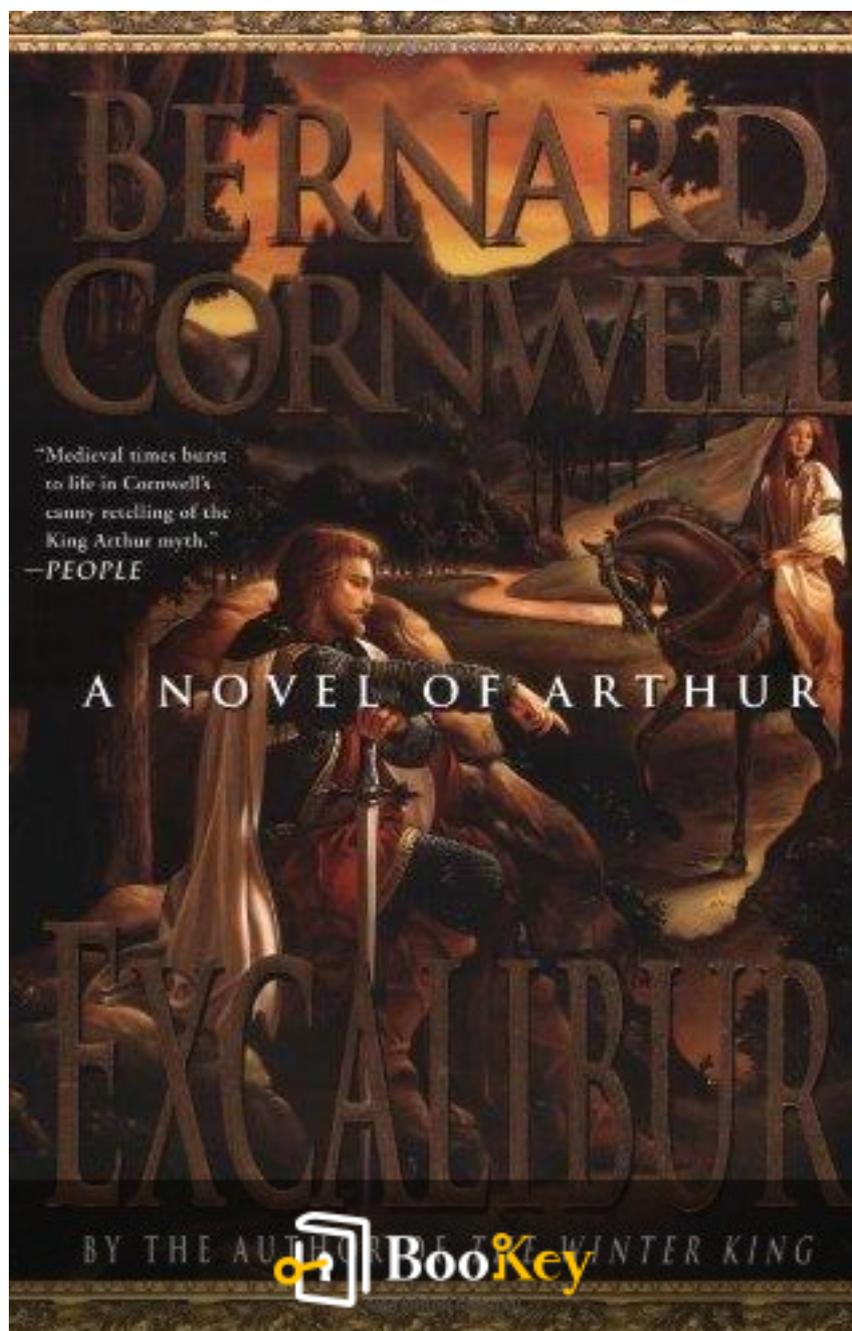


Excalibur PDF (Limited Copy)

Bernard Cornwell



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Excalibur Summary

The Struggle for Legacy in Arthurian Legends

Written by Books1

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About the book

In "Excalibur," Bernard Cornwell masterfully weaves a gripping tale of ambition, betrayal, and the relentless quest for power set against the backdrop of Arthurian legend. As the legendary king seeks to unite a fractured Britain amidst turmoil and warfare, his most trusted ally, Derfel Cadarn, wrestles with loyalty and the haunting specter of destiny. Through vivid battle scenes and intensely personal conflicts, Cornwell explores the fragile line between heroism and villainy, challenging the very fabric of honor and friendship. Will Arthur's dream of a united kingdom prevail, or will the darker forces of treachery shatter his vision forever? Dive into this electrifying saga and discover how the timeless struggle for Excalibur parallels the eternal fight for one's own soul.

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About the author

Bernard Cornwell is a renowned English historical fiction author, celebrated for his vivid storytelling and meticulous attention to historical detail. Born on February 23, 1944, in London, Cornwell has captivated readers with his extensive body of work that often explores themes of war, adventure, and the complexities of human nature. Best known for his bestselling series, such as "The Saxon Stories" and "The Grail Quest," Cornwell's novels are steeped in the rich tapestry of history, bringing to life key events and figures with a compelling and accessible narrative style. His deep passion for history, coupled with his own experiences as a soldier, infuses his writing with authenticity, making him a favorite among both historical fiction enthusiasts and general readers alike.

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Chapter 1 Summary: The Fires of Mai Dun

Summary of "The Fires of Mai Dun"

Prologue: The Role of Women in History

The narrative unfolds with a reflection on the significance of women in the story of King Arthur, a society typically dominated by male warriors and rulers. The speaker, living under the protection of Queen Igraine, emphasizes how a woman's actions can profoundly impact history, particularly in the case of Arthur's enemy. Igraine, the Queen, is pregnant and spurs the author to pen Arthur's story under the guise of writing a sacred gospel to evade the hostile Bishop Sansum, who despises Arthur.

Guinevere's Treachery and Arthur's Pain

As the story progresses, the rebellious Lancelot attempts to usurp control, aided by Christian factions who manipulate beliefs in preparation for Jesus Christ's return. During this conflict, Arthur discovers Guinevere, his beloved wife, in the arms of Lancelot, deepening his despair. This betrayal leads Guinevere to be imprisoned by Arthur's sister, Morgan, in a shrine, which Arthur decrees should be her fate until death. He is heartbroken and hurt, torn between love and vengeance, illustrating the personal tragedies

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intertwined with his larger battles.

Merlin and the Treasures of Britain

The wise Merlin re-emerges in this tumultuous backdrop, seeking to summon the ancient Gods of Britain using the fabled Treasures, including Excalibur. With threats looming from the Saxons, Arthur's steadfast friend Derfel accompanies Merlin and wrestles with his loyalty and doubts about the power of the Treasures and whether the Gods will heed their call. As Merlin assembles people on Mai Dun to prepare for the Gods' return, he faces challenges, signifying the stranglehold of fate and magical hopes on Britain.

Aelle and Gwydre: The Stakes of Sacrifice

A storyline emerges surrounding Aelle, the Saxon King, and Gwydre, the son of Arthur. Nimue, accompanying Merlin, seeks to use Gwydre as a sacrifice to ensure the summoning of the Gods, sharing a bleak vision of impending doom. Arthur, embodying the faction committed to mercy and protection, vehemently opposes the sacrifice of either child and strives to save Gwydre from Nimue's wrath. Tensions rise alongside Arthur's resolve, encapsulating the human cost entangled in the web of ancient magic.

The Summoning: Tension and Uncertainty

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As the night of Samain approaches, Arthur is burdened by impending threats from the Saxons, including Cerdic and Aelle, while the political landscape in Britain grows perilous with strained relationships among kingdoms. Gwydre is taken to Mai Dun by Nimue, igniting Arthur's desperate attempts to rescue him, leading to confrontation with Merlin's plan. The tension culminates as they clash against the backdrop of roaring fires summoning the Gods.

Resulting Chaos and Resolution

Ultimately, Arthur successfully averts the sacrifice of Gwydre, leaving the gathering in turmoil as the Gods fail to appear, signaling a catastrophic failure for Merlin's plans. The aftermath involves reverberations of consequences, where betrayal and alliances falter, foreshadowing an inevitable confrontation with the Saxons. The marriages, friendships, and fidelity of characters are tested amid the chaos, especially with Gwydre and Mardoc, as violence looms ever closer.

Conclusion: Foreshadowing Destiny

With Aelle's intrigues and political maneuvers in action and Arthur retaining Excalibur, the impending struggle for Britain comes to a climax. The future is riddled with uncertainty, as Arthur and his circle confront the loss of their Gods and the fear that their sacrifices might have been in vain.

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In conclusion, "The Fires of Mai Dun" intricately weaves themes of loyalty, betrayal, love, and power through the tapestry of Arthurian legend, underscoring the struggles between ancient beliefs and the rise of emerging powers. The events culminate in a poignant reminder that while magic and divinity are invoked, it is the human heart's desires and failings that often dictate history's course.

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Chapter 2 Summary: Mynydd Baddon ‘W ho?’ Igraine demanded as soon as she had read the first sheet of the lates

Summary of Part Two: Mynydd Baddon

In the second part of the narrative set in the tumultuous world of post-Roman Britain, Derfel and his companions are beset by an impending Saxon invasion. The chapter opens with Derfel and Igraine discussing the mysterious past of a woman named Argante, revealing snippets of their complex relationships with Arthur and their pasts. The narrative captures their apprehension of an approaching Saxon threat as Derfel reflects on the continuous struggle between the Britons and Saxons, and yearns for the absent King Arthur.

As winter solstice approaches, the tension builds with news of a Saxon army preparing to attack Ratae. Derfel's memories reveal past sacrifices made by warriors and the ever-present fear of losing their land and legends to the Saxons. Among discussions about childbirth, Igraine, who is pregnant, obsessively expresses hope for a boy, while Derfel reminisces about the past and Arthur's tumultuous relationships.

Tension escalates as Igraine's husband receives troubling reports, while

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Derfel reflects on Arthur's state of mind and relationships amid the brewing conflict. As the days pass, the Saxons' approach becomes undeniable, and Derfel prepares his men for the potential battle, reflecting on their history and fate in the shadow of Arthur's legacy.

The narrative shifts from the cozy retreat into fears as the winter weather gives way to spring blossoms, but the thoughts of impending war loom larger. Expectation builds as Arthur summons his loyal men for a feast at Lindinis, where rituals echo myths of old, with Arthur's new bride Argante at the center. Tensions rise with the excitement of battle, but also with trepidation.

As Arthur's cavalry prepares for potential conflict, Derfel feels a familiar dread, which looks back to previous battles. A crucial moment arrives when news of a nearby Saxon army pushes Derfel and his warriors to the fore. The tumultuous political landscape unravels as rival factions emerge, with Arthur's loyalty to his people and land tested. Guinevere, present now among the men at Mynydd Baddon, adds strength and charm to their cause while plotting alongside Derfel.

The action heightens as night falls, and the characters navigate their emotions, their pasts, and losses amid the chaos that war brings. The intensity sharpens through various battle preparations that see both Saxons and Britons sharpening blades for the inevitable clash. Derfel leads with

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honor while anguishing over losses from allies and enemies alike.

At dawn, the two armies meet. Arthur's forces, now bolstered and aware of the momentum shift, prepare for battle at Mynydd Baddon, confident the high ground can bring them success. However, their courage is tested by the sheer number of Saxons. With booming drums and battle cries filling the air, Guinevere demonstrates her strength in the face of threats.

The battle at Mynydd Baddon swings with visceral intensity as the two armies clash, with the Saxons' confidence quickly challenged by Guinevere's cunning strategies and Derfel's leadership. As the fight intensifies, unforeseen tactics emerge, and eventual chaos ensues among the Saxons.

Victory appears within grasp as Arthur's forces arrive to flank and bolster Derfel's men. The tide turns dramatically, with the Saxon remnants quickly overwhelmed by the combined might of Arthur, Cuneglas, and Sagramor. The chapter concludes with a chaotic triumph secured through mutual sacrifice as loyal allies band together to break the Saxon siege once and for all.

This segment encapsulates not just the battle itself but examines themes of loyalty, love, ambition, and the nuanced nature of warfare in a time of strife. The dynamics of relationships within the fragmentation of a society at war

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against a relentless foe crystallizes the weight of history and legend that surrounds Arthur and his warriors. Ultimately, Mynydd Baddon transcends being merely a location, becoming a pivotal point in the saga of Britain's tumultuous past.

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Chapter 3 Summary: Nimue's Curse

In **Part Three: Nimue's Curse**, the narrative unfolds through the reflections of Derfel, who recounts the events following the battle at Mynydd Baddon and Queen Igraine's impatient inquiries about the fates of key characters like Aelle and Lancelot. Derfel relates the poignant death of Aelle, his father, during Arthur's ongoing war against the Saxons. Aelle, even in defeat, clings to his warrior identity, leading to a deeply emotional confrontation between father and son that culminates in Aelle's death at Derfel's hands, a moment filled with both tragedy and a sense of obligation to honor the warrior's code.

The chapter transitions to the aftermath of Aelle's death, where Derfel deals with the cascading events of victory and loss, reflecting on Arthur's triumph and his own personal grief. Queen Igraine, heavily pregnant and anxious, presses Derfel for a cohesive narrative, insisting on the importance of stories having resolved endings, a contrast to the chaotic reality of life. As Derfel recounts the fate of the Saxon champion Liofa, who eventually dies a slow and dismal death from disease, the sense of poetic justice that Igraine seeks clashes with the stark realities of war and survival.

The narrative then shifts to the introduction of new characters, particularly Taliesin, a bard now deemed a new vital force among the friends of Arthur. Meanwhile, Arthur and Guinevere find themselves entangled in rising

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tensions surrounding past loyalties and emerging dangers, particularly regarding Mordred, who is presumed dead but may return with dangerous ambitions. The tension builds with the implications of betrayal, the descent of characters into madness and desperation, and the intertwining of their fates with those of the old gods, foreshadowing a struggle not only for power but for the soul of Britain itself.

Eventually, Derfel learns about Nimue's return and her nefarious intentions regarding Ceinwyn, leading to a dire ultimatum tied to prophecies and curses. Nimue's desire to reclaim power requires sacrifices, blurring the lines between love, duty, and vengeance. The stakes culminate in Derfel's confrontations both with personal loss and the ever-present threat of Mordred's return.

In the latter part of the chapter, themes of loyalty, destiny, and the tragic consequences of ambition pull the narrative tighter. With Gwydre's implication in the ongoing struggle for power – embodying both hope and potential conflict – the chapter concludes with a heightened tension as Derfel must navigate treachery, love, and the demands of the cursed family ties that bind them all. As fates intertwine, the stage is set for the ensuing calamities that will challenge Derfel, Arthur, and their allies, embroiling them deeper into the complex fate of Britain.

The interwoven tales of betrayal, madness, and the remnants of ancient

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magic culminate in choices that must be made – decisions that weigh heavily on Derfel as he grapples with his commitments to both the living and those beyond. By the end of this section, the echoes of the past, present, and the haunting shadows of what is yet to come loom large, intricately weaving personal and collective destinies into a tapestry of impending conflict and uncertain resolutions.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The inevitable interplay of love, duty, and loss

Critical Interpretation: As you reflect on Derfel's harrowing experience with the weight of duty to his father and the tragic consequences of ambition, consider how these themes resonate in your own life. In moments of choice, where love must often wrestle with obligations, remember that true strength lies in navigating these complex emotions with honesty and courage. Embrace the reality that every decision shapes not just your destiny but also the lives of those you care about, urging you to find a balance between your aspirations and the loyalties that tether you to your past.

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Chapter 4: The Last Enchantment

Part Four Summary: The Last Enchantment

As spring arrives in Dinnewrac, the atmosphere is overshadowed by a mix of joy and dread. Igraine has given birth to a son, Arthur, whose name weighs heavily on the hearts of those in the monastery due to the ominous return of the Saxons. The once-united Britons now face divisions, murmurs of betrayal, and lingering fears of past enemies. Dafydd, a clerk, debates Arthur's decisions, criticizing him for abandoning Dumnonia, despite the clergy reminding him of the burdens of kingship. Additionally, memories surface of Ceinwyn's recovery from illness and their shared histories, yet the tension of impending conflict remains palpable.

The tranquility of the season is shattered by news of Mordred mobilizing an army, potentially bolstered by claims of revenge and ambition. Arthur's past missteps are scrutinized, and the cumbersome weight of leadership that once uplifted Britain now feels like a shackle. As preparations are made for war, Derfel can't shake the tiredness and fear that accompanies their fate, even as Bishop Sansum, praying for divine protection, hands him the sword Hywelbane. This emblem of his warrior past stirs in him the nostalgia of battle alongside a desperate hope to protect what remains of his legacy.

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Amidst these preparations, bold actions unfold as messengers are dispatched, alliances are contemplated, and the looming conflict grows ever closer. The urgent need to navigate treachery implicates Meurig and the whispers of a comeback by the Saxons, culminating in a strategic retreat to Isca. The Britons unite, ready to embark on a last stand against Mordred's forces.

As the first skirmishes transpire, the story plunges into the intensity of battle. The shield wall forms, and the ghosts of fallen warriors press to protect their kin. The forces clash brutally; blood spills on sand, swirling amidst the raging, overwhelming chaos. Despite their valor, losses mount, and despair peaks. Yet, even as hope flickers, Arthur's prowess shines through, and he becomes a beacon for the beleaguered remnants of his warriors. A climactic duel with Mordred unfolds, revealing the crumbling alliance between past and present, loyalty and ambition.

With the stakes raised, Excalibur glows with the promise of magic and destiny, embodying the threads of power woven through Arthur's bloodline. In a tragic culmination, the deaths of both kings mark the final turning point. As the whirlwind of battle settles, Derfel witnesses the birth of a new narrative for Britain, starkly entwined with loss and rebirth.

Ultimately, victory comes at a devastating cost. As the remnants regroup, Prydwen, the symbol of hope, begins her sail under a fading sun, disappearing into the mists with Arthur and the promise of a new future.

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Derfel stands, having remained true to his oaths, bidding farewell to the lost and embracing the inescapable fragility of existence. In his heart, he carries the weight of memories, oaths broken and kept—an enduring testament to the sacrifice of loyalty and love.

The narrative closes on the chilling recognition of a world forever altered, as shadows loom anew and the echoes of the past meld with the hopes yet to be realized. With Arthur gone, a haunting silence blankets the battlefield—a silence that reflects both the end of an era and the lingering question of what lies ahead for those who remain.

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