The First Battle

Arthur chose the city of Camelot for his capital and, at first, his presence brought a lull of peace. But the kings who ruled other parts of Britain were jealous of this unknown boy, the supposed King of all Britain, and they sent him a message. "We are coming to put you in your proper place. Be ready for us."

When Merlin heard this, he led Arthur into Camelot's strongest castle tower and asked his most loyal knights to protect him. Before long, the hostile kings and hundreds of knights had surrounded the castle, and were baying for Arthur's blood.

After two weeks, Merlin came out of the castle. The kings and knights started yelling at once: "Why is this beardless *boy* called King of all Britain? Why should we bow to him?"

"He'll never rule us!"

"He's a child! He's never fought in his life!"

"Silence, all of you!" Merlin thundered. "Listen, and I will tell you wondrous things."

A hush descended on the crowd as the great wizard spoke in his calm, clear voice. "The darkness that surrounds these lands is greater

than all of you and will consume you unless you heed my words. I have seen a shining path through the darkness, and Arthur is the one to lead the way along it.

"Even now, in the enchanted Isle of Avalon, where magic dwells, the wondrous sword Excalibur is waiting for its true owner, Arthur. With this sword, Arthur will do many great deeds.

"Arthur, only son of the great King Uther Pendragon, is your rightful king. He will be the best knight and the greatest ruler this realm has ever known. He will be good, generous, and just. He shall make this kingdom truly great, for a time, before darkness rules again."

When Merlin finished speaking, the crowd remained silent. Many knights were won over by

the wizard's words. They fell to their knees and vowed their allegiance to Arthur.

But others dismissed Merlin as a dreamer. As the gaunt figure disappeared back inside the tower, they whispered among themselves. "Why should we listen to him? Leave him to his spells," they said. "He's meddling in something he doesn't understand."

Inside the tower, Merlin told Arthur what had happened. "The time for battle has come," he said. "There are now many more knights who will fight on your side. But you have no choice. You must fight your enemies. But do not be afraid, for they will never defeat you. Not even if they had ten times as many men!"

And so, the next morning, Merlin helped Arthur into his armour. And, although Arthur

had never fought in battle, and he knew his men were outnumbered, he had faith that Merlin was right. He mounted his horse, ready to enter his first battle.

"Arthur, you must fight with good spirit," Merlin said. "But listen to me: fight with your old sword. Do not use the sword you pulled from the stone. Not until you feel the battle is lost."

With Merlin's words ringing in his ears, Arthur charged out of the castle, his loyal knights beside him. He flung himself into battle not like a boy, as his enemies had expected, but like a fearless lion.

His opponents fell back in surprise, but they soon rose up again. Wave after wave of soldiers rushed at him, and his knights fell by the dozen.

'He held it up and the light flooded the sky,
piercing the clouds with its brilliance.'

Then, as Arthur struggled on against the tide of enemies, a spear flew and knocked him from his horse. He looked up to see a knight looming over him, ready to strike. "All is lost," he thought. Then Merlin's words flashed into his mind, and he reached for the sword that had come from the stone.

As he drew it, the blade glowed with a bright, golden light. He held it up and the light flooded the sky, piercing the clouds with its brilliance. Men on all sides drew back, terrified, as Arthur jumped back into his saddle and charged, the power of the sword surging into him. As light faded from the blade, so Arthur's power grew.

Knights fled before his sword and, by nightfall, his enemies had all surrendered. King Arthur's first battle was won.