

MICHAEL MORPURGO, *Arthur, High King of Britain*. illustrated by Michael Foreman. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995. Pp. 137. ISBN: 0-15-200080-1. \$19.95.

ANNE MCCAFFREY, *Black Horses for the King*. San Diego. New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996. Pp. 217. ISBN: 0-15-227322-0. \$16.

JANE YOLEN, *Passager*. San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace & company, 1996. Pp. 76. ISBN: 0-15-200391-6. \$15.

Everyone knows the story of how Arthur became *High King of Britain*. This book retells, from the point of view of Arthur, some classic tales of Camelot. Of course, it tells the traditional story of Arthur's past, but it also recounts Guinevere's past, along with that of Launcelot. It also tells of 'Gawain and the Green Knight' and 'Tristram and Iseult.' Michael Morpurgo has very realistically recreated the vast kingdom of Arthur in his book *Arthur, High King of Britain*.

These stories are some the most famous ever told, but I think they have lasted because they transport the reader to a time long since past. They have also lasted because they are entertaining. I recommend these stories to all readers.

Black Horses for the King by Anne McCaffrey is one of the best books I have ever read. It is the story of the beginning of the art of farriers. Lord Artos (Arthur) goes to Septimania to buy some hefty Libyan horses to carry him and his companions into battle against the Saxon hordes. On the boat to Septimania, he meets a very helpful boy, Galwyn Varianus, the main character. Galwyn knows many of the barbaric tongues of the territory, therefore proving himself invaluable to Artos and his knights Bwlch and Bericus in haggling over the price of the horses.

The group has many exciting adventures on their journey to Deva, the location of Artos's horse farm. At Deva, Galwyn is asked to help break in the new Libyans. During this time of constant riding, Galwyn dislocates his right shoulder twice, finally breaking his left arm. While his arms are healing, Galwyn makes himself helpful to Master Ilfor, the blacksmith. He gains knowledge and muscle while pumping the bellows. Galwyn also continues to learn from Canyd Bawn, Artos's horsekeeper, about horse care.

Artos finally sends a troop of soldiers to bring the Libyans to Camelot. The leader of the troop is skeptical at first, but includes Galwyn in the troop. At Camelot, Artos shows off his new steeds to other knights and lords. He also offers Galwyn a chance to stay at Camelot. Galwyn turns down this generous offer, saying he has not learned enough for the esteemed position.

Galwyn returns to Deva to continue his learning. When he feels he is sufficiently competent, he rides for Camelot. Upon his return, he teaches all of Artos's master blacksmiths to make the iron sandals. When Arthur is satisfied that his smiths know the trade, he makes Galwyn the official royal messenger. Since Galwyn must hurry in his new job, he is given a new horse, a gray named Raven who is a wonderfully fast horse.

Meanwhile, Artos has learned that the Saxons have penetrated deeper into Britain. Soon Artos's forces leave Camelot to contest the advances of the Saxon hordes, and

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Galwyn is given a special place in the column between Bwlch and Bericus. Artos's forces rout the Saxons in this, the first battle of Glein. The fast-paced action of this book kept my attention. I recommend this book for all readers.

Passager by Jane Yolen retells a part of the Arthur saga that is much less known. Merlin is generally a shady character, but this book delves deeper into his ever shadier past. Most do not know that Merlin was abandoned in the woods for a year at age seven. He was brought up by a woodsman who has a fondness for falconry.

In the beginning of the story, Merlin is gathering nuts and berries in the woods. He has one true fear—dogs. He hates dogs because he is always plagued by a pack of ruthless dogs. He is forced to sleep in trees to escape these curs. One day he wakes up to see a falconer trying to coax his bird out of the tree. Merlin follows the man home and is taken in by him and his wife who try to tame the poor wild boy.

Merlin is intrigued by the man's birds. One night, the boy goes to see the birds, not realizing that he is downwind of the pack of dogs. Suddenly the pack attacks him, but the falconer's loyal dogs defend Merlin and he is saved.

This book is a fast read. In short, I recommend *Passager* to readers of all ages as a fine book to sit down when one has a little free time.

Two of these three books stuck to the true Arthur story line while the third was about Merlin. All of these books are very believable because of the character relationships. I enjoyed all of these books very much.

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