

BLOOD TIES, Book One of the Castings Trilogy by Pamela Freeman

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Orbit (Hachette Australia) September 2007 Blood Ties is the first book in an adult fantasy trilogy by Pamela Freeman, who has previously written young adult novels. The world Freeman constructs is essentially adult in nature, although her two main protagonists, Ash and Bramble, are young. The writing is crisp and clean, making reading easy. The structure of Blood Ties is slightly different from your average fantasy, as the plot scrambles forth like a vine with shoots and leaves hanging from it. Freeman ventures into asides from various characters' perspectives, which in turn give insight into the world or a character's behaviour. This has positive and negative aspects. These asides provide depth to the characters and enhance the world building. At the same time, however, they can detract from the overarching plot, making it drag slightly in places. The world of Blood Ties was once populated by a dark haired race, long since conquered from the North and now ruled by warlords. The original inhabitants have become Travellers, a despised race of people who are unwelcome in their own land. Life is harsh for these people. Traveller women can be raped and there is no recourse for them in justice. Husbands and fathers can only grit their teeth. Yet in a world dominated by power hungry and brutal warlords, it is another Traveller, Saker, who has the potential to create havoc with his sorcery. Bent on revenge, will he unleash his power? Both Ash and Bramble have Traveller blood and like other Travellers, they find the call of the road beckons. The road is often the only alternative if one falls foul of the local warlord. Bramble does this fairly early and heads off with her freshly stolen horse. A lover of woodlands and adept at fending for herself, Bramble is able to cope in the wider world. Ash and Bramble have both killed—Bramble by accident and Ash by trade. Of the two young Travellers, I found Ash more rounded and likeable even though he becomes an apprentice assassin. He grows as a character from at first being gullible to the wiles of the manipulative Doronit to finally finding his own strength and belief in himself. One of the interesting aspects of this story is Freeman's unusual treatment of ghosts. In her world, ordinary people see ghosts in varying degrees. When a person dies, the ghost quickens three days later. The shade can say goodbye or accept repentance from a person who has wronged them. Although it is not an entirely new concept, Freeman has worked this aspect well. Overall, the dead, or at least their ghosts, will play an important part in the story. Gods of the Celtic earthy kind are also features of this world. Ash and Bramble can hear the gods and Ash, interestingly enough, can command ghosts to talk. In Blood Ties, Freeman throws together gods, destiny and the battle for life in a harsh world, resulting in an intriguing tale. More information can be found at the author's web site, www.castingstrilogy.com