

AUTHOR'S NOTE



“It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long enough, and a sufficiently generous amount has been given to us for the highest of achievements if it were all well invested. But when it is wasted in heedless luxury and spent on no good activity, we are forced at last by death’s final constraint to realize that it has passed away before we knew it was passing.”

SENECA THE YOUNGER

Ancient Roman Stoic Philosopher

Salve, dear Reader! You have officially reached the end of **Book 4** in the **Deorum Legions** saga. As you well know, this novel is a drastic departure from the prior three installments; pivoting away from the main story in favor of observing the recent past. The conclusion of Book 3 gave us a climactic ending where Crixus brutally defeats Bhutaki, Velkan and the other members of the Lucian delegation. Why not resume where we left off? Why dial the clock back to the origins of a supposedly unrelated character?

This was a question that swung inside my mind like a pendulum. Naturally, I want to reveal the fate of Bhutaki and his contubernium. But equally so, I also wanted to explore the early life of **Scipio Lorentius**, for he will play a critical role in later books. For a time, I pondered over whether to treat this text as a mainline novel or merely as a side-story to compliment the primary canon. Perhaps a more sapient author would have had the discipline to postpone this particular novel and release it as a supplemental text along with the official Aurelian storyline. But in the end, I chose in favor of Scipio's story becoming **Book 4**. Whether or not this was the *right* decision won't be apparent to me until much later. But rest assured my dear reader! It will be **Book 5** (scheduled for early 2026) that shall commence the true continuation of the **Nibiru Grain Crisis Arc**.

There were numerous ideas I wanted to express in this book... Many of which sadly never made it to the final draft... In the interest of fitting this story comfortably within a singular volume, I had to remove various concepts and characters that will have to make their debut at a later date. Thankfully, I was still able to include certain aspects of my original vision such as the dictatorship of Quinctius Mella, Scipio's multi-year exile in Lemuria, the Pan-Lemurian Games, Torquatus Marius, Orestes Aurelian, and so on...

Many ideas and concepts introduced in this book will have long-lasting ramifications for the future of Theia. As I mentioned before, Scipio Lorentius is going to be one of the more important characters in the series. Thus, I desired to give him the honor of a light origin story so that when he, Germanicus, and the entirety of the seventh legion, finally arrive in Nibiru proper, we can get right into the action without delay. I'm genuinely excited!

AUTHORIAL REFLECTIONS -----

Back when I was writing the Author's Note section for Book 3, I described how I was going to pursue a side-career in either **Web Development** or **Real Estate** so that I could raise the necessary capital to launch my manga production studio. Initially, when I was writing Book 4, nothing about this had changed... However... Certain circumstances have caused me to reflect and seriously reconsider these options in favor of *another*. Growing up, my father always said that when following one's dreams, it's important to understand that there is no such thing as a single, straight road.

My goal is still exactly the same: to keep on writing Deorum books, to assemble a team of talented artists, launch a manga studio, adapt Deorum into a full-fledged manga, and one day have that become an anime. This is the core of my **Manga Dream** and nothing aside from death itself can dissuade me from this mission. However, the path I choose to get there won't always be a straightforward approach. This was made all too clear to me the *hard* way.

It was a Thursday on May 2nd, 2024. I was just on my way to go grocery shopping when suddenly, a careless driver sped along a residential street and, (they) not paying any heed to both their velocity and the clearly visible stop sign, crashed directly into the side of my vehicle. The momentum of this collision was so great that my car flipped and rolled over twice despite my due diligence.

Luckily, my transport landed right back on its wheels which allowed me to immediately exit the vehicle. Before even checking the state of my own car, I hastily made my way over to the at-fault driver to see if he or she was still alive. Thankfully, she was; albeit her vehicle was effectively damaged beyond repair. My car was in an even worse state.

I shudder to imagine a scenario where a passenger could've been riding with me as they most certainly would not have survived the impact. Once the paramedics arrived, I came to understand the full gravity of what had transpired.

On the night of the accident, I was in a tremendous amount of pain which would see me bedridden for several days. My muscles and bones ached; my back tender and delicate. Knowing just how viciously exploitative America's healthcare industry is, I knew that I could be crippled by overwhelming medical debt. My worries only compounded as my primary means to generate income evaporated with the destruction of my only reliable transportation. Even acquiring basic necessities such as food has become a real challenge in America's oddly car-centric society. But in the quietude of the night, unable to move so much as an inch without inviting acute pain, I had ample time to reflect. Maybe this did not necessarily qualify as a "*near-death*" experience. Regardless, the volatile emotions incurred by such a dramatic collision and the physical pain thereafter prompted me to delve into a rather meditative state.

As you might expect, my thoughts first went towards the ancient Romans because... Well, why not? I think about Deorum Legions literally every hour of every day with obsessive fixation. It's only natural then that the Romans are also a daily part of my mental process. As I laid there in the silent dark, I contemplated the words of Cicero, the exploits of Ceasar, the insights of Marcus Aurelius, and the timeless lessons of Seneca. But perhaps more potently, my mind imagined a certain scene which would have been a sight to behold in the ancient world... The Roman Triumph.

Imagine, if you will, the great and bustling capital of the Roman Republic. There is much fanfare and jubilation as a

victorious general returns home from a multi-year campaign against an enemy kingdom. With senatorial approval, the triumphant legion is granted permission to pass through the pomerium and enter the city-proper. The triumph, which is effectively a military parade of the grandest sort, begins with a procession of carts and wagons which display a multitude of paintings, war banners, and other facets of the newly conquered territories.

Much of this served to educate the masses as to *why* exactly they were celebrating. People would be shown the iconography of the foreign kingdom along with the spoils of victory such as local coinage, exotic animals, sacred artifacts, weapons, slaves, captured enemy combatants, and (if at all possible) the defeated monarch dressed in their full royal attire. It was all cleverly staged propaganda meant to stoke the collective pride amongst the citizenry, demonize the vanquished, and to exemplify the greatness of Rome. The wealth that poured into the city as a result of their victory only further raised Rome's prestige.

The victorious general, referred to as the Triumphator, debuted to the public atop a grand four-horse chariot. He would be allowed to wear a purple-dyed toga which was symbolic of royalty. His face would also be painted red to represent the Roman god, Jupiter; his head donned with a laurel crown. The entire scene gave the Triumphator a rather kingly aura; magnified by the thunderous roar of a cheering crowd of tens of thousands of spectators.

Following the general were members of his extended family. Being seen in this most august parade could often launch entire political careers for the males involved. Sadly, being a firmly patriarchal society, the same opportunity was not afforded to the women. Instead, they were seen only as

exemplary mothers or potential wives for other ambitious men. Finally, this was followed up by the magnificent march of the legions with bombastic drums and brass horns.

On the night of my accident, there was a specific detail of the Roman triumph that was brought to the forefront of my mind. Evidence for it is fragmentary at best with only scant allusions to it in the textual accounts of Tertullian and Pliny the Elder... But supposedly, a man, possibly a slave, stood next to the victorious general and whispered a certain phrase into his ear repeatedly for the triumph's entire duration. This person may have even held a golden laurel crown over the Triumphator's head. As for the *exact* words of the phrase, it differs slightly depending on the source. Regardless of the precise Latin used, the overall message is akin to: "*Remember you are mortal.*"

It's quite similar to the more well-known phrase of **Memento Mori**, which essentially means "*Remember that you will die*", citing the fickleness of mortality and that death is all but a certainty. This thought triggered a vivid memory of my brief time in Italy when I was exploring the ruins of Pompeii. A once thriving metropolis, Pompeii ended up being engulfed in flame by the 79 CE eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Countless artifacts and relics have been retrieved from the historic site and are now held in the National Archaeological Museum in Napoli. One rather famous mosaic features a skull which is supposed to represent the *Wheels of Fate* and the capricious nature of existence.

On the night of the accident, whilst lying there in that moonlit room, I kept replaying the event in my head over and over again. It was certainly a close call. Had the car rolled over once more, I would have hit a metal pole; resulting in a less fortuitous outcome. Such is the fragile nature of our

lives. In order to function, we must push the idea of death from our minds; our very actions life affirming. But it is all around us. At any moment, it can strike irrespective of our hopes and dreams. Cancer is one such negation of the will to live. And since I live in a divided America, a mass shooting can occur anywhere and at any time.

In terms of financial insecurity, my life was already a precarious thing. But now, due to the folly of this incredibly reckless individual, a multitude of unique challenges, both of a monetary and medical nature, have made themselves known to me. In that moment, I was worse off than I've ever been. But such undue setbacks have only served to bolster my desire to manifest the **Manga Dream**. My insatiable hunger to go to **Japan** and establish that manga production studio which will transform these novels into a full-fledged manga has only magnified in intensity.

In lieu of this inimical event, it has become tacitly clear that **time** is a fleeting and uninsurable thing. Considering that I am a godless atheist who does not subscribe to the notion of an afterlife, I cannot rely on the volatility of a wrathful and tyrannical god to support my plans. I am also partial to the idea that there is no inherent meaning to life. But I'm no nihilist either. I believe that purpose is derived solely from the individual and that it's up to each of us to persevere for the sake of our dreams. I must march onwards for the sake of my vision of opening that manga studio!

ON THE GENEALOGY OF DEORUM -----

A meager two months prior to the accident, there was another piece of devastating news that sent shockwaves around the world. On the first day of March, the legendary mangaka, **Akira Toriyama**, passed away at the ripe age of 68.

Toriyama-sensei is of course known as the man who created the global sensation that is **Dragon Ball**. He was the last person I ever expected to die this year and was mourned by millions of people who grew up with his manga and characters. I credit Toriyama as my initiation into Japanese storytelling, manga, and anime. Were it not for him and the adventures of Son Goku, I probably would never have cared much about Japan or manga in general. There would be no Deorum Legions... No Lucium... No Velkan Aurelian.

In the days following my own accident, I contemplated a lot about Akira Toriyama-sensei, as well as other now deceased manga artists such as **Kentaro Miura** (Berserk) and **Kazuki Takahashi** (Yu-Gi-Oh!). These were prolific masters of the craft who each steered the industry in new and bold directions. It is without exaggeration to claim that their works, along with their surviving contemporaries, have made me who I am today.

If I were to track the historical genealogy of the story that would eventually become Deorum Legions, then it all begins with Toriyama. Having grown up in the rural backwaters of Polk County Florida where you had nothing but flatness and orange groves for miles, the fantastical worlds presented to me by Japanese storytellers offered a most sublime escape. From an extremely young age, I was already being heavily influenced by classic anime such as Dragon Ball Z, Pokémon, Sailor Moon, Yu Yu Hakusho, Yugioh, Rurouni Kenshin, Inuyasha, Trigun, Mobile Suit Gundam, Neon Genesis Evangelion, Ghost In The Shell, Digimon, Detective Conan, Paranoia Agent, and the vast collection of films produced by Hayao Miyazaki at Studio Ghibli. By the time I entered middle school and high school, newer and arguably more pivotal anime & manga entered

my life such as *Naruto*, *Bleach*, *Death Note*, *Moribito*, *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *Code Geass*, *Anohana*, *Black Butler*, *Mononoke*, *Samurai Champloo*, *Monster*, *Soul Eater*, and *Gurren Lagann*. Once I was in college, a new wave of anime had risen such as *Shingeki-no-Kyojin* (or *Attack on Titan* in the west); instilling an appetite for anime to a new and previously unexposed global audience.

Deorum Legions is undoubtedly derived from the very clay left behind by these venerable masters of manga and anime. Bits and pieces of this proverbial clay have sculpted and molded the expansive world of *Theia* in ways both seen and unseen... Both known and even unknown to me... This doesn't even include the overwhelmingly vast tapestry of Japanese video games which have directly contributed to certain aspects of the *Deorum* universe. The most notable ones I can think of include *Final Fantasy*, *Kingdom Hearts*, and the numerous *Soulsborne* games.

But to say that Japanese cultural imports are solely responsible for the creation of *Deorum Legions* is not completely accurate. Western novels, films and television have enriched the lives of billions for longer than I've been alive; championing the ancient storytelling traditions which hark back to ancient Greece. I could write pages upon pages of every single movie or show that have directly influenced the genealogy of *Deorum*, but that would take too long.

Although! I want to give an honorable mention to the magnificence that is ***Avatar: The Last Airbender***. The epic journey of Aang, Katara, Sokka, Toph, and Zuko is simply transcendent. I still watch it annually to analyze and absorb its timeless lessons on writing well-developed characters. I can only hope that one day, *Deorum Legions* will reach the same superb quality as *ATLA*.

Yet, as great as film and television are, I would argue that **VIDEO GAMES** have proven to be a far more potent force in my life. I've been a gamer since I was able to hold a controller. When I was three years old, I remember playing Donkey Kong Country with my dad on the Super Nintendo. In addition to Super Mario, the Legend of Zelda, Metroid, and Pokémon, Nintendo games were my first true exposure to the wonders of Japan.

Naturally, the western world has produced its own vast collection of memorable titles that have defined my own generation. Unlike the more passive entertainment methods of film or even manga, video games offer an interactive experience with a degree of immersion unmatched in any other medium to date. Among my most cherished game franchises are Assassin's Creed, The Elder Scrolls, Fallout, Uncharted, The Last of Us, The Witcher, Ratchet & Clank, Mass Effect, God of War, Gears of War, Grand Theft Auto, Sid Meier's Civilization, Horizon: Zero Dawn, RuneScape, Ghost of Tsushima, and Bioshock – just to name a few.

DREAMS OF A WORLD BEYOND -----

Describing the genealogy of Deorum Legions wouldn't be entirely complete without first acknowledging the key influences of history. Unlike anime and manga which is purely fictional, learning about past events carries with it a profound weight. When I read about the gripping accounts of Gaius Julius Caesar during his conquests of Gaul or Justinian's overzealous attempts to retake the west from what he considered to be barbarians, I often close my eyes and, for the briefest of moments, imagine myself there.

What would it have been like to be alive during those times and bear witness to such calamitous events? To me,

this type of inquiry and speculation is the joy that learning history entails. With the proper mindset, it can be its own adequate form of escapism. To study history is to jump into a world that often exceeds fiction, for all fiction is ultimately derivative of real history – infused with imagination.

But what writer of merit can claim to write honestly without first drawing upon their own lived experiences? While it's true that Japanese anime and manga has certainly contributed to the story of Deorum, it's the very fact that I was born in *Florida* that the series truly became what it is today. As a boy, I loathed my rural upbringing. I lamented over the lack of cultural stimulation in the dull and dreary wastelands that was life in ol' Davenport.

I yearned to experience life in massive cities like Tokyo, Kyoto, or Osaka. I wanted to experience the sophistication of London or Paris. I wanted so badly to bask in the glory of gigantic edifices such as the Pont Du Gard in France or the mighty Coliseum of Rome. I yearned to be stunned by the overwhelming majesty of natural landscapes such as with Lake Como near Milano. Florida simply had none of the things I was looking for as a child. Even now, my every thought and action is geared towards securing a permanent solution to flee this low-wage tourism swamp for good. Anime, manga, and video games was my only window into a world beyond my pitiful existence and became a life raft which promised greater possibilities.

History was yet another way to appreciate and reframe my understanding of the world. But beyond the well-known conquerors, monarchs, and wealthy aristocrats which are given a disproportionate amount of attention in the annals, my younger self gravitated more towards history's daring explorers. Deorum Legions is certainly many things. Due to

the volatile socio-political conditions as depicted in Lucium and the wider Lucian Republic, themes of justice, slavery, corruption, and ambition are speckled all throughout the pages. Quite a few characters such as Velkan, Bhutaki, and Scipio even preach their own philosophical views. But beneath this layer of abstract thought and ideological musings is a far more intimate reservoir of feeling. It is that very essence which has molded much of my life since I was barely able to hold a pencil... The desire to explore.

My mother instilled in me a love for traveling. We can already observe this desire to travel and see the wider world in characters like Orestes. This book introduces the concept of the Spice Corridor; based on the real-world Silk Road (or Silk Routes in modern scholarship). As the story continues, I plan to expand the world of Deorum far beyond the familiar shores of Theia. As the author, I can confirm that there is a much larger theatre of events occurring well beyond the Theian sphere of geopolitics.

In the western world, we have an ample amount of famous explorers such as Magellan, Vespucci, Columbus, Ponce De Leon, and Leif Erikson. The travels of Marco Polo, handed down to us by Rustichello of Pisa, gives us a legendary trek along the ancient Silk Road from Venice all the way to the royal court of Kublai Khan in Xanadu. The Islamic polymath, known as Al-Mas'ūdī, was a magnificent explorer touted as the “Herodotus of the Arabs”. One of my personal favorites is recorded in the *Rihla*, a 14th century travelogue detailing the impressive journey of the Islamic scholar, Ibn Battuta, who ventured across North Africa, Central Asia, and China over the course of twenty-plus years. Another famous explorer that isn't as well known in the western world (but no less important) is Zhang Qian, a

Chinese diplomat who lived during the Han Dynasty more than 2,000 years ago. His legendary odyssey eventually led to the formation of the Silk Routes. He and the Polos are a major source of inspiration for Orestes Aurelian.

FINDING DEORUM -----

It is this intermingling of colorful fictional worlds, coupled with my own personal experiences and passion for history, that would ultimately lay the foundations for what Deorum has become. Yet despite all this, the path towards creating the Greco-Roman fantasy you now hold in your hands was mired in self-doubt and uncertainty.

The early drafts of Deorum had nothing to do with legionnaires or eidolons. From its very beginnings, when I was in middle school and high school, Deorum was no more than a pitiful carbon copy of Naruto with trace elements of other manga from the time. When I graduated college in 2014, Deorum had evolved into a rather odd mixture of steampunk fantasy with hints of cyberpunk attributes. Back then, I obsessed over the history of World War II with much of my research seeping into the story that I was developing. But the *only* similarity that this proto-Deorum had to the modern variant was that the Elysium Crystals and the relationship dynamic between Bhutaki and Velkan were already somewhat cemented. I still have folders hidden somewhere containing sketches, notes, and detailed artwork of this conceptual world that never was.

For pretty much the entire pre-production cycle of Deorum (2006 – 2019) I was deeply unhappy with the setting, its many characters, and the story. It all seemed fake and derivative of every piece of media I had ever consumed up to that point. I struggled to find that proverbial “**X-factor**”

that could make *Deorum* truly stand out in our highly competitive landscape. I just couldn't conceive of the *thing* that would make it unique and deserving of existence. For much of my teenage years and early twenties, it seemed as though everything humanity could imagine had already been thought of. Constantly, I pondered over whether or not any new stories could even be told anymore. As a result, I regularly questioned my own ability to create something fresh that people would enjoy.

The Lord of the Rings essentially *invented* the western fantasy genre as we currently understand it; cementing all of the tropes we know and love such as knights, wizards, orcs, dragons, elves, and so on... **Star Wars** is set in a faraway galaxy where force-wielding Jedi fight against aliens and the Sith... **Naruto** is about ninjas weaving magic spells like the onmyōdō practitioners of Heian Japan... **One Piece** is a manga about pirates sailing the seas in search of a treasure desired by the whole world... **Bleach** is a story of samurai grim reapers who fight in an afterlife steeped in Shinto and Buddhist mythology.

But what was *Deorum* about? For the longest time, I had no answer to this question, and it scared me. For years I felt like a fraud chasing a dream for which I had no aptitude. Growing up, the manga artists I admired all came from an environment overflowing with rich historical traditions and a cultural heritage full of myths that provided the perfect backdrop to draw inspiration from. The more I learned about Japanese history, the more I recognized the nuances and often subtle details of anime and manga that reference the larger socio-cultural makeup of the country. I am a firm believer that one's environment is critical to the creative process. We artists are sensitive creatures. It can either

supercharge one's creative output or nullify it. I was just a kid living in the rural hinterlands of bumfuck Davenport, Florida. There still is no culture to speak of here. There are no grand monuments to bask in, no enriching traditions to relish nor are there grand or sweeping histories to marvel at. It is a land devoid of all that I craved as a child. It wouldn't be until I moved to Japan in 2019 that it all clicked for me.

I came to recognize that a great number of fictional works take place in settings that are, with few exceptions, based on the European middle ages. Perhaps it is simply a result of Tolkien's all-encompassing legacy in the fantasy space. But perhaps it is more like an oppressive shadow. It matters not if it's a book, film, television, or a video game – if it's fantasy, it's very likely to emulate medieval Europe populated by the same tired clichés of wizards, knights, elves, goblins, orcs, castles, dragons, and so on... Even the Japanese seem to embrace this rigid interpretation of the west when it comes to making a fantasy story. It's as though the world has become conditioned to think that fantasy must always equate to the medieval.

While I enjoy knights as much as anyone else, I also feel that this can be a boring approach to writing a fantasy work since medieval settings have been done ad nauseum. But with the right imagination, a fantasy world can be based on virtually anything. And thus, that is how I came across my (potentially) important realization. Few have attempted or even considered the **Ancient Mediterranean World** as a viable source to build a fantasy world. The only media that comes to mind which (sort of) explores this fascinating idea is Robert E. Howard's *Conan The Barbarian* novels, which takes place during a mythical bronze age. Classical antiquity is a vastly underutilized period. Perhaps that is because it's

so much further away from us in time than the empires of France, England, or Spain? To understand the incredible rise and fall of Rome, you have to delve into millennia's worth of history to try and piece together all of the complex nuances of the period. Understandably, some writers may be turned off by this rather steep time commitment.

Although, that's silly for me to say because research is essential for any story setting: real or fictional. Even if you want to make your own fantasy world in a typical medieval fashion, you still need to do the work of accumulating vast amounts of historical information in order to establish an authentic and believable world. An overwhelming amount of fantasy media seems to try and replicate the look and feel of Tolkien without experimenting with other time periods or cultures as a viable alternative. This became more apparent to me when I was in Japan delving more into ancient roman history. Finally, after nearly fifteen years of searching for a unique X-factor, I felt that I had obtained my answer.

I knew right then and there that Velkan and the world of Deorum would be based on the Romans and the larger Mediterranean world. This of course includes the Greeks, Egyptians, Persians, Phoenicians, Celts, Gauls, Nubians, Sumerians, Akkadians, and many other cultural groups. It's an ideal setting that offers truly limitless possibilities to derive inspiration from. Whether or not I have *succeeded* in telling a captivating story with interesting and lovable characters remains to be seen. Absent a sizable audience to voice their opinion, as of this writing, I cannot entirely tell if what I have written thus far (regarding Books 1 through 4) is either great, good, decent or complete and utter trash.

If it turns out that Velkan Aurelian's story is a waste of everyone's time and no one likes him then, at the very least,

I still have **Theia**. I can always create new stories within this setting; born of my love for Roman history. Tolkien's books are set in the land of Middle Earth. George R. R. Martin's Game of Thrones occurs in Westeros. The Fallout games are set in the post-nuclear wastelands of America. Naruto has Konoha and the larger Ninja World. Dragon Ball has an entire universe (or twelve if you add Dragon Ball Super). Final Fantasy VII has Midgar. Bleach has Karakura Town, Hueco Mundo, and the Soul Society. The Elder Scrolls series encompasses the continent of Tamriel and the planet of Nirn. The Legend of Zelda has Hyrule. Demon's Souls is set in the fallen kingdom of Boletaria. The Dark Souls franchise, one of my absolute favorite games of all time, explores the lands of Lordran, Drangleic, and Lothric. Then there is Bloodborne and the plague-stricken city of Yharnam.

I guess what I'm trying to say is... Even *if* a new protagonist should arise in the wake of Velkan Aurelian or Scipio Lorentius failing to capture a commercial audience, I shall always have **Theia** and its wider world to explore.

FINAL THOUGHTS -----

I am proud to announce that I have begun writing an entirely new series of novels. Set in the mystical lands of **Wakuni**, we follow the story of an altogether different protagonist named **Temujin Mugen**. This novel series, titled **Yokai Country™ (妖怪の国)**, is a wuxia/xianxia fantasy of which I have been developing in parallel to Velkan's story since 2015. **Part One** will be available in **early 2025!**

Naturally, I have many more books planned for this series so hopefully, if my schedule permits, I can squeeze more Yokai Country books along with my annual Deorum publications. I have thus chosen to include a small excerpt

from Yokai Country at the end of *this* book as a **preview** of things to come. Perhaps you may enjoy it and look forward to its future releases.

With that, I will conclude things with a side note. The oldest known records of written music would probably be the **Hurrian Hymns** which were written on cuneiform tablets and Akkadian notation more than 3,000 years ago. But much of it is fragmentary. There is, however, another piece of music passed down to us from the ancient Greeks. Written either in the 1st or 2nd century CE, it stands as the oldest complete musical composition bequeathed to us from *any* of Earth's civilization.

I am of course referring to the song Scipio sings as he laments over the death of his mother, Iulia, in Chapter 6, page 125 of Book 4. This scene was originally nonexistent in the first draft. After my car accident, I chose to add it later as it felt somewhat relevant to me. The song is known to us as **Seikilos' Epitaph**. Engraved on a stele in ancient Anatolia (modern Türkiye), it is believed that the song was dedicated to a woman named Euterpe; possibly Seikilos' wife.

The lyrics, interestingly enough, focus on the short and fleeting nature of life. Though I have known about this song for years, my recent experiences spurred me to include it in Deorum; if only to celebrate the song's longevity. There are plenty of people who've never heard of this piece, and I invite you to look it up online. There is something cathartic about listening to music from so long ago. Thus, I hope that its words can touch you in the same way it has touched me. Maybe, when Deorum becomes an anime, this song can be used for its opening sequence? If there is *one* thing to take away from this excessively long **Author's Note**, then let it be the words of ol' Seikilos...

Hóson zêis, pháinou...
(While you live, shine)

Mēdèn hólōs sỳ lypoû...
(Have no grief at all)

Pròs olígon ésti tò zên...
(Life exists only for a short while)

Tò télos ho khrónos apaitêi...
(And time demands its due)

Thank you very much, dear reader, for supporting me up to this point. I will commit myself to ensure that the next book is even better. That is my sincere authorial promise to you. Until next time! Gratias Tibi.

The Owl Shogun (Age 30)
Davenport, Florida, USA
October 25th, 2024

Until we meet again! See you in **Book 5!**



妖怪の国

YOKAI COUNTRY™

- PREVIEW -



Story & Art By:
JOSH ALICEA

序幕

TEMUJIN MUGEN

The wanderer meandered along the pristine forest riding atop his demonic steed. Rays of bright, aureate light with emerald hues peeked through the mesmerizing canopy of bamboo; the lush foliage merging to form a dazzling jade ceiling. It is a peaceful and tranquil setting. The rustling of leaves brought with it a gentle wind. But the air also bore a most displeasing of scents. The wanderer knew he was closing in on his destination, for he could smell the peculiar odor of rotten flesh.

Upon reaching the forest clearing, he gazes down from atop the steep hill which overlooks a fertile valley. Below is a quaint farming village of humble means. Recognizing this as the correct place, he beckoned his servile beast to carry him forth. As they arrive, the wanderer is met with fear and suspicion. The townsfolk appeared famished and bore gloomy expressions. Even the children scurried away back to their pitiful dwellings. Every move the wanderer made was carefully observed; the source of their apprehension being the mysterious creature which he rode atop of.

This unusual beast was both frightening and majestic; conjuring up imagery of an ancient time where man and the gods once lived side by side... A relic of a bygone age. And yet here it was – a rarity even in this blood-soaked land of war and monsters. Chimeric in appearance, this fabled steed possesses an amalgamation of various animal traits. Its body seems to be horse-like yet covered in reptilian scales. Its neck

is serpentine, and its head resembles a mighty dragon. Its eyes are black as the night with silver irises. Crowning this magnificent being is the mane of a lion with large deer-like antlers protruding from its rigid cranium.

It's rider, the wanderer, calmly rides forth wearing a brilliant sapphire robe; his shoulders sparsely covered in black, multi-plated metallic armor. The design of his outfit is reminiscent of many of the bandits and outlaws who now roamed the lands of Wakuni with no homeland to call their own. His hair is jet black and smooth as silk; though stylistically it is rough and unkept. And like his clothes, his eyes bear a deep cerulean hue.

Upon his head he wears a *sugegasa*, a type of conical straw hat favored by rice cultivators. It offered excellent protection against the harsh sun. Wrappings of red-dyed linen kept the outfit firmly in place by the waist. Attached to this crimson sash is a leather bag full of all of the tools he'd need for the job. Put together, along with the wanderer's mythical beast, they both seemed to resemble characters ripped straight out of the classical myths.

A decrepit old man approaches the warrior with hesitant motions. He was malnourished and clothed in a *samue*, a kimono-like article of loosely strewn fabric made for breathability in hot and humid summers. The colors were muted, and the material torn and practically falling apart. After slowly trudging along the wet mud, he reaches the bizarre outsider and speaks.

"Are you the one we called for? You do not look like an *Onmyōji* sent from the capital..."

"No..." The wanderer casually confirms. "All the same, I have answered the call while the bureau has not. Rest assured; I will put a stop to it."

The old man, relieved to hear such words, drops to the ground and prostrates himself at the wanderer's feet.

"Oh, praise the kami!... I beg of thee... Please slay that vile creature and rid us of its evil..."

The wanderer does not respond right away. He simply looks at the old man and is somewhat taken aback by his desperation. He switches his gaze and carefully studies the environment around him; noticing all too acutely as to the palpable dread which plagues the villagers. It was a mood that had seeped into every nook and cranny of this miserable place on the far side of the inaka. For certain, this village had suffered for far too long. The wanderer then smirks and addresses the timid elder.

"Let's get one thing clear. I'm not doing this for you out of the goodness of my heart. It's a job. Nothing more."

"I... I understand... As long as you kill it, I care not of your intentions. The creature resides in the temple up the mountain. Many have tried to slay it and yet none have returned... Be careful."

"You needn't worry. Fighting monsters is my specialty. Well... One of them, anyways."

And thus, the lone wanderer and his draconic beast trotted along towards the edge of this dreary village. Eventually, they reach the base of the mountainous temple path. Numerous rows of peculiar looking tōrō, or stone lanterns, guide the faithful with a trail of lights up and down the slope. They are most useful during nighttime ascents or on days of heavy mist. A wooden torii gate, painted in an alluring hue of vibrant vermillion, stood at the entrance of this sacred space.

Slips of paper folded into a unique zigzagging pattern, known as gohei, hung from the wooden structure. Beyond

the impressive torii gate is a perilous flight of stairs which led up to the mountain peak. Even from the base of the slope, the wanderer could feel an ominous presence from up on high and proceeded to disembark from his beast.

“Best I travel on foot from here on out, Kuromaru.”

With a gentle tap of the index finger, the body of his beastly companion brightens up with an innate luminous glow until, suddenly, it transforms into an amorphous blob of flames. It would be only seconds later that these flames condensed into the physical form of a pendant of sorts. The wanderer then picks it up and places the pendant securely around his neck. Afterwards, he reluctantly begins this most arduous of climbs.

With each laborious step, the smell of rot and decay grew ever more potent. Additionally, he could not help but feel a persistent sensation of malice. It was as if the very air itself was corrupted by an unseen magical force. He soon discovered the source of these horrid scents, for the entire mountainside was lined up with dastardly rows of decapitated heads perched atop wooden pikes. This colonnade of unholy pillars led all the way up to the end of the path. Flies and maggots congregated in and around these lifeless husks of human remains. Even bits of bare bone are clearly visible. But despite the unsettling nature of this very crude attempt at scaring away trespassers, the wanderer presses onward. After a tiring trek, he finally reaches the top.

Greeting him at the summit is an remarkably tall five-story pagoda which towered over him; surpassed in height only by the surrounding bamboo forest. He could feel that the source of the dark aura emanated from the pagoda itself. Ready his mind for whatever foul deeds awaited him, he cautiously approaches the temple and enters its hallowed

halls. To his surprise, all he found was a lone monk chanting whispered prayers next to a modestly built shrine.

The space is dark; illuminated only by a sparse collection of wax candles. The monk, bald and decrepit, continued with his hushed invocations without any hint or indication that he was even aware of the wanderer's presence. The wanderer quietly steps onto the wooden floor and creeps closer and closer; silencing his breath. Alas, the solitary monk finally took notice. He halted his chants and spoke to the wanderer while not once turning to face him.

"Oh? A visitor? And what brings you to this holy place? Come to pay respects to the dead as well?"

"Hardly..." The wanderer answers as he corrects his straw hat. "I'm just a traveler passing through."

"I see..." The monk states in a solemn tone. "What a shame... Used to be, people would come and pray to the kami. They would invoke all manner of kotodama... But in these dark days, they've forgotten the old traditions..."

"Is that why you killed all those people?"

The monk tilts his head slightly; still refusing to turn his gaze and face this now unwelcome visitor.

"I know not what you mean, stranger... I am but a simple monk... Devoted to the teachings of the kami..."

The wanderer smirks. "There have been rampant reports of disappearances in these parts... Violent deaths... But every time people got close to uncovering the culprit's identity, the killings suddenly ceased, only to resume in another location... Like chasing a ghost... I admit... Even for me, it was quite a challenge to track you down... *Yokai*."

Quietude fills the air. Not a word is spoken for what seems like an eternity. Finally, the monk tilts his head just enough to reveal frightening umbral eyes. Pulsating veins

protruded from all over his face and his blackened teeth became sharpened fangs like that of a foul snake.

“You are not the *first* onmyōji sent to kill me... And you will certainly not be the last!!!”

In an instant, the monk’s supposedly frail body ignites into a maelstrom of reddish flames. His body then quickly bursts with an explosive release of energy. The sheer corporeal detonation was such that it effectively generated hurricane force whirlwinds; the structural integrity of the wooden pagoda tested to its absolute limits. After a few seconds of tempestuous gales, it looked as though the tower would collapse on account of the immense strain. However, the patient wanderer simply stood there undeterred and demonstrably unamused.

“You are mistaken, yokai... I am no onmyōji.”

He reaches into his leather pouch and pulls out several paper tags with arcane sigils written in dark squid ink. After performing a sequence of specific hand signs in a particular order, the symbols on the tags start to light up. Flames manifest all around him as an ethereal mass begins to spawn out of thin air. The wanderer then reaches into the fire and pulls out a tsurugi, a double-edged straight sword with ancient roots to the dynasties of old.

As the dust settles, a terrifying entity emerges from the transformative fog. Gone was the humanoid visage of a harmless monk. Looming over the wanderer is a most grotesque horror of unimaginable disfigurement. The yokai possessed an ogre-like face with massive horns and charcoal teeth. Multiple human heads sprouted out of its back and shoulders; each with varying facial features. Some appeared distraught while others cried or even laughed hysterically. Throughout the monster’s body are dozens of prying yellow

eyes. Its fingers are long and tipped with raven-like claws. Other traits included bestial fur, virulent warts, and aquatic scales which all coalesced into a veritable nightmare... A truly despicable abomination.

Without hesitation, the yokai swings its mighty arms as the wanderer braces for impact. Upon contact with the floor, the walls of the pagoda temple are blown apart; nearly toppling the multi-storied tower. The wanderer manages to elude its deadly swing and skids along the grass moistened by morning dew. His feet then begin to emit a radiant surge of amber-tinted flames and, with a light tap, dashes towards the creature at incredible speeds. The wanderer attempts to inflict a clean cut into the monster's flesh but his tsurugi blade proved ineffective. The yokai's skin was tougher than even the most prized armor. It then unleashed a second swing with its oversized limbs. Just like before, the wanderer successfully gets out of the way via a fanciful dance of dodges and evasions. This exercise in avoidance is aided by channeling a consistent stream of this magical energy into his feet; enhancing his movements which often enabled gravity-defying maneuvers. He strove to maintain a careful distance; striking only when the moment was most opportune.

Finally, an opening presented itself! The wanderer concentrated golden flames into his sword which then became fully enveloped by a raging inferno. With a forceful tap on the ground, he sped towards the demon like a shooting star and managed to sever an entire arm. The creature moaned in agony and began to lash out erratically. It crushed boulders, toppled trees, and even destroyed what remained of the pagoda temple in a ferocious tantrum of irate rage. All the while, the wanderer eluded its grip and closely analyzed its attack patterns.

But without warning, a phallic-like object penetrates through the wanderer's chest from behind; dislodging and obliterating his internal organs. A torrential cascade of blood sprays all over the verdurous grass which gathers into deep puddles of crimson. Perplexed, the mortally wounded wanderer turned his head and was shocked to see that what struck him from behind was a claw belonging to the very arm he had severed only moments prior. Somehow, it reanimated and moved of its own accord. The wanderer's strength quickly began to fail him.

His vision blurred and darkened. Within seconds, he could no longer stand and collapsed onto the ground. He struggled to reach for his sword. But after a few more moments of fruitless toil, his breath gave out and his mind ultimately faded into the void. The giant yokai clumsily tramples over the soft mountain soil and snatches the fallen warrior. The wanderer's neck arched back; the spark of his life all but extinguished. Seeing this, the demon cackled happily and slithered its diseased tongue.

"You did well for a human... But I'm afraid you will never gain admittance into the lands of Takamagahara... Time to devour our soul!"

The villainous yokai opened its jaws wide. The seams of its mouth extended well down to its torso; revealing an uncannily large vacuum of an orifice. Inside the throat are a dense cluster of hands and ghoulish faces reaching out desperately to consume the wanderer's now motionless vessel. The entities screamed out for sustenance. Black acidic saliva dripped down as noxious fumes vaporized from the bowels of the beast. Its wart-infested purple tongue wrapped around the wanderer's corpse as it inched closer within reach of the throatily phantoms.

But just when the yokai was about to clamp down with its devilish teeth, something unexpected had occurred which defied all reason. For certain, the wanderer was dead. The massive hole in his chest was still clearly visible as he was drained of all blood. And yet, the fingers twitched.

All of a sudden, five sigil-inscribed slips of paper dart towards the ground from all directions and surround the demon. The symbols etched onto the paper began to glow as strings of light connected each slip via ethereal chains of golden fire; forming a circle around the beast. The ground beneath the yokai's feet also began to display a pentagram pattern of light. Finally, the human corpse slowly devolved into mud which broke apart into a cascade of earthy goop. A man then casually approaches.

"It never ceases to amaze me how beings of such immense power can still fall for these simple illusions."

To the yokai's disdain, the man talking was none other than the wanderer himself; perfectly uninjured.

"But how?! I killed you!"

"A replacement spell... It's one of the first things they teach us in the bureau. Though basic, it can be quite useful in certain situations... Or to prank one's opponent."

In a rampant fit of fury, the yokai sought to charge towards the mocking wanderer, only to be repelled by an invisible force. Try and try as it might, it could not move from its exact spot.

"It is pointless, friend. I have already erected the prison that shall seal your fate."

The yokai ignores this statement and continues to lash out repeatedly in an attempt to escape. Every time it came upon the edge of the barrier, a wall of ethereal energy would manifest to reveal the true shape of his seal, only for it to

flicker out of visible range immediately after. It was indeed trapped within a force field of sorts. The yokai concluded that the slips of paper thrown by the wanderer had something to do with it. The demon looked to the ground and became further stoked by rage at the thought that it could be stopped by so harmless an object.

As the beast kept indulging in blatant futility, the wanderer performed a series of obscure incantations which channeled his energy towards a singular point in his body. His invocations end with a swift gesture as he clasps his hands together in prayer with only the index and middle fingers extended.

“Farewell, yokai.”

“Curse you, damned human!!!”

In a matter of seconds, the moist ground beneath the monster’s feet starts to glow with intense luminosity until, alas, an explosive burst of condensed flames erupted like a volcano. Thanks to the durability of the pentagram barrier, the blast was directed upwards towards the heavens which gave the appearance of a mighty pillar of light. It did not take long before the wicked yokai disintegrated into vapor. As the flames subsided, nothing remained of the yokai except for a tiny floating orb. Its luminosity gave it the appearance of a miniature sun. The sphere even gave off a gentle rhythmic drumming noise which resembled that of a heartbeat. The wanderer walks right up to the strange orb and swallows it whole. Satisfied with this rewarding meal, he proceeds to descend back down to the valley below; his mission now thoroughly complete.

近日発売

COMING SOON



ワクニの世界へ入ろ

Enter the world of WAKUNI

ARTIST PROFILE (2025)



ジョシュ・アリセア

| AUTHOR DETAILS | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Name | Josh Alicea |
| Born | July 10, 1994 CE |
| Nationality | American (United States) |
| Ethnicity | Latino / Hispanic (Puerto Rican) |
| Hometown | Davenport, Florida, USA |
| Occupation | Author / Artist |
| Height | 5'5" (Feet) / 168 Centimeters |
| Eye Color | Hazel Brown |
| Dominant Hand | Left-handed |

FAVORITE FOODS: White Rice & Beans (Puerto Rican style), Mofongo, Tripleta, Paella, Murgh Makhani, Chicken Adobo, Pizza Margherita, Spaghetti Carbonara, Kastudon, Sushi, Tonkotsu Ramen, Yakisoba, All-American Cheeseburger.

PREFERRED MUSIC: Japanese Pop, Lo-fi, Synthwave, Salsa, La Balada Romántica, Alternative Rock, Western Classical, Pagan Folk, Video Game OSTs, Film OSTs, Anime OSTs

FAVORITE COMPOSERS: Nobuo Uematsu, Yoko Shimomura, Joe Hisaishi, Shiro Sagisu, Toshio Masuda, Michiru Oshima, Hiroyuki Sawano, Koji Kondo, Jeremy Soule, Jesper Kyd, Yasuharu Takanashi, Hans Zimmer, John Williams

FAVORITE MANGA & ANIME: Dragon Ball, Naruto, Bleach, Code Geass, Fullmetal Alchemist, Death Note, Moribito, Gurren Lagann, Attack on Titan, JoJo's Bizarre Adventure, Berserk, Pluto, Avatar: The Last Airbender

FAVORITE MOVIES: Gladiator (2000), The Prince of Egypt, Midnight in Paris, Lord of The Rings, The Matrix, Lincoln, Pulp Fiction, The Last Samurai, Django Unchained, The Grand Budapest Hotel, Goodfellas, Kiki's Delivery Service, Spirited Away, Princess Mononoke, Cloud Atlas

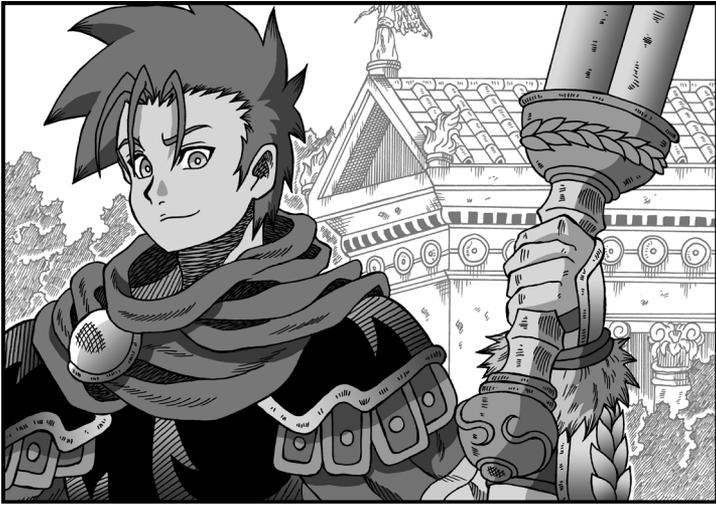
FAVORITE TV SHOWS: Rome, Spartacus, Vikings, Shogun, House of Cards, John Adams, The Crown, Peaky Blinders, Breaking Bad, Band of Brothers, The Pacific, Star Trek

FAVORITE VIDEO GAME SERIES: Bloodborne, Dark Souls, Nioh, Wulong, Sekiro, Elden Ring, Pokémon, Final Fantasy, Kingdom Hearts, Assassin's Creed, Uncharted, Bioshock, The Elder Scrolls, Civilization, Gears of War, Mass Effect, Donkey Kong, Super Smash Bros, Mario Kart, Super Mario, DBZ: Budokai / Legacy of Goku, The Witcher, RuneScape, Naruto (Ninja Storm series), Monster Hunter

HEROES OF MY YOUTH: Akira Toriyama, Eiichiro Oda, Masashi Kishimoto, Tite Kubo, Hayao Miyazaki, Tsugumi Ohba, Takeshi Obata, Hirohiko Araki, Hiromu Arakawa, Naoki Urasawa, Kazuki Takahashi, Kentaro Miura, Hajime Isayama, Shigeru Miyamoto, Satoru Iwata, Rick Steves

THREE RANDOM FUN FACTS

- 1) In 2019, I was living and working in Japan as an Assistant English Teacher (ALT). I was assigned to a small town called Namegata in Ibaraki prefecture.
- 2) When I was a young lad, before the idea of becoming a manga artist ever entered my mind, I dreamed of growing up to become a paleontologist.
- 3) Back in middle school, I became a member of the school band as a trombone player. I pursued this path well into my late teens as a participant in the high school marching band. I often attribute my current tastes in music to this period of my life; cultivating a love for more instrumental works.



THAT'S ALL FOR NOW, FOLKS! SEE YA SOON!

