

DENISE DOWDELL-STENT

PRESS KIT



BIOGRAPHY

Denise is a YA Fantasy Fiction author but also writes scripts, poetry (published in various anthologies such as 'A Passage in Time' and 'Speaking of Love' by Forward Poetry), song lyrics, and maintains a blog at <http://www.eternaluk.com>.

Denise has been writing stories from the time she could form coherent sentences at six years old – she has always had a wild, untamed imagination and writing provided a means to structure it and share it with the world. She grew up and continues to live, in the picturesque riverside village of Godmanchester in Cambridgeshire. However, she spent three years in Farnham, Surrey while studying for her BA HONS Animation degree. Before Denise realised her true calling was in writing, she wanted to be an animator and produced a number of animated films, mostly 3D Model Animation. Throughout her degree, she continued writing and later realised that as long as she drew breath, this is what she wanted to do.

Denise has always been a big fan of the Fantasy and Paranormal genre; though her books clearly reflect this, they have a strong emphasis on the importance of family and friends, sizzling romance, and adventure.

Denise is married with an amazing young son, Andrew, and though he is not yet at an appropriate age to read her books, he is still an avid reader and a great storyteller himself. Other than being the inspiration for many of the ideas in her writing, it was whilst playing a game of Rory's Story Cubes with Andrew, that the idea for Eternal was born. Rory's Story Cubes is a game in which nine dice are thrown with a selection of unique pictures on each side of the die. Eternal began as just a four page short story but soon took on a life of its own as did the characters that had a story begging to be told. Denise has always had an interest in Arthurian legend (she loved the TV series, 'Merlin'!) and the mysterious world of the fae, so she knew from the start that this would be an integral part of Eternal.

Whilst not lost in the realm of Candalia, Denise loves reading other YA Fantasy Fiction, including Stephenie Meyer, Libba Bray, Lesley Livingston, Alyson Noel, Aprilynne Pike and Katie. M. John. In her (very rare) free time, she enjoys exploring new places and lands, cooking up culinary delights, listening to an eclectic range of music (Tim Janis – the awesome composer of 'Water's Edge': the soundtrack for the Eternal trailers, Hayley Westenra, Josh Groban, Blake, Enya, Delta Goodrem, 80's pop and a host of other artists), watching her favourite TV shows and chilling out at her local Starbucks. She is also guilty of indulging in chocolate, caffeine and Kulfi ice-cream (or Baskin Robbin's Pistachio and Almond if at the movies), far too often.

It has been frequently observed that Denise is a manic hair twirler – something she does when happy, tired, bored, stressed (i.e. pretty much all the time) – you get the picture!

WHY I WROTE ETERNAL

I wrote *Eternal* as I felt I had an exciting, inspiring story inside me that was screaming out for attention – to share itself with the world. The concept for *Eternal* was born during a game of Rory's Story Cubes with my son; from nine simple images on dice, a story began to unfold – initially a very short story. However, it soon took on a life of its own, and as I began to write, a continuous stream of ideas and plots flowed through my mind; simultaneously the characters started to develop and come to life.

The character Vala is ostensibly based on myself – my younger alter-ego with awesome powers. Elvar is a representation of my ideal man; Jelly and Max are supportive, wonderful friends and Vala's parents are sympathetic and caring with a close relationship with their daughter.

Eternal is a fantastical adventure set between two realms – the human world and Candalia, the fae realm. It weaves together magic, Arthurian legend, perilous adventure and romance. However, at the heart of it are the relationships between the characters and the personal struggles they face. Nearly all the main characters are aged between seventeen and twenty-two, and magical abilities aside they face the same challenges as the majority of their contemporaries. There is a strong emphasis in *Eternal* on the importance of family and friends, particularly on how relationships grow and change over time.

The story opens with Vala and her friends, Jelly and Max; it is clear from the outset that they each have a close bond to one another and at the darkest hour, Vala's friends are there for her – even risking their lives to help her. The characters of Jelly and Max are not based on particular friends of mine but their qualities encompass all the wonderful attributes of my friends as a whole. I am hopeful this is something that readers of all ages can relate to or if they can't, realise they should find better friends.

Vala meets her love interest, Elvar, who is fae, early in the story. It is Elvar who reveals to Vala her fae heritage and helps her to come to terms with who and 'what' she is. Right from the start, Vala and Elvar have an instant and powerful chemistry. Both characters are initially very inexperienced in romance, though their relationship develops quickly, both in emotional intensity and sexually.

Alongside this, Jelly and Max begin a romantic relationship together, so Vala is experiencing all of these new developments at the same time as her friend. I have portrayed the more sensual facets of Vala and Elvar's relationship with great sensitivity and care. I do believe I have approached this matter differently to most other YA literature on the market. In most YA books I have read, the female protagonist is nearly always virginal (as is Vala at the beginning), but continues to remain so over many months or years or until she marries her love interest. In contrast, there are a number of YA novels where the female protagonist is already sexually experienced and conducts herself in a promiscuous, indiscriminate way. I feel for the majority of readers both these extremes are unrealistic and make the characters difficult to relate to. To me Vala and Elvar's relationship is loving and healthy – I believe I have conveyed this appropriately and made it very relatable.

Vala is a strong female protagonist who with the help of her friends and family, is able to overcome adversity, ultimately facing her fears and the antagonist of the story, the malevolent Spindler, with courage and strength. She is also a normal teenage girl with insecurities, desires and aspirations that make her character likeable and easy to identify with – an inspirational, yet believable heroine.

Eternal also explores Vala and Elvar's relationships with their parents and siblings – again, I have included many elements that are easy to relate to and may even elicit a laugh or two.

Eternal fills a niche in the market for a story which combines a strong Arthurian flavoured Romantic Fantasy Adventure but that also delves deeply into the relationships between the characters and the more everyday struggles they face. It is a life-affirming, positive story about overcoming adversity, self-discovery, relationships and romance blended with magic, peril and the realisation that 'there is no magic more powerful than that of love'. *Eternal* interlaces all these together in an exciting and highly readable form.



Q & A WITH DENISE

Q. Tell us a bit about your background. Why did you start writing?

A I started writing because I was born with a wild, unstoppable imagination; dreams and stories would form in my mind and I needed a way to express them coherently. I can still vividly recall dreams I had when I was just three years old. I first considered sharing these stories publicly after winning a short story contest at seven years old – it gave me the confidence to continue and the realisation that I had something wonderful to share with the world.

Although I initially intended to pursue a career in 3D Model Animation I continued to write stories and scripts throughout my time at university. However, my writing ambitions were put on hold as marriage and starting a family intervened.

I am now balancing writing full-time with family life, and will continue to do so for as long as I can draw breath.

Q. What was your inspiration for writing *Eternal*?

A Curiously, my inspiration for writing *Eternal* came from playing a storytelling game with my young son. It was during a game of Rory's Story Cubes that the idea for *Eternal* was born. Rory's Story Cubes is a game that involves throwing nine dice – each side portraying a unique image; after the dice land, a combination of nine different pictures is displayed, and a story must be created from that. I can't remember all of the combinations that fateful throw resulted in, but I do recall a ghost, a keyhole, a water droplet and a sheep.

The characters of Vala, Elvar and Amalia formed almost instantaneously, with Jelly and Max closely following. The characters took on a life of their own and the story just flowed; I did not actually have a fixed story outline from the outset – I just wrote a scene and the next followed, though I did have the key points of the story in my head throughout.

The character of Vala is based very much on myself – we share many attributes and insecurities, though I have not yet got the hang of soul-mirroring or miraculous healing prowess. Elvar is ostensibly my ideal man – I am unashamedly in love with him.

Q. Who are your favourite writers/books?

A I have many favourite writers and books. There are childhood favourites such as Maurice Sendak's 'Where the Wild Things Are' and 'Outside Over There' to the classic poetry of Tennyson ('The Lady of Shalott' is my all-time favourite), Byron, Shelley, Clare and Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' (I have always been a romantic) and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' (a story about the fae – what is there not to love). I also enjoy Ray Bradbury and Joanne Harris. In the YA Fantasy genre, I love Libba Bray's 'Gemma Doyle' trilogy – the descriptions and atmosphere are fantastic; also Lesley Livingston's 'Wondrous Strange' trilogy, Aprilynne Pike's 'Wings' series, Katie. M. John's 'Knight' trilogy, Alyson Noel's 'Immortals', and I was a big fan of Stephenie Meyer's 'Twilight' series long before it gained the cult following it has today. There are many other authors whose work I enjoy immensely, though I think it is wise to draw to a close here. However, I will admit to being a big Harry Potter fan too.

Q. Once *Eternal* is completed, what are your next projects?

A *Eternal* is the first part of a trilogy and I am currently working on the second part, 'Awakenings', which continues to follow the relationships between Vala and Elvar and their families and friends. 'Awakenings' picks up fourteen months after Vala and Elvar's family wedding; like the first it promises romance, adventure and lots of peril for our characters to overcome. In addition to this, Vala and Elvar will face a new and unexpected challenge. The third instalment will conclude the story of Vala and Elvar. However, this is not really the end. After the *Eternal* trilogy is completed I intend to follow up on one of the other characters as they too have a story that needs to be told ...

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Book Facts

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<http://www.facebook.com/eternaltrilogy/>

<http://www.twitter.com/valaoakley/>

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/denisedowdellstent/>

<https://plus.google.com/115477000643559514967>

<http://www.pinterest.com/ddowdellstent/>

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