

THE SETTING

Part I: The Courtship of Princess Gwen

It is Britain, the middle of the fifth century, A.D., twilight of the Age of Heroes. The Romans have withdrawn, leaving behind their stone structures and a patchwork of independent kingdoms and fragile alliances. It is an heathen age. Individual glory outweighs any considerations of nationality, but, especially with the influx of the Saxons, tribal identification remains important.

The principal action takes place in Galwalk, a fictional kingdom set in north-east Wales. For our purposes, English will be the common tongue, but accents are Irish, Scottish, German, and Welsh, recreating the wealth of tongues and tribes that characterized the era. Roman-style dress is still favored by Celtic women. Swords and spears are the weapons of choice for the nobility. Much of the armor worn by warriors is made of leather, with fittings of bronze, silver or gold and there is a fondness for enamel ornamentation in both sexes.

The "Three Kingdoms" are Galwalk, Fellsgard and Osterlaw, Westles being more distant. "Kingdoms", by modern standards, is an overstatement. The "kings", (a Saxon word), are little more than landlords, tribal chieftains . . . robber barons, if you prefer. They are settlers, noble lords who, with their warbands, hold territories of their own. That they used to, on occasion, raid their neighbors, was merely reflective of the Celtic/Germanic notion of sport, a notion profoundly disturbing to the legal-minded Romans who conquered and reorganized most of Britain, even importing the various factions to keep a check on the native population's often piratical tendencies.

This, then, is the true setting for the most popular legend in the western world; the tale of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. But Long-Grin, for all the elements of fantasy, for all the richness of the Celtic imagination, is also a true story; "true" in the sense that it is a re-examination of the culture and times of Britain's greatest hero, and "true", because it captures the essence of the mystery, sacred symbolism and magical thought that have made the Arthurian legend so compelling to this day, and placed a Red Dragon on the Flag of Wales.

