



## Under in the Mere

*Catherynne M. Valente , James A. Owen (Illustrator) , Jeremy Owen (Illustrator)*

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**Under in the Mere** Catherynne M. Valente , James A. Owen (Illustrator) , Jeremy Owen (Illustrator)  
What damosel is this? What damosel is this?

Perhaps I am nothing but a white arm. Perhaps the body which is me diffuses at the water's surface into nothing but light, light and wetness and blue. Maybe I am nothing but samite, pregnant with silver, and out of those sleeves come endless swords, dropping like lakelight from my hem. Will you come down to me and discover if my body continues below the rippling?

I thought not.

So begins the second release from the Electrum Novella Series, *Under in the Mere*, which takes Arthurian legend to the furthest limits of the imagination. Incantatory, labrynthine, and both playful and heartbreaking, *Under in the Mere* is a major new work from one of America's premier writers of fantasy.

With full interior illustrations from renowned fantasy artist James Owen and Jeremy Owen.

## **Under in the Mere Details**

Date : Published 2009 by Rabid Transit Press

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Author : Catherynne M. Valente , James A. Owen (Illustrator) , Jeremy Owen (Illustrator)

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## From Reader Review Under in the Mere for online ebook

### Roby says

I love most of what I've read by Valente, but just couldn't get into this book. Most of the chapters seem like they have great personal significance to the author, but not to me. I feel like I've failed as a reader...

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### Gini says

Arthurian legend meets the California coastline, and magic ensues. This book, more tone poem than novel, is a reimagining of the tales of Camelot told in first person from eleven points of view. This is not a book to be gulped down, but one in which to immerse. The language is beautiful and evocative, metaphor that will challenge and enlighten.

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### Nikki says

Catherynne Valente's take on Arthurian myths are very distinctively hers. I could've picked any extract from it and tell it was hers. She brings her distinctive style to my most beloved legends -- and sometimes I find the result interesting, and sometimes not. The idea of Morgan being Arthur's true love interested me most, since I wrote an essay on Guinevere which of necessity examined Morgan's role in the legends as well. I was most intrigued by her version of Kay, though, but of course I'm writing my thesis on Kay, so maybe that's not surprising.

I wasn't so fond of Galahad and Lancelot's parts, but they're characters I'm not so interested in anyway. Bedivere, though, and Kay... very powerful retellings, and I appreciate that her Kay was based on the Celtic Cei.

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### Jasmine says

I thought I had difficulty putting *Tithe* in a mental box, and then I read this. I'm not even going to TRY to box it.

As best as I can describe it, the book is a collection of short stories, each narrated by a character in the court of King Arthur. (Guenevere doesn't get to talk, and neither does the king.) And if you open up the book when Lancelot is talking, you know the difference between him and the Green Knight. The voices are vividly different.

I say narrated, but that's not right. It's almost stream-of-consciousness, as the characters regret and accept and anguish and plot for the future.

What damsel is this? What damsel is this?

Perhaps I am nothing but a white arm. Perhaps the body which is me diffuses at the water's surface into nothing but light, light and wetness and blue. Maybe I am nothing but samite, pregnant with silver, and out of those sleeve come endless swords, dropping like lakelight from my hems. Will you come down to me and discover if my body continues below the rippling?

I thought not.

-the Lady of the Lake

I'm sure there is a genre name for this- post-modern fantasy, perhaps- but it was new to me. Perhaps because of the drug-like quality of the writing style, or perhaps because of the jolt before dropping into someone else's head, I couldn't read it all in one sitting. I mention this because I usually do read books all at once (it's a failing, I know, PLEASE DON'T LOOK AT ME THAT WAY?) and also because did want to read more. (Unlike, perhaps, the *Summa* which I am STILL very happy to walk away from for a while. Just to let it sit and regrow my mind...) But yes, before I was distracted by traumatizing memories of Aquinas, I was saying I had to leave the Valente for a while, and go wash dishes or sleep or such. Reading it is just like, lighting a handful of sparklers **inside** your head\*. Awesome, but at some point the sparklers burn out, and things have to heal before you can light them up again.

The voices in these stories are old, and weighed down with memories. In the case of the lady of the lake, they almost have no concept of time anymore, if they ever had it. They are ground down by lives, sins, responsibilities, war, the way a king will bend all the lives surrounding him around him like a knot in a board distorts the grain, by, memories and cruelty and love. (They have difficulty seeing the difference between hatred and love, in a few notable cases.)

I- am having difficulty describing this book with any degree of coherence. \*deep breath\*

The voices are myriad with imagery. Cunningly imaginative imagery that finds its way into your head through unexpected chinks in your bones and makes you pause days later\*\*. The plot is a shadow that stays at your back, whispering mockingly in your ears. The individual stories, even if you've read the "originals", are horrifying and aesthetically pleasing. The whole thing is *crafted*, all the strands of the stories tethered secure with nails or circling with malice intent to reappear.

It's most definitely not for everyone. The story gets graphic at points. (Which, I mean, c'mon, you're dealing with Camelot here. I think their morals and little indiscretions in the river have been pretty much flaunted to every conceivable corner of the sky.) But I will say that I went through an Arthurian Stage, where I read every bit of it that was available at my pathetic library, and this is the first tale that has made me warm to Mordred, much less LIKE Morgan le Fay. (That was a freaky shocker.) Oh, and if you're looking for a Christian retelling of the Christian myth of King Arthur, for heaven's sake look elsewhere. (SPOILER ALERT: There's incest you guys. GASP.) But for pure magical prose, reading this is a good idea. It's, good.

\*Metaphorical sparklers. I have not ever, nor do I intend to, nor do I condone the use of; lighting incinerary devices inside of one's cranium. ~~That is between you and your gods.~~ Srsly. Plz don't, I'd feel guilty, and think of the coroners! (I should have used the Seltzer Down The Spine metaphor, shouldn't I have?)

\*\* Mordred's lies are his "other boy." Galahad talks of his father Lancelet being broken on a wheel made of women's legs- the Lady, Elaine and Guenevere. Kay sees his orders as a snake which climbs inside his armour and eggs him on, eatings its self as any part of the order is completed.

### **James says**

don't remember when i read this, probably 2008 or 2009 maybe... regardless, it's Catherynne M. Valente so it was obviously amazing... i don't know where she gets her writing style, but it is uniquely incredible... at times, in her short stories, it can overtake the plot, but in her novellas and novels it works magically... must read, hard to find...

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### **Jen says**

Holy dense lyrical prose, Batman!

I'm...not sure what that was. It was beautiful. It was evocative. It was mesmerizing. It was...a thing.

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### **William Leight says**

A retelling of a story that's been told as many times as the Arthurian legend has needs something to justify it, and this one comes up short. There are some nice images, like the clockwork knights, but the one attempt to really do something new, which comes when Valente tries to add modern-day California as an adjunct to the story, as the mystical western land of Avalon, doesn't really make sense. The fact that it's a collection of stories with no connection beyond the fact that they are all adapted from the Arthurian legendarium doesn't help here.

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### **Anie says**

Lyrical, just enough to present you with the kind of dreamscape you can comprehend. This is a book that requires prior knowledge of Arthuriana, and not just passing familiarity; it's also aided by a knowledge of tarot (for the illustrations). I got a passing grasp on it, but like a dreamscape, it slithers through your fingers, and you're left hoping you can dream it again sometime.

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### **Vittoria says**

I am certain I have missed half of the references in this novella and I still enjoyed it.

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### **Bridgett says**

I like Arthurian mythology and this is a very unusual take on it. The prose is beautiful and poetic.

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## **Sarah says**

This book makes me wish that I was still in college, and taking a class on Arthuriana - and I mean that in the best way. I don't know nearly enough about the legends of Arthur to really understand and appreciate what Cat's doing here, but Cat's language and storytelling ability are still amazing.

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## **Fantasy Literature says**

Catherynne Valente's novella *Under in the Mere* is about as inaccessible a book as I've read in some time. That doesn't mean I'm not recommending it, but it's fair warning to any who attempt it. *Under in the Mere* is a poetic, surrealistic "retelling" of several Arthurian tales (a mix of the better and lesser known ones), although "retelling" is really far too pedestrian and prosaic a term for Valente's dense, imagistic and poetic language here, and far too limiting with regard to how she plays with the tales and with language. Perhaps "recreation" is a better description.

Here's a short taste of the language from the opening of the first story, involving the Lady of the Lake:

Perhaps I am nothing but a white arm. Perhaps the body which is me diffuses at the water's surface into nothing but ... [Read More](#):

<http://www.fantasyliterature.com/reviews/under-in-the-mere-by-catherynne-valente/>

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## **Colton says**

Prose is to texts as abstract is to paintings. By definition, multiple interpretations are not only possible but achieved. I had previously thought my appreciation for prose was not. Such subjectivity could never matter. Yet it is all that matters, demonstrated by Mr. Island, as the atom comprises the universe, and without it, it would be not. The Informal may warrant being synonymous with the Senior. Ambiguity may be either worthless, time-wasting nonsense, or the best dream that I have ever had, in which I am riding atop a massive, fire-breathing dragon flying over the Kingdom of Kingdoms. It is not a nightmare, not sleeping, but a dream, what life is, serving as an example to why everyone loves references, to share what makes them happy, in order to make it omnipresent. For everything is connected, and everything has to do with everything, all while synonyms and connotations are underestimated, making it never what you expect. Finding the hidden meaning brings not only euphoria, but satisfies the vocation, making one happy to die alone. In any case, I digress. Never before have I dreamed in such a way while reading, and (not) also retaining paired auditory information. Firsts are quite the experiences, time mutating them into beauty through change for vacuous desires. Relevance and code strength matter. Writing at such length about nothing is a prodigious form of art. That of one talent I will never have, and will only observe. She understands. She does not comprehend. And never will. Thus therefore indeed, I have interpreted reading this book as such.

"Sometimes I think it is all our trying that has brought us here, all our struggling and trying that sets up all these tragic scenes."

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## **Kopratic says**

Here we explore the deep confessions of those ladies and knights. Of the Lady in the Lake, whose arm seems so much more important than the rest of her body. Of the Green Knight. Of Balin and Balan. Of Galahad. Of Morgan Le Fey. So many. So many. We are like untrained counselors who can only listen as these Arthurian patients whisper and scream their hearts out to us. They plop them right in our laps and don't expect a thing from us. There is no rhyme or reason. Only the poetry of emptying their whole self. Throw a sword into a lake. Easy. In words. Yet so difficult in action. Kill your brother, your twin. They are knights. The color red does not scare them. Yet when the poisoned apple touches those lips, or the red-hot shoes are on those feet...well, having someone die in your arms isn't easy.

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## **Amanda says**

I have been looking for a Kindle copy of Under The Mere since the moment I heard there was a Cat version of Arthur. I have been an Arthurian buff since I was wee thing, and I have been a massive fan of Cat since the moment I discovered her. Hear there was a crosshatch between the two maybe be long desperately for it.

Finally, I got to cross it off, and I have to say I deeply loved getting to ready this. Dissolving into the lake of all of it, glorious and descriptive and enchanting. I think that everyone (who loves these two things, as well) should definitely take it as a charge that they will need these. It's gorgeous and worth having.

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