



Lord of Rage (Royal House of Shadows Book 2)

By Jill Monroe



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The golden-haired beauty had eaten his food and slept in his bed when Osborn found her. Though he wanted to awaken his virgin princess to carnal pleasures, Breena wanted more—including his warrior skills. Skills the once-legendary mercenary had long buried. Now Osborn had a choice—risk his life or deny his princess her fairy-tale ending.



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Jill Monroe is an award-winning author of eight romance novels. She is convinced every person she meets is more than human, and spends most of her non-writing time trying to figure out if they're Werewolf, Vampire, Zombie—or, in her husband's case, Demon. She lives in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Visit her at JillMonroe.com.

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A furore libera nos, Domine!

Deliver us from the fury, O Lord!

Ten Years Ago

Osborn's fingers tightened around the smooth handle of his spear. He'd spent countless hours peeling away the bark and sanding the rough wood until it felt easy in his hand. His legs shook in anticipation as he sat at the campfire, watching the logs turn orange and the smoke rise to the stars.

His last night as a child.

Tomorrow he'd follow the path his father—and his father's father and the generations of his forebearers—had once all walked since the beginning of the beginning. Tomorrow he'd meet the final challenge. Tomorrow he'd become a man or he'd die.

"You must sleep," his father told him.

Osborn glanced up. Even in the dimness of the firelight he could recognize the tension bracketing his father's eyes. Tomorrow he'd either join his father as a warrior or his father would be burying another son.

"I'm not tired," he admitted.

With a nod, his father joined him on the ground, the fire warming the chill night air. "Neither could I that night."

Osborn's eyes narrowed. Even though he'd asked a dozen times about his father's Barenjagd, he'd said little. A father's task was to prepare his son for the fight, but what to expect, how to feel...that battle was left for each boy to face alone. On his own terms. It defined the warrior he'd become.

If he lived.

An abrupt shake to his shoulder awoke Osborn in the morning. Somehow he'd fallen into a deep sleep. "It's time."

The fire had died, and he resisted the urge to pull his pelt around him tighter. Then he remembered.

It was *now*.

A smile tugged at his father's lower lip when he saw the suddenness of Osborn's actions. In a flash of

movement he was dressed, bedroll secured and spear in hand.

"It's time," he announced to his father, repeating the words he'd been given.

They were eye-to-eye now, and still Osborn would grow taller. Later tonight he'd be returning a man, welcomed to take his place among the warriors.

His father nodded. "I will tell you what my father told me, and I suspect his father and the fathers before him. What you must do now, you do alone. Leave your aleskin here, and take no food. Nothing but your weapon. Be brave, but above all, be honorable."

"How will you know when it is done?" he asked.

"I will know. Now go."

Osborne turned on his heel, and trekked silently through the brush as his father had first taught him so many years ago. One of his many lessons. Last night they'd slept on the outskirts of the sacred bear lands. Now was the time he must cross over.

With a deep breath he stepped onto the sacred land, reveling in the unexpected thrust of power that pounded into his body. The surge swelled in his chest, then grew, infusing his limbs, his fingers. With new energy, he gripped his spear and began to run. Running faster than he'd ever run before, he followed that tug of power, trusting his instincts.

Time lost meaning as he ran. He never grew tired, even as the sun continued to rise in the sky. His vision narrowed, and the heavy tang of musk scented the air. Bear musk.

The time was *now*.

Every muscle, every sense, tightened. Instinct again told him to turn his head, and then he saw it.

The bear was a giant. Towering more than two feet above Osborn, its fierce claws curved, its dark brown fur pulled tight over taut muscles. Osborn met the fearsome creature's eyes. Again something powerful slammed into him, and his muscles locked. His body froze.

The bear growled at him, a thunderous sound that made the earth beneath his feet rumble. Osborn felt his eyes widen, but he still could not move.

The time was *now*.

Osborn forced his fingers to shift, his arm to relax. Then, with a flowing arc he'd practiced alongside his father hundreds of times, he sent his spear soaring. The sound of its sharpened tip whizzed through the air. The animal roared when Osborn's weapon sank into his chest. Blood darkened its coat.

With a guttural cry, Osborn sprinted to where the bear had stumbled to the ground, pawing at the wood lodged inside its body. The animal went wild as Osborn neared, striking toward him with those killer claws. A wave of fear shuddered down his spine. The rusty, salty scent of blood hit his nostrils. The breathy, angered groaning of the bear made Osborn shake his head, trying to clear the sound. The bear rolled to its feet, once more towering above him, and close. So close.

He steeled his resolve. He was to be a warrior. A brave one. Osborn reached for the spear. One weapon was all a boy was allowed to take. The bear swiped at him, his claws ripping through the cloth of his shirt, tearing

the skin of his bicep. With a mighty blow, the animal sent Osborn to the ground, the air knocked out of his lungs by the force.

Forget the pain. Forget the blood. Forget the fear.

Once again, Osborn's focus narrowed. He reached for the spear again, this time dragging it from the bear's body. But not without a price. The mighty animal clawed at him again, leaving a trail of torn flesh crossing from his shoulder down to his hip. The pain was agony, and his vision blurred, but he steadied his hand and aimed at the animal's throat.

The animal fell to the ground again, but Osborn knew it would not be getting back to its feet. He met those dark brown eyes of the bear. A wave of anguished compassion settled into Osborn. *This* was why the warriors never told of their experiences.

The bear took a labored breath, blood trickling from its nose. Osborn squeezed his eyes tight, fighting the nausea that threatened. His glance drifted to the pain-glazed eyes of the bear. He was dishonoring this great animal's spirit by letting it suffer. The bear's soul clamored for its release. Its next journey.

The time was *now*.

Osborn grabbed the spear once more, then plunged it directly in the bear's heart, ending its life. A rush of energy slammed into him, almost knocking him backward. He fought it, but it was ripping and tearing through his soul. The *ber* energy fused with his own nature, turning him into the warrior the rest of the realm referred to as *berserkers*.

He felt his muscle begin to quiver, feeling weak from his loss of blood. But the wounds would heal. He'd be stronger than ever before. Osborn gulped in air and stumbled his way back to the place where he'd parted from his father.

Intense relief passed across his father's face, and his brown eyes warmed when he saw Osborn approach. Osborn immediately straightened despite the pain. He was a warrior; he'd greet his father that way. But his father hugged him, grabbed him and held him tight to his chest. For a few moments he basked in his father's pride and love before his father broke away and began packing away their camp supplies.

"It was harder than I thought. I didn't think I'd feel this way," Osborn blurted out for no reason he could guess. He regretted his rash words instantly. That was a boy's sentiments. Not a man's. Not a warrior's.

But his father only nodded. "It's not supposed to be easy. Taking of a life, any life, should never be something done without need and compassion." He stood, slinging his pack over his shoulder. "Guide me to the bear. We must prepare it."

They trekked silently together, crossing into the sacred land to where the bear had taken its final breaths. His father taught him to honor the bear in the ancient ways, then they set to work.

"Now you possess the heart of the bear. As a warrior of Ursa, you will carry the bear's spirit with you. Your *ber* spirit will always be there, waiting silent within you, ready for your call. The strength of the bear comes to you when you wear your Barenhaut," his father told him, lifting up the bear pelt. "Do not don your pelt without thought and careful consideration. You will be able to kill, Osborn, and kill easily. But only with honor."

"I will, Father," he vowed with a humble sense of pride. "What do we do now?"

"We take the meat back so our people can eat. The claws we use for our weapons. We don't waste what the bear has given us. We revere its sacrifice." His father ran a finger down the bear's fur. "But the pelt, that belongs to you. You wear it only when you go into battle and must call upon the spirit of the bear."

As he'd observed with his father, and the dozen of Ursa warriors who guarded their homeland. Now he was joining their elite ranks.

They came at night. But then vampires were strongest at night. Attacking when all would be asleep. While the warriors and their sons were on Barenjagd. A coward's choice.

The cries of women filled the night air. The blaze of burned homes and barns and grain silos lit up the sky. Father and son took in the scene below. Osborn's mother was down there. His sister.

His father shucked his clothing, grabbing for his Barenhaut and sword, which were never far out of reach. Osborn's own bear pelt wasn't ready, not yet dried by the sun, but still he reached for the fur, drawing it about his bare shoulders. Blood and sinew still clung to the pelt, and seeped into Osborn through the wounds on his arm and down his body. A powerful rage took him over. He felt nothing else. No sadness over the bear, no worry or concern for his brothers or sister and mother, no anguish over the loss of the food stores that would keep his people alive through the harsh winter. Osborn felt nothing but the killing rage.

With a war cry, he charged down the hill, to his village, his people. To do battle. Not heeding the warning of his father. A vampire turned at his call, blood dripping from his chin, a chilling smile on his cruel lips.

The anger, the force of his rage, overpowered him. He charged the vamp, grabbing for his throat, tearing at his flesh, ripping at the creature's body wit...

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