



Linda Winstead Jones

MARRIES OFF HER LEADING MAN, AND READIES THE VAMPS

TAKE ONE IRRITATED EMPEROR, add in his reluctant search for a bride, and you have the final installment of Linda Winstead Jones' Emperor's Brides trilogy. *Bride by Command* (Mar., Berkley Sensation) takes place simultaneously with the previous titles, *Untouchable* (Aug. '08) and *22 Nights* (Dec. '08), and is, at long last, emperor Jahn's story.

Upon his mandate that six women be brought to the kingdom for his royal consideration, Jahn unleashes unmitigated chaos. One royal candidate is murdered, and attempts are made on the other women's lives. Among those trying to thwart the emperor in his search for a bride are an immortal assassin, a conniving former empress married to Jahn's father and a host of other traitors.

"Jahn wasn't raised knowing that he would one day be emperor, so he's annoyed that he's required to marry and produce an heir," Jones says about her conflicted hero. "The contest is his way of irritating those around him — and prolonging his days of freedom. He likes the single life and would prefer to marry for love . . . But that's not a luxury an emperor can insist upon."

Finding her inspiration for the book in the Grimm's fairy tale "King Thrushbeard," in which a king disguises himself as a beggar after the maiden he pursues turns him down, Jones reveals that characters from the other books in the trilogy make appearances in *Bride by Command*.

A genre-crossing author, Jones has tackled series romance, paranormals, fantasies, romantic suspense and more. Now she's exploring new terrain — vampires — with a novella called "Sundown," due out at the end of the year as part of the Silhouette Nocturne anthology *Christmas With a Vampire III*. In the story, bar owner Abby Brown caters to both human and vampire clientele. After a customer is killed, detective Leo Stryker comes to investigate what happened.

"I've often said I wouldn't write a vampire story," she says. "And then one day I was talking with friends before my Romance Writers of America chapter meeting and vampires came up. I said, once more, that I wasn't interested in writing about vampires and then, for some reason, I started telling my friends why. Vampires are supposed to be monsters, I said. Too often they're defanged. Made cute or whiny. My vampires would be monsters. They would embrace who and what they were. And then — wouldn't you know it — I had vampire characters insisting that their story be told."

— Lauren Spielberg

For more on the author, visit: LindaWinsteadJones.com.

WISH FULFILLED

ALISA KWITNEY TAKES A NEW DIRECTION

WRITING, IT CAN BE SAID, is in Alisa Kwitney's blood. Her mother, Ziva Kwitney, is a nonfiction writer who has worked as a journalist and an editor, and her father, Robert Sheckley, was a well-known science-fiction author.

Kwitney has combined the best of both worlds in her publishing career. Her first book, a collection of poetry, was published at the tender age of 8 or 9 thanks to a New York City school program. "It was a real skinny book," ironically titled *A Huge Lion of a Book*, Kwitney recalls. "I was a very nerdy child. I looked like Harry Potter, I was constantly being beaten up by older kids who thought I was a nerdy, poetry-writing boy."

But, she adds, "every writer needs an unhappy past."

With her unhappy past behind her, Kwitney has continued to put pen to paper, as a comic book editor and graphic novelist for Vertigo and as the author of several women's fiction/chick lit novels like 2002's *The Dominant Blonde*. Now, using the pen name Alisa Sheckley, she's branching out again and writing a new paranormal series, starting with this month's *The Better to Hold You* (Del Rey).

"When I first wrote *The Better to Hold You*, it was right after *The Dominant Blonde*, and I think it was probably a little too much ahead of the paranormal curve, because people looked at it a little askance," says Kwitney. "But I didn't feel it was so different from what I did before" at Vertigo. "There was a lot of crossing over between slice-of-life and gritty fantasy, and I'd already written a dark fantasy in graphic novel form under the Kwitney name."

But why make the move from women's fiction to the paranormal realm? "I was a huge *Buffy* fan and I thought, 'Why can't I write a romance like *Buffy*?' I loved the idea of playing with all the great B-movie horror stuff but also having the supernatural work on a metaphoric level. And then I came up with a heroine who is a veterinarian, very grounded in New York City, really, really smart about dogs, but stupid about men.

"I imagined her being in a marriage where she gave all her power away. She was in love and would do anything to keep her husband. The pivot of the plot for me was that the cheating husband infected her with a dose of lycanthropy," says Kwitney. "It's like werewolf syndrome as an STD."

Thus, Abra Barrow, the heroine of *The Better to Hold*, was born. And in its July sequel, *Moonburn*, she has to learn to deal with her new power, instinct and fighting ability. "All this, for me, felt very much real and grounded in women and the foolish things we do — and a little *Buffy* wish fulfillment." — Faygie Levy

Learn more at AlisaKwitney.com

