

## RETURN MAGAZINE, 2022

1. What's the best way for me to introduce you to our readers?
2. Is JT LeRoy a real person? Even if he only exists within you?
3. Would you ever bring him back?
4. Did you build JT LeRoy's world, or did you remember it? And if you remembered it, where do you think those memories came from?
5. What do you think people misunderstand most about your story?
6. What do you think of the idea that the Internet is a prism, not a mirror? Do you think the same is true of books?
7. Have you ever role played? Online? In real life? As your physical body, with dolls?
8. I often wonder if when we create online usernames, if we're announcing ourselves ("Hello! I'm @default\_friend") or if we're creating an entirely new person. What do you think?
9. Do you think there's such a thing as a digital truck stop? If so, where? Do you think there are digital lot lizards?
10. What is one book you think everyone should read?

1. Please introduce me as who I am: The writer Laura Albert – author of the JT LeRoy books *The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things*, *SARAH*, and *Harold's End* – who was perhaps way the fuck ahead of her time. ;)

2. I like to quote the film historian Joe Adamson, who once wrote, "Bugs Bunny does not exist. But he lives." The exact same thing is true of JT LeRoy. JT has a complete, full-blown life in our culture and in people's hearts and minds, and that life is permanent and indelible, the same way Bugs Bunny's is.

3. I can't bring back someone who has never gone away. If you're asking, Can I still write JT LeRoy fiction, the answer is Oh yeah!

4. The world of Terminator (who was an earlier iteration of JT LeRoy) came to me directly from my own life experiences, but almost in a dream state. I did not consciously adjust specific details to accommodate his personality and identity – to give myself the distance I needed to confront those life experiences. As I write my memoir, it surprises the fuck outta me, how very hard it is to find anything in the JT LeRoy books which does not have at least a direct metaphoric connection to my own life.

5. Probably the single biggest misunderstanding is the mistaken belief – encouraged by a lot of the press – that JT LeRoy was some kind of deliberate contrivance employed to sell books. The fact is, my own life had been preparing me to write in that voice, and when I did start writing, the prose was spontaneous and immediate. I never sat down and thought to myself, What kind of persona should I adopt for writing fiction? If I had, I never would have settled on a gender-variant truck-stop prostitute. That was not a formula to become a successful writer – at least, not BEFORE the publication of *SARAH*. Context is everything, and it is easy to forget that, at the time, there was no term for gender variance. I created a landscape that I needed to express. I had no way

to express my feelings of not fitting into the strict gender binary. JT LeRoy did not fit either. It's bizarre that folks can still write about JT LeRoy and assign him the identity of being trans, when that is not how he was identified then – or would identify now. And it's equally bizarre when anyone makes assumptions about how I identify. It's wild how folks who have no sense of all the different facets of gender identity will pick whatever they find to be most familiar and ignore everything that is available to educate themselves. Also, because the world I created in SARAH is so gritty and has such recognizable emotion, such felt authenticity, it then becomes easy for some people to lose sight of the fact that SARAH is not only fiction but is also suffused with magical realism. I deliberately elevated queerness in SARAH. I very much like the idea of creating what has been called “a holy place” for those who self-identify as part of the broader queer community – that's exactly the sort of language which should be used. Societies throughout history have understood this special status for people who don't fit within the standard boundaries of gender and sexuality, they've recognized that we walk between other kinds of worlds as well, seen and unseen. We need to renew and extend this recognition.

6. I think the metaphor of a mirror fits the internet very well. If you want to know who someone is, look at what holds their attention online: It will be some idealized version of themselves. That reflection may be complex and ramified, but it's still a reflection. And the same could be said of books and other art forms. We do all these creative things because we are continuously in search of ourselves.

7. Because my personal body boundaries were so nebulous from when I was a small child, I have struggled with a sense of self that felt solid. Storytelling through play was my first way to project out various selves and play out scenarios that had occurred. This is a much deeper conversation, as you have written so much about role-playing that is possible on the internet – we could do an entire conversation just on this. But it feels like everyone's life is an attempt to construct a role that feels authentic and recognizable to themselves.

8. I'm not sure that it's possible to create an entirely new person. Even when someone has children, those new people have come from somewhere, with traits and characteristics and feelings and thoughts that are derived from others who came before them. It's like that saying, “Only God creates.” The rest of us just rework things.

9. Almost everything else in our lives seems to have some kind of digital correspondent these days. I can see in Web 3.0 a truck stop with Lot Lizards, as sex workers can work much more safely in the truck stop of a virtual Metaverse (that's not run by Zuckerberg).

10. There have been documentaries, movies, TV shows, articles, podcasts, etc., about myself and the creation of JT LeRoy. It's easy to lose sight of the fact that all this interest exists because of SARAH. There were never any advertisements taken out to promote SARAH, it was all word of mouth. SARAH filled a need in the culture, one that very much still exists. Both SARAH and *The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things* have been reissued and are now out with my name, and they are available as [audiobooks](#) as

well. I hear from folks all the time, from all over the world – SARAH was translated into 20 languages. People see and feel themselves represented in it. None of what happened would have occurred without that book. The kingdom on which it exists is SARAH. The rest is extra.