

Devoted

Shirlene Obuobi

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Abigail Lingston, the teenaged heroine of Shirlene Obuobi's *Devoted*, lives a mundane life with her tough and caring foster mother Willy. But dreams of flying and falling terrorize Abigail and, on one occasion, her nightmares become reality. Abigail, her body overtaken by a violent, raging entity not herself, beats up her annoying roommate. In her attempt to escape this terrifying possession, Abigail jumps out the window, catapulting herself from this reality into an alien one, Fosha.

Fosha is a strange world, with eerily deserted streets, hover bikes, and citizens who can temporarily grow wings. Abigail's guides in this unusual universe are a host of colorful characters, including one who seems like a version of her own foster mother. Abigail learns that she is the Heiress, destined to purge Fosha of the Reefers, which are evil emanations of emotion similar to the one that took hold of her. Our protagonist must quickly orient herself to the foreign ways of Fosha and learn all she can about the nightmarish Reefers if she is to successfully defeat them and make Fosha safe again.

Devoted is Obuobi's first novel, and it is the recipient of the iUniverse Editor's Choice designation, which means that an editorial evaluation has deemed *Devoted* to be of high quality. Obuobi is a high-school student with interests in writing and reading fantasy, but her plot structure and pacing show skill usually seen in more experienced works.

Impressive for a freshman effort, *Devoted* stands above most self-published fantasies in terms of quality. Obuobi's writing—vivid and descriptive, but never heavy or plodding—immediately immerses readers in the tumult of Abigail's inner life. Obuobi gets the story moving from the first page and keeps the pace fleet and entertaining as Abigail drops into Fosha and tries to find her way around. From the moment a malicious Reefer seizes temporary control of Abigail, narrative tension mounts, impelling readers to share Abigail's panic, curiosity, and desire to figure things out.

Devoted does have its weak points. The writing can be overdramatic, with Abigail feeling all emotions to the extreme. Sometimes, when the author tries to be poetic, her phrasing takes an awkward, confusing turn. However, the strength of the story and the propulsive forward momentum of the plot do much to smooth out these difficulties. Obuobi's already promising style can only improve with time.

As an unusual spin on the fantasy save-the-world trope, *Devoted* will appeal most to pre-teen and teen readers who may take Obuobi's example and prove that they, too, have an exciting tale to tell.

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