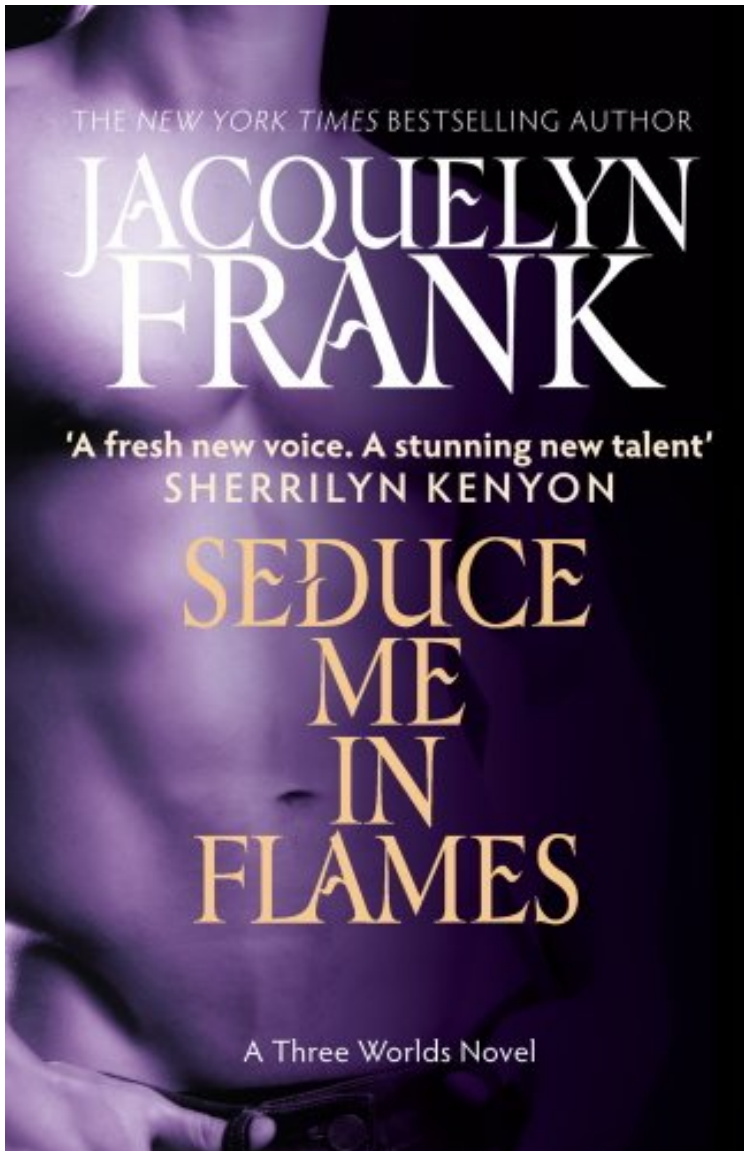


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Seduce Me In Flames: Number 2 in series (Three Worlds Novel) (English Edition)



Par Jacquelyn Frank
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurCast aside after her mother was tried and executed for treason by her volatile father, Ambrea Vas Allay has lived in exile for much of her life. Once raised amidst opulence and luxury, the proud and regal Ambrea - the exiled heir to the Allay throne - is watched closely by the emperor's network of spies.Now being offered a chance at freedom, at the cost of denouncing her blood and right to the throne, Ambrea hesitates to take it . . . until a mysterious, incendiary man enters her world. A man whose secret powers have already caused destruction in his life. Betrayed by those he cared about the most, his embittered

hard exterior refuses to allow anyone in. Yet, despite his reluctance, he and Ambrea forge a fragile bond . . . one that could finally free them both from their tragic pasts. Extrait Her heart beat rapidly, her breath rasping in the back of her throat. What could it mean? What could he want? The same questions swirled around her head again and again as she strode through the palace hallways with an air of confidence she did not feel.

There had never been a sense of confidence, a sense of security in her life. Even when her father had supposedly loved her, she had never felt that sense of cocooning comfort that a child was supposed to feel when in the presence of her protector. She supposed his treatment of her these last years had proven her very intuitive, even at toddling age. He had once professed a great love for her mother. There were those in her household who swore, to this day, that her mother had been the great love of his life. But then his eminence the emperor had tired of his favorite concubine. Some said it was because a newer, younger woman had caught his fancy. Others said her mother had overstepped herself with him one too many times, that she'd grown proud and arrogant, making the mistake of thinking that being the mother of his heir apparent made her as good as being empress. Whatever the reason, Emperor Benit Tsu Allay had put down his common-law wife like a dog. Unafraid of the possible repercussions he might face at the hands of the Interplanetary Militia, he had her tried for treason, proclaiming her an enemy to his crown and a conspirator in a plot to have him killed. Her mother's trial had been a whirlwind of, some said, preponderously damning evidence, spurious accusations, and one of the cruelest and most horrific executions in the history of their realm. Then, before she could understand that her mother would never touch her again, hold her or hug her, she had been declared fruit of a poisonous tree and packed off into the back of nowhere where she had been languishing ever since. More or less. She had been called into his presence twice since her exile at the age of four. Once when she was twelve and once when she was fifteen. Both times he had hurled accusations of treason at her, accused her of knowingly plotting with his enemies to overthrow him and take his throne. However, lack of evidence, or, perhaps more likely, his unwillingness to slaughter a child, had spared her life . . . but not before she had spent over a year each time in his prisons. Then there had been silence. After some time, news had filtered down to her through her more trusted attendants that the emperor had sired a male heir. Her brother. And her only living sibling. This decided lack of proliferation the emperor had blamed on his weak-blooded concubines, however with medical technology at such an advanced state that in vitro could have been performed at any time with any viable uterus, it was widely believed that Emperor Benit was the one with the problem. But Benit was not about to prove anyone right by having himself tested. All of this swam through her mind in a ceaseless stream as she was led by a cadre of guards through the grand halls of Blossom Palace, the emperor's most favored of his seven residences. The astounding opulence of just the corridors would take one's breath away. She could still remember playing in these halls, running the maze-like lengths day after day . . . her rich little gowns inlaid with Delran platinum, her bed so big and soft she had needed help getting in and out of it and she could lay all six of her attendants on either side of herself comfortably. Now, her bed was narrow and serviceable, the sheets a bit worn in places. She had only two personal attendants (one of which was, she believed, her father's spy) and a household totaling four, when the maid and cook were taken into account. Her gown was threadbare at the seams, her father having neglected her household stipend, and when he did remember to pay her servants, there was nothing left over for new clothes. She balanced the books herself since, years earlier, she had been forced to let her secretary go. As it stood, her servants stayed on because of their love of her, because they certainly did not stay for the value of the living she could provide. Still, it was a damn sight better than the cold, bleak dampness of the emperor's prisons. The fact of the matter was, she was the emperor's daughter whether he wanted to acknowledge that or not. The blood in her veins meant his enemies could use her to stage a coup. So, he had to control her and keep her close enough to keep an eye on her. At least, she believed, until he could contrive of a way to be rid of her like he had done with her mother. Now she was twenty-five cycles old and more than adult enough to be a threat to her decade younger brother and heir apparent. She was also old enough now to be executed without making her father look too much like the monster he was. Truthfully, she had been living in anticipation of this day ever since her last incarceration. The day when she would be called into his presence for the last time. They reached the presence chamber and the guards before her threw open the doors. She had expected to see him at the end of the bamboo runner that led through a sea of courtiers and ended at the foot of the throne where he was usually sitting in much state and pompousness. But the throne lay empty and there was an eerie quietude among the courtiers. Her chin rose proudly as she realized all eyes were upon her. She might be terrified of what the emperor had in store for her, but she would be damned if she would let anyone else see that. No matter what he decreed, as far as she was concerned she was the heir to his

throne. She had lawfully been his firstborn child. The law of their land demanded she be his heiress. She did not recognize the laws he had hastily passed in order to put her aside. But neither would she raise a hand against her innocent half-blood sibling. She knew there were factions willing and able to overthrow the young prince if she so much as nodded in their direction, but she would not exile another to the fate she had been exiled to. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Prelate Kitsos step to the edge of the runner as she was being hurried past the roomful of prelates and paxsors. He tried to catch her eye, his look full of some kind of meaning and intent. She remained staring full ahead, not wanting in any way to be associated with the mans plots and plans. He was too obvious in his avarice. He would be the death of them both if he were not more careful. Now her heart was lodged firmly in her throat, although it seemed to beat twice as fast. She was led past her fathers throne and into his private visitation chamber. The difference in the brightness from one room to the next was shocking, and she was nearly blind in the sudden darkness. She clutched the prayer book she held between her hands, hoping the Great Being was watching over her. As her eyes adjusted to the darkness she was grabbed roughly around each of her arms and shoved hastily forward. She tripped over the skirt of her gown, making her fall to her knees in an obescience she did not truly feel, may the universe forgive her for her angry heart. She was now kneeling at the feet of the man who had tormented her throughout her life in one way or another. She would have bowed to him on her own power, but she would never have groveled before him. She clenched her teeth in anger, forcing her countenance to remain cool and serene. She could not afford to be prideful. She could not risk any show of backbone in front of an emperor who had no compunctions about killing off anyone who ticked him off. Silence ticked by, the only sound in her ears was the rasp of her own breathing. She kept her eyes trained on the bamboo runner that ran through this room as well. The woven, decorative mats were used to protect flooring and, in this instance, hand-malleayed carpeting. Artisans created malleay rugs on great looms, working teams of people in some sort of concert of creativity. She had not seen one of the rich creations in completion since childhood, and even now the mat thwarted her. True, the bamboo was cleverly wrought, colorful threads and Delran platinum decorating the plain tan fibers and creating something quite spectacular, but she would much rather see the rug. Far more than she wished to see her father just then. Even now all she could see of him was his slippered feet. Sister. The pubescent voice startled her, as did the address, and she forgot herself and looked up. Instead of her father, she found herself at the feet of a brother she only knew from images in VidMags and other media. He was tall and gangly, all sharp joints and a physical awkwardness that rolled off him even though all he was doing was standing still. But he also had that imperious air and confidence of a prince born and raised. The luxurious clothof-platinum robes he wore were robes of state and, though they seemed to weigh heavily on his narrow frame, he wore them perfectly straight and with the exactness of someone used to such finery. My good brother, she said, inclining her head again. I am honored to meet you at last. Are you? he questioned her. Or are you as much a traitoress as your mother was? Now that our father is dead, will you drive a knife in my back at the first opportunity? Our father is dead? He will be long remembered, everyone in the room said solemnly, the ritual confirming the fact. The shock was so tremendous, so unexpected, that she forgot she was not allowed to acknowledge the emperor as her father. There was also such a shocking release within her psyche, the relief of almost a decades worth of stress and tension, that she immediately felt lightheaded. Blackness rode over her, forcing her to drop her prayer book and brace her hands out on the floor. She fought off the faint that was tugging at her and used her seemingly obeisant position to touch her forehead to her brothers slipper. My great lord and emperor, she said, I am so utterly sorry for your loss. So, you acknowledge me to be our fathers heir? He was clearly fishing and she had learned to tread carefully around such dangling worms. I have always done so, Your Eminence. Is it not so decreed? I am the fruit of a treacherous woman who conspired to murder our lord and master, the late emperor. Her shame is my shame. I do not deserve to be heir or empress. Then you will not mind signing this document to that effect. Her brothers hand swept out to the left and she raised her eyes to see a secretary reach down with a carefully drawn up document, its gilt edges brightly obscene as she quickly read the contents. I, Ambrea Vas Allay, do swear from this day forward, that I renounce my blood and any connection to the Allay throne. Thus, I will now be known only as Ambrea Vas, a commoner and subject of this realm. I sign this of my own free will with both signature and retinal scan to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that these are my wishes and desires. Any attempts on my part to take the Allay throne, from this day forward, will be considered an act of high treason and will result in the immediate forfeiture of my life. Ambrea Vas. Ambrea, it meant . . . daughter. Ambrea Vas Allay meant daughter of this realm. In all these years, her father, though he had alienated her and stripped her of her rightful place in the succession, had

never taken this step, stripping her of her name. She had always wondered why. Perhaps there had been some part of the former emperor that had been, after all, loath to deprive himself of his spare heir while his only living son was still young and susceptible to the many illnesses and dangers of youth. Perhaps he had not, in the end, wanted to leave her without any claim to anyone. But clearly her brother had no such reservations. To sign such a document would mean she could never, even in the event of her brother's death, lay claim to the throne. She would be cut loose. Set free. She could then do anything. Go anywhere. Her brother would be renouncing all ability to hold power over what she did or where she went, except that of a sovereign over his subject. He would no longer be responsible for her upkeep. She would, in essence, be her own woman. The rush of the idea was a heady one. The thought of it, of being able to walk away, perhaps leave the planet altogether, where she could explore any part of the three worlds, it was remarkable. She could hear her blood rushing against her eardrums. She was a signature and a scan away from turning her back on this stifling existence forever. Except . . . I beg you to forgive my hesitation, Your Eminence, she said quickly, not wishing to anger him, knowing nothing of his temperament that she didn't see in the media. But all hints thus far had pointed to a spoiled, rich, and powerful youth who was used to getting his way, just like his father had been. I am merely in shock at the news of the emperor's death. He will be long remembered, her brother's attendants chorused respectfully. But there was a decided lack of enthusiasm in their voices. The fact was, Emperor Benit had been a tyrant, and these attendants that were now flocked at her brother's back had been the previous emperor's attendants and advisors. When Emperor Benit had raged, which he had often done, these were the people that had borne the brunt of it. Now they were eagerly supporting a child they probably felt would be far more malleable than his father had been. There was power to be found by being the advisor to the boy sovereign. These vultures would be clawing at one another for the best position. He had been ill for some time, her brother faltered. There was emotion there. Genuine emotion. Despite how he was portrayed in the media, young Emperor Qua Tsu Allay had feelings. And now his insecurities were also showing. Suddenly those robes of state looked far too big for the boy. Presentation de l'diteurCast aside after her mother was tried and executed for treason by her volatile father, Ambrea Vas Allay has lived in exile for much of her life. Once raised amidst opulence and luxury, the proud and regal Ambrea - the exiled heir to the Allay throne - is watched closely by the emperor's network of spies. Now being offered a chance at freedom, at the cost of denouncing her blood and right to the throne, Ambrea hesitates to take it . . . until a mysterious, incendiary man enters her world. A man whose secret powers have already caused destruction in his life. Betrayed by those he cared about the most, his embittered hard exterior refuses to allow anyone in. Yet, despite his reluctance, he and Ambrea forge a fragile bond . . . one that could finally free them both from their tragic pasts.