



## About the Author

### Full text biography:

**Naomi Novik**

**Birth Date :** 1973

**Place of Birth :** United States, New York, New York

**Nationality:** American

**Occupation :** Novelist

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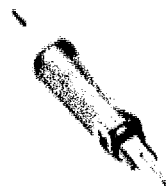
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### Awards:

Locus Award for best first novel, 2007, and Compton Crook Award for best first novel, both for *Temeraire: His Majesty's Dragon*; John W. Campbell Award for best new writer, 2007; Nebula Award for best novel, 2015, Locus Award for best fantasy novel, 2016, Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for adult literature, 2016, and Robert Holdstock Award for best fantasy novel, 2016, all for *Uprooted*; Dragon Award for best alternate history novel, 2016, for *League of Dragons*.

### Personal Information:

Born April 30, 1973, in New York, NY; married to Charles Ardai; children: Evidence Novik Ardai. **Education:** Brown University, B.A., 1995; Columbia University, M.S. **Addresses:** Home: New York, NY. **E-mail:** webmaster@temeraire.org.

### Career Information:

Writer, computer programmer, and game designer. Worked on design and development of computer games, including *Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide*. Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), board member.

### Writings:

- *Will Super Villains Be on the Final?* ("Liberty Vocational" series; graphic novel), illustrated by Yishan Li, Del Rey (New York, NY), 2011.
- *Uprooted* (young-adult novel), Del Rey (New York, NY), 2015.

### "TEMERAIRE" SERIES; FANTASY NOVELS

- *Temeraire: His Majesty's Dragon*, Del Rey Books (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Throne of Jade*, Del Rey Books (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Black Powder War*, Del Rey Books (New York, NY), 2006.
- *In the Service of the King* (omnibus edition), Del Rey Books (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Empire of Ivory*, Del Rey (New York, NY), 2007.
- *Victory of Eagles*, Del Rey Books (New York, NY), 2008.
- *In His Majesty's Service* (omnibus edition), Del Rey Books (New York, NY), 2009.

- *Tongues of Serpents*, Del Rey/Ballantine Books (New York, NY), 2010.
- *Crucible of Gold*, Del Rey/Ballantine Books (New York, NY), 2012.
- *Blood of Tyrants*, Del Rey (New York, NY), 2015.
- *League of Dragons*, Del Rey (New York, NY), 2016.

Also contributor of short fiction to *Fast Ships, Black Sails*, Night Shade Books, 2008; *The Improbable Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Night Shade Books, 2009; and *Zombies vs. Unicorns*, Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2010.

### Media Adaptions:

The "Temeraire" series has been optioned by director Peter Jackson. *Uprooted* was optioned for a film by Warner Bros.

### Sidelights:

Fantasy novelist Naomi Novik is a former programmer and computer game designer. Her "Temeraire" series has been widely praised by critics and readers both for the quality of the writing and for a new and innovative interpretation of one of fantasy's most venerable creatures, the dragon. Novik's "method of weaving this overworked fantasy lizard into a real world context is meticulously thought out and entirely believable," commented T.M. Wagner on *SFReviews.net*. Novik, a first-generation American who was raised on the folktales of her mother's native Poland, has also broadened her repertoire with the 2011 graphic novel *Will Super Villains Be on the Final?*, the first volume of the "Liberty Vocational" series, about a private college for superheroes in the making, and with her critically acclaimed 2015 stand-alone fantasy title, *Uprooted*. Novik began her writing career in fan fiction, penning spin-off stories of her favorite television program in college, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Soon this evolved into beta reading, noted a contributor for the *BookBanter Blog*. Beta readers are those who actively offer advice on the works of others. Inspired by the fiction of Patrick O'Brian and his score of naval novels set during the Napoleonic Wars, Novik came up with the idea of her "Temeraire" books.

*Temeraire: His Majesty's Dragon*, the first book in the series, is set in the Napoleonic era of the early nineteenth century. In this world, dragons are a well-known and accepted part of military life. The formidable flying creatures are controlled by the mysterious Aerial Corps, whose members tame, harness, and ride the dragons as powerful air combat forces. As the story opens, British naval captain Will Laurence has boarded a French ship and discovered an unhatched dragon's egg, which he discovers was intended as a gift for Napoleon himself. When the egg hatches, the dragon refuses the ritual harnessing by anyone but Captain Laurence, thus forging the beginning of a deep and permanent bond between human and dragon. Laurence names the sentient, talking dragon Temeraire, and the story focuses on their growing adventures and deepening friendship as Laurence leaves his beloved naval command to join the Aerial Corps. As the elegant dragon matures and learns about the world, Laurence teaches him responsibility and duty. Laurence laments what his departure from the navy has cost him: his father's respect, his career, and the chance to marry the woman he loved. Yet there is nothing to compare to being friend and equal to a magnificent dragon. The two share combat experiences, political maneuvering, and more serene moments of simple camaraderie such as reading together.

"Novik knows that for the story to work, we have to believe the relationship between Laurence and Temeraire wholeheartedly. And we do," Wagner remarked. *Library Journal* critic Jenne Bergstrom called Novik's debut a "perfect blend of the familiar and the fantastical." *Booklist* reviewer Frieda Murray offered "bravos for a most promising new author" and her "superbly written, character-driven series." Reviewer Michelle West, writing in the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, called the book "a joy of a first novel, a wonderful take on dragons, on those who fly them, and on the relationship that unfolds."

In *Throne of Jade*, the second book in the series, Laurence discovers that Temeraire is among the rarest and finest of dragons, a Chinese Celestial, and that the Chinese want the dragon back. Temeraire agrees to go only if accompanied by Laurence, and after an eventful sea voyage, they arrive in China, where they face political pressures

and other dangers from the Chinese Imperial Court. Further surprises about Temeraire's lineage await them, as they observe firsthand how luxuriously and deferentially dragons are treated in China, as opposed to the near-servitude they endure in Europe. As Laurence worries that Temeraire will prefer to take up a pampered life in China, the dragon himself struggles to reconcile his birthright to the military life he has forged with Captain Laurence.

In the third book of the series, *Black Powder War*, Temeraire and Captain Laurence face conflict with the Turks, who have failed to produce three dragon eggs purchased by the English, and with Temeraire's new blood enemy, Lien, the albino celestial dragon he encountered in the previous book. Wagner concluded on *SFReviews.net*: "With a multilayered plot that balances adventure, intrigue, war, and rich moments of character-driven drama, *Black Powder War* brings a great trilogy to an explosive finale ... with the promise of more to come. Bravo."

An unknown epidemic hits the dragons of the British Aerial Corps in the fourth series installment, *Empire of Ivory*, leaving Temeraire and some other new dragon recruits the only defense against a French invasion. Temeraire, who appears to be immune to the illness, and Captain Laurence now must journey to the coast of Africa, where it is said a cure for the mysterious disease is to be found. But Africa has its own dragons and its own peculiar dangers—including echoes of the slave trade—from which Laurence and Temeraire barely escape. Returning to England, Laurence must now face the dreaded lords of the admiralty after he decides to share the dragon serum he discovered with the French dragons; this is an act of treason as far as many are concerned.

Reviewing this series addition in *Booklist*, Murray noted: "Novik's alternate early nineteenth century is so realistic that it drowns disbelief." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer complained of a "slow start" but went on to remark that "most will find the richness of Novik's developing world—and characters—to be worthy compensation." In a review for the *SF Site*, Michael M. Jones had higher praise for the book, observing that this fourth series installment "continues to explore a fascinating alternate history where the Napoleonic Wars were fought using dragons in addition to the traditional methods." Jones went on to note: "Novik has taken this period, and this concept, and really made it her own. *Empire of Ivory* is a worthy addition to the 'Temeraire' series." Further praise came from *SFReviews.net* contributor Thomas M. Wagner, who commented of this series addition: "Four novels in, and Novik has proven herself nothing less than a master of the form. She does literally everything right here, including mastering the art of economy-sized epic storytelling."

In the next series installment, *Victory of Eagles*, the author makes a return to her "familiar themes of love, duty and liberty against the backdrop of the Napoleonic wars," according to a *Publishers Weekly* contributor. Now Napoleon's troops are attacking England, and Temeraire, initially without Laurence, who is being punished for his treason, takes charge of other dragons without their captains, commanding them in war. Once reunited with Laurence, however, Temeraire begins to share power in the war councils and also begins advocating for his fellow dragons to be paid. Meanwhile, Laurence must also face his king, whom he has betrayed by curing the French dragons.

The *Publishers Weekly* contributor found this a "thrilling" addition to the series. Likewise, *Library Journal* reviewer Bergstrom felt that "fans of military historicals ... will likely enjoy the detailed points of military strategy and supply-line wrangling." Murray, again writing for *Booklist*, similarly thought this fifth novel in the series "measures up to its predecessors in excellent plotting, engrossing characters, and sheer page-turning excitement." Wagner also commended this novel and the series in general in his review for *SFReviews.net*: "Naomi Novik has not sounded a wrong note yet in this sweeping, lustrous saga."

In *Tongues of Serpents*, Temeraire and Laurence are still feeling the repercussions of their adventures in *Empire of Ivory*, being banished to New South Wales for saving the French dragons. Here, they become involved in a dispute between rebels and a deposed governor and also in the adventure of a hunt for a kidnapped dragon egg.

A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer found this a "somber ... installment." However, *Library Journal* contributor Jackie Cassada had a higher assessment of *Tongues of Serpents*, noting: "Strong writing, engaging characters, and unforgettable dragons make this a sure bet." Murray also commended this sixth installment in her *Booklist* review, concluding: "The characters are as riveting as ever, the setting is new but convincing, and the plot ... shows Novik's continued excellence as a novelist."

Novik's graphic-novel debut, *Will Super Villains Be on the Final?*, was published in 2011. The work is illustrated by Yishan Li and presented in a style reminiscent of manga novels. The book is set at Liberty Vocational, a school where budding young superheroes learn how to use their powers. Protagonist Leah Taymore is a new pupil at the school who may be one of the most gifted. However, Leah is not yet very skilled at controlling her powers, which results in a great deal of mayhem and gets her into plenty of trouble. Other characters include a teacher and his son who also attends the school, who both seem determined to make Leah's life miserable.

Reviewing the work for *Examiner.com*, contributor Nicholas Ahlhelm noted that the work ends abruptly, which is typical of the manga style it is written in but seems like a disappointment in this work. "Even so," Ahlhelm concluded, *Will Super Villains Be on the Final?* is a solid first entry by creators this new to the comic field." A contributor to the *Black Kitten Reviews* Web site stated: "The art is simple and pleasant, the story interesting, and the characters are fun to follow." *Booklist* contributor Candice Mack suggested that "quick pacing, humorous dialogue, thoughtful plot, and manga-inspired art will appeal to fans of Western comics." A *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted: "Leah's ability to do almost anything is too convenient, and exactly what she's doing isn't always clear."

With her next book, *Crucible of Gold*, Novik returned to her well-known series featuring the exploits of Captain William Laurence and his Chinese Celestial dragon Temeraire. Following Laurence's conviction of treason and exile to Australia, at the beginning of this work ambassador Arthur Hammond puts an end of Laurence's exile and allows him to come back to handle a band of dragons sent by Napoleon to Brazil. To make matters even more complicated, they have to cross through the Incan Empire and face myriad obstacles, including more dragons, to get to where they need to be.

In a review of the work, a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor stated: "Novik is ambitiously exploring what it is to be a moral man in a world where such a quality is considered inconvenient at best." *Booklist* contributor Jessica Moyer remarked: "Readers who persevere past the slow start will be satisfied, and an exciting, cliff-hanger finale will leave them clamoring." A *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted: "Novik weaves in complex moral questions about the blurry line between freedom and possession."

In the eighth and penultimate series installment, *Blood of Tyrants*, the brave Captain William Laurence finds himself shipwrecked in Japan and has no recall of his adventures as an English aviator or of his friend, Temeraire. As Laurence becomes embroiled in local political machinations, his friend Temeraire sets out to find him, regardless of warnings to the contrary by English officers fearful that these two in Japan might set off a new conflict for Britain, for Japan is like a bomb about to explode. Meanwhile, in Europe, Napoleon has turned against his one-time ally, Tsar Alexander of Russia, and is amassing a huge army outside the gates of Moscow to add Russia to his list of conquered nations. It is at Moscow that Laurence and Temeraire are once again reunited to face their most perilous challenge to date.

Reviewing *Blood of Tyrants* in *Booklist*, Frieda Murray felt that the author's alternate history of the world "based on the existence of intelligent dragons has been so well crafted that all eight books in the series are highly recommended." A *Kirkus Reviews* critic was also impressed by this installment, noting: "A first-class entry in a remarkable and appealing series; this one's mostly independently intelligible, though newcomers will want to start from the beginning." A *Publishers Weekly* contributor commented on the "fast pace" of this novel, and added: "Fans will mostly find their appetites whetted for the series conclusion."

In Novik's stand-alone fantasy novel, *Uprooted*, the plot centers on a young woman named Agnieszka, who lives near the border of an evil wood, with only a wizard named Dragon who seems to keep the danger at bay. The price for the man's protection is that a woman--someone with some remarkable gifts either of beauty or intelligence--is selected from the village and sent to serve him for ten years. It has been thus for as long as anyone can remember, and at the end of ten years it has also been the case that the chosen woman has been so changed by the experience that she can no longer remain in the humble village. This year to everyone's surprise, the rather plain Agnieszka is selected. No one is more surprised than she, for she finds herself not only plain but accident prone and rather hard on clothes. But once established in Dragon's home, she discovers that she does have a talent--she has the power of spell

casting. It is this latent power that bonds the young girl and Dragon and that ultimately sets them on a mission into the heart of the dark Wood to battle the evil lurking there. A *Book Smugglers* Web site contributor noted of the novel: "*Uprooted* tells this story about a young woman who discovers who she is in the most elemental way: the story goes deep into questions of agency, of power, or discovery, of passion, sexual awakening, friendship, family, loyalty and more. In many ways, these things are the root of who we are as people and in building this story around these questions, Naomi Novik cleverly goes back to fundamentals to tell a story that is everything but trivial."

*Uprooted* earned near universal praise from critics and was quickly optioned for a feature film by Warner Bros. Writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, Genevieve Valentine noted of the work: "Agnieszka's brisk narration and shrewd, shorthand observations of character make *Uprooted* a very enjoyable fantasy with the air of a modern classic." Similarly, *Washington Post Online* contributor Nancy Hightower called it a "tale that is funny and fast-paced, laced with hair-raising battle scenes and conspiracies; it also touches on deeper ecological concerns we grapple with today." For *Seattle Times Online* reviewer Nisi Shawl, *Uprooted* offers a "surprise-filled journey over comfortingly familiar territory." *BookPage* writer Hilli Levin also had a high assessment of *Uprooted*, commenting: "Novik spins an enthralling story of the classic good-versus-evil variety, where magic, monsters and romance abound. Truly beautiful prose, inventive twists and a capable, tenacious heroine make this charmingly accessible fantasy shine." An *Omnivoracious* Web site writer was also impressed, observing, "Fans of tightly woven fantasy tales and exhilarating characters to ... root for will not want to miss *Uprooted*." Likewise, a *Publishers Weekly* critic felt that this "instantly immersive Polish fairy tale ... will be a must-read for fantasy fans for years to come." *Christian Science Monitor* writer Yvonne Zipp added to the positive reception of *Uprooted*, commenting: "This is the kind of book that reminds readers why 'once upon a time' originally cast a spell on them. It is, in a word, enchanting." And *NPR.org* reviewer Amal El-Mohtar noted: "*Uprooted* is a triumph on several fronts--characterization, pace, a warm and beautifully realized setting, a tensely escalating threat level--but for me its most remarkable, wonderful aspect was in Agnieszka's love for her friend, which becomes the novel's driving force. ... Moving, heartbreaking, and thoroughly satisfying, *Uprooted* is the fantasy novel I feel I've been waiting a lifetime for. Clear your schedule before picking it up, because you won't want to put it down."

The final book in Novik's "Temeraire" series is *League of Dragons*. When the volume begins, Napoleon has fled Russia for France. Meanwhile, Temeraire learns that his enemy, a Chinese dragon called Lien, is in possession of his egg and may destroy it. After he saves his egg, Temeraire fights against Napoleon and his forces, stopping their plan to use feral dragons to fight the allies.

Joseph Bottum, contributor to the *Washington Free Beacon* Web site, commented: "No matter how much her characters protest the manners and morals of their time, the author can't allow them to leave the era of her setting--and the new final volume, *League of Dragons*, shows how fed up with it all Novik has become." Bottum added: "About midway [through] *League of Dragons*, Novik simply changes gears, rushing in overdrive to finish off the plot." A *Kirkus Reviews* critic described the book as "not the finest entry in the sequence, being slow to gather momentum and somewhat patchy, but overall a satisfying conclusion to a remarkable series." Other assessments of the volume were more favorable. Writing on the *NPR.org* Web site, Jason Heller suggested: "*League of Dragons* masterfully wraps up so many plot threads and loose ends that had built up throughout the previous eight books. ... Meanwhile Novik never forgets that, as complex as her ideas and plot may get, the very simple notions of friendship and loyalty lie at the heart of the series." "Novik expertly balances a myriad of plotlines and characters and offers an extremely satisfying resolution," asserted Krista Hutley in *Booklist*. Similarly, a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer remarked: "This thrilling installment is packed with action and excitement, drawing the series to a ... satisfying close."

#### Related Information:

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- Murray, review of *Tongues of Serpents*, p. 5; April 15, 2011, Candice Mack, review of *Will Super Villains Be on the Final?*, p. 42; February 15, 2012, Jessica Moyer, review of *Crucible of Gold*, p. 30; August 1, 2013, Frieda Murray, review of *Blood of Tyrants*, p. 48; June 1, 2016, Krista Hutley, review of *League of Dragons*, p. 68.
- *Bookmarks*, November-December, 2006, review of *Throne of Jade*, p. 58.
  - *BookPage*, June, 2015, Hilli Levin, review of *Uprooted*, p. 23.
  - *Bookseller*, December 9, 2005, review of *Temeraire*, p. 31; December 15, 2005, Alison Bone, review of *Temeraire*, p. 38.
  - *Christian Science Monitor*, July 6, 2015, Yvonne Zipp, review of *Uprooted*.
  - *Kirkus Reviews*, March 15, 2012, review of *Crucible of Gold*; July 1, 2013, review of *Blood of Tyrants*; April 15, 2016, review of *League of Dragons*.
  - *Kliatt*, July, 2006, Ginger Armstrong, review of *Temeraire*, p. 24.
  - *Library Journal*, April 15, 2006, Jenne Bergstrom, review of *Temeraire*, p. 71; June 15, 2008, Jenne Bergstrom, review of *Victory of Eagles*, p. 61; June 15, 2010, Jackie Cassada, review of *Tongues of Serpents*, p. 67; March 1, 2013, review of *Blood of Tyrants*, p. 6; May 15, 2015, Meridith Schwartz, "Naomi Novik," p. 111.
  - *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, September, 2006, Michelle West, review of *Temeraire*, p. 38.
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  - *UWire Text*, January 21, 2015, Gabrielle Owens, "Booking It: His Majesty's Dragon," p. 1.

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- *Blogcritics*, <http://blogcritics.org/> (October 26, 2009), Richard Marcus, review of *In His Majesty's Service*.
- *BookBanter Blog*, <http://bookbanter.wordpress.com/> (September 17, 2010), "Dancing with Dragons: An Interview with Naomi Novik."
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## Is Agnieszka a good role model?

Throughout Uprooted I really enjoyed Agnieszka's agency and self determination, and I think those qualities make her a really interesting role model that I would be keen for older teens to be exposed to. One of the defining turning points for her as a character is during her 'naming':

*I took a deep breathe and said, "There's nothing wrong with the name I already have."*

Her decision to stand up for what felt right for her, and to refuse to be labelled by others gives momentum to her growing self belief, and felt like a powerful moment of leadership to me.

## How did you feel about Dragon/Sarkan as a character?

One of my favourite quotes in Uprooted, that I think sums up all the things I liked about the Dragon was:

*His name tasted of fire and wings, of curling smoke, of subtlety and strength and the rasping whisper of scales. He eyed me and said stiffly, "Don't land yourself into a boiling-pot, and as difficult as you may find it, try and present a respectable appearance."*

I really enjoyed the interplay between the Dragon's generally 'good' moral code and his abrasive personality. I thought that Novik presented him well, and didn't fall into the trap of having him instantly turn out to be the hero of the story who was simply misunderstood and needed a woman's touch to revive him. He is never the hero of the story as whole, or within it, the hero of Agnieszka's story. Though he certainly supports her along the way, in the end it is her empathy that solves the riddle of the Wood. He stays true to the earlier elements of his character by leaving (but eventually coming back), and the ending had me grinning like mad because it felt so right.

## What was your favourite quote?

Thought there were many beautiful passages, snide comments that made me smile, and charming descriptions, my favourite quote was a reflection on the futility of war. The whole section was heartbreaking to read, and definitely increased my respect for this book, in drawing attention to something that many fantasy stories would simply move past as a sad but necessary means to an end.

*"...they all had stories... They weren't alone in the world, mattering to no one but themselves. It seemed utterly wrong to treat them like pennies in a purse."*

## Do you see Uprooted as a love story?

It's hard to find a YA or even Adult fantasy novel that doesn't have some element of a love story, after-all as humans we crave connection in various different ways. But to me Uprooted was more focused on friendship rather than romantic love. Agnieszka's friendship with Kasia is challenged again and again throughout the novel, and yet it only grows deeper despite the trials they face both apart and together.

**If you're enjoying this discussion don't forget to join me next month!**



# GT Book Club Discussion: Uprooted by Naomi Novik!



ASnowdenofYesteryear

1/31/16 11:50am



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3



Hello everyone! I am SO EXCITED to talk about this book with you guys. Seriously. I've been starving for discussion since I read it in June, and no one else I know had picked it up.



(Sweet pixel art brought to you by @QuinnStephens )

So, on to the questions! Feel free to talk about any or all of them, or bring up something new in the comments!

*1. The basics: Love, hate or meh? From reading other people's discussions, those are the only three options for how people have felt about this book. If you didn't like it, that's okay!*

While I found that this book hit a lot of my sweet spots, I definitely had problems with the pacing once we got to the capital, and I really was confused and felt like I was missing something during Nieshka's flight from Marek and Solya to the tower. Did I skip a paragraph or something where she learned how to make golems earlier in the book, or is that part of the Baba Jaga myth that I should have known about?

*2. How did the first person viewpoint work out for you? And when did you realize (or, I guess, did you realize) that Agnieszka is an unreliable narrator?*

I picked up on it on my second read-through, after getting offended when I saw a lot of people hating on Sarkan (more on him later) and realized how much *how* she was telling the story matched her description of casting Luthe's Summoning. She's telling it after the fact, glossing over pieces she thinks aren't important, moulding them onto the bones of the fairy tale form. But the specific moment I realized that she was unreliable happens in almost the first few pages of the book — when she talks about how the men of the village feel about sacrificing their daughters, since it's clear that she's sheltered and really doesn't know how dangerous the work the men do burning back the forrest is. You see little glimpses of what Sarkan's been up to the past century when she's able to "summon" him for long distance communication in the capital, but it doesn't seem like Agnieszka's really aware of exactly what's up because she's not directly involved.

*3. The relationships and the sextimes — did they work for you? Did you want Nieshka and Sarkan to get together, Nieshka and Kaisa, or did you not care about them at all?*


I loved the portrayal of female friendship – when they're ripping Kaisa from the grip of the Wood, when they're looking into each other's eyes and seeing all the petty jealousies and anger and shame, and still love each other... that's some powerful stuff. I didn't see them as romantic partners, though a lot of people in the other discussions I lurked in wanted them to pair off.

I adored Sarkan, in all of his grumpy fastidious splendor. (I'm #teamsnape, and I've described him to other people as "Snape sorted Ravenclaw" in an effort to make them read the book). I found that the relationship worked for me, because Nieshka was almost entirely in control. When he kisses her, after

the rose illusion, she's the one that shoves him onto his back. When the have sex, she's the one who pushes the issue. And how refreshing was it to have the woman come first!

There's a lot of other stuff to discuss, and I'll come back with more questions later, but feel free to discuss anything you like! I'll try to reply to everyone, but I'm several time zones ahead of most of you.

## Naomi Novik | LibraryReads Author, May 15, 2015

 [reviews.libraryjournal.com/2015/05/in-the-bookroom/authors/naomi-novik-libraryreads-author-may-15-2015/](http://reviews.libraryjournal.com/2015/05/in-the-bookroom/authors/naomi-novik-libraryreads-author-may-15-2015/)

Meredith Schwartz



Photo by Beth Gwinn

Naomi Novik, author of the best-selling “Temeraire” series (an alternate English Regency with a dragon-based air force, from Del Rey: Ballantine) offers a stand-alone fantasy.

**Uprooted is so different from your “Temeraire” series. What inspired you?**

The initial inspiration was procrastination. I was working on *Blood of Tyrants*, “Temeraire” No. 8. I wrote the line, “Our dragon doesn’t eat the girls he takes,” which is the first line of *Uprooted*. I’m supposed to be writing one kind of dragon, and I thought about a totally different kind.

The narrator is first person, so she didn’t have a name for a long time. I’m a discovery kind of writer; I plan later. If I plan things out too far in advance I can lose the electricity. At one point, somebody called her a short version of [the Polish name] Agnieszka, and I realized this story was set in the fairy-tale Poland of my childhood: a very specific place

that even though it never really existed, [it] existed for me, because as a child my mother would read me these fairy tales [to keep] me connected to her own roots.

**What are those fairy tales like?**

One of my favorite [childhood] stories was called *Agnieszka Piece of the Sky*, or *Scrap of Heaven*. I am, with my mother’s help, translating it into English. I’ve done a children’s version for my daughter, but I’m trying to do a more [adult version for publication]. The original fairy tales are not meant for children or [come] from a time when people didn’t assume children needed to be written down to.

Another book my mother read to me, called *Living Water*, is also part of the inspiration. There are all these wonderful elements, especially the forest. Across not just Polish fairy and folk tales but Polish life, the forest is central. I wanted to write this story about this wood that should be a place of nourishment, and the evil is that that connection has been broken. This becomes the story of how someone repairs those roots.

Tolkien was also something my mother read to me, so [he] feels like a part of my roots as well, even though it is from a completely different culture. Writing this book feels like a reconciliation of these heritages.



**Why is *Uprooted* a descendant story of the famous Baba Jaga instead of a retelling?**

For me Baba Jaga is a force of nature, and when I think of Baba Jaga I think of my grandmother. I want at some point to write her story, but this story was about my daughter and my mother. I believe in books having roots deeper than what you see. This book succeeds because it does have roots.

**Is working with fairy-tale source material similar to the process of writing fanfiction?**

All work is in dialog with other work. “Temeraire” has a very clear family tree: [Anne McCaffrey’s long-running fantasy series] Pern, [Patrick O’Brian’s *Master and Commander*], Jane Austen, and the history of the Napoleonic wars and of colonialism. You have these four parents...but not the characters from any one of them. The line for me [between fanfiction and original fiction] is when I realize I can’t tell the story I want to tell with the characters from the original.

**What’s next for you?**

I’ve got four ideas that are jockeying, and we’ll see which comes out on top. I have got maybe another 30 books in me—I want to write only really good ones.

**Anything else you want to tell librarians?**

It was really exciting for me that librarians got on board with this book because libraries are where I found that English-language set of my roots. I was this voracious reader, and my mom did not have her own tradition of books in English so I found my own.—Meredith Schwartz



**Created by a group of librarians, LibraryReads offers a monthly list of ten current titles culled from nominations made by librarians nationwide as their favorites. See the May 2015 list at [ow.ly/Nd4dF](http://ow.ly/Nd4dF) and contact [libraryreads.org/for-library-staff/](http://libraryreads.org/for-library-staff/) to make your own nomination.**



# JOINT REVIEW: *UPROOTED* BY NAOMI NOVIK

In which we discuss the brilliant, beautiful, dark, and enchanting new fairy tale from Naomi Novik.

**Title:** *Uprooted*

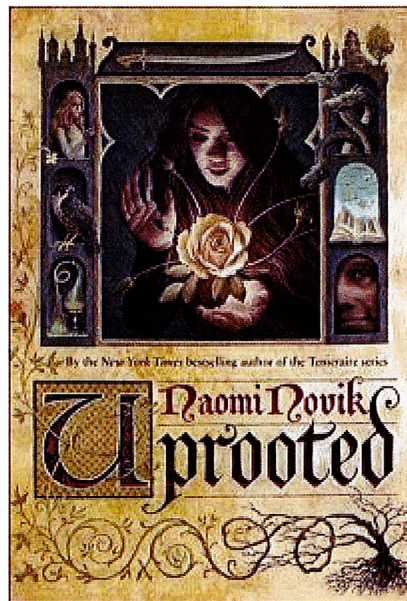
**Author:** Naomi Novik

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Publisher:** Del Rey / Macmillan

**Publication Date:** May 18 / May 21

**Hardcover:** 437 Pages



Agnieszka loves her valley home, her quiet village, the forests and the bright shining river. But the corrupted wood stands on the border, full of malevolent power, and its shadow lies over her life.

Her people rely on the cold, ambitious wizard, known only as the Dragon, to keep the wood's powers at bay. But he demands a terrible price for his help: one young woman must be handed over to serve him for ten years, a fate almost as terrible as being lost to the wood.

The next choosing is fast approaching, and Agnieszka is afraid. She knows – everyone knows – that the Dragon will take Kasia: beautiful, graceful, brave Kasia – all the things Agnieszka isn't – and her dearest friend in the world. And there is no way to save her.

But no one can predict how or why the Dragon chooses a girl. And when he comes, it is not Kasia he will take with him.

## **REVIEW**

### **Ana's Take:**

Let me preface this review by getting something off my chest straight away: I *loved* this book with the intensity of a thousand supernovas.

+++

The Dragon from Agnieszka's village is not a creature but a man, a wizard who protects villagers against the always-expanding, living, corrupted Wood. In exchange for his protection all he asks is for a young woman to be handed over to him as a servant (and perhaps something more, so says the whispering grapevine) for ten years. After ten years, the girl is free to go back but for some reason – no one really knows why – they never go back *home*.

Agnieszka and Kasia are best friends who grew up knowing they would both be up for the next choosing. They – and everybody in their village – know that Kasia will be the chosen one for her beauty and grace. They have prepared all their lives for this day and for their separation but when the Dragon comes, it is Agnieszka who is taken.

Uprooted from everything that she holds dear, apart from family and her beloved friend Kasia, Agnieszka is thrust into a new life up in the Dragon's remote tower with no hope for escape, in the company of a man she barely knows. Getting to grips with what has happened is only the beginning, for deep inside Agnieszka, there is power and knowledge yearning to get out. And just as she is learning to cope, the unthinkable happens: the Wood comes back and takes Kasia.

I think about *Uprooted* and I keep going back to these words: “elemental”, “basic”, “primal” and of course “rooted.”

And I understand that these words are often used in negative ways when describing a book but here I want to use them in the most positive way imaginable.

Because there is something *elemental* about the way *Uprooted* is built: it delves into the origins of storytelling, using the foundation of fairytales to tell a story that is at once familiar and comforting as well as subversive and progressive. And *extremely* beautiful. And somehow, hilarious? Also, romantic. Clever. Oh yes, and sexy.

*Uprooted* tells this story about a young woman who discovers who she is in the most elemental way: the story goes deep into questions of agency, of power, or discovery, of passion, sexual awakening, friendship, family, loyalty and more. In many ways, these things are the root of who we are as people and in building this story around these questions, Naomi Novik cleverly goes back to fundamentals to tell a story that is everything but trivial.

And she does that in more ways than one. Because yes, of course, this is Agnieszka's story first and foremost but this is also the story of her world – of the Wood, of the people around the Wood and the history behind it all. It is also about the history of magic and how it works and the difference between learned magic and intuitive magic – the magic of roots and the magic of intellect. It is also a story that looks at mortality in a deeply felt way. One of the most affecting scenes in the novel is when Agnieszka realises that as a witch, she will live a very long life, possibly outliving everything and everyone she knows. Part of her coming of age is coming to terms with that and finding a way to move forward that will serve her loving personality well.

It is also the story of the Dragon, a man steeped in a type of learned magic, someone who goes through an awakening just as Agnieszka does.

But above all, at the centre of this story, its focus and its beating heart lies Agnieszka and Kasia's friendship. This is a where the story goes back to, this is where the story plants its roots and beautiful uses it as juxtaposition to another story of sisterhood back in the past of their world. Their friendship feels real because it is both close and difficult for how their lives had been to this point and because it grows and evolves as a living thing in front of our eyes. They are *fierce*, these two girls, extremely loyal to one another and the way Kasia's own story develops is *amazing*.

Reminiscent of books by every author I love – Juliet Marillier, Megan Whalen Turner, Diana Wynne Jones and Robin McKinley – *Uprooted* is not only a *perfect* book but also a perfect book for me. I have nothing whatsoever to criticize here. I wholeheartedly recommend it as one of the best books I read this year, lately, ever.

### **Thea's Take:**

I will also preface my part of the review by stating outright: *If\*\*\*ing love this book.*

If you cross-pollinated the lyrical prose, woodland setting, and female characterization of Juliet Marillier (one of my all-time favorite authors), with some of the intensity (sexual and political), worldbuilding, sharp magic of Jacqueline Carey, with a dash of old school fantastical Robin McKinley on top, you might get something close to *Uprooted*. Truly, comparing the book to these other powerhouses of fantasy sells the book short – because *Uprooted* is brilliant, beautiful, dark, and enchanting on its own.



As Ana says, *Uprooted* is at its core a fairy tale. It's a fairy tale that uses familiar elements that lure unsuspecting readers in – the great and powerful Wizard/Dragon, who demands tribute of a village daughter every 10 years (as Dragons from fantastic tales are wont to do); the headstrong heroine, whose fate seems sealed and dedicated to a provincial life but is suddenly uprooted; the encroaching darkness that must be stopped before the world is lost to the forces of evil.

All of these elements are known quantities in fairy tales – the magic with *Uprooted* lies with the nuances and subversions (some subtle, others not so much) that Naomi Novik weaves into her yarn. That, and the fact that Novik has a killer way of writing action, magic, and danger that *literally* has you on the edge of your seat. (On two separate occasions I missed my subway stop to work because I was so engrossed in *Uprooted* – it's the Thea test for true submersion in a story.)

There are many aspects of the book that demand deeper examination, but I'm going to focus on the three things that sang to me the most: the rules of magic in Agnieszka's world (and related to that, overall worldbuilding and deep-rooted corruption at the heart of the Wood), the subversive thematic elements (especially concerning female characters and traditional notions of heroism), and the powerful relationships that define each of these characters.

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*Uprooted* tells the story of a young village woman named Agnieszka, born in a year where she is eligible to be taken by the Dragon – a powerful wizard who protects her village and the rest of the kingdom from the encroaching evil of the poisoned Wood. Every ten years, the Dragon leaves his marble tower and selects a girl from the villages of the valley to live with him. No one knows what the Dragon does with these girls during their servitude – just that after ten years, the girls emerge from the tower, free and healthy, but always determined to leave the valley and village behind for bigger and better things.

When Agnieszka is inexplicably chosen by the Dragon – and not her best friend Kasia, whom everyone believed would be chosen – her life is completely turned around. See, Agnieszka has *magic* – and the Dragon is determined, in his own churlish, brutal way, to teach her how to use her skills. It's the law, after all.

Little does Agnieszka (or the Dragon) know that her magic is *strong*, and it's different than any of the measured incantations and spells known to wizards in this world. And *this*, dear readers, this is what I loved very much about *Uprooted*. Nieshka (a nickname for Agnieszka)'s magic is the magic of intuition and storytelling, of song and memory. Initially, she struggles with the Dragon's way of doing spells, tripping over the incantations and deliberate instructions he has laid out for her, earning his self-righteous scorn. What is so beautiful about *Uprooted* and this magical system, however, is the idea that not all magic need be applied the same way – I like to think of it as the difference between various kinds of intelligence and skill. Magic is approached as an

academic feat and a science by the great wizards of the land, but Agnieszka takes an intuitive approach, trusting her feelings and her own style in order to affect spellcraft. I *love* this variation, the different descriptions of magic, and the spell-working throughout *Uprooted* – particularly as the different wizards learn to work together (or against each other) to their own ends.

Related to the powerful magic imagery, the worldbuilding itself in *Uprooted* should be mentioned. In this world, there are two kingdoms frequently at war – Polnya, the kingdom to which Nieshka, her Dragon, and her village belong, and the neighboring Rosya. Ever since Polnya's queen was wooed away from home twenty years prior and lost to the Wood, tensions between the two kingdoms have run high – fraught with jealousy, with an angry King and a quick-tempered Polnyan prince named Marek, diplomacy between the two lands has been hard. In *Uprooted*, we see the insidious, malicious workings of the corrupted Wood that haunt these two kingdoms, that play human and wizard against each other out of hate and insatiable rage. The Wood is dark, and deep, and wrong – it has a consciousness of its own, an agenda of its own, and it worms its corruption into anyone who passes under its shade. The Wood itself is a character, its true motivations and backstory not revealed until *Uprooted*'s final act. I was terrified by the sheer *malice* of the Wood in this book, of Novik's skill in creating a truly formidable menace that, Sauron-like, pulses under every war and misunderstanding and motivation throughout the book. The nightmarish creatures that emerge from the Wood, its Walkers and Heart Trees and Wolves, they are the stuff of great horror. And I loved reading every twisted, decaying second. Finally, since Ana has covered the beauty of the relationships – particularly the friendship between Agnieszka and Kasia – so well already, I'll just add my voice to the praise and say *yes*. I love the subversion here, that Nieshka sacrifices all she holds dear to save her beloved best friend; the magic that lays all the good and all the ugly truths between them bare. I love the slow-burning romance that unfolds between Nieshka and her love interest, just as I appreciate the fact that the Dragon is not perfect, or idealized or even desirable. I love the challenges that Nieshka issues to the shining Prince Marek of legend, to the most powerful Wizard in the land, to the courtiers and magicians who scorn her. Most of all, I love Nieshka's belief in herself and her ability to follow the things she knows to be true – this takes emotional bravery as well as magical and physical skill. There is little not to love in *Uprooted*. If I had to point out a quibble, it would be that the ending and the truth behind the Wood and its evil are rushed in the novel's last 50 pages – I almost wish this were a series (I hardly ever say that), or that the story of the Wood was revealed more slowly over the course of the novel, instead of parlayed at the end.

Yet... this quibble is minor. *Uprooted* is a beautiful, nearly-flawless read, and I loved it wholeheartedly from first chapter to empowering and heart-rendering finale.

Recommended for all, and absolutely one of my top 10 books of 2015.

<http://thebooksmugglers.com/2015/06/joint-review-uprooted-by-naomi-novik.html>