

## **Plotting by Wen Spencer**

I marvel that anyone can tell plot out a novel in push. To me, plotting a novel is a lot like making stew in someone else's kitchen without a recipe. You're not sure what is going to go into the pot, so you do a lot of improvising and tasting.

My original plot of Tinker 2 ran like this:

Tinker discovers that the colonists are lost on a fourth world where they have endured great hardship. Turtle Creek represents a possible way to rescue them. The elf queen sends representative that check into the oni problem, one of which is Windwolf ex-girlfriend. As Tinker's private life is rocked but she makes alliances with the Earth Clan to rescue the colonists through Turtle Creek.

I started to write. The problem with Turtle Creek came easily, but most of the rest of the book refused to take shape. I made little stabs at the story only to have the scenes fall flat. One of the few developments that worked was the change that Lain's sister, Esme, was one of the colonists and that via dreams, Tinker discovers that Esme is her mother. So a new plot was crafted:

Tinker dreams of her mother, Esme, and discovers that the colonists are lost on a fourth world where they have endured great hardship. Turtle Creek represents a possible way to rescue them. Through the rift has some an oni dragon – a dangerous animal that will kill everything in sight. The tengu offer to help deal with it for a price. The Pittsburgh Mayor makes a grab for power – and tries to gather up the tengu into camps. Tinker rescues the colonists through Turtle Creek after a fight with the Mayor's people.

That didn't go much better. As I poked at it, several ideas hit me:

Tinker dreams of her mother, Esme, and discovers that the colonists are lost on the world of dragons. One of the dragons are lost on Elfhome. The tengu recognize this from their mythology and offers to help.

Okay... so it was missing the whole backend of the plot. I couldn't find the end game to this book. Part of the problem I realized, came with the concept that many of the colonists left Earth nearly 25 years ago. What hardship had they been enduring that they could survive and yet make them drop everything to move to Elfhome? Thoughts of dragon politics murmured in the background but wouldn't come to the forefront. Also how exactly was I going to get them through Turtle Creek. It had to be difficult, or they wouldn't need Tinker's help, but what in heck was Tinker going to do that was cool and exciting?

In an attempt to figure out the colonist problem, I started at the other end and said "Okay, the colonist went through the gate, and boom, they realize they have a problem immediately. What did they do? Who are these people? How did they get into a mess

when they have so much with them to survive a hostile planet to start with?

Then it occurred to me that I had set up that Esme dreamed of future events. At the same time, it occurred to me that if the gate didn't work as plan, one way around the whole "25 years" problems is that the gate could deliver all the ships to the same time coordinates. A collision would occur as the ships try to occupy the same point at the same time. Esme, however, avoids massive damage to her ship because she was forewarned by dreams. The colonists now only have to survive a short period time, guided by Esme dreams, before making contact with Tinker. Her story is so cool I almost drop everything to write it.

I go back to Tinker 2, though, and play with this idea. Still not helping.

A phone call to a friend, June Drexler Robertson, triggers a sudden idea. What if instead of knowing the dragons via myths, the tengu have a more personal connection. A dragon has been their guardian for countless years.

This is cool and I work with this for a little while when it occurs to me that I could use that cool idea about Esme – the colonists are STILL in space and Tinker gets help from the dragons to go to them.

I start to write like a mad person but quickly realize that this only takes the story so far. I have all this set up in Pittsburgh -- which we abandon to go into space. I need to bring the story back to Pittsburgh for a wrap up. But what wrap up? The mayor thing feels so wimpy because he's got not only Windwolf and all the elves but Maynard and the EIA and the oni to deal with. He's just not that dynamic.

Suddenly, everything is looped back. What if the elf queen sends her representatives, who out rank Windwolf? They would want to "fix" Turtle Creek, which is the only point of contact with the colonists. They would also want to kill all the oni – but the tengu are in alliance with Tinker. Also one of the colony ships was mostly tengu, and Esme is falling in love with one of them. The end fight could be Tinker versus one of the queen representatives over the fate of the tengu.

I glance back over the scenes I have written with the tengu. It would not take much to tweak the scene so the tengu ask Tinker for protection and she wavers... until she meets the tengu on the ship and must work along side them to rescue all the colonists. With a change of heart, she returns to Pittsburgh to save the endangered tengu.

Okay, so this might not stay the final plot of T2 – but currently its looking strong. Only time will tell.

I've included a snippet here of rough draft. The final version won't be like this. Already much has changed. I'm changing the dragon name to Providence and much of the history of the tengu might be moved to chapters with the colonists. Also the scene will end with Tinker still in the "are you nuts" phase.

It does, however, contain the seeds for what looks like the true plot of Tinker 2.

#

"The elders have given me permission to show you what I wanted you to see."  
Riki put out his hand. "Come with me."

She hesitated, not really trusting him.

"Please."

She supposed that he had put a great deal at risk for her to see his mystery thing.  
She took his hand. He pulled her close, wrapping his arm about her waist.

"This time, don't wriggle so much."

A squeak of fear leapt up her throat - followed her heart - as he launched them out of the tree house. They dipped alarmingly and she clutched him tightly. His wings unfurled with a loud rustle, and they rose again, up through the forest canopy.

#

They landed on a narrow ledge of a sandstone cliff face. Riki released her to slip his hand into a niche chiseled into one rock. There was a metallic clank, and one rock swung inward, exposing a tunnel.

#

Riki spoke a command and spell lights gleamed to life.

Riki's monster lay on a dais, the bulk of its body lost in the shadows.

Tinker jerked back, smacking into Riki's chest. "What the hell?"

"This is--" Riki made a low rumbling noise. "It means Dusk." Riki stepped around her to kneel in respect before the creature. "He is the guardian spirit of the Tengu."

Tinker retreated as far as the small room allowed her.

It wasn't the same creature that attacked her at Turtle Creek. This one seemed smaller, but it could be a difference in perspective -- something about having fangs in your face that kind of made a bigger impact visually. This one was more of a golden hued, but otherwise they were the same species, the over large head with the bushy mane, the long sleek body, and short stubby legs.

The stillness of the animal finally sunk in.

"Riki, isn't it - he -- kind of - dead?"

"Yes, he's dead, but his spirit still protects us." Riki took out a wooden match and lit it. "Before we became tengu, we lived in a vast marshland, eking out a living fishing and hunting. We had little that others would want, so we were left in peace for centuries.

"In the end, that was the very thing that doomed us." Riki lit a slim taper of incense. "When the greater bloods pushed into the marshes, we had no way to protect ourselves, nothing of value to buy our freedom. We were herded together and put to work draining the marsh to make rich farmland. It was brutal work meant to kill us; thousands of our people died.

He waved out the match, leaving a trail of smoke. "As the work neared its end, the greater bloods discovered a way to trap a dragon, strip it of its power and torture knowledge from it. Hunting parties roamed the world, searching out places where dragons occasionally appeared. There was a place scared to us a place where a dragon had been seen there. A hunting party camped there for months until they captured Dusk."

"Dusk? You mean this is - was - an oni dragon?"

"Yes. We have always had clever with languages. While the hunting party labored to transport Dusk out of the marsh, their tengu slaves learned a few words of dragon tongue. He pleaded with them to release him. They explained that their families would be punished for their crimes. He promised that he would protect their families - so they sacrificed themselves to free him."

"How surprisingly noble of them."

"It was common knowledge that when the marsh was completely drained, all adults were going to be put to death and the children crafted into random lesser bloods. As a race, we were facing genocide."

"And they hoped Dusk could save the tengu from that?"

"Yes, and he did. Dragons have god-like powers, but still we had to make hard choices for ourselves. We decided to become tengu and he shaped our minds and bodies. He created the spell that forms our wings. We abandoned our homeland and pushed deep into the marsh, but at the same time, we did not ignore the outside world. We learned how to spy, how to use magic, and other skills that made us valuable allies. All these changes were to stay what we are - one people happiest when we are gathered together."

"Birds a feather, flocking together?"

Riki nodded, unruffled by it. "We survived, but only marginally. The oni's first attempt to invade Elfhome via Earth, three hundred years ago, stranded half of us on Earth, without magic. Our crow blood became a death sentence without magic; a bird's instincts -- millions of years of evolution focused on flight - imprisoned in a body that couldn't fly. It drove us insane. Tengu never die of old age on Earth - sooner or later, we climb the tallest mountain and throw ourselves off, just to feel that oneness with the sky."

"So you murdered my father for his plans."

"We never planned to hurt him; it was accident. All we wanted was to save our race. We tried everything else. Airplanes. Hang gliding. Parachuting. Deep space. We even tried to breed out the crow blood, but its recessive: the instinct, the feet, all of it."

"Well, you made a mess of everything." At least it gave her someone other than herself to blame. She glanced back out the door, as the tiny village hidden in the treetops. "How many of your people did you get here before we were stranded? Did you make your lives any better? Or did you just scatter your people wider?"

"Elfhome was to be our new home. In the last few years, we've moved everyone here without even the oni knowing." (indicate there are still some on Onihida and earth)

(She realizes that he has plans behind telling her.) "Why did you bring me here? Why show me Dusk?"

"There is a dragon roaming loose in Pittsburgh. You know nothing about them. If you help us, we will help you with it."

"I'm suppose to trust you after what you've done?"

He went down on one knee. (Repeat Pony's pledge here)

"You've got to be kidding."

"I beg you - for the life of my little brothers and sisters, my cousins, my nieces and nephews, for all the people I have known all my life and their children, for my entire race."

"You could have done this before, saved us all a lot of grief."

"No, I couldn't, not without dooming everyone still on Earth and Onihida. Being stranded as freed me."

Tinker: Grrrr

"Please, we need your protection."

"I can't be guardian of an entire race."

"The oni have one mind set - you're either their slave or their enemy. We've cut our ties with them. The elves have every reason to hate us and the human are going to be looking for a scapegoat. We need someone on our side."

"oooh, shit." Think of kids, think of mayor. "I don't know how much protection I can give you. I need to talk to Windwolf. I've thrown my weight around, but I don't know really know if my authority goes this far."

"But you'll help us as much as you can?"

"I need to think about it."

"Give me your word."

"Or what?"

Riki looked away. "Nothing. I'm not going to threaten you. I can only beg."

"I try."

Posted by wen at May 22, 2004 04:51 PM