

## Plot Skeleton

- **Frame & Collision of Canons.** Saberhagen merges his Dracula cycle with Arthurian tradition. The plot pivots around Excalibur, recast as a magical key that could open a passage for an ancient evil (Falerin) into the modern world.
- **Dual Programs.**
  - Vivian/Nimue orchestrates a centuries-spanning project to obtain Excalibur and free Falerin.
  - Merlin (appearing under multiple names) and allies counter her plan by concealing the Sword across times.
- **Key Set-Pieces.** Ritual sacrifices in grottoes, cultic theater at Bluebeard's castle, and time-jumps to Arthur and Ambrosius's concealment maneuvers ground the novel's fantasy in both myth and history.

## Vivian/Nimue's Grand Plot

### Components

1. **Eugenics/Conditioning.** Centuries of selective breeding to create humans with traits she requires—particularly the ability to locate Excalibur.
2. **Cult Theater.** Sacrificial rites in staged, theatrical settings reinforce fear and normalize complicity.
3. **Magical Compulsion.** Vivian commands obedience with disembodied, irresistible orders.
4. **Historical Anchoring.** She repurposes notorious historical atrocity sites (e.g., Château de Tiffauges) as ritual infrastructure.
5. **Goal.** Secure Excalibur to open the gate for Falerin.

### Internal Logic

- **Strengths.** The plan's redundancy (breeding + magic + fear + history) makes it robust and coherent. Excalibur as a universal key ties the plot together.
- **Weaknesses.** The determinism of breeding strains plausibility, and the climax is compressed compared to the elaborate setup.

### Compliance Mechanisms

- Enchantment and paralysis by command voice.
- Fear and spectacle in ritual architecture.
- Predisposition through long-term breeding.
- Disorientation and information control.

## Simon Hill's Role and Psychology

- **Plot Function.** Simon is the product and target of Vivian's design, "guided" to her by false intuitions, immobilized at critical moments, and crucial for locating Excalibur.

- **Psychological Profile.**
- *Induced hypervigilance.* His physical panic is heightened by recognition of manipulation.
- *Engineered suggestibility.* Compulsions are experienced as intuition, undermining his sense of agency.
- *Moral clarity.* Despite manipulation, Simon's conscience resists, keeping him sympathetic.

## Female Figures in Legend and Saberhagen's Vivian

- **Arthurian Tradition.** The Lady of the Lake is fragmented—Nimue, Viviane, Niniane—sometimes benevolent, sometimes treacherous.
- **Saberhagen's Move.** He collapses these variations into a single, consistent immortal manipulator. She is both Merlin's betrayer and a modern cult queen.

## Name-Play and Its Function

- **Merlin's Aliases (Feathers, Hawk, Ambrosias, Falcon).** Names signal his fractured identity, bird-like vigilance, and ties to Ambrosius of legend.
- **Vivian/Nimue's Names.** Saberhagen exploits medieval instability of the Lady's names to imply she is a single immortal sorceress shifting guises.
- **Arthur/Artos; Ambrosius.** Older, continental forms root the tale in deeper strata of tradition.

## Falerin: Origins and Role

- **In the Novel.** Falerin is the off-stage master, the being Vivian seeks to release.
- **Arthurian Sources.** No canonical analogue. The nearest phonetic echo is Valerin, a hostile abductor-king, but the link is tenuous.
- **Likely De Novo.** Saberhagen seems to invent Falerin, blending abductor archetypes, faerie otherworldliness, and Gothic atrocity motifs.
- **Historical Overlay.** Linked with Comorr(e) and Gilles de Rais (Bluebeard), grounding him in histories of tyranny and mass murder.

## Historical vs Modern Fusion

- **Historical Anchors.** Saberhagen literalizes the horrors of Tiffauges, folding Gilles de Rais's history into his fantasy plot.
- **Mythic Sources.** He draws from Vulgate Merlin traditions and early continental forms, then projects them forward into a present-day occult struggle.

## Coherence of the Whole

The novel's thematic claim—that evil perpetuates itself by weaving together seduction, spectacle, false destiny, and rewritten history—largely holds. The narrative pays off the premises, though the conclusion is rapid compared to the grand design.

## References

- Lady of the Lake name traditions: Nimue, Viviane, Niniane.
- Vulgate Cycle (Prose Merlin) for Merlin's entrapment.
- Arthurian figures: Ambrosius, Artos.
- Historical atrocity sites: Château de Tiffauges, Gilles de Rais.
- Comparative figure: King Valerin of the Tangled Wood.

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