

The
BATTLE FOR LIFE

AWAKENING THE WARRIORS

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« LUCAS RYAN »

OTTO
Publishing

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OTTO Publishing

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Cover production artist by David Moratto

Interior design by David Moratto

First edition,

Printed in Canada.

LCCN: 20169322578

ISBN: 978-0-692-81429-1

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.v*

*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.*

*To Sharon Moses-Solano, you are magical, thank you
for making my dreams come true. I'm forever grateful
for everything you've done for me.*

*To Dr. Iftikhar Hanif, Dr. Brian Cauff, Dr. Carmen Ballestas,
Dr. Deborah Kramer, and Dr. Anne Schaefer, you made it possible for
me to write this book. I am forever grateful to you for saving my life.*

To Michael Jordan, meeting you was one of the greatest experiences of my life, you will always be my king.

*To Don Yaeger, you inspired me in every way.
Thank you.*

To Gabriel Tora, you are an artist with talent beyond measure. Thank you for showing the world in my imagination.

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

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INTRODUCTION



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-

cause I had no clue what cancer was. I thought cancer was something old people get. My mother's eyes were HUGE with anger. She asked the nurse to leave the room. Figuring out she had just done something wrong; she left straight away. My mother quickly took a seat next to me and said, "Lucas, it's true; you do have cancer, but you don't have to worry. We got this! We are going to kick cancer's butt! Cancer just messed with the wrong kid!" She then grabbed a pillow and again cried hysterically. I then knew I was in trouble.

As chemo treatments progressed, I was responding amazingly, and was able to quickly go home. Although I still had to go to the hospital for chemo every other day, I was able to sleep at home. That made all the difference in the world! There were times when I was so sick, I had to stay in the hospital overnight, but I tried my hardest not to look sick; I did not want to sleep there.

The first year out of the three years of chemotherapy was the worst; I had chemo every other day. I lost all my hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes included. I think that was the worst part. I didn't want to go anywhere. I didn't want anyone to see me. I felt as if people looked at me strangely, and often with pity. Chemo is like sitting in front of a bus that just keeps on running you over, over and over again. I was determined though, and I knew I was going to be okay. I wasn't alone; there were so many other kids there, in a similar situation. When I started working on this book. I was thinking I wanted to make the whole world aware that pediatric cancer isn't rare, that it is just horrible, and no child should ever experience cancer. Cancer stole my childhood, my innocence; now I'm a 25 year old trapped in the body of a 10 year old. I wish I never had to endure all the physical and emotional pains, watching myself deteriorate, and to know everyone I love suffered alongside of me. Cancer affects the whole family; not just the patient. Although I was extremely lucky I caught it in time, it still terrifies me that I was so sick, yet had no symptoms. I had a huge tumor pressing on my heart, lungs, and liver. I had fluid in one lung, and had to have a tube drain it out. I had just finished playing basketball!

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*

Wi rgos — *The wizard of the West*

Wolbah — *The wizard of the Getaes people*

Zurob — *Master of stronghold*



The
BATTLE FOR LIFE

AWAKENING THE WARRIORS

A LONG FORGOTTEN EVIL



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.

Slowly, with a staggering gait, she enters into the Wizard's kitchen and starts looking through the pots that are as old as the books on the shelves. She wondered if he ever ate. Finding a bag, she begins filling it with old sausages and molded bread. She is moving slowly, as all of her strength has abandoned her.

Finally, the Wizard arrives through the creaking door with a beard laden with ice and snow. He shakes the snow off his legs, and states adamantly,

"It's time to go now! Climb up on the fetched horse; he's a gentle one, but very strong. He will take you without worry. I will take the boy; he is safer, close to me. Do not worry if you cannot see the road; your horse is tethered to mine and will follow my lead. This winter storm is looking to steal those who lose their way.

The Wizard takes the boy outside, wrapped in a shabby old cloak. The woman takes the bag with food for their journey.

The winter is showing all its madness, unleashing its fury from the cold and cruel northern wind, shattering the snow like a spell meant to impeach them from leaving the Man's land. Even the light of the sunrise seemed to be held into darkness' claws. The wind was so strong, it took their breath away. They crossed frozen rivers, winding through ancient forests. The landscape was beautifully Frightening. They were riding through dark forests where no man dares to enter, where even light seems to fear piercing the trees.

"We should be on our guard," says the Wizard. I feel that something or someone is moving unseen behind us, hiding in the shadows of the trees. "What it is; I do not know. It could be that Karken has sent his spies to find your child, and take him to their master. As

long as the spell is upon him, and the poison is in his body, they can trace him like a pack of wolves tracing their prey.”

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.”

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.

“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 heavy 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

the hill, outside of the village, they better see all the landscape, draped like a painted cloth over the sloping hills before them. On top of a mountain in the far distance, the white towers of a fortress surrounded by high vertical walls can be seen. Waterfalls flow underneath the four corners of its strong foundation. The buildings inside follow the contour of the mountain on which they were built. On top of what was once the peak of the mountain they could see a gigantic building, which seemed to sparkle in vibrant white. They started descending into a sleepy valley, bathing in the light of the morning sun. These lands seemed to be enchanted. Even the birds sing a tune of peace and joy.

In the horizon they saw riders coming their way; banners waving proudly in the wind.

“The Master Wizard sends heralds for us,” says the Wizard. “Do not be afraid, for now we are in good hands.”

The soldiers stopped ahead of them, turning their horses in place to take them way. They were robed in silver armor, laden with golden symbols. A falcon with wings wide open, ready to catch its prey, embroidered on their long capes. It’s the blazon of the Master Wizard. In their left hands, they hold long spears with banners. One of the soldiers approached, raising his right arm, covered with a silver glove.

“The Master Wizard welcomes you into his realm,” says the Herald. “You must be in great trouble to have come such a long and perilous way. I will not waste your precious time with useless words. Follow me.”

The Herald turned his horse and rode fast, closely followed by the wizard, the boy, and his mother. Behind them, the other riders were closing the column. The fortress on the mountain looked like it was reaching out and touching the clouds above. The group crossed a narrow packhorse bridge, and took a steep, winding path up and around the mountain, under the waterfalls, ending at the fortress gate. On the embattled walls, colorful banners with embroidered falcons and mystical symbols battered into the mild wind.