

AUTHOR'S NOTE



“They’re driven to pursue It. So driven that they do it entirely for their own sake – it’s their dream. Men yearn for their dreams, regardless of their class and no matter what their achievements have been. One can be sustained by their dream, hurt by their dream, or even killed by it. And though one might be abandoned by his own dream, even then it will smolder in his heart forever. One should know what it feels like to strive for such goals. To willingly martyr yourself to the god named DREAM.”

Griffith (Band of The Hawks)
From Kentaro Miura’s Legendary Manga:
BERSERK

Salve, dear reader! You have officially reached the end of **Book 3** in the **Deorum Legions** saga. This book is the first of a multi-part tale that encompasses the **Nibiru Arc**. After writing the conclusion to the Populares Uprising with the defeat of Drucilla and Numitor, there were numerous paths I wanted to steer the series towards. Since I have spent the

greater part of two books solely fixated on the fantasy equivalent of Ancient Italy, I felt that it was time to take Deorum in a new direction. The world of Theia is abundant with unique and exciting locations which can offer fertile ground for compelling scenarios and story development. Do I take Velkan to the frozen wilds of Hyperborea to face barbarians? What of the Hellenic city-states of Lemuria? Or perhaps east to where Orestes has gone? But in the end, I chose **Nibiru** as the next phase in Velkan's journey.

It goes without saying that Nibiru is heavily inspired by Ancient Egypt – particularly during the Ptolemaic Dynasty whose roots hark back to the days of Alexander of Macedon. While the entire canon of Egypt's vast history is fascinating, *this* period saw great changes not only in Egypt, but also across the wider Mediterranean world. Rome quickly rose to become a dominant force in the region. After their conquests of Carthage, Hispania, Gaul, Illyria, and many of the Greek city-states, it seemed that nothing could stop Rome from swallowing up the whole world. But the Republic was also in a state of crisis.

It could be argued that the Roman Republic began its path towards decay with the assassination of the Gracchi brothers who championed land redistribution in favor of the people. The widening social divide between the patricians and the plebeians kept seeping into every aspect of Roman society. The Servile Wars complicated things, with the first and second slave revolts centering around Sicily – each led respectively by Eunus and Athenion. The Third Servile War, led by the gladiator Spartacus, was far more dramatic.

This corrosion was only further inflamed by the *Bellum Sociale*, where numerous Italic allies rebelled in open war. Eventually, we see the pivotal dictatorship of Gaius Marius,

followed by the purges of the dictator Sulla. It had gotten to a point where the rule of law was administered primarily by the sword. The Republic saw the rise of ambitious men with large armies loyal *not* to the state, but to their general.

This was the world by which Gaius Julius Caesar was born into and where much of the *essence* for Deorum is derived from. This is also when we start getting into what I consider to be one of the most fascinating crossovers of all time. After his victory in the Battle of Pharsalus, Caesar chases after the defeated Consul, Pompey Magnus, who fled to Egypt. What happened next is a chain of events that saw Caesar join forces with Cleopatra to overthrow her brother, Ptolemy XIII, and retake the throne. I just love this period in history. The very image of Roman legionnaires marching down the Nile with pyramids to the distance intrigues me. I wanted Velkan and his comrades to emulate a similar image.

And yet, despite all of Caesar's dramatic exploits, I am always reminded of an interesting account which comes down to us from the Roman historian, Suetonius. When a younger Julius Caesar came upon the ancient city of Gades, now modern Cadiz in Spain, he entered the old Temple of Hercules and laid his eyes upon a statue of the warrior-king, Alexander. It is said that Caesar lamented over the fact that, while he was of similar age to him (33), he bemoaned that he had achieved nothing of significance. By 32 years of age, Alexander the Great had conquered much of the known world, birthing an empire which stretched from Greece all the way to India. In the opinion of Caesar, his own life was nothing remarkable.

While I have zero interest in conquering my neighbors and acquiring vast swathes of enemy territory, the sentiment of inadequacy is surprisingly relatable to me. We all know

what it's like to compare ourselves to those who are, either perceptively or demonstrably, more successful than us. This angst is further accentuated with social media acting as a filter where people post tailored narratives which elevate their lives well past the point of truth; creating a hyperreality which sends us deeper into the pits of self-doubt.

Upon writing Book 3, I've had many opportunities to reflect and ruminate over the past. By summer of 2024, I will turn 30. This has filled me with much dread over the past several months. Although very little seems to tangibly change in the transition from 29 to 30, there is invariably an internal sense of loss. An entire decade which defines the springtime of our youth comes to a close as we all enter the long summer. With that, we then inexorably march towards the autumn and winter of our brief existence on Earth.

This was put into greater perspective back in October when I crossed the Atlantic and spent a much-needed holiday in Europe. It was *there* in that most splendid region of the world that I was able to find some semblance of peace, clarity, and focus; realigning myself with the **manga dream**. Over the course of this journey in the old continent, my faithful travel companions and I would explore nearly twenty towns and cities across Italy with slight detours into Spain, France, and the United Kingdom.

Every day was like stepping into a sort of dream, with overwhelming sensations of awe and wonderment being a constant state of being. My obsession over the Romans only served to enhance my appreciation. One of the chief reasons I came to Europe was to find inspiration for future books of **Deorum Legions™**. Instead, what ended up happening was the rekindling of a flame that was dangerously close to being extinguished. In essence, I had found *myself* again.

As I walked through the charming streets and sat in the dazzling public squares, I could scarcely believe that I was indeed standing on the same sacred ground as the ancient Romans once did all those millennia ago. The city of Rome itself is a history-nerd's delight. Everywhere you look, you are bombarded by a profound heritage stretching back into the endless mists of antiquity. No words can describe the sheer immaculacy of the splendorous buildings of various architectural styles or the grand cathedrals resplendent with delicious detail. Upon sailing the majestic cerulean waters of the Mediterranean, I was gripped by an unspeakable joy. Here we were, gazing out towards the very sea by which Romans would have affectionately called *Mare Nostrum*, which means *Our Sea*.

For much of this trip, we were incredibly busy with the jam-packed itinerary that we had crafted prior to arrival. I hardly had a chance to take a step back and perform the very act I sought to do in the first place: writing! But this plethora of thrilling and stimulating experiences proved a most necessary ointment. Just as Julius Caesar lamented over the great feats of Alexander, much of my twenties was spent wallowing in feelings of wasteful inadequacy.

Unfortunately, I've spent this decade stuck between a dance of periodic unemployment and low-wage drudgery. In essence, I'm no closer now to achieving the manga dream than when I was a boy; despite various attempts to change the circumstances of my life. At times, it felt that my very environment was fundamentally antithetical to all that I aspired to be... Although... Looking back... I can certainly identify numerous decisions pointing to *me* as the chief saboteur of my life. Thankfully, my time exploring Europe allowed me to mend many of these depressive neuroses.

It wouldn't be until I reached the region of Tuscany where I was finally granted a moment of pause. The rustic and isolated nature of these hillside towns offered a pristine opportunity to open my notebook, put my thoughts to paper, and plot out the future... And thus, it was to the beautiful and breathtaking backdrop of Montepulciano where I came to reacquaint myself with... Myself.

THE MANGA DREAM PLAN -----

Deorum was always meant to be a **manga**. Since the day I first conceived of Velkan and Bhutaki in middle school, I knew it was destined to show up on the pages of a manga. This holds true even today. Even though **Deorum Legions™** is *currently* an unknown trilogy of fantasy novels, it is my unwavering intention to turn this story into a proper manga with the additional goal of having it become a globe-trotting anime. Upon ample introspection, I've drafted what I hope is a suitable plan that will see this boyhood dream realized. I've come to call this initiative:

The Manga Dream Plan

or

Manga No Yume Keikaku.

The primary objective of the 漫画の夢計画 is to establish an official **manga production studio** either in **Japan** itself or remotely. This manga studio will be a subsidiary of **Owl Shogun Studios LLC** and will consist of a small but dedicated team of talented artists. Their sole task is to adapt, and possibly improve, these books into a high-quality manga fit for a global audience. It's still too early to determine if the studio can indeed be incorporated on Japanese soil. Visa requirements are a reality that can very well derail this part

of the plan. Should I not be able to procure the visa, I shall simply leverage web technologies to hire artists abroad. Whichever the case is, it does not change the ultimate outcome. But of course, to have a manga, there must be content to adapt. As of this writing, there are already three books published. I estimate that these are worth about 15 manga *tankōbon* (volumes). Below is a rough forecast for the future of the series and their release targets.

| DEORUM LEGIONS™ Book Release Schedule | | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Age | Year | Book | Title | Status |
| 27 | 2022 | I | The Origin | Published |
| 28 | 2023 | II | The Servile Conspiracy | Published |
| 29 | 2024 | III | The Grain Crisis | Published |
| 30 | 2025 | IV | Sons of The Republic | In Progress |
| 31 | 2026 | V | Regis Blood | - |
| 32 | 2027 | VI | Vermillion Sands | - |
| 33 | 2028 | VII | Dynasty | - |
| 34 | 2029 | VIII | Eastward Odyssey | - |
| 35 | 2030 | IX | Dissidium | - |
| 36 | 2031 | X | The Promise | - |

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With a rate of one book per year, there will always be more than enough material to work with regarding manga

adaptations. The pertinent question is: how do I get from writing novels to leading a team of artists? To launch this studio, I must first secure my own finances. Money, or lack thereof, has been the source of all my limitations in life. The acquisition of said capital will drastically change everything. So really, I have to escape my impecunious circumstances with a sustainable strategy. For a decade I have struggled to find an answer. One *possible* solution that I came up with, sadly a little too late, is technology.

WEB DEVELOPMENT -----

As of this writing, one *potential* path is to eventually transition into **web development**; using that foundation to pivot into other and more specialized problem domains in the tech field. This means that I must become proficient in a large number of skills and disciplines such as computer science fundamentals, higher mathematics, and a plethora of relevant technologies.

Some programming languages I'll need to learn are HTML, CSS, JavaScript, Python, PHP, SQL and perhaps C# or C++ if I ever want to start making my own video games. There are a wide variety of tools to master too such as git, GitHub, Linux, IDEs, and the command line. Then there are the vast breadth of concepts that must be internalized over time such as data types and structures, algorithms, domains, hosting, web APIs, UI & UX principals, the DOM, security, authentication, containerization, virtualization, etcetera... It really is a LOT to learn... Perhaps *too* much.

There's also several CSS frameworks such as Tailwind, Bootstrap, or Bulma. Front-End frameworks like React, Vue, Angular, SolidJS, or TypeScript are valuable additions. Back-End frameworks like Next.JS or Redwood may be critical

should I seek to become a true full-stack developer. This is further reinforced by needing to understand server-side databases like with MongoDB, Oracle, or MySQL. To my *limited* knowledge, this is but a small taste of what to expect and is merely the *bare minimum* requirement for a junior role. In order for me to land an *actual* position in this volatile and uncertain job market, I may need much, much more.

Looking back, I have only two real regrets in life. The first is leaving Japan... The second was not getting into programming in my early 20s. Had I done the latter, I'd be in a far more advantageous position today. Most likely, in adherence with the manga dream, I'd already be working remotely in Japan with plenty of capital accrued to fund the manga studio... I would not be languishing in Davenport.

While there is still some opportunity as of 2023, it has also become insanely competitive. In lieu of mass layoffs, there are simply fewer entry-level positions for an ever-increasing influx of candidates like myself looking to switch fields. Additionally, self-taught autodidactics like me are competing against younger and formally trained Computer Science graduates. Further complicating things is the sudden and meteoric rise of artificial intelligence; specifically that of machine learning based on Large Language Models.

When I was 19 years old, I concluded that knowledge of computer programming was the new literacy of the 21st century. I strongly believed that machine automation could eventually render most people unemployable in my lifetime and that the best way to future-proof oneself was to get into the tech industry. But I incorrectly assumed that it would only be blue-collar labor jobs being replaced by robots. The irony is that robotics has yet to reach the point of fully replacing human muscle.

Instead, generative AI threatens our most prized of the human domains: creative and intellectual pursuits. The tech landscape is changing so fast that it's a bit difficult to keep up with. With powerful AI tools like ChatGPT, DALLÉ-3, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion, media once thought the exclusive dominion of humanity such as art, literature, music, videography, and even people's likeness, can now be instantly fabricated via a few sentences in a prompt.

Do you want to make a feature-length film but haven't the skill nor an interest to learn the craft? Want to write a best-selling novel but can't be bothered to put in the time? Want to create incredible artwork that will wow audiences yet have zero artistic aptitude? Want to create dazzling music but never cared to train yourself on theory, notation, and composition? Need voice actors? No worries! Just type a few passages into a prompt and AI shall convert natural human language into an algorithmic solution. Let AI do all the heavy lifting, so you don't have to. The *current* tech may be limited *today*, but it *is* advancing at a rate that biology simply can't match. And this, my dear reader, is merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg... Soon, it may even replace software engineers – a most frightening prospect.

As a natural-born artist fueled by my imagination, AI deeply concerns me. What use are human beings in the eyes of corporate executives or avaricious shareholders whose only commitment is to maximize profits? Why hire people when, one day, an AI model can do the work faster, cheaper, and will never demand compensation, healthcare, or labor rights? Why have a dedicated team or staff when only one individual with a simple text prompt could suffice? In this modern society, the profit motive supersedes all; worker's rights, dignity and livelihoods be damned.

I fear most for my fellow artists around the world who, despite dedicating their entire lives towards mastering the craft, now face a collective existential crisis. People now publish entire books generated by AI yet have the audacity to call themselves *authors*. People shamelessly post AI-generated art yet have the temerity to call themselves an *artist*. Even lackadaisical students in academia use AI to cheat. It only gets stranger as one's own face and voice can be unduly appropriated with deepfake technologies.

Will the day inevitably come when manga ceases to be a fundamentally *human* endeavor? Is it still really *art* if an algorithm generated it using massive datasets derived from the stolen works of countless non-consenting humans across the internet? What of the legality of copyright, ownership, and intellectual property when AI models are trained via the public pillaging of the arts and sciences? Will the internet itself eventually become a void where bots generate an infinite wasteland of AI content? How do we sufficiently guard against rampant misinformation in our elections?

I have no doubt that future generations will look upon these views as the archaic fearmongering of a backwards luddite refusing to adapt to the new reality. And perhaps there is some modicum of truth to this statement. I sincerely hope that I am proven historically incorrect. Perhaps there is no merit to these concerns. Regardless of my own personal feelings, AI is here to stay and will only continue to alter our civilization for better or worse. Rather than resist the tide, we must embrace it, lest we sink into the depths of obsolescence. We must actively participate and shape it to serve **humans**.

AI, like any major tech revolution, is certain to disrupt numerous industries in the coming decades. Who knows if software development will even be a *profitable* career in ten

years? Who knows just how many people will be rendered unemployable through no fault of their own? Although, we can certainly look forward to the sheer abundance of future scientific breakthroughs thanks to this technology. Despite this, I still think that knowing how to code may be a valuable skill moving forward. Being involved in the tech industry is possibly the best way to shield against irrelevancy... And given my lack of options in life right now, tech may be my *only* path to escape poverty and manifest the **manga dream**.

MOVING FORWARD -----

Much of my twenties was wasted chasing a plethora of false opportunities. I recall applying for thousands upon thousands of jobs, from well-respected enterprises to fast-food chains, all while attending numerous job fairs along with a multitude of folk desperate for financial stability. In the end, my efforts amounted to nothing. All I could ever procure, despite my utterly worthless college degree, were hospitality positions which not only tested my patience but put in question my desire to keep on living. When I was 13, I genuinely believed that I would've already left for Japan after high school to pursue a fulfilling career in manga. Instead, I now currently serve spiteful and wrathful tourists from the front desk lobby of a tacky resort at the agonizing age of 29. This has been the wretched story of my twenties... One which I am determined to change in my thirties.

The Manga Dream Plan encompasses the next several years which will start on **January of 2024** and conclude with the establishment of my manga studio sometime either in 2027, 2028, or 2029 at the latest. I'll be in my mid-thirties by then; a far cry from the original plan I concocted in middle school. But better late than never! Most would have already

given up on their dreams by now; their ambitions robbed by the corrosiveness of capitalist indifference. I'm merely a fool who's been pursuing this dream of mines for so long that I don't know how else to live.

Web Development and computer programming is just *one* possible pathway to freedom. Perhaps delving into the real estate industry, either in the sales or finance side of things, can be a valuable alternative? All I know is that a regular job may never afford me the means to free myself from the economic thralldom of corporate pleonexia. If I'm to one day realize the lofty and fanciful dream of launching a manga studio in Japan, I cannot do it with the mediocre wages of Florida's tourism industry. All the same, I must determine a viable path and stick with it to the bitter end.

There will most definitely be numerous obstacles and hardships on this journey. I may not be able to acquire a tech job in a timely manner. Japan might not even grant me a visa; blocking all efforts to start a business there. Even more scary to me is the very real possibility that no one will ever like Deorum Legions or any future books I write; rendering this entire project null and void. What to do then in the face of such overwhelming adversity?

Should the worst indeed come to pass, one silver lining in regards to web development is that it can open up the doors to life overseas. In lieu of my rapidly waning interests to remain in the United States of America, there are other nations I'd like to pursue; each for varying reasons. Chiefly among them are China, Singapore, South Korea, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Italy. But no matter where I live on Earth, I shall always hold steadfast to the manga dream by publishing even more books while I endeavor to produce its manga.

One persistent challenge in this future equation will be **brand recognition**. As of right now, no one in the world knows or cares about Deorum Legions. In an oversaturated ecosystem where there is more content available than ever before in history, a single Deorum book is but a mere drop in an endless ocean of content. Without the money and the social influence to navigate this noise, Deorum Legions is virtually invisible. I don't have any substantial followers on social media, nor have I ever been particularly successful in such efforts. Regardless, I must figure out a way to promote the word of Deorum to a global audience... Else it is doomed to molder in eternal obscurity.

The final missing piece to this equation is **distribution**. This is critical in making Deorum available to a worldwide marketplace. I write novels which act as a script. My studio artists will take that script and adapt it into manga. But who distributes it? It would be great if Owl Shogun Studios could take up such a burden. But in the event that it ends up being too costly, perhaps a **distribution partner** is more sensible? I'd need someone with the resources and experience to take a product (Deorum) and market it, publish it, print it, and sell it to all bookstores and digital platforms available.

In an ideal world, I greatly desire a mutually beneficial partnership between **Owl Shogun Studios** and **Viz Media**. The good people at Viz are perfectly positioned in the market for manga and have a storied tie with Japanese publishers. It is a natural and logical arrangement. In the past, I've sent several submissions to their **Original Manga imprint** in the hopes of proving the merits of Deorum. Sadly, this has led to nought. Perhaps it is because I have no preexisting fanbase on social media? Perhaps I am too risky and unknown, thus undesirable? I can only ever guess in the absence of a direct

response. Still, I am hopeful that one day, as these novels potentially rise in prominence, Viz and I can work together to bring the Deorum Legions manga into the hands of people all over the world. THAT is the manga dream!

FINAL THOUGHTS -----

It remains to be seen exactly how AI will continue to shape our future. It's quite possible that much of the hype surrounding this cutting-edge tech is simply that – hyperbole meant to swallow up investor money and inflate company valuation. While we will certainly start to see more and more bad actors abusing these tools for their own selfish gain, there may be boundless possibilities to further the fields of academic research and other worthy causes of public utility.

Regardless of what happens, I will state this solemn pledge: as long as I draw breath, no portion of these novels shall ever contain within it artificially generated content spewed from these learning models. Utilizing AI to write is the greatest insult to a writer. It is my ultimate priority to ensure that Deorum Legions remains a 100% human-made product crafted by my very hands. Every page and every piece of artwork that you see in this book (and all future books) shall forever henceforth be the sole creation of me, **Josh Alicea... The human... The Owl Shogun.**

All of this sudden discourse on tech has prompted me to refocus on my roots. Growing up, it was taboo to be an enthusiast of anime or manga. Upon discovery, you were marked a social pariah by the ignorant youths of my age group. But nowadays, Japanese anime and manga has become truly mainstream and is beloved by many. Today, countless people cherish the gripping tales of Son Goku, Naruto Uzumaki, Monkey D. Luffy, and Ichigo Kurosaki.

This burgeoning passion for Japanese storytelling is further exemplified with more recent and modern manga getting impressive anime adaptations such as My Hero Academia, Jujutsu Kaisen, Demon Slayer, and Chainsaw Man. To see this societal shift in favor of Japanese cultural imports is greatly encouraging! Perhaps there really *is* a genuine place for Velkan Aurelian and his story to reach the hearts and minds of this new generation of youths? Perhaps even the members of my own age group will enjoy my work?

Anyways! I must cease my prosaic musings as I am technically still at work. It is 10:47 PM as of this writing and 2024 is fast approaching. **The Manga Dream Plan** will come into effect. There's much work to be done! My twenties may have been an irredeemable failure, but with Romula as my witness, I shall ensure that my thirties will become the greatest years of my life. Thank you for reading! Gratias Tibi!

The Owl Shogun (Age 29)
Davenport, Florida, USA
December 31st, 2023

Until we meet again! See you in **Book 4!**

