



Perceval: King Arthur's Knight of the Holy Grail

John Perkins

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The story of Perceval originated in the late twelfth century when Chrétien de Troyes, the premier poet of that era, wrote romances for the courts of Marie of Champagne and Philip of Flanders. Chrétien's version, although unfinished, inspired a multitude of variants that followed immediately afterward.

Young Perceval, awed by five knights from King Arthur's Round Table, decides that he, too, wants to become a knight. After training for a short while, he quickly achieves his goal, defeating many an enemy and sending them back to King Arthur's court. During his travels, he stumbles upon a mysterious castle inhabited by an ailing king. There he witnesses an unusual procession of maidens and pages who are escorting a dazzling cup to a secret chamber. When Perceval is afraid to ask the one question that would relieve the king from his suffering, he discovers that there's more to being a knight than mastering the arts of chivalry. There is a higher, divine calling, which Perceval, with the aid of a hermit, finally realizes. Author and illustrator notes are included.

Russian-born painter Gennaly Spirin used an ancient technique, similar to that in creating icons, to prepare canvas over a piece of wood with ten layers of gesso before painting it with egg tempura. The remarkable result enhances and heightens the drama of this timeless tale about "the wisest fool who ever lived."

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