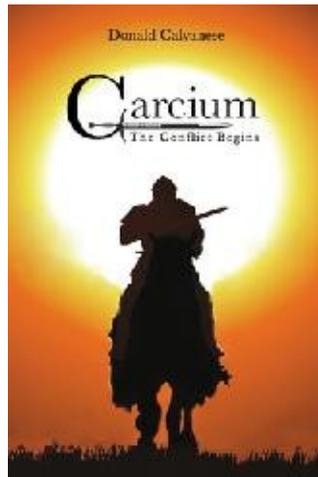


Excerpt from 'Carcium: The Conflict Begins'

By : [authordonaldcalvanes](#)

Readers are first introduced to a great king, the ruler of the kingdom of Carcium in the land of Phygeria. Brave and just, the king has protected Carcium from the evils of the outside world and the evils that can even lurk within the kingdom's walls. The mystical elves tasked with overseeing the kingdom of Phygeria and its rule have been pleased, and in return they have aided in containing the darkness beyond Carcium's boundaries. But when the brave king falls, the days of peace in Carcium fall with him.



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The sword came crashing down with such force that it shook Nina's balance, knocking her to her knees. She pulled her head up to see a massive gargoyle hovering over her. The beast was a glowing vermilion color with a muscular build and bottomless black eyes that looked deep into her soul. The creature's leathery wings moved slowly as the muscles in its torso flexed with each flap. The gargoyle shifted its body weight as it moved for its next attack. The leathery wings were almost motionless as it rushed her. She watched the calm and precise movements of the vicious creature. The battle had drained her, and she began to fear her talents would not be enough.

On the ground with her sword wedged under her leg, Nina faltered as she tried to regain her balance. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught the steel glistening in the sunlight as the gargoyle's sword rushed her. Nina wrestled with her sword as the gargoyle closed in. Nina had spent all of her childhood preparing and studying to be a knight. Now she would need to call upon all of her skills.

As the beast swooped down upon her, she quickly rolled over to avoid the attack. With its lightning speed, the gargoyle's sword caught her shoulder. Blood shot from her arm. The slice exposed the bone and artery but had used enough precision to leave them unscathed. The creature wanted its enemy alive. Nina raised her head, howling in agony as she tightly gripped her shoulder. Struggling to her feet and looking up, she noticed the gargoyle was out of her reach. The creature looked down at Nina. Its dark eyes bored deep into her soul. The pain grew in her arm as she held tight, waiting for the end. Nina froze as she watched the animal lick her blood from its sword.

Hovering in the air, watching, the creature waited for another opportunity to strike. With blood dripping down her arm, Nina pulled herself back to the battle. Nina held her sword rigid despite the pain. She knew the gargoyle needed only the slightest opening to strike. Her sword stood now as her only defense, and she held on for her life. Nevertheless, the gargoyle could see her weakening. Blood was pulsing from her wound with each beat of her heart. She winced with each flex of muscle as she held tight to the sword. Forcing herself to ignore the pain, Nina held firm.

“Come closer and fight! If I could get you to the ground, you beast, you would be mine,” Nina screamed at the hovering gargoyle.

There was a long pause as they studied each other. Nina looked down at her wound as she felt her hand numbing. The gargoyle's wings shot back as it started its downward flight. The creature clutched its sword hard, ready to thrust it through Nina's body. Nina tried to move, but something held her back. Darkness began to surround her; it was too late, the gargoyle too fast. *Clang!* The sound echoed through her ears. The massive blow forced her to shut her eyes, but Nina held her ground. She opened one eye and then slowly opened the other. Nina looked to see the gargoyle lying motionless at her feet. *How could this be? I did not swing in offense with my sword.* Her mind raced. *Something must have struck it, but what?* She noticed that its sword lay beside the creature in two pieces. Nina knew the force to slice a sword was too great for her to provide. Something or someone must have helped her, but why now? *Why at the end, and why not show yourself to me?* she thought.

She knelt beside the gargoyle, shuddering as she examined her blood on its lips. Moving her face close to the creature's mouth, she could feel hot, wet breath touch her skin. Slowly, Nina raised her head and softly spoke. “I have to end it.”

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She rose to her feet and raised her sword over her head. Nina tightly closed her hands around the handle and pointed it at the gargoyle's heart. Silent, Nina stood for a moment, reflecting on the battle she now would end with this one motion. As she thrust the sword down, the gargoyle howled in pain. The scream dissipated, and Nina stood looking down at the lifeless corpse.

With the battle now over she fell to her knees. The pain in her body pounded with every heartbeat, the cut deep and the blood loss great. She forced the victory to give her new life. It was over, and she knew it. Overflowing with triumph, she cried out, "I've done it. I've saved my kingdom. The nightmare is over." Looking up, Nina surveyed her kingdom, but the sight of the kingdom and the sky around it sobered her victorious mood. Nina contemplated the image of her home. She saw that nothing had changed. The sky was still painted black, the castle still dead. The life her kingdom once had had not returned. She felt faint. Bowing her head, she spoke. "Could it be the elves are giving me one last look at my kingdom?" she asked, looking back at the gargoyle through her tears. "Am I to spend the rest of eternity thinking about how I could have saved my kingdom? What more must I do!" She screamed to the sky. "What more!"

Her words cut short when she felt someone grab her neck from behind. She tried to turn but found herself unable to move. *Could this be an elf?* she thought. *But why do I feel so cold?*

Nina stood paralyzed as another hand touched her back and slowly began to stroke her hair, sending a chill down her spine. Suddenly and without warning, the grip tightened around her neck. With no time to gasp for air, her face quickly turned a dark crimson. She could feel a beating sensation on the walls of her head. Nina tried reaching for her attacker but was either not reaching far enough or in the right direction. Vying for air, Nina looked for her sword, but it lay on the ground out of reach.

Feeling her determination escape from her soul, she could no longer fight, her mind now losing to defeat. As if her attacker sensed this, the hand around her neck eased slightly. She only had enough strength for one burst at freedom. Throwing her body back against her assailant, Nina felt her attacker waver. Seeing a hand reach out for balance, she hurled herself forward. Nina broke free and landed on the ground a few feet from her aggressor. Slowly, the pressure in her head decreased. Nina could feel a ring of heat around her neck as she brought herself back to the problem at hand. She quickly jumped for her sword. Surprised, Nina found her sword in hand. Where she found the strength, she did not know. How her body forced her to fight, she could not understand. Her movements were smooth, yet she did not command them. Her training as a knight now controlled her.

She swiftly turned, anticipating someone charging her or standing in defense. Never did she expect to see the dreaded figure. It filled a huge black robe, standing softly in front of her with hands clasped gently in front of its dark being. She screamed in terror. Tightening both hands on her sword, she cautiously moved toward the figure. The ebony robe barely moved as Nina's sword became engulfed in a flash of light. The force from this knocked Nina off her feet, sending her flying to the ground. She wailed as blisters formed on her hands instantly from the heat of the light. Blood dripped from the blisters as the pain covered her mind.

She looked to see the figure slowly moving toward her. Nina reached for her sword but dropped it when the heat touched her blistered hands. The figure slowly pulled the hood from its head. She shrieked, "It can't be!"

There in front of her stood Duras Carcer, the one the elves had warned her about. The one she'd never seen and never thought existed till now. She knew it had to be him, for she could feel her own death around her.

"Of course," Duras Carcer spoke from deep inside her soul. "Don't pretend you didn't know. You accepted the truth when you tried to save your kingdom." He then added with a whisper, "When it

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was too late.

The words sent guilt through Nina's heart. She had dismissed her lessons about Duras Carcer as an exaggerated future of a ruler's life. She had servants to handle all of her problems. She had finally realized her failures. Her heart sank as she thought of the fate of her people.

Nina tried to sound determined, yelling at Duras Carcer. "You will not get my kingdom!" But she only sounded heartbroken.

Duras Carcer rose above her, engulfing the light around her with his robe. "Now, you must pay the price for your ignorance." His words forced her to hear defeat as well as feel it, thus closing the door on any hope she had to free herself or her kingdom. "You will now watch as I slowly destroy your kingdom."

"I will not," Nina shot back. "You have won, but I will not give you satisfaction beyond that."

"You do not understand." His voice was dark and calm but cold as the night. "You will watch the fate you have made for your kingdom." She knew he spoke the truth. Defeated, she had become his slave. This was the law of the land, the words of the elves.

Nina felt she deserved to die for her failure and welcomed the thought. She felt death would stop the pain. "You must kill me," Nina pleaded with Duras Carcer, hoping his love for death would end her suffering.

His eyes looked through her, and she could feel the presence of the place she had always feared but never been. A chill ran deep into her bones. Alone, she stood in shame for having lost her kingdom.

She tightly closed her eyes trying to turn away from herself, but the contempt she felt for herself overpowered all of the deepest feelings. "No." Simply *no*. The word fell upon her. She could feel the word rip into her heart and choke it. Duras Carcer grabbed her, pulling her to his face, forcing her to see her own soul die in his eyes as he spoke. "You will watch as I destroy your kingdom." His words were cold and dark inside her head.

Weakened from the battle, she could no longer fight. Nina searched but could not find the strength to elude the visions. She tried to close her eyes, but the image only became stronger in her mind. She hated herself for her weakness.

The destruction would be quick, but she would live with the pain always. She watched the elderly, the sick, and the children perish because they were weak. The men and women were forced into slavery as they tore her castle to the ground. With their task complete, their need no more, they were exterminated. Watching them die, Nina imagined how much they must hate her. With each soul that perished, she was forced to look into their eyes as they took their last breaths. Each face burned into her memory.

When all was done and her kingdom destroyed, the images faded to darkness. Nina felt relieved; now that Duras Carcer had her kingdom, he would kill her, thus ending her anguish. She watched as he stood silent. She prayed for the action to end her life.

"I have decided..." He paused, adding to her suspense. "That you will be my slave for the remainder of your life."

With those words, Nina's body fell limply to the ground. Nina reached out, grasping at Duras Carcer's robe.

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Tears rolled down her face. "You can't," she begged. "You gave your word! Please, end my pain now."

Duras Carcer glared at her with his crimson eyes. For a moment, she thought he would kill her.

"No! You will live."

Donald Calvanese has been writing for practically his whole life. Creating lyrics and music since he was a pre-teen. Donald has published many songs over the years, eventually transforming his music into fiction. After watching a Disney movie with his daughter he became inspired to write the Carcium Trilogy. Learn more at www.carcium.com.

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