

## Excerpt The Sword and The Grail

Any witch worth her cauldron knew the world needed someone like Arthur. The mess in the Middle East wasn't going away. Nimue shook her head as she put the mandrake—minus one small root—back in its pot where it glared at her balefully. Even before the Crusades, Christians, Jews and Muslims had been calling each other infidels. It was worse than when the Romans had come to Britain and tried to destroy the Druids' holy groves and tumble the Goddess from her circles of stones. Nimue scraped the remnants of mugwort, horehound, hyssop, and mistletoe berries from the table and into a mortar, mashing them with the pestle.

“Too bad people can't be blended to get along together,” she said to Ariel as she sifted the fine particles of her ingredients. “If anyone can bring opposing forces together and make them see sense, Arthur can.”

The feline looked back at her with emerald eyes and stopped licking its sleek black fur. “But that's not the only reason you want him back,” she said with a slow, luxurious stretch. “Is it?”

Nimue shrugged, still marveling at the feeling of being able to move. She had been stuck in that tree Merlin sent her to for far too long. “Arthur will need me, of course, to help him.”

“Uh-huh,” the cat said.

“Well, he will. Guinevere is dead. I'm not bringing *her* back.” Hardly. All those years of watching Guin toy with Arthur while Nimue had been desperately in love with him and blocked by Merlin's magic to do anything about it. No more. She had finally escaped the Magician's bonds and her power had only grown stronger while confined.

Now she would wield it and this time, *she* would be Arthur's lover and his friend, the one to stand by his side and uphold his principles. *This* time, the fellowship of the Round Table would remain intact, for Nimue would never betray Arthur as Guinevere had done. Not, she admitted grudgingly as her conscience poked at her, that it was entirely Guin's fault. The dark-haired, dark-eyed Lancelot was half-fey, like Nimue herself, and irresistible to most women. Guinevere, for all her golden beauty, was merely mortal.

