

MAGISTERIUM

BOOK TWO

THE COPPER  
GAUNTLET

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
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FOR URSULA ANNABEL LINK GRANT,  
HALF FIVE-YEAR-OLD, HALF FIRE

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## CHAPTER ONE

**C**ALL REMOVED A small circle of oily pepperoni from his slice of pizza and slid his hand under the table. Immediately, he felt a wash of Havoc's wet tongue as the Chaos-ridden wolf inhaled the food.

"Don't feed that thing," his father said gruffly. "It's going to bite your hand clean off one of these days."

Call petted Havoc's head, ignoring his dad. Lately, Alastair wasn't happy with Call. He didn't want to hear about his time at the Magisterium. He hated that Call had been picked as an apprentice by Rufus, Alastair's former master. And he'd been ready to tear out his hair ever since Call had come home with a Chaos-ridden wolf.

For Call's whole life, it had been just him and his father, and his father's stories about how evil his former school was — the same school that Call now attended, despite Call's hardest efforts to not get admitted. Call expected his father to be angry when he had gotten back from his first year of the Magisterium,

but he hadn't anticipated how it would *feel* to have his father so angry. They used to get along so effortlessly. Now everything felt . . . strained.

Call hoped this was just because of the Magisterium. Because the other option was that Alastair knew Call was secretly evil.

The whole being-secretly-evil thing distressed Call, too. A lot. He'd started making a list in his head — any evidence of him being an Evil Overlord went into one column and any evidence against it went into another. He'd taken to referring to the list before making any and all decisions. Would an Evil Overlord drink the last cup of coffee in the pot? Which book would an Evil Overlord take out from the library? Was dressing in all black a definite Evil Overlord move, or a legitimate choice on laundry day? The worst part was that he was pretty sure his father was playing the same game, totaling and retotaling Call's Evil Overlord Points whenever he looked in Call's direction.

But Alastair could merely suspect. He couldn't be sure. There were some things only Call knew.

Call couldn't stop thinking about what Master Joseph had told him: that he, Callum Hunt, possessed the soul of the Enemy of Death. That he *was* the Enemy of Death, destined for evil. Even in the cozy yellow-painted kitchen where he and his dad had eaten thousands of meals together, the words rang in Call's ears.

*The soul of Callum Hunt is dead. Forced from your body, that soul shriveled up and died. Constantine Madden's soul has taken root and grown, newborn and intact. Since then, his followers have labored to make it seem like he wasn't gone from the world, so that you would be safe.*

“Call?” his father asked, staring at him oddly.

*Don't look at me*, Call wanted to say. And at the same time he wanted to ask, *What do you see when you look?*

He and Alastair were splitting Call's favorite pizza, pepperoni and pineapple, and ordinarily they would have been chatting about Call's latest escapade in town or whatever fix-it project Alastair was currently working on in his garage, but Alastair wasn't talking now and Call couldn't think of anything to say. He missed his best friends, Aaron and Tamara, but he couldn't talk about them in front of his father because they were part of the world of magic that Alastair hated.

Call slid off his chair. “Can I go out in the backyard with Havoc?”

Alastair frowned down at the wolf, a once-adorable pup that had now grown into a rangy teenage monster, taking up a lot of the real estate underneath the table. The wolf looked up at Call's dad with Chaos-ridden eyes, tongue lolling from his mouth. He whined gently.

“Very well,” said Alastair with a long-suffering sigh. “But don't be long. And keep away from people. Our best bet of keeping the neighbors from making a fuss is to control the circumstances under which Havoc is seen.”

Havoc jumped up, toenails clacking over the linoleum as he made for the door. Call grinned. He knew that having the rare devotion of a Chaos-ridden beast counted for a lot of Evil Overlord Points, but he couldn't regret keeping him.

Of course, that was probably a problem with being an Evil Overlord. You didn't regret the right things.

Call tried not to think about it as he stepped outside. It was a warm summer afternoon. The backyard was full of thick green overgrown grass; Alastair wasn't very meticulous about

keeping it trimmed, being the sort of person who was more interested in keeping the neighbors away than sharing lawn-mowing tips. Call amused himself by throwing a stick to Havoc and having him retrieve it, tail wagging, eyes sparkling. He would have run alongside Havoc if he could have, but his damaged leg kept him from moving too fast. Havoc seemed to understand this, and rarely scampered too far out of reach.

After Havoc had done some fetching, they crossed the street together toward a stretch of park and Havoc ran off toward some bushes. Call checked his pockets for plastic bags. Evil Overlords definitely didn't clean up after their own dogs, so each walk counted as a mark in the good column.

“Call?”

Call spun around, surprised. He was even more surprised when he saw who was speaking to him. Kylie Myles's blond hair was pulled back by two unicorn clips and she was holding on to a pink leash. On the other end of it was what appeared to be a small white wig, but might have been a dog.

“You — uh,” Call said. “You know my name?”

“I feel like I haven't seen you around lately,” Kylie replied, apparently deciding to ignore his confusion. She pitched her voice low. “Did you transfer? To the ballet school?”

Call was seized by hesitation. Kylie had been with him at the Iron Trial, the entrance exam for the Magisterium, but he had passed and she had failed. She'd been removed to another room by the mages and he hadn't seen her since. She clearly remembered Call, since she was looking at him with a puzzled expression, but he wasn't sure exactly what she thought had happened to him. Her memories had certainly been altered before she'd been released back into the general population.

For a wild moment, he imagined telling her everything. Telling her how they'd been trying out for a *magic* school and not a *ballet* school, and how Master Rufus had picked him, even though he'd scored way worse than she had. Would she believe him if he told her about what the school was like and what it felt like to be able to shape fire in his hands or fly up into the air? He thought about telling her that Aaron was his best friend and also a Makar, which was *a very big deal* because it meant he was one of the few living magicians who could work magic with the element of chaos.

"School's okay," he mumbled, shrugging, not sure what else to say.

"I'm surprised you got in," she said, glancing at his leg and then falling into an awkward silence.

He felt a familiar rush of anger and remembered exactly what it had felt like to go to his old school and have no one believe he could be good at any physical stuff. For as long as Call could remember, his left leg had been shorter and weaker than the other. Walking on it caused him pain, and none of the innumerable surgeries he'd endured had helped much. His father had always said he'd been born this way, but Master Joseph had told him something different.

"It's all about the upper body strength," Call said loftily, not sure what that really meant.

She nodded, though, wide-eyed. "What's it like? Ballet school?"

"Harsh," he said. "Everyone dances until they collapse. We eat only raw-egg smoothies and wheat protein. Every Friday we have a dance-off and whoever is left standing gets a chocolate bar. Also we have to watch dance movies constantly."

She was about to say something in return, but she was interrupted by Havoc pushing out of the bushes. He was carrying a stick between his teeth, and his eyes were wide and coruscating — shades of orange, yellow, and hellfire red. As Kylie stared, her own eyes popping, Call realized how huge Havoc must look to her, how very obviously not a dog or any kind of normal pet he was.

Kylie screamed. Before Call could say another word, she bolted out of the yard and tore down the street, her white mop of a dog barely keeping pace with her.

So much for making nice with the neighbors.

By the time Call got home, he'd decided that between lying to Kylie and scaring her off, he had to take away all the good points he'd gotten for picking up after Havoc.

The Evil Overlord column was winning the day.

"Is everything all right?" his father asked, seeing the look on Call's face as he closed the door.

"Yeah, fine," Call said dejectedly.

"Good." Alastair cleared his throat. "I thought we might go out this evening," he said. "To the cinema."

Call was startled. They hadn't done much since he'd come back for the summer. Alastair, day after day, seeming sunken in gloom, had been wearing a path from the TV room to the garage, where he fixed up old cars and made them shine like new, then sold them to collectors. Sometimes Call grabbed his skateboard and skated halfheartedly around the town, but nothing seemed like much fun compared to the Magisterium.

He'd even started missing the lichen.

"What movie do you want to see?" Call asked, figuring

that Evil Overlords didn't consider the movie choices of others. That had to count for something.

"There's a new one. With spaceships," his dad said, surprising Call with his choice. "And perhaps we could drop that monster of yours at the pound on the way. Trade it in for a nice poodle. Or even a pit bull. Anything not rabid."

Havoc looked up at Alastair balefully, his eerie eyes swirling with color. Call thought of Kylie's wig dog.

"He's not rabid," Call said, rubbing Havoc's neck ruff. The wolf slid down and rolled on his back, tongue lolling, so Call could scratch his belly. "Can he come? He could wait for us in the car with the windows down."

Frowning, Alastair shook his head. "Absolutely not. Tie it up out in the garage."

"He's not an *it*. And I bet he'd like popcorn," Call said. "And gummi worms."

Alastair checked his watch, then pointed to the garage. "Well, perhaps you can bring some back for it."

"*Him!*" With a sigh, Call led Havoc out into Alastair's workshop in the garage. It was a big space, bigger than the largest room in the house, and it smelled of oil and gasoline and old wood. The chassis of a Citroën rested on blocks, tires missing and seats removed. Stacks of yellowed repair manuals were piled on antique stools, while headlights dangled down from the rafters. A coil of rope hung above an assortment of wrenches. Call used the rope to fasten a loose knot around the wolf's collar.

He knelt down in front of Havoc. "We'll be back at school soon," he whispered. "With Tamara and Aaron. And then everything will go back to normal."

The dog whined like he understood. Like he missed the Magisterium as much as Call did.

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Call had a hard time keeping his mind on the movie, despite the spaceships, aliens, and explosions. He kept thinking about the way they watched movies at the Magisterium, with an air mage projecting the images onto a cave wall. Because the movies were controlled by the mages, anything could happen in them. He'd seen *Star Wars* with six different endings, and movies where the kids from the Magisterium were projected onto the screen, fighting monsters, flying cars, and turning into superheroes.

In comparison, this movie seemed a little flat. Call concentrated on the parts he would have done differently as he downed three Extreme! Sour Apple Slushies and two large tubs of buttered popcorn. Alastair stared at the screen with an expression of mild horror, not even turning when Call offered him some peanut clusters. As a consequence of having to eat all the snacks himself, Call was buzzing with sugar by the time they got back to Alastair's car.

"Did you like it?" Alastair asked.

"It was pretty good," Call said, not wanting Alastair to feel like he didn't appreciate his dad dragging himself to a movie he would never have gone to see on his own. "The part where the space station blew up was awesome."

There was a silence, not quite long enough to be uncomfortable, before Alastair spoke again. "You know, there's no reason for you to go back to the Magisterium. You've learned the basics. You could practice here, with me."

Call felt his heart sink. They'd had this conversation, or variations of it, a hundred times already, and it never went well. "I think I should probably go back," Call said as neutrally as possible. "I already went through the First Gate, so I should finish what I started."

Alastair's expression darkened. "It's not good for children to be underground. Kept in the dark like worms. Your skin growing pale and gray. Your Vitamin D levels dropping. The vitality leeching from your body . . ."

"Do I look *gray*?" Call rarely paid attention to his appearance beyond the basics — making sure his pants weren't inside out and his hair wasn't sticking up — but being *gray* sounded bad. He cast a surreptitious glance at his hand, but it still appeared to be its usual pinky-beige color.

Alastair was gripping the wheel in frustration as they turned onto their street. "What is it about that school that you like?"

"What did *you* like about it?" Call demanded. "You went there, and I know you didn't hate every minute. You met Mom there —"

"Yes," Alastair said. "I had friends there. That was what I liked about it." It was the first time Call could remember him saying he'd liked anything about mage school.

"I have friends there, too," said Call. "I don't have any here, but I do there."

"All the friends I went to school with are dead now, Call," said Alastair, and Call felt the hair rise up on the back of his neck. He thought of Aaron, Tamara, and Celia — then had to stop. It was too awful.

Not just the idea of them dying.

But the idea of them dying because of him.

Because of his secret.

The evil inside him.

*Stop*, Call told himself. They were back at their house now. Something about it looked wrong to Call. Off. Call stared for a minute before he realized what it was. He'd left the garage door closed, Havoc tied up inside, but now it was open, a big black square.

"Havoc!" Call grabbed at the door handle and half fell out onto the pavement, his weak leg twanging. He could hear his father calling his name, but he didn't care.

He half limped, half ran to the garage. The rope was still there, but one end of it was frayed, as though sawed through by a knife — or a sharp wolf tooth. Call tried to imagine Havoc all alone in the garage, in the dark. Barking and waiting for Call to answer. Call started to feel cold all through his chest. Havoc hadn't been tied up a lot at Alastair's, and it had probably freaked him out. Maybe he'd chewed the rope and thrown himself against the door until it opened.

"Havoc!" Call called again, louder. "Havoc, we're home! You can come back now!"

He whirled around, but the wolf didn't come out of the bushes, didn't emerge from the shadows that were starting to gather between the trees.

It was getting late.

Call's father came up behind him. He looked at the torn rope and the open door and sighed, raking a hand through his gray-black hair. "Call," he said gently. "Call, it's gone. Your wolf's gone."

"You don't know that!" Call shouted, spinning to face Alastair.

"Call —"

“You always hated Havoc!” Call snapped. “You’re probably glad he’s gone.”

Alastair’s expression hardened. “I’m not glad you’re upset, Call. But yes, that wolf was never meant to be a pet. It might have killed or really hurt someone. One of your friends or, God forbid, you. I just hope it runs off into the woods and doesn’t head into town to start snacking on the neighbors.”

“Shut up!” Call told him, although there was something vaguely comforting about the idea that if Havoc ate someone, Call might be able to find him in the commotion. Call pushed that thought firmly out of his mind, consigning it into the Evil Overlord column.

Thoughts like that didn’t help anything. He had to find Havoc *before* awful stuff happened. “Havoc’s never hurt anyone,” he said instead.

“I’m sorry, Call,” Alastair said. To Call’s surprise, he sounded sincere. “I know you’ve wanted a pet for a long time. Maybe if I’d let you keep that mole rat . . .” He sighed again. Call wondered if his dad had kept him from having a pet because Evil Overlords shouldn’t have pets. Because Evil Overlords didn’t love anything, especially not innocent things, like animals. Like Havoc.

Call imagined how scared Havoc had to be — he hadn’t been on his own since Call had found him as a puppy.

“Please,” Call begged. “Please help me look for Havoc.”

Alastair nodded once, a sharp jerk of his jaw. “Get in the car. We can call for him as we take a slow drive around the block. He might not have gotten far.”

“Okay,” Call said. He looked back toward the garage, feeling as though he was overlooking something, as though he’d see his wolf, if he just stared hard enough.

But no matter how many times they went around the block and no matter how many times they called, Havoc didn't come out. It got darker and darker and they went home. Alastair made spaghetti for dinner, but Call couldn't force any of it down. He got Alastair to promise to help make lost dog posters for Havoc the next day, even though Alastair believed a picture of Havoc would do more harm than good.

"Chaos-ridden animals aren't meant to be pets, Callum," Alastair said after clearing away Call's untouched plate. "They don't care about people. They *can't*."

Call didn't say anything to that, but he went to bed with a lump in his throat and a feeling of dread.



A high-pitched whining noise roused Call out of a restless sleep. He shot upright in bed, grabbing for Miri, the knife he always kept on his nightstand. He slid his legs off the bed, wincing as his feet touched the cold floor.

"Havoc?" he whispered.

He thought he heard another whine, distant. He peered out the window but all he could see were shadowy trees and darkness.

He slipped out into the hallway. His dad's bedroom door was shut and the line between it and the floor was dark. Though he could still be awake, Call knew. Sometimes Alastair stayed up all night fixing things in his workshop downstairs.

"Havoc?" Call whispered again.

There was no answering noise, but gooseflesh spiraled up Call's arms. He could *feel* that his wolf was nearby, that Havoc

was anxious, was scared. Call moved in the direction of the feeling, though he couldn't explain it. It led him down the hall to the top of the cellar stairs. Call swallowed hard, gripped Miri, and started to descend.

He'd always been a little creeped out by the basement, which was full of old auto parts, broken furniture, dollhouses, dolls that needed repairing, and antique tin toys that sometimes whirred to life.

A bar of yellow light peeked out from under the doorway that led through to another of Alastair's storage rooms, full of even more junk he hadn't gotten around to fixing yet. Call gathered his courage and limped across the room, pushing the door open.

It didn't budge. His father had locked it.

Call's heart sped.

There was no reason for his dad to lock away a bunch of old, half-repaired stuff. No reason at all.

"Dad?" Call called through the door, wondering if Alastair was in there for some reason.

But he heard something very different stir on the other side. Fury rose up in him, terrible and choking. He took his little knife and tried to press it into the gap on the door, tried to push back the bolt.

After a tense moment, the tip of Miri pressed the right place and the lock sprung. The door opened.

The back of the cellar was no longer the way Call remembered it. The clutter had been removed, leaving space for what looked like a very spare mage's office. A desk stood in one corner, piles of old and new books surrounding it. There was a cot in the other. And in the center of the floor, bound by

shackles and gagged with a horrible-looking leather muzzle, was Havoc.

The wolf lunged toward Call, whining, only to be snapped back by his chains. Call sank to his knees, fingers ruffling Havoc's fur as he felt for the release on the collar. He was so happy to see Havoc and so overwhelmed with rage at what his father had done that for a moment he missed the most important detail.

But as he scanned the room for where Alastair kept the key, he finally saw what he should have noticed first.

The cot against the far wall had shackles attached to it as well.

Shackles just the right size for a boy who was about to turn thirteen.