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The Song of Arthur

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

The emphasis on this latest retelling of the Arthurian story is on the pagan myths which preceded Thomas Malory's chivalric Christian fifteenth-century version. Leeson looks back to the fifth century when the legend of Arthur, the Celtic warrior king defending Britain from the Saxon invaders, began. Around Arthur, of course, many earlier sagas of Celtic gods and heroes achieved new focus and were kept alive. In this book it is the poet and prophet Taliesin who chronicles the achievements and aspirations of Arthur and his followers, and the mysteriously magical events which they sometimes direct, but are often controlled by. At first Taliesin is seen as a young boy orphaned by the ravages of war. His harp becomes more important to him than his sword and, established as a minstrel at Arthur's court, he grows in authority and prophetic prowess as the story progresses. As Leeson says in an afterword, in **The Song of Arthur** 'there are no Sir Knights', only warriors; there are no romantically turreted castles but only simple strongholds. Also 'the Otherworld is not in Heaven, but all around the living'. Some of the most celebrated characters in more conventional versions (Merlin, Launcelot and Guinivere, for example) come across as rather shadowy figures here. However, the complexities of Arthur's nephew Mordred and half-sister Morgaine are more satisfyingly explored. Although the stress is on reality rather than romance, the overall narrative tone is lyrical. However, contrasts to the poetic mood are provided by a variety of starkly expressed challenges, and flashes of power that operate at both ordinary and supernatural levels. Leeson gives little detail of social and physical backgrounds but one feels that a great deal is going on beneath the surface of the narrative. His book is likely to appeal to young readers who look for more than simplistic battles between good and evil. Doubtless it will also be read with relish by many adult enthusiasts of the never-ending saga of the once and future king.

Running Order:

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