

King's Plan

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King's Plan

by [Megchad22](#)

Summary

I know I shouldn't be venturing into a new fandom but this begged to be written. AU Set sometime After Morgana goes bad but before Lancelot dies. Sort of Reveal fic The loss of his warlock effected Arthur in ways that not even the gods imagine.

Chapter 1

When King Arthur rode from Camelot the final time it was by himself in the pre dawn light. He never looked back to the city he had grown up in. From her window his Queen and her future consort held silent vigil, their hands entwined protectively over her slightly protruding stomach.

Though no one else knew of the plan nearly four years in the making each heart in Camelot felt a touch heavier that night. No eyes were there to witness a king swallow poison or slump over an unmarked grave. The world would wake to an inevitable truth still hidden and the unremembered pain of the last casualties of a bygone age...

It began at the end.

The end of another long battle against Morgana's forces and Arthur was weary. They were winning, with no little help from Merlin's magic, but it would be at a high cost. Many of the knights had already fallen and on a field coated in blood Arthur faced his half sister once more.

She looked horrible, emaciated and drained. The part of him that remembered her as his childhood friend ached at her brokenness. The magic she threw at him was a sickly black; nothing like his lover's golden protection. A few whispered words and suddenly she was much too close; her spell would hit him dead on and there was nothing he could.

The next blast was preceded with the smell of decay and Arthur braced himself for the pain he knew would come. Out of nowhere a body flew across his vision then slammed back into him. Though most of the blackness ricocheted backwards, killing the corrupted priestess, it still caught his savior. His beautiful lover looked up at him even as his skin grayed. Merlin didn't speak cliché's of love or false promises. Instead he used the last of his dwindling energy to weave one of the most powerful protection spells to ever be sunk into one place. His last act sealed Camelot's protection from any evil magic that wished harm upon the city.

He never saw the world he died changing.

For four months Arthur recovered. He ate just enough to dissuade suspicion and ruled in his dying father's stead. In private he mourned the death of his heart. The mask he learned growing up was perfected to the point that all but a few thought he had moved on from his manservant's death.

One night the man called to his chamber the only two who knew about his true relationship with the warlock; Gwen and Lancelot.

"You wished to see us, sire?" the former handmaiden asked softly

The Prince Regent waved to two chairs that had been brought for them, "sit, please. And don't call me sire; not tonight. Tonight we are equals."

"My Lo-Arthur?" Lancelot asked with a worried frown.

The other man looked pensively at the table top "You are the only ones I can trust" He spoke softly, "the only ones who know"

" You needed our help" Gwen replied simply. It was the truth; Gwen had agreed early on to keep their secret and allow the court to believe that the prince's interest lay with her. It worked so well because it gave everyone, even the busybodies of court a scandal to titter about behind their hands. When Lancelot returned it was only natural to include him and allow his and Gwen's love to blossom.

" And I will need it again" was the equally frank reply. The Prince Regent looked up at them. For once his masks were gone and the duo could see the soul wrenching pain that lay underneath. "I wish to die"

Gwen gasped and Lancelot jerked back in surprise. "A-A-Arthur, we can get Gaius. It will be all right"

But the man continued as if Gwen had not spoken. "But there are things I must do before I can go. Merlin would never forgive me if I allowed his hard work to go to waste." He studied the wall calmly before his eyes shifted to the couple in front of him. They sat pinned under his suddenly manic gaze, "I'm about to ask you more than I have any right to. I know you've kept up our charade and I thank you for it. I need to make things better before I go and make sure this kingdom will not fall apart after I go. I owe it to Merlin"

Gwen bit her lip, "Arthur..."

Again he almost seemed to be talking to himself more than them. "I intend to make sure magic is free once more, that no magic user feels Merlin's fear." He looked at them again rather than through them, "I intend to make you Queen, Guinevere, and I plan for your child to one day sit upon the throne." His wild eyes focused on Lancelot, "I know what I'm asking and I will never make this an order. I will touch no one now that Merlin is gone and I expect that after the proper mourning period you will be the one to sit beside my queen." His face changed and for a moment they saw the playful, protective Arthur who died in battle; "I want...every lord and lady, every royal who ever looked down on a servant; who ever spit at a peasant. I want them to hurt in the worst way they could by having to look up at the people they once looked down on. Will you help me?"

In the end there was only one answer to that...

And so it came to pass that Prince Arthur became king. Guinevere became his queen and it would be Lancelot's child she bore. The King, whose first act had been to legalize magic, had approached the druids the moment he found out she was pregnant. The position of Court Sorcerer had never been filled but Arthur had become friendly with the druid leader Mordred. He obtained two things from the young man he once saved, first a potion to ensure Gwen's child looked like him but also a powerful yet untraceable poison. Now he could slide peacefully into death, knowing he would soon hold his beloved after four long years.

Blue eyes snapped open only to realize he stood in darkness. "Hello" he called out only to hear his voice echo back.

A small amount of light flooded the area right in front of him revealing Morgana and Merlin. He tried to rush forward but was held still. The two stood simply looking at him for a moment.

" This should not have happened" A stranger spoke in Morgana's voice. It was far too deep, too powerful to be his broken sister. A cold shiver raced down his spine; if he was not looking at Morgana than this was someone else wearing Merlin's face as well. Try as he might though he couldn't bring himself to be angry as he hungrily took in the long lost face.

Merlin eyed him curiously, "It is not often that the gods are surprised, yet you have done it. Him as well, your lover..."

"This has tangled the threads" Morgana all but hissed.

" Be at ease sister, it will be fixed one way or another. We have watched you Arthur Pendragon and your lost lover. Your death was not for a few years yet, and much more violently. His was even more far flung and again you twisted things further with you plans. There is much to fix."

"Fix?"

Merlin nodded absently, a gesture that was familiar enough to cause a pit to form in his stomach "Your actions, noble though they might be, have destroyed this world for in a far flung future you will be needed as Ermys was needed to guide you. The tapestry guiding you has been destroyed and a new future must forged."

Morgana looked at him grudgingly, "For that we'll need you"

Arthur was surprised, "Me, why me?"

The siblings looked at each other with faint amusement, "Why not you? You want to change the past right? Make sure your lover doesn't die..."

"What?" Suddenly Arthur felt a bit weak, "That can be done?"

Merlin nodded, "This once, but only because of the unusual circumstances that surround you and your lover. You once stood at precipice; a choice so fundamentally altering that it effected the destinies of all those around you."

"What choice?"

Now Morgana spoke "your servant stood ready to speak of his magic, one of the first times he tried to admit such to you. There was an interruption and by the time that the time came again his nerve was gone."

Arthur remembered, "In Ealdor" he said pensively.

Merlin grinned proudly, "It's good you remember"

"But why...?"

Morgana scowled at him, "This is where the fear that drove him began. This fear that you would never forgive him would drive Morgana deeper into the darkness. It would drive Merlin deeper into doubt as he tried to protect you and not get caught. It was the first time he truly doubted his ability to bring magic back to the land."

" We can bring you back to that day; that minute so that you may make this one choice differently. I warn you though this will be fraught with dangers; you will have to forge a whole new destiny. "

"How do I start?" Arthur asked almost eagerly.

" It will take but a moment to send you back. I will warn you, young Pendragon. In order for this to happen we must bind your soul to Ermys much closer than it was before, neither will survive the death of the other and should you fail both your souls will be shredded into oblivion."

A much more solemn Arthur answered, "I understand."

Suddenly Merlin flashed him the goofy grin which always melted his heart. "Also...No one but Ermys may know what has come to pass here." There was a sensation that could almost be akin to riding full gallop on a horse while being completely still that caused Arthur to blink. The world faded back into view.

"I hope you won't think any differently of me after today..."

Arthur would be forever grateful for the four years it took for him to take his life. It was only that iron control that kept him from rushing at the younger man and pulling him into a long embrace. That same control hardened mask allowed him to give his answer even while he oriented himself to his new reality.

Originally the prince had given some pithy answer about being frightened. In an instant he knew this would change his whole world. He took a deep breath "I know about your magic, Merlin. It doesn't change anything. You don't need to worry about that."

Were it not for the immediate interruption of Morgana, who looked a little shocked herself, the slack jawed look of Merlin's would have been cause for an immediate laugh. As it was there was battle to prepare for. He would talk Merlin later, when they weren't going to be overheard.

The words are flowing easily

Though Merlin was clearly still trying to hide his powers he used them much more freely than before. In the end it changed nothing and everything. They still drove away the bandits and though the fight was still hard and drawn out there was no deaths among the villagers save one. Strangely enough Will never came forward to help fight off the bandits. It would be

discovered later that the arrival of Camelot's prince to help on Merlin's behalf drove the man to making a deal with Kanen. He fought with the bandits and ended up becoming a casualty.

This time there was no mourning pyre. Instead Merlin approached him during the celebrations.

"How long have you known?" The young warlock asked wariness still in his voice.

Arthur looked at his future lover. "Is there somewhere private we can talk?"

With a short considering nod the duo slipped away. They walked silently to a small cave about a half a mile away from the village. "I used to hide here as a child" Merlin whispered reverently. Then he turned back to his Prince, "How did you know?" He asked.

The prince sighed a deep breath and began, "I know because you told me about a year and a half from now." He pushed against the urge to take his other half into his arms. That look of confusion always did him in. "You died for me in...in battle" he couldn't bring up that it was against Morgana. "I couldn't deal with it...I..."

"Arthur?" There was deep concern, actual worry in Merlin's voice. The warrior-prince couldn't look at the other man for fear he would lose his resolve.

"I took an opportunity to be with you again, to join you." There a stricken silence at the other side of the cave at his words. "Something strange happened though and they gave me a choice. I could come back, I could fix this..." The explanation trailed off abruptly as he suddenly had his arms full of skinny warlock.

Deceptively strong arms pulled him close. For the first time in four years something deep inside his soul relaxed and healed. Because under the scent of cold iron and sweat, the scent of blood and pain, was something so uniquely Merlin that Arthur couldn't help but fall into it and bury his nose in dark hair.

It was only because they were wrapped so close that Arthur felt the jolt that shot through the younger man when he brushed a kiss across his temple. Merlin pulled away just then and looked up at him with wide confused eyes. "Arthur?" He asked.

The warlock's tone had changed; quieter, heavier than it had been earlier that day. His eyes, though confused, held an aged look that the prince knew didn't yet exist in his future lover. That was how Arthur Pendragon, prince of Camelot, realized he was now staring into the eyes of his Merlin; the one who had died for him.

"Arthur, what happened? The last thing I remember was you fighting Morgana."

In a move that the slightly older man would deny later he pulled the warlock close with a desperate kiss. "We have another chance, Merlin" And with that he explained everything that had happened, this time without leaving out a single detail. Merlin's face switched between confused and horrified multiple times.

"So you're telling me that we're in the past? That Morgana hasn't succumbed to her hatred yet? That we're *supposed* to change things." When Arthur nodded into his shoulder suddenly exhausted a strange look overcame his face. "Well we'll definitely have to start planning then"

Then sometimes they don't

The reunited lovers would stay awake most of the night trying to decide what could and should be done with this newfound gift. It was clear that Morgana was the first issue. Her hatred of Uther Pendragon and her fear of her own magic had left the woman vulnerable to Morgause. That hatred had only just begun to seed and her powers hadn't manifested yet meaning they could still turn her from that path.

It was so hard to think that to the world they had met less than a year ago. It would be important to tread lightly for the months to come. Nimueh would need to be dealt with again and though they could avoid some of the more obvious pitfalls some were inevitable.

One important thing they discussed was the innocent people Uther was executing weekly. Even leaving aside how both men flinched at the thought of letting another person die the king was creating more enemies by the day. That would have to be stopped.

In the end they decided to take things on a case by case basis; sneaking people away to safety when they could. That was the only decision they really got around to before other parts of their reunion came to the forefront. They only just made it back to the celebration without anyone noticing they had been gone.

The next morning a whole new adventure would begin...

Chapter 2

It was strange, Morgana mused as she watched a certain crown Prince and his manservant how things had changed in these last few months. Ever since fighting off the bandits in Merlin's village something indefinable had altered with the duo.

It wasn't just with how they were with each other either. For nearly a month after they had both eyed her with a strange wariness. That could be explained by the revelation she heard on the day of the fight. It was still so hard to believe that Merlin had magic or that Arthur knew about it.

What couldn't be explained was how they acted around everyone else. Oh Merlin still shot insults of common or made up words at the Prince. They still bickered fondly with each other. Merlin still gave a helping hand to anyone in need and Arthur still trained with the knights and went on Quests. But there was something different about the way they acted. Something she still couldn't put her finger on.

This will be a two shot I think

Unlike Morgana Gwen saw the changes a little more clearly. Perhaps because her mistress was looking at too big of a picture so she was losing the details Maybe it was because as a servant she had to pay more attention to the little things. It could even be the slight reticence both men now had with her mistress that is the cause but while she may not know why the changes occurred it was pretty clear to her what they were.

The arrogance that the Price had always embodied seemed to fall away. He held himself with a different confidence; a new surety that had escaped him before. Many of the servants whispered that he was less likely to order and more likely to ask.

Merlin also appeared to be surer of himself. When he snapped back at the Prince with insults there was less defensiveness, more humor. Though the young man remained as clumsy as ever he was less embarrassed when he fell than ever before; Merlin would simply laugh along with the rest.

Though many of the changes were positive there were others that were not. Both men became a great deal more suspicious, often times quiet and secretive. Whenever a raid brought back accusations of magic Arthur's mouth would tighten with anger and Merlin's eyes would brighten with determination. Gwen could see they were hiding something big between them.

I don't know yet though

As Court Physician Gaius was not required to attend the executions; he did force himself to watch the death of every single magic user that went to the pyre or the chopping block however. That was how he noticed at first. His own self made penance. It was an odd thing to see; a flicker where the woman on the pyre seemed to vanish for just a moment. It was almost accidental when he found out what it was.

In many ways Gaius deliberately blinded himself; he used his fears as a shield so he wouldn't have to betray either his King or his helpless brethren. He had dedicated his life to not allowing himself to truly see. That was why he was in some ways envious of Merlin; not of his power but his pure undaunted belief in Arthur's goodness. Perhaps that was why it took five executions to realize what that small flicker meant. Another six passed before it settled into his mind what a glamour of that kind could mean.

"Are you daft?" he hissed at his ward that night while they were eating one night. The words had burst from him unwillingly. Merlin looked at him curiously. "How many times have you endangered yourself pulling dead men from the flames?"

As ambiguous as the question was Merlin understood. For the first time Gaius was treated to the true change in his ward's eyes. Something lingered there, a tempered steel that wasn't possible in one so untested. The eyes assessed him for a moment before the young warlock responded with a quiet, "18. The other three deserved death."

The older man allowed himself to be dragged away from the point for a moment, "deserved death? What could they have done?"

The younger man's eyes shuttered, "One killed six men because he wished to have their wives. The second studied torture extensively, he never used magic but his work was some of the most gruesome I've ever heard of. The third had a tendency of keeping human *pets*; none were over the age of 9 and he certainly *enjoyed* them"

The physician ignored the questions he had about that last statement. "Merlin...I know it's hard but you can't do this. The risk of you being found out is..."

"Non-existent" Merlin interrupted.

"If the Prince or the King found out it would be disastrous."

"Arthur already knows; we came up with this together."

Gaius jolted, "What?"

Merlin shrugged with a grin, "Gaius, he's known for a while now. He doesn't care. Before you say anything no one with magic is going to trust him if he just changes the laws on magic; Uther has created far too many enemies for that."

"And how will your recklessness change that?"

Merlin shook his head with a small private smile "The druids now know that Arthur opposes his father's laws. Every person we've sent into hiding with them is sent with a message. They also know that he can't speak openly for fear of inciting another Purge." The young face stretched into a wide grin, "We have significantly shortened our list of enemies."

Even at the younger's obvious pride the older man couldn't help but shake his head. "It's too dangerous" he insisted.

Though a grin still stretched across Merlin's face, something shifted in the young man's countenance. "No" he replied softly, "It's not"

What's the word?

The fates were shifting in a way that the Great Dragon, Killgarrah, had only ever seen once before in his long lifetime. Not long after his imprisonment the future of Albion had formed with the birth of Merlin. Since then that goal had been unwavering; that picture fully formed. That same surety had swirled around Morgana Pendragon and her decent into darkness. It had formed his warning about the little druid boy. These events were all but set in stone, unchanged for nearly two decades.

Then they weren't.

Suddenly the paths that Morgana could take expanded. She was no longer the darkness to the warlocks light. Mordred's future had clouded over. The Albion that the dragon had clung to was rattling; shifting into something completely different. It was almost terrifying to the ancient creature; if the future Albion crumbles he would have nothing left but the darkness of his current existence.

That was why he was surprised when his senses picked up not one but two people making their way into his cave. One he can recognize as the young Ermy's; the other is hidden from his sight. Or at least it is until the warlock and Arthur Pendragon came into view on the little ledge that led up to Camelot's citadel.

"What is the meaning of this Ermy's?" The dragon hissed as he reared back slightly. Despite the destiny of the future king Kilgarrah could not find any fondness for a Pendragon. The shaken nature of that destiny fueled his dislike.

The boy didn't bumble like he usually did. "It's time for Arthur to meet you, Kilgarrah" The Great dragon focused fully on the youngling, tasting the air to find out what was different. A strange shudder past through his scales when the scent power unleashed rang through them.

"What foolishness did you do?" He roared as the realization of what that power meant washed over him. The last Dragonlord still lived, that much Kilgarrah could sense, and yet his son stood fully awakened before him. The tinge of the ancient priest also swirled around him, the power of life and death unbound in his veins. It was almost as if...

Unperturbed the warlock merely grinned at the bound Dragon, "Can't you see?" He all but sung teasingly. Pendragon shook his head with a fond exasperated smile; muttering about idiots and overgrown lizards.

Kilgarrah ignored the prince, instead focusing on the question asked but the Dragonlord "Albion's future is clouded; the vision is shifting and sight is lost. You have unraveled the fates you foolish child. In doing so you may have destroyed us all."

Pendragon snorted, "You're an even bigger pessimist than Morgana you know that. I came down here to meet you, Kilgarrah, but I also came to make you a promise. " Serious light glinted off the Prince's eyes, "*Byddaf yngweld chiam ddim, Draiggwych, a chydbwyseddei*

adfer i'wtrefn briodol" A strong promise in the common tongue but whispered in the Old Tongue the promise became binding.

Another shudder wracked the imprisoned dragon. Suddenly his sight cleared and a vision flowed through him. Not of Albion's gleaming spires metal and glass, of the future dragged from the blackest horror into gleaming light or the uneasy rot that lingered in the golden age. He saw...

...A small girl laughed and hugged the dragons forepaw, her golden eyes swirling with blue as a magic erupted from her...

... Solemn mourning and funeral pyre; old age had caught up to the great King at last. No one ever saw the two youths, on dark haired and one light, walking away hand and hand...

...An argument, loud and angry turning into laughter...

...A noble kicks his servant; it is the noble who is arrested...

...A reasoned argument instead of a shouting match. An old King abdicating with a thoughtful look...

...Preparation made early so a new law would not cause riots. An old lord kneeling with tears of joy remembered and fear that could be forgotten...

...A King smiles at his consort, stronger and more determined than ever. Together they release the chains that bound Kilgarrah for so long...

In an instant he saw the new future that had risen from the ashes of the old. It held none of the pure light of Albion, none of the golden age. Instead it was imperfect, it was real, and unlike Albion it would last past the 'death' of its creator. Comparing the two futures Kilgarrah could see the rot that would have destroyed Albion as surely as it was created.

"I thank you Sire and look forward to that day. No matter how distant."

Second to the last section

"Arthur" The king began with an imperious look on his face. "We need to talk about your manservant"

Looking oddly resigned but not nearly as irritated as he usually did the Prince sighed. "What about Merlin, father?"

"I am concerned with the lack of propriety. His inability to respect the crown is well known." The words flew from his mouth by rote. The king paid little attention, more focused on how his son would react to one of their most common disagreements

"Merlin respect the crown father"

Uthur gave the prince a slightly disbelieving look, "Did he or did he not call you a...what was it? Oh yes a clot pole during training yesterday?" Here was the point when the Prince

should start to get defensive, irate. To Uthur's surprise that wasn't what happened.

The prince sighed again, "Merlin acts like that on my orders, father" the younger man pursed his lips slightly in thought, "well partially on my order. Partially it's because he really has no sense of self preservation."

"On your orders?" The King repeated slowly.

Arthur nodded, "What kind of a King would I be if I couldn't handle some simple in jest insults or if I allowed my temper to control me. I ask him to continue to insult me in public because the more I hear it from him, the less likely my enemies will be able to use insults as a way of distracting me during battle."

Surprised Uthur just stared at his son for a moment thinking to himself that it seemed to be working.

Can I do it yes I can

Two small children, one tanned with golden hair the other dark hair and pale skin, chased each other around giggling madly. The golden child caught the dark and they tumbled over each other. In a breath the scene shifted and two young men replaced the boys. They played too but their games were for a much older crowd than the children. After their romp they curled together, children again, letting the world shift around them in the way that only dreams can. After a while both stood and allowed themselves to grow to their real ages. The dark haired man smiled at his lover.

"It's time to wake up Arthur" he said.

The golden man, Arthur smiled back at his warlock, "Make sure to bring enough breakfast for two" He requested with a quick kiss.

Simultaneously two pairs of eyes snapped open. The spell Merlin had found was a godsend. It took an existing bond between two souls and allowed a mental bond to be formed as well. They had accidentally found out that it involved dream sharing but neither would give those precious few hours up for anything. Because they were able to love one another freely each night with none the wiser they were able to maintain a charade of friendship and loyalty but no more.

It had been nearly six months since the fight in Ealdor. Both young men had distinct memories of the trials they had endured the first time around. Their own actions had changed so much so quickly though and future knowledge was quickly obsolete.

On a hunting trip, not long after Arthur met the Great Dragon, the duo had made a point to travel to the Isle of the Blessed to speak with Nimueh. They had approached the Priestess with great caution only to be surprised when she greeted them warmly. Though her hatred of Uthur had not eased she had seen the future they were building and knew that the true balance could only be restored if the proper steps were taken. She was willing to lay aside her own bitterness for the return of magic. They had spent the full week with her learning of the Old Religion.

In the meantime not all was well at Camelot. Unfortunately another hunting trip had shot and killed the unicorn passing through. Because it hadn't been the prince that had killed the magical creature the curse should not have spread to all of Camelot. However the knight in question had presented the horn to the King to show his devotion to Camelot. That devotion had spread the curse in a different manner than before. No magical curse had been laid upon Camelot but discontent seeded itself through the city at the death of such a pure creature. Many people had suppressed their own magical inclinations but it was difficult to ignore the ended of such goodness.

When the duo returned it was to a citadel on the brink of madness and a lower town just waiting to explode. The King used every method at his disposal of calming the populace but it seemed that every single one made the situation worse. Only hours before they entered the city the knight who had shot the Unicorn killed himself.

There had been no quick fix, no curse to be lifted. Instead months of work awaited the prince as he tried to right the wrong done by the knight. It was during this time that Arthur began to slowly build his own support base.

The duo never spoke of the time that never happened outside of their bond; they never spoke of the balance that would have been demanded. That was something they strove together to understand, the balance. It hadn't taken long to realize that the amount of magic that would be needed to send two souls back in time would have required a massive balance in comparison. It was the kind of balance that would destroy the future of a Kingdom. No they never spoke of the fact that Merlin instinctively knew that Albion would never be truly united. Not under Arthur or anyone else. There would be no golden age and though the history books would remember the king who brought back magic, who learned and kept the sacred balance of the Old Religion Arthur's name wouldn't stick out any more any other good king.

Life is about balance and the only way to change a destiny is to sacrifice a destiny.

Promise to the Great Dragon: I will see you free, Great Dragon, and balance restored to its proper order

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