

# RISE OF THE MYSTICS

BEYOND THE CIRCLE



TWO

## TED DEKKER

  
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Seeing, they do not see.  
Hearing, they do not hear.

Yeshua  
AD 32

You should read book 1, *The 49th Mystic*, before reading this novel. Think of it as season 1 and *Rise of the Mystics* as season 2, the completion of one overarching story, one that leaves behind the old, limiting confines of your mind. The ride is wild and sometimes bumpy, so hold on tight. There is no greater thrill than finding freedom from the shackles of a common existence. The old mind offers no life at all.

And so it continues . . .

Previously in  
**The 49th Mystic**  
Book 1

This is book 2 in the story of Rachelle Matthews, who came to be known as the 49th Mystic.

Born with sickle cell anemia in Eden, Utah, Rachelle became blind within months of her birth. She lived in that darkness for sixteen years, struggling with terrifying nightmares of the Shadow Man, who promised to blind her again and again even if she did recover her sight. Her father, David, desperately searched for a cure.

It was when he found one that the Shadow Man walked out of Rachelle's dreams and into Eden. He called himself Vlad Smith and he carried a Book of History, a mystical volume that allowed certain people to cross over into Other Earth, a dimension that mirrors Earth.

Without Rachelle's knowing, Vlad took her blood and applied it to the book, and she awoke in Other Earth with no memory of who she was. From that point forward, every time she fell asleep in Other Earth, she woke up on Earth, and every time she fell asleep on Earth, she woke up in Other Earth.

But a man named Justin, who was far more than just a man, came to her in the desert and healed her blindness, and when she awoke in Eden, Utah, she could see. That's how Rachelle learned that both realities had to be real.

And she learned much more.

She learned she was a Mystic in Other Earth. Unlike the Albinos and the Horde, who numbered in the millions, there were only a few dozen Mystics. Seen as the worst kind of heretic, they were despised by all.

More, she was the *49th* Mystic. Her mission: to fulfill an ancient prophecy that foretold of a child to be born in Other Earth who would divide the world to expose the shadow of death. Only then would the lion lie down

with the lamb, meaning that fear would yield to love in the hearts of all. But neither Albino nor Horde interpreted the prophecy this way. Each race was convinced that if the 49th succeeded, they would be subjugated by their enemies. Thus, she was the enemy of all.

Rachelle also learned that, as the 49th Mystic, she could only fulfill the prophecy if she overcame her own fear. And the only way she could conquer her own fear was to find the Five Seals of Truth before the Horde or the Albinos found and destroyed the Realm of Mystics.

If she failed to find all five seals before then, all would be forever lost in Other Earth. And Earth would face a terrible threat, yet unknown.

Stunned by the revelation that so much hung in the balance of her quest, Rachelle learned that a powerful Leedhan had been sent from Other Earth to Earth with the sole mission of preventing her from finding all five seals before the Realm of Mystics could be destroyed.

He was Vlad Smith, the Shadow Man who'd haunted her dreams and entered Eden in an attempt to prevent her from finding the seals.

Facing what felt like insurmountable odds, Rachelle began her quest with the help of Talya, a wise sage who'd been tasked with helping her discover the five seals. They weren't five amulets or medallions but five truths, and when she discovered each, a seal appeared on her shoulder as a three-dimensional tattoo.

She found the First Seal in Eden, and it branded her shoulder with a luminescent white circle. *White: Origin is Infinite.* Meaning Elyon, who was God, could not be threatened or disturbed by anything finite. Nor could he suffer fear, least of all the fear of loss, on any level. He was the light in which there was no darkness.

She found the Second Seal in Other Earth, and it branded her shoulder as a green band of light. *Green: I am the Light of the World.* Inchristi is me and also in me. Meaning she was made in the fabric of her Father, one with Justin and so as safe as Elyon.

She found the Third Seal on Earth when she saved Eden by bringing down the synthetic sky, and that seal appeared on her shoulder as a black circle. *Black: Seeing the Light in Darkness is my Journey.* Meaning her journey

during this life was a journey of transformation that allowed her to see who she was as the light of the world, joined as one with Justin.

But not all ended well from her limited perspective, even in the wonder of finding the first three seals. For starters, the seals she had could be rendered powerless until she found all five of them, Talya said. Against the Fifth Seal there was no defense, but unless she found the last two before the Realm of Mystics was destroyed, all would be lost.

Furthermore, Vlad Smith, the Shadow Man, proved to be a deviously manipulative adversary who accomplished his objectives in Eden and returned to Other Earth to prepare for a final assault on the 49th Mystic.

Most disturbingly, although Rachelle saved the town in a demonstration of great power, she was forced to write her father into Other Earth, where he now remains a slave of Vlad—to what end, she does not know.

On Earth, her heroic rescue of Eden was heralded by the world as a wonder that defied the mind.

But in Other Earth, she found herself captive to the Elyonites, imprisoned alone in a dark dungeon far beneath the city.

As she shivers deep in the dark Elyonite dungeon, the light she once felt in such staggering fashion grows dimmer each hour. The armies of the Horde and the Elyonites are gathering for a war that will tear the world apart. In that war, they will surely find and destroy the Realm of Mystics before Rachelle can find the last two seals.

Samuel, the Albino son of Thomas Hunter, might save her. He's smitten with her. Jacob, the Horde son of Qurong, might save her. She thinks she might be falling in love with him. Thomas Hunter, supreme commander of the Circle, might save her. Talya's gone to find him. She can only hope and pray.

At least she's safe and secure on Earth.

These are Rachelle's thoughts as she tries to be brave in the Elyonite dungeon.

But Rachelle is wrong. Very wrong.

# 1

I ONCE KNEW who I was.

More precisely put, I once *thought* I knew who I was, but four months of intense therapy aided by psychotropic drugs slowly showed me who I *really* was. Even more precisely put, all that therapy helped me see who I *wasn't*.

I wasn't the girl who'd saved the residents of Eden, Utah, by bringing down the synthetic sky as I once thought I had. That was DARPA, as part of its experimental process.

I wasn't the girl who could travel to other worlds in her dreams—those were all implanted memories, one of the unfortunate triggers that had led to my schizophrenia. I hadn't dreamed in months, and the dreams I used to have were lost in a distant fog.

I had confronted a man named Vlad Smith, but he was only a part of DARPA's programming, designed to test us all to a breaking point. He was a phantom implanted in our brains, they said. He didn't really exist, which is why he'd vanished.

That's what they've told me, and I believe them.

So who was I as I sat there in the lab across from Charlene Morton, one of the therapists who tested my brain to monitor my progress? I was Rachelle, a girl who'd just turned seventeen. I was one of the survivors of Eden who was well on her way to healing, though I can't say I loved the process. Then again, no pain, no gain, right? It had taken me a few months to accept the truth, but at least I was finally on the road to a full recovery.

“Are you ready, Rachelle?”

“Always,” I said. The wireless cradle on my head, called a Mindflex, had been custom fit to my head. Its twenty-four sensors read all of my brain activity and displayed the data on both Charlene’s monitor and the screens behind the one-way glass to my right. I was a bit of a celebrity at DARPA, and I can’t say I didn’t find all the attention comforting. My dad and I were the only two residents from Eden at the facility—the rest were in other “integration centers,” adjusting to a new reality. But my dad and I were special to DARPA.

Charlene moved her coffee cup to the side and smiled at me. One of the voices in my head—the one I associated with Charlene—whispered, *Poor girl, she has no clue.*

My thoughts were often a bit fuzzy due to the drugs, but my auditory and visual hallucinations cut through all that fog with amazing clarity. I’d learned to mostly ignore them, knowing they were simply misfiring neural connections.

She studied me with warm eyes, preparing the numbered cards that she would quickly flip through before asking me to recite the numbers I’d seen. I’d done the same exercise dozens of times. It was designed to measure my ability to recognize and recall images the way a normal brain does.

“You’re having auditory hallucinations,” Charlene said, glancing at her screen.

“Just a little,” I said.

“What did you hear?”

I hesitated. Some of what the voices in my head said could be embarrassing, and I often changed what I actually heard. The voice might say anything, no matter how inappropriate. I used to attribute those voices to the people around me, thinking I could hear their thoughts.

“I heard, ‘Poor girl, she has no clue,’” I said, then grinned. “I guess I’m feeling sorry for myself today.”

Charlene held my gaze. “Are you? Or is that just a stray, uncontrolled thought you associated with me?”

“One associated with you. But really me.”

“That’s good, Rachelle.” She tapped a few keys, then faced the deck of cards toward me so I could see the first card clearly—9. “Focus on the cards.”

I already was.

Using her thumb, she fanned the cards so they landed facedown on the table, giving me a very brief glimpse of each one. I can’t say I was consciously seeing the number on each card, but a string of numbers popped into my mind as the deck of cards fell in about four seconds.

“What did you see?”

“9, 23, 24, 52, 4, 11, 21, 27, 2, 12, 32, 45 . . .” I continued on, because I could see the numbers there in my head, floating across a white horizon the same way I always saw numbers or any other image they showed me. She let me recite what I was seeing, and somewhere in there the voice spoke again.

*Amazing. Never get used to it.*

Again, Charlene’s voice, but really just my mind speaking to me, telling me how impressed I was with myself.

“How’d I do?” I asked when my mind went blank.

She lifted her eyes from the screen. “Good.”

“Better?”

“Let’s just say your brain is lighting up like a Christmas tree. Slowly but surely we’re forcing it to make typical connections. So, yes . . .”

I didn’t hear the rest because I was seeing her elbow bump her black coffee cup off the table, and I bolted from my chair, acting from pure instinct, not wanting to see the cup shatter on the floor and make a mess. Three steps and I was there, catching the cup before it had fallen more than a foot.

I held it there for a moment, then stood up and set it down, grinning at her. “Close one.”

“Close indeed. Thank you, Rachelle.”

“You’re welcome.”

That was one thing I was really good at. Moving quickly. Project Eden had messed up my brain, but all that rewiring had somehow formed new

neural connections that allowed me to perceive and react to motion with catlike quickness. I couldn't exactly catch bullets, but I could move like a ninja, as Steve put it.

Steve Collingsworth was the young DARPA scientist who'd been the first to reach Eden when they dissolved the sky and brought us all out safely. Next to my dad, he was my closest friend now.

*Ninja practice*, he sometimes called the physical tests they put me through. I sometimes thought Charlene knocked stuff off the table on purpose, just to see how quickly I would react.

They wanted to cure me, I was sure of that, but they also wanted to understand how my brain and body could operate in such a unique way. That's why I was special to them. At times I wondered if they were actually more interested in studying me than helping me, but even so I didn't mind. I, too, wanted to know how I could do the things I could do. If that meant being their guinea pig, so be it.

No one had ever encountered a mind quite as gloriously messed up as mine. If they could figure out what was happening to me, they might be able to re-create the good without the bad. I was playing my part in the evolution of the human mind/body connections.

I returned to my seat, feeling accomplished.

*Who are you, dear daughter?*

They had told me that was my mother's voice, speaking from the grave. Just an old memory fragment from Eden.

*Re-member your true name.*

They knew I was hearing things—no hiding that with the Mindflex on my head. They also knew I was getting much better at ignoring the voices.

Charlene stood, retrieved a clear glass from the cupboard, filled it with water at the sink, and set it down on a silver disk five feet in front of me. The nickel-plated sensor would read even the slightest change in the atoms contained in the glass and the water.

"Ready when you are," she said.

We'd done this exercise twice in the last week. Focus on the glass and imagine boiling the water. Impossible, naturally, but that was the point.

My brain had learned to see the water boiling with my intention to see it in that state. A hallucination I could control.

“Why, if we already know what I’m going to see?” I asked.

“For two reasons. The first is as a simple exercise in retraining your brain. See if you can observe what’s really happening.”

“The water *not* moving.”

“That’s right, even though you think it is. Can you think of it boiling but still see it as it really is—not moving? That’s what we still haven’t achieved. Fair enough?”

“Fair enough.”

I stared at the glass of water and focused all of my thoughts on seeing it bubbling, boiling, changing, heating, as if I really had that power, like someone from a comic book.

*Return to the truth of who you’ve always been, dear daughter.*

The auditory hallucination of my mother’s voice distracted me. I dismissed the interruption, drew a deep breath, and began again.

Focus . . .

Less than five seconds passed before I saw the water’s surface shimmer, as if the glass was vibrating and agitating the surface of the liquid inside. Small bubbles formed in the water and rose.

Within ten seconds the water was bubbling.

“There,” I said, looking up at her.

“You’re done?”

“I’m done.”

“You saw the water bubbling?”

I glanced at the water and saw that it was still again. But I already knew that I’d only imagined that boiling.

“Well?” I asked.

“Well, what?”

“Did your sensors pick up any change in the water?” It sounded ridiculous to me, but they seemed to think it might be possible, so I was a little disappointed when she shook her head.

“No.”

“All in my mind.”

“But what a beautiful mind it is. Want to go again?”

STEVE COLLINGSWORTH stood next to DARPA’s director, Theresa Williams, watching Rachelle through the one-way glass, arms crossed. Next to them: Bill Hammond, leader of the now-defunct Project Eden.

It would be an understatement to say that Steve had developed a profound interest in the girl wearing blue jeans, a black shirt, and a new pair of red Converse tennis shoes. Everything about Rachelle fascinated him—the way she flipped her black hair when it hung in her eyes, the way she walked, light as a feather, the way she read her surroundings like a book.

The way she could transform the physical state of water through thought alone.

Real. All of it.

“She moved before Charlene bumped the coffee cup,” the director said. “Ten seconds and the water boils. She’s getting stronger.” Eyes on Steve. “Why wasn’t I told?”

“It’s nothing new.”

“What is new is the ease with which she’s doing it.”

“Which is why you’re here, watching what we’re watching.”

Theresa looked at the data on the monitor as if to convince herself that what she’d just seen had actually happened.

Steve nodded at the screen. “You see the energy readings. Her operational field extends at least ten feet from her body.” Charlene’s field extended the mere six inches typical of most humans. “We’re still no closer to understanding where all that extra energy comes from.”

They’d long ago developed instruments sensitive enough to read a person’s energy field in the same way a less sensitive monitor could read a light bulb’s energy from a distance. Human beings, like all matter, were made of energy—99.999 percent of flesh and bone consisted of empty space charged by energy fields that held atoms and subatomic particles in a perceivable form.

Humans “saw” matter, when what really existed was collapsed energy.

Part of what the human eye couldn't see was the energy field extending beyond a body, a field that changed dramatically depending on the body's brain activity. Fear limited the frequency of that field, retracting it to within an inch of the typical body. Feelings of gratitude and love operated at a different frequency and expanded the field to several feet in most human bodies.

Most. Not Rachelle's. Hers was much stronger and extended much farther.

Theresa nodded at the monitors, voice tight. "I'm not sure you fully appreciate the danger a person with her abilities poses to a world that essentially runs on information. She proved as much when you put her on television four months ago."

Steve had allowed Rachelle one field interview on an ABC affiliate the same day she'd collapsed Eden. He'd asked her to keep it simple, so she had. She said nothing about Vlad Smith.

His motivation had been split. In part he wanted to protect himself from DARPA's backlash—any firing of him, the man who'd rushed in to help save so many souls, would only raise suspicions among the public. In part he hoped to put Rachelle in the nation's consciousness, thereby protecting her as well.

The brief interview with the blind girl who could now see had gone viral. As had the few seconds in that interview when she'd told the reporter, Robert Martin, that he didn't need to worry about his daughter because she was in a better place now. The camera caught his stunned reply: How could she have known that he'd lost his unborn daughter when his wife was killed in a car accident three months earlier? They hadn't told anyone about the pregnancy. Rachelle offered no response.

Speculation ran rampant as social media and news pundits ran with the story. She became the face of Eden, DARPA's mind-blowing memory-manipulation experiment.

Alarmed, DARPA spun their own version of the events: All in Eden had signed up for the project in full knowledge of the experiment's parameters, designed to measure the effects of memories on both physiological and

psychological behavior. What all of the residents, including Rachelle, believed was radically subject to alterations made to their memories within the context of the experiment. Whatever they thought had happened hadn't necessarily happened at all.

What had happened was classified. End of story.

Still, conspiracy theorists made their hay for a couple of months before the story finally died. Everyone wanted to know: How could Rachelle have known that Robert Martin had lost his daughter?

DARPA went silent. They sequestered Rachelle along with her father, David. They simply couldn't allow someone who could read thoughts to roam free.

Within a week of sequestering her, the director concluded that the only way to protect both Rachelle and DARPA was through a radical, drug-induced recontextualization of her memories. And of her mind-reading skills. And of her dreams of another world, from which she claimed all her skills had come. Memory wipes wouldn't work with her—they'd tried—but old-fashioned brainwashing might.

Despite Steve's strong objections, they proceeded, first by dosing both Rachelle's and David's water with Rexpinal each night to suppress their capacity to dream. Dreams gone, they'd wiped David's memory entirely using a procedure called MEP, or Memory Editing Protocol.

In 2017, using engram cells to trace the specific location of memories, MIT had first discovered the mechanism for short- and long-term memory storage. At the outset, memories were simultaneously recorded in both the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex as previously theorized. The amygdala stored short-term memories. It took two weeks for the brain to decide whether the memories in the prefrontal cortex were worth holding on to. If so, the memory became long-term, stored there. If not, the memory was deleted.

All DARPA had to do to wipe a brain of all memories was replicate the brain's process of purging itself.

But the process that worked with others didn't work with Rachelle. Unable to reformat her brain, they'd begun systematic sessions of decon-

struction. Old school. The administration of both psychotropic and hallucinogenic drugs had scrambled her mind, leaving her to finally accept that her memories of Eden weren't real.

Over the course of three months, she'd embraced the only diagnosis that made any sense: severe schizophrenia triggered by the trauma of her experience.

Nothing could be further from the truth, but there it was.

Steve turned to Bill Hammond. "I've never doubted the danger she poses. I'm also aware of the danger to Rachelle."

"An unfortunate consequence," Bill returned. "You know as well as anyone that she's a liability."

"A liability? She's the single greatest opportunity for consciousness research this or any organization has stumbled on. I agreed to go along only because it gave us access to a mind that's clearly operating outside our best models. Rachelle understands that much and is agreeable. But I've never liked the deception."

"And what precisely have we learned about consciousness in the last four months? We have to weigh the danger she presents with these parlor tricks."

"There's clearly a field outside of her mind that she's able to access," Steve shot back. "We don't know how external consciousness can be accessed, but we're just getting started. I think—"

"Consciousness outside the mind? We all know consciousness is generated by the mind. Our brains make us conscious."

"So says prevailing science, but from what I'm seeing, Rachelle defies that science. We have to figure out how and why. Isn't that what we're doing here?"

A slight grin of disbelief crossed Bill's face. "Need I remind you that spirituality isn't science? The brain isn't receiving consciousness from a higher source as if the mind was some kind of antenna. It's generating it between the neurons."

Steve peered through the window where Rachelle was on her third or fourth successful attempt to stimulate the water using her thoughts alone. To his left, Theresa watched in silence, letting them go on.

The water was boiling.

“And I suppose you have a logical explanation for how she can affect water at a distance of seven feet,” Steve said. “Any of your models allow for telekinesis?”

“Clearly there’s a quantum field between them. ‘Spooky action at a distance,’ as Einstein called it. But the brain’s creating it, not receiving it. Regardless, I doubt our research into one subject’s ability to influence the quantum field is going to redefine science. Particularly a subject who presents such a risk.”

“A risk due to her ability to hear thoughts, which also defies our understanding of consciousness. She’s far too valuable to treat with such low regard. We should at least reconsider our approach,” Steve insisted.

“And what approach would you suggest?” Theresa asked, turning.

“Bring her in. Tell her everything we’ve done and why. Ask for her help in decoding her own mind. If she can boil water with her thoughts, maybe she can solve problems not even our best quantum computers can.”

“You want to tell her that she’s not, nor ever has been, schizophrenic?” Bill cut in. “That we’ve deliberately scrambled her brain with drugs? That we shut down her dreaming to hamstring her? You can’t be serious.”

“You mean the dreams of a world that at least offered an explanation for Vlad Smith? The dreams that somehow manifested her sight and the tattoo on her shoulder? We still have no explanation for Vlad, and we all know Eden had no access to holographic dye technology.”

Bill looked stunned. It was probably the bit about her dreams offering an explanation for Vlad Smith. An explanation, maybe, but not one that could be taken seriously.

Steve continued in a more measured tone. “Okay, so we don’t tell her we’ve cut off her dreams. The rest, yes. I think I could bring her in gently. Nothing would surprise her anymore.”

The director crossed her arms and paced, eyes still on Rachelle. “From the beginning our process has been to use a sequential regimen of drugs that systematically impairs her brain functions, hoping to isolate the neural regions responsible for the skills she demonstrates. That would prove

useful to us, no question. Unfortunately, other than shutting down her dreams, we've been unsuccessful. Meanwhile, her power is increasing. You can understand how that might concern some people."

"Concern who? The military? The administration? Fear of the unknown, I get that, but—"

"Some risks overshadow any potential reward, Steve. DARPA's own history has proven that much. Which is why I'm ordering the initiation of the new MEP."

Steve felt the blood drain from his face. Rather than replacing old memories with new ones, the new Memory Editing Protocol was designed to essentially reboot the brain, retaining only those systems integral to motor and logical functions. It had been tested on three volunteers, all of whose minds were reduced to those of young children in adult bodies. Two died within weeks.

"Please tell me this is only a stray thought."

"We've been preparing for it all along," Theresa said.

"Who's 'we'?"

"We!" she snapped. "Surely you knew it could come to this."

"I knew we would eventually find a solution short of eradicating the finest brain since Einstein's. There's no telling what the MEP will do to her!"

The director shook her head. "I'm sorry, Steve, this one's over my head. In a perfect world, I'd give you all the time you need, but it's out of my control."

He pushed back the fear lapping at his mind. It was the first time she'd admitted that someone else was pulling the strings.

She looked at him, eyes soft. "If it helps, I can have someone else—"

"No, she needs me by her side. Just because we've drugged her into oblivion doesn't mean she can't detect threats."

"You sure she won't pick up those threats from your mind?" Bill said.

"She probably will, but my presence will mitigate them. She trusts me."

It felt like betrayal because it was. On the other side of the glass, both Rachelle and Charlene were laughing about something.

He swallowed. "When?"

"Tonight."