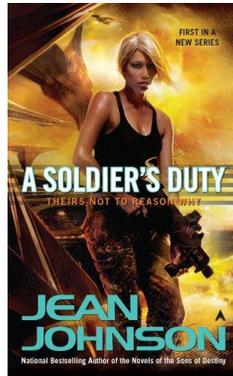




Review by: Inspector Librarian

Reviewed on: July 23, 2011

Rating: 4 out of 5 Stars



How did I get it: An ARC was sent to me courtesy of [Ace / Penguin](#). *A Soldier's Duty* is the first book in the *Theirs Not To Reason Why* series and comes out on July 26th.

Why did I get it: I was intrigued by the summary and the idea of a female character training to become a very dangerous, brave soldier out to save sections of the universe if not the entire thing. (This title will also count towards my [Speculative Fiction Reading Challenge](#) for 2011.)

Summary: *Ia is a precog, tormented by visions of the future where her home galaxy has been devastated. To prevent this vision from coming true, Ia enlists in the Terran United Planets military with a plan to become a soldier who will inspire generations for the next three hundred years—a soldier history will call Bloody Mary.*

Summary: For me, *A Soldier's Duty* was like a much needed breath of fresh air. Not only because it was a fun, character-driven series opener with a strong, vivid female lead, but because it lacked romance of any kind. Romance is fine and good, of course, but sometimes I just want to read about someone saving their world and/or universe.

The best parts of the book were the details and the way the future was set up as a far more open-minded, complex place, which I appreciated. Too often Science Fiction

becomes preachy or dated because it tries to so closely mimic or parallel current events. A Soldier's Duty does its own thing, not bothering to hone in on Earth in terms of politics or culture, but to expand beyond that. This feat is easily accomplished because although Ia is human, she is not from Earth and hails instead on a world called Sanctuary. She is also a second generation first-worlder as well as a heavyworlder which means she's capable of more than most when on planets, stations, etc. with lighter gravity. She also has mothers, so basically Ia is pretty awesome.

While training and at her first few assignments, Ia is surrounded, for the most part, by other humans hailing from Terran United Planets, but there are plenty of aliens around as well. I am especially intrigued by the Feyori who are responsible for creating humans with precognitive abilities and who view everyone as part of an elaborate game of Chess crossed with Risk that they're playing against one another. I cannot wait to learn more about them or to see how Ia continues to prove herself worthy of having her own faction.

Following Ia's career as she moved from soldier all the way to officer was a pleasure although some sections worked better for me than others and the first half of the book was a bit more enjoyable for me. The second half covered a larger span of time though so a lot had to be packed into not necessarily enough pages. And even when I wasn't sure I agreed with her approach to superior officers or crisis situations, I never stopped liking Ia though or caring about what would happen to her. The journey she's taking is certainly an interesting one. and the way Ia's own precognitive abilities played out was really intriguing as well as her other physical attributes. She definitely teeters on the edge of being overwhelmingly, blindingly special, but Johnson never quite throws her over it.

Johnson also does a great job of sharing Ia's motivations as well as actual reasons for why Ia does certain things the way she does them, which I thought was fascinating. She has to keep quiet because the events she sees playing out can change based on the slightest alteration and she doesn't exactly know all the points she has to hit along the way to get to her main objective. She doesn't always feel the need to explain herself the few times she does share her visions or her abilities, which is a bit annoying, but she also lives in a universe where people can have precognitive abilities, telekinetic powers, and telepathy so the skepticism is not as hard to overcome as it might be in a different setting. I think what also helps balance things out is Johnson's approach to Ia's abilities. Yes, she can see the future, but time is constantly changing and evolving. She's definitely

not the most gifted precious precog snowflake out there either, and even when she's certain of how to get from Point A to Point B, Ia still has to do whatever it takes to get there. That journey isn't always pleasant and often requires a lot of fortitude, conviction, and inner strength.

Due to being a precog and aware of future events, it does make sense for Ia to shy away from people, especially in the instances where she can get a good, solid sense of what will happen to them further down the road. Or what might happen if she interferes and/or they live long enough. Since *A Soldier's Duty* acts as Ia's origin story, I think that loner vibe worked for the most part because all heroes tend to start off on their own and some even stay that way. Moving forward though, this might become problematic. I'm glad that, based on the excerpt for *An Officer's Duty* in the back of my ARC, it does look like she will go home to at least talk with her family and that will probably help. But at some point it gets ridiculous for Ia to do everything on her own. I would certainly not object to her getting someone to be the Samwise Gamgee to her Frodo Baggins or I guess maybe something more along the lines of the sensible William Bush to her precognitive Horatio Hornblower, but I digress.

Only two aspects of the book really irked me and both of these are pretty minor things. The first was Ia's singing at various intervals and even making up a song about herself on the spot in a bar after one battle. I imagine it will work for other readers, but for me it came across as sort of awkward particularly in the middle of her trying to torture information out of someone. I was also really disappointed by the way Ia earned her nickname, not just because it was so easy but because it wasn't for doing anything really chilling that a moniker like Bloody Mary would suggest. Similarly, the more I think about it, the weirder it is to me that she would even get a nickname like that because I have a hard time believing anyone would remember Bloody Mary in 2491. Unless they were naming her about the alcoholic beverage, which would just be sad.

In conclusion, really, really good and definitely the start of something awesome! If you've tried other Science Fiction series with female leads only to find them to be dated or not be very progressive in one way or another, I would suggest moving on to the *Theirs Not to Reason Why* series. Or if you simply want a book where a female character sinks and swims based on her own insights and courage as well as precognitive powers all the while knowing that the fate of a galaxy will be determined by her actions, this is the book for you. And now I'm off to pine for the sequel.