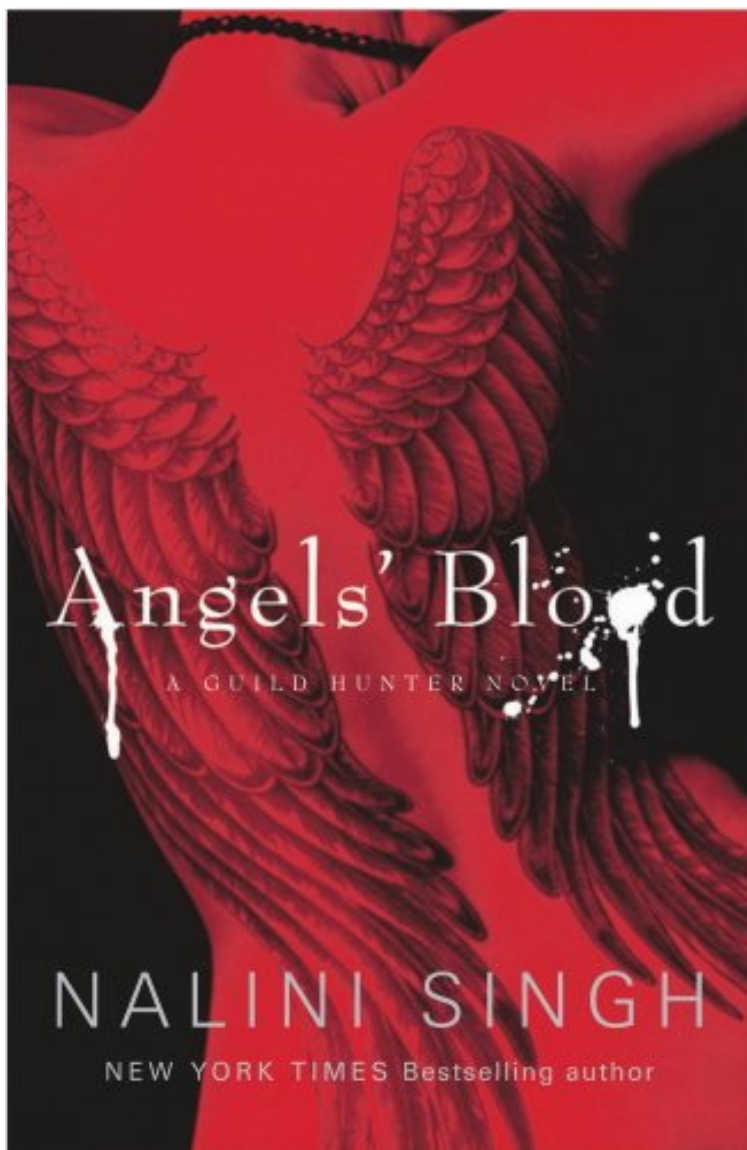


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Angels' Blood: Book 1



Par Nalini Singh
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNew York Times bestselling author Nalini Singh introduces a world of beauty and bloodlust where angels hold sway over vampires . . .Vampire hunter Elena Deveraux knows she's the best - but she doesn't know if she's good enough for this job. Hired by the dangerously beautiful Archangel Raphael, a being so lethal that no mortal wants his attention, only one thing is clear - failure is not an option . . . even if the task she's been set is impossible. Because this time, it's not a wayward vamp she has to track. It's an archangel gone bad. The job will put Elena in the midst of a killing spree like no other . . . and pull her to the razor's edge of passion. Even if the hunt doesn't destroy her, succumbing to Raphael's seductive touch just may. Because when archangels play, mortals break . . .ExtraitElenas instincts were screaming at her to

grab the knife in her boot, do some damage and get the hell out, but she forced herself to stay in place. The truth was, she wouldn't make it more than two feet before Raphael broke every single bone in her body. It was exactly what he'd done to a vampire who'd thought to betray him. That vampire had been found in the centre of Times Square. He'd still been alive. And he'd still been trying to scream No! Raphael, no! But his voice had been a rasp by then, his jaw hanging on by stringlike tendons, his flesh missing in places. Elena had seen the news footage after the event. She knew the vamp had lain there in agony for three hours before being picked up by a pair of angels. Everyone in New York, hell, everyone in the country, had known he was there, but no one had dared help him, not with Raphael's mark blazing on his forehead. The archangel had wanted the punishment witnessed, wanted to remind people of who and what he was. It had worked. Now the mere mention of his name evoked visceral fear. But Elena wouldn't crawl, not for anyone. It was a choice she'd made the night her father had told her to get on her knees and beg, and maybe, maybe, he'd accept her back into the family. Elena hadn't spoken to her father in a decade. You should have a care, Raphael said into the unnatural silence. She didn't collapse in relief; the air continued to hang heavy with the promise of menace. I don't like to play games. Learn. He settled back in his chair. You will live a very short life if you expect only honesty. Sensing the danger had passed, she unclenched her fingers with an effort of will. The force of the blood rushing back into them was painful in its extremity. I didn't say I expected honesty. People lie. Vampires lie. Even she caught herself. Surely you're not going to practice discretion now? The amusement was back but it was tempered with an edge that stroked like a razor across her skin. She looked into that perfect face and knew she'd never met a more deadly being in her life. If she displeased him, Raphael would kill her as easily as she might swat a fly. She'd be smart to remember that, no matter how the knowledge infuriated her. You said I had to do a test? His wings moved slightly at that instant, drawing her attention. They truly were beautiful and she couldn't help but covet them. To be able to fly—what an amazing gift. Raphael's eyes shifted to look at something over her left shoulder. Less a test than an experiment. She didn't twist around, had no need to. There's a vampire behind me. Are you sure? His expression remained unchanged. She fought the urge to turn. Yes. He nodded. Look. Wondering which was worse—having her back to an enigmatic and highly unpredictable archangel, or to an unknown vampire—she hesitated. In the end, her curiosity won out. There was a distinctly satisfied expression on Raphael's face and she wanted to know what had put it there. Shifting, she turned sideways with her whole body, the position allowing her to keep Raphael in her peripheral vision. Then she looked at the two creatures who stood behind her. Jesus. You may go. Raphael's voice was a command that awakened absolute terror in the eyes of the one who looked vaguely human. The other scuttled away like the animal it was. She watched them leave through the glass door and swallowed. How old was she? She couldn't call that thing a vampire. Neither had it been human. Erik was Made yesterday. I didn't know they could walk at that age. It was an attempt to sound professional though she was creeped out to her toes. He had a little help. Raphael's tone made it clear that that was all the answer she was going to get. Bernal is a fraction older. She reached for the juice she'd rejected earlier and took a drink, trying to wash away the stink that had seeped into her pores. The older vamps didn't have that ick factor. They—except for the unusual ones like the door vamps—simply smelled of vampire, like she smelled human. But the very young ones, they had a certain rotten-cabbage/putrid flesh smell that she always had to scrub three times over to get rid of. It was why she'd begun collecting the body washes and perfumes. After her initial contact with one of the newly Made, she'd thought she'd never get the smell out of her head. I didn't think a hunter would be so disturbed at the sight of the just Made. Raphael's face appeared oddly shadowed, until she realized he'd raised his wings slightly. Wondering if that implied focus or anger, she put down the glass. I'm not, not really. True enough now that that first, instinctive flash of disgust had passed. It's the smell like a coating of fur on your tongue. No matter how hard you scrape, you can't get it off. Open interest showed on his face. The feeling is that intense? She shivered and looked around the table for something else to take the edge off. When he pushed a cut grapefruit in her direction, she dug into it with relish. Uh-huh. The citrus fruits' acidic juices dampened the reek a little. At least enough that she could think. If I asked you to track Erik, could you? She shivered at the memory of those almost-dead/not-quite-alive eyes. No wonder people believed those stories about vampires being the walking dead. No. I think he's too young. What about Bernal? He's on the bottom floor of the building right now. The barely-Made vampire's odor was so noxious, it permeated the building. In the lobby. Golden-tipped wings spread to shadow the table as Raphael put his hands together in a slow clap. Well done, Elena. Well, done. She looked up from the grapefruit, belatedly aware she'd just proven how good she was when she should've flubbed it and gotten out of this, whatever this was. Shit. But at least he'd given her some idea of the job. Do you want me to track a

rogue? He rose from his chair in a sudden, liquid movement. Wait a moment. She watched, transfixed, as he walked to the edge of the roof. He was a being of such incredible splendor that simply seeing him move made her heart squeeze. It didn't matter that she knew it was a mirage, that he was as deadly as the filleting knife she carried strapped to her thigh. No one, not even she, could deny that Raphael the Archangel was a man made to be admired. To be worshipped. That utterly wrong thought snapped her out of her dazed state.

Pushing back her chair, she stared hard at his back. Had he been messing with her head? Right then, he turned and she met the agonizing blue of his eyes. For a second, she thought he was answering her question.

Then he looked away and walked off the roof. She jumped up. Only to sit back down, blush reddening her cheeks, when he winged upward to meet an angel she hadn't seen until that moment. Michaela. The female equivalent of Raphael, her beauty so intense that Elena could feel the force of it even from this distance. She had the startling realization that she was looking at a mid-air meeting between two archangels. Saras never going to believe this. She forgot the stench of young vampire for the moment, her attention hijacked. She'd seen photos of Michaela, but they came nowhere close to the reality of her. The other archangel had skin the color of the most exquisite, fine milk-chocolate and a shining fall of hair that cascaded to her waist in a wild mass. Her body was quintessentially female, slender and curvy at the same time, her wings a delicate bronze that shimmered against the richness of her skin. Her face Wow. Even from this distance, Michaela's face was perfection given form. Elena fancied she could see her eyes a bright, impossible green but knew she had to be imagining it. They were too far away. It made little difference. The female archangel had a face that would not only stop traffic, it would cause a few pileups in the process. Elena frowned. Despite her appreciation for

Michaela's looks, she was having no trouble thinking straight. Which meant the damn arrogant blue-eyed bastard had been fucking with her mind. He wanted her to worship him? They'd see about that. No one, not even an archangel, was going to turn her into a puppet. As if he'd heard her, Raphael said something to his fellow archangel and winged back down to the roof. His landing was a lot more showy this time. She was sure he paused to display the pattern on the inside surface of his wings. It was as if a brush dipped in gold had started at the top edge of each wing and then stroked downward, fading to white as it neared the bottom. In spite of her fury, she had to face the truth: If the devil or an archangel came to her and offered her wings, she might just sell him her soul. But the angels didn't make other angels. They only made blood-drinking vampires. Where angels came from, no one knew. Elena guessed they were born to angelic parents though, come to think of it, she'd never actually seen a baby angel. Her thoughts derailed again as she watched the fluid grace of Raphael's walk, so seductive so perfect. Standing up, she sent her chair crashing to the tiles. Get.

Out. Of. My. Head! Raphael came to a standstill. Do you intend to use that knife? His words were ice. She felt blood scent the air and realized it was her own. Looking down, she found her hand clenching on the blade of the knife she'd drawn instinctively from the sheath at her ankle. She'd never have made such a mistake. He

was forcing her to hurt herself, showing her she was nothing but a toy for him to play with. Instead of fighting, she squeezed harder. If you want me to do a job for you, fine. But I won't be manipulated. His eyes flicked over the blood seeping from her fist. He didn't have to say anything. You might be able to control me, she said, in response to the silent mockery on his face, but if that would've gotten the job done, you'd have never gone through the farce of hiring me. You need me, Elena Deveraux, not one of your little vampire flunkies. Her hand unclenched in a violent spasm as he made her release the blade. It fell to the ground with a thud cushioned to softness by the blood that had pooled below. She didn't move, didn't attempt to stem the flow. And when Raphael walked to stand less than a foot from her, she stood her ground. So, you think you have me over a barrel? The sky was a seamless blue but Elena felt storm winds whip her hair completely out of its coil. No. She let his scent clean, bright, of the sea settle over the lingering coat of vampire on her tongue. I'm ready to walk away without a backward look, return the deposit you paid the Guild. That, he said, picking up a napkin and wrapping it around her hand, is not an option. Startled by the unexpected act, she closed her hand to help slow the bleeding. Why not? I want you to do this, he responded, as if that was reason enough. And for an archangel, it was. What's the job? Retrieval? Yes. Relief began to wash through her like the rain she could feel so close. But no, it was his scent, that fresh bite of water. All I need to start with, is something the

vampire wore recently. If you have a general location, even better. If not, I'll get the Guild's computer geniuses on tracking public transport and bank records etcetera, while I hunt on the ground. Her mind was already at work, considering and discarding options. You mistake me, Elena. It's not a vampire I want you to find. That halted her in her tracks. You're looking for a human? Well, I can do it but I really don't have any advantage over a good private investigator. Try again. Not vampire. Not human. That left An angel? she whispered. No. No, he agreed and, once again, she felt the cool brush of relief. It lasted until he said, An

archangel. Elena stared at him. You're joking. His cheekbones stood out starkly against the sun-kissed smoothness of his skin. No. The Cadre of Ten does not joke. Her stomach curdled at the reference to the Cadre if Raphael was any example of their lethal power, she never wanted to meet that august body. Why are you tracking an archangel? That, you do not need to know. His tone was final. What you do need to know is that if you succeed in finding him, you'll be rewarded with more money than you can hope to spend in your lifetime. Elena glanced at the bloodstained napkin. And if I fail? Don't fail, Elena. His eyes were mild but his smile, it spoke of things better not said aloud. You intrigue me. I'd hate to have to punish you. Her mind flashed to that image of the vampire in Times Square, that broken mess that had once been a person. Raphael's definition of punishment. *Revue de presse* "Angels' Blood" had me enthralled from the first page - I loved it!

9/10 rating (BOOK CHICK CITY)