

"I love Sir Gawain! Even though his quest seems impossible he manages to win." Bertie, 13



GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Gawain and the Green Knight is one of the best-loved stories in all the tales of King Arthur.

A horrific apparition interrupts the Christmas festivities at King Arthur's Camelot. A staggeringly green giant on a great green horse delivers a deadly challenge – one of the gathering must cut off his head, after which he will return the favour in a year's time.

King Arthur must accept this challenge or appear a coward, but it's left to young Sir Gawain to act. Gawain chops off the giant's head, which rolls across the floor. Horror of horrors, the giant strides over to pick up his head, which then begins to speak, seemingly unharmed. He holds Sir Gawain to his promise and rides off into the wintry night.

A year passes and Sir Gawain sets off with terrible dread to find the Green Knight and keep his side of the bargain. Can he avoid his almost certain doom?



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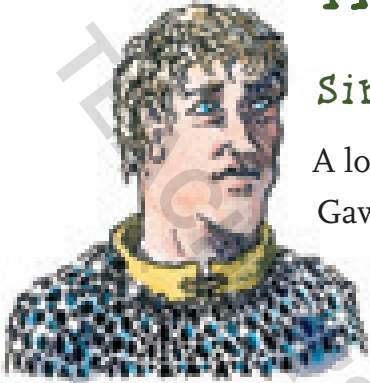
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THE CHARACTERS



Sir Gawain

A loyal and brave young man, Gawain is keen to impress the great King Arthur. His desire to be a good knight puts him in terrible danger. Will he survive?

King Arthur

The legendary King of Camelot is Gawain's uncle. During the great Christmas celebrations he is presented with a strange and horrific challenge. Should he take it on?



The Green Knight



Savage, terrifying, and very green, the Green Knight storms in to interrupt the peace and harmony of the Camelot Christmas festivities. Will he carry out his deadly threat?

The Lord of the Castle



Larger than life and very hospitable, he welcomes the young knight into his home to shelter from the harsh winter as Gawain seeks out the Green Knight. But should he be trusted?

The Lady of the Castle

The most beautiful woman that Gawain has ever seen, she is very kind and friendly to him as he shelters in the castle. Why is she so friendly?



The Old Lady



A curious woman who is always close by the Lady of the Castle. What is it about her that unsettles Gawain? Is there something familiar about her?



GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Part 1

It was Christmas at Camelot, the court of that king
Whose life is legend, his name so memorable
(Please do me the honour of not nodding off –
It's the tallest of tales in the annals of Arthur
So weird and so wacky you'll say it's a whopper!)
The lords and the ladies all revelled till late
In dancing and drinking, in jousting and japes,
And they feasted a fortnight on fabulous fare.
Then night drew in on New Year's Day
With a banquet prepared of prodigious proportions.
All sat and stared at the star-studded table,
At the canopy covered in sumptuous silk
Where Guinevere graced the great and the good,
King Arthur at her side, Gawain beside his king,
The rest arranged according to rank.

She shone,
The brightest belle of the ball.

The beauty is hard to relay
Of that loveliest lady of all –
Her eyes were amazingly gray!



The king was a creature of action and clamour,
He liked nothing less than lazing around.
So instead of tasting the titbits before him
He called for a story, some stirring old saga,
An epic, a pitting of man against peril,
A death-defying tale of derring-do!
Alas, no fable fell from their lips.
The food arrived in full-fettled fanfare
The tables were teaming with taste-tempting treats.

But look:

It's beyond my powers to describe
The amount they were given that night
And what they chose to imbibe.
(It's really not easy to write.)



The courses were coming in thick and fast
To the tooting of trumpets and the din of the drums,
And just as they ceased their cacophonous cries
A new noise was heard, a nerve-racking roar,
And into the hall hove a hair-raising sight:
A strange colossus, a spine-chilling stranger,
All sinewy strength and bone-crushing bulk;
A gargantuan, jaw-dropping, genuine giant!
(Or half a hulk – it's hard to say.)

In spite of his size, it has to be said
He was a bit of a hunk, a humongous heart-throb,
Gigantically gorgeous.

But the gathering gawped and gazed
At this curiosity they'd seen.
Prepare to be amazed:
The man was entirely green!



From top to toe he was decked out in green
With a tailor-made coat tucked into his waist.
His cape was trimmed with tip-top fur,
The purest of pelts, all spotlessly clean.

The poem also demonstrates the author's detailed knowledge of the countryside, and what it was like when travelling was much harder than it is now. There is a long passage when you can feel Gawain's pain as the rain lashes him like sharp knives of ice as he rides on his wintry search for the Green Chapel.

Back in time

The legend of Arthur became very popular in the medieval period, and if you watch films and look at pictures depicting Arthur and his court you will almost always see them dressed in medieval costume. In fact, if Arthur actually existed at all he was probably a warrior fighting the Saxons at the end of the Roman occupation of Britain in the sixth century.

The most famous writer at the time of the *Gawain* poet was Geoffrey Chaucer, who wrote *The Canterbury Tales*. Not only is this a brilliantly funny poem depicting medieval life in all its colour, it is very important because it is written in English.

French had been spoken at court since the Norman invasion in 1066. Chaucer and the *Gawain* poet were writing over two hundred years later, during the reign of Richard II. At this period language of literature was changing from French to English, though the official language used at court did not change until Henry V's reign, round about the time he set off to fight the French at Agincourt in 1415. Many scholars think that one of the reasons for King Arthur becoming so popular at this time is that people wanted a real 'English' hero.

The most popular writer of medieval romance was a French poet called Chrétien de Troyes, who enhanced the Arthur myth and introduced Sir Lancelot and the Holy Grail. These do not feature in *Gawain*, but many of those who read *Gawain* would also have been familiar with Chrétien de Troyes.

The most famous book about Arthur appeared nearly a hundred years after *Gawain*, in 1485 – *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Thomas Malory. This is probably the most famous medieval book about King Arthur and his knights.