# Eta Draconis
By Brendan Ritchie

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## Synopsis

Elora is leaving her hometown for university. Leaving behind friends, family and safety to follow her dream of studying theatre while she still has the chance. Together, Elora and her older sister, Vivienne, set out by road for the city and the upcoming semester. The relationship between them is fractured and fading, turned upside down by Eta Draconis: the violent meteor shower that has rained across Earth since the beginning of their adolescence. In a land scarred by craters and shockwaves, to travel anywhere is to risk everything. As the showering intensifies and their way forward becomes threatened, the sisters are forced to confront their relationship and recalibrate their hopes for the future. Do they return home or press on in the face of the meteors? Can life ever be normal with the world crashing down all around you?

**Eta Draconis is an epic story about two resilient sisters who are determined to live their life in a world on the brink of destruction.**
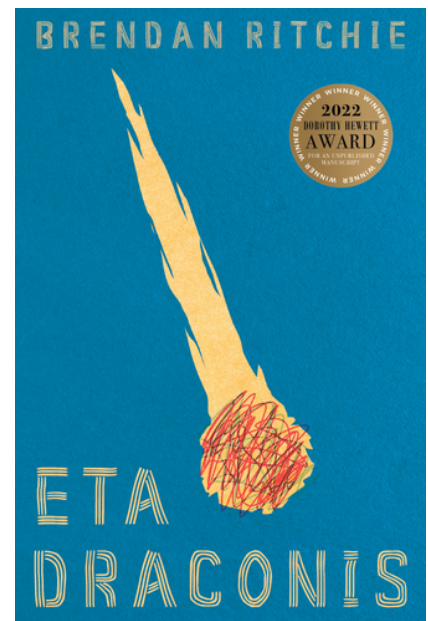
## Genres

- coming-of-age
- dystopian
- climate fiction
- young adult
- speculative fiction
- science fiction
- quest

## About the author

Brendan Ritchie is the author of the novels *Carousel* (Fremantle Press 2015), *Beyond Carousel* (Fremantle Press 2016) and *Eta Draconis* (UWA Publishing 2023). *Eta Draconis* is winner of the 2022 Dorothy Hewett Award for an Unpublished Manuscript. Brendan has a PhD in Creative Writing and has also published poetry and non-fiction in several literary journals and anthologies. He lives on Wadandi land in the South West of Western Australia with his wife and two daughters.

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## Links to the Australian Curriculum

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|---|---|
| English | Year 10 |
| Senior Secondary English | Year 11–12 |
| Geography | Year 10 |
| Senior Secondary Geography | Year 11–12 |
| Media | Year 9–10 |

## Themes

Natural disasters, family relationships, sibling relationships, friendship, uncertainty, hope, despair, independence, leaving home, growing up, journeys.

## Discussion Questions

- Describe Elora and Vivienne. How does author Brendan Ritchie reveal the differences between the two sisters? Consider what each of them say and how they speak, their appearance, body language and actions, and how others interact with them.
- How do each of the girls deal with the ongoing crisis?
- Describe Elora's relationship with her parents.
- How does Elora's life contrast to yours? What similarities are there?
- Which character do you identify with most, and why?
- What are the various reactions to the unfolding crisis and impact of Eta Draconis that Elora encounters in her friends (see chapter 2) and the people they meet on the journey to the city? What does this reveal about the way people respond in a crisis?
- Elora is reading a fantasy novel. Why do you think Ritchie has chosen this novel for her to be reading? How does it parallel or speak to Elora's current circumstances?
- What is the effect of the narrative shifting between the present road trip and Elora's past experiences? What do you notice about the frequency of the chapters containing flashbacks to the past?
- What words and phrases does Ritchie use to describe the changing landscape at different points along the road trip? How does this help you visualise what Elora is experiencing along the way? Here are a few to get you started:

The natural environment:
  - "thick scrub bordered the highway for as far as she could see" (p. 8)
  - "Trees by the roadside. They were spindly and broken, hugging the edge of the highway to escape the engulf of the farmland beyond" (p . 25)
  - "whiteness and glare" of salt lakes (p. 49)
  - "thick gumtrees" whose "bark caught the last of the sun as it sank into the haze to the west" (p. 237)

The impact of Eta Draconis:
  - "blackened rims of two impact craters, side by side in a paddock" (p. 26)
  - "the land around was charred and flattened as if by a hurricane" (p. 26)

**Discussion Questions continued**

- ○ "empty sheds, rusted machinery and neatly fenced paddocks of nothingness" (p. 43)
- ○ "broken down machinery and abandoned shearing sheds...rusted surnames on gates made of steel" (p. 2)

- "...Elora couldn't help but think that Eta Draconis masked the real crisis gripping her tiny, battered Earth" (p. 43). What do you think is meant by this statement?
- What words and phrases does Brendan Ritchie use to create mood and atmosphere?
- How does the mood and atmosphere of the novel shift between the first and last chapters?
- How does Elora change or grow between the beginning and end of the story?
- Other than the meteor shower crisis, what hints are there that this novel is set in the future? For example, what aspects of everyday life familiar to you are referenced as being in the past?
- Although Brendan Ritchie is imagining a future that does not exist, how does he create a world that seems scientifically plausible?
- How do you know that Eta Draconis is a world-wide phenomenon and not just impacting Australia?
- To what extent is Eta Draconis personified, as if another character?
- What words and phrases are used to describe Eta Draconis throughout the book? What is the effect of the language Ritchie has chosen?
- Describe Hayden. Why do you think Elora is drawn to him? What role does he play in her story? Do you think the two of them ever see each other again? Why or why not?
- How does the book reflect some of the challenges of growing up and becoming independent? How are these challenges similar or different to your own?
- Brainstorm themes and issues explored in *Eta Draconis*. Individually or in groups, choose one and find scenes, sentences and phrases related to this theme. What perspectives or view is conveyed through these examples and quotes?
- Research the definitions for "speculative fiction," "dystopian fiction," "science fiction" and "fantasy." Where do you think *Eta Draconis* fits?
- What other books, films or television series have you seen that have an intertextual link to *Eta Draconis* in some way? These links could include similarities to other fiction in a similar genre, other young adult novels, or texts that explore similar themes and ideas.
- Visit your library or bookshop and take note of the various categories/sections under which books may be shelved. Where would you place *Eta Draconis* in a library or bookshop? Justify your response.

## Reflective and Creative Writing

- Brendan Ritchie's ability to describe the changing landscape between Esperance and Perth is partly due to his own familiarity with this trip while he was a university student. Choose a landscape you are familiar with. Using your five senses, brainstorm words and phrases to describe that place. Use this as a setting for a story.
- Elora hopes to study drama at university. What is something you enjoy or are passionate about, and why? Tell the story about how you developed this interest.
- Although the story is written in third person, it is what would be described as limited third person point-of-view. In other words, we very much see the events of the novel through the eyes of one character: Elora. Select your favourite scene in the novel and re-write it from Vivienne's point-of-view (or another character of your choice). How do the two perspectives differ?
- Using your understanding of Elora and Vivienne, and the world as it exists in the novel, choose one of the sisters and write what you think happens next for them.
- Write a story in which the protagonist (main character) grows or changes between the beginning and end of the story.
- Write a story that makes use of more than one time frame. Possibilities include:
  - shifting between the past and the present as in *Eta Draconis*
  - beginning in the present, flash back to a moment in the past and then circle back to the present
  - starting the story in the middle of the action ("in media res") before going back to the beginning of the story that led up to this moment
- If you were to embark on a road trip, whether temporary or permanent, what are the items you could not leave behind? Explain the significance of each item.
- What is the difference in meaning between dystopian and utopian? Brendan Ritchie has imagined a particular version of the future. Describe your version of the future, which could by dystopian, utopian or somewhere in between.
- Imagine the world of a story set in the future. Create that story world. Check out the following world building resources to help you:
  - "Worldbuilding: How to Create Rich & Engaging Fiction Worlds," Self Publishing School, 27 June 2023, https://self-publishingschool.com/worldbuilding/
  - "How to Write a Believable World: A Guide to Worldbuilding," Masterclass, 2 September 2021, https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-write-a-believable-world

## Essay Questions

- Compare the way a theme, issue or idea is conveyed in *Eta Draconis* with its treatment in at least one other text.
- Compare the way *Eta Draconis* and one other dystopian or speculative fiction construct the world of the story.
- How does Brendan Ritchie use emotive language, description and dialogue to invite empathy for an individual or group?
- Evaluate how your context has shaped your response to *Eta Draconis*.

## Geography/History
- Where and when have meteors hit the Earth in the past?
- What can you find out about Eta Draconis?
- What else can you find out about meteors and meteor showers? Use a variety of sources and create a reference list of these.
- Create a list of towns that Elora and Vivienne pass through on the way to Perth. Label these places on a map of Western Australia. Where possible, add a description of the flora, landscape or town as described in *Eta Draconis*.
- What is a change you would like to see happen that could make a difference in the world, either now or in the future? Brainstorm what would need to happen to enact these changes? What is one first step you could initiate?

## Mental Health and Well-Being
Consider a time that you have experienced uncertainty (for example the pandemic). What parallels can you notice between the experiences, emotions and reactions of Elora and/or Vivienne, and your own experiences of living through a time of crisis or uncertainty?

How did the experience of living through the pandemic impact you, your family and friends? How was this time challenging? What offered you hope? Who supported you? How did it change you?

As a class, brainstorm strategies that have helped you during tough times.

## Media Studies
Imagine *Eta Draconis* is to be adapted for the stage or into a film or TV series. Individually or in groups, choose between five and ten key scenes in the book.
- Create a Spotify play list of songs you think would work as a soundtrack for these scenes. Explain your choices. Consider the atmosphere and mood you wish to create, as well the potential emotional response of the audience.
- Choose your favourite scene and create a storyboard for a film. Alternatively turn the scene into pages from a graphic novel.
- Who would you cast for the roles of Elora, Vivienne and any other supporting roles in your selected scene? As a group, justify your choices and come to a consensus. Explain why you think the final casting is a good fit.
- Create a film poster for the adaptation of *Eta Draconis*. Consider the audience you wish to reach. What image do you wish to portray about this film adaptation? How might you use film codes such as body language, costume, setting, camera angles to convey this?

**Developing Critical Thinking Skills**

Discuss the difference between a verifiable fact and an opinion.

Discuss the difference between a news report and an opinion piece. Explore a range of articles in the newspaper or online. To what extent has the line between a news report and an opinion piece become blurred?

Select an incident in the novel that might have made the news and write it firstly as a news report and secondly as an opinion piece or blog post.

Look at the sources of information you used to research meteors. Evaluate these as to the reliability and credibility of these sources. What was the most unreliable piece of information you found? What do you think was the most credible? Why?

Consider the following:
- Who created the text? What might be the creator's purpose? How might they benefit from the information being interpreted in a particular way?
- What is the creator's expertise? A writer may include a doctor's comment about the COVID-19 vaccinations. However, a little more research might uncover that while this doctor is brilliant at what she does, vaccinations is not her area of expertise.
- How recent is the information? Is it still current or is there more up-to-date information or research that supersedes it or provides additional details?
- What is fact and what is opinion or interpretation?
- What bias exists? Bias doesn't have to be negative (and whether you view it as negative or positive may depend on your own beliefs and values), but it is necessary to acknowledge it.
- Examine the way emotive language and selection of details has been used. What details have been included—and what has been omitted? Who or what are you being positioned to sympathise with or view negatively?
- What other sources of information and varying perspectives can you find through further research? Look for material that both support and challenges what you are currently reading or viewing.
- How well referenced is the source you used?

(adapted from https://www.melindatognini.com.au/fashion-stakes-or-a-drunken-day-out-critical-thinking-in-an-age-of-alternative-facts/)

## Links to the Australian Curriculum
**Year 10**

English
**Language**
- understand that language used to evaluate, implicitly or explicitly reveals an individual's values (AC9E10LA02)
- analyse text structures and language features and evaluate their effectiveness in achieving their purpose (AC9E10LA03)
- evaluate the features of still and moving images, and the effects of those choices on representations (AC9E10LA07)

**Literature**
- reflect on and extend others' interpretations of and responses to literature (AC9E10LE02)
- analyse how the aesthetic qualities associated with text structures, language features, literary devices and visual features, and the context in which these texts are experienced, influence audience response (AC9E10LE03)
- evaluate the social, moral or ethical positions represented in literature (AC9E10LE04)
- analyse how text structure, language features, literary devices and intertextual connections shape interpretations of texts (AC9E10LE05)
- create and edit literary texts with a sustained "voice," selecting and adapting text structures, literary devices, and language, auditory and visual features for purposes and audiences (AC9E10LE08)

**Literacy**
- analyse and evaluate how people, places, events and concepts are represented in texts and reflect contexts (AC9E10LY01)
- analyse and evaluate how authors organise ideas in texts to achieve a purpose (AC9E10LY04)
- plan, create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts, organising, expanding and developing ideas through experimenting with text structures, language features, literary devices and multimodal features for specific purposes and audiences in ways that may be imaginative, reflective, informative, persuasive, analytical and/or critical (AC9E10LY06)


**Senior Secondary**

Unit 1
**Investigate the relationships between language, context and meaning by:**
- explaining how texts are created in and for different contexts (ACEEN001)

**Analyse and evaluate how responses to texts, including students' own responses, are influenced by:**
- purpose, taking into account that a text's purpose is often open to debate (ACEEN008)
- personal, social and cultural context (ACEEN009)
- the use of imaginative, persuasive and interpretive techniques (ACEEN010)

**Create a range of texts:**
- using appropriate form, content, style and tone for different purposes and audiences in real and imagined contexts (ACEEN011)
- drawing on a range of technologies in, for example, research, communication and representation of ideas (ACEEN012)
- combining visual, spoken and written elements where appropriate (ACEEN013)
- using appropriate quotation and referencing protocols (ACEEN015)
- using strategies for planning, drafting, editing and proofreading (ACEEN016)
- using accurate spelling, punctuation, syntax and metalanguage (ACEEN017)

**Reflect on their own and others' texts by:**
- investigating the impact and uses of imaginative, interpretive and persuasive texts (ACEEN020)

# Links to the Australian Curriculum continued

Unit 2

**Compare texts in a variety of contexts, mediums and modes by:**
- analysing the style and structure of texts including digital texts (ACEEN022)

**Investigate the representation of ideas, attitudes and voices in texts including:**
- analysing the ways language features, text structures and stylistic choices shape points of view and influence audiences (ACEEN024)
- analysing the effects of using multimodal and digital conventions such as navigation, sound and image (ACEEN026)

**Create a range of texts:**
- experimenting with text structures, language features and multimodal devices (ACEEN033)
- using imaginative, interpretive and persuasive elements for different purposes, contexts and audiences (ACEEN032)
- using strategies for planning, drafting, editing and proofreading (ACEEN036)

**Reflect on their own and others' texts by:**
- analysing the values and attitudes expressed in texts (ACEEN038)
- evaluating the effectiveness of texts in representing ideas, attitudes and voices (ACEEN039)
- explaining how and why texts position readers and viewers. (ACEEN040)

Unit 3

**Compare texts from similar or different genres and contexts by:**
- analysing language, structural and stylistic choices (ACEEN041)
- analysing and evaluating how similar themes, ideas or concepts are treated in different texts (ACEEN043)

**Create a range of texts:**
- transforming and adapting texts for different purposes, contexts and audiences (ACEEN050)
- using appropriate referencing, for example, footnotes, inline citations and reference lists (ACEEN054)

**Reflect on their own and others' texts by:**
- analysing and evaluating how different texts represent similar ideas in different ways (ACEEN057)

Unit 4

**Investigate and evaluate the relationships between texts and contexts by:**
- undertaking close analysis of texts (ACEEN060)
- examining how each text relates to a particular context or contexts (ACEEN061)

**Evaluate different perspectives, attitudes and values represented in texts by:**

analysing content, purpose and choice of language (ACEEN063)

analysing the use of voice and point of view such as in feature articles, reporting of current events or narration (ACEEN064)

**Evaluate how texts convey perspectives through:**
- the ways points of view and values are represented (ACEEN067)

**Create a range of texts:**
- synthesising ideas and opinions to develop complex argument (ACEEN071)
- substantiating and justifying their own responses using textual evidence (ACEEN072)
- using appropriate referencing, for example, footnotes, inline citations and reference lists (ACEEN073)

**Reflect on their own and others' texts by:**
- analysing and evaluating how different attitudes and perspectives underpin texts (ACEEN076)