

## Jane Fletcher Interview by DK Ward



*Jane Fletcher was born in Greenwich, London in 1956. She now lives alone in the south-west of England, after the sudden, and untimely death of her partner.*

*Her love of fantasy began at the age of seven when she encountered Greek Mythology. This was compounded by a childhood spent clambering over every example of ancient masonry she could find (medieval castles, megalithic monuments, Roman villas) It was her resolute ambition to become an archaeologist when she grew up, so it was something of a surprise when she became a software engineer instead.*

*Jane started writing when her partner refused to listen to yet another lengthy account of 'a really good idea for a story', and insisted that she wrote it down. After many years of revision, the result, *Lorimal's Chalice*, was published. This book was short-listed for the Gaylactic Spectrum award for that year. If you do a little Googling, you'll also come across some other interesting tidbits. One such wonderful find was her article [And The Plot She Thrives In](#).*

*Now, sit tight and enjoy the interview...*

### **Who is Jane Fletcher?**

**Jane Fletcher:** *A forty-nine year old Englishwoman with a love of history, a day job in computing and a very demanding cat.*

**Can you recall the very first lesbian book you've ever read, and did it have any impact on you then or now?**

**JF:** *The Well of Loneliness, by Radclyffe Hall. I was eighteen at the time, and it had a big impact. Looking back, the book is a complete downer, but it matched my world view*

at the time that I read it, in that my ambitions for the world's treatment of me did not go beyond a hope for tolerance. However, I loved the romance element, even though it had a sad ending. It made me want to read more books with lesbian characters, which marked the start of a long hunt.

The second one I read was Johanna Russ's *The Female Man*, a completely different kettle of fish, which may go some way to explain why I've never gone back to re-read *The Well of Loneliness*.

**Of all the genres you could have submerged yourself in, why Fantasy/Sci-fi?**

**JF:** It's the one that stirs my imagination. It lets me tell the stories I want to tell and play games with the idea that I want to play games with. No other genre has the same potential for fun and freedom.

**Will you ever cross genres and write a full-length romance novel?**

**JF:** It's the action plot that drives me and my characters. I don't think I could string along the romance element on its own for 70,000 words, and I'm in complete awe of the writers who can.

**How has your life changed since you've become a published author?**

**JF:** I get to sit on the stage at book fairs, instead of staying in the audience all the time - this is a huge ego boost.

More seriously, I've become more observant, just in noticing colours, sounds, overheard conversations, and things like that, because these are the details that I use to flesh out my plots. I've always had the stories in my head, now I need to be able to put it down on paper in a convincing way, and this means I have to be able to put the whole scene together in my head.

**What, or who is your muse these days?**

**JF:** I always say that I don't have a muse. Ideas come to me. Sometimes I can turn them into stories. However, I am so conscious of the process that I work thought in building a story that it never feels like something external that is calling me on. I've always told myself stories; it's just something I do. Now I have to be far more disciplined and hammer them into a tidy plot and then type them out in coherent English. But it is discipline, not inspiration at the core...

**I've read that some people who've read your work are surprised there's not much sex in the books and even more so, they hadn't noticed. What is your take on this?**

**JF:** I get more surprised that people don't notice the sex that there is. I had to give a complete page listing for sex-scenes in each novel recently, just to disprove it when

somebody claimed that there was no sex in my books at all.

However it is true to say that there is less sex in my novels than in most other lesbian fiction. As I said above, my books are very heavily plot driven. If any scene - sex or otherwise - is not playing a role in the plot then it does not get into the book. I would never put in a sex scene just to meet a criteria for number of pages of sex that have to be in the novel.

**Is there a particular book you've written that you like above the others?**

**JF:** My answer for this is always the same - the one I'm working on now. Looking back on past novels, there is always something that didn't work, or that I wish I'd done differently. Whereas the one I'm writing at the moment is going to be perfect.

So, my best ever book, is going to be *Dynasty of Rogues*, which I've just completed the first draft for, and is due out early next year. I know that this certainty will fade the day after I send off the final version. But luckily there will always be the following book to get it right.

I'm also not sure if I could keep up the enthusiasm to write, if all the time I was thinking, "This isn't as good as the one before last."

**Which was the hardest book to plan and complete?**

**JF:** The hardest planning was *Rangers at Roadsend* with the complexity of engineering the who-done-it side of the story, and making sure I'd caught all the plot holes.

The hardest to write was *Lorimal's Chalice*, because that was the first story I wrote, and I had to learn how to string sentences together. It took me six complete re-writes until I felt I'd mastered the knack.

**Would you share how it felt when you heard *The Walls of Westernfort* had won an award? Perhaps a little synopsis of the event?**

**JF:** I sat down. I grinned. I poured myself a large whiskey. I drank it. I grinned some more.

**The lesbian publication scene is literally being flooded by former fanfic/uber writers; do you think that's had any effect on the genre?**

**JF:** I find it hard to judge, because in many ways I'm sitting in the pocket that the fan-fic phenomenon has created. I'm not sure if it is having any effect in the outside world of publishing. I'd like to think that it will help drive home the message that in order to succeed in lesbian niche publishing, you need to provide genre rather than literary fiction, but I fear GLBT publishers will continue to go under because they insist on publishing the books the publisher thinks that lesbians ought to read, rather than the ones they want

to read.

**What book(s) are you reading now?**

**JF:** I've just finished Merry Shannon's *Sword of the Guardian*, Radclyffe's *Turn back Time* and Rose Beecham's *Grave Silence*, all of which I've enjoyed enormously. I've just started Katherine Forrest's *Hancock Park*..

**If you wouldn't mind, take our readers through what a day in Jane Fletcher's life is like...**

**JF:** I wake up to the 7:00 news headlines on the radio, except when my cat wakes me up first. I get up, have breakfast, feed the cat and then sit at my computer for the next 16 hours, either writing, working, playing games or surfing. I will take breaks for food, shopping, pubbing, other necessities of life, and sorting the cat out whenever she becomes too much of a nuisance. Then I go to bed.

**Tell us one of your little quirks?**

**JF:** I have all the fiction books on my bookshelves arranged in order by author name, and I have the non-fiction classified by subject number. I hate it when I want a book, and have to spend half an hour trying to find it.

**You have an innate ability at humor. Where do you suppose this came from? And is it more prevalent in your writing than it is personality wise? Or both?**

**JF:** My sense of humour I get from my dad. I'd like to think I was funny in real life, but it's not something that is easy to judge. Ask my friends.

**For those of us new to your work, is there a certain order in which to read your book series?**

**JF:** The Lyremouth series should be read starting at book one, then book two and so on. For the Celaeno series, there is no right order. I think of *The Temple at Landfall* as the start point, because that is the one I wrote first. However it is not the first chronologically speaking.

**Where is your favorite place to write?**

**JF:** At the computer on my desk. I can't write on paper (I'm physically capable of it, but it does not suit my way of writing) and laptop keyboards don't have the right dimensions or feel.

**What is your earliest and fondest memory of Lizzy and why has it stuck with you over the years?**

**JF:** Just her smile. It gave her dimples in her cheeks. It struck me a couple of hours after we first met, and that was when I knew I was falling for her. I'll never lose the image of watching her smile and feeling my insides melt.

**Was Lizzy a writer as well? Did she ever have a hand in anything you've written?**

**JF:** No. However she was my first and harshest editor. I used to give her the printout, and she used to take a large red pen to it.

**Was Lizzy the inspiration behind any of your characters?**

**JF:** Not in herself, but some of the stories she told me have worked their way into my stories. She went to a Catholic boarding school - the nuns of St Mary's Abbey walk the halls of Celaeno's temple at Landfall.

**You've said Lizzy's motto was "You can never have too much chocolate or too many teddy bears." What's Jane's motto these days?**

**JF:** Carpe Diem.

**What does Big Ted represent in your life to you? What are your best and worst memories of him?**

**JF:** Big Ted was my first Christmas present when I was four months old, we've never been apart and I've left instructions that I want him put in my coffin with me as well, but I'd be hard put to say what he represents. The good memories are things like using his tummy as a trampoline when I was four (which explains why his growler no longer works) and cuddling him in the night when I thought the daleks were coming to get me. I don't have any bad memories of him.

**You've said you grew up a happy child and that your parents were "loving and responsible", and they encouraged you early in life to pursue history, tell us a little more about them if you will?**

**JF:** My parents had a mature, strong relationship. There was never the faintest risk of them separating. As a child this gave me a very secure home life. It also gave me a good model of what a relationship should be - a team effort, both unquestionably on the same side and against rest the world if need be.

I think this has an effect on the characters in my books, in that I tend to show partners working together as a team, rather than one always claiming the assertive protector role. More so in the Lyremouth books, as Jem and Tevi move into the well-established phase of their relationship.

**Coffee, Tea or Pop?**

**JF:** Tea - Assam - made with boiling water (very hot is not good enough).

**If you were stranded on an island, what three items would you wish you had brought with you?**

**JF:** 1) A radio, so that I can call for a rescue. 2) My pile of books to read, so I have something to do while waiting. 3) Ray Mears (although I suspect that this last one will confuse people outside the UK).

**Do you have a favorite place to visit when you come over seas to the US?**

**JF:** I've not seen a lot of the US. To date, New Orleans has been my favourite.

**I'd like to thank you for taking time out of your very busy schedule to sit down and answer these questions. I'll close this interview as I always do: Is there anything you'd like to leave us with? Quotes of inspiration? Things we may not know about Jane Fletcher?**

**JF:** A quote from me - Don't dismiss escapist fiction, because nothing defines our desires better than where we chose to escape to.