



# The Root

*Na'amen Gobert Tilahun*

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## **The Root** Na'amen Gobert Tilahun

A dark, gritty urban fantasy debut set in modern-day San Francisco, filled with gods, sinister government agencies, and worlds of dark magic hidden just below the surface.

When a secret government agency trying to enslave you isn't the biggest problem you're facing, you're in trouble.

Erik, a former teen star living in San Francisco, thought his life was complicated; having his ex-boyfriend in jail because of the scandal that destroyed his career seemed overwhelming. Then Erik learned he was Blooded: descended from the Gods.

Struggling with a power he doesn't understand and can barely control, Erik discovers that a secret government agency is selling off Blooded like lab rats to a rival branch of preternatural beings in 'Zebub—San Francisco's mirror city in an alternate dimension.

Lil, a timid apprentice in 'Zebub, is searching for answers to her parents' sudden and mysterious deaths. Surrounded by those who wish her harm and view her as a lesser being, Lil delves into a forgotten history that those in power will go to dangerous lengths to keep buried.

What neither Erik nor Lil realize is that a darkness is coming, something none have faced in living memory. It eats. It hunts. And it knows them. In *The Root*, the dark and surging urban fantasy debut from Na'amen Tilahun, two worlds must come together if even a remnant of one is to survive.

## **The Root Details**

Date : Published June 7th 2016 by Night Shade

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Author : Na'amen Gobert Tilahun

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Genre : Fantasy, Urban Fantasy, Fiction, Lgbt, Glbt, Queer

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# From Reader Review The Root for online ebook

## Sarah says

I loved every moment of this book! I can't even write a proper review, I can only squeeeeeee.

highlights: incredible world building  
dynamic characters  
excellent use of shifting perspectives  
hella queer ♥♥  
hella brown and black  
sick ass monsters (not monsters?)  
action packed!!!  
moving as hell (I cried in a pizza parlor)  
mystery!

I am eager for the second book in the series. Cannot wait but sadly must wait.

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## Monica **\*\*can't read fast enough\*\*** says

Tilahun has created a unique world that features diverse characters and fantastical otherworldly beings that are so out there that I had trouble visualizing what they looked like. There were creatures that were translucent blobs and even beings that are covered in eyes. These creatures also had unique ways of communicating which encompassed everything from grunting to wind currents. I found those characteristics a bit much, but that is purely personal preference.

I absolutely loved that the main characters are ethnically, racially, and sexually diverse. Gender, race, and sexuality do not define the characters and there are no stereotypical characterizations to be found here. The diversity is simply part of more realistic reflection of the diversity of the world we live in. Erik's problems do not all stem from the fact that he's gay, but rather from the fact that his father wanted to control the trajectory of his career and didn't put any emphasis on what Erik wanted for himself. Erik's family dynamics and his heritage are part of the background in book one, but it is clear that they will become more significant as his powers continue to manifest and strengthen as the series progresses.

San Francisco's parallel city is Zebub and I enjoyed the corresponding storyline that is developing there. Lil is thrust into the role of sole caregiver for her younger siblings after a horrific incident. Lil is left struggling to juggle her responsibilities to her Holder mentor while having to become the adult and provider for her family. Lil is also manifesting powers and abilities that are surprising to her mentor as well as herself, which causes her problems with many people around her. There's a darkness that is slowly consuming her world and Lil is caught up in the fight to stop it.

Although I really enjoyed the plot of this story, my inability to fully visualize the alternate world and the creatures that inhabit it made it difficult for me to fully immerse myself into the story. I had to pause several times and reread descriptions in order to picture the beings being described and I'm still not sure that I have it right. However, I enjoyed the plot enough that I will grab book two when it is released. I just hope that I will be able to get a better grip on the world being built by Tilahun because the overall story is very good!

You can find more from me at

•(♥).•\*Monlatable Book Reviews\*•.(♥)•

<http://www.monlatablereviews.com/>

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### **Matt Beams says**

This is an incredibly interesting, smart, and fun-to-read book. I found it on the Afro-Futurist table at Bluestockings Bookstore in NYC, and I was embarrassed as someone who loves reading, sci-fi, and spec fic, and who tries to be woke, that I had never heard of Afro-futurism. Well, I read the back and looked at the cover, and was sold.

I'm not going to tell you about the plot really, but if you like magic, fantasy, intrigue, action, adventure, flirting, parallel worlds, a different way of looking at things, or just plain fun, then you should pick up this book.

Also, the book is filled with queer and trans characters who are just going about their lives seamlessly woven into the fabric of the book. What I mean by that, for example, is there's a character who turns out to be trans. There's no announcement of it, merely notice of it when he's getting dressed, by a description of what he's wearing. I'm sure there are lots of books like this, but this is the first one (!) I've ever read with a trans character as merely a part of the story not as the focus or worse as the villain (don't get me started on Helen Oyeyemi's wretched ending of *\_Boy, Snow, Bird\_*).

I can't recommend this book enough. And, the author was even gracious enough to tweet back at me that part two will be out June 2017!

Read it!

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### **Tiffani Martin says**

Oh my sweet baby Jesus why lawd? Why? I can't even do a review because I'm so emotional right now *and* I have to wait for the next book? My heart hurts.

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### **Alyssa Joy says**

This book was incredible. It held unique fantasy aspects while also bringing in representation for identities typically left out of mainstream media, let alone fantasy. I could not put the book down, except to take moments to revel on how beautiful it was to read. I was drawn into the worlds and abilities of these characters that were connected into our own common mythos and religions. The characters are relatable and most other series would be lucky to have even one of them. I'm excited to see where the story goes as San Francisco and Zebub finally start to collide.

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## **MsArdychan says**

I first learned about *The Root*, by Na'amen Tilahun, at the Bay Area Book Festival in June of this year. I was attending a discussion about YA Fantasy and the author was on the panel.

Honestly, I was there to fangirl over Victoria Schwab, but I left being very excited by all the authors' books. Afterwards, there was a book signing, and I wound up getting *The Root*, *A Gathering Of Shadows* (V.E. Schwab), and *A Natural History Of Dragons* (Marie Brennan). I have finally had time to sit down and read the first of these books, *The Root*, and it is a fun, diverse, fantasy with parallel universes, secret organizations, and creepy creatures!

What I liked:

Diversity:

It was refreshing to read a book populated with so much diversity. There are gay characters, straight characters, people who are transgendered, and a rainbow of ethnicities. Living in the Bay Area where part of the book is set, I can tell you that this is not political correctness, this IS San Francisco. I also loved that they were fully-fleshed individuals with many aspects to their personas. Their gender, sexual preference, or ethnicity was not the only distinguishing characteristic. They were not treated as tokens, but as people!

Settings:

I have to use the plural because there are two different universes in this book: Zebub and Earth. There are supposed to be mirrors of each other (or perhaps distant futures...). I didn't really see the similarities, but I did enjoy how unusual and exotic Zebub was from San Francisco. In Zebub, there are eleven courts and their palaces are called Hives. Each court seems to have a specific emphasis (The Court of Sorrow and Riches, The Court of Pain and Solitude etc.) and each palace is filled with eye-catching details such as special rooms or wall that are alive! When the action bounces to San Francisco, the author uses creepy industrial complexes and the towering skyscrapers of the Financial District to menacing effect.

Creepy Creatures:

I loved how creative Na'amen Tilahun got with the various creatures that populated Zebub. I can't fully describe many of them, but let's just say many don't resemble humans at all. I often think about this when I read books that are set on other planets or universes: why would the life-forms look anything like humans? Some of the creatures are gases, or collections of objects, others do look like animals we would recognize such as dragons, or giant insects. This was so well done in this book!

What I was mixed about:

Exposition:

The author obviously has a fertile imagination and a need to describe everything to the reader. But I found it confusing to keep track of the various factions, alliances, courts, and names (some of which were so similar, I was frustrated).

Perhaps a glossary at the end of the book would have been helpful to help me sort out who was who. So

much was going on that did need explanations. But I think some of the details would have been better expressed on a need to know basis. It would have made for a faster-paced book.

Overall, there is so much to recommend in this novel: great characters, new worlds, alliances and betrayals... The end was a cliffhanger so I hope that the next book comes out soon. I will be eager to read it.

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### **Sunny says**

LOVED this book! Find me in person and I'll tell you all about why.

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### **Lisa says**

Oh, man. I was so mad at myself when I finished this book because it is SO GOOD. And now I have to wait for the next book to come out and I hate having to wait. I'd rather start a series that is already finished, especially when it reaches the level of complexity this one has. On the other hand, would not mind re-reading this book because SO GOOD. Imperfect, but lovable characters. Beautiful, beautiful world building that I can see expanding beyond the scope of the book. Multi-race. Multi-gender identity. Multi-sexuality. And few to zero apologies for any of it.

Tilahun fearlessly plunges straight into how the world came about concepts and non-human cultures and then smashes those non-human cultures that have little respect for the humans that live among them right up against a version of our world. So delicious! I can see this book being classified as a teenager book because of the age of the characters. It does not deserve to have its audience limited like that. I would have loved this as a teenager and I clearly love it now.

I may. Have to buy each of the books in this series as they come out and wait for a really long time until its done to read them all at once. So let's hope neither the author nor I die while I'm waiting for this.

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### **Anya says**

Omg this book is so amazing! The worlds are complex and fascinating, the magic is unique and terrifying, the creatures are even more unique and terrifying, and the cast of characters is so diverse they actually reflect the real world! If you are looking for fantasy with astounding world-building, characters you will love, and the diversity that is sorely lacking in genre fiction, don't miss The Root.

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### **Brittany Makufka says**

Well... I'm not really sure what to say about this book.

I got more into it as I read it, but I'm still left with a "meh" feeling about it.

I LOVE the freshness, that it's different, the creativity that went into the world building, the diversity. All of that is really, really lovely. And I think that's what kept me reading it.

What I struggled with was the writing. There were times that I had to re-read sentences or paragraphs again

because I didn't understand who was talking, or what was going on. It definitely feels like a first book. I really just wish the writing could have been more polished.

Also, this really felt like two books mashed into one. I was waiting and waiting for the Erik and Lil to finally meet up - but they never did? The two worlds finally started to meet up at the end, but just barely. I also enjoyed the Zebub story line a lot more than the San Fran one. I had a hard time caring about Erik and the others. Lil and her world were much more interesting. This is also one of those books where you just have to go with it. It gets \*weird\* - but I like that. That's what brings the freshness to me.

I'm not sure if I'll continue with this. I'll see if the characters grow on me at all.

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## **Reggie says**

I've never had a book intentionally make me as angry as this one did, in a good way.

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## **Kristen Burns says**

### **4 Stars**

#### **Review:**

\*I received a copy of this book from the publisher. This has not influenced my review.\*

This book was a refreshing, diverse urban fantasy story that managed to stand out while still capturing the kick-butt, monster-fighting essence that I think many readers look for in the UF genre!

First let's talk about our protagonist, Erik. In this book, there are people who are Blooded---descendants of old, powerful beings and have powers based on their bloodline. Erik is one such person. He's a berserker, and a fairly unusual one for how he's able to think and calculate while fighting instead of just losing himself to the rage. I loved the berserker aspect because it's a familiar power, but one you don't see often. I also just liked Erik himself. He was clever and a good person who wanted to help others, but he was still imperfect enough to be realistic.

The other main character was Lil, a human in another realm. I didn't connect to her quite as much because she was very serious and stoic, but she was smart and capable and hardworking and cared a lot about her siblings and about saving her world from the darkness.

But talking about the characters brings me to my one real issue with this book: too many POVs---twenty in total. Jumping around so much makes it harder for me to sink into a story and to get to know any of the characters well. It was also hard to keep track of whose head I was in sometimes. That being said, some of them were only a page or two out of the entire book, which meant we got more from the main characters. Also, the POVs were clearly separated. So I still thought the book was good; I just think it could've been better, and I could've connected to the characters more, with fewer POVs. I know I'm not the only one who dislikes too many POVs, but my advice is to not let this stop you from giving the book a chance if it otherwise sounds like something you'd like.

Back to positive things now... there was so much diversity/inclusivity! Two Black main characters, at least one of whom was gay. And there were more POC and queer characters scattered throughout the story and the

worlds, including Asian, non-binary, trans, lesbian, bi, and more. I was confused by changing pronouns sometimes (e.g. one character was sometimes 'they', sometimes 'he', but in that character's POV it was 'ze'), but maybe some of them just used multiple pronouns. The story also touched upon things like racism and homophobia.

The world-building for the other realm was unique and interesting with other beings and magic and a different society. I maybe didn't quite understand everything about it, but I understood enough to enjoy it. I especially loved how not-human some of the beings were. Some were clouds of mist, or tunnels of sand, or a wheel of flesh covered in eyes. Some communicated with smells and other senses rather than any sort of spoken language. And Arel and Jagi's POV chapters were a surprising hit for me because I loved learning more about their... species? Like how they had openings on their body where they could extend or retract tentacles, and they could communicate with each other in a more nuanced and private way by entwining their tentacles with each others'. The world-building for our world was cool too with different characters having different powers.

As for the plot, it had some of the action and fight scenes you'd expect, but it was more about Erik coming into his powers and learning about the supernatural, Lil navigating the dangerous political landscape of the Ruling Courts while trying to find a way to stop the deadly darkness, and various other characters and their plans and machinations.

Overall, though I did have an issue with too many POVs, I loved the diversity, the creativity of the magic and creatures, and the refreshingly different urban fantasy story, and I feel invested enough that I want to continue the series!

#### **Recommend For:**

Anyone who likes urban fantasy, POC and LGBT+ characters, interesting not-human beings, other realms, and a wide range of POVs.

#### **Original Review @ Metaphors and Moonlight**

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#### **Initial Thoughts:**

Diverse, refreshing urban fantasy! Full review soon.

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#### **Frogqueen says**

The biggest problem with *The Root* is that the next book is nowhere near being out.  
The biggest strength of *The Root* is... do I HAVE to pick? There's a lot to like.

Still, if I had to pick, it would be the way that despite an immense cast of POV characters, I cared out them, and I keep thinking about them after finishing the book. *The Root* does an impressive job of finding room for its wide cast to have complicated feelings and complicated lives with complicated families. I enjoyed the nascent friendships and romantic elements, but I love that family in all its complicated ways is so central to this story.

I appreciate that despite having a split narrative (something that often bugs me), I actually wanted to know



what that other person saw or what was going in the other world. I like that the characters are generally sensible and when they do the wrong thing it's mostly for a good ( or at least intelligible ) reason. I like that despite a lot of "tada! Hypercompetent magically powered child of prophecy," Erik, Lil ( and everybody else ) have problems that feel real, important and not trivially susceptible to a five minute conversation and a punch or a muttered spell.

I enjoyed the extensive and intriguing world building though in a few places I felt like some of the cultural exposition could have been expanded.

Of course, all of the characters and their environments do not in themselves make a novel. They've got to interact, and I found the complex plots and counterplots compelling.

There is one minor heads up to go with all this love, which is that there is a good bit of (sometimes graphic) violence. I'm rather squeamish and still found that the violence was contextually appropriate (and plot relevant). I appreciated that it was not gratuitously sexualized. Still, it's a thing, and there are a few scenes that ... I won't know what I think about until I see how their knock-on effects are or aren't addressed in the next book.

In trying to explain *The Root* to the spouse, I've talked about Mary Gentle and Malinda Lo and Steven Universe... but really *The Root* is its own thing, and anything I say to describe it is probably misleading.

So go read it already!

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**mg says**

4.5 stars

Best "reveal" of a trans character in YA Fiction!!!

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**Spracherwerb says**

Oh God, where do I begin? I have so many mixed feelings about this book that I have to leave a comment. It was promising as much as it was badly written. The parts taking place in Zebub were written greatly all in all, and for the most part the world building there was believable and well done. Apart from some minor things such as randomly appearing places in the end (in my opinion, it just doesn't work well if you introduce a new place by name and then describe it in one sentence as if you were reading a travel guide or a history book. I want to feel it. Not feeling like I'm reading a Wikipedia article).

Then there's the San Francisco gang.

...

\*long sigh\*

...

It started out so well and promising. It's your everyday teenager-finds-out-that-they-are-blessed-with-some-sort-of-power trope, but that is what we are in for and I will not complain about that. However, the author tried too many things at once. Nearly all of the characters get their own POV chapters, but with a book this size it means that the chapters are mostly only very few pages long. You just barely get a feel for a character

before the POV changes. You don't really get to hear their motives, their intentions, their plans. So it happens that a character gets something to reflect upon themselves, but it feels so out-of-context that you're wondering why this piece of inner musings has been included in the first place. Characters seem to change sides or plans randomly (which I assume doesn't happen, we just don't get to see their train of thoughts). It is due to this that Matthias' growing interest for Eric feels so forced? Why is he so head over heels for him? The Organisation had needed much more pages to be described properly. It all happens so quick that I don't understand everyone's motives. Tae would have been a perfect traitor but no - he forgot his years of training on like two pages.

And the diversity. I came here for homosexual main characters, and I welcome every depiction of non-normative sexuality (since I'm not heterosexual myself and would like to get away from every-romance-ever). But here we have it all (homo, trans, bi, nonbinary, lesbian, ...you name it), just randomly thrown into 400 pages and it just does not feel real. The Organisation is not a LGBT+ group - it's unrealistic to randomly have such a diverse group of characters. As much as it saddens me to say this.

I have ranted a lot now, but I also enjoyed much. The first half of the book was definitely better; I appreciate trying to have many diverse characters at once. I like Byron and am curious to see what he'll be up to. And the cover itself alone deserves 5 stars.

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