

Q & A with ... Joan Lennon

1. You've created a unique and imaginative world within *Walking Mountain*. Where did it come from?

Life is full of amazing facts that I keep stumbling across, and then they bump up against other amazing facts that I found out about earlier, and then, over time – sometimes a lot of time! – the story starts to build. Asteroid belts and the fact that mountains move and the ways evolution works (lurchingly) and how creatures adapt to their environment and the sheer variety of humanity, are all things that were shouting to be written about.

2. The book contains a strong theme of our relationship with the natural world – was this always the main motivation behind the story?

No, the story came first – the characters and the setting and the things that happened. Only gradually, as the story developed, did I realise how much of our world and the issues that concern us today were echoed in the world of the novel.

The Drivers say “Geography makes History” and I’m often surprised, as a story is growing in my head, how much the setting that the characters are in shapes them, and then how who they are shapes the plot.

3. Who was your favourite character to write?

An impossible question to answer! Without wanting to sound slightly insane, all of the characters in my head are completely real to me. Even the minor characters, like the little girl playing in the dirt in River Head or the Philosopher on the *Aubergine* or Noksam the accountant thief or big booming Lady Allum – all real, all irreplaceable. And if I can’t choose a favourite from among them, there’s no way I can choose a favourite between Pema, Singay and Rose! Just can’t be done.

4. What is your favourite scene or moment in the book?

I love writing the dramatic scenes, like the chase after the ice eagle snatched Jeffrey the marmole, or the collapse of the roof inside the Mountain, or the tsunami coming at them out of the sea. But I also like writing the quieter bits, where the characters can sit down and rest a little and talk to each other.

5. Have you ever regretted how you ended a story and wish you could change it?

No – stories have their own shapes and their own endings, and you can’t really argue with them. There are always sentences, though, that I think I could have done better!

6. What’s your favourite book, and why?

There’s no way I could choose a single favourite book, but if I had to choose a single favourite author, I’d go for Terry Pratchett. Wit, word play, empathy, toughness, intriguing ideas, creative world building, vividly real characters – I could read and re-read Terry Pratchett’s books forever.

7. What inspired you to become a writer?

Stories. I've always loved stories – stories in books, stories in films, stories I've been told, stories I overhear. Making stories of my own was the logical next step.

8. What keeps you motivated as a writer?

Being a writer is a job of work. It's not about being in the mood or waiting for flashes of inspiration. Not that those things aren't nice, when they happen. But you can't count on them. What you can count on is sitting down every day and getting the words on the page. Then all you have to do is get them right. Well, as right as you can.

9. What advice would you give to any budding writers?

Have fun! Play with words and ideas and what ifs. Don't try to be perfect with every word you write – that's what re-writing is for. Just jump in the water and get swimming!

10. If you had a superpower what would it be?

Shapeshifting. Absolutely. I've always wanted to be able to become something or someone else at will. Also it would be helpful for writing.

11. If you could live in any other time period, when would that be?

That's difficult, because I'm a wuss. I'm fascinated by times that are in a state of change, in transition, but I don't like bad smells or no painkillers or dying in childbirth, and what if my glasses got broken? So perhaps I could choose sometime in the future – on a terraformed Mars, perhaps? That would be interesting!