

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

2400 THIRD AVENUE SOUTH

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404

612-872-5108

FAX 612-874-8119

King Arthur and the Magic Sword

Adapted for the Stage by
Frederick Gaines

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Cast of Characters

- Merlin
- Arthur
- Kay
- Bedwyr
- Ector
- Drusilla
- Pellinore
- Tancred
- Uther
- Cador
- Stag, High Priest of the Hill People
- Woad
- Singer
- Meg

Ensemble includes: Warlords, Soldiers, Hill People

Scenic Design Notes

The setting for the original production of King Arthur and the Magic Sword, as designed by Jack Barkla, consisted of a raked circular platform extending over the orchestra pit. The platform was textured and painted to suggest stone. Entrances existed via ramps immediately upstage of the proscenium wall, from the stage floor immediately downstage of the proscenium wall, and stairway units leading up from the orchestra pit. The platform utilized a hydraulic elevator concealed by a floor plug to allow the sword stone to rise up from the center of the stage. The proscenium opening was modified to echo the circular shape of the platform. Upstage was a black scrim behind which a rear-projection screen for slides and film to provide environments and special effects; this screen was also masked to conform to the circle design motif. Flying units: screens of metal vertical and/or horizontal slats, hanging fabric, etc. were also used. Small rolling carts, a stone wall, a runestone, carry-on stools, benches, and tables completed the environments. A rolling platform with levels, covered in black velour, shifted to various locations between the platform and scrim to allow characters to appear as "hovering" in the void.

KING ARTHUR AND THE MAGIC SWORD was presented without intermission. Approximate running time of the play was one hour, thirty minutes.

KING ARTHUR AND THE MAGIC SWORD

Prologue

VOICE There was an ancient land without a king -- a land broken by war. And the warlords of the land fought, for each would be its king.
From the blood spilled in their battle, a dragon was born to give its name to the mightiest warrior. That name was Pendragon.
But still the land had no High King.
From the roar of the dragon a wizard rose, called Merlin.

(A pool of light rises on MERLIN who stands amidst swirling fog.)

And Merlin sang to the land for a sign. The heavens burned a star through the night and from the star a sword was made.

(MERLIN turns upstage and reaches toward the sword Excalibur which hovers in the air above.)

A sword that was called Excalibur.

(Lights have faded on the hovering sword and MERLIN turns downstage, holding Excalibur in his hand and approaches a stone which rises up from the floor center stage.)

MERLIN Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone is rightwise king of all Britain!

(MERLIN takes Excalibur and inserts it into the stone with a crash of thunder. Lights fade.)

VOICE And still the warlords fought to win the title of Pendragon!

(WARLORDS and their SOLDIERS enter and fight.)

UTHER Merlin! Help me! Make me Pendragon and you may have what you want!

MERLIN (Hovering in the void above the battle.) My magic is not given cheaply, Uther.

UTHER I will give you anything! Anything! But give *me* Pendragon!

MERLIN I will have your first born son.

UTHER Never!

CADOR (Entering.) Uther, never shall you be Pendragon!

UTHER (A growl before attack.) Cador!

(CADOR and UTHUR fight.)

UTHER Merlin! Make me Pendragon!

MERLIN Your son, Uther. That is the bargain.

UTHER No! Never!

(Fighting continues. UTHER loses his spear and is at the mercy of CADOR and his MEN.)

UTHER Merlin!

MERLIN Swear it!

UTHER To you I give my first born son!

MERLIN Then you shall be Pendragon.

(With a gesture from MERLIN, UTHER's lost spear flies magically back into his hands. The battle continues with UTHER driving away CADOR and his MEN. The other WARLORDS and SOLDIERS gather around UTHER and force him to step near the stone which holds Excalibur.)

SOLDIER If you are Pendragon, then draw the sword, Uther! Let us know if you might be High King as well!

(WARLORDS and KNIGHTS urge UTHER to test the sword in the stone. Instead, UTHER whirls upon the SOLDIER who spoke the challenge.)

UTHER I need only *this* sword to rule this land!

(UTHER slays the SOLDIER.)

Do any others challenge me?!

(None do.)

I am Pendragon!

(The MEN sweep UTHER up onto their shoulders and carry him off with a chant.)

MERLIN We have a bargain, Uther.

(Lights fade, then immediately rise again on the silhouettes and voices of UTHER and his wife IGRAINE. We hear the cry of a newborn infant.)

IGRAINE (Voice.) No, Uther! Don't take him...!

UTHER (Voice.) I made a vow.

IGRAINE (Voice.) Not my child...!

(The cries of the child grow nearer and we see UTHER step to MERLIN and hand him a baby in swaddling clothes.)

UTHER Here is our bargain, Merlin. He is no son of mine.

IGRAINE (Voice.) My son! My son! My son!

(UTHER turns back and walks into the darkness as MERLIN carries the child away.)

MERLIN There, there, sweet bairn -- hush now. Have no fear -- from great evil may be born yet greater good. Yes -- far from the den of the dragon thy father I do now deliver thee. For one day thou shalt be High King and wear the crown. That I promise thee.

(A shadowy figure -- WOAD -- emerges from the darkness and MERLIN hands to him the child. Thunder.)

(At another place on the stage we see the figures of ECTOR and DRUSILLA.)

DRUSILLA Husband! Let me come with you. . . .

ECTOR Stay, woman. I was told to bring no one.
(He separates from her.)
What ho! Is any there?

MERLIN (From the darkness.) To a friend of Britain, I am here:

ECTOR Know that I am that.
(MERLIN comes forward.)
Merlin!! *How* sent for me? Why?

(WOAD appears with the baby and hands it to MERLIN who, in turn, gives it to ECTOR.)

MERLIN Into your care, Ector -- far from the strife and bloody battles. Keep him as your own. I will never be far away. When the time comes, I will be here.

DRUSILLA (Coming down as MERLIN exits.) Husband?

ECTOR Drusilla! A child.
(A sudden thought, he calls into the night.)
Merlin?! What are we to call him?

MERLIN (Offstage. Echoing.) Arthur.

(They exit as the lights fade to Blackout.)

(Lights rise on a clearing with a large runestone. As the echo of MERLIN's voice fades, we hear KAY and ARTHUR as they approach.)

KAY Arthur? Arthur -- I don't think we ought to be here.

ARTHUR But it grows by the stone. I know I saw some last time I was here.

KAY (Entering after ARTHUR and looking about.) What is this place?

ARTHUR Temple. The Hill People.

KAY (Quickly crossing himself.) Let's never mind, Arthur; Mother'll have something.

ARTHUR Nothing as good as wound-wort. It'll take your bruise right away.

KAY If you'd only followed the rules. . .

ARTHUR In battle there are no rules.

KAY "Battle"?! I thought we were just practicing. . .

ARTHUR (He spies the herb and picks some.) There! Wound-wort!

KAY But that's just yarrow weeds!

ARTHUR That's what you call it, but it's wound-wort all right.

KAY What are you going to do with it?

ARTHUR Make it into a poultice for your eye. . .

KAY Not my eye, you're not.

ARTHUR Now, Kay -- it won't hurt. All the Hill People use it.

(KAY looks at it skeptically.)

Need some water though. Run back and bring some from the butterhouse.

KAY They'll ask where we've been . . . what we've been doing. . .

ARTHUR Then don't let yourself be seen. Hurry now.

(KAY, still uncertain, exits. ARTHUR takes some rocks on the ground and piles them into a sort of pyre, then places the weeds on top.)

Good old wound-wort!

MERLIN (From behind the stone.) And in the Latin known as *Achillea Millefolium*.

ARTHUR What?

MERLIN (Appearing into view.) *Achillea Millefolium*. The thousand leaves of Achilles.

ARTHUR He was just now talking to me.

KAY We're getting out of here.

ARTHUR About wound-wort.

KAY (Almost spooked; pulling ARTHUR after him.) Now!

ARTHUR Cures baldness, he said.

(KAY grabs the wound-wort from ARTHUR's hand and throws it down, then turns away.)

KAY Weeds! Hill People's temple!

ARTHUR (As they exit.) And he knew Latin. . . .

(They are off. Slight beat and then MERLIN steps out from behind the stone, picks up the wound-wort and chews it thoughtfully.

(Music. Lights alter to focus on MERLIN and the figure of Uther hovering in the void. They speak to one another through the power of alchemy.)

UTHER Merlin?

MERLIN Uther? I've been wondering when again you might call for me. It's been sixteen years.

UTHER I want your help.

MERLIN I helped you once.

UTHER Yes -- you made me Pendragon.

MERLIN I made a bargain. That's all. Your own strength and thirst for power made you Pendragon.

UTHER I want the High King's sword, Merlin.

MERLIN Excalibur waits to be drawn from the stone.

UTHER Is it a sword I can draw?

MERLIN It will know the High King's hand.

UTHER If you place my hand upon it, the sword will come free.

MERLIN No, Uther. I could not take it myself.

UTHER Then I shall continue to rule the land with the sword I have!

MERLIN Yes -- for Excalibur was made to serve the land, not rule over it.

UTHER So be it!

(Lights fade to Blackout.)

(Lights rise on the central yard of ECTOR's stronghold. It is filled with activity: a lazy BOY is being scolded by the cook MEG, wood is being carried in, TANCRED, the one-armed swordmaster sits as his beard is trimmed, a KITCHEN MAID is churning butter, a PRIEST is crossing the courtyard. ECTOR enters with a pot of ale in his hand, listening with half an ear to his wife DRUSILLA, who enters on his heels.)

DRUSILLA . . . now Ector, though we don't know the boy's father, I'm certain he'll expect his son to be given a full program of instruction, not just "catch as catch can" as our own two have been raised.

ECTOR Kay and Kit were taught the way I was.

DRUSILLA Husband! Times change.

ECTOR Yes, they get worse!

(A call to MEG as she exits.)

Meg? Did you make this ale?

DRUSILLA Ector!

ECTOR Yes, yes, listening! Now what was the name again of this would-be knight we're supposed to train?

DRUSILLA Bedwyr. Bedwyr ap Gryffyn. And he must have a proper tutor. Latin and mathematics and his catechism. . . .

ECTOR Oh, Lord. . . !

DRUSILLA Yes, "Oh, Lord!" I won't have him raised up as a rough country boy praying to gods in the woods the way you and Kit do.

ECTOR Give this Bedwyr to your old priest then.

DRUSILLA But his Latin is not what it might be and he couldn't put two and two . . .

ECTOR Then what would you have me do? Tutors don't grow on trees.

DRUSILLA You needn't do a thing. Just accept the one I've sent for.

(DRUSILLA exits to her work.)

ECTOR What?! You sent for one to come *live* here?!

ARTHUR (Coming in after KAY.) Father? Father!

ECTOR Ho, boys. Come have a taste with me.

ARTHUR Why won't he believe me, Father?

ECTOR Because Kay's a self-centered lout. Believe what, Kit?

ARTHUR Believe that I saw a man at the stone.

(ECTOR turns to a SOLDIER as a litter passes by with a corpse upon it.)

ECTOR Your man?

SOLDIER Dead, sir. . . but we couldn't leave him behind, could we? Not alone out there, could we?

ECTOR Kay, help them. Have your mother fetch her priest.

(SOLDIERS exit. ECTOR turns to ARTHUR again.)

The warlords have finally brought their battles to our home, Kit. Peace is gone for us now.

BEDWYR Then let us join in battle!

ECTOR Huh? Lord, I've forgotten our young knight! You're all right, boy?

BEDWYR I am, sir.

ECTOR Welcome. Bedwyr, is it?

BEDWYR Yes, sir.

ECTOR (Seeing MERLIN, but not recognizing him.) And what we got here?

BEDWYR A scholar, sir.

MERLIN Your wife Drusilla sent for me, sir.

ECTOR Yes, unh-huh, right, told me. Tutor.

(Turning back to BEDWYR.)

And look at this great lump of a fellow! Can't be only fifteen.

BEDWYR Just turning it, sir.

ECTOR What a pair of arms and legs on you! You'll make a meat pie of poor old Tancred in your sword lessons.

(Remembering MERLIN.)

And'll do proud in Latin and all that as well, don't you think?

MERLIN One would hope.

ECTOR (Slight hesitation; unsure how to answer.) Yes. Well.

(To BEDWYR again.)

So -- this is young Kit and he'll show you anything you've a mind to see. The weapons shed, eh? Muck about a bit in the hawking house?

BEDWYR If it's not too much trouble.

ECTOR Trouble? It's what a man's made to do. Show it to him, will you, Kit?

ARTHUR Yes, Father.

(ARTHUR leads BEDWYR off as ECTOR looks after them fondly.)

ECTOR A pair of as likely lads as you'll want to see. And a strong one, that Bedwyr is.
(Back to MERLIN.)
So. Yes. As to your recompense and accomodations...

MERLIN You old fool.

ECTOR ... my wife'll be talking to you about all of that... What was that?

MERLIN Balding, short of sight, bad memory...

ECTOR If it's me you're referring to, Latin Master...!

MERLIN It's me.

ECTOR I can damned well see it's you....

MERLIN No you can't, you great fat-headed sentimental ale-guzzling...

ECTOR Merlin?

MERLIN Finally.

ECTOR Merlin?!

MERLIN You want all to hear?

ECTOR Old friend and warrior! Couldn't send word you were coming?!

MERLIN (As ECTOR thumps him on the back.) None are to know!

ECTOR What...? Oh... Oh, right.

ECTOR (A grin.) Do we tell the wife?

MERLIN Time enough for that. She's well?

ECTOR Right as rain, though been naggin' me to hire up a tutor...
(The coincidence dawns on him.)
It's you she sent for, isn't it?

MERLIN (Grins.) Well, it's me who answered.

ECTOR (Seeing MEG coming with the ale.) Meg! Another pot! And bring it inside!
(To MERLIN as they exit.)
Long stories to tell you, friend.

(They are off.)

(BEDWYR enters wielding a sword, followed by KIT who carries a heavier, iron sword.)

BEDWYR Feels good!

ARTHUR Try this one.

BEDWYR (Trading swords.) Heavy.

ARTHUR It's iron.

BEDWYR Iron?! For fighting?!

ARTHUR / think it is. Nobody else does, though -- except the Hill People.

BEDWYR Hill People?

ARTHUR The Ancient Ones. The ones who were here on the land before us.

BEDWYR We don't have any where I live.

ARTHUR You have them. They're everywhere, but they keep themselves hidden.

BEDWYR They do? Will I get to see them?

ARTHUR I don't know. The smithy -- Woad -- he only comes to his forge at night, and then not all the time.

BEDWYR How do you know when he will?

ARTHUR When a star falls. Woad makes the swords from the fallen stars and says the fire is still in them.

BEDWYR You've watched him?

ARTHUR I saw him make this one.

BEDWYR (Looks at the sword for a moment.) Would you bring me with you next time?

ARTHUR If you'd like.

BEDWYR I would. If I'm to be a knight, I suppose I should see things like that.

ARTHUR Yes.

BEDWYR Is this sword going to be yours, then? When you take your knighthood?

ARTHUR No.

BEDWYR Why not?

ARTHUR (As if reciting an often-heard phrase.) I'm not to be trained as a knight, only as a squire.

BEDWYR But you seem to know so much about it.

ARTHUR Yes.

BEDWYR Didn't give a name.

(Referring to his holding of the sword.)

Is this the way?

ARTHUR No. Let its weight work for you. Just practice, Bedwyr -- I'll be right back.

(ARTHUR exits. After a couple unpromising attempts to handle the weight of the sword, BEDWYR exits, calling after ARTHUR.)

BEDWYR Kit?! Kit!

(Lights fade and location changes.)

(ECTOR and MERLIN enter.)

MERLIN And you call him Kit?

ECTOR Well, the dragon's young are called "kittens", aren't they?

(A pause.)

There's something in the boy's blood, I think, Merlin.

MERLIN (To himself.) And how much of that something is what I've come to know.

ECTOR What's that?

MERLIN Have you taught him the ways of a knight, Ector?

ECTOR Why, no. Kit's the younger -- and with us not knowing... not knowing for certain... whether he's of noble birth, well, it seemed most proper for Kit to be Kay's squire.

MERLIN You've done well in that, old friend. But he must learn the sword.

ECTOR And that he knows, without benefit of training. Seemed to come natural to him.

(A chuckle.)

Why, the boy blacked Kay's eye this morning in some sort of secret practice they were having.

MERLIN And he's never asked after his father?

ECTOR Not out loud. But it's in his eyes.

(ARTHUR appears.)

What is it, Kit?

ARTHUR Uh... nothing important, sir. Just a question about some healing herbs. I thought the tutor might know.

ECTOR Well, uh... not quite his line of study, I suspect...

ARTHUR Oh... well, I thought he might know something...

MERLIN About *Achillea millefolium* and *Saponaria officinalis* I know a few odd things...

(ARTHUR reacts.)

ECTOR Well, it's all Greek to me...

ARTHUR No, sir -- Latin.

ECTOR There -- you see? Already up on it; no tutor needed.

(ECTOR notices that ARTHUR and MERLIN are staring at one another. An awkward pause from ECTOR before he decides he'd best excuse himself.)

Right. You'll bring him to the eating hall, won't you, Kit?

(No answer.)

Right.

(ECTOR exits. Slight beat.)

ARTHUR It was you at the temple, wasn't it?

(MERLIN says nothing.)

You made yourself disappear so Kay couldn't see you.

MERLIN He couldn't see me?

ARTHUR You wouldn't let him.

MERLIN I think that's right.

ARTHUR But that wasn't fair.

MERLIN Probably not. World's not fair.

ARTHUR But he's to be a knight and if anyone should have a magician for a teacher, he should.

MERLIN You don't think him a bit ordinary for magic?

ARTHUR He's very good at soldiering.

MERLIN How did you black his eye then?

ARTHUR Well, only because. . . .

(He doesn't have an explanation.)

MERLIN Yes?

ARTHUR He may not think very fast.

MERLIN No, wouldn't accuse him of it.

ARTHUR But he's a good follower.

MERLIN Can't think of a better word for him.

ARTHUR (Slight beat.) What about Bedwyr?

MERLIN Bit young to corrupt with magic, I think.

ARTHUR (After another pause; finally.) Why me?

MERLIN Oh. . . I'm looking for a boy who can believe in the magic of things.

ARTHUR (His back up a bit.) I'm not a boy any longer.

MERLIN I can see that. But can you still believe?

ARTHUR In some things.

MERLIN Good.

ARTHUR (Slight beat.) I've been waiting for you.

MERLIN Have you?

ARTHUR You're part of a dream I have.

MERLIN You dream of magicians?

ARTHUR Everything has to be changed.

MERLIN Everything?

ARTHUR Do *you* like the world the way it is?

MERLIN I'm just listening.

ARTHUR Sir Ector is good, and my mother, and Kay -- sometimes -- but the rest doesn't seem right.

MERLIN Are you?

ARTHUR What?

MERLIN Right.

ARTHUR I'm going to be.

MERLIN And if you're not?

ARTHUR I have to be.

MERLIN (Slight beat.) What you have to be is wise enough to know that no man is. . . right.
(Slight beat. MERLIN hands ARTHUR a book.)
Now take this off and learn it.

ARTHUR What is it?

MERLIN Latin.

ARTHUR Oh.

MERLIN Not too keen on that? To change the world would be easier, perhaps?

ARTHUR If there were some practical use for it. . .

MERLIN The people who make the world what it is speak Latin, and if you hope to talk to them. . .

ARTHUR (Looking at the book.) What are these words?

MERLIN *Veni, vidi, vici.*
(ARTHUR looks at him questioningly.)
I came, I saw, I conquered. Interest you?

ARTHUR (Exiting with the book.) *Veni, vidi, . . . vici!* I came, I saw, I conquered.
(MERLIN repeats the Latin as lights alter. Music.
UTHER appears in the void.)

UTHER Merlin.

MERLIN I hear you, Uther.

UTHER Where are you?

MERLIN You don't know? Good.

(In the Blackout a song begins. Lights slowly rise to reveal ALL of the camp in the eating hall, listening to the song. In the middle of the song an old knight -- PELLINORE -- enters unobserved.)

SINGER *The High King child was born that night / Born of lady fair
But never since that cold, cold night / Seen here or anywhere.
Songs have said that he grows strong / Hidden from the light
That he is taught by wizard's sight / To know wrong from right.
Pendragon's son, pendragon's son / When will your good time be?
Pray you come to save the land / Our good land by the sea.*

(ALL are silent for a moment, then ECTOR leads them in applause.)

PELLINORE Capital song! First rate!

(ALL turn in surprise at the voice.)

ECTOR Pelly?! Pelly!

ARTHUR Sir Pellinore! Welcome back!

PELLINORE Glad to *be* back, lad. So -- a banquet, is it? You heard I was coming?

DRUSILLA No -- we've other guests arrived today, Sir Pellinore.

ECTOR Meg, fetch another plate; there's a lass. Pelly, old friend, we have a new student of the sword: Bedwyr ap Gryffn.

DRUSILLA And a Latin master too!

BEDWYR An honor, Sir Pellinore.

PELLINORE And honor's what being a knight's all about, young man. Learn that.

BEDWYR Yes, sir.

ARTHUR And a quest, too. A knight must have a quest!

PELLINORE But of course -- always a quest!

ARTHUR Did you find it, Sir Pellinore?

PELLINORE No, Arthur. But next time! Oh, next time!

BEDWYR Find what?

KAY Oh, some old dragon he's forever chasing. No such thing.

ECTOR Now, Kay -- a man's quest should not be judged by any but himself. Come, Pelly -- sing us your song of it!

ARTHUR The Questing Song!

PELLINORE No, no, no -- out of breath with the hunt, you see. Couldn't do proper by it.

MERLIN We'll listen to your heart.

PELLINORE Very well. I'll sing for my supper, then.

(PELLINORE gets the SERVANTS and OTHERS to pound out a beat and he sings.)

PELLINORE *There goes the Beast -- after him, lad!
What the claws -- they are bad!
Don't touch the tail -- he'll get mad,
That is the Questing Beast!*

*Hum-a-dee-ho, Off we all go
Honor and pride, After his hide!
That is the Questing Beast!*

(ALL repeat the chorus with fervor and then PELLINORE adds a verse.)

*Here comes the lad -- brave and true!
Just like me -- just like you!
He'll be High King, Then we'll all sing,
Uther's son has been found -- ho!
Uther's son has been found!*

(The song becomes a general celebration with all singing. Suddenly the night outside the castle is filled with a bright light. The song stops in midverse. Uncertain quiet for a moment and then ALL move to the windows and doors.)

VARIOUS A star fell.
Fire in the sky.
Look! A sword hangs there.
The end is coming!
Heaven is falling!
It's the red dragon!
Jesu, Mary, Joseph -- guard me now this night.
What does it mean?
The land is dying.

MERLIN It's in the heavens, not on earth. It's not harm meant for us.
(MERLIN exits.)

ECTOR Go to your beds. To sleep. Another day tomorrow.

TANCRED Post all watches.

(BEDWYR rushes to ARTHUR and grabs his arm excitedly as OTHERS start exiting.)

BEDWYR A star fell, Kit! Will they be out tonight, then?

ARTHUR The Hill People?

BEDWYR Yes!

ARTHUR We'll just have to go and see, won't we?

ECTOR Lads -- to bed!

(ARTHUR and BEDWYR obey and exit. We hear the watch called from offstage.)

WATCH I (Offstage.) Midnight. All clear.

WATCH II (Offstage.) Midnight. All clear.

WATCH III (Offstage.) Midnight. All clear.

(WATCHMEN appear.)

RELIEF Anything stirring?

WATCH Nothing.

RELIEF Not a night / 'd want to be out.

(KAY and BEDWYR appear, led by ARTHUR.)

ARTHUR Not until he's past the gate.

KAY Where are you taking us?

ARTHUR To the forge by the temple. There's a break in the stonework; we can climb through there.

KAY A break in the wall and you've not told Father?!

ARTHUR It's just loose stones.

(As a WATCHMAN passes.)

As soon as he's past.

KAY Well, I'm going back.

ARTHUR Kay...!

KAY It's a knight's duty to report faults in the perimeter defense.

ARTHUR But Kay... Woad will be there!

KAY And we're not supposed to be.

(KAY exits. ARTHUR and BEDWYR slip out of hiding and disappear in the opposite direction. Blackout.)

(In the blackout we hear the boys' voices echo and the sound of their steps in a water-filled cave.)

ARTHUR (Voiceover.) Quiet.

BEDWYR (Voiceover.) Where are we going?

ARTHUR (Voiceover.) It won't be much longer.

BEDWYR (Voiceover.) Is that the fire from the forge?

ARTHUR (Voiceover.) He's just fired it.

BEDWYR (Voiceover.) Are we going to go down?

ARTHUR (Voiceover.) Not til the hammering starts.

(Lights rise from out of the pit -- a fiery glow. ARTHUR and BEDWYR move quickly down from the wall to the forge. We see WOAD at the anvil, hammering on a sword. He looks at it, thrusts it into the forge. He gives the boys an order as if he knew they would be there.)

WOAD Bellows.

(The boys pump the bellow.)

Harder.

(The fire blazes up.)

Harder.

(The boys obey.)

Stop.

(WOAD takes the blade from the forge and plunges it into water. Steam fills the shop. WOAD takes it from the water and strikes it against the anvil. A clear ringing sound but the sword does not break. WOAD nods his head toward BEDWYR and addresses ARTHUR.)

Does he belong?

ARTHUR He's to be a knight, sir. He's in his sword year.

(WOAD grunts. A pause.)

Is it perfect?

WOAD It is only an iron sword.

ARTHUR Is there a perfect sword?

WOAD One.

ARTHUR Did you make it?

WOAD No. The Ancient Ones did.

ARTHUR Where is it?

WOAD It waits.

ARTHUR For the perfect man?

WOAD No man is perfect.

ARTHUR The High King will be.

WOAD What fire has tempered him?

ARTHUR I . . . don't know.

WOAD This sword is sound, strong, iron. No man can break it. But the perfect sword can be broken.

ARTHUR Can we see it?

WOAD No.

ARTHUR Tell us of it.

(WOAD looks at him for a long moment before issuing the order.)

WOAD Bellows.

ARTHUR But there's no sword in the forge.

WOAD Bellows. The perfect sword is there!

(The two boys pump the bellows and the fire in the forge blazes up and seems to engulf them. The flame dies down and in the glow we see the mist-filled temple of the Hill People.)

BEDWYR Kit -- where are we?

ARTHUR The old temple, where I told you.

BEDWYR How did we get here?

(ARTHUR goes to a secret place and takes out a visored helmet.)

ARTHUR My helmet.

BEDWYR The one that gives you the dream?

ARTHUR Put it on.

(BEDWYR accepts the helmet, hesitates, and then puts it on. It alters him. He seems to turn into a statue. Suddenly the HILL PEOPLE are present. ARTHUR touches BEDWYR.)

 Bedwyr! Bedwyr!

(The HILL PEOPLE close in on ARTHUR, who turns and wields the iron sword as if to defend himself. One who appears to be the high priest of the people, STAG, speaks in a quiet but supernatural voice.)

STAG Would you use it before you know whom you strike?

(Continuous with the preceding. TWO SOLDIERS enter the stage in sword combat, TANCRED and KAY, and a few SERVANTS enter with a weapons cart and the stage is transformed to the sword yard. When the lights have completed the transition to the next morning, KAY and BEDWYR are practicing under TANCRED's tutelage and ARTHUR is offstage. During the following, TWO SOLDIERS cease their practice or allow their combat to carry them back offstage while SERVANTS may remain a while to observe KAY and BEDWYR.)

TANCRED On your guard! By the numbers! And one, cut. . . and two, cut. That oak about got cut down, boy -- faster shield!

BEDWYR I'll do better this time.

TANCRED We will see. To the center, on your guard, by the numbers and one. . . and two. Better reciprocal attack! Kay -- one, two, cut, cut; Bedwyr -- three, four, cut, cut -- are you with me?

BEDWYR Yes sir.

TANCRED On your guard, by the numbers. . . and one. . . and two. . . and three. . . and four. Fast learner, Kay; shall we try him?

KAY Yes sir.

TANCRED On your own time then. . . and go.
(ARTHUR enters with a water bucket as KAY and BEDWYR fight.)

ARTHUR Here's the water, sword master.
(KAY trips up BEDWYR. BEDWYR loses his temper and scrambles after KAY.)

BEDWYR Here. . . ! Why you doin' that. . . ?

TANCRED Oi, oi, oi! And what is this all about?

BEDWYR Kay, sir, he. . . .

TANCRED I'll have none of that in me swordyard, you understand?

BEDWYR Yes, sir.

TANCRED Take up your weapons from the ground, boy, and no more of your shenanigans. Reverse positions. Once again; your own time. . . and go.
(BEDWYR tries to use the same tactic KAY used on him but it backfires and KAY wins again.)
And that is precisely what you may expect every time you exhibit that sort of nonsense. Well, maybe a step too far too fast, eh, Kay?

KAY Yes, sir.

TANCREW Take him back there and show him how it's done, will you, lad?

KAY Yes, sir.
(BEDWYR reluctantly begins to follow KAY.)

TANCREW (Stopping BEDWYR.) Here, leave that weapon right there. That weapon is for a real fighter, which you are not as of yet, but only a boy what loses his temper. Take this.

BEDWYR But that's only a stick!

TANCREW It's a dummy sword so's you won't hurt yourself with it. Show him, Kay.
(KAY takes BEDWYR and the other TWO KNIGHTS upstage and they practice. TANCREW goes to the water bucket and speaks to ARTHUR.)
Always hard to start a new one. Ideas of their own; ignore what's time-proven. Was the same with Master Kay.
(TANCREW takes a drink from the dipper.)
You didn't put them ideas into his head with that iron pole you knock around with, did ya?

ARTHUR I did show it to him, sir.

TANCREW Impossible, you know. Too heavy to maneuver with your wrist.

ARTHUR I do it with two hands, sir.

TANCREW Two hands?! And what hand's left to hold your shield with?

ARTHUR I... haven't worked that out yet, sir.

TANCREW But workin' on it, are ya?

ARTHUR Yes, sir.

TANCREW You do that. But speakin' from experience, I wouldn't work it out with a sworded man against me.

ARTHUR But it's safe in a swordyard, isn't it?

TANCREW A knight isn't always going to be in a swordyard. If you'd been trained, you'd know that.

ARTHUR Yes, sir.

TANCREW (Noticing BEDWYR standing nearby and observing their conversation.) What? Ready now, are you?

BEDWYR Yes, sir.

TANCREW All right, Bedwyr ap Gryffin -- we're going to have a little look-see at what you're made of. Let the two of you just sort it out, full combat. That suit you?

BEDWYR Yes, sir.

TANCREW Thought it might. Take your guard, fight to the yield... at your will!

KAY Yield. (KAY and BEDWYR fight. KAY wins easily.)
Yield, boy! (BEDWYR hesitates.)

BEDWYR Yield.
I want another. (KAY releases him and BEDWYR scrambles up to TANCRED.)

TANCRED You're sure?

BEDWYR Yes, sir.

TANCRED Positions... to the yield... at will.
(They fight again. KAY wins.)

KAY Yield.
There's no way for you to win, boy! (BEDWYR hesitates.)

ARTHUR There is for me. (TANCRED, KAY, and KNIGHTS look over to ARTHUR with some astonishment.)

KAY Try me. (KAY releases BEDWYR as ARTHUR steps toward KAY.)

TANCRED Now, don't you two brothers start that sort of thing.

ARTHUR Just once.

KAY Yes. Just once.

TANCRED You know what Sir Ector would say to me... ?

KAY No one'll tell him.

ARTHUR We promise.

TANCRED Brothers fightin' in the bedchamber and in the bathhouse, well, that's one thing, but...
(Slight pause.)
All right. Let's see what you can manage with that iron pole of yours. To the yield. At will.
(KAY and ARTHUR fight. Throughout most of the combat ARTHUR has the best of KAY, but KAY ultimately gets ARTHUR to the ground and stands above him, his sword at ARTHUR's throat as he did twice before with BEDWYR.)

KAY Yield.
(ARTHUR suddenly delivers a kick to KAY's groin and knocks KAY's sword out of his hand to the ground. ARTHUR points the tip of his sword to the surprised KAY's throat.)

ARTHUR Yield!

KAY What happened?

ARTHUR Yield, big brother!

KAY Yield! Yield!

(ARTHUR proudly hops to his feet and steps up to TANCRED.)

ARTHUR It works, doesn't it, sword master?!

(TANCRED glares at ARTHUR for a second, then suddenly lets his sword fly out and disarms ARTHUR with ease.)

TANCRED Keep workin' at it!

ARTHUR But you saw what it can do...!

TANCRED "But" nothin'! Two hands on a sword?! A knight carries a shield, boy, with his emblem blazoned on it, and you've left no hand to carry it with!

(TANCRED turns away from ARTHUR and addresses KAY and BEDWYR.)

Enough nonsense with iron poles then. Back to the real weapons.

(To ARTHUR.)

And you, young squire -- more water for the men.

(ARTHUR angrily grabs the water bucket and exits as lights fade on the swordyard.)

(Lights rise on kitchen as ARTHUR enters and angrily throws down his water bucket and fumes. DRUSILLA enters with a basket and observes him, unnoticed. ARTHUR kicks the bucket for good measure.)

DRUSILLA Arthur?

(ARTHUR turns and sees her, then turns away.)

Arthur.

ARTHUR They might *pretend* to listen to me. Even if I am only a squire, they might pretend.

DRUSILLA What's Kay done now?

ARTHUR Nothing.

DRUSILLA Your father?

ARTHUR Nothing.

DRUSILLA Is this a guessing game we're playing?

ARTHUR (Starting to leave.) I'd better be back at my work. . .

DRUSILLA Arthur.

ARTHUR (He stops. She waits for him to speak.) It isn't fair!
(She says nothing.)
In any other stronghold I'd be made a knight.

DRUSILLA I see.

ARTHUR You don't; none of you do. I'm more than just a squire.

DRUSILLA Good. Be more. But don't quit.

ARTHUR (Almost sullenly.) I'm not quitting.

DRUSILLA Then what are you doing?

ARTHUR I'm. . . I'm just being mad.

DRUSILLA Arthur. I'm Kay's mother and I love him and he knows that, but I've raised the both of you and I know what your abilities are.

ARTHUR And what am I to use them on? A squire is not what I want to be, Mother!

DRUSILLA Is Kay what he wants to be? Is Bedwyr? Am I? Might Kay want to be some of the things that you are, without trying? You beat him at every game, best him at every challenge. Rules are limits to him, but they're only fences to you and you leap over them without a thought and leave him behind. Yes, Kay's to be a knight and he might, though he shouldn't, lord it over you for that, but a knight is all he will ever be and he knows it. He can win only what is his already, but you can win whatever you set your heart on. Shout at the world that makes that so if you want to, but not at your brother and not at those of us who must take what we are given.

ARTHUR (Slight beat.) I'm sorry.

DRUSILLA Don't ever be sorry for your anger at injustice, Arthur. We want you to conquer that injustice for us.

(Slight beat.)

Now, we won't talk of it anymore. Here -- one of Meg's good scones. They're a bit easier to swallow than pride.

(ARTHUR takes the scone and has a bite. Their eyes meet and she smiles and then they embrace. She holds him tightly. SIR PELLINORE appears.)

PELLINORE (Dramatically.) Not a wagging hound to greet him, not a friendly eye to meet him. Poor, sad, alone Pellinore courses the world and here, where he might expect welcome, he sees others in loving embraces but none for himself.

(ARTHUR and DRUSILLA rush to him and encircle PELLINORE in an awkward embrace.)

DRUSILLA Pellinore!

PELLINORE (Extracting himself from their embrace.) Here now, enough of that; wrinkle the tunic.

DRUSILLA Back without a scratch. Come sit down. Have something to eat.

PELLINORE Does she offer him a morsel?

ARTHUR Meg's scones, sir.

DRUSILLA Warm and fresh.

ARTHUR With honey.

PELLINORE Oh, I might assay a taste.

(He mounds one whole then speaks through the mouthful.)

Passable.

ARTHUR Back from your hunt so soon, Sir Pellinore?

PELLINORE And nearly, lad, this time, nearly successful.

ARTHUR You came upon the Beast?

DRUSILLA And came away alive?

PELLINORE If he had seen me, mum . . . if he had but turned his dragon's eyes upon me . . . ? Death and purgatory.

ARTHUR What happened?

PELLINORE My unsheathed sword raised and ready and but a moment from making a Christian end of him . . .

ARTHUR Yes? Go on.

PELLINORE Foiled by that damned hound of mine.

ARTHUR &
DRUSILLA Ohhhh.

PELLINORE Too true, too true. With my singing sword high in the air, my arm a mountain of determination. . . tangled my foot in his leash and down to the ground I came.

DRUSILLA Poor thing; where is he?

PELLINORE Lion! Heel, boy!
(He reels in his long leash and a small mongrel appears on the end of it. DRUSILLA snuggles it affectionately.)

DRUSILLA Lion!
(She takes the plate and feeds the dog a scone.)

PELLINORE Don't soften him, mum -- needs to keep his blood hunger high.

DRUSILLA That's the lot, anyhow.
(PELLINORE looks at the empty plate.)

PELLINORE So, that's all of 'em, is it?

DRUSILLA You've et them all, sir.

PELLINORE I shall repair to my chamber then and continue my fast. Improves the reflexes, don't you know? Eat too many scones and honey and the Beast'll get me sure. Come, Lion -- to bed.
(PELLINORE exits with his dog.)

DRUSILLA What a sweet, gentle man!

ARTHUR Kay and the other knights laugh at him.

DRUSILLA I don't think he really minds.

ARTHUR I do. How can he bear to come back here, knowing he'll have to play the fool?

DRUSILLA Where else has he to go? Pellinore's too old now for the battles; he'd haven't a chance against the young warriors. So what's left for him? His Beast and us. Beyond that, Pellinore really doesn't have much of a place in this world.

ARTHUR Then the world is wrong.

DRUSILLA I agree. So make it right for us then, will you?
(DRUSILLA kisses ARTHUR and exits. ARTHUR, absent-mindedly, still thinking of PELLINORE, picks up a bite of a scone left behind and nibbles on it. MERLIN enters and sees him.)

MERLIN A man after my own heart -- scones and honey to end a night's hunger. Where are they?

ARTHUR Oh. . . well, they're gone.

MERLIN Greedy one, aren't you?

ARTHUR Sir Pellinore ate them.

MERLIN Work up an appetite chasing his Beast, did he?
(Sees ARTHUR looking at him.)
I say something?

ARTHUR Do you laugh at him too?

MERLIN No, don't laugh at him. Each man has his way; that's his.

ARTHUR He's a good man. An honorable man.

MERLIN He is that.

ARTHUR And never harmed anyone knowingly.

MERLIN But he says he'd harm the Beast, if he ever caught him.

ARTHUR (Slight beat.) Could he?

MERLIN What?

ARTHUR Catch the Beast? With your magic, could he do that?

MERLIN Never thought about it.

ARTHUR Give him that.

MERLIN You're sure that's what he wants?

ARTHUR I know he does.

MERLIN Well... give me the night to think on it. Must be some sort of "Questing Beast" spell. But now you give to me.

ARTHUR Anything.

MERLIN (Recognizing Uther's oath.) I don't give my magic cheaply.

ARTHUR Anything I have.

MERLIN Be Kay's squire.

ARTHUR (Slight hesitation and then anger.) You were listening!

MERLIN No.
(Slight beat.)
Is it a bargain?

ARTHUR It might as well be. "Once a squire, always one." Isn't that the way of this world?

MERLIN I wouldn't know, because you're going to change this world. Aren't you?

ARTHUR You don't think I can.

MERLIN That star that fell, that burned the sky last night, it didn't know it was falling. It was only going, from there to there, but then the world got in the way. Because that was its destiny.

ARTHUR Do I have a destiny? Can you see what it is?

MERLIN I can see that it starts here, Ector's stronghold, with you being a squire and it goes ... there! But I can't see what world will get between you and it, and neither will you if you don't start from here.

ARTHUR (Beat.) I'll be Kay's squire.

MERLIN Good.

ARTHUR The best squire any knight could hope for.

MERLIN Better. And tomorrow, we'll go a-questing for Sir Pellinore's Beast!

ARTHUR Yes, sir!

(ARTHUR exits. MERLIN sits. Lights alter.
UTHER appears, a shroud covering him.)

UTHER Merlin, I know you are with me.

MERLIN I hear your voice and see you.

UTHER I have need of you.

MERLIN No.

UTHER You are the king's merlin. Come to me.

MERLIN You are not king; you are Pendragon only. My place is here.

UTHER I've lost my strength.

MERLIN Yes.

UTHER Set your hand upon me; take away the illness.

MERLIN None can do that now.

UTHER You can.

MERLIN My place is here.

UTHER There will be no High King without me.

MERLIN There will be one.

UTHER Do you think you know all?

MERLIN I know you are dying.

(The light on UTHUR fades, and on MERLIN.
Blackout.)

(A series of brief scenes which occur without major scenic elements but rather lighting, projections, and props to suggest locations.)

(Lights rise on CADOR looking down on the stronghold.)

CADOR Have any seen the merlin?

SOLDIER Not this night, Sir Cador.

CADOR But he's still there?

SOLDIER He was. And none have left by the gate.

CADOR We'll wait until first light, then go in.

SOLDIER There are too many of them.

CADOR Too many of them; too few of us. Nevertheless, tomorrow, we go in.

(The focus moves to the WATCHMEN at the gate and walls.)

WATCH I Midnight. All's well.

WATCH II (At a distance.) Midnight. All's well.

WATCH III (At a greater distance.) Midnight. All's well.

(We see MERLIN looking out at the night. Behind him is ECTOR. Both men hold drinking cups in their hands.)

ECTOR (After a longish silence.) What is it?

MERLIN Something.

(The focus moves to ARTHUR and KAY.)

ARTHUR Why won't you come with us?

KAY Because I don't believe in any Beast.

ARTHUR But Sir Pellinore does.

KAY And Pellinore's going.

ARTHUR That's no answer.

KAY I don't like to leave the stronghold with so few men to guard it.

ARTHUR It'll be all right.

KAY I'm not going. Now let me go to bed.

(The boys exit.)

(Focus shifts to CADOR and his SOLDIERS.)

SOLDIER Cador. There's a break in the wall. We can climb through it and not be seen.

CADOR Good.

SOLDIER Men assembling!

CADOR Is the merlin there?

SOLDIER Can't tell. Too dark. Gate's opening!

CADOR How many leaving?

SOLDIER Seven.

CADOR There's the odds we want.

SOLDIER Now, Cador?

CADOR Wait. Let the seven get some distance from the stronghold.

(A grin.)

Then we'll go in.

(Focus moves to the courtyard. ARTHUR, BEDWYR, PELLINORE, MERLIN, and three additional SERVANTS or KNIGHTS march out singing as ECTOR, DRUSILLA, and OTHERS bid them farewell.)

ALL *Hum-a-dee-ho, off we all go.
Honor and pride, after his hide!
That is the Questing Beast - ho!*

DRUSILLA (Giving ARTHUR a parcel.) Wait, Kit! Here's some honey cakes!

PELLINORE Come lads -- it's a fine morning for a quest!

(The Questing Party exits, singing the chorus of their song another time. OTHERS return to their work as DRUSILLA and ECTOR linger, looking after the Questers. TANCRED and KAY start off toward upstage left.)

TANCRED Alright, Kay -- let's us have a look-see at this break in the wall, then, shall we?

(KAY and TANCRED are off. ECTOR turns back toward the stronghold SR.)

ECTOR What fun they'll have.

DRUSILLA Ector? What if they find it?

ECTOR The Beast?

(A laugh.)

And aren't you the one always saying we're past the age of the dragons?

DRUSILLA (As ECTOR reaches SR exit.) And where are you off to?

ECTOR (Exiting.) Still early. To catch myself a minute more sleep -- that's my quest.

(ECTOR is off. DRUSILLA turns to fetch her water bucket as TWO GUARDS reappear and cross from SL to SR.)

DRUSILLA Gate shut tight, is it?

GUARD Yes, mum.

(One GUARD remains at top of SR ramp and stands guard. Immediately one of CADOR's MEN appears and overpowers the GUARD as CADOR and TWO MEN sneak up behind DRUSILLA. A FOURTH appears from SL and grabs DRUSILLA from behind, clasping his hand over her mouth as CADOR gestures to her for silence. FOURTH MAN drags DRUSILLA DSL as THIRD MAN gestures to CADOR that KAY and TANCRED are approaching. CADOR and THIRD MAN hide upstage as SECOND MAN joins FOURTH MAN and DRUSILLA in hiding. FIRST MAN assumes guard position at SR ramp, having first disposed of GUARD's body USR.)

KAY (Entering as TANCRED follows.) But it's just like Arthur to forget the wall in favor of all this Beast flummery. . . .

(By this time TANCRED has been taken from behind by SECONND MAN as CADOR and THIRD MAN leap out of hiding and bring KAY to his knees.)

CADOR The Merlin's boy, are you?

KAY "The Merlin?" Who's that?

CADOR Are you the son of Uther?

KAY I'm Ector's son!

(DRUSILLA bites her captor's hand and cries out.)

DRUSILLA Kay -- not a word!

KAY (Whirling to see DRUSILLA.) Mother!

(DRUSILLA overpowers FOURTH MAN as KAY shoves CADOR away and grabs THIRD MAN's sword. TANCRED takes advantage of the confusion and overpowers SECONND MAN and takes them all on as DRUSILLA grabs KAY and urges him to run into the forest.)

DRUSILLA Kay! Get the others! Bring them back!

KAY (Wanting to help TANCRED.) Tancred. . . !

TANCRED Go, Kay! Run!

(CADOR has made his way toward KAY as the boy flees off SL with CADOR in pursuit. TANCRED has overpowered SECONND, THIRD, and FOURTH MEN and CADOR returns and delivers a blow which knocks TANCRED unconscious. FIRST MAN has taken DRUSILLA and CADOR steps toward her as he commands FOURTH MAN.)

CADOR After the boy!

(FOURTH MAN rushes off SL. MEG and TWO SERVANT WOMEN appear SR at the entrance and scream at the sight. They rush off and CADOR gestures for them to retreat.)

CADOR Come! With a hostage I can strike a bargain.

(CADOR and his MEN drag DRUSILLA off as lights quickly fade on TANCRED lying unconscious C.)

(Fog. Focus moves to the forest. MERLIN is concocting an elixir. We hear BEDWYR calling out for PELLINORE in the distance as ARTHUR stands near MERLIN.)

BEDWYR (Offstage.) Sir Pellinore? Sir Pellinore?!

ARTHUR It's going to be perfect, isn't it?

MERLIN It would be nice if I could do one spell perfect.

ARTHUR Aren't all of them?

MERLIN None of them. It's not all herbs and powders and fires, you know. People are involved.

BEDWYR (Entering.) I can't find him, Kit. He was only just a step behind me, but then I lost him.

ARTHUR (Calling.) Pellinore?! Sir Pellinore!

MERLIN Can't wait. This has to be drunk now.

ARTHUR But it's Pellinore's quest we're here for.

MERLIN If he comes, he comes; if he doesn't...

ARTHUR You've made three cups, though; three's the magical number.

MERLIN I'll adjust it.

ARTHUR No. You drink Pellinore's. Join with us.

MERLIN Someone ought to stay outside the spell.

ARTHUR I want you to do it.

MERLIN (Hesitates.) As you wish. Straight down and then do nothing, say nothing. Close your eyes and see nothing... and then you will begin to see it. The quest, gentlemen!

(They drink the elixir. Music suggests visions of glory. Suddenly KAY's voice is heard.)

KAY (Offstage.) Arthur! Bedwyr!

(KAY enters, short of breath. He rushes up to ARTHUR and shakes him to snap him out of his trance. MERLIN and BEDWYR also awaken.)

KAY Arthur! The stronghold! We're attacked!

ARTHUR What?!

MERLIN On your feet! Now!

(MERLIN moves them out quickly. We hear ARTHUR's call fade in the distance.)

ARTHUR (Offstage.) Pellinore! He may be in danger! Pellinore!

PELLINORE (Entering.) Arthur?! Boys?!

(Two of CADOR's SOLDIERS enter.)

SOLDIER I (As they rush in searching for Kay.) The boy! We've lost him!

PELLINORE Halt!

SOLDIER II What ho! An old soldier!

SOLDIER I It's Ector's son we're after!

(SOLDIERS start off.)

PELLINORE (Pulling out his sword.) Halt, I say!

SOLDIER I Keep away, old man!

PELLINORE Never!

(PELLINORE lunges at them, his sword held high for the attack, and SOLDIERS whirl about to defend themselves as lights quickly fade to Blackout.)

(Lights rise on stronghold -- CADOR and his MEN are gone; SERVANTS and SOLDIERS, frightened, try to restore order to their home. ECTOR stands with TANCRED.)

ECTOR Happened so fast. . . how could I have been asleep. . . ?

TANCRED It's happened, Sir. Asking how won't change it.

(KAY rushes in with ARTHUR, BEDWYR, and MERLIN following after.)

KAY I brought them as soon as I could.

ECTOR Not soon enough, my son.

KAY But you drove them away. Cador is gone.
(ECTOR turns away.)

Father?

(ECTOR takes KAY to one side, as TANCRED takes BEDWYR aside.)

MERLIN I couldn't see. Because of the quest. . . .

ARTHUR See what? What's happened? Someone tell me!

TANCRED Sir Ector's wife, Kit. They've taken her.

ARTHUR My mother. . . !

KAY (Whirls around at him.) No! Not yours! Mine!

ECTOR Don't, Kay!

KAY Because of you! Your dreams!

ARTHUR It was Pellinore's!

KAY Don't you ever take the blame for anything? If you had been here to help. . .

ARTHUR I'm . . . sorry.

KAY "Sorry?!" You're a sorry squire! How could you ever dream of becoming a knight?

ECTOR Enough now! You're brothers!

KAY Not of mine! Never of mine!

(A cry from the WATCH.)

WATCH (Offstage.) Men!

(Battle stations are quickly taken.)

TANCRED What colors?

WATCH (Offstage.) Cador of Cornwall!

ECTOR To arms!

MERLIN (Pulling ECTOR aside.) No. Not this time. He's here for me. Let him come.

ECTOR Don't do it, old friend!

MERLIN It's nothing I fear. Draw back your men, Ector.

ECTOR (After a moment's hesitation.) Free the passage.

TANCRED (A call.) Free the passage!

WATCH (Offstage.) Free the passage!

(MERLIN exits. A moment later CADOR and his MEN enter. A moment's silence.)

CADOR Your wife is not harmed.

ECTOR Why do you come?

CADOR For the merlin.

TANCRED There is no merlin here.

MERLIN (Reappearing, now no longer in his "tutor" disguise.) I am the merlin.

(ALL react.)

CADOR I will talk with this man and then I will leave. Do not harm me and your wife is safe. Do I have that?

ECTOR And the merlin?

CADOR The merlin and I will talk. Alone.

(ECTOR hesitates.)

MERLIN Leave us.

(ECTOR pulls his MEN back.)

CADOR You know what I want.

MERLIN To draw the sword. To be High King.

CADOR No.

MERLIN Then why come for me?

CADOR Uther Pendragon grows old and weak.

MERLIN Uther is already dead.

CADOR Then Britain needs the High King. Where the merlin is, the son of Uther is. I must know the boy's heart.

MERLIN His heart is his own.

CADOR The land can no longer bear another tyrant such as Uther! Soon the tribes will gather to choose the new Pendragon.

MERLIN And if the boy is chosen?

CADOR If he is High King, then he must work to unite the tribes, not defeat them.

MERLIN That is in heaven's hand.

CADOR Then let heaven's hand guide the son's hand!

(Pause.)

Bring him to the circle of stones, Merlin. Bring him that far?

MERLIN I will.

CADOR (Slight beat.) Call them in.

(MERLIN signals for ECTOR and the OTHERS to approach.)

Sir Ector, I release your wife to you. I ask nothing in return but that you know I stand for a Britain united. My arm is for the good of all tribes in our land.

(CADOR signals his MEN and DRUSILLA runs to her husband as SOLDIERS carry in a mortally wounded PELLINORE.)

DRUSILLA My husband, Sir Pellinore is dying...

(A bristling of arms in ECTOR's group.)

CADOR We meant no harm to this old man. It was he who struck the first blow.

(CADOR and his MEN exit. ECTOR, ARTHUR, and the others gather around PELLINORE.)

ARTHUR You were lost. We couldn't find you.

PELLINORE I found my beast, Kit. And oh, I gave him forty good whacks!

(He dies.)

ARTHUR Sir Pellinore!

(ECTOR gestures for PELLINORE to be carried off. ALL follow except ARTHUR, ECTOR, MERLIN, and BEDWYR.)

ECTOR There, there, Kit. Bear up. He wouldn't want us to cry. He's off on a new quest. Tonight we will honor him.

ARTHUR Everything's changed. In just an hour's time... everything's changed.

(He whirls angrily at MERLIN.)

You let it happen!

MERLIN I only know what might happen, not what will.

ARTHUR Than what am I to have learned from you?! Quests? Spells? Is that what you teach -- adventures?

(Continuous with the preceding. During ECTOR's speech, WARLORDS and KNIGHTS gather in a circle around the sword in the stone as the HERALD calls.)

HERALD Lot of Orkney
 Ban of Benwick
 Uriens of Gore
 Leodegranz of Camelard
 Clarivaus of Nothumberland
 Accolon of Gaul
 Aquisance of Ireland
 Brandegoris of Strangore
 Cador of Cornwall

(KAY enters and goes to ECTOR.)

ECTOR Choose a side, Kay, and get in there!

KAY But I haven't a sword!

ECTOR What?

KAY I sent Arthur for it; he won't be but a minute.

(A shouting match begins among the WARLORDS. Until CADOR interrupts, the dialogue may be regarded as ad-libs.)

LOT Leodegranz. Now we'll know whose lands they are.

LEODEGRANZ They are mine to the sea.

LOT Nothing is yours, Camelard! It was stolen!

LEODEGRANZ That we'll settle here!

LOT Call your knights together then. We'll have an end of it!

LEODEGRANZ Stand here or stand against me!

LOT Knights of Orkney. . . !

(CADOR pushes his way to a place of dominance.)

CADOR Are we here for this?!

LEODEGRANZ We're here for our own -- like you!

CADOR To have another lifetime of warring?

LOT With me or against me, Cador.

CADOR Against you, then!

(WARLORDS react.)

And for Britain! For the sake of the land, your wives, children, holdings -- look beyond your own anger! Invaders stand outside our borders, waiting like wolves to feed upon us -- and we divide ourselves!

LOT And you haven't taken part in that?

CADOR I have, and will again if the winner here rips the belly of Britain for his own gain as did Uther. No -- we are gathered to find a new Pendragon, but not a butcher! So let us fight man against man -- but for honor, not for death! Will all abide with that?

VARIOUS Yes!
For honor!
Best man to win!

CADOR Then join me!

(CADOR leads them off.)

ECTOR Hurry, Kay!

KAY Arthur's not back yet!

ECTOR He'll bring it!

(ECTOR and KAY follow the WARLORDS off. A moment later ARTHUR enters.)

ARTHUR Kay leaves his sword behind and now someone's stolen it. How can I be a good squire without a sword to give my knight... ?

(ARTHUR rushes past the sword in the stone, catches it out of the corner of his eye.)

A sword!

(He grabs it and starts off. He stops in his tracks, feeling the power of the sword and suddenly realizing with awe what he has just done. As if to see if it really happened, ARTHUR steps back to the stone and puts the sword back in; then pulls it out again. KAY suddenly rushes on toward him.)

KAY Arthur! I told you to...

(He sees that ARTHUR holds a strange sword.)

Where did you get that?

ARTHUR Never mind. It's better than yours -- take it!

(A WARLORD sees the boys with Excalibur. He hurries off again.)

KAY There's words written on it.

ARTHUR The words won't stop you from using it.

KAY (Reading.) "Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone is rightwise king of all Britain"... Arthur!

(ARTHUR is looking at the sea of silent WARLORDS who have come back at the news.)

ARTHUR Kay...

KAY What do they want?

(The WARLORDS' words start as whispers and quickly build.)

VARIOUS The sword!
The boy pulled the sword!
The sword!
The sword is out!
The boy is king!

(The words are taken up in a roar. ECTOR pushes his way through the throng and sees the sword in KAY's hand. The crowd silences.)

ECTOR Boy?

KAY I... have the king's sword.

ECTOR You drew it from the stone?

KAY (After a moment's hesitation.) Yes.

ECTOR Place it back where it was.

KAY But it's already in my hand. . . .

ECTOR Back.

KAY No one can do that.

ECTOR The one who drew it out can do that.

(KAY hesitates and then tries to return the sword into the stone, but cannot.)

KAY (After a pause.) Arthur gave it to me.

ECTOR Arthur?

(ARTHUR steps forward.)

Arthur, did you?

ARTHUR Yes, Father.

ECTOR Put it back.

(ARTHUR does so. A KNIGHT pushes his way forward to the stone. ARTHUR steps away.)

KNIGHT If a boy can put it in, I can draw it out.

(The KNIGHT tries and fails. KNIGHTS scramble toward the stone to try also as a clamor rises.)

WARLORD The boy!

CADOR Let the boy try!

WARLORD Let him draw it!

LOT Are we here to let a beardless boy play at being king?

CADOR (Shoving the others away.) Let the boy try it!

(ARTHUR does not move.)

ECTOR It's all right, Arthur. The sword was put there to be drawn out.

(ARTHUR hesitates, then steps up to the sword and draws it. The CROWD reacts. ECTOR kneels at ARTHUR's feet.)

ARTHUR Don't, Father. Please don't. Why are you doing that?

ECTOR Now I know for certain the man your father was, and you are my king.

ARTHUR You're the only father I've known, sir. Don't change that.

ECTOR But it *is* changed, Arthur, and now I ask you to honor me and my son. Will you give him a place beside you?

ARTHUR I will.

CADOR Let the robes of the king be put upon him!

(WARLORDS all step forward around ARTHUR as lights alter and stone descends.)

(Continuous with the preceding.
WARLORDS step back and silently observe
as SERVANTS dress ARTHUR. The young
man stands -- awkward and uncomfortable
as he is encased in the trappings of
royalty.)

ARTHUR You're there, aren't you?

MERLIN (Hovering in the void.) I'll always be there, Arthur.

ARTHUR I feel an imposter.

MERLIN That feeling will go soon enough.

ARTHUR What am I to do?

MERLIN What kings do.

ARTHUR But how do I know what a king does?

MERLIN Whatever you do now is what a king does. Try it.

ARTHUR (To CADOR.) Announce to the knights that we will meet in a trial of arms. There
will be a tournament.

CADOR (Stepping forward.) But sire -- a king has already been chosen.

ARTHUR I want to see who the best are. Have it called.

(CADOR exits, followed by WARLORDS, KNIGHTS,
and SERVANTS.)

MERLIN You want them to bang away at each other just so you can watch?

ARTHUR I will choose the winners as my guard. I want the best.

MERLIN You'll get the strongest. There is no guarantee you'll get the best.

ARTHUR That's just what Bedwyr said. . . when I told him of my dream.

(A pause.)

You made it all happen, didn't you?

MERLIN Not all. Uther Pendragon made you happen. You are his son. And now you are the
High King. Whatever I have done cannot change that. . . and neither can you.

(Lights fade to Blackout.)

(In the blackout the sound of a great crowd rises -- perhaps like the roar of a dragon. Lights rise to reveal ARTHUR in his full robes address his assembled KNIGHTS.)

ARTHUR Great lords of Britain, the tournament has proven all here as champions -- and all will henceforth be equal. I know you to be the best of the kingdom, and I want none here to challenge another knight.

(A CHALLENGER, disguised in armor, steps forward, carrying an iron sword.)

CHALLENGER I challenge them.

ARTHUR Not alone, I hope.

(KNIGHTS laugh.)

CHALLENGER Yes. Alone.

ARTHUR What would you prove in a trial of combat? That you are strongest?

CHALLENGER That I am best.

(ARTHUR turns to see if there are any who will fight the CHALLENGER.)

ARTHUR Champions?

KNIGHT (Stepping forward.) I will meet him.

ARTHUR (To CHALLENGER.) Challenger knight, on horse or on foot?

CHALLENGER On foot.

ARTHUR Weapon?

CHALLENGER Long sword.

ARTHUR Know that you meet a knight I have chosen as my champion. Herald?

(ARTHUR steps back to observe. Trumpets blow.)

HERALD Places. Enter combat.

(CHALLENGER defeats the KNIGHT.)

CHALLENGER Yield.

KNIGHT I yield.

ARTHUR You have, by your victory, earned the right to serve in the dragon guard.

CHALLENGER No.

ARTHUR What?

CHALLENGER I will serve only the knight who defeats me in battle.

KNIGHT II I accept him.

HERALD Places. Enter combat.

(CHALLENGER defeats the second KNIGHT.)

ARTHUR You have defeated two of my champions. You may join them as equal, and serve beside them as defender of my realm.

CHALLENGER I will serve only the knight who defeats me in battle.

ARTHUR But I acknowledge you, sir, as a champion and equal. I ask you to serve no knight -- only your king.

CHALLENGER I will serve only a champion.

ARTHUR What? Is it me you challenge?

CHALLENGER I do.

(KNIGHTS react -- acknowledging both the audacity and the propriety of the challenge.)

ARTHUR I accept.

(ARTHUR and CHALLENGER fight and ARTHUR "wins" the first moment. KNIGHTS cheer him on.)

ARTHUR Do you concede?

CHALLENGER I concede that this is but a game and no true measure of a man's strength -- or a king's worth.

(They continue to fight and this time CHALLENGER is stronger and the KNIGHTS support him.)

Because my sword is stronger, am I worthy to be High King?

ARTHUR No, never!

(They continue to fight. ARTHUR loses his sword and now CHALLENGER is clearly the victor, his sword holding ARTHUR to the ground in the "yield" position. The KNIGHTS cheer.)

CHALLENGER Yield!

ARTHUR No!

CHALLENGER Let it end! No man should suffer in a trial of honor!

ARTHUR This is a trial of strength! The broken man will die; the perfect one will live!

CHALLENGER No man is proven perfect by the sword!

ARTHUR One man is proven by the perfect sword!

(ARTHUR suddenly reaches forth his hand and cries out.)

Excalibur!

(Excalibur magically flies into ARTHUR's hand and ARTHUR attacks viciously with it and fells CHALLENGER, but in so doing, Excalibur is broken. The KNIGHTS acclaim ARTHUR, but he hears only MERLIN, as he stands and stares in horror at the consequence of his pride and rage.)

ARTHUR (Holding the broken sword in his hands.) Merlin!

