



Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega)

By Patricia Briggs

Download now

Read Online →

Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs

Praised for having “the perfect blend of action, romance, suspense, and paranormal”*, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Patricia Briggs's Alpha and Omega series now takes readers into the middle of some bad supernatural business...

For once, mated werewolves Charles Cornick and Anna Lantham are not traveling because of Charles’s role as his father’s enforcer. This time, their trip to Arizona is purely personal. Or at least their visit starts out that way...

Charles and Anna soon discover that a dangerous fae being is on the loose, replacing human children with simulacrums. The fae have started a cold war with humanity that's about to heat up—and Charles and Anna are in the crossfire.

*Rex Robot Reviews

↓ [Download Dead Heat \(Alpha and Omega\) ...pdf](#)

📄 [Read Online Dead Heat \(Alpha and Omega\) ...pdf](#)

Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega)

By Patricia Briggs

Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs

Praised for having “the perfect blend of action, romance, suspense, and paranormal”*, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Patrica Briggs's Alpha and Omega series now takes readers into the middle of some bad supernatural business...

For once, mated werewolves Charles Cornick and Anna Lantham are not traveling because of Charles’s role as his father’s enforcer. This time, their trip to Arizona is purely personal. Or at least their visit starts out that way...

Charles and Anna soon discover that a dangerous fae being is on the loose, replacing human children with simulacrams. The fae have started a cold war with humanity that's about to heat up—and Charles and Anna are in the crossfire.

*Rex Robot Reviews

Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #51512 in Books
- Published on: 2016-02-02
- Released on: 2016-02-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.75" h x .75" w x 4.13" l, .36 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 336 pages

 [Download Dead Heat \(Alpha and Omega\) ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Dead Heat \(Alpha and Omega\) ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online *Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega)* By Patricia Briggs

Editorial Review

Review

“Grade: A. A definite recommend.”—Dear Author

“Gripping and intense, *Dead Heat* is everything an urban fantasy novel should be — it doesn’t get better than this!”—*RT Book Reviews*

“Briggs offers the complete package, a book with interesting world building, lovely characters, and stakes that could not be higher. *Dead Heat* is a great addition to the series.”—All Things Urban Fantasy

More Praise for the Alpha and Omega Novels

“A terrific saga.”—Midwest Book Review

“Briggs has created such a detailed and well thought out world that I am helpless to resist.”—Fiction Vixen

“[Briggs] spins tales of werewolves, coyote shifters and magic and, my, does she do it well...If you like action, violence, romance and, of course, werewolves, then I urge you to pick up this series.”—USATODAY.com

“Interesting, fast-paced urban fantasy...[An] imaginative writer who always leaves fans anxiously waiting for the next tale.”—Monsters and Critics

“Patricia Briggs is amazing...Her Alpha and Omega novels are fantastic.”—Fresh Fiction

About the Author

Patricia Briggs is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the Mercy Thompson urban fantasy series and the Alpha and Omega novels.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Prologue

December

The fae lord stalked back and forth in his cell of gray stone. Three steps, turn, four steps, turn, three steps. He could do it all day. Had, in fact, done it for two weeks.

His boots were soft and he made no sound as he paced. Sound distracted him unduly from his purpose—which was to bore himself to the point where he no longer thought about anything.

His clothes, like his boots, were practical, but still representative of his position as High Court Lord—though he no longer remembered much about that part of his life. Still, his long red hair was confined in a complicated series of braids that trailed the floor behind him, a court fashion of at least a millennium ago. Doubtless if there were still courts, still High Courts, he would be considered out of fashion entirely.

He'd worn High Court dress for the first week he was here, but there was no one to impress, so he'd left them off and exchanged them for the more comfortable clothing. He could have put on jeans, he supposed, but he was losing that long-ago lord a day at a time, and the clothes served as a reminder of what he had once been—though some days, some years, he could not remember why it was that remembering what he had once been was so important.

There was a knock on his door, and he hissed in irritation because he'd nearly succeeded in numbing himself to the imprisonment. Immortality was a curse because no matter how powerful you were, there was always someone more powerful. Someone to obey. Someone who stole what was yours and left you with the dregs of what you once had. Then they took that, too, and here he was in this prison while his gut ached with need and his body missed magic like meat missed salt. Without magic, he had no savor.

The knock sounded again. He'd pissed off whoever it was because his whole prison shook with a noise that hurt his ears and his heart. Wonderful. One of the Powers had come to call upon him. He almost didn't answer—what more could they do to him than they had already done?

He stopped in the middle of the room, because, of course, there was always something worse they could do. It didn't do any good to speculate upon what. He said, "Come in then."

The woman who stepped in was neat and small. She almost stirred that beast inside him. But then she spoke and the illusion was gone.

She was the spiritual archetype of the evil queen in the fairy tales, partially because she'd participated in quite a few of the actual events that had spawned the tales. She adored causing misery and pain to the short-lived humans. All those centuries of power lived in her voice, even if she liked to hold the appearance of a child.

"Underhill will become anything for you," she said, her lip curling as she looked around his current home, "and you chose a prison."

He straightened warily. "Yes, lady."

She shook her head. "And they want you?"

She didn't say who "they" were, or what they wanted him for. He didn't ask because he still had some sense of self-preservation.

She walked around the small room. "They say you have imagination."

She folded her arms as she walked, twisting her torso first so as to see the ceiling stones and then turning until she got the proper angle to see the subtle bend in the wall that made his hiding place less noticeable. She loosened the granite block, the only one without mortar. "They say you know how to hide from humans, from fae, from other creatures who might hunt you because your glamour is so very good."

He wanted to stop her, to keep her from finding his treasure. He wanted to destroy her. But they had taken away his power and he was left with nothing. But that was vanity speaking; he knew that even if he'd had his

power, it would have done him no good against one of the Gray Lords.

He watched as she pulled out the block and found the cubby it hid. She took out the doll he kept there and straightened the pretty yellow skirts, her fingers lingering on the faded tear stains.

A child cries with her whole heart, keeping nothing back. A child lives in the present, and that gives her pain an endless quality. Magic-shorn as he was, he could taste the power of those tear stains from here.

She put the doll back and replaced the block thoughtfully. Then she looked at him. “They tell me you were a skilled magician, subtle and powerful. Once the flower of a powerful High Court—later the bane of it, the first dark root of destruction. Able to hide from the best trackers.”

“I don’t know who they are or what they say,” he told her truthfully, trying to hide his temper.

She smiled. “But you don’t argue with the sentiment.” She walked toward him and touched his face with her left hand.

His glamour fell away, the illusion that truly represented the lord he had once been. But as his magic had twisted and fouled, so had his true form twisted and fouled over the years. He waited for her to recoil; he was not good to look upon, but she smiled. “I have a gift for you. A gift and a task.”

“What task is that?” he asked warily.

“Don’t worry,” she said, putting her right hand on the side of his neck. “You’ll enjoy the job, I promise.”

And his magic came back to him, flooding his body like the heat of the dead. He screamed, dropped to the floor, and writhed as the beautiful agony enveloped him.

She bent down and whispered in his ear. “But there are rules.”

Chapter One

“Okay,” said Charles Cornick, younger son of the Marrok who ruled the werewolves in North America and also, Anna had come to believe, the rest of the world. De facto if not officially. If Bran Cornick said, “Sit up and go there,” there was not a werewolf in the world, Alpha or not, who wouldn’t obey.

Charles had inherited a lot of the dirty work that allowed his father to keep their people, their werewolves, safe. The fallout when a good man was forced to commit heinous and necessary acts was that Charles’s emotions could be mysterious even to himself.

For instance, he’d just said “Okay” when Anna could tell he was anything but okay with the topic at hand. She knew that from the way her husband got up abruptly from the stool where he’d been playing and put his battered old guitar up on the wall hook. Restless, he wandered across the hardwood floor to the big window and looked out at the February snow falling down. There was a lot of it: it was winter in the mountains of Montana.

If he had been a little less self-disciplined, she was pretty sure he would have hunched his shoulders.

“You said I should look into it,” Anna told him, feeling her way. She knew Charles better than anyone, and still he was sometimes impossible to read, this wonderful and complex man of hers. “So I did, starting with your brother. Samuel tells me he’s been working on the problem of werewolf babies for a long time, though not quite from our angle. Children apparently were something of an obsession of his before he found Ariana again. Did you know that werewolf DNA is just like human DNA? You can’t tell the difference unless the sample is taken when we are in our werewolf form—then it’s different.”

“I did, yes,” said Charles, apparently happy to talk about something, anything else. “Samuel told me when he figured it out a couple of decades ago. Not the first time having a doctor in the family has been useful. I think that a human scientist published that data last month in an obscure journal; doubtless it’ll make the newspapers sooner or later.”

The alternative subject allowed him to relax enough to give her a wry smile over his shoulder before looking back out at the snow. “My da was overjoyed. Because of that, there is no way to use a blood test to see if someone is a werewolf or not—unless you’re testing the actual wolf, in which case the point is moot. I’m not sure he’d have ever brought us out into the open if it were so easy to identify us.”

“Okay,” Anna nodded. “It’s a good thing. Mostly. Except that there’s no way to tell if an embryo is human, genetically, or werewolf, if we want to go with a surrogate.”

“A surrogate,” he said.

She had hopes for the surrogate card. Charles’s mother had died giving birth to him. She knew that part of his objection, maybe his whole objection to having children, was the risk to her.

“If I can’t carry a baby to term because I have to change every full moon, then a surrogate is the obvious option. No one has done it before—so far as we know, anyway.”

He didn’t say anything, so she continued, laying out the issues for him. “Because there’s apparently no way to tell which embryo is werewolf, human, or some combination of the two, there’s still a good chance of spontaneous abortion, the same problem human mates of werewolves have. And then there’s the issue of what happens to a human woman who carries a werewolf baby for nine months. Will she become a werewolf? Samuel said we ought to consider a surrogate who wants to be a werewolf. That would eliminate the risk of catching . . . um . . . being infected . . .”

He said, very dryly, “Feeling diseased, Anna?”

No. But she wasn’t going to let him distract her.

“It would eliminate problems if such a pregnancy does make her Change, if our child is a werewolf instead of human,” she said with dignity. This wasn’t going at all well. “We don’t know if carrying a werewolf baby and giving birth would infect the mother—or if so, when. No one but your mother has ever carried a werewolf baby to term. If the surrogate wanted to Change in the first place, that would eliminate one part of that problem. The other being if the surrogate is Changed before the baby is viable.”

His back was now all the way toward her. “It sounds like we are offering a bribe. Carry our baby and we’ll let you Change. With the implied corollary—whatever we say or deny—that if you don’t carry our baby we won’t allow you to Change. And there is also the truth that most people die during the Change, and fewer women survive than men.”

“Yeah,” she agreed. “It sounds ugly when you put it like that. But there are a lot of surrogate births every

year—and normal pregnancy is a life-and-death risk, too. If the surrogate goes into it knowing what might happen, and she's still willing to make that deal in exchange for money and/or the chance to be Changed, I don't have a problem. It's still a risk, but it is an honest risk."

"So we can risk someone else for this, can we?" he said, the hint of a savage growl in his voice. "Because they know as much as we know about what might happen to them, which is that we really don't know what will happen."

She opened her mouth to tell him about the things in the thick file Samuel had sent her, but she reconsidered. Maybe if she went at the problem from a different direction she'd get better results.

"Alternatively," she said, "because science is having trouble with magic, I thought maybe someone who dealt with magic would have some ideas. I called Moira—"

He turned back to her, and some chance of light brought out the bones of his face and outlined his shoulders. He was so beautiful to her. His Salish heritage gave him bronze skin and rich, almost-black hair and eyes. Hard work and running as a wolf gave him the muscles that defined the contours of his warm skin. But it was the core of integrity and . . . Charlesness that really made her heart beat faster, that swamped her with knee-weakening desire.

Not just lust—though who wouldn't lust after Charles? She savored the whole of him and thought again, Who wouldn't lust after Charles? But she was consumed with the desire to claim him, to wrap herself in his essence.

Charles allowed her to understand the line in the marriage vows about "these two shall become one." That sentence had annoyed her immensely when she was nine or ten. Why should she give up who she was for some dumb boy? She'd taken her objections to her father, who had finally said, "When and if 'some dumb boy' loses his mind and agrees to marry you, then doubtless he'll also be happy to take that phrase out."

Anna had taken out the "obey" part when they married. She didn't want to lie. Listen to, yes—obey, no. She'd had enough of obeying for ten lifetimes. She had, however, left in the part about "one flesh."

With Charles she didn't lose herself, she gained Charles. They were a united front against "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." He was her warm safe place in the storm of the world, and she . . . she thought that she was his home.

She wanted his children.

"Absolutely not," he said, and for a moment she thought he was reading her mind because she had lost track of the conversation. But then he said, "No witchcraft."

She wasn't stupid. He was throwing out any obstacle he could find. She would have backed off except for the deep belief, born of the mating bond they shared, that he wanted a child even more than she did.

"Don't fret," she told him. "I won't do it the way your mother did." Unless there are no other options. "I actually thought that Moira might have some insights for Samuel. I thought it only fair to call and warn her that I've sent him after her . . . he sounded quite intense about the whole thing."

He raised his head like a panicked horse. "Ah. I misunderstood. Good."

Charles liked children. She knew he liked children. Why did he panic over the thought of their child? She considered asking him. But she'd tried variants of that; he'd given her a series of answers that were true as

far as they went. She was pretty sure that he didn't know the real answer. So it would be up to her to figure it out.

Once she figured it out she would be able to see if there was a way around it. The panic she could work around—and if he honestly didn't want children, well, she'd deal with that, too. But it was the sadness that lingered behind the panic, the sadness and longing her wolf knew was there, that made her dig in and fight. Anna style.

“Okay,” she said brightly. She who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day. “I just thought I'd give you an update.” She picked up her bundle of information and tucked it under her arm.

She walked over to the window and looked at the falling snow that had frosted the deep green trees and coated the not-so-distant mountains, making the world seem clean and new. Also cold.

“Have you decided what you're getting me for my birthday yet?” she asked.

He liked giving presents. Sometimes it was a flower he'd picked for her—other times expensive jewelry. He'd gradually learned that really expensive gifts, which he liked best, freaked her out. He now left those for important occasions.

He put his arm around her, his body relaxed against her. “Not yet. But I expect I'll figure something out.”

Charles couldn't keep his mind on the numbers, so he closed down his computer. Money was power, and in the long run it could keep his people safer than his fangs and claws. Finances were something he never messed with unless he could pay attention.

His gaze fell on the yellow sticky he'd put on the top of his monitor—Anna's birthday, her twenty-sixth. He needed to find her a present. His preference was for jewelry—which, as his da pointed out, was sort of marking his territory for the other males in the vicinity.

My mate, the ring on her finger told them. And when she ventured to wear any of the necklaces and earrings he'd gotten her, they said, And I can provide for her better than you. After his da made him aware of the reason for his need to bedeck Anna in jewels, he'd begun to work on presents that she did want.

Anna wanted children.

He stared at the bright-colored Post-it note.

It was perfectly reasonable that she'd want children. He understood the urgency of her drive even if she didn't. She'd been a college student when Justin, the Chicago Alpha's hit man, had taken away nearly all of her choices; she'd spent the better part of the time since then taking them back. Reclaiming her life from those who would have taken it from her entirely.

His phone rang and he picked it up absently—until he heard the voice on the other end.

“Hey, Charles,” said Joseph Sani, once the best friend he had in the world. “I was thinking of you today. You and your new bride.”

“Not so new,” Charles said, not fighting the happiness rising up. Joseph affected everyone that way. “It's been three years—a few months more than that. How are you?”

“Three years and I haven't met her yet,” Joseph said, his tone asking, Why not?

Years slipping away without notice, Charles thought. And the last time I saw you, you were an old man. I don't want you to be old. It makes my heart hurt.

"I couldn't come to your wedding," Joseph was saying, "but you didn't make mine, either. We're even."

"I didn't know about yours," Charles told him dryly.

"You didn't have an address or a telephone that I knew about," Joseph said. "You were a hard man to find. I admit you sent me an invitation to yours, but it was through Maggie—and I didn't get it until the day before."

Yes, he'd rather thought that Maggie wouldn't pass it on. "I'm surprised you got it before the wedding at all," he said, acknowledging his own culpability. "But we didn't send out invitations through the mail. Just called. I tried three times and got Maggie twice. The second time I just left the message."

Joseph laughed, and then coughed.

"That's quite a cough," Charles said, concerned.

"I'm fine," Joseph said lightly. "I want to meet your wife, so I can see if she's good enough for you. Why don't you bring her up?"

Charles worked the numbers in his head. He'd met Joseph when he'd been twelve or thereabout, back shortly after World War II. Joseph was in his eighties. The last time he'd seen him face-to-face he'd been in his sixties. Twenty years, he thought in dawning horror. Had he been so much a coward?

"Charles?"

"Okay," he said decisively. "We'll come up." His eyes caught on the Post-it note again, and that gave him an idea. "Are you and Hosteen still breeding horses?"

Three Days Later

Chelsea Sani parked her car, pulled off her sunglasses, and got out. She patted the oversized sign that declared that Sunshine Fun Day Care was a place where children were happy as she passed it. The fenced-off play areas on either side of the sidewalk were empty of children, but as soon as she pulled the heavy door of the day care open, the cheerful blast of kid noise brought a smile to her face.

There were day cares closer to her house, but this one was clean and organized and they kept the kids busy. With her kids, it was always best to keep them busy.

Michael saw her as she peeked into his class of fellow four-year-olds and hooted as he dropped the toy he was playing with and double-timed it to her. She scooped him up in her arms, knowing that the time was soon coming when he wouldn't let her do it anymore. She blew against his neck, and he giggled and wriggled down to run to the wall of coat hooks where his backpack was.

The teacher in charge waved at her but didn't come over to chat as she did sometimes. Her assistant helped Michael with his backpack, grinned at him, and then was distracted by a little girl in a pink dress.

Michael held her hand and danced to music he heard in his head. “First we go to pick up Mackie and then we go home,” he told her.

“That’s right,” she agreed as they walked down the hall. She opened the door to Mackie’s classroom and found her sitting on the time-out chair with her arms folded and a familiar stubborn expression—a look that Chelsea had seen on her husband’s face more than a time or two.

“Hey, pumpkin,” she said, holding out her free hand to give her daughter permission to get up. “Bad day?”

Mackie considered her words without leaving the chair and then nodded solemnly. The new teacher, who was maybe twenty, hurried over, leaving the rest of the kids with her assistant.

“Sharing time didn’t go well,” she said, a little grimly. “We had to have a talk with Mackie about being kind to others. I’m not sure it took.”

“I told you. She isn’t hozho,” said Mackie stubbornly. “It’s not safe to be near someone who isn’t hozho.”

“And she is old enough to speak clearly,” continued the teacher, whose name Chelsea couldn’t remember.

“She is speaking clearly,” piped up Michael, always ready to defend his sister.

“Hozho is a Navajo word,” Chelsea explained as Mackie slid off the chair, finally, and took her mom’s hand in a fierce grip. Ally amidst enemies, that grip said, which meant that Mackie didn’t think she had done something wrong. She never looked for help from her mom when she’d misbehaved. “Their dad or grandfather teaches them a little now and then. Hozho is”—complicated and simple, but hard to explain—“what life should be.”

“Happy,” said Michael, trying to be helpful. “Hozho is like picnics and swing sets. Happy little trees.” He twirled around in her hand without losing his hold and half danced as he chanted. “Happy little breeze.”

“Navajo?” asked the teacher, sounding surprised.

“Yes,” Chelsea gave the teacher a sharp smile. No one could look at Chelsea, whose ancestors had sailed on dragon-headed ships, and think that she was responsible for her children’s warm-tinted skin and eyes dark as a stormy night. If you make my children, make any child, feel bad for who they are, I will teach you why people fear mama grizzlies more than papa grizzlies. I will teach you that if a child parented by Martians comes into this room, they should still be safe.

“That’s so cool,” said the teacher, unaware of her danger. “We’re planning on studying Native Americans in a couple of weeks. Do you think their father or someone you know who is Navajo might be willing to come in and speak to the kids?”

The wind pulled out of her defend-her-children-to-the-death sails by the new teacher’s enthusiasm, Chelsea silenced her inner Viking and said, “If you wait to ask him until the end of the month. His family raises horses and there’s the big show coming up. The whole family will be at sixes and sevens until it’s over.”

A little girl caught her eye. The child was standing in the middle of the room, oddly alone in the chaos of excitement caused by the beginning of the arrival of the parents.

After picking her kids up every day, Chelsea knew the faces of most of the children in their classes. She’d seen this one before, too. This girl and Mackie had built clay flowers together and given them to Chelsea and the other girl’s mother for Christmas a couple of months ago. Both girls had been giggling like triumphant

hyenas as they'd tried to explain how they made the flowers. She was named for a gemstone. Not Ruby or Diamond . . . Amethyst. That was it.

Today, though, Amethyst was watching Mackie intently, and there was no sign of the giggling child she'd been. As the teacher talked about her own childhood pony with enthusiasm, the little girl shifted her gaze from Mackie to Chelsea. Green-gray eyes met Chelsea's eyes briefly and then the girl turned away.

"I ride a little," said Chelsea, half-distracted. "But I don't usually show the horses. My husband does, and he has a couple of assistants, too."

"Cool," said the teacher. "I'll remember to ask about getting your husband to come in after the show is over." She looked at Mackie. "Bye, sweetie. We're going to build pinwheels tomorrow, I think you'll like it."

Mackie considered her solemnly, then nodded like a queen. "All right, Miss Baird. I will see you tomorrow." The teacher, it seemed, was provisionally forgiven.

Mackie was strong in her likes and dislikes. She liked Ms. Newman, who'd been her teacher last year and was Michael's this year. She did not like the principal, the janitor, or Eric, one of her much older brother Max's friends. Eric had quit coming over because Mackie had made him so uncomfortable. Eric seemed like a perfectly nice boy to Chelsea, and she had deep reservations about Ms. Newman.

Mackie tugged on her mother's hand and led the way out of the day care. While Chelsea seat-belted Michael, Mackie belted herself in. Mackie had been belting herself in ever since her hands could work the buckles.

"Independent" was an understatement, Chelsea thought ruefully. Mackie got that from her mother as well as the managing nature. Both served Chelsea quite well in the business sector but would probably ensure that this wouldn't be the only time the new teacher was going to have trouble with Mackie.

Speaking of which . . . "What happened?" Chelsea asked her daughter. She rubbed her temples because she was starting to get a headache. "Why did the teacher put you in time-out?"

Mackie looked at her with a contemplative expression.

To her dad, Mackie would tell the complete, honest truth if he asked. But he seldom did, being more interested in her handling of the situation rather than the particulars of the incident. Had she done the right thing? Could she have chosen a different path that would have led to a better result? Those were the things that were important to Kage.

Chelsea, on the other hand, would be given what Mackie thought her mom needed to hear. Not because Mackie was trying to avoid getting into trouble, but because, Chelsea firmly believed, Mackie made a huge effort to spare her mom any burden of pain or sorrow.

Mackie worried her mother. Both of her boys, Max and Michael, were joyous, healthy spirits. Mackie was born solemn and watchful, a hundred-year-old soul in a barely five-year-old body. She had moments of lightheartedness, but her usual state was wary. Kage said his daughter had the soul of a warrior.

"The girl I was supposed to share crayons with was chindi," said Mackie, finally, which didn't make sense. Chelsea was pretty sure, even with her mere bits and pieces of Navajo language, that chindi were evil spirits of the dead. "But not chindi," added Mackie, even more obscurely.

"You aren't supposed to say chindi," said Michael direly. "Ánáli Hastiin says bad things will happen to

you.”

“Okay,” Chelsea said, abruptly cranky with trying to interpret what had happened at day care. Kage could talk to Mackie about it when he got home.

It was February and usually there was some rain this time of year, but today the skies were blue and the sun beat down and made her eyes ache along with her head. Chelsea didn’t have any pain reliever in the car, so she had to get home to find any relief. Any relief from anything.

“I think I’m going to have to talk to your grandfather about what he is teaching you,” she said.

“Not Granddad,” said Mackie. “Ánáli Hastiin.”

Ánáli Hastiin meant grandfather. But they only used the Navajo term for Mackie’s great-grandfather, Hosteen.

“Fine,” Chelsea said. “I will have a talk with Ánáli Hastiin about what is appropriate to discuss with five-year-olds and what is not.” She shut the back door of the car with a little more force than necessary and started the drive home.

“So far this trip,” said Anna with wry amusement that would carry just fine though Charles’s headphones, “we’ve talked over current stock market trends and why they are good for us and bad for lots of other people. We’ve discussed the problems with using military tactics for police-type problems. We’ve talked about the literary license used when filming classic fantasy novels and whether the results were enjoyable or heinous. We’ve agreed to disagree, even though I’m right.”

We have not discussed the topic that we really need to talk about, my love. My mother used to say that no one does stubborn like a Latham, and I will prove that to you. We have time.

So she brought up the other topic he hadn’t been willing to talk about. “Are you ready to tell me about where we’re going?”

Charles smiled, just a little.

She gave a huff of amusement. “I’m just trying to decide if it’s a birthday present or a job.” It would be a birthday present, she was sure. Her birthday was two weeks away, but Charles was never playful about work assignments from his father.

“Okay,” Charles told her agreeably, and she gave him a mock punch on his shoulder.

“Careful, now,” he told her, waggling the wings of the airplane just a little. “We might crash if you keep hitting the pilot.”

“Hmm,” she said, not worried. When Charles did something, he did it well. “Where are we going? Besides Arizona.” He’d already told her Arizona, sometime between the discussion about police work and the one about movies. “Arizona is a very big state.”

“Scottsdale,” he told her.

She frowned at him. She knew only one thing about Scottsdale. “Are we going golfing?” Her father enjoyed golfing on his infrequent vacations.

“No, we’re doing the other thing Scottsdale is famous for.”

“Going to a resort and hanging out with celebrities?” she said doubtfully.

“We are going to find you a horse.”

“Jinx is my horse,” she said immediately.

Jinx was a mutt that was, Charles had told her, probably mostly quarter horse. He’d acquired the aging gelding at an open auction, outbidding the meat buyer.

Anna had learned to ride on him.

“No,” Charles said gently. “Jinx is a great babysitter, but you don’t need him anymore. He’s a good horse to learn on, but he is lazy. He doesn’t like the long rides or being asked to speed up. You need a different horse. I have a good home in mind for him. He’ll be carrying kids around very slowly: he’ll be ecstatic.”

“There aren’t any horses that would suit me in Montana?”

He smiled. “I have an old friend who breeds Arabians. I talked to him on the phone the other day and it got me thinking about your birthday and about how it is time for you to get a different horse to ride.”

Anna sat back. An Arabian. Visions of The Black Stallion danced across her vision. She couldn’t stop her happy little sigh.

“I like Jinx,” she said.

“I know you do,” Charles said, “and he likes you.”

“He’s beautiful,” she said.

“He is,” agreed Charles. “He’ll also see you saddle up another horse with a sigh of relief and go back to sleep.”

“Arabians look like carousel horses,” Anna said, still feeling as though she were betraying the amiable gelding who’d taught her so much.

Charles laughed. “That’s true enough. The Arabians might not suit you; they don’t suit everyone. They are like cats: vain, beautiful, and intelligent. But you deal well enough with Asil, who is also vain, beautiful, and intelligent. Still, if they don’t have a good match for you here, we can find a horse nearer to home that suits you.”

“Okay,” Anna said, but in her heart of hearts she was riding a black stallion without bridle or saddle along a beach on a deserted island, and they were galloping full speed.

Charles must have heard it in her voice because he smiled.

Then a nagging thing—that she hadn’t immediately pounced on because she’d been dazzled by the horse part of what he’d said—suddenly caught her attention. “An old friend,” he’d said. Charles didn’t have many friends. Acquaintances, yes, but not friends—and he was very careful in what words he chose. The people he was close to were numbered on the fingers of one hand—Anna; his brother, Samuel; and his da. Probably Mercy, the coyote shapeshifter who’d been raised in his pack, would qualify. But that was it. Charles was

nearly two hundred years old and he'd collected very few people to love.

"Tell me," she said, "about your old friend."

For a moment his face grew still and her stomach clenched.

"Joseph Sani is the best horseman I've ever seen or heard of," Charles said slowly. "He's a daredevil with no sense of self-preservation." Most people would not have heard the half-despairing, affectionate admiration in Charles's voice. "The more dangerous something is, the more likely he is to throw himself in the middle of it. He sees people—all the way through them—and he likes them anyway." Cares about me went unspoken, but Anna heard it just the same. This Joseph was a man who knew her husband and loved him.

You love him, too, Anna thought. And I've never in three years heard you mention his name.

She didn't say it out loud, but his eyes flicked to her and then away, so she thought he might have caught her thought through the mate bond that sometimes startled her with its usefulness. Hard to keep secrets from your mate, harder to stay angry when you can feel the other person's pain . . . and love. Their bond seemed to communicate their emotions better than words. But it sometimes slid the words in, too.

"Yes," he said. "Until I met you, he was my best friend. I haven't seen him for twenty years because the last time I was there, I suddenly realized that he was getting old. He is human, not werewolf." He stared out at the blue sky. "I didn't stay away on purpose, Anna. Not on purpose. But visiting him wasn't a . . . good thing anymore. I counted on him keeping me . . . level. What you do for me now, when Da's assignments are bad." He let out a shaky breath. "I don't say good-bye very easily, Anna. Not gracefully or prettily. Good-bye tears your heart out and leaves it a feast for carrion birds who happen by."

She put her hand on his thigh and left it there until the plane touched down.

Chelsea's headache redoubled on the way home, and after a few sharp interchanges the children fell silent. She craved home in a way that she hadn't since she was ten years old returning from a very long, very bad summer camp.

When she turned the car into the driveway there was no magical surcease from pain. She got the kids out of the car and into the house. She should have . . . done something with them, but she worried that in her current state she might hurt their feelings . . . or worse.

She left them to their own devices while she stumbled through her bedroom to the bathroom beyond. If she could just get rid of this headache, she could regain her balance.

She took three painkillers when the directions told her to take two. The pills were dry and stuck in her throat; she took two more and then put her mouth to the faucet and drank water to get them down.

Too many, she thought, but her head really hurt. She felt like she should take more. Her hand went up to the medicine cabinet where there were some leftover painkillers from when she'd had a root canal done a few months earlier. She hit the glass toothbrush holder, and it fell into the sink and shattered.

She cleaned it up, but her headache made her clumsy. She sliced her finger on a shard she was throwing away. It wasn't a bad cut. She stuck the finger in her mouth and stared at herself in the mirror over her sink. She looked . . . wrong. She put her hands to her face and pulled the skin back, flattening her nose a little, but it didn't change the stranger in the mirror where she was supposed to be.

She washed her face in cold water, and that seemed to help the headache a little. Her finger had quit

bleeding.

A glance at the clock showed her it was nearly time for Max to be home. Ten years older than his half brother and sister, he had . . . what sport was it? Basketball. He had basketball practice after school.

And if he was almost home, she'd been in the bathroom an hour, left a four-year-old and a five-year-old without supervision for an hour. She hurried out and down the stairs. The sound of the TV led her to the family room, where the kids were watching a cartoon. Michael didn't look up, but Mackie gave her a wary look.

"Sorry," she told them. "I have a bad headache. Will you two be okay for a while more? I have to get dinner started."

"Okie-dokie," said Michael, without looking away from the TV.

Because he couldn't be bothered. TV was more important than his mother.

Mackie didn't say anything. Just watching her with her father's eyes and judging what she saw, always judging her and finding her lacking.

Chelsea turned and went to the kitchen. She got random things out of the refrigerator with shaking hands: carrots, celery, summer sausage, and radishes. The cutting board hadn't been put back where it belonged and she had to search for it. She found it among the pots and pans instead of in the narrow cupboard next to the stove, and by then she was in a fine rage.

Max came in the kitchen door, letting it bang carelessly against the wall. He took after her, tall and blond, rather than her first husband, who'd died in a car wreck, leaving her to raise her two-year-old son on her own. For a moment Max's presence cleared her head like a breath of fresh air.

"Hey, Mom," he said cheerily, sounding so much like his father that it sometimes made her heart ache. She loved Kage, but that didn't mean she hadn't loved Rob, too. "What's for dinner?"

He was always hungry these days. Always expecting her to feed him when he was old enough to get his own food. She clenched her fingers around the chef's knife, so cool and powerful in her hand.

"Would you do something for me?" she said through gritted teeth, unable to look away from the bright silver promise of the knife.

"Sure," Max said, snitching a carrot from the bag she'd put on the counter.

Bad manners to steal food before the cook was ready. Bad.

Anna blocked the tires while Charles finished tying down the plane to the anchors he'd driven into the ground. The plane wasn't that small, but it was designed to fly. That meant that a strong wind would move it unless it was tied down. They'd done this enough times now that Charles didn't have to tell her what to do or how.

A battered truck charged up the dirt road in a cloud of dust and stopped next to their airplane without slowing much in between. The driver was young, Native American, and dressed in a cross between cowboy and First People: jeans, boots, cowboy hat, T-shirt, turquoise necklace, earrings. He held up his pants with a leather belt decked with silver and turquoise.

Young meant that he was not the man she and Charles were coming to see.

Charles didn't look up from his task as the stranger rounded the end of his truck and walked toward them, his steps rapid and businesslike. If this man had been a stranger, Charles would have looked up.

The expression on the approaching man's face was a bit grim, as if he were engaged in a necessary but not enjoyable task. He watched Charles until he came within easy talking distance and then glanced, almost absently, at Anna. He staggered, rocked back on his worn boot heels, and let out a gasp of air like a man hit in the stomach.

He was a werewolf, Anna divined more from his actions than from his scent, as he was downwind. A dominant werewolf, if his reaction was anything to judge by. Less-dominant wolves tended not to react so strongly to her presence.

Omega werewolves were rare as hen's teeth. Anna knew of one other Omega wolf in Europe. As far as she knew, they were it. Bran said it was because there weren't many werewolves crazy enough to attack and so Change a person who had the qualities of an Omega. Samuel, Charles's brother, called her "Valium for werewolves."

Charles, satisfied the little plane would be there waiting for them when they came back, looked at the stranger and raised his eyebrows. She knew he was amused at the other man's reaction to her, but she didn't think that the stranger would notice—most people didn't. A lot of Charles's expressions were more . . . micro-expressions, especially when he was in public.

"Hosteen," Charles said, "this is my mate and wife, Anna. Anna, this is Hosteen Sani, full-blooded Navajo, Alpha of the Salt River pack, and breeder of fine Arabian horses for the past three-quarters of a century, give or take a decade."

Sani meant that he was related to Charles's Joseph. Anna was going to sit her husband down as soon as she got him in private again and make him talk.

"Good to meet you," Anna said.

Hosteen inclined his head but didn't say anything, just stared at her while Charles tossed their bags into the back of the truck. Her mate didn't seem to be worried about Hosteen's lack of response, no matter how awkward. He opened the passenger door in open invitation for Anna to sit in the middle.

Anna got in and watched as Hosteen walked thoughtfully around the front of the truck with no sign of the get-things-done stride he'd had before he met her. He opened the driver's-side door as Charles got in beside her, but then Hosteen stood in the shelter of the door as if he were reluctant to sit next to her.

"Navajo?" Anna asked, trying to make things easier on him with a little conversation. "I thought the Navajo in Arizona mostly live north of Flagstaff."

Hosteen narrowed his eyes until she thought she'd said something wrong. Then he muttered something in a foreign language that she didn't quite catch, nodded to himself, and hopped into the driver's seat.

He didn't say anything more until they were headed down the bumpy, unpaved road.

"Yes," he said. "Most Navajo live in the north, in the Four Corners region. There are a few Navajo here, because there is work here, but you are right, mostly it is Pima, O'odham, Maricopa, with a dash of Apache or Kwtsaan to liven the mix."

She read the atmosphere in the truck as strained, but that might only be two dominant males in a small truck. Or more of Hosteen's reaction to her. She honestly couldn't tell whether Charles liked Hosteen or not. They certainly knew each other well; otherwise two dominant wolves would never have gotten into the same vehicle together.

She decided to keep quiet and let them figure things out.

After five minutes or so of silence, Hosteen gave a jerky nod as if in answer to some question only he heard. Then he put an end to any image of the laconic Native American, an image that Charles, for instance, could have been the poster boy for.

"There is a long story to how I ended up here, away from the lands of the Diné, the Navajo," he told her. "When I was Changed, a hundred years ago, more or less, I thought I must be a skinwalker. I had never heard of werewolves, you see, and neither had anyone I knew. You know what a skinwalker is?"

Yes, but she'd learned that it was better to plead ignorance because sometimes what she thought she knew about the supernatural world was wrong or incomplete. "A little."

"Skinwalkers are evil witches who take on the shape of animals—usually it is animals—they skin. They delight in destruction, suffering, and pain. They spread illness and evil. I thought that was probably what I was—though I didn't feel more evil than I had before I was attacked." He smiled at her, inviting her to enjoy the joke on the young man he had been. She thought it was more horrific than funny—too close to her own experience.

When she didn't smile back, he regarded her thoughtfully, then turned his eyes back to the rough dirt track they were following.

"I didn't skin an animal for its shape. But even an ignorant boy such as I was could see that changing into a wolf, a monstrous wolf, gave me something in common with the witch people," he said. He seemed to relax as he settled into the story, his voice drifting into a cadence that made her think that he had told this story more than once. "Those who follow the witchery way are evil, so I figured I must be, too. My parents loved me, but I was dangerous to them and to my family, so I left. This is where I ended up."

"California is where you went first," said Charles, and the way he said it made Anna think that he was encouraging the other man to tell stories. "Hosteen is a movie star, Anna."

Hosteen smiled—and it changed his whole demeanor. Anna saw that she had been wrong when she'd thought he was a little grim. There was delight and innocence in that smile.

"You'll see my face in a few movies," he conceded almost shyly. "But only if you like the old silent movies. No real parts, just Apache number two, Hopi number eight, that sort of thing. When they found out I was good with horses, I moved pretty quickly into horse wrangling. Worked on *The Son of the Sheik*."

And Anna realized that Charles had prodded Hosteen because he knew that she'd enjoy this story.

Charles kept telling her that just because a wolf was old didn't mean that he'd ever met a famous person from the past. She and her brother had spent a lot of Saturday afternoons eating popcorn and watching movies with her father. He liked either very old black and white movies, though usually with soundtracks, or kung fu theater.

One afternoon, her father had rented a whole bunch of Valentino films and they'd watched them, one after

another. The finale had been *The Son of the Sheik*.

“Rudolf Valentino’s last film?” Anna asked.

“Yes,” Hosteen said. “I wrangled horses for a few of his movies. Valentino was a horseman. He liked dogs, too, and he didn’t mind stopping to talk to the Indian who was handling the horses. I liked him.”

Hosteen had answered her question, but he kept talking. Either he sensed her continued interest, or he liked to tell stories. Maybe a bit of both.

“They brought in a small herd of Arabian horses for the movie. Rented them from Kellogg, the guy who invented corn flakes.” Hosteen laughed to himself as if something about the deal amused him. “Anyway, they brought in a number of Arabians—prettiest horses I’d ever seen. Valentino liked this big gray the best. But Valentino was too valuable and Jadaan, he could be unpredictable. The producers were worried Valentino would get tossed, so he mostly rode other horses for the film. Valentino was furious and insulted.” He pursed his lips. “They were idiots, those producers; Valentino could ride.”

Hosteen fell silent, and Anna tried to think of a question to get him going again. Before she did, he said, “That Jadaan. He had terrible front legs. But he was as good as Valentino himself at striking a pose. Cameras loved him.”

They bounced on over the rutted dirt road.

“They brought in a stunt double to do the dangerous stuff,” Hosteen said after a while. “Carl Schmidt, he was a good horseman. Later, he changed his name to Raswan and wrote a lot of books about the Arabian. A good horseman, but a ridiculous person—like that singer who changed his name to a symbol instead of a word. Carl Raswan.” He snorted. “Raswan was a horse. Still, Carl was a good rider, did most of the shots with Jadaan and anything that required more speed than a canter. No one on the set, except perhaps Valentino because he was a nice guy, would have missed Carl if he’d broken his fool neck, so he was a good choice for a stunt double.”

He laughed a little to himself again. “Now you see. Just ask me a question, any question, and it all comes back to horses. But you asked what I am doing here. I met Fowler and Annie McCormick, big money people, in California when they brought a couple of their horses to me to train. They had a place out here and were willing to guarantee me some work. I wanted to breed Arabians, and so I moved here. Bought a hundred acres next to their ranch and started my own operation.” He glanced at Charles. “About the time we first met, eh? Just before the Second World War.”

“How’s Joseph?” Charles asked, in an apparent non sequitur, and Hosteen sobered.

“Still human, and will apparently die that way. Eighty-two, stubborn as a mule.” Hosteen looked at Anna and then the road. “I wish you would change his mind about that.”

“I’ve offered before,” Charles said.

“Yes,” said Hosteen. “I know.” He kept his eyes straight ahead. “Maybe you could do more than offer.”

The atmosphere in the truck chilled to below zero, even though, Anna was pretty sure, it was close to seventy degrees outside.

“No,” said Charles.

“You go see him,” said Hosteen with a sudden growl in his voice. “You go see my son, that bright spirit who is trapped in a body that is dying around him. You see him—and then you look me in the eye and tell me that again.”

“Hosteen,” said Charles carefully. “If Joseph had at any time in the last twenty years changed his stance on the matter, he would have asked you or me. I will not, and you will not force him. A wolf who Changes an unwilling victim must himself die, by the Marrok’s word.”

“Your father would not kill you for it,” said Hosteen, but the fire of his anger was gone. “He would kill me—have you kill me—but you he would spare.”

“If you think that,” Charles said, “then you don’t know my father very well.”

Chelsea tried not to look at the blood when she called her husband.

“Kage, Kage, Kage,” she chanted in time with the rings.

“This is Kage Sani,” his voice said in her ear, and she could have cried. “I can’t answer right now. Please leave a message and I’ll get back to you as soon as possible.”

“The children,” she said. “Kage. The children.” She wanted to tell him about the children, but she screamed instead. When she caught her breath, and silence fell, she could only whisper, as if another loud noise might wake something evil. Again. “I was so angry, Kage. This knife. Blood. Hurry. Hurry. Blood.” When Kage’s phone beeped to signal that it had stopped recording, she was still chanting into the mouthpiece.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

John Davis:

The particular book *Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega)* will bring that you the new experience of reading a book. The author style to describe the idea is very unique. In case you try to find new book to study, this book very suited to you. The book *Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega)* is much recommended to you to learn. You can also get the e-book through the official web site, so you can more readily to read the book.

Daniel Trimble:

Reading can called thoughts hangout, why? Because while you are reading a book specifically book entitled *Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega)* your mind will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in each and every aspect that maybe mysterious for but surely will end up your mind friends. Imaging just about every word written in a e-book then become one web form conclusion and explanation that will maybe you never get ahead of. The *Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega)* giving you a different experience more than blown away your thoughts but also giving you useful information for your better life in this particular era. So now let us demonstrate the relaxing pattern the following is your body and mind is going to be pleased when you are finished studying it, like winning a sport. Do you want to try this extraordinary shelling out spare time activity?

Robert Alcock:

As we know that book is important thing to add our expertise for everything. By a book we can know everything we would like. A book is a pair of written, printed, illustrated as well as blank sheet. Every year seemed to be exactly added. This publication Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) was filled with regards to science. Spend your time to add your knowledge about your science competence. Some people has diverse feel when they reading any book. If you know how big benefit of a book, you can truly feel enjoy to read a e-book. In the modern era like currently, many ways to get book which you wanted.

Nancy Smith:

That e-book can make you to feel relax. This specific book Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) was colourful and of course has pictures on there. As we know that book Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) has many kinds or type. Start from kids until young adults. For example Naruto or Private investigator Conan you can read and feel that you are the character on there. Therefore , not at all of book are generally make you bored, any it offers you feel happy, fun and loosen up. Try to choose the best book for yourself and try to like reading that.

Download and Read Online Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs #Z5HLG8EAWXD

Read Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs for online ebook

Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs Free PDF d0wnl0ad, audio books, books to read, good books to read, cheap books, good books, online books, books online, book reviews epub, read books online, books to read online, online library, greatbooks to read, PDF best books to read, top books to read Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs books to read online.

Online Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs ebook PDF download

Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs Doc

Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs Mobipocket

Dead Heat (Alpha and Omega) By Patricia Briggs EPub