



# THE SWORD IN THE STONE

**T**he bitter winter wind swirled around Ector and his sons as their horses trudged through the thick snow. The three were making the long journey from their home in the south of Wales to Caerleon for the king-making. The old king was dead, and now the bravest warriors of all the clans in the land were meeting to battle for the right to be Pendragon, High King of Britain.

"Father, I am frozen nearly to death!" moaned Cei, Ector's elder son. "Can we not stop and rest?"

"No!" said Ector. "We are nearly at the battlefield. Look! There are crowds of warriors in front of us!"

"I am too cold and tired to fight!" whined Cei. "I am not meant to be king, so why carry on?"

"I'll not have my son talk in that manner!" bellowed Ector. "Prepare yourself, boy. Take up your sword!"



Cei swung round to reach for his sword. Suddenly he gasped. "Father! My sword is gone!" he said.

"What?" shouted his father. "You cannot become Pendragon without a sword! How could you have been so careless?"

Ector's younger son, Arthur, a boy of only seventeen, spoke up.

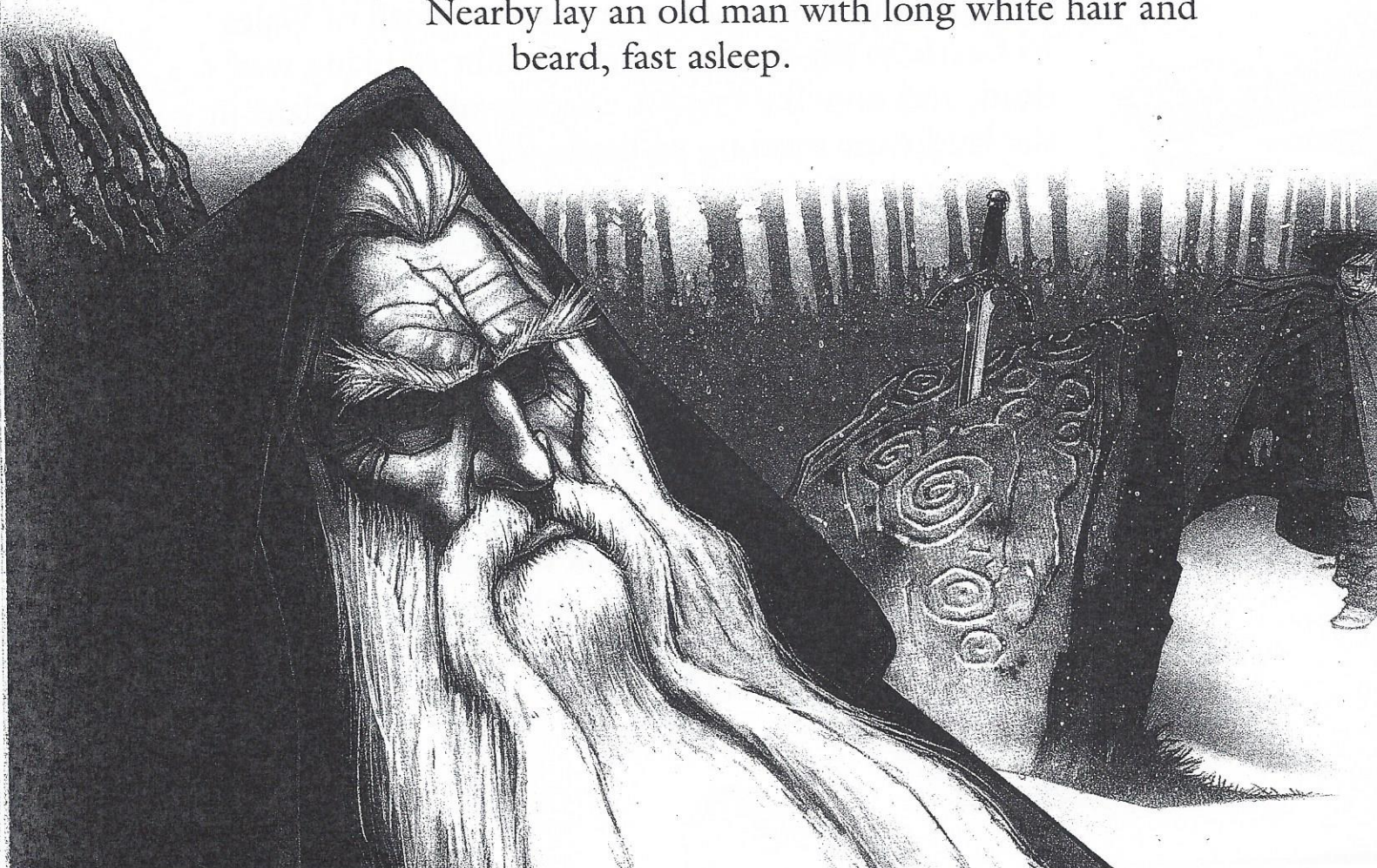
"I saw a smithy a few miles back," he said. "I could hurry and fetch Cei a new sword."

Ector broke into a smile. "You see, Cei! Your younger brother has been watchful! Perhaps he would make a better Pendragon! Here is some gold," he said, turning to Arthur. "Go and buy Cei a fine new sword."

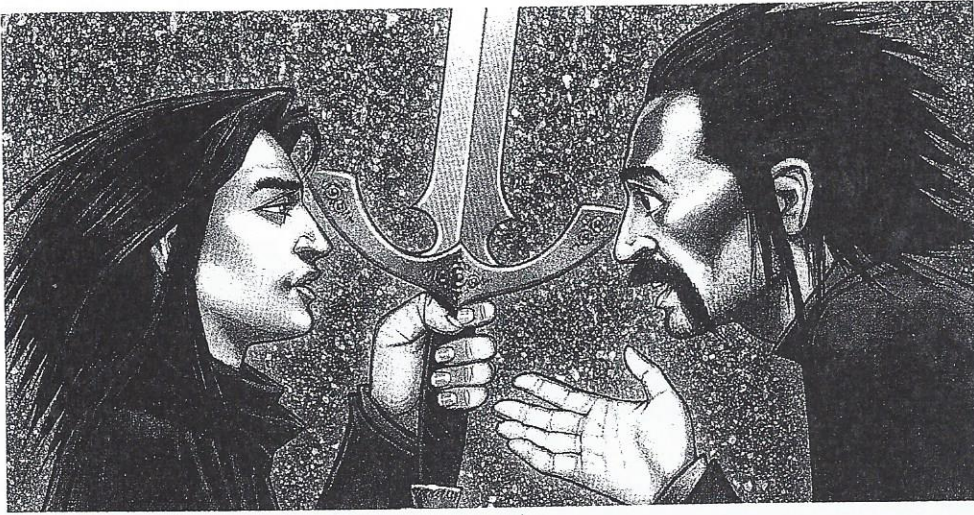
Arthur turned his horse and sped off through the snow. But to his dismay, the smithy was shut, and all the doors were barred.

Glancing around, Arthur noticed a path a few yards away. Curious, he followed it into a small grove. In the middle of the grove was a large, moss-covered stone with a sword plunged deep inside it.

Nearby lay an old man with long white hair and beard, fast asleep.







"This must be his sword," Arthur thought. "I'm sure he wouldn't mind if I just borrowed it for a while. I'll return it as soon as the battle is over."

Arthur grabbed the weapon and slid it easily from the stone. As he turned to go, he saw his brother riding towards him.

"What's taking you so long, Arthur?" Cei shouted. "The battle is about to start!"

"Sorry, Cei," Arthur stammered. "But look at the magnificent sword I have for you!"

"This is a fine weapon," said Cei, admiring the gleaming blade and the jewel-encrusted handle.

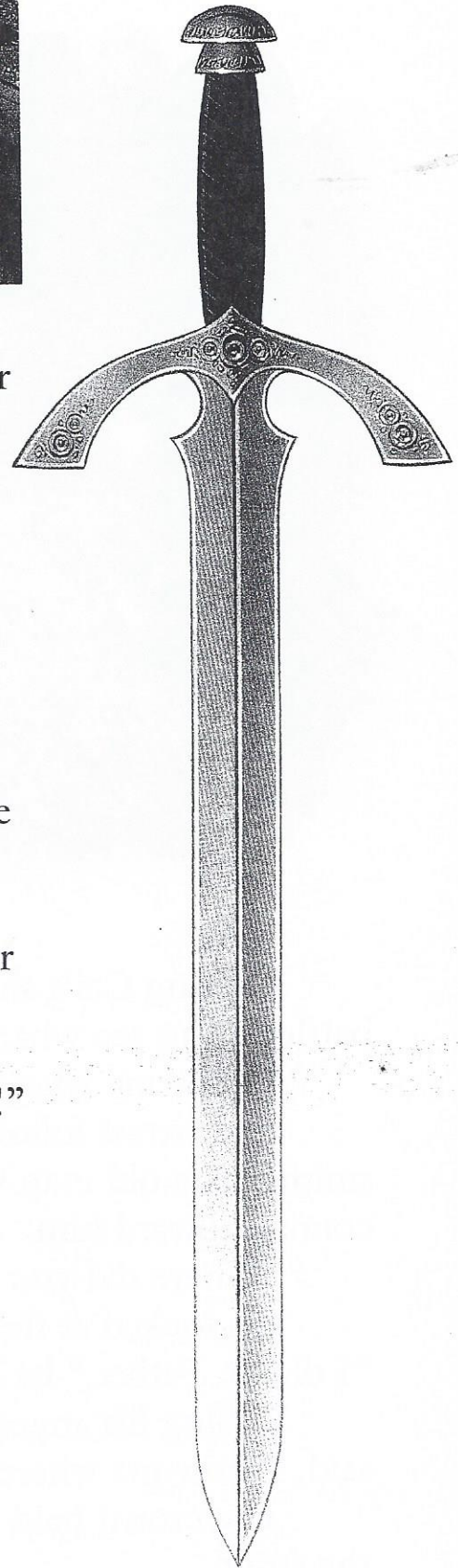
"Thank you, Arthur!"

The two rode to the battlefield together. Ector was waiting uneasily, but his impatience turned to amazement when Cei showed him his new sword.

"This is Caliburn, the sword of the Pendragons!" whispered Ector. "This is the prize for the victor in today's battle! Arthur, how did you get it?"

"It was stuck in a stone," Arthur began, "and..." Before he could finish, Cei interrupted.

"...and I pulled it out, Father," said Cei. "Arthur didn't get it, I did. That must make me the Pendragon!"







Hearing Cei's shouts, some of the warriors rode over from the battlefield to see what the commotion was about.

"Show me where you found this, son," said Ector.

The crowd followed Ector and his sons to the grove near the smithy. The old man was awake now, smiling wryly at the group coming toward him.

"Where did you find the sword, Cei?" asked Ector.

Cei looked at the old man, and knew that he couldn't lie any more. "I didn't, Father," he said quietly, hanging his head. "Arthur did."

Stifling his anger, Ector turned to his other son. "Arthur," he said, "show me where you found it."

The crowd held its breath as Arthur put the sword back into the stone.



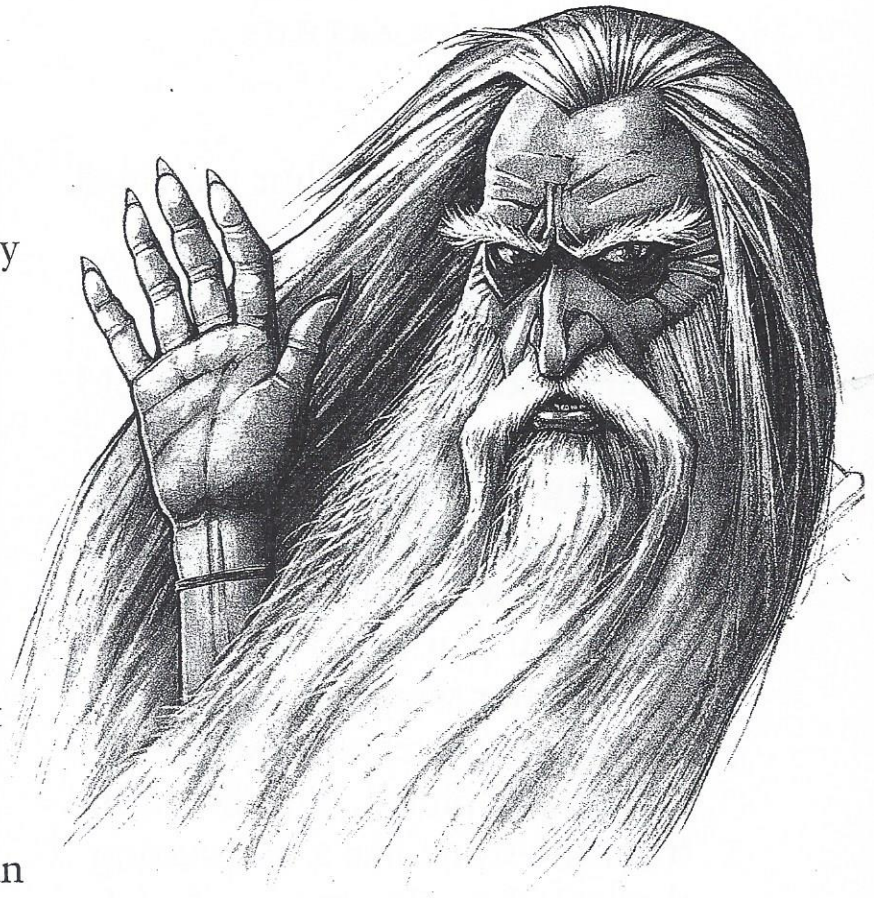
"What trickery is this?" shouted a man in the crowd. "The sword is meant to be lying on the stone, as a prize for the winner of the battle." More angry shouts joined his.

Holding up his hands for silence, the old man stepped forward.

"This sword is too great a prize for the winner of a mere battle," he said.

"You have come to choose the High King today. A different test is needed. I am Merlin the Druid, and I have put a spell on this sword. Only the one who can draw it from this stone is the true-born King of Britain!"

A great cry arose, and men began pushing forward to get to the sword. But not even the mightiest warrior could budge it. None of these men was the true Pendragon.





At last only Arthur remained.

"The boy will try now," Ector declared.

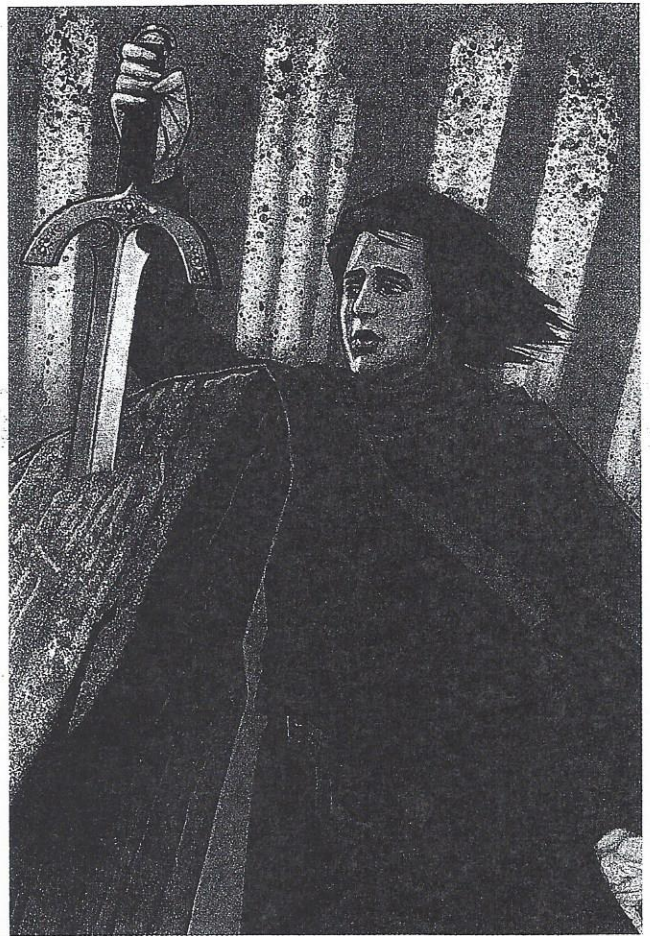
"The boy?" someone shouted scornfully. "He's not old enough to shave, much less be Pendragon!" A ripple of laughter ran through the crowd.

"He will try!" said Ector, leading Arthur up to the stone.

Arthur wrapped his hands around the jewel-encrusted handle and pulled. The sword slid from the stone like a fish cutting through the calm waters of a lake.

Instantly, the crowd fell silent.

"How can I be king?" Arthur whispered.



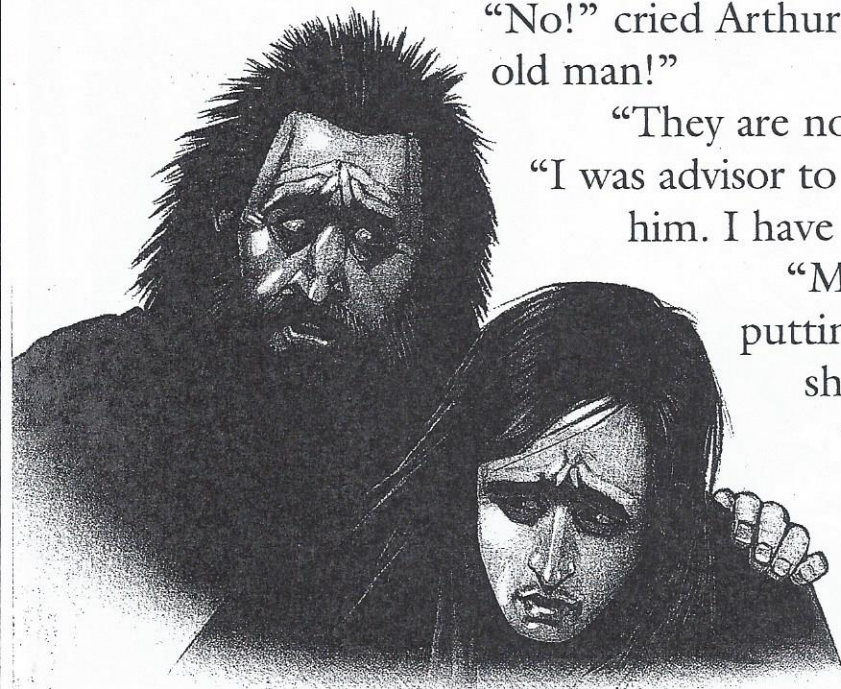
Merlin came forward. "Arthur," he said, "you are the son of Uther Pendragon, clan chieftain and High King of Britain. You are the true Pendragon."

"No!" cried Arthur. "Ector is my father! You are lying, old man!"

"They are not lies, Arthur," said Merlin gently.

"I was advisor to your father, and to his father before him. I have been waiting for you."

"Merlin is telling the truth," said Ector, putting his arm around Arthur's trembling shoulders. "He brought you to me when you were only a baby, and told me to raise you as my own. I did not know then who you were. But it is all clear to me now."





“So you are not my father?” Arthur breathed. “Cei is not my brother?”

“I may not be your true father,” replied Ector, “but I love you as my own. And because of that love I know that you must take your seat as Pendragon. You are the chosen one, Arthur, whom the Druids of old spoke of in their prophecies. Now your time has come.”

Ector kissed Arthur on both cheeks, then stepped back.

“Kneel!” he shouted to the crowd. “Kneel before the Pendragon of Britain!”

Arthur gazed at the sword in his hand. The air was cold, but the sword felt warm and alive, and a surge of energy coursed through Arthur’s body.

There, in the winter sun, with the melting snow under his feet, he raised Caliburn above his head. He was no longer just Arthur, a shy and quiet young boy. He was Arthur Pendragon, Chieftain and High King of Britain.

