



Myths, Magic, and Podcasting: A T. A. Barron Interview

October 11, 2022 by Betsy Bird

Folks, I've been around a while. Met a lot of folks. And about nine years ago I did something I'd never done before: I finally visited the [Bemelmans Bar](#). Imagine, if you will, a beautiful little watering hole located in the Rosewood Hotel in Manhattan, and inside, more surfaces than you would ever think possible are painted by none other than Ludwig Bemelmans himself. The man behind *Madeline*! I'd always wanted to go, but it took an invitation to get me there. And that invitation came from none other than author T.A. Barron himself. We struck up a friendship that day.

Mr. Barron's had quite the career of his own. Sure, he's the award-winning author of more than [30 highly acclaimed books](#), many of which are international bestsellers. Sure, he's won the de Grummond Medallion for "lifetime contribution to the field of children's and young adult literature" as well as many other awards. But what you may best know him for are his books. Books like [The Merlin Saga](#), [The Great Tree of Avalon](#) (a New York Times bestselling series), [The Ancient One](#), and [The Hero's Trail](#) (nonfiction stories of courageous kids).

And now Tom's doing something entirely new: podcasting. Called [Magic & Mountains](#), it's described this way:

"In this first season, T. A. explores the creative writing process, the enduring magic of Merlin, the wonders and inspiration of nature (as well as the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss), the power of young people to make a positive difference in our world... and he'll also invite listeners to "see your life as a story." On some episodes, he will interview some truly wonderful guests; on others, you will hear T. A. sharing his own magic as a storyteller."

How does a fantasy author make the switch to an audible medium?

You know what this means: Question Time!!

Betsy Bird: *Tom! So great to talk to you today. You've been a fantasy book creator for, I dare say, decades. Now you're switching venues, slightly, and getting into the podcasting game. Can you tell us a bit about the show and where it came from?*

T. A. Barron: Lots of folks have asked me to do a podcast, but for a long time I resisted. Then I realized it's really another form of storytelling. While the form is certainly different from writing a novel, a movie script, or a children's book — all of which I've done — the core elements of telling a good, gripping story are the same. And I've had lots of practice using my voice to share stories around the campfire (or the breakfast table) with our kids... so it's familiar terrain!

BB: *I understand you'll be talking to some creators on your show. Can you give us a sneak peek to some of the folks you'll be chatting with?*

TAB: Sure! I'm thrilled to share some truly sparkling conversations with people, ranging from Carolyn Larrington (professor at Oxford and the world's greatest expert on British folktales and Merlin) to Rue Mapp (founder of Outdoor Afro, a superb group that supports Black people experiencing nature) to marvelous young people who are helping our world. And of course, I will share stories about brilliant creators I've known like Madeleine L'Engle and Eric Carle. In addition... since the podcast episodes were recorded in my writing room at home, all those wonderful characters from my stories are "in the air" — so you can also expect to hear the voices of the wizard Merlin, Rhia, Atlanta, Shim, Trouble, Promi, the Grand Elusa, and many more!

BB: *One aspect of MAGIC AND MOUNTAINS that particularly appeals to me is the focus on "the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss". I'm intrigued by the connection made between this and the fantasy elements you've discussed for years. Can you delve a bit into their connection and what they mean to you? What is the connection between conservation and fantasy?*

TAB: Brilliant question. Throughout my life, I've been inspired by the sacredness of nature — its power to heal and teach and transform us all. Nature has been the greatest mentor in my life, giving me hope when I've most needed it, or reminding me of my own power of renewal and rebirth when I've felt deeply sad.

So it's no surprise, really, that those themes are woven through all my books, whether fantasy novels about young Merlin or the origin story of Atlantis, children's books about brave young people, or nonfiction tales of heroic kids. Today, young people are really hungry for big ideas and tough questions about life. So even if a fantasy tale happens on a magical world like Merlin's isle of Fincayra, the big questions and core values are the same as those right here on Earth. Smart kids totally get that connection!

On top of that, we are living in a time when human actions are causing serious damage to our climate and the planet that supports us and all living creatures. So I hope that my stories might inspire young people to care even more deeply about the future of the environment... and also remind them of their power to make a positive impact.

BB: *I see that you're starting off with 12 episodes in your first season. Do you have any intention of creating other seasons as well? Where would you like this show to go as you produce it?*

TAB: Absolutely! I'm already dreaming up some fun ideas and awesome interviews for the next season. And who knows? Maybe, if the Disney movie of young Merlin keeps making good progress... I'll be recording some episodes on a film set.

BB: *Oh, that's neat! Which takes me to my last question, actually. I know that you're particularly busy. So I ask you, what else are you working on these days?*

TAB: You're right that my life is busy! I'm grateful for so many blessings — including the small ways I can try to help our troubled world. Among them are writing new stories (I've got two in the works right now), supporting fabulous kids through the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes (which I named for my Mom), and helping superb conservation groups like World Wildlife Fund, Earthjustice, The Wilderness Society, Wildlife Conservation Society, and Alaska Wilderness League. On top of that... I'm always grateful for time with my wonderful wife and kids, as well as time out in the marvels of nature. Oh, and I'm now learning to play marimba, hoping to make something that sounds vaguely like music!