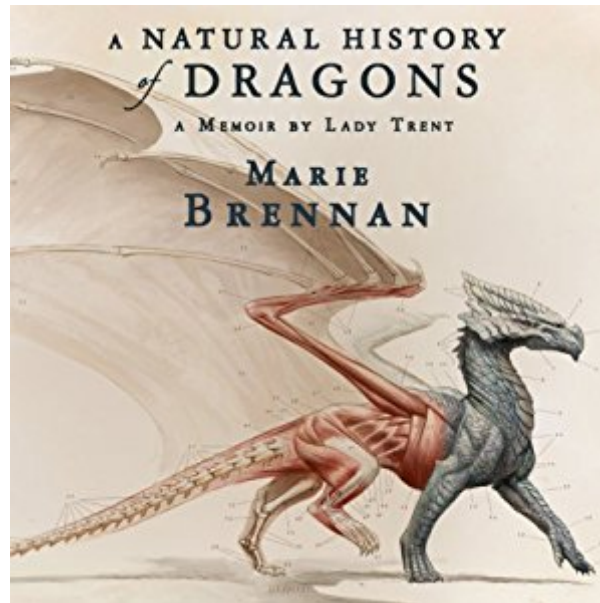


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A Natural History Of Dragons: A Memoir By Lady Trent



Synopsis

Marie Brennan begins a thrilling new fantasy series in *A Natural History of Dragons*, combining adventure with the inquisitive spirit of the Victorian Age. You, dear listener, continue at your own risk. It is not for the faint of heart - no more so than the study of dragons itself. But such study offers rewards beyond compare: to stand in a dragon's presence, even for the briefest of moments - even at the risk of one's life - is a delight that, once experienced, can never be forgotten....All the world, from Scirland to the farthest reaches of Eriga, know Isabella, Lady Trent, to be the world's preeminent dragon naturalist. She is the remarkable woman who brought the study of dragons out of the misty shadows of myth and misunderstanding into the clear light of modern science. But before she became the illustrious figure we know today, there was a bookish young woman whose passion for learning, natural history, and, yes, dragons defied the stifling conventions of her day. Here at last, in her own words, is the true story of a pioneering spirit who risked her reputation, her prospects, and her fragile flesh and bone to satisfy her scientific curiosity; of how she sought true love and happiness despite her lamentable eccentricities; and of her thrilling expedition to the perilous mountains of Vystrana, where she made the first of many historic discoveries that would change the world forever. "Saturated with the joy and urgency of discovery and scientific curiosity." (Publishers Weekly (Starred Review) on *A Natural History of Dragons*)

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The preface drew me in with its strong voice and promise to relate the adventure-filled career of a

lady naturalist in an alternate Victorian age, studying dragons. The book itself is entertaining, but doesn't quite live up to that promise. *A Natural History of Dragons* is the first in what looks to be a long series of fictionalized memoirs of Isabella, Lady Trent, a dragon naturalist. In this book, Isabella briefly takes readers through her childhood, courtship and marriage, then moves on to spend the bulk of the pages describing her first scientific expedition: from her quasi-English homeland to the quasi-Eastern-European mountains. Very little is known about dragons in this world, and Isabella and her companions seek them out with limited success, while meanwhile she must struggle against the restrictive gender expectations of her time. This is a short, quick read, and an entertaining novel. It's not action-packed and the dragons' appearances are fairly limited, but if you enjoy historical fiction as well as fantasy, you and this book will likely get along well. The older Isabella, the supposed author of the memoir, has a strong and believably Victorian voice, and the world is interesting and grounded as much in historical fiction and anthropology as in fantasy, such that it feels more real than your average secondary world. Isabella is a bold and active protagonist, always up for an adventure. And the book does a great job of making fantasy elements feel realistic; dragons here are just another species of wild animal (albeit a particularly difficult one to study), and are given an entertainingly scientific treatment. But while the book is certainly competent, some problems hold it back.

Stop right now. If you're looking for *Pern* or *Temeraire*, then this book is not going to scratch that itch. The dragons in Lady Isabella Trent's world are natural creatures, and they are treated as such by both the character and the author. If, however, you enjoy snarky old ladies commenting on the adventures (mis- and otherwise) of their youth, if you get a kick out of cryptozoology, if you love nature documentaries, anthropology, and mannered romances of the 19th century, if you wish you could have gone along on Darwin's voyage of the *Beagle*, if you think Wallace was shafted on the whole evolution issue due to class prejudice and structural inequality... then this book will thrill and delight you. It's right there in the title. *A Natural History of Dragons*. Brennan doesn't disappoint on that front. She builds a convincing secondary world -- a good choice, as it frees her from the constraints of fitting her dragons in around the cracks of actual history and biological classification -- where exists an entire... hm... I think it would be Family in taxonomic terms... of reptilian creatures, some of which fit a set of characteristics marking them as dragons. She shows us this world through the eyes of Lady Isabella Trent, and Lady Isabella shows us her world through her memoirs documenting her first forays into naturalism. This double-voiced narrative is perhaps the strongest part of this book (alongside the excellent portrayal of scientific study and the challenges of

fieldwork). Brennan draws the reader into the gap between younger Isabella's adventures and older Isabella's wisdom and regrets, and there is just as much emotional weight in what Isabella doesn't tell us as there is in what she does say.

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