

# The Journey to Rivin

## Part 1 in the Battle of Lavita



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Francisca Oosterhuis

“All of us start from zero. We take the right decision and become a hero.” – Govinda

Now turn the page.

## Prologue

A large crowd stood packed into a wide hall, deep in the Red Mountains. There was a shout from the group of men which were present. They were exhausted after their long journey but the time had finally arrived. They found what they had been searching for.

"Come on!" one shouted.

"Seize that sword!" shouted another.

After many dangers, the group of bandits had arrived at the Dark Hall, where the Sword of Demons stood on a stone plateau in the middle of the hall. There were men who did not survive the journey to the Red Mountains. But the majority had overcome the dangers and their king now stood before the sword.

A king who had no fears and who everyone was afraid of. Even his own men, who did exactly what he told them to do. To contradict their king would be the death of them.

The bandit king was surrounded by the men. Most of them wore a dark gray tunic, with a black cape attached to it. The cape depicted a dragon, a large red dragon, the sign of their wise and strong leader. Some of them wore a full black tunic. They were the commanders.

The king reached out his hand to the hilt of the sword and gripped it tightly. He pulled it off the stone platform. The blade was made of black steel and a dark haze radiated from it.

"Finally! The Sword of Demons is mine!" the king roared.

A loud cheer went up among everyone present, which dimmed the moment the speech resumed.

"After a long search, the sword is now mine, Navarog, king of the bandits!"

Once again there was a loud cheer. The king held up his hand, and all sound died away.

"My revenge will be sweet! Today we advance to Oros. In a few days we will take the capital and those wretches will surrender to me! Then the rest of the country will follow and then the world!" he shouted.

There was now not only cheering, but also loud, derisive laughter.

Navarog looked on with a grin. He ran his hand over the blade of his sword.

"This day will go down in history as the day the destruction of Lavita began!" He held up the sword and continued speaking, "May the power of the demons be with us!"

A dark, pulsating wave slid from the sword, as if it had heard and understood Navarogs words.

"My evil demons, come to me and do as your king commands!"

With one blow, the bandit king smashed the sword into the ground.

The earth began to shake and crack. All the bystanders rushed to safety as quickly as they could, while the ground was completely split open.

Black creatures with glowing red eyes and long claws came climbing out of the resulting hole. Some flew up on pitch-black wings and landed on the ground in front of the bandits. They became more and more until finally the earth stopped shaking and the split ground closed again, as if nothing had happened.

There were hundreds of demons standing in front of Navarog, who pulled the Sword of Demons out of the ground again, and the remaining group of bandits.

Navarogs right-hand man, Wolfe, placed a black crown with gold accents on the bandit king's head.

Then Navarog stood before the waiting demons, sword in hand.

"My name is Navarog. I am your king and from now on you will do as I command you," he said in a strong voice.

The demons all simultaneously bowed to their new leader.

"Your wish is our command, master king. What have you summoned us for?" said one in an eerily cracking voice.

Navarog seemed pleased with the way the demons addressed him and grinned ahead.

"We are still on our way today to conquer the country. No one will and should doubt my power. My name will be feared. And nothing and no one will be able to stop me now! Get ready for



departure. Kill anyone who gets in my way. The world will be at my feet!"

The bandit king began to laugh loudly, devilishly.

Soon everything would be his!

# Chapter 1

It was dead quiet in the green forest surrounding the village of Liova. The calm before the storm that was sure to come, as it arose every day.

Amira sat on a branch high in a tree, hidden behind leaves. A quiver hung from her shoulder and she held a bow in her right hand. The bow that she had made with her own hands, because the village chief had not been willing to give her one. She had walked away from him with her head held high and into the woods. She had spent the rest of the day making that bow and perfected this in the weeks after. Now she still practiced every day with her handmade bow, four years later.

She sat very still in one of the many trees of the forest. She would remain so silent until the village men and boys gathered in the forest. Every day, when the sun was at its highest, they trained. The youngest only learned archery. As they grew older, they were also supposed to be taught one-on-one combat and, something only the most experienced men were allowed to do, swordsmanship. It was decided that when a young person proves himself worthy to learn swordsmanship, only then should the sword be handed over to them.

Amira trained with them almost every day, even though this was not allowed. But she enjoyed learning target archery. Ultimately, she was allowed to train, only because she was so stubborn to show up every day. Yet she was not allowed to learn to fight, or

as she called it: defend. The saying "women can't fight" was used all too often. A statement that Amira completely disagreed with.

She waited with her ears pricked until she heard the villagers approaching. She was going to wait in the tree until they started their training. Through the foliage of the tree, she could see the archers' training ground.

She knew that Aedion, the village chief, would come looking for her. Although Amira made sure he couldn't find her. She would only show herself when she decided. It had taken her a long time to find this hiding place and she wasn't about to give it up. She had been hiding here for months. And here she waited until the shooters started.

Amira had to admit that she couldn't wait until the time came. This was mainly because some of the village boys could not yet shoot well. Once they had shot their arrows, the moment came for her to show up and help them with their archery. Because that was something she was really good at.

In Liova, archery, sword fighting and one-on-one combat were a kind of sport during times of peace. When they were not harassed by bandits or other troublemakers, competitions were held once a month. The men and boys competed against each other in different age categories. A winner was then declared in each group. But even without those matches, everyone could guess who would win.

Sometimes they saw Lavitans from other villages of Lavita. And often they were interested in the life that was led in Liova. That interest was mainly in one of the most important rules that Aedion had drawn up: not killing animals for food.

Of course they had all kinds of animals in the village, but they were well cared for by their owners. Animals were good for many things. Like milk which could be made into food. But an animal existed to live and not to die for our pleasure, the village chief said, when asked about it by strangers.

Furthermore, all Lavitans throughout the country lived during summers from agriculture. In winter they grew special plants. In the evening you planted one seed in the ground and added a little water. The next morning there was a beautiful plant with three purple fruits. Three of those fruits were enough for one day. Those plants were called suash.

Amira sat up when she heard an enthusiastic cheer from not too far away: the villagers were coming closer!

She quickly shrunk down and looked through the leaves of the tree, keeping a close eye on the training field. After a few minutes she could hear the conversation that some men were having verbatim.

"...No use to him, Aedion. Why do you take him with you every time, if you know he can't do anything anyway?" one of them asked.

"Yes!" another chimed in. "That child better stay in the village!"

“Quiet!” Aedion commanded. “I don't want to hear about it anymore! Adrien may not be an archer, but I'm sure he will one day become a great warrior.”

Amira could hear the others chuckling softly. She clenched her free hand into a fist. This was something she couldn't leave untouched. They made fun of her best friend! Maybe not Aedion, because she could clearly hear from his voice that he had complete confidence in Adrien, but most people thought he couldn't do anything. In the village he was also called "the flower child", as he grew a beautiful flower garden every year.

Many villagers avoided him and thought he was a good-for-nothing, but Amira had taken a liking to him immediately when she came to live in the village. A day she could still remember very vaguely.

Fourteen years ago, when she was only four years old, someone had brought her to Liova. She didn't know who it had been, and the stable owner who had taken her in never wanted to say anything about it. She was at peace with that. If it was necessary, she would be told. And otherwise, not.

But from that one day there was only one thing she could remember clearly. Adrien, who came to greet her with flowers from his mother's garden. There had been an instant connection and they had been best friends ever since that day.

Amira carefully peered through the tree leaves. She saw Aedion, a tall and broad-shouldered man, immediately. His dark

brown hair blew slightly in the wind. He looked around inquisitively. It took Amira a lot of effort to contain her laughter. He was looking for her! Apparently, she wasn't the only one who noticed, because one of the men put a hand on Aedion's shoulder.

"What is it?" asked the balding man named Brugus.

"She's here...I'm sure," the village chief said.

"I just saw her in the village, Aedion. Don't worry. She can't come every day, can she?" said Brugus.

"She's been here different every day for the past four years..." Aedion muttered.

"Do you really think you can send her away? That girl is very obedient, but not when it comes to archery. Even if you send her back to the village, she will be back here to participate. Just accept that she is here. She wants to be able to defend herself if necessary. There's nothing wrong with that," said another man, with shoulder-length blond hair, named Bertran.

Aedion didn't seem to entirely agree. Then he sighed deeply and looked around again.

"If you're here, come and train," the man said in his deep voice.

Amira nevertheless remained very still. What if it was a trick?

"You see," said Brugus. "She's not here today."

Amira looked down with narrowed eyes. It looked like they meant it. Could she suddenly be allowed to join the training?

She looked around briefly and jumped as quietly as possible towards a branch. She carefully climbed down a little and sat on a branch where she could see them better and the men her. She brushed a strand of blonde hair from her face and turned to the village chief.

"You're not sending me back?" she asked, just to be sure.

Aedion looked at her for a long time with his serious gray eyes, without saying a word. Meanwhile, the young people had also joined and were interested in the staring contest between the village head and Amira. Ultimately, Aedion gave in.

"From now on you can train with us, without objection from me or the others. But you can only do archery," he said.

The girl nodded and jumped down. She extended her hand to Aedion and after a moment's hesitation he shook it.

"Thank you," Amira said softly with a smile.

Then she turned and, without caring about the others, walked towards the archery field and took an arrow from her quiver. She placed it on her bow and aimed carefully at the red rose. She breathed calmly and stood completely still, focused, looking at the target. She felt eyes piercing into her back. Everyone knew she was an excellent shot, but to hit the bullseye on a target that was forty-five yards away? There weren't many in the village who could hit that target.

As Amira exhaled, she released the arrow and watched as it landed in the center of the bullseye.

It was quiet for a moment. Then there was applause from the villagers behind her. She turned to them and bowed elegantly to them.

Grinning, Adrien came over to her.

"Show me how to do that," he said, his eyes glistening with pleasure.

Amira nodded and couldn't wait to help the boys.



## Chapter 2

"That was absolutely fantastic!" one of the newest students shouted after training.

"Did you think so?" Amira asked somewhat shyly.

"Yes! I haven't had a lesson like this before. And have you seen how much better I've become?"

Others joined him. They were all happy that Amira had been able to really teach them. And tomorrow they would be taught by her again.

One of them looked ahead with a sour expression. Jay, Brugus' son, who had previously taught the young people. He was a few years older than Amira, and he didn't like the fact that the boys thought she was better than him. Amira didn't react too much to it. She got the feeling he felt humiliated, even though that had never been her intention. She sighed deeply and turned back to the road to the village.

"Why do you look so sad?" asked Adrien, who was walking next to her.

"Oh, uh... I... Um..." she stammered.

"Come on, you can tell me, right?"

"It's Jay," she muttered. "I feel like I humiliated him by helping you with archery."

Adrien looked back briefly and saw Jays angry face.

"I think you're right. Maybe you guys should talk later or something."

Amira nodded and smiled crookedly at her friend.

"You have also improved, Adrien. At least you hit the target," she teased him.

Adrien burst out laughing. "Well, that's quite something!"

He linked his arm with hers and they looked at each other briefly.

"Maybe you're not very good at archery, I'm sure you have a hidden quality that even you have yet to discover," Amira said.

"There is no one who believes in me," Adrien said.

"I certainly do. And of course, you also have to believe in yourself! Trust yourself and you will discover your greatest strength."

"You really know how to cheer someone up."

They walked back to the village feeling cheerful. Once there, the group split up and everyone went back to their own homes. Amira walked on to the horse stables, which were behind the house. Her father was standing in one of the stables brushing a horse. He did this until the coat shone.

"Good afternoon, father," she greeted him.

"Ah! There you are. Did the training work out?" Pedro asked.

Amira chuckled and started to tell her father how Aedion had finally given her permission to train and also teach in the future. Her blue eyes sparkled. He listened attentively to her story and there was a smile on his face when she was finished.

"I told you so. Just keep going. In the end you always manage to get what you want."

"And as always, you were right," Amira said.

"Good. As long as you know, young lady. Are you finally going to help me with the horses?"

Amira bit her lip and looked at the ground. There was something she still had to do.

"What's wrong, my child?"

"If it's okay with you, I'd like to talk to Jay first. He looked so angry and unhappy when we went back to the village... And honestly, I'm afraid it's my fault, because..."

"...Because you took his place teaching the boys archery," Pedro finished her sentence.

She nodded.

"If you think you need to talk to him, then you should, Amira. Tell him what you think about it."

Amira nodded and kissed her father on both cheeks. Then she ran into the house, put her bow and quiver in her room and rushed back into the village. The village was small and she could already see Brugus' house when she rushed into the first street that led to the town hall. Brugus and Jay lived next to the town hall.

The houses were all made of wood and made by hand. They had covered the roofs with reeds that they had found along the river. They may have been simple houses, but the residents

here in Liova were happy. You didn't have to have a huge house or a lot of wealth to be proud of who you are.

She ran down the street as fast as she could. Less than two minutes later she knocked on the door of Brugus' house. In fact, she hoped the door wouldn't be opened. She and Jay had their disagreements before, but she knew she had to make it up to him. Yet they never really got along well. Just as she was about to turn and leave, the door opened. Brugus looked at her in surprise.

"Is Jay here?" Amira asked before giving Brugus the chance to say something.

"Yes, but I don't think he wants to talk to you right now."

"That's a shame for him. I have to talk to him. And now."

Brugus blinked a few times. He was never spoken to like that. And not at all by Amira.

Amira briefly saw Jay emerge from a room. When their eyes met, he darted back into the room and closed the door behind him.

"Sorry, Brugus, but you can't stop me," she said.

Without waiting for a response, she pushed past him and threw open the door to Jays room.

"We need to talk!"

Jay stood right in front of her, blinking.

"What... Get out of my room!" he exclaimed.

"No, Jay. I... Well... Um..."

"What do you want?"

"I'm sorry," Amira said in an almost whisper.

Jay almost stumbled backwards in surprise.

"You never apologize," he said suspiciously.

"I know. But I had to tell you. I'm sorry I took away your archery lessons. But I thought you wanted to get back to one-on-one fighting... So, I thought you wouldn't mind that much. And only afterwards did I notice that you were angry and felt humiliated. If you want, we can also give the lessons together..."

It remained silent between the two for a long time. Amira had put her hand over her mouth, only now realizing what she had said and that she had left the door open, so Brugus had heard it all. Jay could only stare at her. He couldn't believe what was happening now.

Brugus looked inside, wondering why it had suddenly become so quiet. He looked from his son to the girl, who stared at each other in silence. He walked in and waved his hand between them, but got no response. They were that surprised.

He grabbed his son by the shoulders and shook him. Blinking his eyes, he seemed to be fine again.

"Amira?" Jay asked, placing his hand on her shoulder.

She stared at him for a moment into space. Then it turned out that she too was completely fine again, although they were both a bit shocked.

"Did I really just say that?" the girl asked, a little embarrassed.

Brugus started laughing loudly. His whole body shook with him. Jay and Amira looked from each other to the man, who seemed to have gone completely crazy.

"What is it, father?" Jay asked.

"You two... Are really... Incredible!" the man shouted, still hiccupping with laughter.

"Would you mind leaving us alone for a moment?" Amira asked. Brugus couldn't say a word and walked away. He closed the door behind him.

"Amira, did you mean what you told me?" Jay asked. "That you want to take the archery lessons and then I'll go back to one-on-one fighting?"

She slowly nodded her head.

Jays' eyes lit up with pleasure. On an impulse he hugged her.

"Thank you! You're amazing!" he said cheerfully.

"Um... Well, you're welcome, Jay," Amira stammered.

She tried to gently pull away from his embrace, but he only held her tighter.

"Say... Jay... I can't... Can't breathe," she squeezed out.

Jay immediately let go of her and Amira's head was spinning.

"Are you okay? You look a bit pale," Jay asked.

She nodded. She took a few deep breaths and then smiled.

"I never thought we would be friends," she said.

Jays' eyes widened and he flushed a deep shade of red.

"Sometimes things don't turn out as expected. Anyway, thanks for considering us friends. That's already a lot of progress after the harvest ceremony."

Amira burst out laughing.

"Everyone was so mad at us!" she chuckled.

"And we were even madder at each other," Jay laughed.

"I should have shoved the chocolate cake in your face instead of the strawberry cake. It's way too good to be wasted on that."

Jay couldn't keep up with the thoughts of the harvest ceremony anymore.

"And that bucket of sticky sauce I dumped on you and then threw the grain on you! The chickens didn't know where to look!" he screamed.

"I think it would have been even better if we were friends at the time," Amira laughed.

"Maybe for the next harvest ceremony," Jay said conspiratorially with a wink.

"I'll let you know when I've come up with a plan."

"And I'll let you know when I've come up with a brilliant plan."

"Agreed to meet!"

Without warning, Amira was given another tight hug, even though she could still breathe.

"I'll see you tomorrow, okay? I'll go help my father take care of the horses," Amira said.

"Yeah, that's good," Jay said.