

Unearthed

Karen Seymour

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Zombies, vampires, and werewolves, good-bye. Seymour's original mythos sets this fast-moving fantasy apart.

Unearthed, Karen Seymour's fast-moving fantasy debut, tells the story of a young woman discovering her own identity while uncovering a strange, secret society of supernatural beings. It is a story of loss and regret, as well as victory and pride.

Gemma Pointe is a young person on the cusp of maturity, a self-doubting college student who is just beginning to realize that her relationship with the cute, funny, musically talented boy next door might be something more than a childhood friendship. Unfortunately, she's not just another girl next door. Her past includes not only tragedy but mystery, and now a grim, hulking stranger has appeared in her life, dropping menacing hints that she is fundamentally different from everyone around her. Gemma is an "Essen," or supernatural, and as she approaches her twenty-first birthday, she will undergo fearsome and painful changes. Worse yet, her very existence will become a deadly danger to everyone around her.

Gemma is not the first fantasy protagonist to reluctantly receive supernatural gifts she'd rather not have, or to discover the existence of a hidden world inhabited by strange and magical beings. What sets *Unearthed* apart is Seymour's invention of an original mythos. Rather than relying on familiar fantasy tropes like elves, faeries, vampires, or wizards, Seymour introduces her protagonist to a small society of supernatural beings who follow rules that are a complete mystery, and whose nature and motives are revealed only gradually, at great cost to Gemma and her loved ones. For example, Gemma's ignorance of the Essen's hereditary enemies causes the deaths of two individuals, including a close relative, before she figures out what is happening.

Some of the laws and gifts of the Essen may come across as oddly arbitrary or suspiciously convenient to the plot. This includes a highly unusual gift of Gemma's that is not even recognized until near the end of the book, when it becomes a critical plot point.

The short chapters and propulsive action keep the story moving rapidly, and Gemma is an interesting protagonist: well-intentioned; slow to trust, but devoted to those she loves; brave to the point of foolhardiness; and naively fallible in ways that sometimes have disastrous consequences.

Many questions are left unanswered at the end of *Unearthed*. Presumably, curious readers will find answers to some of these questions in later books in the series. If the first installment is any indication, Gemma's journey will be an entertaining ride.

BRADLEY A. SCOTT (March 4, 2014)

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