



## The Wings Upon Her Back

**Samantha Mills**

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After a long career as a warrior, a determined woman questions her sacrifices and unwavering obedience to a charismatic leader in *The Wings Upon Her Back*, Samantha Mills's thrilling fantasy debut.

Zenya's community is organized into five sects, each serving a different god. Zenya's parents are scholars—inquisitive, gentle people who are keepers of past wisdom. But Zenya dreams of becoming a winged warrior and runs away from home. Her rigorous training demands utter devotion to an alluring and fiery leader, Vodya. She braves painful surgeries to have mechanized wings implanted. Earning the title of Winged Zemolai, she turns away from her family and endures bruising tours of duty defending her community, sect, and leader.

The novel unfolds via two parallel storylines—Zenya as an eager teenager training to be a warrior, and her crisis of faith twenty-six years later when she is cast out from the warrior sect after showing mercy to an elderly worker. As an outcast, she joins with a group of rebels and begins to see Vodya in a new light—as an ambitious, dangerous autocrat. The intertwining threads culminate in an unforgettable ending whose battle parallels a pivotal battle fought years earlier when Zenya was a teenager in training.

The story raises riveting questions about the seductive influence of power, the roots of fascism, and the dangers of single-minded loyalty to a cause. It also portrays an accomplished woman grappling with questions of family, faith, and meaning: "Zemolai teetered on a precipice, and for the first time in her life she had no idea what waited below. So often, she had simply taken the leap."

*The Wings Upon Her Back* is a masterful fantasy novel in which a powerful woman confronts the threats of fascism, zealous faith, and disillusionment.

KRISTEN RABE (March / April 2024)

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