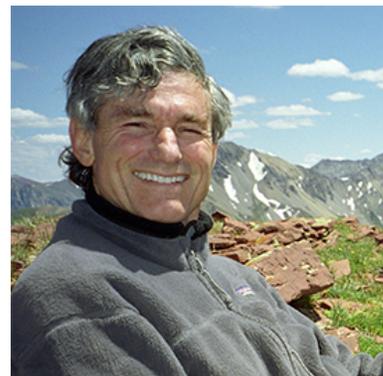


Interview with T. A. Barron

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I am pleased to present an interview with T. A. BARRON New York Times Bestselling Author of *The Merlin Saga*. I will have to admit that I was thrilled beyond imagination when I received the email saying he would do an interview for *The News in Books*. So without further ado, Mr. T. A. Barron—



Thank you Mr. Barron for the opportunity to interview you. I have enjoyed reading your books, and look forward to reading *Atlantis Rising*!

1) What made you decide to write, or has it always been a part of who you are?

I have done many things—built a mountain cabin, studied at Oxford, run a growing business, started a family—but I have always written.

As a kid, I would sit outside under a big old apple tree and write poems, stories, and zany jokes. When I was in fifth grade, I liked to tell stories so much that I started my own little magazine, called *The Idiot's Odyssey*. (My most popular article was an imaginary exposé of what teachers really did when nobody was looking!) Even when I was president of a business, I often found myself getting up at 4 a.m. to write, composing during meetings, or scribbling in the back of a taxi.

Finally I had to make a choice, to do what I love best, because life is too short not to follow your passions. So here I am, still telling stories. But now I get to do it as my job. I feel very fortunate. Writing is the hardest, and most joyous, labor I know. And here is the bonus: It's also a great way to be fully alive, to soak in life in all its sensuous detail, wonder, mystery, and surprise.

2) With all of your many national and international tours and book signings, how do you find the time to write?

Essentially, I write all the time, even when I'm traveling, going for a hike with my kids, sleeping, whatever. The creative process isn't limited to the hours I spend in my writing chair in the attic of our house—though that is still my favorite place to work. I love to sit up there with a steaming hot mug of cinnamon tea.

Writing is the hardest work I've ever done—as well as the most joyous work I've ever done. Which is why all the hard labor is worthwhile.

3) What was your big break and how long did it take?

Some of my friends from my years at Oxford will remember when I wrote my first, utterly wacky novel – and gleefully accosted people on Longwall Street to read them the latest passage. That book, which I thought was my great American novel, I sent off to more than 30 publishers. Even before I'd finished the mailing, I could already imagine a life writing books in some wilderness cabin in Colorado. I guess you could say the book got a terrific response: By the end of the year, I had received a grand total of 32 rejection letters. None of them were what you would call warm and cuddly.

It took me another 7 or 8 years, and the start of a business career, to work up the moxie to try again. That was the crucial moment, and I almost didn't go for it. Right then, I had dinner with a good friend and wonderful writer, Madeleine L'Engle (author of *A Wrinkle in Time*). During the meal, I told her about my dilemma and called myself "a would-be author". She looked me right in the eye and declared, "No, Tom. You already are an author. Just not a published one." That was the nudge—more accurately, the kick in the pants—I needed. I finished the new book, even in the busy days of taking our company public, and sent it off. It was accepted by the first publisher. That was 20 years and 24 books ago. To this day, I am grateful to Madeleine for seeing into the heart of my hopes, and giving me the kick I needed.

4) What is the draw of writing for younger readers?

I write stories I'd like to read myself! So they really are for readers of any age ... so long as they are young at heart.

5) What advice would you give to those trying to break into the market?

The advice that I can offer is this:

1. Remember that you **are** a writer, even if you are not yet published. You have things to say—important things—and you deserve to find a voice of your own.
2. Writing is a craft, something one learns by doing. So there is no substitute for constant practice. (And that, unfortunately, requires constant discipline.) The bad news is, no matter how good you get at the craft of writing, there are always things you can learn to do better. And the good news is—exactly the same. That is why writing is a wonderful way to grow as a human being...even if it is also full of struggle and anguish at times.
3. Be honest. Deep soul-searching leads to more compelling writing.
4. Write through your passions. That energy will flow into your writing, breathe life into your words.

5. Now for some practical advice: Get yourself a literary agent. It's just too difficult to get published without one. How do you find one who is right for you? There are professional writers' organizations, such as the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and the Mystery Writers' Guild, that could be helpful. Or you could track down whoever was the literary agent for a published book you admire by contacting the editorial division of the publishing house. You may still wonder why you need an agent. Thanks to the increased availability of self-publishing, and also the ability to reach new readers through the internet, there are more alternatives than ever. But for the time being, at least, there is nothing that beats having a major publisher adopt your work and distribute it to book stores' shelves across the planet. And to accomplish that, a literary agent can be extremely helpful.

6. Finally: Don't give up. Remember that rejection is, unfortunately, part of the process. But if you persist, the chances are good that you will eventually succeed. Never forget that you have something valuable to say, and it's worth sharing!

I would like to thank T. A. Barron for the interview. It was a pleasure!

Mr. Barron's new book is available now.