

# 427 AD

## The Britons: Part II

Written by

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## About the author



About the author etc. J.Patrick McAteer has been an avid writer for much of his life and holds both a Bachelor of Arts and a Masters degree in English with Creative Writing from the University of Birmingham. His interest in history, politics and ancient warfare has drawn him to the historical fiction genre and has led him to create “The Britons”, an anthology of three short stories set in the aftermath of the Roman Empire abandoning Britain. He is also working on several other short stories in the fantasy genre, has written online essays about books, films and video games on his blog and is currently writing his first full length novel.

In his own words; *“At heart I’m a narcissist – I like having*

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*complete and total control over a character, a story, or even an entire world. When the author wields so much power, why doesn't everyone want to write? The rise and fall of civilizations, battles won and lost, characters living or dying; this is what it means to be a writer... and I love it."*

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They waited on a cliff overlooking the ships. The sun had risen just a few moments before and was already blazing down its heat, promising a glorious summer day. The five riders were starting to sweat in their leather and armour. Behind them, four thousand fighting men did the same.

“It will be hot today,” said Garwin, Lord of London and Master of the King’s Infantry.

“I should have worn my tunic,” said Eustace, Lord of Eboracum and Master of the King’s Cavalry.

“We won’t regret this armour if it’s to be battle, Lord Eustace,” said Callum, son to Garwin. His father shook his head.

“Niall won’t fight. He wants gold and silver, not war.” Garwin sighed and spat over one side of his horse; an old habit. “We’ll be waiting awhile yet I’d wager. Rian, give me some water.” Garwin’s servant, grey haired and thin, took a skin of water from his saddlebag and passed it to his master. Garwin drank deep, tilting his head back and spilling droplets of water from

the corners of his mouth into his salt and pepper beard. When he'd had his fill he gasped and wiped his mouth off. "When I was a young man, I thought wine was God's own nectar. But nowadays I find water a far finer drink."

"You keep your water, father," Callum said, "I prefer beer." He kicked his horse into a canter and took off towards the cliff edge. Garwin felt a twinge of worry until Callum brought the horse rearing to a stop at the last moment and gazed out at the dozens of ships filling the bay. "There are bloody thousands of them!"

"Keep paying a bully off and he'll just bring more friends next time!" Eustace called back. He turned to Garwin. "Gorlois has a lot to answer for. His coffers are empty and enemies are still on his doorstep. It's no wonder Uther took the title of King from him when Telosa died."

"The apple has fallen very far from the tree. The old woman would weep to see Dumnonia in the hands of such a weak man. Speak of the devil." Behind them, riding up the gentle slope leading to the cliff came Gorlois himself with two men-at-arms at his sides. Unlike the other riders, Gorlois had not come armoured in mail, instead dressing in a dark, ill-fitting

tunic and cow-hide boots. As he drew near to Garwin and Eustace he smiled, showing off yellowing teeth and a jowly face.

“My friends,” he said cheerfully, “are we the first ones here? Where is the King?” he dragged his sorrel horse to a stop.

“His grace is expected soon,” Garwin replied, “now where is this raider who has grown so rich off of you?” Gorlois raised his arms helplessly.

“He’s of the Scotti. You know what they’re like. Godless, monstrous and inconveniently late. And look – now I have an infestation of them!” Gorlois pointed to the ships in the bay beyond the cliff. There were many kinds of vessels in the shallow water but they were predominantly longships with striped sails and bearing flags of emerald green; ships of the Scotti.

“And whose fault is that?”

“Well, it’s certainly not mine Garwin, if that’s what you’re implying. I paid this Niall off half a dozen times, yet he always comes back for more.” Gorlois fixed Garwin and Eustace with another smile, tilting his head to one side so as to hide the ugly

goitre on his neck. Garwin bristled with irritation and Eustace merely rolled his eyes.

“The King will not care for your excuses, Gorlois. We have raised an army to deal with a threat to the realm, not to excuse your incompetence.” Eustace the Younger had grown into a capable man, his education in Gaul making him a superb administrator.

“Now comes the reckoning. The King is here,” Garwin said. Through the swarms of men who made up the Kings army the royal banner came; a golden dragon sprawled across a field of blue. It was held by herald with a war horn around his neck, leading a score of horsemen up the cliff towards Garwin and the rest. Next to the herald rode a large, dark haired man with eyes of sapphires and a great slab of jaw covered in a poorly trimmed beard. A simple circlet of gold lay about his head. At his approach, Garwin lowered his head. Gorlois and Eustace did the same.

“Your Grace.”

“Yes, yes. Get the pleasantries out of the way. Why is there an army of Scotti on the coast of my Kingdom gentlemen?”

Don't I keep you all around to prevent that?" While King Uther Pendragon was a wide-shouldered, powerful man he was already turning to fat at the age of just twenty four; anyone looking closely could tell that the royal doublet disguised a rapidly growing paunch. His hair was long, his face was broad and his eyes were piercing, making him a larger, less handsome version of his renowned and long dead father, Constantine.

"As I was explaining to Lord Garwin, your Grace, these men are fierce creatures. They want gold and silver to furnish their pagan homes."

"What they want is of no concern to me. What I want is them gone. Dead or fled; either will do."

"That is why we assembled the army your Grace," Garwin said. "Give me the order and I will lead the attack."

"There are a fearsome lot of them your Grace," Gorlois said, "I would advise caution." Garwin snorted.

"The counsel of a coward. You are King of Britain, your Grace. You should not fear men such as this, no matter their strength." King Uther considered this even as Gorlois and Garwin glared at one another.

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“Well... how many of them are there?”

“Callum!” Garwin bellowed to his son at the cliff, “how many ships?”

“Fifty, father. Maybe more!”

“Fifty ships means fifty crews; two thousand men at least.”

“Only Saxons come in such numbers!” the King said with wonder.

“What did I tell you? They are a formidable force,” Golois said.

“We have them two to one nonetheless. Give the order, your grace, and Eustace and I shall smash them.” But King Uther was not convinced.

“This is my army Garwin, not yours,” he said tersely, looking back at the assembled men of Britain. “We cannot beat two thousand raiders without casualties. Heavy casualties. Then who will protect my Kingdom from the Saxons?” Garwin clenched his knuckles in frustration. Had he become King, he wouldn’t have hesitated – the raiders would be dead before they even set foot on Dumnonia’s beach. “I shall ask Merlin;

he always provides good council in these matters,” the King said at last. As if he had heard, a familiar rider dressed in black and covered in a mane of shaggy black hair rode from the army to the cliff. Merlin looked much the same as he had at Dinas Powis where he had denied Garwin’s effort to become King. In sixteen years, the man had not seemed to have aged at all.

“Your Grace!” Merlin said cheerfully, pulling his horse to a stop and joining the others. Garwin glowered at his enemy silently, but Merlin did not pay him any attention.

“Merlin, my Kingdom is overrun by Scotti. There’s a whole army of them beyond these cliffs.”

“So I see. I would imagine our dear Lord of Dumnonia advised us to pay them off?”

“Of course I did, Merlin!” Gorlois said, his goitre throbbing painfully, “surely a few more trinkets is a sound price for peace?”

“But not a very permanent one it seems. What say you Eustace?”