

# A VOW OF GLORY

(BOOK #5 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 eight books, which has been translated into six languages.

Morgan is also author of the #1 Bestselling THE VAMPIRE LEGACY, a young adult series comprising two books and counting.

Morgan is also author of the #1 Bestselling ARENA ONE and ARENA TWO, the first two books in THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY, a post-apocalyptic action thriller set in the future.

Morgan is also author of the #1 Bestselling epic fantasy series THE SORCERER'S RING, comprising five books and counting.

Morgan loves to hear from you, so please feel free to visit [www.morganricebooks.com](http://www.morganricebooks.com) to stay in touch.

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“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.”

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--The Romance Reviews {regarding *Loved*}

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A MARCH OF KINGS (Book #2)  
A FEAST OF DRAGONS (Book #3)  
A CLASH OF HONOR (Book #4)  
A VOW OF GLORY (Book #5)

**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)  
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“Life every man holds dear; but the dear man holds honor far more precious dear than life.”

—William Shakespeare  
*Troilus and Cressida*

## CHAPTER ONE

Andronicus rode proudly down the center of McCloud's royal city, flanked by hundreds of his generals, and dragging behind him his most prized possession: King McCloud. Stripped of his armor, half-naked, his hairy body rolling with fat, King McCloud was bound by ropes and tied to the back of Andronicus' saddle by a long rope circling his wrists.

As Andronicus rode slowly, reveling in his triumph, he dragged McCloud through the streets, over dirt and pebbles, stirring up a cloud of dust. McCloud's people gathered and gaped. He could hear McCloud calling out, writhing in pain as he paraded him through the streets of his own city. Andronicus beamed. The faces of McCloud's people crumpled in fear. Here was their former king, now the lowliest of slaves. It was one of the finest days Andronicus could remember.

Andronicus was surprised at how easy it had been to take McCloud's city. It seemed as if McCloud's men had been demoralized before the attack had even begun. Andronicus's men had conquered them in a blaze of lightning, his thousands of soldiers swooping in, overriding the few soldiers who dared to defend, and swarming the city in the blink of an eye. They must have realized there was no point in resisting. They had all laid down their arms assuming, if they surrendered, Andronicus would take them captive.

But they did not know the great Andronicus. He despised surrender. He took no captives, and their lowering their weapons just made it all the easier for him.



The streets of McCloud's city ran with blood, as Andronicus' men swept every alley, every side street, butchering every man they could find. The women and children he had taken as slaves, as he always did. The houses they looted, one at a time.

As Andronicus rode now, slowly through the streets, surveying his triumph, he saw the corpses everywhere, the heaps of loot, the destroyed homes. He turned and nodded to one of his generals, and immediately the general raised a torch high, motioned to his men, and hundreds of them fanned throughout the city and set fire to the thatched roofs. Flames rose up all around them, reaching for the sky, and Andronicus could already begin to feel the heat from here.

"NO!" McCloud screamed, flailing on the ground behind him.

Andronicus grinned wider and picked up his pace, aiming for a particularly large rock; there came a satisfying thump, and he knew McCloud's body had ridden over it.

Andronicus took great satisfaction in watching this city burn. As he had in every conquered city in his Empire, he would first raze the city to the ground, then build it up again, with his own men, his own generals, his own Empire. That was his way. He wanted no trace of the old. He was building a new world. The world of Andronicus.

The Ring, the sacred Ring which had eluded all of his ancestors, was now his territory. He could hardly conceive it. He breathed deeply, wondering just how great he was. Soon enough, he would cross the Highlands, and conquer the other half of the Ring, too. Then there would be no place left on the planet upon which his foot had not tread.

Andronicus rode up to the towering statue of McCloud, in the city square, and stopped before it. It stood there like a shrine, rising fifty feet, made of marble. It showed a version of McCloud that Andronicus did not recognize, a young, fit, muscular McCloud, wielding a sword proudly. It

was egomaniacal. For that, Andronicus admired him. A part of him wanted to take it back home, install it in his palace as a trophy.

But another part of him was too disgusted by it. Without thinking, he reached down, took out his sling, a sling three times larger than that of any human, large enough to hold a rock the size of a small boulder, and he reached back and hurled it with all that he had.

The small boulder flew through the air and connected with the head of the statue. McCloud's marble head shattered in pieces, exploding off the body. Andronicus then let out a shout, raised his two-handed flail, charged and swung with all he had.

Andronicus smashed the statue's torso and the marble toppled, then crashed to the ground, shattering with a great noise. Andronicus turned his horse and made sure, as he rode, that McCloud's body was scraped up over the shards.

"You will pay for that!" an agonized McCloud cried weakly.

Andronicus laughed. He had encountered many humans in his lifetime, but this one might just be the most pathetic of them all.

"Will I?" Andronicus yelled.

This McCloud was too thick-headed; he still did not appreciate the might of the great Andronicus. He would have to be taught, once and for all.

Andronicus scanned the city, and his eyes fell on what was surely McCloud's castle. He kicked his horse and took off at a gallop, his men falling in behind him, as he dragged McCloud across the dusty courtyard.

Andronicus rode up the dozens of marble steps, McCloud's body thumping behind him, calling out and groaning with each step, then he continued to ride, right up through the marble entrance. Andronicus' men were already standing guard at the doors, at their feet the bloody

corpses of McCloud's former guards. Andronicus grinned with satisfaction to see that already, every corner of the city was his.

Andronicus continued riding, right through the vast castle doors, inside a corridor of soaring arched ceilings, all made of marble. He marveled at the excess of this McCloud king. He clearly had spared no expense in indulging himself.

Now his day had come. Andronicus continue to ride with his men down the wide corridors, the horses' hooves echoing off the walls, to what was clearly McCloud's throne room. He burst through the oak doors and rode right to the center of the room, to an obscene throne, carved of gold, sitting in the center of the chamber.

Andronicus dismounted, climbed the golden steps slowly, and sat in it.

He breathed deeply as he turned and surveyed his men, his dozens of generals seated on horseback awaiting his command. He looked over at the bloody McCloud, still tied to his horse, groaning. He surveyed this room, examined the walls, the banners, the armor, the weaponry. He looked down at the workmanship of this throne, and he admired it. He considered melting it down, or perhaps bringing it back for himself. Maybe he would give it to one of his lesser generals. Of course, this throne was still nothing next to Andronicus' own throne, the most massive throne of all the kingdoms, one which had taken twenty laborers forty years to build. The building of it had begun in his father's lifetime, and had been completed on the day Andronicus had murdered his own father. It had been perfect timing.

Andronicus looked down at McCloud, this pathetic little human, and wondered how best to make him suffer. He examined the shape and size of his skull, and decided that he would like to shrink it and wear it on his necklace, with the other shrunken heads around his neck. Yet Andronicus realized that before he killed him, he would need some time to thin out his face, his

cheekbones, so that it looked better around his neck. He did not want a fat, plump face ruining the aesthetic of his necklace. He would let him live a while, and torture him in the meantime. He smiled to himself. Yes, it was a very good plan.

"Bring him to me," Andronicus commanded one of his generals, in his ancient, deep snarl.

He jumped down without a moment's hesitation, hurried over to McCloud, cut the rope, and dragged the bloody body across the floor, staining it red as he went. He dropped it at the base of Andronicus' feet.

"You can't get away with this!" McCloud mumbled weakly.

Andronicus shook his head; this human would never learn.

"Here I am, seated on your throne," Andronicus said. "And there you are, lying at my feet. I should think it is safe to say that I can get away with anything I want. And that I already have."

McCloud lay there, moaning and writhing.

"My first order of business," Andronicus said, "will be to have you pay the proper respect to your new king and master. Come to me now, and have the honor of being the first to kneel before me in my new kingdom, the first to kiss my hand and call me King of what was once the McCloud side of the Ring."

McCloud looked up, got to his hands and knees, and sneered at Andronicus

"Never!" he said, and turned and spat on the floor.

Andronicus leaned back and laughed. He was heartily enjoying this. He had not met a human this willful for quite some time.

Andronicus turned and nodded, and one of his men grabbed McCloud from behind, while another came forward and held his head still. A third came forward with a long razor. As he approached, McCloud buckled in fear.

"What are you doing?" McCloud asked in panic, his voice several octaves higher.

The man reached down and quickly shaved off half of McCloud's beard. McCloud looked up in bewilderment, clearly baffled that the man had not hurt him.

Andronicus nodded, and another man stepped forward with a long poker, at the end of which was carved in iron the emblem of Andronicus' kingdom—a lion with a bird in its mouth. It glowed orange, steaming hot, and as the others held McCloud down, the man lowered the poker for his now-bare cheek.

"NO!" McCloud shrieked, realizing.

But it was too late.

A horrific shriek cut through the air, accompanied by a hissing noise and the smell of burnt flesh. Andronicus watched with glee as the poker burned deeper and deeper into McCloud's cheek. The hissing grew louder, the screams almost intolerable.

Finally, after a good ten seconds, they dropped McCloud.

McCloud slumped to the ground, unconscious, drooling, as smoke rose up from half of his face. It now bore the emblem of Andronicus, burned into his flesh.

Andronicus leaned forward, looked down at the unconscious McCloud, and admired the handiwork.

"Welcome to the Empire."

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