



Rogue Knight (Five Kingdoms Book 2)

By Brandon Mull

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Magic and danger abound in the second book in a series of “fanciful, action-packed adventure” (*Publishers Weekly*, starred review) from the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the Fablehaven and Beyonders series.

Cole Randolph never meant to come to The Outskirts, but when his friends were kidnapped on Halloween he had to try and save them. Now he’s trapped in a world that lies between wakefulness and dreaming, reality and imagination, life and death.

Cole’s hunt for his lost friends has led him to the kingdom of Elloweer. Accompanied by new friends Mira, Twitch, and Jace, Cole teams up with the resistance movement and joins the search for Mira’s sister Honor.

But Elloweer has grown unstable. A mysterious enemy is wiping out towns, leaving no witnesses or survivors. And an infamous rebel known throughout the kingdom as the “Rogue Knight” is upsetting the balance of power.

With enemies in pursuit, Cole and Mira must resort to a fascinating new kind of magic to protect themselves. Every move is filled with danger as Cole and his friends try to outwit the High King, who will stop at nothing to regain what he has lost.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 5–8—Free from the Sky Raiders and fresh from their defeat of Carnag, Cole, Mira, Jace, Twitch, and Joe are on the run. Following Mira's sister, Honor's star, the group is determined to come to her rescue wherever she may be. Missing his friends, Cole's first goal, however, is to find his separated friends, Dalton and Jenna. As they travel farther along, new threats emerge. A slaver is after Cole and determined to drive him back to the Sky Raiders. The Rogue Knight is wreaking havoc on Maarston and Morgassa's turning people into blank, zombie-like figments somewhere to the North. Characters are likable and well developed. The dynamic between them is amusing, mostly realistic, and engaging. Narrator Keith Nobbs complements well these dynamics with his unique voices. His narrative style suits the voice of a teenage boy and easily draws the listener into Cole's world. VERDICT With a well-developed plot and masterfully done action scenes, this engaging listen will be hard for fantasy fans to pause, particularly if they enjoyed the first title in the series.—Kira Moody, Whitmore Public Library, Salt Lake City, UT

About the Author

Brandon Mull is the author of the *New York Times*, *USA TODAY*, and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling *Beyonders* and *Fablehaven* series, as well as the bestselling *Five Kingdoms* and *Candy Shop Wars* series. He resides in Utah, in a happy little valley near the mouth of a canyon with his wife and four children. Brandon's greatest regret is that he has but one life to give for Gondor.

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Rogue Knight

CHAPTER

✖ 1 ✖

AUTOCOACH

It took some time before Cole noticed that the autocoach was going faster than usual. Mira, Jace, Twitch, and Joe had fallen asleep shortly after nightfall. Despite the darkness and the rhythmic trotting of the huge four-legged brick pulling the coach, Cole had failed to relax enough to sleep.

They had been progressing toward Elloweer for many days now. Mira was so excited to see her sister that Cole sometimes wondered if she remembered that Honor was in peril. Twitch remained quiet and content, not speaking much unless asked direct questions. Joe spent most of his time focused on the possible dangers of the road. Jace grew more cranky and restless with each passing day. Cole couldn't blame him.

The travel conditions helped explain Cole's current insomnia—too many hours confined within the autocoach, getting little exercise and napping whenever he wanted. The days and nights blurred together, making it tricky to keep a regular schedule.

As he sat in the dark while the others slept, the reality of his circumstances confronted him. Until a few weeks ago, Cole had lived a normal life as a sixth grader in Mesa, Arizona. Then one trip to a neighborhood haunted house on Halloween had landed Cole and his friends in the Outskirts, a mysterious realm made up of five kingdoms that each contained distinct forms of magic. As if getting stuck in another world wasn't

terrible enough, all the kids who had traveled with Cole to the Outskirts had been branded as slaves the second they arrived.

After a failed attempt to rescue his friends, Cole became separated from the others when he was sold to the Sky Raiders, a group of scavengers who salvaged valuable items from dangerous castles in the sky. He had no clue where any of his friends from Arizona had ended up, including his best friend, Dalton, and Jenna, the girl he'd had a crush on for years. He knew they were somewhere in the five kingdoms, and he was determined to rescue them. But sometimes the task of finding them felt impossible.

The only bright spot for Cole was the new friends he'd made in the Outskirts—including Jace, Twitch, and Mira, fellow Sky Raiders who had escaped with him. Joe had come to warn Mira of danger, and later had joined them. Cole felt that sticking with Mira was important. She had connections across Elloweer that made travel easier and that might help him find leads about his friends. Of course that meant facing a lot of danger in the meantime, since Mira was on the run from an incredibly powerful evil ruler who just happened to be her father, the High Shaper who had proclaimed himself High King. Having stolen Mira's power once, he wanted her abilities back, and after seeing firsthand what that power could do, Cole understood why.

Since arriving in the Outskirts, Cole had flirted with death several times—while scouting sky castles, escaping Skypoint, and battling his way through a dreamlike land created by some magical kid. And there was no foreseeable end to the danger. How many near misses could he expect to survive?

Home felt a million miles away. The actual distance was probably even worse. From all appearances, the Outskirts existed in a whole separate universe.

But Cole was here in Sambria, one of the five kingdoms, and that wasn't changing anytime soon, so all he could do was focus on their next goal.

Mira's mother had used her shaping talent to place a star in the sky above Honor, which meant Mira's sister was in trouble, but they had no other details. Not long ago, Mira's power had taken tangible form, and defeating it had nearly cost them their lives. Were they now heading toward a similar battle? They had no idea what threat Honor could be facing, but Mira was determined to rescue her.

Bertram, the coachman, slouched forward on his bench, eyes on the floor, elderly features blank. As a semblance created by shaping, he didn't need sleep, but he wasn't designed to provide much company. He sometimes shared useful information about their route. According to Bertram, they would reach the border of Elloweer tomorrow morning.

The autocoach usually provided a smooth ride, so when it jostled over two rough patches in succession, Cole began to pay attention. The clip-clop of the trotting brick sounded faster than he had ever heard it. Then the rhythm of the trot changed to one of a loping stride, and the speed of the autocoach increased even more.

Neither animal nor machine, the autocoach had been created by shapers. It never tired, but it never went fast, either. Cole tapped Bertram. "Why are we speeding up?"

The old man looked at him, lips quivering, one eye twitching. Bertram only spoke to share information about the roads ahead or to assure anyone who cared to listen that he was on holiday with his grandniece and grandnephews. Though his replies weren't always relevant, he had never failed to respond to a question.

"Guys!" Cole yelled. "Something's wrong!"

Joe's soft snoring sputtered to a halt. He squinted at Cole. "Is the coach running?"

"Yes," Cole said. "And Bertram won't talk."

The old semblance wore a pained expression. One hand clenched sporadically.

Joe hastily shook Mira and Jace. "Wake up!"

Twitch sat up with a start. "What's happening?" he asked.

The brick's pace increased to a pounding gallop. The autocoach rattled and creaked, then jolted over a sharp bump, jarring Cole's spine.

Jace produced his golden rope, the magical item he obtained when he worked for the Sky Raiders. Mira reached for the Jumping Sword that their friend Liam had made for her before returning to the Grand Shaper of Sambria.

Joe slapped Bertram briskly across the cheek. "Bertram! Slow us down! Stop the coach!"

"Halt the coach, Bertram," Mira demanded.

Face contorted, Bertram's lips peeled back as he ground his teeth. Drool leaked down his chin.

"Stop us, Bertram," Joe insisted. "Stop us now!"

Rocking from side to side, Bertram screamed. The wretched, desperate cry filled Cole with panic. What could make the calm old semblance behave like this?

If anything, the autocoach gained speed.

"Should we bail?" Twitch asked, slipping on his Ellowine ring to reveal his semitransparent wings and grasshopper legs.

"What about our stuff?" Jace asked.

"You kids go," Joe instructed. "Use your renderings to land softly. I'll stay with the coach to see where—"

His instructions were cut off as the autocoach launched into the air. For a moment, gravity disappeared. Cole was floating, as were the others. They all came crashing down when the coach landed thunderously, slanted steeply forward as it plunged down a sharp incline.

Cole ended up on his back with Twitch on top of him. The autocoach quaked as it skipped out of control down the slope. Before Cole could sit up, the coach went airborne again, tilting sharply to the right.

Jace's golden rope suddenly expanded, zigzagging around the inside of the compartment in a complex pattern. The autocoach landed on its side and tumbled wildly, flinging Cole and his friends against yielding lengths of golden rope. The elaborate tangle cushioned their movements and kept them from slamming against the interior walls of the coach. Cole lost all sense of direction as he flopped between segments of rope, the coach whirling and shattering around him.

The autococh came to a rest upside down. For a moment, the occupants hung suspended like bugs in a spiderweb. The stillness and silence was eerie after the chaotic crash. Then the rope web slackened, and they dropped to the ceiling. Cole felt loopy and sore.

“Get out,” Joe whispered urgently. “This was an attack. It’s not over. We need to move.”

The door had been torn from one mangled side of the coach. Twitch ducked through and into the darkness beyond. Jace shrank his rope to its normal length and exited as well. Mira went next, followed by Cole. Joe came last.

The autococh had settled at the bottom of an earthy ravine that was spanned by a bridge. Dim moonlight revealed steep, brushy banks sloping up on either side, and a stream, crawling down the middle, narrow enough to step across. The rocks, branches, and warped old logs littering the bottom of the ravine suggested that sometimes the stream rose higher than its current trickle.

Cole took a deep breath of the night air. It definitely beat the odor of six bodies crammed in close confines day after day. Since they had started their journey to Elloweer, he had only left the coach to relieve himself and occasionally to eat at a roadside inn.

Jace pressed a finger to his lips and pointed at the top of the ravine. A pair of caped, armored figures was descending the slope, one astride a huge jungle cat, the other riding what appeared to be a writhing mass of rags. The intimidating mounts glided down the incline with slinky grace.

Crouching low, Cole held his breath. The last few days had been quiet, but he knew Mira’s father had people hunting them. When Mira defeated the semblance monster Carnag and regained her shaping power, the High Shaper had lost all claim to her stolen abilities. With the power he took from her other sisters fading, the High Shaper would be in a panic.

The sinister riders didn’t look like legionnaires or city guardsmen. Could they be Enforcers? Cole had heard warnings about the High Shaper’s secret police, but had no way of knowing if these riders were affiliated with them. Whoever they were, the sight of them gave Cole chills. In a land where reality could be reshaped, he had learned to accept the impossible, but that didn’t mean he liked it trying to hunt him down.

Without saying a word, the small group headed in different directions: Twitch slithered behind a log, Mira crouched behind a bush, and Jace melted into the shadows behind a rock pile. Joe ducked back into the damaged compartment. Cole crept around the autococh, putting it between himself and the oncoming figures, which still let him peek around it to keep an eye on them. The duo advanced with little effort at subtlety. Cole realized they probably assumed the crash had left all occupants of the carriage incapacitated or dead. If not for Jace’s rope, they would be right.

Cole considered retrieving his Jumping Sword from the coach. With a fight brewing, he hated to be weaponless. But he worried about the noise spoiling their chance to surprise the oncoming riders. Both were almost to the floor of the ravine.

Squinting, Cole tried to make sense of the squirming jumble of rags. The ragbeast glided along on tattered wisps of fabric, hovering more than walking. Though not very substantial, and lacking a clear shape, it seemed to support the rider without difficulty.

Joe sidled up next to him and quietly handed Cole his Jumping Sword. “Lay low if you can,” Joe whispered

in his ear. He held up a bow—a shaped weapon Cole had retrieved from a sky castle and that produced an arrow every time the string was drawn. “I’m borrowing this. Top priority is getting Mira away from here.”

Bow in hand, Joe slunk away from the totaled autococh. He stepped over the small stream and took cover in some tall brush.

Staying low, Cole peeked as the riders prowled along the base of the ravine. They advanced straight toward the autococh. Of course! They meant to search the wreckage! Why hadn’t he picked a different hiding place?

Keeping the inverted autococh between himself and the riders, Cole backed away, crouching, Jumping Sword held ready. If they spotted him, he would use the sword to flee up the slope. Maybe he could draw them away from the others. Even with their strange mounts, the Jumping Sword might give him a chance to outrun them.

One foot stepped into the stream, making a little splash. Cole froze.

The big cat gave an angry yowl. Cole cringed, gritting his teeth. Beyond the coach, Cole could see Twitch had risen skyward, oversize dragonfly wings shimmering in the moonlight.

Twitch had been spotted.

Cole shuffled sideways in time to see Jace’s golden rope whip around the rider on the jungle cat. The rope hoisted the armored figure high into the air, then slammed him down on a rocky patch of the streambed with a resounding clang.

The ragbeast wheeled toward Jace. Mira sprang out of hiding, flying through the air, Jumping Sword extended. Her blade struck the ragbeast’s rider in the side, knocking him to the ground without piercing his armor. Mira tumbled to the nearby creek bed, her sword falling from her grasp.

The huge jungle cat streaked toward Mira. Pointing his sword at a spot ahead of the jungle cat, Cole shouted, “Away!”

The sword pulled Cole through the air on a low trajectory, skimming along just above the ravine’s floor. As the big cat pounced at Mira, Cole, backed by the momentum of his flight, plunged his blade into the feline’s ribs. The Jumping Sword had slowed just before reaching the target, but even so, Cole drove it deep, then collided with the furry, meaty side of the huge cat. Cole spun through the air and landed on the ground, painfully wrenching his shoulder and scraping his legs.

Twisting to nip at the sword in its side, the jungle cat hissed. Then an arrow hit the big cat in the neck.

“Flail, attack!” Mira called, pointing at the feline.

Accompanied by the crunch of smashed wood, the Shaper’s Flail flew out of the wrecked autococh. Composed of six heavy iron balls joined to a central ring by weighty chains, the flail whirled to the jungle cat, simultaneously pummeling it and wrapping it up. With two legs pinned, the huge feline ended up on its back, hissing and struggling.

The armored rider Mira had unseated was now on his feet clutching a double-bit battle-ax. He clomped

toward Cole, weapon raised high. Curling his legs, Cole prepared to lunge away from the downswing of the heavy weapon.

Before he could move, a golden rope lashed the rider's ankles together, jerked him upward, and flung him against a boulder across the ravine. The gigantic jungle cat went still as arrows accumulated.

Jace whipped the ragbeast a couple of times, but the golden rope passed through it without grabbing hold of anything. The attack seemed to spur the tattered mass of fabric into action. After whirling in place for a moment, the ragbeast swished by Cole, doing no more damage than a thrown pile of laundry.

Cole went and retrieved his sword from the big cat, jiggling it to wrench it free. He wiped the blade against the animal's fur.

At the top of the ravine, near the bridge, a horse gave a loud whinny. Cole glanced up in time to see the steed rearing. A rider slid off before both silhouettes moved out of sight.

Wings fluttering, Twitch landed beside Mira. He crouched and helped her to her feet. The ragbeast glided swiftly upstream alongside the trickle of water.

Joe ran over to them, holding an arrow ready against the bowstring. "Mira, get that rider." His bow pointed toward the top of the ravine.

"Flail, attack," Mira ordered. The tangle of balls and chains disengaged from the fallen cat and zoomed up the slope of the ravine. At the top, it paused.

"Flail, attack," Mira repeated, gesturing in the direction the stranger had gone.

The flail hovered benignly.

"I'm trying to picture the rider," Mira said. "He moved out of sight before I really saw him. I think I have to see the target. Should I go up the slope?"

"No," Joe said quietly. "It isn't worth the risk. Can't you command the flail to strike whatever is within range up there?"

"It isn't an attack dog," Mira said. "I have to direct it."

Joe nodded. "I hit the rider's horse with an arrow. I'm not sure how much damage it did. We can't let him escape. He could round up reinforcements. I should go after him."

"How'd they make the autocoach run wild?" Twitch asked.

"They must have reshaped it somehow," Jace said.

"But Declan made the coach," Mira murmured. "It would take quite a shaper to hijack a Grand Shaper's work."

"Might have been shapecraft," Cole said. "If shapecrafters can mess with the shaping power itself, who knows what else they can do?"

“They organized Mira’s power into Carnag,” Twitch said. “Why couldn’t they tamper with a semblance?”

“Whatever their skills, those were no ordinary soldiers,” Joe said. “You just met some Enforcers. And one of them is getting away. I can’t let that happen. He probably won’t go to the legion or any regular authorities, but there may be others of his kind in the area.”

“We’re splitting up?” Jace asked.

“For now, yes,” Joe said.

“We follow the road?” Twitch checked.

“It will take you to Carthage, on the border between Sambria and Elloweer,” Joe confirmed. “Honor’s star has held steady in that direction. If danger forces you to abandon the road, Mira knows how to follow the star.”

Cole glanced at Mira, who had turned her gaze to the sky. To help guard the precious secret that Mira’s mother could mark the location of her five daughters, only Mira and Joe knew what Honor’s star looked like. If that information ever leaked to the High Shaper, the girls would be doomed.

“Am I just flustered?” Mira asked. “I don’t see it.”

Joe looked skyward in the same direction she was peering. “Oh, no,” he muttered after a tense pause. “You’re right. The star is gone.”

Users Review

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Candy Yazzie:

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