

# Spotlight on: Jennifer Allis Provost

## January 2017



### Biography

Jennifer Allis Provost writes books about faeries, orcs and elves. Zombies too. She grew up in the wilds of western Massachusetts and had read every book in the local library by age twelve. (It was a small library.) An early love of mythology and folklore led to her epic fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Parthalan*, and her day job as a cubicle monkey helped shape her urban fantasy, *Copper Girl*. When she's not writing about things that go bump in the night (and sometimes during the day) she's working on her MFA in Creative Nonfiction. Visit Jennifer at [authorjenniferallisprovost.com](http://authorjenniferallisprovost.com).

[Find Jennifer's work at the Sharon Public Library!](#)

### Interview

**1. You grew up in Massachusetts, and still live here today. Can you talk about your relationship to the state? In which town did you grow up? What kept you here (or brought you back, if you left at some point)?**

*I've lived in Western Mass. almost my entire life, and I currently live in Springfield. It's a unique experience, being from Massachusetts—we have our own lingo (e.g. wicked), our own sports (candlepin bowling), and many other popular sports, like basketball and volleyball, were invented here. We drive fast, talk fast, and consider “masshole” a compliment. We're also some of the best educated people in the country, and our state's so blue it's practically ultraviolet. Who would want to live anywhere else?*

**2. What a glowing review of the state! Does Massachusetts (or Springfield, or your hometown) show up anywhere in your work—even if only subtly?**

*Oh, does it ever. In Copper Girl, the company the main character works for is based on a truly awful corporate job I endured for years. Even the portal to the Otherworld is based on a specimen in the back parking lot. Sadly, the real tree was not a portal, and the parking lot only led to the office.*

**3. Do you ever wonder whether a previous coworker or company rep will read your book and recognize the setting? Has anyone you know ever recognized something in your books and asked you about it or mentioned it to you?**

*No one has ever mentioned that they recognized a setting—and believe me, my former coworkers (at least, the ones I'm still in contact with) would be all over that. Although, I did once write a short story about an underwriting convention in which the denouement was that the company was run by a blood-sucking monster, and everyone identified with that. Go figure.*

**4. Your biography mentions “an early love of mythology and folklore.” How were you first introduced to folklore? Do you have a favorite myth or legend?**

*It was pure happenstance. My local library had a very small children’s section; it amounted to one set of shelves and a revolving wire rack. Once I’d read all of those books, the poor librarians—who were at their wits’ end, thanks to my voracious reading habits—directed me toward the mythology section. That summer I read [Bullfinch’s Mythology](#), [The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries](#) by W. Evans-Wentz, and a plethora of shorter books. My favorite myths are Irish and Norse, and I’m particularly fond of anything with Queen Maeve, like the [Tain Bo Cuailnge](#).*

**5. It sounds like you were quite the bibliophile—and an excellent library patron, to boot, even if your reading habits did outpace the collection somewhat. I have to say: With the advent of the internet and other new technology, some people feel that libraries are in danger of becoming obsolete. As a lifelong library-goer, what’s your opinion on the matter?**

*I have no idea how anyone could consider a library obsolete. The ability to look over the curated shelves is a joy unlike any other, when you can browse and investigate and find exciting new stories that you had no idea existed. And if you’re researching a few well-worded questions to a librarian have the power to take your ideas from good to great. As Neil Gaiman once said, you can type a question into Google and get a million answers, or you can ask a librarian and get the right answer.*

**6. Have you ever collaborated with a librarian while researching for one of your books? How much research do you conduct on average while working on a project?**

*A good friend of mine once worked for the Library of Congress, and she pointed me toward many valuable resources. She’s the only one I’ve ever “partnered” with, since my odd hours mean I’m usually researching online catalogs and only setting foot in the brick and mortar library to pick up my wait listed titles. As for the amount of research I do, is constant and never-ending a good quantification? I’ve researched swords, both how to use and how to make one, the care and feeding of horses, medieval fortifications, and one summer I taught myself Gaelic. The better researched your story is, the better it is, hands down. After all, you want the reader to be fully invested in your story, and not getting stuck on details that seem incorrect or out of place.*

**7. What can you tell us about your writing projects—past and present?**

*I’m currently in the midst of an epic fantasy series, The Chronicles of Parthalan. It’s a second world, but you can see the mythic influences. I’m also set to release an urban fantasy in June that is based on Scottish legends called Gallowglass. I’m also toying with the idea of a short story collection based on my favorite Celtic myths. We’ll see if I have time for that.*

**8. Are you a full-time writer, or do you pursue it on the side?**

*I’m not a full-time writer... yet. My day job is in the insurance industry, which is probably why I don’t write much horror. After all, what’s scarier than a claim form?*

**9. Shades of Kafka there... As an experienced, published author who has to balance writing with her day job, what advice would you give to beginning writers?**

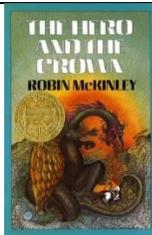
*You can do it, but you have to work that magic combination of motivation and discipline. We all want to write the next bestseller, but if all you're doing is daydreaming about your characters instead of increasing your word count and putting together a publishing plan, you'll never get anywhere. I find it best to treat writing like a part-time job. If I'm actively working on a manuscript, I aim for a certain number of words written per day (usually 2,000). If I'm editing or actively promoting a title, I devote two hours per day—one in the morning, and one after work. The best advice I can offer is to take breaks. No matter how much you want to be a writer, after staring at your work computer for eight hours it's hard to stare at a manuscript. Go for a walk, take a nap, play with your dog. Trust me, you—and your story—will be better for it.*

**9 Books Jennifer Wants You to Read  
(and Why)**



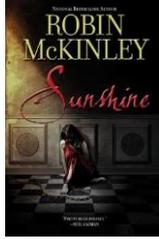
[The Once and Future King](#)  
by T.H. White

I am a BIG fan of all things Arthurian, and while this was not the first version I read of King Arthur's ascent, and subsequent loss, of the British throne, it is my favorite. At times both humorous and poignant (Arthur hoped Lancelot would rescue Guinevere!), it's everything a children's fantasy is supposed to be.



[The Hero and the Crown](#)  
by Robin McKinley

I first read this book when I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and I reread it every year or so. It's about a girl called Aerin who doesn't fit in, so she learns how to handle a sword and goes off to kill the meanest dragon ever. And, she succeeds. So many fantasies have their roots in Aerin; feisty redhead, deadly with a sword, saved the kingdom/world/multiverse? Yeah, those stories.



[Sunshine](#)

by Robin McKinley

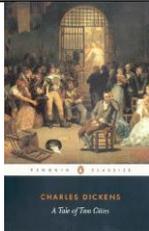
I know, a repeat of the last author. Sunshine is what all vampire novels should be. The vampire is not pretty; in fact, the heroine (the titular Sunshine) likens the main vamp (Constantine) to a rotting mushroom. The story begins with Sunshine being kidnapped and held alongside Constantine, then—against all sense—she helps him escape.



[A Swiftly Tilting Planet](#)

by Madeline L'Engle

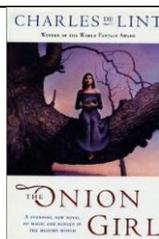
This is the third installment in the Time Quintet, a classic series if there ever was one. Most “best of” lists cite *A Wrinkle in Time*, the first book in the series, as the favorite pick; don't get me wrong, they're all excellent. But this installment tells Charles Wallace's story, as he travels through time to save the world from a madman with nuclear weapons and communicates telepathically with his sister Meg. To this day, I can recite the poem.



[A Tale of Two Cities](#)

by Charles Dickens

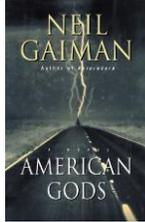
Remember all those dusty old books we had to read in school? This is the first one I actually enjoyed. From the world's greatest opening line to Sydney Carton's noble sacrifice, this is a truly timeless story of love and honor. I wish I could read it again for the first time.



[The Onion Girl](#)

by Charles de Lint

Jilly Coppercorn, the local art scene's darling, is severely injured in a hit-and-run accident, leaving her partially paralyzed and unable to care for herself, never mind hold a paintbrush. During her journey of healing, she discovers that the spiritual wounds she's been carrying since childhood are far deeper than her current physical ailments.



[American Gods](#)  
*by Neil Gaiman*

American Gods follows Shadow, a man newly released from prison who learns that his wife has been killed. While he makes his way home, he meets a Mr. Wednesday, who warns shadow that he will be at the center of an epic battle. The author successfully blends Native American myths with various European gods brought over by their followers.



[The Last Unicorn](#)  
*by Peter S. Beagle*

A unicorn worries that she's the last of her kind. Together with Schmendrick the Magician and Molly Grue, she sets out to find the rest of her race. A brilliant story about the need for magic in our lives.



[Graceling](#)  
*by Kristin Cashore*

Those with two different colored eyes are said to be Graced with special abilities. In Katsa's case, her ability is killing people—or is it? Then she meets Po (after rescuing his grandfather, and punching his lights out—Po's, not the grandfather's), also Graced, yet his ability isn't straightforward either. A beautiful tale about growing up, and embracing one's uniqueness.