INTERVIEW

**What was your first car?**

1974 California Sun Bug (Gold-colored Volkwagen Beetle w/ sun roof). Awesome.

**What is the weirdest food you enjoy?**

When I was young, my dad used to make me peanut butter, mayonnaise and dill pickle sandwiches. I still love them.

**What was the inspiration for *The Jack of Souls?***

I wrote *The Jack of Souls* out of a deep love of tricksters. I love the wit-over-brawn motif—Odysseus over Achilles, Fox over Wolf, Raven over Eagle—so I like to play with it in my stories. *The Jack of Souls* is the tale of Harric, a rogue and con artist born in a land dominated by warriors and warrior culture. Harric must make his way among all that muscle and steel using only his wit and charm and training in trickery, a task complicated by the fact that the girl he loves is a straight-talking knight with zero tolerance for sneakery.

I call it, “A tale of mischief, magic, and the triumph of trickery.”

(Speaking of magic, one of my favorite parts of the story is a subplot borrowed from

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which leads to havoc and romantic calamity. So I guess I’d have to add that as an element of inspiration.)

**Star Wars, Star Trek, or Firefly?**

*Firefly.* Hands down. I love the grittiness of the world Whedon creates, and I appreciate the “grayness” of the characters—it feels real to me; that is, the world isn’t black and white, good vs. evil, and the crew aren’t simply white-hat good guys. Captain Malcolm and his crew are complex and flawed but lovable and mostly good-hearted (with the exception of Jayne, who’s amoral as a jackal).

Of course, I grew up on *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* and *The Lord of the Rings,* and I still love them, but at this point in my life I find the white-hats vs. the black-hats a bit hollow. As George R.R. Martin once said, “There are no dark lords. We are all gray lords.” And that’s the point, really—LIFE is gray lords, and I crave art that reflects life. Reading about and watching gray lords allows me to better understand my own grayness and the very gray world around me.

The thing is, it’s so much easier to write a black and white world filled with white-hats and black-hats. It’s easier to read, too. The white-hats are easy to like, the black hats easy to hate. Such stories don’t ask much of us as readers. Much more challenging is the gray character whose flaws make her real and complex and whose sometimes questionable actions make the reader conflicted. There’s no question this kind of character is harder to write. It requires careful balance of flaws and some fundamental good that redeems them to the reader.

In *The Jack of Souls* I aim to write gray lords, and I think I mostly succeed. I confess, there are some purely evil immortal knights, but the rest—even some who fight alongside the evil—are gray. One way to measure that is that *they* seem themselves at the white hats, and they have sound reasons for believing it.

I try to write gray because it’s what I prefer to read, and *Firefly* is the epitome of gritty, complex gray. Messy world, messy language, messy relationships, messy morals, messy hearts. That’s the world I see around me. And when I watch *Firefly’s* world, I understand my own a little better.

Plus, no one writes dialogue like Whedon.

**Worse movie ever?**

Fuzzy, cooing, waddling Ewoks. Nuf said.

**Best guilty pleasure ever?**

WoW. No, Skyrim. Wait, Destiny!

**Who would play you in the movie?**

Michael J. Fox.