

# URBAN MYTHIC

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C. GOCKEL   CHRISTINE POPE   MEG COLLETT  
C. J. BRIGHTLEY   MARK E. COOPER  
HELEN HARPER   MELISSA SNARK  
DEBRA DUNBAR   RON NEITO   S. T. BENDE  
NANCY STRAIGHT



## ABOUT THE BOOKS

### ***Soul Marked* by C. Gockel**

When Tara finds a man passed out in her alley, she hopes he's just a junky, and then she sees his pointed ears...

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### ***Chosen* by Christine Pope**

When a fatal fever nearly wipes out the entire world's population, the survivors of what became known as "the Dying" believe the worst is in the past. Little do they know...

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### ***The Hunted One* by Meg Collett**

Archangel Michaela has been framed for crimes against Heaven and must prove her innocence. Disgraced and wingless, she discovers

the holy angels have a plan for Heaven, and it is one that may prove to be the End of Days

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***Things Unseen* by C.J. Brightley**

A moment's compassion draws history student Aria Forsyth into a conflict between human and inhuman, natural and supernatural, and she begins to discover the secrets of the Empire, the Fae, and what it means to be human.

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***Way of the Wolf* by Mark E. Cooper**

Doctor David Lephmann is attacked when he tries to aid a shifter in trouble, and is thrust into a world of violence and mistrust where he must battle for a place among his new people. Can he survive the challenge?

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***Eros* by Helen Harper**

The Greek god of Love and the human who caught his heart—a love story that's endured for hundreds of years. Eros is a contemporary re-telling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche.

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***The Wild Hunt* by Ron Nieto**

Lily was meant to become a faerie doctor, a warden of humans

and a keeper of balance, but disbelief and pragmatism led her away from the hidden world and into a mundane life. But she will be forced to face the truth, and the fae, if she wants to save her family.

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***A Demon Bound* by Debra Dunbar**

Sam is an imp, on vacation from Hel, but when she's blackmailed into tracking a rogue angel, her vacation, and possibly her life, might be over.

\* \* \*

***Valkyrie's Vengeance* by Melissa Snark**

A thirty-year alliance that aligned wolves and hunters has shattered. When children are abducted, Victoria Storm, priestess of Freya and Odin's Valkyrie, must work with her worst enemy to rescue them.

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***The Blue Rose*, by Lola St. Vil**

The most powerful Angel that ever lived...The dangerous demon who holds her heart... As he scoops her into his arms, away from the flames, he begins to understand, he isn't rescuing her; she's saving him...

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***Elsker* by S.T. Bende**

Kristia Tostenson just found out her new boyfriend is the Norse God of Winter—an immortal assassin destined to die at Ragnarok. Her orderly life just got very messy.

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***Blood Debt* by Nancy Straight**

A mythological romance: Camille is denied her father's identity until her mother's death. She discovers a family she never dreamed of and a world that should not exist.

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Urban Mythic

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# SOUL MARKED

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A STANDALONE NOVEL IN THE I BRING  
THE FIRE UNIVERSE

## **Magic is real, but Tara's life isn't a fairy tale.**

From humble beginnings, Tara's managed to work her way into a great job researching Dark Energy, aka "magic," in Chicago. She has a beautiful house she renovated with her own hands, and a loving extended family, but she hasn't found her soulmate ... Not that she believes in soulmates.

Lionel is a Light Elf. Despite being of dubious heritage and being born a peasant, he's risen in the ranks to serve the Elf Queen. Like all true elves, Lionel has a soulmark to identify his soulmate ... He just hasn't found her yet.

When Lionel's and Tara's lives collide and Dark Elves strike, they're forced to work together or perish. Friendship and more grows between them, but dangers loom ... Tara is more important than she knows, and Lionel is more important than he wants to admit. Both of them have choices to make.

Will Lionel choose a "perfect" love over Tara? How much is Tara willing to give up for a happily ever after?

**They might find that in an uncertain world, the love you struggle for is the only certain thing.**



## FOREWORD

***Soul Marked* is a standalone novel.** It is based in my I Bring the Fire universe, but you need absolutely no knowledge of that universe to enjoy it.

For those of you who are familiar with I Bring the Fire, the events in this story happen between *Fates* and *Warriors*.

For those of you finding this book after reading *Magic After Midnight*, the story takes place before the demise of Odin.

**To all readers, new and old, thank you for following me on this journey. Enjoy!**



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## INVISIBLE

Wincing in the dark and dust, crushed in the small space, Tara stretches her arm. She finds the socket, inserts the plug, and hears a beep above her. Stifling a sneeze, Tara says, “I think I fixed your printer, Dr. Eisenberg.”

From across the lab comes a distracted, “Mmmm ...”

She didn’t expect more. Scooting out from under the desk, she sees the doctor, back to her, sitting in front of a computer. Not turning, he says, “I love this interface for the dark energy detector you built me, Tara. I told you that you could do it!”

Tara smiles. “Thank you.” She hadn’t been so sure, but he’d convinced her to try, and she is pretty proud of the results. It’s not as special as he makes it out to be; she’d just combined low-frequency mining communication technology with dark energy detection tech. Still, putting that thing together, and designing the computer interface had been one of the more interesting things she’s gotten to do for her job. When she applied for the job for “network support specialist,” she hadn’t realized how many plugs she’d be inserting into electrical outlets.

Dr. Eisenberg's voice rings with delight. "I can't wait to see my first magical creature!"

It's her turn to be noncommittal. "Mmm ..." Dr. Eisenberg is new to Chicago. She's lived here her whole life. She was here the day the world learned that humans aren't alone in the universe. There are other realms, and some of humanity's mythical gods and magical creatures—more scientifically known as "dark energy utilizing life-forms"—are real. She watched the dust rise from downtown as Loki, the so-called Norse God of Mischief and Chaos, and a handful of AK-47 toting Dark Elves, turned half of Chicago's financial district to dust. Loki vanished, the Dark Elves retreated to Eastern Europe, but visits by trolls, wyrms, and other nasties are fairly regular. Granted, the unicorns are pretty, Thor seems nice, and Odin's people rounding up the Dark Elves and their collaborators around Chernobyl seem to be taking care of the radiation situation there, but her feelings on magical creatures are decidedly mixed.

Peering over his shoulder to check the readouts, her heart falls. Swallowing, she bites her lip, takes a deep breath, and fesses up. "Dr. Eisenberg, I don't think you should thank me."

Spinning in his chair, he looks up at her through his bifocals, a frown on his lips and brows furrowing. "What do you mean?" he huffs.

The small man goes from warm to ice cold in seconds. He's more than a little plump, and right now his cheeks are trembling with what she knows is barely suppressed rage. He can be a difficult guy to work with, but Tara hates to let him down. He gave her, a Liberal Arts major without a computer science or engineering degree, the chance to work on this project, and she's messed up.

Swallowing, she points at the readout. "Well, this is saying that there is a very large sustained energy disruption."

"Yes," Dr. Eisenberg says, eyes narrowing. "What are you getting at?"

Tara gulps. "The only thing that would cause this sort of readout would have to be a wyrm, or an invading army."

Dr. Eisenberg's pale skin goes chalky white.

Holding up a hand, she points to the office at the end of the lab where he's been keeping Tara's device. It's designed to transmit through rock and concrete, and he's been waiting for the guys from building maintenance to install it in the basement so they can test it. "If it was working, we'd have been eaten by now."

Dr. Eisenberg licks his lips nervously. "It's not in my office ... or in the basement," he whispers, and then spins in his chair. "Oh my god, oh my god."

Tara's heart skips a beat. She puts her hand on his shoulder. "We have to be calm. Where did you—?"

A deep voice booms, "Be calm about what?"

Tara turns to find Dean Kowalski at the door.

Spinning back around in his chair, Dr. Eisenberg cries, "I put Tara's dark energy detector device in the abandoned Washington-State L station and it's detected a wyrm ... or an army."

Tara blinks. Well that tells her the *where*.

"Why is your device somewhere other than this campus?" Kowalski demands.

Dr. Eisenberg pushes his glasses up his nose. "It's Tara's detector, George. You never give her credit."

Tara's eyebrows hike. *Not the time to point that out, Dr. Eisenberg.*

Kowalski roars, "Eisenberg, if you were in the abandoned L stop, you were trespassing!"

"You didn't get me authorization to put it in the basement. Now we have to warn the FBI and call 911!" Dr. Eisenberg cries, raising his arms.

"Do you realize the laws you're breaking by putting an unsanctioned surveillance device on public property? And how much money we get from city tax dollars?"

"There isn't any law against that!" Dr. Eisenberg snaps.

Tara looks at the computer screen and the steady yellow dark energy indicator ... if it's real, it's a wyrm ... not an army.

“Of course there is, and if there isn’t, there should be—”

Taking advantage of her invisibility, Tara slips out the door, whips out her phone, and types out a quick warning on her social media channels.

*Thought I saw a wyrm at Washington/State L.*

She tags @ChicagoDE—the FBI’s handle for their Dark Energy Branch in town. Tara’s message is not technically a lie, even if she “saw it” on a readout on a computer. Brow furrowing, she also tags @godofradioshack and @godofsmallengines. They tweet a lot about magic detection devices—she’s almost sure they’re government techs.

She gets a reply from @godofradioshack almost immediately.

*Thanks @ChiQueen. We’re on it.*

They trust her. She smiles grimly. This isn’t the first time she’s let information like this out into the wild when Kowalski had a meltdown about procedures, or proprietary technology, or just “you didn’t get my permission for that!”

Moments later, @ChicagoFBI posts a yellow alert for the L line, and Tara nods in satisfaction. Yellow alert is perfect. Red alert would have people trampling each other to get to the exit. Yellow will have them griping about a possible false alarm—which it might be—but heading for the exit anyway. Wyrms are giant, gray, venomous snake things. After you’ve seen one wyrm, you don’t want to see another.

Kowalski storms through the door, not even glancing at her as she slips her phone away. Crossing her arms, she rolls her eyes at his back. His deliberate ignorance of her existence is probably not because she’s black, or female, or doesn’t have even a Master’s degree. It’s probably all three. She sighs. She didn’t take this job because she wanted to be famous, she took this job because she likes it. The hours aren’t stressful—well, they weren’t before she started working with Dr. Eisenberg—the health insurance is great, and it seemed like the perfect job to have if you wanted to start a family. She frowns. Not that she has a family, or even a significant other.

Shaking her head, she pats her phone in her pocket. She may be



invisible, but she's an invisible person saving the world, and she's ready for any crisis Kowalski, or magic, sends her way.

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Lionel stands in the lone Light Elf outpost in the Delta of Sorrows and wishes he could make himself invisible. The night wind is gusty, and branches of the skeletal black swamp trees clack against the outpost's wooden walls. He hears the sounds of beasts and insects in the swamp. Soldiers pass by him, scrutinizing his steward's attire with hard eyes. Around him, he hears whispers. "A steward should not be able to open a World Gate," someone says. Someone else replies, "The peasant who approached us on the Golden Road was his mother ... Peasants shouldn't rise to the level of steward to Her Majesty, either."

Lionel feels his ears flush. It is unusual that a peasant as young as Lionel is magical enough to rise to the level of steward. He hates attention being brought to that ... it brings up too many awkward questions. *Who is your mother?* And worse. *Who is your father?* He shifts on his feet and tries to ignore the gossip.

It's harder to ignore the way his skin crawls to the points of his ears. The Delta of Sorrow's waters twist magic inside out and backward. Even though he'd ridden in on a horse, and had been a good pace above the effluent, the whole trip he'd felt like his hair had been brushed the wrong way. Now he feels like the black trees, angry beasts, and dark waters around the outpost are ready to swallow the tiny piece of dry land whole. He doesn't know how the Dark Elves can live here.

He turns at the sound of footsteps. Finding himself facing Lady Light Leaf, a member of the armed escort that brought him to the desolate place, Lionel bows.

"Steward, come with me," she says.

Lionel falls into step as she strides toward a bare patch of land atop the tiny hillock within the compound. He can feel the flush of

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