



[Damsel](#) by Elana K. Arnold

Balzer + Bray, HarperCollins, 2018

ISBN: 9780062742339 (Paperback)

*Age Range: 14 up (Suggested by Publisher)

Grade Range: 9 up (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

A dark, twisted, unforgettable fairy tale from Elana K. Arnold, author of the National Book Award finalist *What Girls Are Made Of*

The rite has existed for as long as anyone can remember: When the king dies, his son the prince must venture out into the gray lands, slay a fierce dragon, and rescue a damsel to be his bride. This is the way things have always been.

When Ama wakes in the arms of Prince Emory, she knows none of this. She has no memory of what came before she was captured by the dragon or what horrors she faced in its lair. She knows only this handsome young man, the story he tells of her rescue, and her destiny of sitting on a throne beside him. It's all like a dream, like something from a fairy tale.

As Ama follows Emory to the kingdom of Harding, however, she discovers that not all is as it seems. There is more to the legends of the dragons and the damsels than anyone knows, and the greatest threats may not be behind her, but around her, now, and closing in.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ "This incisively written allegory rips into a familiar story and sets it aflame."

— [School Library Journal](#) (starred review)

★ "Arnold's pitch-black fairy tale isn't subtle, but this isn't a tale that requires subtlety. For teens learning to transform sadness and fear into active, productive fury, it's an essential allegory. Eat your heart out, *Sleeping Beauty*: this brutal, devastating, powerful novel won't soon be forgotten."

— [Booklist](#) (starred review)

"Exquisitely written and unflinchingly, furiously feminist, *Damsel* is a gorgeous inferno of a fairy tale and my new obsession. Searing and audacious, with an ending that will leave you howling at the moon. A must for every collection."

— Claire Legrand, author of *Furyborn*

"*Damsel* is a lush, sweeping, gorgeous fantasy, tied up tight with an inexorable and winding dread. This is the best sort of novel—part journey, part discovery, abundant with beauty and truth and rage. It is sharp and quick and cuts like a blade. Keep your eyes open. Be ready.

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HarperCollins

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— Kelly Barnhill, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* and *Dreadful Young Ladies and Other Stories*

“Brutal and unflinching, *Damsel* is a gorgeously twisted fairy tale that lures you in with pretty words and then shows you its thorns.”

— Justina Ireland, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Dread Nation*

“A meditation on the smothering uselessness of weaponized kindness, *Damsel* will have you reaching for the narrative with scale and claw and tooth.”

— E. K. Johnston, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Spindle*

“Arnold is a master of writing the struggles of young women and the violence they endure. In *Damsel*, she gives us a suitably masterful, darkly gorgeous modern fairy tale of a young woman passing through fire to protect what is hers. You will not be able to look away.”

— Jeff Zentner, William C. Morris Award–winning author of *The Serpent King*

“Not unlike the original fairy tales, *Damsel* isn’t meant for the faint of heart. This unflinchingly feminist story is beautiful in its gruesomeness.”

— Amanda Lovelace, bestselling author of *The Princess Saves Herself In This One*

“In this timely, riveting fantasy novel, Elana K. Arnold forges meaningful parallels between Ama’s plight and that of all women belittled, objectified and controlled by patriarchal culture.”

— *Chicago Tribune*

“With haunting prose and lush descriptions, Arnold weaves a terrifying tale that explores contemporary conversations about rape culture, misogyny, male entitlement, female agency, and the need for consent. The message is as timely as it is vital.”

— [Publishers Weekly](#)

“Timely, dark, and compelling, *Damsel* is an intense feminist read, an anti-fairy tale, and definitely a crossover adult title. Arnold’s writing is impeccable, her voice powerful, her style sly and captivating. She turns the damsel in distress trope inside out here with a tale that deals creatively and unflinchingly with violence and sexual assault and more, reminiscent of such other powerful titles as Margo Lanagan’s *Tender Morsels*. One of my favorite titles of the season.”

— Joy Preble, Brazos Bookstore, Houston, TX

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- Printz Award, Honor, 2019
- Amelia Bloomer List, 2019
- ALA Booklist Editor’s Choice, 2019
- California Book Awards, finalist, 2019
- Chicago Public Library Best of the Best Books, 2018
- Nerdies Award, 2018
- English Journal Honor Listing, 2018
- Rhode Island Teen Book Award, 2020

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Discussion Guide](#)
- [PEN America Member Spotlight](#)

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- <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/libraries/article/94699-proposed-changes-to-huntington-beach-public-library-draw-opposition.html>
- <https://www.tiktok.com/@penamerica/video/7247160557655117099>
- [What About the Girls?](#)
- [Teen Librarian Toolbox interview](#)

AUTHOR STATEMENT

My work and the work of my fellow authors that is being targeted as a result of this current moral panic are neither obscene nor pornographic. Attempts to call them so by taking specific lines out of context and claiming they represent the works as a whole is either ignorant, intellectually dishonest, or both.

Book bans harm the very children and teens they purport to protect. Literature gives us stories and information so that we might understand ourselves and the wider world. A reader is in a powerful place with a book: with a book in their hands, they are in charge. They can read it if they choose; equally, they have the power to set it down and walk away. When someone makes that choice for readers by banning a book that has been included in a library's collection by an educated, trained library professional, they rob readers of their freedom and cheat them of an opportunity to engage safely with information and art. Armed and empowered by the experiences and information they encounter in books, readers develop the language to understand what's happening in the great big world outside of them, and inside of themselves, as well.

Readers deserve free access to books. They have a first amendment right to freedom of press. Those who aim to take away their books, who are stripping their libraries and book collections, are thieves of art, culture, information, and liberty. I stand in solidarity with the librarians, teachers, parents, and educators who acknowledge that our duty is to the freedom of information, the art of literature, and the protection of young people's access to the full library collections to which they are entitled.

*A NOTE ON AGE RANGES

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.

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