

# Realms on Our Bookshelves

## Interview of Jean Johnson

November 2007

- **Did you want to be a writer from early on or did it come to you as an adult?**  
From early on, definitely.
- **When did you write your first book, what was it about and what was the title, if it had any?**  
Unpublished, I presume? It was an historical romance, over a decade and a half ago...and it was a badly written one, at that. And I knew it wasn't the best thing out there, and I've mercifully forgotten the title (that's my story, and I'm sticking to it). But the important thing is, I finished it. Finishing a story, wrapping up all the loose ends you can weave into the story and tying the rest off into a decorative fringe, is a very hard thing to do. Published, obviously my first books would be "The Sword"; I finished writing that back in 2001...which meant I had to do some serious polishing before initially passing the manuscript to my editor, since my writing style has matured a bit in the last handful of years.
- **Have you attended any workshops or have any degrees in writing?**  
I've attended any number of panels on various writing techniques and topics at conventions through the years, bounced my story-ideas off the unsuspecting foreheads of my friends (they've been very forgiving about the bruises, thankfully) and technically I did major in English in college for several years. Other than that, though, my focus has been aimed more toward improving my actual writing ability through hard work than acquiring pieces of paper.
- **Who are your muses when things get rough during writing a book?**  
Music, almost always music. Chocolate helps, too. And I try to take a break every once in a while and play some sort of game, even if it's just a couple rounds of Solitaire or Spider—something logical so that the creative half of my brain can rest, relax, and shake out its mental muscles before diving back into the fray.
- **Which author(s) inspire you?**  
Oy. You would ask the question that's a gazillion miles long... If I had to pick just three authors from my top three favorite genres, science-fiction, fantasy, and romance...I'd have to pick Alan Dean Foster, Mercedes Lackey, and Deborah Simmons. Or Dara Joy. Or Robert Asprin, or Randall Garrett & Vicki Ann Heydron, Ann Logston, Debra Doyle & James D. McDonald, or...aaaaaugh! (I hate that question. How do you pick just one favorite when you're standing in a gourmet chocolatier's shop??)

- **What does your family think of your writing?**  
 My sister thinks it's uber-cool, and my parents are proud that I'm finally getting somewhere with it. The extended family all think it's great, too—my friends and family like bragging about me, which is kind of puzzling to me. As a writer, I know what the “seamy underbelly” of this life is like, and truthfully...it's really not all that glamorous.
- **What do you think makes a good story?**  
 Anything that moves the reader, whether it's broadening their mind, engaging their emotions, or exercising their imagination. Anything that makes the reader sympathize, empathise, and/or dream. It could be the struggles of the hero, the sacrifices of a friend, a lively conversation, the perfect pratfall, or even just a single turn of phrase that grabs onto the reader and won't go away. With each story, it's different—with each reader, it's different—but it clearly gets and holds the reader's attention.
- **What is your work schedule like when you're writing?**  
 I'm a perpetual night-owl. I get up in the early afternoon most days, and that's when I check my email and so forth, try to handle the business side of things. Somewhere in there I might take my father to one of his doctor appointments, and I usually make dinner for everyone. I might or might not settle down to writing before dinner, but usually I write after dinner, which is when I'm least likely to be interrupted. Or I try to. Some of those plot-bunnies are a bit feral, you know, and have to be caught before they can be wrestled into place. And then I usually go to bed around the time everyone else is getting up and going off to work. I've tried being diurnal, but so far it hasn't worked. Maybe when I get my own place...
- **Did you have any research done for the Sons of Destiny world?**  
 Specifically for the series? Not really. But I am constantly absorbing information, striving to learn new things. Some of it gets incorporated into my story ideas immediately, while other bits percolate in the back of the mind for years. In fact, I just read an interesting article on the immune system, how a seeming culprit of inflammation during allergic reactions is actually responsible for quelling even worse reactions than what is seen, and that set my mind racing on the background information for one of my science-fiction universes, where there's a planet full of people who aren't allergic to anything, because they've adapted to a world high in histamines. ...Yes, I'm a science geek.
- **Can you tell us about the journey from concept of the Sons of Destiny series to getting published?**  
 Hmm, the journey... Started the series back in 2001-ish, and within the first month of composition, I knew it would eventually be an 8 book series, and that certain plot-bunnies had to be hinted at within book 1—and other books along the way—in order to bring the overall fantasy arc together. But I didn't know all the details until each book was being written. I compare it to a road-trip along I-90 from Seattle to Boston: you for absolute sure know that you're going to pass through Chicago at some point along the

way, but you might not know until you're on the road that you're going to take a side-trip up into Canada for a few days to visit some friends, or just a brief detour a few miles off the freeway to see the World's Largest Whatever. As for getting published...well, I got book 1 written, and half of book 2, and set them aside for other pursuits. Then I got noticed through fanfiction by an editor at the Berkley Group, and when she requested to see an original manuscript, I panicked a bit, hunted around, found "The Sword"—one of my few completed stories that I felt was even close to being acceptable—dusted it off, scrubbed it as clean as I could, and handed it off to her. Then scrambled to finish book 2 just-in-case, until she told me book 1 was good enough that she wanted to talk about making it a series, since she knew that I'd had book 2 halfway finished.

- **What was one of the most surprising things you learned in creating your books?**  
Aside from how deviously delightful my plots can be? And that maniacal giggling when you're a night owl is not a good thing, because it disturbs the people sleeping elsewhere in the house? ...I really haven't had any big surprises, save for the realization I had—decades ago—that I'm not just writing stories; I'm tapping into alternate universes and voyeuristically writing down what I see the characters doing, because my characters and stories often take on a life of their own, and don't necessarily do what I'm expecting them to do. When it happens, sometimes I can steer things back onto track, or at least try, to keep the plotline intact, but other times...well, I just write what I see happening in my mind.
- **Which character(s) do you have a soft spot for?**  
All of them have their good points and their bad. If I absolutely had to pick two...: Rydan, because he and I have something in common, something the others don't understand; and Morganen, for being a manipulative little sneak with a warm heart and good intentions—he's very much like a writer, in that regard.
- **Did you create the Prophecy that is key to the stories of the Sons of Destiny?**  
Yes, I created everything you see in the Destiny series, including the poetry seen in the books. The Song of the Sons of Destiny was created way back when I started book 1, in fact, within the first few weeks of writing.
- **Did historical facts inspire certain events in the stories?**  
In the sense of influencing the plot? Not really, unless you count the Mandarite invasion being linked by Kelly to the discovery of the Americas, but that was just a comparison, not what I'd consider an inspiration. I knew they were going to invade, and that they'd cause problems, but didn't really link it until I wrote out Kelly's line at that point. But if you mean in the sense of helping me to build a world with a semi-medieval feel, then yes.

- **Can you give a sneak peak at what's to come in The Song?**

Plot. Lots and lots of plot. In fact, my editor complained and demanded I put in one more "romantic moment" between Evanor and his lady in a spot just before the majority of the plot hits the aeration charm and splatters all over the place—book 4, "The Song", does happen to tie up a lot of loose threads that have been dangling throughout books 1, 2, and 3. There are a few small threads that go on to books 5-8 in the rest of the series, and book 4 introduces one big new thread that ties the first four to the second four...but if you want something specific...if he never got his voice back, Evanor could still make a living as a masseur. Musicians usually have the nicest hands, after all. But that's all I'm saying. You'll just have to wait until February 2008 for the rest.
- **Are the heroines going to play a part in fulfilling the destiny as each of them has a certain talent?**

Yes, to a certain degree. We've already seen Kelly dealing with the Mandarites, and Alys confronting her uncle, and Serina's mathemagical work. And we've seen how Kelly has claimed Saber—and by extension, his world—for her own, how Alys has tamed Wolfer's temper, and Serina...heheh...yeah, she and Dominor are finally getting along quite nicely.
- **Did you have any say in the cover art, who has created them and are you satisfied with the outcome of it as you envisioned the twins?**

I didn't have much say in the cover art, though I could make a few minor suggestions. The most amusing one I got to make was, after "The Wolf" came out with that faint image of a howling wolf in the background, when we got around to talking about the cover for book 5, "The Cat", my editor had to go to the art department to tell them that Trevan's symbol was a cat...so they asked what kind, lion, leopard, tiger, and she had to reply, "Um...a housecat?" We had a good giggle over that one, when she told me about it.
- **It seems that with every twin there is a magical stronger one, does this have a purpose or is it just something that happened?**

If you mean one twin is more magically powerful than the other, I suppose that's true. I never actually got around to ranking them (other than the top three) until after I had finished book 6, "The Storm", though I did have a vague idea who was at the bottom of the list. Of course, the brother at the bottom of that list is actually as strong as your typical middle-ranked Katani mage, so when you call him the weakest of the lot, he's really not all that weak. Besides--as in everything--it's not necessarily your strength that matters, so much as your skill. Saber, Koranen, and Rydan are all trained in forge-based magics, but Saber is the most skilled at metalworking, Rydan has the most power, and Koranen is the one with the broadest education in fire-based magics, from glassworks to metallurgy and back.

- Thank you for satisfying our curiosity about you and the incredible series you're writing by participating in this interview! One final question: When is *The Song* released in the *Sons of Destiny* series?

"The Song" comes out at the start of February 2008 in trade paperback.

#### Personal favorites:

- **Day or night?**  
Yes, please. They both have their good points.
- **Rain or sunshine?**  
Both, preferably together. I love seeing rainbows in the sky.
- **Chocolate or vanilla?**  
Yes, please! (High quality dark or white chocolate, and real vanilla, by preference.)
- **Fantasy or reality?**  
Equal doses of both.
- **Tea or coffee?**  
Um...I despise and loathe coffee, so I'd have to go with tea, but I'd really rather have a tall, cold glass of skim milk, please.
- **Ordering in or cooking dinner?**  
Depends on who's cooking, what's on the menu, and who's company it's being eaten amongst.
- **Manicure or pedicure?**  
Never had either, and probably never will (unless I become fabulously wealthy; then maybe I'll reconsider, just for the novelty of it). I can't have long fingernails because they interfere when I type, and I've never been able to keep fingernail polish neat and tidy for more than thirty minutes after it's been applied anyway, so I've given up trying.
- **Pants or skirt?**  
Usually pants.
- **Pepsi or Coca Cola?**  
Neither. I'd rather have a Sprite.
- **Forest or beach?**  
Forest. A really big, green forest, with mountains on the side, and a waterfall for dessert.

- **Film or book?**  
Depends on the film/book.
- **Going out or staying at home?**  
Depends on who I'm with.
- **Dog or Cat?**  
Cat, definitely. I'm allergic to dogs.
- **Writing or reading?**  
\*whimper\* If I write, I don't have a lot of time to read. If I read, I don't have a lot of time to write. Aaaaugh—please don't make me choose!