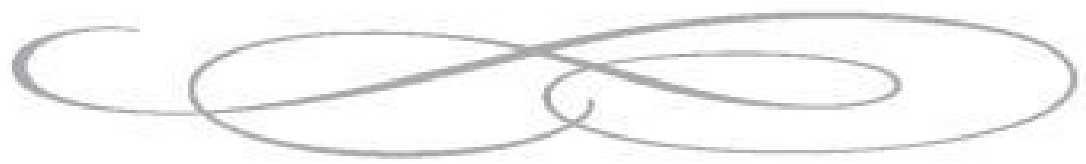


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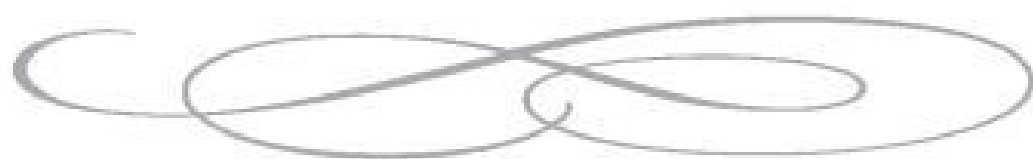


P. C. Cast



BERKLEY SENSATION. NEW YORK

Goddess
OF
Light



P. C. Cast



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Dear Reader,

Okay, I'll admit it—authors have favorite books. I know, I know, books are like children and we don't always want to admit to liking one better than another, but it's true. The Goddess Summoning books are my favorite children.

As with my bestselling young adult series, the House of Night, my Goddess Summoning books celebrate the independence, intelligence, and unique beauty of modern women. My heroes all have one thing in common: they appreciate powerful women and are wise enough to value brains as well as beauty. Isn't respect and appreciation an excellent aphrodisiac?

Delving into mythology and reworking ancient myths is fun! In Goddess of the Sea I retell the story of the mermaid Undine—who switches places with a female U.S. Air Force sergeant who needs to do some escaping of her own. In Goddess of Spring, I turn my attention to the Persephone/Hades myth and send a modern woman to Hell! Who knew Hell and its brooding god could be hot in so many wonderful, seductive ways?

From there we take a lovely vacation in Las Vegas with the divine twins, Apollo and Artemis, the Goddess of Light. Finally we come to what is my favorite of all fairy tales, "Beauty and the Beast." In Goddess of the Rose I created my own version of this beloved tale, building a magical realm from whence dreams originate—good and bad—and bringing to life a beast who absolutely took my breath away.

I hope you enjoy my worlds, and my wish for you is that you discover a spark of goddess magic of your own!

P. C. Cast

Praise for *Goddess of Light*

“A charmer . . . Cast continues her unique brand of delightfully mixing a modern-day romance with mythological legend . . . Creative.”

—*Midwest Book Review*

“Pure enjoyment . . . Anything can [happen] when gods and mortals mix.”

—*Rendezvous*

“A fanciful mix of mythology and romance with a dash of humor for good measure . . . Engages and entertains . . . Lovely.”

—*Romance Reviews Today*

Goddess of the Sea

“Suspense, fantasy, time travel, all topped off with a very healthy dollop of romance . . . The good news is that this is just the beginning.”

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“Captivating—poignant, funny, erotic! Lovely characters, wonderful romance, constant action, and truly whimsical fantasy . . . Delightful. A great read.” —*The Best Reviews*

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—*Midwest Book Review*

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—*New York Times* bestselling author Sharon Sala

“Sweet and funny.” —*Huntress Reviews*

Goddess of Spring

“One of the top romantic fantasy mythologists today.”

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“As always, there’s a dash of humor and lots of meltingly hot sex.”

—*Affaire de Coeur*

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—*Romance Reviews Today*

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—*The Best Reviews*

“Outstanding . . . Magic, myth, and romance with a decidedly modern twist. Her imagination and storytelling abilities are true gifts to the genre.”

—*Romantic Times*

Goddess of Love

“Sexy, charming, and fun, *Goddess of Love* is the fantasy romance of the year! You will fall in love with this book. (I did!)”

—*New York Times* bestselling author Susan Grant

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MYSTERIA

(with MaryJanice Davidson, Susan Grant, and Gena Showalter)

MYSTERIA LANE

(with MaryJanice Davidson, Susan Grant, and Gena Showalter)

Goddess
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Light



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*With love to the real Pamela,
owner of Ruby Slipper Designs,
who found her Apollo in Keith.
Lucky girl!*

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Thank you and a wink to my fabulous webgoddess, Shawn Wilson, who bears an amazing resemblance to Vernelle . . .

And, as always, I am grateful for my Goddess Editor, Christine Zika, and my friend and agent Meredith Bernstein.

PROLOGUE

“I have made my decision, Bacchus. The portal will remain open.” As Zeus spoke, he turned his back on the corpulent god and rested his hands against the smooth top of the marble railing that framed the balcony. He gazed down at the Great Banquet Hall of Olympus. The magnificent room was teeming with young gods and goddesses. Zeus’ smile became self-satisfied. The immortals were matchless in their beauty, and when they gathered as they did on this evening, their combined allure was more resplendent than all the stars in the heavens. Then his expression sobered. No matter how perfect the exterior, he had slowly been forced to admit to himself that there was something lacking in the group below him.

They lacked the sublimely mortal touch of humanity.

The Supreme Ruler of the Gods indulged himself briefly in a particularly enticing remembrance of Aegina . . . she had been the most lovely of maidens. Her skin had been seductive mortal cream. He could still feel the imprint of its unique softness as she had pressed herself willingly against his feathered back when he changed himself into a mighty eagle and carried her away to make love to her. No, her body had not had the sheen of perfection that gilded a goddess’s complexion, but she had responded to his touch with a naive exuberance that no goddess could ever match.

“Exuberance!” Zeus thumped his palm against the balcony railing, causing thunder to grumble across the sky in response. “That is what our young immortals are missing.” He didn’t turn to look at Bacchus; instead, his gaze roamed restlessly across the sparkling crowd. Considering, he squinted his dark eyes. What was it that Hera had said . . . *They take for granted the gifts of their immortal powers. They need to spend time away from the Ancient World. Somewhere they are not idolized and worshiped.* He had to admit that Hera tended to be right, even though he often had reason to wish her wife’s powers of observation were less accurate. He grimaced, wanting to forget the knowing look of her sharp gaze, which always seemed to see into his soul.

“They have languished too long in Olympus. It is past time that they mingle with modern mortals,” Zeus said suddenly.

Bacchus tried to keep the irritation from his voice. “But I am the only one of the immortals to even show an interest in the modern world. Why must you insist that they clutter up my realm?”

Zeus looked over his shoulder at Bacchus. “Demeter and Persephone have recently visited the modern world of mortals, and, as the Goddess of the Harvest told me, Persephone became so attached to a kingdom known as Tulsa that she has made a bargain with a mortal woman so that she may return on a regular basis.”

Bacchus drew a deep breath and tried not to squirm under the Thunder God’s gaze. “Then why not open the portal in the Kingdom of Tulsa?”

Zeus shook his head, turning back to his contemplation of the crowded hall. His talk with Demeter had convinced him that Tulsa was not a place where young gods and goddesses could come and go without being noticed.

“No, Bacchus. I have given this great consideration. I have searched the modern mortal world. Las Vegas provides the perfect setting with its fanciful mortal re-creation of Caesars Palace and The Forum.” Zeus chuckled, remembering the silliness he had glimpsed through the portal.

“But Las Vegas is my realm! You know how much time I have devoted to making Caesars Palace and The Forum mine. They will be meddling in a part of the world I have chosen as my own.”

Zeus’ head snapped around, and his eyes blazed. “You presume too much! Have you forgotten that rule supreme amongst the gods?” Thunder rolled threateningly in the background.

Hastily, Bacchus bowed his head. “Forgive me, Lord.”

“Do not forget yourself again, Bacchus. What I have given, I can also take away.” He stared hard at the lesser deity before returning to his scrutiny of the crowd. “Look at them. The portal has only been opened to them for a short time, but already I feel a change. Even the nymphs have become excited. He paused, scowling as he remembered how too many of the lovely semideities had chosen to be made stars and flowers and trees because they had become so bored with their lives. “Exuberance . . . that is what Olympus has lacked. And that is what Las Vegas has breathed into us once more.”

“But Lord.” Bacchus covered his growing anger and pitched his voice to a concerned, paternal tone. “You know what happens when gods and goddesses become too involved in the lives of mortals. Think of Troy. Remember Medea and Jason. Consider what became of Heracles and Achilles. Are you willing to doom the world of modern mortals to chaos and heartache?”

“I do not need to be lectured by such as you, Bacchus.” Zeus’ voice remained controlled, but his warning was clear. Then, changing moods as easily as a spring storm cleared from the mountains, he smiled. “But I have already considered such things. I have set into place certain . . . *restrictions*.” Zeus drew the word out carefully, his eyes gleaming—“which I intend to announce tonight. My children will simply be gracious visitors, enjoying a much-deserved sojourn in the Kingdom of Las Vegas.” He shifted his head so that Bacchus could see his stern, majestic profile. “This discussion is over. My will stands.”

Bacchus had no choice but to bow and retreat respectfully from the balcony, but his mind seethed. Once again his needs were to be ignored as Zeus played favorites. He had made Vegas his own. The mortals worshiped Bacchus there. At The Forum he commanded the attention of an audience of mortals every day. They cheered for him. They adored him. And now he was to share his realm with the young, beautiful darlings of Olympus?

“We shall see . . .” he whispered between clenched teeth as Zeus’ voice thundered from the balcony, calling the attention of the Banquet Hall to attentive silence.

“Beloved children!” Zeus beamed at the gathering. “It pleases me greatly that you enjoy my latest gift.” He stretched his arms, palms open, towards the two pillars that stood in the center of the hall, between which an opaque disk of light quivered and swirled. “This evening I announce more news—I have decided that the portal may be open to our lovely legions of nymphs, as well as the young Olympians!” Excited gasps from the minor female deities and semideities present sounded like sweet music to Zeus. “But remember, my beauties, you are entering a world unused to having gods such as us walk amongst them. You do not go to meddle with mortal affairs but rather to observe and to delight in a unique world. Lest you be tempted to forget that you are only there to visit, I have decided that the portal shall only be opened at limited times.”

The glowing faces below him all remained upturned and listening. Zeus searched the crowd until he found Demeter standing regally beside her daughter. He inclined his head to her in respectful acknowledgment before continuing.

“The Goddess of the Harvest has informed me that modern mortals enjoy most of their revelry during a small cluster of days which they call a weekend. So it is during mortal weekends that our portal will be open. You have from dusk on their Friday evening to dawn on their Monday to frolic with the modern mortals.”

With a small gesture of one hand, he silenced the enthusiastic whispers that his words evoked.

“And now, I give to you the Kingdom of Las Vegas!” The Thunder God clapped his hands together and the crowd cheered as the sky roared in response.

Below in the Banquet Hall Artemis laughed and shook her head fondly at Zeus before turning her attention back to her brother.

“Father is certainly pleased with himself,” she said.

Apollo shrugged. “I don’t understand the excitement. It is simply the modern world of mortals, not a new Olympus.”

Artemis raised one perfect, golden eyebrow at him. “Thus said by the god who spent months spying on a modern mortal in the Kingdom of Tulsa.”

“I was simply performing a favor for Demeter,” he answered a little too nonchalantly.

Artemis said nothing, but she studied her twin as he flirted half-heartedly with a violet-tressed nymph who had stopped to talk in excited little bursts about visiting the Kingdom of Las Vegas. There was no doubt about it. Apollo had been behaving oddly ever since the Persephone debacle.

Artemis sipped her ruby-red wine, remembering how her brother’s surprise at Persephone’s sudden rejection and odd infatuation with Hades had turned to outright shock when it had been discovered that the soul that had temporarily inhabited the goddess’s body had been that of a mortal woman. Persephone herself had been masquerading as a mortal on modern earth. So it was a mortal woman who had rejected Apollo and fallen in love with the God of the Underworld. Artemis’ lovely lips curled into a sneer. Mortals. In her experience they either whined pathetically and needed constant care or were so ridiculously hubris-filled that they self-destructed. All in all, they were only good for mild amusement or dalliance. Not that she would ever want to dally with one, but her brother was of a different mind. Often he had laughed and shared tales with her about his latest seduction of a hopelessly naive young maiden. Artemis took another long drink from her goblet. It was good for a mortal to be gifted by the love of a god. Mortal women should be grateful to be noticed by such a god as her twin brother.

The chattering nymph had drifted away, leaving Apollo to gaze silently at the swirling portal. Perhaps that was it. Apollo needed a diversion. Her brother had spent too much time lounging aimlessly around Olympus, brooding about the silly mortal’s rejection. He needed to remember that mortals were weak beings who lived the span of their frantic lives within the blink of an eye. They were easily manipulated—then easily cast aside.

A slow smile spread over her flawless face. What better place for him to be reminded of the insignificance of mortals than in a modern world teeming with the creatures?

“Come, Brother,” she said with a cheery smile. “Let us visit the Kingdom of Las Vegas.”

CHAPTER ONE

GOD, she adored airports. They reminded her of love and excitement and the promise of new beginnings. Not for the first time Pamela thought that it had probably been her deep and romantic infatuation with airports that had fueled her relationship with Duane. One glimpse of him in his United Airlines pilot's uniform, and all rational thought had leaked out of her body along with her ridiculously girly sigh of pleasure.

What a moron she'd been.

That relationship fiasco was over. Finally. Pamela closed her eyes and ran her fingers through her chic new short haircut. She wished she'd run into Duane somewhere in the Colorado Springs Airport before she boarded the Southwest Airlines jet. She would have loved to have seen his horrified expression as he realized that she had cut off all of that thick, dark hair that used to swing around his waist. The hair that he used to take such pleasure in touching and stroking and . . . Pamela shivered with disgust at the memory. Just thinking about it made her feel suffocated. Getting rid of her long hair had been the final step she had taken to free herself from the shackles of Duane's smothering love. It had been six blissful months since she'd spoken to him. After months and months of refusing his gifts, sending back his flowers, and reminding him that their marriage had made both of them miserable, the end of their relationship had finally sunk in, much to the chagrin of her family, who believed that Duane was perfect for her and that she was a fool to have left him. She could still hear her brother, her sister-in-law and her parents. *He's not that bad. He gives you anything you want. He makes great money. He adores you.*

He hadn't just adored her. He had wanted to consume her. Duane Edwards had appeared on the surface to be a successful, handsome, slightly macho, charismatic man. But under that surface, where the real Duane lived, lurked a needy, controlling, passive-aggressive boy/man.

Pamela rolled her shoulders to release the tension caused by thinking of Duane. On second thought she was glad she hadn't run into him at the airport. She hadn't cut her hair to "show him"! She'd cut it because that's what she wanted. It fit with the woman she was becoming. She rested her head against the seat back. Her lips curved up.

She liked the woman she was turning into. *Satisfied*, Pamela thought. She hadn't been so satisfied with herself in years. She didn't even care that she was mashed into the window seat of the Southwest Airlines jet next to a woman whose bony elbow kept poking her while she struggled to work the cigarette-scented crossword page of the *New York Times*.

Why would anyone obsessively work crossword puzzles? Did the woman have nothing better to do with her mind? Ms. Bony Elbows cackled and filled in another blank. Pamela guessed she didn't.

No! No negative thoughts. Self-fulfilling prophecies are powerful. Negative thoughts cause negative energy. Now she sounded like her mother, God help her. She sighed and pressed her forehead against the airplane window.

Okay, she'd mentally start over. She wouldn't let the lady sitting beside her bug her, because that was a pointless waste of time, as was dwelling on negatives in general. Hell, who was she to judge

She glanced down at the book in her lap. It had been open to the same page for the entire flight. What had ~~she~~ been doing with her mind? Instead of reading Gena Showalter's scrumptious *The Story Prince*, she'd been wasting her time thinking about her horrid ex. She was better than that—she worked hard to make it so.

Purposefully, Pamela shifted her attention to the view outside her window. The desert was a bizarre mixture of harshness and beauty, and she was surprised to realize that she found it attractive—at least from several thousand feet in the air. It was so different from the lush green of her Colorado home, yet strangely compelling. Turning, the plane dipped its wing down, and Pamela's breath caught at her first glimpse of Las Vegas. There, smack in the middle of desert and sand, red dirt and canyons, was a city of glass and light and snaking highways, which she could tell even from the air were choked with rushing cars.

"It's like something out of a dream," she murmured to herself.

"Damn right! Ain't it grand," Ms. Bony Elbows rasped through a throat that had sucked down too many Virginia Slim Menthol extra-longs.

Pamela stifled her irritation. "It is unusual. Of course I knew Vegas had been built in the middle of the desert, but—"

"This your first time in Sin City?" She interrupted.

"Yes."

"Oh, girlie! You are in for the time of your life." She leaned in and lowered her gruff voice. "Remember, what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas."

"Oh, well, I'm not here for pleasure. I'm here on business."

"A pretty young thing like you can sure find time to mix the two." She waggled her penciled-brows knowingly.

Pamela felt her jaw setting. She really hated it when people patronized her because she just happened to be attractive. She worked her ass off to be successful. And thirty wasn't young!

"Perhaps I could if I didn't own my own business, and I didn't care if my client recommended me to work to others, but I do. So I'm here for professional reasons, not to play."

Her seatmate's surprised look took in Pamela's diamond stud earrings—one carat each—and her well-tailored eggshell Fendi slack suit, the classic color of which was nicely set off by a melon and tangerine silk scarf and shell.

Pamela read the look in her eye, and she wanted to scream, *No, I did not have some damned man buy me this outfit!*

"Just what is it you do, honey?"

"I own Ruby Slipper, an interior design business."

The woman's crinkled face softened into a smile, and with a start Pamela realized that she must have once been very pretty.

"Ruby Slipper . . . I like that. Sounds real nice. I'll bet you're good at it, too. Just lookin' at you can tell you got class. But it don't look like Vegas class. What are you doing here?"

“My newest client is an author who is building a vacation home in Vegas. I’ve been hired to decorate it.”

“An author . . .” She fluttered long red fingernails at Pamela. “That’s big stuff. Who is it? Maybe I’ve heard of him.”

“E. D. Faust. He writes fantasy.” Pamela only knew that because she’d looked him up hastily on Amazon during their first phone call. The man had proclaimed himself, “E. D. Faust, bestselling author.” She’d had no idea who he was, but when she typed his name into Amazon’s search box, her screen had blazed with page after page of titles like *Pillars of the Sword*, *Temple of Warriors*, *Naked Winds*, *Faith of the Damned* . . . and on and on. At that moment he’d instantly had her undivided attention, even though Pamela didn’t particularly care for male science-fiction and fantasy authors. She read a little of everything, so she’d tried a few of the giants of the genre, but it seemed they were all too much alike. Swords, magic, spaceships, blood, testosterone . . . blah . . . blah . . . yawn. But she wasn’t stupid. Far from it, and one of her primary rules was never, ever say negative things about a client. So she put on a bright smile and nodded in response to her travel partner’s blank look like she thought E. D. Faust was Nora Roberts.

“His current release is *Pillars of the Sword*, but he’s published more than fifty books, and most of them have appeared on all the major bestseller lists.”

“Never heard of him, but then I like a good crossword puzzle more than just about anything.” She cackled again. “Well, anything except a long, tall man in a cowboy hat with a cold beer.”

She elbowed Pamela as she laughed, this time on purpose. Pamela was surprised to feel herself smiling back. There was something honest and real about the old woman that made her craggy face and her gruff manner strangely appealing.

“Pamela Gray,” she said, holding out her hand.

“Billie Mae Johnson.” She returned the handshake with a firm grip and a warm smile. “Pleased to meet ya. If you need a friendly face or a cold beer, come on by the Flamingo. I’m usually working the bar on the main floor.”

“I may just take you up on that.”

The stewardess announced that they were landing, and Pamela returned her seat to the full and upright position. Billie Mae shook her head and grumbled at the squares of the crossword puzzle, most of which were still empty.

“Ya have to know that the hoity-toity *New York Times* has gone to hell when they start letting divorce lawyers from Texas write their puzzles.” She sighed and concentrated on one of the questions before looking askance at Pamela. “Hey, the snooty clue is ‘metaphoric emancipation.’ The answer has seven letters. All I can think of is Budweiser, but that’s nine.”

“Is the attorney who wrote the puzzle a man or a woman?”

“Man.”

“Try alimony,” Pamela said, smiling wickedly.

Billie Mae filled in the letters with a satisfied grunt, then she winked at Pamela as the plane touched down. “You just earned yourself a free beer. Hope you’re as good at decoratin’ as you are at

crosswords.”

PAMELA approached the uniformed man who was holding a sign that spelled out Pamela Gray, Rubber Slipper, in gold embossed letters. Before she could speak, the man executed an efficient little bow and asked in a clipped British accent, “Miss Gray?”

“Yes, I’m Pamela Gray.”

“Very good, madam. I shall take your luggage. Please be so good as to follow me.”

She did, and had to hurry to keep up with his brisk pace as he whisked confidently through the crowded airport and out to the waiting limo. Pamela wanted to stand and gawk when he opened the door to a lovely vintage stretch Rolls-Royce, but she slid into the dove-colored leather seat gracefully, thanking him before he closed the door.

“Well met, Miss Gray!” a deep voice boomed at her from across the limo.

Pamela jumped. Out of the shadows a man leaned forward, extending a beefy hand. As she automatically grasped it, the crystal chandeliers hanging from both sides of the car blinked on.

“I am, of course, E. D. Faust. But you must call me Eddie.”

Recovering her composure, she smiled smoothly and returned his firm grip. Her first impression of E. D. Faust was one of immense size. As soon as he had hired her, she had gone immediately to the nearest bookstore and purchased several of his novels, so she was familiar with his author photo. But the pictures in the back of his books hadn’t begun to capture the size of the man. He filled the space across from her, reminding her of Orson Welles or an aging Marlon Brando. And he was dark. His hair, which formed an abrupt widow’s peak, was thick and black and tied back in a low ponytail. His long-sleeved silk shirt was black, as were the enormous slacks and the glistening leather boots. Though insulated by layers of fat, the strong lines of his face were still evident, and his age was indeterminate—Pamela knew he must be somewhere between thirty and fifty, but she had no clue exactly where. He watched her watching him, and his brown eyes sparkled with what might have been a mischievous glint, as if he was used to being the center of attention and he enjoyed it.

“It’s nice to finally meet you, Eddie. And please, call me Pamela.”

“Pamela it is then.” Abruptly, he tapped the dragon-head handle of his black cane against the half-lowered panel of glass that divided the passenger area of the limo from the chauffeur. “You may carry on, Robert.”

“Very good, sir.”

The sleek limo pulled away from the curb.

“I trust your journey has not overly fatigued you, Pamela,” he said.

“No, it was only a short flight from Colorado Springs.”

“Then you would not be opposed to beginning your work immediately?”

“No, I’d be pleased to start right away. Does this mean you’ve made a decision about the style

you'd like for your home?" Pamela asked eagerly. If this exquisite car was an example of Eddie's taste and budget . . . her head spun at the possibilities. A showcase! She would create an exquisite vacation paradise fit for the King of Fantasy Fiction.

"I most certainly have. I know exactly what I desire. I found it here in this magical city. All you need do is to replicate it." Eddie tapped the window again. "Robert, take us to Caesars Palace."

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