

## **Interview with Tina Field Howe author of *The TrailFolk of Xunar-kun, Book Two in the Tellings of Xunar-kun Series***

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar is pleased to interview Tina Field Howe, who is here to talk about her newest book “The TrailFolk of Xunar-kun, Book Two in the Tellings of Xunar-Kun Series.”

*Tina holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Anthropology and Art. Her favorite college studies included physical and cultural anthropology, archaeology, studio art, and art history. Her love of creativity, her interest in diverse peoples, and the experience of her own struggles inspired her to write her fantasy novel series, beginning with “Alysa of the Fields, Book One in the Tellings of Xunar-kun Series” in which she created the cultures, religions and creatures of a fantasy world. She has been writing for several years, mainly business communications, poetry, screenplays, web content, and short stories. Tina illustrates the covers and graphics of her books as well. The cover for “Alysa of the Fields” won the 2006 Dream Realm Awards for Cover Art. She has been involved in digital graphic design since the '90s and for most of her life has been creating artwork in some form. She teaches creative writing workshops to adults and young adults and will be teaching graphic arts at Corning Community College in Corning, NY in 2009. She has previously been interviewed by Reader Views about “Alysa of the Fields” and today she will discuss the second book in her series “The TrailFolk of Xunar-Kun, Book Two in the Tellings of Xunar-kun Series.”*

**Tyler:** Welcome, Tina. I’m so excited to talk to you about your second book. For starters, will you catch us up on what “Alysa of the Fields” (Book One) was about and how “The TrailFolk of Xunar-Kun” (Book Two) works as a sequel?

**Tina:** In Book One, we travel with Alysa from adolescence through adulthood. She goes through many struggles, with herself and with others. There is a lot of emotional pain and danger as she strikes out on her own with the task of doing the right thing, which is to aid children in peril.

**Tyler:** Do you think it necessary that people read “Alysa of the Fields” first or can they start with the second book?

**Tina:** I begin Book Two with a brief Prologue, which takes the form of a “telling.” Tellings are the oral histories that are passed from generation to generation. Part history, part legend, tellings are conveyed in a theatrical way for impact. The Prologue catches up the reader with the main events of Book One. Then within each chapter, particularly when a character from Book One is reintroduced, I have added some description or memory jogger of the person. Book Two builds on the characters from One. So while it is not absolutely necessary to read Book One first, I would recommend it.

**Tyler:** In the first book, the Field Folk thought they were the only ones left alive on Xunar-Kun as a result of the Cataclysm that had happened to their planet three thousand years before. Then they met the Trailmen. Since Alysa

represented the Field Folk, does Alysa have much of a role to play in this book about the Trailmen, or does the reader meet mostly new characters?

**Tina:** Alysa is still a major factor in the story, although others—particularly Orryn and Haraht, have a much more major role. I also added several new characters, while others dropped away. For instance, Alysa’s mother and sister played a much larger part in Book One. In Book Two, their roles are much smaller, although still important. That’s because very little of the book takes place at Alysa’s homestead. Much of it takes place in the Lowlands, amongst the Trailmen, so I’ve introduced several new Trailmen characters.

Although Alysa matured and learned a lot in Book One, some of her struggles continue in Book Two; for instance, her difficult relationship with Haraht. And she has anxiety about being away from the mountains for extended periods.

**Tyler:** Will you tell us why Alysa has a difficult relationship with Haraht?

**Tina:** In Book One, Alysa and Haraht are rivals and “fight” over Szaren. Alysa wins but continues to feel anxious about Haraht, who has made herself scarce over the last few years. In Book Two, Haraht returns and insists on hangin’ with the Seekers, however; so Alysa has to get beyond this. Haraht has gotten beyond it, and she and Alysa have a need to bond on a “mission,”

**Tyler:** I understand Alysa falls in love with Szaren. Will you tell us more about their relationship with each other?

**Tina:** Alysa and Szaren are madly in love (although their affection is “clean” on account of the stories also being for young readers). They touch a lot, have many intimate conversations. I tried to make them as realistically “joined” as I could while not making it graphic. They take a skinny-dip in a hot springs...but this takes place in the dark, so no detail is necessary. Strong marriages have a sexual component, but I focus on their companionship.

In Two, Alysa learns more about the Trailmen, as she lives with them during the winter for the first time. She is surprised about how much she actually doesn’t know! Szaren still has fun surprising her when they do something new together.

**Tyler:** Would you give us an example of something Alysa learns about the Trailmen that is different from the life she has known among the FieldFolk?

**Tina:** She learns about living under the snow. She wants no part of hunting, so she finds things to teach the Trailmen. She learns about how they mourn for the departed, how they settle leadership conflicts, how marriage rite works, and how the children are taught.

**Tyler:** What is the significance of the quest Alysa and Szaren undertake in this second book?

**Tina:** Their quest attempts to complete a discovery at the end of Book One. They believe that children should be with their rightful parents, so their new journeys are based on reuniting them. They are also looking for remnants from before the destruction of their cities. The journeys are a test of their will, commitment and strength.

**Tyler:** Our reviewer at Reader Views, Olivera Baumgartner-Jackson, remarked upon the similarities of our world to that of Xunar-Kun, despite it being a fantasy world. She particularly commented on the story of “Orryn’s Lantern” and its significance? Can you tell us more about this story and your reason for including it in the novel without giving away anything important?

**Tina:** The old technology of planet Xunar-kun is in the dawn of its rediscovery, thanks to the former Teller Orryn’s persistence. Orryn gave up his Teller duty to pursue the secrets of Father Gord’n. When Book Two opens, he has found a lot of “gadgets,” but can’t seem to make them do anything, until Haraht provides a clue that makes the Lantern possible. I’m not certain what Olivera meant by her comment, but I think she was referring to the elements that came together to make it possible: a thirst for knowledge and desire for something better...which becomes short-lived—or does it? Maybe she also meant that this would be a clue to future discoveries.

**Tyler:** In writing the novel, do you think about the real world of earth and try to draw comparisons, or would you say that happens subconsciously?

**Tina:** I think it happens subconsciously. I'm not trying to moralize about situations among humans and earth. Of course, what we write must come from what we know (or from research we have done). A writer can distance him or herself from the reality from earth only so far. I just try to stick to the planet's history, character reactions, and keep it "true" according to the story.

**Tyler:** What are some of the key differences between the FieldFolk and Trailmen that they work out during the course of this second book?

**Tina:** All is not peachy; early in Book Two, it is obvious that there are still many that don't want an alliance between the two tribes. The theme of Book Two is: "We are a part of something greater than ourselves." The events and the outcome between the TrailFolk and the new antagonist make this very apparent.

**Tyler:** I understand you have a couple really good villains in the novel as well? Would you tell us about them?

**Tina:** The Parents are not what they seem. They are cunning and persuasive; and they have a piece of technology that aids them. I don't think that I take anyone by surprise about who the bad guys are, but I don't want to say too much here, other than I build in as much mystery around them as I can.

**Tyler:** Tina, your books are geared toward young adults. Do you consciously think of how they will react to your words as you write, and what responses have you received from them regarding your books?

**Tina:** What I focus on are the appropriate words for Xunar-kun. I try to stay away from earth-like terms. I discovered while writing Book One that I used a TON of clichés! I had no clue how many I was writing until I got serious during the editing process. It is really difficult to write with the intention of not using earth references. Of course, clichés should be avoided in any kind of writing. This forces you to be more creative and use words in better ways. It keeps you from getting lazy, too.

Then there's the dialogue. The Folk and Trailmen speak with different "accents." The Folk always use contractions, the Trailmen never do. I'm going to be recording an audio book of Book One (I got word that I'll be receiving a grant!) and have specific accent needs of the actors. It will be challenging bringing Xunar-kunians' voices to life!

**Tyler:** That sounds very interesting—it will give us a chance to hear how you hear the characters in your head. Will you be doing all the voices yourself? Can you give us an idea of when the book on tape will be available?

**Tina:** I'll be using my voice for the narration. My plan is to audition voices, preferably actors with voice experience, add sfx, do the sound editing, etc. I have experience with local theatre groups and in sound editing; it's still going to be a huge job. My agreement according to the grant is to have the audio book finished by the end of 2009. If the grant doesn't happen (if NYS does cancel it), I'll do the recording some day. But since Book Three's tugging at me, I'd do that first. Will have to see how circumstances play out.

**Tyler:** Tina, will you tell us how you envisioned writing a series? Did you intend just to write one book originally, or did you plan an entire series before you started writing?

**Tina:** The idea for Book Two came to me as I was doing the final edit on Book One. I truly had no intention in the beginning. Then it gelled last minute and I had to rewrite the ending to inject the premise for Book Two. At the end of Book Two, the premise for Book Three came to me. I don't force this, however. I think that stories have to tell you if there actually is one. Book Three will barely leave me alone. However, last week I got what I think would be a great idea for a historical novel, so now that's rolling around in there.

**Tyler:** Tina, I understand you also design your own book covers. Do you do so after the book is finished, or do ideas develop while you're writing the book? Will you tell us a little about your cover design process?

**Tina:** While I'm writing, I get ideas of the scenery and the action I want to portray on the cover. The writing, of course, gives me ideas and the cover directly reflects the story. As I'm writing, I get several ideas and do quick sketches. After the first draft is finished and my readers are reading, then I begin the cover for real. I create everything on my computer, as that has become my medium. Rather than do my final artwork on paper or canvas, I work in Freehand (or Illustrator) and Photoshop. Then I can do any kind of alterations I want as I go along. I add the book cover text too so that I know how to position objects in the artwork. I upload the final cover to the publisher. This gives me complete and total control, which I love.

**Tyler:** Tina, when will the next book in the series be published, and will you give us a little preview of what it will be about?

**Tina:** I have an idea for Book Three—but if my grant isn't cancelled (NYS is on an artistic grant destruction rampage at this writing), I'll be doing the audio book of Book One in 2009. I plan to produce the whole thing myself, so that won't leave any time for Book Three. So probably 2010 will be the earliest I can get the 3rd in the series out.

**Tyler:** Last time we talked, you said you weren't sure how many books would be in the series? Do you know now?

**Tina:** If the stories keep coming, I'll keep writing them. I have absolutely fallen in love with my characters! They speak to me. They have become my friends, and I aspire to become more like several of them.

**Tyler:** Thank you for joining me today, Tina. Before we go, will you tell us about your website and what additional information may be found there about "The TrailFolk of Xunar-Kun" and your other writings?

**Tina:** I recently redesigned my website and have a new domain: [www.AlysaBooks.com](http://www.AlysaBooks.com). I now have information about The TrailFolk of Xunar-kun up there. It should be listed on Amazon, B&N, etc. during the next couple of weeks. I am posting reviews as they come in and am updating the events calendar as they are scheduled. I will probably have my physical book release in Corning in January.

Thanks for another great interview, Tyler!

**Tyler:** Thank you, Tina. And I hope you keep coming back to tell me more as the world of Xunar-Kun continues to grow and evolve.

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