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The Legacy of King Jasteroth

- Vol. 1 -

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THE LEGACY OF
KING
JASTEROTH

- VOL. 1 -

S. L. WYLLIE

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The Legacy of King Jasteroth was self-published by an independent author,

S. L. WYLLIE.

I sincerely hope you enjoy this book.

If you have any comments, suggestions, or happen to spot a little typo, please find it in your heart to forgive me, and please contact me at my personal email to notify me of this error. Fellow authors and fans are welcome to contact me at any time as well.

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Thank you,

S. L.

Dearest Reader:

I would like to take the time to introduce myself to you. My name is S. L. WYLLIE, and I am an independent author. The Legacy of King Jasteroth Vol.1 is a self-published novel I've written, therefore, if you have any comments, suggestions, or happen to spot a little typo, please find it in your heart to forgive me, and please contact me at my personal email to notify me of this error.

s.davis2016@hotmail.com

Before I let you begin your journey into the world I've created, I wanted to personally thank you for purchasing The Legacy of King Jasteroth Vol.1.

If it's not too much to ask of you, I would really appreciate if you reviewed this book on Amazon and Goodreads.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

S. L.

This story is dedicated to Mike, Angela, and Deanna.

Thank you to my friends and family, without you this wouldn't be possible. Thank you for spending hours reading my manuscript and supporting me every step of the way.

- Prologue -

There once was a family who resided in a castle on the mountaintop, and for many generations, the most extravagant King and Queen ruled the land, Lucien and Evelyn Ostragorion. They were loved, honored and the most celebrated royal family who had ever ruled the Kingdom of the Golden Peaks. Every morning Queen Evelyn would travel through the villages and into the marketplace. Waving and smiling, she made her way through all the different stands, observing all the local and exotic objects her villagers had on display. Suddenly she walked past a peculiar market stand stacked with glass jars and small wooden barrels.

“Hello, my Queen!” a voice called out, and a strange looking man draped in faded gray robes appeared. He had curled auburn hair highlighted with several slivers of silver that hung wildly about his shoulders, and brown eyes deeply sunken into his heavily wrinkled face. Queen Evelyn blinked in amazement as she hadn’t noticed this man until he had called to her.

“Hello, sir! What are you selling today?” Evelyn replied with curiosity and pleasantness in her voice.

“Only the finest exotic herbs and homemade remedies. Remedies that can cure any illness or bring you immense amounts of good fortune.” The man gave her a friendly smile as he waved his weathered hand over the stand. He disappeared out of her sight for just a moment and returned with a vial filled with a shimmering smoking liquid in his hand.

“Remedies that can bring good fortune? I’ve heard rumors from the villagers of a mysterious man with mysterious potions that work miracles. A man who has traveled as far

as the eye can see and who has seen what other eyes have not.” She stopped smiling and looked at the man. Deep into his eyes, she searched for some sign of deception, but his eyes were true.

“My Queen, the rumors alas are true. I am known in the Eastern Realm as the Traveling Man, and today I have traveled from a faraway land because I have also heard rumors, you see. I heard this kingdom was ruled by a King and Queen so fair and so just that I had to see for myself. I see now the rumors also are true.” He spoke quietly and then gazed around at the other villagers selling goods in the marketplace. He observed the people who were shouting over the hustle and bustle before he turned his attention back to the Queen, who had become vastly interested in the vial he was holding.

“What is this you’re holding?” she asked softly, her eyes transfixed on the shimmering liquid.

“This is my secret masterpiece. It will ensure the person who drinks it will live for one hundred years longer to the day that they drank it. It is called the Draught of the Century.” He lowered his raspy voice to almost a whisper, “It is not available to the public.” He discreetly winked at her and then set the vial down on the stand.

Queen Evelyn looked at the vial and then at him and then back at the vial. It was smoking a little and shimmering now more than ever. If she drank it, she would live for another one hundred years. One hundred more years of ruling the land, and one hundred more years of peace. “*What if it’s a trick?*” she thought to herself, “*What if he intends to poison me and sabotage the kingdom?*” She scolded herself for being so foolish; there was no such thing as a potion that could make you live for one hundred years. That would be like magic, and Queen Evelyn knew any form of magic was strictly forbidden in the Kingdom of the Golden

Peaks. Glancing again at the vial, she felt all temptation to drink it cease. The shimmering had stopped, and it appeared to be nothing more than a vial of water.

“Will you take it, my Queen? As a gift from a traveler like me?” the man asked her in a gentle voice. He reached into the pockets of his pale gray robes and pulled out a stopper for the vial. Inserting it carefully, he then took her hand and placed it firmly in her grasp. He stared into her eyes and his friendly face disappeared, replaced by a more serious one that accentuated the deep lines around his wide, scared eyes.

“Terrible times are coming, Evelyn. The Black Magic Sorcerers have returned, and they have something sinister planned. No one is safe anymore! Don’t trust anyone and keep your family close. Take this; I hope you never have to use it. This potion is the most powerful potion I’ve ever brewed. The drinker will live for one hundred years longer to the day from the moment it touches their lips. Even if someone is on their deathbed, it will restore them to full health. If someone has been in an accident, it will ensure a fast recovery. You could be seconds away from your demise, and as soon as it touches your lips you will be immortal for one hundred years! Terrible times are coming, don’t forget what I’ve told you!”

His voice had become nothing more than a hoarse whisper. He frantically looked around at the villagers searching for something or someone, but the people indulging in the market appeared to have heard nothing of their conversation.

Queen Evelyn was astonished. She stood there with his gift in her hand, mouth slightly open in shock. Before she could say another word, a loud crack of thunder broke her silence. It boomed overhead, loudly echoing throughout the air. Startled, as she hadn’t noticed any clouds, yet when she turned her head upwards, the sky was a dark and threatening gray. Thunder continued to roll, intensifying each time as it sounded. Queen Evelyn looked back at

the Traveling Man, but to her surprise, he was gone and so were all his jars and barrels. She was standing in front of a vacant stand clutching the vial in her hand.

Villagers were rushing back and forth around her, shouting and pushing their way through to bring their possessions back to their homes before the rain began. The marketplace was closing faster and faster as each crackle of thunder rang out. Evelyn continued to stand there, rooted to the spot and unaware of the panic-stricken villagers around her.

Had she dreamed the entire conversation with this mysterious traveler, the Traveling Man? Maybe she had been talking to herself the whole time, but she can't have been hallucinating, how did this vial come into her hand? What would the people think if they saw the Queen having a conversation with someone that wasn't there? Would they feel she was unfitting to serve as ruler of the people? She pocketed the vial and decided not to mention their conversation or the potion to the King or anyone for that matter, just in case.

The sky bellowed above her, it heaved and groaned with more thunder and finally, a flash of lightning tore the sky wide open, bringing her back to the world as a torrential downpour began flooding the villagers. Queen Evelyn was utterly drenched within a matter of seconds; she started to run back to the castle. Slipping, stumbling, and struggling to see through the thick blanket of rain that engulfed the roads to the castle, she pushed her worries to the back of her mind.

She gasped for air as she continued to run, up and up the mountain road and through the deserted courtyards. She stopped running only as soon as she made it back to the shelter of her home, in the castle of the Golden Peaks. As the massive iron-wrought doors banged shut behind her, she forgot all about the Traveling Man, the potion, and his strange warning about the return of the Black Magic Sorcerers.

She stepped over the threshold and suddenly found King Lucien and their three children waiting for her. She had two sons and one daughter; Edward was the oldest child, he was twenty-three. Ariella was her second, who was eighteen, and Charles, her youngest child, was seventeen. Queen Evelyn looked around at her husband and their children. All four of them had silver hair, fair skin, and vibrant green eyes. Her husband, King Lucien took pride in his silver hair and green eyes, as it was a trait that only the fiercest warriors in his bloodline possessed.

Sopping wet, Queen Evelyn embraced him and then exclaimed, "I don't know what happened! One second I was in the market and the next it was pouring rain so hard I was lucky to get back!"

King Lucien gave his wife a funny look and replied in a puzzled tone, "My Queen, there isn't a cloud in the sky, and there hasn't been for a fortnight!" She turned around abruptly and wrenched the heavy doors open. "AH!" She cried out as the hot sun blinded her with its powerful rays. There wasn't a cloud in sight. All in the courtyard was dry. She ran back out into the summer's light and gazed around wildly in disbelief.

"It was just raining, as hard as a gale and as fierce as a monsoon! How do you explain my being soaked to the bone?" She shouted this to the heavens and then to her husband and children, all of whom stared at her with perplexed and almost frightened eyes.

"Mother," said Charles, her youngest son. "Your clothes are dry."

Queen Evelyn looked down at her dress and screamed in shock. Her clothes were perfectly dry. Not a drop of water or even a hint that she had been caught in the rain. Confused, upset, and angry that she had made a fool of herself, she returned inside. Without another glance at her family in fear that they might ridicule her foolishness, Queen Evelyn

stalked off to the West Wing of the castle while King Lucien and their three children remained at the front doors.

“Charles and Edward go down to the courtyard and continue your training. Ariella, come with me.” Lucien ordered, and he quickly waved his sons away. The two sons gleefully exited the castle together while King Lucien and Ariella continued down a giant stone corridor that led to the East Wing.

“Father, why can’t I go with my brothers? I want to learn how to use a sword too! I want to fight!” Ariella questioned, but he silenced her with the wave of his hand.

“Enough, Ariella. I will not tolerate these silly questions. You are a girl. And girls do not become warriors. You will see no battle nor glory. You must follow in your mother’s footsteps and learn to become a proper lady.” Lucien scolded her.

They continued down the vast and empty corridor that was aglow with the summer’s sunlight as it penetrated through the windows. After passing her chambers, near the end of the hall they turned left and began to climb a large spiral staircase.

Ariella felt tears spring to her eyes and blinked them away angrily. She didn’t want to spend her days inside learning how to be a face of the public. She wanted to learn how to brandish a sword and become a warrior. She wanted to fight for the people, not stand there and smile at them. They climbed higher and higher up the broad stone steps, passing portraits of old Kings and Queens and the occasional gem encrusted sword that hung high on the walls; swords that had brought glory and honor, swords that had fought many wars, swords that had beheaded enemies and still shone through the dried blood of their victims.

Ariella gazed at them all longingly. Her dream for as long as she could remember was to share in a glorious battle and earn a place amongst her ancestors in these very halls. When

they finally reached the top landing, they stopped for a few moments while King Lucien busied himself with a heavily shackled door, a door made of ancient woods and heavy irons that was bolted shut, a foreboding looking door.

That's when Ariella noticed it, an unusually large sword with a long wide blade. Blood stained and shining, it was tilted on its hilt atop of a grand table made of weathered mahogany; it was the sword of her ancestors. She wanted to pick it up and prove to her father that she was strong and brave enough to become a warrior.

As she walked towards it, captivated by its mysteriousness, the door behind her groaned loudly, snagging her from the strange trance. The foreboding door swung open, and her father immediately called her inside and away from the sword. He led her into a well-lit circular room with several oversized windows, and shelves that towered all the way to the top of the ceiling, and every inch of those towering shelves was packed full of books, hundreds, if not thousands of books.

There were a few pieces of furniture, desks, and chests that she thought were made from the same material as the table outside, antique and very weathered mahogany. *"This must have been some study that hasn't been used for a very long time because there's a thick coat of dust on everything."* Ariella thought to herself, and for how many windows there was, she couldn't get a good glimpse of the castle grounds for each window had at least fifty years' worth of grime on them.

"You will wake up every morning, and after you've fulfilled your duties, you will go and help your mother. After she is finished with you, you will come here. There will be a tutor here who will be spending the entire day with you. I forbid you to leave this study until all the work your tutor has set for you is complete and I forbid you to leave the castle. You are

not to go into the village under any circumstances. Do I make myself clear?" Lucien said sternly as his green eyes glared down at her.

Ariella opened her mouth to protest, but he raised his hand again and silenced her with another wave. "No more nonsense! Your chores for the rest of today are to tidy this study up before the tutor comes. You will wash the windows and dust the furniture. Wipe down the bookcases and sweep the floors. You will not call a servant up to assist you. I expect you to be finished in time for dinner or no dinner." He barked the last few words at her and then turned around and stormed out of the study, slamming the door and locking it behind him.

Ariella took one look around at the mess and began to cry. She flung herself into an old rickety chair and sobbed quietly. It wasn't fair. Her brothers got to be in the courtyard dueling, and she had to stay inside and clean up this mess. And from now on, she had to spend all her free time with a tutor.

Ariella spent the next few hours feeling sorry for herself, and at the same time she was frustrated, yet as frustrated as she was, she was at least smart enough to scrub the grime off the windows first, enabling her to gaze down into the courtyard and over the castle grounds. In the distance, she could see her brothers practicing with the sword master and another pang of jealousy caused her to knock a chair on its side.

Muttering angrily to herself, she picked it up and continued to clean while staring out the window, as one of her brothers fell and lost his sword. Smiling, Ariella turned from the window and moved towards one of the towering bookcases. She began dusting the shelves but suddenly, she let out a groan of exasperation. The books were filthy! There was no way she would be allowed out of here without wiping off every single book, and there were

hundreds of books stacked neatly in the bookcases, maybe even thousands. She craned her neck to look all the way to the ceiling, but the books reached higher than her sight.

Finally, she gave up on the idea that she would finish in time for dinner and pulled an incredibly thick and heavy book from the shelf. “The Expanded History of the Eastern Realm,” she read aloud as she carefully dusted its cover and gently wiped the spine before returning the book to the shelf. She repeated this process ten times, then twenty times and finally thirty times. She had gotten through a quarter of the books when at last she heard a clicking coming from the door; her father was unlocking it.

Ariella glanced outside and seen that the sun was dropping lower and lower in the sky. Irritated by the tedious work he had set for her, and feeling desperate because she hadn’t finished yet, Ariella wiped a few more things and quickly straightened some chairs. The clicking of the lock stopped, and the door swung open abruptly. She turned to greet her father but dropped her rag instead because there was no one there. Confused as to who unlocked the door, Ariella walked over and peered out at the landing.

“Hello?” she called softly, but there was no answer. She cautiously stepped out onto the landing where the sword was still gleaming in the light, brighter than ever. She knew she shouldn’t touch it, but if no one was around, then she must. She longed to feel the coolness of the blade, run her finger from end to end, pick it up for just a second and feel the eternal glory of this sword.

Ariella stood in front of the table as if she were about to collect a prize, a trophy. She took one last look around and reached out to grab the sword. Her fingertips barely grazed the handle when a strong gust of wind rushed around her, knocking pictures off the walls and shattering the glass from a few smaller windows. She shrieked and flung herself back into the

study, closing the door as fast and as quietly as she could, lest her father find that she was out of the room. The door shut but it would not lock, and Ariella began to panic as she heard voices shouting, echoing up the stairwell from the other side.

Holding the door shut and closing her eyes as tightly as she could, she wished despairingly for the study door to lock. Ariella knew that if her father realized she had left the room even for a second, she would have no dinner for a week. Admitting to him that she had touched a family heirloom was not an option. He would never believe her story about a mysterious and powerful whirlwind being responsible for the extensive damage to the landing, so Ariella let go of the door and decided to hide behind a large desk on the other side of the room.

“Please let the door be locked! Please let the door be locked! Oh, please let the door be locked!” she put her hands over her face as the voices drew nearer. They were directly outside the study now and her father, King Lucien sounded furious. Shaking with fear, Ariella waited, but no one came. Instead, she heard the faint clicking of a door unlocking and then a loud creaking noise as King Lucien entered the study.

“Ariella!” he bellowed as he stumbled inside, but she didn’t answer. She couldn’t respond; she couldn’t even move. Ariella was frozen to the ground in fear. Her father desperately searched around the study until he found her curled up into a ball on the floor, just behind the large desk.

“She’s here!” he called out, to whom she did not know.

“She’s safe?” a voice boomed from across the room. Lucien nodded, then he scooped Ariella off the ground, and placed her on her feet.

“It’s ok, Ariella. You can come out now. There’s nothing here! No one is going to hurt you!” Lucien said gently to her, and as he turned to his comrade, he said, “I want you to round up my sons, and I want you to search this castle. Whoever did this could still be here, and I don’t want to put my family at risk.” The voice that was on the other side of the study faded away, and his footsteps echoed down the stairs as he went.

Lucien then took a good look around and said to Ariella, “You’ve done well today. Come, join your family for dinner. The servants will finish cleaning this room.” He put his arm around her in a shaky hug, but Ariella was still confused.

“Father, what happened?” she asked innocently. Her father sighed as he carefully led her from the study.

“I was going to ask you the same thing, but when I realized the door to the study was still locked, I knew at once something had gone wrong.” He spoke in what he thought was a concerned parental voice.

“What do you mean?” she asked curiously, gently cocking her head to the side.

“As I arrived upstairs and found the door still locked, I remembered that the door to this study could only be unlocked from the outside, and I have the only key.” He patted the pocket of his robes, and a faint jingle was heard. Ariella stared at her father in astonishment as they left the study and climbed over the mess of portraits, artifacts, and broken glass. A million thoughts raced through her mind, only pausing for a split second to notice that the one thing left unscathed and gleaming brighter than ever in the light of the setting sun, was the strangely captivating sword on the table, the sword of her ancestors.

- Chapter 1 -

Ariella awoke from such an incredibly deep sleep that she had forgotten the events of the day before. She had forgotten that her father, King Lucien had ordered her to remain inside during the day with a tutor, and she had forgotten all about the disaster outside of the study.

She rolled on her side, facing a set of grand French doors which opened onto a quaint stone terrace that overlooked the silver waterfalls of the mountains and road to the villages below. She gazed at the doors thoughtfully, and when she couldn't lay in bed any longer, Ariella got up and flung them open. Weak rays of morning sunlight filtered through, illuminating her chambers with a soft pastel glow and a fresh summer fragrance of flowers and grasses drifted in on a cool gentle breeze.

She stepped onto the terrace, leaned over the iron railing and took in a deep breath. The castle was built on the highest plateau of the Sacred Mountains of the Golden Peaks, and her chambers faced the very edge of it. Below were large and sharp boulders with several small silver waterfalls streaming into shallow pools that eventually trickled down towards the villages, and on the other side of the boulders lay an old abandoned dirt road.

She had heard that it was once the main road many years ago before Ariella's older brother Edward was born. It connected the castle to the villages and led to the mountain road out of the Golden Peaks. But after many strange occurrences and disappearances, King Lucien condemned it and agreed it would be best if no one came by this road again. The road wound its way around the villages, past the forest which Ariella believed was haunted, over the river and up to the castle.

First, travelers began to complain about a strange presence on the outskirts of the forest. Then, they told wild tales of the road leading them into the wooded area, and before they could turn back, the road simply vanished, stranding them in the middle of nowhere. Some travelers even swore the road had swallowed people whole and they were lucky enough to escape with nothing more than a few scratches.

Ariella recalled from her memory an old story the parents in the villages used to frighten their naughty children with; it was a story about a great sorcerer who could turn bad children into common barn animals. She shook her head as if to clear the nonsense from it, gazed one last time towards the forest wondering if there indeed was something unusual in there, when a knock at her door brought her back from her trance.

A few swift paces and she crossed her glowing chambers to the door where she found her father standing on the other side of it. His silver hair was combed back, and he was wearing his usual white fur over his finely spun silks which were the traditional colors of the Golden Peaks; purple accented with gold. Lucien looked her up and down when she opened the door, and at first, he said nothing. Then, his green eyes began to narrow as he observed her unkempt appearance, again.

“Are you wearing the same clothes as yesterday?” Lucien asked her slowly. Ariella watched his face wrinkle with anger, and she shook her head quickly as he continued to give her an angry and suspicious look, “Do you have any idea what time it is?” He questioned her impatiently; struggling to keep his voice down.

Ariella was taken back. Confused, she thought to herself, “*Why is he asking what time it is?*”

“Have you already forgotten that you have to be in the study in the East Wing with a tutor today?” Lucien’s voice began to shake with a suppressed rage. Ariella gulped nervously; it had completely slipped her mind.

“Why are you still standing here?! GO GET DRESSED NOW YOU ABSENT MINDED GIRL!” He bellowed as he waved his arms at her in frustration. Then, he grabbed his daughter’s shoulders, spun her around roughly and pushed her back inside of her chambers before slamming the door shut.

As Ariella dressed and frantically combed the knots from her silvery hair, she could still hear him fuming outside.

“You were supposed to help your mother this morning, and I find you here in yesterday’s clothes, doing who knows what, and it’s already half past nine in the morning!”

Ariella pulled on a light blue button-up dress with long sleeves and slipped a light blue ribbon through her hair; she struggled to pin it up and make herself presentable. She didn’t want to risk angering her father anymore, and she certainly didn’t want to give him a reason to assign extra chores or punish her.

The train of her dress billowed slightly behind her as she traveled swiftly down the vast corridor towards the East Wing. She tried her hardest to not look through the windows because she knew the sun was shining, it was a gorgeous day. As Ariella arrived at the bottom of the staircase that led up to the study, she bumped into her mother who hadn’t been seen since she arrived home from the marketplace and tried to convince everyone that it had been pouring outside on a cloudless summers day.

“Mother, what are you doing here? Are you feeling better?” Ariella asked her eagerly, but Queen Evelyn had not heard her. Ariella noticed her face was white and withered looking.

Then, her mother made a faint croaking sound and turned away. In an instant, she took off towards the West Wing leaving an unsettled feeling in the pit of Ariella's stomach. Her mother wasn't acting like herself lately. She rarely disappeared for more than a couple of hours and never had she not acknowledged Ariella before. Confused, worried, and a little bit hurt, Ariella began to climb the stairs as the knot in her stomach swelled.

Up and around she went, passing portraits of Kings, Queens, and warriors alike, ancient swords, artifacts, and heirlooms. Around and around she climbed until she made it to the landing at the top of the stairs where she observed that the destruction of yesterday had been cleaned up. The glass had been swept, the pictures rehung, and the artifacts reset. The landing was restored to its former glory.

That's when Ariella saw it, there, on the table, gleaming brighter than ever was the sword of her ancestors. She blinked hard trying to refocus her eyes, but nothing happened. The sword looked like it was glowing. Was it glowing? She rubbed her eyes and shook her head but still, there was a faint aura surrounding the sword. Did she dare reach out and touch it? Risk another explosion? Was it worth it to feel the cold steel in her hands as she imagined it, balanced and weightless?

She lifted her arms high over her head when suddenly, the door to the study swung open, catching Ariella by surprise. Empty handed, and arms still raised, she was frozen in a pose like a silly puppet awaiting the commands of her master. Not sure whether she should feel embarrassed, ashamed, or frightened, she lowered her arms and stepped back from the table.

"Hello! You must be Princess Ariella!" A friendly voice called to her from within the study. She turned sharply and then stumbled through the doorway. Tripping over nothing, she landed hard on her hands and knees.

“Oof!” she gasped as she found herself looking up into a pair of eyes that were bluer than the sky, and deeper than the ocean; eyes that penetrated the darkest depths of her mind.

“Oh dear,” he muttered, and then he stooped down to help her up. Ariella blushed as she struggled to her feet. She looked at the stranger up and down, observing him cautiously. He was a tall, strong, and very handsome young man, not much older than she was, with sleek black hair that he had tied back and a long black beard.

“Ok, so, I will be your tutor.” The young man said awkwardly. He was thrown off by her clumsy entrance and was struggling to find words that wouldn’t embarrass her. The young man let out a quick chuckle. Ariella shot him a dirty look, but she couldn’t keep a straight face for more than a few seconds. She giggled a little before letting out a small snort and then she turned red as she desperately tried to contain herself. She promised her father that she wouldn’t make a fool out of him, that was before she tripped over her own feet and nearly bowled her tutor over.

“Alright! Now that we’ve got that out of our way, we can introduce ourselves and then get to work! My name is Austin Alvar, and I am a friend of your family.” He said with a cheerful smile. Then, he held out his right hand to shake hers. Ariella was skeptical as she shook it. Nervous, for no man had ever tried to shake her hand like an equal before.

“Hello Austin, I’m Ariella, just Ariella.” She replied quietly, lost for words and feeling more uncomfortable as each minute passed.

Austin clapped his hands together suddenly and then walked to a large desk in the center of the room where he picked up a very worn book that was so old and tattered its title was no longer legible.

“Take a seat, please,” Austin said politely, and he signaled her to come and sit at a smaller desk near his. “This is what we will be studying today. Please read the first chapter, and when you’re finished, we will have a small discussion. There’s no need to take notes yet.” He strode to where Ariella was sitting and carefully set the ancient book down. She stared at it briefly, and then opened the cover as gently as she could, worried that she might tear it off by accident. There was no table of contents in the book, the parchment was yellowed with age, and it appeared as if something had been nibbling away at the pages themselves. She turned a couple more pages, and to her surprise, they were also blank. Thinking this was some trick, Ariella slammed the book shut and glared up at Austin.

“Yes?” He asked innocently.

“There’s nothing written in this book!” She exclaimed. She gazed intently at his youthful face, watched his blue eyes light up, and his long beard quiver as a smile escaped his lips showing his perfect white teeth.

“Oh?” he said slyly. His eyes met her blazing gaze, and his smile became a smirk as she grew more impatient and more frustrated with him.

“How am I supposed to read it if there’s no ink on the pages?” she demanded, feeling her face and neck growing hot now.

“Open your eyes, Ariella,” Austin replied softly, and then he laughed as he returned to his desk and sat down behind it. Ariella opened the book angrily, and to her astonishment, the pages were filled with thousands and thousands of words and illustrations. She scanned the table of contents and stopped dead halfway through.

An Introduction to the Inner Eye - Table of Contents

Chapter One

- The Basics and Fundamentals of the Inner Eye.

Chapter Two

- How to control your mind using the Inner Eye.

Chapter Three

- How to use the Inner Eye to control and levitate objects.

Chapter Four

- How to use the Inner Eye to block infiltration of your mind.

Chapter Five

- How to use the Inner Eye to draw magic.

Ariella quickly shut the book again. Not sure if she should run or scream or –

“Is something wrong, Ariella?” Austin asked gently, sensing her anxiety from where he sat.

“Uh, um.” She began to stutter, trying to find words, something, anything and then, “I think you gave me the wrong book!” she blurted out, finally gathering the courage to look at Austin. His piercing blue eyes narrowed as he leaned forward in his chair and crossed his arms. Austin then spoke in a calm yet firm voice, “Miss Ariella, I am the tutor. Therefore, I set the courses. If you’re going to sit there and ask me pointless questions and continue to interrupt our study time without good reason, then I’m afraid I will have to let your father, King Lucien, know how unfocused and distracted you are.”

His threat lingered in the air, leaving Ariella flabbergasted. She opened her mouth slowly and then closed it again, but Austin didn’t blink or smile. She let out a sigh of defeat and

opened her book for the third time. Chapter one began on page three. Turning to page three, she began to read the following passage.

Chapter 1 – The Basics and Fundamentals of the Inner Eye.

1. An Introduction to the Inner Eye.

- The Inner Eye is a powerful gift that very few people possess in our world. With enough training those who possess the Inner Eye can learn to draw magic using their hands, and minds.

- The Inner Eye enables you to control situations, objects, and people using unnatural forces.

Those who possess the Inner Eye are marked from birth with a unique and sometimes rare elemental power.

- There are several magical weapons or tools that one can use to enhance everyday living, or one can use in battles. See Chapter 29 for more information about magical weapons and possessing and bewitching battle weapons.

Ariella stared at the book in disbelief as she read the same passage over again, and weird thoughts started to race through her mind. Her head began to spin, and she suddenly felt ill. Glancing up from the pages, she watched Austin stare dreamily out of the windows at a hummingbird with a stunning green plumage that was flying nearby. Ariella stood up so rashly she knocked her chair over behind her, and it fell with a loud clatter that echoed throughout the study. Austin snapped back to reality, gave her a damned strange look, and then continued to gaze outside without saying a word.

“I’m finished.” Ariella declared. She stood shakily behind her desk and waited for an answer or some form of explanation from him.

“And?” Austin replied lazily, not lifting his gaze from the bird outside. His disinterest began to annoy her. *“How can he not pay attention at a time like this? How can he just sit there after dumping this book full of gibberish on my desk?”* Ariella angrily thought to herself.

“And I’m finished!” her voice quavered as she began to seethe. Her insides were bubbling as she continued to stare at him expectantly. Austin straightened himself in his chair and at last, he turned his attention to Ariella. Finally, she was going to get some answers! Instead of speaking to her though, Austin quickly reached under his desk to grab something. He lifted an old leather case up from underneath, carefully placed it on the desk, reached deep inside his robes, which were a distinct shade of purple, and pulled out a tiny rusty key.

“Here we are!” he mumbled as he inserted the rusty key into the leather case. There was a single soft click, and the case sprung open. He rummaged through it for a moment before he drew out a few discolored papers.

Ariella sat down and said nothing more. Believing this to be a cruel trick of her father, she began to deflate. Austin, on the other hand, had jumped out of his seat and was running his finger along the papers as if tracing an invisible line as he began to pace across the study. He muttered something under his breath and waved his hand gently, but nothing happened.

Giving up on the situation, Ariella folded her arms over her desk and rested her head on them, sheltering her devastated face from him. When would the joke be over? All she could think about was the beautiful sun shining outside the windows, and here she was confined in the castle with this strange young man.

Suddenly, a blinding flash of light snatched her from her daydreams. Her head shot up immediately as she searched wildly for the source. Austin was holding an orb in his hand, a

sparkling, shimmering orb. An orb that looked as though lightning was trapped inside of it, swirling round and round like a tornado in a glass sphere. A harder glance revealed to Ariella that it wasn't in his hand after all, but above it, somehow hovering slightly above, and with the flick of his wrist it spun over and around his hand.

He tossed it a few feet over his head and Ariella watched curiously as the orb remained in midair, floating for a split second. Austin quickly clapped his hands over the orb and then spread his arms wide. The orb split apart and exploded violently across the study, sending sparks, lightning, and a thick haze over their heads.

She screamed and threw herself under her desk as the room filled with crackling explosions of lightning that shattered and scattered in all directions, setting books and furniture ablaze. Everything in sight was flashing, crashing, and smashing as a whirlwind picked up flying fiery furniture that whizzed throughout the study. Lightning, fire, and haze wreaked havoc all around them, and when she couldn't stand it any longer, Ariella began to scream at him, "Austin! Stop! Austin! MAKE IT STOP!"

Austin was standing in the middle of the room amidst the noise and the destruction. He was smiling and laughing apparently impressed with his work. Then, he lifted his arms back over his head and clapped his hands together once more. Ariella watched in amazement as the lightning, fire, and smoky haze was sucked away into a space between his hands. Like a whirlpool it all faded away, spinning, swirling, circling, drawn to his hands like a magnet. The destruction dissolved and returned to its orb-like state between his hands.

He lowered his arms and played with the orb for another minute before pushing his hands together, squashing it, and then rubbing his hands gently as if to brush off an invisible substance. He shook his hands slightly, and the orb was gone.

Continuing to watch him from beneath the desk, Ariella's mouth fell open when the orb vanished from her sight. Then, she climbed out from under her desk and stood amongst the rubble of the destroyed study, watching him with a fascinating look in her eyes.

"What in the world?" Ariella said, completely awestruck.

"That, Ariella, is what happens when you train your Inner Eye. It gives you the ability to summon incredible powers and forces that are unnatural. You can use them for great or for terrible things. You are the master of your own destiny, but you must be careful when and how you use your powers. You could bring everlasting joy and happiness, or you could wipe out entire villages and condemn the land to eternal darkness." Austin finished his sentence with utmost care, locking eyes with her.

"You must not use your Inner Eye for the wrong purpose. If you misuse your power, you could become consumed by something terrible called The Burn. It will take control of your Inner Eye and take control of you. The powers will control you and make you do terrible things. You must be careful that you don't give in to the urges or the voices."

"So, you're telling me that I can do that?" Ariella asked him slowly, naturally ignoring his warning as she continued to gaze at him in fascination.

"Eventually."

"Amazing!"

"That's enough for today then. I'll straighten this place up and will see you tomorrow morning. And remember, magic is strictly forbidden in the Golden Peaks, so you mustn't tell anyone about what you've seen here. No one can know about your powers. You must never talk about it or reveal yourself to anyone here!" he warned her in a sharp low voice as he ushered her out of the study, "Goodbye now, Ariella."

Before she could say another word, he had gently pushed her out of the study and promptly closed the door. She heard the locks click abruptly and there she was, left standing on the landing with a million thoughts racing through her mind once again.

Feeling numb, she turned and began to walk down the spiral staircase, hardly watching where she was going. Her mind was reeling as she quietly made her way back to her chambers. What did she just witness? Surely someone in the castle had heard her screams or the sound of the explosions. And what did he mean she couldn't talk to anyone about it? How was it that Austin had come to be her tutor so conveniently?

Dizzy and exhausted, Ariella bolted for her balcony. The doors swung open, and she stepped out onto the terrace. Leaning against the iron-wrought railings in her usual spot, she took a deep breath as she stared up at the cloudless blue sky, searching for answers. Maybe this was all a dream and tomorrow she would wake up, still Princess Ariella, the ordinary girl with no extraordinary talent.

The girl who wished she could be a warrior and prove to her family she was both valiant and brave. Ariella, the girl who would forever be confined in this castle, forbidden to have friends and destined to follow in her mothers' footsteps. To be married to whomever her father thought best. To live a life where her opinion wasn't important because she was a girl and girls were not equal to men in her kingdom. Ariella shook her head sadly, and with eyes full of tears, she stared angrily past the horizon and wished for something or someone to tell her that there was more to life than what was here.

Overcome with emotion, she collapsed. She prayed that Austin was real and that what she had read in that wretched book was real and that everything she had witnessed today was

real. Ariella began to sob silently into her arms; she needed an escape. She couldn't live like this anymore.

- Chapter 2 -

Over the next few weeks, there wasn't a day that Ariella didn't wake up before the crack of dawn. She trained hard, often spending the entire day and night locked in the study with Austin Alvar. Her lessons with Austin had given her a new sense of hope, and a sense of belonging. She had always felt like an outcast and an outsider. Her family never made much effort to include her in their lives, but made much more effort to exclude her.

While her father doted on her brothers and spent his leftover energy bullying and harassing Ariella, her mother was often no better. She never treated Ariella as brutally as King Lucien did, but she was far too busy with her royal duties and private affairs to be involved in Ariella's life. For what she could remember, most of her childhood she was left alone, brought up by the servants and maids.

She spent most of her days asking them about life outside of the castle and kingdom. Some of the servants even snuck her to the village to see the wonderful sights, the sounds and smells of the market, and to play with other children. That was something she was not allowed to do in the castle. Ariella never had any friends, and her parents kept her isolated from her brothers. She thought back to those secret visits to the village and remembered watching her first sword fight. The swords clashed and clanged, metal upon metal. Laughter rang out in the crowd and then screaming. Her father had found out, and she never saw those servants in the castle again.

Ariella stumbled around in her dimly lit chambers for a few minutes, dressing and preparing for her day. Today she had chosen to wear a light pink dress with white lace trimmings, and she pinned up her hair in the usual messy sort of way with a single white ribbon tied through it. She

looked just like a Princess, but, Ariella was no ordinary Princess; she had fifty generations of warrior blood surging through her veins.

Feeling slightly uncomfortable now, she regretted choosing something pink and lacey. “*Oh well,*” Ariella thought to herself as she slipped out of her room and into the empty corridor which wasn’t as dark, now that the few morning rays of daybreak had begun to peek through the windows. Her routine had almost become automatic, and she used every ounce of time and energy to be practicing with Austin. The longer they worked, the less likely she was to run into her father; he never had anything good to say to her anyway.

Arriving at the study which was always locked at this hour, Ariella lifted her hand and placed it gently on the keyhole. She closed her eyes and imagined the lock releasing. “Open.” She whispered, and a faint clicking noise could be heard from within the door. Click. Click. Click. The ancient door creaked open and revealed an empty study. The light was filtering in from all directions, casting a soft glaze upon everything.

She walked in and carefully shut the door behind her. Every day for the last month she had been coming here well before Austin arrived, and spent the better part of an hour straightening the furniture, dusting the shelves and polishing the desks they studied at. After this, Ariella would go to one of the bookcases that towered up to the ceiling where she proceeded to climb an old wooden ladder, up to the very top, where she retrieved the book they were studying.

At first glance, one would believe it to be a tattered book so old, that unfortunately the ink had either been washed off or simply faded away from too much use. Ariella carefully climbed back down with the book under her arm and then set it on her desk. She opened the book slowly and smiled as she felt a sense of relief rush over her; a glowing feeling erupted in her chest. After a month of strenuous training, they were finally on Chapter three. She read the title, ‘How to use

the Inner Eye to control and Levitate objects.’ Then, she read the first few paragraphs that described the usefulness of being able to control things, lift them into the air, and even summon them, and below that were instructions on how to use your powers.

Step One:

Close your eyes and relax your mind.

Step Two:

Keeping your mind relaxed, open your eyes and focus on a small object.

Step Three:

Start by using your hands, feel your power flow through your fingertips and then summon the item upwards. Repeat these three steps until the object floats with ease.

See diagram A.

Ariella searched the room until she found the smallest object in sight. It was a gold artifact from Austin’s desk, and it was no bigger than a stone. She placed the object beside the book, read the steps again and then closed her eyes. “*Relax,*” she told herself, then she opened her eyes and lifted her hands. She felt a weak tingling sensation, but nothing happened. Ariella stared blankly at the object and then glanced at the instructions again. She closed her eyes and told herself to relax. Then, she opened her eyes and lifted her hands, but nothing happened again, not even a whisper of wind! Frustrated with herself, she pounded her fist down on the desk before she closed her eyes for the third time.

“Practicing again?” the voice of a young man broke her concentration; it was Austin. He gave her a friendly smile as he stood beside his desk. He was wearing an emerald green cloak and a pair of shimmering boots that looked suspiciously like dragon skin.

“I didn’t hear you come in!” Ariella replied, feeling embarrassed that he arrived at the exact moment that she was failing miserably. He chuckled as he observed the object on Ariella’s desk.

“May I suggest that you try something lighter? Maybe this for instance?” Austin said as he plucked a single leaf from the back of his cloak, placed it on her desk and then picked up the gold artifact, “It’s much easier to start with a fragment of something or something that carries no weight at all, really.” He explained as he placed the artifact back on his desk and then he turned to face her. “What do you feel right now?”

“Frustration,” Ariella said as she let out a long sigh. She hated not being able to do this, for once in her life she thought she was *finally* good at something, but it turned out, maybe she wasn’t.

“Relax your mind and focus on your power. Where do you feel it the most? Where is the center of your power? Locate the source of it within. Now, relax your mind and open your eyes!” Austin called out, raising his arms as he took a deep, sharp breath. “Now, command your power to travel from its source and into your hands, like this!” He raised his hands to the level of his eyes and Ariella watched excitedly as sparks engulfed his fingertips.

She closed her eyes again, feeling more confident this time. There was a great swelling feeling in her chest. She inhaled it, feeling it shake within her. Opening her eyes, Ariella lifted her arms as Austin did and her mind commanded her powers to flow through her body. She rose to her feet, every inch of her body surging with power, burning, and begging to be released from inside of her. She knew what to do. She drew her hands together as she once saw Austin do and then ripped them apart.

Suddenly, there was a huge explosion that sent Ariella flying several feet back. She landed hard on the ground and let out a loud yelp, and Austin was nowhere to be seen. The study was

coated in a thick blanket of mist, and there was a deep and long crater that began where her desk used to be and stretched like a great trench all the way to where she had last seen Austin standing.

Icicles hung from the ceiling and shelves, and the room had become bitterly cold. Ariella struggled to stand, surveying the study in shock. It was beyond destroyed. Through the mist she couldn't make out much, everything that wasn't obliterated was frozen solid.

"Austin?" she gasped, terrified with what she had done, "Austin?" Ariella called out again, feeling the panic instilling in her. She heard a cough and a sputter from somewhere within the mist, and as she rushed forward, she tripped over his crumpled body. Falling to her knees, she reached around blindly through the mist for him. "Austin! I'm so sorry! Are you okay? I didn't mean to! I don't know what came over me! Austin!"

She began to cry when she felt him lying there, motionless. He was gazing up at her in a daze, but his blue eyes still twinkled in their usual way.

"You were... Only supposed to... Make the leaf levitate..." He mumbled as he took slow deep breaths. Ariella held his limp body amongst the rubble of the study and began to sob harder.

"I'm sorry! Austin, please! Don't die!" She apologized as she cried over him, squeezing him even tighter.

"Foolish girl... I am not going to die... You stunned me... Therefore, I cannot get up... Yet..."

Austin was cradled in her arms for a long while before he regained his strength. Feeling rather foolish as he said, Ariella released him, blushing furiously as she helped him to his feet. Austin dusted himself off and muttered an incantation under his breath. He waved his hands, and with a flash of dull purple light, the mist and ice melted away, the trench filled, and the rubble returned

to the walls. There wasn't a scratch in sight. He had restored the room once more and then began to shake out his sleek black hair. Bits of stone, dirt, and ice chips fell from it and vanished before they hit the floor. Ariella didn't say another word; she felt silly and ashamed. She had lost control of herself and even made a fool of herself by believing that he might be dead.

Austin finished tidying himself and the room, and after some time he addressed her.

"I want you to know I'm not mad at you," he paused when she glanced up, and he caught her gaze, "I am actually very impressed. That was one of the most effective forcefield blasts I have ever seen, or rather felt, in a very long time. I am also impressed because during your attempt to assassinate me," he chuckled again, "your powers showed sign of frost and ice. Only vastly powerful individuals can summon ice. After a little more training you will be able to summon a ferocious blizzard that will blow out an entire battlefield. Foes will be frozen solid. It is a terrible fate. I have seen it before, but not for many years." He finished and then gazed deeply into her eyes, searching for something, before slowly carrying the book and the leaf back to her desk.

"Shall we try again?"

With a smile and a nod, Ariella closed her eyes and repeated the three steps.

Austin watched her carefully, observing her and taking mental notes. Truthfully, he had never met anyone that could blast a forcefield as devastating as hers, except for King Jasteroth himself. Austin recalled that King Jasteroth was the last living individual recorded in the histories of both the Eastern and Western Realms who could summon ice too. Ariella had powers beyond her wildest dreams, and she had no idea.

Austin watched her again, trying to sense where that power came from, but he didn't get any readings. Worried that her powers would outgrow and overcome her, he vowed to train her to the

best of his ability before she became powerless over it. It was a power like this that could force someone as pure as her to do dark and dangerous things.

“Ah ha!” Ariella shouted happily. Austin’s attention diverted back to Ariella who had managed to control the leaf, sending it swishing through the air as if caught in an imaginary wind. She giggled and smiled; she was so proud of herself.

They practiced this over and over until the sun began to set, and the study began to darken. Finally, Austin firmly closed the book and gave her an impressive smile.

“You did great! You should be very proud of yourself. I am very proud of you.” He encouraged her, and as their eyes met again, Ariella blushed. She had never had someone talk to her so kindly before.

“Thank you for everything today, goodbye Austin.” She mumbled, then she left the study feeling elated and pleasantly surprised; she had never felt so alive.

Austin waved to her and retreated into the study. “*What a productive day.*” He thought, but as he remembered her awesome power, he frowned slightly. He would not allow her powers to consume her if it was the last thing he did. With a wave of his hand he returned everything in the study to its original place, and with another wave, the room went dark. There was a swish of a cloak, and Austin disappeared into the night.