



Behind the Book *Wildefire* by Karsten Knight

There are many ways that I wish *Wildefire* had been inspired. I wish I'd gone to a boarding school in the middle of a redwood forest, where a group of reincarnated gods and goddesses had been mysteriously summoned. I wish I'd climbed to the summit of Kilauea and then had to sprint down the slopes for my life as it erupted. I wish I'd narrowly survived a turbulent affair with a volatile volcano goddess and decided to document the memoirs of her teenage years.

Instead, I grew up in a quiet neighborhood of a tiny suburb, attending a charming but unfortunately deity-free high school of 350 students. I never had to flee from any lava flows. My girlfriends were all well-adjusted and mortal, and rarely did they spontaneously combust.

I spent my formative years doing the exciting things that suburban nerds do. Playing hacky sack. Nature hikes. Failing miserably to fill out my gangly frame. And, of course, writing young adult novels. I started my first novel when I was 9, mailed my first query letter at 12, signed with my first literary agent at 17, read through my first stack of editor rejections at 18. Then, at age 22, I did that unmentionable thing that recent college graduates often do: I joined the "real world." I worked as a college admissions counselor for two years, during which time I didn't write a single word. I'd like to pretend it was some monastic vow of literary silence. Really it was just exhaustion. It's hard to be faithful to a manuscript when you're on the road six days a week, and the bizarre questions students and parents asked at college fairs were far stranger than anything I could have written anyway.

Two years ago, something wonderful happened: I was terminated. Not in the time-traveling-robots-from-the-future sort of way, but in the economy-is-in-crisis-and-you're-subpar-at-your-job sort of way. Suddenly faced with sixty extra hours a week, I started work on a new novel in a genre I'd always loved: mythology. As I searched for a focal point to the evolving story, an old friend introduced me to Pele, the Polynesian volcano goddess, and it was love at first read. Pele turned out to be the heroine I'd been searching for, as well as a fresh addition to a YA market saturated with the same, revisited, paranormal beings.

From there it was just a matter of gathering Pele's entourage from the far corners of the earth: the Zulu god of thunder; a Greek siren; the Norse god of light; the Shinto blossom goddess; and the Egyptian goddess of death, among others. To do justice to the gods of old, the pantheon I assembled for *Wildefire* needed to live up to their impetuous, feuding counterparts. They had to be reflections of the natural world, and amplifications of the darkest corners of our hearts—but at the end of the day, they needed to be teenagers as well. While the story does feature the steamy romance that YA fans have come to expect, the heart of *Wildefire* actually surrounds the tumultuous sibling relationship between Pele and her storm-goddess older sister, Eve. Before Pele's story is done, she'll have to navigate the stormy waters of family, heritage, loyalty, and betrayal.

