

# Magus

Vol. 1



Jesse Freeman

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**Magus Vol. 1**

By Jesse Freeman

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Smashwords Edition

# Chapter 1

My head smacked against the window and scraped down the metal frame. It cut across the side of my scalp.

The bus screeched to a halt, skidding for several feet. Car horns blared from behind.

I wiped an arm against my head. “What the hell was that!?” A red smear ran across my arm.

Everybody else on the bus glanced around, some standing up, most trying to look out the left side of the bus. The driver opened the door and stepped out. I followed.

Traffic diverted around us. People poured out of the bus behind me, filling the sidewalk. A few heads peeked out from behind the bus's windows.

The bus's front left tire had busted open, leaving behind only a metal rim with bits of black rubber stuck to it.

An open manhole lie behind us.

The driver knelt down in front of his destroyed tire, then gave me an apologetic look. I looked back and forth between him and the manhole.

“We can get this thing moving again, right?” I asked.

The man shook his head. “I don't carry any spares. It's gonna take a while for someone to come out here and replace this.”

I ran my fingers through my hair, taking a deep breath. “Listen, I really need to get moving again. I have a very important interview!”

He crossed his arms, looking me over. “How old are you?”

Evidently being a scrawny teenager somehow made him take my statement less seriously. “Sixteen.”

“Right.” He rolled his eyes, fishing for something in his pocket. “I’m sure the manager of whatever fast-food place you were going to will understand.”

I crossed my arms. “I’ll have you know, sir, that my interview is at the institute.” I smirked. “That’s right, the academy that trains heroes. You know, the one we all owe for our continued safety. Maybe it rings a bell?”

He placed a hand on his hip.

I nodded. “Yeah, so for the good of humanity, it is critical-”

“I’m sorry.” He raised a hand to cut me off. “What position are you interviewing for?”

My eyes narrowed at him.

He stared back, utterly unimpressed.

“...Groundskeeper.”

“You mean janitor?”

And that’s the story of how I found myself sprinting across several city blocks to reach my job interview. Well, sprinting part of the way. I got tired after the first block and power-walked the rest of the way.

The institute trains heroes starting from about fourteen. It only operates as an actual academy during the summer break. It becomes more of an extra-curricular activity when school starts up again. Apparently society thinks you still need to know math even if you’re learning to use magic and guns for a long and luxurious career of stabbing horrifying things to death.

Needless to say the fact that fourteen year-olds have to forgo ever getting a summer vacation to attend an institute that prepares them for a future of risking their lives on a daily basis means volunteers are not particularly forthcoming. At least they know the kids that do join are dedicated.

Or have parents that cajoled them into it.

I found myself within the institute's pristine lobby only a couple of minutes late. The secretary had me wait a few moments before sending me into a nearby office.

The name Yvette was displayed prominently on the open door.

A woman waited behind a desk, typing away on her computer. She wore a pair of slender glasses, the computer's screen reflected off of them, giving me an unclear image of the display. Her pale blonde hair was tied back into a bun.

Papers, folders, and binders were scattered around her desk. The stationary hid a layer of staplers, mouse pads, and a colorful assortment of pens and pencils. A couple of wrinkled papers peeked from the crevice of a filing cabinet's drawer.

I did, however, appreciate a poster of a cat raising its paw, with the caption 'Your meowtastic!' underneath it.

I don't know what a 'meowtastic' is or how I could have one, but I do love painfully forced puns.

She sighed when I stepped in, and tore herself away from the screen. Yvette planted her elbows on the desk and entwined her fingers together.

“You're late.”

*Wow, really? It was only a couple of minutes.*

I pushed that thought to the back of my mind immediately and forced a smile. “I'm sorry, ma'am. My bus... got a flat.”

“Right. Well, it doesn't really matter-”

I held a hand up. “Now hold on a moment there. I may have been a whole sixty seconds late, but I will have you know that I, Ronan Hyland, am undoubtedly the most qualified man for this job.”

“I-”

“Because,” I interrupted. “I’m not just a groundskeeper, I strive everyday to be the greatest groundskeeper there ever was, or ever will be.”

She stared at me before releasing a long, tired sigh. “The last two people didn’t show up for their interviews, and my last groundskeeper is leaving after today. Show up tomorrow for work, and you’ve got the job.”

I raised a brow at her. “That’s it?”

She nodded. “If you have time, please take a look around our campus. It’ll save me trouble tomorrow when I have to walk you through your responsibilities.”

I scratched the back of my neck. “Uh, Ma’am? Won’t the old guy be teaching me everything?”

“Normally.” Her eyes shifted. “But he’s leaving very suddenly.”

“And he’s the only groundskee-”

“If that’s all you need?” She quickly stood up and pushed me towards the door. “I’ll see you tomorrow. Please be here by eight.”

The door slammed shut behind me.

*What in the world was that all about?*

That job interview had been weird, but on the other hand...

I fist pumped. “Nailed it!”

Getting a summer job wasn’t nearly as hard as I thought it’d be. All I needed was to poke around the campus for a bit and then I could go home.

It was mid-June so school had just let out, and the institute had fully opened. The students’ day was nearly over.

I never really understood how the curriculum around there worked. The day was over only an hour after noon, but students rarely seemed 'done'. They always ran around town doing something.

Considering the institute was training these kids to fight monsters someday, most people didn't bother asking questions when a few students showed up on their property, asking if they've seen anything strange lurking around the neighborhood.

I counted myself amongst those same people. I'm not saying I'm not curious, but I'm pretty confident I'd rather not know.

It was a nice enough campus. Four buildings surrounded a large fountain with gray brick roads connecting them together. Flowers were grown along the side of the pathways, though I did note more than a few of them were wilting in the heat.

*Maybe the reason they're losing their last groundskeeper today is because Yvette fired him. How hard is watering a plant though?*

I can't really deny that it worked out in my favor.

The eastern-most buildings contained a cafeteria, auditorium and gymnasium. The northern a library. And the western building contained all the classrooms. The last classes had let out by the time I entered.

Students scrambled by me and I kept to the side. Some of the older ones carried weapons ranging from swords and knives to machine guns. I never saw any younger student carrying weapons.

At least not openly.

It was better not to think about it, given that they were already effectively child soldiers and all.

I rounded a corner, just about done taking in the last section of the third floor. I tried to memorize the names listed next to each door as I went. There were far too many of them to have any real chance of remembering them, but I figured it



was good to at least have a vague idea of where everything was.

“I'm telling you, there's a story here!” Some girl was yelling at someone on the phone. She was, well...

A mouse. Person. Thing.

I mean she was pretty much human. Two legs. Two arms. But also mouse stuff.

Fur coated most of her body, the only exception being her palms and the underside of her fingers, which were a pinkish color. A pair of rounded ears poked around the side of a newsy cap. A slender tail hung behind her.

It twitched every few moments. I stared at it.

“Gah!” She yelled into the phone before firmly pressing her finger against the screen and pocketing it.

The tail twitched.

My gaze drifted from the tail to her eyes after a long few moments.

She was staring at me, staring at her.

I tilted my head. She looked around before focusing back on me.

I'd like to think that I could have said something, could have come up with some witty line to repair that entire awkward situation.

Instead I did a nice little one-eighty spin, pivoting on my right heel, and walked away.

“Hold up.”

I only made it a single step.

*Dammit.*

My weight sunk into my right foot as I slowly shifted forward. After a brief moment of hesitation I continued my pace.

A hand tugged at my shoulder, forcing me to stop.

“I'm talking to you.”

“Of course you are,” I said, spinning back around.

“Listen, I'm doing work for the school paper.”

“Of course you are,” I said, looking up at her newsy cap.

“I-”

“Hold on a second. The institution has a newspaper?” I frowned. “Aren't they training you guys to kill monsters? Does the institute have-”

She firmly pressed her palm against my mouth, leaning in close. “Shush.”

I nodded once. She let go.

“I...” She shifted her weight between her feet a couple of times. “Look, I know you don't know me, but I need help with-”

“No.” I walked away immediately.

A choked hiccup came from behind me.

I hung my head back, running my fingers through my hair while staring up at the ceiling.

“Y-your just going to... to...” She buried her face in her hands.

“Please don't-”

She fell to her knees, openly sobbing.

I tugged at the collar of my shirt. “Please. Don't.”

She shook every few moments, occasionally releasing a pained hiccup.

“Fine!” I threw my hands up. “I’ll do whatever, just stop crying!”

She leapt to her feet in a flash. “Thank you!”

She hugged me, and in that instant before her arms wrapped around me I got a good look at her face.

There was not a single sign of her having been crying.

My arms hung limply at my sides. If only I had more of a spine, I probably would have walked away immediately.

With a tired sigh I asked, “What exactly are we doing?”

## Chapter 2

Though they had been delayed, we got the boring introductions out of the way before our approach to the recycling center.

Maude. Ronan. Ronan, Maude. All fine and dandy.

After I wiped my brow for the nth time a streak of moisture coated part of my arm. I wiped it off on my shirt, dampening the cloth.

“They'd better have AC in there.”

The recycling center was a bit of a mess. Random papers were scattered around the floor, crumbled and marred by dirty shoe-prints. The overhead fan was off, and the fan blades were slightly off kilter. I pondered if it was broken.

I considered collapsing into a sofa set up near the front desk, but thought better of it at the sight of multiple odd stains. Not to mention the tears marring the leathery material.

“What a dump,” I mumbled.

Maude elbowed me. “Shush.”

We approached the counter.

A sticky residue clung to one of the corners. A splotch formed an irregular circle on the counter. Stains were splattered along the white surface.

Maude looked around, and then leaned over the counter, trying to peek into the back. It didn't look like anyone was around.

“Hello? Is anyone in?” Maude glanced at me.

I shrugged.

She frowned and cupped her hands in front of her mouth shouting, “Hello!?”

Someone yelped from deeper within the building and a metal cylinder rolled by from around the corner.

We gave each other a look but said nothing.

An overweight man stumbled out of the back and accidentally stepped on the metal cylinder, causing him to tumble forward. He caught himself by grabbing hold of the counter.

I winced at how close he came to hitting his head. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, yeah.” He straightened up, dusting himself off.

He wore a white sleeveless shirt. The cotton was blackened by something greasy near his waist. The middle-aged man was balding, but quickly covered his head with a cap that was hidden behind the counter. I could barely see part of a tattoo peeking out from behind his shirt's collar.

“Well?” he asked. “What do you...”

Maude tilted her head.

He was staring at her rounded rodent ears.

She cleared her throat. “Sir.”

“What?” He snapped back to her eyes. “Oh. What do you two want?”

She offered her hand. “I’m Maude, and I work for the paper.”

“Paper?” He looked her over, hesitantly shaking her hand. “You look a little young to be a journalist.”

I smirked. “She means the ins-”

She elbowed me, giving me a dark glare.

“...school paper.” I finished.

Oddly she smirked, seemingly pleased with what I said.

“Alright?” the man said expectantly.

“I don't suppose you'd give us a run of the operation?” She clasped her hands together, smiling. “We're doing a piece about recycling, and how students should make an effort to bring aluminum cans down here.”

“Well.” The man scratched at his chin for a moment before responding, “yeah, sure. I guess I can do that.” He laughed. “There's not exactly much else to do around here.”

He disappeared briefly before reappearing from behind the door next to the counter. The sound of keys jingling and a lock turning gave way to the door creaking open.

He motioned us to follow him.

I'm not sure what I had really expected from a recycling center, but the backyard just wasn't quite what I'd imagined.

“So, Mr. Beal,” Maude said, casually wandering around the fenced in area behind the recycling center.

I tuned out their conversation immediately, taking a look around the yard instead. It looked like she had everything handled anyways, which begged the question as to why she felt the need to drag me along.

Sheets of metal reinforced the chain-link fence surrounding the perimeter. A few weeds poked out from the fence line, but the field was otherwise bare dirt.

Scrap metal was piled everywhere, and in no particular fashion. A large mountain of cans protruded from the farthest side of the enclosure, pipes of varying sizes and conditions were tossed around haphazardly. The entire yard was complete chaos, there was absolutely no sign that Beal kept the place organized at all.

*Geez, even the manholes-*

I stopped to stare at several manhole covers forming a small pile. I thoroughly scanned the rest of the garbage scattered around.

Strange red parts of some sort looked like they belonged on a fire hydrant.

What I initially thought were pipes poking out from behind a stack of boards were actually signs torn from the side of roads.

“Seriously!?” I threw my arms up. “Is there no oversight when it comes to recycling?”

I lifted a nearby tarp up, revealing several loose strands of bronze-colored wire. I shook my head at the man in open disappointment.

The only legitimate metals Beal had back there was the giant pile of cans, and even that was suspicious. Why was it so big? There must have been over ten thousand cans stored there. Was he even recycling them?

I decided to take a closer look.

A small hole was formed in the side of the mountain of cans. A piece of sheet metal sat within it. I reached out to displace a few cans, so I could get a better look.

“Hey!” Beal marched over to me. “Stay away from those!”

“Easy, old guy,” I said. “I’m not the one taking obviously stolen crap off of people’s hands.”

I regretted saying it, because he looked pretty pissed. I opened my mouth to speak but was cut off immediately.

“Get out!”

Maude rushed over. “I-”

“Out! Get the hell out!” He shoved me towards the door.

Evidently Maude must have been feeling somewhat merciful, because she got us out of the heat immediately by wandering into a Gracie's Kitchen just down the road.

Mostly they just served ice cream. The only other food offered were some really cheap burgers and fries. Despite their quality I still got some fries since I was hungry.

And I like to poke squares into my ice cream with them.

I idly chewed on a fry partially coated in vanilla. "Sorry."

She perked up from her cone, a look of confusion spread across her features. "For what?"

I shrugged. "Well... you know. I kinda got us thrown out of there."

"Please." Maude waved a hand dismissively. "That was great. I got a lot out of that."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "He couldn't have told you much for your recycling article."

"'Recycling article'?" She laughed. "I'm not writing about how students should recycle more."

I raised a brow at her.

She pointed a plastic spork at me, her tone suddenly icy. "But they should."

I propped my elbow up on our table, resting my head on it. "Uh-huh."

"Anyways..." She cleared her throat. "It's fine."

"And what are you writing about then?" I asked.

Maude shrugged. "Depends."



“On?”

“Whatever I happen to find.”

I rolled my eyes. “Thanks for clearing that up.”

“No problem.” She smirked.

Silence settled over us, and I studied the inside of Gracie's Kitchen. Something had seemed a little off since I entered.

The tables were clean and stocked.

The fluorescent lights were, as always, mostly working. Except for that annoying flickering one.

The black-and-white tile flooring was recently mopped.

“Listen,” Maude said. “Do you remember the way that guy freaked out when you approached that mountain of cans? And what's up with all those cans? It's like he's not recycling them.”

“Why wouldn't he do that though?” I asked.

“I dunno.” Maude chewed her lip. “But Mr. Beal's definitely hiding something.”

“You mean like the tons of obviously stolen crap lying around?” I rolled my eyes. “Yeah, I think he might just be trying to hide that.”

The hairs on the back of my neck stood up. My head snapped to the side, and I studied the mostly empty shop.

A young lady idly studied her finger nails. Her expression clearly showed her boredom.

An old man sat in the far corner of the shop. He ate a cheap burger alone.

A fluorescent light flickered.

I looked out the window and saw the eyes of hell. Bloodshot and tinged with yellow. Its face was pure white. Its lips coated in thick red. The creature's head topped in a fluffy mess of rainbow mesh.

Eyes wide, I froze, unable to avoid its gaze.

“HEYA KIDS!”

I lurched away from the glass. “Dear god!” I inched just far enough over the edge of my seating to fall from our booth, hitting the floor. Hard.

That clown smiled at us with crooked, stained teeth.

Maude's eyes darted between the two of us.

*I hate that clown so much.*

“Well, if it isn't my old friend Ronan!” He said, in that awful mocking tone. “Haven't seen you around Gracie's in a while!”

*I hate you.*

“Aw...” He wagged a finger at me. “You weren't very talkative when you were younger either!”

*I wish I could kill you. I wish I could kill you with my HATE.*

We stared at each other for awhile. Maude kept her head down, focusing completely on her ice cream.

Loved the moral support.

“Hey!” The lady behind the counter shouted at us. “Clown! Get out of here!”

“Whoops!” The clown did a spin while sliding backwards. “Got to go!”

She climbed over the counter and sprinted past the tables. “Stop harassing customers!”

The lady disappeared past the front door to chase him off once again.

“Wow,” Maude said. “She's kind of a mean boss, huh?”

I clambered back into my seat. “He doesn't work here.”

She blinked slowly. “Excuse me?”

We made our way to the top of a grassy hill that overlooked the recycling center. Unfortunately, although we could see down into the centers yard, we were an enormous distance away.

Maude spied on the scrapyard behind the facility through a scope. It looked old, like something out of a movie set hundreds of years ago.

She checked her watch. “It's been forty-five minutes and nothing's going on down there.”

“Wow,” I said.

She glanced back at me, her confusion apparent.

“I didn't know they made wrist watches in the fourteen-hundreds.”

Maude studied the watch in silence before snapping her attention to the scope. “Oh. I'll have you know, Ronan, this scope's an antique.”

“Then put it behind a display case where it belongs.”

“Shush.” She elbowed me before pressing the scope into my hands. “You look for a while.”

“Hrm.” I grumbled but did as she asked.

We spent hours up on that hill and saw absolutely nothing. I was almost proud of my dedication to following through with Maude's insane requests. Almost.

A few empty glass bottles cluttered the field around us. The soda Maude brought didn't stay cold long, but thankfully the sun was losing some of its intensity in the waning daylight.

Maude leapt to her feet. "Look! Look!"

I walked next to her and stared expectantly.

"Look!"

"I-"

"*Look!*"

"I would..." I snatched the spyglass from her. "If you gave me the scope!"

The scrapyard was empty, and I didn't see anything going on through the recycling center's windows.

"Okay? I don't-"

A small section of the can mountain moved. Numerous cans shook around, like something shifted underneath.

They suddenly exploded outward, tumbling across the yard. A hole was left in their place.

A figure climbed out, but even with the scope I couldn't make out many details.

Mr. Beal immediately came bumbling out of the center, throwing his hands up, apparently shouting. Whoever he spoke to stood more calmly, covered in a dark colored robe.

I lost sight of them when Maude recovered her monocular.

"This is good. This is what we've been waiting for." A smirk tugged at her lips. "I've got a plan."

I sighed. “Awesome.”

## Chapter 3

A bloom of orange light clung to the horizon, and I glowered at it.

Go down already.

I sighed.

A turned over trashcan lay next to me; its contents spilled out across the alley that we concealed ourselves in. The street lights were just coming on, and an orange light over us illuminated the alley.

Maude was doing... something.

“Are you done yet?” I asked, my back turned.

“Don't look!”

“I'm not!” I shouted. “What on earth are you doing?”

“Just don't look!”

“Why!?”

An empty can hit the back of my head. I still didn't turn around.

I kicked it away. “What are you-”

“Done!” Maude leapt past me, before quickly spinning around to face me.

*What. The. Hell...?*

“Well, Ronan?” She spread her arms out, curling her fingers toward herself a few times. “Stealthy? Right?”

Her tail swooshed behind her. I clicked my tongue.

Maude was wearing a catsuit. Like, a spy catsuit. With a large pair of sunglasses.

I poked her shades. “Good luck seeing with those.”

Maude smacked my hand away. “Shush, I look awesome. Let's see... the sun's down.” She dramatically pointed forward. “Let's move out team!”

I rolled my eyes. “Keep hamming it up there, Maude.”

We approached the recycling center's fence moments later. The fence itself was chain-link, but sheets of metal placed around the perimeter of the yard blocked our ability to see within it. The only thing visible from the outside was the mountain of cans.

I heard chatter as we got closer. It sounded distant, and the voices were many. It was like people were speaking in unison.

I grabbed the fence. “Alright, so we're just going to stand out here listening? Or...”

Maude leapt to the top of the fence, effortlessly pulling herself up and over it.

“Alright.” I nodded. “We're breaking in then? Okay.” I looked around. “This is... freaking illegal.”

I jumped up, grabbing the upper part of the fence.

“Dammit!”

And immediately fell back down.

“Ronan?” Maude called. “What's taking so long?”

“Give me a second. I'm not in as good a shape as you are!”

Several tries later and I finally clambered over the top of the fence.

Unfortunately I didn't stick the landing, instead collapsing into a heap in the dirt.

“Oh, I'm sorry sweetie. Does Anastasia need a few minutes to catch her breath?” Maude asked.

“Go. Screw.” I winced as I forced myself up. “Yourself.”

She smiled and nodded. “Hmm. That's lovely.”

Voices continued to echo from somewhere around the base of the can mountain. We approached cautiously before displacing cans, trying to find that opening.

“You don't think Beal is keeping an eye out do you?” I asked.

“Even if he is, I've got this disguise.” Maude adjusted her sunglasses.

“Yeah,” I said. “But I don't! And I'm pretty sure he can take a guess as to who the freaking mouse with me was!”

“Well if you wanna be a baby and just go home- found it!” Maude threw a trapdoor open.

Cans loudly rattled across the dirt. I cringed at their racket while looking back at the recycling center. The lights were still on, but I didn't see any sign of Mr. Beal.

“You are going to get us freaking arrested...”

A dim light shone from the hole. metal steps were built into it, leading underneath the mountain of cans. Voices came from within, clearer now than they had been. They weren't talking; they were chanting.

The lighting stemmed from old cracked and warped lanterns hung along the walls. Closer inspection revealed that they were all different kinds. Some were made entirely from metal, others a mix of steel and wood. Their condition was extremely poor, as if they had simply been discarded over the years. I wondered if they were once part of Beal's collection of scrap, re-purposed now for... whatever this was.



“Ooh...” Maude fawned over them. “They're all antiques! I wish one of these was in good condition, then I'd...”

I ripped one off the wall, and then shoved it in her hands. “Can we move on now?”

“But, but...” She lifted the warped lantern up, frowning. “It's not in pristine condition.”

I crossed my arms. “Just. Go.”

We didn't have to travel far before stumbling upon an impossibly large chamber. We were only just under the surface, but the room somehow had a very high ceiling. The walls, the floors, and ceiling were built from rusted metal, obviously melded together in a very haphazard fashion. Stairs built from sheets of metal led down to the center of the chamber.

I felt nervous just being near a structure with such questionable integrity. Well... that was part of the reason I felt nervous. The other part was the dozen or so people in dark robes, standing around a circle filled with archaic symbols, all chanting a strange foreign language I couldn't place.

Candles were placed around the room. Eight stood on tall rusted poles around the chanting people; other smaller ones were placed randomly around the room.

The circle contained six smaller circles within, which in turn, surrounded seemingly random pieces of junk. A busted open mini-fridge, rusty pipes, tons of wiring...

“Hah! I knew it.” Maude smirked. “And they thought they could get away with it...”

My eyes shifted between her and the group. “Get away with what exactly? Who are these people?”

“Scrapologists.” She cracked her knuckles. “They're a dangerous breed, weaponizing the random bits of metal we throw away everyday.”

“What? They're dangerous!?” I cupped my mouth while ducking down. “How dangerous? Should we call the police?”

“Police?” Maude laughed. “That's a good one. Why do you think we're here?” She elbowed me playfully.

“Uh...”

The chanting shifted in tone, becoming darker and more menacing. The candles in the room shifted to green in an instant, even Maude's lantern was affected.

“Their ritual is nearly complete!” Maude grabbed my shoulder and tugged me down the stairs. “We can't let them finish that trash golem!”

“Wait, wait!” I resisted her pull, but she kept dragging me forward. “How are we supposed to do that?”

Maude rifled through a pouch on her waist, retrieving a set of steel claws. “How do you think?”

Right... you're from the institute.

“But...” I shook my head. “Alright, how am I supposed to stop them?”

Maude came to a dead stop. “You didn't bring your weapon?”

I wrenched her hand off my shoulder. “No!”

“Why not!?”

I stepped back toward the doorway. “No, I mean I don't have a weapon!”

“Oh, you fight unarmed?”

I shook my head.

“You use magic?”

I shook my head.

Maude stared at me.

“I don't, uh... I'm just a groundskeeper.”

“You...” Maude stared, her mouth agape. “You're a...”

I coughed. “Did you not know that?”

“Groundskeeper?”

“You know... a janitor.”

We stared at each other.

“Are you two quite finished?”

We snapped back to the group, their chanting at some point had ceased. The circle glowed with green light that infused itself into the bits of scrap metal left within it.

“Because we are somewhat in the middle of something?” A man stepped forward before removing his hood.

He was tall, his skin pale, and his features gaunt. A monocle covered his right eye, and I spotted rust clinging to the frame. He removed a pocket watch from within his robe, the chain and watch looked just as used as everything else in that place. He shifted his weight onto an old cane that bent from the strain.

“Well, I suppose I can take a moment to entertain our guests, hmm?” He looked to his companions, who nodded in agreement. He withdrew a blade from his cane, before tossing the sheath to a nearby woman. “Take over now would you, dear?”

She stepped in front of the group, and they resumed their deep chanting.

He, on the other hand, stepped toward us.

I stepped back. "Hold on, we aren't looking to cause any trouble." I forced a pained smile.

"Oh, no, no, no." He shook his head at me. "We are the ones looking to cause trouble." He smirked. "It's quite fortunate that the two of you came along when you did, we needed someone to test our newest creation out on, and I'm thinking you two will do just nicely."

"What... what are you doing?" I asked.

"What am I doing?" He snickered. "I am trying to create a more perfect world! A world where all scrap metal is recycled properly! And put in its proper place!" He pointed to the circle behind him. "That my friends... is the future. A golem that will find misplaced scrap in people's garbage, and bring it to local recycling centers. We'll make another one in the next city over. And another one in the next city past that!" He laughed uncontrollably. "We will create a true UTOPIA, where all recyclable materials are treated responsibly!"

I rubbed my chin. "You know, a magic robot that collects scrap metals sounds like a pretty good idea."

"Also it will kill those disrespectful monsters that didn't recycle properly."

I nodded. "And there it is. Now it's evil."

Maude smiled darkly, fire burning behind her green eyes. "Pity it's not ready yet."

He laughed. "No. It isn't. But I suspect you're going to be a little busy for the next few moments." He pointed a chipped blade toward us.

The quality of the blade might have made it less threatening if the rust clinging to it didn't make me fear getting some weird disease from it.

Maude casually put on the claws, then disconnected the chain linking them.

"My name is, Duke Mellor. And this night spells your doom, mouse!" He crouched down and kept his blade raised just over his head. "Prepare yourself!"

He launched himself at Maude. “En gua-”

She deflected the blade to her side, away from me. She used her other hand to grab the back of his head, kicked his leg out from under him, and slammed his skull against the metal stairs.

The cheap material bent immediately from the impact. He slowly pushed himself up. Maude stomped down on the back of his skull. Repeatedly.

I slowly shrunk back as the man sunk into the staircase.

When Maude came to a halt she was breathing heavily. “Alright. Let's finish the rest of them.”

“What do you mean we?”

“I said 'let's!'” She tossed his sword at me. “Just swing that at anyone who moves near you.”

I grasped at the grip, but it fumbled out of my hand immediately. “Crap.” It clattered across the ground.

“Except me, of course,” Maude added as she leapt off the final step and toward the circle of scrap-cultists.

## Chapter 4

*So this is how I die.*

A pillar of emerald light lifted from the circle, carrying the materials up with it. The chant finished with one, final, powerful chord as the different materials came together.

A silhouette slowly took shape, but the light's intensity ramped up over the following seconds, making it increasingly difficult to view their creation take form.

The pillar exploded. A loud crash came from the circle.

A towering, thing stood in the center of it, watching us. It's head took the form of a mini-fridge, its limbs made from pipes, its torso was a mixture of entangled metal sheets and an engine block. Copper wiring hung from the top of its 'head' in something resembling a pony tail.

Its front arms came down, crashing against the flooring. It's posture resembled some kind of freakish trash gorilla.

We stared as it took a lumbering step toward us.

I crept closer to Maude. It stepped closer to us.

Another step from me. Another step from it.

I snatched the broken lantern from Maude and tossed it at the creature.

The lantern bounced off of its head with a metallic 'clink' before falling and rolling across the ground. It slowly made its way back to us.

It stared down at us, motionless. Maude stared at me. I stared at the lantern.

And threw it again.

The lantern stopped short of hitting it. A green light shone from the creature's body, surrounding the lantern. It floated around behind the creature's head. The wiring sticking out of the golem's head entwined around the lantern, fixing it into place.

I tossed the worn sword at it, only for the golem to repeat the process with the blade, affixing it to the end of its right hand.

It took a swing at Maude and she flipped backwards, narrowly avoiding contact with her stomach.

“We, uh.” Maude glanced between me and it. “We should probably run now.”

We sprinted back through the tunnel at the top of the stairs behind us and out of the cultists' lair. That creature was three times as tall as any human, which gave me hope that it was trapped underground.

That hope was destroyed instantly as the creature exploded out of the can mountain behind us as soon as we escaped. Sheets of metal hidden just under the enormous pile gave way to the sudden strain, collapsing into a previously hidden hole, and disappearing into the cultist's lair.

It tried to clamber out of its hole, repeatedly struggling to find footing amongst the ring of cans left around its exit.

Maude took the initiative to sprint at it full speed and jump on its face, sending it back down. She managed to find safe footing outside the hole after bouncing off its fridge-head.

“So, do you actually have a plan?” I asked.

“The plan was to stop them before they made something like this!”

Metal shifted and groaning from inside the hole.

A metal nub covered in sheets of metal emerged, followed by similarly reinforced arms.

“Oh. Crap,” I said.

It pulled itself up, revealing its body was coated in the metal once used to support the walls of the hidden chamber. Oddly, numerous cans stuck out of its body haphazardly.

It barreled toward Maude, who weaved to the side and slashed its left arm as it came down next to her. Her claws painfully erupted in a metallic squeal and left large cuts along the sheet metal.

It used its free arm to stab at her with the rusty blade I had inadvertently provided. Maude swiped at the sword, shattering it, but took the full impact of its metal nub. She rolled across the dirt before sprawling out several feet away.

“Hrm...” Maude staggered back to her feet and looked at her sunglasses.

One of the lenses was missing and the frame was bent.

“You. Bastard,” she growled.

Maude crushed the sunglasses in her hand before tossing it at the golem. It didn't flinch.

“You.” Her fists shook. “Will pay for this!”

Maude pelted the hulking heap with anything she could grab. The creature settled down, quietly allowing itself to be hit while green light enveloped each projectile. Each new piece of scrap was assimilated in short order.

A pipe struck its face.

A tire iron bounced off its torso.

A manhole cover tore through its shoulder.

I slowly backed away from the scene, watching in horror as the golem steadily grew in size piece-by-piece. “Maude. Stop.”



Maude breathed heavily, her face contorted into a fierce scowl. She looked around herself.

She had thrown everything away that was within arms reach.

The golem shifted forward, the lumbering thing ready to attack once again.

I crept over to Maude, wary of the thing. “Are we... you know?”

She gave me a tired look.

“You know?”

She blinked.

I sighed. “Are we going to die?”

Maude stared at me, then back at the golem.

It awkwardly stepped forward, the golem's weight shifting around. Loose bits of metal sticking out of its body groaned. Its leg slipped, and it fell flat.

A tire iron flipped out of its back and slid toward us.

The golem shook itself violently. Metal squealed as excess parts flung free from it, clattering around the yard. It stood back up.

I watched with interest. “Hey, Maude.”

It stomped its arms down, shaking the earth, and charged toward us. I sprinted off to the side while Maude slid between its legs.

It crashed into the recycling center, obliterating the wall and collapsing the roof.

*I almost hope Mr. Beal wasn't in there.*

Green light softly shone from within a cloud of dust bellowing from the destroyed building.

A loud metallic pounding rang out from the building. Then another, and another.

The golem emerged from its smokescreen, its gait lopsided as it struggled to stand. Metal fused into the crevices of its right arm, eventually stopping its movement entirely. The entire body groaned in one long, painful moment before the arm forcibly bent itself, crushing the assimilated metal.

It limped forward.

I looked to Maude. "I don't think it has any control over absorbing metal."

Maude tapped her foot against the dirt.

"Maude?"

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

"Maude...?"

"I'm thinking." She scanned the yard.

The golem stomped its jammed arm down in front of her and raised the other arm up high. Maude smirked.

It brought its arm down like a hammer, crushing the earth. Maude skidded backwards.

She grabbed a speed-limit sign and leapt at its more mobile arm, stabbing the pole into its artificial joint. Maude held onto the sign as it lifted its arm up, studying her.

It fell forward, supporting its weight on the arm she clung to as it struggled to lift its other limb. The damaged limb came to rest just short of its shoulder before scraping loudly along the top of its working arm.

Sparks flew along its path as Maude jumped off the arm. The street sign was flattened when the arm passed over it. A familiar green light melded it into place.

The creature went through a familiar motion of trying to move, only to find the joint jammed. It violently shook the limb before fruitlessly trying to pluck the pancaked sign off its joint with its free metal nub.

Maude landed on its back, slid down to its legs, and stabbed a pair of signs into each one.

The creature's leg slid forward, but the entire entity came crashing down immediately. Maude climbed onto its back before violently slashing her claws into it, burrowing into its insides. It pushed down and flipped itself onto its side.

Metal squealed as it pushed itself just enough for gravity to roll it over completely.

Maude didn't move out of the way before it completed its transition.

A loud crash came from it when the golem slammed back down and came to a rest.

“Maude...” I stared, my mouth agape.

It turned its head over to me.

I flinched back.

Something ground around inside its body. Metal scrapped, squealed and groaned, but the creature itself wasn't doing anything at all.

It slowly leaned forward, studying its own torso before a loud bang sounded from within it.

The creature fell limp.

A green light spread to its form before dissipating.

The golem's body fell to pieces.

I stared as a pristine can rolled by my foot.

A clawed hand burst from the golem's chest. A second hand pried the shell of sheet metal open.

Maude crawled up, took one step forward, and fell across the ground. She placed a hand on her chest and stayed in the dirt. "Woo."

"Maude," I said.

"Hmm?" She mumbled.

"Maude!" I sprinted over to her. "I thought that thing killed you!"

"Sorry to disappoint." She laughed. "You thought this ugly bastard was gonna take me down? Hah!" She pointed a finger at me. "Hah, I say!" It immediately fell limp.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

Maude groaned as she sat up. "Let's find out." She lifted her shirt up enough to expose her stomach. White fur coated it just as it did her arms and face.

I didn't see anything unusual about it, well aside from the obvious.

She gently touched the left side of her stomach. Maude's rounded ears pinned to the sides of her head as she winced.

I knelt down next to her. "You need to go to a hospital."

"It's just one hit, I can walk this off. Easy." She struggled to stand.

"No." I held her back with a hand on her shoulder. "You need to-"

"No," She smacked my hand away and leapt to her feet. "I need to go finish those- hey!"

A small crowd of cultists were climbing the fence.

"Get back here you bastards!" She sprinted at them but abruptly came to a

stop, clutching her stomach.

I came to her side. “Maude, its over.”

She scowled at her fleeing enemies.

I tugged her back in the opposite direction.

“Fine. But I'm still not going to the hospital- OH MY GOD!”

I jumped back. “What's wrong!?”

Maude snatched the lantern that once hung off the golem's head. “It's fixed! Its scrapology magic repaired it! It's in pristine condition!”

Maude hugged the refurbished lantern. Copper wires still wrapped around the top of it.

Half-an-hour later we sat by a bus stop in a lonely street. The bench was old and lopsided, aggravating me greatly. I did my best to sit still, but it kept shifting. A schedule was posted nearby, but its case was broken open and the schedule within torn and mostly missing.

I had no idea how long we'd have to wait.

Maude had kept silent during our entire walk to the stop, and still didn't say anything after we sat down. I worried she was in more pain than she let on. Her ears were down, it kinda reminded me of a sad animal.

Maude sighed. “Hey.”

I jumped when she spoke.

She grinned, but suppressed it quickly. “Sorry.”

“Don't worry about it.” I chuckled. “I just didn't expect you to say anything”

Maude shook her head. “That's not what I meant. I'm sorry I dragged you into this.”

“Yeah, well its not like I had much else to do so...”

“You're not a student,” she said. “I assumed you were. I never would have brought you here if I'd known you were just a janitor.”

“Hey!” I snapped.

Maude stared, eyes wide, ears perked up.

“I'm not just a janitor. I'm a groundskeeper.”

A smile tugged at the corner of her lips. “It that a fact?”

“Yeah. I'm not just some kid working a minimum wage job. I'm a specialist.”

Maude put a hand over her mouth, failing to suppress a laugh.

“You think just anybody can pick up trash around the campus?” I wagged a finger at her. “Nope, you need someone with the skills.”

Silence settled over us, and I took in the night-time atmosphere. The stores littering the street were all closed, their lights long since turned off. Not a single car had passed us at any point during our wait. I didn't mind though; sometimes you just want to lie back and let everything soak in.

“When do you start working?” Maude asked.

“Tomorrow,” I said.

“So, I'll see you around the institute then?”

“Yep. You planning on dragging me along another misadventure?”

She laughed. “Not if it's this dangerous.”

###

Thanks for reading my first ebook. If you enjoyed this I hope you're willing

to look up Magus Volume 2 when it comes out.

You can contact the author at: [odic\\_hastings@yahoo.com](mailto:odic_hastings@yahoo.com)

Seriously, feel free. I'd like to hear anything nice you have to say.

And if you don't have anything nice to say, I'd like to hear from you even more.

Jesse Freeman. Wannabe writer.