

# LBRIS

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Amber continues to follow her passion for exploring morally grey characters, so you can expect more epic tales to come.

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GODS & MONSTERS

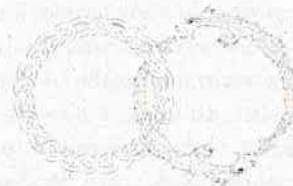
*The Book of Azrael*  
*The Throne of Broken Gods*  
*The Dawn of the Cursed Queen*  
*The Wrath of the Fallen*

# THE WRATH OF THE FALLEN

GODS & MONSTERS  
BOOK FOUR

AMBER V. NICOLE





## PROLOGUE

**T**he town had started to settle for the night as I left my home. I waved at a few shopkeepers as they closed up and sidestepped two drunkards, stumbling and laughing their way to wherever they were headed. The night was beautiful, the sky alive with stars, and I enjoyed the walk to work. I did better working nights, preferring fewer crowds. Plus, the lake came alive once the sun set, with or without the moon.

“You’re early,” my boss said, adjusting his straw hat. His white shirt strained around his lower midsection, the bulge of his belly enhanced by the worn dark pants he’d tucked into his knee-high boots.

The dock was abandoned, the lake empty, and the usual crowds were absent. All the boats were still tied to the pier, and from the looks of it, none of them had gone out.

“Slow night for lovers?” I asked.

He shrugged. “It’s not that. The mooncrests are nowhere to be seen.”

I frowned, and he nodded toward the lake, telling me to look for myself. The boards creaked as I crossed them. I stopped at the edge of the pier beside the barrels of sparklers and leaned against the railing. The trees were silent, and no bugs floated around the hanging branches that teased the surface. There were no signs of the

mooncrests, even with the full moon casting bright beams of light deep into the inky depths. That was very odd. They were always active when the moon was out.

I turned to ask him what he thought was happening, but I was alone on the dock. Nothing seemed amiss, the stars twinkling above and the breeze forming soft ripples at the lake's edge. Weird. Where had he gone? He wouldn't just leave, and he wasn't quiet or fast.

Screams and sounds of fighting pierced the peaceful night, and I spun toward town. I started back down the dock but froze when I heard the thick beat of wings above me. Something landed behind me, hitting the wood hard enough to jar me. When I turned around, I realized why every living thing around the lake had gone into hiding.

The massive creature folded its four wings against its back, the transparent membranes flashing iridescent in the moonlight. Dark brown, plated armor wrapped his shoulders and molded to his body, stopping just above his backward-bent legs. His lower bony mandible split into pincers and flickered, creating an ominous chittering noise. The sound activated my primal brain, sending shivers of alarm through me. I didn't know what this creature was, but every instinct I had screamed that I was in danger.

I took a step back just as another thud sounded behind me, and the dock shuddered beneath my feet. I turned to run and slammed into the hard exoskeleton of a second creature. My ass hit the boards hard, and the creature reached for me with his four arms. Adrenaline surged through me, and I rolled toward the railing, scrambling to get back on my feet. I grabbed a paddle from a stack and swung. The creature blinked and chittered angrily as the wood splintered against his shoulder, but then he was atop me.

MY CHEST HIT the ground, dust scattering as my breath exploded from my lungs. My wrists stung from where they'd bound my arms behind my back, and despite my struggles, there was no give in the bindings. I groaned as long nails dug into my twisted and tied limbs.

He hoisted me up, and I gasped in horror at the carnage around me. I blinked, certain I had died, and arrived in Iassulyn.

Flames crackled off the remains of the tavern and surrounding buildings, the dark smoke acrid and clogging. Creatures ransacked the shops, breaking windows and chirruping in their strange language. Screams rent the air as men, women, and children were dragged from their houses. Some had managed to escape and were running into the woods, creatures following both on the ground and in the air. Those who were able to arm themselves and do what they could to fight were quickly overtaken and consumed. I swallowed hard and closed my eyes as the sound of bones crunching filled the air.

It wasn't just a nightmare. My mind could never imagine this horror. The Otherworld had opened up its horrible, rancid jaws, and a plague of demons had descended upon our town. My heart thudded in my chest as the scent of death clogged my nose. The monster dragging me further into town chittered with what sounded like excitement. My feet scrambled against the ground, and my muscles strained in the creature's powerful grip. But no matter how hard I fought, I knew I couldn't escape. The beast shook me violently until I stopped struggling, its talons digging into my shoulders. My chest heaved, my nostrils burned, and my eyes stung, terror consuming any hope I had.

I heard heavy, thick footsteps approach, and dread trickled down my spine, turning my guts liquid. My eyes shuttered, and I started praying to any gods still left in this world, praying to Samkiel himself. I kept my eyes closed, not wanting to see what was coming. The sounds were bad enough. The creature shook me again and screeched in my face, his hot breath hitting me hard enough to blow my hair back. My eyes snapped open, and I wished I had followed my instincts and kept them closed.

The beast loomed in front of me, his face inches from mine. His pincers clicked a few more times before withdrawing. He closed his bony mandibles and stood straight and at attention. It took a few moments for me to find the courage to look away, and when I did, there was a new nightmare to make my legs go weak.

He was taller than any being had the right to be. From the deep black pits of his eyes, poreless pale skin, and sharply pointed crown atop his head, it was clear this was not a man standing before me. He wore a dark coat that split into two large flaps in the back, the odd fabric flaring around his feet. He stood inside a double circle, and I recognized the runes within the perimeter. It was a teleportation mark. It glowed weakly and flickered. The power he had infused it with to transport himself and summon the ghastly horrors he'd brought with him was fading.

Fear was an overwhelming force that turned me almost numb. I found myself focusing on his chest because I couldn't look at his face and stay upright. I squinted, watching as the material of his intricately embroidered clothing bunched and moved. Both his skin and clothes were ill-fitting, and I wondered if this wasn't his true form. Power pulsed from him, and I forced myself to lift my eyes to meet his cold, otherworldly ones. My throat went dry as I finally put the pieces together. I knew who this was.

"I can smell the fear on you. Stronger than the piss that runs in your streets. Stronger than the blood decorating the ground. You know who I am?" he asked, his voice as deep and dark as the realm he'd ascended from. He crouched in front of me, his body moving in a nauseatingly alien way. Even in that position, he towered above me.

"Y-yes," I managed to get out. "I heard rumors about the new age, a rebellion amongst the princes, and a newly crowned ruler. You're the King of the Otherworld. Umemri."

"Correct," he said with a smile, and my stomach churned again. The twin lines that bracketed his mouth bisected his sharp features, ending where his ears should have been in this form. His mouth was way too wide, and I feared what I would see if he truly opened it. His hair looked stark black in the firelight, but when he turned to his general, I saw it wasn't hair but jagged spikes vibrating with his every breath. He was a genuine horror brought to life. No one I knew had ever laid eyes on any of the princes of the Otherworld, much less its dark lord.

Unable to hold his gaze, my eyes flickered restlessly. Flames crackled throughout the ruined town, and a few feet away, two people lay

face-first on the ground, bleeding out from their throats. Whatever answers he'd demanded, they had not given. Hope flared in me. Maybe if I answered his questions correctly, he would spare me.

"W-what do you want?" I asked, forcing myself to look at him again. "Whatever it is, I can give it."

"Can you now?" Umemri tilted his head, his black eyes boring into me as if he could pluck the answers from my mind. "I am looking for someone important to me. Her last bit of communication was from this town. Since then, there has been nothing but . . . silence."

The way he spoke the last part of that sentence made me wonder if something as horrid as he might have a heart.

I shook my head, blinking. "I haven't . . . We haven't seen anyone from the Otherworld here."

He flicked his hand open, the long, curved claws tipping his three long fingers clicking against each other. I flinched, even though he had made no move toward me. "Oh, but I think you have. Her scent lingers in this town, and I can smell her blood on these wretched streets."

Recollection hit me like a brick wall, and my heart started beating so hard it sounded like a drum to war. Umemri heard it, his cold, dark eyes dropping to my chest.

"Where is my murrak?"

Panic clenched my gut, and sweat formed on my brow. Oh gods. I couldn't lie. I couldn't hide the fact that she was . . .

"Dead."

I blurted it out, fast and harsh. Some dark and devastating emotion flared to life on his face. The chaos around the town drew closer as if the others sensed his emotions and were preparing to rip me to shreds. Umemri laughed, his dark, thick voice vibrating my bones. His generals joined in his mirth, the sound growing more grating and animalistic. He reached out and grabbed me by the throat, his laughter abruptly morphing into a snarl as he lifted me off my feet. His face split and opened, the transition making bile rise in my throat. I saw the pincers waiting within, and I was certain he was going to eat me.

"Impossible," Umemri said, holding me as if I weighed nothing. "No one I have an allegiance with would touch her. Even if they tried, none could stop her if she was in her true form and on a rampage. I doubt a town full of Itians could even scratch her."

I struggled against his hold, my heart thudding in panic. He eased up just enough that I could choke out, "Samkiel." I said his name as if it were a prayer, and it alone could grant me my life, and it did.

Umemri's eyes flared, and the creatures halted as if I'd spoken a curse. Everything went oddly silent. The only things I could hear were the crackle of the fire and the whisper of the wind. He suddenly released me, and I fell to the ground. I panted, blood dripping down my neck from the puncture wounds his talons had left. It felt like hours passed before Umemri finally blinked, and I saw realization rip through him. It was as if just the sound of his ancient enemy's name was enough to prove to him that his murrak was dead. His shoulders bunched and fabric ripped as thick, spiny, dark appendages broke free, curling around him in agitation.

"You're lying," he snapped, his lip curling and his tentacles snapping toward me in agitation.

I wasn't, but I could tell he wished, above all else, I was. "No," I said, my entire body shaking with uncontrollable tremors. "I'm not. He was here with a woman. They left after the murrak attacked and he killed it."

The sharp point of an appendage pierced my shoulder. I screamed, and Umemri smiled cruelly, seeming to savor the sound.

"A woman?" Umemri enunciated with a painful twist.

"Yes!" I cried. "I never got her name, but she was an Ig'Morruthen. I don't know why she was with him."

The talon twisting in my flesh stopped before it ripped through my shoulder. Umemri's head snapped toward his cursed army, and he barked an obvious command in a language I did not know. One of his creatures took flight before he brought his attention back to me. The look in his eyes only increased my fear.

"It seems I do not need you any longer, then."

He raised one thick tentacle, the sharp point aimed at my head. Just as he brought it toward me, I yelled, "I can take you to her! Where we buried your murrak!"

He dropped me so fast that I fell forward. One of his guards caught me and lifted me to my feet, arms still bound.

Umemri tilted his head, his eyes flashing with grief and rage. "Very well, lead the way."

I took a shuddering breath and started walking, knowing exactly where her large, twisted body was. A few of the other townspeople and I had buried her. I always knew doing good deeds would eventually fuck me up. His guards fell into step beside and behind us as I led them forward, past the tree line, until we reached the freshly churned dirt mound near the base of a thick, gnarled tree.

A soldier pushed me to my knees, my shoulder aching and seeping blood as he held me there. Umemri stepped forward as his guards formed a circle around the grave. He lifted a hand and squeezed it into a tight fist, the ground shifting and rolling in response. What powers did he possess? I thought only gods had telekinesis. I had heard rumors that some witches had powers to rival the gods, but I didn't know of any, and he wasn't a witch.

The ground split, thousands of bugs and worms oozing from the grave on his command. With a nauseating pulse of their bodies, a head emerged from the dirt. I'd braced for the monstrous, crystallized one with pinchers and large, oval eyes. Only that was not what they delivered. Umemri kneeled and brushed his talons through hair the color of moonlight. The insects retreated, and the guards in the clearing bowed their heads in a sign of respect and shared grief.

A sound of despair left the King of the Underworld, but he cut it off as if he'd had no control over the making of it. He stood and turned toward me, his tentacles raised threateningly behind him. My eyes were drawn to the head he cradled against his chest as if it were the most precious thing in the world to him. She stared at me with wide, lifeless eyes glazed a milky white. Her features were feminine and delicate, with the same lines around her mouth that he had. I saw nothing of the monster we'd buried.

I realized now why the town burned, why he'd slaughtered everyone. He was the same as any being who had abruptly lost someone they loved. The murrak hadn't been just something to him. She was *someone*. From the level of his despair and anger, I suspected she was a lover, or worse, his mate.

"This woman he was with. Tell me more about her," Umemri demanded.

I didn't think there was a way out of this for me, but I knew this was my only hope, so I didn't hesitate. I told him about the boat ride and how they acted with each other. A tremor went through him, and his tentacles lashed the air when I told him how they'd fought for each other, describing how they killed the female he held so close. When I was finished, I swallowed the growing lump in my throat and waited.

A bird of night landed in the trees just above Umemri, its glittering eyes boring into me. Watching. Waiting. It stretched its wings and cawed loudly, but neither Umemri nor his guards seemed to notice it at all. I blinked up at it. The damn thing seemed curious about our conversation. The peculiar thing, though, was that birds had fled this area hundreds of years ago.

Leaves crunched, drawing my attention back to the King of the Otherworld. His guards watched me, their eyes reflecting the light from the crescent moon peeking through the trees.

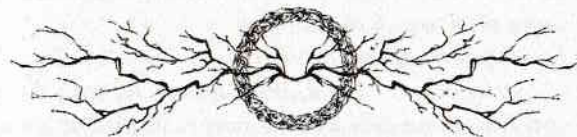
"Am I free?" I stumbled across my words. "I told you everything I know, and I won't speak of anything that happened here today. Whatever you wish."

A ghost of a smile pulled at his mouth. "You cannot give me what I wish for now," Umemri said. "But I shall grant your request. I'll set you free."

The warmth of relief spread through my body. I knew some would call me a coward at how I gave up everything to save myself. Some would say that I was without honor, but I wanted to live. Pain exploded across my neck, and then I felt nothing.

I watched from the forest floor as my body thudded inches away from me, my head missing. I blinked as the last of my life held fast. The ground shook and hissed, splitting as steam rose. Orange runes

appeared, casting a bright glow around each being. The beasts sank one by one, the ground swallowing them whole as the king and his army returned to the Otherworld. My mouth gaped open, trying to form words I could no longer utter. I blinked once more as the bird made of midnight spread its wings far too wide. My vision faded as it landed, taking the shape of a man made of darkness.



## SAMKIEL

**A** book slammed down on the table in front of me, startling me awake. I sat up and blinked rapidly at my scowling father.

*“I have already made my amends with those affected,” I grumbled and stretched before folding my arms across the council garbs I was still wearing. The buttons and tassels twisted over one another as I tapped my foot. He had forced me to sit at council meetings for days, and if I weren’t there, I was here, studying until sleep took me. I knew most frowned upon setting a god’s temple aflame, but it had truly been a mistake. Apparently, it was embarrassing for him, and as a result, it earned me a week’s worth of punishment.*

*My father nodded but folded his arms and continued to glare at me. “Read. Aloud.”*

*I frowned and sighed deeply, slumping further into my chair. With a roll of my eyes, I slid the thick red and gold-encrusted history book toward me. It was tabbed where I had left off yesterday, and I flipped it open. The illustration spanned two pages, depicting an army of a hundred strong, draped in silver armor, as they lined up for war. I sighed loudly again, making sure he knew just how much I hated this before I started reciting the text describing the battle.*

*“You are the gory, blood-soaked land,*

*I wonder how to make peace with these butchers.”*

*My head snapped up in surprise, and I stared at them in confusion. The text was not the ancient dissertation I had read the day before. Instead of tactics and weaponry, the words bled, seeping into the worn cream parchment. I watched as they disappeared, only to return, the letters dark and thick.*

*"Read," my father insisted.*

*"But it's not as before," I said, and it wasn't. I gaped, the image melting as if water had been poured over it. It disappeared, and more text formed.*

*"Read," he demanded again.*

*I sat up in my chair and half-turned to face him. Unir stood just inside the balcony doors, framed by massive columns. Outside, the clouds grayed at the edges, bubbling in size and mass. Shadows blanketed the mountains of Rashearim, the darkness beneath them spreading wide like gaping beasts, attempting to swallow the ground below.*

*"Read." Unir's voice had deepened and gained an edge I couldn't define.*

*I shook my head but didn't dare disobey. I knew he'd keep me in this study until my eyes bled for the devilment Cameron, Logan, and I had gotten into. So, with a shuddering breath, I clutched the edges of the book and tried to read. The words continued to change and twist together on the page before spitting out the verse it wished me to recite.*

*"You decimate the soul of the noble man.*

*Moving through stars, laying curses upon the land."*

*The words kept reforming over and over. I ran my fingers over the lines as if I could keep them still. I recognized this poem, having come across it in a book I'd found in the library. It was one nearly lost to time, originally transcribed by an ancient prophet.*

*"Repeat it," my father demanded, standing with his back straight. He was ever the general and less the doting caregiver he perceived himself to be.*

*I swallowed. "It's not the same."*

*"Keep looking." His eyes held no amusement or anger.*

*"The unheard voices, drowned in the cries of the dead.*

*Men begging, uttered curses and prayers,  
Only answered by just and strong hands  
Here is our scourge, our salvation, our hope.  
Bathed in light with strength and might.  
The anguished land sends tremors through all men,  
Blood and destruction wear at every soul.  
Weapons of horror now familiar."*

*My chest heaved as the words all but slammed out of me. I heard his boots against the stone floor, his thick strides changing in both tempo and weight as he moved toward the door.*

*"Compassion falls before thy destructive force."*

*I shook my head as the words started to tremble. Fear shivered through me, and I glanced up. The royal, bright room had turned a sullen gray, but that wasn't what made my heart ice over. Nismera stood where my father had been, Dianna clutched in her grasp. My chair toppled to the floor with the force with which I rose. I struggled to move toward them but found I couldn't.*

*Nismera smiled, her lips resting against Dianna's cheek. She clenched Dianna's jaw, raising the golden death spear in her other hand to point it at her heart. My heart. Dianna's eyes stayed on me, unmoving. There was a soft glow within their depths that I could not decipher.*

*"You didn't finish the words." Nismera smiled cruelly at me, her eyes darting to the table and the book behind me.*

*"I don't need to," I responded, my teeth gritting. "I know the poem of Jeremiah."*

*"Hmm, do you, Brother?" Nismera said softly, her lips brushing a gentle kiss against Dianna's cheek as she lifted her head. If I could just move, I could reach Dianna. I could hold her to me, and we could flee, but I dared not fight Nismera with Dianna in her grasp.*

*"Do you know the true meaning? Shall I finish them for you?"*

*"Don't," I demanded. I didn't know what would happen if Nismera said those words, but I knew it could be nothing good. She held someone more precious to me than a throne or a crown or the air I breathed. Dianna was more precious to me than any world or realm. I would sacrifice it all for her and not think twice about it.*

*Her smile was so cold I swore the warm air frosted around her. "You may have returned, but you did so with a weakness, World Ender. All your enemies will know it now. They will know how to break you, and when you break, so will the world."*

*"Don't," I said. I wasn't denying the words that made me hate myself, but the threat she posed to what she held. My eyes fell on Dianna before they raked to Nismera. "She's all I have."*

*Her eyes were filled with cruel satisfaction. "I know." As the last word left her lips, she thrust the spear into Dianna's chest.*

*Blinding yellow light exploded from Dianna, her head tilting back as her skin burned, flakes peeling off and rising into the air until only ash was left. Dianna's remains. An empty wail tore from my throat, and the sky cracked open. Lightning flashed like a strobe light, the thunder so loud it sounded like a bomb exploding overhead, the sky echoing my pain.*

*It wasn't the building storm that darkened the room nor lightning that sprung from my fingertips. Oblivion burst from my outstretched hand, ripping from me in waves of darkness that quickly encompassed the room. It engulfed the spot where Nismera had stood, but somehow, she'd moved fast enough to elude my grasp. Only her laugh, cruel and malicious, told me she was still in the room. I did not care. I did not care as I fell to my knees and crawled to those ashes, and I did not care when tears spilled from my eyes. My fingers pressed to what was left of my love, my akrai. Nismera's laugh was victorious as she appeared and crouched before me. She gathered Dianna's ashes in her gauntleted hand. Her smile was a cruel, ugly thing as she blew the remains of my mate toward me.*

*Massive, twisting tornadoes screamed into existence outside the palace at her callous cruelty. The wind whipped hard enough to tear flesh from bone, the ceiling crumbling and falling around us. Nismera looked up, her silver hair whipping around her in waves. She smiled at the dark violence of the sky and began to speak. Somehow, I could still hear her, even over the crash of thunder.*

*"You, therefore, I, tool of gods, decimator of those who walk or slither.*

*Made of light, made of wind.  
Swords so sharp our foes shall bend  
For in a war between gods, no one wins."*

*My body shook, but not from the raging storm and trembling palace. It was as if I were being pulled and shoved.*

*". . . kiel."*

*My head snapped back, and I stared at the roiling purple and black clouds clogging the sky. Lightning struck the ground over and over, punishing and destructive. As the world I kneeled on died.*

*". . . iel."*

*A sharp pain ricocheted across my jaw, and I sat up, cupping my face. "Ow."*

*Dianna's eyes were wide and touched with fear. She pulled back her clenched fist and slammed her hands over her ears. Her hair danced around her, whipping violently in the wind. Darkness coated our room, and I realized I had unleashed Oblivion here, not in my death dream. Tendrils of it curled like serpents around my arms, coiled and ready to face and destroy the threat. The ceiling groaned, and I saw the pieces I had already released gnawing at the edges of our room.*

*"Samkiel!" Dianna called over the sound of the building storm. It had been her calling to me from the beginning, pulling me back from the edge. She gathered her hair, holding it back from her face as the force of Oblivion grew. "You have to make it stop, or it will consume this room, the castle, and then the town next."*

*My chest heaved. "I don't know how!" I shouted back, and I didn't. I had never been able to control my power when it manifested like this.*

*Dianna winced as a piece of the outside wall ripped away, exposing us to the growing storm. A massive swirling funnel rotated in the nearest cloud. It descended, and I knew what devastation would follow once it touched down. She clamped her hands over her ears, the roar of the wind painful. "What caused it?" she shouted.*

*Rather than trying to speak, I sent the details of the dream down our bond. Her eyes flashed, and I felt realization ripple between us. She had been there for the dreams I'd had back on Onuna and*

recognized that they were raising their ugly heads again. Only here, it was Nismera who took her from me, not Kaden.

I did not know what I expected, but her dropping her hands from her ears, gripping my face, and slanting her lips across mine was not it.

*"I am here."* Her voice whispered across my subconscious. *"I'm with you now and forevermore."*

The world stilled as if a massive hand had wiped away the storm. The wind ceased to howl, and my skin no longer prickled with dark ancient power. I may wield Oblivion, but it seemed Dianna controlled it. It responded readily when she was in danger, and it had since the first time she was taken from me. Now, it retreated, easing like a compliant beast beneath her touch.

Our bedroom door slammed open, and both of us turned. Cameron stood in the doorway, his sleep pants hanging low on his hips and his hair a disheveled mess.

"What the fuck?" he panted, his eyes roaming the room. He took in the missing ceiling and wall before falling to us. Since we had been in the center of the storm, I assumed we looked just as disheveled as he did. "I thought I heard a fucking hurricane, but it was just you two having sex?"

*"Don't tell him."* My words danced to her. We had more than enough to worry about without this added.

*"I won't,"* she replied.

"Think of the children, Dianna," Cameron scoffed before pointing to himself. "And the sexless."

A small snort left my lips. I hadn't thought it possible for me to feel humor right now, but given what he saw when he entered and how Dianna was draped across me, of course, that would be what he thought.

Dianna jumped from the bed. "Go back to bed," she demanded with a scowl, storming toward him. Fire danced over the tips of her fingers, distracting him from the destruction and ash all around us.

"So violent." He playfully rolled his eyes before waving to the room right as he left. "And clean up your mess."

Dianna closed the bedroom door, and I slipped from the bed, righting the walls and ceiling of the room. Once everything was back in place, I turned toward her. She leaned against the bedroom door, worry tightening her beautiful features and darkening her eyes. The destruction I'd created wasn't the source of her concern. It was because we both knew Oblivion lived inside me, and I had just become a threat to everyone I loved.