

Q&A with the contributors of *The World of All Souls*

-How did the idea for the project come about, and how did you become involved?

JILL: The project was inspired by the enthusiasm of Deb's readers and their intense interest in the world Deb built in the trilogy. After SHADOW was published, Deb and her publishers saw readers' enthusiasm and curiosity deepen, and I think that's when Deb started to imagine a companion book to the series. I'd been working with Deb since the publication of A DISCOVERY OF WITCHES and knew the books fairly well so I was happy to join the project, especially alongside such a talented team.

LISA: I got involved very early because I had been editing Deb's drafts since A Discovery of Witches. Deb broached the possibility of my writing a companion volume around 2012, when Shadow of Night came out. We played with the idea, and shortly afterward Jill came into the mix. We had a good idea of the subjects we wanted to cover, but how would we find time to write and pull the whole project together at the same time? Then in 2015 Deb added Claire and Colleen to the project, and off we went!

CLAIRE: Discussions for a companion book to the trilogy had been going on for a long time. As the All Souls fandom grew, it became clear the community of readers were passionate about the rich and vast historical background to the trilogy. In the absence of a companion book, they had created their own forums to share and discuss all the different aspects of the world. There was clearly a need and desire for a comprehensive 'World of..' volume.

I was Deb's UK editor at Headline and have worked with her since the first publication of A DISCOVERY OF WITCHES, publishing all three books there. When I went freelance I carried on working with Headline and Deb, and had just finished putting together the All Souls Real-Time Reading e-book for them when Deb approached me and asked if I'd like to work with her on creating THE WORLD OF ALL SOULS volume. Obviously, I squealed with excitement and said YES PLEASE.

COLLEEN: deb asked me a loooooong time ago thru my tumblr account if i'd ever want to work on a project with her. i thought she was some freaky fan, wanting me to do a mural of gallowglass in their basement. but she proved to be legitimate. and then in 2016, she officially hired me to illustrate the TWOAS and i giddily said yes as then i knew she wasn't a crazy person. :-)

-What part of the process of creating this book surprised you the most?

CLAIRE: There were lots of surprises and challenges throughout the whole process of putting the book together. Working as part of a team, and

brainstorming ideas for all the things that could be included in the book, was so fun. As we got to work in more detail on each section, and delved into Deb's inspiration cabinet, the incredible depth of the All Souls world kept astonishing me. Every aspect, from the science, alchemy and magic, to the people and locations, and down to the smallest historical details (such as the fact that Matthew Roydon really is recorded as living with a shoemaker in Blackfriars) is based on some real historical fact, person, place or fascinating concept. It's a master-class in world-building!

COLLEEN: that the writers had to keep to word counts. FOR EVERYTHING!

LISA: I think the biggest surprise was the depth of the trilogy. I already knew that several of the characters were historically real, but in doing the research I discovered even more characters I hadn't known were actual people. The line between fact and fiction started blurring in a very pleasant way, which is how I imagine Deb feels much of the time!

JILL: Even though we all lived thousands of miles apart, I was surprised by how intensely collaborative the project was. When you read any given paragraph, you're reading something that was drafted by one of us, edited by a couple of others, then re-worked and embellished by a third person (usually Deb), and finally, beautifully illustrated and imagined by Colleen. (Also, we discovered plenty of surprises in the course of our research. For instance: poor, poor Jane Dee).

-What's your favorite thing about TWOAS?

LISA: My favorite thing is the way the different categories interweave and overlap, providing an incredibly rich combination of fantasy world building, history, alchemy, fashion, mythology, and art. The book is so much FUN—you don't read it so much as you experience it. And I love the way both the trilogy and TWOAS make you think about the people and objects that have fallen out of the historical record. It gives me great comfort to think of a lost Holbein portrait of Margaret More, hanging over a loo.

JILL: I love learning new things so working on this book was a delight—I know so much more about Elizabethan fashion, and about people like Pliny the Elder (he had a terrible life/work balance), the functional and tactical differences between rapiers and broadswords, how to make candied violets, the relationship between phaeton carriages and Spyder cars, theories of time travel, etc. I pity my friends because now I'm THAT PERSON at dinner parties...

CLAIRE: It's impossible to pick a favourite. There's so much fascinating background to all the aspects I loved about the trilogy. Having studied history, I am always drawn to the wonderfully rich historical elements. And I love the way in TWOAS that this background is brought to life through the framework of the All Souls characters and their experiences – we never wanted the book to feel dry or too dense at any point. But looking at it overall, I think it's the

sheer scope of subjects covered that's one of my favourite things about the book, and what really makes it stand out.

COLLEEN: the statues. the 3 sexy pages and the fashion. oh and the little chess pieces. all the little whimsical doodly bits, too!

-What was it like to work with Deborah on creating a book?

CLAIRE: Fun, exhilarating, inspiring and a hugely rewarding experience! Having worked with Deb on the All Souls trilogy since the first publication of A DISCOVERY OF WITCHES, I knew it would be an absolute joy. But now being in a position to work with her on creating a book from scratch was really special and something I feel SO lucky to have been a part of.

LISA: It was such a delight! I don't have a fraction of her fictional creativity but I love to write, so delving into her fictional and historical world was an ideal way for me to participate in the process.

CLAIRE: When it started, she fed me, wined me, introduced me to oysters and champagne, her wonderful working family (and her rocking mom!) and from that point on she could have thrown me in a pit to crush rocks with a hammer and i'd happily do it.

During the process, i gave her lots of "in process sneaks" but my main bosses were claire and the jill-lisa. I did have deb's world, in my hands tho, for a year and THAT was thrilling.

JILL: It was lovely, actually. Deb is a wonderful teacher and a gentle editor.

--Do you feel like you got a peek into Deb's creative process and if so, what did you discover?

COLLEEN: Somewhat. I feel like i helped bring the world of ALL SOULS to visual life. I feel like i spent an INORDINATE TIME researching, museum crawling, google diving, and thinking and sketching and processing the HOW i wanted to go about the illustrations, which must have been like how she chose specific elements, periods, narratives, character aspects (fictional and historic) of the first 3 books. I ended up thru that process, discovering "deb patterns" of thinking and creating, understanding her aesthetic, her "eye" and the way she has her readers use ALL of their senses thru her scenes. and her extraordinary gift of sparking my imagination and making me really want to push my elf, creatively, to render her world with the highest compliment of my talents. :-)

CLAIRE: I wouldn't say there's a set process for Deb as such, but we definitely got an illuminating peek into how she used her vast knowledge and research as an academic to create the amazingly rich world that has captured readers' imaginations. I also loved discovering some of the magical

connections Deb said came to her while she was writing the books. One of my favourite examples of this magic is Deb's story of when she was researching locations in Venice for THE BOOK OF LIFE. While being shown around a centuries old, beautiful palazzo (usually closed to the public) she noticed engraved in Latin on the fireplace in the main hall Christopher Marlowe's phrase, "What nourishes me, destroys me". This was all the sign she needed that it had to be Matthew de Clermont's Venetian residence. Wonderful.

JILL: We got a lot more than a peek--we were absolutely immersed in her process (to mix a metaphor). Even though I know Deb's a historian, I was gobsmacked by the breadth and depth of scholarship she brings to her novels. I'm all about the emotional journey when I read her books, but working on TWOAS reminded me that Deb is not only a student of human character—she's also an astounding scholar.

LISA: I'd been getting peeks into her creative process for several years, so I had some idea of how she operates. But so much of her creative process is unknowable. I don't think even Deb fully understands it—she just makes magic.