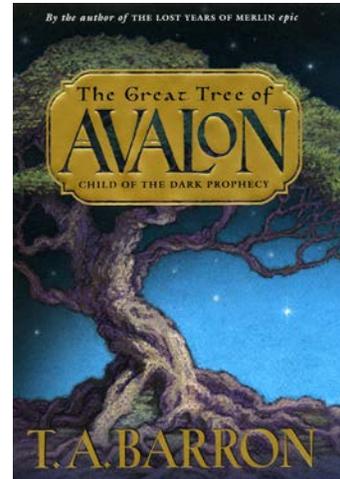


It's Only Natural: T.A. Barron follows his passion on a literary quest

By Linda Castellitto
Book Page

Enter the world of Avalon: a wondrous land where all manner of creatures coexist around a great tree. Grown from a seed planted by none other than Merlin himself, the tree is cultivated and nurtured by T.A. Barron, author of numerous fantasy books and possessor of a fabulously fertile imagination.

Barron, perhaps best known for *The Lost Years of Merlin* series, continues the magic with *The Great Tree of Avalon: Child of the Dark Prophecy*, the first book in a trilogy featuring a trio of young would-be heroes who find themselves charged with saving their beloved Avalon. As droughts drain the land of its lushness and stars fall dark in the sky, the three—wilderness guide Tamywyn, priestess-in-training Elli and eagle/man Scree—realize they must move beyond their uncertainty about the future and work together to protect Avalon.



“My job, as an author, is to raise issues about living sustainably with our fragile and beautiful planet. I try to raise them as passionately and convincingly as I can, yet never lecture and sermonize so the reader can form his or her own conclusions,” says Barron, who spoke with *Book Page* from his home outside Boulder, Colorado, where he lives with his wife and five children. And, he adds, “I truly believe every person can make a difference—that’s why I’m drawn to heroic quest stories.”

Barron himself undertook a quest that led to author-dom, one that began when he was a Rhodes Scholar. Between the two years of his scholarship, Barron took a year to travel and, he says, “I got a bad case of dysentery and an enormous number of story ideas.” He turned one into a book,” and got rejected by 30-plus publishers.”

After that less-than-encouraging experience, Barron returned to the United States to work as a venture capitalist. “I was constantly finding myself getting up at 4 a.m. to write for a couple of hours before the phone calls and meetings began,” he recalls.

This didn’t detract from his business success: he eventually became president of his firm, a turning point that Barron says changed the direction of his life. “It was clear if I didn’t leave then to write full-time, I never would.” And so, in a bit of drama befitting one of his characters, on the same day Barron day announced good news about the company’s

finances, he also broke the news of his resignation. “One investor was so upset,” Barron recalls, “he pressed a business card into my hand and said, here's the number for my therapist. You must call him.”

“It's all about following your passion,” the author says. “If you love something as much as I love stories and books, you absolutely have to follow that passion, to keep traveling.”

It's this persistence in the face of doubt that informs the quests in Barron's books. In *The Great Tree of Avalon*, Tamywyn is uncertain about his abilities and his future. Barron says, “I wanted to ground him in the world we all live in, where we often don't understand our full potential, or feel cut off from the future and what might lie ahead.”

Barron says a passion for preserving the environment is also an important element of his work and his life: “I've always been grounded in nature and have always found my greatest inspiration in the natural world. To me, nature is not just a backdrop, but a full-blown character.”

In *The Great Tree of Avalon*, this is certainly so; the inextricable links between the land, air, water and sky are evident. And the fact that even Avalon—a giant, soaring tree that bridges the celestial and the earthly—can be weakened, draws a strong parallel to the possible consequences of environmental damage in our own world.

Although the author won't reveal what lies ahead for Tamywyn, Elli and Scree, readers will soon find out: the second book in the trilogy will be published next year.