

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# Blessed

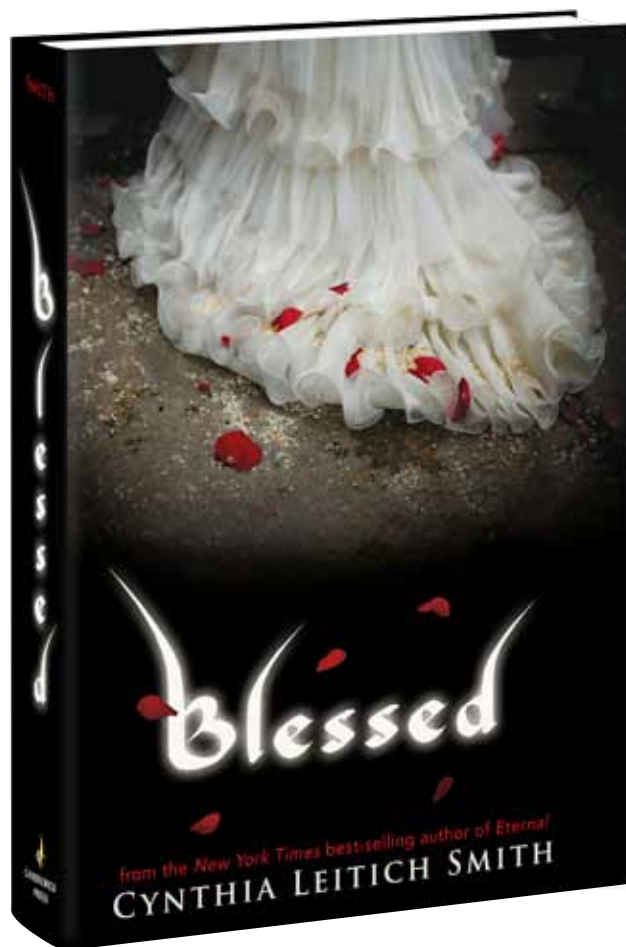
BY CYNTHIA LEITICH SMITH

With a wink and a nod to Bram Stoker, best-selling author Cynthia Leitich Smith unites the casts of *Tantalize* and *Eternal* in a delicious dark fantasy her fans will devour.

Quincie Morris, teen restaurateur and neophyte vampire, is in the fight of her life—or undeath. Even as she adjusts to her new appetites, she must clear her best friend and true love, the hybrid-werewolf Kieren, of murder charges; thwart the apocalyptic ambitions of Bradley Sanguini, the seductive vampire-chef who “blessed” her; and keep her dead parents’ restaurant up and running. She hires a more homespun chef and adds the preternaturally beautiful Zachary to her wait staff. But with hundreds of new vampires on the rise and Bradley off assuming the powers of Dracula Prime, Zachary soon reveals his true nature—and his flaming sword—and they hit the road to staunch the bloodshed before it’s too late. Even if they save the world, will there be time left to salvage Quincie’s soul?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cynthia Leitich Smith is the acclaimed and best-selling author of *Tantalize*, *Eternal*, and several other books for young readers. About *Blessed*, she says, “Who hasn’t felt like their life is over? Like they’re all alone, facing an infernal storm? That’s when a little faith can save you, when you’re fighting the hardest to believe in yourself.” A member of the faculty at the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA program in writing for children and young adults, she lives in Austin, Texas.



*Blessed*

by Cynthia Leitich Smith

**ON SALE FEBRUARY 8, 2011**

HC 978-0-7636-4326-3 • E-book 978-0-07636-5448-1

\$17.99 (\$20.00 CAN)

480 pages, age 14 and up



CANDLEWICK PRESS  
www.candlewick.com

# Blessed

## A conversation with Cynthia Leitich Smith



PHOTO © FRANCIS HILL

*How does it feel to have completed the third book in this series? What's on the horizon?*

I'm ecstatic! Spinning in the starlight, delightfully, diabolically ecstatic!

Readers of *Tantalize* and *Eternal* have been begging for more, and *Blessed* brings together the two casts in spooky and (I hope) intriguing ways.

Coming up next is the fourth novel, centered on the "slipped" angel, Zachary, and his lost love, Miranda. Beyond that, the phenomenal Ming Doyle is busy illustrating graphic-novel adaptations of the books.

*In Tantalize, Eternal, and Blessed, who was your favorite character to write, and why?*

I have a great affection for quirky secondary characters. So I'd have to say the contenders would be: Clyde, the sarcastic wereopossum; Joshua, the surfer-speak guardian angel; and Sabine, the villainous queen of the undead.

For now, though, Clyde is the winner. Despite his sharp, tiny teeth and pretensions to the contrary, the furry little marsupial is all heart.

*Much of your writing is set in Texas, and you live in Austin. What do you find so intriguing about that area?*

My original literary inspiration is Bram Stoker's classic novel *Dracula*, which features a rugged Texan character named Quincey P. Morris, who's one of Van Helsing's vampire hunters. So in a way, I'm bringing the gothic tradition "home" to Texas.

Austin also hosts the world's largest urban bat colony. We're talking 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats, which make their home under the Congress Avenue Bridge. Folks gather at sunset to watch them fly out on the hunt. You can't get much more vamped out than that.

Big picture, the city is funky, eclectic, green, and fully embracing of its strong Mexican-American traditions. It's

a brilliant juxtaposition of ex- and next-gen hippies, good-time Bubbas, urban cowboys, hikers, bikers, college students, the pierced, the tattooed, and the multi-colorfully haired. Indie filmmakers mingle with street and saloon musicians, casual techies, world-class academics, the old guard, dot-com money, and just enough button-down types to keep the 'dillos (trolley buses) running on time.

Against that backdrop, I could readily imagine a, say, werebear on the police force or a vampire serving up Chianti.

That said, Austin isn't the only city featured in the series. The eternal royalty is based in a wildly affluent, fictional North Shore suburb of Chicago, and a number of scenes are set on Michigan Avenue. Then there's that road trip in *Blessed*. . . .

I've lived in Chicago in the past—for three years, not long after graduating from law school. I also lived in Dallas (Miranda's hometown) one summer when I worked as a reporting intern for the *Dallas Morning News*. And those who know me well won't be too surprised when they turn a page and discover the location of the Wolf training pack. I'm a sense-of-place writer and typically stick to the places I love deeply and know well.

*Eternal is told from alternating male and female perspectives, while both Tantalize and Blessed are told from a female point of view. How did you differentiate the voices?*

So far in the series there are four first-person protagonists: Quincie, who narrates *Tantalize* and *Blessed*; Kieren, who narrates the *Tantalize* graphic novel; and Miranda and Zachary, who take turns telling the story of *Eternal*.

Quincie is bright, funny, and very much a boots-on-the-ground kind of girl, but she does have her poetic and wistful side.

Kieren is the closest to an intellectual, a serious reader-student kind of guy, but he also has a primal bent and tends to show rather than talk about his emotions.

Miranda is originally a social wallflower, though she aspires to center stage, and later, as eternal royalty, she becomes quite formal and commanding.

Zachary is direct, uses short sentences, and has a strong moral grounding—regardless of whether he adheres to it—and an equally well developed sense of the ridiculous.

# Blessed

## A conversation with Cynthia Leitich Smith

Voice is character is voice. Who the character is, his or her background, current situation, and perspective will dictate the words chosen and how they're used. The job of the author is mostly to get out of the way.

### *Have you done any vampire-related research?*

Tons. I've also done my share of research on shape-shifters, their respective animal kin, various kinds of angels, and the literary traditions that surround all of them.

Much of it focused on the existing literary traditions. If you're going to integrate a classic creature into your mythology, you need to know what's been done before. That'll make the difference between a thoughtful nod or a meaningful extension and doing something merely derivative. So not only did I read the most influential books; I also studied the related literary criticism and even corresponded with a professor of *Dracula* studies.

From there, I went back even further, to folktales and traditional stories from around the world, and then to the psychology believed to have inspired those tales.

For the average reader, it may not matter. But serious genre aficionados appreciate the time and care. I write first and foremost to entertain, but it's always flattering when I hear from, say, a grad student analyzing my work with an eye to the old-school masters.

### *What inspired you to use a restaurant as the setting for your books?*

For obvious reasons, people tend to think of vampires more as drinkers than as diners, so I thought that could add a fresh twist to my approach.

But more personally, I worked as a waitress when I was a teen—first at a Tex-Mex restaurant and then at one in an athletic club—to pay for my day-to-day expenses and make money for college. It struck me that restaurants were terrific stages for drama. You have a thematic menu, decor, music, outfits. . . . Occasionally, people even burst into song.

When I first began *Tantalize*, in late 2001, I'd been wanting for some time to write a book centered on vampire

mythology and a book set in a restaurant. When it occurred to me to combine those two ideas, the story began to click.

What a treat it was to return to Sanguini's: A Very Rare Restaurant in *Blessed*!

### Five Quick Questions

#### 1. *Crème brûlée or chilled baby squirrels?*

Tiramisu.

#### 2. *Austin or Chicago?*

Austin winter, Chicago summer.

#### 3. *Fangs or halo?*

Claws.

#### 4. *Van Helsing or Buffy?*

Buffy for maximum slayage. "Take back the night!"

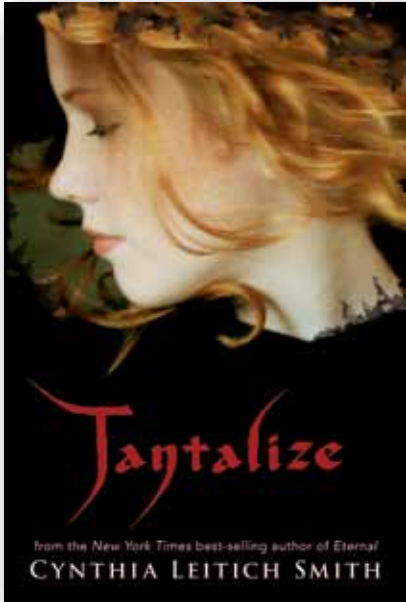
#### 5. *Werewolf, Bear, Cat, Deer, Possum, Elk, Hog . . . ?*

Armadillo.



# Blessed

More dark fantasies by Cynthia Leitich Smith



A New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

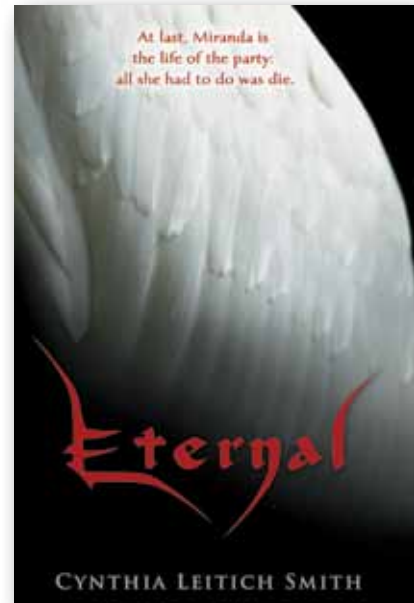
“Looking for something to read that will make your TV jealous? *Tantalize* has it all—hot vampires and wolf-boys, a super-cool heroine in cowboy boots, nail-biting suspense, romance, chills ’n’ thrills, and Austin, Texas. What more could you want?”  
—Libba Bray, author of *A Great and Terrible Beauty* and *Rebel Angels*

“Readers will be tantalized by this dark, romantic, and disturbing fantasy of vampires, werewolves, and a strong, no-nonsense heroine. Fans of Stephenie Meyer and Annette Curtis Klause will eat it up.”  
—*School Library Journal*

“Smith juices up YA horror with this intoxicating romantic thriller.” —*The Horn Book*

HC: 978-0-7636-2791-1, \$16.99 (\$21.00 CAN)  
PB: 978-0-7636-4059-0, \$8.99 (\$10.00 CAN)  
E-book: 978-0-7636-5152-7, \$8.99

336 pages, Age 14 and up



A New York Times Bestseller

“Smith has built on centuries of vampire lore to create a spooky, snarky, supernatural world all her own.”  
—BookPage

“Serious vampire buffs will undoubtedly add the novel to their must-read list.” —*School Library Journal*

HC: 978-0-7636-3573-2, \$17.99 (\$20.00 CAN)  
PB: 978-0-7636-4773-5, \$8.99 (\$11.00 CAN)  
E-book: 978-0-7636-5-1534, \$8.99

320 pages, Age 14 and up