



Dark Sins and Desert Sands

Stephanie Draven

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Escaping a hellish Syrian prison, U.S. serviceman Ray Stavrakis emerged with uncanny mind-control powers and an eerie ability to morph into a mythical Minotaur. As a half man, half bull, Ray had legendary power, but only one woman could prove his innocence. The woman who'd driven him to the brink of insanity with her cool-eyed interrogation and her hot-blooded sensuality.

But Vegas psychologist Layla Bahset had no memory of Ray or her past. Only a feeling of being stalked by a nonhuman predator. Was it Ray whose eyes condemned her soul even as his hands ignited her body? Or was another evil force at work? But nothing could stop Layla from remembering *what* she was; and what her evil creator had planned for her and her soldier lover.

Book #124 in the Harlequin Nocturnes.

Dark Sins and Desert Sands Details

Date : Published October 18th 2011 by Harlequin

ISBN : 9780373618712

Author : Stephanie Draven

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Romance, Paranormal Romance, Fantasy, Paranormal, Harlequin, Harlequin Nocturne, Category Romance

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From Reader Review Dark Sins and Desert Sands for online ebook

Christi Barth says

Taut suspense, amazing layers to the characters, and a level of emotional depth that just blew me away. This is heads and tails better than an average paranormal. The modern day twist to ancient mythology sucked me in from page one. Several big twists I never saw coming, and the dark complexity kept me frantically turning the pages. Oh, and the sex scenes left my fingertips burning just from touching the page. This is a must read!

Cathy Beckett says

I really enjoyed this book. One of the questions that the author had fun answering was where do defunct gods, goddesses, and mythological creatures go when they no longer have believers? The answer is VEGAS. My favorite vacation spot.

This was quick, fun read.

Liss Capello says

No question, this is my favorite of Stephanie Draven's Mythica books yet. There were so many excellent elements - the war story was compelling, the way the immortal characters were rendered and intertwined throughout was fascinating, and I was driven to finish quickly to unravel all the secrets waiting to be revealed. The classic romance scenes were scintillating (Oh. My. God.), but in between them was a meaty story that made me (gladly) forget that the book I was reading happened to belong to that genre. I also rather loved the riddle opening to each chapter, and the clever way the answers were revealed. All in all, this book just worked on every level for me.

Judy & Marianne from Long and Short Reviews says

Originally posted at: <http://longandshortreviews.blogspot.c...>

Who would ever have believed that the path of vengeance would lead to the discovery of love? A man born and recreated and a woman created yet reborn join together to find that which others denied them. Dark Sins and Desert Sands ends up being a powerful and completely entertaining tale that kept this reader on the edge of her seat.

I was fascinated with the heroine that Ms. Draven created. It seems she explored the possible question of, "what kind of person would I be if I didn't have all the baggage from my past?" Layla, the heroine, didn't purposely pursue the answers to that question. How and why she did is intimately mixed up with the villain of the book.

Layla is a nice person. Too nice. By that I mean she is bland - not forceful or colorful. She's numb to life and

yet she knows there's something out of reach, something missing and it's driving her nuts that she can't figure it out. She does the best that she can because she has a good heart. And after reading the book, it totally makes sense. Inside, the heroine really is a decent and giving person who longs for the dream of love, home and kids. A reader is in for a surprise when they find out what Layla is actually capable of. She ends up being a very sympathetic character and I cheered her on as she tried to thwart the destiny mapped out for her. When the heroine starts putting the pieces together, mixed with the person she was at the beginning of the book, get ready for a treat. She's a tough cookie and will fight for what is important, no matter what. The person who inspired that keen sense of loyalty is the yummy hero, Ray.

Ray is an awesome character. He's a military guy with a great record – to a point. His sense of duty, honor and integrity would normally be great qualities and they are. But they can and were used against him. He experienced horrible terrible things. Ms. Draven described a scene that would make anyone puke, not just the hero. Despite the things done to him and his need for revenge, it didn't block him from the basic good nature inside himself. He wasn't blinded by rage all the time and when he wasn't, clarity exposed some intriguing possibilities that blew his mind. And, it set him on a path totally different from his original goal, much to my delight.

The culprit and villain that created the chaos and horror that dogged the steps of Layla and Ray throughout the book is, Seth. The author was creative and amazing in what she did with him. I felt I should hate his character: certainly I was given enough ammunition to do so. But I couldn't. In reality, he was as dysfunctional with relationships as a guy could be. He was so set in his ways; he had become arrogant, lofty and totally clueless when it came to a real woman. The bad guy also had some weird phobias and twisted views of women in general. He's so complicated! Because of the author's brilliant writing, I ended up giggling with diabolical glee when Isabel matched wits with Seth. That's all I'm going to say about that - wouldn't want to ruin the fun for readers.

Secondary characters contribute mightily to the plot movement in the book. I enjoyed how the author led me to a false sense of ambiguity about their presence in the story. They were more than they appeared and readers are going to be pleasantly surprised at the roles they play.

The happy ever after brought tears to my eyes. Truly. It was emotionally powerful, poignant and sweet.

Ms. Draven created a wonderful heartfelt final chapter that wowed me and made everything that came before more meaningful and special. It highlighted the fact that all the tragedies in the past paid the dues for the hope and optimism that now embrace Layla and Ray. Totally romantic.

Dark Sins and Desert Sands is a light in the darkness. Ms. Draven delivers a suspenseful emotionally packed romance layered with passion, heat and the power of true love. The story reaches into the depths of its characters and brings them to life, taking readers along for the ride. There's drama, more twists than a pretzel and plenty of thrills and chills to satisfy readers of romantic suspense. The loving between Ray and Layla is potent and sensual, and their journey of love, though bumpy, is beautiful.

Dark Sins and Desert Sands is great romance. Pick up your own copy and see.

Heather Book Savvy Babe says

3.5 of 5 Stars Reviewed by request for <http://booksavvybabe.com>

In *Dark Sins & Desert Sands*, Ray is a soldier, escaped from prison and torture in the middle east. Ray had been accused of being a terrorist and seeks revenge on the people who wrongly accused and tortured him. Ray is not the same after his time in prison, while there, he was changed. He now has special powers, powers that he will use in his quest for justice. His primary target is the psychologist who mercilessly questioned him, Layla. Layla is living in Las Vegas and working as a psychologist. She has no memories whatsoever of her life before the last 2 years. She is a blank slate, and she can't enjoy emotions or experiences. When Ray finds her, he makes her start to remember, but Layla is not sure if she really wants to remember her past.

Mythology and the modern age converge in Stephanie Draven's *Dark Sins & Desert Sands*, and engaging new paranormal romance read.

I enjoyed reading *Dark Sins & Desert Sands*, the mythology in the book is clever, modern, and very intriguing. Former Gods roam the earth with lessened powers, living among humanity. In *Dark Sins & Desert Sands*, Stephanie Draven combines Egyptian mythology and gods with greek as well as south american gods. This combination of deities gives the story that extra something more, and I was curious to figure out who and what each person was, and where they came from.

As to the characters, I liked Ray a lot. I could sympathize with him and his situation. He is a good man, a good soldier, wrongly accused. Because of that betrayal, he was tortured and completely changed. Once he escapes from that torture, he seeks revenge. I can understand that, and I understood the emotional upheaval that he was suffering with. As for Layla, I am not the biggest fan. She had no memories, but once Ray showed up, the woman was a hot mess. In one paragraph, she would start to trust Ray, and kiss him. One sentence later, she is accusing him of being a terrorist and making her a slut. She was beyond frustrating. The back and forth she went through dragged on for most of the book. As the story goes on, that does get better, but she's still not my favorite heroine.

Dark Sins & Desert Sands is book 5 in the series, but it is easily a stand alone novel. I have not read the earlier books in the series, and I had no trouble picking up the story. The paranormal world and elements in the story are unique and interesting. I love mythology, and the mixture of gods, goddesses, and mythological beings in this novel are very entertaining. The story is well developed, and fast paced. I was never bored with this story, there is always something new going on, something different to uncover. While I did not love the heroine, *Dark Sins & Desert Sands* is a good read. I will read more books by Stephanie Draven in the future, I am curious and looking forward to more books in this series.

Lillie says

See the full review at: [Read My Mind](#)

My Review:

As with the other books in Stephanie Draven's MYTHICA series, *DARK SINS AND DESERT SANDS* is a walk on the dark side of the human condition, with war-forged and war-born mythological characters come to life on the page. Ray Stavrakis is a minotaur in a human body, and he's out for vengeance against Layla Bahset, a woman he believes had a hand in torturing him while he was imprisoned.

There is just something about Draven's deeply emotional and psychologically embattled heroes and heroines. Each of her MYTHICA books have hit me hard and sucked me in. *DARK SINS AND DESERT SANDS* was no exception. This is a book that is as powerful in language as it is imagery. Draven creates characters that have assumed a mythological persona through war. Though I won't spoil Layla's story, let me just say

that her memory loss and subsequent connection to Ray turn out to be explosive.

The best part of this novel is that both the hero and the heroine find their way to redemption, and love with each other, despite the rocky journey that is as exciting and seductive as it is dangerous. If you haven't read a MYTHICA book by Draven before (they are stand-alone and can be read in no particular order), and you love a good romance with suspense and action, what are you waiting for?!

4.5/5 for plot

4.5/5 for characters

5/5 for language

My Rating: 14/15 (4.5 stars) Must Read

Find the author at:

Website | Blog | Twitter | GoodReads | Facebook

Annie (Under the Covers Book Blog) says

Posted on Under the Covers

Ray Stavrakis is one scary sonovabitch! With his ability to use mind control and morph into a Minotaur, Ray is definitely a force to be reckoned with. However, it wasn't just his uncanny abilities that made him freaky, it was his testosterone-driven I-will-kill-you vibe he was sporting through the entire book. I will admit, I did not like Ray in the beginning of this book. In fact, I thought he was a jerk with a big chip on his shoulder.

But then Ms. Draven begins to unravel his backstory and we learn that he has escaped a Syrian prison and while there, he was tortured and interrogated ruthlessly. With vengeance on his mind, he seeks out those who were responsible for his pain and scars and seeks out the psychologist Layla Bahset to exact his revenge.

However, to his surprise, the Vegas psychologist has no memory of Ray. In fact, her memories are locked away where even his mind control abilities aren't enough to crack them. While I thought Ms. Draven's writing was pleasant, I just didn't find myself connecting with Ray or Layla that much. As I mentioned earlier, Ray was too much of a brute that he became unrelatable to me. There were moments between him and Layla that I really enjoyed though. Those witty conversations between the two slowly made them real to me. However, with the heroine lost to her own past, most of the time I felt like connecting with her was a lost cause. But this is not to say that the journey of these characters isn't a great one. Soon, I found my initial perceptions of them changing and Ray and Layla grew on me more and more.

What was intriguing was Ms. Draven's use of the supernatural. I would have loved to pick her brain and ask her why she chose the magical elements that she did. It was unique, setting her apart from many of the books I've read and I really enjoyed this aspect of the book. Another thing I also really enjoyed was the eclectic mix of races. I wished more authors did this. Ms. Draven weaves Aztec, Greek and some Egyptian mythology into this one and it was surprising to see a lot of action in such a short book. I enjoyed the tangle of web that Ms. Draven created. And part of the joy is watching it all unravel right before your eyes.

*ARC provided by author

Karina says

Wow ! Stephanie I have to say this is the best romantic ,fiction , and paranormal book! I loved everything about it ! The romance between Layla and Ray was truly beautiful and it has a great plot :) I liked the way Seth had captured Layla and took away all her memories and how Isabel helped Layla in the end a great friendship ! I enjoyed the end where Layla has a child , so cute! It was very sweet of her to name it after Isabel :) I absolutely adored this book, it was great and I couldn't put it down ! Great job Stephanie, thanks again :)

Anna says

Being new to the Mythica series I wasn't quite sure what to expect from a romance based on a mind controlling minotaur, it just seems more far-fetched than what I normally read, so I was surprised that the romance practically scorched the pages! Not sure how I feel about a man that can command orgasms with his mind (I think I might prefer the traditional way on that one) but it was an interesting idea and fit with the storyline of Layla's missing memories.

Ray is a flawed hero that has a great deal of baggage to overcome and a short amount of time to do it. His years as a hostage have shaped him into a raging machine bent on rage and revenge. He obtained the ability of mind control and shifting into a Minotaur while he was being held captive, tortured on a constant basis so his rage is quite understandable. Upon his escape he turns his focus to Layla, the doctor that was involved in his torment, and force her to reveal the name of the ones that betrayed him, the ones that falsely accused him of being a traitor to his own country. Nothing goes as planned because Ray quickly discovers that Layla's mind is an empty landscape, barren of memories and feelings. Her mind is simply wiped clean. They agree to help each other, eventually, and passion leads them to old memories and new feelings...for each other.

I enjoyed the fresh new take on mythology, so many new and exciting creatures to learn about. Don't be put off by the book 5 label because I had zero problem following along and I don't think that the stories are closely linked, maybe just the world being played in. That could be very wrong (only a guess on my part) but regardless, you won't have any trouble diving right in and enjoying the unique blend of suspense and paranormalcy. I'd be interested in reading more from the Mythica series and I'd rate the romance/sexuality a solid C+, with the worldbuilding having a B. A great afternoon read with plenty of heat to warm you up.

As with most Nocturnes, everything happens fast. The books are shorter than a full length novel but longer than the average novella, at least by my estimation. I like switching things up and the change in pacing is sometimes just what I need to escape from the daily grind without the time investment of a longer story.

Mimi Tremont says

Dark Sins and Desert Sands

After spending two years locked in a Syrian prison's torture chamber for a crime he didn't commit, Rayhan Stavrakis, has only one plan once he escapes.

To make everyone that tortured him pay...especially Dr. Layla Bahset.

The sexy Dr. Bahset spent hours questioning him and messing with his head, while her cohorts did things to him that forced him into becoming everyone's worse nightmare; a Minotaur capable of controlling the minds of others and trapping them in their own mental labyrinth. Ray plans on finding the doctor and not only making her prove his innocence, but using those same powers to make her pay however he sees fit. After all, she made him trust her and believe that she reciprocated his feelings only to continually turn him over to be tortured both physically and mentally.

Layla Bahset remembers nothing about her life prior to awakening in the desert outside of Las Vegas two years earlier clutching a six pence in her hands.

Nothing.

She had enough money to live comfortably and open her own practice, but little else. Wisely, she fears what the gaping holes in her memory once held. Although she has the knowledge and ability to listen well and counsel her patients, Layla feels like a fraud. How can she help her patients when she can't remember anything about herself and she's as emotionless as the arid desert in which she lives?

When Rayhan Stavrakis side-tracks her being snatched by a group of men-in-black, she fears Ray almost as much as the men that seem to be following her. Unfortunately, she wants him as much as she fears him. How could she not? He makes her barren emotions bloom and her life-less heart pound.

Ray needs the answers Layla has locked deep within. Layla wants to trust Ray. But, he could be as dangerous as the government says he is.

As complex as a sphinx's riddle, Stephanie Draven's "Dark Sins and Desert Sands," smoothly merges Egyptian, Greek and Aztec mythology and legends into a fast paced tale of romantic intrigue. Like a great blockbuster movie, readers will be captivated as Ray uses his powers on a man too cocky to realize how much danger he's in. Then swiftly on the edge of their seats, as they find themselves turning pages late into the night...most likely with the lights on, as together, Layla and Ray untangle the tightly woven web of lies and riddles that's leads them to their action packed conclusion. A beautiful blending of paranormal and intrigue, readers of both genres will not only enjoy "Dark Sins and Desert Sands," they will recommend it to a friend.

Like: Ms. Draven takes readers, at least this one, down a path few (other than author Seressia Glass) have traveled thus far, as she explores mythological beings that readers may have not come across before in this manner, if at all. She takes strong, but broken characters and uses their weaknesses to illuminate their inner strength in such a way that even when they're weak you admired them. By the way, did I mention that the hero was sexy? Really sexy...Hard bodied, disciplined and a good guy forced to do some not so great things that made me swoon.

Dislike: I wish it was a tad longer. Not because it lacked anything, but because I got to the end and thought,

“I’m at the end? Already?”

Favorite Scene: One of my three favorite scenes in the book takes place on a subway train. It’s hot, sexy and pulled at my heart strings so firmly it’s a wonder I didn’t sob uncontrollably as I read it. That’s as much as you’re going to get from me regarding my favorite scenes. Another syllable and I might give away an important plot point. But trust me from beginning to end this book was amazing.

Kelly at says

My reviewer Kellie's Thoughts:

Let me start by saying I read and listened to this book at every opportunity until it was read. I listened in the car while running errands, read between chores and I feel asleep while trying to get in one more chapter. Dark Sins and Desert Sands is a love story with a twist; a love story that overcomes the worst betrayal and the powers of Gods. When you’re meant to be together no unworldly powers can’t stop it. Ray and Layla fight others, each other and then fight together against others. You will fall for the hero, you will hate the heroine but through the twists and turns of self-discovery you will love them both by the end. Given the length of the book some details are lacking but the heart is retained and you will continue to turn the pages as you cheer on the good guys. Read and enjoy as you discover there’s more to the reality than can be seen with your eyes.

Jess the Romanceaholic says

This is a Quickie Review. For the full review, please visit The Romanceaholic.

Expected Release Date: November 1, 2011

Publisher: Harlequin

Imprint: Harlequin Nocturne

Author’s Website: <http://stephaniedraven.com/>

My Source for This Book: Netgalley

Part of a Series: Yes, Book 5, Mythica Series

Series Best Read In Order: Worked well as a standalone

Steam Level: Steamy

I admit, the appearance of forced nudity in one of the ending chapters pulled the final rating down for me. It just came out of left field in a way and occurring so close to the end of the novel, really threw me off. Since this pet peeve of mine was so close to the end, and not something I’d been expecting, I did end the book with a vague sense of dissatisfaction that had nothing to do with the book as a whole.

Mainly because of that, I had a hard time settling between a 3.5 Star and 4 Star final rating when I first sat down to write this review.

In the end though, after carefully weighing all of the things I adored about this story against what was really only one major thing that really took away my enjoyment, I realized that even with the forced nudity, this

was truly a satisfying read.

A solid 4/5 Stars.

Wandax21 says

Wrongfully accused and broken by torture, an American soldier Ray transforms into a mind-controlling minotaur seeking revenge. Egyptian god and a sphinx are involved.

story: *****

hero: *****

humor: ***

heroine: *****

L.E.Olteano says

Wow. That cover is just...epic! Really loved that cover, I gotta say. Now on to the rest of the book, lol.

I don't usually read stories about military/ex-military and PTSD, I don't have the strength to go through it with them. But this being a Harlequin, I was betting on that part of the story being more like a setting than a significant matter - I was wrong. Sort of. The ex-military and PTSD does come into play, but since we have other elements like mythology, old Egyptian gods, Aztec goddesses, a sphinx, a Minotaur, you see why I could deal with it. Plus, obviously, the smutty awesomeness that's expected and always delivered.

The plot was sort of awesome, actually, minus the whole Syrian dungeon and torture thing, that I didn't like at all. But other than that, wow, great plotting! It was also a very original mix, in my opinion, I mean I totally didn't see the next events coming, I was wondering and getting surprised all over the place. I did get the sense of what the main couple will be pretty early on, but it wasn't one of those lover lost/lover found or childhood crush turned lover sort of scenarios, this one was a bit darker and slightly twisted and man, I'm a sucker for that!

The characters were really interesting and original, Ray had a lot of magnetism and Layla's evolution was very well rendered, I could actually feel her turn from something of a machine into a woman. The Ray/Layla couple had a special kind of chemistry, a sort of love/hate to begin with, that developed into intense chemistry and ended up becoming love. I was with it all the way, I believed every second of it.

I also got my personal flavor of fun with Seth, though there wasn't nearly enough focus on him. Well, there was, he wasn't a main character, but he was the villain of all villains so I wanted more, lol. I'm hoping for more, to be clearer, because Seth needs to unleash his inner beast, go on rampage and make that Aztec goddess shake from roots to tips of her branches, fu~fu.

Good writing, interesting plot, charismatic characters and originality - to sum it all up, if smutty is for you, you should totally give this a try.

Ni_kii says

Ray Stavrakis is a man on a mission. After escaping from the prison where he was tortured for being an enemy spy, he now is on a race to clear his name. Ray is no ordinary man; he has the ability to walk into others dreams as a legendary Minotaur and to control their actions with the power of his mind. All this power is now channelled on finding the one person who can clear his name, the therapist that his captors used to interrogate him and who allowed them to hurt him more when he didn't break; Layla Bahset.

Layla is now working in Las Vegas as a therapist. She knows that someone is tracking her but has no idea who. Layla is an amnesiac who has no memories of her life before she took over the practice in Vegas. When Ray tracks her down, she can't believe that she could have done the evil things that he describes. When their attraction starts to heat up, his touches and kisses start to awaken memories she wishes had stayed buried. As flashes of Gods and other mythical beings start to merge with the ones of blood and pain, can Layla stop the evil forces that have already focused their attentions towards both herself and Ray? And is she powerful enough to stop Seth, her evil ex, in his quest to use both of their powers to do his bidding?

This book was an enjoyable mix of Romantic Suspense and mythology. I had a minor problem for the first few couple of chapters as I couldn't figure out what the hell was going on. Once the concept of Gods was introduced, I realised that I was looking at this book from the wrong angle. This is not a Romantic suspense, it is a PNR with suspense elements.

Ray is a broken man. Tortured to the point of death, branded a traitor and having every sense of normality snatched away from him, he has become a hard and angry man. The Minotaur power isn't something that he has put a name on; it is something that occurred during his detention and it now something to be utilised. He has found that he can enter the dreamscapes of peoples subconscious and extract information. Layla is the person that stands out from his time in captivity. He feels she alone is the person that he can use to find out what evidence the Government had to arrest him with. I liked Ray's character and understood it to a point. He was a man on a mission to clear his name so he could return to his family and live again as a free man. I just couldn't understand his feelings towards Layla at first. He believes she had him tortured to break him, that she enjoyed the pain and suffering of others. To then start to have feelings for her, before actually knowing her, felt a little odd to me. I couldn't quite get my head around the fact that a man would start to fall for the woman who helped torture him (in some pretty distasteful ways, I may add) without attributing it to Stockholm syndrome. It was the only issue I had, but I will add that this started to fade the more I knew about the characters. They have a lot in common, more so than first meets the eye, and I did feel that they were suited to each other by the end of the story.

Layla is a fully functioning amnesiac. She feels she is a much more efficient therapist like this as she has no emotional baggage to tie to anyone case, but keeps her condition secret. I liked her character. It isn't the strong female personality that I usually prefer, but she had a certain strength of will that I enjoyed. I liked that she kept working even though she could have been a wailing wreck, I liked that she didn't shy away from the possibility that she could have done all these awful things and I enjoyed the fact that she was willing to try to help Ray even though he was pretty awful to her (although I understood why he was that way!). All in all she was the character I enjoyed the most. The fact that she couldn't get her rocks off without being "forced" by Ray's ability was a pretty interesting twist; it wasn't disturbing as I knew that she wanted it, but it was pretty erotic! The sex scenes were pretty hot all in all and they were very sensual, rather than full on erotic.

The dreamscape scenes were weird but incredibly interesting. The book was very well written and the memories unearthed within these dreams allowed more of the pieces to fit into the puzzle which was the plot. The memories unearthed from both sides allowed us to delve further into the characters of the main players and their lives before this book. I liked Layla more when I found out more about her and my heart bled for Ray when I heard the disturbing things that he had been put through. The God's, Goddesses and other beasts were all very familiar to me from previous reading, but this book has such an interesting twist to the mythology that it was hard to compare it to other books in the same genre. I can't say anymore on this book

without giving things away, but I will say that it is worth a read.

An interesting twist on ancient legends, this book mixes fast paced romantic suspense with the surrealism of the supernatural. A sexy book with tortured characters and evil Gods, it's definitely a good addition to anyone's book case.
