

A SEA OF SHIELDS

(BOOK #10 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 ten books (and counting), which has been translated into six languages.

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 ten books and counting.

Morgan loves to hear from you, so please feel free to visit www.morganricebooks.com to stay in touch.

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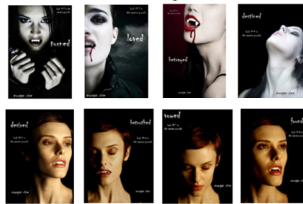
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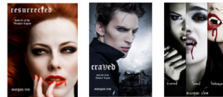
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Earl: "O that we now had here
But one ten thousand of those men in England..."

Henry V: "No, my fair cousin...
The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more."

--William Shakespeare
Henry V

CHAPTER ONE

Gwendolyn screamed and screamed as the pain tore her apart.

She lay on her back in the field of wildflowers, her stomach hurting her more than she imagined possible, thrashing, pushing, trying to get the baby out. A part of her wished it would all stop, that she could just reach safety before the baby came. But a bigger part of her knew the baby was coming now, whether she liked it or not.

Please, God, not now, she prayed. Just another few hours. Just let us reach safety first.

But it was not meant to be. Gwendolyn felt another tremendous pain rip through her body, and she leaned back and shrieked as she felt the baby turning inside her, closer to emerging. She knew there was no way she could stop it.

Instead, Gwen resorted to pushing, forcing herself to breathe as the nurses had taught her, trying to help it come out. It didn't seem to be working, though, and she moaned in agony.

Gwen sat up once again and looked around for any sign of humanity.

“HELP!” she screamed at the top of her lungs.

No answer came. Gwen was in the midst of summer fields, far away from a soul, and her scream was absorbed by the trees and the wind.

Gwen always tried to be strong, but she had to admit she was terrified. Less for herself, and more so for the baby. What if no one found them? Even if she could deliver on her own, how would she ever be able to walk out of this place with the baby? She had a sinking feeling that she and the baby would both die here.

Gwen thought back to the Netherworld, to that fateful moment with Argon when she had freed him, the choice she'd had to make. The sacrifice. The unbearable choice that had been forced upon her, having to choose between her baby and her husband. She wept now, recalling the decision she'd made. Why did life always demanded sacrifices?

Gwendolyn held her breath as the baby suddenly shifted inside her, a pain so severe it reverberated from the top of her skull down to her toes. She felt as if she were an oak tree being split in two from the inside out.

Gwendolyn arched back and groaned as she looked up to the skies, trying to imagine herself anywhere but here. She tried to hold onto something in her mind, something that would give her a sense of peace.

She thought of Thor. She saw the two of them together, when they had first met, walking through these same fields, holding hands, Krohn jumping at their feet. She tried to bring the picture to life in her mind, tried to focus on the details.

But it wasn't working. She opened her eyes with a start, the pain jolting her back to reality. She wondered how she had ever ended up here, in this place, all alone—then remembered Aberthol, telling her about her dying mother, her rushing out to see her. Was her mother dying too at this moment?

Suddenly, Gwen cried out, feeling as if she were dying, and she looked down and saw the crown of the baby's head emerging. She leaned back and shrieked as she pushed and pushed, sweating, her face bright red.

There came one final push, and suddenly, a cry pierced the air.

A baby's cry.

Suddenly, the sky blackened. Gwen looked up and watched in fear as the perfect summer day, without warning, turned to night. She watched as the two suns were suddenly eclipsed by the two moons.

A total eclipse of both suns. Gwen could hardly believe it: it only happened, she knew, once every ten thousand years.

Gwen watched in terror as she was immersed in the darkness. Suddenly, the sky filled with lightning, streaks flashing down, and Gwen felt herself pelted by small pellets of ice. She could not understand what was happening, until she finally realized it was hailing.

All of this, she knew, was a profound omen, all occurring at the precise moment of her baby's birth. She looked down at the child and knew immediately that he was more powerful than she could fathom. That he was of another realm.

As he emerged, crying, Gwen instinctively reached down and grabbed him, pulling him to her chest before he could slip into the grass and the mud, sheltering him from the hail as she wrapped her arms around him.

He wailed, and as he did, the earth began to quake. She felt the ground tremble, and in the distance, she saw boulders rolling down hillsides. She could feel the power of this child coursing through her, affecting the entire universe.

As Gwen clutched him tight, she felt weaker by the moment; she felt herself losing too much blood. She grew light-headed, too weak to move, barely strong enough to hold her baby, who would not stop wailing on her chest. She could barely feel her own legs.

Gwen had a sinking premonition that she would die here, on these fields, with this baby. She no longer cared about herself—but she could not imagine the idea of her baby dying.

“NO!” Gwen shrieked, summoning every last bit of strength she had to shout her protest up to the heavens.

As Gwen dropped her head back, lying flat on the ground, a shriek came in response. It was not a human shriek. It was that of an ancient creature.

Gwen began to lose consciousness. She looked up, her eyes closing on her, and saw what appeared to be an apparition from the skies. It was a massive beast, swooping down for her, and she realized dimly that it was a creature she loved.

Ralibar.

The last thing Gwen saw, before her eyes shut for good, was Ralibar swooping down, with his huge, glowing green eyes and his ancient red scales, his claws extended, and aiming right for her.

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