

Rosco the Time-Traveling Salesman

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A strange man from the year 2010 has arrived in Camelot, selling strange and wonderful things, like cell phones, computers, televisions...and books about sparkling vampires? Inspired by Merlin Children in Need 2009. Crack!fic

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1 - Rosco and His Time Machine

Rosco had a plan. This wasn't something strange within itself – Rosco always had a plan. But this one, this plan...it was the most devious, most ingenious, and most extreme plot he had ever concocted, and it was all thanks to his time machine.

Forget the fact that it technically wasn't his time machine. He had borrowed it – without permission – from a strange man wearing an odd, futuristic jumpsuit made of shiny blue latex and yelling, "Eureka! I've done it – my time machine actually works!"

Rosco had always wanted a time machine, but there was no way that he would have ever been able to build one of his own. After all, he wasn't a scientist – he was a salesman, and a good one at that. He could sold anything to anybody, and he had – he'd sold timeshares, watches, poodles, escargot, cell phones, books, toys, noodles, guns, sports paraphernalia, cars, helicopters... The list went on and on.

But there was one thing he hadn't done – he had never sold anything to anyone of any other era. There was only so much that the people of 2010 would buy – after all, money was tight and pockets were getting picky with what they spit out in exchange for goods. And when he had commandeered the time machine, he had had an epiphany. He was going to do something no salesman had done before – he was going to peddle his wares in other times.

Who said that people in Ancient Greece wouldn't appreciate Lady Gaga CDs? Or that the Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt would object to wearing t-shirts that said "I'm with stupid," or that the mighty Romans wouldn't want to watch TV? He could sell Twilight merchandise to the young Transylvanian girls of the 1700s who wanted nothing more than to fall in love with a vampire (although he was pretty sure that Count Dracula hadn't sparkled). He could set up cell phone kiosks in ancient Asia and provide the cavemen in the time of the dinosaurs with something a bit more substantial than a club to protect themselves with. He'd introduce video games to the 1400s, iPods to the 1500s, and Facebook to the 1600s. He knew the kind of payment he'd receive wouldn't work for him in this time, but who said that he had to live in 2010? He could travel around, living wherever he wanted, whenever he wanted, and sell his goods until he had to make a trip to the present for some more stuff to sell.

It was fool-proof. He would be the greatest salesman ever, because he would sell to everyone. But where to start?

He pondered this as he considered the screen of the time machine, his long fingers hovering just above the buttons, ready to choose a destination. Where to sell, oh where to sell?

A thought struck him – a beautiful, insane, wonderful idea. He was going to be a legend, was he not? So why not go to a time and place where one of the greatest legends of all time had been born? Surely the medieval crowd would appreciate his vast array of merchandise. He would be a hero in their eyes, a savior to bring them out of their dark ages and into a new era, an era of peace, prosperity, and technology.

With an excited grin on his sly face, he punched in: Camelot

Then he sat back, relaxed, and listened to the rambling of the machine while it started up, shook a bit, coughed a bit of purple smoke, and then disappeared into the time-space-continuum with a flash and a bang.

Camelot had no idea what was about to hit them.

2 - Rosco and His Not-Magic Stuff

Something odd was happening in Camelot. Then again, something odd was always happening in Camelot, and more often than not, it involved some sort of danger. This time, however, if there was danger in the new market stall on the side of the street, it was well concealed.

Arthur was doing his morning patrol of the city when he noticed something that, quite frankly, he had never noticed before. Next to Sampson's cabbage stand and across from Lillian's flower stall was a new, bigger place of merchandise, made out of metal, like his armor. He frowned, observing the strange man behind the armored table, having never seen anyone quite like this in Camelot.

He was a tall man, and very lean, with a shock of red hair just beginning to recede. He was thin – thinner than Merlin, perhaps – with long, slender fingers, knobby, chicken-esque legs, shifty green eyes, and a large nose (more of a beak, actually) that was a smidge off-center. He wasn't exactly a charming fellow in appearance, but something about him called out to Arthur, making him want to speak to the man, to learn more about him and what he was selling. Certainly there were enough people crowded around his market stall.

As he drew closer, he blinked in shock, because as odd-looking as this man was, it was nothing compared to his attire. He wore black breeches that hung loosely off of his skinny hips, drawing to a stop just above bony ankles that were covered in checked red, green, and white stockings. His shoes did not seem to be made of leather or skins, but of some sort of shiny, slippery material, and were ebony. He wore a crisp white shirt that was made out of a thin, light material. Over the shirt he wore a vest of sorts – a dark gray color with burgundy check patterns reaching across it. At his neck, right at the collar of his shirt and above the "V" neck of his vest, was a little red bow that Arthur would expect to see on a little girl's head, not a grown man's chest.

More people were gathering around the man's store, staring wide-eyed at his merchandise, oohing and aahing like crazy. Arthur knew that he had to find out just what was going on. "Excuse me," he said loudly, expecting the sea of people to part for their prince, but nothing happened. Everyone was too fascinated by the weirdly dressed man and his metal stall.

Arthur frowned. He wasn't used to people not listening to him – well, except Merlin, that is, but he hardly counted; it was just Merlin after all – so he tried again. "Citizens of Camelot. Please, step aside, so that I can speak with this man."

Still, no response. One young woman delicately picked up a small gray box and flipped it open, the red-haired man talking animatedly to her and putting the opened container to her ear. What was this man going on about?

Taking a deep breath, Arthur bellowed, "I would like to speak with this man!"

At last, his people acknowledged him, reluctantly backing away and putting some of the strange objects back on the surface of the table. Arthur motioned for the people to move along, wanting to talk to him in

relative privacy.

When they were gone, he eyed the stand set up, his eyes travelling over the multitude of items littered on the shelves of the stand. There were more of the strange flip-boxes, along with a few other rectangular boxes that looked as if they wouldn't open but instead had a vast array of tiny buttons – marked with letters and numbers – on their front. On another section were a display of four books, all sheathed in a thin, papery black coat with pictures on the spines – one with an apple, another with a flower, the third with a ribbon, and the fourth with some kind of game piece. They were labeled *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*, respectively. He wondered if they were books predicting the lunar patterns for this year.

There were some bigger boxes, black with green X's on them. Strange yellow devices that could pass for some sort of weapon. An opened box that had a shiny black surface on the inside of the top and more letter and number buttons on the inside of the bottom, along with some other symbols that he had no idea what they meant. There was an even bigger box that didn't seem to open but had a few buttons on the bottom of it, labeled "On," "Off," and "Channel," whatever that meant.

Arthur stared up at the man, who was just an inch or so taller than Arthur, and asked, "What is this?"

The strange man grinned wide – his teeth were perfectly straight and blindingly white, and somehow he managed to show every single one of them when he smiled. "Ah, hello, my good man. How are you on this fine morning? Can I interest you in some of the most popular merchandise that will ever be sold?"

Arthur looked at the man blankly for a moment, slightly irritated that he hadn't answered the question. "Excuse me, but I just asked who you are, man. You should show respect to your prince."

The red-haired man's eyes grew wide for a split second, before he stepped out from behind his stand and bowed so low that the tip of his supersized nose almost touched the dusty ground. "My liege," he embellished, waving his right hand around in what Arthur assumed was supposed to look extravagant but in all honesty made the man look like he had a twitch.

"Stop that," Arthur snapped. Although he was the prince of Camelot and he wanted respect, there was nothing he hated more than bootlickers – although it had taken his smart-mouthed, entertaining, and outspoken servant, Merlin, to fully come to that realization. "All I ask is that you answer my question. What is this..." he gestured at the strange market stall, "...stuff?"

The annoying, all-too-big smile was back. "Stuff?" the man cried, pretending to be shocked but in actuality looking positively delighted at Arthur's question. "My dear friend, this stuff is what your grand kingdom of Camelot has been searching for."

Arthur was confused but not about to show it, so he hid his uncertainty with arrogance. He scoffed, "We aren't searching for anything."

"Or so you think!" the happy man replied giddily. He picked up one of the gray boxes that flipped open. "Have you ever wondered, just once, what it would be like to talk to someone who was miles away, and hear them like they were right next to you?"

Arthur was instantly alert, shushing the vendor and glancing around to make sure that no one was paying too much attention. "Quiet!" the prince hissed. "You speak treason!"

"Treason?" The odd man looked genuinely confused and the corners of his perky smile lowered marginally. "How is this beautiful array of goods treason?"

"Magic is banned in Camelot," Arthur answered stiffly. "If you know what is good for you, you will take your forbidden wares out of the kingdom, because if my father finds out that you are peddling magic, he will not give you a chance like I am. Leave. Now."

To his surprise, instead of looking terrified or trying to hide his merchandise, the man simply threw his head back and laughed, holding his stomach. "But it's not magic," he countered, wiping a tear of merriment from one of his emerald eyes. "It's science."

Arthur frowned. "Our court physician, Gaius, knows science, and he's never shown me anything like this. Where did you get it?" Another thought struck him. "And who are you, anyway?"

Looking all too pleased with himself for reasons that Arthur couldn't figure out, the man bowed deeply again, this time his nose actually brushing the dirt. "Allow me to introduce myself – I am Rosco, a humble salesman of extraordinary goods – of technology and other wonderful items from the future."

Arthur looked at him sharply. "You are from the future? You must be magic."

Rosco tutted to himself and shook his head. "I am afraid I know nothing of the magical arts, My Lord. I did not, in fact, build the device that brought me here or any of the things that I am selling. I know little of science, either. But what I do know is people, and people like, as you say, stuff. So I came here to sell my 'stuff' and to introduce you to a whole new world beyond your wildest dreams!"

"This box," Arthur said, pointing to the gray thing in Rosco's hand. "How does it work, if not by magic?"

"Excellent question, my friend," Rosco beamed, moving around the counter and showing the gray box to Arthur, flipping it open. "This is called a cellular phone." He gave a short and supposedly simple explanation about how the device worked but Arthur didn't understand a word of it. He shook his head, a bit dazed.

"Rosco, I am afraid that I am going to have to take you to my father. He will be the one to decide if you are using magic or not. And if you are... well, don't say that I did not warn you."

Instead of looking wary, Rosco grinned ear-to-ear. "Wonderful, I will be thrilled to see your father again!"

Arthur stopped in his tracks. "You have met my father?"

Rosco nodded enthusiastically. "Of course. He's the one that gave me permission to set up my stall here."

At that moment, Arthur thought his whole world was going to come crumbling down on him. His father had condoned this? But it was – it had to be – magic. "That doesn't sound like my father," the prince said

slowly, watching Rosco's reaction to see if he were lying.

He wasn't. Arthur could tell by the way his voice never changed pace or inflection and the way his sharp green eyes never left Arthur's blue ones. "Well, I'll admit, his first reaction when I came to him with my story and my merchandise was rather scary – he was about ready to fry me on the spot! But then I told him, 'Your most merciful Excellency, please, I implore you – take one of my devices – free of charge, and after using it for an hour, if you still think it is evil, by all means, do what you wish of me.'"

Arthur frowned. "That was awfully brave of you."

Rosco shrugged. "That was nothing. You should've been there the time I had to wrestle that Sumo guy over a misunderstanding about a shih tzu I sold him by mistake." Arthur blinked, having no idea what this man was on about. Rosco seemed to catch on that Arthur had no idea what he was talking about and chuckled. "Never mind. The point is, at the Lady Morgana's insistence – she really is quite charming – he agreed, fully expecting to have me killed within the day. But he saw the beauty of my device and not only did he thank me profusely for opening his eyes, but he allowed me to set up right here."

Arthur was dumbfounded. "You didn't enchant him, did you?"

It was Rosco's turn to have a blank look on his face. "Enchant him? With magic? I told you, Sire, I know nothing about magic, except that magicians get really mad when you mess up their order and stick a piranha in their top hat instead of a rabbit..."

Again, Arthur was lost, but this time, he just asked, "What on earth did you give my father that has him so engrossed?"

Rosco grinned, holding up one of the shiny, buttoned boxes. "The wonders of the Blackberry Storm, my friend."

Arthur turned on his heel and stalked off. He had to go see his father.

Rosco's voice followed him as he strode away, charismatic and peppy, "Alright, so we'll talk iPhones later, then? Okay, cool. Just give me a yell. I'll be here all day..."

And that was when the madness began.

3 - Uther and His Blackberry Storm

Believe it or not, Uther Pendragon was the first to succumb to the lures of technology.

Arthur hastened through the city, into the castle, and burst into the throne room, not sure what sort of sight would greet him when he entered. He did not expect – and was more than a little baffled – to see his father sitting regally on his throne with the council gathered around him as always – Merlin standing docilely behind Gaius, who looked quite grim. His father had something to the side of his face, holding it there with one battle-hardened hand.

Suddenly Uther laughed, his loud voice echoing through the chambers. Arthur moved closer as his father shifted in his seat, revealing that one of the little buttoned boxes was pressed to his ear. To Arthur's shock, Uther spoke directly into the box, his voice booming regally, excitedly across the throne room. "Really, Lord Godwyn, you are a riot!" He cracked up again, clutching his sides. "Princess Elena did what? Good heavens, is she alright?" There was a pause, almost as if he were listening to someone speaking. "Well, it's a good thing she has Grunhilda around to look after the poor child then..." Another peal of chuckles.

Arthur blinked. Lord Godwyn? Princess Elena? His father was talking to the little black box like it was one of his oldest and dearest friends, Lord Godwyn, about Godwyn's daughter, Elena, who had a reputation of being a bit of a klutz. Surely his father was going mad! He glanced around at the others in the chamber – the knights, Gaius, Merlin... They seemed to be mildly confused but not entirely weirded out by the king's behavior, which made Arthur panic even more.

He strode toward his father. "Father, I must speak with you."

Uther waved him away with a wave of his hand, shooting his son an annoyed glance. "Not now, son, I'm on the phone."

"But, Father, you must see reason –" Arthur stopped, frowned, and asked incredulously, "You're on the what?"

But Uther had already turned back to his strange conversation with the box. Arthur stared at his father for another minute, before marching toward the throne room doors, grabbing Merlin by the neckerchief as he passed the servant and dragging him out into the hall with him.

o.O

Arthur dragged Merlin all the way to his chambers before releasing him, shutting the door behind them, and demanding, "What the heck is wrong with my father, Merlin?"

Merlin blanched, his thin face a bit paler than usual, making his blue eyes and black hair stand out in stark contrast. He was dressed in his normal attire – black breeches, blue tunic, red neckerchief, brown jacket. Arthur had to say that it was good to see that some things never changed, especially after

walking in on his normally sane father and king talking to a bloody box!

Merlin glared at Arthur, straightening that ever-present neckerchief. "Why is it that every time something goes wrong around here, you automatically blame me?" Arthur's servant huffed.

Arthur sighed. He could tell by the uncertainty in Merlin's eyes that his servant was just as confused about all of this as he was. "Alright, maybe that was a bit unfair," Arthur conceded. Merlin just raised his eyebrows at his master. Gritting his teeth, Arthur asked, "So what is wrong with my father? Why's he talking to a box like it's Lord Godwyn? And why is everyone standing around like nothing is wrong."

Merlin sighed and fidgeted with the tattered hem of his shirt. "Well, after I came in and got you ready this morning —"

"Late, as usual," Arthur interrupted.

Merlin didn't respond other than to continue his tale, "—and you left to do your patrol, I went with Gaius to the throne room because a strange man had requested an audience with the king."

Arthur's eyes narrowed. "Rosco..." he growled.

Merlin looked at him in surprise. "You've met?"

Arthur nodded curtly. "This morning, during the last round of my patrols of the lower town. He told me that it's not magic, but that he used science to get here from the future?"

Merlin nodded slowly. "That's what he told the King."

"Mmm." Arthur rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "And what of this...thing, this box? Did he saw what it is?"

Merlin nodded, rocking back and forth, shifting his weight from his heels to his toes and then back agin. "Yup." He kept on rocking.

"Merlin?" Arthur asked, barely restraining his irritation.

Merlin looked at him with those big blue eyes and asked, "What?"

"WELL, WHAT IS IT, THEN?" Arthur let out a rush of air, trying to release his agitation. He hadn't meant to yell at Merlin; he was just concerned because his father was acting so strangely.

Seemingly unperturbed by Arthur's outburst, Merlin answered, "He said it is a... black berry, Sire."

Arthur scoffed. "A black berry? I've seen black berries, and that is no black berry."

"Actually, it's a kind of device that's named after black berries." He paused. "And storms, apparently."

Arthur's head snapped up. "What?"

Merlin shrugged. "According to that Rosco man, it's a device called a Blackberry Storm. It, er, is supposed to allow you to talk to other people far away. It's a... brand name for a contraption called a phone."

Something stirred inside of Arthur. "When I spoke to Rosco earlier, he mentioned being able to talk to someone miles away like they were standing next to you." A frown creased his forehead. "And father said he was on the phone. So what you're telling me is that Lord Godwyn also has one of these phone things, and my father is talking to him through that little box and Godwyn is talking back through his?"

Merlin nodded. "I think so."

"It's magic, it has to be," Arthur said.

"I don't really think it's magic, Sire," Merlin supplied but Arthur just rolled his eyes.

"And what, Merlin, would you know about magic?"

With a humph, Arthur left the room, muttering something about having to keep an eye on his father and the talking box, leaving Merlin standing alone in Arthur's chambers wondering what the heck was actually going on.

o.O

Merlin really had no idea what was going on. This technology business that Rosco had introduced and was apparently now selling unhindered on the streets of Camelot was not magic. Merlin could tell that much for certain, because he had magic, and he knew what magic felt like, and it did not feel like magic. It felt cold, lifeless, strange...

Merlin didn't trust it one bit. He didn't think it was exactly dangerous, no, but to see how quickly it had taken in the King, he knew they had to be wary. If the whole kingdom fell prey to Rosco and his not-magic stuff, who knew what would become of Camelot?

Vowing to keep a close eye on the situation, Merlin started on his chores, tidying Arthur's room, making his bed, and polishing his armor. The whole time he was working his mind kept going back to that box, that phone. He wondered briefly if he got one, if the Druids would start using it to contact him instead of talking directly in his head.

He shook his head, banishing the thought. He would much rather hear voices in his head on occasion than give into this odd new parasite sweeping through the castle.

o.O

Uther loved his new phone. It could do so many things, things that he never would have dreamed. He was, of course, suspicious at first. It was only natural, after all, to assume that something this miraculous could not be of mundane means. But Morgana had persuaded him to try it, just for an hour like that brilliant, brilliant man Rosco had suggested, and he had agreed. Thank heavens for that!

He had caught up with Lord Godwyn, who told him he was making arrangements for he and his daughter, along with Elena's nanny, Grunhilda, to visit in a couple of weeks. It had been a long time since they had made the journey, however, and Godwyn wasn't entirely positive of what route he should take to get to Camelot. So Uther had gone to this wonderful place he could access on his phone – called the Internet – and had MapQuested the directions before e-mailing them to Godwyn's own cell phone. All on that little screen!

He sighed happily, leaning back on his throne and keeping his eyes glued to the colorful screen. Rosco had come by earlier and taught him about Apps, which he could download off of the Internet for his phone. He had taken quite a liking to a game called Tetris, in which the goal was to fit as many colorful blocks together as possible. He wasn't exactly sure how this was beneficial to society, but he was having too much fun to really care.

He knew that Arthur didn't seem to understand how he felt about this device, along with many in the court, but to appease them, Uther gave the others in the castle – even the servants – permission to purchase something from Rosco. After all, he wasn't going to be able to enjoy his new phone if everyone else was breathing down his neck, telling him that it was dangerous. Let them have their fun. Soon they would see what an amazing place this 2010 must be, with all of their amazing gadgets.

Gaius had been one of the biggest critics of Rosco's technology, so to show his old and loyal friend just how harmless these things were, he had personally bought the old man a flat-screened television, which conjured images and dramas onto the screen – he was sure that his old friend would love it.

As for Arthur and Morgana, he planned on buying them something as well, but not just yet.

First he had to beat his high score.

4 - Gaius and His Soaps

Gaius was the second to succumb to Rosco's merchandise.

Uther had bought him a large box that Rosco had informed him upon its arrival in a big, brown box, was a plasma screen, 32-inch television with high definition. Whatever it was, it must have been something impressive because even the smiley, know-it-all salesman had been eyeing the contraption with a bit of envy in those green eyes.

Several guards had arrived at the doors to Gaius's chambers carrying a huge brown box between them. Rosco had been behind them and had invited himself in, all smiles and too-white teeth. "Gaius. It is Gaius, isn't it?"

Gaius eyed the brown box with suspicion. "Yes, that's right; who are you?" He had known, of course, who he was from Uther's interactions with the man, but he wanted the man to tell him nonetheless.

The man grinned even wider – how he could smile that big and manage to talk clearly was beyond the physician, but he would have very much liked to have taken a quick look into the man's mouth for his medical records. The amount of teeth he possessed had to be something unseen in the human race. "You're a man of business, Guy – can I call you Guy? – and I like that in a person. No dilly-dallying, no putting off the inevitable. Just – boom-bam! Straight into the heart of the matter."

Gaius looked at him flatly. "No."

The strange man had cocked an eyebrow. "I'm sorry, what?"

"No, you may not call me Guy," Gaius answered to the earlier question. "My name is Gaius, and yours is?"

He winked. "Not to be put off, I see. Name's Rosco, a humble salesman, at your service." He gave a slight bow.

Gaius rolled his eyes in exasperation. "There's no such thing as a humble salesman, I can tell you that. And I'm not looking to buy any of your gadgets, so if you'll leave me to my work. There's remedies to be made and I have rounds; Lady Percival's feet have developed a nasty fungus and I believe only my toad-paste remedy can sort them out."

He started to move around the man but Rosco casually stepped in his way. Gaius groaned inwardly; usually his technique of getting rid of unwanted visitors, filling them in on the more disgusting aspects of his job as court physician, worked like a charm. Rosco didn't seem to be perturbed in the slightest.

"Are you deaf?" Gaius asked, really starting to get annoyed. "There are ailing people out there waiting for me to tend to them. I'm not interested in buying anything from you."

"Ah, but you don't have to buy anything," Rosco happily announced. "I come bearing gifts!"

Gaius narrowed his eyes, the lazy one almost closing as he did so. "A gift? Whoever from?"

"Me, of course." Gaius stared as Uther appeared in his doorway, little Blueberry Lightning or whatever that thing was clutched firmly in his ungloved hand (the touch screen, he had informed Gaius when his physician had asked why he had neglected his leather gloves, was heat-sensitive and only reacted to flesh), his eyes never leaving the screen.

"You, Sire? But why?"

"Because I want you to see how harmless and positively enjoyable Rosco's items are, Gaius. Simply magnificent. I chose the HD plasma flat screen—" how Uther could say the name of something so foreign so casually, Gaius didn't know, "—because I know that you will find enjoyment from the dramas depicted on its screen. Now, do as your king commands and take a load off."

Gaius blinked. "A load off, Sire?"

Uther sighed heavily. "It means to relax. While you're doing your rounds, Rosco will get your new television set up and ready to go. And then you will sit and you will watch and you will enjoy. Relax, Gaius. Your world is about to be turned inside out."

Oh how right Uther was.

O.o

Merlin sighed, rubbing a weary hand over his face. He had been on the training field with Arthur all morning. The prince had worked exceptionally hard today, throwing spears at the target on Merlin's back, clanging on a shield Merlin used to cover himself as he banged on it with a mace, and picking up sword training again. When he had finished using Merlin as his practice dummy, he had moved on to the knights, who were equally exhausted when the prince was done with them.

Merlin knew that Arthur was simply getting pent up aggression and frustration out. Ever since his father had discovered the wonders of the cell phone, he had not been King Uther at all. Instead, he had been a man that looked like King Uther – minus his gloves – that sat on his throne and talked to various friends of his through the phone, played mind-numbing but addicting games like Tetris, and looking up battle strategies from the twenty-first century using the Google search engine on his phone. At least, that's what Arthur had told Merlin last night as the servant had prepared him for bed. Apparently Uther hadn't stopped talking about the wonders of his Blackberry Storm during the council meeting yesterday.

After seeing how worn out Merlin and the knights were, Arthur had looked a little guilty and told them all to get a bit of rest before training resumed later in the afternoon. They had happily complied.

Merlin let out a sigh of relief as he reached the flight of stairs that led to his and Gaius's chambers. He trudged wearily up the stairs, aching and ready for some sort of meal – no matter how meager – and a nice nap before having to meet Arthur on the training field again.

Before he could open the door, though, he heard a soft murmur of voices from inside the physician's quarters. Frowning slightly in concentration, he tried to make out who the voices belonged to – there were more than one, and none of them were Gaius's – but it was in vain. They were talking too quietly. He wondered why Gaius didn't speak and wondered if he were even in there, if these strangers had waltzed in there on their own and were helping themselves to what little stuff they had. Either that, or if Gaius was there but in danger and not able to talk.

His heart racing, Merlin steadied himself, not wanting to burst into the room without knowing what was going on at all. He needed to take stock of the situation, just a bit, before he went barreling in harum-scarum and got them both into trouble. He closed his eyes briefly, and when he opened them, they were flashing gold. "Eisteacht," he whispered. He smiled triumphantly. Now he could hear what was being said behind the door.

A woman's voice spoke first. "I KNOW what I saw, Charles! You cannot lie to me anymore, this stops NOW!"

A man, presumably Charles, replied. "Face it, Angelina. He doesn't love you anymore. He was kissing another woman. He was kissing YOUR SISTER!"

The woman began to scream. "LIAR! I KNOW it was YOU that night, Charles! It was not Xavier. You are his twin, and you want nothing more than to tear us apart so that YOU can take his place!"

The man yelled back. "I would NEVER want to be with you, Angelina. That's your own denial speaking."

Angelina's voice was deadly. "It was you, wasn't it? You switched Leanna and Paris in the hospital, didn't you? You're the reason that my daughter wound up in the hands of my ex-husband's mother-in-law's plumber's care, aren't you? YOU want me so terribly that YOU concocted this whole scheme so that you could comfort me when I found out that the girl I've raised since birth isn't my own... but my mortal enemy's flesh and blood, you MONSTER!"

Charles's voice became cold and icy. "And now I have you. No one's around. No one's here to save you, Angelina Decrausiana. You're on your own."

Angelina sounded scared. "Why are you doing this? I thought you loved me!"

"Oh I do, Angelina, but you've made it perfectly clear that you don't love me. You'd rather have my stupid twin brother, Xavier, even if he IS cheating on you with Arabella. So if I can't have you, no one can!"

Angelina screamed. "Please don't hurt me! We can get married, you'll be my only one, Charles, I swear, I won't even say his name again..."

Charles chuckled coldly. "It's too late for that, Angie. It's too late for you."

Merlin had absolutely no idea there were two people arguing about who was in love with who in Gaius's chambers, but when this Charles person began to get violent, he knew it was time to interfere.

Without wasting another precious second, Merlin lunged forward and burst through the door, magic

bubbling just beneath the surface. "What's going on?" he yelled, eyes darting back and forth for trouble.

He stared at the sight in front of him. Gaius was sitting on the patient bed, eyes glued to one of the big black boxes that had been on display in Rosco's market stall. There was a picture on the front of it, but the picture was moving and the voices were coming from the large box. Two strangely clad people, a tall, muscular man with dark, soulful eyes and shoulder-length black hair and stubble on his jaw was arguing with a beautiful woman with long blonde hair, crystal blue eyes, and a very short, very tight red dress that covered much less skin than was decent.

Gaius tore his eyes away from the moving picture and glared at Merlin. "Merlin!" he exclaimed, using the tone of voice he reserved for reprimanding his ward for doing magic foolishly, "will you please keep it down? I'm trying to watch my stories."

Merlin took a tentative step forward, an ominous feeling in his gut. "Your... stories?"

Gaius nodded excitedly, the lazy eyelid on his left eye flapping wildly as he did so. "Yes, Merlin. My soap operas. It's quite riveting – Angelina caught her sister Arabella kissing her boyfriend, Xavier. But it wasn't Xavier, it was Charles, his evil twin, the same man who kidnapped Angelina's daughter and switched her with her arch enemy's child the day they were born. Xavier's been kidnapped by Charles and is going to die unless someone saves him, but..."

The rest was a blur to Merlin who, dazed, stumbled up the stairs to his room and collapsed on his bed, his headache a million times worse.

First Uther, now Gaius?

What is happening to Camelot?

Merlin could only hope that he would always have a like-minded skeptic in Arthur... but little did he know, Uther was perusing Rosco's website for something for his son, via his shiny new Blackberry Storm cell phone, basking in the wonder that was technology.

From within the main room, a deep voice said, "To be continued," and Merlin heard Gaius give an irritated groan. "Now I'll have to wait until next week to find out whether Charles's father's uncle is really an alien..."

Merlin moaned. His headache had suddenly gotten so much worse, and he still had to go train with Arthur some more in a little while.

Today just really wasn't his day.

5 - Arthur and His iPhone

Arthur was the third to succumb to the lures of the twenty-first century.

He was exhausted, having worked Merlin and his knights half to death during training earlier in the day in an attempt to shake off some of the frustration that had built up inside of him because of his father's new toy. He couldn't understand what was happening to his father, that strong, independent man who always had a plan and always had his head on straight. Uther used to care about his kingdom, about protecting their borders, and about taxes and other such things that kings are meant to care about. Now all he wanted to do was sit on his throne and fiddle around with his Blackberry Storm. And when he wasn't playing with it, he was talking about it.

"Oh, Arthur, did you know that my phone has more memory than a small computer?"

"Oh, Arthur, have you seen the new security screen cover I bought for my phone?"

"Oh, Arthur, smile, I want to take a picture of you for my new wallpaper!"

"Oh, Arthur, have I told you about the heat sensitive touch screen?"

On and on and on it went, driving Arthur completely mad.

Arthur had let Merlin and the knights, who also seemed baffled about Uther's strange change of behavior, have a three hour break for lunch and rest before they regrouped. He had told them it was because Merlin was looking like he was going to pass out like a little girl – which he was – and that he wasn't just going to let Merlin off the hook and not the knights – but the truth was, he was tired, too, and was hoping a quick powernap would clear his head a bit.

His plans were dashed, however, because ten minutes into his nap, one of his father's servants knocked on his door and told him that the King wished to speak with him. "Great," muttered Arthur sarcastically. "He probably wants to show me his new high score in colored Yahtzee again."

But he went to his father regardless, and when he arrived at the throne room, King Uther beckoned him in, an excited grin on his face and his Blackberry Storm cell phone resting on one of the arms of his throne. "Ah. Arthur. I have something to show you."

Arthur sighed and refrained from rolling his eyes. "Father, if it's about a new app you've downloaded, I really don't have the time. I...er...have to train my knights." Technically, it was a lie since he had let the knights take a break, but Arthur found he didn't exactly care. He really just didn't want to hear anything else about his father's new pride and joy.

"No, it's not about a new app, Arthur," Uther responded smoothly, smiling even wider, "and I'm sure your knights can wait for a little while. This is important."

Instantly Arthur was on the alert. Important? "Is it news from Cenred's kingdom, my lord?" he asked urgently. "Or is there some sort of magical threat?"

Uther stared at his son for a few seconds before bursting into laughter. "My boy, how paranoid yo've become," he chortled, reaching behind his back and withdrawing something wrapped in paper. "No, nothing like that, Arthur. But I have a present for you."

Arthur eyed the package with a bit of suspicion. "A...present, Father?"

Uther shoved it into the prince's hands and watched in delight as Arthur opened it, revealing a shiny new device similar to Uther's phone but with a long wire with little padded nubs at the end of the two branched out strings attached to it. Arthur stared. "Er, thank you, Father, but what is it?"

Beaming, Uther said, "It's an iPhone, Arthur. It's a cellular phone, like I have, except it also functions as an iPod, a music-playing device. I thought you'd like to peruse some futuristic music so I had Rosco download a big variety of musicians from different decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. You can also access a place called iTunes from your phone and download any further music, videos, or audio books that you wish to have." Arthur blinked, trying to process all the information. It was like his father was speaking a different language. "You've also got unlimited texting; I've had Rosco put in all your contacts so you're all set to go. Now take your gift and run along. I want you to know the joys of technology, my son." He smiled, patted Arthur's hand, and turned back to his web surfing on his cell phone. "Oh, and Rosco is waiting for you outside of your chambers. He'll explain everything you need to know. Have fun."

Arthur shook his head and slowly walked out of the room, his mind still reeling. He smiled slightly and looked at the little music player/cell phone in his hand.

iPhone...

Maybe this future stuff wasn't as bad as he had previously thought...

O.o

Three hours had passed and Arthur had not sent for Merlin or any of the knights. Merlin knew he had to see what was going on, even if it meant he had to walk through the main room where Gaius was still fixating on his "stories." There was a strange, high pitched music coming from the television and Merlin wondered vaguely what new drama Gaius had discovered.

When he stumbled out of his room and took a glance at the TV, he saw that Gaius was watching something in which a man wearing a suit similar to Rosco's but much more stylish, with mussed brown hair and spectacles, was talking animatedly to a pretty blonde girl that wore blue breeches and some sort of brightly colored shirt. The two people had just stepped out of some sort of blue box that said "Police."

Merlin rolled his eyes. "Gaius, what are you watching now?"

Gaius looked up at Merlin, grinning from ear to ear. "It's this fascinating show on a station called BBC,

Merlin, called 'Doctor Who.'"

Merlin cocked an eyebrow. "Doctor who?" he wondered.

Gaius just smiled. "Exactly."

Shaking his head, Merlin muttered, "I don't have time for this." Raising his voice so that Gaius could hear him over the sound of the Doctor man saying, "Fantastic," Merlin said, "I have to go see Arthur."

Gaius nodded distractedly. "Yes, yes." Merlin was almost to the door when Gaius called his name. Merlin turned.

"What?"

"I just remembered – I was watching an episode of Doctor Who a little while ago, and you won't believe it – there was a boy on one episode that looked just like you, Merlin, except for his attire! His name was Jethro on the episode, and I swear, he could be your twin." He lowered his voice, "The actor who plays him is named Colin Morgan. You two look so much alike you could be brothers. In fact, you're so similar that he could be you."

Instead of finding this information as exciting as Gaius had, Merlin simply found it a bit creepy. Someone named Colin thousands of years in the future looked just like him? Now that was just weird. "Great," he said hastily, waving to Gaius. "I have to go."

Thankfully, Gaius was wrapped up in his show again and didn't respond.

Merlin arrived at Arthur's room and burst in, not bothering about knocking – he never did – and fully expecting to get fussed at by Arthur for his rudeness. Instead, he saw a dreaded picture in front of him: Arthur was sitting in one of his dining chairs, a device similar to Uther's resting on the table with cords snaking from it and into Arthur's ears.

Merlin hurried forward and said, "Arthur!"

Arthur turned, saw Merlin, and grinned, pushing a button on his gadget and pulling the little strings out of his ears. "Ah. Merlin. I've decided we're not going to resume training today, but we'll be right back at it tomorrow morning."

Although Merlin didn't like the sight of Arthur playing with one of Rosco's toys, he did find it a relief that there would be no more training today. "So you're giving me the evening off?" he asked hopefully.

Arthur paused in the act of putting the little things back in his ears and rolled his eyes incredulously. "You've been smelling those herbs of Gaius's again, haven't you, Merlin?" Merlin chuckled, glad that some things never changed, but his smile faded as Arthur went on, "I need you to polish my armor, tend to my horses, feed my dogs, draw my bath, wash my clothes, clean my room, and prepare me for bed later. Oh, but before you do, sit down for a minute." He patted the seat beside him and, having put one of the wires in his ear, held the other out in Merlin's direction. "Listen to this first."

Merlin eyed the seat and the proffered cord disdainfully. "What is that thing, anyway?"

Arthur grinned. "It's an iPhone. I can text, talk, surf the web, and listen to music on it. And there's this one song I want you to hear. It's my favorite."

Merlin shook his head. "Nah, it's okay. Thanks anyway; I'll get started on your chores."

Arthur glared at him. "That's not an option, Merlin. It was an order. Sit. Listen. Now."

Merlin sighed. "If I must." He sat down and took the wire. "What is this?"

"This is a set of ear buds. The music flows from the iPhone and through the wires and out of the speakers, into our ears. You put one in your ear, I'll put one in mine, and we can both listen." Merlin nodded, doing as he was instructed.

Arthur snorted softly. "Well, I'm surprised. I thought the ear bud would fall right out, as big as your ears are and all, but apparently they are one size fits all."

Merlin glared at his master, feeling his ears burn. "If you're just going to make fun of my ears..."

Arthur shook his head, pushing a button that said "PLAY" on his iPhone. "This is an amazing song from the 1980s, a power ballad by a man named John Farnham."

Merlin frowned. "John Farmer?"

"No," replied Arthur with barely restrained patience. "Farnham. Now listen."

The music came on and Merlin obediently listened through the song, trying not to notice Arthur mouthing the words over-enthusiastically; the lip-syncing was enough to embarrass even Merlin. "You're the voice, try and understand it! Make some noise and make it clearer-er-er-o-oo-oh, wha-oh, a-oh, a-o-oo! We're not gonna sit in silence! We're not gonna live in fear! Wha-oh, a-oh, a-o-oo! Wha-oh, a-oh, a-o-oo!"

When Arthur stopped the music and took his ear buds back, Merlin nodded, having been surprised at how much he had enjoyed the music. "It's catchy," he admitted.

Arthur stared Merlin down. "Now, Merlin," he said seriously.

Merlin gulped, wondering what Arthur was about to tell him to do.

The prince continued, "Can you tell me, who sings that song?"

Merlin racked his brain, trying to remember what Arthur had said. Farm-hand? Farman? Farmer? Farmer!

"John Farmer," he answered confidently.

Arthur rolled his eyes to the ceiling. "You really are completely useless, aren't you, Merlin? It's Farnham."

Go do your chores or something."

Merlin sighed. "Yes, Sire," he conceded, noticing that Arthur had gone right back to his iPhone.

This was not good.

O.o

Later that night, Arthur was laying in his bed, listening to music and texting some of his noble friends that also had cell phones, when he got a text that befuddled him a bit and made him a tad uneasy.

Hey baby, it said, I've been watching 4 weeks. I miss u. We should meet up & make out sumtime.

Arthur blanched. Someone was watching him? Who? Why? Wait – I miss you? It was someone he knew?

Quickly, he texted back: Who r u? What do u want? Do I know u?"

The response came back quickly, Duh, its me, Vivian. Remember? U were gonna fight my dad 4 my heart but u changed ur mind. But ill always luv u, baby.

Arthur stared. How had Lady Vivian gotten his phone number? Someone in Camelot must have sneaked it to her, knowing how madly in love with him she was. Someone had done this deliberately, just to spite him! Cursing, he texted, How did u get my #?

The reply was, Duz it matter? We r 2gether again, that's all that matters, isn't it?

He groaned and fought the urge to throw his phone across his room. Tomorrow, he would talk to Rosco and ask him how to block numbers. In the meantime, he wondered who could be the one who had betrayed him and given his number to the crazy stalker girl that he wanting absolutely nothing to do with.

Meanwhile, somewhere in the castle, Morgana was smirking...

6 - Gwen and Her Twilight Saga

Gwen was the fourth to succumb to Rosco and his futuristic merchandise.

Since Gwen was a servant and didn't have enough money to buy any of the more expensive electronics, and since she enjoyed a good read whenever she had the chance, she decided that the four books displayed on Rosco's stand would be the perfect items to invest in. The books were fabulous. She hadn't known what to expect, but she certainly hadn't entertained the idea of it being a teenage romance vampire novel.

Morgana had been keeping to herself more than usual lately but Gwen found that she did not mind having extra time when she had a riveting book series to peruse when she wasn't working. She had highly recommended the books to Morgana, who had smiled and told her that she would read them whenever Gwen was done.

By the end of the first book, *Twilight*, Gwen was a full-fledged member of Team Edward. Edward Cullen... what wasn't to like? He was a vampire but he defied his evil nature and refused to kill humans. He was madly in love with Bella Swan but her scent was so delicious that he could hardly refrain from biting her. Bella was in love with Edward and would do anything for him, and vice versa.

Edward saved Bella from some men who wanted to harm her, Bella showed Edward that love isn't something to fear. Their romance was so beautiful, so forbidden, and so tear-jerking that Gwen found herself envying Bella and comparing the man in her life to the vampire that sparkled like a thousand sons.

o.O

Merlin had slipped out of the physician's quarters without Gaius seeing him – he was wrapped up in Doctor Who again, with plans to tune into some sort of reality show called *Big Brother* afterwards – and was on his way to wake up Arthur when he heard a soft sob coming from a corridor he had just passed. He recognized that cry – Gwen!

Wondering what could have happened to cause his friend to be so distraught, he spun around and darted into the corridor, his eyes roving for any sort of potential danger. Instead, he saw Gwen sitting on the floor, leaned up against the cold stone wall of the castle, a thick black book labeled *New Moon* clutched in her shaking hands. Tears were streaming down her face.

"Gwen?" Merlin asked hesitantly, walking over and easing himself down the wall to sit beside her. "Are you okay?"

"No," Gwen sobbed, her shoulders shaking. "I can't believe he did that!" She turned to Merlin and he was taken aback by the agony and hurt in her dark eyes. "How could he do that?" she wailed.

Merlin felt his heart go out to his friend. What had Arthur done now? "Gwen," he began seriously, "what

happened between you and Arthur?"

Gwen blinked as if waking up from some sort of trance. "What do you mean?" she asked a spark of worry in her eyes. "What has he said?"

Merlin shook his head, confused. "Nothing. But...who are you talking about, Gwen? Is there another man?"

Gwen laughed nervously. "What, have you been talking to Lancelot? Because he's lying I tell you! And... er... so is Gwaine. And Leon, for the record."

Merlin cleared his throat. "Yes, well," he said awkwardly.

"I'm talking about Edward," Gwen mourned, staring sadly at the book she was reading.

Merlin took another good look at the book and made the connection. Gwen had been taken in as well. "Not you, too, Gwen," he moaned.

But Gwen wasn't listening. "How could he?" she spat. "He loves Bella more than his own life – if only a man could love me that much!" Merlin didn't bother to point out that Arthur had risked his life many times for Gwen's. "He just gave her the most wonderful birthday party, and all because of some big misunderstanding – I mean, so what if she almost got devoured by an entire family of bloodthirsty vampires? – he takes her to the middle of the forest and tells her that they can never see each other again because he's too dangerous for her! But he'll die without her, I know he will! He's going to devastate Bella, she's all he cares about, she never does anything without his agreement and she lives to touch his face!"

Merlin wondered what kind of 'helpless female' message these books were sending to its readers. He would have thought that by the twenty-first century, girls would have gained at least some rights and liberty, but the way Gwen was going on, women's lives weren't too different then than they were now. "Eh, so this girl cares more about a man who would drink her blood as soon as look at her than her family?"

Gwen nodded. "Yes, it's so romantic, isn't it?"

Merlin grimaced. "Not really, it's just kind of sad."

Gwen gasped. "I know, it is, isn't it? It's the most tragic love story..."

Merlin shook his head. "No, as in pathetic. Listen, Gwen, I know you're upset about what this Edmund –"

"—Edward," Gwen corrected.

"—Edward guy did, but it's just a book."

Fresh tears rolled down Gwen's cheeks. "And I thought you were someone I could confide in, Merlin," she cried, getting up and running away, her dress's hem trailing along behind her.

Merlin sighed wearily and rubbed his temples.

Was the madness ever going to end?

o.O

Arthur was training the next morning with the knights, his iPhone not too far away just in case someone needed to get a hold of him. Lucky thing he did because in the middle of one of his spars, he heard "You're the Voice," bellowing out from his phone and completely abandoning the fight, nearly getting his head lopped off in the process, he yelled, "Merlin! Phone! It's a text!"

Merlin obediently brought Arthur his phone but he looked both irritated and distracted. Arthur made a point to ask Merlin about what was wrong later, although when later actually came, he wouldn't remember to ask. But it was the thought that counted, right?

He flipped open his phone and read the text, which was from Lancelot.

Arthur – its Gwen, Lance let me use his phone. We need 2 tlk. Plz meet me at ur chambers asap.

Arthur was mildly concerned at her choice of words... "We need to talk..." That didn't sound too good. He alerted the knights that they were to take a break, barked an order at Merlin, and hurried to his chambers. True to her word, Gwen was waiting for him outside of his door, black book entitled Breaking Dawn in her hands.

"Arthur," she greeted him, her eyes serious.

Arthur shifted on his feet and motioned for her to precede him into the room. "Guinevere," he acknowledged the girl he loved. "What brings you here?" His phone vibrated and he ignored the urge to check it. There would be time for that later. It went off again. He forced himself to ignore it. It was extremely difficult to do so.

Gwen smiled sadly at Arthur. "Arthur... I don't know if it's going to work out between us anymore."

Arthur felt his heart plummet and as his phone let out a persistent text alert he didn't even notice (okay, so maybe a little), he was so taken aback. "What do you mean? Why?"

"You're just not... dangerous enough," Gwen informed him.

Arthur stared. "Dangerous? You want me to be dangerous? Gwen, I've fought griffons and skeletons and knights and armies and every sorcerer in the world wants to kill me – how exactly am I not dangerous?"

She bit her lip and gazed into his eyes. "You don't want to kill me, do you?"

Arthur blanched at the thought. "No. Of course not. No."

"I'm not your own personal brand of heroin, am I?"

Arthur frowned. "What's heroin?"

"It doesn't matter. It's not dangerous for us to be together. You're not a lion, but I'm a lamb."

Arthur was thoroughly confused. "I am strong like a lion."

"But you are more of a... cougar," Gwen smiled. "You're fierce but you don't have that dangerous edge for me to be around. My scent doesn't make you want to kill me. It's just not... forbidden enough."

"You want forbidden? If my father found out about us, he'd have you killed!"

Gwen nodded. "Mmm." A pause. "Maybe we can make this work. Would you sparkle?"

Arthur coughed, startled. "Excuse me?"

"Edward Cullen sparkles in the sunlight," she informed her prince, stars in her eyes.

Arthur snorted. "What kind of man sparkles?"

"A vampire... a real man." Gwen squeezed his hand. "I'll have to think about this, Arthur. But it may be that we cannot be together until you have glitter skin."

"Glitter skin?" His voice was weak and scared.

"I have some sparkles we can dust you in if you change your mind. Until then, I'll be at my home, finding out how Bella will react to Jacob imprinting on Renesmee. My lord," she curtsied and walked away.

"Glitter. Skin?" Arthur muttered again wearily. His phone buzzed again. He picked it up and ignored his texts, instead creating a new one addressed to Gwaine.

"One heck of a day. Goin 2 tavern. U in?"

7 - Gwaine, Lancelot, and Their Wii

Gwaine and Lancelot were the fifth to succumb to the newfound technology.

They had each bought cell phones from Rosco on their first trip to his market stall but that was out of mere necessity. They knew that all the knights had been required to invest in phones so that they could keep in contact at all times. Granted, they weren't knights yet – as Uther was still king Gwaine refused to be a knight for him regardless of whether his father was a noble and Lancelot was a commoner and unable to become a knight under Uther's reign – but they knew that when the time was right, when Arthur was king and turned Camelot into the just land it was meant to be, they would be knighted. And so they had opted to buy phones so that they would be prepared when the time came. Plus they liked to prank call Arthur, offering him a discount on sparkles and fake vampire fangs for Gwen's pleasure.

Both of them had noticed something on their first trip to Rosco's market that had caught their eye and lingered in their minds ever since. When they discovered that they coveted the same item, they decided that they would pool the rest of their money together and make a joint purchase. After all, the Wii gaming system was not cheap.

They had somehow managed to convince Gaius to let them have the use of his giant screen television during the few hours every day that nothing worth watching was on and Gaius begrudgingly went on his rounds – sadly, with the introduction of technology did not come perfect health. With Rosco's help (the salesman grinning like a Cheshire cat the whole time, slightly unnerving Lancelot), they hooked the lean, black machine up to Gaius's TV and learned how to use the remotes to create their own Miis (little cartoonish versions of themselves) to use during game play. As an added bonus, Rosco threw in four games: Wii Sports, Wii Sports Resort, Mario, and Guitar Hero.

And the battle commenced.

o.O

"That does not look like you," Lancelot scoffed, frowning intently at the screen as Gwaine moved his remote around, creating his little Mii. Gwaine's avatar was tall and thin, with a green Mohawk and squinty oriental eyes and a casual smirk, wearing a bright purple shirt. The little bouncy character moved around the main Mii room, bumping randomly into walls and meandering into Lancelot's Mii, which, despite its unrealistic appearance, succeeded in looking quite similar to its creator.

"So?" Gwaine snorted, laughing as his Mii barreled across the length of the screen and bumped into Lancelot's Mii. Lancelot's creation was tall, had short black hair, big black eyes, a warm smile, and wore red. Lancelot had dubbed it Lancelot, wanting to be true to real life. Gwaine's Mii's name was G-Man the Epic. "That's the fun of the game. You can create a whole new identity, be whoever or whatever you want, eh?"

Lancelot rolled his eyes a bit impatiently. "If that's the case, may I say that although it looks nothing like you, it's still stumbling around like a drunk."

Gwaine grinned. "Thank you."

Lancelot chose to ignore Gwaine's retort and instead popped Wii Sports Resort into the game system. "Why don't we settle this over a game of table tennis, my friend?"

Gwaine grinned cheekily. "Bring it on."

o.O

It was a few days after Merlin's strange encounter with Gwen and the few times he had run across her since, she had been smiling and happy once more although a hint of sadness lingered in her eyes. The last time he had seen her passing by, he had stopped her, smiling warmly at her, pleased with her transformation from sad to happy. "Gwen... it's good to see that you've gotten over those books."

Gwen chuckled almost patronizingly. "Over them? Please Merlin. There's only one thing that I'm over. And although it was a difficult decision to make, I feel so much better now. After all, a man that isn't brave enough to sparkle for me isn't the man I thought he was, right?"

Merlin gaped at her. "What are you talking about, Gwen?"

She smiled somewhat forlornly at Merlin but then her countenance brightened up. "Arthur, of course. We had a talk. I told him about what an amazing man Edward Cullen is, and offered to help him become more like him so that our relationship would be like the one Edward and Bella have..."

Merlin rolled his eyes. "You mean the one where Edward tells Bella how to live her life and she does exactly what he says, when he says it, how he says it, and without any of her own personal preferences considered?"

Gwen nodded. "Yeah. Isn't it a beautiful relationship?"

Merlin shook his head as the rest of what Gwen had said sunk in. "Wait – are you saying that you ended your relationship with Arthur over a book?" He felt a wave of panic smash through his defenses as he realized that Rosco's merchandise was affecting more than just the daily lives of the people of Camelot – it was destroying long-term relationships as well.

Gwen looked at Merlin like he was someone to be pitied. "Merlin, I don't expect you to understand. But I'll remind you that it is my life and it's really none of your business."

Merlin had nodded curtly and moved on his way. He was going to go and see Gwaine. He hoped that his fun-loving friend would have some clever idea of how to set things straight.

o.O

Gwaine hadn't been in his room, but there had been a note on the door that had read – "In Gaius's chambers. Be back later."

Merlin frowned, hoping that Gaius hadn't managed to suck Gwaine into watching those soap operas and Doctor What, or whatever that show was called, but why else would he be in Gaius's chambers? Unless he was hurt or ill, but the note left no indication of that. His heart feeling a bit heavy, he turned and hurried toward his guardian's and his rooms.

He had been expecting – although at the same time, dreading – to see Gwaine and Gaius both staring at the screen, but the what he witnessed upon arriving at the court physician's chambers was completely unexpected and quite frankly, a bit scary. Gaius was not in sight but Lancelot had joined Gwaine in... well, whatever it was they were doing.

Both were facing the TV, but instead of sitting and watching like zombies, they were jumping up and down, swinging strange black remote-type things around, trash talking each other and bantering like there was no tomorrow. Merlin wondered if they had completely lost their minds. And then he walked further into the room to see that on the screen of the television, strange little bubbly people were bobbing up and down, wielding paddles of some kind, hitting a ball back and forth across a net on a table with lines drawn on it.

When the two soon-to-be knights saw their friends, they pushed a button and the screen paused. Grinning from ear to ear, Gwaine ran over to Merlin. "Merlin – we've been hoping you'd show up! This is the most amazing thing that has ever been invented – EVER!"

Merlin eyed the screen suspiciously. "Have you guys gone mad? You're dancing around Gaius's chambers, acting like lunatics! And what is that thing?"

"A Wii," Lancelot answered. "It's a gaming system – you can play all sorts of games and it's like you're actually doing them. We were playing a game called ping pong, and I was kicking Gwaine's butt."

Merlin stared at the screen for a moment. "Gwaine... why do you have green hair?"

Lancelot smirked. "Thank you, Merlin."

Gwaine scoffed, "Because it's cool."

"No," Merlin argued. "None of this is cool. The whole kingdom is being taken in by Rosco's stuff and every single person I go to has already become addicted something. First Uther, then Gaius, and Arthur, and even Gwen! Don't you people see what's happening to Camelot?"

Merlin jumped as a loud screech of a foreign kind of music cut him off. Indignant, he faced his friends to find that they had lost interest in his rant and had taken out two black devices shaped similar to instruments Merlin had seen, with colorful buttons going down the handle. They were now pushing the buttons frantically, music blaring every time their fingertips connected with one of the keys.

Gwaine tossed his shoulder-length hair as he played the instrument and Lancelot glanced from the screen long enough to mutter, "Show off."

"Hey, if you've got the rock-star look, flaunt it," Gwaine retorted merrily.

The crowd around the strange characters on the stage on the game was going nuts as the numbers – their scores, apparently – rocketed up. The logo at the top of the screen said: Guitar Hero.

Merlin gave up, throwing his hands up in the air. "Forget it," he groaned, stomping to his room and slamming the door behind him. Sadly, the door was thin and flimsy and offered no protection from the blaring, wild music coming from the Wii game.

Clamping his hands over his ears, Merlin tried and failed not to hear the scream of the guitar and the pumped up voices singing: I-I-I wanna rock and roll all ni-ight, and party every day! Yeah, I-I-I wanna rock and roll all ni-ight!

Merlin vowed that if the next person he went to was also absorbed in this untrustworthy, soul-sucking technology, he and Rosco would have a little chat. At this rate, Merlin could do magic in front of Uther or Cenred's army could flatten Camelot and no one would notice.

This was getting ridiculous.

8 - Morgana and Her Facebook

Morgana was the sixth to succumb to the wonders of technology.

Morgana stared at her new computer screen, her fingers hovering over the keys as she contemplated what she was going to type.

As much as she hated Uther – the man was a hypocrite who, if he knew the truth about her, would kill her without a second thought, even if she couldn't help that she had magic – she had to admit that she was happy with his gift to her. She had been the one to convince Uther to try out the technology – his beloved iPhone – because she had hoped that he would like it and it would serve as a distraction. If his mind was somewhere else – like in the wonderful world of cellular phones – then perhaps he would not be adequately prepared for an attack upon Camelot.

What she hadn't foreseen, even with all her powers of seeing visions, was that she, too, would become infatuated with the wonders of the twenty-first century. But she relished the thought that the computer – as Rosco (who gave her the willies, quite honestly, with his toothy grin and shifty green eyes) had said, was basically a super-smart technological brain that could do just about anything – given to her by Uther himself, was serving as a much easier way to keep in contact with the people that would ultimately help her bring him down. She smirked.

Face lighting up, she realized what she was supposed to do with this little box to type in, which currently read in light gray letters: What's on your mind? She typed in, "is smirking," and pressed the ENTER button.

Almost instantly, her Facebook status changed to "Morgana is smirking." A little red notification bubble appeared on the top of the screen, telling her that she had a comment on her status (already!) from Arthur via his cell phone. She scowled, thinking about her half-brother and how he stood between her and the throne, and thought about deleting him as a friend here and now. She sighed though, and clicked the notification, knowing that with the use of this social network that was already becoming wildly popular in Camelot, she would be able to keep tabs even better on the movements of the ignorant buffoon and his – well, their, she scowled – father.

Arthur's comment below her status was: LOL – u are ALWAYS smirking about something. What happened – get your brush stuck when u were combing ur hair this morning? Ha!

Rolling her eyes in disgust, Morgana chose to ignore him for now. She knew that he had subscribed to her status via his phone, so that whenever she updated, he would get a text. Why he was so interested in her daily life was beyond her, but now that she read his obnoxious and smart-alec response, she came to the conclusion that he had done this so he could always be the first to make fun of her status. Then a terrible thought struck her – now that Gwen had broken up with him, over a book nonetheless, she chortled, could he have gone back to being attracted to her? Was he flirting with her?

Morgana felt sick at the thought, not just because he was her brother, but because for him, someone

that stood between herself and the throne, between herself and what was truly hers, to like her was just disgusting. True, before she had realized that she was above all of those she used to be friends with, she had had a certain amount of a crush on Arthur, but that time was long past, especially since she now knew that they were related.

Shaking her head at the thought, she smirked excitedly when she saw that she had a new private message from her sister.

Morgana – the message read,

I hope you are doing well. The introduction of this communication device makes our conversations and interactions so much easier and I am very pleased that you were able to smuggle me one as well. Just be careful not to let anyone have any access to your computer because we will be discussing many plans and plots with this private messaging.

Tell me, sister, how is Uther taking to the technology? Do you think an assault on Camelot in the near future would be plausible? Message me back, and let me know as soon as possible.

With Love,

Morgause

P.S. – I'm trying to expand my chicken coop in Farmville. Can you please send me a nail? I'm almost done, and I've got so many chickens running around my farm, I don't know what to do with them. In return, I'll send you the maple tree you've been wanting. Oh, and if you could add Cenred as a friend, he'd be most grateful – he's one neighbor away from obtaining the Popularity Red Ribbon. Thanks!

Morgana smiled triumphantly. Yes! She was finally going to get that coveted maple tree for her farm... and they might be launching an assault on Camelot soon. She quickly updated her status to: Morgana is having a GREAT day! and hastened to check on her Farmville before messaging Morgause back.

Life in Camelot had become so much more tolerable since she had gotten her computer and had learned about the miracle of social networking.

O.o

Arthur grimaced as he got yet another text from Facebook, informing him of Morgana's antics. He didn't understand her addiction to the website or why anyone would want to inform everyone of their mundane, every day activities as they were doing them. Just since he had woken up, Arthur had gotten a plethora of updates from Morgana's Facebook status.

Morgana just woke up and is yawning.

Morgana is going riding today.

Morgana is smirking.

Morgana is staring moodily out the window.

Morgana is brushing her hair.

Morgana is smirking.

Morgana is playing Farmville and needs a maple tree – anyone want to send it to me?

Morgana stepped on a rock when walking across the courtyard and it stung.

Morgana is smirking.

Morgana is having a GREAT day!

Morgana is smirking.

Arthur was just itching to hack into her account somehow and change her status to: Morgana is annoying. Why did he ever subscribe to her status anyway?

Oh yeah – he had been hoping that she would say something, anything about Gwen every so often. As much as Arthur's iPhone had taken precedence in his life, he missed Gwen more than he could ever admit. But there was no way on this earth that he would ever – ever – sparkle. He let out a sigh as music blared through his ear buds, lightening his mood somewhat as he mouthed along to a song he had recently discovered that was quite accurate in describing how he was feeling today.

He grimaced as he reflected on what a terrible day it had been. He felt guilty for being so rough and mean with Merlin earlier, but he was sick and tired of hearing about the evils of his iPhone, which he loved more than anything... and he was angry about hearing Gwen's name, thinking about her infatuation with a sparkly vampire...

He really should apologize to Merlin later. But... maybe after he listened to this song, which he loved because it was so relevant as of today...

"Because you had a bad day, you're taking one down, you sing a sad song just to turn it around, you say you don't know, you tell me don't lie, you work at a smile and you go for a ride, you had a bad day, the camera don't lie, you're coming back down and you don't really mind, you had a bad day, oh, you had a bad day..."

Ah. Good old Daniel Powter.

O.o

Merlin was furious. This was the last straw.

He had gone to Arthur's room this morning to hear his prince going on and on about how Morgana had discovered Facebook, a social networking website that she could use to communicate with virtually anyone with access to a computer in the world. Arthur had been complaining about Morgana's constant

status updates and Farmville escapades, but that wasn't what had struck dread into Merlin's heart.

If she could contact anyone, he was positive that his ex-friend would be able to communicate with her evil half-sister, Morgause, much more easily than she had been able to before. And if she started using Facebook to plot with Morgause, that meant that he couldn't follow Morgana and overhear their plans anymore (not that it had worked so well the last time; he had wound up chained up in the middle of the Darkling Woods with giant scorpion venom plunging through his veins).

And so he decided that he was going to talk to Rosco. First, though, he had tried to talk reason into Arthur again with no avail.

"Arthur, you have to see, especially after what happened with Gwen –"

Arthur had pulled his ear buds out so quickly that Merlin had thought it had to have hurt but Arthur showed no indication of pain. Instead he had glared stonily at Merlin and grabbed his servant's shoulder much more roughly than he ever had before. "Shut up, Merlin," he had fumed, "and if you ever speak of Guinevere like that again, I will throw you in the dungeons. Is. That. Clear."

Merlin had gulped, wondering what had come over his friend, but as Arthur stuck the ear phones back in his ear, Merlin knew without a doubt. The technology and other stuff from the year 2010 was really starting to change everyone – Gwen had broken up with Arthur, Arthur had changed, becoming a different person when presented with the truth about what Gwen had done, and even more startlingly, with how much he was changing due to the iPhone.

Shaking his head, Merlin had stumbled out of Arthur's chambers, annoyed beyond all reason. After the ordeal with Arthur, he had more than one bone to pick with Mr. Rosco the Time-Traveling Salesman...

9 - The Knights and Their Nerf Guns

The knights of Camelot were the seventh to succumb to Rosco's wares.

They had, of course, all received cellular phones, as Uther had declared that they were required for his knights to possess. While many of them had been dubious at first about the small, buttoned devices, most of the knights had formed a bit of a liking for them, as they provided a way for them to keep in contact with each other when they were not close together and it made scouting missions so much easier. Still, the knights were not completely satisfied with their little phones.

As knights, men of action, they longed for something that could allow them to train and get exercise. This way, they could enjoy the newfound technology while also managing to stay fit and ready for battle. The cell phones were not much use in this scenario, and so several of the men – Sir Leon, Sir Rupert, and Sir Roland – had taken a "field trip" to Rosco's stand and had discovered a collection of new wonders that would help them with training and looked absolutely, beautifully, fun.

After making their discovery, Sir Leon had opted to go to Arthur and request that they begin to train some with these exciting and colorful new devices. Arthur had been wrapped up in his iPhone – bobbing his head along to a rock and roll song while texting Gwaine about llamas (another story for another day) – but had still seemed quite enthusiastic about the suggestion. He, too, had felt that training needed to be spiced up a little. He informed Leon that if he and the other knights would go ahead and purchase as many of these "Nerf guns" as they needed, then they would meet for training the next day at noon.

Plans having been made, the knights pooled together the needed money and made the biggest – and most ridiculously fun – investment that they had ever done before. Tomorrow, they told each other as they went ahead and loaded the vast array of guns (all different shapes, sizes, and colors) with foam-like Nerf bullets, was going to be epic.

They just hoped that Merlin wouldn't try to bring them all down. They had noticed how the outspoken servant had tried to talk Arthur out of his iPhone and Gaius out of his television. They did not want Merlin to try and ruin their Nerf battle. In fact, they vowed that they would show him what a blast Nerf guns were. Tomorrow, it wouldn't be much of a battle – it would be a metaphorical massacre of the pessimistic servant.

Merlin was going to stop griping about the dangers of technology or find himself getting jumped by a bunch of big, burly knights wielding plastic guns filled with squishy, suction-cup ended bullets.

They could hardly wait.

o.O

While the knights were busy planning their surprise Nerf attack on the oblivious servant, said servant was stalking down the corridors, all but fuming, preparing to try and talk a bit of sense into Rosco. He knew that the man was a salesman and that he was just doing what salesmen were supposed to do, but

he was really beginning to wish that Rosco would just go and do it in his own time instead of infiltrating upon theirs.

It wasn't that Merlin didn't like seeing the others have fun with their new toys, like Arthur had, in a very prat-like manner, suggested when Merlin had attempted to warn him that he was losing his mind to his cell phone. No, Merlin was just growing increasingly concerned because instead of successfully incorporating the wares from 2010 into their daily lives, the people of Camelot were rapidly losing themselves to the devices. If he was the only sane one around here, it was going to fall upon him to do something about the insanity.

As he passed Arthur's room, the prince's head popped out of the doorway, those silly ear buds still planted firmly in his ears, and he called out to Merlin. Sighing, and really not wanting to hear another one of Arthur's renditions of Michael Jackson's "Thriller," Merlin reluctantly turned to face his master. "Yes, Arthur?"

Merlin could hear the muffled scream of an instrument that, thanks to Arthur's iPhone and Gwaine and Lancelot's Guitar Hero game, he had come to learn was called a guitar from the ear pieces that were in Arthur's ears and he inwardly winced. Having music up that loud couldn't be good for his ears, could it? Shaking his head ever so slightly, Merlin chided himself. He was wary of Rosco's merchandise, yes, but he was starting to sound like a mother, and that was something he was not happy about so he forced the petty nagging voice that said "Turn that music down!" out of his head and waited for his master to speak. When he did, Arthur's voice was much louder than usual as he was trying to be heard above the blaring of the music.

"HAVE YOU MUCKED OUT MY STABLES YET?"

Merlin winced at the volume of Arthur's voice. He groaned, "Not yet. I'll get to it in a little while."

Arthur frowned and pointed to his ears. "WHAT? YOU WANT TO JUMP INTO THE NILE?"

Merlin rolled his eyes, smothering a laugh at Arthur's antics. If you'd just turn the music down, you prat... No! No nagging mothers! He scolded himself and tried again. "I said, I'll have to muck out the stables in a few minutes."

Arthur shook his head incredulously, "YES, I KNOW THAT A LLAMA WILL OCCASIONALLY SPITTLE, MERLIN. WHAT ABOUT MY STABLES?"

Mildly irritated but also quite amused, Merlin yelled back, "NOT YET, I'LL DO IT IN A MINUTE." In all honesty, he'd get to it when he got to it; he doubted Arthur would be taking any trips to the stables to see if Merlin had actually done his chores now that he had his iPhone to keep him company, anyway.

Arthur nodded in approval and then shot Merlin a patronizing look. "YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO YELL, MERLIN, MY HEARING'S JUST FINE."

Exasperated, Merlin fought the urge to just yank the ear buds out of his master's ears. Instead, he forced himself to keep smiling.

"WELL, GET ON WITH WHATEVER YOU'RE MEANT TO BE DOING," Arthur ordered, then stopped Merlin before he could walk away. "WE'RE RESUMING TRAINING TOMORROW, SO MEET ME ON THE FIELD AT NOON."

Merlin nodded, hoping that this meant that at least a shred of normalcy would be returning to Camelot with the resumption of training.

How very wrong he was.

o.O

Rosco was grinning from ear to ear when Merlin approached his metal kiosk. "Hello, my good fellow," he tried to charm the agitated warlock. "I've seen you around the castle but this is the first time you've shown any interest in my products." His green eyes were flashing with excitement at another potential customer. "This must be my lucky day – first I sell all of my Nerf guns and bullets to the knights, and now you, my elusive friend, have decided to pay me a visit –"

Merlin felt a bit nervous as he heard what Rosco had said. Not the knights, too! "What's a Nerf?"

Rosco smiled even wider. "Only the most fun toy gun on the face of the earth!"

Merlin still didn't understand but he didn't have time to get into any complicated discussions about what guns were with Rosco – Arthur wanted his stables cleaned out and Merlin had a feeling that if he didn't get them done, Arthur would punish him by making him listen to (he shuddered) country music, and that was an experience that he did not want to go through again.

"I'm not here to buy anything," Merlin announced, but Rosco's grin did not falter.

"You say that now, but once you have seen the –"

Merlin cut him off. His friends, his home, and quite possibly his destiny was at stake because of this peddler's merchandise and he couldn't afford to be conned into trying out any of the... stuff... that was changing those around him, changing Camelot as a whole, so drastically. "I'm really not interested."

Rosco looked Merlin up and down, the hope of convincing him to buy something still burning brightly in his eyes and his unnerving smile still plastered on like it had been painted there. "Of course you're not," he laughed good-naturedly. Merlin had to admit, the man had charisma, even if he was a tad creepy at times with his toothy, nearly wolfy grin. "May I ask what brings your fine self to my humble establishment today?" Merlin found himself a bit distracted by the enormity of Rosco's nose, watching as the skin around the nostrils flapped around as the salesman's head moved from side to side as he embellished.

Shaking himself out of his stupor, Merlin cleared his throat. "I came because I need to speak to you."

Rosco raised two fiery eyebrows. "Oh, I do love to be informed on the local gossip. Tell me, has Prince Arthur decided that he's man enough to sparkle for Guinevere yet?"

Merlin snorted. "Hardly. But that's just what I want to talk to you about."

"Your master's relationship with the woman who is ultimately destined to have a juicy affair with his best friend after their marriage?"

Merlin choked. "Excuse me?"

Rosco winced. "Sorry. Just... kidding."

Not wanting to get into this now, Merlin shook his head. "No. That's not what I came here to discuss. I know that you're not trying to harm anyone – at least, I hope you're not – but I think it would be best if you took your stuff from the future and left Camelot. Everyone is changing, and Camelot is becoming vulnerable to attack. The king doesn't care about anything but his cell phone anymore, the prince randomly starts singing "The Circle of Life," and other Elton John Classics in the middle of council meetings, Gwen is running around wearing a shirt over her dress that says, "TEAM EDWARD," Gaius cares more about whether Angelina and Xavier are reunited than about his own patients, and who knows what evils Morgana is plotting with Morgause over that Facespace, or MyFace, or whatever... and now you've got the knights of Camelot into some kind of toy when they should be defending the kingdom!"

He was breathing heavily when he finished his little rant. He had not realized just how stressed he had become over this whole thing, but he felt justified. If only they could have fun with their toys and still do their duty... but that seemed to be impossible for the residents of Camelot. Now Merlin could only hope that Rosco would see reason and that it wasn't too late to set things right...

o.O

The next morning Merlin awoke to the sound of Charles threatening to kill Xavier if Angelina and Arabella tried to go to the police from the main room of Gaius's and his chambers. Groaning, he rolled out of bed, tugging his clothes on and trying to get ready without thinking about how terribly the talk with Rosco had gone the day before.

It seemed that no matter what kind of appeal, logic, or tone Merlin used on the merchant, nothing could get his mind off of selling things or that big grin off his face long enough to get his point across. The conversation always lapped around to what an X-Box's graphics looked like, or how pac-man revolutionized video games, or how vacuum cleaners made cleaning ten times easier (Merlin had had to force his mind to stay on task here and not to cave in).

Merlin had left Rosco's stand much more frustrated than he had been when he had approached it. He had decided that for now, he would do what he had been doing and keep a close eye on things around Camelot. If things got any worse, he would go to the Great Dragon for advice, but for now he would wait and watch.

The time might come when he had to reveal his magic to Rosco and force the time-traveler to leave Camelot and its citizens alone, but that time had not yet come.

He stumbled down the stairs to the usual sight of Gaius watching his stories and hurried to get some chores done before he had to meet Arthur on the training field at midday. When he saw how neglected

Arthur's usually semi-clean chambers were by his musical highness, Merlin's stomach clenched and he found his mind wandering to Rosco's description of the vacuum cleaner, but he shrugged the unwelcome thought as quickly as he could and got to work.

o.O

The training field was quiet when Merlin stepped onto the grass and looked around for any sign of life. Too quiet. The uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach was back. Where was Arthur? The knights? He began to slowly walk across the turf, trying to pick up any hints of where the others might be. With a groan, he realized that they had probably been so immersed in their phones and Nerfs – he still wasn't sure what a Nerf gun was – that they had forgotten about training.

Yeah, that was it, Merlin decided as he turned and began to walk away – normally he wouldn't particularly mind, as getting walloped by Arthur was not on his list of "My Favorite Activities," but seeing as it was because of Rosco and his merchandise that they were forgetting, it only made him despair more.

He was about to leave the training field when he heard a yell – actually, it was more of a battle cry. He spun around, his magic boiling just beneath his skin, yearning to come to life outside of him and kick some butt. He pushed it back when he saw that it was not an enemy that was advancing upon him, but a whole slew of knights, all wielding different colored and sized weapons that shot out fairly soft little cylinders with a loud popping sound, led by Prince Arthur himself.

Before Merlin knew what was happening, they were upon him, shooting the foam bullets at him at such a speed and density that Merlin found it increasingly difficult to run away. "Oh goody," he thought, as he was pelted by the small, stinging things from the guns, "that's what Nerf guns are."

After "training" was over, Merlin stumbled into his room, disheartened to discover that he had Nerf bullets in places that he didn't think Nerf bullets should be. He flopped down on his bed, dislodging one from under his arm, where it dropped to the floor, sticking perfectly to the floor and he sighed heavily, the beginnings of another massive headache coming on.

He had a strong feeling that he'd be paying Kilgharra a visit very soon.

10 - Kilgharrah and His Riddle Book

Merlin would never have suspected it, ever, even in the darkest, most obscure corners of his mind, but Kilgharra the Great Dragon that was imprisoned beneath the castle was the eighth to succumb to one of Rosco's temptations.

Merlin had planned on creating a distraction for the guards that kept an eye on the entrance to Kilgharra's prison like he usually did, but this time, it was completely unnecessary. The guards were sitting at their customary table, iPods out, cell phones ready, paying absolutely no attention to what they were supposed to be doing. Any other time and they would be flogged or imprisoned for not doing their duty. Now, it seemed that the king was too busy playing Bejeweled on his Blackberry Storm and browsing eBay via his Internet connection to give these slacking guards any form of punishment. Merlin winced, not believing how much of these technological, future terms that he now knew thanks to those around him.

As he descended the staircase that led to Kilgharra's cave, Merlin found himself hoping and praying that the dragon would have something – anything – to say that would help him. At this point, he'd even be happy with a cryptic riddle. At least it would be something.

He would regret yearning for even a riddle later on.

o.O

Uther smiled widely as he lounged upon his throne and fingered his beloved Blackberry Storm fondly. After everything that this miraculous machine could do, he could scarcely believe there was more. He was so excited that Sir Leon had taken it upon himself to teach his king how to use this particular function on his cellular phone.

He chuckled. Arthur was sure going to be excited by this new development. Imagine his son's excitement when he found out that his father was now savvy with everything cell phones had to Arthur. The two of them could be in constant contact now – wouldn't Arthur love that!

He was sure that his son, the crown prince of Camelot, would be ecstatic when he found out that his father was now as "cool" as any of Arthur's friends with cell phones.

o.O

Merlin heard the first of the laughter when he was halfway down the dark staircase, the torch in his hand flickering eerily, casting light on the stone walls that surrounded him. He wondered what could have left the Great Dragon so delighted. He snorted slightly; knowing Kilgharra, he was reveling in the way that Uther and the rest of the kingdom had been taken in by Rosco and his stuff. The dragon had always had a weakness for laughing at Uther's weaknesses and failures. It could be amusing at times, but most of the time it was irritating.

Merlin rounded the corner and stepped onto the ledge above the deep, dark cave the dragon lived in. Above him, the ceiling of the cave was so tall that the warlock could barely even see it. Huge rocks jutted up from the unseen floor and ceiling of the cave. Kilgharra was seated on his favorite rock, a ball of light – magic – floating above a small book propped open in front of him. Kilgharra's great golden eyes were perusing the pages.

Merlin was quite surprised. He knew the dragon was highly intelligent but had never actually thought about it reading. This was certainly the first time he had ever seen Kilgharra with a book. It was a small book, about half the size of one of the dragon's giant paws, and Merlin wondered how such a great creature could see the tiny words on the page. He quickly decided that it was irrelevant.

Seeing and understanding that Kilgharra was not paying any attention to his surroundings, completely focused as he was on that book, low chuckles emanating from his massive chest, Merlin cleared his throat. The dragon lifted his great head and smiled a big, toothy grin at the warlock that had come to pay him a visit.

"Ah. Merlin. I was beginning to wonder when you would come to me for advice again." The golden eyes traveled slowly back to the page but Merlin made another irritable little cough and Kilgharra turned his attention back to Merlin. "Yes, young warlock?"

Merlin tried not to stare curiously at the book the dragon was perusing, because he didn't have time to worry about it. He needed advice, and quickly. Camelot was becoming overrun with technology and Merlin had no idea what to do about it. If anyone could help him, it was Kilgharra. "I suppose you know what's been happening in Camelot," he began cautiously, eyes locked on the topaz ones of the magical creature looming above him.

Kilgharra smiled even wider – his grin reminding Merlin vaguely of Rosco's, except much more unnerving, since Rosco's teeth weren't nearly that sharp. "Yes, Merlin, I am fully aware." He laughed loudly, his voice bouncing airily off the walls of the cave. "Uther has become enamored with an invention that will not be invented for hundreds and hundreds of years. He is abandoning his kingdom, and before he even knows it, Camelot will fall and Arthur will take his rightful place as king, and magic will be returned to the realm."

Merlin laughed shortly and bitterly. "Not likely," he announced, "since Arthur has an iPhone and being separated from it is apparently a fate worse than death." Merlin groaned. "I hate all of this 'technology' stuff. It feels so... wrong."

Kilgharra huffed. "Of course it does, Merlin." His eyes began to wander and Merlin knew that Kilgharra was itching to get back to his book – whatever it as; as long as it wasn't about controlling, sparkling, fancy bloodsuckers dating their food, there was some hope at least – so he raised his voice to keep the dragon on track.

"What do you mean?"

The Great Dragon sighed. "You are a creature of magic, Merlin, as am I. Technology, science, inventions, electricity, cell phones, televisions... they are so against your nature, so against the elements of magic, that the two of you – technology and magic – are like two positive magnets repelling each

other."

Merlin cocked his head. "Magnets?"

"Never mind, Merlin. More technology. The point is, you, a creature of magic, cannot exist alongside technology for long without going mad because it is so much against your nature. As you do not just possess magic, but are essentially magic itself – as I've said before, an extraordinary occurrence that has never happened nor will ever again – it does not go just against your nature, but your being as well, everything that you are. Subjecting your magic to the modernity of the twenty-first century for too long could cause you to go mad."

Merlin snorted, a reaction that seemed to surprise the dragon somewhat. "You can say that again," he muttered. "I think I'm already going mad. Kilgharra – everything is changing for the worst – I fear Camelot is going to fall!"

The dragon had gotten bored with Merlin's speech and his eyes were now glued back onto the book, laughing jovially at whatever the script said. Merlin snapped, "What are you reading, anyway?"

Kilgharra smiled that slightly creepy, extremely sharp toothy grin again. "I, too, am a creature of magic, young warlock, but unlike you, I have great knowledge that surpasses all time. While I am not fond of the technology, there are other things from the future that I find extremely helpful. Unlike you, young warlock, you who has known nothing but this life here, and your magic, I can adapt. And so I have."

Merlin paled. "You don't mean to say... Rosco sold that to you, too? And how on earth did you pay him?"

The dragon laughed. "I wouldn't say he sold it to me, Merlin, but I don't believe he minded parting with it in the slightest. If you want me to say that I did 'buy' it to ease your conscience, young warlock, then this is how I paid him – with his life."

Merlin frowned. Swallowed. "What is it?"

"Alive without breath, as cold as death. Never thirsting, ever drinking. All in 'mail, never clinking."

Merlin's brow furrowed with the dragon's words, stranger and more cryptic than usual. "Are you trying to help me? Because I've told you, riddles mean very little to me. I don't understand, what are you trying to tell me?"

"A fish," Kilgharra answered smugly.

Merlin blinked. "What?"

"That's the answer to the riddle. A fish."

Merlin shook his head slightly. What on earth was the dragon going on about? Perhaps he had already lost his mind due to the complex between magic and science. "I don't understand. What does a fish have to do with getting rid of Rosco's junk?"

Kilgharra laughed. "Nothing, young warlock. But you asked what this book is."

Merlin rubbed his forehead, feeling more lost than ever. "The book... is a fish?" That's it. Kilgharra was mad. Maybe Merlin was too.

Kilgharra snorted. "Does it look like a fish to you, Merlin? I am beginning to wonder if you have already begun to go mad. It is a book of jokes and riddles, one from the twenty-first century. It is quite informative, enlightening, and entertaining. Right up my alley, so to speak."

Merlin could almost feel himself paling. The Great Dragon had been taken in by one of Rosco's futuristic traps? He felt his heart sink. The most powerful and wise being he knew, sucked into something of the future as well. Had he no one to turn to now? Was there ever to be a solution to this terrible problem? Would Camelot fall?

His dark thoughts were cut off when the dragon let out an extremely loud laugh and said, "Young warlock, I can see that you are distressed. Allow me to give you something that might help you."

Merlin glanced up, hardly daring to believe it. Was there really some of the Great Dragon left behind the obsession for this riddle book? Would he help? "You're going to help me?"

"Yes, Merlin." Giggle. "Answer me this – what do you get when you cross a rooster and a small dog?"

Caught completely off-guard by the query, Merlin blinked rapidly several times. "Uh... I dunno," he admitted, increasingly confused.

Kilgharra's great form shuddered with a barely contained fit of laughter as he answered, "Cocka-poodle-doo!" And then the laughter burst forth like the tide, washing over the warlock and increasing the hopelessness building up inside of him. Merlin groaned.

Something had to be done. This was worse than he could have ever imagined.

o.O

Arthur was lounging about in his room, listening to music, when he got the text. He paused Poker Face, silencing Lady Gaga's voice for the time being, and went to check his message. He blinked at the number it was from and felt an uneasy feeling clench his gut.

Since when did his dad know how to text?

Warily, he pushed the view button and looked at the message contained:

Arthur – it's your father. Sir Leon taught me how to text! Isn't it gr8? See what I did there? Replaced great with gr8? It's cool, huh? Leon showed me how to do that too! Now we can tlk (did you see that?) all the time!

Arthur groaned. Oh no. No. This could NOT be happening.

He ignored the message, turned the music back on, and tried to forget his problems. "M-m-m-m-my p-poker face – can't read my, can't read my, no you can't read my poker face..."

The phone buzzed as he got another message. He sighed heavily, hoping that it was from Gwaine, Lancelot, or even Vivian. Anyone else. Just not his dad trying to be... cool.

He winced when he saw the number. The message said:

Did you get my message? Wasn't it gr8? U (see, u for you!) need to answer me, Arthur. And guess what? If you put a colon : and a parenthesis) together, it makes a happy face! See? :)

Arthur had barely had a chance to erase that message when he got the next. This one read:

Quick question – if I write ROFTLOL, does that really mean that I have to roll on the floor, laughing out loud? Because I did that during the council meeting, and they looked at me funny.

Arthur flopped back down on his bed, ignoring the urge to chuck his beloved iPhone across the room. After Gwen leaving him and his father trying to be 'cool,' not to mention the humiliation that was sure to follow him when his father began to interrupt everything he did with stupid texts and floor-rolling, Arthur was beginning to doubt whether or not any of this was worth it. But then "You're the Voice" came on again and he relaxed. Sure it was. His phone buzzed again and Arthur knew without even checking it who it was from. Then again...

11 - Mordred and His Pixie Sticks

Even though he technically wasn't from Camelot and possessed magic, Mordred was still the ninth to succumb to the futuristic material that was now spreading from Rosco's little stand out of Camelot and into the surrounding villages and had even been smuggled into some Druid settlements.

The Druids didn't like the idea of the technology any more than Merlin did – it was the opposite of their magic and made them uncomfortable. Be that as it may, some items that Rosco peddled still found their way into the hands of curious Druids. One of those Druids was Mordred.

Mordred may have been intelligent and powerful and might have seemed to be older than his age, but he was still a child. And children, no matter what time period they are from, love sugar. And so when he discovered a certain food item from the future that Rosco was selling, he found that he couldn't resist.

Pixie sticks – the name itself was appealing to anyone who had knowledge of magic. Pixies were creatures of magic and wonder and possessed pixie dust. The sugary, colorful powder in the thin paper tubes was reminiscent of fairy dust. Intriguing.

Mordred had spent most of his free time over the past few hours downing tasty treat after tasty treat, swallowing the dust-like colorful candy like it was water in the middle of the driest desert. Some of the older, more experienced Druids had tried to deter him from eating the candy, telling him that his consumption of it could lead to dire consequences. Mordred, however, had his own mind – and taste buds – and was set on making his own decision and thinking for himself.

Unfortunately for Mordred and everyone who would come in contact with him in the next few days, the young sorcerer didn't realize that a pixie stick is simply and purely sugar added with artificial flavoring (comprised of sugar), and even more sugar. And sugar, as you know, tends to make people – especially children – extremely and uncontrollably hyper.

o.O

Arthur watched Merlin in silence as his servant wandered around his room, tidying up as he went. Merlin didn't talk either, which had to be a first for the dark-haired boy, and Arthur couldn't help but feel a little guilty about how he had treated him the other day. He had thought that Merlin had forgiven him, though, but perhaps after he and the knights had attacked him with the Nerf guns, Merlin had gotten angry again.

Although he had meant to apologize to Merlin after threatening to throw him in the dungeons for no real reason and yelling at him, the prince simply hadn't gotten around to it. If he were honest, the truth was that he had forgotten. Merlin apparently hadn't forgotten about that or the way the knights had ambushed him, however, for he had barely spoken to Arthur all day, only talking when he was asked a direct question. Even then, he used the least amount of words possible and spoke stiffly, calling Arthur "your highness" or "my lord," something he did when he was angry or worried.

And why shouldn't he be upset? Arthur glared down at his iPhone, frustrated. This thing was proving to be a lot more trouble than he thought it would be. He thought back to what Merlin had told him when they had argued. Everyone was acting different. Was he acting different?

Sighing he put his phone down on his dining table and approached his servant, who was making the bed. "Merlin?"

Merlin stiffened for a second when he heard his master's voice, but he turned to face Arthur anyway. Arthur was shocked at the exhaustion and anxiety he saw in Merlin's eyes. What could have gotten him so frazzled? Surely it wasn't Rosco's merchandise that was upsetting him so like Merlin claimed. After all, even though they had run into a few problems since the introduction of technology to Camelot, everyone was so happy; their lives had been improved. So why did Merlin look so... unhappy?

"What?" Merlin sighed. "I'm really not in the mood to watch another music video, Arthur."

Arthur bit his lip. "What's wrong?"

Merlin rolled his eyes and smirked, but the look was strained. "I'd tell you, but you'll throw me in the dungeons, remember? Or set me up so the whole of the knights can shoot me with those stupid Nerf things. And I'd prefer not to have to go through it two days in a row."

Arthur winced. "Maybe I was a little harsh." Merlin gave him a look. Arthur grinned sheepishly. "Okay, so maybe I was a lot harsh. And the ambush wasn't fair. But is that really why you're so upset, Merlin?"

Merlin looked at the ceiling for a moment before meeting Arthur's eyes again. "Look, Arthur," he sighed. "If I try to explain that everyone in Camelot is going crazy because of all this junk Rosco's introduced, and how we are completely vulnerable to attack because no one wants to live in the real world now, you'll just get angry. It seems like I'm the only one that sees the truth, and that I'm going to have to be the one to fix it. So you just go ahead, listen to your music, text your friends, and have a grand time. I'm going to try and peel Gaius away from the television long enough to make the medicine your father needs for his shoulder, and then I'm going to do whatever it takes to make this right."

He stomped out of the room, eyes glistening. Arthur groaned, scrubbing a hand over his face. Was everything really as bad as Merlin claimed it was? Shaking his head, he picked up his iPhone and fingered it for a few minutes, turning it over in his hand. Or was Merlin simply being childish?

His phone buzzed and he found himself stuck between laughing and bashing his head against the wall when he got a succession of messages, three from his father and one of them Morgana's Facebook status. The messages from his father read:

"Art (c I shortened ur name, HA!), guess wat, I'm txting and wlking! Isn't it gr8?"

"Ow – I just ran into a wall."

"I'm okay, don't worry! LOL (and no, you don't actually have 2 laugh out loud! Imagine that!)"

Arthur shook his head at his father's antics, and read Morgana's new status update:

"Morgana is BRILLIANT! I can't believe I didn't think of this sooner... Ha ha!"

Arthur decided that he didn't want to know what Morgana was up to now (probably planning to attack him with Nerf guns) and exited out of his texts without replying of them. He turned on some Bon Jovi and stuck the buds in his ear. He had some serious thinking to do. He was beginning to get the feeling that this iPhone and perhaps the rest of Rosco's merchandise was more trouble than it looked...

o.O

The Druids were about ready to pull their hair out. Mordred, after consuming the contents of about fifty pixie sticks, had begun to run around their hidden camp, screaming at the top of his lungs, his cloak wrapped around his shoulders and flying behind him, yelling, "Ba-ba-ba-ba-BATMAN!" They didn't even know who Batman was. Apparently another of the Druid boys had gotten a hold of something called a comic book and had let Mordred take a peek. Now Mordred was pretending to be said character, his voice shrill and almost crazed as he darted and weaved between tents and around people.

He had just suggested trying something called "people bowling," when one of the elder Druids came up with an idea. He called the young, powerful, and currently high on sugar sorcerer to him, after closing his eyes briefly and muttering, "Forgive me, Emrys."

"Yeeeeeeeees?" Mordred drawled, hopping from one foot to the other. His tongue and lips were stained blue and his was physically shaking. "What's up? Do you want to play tag? I'll be it, no you can be it, or we can both be it! Did you know that if you eat the blue candy it makes your tongue blue! It's just like magic! Magic! Look what I can do!" He squealed a few words from the Old Religion and a rude squelching sound tore through the air, causing the children to giggle and the older Druids to point their noses in the air distastefully. Mordred, meanwhile, shrieked with laughter.

"Mordred – why don't you go check up on Emrys? I take it you can speak to him from the edge of the forest?"

Mordred nodded, his head moving up and down so fast it made the man's head spin. "Yeah I can, and I can also touch my nose with my tongue wanna see?"

"Not particularly. You must go to the edge of the forest but do not enter into Camelot, for you will get caught. Make sure that Emrys is alright with all of this... chaos going on. And if you must, run in circles until you get your energy out. Just... calm down."

o.O

Merlin was trying to sleep but was finding it increasingly difficult since Gaius was watching the television loudly, crying at the top of his lungs, "No, Roderick, don't go in there, it's a trap!"

Suddenly he felt a stirring at the back of his mind like he did when someone was trying to contact him through his thoughts. He sat up, heart pounding as he felt a bit of hope enter into his heart. The Druids! Perhaps they knew what was going on in Camelot and were going to help. Surely they felt the same about the technology as he did, since they, too, had magic.

"Emrys..." It was the Druid boy, Mordred, but he sounded different. His voice was faster, a bit higher pitched. Merlin decided not to answer just yet, to see if the boy had anything else to say. When he didn't answer right away, Mordred tried again. "Emrys... Emrys. Emrys! EMRYS! EmrysEmrysEmrys! EMRYS! MERLIN!"

Finally, his mind spinning with Mordred's quick succession of calls, each one more frantic and high pitched, Merlin shouted (out loud and in his mind), "WHAT?"

There was a little giggle. "Hi!"

And Merlin knew then that not even the Druids had been spared the horrors of the twenty-first century. He was going to be alone – utterly, completely alone in his fight against technology.

Lovely.

12 - Morgana and Her Joining of Team Jacob

Morgana sat at her computer, checked over her shoulder to make sure that no one was lurking in the doorway – like that pesky servant, Merlin, who seemed to have a penchant for sticking his abnormally large nose into things that were not any of his business. For some strange reason, he seemed to be the only one in Camelot that had not found something that he was interested in. Why, even her little friend, Mordred, had contacted her last night, babbling frantically about magic candy. Why hadn't Merlin found something that he enjoyed?

Maybe it was because he was a back-stabbing loser with no sense of fun. Yeah, she decided, that was it. He was like Edward Cullen in that respect.

Yes, Edward Cullen. Morgana had indeed taken up reading the Twilight series after Gwen finished, gushing about what an amazing vampire he was. Morgana, on the other hand, hated Edward instantly. The way he treated Bella like a possession more than a person. The way he would forbid her to see her friend Jacob because they didn't get along. The way that Edward would tell her he loved her and then leave her stranded in the middle of the forest. As if that wasn't bad enough, she despised Bella Swan even more. She was dependent, wishy-washy, clingy, far too taken in by shiny things, whiny, and just all-around boring. In Morgana's not-so-humble opinion (for she knew she was always right), the only character worth reading about was Jacob Black.

Unlike the vampire that Gwen so adored, Jacob was honest and straightforward (most of the time) with his feelings and what he was doing. He didn't beat around the bush. And he was a werewolves. Wolves were so much cooler than bats. If it came to a choice between a scrawny, sparkly, animal slurping bat drowned in hair-gel that had never smiled a day in his long but oh-so-boring-I-don't-even-want-to-read-about-it-anymore life and a strong, muscular, easy going, smiling, caring, motorcycle driving (Morgana so wanted a motorcycle), powerful wolf, there was no choice.

She was Team Jacob all the way, baby.

That being said, Morgana was nowhere near as obsessed with Twilight as poor Guinevere was. She thought the girl sillier than Edward for breaking it off with Arthur because the prince wasn't glittery enough, but despite the reasons, she was relieved. A small part of her – a very, very small part – still cherished the friendship she used to have with her maid before smirking became the center of her existence. It was good to see that the girl had some sense to leave Morgana's arrogant brother. Maybe it would be less of a heartache for Gwen when Uther and, therefore, Arthur were killed to make room for the real ruler. Her.

She logged onto Facebook and smirked when she saw that Morgause and Cenred were on chat. She had had a marvelous idea and couldn't wait to share it with Morgause. And knowing her sister, Morgause would have something up her sleeve as well.

If all went well, the traitor Merlin wouldn't be in their way, blaspheming their technology or trying to foil

their plots anymore...

O.o

Merlin knocked on Arthur's door that evening, having just finished mucking out the stables. Arthur hadn't asked him to – or even demanded it, which was something unheard of within itself – but Merlin had been longing for a sense of normalcy, despite how stinky that normalcy might be. When Arthur opened the door, he blinked in surprise.

"Merlin? Since when do you knock?"

Merlin stared his master in the eyes. "Since when do you not order me around like a slave – not that I'm complaining," he added hastily, wanting to make sure that Arthur realized when all this was over, he would mind getting some time off, not that Arthur would agree, mind you.

Arthur grinned. "I'm not complaining either. It's nice not to have you barrel in here like you own the place."

Merlin quirked an eyebrow, wondering what had gotten Arthur in such a good mood. He decided to go with it – they hadn't had a pleasant, sarcastic conversation like this in a long time. "Well, considering that the last time I just burst in here without knocking, I ran in on you doing some sort of interpretive dance to a John Farmer –"

"Farnham," Arthur correctly automatically.

"—song."

Arthur pouted. "I like that song." His expression grew more solemn. "Merlin, come on in and sit down. I need to talk to you."

Merlin swallowed, not sure if this would bode well for him or not. Arthur had seemed to be in a good mood, but what if it was all an act? What if the technology had made Arthur crazy? Well, crazier, Merlin reprimanded himself, smirking at the thought.

"What's going on Arthur?"

Arthur sighed heavily. "I might as well tell you, Merlin – I destroyed my iPhone."

13 - The Baddies and Their Facebook Plotting

Morgana logged onto Facebook chat and hurriedly messaged her sister. She had wicked, devious, smirk-worthy plans to make.

Morgana: Sister!

Morgause: Morgana, how wonderful it is to hear from you again! :D How are things in Camelot?

Morgana: Same. ./ Uther's an idiot, Arthur's obnoxious, and Merlin won't mind his own business. He's really starting to get on my nerves. He's the only one who hasn't gotten distracted by anything. I think he suspects me.

Morgause: I'm sorry sister. Surely he won't be a problem for us though, he's just a simple serving boy.

Morgana: You don't understand Morgause. Every time something goes wrong, Merlin's involved. I think he's more than what he seems. His loyalty to Arthur's getting to be a problem and I'm afraid he's going to take my brother's mind off his iPhone. He has to be stopped.

Cenred: Why, hello, Morgana. It's great to hear from you, too. Thanks for acknowledging my existence.

Morgana: *facepalm* You are so annoying, Cenred.

Cenred: I aim to please.

Morgause: Enough! Morgana, what is your plan? Do tell. :)

Morgana: Have you ever heard of the website Picnik?

Morgause: I can't say that I have Sister. What is it?

Morgana: A picture editing site. You can add in graphics and effects and text and it's really cool! You can add sparkles and change the colors and everything!

Cenred: Yes. Sounds positively EVIL. NOT! Why are we wasting our time with this, Morgause? I wanna cuddle on my new La-Z-Boy throne...

Morgana: That's gross.

Morgause: Agreed. Go sulk somewhere else Cenred. And don't change the channel on the TV – I've got the DVR set on Mythbusters.

Cenred:Fine.... (Cenred is offline)

Morgause: He does have a point, though, Sister. What does this picture editing have to do with getting rid of Merlin?

Morgana: *smirks* If I can get a pic of him, I can edit it. Put in some sparkles coming from his hands, make something randomly float in the air – I can even color his eyes gold! Then I send the pic to Uther's cell and the ignorant idiot that knows nothing about magic will assume Merlin is a sorcerer! As if! But Uther'll believe it without a second thought! Merlin will get locked away or maybe even executed and won't bother us while we complete ur plan.

Cenred: (Cenred is online.) It's my plan too. :(

Morgause: Cenred, when I need you, I'll page you. Until then, go make us both some coffee – I'll take mine black. And put in some TV dinners, I'm in the mood for lasagna.

Cenred: *rolls eyes* I thought I was the king.

Morgause: I won't send you the special edition sheep on Farmville if you don't make dinner.

Cenred: Fine. Yes, dear. Whatever you say dear. *grumbles* Happy?

Morgause: I'll be happier when your usefulness is over.

Cenred: ?

Morgause: Never mind. Just go pre-heat the microwave oven.

Cenred: (Cenred is offline.)

Morgana: He's such an idiot.

Morgause: I know! O.o He put aluminum foil in the microwave yesterday! Almost burned down the castle. Not that I'd mind but we can still use him....

Morgana: Is he worth it? Really? LOL!

Morgause: I don't know, Sister. I just don't know. But your plan is brilliant! Get Merlin out of the way, and when he's been arrested, let me know. And we'll have Cenred's armies ready to march on Camelot while everyone else is distracted by their technology! Isn't it pathetic how dependant they've become on future stuff?

Morgana: I know!

Morgause: Anyway, I have to go, Sister. I've got lasagna in the microwave and I have to harvest my crops – did you know that they've got pink corn now?

Morgana: No way! Kk, I'll let u go. ^^ Got some harvesting to do too before I put my plan into action. Oh and could you do me a favor and join my job? If I harvest twenty more fields of grapes I'll get a school

bus plow! XD

Morgause: Of course, sister. Message me tomorrow about how ur plans are going. Oh and forward the pic to me! I want to see what it would look like if Merlin had magic! Hahahaha – like that would ever happen! XP

Morgana: No prob. Luv ya sis! TTYL! *smirks*

Morgause: What was that for?

Morgana: I don't know. I just like smirking! (Morgana is offline.)

Cenred: (Cenred is online.) Yes, goodbye to you, too, My Lady...

Morgause: Cenred, shut up and get my lasagna. (Morgause is offline.)

Cenred: *sigh* Yes, dear. :((Cenred is offline.)

14 - Big Bird and His Taser Gun

Merlin gaped at Arthur, not sure if he had heard the prince correctly. "You... what?"

Arthur sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "I destroyed it," he said in a small, regretful voice. "I destroyed my iPhone."

Merlin chuckled weakly. "Right...?"

In a very reluctant voice, sounding as if he would rather be doing anything than having this conversation with Merlin right now, Arthur mumbled, "You were..." he blanched, "...right, Merlin."

Merlin grinned wickedly. "I'm sorry, I didn't quite hear you, Sire," the servant said. "Could you say it again – and speak up, I can't hear you – OW!" he yelped as Arthur smacked him upside the head. Merlin rubbed the sore spot. "What was that for?"

"You're an idiot, Merlin," Arthur announced although his spirits seemed a bit brighter now that he had insulted and smacked his servant. "But... it is true that I was becoming distracted. Letting my iPhone control me, not thinking straight. For heaven's sakes, I should have realized something was very wrong when Guinevere..." He bit his lip, looking upset.

Merlin sighed and hesitantly put a hand on his master's shoulder, relieved when he didn't get smacked again. "Gwen's not in her right mind," Merlin tried to assure him. "If we can just find a way to fix this..."

Arthur growled in frustration and Merlin quickly removed his hand. "How can we fix it, Merlin?"

Merlin shrugged. "You are the prince, Arthur. Surely you of all people..."

Arthur grimaced. "Merlin – all my father cares about now is his cell phone. I don't think you understand how strong that addiction is – I know, because I went through it, too. It took every ounce of willpower I had to – to –" he glanced forlornly at the window, "—drop it out the window." He looked like he was grieving the death of his best friend and Merlin didn't like the look of longing that had taken over Arthur's face. He finally had someone else on his side – and a person with the power to do something about it – and he didn't need Arthur running back to Rosco's for an iPhone replacement.

"Arthur, I –" Merlin began but was cut off when the door to Arthur's room was flung open and two guards – both sporting a cell phone clip on their ears and tasers on their belts – rushed in, faces hard and determined. Merlin felt his gut clench as he took in the situation – something was not right.

Arthur noticed as well and stepped forward, eyes flashing as the guards approached. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, every bit the prince of Camelot.

One of the guards pressed two fingers to the listening device clipped to his ear and said in a deep murmur, "This is Big Bird calling P-Dog. P-Dog, do you read me? The Prince wants to know what's going

on. What do we say?"

There was an indistinct mumble from the headset while Arthur and Merlin glanced at each other warily. The nervous feeling in the pit of Merlin's stomach intensified as he noticed that the other guard, the one that wasn't speaking on his ear clip thing, was staring at him hatefully, almost predatorily. Arthur must have noticed too, for he took a step forward and positioned himself in front of Merlin, cocking his eyebrows at the guard in question. Merlin felt gratitude wash over him. It seemed that Arthur really was back! Hopefully it would stay that way.

The other man was speaking again. "Alright, got it, P-Dog. We're on it. Big Bird out." He turned, saw that Arthur and his fellow guard were having a stare down, and bowed slightly to Arthur. "Prince Arthur, we have orders from P-Dog – er, I mean, King Uther – to bring the servant to him."

Merlin's eyes went wide as did Arthur's, but the prince stood his ground. "Why is that?"

The second guard cleared his throat, looking uneasy. "He... didn't say." The man reached around Arthur to grab Merlin's wrist but found himself pinned against the wall, Arthur's elbow digging into his back.

"My father," Arthur hissed, "is not in his right mind. None of you are – you're so consumed by Rosco's futuristic merchandise. There's no way I'm letting Father have my manservant when his mind has been boggled by cell phones and embarrassing text messages and apps – who knows what he'll do to him!"

"I'm sorry, Sire, we have our orders," the guard that wasn't in the process of becoming one with the wall announced as he proceeded to grasp Merlin firmly by the upper arm. Merlin, unsure of what was going on but not wanting to find out, tried unsuccessfully to pull away, only to have the guard reach into his belt, pull out the taser gun, and jab it quite brutally into Merlin's side. Merlin gasped as the electrical current hit him, mixing with his magic and causing him even more pain than intended – Merlin's magic and cold, scientific technology sure didn't mix! He let out a howl of pain and nearly fell flat on his face. The guard, meanwhile, looked surprised – it shouldn't have hurt that bad; after all, he had used the lowest setting, just enough to let the master and servant know he was serious.

Arthur growled, let the other guard go, and was about to lunge at the man holding Merlin when the first guard – code name "Big Bird" – used Merlin's position to his advantage, letting the taser gun hover just by the servant's other side. "Sire, I'm sorry, but your father said that if we didn't bring your servant to him, he'd take away our cell phone privileges for a month! So we're taking him to P-Man – cool name, by the way, right? He thought of it himself." Arthur rolled his eyes in exasperation despite the circumstances. Of course Uther had made it up. That's why it was so utterly lame. Dear heavens, his father really needed to stop trying to be cool. "And if you don't want him to get zapped again, you'll let us take him without a fuss."

Arthur traded an almost apologetic (even more apologetic than when he'd looked out the window at the remains of his beloved iPhone) glance with Merlin and dipped his head curtly. "I'm coming, too," he stated bluntly, determined. The guards nodded simultaneously while the man who wasn't already holding Merlin latched onto his other arm. With Arthur walking protectively behind Merlin, the guards leading the confused and aching warlock through the corridors, the foursome made their way to the throne room.

o.O

Morgause was very happy. She had had a TV dinner lasagna while watching Mythbusters – apparently it wasn't possible for someone to escape after being buried in a coffin six feet in the ground – alive. She'd remember that next time someone got on her nerves. She wondered if Cenred had caught the conniving looks she had been throwing at him throughout the course of the episode.

Now she was sitting on Cenred's brand new, lime green La-Z-Boy throne while the King himself was roaming his castle with a bullhorn and a bag of Cheetos (what he needed the Cheetos for, she didn't know, but he'd grown quite accustomed to the orange, cheesy snacks and if bribing him with a bag of Cheetos got him motivated to do what needed to be done, so be it), gathering his army together for a meeting.

Morgana had messaged Morgause on Facebook just five minutes earlier, gleeful because her brilliant Picnik plan had been set into motion. She'd also forwarded her sister the picture of Merlin she'd sent to Uther's phone – it was very well edited, actually, and if one didn't know better, they'd actually be inclined to believe that the hapless idiot did have magic. Of course he didn't, though; Merlin wouldn't know magic if it danced a jig on his head butt naked.

According to Morgana, that pesky servant was being taken care of right now, as Uther had ordered two of his guards – apparently code named "Big Bird" and "Rainbow Princess" (Morgause really wanted to know the background story of the latter name) – to go and bring Merlin to him as soon as the picture was anonymously sent to his phone.

Morgana had apparently been sneaking around in her red cloak and clunky high heels – because every villainess knows that if you slyly put your hood over your head, no one can see you, even if you do walk around in loud shoes. It was just a general principle that all plotting people understand – once the hood is on, no one can see you, even if the cloak is bright red and doesn't blend in with the surroundings at all.

Why had Morgana been skulking about the castle in her completely non-conspicuous manner? In order to sneak a picture of Merlin on her cell phone. She had managed to get one where Merlin was pointing. In actuality, he was apparently giving someone directions to the throne room, but with the sparkles coming out of his finger and the lost servant with ear buds in their ears and an iPod on their hip cropped out of the picture and Merlin's eyes a startling shade of gold – it looked like Merlin, of all people, was performing magic!

Soon, he would be thrown in the dungeons and then hopefully executed – Morgause was hoping for a more "modern" death. Electrocutation, perhaps? Open fire with machine guns? Speaking of which...

It wouldn't be too much longer before Cenred had his army together. They had something very important to discuss with the men. Apparently Rosco had a big supply of modern weapons that he had brought along for his own protection in case he got into trouble and needed to defend himself. Morgana had discovered this and had told Morgause about it... after their raid on Rosco's personal arsenal, they would have the supplies and means to blast Camelot right off the map – for good.

15 - Arthur and His Academy Award Winning Performance

Merlin grunted as he was thrown to the floor in front of Uther's throne, Arthur hovering protectively behind him. The two guards – Big Bird and Rainbow Princess, according to the code names they'd called each other on the way to the throne room, names that, coincidentally, made them much less intimidating, even with the taser guns – stood over him, hands resting on their guns, ready to use them if necessary.

Uther was reclining on his throne, Blackberry in his hands, fingers twiddling with the touch screen keypad and eyes glued to the screen, obviously intent on whatever he was doing. Merlin, for his part, was fighting off massive bouts of nervousness while still trying to get a grip on the pain from the shock he had received. It had felt like he had been struck by a bolt of lightning in his side and instead of leaving his system shortly after the gun had done its work, his magic had seemed to have sucked it in and was grappling with it, trying to expel it or overcome it. It was not a pleasant feeling.

Merlin wondered anxiously why Uther had so violently and urgently summoned him here. Could it be because Merlin was the only one in the kingdom who hadn't found solace in one of Rosco's toys? Had he found out that Arthur had tossed his iPhone out of the window and blamed Merlin for it? Merlin felt the tension build as he waited for the king to speak but Uther seemed to be completely preoccupied with his phone. Merlin heard Arthur shift impatiently behind him. Finally, the prince cleared his throat.

Uther glanced up, as if startled. "Arthur," he smiled. "I was trying to text you. Someone sent me the most..." he glared at Merlin, "...intriguing picture and I've been trying to forward it to you all morning but you haven't replied. I was simply trying to look up how to fix your phone's reception issues on the Internet that I have on my phone." He looked giddy like he always did when he talked of his phone. Quite frankly, it unnerved Arthur to the point where he didn't even notice the glare Uther sent to his servant at the mention of the picture.

Merlin, however, did notice and glanced up at Morgana, who was seated in her customary seat at Uther's side, laptop balanced on one knee. She smirked at him and Merlin's stomach dropped as he realized Morgana had done something, set him up. He gritted his teeth but didn't say anything.

Arthur rolled his eyes. "I regret to say that I... lost my iPhone, father."

Merlin held back a snort of laughter at Uther's devastated expression. "You... lost your..." his voice broke. "Give me a moment." He covered his mouth with one hand, looking as if he were about to cry, before collecting himself and fixing Arthur with a mournful stare. "I am very disappointed in you, Arthur."

Arthur opened his mouth, closed it, and opened it again. Had Merlin not been kneeling on the throne room's floor, wincing from the pain of an electrical shock, and more than likely awaiting his doom, he probably would have laughed at Arthur's accurate impression of a large mouth bass. As it was, Merlin simply snorted, which probably wasn't the smartest idea because it brought Uther's attention back to him. The king scowled down at him, clutching his Blackberry Storm tightly in his hand.

Arthur noticed the dark look his father was sending the servant and immediately stepped forward, eyes linking with his father's. "Father – what is this about?"

Uther turned back to his phone, pushed a few buttons, and all but shoved the device into Arthur's face. "Here, Arthur. Take a look for yourself. He's magic."

Merlin's heart dropped to his feet. Morgana knew? How long had she known about his magic? And how had she managed to catch him doing it? Since Arthur had been so preoccupied with his iPhone these past days, he had miraculously not gotten into any danger that Merlin needed to use magic to save him from (that had been, it seems, the only good thing that had come from Arthur's being enamored with an electronic box).

He shifted slightly, angling his head so he could look up at Arthur as his master stared at the image on the screen of the phone. First there was disbelief on his face, then anger, and then finally, a resigned sigh escaped from the prince's lips. Merlin's anxiety level continued to rise. He hadn't wanted Arthur to find out this way – actually, he never would have imagined that Arthur would have found out this way, considering he hadn't even known what a Blackberry Storm or a picture message was a week ago – and if Arthur had indisputable proof, there would probably not be a way for Merlin to worm his way out of the truth. He just hoped that Arthur would understand.

No such luck.

Arthur's voice was flat, laced with barely concealed anger as he glared down at his servant. "You have magic, Merlin." It wasn't a question. There wasn't any teasing, friendly emphasis on the "Mer" of "Merlin" this time. Arthur did not look amused.

Merlin tried to look as shocked as possible, unknowingly fueling Morgana's belief that he did not have magic and was just as shocked about this revelation as Arthur was and squeaked, "No."

Arthur glowered and put the phone up in Merlin's face. "Oh, yeah?" he sneered. "Then what's that?"

Merlin blinked. What on earth? It was the strangest picture of himself he had ever seen (okay, so it was the only picture of himself that he had ever seen, but the point still remained that it was a weird picture). He was smiling slightly from talking and his hand was in the process of pointing or waving about. That in itself wasn't too strange, although he found it very disconcerting staring at himself on a phone screen. No, what unnerved him was that his eyes were a bright, sickly shade of yellow, that pink flowery sparkles were flying out of his fingers, and that there was a very unrealistic hot dog (he only knew what a hot dog was because the people of Camelot had become very accustomed to fast food – Merlin thought it should be called "get fat fast" food but of course no one ever listened to him) floating just above the sparkles.

If it was a picture of how he looked when he used magic, he would eat his hat – and he didn't even have a hat! (But if he did have a hat, it would be tall and pointy and blue and have stars and moons on it because how nifty would that be!) He realized that Morgana must not have known that he had magic after all – she had somehow manipulated this photo she had snuck of him (So now she was smirking and stalking? She just kept getting creepier.) to make it look like he was using magic.

The only problem?

It did not look like he was using magic. The photo's editing was so unreal that Merlin could scarcely believe Uther and Arthur, as dim-witted as they may be at times, were falling for this! Surely he could talk his way out of this one!

Before he could even open his mouth, however, Arthur spoke again. "I trusted you, Merlin. But you betrayed me."

Merlin gaped. "Arthur, I'm not doing magic in that picture! I don't have—"

"SILENCE!" Uther bellowed, having heard enough. "Guards, Arthur – take the sorcerer to the dungeon. Tomorrow morning, he'll be executed for his crimes – I've been researching fun ways of killing people in the twenty-first century online. I'm thinking we might try a firing squad or something equally as dramatic and loud, so after you've taken him to the dungeons, go to Rosco and tell him we'll be in need of a few modern weapons, will you, Arthur?"

Merlin paled. "Arthur..." he whispered, but Arthur's eyes were hard and cold.

"There will be no need for the guards," the prince fumed as he latched onto Merlin's arm and yanked him roughly to his feet. "I want to throw this vile traitor in the dungeons myself!"

"Arthur..." Merlin pleaded quietly as the prince roughly, bodily dragged him out of the throne room, the guards following a respectful distance behind despite the prince's orders.

"Shut up, you low betrayer!" Arthur wailed dramatically and Merlin almost burst into a grin then, knowing at Arthur's terrible rendition of Gaius's soap operas that the prince was merely acting – or over-acting – for his father's and the guard's benefit. "You shall never again see the light of day!"

Merlin snorted quietly and whispered, "Arthur, don't you think that's a bit over the top, melodramatic?"

Arthur grinned wickedly as he continued to pull his servant along. "Well, if my father and everyone else is really going to be thick enough to believe that hideous editing job on that photo, then why wouldn't they believe my academy award winning impromptu performance?"

16 - Rosco and His Cowardly Escape

With the guards following closely behind them, Arthur had no choice but to escort Merlin to the dungeons. When they reached the cells, he firmly ordered Big Bird and Rainbow Princess to stay outside and guard the dungeon door while he took Merlin to his cell. When they arrived, Arthur sighed and gently nudged Merlin into the prison, locking the door behind him. "I'm sorry, Merlin," he said quickly, quietly. "I didn't want those two idiots to hurt you anymore so I took you to the cells myself. But my father gave an order, I can't go against it."

Merlin, who knew that he really did have magic and would be able to get out of the cell in a heartbeat if Arthur would just get the heck out of there and let him work his magic, smiled grimly. "Thanks. I'll be alright, though."

Arthur rolled his eyes. "You are an idiot, Merlin."

Merlin couldn't help but smirk, glad to see that Arthur was completely back to normal. In fact, it seemed as if iPhones were the last thing on his mind right now. Merlin was still at a loss at how to stop this madness and could use all the help he could get. With the prince on his side, surely they could figure out something – something that preferably didn't reveal Merlin's magic to Arthur just yet. "You really need to get a new mantra," Merlin joked airily, not worried about his impending execution in the slightest. He was actually quite happy now that he knew Arthur hadn't fallen for Morgana's petty trick. "You tell me I'm an idiot at least a dozen times a day."

Arthur growled, "Only because it's true."

Merlin shrugged. "If you say so."

Arthur glared at him. "You, Merlin, are to be executed tomorrow. With guns. Do you know what that means?"

Merlin just shrugged again. "No, actually. I haven't exactly been keeping up to date on all this future stuff. It's not my thing." He grimaced.

Arthur huffed. "How can you be so chipper, Merlin? You're going to die tomorrow."

Merlin smiled warmly at his master and friend. "No," he said calmly. "No, I'm not."

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Arthur slammed the door to the dungeons, leaving Big Bird and Rainbow Princess to do whatever it was they did during this time of the day. He didn't understand how Merlin could be so cheery in the face of certain death, but it was really starting to annoy him. He snorted – perhaps Merlin was acting happy just because he knew it would annoy Arthur.

Or maybe he knew the truth.

Maybe he knew that Arthur's words in the cells were just a precaution for the guard's benefits just in case they were listening. Maybe he knew there was no way on earth that Arthur was going to let his friend die because of a poorly edited picture. Maybe he knew that Arthur was going to make a plan and help the idiot escape whether he had any other assistance or not.

Arthur held back a chuckle at the idea of Merlin, of all people, having magic. It was ludicrous. Merlin with magic. But even if by some crazy, ironic force of nature Merlin actually did have magic, Arthur wasn't sure that he would even be able to go through with the execution regardless. He'd grown used to having Merlin around and if there was one thing he knew about his manservant, it was that he was anything but evil.

He pushed such thoughts out of his mind as he headed for Rosco's camp just outside of the lower town, where he kept his store of future items and lived when he wasn't in the marketplace selling cell phones and computers and magazines and hot dogs and cameras and DVDs and televisions. Even if he had no intention whatsoever of letting his father holes shoot holes in his servant, turning him into a human version of Swiss cheese, he did have to keep up the pretense that he fully supported his father's actions. Uther wanted him to go to Rosco and inquire about getting guns. Arthur would do that, but there was no way that his father would be allowed to touch the weapons. In the state of mind his father was in now, he might very well get trigger happy and start shooting at anything that moved.

He realized that something was wrong as he drew closer to Rosco's abode. The man's ship – a "time machine," he'd called it – that he had arrived in was making strange noises and Rosco was in the process of hastily packing boxes into the great shiny and silver contraption. The tall, red-haired man no longer looked uncontrollably happy and a smidge devious. Instead, panic was on his face as he jumped a mile in the air (not literally, of course, it was more along the lines of two inches) at Arthur's approach. He breathed a sigh of relief seeing who his visitor was and stopped in his packing, eyes darting about nervously all the while.

He dipped his head slightly – no ridiculous, expressive, and frankly embarrassing bow this time – at Arthur's arrival. "Hullo," he said distractedly and looked longingly at his machine. He seemed to be in a bit of a hurry.

Arthur frowned. "What's going on?"

Rosco winced at the prince's bluntness. Arthur had never seen the ecstatic man so, well, un-ecstatic before. He was scared, that much was certain. And from the look of things, he seemed to be in the process of packing up and leaving. Where he planned on going, Arthur didn't know for sure, but he had a sneaking suspicion that Rosco was trying to run away to the future. To his own time, or maybe to terrorize someone else's time. If that was true, though, he hadn't the slightest clue why.

"I-I'm terribly sorry, I got called away on... eh, business – yep, that's it, business. That sounds believable," he mumbled and Arthur rolled his eyes.

"Why are you leaving?" Letting out an explosive breath, Arthur snapped, "You have to fix this! Because of technology, an innocent man has been condemned for the crime of sorcery. My father has ordered

me to request some modern weapons – guns – so that he can have a 'modern' execution!"

If it was possible for the wiry man to pale any more, that is what Rosco did. It was then that Arthur noticed that the man's clothes were mildly rumpled and that there was the beginnings of a light bruise on his forehead. "Someone threatened you," Arthur stated. He looked at Rosco, eyebrows raised. "Who?"

"I don't know!" Rosco groused back, eyes wide and scared. "All I know is they took the guns, the weapons, the artillery – everything – and then told me I'd better get back to my own time so that I can't aid Camelot in the event of an attack!"

Arthur was furious. "And you let them take it?"

Rosco gestured wildly to his forehead. "They were going to kill me!"

Arthur crossed his arms over his chest and stared the man down. "I fail," he said in a slow, measured voice, "to see the problem."

Rosco let out a little squeak. "I never wanted any of this!" he moaned dramatically. "I was going to be the best salesman ever!"

Arthur glared. "And how's that working out for you?"

Rosco's lower lip trembled precariously. "It's not fair!" He was in full-blown tantrum mode. "I had everything – everything – going great and then that small army came and roughed me up, took my weapons, and threatened me!" He sniffled. "I want my mommy."

Arthur paled. A small army? Rosco crying for his mommy? That could only mean one thing... Cenred had had some of his men raid Rosco's weapon stores and now the enemy was armed to the teeth with killer, futuristic guns. They would launch an assault on Camelot and their swords and shields would be of no use. They'd be slaughtered. And it was all Rosco's fault!

Consumed by anger, Arthur spun to accuse the man, only to howl in frustration at the sight he was faced with. While Arthur had been distracted by his dark thoughts, Rosco had seized his chance. He had darted into his time machine, jammed the "return trip" button, and zapped off into the time-space continuum.

Rosco was gone and now there was no way of defending Camelot against an army of machine guns – the only form of modern weaponry they had in Camelot were the Nerf guns... and somehow Arthur didn't think they would be of much use against the real deal.

17 - Gwaine and His Unintentional Brilliance

King Uther was not happy. He had been on his cell phone, playing Tetris – he had almost beat his high score! – when suddenly a strange feeling overtook him. He felt as if something was not right, like he was missing out on something big. The phone in his hand vibrated slightly and at first he was overjoyed, thinking that maybe – just maybe – someone had finally decided to text him back. He had been texting all the knights and of course his son ever since he learned what a text message was. For some reason, no one ever messaged him back and that had made the king very grumpy. The only thing that had served to cheer him up was that he still had his phone (even if everyone else was rude and didn't LOL at his jokes), and, of course, the impending doom of the sorcerer, Merlin.

His eyes quickly jerked to the screen, hoping to see a message or even just a simple :) (that was a smiley face made by punctuation marks – he had been so thrilled to learn how to smile through a text, although he preferred making mad faces the most because that was truer to real life) from Arthur. He frowned when he realized that this was not the case. The screen of his phone had gone completely black.

The king of Camelot began pushing buttons frantically, almost madly. Fear gripped his heart as he realized that his phone might be – as horrific as it was – dead! He glared at the little box in his hands as if just staring at it would bring it back to life. "Why?" he mumbled softly, as if speaking to a lover that was abandoning him. "Why do you betray me like this?"

The phone didn't answer. It didn't flash or ring or vibrate or even show a dead battery sign. Growling in anger, Uther realized what must have happened. That servant! He had magic; he must have been angry when Uther sentenced him to death by open-fire machine guns (not that Uther was very surprised, no one was ever happy to die in such a painfully bloody and brutal way). He must have decided to take his revenge by turning Uther's Blackberry Storm against him. The king gritted his teeth and pressed a finger to his walkie-talkie headset, intent on contacting his guards with orders to bring the boy to him from the dungeons.

"Rainbow Princess, this is P-Dog. P-Dog, do you read me?" Apparently Rainbow Princess did not read him. There was no crackle of static, no response, nothing. He tried again but the apprehension in his stomach only grew worse. Something was terribly, terribly wrong. "This is P-Dog calling Big Bird, come in Big Bird, we've got a Code Unicorn in the throne room. Do you hear me? Code Unicorn, man! This is serious stuff!" Big Bird didn't answer.

That SORCERER!

Uther let the anger fill him up and he yelled, "GUARDS!" Rainbow Princess and Big Bird rushed in, having been right outside the door where Uther had assigned them to be. He supposed he could have yelled for them the first time but it was so much cooler to use the walkie-talkies. Rainbow Princess, whose real name Uther hadn't even bothered to learn, spoke up. "P-Dog. I, er, I mean, King Uther – your majesty! What is going on?"

Now positively seething with hatred toward that boy, Merlin, Uther demanded, teeth gritted, "Go to the dungeon and bring the sorcerer to me. He has cursed our technology and he will pay dearly for his crimes." He paused dramatically. "We can only hope that when he dies, this terrible curse will die with him."

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Merlin had used his magic to unlock the cell and had slipped out of the dungeon unnoticed. No, he hadn't had to distract the guards – not Rainbow Princess or Big Bird this time, they had gone back to guarding King Uther. He hadn't had to knock them out or wait until they fell asleep. In fact, he used magic to escape right in front of them and they hadn't even noticed.

Why?

Because they were too busy having panic attacks over their broken iPods and cell phones. Shortly after Arthur had reluctantly left his servant in the dungeon, the guards' technological equipment had stopped working. There had been wailing, cursing, throwing of said broken objects against the wall, and maybe even a few tears shed. Shaking his head at the pitiful scene, Merlin slipped out of the dungeon and through the empty corridors to Gwaine's chambers – he only hoped that he'd be able to pull the knights away from their game.

He wasn't expecting to see Arthur in the room with Lancelot and Gwaine – both of whom looked very glum like they'd just lost their best friend. Upon seeing Merlin, Arthur leapt to his feet and rushed over to him, hauling him the rest of the way into the room and slamming the door shut, blocking it with the large TV that didn't look like it was working. Merlin flinched, not knowing how he was going to explain his escape to Arthur or how Arthur was going to react.

To his complete amazement, Arthur just stared at him for several moments before breathing, "Merlin! Thank God."

Merlin cocked an eyebrow. "You mean you're not angry that I escaped?" Arthur shook his head and Lancelot gave a little whimper that Merlin figured had something to do with the TV whose only use now was a barricade. "You're not even going to ask how I escaped?"

Arthur rolled his eyes impatiently. "Why would I? You always come up with a stupid excuse, I tell you to tell me the truth, and then you say something completely idiotic to distract me from whatever the truth is... it's all very tiring and gets a bit boring and we have more important things on our hands." He paused, rolling his eyes at Lancelot and Gwaine. "Like the fact that those two are so bummed about losing their Wii and TV power that they're doing nothing but moping. And the fact that my father is so angry that none of the electronic stuff isn't working that he's blamed you and has ordered you to be killed on sight."

"What?" Merlin yelped. This was going to make things much more complicated.

"And that's not all," Arthur added ominously. "Cenred's army raided Rosco's supplies and stole all of his guns – deadly weapons that our swords are no match for. They're going to attack Camelot and slaughter us."

Merlin gaped. "But... Rosco! Can't he do something? Those are his weapons!"

Arthur winced. "Well... see, Merlin, the reason all this stuff has stopped working is because Rosco ran away after Cenred's men roughed him up a little. There's no supply to the TVs, phones, Wiis..." Gwaine mumbled something about his "Wii-Mii" and Arthur found he didn't exactly know what the knight was talking about.

"But shouldn't the guns stop working, then?" Merlin asked hopefully.

Arthur shook his head. "No – the books, the guns, anything that doesn't require some sort of signal or electrical source still exist. Gwen's still pining over Ed-Weird Sullen—"

"Ha! Good one!" Merlin crowed and even Lancelot and Gwaine had to agree. Then he sobered, realizing that the dragon would still be hooked on his riddle book. He would be of no help. On the plus side, now that Rosco was gone, Morgana couldn't communicate with her sister through FaceSpace or MyBook or whatever the heck that thing was.

"Surely we've got something we can use to fight back?" Merlin asked hopefully.

Gwaine stood up, sauntering over to the prince and Merlin while Lancelot stayed slouched on his chair, looking forlornly at the Wii-mote. "Look, mate – we've got nerf guns. Heck of a lotta fun to play with, but somehow I don't think that they're going to do us much good." The man grinned and flipped his hair and Merlin couldn't help but smile back, seeing that maybe Gwaine was beginning to snap out of his lethargic, grieving stupor. Maybe Lancelot would come round soon, too. "Not that it means I'm not going to try – if all else fails we can just beat them over the head with plastic toy guns until they're dead." Gwaine looked far too pleased by his idea, despite the fact that if that were the case, swords would make more sense.

But Merlin jumped to his feet, an idea striking him. "Nerf guns!" he crowed, grinning ear-to-ear. "That's it – Gwaine, you're brilliant!"

Gwaine tossed his hair. "Of course I am... Not that I'm questioning your completely accurate observation, Merlin, but could you tell me why I'm so brilliant? Just so I can know for sure you know what you're talking about?"

Lancelot (who had finally stopped pouting and decided to join his other three friends), Merlin, and Arthur all looked at the man blankly before intoning, "What?"

Merlin shook his head. "I don't have time for this – I've got to go!"

Arthur grabbed his arm. "Oh no you don't! My father has ordered you to be killed on sight – you're staying here. Gwaine and I will go see how father is doing and find out if we've been able to scrounge around for any weapons. Lancelot, you stay here with Merlin and don't let him leave your sight. If anyone comes searching for the idiot, hide him. Whoever sent that picture to my father was playing a cruel joke and no matter how useless Merlin may be, I don't want him to die because of it."

"I'm right here; I can hear every word you're saying," Merlin commented dryly, but as usual, Arthur

ignored him.

Lancelot sighed and nodded solemnly. "Of course, sire."

Once Arthur and Gwaine had left the room, Merlin grinned widely. Arthur had unwittingly left him with the one person that already knew about Merlin's magic and who would be sure to help the warlock with his Gwaine-inspired plan. It was a wild plan, and it might not work, but then again Gwaine was wild and he never worked, but somehow he was still alive anyway. Merlin realized, startled, that his line of thought was becoming as confusing as Gwaine's and he shook his head, clearing it. Now wasn't the time or the place.

He turned to Lancelot, who still looked a little out of it and announced, "Okay, Lancelot – you've got to snap out of this. Because I've got a plan on how to stop this bloodshed from happening... and with luck, we'll all come out of this alive and with our sanity intact. Maybe."

Lancelot blinked a few times, tore his gaze away from the dead Wii, and turned to face Merlin, the spark returning to his eyes. "Okay, boss," he smiled warmly. "Tell me what to do."

18 - Gwaine and His Pink Dragon, Bubbles

Camelot was in an uproar. Arthur had informed his father about the theft of Rosco's ammo and the merchant's subsequent flight from Camelot with his metaphorical tail tucked between his legs. Uther hadn't responded at first, as he was still gazing longingly at his Blackberry Storm, not quite accepting that it really was over. Finally in desperation, Arthur did something that no other person, no matter how brave, would have ever attempted. With a growl of frustration, he grabbed his father's cell phone and chucked it across the throne room, watching in satisfaction as the heat sensitive touch screen shattered and the phone fell to pieces.

That had gotten his father's attention. Rubbing his ringing ears from Uther's near temper tantrum at the ruining of his precious phone. Once Arthur managed to calm him down enough, though, Uther's eyes had gone wide at the news his son brought. Cenred's army had guns and they were preparing to attack Camelot with them... and what did they have? Swords and Nerf guns. Neither one would do much damage against the weapons that Cenred and his men would be wielding. They would be slaughtered and Camelot would fall.

Of course, this was all Rosco's fault, but Uther, who had an annoying tendency to blame exactly the person needed to save them all, had decided that it was the sorcerer's fault and that if Merlin died, somehow all the guns would vanish into thin air. Arthur attempted to poke holes into his father's ridiculous logic (if you could call it that) but Uther would have none of it. He ordered that Merlin be found and executed immediately. Arthur told his father that he would take care of it personally.

Arthur wasn't actually planning on killing Merlin. In fact, the prince had no intention of letting anyone else kill his servant, either. But he was, for once, thinking with his mind and not his emotions, and had twisted the situation to their advantage. "Father, we are going to need all the men we have to defend the citadel against Cenred and his guns. You put the knights and guards on that and I will take care of the sorcerer myself."

Uther had agreed, and now Arthur found himself hastening through the corridors to Gwaine's room where he had told Merlin to stay with Lancelot (Gwaine had gone to try and talk some sense into Gwen and Gaius, although with the Twilight books still intact, he wasn't very optimistic that he'd be able to get through to the former). He was going to try and work out a way to possibly smuggle Merlin out of Camelot but chances were that they were all going to die anyway, so the most he could really hope for was to keep Merlin out of Uther's hands until either some miracle happened and they all came out of this alive or they were all turned into living replicas of Swiss cheese.

Arthur skidded to a stop when he reached Gwaine's room and let out a growl of frustration. "Really, Merlin?" he hissed, anger warring with worry for dominance over his emotions. "Really, Lancelot?"

The room was empty. Merlin had either tried to get out thinking that somehow he might be able to help, recruiting Lancelot to go with him (and Lancelot always listened to Merlin over Arthur for some reason; it was something that Arthur had never quite been able to figure out) or Lancelot hadn't trusted Arthur to help Merlin and had taken it upon himself to get him out of the city. Either alternative made Arthur's

blood boil at the two men but he couldn't dwell on it. As much as he hated abandoning the search for Merlin and Lancelot, he had other things to worry about. Namely the army of bloodthirsty modern ammunition bearers that were marching forth with the intent to blow Camelot off of the map.

Sighing, Arthur turned on his heel and headed toward Gaius's chambers. He hoped that Gwaine had been able to help the court physician regain his senses after the sudden and oh-so-tragic loss of his television. He hoped that the old man might have some advice on how to combat this threat and he also needed to inform Merlin's guardian about the predicament he had somehow landed himself in, no matter how difficult it might prove to be. And if nothing else, Arthur could really use a bit of Gaius's dry wit to help lighten the mood (or darken it, for an old man he could sometimes have a grim sense of humor). What he really wanted, though, was for Gaius to pull a "miracle cure" right out of one of those huge sleeves and fix everything.

Sadly, though, he knew that that wouldn't be the case.

O.o

"So what exactly is your plan?" Lancelot asked Merlin as they snuck through the town. They had almost made it out of the city. Merlin hadn't told his friend much of anything other than that they had to get out of Camelot and close to Cenred's army.

They quickly slipped out of the wall and took off at jog toward the woods, leaving technology-plagued Camelot behind them. Merlin smiled at his friend as they reached the edge of the forest, heading in the general direction of the approaching army. "Well, Gwaine said that we won't be able to fight off Cenred's men with Nerf guns alone," Merlin grinned.

Lancelot shrugged. "That much is obvious."

Merlin nodded. "And as much as I dislike those toys—"

"Oh I heard about the ambush," Lancelot told him. "Rotten luck."

Merlin rolled his eyes. "And where were you when all this happened, eh?"

Lancelot glanced over his shoulder mournfully, almost as if he could still see the Wii he had left behind. "Playing Super Mario Brothers," he muttered wistfully. "I had almost made it to the second world when it stopped working!" He scowled uncharacteristically. "And I would've made it even further if Gwaine hadn't kept making his pink dragon eat me!"

Merlin blinked. "Gwaine had a pink dragon?"

Lancelot shrugged. "I refused to let him have the green one. I think that's why he made his eat me." He rolled his eyes. "Revenge is so petty, don't you agree, Merlin?" He scratched his chin. "Just wait until Gwaine finds the garden snake I put under his pillow – he'll rue the day that he ever made Bubbles eat Luigi!"

"What was that you were saying about revenge being petty?" Merlin asked sarcastically. He shook his

head as if to dislodge some disturbing thought. "Wait – he named the dragon Bubbles?"

Lancelot shrugged. "It's Gwaine, Merlin."

Merlin nodded. "Good point."

"Anyway," Lancelot continued, sounding much happier now that he was reminded of his plan to retaliate against Gwaine's Wii antics, "what does all of this have to do with your plan?"

Merlin gazed off into the distance before shaking his head again. "I have no idea. But here's what I'm thinking – what if Cenred's army also had only Nerf guns for weapons?"

"But they have regular guns," Lancelot reminded his friend. "Big, scary things that don't shoot plastic, suction cup darts but actual bullets!"

"How do you know so much about these weapons?" Merlin asked curiously.

Lancelot shrugged. "I played some Halo as well – lots of guns and stuff in that game."

Merlin sighed. "I should have known." He paused. "And as for Cenred's army, they may have those big, scary guns now, but if we can get to them in time and with a little bit of luck... we won't have a massacre but an all-out Nerf battle to the death – or exhaustion, more likely – that will result in a stalemate. No one can gain the upper hand if they can't kill the other side!"

Lancelot grinned. "You think your magic will work on modern weapons?"

Merlin bit his lip. "I sure hope so, Lancelot. Because it's the only plan we have."

19 - Gaius and His Cardboard TARDIS

Gaius had built himself a cardboard TARDIS.

His television was now completely useless, which had driven him into a deep state of depression for the time span of about half an hour. Then he had had an epiphany. The old man, currently downcast because of the loss of his stories and his favorite BBC show, had caught sight of the huge cardboard box that had been used to house his television before Rosco – who he hadn't heard from in a while, strangely enough – and a large bottle of spare blue dye he had conveniently lying around and a candlestick had popped on over his head (light bulbs no longer worked because Rosco was gone, so a candle would have to suffice to provide a cliché representation of an idea forming).

He could make himself a TARDIS replica.

He hadn't really considered the fact that just because he had a TV box painted blue that said "POLICE" on it and resembled an old police booth that it would still just be a blue cardboard box that said "POLICE." Gaius was normally quite an intelligent fellow and later on he would be sorely embarrassed at his lack of foresight but at the moment it seemed like a beautiful idea. With his own TARDIS he could go anywhere he wanted (like to the future where he could get another TV to watch his stories on) and maybe he could even find the Doctor himself! (The Doctor was real, he had to be, Gaius had decided, or how would life even be worth living for? And no, he hadn't been watching far too many melodramatic soap operas for his own good, thank you very much!)

He had just finished painting his TARDIS and had grown impatient for the paint to dry so he had used a little bit of magic to jumpstart the process. His wrinkled face breaking into a delighted grin as he eyed his handy work, Gaius opened the "door" he had cut into the box and clambered inside his homemade TARDIS, whose innards were considerably smaller and much less technological than the one on the show. In fact, there was nothing inside his "machine," not even a button or a wheel or even a glowing, pulsing light that could do terrible things to you if you look right into it. Frowning, Gaius hunched over in the box and shut the door, trying to ignore the rational part of his mind that was trying to rise to the surface over this lunacy telling him that this was the stupidest thing he had EVER done. The other, slightly manic part of his conciseness decided that he would just have to sit scrunched up in the TARDIS until something happened.

Thirty minutes later, the physician was beginning to regret listening to that part of his brain as his joints were aching terribly and his back hurt more than he could say because of the position he'd been sitting in for so long. And there had not been even a single thing happen! He felt so cheated and he thought about trying to get out of his box, the wiser side of him coming into slightly clearer focus. The problem was that at his age, his body had a tendency to want to remain locked in any position he stayed in for longer than a few minutes. And it had been at least twenty minutes more than a few. He couldn't get up and he couldn't move.

At that moment, just as he was despairing and seriously considering whether or not he had actually lost his mind, the door to his chambers burst open and none other than Gwaine rushed into the room. "Oh

thank heavens!" Gaius muttered as he watched the fluffy-haired knight look around for the physician. He cleared his throat and Gwaine's eyes locked on the arts and crafts TARDIS and his eyes lit up like he was a small child.

"Is that a... is that a... TARDIS?" he squeaked excitedly, so enthused that he forgot that it was time for his daily mid-afternoon hair flip.

Gaius was surprised. "You know what a TARDIS is?"

Gwaine grinned. "What did you think I watched when I wasn't beating Lancelot at Mario Brothers?" He sighed wistfully and placed a hand over his heart (if he had been wearing a hat he would have removed it in reverence of his lost friend). "I shall never forget you Bubbles."

Gaius decided to not even ask about what the man was thinking. He had learned almost as soon as he met Gwaine that if you wanted to keep your mind safe from trauma and confusion, you would try not to understand what went on in that head beneath the silky, totally attractive (but not to Gaius, obviously, although he was a bit jealous of Gwaine's lush locks) hair. Gwaine apparently took the awkward silence as a cue to keep talking and demanded, "Where did you get it?"

"I... er.... made it."

Gwaine crowed with excitement. "Amazing! My turn!"

Gaius blinked. "I'm dreadfully sorry, Gwaine, but I seem to be stuck. My old joints have locked into place and I cannot get up. Perhaps if you help—"

Before he could finish his request, Gwaine had bounded across the room, flung open the door, and instead of doing the logical (and kinder) thing and helping the old man up, he ordered, "Scootch over, Gramps!" and somehow managed to wriggle his rear in next to Gaius and sit scrunched up against the taken aback old man. Gaius had never been this close to Gwaine and instantly wished he had never gotten the chance because the man smelled like a strange mixture of ale, daffodils, and tacos.

Some good did come of Gwaine's intrusion, however. Perhaps it was the close proximity, the numbness in his backside and aching in his knees, or the overpowering smell of flowery, alcoholic tacos, but Gaius was suddenly snapped out of his stupor and he shook his head as he tried to regain his senses. He blinked again and nearly jumped a mile as he realized what a fool he'd been. (He also jumped because Gwaine had wiggled some more trying to get comfortable and he had accidentally stuck his finger in Gaius's ear.) "Gwaine!" he spluttered indignantly. "What are you doing, silly boy? You need to get out!"

Gwaine pouted and shook his head, giving Gaius a face full of hair. "No way. Stop being stingy, this is my TARDIS, too!"

Gaius rolled his eyes and tried to escape but to no avail. Not only were his joints unresponsive but Gwaine was smushing him against the side of the box and he couldn't move an inch in either direction. "It's not a real TARDIS, you ninny!" the physician exclaimed. He looked around and realized he hadn't seen his ward for some time now (not that he would have noticed before, seeing as how he had been totally engrossed in his favorite shows). "Where's Merlin?"

And just like that, Gwaine's face went from childishly petulant to worried and urgent. It seemed that the mention of his best friend struck a chord and brought him back to reality. "GAIUS!" the knight-to-be-someday-after-Uther-finally-decides-to-kick-the-bucket yelled right in the old man's ear, causing Gaius to snap back rather irritably.

"I'm right here!"

But Gwaine didn't seem to care that he had just probably permanently deafened the left ear of Camelot's court physician and he plowed on. "I remember now! I was supposed to come get you, snap you out of your daze because Merlin's in trouble!"

Gaius tried to move but could get nowhere. (This was a very sturdy cardboard box turned time-machine.) "Why? What happened?"

"Uther," Gwaine spat out the name like it was a mouthful of troll potion, "has decided that Merlin is to blame for the technology going dead because of some stupid prank picture text he got that was clearly photoshopped to make him think Merlin's a sorcerer. He's declared that Merlin is to be killed on sight."

Gaius felt horror fill him to the brim. How could he have been so careless? He had been watching soap operas and sitting in a box while Merlin's life was in danger. "Where is he?" He was afraid to ask the question because he was scared of what the answer might be.

"He's with Lancelot—" Gwaine started but at that moment, the door to the physician's quarters opened again and this time, a very worried and agitated Arthur Pendragon stalked in.

"No he isn't," he announced irritably. "At least, not where we left them anyway. They've disappeared."

Gwaine groaned and Gaius hung his head. Arthur stared at the young and old man, squished together inside of a blue box that said "POLICE" and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "What are you two doing?" he demanded.

Gwaine tried to dislodge his elbow from Gaius's side and grinned sheepishly. "Playing... pretend?"

Gaius facepalmed. Arthur let out a rather unprincely growl. "Get out of there, both of you!" he ordered. "We have to start preparing for battle. Cenred's army is approaching Camelot fast and they have guns."

Gaius's eyes widened. "Oh no," he breathed.

"Oh yes – oh no!" Arthur agreed. "Now get out."

There was silence before Gwaine cleared his throat and peeped through the little "window" in the door while raising his hand fractionally. Arthur rolled his eyes and called on the man. "Yes, Gwaine?"

"Erm... we're stuck."

Despair filled Arthur. This was what was going to help defend Camelot?

They were so screwed.

20 - Arthur and His Mysterious Shape-Shifting Swords

Something very strange had happened in Camelot. Actually, something strange had been happening in Camelot for as long as Rosco had been there, and even after he had left. But now the strangeness had gone to new levels. That in itself was hard to fathom, considering how wild life in Camelot had been ever since Uther bought his first – and last – Blackberry Storm.

After finally liberating Gaius and Gwaine from the homemade TARDIS (which involved an exceptionally large amount of butter, a crowbar that Rosco had conveniently forgotten to take back to the future with him in his haste, and a lot of cursing and swearing, most of which was, as surprising as it was, came from Gaius, whose body still didn't want to move even though so much was at stake; Gwaine was quite happy because he learned a few ancient, lost to the ages swear words that only someone with Gaius's life experience, keen ears, and exceptional memory could know), Arthur had told Gwaine to come with him, that they had to try and find any weapons, swords, Nerf guns, maces, paintball guns – anything they could use against Cenred's army.

"You know this is a hopeless battle, right?" Gwaine asked, observing Arthur critically.

Arthur had felt slightly uncomfortable being the target of Gwaine's unusually perceptive gaze. "Since when has that ever stopped us?"

Gwaine snorted. "Good – just as reckless as me. We'll get through this yet." Arthur chuckled and Gwaine added, "But what about Merlin? You said your father's trying to kill him and he's disappeared. We've got to find him first!"

A pang of guilt and irritation swept through the prince of Camelot as he thought of his wayward servant and servant-snatching knight-to-be. What was next, he wondered sarcastically, would Lancelot then sweep Gwen away, too? He rolled his eyes at the thought. Lancelot might try to steal his friend – erm, servant – but even he wasn't stupid enough to steal his girlfriend (or ex- but hopefully she would eventually get over Edweirdo and run back to Arthur)... was he?

A trickle of worry tickled his throat and he cleared it before laughing nervously. No way. Lancelot and Guinevere were totally loyal. He'd have nothing to worry about. Except right now he was worried about Merlin. And Gwen. And his father. And Camelot. And everyone else in the bloody kingdom. All this probably wouldn't matter anyway, he mused glumly, because unless a strange miracle occurred Camelot would fall to Cenred's army.

Still, like he'd told Gwaine, the impossible odds and cold steel barrels of machine guns weren't going to stop them from trying. And their pathetic attempts to defend themselves with swords weren't going to stop them from dying either. Hm. Trying and dying. That rhymed – like lyrics in a song. A song that might have been on his iPhone. The iPhone that was crushed below his window and that wouldn't have worked anyway because Rosco was a cowardly snake. Arthur shook his head firmly – he couldn't have a relapse. He couldn't lament what was already gone. He had to focus on the present.

Gwaine saw his slightly mournful expression and sympathized. "Thinking about your iPhone?" Arthur looked at him, surprised, and Gwaine grinned. "I still miss my WiiMii – his name was G-Man the Epic – and Bubbles the Pink Dragon. But I am comforting myself that I am going to avenge them in this battle." His words were noble and a few tears gathered in Arthur's eyes unbidden. He swiped them away, clasped Gwaine on the shoulder, and nodded jerkily. "We'll do this for Bubbles..." he hesitated... "and Roy."

Gwaine cocked an eyebrow. "Roy?"

"That's what I named my iPhone," Arthur sighed. "Before I killed him, I promised him that he wouldn't go unnamed or remembered."

Gwaine nodded slowly before looking at Arthur with a gleam in his eyes. "How do you know it wasn't a girl iPhone?"

Arthur looked aghast at the suggestion. "How dare you taint Roy's memory further? What if I told you that Bubbles is a boy?"

Gwaine snorted. "I don't care. Bubbles is a boy."

"You have a pink dragon named Bubbles that's a male?" Arthur asked incredulously.

Gwaine pouted. "And your girlfriend is in love with a sparkly man named Eddie that's a male-ish thing."

Arthur inclined his head seriously. "Touché."

"Ahem." Both young men swung their heads around to see an eyebrow-less Gaius. In actuality, Gaius wasn't eyebrow-less. He had, in fact, managed to raise both of them to such heights that they blended in perfectly with his hairline. It was quite a remarkable feat, and it also implied that he was quite exasperated. Mouth set into a thin line, the old man remarked, "As thrilling as this debate is, it is my understanding that – and correct me if I'm wrong – there is an army of gun-toting maniacs heading for Camelot as we speak? And you never answered Gwaine about Merlin – what are you going to do to help him? If Uther finds him, he will not ask questions. He will kill him, Arthur."

Arthur swallowed heavily, feeling ashamed of himself for thinking about Roy the Dead iPhone and Bubbles the Pink Boy Dragon when he should be thinking about Merlin the Idiotic Loyal Servant Who Is In More Trouble Than He's Probably Worth. "I'm sorry," he said softly. He looked between Gaius and Gwaine. "And I'm sorry that Merlin's missing. I told him to stay put. But we can't go looking for him – Gaius is right, we've got a big problem on our hands with this army. We've got to deal with it."

"But... what if your father has already found Merlin?" Gwaine asked a bit fearfully.

Arthur's eyes narrowed. "He hasn't."

"And how do you know?" Gwaine countered petulantly.

"Because," Arthur responded, allowing a bit of a smile to barely touch the corner of his mouth,

"Lancelot's gone, too. And that means that Lancelot's with Merlin – do you really think that Lancelot's going to allow my father to hurt Merlin?"

Gwaine let out a begrudging sigh and mumbled crankily. "No... but I still don't like it," he half-whined.

Arthur sighed. "Neither do I," he admitted.

Gaius offered a small smile and his eyebrows slowly, gracefully – like a swan's feather drifting down to the earth in the light of the elegant moon – descended to rest in their normal positions, causing him to look much less intimidating. "Merlin can take care of himself. And Lancelot will help. Now you must go find weapons and prepare for the siege upon Camelot."

Arthur nodded at Gaius and then at Gwaine. Gwaine grinned bravely and announced, "Allons-y!" Gaius smiled knowingly and his gaze drifted to the TARDIS but Arthur was just as confused as ever.

"What the heck does that mean?" he demanded.

"It's French," Gwaine supplied chipperly. "For 'let's go.'"

Arthur rolled his eyes and left the room. As Gwaine was turning to follow, he felt a surprisingly strong hand clasp onto his shoulder and he turned. Gaius looked steadily into Gwaine's eyes and his eyes watered up as his great words of wisdom bubbled to the surface. "The Doctor," he said gravely, "would be proud."

A lone tear tracked down Gwaine's face as he thought of the man he sought to be like, if only because he got to go to taverns and meet girls at every end of the universe. "For Ten!" he announced, referring to the Tenth Doctor.

Gaius snorted. "I would say not! Nine was much better! That man had style."

Gwaine looked hurt. "We must... agree to disagree," he muttered melodramatically. "Because I do not want to say good-bye on a bitter note."

Gaius nodded. "Good-bye, fellow space traverser."

Gwaine began to tear up again as he headed for the door. "And Gaius-?"

Gaius raised his eyebrow and waited for Gwaine to talk. When he did, affection for the young man that he had, only moments before, been angry at for getting them stuck in a cardboard box, welled up inside of him.

"The Doctor would be proud of you too, Gaius."

And then Gwaine was gone and Gaius was alone.

o.O

That's not even the strange part that was mentioned in the beginning.

Yes, as strange and potentially frightening as the above scenes may have been for anyone with a grip on reality may have been, stranger things were yet to come.

When Gwaine and Arthur arrived at the armory, they stared in shock and found that many other knights were doing the same. For where there had once been somewhat feasible weapons like swords and shields and maces, the walls of the armory were lined with not metal or silver or bronze or even aluminum foil (which had actually been banned from Camelot after Leon nearly blew up his chambers by sticking a taco wrapped in aluminum foil in the microwave), but with brightly colored plastic.

All the real weapons had somehow been changed to Nerf guns of all shapes, sizes, colors, and models. There were a few Nerf swords as well and even a Nerf football, and as fun as the collection looked, Arthur's heart sunk to his feet and then jerked back up like a yo-yo and sunk back down again. He exchanged grim glances with Gwaine, who looked like he was trying to decide whether to try and kill someone with a Nerf revolver or laugh at the absurdity of the situation.

Yep. The only way that things could get worse would be if Cenred's army was outside of Camelot's walls right now with their guns. Arthur winced as a petrified messenger darted into the armory the second after the thought had passed through his mind and announced in a trembling voice, "Things just got worse! Cenred's army is outside of Camelot's walls right now with their guns!" Wow, talk about irony, Arthur thought sarcastically.

He felt the eyes of the knights watching him expectantly and he made a decision. First, he had to make sure Gwaine could fight with him. So he grabbed a pink Nerf sword (because pink was the color of Bubbles and he thought Gwaine would appreciate the gesture) and knighted him with it. Then he grabbed a Nerf machine gun in one hand and a Nerf battle axe in the other and said with a tone positively dripping bravado, "Let's rock."

21 - Camelot and Its Epic Nerf Battle of Doom

While Camelot had been preparing for battle, Merlin and Lancelot had been scurrying through the Darkling Woods as fast as they could go. Merlin had been delighted to be on a mission alone with Lancelot, not necessarily because he enjoyed the man's company but because he was finally with someone that knew about his magic. For once Merlin could use his magic to speed up their journey, fight, and of course, do what they came to do – sabotage Cenred's arsenal of guns.

When they came upon the army's camp in the woods, Merlin and Lancelot had stopped and watched as the various black-clad soldiers worked to pack up camp. It had been a terrifying sight, so many enemy soldiers with dark intentions toward Camelot. The scariest part of the scene had not necessarily been the soldiers (with King Cenred not in sight; apparently he had opted to stay in his castle with Morgause and let his "knights" do all the work and risk their necks) but the vast store of weapons they had. Guns of all sizes were being loaded and readied for use on Camelot's defenses. Merlin and Lancelot had exchanged worried glances that confirmed what they were both thinking: if Merlin's plan didn't work, Camelot would be reduced to rubble and everyone in the city would be holey (and not in the religious sense, either!).

"They're getting ready to set off," Lancelot had hissed. "If you're going to do something, you should do it now."

Merlin had nodded. "Right." He hadn't been able to find a spell that had anything to do with modern weapons so he was just going to have to improvise. Closing his eyes, he had outstretched his hand and muttered, "Newid y tu mewn y gynnau, yn cadw y tu allan yr un fath, newid bwledi marwol I mewn I nerf dartiau!" It was a terribly complicated and long spell but the words spilled almost effortlessly from Merlin's lips. There was a flash of light but thankfully it was only in Merlin's palm so none of the enemy noticed.

Lancelot had glanced cautiously at Merlin. "Did it... work?"

Merlin grinned. "Yes, look!"

They both watched as uncertainty quickly spread across the war camp. They had listened for a while to the small snippets of muddled conversation between the soldiers that were scratching their heads and examining their changed weapons with confusion and awe.

"What just happened?"

"I could have sworn my weapon was black. Why is it blue and yellow now?"

"My bullets are orange and have blue tips on them. What's up with that?"

"Wow, my gun turned green – my favorite color!"

"Aww, no fair! I want the green one! I'll trade you – I've got blue!"

"Should we go on?"

"Cenred and his girlfriend will kill us if we don't. They're still guns, so I'm sure they're just as lethal."

Merlin and Lancelot had exchanged elated glances before melting back into the woods and heading back to Camelot.

o.O

They decided to meet Cenred's army in an open field that was in between the Darkling Woods where they knew Cenred's men would be emerging from and Camelot. Arthur wanted to be away from the lower town and the citadel, to try and hold off Cenred's army for as long as they could without any citizen getting hurt. Maybe some people would even be able to flee the city before the enemy army got to them. Arthur thought about Gwen, who he had ordered to stay away from the battle with Morgana. He wondered if he would ever see her again. And he thought about Merlin. Where was that idiot anyway?

And then the time for thinking, worrying, and lamenting was over. Cenred's army was charging out of the woods, waving their guns around... their Nerf guns. Arthur stared. Now this put an interesting twist on things. Grinning almost maniacally, the prince hefted his Nerf axe and Nerf machine gun and said, "It's on." A pause.

Somewhere beside him he heard the newly knighted Gwaine declare, "For Camelot!"

Arthur stopped in his tracks. "Hey," he complained petulantly. "That's my line."

Gwaine shrugged. "The early bird gets the worm."

Arthur rolled his eyes. "That doesn't even make sense. I don't want a worm, I want to say 'For Camelot!'"

The eyes of both armies roved between them, watching the tense drama between the two knights unfold. Gwaine sighed long-sufferingly. "Fine," he grouched. "Say it."

Arthur grinned triumphantly and hoisted the Nerf axe in the air. "For Camelot!"

Gwaine cut in, pumping his pink Nerf sword above his head. "And for Bubbles!"

"Yes," Arthur said. "For Bubbles. CH—" He started to give the order to charge but Gwaine interrupted again.

"And for G-Man the Epic," Gwaine announced.

"Yes, him too," Arthur ground out a bit impatiently. "Now, CHAR—" He almost got the whole word out before his fellow knight jumped in again.

"And for the Doctor!" he hooted. Arthur glared at him and Gwaine stared blankly back. "Well, what are you waiting for, Arthur? You gonna give the order to CHARGE! or not?"

At the word "charge" from Gwaine, Camelot's army began to surge forward. Arthur glowered furiously at Gwaine.

"Your line again?" Gwaine asked in a small voice."

"Go, Gwaine. Just... go."

They moved forward with the army.

Just moments later, the two armies clashed.

o.O

Arthur took down the first man with his battle axe, whacking him over the head with it. The man fell on the ground, moaning, and didn't move. Arthur hadn't hit him hard enough to knock him out, but Cenred had had all his knights up all night discussing how to turn on the safety when not shooting and the fallen knight was just sleepy. When he hit the ground he just decided not to get up again. He didn't have anything better to do than sleep anyway. He hadn't wanted to fight in this war. He hadn't even wanted to be a soldier. He wanted to be a dentist, which Rosco had informed him was someone who fixed people's teeth. The prince stood over the fallen warrior with tears in his voice and yelled vindictively, "THAT WAS FOR ROY!"

Arthur hefted the machine gun and managed to shoot about ten Nerf bullets at the oncoming enemies, hitting a few eyes, a nose, and even dead on the heart. Bullets sailed past him and someone hit him on the shoulder with a foam sword. He dodged another sword, knocked someone over with his axe, and caught a Nerf bullet in midair right before it hit his nose. That would have been a nasty mess.

There were screams of outrage and the stench of battle (which in this case was the sweat of a thousand soldiers trying to kill each other with toy weapons) permeated the area. There was the almost constant pop! pop! popping of the rainbow of cylindrical bullets being released from the shiny plastic barrels. Fallen warriors from both sides lay on the ground, clutching their wounds from where the bullets had hit (those little suction cups at the end hurt). A few seemed to have gone mad with battle lust and were shooting everyone in sight, even their own men. The constant pattern on the battlefield was *pop* "OW!" *pop* OOW! *pop pop pop* "OW OW OW! Stop it, that really smarts!"

Arthur ducked under a bright green handled play sword before jumping over a fallen man's last two purple handgun bullets. He dropped his machine gun as he had already exhausted the bullets in the gun and the clips and wrenched a smaller 6-cylinder revolver – this one bright yellow – from someone's hand. Still dodging bullets and swords and even the odd Nerf brand baseball bat, Arthur cursed as he realized his newly acquired weapon was not loaded, either. He quickly began to scan for dropped darts, grabbing at them and stuffing them first into the slots in the gun before shooting off several bullets.

There were 'corpses' everywhere and if one of them decided to try to get up and fight again, one of the 'dead men' from the other side would pull them back down and hiss, "No fair – you got hit in the forehead. You can't fight anymore – you're dead."

"But I'm fine," the other warrior would protest.

"It doesn't matter. If you would've been dead in a real battle, then you can't be alive now. It's against the rules."

While Arthur was leaping and dodging and running and collecting and sliding and bashing and shooting and hacking (as best he could with a blunt albeit still painful axe), Gwaine and Leon were covering each other's backs. "Camo dart at five o'clock!" Leon yelled. Gwaine used his sword like a baseball bat and hit the oncoming bullet across the field where it took out Sir Owen's left ear.

"HEY!" came the annoyed voice.

"Sorry mate!" Gwaine called back before snapping to attention. "Leon – yellow dart at 5:35!"

Leon stopped, confused, and turned to Gwaine. "What on earth are you talking about? Where did you come up with that number?" Before the other knight could answer, the yellow Nerf bullet had struck Leon in the chest. "NOOO!" Gwaine roared. "LEOOON!"

Leon gasped and stared at the brightly colored dart that was falling from where it had hit him. "I – I've been... hit..." he moaned pathetically, sinking to the ground.

"Leon, no, don't do this to me..."

"It was... my time..."

"No! Do something! Respawn! Regenerate! LIVE, DARN YOU, LIIIVE!" The last word came out as a howl. Neither one of the men paid any attention to the raging foam war that was going on around them. Also, neither even considered the fact that what Leon had been hit with was in fact a tiny foam dart that weighed less than... well, most anything, really and that Leon hadn't felt at all underneath his armor. But that was okay – they were just caught up in the moment.

Leon coughed a little as Gwaine cradled his head in his lap. "Regenerate?" he chuckled. "You've been watching too much... Doctor...Who..."

"Oh, Leon," Gwaine said sadly, tears filling his eyes at the man's words. "You can never watch too much of the Doctor. Just like you can never stop playing Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2 once you start..."

"Gwaine... you must... go on without me..."

"NO!" Gwaine protested. "I'm not leaving you behind. Knights are supposed to stick together, remember? It's the code."

Leon chuckled weakly. He was beginning to fade, he just knew it. "I thought you... hated the... rules..."

Gwaine blinked. "By Jove, you're right!" he announced. He sprung to his feet, Leon's head falling to the earth with a gentle thud. "See you later, Leon."

Leon sighed mournfully. "If I'm not dead first..."

o.O

Back in the castle, another kind of war was raging between mistress and maidservant. Morgana was armed with a copy of New Moon and a Nerf sword. Gwen had her copy of Breaking Dawn and a Nerf long sword.

"Edward!" Gwen yelled, rapping Morgana over the head with Breaking Dawn. "Because he's pretty!"

"Jacob!" Morgana shrieked, blowing the dust from New Moon into Gwen's face and making her cough. "Because he's a REAL man!"

"No he's not – he's a dog!" Gwen snapped, knocking Morgana's book out of her hands with the sword.

Morgana gasped and lunged for the volume. "You take that back!" she cried out waspishly.

Gwen, encouraged by her ability to rile Morgana so much, went further, "Besides, what was that old proverb Gaius always says? Oh right – 'He who lies with dogs shall get fleas!'"

"Oh no you didn't!" Morgana lunged, dropping both of her weapons and Gwen doing the same. A cliché, annoying, childish, but still highly amusing "catfight" ensued.

o.O

While the two massive battles – one inside the castle and outside – went on, Uther was having a very serious discussion with his advisor. "So anyone can make pictures look magic?" he sniffed, still upset because of his lost Blackberry although he was much more rational now that it had been gone for a few hours. "The boy didn't really make it go away?"

"No," Gaius breathed, relieved that Uther was no longer after Merlin's head. "Rosco was the one using magic, Sire. He duped us all." Technically, it wasn't true but if it would get Merlin off the line Gaius found he didn't really mind. Besides, what was one more lie for Merlin's behalf in the grand scheme of things anyway?

"I've been a fool, Gaius." He took his dead Blackberry Storm and caressed it almost lovingly before tossing it out of the throne room window. "I will never tolerate any of this 'modernization' in my kingdom again. It tore us apart, made us forget what it really is we fight for." Uther still looked very sad.

"Sire?"

"It's nothing, Gaius. It's just, even after everything that this technology magic has put us through, I still miss Sylvia."

"Sylvia, sire?"

"Yes. That was what I named my Blackberry."

"Of course you did, sire. And I'm going to pretend like that's not disturbing in the slightest."

"Thank you, Gaius," Uther almost beamed, feeling much better now. "You are the greatest physician/advisor a sullen, paranoid, murderous king could ask for."

Gaius just smiled. "I know."

o.O

"This has got to be the most ridiculous thing I've ever seen," Merlin snorted as he and Lancelot watched the Nerf battle from the trees. While actually being in the battle was intense and angsty and terrifying, watching it was a whole different story.

Merlin and Lancelot watched as a bunch of grown men wearing armor ran around screaming at each other, Nerf bullets being pelted everywhere, and as they fell to the ground, not even injured in the slightest. There were people lying everywhere, but they weren't dead – in fact, they were propped up on their elbows, watching the battle go on around them, cheering on their fellow cohorts and occasionally tripping someone from the other side. It was ridiculous and petty and very amusing. Merlin was so glad he had come up with this course of action, if only for his own amusement. Hey, a warlock could have a little fun now and then, right?

Lancelot squirmed a bit. "Yeah. Totally... stupid."

Merlin rolled his eyes. "You want to go play, too?"

Lancelot's eyes got comically big. "Maybe..."

Merlin sighed. "Okay, fine. Go have fun."

"Thanks!" Lancelot hurtled out of the trees, scooped up a blue gun that had fallen upon the ground, and entered the fray yelling, "For my WiiMii!"

Merlin shook his head, almost embarrassed for all of these men. They were just acting like big kids really. But he had noticed that the battle was becoming less violent and more fun-gearred. Everyone was enjoying themselves, even Cenred's men. Maybe this battle would end in peace instead of more war. After all, if shooting plastic guns and beating the crap out of other people with blunt weapons wasn't the epitome of male bonding, then he didn't know what was.

Merlin sat back, relaxed, and watched the show.

22 - Merlin and His Secret Infatuation

Several weeks passed and finally Camelot was back to normal – or as normal as Camelot could get, that is. After the Nerf battle between Camelot and Cenred's army, the two armies had parted ways the best of friends. Sure, they would probably fight against each other in future battles and try and kill one another with real weapons someday, but they would never forget the time they spent duking it out with plastic dart guns and foam swords. It had been a moment of revelation for all fighters involved – that maybe they weren't all that different after all. Perhaps, deep down, we are all just big kids at heart. This was at least one positive result that came out of Rosco's intrusion in the past – a feeling of unity that can only be achieved by Nerf guns.

Now, weeks later, Uther had successfully gathered all of the future material – most of which had stopped working when Rosco left although there were a few books (Twilight, for example) that hadn't been affected by lack of power source – and the whole of Camelot had had a great bonfire in the courtyard, this time not burning sorcerers but future equipment. Uther made a declaration that anyone that was found with anything from the future in their possession would be arrested and then punished severely – maybe even thrown into the bonfire with the Wiis and TVs and cell phones and teenage romance vampire novels.

It was a sad day for all of Camelot. They had become so used to the "instant gratification" that their future stuff had given them that many had to learn and function without it on their own. Sometimes it took a great toll on the mental state of some of the citizens as they suffered from withdrawals.

Gwen, for example, had spent days locked up in her room, crying about the loss of Edward, until Merlin came to visit and reminded her of her old love – her real love – that would never leave her because he was afraid he'd suck her blood and that didn't think she smelled like his favorite snack. Just because he didn't sparkle didn't mean that Arthur wasn't a good man and eventually Gwen caught on, remembering all the good times she and the prince had had together. They were reunited and Arthur hadn't looked so pleased in a long time.

Morgana, on the other hand, was absolutely furious that her evil plan had failed – but even more so that she couldn't tend to her Farmville crops anymore. When the computers had shut down she had all but thrown a tantrum, claiming that she couldn't wait a thousand years for computers to be invented before she harvested her cabbage fields. No one bothered to remind her that she wouldn't have to wait a thousand years because she'd be dead before then, anyway.

Gwaine and Lancelot were official knights of Camelot and the bliss of finally having been accepted into Camelot's most elite was almost enough to ease their sorrow at not being able to play Guitar Hero anymore. Almost. Sometimes, though, one could hear two out-of-tune voices singing "Rock and Roll All Night" from the training grounds as the two knights reminisced about the old days of rocking and rolling and hair-flipping and jamming to the music.

The Great Dragon destroyed his riddle book. He didn't mean to, actually, and would have kept it forever, no matter what Uther said (because since when did he listen to the man that had betrayed him and

locked him under the castle for years on end?), but after reading a particularly hilarious riddle (Why do sea gulls fly over the sea? Because if they flew over the bay, they'd be bagels!), he laughed so hard that fire spewed out of his nose and he incinerated his book. He was very sad, but he eventually got over it and began talking cryptically and not answering questions clearly once more.

Sometimes Gaius and Gwaine would go outside and lie on blankets in the grass and stare up at the sky, hoping, dreaming, that they would see a blue police box flying somewhere in the distance. They knew that the Doctor was real and maybe one day, he would come to visit.

They're still waiting.

Despite the withdrawals, setbacks, crying, and emotional turmoil, the kingdom gradually went back to normal. Gwen and Arthur were secretly in love again and she only asked him to sparkle once (or maybe twice). Uther was back to being a magic-hating tyrant with an iron fist. Gaius actually took care of people again and Arthur stopped doing the moonwalk around the training field.

Merlin watched all this with happiness, glad that he no longer had to worry about the negative effects Rosco's future technology would wreak on Camelot. He had the evening off and was glad of it – now that Arthur was back to normal, he was giving Merlin twice the chores, almost as if making up for all the missed opportunities to boss him around while he'd been singing karaoke. Thankfully, he'd seen how tired Merlin looked and had decided to give him the afternoon off today – and Merlin knew exactly what he was going to do with it.

He entered the physician's chambers, glancing around to see that Gaius was gone – probably on his evening rounds – and grinned, knowing he'd be alone for a while. He hurried up the small set of stairs and into his room, closing the door behind him. Glancing around furtively, just in case, he dropped to his knees and pried up the loose floorboard under his bed and pulled out one of the seven books that he had collected secretively during Rosco's reign of technology. He was almost done with it, just a few more pages, and then there was something he wanted to try...

He flopped onto his bed and opened the book, knowing that he would be killed if he was caught with it – not only was it future contraband, but it was also a book of magic. He just couldn't resist though. These volumes were just so... GOOD!

He opened the book and started to read. He laughed, cried, and cursed the author for killing all of the characters he had grown to know and love. And then he finished, shutting the book and letting out a satisfied smile. "That was better than I had anticipated," he said to no one in particular.

He flipped through the book again, this time looking for something that he was dying to try. When he found the right page he read over the narration of how it was done and then grinned, closed his eyes, spun on his heel, and thought about where he wanted to be right now. With a loud "pop!" he disappeared, the seventh and final Harry Potter book dropping to the floor at his feet.

After feeling like he was being squished in the time-space continuum until he couldn't breathe for a few seconds, he popped back into existence right where he had planned to go. Grinning, he readjusted his seat on the barstool and glanced over at the man seated next to him.

"Oh hey, Merlin," Gwaine said happily, with a drunken slur. "Did you just apperate?"

Merlin grinned, delighted that he had found another Harry Potter fan, and laughed, Gwaine joining in with him. "Why yes," he said cheerily. "Yes I did."

23 - Emachinescat and Her Extra Epilogue

Somewhere amidst the pyramids of ancient Egypt, a time-machine appeared. The Pharaoh sent his finest guards to go see what this contraption was - perhaps a gift from the gods? - and all were in awe as a gangly red-haired man leaped out, grinning ear to ear.

"Hullo," the man said cheerily, "My name's Rosco, and I'm here to make your dreams come true."

o.O

Thousands of Years Later ~ 2010

A team of renowned archaeologists were working in Egypt, excited beyond belief because they had just discovered the tomb of a previously unknown Egyptian king. "Imagine what will be contained within this tomb," one of them said blissfully as he hefted his digging tools and got ready to excavate.

"Yeah," another said dreamily, eyes shining with the prospect of yet another educational and expensive treasure. "The mummy, the gold, the statues, the jewels..."

They worked for a while, carefully digging into the grave, intent on uncovering some ancient artifacts that would make the world cheer from the excitement of it all. They'd be all over the news after this find!

The leader of the group, a man named Tim, finally broke through and, flashlight on, stepped into the tomb of the lost Pharaoh of Egypt. His anticipatory grin faltered as his jaw dropped and he gaped, "What the-?"

Instead of the vast troves of treasures the ancient Egyptians buried with their dead kings for them to take along with them to the Underworld, there was another, rather unconventional type of treasure splayed out in the musty tomb before the archaeologist team. The cavern looked more like an ancient bachelor pad than a tomb. A big screen TV was propped up next to the coffin, an X-Box placed on a pedestal next to it. A microwave and a mini-fridge were in the corner. Posters of the Black Eyed Peas and Lady Gaga lined the walls and a vast CD collection was stacked next to a stereo.

Tim rushed forward with a few of his colleagues and they approached the coffin and together they lifted the lid and peered inside. The man to Tim's left burst out laughing. "Okay, who's idea was this? Bob? Jimmy? Chris?" One by one, the men he named shook their heads incredulously. This had to be the strangest thing any of them had ever seen.

The king was dead, alright - a mummy, and an old one, if they'd ever seen one (which they had, many times). But the preserved dead man was wearing what looked like the ragged but relatively well-preserved remains of a black T-shirt that read in modern English: VOTE FOR PEDRO.

One of the men quirked an eyebrow. "Napoleon Dynamite?" he asked hesitantly. "But... what does this mean?" He gestured to the whole strange scene before them.

"That the Egyptians had really crummy taste in movies?" suggested Bob.

"That the Egyptians were even more advanced than we ever imagined was possible?" Jimmy ventured.

"That this Pharaoh is having the greatest time ever in the Underworld?" Chris decided.

"No..." Tim said slowly, eyeing the X-Box with a great longing. He'd always wanted a game system, but with his salary he had never bought one. He bit his lip as if debating a course of action before springing toward the "treasure" and announcing gleefully, "It means 'finders, keepers!'"