



## In Camelot's Shadow

*Sarah Zettel*

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### **In Camelot's Shadow Sarah Zettel**

#### **The Barnes & Noble Review**

Sarah Zettel's *In Camelot's Shadow* is an enticing romantic fantasy set in Arthurian England that explores the legend of Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady. When Gawain, King Arthur's handsome and promiscuous nephew, saves a beautiful maiden from a sorcerer, will his love be able to overcome the forces of evil?

Risa of the Morelands was cursed even before she was born. While returning from King Arthur's coronation, her father made a deal with an evil necromancer named Euberacon to save his beloved dying wife. In return for his wife's health, the sorcerer asks for the life of the child growing inside her womb. Her father accepts the deal and thus dooms the unborn Risa to a life of unthinkable depravity.

Now a beautiful 19-year-old with red-gold hair, Risa confronts her father after another suitor is turned away. When he eventually tells her about his deal with the sorcerer, she runs away -- only to be caught by Euberacon. Gawain fatefully witnesses the assault, saves Risa, and falls in love with her. But when Euberacon turns Risa into a monstrosity, will Gawain's love be enough to defeat a sorcerer, a pagan god, and all the naysayers at Camelot?

Like many Arthurian stories, *In Camelot's Shadow* is a tale about honor -- its moral obligations and all its unintended consequences -- but ultimately it is a story about the power of love. Lyrical, heartwarming, and engaging until the very last page, this novel is highly recommended for fans of romantic fantasy as well as Arthurian legend and lore. *Paul Goat Allen*

### **In Camelot's Shadow Details**

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Author : Sarah Zettel

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## From Reader Review In Camelot's Shadow for online ebook

### Tracey says

Camelot's shadow Has been an intriguing read. I enjoyed the twist of the story being from Gawain's And Rhian's Point of View.

I have always loved Arthurian legend , And Sarah Zettel As of increased my pleasure in reading about King Arthur and Queen Guinevere and the Knights of the round table.

It had the perfect amount of magic, darkness and love and bravery in the story as well as Mythical legend.

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### Emily says

I was prepared to adore any book written by a woman who's cat is named Buffy the Vermin Slayer.

Unfortunately, this did not quite reach adored status. The story of Risa of the Morelands and Sir Gawain of the Round Table is filled with Celtic mythology and Arthurian Legend. Risa's father has sold her to a sorcerer and Gawain must rescue her. That's pretty straightforward, but there is also another witch who wants Arthur's throne and sees Gawain and Risa's issues as fortuitous to her aims.

The pacing is a little slow, but the characters are well-developed and sympathetic. Zettel's take on Camelot is not wholly unique, but she throws in enough of her own inventions to make this different enough from other Arthurian tales that it doesn't feel old hat.

This is the first book in a series, but I don't own the other three. From reading this, I would be interested in Gawain's brother Agravain's story, but in doing some research his is the fourth book, and I didn't like this enough to slog through another two 400+ page novels to get to that. In my opinion, the ending of a series book should make one long to pick up the next, but I am sort of glad this didn't. This way I can leave it here with a satisfying wrap-up, knowing Gawain and Risa are going to be happy and well.

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### Barbara ★ says

This is the third book I've read this month pertaining to Merlin and/or Avalon. This is the best one yet and it's only the first in a series. It's a tender love story in the midst of terrible danger. I can't wait to see where For Camelot's Honor takes this tale.

Lady Risa is promised at birth to the evil sorcerer, Euberacon, who is intent on dethroning King Arthur. Of course, Risa has absolutely no intention of becoming Euberacon's tool of destruction so she flees. She meets up with Saxon forces who are marching on Arthur and is rescued by Sir Gawain himself. Since she will not return to her father, she continues to Camelot with Gawain. They stop at Pen Mahras to recover after the battle with the Saxon's and end up smack dab in the middle of another battle with the Saxons.

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### Nikki says

Reread in February 2010.

Since I'm hoping that the module on King Arthur will run next year, and reading widely in the tradition helped me with the Robin Hood module, I decided to revisit these books. As I said in my review almost two years ago, I'm not really one for romance books, generally, but these are Arthurian -- which helps a lot, since it's something I'm always interested in -- and they're not exactly bodice-rippers, and I do like Sarah Zettel's writing. There's genuinely a plot alongside the romance -- at least in this first book of the four -- and earlier elements of the tradition are woven into the story, while it's also not quite a carbon copy. It could have deviated more from the tradition, easily, and perhaps been more engaging then, but this is interesting enough. I like the portrayal of Guinevere, very much in love with Arthur, and though she's mischievous, she's a good queen. If I remember rightly, the betrayal of Arthur with Lancelot isn't re-enacted in this quartet, which I quite like. That's something new. And I like this portrayal of Gawain, as compared to some quite loutish ones I've read before.

It's interesting how close it sticks to the plot of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, which I'm doing a module on at the moment. I hadn't read that the first time I read this, so I didn't really appreciate how it had taken that plot but also woven in the women, Rhian and Kerra, and how it's also woven in the story of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell -- which I haven't read, but I know a decent amount about.

It's nice that there's an overarching plot to these four romances, with the figure of Morgaine, about whom we learn little in this book. It's also nice that they're romances in both the medieval sense and the modern sense. At least, it is for my inner geek.

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March 2008.

I'm not much for romances, but I did enjoy these books. They center around the sons of Morgause, which in this case means Gawain, Geraint, Gareth and Agravain, in that order. They're all romances, so the lead characters are girls somewhat rooted in legends surrounding the boys -- except Elen, who I couldn't find any mythological basis for (but that was only on a quick search). Rhian for Gawain (Ragnelle), Elen for Geraint, Lynet for Gareth (Lynette), and Laurel for Agravain (Lyonesse).

The books individually tell the stories of how the brothers come to meet their brides, and put together tell the story of Camelot's fight against Morgaine, Arthur's sister (commonly known as Morgan Le Fay). I don't think they adhere to any plot previously set out for Arthur, but there are little references and similarities throughout. Guinevere, for example, is faithful to Arthur, but at one point Morgaine impersonates her and has sex with Lancelot. Mordred also plays a part, the son of Morgaine and Arthur, but ultimately doesn't seem that important to the plot.

As an Arthur retelling, it's interesting. There's lots of the pagan magic mixed in with the bright and shining Camelot and Christianity, which is an intriguing mix. The writing itself is quite good: descriptive enough to call pictures into one's mind, but not weighed down with it.

Unfortunately -- considering it's a series of Arthurian romances! -- the romance falls fairly flat to me. Knight meets lady in need and falls in love. Lady meets knight and falls in love. Unfaithful womanising knight becomes faithful (Gawain and Gareth). Beautiful woman gets through the coldness and silence (Geraint/Elen and Agravain/Laurel). The love seems to come quick as fairytales, and happily ever after seems inevitable. All the men have to do stuff to bring their ladies back after the lady's bold and noble sacrifice -- Gawain stands up to the test of the Green Knight, Geraint kills something important while fearing the worst, Gareth gives his life to Lynet to bring her back from the sea, Agravain uses Excalibur's scabbard to bring Laurel back from the sea. It all seems a bit formulaic.

It also seems a little... unfinished. At the end of Agravain's story, Morgaine is dead, but Mordred has fled. A

prophecy remains that Mordred will kill Arthur. But the epilogue deals only with Sir Kai's death, and doesn't say anything about where Mordred went and how that prophecy pans out. It's true, though, that the story doesn't focus on Arthur but on the knights.

The books are easy to read, hard to put down and probably enough to keep someone interested. I got into the world and the relationships despite their flaws, and I'll probably reread the books someday. I think Sarah Zettel's Isavalta books are a much better introduction to her writing, though. They're more original and flow much more easily, with characters that are much less formulaic. I think I partially blame the flaws of the Camelot series on the fact that she's writing in a tradition that's centuries old. Sometimes that makes people not dare to be more creative.

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### **Milaryn says**

Eh, not my type since it's a bit too heavy on the romance and the "perfect man" and "perfect woman" and the "perfect couple". Dunno if it's my version, but could do with another edit.

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### **Ron says**

Okay book if you like the type--high Medieval Arthurian romance--which I don't.

Essentially a 100 page retelling of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight set within 400 page framing story told from the point of view of Risa, his lady love. Little to enjoy and much to gag over.

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### **Arthurianmaiden says**

This novel mix the story of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and The Wedding of Dame Ragnelle and Sir Gawain, in a new story where the author narrates the love of Rhian and Gawain. Rhian is the daughter of a powerful lord who had sold her soul to a sorcerer, in exchange for the life of his wife. When Rhian finds out, she runs away, trying to escape from the sorcerer who wants now to take her for her powers. Gawain finds her and you can imagine the rest.

I admit I preferred this novel to the fourth of the serie (which I've read first) because the character had a little more substance, in my opinion, and the plot is quite delineated. I particularly loved the villains and how most of the surprises in the story came from them.

(view spoiler)

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### **Nikki says**

I seem to change my mind every time I read these books. I've loved all of Sarah Zettel's work, but reading Camelot's Shadow again (for a third time) didn't do it any favours. The amount of grammar mistakes I came across in the text, for example, really began to annoy me. And the oh-so-perfect women -- Rhian, Guinevere, Jocosa -- or the demonised women -- Pacis, Kerra, Morgaine -- really got to me. Rhian was perfectly patient, Guinevere a perfect queen, Jocosa a perfect mother... Pacis was the scapegoat for Gawain's bad side, Kerra wielded her sexuality as a weapon, Morgaine brooded on Camelot's fall and betrayed even her own foundling...

At the same time, I do like the way Zettel chose to retell the stories. She wasn't afraid to take up the Arthurian stories and bend them to whatever suited her story best: she blended the tale of the Loathly Lady and the story of the Green Knight quite well, and gave an interesting background to the Orkney boys. Women are powerful in her story, for good or bad, too -- her positive Guinevere is believable, I think, and her relationship with Arthur a sweet one. And there's Kai and Agravain, both flawed but human..

Gawain is a little too perfect, I suppose, and the relationship between him and Rhian a fairytale one. I'm less impressed with this book than I was before. But I still enjoyed it, and was glad to spend time with it again. I think perhaps it suffered for being read for essay research, and because it hasn't been that long since I last read it.

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### **Wealththeow says**

Risa's father forbids her to marry, and at last Risa discovers why--years ago, her father promised her to a sorcerer in exchange for his wife's life. Unwilling to wait around to lose her soul as part of a sorcerer's household, Risa flees. The sorcerer pursues, but to everyone's amazement Sir Gawain happens upon them and rescues Risa. Gawain offers his protection to Risa, and as they ride together toward Camelot the seeds of love are planted in them. But even as they fall in love, they are troubled by marauding bands of Saxons, sorcerous machinations, and Gawain's tendency to save any damsel he comes across.

I don't know exactly why but I just didn't enjoy this. Zettel conveys the medieval period well, and Risa's reactions to spices, servants, and cloth types tell you a lot about her society. But Risa herself feels like an anachronistic hodge podge of modern fantasy heroine tropes; if I never read another red haired archer who disobeys her father to be with the man she loves, I will still have read too many. Gawain at least is given a chance at depth, as he tries to be honorable even as he's stupidly susceptible to manipulations by ladies. Two side characters, Agravain and Kaye, comment on this, and I think a little more attention to this aspect of the novel would have made me like it more.

I didn't like the pacing; the plot with the Saxons is built up to be the big problem of Camelot, but then it fizzles away (presumably to come up again in some later book in the series). The sorcerer is defeated ludicrously easily and simply. Worst of all, I flat out disliked Zettel's rewrite of the Green Knight and the Loathly Lady stories. She actually manages to make the Loathly Lady tale *less* feminist. (view spoiler)

Basically, I didn't like Risa, was unconvinced (and uninterested) by the romance, and thought the plot was a combination of poorly-paced imagined events and poorly-rewritten legends.

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### **Kiri Kayrooz says**

This one has sentimental value as it is part of a series that I started reading as a teenager. As a teenager I

liked fantasy, romance, and reworkings of other stories so this book would've ticked all the boxes back then!

Lady Rhian is ready for marriage but frustrated because her father refuses to give his consent to any suitor. Rhian is devastated to discover that her father cannot give his blessing because she was promised years ago to a sorcerer in order to save her mother from death. When she runs away, her path crosses with Sir Gawain, a knight of the Round Table. He promises to take her to Camelot so that she can ask for protection from the High King.

Gawain is pretty swoon-worthy (to a teenage girl) and Rhian has some touches of independence, resilience and humour that stop her from being a stereotypical damsel in distress. As an adult, I found the villainous women in this book and some of the sub-plots more interesting than the central romance. Overall, I liked it.

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### Terence says

I like Kage Baker's Company books (Mendoza, before she's reduced to a simpering, love-sick nonentity, is one of my favorite characters in any series) and I love C.J. Cherryh's Union-Alliance future history (Signy Mallory of ECS *Norway* ranks as one of the most brilliant characters in SF (IMO) and *Downbelow Station* is a masterpiece). But I can't stand their forays into fantasy. I couldn't finish *The Anvil of the World* and Cherryh's fantasy tends to bore me.

Sarah Zettel joins that band of authors whose SF I like but whose fantasy leaves me cold. I first met Zettel in her SF author guise - *Fool's War*, *Kingdom of Cages*, etc. - and enjoyed her writing. (Though, being reasonably honest, I confess to not remembering anything about the stories; all I remember is that I liked them.) And perhaps I should have known better: I hated *A Sorcerer's Treason*. But this was a tale of King Arthur, and because I didn't like one book didn't mean that I wouldn't like this one.

But that turned out not to be the case. I gave Zettel 117 pages to convince me to go on but her arguments weren't good enough. The writing felt awkward and forced; there was never a point where I could lose myself in the story. I was always aware that I was lounging in a chair reading a book. Even in Mary Stewart's Arthurian saga, which I recently finished rereading and had issues with, I was engaged enough in the story and the characters to *want* to continue reading. Every few sentences, *In Camelot's Shadow's* clumsy prose jarred me back into reality.

If I had time or inclination, it might be interesting to reread Zettel's SF novels to figure out why she fails for me in a fantasy setting.

But in this case, I can't recommend the book. I can see where others might find interest in it, however, and wouldn't want to discourage anyone from trying it.

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### Lena says

I like all of the ideas that go into this book - the fusion of the story of the loathly lady and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the way women have agency in this book, and even the changes to the story of Dame Ragnelle, and the interpretations of the characters (from sharp, thorny Kay, wise Guinevere, and Gawain, who manages to be both honorable and a bit of an idiot). I like the sense in the book that happy endings are something you have to earn - love isn't enough on its own, but you have to work at having a relationship, communicate, and strive to be worthy of each other by not doing shit like selling your daughter to evil

sorcerers.

But, much of the actual story was burdened by some clumsy prose and usage of romance tropes, cheesy villains (they pretty much have glowing signs over their head that say things like EVIL FOREIGN SORCERER and DECADENT SEDUCTRESS - though she gets a lot of more depth and she's an interesting foil to the heroine), and a spunky archer heroine.

Also, I didn't really buy Gawain and Risa's epic romance for about 85% of the book, because it felt like infatuation on both their parts.

The book redeems itself in the last 20%, which involves old gods, temptation, despair, and the riddle of what a woman wants (with an answer and a change that I found really satisfying!), and the heroine gets more interesting, but still, it was a long slog to get to that point.

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## **Nikki says**

I've read this several times now, and I always go back and forth on it a little. Initially, I think I was a teeeeeny bit ashamed to be caught reading something that is a romance in both the modern and the medieval senses of the word. Then I included it in my dissertation and had to think about it critically. And now... now I get to read it just for pure fun. Which is great: it makes me realise how much this version of Gawain is exactly what made me love the character in the first place, and that this retelling of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle's story was what guided me toward reading and loving the Gawain ballads.

It's fun, with and without the romance; I love this version of Camelot, which is practical at the same time as romantic. There's the knights, but there are also Saxon boys staying at the court as hostages. Guinevere is a queen and a figure of romance, but she's also Arthur's other half, managing Camelot alongside Kay, maintaining a whole set of duties belonging to queenship. There's no polite ignorance of the need for an heir: Gawain is openly Arthur's heir. (And definitely worthy of it; this version of Gawain doesn't kill women or go on mad rampages yelling for blood. He's courtly, though human — somewhere between Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Le Morte Darthur's least flattering sections.)

And Rhian is a great character too: determined, but not foolhardy; clever, but not infallible; cautious, but not immune to Gawain's pretty face. Brave, but not insensible.

The two make a great pairing, and it's a joy to read — as it's also a joy to read of Arthur and Guinevere's genuine love.

There are some frustrating aspects to this, like a certain judgemental quality around women who have sex (but not men), and an unfortunate editing slip-up where even when "father" is being used as a name, it isn't capitalised... but it's still fun, and I'm glad I got the chance to read it in a relaxed way like this.

Sidenote: I don't understand why the US version has changed Rhian's name to Risa. Well, probably to avoid people thinking it's pronounced "Ryan", but that doesn't mean I like the decision — Rhian is a pretty and Welsh name, and it fits much better in the context than "Risa".

Originally posted here.

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## **feux d'artifice says**

an utterly tedious and boorish read. if it weren't for the fact that this was a book club book, I definitely would have stopped after a couple pages.

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## **Maddie Senator says**

I am highly attracted to midieval and old English stories, so this book was right up my alley. A friend recommended it to me, and I was a little skeptical to read it at first, but then I got into it and it was great! It follows a nineteen-year-old young woman named Risa (it was nice to get a slightly older heroine for once) and Sir Gawain—yes, the same one from the King Arthur stories! When Risa was just a baby, her father promised her to an evil sorcerer out of desperation to save her mother's life. Now she's trying to escape that promise by running away, and Sir Gawain is there to help. Risa kicks butt! Beautiful but very capable, she takes down enemies with bow and arrow. A romance blossoms between her and the dashing Gawain (the somewhat roguish knight has to learn to be loyal to one woman by the end); you get to meet Arthur and Guinevere (and I really liked this representation of them); and there's a really cool twist at the end, hearkening back to the old story "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"! The only reason I gave it four stars instead of five, and why I hesitate to buy it, is because of some sexual content. It isn't between our hero and heroine, but there is a seductress working for the sorcerer (I think? Can't quite remember now) who uses her power over men to great advantage. If that were toned down a bit, this book would be perfect.

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