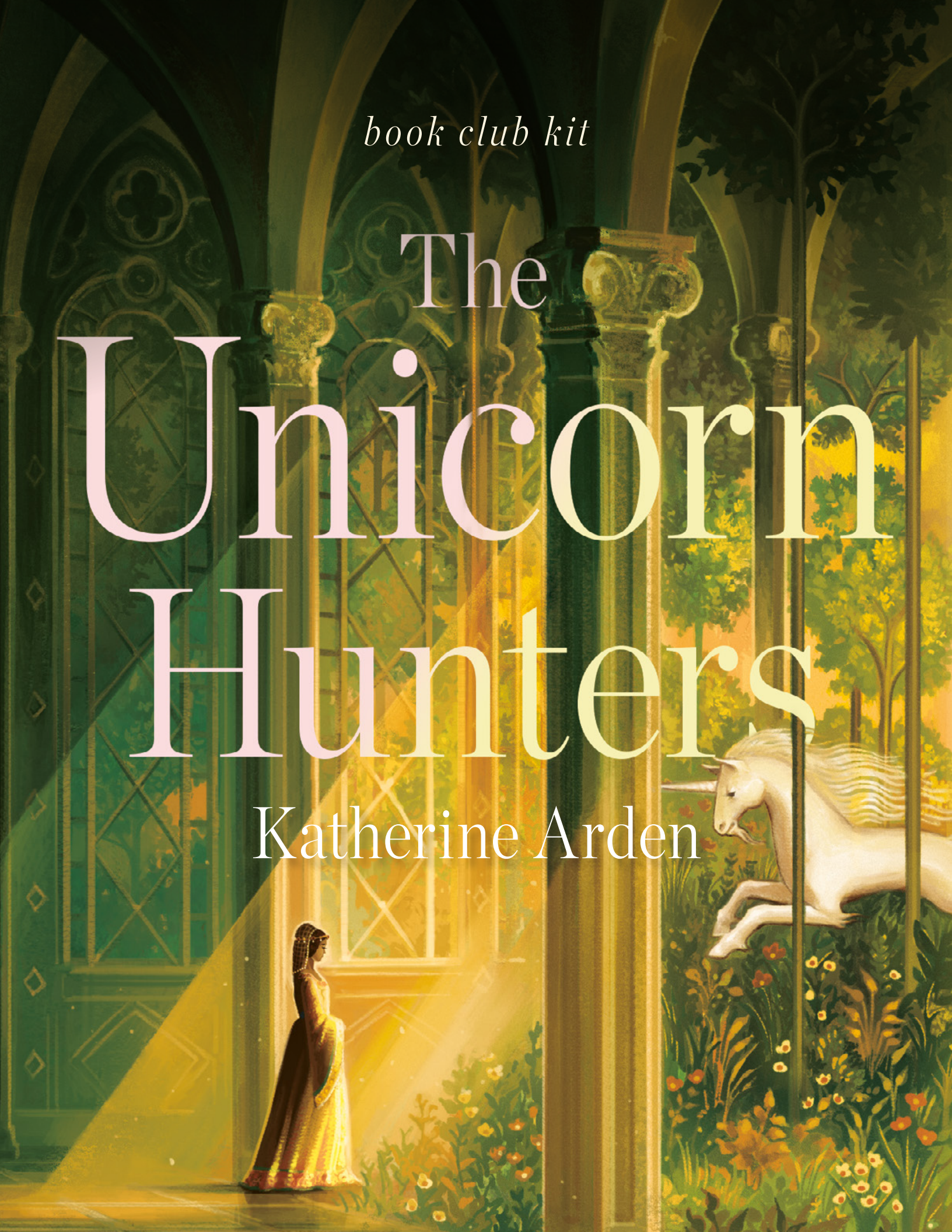


book club kit

The Unicorn Hunters

Katherine Arden





Dear Wanderer.

When I was a little girl, I owned a compendium of folklore about magical animals titled *Magical Beasts*. Sitting tucked away on a cushion behind my bedroom curtains, I read this book front to back more times than I can rightly remember. Above all, I loved the final chapter, which was devoted entirely to unicorns. I read that chapter until I could recite its passages, summon its illustrations to hover behind my eyes when I lay awake in bed at night.

The first story in that chapter described a medieval unicorn in a forest called Brocéliande. I loved this story for its details and hated it for its ending. Every word evoked scent and sight and color to my childish imagination. I could almost feel the mist on my face, see it spread like smoke amid the tree trunks and collect as dew on the gaudy sleeves of the hunters. I used to imagine the maiden's face when she was ordered out to bait the unicorn. I used to cry at the end, when they speared the unicorn at last. The first piece of fiction I ever wrote—we say fanfiction now, but in 1999 I'd no idea what that was—recast this story so the unicorn evaded her hunters and escaped into another world.

I was sixteen in 2004 and had mostly laid unicorns aside, when I learned that Brocéliande was not merely a made-up forest where men hunted unicorns. I was living in Brittany, an exchange student in Rennes, when I mentioned my favorite story and was told, quite casually, that the forest of my dreaming was merely a half-hour's drive from town. I begged a ride of course—I'd have walked if I had to—and found a place wholly familiar, though I had never been there. Mist wound between the trees, dewed the moss and stony ground. I could hear water running just out of sight and stray alone by dark ponds, with bent trees weeping leaves into the water. I could imagine, just out of sight, the gleam of light on a unicorn's horn.

That year in Brittany was also the first time I heard the name Anne of Brittany, the "Good Duchess," whose name and image grace streets and restaurants and hotels across the region. It was the first time I saw her castle in Nantes, still standing beside the Loire.

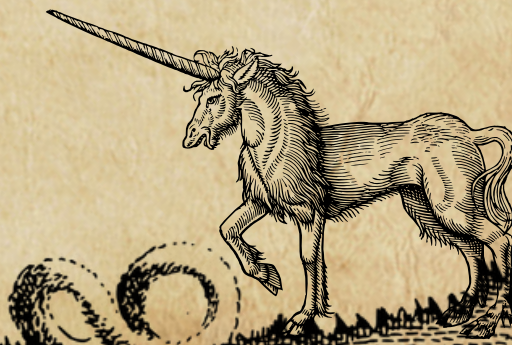
I had no notion then of making a tale of these disparate elements. Indeed, at sixteen, I was very earnestly at work on a novel about dragons asleep in a dormant volcano. Writing it pleased me greatly, and when I finished, I read it over and buried it for good, to embarrassed to let anyone see.

But other stories came. The dragons lie entombed on a forgotten hard drive, but I grew up and wrote a story about a girl who can see all the spirits of Slavic folklore, and then I wrote a story about a woman who meets the Devil during the first world war, and then somewhere in the strange wandering paths of my own brain, I found myself walking again in memory down the winding paths of my imaginary version of Brocéliande.

This time, older and more intrepid, I decided to follow this track into forest and castle and the far, strange country beyond. Perhaps, in these pages, you also will set your feet on that mist-shrouded path, and have your own adventure.

Perhaps you will even meet your unicorn there.

Katherine Arden
Duxbury, Vermont



Make Your Own **H**ennin

MATERIALS

Scissors	String
Tape	Hot glue gun
A pen	Fabric of choice
Accessories (pearls, ribbon, gems, etc.)	

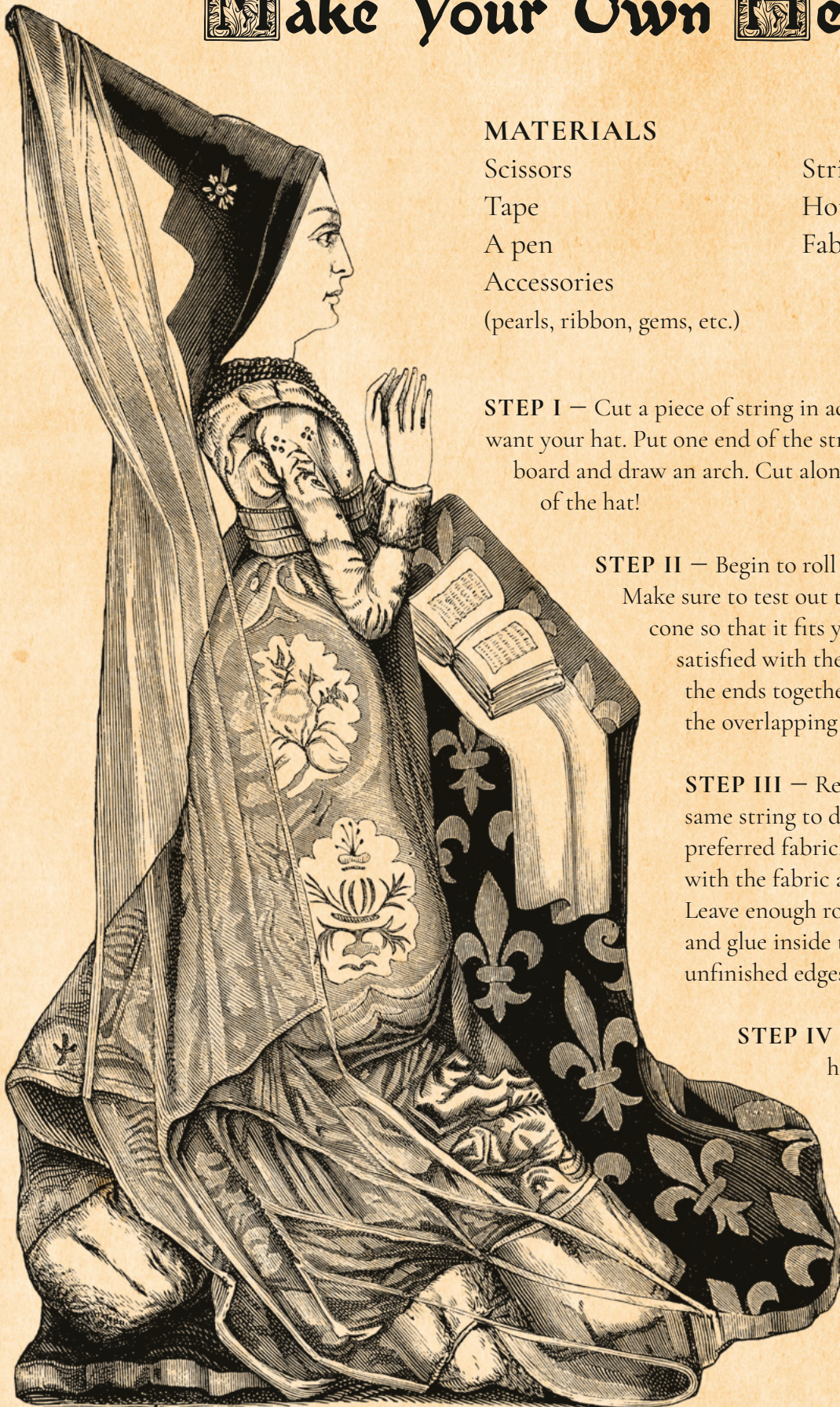
STEP I — Cut a piece of string in accordance to how tall you want your hat. Put one end of the string on a corner of the poster board and draw an arch. Cut along the arch. This is the body of the hat!

STEP II — Begin to roll one side in to create a cone. Make sure to test out the size of the bottom of the cone so that it fits your head nicely. Once you are satisfied with the fit, use a piece of tape to keep the ends together so that it is easier to hot glue the overlapping pieces.

STEP III — Repeat step I by using the same string to draw out a cone shape on your preferred fabric. Cover the overlapping paper with the fabric and begin to hot glue it down. Leave enough room at the bottom to tuck and glue inside the hat so you don't have unfinished edges.

STEP IV — Decorate! Embellish your hat with ribbons, pearls, beads, and maybe even some unicorn hair. Add a string on either side of the hat to tie under your chin for extra stability.

STEP V — Wear your hennin to your next book club meeting!





Discussion



Questions

1. What did you know, if anything, about Anne of Brittany before reading *The Unicorn Hunters*? Did knowing the real history behind the story influence your reading experience?
2. Anne sacrifices many of her own possessions and comforts to fight for Brittany's sovereignty. How does her selflessness impact the story?
3. What was your biggest takeaway from *The Unicorn Hunters*? How has this book inspired you?
4. How do you think the story would differ if Isabeau was the elder sister and duchess of Brittany instead of Anne? Do you think Julien's plan would have succeeded?
5. As a woman in the late 15th to early 16th century, Anne's most valuable asset was her ability to bear children. Explain how, in the alternate history of *The Unicorn Hunters*, she uses this as a tool rather than giving in to systemic oppression.
6. Many of the royals had diviners, such as Calyx, to inform their decisions, and there were myriad ways that diviners used to see the future, some being "dice and clouds and water and candlelight" (14). What would your divination technique be?
7. Who was your favorite character? How would the story change if told from their point-of-view?
8. If *The Unicorn Hunters* was being adapted into a movie or television show, who would you cast for each character?
9. How did Anne's character evolution throughout the story impact her romance with Louis? Did her acceptance of their love aid her efforts for independence? If so, how?
10. In mythology, there are many beliefs about what bait to use for unicorns during a hunt. Why do you think the unicorn chose to present herself to Anne in *The Unicorn Hunters*?

France in the 16th Century

THE KINGDOM OF FRANCE
AND THE DUCHY OF BRITTANY
15TH CENTURY

