

alma-alexander-ust-jackets-interview

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SPEAKERS

Alma Alexander, Maggie Lynch



Maggie Lynch 00:00

Hello Welcome to dust jackets conversations with authors. My guest today is Alma Alexander. ALMA is not someone I know personally and I haven't yet had a chance to read any of her books. However, her background and the topics of her books do intrigue me. ALMA is a fantasy writer whose novels include the World Weavers young adult series. Voya magazine suggested her world Weaver series of four books might be just the thing for readers suffering Harry Potter withdrawal. That is a great review.



Alma Alexander 00:49

Well, actually, I got two different kinds of reviews for those books. One was that it was a great withdrawal antidote for Harry Potter. Implying that it's the same sort of thing if you like Harry Potter that you love these books. It's the same sort of story and all this. The other one is diametrically opposite. It says, these books are nothing like Harry Potter, they're completely unique. They're completely different. There's something else entirely.



Maggie Lynch 01:15

Well, both of those are good.



Alma Alexander 01:16

As long as that person can say why don't I read them and decide for yourself, right.



Maggie Lynch 01:23

So let me just tell you a little bit about Alma and where she comes from. She's a native of Yugoslavia, and she grew up in various African countries, including Zambia, Eswatini, and South

Africa. And she's also spent time in England and New Zealand before moving to the United States. In addition to her fantasy novels, she's published a memoir about growing up in Africa, and an epistolary novel written with her husband about the NATO war in Yugoslavia. She's also written and published numerous book reviews, travelogues, essays, poetry, and other articles in various magazines around the world. In fact, in 2000, her short story, *The Painting*, won the 2000 BBC short story contest. In 2009, she donated her archive to the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Northern Illinois University. And since then, she has published at least nine additional titles. So welcome, Alma, I'm so happy to have you here. And I hope that you feel free to answer these questions in any way you like. And if I forget anything along the way that you just want to talk about, feel free to just start in and mention that. So my first question for you is that your books seem to be primarily based in mythology, and explore the mind from both a cultural and intellectual perspective. Can you talk about why you've chosen to focus on the fantasy or magical side of speculative fiction?

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Alma Alexander 03:03

Well, I keep on telling everybody who cares to listen that all fiction is fantasy period, because it's basically alive to begin with. And essentially, what we consider to be fantasy is just a subset of that greater circle of literary work. The thing about fantasy, with a small F, as in the fantasy subset that deals with a sort of metamorphic and magical kind of stuff, is that, for me, it's freeing. You are not tied into a set of preconceived and pre understood notions and prejudices that the real world brings with it. Inevitably, if you set a book in our world, in the world that we live in right now, in the world outside this window, we all know that world really, really well. We know what's going on in that world. If we're halfway connected or plugged into the current situation, we know what's going on outside of our backyard. We know that the world is going to hell in a handbasket. In a lot of ways. There's a lot of things that are human centered in the Anthropocene as they call it, which is how people treat each other. And that is a building block of fiction of fantasy, if you like. But in this kind of context, writing a story that is fictional, but set in our world and dealing with these horrid hard truths can step on a lot of metaphorical toes. There are a lot of readers who are going to react viscerally to something that is being presented to them, which is not their own worldview, not their own point of view, which is directly opposing to what they think and they feel. Because the world, the world in which the book is set in the world in which they live out the same world, they're going to feel almost targeted by something like this. Whereas in fantasy world, you can set up a situation which is remarkably similar to reality, but it is not. And what you're getting people to do is understand and internalize certain hard truths. And a sort of hard pill that is coated with this sugarcoating of fantasy. You can teach people a lot of things that they may not necessarily be inclined to learn, if you like, if you're writing a fantasy story like that. This is not to say that I'm considering fantasy to be a sort of allegorical, preachy, here's my podium, this is what I think about the world. And I'm just gonna wrap it up with sugar plums and then try it and just drop it down your throat. That's not what I'm saying. But what I am saying is that if there is a harder truth that you want to explore, wrapping it up in the silver tissue of *Why* that is fantasy. It is a remarkable tool for reaching people who might not otherwise have been reached at all.



Maggie Lynch 06:09

So I really love that analogy. And, I find for myself, the same thing is true in science fiction, which is more what I write although I have written some fantasy. So um, I did see an anthology or two on your website that does have science fiction. Do you write in that as well?

 Alma Alexander 06:32

Well, my first real science fiction novel came out last year, which is this. The Second Star. In fact, like a lot of my stories have really weird genesis points. And this one turned up in a single sentence that I woke up with from a deep sleep. And then I spent the rest of the next three weeks asking what-if questions around that particular sentence, and then that just kind of gotten broader, more dominant. Before I knew what I was doing, I had 160,000 words.

 Maggie Lynch 07:13

Oh, my goodness.

 Alma Alexander 07:17

So I do that a lot. When I, when I did my weird Chronicles books, they started...there was an email that floated about that somebody was doing an anthology about weird creatures. But they didn't way what they wanted. Other stuff they wanted. Weird, exotic Were creatures, they wanted something different. So I decided to start writing a short story for this anthology. I ended up with not one novel, but three novels. And the possibility of a second Were Chronicles trilogy coming up eventually, because I left a lot a world open for me to explore. So I mean, when I start writing something, I never know when it's going to stop. It's like riding a bareback horse without any kind of tack and just trying very hard to hang on, until it stops somewhere where it wants to.

 Maggie Lynch 08:15

Oh, my goodness. In terms of those Were novels, I know when we've briefly talked about this before, what sets them apart, and in my mind, makes them science fiction as opposed to fantasy, is that you actually did some research about how these creatures could evolve.

 Alma Alexander 08:35

Well, I actually have a master's degree in molecular biology. Ah, which was remarkably useless in the career that I was doing until now. When I was starting to write these books, I actually posited a way--I am a hard technical science person--I don't know how much is gonna go over everybody's head. But there is a lot of stuff in it. In your DNA, every cell of your body, there is a hell of a lot of DNA probably longer than you are in every cell of your body. A bunch of that DNA is what they call junk DNA, which is essentially not directly applicable to anything that they can figure out. And a lot of your DNA, which is applicable to this kind of stuff doesn't come in a chunk, like your gene starts here. And here. No, it's more like a gene starts here and ends here. And then there's another junk DNA and there's more DNA was there and then there's another kind of junk DNA and there's something else over there, there's more of a genome. So basically it gets reread and the RNA kind of figures out which parts of your DNA connect to this particular thing that you're trying to figure out is part of a human. But there's a whole lot of stuff in there

that doesn't really attach to anything specific. And the way that a lot of this works is by operons. An operon is a certain sequence of DNA which the mRNA that reads the genome, is going to attach to this particular bit and say, Okay, I'm doing this particular job, the gene for this particular job starts over here. This is my operon signal. I'm going to start reading from here, and I'm going to pick up whatever is attached to this kind of thing. Well, what I posited was, what happens if all this junk DNA that we don't know what it does, if your RNA starts reading it from a different set of operons, it reads a different creature.



Maggie Lynch 10:30

Ah, so essentially, there's a space for an entirely different double self inside your DNA that can create a creature, like a Were creature and ignore the human DNA.



Alma Alexander 10:41

It was actually fun to figure this out. It was just fun to sit there and figure out that this is actually possible. And my professor, the guy who supervised my master's degree, wrote back to me an email saying the science is as good as it gets.



Maggie Lynch 10:53

Oh, that's wonderful. You know, I have often wondered, because of evolution, you know, how much of DNA is from animals, before we evolved to be what we are today. How much came forward? And if perhaps some of that is the junk DNA that we don't really know what it does? Because it's, if we're not using it, we think, in terms of what we look at so much, we don't really know.



Alma Alexander 11:23

Yeah, the other part of this equation is that it's a question of translating maths and metabolism, if you like. And if you as a human are being turned into a Weird Mouse, the size differential is kind of radical, and all that difference has to go somewhere. If you by the other extreme, if you as a human being turned into a grizzly bear, same thing applies, but in a different direction. The bear is so much more massive than you are. So from somewhere you have to find the energy to to be the bear kind of thing, right? So what I posited is that, what happens is that the energy of changing into a creature that's much bigger than you are, goes into that metabolism. So if you turn into the mouse, you become a supercharged mouse, your metabolism level just skyrockets and goes through the roof. And vice versa, if you turn to the big bear, you'll be sleepy and slow as they can possibly be, because all of that energy is going into maintaining the bear, which is not right. So the creatures who change into the creatures who people change into are constrained by this. And a lot of the shifters who do change into to something like a mouse pay for this because their bodies are, you know, really racked by this. I mean, think about what goes on in terms of changing your entire insides into something else. Your heart suddenly beats how many times faster. Think what happens if you suddenly became a hummingbird? You'd explode?



Maggie Lynch 13:08

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Wow. That's really a lot to think about. I perhaps that's one of the reasons for the most part, I've never liked shifter worlds. But I do like the idea of there being other seemingly human like creatures.



Alma Alexander 13:27

The one thing that I strongly believe in, and it's really important in fantasy creation, is that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Everything has a price. All magic has a price. And sometimes that price is more than you may be willing to pay. But you have to know that there is a price that if you do something that is magical and big, you're going to have to count on the fact that somewhere along the line there's a reckoning coming of some sort and you have to be willing to pay it.



Maggie Lynch 13:59

Yeah, I absolutely agree with you. And that actually leads directly into my next question, which is that any kind of speculative fiction requires really good world building to be believable. And part of that is just as you said, you know that magic has a price or shifters have a price, you know? So can you just talk a bit about how you approach this process? Do you like plan out your world and the rules of that world before you start? Or does it come while you're writing the book? Does it happen a bit more organically and then you go back and and tweak it to make sure it actually makes sense.



Alma Alexander 14:37

I'm your ultimate pantsier. I tend to tell people that what I do is I take a story seed and I stick it into a story pot, and I never know what's going to come out. A cabbage or a redwood until I start writing the thing. I find out what happens a lot of the time while I'm typing the scene. As in I'm looking at my character doing something utterly stupid and say: What? Yyou expect me to get you out of this? He could walk? Why didn't you warn me? You're on your own boy. But the flip side of that is that my characters just kind of wander out of the woodwork fully formed and they take over and I just sit there and take dictation as it were. And if I do it wrong in the shifter work, for instance, a character called Chalky, basically, sat on my bed at three o'clock in the morning, kicking his heel against the side of the bed very annoyingly, and telling me I did not say what you said. I said, and if I did say it, I didn't say it in those words. Now go and fix it. The worst part of that is that he was right, damn his hide.



Maggie Lynch 15:46

Well, I'm so glad actually to meet another pantsier because I am one, although probably not quite as committed as you are. Because I will pants along till maybe the halfway point. And then I usually feel kind of lost. Because I am not quite sure where we're going. And that starts

to bother me. So I start making up things about where we're going and then go back and try writing that. It doesn't always go that way. But it makes me feel a little more secure.

 16:19

 Alma Alexander 16:23

One thing I'm absolutely lousy at doing what they call the Sales Synopses which which came up with the worldview of books. My situation was that the first book was at the publisher, but they wanted a sale synopsis for the second book. And I said: I can't do that. I haven't written it yet. They said just write a synopsis. So I wrote the synopsis. And I still have that synopsis. I might say that the finished book and that synopsis have got absolutely nothing to do with each other. They are, they are there. They were very kind to accept the book that I didn't give them. But they asked me to do something I can't do. I don't know what the book is about. I haven't written it yet. I haven't thought it yet.

 Maggie Lynch 17:04

I completely understand that. In school, when they were teaching us how to write papers, they wanted me to do an outline first. And I always wrote the paper first and did the outline second.

 Alma Alexander 17:15

I had one of those teachers, I had one of those teachers who insisted that every time we handed in an essay, it had to be preceded by a synopsis of the essay. And I handed in my essay. I don't do that. So I handed in my essays and I kept getting marks taken off by not having the synopsis. So eventually I just wrote the essay, then wrote the synopsis, copy down the synopsis, and the essay. I handed it into him got full marks and got told: Yyou see how much better it is now?

 Maggie Lynch 17:42


Yes, that is a person who doesn't understand the pantsner mentality at all for sure. So I see that you've also written a lot of short works, you know, short stories and novelettes, and participated in anthologies.


 Alma Alexander 18:00


Yes and I'm putting them together in collections. Yeah, this is the latest one of those.


 Maggie Lynch 18:08


I can't see the title. Can you tell us what it says?


 Alma Alexander 18:12
It's Fractured Fairy Tales.


 Maggie Lynch 18:14
Very good. Really lovely cover.

 Alma Alexander 18:18
So I got I got really lucky because I am good friends with an artist who is amazing. And this was a Kickstarter anthology. And when my Kickstarter got a little bit more money than I anticipated. I went to my friend and I said: I don't want to lowball you. But I've got this extra money and I want to use it for original art. Would you be willing to do a sketch for this book for this money? And he said, Absolutely. And I sent him a sketch. This is my idea. This is his art. The artwork is my idea, but I can't draw to save my life. So I sent him a sketch and I said, Don't laugh. He came up with this magic. People have bought this book because of the fact that this book cover was on it, because it's just so amazing.

 Maggie Lynch 19:05
Yeah, well and that definitely proves the point. How important book covers can be in terms of sales.

 Alma Alexander 19:11
I don't know. I mean, you can probably get this if it doesn't work, but can you actually see the details?

 Maggie Lynch 19:16
Oh, yes. Now that it's much closer that wow, that is absolutely gorgeous. Oh my goodness. Wow. So um, can you just give us an idea of why it's fractured fairy tales?

 Alma Alexander 19:36
Because these are the stories of the fairy tales that are told, retold, reimagined, recast and forms that you might not have been anticipated them. For example, there is a story in there or what are the pointers for stories that create a sort of mini subsection in there, which arose from an anthology I was editing at that point. It had stories for the UN about refugees. The Anthology was a charity in Georgia and the proceeds were going to the refugee charity. That was the

whole idea of that. But while I was doing that the rest of my brain, as usual, was percolating somewhere else entirely. And five o'clock in the morning, I woke up and thought, well, what if your classic Disney princesses, and everybody will recognize them immediately, were refugees? So I got up at five o'clock in the morning and I was tapping furious. And I'm not a morning person. All right. I don't usually do this. In early mornings. I'm, a um huh? Who? What day is it?



Maggie Lynch 20:41

Oh, my goodness, wow.



Alma Alexander 20:41

I was sitting there at my husband's computer as it happened, because it was the closest one. He came out and he said, What are you doing? And I said, I'm trying to write a story. Go away. Five o'clock in the morning, I wrote the first one. The rest of them I wrote that day. Four stories and the princesses in question, which you will recognize immediately as Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Little Mermaid. It's absolutely like this is what I'm talking about. When I say fantasy can give you a platform which you might not otherwise have. There are backstories here, there are situations here that you can translate into what is going on in our own world. In fact, the Cinderella story was almost directly inspired by images that kept on coming through while the Syrian refugees, at the time, that people were running from this hot war and basically leaving everything just to get out with their skins. That was what more or less triggered that story and the rest of it just just came and followed. And some of these stories are harrowing stuff. I mean, these are not your children's fairy tale. This is not something you read someone to sleep with.



Maggie Lynch 21:55

But then neither was Grim, really.



Alma Alexander 21:56

Yes Grim. And most importantly, neither was Hans Christian Andersen, which is what I cut my teeth on. I mean, Anderson's original stories were not happy. I mean, think about the original Little Mermaid had no singing lobsters in it, it was a tragedy. Right? And there's another story in there that is a retelling or re-inspired by a Hans Christian Andersen story. And that's The Little Match Girl.



Maggie Lynch 21:57

Oh, I love that story so much.



Alma Alexander 22:07

 Alma Alexander 22:07

And, again, this was one of those things that I'm that are mapped directly on to our situation under a story rich from our own headlines, in my Little Match Girl, she is a little Latina girl in the pens of refugee children ripped from their parents on our borders.

 Maggie Lynch 22:46

Oh my goodness. Wow, that is quite an imagination, I have to admit to be able to, to take something that's going on in our own lives and make a connection to fable is amazing. I have a really hard time separating that. I get like get lost and despondent about what's going on in our own lives. And then I see my writing and fantasy is something that's completely separate, I just really admire that, that you can do that.

 Alma Alexander 23:17

I've got a very strange story telling brain.

 Maggie Lynch 23:23

All to our benefit.

 Alma Alexander 23:24

It's basically a set of jumble, jigsaw puzzle. And every now and again, I just take a piece from one puzzle and put it into another puzzle. And it fits perfectly. So the whole thing changes, the whole picture changes immediately.

 Maggie Lynch 23:36

Wow. So can you talk a little bit about for you, is there a difference in the forms for you? Do you have difficulty in writing short versus longer? Because there's not very many people I know who can do them both well. And you certainly seem to do that. You know, most people tend to choose one format, you know, either the novel or maybe a novella, or the short story. Not that many, you know are more equal, which you seem to be very split from what I can tell from from your website.

 Alma Alexander 24:07

They are two very different beasts and short stories are that much tougher, simply because it's that much more constrained. I mean, if you have a novel, which is anything above 40,000 words, depending on how long you go, you have a lot of elbow room. Yes you can start with a story. And then you can figure out some stories and subplots, and world building and description and character development. And it all comes along and you've got room for this. If you can actually build this book brick by brick and into some kind of pyramid that has some

kind of sense. A short story you have. What? What's the short story 7000 words on the outside, right? Usually two to four, right? Usually two to four. You have to match space. And every word has to count every word has to be that word, the perfect word, the word that means that thing that you want to say, because you don't have the room to go off into the brambles for a word. There's just no space for that. A short story is this absolutely brilliant little gem that has to spit precisely in good setting, because otherwise, the whole thing is just wreck. There's a lot of people who start out writing short stories who don't know where to begin one and don't know where to end one, these two are very, very important things because some people will begin a short story a long way before the story begins. And then they find themselves getting, I don't know, trapped by the fact that then they're halfway through the story, shape, and they still haven't started their story yet. And then there's people who finish the story somewhere brilliant, and then overwrite their ending because they feel that something else is required. So they write another 1000 words over and above that, and just carry on and you kind of go here, yeah, this is, this is stuffing, this is padding take this away. This is why I'm a very good editor of other people's work, I can see these things happening when they're thrown at me. I can see like your story ended, like three paragraphs ago, all of this is not necessary. The power of your story ends here. This is where you leave, and endings are so important. Because that is the thing that you leave your reader with. That is the last thing that they take away with them. That is the thing that they will remember, sometimes the last word of the story is going to linger in your head. I mean, take, for example, for a short story, the 9 billion Names of God. Have you read that?



Maggie Lynch 26:47

I have not.



Alma Alexander 26:48

Arthur C. Clarke?



Maggie Lynch 26:50

No, I've read Arthur C. Clarke novels, but I have not read this short story.



Alma Alexander 26:53

This is basically about a computer that that is working to print out the 9 billion Names of God. And what happens when that work is done. The whole story is working towards this ending. And it's working. And it's working. And it's working. And now it's finished. And then the characters look up. And the last word, the last sentence of that story is overhead without any sound. The stars were going out one by one.



Maggie Lynch 27:22

Oh my gosh. Wow. You just stop there.



Alma Alexander 27:25

Yeah. And your hair stands up on your arm.



Maggie Lynch 27:27

It gives me shivers.



Alma Alexander 27:28

A lot of people who don't know when to stop, I'm going to go on and explain this now. Right, we started going up, you know? Yeah, right. You don't need to know, you know that once God is fully named, everything else becomes irrelevant. The World Ends. And you don't need to say anything else. This is the end of that story. This is the end of everything.



Maggie Lynch 27:52

Yeah. Yeah. Wow. So do you have a favorite between those two forms for yourself?



Alma Alexander 28:04

No, because it depends on what I'm trying to do. And depends on what I'm trying to write. I mean, the princess stories were definitely short stories. They were not novel length. There wasn't enough there for novel length material. On the other hand, the shifter short story was definitely not the short story that I set out to write. So depends on the material, it depends on what I'm trying to do with it, where it's supposed to go. And if it grips hard enough to actually show me that there is a lot more iceberg under that surface than I thought that there would there was just by looking at the what I could see.



Maggie Lynch 28:37

Okay, well, I admire you, I have to say. I have written some short stories, maybe 30, over 40 years. But they're always difficult for me. I almost always start them because of an anthology or something I've been invited into. And, at least 50% of the time, I get past whatever the requirement is, whether it's 4000 words or 7500 words top and, and then it's too long and there's nothing for me to give. So I admire that you can see firstly, opportunities and second that you can actually execute them. So you've had a long career as a writer and I wonder if you can talk about you know, what keeps you going and move through challenges. I mean, so many different times, not only in your own life, but in the life of our country or the world as a whole. So many writers get kind of bogged down in events that are happening outside of them. So can you just give us a little bit about what keeps you going

A

Alma Alexander 29:50

it's just who I am. It's what I do. It's how I think. I think that in certain contexts, there are times in my life when things happen, and I just shut down, which includes writing. When I went through a particularly bad breakup, many years ago, I spent many months, wordless, until I heard a tiny little voice in the back of my brain saying, if you don't start writing, we're all going to die.



Maggie Lynch 30:28

Oh, wow.

A

Alma Alexander 30:30

So I just kind of started picking it up again, and then kept on writing. The last six months have been difficult. I haven't really written anything original, except for one story, which I think is madly self indulgent. And it's probably never gonna get seen by anybody. But it's sometimes it's hard to find the heart to go somewhere where you can't see if you're adrift in a sea, which is just horizon. It's very hard to, you know, to find that shore which to just get out of the water on. But more often than not, that shore is always there, for me, at least as a shape on clouds somewhere as a reflection in the water. I know it's there. I know it's in here. And it's somewhere where I just can't get at it right now. But it's probably going to come back. Eventually, I hope.



Maggie Lynch 31:34

No, I think it will for sure.

A

Alma Alexander 31:36

Because if I don't do it, all of us, we're going to die.



Maggie Lynch 31:38

Well. And I think that often, at least for me, this is true. And I've gone much longer periods of time, perhaps than you are. Like right now I'm sitting on two years of not having anything original. So and I think some of it is me being willing to, to not only see that the shore is there. But to want the shore to be there. So because when I'm really bogged down, like, right, the thing I've been going through lately is that there's nothing that I can write that is as important as whatever the events are of the world. And so I keep looking for, and failing to find, something that is as important as that.

A

Alma Alexander 32:27

And this is where you write fantasy, and you use the events events in the world to write.



Maggie Lynch 32:34

Exactly, so. So I'm slowly inching my way there, I've actually decided, I'm going to do a middle grade series. So because children accept what you say, and I don't have to write to adults. So that's actually what I'm going to do to get myself out of it.



Alma Alexander 32:52

The way that I grew up the way I was brought up in the house that had books everywhere is essentially no book was forbidden. If you can reach it, you can read it. If you can figure it out. It's okay. If not, you're going to find your own level, you can put it down because you don't understand it, you're going to come back to it later. That's fine. By the age of four, I taught myself to read. By the age of seven, I'd gone through the entire children's library in my town and my parents got me an adult card because I finished everything that I wanted to read in the kids section. The librarian is going she's seven and my parents are going that's okay.



Maggie Lynch 33:34

Wow, what a wonderful childhood. That's just really amazing. Well, no wonder you're a writer. You were connected to stories. So very young then.



Alma Alexander 33:47

Yeah. I basically learned to read I taught myself to read was because my mother read Heidi to me when I was four. She just read me the story as sort of reading the story to me, and I loved it. I probably didn't understand three quarters of it. But I loved the whole thing, the whole idea of Heidi and the goats and Grandpa in the pines, in the cottage in the mountains, and I just loved the whole thing. And when she was finished with it, she shut the book and I said start again. She said, Oh no. So I went away and I started to read it myself because I knew the story. And I just figured it out. And this is my first memory. The first true memory that I know is real is me wobbling into the kitchen when my mother was washing dishes and asking whether she wanted me to read to her. And what she heard was, Do you want me to read to you. She said I'm busy. I can't do it right now. And I just opened the book and started reading and she dropped whatever she was washing into the dishwasher and then came into the same room.



Maggie Lynch 34:49

Wow. Do you remember how you were able to to teach yourself?



Alma Alexander 34:53

Well, I had the advantage there because my own mother tongue is completely phonetic. So there's no such thing as spelling or weirdnesses like the word that looks like something but it said something else and I couldn't recognize it by sight. Now, in my language, the word which

the way you say things is the way you write it. So it's, it's directly connected. And once I've figured out the sounds, the words on the page were no mystery.



Maggie Lynch 35:23

Now, I think that's something those of us who speak English have difficulty with. Because even using phonetics sometimes doesn't quite work out the way you think. Nor the meaning that you're looking for. So, wow.



Alma Alexander 35:36

I also learned English, a lot of it from the printed page. So a lot of the words that I knew I didn't know how to pronounce because I learned them by reading them phonetically but not by saying.



Maggie Lynch 35:48

Ah, okay, interesting. Wow. So, um, what do you think is next for you? Do you have some ideas floating in your head right now?



Alma Alexander 35:59

Well, I'm currently engaged in reissuing a book that was originally written as a single novel, but which because it clocked in at a quarter million words, was published as a duology. Ah, basically, the publisher said split that puppy up. And I'm putting together a 20th anniversary edition. So instead of these two books, you're gonna get this book.



Maggie Lynch 36:23

Oh, how wonderful. And what are the names?



Alma Alexander 36:27

Changer of Days. Okay, it's high fantasy. And it's actually quite funny because my mom is very, very non fantastical. I often describe it to people as someone with two feet in the ground so firmly, she's standing in it up to her ankles. We're finding it very hard to, to come to terms with the fact that she produced somebody who lives up in the air fairy clouds like me. She's read a lot of my stuff. And she doesn't quite connect with it. But for some reason, the most fantastical of the fantastical, this secondary World Fantasy. She loves this. She says that this book is about real people.



Maggie Lynch 37:13

Oh, okay. Well, I think that's a great compliment for certain.

A

Alma Alexander 37:20

From her Yes.



Maggie Lynch 37:21

Well, and if she can, and if she does love it, given, you know who she is, then there may be other people like her that that will find that same thing. So that's, that's really great for you. And what is your timeline on that right now?

A

Alma Alexander 37:35

I'm hoping to get it out just in time for Christmas shopping.



Maggie Lynch 37:39

Ah, wow. So very soon, then.

A

Alma Alexander 37:41

Yeah, at present, I just handed it off to someone to proofread it because I did a very messy thing. And there's a lot of names in here with apostrophes in them. And I changed something that changed the apostrophes with double quotes. And I had to go through the whole thing like name by name by apostrophe by logo to figure out which was which and what I was doing. So I handed it off to someone else to proofread it, because I'm not trusting my own eyes at this point. So that's where it is right now, when that person hands it back to me, I'll just fix all the fixes that need to be fixed. And then we're ready to go. I mean, I've got everything else. I've got original artwork for the new cover. I'm going to miss the map in there, which of course is copyrighted to this publication. So I had to redo the map, because I had to redraw it. So the new book has a copyrighted map for it. So I've got that. Everything else is in place. All I'm waiting for is the final shape of the manuscript and then format that and we're off to the races.



Maggie Lynch 38:45

Excellent. Oh, I'm so glad to hear that. I think that a great way to stay connected is by looking at backlist. And seeing, you know, how you can put those out in different forms is really helpful. I think.

A

Alma Alexander 39:01

So really, the really weird thing is that we were talking earlier about not plotting and pantsing

away and there was a character in this book, which started out as a throwaway name in somebody else's conversation. That character is probably going to get the novel of his own out of this. It's just he just grew like Topsy, and he just created himself out of nothing. And he's a very interesting guy. And at some point, there's probably going to be a companion novel to this.



Maggie Lynch 39:35

Oh, that will be great. Absolutely. Wow. So we're kind of getting towards the end of our time. But is there any questions I didn't ask you or something you wanted to share with the audience? Before we close here?



Alma Alexander 39:51

No, I'm just a writer who writes and I'll keep writing as soon as I can get my mojo back which is gonna take a little while to get there. But I'll keep doing this because that's the only thing I wanted to do. And the only thing I know how to do. Without this, there was there was a wonderful quote that I tend to kind of carry around with me. Somebody asked Ursula Le Guin once in an interview, what would you be if you weren't a writer? And she said very succinctly, dead.



Maggie Lynch 40:24

I believe that of her. I absolutely do. That will probably be my answer to and in that kind of context.



Alma Alexander 40:34

Yeah. Well, I think true writers have to write you know, that is their life. And so the way I put it before was, if you want to be a writer, no one can stop you. If you don't want to be a writer, no one can help you.



Maggie Lynch 40:51

Very good. I love that quote. I love that quote, I think you should copyright it, make a t-shirt. Well, thank you very much for your time, Alma. And thank you listeners for listening to this episode of Dust Jackets conversations with authors with my special guest, Alma Alexander. As always, I will have additional information on how to contact Alma in the show notes.