

Interview with T. A. Barron for Columbus Metro Library

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****Most of your novels are geared toward young adults. Why do you prefer writing for a younger audience?**

Young people are--quite literally--our future. They have the energy, hope, and ideals to create a better world. And part of my job as a writer is to give them ideas, encouragement, and inspiration--to stretch their minds and hearts so they know that they can truly change the world.

While the heroes in my novels are mostly young adults, I don't write "for" that age group. Maybe that's why lots of adults read my books, as well. The fact is I write books I would like to read. That means each story must have a character, a relationship, a place, a dilemma, and an idea that I care about. A lot. I like a story where an individual must deal with personal issues as well as overarching issues. The mythic quest--call it fantasy if you prefer--allows me to incorporate all of these qualities.

In addition, the mythic quest gives me a great opportunity to wrestle with some of life's biggest questions in the context of a good old-fashioned page-turner. For example, telling the story of Merlin's lost years allows me to explore the idea that all of us, whatever our backgrounds, have a magical person hidden down inside of ourselves. Just like that unknown boy who washed ashore, each of us has the potential to reach for the stars.

****Where do you get the ideas for your books? Do people you know ever inspire some of your characters?**

My best ideas come from life itself. Observing everything. With all of your senses wide open. Then add a pinch of imagination and anything is possible.

And why do I write about imaginary people and places? Dreams are sometimes the best ways to talk about reality. Fantasy novels--or, as I prefer to call them, mythic quests--give me the chance to bend the rules of our everyday reality, in order to highlight some big ideas. About the human condition, how we can grow into wisdom, how we can affect the world around us. Fantasy, you see, is like a bent mirror: We can see ourselves, but with certain qualities enhanced and others diminished. And, in the process, we can explore some of the great questions of life.

****Why did you decide to write about Merlin? Why do you think he still fascinates people?**

Merlin--at least, the Merlin I have written about in The Lost Years of Merlin epic--is a real human being. He has struggles, sorrows, joys, and aspirations--and, hidden deep within him, a remarkable talent. Or gift. Or magic. In that way, Merlin is no different

from all of us--burdened by the human experience while at the very same time exalted by it.

Therein lies the remarkable metaphor of Merlin. This metaphor I truly believe lies at the very heart of the whole Lost Years of Merlin epic. Just like the young Merlin, all of us are washed ashore, half drowned, at some point in our lives. All of us have hidden struggles--and hidden potential. And all of us, like the greatest wizard of all, have great magic within us: the ability to reach for the stars.

****The Library is trying to encourage more reading among young males.**

What would you tell young males to pique their interest in reading?

I would say that endless great adventures await readers who explore the universe of books! Heroes, action, mystery, excitement, and the biggest questions of life itself--all these are found in a well-written story.

****What are you currently writing?**

THE GREAT TREE OF AVALON, my new trilogy, has begun. Book One, subtitled "Child of the Dark Prophecy", was published by Philomel Books in October, 2004. And by November, it was on the New York Times bestseller list. Many of you have been wondering when Book Two will be released, and that is now set for the fall of 2005. I am working hard to meet that schedule ... and to bring you ever deeper into the mysterious world of Avalon.

It is NOT necessary to have read The Lost Years of Merlin books to enjoy this new trilogy. But for those of you who have joined young Merlin on his adventures, the miraculous world of Avalon will remind you of Merlin's lost isle of Fincayra. For like Merlin's isle, Avalon is a highly mysterious place, full of dangers, wonders, surprises, tragedies, and triumphs. And also like Fincayra, it will lie somewhere in the mists ... between dark and light, mortality and immortality.

For more details, check my website: www.tabarron.com. Enjoy the journey to this new world!

During the past decade, I've also written several other books: The Hero's Trail, a non-fiction book about what it really takes to be a hero (with some amazing real-life examples of heroic young people); Tree Girl, a short novel about a girl who yearns to find the secret of her true identity; and High as a Hawk, a picture book about a brave girl who was the youngest person ever to climb Long's Peak, Colorado, with truly fabulous paintings by Ted Lewin. But my most absorbing project (other than my kids) has been the five-novel epic called The Lost Years of Merlin. In those books, my goal is to solve a mystery about the legendary wizard, Merlin, who was the mentor to King Arthur and the greatest enchanter of all time. The mystery is what happened to Merlin as a young man. Those

years, for some reason, have been lost from the world of story and song. The Lost Years of Merlin (also the title of the first book in the epic) begins when an unknown boy washes ashore on the coast of Wales. At that point, he has no idea who he is, or what he may become. The epic reveals the great discoveries, challenges, gains, and losses that ultimately prepare him to be the wizard Merlin.

****When you're not writing, what are some things you enjoy doing?**

Hiking in the mountains near my Colorado home. Cross-country skiing. Reading a good book. Baking bread. And, most of all, playing with my five rambunctious kids.

****What can we expect from your appearance at Columbus Metropolitan Library in April?**

An adventure! Let's think of our time as a wonderful hike together in the mountains: We will see some grand, sweeping vistas; experience heroic qualities such as courage and perseverance; find plenty to laugh about; and--I'm sure--discover some big surprises.