

"Rife with longing, extraordinary tenderness,
and delicious tension. A glorious escape."
—*New York Times* bestselling author Roshani Chokshi

A NOVEL

SOULGAZER

MAGGIE RAPIER

PRAISE FOR

SOULGAZER

“Rich in myth and wonder, *Soulgazer* is a tale rife with longing, extraordinary tenderness, and delicious tension. A glorious escape for the heart and imagination.”

—Roshani Chokshi, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Tale of the Flower Bride*

“A stunning world of lush magic and tantalizing romance. Every word stuck with me long after I finished!”

—LJ Andrews, *USA Today* bestselling author of the Broken Kingdoms series

“A high-stakes romantic adventure steeped in magic. I loved it!”

—Kristen Ciccarelli, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Heartless Hunter*

“Strikingly beautiful and as romantic as the sea itself, this gorgeous fantasy debut has both the lure of a song and the power of a tide.”

—Brittney Arena, author of *A Dance of Lies*

“*Soulgazer* is the epic pirate romantasy of my dreams. Maggie Rapier’s debut combines immersive worldbuilding, heroic adventure, and steamy romance effortlessly. Her poetic prose enhanced every element of the story, bringing it to life with lush metaphors and a dreamy cadence so beautiful I couldn’t help but think I was standing next to the characters through every

twist and turn. Saoirse's journey of self-discovery and empowerment had me rooting for her from page one. Her serious, sorrowful beginning paired with Faolan's flirtatious banter, storytelling prowess, and tender care for his wife-of-convenience left me swooning. He's a love interest unlike any I've read before, which made him all the more captivating! The chemistry flew off the page and had me racing through the chapters late into the night, desperate to discover how it ended. I cannot wait to read Rapier's next book!"

—Alexandra Kennington, author of *Blood Beneath the Snow*

"Rapier's wild-hearted debut embraces rich mythology and thorny generational inheritances. Equal parts ferocious, sensitive, and sexy, *Soulgazer* will draw you into its hypnotic currents."

—Isabel Agajanian, author of *Modern Divination*

"Every page brims with fathomless atmosphere and captivating, untethered magic. Deeply romantic and ethereally written, *Soulgazer* will hook you and leave you desperate for more."

—Kalie Cassidy, author of *In the Veins of the Drowning*

SOULGAZER



MAGGIE RAPIER

ACE
NEW YORK

ACE

Published by Berkley

An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC

1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

penguinrandomhouse.com



Copyright © 2025 by Maggie Rapier

Readers Guide copyright © 2025 by Maggie Rapier

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for every reader. Please note that no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

ACE is a registered trademark and the A colophon is a trademark of Penguin Random House LLC.

Cover art by Charlie Bowater

Cover design by Adam Auerbach

Book design by Kristin del Rosario, adapted for ebook by Estelle Malméd

Map by David Lindroth Inc.

Interior art: Triskele © Anne Mathiasz / Shutterstock

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Rapier, Maggie, author.

Title: Soulgazer / Maggie Rapier.

Description: First edition. | New York: Ace, 2025.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024036389 (print) | LCCN 2024036390 (ebook) | ISBN 9780593819272 (trade paperback) | ISBN

9780593819289 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Fantasy fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3618.A72585 S68 2025 (print) | LCC PS3618.A72585 (ebook) | DDC 813/.6—dc23/eng/20240923

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024036389>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024036390>

Ebook ISBN 9780593819289

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin Do2 YH68, Ireland, <https://eu-contact.penguin.ie>.

pid_prh_7.1a_152035053_co_ro

CONTENTS

[Dedication](#)

[Map of the Crescent](#)

[Pronunciation Guide](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One](#)
[Chapter Twenty-Two](#)
[Chapter Twenty-Three](#)
[Chapter Twenty-Four](#)
[Chapter Twenty-Five](#)
[Chapter Twenty-Six](#)
[Chapter Twenty-Seven](#)
[Chapter Twenty-Eight](#)
[Chapter Twenty-Nine](#)
[Chapter Thirty](#)
[Chapter Thirty-One](#)
[Chapter Thirty-Two](#)
[Chapter Thirty-Three](#)
[Chapter Thirty-Four](#)
[Chapter Thirty-Five](#)
[Chapter Thirty-Six](#)
[Chapter Thirty-Seven](#)
[Chapter Thirty-Eight](#)
[Chapter Thirty-Nine](#)
[Chapter Forty](#)
[Chapter Forty-One](#)
[Chapter Forty-Two](#)
[Chapter Forty-Three](#)
[Chapter Forty-Four](#)
[Chapter Forty-Five](#)
[Chapter Forty-Six](#)
[Chapter Forty-Seven](#)
[Chapter Forty-Eight](#)
[Chapter Forty-Nine](#)
[Chapter Fifty](#)
[Chapter Fifty-One](#)
[Chapter Fifty-Two](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Three](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Four](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Five](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Six](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[*Acknowledgments*](#)

[*Readers Guide*](#)

[*Behind the Book*](#)

[*Discussion Questions*](#)

[*Maggie's "Books That Made Me"*](#)

[*About the Author*](#)

*For Corinne,
whose soul-piercing gaze recalled the wild I nearly lost.
Soft doesn't mean weak. Silence is not golden.
Stay vibrant. Stay loud.
Stay you.*

THE CRESCENT



PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

PEOPLE

Aisling ASH-ling

Clodagh CLO-dah

Eabha AY-vah (like Eva)

Faolan FAY-lan

Gráinne GRAW-nya

Odhrán Oh-RAHN

Róisín ROH-sheen

Saoirse SUR-shuh

Sionn Shawn

Tadgh TIE-g

PLACES

Iolair Eye-oh-LAIR

Leigheas LAY-huss

Scath-Díol Scath-DEE-uhl

OBJECTS/THINGS

aisling de na sióga ASH-ling duh nah SHOH-gah

bean sídhe bahn shee (banshee)

bodhrán BOW-rawn

caipín baís CAH-peen BOH-sh

carnyx CAR-nix

Damhsa Babhdóir DOW-sah BAV-door

Daonnaí DAY-uh-nee

dhia DEE-yuh

grianchloch gree-yahn-claw (guttural chh, like “loch”)

murúch muhr-ROCH (guttural chh, like “loch”)

oilliphéist OH-lih-fihsh

rí REE

ríona REE-ohna

seanchaí SHAH-nah-chhee (guttural chh, like “loch”)

tuar ceatha TOOR CAH-thah

ONE



I am the lone magpie in a sea of silver-winged swans. Lithe, artless girls who flick their bone-white skirts to the beat of a bodhrán, heedless of the waves lapping at their ankles. As they revel in their costumes, lit like jewels by the fading sun, I shrink deeper into my feathers and pray the light does not seek me out.

There are dark-eyed, starving things waiting onshore.

Sweat beads across my palms, dots my spine, until the gown clings to my skin, as a man stalks the edge of the water, head bent low like he's scenting blood. A bear's pelt cloaks his shoulders, fur lashed to his wrists with strips of tanned hide. Behind him, a woman arches her back so that braids of kelp stretch taut across her stomach, thousands of shells clattering into a single song. They watch us enter the waves without flinching—two beasts among hundreds, waiting to devour us whole.

A touch dramatic, my brothers would say.

I fight the urge to search for their faces, blink until the beasts become human.

Blink until the sting fades to a distant throb.

Aidan and Conal are not here.

I've waited years to attend the Damhsa Babhdóir, our one tradition to outlive the gods. Six clans gather at the birth of every summer, abandoning their old bloodlust for a chance to strike bargains of marriage instead. For

three days we live under a truce, dancing among feasts and finery to form fragile bonds that our noble families can pick apart like crows seeking the choicest bits of carrion. It is a challenge to our bloodlines, a feat meant to be undertaken alone.

But my brothers always swore they'd find a way to guide me. Conal would wait onshore to collect me after the first ritual was done—Aidan smothering his laughter as I trembled among the waves. Beneath the eyes of our sovereigns, they told me I would invite the sun to set upon my youth and would emerge from the water fully grown, ready to wed at last. Or, more likely, resembling a half-drowned rat.

I've never felt their absence more keenly than I do now. It is a snarled knot in my stomach, tangled tighter every time I pull at the threads.

Neither of my brothers will ever see me wed.

A girl wearing an otter's pelt brushes against my skirts. I twist my hands into the limp fabric of my dress and shy away before her skin can touch mine.

It took three months to create this gown. Black and white linen straining against my needle until a thousand wee pleats formed into feathers. I pricked my thumb on nettle, crushing woad to stain the bottom layers that same unearthly shade of blue witnessed every time a magpie takes flight. If I were to spread my arms, wings would fall from the delicate bronze cuffs at my wrists and elbows, ready to catch the wind.

Such a foolish notion, wanting the sea or the open sky. A pitiful grasp at hope.

Cursed things belong in cages, after all.

"Children of the Crescent!"

The voice is the snap of a twig in winter's flame, cutting through the wind without effort. It sails across sea-foam and sand to where we stand among the waves, drawing our attention to the eldest queen—a weathered dagger sheathed in silk. "Descendants of the Daonnaí, those six who sculpted our world anew. Who comes to claim their birthright?"

"I!" Hundreds of voices lift at once. Mine is the barest hum.

“And who among you would dare to slaughter a god?”

No one utters a sound.

Wind tears at Ríona Etain’s braid, silver strands splitting her wrinkled face like lightning as she rakes her gaze over our forms. Finds them wanting. “Our ancestors were cunning. Strong. Beautiful. Wise. As reckless gods rotted on their gilded thrones, it was *they* who plotted the destruction of the divine. Together, the Daonnaí drove the gods down from their mountains and dragged them shrieking out of their golden coves. Together, they brought time to its knees.”

These are not the stories I grew up with. My mother speaks of the gods with reverence—beseeching them night and day to forgive our ancestors’ actions. To rid me of the curse they left behind.

But the Slaughtered Ones never respond.

“Bound by a strange darkness, the sun a solitary ring of gold, our ancestors held the gods at their mercy until one after another, they slit their throats. And what did the Daonnaí discover as the gods bled into our starving lands?”

The answer pricks my neck like the stroke of a blade.

“Magic.”

I resist the urge to step back, slipping my fingertips over the pulse rushing at my throat instead. Down the golden chain nestled against it, leading to an amulet and its promise of relief—sickening and sweet. Three slender spirals mark the surface in a chalky white, connected by their middles and all rotating left. I hesitate, my finger poised just above a sharp point directly at the center.

Better to be numb than dangerous. To forget rather than mourn.

I press down in a single firm touch as another person jostles my side until the point breaks skin, flooding my veins with ice.

“Ten years it took to hunt the last of the gods down. Another five for their descendants, three for the bastards and blessed. With each fresh slaughter, our islands drank deep until the divine blood called forth magic the likes of which we’d never seen—power they never permitted us to touch.”

Ríona Etain raises one gnarled hand into the air, as though breaking the barrier between this realm and the next. It beckons us forward until the waves are only a whisper at our feet.

“What once we had to beg for, we could now *take*.”

A final drum echoes across the water just as I reach its edge, and Ríona Etain smiles—a slash of red that distorts half her face.

I grip my amulet tighter, swallowing hard.

“And so, descendants of the Daonnaí. I ask you again. Who comes to claim their birthright?”

“I!”

Through a haze of salt spray and smoke, the queen lifts a bronze carnyx to the sky. Said to be sculpted by Odhrán, god of her isle, the stag-shaped trumpet produces a sound like I’ve never heard—half keening, half cry. It weaves between our bodies like a clever spider’s web, coaxing us closer until waves become ripples, then nothing but foam and dry pebbles underfoot.

A final note splits the air, like a breakage of time itself.

And then the Damhsa Babhdóir begins.

Silver coins sewn like scales glitter on the back of one lad as he hooks the waist of a crane, sending her crown of sweet-gale blooms flying. It’s caught by a girl masked in raven feathers, inky black silk cut across her bare shoulder blades where true wings would be. She twists into the arms of a fawn with white-speckled shoulders, anointing her with the flowers as I jerk clear of their path.

I do *not* belong to this menagerie. I never had the chance to.

Heat lashes my skin as I stumble farther onto shore, away from the writhing bodies and wild laughter. They’ve all done this before, somehow—I’m certain of it. Dancing round the solstice fires, gathering at harvest with the rest of their clans. Three girls wind around one another like a braid, while beyond them, men clatter together like boulders with the strength of their embrace.

My throat runs dry to see how easily they all touch, loose limbs outlined in a hazy golden glow.

“Och, would you look where you’re going, lass?”

A weathered hand snatches my skirts just as I stumble back from a fire’s edge, one of a dozen scattered across the beach.

“I’m so sorry! I—”

But the woman’s already lost interest. She stands among a patchwork of elegant figures with lined faces and silver crowns woven of their own braids. Each of them, from the tallest man to the shortest woman, bears the hands of Clodagh tattooed across their collarbone: the markings of the seanchaí.

I nearly cry with relief.

Seanchaí are storytellers, trained from childhood to guard our histories and keep our laws. Above family ties, friendship, payment, or blood, it is their sworn duty to witness our world and reflect what we’ve become.

They might also be my only chance of surviving tonight.

I shuffle closer and try not to think about how my brothers would tease me if they saw this feeble attempt to get by—but Aidan and Conal never had to undertake a Damhsa alone. Da prepared them to face suitors drunk on power and possibility, willing to do *anything* to wed a true child of the Daonnaí. His pride cloaked their shoulders; mine still ache with the force of his grip.

“Listen to that lot,” the first seanchaí says, her spine notched and jagged beneath the line of her dress. “Carrying on as though it’s something to be proud of, breaking the natural order of things. No mention of what came after—or what the slaughter cost.”

“Aye, because *that’s* what’s on everyone’s mind tonight. The consequences of death.”

I curl my toes into the ground as they cackle, digging my nails into my thighs.

Death will be a kindness if you make a fool of me, Saoirse.

My father’s final blessing, after he unlocked my cell door—careful never to touch my skin. Even after seven years of exile, with the amulet secured at my throat, he won’t risk the magic. Not when any small intimacy could allow it in.

Maybe that's why he's never been soft.

You will join the others until I find you, and for star's sake, don't look anyone in the eye. They believe you simple, sent away to heal your fractured mind. You'll earn your place with silence, and, gods willing, we'll put an end to this before the night is done.

I didn't dare ask what he meant by those words, or how I could please him by offering nothing. But if I could talk to the seanchaí...my shoulders ease at the mere thought.

I'll just ask for a name. Someone who might want my title or Father's resources—who'd be content to forget me as soon as we wed. Someone who could balance the scales of what I've cost.

Someone I could survive.

Perhaps then I'd earn Da's ambivalence in the place of his outright contempt.

I reach the circle's edge. "Blessed seanchaí?" My voice falters, catching on the wind. "I beg you to h—"

"All the magic in this world is meaningless, so long as we cannot pass on to the next." The oldest seanchaí's veins stretch in purple streaks from one knuckle to the next as he sweeps his hand through the air, narrowly missing my head. I flinch back. "For two hundred years, the dead have choked our lands—thousands upon thousands of souls left to rot. And for what? For those six eejits to preen each other's feathers and polish their pretty crowns?"

"Be fair," another seanchaí says, her hair more copper than silver like the rest. She looks not at the first speaker but beyond, where a cluster of men gather around a single point. Their voices tumble over one another, competing with the music and the elderly storytellers both.

The younger seanchaí raises her voice, a scowl lining her lips. "Ríona Kiara's half-decent at least. I heard she's called for another quest, only *this* time her cousin is joining."

A scoff. "What, the pup who calls himself a wolf?"

“Aye.” The copper-haired seanchaí’s words take on an edge. “They say he’s never once failed to find what he seeks. And if rumors are true, he’s looking for a girl here who can lead him to the lost isle. A girl with—”

“Ocean eyes!”

I whirl away from the seanchaí as though someone’s caught hold of my wrist, tugged along by the solitary, fierce thread of that voice. It emerges from the thicket of bodies clustered around the fire nearby, the lines of it blurring the more people join, until suddenly, one figure breaks free from the rest—a man.

No.

A wolf.

He stands half a head taller than me, bare above the waist and painted with streaks of mahogany, umber, and ash. Wayward curls sweep his shoulders, as ruddy brown as an evergreen’s bark stripped at the height of spring. When he raises his arms, the air grows thick around him—tinged violet with the essence of twilight and smoke.

And he’s wearing a tail.

None of those gathered see the absurdity, their eyes transfixed by the legend walking the earth. But I cannot look away from that ridiculous length of fur-lined cloth, sewn by a shoddy hand into the back of his trousers so it sways with every quicksilver step.

“She’ll be something special, this girl. Excellent with her stitching, or a damned good fighter. Blue-eyed, green? Hell, sometimes the sea is pure silver as it was three winters past!”

A roar of laughter breaks out over a story of the Wolf’s exploits I’ve yet to hear—the sort that used to set my heart to flying.

It sours my stomach instead. Aidan hasn’t shared a tale with me in seven years.

I start to turn toward the seanchaí again, but I cannot stop watching that pitiful tail. The Wolf of the Wild is a creature belonging to my brothers’ stories and my own dreams—ones where sirens can be seduced and shipwrecks survived by cunning and skill. He’s a pirate. A myth.