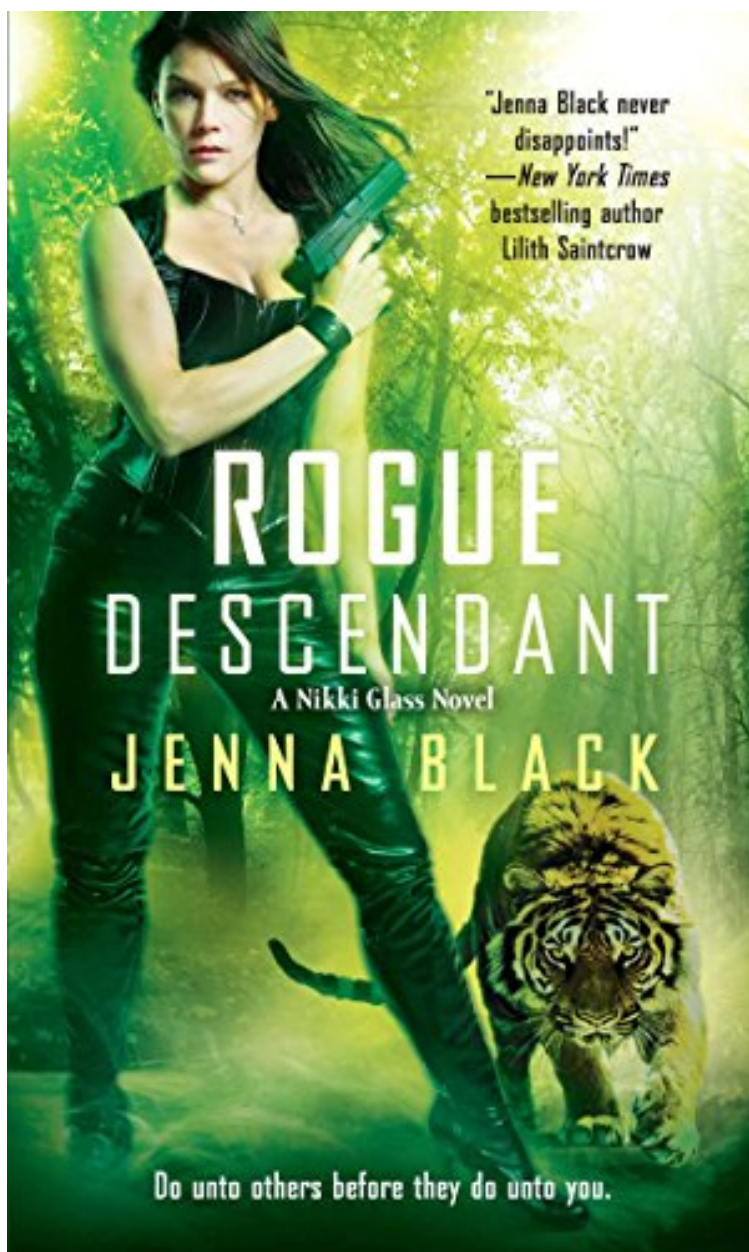


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Rogue Descendant



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA Simon Schuster eBook. Simon Schuster has a great book for every reader.ExtraitRogue Descendant ONE Its time, Nikki, Anderson said. I made a very undignified squealing sound and almost dropped my towel. Goddammit, Anderson! I snapped, my heart pounding. The sun hadnt risen yet, and I was still bleary-eyed even after my shower. I certainly had not been expecting to find anyone waiting for me in my bedroom at this hour, especially when I was pretty certain Id locked the door to my suite. The adrenaline coursing through my veins did more to wake me up than ten cups of coffee. Sorry to

startle you, he said with an unrepentant smile. Like hell you are, I grumbled, clutching my towel a little more securely around me. I knew Anderson well enough by now to know a deliberate intimidation attempt when I saw one. He was at his rumpled, harmless-looking best, in a wrinkled shirt, wash-faded cords, and tattered sneakers, but he was anything but harmless. He was a real, bona fide god, the son of Thanatos, the Greek god of death, and Alecto, one of the Furies. If you hadnt been so determined to play hard to get, Anderson said mildly, we could have done this differently. Id have preferred not to do this at all, which was why Id spent the last two weeks making myself scarce, finding any excuse I could to avoid the confrontation I knew was coming. Gods are notoriously bad at taking no for an answer, but it was the only answer I could give to the request he was going to make. This wasnt going to go well no matter how we did it, I said. He had to know what my avoidance strategy meant, and I knew hed come prepared for a fight despite his so-far mild manner. Im sorry to hear that, he replied, a slight edge creeping into his voice. I would have thought youd be eager to rid the world of a predator like Konstantin. Ridding the world of Konstantin, the deposed leader of the Olympians, sounded like a great idea, in theory. He was vulnerable now that he no longer had the might of the Olympians behind him, and with my skills as a descendant of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt, I was the perfect candidate to find him in whatever hole he was hiding in. It was what would happen when I found him that gave me problems. This isnt something I want to talk about while wearing a towel, I said.

Andersons eyes strayed downward as he took a visual tour of my body. I wasnt much to look at with my knobby knees and winter-white skin, but guys dont seem to care about aesthetics much when a woman is wearing nothing but a towel. I gritted my teeth and kept my mouth shut, knowing he was only looking at me like that to unsettle me. I wasnt about to let him do it. At least, thats what I told myself. Why dont you go wait in the sitting room while I get some clothes on, I suggested. Then we can talk. All right, he agreed. You arent going to try climbing out the window to avoid me, are you? I might have been tempted if my rooms werent on the third floor of the mansion that was home base for all of Andersons Liberi. Im not in the mood for a broken leg, so no. Of course, breaking a leg might be more fun than whatever was going to come next. Dont take too long, Anderson ordered. He strode out my bedroom door and didnt even bother to close it all the way behind him. I gave the door the kind of glare I really wanted to give to Anderson himself, then stalked to my closet to get some clothes. I didnt want to do this ever, much less at the literal crack of dawn and with no coffee in my system. I usually dont have any qualms about defying authority, but Anderson was a different story. Most of the time he seemed like a pretty nice guy, but I knew what lay under the surface, and I didnt want him angry with me if I could avoid it. Knowing Andersons patience had more than reached its limit, I pulled my clothes on hastily and toweled my hair dry. I had to at least run a brush through it a few times to smooth out the tangles before they dried that way, and I swear I could feel Andersons impatience from the other room. I looked at myself in the mirror over the sink and saw a delicate, anxious woman with bedraggled hair and a faded T-shirt. Dont you dare let him browbeat you, I told myself as I tried to wipe that anxious look off my face. I stood a much better chance of holding my ground if I at least looked strong and confident. Hurry up, Nikki, Anderson called, and I knew I couldnt afford to stand there and make faces at myself in the mirror any longer. Well, here goes nothing, I muttered, and left the relative safety of my bedroom to join Anderson in my sitting room. I gave him a few mental brownie points for having brewed a pot of coffee while he waited. Id gotten tired of having to go all the way down to the first floor whenever the craving hit me, so Id brought my own coffeemaker from my condo, which I hadnt relinquished, despite having taken up residence in the mansion. Anderson was sitting on the armchair beside the couch, and there were two steaming mugs on the coffee table. Thanks for making coffee, I said, picking up my mug and inhaling the steam. I didnt look at him as I reluctantly lowered myself onto the couch. I harbored a brief hope that he would let me get some coffee into my system before the fun and games began, but I knew better. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him lean forward in his chair. I realized I was holding my breath, and forced myself to let it out and take a sip of coffee. Id dawdled long enough that it didnt burn my tongue. I would have thought youd be chomping at the bit to hunt down Konstantin the moment he was forced to step down, Anderson said. I dont understand why youve been avoiding it. Im sure its hard for someone whose mother was a goddess of vengeance to understand, I said, though I knew there were plenty of others who wouldnt have my moral qualms, either. How can you not want his blood after what he did to your sister? That made me flinch. Konstantin hadnt hurt Steph himself, but there was no doubt his late second-in-command had acted with his blessing, if not on his direct orders. If youd asked me when I first found Steph if I wanted Konstantin dead, Id have answered with a resounding yes. Even now, I would be happy to dance on his grave. But there was a difference between wanting a man dead and taking it upon yourself to make

him that way. If I hunted Konstantin and found him, then Anderson, who had even more of a score to settle than I did, would kill him. I'd seen Anderson kill before, and the screams still echoed in my dreams sometimes. Death at Anderson's hand was neither quick nor painless. I fidgeted with my coffee cup and avoided Anderson's gaze. I've told you before I'm a bleeding heart. I'm not the kind of person who can cold-bloodedly hunt someone down so you can murder him. You had no qualms about hunting Justin Kerner, he retorted. But he was wrong about that. I'd had plenty of qualms. Kerner was a serial killer, but he was a victim before that. An ordinary man with an ordinary life who'd been captured by the Olympians and used as a lab rat, forced to take on a seed of immortality that the Olympians suspected might be infected with madness. When Kerner had gone mad, they'd buried him, meaning to leave him in the ground, constantly dying and reviving, till the end of time. He'd been killing civilians. But I'd felt sympathy for him the whole time. I hunted Kerner because he had to be stopped before he killed more innocent people, I said, then again met Anderson's eyes. You want me to hunt Konstantin for revenge. That's an altogether different beast. For justice, Anderson corrected sharply. He can't be tried in a court of law. There is no way to make him accountable for his crimes. Unless we do it ourselves. You know that. Yeah, I know. But I'm not a freaking hit man! Anderson's gaze was hot enough to burn, and the muscles in his jaw and throat stood out in stark relief. I'm not asking you to kill him. I'm asking you to find him. Usually, Anderson looks mild-mannered and relaxed. The kind of man you'd pass in the street without a second glance. Certainly not someone you'd be afraid of. But that's just his human disguise, and sometimes when he's with me, he lets the disguise slip. Like right now, when pinpricks of white light appeared in the center of his pupils. I won't say I wasn't intimidated. I'd seen what Anderson could do, and though I liked to think of him as something of a friend, I knew he didn't have some of the boundaries human beings do. I was pretty sure he would hurt me if he got mad enough. But I was not a murderer, and I wasn't going to let him turn me into one. I put my coffee cup down, as if freeing my hands to defend myself would really help. My mouth had gone dry with nerves, and I couldn't bear to meet his eyes and see that glow. It was hard to feel like I was drawing a firm line in the sand while not meeting his eyes, but I hoped he'd hear the conviction in my words. You sound just like Konstantin, I told him. Remember? He asked me to hunt fugitives for the Olympians and basically told me I shouldn't feel bad about doing it because I wouldn't be the one actually killing the people I found. In truth, there'd been no asking involved. The Olympians were on a mission to destroy all mortal Descendants—the only people capable of killing Liberi, at least as far as they knew—and they thought having a descendant of Artemis on their payroll would make their mission a lot easier. I was pretty sure that under the supposedly kinder, gentler leadership of Cyrus, they still had the same goal in mind, and still would love to recruit me by hook or by crook. If I hunt someone down knowing that person is going to be killed, then I'm a murderer, whether I do the deed myself or not, I argued. I'm not a murderer. You were willing to hunt Kerner down, and you were hoping I would kill him! Since the alternative had been to bury him alive for all eternity, yes, I had indeed hoped Anderson would kill him. But as a mercy, not as a punishment. I was pretty sure he was being willfully obtuse, but I restated my point anyway. I hunted Kerner because it was the only way to stop him from killing innocents. Not because I hated his guts and wanted revenge. And you think Konstantin won't kill innocents if he's allowed to live? I understood why Anderson wanted me to do this. Really I did. I could even acknowledge that he had a point. Konstantin had raped, tortured, and killed countless innocents in the centuries he'd been alive, and there was no reason to believe he would mend his ways now. Anderson would probably want to kill him even if Konstantin hadn't kidnapped Emma, Anderson's now-estranged wife, and chained her at the bottom of a pond to drown and revive for almost ten years. But we'd both be doing it as revenge for what Konstantin had done to our loved ones, not for any great and noble cause, and that would make me a murderer in my own eyes. Whatever I do, I'm going to have to live with it for the rest of my life, I said, and with an impressive effort of will managed to meet Anderson's gaze once more. The glow in his eyes had widened, the anger on his face inhuman in its intensity, but I didn't let myself look away. Unless you're planning to kill me for saying no to you, I'm likely to have a very, very long life. And a revenge killing is something I don't want to have on my conscience. You don't think Steph deserves vengeance? There was both contempt and surprise in his voice, along with the anger. Yes, there was a good reason I'd been avoiding this conversation. She wouldn't want me to do this, I answered. She didn't even want me to kill Alexis. Not that I was capable of killing a fellow Liberi myself, but I'd been trying to dream up a scheme to get him killed when Steph put the kibosh on it. She wanted him dead, I clarified at Anderson's incredulous look. But she didn't want me to be involved. I want Alexis to pay for what he did, she said, but not at the price of putting a black mark on your soul. She was the best big sister I ever could have hoped for. Anderson slowly rose

from his chair. I rose just as slowly, my heart pounding, my breaths shallow. My lizard brain really wanted me to get the hell out of there, away from the dangerous predator that was Anderson, but I forced myself to stay rooted in place. I need you to do this for me, he said in a low growl that resonated strangely in his chest.

He slowly raised his hand, threatening me with what I had dubbed his Hand of Doom. It wasn't glowing, which is what it did when he was about to kill someone, but I didn't much want him to touch me, either. I'd seen him use that hand against Jamaal. He'd been able to make the big, tough death-goddess descendant scream in pain with nothing more than a touch. I did not want to know how bad it had to hurt to accomplish that. If your plan is to torture me until I agree to do what you want, then you really are no better than Konstantin, I said. My voice shook a little, and I was sure my eyes were wide and frightened looking. Under ordinary circumstances, I wouldn't expect him to follow through with his threat, because I believed he was one of the good guys. But he'd never been able to see straight about anything involving Emma, and I was standing between him and his longed-for revenge. It took every scrap of courage I could gather not to run screaming from the room. We stood there like that, Anderson's eyes glowing, his hand halfway extended toward me while I quaked in my boots for what felt like forever. Then Anderson let out a whoosh of breath. His hand fell back to his side, and the glow receded from his eyes. There was still a wealth of tension in his body language and a hint of menace in his facial expression, but at least he looked short of murderous. It seemed like I'd won round one of our game of chicken. This isn't over, he told me. But I guess we have to wait until Konstantin kills someone else before you can feel righteous about hunting him. Don't worry. I doubt it will take long. He was still so angry I didn't dare move, and I didn't think any response was required.

So I stood there like a statue as he stalked out of my sitting room and slammed the door behind him. Presentation de l'diteur A Simon Schuster eBook. Simon Schuster has a great book for every reader.