

THE ATEBAN CIPHER

The Book of Secrets

The Book of Answers

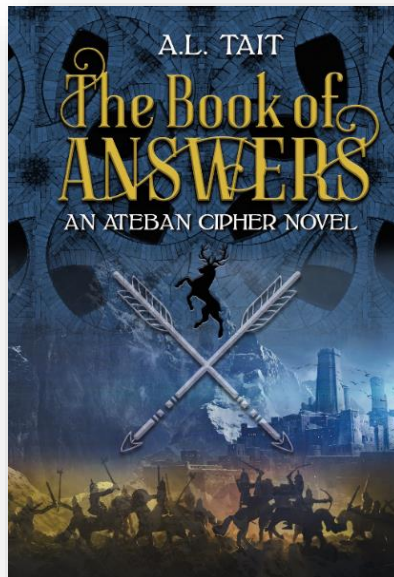
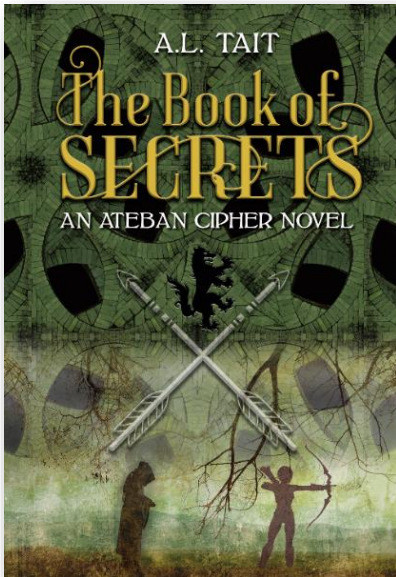
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An orphan in exile. A band of rebel girls. A prince whose throne has been stolen. Come on a journey full of danger, intrigue, adventure and incredible secrets in *The Ateban Cipher* duology.



- Fantasy, adventure, mystery and a quest.
- Appeals to boys and girls.
- By the award-winning author of *The Mapmaker Chronicles*.
- Friendship, books, reading, girl power.

CHAPTER FOUR

"I'm definitely sure it was this one," Gabe said in a loud voice.

"Just like you were definitely sure it was the last three," said Damman, frustration making his voice rise. "Enough! This is a wild goose chase."

"I'll decide when enough is enough," said Ronan, and Gabe didn't miss the menace in his voice.

"I'm sorry," Gabe said, trying to be conciliatory whilst his eyes searched the surrounding woods for any hint of escape. "It was dark when I was last here and all the trees look the same."

"Says the boy who topped the class in plant studies," said Damman with a smirk.

"It's different in real life," Gabe said, echoing Gwyn's words. Frown to think that a thief's taunt could help him now.

"That's as may be," said Ronan, "but this is your last chance. If it's not here, it's into the dungeons with you." He hooked his thumbs into his thick black belt as he spoke, drawing Gabe's attention to the stout, polished truncheon that hung from his right hip. His left was adorned with a silver sword.

Gabe's throat was dry as he led the two men off the path, heading towards a large oak tree with a hollow about halfway up its sturdy trunk. "Up there." He pointed, thinking that perhaps he could simply start climbing and not come back down.

"Up you go then," said Ronan, "and no mucking about – I was the castle's champion tree climber in my day and I will follow you up there if I have to."

Cold with fear, Gabe began climbing, knowing that there was nothing in the hollow, not knowing what Ronan would do to him when he learned of this sad truth. The bark was rough under his hands and his feet slipped inside his sandals, but he persisted, knowing he had no choice. He reached a small branch, putting his hand in the V it created where it met the trunk to test its strength. Deciding it was sturdy enough, he dragged himself up high enough to put one foot in the V, before stopping to catch his breath.

"Oi!" came Ronan's rough shout from below. "No dillydallying."

Staring up into the tree above him, Gabe took a moment to take in the beauty of its spreading canopy