

Alysa of the Fields: Book One in the Tellings of Xunar-kun

Tina Field Howe

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Reviewed by Olivera Baumgartner-Jackson for Reader Views (5/08)

Tina Field Howe's "Alysa of the Fields" is set on a planet Xunar-kun, some 3000 years after a catastrophic event, referred to as the Cat'clysm, wiped out most of the planet's population. Alysa is member of the Field Folk, one of the two clans remaining in the area. The other clan, the Trailmen, is considered by the Field Folk to be rather uncivilized and quite dangerous; and the two meet rarely, only to barter for the goods that the other clan does not possess. Alysa's father, Abso, is one of the rare Field Folk who actually interact with the Trailmen in his role of the Trader. After Abso's untimely demise, Alysa's world is thrown for a spin – everything she's been taught and everything she believed in seems to be very shaky all of a sudden.

Alysa's character is one that adolescents, especially girls, will be able to relate to extremely well. She is a child in many ways, wise beyond her years in others, vulnerable and extremely brave at the same time, obedient, yet questioning authority. Ms. Field Howe captures the oftentimes extremely difficult world of an adolescent perfectly. She teaches important life lessons without unnecessary moralizing or preaching. She shows how individual desires and needs are not always aligned with the way others live and are taught to live. More importantly, she shows us that it is important to follow our dreams, that things can change, that questioning the authority is not necessarily bad, that bad things can and do happen to good people, that different is not dangerous and that perseverance usually pays off.

The world of Xunar-kun is beautifully described in great detail. While it might remind you of the books about the prehistoric tribes a lot, it does have a charm all of its own. I've enjoyed the descriptions of day-to-day life of both the Field Folk and the Trailmen a lot. The Planting Calendar is charming and certainly unique. My favorite parts of the book dealt with the differences between the Field Folk and the Trailmen – which just like in today's world were mostly perceived and not real. The more we study our "neighbors", the more similarities and common areas we usually discover; and that is one lesson that is taught to perfection in "Alysa of the Fields".

It will be interesting to see where the author leads this charming story, "Alysa of the Fields," in the sequel – or even better, sequels. Although it has been very many moons since I was an adolescent, I am looking forward to the new 'Tellings of Xunar-kun.' There is a lot of literature supposedly geared towards adolescents that should – and hopefully will – find its way to the bookshelves of adults as well, and I believe Tina Field Howe will join the ranks of J.K. Rowling, Stephenie Meyer, Cornelia Funke and the likes shortly.