

Author Q & A



Q: Can you share what inspired you to write an Arthurian legend? For example, how did you become interested in this genre and what are some of your favorite books?

A: I have been fascinated by myths and legends since I was a little boy. *Bullfinch's Mythology* was a fixture in my personal library, and I made a trip to the library almost weekly, for years, seeking new material on this subject. After reading every book I could find on ancient Greek myths, I moved on to Norse myths and Celtic myths, and finally arrived at the legends and myths unique to Britain. The Arthurian legend is the most prominent and fascinating in the latter genre.

As far as favorite books within the Arthurian genre, I enjoyed Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, which I read decades ago, and I also enjoyed Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of Kings of Britain*, which I read just before writing *The Return of Sir Percival*.

Q: You take a very different approach to your tale. What inspired you to begin your story after the fall of Arthur Pendragon?

A: The central themes at the heart of this tale could only come to life in an Albion where Arthur and all but one of the Knights of the Round Table have died and Camelot has fallen. Moreover, this time frame

allows Guinevere, Percival, Capussa, Merlin, and Lord Aeron to take center stage and fulfill the roles assigned to them, without being overshadowed by Arthur.

The timing of the story also gave me the flexibility to let each character look back upon the lost magic that was Camelot through a series of flashbacks. These periodic reminiscences tell the story of yesteryear through the eyes of each character, thereby deepening the reader's insight into, and connection with, each character's persona. They also forge the links that tie the past to the travails of the present.

Q: This telling of the Arthurian legend seems to have more history and less magic. What inspired you to go that route rather than the potions-and-wands approach, as other authors in this genre tend to do?

A: The real Arthur achieved fame struggling to defend the Celtic Britons from Saxon invasions. His story is the story of a people's fight for survival. To the extent possible, I wanted this same existential struggle to be at the heart of the tale told in *The Return of Sir Percival*. Insofar as magic is concerned, I think readers will find that magic and mystery have been woven throughout *The Return of Sir Percival*, both human and divine, in ample measure.

Q: Your knowledge of the time period seems significant. Did that knowledge lead you to the story, or did the story lead you to that knowledge?

A: I am an obsessive history buff, and I have a particular passion for Roman and post-Roman Britain. However, the historical threads that appear in *The Return of Sir Percival* are only there to enrich the story and to enhance and provide depth to the backgrounds of the characters (such as the dynastic struggle in Constantinople). They were not the inspiration for the tale.

The Return of Sir Percival

In truth, the story came to me when I was recovering from an eye operation. The idea became such an obsession that I set aside another book that I was three quarters of the way through (a second thriller) and started writing *The Return of Sir Percival*.

Q: Geography plays a major role in this story. What kind of research did you do while writing the novel? Did you encounter the map during your research, or is it something you were inspired to create as a result of your findings?

A: I love geography. The room where I sit and write is full of maps, both historical and modern, and I spent a good deal of time trying to place Sir Percival's journey across the Land of the Britons within a viable historical reality. One of the key sources that I used as a reference was *Roman Roads In Britain*, by Ivan D. Margary. The references and maps in *Oxford Illustrated History of Roman Britain*, by Peter Salway, were also helpful.

Some of the other books that I read while writing the book were *Foundation*, by Peter Ackroyd; *History of Britain*, by Simon Schama; *A Brief History of Roman Britain*, by Joan P. Alcock; *History of The English People*, by Paul Johnson; *Empire of Gold: A History of The Byzantine Empire*, by Thomas F. Madden; *The Ruins of The Roman Empire*, by James J. O'Donnell; *How Rome Fell*, by Adrian Goldsworthy; and *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians*, by Peter Heather.

All of these were fascinating and informative reads, and they provided great insight into the Roman and post-Roman reality that existed in Britain. However, the seventh-century universe that I used in the story is entirely fictional, with certain limited exceptions. For example, the roads Percival travels in the story are Roman roads, and, where possible, I used historical landmarks to add context and color, such as the site of Walton Castle in Felixstowe (this was originally built by the Romans as a Saxon coastal fort and now lies in the ocean), and the Roman signal station at Filey (which is just ruins now).

Q: What was your favorite chapter to write in *The Return of Sir Percival* and why? And on the other side of the spectrum, were there any chapters that were particularly challenging for you to write? If so, can you share what it was about these parts of the story that challenged you?

A: The chapter where Sir Percival walks into the arena in Londinium was great fun to write, as was the scene where Cadwyn bursts into Guinevere's quarter's pantomiming a sword fight. The most challenging chapters were those where Guinevere returns to the past, in a series of conversations with young Cadwyn, or where she returns to the past alone, in a series of solitary reveries. Each reminiscence is intended to give the reader an empathetic insight into the personality of this intelligent, complicated, and fascinating woman, so it was critical to get them right.

Q: Do you have a favorite character in the story? If so, what is it about this character that you most appreciate?

A: Yes. That would be Capussa, the Numidian mercenary. He is older than Percival, and in many ways wiser. He sees the world as it is—a Hobbesian universe where life is truly “nasty, brutish and short.” (quoted from *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes). And yet, this realization does not suborn Capussa's innate goodness or his patient and positive outlook on life, nor does it dull his wonderful sense of humor.

Lord Aeron also has a special place in my pantheon of magnificent characters. In the story, Lord Aeron, as the magnificent young Galahad, is the most handsome man at court and the life of every party. Although these antics often place his loyal friend and fellow knight Percival in the awkward position of having to explain his early morning absences, Percival nonetheless holds his roguish brethren in the highest regard.

After the disaster at Camlann these two men travel very down different paths, but both are forced to endure cruel hardships and carry terrible burdens in the service of their King and Queen. In the end, these

two knights come to epitomize, in different ways, what was most noble about the brotherhood of the Knights of the Round Table.

Q: In a similar regard, which character in *The Return of Sir Percival* do you most personally identify with and why?

A: Cynric the Archer. He is a man who rises each day and “gets the job done,” without complaint, despite the setbacks and tragedies he has endured during his life. He is also a man who is not afraid to resist what may be a noble, but foolhardy venture. Yet, once the decision is made to attempt the near impossible, he steps across the proverbial line in the sand along with everyone else.

I identify with Cynric on account of his quiet perseverance and exceptional, but hard-earned skills. In my humble estimation, the world rides on the backs of men and women who have these characteristics.

Q: How do you get in the mood to write? Is there anything in particular that helps you stay focused? Do you have any writing rituals, for example?

A: Due in part to vision problems, I try to write early in the morning. This is the time when my mind is clear, my eyes are fresh, and when the constant harassment inherent in the practice of law is least intrusive.

I also try to write every day. Writing a book is somewhat like climbing a mountain. When you stand at the bottom, the idea of climbing to the top seems daunting, even irrational. However, with each step, the end goal seems more attainable. If I write every day, then the internal “you are never going to get there” voice becomes less persuasive with each sitting.

Q: *The Return of Sir Percival* ends with quite a cliffhanger. Did you know how this first book in the series would end when you started to write it? Or did the ending come to you as you were working on the book?

A: Unlike other books that I have written, or that I am currently working on, I had a pretty clear vision of where the road was going when I sat down to write *The Return of Sir Percival*. There were many side roads, diversionary paths, and secondary characters who were conjured into existence as the tapestry was woven, but I knew the destination from the beginning. I wish every book came to me with that singular clarity.

Q: And lastly, because readers will be curious about what your next book holds, can you share what readers can expect from Sir Percival and Guinevere in their next adventure?

A: I am working on the prequel. It will capture Sir Percival's early life and adventures as a Knight of the Round Table before the fall and his travails and trials in the Holy Land. It will also chronicle Guinevere's life in the last years before the fall and provide a window into the Camelot that was lost. Then, I will write Book II.