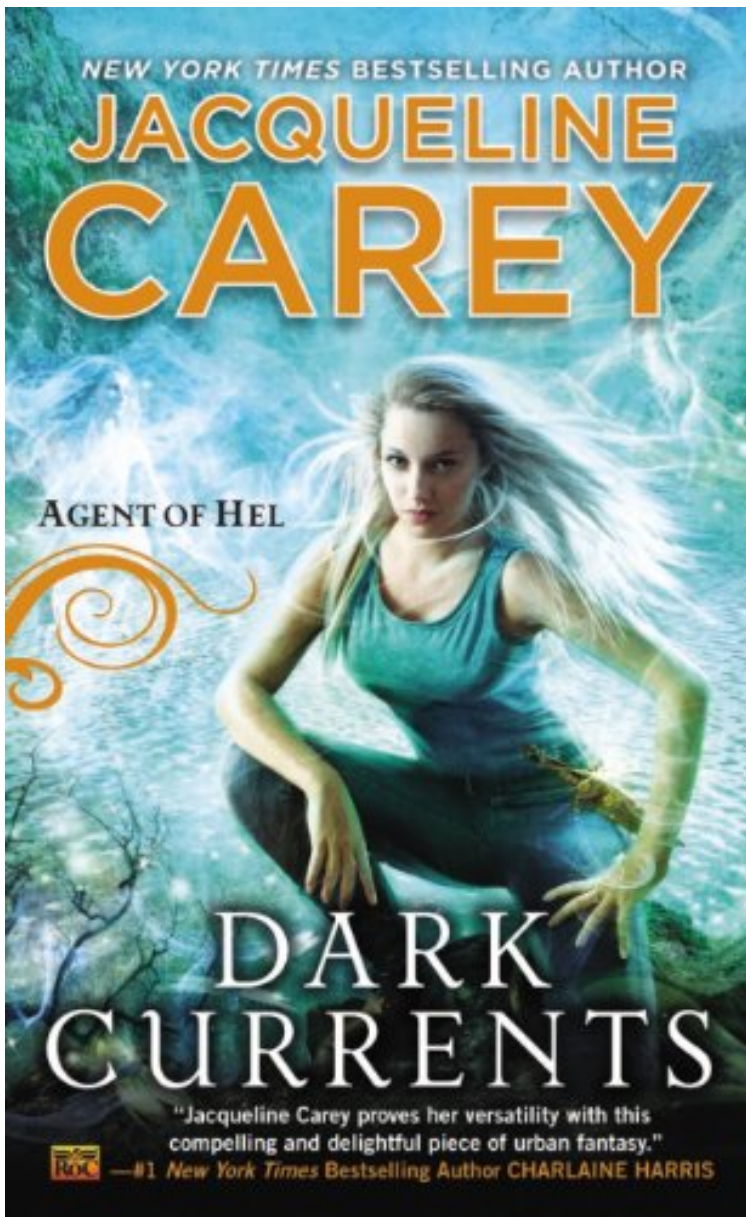


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Dark Currents: Agent of Hel



*Par Jacqueline Carey
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe Midwestern resort town of Pemkowitz boasts a diverse population: eccentric locals, wealthy summer people, and tourists by the busloadnot to mention fairies, sprites, vampires, naiads, ogres, and a whole host of eldritch folk, presided over by Hel, a reclusive Norse goddess. To Daisy Johanssen, fathered by an incubus and raised by a single mother, its home. And as Hel's enforcer and the designated liaison to the Pemkowitz Police Department, its up to her to ensure relations between the mundane and eldritch communities run smoothly.But when a young man from a nearby college drownsand signs point to eldritch involvementthe towns booming paranormal tourism trade is at stake. Teamed up with

her childhood crush, Officer Cody Fairfax, a sexy werewolf on the down-low, Daisy must solve the crime and keep a tight rein on the darker side of her nature. For if she's ever tempted to invoke her demonic birthright, it could accidentally unleash nothing less than Armageddon.

It was an idyllic summer evening in Pemkowitz the night the Vanderhei kid died. No one could have guessed that the town was hovering on the brink of tragedy. Well, I suppose that's not technically true. The Sphinx might have known, and the Norns, too, come to think of it. But if they did, they kept it to themselves. There's some sort of Soothsayers Code that prevents soothsayers from soothsaying on a day-to-day basis, when it might, you know, avert this kind of ordinary, everyday tragedy. Something about the laws of causality being broken and the order of creation overturned, resulting in a world run amok, rivers running backward, the sun rising in the west, cats and dogs getting married. . . . I don't know; don't ask me. I don't pretend to understand, especially since it wasn't an ordinary, everyday tragedy after all. But I guess it didn't rise to the standard required to break the Soothsayers Code, since no sooth was said. Anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself. So, it was an idyllic evening in Pemkowitz, the little resort town I call home. A mid-July Michigan evening, soft and warm, not too muggy, one of those evenings when the sunlight promises to linger forever. It was a Sunday, and I had plans to meet my best friend, Jen Cassopolis, for Music in the Gazebo. Los Gatos del Sol, a Tex-Mex band, were playing. They say music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, and in my experience, it's true. Also, I'd seen the promo poster, and the guys in the band were pretty cute. Hey, it doesn't hurt. Mogwai didn't come when I called him, but he was a cat of independent means and he'd been pissed at me since I'd given in to pleas from my friends in animal rescue and had him neutered. I'd hated to do it, since he wasn't really my cat so much as a streetwise buddy who dropped by on a regular basis, but there were an awful lot of feral Moglets running around town. I filled his bowl on the back porch and made sure the torn screen that served as a cat door was ajar. It wasn't the most secure arrangement, but I didn't worry too much. For one thing, my apartment was on the second story above Mrs. Brown's Olde World Bakery. Mogwai's route to the screened porch involved a series of feline acrobatics, Dumpster to fence to porch, that I doubted many humans could duplicate. As for nonhumans . . . well. Those who were my friends, I trusted. As far as I knew, those who weren't didn't want much of anything to do with me. I slung my folding chair in the carrying case over my shoulder, locked the apartment behind me, and headed down the stairs into the alley alongside the park. In front of the bakery, there was a line of tourists spilling out the door and down the sidewalk. There always was at this time of year. Most locals would avoid the place until after Labor Day. It was quiet in the rear of the bakery. That was where the magic happened, but it happened in the wee hours of the night, after the bars had closed and the last tourist had staggered home, before the sun rose. Cutting through the park, I headed for the river, dodging meandering families pushing strollers, small children clutching ice-cream cones that melted and dripped down their chubby hands. It could be a pain if you were in a hurry, but I wasn't, so it made me smile. I still remembered my first ice-cream cone. It was Blue Moon, a single scoop in a kiddie cone. If you've never had it, I can't even begin to describe it. Truth is, for all its quirks and flaws, I love this town. I wasn't born here, but I was conceived here. And when my mom returned here four years later, a desperate young single mother with a half-human child who couldn't manage to fit into the mundane world outside, Pemkowitz took us in. Twenty years later, I'm still glad to be here. My feeling of benevolent well-being persisted the entire two blocks it took to reach the gazebo. The gazebo was perched in a smaller park alongside the river. It was a fanciful structure of white gingerbread wicker strung with white Christmas lights, dim in the still-bright daylight. The band was setting up, and a good-size crowd had already gathered, locals and tourists alike. The river sparkled in the sunlight. It had its own unique smell, dank and green and a little fishy, yet somehow appealing. The hand-cranked chain ferry, its curlicued canopy also painted white, was making its way across the river, the big chain rattling as a pair of small boys hauled furiously at the crank, their efforts encouraged by the amused operator in the best Tom Sawyer tradition. I'd begged for a chance to turn the crank when I was a kid, too. Beside the ferry landing, a massive weeping willow trailed an abundance of graceful branches into the water. Beneath its green shadow, tourists fed popcorn to the ducks, the adults hoping for a glimpse of something more eldritch and exotic, the children delighted to settle for greedy mallards. Life was good. A vast affection filled me, making me feel warm and buoyant. I held on to the feeling, willing it to last. It didn't. The moment I caught sight of Jen, it fled, leaving me feeling as shriveled as a pricked balloon. Envy rushed in to fill the empty space it left behind. I'm okay with being cute, honest. I shouldn't complain. I recognize the fact that there's a certain irony in it. On a good day, I can aspire to pretty. Jen's pretty on an ordinary day, and on a good day, she can aspire to gorgeous. She's got that perfect Mediterranean coloring, with dark hair and olive skin, and she's one of those girls who always looks sort of

glossy. When we were both teenagers, my mom said she looked like Phoebe Cates in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. I'd never heard of the movie, which shocked Mom, so she rented it from the library and we watched it together. We watched a lot of TV and videos together, Mom and I. Turns out it was a pretty good movie, and she was right. Anyway, Jen was having a good day, in part because the light was hitting her just so, and in part because she was flirting with a guy who obviously found her attractive, mirroring it right back at him. A guy I knew. Oh, crap. In a small town, practically everyone knows one another. When you combine the entire population of Pemkowitz, East Pemkowitz, and the outlying township, it's only about three thousand people. Between the tourists, the cottagers, and the boat owners, that triples during the summer, but they don't count in the same way people you went to high school with do. I not only went to high school with Cody Fairfax, I worked with him at the Pemkowitz Police Department, where he was the youngest patrol officer on the force and I was a part-time file clerk. Or at least that's what I started out as. I did a lot more behind the scenes, but that was mostly between me and the chief. Unfortunately for me, I had a whopper of an unrequited crush on Cody Fairfax, who was currently lounging on a blanket at my best friend's feet, propped on his elbows, legs crossed at the ankles. Unfortunately for him, I also knew exactly what kind of closet case he was. When it came to women, he had a reputation for being a player that he'd earned fair and square, but there was a reason behind it, and it wasn't fear of commitment. Cody was afraid of being found out. Envy and anger, two of the Seven Deadly Sins. I could feel them coiling deliciously in my gut, wanting to rise and consume me. I had to be careful with that sort of thing, especially anger. When I lost control of my temper, things . . . happened. With an effort, I made myself envision the emotions as a glass filled with roiling liquid, and imagined myself emptying it slowly on the ground. Bit by bit, my mood eased. While the band tuned their instruments, I picked my way through the throng, unpacked my folding chair, and plunked it beside Jen's. She glanced over at me. Hey, Daise! It's about time. I made myself smile in response. Yeah, sorry. I was hoping Mogwai had forgiven me. Jen laughed. After you had him snipped? Not likely. Cody acknowledged me with a studied casualness. Good evening, Miss Daisy Jo. Officer Fairfax. I shot him a covert glare. He raised one eyebrow in response. Members of the eldritch always recognize one another, and we can usually identify one another by nature or species in time. Cody knew perfectly well that I knew what he was. After all, in some circles in Pemkowitz, it was common knowledge. But the soothsayers aren't the only ones with a code. There's a code of honor in the eldritch community, too. You don't out one another. Everyone in town knew about me because the story had gotten around when I was conceived, even before Mom and I moved back here. It was different with the Fairfaxes. And I wouldn't out Cody for spite or any other petty reason. I'd catch some serious flak if I did, and his reclusive clan was rumored to be pretty dangerous, too. But that didn't mean I was about to let him work his wiles on Jen. She'd had a hard enough life. I just wished he weren't so damn good-looking and that I didn't have a crush on him. I couldn't help it. For me, it went back to the fourth grade. Cody was in the seventh grade, and we rode the school bus together: me to the mobile home community alongside the river out in the marshy sticks where Mom rented the double-wide she owns now, him to his clan's place out in the county woods. There were bullies on the bus, and if I wasn't exactly afraid of them, I was afraid of the reaction they might elicit from me. They had heard the rumors. They made it a point to pick on me. Cody made them quit. It was as simple as that, and I'd been infatuated with him ever since. Even through his transformation from a promising young JV basketball star to a semidropout loser and alleged stoner, through his myriad high-school-and-after conquests, none of which ever lasted longer than a month or two, and through his surprising rebirth as an officer of the law. Once, he had protected me. It was enough. Ladies, I should be going. Uncrossing his legs and hoisting himself from propped elbows, Cody rose to his feet. He did it in one effortless movement, the kind you might expect of someone who had been a JV basketball star. Or, say, a feral someone who occasionally howled at the moon and turned into something wild, untamed, and bloodthirsty, possibly quite furry. I'm on duty tonight. I glanced surreptitiously at the sky, where a crescent moon hung pale in the fading cerulean. The chief and I had never discussed it, but I was pretty sure he scheduled Cody for patrol duty very, very carefully. Call me? Jen asked hopefully. Cody's gaze slid sideways toward me. He had light brown eyes speckled with gold, a distinctive topaz color. There was a hint of phosphorescent green behind them that only I could see. Well see. He left, and the locals in attendance retrieved various prohibited adult beverages they'd hidden from his view. Jeez! Jen muttered under her breath. Call or don't call, but you don't have to be a jerk about it. She paused. Do you think he'll call? I shrugged. I guess we'll see. *Revue de presse* Jacqueline Carey proves her versatility with this compelling and delightful piece of urban fantasy. #1 New York Times Bestselling Author Charlaine Harris Carey's first urban fantasy turn is as fun and fantastic as her previous

efforts; fans will definitely want this, and pronto. Library Journal (Starred) Beautifully articulated and intriguingly populated: altogether, an arresting kickoff. Kirkus s