The Battle for Life

Awakening the Warriors
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Awakening the Warriors

Lucas Ryan

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Dedications

I fought cancer and won; enduring a battle fraught with pain, and what in some moments felt like physical and emotional torture; but I fought, and I won.

This book is dedicated to my father, Mihai, who often donated his blood for me, slept next to me many nights in the hospital for two and a half years. Without you, I never would have been able to complete this book. Your insight and unique perception helped me throughout, but most of all you taught me how to be a warrior, to trust myself, and to honor everyone I meet.

To my mother, you are everything I am, and all I am yet to become in this world. You are my angel.

To my sister, Nicole, thank you for showing me the beauty of unconditional love.

To my grandparents, who have filled my world with joy and meaning, and were right by my side during my battle with cancer.

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To Jenieve Fisher, thank you for editing my book and doing such a fantastic job on it.

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The day that changed the course of my entire life and nothing would ever be the same.

February 4th, 2013; my mother picked me up from school. It was a typical day for my friends and I; we were playing basketball as we always did after lunch, pretending we were big shot NBA players. It was about 1:00. I heard the office calling my name over the intercom, so I got up, packed my bag to leave, as my mom walked into my classroom. I was astonished to see her there; I didn't know why I was going home early, but I intuitively knew something was seriously wrong. I overheard her asking my teacher if she thought I had been acting weird in any way. My teacher asked what was wrong, and said I had been acting normal as always. My mom was panicking. As I walked out of my classroom, I started to get really worried and panicked, myself. I asked several times if everything was okay. Once we were inside the car she looked at me and asked if I was feeling fine. I tried to calm her down. I kept on telling her I had a fantastic day, and I got my math grade back and had another “A”! She took a deep breath and said, “I want you to get checked out by a doctor.” My mom had never done this before; she was never one of those paranoid moms. I agreed to go with her to the ER. As we walked in, she said, “Don’t listen to anything I say. It’s not okay to tell a lie, but if I tell them we are here because I “think” something is really wrong, they will never see you. All I said was, “I’ll be here reading my book; say whatever you want.”

I’ve always been a reader. I love reading more than anything in the world. I was lost in my book, so it didn’t seem long before my name was called. I went back to a room where they took my vitals, then transferred me into one of the patient rooms. I was seriously
hoping I wouldn’t get a needle! IV’s are horrible, and besides that, I was feeling fine! Everyone moved along pretty fast. I had a heart ultrasound, chest x-ray, and finally I had a CT scan. Of course, I ended up getting a needle too, but by that time I was just ready to go home. It was late in the evening when the doctor walked in, and said to my mom, “Okay, so, what your son has, we can treat with chemo.” I was thinking, “CHEMO? What is CHEMO? ...And, can I get some food now?” I was starving, and I wanted pretty badly to go home.

It all happened quickly. I didn’t go home that day; instead, I went directly to the ICU, and before I knew it, I was going into surgery. My mom was crying in a corner hysterically, assuming I couldn’t see her. My dad was trying to console her. My grandparents were with us, too. Everyone was making a pretty big deal out of whatever this was. When I got out of surgery, I felt as if a bus had hit me or how I imagine being hit by a bus would feel like. I had tubes coming out of every possible part of me, and everything hurt. Everything! Even with tons of medications on board.

I was finally transferred into the Oncology Wing of the hospital. I was about done with hospitals, doctors, and all the pain at that point. At eight years old, this was by far the worst experience I ever had, but it was about to get much worse. One of my doctors came in to explain how my life would be “a new normal”. All I kept thinking was, “I don’t want a new normal; I’m fine with my current normal. After all, I had just turned eight, and my current normal was great! I had a beautiful life, full of innocence and everything childhood should be. Until this point, my biggest problems were getting up for school! I had been struggling with being a bit more tired than normal, which is what triggered my mother’s concern, and her reason for thinking something was wrong.

The way I found out I had cancer was by mistake. One of my nurses walked in and said, “I’m so sorry you have cancer.” I thought my mother was going to strangle her! My mom had a plan that she would slowly break things down for me, so I could understand what was happening, and not be afraid. At first, I wasn’t too worried, be-
I wrote this book to inspire. To inspire not just children but anyone going through any diagnosis. Cancer doesn’t care about age, ethnicity, if you’re rich or poor, if you’re ready or not; cancer just happens at random, and happens way too often, to good people. We need to find a way to cure cancer. I watched as some of my friends lost their battle. I will live with those memories for the rest of my life. The fear cancer leaves in its wake never goes away. Together we can change this together we can kill cancer. No parent should have to watch, as their child fights the battle of their life, and no child should have to lose the battle.

DIRECTORY OF
CHARACTERS & LOCATIONS

Alburn — The star
Argam — Fortress village
Armizeg — The warrior, king of Getaes people, cousin of Kothar, great- grandson of Dorbald
Barkon — The dragon, the ex-wizard of the South, now known as Karken
Borysth — The captain of the guards
Cythun — Falconer and warrior
Derron — The Master Wizard
Dolong — The wizard
Donnar — River in the Getaes land
Dorbald — Ancestor of Armizeg, a king from Getaes
Dytes — Bowman escort
Elidoc — The boy
Folmart — The falconer
Getaes — Land across the sea
Hydal — King
Karken — The dragon, formerly known as Barkon
Kolnet — The cook
Kothar — The regent, cousin of Armizeg
Larsa — Housekeeper for Derron, the Master Wizard
Loend — Village in Maedyv’s land
Ludorn — Stone statue of the warrior
Maedyv — The wizard of the East
Metaur — Metal alloy of gold and meteorite
Maryia — Mother’s name
Nather — Mother’s male name
Nysgar — A spy from Loend, reports to Maedyv
Obert — The old man’s dog
Partogos — King of the western lands across
from the Bended River
Sargem — Elidoc’s village
Strebo — A village neighboring the Argam village
Taiss — Landlord near the lands of Zurob
Troko — Karken’s lieutenant of spies
Tykas — A spy from Loend, reports to Maedyv
Wigros — The wizard of the West
Wolbah — The wizard of the Getaes people
Zurob — Master of stronghold

The Battle for Life
Awakening the Warriors
A lone...at a table made of uncarved wood, resting his head on his left hand, sat the old Wizard, contemplating scrolls written in a long forgotten language, the light from his only candle was playing on the wooden walls like it wanted to fight the unforgivable winter storm raging outside. In his mind he was passing from one world to another, as he has done for centuries. Here, in the Land of Man, he keeps watch over the Dark Evil that has been trying for such a long time to bring all living beings under his heavy spells of grief and desolation. In their minds, he is nothing but an old myth. The truth has been long forgotten by the Man’s kin, as his life is short in the eyes of the immortals. The fear of the unknown made them begrudge the Wizard’s knowledge and his unexplained long life.

Knock! Knock! Knock! The Wizard startled. Was he dreaming, or was his mind playing tricks? The chilly winter winds were howling, blocking all the outside noises. He got up from the chair and lit another candle. Knock! Knock! Knock! He heard it again. He wasn’t imagining it. Someone was outside. He got up slowly and opened the door. What living thing could possibly be outside in this kind of weather? A woman with tears frozen on her cheeks was holding a young boy with a livid face and eyes lost in the darkness.
“Help me! Help me! My child is ailing. I’m afraid that he is passing into the World of Shadows. I don’t know how this could happen. He was sleeping peacefully, when suddenly I heard this strange noise coming from his room and from outside; when I found him he was laying on his bed and could not move, his skin was paling in front of my eyes, then the light from his eyes started fading. Oh, Wizard! Please tell me! What is happening to my son?”

The Wizard touched the little boy’s head, whispering words the mother could not understand, and then quickly retreated his trembling hand, murmuring,

“Bring him quickly! Inside! What day is it?”

Instantly he remembered; it is the last day of the century. It is the day when the Dark Evil takes his tribute from our lands. Today is the day when his servant, Karken, the Shadow Dragon, takes children into his realm.

“It’s Karken’s witchcraft.”

The dragon had chosen this child to serve him in his realm of shadow. He was poisoned from within his body. If you had delayed any longer, your entire struggle in this unleashed winter storm would have been in vain; no one would be able to help your son.

The mother laid the child down on a bed of woven twigs while the wizard searched through the dusty shelves cluttered with old books, and bottles with colored potions. He took the child’s hand made a small slit with his knife, the child’s blood quickly changed from crimson to black. The Wizard began reading to the child out of a book with tattered leather covers, written in a strange and unknown language; words only a Wizard understood. Periodically, the Wizard poured small drops of potion onto the child’s lips. The mother sat in a corner, holding her knees to her chest, watching the fire in the grand stone fireplace, distraught by the unknown.

Countless hours passed. Fraught with despair, the mother dared to ask, “Who is this Karken of which you speak; the dragon sorcerer? I remember when I was a child, my grandmother told me stories about a dragon, who would come during the night to steal children’s souls.”

“Karken is an evil from the bygone age. In the last day of each century the dragon rides through villages and chooses children so they can serve him in his realm of shadows and desolation. Now that he lost one child and cannot take another, he will be searching for your child as long as the poison is in his body, and his spells are upon him.”

Many more hours passed, and the Wizard was still whispering those unknown words from the old book. Suddenly the wizard turns to the mother,

“I was able to stop the poison from spreading throughout the child’s body, but his heart and lungs were already touched. This is beyond my powers. The evil that was seed inside him is hidden from my sight, and won’t show itself easily. We must head to the Master Wizard of the North, he will know what to do, but we need to hurry, because for every hour that passes the evil grows in strength. Find food to prepare for a seven-day journey. Don’t be afraid of the roaches; they are my guardians. I will get the horses saddled. We have a long and harsh road ahead of us, and the wind isn’t going to do anything but slow us down.”

“Who is the one you call Master Wizard? Is he a wizard like you?”

“The Master Wizard is nothing like me. He’s the leader of our Order. There are three more wizards like him but he is the most powerful among us. To become a Great Wizard you have to be chosen by the light of the Alburn Star; the star that keeps watch over our world since the beginning of time; fighting to keep the Dark Evil in his cage.”

After saying these words, the Wizard pulled on his old cloak, and went outside, closing the door behind him. All that was heard was the long, gnarling creek of the door. The mother, still trembling, laid close to the child, taking his weak hand into hers, and began to cry. She asked herself, “Why has Karken the dragon chosen her beautiful son? Could she have saved him from this curse if she had stayed with him?”

The child slowly opens his eyes, and mumbles, “Where am I?
His wings all over me... It’s so cold... red eyes glows in smoke... a shadow is coming through my window. It feels like I’m falling into a deep dark hole... there is no end... I feel dizzy... It is the mist? Where am I...” Then with a long sigh he falls back into a deep sleep.

The crying mother tightens his hand, hoping the Wizard is right, and once they get to the Master Wizard, his great wisdom and power will undo this dreadful spell.

The mother and the boy fell asleep in each other’s arms, close to the fire. Only the Wizard started gazing at the stars and mountains beneath the moon. He is desperate to save this child, for he could be the first one to survive the dragon’s witchcraft.

What he didn’t realize is the fact that he just woke up dark forces that are way beyond his powers and knowledge. Outside, the howling wind is moving the snow in a circular motion around ruins of the towers and walls of the once grand fortress.

Days and nights had passed. They only stopped to eat, and water the horses. Soon they begin to tire, and decided to rest for the night.

“A few hours from here, Northward, there’s a ruined fortress,” said the Wizard. “We will stop and rest there.”

He clutched the boy closer to his chest and kept on riding through the mad storm. They were moving slowly, covering their mouths to avoid breathing the frozen air. The ruined fortress was perched on a steep mountain cliff, with narrow stairs, unfit for a horse. After sheltering their horses beneath a cliff, from the wild winter wind, they began their climb up the narrow stone steps. The Wizard pushed forward on the old, broken doors, and entered what once was the guard’s room.

“Let’s make a fire and eat something. We need to feed and water the horses in order to regain strength for tomorrow,” said the Wizard, bringing the boy close to the mother. He made a fire. The winter didn’t feel so harsh from inside. The wizard brought an old, broken cauldron filled with snow, to melt for water.

The boy, eyes closed, started mumbling again. “Where am I? I want to go home. I am scared. I don’t want to be alone. Mother? Where is my mother?”

“Do not be afraid, child, you are not alone. Your mother is here; she’s holding you in her arms. We have left home and now the three of us have a task to accomplish. A long and perilous way lies before us. Now sleep in peace, child, I will take the night watch.”

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“We must awake!” exclaimed the Wizard; getting up and preparing for the treacherous journey ahead. The white skin of the boy is covered in a cold sweat. His mother lovingly wiped his face with her sleeve. They start riding, as the growing cold of winter is again showing its cruelty. Their home is now far behind them as they have crossed the mountains, the ridged hills and valleys where there is no sign of beast nor man. No one from their village has ever adventured so far into the wild.

An unknown world lies in front of the mother’s eyes, a world she’s afraid of; beyond her knowledge or understanding, but she has no choice but go forward. The child’s life depends on it, and the mother’s love is stronger than her fear of the unknown.

“How far are we from home?” asks the mother

“I am not sure, but I think a few hundred leagues are behind us,” answers the Wizard.

“How far is the realm of the Master Wizard?” she asks.

“How far it is, no one knows; no one can measure distance in these bewildering forests where even time seems to stop. For us wizards, the distances and time are meaningless.”

Hearing all these words causes the mother to tighten her grip on the horse bridle.

“Soon we will pass on a hidden path, leading us deep through the heart of the mountain. Once we enter, do not look back. You will see things, and hear sounds that will terrify your soul, and isolate you from your mind. They are too powerful for a human soul to sense. Better close your eyes and trust your horse, think of all the good moments in your life. We have to tether our horses together, so you will not lose your way.”

As they ride, the trees upon them bind their crowns together into an underpass, slowly engulfing the sunlight. It feels like the trees may fall onto them, and take them as hostages. With a limited view, it seems as if they have nowhere to go but forward; deep into the darkness of the forest. The entrance into the mountain suddenly appeared before them. A deep cavern opens like the wide-open mouth of a dark, hungry beast, ready to swallow anything that dare cross its path.

The mother closed her eyes, laying her head on the horse’s arched crest, tightening even harder onto the bridles in her weary hands. They entered into the mountain, guided only by the wizard’s magic. The mother wondered how he could possibly see the path in such deep darkness. She assumed his senses were guiding them. Strange noises surrounding them seemed as if they had entered into another world. The air became heavy, and the dense smell of wet dirt and decomposing leaves was inescapable. The wet air moved around the mother’s face like gigantic wings, pushing forcefully into the dark cave, where screeching bats flew chaotically, feeding on insects. Their frightening scratches made by gigantic claws echo from the stonewalls. The mother breathes slowly, for fear her breath will be sensed, and increase the chaos.

“We are almost out of here, just be still,” says the Wizard.

The woman felt how the air was changing; becoming fresh enough to inhale easily. A strange heat traveled over her cheeks; she slowly opened her eyes. Suddenly, and surreally, the landscape changed. It seemed that even the grass was a deeper green; a green that enlivens the senses to the point the color can not only be seen but inhaled. The mother no longer senses the cold, and doesn’t even realize winter is gone for another year. In this land on the other side of the mountain there’s no winter. “Is this real? Maybe I’m dreaming.” As they ride through the meadows, and over the hills, they cross the bold mountains recently covered with snow. Seasons are changing in a strange and rapid manner; the mother wonders why.

“Where are we now? We are not home?” asks the child. “I want to go home, Mother! Please, can we go home?” “I’m sorry, my child, unfortunately, you’re very ill and we must take you to the Master Wizard. Your life is in danger. Don’t worry; all will be fine once we reach him.” “Why is my life in danger? Why are you sad, Mother?” The Wizard interrupted, “You and other children of your age were chosen by Karken, the dragon sorcerer to serve him in his realm.
Your mother brought you to me as you started to become a shadow. I tried to stop the poison from spreading all over your body, but all I could do is to slow it down. The dragon's witchcraft is too powerful for a wizard like me. To save you, we need the power and wisdom of the Great Wizard.” “But...but, I thought it was just a bad dream,” says the boy. “I’m sorry my child, it wasn’t just a bad dream, I wish it was. We have entered into the realm of the Master Wizard, and here the weather is obeying his will, like all living things that move around us,” he says, looking into the child’s mesmerized eyes. The Master Wizard knows already that we are coming. See those falcons above us in the sky? They are the watchers of these lands, and the eyes of the Master Wizard.”

Unending plains stretching as far as the eye can see, with rivers winding throughout, green fields with people harvesting crops, working their land, meadows where the horses run free with their foals, orchards aplenty, a village full of joy; children running and playing in blissful peace.

“The Argam Village,” says the wizard, looking toward the mother. “Many people call it the Fortress Village, because it’s so close to the White Fortress.”

The path leads them onto a wooded hill where village houses can be seen in the distance. They were built with heavy logs and rounded river stones, with have brown shingled roofs and smoking chimneys. The houses were grand, and well maintained; no domestic beasts were on the streets; nothing like the place these three travelers came from. Clean streets paved with square, gray stones; big trees, well trimmed, shading houses, and perfect, green grass surrounding every house and tree. As they pass through on the street, townsfolk begin appearing from nowhere, watching them with eyes of wonder. Some of them smiling at the newcomers; others speaking discreetly.

They passed on a bridge where a strong river flows beneath. Swirling water and seething foam flows between gigantic boulders; seemingly struggling to cut a path straight through. From the top of
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"Open the gates!" shouts the Herald. "The Master Wizard’s guests are here!"

The massive gate moved slowly, with a loud clang of metal. A top the embattled walls, the soldiers armed with bows were watching with wandering eyes, as the newcomers entered.

"The Master Wizard is awaiting you in the Great Hall; follow me. You can easily get lost here.," says the Herald. "The fortress streets are built like a maze to make it easier to defend against the outside enemies. The streets are narrow with tall buildings on each side, in order to ambush invaders, and defend the fortress."

"Enemies? How can you have enemies in such a peaceful land?" asks the mother. "Well, there is always someone or something that does not like peace, who wants to rule over all lands, realms, and living things, one who desires to be the only Master. We have to be ready to fight, to prevent evil thriving in our lands."

They rode on the paved streets of the fortress, higher and higher to reach the fantastical structure they had seen from the distance. As they climbed higher along the streets they could clearly see the land they had passed. From the fortress heights the trail looked so thin; the fields appeared now as green and brown patches. The townsfolk on the fields so small, they seemed unreal. Far in the distance, mountain peaks could be seen with snow sparkled like beacons in the sunlight.

"Here it is! The Great Hall of the White Fortress, with its tall and twisted marble columns and arched doors, fit for a giant." The doors were made of wood and polished metal. From the top of the tall stairs one can see all that encompasses the great realm of the Master Wizard; the splendor of the meadows and forests surrounded by tall mountain peaks, where the snow never melts, and only eagles dare pass over.

"What trouble brings you here, Dolong, Wizard of the Man’s land?" asks the Master Wizard, with a voice sounding like summer thunder.

He was dressed in white clothes embossed with golden embroidery, his long white hair flowing like rivers atop his shoulders. In his right hand, a staff on which ancient symbols and runes are carved. The top crested with a large, clear stone, seeming to grow from within the grand staff.

"My Lord, I bring you a child from the village of Sargem, chosen by an old enemy of ours, Karken, the dragon sorcerer. His mother brought him to me just in time to stop the poison from spreading, but the witchcraft which lies upon him is too strong for my powers. I come here to seek your wisdom, and your power to undo this heavy spell."

The great Wizard looked at the boy with discerning eyes. He never saw nor heard of any child escaping the dark powers of Karken. He takes the child’s hand and whispers in his ear. His face fraught with concern.

"Take him to the Healing Room!" he orders the guards. "...and do it quickly! We have already lost precious time."

They entered the Great Hall, which looked even mightier from within. The tall, stained windows made the majestic walls look like they were made of glass. They represent old battles scenes, battles long forgotten by Man’s kin. The light passing through the tall, colorful glass windows made the battles seem like they were written with light. The majestic marble columns of the Great Hall were sustaining the immense, vaulted ceilings of stones that seemed to reach celestial heights. On the sides of the long hall were great statues of kings and warriors who fought and protected the land and its inhabitants for thousands of years. Their faces mysteriously powerful eyes, that seemed to pierce the soul. Each of them was holding their chosen weapon: long double-edged swords of many sizes and shapes, with blades covered in symbols; swords with unusually long grips and curved blades, which were straight for much of its length, but curved at the end, sharp only at the concave underside; axes made not for cutting wood but to fight battles; battle maces of strange shapes, some of them with spikes; double ball spiked flails; bows; double ended spears; enormous shields with strange shapes, carrying the blazons of their kingdoms and their kings. On the pedestal
sapphire, surrounded by transparent colored crystals, and covered
with a canvas, embroidered with golden runes and strange symbols.
“Lay the child in the middle of the table!” shouts the Master
Wizard to the guards carrying the child. “Now, leave me alone with
the child, I am commanding you to leave this room. No matter what
you hear, do not enter; your strength will wither and your mind will
see things beyond your understanding.” They leave the Healing
Room and walk away from the door.

“Let’s go outside,” says the wizard, “we both need some sun and
fresh air. Do not worry; your child is in good hands. Karken the
dragon does not have power here. Great spells are guarding these
borders so only those allowed by the Master Wizard can enter his
realm. Let’s free our minds from dark thoughts, and hope the power
and the knowledge of the Master Wizard will heal your child and
undo the witchcraft of the old and evil fueled dragon.”

“This land is so peaceful, and there’s no winter here. The people
are so happy. Why is not like this in the Man’s land?” asks the mother.
As the Wizard draws a breath, he looks toward her, and then
turning his sight to the green plains below the fortress walls, and an-
swers, “The Land of Man was not always as you know it. A dark,
cold place, filled with sorrow, where evil and fear ruled over its peo-
ple. It was the same land as this one.”

“But, what happened? Why is it like this now?”
“A few thousands years ago the world was protected by four wiz-
dards. They had once been kings, ruling over their own land. They
were chosen among many other kings, by the light of a star that we
called Alburn. That light gave them the chance to protect this world
from the dark evil to come. But it came with a price. They had to
give up their thrones, their wealth, and their kingdoms; even their
names, in order to become the protectors of this world. That light
gave them knowledge, magical powers, and undying life, so no living
thing, beast, or man could kill them. Centuries passed in peace, and
no trouble disturbed the world until one day a nameless evil came; a
dark evil beyond time, far from the darkest corners of the unseen
bow crystal droplets. Small streams were slowly flowing into the garden with bridges made of woven twigs, covered in stone. The streams were flowing around trees with trunks that seemed to be made out of bronze and copper with colorful leaves where birds played, and nightingales sang effortlessly.

“Let us have a seat; we had a long and arduous journey. We are not yet done for today,” says the Wizard.

“I am terrified, and have so many questions. I cannot even feel the exhaustion overtaking my body,” the mother tells him.

“I understand. Too many things have happened in these past few days; events beyond your understanding.”

“Yes, I have begun to feel this is all just a bad dream; we are still within the safety of our home, sleeping in peace. All of this seems unreal to me. Perhaps my mind has made up things that are not real, because I had always feared something bad would happen to my child,” said the mother, as guilt enveloped her.

“I wish all these were only the fruit of your imagination, but they are not. This world is much bigger than you can imagine, with plenty of dark places, kingdoms and creatures you have never heard nor seen. None you ever even imagined. Do not let your hope die; we will walk through this together. I will never leave your side,” as he comforts her by placing the mother’s hands gently inside his.

As they enter the Fortress City garden, they see trees that have grown in such a fashion to form benches and garden tables, pools plentiful with water lilies, geese playing with their goslings, columns of all shapes and sizes made of rosebuds and yellow flowers bound together to form arches and canopies, bees, rainbows, and butterflies playing among intricate and alluring flowers. Green marble water fountains with water springing up, forming a refreshing rain of rain-
The Master Wizard uncovers the pale child’s chest, letting the light beam from the ceiling warm his weakening body. He walks to a wall lined with bookshelves carved into ancient, cold stone, and looks through countless century-old books.

After a long while, in the far corner of the shelves, he finds what he is looking for; an ancient book written in the times when the light of the Alburn star came to instill its magic, teaching how to fight the Dark Evil that may one day come. With a satisfied smile, he carefully takes the book into his strong hands, and turns over the pages, reading each word written in glowing blue letters. He approaches the child, closes his eyes, and utters the book’s magical words.

The child murmurs; his lips a pale blue, eyes gentle closed and starting to move back and forth, as if he was dreaming. His body moves as the Master Wizard places his hand on the child’s chest.

“This spell is more powerful than first thought. I may need more than spells to undo this evil. This poor child.”

He opened a wooden box lying underneath the table, taking a big blue crystal with precisely chiseled shapes and angles. He approached the light beam, placing the crystal between the light and the child’s body. A rainbow light, stronger than the beam itself, appears from the crystal, forming an elongated shape on the child chest.

The Master Wizard whispered spells from the old book of the Alburn star, waving the colorful light over the child’s chest. Black spots appear and disappear as the light moves away from them. He removes the crystal from the light beam and covers the child body with the black canvas from the table. He closes his eyes. His fears are validated. The power of Karken has grown in strength and he was not aware of it until this very moment.

All those children he had taken to his world of shadows centuries ago, have become soldiers ready to fight in his dark army, equipped with powerful spells. It Would be just a matter of time before the Dark Evil would unleash his wrath upon all kingdoms and lands. He must warn the others warn them fast. They must all assemble, in order to stop this work of evil, and save the child. If they could make this happen, all the people from all corners of the world would know how to protect their children from Karken, and his dark spells. All the havoc Karken brought to this world over centuries could end at once. He needs the other three wizards to help him win this battle. And he needed them fast! He ran to the writing table and rapidly wrote on small pieces of paper, messages with coded words.

“Guards!” A soldier came from a hidden door, moving quickly toward the writing table. “Yes, my Lord,” says the soldier, slowly bowing his head. “Take these letters to the Falconer and tell him to send it with the strongest falcons he possesses! Do it fast, as our lives depend on it!” “Yes, my Lord,” says the soldier, as he sprints toward the same door he entered through. “Hang on, my child. You are our last hope to save all living beings from this world. The last chance to stop the evil from stealing our children’s souls and taking them into the darkness,” says the Master Wizard, lovingly placing his hand on the child’s forehead.

In the realm, the sun was setting quietly over the mountains, making the snow on the highest peak sparkle like diamonds. Little
past days have been harsh on them. After such a long journey they must be quite tired.” As he turns to walk away, he pauses, “Oh! I almost forgot; you have clothing in your rooms, I hope they fit you well. If you need anything, just ask Larsa. She’s my housekeeper and a person you can trust. Everything you need is available to you. Do not hesitate to ask. Larsa, would you please care for our guests?” “Yes, my Lord. Follow me, my Lady; do not bother to take off your shoes, I will handle that later,” Larsa says softly, walking toward the stairs.

“Thank you, Master Wizard, for your kindness and hospitality,” offers the Mother, climbing the stairs, followed closely by the child’s mother. “You are more than welcome. In times such as these, we all should help one another. We gather our strength together, as we cannot fight such an evil alone.”

Slowly, the mother descends the winding staircase, to the first floor of the Master Wizard’s quarters. His house was not ornately decorated like the others; it was a simple, with a polished, white stone floor, covered with hand woven carpets. Supported by three rusty chains, was an old, wooden chandelier. It hung from the ceiling with white consumed candles. The chandelier’s arms were engulfed in candle wax. They seemed to be frozen in ice. The walls looked like they were carved in stone, and from place to place paintings were hanging in erratic patterns. It looked more like soldier’s quarters; not the house of the Master of the Fortress.

She started walking down the long hall, turning her eyes to the paintings on the walls. On them were depicted long gone kings and lords, landscapes that reminisced of other lands or realms, magnificent beasts in their forests, giant elk with antlers like chandeliers calling their herds, and mysterious, leafless trees with broken branches. “Strange paintings cover the walls of this house,” the mother thinks to herself. “I was looking for you, my Lady,” says Larsa. “They are waiting in the dining room. Please, my Lady, follow me.”

She follows Larsa through the long and narrow hall as they entered into the dining room. The dining room was simple like the other rooms of the house. In the middle was an unusually long table
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With hand carved, dark wood chairs. Atop the table were three massive, five-arm pedestal candleholders made of brass. Sitting at the far end of the table, the Master Wizard, and Dolong, the wizard from the Man’s Land, whisper to one other. They stop as the mother stepped into the room.

“Please, take a seat,” says the Master Wizard, rising from his chair. “I hope you found everything you needed.”

“Yes, I found all I needed, but when may I see my son?” asks the mother.

“Do not worry; if it makes you feel better, I assure you he is well protected; my guards are watching over him. In order for my medicine to work, he needs to rest and let time heal him. You may see him in the morning, but he will still be sleeping, and we cannot wake him.”

“Will he survive? Do you think the witchcraft is still upon him?”

“That is why I have called you here. The fact you brought him here, to my realm, has saved his life and his soul. If you had not done so, the spies of Karken would have searched endlessly for the child. As long as the spell is upon him and the poison is still into his body, they can sense it, and track him. It will be only a matter of time until they find the boy and take him into the Realm of Shadows, where Karken will make him a servant. The borders of this realm are guarded by heavy spells, and my falcons are watching them relentlessly so no one enters unseen. Karken cannot cross them; the spells are meant to keep the evil away.”

“Now you have undone the spell, and have taken the poison out of his body, haven’t you, Master Wizard?”

“Unfortunately no,” answers the Master Wizard.

“But why aren’t you? Why can’t you?”

“The witchcraft that lies upon your child is something I have never seen before. He is the only child, as far as I know to be stolen, from the Karkens’ hand. He will not allow it. If we have this child, we can undo his witchcraft, and in the future we can protect other children from his spells and poison. By doing this, he cannot build his army anymore, he cannot fight against us anymore, and his days in this world may be numbered.”

“What army? I thought he was just a shadow, and if my son cannot survive this he will be a shadow too. He will leave the world of living before his time, like the other children taken by Karken.”

“You see, in the world of living, when the soul leaves the body, they think it’s the end of it all, but they do not know it’s only the beginning. The whole world is not made the same, and not all beings see it the way you do; the people from the Man’s Land. Karken stole their children souls, and until they get older he trains them to become soldiers of the Dark Evil. He teaches them how to fight against us; they learn how to build their own weapons and how to survive our spells, in case they are caught out of their shadow realm, the realm where the magic of the Dark Evil protects them.”

“Dolong, the wizard, told me about Karken, and about how you and the others were chosen to be the wizards who protect this world. But how did the evil succeeded and made Karken his servant? He is not meant to have a strong and trustworthy soul like the others.”

“With kindness and wisdom you can change almost anything in this world, but you cannot change the human nature, and that was precisely what the Dark Evil was searching for; the weakness of the human’s soul, and the greediness that lies within.”

“Indeed, there are many things in this world not many people understand; even when they do, they cannot accept them,” said the mother. “Before this happened, I could not have imagined realms like this could exist. I feel as if all my life I have lived in the blindness of a deceiving mist.”

“It’s unfortunate you have to discover all this at the sacrifice of your son. There are realms and lands that are way beyond your imagination, some of them are like paradise and some are like a nightmare, but you should be assured, knowing this entire world is an eternal battlefield against the evil forces who want to take over this world, man and creature alike, bringing them into the darkness and
The child was lying on a black, embroidered canvas, draped over the cold table inside the Healing Room, surrounded by glowing crystals. The crystals began glowing stronger and stronger as the light beam faded with the setting of the sun. The guards were changing every few hours at the entrance of the Healing Room. They began to light the lamps around the walls of the hall, as night took the place of day. Stars began making their grand appearance, one by one, on the ceiling where once the beam of light came through, as if they were assembling after a long time apart. They seemed to dance in the darkness, lighting the sky with twinkles of joyful splendor, at the opportunity to meet once again.

The child’s body was bathed in a rainbow of colors, from the crystals surrounding the sapphire table. Around the shrine where the table sat, five more soldiers gathered with their long spears and shields; posting them in defense position, ready for a battle against the evil that may come at anytime.

The orders of the Master Wizard were clear; no one except him should approach the child. In the heavy silence of the room the child moaned, writhing in pain, as he lies restless on the table. Strange noises began to emerge from his dry mouth. The soldiers searched