

## The Hawk and the Wolf A Conversation

In February 2009, the Yahoo discussion group Renditions of Camelot read *The Hawk and the Wolf*, and offered many and varied opinions. What follows is their comments, edited slightly so that it reads like the transcript of a conversation.

### Introduction

I became fascinated by the Arthurian legend in 1984, when I should have been studying for my first-year exams at Cartrefle College, Wrexham. I had been asked to adapt T. H. White's book *The Sword in the Stone* for possible production as a pantomime, so I went to Chester, a beautiful city near my college with Roman walls and an Elizabethan high street, to ransack its bookstores for a copy. I couldn't find *The Sword in the Stone*, but I did find *The Once and Future King*.

I was captivated. I couldn't put the book down. I found the characters fascinating, the situations deeply moving. But I knew that White had not written it all. He had left some gaps and, when I had finished reading it, I hurried to the bookstore for the source he cited so often, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. Alas, Malory left gaps too, so my search began for other sources: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, *The Mabinogion*, Chrétien de Troyes' *The Knight of the Cart*, Mary Stewart's Merlin Trilogy. It soon became obvious that, if I wanted to see a complete rendering of the Arthurian legend—one book with absolutely everything in it—I would have to write my own.

Two stories captured my imagination more than any others, both in Welsh: the poem "The Spoils of Annwn" and the prose tale "How Culhwch Won Olwen." I hit upon the idea of combining the two stories into one, so that Arthur's expedition to the Otherworld would be for the purpose of winning Culhwch's bride. But I realized also that I would need some considerable back-story. My book couldn't begin, "One day, Arthur and Culhwch decided to sail to Annwn."

That's how I hit upon the idea that at least the first half of my series should centre around the quest for Arthur's sword, Excalibur. If Arthur was to find the sword Excalibur, then I must also describe how it was lost, and why it was important to regain it.

I tried writing the book many times without success, then realized that the problem was that one book was not enough. I came up with a fifteen-book series, five trilogies, as a way of dealing with the entire subject, beginning with Brutus coming to Britain, and finishing with the death of Lancelot, 1500 years later. Almost ten years had passed now since I had first read *The Once and Future King*. I had graduated from college, I had gone on to get an MA in Arthurian Literature from the University of Wales-Bangor, I had met a wonderful woman and married her, moving to the United States in the meantime (although I met her in Wales, she's American). Other things had happened to delay my project: the need to support a family dictated a teaching career (which I love). I taught 3rd and 4th grade, English as a Second Language and, eventually, college English. I studied—not only Arthurian literature, but also medieval literature in general, Chaucer, Langland, and Shakespeare (whom I considered the last of the medieval poets, not a Renaissance man at all). I got a PhD. I taught in Florida, Georgia, and Montana.

Eventually, I found myself in Missouri, and I decided that now was the time to start my books. Taking the advice of one of my professors in graduate school, I decided that I would write for half an hour each day, whatever the cost.

I rapidly came to the conclusion that I didn't like the first three books in my series, which would have dealt with Brutus, Locrin and Gwendolyn, and Bran the Blessed. So I began work on the story of Merlin.

As I point out in the Introduction to *The Hawk and the Wolf*, there's a discrepancy between medieval versions of Merlin's story. He's a contemporary of Arthur, or at least of Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon. Yet his conception was devised by the devils as a counter-attack against God after the Resurrection of Jesus. How could Merlin live in both the first and fifth centuries?

I can't tell you what my solution was, since that would be a spoiler for my next book, *The Hawk and the Cup*. Suffice to say that the first book is set in pre-Roman Britain, the second in Roman Britain, the third in post-Roman (what some scholars call sub-Roman) Britain.

That, I think, is the most unusual feature of *The Hawk and the Wolf*. Merlin's story, normally set against the background of the Saxon invasions of the fifth century, is here set against the background of the Roman invasion of the first. Rather than being the contemporary of the usurper Vortigern, he is the contemporary of the rebel Boudicea.

Something else I point out in the Introduction is that *The Hawk and the Wolf* is not designed to be a historical novel. I'm not trying to reconstruct historical events as I believe they actually happened. Rather, I'm trying to tell a story of the legend of Merlin and Britain. My principle source in this book is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*. He didn't get his history right about the Roman invasion and, therefore, neither do I. There's a hearty dash of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, and I take something of the mood from *King Lear*. For the actual plot of Emrys' early life, I used the Lailoken episodes from Jocelin of Furness' *Life of St. Kentigern*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Life of Merlin*, and Robert de Boron's *Merlin*. Geoffrey and Jocelin are collected and translated in Peter Goodrich's book *The Romance of Merlin*; Robert de Boron's version of Merlin's story is to be found in *Merlin and the Grail*, translated by Nigel Bryant.

I never did adapt the pantomime from *The Sword in the Stone*.

Todd Jensen: "The adventure of Diwrnach's cauldron in 'Culhwch and Olwen' has often been interpreted as a variant of 'The Spoils of Annwn.' . . . Judging from your earlier comments, you include one historical figure from the period that Geoffrey of Monmouth didn't: Boudica.

I didn't make the connection between Diwrnach's Cauldron and "The Spoils of Annwn" until much later, though it's indisputably there. As for Boudicea—well, you can tell, I can't even spell her name! (Traditionally, her name has been spelled Boadicea in English, but more recently the spelling has been given as Budicca. I guess my spelling is just one way of keeping my world separate from the historical one!)

This first chapter, though, is where Emrys conceives of his desire to search for Excalibur. But what's his main motivation? Does he really want to make Britain mighty again, or is he just a sucker for a pretty girl?

Jorge Ranero: "I think that both Emrys and Boudicea are representative of freedom and victory. Boudicea, as we know, was the Queen of the Iceni who defied the Romans. Emrys (Ambrosius) led us to the name of Ambrosius Aurelianus the probable British leader in the Siege of Mount Badon—a good combination of names in the plot."

Karen Han: “Were his reasons hormonal or spiritual? I thought it was a clever touch to have Emrys falling in love with Boudicea. As in the medieval romances, once captivated by a lady, a knight would have to do her bidding. To top it off, the name Boudicea (properly *Budicca*) was an excellent etymological choice, meaning *victory*—though I suppose in Old Irish, it should have been *Buadach*, rather than *Boudi*. Through Boudicea, Britain would rise again and be victorious. Hence, Britain’s fate was inexorably linked with Boudicea’s, and Emrys may be seen here as following his heart, and serving both.”

Chapter II is about words and deeds—words that become deeds, and words that just stay words. I can’t really think of a question about that. What examples are there of words and deeds in the chapter?

Jorge: “There Cathbad’s words became alive, as you described, and deeds; also the new vision (through Cathbad’s words) represent not only the past but the future of Britain. Brutus came from Benwick (presumably, in the future of your books, Lancelot’s home) to Albion, bearing with him Excalibur (Arthur’s Sword) given to him by Argante (the name given to the Fairy that received Arthur in Avalon after Camlann according to Layamon’s *Brut*). The world of the story always exists or has real existence in the mind of its creator/writer. But you separated in the text ‘words that became deeds (alive)’ from words that just stayed as words. Therefore, not all has real existence as it seems, in the fiction.”

I guess what I was intending here was something that’s pretty common in my books—the idea that the world of story is somehow more real than the world we live in. I know it sounds silly, but things always work out right in books, and they seldom do in real life. Justice is never done perfectly in real life. Or is it? Perhaps we only think justice doesn’t work out properly because we haven’t read the story we are in—the story of our lives—to the end yet. In that way, a book is only unlike life because it has an ending, and our life hasn’t yet.

Jorge: “You wrote, Mark: ‘Coroticus, a remarkable man but a man.’ Does this imply that Coroticus—despite his greatness—was not the Man in fact?”

Well, he’s not really the man destined to carry Excalibur! Coroticus, whose name is usually spelled Caractacus, was a historical person, one of the tribal chieftains of Britain who resisted the Roman invasion in AD 43.

Karen: “When I first read the name ‘Coroticus,’ I found myself thinking of the tyrannical 5<sup>th</sup> century king of Strathclyde who was turned into a wolf by St. Patrick. The Latin name ‘Coroticus’ later became in Welsh ‘Ceredig’ (rustic/rural), whereas Caratacus became ‘Caradawg’ (love/amicability). The name Rhydderch was recorded as ‘Roderco’ in the 6<sup>th</sup> century *Life of St. Columcille* and ‘Rodarchus’ in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Life of Merlin*. Perhaps there’s a chance to release a second edition with more uniform names?”

Good point, Karen. It's a question of how the names all fit into your fictional world, though. Although I wouldn't want to be too strict about it, I'd decided to use names ending in -us for Roman characters, and to convert all names to -os endings for the Brittonic characters. The spellings are all idiosyncratic to me, anyway. My model here is Shakespeare. He changed the name of Belleforest's character Hamblet to Hamlet (to echo the name of a person he might have known in his youth, who drowned herself); he changed the name of the historical Sir John Oldcastle to Sir John Falstaff (perhaps unwillingly); and he changed Romeus and Julietta to Romeo and Juliet, largely, I think, to make them scan properly. Incidentally, in the earliest sources, Juliet's name is spelled (if I remember rightly) *Giulietta di Capuletti*, and Romeo's *Romeo dei Monteschi*. You can see why the original names wouldn't have caught on in Elizabethan England.

What I was looking for with my names was a way to subconsciously identify them with the different cultures I'd be describing in the books. So I do slightly misspell the names. I'm sorry if it's been confusing to people who know far more than I do about first and fifth century history, though. It's fantasy, not historical, but that doesn't mean that anything necessarily goes. All choices, particularly of names, have to be consonant with the cultures that you depict, even if you invented them.

There are two names that are a bit more romantic than the others. *Boudicea* is one of them, and the other is *Cymbeline*. *Boudicea* is, as you point out, the English spelling—well, almost. The English spelling is *Boadicea*. I wanted the name to be right in between the two—neither one nor the other, as the world of my books is almost, but not quite, historical. *Cymbeline* is really a kind of double of *Coroticos*, an entirely fictional character. Since he's the one who wants to collude with the Romans, I wanted to give him a name that felt different, so I stole the name from Shakespeare. Oscar Wilde once wrote, "Good poets borrow; great poets steal."

A good reason for misspelling names like *Boudicea* and *Cymbeline* is that I don't want readers feeling too comfortable fitting my novel into any known chronology. If I've done my job well, it should have its own internally consistent chronology. As one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century said, "You must unlearn what you have learned."

Karen: "Just some quick questions about your choice of *Caratacus* as High King in your first book. *Caratacus*, of course, has been proposed as the original historical model for King Arthur. Were you consciously turning him into Arthur while writing your novel, or will you be introducing us to another Arthur in your third book?"

Poor Merlin. He certainly seems to think that *Coroticos* will carry *Excalibur*, but the rest of us who know the Arthurian legend know that the one who's actually going to carry *Excalibur* won't even be born for another four hundred years. I can't tell you exactly when I'll be revealing Arthur; I'll just say that it takes a lot of preparation. Merlin has a long way to go yet!

Karen: "Now, you left us with a cliff-hanger, with the battle lost, and *Coroticos* nowhere among

the slain. History tells us exactly where to find him next, among the Silures in south Wales. Is this where you'll be taking us in your second book? Or will it be a book about Boudicea's revolt?"

Here's one of the problems with writing fiction based (even partially) on history. History itself is the spoiler. It would be cheating, really, to introduce a character called Boudicea and then not have her be the Queen of the Iceni and rebel against Rome. That would be like writing a novel in which the Titanic didn't sink. But Caratacus is not nearly so well-known a figure, so I felt I had a little more wiggle room there. Book II, *The Hawk and the Cup*, will open some years after the battle of Mai Dun, when Coroticos has been leading a guerilla war against the Romans. But it's been inconclusive, and he's seeking an alliance with Cartimandua in order to deliver the Romans a decisive defeat. That's not really what the book is about, though. It's a little more wide-ranging than that.

Karen: "What I also found a boost was your introduction of Vespasian. I'll certainly be interested to know if you'll write about Vespasian's massacre of thousands of civilians in the south west of Britain, and the site of one of the most notorious massacres in history—at the site of Cadbury, where he decided to make an example of its resisting inhabitants. Is that going to be in your next book as well?"

It was interesting to me that Vespasian led the XX Augusta, the legion that defeated the Britons at Maiden Castle (Mai Dun in my book). He later became Emperor Vespasian and, according to medieval legend, rescued Joseph of Arimathea from imprisonment in Jerusalem. That was more the connection I wanted to make, rather than with the Cadbury massacre.

Bill Tolliver: "I can't say she was my favorite person, but the Beautiful but Evil Woman has fascinated readers—particularly men, I think—from time out of mind, and appears in many incarnations. I can't say I found Morgana lovable of course, but I want to see more of her, and am sure I will in the future stories by Mark. I felt that all the characters were well drawn, and I even found myself liking the Roman general. He seemed to be most generous in victory, something that winners in war aren't always noted for. I noted that he introduced an early form of 'gun control' right away. 'Y'all don't need your weapons anymore, we'll take care of you.' 'We know what's best for you' are probably the six words most often used to enslave people throughout history, along with the five, 'It's for your own good.'" Good job with all of it, Mark.

I'm glad you liked Vespasian, Bill. Those chapters were quite moving to write. And, given the later trajectory of the books, I didn't want to leave my readers with the feeling that the Romans were irredeemable villains. I wanted a connection between the Britons and Romans at that point—something that at least had the potential to develop into respect and even camaraderie. As Karen pointed out earlier, he wasn't a very nice person historically. But that's another part of his story, and not one that I'm going near.

As for Morgana . . . well, the challenge is to find different things to do with evil sirens. We'll see more of her, but she really has to stay in the background, and let her human puppets carry out most of her designs.

Karen: “I would be curious to know how you’re going to weave in the story of Emrys making it to the 5<sup>th</sup> century and actually being physically present at Arthur’s court. Unless, of course, he won’t be in Part III, and Part III will be the story of the Grail? Another method, I suppose, would be to introduce another character called Ambrosius. This would be a walk in the park, and all too easy, but perhaps if you prefer a more challenging, thought-provoking route, there’s a 4<sup>th</sup> century St. Ambrosius who may have been the mythological prototype for “Merlin and the story of the Grail.”

On my website, there are some teaser synopses, if you’re interested in guessing at how the books will develop in the future. Books 1-3 are already written, and just waiting for Book 1 to be a runaway success so that they can get the go-ahead from Westbank. Books 4-6 have been written too, but I need to re-draft them, which I’m about 10% done with.

William Russeth: “I am enjoying the book. On the Druids, I thought you did a good job of presenting them. Since little is known, it gives the author some creative latitude. Not sure Druids had books for Emrys to study nor would I expect to find a library anywhere in Britain. I do not think Celtic peoples were writing much down before they were Romanized. Druids were actually opposed to writing.”

That’s right. Brittonic society before the Roman invasion was pre-literate. That’s like my more centralized society—in reality, there was no High King of Britain at this time, there were just a bunch of tribes with very loose cultural ties. I centralize authority in my Island of the Mighty because it ups the ante as far as what’s at stake. Similarly, with the writing, I wanted to give an impression of a society that had developed a little more than Brittonic society really had. That way, when the Romans attack, something really very valuable indeed is at risk of being lost. Not that tribal society isn’t valuable—but that’s a much tougher sell.

William: “The Druid practice of human sacrifice has been both supported and contended. The Romans thought Druids practiced it and were mortified by it. I guess killing people in the arena was civilized, but Druid sacrifice was despicable. My opinion is that the threat of human sacrifice kicks up the plot tension a notch and is great for a story. Will Emrys be forced to murder someone to control his power? I like it. Also, I am curious about the seemingly national identity that these people have. I think of pre-Roman Britain as being an intermesh of tribal groupings. Are these people thinking of themselves as a nation? Finally, that torrid library scene, was it based on a personal library experience?”

That scene combines two of my favourite things: books and political intrigue. Enough said.

On the British political scene at the time. Yes, historically there was no real central government in Britain when the Romans invaded in AD 43. They were a bunch of independent tribes, among whom the Catuvellauni were probably the most influential. However, I wanted my book to be of something more than local importance, so I designed an ahistorical world whose passing would be a thing of tremendous importance.

Fortunately for me, I didn't have to go very far for a model. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, Britain is not only united, but it is also a power that is almost equal to Rome! Once again, I'm not portraying events or society historically—I just want to write a good story.

Jacqui Emerson: "It's a bold venture to mix historical characters in a fantasy time frame—it could be difficult for your readers; it certainly makes them think. Interesting that you have little or no magic apart from Emrys' visions (which aren't magic)—a few Druid tricks but that's all. All in all, an unusual combination. What made you settle on that plan?"

That's a difficult question to answer, since it was a decision I made so long ago that I'd almost forgotten. I think it goes back to a conversation in an Olive Garden restaurant with my wife, when we had first got married. And we just celebrated our nineteenth anniversary! She pointed out to me that you can't just have magic popping in and out of your story—it's all got to come from somewhere. So I started thinking: where does the magic in my stories come from? It's systematic, because reality is systematic—cars run on gasoline/petroleum, not on vinegar, gravity pulls us down, and doesn't sometimes push us upwards. So I wrote a lot of backstory to account for the presence of what magic there is. I don't want to give anything away, but I'll give you all a clue. There are three different sources for Emrys' visions, and two different sources for druidic power.

Karen: "Yes, that's what Tolkien was mulling over as he was writing *The Lord of the Rings*. He wanted to equip the wizard Gandalf with magical powers, but he knew he couldn't have lightning bolts shooting from his fingertips, so he turned him into some sort of fallen angel figure, with his magic stemming from the Valar. One of my favourite episodes in your book was the part when Emrys looked at Vespasian and prophesied that he was going to become the future Emperor of Rome. I thought that was pretty "druidic."

Jacqui: "By the way, Mark, where is your Mai Dun? There are several Maiden Castles around the Wiltshire/Dorset area but the only important that one I know of is *the Maiden Castle* near Dorchester."

I had imagined Mai Dun as Maiden Castle in Dorset. I don't think that I got the landscape right, but I believe archaeological digs uncovered a grave of several individuals with food and drink but without weapons, and heaps of slingshots.

As an aside, it's really difficult writing a book set in Britain when you can't actually get there. The best I can imagine, until I have some bestsellers under my belt in the order of Bernard Cornwell (!) and can actually travel, is using Google Earth, where you can sometimes get a vague idea of topography. Not that I particularly want accuracy—it's fantasy, after all, not historical fiction.

There's a new review of *The Hawk and the Wolf* on Barnes and Noble: "Took a little time to get into the language, then couldn't put it down. It was recommended to me by my daughter. Good read for male and female. Can't wait for next book." Is this a common experience with the book? Is the language difficult or daunting?

Laurel Bradshaw: “I just started it today, and quite like it so far. No, I don’t find the language difficult, but then I didn’t find Tolstoy’s *Coming of the King* difficult either. LOL! I was quite amused at the end of Chapter One where Emrys’ mother says ‘Wait until you are nine.’ I had assumed Emrys was more like 16 up until then. Was this intentional? Portraying him as older than his years perhaps? Anyway, it was a nice twist. Hope it continues!”

William: “I would like to read the whole review. Is it on the BN website? The first comment, ‘Took a little time to get into the language, then couldn’t put it down.’ It is a favorable comment, but I do not see it at all. I thought your style and language were very easy to read. My only negative was that I thought it was too short.”

Jacqui: “I haven’t found any problems with the language—it’s well written and as William says, it has much rich imagery. The language wasn’t archaic or pseudo archaic—what a strange comment. One particular description I like is the dawn of a typical English day:

The creeping grey light of dawn grew about Mai Dun. It could not be called sunrise, for there was no moment at which light broke out over the Great Plain. The light seeped into the night, like damp through the planking of a ship. The clouds overhead were thick, the light reluctant, the air damp and cold.”

Jacqui: “How do you feel about Mark’s characters? Of course, the main character is Emrys who is extremely well portrayed. I found the way in which Mark developed his character interesting. As he grows up he develops quite a talent for philosophy. I found I felt quite sorry for him at times having to follow his path which isn’t always what he would like it to be! How did you arrive at your particular Merlin, Mark? Is he a composite of the many Merlins in fiction or did spring from your imagination? Did you find that he did indeed grow/develop/change as you wrote or did you conceive of him as he is? Do you have a favourite character, Mark?”

Merlin grew. I knew what he had to do, so I just asked myself, what kind of person would do these things? For me, the most interesting part of the whole thing was the question, how would a young, inexperienced boy respond to having the Sight? My major creative input was the nature of the Sight itself—pulling Merlin in different directions, descending upon him unpredictably, yet with an overarching pattern to it all.

I would say that Merlin is my favourite character, but I also like Cathbhad very much, and Coroticos grew on me as I wrote him. He became unexpectedly heroic at Mai Dun. But, of course, I was just completely in love with Boudicea. She resembles in some ways a certain American woman of my acquaintance, but I can’t tell you whom.

Karen: “Mark, do you see yourself as Emrys in your novels, or I guess I should ask, are you Emrys?”

I suppose I am Emrys, in answer to your question. At least, Emrys is what I’d look like if I had any skills at all. The only time I’ve ever written a central character who isn’t really me is in *The Hawk and the Huntress*, book 3, in which the central character is a girl, Nymve (Nimue, Nineve or Vivian in the standard versions of the story). She’s radically

different from me in almost every way. And she's a girl, of course. It's always difficult to write a character of the opposite sex.

Kathleen Guler: "I like Emrys very much, too, and how he grew into his destiny. The image of the intertwining paths perfectly reflected his conflicts. I also really like Boudicea's sense of leadership of her people played against her love for Emrys. The premise of starting all the way back in the 1st century is really intriguing and makes me want to know how it all plays out. How many books did I hear will there be altogether?"

I'm planning twelve books altogether. I've finished the first three, and have drafts of books 4-6 (I'm nearly finished with book 4) and detailed synopses of the rest. Here are the titles (hopefully intriguing):

The Hawk and the Wolf  
The Hawk and the Cup  
The Hawk and the Huntress  
The Heroes of Annwn  
The Lady of Annwn  
The Spoils of Annwn  
The Knight of the Cart  
The Knight of the Pentangle  
The Knight of the Fair Hands  
The Vessel of Eirin  
The Vessel of God  
The Vessel of Avalon

Todd Jensen: "As Kathleen Guler pointed out, that *is* an impressive number of books; I hope you can get them all written and published. (I can guess at the subject matters of the three 'Knight' books.)"

Jacqui: "Thank you for being brave enough to let us discuss *The Hawk and the Wolf*. It must be pretty daunting! I for one enjoyed it—I thought you portrayed the development of a young man's character from a boy to a man admirably. Not only had he to grow up but had to cope with the contradictions of the Sight! The growth of Emrys physically, emotionally and spiritually was what the book was about for me anyway, the setting in which he grew up was an additional delight. Thanks again—looking forward to Book 2—when will it be published?"

Thank you, Jacqui. No date on *The Hawk and the Cup* yet. I have to sell a few more copies of *The Hawk and the Wolf* before my publisher will commit to it.

Karen: "According to one of my publisher friends, the normal procedure in the publishing world is to wait for the sales figures to come in after a year. That's when they do the accounts and send out royalties. A thousand copies would be good; two thousand is considered very good for a first book."

Bill Tolliver's Final Word:

I am neither a scholar nor an historian, and fortunately the early ages of Britain are not a time when we can point to an event being described and say with certainty whether it happened this way or not. But that does not seem to matter. When I read *The Hawk and the Wolf*, I was immediately pulled into the milieu of the author's world, and I believed it. The description of Emrys' passage from childhood into manhood had the ring of truth, as did the sweetness and pain of first love described therein.

Stanislavsky said that memory of emotion was the key to re-creating it on the stage. I believe it is also the way to portray it in the pages of a book. When I read of Emrys' feelings toward Boudicea when they were both children, it brought to mind the way I felt at that age about a girl I saw as the Swamp Angel in Gene Stratton-Porter's books of the Limberlost Country. I think Mark must sometime have found his own version of the Swamp Angel to portray the feelings so vividly.

The descriptions of battle were equally vivid. I felt that I was right there watching the Walking Walls of Rome, the most sophisticated and implacable killing machine of ancient times, and perhaps of our own times as well. As teenagers in Latin class we struggled through Caesar's *Commentaries*, and I am sure Mark did so as well. His description of how Romans fought was spot-on. I only hope my own are equally vivid and credible.

I don't think any modern contributor to the Arthurian saga can say with certainty "This is how it was." But Mark can certainly say with certainty, "This is how it may have been." At the end of the first book I am eager to delve into the next one.

So congratulations, Mark. Yours is a worthy addition to the Arthurian canon.