



FEATURED WRITER Dennis L. McKiernan

By: Jasmine Strongheart

Dennis L. McKiernan was born on April 4, 1932 in Moberly, Missouri. At age 18 he joined the US Air Force and served for 4 years. From there he attended the University of Missouri and received a B.S. in electrical engineering and also an M.S. in the same field from Duke University.

He was employed with AT&T Bell Laboratories as a “whiz kid” in research and development before he changed careers and became a full-time writer in 1989.

It was during a long recuperation, following a bad motorcycle accident, in which he boldly began to write a sequel to J.R.R. Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings.” After completing it he offered it to Doubleday who was interested in publishing it. But when Doubleday tried to get authorization to publish it from Tolkien’s estate, they were turned down.

So Doubleday asked Dennis to rewrite his story and he did. But in the rewrite he placed his characters in a different fictitious world and also wrote a prequel supporting the new story. The prequel, due to necessity, does resemble the “Lord of the Rings.” In fact some critics see Dennis as simply an imitator of Tolkien’s epic work.

On another note the fairy tale series that Dennis has written, the “Once Upon A Time” series spanning 5 different novels draw from “Andrew Lang’s Fairy Books” but he expands on the fairy tales turning them into much more detailed and involved stories, giving his characters much more depth and life.

Dennis L. McKiernan was greatly influenced to become a writer through his experiences as a child. His parents were hard workers but still saw to it that Dennis did not feel neglected.

About himself Dennis says: “A middle child, I was born in the depths of the Great Depression. My mom and dad were factory workers, struggling to make ends meet. Yet my (older) brother and (younger) sister and I didn’t feel any neglect, for both our parents loved to read, and to read aloud, both loved to play many games: word games, card games, board games, yard games, and the like. And they included us in these pastimes.

“When I was nine, my dad gave me a pulp magazine - - it featured Captain Future, the quintessential science fiction pulp hero; I devoured the tale. This magazine more than anything else launched me into omnivorous reading: science fiction, fantasy, fairy tales, Oz books, and whatever else I could lay my hands on: westerns, mysteries, romances, the classics, and more: I read them all, and all was triggered by a magazine my dad gave me back when I was but nine.”

On a more personal note: Dennis has many hobbies that he enjoys with his wife. Some of them are: scuba diving, dirt-bike riding, and motorcycle touring. He currently lives in Tucson, Arizona.

Although Dennis has written many different series, I’ve only had the pleasure of reading the “Once Upon a Time” series so far.

I enjoy his writing style and the way that he takes time to create well-developed characters with depth and personality. When I’m reading a book, it’s important that the author give me reasons to care for the characters. I like a book to envelop me with the storyline – like I’ve become part of that time and place for the moment. To do otherwise makes the book uninteresting.

Dennis does a great job of drawing me in. I just finished his “Once Upon A Time” series and, from the first book, I was captivated. His descriptions of people, places and things are quite vivid and he entices you to care about his characters and the struggle of good versus evil. He takes an everyday fairy tale and transforms it into something more. If you enjoy fantasy I highly recommend reading Dennis L. McKiernan. It’s worth the time it takes. I’m looking forward to reading his “Mithgar” series next.