

Author Interview Questions on *Secrets of the Dragon Riders*

JAMES A. OWEN

Q: Your brother Jeremy Owen's essay in *Secrets of the Dragon Riders*, the book you were editor on, is about seeing the author in his or her work-and how you're really only seeing yourself. Which character from Paolini's books to you most see yourself in?

A: I would dearly love to say Eragon, but I'm afraid it's Roran. He's a guy who makes lots of good decisions that unfortunately have bad repercussions. He's always trying to do the right thing, but can't seem to catch a break. I hope I'm luckier than he is-- but the fact I can identify with his struggles may mean that I can give myself the opportunity to learn from his character. There are always opportunities to learn, and grow-- and to try to make better choices than the characters we identify with in the books we read.

Q: You write about dragons yourself in *Here, There Be Dragons* and the rest of the books in that series (*The Search for the Red Dragon, The Indigo King*). Are your dragons anything like Saphira?

A: Hmm. Good question. I think yes, after a fashion-- because all dragons are going to be unknowable in a lot of ways. They're going to be older (as a species) and wiser, and enigmatic. But those traits make it more significant when one of them DOES form a bond with one of us humans. They're something to be feared and respected in both my books and Christopher's.

Q: What fascinates you about dragons? Why do you think other people are fascinated by dragons?

A: Mine came about because of the Imaginarium Geographica, the atlas of maps of every land you've ever read about from every myth, legend, fable, and fairy tale. On the eastern edge of all the maps is the warning, "Go ye no further, for here there be dragons." I got it from a real old mariner's map, and so of course, I had to have dragons in the story! But I think the possibility that creatures may have existed that we know nothing of today inspires something even more powerful: belief. We WANT to believe in dragons. We WANT to believe in magical creatures. We WANT there to be something out there to discover. And for me, one of the best metaphors for that belief is dragons.

Q: Paolini was pretty young when he first wrote *Eragon*. When did you first discover your love of writing?

A: Chris and I have that in common. I started doing little versions of Goldilocks and Red Riding Hood and selling them to the neighbors when I was five. When I was fifteen, I wrote and illustrated a comic called *Pryderi Terra* and then published it myself. At sixteen, I was the youngest professional exhibitor ever to attend the San Diego Comicon - and all of that work and

experience later coalesced in my graphic novel project *Starchild*. The graphic novels led to an invitation to write the Mythworld novels, and those gave me the experience I needed to write *Here, There Be Dragons*.

J. FITZGERALD MCCURDY

Q. Your essay in *Secrets of the Dragon Riders* describes Roran as a hero (more of a hero, in *Eldest*, than Eragon, even). What do you think makes a great hero?

A. I've finally figured out that perfect heroes are bor-ing. True heroes are made, not born that way. The greatest heroes of fiction frequently appear as tragic figures, conspicuously deficient in moderation, self-knowledge, and self-restraint. They seem to possess a much greater sense of helplessness-- an unwillingness to accept their destiny along with a feeling that they are unworthy of wearing the mantle of hero. Almost unconsciously they begin to know themselves by developing courage, wisdom, moderation, a sense of justice, and self-confidence as a direct result of their deficiencies. In real life there are well-known heroes like Mother Theresa and Mahatma Gandhi, and there are those -- ordinary people-- who emerge unexpectedly. A nine-year-old boy in my neighborhood emerged as a hero last summer when he snatched his younger brother out of the claws of a cougar. I'd like to think I'd save one of my kids or any kid from a cougar attack, but I don't really know if I'm a hero because I've never been tested like that. What if I ran away in terror? And I can't even begin to understand the inner reserves of strength, the sense of duty, and the amazing courage of those firemen and women in New York in the aftermath of 9/11. We don't even know their names, but talk about real heroes!

Q. Who would you say is your favorite hero of all time?

A. What a brain-squeezing question! OMG! Asking me to choose one favorite hero from the pantheon of past and present fictional heroes is like asking me to pick my favorite star in the sky. There are so many great heroes, and I love them all, including the comic book heroes Batman and Spiderman. I still cry when Boromir dies in *Lord of the Rings*-- what an awesome tragic hero. I'm sad when I read about Anomander Rake, Steven Erikson's *Son of Darkness* in the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*-- another great tragic hero. There are Lloyd Alexander's Taran and Homer's Odysseus. There are Beowulf, Ulysses, Athena, Harry Potter, Hagrid, and Zorro, not to mention the kids in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. But, when it comes right down to it, I have to say that my absolute favorite fictional hero is Aeneas from Virgil's great epic poem, *The Aeneid*. He's wise, strong, loyal, and courageous, and human. I believe he'd die to save me. That's the sort of leader I'd willingly follow.

Q. Why do you think so many people are fascinated by tales of heroes?

A. Tales of heroes transport us from our mundane world into a world of magic-- a place we can only reach in our imaginations. Despite their fictional existence though, heroes are very real in that they inspire us and make us want to be better human beings. Our world would be a less interesting place if there were no Harry Potter, no Hobbits, no Spiderman. Our fascination with heroes is as old as civilization and the earliest myths. We have made of heroes models for our own character development. I believe that if we didn't have literary heroes to emulate, the effect

would be the same as if someone erased a vital ingredient of our moral development. Heroes help us have dreams, give us hope, and make us reach for the stars.

Q. *Brisingr* is due to be released next week. What do you hope to see happen in the book?

A. Besides wanting to see more of Roran, I'd like to see Eragon lose his obsession with himself and emerge as a great tragic hero, passionately committed to ridding his country of Galbatorix's evil rule and risking everything to that end, like Boromir, whose love of his country was so palpable, so naked and raw, that it was painful reading for the reader. I'd like to see Eragon fail and plummet to the depths of despair, and then claw his way back, becoming stronger, humbler, and a better man in the process. I hope to see Roran changed by his adventures in *Eldest*. After what he's been through, he shouldn't be content to simply marry Katrina and farm his land. He must ascend to the next rung on the ladder and keep climbing. I felt that Paolini was grooming him to be a real King in *Eldest*, so I'm hoping Roran becomes the great King to replace Galbatorix. Finally, I love Saphira and hope to see more of her, especially scenes that reveal her dragon wisdom and keen insight.

NANCY YI FAN

Q. In your essay for *Secrets of the Dragon Riders* you write about the use of anthropomorphic animals in fiction, like dragons in Paolini's books and birds in your own. If you could have an anthropomorphic pet what would it be? What human characteristics would it have?

A: I would have a miniature griffin-like creature, who'd canter around on my desk as I write. He'd have white fur and feathers, with black letters of the alphabet speckled over it, and because he'd eat wood he'd keep my pencils sharp. My pet would speak, of course, and wear little reading glasses. "What happens next in the story?" he would often say.

Q. What is your all-time favorite anthropomorphic character?

A: I love Charlotte the spider, from *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White.

SUSAN VAUGHT

Q. In your essay for *Secrets of the Dragon Riders* you talk about how being older doesn't always make you wiser. What do you think you're less smart about now than you used to be?

A: I believe I'm less intuitive, or that I've forgotten how to listen as closely to instincts, intuition, and impulses/urges that probably represent my deeper connection to the world and universe. I second-guess and analyze too much, instead of taking action. I rely on my eyes to "see" instead of my heart, and to be more balanced and wiser, I should give my heart a louder, stronger voice.

Q. Do you agree with Eragon that it's more important to possess wisdom and a good heart, or do you agree with Oromis that it's more important to be able to use logic?

A: I agree with Eragon, 100%. Logic can be cold and cruel without wisdom and a good heart. Many, many times criminals and despots are following solid logic when they commit atrocities, but without wisdom and that good heart, the logic leads them horribly astray.

Q. You have a *lot* of pets. If you could choose one of them to be able to talk with the way Eragon does with Saphira (though I don't think anyone would ever call her a pet!), which would it be?

A: Yeah, Saphira would roast you over the whole pet-thing. For sure. But me, hmmm. I think I would most like to be able to speak more directly with my parrot, Frank. We almost do have conversations, simple ones, but I know Frank sees things in the universe and in me that I don't understand. Plus, I'd really really like to be able to convince Frank not to bite my toes, my son-in-law, and the bathroom door.