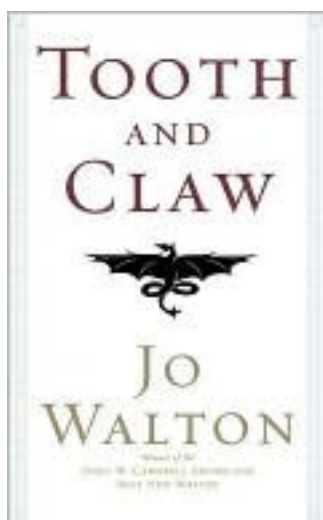


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**Jo Walton**

**Tooth and Claw**



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## Description

A tale of contention over love and money—among dragons

### *Tooth and Claw*

Jo Walton burst onto the fantasy scene with *The King's Peace*, acclaimed by writers as diverse as Poul Anderson, Robin Hobb, and Ken MacLeod. In 2002, she was voted the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer.

Now Walton returns with a very different kind of fantasy story: the tale of a family dealing with the death of their father, of a son who goes to law for his inheritance, a son who agonizes over his father's deathbed confession, a daughter who falls in love, a daughter who becomes involved in the abolition movement, and a daughter sacrificing herself for her husband.

Except that everyone in the story is a dragon, red in tooth and claw.

Here is a world of politics and train stations, of churchmen and family retainers, of courtship and country houses...in which, on the death of an elder, family members gather to eat the body of the deceased. In which society's high-and-mighty members avail themselves of the privilege of killing and eating the weaker children, which they do with ceremony and relish, growing stronger thereby.

You have never read a novel like *Tooth and Claw*.

## Insightful reviews

TheBookSmugglers: Originally reviewed on [The Book Smugglers](#)

### REVIEW

#### Ana's Take

When I first thought about how to I could describe *Tooth and Claw* in a way that truly conveyed its level of awesomeness, I could only think of: "it's a Jane Austenesque novel with Dragons. Cannibal Dragons". On second thought though, although that line does more or less captures the gist of it, it is not *quite* right. *Tooth and Claw* is, after all, more Victorian than Regency.

Eating each other is at the centre of this society – it's what dragons fear the most, and what they most look forward to. Dragon meat is not only delicious but so nutritious as to make whoever digests it literally bigger. The bigger the dragon, the stronger it is and the more *important* in the grander social scheme of things. But of course, only dragons who are already significant (in terms of their size and in their social standing) manage to eat other dragons. It's a vicious circle that seems impossible to break. The "why" is also important: weaklings, sickly and older dragons are eaten so that the race can be bettered (and so that other dragons have

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enough dragon meat to go on) and dead dragon's meat is divided between the members of their families according to a Will that stipulates the amount that each family member will devour or depending on - again – social standing.

The novel opens with Bon Agornin's on his deathbed and his devastated family getting ready to eat his remains. There is the matter of an expressed Will in which the bulk of his remains is to be divided between his three youngest children Avan (who lives and works in the city), Selendra and Haner (both young maidens). But his expressed wishes are contested by his ambitious son-in-law, who wins the argument and takes a greater portion. The three younger dragons – who have already lost their father, their home and who have little gold to their name – are now unable to even grow on their expected inheritance. This precipitates one of the main arcs in the book, as Avan decides to sue his brother-in-law.

And that's what makes *Tooth and Claw* a delight: it is about bloody dragons, who might eat each other but please, let's all be *proper* about it, and follow the *rules* and wear the right hats (ha, dragons wearing hats).

Because propriety and order rule this world, and the social structure of their society is set in stone and hardly questioned. There is extreme importance given to being a maiden and women's lives can be ruined in one single moment. Those in service have no expectations other than remain in service until they die (or get eaten) and those who are male and rich can basically get away with anything. And in a way, it is all very familiar except for how far the author takes those. So a maiden is no longer a maiden when she blushes: a mere touch by a non-family member will do it and her new pink colour is a sign for all to see. The dragons who work in service cannot fly, their wings bound, their movements restricted.

*Tooth and Claw* is a novel where the word *literally* has a whole new meaning (figuratively, speaking of course). It is a very interesting exploration of familiar themes of gender and class oppression in a way that makes that oppression literally *visible* (although not necessarily more real).

It is not all seriousness, blood and guts though, for *Tooth and Claw* is also a comedy of manners! With a delightful omniscient narrator and a focus on the three youngest Agornins and their lives. Avan who is a nice chap who shares his life with a young female dragon who is not a maiden making their association a complicated thing. Selendra and Haner are both in the marriage market, each learning to stand on their own feet after being separated into very two different households. There is a clear divide between the structured, inflexible older generation and this new generation full of forward-thinking ideas.

And there is even - yes, I think I shall use the word - swoonworthy romance and awesome relationships. And this is where the novel is at its most Jane Austenesque as Selendra and Haner have a little bit of all Jane Austen heroines in them. Plus, there is a male dragon called Sher that ....I shall say no more, dear reader. Some delights are better experienced without advance notice.

*Tooth and Claw* is as close to perfect a book can be. I loved it.

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## Thea's Take:

I am at a loss when it comes to attempting to describe *Tooth and Claw*. Allow me take Ana's words, to emphasize the awesome: *Tooth and Claw* is absolutely Jane Austen-esque, but with dragons. Take the social mores, the gender roles and restrictions, the foibles of Austen's work, but blend that with cannibalistic dragons with their own laws of propriety and social strata - *then* and only then will you get even a close approximation to *Tooth and Claw*.

For me, the strongest and most compelling part of the novel (the first I've had the pleasure of reading from Jo Walton) is its worldbuilding. This is a world strikingly similar to Regency England (well, yaknow, if society comprised dragons exclusively) - there are lords and ladies, daughters who must rely on their dowries in order to make a good match and thrive in society. There are servants and pastors and those born into money and status, just as there are those who must fight tooth and claw (oho!) for their way in the world. But, unlike Regency England, in this society, weakness - green colored dragons, small dragons, ailing little children, or the elderly, or the oppressed - equates to instant death. Those dragons deemed too weak to live will be killed and immediately *eaten* by others, their lifeforce fueling the dining dragon's size and power.

Oh, yes, there is magic too, for these are talking dragons and flying dragons. And for all that they are civilized creatures with a hierarchical society mimics an oft romanticized period in human history, they are also *dragons*. They dine on raw flesh and on each other, adding a level of frightening alien-ness to this particular world. The most fascinating aspect of the particular world, to me? The "blush" of dragon females when they are leaned on by male dragons - it's a terrifying and fascinating physical manifestation of "impure" females that examines agency and choice in such a smart, brilliant way through these female dragons. When Selendra is accosted by the amorous advances of an old family friend who professes his love for Selendra and intends to make her his bride, she turns from maiden gold to bridal pink - to her great horror, for she refuses his advances. To society, a pink dragon is one that has accepted the embrace of a male, and if not affianced, such a dragoness is ruined (and likely eaten later).

In many ways, *Tooth and Claw* is a kind of explication of our own world, a hyperbolic reflection of the flaws in our history and society. The concept of absurd creatures exposing the flaws is a familiar one (see *Amberville*, or any number of robot/zombie/vampire type fiction), Walton's choice of dragons is, frankly, unparalleled. I cannot think of a book that does it better.

My *only* criticism of the novel is how leisurely and meandering it is - and this is not exactly a bad thing. Not every book needs to be a white-knuckle thrill ride, and *Tooth and Claw* is definitely more of a beautiful scenic tour than a roller coaster. I loved the characters, and I loved the story of their lives that unfolds following their esteemed father's death. I only wish there was more of a force driving the novel forward. As Ana and I discussed when thinking about this book, my only issue with *Tooth and Claw* can be boiled down to the same reason I *\*love\** Jane Austen's books so much: the heroines. I love the heroines in Austen's work - from Lizzie to Emma to Anne to Marianne and Elinor. *Tooth and Claw* is very much in the spirit of Marianne and Elinor Dashwood (both of whom I love dearly)... but while sisters Selendra and Hanner (and Berend!

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Who actually was my favorite of the sisters) are wonderful characters, I didn't fall in love with them the same way that I root wholeheartedly for an Austin heroine. If that makes any sense at all.

Ultimately, *Tooth and Claw* is a brilliant, beautiful book. I loved it and highly recommend it - and I cannot wait to read more from Jo Walton very, very soon.

Kim:

I have yet to be disappointed by Jo Walton. In addition to this novel, I've loved the alternate reality of [Farthing](#) and its sequels, the pastoral fantasy of [Lifelode](#) and the coming of age story of [Among Others](#). All of these novels are distinguished by Walton's intelligent prose, deft characterisation and ability to create strange, yet completely believable fictional worlds.

The premise of this particular work sounds silly: it's written in the style of a Victorian novel, but the characters are dragons. Dragons who wear hats, fly or don't fly depending on their occupation and status, sleep on gold and eat their deceased relatives and dragons weaker than themselves. At its heart the novel is a family drama, complete with the death of the patriarch, dissension within the family about his legacy, legal proceedings and love affairs. Its characters are landowners, servants, bureaucrats, lawyers, ministers of religion, women looking for love and women developing and acting upon their growing social conscience.

If this wasn't written by Jo Walton and recommended to me by a GR friend whose taste I trust, I probably wouldn't have picked it up. However, as odd as it sounds, Jo Walton makes it work. She used the novels of Anthony Trollope as an inspiration, although there are also faint echos of Jane Austen in a disagreeable parson and a lady of the manor who ever so slightly brings to mind Lady Catherine de Bourgh. There's nothing gimmicky in the writing: the world building is so good that the reader is completely drawn in.

If there's a weakness in the novel, it's that the conflict is resolved rather too quickly at the end. I'd put this down to Walton making a deliberate choice to emulate the conventions of the Victorian novel in which no loose ends are left hanging, but I also felt that Walton wrapped up things too abruptly in "Among Others". In any event, if it is a weakness, it didn't destroy my very real enjoyment of the work.

I've not read Trollope and I'm undecided about whether Walton has made me want to do so, but I'm certainly tempted, if only to recognise the source material.

Sanaa: [4.5 Stars] This was really spectacular! It's a Victorian drama populated with dragons instead of people, definitely my kind of book. I think what I loved most about this was how dragon lore and mythology was transformed to work with Victorian societal customs. Seriously, it's eerie how well everything worked together even though it was definitely a bit weird. The Victorian drama plot was also really splendid, and I could never figure out what was going to happen next! It definitely has a touch of Austen and Heyer in the writing and overall felt like you were reading a proper Victorian novel, but it didn't rehash well known plots which was great. If there is one problem I had with the book is that it did read a little slow at times, and I do wish the

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book had delved a bit further in the details along with delving more into some of the characters. Overall though I really enjoyed this and would recommend this for lovers of Victorian dramas and fantasy and dragons and fans of the fantasy of manners genre. It was so good!

Stefan: while I learn the studies for this novel, I couldn't were much less excited. First of all, i attempt to stay away from myth with dragons simply because i feel they're the oldest cliché within the book, and secondly, it easily sounded too gimmicky. However, i used to be pleasantly surprised. Read the total evaluate on my web site some distance past Reality!

John Wiswell: enamel and Claw is a unique approximately dragons dwelling in an uptight Victorian-like culture, the place people have been principally vanquished and are actually legend. Having informed you the premise, allow me inform you issues approximately myself: i locate such a lot tales approximately non-human animals to be unbearably cheesy, and it'll take business energy emotional blackmail to get me to learn one other Jane Austen novel. That I loved the teeth and Claw lots continues to be a interest to me. Its hook is vintage Trollope: whilst the daddy of a kin dies, he wills his treasure to the least of his children, hoping to assist them. Then it subverts the Trollope, as different individuals of his relations arrive and consume an excessive amount of of his corpse, inflicting them to develop greater and improved after they have been already powerful. The least of his kids hence can't develop and protect themselves, and needs to depend on kindness of the underclass and navigating the dangers of marital culture, this means that their survival. The least flirtation may perhaps mark and wreck the daughters, within the dragon-world, either socially and physically. one of many novel's nice successes is seldom falling to the Berenstain Bears problem. so much fiction approximately anthropomorphized creatures provides them too many human trappings until eventually they're primarily people donning fur or wings. You get a web page of boilerplate discussion that sounds incredibly human ahead of the hackneyed reminder whilst the "spider-woman" flutters her 8 eyes. Jo Walton is much above this because of completely meshing her Victorian inspirations with the biology of its dragons. The patriarchy during this global is in part a social construct, yet ladies are bodily smaller, and as soon as made to "blush" via a mate, completely swap color, marked in order that they can't dodge judgment. instead of having animal stand-ins for a identified culture, the animal parts intensify and supply an alternate tackle sexist and classist problems. Even clinical terrors of the time are echoed, such start mortalities of the time echoing whilst a mother's lifestyles is in danger as the egg inside of her has cracked is slicing her insides. It harkens to these fears that Downtown Abbey continues to be calling on, whereas rendering them novel with the curious features of dragons. That's the place the magic comes from: while i'd quite often be pissed off with Romantic melodrama, the dragon-side renders it life-and-death. whilst i would tire of fifty-foot dragons posturing and intimidating every one other, they're sucked into their model of a courtroom system, repurposing their primal posturing for a pass judgement on and audience. the 2 strange angles will be shifted over and over, preserving issues creative. testimony to Walton as a writer, she saved arising with strange rules to the final fifty pages of the book, the place her bald-faced deal with of characters in jeopardy (no spoilers) we hadn't noticeable for too lengthy made me bust up laughing. But it's now not a comedy. It's essentially bizarre fiction, and laudable for it, yet it's frequently concerning the cruelties of a inflexible society, and the optimism of what stable humans can pull off in the event that they attempt and care adequate for every other. relatively in that optimism of the cultural underdog, i'll see why humans flock these old skool romances. And I'm high quality with seeing the charm

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– from a distance. cross me a few extra Walton, yet you could preserve the Victorians.

Ferdy: Spoilers! can see why the teeth and Claw was once defined because the satisfaction and Prejudice of the dragon world. there have been occasions the place I felt like i used to be examining an Austen novel, a truly weird and wonderful Austen novel with church going, hat wearing, excessive society, cannibal dragons.-Took some time to immerse into the tale and get used to the world. the start used to be relatively gradual and never a lot looked as if it would occur except loads of ready and monologuing. -The global development and surroundings used to be very extraordinary (for the main part). the various social classes, religion, family members dynamics, and the rights and privileges of females/males/aristocracy/servants heavily reflected that of the Victorian era, yet with a special dragon twist to them. there have been a few features of the realm notwithstanding which used to be tough to imagine, reminiscent of the dragons using trains/carriages, donning wigs and fancy hats, doing paperwork, and ingesting beer. It used to be too human - i do not understand how they have been capable of do part the issues they did once they had claws (which are not precisely dexterous). inspite of that though, all of it labored good enough. -There have been a few distinctive touches which i presumed have been brilliant. akin to the consuming of dragons via relatives after loss of life (as eating dragon flesh could lead them to more desirable and bigger), the dragon lords killing and consuming the susceptible dragons (even the babies) of their demesne, the parsons consuming the eyes of lifeless dragons as a few form of non secular ritual, the adult females completely blushing pink/red with any shut touch from a non-related male (and that inflicting every kind of shame and difficulties if unmarried), and the complete altering wig enterprise in courtroom (which used to be hilarious). All these little and never so little issues made the realm fairly attention-grabbing and rich.-Enjoyed the imperative arc/conflict of Daverak consuming his father-in-law's physique rather than letting Haner/Selendra/Avan take what they have been owed. It used to be nice the way it attached and drove the tale and characters together. -There used to be a a great deal of family members and non secular politics throughout, a few of it was once form of repetitive, yet generally it used to be quite fascinating to learn all in regards to the numerous politics, constitution and etiquette of the dragon society.-Most of the characters have been completely unlikeable, the one ones i actually cherished have been Felin, Sebeth and Berend. They have been effortless to root for, had good judgment and were not precocious little snowflakes. That said, i did not brain the unlikeable characters that much, so much of them have been entertaining. -I hated Haner and Selendra though, they have been so self-centered and horrid (especially with how they handled their sister Berend), i would not have minded that a lot in the event that they hadn't been completely dull as well. Their POV's particularly received the tale down for me, all their components have been unbelievably slow, whiny and dull.Haner's response to Berend's loss of life specifically irked me, she used to be extra focused on her personal difficulties than her sister loss of life in childbirth (I think i used to be intended to suppose sorry for her yet I didn't). She was once an entire cow. And Selendra used to be a monotonous Mary Sue (as a lot as dragons could be Mary Sues) who everybody fawned over. It was once purely her destiny spouse's mother (Exalt Benandi) who hated her, or even that wasn't pleasant due to the fact Selendra ended up placing her in her position through the end. Ugh, i used to be hoping that the Exalt might by some means fuck her over.-I sought after a few comeuppance for that rapey Frelt fucker, the very fact he ended up together with his dream spouse took the piss. I hated him greater than Daverak. -Thought it was once humorous how the yarge became out to be humans, I anticipated that to be the case, yet I enjoyed the way it

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was once proven on the finish with the Exalt Benandi being so completely terrified and disgusted while she observed the yarge ambassador (and how flat and small he was), it was once certainly my favorite scene.-What was once with these stones Selendra/Wontas/Sher observed when they escaped the cave? i presumed whatever may come of them yet not anything happened. have been they really yarge or dragons or a possibility or something?-How did dragons dance with out touching one another or being in shut proximity to every other? is not going to the entire adult females have grew to become red simply by dancing? Or was once the dancing performed at a miles distance or something? It wasn't ever explained. certainly an exciting learn for an individual who'd wish an Austen/cannibal dragon mash up of sorts.

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