

A Giant Interview with T.A. Barron (see what I did there?)

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Years and years ago, a fine fellow by the name of Tom (or T.A.) Barron took me to the Bemelman's Bar in the Carlyle Hotel in New York City. I should probably mention as well that we were both living in the area and it was just for a sit down talk. Even so, I'd heard of the bar (illustrated entirely by the man behind Madeline) for a number of years and yet had never made it there. I still think back on it fondly, and I think fondly too of Mr. Barron. Now, lo and behold, he has a new book out and it's a darned fun premise:

When a terrible attack forces young, peace-loving giant Shim and his mother to flee the magical isle of Fincayra and a wager shrinks him down to the size of a man's knee, they must embark on a perilous journey to reach the only person who could possibly help them, the mysterious Domnu.



Now, after all these years, I get to ask Tom more questions. A delightful proposition:

Betsy Bird: *Tom! So good to “see” you again (so to speak). Let’s talk about your latest. I can’t say I’ve ever heard of a book where a giant is shrunk down to knee-high height. Where on earth did you get the idea for this title?*

T.A. Barron: The simple truth is this: Every kid I’ve ever known, no matter how small or insecure, really has a giant down inside themselves. A desire to be big and powerful, a wish to shape their world, and a special magical power that they haven’t yet discovered.

(If you’d like to see how I put that point in a recent video announcing the publication of *GIANT*, just check my Facebook post from October 21 : www.Facebook.com/TABarronFans)



T.A. Barron

BB: *Will do! Now I know that you serve on a variety of environmental and educational boards including the Wilderness Society, World Wildlife Fund, and Earthjustice. To what extent does nature engulf the story of GIANT? What role does it play in the storytelling?*

TAB: Nature is, for me, much more than just a setting for my stories. More than just a backdrop. It's really a full-blown character in those stories. Because places are alive! They have moods, histories, and specific character qualities. They can be bizarre, funny, surprising, dangerous, comforting, mysterious, or sensuous. Part of my job as a writer is to make the imaginary places in my stories feel so real, so fully alive, that readers feel like they're really there, experiencing the adventure.

On top of that, I weave environmental questions and ideas into my stories. That needs to be done organically and humbly, in ways that are never ever preachy. I believe in letting readers decide things for themselves. But I do raise the questions, hoping that might improve readers' awareness. Saving our home planet depends on our being deeply aware of nature and our fellow living creatures... and their many gifts of wonder and inspiration.

BB: *Hero characters interest me. You've given Shim a double problem with this title in that he's now not only diminutive but has gaps in his memory. In terms of plotting, what advantages does the memoryless protagonist offer you, the author?*

TAB: Oooh, what a good question! The loss of memory is a powerful storytelling tool — but it has to be used sparingly. I used it when the young lad who just might grow up to be Merlin the wizard washes ashore at the very start of The Merlin Saga, and that leaves the reader wondering, Who is this person really? So the hero's quest also becomes the reader's journey of discovery. In Shim's case, the reader already knows who the hero is, but now is left wondering, Will Shim ever remember his true identity? And will that actually happen in time before all is lost? That dials up the suspense, making the reader lean more into the adventure.

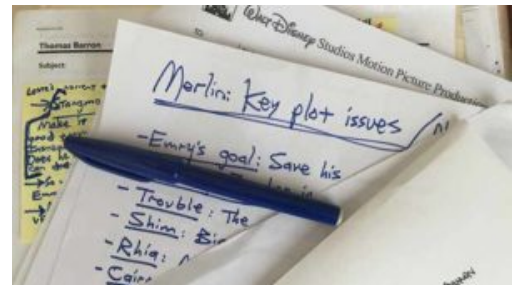


BB: *I can see that this is a prequel to your Merlin series. To what degree should a young reader be familiar with that series? Or do they even need to have read it at all?*

TAB: This book is a stand alone story. Readers don't need to have any idea of the rest of the Merlin series to enjoy Shim's adventures. All they need is a good imagination! Having said that, readers who like Shim and the magical isle of Fincayra will have an easy time entering into the complete, wondrous world of Merlin.

BB: *Speaking of Merlin, I hear that Disney is making a movie of that series. Is there anything you can tell us about that progress at this time?*

TAB: Well, the best news is that Disney has brought together an awesome team of people to make the Merlin movie — including director Michael Matthews (who recently made the highly acclaimed film Love and Monsters), producer Gil Netter (who did Life of Pi and The Blind Side), writer Chris Weitz (who wrote the scripts for Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, The Golden Compass, Twilight: New Moon, and Disney's Cinderella), and previously, writer Philippa Boyens (who won an Oscar for her work on the film scripts for The Lord of the Rings).



Most importantly, while some of the plot points will change for the film, the Disney folks have stayed true to the key elements and core values of the books. So I'm quite sure that Merlin, wherever he is right now, is feeling pleased!

For more info and the latest news, visit the Merlin the Movie page on my website: <https://tabarron.com/merlin-the-movie/>

BB: *Awesome. So dare I ask it? What are you working on next?*

TAB: You can certainly ask. But I might not be able to answer! You see, I'm still playing with ideas, which include a rather unusual tree with some surprising magic of its own. So far, alas, there aren't any giants... but you never know when a giant might suddenly appear. They are so unpredictable. As Shim likes to say, "Certainly, definitely, absolutely!"

A thank you to Olivia Russo and the folks at Philomel / Penguin Random House for setting up this interview. Thanks too to Tom for so patiently answering my questions. GIANT is on shelves now so be sure to pick it up today!