

MERLIN

BOOK 5

A WIZARD'S WINGS

Previously published as *The Wings of Merlin*

T. A. BARRON

PUFFIN BOOKS
An Imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

Praise for T. A. Barron's Merlin saga:

“An extraordinary journey of mind, body, and spirit—both for Merlin and for ourselves.”

—Madeleine L'Engle

“Rich with magic.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“In this brilliant epic, T. A. Barron has created a major addition to that body of literature, ancient and modern, dealing with the towering figure of Merlin. Barron combines the wellsprings of mythical imagination with his own deepest artistic powers. Through the ordeals, terrors, and struggles of Merlin-to-be, we follow an intense and profoundly spiritual adventure.”

—Lloyd Alexander

“This is a brilliant epic tale with memorable and glowing characters—a real gift.”

—Isabel Allende, author of *House of the Spirits* and *Daughter of Fortune*

“All the elements of a classic here.”

—Robert Redford, actor, director, and conservationist

“Barron has created not only a magical land populated by remarkable beings but also a completely magical tale ... that will enchant readers.”

—*Booklist* (boxed review), on *The Lost Years of Merlin*

“Set on the legendary island of Fincayra, this novel about the childhood of the wizard Merlin is imaginative and convincing.”

—*The Horn Book*, on *The Lost Years of Merlin*

“The quest for one's true identity, of puzzles and tests of intelligence, and moral courage are all here. ... The climactic ending offers a twist to seeking one's identity and heritage. A good bet for those who enjoy fantasy, mythical quests, and of course, Merlin, the greatest wizard of them all.”

—VOYA, on *The Lost Years of Merlin*

“Barron never falters in creating a believable past for the greatest enchanter of all time.”

—*Family Life* (Critic's Choice review), on *The Lost Years of Merlin*

“With each book, Barron's *Lost Years of Merlin* saga just keeps getting richer in characterization, ambience, and Celtic lore. ... Fans will definitely be clamoring for more.”

—*Booklist*, on *The Fires of Merlin*

“For those who love the Merlin and Great Tree of Avalon series, Basil will be a welcome new friend.”

—VOYA, on *Merlin’s Dragon*

“No one can compare to Barron when writing about Merlin or Avalon. Once again, he brings texture, color, and love to the seven realms. His many fans will gobble up this new offering.”

—*School Library Journal*, on *Merlin’s Dragon: Doomraga’s Revenge*

“The many fans of Barron’s various Merlin sagas will not be disappointed.”

—*Booklist*, on *Merlin’s Dragon: Ultimate Magic*

★ “Liberally laced with humor and wit ... readers will relish this fine ... fantasy series.”

—*Booklist*, starred review, on *The Great Tree of Avalon: Child of the Dark Prophecy*

“Barron crafts vivid scenes with original and well-developed supporting characters, moving the plot at a gobble-it-up pace.”

—*KLIATT*, on *The Great Tree of Avalon: Shadows on the Stars*

“Barron’s world is fully realized and sophisticated, and fans of high fantasy will undoubtedly enjoy ... this well-written, suspenseful story.”

—VOYA, on *The Great Tree of Avalon: The Eternal Flame*

What lies underneath the sea?

Something stirred beneath the surface. I glimpsed a row of quivering suction cups, glowing with their own greenish light. A tentacle! I could tell by its immense length and girth that it belonged to something big—far bigger than our vessel.

Stretching out my arm, I sent a stream of water, concentrated to strike as hard as a spear, at the tentacle. Seawater sprayed in all directions. But the tentacle swiftly recoiled. At the same time, other serpentine limbs lifted out of the waves, entwining themselves with the branches. Glowing strangely, they pulled on the hat, dragging us downward.

Drawing on all the power within me, I called to the great hat. *Rise, now. Rise, O vessel of willow and vine! Rise now, up from the sea!*

Suddenly I felt the vessel starting to vibrate. The vibrations grew swiftly stronger, loosening the grip of my legs on the staff. With a wrenching effort, I pulled myself back up onto the brim.

At that instant, the quaking hat began to turn, spinning slowly in a circle. The rotations came faster, and faster still. I clung to the staff, trying to keep my balance. Then, without warning, the spinning ceased.

READ THE WHOLE MERLIN SAGA!

MERLIN: BOOK 1: *The Lost Years*

MERLIN: BOOK 2: *The Seven Songs*

MERLIN: BOOK 3: *The Raging Fires*

MERLIN: BOOK 4: *The Mirror of Fate*

MERLIN: BOOK 5: *A Wizard's Wings*

MERLIN: BOOK 6: *The Dragon of Avalon*

MERLIN: BOOK 7: *Doomraga's Revenge*

MERLIN: BOOK 8: *Ultimate Magic*

MERLIN: BOOK 9: *The Great Tree of Avalon*

MERLIN: BOOK 10: *Shadows on the Stars*

MERLIN: BOOK 11: *The Eternal Flame*

MERLIN: BOOK 12: *The Book of Magic*

MERLIN BOOK 5

A WIZARD'S WINGS

Previously published as *The Wings of Merlin*

T. A. BARRON

PUFFIN BOOKS
An Imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

PUFFIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Young Readers Group, 345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre,

Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632, New Zealand

(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue,

Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Registered Offices: Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

First published in the United States of America as *The Wings of Merlin* by Philomel Books,
a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2000, Paper-over-board edition, 2007

Published as *A Wizard's Wings* by Puffin Books, a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2011

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Patricia Lee Gauch, editor

Text copyright © Thomas A. Barron, 2000

Map illustration copyright © Ian Schoenherr, 2000

All rights reserved

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS HAS CATALOGED THE PHILOMEL BOOKS EDITION AS FOLLOWS:

Barron, T. A. *The wings of Merlin* / by T. A. Barron.

"Book five of 'The lost years of Merlin.'"

p. cm.

Summary: Merlin's fragile home on the isle of Fincayra is threatened by the attack of a mysterious warrior with swords for arms and by the escape of Stangmar from his imprisonment, as Merlin continues to move toward his ultimate destiny.

ISBN: 978-1-101-64182-8

1. Merlin (Legendary character)—Juvenile fiction. [1. Merlin (Legendary character)—Fiction. 2. Wizards—Fiction. 3. Fantasy.] I. Title

PZ7.B27567Wi 2000 [Fic]—dc21 00-027553 CIP AC

Design by Gunta Alexander

Text set in Galliard

Printed in the United States of America

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party Web sites or their content.

*This book is dedicated to
the elusive wizard himself—
and to all those who have gathered to hear him
reveal, at last, the secrets of his lost years*

THE FORGOTTEN ISLAND



As it appeared just before

Winter's Longest Night

CONTENTS

Author's Note

Prologue

PART ONE

- I. Threads
- II. Treasures
- III. Raspberry Syrup
- IV. A Distant Doorway
- V. Radiant Spirit
- VI. Escape
- VII. Caer Aranon
- VIII. Look for Me Wandering
- IX. Kindling

PART TWO

- X. Awakening
- XI. Ellyrianna's Hand
- XII. Decision
- XIII. The Visitor
- XIV. Snowfall
- XV. Slayer
- XVI. The Question
- XVII. Seeds
- XVIII. Gathering
- XIX. The Mind of the Mist
- XX. Fin's Ballad
- XXI. Airborne Bodies
- XXII. Attack
- XXIII. The Vessel

PART THREE

- XXIV. The Very Depths of the Sea
- XXV. The New Day

- XXVI. A Golden Crown
 - XXVII. Flown and Fallen
 - XXVIII. Land Long Forgotten
 - XXIX. A Star Within a Circle
 - XXX. First Tremors
 - XXXI. The Doorway
 - XXXII. Winter's Longest Night
 - XXXIII. A Distant Horn
 - XXXIV. The Joining
 - XXXV. Miracles
 - XXXVI. Merlin's Choice
- Epilogue

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Almost a decade ago, I had a dream—strikingly vivid, deeply mysterious. In it a boy, nearly drowned, washed ashore on a strange, rugged coast. He had no memory at all of his childhood, not even his own name. And he certainly had no idea of the glorious destiny that awaited him.

Nor did I, in truth. For I hadn't yet realized that this lone, bedraggled boy was really the wizard Merlin. He bore no resemblance whatsoever to the legendary mentor of King Arthur, the mage of Camelot, the greatest enchanter of all times. No, that discovery would be the first of Merlin's many surprises.

But only the first. As those who have read the first four volumes of this epic already know, this wizard is full of surprises. He startled me, as his scribe, with the true nature of his sight, his family, and his heritage. Then he went on to introduce us all to the mysterious isle of Fincayra, unknown except to the ancient Celtic poets who called it an island beneath the waves, a bridge between the mortal Earth and the immortal Otherworld.

Fincayra has become Merlin's home. The people he loves most are there: Rhia, Shim, Elen, Cairpré, and Hallia, the deer-woman who has taught him how to run like a stag, hearing not just with his ears but with his very bones. The brave hawk, Trouble, along with the spirit lords Dagda and Rhita Gawr, may not be physically present, but they are never very far distant.

This mythic isle was best described by Merlin's mother, who saw Fincayra with a Druid's eyes, as a place much like the mist swirling about its shores. She called the island an *in between place*. Like the mist—which was neither quite water nor quite air, something of both and yet something else entirely—Fincayra is both mortal and immortal, dark and light, fragile and everlasting. Just how fragile it truly is, young Merlin will discover in this book, which concludes *The Lost Years of Merlin* epic.

In this volume, Merlin will also discover some new aspects of his own spirit— aspects that are, themselves, truly in between. For the wizard he is destined to become is not really a man, yet not really a god; not fully shadowed, yet not fully luminous. When he becomes Arthur's mentor, his greatest wisdom will spring from his essential humanity, his understanding of both our frailties and our highest possibilities. And his greatest power will arise from those elusive meeting places of nature and culture, masculinity and femininity, consciousness and dreams.

Much of Merlin's depth as a character, I am convinced, stems from these very qualities. And something more: They make him the perfect mentor for a young and idealistic king, a king whose vision of a just society would fail in his own realm, but

would lodge firmly in the realm of the heart—so firmly that Merlin’s pupil would ultimately be celebrated as the Once and Future King. Small wonder that Merlin himself, in tales stretching back fifteen centuries, has long been seen as a bridge builder, a unifier, a wizard of many worlds and many times.

The scope of his bridge building is astonishing. The very same Merlin who gives counsel to a great ruler may well, a moment later, ask advice from a homeless wanderer—or from an ancient, green-eyed wolf roaming the mountainside. The same Merlin who urges his companions to seek the Holy Grail, with its abundant Christian symbolism, often speaks as a Druid master with the spirits of rivers and trees. The same Merlin who, in traditional tales, was fathered by a demon was also mothered by a near-saint. Most remarkable of all, the same Merlin who inspired so many tales hundreds and hundreds of years ago remains wholly present in our lives today. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, he is more alive than ever.

That half-drowned boy, spat out by the sea in the opening scene of *The Lost Years of Merlin*, could not have foreseen his remarkable destiny. Indeed, looking back on that day, the elder wizard intones:

If I close my eyes, and breathe to the rolling rhythm of the sea, I can still remember that long ago day. Harsh, cold, and lifeless it was, as empty of promise as my lungs were empty of air....

Perhaps I remember it so clearly because the pain, like a scar on my soul, will not disappear. Or because it marked the ending of so much. Or, perhaps, because it marked a beginning as well as an ending: the beginning of my lost years.

In time, I came to understand Merlin’s greatest surprise. The lad who washed ashore on that fateful day was more than a boy, more even than a mythic figure. He was, himself, a metaphor.

Perhaps, like that boy, each of us harbors some hidden gifts. Gifts that are invisible to everyone, even ourselves, and yet remain there, waiting to be discovered. And who knows? Perhaps, like that boy, we harbor a bit of magic as well—magic that just might hold the makings of a wizard.

As with the prior volumes, I am most grateful to my wife, Currie, and my editor, Patricia Lee Gauch. All the other people I have thanked before, including Jennifer Herron, and each of my children, I thank once again. But one more source of inspiration deserves to be thanked above all: Merlin himself.

T. A. B.

*Ay, wingëd as the summer wind,
I left the haunts of men behind:
By waters dire, through forests dark,
Under the white moon's silver arc;
O'er hilly down valley, far away.
Toward the sunset gathering gray,
I, Merlin, fled.*

—From “Merlin and the White Death,”
a ballad by Robert Williams Buchanan

PROLOGUE

Wings, take me back! How often have I dreamed, in the centuries since that day, of returning to that place and time, of facing once again the choice that changed everything.

Such longing, though, is useless. An idea that is lost may yet be reborn, but a day that is lost is gone forever. And even if I could return, would I choose any differently? Probably not. Yet how can I be certain? Even after all these years, I know so very little.

But there is one thing I do know, a gift of that long ago day: Wings are far more than feathered arms. They are part mystery—and also part miracle. For what bears high the body may also give flight to the soul.

Bare feet in the water, the boy sat alone.

Though his sandy hair spun in jovial curls, his eyes, as brown as the muddy tarn before him, seemed strangely sad. Not that he minded being alone. As far back as he could recall—most of his eight or nine years—he'd lived that way. Even when others welcomed him at their meal table, offered him a pallet of straw for a night's rest, or shared their games with him, he knew his only real companion was solitude.

His life was simple—just like his name, Lleu. Whether the name had come from his parents before they died, or from someone else he'd met in his travels, he didn't know. And why should it matter? His name was just a word. A sound. Nothing more.

He plucked a reed, ran his finger down the shaft as if it were a tiny spear, and tossed it at a dead leaf floating in the water. A perfect hit: The leaf sank under the weight, sending rings of tiny ripples across the tarn. As the water lapped at his toes, the boy almost smiled.

Then, seeing that his spear had dislodged a small, lavender-backed beetle, he leaned forward. The little insect flailed, trying without success to work its sopping wings in the water. In a few seconds, it would drown. The boy stretched out his leg, caught the beetle on his toe, and brought it safely to shore.

"There ye be, friend." Taking the tiny creature in his hand, he blew gently on its wings. "Jest a bit o' sunshine an' ye'll be flyin' again."

Almost in answer, the beetle shivered and lifted into the air, flying haphazardly. It veered toward the boy's head. With a moist tap, it landed on top of his ear, then crawled onto one of his dangling curls.

"Likes me, do ye?"

Chuckling, the boy turned back to the tarn. This was one of his favorite places to

camp, whenever his wanderings brought him to this part of Fincayra. Even now, as the days shortened and ice choked many streams, the water here still bubbled freely. More than once, he'd caught a pheasant here, or made supper from the brambleberries lining the water's edge. And it was quiet, far from any roads, and the rascally knaves he sometimes met there.

Met—though not for long. He could outrun any of them. He could run for a whole day without stopping if necessary. Lifting one foot out of the water, he studied its calluses, as thick and rough as the leather on an old boot. But even better. These soles wouldn't wear out. All they needed was a tarn like this, for soaking after a long day's trek.

Lleu's face tightened. He scanned the wintry sky, watching the gray, leaden clouds slide above the leafless trees on the far side of the tarn. Turning back to his foot, he knew he'd really welcome a pair of boots, or sandals at least, in the colder days to come. Days when he might need to cross long stretches of snow to find his next meal.

To be sure, being an orphan had some advantages. He could roam wherever he pleased, sleep wherever he liked. The sky above was his ceiling, often brightly painted. Meals came at odd times, but at least they usually came. He expected little, and normally got it. And yet ... he longed for something more. Placing his foot back in the cool, dark waters of the tarn, tinted red from the leaves still clinging to the bramble bushes, he thought about another place and time—a time too distant for memory, yet impossible to forget.

He couldn't recall her name. Nor even her face. The color of her eyes, the shape of her mouth, the length of her hair—all lay hidden, buried deeper than his dreams. He didn't know her name, or the sound of her voice. He wasn't even sure she was his mother.

But he remembered her smell. Earthy, like fallen leaves; tangy, like rose hips in summer; zesty, more than meadowsweet.

She had held him, that much he knew. Every so often, sitting by a tarn like this one, he might hear a blackbird warbling, and the wind humming through the reeds. And then he'd feel sure that she had sung to him, too. Yes, she had! What sort of song, in what sort of tones, he couldn't say. Yet he knew she'd held him close, singing softly, surrounding him with her fragrant skin.

He shuddered. Probably, he told himself, it was just a sudden chill in the air. Sunlight felt weaker at this time of the year, and the wind harsher. Already a tracery of ice lined the far side of the tarn. The longest nights of the year, he knew, lay just ahead.

But he'd survived other winters, at least five or six, and he'd survive this one, as well. Tomorrow he'd move farther south, closer to the coast. Meadows there stayed mostly unfrozen, and if snow fell, it rarely lasted for more than a day or two. As long as he didn't venture too close to the sea, and that shoreline where the dark mist swirled endlessly, forming twisted shapes and scary faces, he'd be fine.

A fire. That's what he needed now. He reached into the pocket of his tunic, squeezing some shavings of dry bark, as well as the pair of iron stones that never failed to spark a flame. He would warm himself, as well as the strip of dried beef a man had kindly tossed him that morning, and make camp for the night.

Lleu stood, scanning the bank as he slapped his feet on the mud. He knew from

experience the weight and thickness of the sticks he needed for a good fire: several as thin as his smallest finger, a load or two of larger ones, and at least one about the size of his leg. Dry kindling was more tricky to find, especially at this time of year, which was why he always carried some. Otherwise he might have to use a strip of cloth from his tunic. And burning his tunic was burning his blanket.

Behind the brambles, he spied the largest branch he would need, ripped from a hawthorn tree by some heavy wind. He ran over. But the branch weighed more than he'd thought—too heavy to carry, or even drag. Nonetheless, he tried, tugging on it with all his weight. Still it wouldn't budge.

"All right then," he muttered aloud, "I'll bust ye! All I'm needin' is 'nuf to burn."

Bracing his foot against a cracked portion of the branch, he grabbed the upper end. Hard as he could, he pulled. The branch wriggled, creaking slightly, but didn't break. Again he tried, without success.

"Jest break now, will ye?"

As the boy set his hands to try again, a sword suddenly slashed through the air. The blade severed the branch, as if it were nothing more than a twig. A section just the right size to carry rolled on the muddy ground.

Grateful as well as startled, the boy whirled around. But his words of thanks caught in his throat. There, facing him, stood the most fearsome warrior he had ever seen—a man, immensely tall and sturdy, wearing a horned skull as a mask. Behind the mask shone wrathful eyes. And worse, the warrior carried two massive swords, each strapped to one of his arms.

Strange, thought the boy. *Those swords ...* He sucked in his breath. They weren't, he suddenly realized, strapped to the man's arms. Rather, they *were* his arms, bound somehow to the warrior's powerful shoulders.

The masked man stared down at him. In a deep but hollow voice that seemed to echo from somewhere faraway, he commanded, "Tell me your name, boy."

"Ah, 'tis ... Llew, m-master." He tried to swallow, but his throat only made the sound of a whimper. "Least that's what I be mostly called."

"Have you no home?"

"N-no, master."

"Have you no parents?"

"N-no, master."

The warrior laughed mirthlessly, even as one of his swordlike arms lifted. "Then, young whelp, you shall be my first victim."

PART ONE



I

THREADS

This wasn't just a familiar stroll down a wooded path. No, this was something far different: more like a flight.

Luminous threads of light wove through the loom of branches, making the forest floor sparkle. The springy turf, softened by centuries of fallen leaves, seemed to lift me higher with every step. I felt I could leap into the trees, or sail like the golden butterflies among their branches. I had taken this woodland path many times before, to be sure. But it had never seemed at once so bright and so dark, so full of clarity as well as mystery.

Hallia, her hand in mine, walked with the same lilt in her step—and something more, the added grace of a deer. She knew, with every curl of her toe and sweep of her arm, the simple glory of motion. Truly, she *was* motion, as fluid as the falling leaf that spun downward from the highest boughs, as gentle as the forest breeze that stroked her auburn hair.

I smiled, thinking of the many such walks we had taken in the past few months. When she had first invited me to live among her people and learn their ways, several of the elders of her clan had objected. Long councils and fierce debates ensued. I was, after all, not a member of the Mellwyn-bri-Meath. And worse, I was a man. How could they possibly trust me with some of their most precious secrets, when my kind had so often hunted and killed their own, for no better reason than hunger for a slab of venison?

Hallia, in the end, had prevailed. The tales of how I'd saved her life didn't sway the elders, nor even the things I'd accomplished for the land of Fincayra. No, it was something far more simple, and powerful: Hallia's love for me. Faced with that, even the most skeptical members of her clan finally gave way. And so, in the time since, I'd learned how to drink water from the rill without disturbing its flow, how to feel the ground as if it were part of my own body, and how to hear with the openness of the air itself.

Such walks we had taken! Hallia guided me through meadows where ancient trails lay hidden, through tall stands of eelgrass that could be woven into baskets or clothing, and through secret glades where many a fawn-child had been born. Often we strode upright, as we did now. Just as often, we ran side by side as doe and stag, our bodies sailing above the soil more than treading upon it.

Yet on this day and on this trail, I felt closer to her than ever before. Tonight, when we reached the far side of the forest, I would show her a secret of my own—my stargazing stone. And there I would give her the present I'd been saving. I tapped my