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The Great Tree of Avalon Child of the Dark
A new essay by T. A. BARRON

Fantasy author brings 'The Great Tree of Avalon' to Exeter

By Holly Finigan
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Move over T.S. Eliot, J.K. Rowling, and C.S. Lewis. T.A.'s in town.

Is it Todd Alexander? Timothy Andrew?
Thomas Aaron?

Whatever the T.A. stands for remains a
mystery.

"I wrote my first book while a Rhodes Scholar
in Oxford," says T.A. Barron, 52, during a
recent telephone interview. "Everyone there
uses initials."

Barron will be in Exeter on Oct. 18 to give a
reading of his latest book, "The Great Tree of Avalon" — the first in a trilogy.

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But Barron has not always dreamed up ideas of Merlin, Camelot, and heroic young adults. Well, at least not professionally.

Barron's business

An accomplished New York City businessman, Barron left the city life 14 years ago to pursue his dream of writing.

"After eight years of working my way to being president of the Prospect Group Inc., I walked into the partners' meeting, and gave the best financial report that I had ever been able to give.

"Then I said, 'oh, by the way, I am not going to be president anymore'." The room was shocked. Some thought Barron needed therapy.

He knew he needed out.

"I think that life is about following your dreams," he says. "If you have a dream to be a writer, dancer or even a rocket-ship builder, then you must follow your passion."

People would constantly ask him, "wasn't it scary to move from New York City to Colorado in pursuit of a writing career?"

"Of course it was,' I'd tell them. But it was not nearly as scary as growing old and never have followed my dreams. "

Nurture of nature

Henry David Thoreau is one of the most influential authors to Barron. "Nature writing is my home turf. What are the imaginary worlds like that are portrayed in my books? They are just like the world we live in, because if you know how to get all five senses alive, then you can make any world appear real.

"Unspoiled nature is the last best place on earth for people to find out who they really are," he says. "Nature is the only place where we can feel both very small and very large at the same time."

Barron lives in Boulder with his wife of 18 years, Currie, and their five children, who are all named after mountains. Besides being an accomplished businessman and author, Barron has also founded the "Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes." This award honors 10 young people yearly from across the United States who have made a significant difference to people and the planet.

The award is named after his mother.

"I simply wanted to honor that great old gal and do it while she was still alive and to see her rise in embarrassment. She taught seven kids about the power each individual has to make a difference."

Barron also stressed that most heroes are unsung.

"I want to make a point that most heroes are virtually unknown and most heroes are not famous. This award goes out to those people."

From Ivy league to big league

Barron went to Princeton University and majored in history and politics.

"I always loved to read, but I was really fascinated by history."

Barron's books — including the best-selling "The Lost Years of Merlin" epics, optioned by Miramax for a feature film — are all set in mystical eras. "'The Great Tree of Avalon' is set in a completely fictional world, but it has a feel to it, as real as walking in my fields in Colorado."

The book took three years to finish.

"I have to keep track of 67 characters throughout," Barron says. "Luckily only three of them are main characters!"

Anticipation

Dan Chartrand, co-owner of the Time of Wonder bookstore in Exeter says, "there's a lot of excitement building within the store" for the author's arrival.

The fantasy section of the bookstore is definitely the fastest moving, he says. "Barron's books have sold steadily and well."

Chartrand says he enjoys how Barron portrays Merlin as a young man instead of an old legend.

"It helps kids think about the question 'where does Merlin come from?' He really is a layered character."

Chartrand and his 9-year-old son are in the process of reading "The Great Tree of Avalon." The second book in the "Avalon" trilogy will be out in the fall of 2005. Though Barron refuses to tell who the dreaded child of the dark prophesy is, he does promise one thing:

"You'll have a very good idea who it is, by the end of the first book. But, I'll also leave the reader with a real sense of satisfaction, and the constant thrill of wanting more."

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