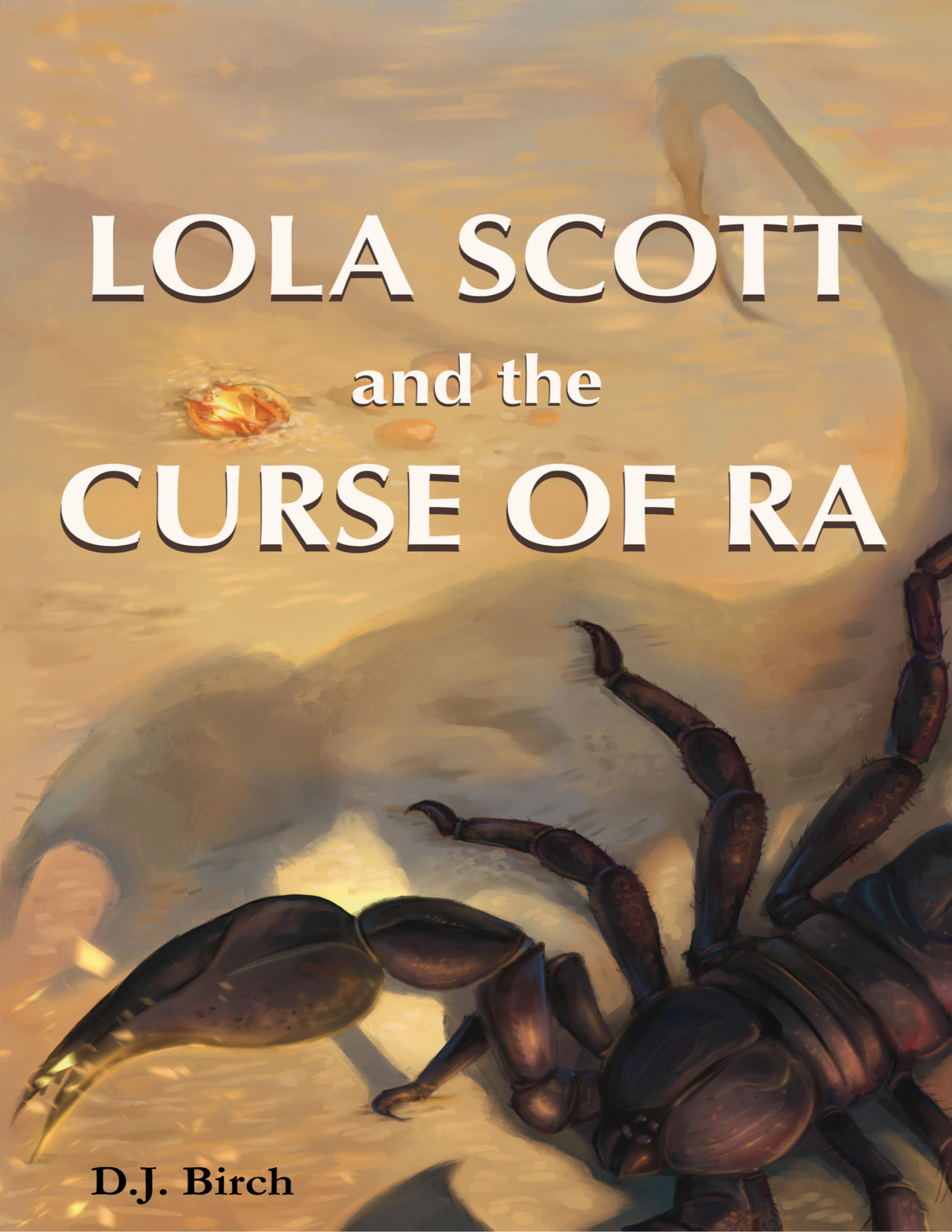




LOLA SCOTT

and the

CURSE OF RA

D.J. Birch

Lola Scott and the Curse of Ra

DJ Birch

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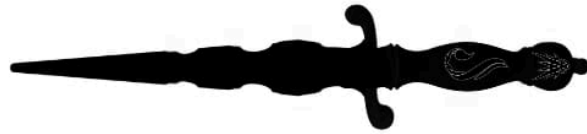
[Author's Note](#)

[About the Author](#)

The thrilling life and adventures of Lola Scott have been carefully recorded by D.J. Birch and include elements of intense violence, brutal injuries, perilous situations, blood, dismemberment, burning, murder, consumption of human flesh, death, graphic language, ableist comments mentioned, drug use, mention of suicide, familial abuse, loss of family, grief, and sexual activities.

Readers who may be sensitive to this material, please take note, and welcome to the Marked Covenant.

*For those who had to fight to survive, I hope you are living well.
And for Lauren.*



PROLOGUE

“For his crimes against humanity and the murder of the Marked Ones, it is hereby decreed that, in the unlikely event that Juba survived the Day of Reckoning, he will be executed on sight.”

Excerpt from Librarian records, dated ~3,400 BC

“From blood, a song cries for justice:

The Scorpio will sting the Ram

And many stars will shatter before there is peace.”

Prophesied by the first Seer, dated ~10,000 BC

Part 1



CHAPTER 1

Lola

Western South America, AD 1430

Trying to reason with a primitive, bloodthirsty deity wasn't one of my best ideas.

In my defense, I didn't want to get blood on my new pants.

I twisted my machete, letting the steel dig in further through the dense layers of scales with a satisfying squelch of flesh. The decaying temple surrounding me trembled as the dying roars of the beast threatened to disrupt the stony foundation.

After what seemed like an eternity, my blade reached the heart, and the beast's cries died down to whimpers. The fight had been won.

I strolled out of the temple's darkness and winced at the onslaught of light. Deep in the heart of the Andes Mountains, the dense fog snaked through the trees like extended fingers curling around the hand of a lover.

The tranquil jungle morning was starkly at odds with the deadly battle that had taken place within the belly of the ancient temple.

The *Amaru* had been terrorizing local wildlife and tribes over the past year. Normally a recluse, the flying, serpent-like beast had grown bolder in the Andes, taking refuge in an abandoned temple. Ever the diplomat, I had attempted to compromise with the *Amaru* to find it a better home and food

source. When the creature tried to take a bite of my arm instead, I decided our negotiations had reached a stalemate.

Droplets of thick blood fell from the machete in my hand.

“Son of a ...” I cursed, looking down at my cargo shorts stained scarlet. “Definitely ruined,” I grumbled, flinging my weapon down.

I assessed the damage and determined that no amount of dry cleaning could save them. I gathered errant strands of curly red and pushed them back into my sweaty ponytail.

Wiping my weapon clean in the tall grass, I sheathed it back at my side. Rummaging through one of my many pockets, I pulled out a sleek, white rectangle with headphones wrapped haphazardly around it. Placing the buds in my ears, I scrolled through the iPod and clicked on *When You Were Young*.

Bobbing my head to The Killers, I retrieved my backpack from the deteriorating steps, slung it over my shoulder, and began the long trek back to civilization.



English Countryside, AD 2007, Present Day

Rubbing the tiredness from my eyes, I peeled my forehead off the cool window and looked out at the familiar rolling dark moors. The terrain changed as the car turned onto the gravel driveway, and Dalton House came into view.

House was hardly the word I would associate with the enormous manor ahead of us. Sprawling over two thousand acres, the residence had at least forty bedrooms and eighty smaller rooms, including bathrooms, entertainment areas, and halls.

I felt more warmth coming from the heater in the backseat of the Rolls-Royce than from the cold, ornate structure that I called home.

The car slowed to a stop at the front entrance just at the top of the half-circle driveway.

“Thanks, Jerry.” I smiled as my driver opened the door for me. Stepping down onto the pebbled walk-up, I felt a twinge of longing for the warm Peruvian sun. The dreary, English gray clouds overhead weren’t exactly a welcoming sight.

“Here you are, Miss Scott.” He handed me my backpack caked with dirt.

“Take care, say hello to Sheila for me.” I waved goodbye and readjusted my earbuds.

As the car drove off, I bounded up the steps to avoid being left in a cloud of dust. Clutching my backpack close to my chest to minimize the jangling of zippers and key chains, I opened the heavy front door and stepped inside. Moving as stealthily as I could, I tiptoed across the marble floor of the foyer.

I crossed my fingers in the hopes he was out ...

“Scott!”

Groaning, I turned around, plastering on a toothy grin.

“Will! I missed you, darling. How’s your day been?”

A lanky middle-aged man with a black patch on his right eye rounded the corner. I winced as I noted the red hue coloring his ears.

“What happened?” He snatched my headphones out of my ears.

“Well, it’s my same routine. Take a sleeping pill for the long flight and wash it down with a mimosa. Before I knew it, I was ...”

“Don’t be coquettish with me, girl,” the old man spoke in a clipped, posh English accent. “Why are you back so soon? That mission should have taken you at least five light-years.”

“Would you believe me if I said I missed you, honey?” I batted my eyes, giving a sickly-sweet smile.

Time was a fickle mode of transportation. The present couldn’t seem to keep up with the past. Twenty years, or light-years, spent in the past would only progress as a year in the present.

I tried to sidestep Will on his blind side. Unfortunately, his other senses were all too keen, and he anticipated my move.

“Answer me.” He scrutinized me with one icy, gray eye.

“I had some help.” I ventured into the kitchen and dropped my backpack on the floor. Will followed close behind.

“Scott, I told you not to engage with the Inca tribes.” He slammed the fridge shut as I attempted opening it. “The Spanish won’t arrive at their borders for at least another hundred years. What kind of cataclysmic consequences will this have on the already tenuous space-time continuum when they encounter a pallid-skinned, meagerly dressed woman?”

I sighed and scratched my scalp. “Your mastery of the English language never ceases to amaze me.” When I saw he was not amused, I shrugged and walked towards the pantry. “What’s the fun of speaking *Quechua* if you can never use it?” When I felt Will’s one good eye boring into my back, I continued, “If I hadn’t made contact with them, there wouldn’t be *anyone* to greet the Spanish in a hundred years. The Amaru was picking them off one by one, snatching them from their villages as if they were no more than rodents.”

I shuddered, recalling when I saw firsthand that long, scaly beast descending from the sky to snatch two innocent souls in its sharp claws and shoot back up with its massive feather wings. Just before the creature was out of sight, it tossed the two people into its massive jaws in full view of the horrified villagers.

I rummaged through the cupboard and settled on a bag of salt and vinegar chips. Popping a few into my mouth and chewing roughly, I thought back on my decisions and only regretted that I hadn’t killed the monster more slowly.

Will pinched the bridge of his nose before asking, “Did you at least veil yourself to help assimilate better?”

“OK, hear me out.” I paused mid-chew, swallowing hard, before facing him. “This tribe had some of the best tracking skills in history, far exceeding my own. They responded better to a perfect stranger than someone from a rival tribe.”

The old man’s expression darkened. “You directly disobeyed my orders. I could wring your pestiferous little neck right about now.”

“I know you’re angry but now is not the time for your fetish.”

Losing any remaining patience, if he had some at all to begin with, Will unleashed a tirade of lectures and colorful adjectives on me as I shoveled more handfuls of crispy chips into my mouth.

“I take it Scott has returned?”

A genuine smile stretched across my face at the sound of a more friendly British voice.

“Hey Lance.” I glanced back at a tall, refined man appearing to be in his early thirties, leaning against the door frame. “Yes, about five minutes ago.”

He shook his head. “It took you that long to upset poor Will? Must be a new record.”

Lance strode into the kitchen with an air of sophisticated confidence and dignity that turned heads whenever he walked into a room. His thick, dark brown hair was cut short and styled away from his shaven face. He wore a clean-pressed button-up shirt tucked into dark navy slacks. The fragrance of his warm, spicy cologne permeated the air, and I immediately felt my tense muscles relax in the presence of my friend. “What did she do this time?” Lance asked, crossing to stand next to Will and folding his arms across his broad chest.

“You don’t want to know,” Will huffed. “We’ll finish this discussion later, Scott.” He gave me one final dirty glare before leaving the room, grumbling to himself.

“Would it kill you to follow his rules?” Lance rubbed his jaw.

“Yes,” I answered, double-checking that Will had left before getting a step ladder and climbing up towards the higher pantries.

I knew where he kept the good liquor stashed. I grabbed a bottle of my favorite whiskey and tossed it down to Lance.

He caught it with one hand and raised a brow. “So melodramatic.” He tried to sound serious, but I saw a ghost of a dimple in his left cheek.

“Thank you.” I climbed down from the ladder and caught a glance of my reflection in a glass cabinet.

I massaged my freckled cheeks and pushed the skin away from my face, trying to rub away my exhaustion. I needed to shower, sleep, and debrief my assignment.

But something far more pressing was on my mind.

“Have you been called away since I left for South America?”

“No.” Lance retrieved two crystal glasses from another cupboard. “I’ve been here training her.”

Neither of us needed to clarify who *she* was.

I walked around the granite island and picked up the house’s landline. “While the rest of us are out there risking our necks, you get to be wined and dined by Will in his castle,” I grumbled.

Pressing a number, I changed my tone when my call was answered. “Hi Curtis, how are you? Yes, just returned. Can I get a margarita pizza and sandwich ...? Nothing too fancy, just ham, Swiss cheese, mayo, and lettuce on a toasted ... what did you make me last time? Yes, on a baguette! And a side of those thin, crispy fries that I love with that fancy seasoning ... rosemary? Perfect, thank you!” I motioned to Lance. “You want anything?”

“Nothing in that order was for me?” He chuffed and poured our drinks.

I flipped him off and hung up the phone.

“I miss Poh Ling,” Lance sighed.

“Really? I like the new chef.” I took my glass from him.

“You enjoy his fried chicken sandwich and Australian accent,” Lance teased. “Shall we pick up where we left off? I believe it was my move.”

I drank the whiskey to the dregs, savoring the friendly, warm burn spreading throughout my chest. “What happened to ladies first? Here, I thought the British were honorable gentlemen.” I slapped my hand over my heart and feigned shock.

He quirked a brow, swirling his drink. “It’s my move, Scott. We paused after you moved your Bishop, and I was called away to an assignment in Moscow for nearly two light-years.”

Shit.

He was right, but I would never freely admit it.

“Fine, fine!” I raised my hands in defeat and poured myself another drink, the amber liquid sloshing in the pristine crystal. “Have it your way.” I playfully knocked my hip into his as I walked by, taking the bottle with me.

“We should be able to finish tonight.” He followed me out of the kitchen and into the hallway.

Despite it being the closest place I could call home, I still easily got lost in the endless passageways and secret corridors of Will’s ancestral family estate. As long as I could find good booze, a comfortable place to sleep, and occasionally catch up with my friend, the other ancient rooms could house Bigfoot for all I cared.

“Did we place bets?” The old mahogany doors groaned under their weight as I pushed them open to enter the smoking room.

“Not that I recall.”

I considered knocking out one of the rare book editions from the neatly lined bookshelves to give the place some life. In a way, it reminded me of Will, tightly wound and ever composed. Still, this was the coziest room in the house, and I savored the privacy.

Will and I took our designated spots opposite one another in deep brown leather chairs. I always sat farthest; it was closer to the fireplace, and my chair hadn’t quite been rid of its rich musky scent of tobacco from decades of pipe and cigar smoking.

Sometimes, when I knew Will was out of the house, which wasn’t that often, I could convince Lance to light one with me for history’s sake.

“How have things been at the house?” My eyes roamed the chessboard, refamiliarizing myself with our game.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Lance shoot me a pointed look. “If you want to know how her training is going, you only need to ask.”

I looked up, my face remaining neutral. “I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t have to.”

I brought the glass to my lips and narrowed my eyes. “Lance.”

“She’s magnificent,” he said matter-of-factly. “I’ve never seen anyone excel so quickly at ... well, everything: combat, weapons, history ...”