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Fantasy author reads at Magic Tree

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Kids often tend to live in a fantasy world all their own. Fashioning castles out of sand, they operate in a parallel universe during playtime. It's that sense of creativity that propelled Colorado author T.A. Barron to write his most recent tale, "The Great Tree of Avalon: Child of the Dark Prophecy" (Philomel Books, 2004).

Both an environmentalist and a fantasy lover, Barron will appear at the Magic Tree Bookstore in Oak Park on Oct. 11. The well-known author of "The Wings of Merlin" and "The Mirror of Merlin" left the corporate world and his powerful post as a venture capitalist to write. It's all paid off since Dimension, a division of Miramax that is run by "The Lord of the Rings" executive producers Bob and Harvey Weinstein, are looking to turn his earlier epic into a feature film.

As the present tale goes, the great wizard Merlin planted a seed that grew to be the "Great Tree of Avalon," which provided a realm for humans and mystical beings to inhabit. Now, the land is suffering from mysterious droughts and its constellations have begun to dim. The story, which is part one in a trilogy, follows three young individuals: Tamwyn, a wilderness guide; Elli, a young priestess and former slave; and Scree, an eagle-man who can sprout wings and fly. The three are on a quest to save the land of Avalon, not knowing who among them is the evil Child of the Dark Prophecy and who has the power to overcome



Colorado author T.A. Barron reads from his latest novel, "The Great Tree of Avalon: Child of the Dark Prophecy," at the Magic Tree Bookstore. "I think the biggest mistake you can ever make is to dumb things down for kids," he said.

it.

"Although the book is purely fantasy, it does relate to our world today in important ways," Barron said. "We're doing a lot of damage to our environment right now -- particularly under the current administration. We need to save our planet since our continued existence depends on it."

That having been said, fantasy seemed a logical outlet to Barron because he claimed "mythic quests allow us to see ourselves through a misted mirror," adding that as long as the characters "feel" and "smell" true, they're believable in everyday life.

Given the story's multilayered approach, it took three years to complete.

"At any given time, there are four- to-five plots running at once, and there are 67 background characters," Barron said. "The world of Avalon is a complex place dating back 1,000 years. In order to make the story good and meaty, I had to give it a great deal of thought."

Sound too complex for your tike? To hear Barron tell it, it's that complexity that makes his story appealing to young readers.

"I think the biggest mistake you can ever make is to dumb things down for kids," he said. "You need to give children a chance to rise to the highest places in themselves."

In order to create a good novel, Barron said the formula is simple.

"You need to have a page-turning, gripping plot-line, characters you can really get to know well and an underlying moral question that touches people in a lasting way," he said. "The only way for me to do that is to write stories I want to read myself."

When asked what he'd like his readers to walk away with after having read his latest epic, Barron answered: "to know that each of us has a special gift inside, one that will help us through times when we feel lost, something to help pull us through."

When he's not writing, Barron serves on environmental boards, such as the Nature Conservancy and the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies, and he's set up the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, a \$2,000 higher education scholarship for those 8 to 18 who demonstrate a positive spirit and high moral purpose in accomplishing their goals.

Barron will read from and sign his latest book, and answer questions at 4 p.m. Oct. 11 at Magic Tree Bookstore, 141 N. Oak Park Ave., Oak Park. The event is free. Call (708) 848-0770.



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