

The Lost Years of Merlin

T.A. Barron

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Years before he was a powerful wizard and mentor to King Arthur in well-known legends, Merlin had a mysterious childhood lost in time. These accounts of his youth, known as his “lost years”, all started with a small nameless boy washing up on the shores of Wales with no memory or knowledge of who he is. As he grows up, he finds that he is different from the other kids and wields some extraordinary but dangerous powers that he soon despises and fears. Stubborn and restless, the boy known by others as Emrys, leaves his world behind as he goes back to the sea where he was first abandoned, in order to find some kind of inclination or answer to his forgotten past and identity. Out at sea, he soon discovers a mesmerizing island known as Ficapra, whose beauty is gradually becoming more corrupted by the evil King Stangmar and his warrior goblins that terrorize the land. Emrys makes a few friends and together they attempt to save the declining land. Without knowing, Emrys’s little adventure may change the course of history as well as reveal more about his past than he had expected.

This novel is suitable for readers age 8-14. The vocabulary and descriptions are a little more advanced than other children’s novels but the content itself has a mysterious fairytale aura that would be appealing for younger audiences.

The point and purpose of the novel was to give a fictional backstory to a legendary figure from a traditional fairy-tale. I think this much was well-done. The novel does have a more traditional fairy-tale-type style of story-telling with somewhat cliché-like fantasy characters. However, some of the initial accounts did not seem to be relevant to the overall conflict of the story. In this way, I feel like the plot wasn’t as organized. Emrys didn’t seem to have a very coherent direction or purpose when attempting to run from home to learn about a past he had no hints or clues about. Some events seemed purely coincidental and unrealistic. From an overall perspective of the plot, I think it sufficiently achieved a basic storyline, but some of the earlier points and events could have been more deeply infused with the theme and direction of the novel. In other words, with greater organization and character depth, it could have made the plot stronger and more riveting. However, from the standpoint of a child around 10-12, I think this plot would still be pretty interesting and diverse. To older kids though, the story might be considered cliché and boring to other fantasy-like re-tellings.

Despite this, I think one of the strong points of the novel was the author’s writing style. The voice of storytelling is a bit more on the traditional and classical side, but it does justice to the imagery of the novel. I enjoyed the visual and vivid fantasy-like descriptions. The author definitely painted a very strong image of the tone and setting for the story. Again, some of the vocabulary might be a bit advanced and complex for younger readers, but in terms of literature, the language went far in achieving a rich and flavorful reading experience.

Overall, this book wasn’t bad. I would recommend this for fans of fantasy or fairytale. It reminds me a little bit of the work from C.S. Lewis in terms of the characters and magical aspects, so if you enjoyed those novels, I would recommend to give this one a try.

Recommended Titles:

- The Crystal Cave by Mary Stewart
- The Seven Songs by T.A. Barron
- The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis
- East by Edith Pattou
- The Mists of Avalon by Marion Zimmer Bradley