The (Semi) Complete Avalon[1] Strategy Guide

Version 1.0

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-known to some as Mordred-

Thanks to my fellow Avalon players for input and suggestions. You know who you are.

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[1] This guide works equally well for the Resistance "Hidden Agenda" characters, which are ported directly from Avalon. Merlin = Commander, Percival = Bodyguard, etc.

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An Anecdote and Explanation

I started playing Avalon a few months ago with a group of very experienced players. After getting Morgana several times in a row, and being immediately outed as evil each time, I spent an angry few minutes in the women's bathroom—cursing, kicking the walls, and swearing never to play Avalon again. Someone convinced me to give the game a second chance, and by the time a few weeks had passed I was hooked. In the beginning, I had a hard time understanding the other players' actions and motivations. I turned to the internet for guidance only to be surprised that remarkably little information on strategy was available. As I climbed the steep learning curve to understand the game, the idea for putting together this guide was born. I promised myself that once I learned enough I would create a resource to help the next generation of Avalon players.

How to Use This Guide

This guide was originally supposed to be just a few pages, and was intended to help beginners learn the most basic elements of Avalon strategy. Over time, the guide became much more comprehensive than originally intended, and incorporated advice from a number of experienced players. Although the guide is still geared toward (relative) beginners, more experienced players may also gain benefit from perusing its pages. The guide assumes readers are familiar with the rules of the game and the character roles. **Because of its length, I recommend reading the guide one or two sections at a time and focusing on general principles, not on details.**

As you read the guide, you will notice that it is *not* entirely internally consistent, although I tried to eliminate or explain inconsistencies where possible. Avalon is a complicated game and conflicting strategies can lead to success: even though two pieces of advice may conflict, both may lead to success depending on the context. With that in mind, take the examples with a grain of salt but know the general principles behind them are sound.

I recommend beginning with the Foundation, Choosing Teams, Team Good: Basic Strategy, and Team Evil: Basic Strategy sections. Take a look at the Overarching Principles section toward the end as well. The individual character sections are written at a more advanced level of strategy than the rest of the guide, and are likely to be overwhelming when you first begin to play the game. Only when you have a better feel for the game would I recommend looking at the characters; if you understand the main ideas in the guide you can play as a "generalized Good player" or "generalized Bad player" until you feel ready to tackle the nuances of each character.

A Few Key Assumptions and Provisos

It is important to warn at the outset that Avalon is a very group-dependent game, and how the game is played depends on the customs and rules each group develops. For instance, my group does not allow players to "break the fourth wall" by claiming to be a particular character. Neither do we allow signaling under the table, behind players' backs, or conversing outside the room. Other groups allow these things, making for a significantly different game. There are many much more subtle customs and practices that different groups develop, so be cautious in your implementation of the strategies learned from this guide.

Remember too that the guide can only teach so much. Being good at Avalon depends both on the mechanics of the game (like voting or picking teams) and on qualitative factors--your "believability." The guide can help you with the former, and it will give you a pretty good idea of what you should say in specific situations. However, this knowledge is of limited use unless you can *convince* the other players that what you're saying is true. Getting good at the qualitative factors is largely a matter of practice, but I think gaining a strong foundation in game mechanics will put you in a good position to pay attention to, and get better at, the other aspects of the game.

Finally, note that unless otherwise specified, the guide assumes the "average" Avalon game with 7-8 players and the following character breakdown:

- Good: Merlin, Percival, 2-3 Loyal Servants of Arthur
- Evil: Morgana, Assassin, Mordred

Most of the guide discusses the game without either Excalibur or the Lady of the Lake in play, though specific notes are made about both where appropriate. Both Excalibur and the Lady are discussed in more depth in their own sections toward the end of the guide.

The Foundation: Sharing and Receiving Information

Information in Avalon is passed in a number of ways--what you say and how you act as the game progresses is critical for information communication, but there are several more "quantitative" methods of information communication as well. Two of the most important are (1) how you vote after someone has proposed a team, and (2) who you select when it is time for you to choose your own team. The next sections will discuss both in turn.

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When you are first learning to play Avalon, understanding the votes of the other players can be a challenge, but there *is* a method to the madness. Whether each player votes to "approve" or "reject" a mission may say a lot about his or her knowledge and allegiance, and interpreting the votes is crucial to playing the game well. This section will help you untangle the mess, and gives advice on both how to vote and how to interpret the votes of others.

The first thing you should do in your own voting is to pretend to be a Loyal Servant of Arthur (henceforth referred to as Generic Blue), *even if you're not.* Voting like Generic Blue is a good strategy for a couple of reasons. First, it helps you stay hidden. Early in the game most players don't want to reveal that they have information; pretending to know nothing is a good way to do this. Second, imitating Generic Blue is safe. Unless you're in a game with five players, there are always at least two Generic Blue players in the game. So if you pretend to be Generic Blue you won't stand out, and other Generic Blue players won't know with certainty that you aren't also Generic Blue. Finally, if you're Good, voting like Generic Blue helps the Good team, as it tends to prevent Bad teams from going on missions.

The good news is that it's <u>really</u> easy to vote like Generic Blue. In short, vote approve sparingly, and begin each game by voting to reject a team if you are not on it.[2] To Generic Blue, this strategy makes sense. When you are Generic Blue you have exactly one piece of information: you are Good. If you are *not* on a mission, then the probability that there is an Evil player on the mission is higher than if you *are* on it. It's a pittance, but at the beginning of the game it's the only information Generic Blue has to work with.

Perhaps more importantly, voting approve if you are not on the mission looks *very* suspicious early in the game. Remember that the Evil players know who each other are; if an Evil player is on a team that has been proposed, the other Evil players have an incentive to approve the mission. By contrast, early in the game Good is unlikely to vote approve off-mission: Merlin must remain hidden so can't appear to have too much information, and Percival doesn't yet know who to trust (Merlin or Morgana). Therefore, Evil players are far more likely to vote to support a team off-mission at the beginning of the game than are Good players. So voting off mission at the beginning of the game looks suspicious, and everyone votes reject a lot.

You'll quickly realize that if everyone follows the "reject if not on mission strategy," missions will never pass—sooner or later someone will have to vote approve off-mission in order for it to go. Don't worry about that yet: voting reject a lot at the beginning is a good way to start. And if you actually *are* Generic Blue, know that most players have more information than you do; leave it to them to get the game going.

For the reasons described above, is *very* common for the first four teams proposed for the first mission to be rejected. Remember that the fifth proposed team for each mission (sometimes referred to as "the hammer") *must* pass, or <u>Evil automatically wins the game</u>. This essentially forces the game into action; after the first mission, players have more information and voting patterns begin to change.

That said, letting the mission selection make it to the hammer all the time can be problematic – if the hammer is Evil, it gives that player an <u>enormous</u> amount of control over the direction the game takes.[3] Because of the hammer dynamic, sometimes players will vote off-mission to support the fourth proposed team (the "pre-hammer"), especially if there is some reason to question the hammer's allegiance. If you think the fourth proposed team looks good, voting off-mission in support of it may not be a bad idea. After all, if that mission fails to be approved you have no idea who the hammer might put on his or her team, and that team *must* be approved.

When the mission selection makes it to the hammer just about everyone votes yes, no matter how bad the team. Regardless of game size (the exception being nine players), if all the Evil players vote to reject a mission and just *one* Good player joins them, the mission won't go—causing the game to end

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[2] Note that this is a good strategy while you're new and don't know any better. Once you *do* know more about the game (and about how to play different characters), you can start to mix things up and vote approve off mission. As will be discussed later in the guide, it's a very good idea to vary your strategy and play style from one game to another, regardless of which character you're playing. Having variation in your play allows you to communicate information when you have it, while still remaining hidden. If you're Merlin, being able to identify a good team to Percival at the very beginning of the game is *very* valuable—but *only* works if voting approve off-mission won't instantly give you away as Merlin.

[3] It's also worth noting at this point that because (in practice) players almost always vote "yes" on the hammer, you're losing valuable information: if mission selection makes it to the hammer and a Bad player picks the team, Merlin and Percival have no mechanism to express their dislike for the team. If the Bad player then throws a success, the team may be trusted, making it very difficult for Merlin or Percival to change the team for the next mission, steering the game back in the "correct" direction.

immediately. Because of this risk, it is unusual that a Good player will vote reject on the hammer. However, on occasion a player will "protest vote," registering a strong dislike for the team. Although there are instances in which this is a good move, a protest vote may make you look very Evil—and I wouldn't recommend doing it until you have a better feel for the game.[4]

Once missions start going and the game progresses, you will begin to get a better sense of who is Good and who is Evil based on the votes, the mission results, and the behavior of the other players. If you think you have a good sense of who is Good, then you can start voting approve off-mission (*especially* if you can articulate a justification for your beliefs). If you're still confused, it's ok to keep voting reject unless you're on the team. If you're Good (or just pretending!), voting reject a lot is usually a good way to play: as additional missions are proposed and rejected, you learn more about your fellow players. Not only do you get to see more votes, but you will also see who each player selects for his or her team. If a player tries to drastically change up a successful team, it means they probably have information – though determining whether that information is "Good" or "Bad" may be more difficult. And remember, if someone to your right is picking a team and the team is rejected, you may then have the chance to pick your own team. That is often reason enough to reject a mission.

Before moving on, I want to make one additional point: just as you are communicating information through voting, so are the other players at the table. When you first start playing Avalon, this seems pretty overwhelming: you may have eight players, five missions, and four proposed teams per mission. This is a lot of votes to count. Please—don't try. Instead, pay attention to things that stand out: who is voting like you are? Who seems to be voting "approve" off-mission a lot? It might mean that they know something. Remember things that strike you as odd; that knowledge will likely come in handy later.

Choosing Teams and Going on Missions

Of course, you also communicate information when it comes time to put together a team yourself. In my group, at the beginning of the game the custom is usually to select yourself and one or two people on your left for the first mission. This approach has only the smallest basis in strategy: the people on your left have the next chance to pick the team, so by putting them on your proposed team you may learn something about them. It's pretty tenuous, though, and I think it's actually better--for a number of reasons--to select the first mission in a less constrained manner (regardless of your character). I'll often pick an "arbitrary" characteristic (e.g. "just the ladies" or "every other person") to pick my team. The more you mix up your strategy, the more you can influence the game when you have a named character card – without arousing the suspicion of the other players. Be warned though: if you depart from your group's custom in selecting a mission, others might ask you to justify your decision.

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[4] I don't do it very often, but will "protest vote" on occasion as Morgana, Percival, or Generic Blue (I've done it once or twice as Merlin, but that's getting *pretty* risky). Protest voting, more than just about anything else in the game, registers that you *hate* the team that has been picked--after all, you're willing to risk losing the *entire game* to demonstrate your displeasure. If you protest vote and the mission subsequently fails, it's a pretty good boost to your credibility; conversely if the mission succeeds after you threw a protest vote you're going to look pretty darn Evil. I protest vote as Generic Blue probably more often than with any other role, in part because if you protest vote "correctly" and there is a known Evil player on the team (Morgana or the Assassin), you may be considered by the Evil team as a "Merlin-suspect" at the end of the game.

Team selection is often quite random at the beginning of the game (particularly if you are Generic Blue), but the teams will become much less random as the game progresses. Remember that the second mission always requires one additional member over the first mission. If the first mission succeeds, it is pretty common to either pick the same team and add yourself (if you *weren't* on the first team), or pick the same team and add one additional player (if you *were* on the first team). Another common move is to swap out one member of the first team: if the first team had three players, you may want to keep the two you think are the most likely to be Good, add yourself, then add one additional player. Making small changes has the possibility of giving you information about additional players—you want missions to succeed, but you also want to learn the allegiances of as many players as you can. If the game progresses to the last mission, Good may need to have a perfect team—that is, identify *every* Good player and *every* Bad player.

One important piece of advice: be very suspicious of the first team, <u>even if the first mission is a success</u>. Be glad that the mission succeeded (after all, Good is now a third of the way to victory!), but the fact that the mission succeeded probably tells you *very little* about allegiances of the people on the team. As will be discussed in more detail later in the guide, Evil often has an incentive to "hide" on the first mission and throw successes. This provides a good reason to mix up the team between the first and second missions; even so, it can look suspicious if you make too many changes to a team that was successful.

If instead the first mission fails, selecting the second team can become quite challenging. Often the best strategy is to try to identify who was the most likely player to throw the fail (based on what you know about them as a player or how they're acting), and take that person off the team. It's usually *not* a good idea to swap out the whole team, for two reasons.

- First, it's not a good move in terms of probability. For example: in a game of eight, the first mission has three players. Let's assume that only one player on the first mission was Evil; in this scenario each member of the mission has a 1/3 chance of being Evil. Of the five players who did not go on the mission, two are Evil. Therefore, although the first mission failed, any given member of the team is actually somewhat more likely to be Good (2/3) than a player who was not on the mission (3/5). Furthermore, since the second mission requires four members, picking four of the remaining five players would *guarantee* that there is a Bad guy on the second team. This example of course depends on the assumption that there was only one Bad player on the original team, but that's not necessarily a bad assumption to make (one in three is about what you would expect <u>if</u> the first team was selected at random).
- Second, and perhaps more importantly, by swapping out the entire team, you risk learning *very little* about who is Evil. Working from the example above: say you believe there were two (or even three!) Evil players on the first team so you create an entirely new team for the second mission. If the second mission fails, Good has a very big problem: not only are they down by two missions, but they have learned almost nothing about the allegiances of the players. Seven of the eight players have gone on missions, and all Good knows is that at least two of those seven are Evil. Instead of swapping out the entire team, it's usually better to swap out a smaller number of players; making smaller changes gives Good a better chance of identifying players who are very likely to be Good or Evil.

Of course, if you are a character card[5] and know more information about players' allegiances, the thought process for picking teams does change somewhat. I will discuss picking teams in more detail for individual characters later in the guide.

At the risk of pointing out the obvious, as a rule you *always* want to be going on the mission[6]—if you're Good it decreases the likelihood that an Evil player is on the team; if you're Evil you want to either throw the fail immediately or gain the trust of the other players, so you can throw the fail on a future mission. Note that if you are not on the first mission (and the first mission succeeds), it can be difficult to convince others to include you on subsequent missions. Always be thinking about reasons you should be included on a future mission—this can come in the form of explaining why you're Good (and how your voting and other actions demonstrate that "fact"), or you can try to raise doubts about the allegiance of one or more of the members that went on the last mission.

Finally, on a very related note: don't *ever* give up. Even if you have been branded as Evil (correctly or incorrectly), just continue to calmly maintain your innocence, and always look for ways to change people's minds. The game can change quickly; if it does, make sure you are well positioned to take advantage of the subsequent confusion. If you are Evil, remember that on the Good team only Merlin knows your allegiance with absolute certainty—the other players will only have circumstantial evidence of your guilt. Give them as little confirmation as you can, and be ready to jump in if given the opportunity to change people's minds. For example, if you are branded as Evil because people think you failed a mission, keep an eye out. If one of the other players on the mission makes a suspicious move, then you may be able to persuade the others at the table that the other player threw the fail, not you.

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Now that we have covered the basics, it is time to move on to the heart of the guide: the characters. Learning how to play all of the characters is tough, and you may find it to be a work in progress even after many (many) hours of playing Avalon. Remember that the strategy for playing each character isn't static—the "best" way to play a character varies significantly from game to game, and depends on the personality (and mood) of the individual player, the identities of the other players, and a host of other factors.

But as overwhelming as learning how to play all of the characters can be, the rewards can be significant as well--fooling Percival as Morgana, throwing the fail as Mordred on the final mission, or successfully defending Merlin as Percival are all very satisfying moments, ones that can only come with practice and a good understanding of how to play each character. I believe few would disagree when I say that the characters (and nuances they present) are the reason Avalon is such a deep and addictive game.

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[5] My group uses "character card" to refer to cards that are not-Generic Blue (Merlin, Percival, Morgana, Assassin, Mordred, and Oberon).

[6] The primary exception is when you're Good and you're almost positive you've figured out the identities of all the Good and all the Bad players. In this case it can be effective to leave yourself off the team and put all Good players on it – it gives the team one guaranteed off-mission vote, which may help it pass. At the same time, the move can look very suspicious.

The Teams & Characters

A friend pointed out to me that Avalon is really two games: where Good is playing a game of deduction and problem-solving, Evil is playing a game of manipulation and deception. I had never thought of the game in quite this way before, but his point is a good one and thinking of the two sides as distinct may help new players better conceptualize the game.

Throughout this guide, you'll often see instances in which Good players and Evil players approach the same situations in different ways (even if the outward appearance of their actions is similar). For instance, because Evil has information going into the game, probabilities likely aren't relevant when Evil is making the decisions--for example, when an Evil player is picking a team there's no reason to believe that the number of Evil players on the team is consistent with what probability would dictate. Evil can't completely forget probability (or they risk outing themselves), but it's not a primary consideration for them. Similarly, deception is a primary element of gameplay for the Evil team, but the same can't be said for Blue. Although Percy and Merlin (and to a lesser extent the other Good players) need to engage in a certain amount of deception to protect Merlin's identity, the deception is comparatively minimal. So when a player says something that is factually incorrect, an Evil player is likely being manipulative but a Blue player will likely just be mistaken.

One other consequence of this asymmetry of approach is that many players will not be equally good or bad at each role, or each team. A player may be very good at the problem solving needed for Blue but lack the ability to deceive as Red, or vice versa. If you find yourself struggling with one side more than other, it might be useful to return to this section of the guide and try to pinpoint exactly where you're having difficulties.

I tried to make each character's description relatively self-contained, so please bear with the redundancy that necessarily follows (especially regarding Merlin, Percival, and Morgana).

Team Good: Basic Strategy

Much of the guide thus far has outlined the way Good should be thinking and acting throughout the game, and there is little generalized advice to add to what has already been said. Because most members of Good have no way to identify each other with certainty, at the beginning of the game members of Good can only act as individuals. Sure, Good players should be going on teams and trying to identify Bad guys, but these efforts are fairly solitary until relatively late in the game. Furthermore, because Good lacks information, Good's actions must be largely reactive and depend on the events the game has presented (e.g. whether the last mission succeeded or failed). As will be discussed later, this is in stark contrast to Evil—in order for Evil to be successful, Evil players must begin work together from the beginning of the game, developing a forward-looking strategy and thinking and working several missions ahead.

In spite of the limitations on Good's knowledge and coordinating ability, there is still a lot that each Good player should be doing and thinking about.

Generic Blue

As Generic Blue, you have several objectives, each of roughly equal import: (1) get on missions and throw successes, (2) try to figure out enough so that you can put together a successful team--or, failing that, figure out whom to trust and pick *their* team, and (3) provide cover for Merlin and Percival.

The first two points above should be pretty obvious (at least in principle). Figuring out how to achieve these objectives, however, is much more difficult. Unfortunately, this is an area in which I can provide very little guidance--it's mostly about practice. In order to get on missions, you must *look* and *act* like you are Good and have nothing to hide. Since as Generic Blue you *don't* have anything to hide, you're well on your way, though gaining the other players' trust is never a given. Remember too that members of the Evil team will be looking to make members of Good look Evil (to deflect attention away from themselves); give them as little ammunition as possible, and be suspicious of anyone who tries to throw shade on you with little or no support.

In your first games, try to be moderately vocal. If you sit at the table and say nothing, it is likely you will be passed over in favor of other players and won't go on missions. If you pest to be on every mission ("Pick me, pick me!"), you risk seeming *too* eager—which will come across as suspicious. Sometimes you can convince others to put you on a team based on an arbitrary factor (e.g. "just the ladies"). But in all honesty, much of whether you are put on a team at the beginning on the game depends on luck— specifically, who picks the first mission and where you are sitting in relation to that person.

Just be ready to take any opening that presents itself. When the team is changed or a new player needs to be added, be ready to explain (calmly) why you should be included, and why you are Good (or why another person who is being considered is Bad).

In terms of choosing a team, learning enough as Generic Blue to put together a successful team is largely a matter of practice. There are a small number of situations in which a player is "proven" beyond a reasonable doubt to be Good:

(1) Sometimes you get "lucky" and the math works to exonerate a player or two. For instance, in a seven player game, the first mission is a two player mission. Say a fail comes up. Those players are swapped out for three new players; on the second mission, two fails appear. Two of the seven players have not been on either mission, yet we've seen fails thrown by three players. Therefore, the remaining two players *must* be Good.

(2) In other circumstances players are virtually proven to be Good because they would have had the chance to end the game as Evil. For instance, if Evil has won the first two missions and the third mission succeeds, it is highly likely that all members of the third mission are Good. After all, Evil has no more reason to hide—so any Evil player on the team should have thrown the fail.[7]

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[7] Keep in mind, this is *not* true if Excalibur is in play; an Evil player may have expected Excalibur to be used, and thrown a success in the hopes of having his or her vote changed into a fail. That said, if Excalibur is in play, there are a couple of additional ways that characters may be "proven" to be good:

(1) First, if Evil has won two missions and the next mission succeeds, the person who had Excalibur is *guaranteed* to be good—after all, they could have easily caused the mission to fail.

(2) Second, if Evil has won two missions and team selection makes it to the hammer, if the person who is the hammer selects a good mission, you know that that person must be good. The person selecting the mission could have just put two (or three) Evil people on the team, and given Excalibur to an Evil player— guaranteeing that the mission will fail. For this reason, in my group of Avalon players, if mission selection

However, most of the time these scenarios don't happen. Even if they do, they will rarely tell you the identities of all the players. You may assume someone is Good because they have been on one or two successful missions, but treat it like the guess that it is and don't become too attached to it. **I have seen many games lost because the players became too attached to an (incorrect) assumption that was made at the beginning of the game.** Skilled Evil players will often look extremely innocent at the beginning of the game--choosing to let Good have a successful mission (or even two!) in the hopes of creating enough confusion that Good will not be able to identify the Evil players in time.

In large part, being able to create a successful mission is a matter of practice. It's about reading the other players (or their votes) to determine who is Good or Evil. In addition to viewing the players as individuals, you can also try to think of the other players as members of a particular team (Evil or Good), and try to figure out who might be working together. Sometimes one player will clearly be supporting another player—in this situation it's usually one Evil player supporting another (though keep in mind it *could* be Percival supporting Merlin, or Merlin supporting a player he knows to be Good). In rare cases, you may be able to see that there is a divide forming among the group, with three people on one side and two on the other. If this happens, it is very likely that the team of three are the three Evil players, and the team of two are Merlin and Percival. Once you notice this happening, it's probably too late (Merlin will likely be assassinated at the end of the game), but if you identify this configuration early enough and step in quickly, you may be able to deflect attention away from Merlin and Percy.

That brings us to the final objective of Generic Blue: providing cover for Merlin and Percy. When you're new to the game, it can be very hard to be vocal as Generic Blue: you don't know anything about the players, and probably haven't played enough to read the other players well. But—and I can't stress this strongly enough—the best thing you can do to help your team is to throw out as many theories and ideas as you can, and see what sticks. It may be much safer for Merlin to agree with the theory another player proposed than to risk drawing attention to himself by announcing the theory in the first place – if a Generic Blue player proposes a number of theories, Merlin may be able to share information unobtrusively. And if other Good players are proposing a lot of theories, Merlin may be able to propose a theory or two himself without attracting much attention.

Remember: Merlin has significant information to communicate, but he can only do so if he won't be instantly identified by Evil. A good Percival will throw out ideas as well, but the more vocal the entire Blue team can be, the better:

First, Merlin can't be the only one speaking. If only one member of the Good team is being vocal, and that member is calling out the Evil players, you can bet your shield that Merlin will be assassinated. If everyone is speaking and there is a relatively high level of ambient noise, Evil will have a harder time picking out Merlin.

Second, even with adequate noise, Merlin will look very suspicious to the Evil team if he accuses (correctly) one or more members of the Evil team—particularly if he does so early in the game, or

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makes it to the hammer when Evil needs only one more failed mission to win, and the hammer is Evil—he or she will just flip his or her card and declare the game over.

But one word of caution to Evil: if Excalibur is in play, and Evil doesn't win quickly, it is possible that several players may be proven good for the reasons described above. Evil needs to be cognizant of how many players are "proven" good through this method—I have seen a number of games in which Evil has lost because several players have been "proven" good, outing Evil by process of elimination.

without strong justification. So instead, Merlin will often try to hide behind Good players—he may do this by agreeing with a player who makes a correct accusation or by appearing to let himself be convinced by an argument that the player is making. He may also try to disagree with incorrect accusations, signaling that the player in question is really Good. If Percy is doing his job correctly, even if he hasn't identified Merlin with certainty, he should be paying particular attention to the information both of his Merlin suspects are providing.

Finally, a well-placed accusation can be *extremely* valuable, both because it can handicap Evil, and because it can provide additional protection for Merlin. Best case scenario—you accuse the Assassin of being Evil. Merlin may agree with you, as will Percy (if Percy has figured out who Merlin is). Some of the other Evil players may also back you up too—choosing to throw the Assassin under the bus to preserve their own identities. If this happens, not only will you have crippled the Evil team by taking out one of its members (or at least introducing significant doubt about that player), but the Assassin will also remember that you identified her. Because of that, she may think you're Merlin and try to assassinate you at the end of the game. At minimum, you spared Merlin from having to identify the Assassin, helping him to preserve his cover.

You may be wondering at this point: if throwing around accusations is so damaging, what happens if you accuse someone who is Good? In general, although it may be damaging, the costs are well worth the benefits, and may be smaller than you think. First, since there are more Good players than Evil ones, even if a Good player is temporarily suspicious, you still may be able to send a team with all Good players. More importantly, if you accuse a Good player of being Evil, it's generally less likely that the accusation will get lots of support from others. Although a member of Evil may choose to support you (to cast attention away from themselves), you're not likely to get coordinated support from Evil. Furthermore, Merlin and Percy are unlikely to support the accusation, and may even contradict you. So if you make an accusation and it doesn't go over well, just <u>let it drop</u>. It is likely that by the end of the game, no one will remember that you made it.

During your Avalon infancy (and well into adulthood), there are times when, as Generic Blue, you will disqualify yourself from being considered as Merlin. You may have put Evil members on your teams too many times or been too vocal in your support for them, or you may have accused the wrong people of being Evil. This is inevitable. Hopefully though, one of your teammates will have gotten it right, and can be assassinated in place of Merlin.

Although I can't say that I've kept a running tally of which team wins more often, I can't help but feel that, if you're playing with experienced players (and especially if you're playing with Mordred), Evil has a distinct leg up in the game. Not only do they have more information from the beginning, but they also have a second chance to win the game, through assassinating Merlin. In my experience, <u>the only way for Good to win with any frequency is for *all* members of team Good to be vocal.</u>

When you are first starting out, being vocal is *hard*, but do your best—and try to speak up more as you become more comfortable with the game.

Merlin

There's no dancing around it: being Merlin when you are new to the game is *terrible*. Just hope you don't see his serious face and stupid glass ball when you flip to see your card. If you are Merlin, just grit your teeth, give it your best shot, and don't worry too much if you're assassinated at the end of the

game. Merlin is always difficult to play in an experienced group, no matter how good you are or how many games you've played--and the other players understand that (or they should).

More than probably any other character, different players approach Merlin <u>very</u> differently. The following section discusses *my* preferred method of playing Merlin--but know that this section received a lot of criticism from the players who were kind enough to review this guide. I reworked this section to incorporate their feedback and tried to highlight points about which there was disagreement, but as you're reading this section remember that there are several different strategies for success as Merlin (this is true for any character, but especially for him).

What it comes down to is this: Merlin has two primary objectives, and the objectives conflict almost completely. One of Merlin's objectives is to communicate good information to Percival--and in order to do that he must first gain Percival's trust. Merlin's other main objective is to remain hidden from Evil, and avoid end-game assassination. Unfortunately for Merlin, he's trapped: the more good information he provides, the more likely it is that he will gain Percival's trust, but also the more likely it is that he will be assassinated. The more *mis*information Merlin provides, the more likely it is that he will successfully hide from Evil--but if Merlin fails to gain Percival's trust and Good loses the game outright, hiding from Evil becomes irrelevant. Which objective takes precedence, and how you want to balance the two, depends on your own personality and play style and specific events that happen during the game. The balance will likely change over the course of the game, too.

<u>I am of the opinion that it is **often** (though not always) a good idea for Merlin to spread a certain amount of misinformation to avoid assassination. In a group of experienced players, Merlin gets assassinated a lot, *even when* he provides some misinformation. **However**, some experienced players feel very strongly that Merlin should never (or almost never) spread misinformation.</u>

Whether or not I spread misinformation as Merlin will depend on the specific situation in which I find myself. For example, if I am sitting right next to a particularly strong player who is Evil, I will play a *very* hidden Merlin. This means I will put evil players on my missions, and I may vote for the missions as well. *This behavior makes it difficult for Good to succeed three missions*, but it's one step above an (almost) guaranteed loss via assassination. If, on the other hand, I'm sitting far away from the Evil players and am surrounded by several strong players who are Good, I will play a bolder Merlin and will prioritize giving information over staying hidden.

Even if you decide that you do not want to communicate misinformation as Merlin, knowing how to hide is critical. Let's discuss both hiding and communicating information.

Staying Hidden: From the very beginning of the game the Evil team will be looking for Merlin. In particular, Evil players will be looking for: (1) A player who does not trust them at the beginning of the game, especially without justification; (2) Someone who is voting perfectly—that is, someone who is voting reject on every Bad mission and approve on every Good mission; (3) Someone who seems to be directing the Good team; and (4) Someone who seems *very* unsurprised throughout the game (e.g. when a mission fails). So to hide, you want to act to contradict each of these points, all while doing the least harm possible to the Good team.

First--although it may be difficult to do, you have to make sure not to appear to be suspicious of the Evil players until they give you reason to mistrust them. It's a balance. You can't appear to trust the Evil players *too much* or you risk confusing Percy beyond repair, but neither can you show yourself to Evil by failing to trust them without reason.

A good way to confuse the Bad guys is to *listen to what they have to say and appear to be persuaded by their arguments*--I've often seen Merlin out himself by ignoring or disregarding (without cause) an entirely plausible argument made by an Evil character. Remember, Morgana will be pretending to be you, and if she's doing her job correctly she will be (subtly) giving guidance to the Good team. Remember too, Morgana often gives good advice to the Blue team early in the game, and if she goes on the first mission she will likely throw a success anyway. You might have to turn against Morgana later in the game (though with luck she will have made a mistake), but for now it's ok to pretend to listen to what she has to say. Don't go out of your way to support her or make an extra effort to put her on your team (that *will* confuse Percy), but do appear to listen.

As Merlin, one of the best things that can happen is for you is to gain Morgana's trust. You have a pretty good idea of who she is (at least down to a couple of players), but she has *no idea* which of the Blue players you are--and sooner or later she will have to appear to trust some of them. If you gain her trust not only will she be less likely to suspect you to be Merlin (even if you do turn against her later on), but if Morgana trusts you too much and keeps putting you on missions or otherwise supporting you, it is a dead giveaway to Percy that she is the Evil one.

If you are sitting next to an Evil player, you can use that to your advantage and try to gain that player's trust. Ask them who they think is Good or Evil, or ask them who they think you should put on your team. If you don't take their suggestions act confused—or explain that you think they're probably right, but want to change things up to gather information. It doesn't always work, but I've found this strategy to be effective fairly often.

In Avalon, it is very common for players to over-value assumptions that they make early in the game. If Evil discounts you as Merlin early on, they may fail to consider you at the end of the game—even if your subsequent actions should have led them to identify you. Similarly, players will often remember events that occurred just prior to the last mission. Generally, players are significantly less likely to remember events that take place in the middle of the game--use that to your advantage. Be a bit bolder in your suggestions to the Blue team toward the middle of the game: even if the majority of player's don't listen, Percy should be paying close attention to what you say.

To the extent that you appear to support Evil, *try to cause as little damage to the Good team as possible*. If you think there is little immediate damage to be done by appearing to trust Evil, then consider supporting them (it may be worth the risk of confusing Percy); on the other hand if you think there is significant damage to be done, back off with your support.

A good example comes from mission selection. I think it is often a good idea for Merlin to put a known Evil player on his team once early in the game--especially if he is picking the first or second team to go on the first mission. The mission is relatively unlikely to pass, and selecting an Evil player puts Evil off your scent. When it comes time to assassinate Merlin at the end of the game, if the Evil players are unsure of Merlin's identity they will often go through the Good players one at a time, eliminating those who put one of the known Bad players (Morgana or the Assassin) on their teams then assassinating whoever is left.

However, be warned that putting an Evil player on your team can confuse Percy, particularly if that Evil player is Morgana.[8] If you put Morgana on your team, Percival may assume you're evil--and a misguided

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[8] Keep in mind, the "damage" done by confusing Percival is much more significant if Merlin puts Morgana on his team than if Merlin puts the Assassin on his team. Assuming the team doesn't pass, if Merlin puts the Assassin on his team, the damage to Good is relatively minimal. Percival might trust the Assassin in the near term, but Percival won't be suspicious of Merlin because of his team selection. If Merlin puts Morgana on his team, Percival may

Percy can very easily hand the game to Evil. Percy *shouldn't* jump to conclusions this quickly (as I will discuss in Percy's section, below), but he often does. I am of the opinion that the protection provided by picking a "poor" team is generally worth the risk of confusing Percival, but others disagree.

Whether you want to try misdirection or instead simply select all-Good teams without drawing attention to yourself is entirely up to you. It may largely depend on what came before you are able to pick a team: if a player ahead of you in the mission selection process picked a perfect team, you can often just say "same team as player X" and avoid drawing attention to yourself. If every team selected ahead of yours has an Evil player on it, it may be hard to remove that player without signaling that you have information. How you choose to balance Merlin's competing objectives depends on the group, the circumstances of the game, the identities of the Evil players, and your own style of play. Variety is important, too--so try mixing things up to see what works best for you.

An additional word of warning: as Merlin, you will have a pretty good idea of how each mission will turn out before you see the cards (though you will never know with absolute certainty)--but remember: you have *so much* more information than the rest of the Blue team. If Evil has done a good job with misdirection, other Blue players may be surprised if a mission that appears Good suddenly fails. Be careful not to act *too* certain of the outcome before you see the votes--and try to channel a little bit of surprise when an "unexpected" fail comes up.

Sometimes it will be clear that a Blue player (probably Percy) has figured out the identities of the Bad guys. If this happens, you can take the opportunity to vote incorrectly—perhaps by supporting a Bad team, or rejecting a Good one. You don't want to be so persuasive that you convince the Blue player that they have it all wrong--but if you're lucky enough to be given the opportunity by your team, seize the chance to confuse Red even further.

Communicating Information: This is the really tricky part. How do you communicate information to the *right* person (when you don't even know who that person is!), while at the same time avoiding the attention of three people who are looking for you?

This is where the behavior of your team becomes *critical* for success. When you are first learning to play Merlin, you generally don't want to be the first person to accuse a player of being Evil. Instead, if a Red character is looking suspicious <u>and someone else on the Blue team points that out</u>, then you want to back that person up. As Merlin, be on the lookout for situations in which your teammates are making correct statements and try to act in support of those players.

However, being a "follower" may not always work, and sooner or later you will likely need (or want) to accuse the Evil players. <u>When you do, avoid making accusations without support.</u> If you are good at logic and are following the game closely, watch for situations in which you can draw attention to a flawed argument or a situation in which a player's allegiance has been "proven" (or nearly so). Merlin stands out the most when he doesn't back up his accusations with reasoning. If you have a reason, don't be afraid to speak up and explain your thought process--and remember, a good Percy will be paying particular attention to what you say (*even if* he's not yet convinced that you're Merlin).

One word of caution: if you accuse a player (correctly) of being Evil, pay attention to others' reactions. If you make an accusation once or twice, and the accusation doesn't stick--as maddening as it may be, you

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assume that Merlin is the Evil player. This early in the game, Merlin likely doesn't know which of the known Evil players is Morgana and which is the Assassin, so if he *does* decide to put an Evil player on the team, he has to be aware that he might pick Morgana and confuse Percival.

may have to drop the accusation and hope you can raise it again later (or that someone else does). Evil players will remember if someone was particularly insistent in accusing them.

As Merlin, you may also need to speak up in defense of a Good player, especially if Evil seems particularly keen on throwing that player under the bus. Whether or not it makes sense to intervene may depend on degree of suspicion: if a Blue player looks just a bit suspicious (e.g. verbally supports a team that ends up failing) and Evil seizes that opportunity to throw the Blue player under the bus, Merlin may want to try to raise doubts about Evil's arguments. Once assumptions get formed they can be *very* difficult to correct; a word of caution ("Let's not jump to conclusions yet, we don't really know anything.") may stop things from getting too far afield, without demonstrating special knowledge. On the other hand, sometimes a Blue player will mess up and look *incredibly* Evil (often through some combination of strange voting and suspicious demeanor). If that happens, keep your mouth shut and know the situation probably isn't salvageable in the near term. Hopefully things will resolve themselves before it's too late.

Deciding when to speak up can be tricky: although Merlin wants to stay hidden, I've seen a lot of games lost because he has remained too quiet, allowing Evil to dominate the discussion and manipulate the game. By the time Good starts to untangle the mess, it's too late to correct mistaken assumptions and win the game.

When you first play Merlin, aim to be moderately vocal. When I first started playing, each time I was Merlin I was so afraid of giving myself away that I would go an entire game and say virtually nothing. Trust me, if you do that you will be stabbed at the end (unless you're *always* really quiet). It's too much of a departure from typical Avalon behavior, and that departure will be noticeable to other players. Besides, staying silent won't help Percy either. Similarly, don't be too vocal--you don't want to be clearly directing the team from the first mission. That said, it's the exception that makes the rule, and I've seen people being very successful as a vocal Merlin. If a vocal Merlin plays a good game, Evil may dismiss Merlin from consideration because it *can't* be that obvious and the vocal person *must* have been Percy. But that is a strategy for later; for starters try to find a happy medium--and try to play Merlin with roughly the same vocal-ness with which you play other characters.

When it comes to voting my advice would be to mostly focus on blending in. Although others might disagree, I am of the opinion that it is really tough to communicate information with enough accuracy to justify the risk. Let's look at an example. If Merlin votes to reject a team, he could have done so for any number of reasons: it could be because he knows the team contains one Evil player (or more!), or because he *suspects* that Mordred might be on the team. It could be because he doesn't want to vote "yes" off-mission, and wants to mimic Generic Blue. It could also be because he thinks others are going to vote to reject the team, and doesn't want to "stand out" by approving it. Furthermore, even if he is accurately signaling by voting reject (and saying "there is an Evil player on this team"), through voting alone it can be difficult or impossible to learn *which* player is Evil.

It's a lot easier for Merlin to communicate information by voting "yes" on a good mission, but voting approve off-mission can be a dead giveaway of outside knowledge. Furthermore, in certain circumstances a cautious Merlin (especially playing against very skilled Evil players), may be *more* inclined to vote yes for a Bad mission than a Good one, to throw off suspicion.

If Merlin's primary focus is on communicating reliable information, it's very easy for him to out himself. First, he may be voting "too well" by appearing to know which teams to approve and reject. Second, by focusing too much on the membership of each team, Merlin may not pay enough attention to the vibe of the group and risk being the sole person to approve an unpopular team, or reject a popular one. I've

been assassinated as Merlin because of a *single* suspicious vote early in the game, because I was more focused on telling Percy that the mission was Good than on figuring out what the other the players were thinking about the proposed team.

When it comes to picking teams as Merlin, a lot of it will be pretty situation-dependent. If you think you can pick a Good team without raising the suspicion of the Evil players, then do so. If a Good team was formed early in the game by someone else, be grateful for your good fortune and go with the flow. When it's your turn to pick a team, keep the same team and *comment that you're picking the same team as so-and-so*. A few comments like that can misdirect Evil, letting them think you're Percy (or Generic Blue), and are relying on the outside knowledge of another. As Merlin, the best thing you can hope for is a fast game with three Blue chips in a row. If you have the opportunity to nudge the game in that direction, run with it!

Unfortunately, it gets a bit trickier if a mission failed, or if there's an Evil player on the team who threw a success. If the Evil player is looking or acting suspicious, you may be able to take them off the team. More often, however, you might have to take the wrong person off the team to keep from looking like you have too much information: Evil players will invariably identify people who took them off teams when it's time to assassinate Merlin. The best thing you can hope for is that someone will pick a Good mission *before* it's your turn to pick one, and you can again appear to defer to their judgment. Even if the mission doesn't go, it should be a reasonably clear signal to Percy that the team probably *is* a Good one.

In general, as Merlin you want to become bolder as the game progresses. In the beginning focus almost exclusively on blending in, with only the smallest nudges to keep the game going in the right direction. Once Evil players begin to look suspicious (but not before), you can accuse them of being Evil--as long as you can provide a good reason for the accusations. And if the Blue team gets into trouble, remember that you might be the only person who is able to fix the situation. If the choice is between speaking up and an imminent loss for Blue, it's worth the risk to speak up.

As an additional word of warning, be careful of Mordred. As will be discussed below, Mordred is in a very good position to identify Merlin, and can do a really good job of fooling Merlin by imitating Percy. Mordred will be keeping an eye out for players who are accusing his teammates of being Evil. Especially if Mordred is sitting next to you, if you pick out a Bad guy as suspicious he will likely follow up on that accusation and appear to lend his support and agreement. A nervous Merlin is all too eager to accept that trust without questioning it (what a relief that Percy is believing *you*, and not Morgana!), and Merlin will be inclined to drop his guard and reveal the identities of the Bad guys. If Merlin and Percy are sitting next to each other, it's a powerful combination. But if you're going to trust the person next to you, be very, very cautious. Mordred acting as Percy can be an extremely effective strategy against an unwary Merlin.

However, a savvy Merlin is also in a good position to identify Mordred. Identifying Mordred should be very low on Merlin's list of priorities (at least until Merlin has a lot of experience), but it is worth noting that Merlin is the player in the best position to do so. First, Mordred's role in the Evil team is special, and his hidden nature is a particularly powerful asset to the Evil team. Usually, it's not too difficult for the members of the Evil team to figure out which of their number is Mordred, and once they do they will work to protect his identity. Because Merlin knows the identities of the other Evil players so early in the game, he is in a good position to see who those Evil players might be supporting. Evil may throw a lot of Good players under the bus as the game progresses, but it's pretty unlikely that they will throw shade on Mordred.

As a final note: one of my least favorite parts about playing Merlin is that especially in smaller games, sometimes you get assassinated even if you played the game perfectly. In a game of 5 players, Evil has a one in three chance of assassinating Merlin correctly. And sometimes Merlin gets assassinated *because everyone else on the Blue team* disqualified themselves from being Merlin. This may be because Evil did a fantastic job of sowing chaos, but it might also be because Good managed to sow chaos all by themselves. If this happens, you can probably take solace in the fact that your team let you down, and not the other way around. It stinks, but it's just part of the game.

Percival (Percy)

Percival is a *fun* character--Percy has the chance to figure everything out and be the hero, but he also has the power to (almost) singlehandedly tank the game and hand the victory to Evil. When I have played Percival the game tends to either go fantastically well or horrendously terrible, with virtually no middle ground. You have been warned.

Percival has one main objective: act as Merlin's bodyguard and (ideally) be assassinated instead of Merlin at the end of the game (in fact, in the "Hidden Agenda" expansion of The Resistance, Percival's character is just named "Bodyguard"). To protect Merlin, Percival must first identify him correctly, then deflect attention away from him. Percy must avoid "outing" Merlin to the Evil team (which is *very* easy to do inadvertently). If he can, Percy must try to learn the identity of the Assassin from Merlin (remember, if Percy has figured out Merlin's identity, he will also know the identity of Morgana, and neither character knows Mordred). Percy must also assume a leadership role for the Blue team and appear to have knowledge about the game.

Let's begin with correctly identifying Merlin and Morgana. This is something that Percy should be working on throughout the game. If both Merlin suspects are strong players, it may take Percy the better part of the game to figure things out (and in some games Percy won't figure it out at all, or will spend the entire game trusting Morgana). As a matter of strategy, I've always found it easier to identify Morgana, and thus find Merlin by process of elimination. There are a few ways that Percy can go about choosing between the two Merlin look-alikes.

A word of caution: in Avalon it's often a struggle to separate out-of-game personality from in-game behavior, and this is probably most problematic when playing Percival. If one of your Merlin suspects is sunny and cheerful and the other is taciturn or moody, it's easy to immediately identify the former as Merlin. Fight this urge, and use logic (not instinct) to differentiate the two!

First, as Percy, if one of your Merlin suspects is voting "no" on every mission, that one is probably Morgana. Although Merlin won't be voting "yes" with particularly high frequency, eventually he will support a Good mission (especially if he is on it). Morgana, on the other hand, wants to avoid putting Merlin on her team or voting approve for missions with Merlin on them (remember, Merlin will sometimes put Morgana on the team, but won't do it repeatedly). If Morgana appears to put too much trust in Merlin, it can be a dead giveaway to Percy as to her identity. However, she has no idea who Merlin is and doesn't know who to trust and who to avoid, which often translates into Morgana distrusting everyone and voting "no" on just about every mission. Although advanced players won't fall into this trap, it's still unusual for Morgana to vote "yes" on very many missions.

Secondly, there is the trust issue. If a relatively new player is Percy, he may assume automatically that if one of his suspects puts the other one on his or her team, the one doing the picking is Morgana. As Percy this move is certainly something to consider, but be careful not to become too locked into this

assumption. As is discussed in the Merlin section above, Merlin may need to put Evil players on his team to avoid assassination, and may not be able to differentiate between Morgana and the Assassin. *However,* Percy should be aware that it is unlikely that Merlin will continue to trust Morgana as the game progresses. After about the second mission, Merlin is going to be looking for ways to cast doubt on her--either by taking her off the team or otherwise speaking against her. While his actions may not be obvious, you can be pretty sure that at this point in the game Merlin won't be verbally supporting Morgana. The farther the game progresses, the more likely it is that Morgana is the one supporting Merlin, and not the other way around.

Third--and I would view this as a little bit of a last resort--the outcomes of the missions give you a certain amount of information (but it may not be enough until it's too late). If one of your Merlin suspects goes on the first mission, and the mission succeeds--*this tells you virtually nothing about the identities of your suspects*. More often than not Morgana will throw a success on the first mission in the hopes of confusing Percy. If your same Merlin suspect goes on the second mission and the mission succeeds, it's probably relatively safe to assume that that player is Merlin. I've seen Morgana slow-play missions one and two (then go on to win the game!), but it's getting pretty risky for Evil to be down by two (remember, this means Evil must generate two fails on the fourth mission).

The problem with relying on mission outcomes is that, assuming you're playing with Mordred, Merlin doesn't have perfect information. I've seen a number of games lost for Blue because Mordred throws a fail on a team that includes Merlin--and Percival spends the rest of the game believing Merlin is Morgana. If one of your Merlin suspects goes on an early mission that fails (especially if your suspect picked the team), your suspect is *probably* Morgana but it's by no means guaranteed. On the one hand, an early fail looks suspicious because Mordred won't usually throw one on the first mission, and often won't throw a fail on the second mission either. On the other hand, you could be playing with an aggressive Mordred (not a bad strategy for Mordred!), or Merlin may have picked a Bad team expecting the team to be voted down.

The best advice I have for Percy is this: be patient, and when you make assumptions, try to keep them as malleable as possible. When I'm Percy, if I *think* I've figured it out, I will work under the assumption that I am correct, but I will make sure to do two things: (1) continue to pay attention to both suspects to see if I can learn anything from either; and (2) *protect the identities of both*. If you're going to call out Morgana as Evil, you should be <u>pretty darn sure</u> that it's her. If you're wrong, you've all but guaranteed Evil the victory, because even if you later change your mind, your first accusation will mark Merlin for assassination.

One of the most common ways that Merlin gets assassinated is because Morgana (or one of the other Evil players) will identify Percy then trace Merlin through Percy's actions. Remember, not only is Percy the only player who knows Merlin's identity, but Percival is identified by Evil with fairly high frequency (Percival will often exhibit a combination of "leadership" and "confusion" that is quite unique to that character). As Percy I usually don't worry too much about being identified--being identified is not ideal, but sometimes taking a more obvious leadership role is worth disqualifying yourself as Merlin. *However,* this only works if you're pretty sure you haven't betrayed Merlin's identity. This can happen in a number of situations:

- Even if you're unsure which to trust, make sure that you're not going back and forth between the two Merlin suspects in any kind of obvious way. For example--try not to ask each of them the same question sequentially, or ask one what they think of the other. Pay attention to the information they volunteer, and even accuse one of them as being Evil if you want (in the hopes that the other will support you), but don't directly compare the two.

- Sometimes Percy will try to force Morgana into slipping up; this can be effective in certain circumstances but risks outing Merlin. The most obvious example of this is if Percy is picking a three-person team, and puts Merlin and Morgana on the team, in addition to himself. By doing this, Percy is hoping that Morgana will approve the team and Merlin won't. Unless you can do this in a *really* discreet way (e.g. both of them are sitting next to each other to your left), doing this is dangerous. First, if Merlin *does* vote truthfully (and rejects the mission), it will likely look suspicious to Morgana. Even if Merlin *doesn't* vote for the team, if Morgana later identifies you as Percy she may very well remember who else you put on the team and identify Merlin that way.
- Finally, and this is quite difficult: sometimes Percy will trust the wrong player--then realize his mistake and try to correct it. Although this scenario is somewhat inevitable for Percy, be *very careful* how you correct your mistake. Morgana will be paying attention to who trusts her; if she notices that someone was initially trusting her then suddenly stops, she will be very suspicious of both the person and the circumstances surrounding the switch. If you suddenly stop trusting her *and start trusting someone else*, there is a really high likelihood that the "someone else" is going to get assassinated at the end of the game.[9] Also, if you trusted Morgana until she spoke up in favor of a particular player, or until she put that player on her team, she is going to be very suspicious of that player come the end of the game.

I think a lot of these problems come into play when Percy becomes focused on the outcome of the next mission and forgets his role in protecting Merlin's identity. It's not difficult to mitigate the situations described in the bullets above--just remember your priorities: (1) protect Merlin; (2) everything else.

An important factor in both (1) and (2) is being vocal. Although all Blue players should be as vocal as they can be, Percival has a particular responsibility to Merlin--as discussed above, it's really difficult for Merlin to communicate information unless Blue provides cover. Percival is generally a particularly good source of cover: he generally has a slightly better idea of the identities of the players than Generic Blue, and he knows who he should be listening to in order to gain (potentially) accurate information.

Once Percival has identified Merlin with some certainty, learning the identity of the Assassin is pretty easy. All Percy has to do is accuse the right person, and listen for even the most tenuous support for Merlin, or wait for Merlin to pick a team--by the end of the game, you can bet that Merlin won't put the Assassin on the team if he can *at all* avoid doing so. Percival does have to be a little bit careful not to be too obvious in soliciting Merlin's advice, but if the Blue team is being vocal in general, it's not usually too much of a problem. Remember too that by the end of the game, Merlin might have a pretty good idea of Mordred's identity--or at least have it narrowed down to a couple of suspects. A good Mordred can be almost impossible to identify, and Good might need all the help (and coordination) it can get to identify him.

Fair warning--as is likely obvious from the discussion above, Percival can be quite difficult. The combination of confusion (as Percy tries to decide between Merlin and Morgana), and need to act as a leader for the Blue team often means that Percival is a distinct mix of "wildly confused" and "very vocal." This combination, though often not something you can avoid, can cause significant problems for the Good team. Percival may out himself to the Red team (subsequently endangering Merlin), or can promote significant chaos if he trusts the wrong "Merlin." Even more problematically, by his (inadvertent) creation of chaos Percival may look very Evil to other Blue players, and lose their trust. If

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[9] And yes, I've seen Percy use this to his advantage, by "setting up" a Generic Blue player to be assassinated in Merlin's place. I've never managed to juggle that many balls successfully. Something to aspire to.

this happens, it is almost impossible for Blue to win the game. I mention these issues not because I have a good solution (I don't!), but because it's something to be aware of (and be warned about) before playing Percival.

All of that said, one nice part about playing Percy is that you're often in a good position to identify the Bad guys--including the Assassin and Mordred. The fun thing about Percy is that he is the only Blue player who knows both the identity of himself and Merlin (at least kind of). He knows **for a fact** that none of the other Blue players have any information. If a player who is not one of his Merlin suspects pretends to have information, that player is either Blue and trolling (a definite possibility) or Evil (somewhat more likely). Even Merlin doesn't have that advantage: from Merlin's perspective, if a Blue player appears to have information, that player might be Percival--but it might also be Mordred.

Finally--I want to make a quick note about the Lady of the Lake (Lady). The Lady will be discussed toward the end of the guide more generally, but knowing who to Lady can be particularly challenging as Percival. In general, you <u>don't</u> want to give the Lady to Merlin. For all of the reasons discussed above, by giving the Lady to Merlin you risk outing him. That said, two exceptions come to mind: first, it makes sense to give the Lady to Merlin if it seems like a logical choice and/or others are recommending that you do so (you don't want to conspicuously *avoid* giving the Lady to him). The second time in which Percy might want to give the Lady to Merlin is if players are suspicious of Merlin--particularly if it's without anything concrete. It risks outing Merlin, but it's pretty hard for Good to win if Merlin isn't trusted, so trying to improve his credibility may be worth the risk.

If Percy has a pretty good feel for who Merlin is, it's not a bad idea for him to try to use the Lady to find Mordred. If he fails, then the Lady will remain in the hands of Good. If he succeeds, all the Bad guys will be known by *someone* on the Good team, giving Good a solid chance of victory.

If Percival has the Lady but is a bit confused, I am a big fan of trying to give the Lady to *Morgana*. This runs contrary to common wisdom, which says that you want to keep the Lady in the hands of Good (discussed more later in the guide). I like giving the Lady to Morgana for several reasons: first, by doing so you will confirm the identities of Merlin and Morgana without a doubt, and can proceed accordingly for the remainder of the game. Second, you will out Morgana to the rest of the table--but won't give her any information she can use to identify Merlin. Third, Morgana will often just give the Lady back to the hands of Good (and tell the truth), to preserve what credibility she can. Finally, if you gave the Lady to the *wrong* "Morgana," now you're straightened out and the Lady remains in the hands of Good (yes, it might throw suspicion on Merlin, as discussed above, but hey, compromises are a part of life). *However*, if you do decide to try to give the Lady to Morgana--*make sure you're not overly surprised if you're wrong*. On several occasions, I've seen Percy give the Lady to Morgana or Merlin--then been visibly thrown off when the allegiances aren't consistent with what he believed. Pretend you're a Generic Blue player – if you're Generic Blue, you're trying to give the Lady to another Good player: if the card you look at is Blue act nonchalant or a bit pleased; act annoyed if the card is Red. Don't be thrown by your prior beliefs.

A Note on Three Blue Chips

Once Blue has its third successful mission--or the mission is about to go and it is very likely that the team is Good--Good players should stop speaking. It's time for Evil to try to assassinate Merlin, and Blue players should avoid giving Evil any additional information. Make sure to keep your expression neutral, and don't start discussing the game or calling out the Evil players (e.g. "I knew you were Evil all along!").

A lot of players I know have a routine when it's time for assassination--they will cover their faces, or pull out their phones, or start playing with their voting chips (my personal preference: click, click-click, click, click-click). It will be the same routine every game. When you're new to the game, covering your face is a pretty good strategy--it looks a little silly, but you can guarantee Evil won't learn anything from you (as long as they know that's what you do every game). Usually Blue players will studiously ignore the Red team, refuse to meet their eyes, and remain utterly neutral as the discussion progresses. I actually rather enjoy watching the Red players and the discussion as it unfolds, but it's a little dangerous if they're watching and you give something away (e.g. start looking happy if they're talking about assassinating the wrong person).

Exactly what you do is up to you, but what you *don't* want to do is engage with them in any way. Don't claim "I'm Merlin, just assassinate me!" or anything of that variety. I've *never* seen it work--more often it will just give away the identity of Merlin (if you are Merlin) or exclude you from consideration (if you're not). You may think you've disqualified yourself from the Merlin running so it doesn't matter—maybe you *have* disqualified yourself, but memory and perception are funny things, and Evil often misremembers events that happened during the game. The more ambiguity that can remain at the end of the game, the better the chance Merlin has for survival.

Team Evil: Basic Strategy

As has been mentioned earlier in the guide, Evil approaches the game very differently from Good. Unless you're playing with Oberon, all of the Evil players know each other at the beginning of each game. You won't immediately know which character card each of your teammates has, but you'll still know who your teammates are.

In an idealized game of Avalon with three Evil players (Morgana, Mordred, and the Assassin) each player will be responsible for throwing one fail. If all goes according to plan (it never does), the Assassin will throw the first fail early in the game, Morgana will throw the second in the mid-game, and Mordred will throw the final fail late in the game. A good Mordred can often generate two fails for the Evil team, but Evil is usually better off if Morgana and the Assassin can collectively generate two fails (and avoid throwing shade on Mordred). If this happens, the Evil team is *well* on the way to victory.

As Evil, it's important not to forget about the fourth mission: for games of seven or more players, Evil needs to throw *two fails* to fail the fourth mission. This can be quite tricky, though it can be somewhat easier if Excalibur is in play (discussed later). During the first three missions, whenever you're deciding whether or not to throw a fail, pay attention to whether the fourth mission has the potential to give Blue its third victory; it's generally better to risk outing yourself by throwing a fail than to put Blue in a position where succeeding on the two-fail mission wins them the game. It can be tough for Red to get two evil players on the two fail mission, and even if they do, those two players will face a high level of scrutiny if there is a fifth mission.

Also, at the risk of pointing out the obvious: *if you are the only Bad guy on the fourth mission, don't throw the fail*. If possible, let Blue think they've found a Good team--and let them send the same team (with you on it!) on the final mission. If Oberon is in the game or Excalibur is in play, deciding whether or

not to throw a fail on the fourth mission is trickier; it's pretty context dependent, so I'll leave you to figure that one out as you go along.

An important thing to realize going into the game: although Evil players are working together from the start, "working together" doesn't necessarily indicate a collegial relationship among the players. Nothing looks more suspicious to Blue than certain players supporting each other early in the game, so a certain amount of bickering among the Evil players is pretty standard. Furthermore, it is relatively common for Morgana or Mordred to throw the Assassin under the bus relatively early in the game, and Mordred will often accuse Morgana of being Evil later in the game. If you're outed as Evil, the last thing you want to do is accidentally take another of your Evil teammates down with you; in this context infighting helps Evil players maintain their "credibility," and it helps keep the Blue team guessing well into the game.

However, in order to work together and be successful, the Evil players need to be able to figure out which character card each of their teammates has, then play the game accordingly. If Mordred is outed early in the game (e.g. if Morgana thought he was the Assassin and threw him under the bus), it can be very bad news for the Evil team. As an aside, mouthing your character's name or otherwise giving away your identity during the reading at the beginning of the game is **not** ethical; the reading is external to the game and players shouldn't be using it as an opportunity to share additional information (and it's unfair to take advantage of a conscientious reader who provides ample time for the Evil reveal).

As a starting point, you should think of the Evil players as follows: the Assassin is the most "obvious" Bad guy, and rarely plays a "deep" game. She will usually get outed as Evil very quickly; the Assassin has done her job well if she can generate a single fail early in the game, then subsequently avoids "outing" her Evil teammates. Morgana plays at an intermediate level of depth; she'll throw the Assassin under the bus if needed to maintain her own cover, and rarely throws a fail on the first mission. She doesn't necessarily need to fool Percy (though it's pretty satisfying when she does)--instead her main goal is to keep him guessing for as long as possible. The longer it takes Percy to figure out the identity of Merlin, the better the chance Evil has at winning. Mordred should play as the deepest of the Evil players. Although there are certainly exceptions (as will be discussed in Mordred's section, below), in most cases he's not going to even think about throwing a fail until about the third mission. His Evil teammates should do everything they can to avoid throwing any suspicion on Mordred--but Mordred may throw one or both of them under the bus as the game progresses in order to preserve his own cover.

When you've played the game with the same people many times, you may be able to figure out a player's identity based on how the player is acting or carrying him/herself. When you're newer, it can be a bit trickier to quickly identify your teammates. In general, Mordred will be acting exactly like Generic Blue, but both Morgana and the Assassin may be deviating from that pattern slightly. Morgana will be voting much more cautiously than the Assassin; she tends to be voting "no" a lot on missions (particularly the missions the Assassin is on). She will probably be playing a little more quietly than the assassin (imitating Merlin's desire to "blend in"), and may be trying to give guidance on team selection. The Assassin is more likely than other Evil players to vote "yes" off-mission (if one of the other Evil teammates is on the team), and the Assassin is most likely to be accused as Evil early in the game. The Assassin is also more likely to sow chaos than either of the other players--so if one of your teammates is throwing accusations around left and right, that one is probably the Assassin. Finally, Mordred is most likely to be put on teams. If one of your Evil teammates keeps going on missions and no one is suspicious, that one is probably Mordred.

All of that said, there are a couple of small ways in which Evil will be departing from the Generic Blue mold. Most importantly, Evil benefits from there being chaos in the game, so should try to (subtly) sow chaos. The more noise, confusion, and accusations that are flying around the table, the better--if Good

players stop and think and the game is otherwise calm, it's often relatively easy to work out the allegiances of the characters. It's a lot better for Evil if Good can't quite get their feet on solid ground. With that in mind, Evil players should be ready to accuse Good players, <u>especially when they look suspicious</u>--this may be an off-mission affirmative vote, being on a failed mission, looking shifty, or misspeaking (once as Good I accidentally said "I can only throw fails!" Evil had a <u>field day</u> with that one).

That said, throwing around wild accusations can be a big giveaway that you are Evil--so make accusations, but be careful not to go too far. And if you do make accusations, always have some plausible theory to support your accusation. Making accusations without any support can make you look Evil: you can be more persuasive if you appear to gather evidence as you go, either citing recent events to support your theory, or ungrudgingly recognizing contrary evidence and admitting that you have become less certain on the point you made before. Be careful as well when you decide whom to accuse – take into account both how persuasive that person is, and try to get a "feel" for the table. If you attack an effective advocate, or a player with a lot of support at the table, you may end up doing much more harm than good for your team.

Finally--as will be discussed more in each Evil character's section--<u>all the Evil players should be looking for Merlin</u>. The Assassin makes the final call on who to assassinate, but there is always a group discussion and there is often a consensus. Mordred is often in the best position to identify Merlin (and the Assassin may be in the *worst* position to identify him), but it will be context dependent, and all Bad guys should have their eyes open.

Two (or More) Evil Players on a Mission, and Avoiding the Double Fail

When I first started playing Avalon, one of the things I dreaded most was the prospect of a "double fail." As the name might suggest, a double fail happens when two Evil players go on a mission and *both of them* throw fails. Unless it's the fourth mission (which requires two fails in larger games), a double fail can be pretty damaging to the Evil team. For example: in an eight player game, the first mission has three players. If two fails come up on that mission, everyone knows that of the remaining five players, there can only be a *maximum* of one Bad player. This significantly increases Good's chances of finding a Good team before Evil can generate two more fails, and makes it impossible for Evil to generate two fails on the fourth mission (unless Excalibur is in play). Furthermore, once a double fail has happened, Merlin can play very inconspicuously, forcing Evil to guess at the assassination stage.

Because of this fear, when I first started playing Avalon I would avoid putting two Bad players on a team *at all costs*. But this really isn't a good way to go about doing things. First, it can cast suspicion on your teammates, if you're always avoiding them or taking them off teams. Although there are times you *want* to accuse them, you don't want to risk doing so inadvertently, or doing so before it would be useful. More importantly, it can be *extremely* useful to have more than one Evil player on a team, as long as you can coordinate who throws the fail. As is discussed earlier in the guide, it's generally a bad idea for Blue to switch out the entire team if there is a failed mission. The more Evil players on the failed mission, the more likely that one of them will remain on the following mission, and the more confused Good will be if the next mission fails as well.

Of course, this only works if there is a reasonably good chance Evil can coordinate to throw just one fail on the first mission. Fortunately, unless Oberon is in the game (he will be discussed below), double fails are relatively easy to avoid.

The default is that if there are two Bad guys on the team, the Assassin throws the fail before either of the other two, and Morgana throws it over Mordred. This makes things easy for the Assassin and

Mordred: the Assassin "always" throws the fail, and Mordred "never" throws it. Morgana is in a bit of a trickier position--if it's early in the game she may not know the identities of the other two players. If in doubt, it's usually better for her to throw the success. If the Assassin is on the team, she will likely throw the fail, putting Evil on the path to victory. If the other player *doesn't* throw the fail, that might be even better. Morgana now knows that the other player is *probably* Mordred, and Morgana is looking pretty Good in the eyes of Percival. The combination of Percival's trust and Mordred's presence on the team gives her the opportunity to *really* mess up the game, in a way that may be almost impossible for Good to rectify.

All of that said, actual game play can be much trickier than the idealized presentation just described. When two Evil players are on a team and neither throws the fail, you never *really* know why. It could be because the two Evil players were Morgana and Mordred, or it may be because one of the Evil players was *really* afraid of the double fail and didn't throw the fail card (even though he or she should have). If the same mission is proposed again, if you're the Assassin or Morgana I would just recommend throwing the fail and taking your chances. Especially if the mission has four or five players, a double fail isn't necessarily a death sentence for the Evil team. Besides, risking the double fail is much better than letting Good win because Evil couldn't coordinate. In my group of players, double fails have become such an anathema that I've seen more games won by Good because *neither Evil player threw the fail* than I have seen double fails come up. Some of that is because we typically play with Excalibur (introducing another layer of mind games), but some of it is due to genuine fear of the double fail.

It's also worth noting that it can be important to take into account player personalities and reputations if you're playing with a semi-stable group. Some players will have a reputation for being really aggressive, while others will be known for "slow-playing" and almost never throwing fails. If a really aggressive player is on a team with someone who almost never throws fails, then the aggressive player should probably throw the fail, regardless of character card. That said, how to deal with reputation really depends on the customs the group develops.

The "who throws the fail" question gets even more complicated if you're not playing with Mordred--if, for example, you're playing with Morgana, the Assassin, and Generic Red. For all practical purposes, the Assassin and Generic Red are identical characters. At that point, it becomes a little bit of a coin toss to avoid the double-fail. My group usually plays that the Assassin should throw the fail over Generic Red, though this only helps if you've figured out the identity of Morgana. Otherwise, it's best to decide based on the players' reputations (and keep your fingers crossed that only one fail will appear).

Sometimes Evil players will try to "table talk" to coordinate. For instance, the Evil player who gets his or her cards first will put them in immediately and say "here is my success," and "here is my fail" as they push their cards to the respective piles. Other times as they're putting in their cards, they'll say something like "I can only throw successes, so here's my success." Usually if you hear your Evil teammate saying something like that, it means "I threw a success, you'd better throw the fail." Although table-talk can certainly be effective, I'm generally a bit against it. Part of the problem is that other players will be listening for statements like these, and will identify it for the table-talk that it is. Part of the problem is that it may not be accurate--if someone is accusing your teammate of being Evil, your teammate pretty much *has to* say that he/she threw the success, regardless of whether or not it's true. Finally, waiting for there to be table talk then voting accordingly can look really suspicious--Good players have no reason to delay putting their votes in.

That's actually an important point to make more broadly: if you ever don't know whether to throw the fail, what you *can't* do is get stuck or pause. For new players, taking a lot of time to put their votes in can be an instant giveaway that the player is Evil. To avoid this problem, I always follow the same pattern--

when I get my votes, I shuffle-shuffle-shuffle-shuffle, then put my vote in with my right hand. If I don't know what to vote by the time I get to the fourth shuffle, I put in whichever card is in my right hand at the time. Even if there is a double fail, if you looked completely unconcerned when you put your vote in you might be able to convince others that you were one of the Good players.

Assassin/Generic Red

For all intents and purposes, the Assassin and Generic Red are the same character to play--we'll discuss assassination a bit at the end of this section, but otherwise the two are played the same and are discussed together.

The Assassin is the easiest of the Evil characters to play, but she's also a frustrating character (and not one I particularly enjoy). More than any other character, it's pretty common for the Assassin to be outed very early in the game--Merlin will be trying to speak against her and Percy won't come to her rescue (as he sometimes will for Morgana). The Assassin's own team won't hesitate to accuse her either, and Mordred and Morgana will often throw her under the bus the first chance they get.

For these reasons, the Assassin more than the other Evil characters, may want to vote "approve" off-mission to make a Bad mission go. You *don't* want to vote "approve" for every mission that one of your Evil teammates is on--you run a very high risk of outing them if you do so. However, a well-timed "approve" (especially if you can justify your off-mission vote) can mean a Bad mission gets sent. Since the Assassin is often outed so early anyway, voting a little bit suspiciously may do more good than harm.

As the Assassin, you've done your job well if you can get on an early mission (the first or second) and throw the fail. If you can get on a later mission and throw another fail, that's just icing on the cake. In my mind, the Assassin (unlike Morgana and Mordred) should usually throw a fail on the first mission. I don't know how many times as the Assassin I've chosen not to throw a fail on the first mission, only to be outed and not go on another mission for the rest of the game anyway. It's pretty common for this to happen, and throwing the fail while you have the chance is usually well worth it. You may be able to throw suspicion on one of the other players who went on the mission with you, and when the team gets shuffled, Morgana or Mordred may be added.

That said, there are a few situations in which you may not want to throw the fail on the first mission. First, if you're playing with a small group and the first mission has just two players, throwing the fail is a risky move. It's not necessarily a *bad* move, but it's one that you should only attempt *if you think there is a good chance that you can take the other player down with you.* Don't try it with five or six until you're much more comfortable with the game (I've seen it work, but it's tricky), but with seven it can be a good play. Remember, there are three Bad guys in a seven-person game. Say you go on the first mission with a Good player, and throw the fail. Not only is the Red team up by a victory, but now Blue is in a tricky position. If Blue can't figure out which person on the first mission threw the fail, they will likely avoid putting either member of the first mission on a team. That leaves five players to select from (for a three player mission), and two of your Evil teammates still roam free. Either Blue picks a perfect mission (and the game is over for Evil), or one of your teammates gets on the team--and Red is almost guaranteed the victory.

The second time you may not want to throw the fail on the first mission is if Morgana or Mordred are on the mission with you--*especially* if one of them picked the team. Both of them are trying to look Good in the beginning of the game: picking a Bad team, or even being on a Bad team, can throw a lot of

suspicion their way. Of course, by not throwing the fail you risk causing a double fail on the second mission (if both of you remain on the team), so that is something to consider as well.

Fair warning--I tend to be a fairly aggressive player, so take this advice with a grain of salt. Many players I play with won't throw the fail on the first mission--*ever.* I think this is a mistake: being up by one mission at the beginning of the game is too powerful an advantage for Red to dismiss so lightly. Not only are you quantifiably ahead in the game, but the psychological impact on Blue can also be significant. As Blue, it feels *terrible* to be down by one in the very beginning--it's a feeling that Red would be wise to exploit. Moreover, being down at the start of the game can make Merlin or Percival panic, giving you valuable clues that may allow you to correctly assassinate Merlin, even if Blue does manage to succeed three missions.

Many players hesitate to throw the fail on the first mission because they don't want to be outed as Evil. I'm not going to lie: being outed early in the game stinks, but it's by no means guaranteed that you *will* be outed if you throw an early fail. Even if you are, you can still have a bit of fun with it. If you're outed as Evil--first, don't immediately give up. I see this happen *so often*, but if you don't give up a bit of confusion later in the game can be a perfect opportunity to get back on the team. Act annoyed that you've been wrongly accused, and frustrated. Complain that the Good players are just hurting themselves by not putting you on the team, and they'll see--when the next mission fails--that they took the wrong person off the team. A lot of it is being able to muster up the correct amount of frustration--I've had people put me back on teams because I've been getting "too mad" to be Evil. Suckers!

That said, there are times when discretion is the better part of valor, and you really *have* been outed. Sometimes it's just bad luck--the math works against you, or someone used Excalibur to turn your fail into a success. I've sometimes cracked under the pressure of being <u>Mordred for the Nth consecutive game</u> (but *that* is a discussion for later). Note that being Ladied, if you're early in the "Lady-chain," is <u>not</u> insurmountable. Because no one can give the Lady back to the person who started with her, just keep arguing that the person who gave you the Lady is Evil and lied about you. Continue to accuse that person for the entire game (and refuse to put him or her on your teams),[10] and it might just work. Even you aren't entirely convincing, you may be able to throw enough suspicion on that player to keep him or her off the next mission.

However, if you *have* been outed beyond a reasonable doubt, have fun with it. Use it as an excuse to go completely wild sowing chaos. Accuse random people of being Evil, or conspicuously support one or two random players. I like to pick a Blue player or two and *vote yes for every mission they're on*. Sometimes the other players will assume they're my Evil teammates. Sometimes I'll seem to vote completely randomly (keeping an eye out for "Bad" teams that might actually pass with my "yes" vote). Sometimes it makes sense to vote to support every mission, Good and Bad, so that Blue has fewer chances to test the waters before a mission goes. If Blue players see you doing this, they may be afraid of voting "yes" off-mission to support a good team. On other occasions, you might want to vote to oppose every mission (perhaps insisting that you will not support any mission without you on it), so that Blue has a more difficult time getting a mission to go. At this point it's all mind games, and you might be able to

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[10] This is a common mistake for Evil players, especially when they're first starting out. When <u>you</u> were the one to throw the fail, it can be easy to lose track of who you've been accusing. Especially in the case of the Lady, make sure you never select that player for one of your teams!

cast suspicion on a Blue player or two. Just make sure to not out your teammates, by either blatantly supporting them[11] _or_ being blatantly in opposition to them.

Assassination: As the Assassin, the one exciting thing you get to do is be the final arbiter of Merlin's fate. Never assassinate without consulting your teammates--as will be discussed in their respective sections, Morgana and Mordred (especially) are often in a better position to identify Merlin than you are. They might also have picked up on something you missed, or just gotten a particularly good read on one of the players. Of course, both Mordred and Morgana have their own (complex!) tasks to perform, so you can't shirk your Merlin-hunting duties!

You should be working to identify Merlin from the start of the game--in general, it's much better to notice odd things as you go along than to try to recreate missions or votes at the end. Sometimes it works, but it's really easy to misremember a detail or two, steering the discussion in the wrong direction. Instead, throughout the game pay attention to players who:

- Wouldn't put you on a team
- Took you off a team that previous players had proposed--particularly without reason or early in the game
- Verbally supported you but wouldn't put you on their team
- Took a similar dislike to Morgana (but may have trusted Mordred)
- Voted perfectly--or nearly so (by voting against missions with you or Morgana on them)
- Was leading the Blue team
- Acted unusual throughout the game--much louder or quieter than is typical for that player

These are all (possible) giveaways for Merlin. Another thing to be on the lookout for is a player who trusted Morgana throughout part of the game, then _stopped_ trusting her at a certain point. This is _probably_ Percy. If you can figure out who he started trusting once he stopped paying attention to Morgana, you've likely found your Merlin.

Often the most difficult determination will be between Merlin and Percy. Both characters seemed to have extra knowledge--but it can be really difficult to determine who was leading (Merlin) and who was following (Percy). When in doubt, if you have nothing else to go on, the louder one was probably Percy.

Finally, don't discount the "instinct" factor. I've talked myself _out_ of assassinating the correct Merlin much more often than the reverse. Sometimes you just get a read on someone; don't be afraid to trust that instinct.

Morgana

Ok: full disclosure. I'm a _terrible_ Morgana. It's a rare game when I can really play her well—so I got quite a bit of help on this section from a couple players who are fantastic Morganas. First off, before we get started I want to emphasize that Morgana is a tricky character. She has the largest number of objectives

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[11] Though there are always exceptions. As an example, in one game in which the Assassin was definitively outed with the Lady, she gave it to Morgana and declared her good. Morgana exploded, declaring that the Assassin was trying to contaminate her. Other players assumed that this was actually what the Assassin was trying to do, and trusted Morgana until it was too late.

and responsibilities of any character, and a big part of her game depends on what other players (namely Percival and Merlin) do. The combination of a large number of objectives, and necessary responsiveness to the actions of others, can be very difficult for new players (and experienced ones, too).

If you are new to the game and feel overwhelmed, just play her like you would play a generic Evil character—your team will be at a little bit of a disadvantage, but probably not so large a one as you might think. Like Percival, Morgana can really influence the outcome of the game—she can be almost solely responsible for winning the game, or can tank Evil's chances all by herself. New players sometimes try to do too much with Morgana, and it can really backfire—I've seen games in which Morgana has not only instantly outed herself, but also managed to out the Assassin or Mordred at the same time. When you're first learning the game and playing Morgana, if you just try to look a bit ambiguous early in the game (so it's not clear that you're *not* Merlin), and maybe throw a fail in the mid-game, you'll be off to a good start.

Once you're ready to start tackling Morgana in greater depth, well, be ready to wear many hats. First, keep in mind that Morgana should be doing all the jobs that the other Evil players are doing: looking Good and going on missions, casting doubt on Good players, figuring out which of her teammates is the Assassin versus Mordred, identifying Merlin, etc. Because she's somewhere between the Assassin and Mordred in terms of aggressiveness, figuring out when to hide and when to throw the fail can be tricky, and largely rests on experience to get "right." To make matters worse, she also has a unique job—identifying and deceiving Percival.

Although all Evil players have an incentive to find Percival (as a means to find Merlin), Morgana has a particular incentive to identify him. If she can identify him she may be able to use that knowledge to convince him that she is the real Merlin—or, failing that, Percival may inadvertently give away Merlin's identity. As Morgana, if you have the sense that a Blue player is playing *particularly* close attention to your votes at the beginning of the game, or is particularly solicitous of your opinion, you may have found Percival.

Regardless of whether Morgana can identify Percival, she should still be trying to look like Merlin. Her job isn't necessarily to *fool* Percy, instead she should try to keep him guessing. The longer it takes for him identify Merlin with certainty, the more opportunity Evil has to confuse Good. As Morgana, if you can confuse Percy through about the third mission you've done pretty well, and even experienced players can't expect to fool Percival the entire game. In fact, you probably *don't* want to fool him the entire game anyway—sooner or later you need to start getting fails for your team: if Morgana goes on all the missions, identifies the Bad guys, and throws successes, as far as Percy's concerned, she *might as well be Merlin*. You laugh, but I've seen Morgana win the game for Good by doing this far too many times.

But looking like Merlin—who is in turn trying to look like generic Blue—isn't an easy task. In general, I recommend playing a fairly quiet Morgana, but then again, I'm a quiet-ish Merlin too. When you're playing Morgana, think: how do you play generic Blue? Use that as a baseline. I've seen Morgana out herself *a lot* by being too vocal. If a player calls out Morgana for acting different from usual, I've often seen her try to explain away her sudden change of behavior with statements like "I only act like that when I don't have information."   A Blue player (Merlin or otherwise) would almost never be that obvious, so Morgana shouldn't either.

In terms of more quantitative behavior, Morgana can keep Percival confused both through the way she votes and the way she selects teams. Obviously the biggest giveaway to Percy is if Morgana puts Merlin on her team and votes for it. Of course (as is discussed in the Merlin section above), it is not uncommon

for Merlin to hide by putting Evil players on his team—but as a baseline, voting in favor of the "other" Merlin-suspect can be a big tell. In this regard Morgana is at an information disadvantage to Merlin, and there really isn't much she can do to combat it. Sometimes by pure bad luck, Morgana will support Merlin right away and out herself. It's a bummer, but it's a part of the game (and *doesn't* necessarily mean you made a mistake). Just shake it off and don't let it get to you the next time you play Morgana.

Sometimes to avoid voting for Merlin, Morgana will vote no on every proposed mission. This typically doesn't work very well; because Merlin will be looking for Good teams, he *will* vote yes sometimes (especially if he is on the team). It is a giveaway to Percy if one of his Merlin suspects votes no on every mission. Morgana still wants to vote no a lot, but she can't vote no on every mission. So, sooner or later (and by that I mean sooner), Morgana is going to have to take a leap of faith. She needs to look like she has information. So, Morgana has to support *some* players.

Remember, although Morgana doesn't know who Merlin is, she does know two players who definitely are not Merlin—her two Evil teammates. It's often a good idea for Morgana to put one (or both!) of her Evil teammates on her team—after all, she was never going to fool Merlin, and Percival doesn't know the difference, at least until a mission fails. Keep in mind though, putting your Evil teammates on your team can be a bit of a risky move.

If Morgana puts an Evil teammate on her team and the team goes, she should throw the success and see what happens. If the mission succeeds—great. Morgana is well on her way to messing with Percy and she's likely identified Mordred. Both Morgana and Mordred receive a credibility boost from being on a successful team, and it becomes much more difficult for Merlin to change up the team without outing himself. Furthermore, when it becomes time to throw the fail, it is likely that one of the Evil players (at least) will remain on the team after the team is shuffled.

If Morgana picks a team and it fails, it's a decidedly less-good situation, but it's not terrible: Evil is up a Red chip and Morgana has identified the Assassin almost without doubt. It does look bad for Morgana if the first mission she picks fails, but remember if you're playing with Mordred, Merlin doesn't have perfect knowledge. So act surprised and frustrated if the mission fails, and you still may be able to string Percy along for a bit longer.

Another common move for Morgana is to pick a couple of Good players in the game and avoid them. Ideally, Morgana will shun Merlin but not Percival—making Percy believe that Merlin is Morgana, and the other shunned player is the Assassin. If a player puts you on a team or trusts you early on in the game, pick them right back and put them on your team. That player probably isn't Merlin, and *even if that player is Merlin,* in Percy's eyes it's a wash and he still won't be able to differentiate between the two of you. You also might want to shun players who refused to put you on their teams. It may be random on their part, but it *could be* because they're Merlin. All else being equal, it's ok to pick randomly and hope for the best. The odds aren't actually that terrible that you'll correctly shun Merlin (50/50 in a seven player game). Besides, if the game goes poorly for Evil right away, it can be a good sign that Merlin is one of the players you put on your team.

As Morgana, deciding when you've lost Percy's trust, and when to start throwing fails, is *very* dependent on context. You may want to start throwing fails on the second mission, or you may want to wait until the fourth. This is probably the most difficult part about playing Morgana, but there isn't much advice to give—it just depends on what else is going on in the game. The only thing I can recommend is: pay attention. Morgana can quickly go from having a lot of cover (if she is trusted by Percy), to having the least cover of any Evil player (both Percy and Merlin know her), so the game can change for her very quickly.

When the game goes south for Morgana (as it almost certainly will), pay attention to exactly what was going on right at the time of the shift. Who did you put on your team? Who did you verbally support? Was someone recently Ladied? It's also important to take note of the player who is most vocal in their denouncement of you—if someone flipped from trusting you to not trusting you, that player is likely Percival. If you can figure out who that player *starts* trusting—then you may have found Merlin. So, once you are outed, don't give up. Instead, try to remember as much as you can about the surrounding circumstances; you may very well be able to piece together the identity of Percival or Merlin.

Mordred

Oh Mordred, how I love and loathe thee. I often wonder what I did in a past life to anger the Avalon gods. It must have been pretty serious, because they make me play him with a frequency that defies all odds. At one point, people in my group started *going into the game assuming I was Mordred*, until I demonstrated otherwise (I got really good at doing just that). It's gotten better as of late, but I have more experience with Mordred than I (or anyone else) should possess. I will be the first to admit that I struggle with Morgana, and sometimes Merlin and Percy as well. But Mordred? I got this. Follow my lead and you will be an awesome Mordred.

The first thing you need to do to play Mordred well is *embrace the Generic Blue*, at least for the first half of the game. When you're Mordred, *forget you even saw your teammates' faces*. Mordred is under-cover Evil and when you play him, play a game within a game. Just how Blue can you be? Don't *only* try to trick the others, trick *yourself* into believing you're Blue. It sounds silly, but trust me--it works.

In the first part of the game, do everything almost exactly the same as when you're Generic Blue. Try to deduce the identities of the Evil players (and don't hesitate to throw your teammates under the bus if they look suspicious). Support anyone who seems to be making sense. Try to provide "cover" for Merlin by accusing other players, and seeing what sticks. When you're picking teams, pick the people who are acting the most trustworthy. If that's one of your Evil teammates, then that's great. If not--oh well, they're not going to go on your team. In most situations, you don't want to even think about throwing the fail until about the third mission (with some exceptions, discussed below). Throughout the early part of the game you want to build up as much credibility in the eyes of Good as you possibly can--so that if it comes down to you or one other player at the end of the game (which happens with relatively high frequency), it's you.

Admittedly, the above instructions are *just a little bit* oversimplified, and there are plenty of nuances and exceptions. But those instructions form the foundation for playing Mordred, and in many games that foundation (with little or no deviation) will lead you to success.

Mordred is a "late-game" player, and as Mordred it's generally ok if you don't go on early missions. When I play him, I am pretty content to sit on the sidelines, at least until after a mission or two has failed. Early in the game, it is not uncommon for Morgana or the Assassin to intentionally put Mordred on the team--this can be a good play, but it can also throw suspicion on Mordred when the mission fails. If Morgana or the Assassin puts me on a team I'll often vote against it. Voting against it makes the mission less likely to be approved (and my reputation will remain unblemished). If the mission *is* approved--even better. After the mission fails, it makes my suspicion of the team appear vindicated, and I'm more likely to be put on the next mission. Of course, it's important not to appear to have *too much* information. Percy <u>knows for a fact</u> that if you're Good you don't have any knowledge. If you appear to

know too much, you risk outing yourself in Percy's eyes. But a subtle suspicion of a Bad mission can go a long way toward earning Blue's trust.

Don't hesitate to throw your evil teammates under the bus, but *do* look for opportunities to improve their credibility. If Morgana is doing a particularly good job leading the Blue team, then by all means pretend to support her as well. It will make it all the better for you after she throws the fail--and you turn on her, angry because she betrayed you.

Remember, Mordred is unique in his anonymity, and he is the only Evil player who has a good chance of making it to the end of the game with his reputation unscathed. Because of that, it's generally not a good idea as Mordred to throw the fail early in the game. First, as Mordred you just don't want to go on a failed mission until you have to. You never *really* know who will be taken off the team, and it's just best not to risk damaging your "Good" status. Second, missions at the beginning of the game have fewer players--if you're playing the long game (as you usually are as Mordred), it's *much* better to throw the fail if you're one-of-four than one-of-three. Finally, when you throw the fail, especially on a small team, you are vulnerable to bad luck. If you go on a three player mission with Merlin and Percy and throw the fail, as long as Percy is sure of Merlin's identity he will know with absolute certainty that you're Evil, and will work to make sure you never go on a mission again (though if this happens, you can be pretty sure Merlin was on the mission you failed, which may help you identify Merlin during assassination).

That said, exactly when you throw your first fail card as Mordred depends on how the two teams are doing. Although Mordred should be *prepared* to slow-play and hide until the end of the game, it doesn't mean he should *always* take this approach--and in fact, even as Mordred you should be looking for opportunities to bring the game to a quick victory for Red. Mordred should be cognizant that, as the game progresses, more and more players will be "proven" Good. This happens when a player has a chance to end the game *and doesn't do so.* This will begin to happen with frequency after Evil has won two victories: if the mission selection makes it to the hammer and the hammer picks a Good team, he or she <u>must</u> be Good. Players will be proven Good even more quickly when Excalibur is in play--a player who has Excalibur (and lets the mission to succeed) after Evil has two victories is guaranteed to be Good as well. So Mordred *does* have to worry about getting outed through process of elimination. I have seen any number of games come down to mission five--two Bad guys have been outed and three Good guys proven Good--and it comes down to a 50/50 chance of Mordred being put on the team. So if you have a chance to get on an earlier mission (and fail it)--sometimes it's best to take the opportunity. If Excalibur is in play and you are afraid of having your fail changed into a success--it's worth considering the likelihood that you'll get put on the final mission, even if you decide not to throw the fail.

There are also times when Mordred can't (or really shouldn't) slow-play. As I've said throughout my discussion of Evil, ideally the Assassin and/or Morgana will be responsible for generating fails early in the game. But sometimes that doesn't happen--perhaps a suspicious vote by one (or both) will prevent them from going on missions, or sometimes it's just bad luck. In this case the game can snowball *really quickly,* and Evil will lose before they know what hit them (and they will have no idea of Merlin's identity, either). If Mordred has a really strong sense that the game is going south for Evil, he needs to throw the fail as early as possible--this can be the second mission, *or even the first*, in special circumstances. If Mordred waits to throw the fail until the third mission he's pretty much given Good the game--the odds that Evil will survive the fourth mission (requiring two fails) are slim. More broadly stated: <u>Evil never wants to let Good have two victories going into the fourth mission</u>.

By throwing the fail early, Mordred may very well out himself, but hopefully he will cause enough confusion that one (or both) of his teammates will be back in the game. Keep in mind that Mordred can often generate two fails for the Evil team, but he can *rarely* generate three. It's certainly possible, but

it's not something you can count on. So if Mordred feels that he is in a position in which he needs to throw all three fails to win the game--he should throw the fail as soon as possible and hope the resulting shuffle will benefit team Evil.

Regarding the endgame--I discussed this in the Merlin section, and will mention it again here. Mordred is in the best position to identify Merlin, and should always be trying to find him. In one part, it's a weird quirk of perception--although Mordred is seeing the same events as the Assassin and Morgana, he is often better able to make sense of them, probably because he is one step removed. From the perspective of Morgana or the Assassin--if someone accuses them of being Evil, it instantly becomes a fight of credibility, and Morgana or the Assassin will put much more effort into defending themselves than into tracing the accusation back to its source. But perhaps more importantly, Mordred knows from the start of the game that both of his teammates are "known" to Merlin. If Morgana sees a Blue player trust one of her teammates, she can't rule that player out as Merlin, because that teammate might be Mordred. The same is true for the Assassin. On the other hand, if Mordred sees a player trust *either* of his teammates, that player is relatively unlikely to be Merlin.

As Mordred, if you see someone throwing shade on your teammates--especially when they haven't done anything suspicious--follow up with that person. Ask them what they're thinking and pretend to be their friend. You might have found either Merlin or Percy; if you think you have, try to get them to trust you--they might give something away.

As a final note--a lot of my discussion of Mordred sounds rather supercilious. As I have described him, Mordred tricks Blue with impunity and has no qualms about throwing his Evil teammates under the bus. While there are limits as to just how much shade you throw on your teammates (you *do* need them, after all), never forget: in the vocabulary of the game, your teammates are literally your minions. And with good reason: Mordred is the strongest of the Evil players, by a pretty decent margin. So if you're in a situation where either *you* are credible, or one of your teammates is--it's you. If your teammates are experienced players, they will be entirely aware of that dynamic, and won't fault you in the slightest for protecting yourself and throwing shade on them.

Oberon

Oberon is a weird character. He can be a lot of fun to play or he can completely stink--it just depends on the specific game. Oberon should be working on two primary objectives: (1) sow chaos; (2) get on an early mission and throw a fail--if Oberon gets on a mission, he should virtually always throw a fail.[12] His secondary objectives are to identify and aid his Evil teammates (and let them know who he is), and to try to identify Merlin.

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[12] This is sort of the "standard" strategy for Oberon. There is an alternate strategy for him that can be *really* fun, though I wouldn't recommend it if you're new to the game. As Oberon, it can be *fantastic* to go on missions--and refuse to throw the fail. This only works if you're lucky enough to go on an early mission, then fortunate enough to remain there. Over the course of the game Merlin will get more and more agitated as you remain on the team--he *knows* you're bad, but if you don't throw the fail, he can't find any way to throw shade on you. Over time, Merlin will often become less cautious, eventually taking you off the team (or speaking against you) for no reason whatsoever. Remember, unlike the other evil players, as Oberon, Merlin is the only player in the game who knows anything about you. So if one player speaks against you, that player is likely to be Merlin.

This is *risky*. The odds of getting on a mission as Oberon, then *remaining* on the team are relatively low. But if you can pull it off, it's a pretty sweet victory for Red.
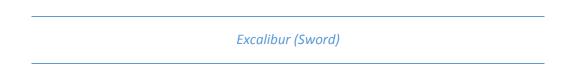
Oberon is unique in that <u>no one will be supporting him</u>: all other players in the game have *at least* one player who might lend them support (take a second to think it through!). The only person who knows anything about Oberon is Merlin--who will be working against him. As such, it's pretty common for Oberon to be soundly ignored throughout the game, and it can be really difficult for him to go on missions.

But oh, if you get lucky enough to go on a mission as Oberon, you'll have so much fun! Even if Excalibur and Lady are in play, you almost always want to throw the fail as Oberon. First, it's worth the risk of being discovered to let your teammates know who/where you are. Second, Oberon is by far the weakest of the Evil players--so if you can generate one fail as Oberon, you've given more help to the Evil team than they should expect.

Many players are worried about the double fail as Oberon--after all, Oberon doesn't know whether there is another Evil player on the team. This isn't something to worry about too much. First, remember that Mordred and Morgana rarely throw fails on the first mission (and <u>especially</u> won't do it if Oberon is in the game). So the concern isn't that there is *any other Evil playe*r on the team; the concern is that the *Assassin* is on the team. Because Oberon is rarely used in small games, it's relatively unlikely that he will be put on the same team as the Assassin on the first mission. Furthermore, Oberon is usually used in ten-player games, so there are a total of four Bad guys. *Even if* Oberon and the Assassin are on the same team and both throw fails--there are still two more Bad guys that can carry the torch for team Evil.

In part because it's difficult for him to get on missions, Oberon should be Loki-esque in his behavior. He should accuse random players of being Evil, and be more sweeping with who he is willing to throw under the bus. It's not a bad idea for him to vote off-mission sometimes (if he thinks one of his teammates might be on the team). Yes--Oberon can help the Evil team by throwing a fail, but his greater service to the Evil team is to prevent the Blue team from getting its bearings.

When it comes time to assassinate Merlin, <u>Oberon cannot flip over his card.</u> It may be worth it to wait for a few seconds to see if anyone else claims to be Oberon--usually that person knows they disqualified themselves as Merlin at some point in the game, and wants to confuse Evil. Once you have seen whether anyone else is going to claim to be Oberon, jump in with your identity. Even if you don't have any insight, you want to cut down the pool of Merlin suspects as much as possible (though it's *very rare* that Oberon will even be *considered* as Merlin. If Oberon gets Assassinated, it's a sign that everyone needs to go home and get some sleep). However, it's not uncommon for Oberon to have a good read on Merlin: Merlin is the only player who knows Oberon, and no one will come to Oberon's defense if he is accused. For these reasons, Merlin's accusation against Oberon might be more memorable, helping team Evil identify him at the end.

Excalibur (Sword)

It's funny--Excalibur changes Avalon in pretty dramatic ways, and yet this section is a relatively small proportion of the guide. What Excalibur comes down to is mind games: will the Evil player throw the fail? Will the Good player use Excalibur?

Excalibur is more-or-less a neutral mechanic, though it might help Evil just a little bit. When Excalibur is *used*, it unquestionably helps Evil. I probably see four or five "Bad" swords for every good one. But

Excalibur changes the behavior of Evil players *significantly*, and when Excalibur is in play they are *much* less likely to throw fails. I've seen games where Evil players were on *all three missions*, but didn't throw a single fail. *That* is the power of Excalibur for Good.

What this means is if you're Good, sword sparingly. You want to sword just often enough that Evil players throw successes, but no more often than necessary to get them to do that. You also want to be a bit unpredictable with your use of Excalibur--you don't want to have a reputation as the person who *always* uses Excalibur, or *never* uses it. Not only will Evil use that knowledge to their advantage, but it also might betray that you have knowledge if you depart from your norm.

It's pretty common for players to refrain from using Excalibur on the first mission (it's pretty uncommon for Evil to throw the fail on the first mission, particularly when Excalibur is in play), then use Excalibur on the second mission. Of course, if Evil knows that's the general pattern, they will behave accordingly, so you do have to mix things up from time to time.

When you have Excalibur, put your vote in and wait until everyone else selects their vote before saying anything; you don't want to give anything away about what you're thinking until it's too late for the other players to change their minds. I like to ask both the players on and off the team what they think about swording. In general, it's not a bad idea to follow the guidance of the group; it's not uncommon that a majority of the players will be leaning one way or the other. If you're feeling particularly sadistic, you can threaten to sword someone--raise Excalibur above your head and fake like you're going to throw it at them. If they're Evil, they just might give something away--an Evil player who threw the fail has a lot to lose from being sworded.

Although it's hard to give specific guidance, there are a couple of things to be aware of: First, if the team was *very clearly Bad* (e.g. there was a lot of off-mission support early in the game), you probably don't want to use Excalibur. If you thought the team was clearly suspicious, the Bad guys most likely did too and probably threw successes in the hopes that you would use Excalibur and make the mission fail.

Second, if you feel confident that the mission will fail, then you should sword *even if* you don't know who to sword. Sure--the ideal outcome is that you will turn a fail into a success, but even if you sword incorrectly, two fails will appear and Good still learns something. They will know (1) that there was at least one Bad player on the team, and (2) that Bad player is *not* the person you sworded. As Good, it's much better to know *something* about the team, than to just know that one-of-four players on the mission threw the fail.

Third, if you're Merlin, and know Morgana or the Assassin is on the team, you want to be thinking of a couple of things. First, think about the personalities of the players: are they fairly risk-averse players, or do they tend to be more aggressive? If the latter, then you probably want to use Excalibur. *If* you sword one of the known Evil players, you have to be *pretty darn* sure that you have a good justification for doing so, and can explain your reasoning to avoid exposing yourself to Evil for later assassination. If you *don't* have a good reason to sword one of them, you may have to choose the "next best" option--that is, swording someone else on the team, causing there to be two fails and (hopefully) helping direct suspicion toward the correct player.

If you're Good and you sword incorrectly, and especially if you do so on the first mission or when Good is "behind" in the mission count, you're going to look Evil, Evil, Evil to the other players. But you're kind of stuck: sometimes if you *don't* sword and the mission fails, you will be accused of being Evil, too. If you make a mistake, there isn't much to do other than wait it out; usually if you're Good, sooner or later the other players will put you back on missions.

Finally, at the risk of pointing out the obvious (but in the interest of covering all the bases), if you're the player picking the mission, give Excalibur to the player you think is most likely to be Good. This could be the player who was most recently Ladied, or who has gone on the most successful missions. Failing that, try to give Excalibur to the player on the team who is most likely to use it correctly--some players just have a better knack for using it than others. If that player then causes the mission to fail, keep in mind that the player may very well have used Excalibur correctly--just done it for the opposite team.

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If you're Evil and Excalibur is in play, it can be a bit of a rough time. I've had my fail turned into a success on *the first mission*, and it stinks. At that point you're outed without a shred of doubt, *and* you didn't even get to make a mission fail.

But in spite of that risk, be bold my Evil Minions. Good players who have Excalibur often won't use it--they don't know who to sword, they don't want to cause the mission to fail, or they hope any Evil players on the team just threw successes. They may also be persuadable--if you threw the fail, be subtle, but encourage them not to sword. Even if Good swords, as long as they don't sword you, it's not too terrible. Though it's not ideal for two fail cards to appear, you may be able to fight your way out of it, especially on a mission with four players.

Remember: the power of Excalibur for Good is in how it changes Evil's behavior. When Excalibur is in play, you *do* need to be more cautious--but being too cautious loses a lot more games for Evil than does the direct use of Excalibur.

When you're on the mission and deciding whether or not to throw the fail, you should be thinking about several distinct things. First, you should be keeping in mind all the things you normally consider when you're Evil--are there other Evil players on the team, is Evil ahead or behind in the game, which character are you (and is it the right time for that character to throw the fail), and so forth. Second, you should be thinking: will the person with Excalibur use it? If you feel confident (for whatever reason) that the player will, then don't throw the fail--let Good mess things up for themselves. Finally, ask: will the person on the team sword *you*? If you're 50/50 on whether they will use Excalibur but are *sure* that if they sword, they will sword you, then it makes more sense to throw the success. If you're 50/50 on whether they're sword, but are almost positive that they don't suspect you, then it probably makes more sense to throw the fail.

Remember: more than any other time in the game, when Excalibur is in play, Evil players need to be careful not to hesitate too much before putting in their vote. It can be hard not to pause--but whatever you do (even if you have to pick a card at random), don't hesitate. It's too much of a giveaway of your allegiance if you do.

If you're Evil and have Excalibur, it's pretty good position to be in because you're *assured* of being able to generate the fail. If you do decide to make the mission fail though, you're not home free: because it's so easy to fail the mission when you have Excalibur, when the mission fails the other players will often suspect you disproportionately. So you have to generate the fail in the least suspicious way possible. *More often than not*, the "least suspicious way possible" is by throwing the fail yourself then choosing not to sword.

I generally advocate throwing the fail over swording for a couple of reasons: first, it generally looks less suspicious to refrain from swording--as mentioned above, Good rarely swords correctly, so swording often makes you look Evil. Secondly, by throwing the fail you guarantee Evil a Red token. If you decide not to throw the fail and plan to use Excalibur, you're sometimes put in a tough spot: if the group is

strongly against swording, you must either (a) not sword and let the mission succeed, or (b) ignore the group, use Excalibur, and look *really* suspicious.

Some players like to be clever, and *both* throw the fail and use Excalibur. I think it's generally a <u>bad idea</u> to do this, though on occasion it can absolutely *ruin* Good. It's a common enough diversion tactic that experienced players will be on the lookout for it, so it often causes more trouble than it's worth. But if you've already thrown the fail and the group is strongly encouraging you to sword, then it's a good idea to go along with it. After all, you can argue that you were right to sword (and the group was correct to encourage it), you just sworded the wrong person!

Finally, it's pretty awesome if there are two (or more) Evil players on the team, and one of them has Excalibur. This definitely falls into the category of "group convention," but in my mind what to do is *really* straightforward: <u>let the player with Excalibur decide whether, and how, to generate the fail.</u> So, if you're not the one with Excalibur, throw a success and let your teammate figure out what to do. Regardless of whether your teammate decides to throw the fail or use Excalibur, it is likely that at least one of you will come out of the mission looking pretty good. As an aside, I recommend ignoring the character cards in this scenario--after all, they're pretty irrelevant. If Mordred and the Assassin are both on the team, but Mordred (with Excalibur) throws the fail, it will look the same to everyone--including Merlin--as if the Assassin was the one who threw the fail.

I've heard Evil players argue all kinds of crazy things, like: "We should both throw the fail, then you can sword my fail and turn it into a success then *tell everyone* you messed up. When the cards are flipped, there will only be one fail." But you have to remember that from the outside, that complicated scenario looks exactly the same as if both of you threw successes and you *actually had* sworded the success into a fail--and the latter version is a lot easier to coordinate. So, definitely consider crazy gambits (sometimes they can really pay off), but don't get lured into a complex set of events just for the sake of complexity.

Lady of the Lake

The Lady of the Lake (Lady) is a tool for Good--although Evil can certainly use her to create chaos, on balance the Lady helps the Good team more than she hurts it. The Lady is best used when there are ten players, though it would be possible to use her with seven or eight. In my group, the player who will be the last to pick a team starts with the Lady—so, the allegiance of the first player to have the Lady is random.

The goal when using the Lady is to create a "chain" of Good players. The farther down the "chain" you go, the more likely a given player is to be Good—if the Lady can stay in the hands of Good for the entire game, by the fifth mission you may have a very good sense of the allegiance of three players. You still need to find two more Good players, but the Lady goes a long way when trying to create a passing team.

The biggest problem new players have is that they think the Lady tells the group more than she actually does, and make problematic assumptions accordingly. Remember—*the Lady tells you virtually nothing about the player who begins with her. Just because that player tells the truth about another player's allegiance <u>does not mean that the original player is Good.</u>*

Let's look at a couple of scenarios. Say Alice has the Lady at the beginning of the game, and Alice gives the Lady to Bill after the second mission:

- Scenario 1: Alice says Bill is Good. In this situation, we have several possibilities. Most straightforwardly, Alice could be Good and she is telling the truth about Bill. Alternatively, if Alice is Bad, we have two additional options. Alice could still be telling the truth about Bill (Bill really is Good). Or, Alice could be lying about Bill (both players are Bad). The only thing we know definitively is that <u>if Bill is Bad, then Alice is necessarily Bad as well</u> (a Good player would never lie about the allegiance of another player).
- Scenario 2: Alice says Bill is Bad. Alice could be Good and telling the truth. If Alice is Bad, she could either be lying about Bill (he is Good, and Alice is trying to cast doubt on him), or she could be *telling the truth about Bill* (she's throwing her Evil teammate under the bus). The only thing we know in this scenario is that <u>both players are not Good.</u>
  - New players will often make the assumption that if Alice says Bill is Bad, then the two players are necessarily on opposite teams. This is often true, but it is a *dangerous* assumption to make. Especially when there are a large number of Bad players in the game (as there are in games of ten), it is not uncommon for Evil to set up a false dichotomy. Both players are Bad, but they will spend the entire game fighting and trying to get Good players to choose *one or the other*.

Moving down the "Lady chain", let's say after the third mission Bill gives the Lady to Charlie.

- Scenario 1: Alice said Bill is Good. Bill gives the Lady to Charlie, and Bill says that Charlie is Good as well. Yay! Good is well on its way to finding some Good players—building up a chain of Good players is what the Lady is all about. We still may be unsure of Bill's allegiance, but <u>in order for Charlie to be Evil, Alice and Bill must **both** be Evil as well</u>.
- Scenario 2: Alice said Bill is Good. Bill gives the Lady to Charlie, and says Charlie is Evil. Bummer—at this point it's pretty darn likely that Charlie is Evil. In this scenario, <u>Charlie can only be Good if both Alice and Bill are Evil.</u>
- If, on the other hand Alice said Bill is Bad, we really don't know much about Charlie's allegiance. I'll leave you to work through the possibilities, but it's essentially a re-do of the "Alice ladies Bill" possibilities outlined above. A lot of it comes down to gut: do you trust Alice, do you trust Bill, or do you trust neither?

Finally, let's say after the fourth mission, Charlie gives the Lady to Dani.

- If Alice said Bill was Good, Bill said Charlie was Good, and Charlie says Dani is Good—well, either Evil has done a masterful job (and deserves the victory), or Dani is Good. The only way for Dani to be Evil in this scenario is if Alice, Bill, *and* Charlie were Evil. There are four Evil players in a ten player game, so this combination is possible, but it's pretty darn unlikely. Besides, this would be a *bad* move for Evil – with a chain like this, if one player is outed as Evil, the entire team will be.
- Similarly, if Alice said Bill was Good, Bill said Charlie was Good, and Charlie says Dani is Bad— then Dani is almost certainly Bad. The only way for her to be Good is if Alice, Bill, and Charlie were all Bad.

I'm sure this all sounds rather confusing, and there are a ton of additional permutations that weren't discussed. When you're playing with the Lady, *don't be afraid to stop and ask others to help work through the different options of allegiances.* Usually when Good gets into trouble with the Lady, it's because they forgot to do just that, or relied on instinct to eliminate a valid possibility. No one (who is

Good anyway) will fault you for slowing things down and working through the options. If someone *does* get annoyed at you, that person either needs to chill out (in a big way) or is Evil—and just doesn't want you to figure out what is actually going on.

Assuming each player says that the person he or she Ladied is Good, the farther a player is in the "Lady Chain," the more confident other players can be of that player's allegiance. Using the above examples— we still know virtually nothing about Alice, we feel a little bit better about Bill, quite good about Charlie, and almost certain of Dani. The chain may be "broken" in a certain place—but if that is true, we know all the players before the "break" are Evil, and all the players after the "break" are Good.

This is all a very long-winded way of saying: if you're Good, you want to keep the Lady in the hands of Good. Building up that increased certainty is very valuable—*if nothing else*, you can make sure that both the person picking the mission and the person with Excalibur are pretty likely to be Good. They may be Generic Blue and know nothing, but at least they're not Evil.

All of that said, there are a couple of scenarios in which Good players might want to risk putting the Lady into the hands of Evil. First, if Percival is still confused when it's time to Lady someone, he may want to find something out about one of his Merlin suspects. I recommend trying to Lady Morgana, in the hopes of protecting Merlin's identity—this scenario is discussed in more depth in Percy's section above. Second, Merlin wants to find Mordred. Especially if he thinks Percy has a good feel for the identities of the other Bad guys, he may want to risk letting the Lady fall into Evil hands. The game is often won or lost based on whether Good can identify Mordred. Finally, during the last Lady (right before the final mission), Good doesn't care whether the Lady falls into the hands of Evil. At this point in the game, it's usually more useful for Good find one of the remaining Bad players (usually Mordred), than to identify one additional Good player.

If you're Evil, the Lady is tough. You *really* don't want to be Ladied, but you can't make it *look* like you want to avoid being Ladied. Showing real hesitation or actively trying to avoid the Lady is a pretty big giveaway that you're Evil. So if someone is considering giving you the Lady, you probably want to put on your best face and look eager—sometimes players will threaten to give the Lady to several players (seeing if any of them flinch), so you might not be Ladied anyway. If do end up being Ladied, and it's at the beginning of the Lady chain, you're better off if you seemed eager to be Ladied—when the other player "lies" about your allegiance, you can get convincingly annoyed at them. If you can play your cards right and sound convincing enough, you can sometimes convince the other players you're good – or at minimum, throw enough shade on the other person to prevent others from trusting him or her. That said, if you think you can get away with it, try to talk the person into giving the Lady to someone else. A good way to still look Good, but avoid getting Ladied, is to encourage the player to give the Lady to the next hammer, or to someone who will be able to pick an upcoming mission.

Mordred in particular doesn't want to be Ladied, and both Mordred and his teammates should try to prevent that from happening. As an aside, players usually try to Lady someone who went on a previous (successful) mission, so the Lady is another reason why Mordred may want to sit out the first couple missions. If the Assassin or Morgana can "take the Lady" for Mordred, they should do so—chances are either character would have been outed soon anyway.

Conversely, if you begin the game with the Lady when you're Mordred, you're in a brilliant position— you can't be Ladied, but you *can* gain credibility in people's minds by starting a Good "Lady Chain." You can protest *all you want* that you wish you could have been Ladied (with zero consequences), and argue that you did all you could do by putting the Lady into the hands of Good.

If you're Evil and you begin with the Lady, you have a number of options—some more fun than others. On the "less fun but more practical" side of the equation, if you're Morgana or Mordred you will often want to just give the Lady to a Good player and tell the truth. It will lend you a certain amount of credibility, which can help you remain hidden for longer. On the "more fun but less practical" side of things, you can also give the Lady to a Bad player, and tell the truth (say they're Bad!). This sets up the false dichotomy I mentioned above, and can be very successful (or rather ruinous, depending on the game). Especially if you're Mordred, it can be a *really* good play. Merlin knows who the other Bad guys are—so if you choose to Lady one of them, then tell the truth, he probably won't suspect you as Mordred.

If you're the Assassin, it can also be a lot of fun to give the Lady to a Good player and lie—what will probably happen is that neither you nor the other player will go on the next mission. Taking out a Good player, even temporarily, is a good move for you. The Assassin usually isn't going to make it much past the second or third mission anyway.

Finally, if you're Oberon and you start with the Lady, you have a really great opportunity. More than any other player, you want to *lie*. Ideally, you will *find a Bad player*, then say they're Good. That will unequivocally identify yourself to the Bad players (and you were never going to fool Merlin anyway). If you find a Good player, it might also be a good time to lie and say they're Evil—it may very well take them out of the running for a little while, and tells the Evil players that one of the two of you is Oberon.

Unless you're Oberon, I don't really recommend giving the Lady to another Evil player and saying they're Good—it links the two of you together. If you're found out as Evil, it casts a certain amount of shade on the other player (though it's not definitive). However, if *they're* found out as Evil—you are by default outed as well. As Oberon, I think the risk is well worth it—and it may be worth it as the Assassin too. But otherwise, it's just not worth the risk; you don't want one wrong move taking down half your team.

Finally, if you do get Ladied, don't give up. If you're the first person to be Ladied, fight, fight, fight. At that point, you have no more or less credibility than the person who Ladied you. Even if people don't quite believe you, you still may be able to take out the other player, which can be a benefit to your team. If you're the second person to be Ladied, you might still be able to fight it—it's situation dependent, but don't automatically give up. Give it a shot, at least, though you may want to concede defeat if no one is buying it. If you're the last person to be Ladied, it's usually better to just admit defeat and see if you can mind-game the heck out of the other players for the rest of the game (which is a grand total of one mission). Fighting at that point is just annoying.

One last word of warning: if you're Evil and you get Ladied, remain calm. I'll often see Evil players jump down the throat of the person accusing them--before the person even finishes saying the word "Bad." That's a dead giveaway that you're evil: think about it from the perspective of a Good player. If you're Good and you get Ladied--you're pretty happy with the situation. Now people will trust you and you'll go on missions, and you have the chance to Lady someone else after the next mission. It's a good place to be. So if someone accuses you wrongly, it's going to take you a second to realize what happened, and only then will you get annoyed about it.

Because of the length of this guide, I want to take the time to emphasize a few key points (let's make it even longer!). Although most of these points are mentioned elsewhere in the guide, these principles are crucial to being a successful Avalon player. These pieces of advice are broadly applicable to the game, and are things I've noticed that many players--both new and experienced--struggle with. Understanding these principles, as well as the basics of voting and team strategy, will get you *very* far in the game. The rest can come later.

Mix things up. Virtually all of the advice in this guide should be prefaced with "usually," or "generally" or "unless you have a better idea." The strategies discussed in this guide are good places to start particularly when you're new to the game, and they're generally a good bet for success. At the same time, the real key to being successful at Avalon is playing with a certain amount of unpredictability. As soon as someone knows that you do something (e.g. she always throws the fail as the Assassin on the first mission), it's time to switch things up. Aim to play every game a little bit differently.

A good example of an effective deviation from this guide is whether or not to throw fails as the Assassin or Oberon. It's generally a good strategy to be very aggressive with throwing fails as either of these characters. But every once in a while, it can be *great* if you can get on teams as the Assassin or Oberon, and *throw successes.* This is particularly effective if Excalibur is in play; Merlin will get more and more agitated as the game progresses (potentially outing himself), and will often get someone to sword you at least once. It's *fantastic.*

One way I often force myself to "mix things up" is that I decide how to play the game (loud, quiet, whatever) before I look at my character card. That way I'm not always being quiet as Merlin, or loud as Percy, etc.

Don't Give Up. Unless you're outed with near 100% certainty, don't give up. It's pretty common for new players to radiate "defeat" when they're called out as Evil (even if they're Good!). Don't do that-- continue to fight. It may feel futile or silly, but you'll be surprised at how often it will work and sooner or later you'll find yourself back on missions. Remember that if you are Evil, only a small number of Good players know that you're Evil with certainty; most may be persuadable if you are consistent. If you are Good and wrongly accused, Merlin and Percy have a pretty good idea of your allegiance, but will only be able to add you to the team if you give them a good excuse to do so. More generally, players make a lot of mistakes. Any unpredictable, illogical turn of events could end up throwing what the Blue players think they know into doubt, and create an opening for you to fight your way back into the game – but you can only take advantage of those opportunities if you have kept on maintaining your innocence.

Don't Overreact. One of the biggest ways players will out themselves is by overreacting. For example, an Evil player who flips over the mission results (and threw the fail) will get *really* upset and make a big deal that the mission failed. (Merlin will sometimes do it, too.) Don't. Always channel Generic Blue: if you're Generic Blue and the mission fails, you're going to be a little bit unhappy, but you're not going to make a big deal about it. You probably didn't know enough about the mission one way or another to have expectations about its outcome. Another example (as is discussed above) is overreacting as an Evil player if you're Ladied – try to pause for a second before being outraged that someone "lied" about your card.

When in Doubt, Ask: What Would Generic Blue Do? I've mentioned variations on this at least about a dozen times throughout the guide, but that's because I think it's such important advice. As you get to be a more experienced player you can stop thinking about everything in terms of Generic Blue--you'll have a good enough idea of how the game works to play independently of that framing. But at the beginning, it's the best way to play the game. Once you become more comfortable with the game you can start mixing things up; it only takes a few small tweaks to Generic Blue behavior to play most of the characters pretty well.

Always Question Your Assumptions. One of the biggest problems I see--for both Good and Evil players-- is that people will make assumptions at the beginning of the game, and stick with that assumption to the detriment of their team. I'm sure there's a psychology term for this, but: once players make an assumption, they get "stuck" with that assumption and fit everything they see into that framework. Because they're not looking for contradictory evidence, they won't see it. When this happens, Percival may be going along feeling great about the game (he's identified Merlin and learned the identity of the Assassin)--only to realize he trusted the wrong "Merlin" and put all three Evil players on the double fail mission. Whoops!

One thing you can do to combat this problem is always try to keep in mind two scenarios. If you're Percival, don't trust one of your Merlin prospects to the complete exclusion of the other. If you're evil and you're Merlin hunting, try to figure out who Merlin is, but identify a secondary suspect, as well. Only rarely will a completely hidden player surprise you, so if you can consider two possibilities at a time, you're going to do pretty well.

For example, if you're Morgana and you have a Merlin suspect, don't put that player on the team. Instead, put your "secondary" suspect on the team. If your cover is blown at that point, you have a pretty good idea that your "secondary" suspect is the real Merlin.

Finally, try to keep as open a mind as possible, and treat assumptions as "tentative working hypotheses." Every time something happens, question whether it is *actually* consistent with what you believed.

Justify Your Actions: Almost without exception, be ready to explain your actions if someone asks. As is discussed throughout the guide, both Good and Evil players have incentives to try to understand the motivations of other players, so you'll want to have a plausible "excuse" for your actions. If you're Merlin or Percival and you take a known Evil player off the team, try to come up with a concrete reason for doing so. If you're Evil and choose not to use Excalibur (then the mission fails!) be ready to discuss why you decided not to sword. And so forth. Easier said than done, but always be thinking in terms of logic or concrete reasons – even if the "reason" is an outright lie.

Have Patience. If you are playing with very experienced players, it might be a long road to success. I found new and exciting ways to mess up each character when I was first getting started. The best thing that can happen to you early on is that you'll be Generic Blue a lot – you'll learn the Generic Blue template, then can build off that template for the named characters. If you end up with named characters a lot in the beginning, it might be rough – but try to stick with it: Avalon is one of the most rewarding games I have ever played (with the highest replay value!). You just have to give it a chance.

If I somehow managed to miss something in the last 40 odd pages, then I *really* can't imagine it was very important. So, I promise to keep this short.

As I mentioned in the beginning of the guide, this thing absolutely exploded in length and depth; it was intended to be much shorter. With that in mind, I know there's a lot of information here, and I know a lot of it is extremely detailed. If you're new to the game, this much information can be very overwhelming. So please: take it one section at a time, focus on the general principles first, and don't sweat the small stuff. I've messed up in just about every way imaginable, and am still here to tell the tale. Hopefully you found the guide to be more useful than confusing (and if it's the latter, you have my sincerest apology).

Good Luck & Enjoy the Game!

Each number of players and character combinations plays a little bit differently, and a game of five will feel significantly different than a game of ten. Some people hate games with certain numbers of players (nine is a particular target), or prefer certain combinations (seven with Mordred, Morgana, and the Assassin is a favorite). A lot of this has to do with the relative strengths of the teams--it isn't very much fun to play if the outcome feels preordained. However, if games are feeling lopsided, or just stale, there are a number of things you can do to mix up the teams or tweak the strength of each team to create a more balanced game.

In general, if Evil is too strong, remove Mordred from the game (replacing him with Generic Red), or replace the Assassin/Generic Red with Oberon. Adding the Lady also weakens Evil, and can work well with seven or eight players. Unless Evil is *really consistently* trouncing Good, I wouldn't recommend using the Lady with five, six, or nine (though the combination of Excalibur and the Lady can work with nine). With these numbers, an early Lady can be devastating to Evil.

A really fun combination with seven (or even eight) can be Morgana, Mordred, and Oberon (Mordred is "Mo-sassin" and is responsible for assassinating Merlin). Adding Oberon weakens Evil and adds chaos, and re-introduces the threat of double-fails. If all players are experienced, adding Oberon balances the scales quite nicely between the two teams--and five of the seven players have <u>fun</u> character cards with unique roles.

If, on the other hand, Evil is too weak, add Mordred (if you're not already playing with him). If you are playing with Oberon, swap him out for Generic Red. You could also try adding Excalibur, but as is discussed above, it's not entirely clear that Excalibur gives Evil much of an advantage. I suppose you could always take out Percy (and replace him with Generic Blue), but if you feel that replacement is necessary, Evil is doing something wrong.

A few notes on each number of players (with my group's standard configuration in parentheses):

- Five (Merlin, Percy, Morgana, Mordred/Assassin, Generic Blue)
    - Five players can be a very good game, provided all five players are at similar skill levels. Even one new player in an experienced group can make five difficult--it's too easy for Evil to force bad missions to go. It's a very different game of Avalon, but can be a very refreshing change from larger games. Good and Evil are evenly matched, and everyone is involved and engaged. There are no unimportant players! In a fun twist, if you're playing with Mordred, *Percy* is the character with the most information. My big problem with five is that Evil has a one in three chance of assassinating Merlin correctly. You could perhaps try to balance this by prohibiting consultation in the assassination phase, but I've never tried it to see how it works.
- Six (Merlin, Percy, Morgana, Mordred, Generic Blue x2)
    - I rather like playing with six players, but know I'm in the minority. Most people I play with view it as a bad number because they think that Evil is at a pretty strong disadvantage (four to two). At the same time, I like it better than five--it's a little bit easier to absorb a newer player, and it's a bit harder to assassinate Merlin at the end. Evil is at a bit of a disadvantage (if Evil gets unlucky and the first team is Good, there's not much Evil can do to fix things), but the right Evil team (with a little bit of luck) can absolutely *wreck* the Good team.

- Seven (Merlin, Percy, Morgana, Assassin, Mordred, Generic Blue x2; Lady possible)
  - Seven is a popular number. The game is small enough that everyone is engaged and most players have named characters--but it's pretty evenly balanced between Good and Evil. I think Evil is at an advantage, but I've seen it go either way. Playing with Morgana, Oberon, and Mordred can be a ton of fun, and the teams are *really* balanced.
- Eight (Merlin, Percy, Morgana, Assassin, Mordred, Generic Blue x3; Excalibur possible)
  - Eight is a good number and plays very similar to seven. It's starting to get on the big side, but is still a pretty evenly-balanced game. Good has a little bit of an advantage, but it really depends on the strengths of the players.
- Nine (Merlin, Percy, Morgana, Assassin, Mordred, Generic Blue x4; Excalibur recommended)
  - Most players rather hate nine--it's a lot of sitting around, without the benefits of ten (Oberon! Excalibur! Lady!). Evil is at a pretty strong disadvantage (six to three). That said, one of my favorite games of all time was playing with nine, *and* Excalibur and Lady (we just forgot to take out the Lady after one player left). The Assassin got Ladied after the second mission--but Morgana and I (Mordred) managed to tie the Blue team in knots. The more of a disadvantage you face, the sweeter victory can become.
- Ten (Merlin, Percy, Morgana, Assassin, Mordred, Oberon, Generic Blue x4; Excalibur and Lady)
  - Ten is another favorite; playing with Oberon is always fun, and playing with Excalibur and Lady adds an extra dimension to the game. I have gotten a bit lukewarm on ten, though used to really enjoy it. My hesitation stems from the fact that that there are just *so many people*, all clamoring to be heard. The games can be really long, and a lot of the characters find themselves with very little to do for much of the game. If you're Generic Blue, you should always be deducing and trying to look like Merlin – but it can be hard to stay engaged if you're not going on missions. Still, Excalibur and Lady are always fun!