

As the months passed, scraps of stories made their way back to Camelot. Most of the time, these adventurous yarns we shared by people coming before me for pleading day, a duty I found more enjoyable when I was the one to pass judgment. Marius and Grainne stood with me, representatives of each religion there to help ward off any potential violence. More than one resident told me they felt more comfortable with someone from the old faith hearing their case.

As it turns out, the presence of the Combrogii across the land settled more than one local dispute and rid our kingdoms of local tyrants. On a pleasant summer day, a beautiful flaxen haired woman bowed before me. She carried with her a bag that smelled of scree and the rot of the slaughter house. Flies buzzed around her, but she paid them no heed.

“My Lady, I beg you to hear my tale, the first in a long list of heroism of the Combrogii on their holy quest. I know of which I speak because I was witness to it all.”

She went on to tell a story of Gawain’s heroism in the face of an oppressor in the Midlands who called himself the Green Knight. The locals said he thought himself the child of the woodland spirit known as the Green Man and a water nymph. Taking his lineage quite literally, he painted his skin green and spent his time challenging local heroes in a sick ritual he called the beheading game. He dared them to try to remove his head with a single stroke, but no matter their skill, he found a way of evading their blows. In exchange, he was allowed to return the favor, and he never missed.

Having removed all of the local heroes, the Green Knight began a reign of terror throughout the land, using his absolute power to control the populous.

When Gawain entered the area, the Green Knight immediately challenged him, entering the common room of the inn in which he was slumbering, extinguishing all the light with a single breath. Gawain accepted his challenge, on the condition he could live with the knight for three

days before the game commenced. According to the teller of the tale, Gawain used this time to learn his enemy's weaknesses. When the time for the beheading game drew near, Gawain laid his head down on the altar stone of a nearby stone circle, arms outstretched to receive the blow. When the Green Knight raised his axe, Gawain, opened his clenched fists, releasing a flurry of moths hidden in his palms. The flurry of wings disoriented the knight and his blow fell short, blade shattering on the stone next to Gawain's ear.

Gawain sprang to his feet and delivered his own deadly blow to the knight, severing his head in a single blow. As a reward, the terrible knight's enslaved companion offered herself as his wife.

"I am that woman," she concluded. "My name is Ragnell. I bring you proof of my husband's heroism." She reached into the bag and removed a rotting head streaked with dried blood and smeared green paint. "Lady, I do not dare ask for your favor, but I do ask one thing. Display this token of my husband's victory at the gates of Camelot to tell all your men do more than hunt a spiritual treasure. They ensure the peace of this land his true."

I could not resist her entreaty. The Green Knight's head was placed on a poll outside the main gates and I took Ragnell into my court. Three weeks later, another head joined his, that of a red-haired giant called Perimones. His story was quite unusual and I found myself compelled to tell Morgan the night I found out, as we were readying for bed.

"You wouldn't believe it. A metalworker came to court today to tempt me with his newest wares." I reached into my pouch and removed a copper and silver armband and held it out Morgan. "I bought this for you."

She took it from me, looking at it curiously. She regarded me warily. "Thank you. What do I owe you in exchange?"

I huffed. “Nothing. Consider it a peace offering.”

Morgan’s lips twisted as though she didn’t think I was telling the truth, but she wrapped the band around her bicep anyway.

“So back to the knight. He and his brothers, all known as the red knights, conspired to block the trade routes along the Roman roads connecting the northern and southern kingdoms. Their goal was to extort tolls and taxes from tradesmen. They were said to be able to control fire and burn everyone who resisted them with the rays of the sun.”

Morgan looked at me skeptically. “Unless they were Druid-trained, I doubt it.”

“That’s just it. I believe they were, drunk on their own power. Anyway, the area around them suffered and no one dared go near. They became known as The Dragons for their willingness to wield fire as a weapon. Only one dared challenge him.”

“Let me guess.” Morgan yawned, clearly not amused. “He was one of ours.”

“One of yours, actually. Morfudd, your eldest by Uriens.”

She sat up at that. “But he is younger than Mordred. How did he get in such a dangerous situation? Surely Arthur did not allow him to quest?” Her brow creased with the wrinkles owned by mother’s the world over.

“The men were allowed to choose their teams. Gareth chose Morfudd, which makes sense since he was fostering with Lot. Relax, Morgan. Your son has proven himself a hero.”

She let out a ragged breath. “Continue.” Her tone was back to imperious.

“Gareth and Morfudd dared approach the reds. They say the laugh issued by the dragons shook the ground, so great was their mirth at being confronted by a mere boy. But Morfudd stood his ground. They threw fire at him, but he deflected it with his shield, holding it back just as you and I would protect ourselves.”

Morgan smiled. "I taught him that!" She crowed.

"His ability to withstand their tricks gave Gareth the opening he needed to strike. It was not an easy battle, but in the end, they were victorious. According to the trader, both only suffered minor wounds. Rejoice, Morgan. Your son has his first battle scars. I am certain Arthur will make him a member of the Combrogii as soon as he reaches manhood."

Morgan was pleased, that much was clear, but she was fighting to restrain her joy in front of me. She readjusted herself in bed, her growing belly making movement increasingly difficult. "There will be one more," she declared, her eyes glassy, voice low in the timbre of prophecy. "Three there must always be. It is the way of the Lady." Then just as quickly, her eyes focused on me. "Now, get out. I wish to sleep."