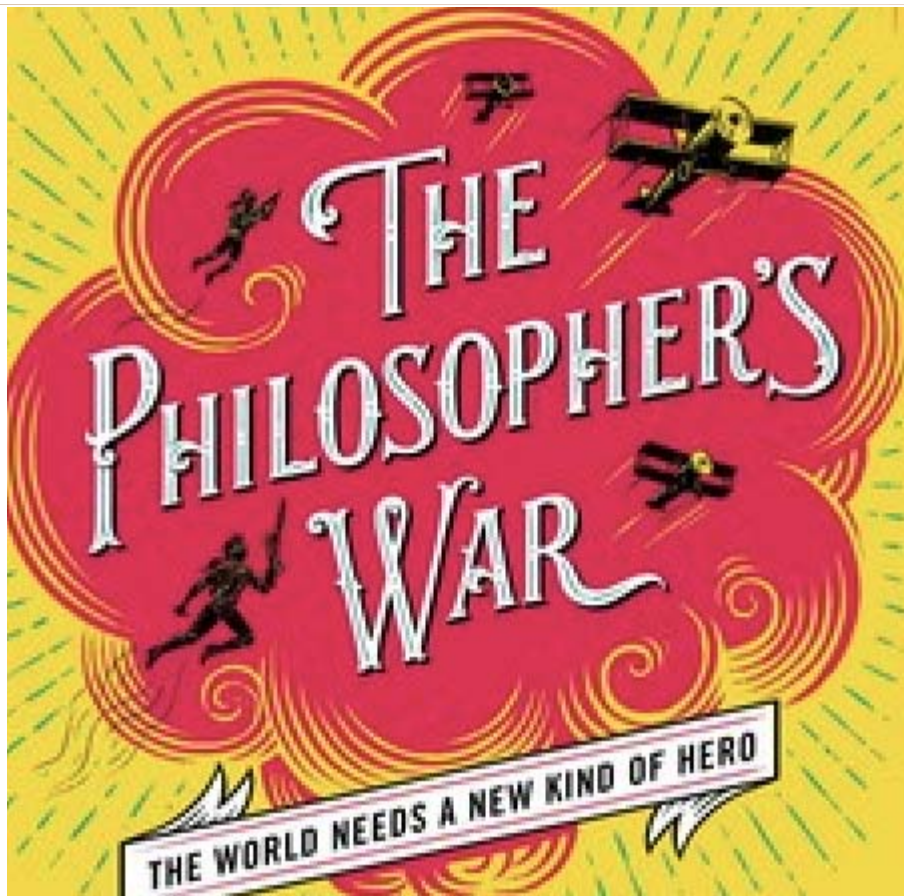


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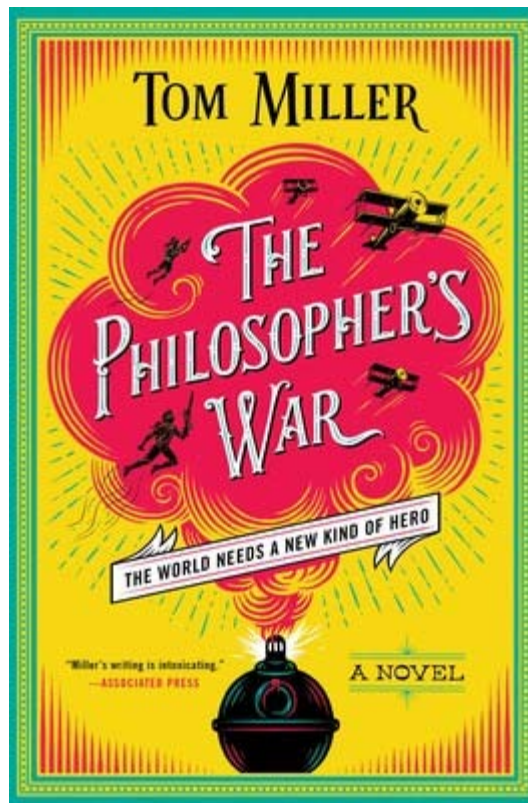
*In this Fantasy Spin on WWI, Women Can Fly...Literally*

July 16, 2019 Michael Giltz

In Tom Miller's clever fantasy series, the Great War is stumbling on and 18 year old Robert Weekes is determined to do his part. To Robert, that means one thing and one thing only: Rescue & Evacuation. In our world, that would have maybe meant driving an ambulance while risking life and limb to get the wounded from the front lines to a field hospital.

In the alternate universe of these books, R&E means Robert wants to be a flier, one of the "philosophers" who literally jumps in the air. Using their philosophical skills, they fly to the front lines, strap the wounded to their harnesses, and then fly out again, looking a lot like Superman in the process.

Well, everyone knows Robert is crazy. Men can't fly, at least not well enough to join the all-female R&E. Naturally, that doesn't stop Robert from pursuing his dream. In Miller's first book *The Philosopher's Flight*, Robert shows just enough promise for Radcliffe to admit him for training. He must endure the hazing and disdain of both the outside world and most of the women alongside whom he wants to work.



In the second book, *The Philosopher's War*, the military tosses Robert into the midst of battle, where an understaffed corps of women strain to meet the demands placed on them. After a few explain exactly what they'll do to Robert if he even *thinks* of looking at one of them sideways, the heat of battle and Robert's gumption convince them to treat him as just one of the girls.

*The Philosopher's War* is a new spin on an old story, a mildly fresh way of seeing what prejudice and exclusion can be like for an outsider, and a rousing tale that gets better and better as it goes along.

Miller fills in the details of this world by beginning each chapter with excerpts from memoirs, histories of the Civil War (in which female philosophers commit what we'd consider atrocities to end the damn thing), letters, private communications, and even textbooks written years after the events in which Robert is taking part.

Quite quickly, we learn a few things. What philosophers do isn't magic, it's a science we don't understand very well yet. But because women do it best, men in power fear and despise them. Radicals want to kill any woman who does it, much as they burned women for being witches when practicing medicine. Meanwhile, radical philosophers don't wait for the police and enact their own revenge.

Robert finds himself in the midst of all this, along with debates over genocide, weapons of mass destruction, mutiny, and more.

Naomi Novik added dragons to the Napoleonic Era in her *Temeraire* series and wondered what military strategy would be like if that were true. Miller does the same in *The Philosopher's War*, deftly mapping out the possibilities of philosophy, which include, along with flying, the ability to transport people and materials

hundreds of miles in one fell swoop and a thousand other niceties.

While the story stays focused on basic training in book one and the actual war in book two, Miller lays out how people have used and abused these powers over the decades and why Robert and women like him (it's a point of honor that his fellow fliers call him "miss" and "Ma'am") might refuse this time around to allow generals who want to win at any cost to misuse the Philosophers' unique skills and powers.

Miller laid lot of groundwork in book one, which may be why I enjoyed *The Philosopher's War* more. A fan of fantasy could read book two on its own, though I wouldn't quite recommend that. The first book is good and the second one very good indeed. Will there be a third? They keep calling this the Philosophers Series, but it seems to me the story has wrapped up quite nicely.

Of course, whether Miller writes another book or not, this won't be the end of it. Movies, or more likely a TV series, will be in the cards. It's got a winning if imperfect young hero, magic, some great roles for men (like the befuddled head of Radcliffe who seems nuttier than a fruitcake until his daft pronouncements start predicting the future), and a TON of great roles for women. In fact, it has so many good female characters that the performers would lock up the acting Emmys for years to come.

Female generals run the entire Philosophers arm of the military. Hard-bitten women curse and argue strategy with one another. Grizzled veterans and wide-eyed kids play cards, swap stories, break in the newbies, and give the lone guy for miles around a good-natured but hard time of it. All of this takes place against the heartbreaking backdrop of the War To End All Wars. It's the perfect fictional recipe for a world hungry for representations of strong, complex women. I'm no wizard, but I can make a prediction: future books or not, this isn't the last we've heard from the Philosophers or Tom Miller.

**(Simon & Schuster; July 16)**

Tags: Naomi Novik, Temeraire, *The Philosopher's Flight*, *The Philosopher's War*, Tom Miller

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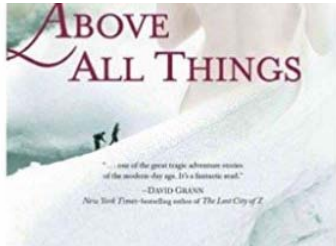


## Michael Giltz

Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in New York City covering all areas of entertainment, politics, sports and more. He has written extensively for the New York Post, New York Daily News, New York Magazine, The Advocate, Out, Huffington Post, Premiere Magazine,

Entertainment Weekly, BookFilter, USA Today and the Los Angeles Times. He co-hosts the long-running podcast Showbiz Sandbox.

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