



# Altaica

*Tracy M. Joyce*

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**Altaica** Tracy M. Joyce

“Look at her – she’s Hill Clan. Even the Matyrani don’t like them ...”

Isaura – little is known about her race, but much is whispered. Born to refugees, she grows up enduring racism and superstition within a community that fears her. She has few friends, and those she treasures. Trapped, she longs for escape to a different life.

Escape is only the beginning of her troubles. Having fled an invading army with her friends, Isaura is faced with heinous choices in order to survive. Secrets from her past emerge to torment her and threaten to destroy all she holds dear. Her struggles forge a bond with an ancient power – a power which may transform or consume her. Old hatreds and superstitions are renewed and at her most vulnerable she learns the true nature of those around her.

Her only hope lies in a foreign land – a land rich in tradition; ruled by three powerful clans. A land with a history marked by warfare; where magic as we know it does not exist. Instead what is here, in abundance, is a more primal power.

Survival carries a high price.

Welcome to Altaica.

## Altaica Details

Date : Published June 6th 2014 by Odyssey Books

ISBN :

Author : Tracy M. Joyce

Format : Kindle Edition 300 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Young Adult, Did Not Finish, Speculative Fiction

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## From Reader Review Altaica for online ebook

### M. C. (MagsTheBookWorm) says

Altaica is the fantasy adventure of a group of villagers fleeing their homeland and the murderous invaders descending upon them. The main character, Isaura, was a healer from the village but was never made to feel like anything but an outcast. We get to see her bravery as she valiantly defends the others from scouts sent by the invading force as they push off into the main channel of the river. Before long, however, they reach the ocean. But instead of following the coastline as planned, the current relentlessly tugs them farther and farther out to sea. Across the endless waves they travel. Will their wandering feet ever again touch land?

I would first like to state that I received this free through NetGalley for an honest review. This book was well written with an engaging storyline - full of plot twists and written in such a way as to garner genuine empathy for the characters through their myriad of tribulations. The author is quite skilled at portraying the vast range of human emotions, even at their ugliest. I did truly enjoy this action-packed adventure and would definitely like to read the next book in the series to see how Isaura grows through her experiences.

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### Phrynne says

I struggled a little with this one. The world building was great and I should have enjoyed it more. However the main character who was delightful, was introduced, allowed to feature strongly for about 25% of the book and then barely appeared at all until the final chapter. I found I was not sufficiently interested in the new characters who popped up and did not really enjoy the rest of the book. I am undecided about reading the sequel.

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### Vacen Taylor says

Altaica by Tracy M. Joyce begins with Isaura discovering the arrival of the Zaragarian troops marching forward after devastating a market town. I won't recite the plot here as other reviewers have already done this. The first part starts slow, for me, but that's not unusual for fantasy as most books of this genre use a particular style of writing to slow the pace. The story soon picks up pace. I particularly liked the cultural aspects, the politics, warfare and the magical elements.

The story takes us through this adventure not merely through the eyes of one main character but several. I found each character to be engaging, and most importantly, believable. I would have liked some more time with each one so I could truly connect with them.

I personally like strong female characters in fantasy, women who can influence and inspire others even against serious adversity. I was pleased this book had that element. Of course, there is the harsh reality of a changing world and the characters are pushed to what is necessary to survive. It's clear that Tracy M. Joyce has spent considerable time researching for the elements explored in this book. I appreciated the aspect of attention to detail because this enhances the storytelling.

Overall, a great read for lovers of fantasy.

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### Kathryn Gossow says

I had so much fun reading this. It is full of adventure and strong female characters - the women drive much of the story. The world the author has built is suitably unfamiliar for a fantasy novel - but also familiar, the distrust of people who are different and the need to flee your home because of war and the vulnerability of 'boat people' when they are in a new place. The ending left me wanting more of this world and its mysteries.

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### Gillian Murrell says

Books like this a few and far between. I feel the cover is a tease of whats to come in the series as we were introduced to Isaura in the the first part of the book, where she made a very memorable entrance but then she is secondary to the story as it builds around her in an effort to save her life. I loved that we were given insight to so many character and that they were easy to comprehend and enhanced to over all story. I did however have to look up the names of some of the weapons as they were unfamiliar to me which translates to, I was invested in the story enough to know exactly how they worked. This was a very easy to read book which I didn't want to put down. Looking forward to reading more books by Tracy M. Joyce.

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### Veronica ?? says

[ she got injured, fell asleep and didn't wake until the last page (hide spoiler)]

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### Donita Luz says

I have Altaica on my currently-reading shelf since September, a month and 3-4 books later, it's still there, unfinished, not for the lack of trying really, because I did try, multiple times.. until I just couldn't do it anymore.

*"They're not used to seeing women fight, that's all. It's one thing for them to know you carry a bow to hunt, but another to see it used like that."*

Seeing the cover for the very first time, I thought this was going to be a very interesting and kick-ass high fantasy read... I couldn't have been more wrong.

**The story was sadly uneventful.** Well, I couldn't be sure since I only read 30% of the book, I know it's too early to give up on the book, but I've tried reading this book for a month and still failed to hold my interest. After the heroic escape that happen on the first part of the book, nothing much happened except for the drama that each characters had, it's incredibly boring, the story drags.

I think it's good that the book is trying to show us the POV of each and every thought of the character, but it just didn't work out for me. I don't usually mind this kind of writing, but the way I'm suddenly reading other characters(and believe me there are a lot of them) thought is just way too confusing. Plus, it's really hard to

connect with the characters when there aren't any depth and complexity in them, since the book's trying to share the limelight with everyone. I actually stopped reading when I reached the part, where there are a new set of characters introduced. I'm so done with this shit.

*\*\*I received a copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review, thank you\**

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## **Leigh says**

*I received this from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.*

I absolutely love the cover of this book. It is what first attracted me, but the premise is what sealed the deal. Isaura looks different than the others in her village, which has lead to suspicion and hatred. She does have a group of loyal friends, who treat her like family, but Isaura yearns for a new life. Together, Isaura, her friends and others from her village will make a perilous journey across the sea to escape an advancing army. On this journey, friendships will be tested and true natures revealed as they struggle to survive. Will they find land before it is too late?

Altaica is a fascinating story that leads us on an exploration of friendship, bigotry, legends, traditions, different cultures and warfare. Tracy M. Joyce has created a well written, action-packed adventure with strong well developed characters. Isaura has endured discrimination since childhood, but she has not allowed that to make her bitter. She is determined to help her friends and to find a new life for herself. Despite their differences Isaura's friends were extremely devoted and protective of her. I really enjoyed this story, and I found myself not wanting to put it down. I look forward to the next installment.

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## **Shelley Nolan says**

This was a great start for a new fantasy series, with a well thought out and designed world and memorable characters. I love Isaura and Pio and their family and friends and was thinking about the story long after I read the last page. Looking forward to reading the rest of the series and finding out what happens next

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## **Martha says**

Some of us just start out in the wrong place. It's like the stork, or the baby-angel makes a mistake and drops us down where we shouldn't have been. As one of those who spent 2/3rds of her life wandering America and then Europe, before finding a place I could really call home, this story of a group of ordinary people escaping from a rapacious invading army, resonated strongly with me. Isaura, one of the book's main protagonists is a healer and purveyor of magic in an insular village of 'salt of the earth', farmers, builders, weavers, fisher-folk and carpenters, replete with all the biases and fears common to such groups; moreover she is dark-skinned while they are light and blond.

We first meet her when she is scouting the progress of the brutal Zaragarian army. Although never a believer

in gods, “There were too many religions with so many gods, each claiming theirs was the true way, that she thought them all ridiculous.” in an act that would have far reaching consequences, she begs Majula and Araceli, the oldest gods, to give her the skills to protect her community.

Isaura and her close friends, which include, Necanor, a carpenter and wood-carver, Lucia his wife and their charismatic, flute playing son, Pio, have been preparing for this invasion by repairing a creaky old barge, intending to use this to escape down river. She returns to her village to find the evacuation already underway. And so the problems begin. These include her decision to drug her reluctant father in order to bring him along. But finally they are underway, headed downstream. After that, very little goes according to plan. When the river on which they are travelling reaches the bay, unusually strong currents pull the barge far out to sea. Now this squabbling, mean-spirited company must survive on small rations and almost no water.

Worse is to come. A combination of storms and vindictive behaviour causes Isaura to be severely injured. The barge moves at its own pace; the exhausted and dehydrated passengers growing ever weaker. Here the POV shifts, introducing several more characters. Chief among these is an old Kenati, Umniga, warrior priestess of the Boar clan. Kenati are very interesting creatures; although human they possess formidable magical powers including the ability to see others’ auras and to merge their spirits with an animal guide. Umniga’s guide and friend is Devi the owl, while Asha, her acolyte, is guarded and helped by Fihir an enormous sea eagle. Their home is the land of Altaica, a country also troubled by dissension and war.

Helpless and unaware, the refugees’ barge has been drifting in the direction of this country. Altaica, has recently been divided into regions governed by clans represented by animal totems: boar, horse and bear. A fragile peace had been carved out between the leaders of the three clans. But Shajahan, the leader of the Boar clan is aging, and Ratilal, his son and heir is a restless, unprincipled sadist.

So, a variety of groups with a variety of needs and goals, some conflicting some harmonious. How these are advanced or not, make up the rest of this tightly plotted, first book of what promises to be an interesting series. Did I mention that there are wolves – enormous magical wolves? There are many wonderful moments here. Very few characters are all bad or all good. The author gives the reader insights into the feelings and motivations of even the most reprehensible acts. There is a substantial amount of vividly described violence, and a brutal, almost rape that is, however, a necessary element in the plot advancement.

Altaica is author, Tracy M. Joyce’s first published novel. She, “has long been a fan of the fantasy genre, but particularly likes novels that deal with deep characterisations and that don’t flinch from the gritty realities of life. This and her fascination with the notions of “moral greyness”, that “good people can do bad things” and that we cannot escape our past provide the inspiration for her writing.” This quote is a very good explanation of what is going on here.

As many of you know, I am well beyond the target age of YA Fantasy but I can honestly say I enjoyed this book as much as any fantasy novel labelled as, adult fiction. It seems to me that the line between the two sectors has become very, very thin – especially in the case of well-written stories.

If I have any criticisms, they are that there seem to me to be too many shifts of POV, often within the same chapter. Not only is this confusing but diminishes the impact of the events on the main and most important characters. Otherwise .....this was a very enjoyable antidote to an egregiously cold and wet holiday weekend. 4\*\*\*\* I am also happy to note that the second in the series, Asena Blessed will be coming in 2015

While I’m on the subject, last week, Joanne Harris – she of *Chocolate* and *The Gospel of Loki* – posted a list on Twitter of 10 Reasons to Read YA. ...regardless of your age group. They included:

1. Because you're reading a story, not a target demographic.
2. Because you're old enough to decide for yourself what books you should read.
7. Because YA fiction experiences the world with maximum intensity.
10. Because you remember what it was like to be wholly consumed by a book,

The link to the entire list is: <http://joannechocolat.tumblr.com/post....> It's well worth taking a look as the post raises some interesting issues about who is reading what these days and why.

Slight disclaimer, I received the ARC of this book from Odyssey Books, Australia, a small press which has a growing line of interesting fantasy and other titles. This is the 2nd of their books that I have reviewed (see my review of Sannah and the Pilgrim from a few weeks ago.) I am impressed by what I see, especially the numbers of women writers they are publishing. Their books are available in the US and UK as well as Australia. I want to make it clear that I am not being paid for my reviews or for these comments. I simply think that in the age of the Amazon-monsters, we need to support the small presses that are taking a chance on new, younger and older authors.

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## Sofia says

Read this review on my blog

\*I received an eARC of this book on Netgalley, in exchange for an honest review\*

"Altaica" is the story of the inhabitants of a small village, who are forced to flee their homeland to save their lives. Their fates become intertwined with those of the clans of Altaica, a far-off land.

Do you think this will be an exciting and interesting journey? Think again.

In this novel, the plot happens in three separate moments: there's the beginning of the book, with the escape scene, then the story disappears completely until roughly forty percent of "Altaica", where things start happening again for a couple of chapters. Then the plot disappears again, rearing his head back out only during the last chapters of the novel.

For the rest of the time, the book drags.

Here's the thing: it's okay to write a character-driven book, even a character-driven fantasy book. But if you do, you've got to write compelling, three-dimensional characters.

There are no compelling, three-dimensional characters in this book. The only two characters that attempt to approach complexity are Elena and Vikram. Vikram is seen so little that he hardly even is a secondary character, so there's not much to say about him, other than I wish he'd been explored more, as he might have been a saving grace.

Elena is the wife of Curro. Curro is the best friend of our main character (I use the term loosely, as she is unconscious for a good chunk of the book) Isaura.

Elena is jealous of Isaura, because she thinks that she's going to take Curro away from her. That makes her an awful, awful person, apparently. Despite the fact that she is not completely wrong. Curro does treat Elena and Isaura differently. Isaura is someone he cares about, but she's first and foremost someone he trusts. He asks her for help, for advice, he's taught her to defend herself in spite of that being forbidden. Curro treats Elena like a child, like someone he has to take care of. Not only does he never ask her for advice or for help, he's the one calling all the shots in their relationship, he's the one making all the choices, uncaring of what she thinks. And to make matters worse, Elena's not stupid. In fact, she's right a lot of the time, but does anyone listen to her? No. Caring first and foremost about herself and her loved ones and wanting to survive the journey apparently makes her an heartless bitch.

Elena is not allowed to be complex. She is constantly being relegated to the mean girl role. Almost none of the characters appear to be able to stand her, and they all treat her like an idiot. At one point they even say something along the lines of her having a dark aura.

Her storyline is supposed to show how jealousy corrupts her soul, but the way it's handled lacks any kind of finesse, because too much emphasis is put on her faults, while her virtues are swept under the rug.

Isaura, our (kinda) main character is the biggest Mary Sue I have read about in years. Let's do a list of all the things she does, shall we? She is the only female who can handle weapons in her society, and the only one to have an active role in the plans for the escape of the villagers. She's a skilled healer, which obviously implies training. But she also has the potential to wield huge magical powers and she can do things that ought to have been impossible. And she's not even a grown woman yet, she's described as a girl. I shudder at the thought of what she'll be capable of when she hits her thirties.

Also, of course, she never makes mistakes. And when she blames herself for something, someone else is always ready to point out that it's really not her fault. She does make a controversial decision at one point in the book, which I appreciated as a brave move from the part of an author who has been playing things pretty safe, but it's neither morally gray or a mistake. It's either nothing wrong or something awful, depending on the point of view of the reader.

Lucia and Pio, while not exactly interesting, were not unlikable. I didn't mind it when the story focused on them. Additionally, Nicanor and Lucia were the only couple whose romance I found believable. In general, the romances are not well-developed, and the characters who are not already together in the beginning of the novel fall madly in love with no transition whatsoever.

I think that some time must be spared to talk about the villain, since he was so cartoonishly evil that all he lacked was a mustache to twirl while he cackled.

He is introduced by entering a room and randomly attempting to rape a main character and it's all downhill from there. He has no redeeming qualities whatsoever, no complexity. And that makes him uninteresting.

Almost all the characters could be summed up in a couple of words, and some of them are even completely devoid of character traits. For example, I wouldn't be able to name one personality aspect of Daniel, who is a character for a huge part of the novel and is part of one of the main romances.

The inclusion of the Asena, the deus-ex-machina (not) wolves, was quite clumsy, as they only appear when they are needed by the story, they are never even mentioned beforehand, despite supposedly being a huge part of the culture of Altaica. If they had been built up better, I might have liked the Asena. I have no complaints regarding the rest of world-building, which was alright if nothing particularly special and original. Additionally, the POV keeps shifting from a character to another, without rhyme or reason (we even get the point of view of a horse at one point), which is annoying at best and confusing at worst.

To sum it up, this is not a good book. In fact, it's a bad book, and it's not even memorably bad, it's boring bad. The kind of bad that means I'm already forgetting what the characters are called, the morning after I finished reading it. The positive aspects are few and far between.

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## **Bethany says**

I received this from netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

I decided to read Altaica purely because of the good cover, I had no expectations before reading it whatsoever. However, I found myself pleasantly surprised. The characters introduced are fleshed out and each have interesting personalities. Joyce has clearly researched into battle strategies/equipment which is reflected in her book.

She makes a relatively simple plot entertaining and intriguing. The main female leads don't fall flat, as many YA female protagonists do. I definitely cannot wait to read the next book in the series; if it's half as good as the first, it will be a good read.

It's definitely a recommended book for anyone interested in YA fantasy books.

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## **Jenna O'connell says**

With its deliberately broad age appeal and its exploration of deep and confronting themes, *Altaica* makes a strong addition to the speculative fiction genre. The novel fills numerous gaps I have been sorry to come across in the fantasy genre, particularly in its complex characters, strong female lead and its refusal to pander to audience sensibilities. Joyce unapologetically pushes her readers to the edges of moral complexities, leaving you thinking about this book long after you put it down.

The novel follows the journey of the irrepressible and tempestuous Isaura. Cast out by most of her village her whole life, due to her racial differences, she nevertheless joins with a motley crew of friends to escape the pillaging of her village by warmongering Zaragarians. The result is a perilous boat journey that brings her and her companions to the very edge, both physically and mentally. Desperately injured, Isaura and her friends are rescued by the warring clans of *Altaica*. The leaders of the Horse and Bear clans recognise something special in Isaura and her young friend Pio, and contrive to rescue and train them for their cause. The resulting adventures and trials spawn a thrilling and action packed journey of discovery and growth.

Joyce's ability to construct a rich and complex world without losing her reader in intricate and minute details is first class. The characters she presents us with are masterfully constructed, and her ability to perfectly capture the internal wars between jealousy, fear, yearning and the desire to be good provides her reader with character development that would rival those of many best-selling authors. Joyce utilises an excellent display of internal monologue to deepen her characters yet further. Snapshots of insight into the thoughts of certain characters add yet another layer of complexity to these highly developed individuals. And yet more importantly, it makes them real. In Isaura she crafts a character we all want to be – strong, independent, almost fearless. But in allowing her to reveal the other side of herself internally, her fears, her failure, she becomes a character we can all identify with a little more deeply. In resisting the all too common urge to adorn her female protagonist with a love interest, Joyce allows Isaura to seize her own destiny, and provides a strong and truly independent character that has been sadly missing from fiction in general lately.

In addition to her rich and skilful character development, Joyce sets a cracking pace. Action pervades the text from start to finish, providing a ride you never want to get off. Unfortunately, this does have its downsides. Particularly at the beginning, Joyce relies a little too heavily on telling her reader exactly what is going on. Whilst this does allow the action to push along much more rapidly, the repetition that this facilitates at times comes off as simplistic. However, the novel quickly finds its stride, and as it moves deeper into the intricacies of the world it builds, this problem largely disappears. *Altaica's* perspective switches will not be for everyone, with Isaura sometimes disappearing from the action in favour of other characters. However, having experienced many iterations of the perspective shift, I feel this is something Joyce pulls off well. The use of a third person omniscient narration takes away much of the jarring potential. The switches allow Joyce to construct her world with much more detail than would otherwise be possible, and *Altaica* benefits from it. Action and intrigue propel the reader throughout a novel rich with well-researched detail and enough mystery to keep you thinking to the end.

Supposedly targeted to a Young Adult, coming of age audience, *Altaica* has a much broader appeal. Joyce's exploration of mature themes, and a refusal to censor the more realistic aspects of war and life makes for a thrilling escape into a brilliantly constructed speculative fiction world. I cannot sing its praises enough. *Altaica* is badass from start to finish.

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## Jeffrey says

Great covers sometimes only tell part of the story. The cover of Tracy M. Joyce's "Altaica" is especially misleading because it overplays one character's presence in the novel, which is more about a group of refugees struggles on a barge while fleeing a war and their arrival into the new land of Altaica, which is facing a war of its own. There are well written characters on both the barge and in Altaica, but the cover seems to imply the novel will be about one character in particular. It is not.

Escaping the warlike Zaragaria, the people of a small village make their way by barge down the river looking for safety. Led by Nicanor, the carpenter, his wife Lucia, and Pio, his flute playing son, his brother Curro and Isaura, a skilled huntress and healer, but an outsider to the rest of the village. Although Isaura will help the villagers, some of the people are jealous of her influence. After every pitfall that befalls the ship, the whispers will start about her. The voyage will be tough and the ship will soon run into problems when the food and water start to run out.

When the barge and its crew are at their weakest, they will be rescued by Umniga, a warrior mage Kenati. Umniga has seen that Isaura and Pio have magic, and she is willing to convince a fisherman to rescue all of the refugees merely to save Isaura and Pio.

At this point, Tracy Joyce, the author, makes the bold decision to shift the focus of the novel from the refugees to the rescuers - Umniga and her apprentice Asha, and the war between the three rulers of the land - instead of continuing the story from the refugee's perspective. Joyce also elects to carve out Isaura from this part of the story. So after one reads over 30% of the novel, the main female character takes a nap.

Two of the princes in Altaica have joined forces and defeated the third prince, who has kept his kingdom, but lost his way. He has been grieving over the death of his daughter. His son, however, attacks and brutalizes Asha without provocation, when she comes to his kingdom to tell them about the refugees. Its easy to see who the villain will be in this story.

When the three princes eventually sit down to parlay and discuss the fate of the ship borne refugees, its very predictable that there will be strife caused by the evil son of the third prince. Soon there is a war and a lot of action. Some of the refugees end up protected by the good princes. Others end up in the hands of the evil prince.

In the end, it will be up to Umniga and Asha, their goddess and various magical animals to try to wake Isaura from her unnatural nap.

On the upside, Joyce's fantasy has a good bit of action, some well developed characters, well crafted scenes, medieval war, magic and Isaura, who is shaping up to be a great character. However, its predictable and one of the main characters sleeps through two thirds of the book.

Hopefully, Joyce will focus more on Isaura's life and her developing magical skill in this new land in the second book in this series.

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## **Elleni says**

A fantastic read, with a compelling storyline. Isaura proves to be a strong protagonist, a role model for all. With a variety of rich and complex characters, this novel leaves you breathless as you are taken on their journey of survival. Altaica is a novel I would highly recommend to anyone, particularly young adults.

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