

STAFF PICK

THE BEAST PLAYER

NOVEL BY NAHOKO UEHASHI

In the fantasy YA novel, *The Beast Player*, by Nahoko Uehashi, 10-year old Elin must escape her homeland after her mother – a skilled beast doctor to the kingdom’s military water serpents – is sentenced to death. She finds refuge with a kind beekeeper, and soon discovers that she can communicate with the Royal Beasts – majestic flying creatures and political symbol protecting the queen’s sovereignty. Elin’s unique skill soon pushes her into the centre of civil conflict and political turmoil as she struggles to prevent her beloved beasts from being used as tools of war. *The Beast Player* proved to be a pleasant surprise to my expectations. Unlike other YA novels that usually devote a large portion of its narrative on dramatic changes, romance or individual power, *The Beast Player* builds its fantastical world layer by layer in a steady and quiet pace. The

complexity of its society and questions about humanity’s coexistence with nature are revealed through Elin’s observations and reflections on the world around her. She is a character with a strong moral compass, but she isn’t foolishly blinded by it. She struggles with the guilt of having to choose between humanity and nature, sometimes even contradicting her past beliefs in this power dynamic. Elin’s coming-of-age story as she tries to find a place in the world for herself and her beloved animal friends is both relatable and realistic.

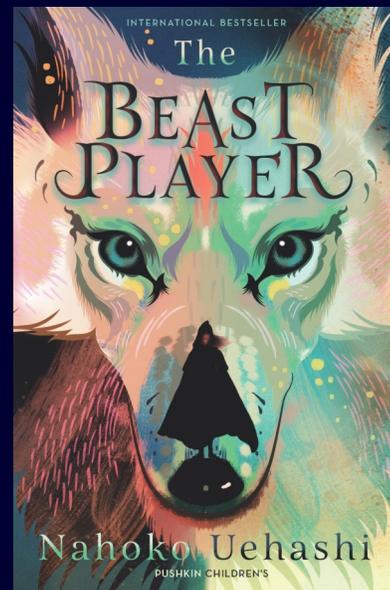
The book ends at a point that promises more to come. In the original Japanese, the series continues with two more books, and the English sequel, *The Beast Warrior* is planned for release July 2020. I can’t wait to know how the plot will further develop and how Elin finds the answers to the questions she posed in the first book.

– Haram, Library Assistant
June, 2020

ABOUT AUTHOR

Nahoko Uehashi (上橋 菜穂子) is a Japanese writer of fantasy titles, whose books have sold more than a million copies in her native Japan. She has won numerous awards, including the 2014 Hans Christian Andersen Award, which she won for her contribution to children's literature throughout her life. An associate professor at a Japanese university, she has a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology and studies indigenous peoples in Australia. She lives near Tokyo, Japan.

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