

The Blood: The Stone's Blade, Book One

Allynn Riggs

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Allynn Riggs's *The Blood* mixes science fiction and fantasy to good effect in a tale laced with humor, tragedy, and romance.

The fates of two worlds hang in the balance when the Lrakiran pilot Renloret is sent on a mission to the planet Teramar to return a former Stone Singer's child whose blood is the only cure for the plague decimating Lrakiran women. Renloret's spacecraft crashes on the northern continent, and he is the only survivor. Blade champion Ani and her telepathic dog, Kela, investigate the crash site, find Renloret, and help him recover from his injuries. What they learn about each other leads them to a confrontation with an unbalanced military man and the truth about Renloret's home planet.

Themes prevalent in *The Blood* are skillfully rendered, and its heavy topics prompt much reflection. The consequences of power when it is used for personal gain, the effects of culture shock, and the undeniable power of love in all forms inform various parts of the novel, though sections that focus on such topics are subtle rather than preachy.

Unique verbiage helps situate the audience in the book's otherworldly environments almost immediately, as with the frustrated exclamatory use of "Blades!"; sometimes, however, there is a bit too much internal reflection included. World-building, including insights into particular worldviews, is accomplished efficiently, and the nature of the stones comes through poetically, though sometimes emphasis on drawing bigger connections inhibits scenes. This is true of a scene at a village social event, where the text exhibits an obvious love for dance through its metaphors, though this twenty-plus-page scene is perhaps stretched out too long.

Characters throughout are rendered with depth and complexity, and the nuances of their backstories play out in important ways through the narrative. Previous events in Ani's life resulted in her development of PTSD, which is revealed in just the right place and helps in making sense of her avoidance of combat. Similarly, traumatic events weaken her desire for revenge and cause her to make key, life-threatening mistakes. Riggs shows trauma's effects on Ani with grace and compassion. Less complex individuals are also rendered well, as with military men driven primarily by a sense of patriotism. Renloret's interest in diplomacy keeps him from being just another bullheaded, violent soldier.

The Blood is the beginning of an adventure that portends the further growth of Ani and Renloret's relationship and the development of diplomatic relations between their two worlds. Riggs has created a world both familiar and strange, and is in good company with the best science fiction and fantasy.

J. G. STINSON (May 12, 2016)

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