

WYCAAN MASTER: BOOK TWO

THE FIRST DECREE

A Novel

ALON SHALEV



Tourmaline Books
Berkeley, California

The First Decree
Wycaan Master, Book 2
Copyright © 2013 Alon Shalev

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. This book has been published by Tourmaline Books. No part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system without the written permission of the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Tourmaline Books, Berkeley, California
<http://www.tourmalinebooks.com>

ISBN: 978-0-9884428-4-9

LCCN: 2012950789

First Edition: February, 2013

This book contains an excerpt from the forthcoming book *Wycaan Master Book 3 - Ashbar* by Alon Shalev. This excerpt has been set for this edition and may not reflect the final content of the forthcoming edition.

Published in the United States of America

DEDICATION

Each summer for three years, a family gathered around a campfire, deep in the ancient redwood forests, to hear the story told. A 9 year-old boy sat with eyes wide open and, together with the ancient trees, bore witness to the tales of Odessiya and the summoning of the Wycaan Masters.

To my son, Asif, who makes friends and builds his own alliances. Who is as brave, strong-minded, and creative as the legendary dwarves of Odessiya. And who, between large yawns late at night, kept this story as honest and true as he is.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- To Monica Buntin, my editor, for once again making sense of an awful lot of words.
- To William Kenney, my book cover artist, for your amazing ability to continually transform my jumbled ideas into such beautiful pieces of art.
- To Jeny Lyn Ruelo and her team at The Fast Fingers, for the interior design and formatting, always willing to guide and help me.

PROLOGUE



When history inscribes what transpired after the fall of the Great Alliance, let it include a chapter about the dwarves. For though men and elves will dominate its pages, the story of those who dwell underground must not be forgotten.

It was I, King Hothen the Elder, who led his surviving dwarf warriors from the battlefield. Our numbers were small and prospects harrowing. We left our dead – including my own father, King Goldenore – to the vultures and the crows. I knew only that I must keep our people alive. Dwarves are brave warriors, and our battalions fought in the fiercest encounters. So it was that as the piles of bodies grew, many – too many – were of noble dwarves.

I instructed our leaders to hold faith, for as he lay on the battlefield, precariously balanced between life and the great halls of our ancestors, the Wycaan Master Perridor shared with me a vision. The Wycaans, he revealed, were massacred but not obliterated.

“Hold fast to our ways,” he whispered. “Bide your time in the shadows underground where the greedy eyes of men cannot see. Rebuild our nation and wait. For I promise: A Wycaan will come to lead you. And though he will not be of our race, he will find friendship among the dwarves and help you return to your rightful place.”

With our armies decimated, I led our people to a deep cave, far away, and there we built mighty Hothengold. The first law passed was one of survival, known as the First Decree. It stated that, following the great treachery, no

man, elf or other – save dwarves – were allowed under the mountains. Those who wandered our way fell to our axes, and the great dwarf nation drifted out of sight and mind of even the most ambitious emperors.

In time, as our numbers beginning to rise, I sent out the leaders of the six clans, ordering them to secure other such underground fortresses and seek mining opportunities, as only we understand.

But hearken to my words, noble dwarves. The land of Odessiya will never heal until the races unite. Whether by promise or blade, the Alliance will one day rise again, and the dwarf nation will, once again, take its rightful place at the council of the great races.

Until then, my people, I counsel patience, a trait not often found among dwarves. Let us grow our clans and our wealth away from the eyes of the empire, but let us never forget. Be vigilant, be patient, and wait the coming of the Wycaan.

These are the last words of Hothen the Elder, High King of the Dwarves.

From the Chronicles of King Hothen the Elder.

ONE



“Wake, young master. Danger approaches and we must talk. Oh, I am so sorry to stir you from such deep slumber.”

Seanchai groaned as he wrenched himself from a rich dream. He tried to hold onto it as one places a marker in a book, but it was already gone. He focused instead on reorienting himself.

“What? It’s dark out. Ethrain? What’s happening?”

“Sire, join me outside so as not to disturb the others.”

Seanchai glanced over at Rhoddan. The big elf’s rumbling snores might have shaken the walls of flimsier huts. In the corner his human friend, Shayth, twitched and muttered as he fought demons of his past that assailed his subconscious every night.

Wrapping his cloak around himself and grabbing his thin, curved Win Dao swords, Seanchai joined the old elf outside. The village elder pressed a steaming cup into Seanchai’s hands. The hot tea stilled the Wycaan’s shivering body, and his senses sharpened as the potent drink took effect.

“What is it, Ethrain, my friend?” Seanchai asked after a moment.

“You know my village, though small and poor, takes great pride in giving you shelter, Wycaan. We are honored to provide you with time to rest and heal, to feed you and mend your clothes. We will share stories about your visit for generations.”

Seanchai nodded. "It is I and my friends who are grateful. You have offered us much when you have little for yourselves. I wish I could give something back."

"No, no, that would be wrong, Wycaan. But listen to me now, for I have not woken you without cause. I fear for the safety of our village, and, as leader, it falls to me to make whatever decision I feel I must to protect our humble home."

The wrinkled elf sighed as he shuffled back and forth in front of Seanchai. His body was bent and he leaned heavily on a staff, shaking his head. "The villages of Tripoguard and Selvestus both gave you shelter, and both were destroyed for harboring you after you left. This I have heard from yourself and others."

"It is so," Seanchai said. "And there have been three others since we fled Galbrieth. General Tarlach himself hunts us, and his troops destroy anything in their path that reveals our scent. I warned you of all this before you took us in."

"Indeed you did, my Lord Wycaan. Still, we are many leagues from these villages and far from the roads that armies travel upon. But you must understand: we are two months from our harvests. Our fields, scant though they might be, are key to our survival over the long winter months, and we must harvest in peace. A few hours ago one of our young traders returned. He reported troop movements coming this way."

Seanchai gasped. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. Their advanced sixers have already reached the mountain pass ten leagues from here, and there they stopped."

Seanchai frowned. He knew the army split its troop units into groups of six, and that these small units could move fast and often undetected. He considered how close they might be.

A female voice spoke from behind him. “They may well leave the main highway and come in this direction. Scouts and rangers will surely be sent.”

Seanchai reached out an arm. Ilana slid into his embrace, taking his mug and sipping the tea.

“I will bring you another cup,” Ethrain offered, but Ilana raised her hand to stop him.

“We must leave, Seanchai. There are many elders and *calhei* living here. With our people’s decimated numbers, we cannot afford to put any young in danger.”

Seanchai nodded. “I’ll wake the others and we’ll pack. Can you work on a route?”

“I will gather supplies for you, Wycaan – as much as we can spare,” Ethrain said.

“No,” Seanchai insisted. “You must keep your food reserves for yourselves. Hide them away from the village just in case. We’ll hunt and forage as we go.”

“Then I humbly request that you leave while it is still dark,” the old elf said.

“Why?” Ilana asked, raising a thin eyebrow.

Ethrain looked at the ground. “When my people hear that I sent the Wycaan away, they will be very angry with me. I will probably lose my position as leader. It is best that you go while the village sleeps.”

“Surely they will understand?” Ilana protested.

“Yes, they will. My logic is sound. But everyone in this village would gladly die for Seanchai.” He looked up at the big elf and smiled. “You have brought us such pride. I never thought I’d live to see the day . . .”

“There is nothing smart in dying without reason,” Seanchai declared. “Nothing will be served by your village being destroyed.” He stood tall, his huge body towering over the elder, his voice deepening. “Tell your people that these are the words of Seanchai, the Wycaan. Tell them that I hold you in high esteem as a wise leader, Ethrain. Tell them that my only regret at leaving so soon is that I cannot learn more from your experience and leadership.”

“You honor me so, Wycaan.”

“You will tell them what I said?” Seanchai pressed.

“Every word.” The village leader’s voice shook with emotion.

“I thank you, then. Keep me in your prayers and tell the villagers to wait for my word.”

“It will be done, Wycaan. Come, Ilana. Let me suggest a good route.”

Ilana glanced at Seanchai, not needing to express her thoughts for him to understand. How could she decide on a route when he had no plan? Two months of running from village to village was not bringing down the Empire or uniting the races.

Seanchai sighed. The memory of his teacher and her death were still fresh two months after the event. Mhari’s crushed body lay under the huge stones of the Galbrieth fortress. Without the guidance of a Wycaan Master, he was still the young, confused elf he had been when he had fled his parents’ village.

He entered their hut and shook Shayth awake.

“Wake the others and pack. We need to leave now.”

Seanchai did not wait for a response. He went back outside and filled his lungs with the crisp morning air. Mhari had given him instructions in anticipation of Seanchai continuing without her. She had told him to go to the Forest of Markwin and study with the Elves

of the West. These mythical elves were often the heroes of fairytales told to eager young *calhei* by their parents.

Rhodan staggered out from the hut, threw his bags down on the ground, and disappeared into the trees. When he returned, he jokingly addressed Seanchai: “Hey, snowflake, do you want me to pack up your stuff, too?” Rhodan was still not used to Seanchai’s white Wycaan hair, since he had barely seen Seanchai since the ceremony, which changed his hair color so dramatically.

Seanchai nodded instead of laughing. “Thanks,” he said, and stalked into the woods.

He could feel Rhodan’s gaze on his back as he retreated, stopping to lean on a tree and inhale deeply. He was evidently out of tears. He had tried to allow only Ilana to see the depth of his grief, but they all knew.

Rhodan would lay down his life for Seanchai without a moment’s hesitation, but would also chide Seanchai for not taking the loss like a warrior. Shayth had seen so much killing, had killed so many himself, that his skin was too thick to allow emotion to pierce it. Maugwen, the young human who had escaped with them, avoided Seanchai when she could and looked terrified every time he spoke to her. Beautiful, dark-skinned Sellia, a graceful hunter and warrior, was tough, and Seanchai was loath to show any weakness in her presence.

Only Ilana. Only she would be allowed to see his shields come down. It was Ilana who reminded him who he really was under his Wycaan skin, and she loved him in spite of his weakness.

Footsteps approached – hers. He turned and forced a smile.

“We must leave,” she said, reaching out to stroke his cheek. “Come.”

And he followed her, as he knew he always would.