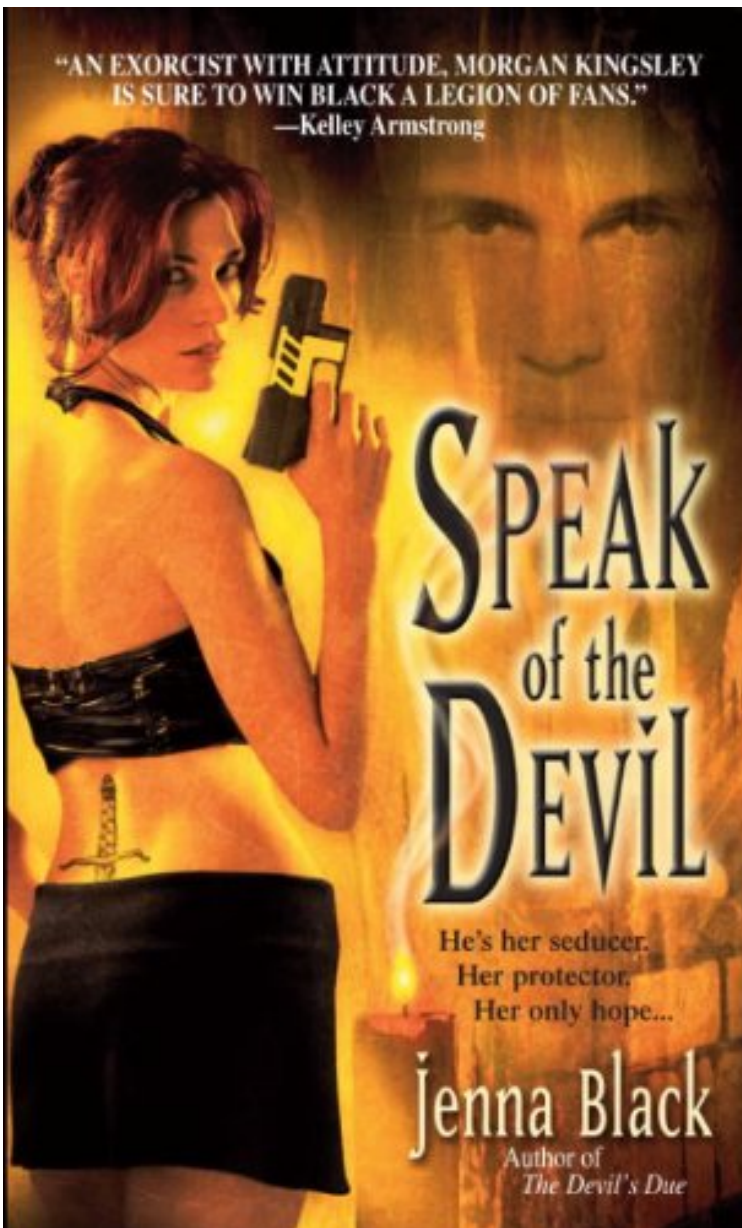


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Speak of the Devil



Par Jenna Black
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFOR A KICK-ASS EXORCIST, ITS ALL ABOUT STAYING ALIVE.Morgan Kingsley, Americas most successful exorcist, is paying the price for an exorcism gone wrong. The victims family is suing the daylights out of her, the Exorcism Board has suspended her, and now shes living on a diet of ramen noodles and bad coffee. But Morgan has a few good men at her side. One is her current boyfriend, nice-guy legal eagle Brian, whos suddenly starting to reveal his inner bad boy. The other is Philly cop Adam White, whos trying to help Morgan find out who sent her a little presenta severed human handand why

someone seems determined to destroy her. As her stalker turns more violent, leaving dead bodies in his wake, Morgan turns to the dark side of her life: a group of demons steeped in secrets, sinful eroticism, and otherworldly family feuds, including one sexy beast who shares Morgans body and some X-rated fantasies.

Soon Morgan must choose between her friends, her enemies, and her libido: to escape a mad demon determined to destroy her completely. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One "I don't need a lawyer," I told Brian once again. He looked more mulish each time I said it. "Yes, you do!" His voice had risen a tad, but he was still calmer than I was. I suspected I was red in the face by now. Arguing with Brian is almost always a losing battle, but that never stops me from trying. "This case is bullshit. People have tried to sue exorcists before and gotten laughed out of court." "That was a bit of an exaggeration, but still... The general public doesn't know why most hosts are catatonic after their demons have been exorcized, or why a small percentage are actually brain-dead. And there was absolutely zero evidence that the exorcist's performance had anything to do with it. But that hadn't deterred Jordan Maguire Sr. from filing suit against me when my exorcism on his son didn't go quite the way he'd have liked." "I don't think you understand lawyers," Brian said with a sardonic grin. "The fact that no one's been successful in a suit so far is more of a plus than a minus for some of them. If they happen to succeed where everyone else has failed, they make a big splash. If the suit fizzles, there's no harm done but it'll still be a major pain in the ass for you." "Yes, but..." "It's not just going to go away, Morgan." "I think I was beginning to believe that, but that didn't stop me from hoping. I had more than enough problems in my life without dealing with a lawsuit. I felt a whopper of a headache coming on. "Why can't you just defend me yourself?" I'm afraid I sounded a little whiny, but I couldn't help it. What's the good of dating a lawyer if he can't defend you when some asshole decides to sue?" "Because you need a tort defense attorney, not a corporate attorney." I plopped down on Brian's couch and rested my head against the back, staring at the ceiling. If Maguire's goal was to make me miserable, he'd succeeded. But there was a reason I was violently opposed to hiring a lawyer, and it wasn't anything I'd said out loud yet. See, a couple of months ago, my house and all my worldly possessions had burned to the ground. It was going to take me approximately forever and a day to recover from the financial devastation, even when the insurance company finally coughed up every cent they owed me. There was no question it was arson, and the official investigation had ruled that I was not the guilty party. However, since the fire had been started inside my house while I was still in it, the insurance company had launched its own investigation. My theory was that they were looking for excuses to delay paying me, but it turned out that mentioning this to the insurance investigator wasn't the way to win friends and influence people. Add to that the fact that the U.S. Exorcism Board had suspended me when the lawsuit was filed, and I was already on a strict diet of ramen noodles and peanut butter sandwiches. I didn't want to think about how much I'd have to pay a lawyer to defend this suit. "Look," I said, "I know this isn't your area of expertise, but I'd feel a hell of a lot more comfortable with you defending me than some stranger." Brian sighed as he took a seat on the couch beside me. "You wouldn't find it so comfortable if I bungled the case." "You wouldn't!" I protested, raising my head to give him an indignant look. Brian is competence personified, and I'm not just saying that because I'm in love with him. He frowned at me. "Yeah, I would. Not because I'm an idiot, but because I'm not an expert. Believe me, this thing could get ugly fast, and I'd be out of my league." "But..." "What percentage of hosts end up catatonic after an exorcism?" "It was my turn to frown. "I don't know, about eighty percent. Why?" "Okay, how many end up brain-dead?" I could tell from the intense way he was looking at me that he wasn't going to answer my question until I answered his. "Maybe about two percent? I don't have the exact figure." "Let's say you've got the figures exactly right. What percentage of the hosts that you personally have performed exorcisms on are catatonic, and what percentage are brain-dead?" I didn't feel like sitting still anymore, so I jumped to my feet and started pacing. "How should I know? You think I keep a tally or something?" Brian stayed seated and watched me pace. "I bet the U.S. Exorcism Board does." "Well, I'm probably right around the average." "What if you're not? What if it turns out three percent of your exorcisms end in brain death?" "I..." "You're the most successful exorcist in the U.S.," he interrupted, in full lawyer mode now. "You get called in to exorcize demons other exorcists have failed to cast out. Is it possible these demons who are extra powerful do more damage to their hosts' brains?" My chest felt kind of hollow all of a sudden. Because I myself was possessed by Lugh, the king of the demons, I knew a lot of things that your average human being didn't know. Like that the reason most hosts are catatonic or brain-dead is that illegal or rogue demonsthose who possess unwilling hosts or commit violent crimesare much more likely to abuse their hosts than legal ones. Brian knew this, too, but most humans thought it was a total mystery why most hosts were fried, and that was just the way the demons liked it. It was certainly within the realm of

possibility that I'd exorcized demons who'd been extra abusive. "You know Maguire's attorney is going to look into those statistics right off the bat," Brian continued. "And if your numbers don't exactly match the national average, he's immediately going to have fuel to attack you." Yup. Definitely getting a headache. I pinched the bridge of my nose. But Brian wasn't finished hammering home his point. "What about your exorcism ritual?" he asked. I crossed my arms over my chest. "What about it?" "Is it exactly like everyone else's?" "Of course not," I said through gritted teeth. "There's no standard procedure. Each exorcist has their own ritual." Brian already knew this, so I wasn't expecting my answer to satisfy him. "But there are some things most exorcisms have in common, aren't there? For example, isn't it common practice to create a circle of protection around the person to be exorcized?" I rolled my eyes. "A lot of people do that," I admitted, "but it doesn't actually do anything. It's just something that helps put the exorcist into the trance state." "Did you create a circle of protection around Jordan Maguire?" "Oh shit! It didn't take a genius to figure out where he was going with this. I'd always had a more no-nonsense style than most of my fellow exorcists. My ritual is very simple, relying only on lighting a few vanilla-scented candles. For me, that's all it takes to induce the trance state I need to be in to perform an exorcism. Sometimes, when I'm really stressed out or upset, I'd set up the candles in a circle just for the reassurance of the more traditional ritual, but I usually just put them wherever it's convenient." "Like I said, the circle is just symbolic." But even I could imagine how this could sound to a layman when delivered with proper flourish from a sharklike attorney. "And what were you wearing when you performed the exorcism?" "What?" I cried, giving him an are-you-crazy look. "What the hell does that have to do with anything?" "Were you wearing a suit? Or at least dressed in business casual?" "No! That's not my style, and you know it." I didn't specifically remember what I had worn that day, but the outfit had likely included low-rise jeans. I was pretty sure I hadn't gone with my leather look. But whatever I'd worn, it would be captured for posterity on a digital recording of the procedures. Brian frowned theatrically. "Then you don't really take these exorcisms seriously, do you?" "Of course I do!" I could tell from the heat in my cheeks that my face had flushed nice and red. And my voice had grown steadily louder. "You expect me to think you take an exorcism seriously when you don't bother to create a circle of protection and you show up wearing jeans?" It was all I could do not to kick the coffee table. Or Brian's shin. "That's just ridiculous. I told you, the circle is just for show. And what does it matter what I wear?" Brian nodded sagely. "You'll make a wonderful impression at your deposition when you start shouting like that." Okay, now I really wanted to go after his shins. "You wouldn't be getting so worked up if you didn't see my point," Brian said. "Like I said, this isn't my specialty. Imagine what an expert can do. You need someone who can anticipate questions like these and worse so you can be prepared to answer them reasonably. I'm not the man for the job." My palms were sweating, so I wiped them on my pants legs. Yeah, he'd definitely made his point. I blew out a deep breath, then sat beside him on the couch again. I clasped my hands between my knees and stared at them. "I don't even want to ask how much this will cost me," I said. "No, you probably don't." I swallowed hard and forced myself to look at him. "How much is this going to cost me?" "Depends on how ugly it gets and how long it goes on. Your attorney will probably charge somewhere around two-fifty to three-fifty an hour, and then there will be all kinds of other expenses, like hiring...Revue de presse An exorcist with attitude, Morgan Kingsley is sure to win Black a legion of fans. Kelley Armstrong