

[PDF] Soul Screammers Volume One: My Soul To Lose\My Soul To Take\My Soul To Save

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Description:

About the Author New York Times bestselling author Rachel Vincent loves good chocolate, comfortable jeans, and serial commas. She's older than she looks and younger than she feels, but is convinced that for every day she spends writing, one more day will be added to her lifespan. Now absorbed in the dark, tangled loyalties of her UNBOUND world, as well as the travails of a teenage banshee in her SOUL SCREAMERS world, Rachel can be found online at www.rachelvincent.com or

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"Thanks for the ride, Traci!" Emma slammed the back door, then opened it again to free the end of her filmy red skirt as her sister leaned out the open driver's side window.

"Be ready to go at eight, or I'm leaving you here."

Em gave a mock salute, then turned toward the mall entrance without waiting for the car to pull away from the curb. We would be nowhere near the parking lot at eight o'clock. Finding a ride home would be no problem—Emma could cock one hip and smile, and guys all over Texas would throw their car keys at her feet, if that's what she wanted.

But sometimes a ride was more fun, because she could flirt with the driver. See how much he could take before his concentration wavered and he had to force his attention back onto the road. She'd never actually caused a wreck, but Em went a little further every time, ever eager to push the limits of.. Well, of anything.

I went along for the ride because it was a delicious rush of power and freedom—living vicariously through Emma was usually more exciting than living my own life for real.

"Okay, Kaylee, here's the plan." Em stepped up to the glass doors, and they whooshed open. The artificial cool inside was a mercy on my damp skin and overheated cheeks; Traci's car wasn't air-conditioned, and September in the Dallas metroplex was still hot enough to make the devil sweat.

"So long as it leads to Toby's public humiliation, I'm in."

"It will." She stopped in front of a mirror built into the wall of the main walkway and her reflection grinned at me, brown eyes sparkling. "And that's the least he deserves. You really should have let me key his car."

And I'd been totally tempted to. But I was less than a year from getting my license and couldn't shake the certainty that if we keyed someone's fresh paint job—even if that someone was my rat of an ex-boyfriend—new-driver karma would come back to bite me on the bumper.

"So, what are you going to do? Push him into the snack table? Trip him on the way into the gym? Unbutton his pants while you're dancing, then scream for help?" I wasn't too worried about homecoming-dance karma. But Toby should have been—

Emma turned from the mirror, her pale brows high in surprise. "I was just gonna stand him up, then make out with his best friend on the dance floor, but that last one has real potential. Maybe we'll do both." She grinned again, then tugged me around the first corner to the huge main corridor of the mall, where the center of the floor opened to reveal the first level below. "But first we're gonna make sure you look so good that he spends every minute of this stupid dance wishing he was there with you."

Normally I'm not much of a shopper. Thin and small chested looks just as good in jeans and skinny tees as it does in anything more complicated, and I must have been dressing to my advantage subconsciously, because finding a new date had only taken two days.

But that didn't make Toby any less of a human cockroach—less than an hour after he'd dumped me,

he'd asked Emma to homecoming. She'd accepted with a plan for revenge already half-plotted.

So I'd come to the mall the weekend before the dance armed with my aunt's credit card and Emma's good taste, prepared to dump a metaphorical shaker of salt over my slime-filled leech of an ex-boyfriend.

"We should start with—" Emma stopped and gripped the brass rail, looking down at the food court on the lower level. "Yum. Wanna split a soft pretzel first?"

I knew from her tone that food wasn't what had caught her eye.

A level below us, two guys in green Eastlake High baseball caps were shoving two tables next to a third, where four girls from our school sat in front of an untouched pile of junk food. The guy on the left was a junior named Nash Hudson, whose pick of the week—Amber something-or-other—was already seated. Showing up at homecoming with Nash would have been all the revenge I could ask for against Toby. But that wasn't gonna happen. I wasn't even a blip on Nash Hudson's social radar.

Next to Amber sat my cousin, Sophie; I would have recognized the back of her head anywhere. After all, that was the part of her I saw most.

"How did Sophie get here?" Emma asked.

"One of the other dancing monkeys picked her up this morning." She'd been ignoring me consistently—mercifully—since dance-team tryouts a month earlier, when she'd become the only freshman member of the varsity dance team. "Aunt Val's picking her up in about an hour."

"I think that's Doug Fuller across from her. Come on!" Emma's eyes glittered beneath the huge skylight overhead. "I wanna drive his new car."

"Em—" But I could only run after her, dodging shoppers hauling bags and small children. I caught up with Emma on the escalator and rode down one step above her. "Hey look." I nodded toward the group at the food court, where one of the dancers had just switched sides of the table to whisper something into Doug's ear. "Meredith's gonna be pissed when she sees you."

Emma shrugged and stepped off the escalator. "She'll get over it. Or not."

But the moment my foot hit the ground, a cold, dark sense of dread gripped me, and I knew I couldn't go any closer to the food court.

Not unless I wanted to cause a scene.

I was seconds from losing control over the scream building deep inside me, and once it broke free, I wouldn't be able to make it stop unless I could get away.

Better to leave before that happened.

"Em—" I croaked. One hand went to my throat; it felt like I was being strangled from the inside.

Emma didn't hear me; she was already strutting toward the cluster of tables.

"Em—" I said again, forcing that single syllable out firmly, ahead of the pressure building in my

throat, and that time she heard me.

Emma turned and took one look at my face, and her forehead wrinkled in familiar concern. She glanced longingly toward the food court, then rushed to my side. "Panic attack?" she whispered.

I could only nod, fighting the urge to close my eyes. Sometimes it was worse then, when I saw only darkness. It felt like the world was closing in on me. Like things I couldn't see were creeping toward me.

Or maybe I watch too many scary movies.

"Okay, let's go." Em linked her arm through mine, half holding me up, half dragging me away from the food court, the escalator and whatever had triggered this particular episode.

"A bad one?" she asked, once we'd put a good two hundred feet behind us.

"It's getting better." I sat on the edge of the huge fountain in the center of the mall. The jets of water shot all the way up to the second floor at certain points during its routine, and little droplets pelted us, but there was nowhere else to sit. The benches were all full.

"Maybe you should talk to somebody about these panic attacks." Emma plopped down beside me with one leg tucked beneath her, trailing her fingers through the rippling water. "It's weird how they seem to be locked on specific places. My aunt used to get panic attacks, but walking away didn't help her. The panic went with her." Emma shrugged and grinned. "And she got really sweaty. You don't look sweaty."

"Well, at least there's a bright side." I forced a laugh in spite of the dark, almost claustrophobic fear still lurking on the edges of my mind, ready to take over at the first opportunity. It had happened before, but never anywhere so heavily populated as the mall. I shuddered, thinking how close I'd come to humiliating both me and Emma in front of hundreds of people. Including half a dozen classmates. If I freaked out in front of them, the news would be all over school by the tardy bell on Monday morning.

"Still feel like cooking up a little revenge?" Emma grinned. "Yeah. I just need one more minute."

Em nodded and dug through her purse for a penny. She couldn't resist feeding the fountain, despite my certainty that no wish you had to pay for could possibly come true. While she stared at the coin on her palm, eyes squinted in concentration, I steeled myself and turned to face the food court, my jaws clenched tight. Just in case.

The panic was still there—indistinct but threatening, like the remains of a nightmare. But I couldn't pinpoint the source.

Usually I could put a face on the dark dread looming inside me, but this time the crowd made that impossible. A group wearing our rival school's colors had taken the table next to Sophie and her friends, and both sides were deeply engaged in a French-fry war. Several families stood in line, some parents pushing strollers, one pushing a small wheelchair. Some kind of moms-'n'-tots group had descended upon the frozen-yogurt place, and couples of all ages shuffled their way through the cattle shoots in front of each restaurant's counter.

It could have been anybody. All I really knew was that I couldn't go back there until the source of my

panic had gone. The safest thing to do was to get as far away as possible.

Em's penny plunked into the water behind me, and I stood. "Okay, let's try Sears first."

"Sears?" Emma's frown puckered both her forehead and her glossed lips. "My grandmother shops there."

As did my style-conscious aunt, but Sears was as far from the source of my panic as we could get and still be in the mall. "Let's just look, okay?" I glanced at the food court again, then back at Emma, and her frown faded as understanding sank in. She wouldn't...

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