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Disney Sets 'Lord Of The Rings' Co-Writer Philippa Boyens To Write Young Merlin Movie



By **Mike Fleming Jr**

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EXCLUSIVE: Disney has set Philippa Boyens to script an adaptation of *The Merlin Saga*, based on the series of books written by T.A. Barron. *Life Of Pi*'s Gil Netter is producing. It's a coup for the studio to land Boyens, who hasn't really worked outside her long collaboration with Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh, with whom she shared the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay in 2002 for the Best Picture winner *The Return Of The King*. She has teamed with Jackson and Walsh on *The Lord Of The Rings* and *The Hobbit* trilogies, as well as *King Kong* and *The Lovely Bones*.

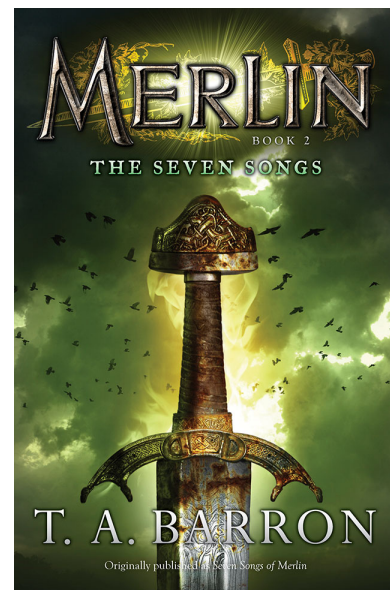


It turned out that when Sean Bailey's Disney division called, it was a fortuitous moment, and the formative story of the iconic wizard was the right subject matter. Boyens came from New Zealand to meet with Bailey and supervising execs Tendo Nagenda and Foster Driver, and Merlin was a character and a world that appealed to her. Also, Jackson and Walsh are only just beginning to figure out what next after finally being able to poke their heads out of Middle Earth. So there is time. Boyens has a good relationship with Alan Horn, who at Warner Bros greenlit *The Hobbit* and was an exec producer on the trilogy.

The studio now has a writer with a strong grasp of how to launch a franchise in a period fantasy world, and a franchise is certainly a hope for the Merlin movie. The young wizard is

the center of a much larger story where the stakes are no less than the future of magic in the world.

Warner Bros has already completed production on *King Arthur: Knights of the Roundtable*, with Guy Ritchie directing, but this sounds like it could be a closer cousin to a series like *Harry Potter* as a wizard figures out his spell-weaving abilities. Barron has created plenty of room in his origin story, as the book series spans 12 volumes. Disney picked up the books after Warner Bros let them go. Patrick Massett and John Zinman were the first scribes brought on.



Boyens is repped by Ken Kamins of Key Creatives and attorney George Davis at Nelson Davis.

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