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Lance of Truth

Written by

Katherine Roberts

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PENDRAGON LEGACY

BOOK 2

LANCE OF TRUTH



KATHERINE ROBERTS

'*Sword of Light* weaves Arthurian legend, Celtic myth and imagination into a romping tale.' *The Times*

PENDRAGON LEGACY

BOOK 2

LANCE OF TRUTH

KATHERINE ROBERTS

templar

A TEMPLAR BOOK

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For my mother

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Characters

ALBA – Rhianna's mist horse, a white mare from Avalon.

ARIANRHOD – Rhianna's maid, ex-maid of Morgan Le Fay. Her cheek bears a scar in the shape of a pentacle.

CAI – young squire at Camelot who becomes Rhianna's champion.

CHIEF CYNRIC – leader of the Saxons.

ELPHIN – Prince of Avalon and only son of Lord Avallach.

EVENSTAR – Elphin's mist horse, a white stallion from Avalon.

GARETH – older squire, Cai's rival.

King Arthur – king of Britain. His ghost appears to Rhianna while his body sleeps in Avalon awaiting rebirth.

Lady Isabel – lady in charge of the damsels at Camelot.

Lord Avallach – Lord of Avalon and Elphin's father. Leader of the Wild Hunt.

Merlin – King Arthur's druid. Morgan Le Fay drowned his man's body but his spirit lives in the body of a merlin falcon. He can still work magic.

Mordred – Rhianna's cousin and rival for the throne; the son of Morgan Le Fay.

Morgan Le Fay – King Arthur's sister and Mordred's mother, a witch. Now dead, her spirit advises Mordred from Annwn.

Nimue – the Lady of the Lake, who took King Arthur's sword Excalibur after Arthur's death and gave it to Rhianna.

Queen Guinevere – Rhianna's mother, held prisoner by Mordred.

Rhianna Pendragon – daughter of King Arthur, raised in Avalon.

Sandy – Cai's pony, rescued from the Saxons.

Sir Agravaine – grumpy older knight.

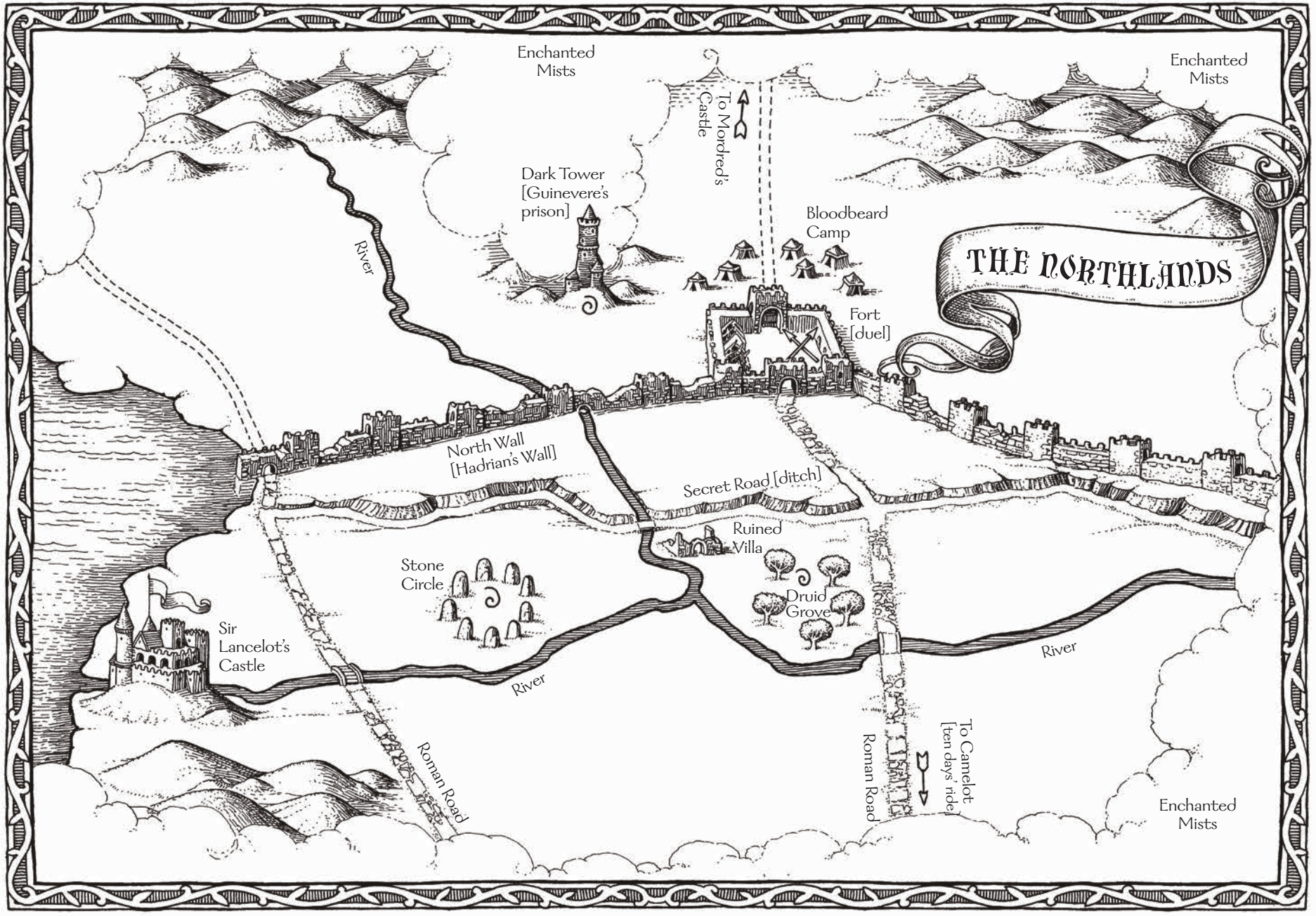
Sir Bedivere – a young knight, also known as 'Soft Hands' because of his gentle nature.

Sir Bors – leader of King Arthur's knights.

Sir Lancelot – Arthur's champion knight, whose love for Queen Guinevere caused him to break the Lance of Truth when he fought against his king.

The shadrake – a dragon from Annwn, breathes ice instead of fire and hunts between worlds.


THE SUMMER LANDS
Aquae Sulis
Enchanted Mists
To Dragon Land
Druid Beacon
Roman Road [Fosse Way]
Lonely Tor [Glastonbury]
SUMMER SEA
Nimue's Lake
Ruined Villa
Marshes
Burnt Town
River
The Battlefield of Camlann
Stone Way
Stone Circle
Camelot
To Mines of Lyonesse
Enchanted Mists


THE NORTHLANDS
Enchanted Mists
Enchanted Mists
To Mordred's Castle
Dark Tower [Guinevere's prison]
Bloodbeard Camp
River
Fort [duel]
North Wall [Hadrian's Wall]
Secret Road [ditch]
Ruined Villa
Stone Circle
Druid Grove
Sir Lancelot's Castle
River
River
Roman Road
Roman Road
To Camelot [ten days' ride]
Enchanted Mists



Four Lights stand against the dark:
The Sword Excalibur that was
forged in Avalon,
The Lance of Truth made by the
hands of men,
The Crown of Dreams, which hides
the jewel of Annwn,
And the Grail said to hold all the
stars in heaven.



The Dark Knight Sets a Trap



Mordred cast a final look around the cave where he'd spent the winter. Damp oozed from the rocky walls. His bed, where he had spent so much time suffering in the dark, would bear his bloodstains for ever.

He spat on it. "They will pay for my pain," he promised the shadows. "They will all pay."

He'd almost died of the wounds he had received last summer in the battle against his uncle, Arthur Pendragon. But now he felt stronger than before, in spite of his crippled

leg and missing sword hand. King Arthur was dead, and Queen Guinevere his prisoner. His horse waited outside with his men. It would only be a matter of time until he dealt with Arthur's daughter, the girl who stood between him and the throne.

Before he left this place, he had one more thing to do. He pulled on a black gauntlet with his teeth. Then he picked up the mirror his mother had given him so he could spy on the world of men. The cracked glass glittered as Mordred breathed on it.

He saw the tower that served as his Aunt Guinevere's prison. It was more comfortable than his own sanctuary, but the queen seemed not to appreciate it. She had tried to escape, and he'd been forced to send his bloodbeards to chain her to the bed. But she didn't know

why she was a captive yet. He'd been looking forward to this moment all winter.

He lit candles so she would be able to see him properly and put on his silver torque. He waited until she was combing her filthy hair and whispered, "Aunt Guinevere."

She jumped. The chain on her wrist clanked as her comb stilled. "Mordred," she whispered. "You can't keep me here for ever! Lancelot will find me. Then he'll hunt you down and send your dark soul to join your mother's in Annwn for all eternity."

Mordred smiled, bored with her empty threats. He'd already made plans to take care of her champion. "Your precious Lancelot won't need to hunt me down. Unlike him, I'm not a coward to run away from my fights. I've issued him a challenge. A joust to the

death with you as the prize. You'll enjoy watching, I think."

She gripped the comb tightly, a flicker of hope in her eyes. "Lancelot carries the Lance of Truth! No knight has ever bested him in a duel. He'll kill you."

Mordred chuckled. "Oh, I doubt it. The lance is broken, as you well know. Without it, Lancelot's no greater than an ordinary knight. Whereas *I* will be fighting with the Sword of Light."

The queen went still. "Excalibur was returned to Nimue's lake," she said uncertainly. "The Lady of the Lake would never let a witch's brat like you have it!"

"No need to be rude," Mordred told her. "You really are behind with the news, aren't you? I suppose you've been a bit out of touch

this winter, so I'll update you. My cousin Rhianna has got the sword back from Nimue, and will shortly be bringing it to me. You look puzzled, Aunt. Surely you remember your sweet baby daughter, with the cute freckled nose, the one you abandoned to the fairies? She's grown quite a bit since you last saw her. She's been in the world of men for some time now, looking for you. Maybe I'll let her keep you company in your tower. I wonder if you'll dare call me a witch's brat then?"

The comb clattered to the floor. The queen backed against the wall as far as the chain would allow and wrapped her arms around her body. "Oh God…" she whispered. "Rhianna… where is she? If you dare lay a hand on her—"

"Oh, I've already laid a hand on her,"

Mordred said, lifting his severed wrist and grimacing at the memory of using the shadow magic. "She knows my power. Just not my plans for her – yet. We had a little, um, *misunderstanding* the last time we spoke, so I can't use the Round Table to send my message. But she should be receiving it any day now. Sometimes the old ways can be more persuasive, don't you think?"

The queen blinked and shook her head. "She won't bring you Excalibur! My daughter wouldn't be that stupid."

Mordred smiled again. "Ah, but you don't know her as well as I do. Believe me, she can be remarkably stupid once she gets a sword in her hand."



1

Joust

At Camelot they joust in spring
To test the knights who serve the king
When a damsel down the course did ride
Enchantments round her for disguise.

The first joust to be held at Camelot since King Arthur's death drew a big crowd. Word had spread during the winter that Arthur's daughter had made a peace treaty with the Saxons, and everyone wanted to catch a glimpse of the brave young princess who was

rumoured to carry her father's magic sword, Excalibur, and to have fought a dragon with it – though few people actually believed that part of the story, of course. A damsel fight a dragon? That didn't even happen in songs.

Unaware of what they were saying about her, Rhianna leaned out of her window to watch the steady stream of people coming up the hill. The breeze blew her unruly copper hair across her eyes. She brushed it away impatiently. She'd hoped her mother would be back by now. But there was still no sign of the queen or the champion knight Sir Lancelot, who had taken her north last winter to keep her safe from the fighting. Soon the knights would ride in search of her, and Rhianna did not plan on being left behind.

She turned her attention to the area outside

the walls, where the squires' tilt would take place later that day. When all the boys had ridden, the winner would be allowed to try his skill against a grown knight. The squires would not carry full-length lances. Instead, they would use light spears with blunted ends that shattered easily. Rhianna reckoned she could handle one, no problem. But when she had asked Sir Bors if she could enter the tilt on her mist horse Alba, he'd just laughed.

"Nobody'll dare tilt against the Pendragon's daughter!" he'd said. "Your father never entered a joust himself after he became king. He let his champion knight tilt for him. No, Damsel Rhianna, let the squires have their fun. Besides, it's just as much fun watchin' them, believe me."

Rhianna never liked watching when she could be doing. But she supposed it would be

embarrassing to have Alba mist under her and to fall off in front of everyone. She had her own plans for today, and they did not include playing the princess so everyone could gape at her. She'd had quite enough of that over the winter.

A knock at the door broke into her thoughts.

"My lady?" Her maid Arianrhod hurried in, breathless from the stairs, her arms full of green material with a gold circlet resting on top. "It's a beautiful morning! Everyone's really excited to see you! You should get dressed now."

"I am dressed," Rhianna said. "Almost, anyway."

She was already wearing the tunic and leggings she used for riding. She quickly opened her clothing chest and slipped her Avalonian armour over the top. The silvery moons glimmered in the early light. She fingered them thoughtfully, remembering how they had stopped an arrow last year when Mordred's bloodbeards had captured her. She hadn't been able to test the armour against a lance. She just hoped the magic would work in the same way.

Arianrhod laid the dress and jewels on the bed. She eyed the armour. "Are you worried Mordred might try something?" she asked sympathetically. "Because you needn't be. Security's always tight for a joust, so you won't need that under your dress today. It'll be warm when the sun gets up. You'll get sweaty, I'm warning you."

"I'll get sweaty all right." Rhianna grinned as she strapped Excalibur's red scabbard around her waist.

She rested her hand on the white jewel set

into the hilt of the sword. A brightness filled her. *The strength of a hundred men.* Well, ninety-nine anyway, since she'd unknighted Mordred and banished his dark spirit from the magical jewel. She marched purposefully to the door.

"My lady… Rhia! You can't go out there before all those people looking like that!"

Arianrhod's horrified tone made her hesitate. She didn't want to get her friend into trouble.

"I can't wear a dress today," she explained gently. "They've come to see Excalibur, and a sword over a dress looks stupid. Besides, I don't want them to see me as a princess today. If they're going to believe we can hold Camelot against Mordred and his bloodbeards, they've got to see me as Rhianna *Pendragon*."

Arianrhod bit her lip. She picked up the

golden circlet and twisted it between her fingers. The pentacle-shaped scar on her cheek – a souvenir from her old mistress, Lady Morgan – pulsed crimson. "You haven't even brushed your hair," she said. "Some of those people have come a long way to see you."

Rhianna thought of the helm she'd borrowed from the armoury and hidden under the woodpile near the gates, and the mess it would make of her hair. But she wouldn't be wearing that until later.

She sat on the bed. "All right," she said. "You can braid my hair. But if anyone asks where I am when the squires' tilt finishes, I've gone riding with Elphin."

Her friend's fingers stilled. "You're not going to do anything stupid, are you?" she said.

"When do I ever do anything stupid?"

"All the time!"

Rhianna laughed as she reached for her father's battered shield with its red dragon design. "Don't worry about me. I'll be as careful as I usually am."

Arianrhod gave her a sideways look. She had got used to treating Rhianna's bruises after she came back from a training session with the squires. "I'll get the ointment ready," she said with a sigh.

Rhianna found the Avalonian prince Elphin in the stables. He was helping Cai, the plump squire who had been with the knights when she and Elphin rode through the mists from Avalon, get his equally plump pony ready for the tilt. Elphin's extra fingers made short work of the buckles, which was just as well because Cai's seemed to be all thumbs. The noise was incredible. Horses neighed and trod on toes, while the squires yelled challenges at one another as they hurried to be first out on the course.

"Good luck, Cai!" she called.

The squire grimaced and patted the pony. "I'm going to need it, and so is Sandy."

"Who are you tilting against?"

He pulled a face. "Gareth. I reckon he fixed the draw."

"If he did, then he's braver than I thought," Elphin said, winking at Rhianna. "Good job you'll only be using wooden swords today."

Cai flushed.

Rhianna smiled. Even after a whole winter's training, a weapon in Cai's hand could be more dangerous to his friends than to his enemies.

"Don't worry, you'll be all right." Elphin picked up his harp, which he carried at all times in a deerskin bag, his eyes violet with amusement.

She wondered if he was planning to use magic to help their friend, because that was the only way she could see Cai winning a tilt against Gareth. She just hoped he would have some magic left over for her when she needed it.

A soft nose nudged her from over the stall. *It is very noisy in here this morning*, said Alba, the mare Lord Avallach had given her from the enchanted Avalonian herd. *Can we go galloping in the wood again? I promise I will not mist if you do not want me to.*

Rhianna smiled as she slipped into the mist horse's stable and quickly brushed her silver coat. "Not today, my darling. We're going to the meadow, where you can race as fast as you like."

That sounds fun, Alba said, with a pleased snort.

"It's going to be fun seeing everyone's faces afterwards," she said, leading the little mare out into the spring sunshine.

Sir Bedivere waited at the gates, handing out lances. The young knight did not seem surprised to see Rhianna dressed in her armour and riding Alba, though the other knights frowned at her.

"Who's going to answer the squires' challenge?" she asked him, hoping it wouldn't be the grumpy Sir Agravaine. She'd seen the dark-haired knight use his lance in battle, and didn't fancy being on the wrong end of it.

"I am," Sir Bedivere said, smiling at her. "Don't worry, I'll be gentle with whoever it is. Once they've eaten mud a couple of times,

they usually lose their bravado pretty quick."

Rhianna relaxed slightly. "And what if he knocks you off?"

Sir Bedivere laughed. "Then I'll knight the lad myself! The others might call me 'Soft Hands', but no one except Lancelot's ever bested me in a fair tilt. Better clear the course, Damsel Rhianna. We're almost ready to start."

Hoping Elphin would remember to bring the helm from the woodpile, she trotted Alba over to the benches, where Arianrhod and the other damsels were already sitting in an excited group. The crowd had not noticed her yet, but it would only be a matter of time. Over in the horse lines the knights rushed about, tightening girths and giving their squires last-moment instructions.

A horn blew, and Sir Bors mounted the steps to announce the start of the spring joust. He made a gruff speech about Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere being on their way back to hold Camelot for King Arthur's return, and Excalibur keeping their lands safe in the meantime. He wasn't a very good speaker, and the crowd got restless. They peered at the stands, obviously trying to spot Rhianna. Someone pointed at Lady Isabel, who looked after the Damsel Tower.

"There she is…!"

"Are you sure? She's older than I thought."

"No, that's the woman in charge of the damsels, silly… what about that dark girl? She's about the right age."

Arianrhod ducked her head, though not quickly enough to hide her cheek.

"Ugh!" a woman said. "Where'd she get that horrid scar? In Avalon?"

Rhianna saw Elphin in the stands with his harp cradled in his lap. Its bag, under the bench between his feet, bulged strangely. He patted it, and she smiled.

"Damsel Rhianna, you'd better show them Excalibur now," Sir Bedivere whispered.

She realised Sir Bors had stopped talking and people were staring around expectantly. She trotted Alba out on the course and drew her sword. The blade flashed in the sun.

A hush fell over the crowd as Excalibur's jewel brightened, haloing her and Alba in silver light. She thought she saw her father's ghost in the stands, smiling at her, and new energy and confidence filled her.

"As you can see, Princess Rhianna carries the Sword of Light that was forged in Avalon!" Sir Bors announced. "She'll keep Camelot and our lands safe from the barbarians till King Arthur is well enough to return from Avalon and sit on the throne again."

A few people whispered uneasily. "And what if King Arthur doesn't come back?" someone called. "You expect us to believe a damsel can handle Excalibur? It needs a man's hand."

Another man said loudly, "Why's the girl wearing armour? No prince is going to want to marry her looking like that!" His companions quickly shushed him. But others in the crowd were muttering now, confused.

Rhianna sighed. She had become used to this.

She raised her voice, which carried easily across the field. "I am Rhianna Pendragon! I'm wearing armour because it was a gift from Lord Avallach of Avalon, and I carry King

Arthur's shield, which Merlin gave to me when he brought my father's body through the mists. This is my father's sword, Excalibur, given to me by Lady Nimue of the Lake last year so we could defeat the Saxons, and I can handle it just fine."

She made Alba prance slowly along the barrier and trot back down the other side, showing the doubters her sword. As she did so, she measured the distance and checked the ground. When she reached the stands again, she sliced Excalibur through the air in a pattern of sparkling light, sketching a dragon.

Sir Bors scowled at her for showing off. But it worked. The horns blew again, and the crowd cheered as another fanfare announced the start of the joust.

Sir Bors had been right. It was quite funny, watching the squires tilt. Most lost their nerve at the last moment and missed each other's shields completely, to the sound of whistles and boos from the stands. A couple of boys fell off as their ponies started down the course, making people laugh. Those who did manage to score a hit usually dropped their spears or galloped out of control across the meadow afterwards. But apart from a few bruises, nobody got hurt.

Gareth and Cai were the last pair to tilt.

Rhianna sat up straighter in her saddle. "Watch carefully, because we're next," she whispered to Alba.

The mare pricked her white ears and snorted. *Stupid sort of race. They gallop in opposite directions.*

The horn sounded, and the two ponies broke

into a gallop. Sandy clearly enjoyed jousting, and Cai nearly fell off over his tail as the plump horse leaped forwards. Gareth's pony was slower to start, but the older boy had his spear lowered first. He aimed the point at the squire's shield with a determined expression. Cai looked terrified.

Rhianna winced as the two ponies came together. She fingered Excalibur's hilt, wondering if she could use the blade to flash sunlight into Gareth's eyes, as she had done to confuse the dragon in the battle last year. But it seemed a bit silly to use the Sword of Light for such a trick. As Cai galloped closer, Elphin reached for his harp.

No wonder his pony runs away with him, Alba said. *He is not looking where he is going.*

Rhianna grinned, and almost missed the quick flicker of her friend's fingers across his harp strings. As the two boys met, the air around them sparkled. Gareth's spear seemed to slide off Cai's shield. At the same time, Cai's spear slipped past Gareth's shield and struck him squarely on the chest. The older squire fell off over his pony's tail with a grunt of surprise. Arianrhod leaped to her feet with a cheer. Gareth's friends groaned.

Sir Bedivere trotted his chestnut stallion to the end of the barrier. Someone passed him a light squire's spear, which he fooled around with to make the crowd laugh. While the knights were distracted, catching the loose pony and organising the other squires to rake the course for the challenge, Rhianna eased her borrowed helm out of Elphin's bag.

Her friend's eyes turned violet. "You're not still going through with this?"

"Of course," Rhianna said, twisting her hair up under the helm and pulling down the face guard. "I have to show the knights I can look after myself in a fight, or they won't let me ride north with them to look for my mother and the Lance of Truth."

"Be careful, Rhia. I'm not sure Father's smith made that armour to withstand a lance."

"I've been training all winter! I'm not going to let Sir Bedivere spear me, don't worry. Just play your harp so they don't recognise me until it's too late."

Before anyone could stop her, she had snatched the spear from Cai's hand, exchanged her Pendragon shield for his plain one, and trotted her little mist horse to the far end of the barrier.

Sir Agravaine squinted at her as she lined up.

"We have a brave squire to take up the challenge!" he announced. The crowd – in the mood now for a good laugh – cheered. "Sir Bedivere tilts against Squire, er…?"

Even as the old knight's eyes narrowed in suspicion, Elphin's harp tinkled from the stands. The air around Rhianna sparkled, just like it had when Cai knocked Gareth out of his saddle. Alba's mane shimmered. Sir Agravaine's face went blank. He lifted the horn to his lips and blew.

Excitement shivered through her as Sir Bedivere's chestnut horse leaped forward. Rhianna crouched low over her mare's neck, tucked the spear under her armpit, and grinned as Alba sprang eagerly into a gallop to meet him. She couldn't see much through the helm, which had a narrow slit to protect the eyes from

splinters, but she did her best to aim at the centre of the knight's shield.

The noise of the crowd surged around her like the sea. The Avalonian music filled her head. She felt dizzy. *Just don't let him recognise me*, she willed. *I only need one chance.*

Sir Bedivere obviously couldn't see very much either. His lance stayed low as the distance between them closed. Rhianna set her jaw, kept her shield steady and refused to think about what would happen if she missed. She had to strike first. If he knocked her off, the knights would never let her ride north with them.

As she braced herself for the crash, she heard large hoof beats behind her. The crowd gasped. Sir Bedivere squinted through his helm in alarm, and his lance jerked up.

Rhianna's heart sank. The knights must have recognised Alba. Elphin's magic must not be strong enough to hide a mist horse. So now they were going to embarrass her by dragging her off the field in front of everyone.

She thought about taking advantage of Sir Bedivere's hesitation to get past his guard. But she couldn't bring herself to do it. At the last moment, she jerked her spear up, too. The ribbon tied to the end slapped Sir Bedivere across the eyes as they galloped past each other, and the crowd groaned.

Looking over her shoulder, she saw a big black horse. She wondered which knight had come after her. Whoever it was couldn't ride very well. He was jerking at the reins, flopping back and forth over his horse's neck. People scattered from its path, screaming.

Alba flattened her ears. *Is it another race?*

Rhianna thought of everyone watching the black horse chase her and Alba across the river, and sighed. Even more embarrassing. "No." She slowed the mare and tugged off her helm, ready to fight with words rather than a spear.

But the black horse didn't stop when she did. Foaming with sweat, it charged on past, so close that Alba misted in alarm. Rhianna grabbed the mare's mane and drew Excalibur. Its rider jerked backwards again as the horse passed them, and she saw why. The knight had been roped into his saddle with the reins tied around his wrists. His throat had been cut.

Alba whinnied, and the runaway horse slowed to a trot. It turned and came back, carrying its grisly burden. The two horses held a short conversation, snorting into each other's nostrils.

He says a dragon chased him, the mare reported. *He has galloped for many days. His legs are very tired. Bad men kill his rider.*

Rhianna kept hold of Excalibur, wary. She'd seen too many of Mordred's tricks to trust a dead knight. A slave collar had been buckled around his neck, stiff with blood and strangely marked.

By this time, Sir Bors and Sir Agravaine and several of the squires on their ponies had caught up. She saw Elphin running across the field with his harp, with Arianrhod and Cai close behind.

"Stay away from him, Damsel Rhianna!" Sir Bors warned, pushing between Alba and the black horse.

Sir Agravaine warily lifted the rider's head and peered into his face. "One of Sir Lancelot's

men," he grunted. "What's that written around his neck?"

Sir Bors used his sword to cut the collar from the dead man. He turned it over, examining the marks on it. He frowned. "It's in the old druid language. We'll need to get the priest to translate. But I recognise that signature…" He looked at them grimly. "It's signed Mordred Pendragon, Emperor of Britain."

2

A Message from Mordred

By dead man's hand the message came
Bearing rules for Mordred's game.
A druid sees what the dark words mean:
Arthur's sword for the life of a queen.

With all the excitement caused by the runaway horse, people soon forgot about Rhianna's embarrassing tilt. Some of the

About the Author



Katherine Roberts' muse is a unicorn.
This is what he has to say about her...

My author has lived in King Arthur's country for most of her life. She went to Bath University, where she got a degree in Maths and learned to fly in a glider. Afterwards she worked with racehorses, until she found me in 1984 and wrote her first fantasy story. She won the Branford Boase Award in 2000 with her first book *Song Quest*, and now she has me hard at work on the Pendragon series, searching for the Grail of Stars.

You can find out more about Katherine at www.katherineroberts.co.uk

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CROWN OF DREAMS

by KATHERINE ROBERTS

Read on for a preview of Rhianna Pendragon's third thrilling quest…

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The Dragon's Lair



Mordred reined in his horse and eyed the cave behind the waterfall. A strange green glow came out of it, lighting up the valley. Water dripped from the trees, from his cloak and off the end of his nose. Why did dragons have to make their lairs in a land where it rained all the time?

"So what are you waiting for?" he snapped. "This must be it. Go in there and bring me King Arthur's crown."

His bloodbeards looked at each other uneasily. Seeing Mordred clench his fist, their captain drew his sword and rode reluctantly towards the wall of green water. His horse rolled its eyes and dug in its hooves.

"I think the horses can smell the dr-dragon, Master," he stammered.

"Nonsense!" Mordred said. "The shadrake's forgotten we were supposed to be following it. You all saw it fly off. If it had stuck around, we might have found this godforsaken place sooner."

"Horses sense more than men, Master," the captain pointed out, glancing nervously at the sky.

"Go in on foot, then!" Mordred used his good leg to kick the bloodbeard off his horse. "You can still run if you need to, unlike me. We'll wait out here in case the shadrake comes back."

The captain shuddered. But he knew better than to argue with his master.

Gripping his sword, he vanished into the hillside. Shortly afterwards they heard a muffled yell, followed by the rattle of falling debris. The water glittered eerily green, spooking the horses again. The men paled and crossed themselves.

"Oh, for Annwn's sake!" Mordred snapped. "Do I have to do everything myself? Leave your horses out here and follow me."

His stallion snorted at the water, but stopped playing up when Mordred growled at it. He ducked over the horse's neck to avoid the spray. Its hooves echoed inside the rocky tunnel, which sloped downwards and burrowed deep into the hillside. At every turn, the eerie green glow brightened.

Sweat bathed Mordred as he remembered his underground sickbed, where he'd almost

died after his uncle Arthur wounded him with Excalibur during their final battle. But that had been a whole year ago. King Arthur was dead. The Sword of Light was in the hands of Arthur's daughter, who by all accounts hadn't even blooded it yet. As soon as he got hold of his uncle's crown, he'd ride to Camelot and claim the throne.

They emerged in a vast cavern, which stank of dragon. Jewelled daggers, rusty swords and dented shields were piled around the walls, along with what looked suspiciously like human bones. One of the piles had avalanched, and his bloodbeard captain lay groaning underneath it. His men hurried over to help.

"Leave him," Mordred snapped, seeing that the man was still breathing. "Find the

crown, you fools! Quickly, before the shadrake comes back."

While his men searched through the dragon's hoard, Mordred rode his horse slowly around the cavern, prodding at the treasure with his spear. "Where is it, Mother?" he whispered.

"Here, my son," whispered the witch's voice from the shadows.

Mordred froze. His mother's spirit lived in the underworld of Annwn now, and before now he'd always needed her dark mirror to speak to her. "Where?" he said warily.

"Right under your feet, you foolish boy," his mother hissed. "What do you think is making the light in here?"

Mordred's horse stopped dead and threw up its head, banging him on the nose.

He looked down and sucked in his breath.

His mother's body lay half buried under the treasure, her dress torn and stained. A crown encircled her dark hair, glittering with coloured jewels. As his horse's hooves dislodged the pile, he saw that one of these – a large green stone at her forehead – was glowing eerily. There wasn't a mark on her, and for a wild moment he thought she wasn't dead.

Then he saw her spirit rippling in the green light. Dark magic.

His gaze fastened greedily on the crown. He slid clumsily out of his saddle and fell to his knees beside her. He tugged at her dress with his left hand, pushing the dragon's treasure off her body with the stump of his right wrist. "Help me, then!" he yelled at his bloodbeards.

They came running.

"Morgan Le Fay!" the captain breathed, still looking a bit dazed. "So this is where she ended up. I always wondered how she died."

"That dragon must've killed her," said one of the others, looking nervously at the tunnel behind them.

"Don't be stupid," Mordred snapped. "My mother's a powerful enchantress. She controlled the shadrake. It led us here, didn't it?"

Before his bloodbeards could point out that the creature had abandoned them halfway, he reached for the crown. It was stuck, so he had to brace his good leg against the rock and pull. The crown came free with a sudden jerk, leaving a line of charred blisters across his mother's forehead, and rolled across the cave.

He scrambled after it, picked it up and examined it carefully. Some of the jewels were missing, but it was definitely the same crown his uncle Arthur had worn in their final battle. Triumph filled him. He ran a finger over the dent his axe had made when he'd split the king's helmet from his head, and smiled at the memory.

"Behold the Crown of Dreams!" he announced, showing it to his men. "You see before you one of the four ancient Lights, with more power than Excalibur, and twice as much magic as that useless Lance my cousin stupidly gave to her squire friend! This crown belonged to my uncle Arthur and gave him the power to command men and dragons, and now it's mine..." He lifted the glowing circlet above his head.

"Careful, my son!" said his mother in a tone that sent a chill down his spine. "Don't put it on yet."

Mordred scowled as his triumph evaporated. "Why not? I thought that was the whole idea. I've got Pendragon blood, so it won't harm me."

"I've got Pendragon blood too, foolish boy, and it killed me."

He lowered the crown and glanced uneasily at his mother's body, which had begun to blacken and shrivel. "How?" he whispered. "How did it kill you?"

"I was careless. There's a jewel missing. I assumed it was a minor one, knocked out during the battle. But it's one of the magic stones, the one Arthur used to store his secrets when he sat on the throne of Camelot.

You've got to find that jewel and destroy it before the Crown of Dreams will accept you as the next Pendragon."

Mordred looked at the piles of treasure in despair. Find a single jewel among this lot? Worse, what if the stupid dragon had lost the stone on its way here carrying the crown from the battlefield? It could be lying at the bottom of the Summer Sea.

"We'll be searching all year!"

"No you won't," the witch said. "Because the stone's not lost. If my ex-maid's information is right, it's still at Camelot. Arthur must have taken it out before the battle as a precaution. He left it with Guinevere, and now your cousin has it."

"Rhianna!" Mordred clenched his fist in rage. He might have known King Arthur's

daughter would stand in his way again. "We have to get it from her," he growled. "I need to raise another army."

His mother smiled. "You don't need an army to catch a fly, not even one that stings like your cousin. My ex-maid still has my mirror. This is what we'll do…"

PENDRAGON
LEGACY
BOOK 2

LANCE OF TRUTH

KATHERINE ROBERTS

The quest for Camelot's survival continues...

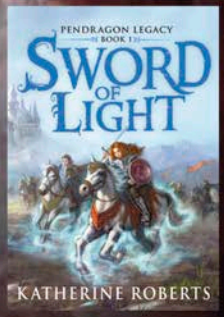
King Arthur's daughter Rhianna Pendragon has faced dark magic, ice-breathing dragons and mortal danger to win Excalibur, Arthur's sword. But Excalibur is just one of four magical Lights that Rhianna must find in order to restore her late father's soul to his body and bring him back to life. Now she must head into the northern wilds in search of the second Light, the Lance of Truth, before her evil cousin Mordred claims it.

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