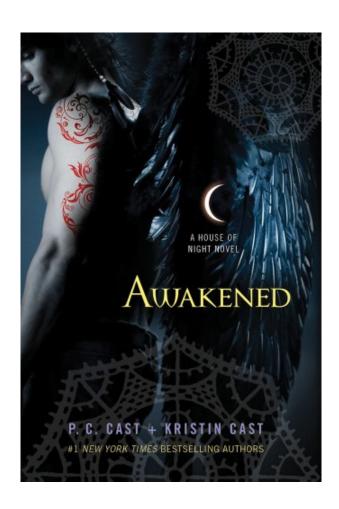
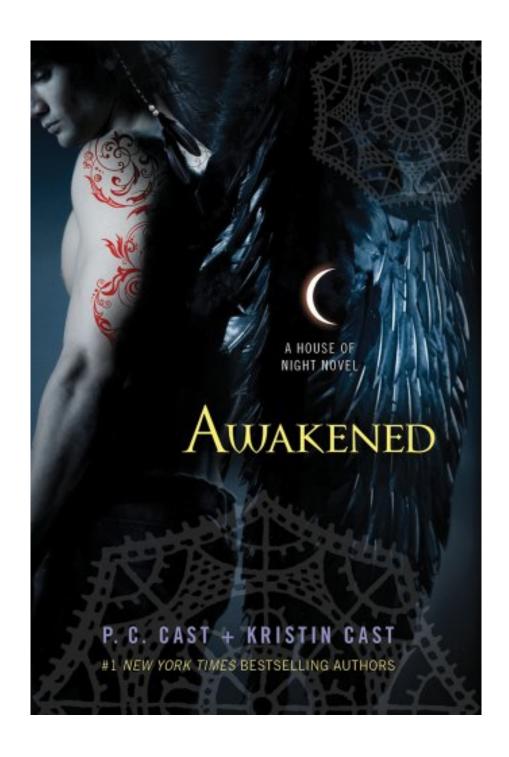
AWAKENED: A HOUSE OF NIGHT NOVEL (HOUSE OF NIGHT NOVELS) BY P. C. CAST, KRISTIN CAST



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Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. CHAPTER ONE

Neferet

A disquieting sense of irritation awakened Neferet. Before she had truly departed that amorphous place between dreams and reality, she reached out with her long, elegant fingers and felt for Kalona. The arm she touched was muscular. His skin was smooth and strong and pleasing beneath her fingertips. All it took was that small, feather-like caress. He stirred and turned eagerly to her.

"My Goddess?" His voice was husky with sleep and the beginnings of renewed desire.

He annoyed her.

They all annoyed her because they were not him.

"Leave me ... Kronos." She had to pause, and search her memory to remember his ridiculous, overly

ambitious name.

"Goddess, have I done something to displease you?"

Neferet glanced up at him. The young Son of Erebus Warrior was reclining on the bed beside her, his handsome face open, his expression willing, his aquamarine eyes just as striking in the dimness of her candlelit bedroom as they had been earlier that day when she'd watched him training in the castle courtyard. He'd stirred her desires then, and with one inviting look from her, he'd willingly come to her and futilely, though enthusiastically, attempted to prove that he was god in more than namesake alone.

The problem was that Neferet had been bedded by an immortal, thus she knew all too intimately just how much of an imposter this Kronos truly was.

"Breathe," Neferet said, meeting his blue eyes with a bored glance.

"Breathe, Goddess?" His brow, decorated by a tattoo pattern that was supposed to represent ball and mace weaponry, but to Neferet appeared more like frilly Fourth of July fireworks, furrowed in confusion.

"You asked what you'd done to displease me and I told you: you're breathing. And in much too close a proximity to me. That displeases me. It's time you depart my bed." Neferet sighed and flicked her fingers at him in dismissal. "Go. Now."

She almost laughed aloud at his undisguised look of hurt and shock.

Had the youth really believed he could replace her divine Consort? The impertinence of the thought fueled her anger.

In the corners of Neferet's bedchamber, shadows within shadows quivered in anticipation. Though she didn't acknowledge them, she felt their stirrings. It pleased her.

"Kronos, you were distracting, and for a brief time you gave me a measure of pleasure." Neferet touched him again, this time not so gently, and her fingernails left twin raised welts down his thick forearm. The young warrior didn't flinch or pull away. Instead he trembled beneath her touch and his breathing deepened. Neferet smiled. She'd known this one needed pain to feel desire the instant his eyes had met hers.

"I would give you more pleasure, if you allowed it," he said.

Neferet smiled. Her tongue flicked out slowly, licking her lips as she watched him watch her. "Perhaps in the future. Perhaps. For now what I require of you is to leave me and, of course, to continue to worship me."

"Would that I could show you how much I long to worship you again." The last word was spoken as a verbal caress, and—mistakenly—Kronos reached for her.

As if it was his right to touch her.

As if her wishes were subservient to his needs and desires.

One small echo from Neferet's distant past—a time she thought she'd buried with her humanity—seeped from the entombed memories. She felt her father's touch and even smelled the reek of his rancid, alcohol-soaked breath as her childhood invaded the present.

Neferet's response was instantaneous. As easily as breathing, she lifted her hand from the warrior's arm and held it, palm outward, at the closest of the shadows lurking at the edges of her chamber.

Darkness responded to her touch even more quickly than had Kronos. She felt its deadly chill and reveled in the sensation, especially as it banished the rising memories. With a nonchalant motion, she scattered the Darkness at Kronos, saying, "If it is pain you so desire, then taste my cold fire."

The Darkness Neferet hurled at Kronos penetrated his young, smooth skin eagerly, slicing ribbons of scarlet through the forearm she had so recently caressed.

He moaned, though this time more in fear than passion.

"Now do as I command. Leave me. And remember, young warrior, a goddess chooses when and where and how she is touched. Do not overstep yourself again."

Gripping his bleeding arm, Kronos bowed low to Neferet. "Yes, my Goddess."

"Which goddess? Be specific, Warrior! I have no desire to be called by ambiguous titles."

His response was instantaneous. "Nyx Incarnate. That is your title, my Goddess."

Her narrowed look softened. Neferet's face relaxed into its mask of beauty and warmth. "Very good, Kronos. Very good. See how easy it is to please me?"

Caught in her emerald gaze, Kronos nodded once, then fisting his right hand over his heart he said, "Yes, my Goddess, my Nyx," and backed reverently from her chamber.

Neferet smiled again. It was unimportant that she was not actually Nyx Incarnate. The truth was Neferet wasn't interested in being cast in the role of an incarnate goddess. "That implies I am lesser than a goddess," she spoke to the shadows gathered around her. What was important was power—and if the title Nyx Incarnate aided her in the acquisition of power, especially with the Sons of Erebus Warriors, then that was the title by which she would be called. "But I aspire to more—much more than standing in the shadow of a goddess."

Soon she would be ready to take her next step, and Neferet knew some of the Sons of Erebus would be manipulated into standing beside her. Oh, not enough of them to actually sway a battle with their physical force, but enough of them to fragment the Warriors' morale by setting brother against brother. Men, she thought disdainfully, so easily fooled by the masks of beauty and title, and so easily used to my advantage.

The thought pleased her but wasn't distracting enough to keep Neferet from restlessly leaving her bed. She wrapped a sheer silk robe around herself and moved from her chamber out into the hallway. Before she'd given conscious thought to her actions she was heading to the stairwell that would take her to the bowels of the castle.

Shadows within shadows drifted after Neferet, dark magnets drawn by her increasing agitation. She knew they moved with her. She knew they were dangerous and that they fed on her unease, her anger, her restless mind. But, oddly, she found a measure of comfort in their presence.

She paused only once in her downward descent. Why am I going to him again? Why am I allowing him to invade my thoughts tonight? Neferet shook her head as if to dislodge the silent words and spoke into the narrow, empty stairwell, addressing the Darkness that hovered attentively around her. "I go because it is what I wish to do. Kalona is my Consort. He was wounded serving me. It is only natural that I think of him." With a self-satisfied smile Neferet continued down the winding stairwell, easily repressing the truth: that Kalona had been wounded because she had entrapped him, and the service he performed for her was a forced one.

She reached the dungeon, carved centuries ago from the rocky earth that made up the Isle of Capri at the bottommost level of the castle, and moved silently down the torch-lit hallway. The Son of Erebus Warrior standing watch outside the barred room couldn't hide his jolt of surprise. Neferet's smile widened. His shocked look, tinged with fear, told her that she was getting better and better at appearing to materialize from nothing but shadows and night. That lightened her mood, but not enough to add the softness of a smile to temper the cruel edge of command in her voice.

"Leave. I wish to be alone with my Consort."

The Son of Erebus hesitated only a moment, but that slight pause was enough for Neferet to make a mental note about being sure in the next few days that this particular Warrior would be called back to Venice. Perhaps because of an emergency regarding someone close to him ...

"Priestess, I leave you to your privacy. But know that I am within the sound of your voice and will respond to your call should you need me." Without meeting her eyes, the Warrior fisted his hand over his heart and bowed—though too slightly to suit her.

Neferet watched him retreat down the narrow hallway.

"Yes," she whispered to the shadows. "I can feel that something quite unfortunate is going to happen to his mate."

Smoothing the sheer silk of her wrap, she turned to the closed wooden door. Neferet drew a deep breath of the damp dungeon air. She swept the thick fall of her auburn hair back from her face, baring her beauty as if girding herself for battle.

Neferet waved her hand at the door and it opened for her. She stepped into the room.

Kalona lay directly on the earthen floor. She'd wanted to make a bed for him, but discretion had dictated her actions. It really wasn't that she was keeping him imprisoned. She was simply being wise. He had to complete his mission for her—that was what was best for him. If his body regained too much of its immortal

strength, it would be a distraction for Kalona, an unfortunate distraction. Especially as he'd sworn to act as her sword in the Otherworld and to rid them of the inconvenience Zoey Redbird had created for them in this time, this reality.

Neferet approached his body. Her Consort lay flat on his back, naked, with only his onyx wings as a veil-like covering. She sank gracefully to her knees and then reclined, facing him, on the thick fur pelt she'd ordered pl...

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And what about Stevie Rae and Rephaim? The Raven Mocker refuses to be used against Stevie Rae, but what choice does he have when no one in the entire world, including Zoey, would be okay with their relationship? Does he betray his father or his heart?

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Neferet glanced up at him. The young Son of Erebus Warrior was reclining on the bed beside her, his handsome face open, his expression willing, his aquamarine eyes just as striking in the dimness of her candlelit bedroom as they had been earlier that day when she'd watched him training in the castle courtyard. He'd stirred her desires then, and with one inviting look from her, he'd willingly come to her and futilely, though enthusiastically, attempted to prove that he was god in more than namesake alone.

The problem was that Neferet had been bedded by an immortal, thus she knew all too intimately just how much of an imposter this Kronos truly was.

"Breathe," Neferet said, meeting his blue eyes with a bored glance.

"Breathe, Goddess?" His brow, decorated by a tattoo pattern that was supposed to represent ball and mace weaponry, but to Neferet appeared more like frilly Fourth of July fireworks, furrowed in confusion.

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She almost laughed aloud at his undisguised look of hurt and shock.

Had the youth really believed he could replace her divine Consort? The impertinence of the thought fueled her anger.

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the sensation, especially as it banished the rising memories. With a nonchalant motion, she scattered the Darkness at Kronos, saying, "If it is pain you so desire, then taste my cold fire."

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He moaned, though this time more in fear than passion.

"Now do as I command. Leave me. And remember, young warrior, a goddess chooses when and where and how she is touched. Do not overstep yourself again."

Gripping his bleeding arm, Kronos bowed low to Neferet. "Yes, my Goddess."

"Which goddess? Be specific, Warrior! I have no desire to be called by ambiguous titles."

His response was instantaneous. "Nyx Incarnate. That is your title, my Goddess."

Her narrowed look softened. Neferet's face relaxed into its mask of beauty and warmth. "Very good, Kronos. Very good. See how easy it is to please me?"

Caught in her emerald gaze, Kronos nodded once, then fisting his right hand over his heart he said, "Yes, my Goddess, my Nyx," and backed reverently from her chamber.

Neferet smiled again. It was unimportant that she was not actually Nyx Incarnate. The truth was Neferet wasn't interested in being cast in the role of an incarnate goddess. "That implies I am lesser than a goddess," she spoke to the shadows gathered around her. What was important was power—and if the title Nyx Incarnate aided her in the acquisition of power, especially with the Sons of Erebus Warriors, then that was the title by which she would be called. "But I aspire to more—much more than standing in the shadow of a goddess."

Soon she would be ready to take her next step, and Neferet knew some of the Sons of Erebus would be manipulated into standing beside her. Oh, not enough of them to actually sway a battle with their physical force, but enough of them to fragment the Warriors' morale by setting brother against brother. Men, she thought disdainfully, so easily fooled by the masks of beauty and title, and so easily used to my advantage.

The thought pleased her but wasn't distracting enough to keep Neferet from restlessly leaving her bed. She wrapped a sheer silk robe around herself and moved from her chamber out into the hallway. Before she'd given conscious thought to her actions she was heading to the stairwell that would take her to the bowels of the castle.

Shadows within shadows drifted after Neferet, dark magnets drawn by her increasing agitation. She knew they moved with her. She knew they were dangerous and that they fed on her unease, her anger, her restless mind. But, oddly, she found a measure of comfort in their presence.

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She reached the dungeon, carved centuries ago from the rocky earth that made up the Isle of Capri at the bottommost level of the castle, and moved silently down the torch-lit hallway. The Son of Erebus Warrior standing watch outside the barred room couldn't hide his jolt of surprise. Neferet's smile widened. His shocked look, tinged with fear, told her that she was getting better and better at appearing to materialize from nothing but shadows and night. That lightened her mood, but not enough to add the softness of a smile to temper the cruel edge of command in her voice.

"Leave. I wish to be alone with my Consort."

The Son of Erebus hesitated only a moment, but that slight pause was enough for Neferet to make a mental note about being sure in the next few days that this particular Warrior would be called back to Venice. Perhaps because of an emergency regarding someone close to him ...

"Priestess, I leave you to your privacy. But know that I am within the sound of your voice and will respond

to your call should you need me." Without meeting her eyes, the Warrior fisted his hand over his heart and bowed—though too slightly to suit her.

Neferet watched him retreat down the narrow hallway.

"Yes," she whispered to the shadows. "I can feel that something quite unfortunate is going to happen to his mate."

Smoothing the sheer silk of her wrap, she turned to the closed wooden door. Neferet drew a deep breath of the damp dungeon air. She swept the thick fall of her auburn hair back from her face, baring her beauty as if girding herself for battle.

Neferet waved her hand at the door and it opened for her. She stepped into the room.

Kalona lay directly on the earthen floor. She'd wanted to make a bed for him, but discretion had dictated her actions. It really wasn't that she was keeping him imprisoned. She was simply being wise. He had to complete his mission for her—that was what was best for him. If his body regained too much of its immortal strength, it would be a distraction for Kalona, an unfortunate distraction. Especially as he'd sworn to act as her sword in the Otherworld and to rid them of the inconvenience Zoey Redbird had created for them in this time, this reality.

Neferet approached his body. Her Consort lay flat on his back, naked, with only his onyx wings as a veil-like covering. She sank gracefully to her knees and then reclined, facing him, on the thick fur pelt she'd ordered pl...

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A Steamy Awakening

By Kale

The lines between adult and YA become a bit blurred in the Casts' latest installment to the House of Night series. Things get quite steamy for a few of the characters early on, and I suppose it helps to fill the void that such an over extended series needs. This edition mostly consists of tying up loose ends and conclusions from previous books, and finally introducing some new threads to close this series out. Because of this I find the story difficult to summarize, but I'll try.

Neferet is up to her nefarious games again conning the counsel, and deceiving all of vampire kind. But her black tendrils of darkness have pissed off the wrong immortal. Kalona is not a happy camper. Zoey is as ever unevolving if not less mature than in previous books avoiding her responsibilities for as long as the Casts' can afford to keep her from going home, which is most of the book. Her and Stark are strengthening their bond as warrior and high priestess as well as boyfriend and girlfriend. Just for fun and as if there wasn't enough magic and folklore in the book the Casts' introduce a fey element into the mix. I'm sure a magical kitchen sink is soon to follow. Death brings Zoey around and devastates her click. By the end Stevie Rae and Rephaim will be outed, Neferet will be down but not for long, repercussions of Stark's resurrection will start to surface, and the lines between light and dark will be drawn. Choices will be made. And yes after seven books the ground work for the end is finally being laid.

Nine books in this series was stretching it. Twelve is becoming unfocused and scattered. Five or six well planned four to six hundred paged books would have been enough to do this story and it's characters justice. Now by the eighth book it seems to me that the original outline for the overall storyline and individual books has gotten wildly out of control. I think the plan went out the window and the story's being made up as it goes along. The great idea of the vampire tattoos, religion a sort of mixture of Wicca and Native American rituals and mythology is getting lost and convoluted by the addition of the nuns, and darkness, and the bulls, and the fey or old magic, the other world, Kalona. My head hurts with all the elements I have to keep up with in this series. I am disappointed that this great original series wants to become more like a teen Trueblood, with multiple story lines, a rich diverse world, but it's not working, it's too much and I wish Cast would

simplify and focus everything. The amount of filler in the last few books is taking a once enjoyable series and turning it into a novelty. The writing seems to be getting worse. I think I would rather hear some one curse than have to hear them say bull poopie constantly. In print it's not so bad, but hearing it on the audio book is quite annoying. I don't think Mark Twain's idea of write how you would speak applies when your imagining what's the worst possible representation of how young people talk. I do understand what the Casts' are trying to do, they just don't do it very well. I don't think you should talk down to a younger audience, in fact I think you should take every opportunity to display good writing.

If your a fan of the characters other than Zoe and Stevie Rae, you will be as disappointed as I was, since their banter was minimal in this installment. We do hear a little about Zoey's long lost family and mom who hasn't really been featured in quite some time. I was not impressed with all the pop culture references and author shout outs. Instead of relating to the audience it seemed to dumb down the story. While I love Glee and agree with the hotness of a certain Trueblood Werewolve, it took away from the originality of HON. Like when tragedy strikes our close knit circle of friends, an unfortunate opportunity to connect with the reader is missed. I admit I cried when Dobby died in Deathly Hollows, and most likely when Sirius met his end as well, because they were written simply and worded beautifully. I found a death framed in the concept of a glee episode and certain Wicked song kind of corny and less than what the character deserved.

Overall I am a bit confused with this book. The authors seem as bored with Zoey's character as I am. She's not developing at all. There is a distinctive shift toward Stevie Rae and her possible role taking down Neferet and Darkness. Her green glow hints at the old magic introduced early in the book. Someone should write a lexicon to keep track of everything, all the different cultures and mythology are becoming too complicated. Though I applaud Stevie Rae's growth her storyline mirrors Zoey's almost exactly. With her having secrets, not trusting her friends to understand, while she's trying to save her friend (Rephaim) or lover (like Stark) from darkness, and a relationship with someone she's not suppose to be with and whom she imprints with. If you feel as I do, that the books end in a strange place Awakened is no different. Because none of the books have that classic story arch with a climax and conclusion you don't get that resolve. Since they aren't really separate stories within a larger plot, more like a long continuous narrative chopped up at a joint in the story.

If you like the other books, well then you'll love this one as well. It's more of (sadly) what we've come to expect from the HON. If your like me and are hoping it will get better, it's not. I would like to see things to the end, but I'm not sure I will feel the same in November. Awakened was as equally entertaining as it was annoying. Once you pick past all the filler and fluff the plot points were decent. Unfortunately you have to wade through all the bad poetry, and dialogue to get to it. The whole book revolved mostly around death. Ironic for a series that just won't end.

129 of 147 people found the following review helpful.

This relationship has run its course

By drosophila

(This review has serious SPOILERS)

When I first started reading this series, I enjoyed the story line enough to over look all the things that were wrong with the books. I am aware that this is YA fantasy series so obviously I do not expect anything high quality. However, this book reached to the threshold for me and I have to say enough is enough. This was a mid size book and it took me 1 1/2 hour to read. Because there was nothing in it. Let me tell you what happens in this book in one sentence. Two people die (they die because they are convenient characters), Zoey and Stark take their relationship one step further, Kalona realizes he is sharing his soul with Stark which is negatively effecting Stark but they don't know it yet, Stevie Rae and her raven get what they want, the group leaves school to live underground while everyone thinks Neferet is good again, Heath comes back in the form of a vessel who will be doing the bid of Neferet and kill Zoey (obviously it is not going to work

in the next book since it is really Heath's soul in the vessel). If you think that is a lot of stuff to happen in one book, you are wrong. Because 70% of the book was dedicated to teenage bickering about pop culture stuff so that we readers feel like this is really happening and these are real characters. The reason that I am ending my relationship with this series aaaaaannnd most importantly with these authors is very simple. I don't want to spend my money for a series which makes me regret it while I am reading every new installment. The quality is dropping because there is simply not enough meat in these books to qualify 10+ books. I don't know if it was the choice of authors or the publishers but they are taking advantage of their fans and I decided not to be one of them.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Such a good series

By Katherine lutz

People don't like it because of when they changed the point of views but I find it more interesting that way so you're getting more than one angle of the story. I dig it a lot

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AWAKENED: A HOUSE OF NIGHT NOVEL (HOUSE OF NIGHT NOVELS) BY P. C. CAST, KRISTIN CAST PDF

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Review

"The mega-selling Cast team continues to reveal its pulse-pounding saga through the viewpoints of multiple characters, giving fresh insight into their hearts and motivations...Tragedy, sacrifice and choice are all themes that make this story gripping." ?Romantic Times

"The saga of the House of Night series continues to smolder in Burned...Overall this is a fast and furious read, but a rewarding one." ?VOYA on BURNED, House of Night Book 7

"Burned [is] a strong, moving, powerful addition to this series....The last fifty pages just wrung me out, crying and happy all at the same time. I don't know where in the world the next book will be going but I wouldn't miss it!" ?Night Owl Reviews on BURNED, House of Night Book 7

"Cast and Cast pull out all the stops and take this story to shattering new heights with devastating consequences!" ?Romantic Times (4 ½ stars) on TEMPTED, House of Night Book 6

"P. C. And Kristin Cast havef made an absolutely amazing [YA] series. The visuals offered by this fantastic duo are entertaining and imaginative, with nonstop action... This is easily a [YA] series that can entertain adults with action, hot Vampyres, true friendship, budding romance, a loving Goddess, and a twist of the unexpected." ?HowlingGoodBooks.com (5 stars) on TEMPTED, House of Night Book 6

"Move over, Stephenie Meyer." ?People on HUNTED, House of Night Book 5

"Zoey Redbird's first-person adventures take on added danger and importance in the latest House of Night release. Forced by circumstance to grow up quickly, Zoey's emotional and spiritual evolution is fascinating. The Cast duo breathes life and vibrancy into the characters and makes each one an integral part of the saga. Awesome and unforgettable as always!" ?Romantic Times (4.5 stars) on HUNTED, House of Night Book 5

"The Cast duo has done it again! These ladies appear to be an unstoppable force within the world of YA literature... Teenage readers will be drawn to Zoey's everyday, angst-riddled life. Not only does she need to save the world, Zoey needs to solve some major vampyre/human boy drama. These stories are surreal, yet shockingly accurate when it comes to teenagers and their lives." ?TeensReadToo.com (5 stars) on HUNTED,

House of Night Book 5

"The most masterful part of the writing lies in how the authors take on serious issues sex, peer pressure, bullying, parental alienation, religion, and substance abuse and weave them into the text. It is a refreshing perspective that doesn't feel like preaching." ?Tulsa World on HUNTED, House of Night Book 5

"This is a series that should not be missed!" ?EnchantingReviews.com on UNTAMED, House of Night Book 4

"Untamed is a fast moving and adventure filled read, with engaging characters and just a touch of romantic chemistry to keep fans guessing. This is a well-written young adult series that should easily appeal to both teens and adults." Parque Reviews on UNTAMED, House of Night Book 4

"The mother and daughter writing team have created a believable world with characters that you can't let go of. The story is addictive and the cliffhanger ending in this installment has me wishing the months till March will fly by! The fifth book Haunted will surely be another great book in this amazing series." ParaNormalRomance.org on UNTAMED, House of Night Book 4

"Teenage issues can seem like life or death, but in this haunting series, House of Night, that's really the case. Through Zoey's eyes readers are led into a world that's getting more complicated by the minute, where friends and enemies can switch positions in a heartbeat. The remarkable Cast duo continues to build a world that you won't soon forget!" ?Romantic Times (4.5 stars) on CHOSEN, House of Night Book 3

"Chosen, The House of Night series book 3, is like the cream in an Oreo cookie holding the two ends together. This story is gearing up for the final showdown between Zoey and Nepheret and mother and daughter team, P.C. and Kristen Cast are setting the stage perfectly for this....Again, P.C. Cast is an auto-buy author for me and this series is also on that auto-buy list." ?Paranormal Romance Reviews on CHOSEN, House of Night Book 3

"The Cast and Cast team is back and stirring up deep trouble in their beguiling supernatural world....The issues faced by these teens are not child's play, and the stakes are life and death. This is extremely craveable reading!" ?Romantic Times (4.5 stars) on BETRAYED, House of Night Book 2

"Some would find it hard to write the sequel to a great book like Marked, but the Cast women obviously didn't have that problem. I laughed, sighed, and definitely cried. I thought that I knew where this series was headed but the authors took me completely by surprise. Congrats to P.C. and Kristin Cast, on a fantastic job. Bring on Chosen!" ?Night Owl Romance Reviews on BETRAYED, House of Night Book 2

"P.C. and Kristin Cast make a fantastic writing team. This enchanting tale is filled with non-stop action, strong relationships, and sweet blossoming romance. Whether you're a teen or an adult who loves a great paranormal read, this is a series not to be missed." ?Darque Reviews on BETRAYED, House of Night Book 2

"This highly addicting series offers a unique twist on the standard vampyre story and is sure to please a wide variety of readers. Although she is a vampyre, Zoey Redbird's journey is one for every teen... These books will have the reader laughing hysterically and sobbing unreservedly-sometimes all at once." ?VOYA (on both Marked and Betrayed)

"Zoey Redbird... is basically the most relatable vampire - sorry, fledgling vampyre - I've ever read about." ?MTV.com on MARKED, House of Night Book 1

"The Casts have put a very interesting new spin on vampire lore. The action is fast paced and absorbing, interspersing light moments among the intensity. When you reach the climax of the tale, you'll be on the edge of your seat. Though this is labeled a young adult novel, I strongly suspect adults of any age will enjoy it." ?Huntress.com on MARKED, House of Night Book 1

"The Casts, mother and daughter, have written a delightful book that's aimed at teens but will be enjoyed by readers of all ages. The trials of growing up are presented in the new and original context of a vampire society, and they're woven into a thoroughly entertaining story. Zoey is a dynamic and spunky heroine who has an amusing and realistic voice. She's surrounded by secondary characters who are just as engaging. The dialogue is sharp and the references to real people and pop culture add to the story. This promises to be a highly addictive series." ?Romantic Times (4.5 stars) on MARKED, House of Night Book 1

"Marked is one of the best coming of age stories to come out of Oklahoma since S. E. Hinton's The Outsiders. It teaches about the beauty of being a social outcast, friendship, and finding your own inner spirituality." ?The Beltane Papers on MARKED, House of Night Book 1

"From the moment I stuck my face in this book it hooked me! Totally awesome new take on vampires! Marked is hot and dark and funny. It rocks!" ?Gena Showalter, author of MTV's Oh My Goth on MARKED, House of Night Book 1

"Cast reeled me in from paragraph one. I snorted and giggled through the whole thing, and devoured it in one sitting." ?MaryJanice Davidson, New York Times bestselling author of the Undead series on MARKED, House of Night Book 1

About the Author

#1 New York Times and USA Today bestselling author P.C. CAST is an award-winning fantasy and paranormal romance writer, as well as an experienced speaker and teacher. Her novels have been awarded YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, and have received the prestigious Oklahoma Book Award, as well as the PRISM, Daphne du Maurier, Booksellers Best, Holt Medallion, Beacon, Romantic Times Reviewer's Choice, and Affaire de Coeur awards. She lives in Oklahoma with lots of dogs, cats, horses, and a burro. KRISTIN CAST is a bestselling author who teams with her mother to write the House of Night series. She has stories in several anthologies, as well as editorial credits. Currently Kristin is working on her first stand-along novel, a dark, mysterious fairytale.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. CHAPTER ONE

Neferet

A disquieting sense of irritation awakened Neferet. Before she had truly departed that amorphous place between dreams and reality, she reached out with her long, elegant fingers and felt for Kalona. The arm she touched was muscular. His skin was smooth and strong and pleasing beneath her fingertips. All it took was that small, feather-like caress. He stirred and turned eagerly to her.

"My Goddess?" His voice was husky with sleep and the beginnings of renewed desire.

He annoyed her.

They all annoyed her because they were not him.

"Leave me ... Kronos." She had to pause, and search her memory to remember his ridiculous, overly ambitious name.

"Goddess, have I done something to displease you?"

Neferet glanced up at him. The young Son of Erebus Warrior was reclining on the bed beside her, his handsome face open, his expression willing, his aquamarine eyes just as striking in the dimness of her candlelit bedroom as they had been earlier that day when she'd watched him training in the castle courtyard. He'd stirred her desires then, and with one inviting look from her, he'd willingly come to her and futilely, though enthusiastically, attempted to prove that he was god in more than namesake alone.

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"Breathe, Goddess?" His brow, decorated by a tattoo pattern that was supposed to represent ball and mace weaponry, but to Neferet appeared more like frilly Fourth of July fireworks, furrowed in confusion.

"You asked what you'd done to displease me and I told you: you're breathing. And in much too close a proximity to me. That displeases me. It's time you depart my bed." Neferet sighed and flicked her fingers at him in dismissal. "Go. Now."

She almost laughed aloud at his undisguised look of hurt and shock.

Had the youth really believed he could replace her divine Consort? The impertinence of the thought fueled her anger.

In the corners of Neferet's bedchamber, shadows within shadows quivered in anticipation. Though she didn't acknowledge them, she felt their stirrings. It pleased her.

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"Now do as I command. Leave me. And remember, young warrior, a goddess chooses when and where and how she is touched. Do not overstep yourself again."

Gripping his bleeding arm, Kronos bowed low to Neferet. "Yes, my Goddess."

"Which goddess? Be specific, Warrior! I have no desire to be called by ambiguous titles."

His response was instantaneous. "Nyx Incarnate. That is your title, my Goddess."

Her narrowed look softened. Neferet's face relaxed into its mask of beauty and warmth. "Very good, Kronos. Very good. See how easy it is to please me?"

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She reached the dungeon, carved centuries ago from the rocky earth that made up the Isle of Capri at the bottommost level of the castle, and moved silently down the torch-lit hallway. The Son of Erebus Warrior standing watch outside the barred room couldn't hide his jolt of surprise. Neferet's smile widened. His shocked look, tinged with fear, told her that she was getting better and better at appearing to materialize from nothing but shadows and night. That lightened her mood, but not enough to add the softness of a smile to temper the cruel edge of command in her voice.

"Leave. I wish to be alone with my Consort."

The Son of Erebus hesitated only a moment, but that slight pause was enough for Neferet to make a mental note about being sure in the next few days that this particular Warrior would be called back to Venice. Perhaps because of an emergency regarding someone close to him ...

"Priestess, I leave you to your privacy. But know that I am within the sound of your voice and will respond to your call should you need me." Without meeting her eyes, the Warrior fisted his hand over his heart and bowed—though too slightly to suit her.

Neferet watched him retreat down the narrow hallway.

"Yes," she whispered to the shadows. "I can feel that something quite unfortunate is going to happen to his mate."

Smoothing the sheer silk of her wrap, she turned to the closed wooden door. Neferet drew a deep breath of the damp dungeon air. She swept the thick fall of her auburn hair back from her face, baring her beauty as if girding herself for battle.

Neferet waved her hand at the door and it opened for her. She stepped into the room.

Kalona lay directly on the earthen floor. She'd wanted to make a bed for him, but discretion had dictated her actions. It really wasn't that she was keeping him imprisoned. She was simply being wise. He had to complete his mission for her—that was what was best for him. If his body regained too much of its immortal strength, it would be a distraction for Kalona, an unfortunate distraction. Especially as he'd sworn to act as her sword in the Otherworld and to rid them of the inconvenience Zoey Redbird had created for them in this

time, this reality.

Neferet approached his body. Her Consort lay flat on his back, naked, with only his onyx wings as a veil-like covering. She sank gracefully to her knees and then reclined, facing him, on the thick fur pelt she'd ordered pl...

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