



Novel touch to fantasy

YOUNG AUTHOR

Nineteen-year-old Priya K. has given a fresh perspective to Greek myth in her debut novel.

TANYA THOMAS



Till a couple of months back, Priya K. would have introduced herself as a final year undergrad English Literature student at Stella Maris College. Now, she's the author of *Prophecy: The Rise of the Sword*, which will soon be available in bookshops.

The book, which took her roughly two-and-a-half years to write, gives the timeless Greek myth of Atlantis a 21st century twist. This fantasy tale tells its reader that the land wasn't lost after all; the inhabitants of Atlantis migrated underwater to their new home, Lemuria, where they live to this day. And now a hip Delhi girl, Neha Sharma is off to find it. Running to roughly 400 pages, the book promises "politics, power play, treachery and suspense" in the dark depths of the Indian Ocean.

At an informal launch last Friday, Chennai's eminent historian, journalist and writer S. Muthiah congratulated the author wishing her "many more to come". And while a bunch of us sat around and joked about getting down to our own tomes, a film industry person in the audience promised to "take a long, good look" at the book. That is something for a 19-year-old first-time writer.

A conversation with Priya revealed.

What triggered the idea for the book? It's uncommon for even Literature students to write professionally when still so young.

I've always liked writing. Usually stories. So I just sat down and wrote this. I had no idea then if it would work. When finished, I looked for publishers.

Why did you choose Atlantis?

I've always loved fantasy and thought it would be awesome to find a new land. But I didn't know if I should make it like Narnia, or

create a different planet, or a portal to another universe. All of that's been done already, thousands of times over. Nothing I had read till then were about Atlantis or suggested that it actually existed.

There's a lot of historical detail, references to Socrates through the book. Is all of that real or imagined?

The history, Greek mythology and everything about Atlantis is true. Lemuria is created.

Did you chart your plot and outline your characters before you started?

I did work out about one-fourth of the book initially. The rest took shape as I wrote. I knew more or less what each character would be like; but there was no detailed character analysis.

When I started, I didn't think it would be published. So it was never like "Oh my God, I have to do this exactly right!" I only felt that the characters should be consistent through the book, and I think they are.

You started writing this book in school. And you were a science student then. Kind of like a double life.

I always did well in school. Till about the first term in XII, I'd wanted to do engineering and write during night! Then a girl I met at the British Council made me ask "Why am I doing science? There's no point." That's when the literature idea came up.

Is Neha (the protagonist) a reflection of Priya's inner adventure junkie? A lot of her dialogues even sound like you speaking!

(Laughs) I do like her and would like her as my friend. But I wouldn't say we're similar. I was younger when I wrote the first parts of the book; so there was more of me in her as I had no one else to go by. Later, I got wider

perspective! College has really been good for me.

A regular question for all first-time authors. Is it easier to write about things you're familiar with or to let your imagination work for you?

I've always felt something imagined is better. If it's familiar, there would be too much of myself in the book. And I'm a very private person.

How difficult was the publisher hunt till Leadstart picked this up?

It took me about a year to find a publisher. Everybody was either not sending replies or sending rejections. I didn't really expect to be published by a huge name. But when even the small places said no, it hurt.

The book features a prologue to the sequel. Have you started writing that one?

Yep. The plot line is in place; it's more structured this time. I've written about four to five scenes.

After the Prophecy series, will you continue with fantasy or switch to Indian fiction?

A lot of people are already writing Indian fiction and I think they do it quite well. But no Bollywood romances or tragedies for me. I would never do anything so depressive.

Favourite writers?

Terry Pratchett, Robert Jordan and Wodehouse.

So, is Lemuria India's answer to witchcraft and Hogwarts?

Of course I hope it's going to be THE book of the year. But I don't want to write with that in mind. Or I might become pompous and smug and a really horrible person!

Priya is a III Year B.Com. student at Stella Maris College