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Friday Night Bites: A Chicagoland Vampires Novel



Par Chloe Neill
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Par Chloe Neill : Friday Night Bites: A Chicagoland Vampires Novel before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Friday Night Bites: A Chicagoland Vampires Novel:

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe story of a young heiress's initiation into the dark society of the Chicagoland Vampires continues...Ten months after vampires revealed their existence to the mortals of Chicago, they're enjoying a celebrity status usually reserved for the Hollywood elite. But should people learn about the Raves--mass feeding parties where vampires round up humans like cattle--the citizens will start sharpening their stakes.So now it's up to the new vampire Merit to reconnect with her upper class family and act as

liaison between humans and bloodsuckers, and keep the more unsavory aspects of the vampire lifestyle out of the media. But someone doesn't want peace between them--someone with an ancient grudge...ExtraitTable of ContentsTitle PageCopyright PageAcknowledgementsEpigraphCHAPTER ONE - MOVIN OUTCHAPTER TWO - HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS . . . NOT NECESSARILY WHERE YOU SLEEPCHAPTER THREE - AMERICAS NEXT TOP MONSTERCHAPTER FOUR - THE PRE-PARTY PLANNING COMMITTEECHAPTER FIVE - TALKIN BOUT FREEDOMCHAPTER SIX - THE RETURN OF THE PRINCECHAPTER SEVEN - THE BELLE OF THE BALLCHAPTER EIGHT - PAPA DONT PREACHCHAPTER NINE - THE SECRET GARDENS SECRETSCHAPTER TEN - YOU CAN TELL A LOT BY THE SIZE OF A MANS LIBRARYCHAPTER ELEVEN - IN WHICH OUR HEROINE IS SENT TO THE PRINCIPALS OFFICECHAPTER TWELVE - MERITS DEEP, DARK (72% COCOA) SECRETCAPTER THIRTEEN - THEYLL EAT YOU ALIVECHAPTER FOURTEEN - THE CENTER CANNOT HOLDCHAPTER FIFTEEN - I COULD HAVE DANCED ALL NIGHTCHAPTER SIXTEEN - AN OFFER THEY CANT REFUSECHAPTER SEVENTEEN - LOVE BITESCHAPTER EIGHTEEN - IN THE STACKSCHAPTER NINETEEN - CRYING WOLFCHAPTER TWENTY - THE RUNT OF THE LITTERCHAPTER TWENTY-ONE - YOU GIVE BITE A BAD NAMECHAPTER TWENTY-TWO - GIVE PEACE A CHANCECHAPTER TWENTY-THREE - HIT ME WITH YOUR BEST SHOTCHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR - CH . . . CH . . . CH . . . CH . . . CHANGESCHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE - THE KING AND IABOUT THE AUTHORExcerpt from TWICE BITTENPRAISE FOR SOME GIRLS BiteDebut author Chloe Neill owes me a good nights sleep! With her wonderfully compelling reluctant vampire heroine, and her careful world building, I was drawn into Some Girls Bite from page one, and kept reading far into the night. I love Merit and cant wait for the next book in this fabulous new series.Julie Kenner, USA Today bestselling author of Deja DemonChloe Neill sinks her teeth into the vampire genre with Some Girls Bite. Neills Merit is the kind of sassy heroine readers love to root foradd to that a fun cast of quirky characters and smokin-hot sexual tension, and youve got a stunning combination.Tate Hallaway, author of Dead If I DoId so hang out with Merit the vampire. Some Girls Bite is smart, sexy, and delightful. A must read!Candace Havens, author of The Demon King and IIn Some Girls Bite, Chloe Neill has brought us an exciting new protagonist who is smart, strong, loyal, and audacious enough to embrace her new reality as a vampire with aplomb. I look forward to Merits next adventure.Jeanne C. Stein, national bestselling author of RetributionTheres a new talent in town, and if this debut is any indication, shes here to stay! Not only does Neill introduce an indomitable and funny heroine; her secondary characters are enormously intriguing . . . truly excellent!Romantic TimesSome Girls Bite is engaging, well executed, and populated with characters you cant help but love. It was impossible to set down, and book two, Friday Night Bites . . . has gone right to the top of my wish list.Darque sALSO BY CHLOE NEILLSome Girls BiteNew American Library Published by New American Library, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) Penguin Books Ltd., 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England Penguin Ireland, 25 St. Stephens Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd.) Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty. Ltd.) Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.) Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty.) 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Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the authors imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.The

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS Writing is a kind of team sport. Although one person does the typing, others brainstorm, offer support, market the product, and ensure that the book that goes out the door is better than the one that came in. Friday Night Bites is dedicated to the team of friends and relatives who've helped get the Chicagoland Vampires novels to print, especially the following: my fabulous marketers, Brooke, Caitlin, Jia, and Mom; my patient editor, Jessica; my fabulous agent (and new author!) Lucienne; the folks who patiently read the drafts, including Dusan, Jenny, Amy, Anne, Sandi, Jon, Linda, and Heather; my fabulous book-signing liaison, Sara; and, of course, Nate, for his moral support, excellent brainstorming skills, and dog walking. A portion of the authors proceeds from the sale of Friday Night Bites will be donated to the Chicago Food Depository.

CURIOUS ABOUT THE CHICAGOLAND VAMPIRES, CHLOE OR THE CANON? Visit <http://www.chloeneill.com> First get the facts. Then you can distort them all you want.

Mark Twain CHAPTER ONE MOVING OUT Late May Chicago, Illinois Higher, Merit. Bring up that kick. Mmm-hmm. Better. I kicked again, this time higher, trying to remember to point my toes, squeeze my core, and flutter my fingers in the jazz hands our instructor ceaselessly demanded. Next to me, and considerably less enthused, my best friend and soon-to-be-ex-roommate, Mallory, growled and executed another kick. The growl was an odd accompaniment to the bob of blue hair and classically pretty face, but she was irritated enough to carry it off. Remind me why you dragged me into this? she asked. Our instructor, a busty blonde with bright pink nails and impossibly sharp cheekbones, clapped her hands together. Her breasts joggled in syncopation. It was impossible to look away. Fiercer, ladies! We want every eye in the club on our bodies! Lets work it! Mallory glared daggers at the instructor we'd named Aerobics Barbie. Mals fists curled and she took a menacing step forward, but I wrapped an arm around her waist before she could pummel the woman we'd paid to grapevine us into skinny jeans. Ixnay on the ighting-fay, I warned, using a little of my two-month-old vampire strength to keep her in place despite her bobbing fists. Mallory grumbled, but finally stopped struggling. Score one for the newbie vampire, I thought. How about a little civilized beat-down? she asked, blowing a lock of sweaty blue hair from her forehead. I shook my head, but let her go. Beating down the teachers gonna get you more attention than you need, Mal. Remember what Catcher said. Catcher was Mallorys gruff boyfriend. And while my comment didnt merit a growl, I got a nasty, narrow-eyed snarl. Catcher loved Mallory, and Mallory loved Catcher. But that didnt mean she liked him all the time, especially since she was dealing with a supernatural perfect storm centered over our Chicago brownstone. In the span of a week, Id been unwillingly made a vampire, and we'd learned that Mallory was a still-developing sorceress. As in, magical powers, black cats and the major and minor Keys the divisions of magic. So, yeah. My first few weeks as a vampire had been inordinately busy. Like The Young and the Restless, but with slightly dead people. Mal was still getting used to the idea that she had paranormal drama of her own, and Catcher, already in trouble with the Order (the sorcerers governing union), was keeping a pretty tight lid on her magical demonstrations. So Mallory was supernaturally frustrated. Hell, we were both supernaturally frustrated, and Mallory didnt have fangs or a pretentious Master vampire to deal with. So, given that unfortunate state of affairs, why were we letting Aerobics Barbie guilt us into using jazz hands? Simply put, this was supposed to be quality time, bonding time, for me and Mallory. Because I was moving out. Okay, Barbie continued, lets add that combination we learned last week. One, two and three and four, and five, six and seven and eight. The music reached a pounding crescendo as she pivoted and thrust to the bass-heavy beat. We followed as best we could, Mallory having a little harder time of not stepping on her own feet. My years of ballet classes and the quick-step speed that vampirism gave me were actually serving me pretty well, the humiliation of a twenty-eight-year-old vampire doing jazz hands notwithstanding. Barbies enthusiasm aside, the fact that we were doing jazz hands in a hip-hop dance class didnt say much for her credentials. But the class was still an improvement over my usual training. My workouts were usually trs intense, because only a couple of months ago Id been named Sentinel for my House. To make a long story slightly shorter, American vampires were divided into Houses. Chicago had three, and Id been initiated into the second oldest of those Cadogan. Much to everyones surprise given my background (think grad school and medieval romantic literature), Id been named Sentinel. Although I was still learning the ropes, being Sentinel meant I was supposed to act as a kind of vampire guard. (Turns out that while I was a pretty geeky human, I was a pretty strong vampire.)

Being Sentinel also meant training, and while American vampires had traded in the black velvet and lace for Armani and iPhones, they were pretty old school on a lot of issuesfeudal on a lot of issuesincluding weapons. Put all that together, and it meant I was learning to wield the antique katana Id been given to defend Cadogan and its vampires.Coincidentally enough, Catcher was an expert in the Second of the Four Keysweaponsso hed been tasked with prepping me for vampire combat. As a newbie vampire, having Catcher as a sparring partner wasnt exactly great for the confidence.Aerobics Barbie whipped herself into a hip-hop frenzy, leading the class in a final multistep combination that ended with the lot of us staring sassily at the mirrors that lined the dance studio. Session concluded, she applauded and made some announcements about future classes that Mallory and I would have to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to attend.Never again, Merit, she said, walking to the corner of the room where shed deposited her bag and water bottle before class started. I couldnt have agreed more. Although I loved to dance, hip thrusting under Barbies bubbly instruction and ever-bouncing bosom involved too little actual dance and too much cleavage. I needed to respect my dance master. Respect wasnt exactly the emotion Barbie inspired.We sat down on the floor to prep for our return to the real world.So, Ms. Vampire, Mallory asked me, are you nervous about moving into the House?I glanced around, not entirely sure how much chatting I should be doing about my vampire business. The Chicagoland Vampires had announced their existence to Chicago roughly ten months ago, and as you might guess, humans werent thrilled to learn that we existed. Riots. Panic. Congressional investigations. And then Chicagos three Houses became wrapped up in the investigation of two murdersmurders supposedly perpetrated by vampires from Cadogan and Grey, the youngest Chicago House. The Masters of those Houses, Ethan Sullivan and Scott Grey, dreaded the attention.But the Master of the third House (that was Navarre) was conniving, manipulative, and the one that actually planned the murders. She was also drop-dead gorgeous, no pun intended. She might as well have leaped from an editorial spread in Vogue. Dark hair and blue eyes (just like me), but with an arrogance that put celebrities and cult leaders to shame.Humans were entranced, fascinated, by Celina Desaulniers.Her beauty, her style, and her ability to psychically manipulate those around her were an irresistible combination. Humans wanted to learn more about her, to see more, to hear more.That shed been responsible for the deaths of two humansmurders shed planned and confessed tohadnt minimized their fascination. Nor had the fact that shed been captured (BTW, by Ethan and me) and extradited to London for incarceration by the Greenwich Presidium, the council that ruled Western European and North American vampires. And in her place, the rest of usthe exonerated majority who hadnt helped her commit those heinous crimesbecame that much more interesting. Celina got her wishshe got to play the bad little martyred vampireand we got an early Christmas present: We got to step into the vacuum of her celebrity.T-shirts, caps, and pennants for Grey and Cadogan (and for the more morbid, Navarre) were available for sale in shops around Chicago. There were House fan sites, I Cadogan bumper stickers, and news updates on the citys vampires.Still, notorious or not, I tried not to spread too many deets about the Houses around town. As Sentinel, I was part of the Houses security corps, after all. So I took a look around the gym and made sure we were alone, that prying human ears werent slipping a listen.If youre debating how much you can say, Mallory said, unscrewing the top of her water bottle, Ive sent out a magical pulse so that none of our little human friends can hear this conversation.Really? I turned my head to look at her so quickly my neck popped, the shock of pain squinting my eyes.She snorted. Right. Like hed let me use M-A-G-I-C around people, she muttered, then took a big gulp of her water.I ignored the shot at Catcherwed never have a decent conversation if I took the time to react to all of themand answered her question about the Big Move.Im a little nervous. Ethan and I, you know, tend to grate on each others nerves.Mallory swallowed her water, then wiped her forehead with the back of her hand. Oh, whatever. You two are BFFs.Just because weve managed to play Master and Sentinel for two weeks without tearing each others throat out doesnt mean were BFFs.As a matter of fact, Id had minimum contact with Cadogans Masterand the vampire who made meduring those last two weeks, by design. I kept my head down and my fangs to the grindstone as I watched and learned how things worked in the House. The truth was, Id had trouble with Ethan at firstId been made a vampire without my consent, my human life taken away because Celina planned on me being her second victim. Her minions werent successful in killing me, but Ethan had been successful at changing mein order to save my life.Frankly, the transition sucked. The adjustment from human grad student to vampire guard was, to say the least, awkward. As a result, Id pushed a lot of vitriol in Ethans direction. Id eventually made the decision to accept my new life as a member of Chicagos fanged community. Although I still wasnt sure I had fully come to terms with being a vampire, I was dealing.Ethan, though, was more complicated. We shared some kind of connection, some pretty strong chemistry, and some

mutual irritation toward each other. He acted like he thought I was beneath him; I generally thought he was a pretentious stick-in-the-mud. That generally should clue you in to my mixed feelings. Ethan was ridiculously handsome and a grade-A kisser. While I hadn't completely reconciled my feelings for him, I didn't think I hated him anymore. Avoidance helped settle the emotions. Considerably. No, Mallory agreed, but the fact that the room heats up by ten degrees every time you two get near each other says something. Shut up, I said, extending my legs in front of me and lowering my nose to my knees to stretch out. I admit nothing. You don't have to. I've seen your eyes silver just being around him. That's your admission. Not necessarily, I said, pulling one foot toward me and bending into another stretch. Vampires' eyes silvered when they experienced strong emotions—hunger, anger, or, in my case, proximity to the blond cupcake that was Ethan Sullivan. But I'll admit that he's kind of offensively delicious. Like salt-and-vinegar potato chips. Exactly, I said, then sat up again. Here I am, an uptight vampire who owes my allegiance to a liege lord I can't stand. And it turns out you're some kind of latent sorceress who can make things happen just by wishing them. Were the free-will outliers? I have none, and you have too much. She looked at me, then blinked and put her hand over her heart. You, and I'm saying this with love, Mer, are really a geek. She rose and pulled the strap of her bag across one shoulder. I followed suit, and we walked to the door. You know, she said, you and Ethan should get one of those necklaces, where half the heart says best and the other half says friend. You could wear them as a sign of your eternal devotion to each other. I threw my sweaty towel at her. She made a yakking sound beneath it, then threw it off, her features screwed into an expression of abject girly horror. You're so immature. Blue hair. That's all I'm saying. Bite me, dead girl. I showed fang and winked at her. Don't tempt me, witch. An hour later, I'd showered and changed back into my Cadogan House uniform—a fitted black suit jacket, black tank, and black slim-fit pants—and was in my soon-to-be-former Wicker Park bedroom, stuffing clothes into a duffel bag. A glass of blood from one of the medical-grade plastic bags in our refrigerator promptly delivered by Blood4You, the fanged equivalent of milkmen, sat on the nightstand beside my bed, my post-workout snack. Mallory stood in the doorway behind me, blue hair framing her face, the rest of her body covered by boxers and an oversized T-shirt, probably Catchers, that read ONE KEY AT A TIME. You don't have to do this, she said. You don't have to leave. I shook my head. I do have to do this. I need to do it to be Sentinel. And you two need room. To be precise, Catcher and Mallory needed rooms. Lots of them. Frequently, with lots of noise, and usually naked, although that wasn't a requirement. They hadn't known each other long and were smitten within days of meeting. But what they lacked in time they made up for in unmitigated, bare-assed enthusiasm. Like rabbits. Ridiculously energetic, completely unself-conscious, supernatural rabbits. Mallory grabbed a second empty bag from the chair next to my bedroom door, dropped it onto the bed, and pulled three pairs of cherished shoes—Mihara Pumas (sneakers that I adored, much to Ethan's chagrin), red ballet-style flats, and a pair of black Mary Janes she'd given me from my closet. She raised them for my approval and, at my nod, stuffed them in. Two more pairs followed before she settled on the bed next to the bag and crossed her legs, one foot swinging impatiently. I can't believe you're leaving me here with him. What am I going to do without you? I gave her a flat stare. She rolled her eyes. You only caught us the one time. I only caught you in the kitchen the one time, Mallory. I eat in there. I drink in there. I could have lived a contented, happy eternity without ever catching a glimpse of Catcher's bare ass on the kitchen floor. I faked a dramatic shiver. Faked, because the boy was gorgeous—a broad-shouldered, perfectly muscled, shaved-headed, green-eyed, tattooed, bad-boy magician who'd swept my roommate off her feet (and onto her back, as it turned out). Not that it isn't a fine ass, she said. I folded a pair of pants and put them into my bag. It's a great ass, and I'm very happy for you. I just didn't need to see it naked again. Ever. For real. She chuckled. For realies, even? For realies, even. My stomach twinged with hunger. I glanced at Mallory, then lifted brows toward the glass of blood on my nightstand. She rolled her eyes, then waved her hands at it. Drink, drink, she said. Pretend I'm some Buffy fan with a wicked attraction to the paranormal. I managed to both lift the glass and give her a sardonic look. That's exactly what you are. I didn't say you had to pretend very hard, she pointed out. I smiled, then sipped from my glass of slightly microwaved blood, which I'd seasoned up with Tabasco and tomato juice. I mean, it was still blood, with the weird iron tang and plastic aftertaste, but the extras perked it up. I licked an errant drop from my upper lip, then returned the glass to the nightstand. Empty. I must have been hungrier than I thought. I blamed Aerobics Barbie. Regardless, in order to make sure that I had future snacks (thinking a stash of actual food would increase the odds that my fangs and Ethan's neck stayed unacquainted), I stuffed a dozen granola bars into my bag. And speaking of Catcher, I began, since I'd cut the edge off my hunger, where is Mr. Romance this evening? Work, she said. Your grandfather is quite the taskmaster. Did I mention that Catcher worked for my grandfather? During that one

big week when all the supernatural drama went down, I also discovered that my grandfather, Chuck Merit, the man who practically raised me, wasn't retired from his service with the Chicago Police Department as we'd been led to believe. Instead, four years ago he'd been asked to serve as an Ombudsman, a liaison, between the city administration led by darkly handsome Mayor Seth Tate and the city's supernatural population. Superstitions of every kind—vampires, sorcerers, shapeshifters, water nymphs, fairies, and demons—all depended on my grandfather for help. Well, him and his trio of assistants, including one Catcher Bell. I'd visited my grandfather's South Side office shortly after becoming a vamp; I'd met Catcher, then Mallory met Catcher, and the rest was naked history. Mallory was quiet for a moment, and when I looked up, I caught her brushing a tear from her cheek. You know I'll miss you, right? Please. You'll miss the fact that I can afford to pay rent now. You were getting used to spending Ethan's money. The Cadogan stipend was one of the upshots of having been made a vampire. The blood money, such as it was, was a perk. It was nice not to be the only one slaving away for the man. Given her glassy office overlooking Michigan Avenue, she was exaggerating by a large degree. While I'd been in grad school reading medieval texts, Mallory had been working as an ad executive. We'd only recently discovered that her job had been her first success as an adolescent sorceress: She'd actually willed herself into it, which wasn't the salve to her ego that a hire based on her creativity and skills might have been. She was taking a break from the job now, using up weeks of saved vacation time to figure out how she was going to deal with her newfound magic. I added some journals and pens to the duffel. Think about it this way: no more bags of blood in the refrigerator, and you'll have a muscley, sexy guy to cuddle with at night. Much better deal for you. He's still a narcissistic ass. Who you're crazy about, I pointed out while scanning my bookshelf. I grabbed a couple of reference books, a worn, leather-bound book of fairy tales I'd had since childhood, and the most important recent addition to my collection, the Canon of the North American Houses, Desk Reference. It had been given to me by Helen, the Cadogan Liaison burdened with the task of escorting me home after my change, and was required reading for newbie vampires. I'd read a lot of the four solid inches of text, and skimmed a good chunk of the rest. The bookmark was stuck somewhere in chapter eight: Going All Night. (The chapter titles had apparently been drafted by a seventeen-year-old boy.) And he's your narcissistic ass, I reminded her. Yay, me! she dryly replied, spinning a finger in the air like a party favor. You two will be fine. I'm sure you can manage to keep each other entertained, I said, plucking a bobble-headed Ryne Sandberg figurine from the shelf and placing it carefully in my bag. Although my new sunlight allergy kept me from enjoying sunny days at Wrigley Field, even vampirism wouldn't diminish my love for the Cubs. I scanned my room, thinking about all the things Cubs-related or otherwise I'd be leaving behind. I wasn't taking everything with me to Cadogan, partly out of concern that I'd strangle Ethan and be banished from the House, and partly because leaving some of my stuff here meant that I still had a home base, a place to crash if living amongst vampires living near Ethan became too much to bear. Besides, it's not like her new roommate was going to need the space; Catcher had already stashed his boy stuff in Mal's bedroom. I zipped up the bags and, hands on my hips, looked over at Mallory. I think I'm ready. She offered me a supportive smile, and I managed to keep the tears that suddenly brimmed at my lashes from spilling over. Silently, she stood up and wrapped her arms around me. I hugged her back—my best friend, my sister. I love you, you know, she said. I love you, too. She released me, and we both swiped at tears. You'll call me, right? Let me know you're okay? Of course I will. And I'm only moving across town. It's not like I'm leaving for Miami. I hefted one of the bags onto my shoulder. You know, I always figured if I moved out it would be because I got a kick-ass teaching job in some small town where everyone is super smart and quirky. Eureka? she asked. Or Stars Hollow. Mallory made a sound of agreement and picked up the second bag. I assumed you'd leave after you got knocked up by a twenty-one-year-old classics major and the two of you ran away to Bora-Bora to raise your baby in the islands. I stopped halfway to the door and glanced back at her. That's pretty specific, Mal. You studied a lot, she said, edging past me into the hallway. I had the time. I heard her trot down the stairs, but paused in the doorway of the bedroom that had been mine since I'd returned to Chicago three years ago. I took a last look around at the old furniture, the faded comforter, the cabbage rose wallpaper, and flipped off the light. CHAPTER TWO HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS . . . NOT NECESSARILY WHERE YOU SLEEP Okay, so I was procrastinating. My bags were stuffed in the backseat of my boxy orange Volvo, but instead of heading directly to Cadogan House, I passed my future Hyde Park home and kept driving south. I wasn't quite ready to cross the threshold of Cadogan as an official resident. And, more importantly, I hadn't seen my grandfather in nearly a week, so I opted to do the granddaughter thing and pay a visit to his South Side office. My grandparents had all but raised me while my social-climbing parents, Joshua and Meredith Merit, were gala-

ing their way across Chicago. So paying my grandfather a visit was really the least I could do. The Ombuds office wasn't glamorous; it was a squat brick building that sat in the midst of a working-class neighborhood of small, squarish houses, tidy yards, and chain-link fences. I parked the Volvo on the street in front, got out of my car and belted on my katana. I doubted I'd need it in my grandfather's office, but word that I hadn't been diligently armed was just the kind of talk that Catcher would pass along to Ethan. It's not that they were buddies, exactly, but chatting about me seemed like the kind of thing they'd do. It was nearly eleven o'clock, but the few windows in the office were ablaze with light. The Ombuds office, or so my grandfather figured, served creatures of the night. That meant third-shift hours for my grandfather, his admin Marjorie, Catcher, and Jeff Christopher, my grandfather's second right-hand man, an undefined shapeshifter and computer whiz kid. Who also had a giant crush on yours truly. I knocked on the locked front door and waited for someone to let me in. Jeff turned a corner and headed down the hallway toward me, a grin breaking across his face. He was all lean appendages and floppy brown hair, and tonight he wore his usual uniform pressed khakis and a long-sleeved button-up shirt, the sleeves rolled halfway up his forearms. When he reached the door, he typed an alarm code into a keypad beside it, then turned a lock and opened it. Couldn't stand being away from me? I was hurting a little, I said, then stepped inside as he held the door open. It's been, what, almost a week? Six days, twenty-three hours, and about twelve minutes. He recoded and locked the door, then grinned over at me. Not that I'm counting. Oh, of course not, I agreed as he escorted me down the hallway to the office he shared with Catcher. You're much too suave for that kind of thing. Much, he agreed, then entered the room and moved behind one of the four metal, atomic-era desks that sat in two rows in the tiny room. The top of Jeff's desk was taken up by a Frankenstein-esque collection of keyboards and monitors, upon which sat a stuffed toy I'd learned was a model of H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu. How was tap class? asked a sardonic voice on the other side of the room. I glanced over, found Catcher at the desk opposite Jeff's, hands crossed over his skull-cut head, an open laptop on the desk before him. One brow was arched over his green eyes, his curvy lips slightly tipped up in amusement. I had to admit it. Catcher was irritating, gruff, a demanding trainer . . . and ridiculously pretty. Mal definitely had her hands full. Hip-hop, I corrected, not tap. And it was just fancy. Your girl nearly coldcocked the instructor, but it was pretty uneventful other than that. I edged a hip onto one of the two empty metal desks. I wasn't entirely sure why there were four desks in all. Catcher and Jeff were the only two in this office; my grandfather and Marjorie had desks in other rooms. My grandfather had reached out to a vampire source since Catcher and Jeff represented Chicago's sorcery and shapeshifting communities, but the secret vamp avoided the office in order to avoid House drama, so no desk for him. Or her. Or it, I suppose. I was still trying to work that one out. Catcher glanced over at me. She nearly coldcocked the instructor? Well, she wanted to, not that I blame her. Aerobics Barbie is hard to stomach for more than five minutes at a time. But thanks to my excellent mediation and negotiation skills, no punches were actually thrown. The pad of footsteps echoed through the hall, and I looked over at the door to find my grandfather in his usual plaid flannel shirt and sensible pants, his feet in thick-soled shoes. And speaking of excellent mediation and negotiation skills, I said, hopping off the desk. My grandfather extended his arms and beckoned me into a hug. I walked into his embrace and squeezed, careful not to inadvertently break ribs with my increased vampire strength. Hi, Grandpa. Baby girl, he said, then pressed a kiss to the top of my forehead. How's my favorite supernatural citizen doing this fine spring evening? That hurts, Chuck, Catcher said, crossing his arms over his chest. I thought I was your favorite sup. His voice could hardly have been dryer. Seriously, Jeff said, his gaze shifting between computer monitors. Here we are, slaving night and day. Technically, Catcher interrupted, just night. Night. Jeff smoothly adjusted. Trying to keep everyone in the Windy City happy, trying to keep the nymphs in line. He bobbed his head up toward the posters of scantily clad women that lined the walls of the office. They were river nymphs, tiny, busty, doe-eyed, and long-haired women who controlled the branches of the Chicago River. They were also, as I'd seen on the night of my twenty-eighth birthday, pretty dramatic. They'd shown up en masse at my grandfather's house, all atwitter because one of the beauties beaus had cheated on her with another nymph. It was a catfight of monumental proportions, complete with tears, swearing, and raking nails. And it'd been stopped, surprisingly enough, by our Jeff. (My reticence notwithstanding, Jeff had a way with the ladies.) And we all know how difficult that can be, I said, giving Jeff a wink. He blushed, crimson rising high on his cheekbones. What brings you by? my grandfather asked me. Wait, wait, I got this one, Catcher said, grabbing an envelope from his desk and pressing it to his forehead, eyes closed, the perfect Carnac. Merit will be undergoing a change . . . of zip code. He opened his eyes and flipped the envelope back onto his desk. If you were trying to get to Hyde Park, you've gone a little too far south. I'm procrastinating, I admitted. I'd done the same thing the night before

my Commendation into the House, seeking solace among friends and the only family that mattered before I became part of something that I knew would change my life forever. Ditto tonight. Catcher's expression softened. You're all packed? I nodded. Everything's in the car. She'll miss you, you know. I nodded at him. I had no doubt of that, but I appreciated that he'd said it. He wasn't one for the mushy-gushy emotional stuff, which made the sentiment that much more meaningful. My grandfather put a hand on my shoulder. You'll be fine, baby girl. I know how capable you are and how stubborn and those are qualities that Ethan will come to appreciate. Given time, Catcher muttered. Lots and lots and lots of time. Eons, Jeff agreed. Immortal, I reminded them, using a finger to point at myself. We have the time. Besides, I wouldn't want to make it too easy on him. I don't think that will be a problem, my grandfather said, then winked at me. Could you do your Pop-Pop a favor and give him something for us? My own cheeks flushed at the reminder of the name I'd given my grandfather as a kid. Grandpa was much too hard for me to say. Sure, I said. I'd be happy to. Grandpa gave Catcher a nod. Catcher opened a squeaky desk drawer, then pulled out a thick manila envelope tied with a loop of red twine. There was no addressee, but the words CONFIDENTIAL and LEVEL ONE were stamped in capital black letters across one side. Level One was the Ombud version of Top Secret. It was the only category of information that my grandfather wasn't willing to let me see. Catcher extended the envelope. Handle this with care. I nodded and plucked it from his hand. It was heavier than I would have guessed, and held a good inch-thick sheaf of papers. I'm assuming there's no free sneak peek for the delivery girl? We'd appreciate it if you didn't, Grandpa said. That way, Catcher put in, we won't have to resort to physical violence, which would make things really awkward between us, you being Chuck's granddaughter. I think we can trust her, my grandfather said, his voice as dry as toast, but I appreciate your dedication. Just a day in the life, Chuck. Just a day in the life. Task in hand, I figured now was as good a time as any to quit procrastinating and actually make my way to the House. I did have a first glance at my new digs to look forward to. On that note, I said, I'm going to leave you three to it. I glanced back at my grandfather and held up the envelope. I'll make the drop, but I'm probably going to need a little somethin' somethin' for my efforts. He smiled indulgently. Meat loaf? He knew me so well. They called it losing your name. In order to become a vampire, to join a House, to gain membership into one of the oldest organized (and previously secret) societies in the world, you had to first give up your identity, surrender yourself to the whole. You gave up your last name to symbolize your commitment to your brothers and sisters. Your House affiliation stood in for your former surname, the hallmark of your new family. I suppose I was a weird exception to that rule: Merit was actually my last name, but I'd gone by Merit for years, so I kept the name post-Commendation. According to the Canon (chapter four: Vampires Whos on Top?), by giving up your name, you began to learn the communitarian values of vampire society. Shared sacrifice. Leadership. Accountability not to your previous human family, but to your new fanged one. Master vampires, of course, got to take their names back. That's why it was Ethan Sullivan not just Ethan who held the reins of Cadogan House. And speaking of Sullivan, that brings us to the most important communitarian value kissing the asses of higher-ranked vampires. I was on just such an ass-kissing mission now. Well, I was on a delivery mission. But given the intended recipient, ass kissing went along with the territory. Ethan's office was on the first floor of Cadogan House. The door was closed when I arrived, bags in hand, post-procrastination. I paused a moment before knocking, ever delaying the inevitable. When I finally managed to do it, a simple Come echoed from the office. I opened the door and went in. Ethan's office, like the rest of Cadogan House, was elegantly decorated to just this side of pretentious, as befit the Hyde Park address. There was a desk on the right, a seating area on the left, and at the far end, in front of a bank of velvet-curtained windows, a gigantic conference table. The walls were covered by built-in bookshelves, which were stocked with antiques and mementos of Ethan's 394 years of existence. Ethan Sullivan, head of Cadogan House and the Master who'd made me a vampire, sat behind his desk, a sliver of cell phone at his ear, eyes on a spread of papers before him. There always seemed to be papers before him; Masterdom was evidently heavy on the paperwork. Ethan wore an impeccably tailored black suit with a pristine white shirt beneath, the top button undone to reveal the gold medal that vampires wore to indicate their House affiliation. His hair, golden blond and shoulder length, was down today, tucked behind his ears. Although it bugged me to admit it, Ethan was beautiful. Perfectly handsome face, ridiculous cheekbones, chiseled jaw, shockingly emerald eyes. The face complemented the body, the majority of which I'd inadvertently seen while Ethan entertained Amber, the former Cadogan House Consort. Unfortunately, we'd discovered shortly thereafter that Amber had been assisting Celina in her attempt to take over Chicago's Houses. He glanced down at the bags in my hands. You're moving in? I am. Ethan nodded. Good. It's a good move. The tone wasn't laudatory, but condescending,

as if he was disappointed it had taken me as long as it did not even two months to make Cadogan House home. It wasn't an unexpected reaction. I nodded, holding back the snark in light of his grumpiness. I knew the limits of pissing off a four-hundred-year-old Master vampire, even if I pushed them sometimes. I dropped the bags, unzipped the duffel, pulled out the confidential envelope, and held it out to him. The Ombud asked that I deliver this to you. Ethan arched a brow, then took the envelope from my hands. He uncoiled the twine from its plastic disk, slipped a finger beneath the tab, and peeked inside. Something in his face relaxed. I wasn't sure what the Ombud's office had delivered, but Ethan seemed to like it. If there's nothing else, I said, bobbing my head at the bags on the floor. I didn't merit so much as a glance. Dismissed, he absently said, pulling the papers from the envelope and thumbing through them. I hadn't seen much of Ethan in the first few weeks. As reunions went, this one was pretty undramatic. I could deal with that. Having done my familial duty, I headed to the suite of first-floor offices reserved for Cadogan staff. Helen was behind her desk when I arrived. She wore a tidy pink suit, apparently having been granted an exception from Cadogan's all-black dress code. Her office was just as pink. Materials were stored in colored binders along neat wooden shelves, and her desk was carefully set with a blotter, pen cup, and calendar, events and appointments neatly penned in colored inks. She was on the phone, the earpiece of a princess-style handset tucked next to her perfect bob of silver hair, the fingers wrapped around the phone carefully manicured. Thank you, Priscilla. I appreciate it. Goodbye. She placed the phone carefully back on her receiver, clasped her hands, and smiled at me. That was Priscilla, she explained. Liaison for Navarre House. We're planning a summer event between the Houses. She cast a wary glance toward the open door, then leaned toward me. Frankly, she confided, this relationship between you and Morgan has done wonders for inter-House relations. Morgan Greer was my would-be boyfriend and the new Master of Navarre House. He'd assumed the position when Celina had been captured, rising to the ranks of Master from his former position of Second. From what I'd seen, Second was a kind of vampire Vice President. A man named Malik served as Second of Cadogan House. He seemed to mostly work behind the scenes, but it was clear that Ethan relied on him, confided in him. Thinking I owed it to Helen to be polite, I smiled and didn't correct her assessment of our relationship. Glad I could help, I said, bobbing my head toward the bags in my hands. I've got my bags, if you'll show me my room? She smiled brightly. Of course. Your room is on the second floor, in the back wing. Luggage notwithstanding, my shoulders slumped in relief. The second floor of Cadogan House held the library, the dining room, and a formal ballroom, among other rooms. Those other rooms did not include Ethan's apartments, which were on the third floor. That meant an entire floor would separate me and Ethan. I wanted to jump for joy. But given where I was standing, I silently screamed my happiness. Helen handed me a navy blue binder bearing the round, Cadogan House seal. These are the residency rules, maps, parking information, cafeteria menus, etc. Most of the information is online now, of course, but we like to have something for the Novitiate vampires to hold on to. She rose and glanced at me expectantly. Shall we? I nodded, resituating my bags and following her down the hall, then up a narrow back staircase. When we reached the second floor, we turned, then turned again, and were soon before a door of dark wood, a small bulletin board hanging from it. MERIT, SENTINEL, read a nameplate just above the bulletin board. Helen reached into a pocket of her jacket, pulled out a key, and inserted it into the lock. She twisted the doorknob, opened the door, and stood aside. Welcome home, Sentinel. CHAPTER THREE AMERICAS NEXT TOP MONSTER I stepped inside, put down my bags, and looked around. The room was small, square, and simply furnished. Wood paneling rose to chair-rail height, its color the same dark shade as the gleaming wood floors. Immediately facing the door was a window covered by a folding shutter. On the left side of the room was a bed with a wrought-iron frame. A small nightstand stood next to it, and an armchair sat beneath the window. On the right side of the room were two doors. A full-length mirror was attached to one. A bureau stood between them, and a bookshelf took up the wall to the right of the hallway door. It was basically a dorm room. For a twenty-eight-year-old vampire. Is there anything else you need? I smiled back at Helen. No, thank you. I appreciate your arranging a room so quickly. My retinas, already singed by the images of Catcher and Mallory's liaisons, were also appreciative. No problem, dear. Meals are served in the cafeteria at dusk, midnight, and two hours before dawn. She glanced down at her watch. You're a little past second meal now, and a little early for third. Can I find you something to eat? No, thank you. I grabbed something on the way over. Not just something—the best homemade meat loaf this side of Chicago. Heaven. Well, if you find you need anything, the kitchens on each floor are always stocked, and there's blood in the refrigerators. If you need something that you can't find in the kitchens, tell the waitstaff. Sure. Thanks again. Helen left and closed the door behind her. I laughed out loud at what she'd revealed. On the back of the door hung a poster for Navarre House, a life-sized image of

Morgan in jeans and a snug black thermal shirt, black boots on his feet, his arms crossed, leather bands around his wrists. Hed been letting his hair grow, and it was wild in the picture, waving around his starkly handsome face, cut cheekbones, and cleft chin, his bedroomy navy blue eyes staring out beneath long, dark brows and ridiculously long lashes. Apparently Helen had been coordinating with the Navarre Liaison on more than just a summer picnic. This required serious teasing, so I pulled the cell phone from my pocket and punched in Morgans number. Morgan, he answered. Yes, I said, Id like to speak to someone about ordering some Navarre porn, please. Maybe a six-foot-tall poster of that gorgeous Master vampire, the one with the dreamy eyes? He chuckled. Found my welcome gift, did you? Isnt it a little weird for a Navarre vamp to leave a welcome gift for a Cadogan vamp? I asked, while checking out the doors on the right side of the room. The first door opened to a small closet, inside of which hung a dozen wooden hangers. The second opened to a small bathroom claw-foot tub with shower, pedestal sink. Not if shes the prettiest Cadogan vamp. I snorted and closed the door again, then moved my bags to the bed. You cant think that lines gonna work. Did we finish off a deep-dish pie Saturday night? Thats my recollection. Then my lines work. I made a sarcastic sound, but the boy had a point. I need to go. Ive got a meeting in a few, he said, and the Master around here is a real administrative bastard. Mmm-hmm. I bet he is. You enjoy that meeting. I always do. And on behalf of Navarre House and the North American Vampire Registry, we hope your days in Cadogan House are many and fruitful. Peace be with you. Live long and prosper. Goodbye, Morgan, I said with a laugh, flipping my phone shut and sliding it back into my pocket. It was fairly debatable whether Morgan had manipulated me into our first date, which was the result of a political compromise (in front of fifty other vampires, no less). But wed passed that official first date a few weeks ago, and as hed pointed out, wed shared a pizza or two since then. I clearly hadnt done anything to quell his interest; on the other hand, I hadnt really tried to encourage it. I liked Morgan, sure. He was funny, charming, intelligent, and ridiculously pretty. But I couldnt shake the feeling that I was dating him from behind a wall of detachment, that I hadnt fully let my guard down. Maybe it was chemistry. Maybe it was a security issue, the fact that he was from Navarre and that, as Sentinel, I was supposed to be always on guard, always on call, for Cadogan House. Maybe it was the fact that hed gotten date number one because hed forced my hand in front of Ethan, Scott Grey, Noah Beck (the leader of Chicagos independent vampires), and half of Cadogan House. Yeah, that could be it. Or maybe it was something even more fundamental: However ironic, the thought of dating a vampire with all the political and emotional complications that entailed didnt thrill me. I guess any of those could have been the reason it felt strange, the reason I enjoyed his company but couldnt seem to just sink it, Morgans enthusiasm notwithstanding. Since I wasnt going to find resolution today, I shook the thought from my head and headed back to my bags, still zipped atop the small bed. I opened them and set to work. I began by pulling out books, writing supplies, and knick-knacks, then organized them on the bookshelf. Toiletries went into the bathrooms medicine cabinet, and foldable clothes went into the bureau. Shirts and pants were hung from the wooden hangers in the closet, beneath which I unceremoniously dumped my shoes. When Id emptied the bags, I began zipping them up again, but stopped when I felt something in an interior side pocket of my duffel. I reached in and found a small package wrapped in brown paper. Curious, I slipped the tape and unfolded the wrapping. Inside was a framed piece of cross-stitched linen that read: VAMPIRES ARE PEOPLE, TOO. Although I wasnt sure I believed the message, as surprise housewarming presents went, it wasnt bad. I certainly appreciated the thought, and made a mental note to thank Mal the next time I saw her. Id just folded the empty bags into the bottom bureau drawer when the beeper at my waist began to vibrate. Beepers were required gear for Cadogan guards, intended to ensure that we could quickly respond to fanged emergencies. Now that I was an official resident of the House instead of twenty minutes north I could respond in record time. I unclipped the beeper and scanned the screen. It read: OPS RM. 911. Not much for poetry, but the message was clear enough. There was some kind of emergency, so we were to mobilize in the Houses Operations Room, the guards HQ in the basement of Cadogan House. I reclipped my beeper, grabbed my sheathed katana, and headed downstairs. I dont care if theyre taking your picture, asking for your autograph, or buying your drinks! This. Is. Completely. Unacceptable. Luc, the head of Cadogan Houses guard corps, growled at us. As it turned out, the emergency, although arguably of our own making, had passed during the daylight hours. This lecture was the unfortunate fallout. There we were, sitting around a high-tech conference table in the equally high-tech, movie-ready Ops Room. Peter, Juliet, Lindsey, Kelley, and me, the guards (and Sentinel) responsible for ensuring the health and welfare of Cadogans Novitiate vampires. All of us were mid-upbraiding by a blondish, tousle-haired cowboy-turned-vampire who was berating us for the lackadaisical attitude our newfound popularity had spawned. So, yeah. We werent exactly

feeling the love. Were doing the best we can, pointed out Juliet, a feylike redhead who had more years as a vampire under her belt than I had years of life. Reporters followed Lindsey around last week, she said, pointing at another guard. Lindsey was blond, sassy, and, thankfully, in my corner. Yes, Luc said, lifting a copy of the Chicago World Weekly from the conference table, we have evidence of that. He turned it so we could all get a glimpse of Lindsey, who had been honored with a full-page photograph on the cover. She was decked out in her traditional blond ponytail, as well as a pair of designer jeans, stiletto heels, and oversized sunglasses, her body in motion as she smiled at someone off camera. I happened to know that the individual she had been smiling at was, like me, one of Cadogans newest vampires. Lindsey, much to Lucs dismay, had started seeing Connor just after the ceremony initiating us both into the House. This isnt exactly the approved Cadogan uniform, Luc pointed out. But those jeans are sweet, I whispered. I know, right? She grinned back at me. Seriously on sale. Seeing your tiny ass on the cover of the Weekly isnt the way to my heart, Blondie, Luc said. Then my plan worked. Luc growled, his patience obviously thinning. Is this truly the best you can do for your House? Lindseys chronic irritation with Luc was equaled only by what I imagined was her deep-seated passion for him, although you wouldnt know it from the menace in her glare. She popped up her index finger and began counting. First of all, I didnt ask to be photographed. Second of all, I didnt ask to be photographed. Third, I didnt ask to be photographed. She raised brows at Luc. Are we getting the point here? I mean, really. That not-showing-up-in-photographs deal is a total myth. Luc muttered something about insubordination and ran a hand through his hair. Folks, were at a crossroads here. Weve been outed, weve been investigated by Congress, and now weve got the paparazzi breathing down our necks. Weve also learned that in a few weeks time, the head of the North American Central, Gabriel Keene himself, will be visiting our fine city. Keenes coming here? Peter asked. To Chicago? Peter leaned forward, elbows on the conference table. Peter was tall, brown-haired, and thin, and looked to be thirty. He also had the just-so clothing and serene attitude of a man who had seen a lot of money in his lifetime (human or otherwise). To Chicago, Luc confirmed. Humans may not know shapeshifters exist, but we do, unfortunately for everyone. There were a couple of snickers among the guards. Vampires and shifters werent exactly friendly, and those tensions were increasing. Id heard Gabriel was coming to town to scope out the city as a future conference site for his shifters. News related to that visit, and the possibility that shifters would assemble en masse in Chicago, had made the dailies daily news updates for the Cadogan guards more than once. Look, lets not be naive and pretend this celebrity deal is going to last forever, all right? Humans, and no offense to you, Sentinel, since youre the recently fanged, are a fickle bunch. Weve seen what happens when they get pissy about us. Luc meant the Clearings, the vampire version of witch hunts. There had been two in Europe, the First in Germany in 1611, and the Second in France in 1789. Thousands of vampires, a big chunk of our European population, were lost between the two, staked, burned, gutted and left to die. Shifters had known about the Second Clearing but hadnt stepped in; thus the animosity between the tribes. And heres the punch line, Luc said. Weve learned that the Weekly is planning a multipart, in-depth expos on underground vamp activities. Underground? Kelley asked. What do we do that so underground? Thats exactly what Im about to find out, Luc said, pointing up at the ceiling. Im meeting your Master and mine in a matter of minutes. But until Ive had a chance to liaise with the big man on campus, let me remind you of some things you apparently need reminding of. We are here, Luc continued, to make our Master happy, not to increase the weight on his shoulders. Henceforth, because you were apparently not doing so in the first place, you will consider yourselves representatives of Cadogan House within the human world. You will conduct yourself accordingly, as befitting Cadogan vampires. He narrowed his gaze in Lindseys direction. And if that means no carousing into the early-morning hours with newbie vamps, so be it. She gave him a look that was both evil and pouty, but managed not to comment. Apparently believing that he had made his point to her, he returned his gaze to the rest of us. Any action that you take out there, outside the House, reflects on all of us, especially now that our asses are, apparently, news. That means you may be called upon to discuss House or vampire matters. He opened a folder in front of him, slid out a sheaf of papers, then passed the stack to Lindsey, who sat closest to him. She took one, then passed the remainder along. Talking Points? Kelley asked, repeating the title that spanned the top of the document. Kelley had a kind of exotic beauty pale skin, coal black hair, slightly uptilted eyes. Eyes that looked decidedly unimpressed with the paper she held gingerly between the tips of her fingers. Talking points, Luc said with a nod. These are answers you are authorized and when I say authorized, I mean required to give if a reporter tries to engage you in a politically sensitive dialogue. Read this, memorize this, and verbalize appropriately. Is that understood? Yes, sir, we answered, a chorus of obedience. Luc didnt bother with a response, but stood up and began shuffling the rest of the materials that

were spread on the table before him. Taking the hint meeting adjourned we pushed back our chairs. I rose, folded the talking points sheet, and was preparing to head out when Luc called my name. He stood, moved to the door, and beckoned me to follow with two crooked fingers. Damn. I knew what was coming, and twice in one day, too. Sentinel, you're with me, he said, and I blew out a slow breath, the beginning of my mental preparation for interacting with the world's most stubborn vampire. Sir, I said, stuffing the talking points into a pocket of my suit and straightening the katana belted at my waist. Lindsey gave me a sympathetic smile, which I accepted with a nod, then followed him. We took the stairs back to the first floor, headed down the hallway to Ethan's office, and found the door shut. Luc, without preliminaries, opened it. I tugged at the bottom of my black suit jacket, and followed him in. Ethan was on the phone. He nodded at Luc, then me, and raised his index finger as if to signal the call wouldn't take long. Of course, he said. I understand completely. He pointed at the two chairs in front of his desk. Obediently, Luc took the one on the right. I took the one on the left. Yes, sire, he said. The information is before me as we speak. As Master of Cadogan House, Ethan got the honorific liege, but sire was a mystery. I looked at Luc. He leaned toward me. Darius, he whispered, and I nodded my understanding. That would be Darius West, head of the Greenwich Presidium. We've considered that, Ethan said, nodding his head and scribbling something on a tablet on his desk, but you know the risks. Personally, I advise against it. There was more nodding, then Ethan's shoulders stiffened and he looked up. And looked directly at me. Yes, Ethan said, hauntingly green eyes on mine, we can certainly explore that route. I swallowed reflexively, not comforted by the possibility that I was a route to explore. Whatever this is, Luc said, leaning over again, you're not going to like it. *Revue de presse* Praise for the Chicagoland Vampires novels If you are looking for a vampiric role-model, you couldn't do any better than Merit Chicago is lucky to have her. #1 New York Times Bestselling Author Charlaine Harris A wonderfully compelling vampire heroine. USA Today Bestselling Author Julie Kenner One of my all-time favorite heroines. Loves Romances [For] fans of Charlaine Harris's Sookie Stackhouse series and Laurell K. Hamilton's Anita Blake. Library Journal Chloe Neill keeps readers right on the precipice of anticipation. Fresh Fiction Delivers enough action, plot twists, and fights to satisfy the most jaded urban fantasy reader. Monsters and Critics A refreshing take on urban fantasy. Publishers Weekly Smart, sexy, and delightful. A must-read. Candace Havens, author of *Dragons Prefer Blondes* A fun cast of quirky characters and smoking hot sexual tension A stunning combination. Tate Hallaway, author of *Honeymoon of the Dead* If you loved Nancy Drew but always wished she was an undead sword-wielding badass, Merit is your kind of girl. Geek Monthly