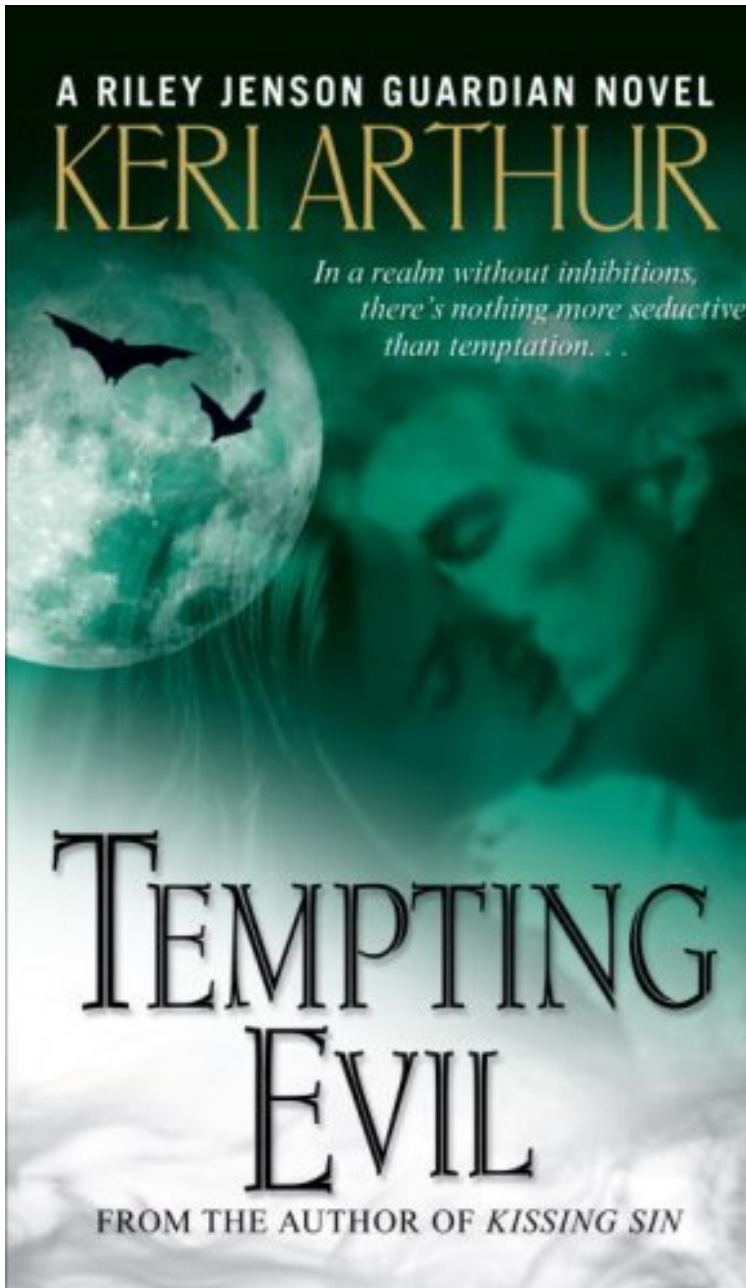


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Tempting Evil (Riley Jensen, Guardian, Book 3)



Par Keri Arthur
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn a world of sorcery and seduction, the nights bring out the beautiful, the damned, and the desired. Here, Riley Jensen is on her ownhalf werewolf, half vampire, working for an organization

created to police the supernatural races. Trusting her superiors and lovers barely more than she trusts her worst enemies, Riley plays by her own set of rules. Her latest mission: to enter the heavily guarded pleasure palace of a criminal named Deshon Starra madman-scientist who's been messing around in the gene pool for decades. With two sexy men, a cool, seductive vampire and an irresistibly hot wolfy guy for her attention, Riley must keep focused. Because saving the world from Deshon Starr will mean saving herself from the trap that's closing in around her. . . . From the Paperback edition.

Chapter One Training sucked. Especially when the main aim of that training was to make me something I'd once vowed never to become a guardian for the Directorate of Other Races. Becoming a guardian might have been inevitable, and I might have accepted it on some levels, but that didn't mean I had to be happy about the whole process. Guardians were far more than just the specialized cops most humans thought them to be; they were judge, jury, and executioners. None of this legal crap the human cops were forced to put up with. Of course, the people in front of a guardian's metaphoric bullet were generally out-of-control psychos who totally deserved to die, but stalking the night with the aim of ending their undead lives still wasn't something that had reached my "to-do" list. Even if my wolf soul sometimes hungered to hunt more than I might wish to acknowledge. But if there was one thing worse than going through all the training that was involved in becoming a guardian, then it was training with my brother. I couldn't con him. Couldn't flirt or flash a bit of flesh to make him forget his train of thought. Couldn't moan that I'd had enough and that I couldn't go on, because he wasn't just my brother, but my twin. He knew exactly what I could and couldn't do, because he could feel it. We might not share the telepathy of twins, but we knew when the other was hurting or in trouble. And right now, Rhoan was fully aware of the fact that I was trying to pike. And he knew why. I had a hot date with an even hotter werewolf. In precisely one hour. If I left now, I could get home and clean up before Kellen's hot date in question came by to pick me up. Any later, and he'd see me as the beaten-up scruff I usually was these days. "Isn't Liander cooking you a roast this evening?" I said, casually waving the wooden baton I'd been given but had yet to use. Mainly because I didn't want to hit my brother. He, however, didn't have the same problem, and the bruises littering my body proved it. But then, he didn't really want me to be doing this. Didn't want me on the mission drawing inexorably closer. "Yes." He continued to circle me, his pace as casual as his expression. I wasn't fooled. Couldn't be, when I could feel the tension in his body almost as well as I could feel it in mine. "But he has no intention of putting it on until I phone and tell him I'm on my way to his place." "It's his birthday. You should be there to celebrate it with him rather than putting me through the wringer." He shifted suddenly, stepping forward, the baton a pale blur as he lashed out at me. I ignored the step and the blow, holding still as the breeze of the baton's passing caressed the fingers of my left hand. He was only playing, and we both knew it. I wouldn't even see his real move. He grinned. "I'll be there as soon as this is over. And he did invite you along, remember." "And spoil the private party you have planned?" My voice was dry. "I don't think so. Besides, I'd rather party with Kellen." "Meaning Quinn is still out of the picture?" "Not entirely." I shifted a little, keeping him in sight as he continued to circle. The padded green mats that covered the Directorate's sublevel training arena squeaked in protest under my bare feet. "Your sweat is causing that," he commented. "But there's not nearly enough of it." "Jesus, Rhoan, have a heart. I haven't seen Kellen for nearly a week. I want to play with him, not you." He raised an eyebrow, a devilish glint in his silver eyes. "You get me on the mat, and I'll let you go." "It's not you I want on the mat!" "If you don't fight me, they'll make you fight Gautier. And I don't think either of us wants that." "And if I do fight you, and do manage to bring you down, they're going to make me fight him, anyway." Which pretty much sucked. I wasn't overly fond of vampires at the best of times, but some of them like Quinn, who was in Sydney tending to his airline business, and Jack, my boss, and the man in charge of the whole guardian division were decent people. Gautier was just a murdering freak. He might be a guardian, and he might not have done anything wrong just yet, but he was one of the bad guys. He was also a clone made for one specific purpose to take over the Directorate. He hadn't made his move yet, but I had an odd premonition that he would, and soon. Rhoan made another feint. This time the baton skimmed my knuckles, stinging but not breaking skin. I resisted the urge to shake the pain away and shifted my stance a little, readying for the real attack. "So, what's happening between you and Quinn?" "Nothing had happened, and that was the whole problem. After making such a song and dance about me upholding my end of the deal we'd made, he'd basically played absent lover for the last few months. I blew out a frustrated breath, lifting the sweaty strands of hair from my forehead. "Can't we have this discussion after I play with Kellen?" "No," he said, and blurred so fast that he literally disappeared from normal sight. And while I could have tracked his heat signature with the infrared of my vampire vision, I didn't actually need to, because my hearing and nose were wolf-

sharp. Not only could I hear his light steps on the vinyl mats as he circled around me, but I could track the breeze of his spicy, leathery scent. Both were now approaching from behind. I dove out of the way, twisting around even as I hit the mat, and lashed out with a foot. The blow connected hard and low against the back of his leg, and he grunted, his form reappearing as he stumbled and fought to remain standing. I scrambled upright, and lunged toward him. I wasn't fast enough by half. He scooted well out of reach and shook his head. "You're not taking this seriously, Riley." "Yes, I am." Just not as seriously as he'd like me to. Not this evening, anyway. "Are you that desperate to fight Gautier?" "No, but I am that desperate to see Kellen." Sexual frustration wasn't a good thing for anyone, but it was particularly bad for a werewolf. Sex was an ingrained part of our culture we needed it as much as a vampire needed blood. And this goddamn training had been taking up so much of my free time that I hadn't even been able to get down to the Blue Moon for some action. I blew out another breath, and tried to think calm thoughts. As much as I didn't want to hurt my brother, if that was the only way out of here, then I might have to try. But if I did succeed in beating him, then Jack might take that as a sign I was ready for the big one. And part of me feared that no matter what Jack said, my brother was right when he said that I shouldn't be doing this. That I was never going to be ready for it, no matter how much training I got. That I'd screw it all up, and put everyone's life in danger. Not that Rhoan had actually said that last one. But as the time to infiltrate Deshon Starr's crime cartel drew nearer, it was in my thoughts more and more. "It's a stupid rule, and you know it," I said eventually. "Fighting Gautier doesn't prove anything." "He is the best at what he does. Fighting him makes guardians ready for what they may face out there." "Difference is, I don't want to become a full-time guardian." "You have no choice now, Riley." I knew that, but that didn't mean I still couldn't rail against the prospect, even if my protests were only empty words. Hell, if Jack came up to me today and offered me the chance to walk away from becoming a guardian, I wouldn't, because there was no way in hell I'd walk away from the chance of making Deshon Starr pay. Not only because of what he'd done to me, but what he'd done to Misha, and to Kade's partner, and all those countless men and women still locked in breeding cells somewhere. Not to mention all the things given life in his lab abominations nature would never have created, creatures born for two purposes only. To kill as ordered, and to die as ordered. A chill ran across my skin. I'd only come across a few of those creatures, but I had a bad, bad feeling that before this month was out, I'd see a whole lot more than I ever wanted to. I licked my lips, and tried to concentrate on Rhoan. If I had to get him down on the mat to get out of here, then I would. I wanted, needed, to grab a little bit more of a normal life before the crap set in again. Because it was coming. I could feel it. A shadow flickered across one of the windows lining the wall to the right of Rhoan. Given it was nearly six, it was probably just a guardian getting himself ready for the evening's hunt. This arena was on sublevel 5, right next to the guardian sleeping quarters. Which, amusingly, did contain coffins. Some vamps just loved living up to human expectations, even if they weren't actually necessary. Not that any humans ever came down here. That would be like leading a lamb into the midst of a hungry den of lions. To say it would get ugly very quickly would be an understatement. Guardians might be paid to protect humans, but they sure as hell weren't above snacking on the occasional one, either. The shadow slipped past another window, and this time, Rhoan's gaze flickered in that direction. Only briefly, but that half-second gave me an idea. I twisted, spinning and lashing out with one bare foot. My heel skimmed his stomach, forcing him backward. His baton arced around, his blow barely avoiding my shin, then he follo... Prsentation de l'diteur In a world of sorcery and seduction, the nights bring out the beautiful, the damned, and the desired. Here, Riley Jenson is on her own half werewolf, half vampire, working for an organization created to police the supernatural races. Trusting her superiors and lovers barely more than she trusts her worst enemies, Riley plays by her own set of rules. Her latest mission: to enter the heavily guarded pleasure palace of a criminal named Deshon Starra madman-scientist whos been messing around in the gene pool for decades. 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