

Barry Alexander Brown's book 'Wind' gets early U.S. release in Montgomery

The filmmaker who grew up in Montgomery has a free event June 4 at the Capri Theatre, with a book reading and a screening of Brown's film 'High Wire.'

SHANNON HEUPEL Montgomery Advertiser
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Story Summary

- Montgomery filmmaker Barry Alexander Brown will preview his debut fantasy novel, "Wind," at the Capri Theatre on June 4.
- "Wind" is the first book in a trilogy set 10,000 years ago and follows the journey of Aeon the Leaf, a member of the Tor'oc warrior nation.
- The event will also feature a screening of Brown's newly remastered 1984 film, "High Wire," about tightrope walker Philippe Petit.

Deep in the mind of Montgomery's Barry Alexander Brown, roots of an ancient world have grown for years.

"I've written screenplays and even did some work for the Boston Globe a long, long time ago," said Brown, a filmmaker who spoke to the Advertiser from France while attending the Cannes Film Festival. "But I never sat down to write a novel."

That changed with "Wind," the first part of a new fantasy novel trilogy, which Montgomery will get an early free peek at June 4, 7 p.m. at the Capri Theatre, 1045 E. Fairview Ave. Along with a screening of Brown's newly remastered 1984 film "High Wire," he will read from "Wind," and discuss his creative process.

"I've always been an avid reader, since I was in high school at Lanier," Brown said.

He said the books that drew him in were somewhat elaborate, with great language.

“For years, I would try to figure out as I read books, what is this writer doing? What’s the construction of this sentence? Why do I like this sentence so much?” Brown said.



Barry Alexander Brown of Montgomery is a longtime filmmaker who has written a fantasy novel "Wind." An event for the book will be held June ... Show more
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Montgomery is getting a treat that only France has received so far — early access to buy “Wind.” The U.S. release date is set for August, but Brown will have the book available for purchase at the Capri, and will close the night out with a book signing.

The Capri event is happening just after another special day for Brown. His mother lives in Montgomery, and will turn 100 on June 3. That kind of longevity runs in Brown’s family. He said his grandfather’s brother also lived to 100, and so did one of his great-great-grandfathers.

“There’s a lucky gene in there,” Brown said.

A ‘Leaf’ in the ‘Wind’: Introducing the world of the Tor’oc

The world of “Wind” is set 10,000 years ago with a nation of huge, brutal warriors called the Tor’oc. Brown said he knew his idea for it had potential as a novel, but he was reluctant to start writing it.

Eventually he wrote four pages, which Brown shared with his wife and a novelist friend. The responses were both positive and a little threatening.

“One of them said, ‘If you stop, I’ll kill you,’” Brown said. “So I had to write this thing.”

Brown said he loved the writing process, which lets his imagination roam. It’s certainly different than decades of work directing and editing film.

Brown described “Wind” as a book of discovery told through main character Aeon the Leaf, a Tor’oc. It also gets into Tor’oc history. A thousand years prior to Aeon, his people lived to conquer. They would basically suck the life out of each new area they occupied.

“They weren’t really ruling, but they were controlling,” Brown said. “They were incredible warriors.”

The Tor’oc were eventually tricked into going onto a peninsula, which magical women called the Four Mothers cut off from civilization and then flooded. Around 200 Tor’oc survived by climbing into trees, where they’d remain and build new lives isolated from the rest of the world — while teaching themselves how to survive.

“After a thousand years, the trees have changed them,” Brown said.

It’s also changed how outworlders envision the Tor’oc, who are talked about like mythic boogymen. An emissary from the outworld visits them to convince Aeon to go on a journey.

“The first book is his travels across this world toward this huge meeting that they’re having,” Brown said.

Speaking of journeys, Brown said his “crazy creative process” to write involves several. When he gets stuck, Brown goes out for a walk — without any direction, and without thinking.

“As I walk, things begin to come to me,” Brown said. “Pieces of the next part of the story. Sometimes lines of dialogue.”

The restored ‘High Wire’ film



Philippe Petit's 1982 tightrope walk in New York is the subject of the 1982 short film "High Wire."
DAVID LIVINGSTON, GETTY IMAGES

In 1984, Brown co-produced the 30-minute film “High Wire,” about tightrope walker Philippe Petit, known for walking a rope between the Twin Towers of New York’s World Trade Center in 1974. Brown’s film documents Petit’s second major walk in New York to St. John the Divine on September 29, 1982.

“It’s shot by a very good friend of mine, Sandi Sissel,” Brown said.

Brown described Petit as a “very intense guy,” and said the film was charming. Along with the walk, it covers three days of preparation to string the wire for the walk. Unfortunately, Brown didn’t have a good version of it to show today’s audiences until recently.

“We couldn’t find the negative,” Brown said. “Last year, I was cleaning out a storage room, and I found the negative for it in a box.”

Brown’s film work, and the French connection



Director and executive producer Spike Lee, left, and actor Denzel Washington arrive for the screening of the film "Highest 2 Lowest" at the 78th edition ... Show more
SAMEER AL-DOUMY, AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The world’s seen Brown’s work as a visual storyteller for decades. He’s known internationally as a filmmaker and film editor, including editing several projects for Spike Lee. That includes Lee’s latest thriller film “Highest 2 Lowest” starring Denzel Washington, which premiered May 19 at Cannes Film Festival.

“As Spike calls it, it’s a retelling of a film that was made by Akira Kurosawa,” said Brown, referring to the 1963 thriller/crime film “High and Low.”

While in France, Brown gave a presentation very similar to the upcoming Capri showcase. The main difference is that event also featured his wife reading excerpts from his book in French. While Brown knows the language, he admits his wife is better at it.

Brown, who was born in the UK and raised in Montgomery, has an Academy Award nomination for best documentary for “The War At Home” in 1980 and one for film editing in Lee’s 2018 film “BlacKKKlansman.” In 2020, Brown directed “Son of the South,” which was set and shot in Montgomery and based on the book by Bob Zellner.

“‘Son of The South’ did incredibly well in France,” Brown said. “It did better in France than it did anywhere else.”



Director Barry Alexander Brown, left, and author Bob Zellner lead a discussion on the upcoming movie "Son of the South" on March 7, 2019, at ... Show more
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