# King

For almost a thousand years, the world has read of Arthur's brave deeds and the exploits of the Knights of the Round Table. The Arthurian body of stories was Europe's first romantic literature. Today, we're surrounded by films, plays, cartoons, comic books, and such—all stemming from the tales of this legendary king of Medieval Britain. But who was he? What was he? Did he even exist?

We don't know. There probably *was* a Celtic warrior back in the 400s who had some success against the invading Saxons, and upon whom the Arthurian stories were ultimately based. But that person's name, and deeds, if he ever existed, have long since been lost. Plus, since the story of Arthur is the story of the Celts in Britain trying to keep the invading Saxons out, all the castles, knights, jousting, etc.—all the things that we now automatically associate with King Arthur—never existed in that time period. They were all added to the circulating legends later, as the Middle Ages kept evolving, and as the stories were told and retold, with more and more exaggerations and embellishments.

Think of all the incredible sub-stories involved in the Arthurian literature that have since become classics in and of themselves—"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", "Tristram and Iseult", "Lancelot and Guinevere", and "The Quest For the Holy Grail". Of course, there's no proof that any of these other characters existed, either, but they've certainly had an effect on our culture, our language, and our thinking. And it's not just the characters. When the terribly wounded Arthur is taken to the magic isle, 'Avalon' comes down to us as synonymous with the ultimate mystical wonderland. When Arthur smites his foes with his magical sword, 'Excalibur' is bequeathed to us as the symbol of hope, salvation, and everything good.

And what about the Round Table? There were quite a few Medieval kings who purposely had round
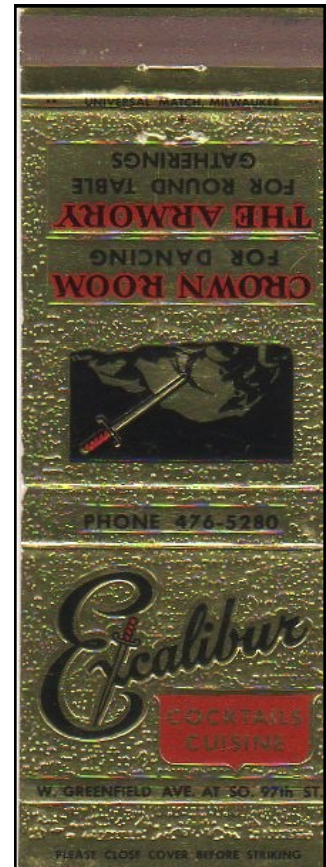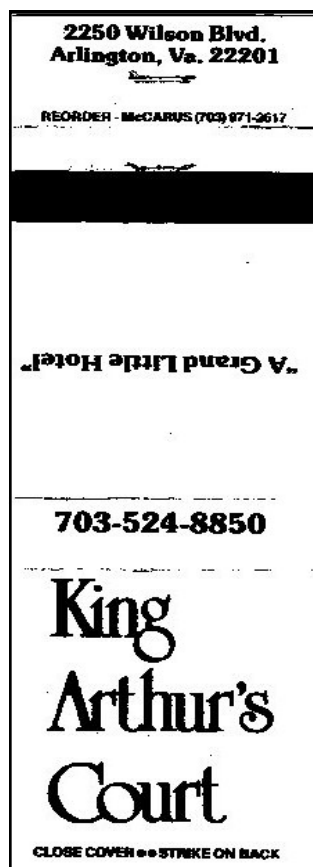
Arthur!

tables...to foster the idea that they were somehow the heirs, direct or not, of Arthur, his power, and or his ideals. And where would Round Table Pizza be without the Arthurian literature?!

Although there were earlier written stories about Arthur and his knights, it was Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, c. 1469, that solidified the legend into the literary classic it has been ever since. Many poets, novelists, and playwrights have based their works on Malory's romantic prose.

The Arthurian legend was comprised of the first European stories to give women a major role— Guinevere, Morgana Le Fay, Lady Nimue. Prior to this, women appeared in stories merely as background and as a support for the men. And the import of the legend goes on...

As Arthur was leaving for Avalon, he said he would return when Britain's need was greatest, and there were more than a few who looked for that return during World War II.

Because there are so many facets to the King Arthur legend, there are more covers available to the collector, at least if he or she lumps then all together under one collection. I keep mine separate, by individual Literary Characters, but you could certainly have a King Arthur collection made up of covers such as "The Camelot Motel", "Excalibur Bar", "Roundtable Pizza", "The Lancelot Lounge," and so on. Actually, that would be a nice 'quest'—to see, for example, how many Knights of the Round Table you could find covers for. Gawain, Kay, Mordred, Pelles, Galahad, Perivale, etc. I've certainly come across some. Currently, I have four actual King Arthur covers...and I'm always still looking!