

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

Ancestors

of

Levalon

DIANA L. PAXSON



A ROC BOOK

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Praise for the novels of Avalon

Marion Zimmer Bradley's Ancestors of Avalon

“Paxson fashions an entirely new entry in the Avalon saga. . . . [Her] storytelling features the requisite veins of mysticism, but, like Bradley, she excels at bringing the vast sweep of imagined history to an accessible level. . . . A rich and respectful homage that will dazzle readers longing to revisit Bradley’s sacred, storied isle.”

—*Booklist*

“Once again, Diana L. Paxson has beautifully elaborated on Marion Zimmer Bradley’s beloved Avalon saga with this dramatic new installment. . . . [An] extraordinary journey.”

—*SFRevu*

“Paxson is an excellent choice as successor to Bradley for this series. Her style and the details of the plot retain the sense of the mysterious past and the feminist awareness that was an underlying theme in the originals.”

—*Chronicle*

“*Ancestors of Avalon* may be the best of the Avalon tales. The story line stands alone due to the strength of the characterizations . . . yet also interconnects the myriad plots from the previously published books.”

—*Midwest Book Review*

Priestess of Avalon

“The message that all religions call on the same higher power should go over well with fans of *Mists [of Avalon]*. Paxson’s own skills at bringing historical characters and places to vivid life enriches Helena’s story.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Stunning . . . this rich and moving novel merits its place beside Bradley’s fantasy classic.”

—*Booklist*

“Bradley creates a powerful tale of magic and faith that enlarges upon pagan and Christian traditions to express a deeper truth.”

—*Library Journal*

Lady of Avalon
The National Bestseller

“Combines romance, rich historical detail, magical dazzlements, grand adventure, and feminist sentiments into the kind of novel her fans have been yearning for.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“Compelling, powerful.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“The prose is as smooth as those sacred stones on which so many interesting things take place.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Bradley’s women are, as usual, strong and vibrant, but never before has she so effectively depicted the heroic male. . . . An immensely popular saga.”

—*Booklist*

The Forest House

“The setting evokes a fascinating time of change. . . . The mythic elements grow to hint satisfactorily at the Arthurian wonder to come . . . the stuff of legend.”

—*Locus*

“A seamless weave of history and myth.”

—*Library Journal*

“The sure touch of one at ease in sketching out mystic travels.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

OTHER BOOKS IN THIS SERIES

The Mists of Avalon
The Forest House
Lady of Avalon
Priestess of Avalon

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To David Bradley

Without whom this book could not have been written

People in the Story

PEOPLE WHO DO NOT ESCAPE ATLANTIS

Aldel—of Ahtarrath; an acolyte, betrothed to Elis, killed in rescue of Omphalos Stone

Deoris [temple name “Adsartha”]—a former priestess of Caratra, mother of Tiriki, wife of Reio-ta

(*Domaris*—a Vested Guardian, priestess of Light, mother of Micail)

Gremos—a priestess, housemother to the acolytes

Kalhan—of Atalan; an acolyte, betrothed to Damisa

Kanar—chief astrologer of the Temple on Ahtarrath, Lanath’s first teacher

Lunrick—a merchant of Ahtarra

Mesira—chief of the healers, a priestess of the cult of Caratra

(*Micon*—Prince of Ahtarrath, father of Micail)

(*Mikantor*—Prince of Ahtarrath, father of Micon and Reio-ta)

Pegar—a landowner of Ahtarrath

(*Rajasta*—mage, priest of Light, and Vested Guardian in the Ancient Land)

CAPITALS = major characters

() = dead before story begins

Reio-ta—regent of Ahtarrath and governor of the Temple of Light on Ahtarrath, priest, uncle of Micail and stepfather of Tiriki

(*Riveda*—biological father of Tiriki, healer, mage, and chief of the Grey Robe Order in the Ancient Land; executed for sorcery)

PEOPLE AT THE TOR

Adeyna—wife of the merchant Forolin

Alyssa [Temple name “Neniath”]—of Caris; a Grey Robe priestess (the Grey Mage), seeress, and adept

Arcor—of Ahtarrath; a sailor on the *Crimson Serpent*

Aven—an Alkonan sailor on the *Crimson Serpent*

Cadis—an Ahtarran sailor on the *Crimson Serpent*

CHEDAN ARADOS—originally of Alkonath; son of Naduil, an acolyte in the Ancient Land before its fall, former Vested Guardian, and now a mage

DAMISA—of Alkonath; eldest of the acolytes, a cousin of Prince Tjalan, betrothed to Kalhan

Dannetrasa of Caris—a priest of Light who assisted Ardral in the library; arrives at the Tor on the second ship

Domara—daughter of Tiriki and Micail, born at the Tor

Eilantha—Tiriki's Temple name

Elis—of Ahtarrath; one of the acolytes, especially good with plants

Forolin—a merchant of Ahtarrath and late arrival to the Tor

Heron—headman of the marsh folk

Iriel—of Arhaburath; youngest of the acolytes (age twelve at the time of the Sinking), betrothed to Aldel

Jarata—a merchant of Ahtarrath

Kalaran—an acolyte, betrothed to Selast

Kestil—daughter of Forolin and Adeyna, five years old when she arrives at the Tor

Larin—a sailor on the *Crimson Serpent*, later inducted into the priesthood

Liala [Temple name "Atlialmaris"]—of Ahtarrath; a Blue Robe priestess and healer

Linnet—daughter of Nettle, of the marsh folk

Malaera—a lesser Blue Robe priestess

Metia—senior saji woman, nursemaid to Domara

Mudlark—son of Nettle, of the marsh folk

Nettle—wife of Heron, headman of the marsh folk

Otter—son of the headman, Heron

Reidel—of Ahtarrath; son of Sarhedran, captain of the *Crimson Serpent*; later, a priest of the Sixth Order

Redfern—a woman of the marsh folk

Rendano—of Akil; a lesser priest in the Temple of Light and a sensitive

Selast—of Cosarrath; one of the acolytes

Taret—wisewoman of the marsh folk at the Tor

Teiron—an Alkonian sailor assigned to the *Crimson Serpent*

Teviri—one of the saji women, attendant to Alyssa

TIRIKI [Temple name "Eilantha"]—of Ahtarrath; a Guardian in the Temple of Light, wife of Micail; she will become the Morgan of Avalon

Virja—one of the saji women, attendant to Alyssa

PEOPLE AT BELSAIRATH AND AZAN

Aderanthis—of Tapallan; midlevel priestess from the Temple at Ahtarrath

Anet—daughter of the high priestess Ayo and King Khattar of the Ai-Zir

Antar—bodyguard to Prince Tjalan

ARDRAL [Temple name “Ardravanant,” meaning *Knower of the Brightest*]—of Atalan; an Adept, Seventh Vested Guardian of the Temple of Light at Ahtarrath, custodian of the library

Ayo—Sacred Sister for the Ai-Zan, high priestess at Carn Ava

Baradel—Tjalan’s older son, seven years old at the time of the Sinking

Bennurajos—of Cosarrath; a singer from the Temple of Light on Ahtarrath, expert on plants and animals

Chaithala—Princess of Alkonath, wife of Tjalan

Cleta—of Tarisseda Ruta; an acolyte, herbalist, betrothed to Vialmar, fifteen years old at the time of the Sinking

Cyrena—Princess of Tarisseda, betrothed to Baradel, nine years old at the time of the Sinking

Dan—one of the three swordsmen known as Prince Tjalan’s Companions

Dantu—captain of the *Royal Emerald*, Tjalan’s flagship

Delengirol—of Tarisseda; a singer from the Temple in Ahtarra

Domazo—keeper of the inn in Belsairath, heir to the local chieftain

Droshrad—shaman of the Red Bulls

ELARA [Temple name “Larnebiru”]—of Ahtarrath; second eldest of the acolytes, also an initiate of Caratra, betrothed to Lanath

Galara—half sister to Tiriki, daughter of Deoris and Reio-ta, a junior scribe

Greha—Ai-Zir warrior, bodyguard to Heshoth

Haladris—of Atalan; First Vested Guardian in the Temple of Light on Alkonath, formerly an archpriest in the Ancient Land

Heshoth—a native trader

Jiritaren—of Tapallan; priest of Light, astronomer

Karagon—of Mormallor; a chela to Valadur

Khattar—chief of the Red Bulls, high king of the Ai-Zir

Khayan-e-Durr—sister of Khattar, queen of the Red Bull tribe
Khensu—Khattar’s nephew and heir
Kyrrdis—of Ahtarrath; singer and priestess of Light
Lanath—of Tarisseda Ruta; an acolyte, former apprentice to Kanar, betrothed to Elara
Li’ija—of Alkonath; a chela, Ocathrel’s eldest daughter, nineteen years old at the time of the Sinking
Lirini—of Alkonath; a chela in the Scribes’ School, middle daughter of Ocathrel, seventeen years old at the time of the Sinking
Lodreimi—of Alkonath; a Blue Robe priestess in Timul’s Temple
Mahadalku—of Tarisseda Ruta; First Vested Guardian of the Tarissedan Temple of Light
Marona—of Ahtarrath; a Blue Robe priestess and healer
Metanor—of Ahtarrath; Fifth Vested Guardian in the Temple of Light
MICAIL [Temple name “Osinarmen”]—Prince of Ahtarrath; First Vested Guardian in the Temple of Light
Naranshada [Temple name “Ansha”]—of Ahtarrath; Fourth Vested Guardian in the Temple of Light, an engineer
Ocathrel—of Alkonath; Fifth Vested Guardian in the Temple of Light
Osinarmen—Micail’s Temple name
Ot—one of the three swordsmen known as Prince Tjalan’s Companions
Reualen—of Alkonath; Priest of Light, husband of Sahurusartha
Sadhisebo and Saiyano—saji priestesses in Timul’s Temple, skilled in herblore
Sahurusartha—of Alkonath; priestess of Light, singer, wife of Reualen
Stathalkha—of Tarisseda Ruta; Third Guardian of the Tarissedan Temple, a powerful sensitive
Timul—of Alkonath; second to the high priestess of the Temple of Ni-Terat in Alkonath, head of the Blue Robes in Belsairath
TJALAN—Prince of Alkonath; leader of the colony in Belsairath, cousin of Micail
Valadur—of Mormallor; a Grey Adept
Valorin—of Tapallan; priest of Light in the Temple at Alkonath, a naturalist
Vialmar—of Arhurabath; an acolyte, betrothed to Cleta

HEAVENLY POWERS¹

Banur—the four-faced god, destroyer-preserved; ruler of winter

The Blood Star—Mars

Caratra—daughter or nurturing aspect of Ni-Terat, the Great Mother; Venus is her star

Dyaus—the Sleeper, also known as the “Man with Crossed Hands,” the force of chaos that brings change; sometimes referred to as “That One”

Manoah—the Great Maker, Lord of the Day, identified with the sun; ruler of Summer, and with Orion (“The Hunter of Destiny”)

Nar-Inabi—“Star Shaper,” god of the night, the stars, and the sea; ruler of harvest time

Ni-Terat—Dark Mother of All, Veiled aspect of the Great Mother, goddess of the Earth; ruler of planting time

The Peacemaker—Virgo

The Sorcerer—Saturn

The Sovereign—Jupiter

The Torch—Leo, also called the Scepter or the Great Fire

The Wheel—Ursa Major, also called the Seven Guardians or Chariot

Winged Bull—Taurus

Places in the Story

Ahtarra—capital city of Ahtarrath

Ahtarrath—the last isle of the Sea Kingdoms to fall; home of the House of the Twelve (acolytes)

Ahurabath—an isle of the Sea Kingdoms

Alkona—capital of Alkonath

Alkonath—one of the mightiest of the Ten Island Kingdoms, famed for its seafarers

Aman River—the Avon, in Britain

Amber Coast—coast of the North Sea

Ancient Land—ancestral realm of the Atlanteans, located somewhere near what is now the Black Sea

Atlantis—a general name for the Sea Kingdoms

Azan—the “Bull pen,” territory of the five tribes of the Ai-Zir, from Weymouth northeast to the Salisbury Plain in Wessex, Britain

Azan-Ylir—capital of Azan, modern Amesbury

Beleri'in [Belerion]—modern Penzance, in Cornwall

Belsairath—an Alkonan trading outpost where Dorchester is now

Belsairath fortress—Maiden Castle, Dorset

Carn Ava—Avebury

Casseritides—“Isles of Tin,” a name for Britain

City of the Circling Snake—capital of the Ancient Land

Cosarrath—an isle of the Ten Kingdoms

Hellas—Greece

Hill of the Ghosts—Hambleton Hill, Dorset

Isle of the Mighty, Isle of Tin, Hesperides—British Isles

Khem—Egypt

Mormallor—one of the Ten Kingdoms, called the “holy isle”

Olbairos—an Ahtarran trading station on the continent

Oranderis—an isle of the Sea Kingdoms

The Sea Kingdoms—the islands of Atlantis

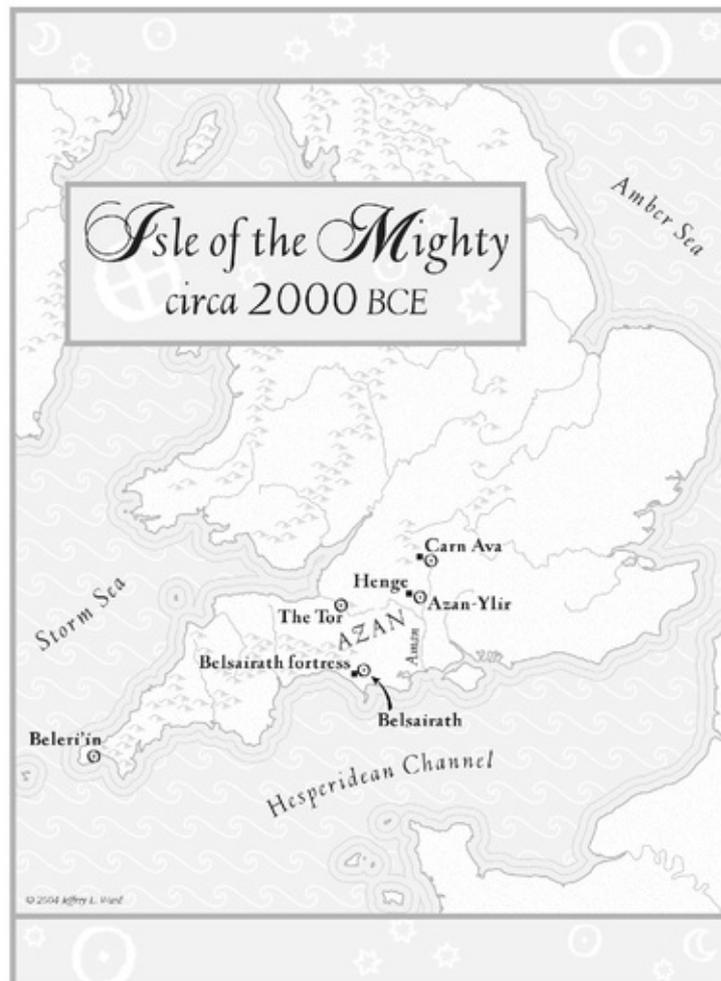
Tapallan—an isle of the Ten Kingdoms

Tarisseda—an isle of the Ten Kingdoms

The Ten Kingdoms—the alliance of Sea Kingdoms that replaced the Bright Empire

The Tor—Glastonbury Tor, Somerset

Zaiadan—a land on the coast of the North Sea



Morgaine speaks ...

The people of Avalon bring to their Lady their troubles, both great and small. This morning the Druids came to me to say that there has been a rockfall in the passage that leads from their Temple to the chamber that holds the Omphalos Stone, and they do not know how it is to be repaired. Their numbers here are small now, and most of those who remain are old. So many of those who might have renewed their Order were killed in the Saxon wars or have gone instead to the monks who tend the Christian chapel that is on that other Avalon.

And so they come to me as they all come to me, those who remain, to tell them what they must do. It has always seemed odd to me that the way to a mystery that is buried so deeply in the earth begins in the Temple of the Sun, but they say that those who first brought the ancient wisdom to these isles, long before the Druids, honored the Light above all things.

The Sight no longer comes to me as it did when I was young and we fought to bring the Goddess back into the world. I know now that She was already here, and always will be, but the Omphalos is the egg stone, the navel of the world, the last magic of a land sunk beneath the seas so long that even to us it is a legend.

When I was a girl, there were tapestries in the Druids' Temple that told the story of how it came here. They have fallen to threads and dust, but I myself once followed that passage to the heart of the hill and touched the sacred stone. The visions that came to me then are more vivid now than many of my own memories. I can see once more the Star Mountain crowned with fire and Tiriki's ship poised trembling on the wave as the Doomed Land is engulfed by the sea.

But I do not believe that I was on that ship. I have had dreams in which I stood, hand in hand with a man I loved, and watched as my world tore itself to pieces, just as Britannia did when Arthur died. Perhaps that was why I was sent back in this time, for Avalon is surely as lost as Atlantis, though it is mist, not smoke, that veils it from the mortal world.

Once, there was a passage that led to the Omphalos Stone from the cave where the White Spring flows out from the Tor, but tremors in the earth blocked that way a long time ago. Perhaps it is not meant that we should any longer walk there. The Stone is being withdrawn from us, like so many other Mysteries.

I know all about endings. It is beginnings that elude me.

How did they come here, those brave priestesses and priests who survived the Sinking? Two millennia have passed since the Stone was brought to this shore, and five hundred more, and though we know little more than their names, we have preserved their legacy. Who were those ancestors who first brought the ancient wisdom and buried it like a seed in the heart of this holy hill?

If I can understand how they survived their testing, then perhaps I will find hope that the ancient wisdom we preserved will be carried into the future, and that something of the magic of Avalon will endure. . . .

One



Tiriki woke with a gasp as the bed lurched. She reached out for Micail, blinking away tormenting images of fire and blood and falling walls and a faceless, brooding figure writhing in chains. But she lay safe in her own bed, her husband by her side.

“Thank the gods,” she whispered. “It was only a dream!”

“Not entirely—look there—” Raising himself on one elbow, Micail pointed to the lamp that swung before the Mother’s shrine in the corner, sending shadows flickering madly around the room. “But I know what you dreamed. The vision came to me, too.”

In the same moment the earth moved again. Micail seized her in his arms and rolled her toward the protection of the wall as plaster showered down from above. From somewhere in the distance came a long rumble of falling masonry. They clung, scarcely breathing, as the vibration peaked and eased.

“The mountain is waking,” he said grimly when all was still. “This makes the third tremor in two days.” He released her and got out of the bed.

“They’re getting stronger,” she agreed. The palace was solidly built of stone and had withstood many tremors over the years, but even in the uncertain light Tiriki could see a new crack running across the ceiling of the room.

“I must go. Reports will be coming in. Will you be all right here?” Micail stepped into his sandals and wrapped himself in a mantle. Tall and strong, with the lamplight striking flame from his red hair, he seemed the most stable thing in the room.

“Of course,” she answered, getting up herself and pulling a light robe around her slim body. “You are prince as well as priest of this city. They will look to you for direction. But do not wear yourself out on work that can be done by other men. We must be ready for the ritual this afternoon.” She tried to hide her shiver of fear at the thought of facing the Omphalos Stone, but surely a ritual to reinforce the balance of the world had never been so necessary as now.

He nodded, looking down at her. “You seem so fragile, but sometimes I think you are the strongest of us all . . .”

“I am strong because we are together,” Tiriki murmured as he left her.

Beyond the curtains that screened the balcony a red light was glowing. Today marked the midpoint of spring, she thought grimly, but that light was not the dawn. The city of Ahtarra was on fire.

In the city above, men struggled to shift rubble and put out the last of the fires. In the shrine where the Omphalos Stone lay hidden, all was still. Tiriki held her torch higher as she followed the other priests and priestesses into its deepest chamber, suppressing a shiver as the hot flame became its own shadow, greenish smoke swirling around the pitch-soaked brand.

The Omphalos Stone glimmered like occluded crystal in the center of the room. An egg-shaped thing half the height of a man, it seemed to pulse as it absorbed the light. Robed figures stood along the curving wall. The torches they had set into the brackets above them flickered bravely, yet the shrine seemed shrouded in gloom. There was a chill here, deep beneath the surface of the island of Ahtarrath, that no ordinary fire could ease. Even the smoke of the incense that smoldered on the altar sank in the heavy air.

All other light faded before the glowing Stone. Even without their hoods and veils, the faces of the priests and priestesses would have been difficult to see, but as she felt her way to her place against the wall, Tiriki needed no sight to identify the hooded figure beside her as Micaïl. She smiled a silent greeting, knowing he would feel it.

Were we disembodied spirits, she thought warmly, still I would know him . . . The sacred medallion upon his breast, a golden wheel with seven spokes, gleamed faintly, reminding Tiriki that here he was not only her husband, but the High Priest Osinarmen, Son of the Sun; just as she was not only Tiriki but Eilantha, Guardian of Light.

Straightening, Micaïl began to sing the Invocation for the Equinox of Spring, his voice vibrating oddly. *“Let Day be bounded by the Night . . .”*

Other, softer voices joined the chant.

*“Dark be balanced by the Light,
Earth and Sky and Sun and Sea,
A circled cross shall ever be.”*

A lifetime of priestly training had taught Tiriki all the ways of setting aside the demands of the body, but it was hard to ignore the dank subterranean air, or the eerie sense of pressure that set goose bumps in her skin. Only by supreme effort could she focus again on the song as it began to stir the stillness into harmony. . . .

*“Let sorrow make a space for joy,
Let grief with jubilation alloy,
Step by step to make our way,
Till Darkness shall unite with Day . . .”*

In the desperate struggle that had caused the destruction of the Ancient Land a generation earlier, the Omphalos Stone had become, if only briefly, the play-thing of black sorcery. For a time it had been feared that the corruption was absolute; and so the priests had circulated the story that the Stone had been lost, with so much else, beneath the vengeful sea.