

An Interview with T. A. Barron

Author of the upcoming novel: *Atlantis Rising*

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- 1. *Atlantis Rising* is about the creation of Atlantis. Why did you feel you had to tell this story?**

Gaps in mythic lore always intrigue me. That was true for the lost years of Merlin's youth—and now for the origins of Atlantis. Why do those gaps call to me? Not only because of the unspoken possibilities ... but because I wonder why there's a gap at all. What really happened? Was it a secret so devastating, so powerful, it needed to be hidden away for centuries?

By the time I'm asking those questions, I know there's only one way to answer them. So I'm at my writing desk, ready to explore.

- 2. What was your favorite chapter or scene to write and why?**

Impossible question! I love each chapter as if it were a child. But if I had to pick one from *Atlantis Rising* ... it would be the crescendo of sacrifices and miracles at the very end of the tale. That crescendo results in the birth of a new and magical place, the island of Atlantis. Yet even in that moment of triumph are the seeds of ultimate tragedy. That combination, the full range we experience in life, is moving to me.

- 3. Your novels tend to contain strong messages about humanity and the responsibility we have to take care of nature. Can we expect something similar in *Atlantis Rising*?**

Yes indeed. As well as something I've not explored much before—the connections between our mortal world and the spiritual realm beyond.

- 4. What has been the toughest criticism given to you as an author?**

Sometimes my books have been banned because people can't handle wizards and magic, or they feel I am promoting nature-based spirituality (which I certainly am). That sort of criticism drives me crazy because it shows such intolerance and arrogance, preventing other people from reading the books and drawing their own conclusions.

Once a woman stood up at a conference where I was speaking and castigated me for offering new metaphors for how people can find truth and divinity. I thanked her for the compliment. The audience gave me a standing ovation ... and, I hope, gave her something to think about.

5. What has been the best compliment?

When people tell me something I've written has helped them feel that they have their own special magic—that they, like young Merlin when he washed ashore, have hidden potential—I feel deeply pleased.

Once a woman wrote to me that an idea in my book had helped her to explain death to her young daughter. She ended it by saying, "Thank you for being a light bringer." That I'll never forget.

6. You've written a whole host of books, across several categories and genres. What keeps you going after all this time?

The world around us is so full of marvels and mysteries, as well as terrors and struggles. I just can't resist exploring it through writing! I feel grateful every day for that opportunity.

Writing is hard work, I admit—the hardest I've ever done. But it's also the most deeply joyful work I've ever done. It helps me to understand this remarkable but very brief journey called life. Best of all, by opening me up to the world, it makes me more sensitive and aware—and therefore more alive! And if that writing also touches others who are sharing the journey, we are connected in meaningful ways.

7. Do you most relate to your main characters or to secondary characters?

All my characters are facets of myself. That includes female as much as male, dark as well as light, human along with hawks, ghouls, fire angels, snow crystals, rivers, and (yes, it's true) even stones.

When I wrote about Kate in *The Ancient One*, I needed to find in myself the voice of a teenage girl as well as the voice of an ancient redwood tree who would carry her spirit through time. When that half-drowned boy washed ashore on page one of *The Lost Years of Merlin*, I needed to feel all his fears and vulnerabilities—as well as the secret inner magic that would enable him to become the mage of Camelot and the greatest wizard of all times.

8. Do you have things you need in order to write (i.e. coffee, cupcakes, music)?

This will surprise some people, but I still write all my first drafts by hand. Yes, I know it's crazy—even *The Great Tree of Avalon* trilogy, which was over 1000 pages, I wrote by hand. Then I'll transfer everything to a computer and do all my subsequent drafts (usually 7 or 8 of them) that way.

Why? It's just a chemistry that works for me. Somehow, writing by hand, feeling the texture of the page and the ink, frees my creative juices. So I stay with it—even though I often need to ice my left wrist after a day of writing.

9. Where's your favorite place to write?

Home. My creative energy is best aroused by being in my writing room on the top floor, accessible by a spiral staircase, surrounded by zillions of books, wizard's staffs people have carved for me, crystals, artwork by my children, and windows that look out on farm fields, blue-green foothills, and the peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park. Add to that a mug of cinnamon spice tea ... and I have all it takes to travel.

10. What is easier to write, the first line or the last line?

The last line, by far. Sometimes I have a much clearer vision of the ending for a story than the beginning. And then the trick is to engage both sides of the brain—the logical, rational side as well as the poetic, dreamlike side—to connect the two ends authentically.

11. What one YA novel do you wish you had when you were a teen?

I didn't discover Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* until my twenties. In some ways, that was a good thing, because it's so richly layered and beautifully crafted. But I do wish I'd encountered it earlier—simply to inhabit that world for a longer time. Maybe that's why I've read it aloud to all of our children as they've been growing up. It's been a lovely sharing.

12. You've been invited by Warner Bros. to work on the screenplay for a *Lost Years of Merlin* movie. How does that experience differ from writing a book? Has it been challenging or refreshing?

Writing a film script is like writing a haiku poem after all these years of big, sprawling epic poems. It's been a steep learning curve—but I'm truly loving it. What fun to imagine the story as a feature film! And I feel very lucky to have this chance to re-tell a story I wrote 17 years ago that's now in over 20 languages around

the world.

The most important realization was that the movie should not be just a duplicate, in film form, of the book. Instead, they are companion pieces—created with the same essential characters, elements, and ideas ... but still different in some ways.