

Panther Newsletter's **ARTIST OF THE MONTH** Jasmine Johnson has come a long way since her first novel *Mr Soon Come* hit the literary scene in 2001. Following that, she wrote and self-published her two subsequent novels *The Devil I Know* and *The Day Hell Broke Loose*. I hooked up with Jasmine to find out more about her and her work...



**NSS:** Jasmine thanks for taking time out to talk about you and your work.  
**Please tell the readers a little about yourself; where are you from?**

**JJ:** I am a humble Country girl from the Parish of St Catherine in Sunny Jamaica. At the age of 14, I left Jamaica to join my Mum, Dad, three brothers and two sisters in England. England was different. *Very* different. In fact, even now after so many years, I still can't get used to the cold! I love life and laughter, although sometimes life sometimes has a way of stealing your smile, but I'm a smiler and I try to hold onto my smiles.

**NSS:** What prompted you to first pick up the pen and start writing?

**JJ:** I have always written since I was a small girl in Jamaica. I started with love poems. I used to have a school-girl crush on a handsome teenage boy. I used to write him love poems, and he used to do the same! But that was all that was, a teenage crush, but I suppose he inspired my creative teenage years in Jamaica.

Later, I discovered stories. I loved it when my imagination would just run away with me when I would write them (then called 'Compositions'). My Jamaican teacher would set exciting titles on the board. Titles like, 'A Narrow Escape', 'Lost in the dark', etc. I didn't see my writing skills as a talent then: I just knew I loved to stretch my imagination, but my teacher would always read my stories out to the class, so I suppose I realise I must have been a little different. However, what prompted me to first pick up the pen to write my first grown-up novel was heartaches: those of myself and people around me. I had seen one too many and decided to write a 'Woman get your own back' story. Hence, the birth of my debut novel, *'Mr Soon Come'*.

**NSS: Which authors have inspired you?**

**JJ:** Without a doubt, the author that inspires me most is Maya Angelou. She is most definitely my hero. I just love the person she is, and the way she puts things creatively. She tells it like it is.

**NSS: What specific subject excites your passion to start writing?**

**JJ:** Relationships, of course. You could write forever about this subject. We have love, hate, tears, joy, shock, horror, triumph and failure... and! Not forgetting that good old 'Passion'.

**NSS: What inspired you to write *Mr Soon Come, the Devil I know and The Day Hell Broke Loose*?**

**JJ:** Well, we're all familiar with the term, '*Mi soon come*'. When a Jamaican guy says to his wife or girlfriend, '*Mi soon come, baby*', she better not hold her breath! And as you know, my debut novel, '*Mr Soon Come*' tells the story of a guy who keeps promising his wife that he'll be faithful. Say no more... As it goes, it was a promise that never came to fruition! So let's say I was inspired by all those guys everywhere, whose time ran out before they could keep their promises!

As for *The Devil I Know*, we all know at least one person who spends numerous years looking for Mr or Mrs Right, and of course, the old saying, '*Better the devil you know, than the devil you don't*'. The inspiration for this novel comes from seeing people leaving their partners for what they *think* is 'Greener grass', when in fact, that grass on the other side is sometimes more wither than wither can be! Hence, the title, 'The Devil I Know'.

Finally, 'The Day Broke Loose'... This final show-down brings 'closure'. It is the resolution to the first two novels, where all the hurting women came together like a bonded force, to have their own back! Though, I dare say, things don't go their way 100%. So, you can say, this novel is inspired by the first two.

**NSS: Tell us briefly about your novels.**

**JJ:** Briefly, my first novel is the one that broke the ice. The second, you might say, shows the other side, and urge women (and men) to think twice before getting rid of what might be *ok*. And what I enjoyed about writing this novel is the fact that it featured a dread. Before this, I don't think a dread has been used as a main character in a love story. And the third speaks for itself: It is the icing on the cake, and I say this with a smile.

**NSS: For anyone who has not yet, but are keen to read your work; how can they get hold of your novels?**

**JJ:** Well, the first two are sold out, although I am looking at producing an omnibus copy in 2010: *Mr Soon Come* and *The Devil I Know* under one cover. People are asking for them, so I must. However, *The Day Hell Broke Loose* is now at a special price of £6.99 (£4.99 plus £2.00 postage). It's £12.99 in Waterstones and other bookshops, so it's a saving of £8.00. Anyone interested can email: [xaymaca@book1.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:xaymaca@book1.freeserve.co.uk)

**NSS: What do you enjoy most about writing?**

**JJ:** What I enjoy most about writing is being able to make my characters do, say, think, be and go whatever and wherever I want them to. Like the Director is the master of the stage, I am the master of my pen.

**NSS: What do you least enjoy about writing?**

**JJ:** What I least enjoy about writing, is having to leave it to go to bed! Sometimes I'm so carried away, it is only the sensibility that I need to sleep that pulls me away. Seriously, I can get so deep; you would think I'm in a real world.

**NSS: How has growing up in Birmingham and being of Jamaican parentage influenced your work?**

**JJ:** In fact, I grew up in Jamaica until I was 14. When I came to England, I spent some years in Gloucester, then Luton, then Birmingham. Although everyone thinks I am a Brummy, it is just the last 22 years that I spent here, but it is home now. Being of Jamaican parentage influenced my work hugely. You will always find a '*Jamaicaness*' about my work: the Pentecostal church, the reggae dancehalls, the patois... all things Jamaican. Mix these in with a good percentage of '*Britishness*' and you have '*Jasmine's melting pot of creativity*'.

**NSS: Do you find that black writers here in Britain come up against barriers when it comes to their work being published?**

**JJ:** Hell yes! You better believe it. When I finished my first novel, I must have sent it to more publishers than I have had hot dinners! Even as far as Ireland. But I feel that if the person receiving your work is not '*feeling*' it, he or she won't give it a chance. However, Mr Soon Come was gladly received by the Xpress Publishers in London. They felt it and wanted it. My last two was self-published, but only because I wanted to be in control of my work from start to finish. But yeh: though subtly, the barriers are there, trust me.

**NSS: In regards to your future work; I hear you're working on a stage play called *Temptations*; tell us a little about this, your current project.**

**JJ:** Oh yes! '*Temptations*' is the adaptation of my first novel, Mr Soon Come. It was a challenge adapting it, but all who know me will know that I love challenges. The latest draft is the 4<sup>th</sup> draft. I'm very pleased with it, and am hoping to get that staged in 2010. Mr Soon Come is my baby, so you will understand that '*Temptations*' is very close to my heart. I just hope the public will enjoy it as much as they do the book. The characters are alive and kicking.

**NSS**: Looking forward to seeing that. Finally have you got any words of encouragement for any budding young writers out there?

**JJ**: Go for it! If it's in you, let it out. There is a story in every one of us. Do it for love, and if money comes, it's a bonus.

**Thanks again Jasmine for taking time out to be interviewed; and may our creator bless you with many more creative gems from your pen.**

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