

The Creation of Young Heroes: An Interview with Author T.A. Barron

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T.A. Barron is the award-winning author of the Merlin and Heartlight sagas. His newest release, *Atlantis Rising*, is the first in a trilogy exploring the mythos surrounding the creation of Atlantis. In this interview, T.A. Barron takes a moment to talk about his new book, the writing process, and his advice for aspiring authors.

LBH: Your new book, *Atlantis Rising*, explores the lost mythology behind the founding of Atlantis. What can readers expect from this exciting new release?

TAB: As you know, there are hundreds of stories about Atlantis — but all of them deal with the terrible destruction of that legendary place. That's fitting, since the whole legend began with Plato's description of a mythic island that was completely destroyed.

Atlantis Rising, however, is the creation of Atlantis — its magical beginnings, the heroic young people who helped make it possible, the forces of arrogance and greed that threatened to stop it, and the enchanted place itself. So this is truly a creation story...but of Atlantis. It will be a story of real sacrifice and ultimate triumph (and, of course, the seeds of its ultimate tragedy).

LBH: You've published quite the collection of successful young adult and children's books. What attracted you to these genres in particular?

TAB: 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. So, rather than an age-specific genre, I chose to write of the hero's journey—which fantasy fits so well—because it allows me to incorporate all of these qualities.

In addition, the mythic quest gives us a superb 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



T.A. Barron and Brooke at Wordstock 2013

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.

And, finally, fantasy allows you to bend the rules of our existence—highlighting troubling issues of our time. In this way, fantasy is like a bent mirror. You can reflect the reality of our experience with more intricacy and power—bending life—emphasizing certain elements and de-emphasizing others.

LBH: The writing process is unique and highly personal for each individual author. What interesting quirks and habits have you developed in regard to your own writing process?

TAB: Writing is a strange, mysterious process. After more than twenty years, I still don't know how it really works. But I do know it requires a special, personal chemistry. So I always write the first draft with a blue felt pen and a pad of paper, because that's a good chemistry for me. Probably because, as a kid growing up in Colorado, that's how I started writing. Once the manuscript is ready—a good first draft but still far from finished—I transfer it to a computer.

I also do a lot of background research—about Celtic lore, Native American dances, sunken treasure ships ... whatever is needed to make the story authentic.

Last of all, I do some careful, delicate editing—marking up the printed copy with my friendly blue pen. And I do lots of rewrites. How many? As many as it takes to get it right! Like a good stew, novels get better when you boil them down and integrate all the ingredients. Most of my novels take six or seven full rewrites and at least a year or two to finish.

LBH: What are your thoughts on the technical side of book production? Specifically, could you provide your perspective on the recent changes in the publishing industry due to the emergence of e-books into the market?

TAB: A good literary agent can help you find a publisher. In addition, 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, electronic readers, MP3 players, and the like, across the planet. To accomplish that, a literary agent can be very helpful. Of course, before you start showing your work to any prospective agents or publishers, you need to make sure that your writing is the very best you can do!

LBH: What advice would you pass along to young and aspiring writers?

TAB: For starters, 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. But in this regard, talent will only take you a small part of the distance you need to go. What is necessary in addition is discipline and persistence. Stay with your writing, no matter how many rewrites it takes to get it right!

And finally, I would tell aspiring writers: As you think about your dream to write ... remember what Merlin said about the value of dreams (in *The Mirror of Merlin*, the fourth book in *The Lost Years of Merlin* series):

“A life—whether seamstress or poet, farmer or king—is measured not by its length, but by the worth of its deeds and the power of its dreams.”

So... write well, my friend! I wish you all the grace and truth of the stories we love best. You will find that, and more, I am sure.

LBH: Where do you draw your biggest inspiration from, and how do you integrate those ideas into the more routine task of writing?

TAB: Nature is my great friend, teacher, and healer. As well as my enduring inspiration.

How did all that happen? The best way to explain is to start with my childhood. I was lucky enough to grow up in two places close to nature—New England and Colorado—and could always explore a mountain stream, climb a tree, pick an apple, or just cover myself with mud. The nearness of nature shaped me profoundly. Not just in the adventurous ways you might expect—in deeper, spiritual ways, as well.

So, how did these experiences shape me? Well, early on I realized that unspoiled nature is the best place to feel both very small and very large at once. Humbled as well as inspired. In nature, we can be dwarfed by the grand sweep of the stars or oceans or mountains, and yet still be part of it all—connected to the changing seasons, the tracks of a fox, or the flight of geese. In nature, we can know that we are a very small part of the universe—but that we are, nonetheless, still part of the grandeur, the pattern, the mystery.

I also discovered something startling—something truly radical in today's hyper-connected, materialistic, noisy world: In wild places, we can still experience silence. We can hear voices apart from our own, sounds not made by automobiles or chainsaws or electronic media. We can even hear, sometimes, the ongoing whispers of creation—that remarkable process whose essence is life, and whose engine is silent.

And so, in time, I learned that nature can be a wonderful friend. A brilliant teacher. A powerful healer. And a great inspiration.