



A BLOOD AND ASH NOVEL

THE  
CROWN  
OF  
GILDED  
BONES

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JENNIFER L.  
ARMENTROUT

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The Crown of Gilded Bones  
A Blood and Ash Novel  
By Jennifer L. Armentrout

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## **Book Description**

### **The Crown of Gilded Bones**

A Blood and Ash Novel

Jennifer L. Armentrout

***Bow Before Your Queen Or Bleed Before Her...***

**From #1 New York Times bestselling author Jennifer L. Armentrout comes book three in her Blood and Ash series.**

***She's been the victim and the survivor...***

Poppy never dreamed she would find the love she's found with Prince Casteel. She wants to revel in her happiness but first they must free his brother and find hers. It's a dangerous mission and one with far-reaching consequences neither dreamed of. Because Poppy is the Chosen, the Blessed. The true ruler of Atlantia. She carries the blood of the King of Gods within her. By right the crown and the kingdom are hers.

***The enemy and the warrior...***

Poppy has only ever wanted to control her own life, not the lives of others, but now she must choose to either forsake her birthright or seize the gilded crown and become the Queen of Flesh and Fire. But as the kingdoms' dark sins and blood-drenched secrets finally unravel, a long-forgotten power rises to pose a genuine threat. And they will stop at nothing to ensure that the crown never sits upon Poppy's head.

***A lover and heartmate...***

But the greatest threat to them and to Atlantia is what awaits in the far west, where the Queen of Blood and Ash has her own plans, ones she has waited hundreds of years to carry out. Poppy and Casteel must consider the impossible—travel to the Lands of the Gods and wake the King himself. And

as shocking secrets and the harshest betrayals come to light, and enemies emerge to threaten everything Poppy and Casteel have fought for, they will discover just how far they are willing to go for their people—and each other.

***And now she will become Queen...***

## About Jennifer L. Armentrout

# 1 New York Times and International Bestselling author Jennifer lives in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. All the rumors you've heard about her state aren't true. When she's not hard at work writing, she spends her time reading, watching really bad zombie movies, pretending to write, and hanging out with her husband, their retired K-9 police dog Diesel, a crazy Border Jack puppy named Apollo, six judgmental alpacas, four fluffy sheep, and two goats.

Her dreams of becoming an author started in algebra class, where she spent most of her time writing short stories...which explains her dismal grades in math. Jennifer writes young adult paranormal, science fiction, fantasy, and contemporary romance. She is published with Tor Teen, Entangled Teen and Brazen, Disney/Hyperion and Harlequin Teen. Her book *Wicked* has been optioned by Passionflix and slated to begin filming in late 2018. Her young adult romantic suspense novel *DON'T LOOK BACK* was a 2014 nominated Best in Young Adult Fiction by YALSA and her novel *THE PROBLEM WITH FOREVER* is a 2017 RITA Award winning novel.

She also writes Adult and New Adult contemporary and paranormal romance under the name J. Lynn. She is published by Entangled Brazen and HarperCollins.

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## **Dedication**

Dedicated to the heroes—the healthcare workers, first responders, essential workers and researchers who have worked tirelessly and endlessly to save lives and to keep stores open all around the globe, at great risk to their own lives and the lives of their loved ones, thank you.

# Map



To see a full color version of the world map, click [here!](#)

## Chapter 1



“Lower your swords,” Queen Eloana commanded, her hair shining a glossy onyx in the sun as she sank onto one knee. The raw emotion pouring out of her seeped into the Temple floors of the Chambers of Nyktos, bitter and hot, tasting of anguish and a helpless sort of anger. It stretched out toward me, needling my skin and brushing against this...*primal* thing inside me. “And bow before the...before the *last* descendant of the most ancient ones. She who carries the blood of the King of Gods within her. Bow before your new Queen.”

*The blood of the King of Gods? Your new Queen?* None of that made sense. Not her words or when she had removed her crown.

A too-thin breath scorched my throat as I looked at the man standing beside the Queen of Atlantia. The crown was still upon the King’s golden-haired head, but the bones had remained a bleached white. Nothing like the gleaming, gilded one the Queen had placed at the feet of the statue of Nyktos. My gaze skipped over the terrible, broken things scattered about the once pristine, white floors. I’d done that to them, adding their blood to what had fallen from the sky, filling the thin fissures in the marble. I didn’t look at that or anyone else—every part of my being focused on *him*.

He remained on one knee, staring up at me from between the vee of the swords he’d crossed over his chest. His damp hair, blue-black in the Atlantian sunlight, curled against the sandy-hued skin of his forehead. Red streaked those high, angular cheekbones, the proud curve of his jaw, and ran down lips that had once shattered my heart. Lips that had pieced those broken shards back together with the truth. Bright, golden eyes locked with mine, and even bowed before me, so motionless I wasn’t sure he breathed, he still reminded me of one of the wild and strikingly beautiful cave cats I’d once seen caged in Queen Ileana’s palace as a child.

He had been many things to me. A stranger in a dimly lit room who’d been my first kiss. A guard who had sworn to lay down his life for mine. A

friend who had looked beyond the veil of the Maiden to truly see me underneath, who'd handed me a sword to protect myself instead of forcing me into a gilded cage. A legend cloaked in darkness and nightmares that had plotted to betray me. A Prince of a kingdom believed to have been lost to time and war, who had suffered unimaginable horrors and yet managed to find the pieces of who he used to be. A brother who would do anything, commit any deed to save his family. His people. A man who bared his soul and stripped open his heart to me—and only me.

My first.

My guard.

My friend.

My betrayer.

My partner.

My husband.

My heartmate.

My *everything*.

Casteel Da'Neer bowed before me and stared up at me as if I were the only person in the entire kingdom. I didn't need to concentrate like before to know what he was feeling. Everything he felt was wide-open to me. His emotions were a kaleidoscope of ever-shifting tastes—cool and tart, heavy and spicy, and sweet like chocolate-dipped berries. Those unyieldingly firm and unrelentingly tender lips parted, revealing just the hint of sharp fangs.

“My Queen,” he breathed, and those two smoky words soothed my skin. The lilt of his voice quelled the ancient thing inside me that wanted to take the anger and the fear radiating from all the others and twist it, turn it back, truly give them something to fear, and add to the shattered things thrown about the floor. One side of his lips curled up, and a deep dimple appeared in his right cheek.

Dizzy with relief at the sight of that infuriatingly stupid—and adorable—dimple, my entire body shuddered. I feared that when he saw what I'd done, he'd be afraid. And I couldn't blame him for that. What I'd done should terrify anyone, but not Casteel. The heat that turned his eyes the color of warmed honey told me that fear was very much the furthest thing from his mind. Which was also a little disturbing. But he was the Dark One, whether he liked being called that or not.

Some of the shock faded, and the pounding adrenaline eased. And when it left, I realized I *hurt*. My shoulder and the side of my head throbbed. The

left side of my face felt puffy, and that had nothing to do with the old scars there. A dull ache pulsed in my legs and arms, and my body felt funny, as if my knees were weakening. I swayed in the warm, salty breeze—

Casteel rose quickly, and I shouldn't have been surprised by how fast he moved, but I still was. In a heartbeat, he'd gone from kneeling to standing, a foot closer to me, and several things happened at once.

The men and women behind Casteel's parents, the ones wearing the same white tunics and loose pants of those lying on the floor, also moved. Light reflected off the golden armbands adorning their biceps as they lifted their swords, shifting closer to Casteel's parents, protecting them. Some reached for crossbows strapped to their backs. They had to be guards of some sort.

A sudden growl of warning came from the largest wolveren I'd ever seen. Kieran and Vonetta's father stood to my right. Jasper had officiated the marriage between Casteel and me in Spessa's End. He'd been there when Nyktos showed his approval by briefly turning day to night. But now, the steel-hued wolveren's lips peeled back, baring teeth that could tear through flesh and break bone. He was loyal to Casteel, and yet instinct told me that it wasn't just the guards he warned.

Another snarl came from my left. In the shadows of the blood tree that had sprouted from where my blood had fallen and then grew to a massive height within seconds, a fawn-colored wolveren crept into my line of sight, head dipped low, and wintry blue eyes iridescent. *Kieran*. He stared down Casteel. I didn't understand why either of them would behave this way toward the Prince, but especially Kieran. He had been bonded to Casteel from birth, meant to obey and protect him at all costs. But he was more than a bonded wolveren to Casteel. They were brothers, if not by blood then by friendship, and I knew they loved each other.

Right now, nothing about the way Kieran's ears were pinned back was *loving*.

Unease skipped its way through me as Kieran sank down, the sleek muscles of his legs tensing as he prepared to attack...Casteel.

My stomach plummeted. This wasn't right. None of this was right. "No," I rasped, my voice hoarse and barely recognizable, even to my ears.

Kieran didn't appear to hear me or care. If he had been acting normally, I would've just assumed he was attempting to ignore me, but this was different. *He* was different. His eyes were brighter than I ever remembered

seeing, and they weren't right because they...they weren't just blue now. His pupils glowed silvery-white, an aura that seeped out in wispy tendrils across the blue. My head jerked to Jasper. His eyes had changed, too. I'd seen that strange light before. It had been what my skin had done when I healed Beckett's broken legs—the same silvery glow that had radiated from me minutes earlier.

Icy bursts of surprise raced through Casteel as he eyed the wolveren, and then I felt...*relief* radiate from him.

"You all knew." Casteel's voice filled with awe, something no one standing behind him felt. Even the easy grin was absent from the auburn-haired Atlantian. Emil looked at us with wide eyes, broadcasting a healthy dose of fear, as did Naill, who had always appeared utterly unfazed by everything—even when he'd been outnumbered in battle.

Casteel slowly sheathed his swords at his sides. Hands empty, he kept them down. "You all knew something was happening to her. That's why..." He trailed off, his jaw hardening.

Several of the guards moved to the front of the King and Queen, surrounding them fully—

A shock of white fur shot forward. Delano tucked his tail back as he pawed at the marble. He lifted his head and howled. The eerie yet beautiful sound raised the tiny hairs all over my body.

Off in the distance, the faint sounds of yips and barks answered, growing louder with each second. The leaves on the tall, cone-shaped trees separating the Temple from Saion's Cove trembled as a rolling rumble echoed from the ground below. Blue-and-yellow-winged birds took flight from the trees, scattering to the sky.

"Godsdamn." Emil turned to the Temple steps. He reached for the swords at his sides. "They're summoning the whole damn city."

"It's her." The deep scar slicing across the older wolveren's forehead stood out starkly. Potent disbelief rolled off Alastir as he stood just outside the circle of guards who'd formed around Casteel's parents.

"It is not her," Casteel shot back.

"But it is," King Valyn confirmed as he stared at me from a face that Casteel's would one day become. "They're responding to her. That's why the ones on the road with us shifted without warning. She called them to her."

"I...I didn't call anyone," I told Casteel, voice cracking.

"I know." Casteel's tone softened as his eyes locked with mine.

“But she did,” his mother insisted. “You might not realize it, but you did summon them.”

My eyes darted to her, and I felt my chest wrench. She was everything I’d imagined Casteel’s mother to be. Stunning. Regal. Powerful. Calm now, even as she remained on one knee, even when she had first seen me and demanded of her son—*What have you done? What have you brought back?* I flinched, fearing those words would stay with me long after today.

Casteel’s features sharpened as golden eyes swept over my face. “If the idiots behind me actually laid down their swords instead of lifting them against my *wife*, we wouldn’t have an entire colony of wolveren about to descend on us,” he bit out. “They are only reacting to the threat.”

“You’re right,” his father agreed as he gently guided his wife to her feet. Blood soaked the knee and the hem of her lilac gown. “But ask yourself why your bonded wolveren is guarding someone other than *you*.”

“I really couldn’t care less at the moment,” Casteel responded as the sound of hundreds—if not more—of paws pounding the earth grew even closer. He couldn’t be serious. He had to care, because that was a damn good question.

“You need to care,” his mother cautioned, a thin quiver in her otherwise steady voice. “The bonds have broken.”

The bonds? Hands trembling, my wide eyes shot to the Temple steps, to where Emil slowly backed away. Naill had his swords in his hands now.

“She’s right,” Alastir uttered, the skin around his mouth appearing even whiter. “I can... I can feel it—the Primal *notam*. Her mark. Good gods.” His voice trembled as he stumbled back, nearly stepping on the crown. “They’ve all broken.”

I had no idea what a *notam* was, but through the confusion and the blossoming panic, there was something odd about what Alastir had stated. If it was true, then why wasn’t he in his wolveren form? Was it because he’d already broken his wolveren bond with the former King of Atlantia all those years ago?

“Look at their eyes,” the Queen ordered softly, pointing out what I’d seen. “I know you don’t understand. There are things you never needed to learn, Hawke.” Her voice cracked then, thickened at the use of his nickname—a name I’d once believed to be nothing more than a lie. “But what you need to know now is that they no longer serve the elemental bloodline. You are not safe. Please,” she begged. “Please. Listen to me, Hawke.”