it is Meliagrance who desires the queen to be burnt, since if he cannot possess her he only wants her to die. Once again Launcelot has to weigh his desire for enacting revenge against Meliagrance, his knowledge of the knight's code of honor, and the wishes of his mistress Guenever. In this case, Guenever's wishes win out, as Launcelot's battle becomes a matter not only of avenging a wrong but also of fulfilling a lady's wishes, another element of honor.



Apart from Merlin, the people in the book who possess the art of witchcraft are uniformly women, reminding us of the book's simultaneous appreciation and suspicion of women's power. Here, though, Urre's wounds are another chance for Arthur's knights to prove themselves.



This catalogue suggests that Arthur's many knights, once among the world's worthiest, now may no longer be.



Having gone through the quest of the Holy Grail, when he was constantly told that he was not worthy enough, Launcelot is wary of this test—but to his great relief, it seems that he still is to be considered as the world's best knight (especially now that Galahad has ascended to heaven).



The end of each section of the book tends to be a time of rest and celebration between adventures—though here we are given some foreshadowing about the conflicts that will arise, and Arthur's eminent downfall.



BOOK 20

Chapter 1 One day in May, Agravaine says openly, among many knights, that it is shameful for Launcelot to sleep with the queen, and for them to all know it and do nothing. Gawaine, Gareth, and Gaheris say they will not continue such talk, but Mordred agrees with Agravaine, who says he wants to tell the king. Gawaine tries to remind Agravaine of how often Launcelot has saved both Arthur and Guenever, as well as many knights' lives. Arthur then comes into the chamber. Gawaine asks them to be quiet, and leaves with Gareth and Gaheris.

Chapter 2 Agravaine announces to Arthur that everyone knows of Launcelot's affair with Guenever. Arthur is reluctant to believe it, since Launcelot has done so much for him and Guenever, and since he loves him. Agravaine tells Arthur to go out hunting, alerting Guenever that he'll be gone that night: he and Mordred will take Launcelot captive with the queen. The king agrees. Agravaine and Mordred gather 12 knights. That night Launcelot tells Sir Bors he'll go to the queen, but Bors counsels him not to, saying he's suspicious of Agravaine. Launcelot isn't worried, and tells Bors he won't be a coward.

Chapter 3 Launcelot goes to the queen's chamber, and Agravaine, Mordred, and their knights surround them, calling to Launcelot to yield. Launcelot has no armor and cries that this is shameful. Launcelot kisses Guenever and tells her, if he is killed, to escape with Sir Bors and Urre, who will take care of her.

Chapter 4 Launcelot opens the door such that only one knight can enter. Launcelot dodges his sword and hits him over the head with his bare hands, killing him. Launcelot arms himself with this knight's armor. He then asks Agravaine to stop making such a scene, and says he will appear before the king the next morning to be properly charged with treason. Agravaine and Mordred cry that they'll kill him now, so Launcelot opens the door and immediately kills Agravaine, wounds Mordred, who flees, and strikes down all the others. Launcelot returns to Guenever and tells her that Arthur must now be his enemy, but he will still try to rescue her.

Chapter 5 Launcelot escapes to Sir Bors, and tells him everything, saying that civil war has now come to the realm. Bors tells him that many knights will be on his side, and he calls Launcelot's allies together. They promise to defend Launcelot.

For the first time, the affair between Guenever and Launcelot that has long been common knowledge at court breaks out into the open, as Agravaine, seemingly out of jealousy, proclaims what everyone knows to be true, but has kept quiet out of respect for Guenever, Arthur, and Launcelot, and for fear that the court and even, perhaps, the very kingdom may begin to unravel.



Agravaine chooses not to listen to his brothers Gawaine, Gareth, and Gaheris, who have split off from Agravaine and Mordred concerning whether or not to share the truth with Guenever. While Arthur's full inner emotions are not shared with us, it seems that he reacts ambivalently, both refusing to believe the news immediately, and curious enough to know whether or not it's true that he agrees to Agravaine's plan.



Launcelot's decision to sleep with Guenever anyway is shown to be overly prideful, as he even puts her into danger once the knights surround them. The knights are now clearly divided into two camps.



Launcelot may not be able to fight one against a dozen knights, but he begins by killing the first knight in order to show that he is not a coward and is, as he long has been, a remarkable knight. But his slaying of the first knight is also just a warning not to continue, since he promises not to flee and instead to face proper accusation as a traitor. Agravaine and Mordred's to accept this raises the stakes of the conflict, as does Launcelot's killing of Agravaine.



Sir Bors has been predicting that Launcelot's behavior, as well as that of his rivals, may well lead to disaster, but now he acts himself in accordance with his loyalty to Launcelot.



Chapter 6 Sir Bors counsels Launcelot to attempt to protect Guenever above all: regardless of the morality of their former actions, now it is his responsibility to defend her, especially if Arthur decides to burn her at the stake. Bors and the others say they will care for her if Launcelot is killed.

The book portrays Launcelot and Guenever's affair ambivalently, and Bors's position in particular is a realist one—rather than bemoaning lost chances, he counsels Launcelot to face current facts.



Chapter 7 Mordred, having escaped from Launcelot, rides wounded to Arthur and tells him what happened. Arthur cries that he is greatly grieved that Launcelot is against him, and that now the **Round Table** is broken forever. Guenever must be sentenced to death, which is the only punishment for treason. Gawaine asks Arthur to grant mercy to his queen, given that there could be another explanation for Launcelot's presence in her chamber, and because of the great good that Launcelot has done. But Arthur refuses, saying that Gawaine has no reason to love Launcelot, who has just killed Gawaine's brother Agravaine. But Gawaine says that he warned his brother, though he is sorry of his death.

Arthur seems almost as upset that Launcelot has fought against his fellow knights, contributing to the destruction of the Round Table, as he is that Launcelot has been having an affair with his wife behind his back. Indeed, the tragedy of these scenes is that none of the characters seem truly angry at each other, but they are forced to take drastic action because of the codes of honor and conduct they adhere to. Gawaine remains loyal to Launcelot as well as to Arthur, given that he cannot find a way to justify the dishonorable actions of his own brother. Despite Gawaine's suggestions, Arthur believes that his knights' actions will trigger a series of inevitable consequences.



Chapter 8 Arthur tells Gawaine, Gaheris, and Gareth to prepare Guenever for the fire. Gawaine refuses to assist in such a shameful death. Gareth and Gaheris say they will be present, but refuse to participate. Weeping, Gawaine returns to his chamber, while the queen is brought to the stake. Launcelot's squire, who has been spying on the queen, alerts him that her death is being prepared. Launcelot charges in on horseback and kills many knights—including, by accident, Gaheris and Gareth, who are unarmed and simply by-standers. Launcelot rides to Guenever, takes her onto his horse, and they ride to Joyous Gard.

Gareth and Gaheris now position themselves firmly on the side of the queen and, by proxy, Launcelot. For a third time, Launcelot enters to rescue Guenever, but this rescue attempt does not go nearly as successfully as previous ones, and he accidentally kills knights who are both loyal to him and dear to Arthur. Chance and accident are crucial aspects of the book's tragic finale.



Chapter 9 Arthur swoons from sorrow at hearing of the death of Gaheris and Gareth, crying that his fellowship is broken. He asks the other knights not to tell Gawaine of his brothers' deaths for now, but someone sneaks off to tell Gawaine. Gawaine refuses to believe that Launcelot killed his brothers.

Arthur realizes that the fellowship of the Round Table is irreparably lost, but he still seeks to avert the worst of the damage, since he understands that the atmosphere at court could in fact grow worse.



Chapter 10 When Gawaine rushes to Arthur, Arthur tells him that Launcelot killed his brothers accidentally. Gawaine swears never to rest until he or Launcelot kills the other, and he asks Arthur to make war against Launcelot. The king summons knights from throughout England, and they prepare to lay siege: meanwhile, other knights join Launcelot, some for his sake and some for the Guenever's sake. For 15 weeks Arthur's men surround Launcelot's castle.

Once Arthur is faced to face with Gawaine, he cannot lie to him. Now, although Gawaine had remained loyal to Launcelot and Guenever before (even when Launcelot killed Agravaine), his loyalty to his own family—especially since his brothers were blameless, unlike Agravaine—now triumphs, and his hotheaded temper takes over.



Chapter 11 Then one day Launcelot calls to Arthur and Gawaine to ask them to give up the siege rather than risk dishonor on the battlefield. Launcelot says he is reluctant to fight against such noble knights, but he will defend the honor of Guenever to his death—he reminds Arthur of all the times he saved her for Arthur’s sake. Launcelot says he regrets killing Gareth and Gaheris. Gawaine cries that he is a liar, and will war against him for his whole life.

Chapter 12 Arthur would have just taken his queen and returned home, but Gawaine refuses to make any kind of compromise. They prepare to do battle, and in the morning all the knights meet: Launcelot asks his followers to spare Gawaine and Arthur if they can.

Chapter 13 Gawaine meets Lionel and strikes him down: the battle begun, many more are slain. Sir Bors strikes down Arthur and prepares to kill him, but Launcelot orders him not to, and he rehorses Arthur and asks him to stop the battle. Arthur, tears in his eyes, rides away from Launcelot, bemoaning the war. The next day Bors tries to avenge Lionel’s death by killing Gawaine, but they wound each other. Launcelot’s knights urge Launcelot to personally fight Arthur to end this battle. The Pope, meanwhile, sends a messenger, asking the sides to make peace.

Chapter 14 Arthur wants to agree but Gawaine won’t make peace with Launcelot. Launcelot agrees to bring Guenever to Arthur in eight days, and they ride together to Carlisle.

Chapter 15 Launcelot cries that he’s brought Guenever according to the Pope’s command. He tells Arthur of Agravaire’s and Mordred’s treacherous actions, but Gawaine says they were right. Launcelot says he has always been loyal to Arthur and Gawaine, and reminds them that he’s rescued them many times.

Chapter 16 Gawaine says that the king can do as he wishes, but he himself will never forgive Launcelot. Launcelot says he is just as sorry to have killed Gawaine’s brothers, and he offers to go from church to church in penance for their sake. All the knights and ladies weep, but Gawaine refuses to accept this offer, and accuses Launcelot of treason. He vows to kill Launcelot wherever he can find him out of court.

Launcelot is reluctant to fight against Arthur’s knights, since it was never Launcelot’s own wish to create a rift between members of the Round Table. Arthur himself seems equally unwilling to go to war against his friend, but for some reason the king now appears to be driven by the will of Gawaine, who is still seeking to avenge his brothers’ death.



For Arthur, the most important thing has always been to maintain unity among his subjects, while for Gawaine, desire for revenge gains the upper hand. It seems strange that Arthur follows Gawaine’s wishes rather than his own, and this only adds to the tragedy of this conflict.



Now, for the first time, knights of the Round Table do battle against each other not in the context of a friendly tournament, but to the death. Launcelot is walking a careful, fraught line by doing battle even while attempting to save Gawaine and Arthur. Even the Pope now becomes involved, suggesting just how high the stakes of the civil war in Arthur’s court have grown.



Again it is Gawaine rather than the king of England himself who prevents peace, as his desire for revenge is so great that it starts to tear the kingdom apart.



Once again, Launcelot attempts to describe some of the mitigating actions that should allow Gawaine and Arthur to forgive him—both his own honor in defending them, and other knights’ dishonor.



Gawaine had turned from pledging loyalty to Launcelot to pledging loyalty to Arthur as Launcelot’s enemy, but now those very sides are disintegrating themselves, as Gawaine extracts himself from any kind of competitive alliance in order to vow individual vengeance.



Chapter 17 Launcelot, weeping, cries that he regrets ever coming into this kingdom, since he's now leaving it in such a way. Launcelot says to Guenever that he will still vow to defend her from any wrongs. He kisses her and dares anyone to say that she isn't true to Arthur. All weep as he leaves, except for Gawaine. Launcelot goes to his castle and draws his knights together, saying that he must leave this realm: they all vow to stay with him wherever he goes.

Chapter 28 A hundred knights leave with Launcelot for Benwick (Bayonne), and they become lords of these French lands. Launcelot crowns his knights kings and dukes of various lands.

Chapter 29 Meanwhile Arthur and Gawaine prepare a great army to fight against Launcelot's people. They sail to Benwick and lay waste to the lands. All Launcelot's knights variously suggest how to respond, but Launcelot sends a messenger to Arthur to try to make peace. All except Gawaine are in favor of this.

Chapter 20 Gawaine tells the messenger that he hasn't forgotten his promise to kill or be killed by Launcelot. Launcelot, hearing the answer, weeps. In the morning, Arthur's knights besiege the city of Benwick. A battle begins, and the siege lasts for half a year, with much slaughter. Finally Gawaine calls to Launcelot not to hide inside his castle like a coward. The knights tell Launcelot he now must fight or be shamed. Launcelot calls down that he is reluctant to fight Arthur, but now must defend himself.

Chapter 21 Gawaine and Launcelot come together, and their horses fall to the earth. They continue on foot, both wounding each other. Gawaine's strength increases from the morning until noon thanks to a holy man's gift. Launcelot marvels at his strength. But past noon Gawaine's strength ebbs, and Launcelot doubles his strokes, striking him down. Launcelot turns to withdraw: Gawaine orders him to kill him, but Launcelot says he'll never kill a fallen knight.

Chapter 22 The king regrets that this war was ever begun. Gawaine lies wounded for 3 weeks. Finally he returns to the castle gates and orders Launcelot to come down. Launcelot and Gawaine fight again for three hours: then again Gawaine's strength ebbs, and Launcelot strikes Gawaine in the old wound. Launcelot again refuses to kill him. Gawaine lies wounded for a month and then prepares to fight again.

Launcelot's departure from court is portrayed as a great tragedy, despite the fact that his affair with Guenever was always, legally speaking, treason. However, the book seems to privilege Launcelot's honorable behavior as a knight more than it condemns his weakness with women, something for which he never repents (except during his quest for the Sangreal).



Now Arthur's court is officially split, as Launcelot's men begin to spread out into foreign lands and create their own kingdom.



Arthur and Gawaine have become the aggressors as they continue to seek to destroy Launcelot, even now that he has a foreign kingdom. But it is clear that Gawaine rather than Arthur is leading this attack.



Now Launcelot realizes that he has lost his best attempt to make peace, and he must be forced to do battle against Arthur's men. A siege, rather than a face-to-face battlefield fight, suggests just how passively Launcelot wants to respond to Gawaine's aggression, so as to prevent bloodshed. But finally, to protect his honor he must meet Gawaine.



Gawaine and Launcelot are only equally matched initially because Gawaine has been strengthened through this magical gift. However, when they fight with only their natural skills, Launcelot once again shows himself to be the greatest. He refuses even to end the civil war by killing Gawaine dishonorably.



With Gawaine wounded but not dead, the civil war is doomed only to be paused rather than ended. This scene is one of notable repetition with the earlier battle scene, suggesting that the two sides seem condemned to constant, unending battle between each other—despite the fact that neither considers the other a true enemy.



BOOK 21

Chapter 1 Meanwhile Mordred has been given responsibility for Guenever. He writes fake letters from across the sea that say Arthur has been killed in battle. Mordred makes a feast and has the lords choose him king. He takes Guenever as his wife: she privately mourns, but publicly agrees. She asks him to buy things for the wedding in London. While he's gone, she encloses herself in the Tower of London, and is defended by many. Mordred lays siege to the Tower of London, but the Bishop of Canterbury tells him it is shameful for him to marry Guenever, his aunt: besides, it's not certain if Arthur is actually dead. Mordred cries that he'll cut off the Bishop's head, so the Bishop flees.

Then Mordred hears that Arthur (who is alive) has heard of his siege, and is pausing the fight with Launcelot to avenge himself on Mordred. Mordred draws many knights to fight with him, since many lords now think that life with Arthur is one of constant war, and they'd do better to fight for Mordred.

Chapter 2 Arthur comes to Dover with a great navy. A great battle takes place, and Arthur's men drive back Mordred's, until they flee. Gawaine is then found lying half-dead in a boat. Arthur weeps of sorrow, crying that he's now lost Gawaine and Launcelot, the two men he most loves. Gawaine cries that he caused all this pain and war. He asks for pen and paper, and writes to Launcelot that he's been mortally wounded at the site of the wound that Launcelot gave him. He writes that his death was his own fault, not Launcelot's, and asks Launcelot to return to Camelot to pray for his soul. At noon, Gawaine dies. The king has him buried in a chapel within Dover Castle.

Chapter 3 Arthur's men battle Mordred's once again, and then prepare to meet a third time, on an upcoming Monday. Many of those who love Launcelot join Mordred's side. The night before the battle, Arthur dreams that he is dressed in rich gold cloth and sitting on a chair bound to a wheel. Under him is black water with serpents and wild beasts, and he suddenly falls into the water, and wakes up. When he falls asleep again, Gawaine comes to him in a dream, saying God has told him to warn Arthur that if he fights with Mordred the next day, he will be killed: Arthur must instead call a month-long truce and wait for Launcelot to arrive. When Arthur awakens, he tells his knights of the vision, and order them to make a peace treaty with Mordred for a month.

We are now meant to recall the prophecy of Merlin: it has never been a secret that Mordred would eventually turn against and kill his father, even though previously he had been a loyal knight. Now, taking advantage of Arthur's distance from court, Mordred begins to put his treacherous plans into action. Mordred is shown to be another knight who cares little for the knightly code of honor—even the warnings of the Archbishop of Canterbury, a holy man, are not enough to dissuade him from his desire for Guenever (which seems to really be a desire for power).



Mordred already knew that Arthur was likely still alive, and now his goal is to seize the throne. Other knights too are sensing that Arthur's regime is crumbling, and they opportunistically change sides.



Now Arthur is caught between two competing battles, one with Gawaine against Launcelot, and one against his own son and knight Mordred. Only on Gawaine's deathbed does he appear to fully understand the implications of what he's done. His furious jealousy seems to have been a kind of enchantment preventing him from seeing clearly, and that spell is only now lifted. Although Gawaine dies repenting, he has put into action an unstoppable chain of events.



One of the consequences of Gawaine's actions is, of course, Arthur's war with his son Mordred. Launcelot, meanwhile, would be appalled to learn that knights who were loyal to him have now chosen Mordred. Arthur's dreams are menacing, suggesting that he is on shaky ground in attempting to defend himself. But he trusts the correctness of these visions and seeks to do all he can to follow God's advice (through Gawaine).



Chapter 4 Mordred agrees, but Arthur warns his knights to keep watch, since he suspects Mordred of wrongdoing. Likewise Mordred warns his men to draw their swords if they see any sword drawn. Mordred and Arthur meet to sign the treaty, but then a small snake (an adder) comes out of a bush and stings a knight, who draws his sword to kill it. When others see the sword, they blow their horns and prepare for battle, the treaty broken. There was never a worse battle than this day, though Arthur performs magnificently. Nearly all the knights from both sides are soon killed, which infuriates Arthur. He rides to Mordred, forgetting Gawaine's warning. Mordred rides towards Arthur, who strikes him through the body. But as Mordred feels his death wound he strikes Arthur on the side of the head. They both fall to earth, Mordred dead and Arthur mortally wounded.

Sir Lucan and Bedivere lead Arthur to a chapel. They hear a great noise in the field, and the two knights emerge to see robbers pillaging the knights of their brooches and jewels. They tell Arthur the news.

Chapter 5 Arthur cries that none of this would have happened if Launcelot were here. Lucan tries to lift up Arthur, but falls on account of his own wound, and dies on the ground. Arthur tells Bedivere to take **Excalibur** to the riverside and throw it in the water. Bedivere departs, but says to himself that no good can come of throwing it in the water, so he hides it behind a tree. Upon his return, Arthur asks what he saw. Bedivere says he saw only waves and winds, so Arthur says he has lied, and orders him to go back. But Bedivere only hides it again: on his return, Arthur says he's betrayed him twice. He's about to die, he says, so he begs Bedivere to listen to him. Finally Bedivere returns and throws the sword into the water. An arm emerges from the water to grab Excalibur, and then it vanishes. Bedivere returns to Arthur and brings him to the waterside, where a barge appears with many fair ladies wearing black hoods. Bedivere puts Arthur into the barge. Then Bedivere cries that he's been left all alone, and he weeps.

Chapter 6 Bedivere lies to rest in a hermitage, where he meets the Bishop of Canterbury, who had fled Mordred. There is a tomb next to him, and the bishop says a number of ladies brought a corpse to him at night. Bedivere cries that this was Arthur. Bedivere swears to remain here forever, and puts on poor clothes. The narrator shares that the queens on the barge were Morgan le Fay, the Queen of Northgalis, the Queen of the Waste Lands, and Nimue.

The truce between Arthur and Mordred is a tenuous one from the start, especially because of the mutual distrust that makes each side believe the other will act dishonorably. However, it is not through shame and deceit but through a tragic accident that the treaty is broken before it is ever made official—an accident that nonetheless seems to be fated. Arthur, in an aberration from his usual calm and thoughtful spirit, is driven to such fury by the killing of his knights that he brings about his own downfall. The prophecy of Merlin thus looks like it will be fulfilled, with the added consequence that Mordred himself also dies.



The looting of riches is another reminder of how low the once mighty kingdom of Arthur's has sunk, and how shame and greed have replaced honor.



Lucan's death is both another tragedy and a confirmation of Arthur's cry that Launcelot would have prevented such death and destruction—except, of course, that this battle with Mordred only took place precisely because of the rift between Arthur's court and Launcelot more generally. On a more personal note, Arthur's lament shows how he still doesn't hate Launcelot for his affair, and in fact still considers Launcelot his greatest friend. Arthur's final conversation with Bedivere is one last example of just how much his knights struggle to do the honorable thing rather than lying and behaving treacherously for their own benefit. Bedivere, however, finally conquers his selfishness, which allows Arthur to die knowing that his mighty sword has returned to the mysteries from which it came (the arm that catches the sword presumably belongs to the Lady of the Lake, perhaps Nimue).



Following Arthur's death—which is, according to the book's title, the central event of the work—other characters struggle to figure out what his death means and how to continue on without him. For Bedivere, this means vowing to live like a poor hermit in loyalty to Arthur even after his death. Women's power in the book also extends to their role in watching over the dead, and even the women who were antagonistic to Arthur in life now seem to assist him in death.



Chapter 7 Some men now say that Arthur is not dead, but hiding by God's grace, and will come again. Others say that on Arthur's tomb is written a Latin verse, saying "Here lies Arthur, once and future king." When Guenever learns of Arthur's death, she leaves to become a nun in Almesbury.

The narrator is careful to recognize the variety of opinions about Arthur's death or continued life, but the book seems to privilege the idea that Arthur has, in fact, died, and that to believe otherwise is just wishful thinking.



Chapter 8 The narrator returns to an earlier moment, and says that Launcelot learns of Mordred's treachery through Gawaine's letter, which has grieved him deeply. Launcelot prepares to go to Gawaine's tomb, and he arrives with his knights and mourns there. But then they learn of the deaths of both Mordred and Arthur. Launcelot cries that they've come too late. He tells his men to leave for their country, while he seeks out Guenever.

Launcelot has not been present for most of this tragic ending, instead remaining in his new kingdom in Bayonne. But once Gawaine is dead, there is no longer much reason for him to stay away. Launcelot only slowly learns the extent of the death and destruction that has taken place while he's been in exile.



Chapter 9 Launcelot finds Guenever in her convent. Guenever cries that Arthur is dead because of her and Launcelot's love. Guenever asks Launcelot never to see her again, since she has sworn to repent. She asks him to take a wife and live in his kingdom. Launcelot swears he will never be false to Guenever: indeed, he even gave up the **Sangreal** out of love for her.

Guenever realizes that while it is directly due to Gawaine and Mordred that her husband fell, it was her own and Launcelot's affair that doomed the kingdom from the beginning. Launcelot, on his part, is doomed to deny even spiritual holiness for love of Guenever.



Chapter 10 Launcelot and Guenever depart, both weeping. Launcelot rides to a hermitage, where he meets Bedivere and the Bishop, and is clothed in poor clothing as well. Sir Bors rides to this chapel, and asks to be made a holy man too. Soon many other knights join them and do penance for six years. Finally Launcelot sees a vision telling him to go to Almesbury and bury Guenever, who has died.

Now that Launcelot and Guenever understand the extent of their sin, they know that they can no longer continue their affair (even if Launcelot remains stubbornly loyal to Guenever). This is presented as a tragic end, as their love for each other remains true, but they can no longer find happiness or satisfaction in it. The knights of the Round Table, meanwhile, have given up earthly glory for quiet prayer.



Chapter 11 Launcelot goes with other knights to Almesbury. He sees the body of Guenever, and he doesn't weep, but only sighs. He bears her body to Glastonbury, where Arthur is buried, and the Bishop sings a great Mass. As they bury her, the hermit tells Launcelot that he displeases God with such grieving. Launcelot says he doesn't mean to, but his sorrow has no end, when he remembers Guenever's beauty, and her and Arthur's nobility, and his own pride and sin.

The scene in which Launcelot sees Guenever's body for the last time is one of great pathos, and his feelings seem to exceed even the capacity to weep. The hermit, like those who chastised Launcelot throughout the Sangreal quest, knows that there is something unholy in Launcelot, but Launcelot never repents of his great love for Guenever. It's also noteworthy that Launcelot continues to honor Arthur alongside Guenever—he didn't consider Arthur his rival or enemy, but only his friend and king, despite the fact that they both loved the same woman.



Chapter 12 Afterward Launcelot eats and drinks little, and grows weaker and weaker. Six weeks later, he falls to bed, and sends for the Bishop to give him Christian last rites. He asks to be buried at his castle. After midnight, everyone hears the Bishop laughing. They rush to him, and he says he's seen Launcelot being drawn up into heaven by angels. They find Launcelot dead in his bed, and all the knights carry his body to Joyous Gard to bury him.

Chapter 13 Sir Ector de Maris comes to Joyous Gard to see the tomb of his brother. He cries that Launcelot was never matched by any knight, and was a true friend and lover, and was good, kind, and meek. All the mourners go to the Bishop's hermitage. Then Sir Constantine is chosen king of England. Many of Arthur's knights leave the kingdom and live elsewhere as holy men. Others go to the Holy Land and fight against heathens, and die on a Good Friday.

Once Guenever is dead, Launcelot is not long for this world either. But in contrast to Guenever's death, Launcelot's is actually one of joy. Despite all of Launcelot's inability to live up to spiritual holiness, the book seems to forgive him at the end, granting him the right to reach heaven even despite his sins.



As Constantine is chosen as the new king of England, the knights of Arthur scatter, and the fellowship of the Round Table is definitively finished. Other reigns and other fellowships will succeed it, but the Round Table members will live on only in the stories and legends so carefully written down and preserved.





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