



Tithe: A Modern Faerie Tale

By Holly Black

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Welcome to the realm of very scary faeries!

Sixteen-year-old Kaye is a modern nomad. Fierce and independent, she travels from city to city with her mother's rock band until an ominous attack forces Kaye back to her childhood home. There, amid the industrial, blue-collar New Jersey backdrop, Kaye soon finds herself an unwilling pawn in an ancient power struggle between two rival faerie kingdoms -- a struggle that could very well mean her death.

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Tithe: A Modern Faerie Tale By Holly Black Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Sixteen-year-old Kaye Fierch is not human, but she doesn't know it. Sure, she knows she's interacted with faeries since she was little--but she never imagined she was one of them, her blond Asian human appearance only a magically crafted cover-up for her true, green-skinned pixie self. First-time author Holly Black explores Kaye's self-discovery and dual worlds in her riveting, suspenseful novel *Tithe: A Modern Faerie Tale*. The book has its faults: it slips into shock-value mode; the descriptions are often overwritten (sunset on the water looks like the sun slit his wrists in a bathtub); the language is overly, unnecessarily explicit; and the writing often unpolished. Still, the story's pull is undeniable, and readers under its spell will be hard-pressed to put the book down.

The novel begins in a bar in Philly, where Kaye's alcoholic rock-singer mother's boyfriend tries to kill her. For their own safety, mother and daughter quickly move back to grandma's on the New Jersey shore where Kaye grew up. This ugly turn of events was all rigged by the Faerie world, as it turns out, a world Black describes in deliciously vivid, if rather overblown, detail. Kaye, a drinking, smoking, foul-mouthed high school dropout in the land of mortals, soon finds herself embroiled--as a human sacrifice, no less--in a battle between Faerieland's Seelie and more malevolent Unseelie courts. The beautiful, mysterious knight Roiben, torn between worlds himself, falls in love with Kaye--the brave, clever changeling--against his better judgment. Throughout the electrifying journey to the horrific underworld of this modern faerie fantasy, teen readers will relate to a hard-luck tough girl who feels alienated, discovers her best qualities in the worst of circumstances, and finally finds a place between worlds where she can feel at home. (Ages 13 and older) --

Karin Snelson

From Publishers Weekly

Tripping the dark fantastic with newcomer Black means pixie dust may very well include blood spatter, sharp thorns and bits of broken glass. At the center of this edgy novel is Kaye Fierch, a 16-year-old "Asian blonde" who spends most of her time taking care of a would-be rock star mom. When her mom's latest boyfriend turns homicidal, they return to Gram's house at the New Jersey shore, where Kaye hooks up with childhood friend Janet and her gay brother, Corny Stone. Stark images ripple through the third-person narrative, offering clues to Kaye's internal state (e.g., "She loved the serene brutality of the ocean"). A covert sexual overture from Janet's boyfriend precedes Kaye's nighttime encounter at the edge of the woods, where she meets and rescues Roiben, a mysterious Black Knight with silver hair. Throughout, the author subtly connects Kaye's awakening sexual feelings in the real world and Roiben's sudden appearances. Kaye soon discovers that she is a changeling--and that her one-time "imaginary" faerie playmates want her to pretend to be a human, so they can use her as the Tithe ("the sacrifice of a beautiful and talented mortal") to earn their freedom for seven years. The author's Bosch-like descriptions of the Unseelie Court, with its Rackham-on-acid denizens, and the exquisite faeries haunt as well as charm. When fate intervenes, sudden tragedy teaches Kaye about the high cost of straddling the faerie and human worlds (and sets the stage for a possible sequel). A gripping read. Ages 12-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 9 Up-Kaye is 16 when she finally learns why she's such a strange young woman: she's a changeling pixie under a spell. A move home to the New Jersey shore brings her back in touch with her childhood friends, the solitary fey, who want to end their servitude to the higher-born faeries by foiling the sacrifice of human blood known as the Tithe. Kaye offers to masquerade as a human for the Tithe and is swept into a

complicated net of politics and treason between two rival courts of faeries. Grim scenes from Kaye's life in the human world pile up at the beginning of the story in what initially seems a gratuitous manner (her mother is almost stabbed by her current boyfriend, Kaye steals for thrills, a new acquaintance tries to rape her), but the details all have explanations later on in the equally grim world of the faeries. The plot moves quickly, and the secondary characters are appealing, if not always entirely believable. Occasional awkward changes in point of view won't discourage readers who enjoy dark, edgy fantasy. However, the excessive use of obscenities adds little to character development. The greatest strength of the story lies in the settings, particularly the descriptions of the debased Unseelie Court.

Beth Wright, Fletcher Free Library, Burlington, VT

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Thomas Obrien:

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Matthew Sewell:

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