



## Merlin's Ring

*H. Warner Munn*

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## **Merlin's Ring** H. Warner Munn

Originally published in 1974 by Ballantine as part of its Adult Fantasy series and reprinted six times, Merlin's Ring was an instant sensation among both fantasy fans and critics. This is an epic saga, ranging through history from the fall of Atlantis to Joan of Arc, and linking the Arthurian legends with Mezoamerican god Quetzalcoatl, the legends of Roland, Prester John, and Kublai Khan. It is also a powerful story of two lovers, Gwalchmai and Corenice, whose spirits are separated and reunited numerous times over the course of many centuries. QUOTES: In Merlin's Ring, Munn reaches the apex of his art, a synthesis of myth and history, imagination and reality, to show the heroic qualities by which the human spirit endures. - Don Herron, in Survey of Modern Fantasy Literature The story of Merlin's Ring is a colossal achievement of sheer imagination. From the moment the wandering spirit of the sorceress from Atlantis occupies the body of a Viking maid and liberates Gwalchmai from his frozen tomb within an iceberg, wherein he has lain in suspended animation for centuries, the tale expands to include shamans and witches and magical and supernatural forces. The vast canvas of this novel pictures a panoply of figures from history and myth and legend as background to a love story that survives the ages and traverses entire continents. Joan of Arc is but the most familiar of these, and the period of the Crusades form but a segment of a much larger history. Seldom have I encountered a more ambitious narrative in my exploration of fantasy, and seldom has a gripping human drama of such strength and vigor invested a story of such sweep and scope and vaulting imaginative power. - LinCarter, from the Introduction to the 1974 Ballantine edition

## **Merlin's Ring Details**

Date : Published May 12th 1974 by Ballantine Books (first published January 1st 1974)

ISBN : 9780345240101

Author : H. Warner Munn

Format : Paperback 366 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Mythology, Arthurian, Fiction, Speculative Fiction

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## From Reader Review Merlin's Ring for online ebook

### **Renee Wolcott says**

Truly awful fantasy about lovers who magically transcend time. Laughably bad.

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### **Ian says**

A very tangential fantasy novel

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### **Jim says**

This is followed by Merlin's Godson chronologically, I think. There might be another book or two in this, but this was the best of the 2 I read. The pace was uneven, but the story was very interesting & rather weird. A love story that spans centuries, mostly in Europe, with very limited magic.

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### **James Oden says**

When I first read the forward at the beginning of the book which extolled the virtues of Merlin's Ring and H. Warner Munn's writing, I was frankly dubious. Still I had bought the book in a used book store and thought in the least it should be a fun read.

What I discovered was that it is a lovely book and in way I have trouble articulating. I certainly enjoyed the way the story crossed time and landed the character Gwalchmai in various historical settings. In each of these setting the culture is explored and reference in many cases was given to other writings. That was then another element I truly enjoyed, which was the other literary references. When the sword of Roland was sought, I could relate as I had read "The Song of Roland". But even this was only a surface thing. At the end of the day I found that I loved Munn's writing, like I love being in the presence of a good friend; it just struck home in a very deep way.

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### **Erik Graff says**

Whew! I sure don't remember this one, but note that it's listed as read in the bibliographical file. Must have been one of those one-nighters read during a break from school.

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### **Fraser Sherman says**

4.5 because the underlying assumption that Europe colonizing the New World is a good thing is never even questioned. That aside, this is awesome, filled with a mix of Christianity and paganism, history and fantasy (the immortal Gwalchmai meets Joan of Arc and also visits Faerie) and crossing much of Europe and Asia

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over its 600 year span. What ties it together and keeps it from becoming just random incidents is Gwalchmai's love for Corenice, which is the real dramatic arc of the story: it starts with her freeing him from a glacier (at the end of Merlin's Godson, the preceding book) and ends with them finally together for all time.

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### **Jackie says**

While the premise of Merlin's Ring is intriguing, I had to force myself to put the time in to finish it. Not because it's good, but because I want to get it over with. The story is good but the author ruins the momentum with uber-wordy paragraphs that don't have anything to do with the story, or just marginally. This book could have benefitted by a good editor as the idea was fantastic yet the execution was awful. In the end, it was very predictable. I had planned on reading the sequel right away but now that's going on the back-burner as I wasn't all that impressed with Merlin's Ring.

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### **Sheila says**

I had a bit of a time getting through the vernacular in this book. Very interesting story line, great characters, a great 'new' (not very new...the book was written in '74, I think) Merlin tale; just too much wordiness.

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### **Douglas Milewski says**

Merlin's Ring (1974) by H. Warner Munn is among the last fantasies of the pre-Tolkien style. Drawing from the Western and Arthurian corpus, the story is of Merlin's Godson, Gwalchmai, and his beloved Atlantean warrior maiden, Corenice. The mission is simple: reach the Emperor of the Roman Empire to add a faraway land to his kingdom. The problem: Rome fell five hundred years ago.

I found this a book that one must intend to read. It's not like an exciting modern novel that whisks you away. Instead, one must walk in and accept the author's story style and pacing. The story itself would be considered bad by many modern measures, as Munn stomps on many modern taboos. In some ways, he shows you why the taboos are taboo, but in other ways, he shows that the taboos are nonsense. Much of his success depends on how well he told any particular piece of the story, with the unevenness being the determinant on whether it worked or not.

The story is broad, as an historical epic is broad, taking place over centuries, giving the reader a witness to historical times. Munn does his work, because history matters here, not the fantasy history that we've grown used to, but history informed by scholarship. While I can't say that the history is perfect, he takes it as close as the scholarship of the time can bring him.

The tale itself consists of many arcs across many times, giving it the feel of multiple novellas rather than one, large novel.

I felt quite charmed with the relationship between Gwalchmail and Corenice. They do not have intercourse before marriage, and then strive to keep faithful to each other despite the arc of time moving between them. He is extremely long lived due to magic, and she flits between bodies, sometimes in control, and sometimes not. What catches me most is the earnestness of this faithfulness, that neither is trying to wiggle out or create moral escape clauses. When they said faithful, they meant faithful.

I found the ending rather lackluster. How does one end a book quite like this? That's always a problem. Good endings are hard, and hard for this book because Munn never quite got the book leading up to something specific. The end comes because, in the end, there must be an end.

I recommend this book because it reads so differently than a modern fantasy. It represents a path that fantasy once followed, a path that's been forgotten but for a handful of old books. The hero is no hyper-macho. The heroine is not hyper-competent. Both are quite earnest, without cynicism or witty banter. They are who they are.

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### **Cheryl says**

I'm not quite sure what to think about this book. I really enjoyed the first half of the book, but totally lost interest about half way thru. I struggled thru the rest over the course of a week and was glad to have read to the end that wrapped things up.

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### **Ada Haynes says**

Took me 20 years to read that book, that I bought in a second-hand bookstore long ago. It was written in 1974 and you feel that when you read it. As a few reviewers wrote below, the 1st half is okayish, even in an old-fashioned fantasy way but the second half... jumping from one main historical event to another, just by accident.

Mmmh.

I finished it, but I'm not going to look for the 1st book.

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### **Theo says**

Not very good, and not even in the entertaining way I thought it wouldn't be good. Just kind of dull, with uninteresting characters, prose, and plot.

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### **S. L. says**

This has all the beauties (or you might call them flaws) of a fantasy from Andre Norton's era. The characters are straightforward, instinctively doing the right thing - no neuroses or self-doubting. History is a joy to travel through, the future hopeful; technology and magic go hand in hand and are usually benevolent. It's straightforward and charming as Elveron, Munn's land of the fairies. The quest has little meaning to jaded moderns, but the love story between a wandering soul and an immortal swordsman never grows stale.

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### **Terry says**

H. Warner Munn's *Merlin's Ring* is one of the odder fantasies I have come across in my reading, but also

one for which I have a deep affection. The book is equal parts pseudo-Arthurian Romance (in both the medieval and modern sense of the word), era-spanning historical fantasy à la Phra the Phoenician, and epic hero's journey; there is even some mild pulp sci-fi thrown in for good measure. Despite (or maybe because of) all of this melding and mixing, *\_Merlin's Ring\_* manages to be something all its own.

Written by one of the old standbys of the *Weird Tales* pulp magazine (Munn was an associate of Lovecraft and Seabury Quinn) *\_Merlin's Ring\_* was probably Munn's masterwork. It is actually the second volume in a series of stories that purport to tell the tale of what happened to Arthur's followers after the great King's fall, but it can be read on its own quite easily. All one needs to know from the first volume (collecting two original novellas under the title *Merlin's Godson*) is that it describes how the wizard Merlin and the Romano-British centurion Ventidius Varro fled Britain with their followers and sailed in Arthur's ship *Prydwen* to the New World. There they became kings among the Aztecs and a son is born to Varro, Gwalchmai, who has for godfather none other than the famous Merlin. Varro sends his son back to the Old World on a quest to find the current emperor and offer to him overlordship of Varro's new domain. On the way across the Atlantic Gwalchmai has many adventures and even comes across an ancient Atlantean Swan-Ship which houses a strange robotic statue inhabited by the transmigrating spirit of an undying Atlantean princess. The two of course fall in love, but as the tale ends Gwalchmai is trapped beneath a glacier with his love, Corenice, promising they will meet again.

This volume opens several hundred years later as Corenice, now inhabiting the body of a Viking maiden, forces her family to steer their ship towards the glacier that houses Gwalchmai's body. Thanks to having drunk his godfather's elixir of life, as well as having possession of his magical ring, Gwalchmai has been able to weather the centuries in the ice unharmed and no older than when he was first frozen. He is freed from the ice by Corenice and so begins his renewed quest to find the emperor to whom he can give the message of his father. What follows is a meandering journey from western Europe to the far East and back again which spans centuries (Merlin's elixir exacts periods of a death-like sleep in order to pay for long life) and takes Gwalchmai into a variety of adventures. These adventures include a somewhat admittedly twee stay in Faery where he retrieves Arthur's sword Excalibur, a journey to China (initially in search of the supposed Christian King Prester John) in a humorous style reminiscent of Bramah's *Kai Lung* stories, a voyage to feudal Japan, and a return west where he comes across Joan of Arc (an apparent descendant of his and Corenice's) and ultimately tangles with an old foe, the alien-god Oduarpa who had been responsible for the fall of Atlantis.

In many ways it is a strange tale and not every element of it works as well as others. Still, Munn has an easy prose style and was a meticulous researcher who brings vivid life to the era-spanning adventures of his hero. Gwalchmai's ostensible quest is really little more than a macguffin meant to propel the hero forward through time and across space as he lives out his not-quite-immortal term. The lynchpin of the story is the romance between Gwalchmai and his transmigrating love Corenice. Sometimes this romance can be stretched to the point of excess, but ultimately Munn is able to pull the story back and make us care about these characters whose fate as semi-supernatural heroes seems to always get in the way of their true desire to simply live a simple life with each other. Munn creates an interesting world populated both with real historical figures (among them Kublai Khan, Joan of Arc, Gilles de Rais and Christopher Columbus), alongside mythical figures such as King Arthur, the Norse god Thor, and the Fae, as well as his own inventions in the form of Corenice, last daughter of high-tech Atlantis, and their alien foe the dark lord Oduarpa.

I imagine this book will not be to everyone's taste, but if you like historically flavoured fantasy with a strong dose of romance and optimism then I'd recommend giving *\_Merlin's Ring\_* a try (either with or without the companion volume *Merlin's Godson*).