



## Blood Bound

**Keshia Swaim**

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*Swaim expertly weaves realism and fantasy elements together to produce a novel both familiar and foreign.*

Dealing with self-esteem issues and rising to a challenge are themes often contained in young-adult fiction. *Blood Bound* avoids the pitfalls of YA fantasy—no maudlin characters in a boring travelogue here. Instead, Keshia Swaim spins a scintillating tale of a young woman realizing her true powers while learning to navigate the labyrinth of her relationships.

*Blood Bound* follows Brielle Reed, seventeen years old, half fae, and about to start her first year of college in Texas. She is also a newly developed mind-reader still practicing how to control her mental “radio.” Still coming to terms with her fae legacy (she learned of her gifts months before starting college), her life is further complicated by the fact that her boyfriend, Alex, is distancing himself from her, bit by bit. She’s still learning about fae politics, and college barely begins before she’s told that the conflict between the two factions in the fae world is heating up. Brielle has a lot on her plate.

Swaim layers magical powers and fae conflicts between the Seelie and Unseelie Courts to the realistic teen angst in Brielle and her roommate, Pamie. Family and romantic relationships, past and present, feature in the novel and provide depth for the main characters. Brielle’s world is different from other worlds in this vein, but the differences are effective and subtly employed.

Brielle is a smart young woman who is an effective embodiment of someone reaching toward adulthood. The scene in which Brielle uses her newest and most powerful gift (even though she hasn’t yet mastered it) is riveting; it contains the familiar (rising to a challenge) and the foreign (discovering a personal gift that has mighty consequences when used).

The believability of characters is the most important element in YA fantasy, and this is where Swaim’s skills shine most brightly. She wraps the story in an atmosphere of the excitement and fear of leaving home for the first time, with a zing of dark doings and the eternal human search for a place to belong.

The novel’s ending leaves enough room for at least a second volume. Here’s to book two. Meanwhile, this one is highly recommended.

J. G. STINSON (Winter 2014)

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