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Gideon's Journal – *I don't understand this man. One minute he's yelling at me until he's blue in the face, and the next, he's laying out his life story to me over dinner. Botàn is a lot older than I realized and a lot more experienced as a magic caster and a warrior. He is a puzzle box. No matter what peg you pull out, there's always another secret waiting behind the next peg.*

He has told me stories of his home in Plodoro. For such an isolated place, he made it seem like a paradise. I can tell how much he misses it, but he could never make the journey there in his current condition. Maybe that's why I'm here, why he took me under his wing. I can sense there's more to it than that. Still, it's good that he trusts me enough to tell me his secrets. I just hope I'm worthy of that trust.



Dinner was as quiet as the ride home from Armändis. They ate a simple meal of roasted pigeons and vegetables. When Botàn finished eating, he poured himself another goblet of wine—his third already that evening. After he gulped down that cup, he finally spoke up.

“Have you ever heard of the Magus, Gideon?” he asked. His apprentice just shook his head as Botàn poured some more wine.

“You mean like a magic caster?”

Botàn nodded his head. “Of sorts... The Magus were the protectors of the secrets of magic, but they became so much more.”

“I don't understand... What did the Magus protect?” Gideon asked. “Magic is studied all around Attlain. There doesn't seem to be very few

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secrets to be kept.”

“Ah, now that’s where you’re wrong. There are many secrets to magic, from the ingredients used in a potion of rejuvenation to the specific runes needed to summon a demon. The secrets that needed protecting were ones that, if they found their way into the wrong hands, could mean the death of millions of people.”

Gideon was intrigued by the conversation and poured Botàn some more wine. “So, what made the Magus so special?”

Botàn raised his cup to Gideon for his hospitality and took a drink before answering. “Wizards, sorcerers, and mages have power, but they lack the skill to wield the weapons of magic they create. For that, they formed the Magus, skilled magic casters who could fight better than any warrior. They could summon lightning with one hand while swinging a sword with the other. They chose only the strongest initiates with the greatest affinity for magic. They would be the warrior-class of magic, guardians at every magical academy, library, and laboratory across Attlain.”

“Then, why have I never heard of them? Even in your books, there is no mention of the Magus.”

“That’s because they wiped our names away from history,” Botàn cursed as he drank the last of his wine. He went to refill his cup, but Gideon held his hand over it to stop him.

“Slow down,” he admonished him. “You start to slur your words after your fifth cup.” Botàn frowned but understood his concern. “Why were they written off?”

“Because of this!” he said as he pointed to the pauldron on his shoulder. “The Armory of Attlain!”

“An armory?” Gideon asked, confused. “But, it’s just a piece of armor?”

“Really?” Botàn smiled as he held out his hand. “*Come to me, Sirocco, Demon Sword of Wind!*” One of the pauldron’s runes glowed before a runic circle appeared next to his hand. Slowly, a hilt began to emerge from the center of the ring. Botàn grasped the hilt and drew a sword from within the circle. It was a curved blade, a scimitar, with an ornate gold cross-guard embedded with a large green gem at each end of the cross-guard and on the pommel.

Gideon was shocked and amazed by the display of magic he had just witnessed. “Is that...” he stammered slightly, “Is that a magic sword?”

“Sirocco, Demon Sword of Wind,” Botàn said as he swung the blade, cutting through the air. A gust of wind erupted from where it slashed, blowing over everything in its path. You could hear birds chirp wildly in

distress as the wind tossed them through the air.

Botàn released the sword, and it vanished as quickly as it appeared. Gideon got up from his chair and walked over to look more closely at the pauldron. He saw the same rune glow again, somehow indicating that the weapon had somehow returned to it. Botàn took the opportunity to pour himself some more wine while he was distracted.

“How? How is this possible?” Gideon asked as he ran his fingers across the runes. Botàn batted his hand away as he drank some more wine.

“The Magus needed weapons to protect their assigned places of duty, so the mages created them the finest of magical weapons. The weapons were housed in the armories, so the Magus had easy access to them and a variety of choices.”

“Okay, well, that makes sense, but I still don’t understand something. What happened to the Magus?”

Botàn loudly sighed as he took another drink. “What happens to anyone when they obtain too much power? Some of the Magus decided that since they were the strongest magic casters and the strongest warriors, they should be the ones calling the shots. They tried to take control.”

“So, they started a rebellion?” Gideon asked, leaning in to hear more of the story.

“Yes, and they crushed the rebellion as quickly as it started,” Botàn continued. “There was a flaw built into the armories that even the Magus were unaware. If a Magus should die in battle, the armory was rendered useless to anyone else. Unless a Magus passes control of the armory to someone like an apprentice, it locked the weapons within it. No magic on Attlain can unlock it after a Magus died.

“Once the remaining Magus were killed or captured, those that declared their loyalty could keep their armories. Most of them became adventurers, while others sequestered themselves into hiding to protect the weapons within their armories. As for the Magus themselves, they were wiped from the pages of history so that no one would know just how powerful they once were, or the weapons they carried,” he concluded.

“So, which one were you? Adventurer or hermit?” Gideon inquired.

Botàn laughed. “A little bit of both,” he said as he drank some more. Gideon was finally beginning to understand why Botàn drank so much. He drank to forgive, and he drank to forget.

“My adventuring days came to an end in the caverns of Golquieth,” he continued. “I was tracking down a vampire that had been plaguing the

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local towns. There were only two of us—me and Duarté Dartagni—who entered those caves. Since he was the better swordsman, I agreed to loan him Durandal from my armory.”

“Durandal?” Gideon asked.

“Durandal, Holy Sword of the Archangel Michael,” Botàn said as he pointed to a space on the armory. “It was the one weapon that was most effective against the undead.”

“So, what happened?”

Botàn took another drink of his wine as if he was preparing himself to speak the words. “He betrayed me,” he recalled. “When we got deep enough into the cavern, we found the vampire’s lair. I drew another holy weapon—Orléans, Lance of the Sainted Maiden—for myself. It’s just as powerful as Durandal, but Duarté was not as good with pole weapons as swords.

“We were about to engage the creature when Duarté disappeared,” he continued. “I turned around to see him leaving. He used Durandal to split the columns and collapse the ceiling at the cavern entrance. He sealed me inside with the vampire.”

“What? Why would he do that? I thought he was a paladin and your friend?”

“So, did I, Marcus... So, did I,” Botàn concurred. “I never found out why he did it, at least not from him. Days later, after I defeated the beast and blasted my way out of the cave, I found out that Duarté declared that he had killed the vampire and was blessed by the archangel with the holy sword Durandal. For his actions, he was knighted and declared a Paladin of Attlain.”

“What? How could he do that?” Gideon argued. “Didn’t they know you had the holy sword in your armory?”

“No, oh no... The Magus kept the weapons of their armory a secret. If too many people knew what weapons you had, the more they were interested in stealing them from you.”

“So, why didn’t you speak up against Duarté and dispute his claim?” Gideon asked.

Botàn paused and drank some more before answering. To Gideon, it seemed as if it was a difficult question for him to answer.

“It was too late for that. I didn’t have the resolve to stand up to Duarté’s lies,” Botàn explained. “My best friend betrayed my trust, turned his back on me, and tried to kill me. I just didn’t have the stomach for it anymore.”

“So that’s why you came to Armändis? To hide away from Duarté?”

“No. I came to Armändis because I fell in love,” Botàn said with a

smile. “As I crawled out of that cave—dirty, starved, and near-death—I was saved by a beautiful young lady... Ophelia, my wife. Armändis was her home, so she brought me here to heal my wounds. We soon fell in love and were married. I apprenticed as a blacksmith under her father, inheriting all this after he died. It was a short time after that I lost Ophelia. She died giving birth to our son, Gabriel.”

Gideon could hear the sadness in his voice, something he rarely heard from Botàn. “So, I still don’t understand why you stayed on in Armändis?”

Botàn touched one of the runes on his armory. “*Evil Eye...*” was all he said as a dagger appeared in his hand. It was a Kris... A wavy blade of black steel, about ten inches long, enveloped in smoky darkness—the guard of the dagger curved toward the tip, encircling an all-seeing eye.

“This is Evil Eye, the Dagger of Eternal Darkness,” he began. “Besides some other special abilities, the dagger gives the wielder the chance to catch a glimpse into the future.”

“Well, that’s helpful,” Gideon retorted.

“No, not really. Every time you gaze into the future, the enchantment exacts a high cost... One year of your own life.”

That revelation surprised Gideon, but it also explained a lot about Botàn. “Is that why you look so old for someone so strong?”

“Yes, exactly. I’ve used the sight more than I should have. I’ve been looking for one thing, and I finally found it... You!”

Now Gideon was even more startled. “Me? Why me?”

“The first time I used it was after Ophelia died. I saw myself, still here in Armändis, and I saw the same thing every time for more than 20 years; and the only question I ever asked was where I would find an apprentice. All I ever saw was me, here in Armändis, and then I saw you.

“I saw the attack on you by Po and his men,” he added. “I knew I had to save you from death. That’s why I had the clockwork heart built. It was the only way to save your life.”

“But, couldn’t you have just stopped them from stabbing me in the chest?” Gideon pleaded.

“No, I’m afraid not. That’s another flaw of the dagger’s foresight. If you try to change the future, there is a chance you could bring about your own death. One must never chance with fate.”

“So, you want me to be your apprentice? To become a Magus?”

“Yes, Gideon, because you have the qualities of a true Magus. You’re strong of heart, steadfast in your convictions, with the potential to be a great warrior and a great magic caster,” Botàn explained. “You are everything that a Magus needs to be. You don’t seek power for personal

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gain. You want it to help people.”

“Then why have you been fighting me, tooth and nail, since I got here,” Gideon yelled. “Every time I asked you to teach me more, you turned me away. If you wanted me to be your apprentice so bad, then why did you disregard all my requests?”

“Because I had to be sure!” Botàn shouted back at him. “I had to be sure that you were willing to accept the responsibility of becoming a Magus. It’s not something to take on lightly. There are weapons in the armory that could level an entire city. You must be able to discern when to use weapons like that and when not to.”

Gideon sat back and poured himself another goblet of wine, chugging it down himself. He expected to hear something surprising from Botàn but not like this. “How long will it take? Being your apprentice, I mean.”

“That depends on you,” Botàn answered. “You have an incredible abundance of mana flowing through you, so the power is there, but its unrefined, raw talent. It’s just a matter of seeing if you have the skill to wield magic. It could take a year; it could take two or more. I just don’t know yet.”

Gideon finished his wine and got up from his chair. “Alright, I’ll see you later,” he said as he started to leave.

“Where the Hell are you going?”

“If I’m going to start training as a magic caster tomorrow, this is going to be my last free night for quite a while. I’m going down to Marion’s and take Ester up on her offer of a ‘reward’...” Gideon said with a smile as he left the house to head into Armändis.

“Gideon!” Botàn shouted, stopping his apprentice in his tracks. “Don’t tell anyone in town about me being a Magus or teaching you magic. No one knows about my past, and I want to keep it that way.”

Gideon was surprised to hear that, but it made sense with all that’s happened over the past few months. Botàn was hiding in plain sight so that no one would come after him or the armory. “Of course, Master Botàn. I won’t tell anyone... Not even during ‘pillow talk’ with Ester!”

Botàn laughed as Gideon left for his night of merriment. He drank some more wine, satisfied that he made the right choice in his new apprentice. Botàn didn’t want to pin all this on Gideon, but he had no choice. He needed to pass the torch, and Gideon was his best hope for the future. “*The Magus cannot die with me,*” he convinced himself.



Gideon’s Journal – What a night! Ester is a very loving, lively, and quite flexible young lady. As much as she “thanked” me, I think I made

her happy too. It was a night I'll never forget because it's the last one I'll have for quite a while. The next day, Botàn started training me as a Magus in earnest. We still had our regular blacksmithing work to do for the guild, but I discovered another one of his secrets beyond that.

Beneath the house, there was a cellar. His father-in-law used it for storing food and supplies for the harsh winters in Armändis, but Botàn dedicated it for something else now. He concealed the entrance to the cellar with magic. I never knew it was there until he showed me, and once I got in, I understood why. It was a magical laboratory with books, relics, elixirs, and other magic items. It included the most valuable artifact of his collection—the “Libru di Magia” or the Book of the Magus. It's a spellbook with specifically designed spells for the Magus, and it's one of the last in existence. The book linked to the armory so that, when a Magus died, his book self-destructed to keep the Magus' secrets.

My brain is going a million miles a minute in twenty different directions. There's so much to do and not enough time in the day to do it all. It was going to be a wild ride.



Botàn began his instruction with the basics of magic. Gideon was an apt student, curious and voracious for knowledge. He read every book, every scroll he was given with a thirst for knowledge, unlike anything Botàn had ever seen. The hard part was learning to control the flow of mana.

“Mana is the source of power for a magic caster,” he explained. “Sometimes, you release mana unexpectedly, as you did at the crossroads, but by controlling the flow of mana, you control the energy. In short, you can increase or decrease the effect of a spell through that control.

“You can manipulate mana through words used to incite a spell,” Botàn continued. “There are two ways to activate a spell... Through a long recitation or a single word. Observe.”

He held out his hand and focused on a suit of armor propped up on the opposite side of the cellar. “*Lampi!*” he chanted. Runic bands of power encircled his hand as a lightning bolt blasted the armor. The armor rattled loudly as the electrical charge jumped around the empty metal suit. Once the armor settled down, he held up his hand again.

“*Thunder dash, and do your dance, sing across the sky anew; ignite the fire within the clouds, lightning strikes my enemy true! Lampi un Stratti!*” Botàn’s spell slowly built up as he cast his rhythmic chant. As

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the runic bands of power spun around his hand, the sparks flew until the last word. The lightning bolt blew the armor apart, nearly obliterating it into pieces this time.

“So, depending on how much mana you put into the spell and whether you do a single word or detailed chant will determine how powerful the spell is? The longer the incantation, the more power is built up behind the spell. Right?”

“Yes, exactly. You can also increase the power of a particular spell if you use it in conjunction with an artifact or relic, like a wand or a staff, but you have to be cautious,” Botàn added as he poked Gideon in the chest. “Remember, your clockwork heart feeds on your mana to replenish the thunderstone within and keep your heart beating. If you use too much of your mana at one time, you could give yourself a heart attack.”

Gideon rubbed his chest, reminded of the pain he felt when Po stabbed him in the heart. “I don’t want that to happen. So, how do I control the flow of my mana?”

“We’ll start with a simple spell—creating fire. You can practice this in the morning when you light the forge. Just imagine a flame, hot and bright, and then, say the word *Brusgià!*”

“*Brusgià?*” Gideon stuttered, trying to pronounce the word correctly. When he said it, his hand exploded with fire, startling the two of them. The pulsing flame expanded outward like a ball of hot plasma. Gideon noticed that he scorched some of his hair when the fire subsided. Suddenly, they both started laughing out loud.

“Well, I did say you had potential as a magic caster,” Botàn joked. “I think you need to be more focused on a target before you repeat it.”

“I think you’re right,” he retorted.

Gideon practiced daily, using the fire spell to ignite the forge daily. There were days when he could easily control the fire, while other days, it was a struggle, leaving him nearly exhausted. It took him time, but he was finally able to learn to control the flow of mana through his body without causing him a lot of discomfort in his heart.

He was like a man obsessed, trying everything and anything he could do with magic. He studied relentlessly, reading everything Botàn had in his collection. He memorized spells and incantations, focusing on the basic elemental, manipulation, and defensive enchantments. Botàn watched his apprentice in awe. He knew his patience had paid off. The faith he put in the foresight bestowed upon him by the Evil Eye was worth the years of waiting.

As they continued the training, Botàn asked even more of Gideon. He

began intense weapons training—with sword, spear, ax, hammer, and dagger—to teach Gideon how to handle various weapons before passing the armory onto him. Like everything else he did, Gideon was a fast learner. The strength he built up swinging a hammer as an apprentice blacksmith improved his skill as a warrior.

“You must learn more than the sword,” Botàn explained. “The weapons in the armory, and ones you may add to it yourself, will consider you its master. You must be able to wield them, or they will not fight for you or even turn against you.”

“You speak as if they have a mind of their own,” Gideon asked.

“In a way, they do. You see, magical weapons become imbued with the spirit of the person who created them. That ‘spark’ gives them a life of their own. Most will follow the will of its master, but if that master falters—especially in battle—then the magical weapon could reject its wielder.”

“So, the weapon controls you, or you control the weapon?”

“A little bit of both,” Botàn surmised. “You must become one with the weapon, and it will become one with you. If you try to exude too much control, it will not obey you, but if you let the weapon control you, it could run wild and kill without abandon. That is why the Magus had to be a master of both magic and sword.”

“I get it. You must master the weapon to tame the magic inside of it,” Gideon queried. “So, what’s next?”

Botàn chuckled. “You have a long way to go and a lot more to learn, my young apprentice. Be patient.”

It became their daily routine: Work in the forge, weapons training, and studying and practicing magic late into the night. Their day usually didn’t end until after midnight. At night, Gideon walked outside, feeling the cool breeze on his face as he wiped the sweat from his brow. He looked up at the sky and saw the endless stars reach from horizon to horizon. It always amazed him how beautiful they sparkled in the night, even when the twin moons brighten the night.

He looked over and saw Botàn where he always was at this time of night. Beneath the branches of a dogwood tree, Botàn sat in front of two graves. The simple tombstones had two names on them: Ophelia and Gabriel. Every night, before he turned in, Botàn would come out to say good night to his wife and son.

Gideon could sense the sorrow in him as it built up throughout the day, drinking away his sadness and then coming out at night as he sat by their graves. He felt responsible for continuing to live when they had died, and that burden was overwhelming.