



Photo By James Cooke

JAINE FENN: PRINCIPLES OF AUTHORS

Bringing to the new year a new author is always a tough task to accomplish. Yet here Gollancz have brought Jaine Fenn, along with her dark vision of a futuristic, alternate world where Blade Runner meets Dark City. We had to find out what made this author tick and delve into the psyche that pits the privileged against those who murder to survive.

Falcata Times: Writing is said to be something that people are afflicted with rather than gifted and that it's something you have to do rather than want. What is your opinion of this statement and how true is it to you?

Jaine Fenn: On a good day, writing one of the greatest natural highs in the world; on a bad day it's an obsessive-compulsive disorder. Most days, it's hard work.

FT: When did you realise that you wanted to be a writer?

JF: I've always wanted to tell stories, and wrote my first 'novel' when I was 7, on my dad's typewriter (which was never the same again). I decided that I'd be a writer when I was 12, after resigning myself to not being a ballet dancer, which is a common girlish fantasy, but I got closer to it than most girls.

FT: It's often said that if you can write a short story you

can write anything. How true do you think this is and what have you written that either proves or disproves your POV?

JF: Writing a short story is certainly a different discipline to writing a novel, and in some ways it is harder, because every word counts, and you only have one shot at getting your idea across. It's a great way to learn the craft of writing before committing yourself to the more ambitious task of writing a full-length book.

FT: If someone were to enter a bookshop, how would you persuade them to try your novel over someone else's and how would you define it?

JF: What I'd say to the hypothetical 'someone' would depend on his/her taste in books, but I'd define the book as a far-future soft SF action and intrigue thriller, with sex, drugs and flying assassins.

FT: How would you "sell" your book in 20 words or less?

JF: Well, see above, but also: decadence/squalor, love/hate, betrayal/redemption, secrets/revelations, brutality/compassion.

FT: Who is a must have on your bookshelf and who's latest release will find you on the bookshops doorstep waiting for it to open?

JF: I've wide tastes, and there's no one writer whose work I avidly collect, with the possible exception of Terry Pratchett, who has a particular and unique genius.

My husband is also an SF reader, who prefers his stories 'harder' than mine, and we both tend to go through fads. Between us the recent SF book budget has gone on: Stephen Baxter, Richard Morgan, Peter Hamilton, Liz Williams, Mary Rosenblum, Karen Traviss and Charlie Stross.

FT: When you sit down and write do you know how the story will end or do you just let the pen take you? ie Do you develop character profiles and outlines for your novels before writing them or do you let your idea's develop as you write?

JF: There has to be some planning. I have to know how my characters think, and the situation they're coming in to, and I generally have an idea of how I expect things to turn out. But I don't outline in detail, as I like to allow for the possibility that the characters will go off with the story, and I'll just be along for the ride.

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FT: What do you do to relax and what have you read recently?

JF: I like to dance - the current fad is Salsa, but I've tried all sorts. I also walk a lot, as I live near some beautiful countryside, and I use the walks as thinking time. I don't read as much as I'd like to, as it somehow seems like an indulgence in my over-full life; most of what I read is SF, but I also like thrillers and a wide variety of non-fiction. Recently I've read Neal Asher's 'The Skinner', Justina Robson's 'Keeping It Real' and a book on the Swedish mystic/philosopher Swedenborg.

FT: What's your guiltiest pleasure that few know about?

JF: My name is Jaine and I am a chocolate addict. Only the hard stuff, though - 70% cocoa solids or nothing. And a lot of people do already know that.

FT: Lots of writers tend to have pets (mainly cats.) What do you have and what are their key traits (and do they appear in your novel in certain character attributes?)

JF: I've had many animals in my life (including cats - at one point I had 13), but the combination of a hectic lifestyle and a house containing many musical instruments has put us off getting a cat since the last one died. I do enjoy meeting, and usually being ignored by, other people's cats.

FT: Which character within the book is the most fun to write and why?

JF: Taro, because he's both worldly-wise and as naïve as only a 17-year-old can be.

FT: How similar to your principle Protagonist are you?

JF: Well, in my head I'm still 17, but that's probably where the resemblance between me and Taro ends. Character-wise I share some of Elarn's traits: I'm impatient, romantic, cynical-yet-credulous and prefer to live outside society's norms.

FT: What hobbies do you have and how do they influence your work?

JF: I've been known to write and run role-playing games (the paper and dice sort) and that has helped me get a handle on planning and plotting, especially when it comes to seeing the bigger picture. I also do medieval re-enactment, the full-immersive living history type, which is a good way of getting to grips with how a change in circumstances can change your outlook on life (it rather makes me glad I spend most of my time in the twenty-first century).

FT: Where do you get your ideas from?

JF: Absolutely bloody everywhere: magazine articles, nightmares, offhand comments, daydreams, good books, bad television, thin air. They generally ambush me when I'm not paying attention.

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FT: Do you ever encounter writers block and if so how do you overcome it?

JF: I think the idea of writer's block covers a wide spectrum; I've never been unable to write at all, but I do sometimes find it very hard to motivate myself to climb the ladder to my garret (yes, I write in a garret, though the unromantic might call it a loft conversion) and get to work. I find first drafts harder than revising, so if my motivation is lacking, I let myself re-visit, and tinker with, one of my old, as yet unsold, short stories, until I get into the swing.

FT: Certain authors are renowned for writing at what many would call uncivilised times? When do you do write and how do the others in your household feel about it?

JF: It's a truism that to get anywhere you need to write to a routine, and mine is generally to work in the afternoon and early evening, though when things are going well I sometimes have to reminded to stop for food and sleep and suchlike. And of course the solution to a knotty plot-point, or a prize bit of background, can arrive at any time, no matter how inconvenient (in the bath, driving

along a motorway, in the middle of a battle (see under hobbies above)).

FT: Sometimes pieces of music seem to madly influence certain scenes within novels, do you have a soundtrack for your tale or is it a case of writing in silence with perhaps the odd musical break in-between scenes?

JF: Some writers have to have silence to write: I have to have music. More than that, it has to be the right music for what I'm writing, though sometimes the definition of 'right' is a bit obscure, even to me.

Principles of Angels is a book where two worlds are in juxtaposition, and so I had two sets of music depending on which of the intertwined stories I was working on: the 'topside' stuff was trashier, lots of pop and dance music; 'downside', the soundtrack was darker, more Goth and Grunge.

FT: What misconceptions, if any, did you have about the writing and publishing field when you were first getting started?

JF: If I'd have realised how much hard work, disappointment and time would be required when I set out, perhaps I'd have kept up the singing lessons ...

**CONSORTS OF HEAVEN
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FT: If music be the food of love, what do you think writing is and explain your answer?

JF: For me, it's a way of making sense of the world via creative megalomania. I put my characters through hell, so I don't have put myself through it.

FT: What can you tell us about the next novel?

JF: Consorts of Heaven takes place at the same time as Principles of Angels, though on a very different, far more primitive, world. It has a mystery at its heart, and the solution to the mystery will change that world. Though Consorts of Heaven stands alone as a story in its own right, the two books are intimately linked. And there's more to come ...

FT: What are the last five internet sites that you've visited?

JF: Other than for day to day matters like banking, and research (and that with a pinch of salt), I don't use the net much. I do lurk around live-journal and am a member of a couple of online SF writers' communities, but as I

would find it all too easy to use time online as writing avoidance, I've made sure my writing computer has no net access.

FT: Did you ever take any writing classes or specific instruction to learn the craft of writing a novel?

JF: Way back in the mists of time I did a creative writing evening class, which gave me a good grounding in the basics. I also attended a one-off workshop week for SF writers run by Liz Holliday, which I found immensely useful, as it dealt with aspects of the craft in an SF context.

FT: How did you get past the initial barriers of criticism and rejection?

JF: If you're going to be a professional writer, you need to learn to take criticism - or more particularly critiquing, which is not quite the same - not as a personal insult, but as a means to improve your stories. As for rejection, you just have to get used to it and move on; you may think a certain editor has failed, as yet, to comprehend your genius, but if you argue with their decision, they never will.

FT: What are the best and worst aspects of writing for a living, in your opinion?

JF: The best is the joy of doing something you love and believe in which results in the creation of stories that will live on independently of you. The worst is the way it eats your life without providing a living wage. But I wouldn't do it if I wasn't willing to put up with that.