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Land is 'wellspring' of soul for author

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When Boulder author Tom (T.A.) Barron discusses his work, words, sentences and thoughts erupt with staccato-like urgency. It's a strange delivery for an author whose theme is the usually pastoral literary connection between nature and the human spirit.

But the same tone can be found in most of his novels as well, and, however incongruous it might seem, it works. In fact, given the way Barron weaves danger, challenges, bravery and self-discovery into his novels, it makes perfect sense.

Barron's fifth novel has been for out about a year. And in recognition of his success, his publishing company has heaped upon him a significant milestone in any author's career — a 23-city book-signing tour.

Barron received another honor recently — the Wilderness Society's Robert Marshall Award — for "wisdom, vision and exceptional service" in protection of the nation's wild lands. It probably wouldn't be fair to put Barron on the spot and ask him which means the most. Needless to say, they both mean a lot.

"This is a humbling moment," Barron said at the Sept. 18 ceremony in Zion National Park. "Bob Marshall climbed the highest peaks, literally and figuratively, and he has always been an idol of mine. Thanks to people like Bob Marshall, we Americans have inherited a collection of

wilderness lands unsurpassed anywhere in the world. These lands give us plenty of fresh drinking water, but they are also watersheds, wellsprings of our very souls."

The need to protect nature as a wellspring of the human soul is what Barron's novels are all about.

His strength is the depth of his love for the wild country and his skill is making us see the world through that lens.

Barron's first novels feature a young heroine named Kaitlyn Prancer Gordon, whose exploits take her from a journey to far galaxies ("Heartlight") to undersea adventure in search of a cup that will prove the existence of Merlin ("The Merlin Effect"). In between, she takes a trip to Oregon to see her eccentric, tree-loving Aunt Melanie, which turns into a struggle to save a newly discovered redwood forest in the basin of nearby crater. Facing danger with bravery, Kaitlyn's adventures

bridge the gap between generations, cultures, centuries and species.

In "The Lost Years of Merlin," a prequel to the 1995 "Seven Songs of Merlin," a young boy washes up on the shores of ancient Wales, not knowing who he is or from where he came.

At the knee of Branwen, he learns the lore of the Celts, the Druids and people even more ancient. But, haunted by his mysterious past and the discovery of his power, he refuses to accept Branwen as his mother and runs away to

the mythical land of Branwen's tales to find the secret to his past and subsequently unlock his mysterious powers to heal.

We all know how that worked out.

Metaphorically, it is a journey we all make or at least yearn to make, Barron says. "All of us have a certain magic down inside ourselves," he said. "And like Merlin, all of us can discover our own magic."

Ideally, we can make our own life-transforming journey through wilderness.

But for those of us who can't, Barron's books put such an adventure within reach.

Barron will read from selected works and sign copies of "The Lost Years of Merlin" on Thursday at 7:30 p.m. in the Boulder Bookstore, 1107 Pearl.

At the knee of Branwen, he learns the lore of the Celts, the Druids and people even more ancient.



Charlie Johnson/Colorado Daily

Boulder author Tom Barron is getting ready to leave on a 23-city book-signing tour. He recently won the Wilderness Society's Robert Marshall Award for his novels, which focus on humanity's relationship with the land.