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The Book of Mordred

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Vande Velde, Vivian. *The Book of Mordred*. Illustrated by Justin Gerard. Houghton Mifflin, 2005. ISBN 061850754X. \$18.00. 342 p.

Reviewer: Rachel Wadham

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy fiction; Historical fiction;

Subject: Mordred (Legendary character)--Juvenile fiction; Arthur, King--Juvenile fiction; Great Britain--History--To 1066--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

The Arthurian legend has offered inspiration to generations of writers. Recently we have seen the villain of the story, Mordred, take on a leading role. Novels such as Nancy Springer's "I Am Mordred," Sarah Thomson's "The Dragon's Son" and Elizabeth Wein's "The Winter Prince" tell his story. Now added to this lofty canon is "The Book of Mordred" by Vivian Vande Velde. Far from rehashing stale territory, Vande Velde offers significant insight. The story is told from the perspective of three women who are part of Mordred's life. Mordred becomes more of a minor character as focus is given to the perspectives of Lady Alayna, the sorceress Nimue, and Kiera, Alayna's young daughter. Through the women's eyes we gain deeper insight into Mordred's psyche. In this way the reader can begin to see him as a character that deserves sympathy rather than a mere villain.

The book chronicles various events over a ten year period, finally ending with the deaths of Mordred and Arthur; the characters impact one another's lives in an action packed plot with vivid words that bring the familiar setting to life. Despite weighty themes such as love, loyalty, chivalry, family, destiny, evil, and death, the story is never overwhelmed by them: readers who have yet to be fully introduced to Mordred will find this novel, with its concluding comprehensive outline of the whole legend, very accessible. Even those more familiar with Authurian tales will find the novel rich and interesting. Breathing new life into an old legend, Vande Velde's retelling provides excellent reading for fantasy and historical fiction fans.