

The Legend of Damiano's Disk

Tales of Aria (Book #1)

By: Carl Russ, III

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TO:

“My sister, Lindsey Russ. For all of her support throughout the writing process. Also, to you, dear reader. For without you, I’m but a dreamer with a keyboard.”

–Carl Russ, III

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Introduction/About The Author

“Now for the obligatory page about me. My name is Carl Russ, III. I live in a small apartment in Bartow, Florida, where I spend most of my time writing and drinking way too much black coffee. I’m a bit of a nerd, and am especially fond of RPGs: those of the video game and table top variety. As you may notice, my work is heavily influenced by the genre. In fact, the ‘Tales of Aria’ series traces its origins to a scrapped RPG project of my own. However, to prevent from making this section of the book far too long, I’ll refrain from elaborating further.

“Oh look, a second paragraph. You’re still reading this? Oh, good. Anyhow, ‘Tales of Aria: The Legend of Damiano’s Disk’ is my first venture into writing. I’ll admit, I’m no professional. But that doesn’t mean I haven’t put a great deal of time, effort, and passion into this story. This is my world, and these are my characters. I hope you enjoy them as much as I have.”

–Carl Russ, III

Prologue

Lucas Bardsson awoke to the sound of scratching at his front door. He sprang out of bed and seized a small lantern resting on his night stand. Quickly grabbing a match out of the drawer, he lit the lantern and bolted out of his room. As he made his way toward the source of the disturbance, he collected a battered sword from the kitchen table.

He pressed his ear against the door. The sound of claws digging into wood was accompanied by a low growling.

“An imp,” he softly whispered, gently hanging the lantern nearby. He tightened his grip on the hilt of his weapon, slowly reaching toward the doorknob with his free hand.

“Go back to bed,” a voice behind him said. He glanced back to see his grandfather, Marvin. “Give me the sword, Lucas. I’ll take care of it.”

Lucas shook his head. “No, Grandpa. I told you, I don’t want you doing this anymore. Let me handle it.”

“Those beasts are dangerous, Lucas.”

“I know,” Lucas responded sternly as the scratching and growling grew increasingly furious. “That’s exactly why you need to let me handle this. Losing dad was hard enough.”

Reluctantly, Marvin took several steps back. Again, reaching for the doorknob, Lucas prepared himself. In one swift motion, he swung the door wide open and thrust his blade into the beast. It screamed in agony as it fell to the ground.

These visits from strange monsters had become a regular occurrence for the Bardsson household. Most often they were imps: short, aggressive hominoid creatures with sharp teeth and claws. For the first few months or so, Lucas found these

encounters frightening. But with time, it became a normal part of his life.

It had been two long years since the day these beasts first began appearing in his homeland of Aria. They arrived without warning, their origin unknown, quickly sweeping across the land, overtaking cities and wreaking havoc. In an attempt to quell the onslaught, King Ashraf sent massive armies of his finest warriors to combat the bizarre invaders. The brutal fighting lasted for several days, and despite the tremendous number of casualties, the monsters only continued to resurface.

Suddenly, when all seemed lost, a mysterious group emerged calling themselves the “Knowms.” They arrived in the royal city of Cymbeline dressed in dark-green cloaks. Promising safety for the cities of Aria, they asked only that the king fund their campaign. Quick to seize any advantage over the seemingly unstoppable foes, he agreed. With the full financial support of the royal crown, the Knowms were successful in keeping the cities of Aria clean.

Considering they were no longer needed within the cities, the king’s knights were assigned the responsibility of delivering mail and transporting goods throughout the land. The battle-hardened men were not pleased by the idea of being demoted to such mundane duty. Regardless, with the presence of the wild beasts, their experience in combat proved to be absolutely essential in completing these once simple tasks.

While King Ashraf had managed to gain control of the situation, the city limits became a type of gilded cage for many of the Arialites; most citizens were far too afraid of monster attacks to traverse the land between cities. Though the majority of Arialites outside of the urban areas had relocated to neighboring towns and cities, the Bardsson family remained in the small house in a vast field just west of Cymbeline. A bold move, but it came with a terrible price.

* * * *

Lucas awoke the next morning to the sound of his grandfather preparing breakfast. The aroma of boiling potatoes filled the house. “Smells good,” Lucas commented as he passed through the kitchen, making his way to a large iron pail resting on the countertop.

Marvin turned to his grandson. “If you get some milk while you’re in town today, I can make us porridge.” Lucas inspected the inside of the pail. It was nearly empty; almost no water remained. He picked it up and turned around to collect the sword from the kitchen table.

The water pump was in the backyard. Lucas’s eyes darted around the landscape as he closed the front door behind him and made his way around the side of the house. The field appeared to be peaceful, but he knew better than to let his guard down when he wasn’t in the safe confines of his home. Placing the pail under the spigot, he began pumping. As he did, his eyes wandered to a large oak tree in the distance. Every time he saw it, he was reminded of that day. Two decaying wooden crosses were planted in the dirt beneath its branches. *I need to replace those again... Mom, Dad... I miss you every day.*

His thoughts were abruptly interrupted by a loud buzzing sound coming from the woods behind him. He looked over his shoulder, continuing to pump as the noise grew louder. All too familiar with the sound, Lucas knew that he would have no choice but to run if its source were to emerge from the trees. Startled by a splash of cold water on his leg, the pail overflowing, he turned his attention back to his task.

Returning inside with the pail in tow, he placed the sword on the kitchen table and made his way into the washroom. Splashing some water on his messy, blond hair, he attempted to tame its wild appearance with a small comb. As a result of the restless nights, thick black rings were visible beneath his green eyes. Here he was, only eighteen years old, yet he had the worn face of an experienced adult. Using the water he had fetched, he cleaned himself up and got dressed.

Lucas entered the kitchen wearing a brown, long-sleeved shirt with dark-gray pants and a black belt. He seated himself at the table and put on his boots as his grandfather placed a plate of sliced potatoes in front of him. “Thanks,” Lucas said. He picked up one of the slices.

His grandfather sat down across from him and began to eat. “I wrote another poem yesterday. You’ll have to tell me what you think of it when you get home.”

Lucas nodded, “I’m sure it’ll be good.” Marvin smiled, a small piece of potato stuck to his thick gray beard. There was a short pause as the two ate. “About last night,” Lucas said, breaking the silence. “I want you to promise me you’ll let me handle all of the monsters from now on.”

“I’m a grown man,” his grandfather replied. “I don’t need protecting.” He ate another potato slice.

“It worries me when you go out there,” Lucas asserted.

Marvin glanced across the table at him. “Do you think I don’t get worried when you do the same?”

Lucas sighed. “Grandpa, you’re getting older. You’re a lot more vulnerable than you think you are.” Marvin did not reply to the remark. The two completed their meal in silence.

Lucas cleaned his plate and collected a sheath from his room. After securing it to his waist, he took the sword from the kitchen table and slid it inside. “I’ll try not to be too long, but I can’t make any promises,” he said as he opened the front door. “Hopefully the blacksmith isn’t too busy today. If any imps show up while I’m gone, don’t try to fight them. Just stay inside. The axe is by the washroom door, but I only want you to use it if it’s absolutely necessary.”

Marvin nodded. “Be careful.”

Chapter 1: The Strange Object

After making his way across the field to a large dirt road, Lucas headed east toward Cymbeline. He could still hear the buzzing sound resonating from the woods behind his house. Lightly placing his hand on his sword's hilt, he continued to walk down the trail. As Lucas neared the royal city of Cymbeline, he observed in the distance what appeared to be a group of imps in the road. Removing his sword from its sheath, he continued toward them, unabated. Something was off. Normally, imps would turn and attack him as he approached, yet they remained in place. It was then that he noticed they were gathered around something.

Suddenly, a shiver went down his spine and he was overcome with the feeling of fear. But this was not his own fear; it was the fear of death. *They're killing someone!* Moving his feet as fast as they would carry him, he bolted toward the assault he was witnessing. Once he was closer to the attack, he saw that there were four of them, clawing and scratching at a badly injured old man lying in the middle of the road. One of the imps looked up at Lucas and let out a dreadful shriek. Instantly, the other three ceased their attack and turned to see Lucas's fast-approaching body, sword in hand.

The group lunged at Lucas, viciously hissing and growling. He thrust his blade into the first imp, but the other three grabbed his limbs with their claws and teeth, biting and scratching at his legs, ripping the pant fabric and drawing blood. Lucas pulled his sword from the corpse and swiftly swung it at the attackers, managing to injure two of them. He kicked another off of his leg and took several steps backward. It growled and lunged toward him as the other two writhed in anguish. Thinking quickly, Lucas stuck his sword straight out in front of him, impaling the imp as it jumped. He scrambled toward the remaining two and ended their suffering.

Sheathing the blade, Lucas ran over to the old man lying in a massive pool of blood. He shuddered at the sight as his thoughts drifted to the conversation he had had with his grandfather before departing the house.

Kneeling down beside the old man, Lucas spoke. “Speak to me. What happened?”

The man slowly moved his lips. “My p-pocket... take it... t-to... Roshan.”

Lucas was confused. “Your pocket?”

“Y-yes! Look... inside. Take it... to Roshan. In Cymbeline... T-tell no one... you... h-have it. G-give it... to him... Aria is...” The man’s mouth swung wide open as his head limply fell to the side. The feeling of fear left Lucas.

Just then, he heard the sound of galloping hooves coming from the direction of Cymbeline. Looking up, he saw a small band of knights riding his way. Hastily reaching into the old man’s pocket, he found the object. It appeared to be a flat, golden semicircle, not much larger than his hand, containing several odd engravings that made no sense to him. *Take it to Roshan?* Still highly confused by the events that had just taken place, he swiftly put it in his pocket and rose to his feet.

The knights halted, inspecting Lucas and the surrounding cadavers. “What happened here?” the captain asked firmly.

“He was attacked by imps,” Lucas replied. “I tried to save him, but I wasn’t quick enough.”

The captain looked down at the old man, then back to Lucas. “I see. What are you doing outside of the city in the first place?”

“I don’t live in the city,” Lucas answered. “I was actually on my way there to run some errands.”

After a brief pause, the captain turned to one of his men. “Get those bodies out of the road,” he barked before turning back to

Lucas. “Go on! Nothing more to see here.” After taking one last look at the mysterious old man, Lucas continued his journey.

* * * *

Lucas stepped onto the cobblestone street that marked the Cymbeline city limit. The streets were bustling with people. Lucas felt a knot in his stomach as he was flooded with emotions. Joy, anger, sadness, fear... but confusion seemed to stand out the most. It was this very reason that he avoided the city when possible.

The Knowms stood on every street corner like statues. They wore dark-green cloaks, covering their heads and entire bodies. In the distance, he could see Regal Heights, a gated community for the upper class. The most notable resident was Lord Javan Quinn, King Ashraf’s trusted adviser. Lucas gazed at Quinn Manor, which dwarfed even the relatively large surrounding homes. *I can’t imagine what it must be like to live in a place like that. Servants, attending your every need. No monsters to worry about...*

Making his way through the crowd, Lucas gently placed his hand in his pocket. His fingers grazed the strange metallic object within. *What is this thing? Why can’t I show anyone?* He scanned the crowd. *Roshan... who’s Roshan?*

Lucas approached a vendor selling fruit. “Excuse me. Do you know of a man named Roshan?”

The vendor glanced at him and continued neatly preparing his display. “He runs a restaurant on the north side of town. It’s called Roshan’s Café. You can’t miss it.”

Lucas nodded, “Thanks,” and disappeared back into the crowd.

“You gonna buy something?” the vendor shouted.

Soon after arriving in northern Cymbeline, Lucas found a building with a brown roof and a sign that read “Roshan’s Café.” He opened the door and entered. There weren’t many people in the restaurant.

“Welcome to Roshan’s Café.” Lucas turned to see an older woman with curly brown hair. She smiled. “Table for one?”

Lucas reached into his pocket to make sure the strange object hadn’t fallen out. “Actually, I’m here to see Roshan.”

The woman looked puzzled. “Just one moment.” She disappeared through a door leading into the kitchen.

Lucas felt awkward standing alone near the doorway and sat down at a nearby table. Quietly observing the restaurant’s patrons, he noticed a man sitting by himself near the kitchen door. Lucas soon realized that the lone man was staring at his ripped pant leg, still stained with blood. Turning his head away from the stranger, Lucas sat and waited as the constantly shifting emotions of the city continued to churn inside him.

Moments later, an older man with a large gray moustache emerged through the kitchen door. He was wearing black pants and a thick brown coat, which was unbuttoned to reveal a red shirt covered in food stains. On his forehead, a red bandana was visible behind the bangs of his thinning gray hair. On his feet were two old brown shoes. He also seemed to be in good physical condition, despite his age. Lucas noticed that he was looking around the room. *That must be Roshan.*

Lucas got up to approach the man, but the nearer he got, the stronger a sense of distrust came over him. “Are you Roshan?” Lucas asked.

The man turned to him, startled, then quickly smiled. “Yes, I am. And who do I have the pleasure of speaking to?”

He extended his hand to Lucas, who took it and replied, “Lucas Bardsson. May I please speak to you in private?”

Roshan’s eyes widened. “Private? Why, whatever you have to say to me in private you can say to me out here. I am quite open to criticism. Did you get poor service? I do apologize.”

Lucas shook his head. “No, no it has nothing to do with the restaurant. I just...”

Roshan’s eyebrows raised as Lucas stumbled to find a way to complete the sentence. “You just?”

“I live just outside of town,” Lucas explained. “I was on my way here to visit the blacksmith when I saw an old man being attacked by imps. I fought them off of him and checked to see if he was okay,” Lucas paused. “Sadly, he didn’t make it. But in his dying breath, he asked that I bring you this.” He took the strange object out of his pocket and displayed it for Roshan to see.

Instantly, Lucas felt an intense surge of panic as Roshan snapped his head around the room. “Put that away!” Roshan whispered sharply. Lucas quickly pocketed the object. Roshan opened his mouth to speak, but stopped himself from talking as a man walked by. Lucas observed that it was the same man who had been eying his injuries moments before. He felt a chill as the man quickly left the restaurant.

“Follow me,” Roshan ordered, hurrying into the kitchen. Lucas obeyed, following him into a sizeable store room. Boxes of food stuffs and ingredients adorned the wall. In the corner, Lucas noticed a tarp draped over something rather large. It was several feet taller than him, and at a height of 5’10”, Lucas wasn’t exactly a short-statured young man.

“Sorry,” Roshan began as he shut the door behind him, securing several locks, “but I cannot risk anyone knowing about this. Please, show it to me.” Lucas was puzzled, but he reached into his pocket and once again pulled out the strange object. Roshan’s mouth gaped. “The disk fragment...” He paused, gazing at the mysterious treasure.

Lucas raised an eyebrow. “Disk fragment?”

Roshan took the object from Lucas’s hands and continued to marvel at it. “I cannot thank you enough for bringing this to me.

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