

## Chapter 12: This Is Not the Master You're Looking For

“-. March 4, 1995 .-“

“How the hell did we win?”

Coming from who might just be the smartest man in the world, that question struck everyone quite hard.

“No, seriously, how?” Charlie Gordon demanded as he waved angrily at Harry’s memory of Washington being eradicated in orbital bombardment, which hung frozen around them in the Room of Requirement’s Pensive space. “If they can do this to the whole world – *in one day* – how the hell were the Goa’uld kicked off Earth in the first place? For that matter, why didn’t they come back to put us in our place afterwards? They’ve had spaceships capable of this all along, didn’t they? They didn’t just invent them in the last few years.”

That was correct. Well, except for what minor improvements in efficiency or rate of fire they crawled through over the last ten millennia. Harry had extensive memories as Evan Lorne to confirm it, and not just the ones in that last life where the whole Earth ended in fire. He recalled another life, a different *version* of that same life during which he served as a member of Stargate Command, and later in the Atlantis Expedition.

In that version of history, on that same uncanny version of Earth where magic didn’t exist, the Americans had been visiting other planets through the Ancient artificial wormhole device since 1945. Well, since 1997 technically, but 1945 was the first time the Stargate was used successfully, by Ernest Littlefield. Then there was another trip in 1996 which was arguably the most important of all, since it was the one that set the whole galaxy on fire by killing Ra.

Evan Lorne had been very passionate about reading all the SG-1 reports, he considered them better entertainment than television.

“Clearly, the answer must be ‘Magic,’” Sirius said when no one else felt like playing devil’s advocate.

“No, that can’t be the case because that’s down to SG-1 going back in time to do the rebellion themselves,” Charlie grumbled. “It might not have even been just the once, according to what Harry remembers reading about in that life.”

“It can still be, depending on how far back the timeline split,” Dumbledore took his turn challenging Charlie this time. “Since the Giza stargate was destroyed here, then it stands to reason that at least the conclusion of that conflict isn’t the one read by Evan Lorne.”

“No, no tangents,” Charlie insisted. “Why did the Goa’uld not just use orbital bombardment, before or after? Especially after. I do *not* like it when the only silver lining is that they still had to come as ‘close’ as low orbit to do it. Does Magic even reach that far? Do we know?”

They didn’t know. Not even Nicolas. Unlike the normals, no wizard had ever been to space. Not in their physical bodies, anyway.

“I refuse to believe there wasn’t at least one spaceship in the system back when they ruled the planet. I refuse twice over to believe more weren’t mustered after the first shots were fired. Especially over however many years the rebellion took. More likely decades, global coordination in a time without power lines or telephones or *vehicles* is no laughing matter. I can buy that *here*, because of Tesla pyramids and magic messaging, or whatever else the magicals had back then. Especially since there wasn’t segregation between them and the normals. But, *somehow*, it worked out over there in No Magic Land too. Within the span of a single lifetime, or time-traveling SG-1 wouldn’t have been so pivotal to the events.”

Harry cleared his throat awkwardly.

“Go on, Harry,” urged Nicolas.

“I – *Lorne* assumed Egeria was the one that did it. SG-1 turned her to their side, somehow, and the Tok’ra did the rest. Somehow.”

“Internal treachery goes without saying,” Charlie grouched, not convinced. “But Ra caught her, so that clearly didn’t happen cleanly either.”

“Our myths are hardly clean themselves,” countered Dumbledore. “There is plenty of strife among the gods, both in heaven and the underworld, killing each other, eating one another, with or without creating or destroying stars. And there are ground-side legends as well, weapons of great might

that ended the lives of men by the thousands and poisoned the earth. Then, too, the Asgard seem to have played a pivotal role in that reality. Harry, what of the myths in that other Earth? Did you spot any significant variations?”

“No,” Harry replied. “But it wasn’t Lorne’s thing, he didn’t actually read that deep into them like other people, never mind someone like Daniel Jackson, so I can’t categorically rule anything out. He was more interested in modern conspiracies, and the gods he was fighting in the present. Reading about the mythic ones would’ve just made it feel even more disappointing, that’s how he – how *I* felt about it.”

Harry had reservations about automatically attributing myths to the Goa’uld, instead of the real gods. Most of the stories dated much further back than the time they were written down.

“Fantastic,” Charlie rubbed his face in frustration. “All this and we still understand jack and shit.”

Harry looked down. He knew it hadn’t been aimed at him, but the more the talk went on the more he felt like this too. He’d boasted that he’d finally get some answers, but in the end he hadn’t even managed to do that. Instead, he fell into a coma he couldn’t wake up from for five months.

Since it happened literally the same day as his stunt with the Goblet, one didn’t need to be a genius to imagine what the rest of the world thought about it. Harry had managed to dodge any updates about that, since he woke up in the middle of the night and immediately got himself spirited away to the Room of Requirement. But the more he did that, the more he dreaded Hermione’s newspaper clippings.

Charlie had calculated Harry’s time unconscious to be the equivalent of one day for every year lived as Evan Lorne. It added up to well beyond a whole human lifespan, which was not just down to Ba’al changing time (except not really because time didn’t work that way without a lot of deliberate meddling). It was still within the expectancy of a powerful wizard, but only when you excluded the overlap.

There was a lot of overlap. Evan Lorne had also lived a bunch of alternate timelines, and parallel realities and whatever else SG-1 stumbled into. Like those months spent in a time loop that only Jack O’Neill and Teal’c remembered, because of that one man playing with the ancient time loop device. For love.

Ugh.

*One year equals one day of the gods*, Harry thought darkly, automatically thinking of the Ascended Ancients every time that word entered his mind now. *How callous would that make someone, towards the short-lived ants scurrying at their feet?*

Since Oma Desala and Morgana were the rare exceptions, the answer seemed to be somewhere around ‘very.’

They earned a lot of goodwill for shielding the Milky Way from the Ori, however they did it, but that only goes so far when the home you’re defending is run like a prison.

*Maybe I’m biased*, Harry thought glumly. *Shit, I hope I am.*

“So,” Sirius said when the quiet stretched on too long. “What’s it going to be? Are we going to use any of this information or not?”

“Like how?” Charlie asked.

“Like going to Antarctica to see if the other stargate is there.”

.... They *could* do that now, couldn’t they? Harry knew where it was.

He knew a bunch of stargate addresses too. Including the one for a certain desert planet where they could find a cartouche with many more. They wouldn’t even need to calculate stellar drift for a bunch of them, though Charlie surely could do that. Even random dialling would work better than it did for the Americans in that other reality, since they already knew the point of origin.

Should they, though? That was the big question, wasn’t it?

“We shouldn’t,” Charlie said, despite being the one among them ‘least into waffling’ in his own words. “Not yet. Not without going through the rest of what Harry has for us, and – no, Harry, we aren’t going to pull anything more out of your head.”

Harry closed his mouth, having been about to offer that very thing. For selfish reasons, he thought guiltily.

“Trauma is one thing, and I maintain that it’s not healthy to remove memories overlong even then. We should put these ones back in as soon as possible, as it is. But the rest is, what? Several

lifetimes' worth of memories? Even accounting for the extensive overlap, it rounds up to over one hundred and fifty years compared to your fourteen. No, it's way too much. You'll have to do like the regular Joe and write all that stuff down."

"Or we can meet up regularly and temporarily extract memories in shorter bits and pieces chronologically," Sirius shrugged. He seemed to be the only grownup now that wasn't treating Harry like he was made of glass.

"Or we can do that," Charlie grudgingly assented, disliking any meddling with the mind on pure principle. Which, Harry was forced to admit, was fair too. Especially from him. "But not today. Today... I need to think. Cross-reference some things. Maybe concoct a model."

"Of what?" Dumbledore asked.

"Messing with time on a galactic scale."

Nicolas, who was nominally the leader of their little conspiracy, nodded in agreement and set about collecting the memories back in their vials, and from there back into Harry's brain. Harry might have felt more conflicted about their return, if what had happened right after that wasn't so much worse. *Almost* much worse, since the – *it* cut off before... any of it could happen.

Thank God.

Well, whichever of them was real. And still around and watching over him, if any. Maybe that 'master' the bartender mentioned, assuming he wasn't talking out of his ass because he didn't actually know anything either. Which... actually wasn't that unlikely. Lorne had lived through a lot of the events, but for what happened in that diner... The only thing he could weigh that bartender's actions against was that same man's word.

Considering what all he did – and the Others – versus what Harry strongly *suspected* them of having done – namely make Ba'al's time travel machine work to begin with, time did *not* work that way – he was not inclined to take him at his word at all. On anything.

Of course, the bartender had been in his head and could have decided the truth would be the best thing to use in that situation, even for a habitual liar. Work on Harry. Or against him? There was clearly no love lost...

*Is this what he wanted? Harry quietly fumed. To make me think myself in circles wondering what was true or not? What was even the point? And then that thing he made me remember – relive-*

No. Don't think about it.

*I'm burning dad's old magazines when I get to my room, Harry thought waveringly. Just in case.*

To Harry's guilty relief, his friends weren't waiting for him. Well, they were, but they were asleep in the anteroom the Room made for them while the adults worked in the pensieve room. They'd tried to stay up waiting for him, but ended up falling asleep where they sat. They'd finally crashed now that they weren't staying up in shifts to watch over him.

Harry dreaded the next morning, when he couldn't avoid them anymore, but at least he could hide from them a little longer.

Harry wished he could hide from everyone else too, but Nicolas wouldn't have it because he was responsible like that.

Harry went through the motions as Nicolas took him back home – the Flamel's home – and even managed to enjoy the meal Perenelle had prepared while they were gone. Harry refused to let the actions of that – *those* creeps ruin the rest of his life. After all, they hadn't managed to make Harry live through... all that. Again. They'd failed.

Hadn't they?

To Harry's horror, however, when he did make his excuses and got back to his room in the Pottery, he couldn't find the magazines.

*Oh god, he thought in dread. Did he – that creep, did he manage to – oh god, he was here? They were – they're here, in this timel-*

“Looking for these?”

Harry whirled around.

Nicolas Flamel stood in the doorway, holding up James Potter's old magazines.

Harry didn't know if he was more relieved or mortified.

Nicolas showed very little in comparison, which was... not the best sign in itself. For such an old immortal, he tended to be pretty open with his feelings. Which still made most of his displays look subtle, he didn't feel strongly about most things anymore because of sheer experience with everything under the sun. But it also made his moments of deliberate restraint that much more obvious, like now.

Nicolas rolled up the magazines and shoved them in one of his many magic pockets. "Come with me."

Harry didn't want to, he wanted to hide under his bed until everything went away.

Nicolas led him down to the den, then through the floo back to his home. There, tea and scones were waiting for them in the kitchen, along with a fountain pen and inkpot next to a stack of fifteen empty notebooks bound in hardcover.

"This way, even if your friends wake up early they won't be able to interrupt us," Nicolas explained as he pulled a chair for Harry to sit on, then took one for himself. The one to Harry's left, not too close to seem overbearing, but also not across the table like some judge. "Charlie won't be around to port them over either, if they go through Raptor Mountain again. He's gone home to spend time with his wife. Says it always gives him inspiration when he's otherwise lacking."

For a while, the only movement in the room, besides Nicolas slowly stirring his tea, were the shadows of the hearth fire on the walls.

"How did you know?" Harry finally asked when the silence was too much. "When did I give it away?" He was sure he gave no hint-

"You didn't."

"But then-?"

"Harry," Nicolas gently chided. "Who's been teaching you divination?"

"Oh." Harry's face started burning. "Right."

"I didn't see anything you went through over there, or any talks we might have on the topic since that's too much *my* future. But I saw you burning these magazines with incendio, not letting the

spell lapse even as you began to choke. Once they were ash, you didn't immediately freshen the air either. You stood in that smoke, coughing tearfully like some twisted penance."

Harry hadn't actually planned that far ahead but... it sounded like something he might have ended up doing. Right now.

"Clearly something... obscene occurred." Nicolas took the first blank tome and pushed it across to Harry, along with the fountain pen on top. "I won't demand a confession. But I *advise* you write everything down. In order, if possible. Facing trauma tends to seem much less daunting when viewed in its complete, broad context. Also, any new activity will make older experiences feel more remote, especially when accompanied by intense thought. About other things."

*My trauma wasn't mixed in with any of the other stuff*, Harry wanted to say but wasn't brave enough. *It came after the end.*

He took the notebook and pen and began to write.

Since Nicolas had couched this as therapy, Harry decided to start with Evan Lorne's early life.

He exhausted that topic before he was even a third of the way through the first notebook. He... didn't really feel bad about it. About how unexciting it had all been. Living as your average Joe was what he'd always wanted, and now he had it. Evan Lorne had been a normal kid who grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area. *Before* it... went to complete crap by the 2020s. Literally. Apparently. Ugh.

His dad was a car mechanic, his mother was an art teacher, and he himself picked up the hobby of painting as a regular weekend activity. He had one older sister. She married and had two sons by the time he joined the military.

Henry Evan Lorne loved ice cream, put aside his painting when he joined the Air Force, didn't become estranged from his family even after all the NDAs he signed upon joining Stargate Command, and was 'blessed' with involvement in some of the more pivotal events after that. Beginning with the Unas mission and culminating in a different galaxy, after he joined the Atlantis Expedition.

Evan Lorne also used to sleepwalk when he was a kid, which was when his life as Harry Potter... *almost* resurfaced. He was prone to indulging conspiracy theories a tad bit too much because of



that, but that was understandable. After all, on this side all of them except the simulation were all real. Come to think of it, many of them weren't inaccurate over there either. Little grey men, the government hid the existence of aliens, alternate realities intersected with the main one on the regular, even the Trust didn't come out of nowhere.

Honestly, it was harder to believe that the Trust were taken out. It said something that Stargate Command needed a spaceship with borderline magical teleport capabilities to do it, and even so the world's aspiring shadow leaders still almost stole the spaceship later.

But he was getting ahead of himself.

Harry did a Hermione and wrote 'see volume \_, page(s) \_ to \_' before moving on to a new section. That way he'd be able to fill in the reference later, after he actually wrote that stuff down.

It would take weeks to cover everything if he went at things in detailed and chronological order. Which he would. Nicolas Flamel didn't raise no scatterbrain. But what remained of the night should be enough to summarise the highlights. It was a good thing that Evan Lorne had such abundant experience writing reports.

*Broader context, Harry thought. That's what Nicolas said right?*

The first major 'context' was the first journey to Abydos of course. Catherine Langford recruits Daniel Jackson to crack the code of the Stargate, which he does. This allows for a successful activation of the wormhole, which Major General West orders Colonel Jonathan "Jack" O'Neill to lead a team of special forces through. And a nuclear bomb too, because the scars of the Cold War era ran deep and long. Things happened, including... some really convenient decisions on Ra's part, culminating in a slave rebellion and the destruction of Ra and his spaceship via point-blank nuclear detonation.

The second major context was the guerilla war against the Goa'uld system lords. One year after Ra's death, Apophis is exploring Ra's old territory and coincidentally stumbles on Earth. He and his jaffa attack the mothballed SGC military base, and kidnap one of the female airmen to use as a host for his wife. The institution of Stargate Command and the subsequent failed rescue attempt result in the miraculous defection of Apophis' right-hand man to Earth's side.

With the stargate revealed to be part of an interplanetary network of countless worlds, multiple teams of airforce soldiers are established. Their role is to explore the galaxy in the hopes of securing technology and allies against the Goa'uld, whose interstellar pyramid warships and vast armies of enslaved walking incubators promise a swift end to Earth and his denizens. Just as soon as Apophis isn't too busy fighting the total war that broke out between all the Goa'uld when Ra was killed.

The flagship team, SG-1, is composed of a Colonel Jack O'Neill with newly revealed jester tendencies, a Daniel Jackson returned to Earth in a bid to rescue his Abydonian wife from Goa'uld possession, the aforementioned defector Teal'c, and Captain Samantha Carter of... suspiciously implausible accolades now that Harry thought about it. She seemed to be that reality's Jeannie M. Leavitt, the first female fighter pilot, but... there was no way she could have clocked all those flight hours at the same time as creating the stargate dialling computer. She also somehow managed to get *multiple* PhDs at the same time as flying missions in the Gulf War. Supposedly.

Harry didn't care how smart Samantha Carter was, there weren't enough hours in the day for half of all she did, and not enough energy in a single human for a fifth of it all. Her alternate reality version where she was just a civilian astrophysicist at least had a background that made sense.

*I smell shenanigans.*

Moving on, SG-1 successfully form several connections across the galaxy –Tok'ra, Tollan, Nox, Asgard – but only the first and last of those actually provide help, and the price for that help becomes progressively higher as time goes on. Tragically, the Asgard end up out-doing the Tok'ra in that regard, with the addition of the replicators to Earth's problems.

Meanwhile, Earth itself becomes its own worst enemy by way of the NID, which repeatedly attempt to take control of the Stargate and other alien technology. Even succeed, at a number of turns.

Eventually, Apophis is handed a final defeat, only for an even bigger and badder Goa'uld to arise in Anubis. He has bigger ships than all the other Goa'uld, better technology than the Asgard, and invulnerable Kull warriors that can take out entire armies by themselves.

It turns out that Anubis is half-ascended because Oma Desala made a bad judgment of character, and the Others decided that galactic genocide and slavery at his hands was a fair price to pay to teach her a lesson. To the point where they prevented her and other ascended, like Daniel Jackson, from vanquishing him. Conversely, they did nothing to stop Anubis from using Ancient technology, claiming non-interference. Because cleaning up after yourself is somehow a bad thing, apparently.

*Maybe* Daniel Jackson was wrong and the Others would have intervened if Oma didn't enter eternal combat with Anubis to stop him... but with his new personal experience, Harry would sooner expect them to break time instead of anything sane.

*Omniscient morality licence is a croc of shit*, Harry echoed words he'd once thought as Evan Lorne, in that alternate life where he'd lived long enough to see the internet at its best.

How Earth managed to build its own interstellar warships amidst all that, never mind while still keeping the Stargate program a secret... Evan Lorne himself called bullshit on that one, so Harry Potter definitely had no idea.

As for the Merlin and Ori thing... Harry didn't much like where his thoughts were going about that. The universe switches from Egyptian to Arthurian bent, a new SG-1 is formed which includes a woman of impossible stunts and leeway – no way would George Hammond and the entire crew of a starship just be taken out by a random woman with a single zat, Kull armor or not. Said woman ends up becoming a twisted version of Christianity's Saint Mary for an evil(er) version of the Ascended over in a different galaxy. Which is the original home galaxy of the Ancients, and thus humanity. Apparently.

So *much* ridiculous stuff happened after the Goa'uld and replicators were vanquished, but Harry was wondering more about other things. He strongly suspected either time shenanigans or mind manipulation were involved again, potentially way back in that reality's history. Everyone including Morgana acted as if they'd just walked out of that completely made-up French nonsense about Arthurian Britain, instead of what really happened in the past. Why? What was the point?

It wasn't a case of events being different over there than here, the authors and writings were exactly the same in both worlds.

In the end, it falls once again to SG-1 – Daniel Jackson in particular – to create the Sangraal and send a working version to the Ori galaxy. Somehow, no Ori manifests to freeze time or otherwise prevent the device from activating on the other side of the supergate, and they are all destroyed. Unfortunately, Vala’s daughter ascends right after that, and all the faith energy from the Origin religion goes to her.

SG-1 therefore has to go to the Ori galaxy and find the Arc of Truth that is suddenly a thing, a supposed ‘brainwashing’ machine which had just been lying around the place for the last billion years, or whatever the time frame was.

The Priors, whose mind-connected staves are conveniently all linked together, are ‘brainwashed’ all at once to stop worshipping the Ori, which apparently weakens Andria just enough that an eternal battle between Morgan and her becomes feasible. Thus was the day saved from ancient malice and negligence by an ancient miracle. How that worked when the priors were a handful amidst untold billions worshipping the Ori *directly*... that could only be down to Ascended space-time shenanigans again, no doubt.

Then Ba’Al managed to use the ridiculous ‘wormhole through solar flare’ method that should in no way result in anything but time loops, in order to go back in time and make it so the Earth never had a stargate program. Which also allowed him to build a proper time machine which enabled him to conquer the whole galaxy like Ra once did. At the end of which he finally came to Earth and got his plans to annex it fatally derailed by his frustrated queen.

Why couldn’t Qetesh have put the galaxy out of his misery sooner?

Trying to distract himself, Harry began to make a list of what gate addresses he remembered, which were few. They’d need the pensieve to get the full collection of addresses Lorne had seen. Harry found it hard to care either way.

If Lorne hadn’t finally died in that timeline, would Harry ever have remembered his past life? Would he have ever made it back from that reality? Or would he have looped... however many times the Others changed time, again and again, while his body here aged and wasted away? The only reason he wasn’t an atrophied mess was because Nicolas gave him Elixir again.

Harry was both glad and not that Lorne hadn't had much directly to do with any of the Ori ridiculousness, having long since gone over to the Pegasus galaxy to deal with an entirely different mess of problems. Because Preston B. Whitmore's Atlantis either wasn't where the man thought it was, or it wasn't the first city to bear that name. Maybe it didn't exist at all, over there.

Don't even get Harry started on the Wraith. Especially on top of everything else. Almost all of which were problems left behind by precursors. Neglectful. Abusive.

Brain-stealing scavenger parasites, inherited slavery under a feudal galactic tyranny, a galactic-scale genocidal tyrant that didn't think that all was evil enough, an unstoppable tide of AI bug monsters bent on devouring all technology, an insatiable race of *humanoid* bug monsters bent on eating all *life*, the even worse faction of the same precursors hellbent on intergalactic jihad, degenerative brain damage any time you used an ancient repository because there was nowhere else to look for a solution to these inherited problems...

If this was the price of the Ancient's legacy, Harry didn't think it was worth it.

The Alteran leftover that came with the fewest strings attached was the weapon at Dakara, which was the only reason the human form replicators were defeated. But then it turned out there was a whole planet of those things in the Pegasus galaxy, because of course the Ancients had to be the origin of that mess as well.

*I'm more biased than Lorne ever was, Harry thought darkly. But can anyone blame me? After...*

Harry shook his head, looked outside to see that dawn was breaking, and turned back to read everything he'd written so far.

Even having lived through it, even being the one who wrote it down just now, even being part of a secret society of magicians that was *actually* in control of the world... reading the history of Stargate Command felt fantastical. Even Lorne hadn't thought that much about it, busy as he was running missions and what else. But there had been... a lot of miracles.

Contrived coincidences all over the place, enemy defections when even those weren't enough, language non-barriers as convenience demanded, technologies so magical that nobody sane would have just left them behind, never mind lying around undiscovered until SG-1 needed them. Some for hundreds of millions of years, like the Arc of Truth. That thing just laid there in the dark, in a

galaxy full of enemy gods or whatever the Ascended and Ori were. All of them with a vested interest in not allowing such a thing to exist, and who had full knowledge of where the Alterans had fled from. Not one of them looked through those ruins? Nobody?

Then... there were a lot of things disguised as failure that were also miracles in hindsight.

The USA decided to mothball the stargate after Ernest Littlefield proved it worked, instead of continuing to use it during the Second World War. The Pentagon subsequently lost track of the files, which delayed the first military expedition to after said war *and* the Cold War that followed. This, in turn, delayed the creation of Stargate Command to when Earth had actually narrowed the technological gap enough that the opposition to the Goa'uld wasn't *entirely* hopeless.

Also, nobody thought to look at the footage of that same Littlefield test, to find the seventh symbol before Daniel Jackson came into the picture. General West didn't know about it at all. Then, when they managed to successfully lock in six symbols for the Abydos planet, it occurred to *nobody* to just... try all the 39 symbols in order until the right one worked on position seven? They didn't need Jackson at all...

But the abject incompetence meant that they did have him later, as translator and accidental prophet on Abydos which proved most pivotal to events.

'Someone' had messed with people's minds. Or time. Or both. A lot. Nothing else was enough to explain all of that.

*I – Lorne thought the same thing when he read the report, Harry remembered. But he dismissed it as false information deliberately inserted in place of whatever the real events were, for opsec. He thought he lacked clearance for the real report. He considered Ra's description as a quasi-energy being to be obvious fabrication proving his assumption. Was it really, though?*

And then Lorne never thought about it again. Like it just didn't matter. Even though he got hung up on a lot of much less blatant censorship, that was why he was into conspiracies to begin with. Those were just few in a long string of contrivances too, it should have called to him like a bloodhound.

*'Ascended may not intervene in the lower planes,' Harry thought disdainfully. The 'Others' were lying through their teeth the whole time, weren't they?*

Maybe it was unfair, maybe Harry was just being biased, but he didn't feel inclined to give any benefit of the doubt after what that creep did to him.

Were... the Ascended the gods? Was that where the gods went, an alternate reality? They made a separate reality for themselves and abandoned the rest of them? A cluster of alternate realities and parallel timelines all revolving around the same plot? And if that was the case, then...

Where the gods evil? The real ones, not just the Goa'uld?

Not just the Ori either...

"You *can* take a break any time you like," Nicolas' voice came from... not at the table. "I won't tell you to sleep, since that's all your body has done for five months. But this is still supposed to be for your sake, not ours."

Harry looked up. Nicolas stood in the door with a tray of early breakfast. Harry had become so absorbed in writing that he didn't notice him get up and leave.

He watched the man walk over and begin spreading out the food. Thankfully, Harry somehow didn't suffer from appetite problems, at least as long as he didn't think about – what he almost lived through. Dreamed through.

Remembered.

Thankfully, Nicolas didn't begin reading his notes immediately. They instead enjoyed an early, peaceful breakfast where Harry could fool himself into thinking it was just one of those early days after Nicolas took him in, when Harry was still coming to terms with how much his life had changed.

Unfortunately, this time the change hadn't been for the better.

“-\_-”

After they finished eating and Nicolas settled in the den to read Harry's notes, Harry decided he'd only dig his hole deeper if he outright avoided his friends. He gave his temporary goodbyes and returned to the Pottery, where his friends had also come early because they still had Hogwarts to go back to, unlike him.

To Harry's conflicted relief, they hadn't skipped any of their schooling to stay at his bedside in that dark room. They'd only done that every moment *outside* of classes. At Dumbledore's direction, McGonagall had given the three of them special dispensation to spend the night at the Pottery instead of the Gryffindor dorms.

There were exclamations of relief, tight hugs, and very hasty updates on what all had happened while he was out. He'd missed the First Task of the Triwizard Tournament, the Yule Ball, and the Second Task too. Not that he'd planned to attend any of them, he had every intention to be a no-show to reinforce that he didn't want to be in any way involved. Also, he hated crowds. Well, maybe not hated them anymore, he was doing better about that now, but he still disliked them.

This all, at least, his friends had known all along, and had leaned *hard* into every time the topic came up. The result of this was that nobody had found out that Harry was in a coma all this time. Ron had made special sure of that by 'making up' a 'tall tale' about Harry going to bed in a dark room and becoming unable to wake up, so you lot better not bother him until his one true destined princess charming goes and wakes sleeping beauty. Many scoffs and jeers ensued as the twins themselves lambasted Ron for being such an embarrassment to the Weasley tall tale tradition, how did he expect to sell people on anything if he was so transparently lying?

Whether Fred and George saw through it or genuinely didn't was still unclear.

Instead, the rest of the Magical World thought Harry was being aloof and private. Some woman called Rita Skeeter made up no end of conspiracy theories about him, but as far as Harry could see from Hermione's newspaper clippings, she never did more than skirt the truth.

She skirted it really close, so much that Harry suspected she knew more than she was admitting, and Hermione agreed. But miss poison quill continued to show restraint for some reason. Weird, but Harry wouldn't complain.

The first task was getting a fake egg from a nesting mother dragon. Viktor Krum won first place with a Conjunctivitis Curse, followed by Cedric Diggory with a rock to dog spell, and Fleur Delacour with a bewitched sleep (she got penalized for the dragon snorting flames over her in its sleep just as she passed by).



For the second task, they had to rescue a hostage from the bottom of the lake. Fleur failed to save her sister because grindylows ambushed her, Cedric saved his girlfriend Cho Chang, and Viktor Krum saved... Hermione. Because she was his date for the Yule Ball.

“Hermione,” Harry said calmly. “Did you consent to... being kidnapped?”

“Actually yes,” she replied to Harry’s relief. “The headmaster called me that morning to ask me, and I wasn’t the only option. They couldn’t risk us talking about it without the Tongue-tied curse, so they didn’t let us know any earlier. Or whatever else they might have used to prevent us from communicating it in writing. Dumbledore was opposed to cursing students not bound to the contest, and the other headmasters had to make a show of agreeing that another ‘leak’ like the first task was unacceptable.”

Cedric Diggory, it turned out, was the only one who went into the First Task blind. If he wasn’t already so good at transfiguration, he might have been in trouble.

Harry thanked his friends for being there for him, but was guiltily glad Hermione wouldn’t get to fret over him immediately. They only had a little more time to get to their first class. Through Raptor Mountain.

He saw them to the door, but didn’t go through with them.

Usually at this point he’d practice magic or sword-swinging, but Harry didn’t much find the motivation for either. He began to walk around his home. At first aimlessly, then more deliberately when he ended up in those parts of the manor that weren’t used.

Dobby kept a clean home, but he also had to attend to Harry, Charlie and Nicolas fairly often, since Harry had offered the house-elf’s services to both men when they were doing work. So while there wasn’t much dust to speak of, that was about as far as Dobby’s housekeeping went, especially in the service corridors, or the workshop buildings adjacent to the main home. Harry even found a doxy nest in the attic.

He ended up spending all his time up to noon on finally dealing with all that leftover clean-up. He even did some renovation here and there, there was a lot you could do with a reparo, the scale of that spell was so big it bordered on silly. Especially when most of the broken parts were still nearby.

All the while, he waited for Nicolas to call in again. Wondered what the man was doing, since he must long since have finished reading Harry's notes. Nicolas had excellent speed-reading, and he would probably be skimming everything too, trying to find his trauma. Which he wouldn't, it all happened after Harry was dead and he hadn't included it in the notes, same as he cut his memories off at the moment his jet blew up.

It was that afternoon, while Harry sat at the table of the master bedroom's veranda, that Nicolas finally showed up again.

The man took a seat across from Harry, dropped the journals on the table and beheld Harry calmly. "There is nothing here that would explain why you would want to burn those magazines."

Harry hesitated.

Then he took out his wand, brought it to his temple and drew the memory he'd been keeping back. The memory of what happened from the moment Evan Lorne died, up to his reawakening on this side.

Nicolas took it cautiously, but wordlessly rose and left to watch it. Maybe back to his own home, maybe in the basement where Harry's own pensieve was. Harry could have tracked him through the wards, but didn't bother.

Nicolas returned half an hour later, grim and silent. He gave Harry back the memory and sat back down in his chair with a face like stone. Harry had never before seen Nicolas Flamel so angry that he had to forcefully control himself.

The tense quiet went on for so long that Harry finally couldn't stand it. He got up, grabbed the cloak from the hanger at the door, and descended to the ground floor. There, he put on his boots and went out the door into the outside air.

"I don't remember that life, exactly..." he hedged as he aimlessly took the first footpath, which was the one eventually leading out into the forest. It was still hard to believe one of his past lives was King Herla himself. "But I do remember what was going on in my head in that moment." Fear. Disgust. Horror. Outrage at the betrayal inflicted on him, and he wasn't just talking about that one leftover body snatcher resurfacing just to possess his sister and re- and commit the incest that would spawn Medraut.

Harry remembered a fancier way of talking than Harry Potter too. Of thinking too. Instead of English, his mental voice changed whenever he touched on Herla's memories, even brief as they were, to the old Common Brittonic of his time. Which, it seemed, Harry also knew now, and would be mutually intelligible with Breton, Cornish and Welsh. You know, if a situation ever arose where that was at all relevant, what with just Cornish hanging on to life in the present day.

Barely.

“Do you know why nobody's been able to pin a historical identity to King Arthur?” Harry asked Nicolas as they walked. Like they once did on that first walk, except they didn't need to pretend to be unaware of each other.

The far too patient man scoffed. “Besides everything other than ‘Arthur and Medraut fell in the strife of Camlann’ being French fiction?”

“Besides that, yes.” Harry felt like he might have smiled on any other day. The impulse didn't make it nearly so far this time. “The reason is because ‘Arth’ is the first name ever put under the Taboo.”

The Taboo was a powerful jinx which designated a word as a key to revealing the speaker's location. Voldemort had used the Taboo during the Wizarding War, to take out his bravest and most defiant opposition, and also as a tool of terror.

The spell worked more or less like the Trace spell applied to underage wizards and witches, but with one key difference – instead of being triggered by magic, it was triggered by a word being spoken. It also worked regardless of the age of the speaker, but Harry now knew that wasn't really a difference. The Trace only *officially* faded upon recognized adulthood, in reality you had to dispel it yourself, or get someone else to do it for you. That was how the ministry had kept track of the doings of adult Muggleborns for quite a while after the institution of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery.

The deception only came to light during the Second World War. Thanks to scapegoats, neither the laws nor their enforcement changed even after that. But at least the Muggleborns tended to find out about it these days, and there were enough of them – and half-bloods – that it was not really an issue anymore.

Also, Dumbledore had added a component to Hogwarts' wards that automatically dispelled the Trace, if it detected the spell on anyone inside the wards over the age of seventeen. The castle had thoughtfully made it a usual part of its wake-up routine to double check that too, ever since.

What the Taboo did have over the Trace spell was its offensive element – it disabled all but the most powerful and mysterious protection spells. Even the Fidelius Charm couldn't completely counter it – while the Taboo might not break the enchantment outright, it did reveal the general area around the speaker's location.

The Taboo thus enabled the hunting, murder and control of individuals, until they themselves limited their freedom to speak, leading to great stress, terror, and frustration even if they were lucky enough not to be found, tortured or killed by headhunters.

“Legend goes that speaking the true name of the bear would summon the bear,” Nicolas said thoughtfully as they crossed into the woods. “That is why nobody knows what the bear's true name was, and every language in Europe uses some version of ‘the brown one’ or ‘honey eater’ instead. There is ongoing effort by linguists and etymologists to reconstruct the proto-European tongues, but I'm not up to date.”

“They'll confirm it in fifteen years or so,” Harry revealed. “The word is ‘Arth’ and it was King Herla's original name. Herlacyning was just a nickname the little folk gave him, because he played the harlequin better than any of them.”

“I don't know where this is going but I dislike it already.”

“You know the tale, right?”

“King Herla of the Britons meets with the king of the little folk, an elf with a red beard and goat's hooves, who is mounted on a goat. The latter offers to attend Herla's wedding, if Herla agrees to reciprocate precisely one year later. The king agrees, and enjoys a most wealthy wedding guest, whose attendants do all the provisioning and hosting to the point where Herla's own preparations are left untouched.”

The house-elves came by their housekeeping skills honestly, at least.

“But when Herla reciprocates one year later as promised, and attends the fairy king's own wedding in his underground realm, the three-day wedding ends up lasting three hundred years on the

outside. Except Herla only finds this out when he and his men return to the surface, and discover that his old lands had been conquered by Saxons two hundred years ago, which was a hundred years after he disappeared on his wife and kingdom. He and his men will also instantly turn to dust if they dismount before the little bloodhound gifted by the fairy king jumps out of Herla's arms. Which it never does, thus the eternal Wild Hunt."

"Herla's-“ Harry stopped in his tracks.

You know what?

No.

It was only a memory, it didn't play itself out, he woke up before everything happened. He'd had indecent dreams before, and they all cut off the same way before the going got good. Or bad, in this case. This was even less than a dream, it was a memory from a dream, which he didn't have to live through a second time. Innocence had protected his sanity, as innocence always did and always would. And even if it hadn't...

He was nowhere as faint of heart as all this.

Harry James Potter straightened where he stood, turned to the man next to him, clasped his hands at his back and gazed at Nicolas Flamel while idly noting that they were the same height. "I am Arth Wendollau ap Ceidio. Brother of Nudd and Chof, son of Ceidio ap Arthwys, who was the great-grandson of Coel Hen the Great, father of kings. Student to who you know as Merlin, but whose own true name was Marzhin Gouez Lailoken. He was my foster father who raised me after I was orphaned, and whom I respected and loved very much. Like you."

For the first time ever in Harry's memory, Nicolas Flamel couldn't find any words.

"The real reason I agreed to that pact was because the king of the little folk promised to reveal who'd cursed my name. The hosting and gifts they provided were to appease my retainers, who to a man strongly advised against going to the Underworld for any reason."

Which would have been the wise thing, considering that elves didn't speak in literal terms that much back then.

“I agreed anyway. After all, someone was going around murdering my people in my name. I’d had to proscribe my own name before people started to believe it wasn’t me indulging unholy urgings. I could bear not a moment more of it.”

Neither could his people.

“Besides, I thought I got along well enough with the little folk. After all, they gave me a name even more famous than the one I was forced to ban all mention of, for the people’s own good. I didn’t know that they resented being treated with the same honors and rights as any of my subjects, they thought I was condescending to them. Considered it me trying to force their kind under human rule. Also, they resented mankind’s ascendance, even *Magic’s* ascendance, though I didn’t know this until much later. And even if not for all that... the little folk played into the image of little jesters, because they thought it was the greatest prank ever pulled over Manu’s kind.”

Nicolas watched Harry grimly. “So when the little fairy king allied with a card-carrying body-snatching ‘goddess’...”

“It was the punchline to the ‘prank’ on me. Kindly, naïve, stupid king Arth.” Harry’s voice didn’t sound like his own at all by the end, his vocal cords metamorphing to match those of the King of the Little Folk, who’d cackled as Herla was about to be raped by his own possessed sister. Oh, sweet Danu, what was done to you? “Also, I didn’t live up to my end of the pact by choice, or in any literal way. See, there was malicious prophecy involved, and I didn’t find out until it was too late back then either. Precisely one year after my wedding was the day of the Battle of Arfderydd. You already know all about that.”

Harry turned away and resumed his walk through the forest.

“... Arderydd,” Nicolas said as he followed in step with him. “Arthuret.”

“The name is not coincidence, no.”

“At the place where was killed Gwendoleu, the son of Ceidaw, the pillar of songs, where the First of the Three Faithful Warbands of the Island of Britain battled for a fortnight and a month after their lord was slain, and the ravens screamed over blood.”

Harry grimaced. “My life isn’t remembered but my death is, and only because of the valor of my men.”

“If your life wasn’t grand, no one would have cared about your death at all,” Nicolas rebutted. “That battle, and the subsequent assassination of Urien Rheged and the defeat of the Gododdin at Catraeth, are considered the reasons for why the alliance of the British kingdoms in the north collapsed before the Angles, Scots and Picts. A tragedy is only a tragedy because the people and events that play it out were among the Great. Or could have been.”

Harry pushed a willow branch out of his way. “Regardless, my battle lines were broken and I was mortally wounded, also through the machinations of that same elf king and the false goddess he’d made common cause with. They’d been going around murdering people who spoke my name in the neighbouring kingdoms too. That’s why I ended up at war with Eliffer and his sons to begin with. The elf then stole my mortally wounded body from the battlefield and took it to his underground kingdom.”

It wasn’t just there in the other Earth, Isis and Osiris weren’t the only ones stranded here either. Set and Hathor were a definite yes, if nothing else had changed. And now, it seemed, Morgana too. Or whichever of those things took and misused her title.

“Once in Undermountain, I was treated just enough that I could wake up in time to see my sister marry the little creature, to the vile amusement of the thing possessing her. I do remember a feast too, but I thought I was dreaming while it was happening, and I still don’t know when it started and ended, I must have been drugged. Yes, she was exactly what you think, and she did indeed do what you saw beginning to happen in that memory. The little king seemed to find much amusement in becoming the cuckold in his own fairy tale.”

“That is vile.”

They had come to the end of the forest now. Before them were the Rollright Stones in all their quiet tranquillity. Unbidden, Harry recalled that the surviving writings described the little elf king as a dwarf. Which he wasn’t, but... wasn’t too far off the mark appearance-wise, if you ignored the overall size and hooved feet. Harry’s thoughts automatically turned to the strange, not-so-little dwarf that had been in the stone circle during the Yearly Walk. Who’d stared at Harry as he passed, with eyes that felt like fire on his back.

Was that.... person... planning to do a repeat of what happened to Arth? Finish the job the elf king started? Or was it just coincidence?

*Could* it be a mere coincidence?

“Do you think he meant you?” Harry asked, looking down as the echo of his past life began to fade along with all its kingly strength, leaving Harry to feel scared and adrift. “The Ancient bartender guy, who made me relive that. He couched it as a lesson, and a warning. Either to me or my ‘master.’ Did he mean you?”

“I don’t know.” Nicolas sounded offended and furious and none of it aimed at him. Or even on his own behalf. “But if the point was to sabotage your development by filling you with crippling fear of making another step down the path you’ve been walking so wonderfully, I can’t think of anything more likely to work.”

So it wasn’t just Harry jumping to conclusions about that.

Knowing didn’t make him feel any better.

“I doubt a being on the scale you experienced would consider any mere wizard a peer. But if it *was* aimed at me, then he was nowhere near as well-informed as he pretended. If he were, he would know that this is the worst possible thing he could have done to dissuade me. From anything. Such as researching ways to corporealize bodiless entities and do away with them.”

Harry’s head snapped up.

“I’m going to research ways to corporealize bodiless entities and do away with them,” Nicolas Flamel repeated, eyes hard and intent, and having clearly decided on this since before he even came back from the memory viewing. “Would you like to join me?”

Finally, despite everything, a tremulous smile began to form on Harry Potter’s face. “I’d like that very much.”