



MORGAN RICE

A
DREAM
OF
MORTALS

BOOK #15 IN THE SORCERER'S RING

A DREAM OF MORTALS

(BOOK #15 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 fifteen 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).

Morgan loves to hear from you, so please feel free to visit www.morganricebooks.com to join the email list, receive a free book, receive free giveaways, download the free app, get the latest exclusive news, connect on Facebook and Twitter, and stay in touch!

Select Acclaim for Morgan Rice

“A spirited fantasy that weaves elements of mystery and intrigue into its story line. *A Quest of Heroes* is all about the making of courage and about realizing a life purpose that leads to growth, maturity, and excellence....For those seeking meaty fantasy adventures, the protagonists, devices, and action provide a vigorous set of encounters that focus well on Thor's evolution from a dreamy child to a young adult facing impossible odds for survival....Only the beginning of what promises to be an epic young adult series.”

Midwest Book Review (D. Donovan, eBook Reviewer)

“THE SORCERER’S RING has all the ingredients for an instant success: plots, counterplots, mystery, valiant knights, and blossoming relationships replete with broken hearts, deception and betrayal. It will keep you entertained for hours, and will satisfy all ages. Recommended for the permanent library of all fantasy readers.”

--*Books and Movie Reviews*, Roberto Mattos

“Rice’s entertaining epic fantasy [THE SORCERER’S RING] includes classic traits of the genre—a strong setting, highly inspired by ancient Scotland and its history, and a good sense of court intrigue.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“I loved how Morgan Rice built Thor’s character and the world in which he lived. The landscape and the creatures that roamed it were very well described...I enjoyed [the plot]. It was short and sweet....There were just the right amount of minor characters, so I didn’t get confused. There were adventures and harrowing moments, but the action depicted wasn’t overly grotesque. The book would be perfect for a teen reader... The beginnings of something remarkable are there...”

--*San Francisco Book Review*

“In this action-packed first book in the epic fantasy Sorcerer's Ring series (which is currently 14 books strong), Rice introduces readers to 14-year-old Thorgrin "Thor" McLeod, whose dream is to join the Silver Legion, the elite knights who serve the king.... Rice's writing is solid and the premise intriguing.”

--*Publishers Weekly*

“[A QUEST OF HEROES] is a quick and easy read. The ends of chapters make it so that you have to read what happens next and you don’t want to put it down. There are some typos in the book and some names are messed up, but this does not distract from the overall story. The end of the book made me want to get the next book immediately and that is what I did. All nine of the Sorcerer’s Ring series can currently be purchased on the Kindle store and *A Quest of Heroes* is currently free to get you started! If you are looking for a something quick and fun to read while on vacation this book will do nicely.”

--*FantasyOnline.net*

Books by Morgan Rice

THE SORCERER'S RING

- A QUEST OF HEROES (Book #1)
- A MARCH OF KINGS (Book #2)
- A FATE OF DRAGONS (Book #3)
- A CRY OF HONOR (Book #4)
- A VOW OF GLORY (Book #5)
- A CHARGE OF VALOR (Book #6)
- A RITE OF SWORDS (Book #7)
- A GRANT OF ARMS (Book #8)
- A SKY OF SPELLS (Book #9)
- A SEA OF SHIELDS (Book #10)
- A REIGN OF STEEL (Book #11)
- A LAND OF FIRE (Book #12)
- A RULE OF QUEENS (Book #13)
- AN OATH OF BROTHERS (Book #14)
- A DREAM OF MORTALS (Book #15)

THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY

- ARENA ONE: SLAVERSUNNERS (Book #1)
- ARENA TWO (Book #2)

THE VAMPIRE JOURNALS

- TURNED (Book #1)
- LOVED (Book #2)
- BETRAYED (Book #3)
- DESTINED (Book #4)
- DESIRED (Book #5)
- BETROTHED (Book #6)
- VOWED (Book #7)
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- RESURRECTED (Book #9)
- CRAVED (Book #10)
- FATED (Book #11)



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CHAPTER ONE

Gwendolyn slowly opened her eyes, caked with sand, the effort taking all of her strength. She could only open them a sliver, and she squinted out at a world that was blurry, filled with sunlight. Somewhere up above, the glaring desert suns shone down, creating a world that blinded her with white. Gwen did not know if she were dead or alive—she suspected the latter.

Blinded by the light, Gwen was too weak to turn her head left or right. *Was this what it was like, she wondered, to be dead?*

Suddenly, a shadow was cast over her face, and she blinked to see a black hood above her, obscuring the face of a small creature, its face hidden in darkness. All Gwen could see were its beady yellow eyes, staring down at her, examining her as if she were some object lost on the desert floor. It made a strange squeaking noise, and Gwen realized it was speaking in a language she did not understand.

There came a shuffling of feet, a small cloud of dust, and two more of these creatures appeared over her, faces covered with black hoods, all their eyes aglow, brighter than the sun. They squeaked, seeming to communicate with one another. Gwen could not tell what sort of creatures they were, and she wondered once again if she were alive, or if this were all a dream. Was it another one of the hallucinations she'd suffered during these past days in the desert heat?

Gwen felt a poke on her shoulder, and she opened her eyes again to see one of the creatures reaching down with its staff and jabbing her, presumably testing to see if she were still alive. Gwen wanted to reach up and swat it away, annoyed—but was too weak for even that. She welcomed the sensation, though; it made her feel that maybe, just maybe, she was alive after all.

Gwen suddenly felt long, thin claws wrap around her wrists, her arms, and felt herself being picked up, hoisted onto some sort of cloth, perhaps a canvas. She felt herself being dragged across the desert floor, sliding backwards beneath the sun. She had no idea if she were being dragged off to her death, but she was too weak to care. She looked up and saw the world go by, the sky bouncing as she did, the suns as blazing hot and brilliant as ever. She had never felt so weak or dehydrated in her life; each breath felt as if she were breathing fire.

Gwen suddenly felt a cold liquid run down her lips, and she saw one of the creatures leaning over her, pouring water from a sack. It took all of her energy just to manage to stick out her tongue. The cool water trickled down her throat, and it felt as if she were swallowing fire. She hadn't realized her throat could become this dry.

Gwendolyn drank greedily, relieved that at least these creatures were friendly. The creature, though, stopped pouring after a few seconds, pulling back the sack.

"More," Gwen tried to whisper—but the words wouldn't come out, her voice still too raspy.

Gwen continued to be dragged and she tried to muster the energy to break free, to reach out and grab that sack, to drink all the water that was in there. But she did not have the energy to even lift an arm.

Gwen was dragged and dragged, her legs and feet hitting bumps and rocks beneath, and it seemed to go on forever. After a while she could no longer tell how much time had passed. It felt like days. The only sound she heard was that of the desert wind ripping through, carrying more dust and heat.

Gwen felt more cold water on her lips, and drank more this time, until it was pulled away. She opened her eyes a bit further, and as she saw the creature pull it away, she realized that he was

feeding her slowly so as not to give her too much at once. The water trickling down her throat did not feel quite as harsh this time, and she felt the hydration rushing to her veins. She realized how desperately she needed it.

“Please,” Gwen said, “more.”

The creature, instead, poured some water over her face, her eyes, and the cool water felt so refreshing as it trickled down her hot skin. It took some of the dust off of her eyelids, and she was able to open them a bit more—enough to at least see what was happening.

All around her Gwen saw more of these creatures, dozens of them, shuffling along the desert floor in their black cloaks and hoods, speaking amongst themselves with strange squeaking noises. She looked over just enough to see them carrying several more bodies, and she felt an immense sense of relief to recognize the bodies of Kendrick, Sandara, Aberthol, Brandt, Atme, Illepra, the baby, Steffen, Arliss, several Silver, and Krohn—perhaps a dozen or so in all. They were all being dragged alongside her, and Gwen couldn’t tell if they were alive or dead. From the way they all lay, all so limp, she could only assume they were dead.

Her heart sank, and Gwen prayed to God that wasn’t the case. Yet she was pessimistic. After all, who could have survived out here? She was still not entirely sure that *she* had survived.

As she continued to be dragged, Gwen closed her eyes, and when she opened them again, she realized that she had fallen asleep. She did not know how much more time had passed, but it was now late in the day, the two suns low in the sky. She was still being dragged. She wondered who these creatures were; she assumed them to be desert nomads of some sort, perhaps some tribe who had somehow managed to survive out here. She wondered how they’d found her, where they were taking her. On the one hand, she was so grateful that they had saved her life; on the other, who knew if they were taking her to be killed? To be a meal for the tribe?

Either way, she was too weak and exhausted to do anything about it.

Gwen opened her eyes, she did not know how much later, startled by a rustling sound. At first it sounded like a distant thorn bush whirling across the desert floor. But as the sound grew louder, more incessant, she knew it was something else. It sounded like a sandstorm. A raging, incessant sandstorm.

As they neared it and the people carrying her turned, Gwen looked over and was afforded a view unlike any she had ever seen. It was a view that made her stomach churn, especially as she realized they were approaching it: there, perhaps fifty feet away, was a wall of raging sand, rising right up into the sky, so high she could not see if it had an end. The wind blew violently through it, like a contained tornado, and the sand churned violently in the air, so thick she could not see through it.

They headed right for this wall of raging sand, the noise so loud it was deafening, and she wondered why. It seemed like they were approaching instant death.

“Turn back!” Gwen tried to say.

But her voice was hoarse, too weak for anyone to hear, especially over the wind. She doubted they’d listen to her, even if they had heard her.

Gwen began to feel the sand scraping her skin as they neared the churning sand wall, and suddenly two creatures approached her and draped a long, heavy sheet over her, draping it over her body, covering her face. She realized they were shielding her.

A moment later, Gwen found herself in a violent wall of churning sand.

As they entered it, the noise was so loud, Gwen felt as if she would go deaf, and she wondered how she could possibly survive this. Gwen realized right away that this canvas over her was saving her; it protected her face and skin from being torn apart by the raging wall of sand. The nomads marched on, their heads down low against the sand wall, as if they had done this many times before.

They continued to yank her through it, and as the sand raged all around her, and Gwen wondered if it would ever have an end.

Then, finally, there came silence. Sweet, sweet silence, like she had never savored before. Two nomads removed the canvas from her, and Gwen saw they had cleared the sand wall, had emerged out the other side. But the other side of what? she wondered.

Finally, the dragging came to a stop and as it did, all Gwen's questions were answered. They set her down gently, and she lay there, unmoving, looking up at the sky. She blinked several times, trying to comprehend the sight before her.

Slowly, the view before her came into focus. She saw an impossibly high wall made of rock, climbing hundreds of feet into the clouds. The wall stretched in all directions, disappearing into the horizon. At the top of these towering cliffs, Gwen saw ramparts, fortifications, and atop them, thousands of knights wearing armor that shone in the sun.

She could not understand. How could they be here? she wondered. Knights, in the middle of the desert? Where had they taken her?

Then suddenly, with a jolt, she knew. Her heart beat faster as she suddenly realized they had found it, had made it here, all the way across the Great Waste.

It existed, after all.

The Second Ring.

CHAPTER TWO

Angel felt herself plummeting through the air as she dove down, headfirst, for the raging waters of the churning sea below. She could still see Thorgrin's body submerged beneath the water, unconscious, limp, sinking down deeper with every passing moment. She knew that he could be dead within moments, and that if she hadn't dove off the ship when she had, he would certainly have no chance to live.

She was determined to save him—even if it meant her life, even if she died down there with him. She could not really understand it, but she felt an intense connection to Thor, ever since the moment they had first met back on her island. He had been the only one she had ever met who was unafraid of her leprosy, who had given her a hug despite it, who had looked at her as a normal person, and who had never shied away from her for a minute. She felt she owed him a great debt, felt an intense loyalty to him, and she would sacrifice her life for him, whatever the cost.

Angel felt her skin pierced by the icy cold waters as she was submerged. It felt like a million daggers piercing her skin. It was so cold it startled her, and she held her breath as she plunged down, deeper and deeper, opening her eyes in the murky waters and searching for Thorgrin. She barely spotted him in the darkness, sinking lower and lower, and she gave a great kick, again and again, reached out and, using her downward momentum, just grabbed his sleeve.

He was heavier than she thought. She wrapped both arms around him, turned around, and kicked furiously, using all her might to get them to stop descending and instead ascend. Angel wasn't big and she wasn't strong, but she had learned quickly growing up that her legs held a strength that her upper body did not. Her arms were weak from the leprosy but her legs were her gift, stronger than a man's, and she used them now, kicking for her life, swimming upwards toward the surface. If there was one thing she had learned growing up on an island, it was how to swim.

Angel kicked their way out of the murky deep, up higher and higher toward the surface, looking up and seeing sunlight reflected down through the waves above.

Come on! she thought. *Just a few more feet!*

Exhausted, unable to hold her breath much longer, she willed herself to kick harder—and with one last kick, she exploded up to the surface.

Angel came up gasping for air and she brought Thor up with her, her arms wrapped around him, using her legs to keep them afloat, kicking and kicking, holding his head above the surface. He still appeared unconscious to her, and now she worried if he had drowned.

"Thorgrin!" she cried. "Wake up!"

Angel grabbed him from behind, wrapped her arms tight around his stomach, and pulled sharply toward her, again and again, as she had seen one of her leper friends do once when another friend was drowning. She did it now, pulling up into his diaphragm, her little arms shaking as she did.

"Please, Thorgrin," she cried. "Please live! Live for me!"

Angel suddenly heard a gratifying cough, followed by throwing up of water, and she was elated to realize that Thor had come back. He threw up all the sea water as he racked his lungs, coughing up again and again. Angel was flooded with relief.

Even better, Thor seemed to have regained consciousness. The whole ordeal seemed to have finally shaken him from his deep slumber. Maybe, she hoped, he would even be strong enough to fight off these men and help them escape somewhere.

Angel had hardly finished the thought when she suddenly felt a heavy rope land on her head, dropping down from the sky and completely engulfing her and Thorgrin.

She looked up and saw the cutthroats standing over them at the edge of the ship, staring down, grabbing hold of the other end of the rope and yanking it up, hoisting them in as if they were fish. Angel struggled, thrashing at the rope, and she hoped Thor would, too. But while he coughed, Thor still lay there limply, and she could tell he clearly didn't have the strength yet to defend.

Angel felt them slowly hoisted up in the air, higher and higher, water dripping down from the net, as the pirates pulled them closer, back to the ship.

"NO!" she yelled, thrashing, trying to break free.

A cutthroat held out a long iron hook, hooked the net, and yanked them with one jerky motion for the deck.

They swung through the air, the cords were cut, and Angel felt herself falling as they landed hard on the deck, dropping a good ten feet and tumbling as they did. Angel's ribs hurt from the impact and she thrashed at the rope, trying to break free.

But it was no use. Within moments several pirates jumped on top of them, pinning her and Thorgrin down and yanking them out. Angel felt several rough hands grab her, and felt her wrists bound behind her back with coarse rope as she was dragged to her feet, dripping wet. She could not even move.

Angel looked over, worried for Thorgrin, and she saw him being bound, too, still out of it, more asleep than awake. They were each dragged together across the deck, too fast, Angel stumbling as they went.

"This will teach you to try to get away from us," a pirate snapped.

Angel looked up and saw before her a wooden door to the lower deck being opened, and she stared into the blackness of the lower holds of the deck. The next thing she knew she and Thor were thrown by the pirates.

Angel felt herself go tumbling as she went flying headfirst into the blackness. She hit her head hard on the wood floor, landing face first, and then felt the weight of Thor's body landing on top of her, the two of them rolling into the blackness.

The wooden door to the deck was slammed from above, blocking out all the light, then locked with a heavy chain, and she lay there, breathing hard in the blackness, wondering where the pirates had thrown her.

At the far end of the hold sunlight suddenly came flooding in and she saw the pirates had opened up a wooden hatch, covered by iron bars. Several faces appeared above, sneering down, some of them spitting, before they walked away. Before they slammed this hatch down, too, Angel heard a reassuring voice in the darkness.

"It's okay. You're not alone."

Angel started, surprised and relieved to hear a voice, and she was shocked and elated as she turned to see all of her friends sitting down there in the blackness, all with their hands bound behind their back. There sat Reece and Selese, Elden and Indra, O'Connor and Matus, all of them captive but alive. She had been so sure they had all been killed at sea, and was flooded with relief.

Yet she was also filled with foreboding: if all these great warriors had been taken prisoner, she thought, what chance did any of them ever have of making it out of here alive?

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