

KING ARTHUR AND THE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

A Legend Retold
By Dale Ahlquist

Cast of Characters

17 Females; 22 Males

<u>NARRATOR:</u>	The narrator.
<u>MERLIN:</u>	An old wizard.
<u>ARTHUR:</u>	Sir Bedevere's squire who becomes king.
<u>SIR LANCELOT:</u>	One of the Knights of the Round Table.
<u>SIR GAWAIN:</u>	One of the Knights of the Round Table.
<u>SIR PERCIVAL:</u>	One of the Knights of the Round Table.
<u>SIR BEDEVERE:</u>	One of the Knights of the Round Table.
<u>SIR GALAHAD:</u>	One of the Knights of the Round Table.
<u>SIR GARETH:</u>	One of the Knights of the Round Table.
<u>SIR ECTOR:</u>	One of the Knights of the Round Table.
<u>SIR MORDRED:</u>	One of the Knights of the Round Table.
<u>SIR NICK:</u>	A carpenter, one of the Knights of the Round Table.
<u>GUINEVERE:</u>	A princess who marries Arthur.
<u>LADY IGRAINE:</u>	Arthur's mother.
<u>RAGNELLE:</u>	A mysterious woman.
<u>MORGANA:</u>	A witch.
<u>MORGAWSE:</u>	A witch.
<u>ELAYNE:</u>	A witch.
<u>LADY ETTRA:</u>	A noble lady.
<u>LADY GELDA:</u>	A noble lady.
<u>LADY MELYDAS:</u>	A noble lady.

<u>LADY ISOLDA:</u>	A noble lady.
<u>LADY OF SHALLOTS:</u>	A lady selling shallots.
<u>ETHYL:</u>	A peasant lady.
<u>EDITH:</u>	A peasant lady.
<u>ENID:</u>	A peasant lady.
<u>ESTHER:</u>	A peasant lady.
<u>BERTHA:</u>	A peasant lady, mother of Binnie, Bit and Bib.
<u>BINNIE:</u>	Bertha's son.
<u>BIT:</u>	Bertha's son.
<u>BIB:</u>	Bertha's daughter.
<u>LOB:</u>	A barbarian.
<u>UTH:</u>	A barbarian.
<u>SOROS:</u>	A barbarian.
<u>ANGWYS:</u>	A barbarian.
<u>BORGUS:</u>	A barbarian.
<u>ROYNS:</u>	A barbarian.
<u>OTHER UTH:</u>	A barbarian, duplicate of Uth.
<u>GREEN KNIGHT:</u>	A tall, green knight who doesn't talk much.

Scene Breakdown

ACT I

Scene 1 – Village Square

Scene 2 – The Woods

Scene 3 – Camelot

Scene 4 – Morgana's Cave

Scene 5 – Village Square, a Wedding

ACT II

Scene 1 – Morgana's Cave

Scene 2 – A Room in Arthur's Castle

Scene 3 – The Barbarians' Camp

Scene 4 – A Church Courtyard

Scene 5 – A Battlefield

Approximate Length

75 minutes

Time

Medieval Ages

Place

England

Scene 4

Setting: Another wedding.

At Rise: GUESTS and KNIGHTS, except for SIR GAWAIN, gathering for Sir Gawain's Wedding Feast.

ISOLDA

Did you get a good look at her?

MELYDAS

There is no such thing as a GOOD look at her.

ETTRA

That was the strangest wedding I've ever been to.

GELDA

A handsome knight marrying the most repulsive-looking woman in the kingdom. What's so strange about that?

(Pause. They break out in laughter. Enter ARTHUR and GUINEVERE.)

GUINEVERE

I don't understand why he married her. Do you?

ARTHUR

Yes.

GUINEVERE

Well?

ARTHUR

I will tell you later. I hope.

GUINEVERE

Sometimes I do not understand men.

ARTHUR

(Almost pleased)

Oh. Well, that's comforting.

(Enter SIR GAWAIN and RAGNELLE, who is wearing a thick veil)

ETTRA

Here they come.

GELDA

Thank goodness, she's still wearing her veil.

ARTHUR

Blessings to the new bride and groom!

(GAWAIN and RAGNELLE bow to the others. They applaud with a false enthusiasm. Then GAWAIN takes RAGNELLE aside.)

GAWAIN

Ragnelle, now we are married. You must keep your promise.

RAGNELLE

Yes, my husband. But first, shouldn't you lift my veil and look upon your wife?

GAWAIN

(Hesitates)

I...well...um....

RAGNELLE

Then allow me.

(She lifts veil, and reveals that she is beautiful. GAWAIN is shocked and looks around wide-eyed.)

What are you looking for?

GAWAIN

I'm looking for my wife!

RAGNELLE

I am your wife.

GAWAIN

But...but...you're beautiful!

RAGNELLE

Thank you. That is a lovely thing to say to your wife, Gawain.

GAWAIN

That's not how you pronounce my name, but...you can pronounce it anyway you want.

RAGNELLE

Now...to answer your question about what it is that women most desire...

GAWAIN

But first I have another question. If you don't mind.

RAGNELLE

Oh. Is your question: how am I so beautiful now when I was so ugly before?

GAWAIN

As a matter of fact, that *is* my question.

RAGNELLE

I am under a spell.

GAWAIN

As in magic?

RAGNELLE

Yes. But because you offered to marry me, I am half-released from the spell.

GAWAIN

So you're under half a spell.

RAGNELLE

I can be either beautiful just to you and ugly to everyone else. Or else, ugly to you and beautiful to everyone else.

GAWAIN

I don't get it.

RAGNELLE

It's magic. You're not expected to get it.

GAWAIN

So you're either beautiful for me or ugly for me, depending on if you're ugly or beautiful for everyone else.

RAGNELLE

Either/or.

GAWAIN

So it just goes back and forth like that?

RAGNELLE

No, it has to be one or the other. Permanently. You have to decide.

GAWAIN

What?! *I* have to decide?

RAGNELLE

What do you want: do you want me to be beautiful just for you and hideous to the rest of the world? Or gorgeous for everyone else and loathsome only to you?

GAWAIN

I...I...suppose I wouldn't mind if you...were beautiful...for...me....

RAGNELLE

And live out my curse in public so that every man, woman, and child turns away in disgust every time they lay eyes on me?

GAWAIN

No, no, no! Not ever! You should be beautiful for everyone else.

RAGNELLE

And what kind of a wife would I be then? Repulsive to my own husband!

GAWAIN

(Perplexed, not knowing what to say)

Well, then...oh...um...oh...

(Hemming, hawing)

Well, what do YOU want?

(Magical sound effect)

RAGNELLE

Oh Gawain! You did it! You broke the spell!

GAWAIN

I did?

RAGNELLE

Now I will be beautiful both for you and for everyone else!

GAWAIN

How did I break the spell?

RAGNELLE

You were willing to let me have it my way! And that, by the way, is the answer to your other question: what women want is to have their own way.

GAWAIN

(Sighs with relief)

That could have been easier.

RAGNELLE

(Smiling sweetly)

But was it worth the risk?

GAWAIN

(Rejuvenated)

Risk? What do I care about risk? You're talking to the luckiest man in the world!

RAGNELLE

Will you ask your bride for a dance?

GAWAIN

Shall we dance, my dear?

(Another wedding dance, guests join in, all of them now trying to get a better look at RAGNELLE. Dance moves to the side of the stage and continues offstage. ARTHUR pulls GAWAIN aside.)

ARTHUR

Congratulations on your marriage, Sir Gawain!

GAWAIN

That's actually not how you pronounce...

ARTHUR

Your bride is unaccountably better looking than I remember her.

GAWAIN

So you noticed that.

ARTHUR

As a matter of fact, she's completely beautiful.

GAWAIN

Yes, well, that worked out rather well. But more importantly, I have completed the task. I have found out what women desire above all else.

ARTHUR

(Deep breath)

Tell me.

GAWAIN

(Deep breath)

To have their own way.

ARTHUR

That's it?

GAWAIN

That's it.

ARTHUR

(Pauses)

I need to go get Guinevere.

(Exit ARTHUR. Enter RAGNELLE.)

RAGNELLE

You left the dance. Are you already tired of me, Gawain?

GAWAIN

I love the way you say my name. I only appeared to abandon you just now because I had a duty to perform for my king.

RAGNELLE

Of course. And how did it go?

GAWAIN

Well, I don't know.

RAGNELLE

Don't worry. *I* know.

GAWAIN

Worry? Why should I worry?

(Enter ARTHUR and GUINEVERE)

GUINEVERE

(Looking very pleased)

You are a wise king after all! You know what women want.

ARTHUR

Well, if there's anything a king should know, it should be that! After all, half the people in my kingdom happen to be women. And I happen to be married to one!

RAGNELLE

(To GAWAIN)

See?

GAWAIN

I told you I wasn't worried.

ARTHUR

But now I understand why you weren't happy on our wedding day. Because I had planned everything and didn't take into consideration what *you* wanted.

GUINEVERE

Yes, well, I may have overreacted.

ARTHUR

But what I wanted most was to make you happy.

GUINEVERE

And you're sure that what you really wanted was not just to make yourself happy?

ARTHUR

Does it matter? I can't be happy if you are not happy.

GUINEVERE

(Smiling)

And now *you* have no reason not to be happy because *I* have no reason not to be happy.

ARTHUR

It's all rather connected, isn't it?

GAWAIN

(Approaching)

Queen Guinevere, may I present my wife: Lady Ragnelle.

GUINEVERE

What a lovely bride you are, my dear.

RAGNELLE

Thank you, Queen Guinevere.

GAWAIN

I trust you have forgiven me for the rabbit stew incident?

GUINEVERE

Completely! That was a trying day for all of us, Sir Ga—

ARTHUR

But don't ever offer the Queen carrots!

(The couples laugh and continue chatting. Enter SIRS GARETH, BEDEVERE, GALAHAD, PERCIVAL, and MORDRED.)

GARETH

We should have a tournament.

BEDEVERE

Why bother? Sir Lancelot would win.

GARETH

We could have a tournament and maybe arrange for Sir Lancelot not to come.

BEDEVERE

Why bother? No one else would come either.

PERCIVAL

Well, in the meantime, Sir Gawain somehow managed to get himself a beautiful wife. King Arthur somehow managed to make Queen Guinevere happy. Everything is perfect. Fairy tale ending.

(Enter the GREEN KNIGHT wearing helmet, carrying an ax)

GALAHAD

Is he part of the fairy tale?

GARETH

Who's that?

BEDEVERE

Looks like an uninvited guest.

(GARETH and BEDEVERE try to stop the GREEN KNIGHT, who easily repels them with a brush of his hand. GALAHAD and PERCIVAL challenge the intruder, and he effortlessly strikes them down.)

GARETH

Sir Lancelot!

(Enter SIR LANCELOT. There is both relief and excitement as everyone anticipates a great match. LANCELOT draws his sword. The GREEN KNIGHT stands impassively. LANCELOT lunges, the GREEN KNIGHT merely holds up his hand, grabs the sword, pulling it from LANCELOT's hand, and tosses it aside. He strikes LANCELOT who falls to the ground. Now everyone is scared.)

GREEN KNIGHT

(Commanding voice)

Arthur!

ARTHUR

(Coming forward)

Who are you? What are you doing here?

GREEN KNIGHT

I am come to offer a challenge.

ARTHUR

That's not even good grammar.

GREEN KNIGHT

I challenge you or any of your knights to strike me as he please with this ax. And then one year later, I shall strike him in the same manner.

(The KNIGHTS, pulling themselves off the floor, look at each other in a confused way)

BEDEVERE

What did he say?

MORDRED

(Entering)

He said that any of us can strike him with that ax any way we want. And one year later, he can do the same to us.

GARETH

If I whack him, there won't be a one year later.

(The GREEN KNIGHT stands silently, holding out the ax)

MORDRED

It can't be a real threat. Who wants to take the first shot?

LANCELOT

(Still dusting himself off)

I will.

ARTHUR

No, Sir Lancelot. I will.

(He takes the ax. The GREEN KNIGHT kneels before ARTHUR and bows his head.)

GREEN KNIGHT

Strike me when you are ready.

ARTHUR

This...does not seem right. But nevertheless...

(He raises the ax. GAWAIN stops him.)

GAWAIN

No, King Arthur, wait! You are right: something about this bargain seems wrong, and you must not subject yourself to it. Let me be the one.

ARTHUR

If it's wrong for me, it's wrong for you, Sir Gawain.

GAWAIN

That's...not how my name is actually pronounced. But at any rate, it is my wedding day and you must grant me the favor I ask.

ARTHUR

I didn't know that about wedding days.

GAWAIN

It's true. You must do this for me. You must allow me to be the one to strike this Green Knight.

ARTHUR

(Hesitates)

Very well.

(ARTHUR hands the ax to GAWAIN, who dramatically lifts it and then brings it down, cutting the head off the GREEN KNIGHT. Then, everyone gasps as the GREEN KNIGHT rises, reaches down, and picks up his severed head and takes the ax from the astonished GAWAIN.)

GREEN KNIGHT

In one year I will be back.

(Exit the GREEN KNIGHT. They stand there, stunned.)

GUINEVERE

What are we going to do?

MORDRED

He's too powerful for all of us!

GUINEVERE

Even Sir Lancelot.

RAGNELLE

This is witchcraft!

ARTHUR

It must be Morgana's doing.

RAGNELLE

Oh, Gawain, the Green Knight is coming back in one year!

GAWAIN

Don't worry, my dear. I know it looks bad, but the last time I made a deal with a strange condition, it turned out pretty good. I married an ugly woman and got a beautiful wife.

GARETH

(To PERCIVAL)

So I wonder what he is expecting to get after having his head chopped off next year?

PERCIVAL

He'll get a beautiful widow!

ARTHUR

Noble Knights! Our kingdom is in peril. We have to find a way to defeat the Green Knight. But it is not just the Green Knight we have to defeat. It is Morgana and all her evil forces. This means an all out war.

BLACKOUT

INTERLUDE

NARRATOR

And so the kingdom was plunged into a brutal and terrible war. Hundreds and hundreds of men followed King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table into battle after battle against Morgana and the Barbarians and their evil forces from near and far. Although the people showed great trust in their King and were encouraged by his wise rule, his just hand, and his bravery in battle, there was also a pervading fear. The land was no longer joyful. There was a longing for days past, for the time of peace and play.

(A dream-like scene where figures move across the stage almost in slow motion, with music evoking a wistful nostalgia and melancholy LADIES walking and talking and laughing together, BERTHA and BIB holding hands while BERTHA points and BIB beholds whatever it is with

childlike wonder, BINNIE and BIT mock sword-fighting and meeting SIR ECTOR who gives them a tip on how to do it, SIR NICK carrying a piece of wood and meeting the LADY of SHALLOTS who sells him some of her goods, other LADIES dancing.)

NARRATOR

One year passed. The war worsened. The blood flowed. Spirits sank.