

THE D-EVOLUTION - BOOK THREE

# DISHONOR



SEAN ALLEN

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The D-Evolution: Book Two

Odyssey of the Serum: Part One

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## Chapter 2: My Brother's Killer

Misery clung to him, and Tyrobus stumbled over the threshold to Esukai's quarters. He felt as if the journey had taken forever, marching in silence, head down, following the trail of blood dotting the cobbles at his feet. Esukai could've walked off Ginju Falls and Tyrobus wouldn't have noticed until he was falling too—the cool spray on his face, the white mist, and then nothing. *I wonder if that would be a better fate than what's coming. And how did Blangaris overhear all those things about Brudenkull without father knowing? Clearly, he wasn't making it up. What couldn't Esukai finish on the battlefield? What the hell happened on that planet?*

Esukai smacked the button to the left of the door, and lantern light filled the room. He moved to the table at the back wall, plucking up his striker in his good hand, then pinched a rolled tinder stick between thumb and forefinger on the other, grimacing as he sparked a flame. The general tilted a candle and touched the punk to its wick. He set it down and moved on to the next.

Tyrobus stood there, lost on the sea of his emotions, watching numbly as his father lit candles in a room already doused with light. His thoughts found shore, and he wondered how badly Esukai's hand hurt, and if he should fetch a shaman. Esukai had cut strips of cloth from his robes back in the courtyard, grunting as he stared at his fingers in the grass and cinched the fabric on his wounds. Tyrobus had asked about the digits as the general marched for the palace. "Leave them," his father had said. "Let the birds and worms take what I could not keep." His thoughts drifted away again, carried by a current of pain, rage, and sadness.

"Close it!" Esukai said. Tyrobus turned and pulled on the door. It met the jamb, and he heard the general's Kaiten slide from its sheath. His heart lurched in his chest and Tyrobus froze.

“Face me.” Tyrobus moved slowly, not from exhaustion as before, but from fear, wondering if Esukai had decided that both his sons were dishonorable, that the Daelekon line had failed. A new current swept through the ocean of anguish inside him. It was guilt. *You should have moved faster! It should have been you and not Kristiuk who kept Blangaris’s blow from killing Father!* Tyrobus faced his shendo once more and raised his head.

Esukai stood there, sword drawn, staring at him, as if trying to decide his fate. Live or die. The general spun around, slashing backhanded as he went, and the lantern above the table shattered and blinked out. Shards of green glass tinkled across the floor, then crunched as Esukai walked to the adjacent wall and gave the bulb there more of the same. Esukai marched toward Tyrobus. His father cut at the lantern near the door, and Tyrobus flinched, turning his head as bits of glass prickled his face and arm. The general stepped past Tyrobus, glaring as he went by.

Esukai extinguished the last lantern and then walked back to the table. He gripped a candle, a wince twitching his eye as his lone finger now did the work of four. Esukai set the waxen torch on the floor and took a step back. “Kneel,” he said, pointing beyond the candle with the tip of his blade. Tyrobus trudged to his mark and lowered himself onto his knees. “I will only ask you once to look me in the eyes.” Tyrobus lifted his head. “How long have you known of this?”

“Of what, Father?” Tyrobus said.

“Do not claim ignorance with me, boy!” snarled Esukai, his features sharp and dangerous in the flickering light. “He is your brother, your twin. You share a connection that few mew have ever known. Now, the next words from your mouth better ring true . . .” Esukai didn’t finish the threat. He didn’t have to. His Kaiten curved from his hand, hovering off to Tyrobus’s right.

“Blangaris . . .” Tyrobus paused. “He’s been going out at night for several years now. I think it began when you started giving us time to ourselves after dinner.”

Esukai stared at him, unblinking. “How do you know this?”

Tyrobust shifted on his knees. “Um—well—er—”

“Out with it!”

“We used to . . . talk to each other from our windows, after your lantern had gone out. One night he didn’t answer.” Tyrobust waited for the blade to flick over and loose his head from his shoulders. But it didn’t move, nor did Esukai’s expression.

“And?”

“And it went on,” said Tyrobust. “The next night, then the next, and the one after that as well. Finally, I found enough courage to check on him.” Esukai arched a brow. “He wasn’t there. Going forward, I’d look in on him now and again. Sometimes he was there, sometimes he wasn’t.”

“And where would he go?”

“I don’t know,” Tyrobust said. Esukai growled. “I—I don’t know, Father, I *swear it!* I always wanted to hide myself in the courtyard and wait, so I could follow him, but I was afraid you’d catch me.”

“So you never saw him committing an act that violated Raijen Law?”

Fear choked him, and Esukai must’ve read his face. The general stepped forward, a low growl threatening from between broken and bared teeth. He twisted his wrist so the razor edge of the Kaiten faced Tyrobust. “I’m—I’m sorry, Father. I didn’t know what to do. He was my friend . . . he was my *only* friend. He was my brother.” Tyrobust hung his head and wept.

“Stop sniveling like a mewling whelp!” Esukai roared, whipping his blade within an inch of his son’s cheek. “Tell me what you witnessed, and if I see another tear, I’ll cut your eyes from your head!”

Tyrobus sucked a breath. Esukai's words, and the steel of his tone, sliced deeper than any Kaiten ever could. He quickly brushed his fingers over his eyes, praying to Glane he could hold back the flood of tears Esukai had just set loose. His heart pounded so fast, Tyrobus thought it might burst through his chest. He swallowed and sniffed, pulling the tear-borne snot down his throat before it ran bubbling from his nose. It tasted of sorrow and salt.

"The night you left to announce us ready for Raijen Do," said Tyrobus, "Blangaris disappeared. I waited for him to come back in the morning, but he never showed. On the evening of the ninth day, something told me I'd find him in Jujuntu, so I went."

"And you found him there?"

"Not at first," Tyrobus said. "It was late, and most of the town had shuttered their windows for the night. I saw a skyjunk overhead and followed it to the peer." Esukai frowned. "A mew asked me why I was there so late, and I told him. He checked the ship's passenger list but didn't see Blangaris's name, so he told me I should ask the local barkeep."

"And so you went there?" said Esukai. "To the Zaku bar in Jujuntu?" Tyrobus nodded. "And that's where you found Blangaris."

"Not exactly," Tyrobus said. "It's more like Blangaris found me." Esukai cocked his head. "I went inside and told the barmew I was looking for my brother—Blangaris Daelekon. There were three mew there who recognized our House. The barmew told me that they sold their swords to the highest bidder."

"Mercenaries," Esukai spat. "Murderers."

"The leader, a mew called Akashi, said he liked his new life without Raijen, and he never wanted to see it return to Arukael." Tyrobus paused, staring into that night at the Zaku bar. It seemed like a lifetime ago.

“And then?”

“And then they tried to kill me.” Esukai blinked, the anger on his face giving way to surprise for a moment before settling back in. He lifted his brow, bidding Tyrobus go on. “And then Blangaris was there. One moment he wasn’t and the next he was, telling Akashi and his mew to rethink their plan. Blangaris gave them a chance, I’ll give him that.” A faint smile tried lifting the corners of his mouth and Tyrobus fought it back, lest Esukai slice the lips from his face. “Of course, they didn’t listen.”

“Blangaris killed them?” Esukai tightened his grip on the sword.

“No, no!” said Tyrobus. “He *was* wearing armor and he had a Kaiten. But he didn’t need any of it. He thrashed them all with my Kenai, then threatened to kill them if they ever told anyone.” *Actually, he threatened to eat their still-beating hearts, but let’s not get hung up on the details, shall we?*

“Is there anything else?”

Tyrobus searched his memory. “He had jin,” he said after a moment. “Lots of it. He always has lots of jin.” Esukai didn’t respond, and the silence smothered Tyrobus like a hot blanket pulled tight across his face.

“How could I have been so blind?” Esukai finally said, staring through Tyrobus. “I did as my father did, and his father, relaxing the rules in your ninety-first year, letting you apply your training, without a shendo peering over your shoulder at every turn. How did I not hear my own cub slipping in and out of my home? Have my senses dulled so in this late house? Katuka, my love, I failed you. I did not raise our sons well, as you had wished. I failed. I’m sorry.”

“Father, no!” said Tyrobus. “Blangaris is a master at sneaking. He—”

Esukai roared, snatching him up by the neck and hauling Tyrobus backward. He gave a sickly breath as he slammed the wall, the general's mangled hand pressed to his throat, the tip of his sword pricking Tyrobus under the chin. "Ninety years," Esukai growled. "For *ninety years*, I taught you the Way. Honor above all else—above all else! Above your heart's desires. Above your father and brother and the loss of your mother. There is none higher than almighty Glane and Raijen!

"You should've told me. When I arrived home from Red Tree, the first words from your mouth should've laid bare your brother's betrayal. *You* are partly to blame for this!" Esukai's finger and thumb tightened on his neck, and Tyrobus smelled the metal tang of fresh blood. "If you had, we'd have been rid of that demon coward, and House Daelekon wouldn't be crumbling before all of Red Tree!" He squeezed harder, and Tyrobus gagged. "Do you see that? Do you?" Esukai waited. He pushed his Kaiten into the soft underside of Tyrobus's jaw, where it broke the skin, a thin line of crimson gliding down its edge. Tyrobus inhaled.

"I do, I see it, I see it, I'm sorry!" he choked out. Esukai let go, and Tyrobus clutched his neck, gasping for air. The sea of emotions inside him had dried up and vanished, replaced by something far more vast, far deeper and darker. He was empty. Tyrobus had never felt so alone in his entire life, and he ached to tumble to the ground, screaming and sobbing. But he knew if he wallowed, even for a moment, Esukai would cut off his head.

"I'm glad you take responsibility for your part in this mess." Esukai sheathed his blade. "And I shall take mine. Together we will salvage what honor remains in House Daelekon and build on its foundation." Tyrobus wrinkled his brow. "*You* will lead our House."



“I—I have increased my Ryukura practice, Father,” said Tyrobus. “I will fight my best in Raijen Bru, like a true warrior of Glane.” Esukai folded his arms and stared at him for what seemed like an age.

“There are laws of Raijen,” he finally said, “passed from the previous head of the House to the next as they assume leadership. And since you will be the head of House Daelekon, I am telling you now. Kaijin-ga permits—” Esukai froze, his eyes locked on the shadows over Tyrobus’s shoulder. He walked to the corner of the room near the door, drawing his blade as he went. The old general cut through the dark, his sword whispering into the air. He looked to the corner down the wall, then up. “This castle has phantoms. I can feel them.”

*Or it’s the drifter, Bogue, turned invisible. Or maybe even the thing lurking beneath the castle, whatever that might be. Maybe it can go unseen too.* Tyrobus shuddered, wondering if he might die in this room after all.

Esukai moved toward the center of the chamber once more, his eyes darting left and right as he walked. “Kaijin-ga allows the leader of a House to refuse relinquishing his station to an heir, if he can prove that heir has dishonored the Way.”

“If Blangaris wins Raijen Bru,” Tyrobus said, but his mind whispered, *When Blangaris wins Raijen Bru*, “you’ll go to the High Council and tell them what he did in Jujuntu?”

“No,” said Esukai. “Jujuntu happened outside of Raijen Do, and doesn’t fall under the purview of Kaijin-ga. I’m afraid I made the only move I could. And I failed, my son.” The wrinkles on Tyrobus’s brow sprouted wrinkles of their own. “As leader of House Daelekon, it is my duty to discipline my shoshuns. Had I struck down Blangaris, I would have been taken before the council, where I would’ve explained my actions. Given Chael’s dishonorable alliance, it’s likely I would’ve lost my head. But your hands were clean. You would’ve been left whole.”

Esukai pushed out a breath. “But soon Red Tree will know there is sour blood between myself and Blangaris.”

Tyrobust tilted his head. “How would they?”

“My son, Raijen might be dying, but the courtyards around Noble Tree weren’t empty. There were mew in the distance who might’ve been curious about the commotion and investigated the scene after we left.”

“I didn’t see anyone, Father.”

Esukai scowled again, and Tyrobust dipped his chin, cursing himself for opening his mouth. “Maybe not,” his father said. “But there’s also Chael, who you know has the city under surveillance with his unholy devices. And even if neither one of those things come to pass, the outlanders won’t keep quiet.” Esukai paused. “Well, perhaps Master Djeck will respect our private affairs. But the Ironak will have no such discretion—he cares only for himself. The rip in House Daelekon will soon be common knowledge, trust me. And then what I say to the council won’t matter, regardless of any evidence I might have of your brother’s treachery. My testimony is tainted. They’ll see it as vengeance for what has happened here tonight. And they would not be wrong.”

Tyrobust gazed at the ground, turning Esukai’s words over in his head. “I don’t understand. If the council won’t believe your testimony, then how will you claim Kaijin-ga?”

“I won’t,” Esukai said. “*You* will invoke it.” Tyrobust lifted his head, his mouth falling open. “Well, not Kaijin-ga exactly. But you will ask the High Council to apply its principles to Raijen Bru.”

Tyrobust’s confusion disappeared like mist at dawn, and the clarity was like a razor, slicing him to pieces. He knew what he had to do—two seemingly impossible things, one of which his

father, among the greatest Mewlatai warriors who ever lived, had failed to do on this very night.

“But that means . . .”

“That means”—Esukai gripped him by the shoulder—“you must first track Blangaris and find evidence of him breaking Raijen Law.”

“I—I can’t—track—he’s like a ghost!” The words fumbled from Tyrobus’s mouth.

“Find him!” Esukai said, tightening his grip. “Now, what is the longest stretch we’ve had between battles in the arena, three weeks?” Tyrobus nodded. “Three weeks . . . that is hardly enough time to get anywhere meaningful off-world and back again. And then he’d need a starship, and those aren’t easy to come by so close to the capital. No, he’s up to something on Arukael. And you, my son, must find out what it is.” Tyrobus stared blankly at Esukai. “It cannot be something trivial. Being caught outside the walls of Red Tree won’t be enough. It must be grievous. But knowing Blangaris, that won’t be a challenge. And it can’t be just your word. You *must* have something tangible, an artifact or”—Esukai looked away, his eyes searching the shadows for an elusive thought—“a Red Ward as witness.”

*Impossible task number one, Tyrobus thought. Oh glane-on-a-gorul, how does he expect you to hunt down Blangaris when he couldn’t even catch him sneaking around the house for ten years? And that’s not the worst, is it? Nope. Look at him, you can see it in his eyes. Here it comes, impossible task number two.*

“Then, my son.” His father paused.

*As if this next thing needs any more drama sprinkled on top.*

“You *must* defeat Blangaris in Raijen Bru.” Esukai shook Tyrobus by the shoulder as he spoke. “And once he’s fallen, you’ll address the council, right there in the arena. You will invoke Kaijin-ga, and present your evidence. And should the High Council find Blangaris guilty of his

sins, the Red Wards will burn his body. And then we will—” Esukai growled, shoving Tyrobus backward and loosing his Kaiten. “Don’t shake your head at me, boy!”

Tyrobus hadn’t realized what he was doing, but now that Esukai had pointed it out, he wasn’t surprised. He’d tried to follow his twin once as he sped away from Kiko’s in a shuttle, but it was like his brother had turned into the wind itself and floated off into the night. And his sword? Tyrobus had just watched father attack Blangaris, without a damn thing in his brother’s hand, mind you, and if it hadn’t been for Shoshun Günnarryn, the general would be in his last house.

“Listen well!” Esukai said, pointing his sword at Tyrobus again. “If you deny me this, I will split you in half where you stand. Then I will spill my life on the stone. For there will be *nothing* left of House Daelekon if that bastard creature should win leadership of this clan. Do you hear?” Tyrobus stared back, his emotions swirling into a maelstrom. “This is it. No more chances, no more hoping that your brother will see his folly and come to Glane. Blangaris your brother is gone, and an enemy is all that remains, an enemy that will destroy our line. Now I saw my son, not two days ago, charge into the arena, risen by the grace of Glane, the thunder of the Blood God himself in his veins. He vowed to fight for all *true* Raijen mew on Arukael and to restore the honor taken from House Daelekon. I ask you, are you that mew, or did you not speak from the heart? Either you follow the Way or you do not, Tyrobus. Now choose!”

Esukai’s words slammed into him, and Tyrobus staggered back. He stared at the aging warrior’s face. It was set with something beyond anger or hatred. It was everything, his very existence, all of his being channeled into one certainty—Blangaris must die, or he and Tyrobus must perish in the effort. And he was right. This was their way of life, and Blangaris had turned his back long ago, never to return. Tyrobus took a breath so deep he thought the skin on his chest

might split apart. He let the air leak out, slow and steady. “I choose the Way, Father. I choose House Daelekon.”

Esukai lowered his head and his shoulders relaxed. “I’m pleased to hear you say it,” he said, sheathing his blade. “I’m sorry this burden falls on you, my son. And I regret that I can only help you with the sword. As I said, the evidence of Blangaris’s dishonor must be gathered and presented by you and you alone. Do you understand?” Tyrobus nodded slowly. “And one more thing. You will no doubt find yourself outside of these walls. If you get caught before Raijen Bru, we will all die. This is a risk, my son. The council might not even accept your claim to Kaijin-ga, and we’ll lose our heads. But I will gladly bear the shame if it means knowing that demon does not decide the fate of this House.”

“But won’t Chael and his allies deny my claim, no matter what I prove?”

“I think we stand a good chance,” said Esukai. “Kaijin-ga is Blood Law, similar to the Kaijo that Captain Krün tried to invoke when Blangaris was caught on Maru Street. That means the Captain of the Red Wards holds a vote. Chael and his alliance will carry four nays against your claim, but from what I’ve seen, the rest of the High Council still upholds Raijen. They will give us three yeas.”

“And Krün’s vote will bring us even,” Tyrobus said, nodding. “And then what?”

“Kaijin-ga is Blood Law. Therefore, the Red Wards are the final authority. In the event of a tie, the captain’s lieutenant breaks the draw. I have seen Ileana of House Pintarus, and my heart tells me that she will be on the side of Raijen. Glane willing, you’ll be granted Kaijin-ga and the rotted limb cut from our House.”

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Tyrobus's journey back to his room was unclear. He remembered cobbles at his feet, a blur of greenish-white light at the corners of his sight, and a fathomless hole of deep black in front of him. The trip seemed nearly endless, and now that he thought about it, he might've taken a wrong turn, meandering through the halls of the palace in a fog of woe. But now he lay in the small washroom attached to his quarters. *These are my quarters, aren't they?* Tyrobus thought. And then decided he didn't care.

He clutched the commode, its metallic rim cool on his cheek. His body heaved, and he retched into the bowl. He slid his hand up and pressed the button on the tank, and the contraption gurgled and whooshed. This was one device that Tyrobus could appreciate. He recalled the outhouse on their estate. Hardly more than a hole in the ground, with walls. Just relieving yourself was a gag-inducing event. Getting sick inside was a miserable, drawn-out affair, the stink coaxing its own bouts of spasms and vomit, in addition to whatever ailment delivered you there in the first place. *I wonder if Esukai has even stepped foot in his washroom. He probably ran his sword through everything inside.*

Tyrobus gave a dazed chuckle, picturing his father sprinting all the way to First Level and through the city gates just to piss. But his mind jumped back to the outhouse, then home, and then to his brother. Tyrobus saw him clearly, leaning on his Kenai beneath the redbarks in front of their house. His eyes danced with mischief as he laughed, smiling back at Tyrobus. It wasn't the arrogant grin that seemed carved on his face for the last several years, but a genuine look, full of joy, love, and brotherhood.

Tyrobus pulled himself forward as he retched again. He pressed the button and watched the water swirl and then vanish, praying to Glane that the memory, and all those like it, would wash away and disappear along with the foul soup. Those memories would have to die. Tomorrow,

Tyrobus would set out to prove Blangaris's disloyalty. Tomorrow, he had to start killing his brother.

He staggered into the main room and collapsed on his bedroll. Tyrobus glimpsed a blanket folded on the floor next to the bed, with an odd piece of brown fabric peeking from its center. *Shit. Braelkor's serum. Well, at least you know you're in the right room.* His eyes slid closed, and Tyrobus drifted off, his last thoughts a prayer, begging Glane for a dreamless sleep.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Allen is the author of the D-Evolution series of space opera fantasy novels. His online base of operations is [www.authorseanallen.com](http://www.authorseanallen.com). You can connect with Sean on Twitter at [@AuthorSeanAllen](https://twitter.com/AuthorSeanAllen) and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/authorseanallen](https://www.facebook.com/authorseanallen).

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