AN ANALYSIS OF CONFLICTS IN *KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD*

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the conflict depicted in the film King Arthur: Legend of the Sword, directed by Guy Ritchie. This research aims to describe the conflicts experienced by the main characters, and characters in relation to the conflicts. The research applied qualitative method with a structuralist approach based on conflict theory by Kenney (1966). The results of the research are that the movie contains internal and external conflict which are experienced by main character named Arthur and Vortigern. Arthur has internal conflict of revolution where he is faced to a choice of doing revolution against the Kingdom of Camelot or not. It is very hard psychologically for Arthur to choose one of the choices. The two choices very difficult choice he must make because each choice brings a bad consequence. Doing revolution can cause many of his men to die, if not, meaning that he lets the kingdom ruled by a king who governs the kingdom illegally and who killed his father as a legal king. Vortigern also experiences internal conflict of gaining magical power to defeat Arthur. He must choose one of the two things - getting the magic power by killing his wife as a sacrifice or keeping his wife alive but not getting the magic power. The magic power is the only one strength which can be used to kill Arthur. The external conflicts of the movie is found in several types; man against man, man against nature, and man against society. The conflict of man against man is experienced by Arthur against Vortigern. Conflict of man against nature is between Arthur and strange creatures, and man against society is conflict Arthur against Vortigern's troops and villagers of Londinium. The conflict happens in the plot of flash back and it happened due to the opposing traits of the characters.

Keywords: *conflict, plot, characters, movie of King Arthur*

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an essential component of storytelling, shaping characters and driving narratives. According to Wellek and Warren (1962), a character is defined by the author's portrayal (p.285), while Kenney (1966) describes a character as an imagined person in a story (19). Conflict and character are closely related, as conflicts influence character development and narrative progression. Without conflict, literary works and films would lack depth and purpose.

This study examines conflicts in King Arthur: Legend of the Sword, directed by Guy Ritchie, focusing on internal and external conflicts faced by key characters, particularly Arthur and Vortigern. Internal conflict arises within a character's mind, such as Arthur's struggle with his identity and destiny, and Vortigern's moral dilemmas in his pursuit of power. Arthur must confront his past and accept his responsibility as the rightful heir, while Vortigern battles his fears and ambitions as he sacrifices those closest to him for power. External conflict occurs between characters and outside forces, including Arthur's battle against Vortigern, his journey through the Darklands, and his rebellion against tyranny (Kenney,1966, p.19).

Arthur, reluctant to embrace his destiny, faces obstacles from his power-hungry uncle, Vortigern. Supported by allies like Bedivere and Merlin, Arthur launches a rebellion to reclaim his kingdom. His struggle is not just physical but also psychological, as he transitions from an orphan raised in the streets to a leader who must inspire his people. The film effectively portrays the tension between tyranny and justice, highlighting the importance of perseverance and unity in overcoming oppression.

This research categorizes conflicts, explores their resolution, and contributes to literary and film analysis, particularly for students interested in conflict studies. By examining Arthur's transformation and Vortigern's descent into darkness, the study offers insights into how conflict shapes character growth and narrative structure, making King Arthur: Legend of the Sword a compelling subject of analysis.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conflict is an essential component of storytelling, shaping characters and driving narratives. Previous studies have explored conflict in literature and film, emphasizing its role in character development and narrative progression. Wellek and Warren (1962, p.285) highlight that a character is defined by the author's portrayal, while Kenney (1966. p.19) describes a character as an imagined person in a story. Conflict and character are closely related, as conflicts influence character arcs and the direction of a story. Without conflict, literary works and films would lack depth and purpose.

Several scholars have analyzed conflicts in Arthurian adaptations. Widyasari (2009) examined Antonie Fuqua's King Arthur, focusing on Arthur's internal conflict between his Roman duty and his loyalty to England, using a psychoanalytic perspective. Similarly, Łaszkiewicz (2017) analyzed The Mists of Avalon, emphasizing religious conflicts in Arthurian literature. While these studies explored Arthur's struggles, they did not categorize conflicts into specific types or analyze their resolutions in cinematic storytelling. This study builds on these works by focusing on character-related conflicts in King Arthur: Legend of the Sword and classifying them into internal and external conflicts.

Conflict in storytelling has long been classified into different categories based on how it manifests within a narrative. According to Kenney (1966 p.19), conflict can be broadly divided into internal and external struggles. Internal conflict, also referred to as man vs. self, occurs when a character grapples with personal dilemmas, emotions, or psychological barriers. In contrast, external conflict arises when a character faces opposition from an outside force, such as another character (man vs. man), natural elements (man vs. nature), or societal structures (man vs. society). These types of conflict create dramatic tension and help to shape the plot's progression. This study examines how these conflicts influence the characters and storyline in King Arthur: Legend of the Sword, demonstrating how Arthur's transformation is guided by both his personal struggles and external battles.

Kenney (1966) described that conflict involve internal and external conflict. Internal Conflict is a conflict occurs within a character's mind, involving emotional struggles or difficult decisions. It can stem from conflicting desires, responsibilities, or personal dilemmas, impacting interactions with others. **External Conflict is a** conflict which happen between characters and outside forces. The external conflict could be a brawl, an argument or disagreement, or just opposition between two parties. The action demonstrates an external conflict. The external conflict includes the conflict of man against man, man against nature, and man against society.

Man vs. Man: conflict occurs when characters struggle against one another, driven by moral, theological, or societal differences. These conflicts can be emotional, verbal, or physical, shaping character interactions and story progression. *Man vs. Nature:* Man vs. Nature conflict involves a character struggling against natural forces such as animals, storms, or harsh environments. Playwrights often depict nature as a hostile force that challenges the hero's survival. *Man vs. Society:* Man vs. Society conflict arises when a character challenges societal norms, beliefs, or systems. As societies grow, their structures can create conflicts between individuals and the collective.

This study employs Kenney's (1966) concept of conflict, which defines conflict as the struggle between opposing forces that shape a narrative. Conflict is categorized into two main types: internal (man vs. self) and external (man vs. man, nature, and society). Internal conflict, such as Arthur's struggle with identity, influences character transformation, while external conflicts, like Arthur's battle against Vortigern, create dramatic tension (Kenney, 19).

Additionally, this study adopts a structuralist approach based on Bressler (1994), which emphasizes that meaning in a text depends on underlying systems and conventions. Structuralism examines how conflicts function within a larger narrative, identifying patterns and structures that contribute to storytelling. By analyzing how conflicts contribute to the film's overarching themes and character arcs, this study connects individual struggles to the film's structural composition (Bressler, 59).

Plot structure plays a vital role in how conflicts unfold and are resolved. King Arthur: Legend of the Sword follows a five-stage plot structure: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The exposition introduces Arthur's life in Londinium and his ignorance of his royal lineage. The rising action begins when he pulls Excalibur from the stone, setting off a chain of conflicts against Vortigern. The climax occurs when Arthur fully embraces his destiny, unlocking the full power of Excalibur to confront Vortigern. The falling action depicts Arthur's victory and the restoration of order, while the resolution portrays his acceptance as the rightful

king. By framing conflicts within this plot structure, this study provides a deeper understanding of how conflict shapes narrative progression.

This framework provides a foundation for examining how conflict shapes King Arthur: Legend of the Sword, reinforcing the importance of struggle, resolution, and character transformation in cinematic storytelling. By integrating past studies and theoretical perspectives, this research contributes to literary and film analysis, offering a deeper understanding of how conflict drives the narrative.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the conflicts in King Arthur: Legend of the Sword. According to Creswell (2018 p.298), qualitative research emphasizes text analysis, open-ended data collection, and interpretation, making it suitable for examining character struggles and narrative structure. The study integrates both intrinsic and extrinsic approaches—the intrinsic approach focuses on identifying internal and external conflicts, while the extrinsic approach applies structuralist theory based on Kenney's framework to explore how conflicts shape the film's plot. Additionally, psychoanalytic criticism is used to analyze the psychological struggles of key characters, particularly Arthur and Vortigern. The primary data source is the 2017 film King Arthur: Legend of the Sword, directed by Guy Ritchie, with supplementary materials including film scripts and scholarly references.

The research process involved detailed observation, transcription, and thematic categorization of conflicts. The film was systematically watched and re-watched to capture key moments related to internal conflicts, such as Arthur's struggle with self-identity, and external conflicts, including Arthur's battles against Vortigern, nature, and society. The collected data were analyzed using structuralist principles, which examine how conflicts contribute to the film's overarching themes and narrative progression. By classifying conflicts and exploring their resolution, this study provides insights into how struggles drive character development and reinforce the story's thematic depth.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study analyzes character relation to the conflict and internal and external conflicts of Arthur and Vortigern in King Arthur: Legend of the Sword (2017). Using key scenes, dialogues, and subtitles, it examines how conflict shapes character development and narrative progression. The findings categorize these struggles to highlight their resolution and significance in the film's structure.

Here are some characters that are related to the conflict:

Figure 1. Arthur Pendragon

Arthur Pendragon: the protagonist of King Arthur: Legend of the Sword, undergoes significant character development, evolving from a street-smart survivor to a fearless leader. Initially unaware of his royal lineage, he struggles with self-doubt and reluctance to embrace his destiny after pulling Excalibur from the stone. His internal conflict is fueled by trauma and resentment over his parents' murder by his uncle, Vortigern. However, as he trains and embraces Excalibur's power, he gains the confidence to lead and fight for justice. His journey reflects self-discovery and transformation, proving that true leadership comes from courage and resilience, not just birthright.

Figure 2. Vortigern

Vortigern: the primary antagonist in King Arthur: Legend of the Sword, is a ruthless and manipulative ruler driven by an insatiable thirst for power. Willing to betray even his own family, he resorts to dark magic and brutal tactics to eliminate threats to his throne. However, beneath his cold exterior lies a deep fear of losing power, fueling his paranoia and desperation. His internal conflict stems from the guilt of sacrificing loved ones for strength, yet he suppresses this unease in pursuit of absolute control. His reliance on dark magic reflects his insecurity, making him a complex and tragic villain, consumed by his ambition and fear.

Figure 3. Uther Pendragon

Uther Pendragon: the former king of Camelot and Arthur's father, is a noble yet tragic figure in King Arthur: Legend of the Sword. Though his screen time is limited, his legacy shapes the story's events. As a ruler, he is brave, wise, and just, dedicated to protecting his kingdom and family. However, his reign is marked by conflict, particularly against his brother, Vortigern, whose thirst for power ultimately leads to Uther's downfall. Despite his tragic fate, Uther's influence endures, guiding Arthur's journey to reclaim the throne.

The conflicts in *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* play a crucial role in shaping the characters and driving the narrative forward. Through a well-structured plot, the film explores various struggles that challenge the protagonist, intensify the stakes, and ultimately lead to character growth and resolution.

Figure 4. Vortigern kills Uther

Exposition: King Uther Pendragon rules Camelot with strength and wisdom, wielding the powerful sword Excalibur to protect his kingdom. However, his brother, Vortigern, secretly conspires against him, aligning with dark forces to seize the throne. In a devastating betrayal, Vortigern sacrifices his wife to gain magical powers, leading a coup against Uther. Forced to flee with his family, Uther fights to protect his young son, Arthur, but realizes he cannot win. In a final act of sacrifice, he casts Excalibur into the stone, ensuring that only the rightful king can wield it in the future. Uther is then slain by Vortigern, marking the fall of Camelot and setting the stage for Arthur's journey to reclaim his destiny.

Figure 5. Arthur pulled out Excalibur

Rising Action: Growing up in the rough streets of Londinium, Arthur does not know his royal lineage and survives by his wit and strength. However, fate intervenes when the water around the stone recedes, revealing Excalibur. Thousands of men attempt to pull the sword, but only Arthur succeeds, unknowingly exposing his true identity. Immediately, Vortigern sees him as a threat and orders his capture. Arthur, however, is reluctant to accept his destiny, struggling with self-doubt and haunted by visions of his past. Through intense training and trials, including his journey through the Darklands, he slowly begins to embrace his true nature. With the guidance of his allies, Arthur learns to harness Excalibur's power and prepares to challenge Vortigern's rule.

Figure 6. Arthur's Full Potential

Climax: Arthur, now fully aware of his destiny, leads a rebellion against Vortigern to reclaim Camelot. In a climactic showdown, Vortigern, empowered by dark magic, transforms into a monstrous warrior, forcing Arthur into a brutal duel. Despite the overwhelming power of his enemy, Arthur finally unlocks Excalibur's full potential, allowing him to fight with unmatched speed and strength. The battle is fierce, symbolizing the struggle between tyranny and justice, as well as Arthur's final test of self-belief. In a decisive moment, Arthur overcomes Vortigern's magic and strikes him down, ending his uncle's reign of terror. With the usurper defeated, Arthur stands victorious as the rightful king of Camelot.

Figure 7. Arthur established the Round Table as a symbol of justice and unity

Falling Action: Figure 7 depicts the round table, one of the most iconic elements of Arthurian legend, and its introduction here signifies a new form of governance. Arthur created a system unlike the previous kings, who ruled through hierarchy and oppression. This is a major departure from Vortigern's rule, where power was hoarded at the top. Arthur's creation of the Round Table signals the dawn of a just and noble Camelot.

Figure 8. Arthur Becomes King

Resolution: With Vortigern's tyranny over, Camelot begins to rebuild as Arthur takes his place on the throne. The people, once fearful of the corrupt king, now rally behind Arthur, seeing him as the true leader who fought for their freedom. Arthur rewards his allies, uniting former rebels into a new kingdom under his rule. To ensure that Camelot never falls into tyranny again, Arthur establishes the legendary Round Table, a symbol of justice and unity where all knights are equal. His journey from an orphaned street survivor to a noble and just ruler is complete, proving that true kingship is not about birthright alone but about courage, wisdom, and self-sacrifice. As he raises Excalibur once more, Arthur's reign begins, marking the restoration of Camelot and the start of a new legend that will endure through history.

Conflict is a central element in *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*, The film presents multiple layers of conflict, both internal and external, that shape the protagonist's journey and define the struggles between opposing forces.

Figure 9. Arthur Internal Struggling

Internal Conflict: Arthur's internal conflict is highlighted in Figure 8 (01:30:29), where he expresses anger and frustration following the rebels' incident. Blaming Excalibur for the chaos, Arthur struggles with the burden of his destiny, resisting the role fate has assigned to him. His reluctance stems from self-doubt and fear, as he feels unprepared to wield the power and responsibility that comes with being king.

Figure 9 further illustrates this conflict through the symbolism of Excalibur, which remains embedded in the stone formed from Uther Pendragon's corpse. This moment represents Arthur's struggle with accepting his lineage and the expectations placed upon him. The lake's receding waters reveal the sword, signifying that the true king has arrived, yet Arthur hesitates to fully embrace his role. His internal battle revolves around the decision to accept Excalibur's power and the destiny it carries, making his journey one of self-discovery and eventual acceptance.

External conflict in *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* arises from the protagonist's struggles against powerful opposing forces. These conflicts, whether against other characters, nature, or society, drive the story's tension and shape Arthur's transformation into a leader.

Figure 10. Arthur fights woth Vortigern

Man Against Man: Arthur's man vs. man conflict with Vortigern reaches its climax in Figure 10, where Arthur, having fully mastered Excalibur, faces his uncle in a final battle at the mage tower. With Arthur's newfound strength and Vortigern's dark magic, the fight becomes a clash between justice and tyranny. Arthur's control over Excalibur allows him to match Vortigern's power, leading to an intense duel.

The falling action occurs when Arthur defeats and kills Vortigern, restoring peace to the kingdom. With the usurper gone, Arthur and his allies hold a ceremonial gathering to mark the beginning of a new era, symbolizing the reunification of the kingdom that had been divided under Vortigern's rule.

Figure 11. Arthur Fights Magical Animal Creatures

Man Against Nature: Arthur's man vs. nature conflict climaxes in Figure 11, where Arthur faces deadly magical creatures in the Darklands as part of a brutal test of physical and mental endurance. Among the monstrous threats are giant wolves, massive bats, vicious rats, and a deadly giant snake, each forcing him to fight for survival. This trial is essential for Arthur to prove his strength and resilience, as failure means death. Overcoming these challenges prepares him to fully master Excalibur, strengthening both his body and mind for the battles ahead.

Figure 12. Arthur Fights Vortigern's Army

Man Against Society: Figure 12 captures a pivotal moment in Arthur's journey, as he unleashes the power of Excalibur for the first time to save his captured allies. Overwhelmed by the dire situation, Arthur instinctively channels the sword's immense energy, cutting down Vortigern's soldiers with a few swift and powerful strikes. This scene marks a turning point, as Arthur begins to realize the true potential of Excalibur, though he has yet to fully master it.

The battle becomes even more intense as Arthur and his allies recognize they have fallen into an ambush, heightening the stakes. Surrounded and outnumbered, they must fight desperately to escape, relying not just on Arthur's strength but also on their unity and strategy. This moment reinforces Arthur's internal struggle—while the sword gives him overwhelming power, he still fears the responsibility it carries. The clash between his doubts and his growing strength pushes him further along his path toward becoming the rightful king.

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the internal and external conflicts in King Arthur: Legend of the Sword, highlighting their impact on character development and narrative progression. The internal conflicts focus on Arthur's struggle with his identity and destiny and Vortigern's moral dilemmas tied to his use of dark magic. The external conflicts include man vs. man (Arthur vs. Vortigern, Uther vs. Vortigern), man vs. nature (Arthur's trials in the Darklands), and man vs. society (Arthur's rebellion against tyranny and quest for acceptance). These conflicts drive the

plot forward, culminating in Arthur's acceptance of his fate, his triumph over Vortigern, and the restoration of Camelot.

For future research, a comparative analysis of conflicts in other King Arthur adaptations could offer broader insights into how these themes evolve across different media. Additionally, psychological and sociological approaches could deepen the understanding of character motivations and conflict resolutions. This study also provides valuable insights for screenwriters and filmmakers, demonstrating how conflict enhances engagement and storytelling impact. By further exploring conflict dynamics in literature and film, future research can contribute to a deeper academic understanding of storytelling structures and audience perception.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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