

## AUTHOR'S NOTE



*“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”*

LAOZI [老子]

Chinese Philosopher | Spring & Autumn Period

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Salve, dear Reader! You have officially reached the end of **Book 5** in the **Deorum Legions** saga. As promised, the story has now returned to the primary canon of the Lucian delegation as they brave the dangers of Nibiru. While I did enjoy writing about Scipio in Book 4, it felt good to go back to Velkan, Bhutaki, and all the others; like returning home after a prolonged absence. This installment features several events and ideas that will prove pivotal for the future of the series. Two things which come to mind are undoubtedly the Forlorn Sanctuary and the Regis Blood – both of which are concepts I’ve wanted to showcase since 2020 when I first started developing these books.

## AUTHORIAL REFLECTIONS -----

What I enjoy most about these **Author's Note** sections is that they give me the chance to establish a dialogue with you; allowing me to express my innermost thoughts which often accompany me throughout the development of every book I write. For *this* book's informal discourse, I wish to briefly indulge in a sort of psychological inquiry which has burdened me in recent weeks. As of this writing, I am the proud author of two official series in the form of novels:

- 1) **Deorum Legions™** | A Greco-Roman Fantasy
- 2) **Yokai Country™** | A Wuxia-Xianxia Fantasy

Both of them are written with the intention of faithfully emulating that deliciously distinct storytelling tradition of Japanese shōnen manga with seinen characteristics. Much of what I write contains flavors and homages to classic anime tropes, themes, motifs, and godly battle sequences which are abundant in the artform such as in the works of Toriyama's **Dragonball**. But I also treat these novels as though they *are* manga in active publication.

This is in stark contrast to more traditional authors who may approach their novels as one might a film script. And like a Hollywood movie, the classically written novel will often embody the three-act structure with a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end that's followed by a resounding climax. This should resolve all loose narrative threads via a satisfying conclusion that will, in theory, have the reader saying to themselves: "Wow! That was a really good story!" Even though I have certainly made some attempts to write similarly neat and concise material which adheres to such succinctness, my mind does not typically conceive of either Velkan Aurelian's or Temujin Mugen's story in such ways.

Having been influenced primarily by Japanese manga artists, the bulk of my brainstorming reflects the mangaka's approach. No single book within the **Deorum Compendium** has a *definitive* ending. Book 1 introduces us to Velkan and the ancient world of Theia. Every book thereafter continues his life's journey as one story arc ends and weaves into yet another arc. In essence, each book is merely a single instance in a much larger narrative. One novel of Deorum can be seen as equivalent to three or four tankōbon (volumes) of long-running manga series such as **Hajime-No-Ippo**, **Berserk**, **One Piece**, and of course, **Jojo's Bizarre Adventure**. Each of these extraordinary tales explore numerous story arcs which together form a vast and continuous narrative across tens, dozens or even hundreds of volumes. **Deorum Legions™** is no different in this regard. As of *now*, my estimate for the current official timeline is as follows:

STORY ARCS	BOOKS
<b>Arc 1:</b> The Origin	I
<b>Arc 2:</b> The Servile Conspiracy	II
<b>Arc 3:</b> The Grain Crisis	III · IV · V · VI · VII
<b>Arc 4:</b> The Eastern Odyssey	VIII
<b>Arc 5:</b> The Promise	IX · X
<b>Arc 6:</b> The Barbarian Uprising	XI · XII · XIII
<b>Arc 7:</b> The Elysium Wars	XIV · XV · XVI · XVII · XVIII
<b>Arc 8:</b> The Millennium Age	???
<b>Epilogue:</b> Samurai Country	???

For certain, Deorum Legions is going to be a *very* long series – much longer than I had originally hoped. Even as **Book 19** brings us to the **Millennium Age Arc**, I don't know how much further it will go in terms of total book count. I don't even know if I shall live long enough to see this series to completion. But at the very least, I WILL publish no less than one book per year until this task is complete.

This is how the legendary classics of the manga world such as **Naruto**, **KochiKame**, **Slam Dunk** or **Demon Slayer** are written. And although Japanese manga is interwoven into the very fabric of my books, I endeavor to incorporate the age-old lessons of western storytelling. The goal is to establish a kind of synthesis between the Aristotelian model and the eastern Kishōtenketsu (起承転結) ethos which comes down to us from the ancient Chinese literary traditions. Yet despite my earnest efforts to produce a work that is worthy of admiration, I feel as though I have not quite reached a sufficient level of quality in my chosen craft.

As of late, I've come to recognize the glaring flaws in my own writing. Even more distressing for me is coming to terms with the ineptitudes in my ability to tell a good story; both as simple entertainment and as meaningful art for the essential nourishment of the soul. Upon glancing over the small body of work I *have* produced thus far, I am beset by the awareness of my faults:

- Poorly rendered plots full of contrivances.
- Excessively verbose prose and lengthy descriptions.
- Indulgent forays into lore and setting which may halt the pace of story progression.
- Characters with little or no development mired in flimsy motivations and inauthentic psychology.

These are but a few of the things I have noticed when analyzing my writings. But the *one* thing that keeps me endlessly worried is the gnawing suspicion that my dear **Velkan Marius Aurelian** has failed to live up to his mantle as protagonist. This became all too apparent to me while writing the fifth installment of this series. As I explored Bhutaki's account of the Maldek Wars, I began to wonder if I had indeed made a critical mistake in choosing the main character. Perhaps **Sage Auelian**, not Velkan, would have been the better choice?

It was *Sage*, after all, who first resolved to leave home when Aurelia was sold into bondage. It was *he* who joined the legions with the single aim of accruing enough coin to earn his sister's freedom. It's this very conviction which sees him fight against a multitude of enemies whilst struggling to stay alive long enough to return home and fulfill his promise. These are the makings of a compelling protagonist.

For example, Book 1 of Deorum could have followed Sage's perspective for its entirety – all the way up to his tragic demise during the Siege of Amanor. The story would then conclude with Bhutaki adopting Velkan into the Marii as the young lad begins his life anew in Lucium; thus bequeathing the torch from one protagonist to another. Then in the *next* book, we would follow the life of Velkan properly and on firmer footing with the whole Drucilla incident. To me, this sounds like a much better version of Deorum than the one I ended up publishing. So why? Why in Romula's holy name did I make Velkan protagonist and not Sage? The answer, I've concluded, is stubbornness.

Even while I was in the midst of writing Book 1, the question of Sage Aurelian's role in the story loomed heavily over my mind well into its final pages. I harbored endless

doubts over my choices and flip-flopped the points of view between Sage and Velkan several times. For a brief period, **Bhutaki** was the protagonist and everything that occurred was written from *his* perspective. And what about the noble **Orestes** and his grand eastern odyssey? Is *that* not a much more interesting story? In the end, Velkan won out over all other potentialities due to simple primacy. He was the very *first* character my juvenile mind conceived of at the tender age of eleven. As a result, Velkan always occupied a special place in my heart. And so in observance of these boyhood sentiments, Velkan is (for better or worse) the protagonist.

This insecurity over who is more deserving of earning the role of *hero* in Deorum is but one of my many so-called “regretful errors” dotted throughout the pages of this series. Many sleepless nights have gone by where I’m struck by pervasive fears hinting that I may not possess the creative fiber necessary to thrive in this industry. Today, virtually anybody can publish a novel. Our modern technology has essentially trivialized the process and removed the need for traditional publishers or other corporate gatekeepers. The very fact that I have six (self-published) books is no longer an impressive feat in the year of 2025. Anyone can be an author... But not *everyone* can become a true **writer**.

The act of writing is so much more than the meager placement of words. Like any field of the arts, writing is a skill which demands strict dedication to daily practice and study. To master the craft is to accept writing as a lifelong pursuit whilst grappling with the possibility that you may never master it. To climb that summit, one must cultivate in themselves a suitable *ikigai* or a *raison d’être*; instilling an unending appetite for perpetual self-improvement and self-examination. And no, leveraging Artificial Intelligence is no

legitimate crutch for aspiring writers. These Large Language Models are built on the indecorous theft of other people's works. To rely on such algorithmic plagiarism is the worst of dishonors. You cannot call yourself a *writer* for participating in such recreant acts.

**Book 1 of Deorum Legions™** is the first novel I ever wrote, thus initiating my very first fantasy series. Naturally, there will be flaws to it which shed a light on my status as a neophyte author. But once a book by **Owl Shogun Studios** is published, it becomes **canon**; eternal and unalterable. And so, I must fully commit to what is already written and press onwards believing in my own innate ability to rectify and steer the story in interesting and imaginative ways that will leave you, my dear reader, satisfied. I'm not the first author in history to be afflicted with imposter syndrome, nor shall I be the last. But with each book I finish, my understanding of the craft improves considerably.

Part of this is learning to identify the shortcomings in my writing and having the courage to accept these mistakes whilst also deriving from them the lessons I need to improve future works. This is the hardest thing for me to reconcile with as there's just far too much emotional baggage tied up with anything even remotely Deorum-related.

Many aspiring writers dream of reaching the very same heights as the literary giants of eras prior who shaped them and imparted in them a love for storytelling. For me, it was venerable mangaka such as Toriyama, Kishimoto, and Kubo who inspired me to pursue this path. And at risk of courting with the trappings of hubris, I dare dream of producing a great work that will be cherished for generations to come. I yearn to be remembered long after **Josh Alicea** has faded from the world.

The wonderful thing about self-publishing is that I do not need to be hindered or restrained by the absoluteness of publishing agencies. To this day, **Viz Media** *still* does not seem interested in me. But of course, mere desire or raw talent is never enough. While devotion to craft is important, such efforts may still bear fruitless yields should no one be made aware of your existence. The biggest disadvantage to self-publishing is that ALL of the marketing and promotion of your books rests solely on YOUR own ability. Without a sizable advertising budget, large social media presence or a sufficient network of people to help you on your quest of reaching the masses, your novel is doomed to languish in wretched insignificance. You can publish over a hundred books and still not receive the recognition you crave in this ridiculously hypercompetitive and oversaturated ecosystem where people's attention has become a scarce resource.

As of this writing, my novels are virtually invisible to the wider world. Even upon releasing Book 1 back in 2022, very few among my closest inner circle of friends and family cared to purchase a copy in support of my dream. In fact, the overwhelming majority of them seemed to express little to no interest whatsoever. Their silence suggested to me that, in their view, my own goals mattered so little as to not even register as a genuine or even legitimate undertaking. Even now, my books are but mere droplets in a vast and endless sea of digital content which risks falling into the abyss of everlasting obscurity.

However, with this fifth installment of Deorum soon to be readily available for purchase, I feel as though I'm finally ready to take on the jovial task of promoting my works to the wider world beyond the limiting and depressing confines of Davenport, Florida, USA.

I admit that part of me quite enjoyed this extended period of anonymity. Between the years of 2020 and 2025, I've been able to write and develop the World of Theia and Wakuni without judgement or the high-stake pressures of audience expectations. I could simply write what I wanted to while simultaneously nurturing my abilities as an author. But the time for waiting is at an end. I have six novels to my name collecting dust and most of them have not sold even a single copy – a pitiful record that is attributable solely to my lack of urgency in marketing.

Those of the artistic persuasion prefer to direct their energy towards the act of creation as it is good and natural for us to do so. But if the aspirant artist is to thrive in this modern and protean world, then they must also vigorously adopt and embrace entrepreneurial thinking and treat their craft as a business. **Owl Shogun Studios LLC** is *my* business and my books are sellable products. And for four years (ever since the studio was legally founded), I have been operating at a loss... That is a scenario which I *must* change.

A major reason for my delay has been fear. I've been working on Deorum and dreaming about making manga since I was a boy. It is the core essence of who I am. And while I obviously wish for my works to receive renown and praise, I feared much more what might happen should the people conclude that my books are instead terrible. What if absolutely no one likes Deorum? Would that effectively be the end of the **Manga Dream**? Will I be forced to give up and settle for a mediocre life working at a job which can only erode the soul? Will the best years of my life only amount to serving the interests of capital where my labor is exploited by out-of-touch billionaires who become wealthier while I wither under the miasma of unfulfillment? I say NAY!!!

32 is fast approaching... After having experienced a car accident back in 2024 and coming face-to-face with the fickle arbitrariness of life, it's absurd that I have even waited *this* long. The time has come to spread the **Gospel of Deorum** to the whole world. I can't predict for certain *how* the market will react to my work. But fear of the unknown mustn't stop me... As the old adage goes:

**“Better to have tried and failed than to live your life wondering what could've been.”**

Each year, more youths graduate from university to enter the work force or actively seek to promote their own brand in search of glory. Each consecutive year, I am at risk of being made redundant and irrelevant in lieu of a rapidly changing society. The longer I wait, the harder it will be to break through the seemingly insurmountable noise of an infinite hoard of content creators vying for supremacy. I believe **Deorum Legions™** & **Yokai Country™** can find an audience and provide them with something rewarding. But for that to future to occur, *I* must become my number one spokesperson. *I* must become **The Owl Shogun!**

## **THE WAY FORWARD -----**

One such promotion strategy has been the creation of my **official website** which you can visit right now under the domain: <https://owlshogunstudios.com>. Completed not too long ago (from this writing), this webpage is built entirely from my own rudimentary knowledge of **HTML**, **CSS**, and **JavaScript** without the reliance of AI. Although to be fair, this isn't the most complicated website either. I cared *only* to create a simple and clean web application where people can go for routine studio updates and other exclusive goodies.

The **Home Page** is where visitors can select between my various intellectual properties (IPs). In this case, there are only the two series: Deorum Legions™ & Yokai Country™. When one is selected, you are taken to a series-specific page which gives you more information on what it's about along with several new illustrations I made *just* for this website. At the bottom, you can read or download free previews of each book in the series.

The **About Page** is rather straightforward. It's a quick summary of my studio and its overall purpose. There's even a brief snippet of me on there.

Then there is the **Essays Page**. As a writer, the very act of putting my thoughts to paper (or typing on a laptop) is itself a form of therapy. These Author's Note sections are indeed one way for me to indulge in this process. However, there *are* limitations to their function. Most of the time, my interests center around geopolitics, economics, history, and other subjects which may elicit controversy or, at the very least, contentious debate. Certainly, such heavy topics are not suitable for the purpose of these Author's Note sections as most readers simply want to rejuvenate their spirit via the wonders of fantasy literature. Therefore, to impose things like geopolitics onto the reader is fundamentally an abuse of my role as the author.

But with the creation of this *Essays Page*, I have given myself a space to write and explore a myriad of subject matters in a less restricted format so as to never overburden my actual novels. As of now, there are currently two studio essays (both of them written in early January of 2025) which are now available for reading and downloading:

- **On The Republic (Part I)**
- **On The Republic (Part II)**

These works focus on the withering state of democracy in America and western civilization as well as the remarkable ascendancy of China and the coming multi-polar world. I'm currently working on a *third* essay which will cover a brief chronology of my life titled: "**Road To Manga**". (Soon to be published either in early spring or summer of 2026)

Finally, there is a last-minute addition to this website which I had not originally intended for. After some back-and-forth deliberation, I chose to call it the **Manga Page**. As you no doubt have astutely surmised, this is where I'll post the very pages of the OFFICIAL Deorum Legions™ manga. Initially, I was *only* going to submit a few manga one-shots, known as yomikiri (読み切り) in Japan. But in the end, I decided to try my luck at creating REAL manga.

But Josh! What about the manga studio? Were you not supposed to build a team of artists to adapt your novels? Well, yes! However, certain events beyond my control have effectively rendered this vision categorically impossible; the details of which are too involved for a simple Author's Note. Therefore, I shall elucidate on *why* this change has ensued in the coming essay: **Road To Manga**. I hope you look forward to its future release. Now back to the Manga Page!

The **official Deorum Legions™ manga** will mirror the same visual aesthetics as actual manga with monochrome artwork. And unlike in the west where content is read from left-to-right, all manga adaptations from me shall adhere to the Japanese approach of reading via right-to-left. I'm also mindful of the fact that my audience will most likely read exclusively on their smart phones (or preferred hand-held devices) rather than a proper desktop computer. Though I was resistant to the idea at first, hoping to keep with the traditionalist format of manga, I have since embraced the

notion that I will need to adjust my art and reflect the more modern **Korean Webtoons** methodology which is inherently designed for the convenience of those who read on smaller screens. This grand project will become a harmony between Japanese Manga (漫画) and Korean Webtoons (웹툰). Every stroke of ink and every panel will be produced solely by my hands. Never will I utilize AI for the manga, lest I betray my own ethical standards as a self-respecting artist.

One major concern I used to have was that, if I publish manga online, then I can't make any money from it. I would essentially be doing all of this work for free. But this was the wrong way to look at it. We in the west often perceive anime as the final form of a mangaka's ambition; as if seeing their work being adapted into an official animation amounts to supreme validation. But from my limited understanding of the Japanese business mindset, anime productions are seen more as elaborate advertisements meant to bolster sales for what *they* deem as the primary product: the manga.

In *my* case, the Deorum manga will serve as a clever bit of marketing for *my* primary product: the very novels which you now hold in your hands. I must also look beyond the basic notions of manga and books as what I am building is much greater than the sum total of their parts. What I am making is a **media franchise**. The strength of these IPs are what may lead towards more profitable opportunities in the coming future. And so, while writing novels and essays, I shall be creating the manga which I have always dreamt of; thus fulfilling, at long last, the glorious boyhood mandate I gave myself more than 20 years ago.

That being said, there are *some* logistical hurdles. The idea of forming a manga studio consisting of several artists was meant to overcome my own real limitations. One such

constraint is time, or lack thereof. I barely have enough time to write novels as is. Squeezing in manga production into an already tight and intense schedule means that the rate of what I *can* produce will be severely stymied.

But if these novels someday generate enough income where I can free myself from the drudgery of traditional employment and become a full-time author, then I can produce MORE manga at a rate consistent with industry standards. Until that wondrous day arrives, my current capacity to make manga will be slow at best. In the end, I'm only human. I must not surrender essential sleep nor can I duplicate myself using the shadow clone jutsu.

One other limitation, which I haven't felt comfortable with divulging until now, concerns matters of health. For reasons that are multifaceted, I seem to have injured my left hand (which I use to make art) to the point that I can't draw for longer than five or six hours per day. It is most likely a classic case of **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome**, though I have not been officially diagnosed as I can't afford the doctor's visit. Needless to say, drawing *anything* for an extended period of time induces considerable pain which can take a long while for me to recuperate from. This issue has steadily worsened over the years since I graduated college in 2014. Even now, I must be very careful with any output that requires physical drawing, inking, or coloring.

Manga creation entails immense time commitments to produce at a steady rate that meets the commercial demands of a weekly, bi-weekly, or even monthly publication. But with this hand injury, I knew that I could *never* reach the output of a professional mangaka. This is the *TRUE* reason why I shifted away from drawing manga to writing novels. It's also why I desired to launch a production studio with

other artists. Sadly, recent changes to Japanese immigration laws have ensured that I may NEVER be allowed to start a business there. Thus, I've now taken the position that I shall no longer wait for others. I will simply proceed with making manga myself... No matter how long it might take. With the divine kami as my witness, it will be done!

## IN CONCLUSION -----

The coming year of **2026** will bring with it numerous challenges and extraordinary opportunities – some of which I must create myself. In order to promote these books in my current condition, I will need to be strategic and persistent with my online approach. And though I'm hesitant to adopt platforms like **TikTok** in lieu of its alarming prevalence of brain-rot content and vocal influencers who embody anti-intellectualism, I can't deny that the Chinese have invented a superior algorithm where organic growth is still possible; especially in comparison to its American counterparts.

While Facebook, Instagram, X and other social media platforms have fallen victim to right-wing radicalization and algorithmic decay where only the well-connected and the well-off can be seen, TikTok is *still* a place where a nobody can become somebody. That is until Donald Trump and his oligarch conspirators finally seize control and impose their own algorithm which'll likely propagate fascist ideologies; thus corrupting and ruining what makes TikTok a shining ray of hope for the unseen and the unheard.

Beyond this, despite not having access to cheap and reliable transportation, I will need to somehow attend live events and build an **extensive network** of associates the old fashioned way. That means going out and talking to people, shaking hands, and forming genuine relationships: a most

frightening prospect for an extremely shy introvert like me. There *is*, however, a silver lining to this approach. While the Orlando metropolitan area is nothing when compared to New York or Los Angeles, I know for a fact that there are plenty of people living here who LOVE anime, manga, and all-things Japanese. I just need to find them and get to know them. This isn't some get-rich-quick scheme. I fully accept that this campaign will indeed require years of constant dedication... And that's *assuming* that my books are decent in the first place! At the end of the day, I must take a leap of faith and believe that what I have produced thus far merits an audience.

Lastly, in lieu of the internal divides, political tensions, and degrading situation regarding the American Republic, I've taken the first tentative steps to secure the potential for living abroad. Though my heart has always been drawn to Japan, I cannot be tethered to a country that, through the application of law and public policy, does not seem to want foreigners anymore. I'm not surprised of course. This is all consistent with Japan's extensive history of isolationist and xenophobic tendencies... But still... I cannot deny the deep sadness I feel over these visa requirement changes. In the meantime, I am working towards new frontiers such as in China or Spain where I can write my books in relative peace. As a consequence, much of my time has been consumed in these efforts. Therefore, I wasn't able to make *two* novels this year like I originally intended to.

While **Book 5 of Deorum Legions** has been published as scheduled, **Part Two of Yokai Country** has *not*. I'm still working on it. But to prove to you that there is indeed some sort of progress being made, I have elected to add a small preview at the end of this book just like before. Even though

it might not reveal *too* much concerning its overall plot and narrative trajectory, I hope that you'll find Temujin's yokai encounters enjoyable. Sometime in early **2027**, I plan to get this published along with **Book 6** of **Deorum Legions**. And with that, I suppose I will end it here.

Much has already been said... Perhaps *too* much. As always, thank you, dear reader, for supporting me up to this point. I sincerely hope that these reflections haven't troubled you in any way as to tarnish our relationship. Even though I'm technically writing into the void, I believe that someday, soon, these words will eventually reach real human beings and touch both hearts and minds. Hopefully, when the time comes to publish the sixth book, it will be to a real audience with eager expectations. *That* would be a most happy change of circumstance.

Now then! let us continue to walk along this literary journey and explore what the future holds for us together. As always, I will commit myself to ensure that the next book is much better than the last. That is my authorial promise to you. Until next time! Gratias Tibi!

The Owl Shogun ( Age 31 )  
Davenport, Florida, USA  
November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025

Until we meet again! See you in **Book 6!**

