

A PYRRHIC VICTORY

VOLUME II

DESTINY UNFOLDS



Ian Crouch

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DESTINY UNFOLDS

A HISTORICAL NOVEL BY

IAN CROUCH



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For Jane, Lucinda, and Alastair

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

This is not an exhaustive list of the characters; it focuses on the principal characters. Principal characters and their positions are presented in order of their importance with regard to setting the historical and political stage.

PYRRHUS—King of Epirus and widower of Antigone, stepdaughter of Ptolemy, Pharaoh of Egypt.

ANTIGONE—Daughter of Berenice and stepdaughter of Ptolemy.

CINEAS—Athenian politician who has become Pyrrhus's friend and advisor.

MENESTHEUS—Athenian scholar, friend and general of Pyrrhus.

DEMETRIUS—Son of Antigonus and widower of Deidameia, Pyrrhus's sister. He controls much of central and southern Greece, as well as the great Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon. His ambition is relentless, and he wishes to increase his power in Greece, as well as regain his father's lost territories.

ALEXANDER AND ANTIPATER—Younger sons of Cassander, who have become dual kings of Macedonia following the death of their older brother, Philip.

LYSIMACHUS—One of Alexander's generals. King of Thrace, and part of Asia Minor.

PTOLEMY—One of Alexander's generals. Pharaoh of Egypt.

BERENICE—Wife of Ptolemy and Empress of Egypt.

SELEUCUS—One of Alexander's generals. King of Asia (Syria, Mesopotamia, and the eastern territories of Alexander's empire).

ALEXICRATES—Pyrrhus's wine steward.

AGATHOCLES—King of Syracuse, Sicily.

LANASSA—Daughter of Agathocles.

BARDYLLIS—King of Illyria.

BIRCENNA—Daughter of Bardyllis.

PANTAUCHUS—General of Demetrius.

MACHAON—Army surgeon and Pyrrhus's personal physician.

TELECLEIDES—A Macedonian captain.

EURYPYLUS—A Macedonian captain.

GAIUS FABRICIUS—Roman senator and army commander.

APPIUS CLAUDIUS—An old and venerated Roman senator who guides his city to its destiny.

Most of these central characters are historical figures. The exceptions are; Menestheus, Telecleides, and Eurypylus. Also Machaon, except in a legendary sense. He was named after Machaon, a son of Asclepius, who served with his brother, Podaleirius, as a physician during the Trojan War.

PROLOGUE TO VOLUME I: *THE SHAPING OF DESTINY*

The great battle that is known to some as Gaugamela, and to others as Arbela, changed the world forever. Alexander had defeated the army of the Great King of Persia for the third time and had made himself the master of the empire of the Persians. Darius the Third was dead soon after, slain by one of his own officers. True, there was more fighting to come. Alexander had to fight the assassin, Bessus, who had killed his king; he had to consolidate the empire he had won; and there was the dream of extending his power to India itself, but the cultural axis of the eastern Mediterranean and beyond was altered irrevocably. The stage had been set for the Hellenization of the East, but Alexander would not live to see his dreams come to fruition.

Alexander died in Babylon in 323 BC at the age of thirty-two. The following years would be ones of continuing rivalry and warfare among the Macedonian generals, the Successors or Diadochoi, many of whom would die in these struggles. By 301 BC those years resulted in four great Hellenistic kingdoms, in addition to Macedonia itself.

In this year, they would once again do battle for their survival.

These years were perhaps the greatest period of political and military high adventure that the world had yet known, and there were other great figures from the Greek world who would join in the contest. One of these figures was Pyrrhus, the young, disinherited King of Epirus, who would later be described by Hannibal as the most capable military commander the world had seen, after Alexander himself.

It also fell to Pyrrhus to open the struggle between the Greeks and the Romans for domination of the eastern Mediterranean world and to foresee the great contest between the Romans and the Carthaginians in the west.

PROLOGUE TO VOLUME II: *DESTINY UNFOLDS*

At the end of the first volume, Pyrrhus is at peace in Epirus, confident in his role of king. His onetime friend Demetrius has become hostile to him, and Pyrrhus has just repelled an attack on his allies, the Thessalians, by Demetrius's army under the command of Pantauchus.

One of the reasons that Demetrius can treat Pyrrhus this way, is the recent death of Deidameia, Pyrrhus's sister and Demetrius's wife. She was the greatest tie between them.

Pyrrhus is to suffer another loss, while Fate rewards him with a return to the grand stage of international politics and intrigue.

The first acts of this second volume of the drama centre on his dealings with Demetrius and the great country of Macedonia; the later acts take us to Italy, where Pyrrhus creates the fame that still endures.

While continuing his quest to be known as a great captain of history, he also pursues his ideal of achieving personal happiness.

CHAPTER I

The smell of Antigone's funeral pyre still haunted Pyrrhus during his waking hours, and the loss of her embrace made his nights lonely and windswept. On this morning, as on each morning of the last sixty days, he gazed at the rising sun with an emptiness in his heart. On his lap sat the letter which had arrived two days ago from Egypt, from Ptolemy and Berenice, reread so often that he could recite it by heart without any conscious effort at all.

From the Father to the Son, Greetings,

My dear Pyrrhus, it is with the greatest sadness that I acknowledge your last letter, telling us of the recent death of Antigone. The tears of Berenice and myself have spattered this parchment as I write this letter. Our deepest sadness is that your grief must be even more severe than our own. Please accept our most sincere wishes that you will be able to continue your life and your works despite this tragedy. I understand

how great a loss this has been to you, but please believe me when I say that your life may still have meaning in the future, if for no other reason than it will enable you to watch your fine son grow to manhood. I will be eternally grateful that your esteem for me enabled you to allow your son to carry my name.

Ptolemy

Pyrrhus continued to stare out his window over the rooftops of Ambracia until the morning's customary knock startled him out of his brown study. He walked to the door to admit his advisors and allowed himself his first smile of the day. His son, Ptolemy, named after Antigone's great stepfather, would be the first to enter his chambers, and would sit on his lap as he conducted his morning audience with his royal council. The boy was now three years of age and, with the adaptability of the young, had accepted the death of his mother more quickly than had his father. As Pyrrhus opened the door to his suite, his son beamed a smile at him, spread open his arms, and said, "Papa!"

Pyrrhus picked his son up and hugged him. "How is my little soldier this morning?"

"Papa", repeated Ptolemy, holding Pyrrhus's neck with all his strength.

"Would the young man like some breakfast?" asked Pyrrhus, unable to resist a smile.

"Breakfast!" repeated his son, happy to be carried to the table by his father.

A short time later, when Pyrrhus's tunic had been sprinkled with a mixture of bread crumbs, butter, and saliva, he turned to Cineas and said, "And now, my friend, what do you have for me this morning?"

"This is no ordinary morning, Sire," replied Cineas, glad finally to be able to offer his king some news which would ease his torment. "A letter bearing the Royal Seal has arrived from Macedonia."

“Indeed!” said Pyrrhus. “We are in exalted company this morning. Gentlemen, please help yourselves to something to eat while I open this epistle.”

Cineas and Menestheus, along with the other members of the royal council, kept one eye on Pyrrhus as they helped themselves to food and drink. Macedonia was the greatest power in their region, and a letter with the royal seal could not be other than important.

As Pyrrhus read the letter through several times, it became obvious to Cineas that it was of great import. Pyrrhus’s mouth cautiously curled at the edges to form a smile, and his eyes gave a promise of an excitement that had not been seen in many a day.

At length, Pyrrhus sat down again and passed the letter over to Cineas to read. His son took the opportunity to jump into his lap, giving the father a moment’s disquiet as one of his testicles gave a loud complaint.

“You will see, my friend, that we are invited to aid Alexander, the young King of Macedonia, in his struggle against his older brother, Antipater, who has gone against the wishes of their mother and usurped his share of the kingdom. What could be more perfect?”

“A domestic dispute in a royal family is fraught with danger, Sire,” replied Cineas.

“True, my friend, but it is also full of opportunity. Please show it to Menestheus and the others, and when I have cleaned this young man’s face, we will have an opportunity to discuss the matter.”

After their customary game of chasing around the room, Pyrrhus returned his son’s face to a state fit for others to see and took his hand. “I will send you off to play with the other children now, my son. I will see you for dinner.”

“Yes, Papa,” replied Ptolemy. As he opened the door, the young man caught sight of his nanny, the source of many of the good things in his life. With a squeal of delight, he took her hand and walked towards the nursery, turning back to wave good-bye to his father.

Pyrrhus felt an optimism that had long been in abeyance well up in his breast as he returned to his meeting, sat down in his chair, and asked Cineas to read the letter aloud to him so they could all absorb it.

“And now, my friend, perhaps you could try and sift the facts from the rhetoric, and give us all a summary of how you see matters in Macedonia, and we can then discuss our response to his request.”

“It is reasonably clear, Sire, and reminiscent of many such disputes within ruling houses. You will recall that after the death of Cassander two years ago, the eldest of his three sons became King of Macedonia. This young man, Philip, died some six months ago following a fall from his horse, so the throne was once again vacant. Cassander’s widow, Thessalonice, then made a decision, the like of which has often caused turmoil in such circumstances. She felt that her two remaining sons should have an equal claim on the throne and decreed they should *both* become kings of Macedonia. As a result, the country was partitioned, with Antipater, the older son, governing the eastern half of the country, while Alexander, the younger son, would govern the western half. That is the background to this drama.

“This letter is from Alexander, the younger of the two, who has been the victim of the inevitable conflict. He states that his brother has put their mother to death and that Antipater has driven him from Macedonia and taken the whole country under his sway, proclaiming that Macedonia has always been a single nation under a single king, and he has only taken what was his to claim. Alexander, as the aggrieved party, naturally raises the objection that his kingship had been decreed by their mother as regent, and had the support of the Assembly of Nobles and the people. Alexander goes on to ask you to intercede for him, to reclaim his lost patrimony, adding that he is prepared to be generous to you in return for helping him to regain his rightful throne. He adds that he has also written to Demetrius in a similar vein, hoping one of you will be able to come to his aid. He says finally that he is in hiding with those

of his bodyguards who remained loyal, and the messenger who brought this letter will know how to find him.”

“A very lucid summary, Cineas,” said Pyrrhus. “My own first reaction is that this proposal could offer us a great deal. The only risk to us in helping this young man would be the fight we could have on our hands if the Macedonian army wholeheartedly supported Antipater.”

“Exactly so, Sire,” replied Cineas, “although I doubt the murder of his mother has endeared Antipater to his fellow countrymen. I suspect there would be a great deal of sympathy for Alexander in the army. It is one thing to kill a direct rival, but quite another to kill one’s own mother. You recall the hatred that Cassander earned for himself after he executed Olympias and the rest of the great Alexander’s family.”

Pyrrhus thought for a time and then looked at Menestheus. “And you, my friend, what do you think of all this?”

“I think it is an opportunity you should interest yourself in, Sire. You would have a considerable amount of natural justice behind you, and in the worst event, if you face an undivided Macedonian army supporting the claim of Antipater, there is no reason why you could not retire without accepting battle.”

“Those are my feelings, Menestheus. Cineas, perhaps you would be kind enough to draft a letter to Alexander offering my support. We could discuss it over dinner tonight. And now, gentlemen, I must prepare myself. I am due to review several cases at the law courts this morning.”

Pyrrhus smiled to himself as he walked to the court building. He was sure the cases he would review today would be anything but pleasant, but the letter from Macedonia had stirred something deep inside him. These recent years of peace had enabled him to earn a considerable degree of self-worth, and he felt rightfully proud of how Epirus had blossomed during this time. The adventurer and soldier in him now demanded to be heard, however, and he knew he could not neglect this opportunity to be a player on the world stage. He would demand a suitable compensation for his efforts, but even if the compensation consisted only of

adventure and prestige, he could not bring himself to decline this invitation.

The afternoon Pyrrhus spent at the law courts was as difficult as he had suspected, but even that could not suppress his enthusiasm. He had two hours to himself before he was due to dine with his advisors. He spent part of the time playing with his son, and now, lying back in his bath, he was able to contemplate his future. To accept Alexander's invitation would take him from his stable, peaceful world and return him to the turbulent arena of Hellenistic politics, the only world to which he truly belonged. There was no doubt in his mind that it would lead to conflict with Demetrius. If Pyrrhus was to become stronger, then he would naturally become a rival, which was anathema to a man like Demetrius, who had no concept of sharing power with anyone in the Greek world. There was little doubt that Demetrius was aiming at complete mastery of Greece. It was also possible he was planning to reclaim all his father's previous dominions.

Also, there was Lysimachus to take into account. If Pyrrhus came to the aid of the young Alexander, it was likely that Antipater would turn to Lysimachus for help. What a struggle was in the making! The events leading up to Ipsus were no more charged with possibilities than this moment, and he still thought of that battle as the most formative experience in his life. For now he could enjoy his bath. There were no doubts in his mind that he would accept this invitation and then see where Fate would lead him. All of his being cried out for the clamour of battle, and now it was certain he would hear it soon.

Two weeks later, Cineas brought another letter bearing the royal seal of Macedonia to Pyrrhus's chambers. Pyrrhus invited his advisor to sit and gave him a goblet of wine.

"Please be so good as to open the letter, my friend, and read it to me."

Cineas did as he was bade and quickly scanned the letter before reading it out aloud to his king. Cineas was also not left unmoved by the adventure that was promised them, and he could not resist a smile as he read the letter to Pyrrhus.

King Alexander to King Pyrrhus, Greetings,

My dear Cousin, I was very glad to read your letter, and am pleased to acknowledge your willingness to help me in this dark hour. As to the means at my disposal to show my gratitude, I am pleased to offer you the districts of Stymphaea and Paravaea, which form the westernmost part of Macedonia. These regions would be ceded to Epirus with my gratitude for your aid. Please give me your decision as soon as possible.

Alexander

“He is as stingy as his father, Cineas,” said Pyrrhus. “He wants me to do all the work and offers me a few cow paddocks for my troubles. Please draft a reply acknowledging his letter, but point out that I also demand the territories of Ambracia, Acarnania, and Amphilochia. If he is prepared to do this, I will return him to his rightful place on the throne of Macedonia.”

Cineas did not reply for a moment, but sat back, deep in thought. After a moment’s reflexion, he smiled and said to Pyrrhus, “I agree with you, Sire. This undertaking is not to be taken lightly, and there must be a worthy strategic objective, if it is to have any basis in logic. You realise, of course, that even if it does not antagonise Demetrius, you will come into direct opposition with Lysimachus? Apart from his natural hostility, Antipater married Lysimachus’s daughter, Euridice.”

“That is clear to me, my friend, but we cannot base our decisions on what other people think, and we may even be doing Lysimachus a favour if we prevent Demetrius from becoming more powerful.”

Pyrrhus was in no doubt that his terms would be accepted by young Alexander, and he gave Menestheus and Abantes instructions to begin preparing the expedition immediately. It could be two weeks before they received a reply from Macedonia, taking into account the indecision of a weak young king, and he

could have the army prepared in that time. As patience was not one of his most outstanding virtues, Pyrrhus was happy to use the time effectively, so he would be able to march as soon as he had his reply.

His friends were also affected by the excitement. Cineas was pleased to return to the world of international political intrigue, and Menestheus and Abantes were no less excited. The great virtue of this particular situation was the great benefit it offered with so little risk. It would strengthen Epirus significantly and give his army a campaign with its supply line intact, with little likelihood of bloodshed. A situation to be savoured.

Pyrrhus joined his commanders each day to discuss the preparations and visited at least part of the army every day. The accounts of his previous military exploits had grown in many retellings, so that he was already being compared to the great Alexander. He did not know that this idea would spread over the coming years, so that his very presence at a battle was worth a battalion of phalangites.

As the days came and went, the Epirote army reached its moment of readiness, and just before Pyrrhus's hypothetical fortnight was up, he received his reply from Alexander. He had agreed to Pyrrhus's terms, and indicated that he and his retinue would watch for Pyrrhus's approach and join him on their march towards Macedonia. Despite the fact that the young man was in hiding, he clearly had sufficient resources to be aware of the events that he had set in motion.

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