

MORGAN RICE

BOOK #13 IN THE SORCERER'S RING

A  
RULE  
OF  
QUEENS



# A RULE OF QUEENS

(BOOK #13 IN THE SORCERER'S RING)

MORGAN RICE

## About Morgan Rice

Morgan Rice is the #1 bestselling author of THE VAMPIRE JOURNALS, a young adult series comprising eleven books (and counting); the #1 bestselling series THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY, a post-apocalyptic thriller comprising two books (and counting); and the #1 bestselling epic fantasy series THE SORCERER'S RING, comprising thirteen books (and counting).

Morgan's books are available in audio and print editions, and translations of the books are available in German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, Swedish, Dutch, Turkish, Hungarian, Czech and Slovak (with more languages forthcoming).

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--*Books and Movie Reviews*, Roberto Mattos

“Rice does a great job of pulling you into the story from the beginning, utilizing a great descriptive quality that transcends the mere painting of the setting....Nicely written and an extremely fast read.”  
--Black Lagoon Reviews (regarding *Turned*)

“An ideal story for young readers. Morgan Rice did a good job spinning an interesting twist...Refreshing and unique. The series focuses around one girl...one extraordinary girl!...Easy to read but extremely fast-paced... Rated PG.”  
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“Morgan Rice proves herself again to be an extremely talented storyteller....This would appeal to a wide range of audiences, including younger fans of the vampire/fantasy genre. It ended with an unexpected cliffhanger that leaves you shocked.”  
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## CHAPTER ONE

Thorgrin's head slammed against rock and mud as he tumbled down the mountainside in free-fall, tumbling hundreds of feet as the mountain collapsed. His world spun end over end, and he tried to stop it, to orient himself, but he could not. Out of the corner of his eye he glimpsed his brothers tumbling, too, flipping end over end, all of them, like Thor, grasping desperately at roots, at rocks—at anything—trying to slow the fall.

Thor realized, with each passing moment, that he was getting farther and farther away from the peak of the volcano, from Guwayne. He thought of those savages up there, preparing to sacrifice his baby, and he burned with fury. He clawed at the mud, shrieking, desperate to get back up there.

But try as he did, there was little he could do. Thor could barely see or breathe, much less shield himself from the blows, as a mountain of dirt thundered down upon him. It felt as if the weight of the entire universe were on his shoulders.

It was all happening so fast, too fast for Thor to even process it, and as he caught a glimpse down below, he saw a field of jagged rocks. He knew that once they hit them, they would all be dead.

Thor closed his eyes and tried to recall his training, Argon's teachings, his mother's words, tried to find calm within the storm, to summon the warrior power within him. As he did, he felt his life flashing before his eyes. Was this, he wondered, his final test?

*Please, God, Thor prayed, if you exist, save me. Do not allow me to die like this. Allow me to summon my power. Allow me to save my son.*

As he thought the words, Thor felt that he was being tested, being forced to draw upon his faith, to summon a stronger faith than he'd ever had. As his mother had warned, he was a warrior now, and he was being put to a warrior's test.

As Thor closed his eyes, the world began to slow, and to his amazement, he began to feel a calm, a sense of peace, within the storm. He began to feel a heat rising within him, coursing through his veins, through his palms. He began to feel bigger than his body.

Thor felt himself outside of his body, looking down, saw himself tumbling down the mountainside. He realized in that moment that he was not his body. He was something greater.

Thor suddenly snapped back into his body, and as he did, he raised his palms high overhead, and watched as a shining white light emanated from them. He directed the light and created a bubble around himself and his brothers, and as he did, suddenly the mudslide stopped in its tracks, a wall of dirt bouncing off the shield and not coming at them any further.

They continued to slide, but now at a much slower rate, easing their way to a gradual stop on a small plateau near the base of the mountain. Thor looked down and saw he had come to a stop in shallow water, and as he stood, he saw it was up to his knees.

Thor looked around in amazement. He looked up the mountain, saw the wall of dirt frozen, hanging there in mid-air, as if ready to come back down at any second, still blocked by his bubble of light. He took it all in, amazed that he had done that.

"Anybody dead?" O'Connor called out.

Thor saw Reece, O'Connor, Conven, Matus, Elden, and Indra, all of them bruised and shaken, getting to their feet, but all miraculously alive, and none with major injuries. They rubbed their faces, covered in black dirt, all of them looking as if they'd crawled through a mine. Thor could see how

grateful they were to be alive, and he could see in their eyes that they credited him with saving their lives.

Thor, remembering, turned and immediately looked up at the top of the mountain with only one thing on his mind: his son.

“How are we going to get back up—” Matus began.

But before he could finish his words, Thor suddenly felt something wrap around his ankles. He looked down, startled, and saw a thick, slimy, muscular creature, wrapping around his ankles and up his shins, again and again. He saw in horror that it was a long, eel-like creature, with two small heads, hissing with its long tongues as it looked up at him and wrapped its tentacles around him. Its skin began to burn Thor’s legs.

Thor’s reflexes kicked in, and he drew his sword and slashed, as did the others, also being attacked all around him. Thor tried to slash carefully so as not to slice his own leg, and as he chopped one off, the eel loosened and the horrific pain in his ankles subsided. The eel slithered back into the water, hissing.

O’Connor fumbled for his bow, firing down at them and missing, while Elden shrieked as three eels came upon him at once.

Thor raced forward and slashed the eel making its way up O’Connor’s leg, while Indra stepped forward and yelled to Elden: “Don’t move!”

She raised her bow and fired off three arrows in quick succession, killing each eel with a perfect shot, and just grazing Elden’s skin.

He looked up at her, shocked.

“Are you mad?” he cried out. “You almost took out my leg!”

Indra smiled back.

“But I didn’t, did I?” she replied.

Thor heard more splashing and looked all around at the water in shock to see dozens more eels rising up. He realized they had to make a move and get out of there quickly.

Thor felt drained, exhausted, from summoning his power, and he knew there was little of it left within him; he was not yet powerful enough, he knew, to summon his power continuously. Still, he knew he had to draw upon it one last time, whatever the cost. If he did not, he knew they’d never make it back, they would die here in his pool of eels, and there’d be no chance left for his son. It might take all his strength, it might leave him weak for days, but he did not care. He thought of Guwayne, up there, helpless, at the mercy of those savages, and knew he would do anything.

As another group of eels began to slither toward him, Thor closed his eyes and raised his palms to the sky.

“In the name of the one and only God,” Thor said aloud, “I command you, skies, to part! I command you to send us clouds to lift us up!”

Thor uttered the words in a deep dark voice, no longer afraid to embrace the Druid he was, and he felt them vibrating in his chest, in the air. He felt a tremendous heat centering in his chest, and as he uttered the words, he felt with certainty that they would come to pass.

There came a great roar, and Thor looked up to see the skies began to change, to morph into a dark purple, the clouds swirling and frothing. There appeared a round hole, an opening in the sky, and suddenly, a scarlet light shot down, and it was followed by a funnel cloud, lowering right down to them.

In moments, Thor and the others found themselves swept up in a tornado. Thor felt the moisture of the soft clouds swirling all around him, felt himself immersed in the light, and moments

later, he felt himself hoisted, lifted up into the air, feeling lighter than he'd ever had. He truly felt as one with the universe.

Thor felt himself rising higher and higher, up alongside the mountain, past the dirt, past his bubble, all the way to the top of the mountain. In moments, the cloud took them to the very top of the volcano and then deposited them gently. It then dissipated just as quickly.

Thor stood there with his brothers, and they all looked back at him in complete awe, as if he were a god.

But Thor was not thinking of them; he turned and quickly surveyed the plateau, and there was but one thing on his mind: the three savages standing before him. And the small bassinet in their arms, hovering over the edge of the volcano.

Thor let out a battle cry as he rushed forward. The first savage turned to face him, startled, and as he did, Thor did not hesitate, but rushed forward and decapitated him.

The other two turned to him with a horrified expression, and as they did, Thor stabbed one in the heart, then reached around with the back of his sword and butted the other one in the face, knocking him backwards, shrieking, over the edge of the volcano.

Thor turned and quickly snatched the bassinet before they could drop it. He looked down, his heart pounding with gratitude that he had caught it in time, prepared to lift Guwayne out and hold him in his arms.

But as Thor looked down into the bassinet, his entire world fell apart.

It was empty.

Thor's entire world froze, as he stood there, numb.

He looked down inside the volcano, and saw far below, the flames, rising high. And he knew his son was dead.

"NO!" Thor shrieked.

Thor dropped to his knees, shrieking to the heavens, letting out a tremendous cry that echoed off the mountains, the primal scream of a man who had lost everything he had to live for.

"GUWAYNE!"

## CHAPTER TWO

High above the lone isle in the center of the sea flew a lone dragon, a small dragon, not yet grown, his cry shrill and piercing, already hinting at the dragon he would one day become. He flew triumphantly, his small scales throbbing, growing by the minute, his wings flapping, his talons clutching the most precious thing he had felt in his short life.

The dragon looked down, feeling the warmth between his talons, and checked on his prized possession. He heard the crying, felt the squirming, and he was reassured to see the baby was still there in his talons, intact.

*Guwayne*, the man had called out.

The dragon could still hear the shouts echoing off the mountains as he flew high above. He was elated he had saved the baby in time, before those men could bring their daggers downward. He had snatched Guwayne from their hands without a second to spare. He had done well the job he was commanded to do.

The dragon flew higher and higher above the lone isle, into the clouds, already out of sight of all those humans below. He passed over the island, over the volcanoes and mountain ranges, through the mist, further and further away.

Soon he was flying out over the ocean, leaving the small island behind. Before him was a vast expanse of sea and sky, nothing to break up the monotony for a million miles.

The dragon knew exactly where he was going. He had a place to bring this child, this child whom he already loved more than he could say.

A very special place.

## CHAPTER THREE

Volusia stood over Romulus's body, looking down at his corpse with satisfaction, his blood, still warm, oozing over her feet, over her sandaled toes. She reveled in the feeling. She could not remember how many men, even at her young age, she had killed, had taken by surprise. They always underestimated her, and displaying just how brutal she could be was one of her greatest delights in life.

And now, to have killed the Great Romulus himself—and by her *own* hand, not by the hand of any of her men—the Great Romulus, man of legend, the warrior who killed Andronicus and who had taken the throne for himself. The Supreme Ruler of the Empire.

Volusia smiled in great delight. Here he was, the supreme ruler, reduced to a pool of blood on her bare feet. And all by her hand.

Volusia felt emboldened. She felt a fire burning in her veins, a fire to destroy everything. She felt her destiny rushing at her. She felt her time had come. She knew, just as clearly as she had known that she would murder her own mother by her own hand, that she would one day rule the Empire.

"You have killed our master!" came a shaky voice. "You have killed the Great Romulus!"

Volusia looked up to see the face of Romulus's commander standing there, staring back at her with a mixture of shock and fear and awe.

"You have killed," he said, despondent, "the Man Who Cannot be Killed."

Volusia stared back at him, hard and cold, and saw behind him the hundreds of Romulus's men, all bearing the finest armor, lined up on the ship, all watching, waiting to see what she would do next. All prepared to attack.

Romulus's commander stood on the docks with a dozen of his men, all awaiting his command. Behind Volusia, she knew, stood thousands of her own men. Romulus's ship, as fine as it was, was outnumbered, his men surrounded here in this harbor. They were trapped. This was Volusia's territory, and they knew it. They knew any attack, any escape, would be futile.

"This is not an act that can come without a response," the commander continued. "Romulus has one million men loyal to his command right now in the Ring. He has one million more loyal to his command in the south, in the Empire capital. When word reaches them of what you've done, they will mobilize, and they will march on you. You may have killed the Great Romulus, but you have not killed his men. And your thousands, even if they outman us here today, cannot stand up to his millions. They will seek vengeance. And vengeance will be theirs."

"Will it?" Volusia said, smiling, taking a step closer to him, feeling the blade crossing in her palm, visualizing herself slicing his throat and already feeling the craving to do it.

The commander looked down at the blade in her hand, the blade that had killed Romulus, and he gulped, as if reading her thoughts. She could see real fear in his eyes.

"Let us go," he said to her. "Send my men on their way. They have done nothing to harm you. Give us a ship filled with gold, and you will buy our silence. I will sail our men to the capital, and I will tell them that you are innocent. That Romulus tried to attack you. They will leave you be, you can have peace here in the north, and they will find a new Supreme Commander of the Empire."

Volusia smiled widely, amused.

"But are not already laying eye upon your new Supreme Commander?" she asked.

The commander looked back at her in shock, then finally burst out into short, mocking laughter.

"You?" he said. "You are but a girl, with but a few thousand men. Because you killed one man, do you really think you can crush Romulus's millions? You'd be lucky to escape with your life after what you've done today. I am offering you a gift. Be done with this foolish talk, accept it with gratitude, and send us on our way, before I change my mind."

"And if I do not wish to send you on your way?"

The commander looked her in the eye, and swallowed.

"You can kill us all here," he said. "That is your choice. But if you do, you only kill yourself and your people. You will be crushed by the army that follows."

"He speaks truly, my commander," whispered a voice in her ear.

She turned to see Soku, her commanding general, coming up beside her, a tall man with green eyes, a warrior's jaw, and short, curly red hair.

"Send them south," he said. "Give them the gold. You've killed Romulus. Now you must broker a truce. We have no choice."

Volusia turned back to Romulus's man. She surveyed him, taking her time, relishing in the moment.

"I will do as you ask," she said, "and send you to the capital."

The commander smiled back, satisfied, and was about to go, when Volusia stepped forward and added:

"But not to hide what I've done," she said.

He stopped and looked at her, confused.

"I will send you to the capital to deliver them a message: that they will know that I am the new Supreme Commander of the Empire. That if they all bow the knee to me now, they just might live."

The commander looked at her, aghast, then slowly shook his head and smiled.

"You are as crazy as your mother was rumored to be," he said, then turned away and began to march back up the long ramp, onto his ship. "Load the gold in the lower holds," he called out, not even bothering to turn back and look at her.

Volusia turned to her commander of the bow, who stood there patiently awaiting her command, and she gave him a short nod.

The commander immediately turned and motioned to his men, and there came the sound of ten thousand arrows being lit, drawn, and fired.

They filled the sky, blackening it, sailing up in a high arc of flame, as the blazing arrows landed on Romulus's ship. It all happened too quickly for any of his men to react, and soon the entire ship was ablaze, men shrieking, their commander most of all, as they flailed about with nowhere to run, trying to put out the flames.

But it was no use. Volusia nodded again, and volley after volley of arrows sailed through the air, covering the burning ship. Men shrieked as they were pierced, some stumbling to the decks, others falling overboard. It was a slaughter, with no survivors.

Volusia stood there and grinned, watching in satisfaction as the ship slowly burned from the bottom to the mast, soon, nothing left but a burning, blackened remnant of a boat.

All fell silent as Volusia's men stopped, all lined up, all looking at her, patiently awaiting her command.

Volusia stepped forward, drew her sword, and chopped the thick cord holding the ship to the dock. It snapped, freeing the ship from shore, and Volusia raised one of her gold-plated boots, placed it on the bow, and shoved.

Volusia watched as the ship began to move, picking up the currents, the currents she knew would carry it south, right into the heart of the capital. They would all see this burnt ship, see

Romulus's corpses, see the Volusian arrows, and they would know it came from her. They would know that war had begun.

Volusia turned to Soku, standing beside her, mouth agape, and she smiled.

"That," she said, "is how I offer peace."

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