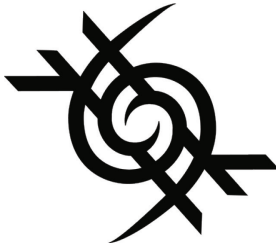


THE ELEMENTS OF TIME:
BOOK 1

THE
WINDS OF
CHANGE



SAM PAISLEY

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acknowledgments and dedications

This book would not have been possible without the unwavering love and support of my parents. They have given me everything and asked for nothing. I've learned more from them than I can put into words.

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Finally, thank you to every person who has decided to read this book. The process of creating this world was rewarding, but sharing it has always been my dream.

This book is dedicated to the stories that captured me as a kid, to the worlds and adventures I got to live in. My only hope is to create something that can do the same thing for others.

prologue

Time came to a halt. Sofyross gazed at the slain bodies of the men and women who once believed he might be their path to Elevation. This was his doing. His inability to convey the truth had caused this war; their blood would forever stain his hands and his heart. Tegryn, his temple, his home, and the holiest place in all creation, would forever more be marred by the bloodshed that had taken place in his name.

“Enough,” he whispered so softly that his tightly braided beard barely moved under his breath. His broad shoulders slumped and his head dropped, curving a posture perfected through decades of training and meditation. His wizened eyes sank behind bags that had never before appeared in his nearly two hundred years, and the pain of every lost soul rang through his heart. His acute senses, honed to feel changes in air currents, now made the layers of his robes – almost a second skin – feel like weights that hung too long off his limbs and dragged his body to the ground.

Sofyross held his staff above his head. The silver light of the cloud-filled sky glinted off the fanblades on either end of his weapon as he slammed one end into the ground. He knelt behind it, bowed his head, and crossed his arms in front with outstretched wrists to signal his surrender. An awful warmth seeped through his robes, and the sickly warm smell of blood and soil filled his nostrils. What had he become? What had the search for the truth led him to? He had dedicated his life to mastering his mind and his body in pursuit of bringing those around him to Elevation, and now ... he had done far worse than fail them.

A swinging hooked sword stopped as it reached Sofyross’s neck. It slid under his chin and lifted his head upward. “Surrender, after poisoning the minds of our brethren? A coward’s end to a coward’s life.” A man whose gaze was as biting as his sword glared down at Sofyross. His straw-grey hair looked nearly white in the pale light of the clouds above Tegryn.

Sofyross did what he could to make his large and imposing stature

look small and worthy of surrender. He looked up at Corsac, his former pupil, a man he'd trained for decades, and saw nothing but rage. "Corsac, my friend, I give myself freely to the judgment of the Keepers. I ask only that you end this war and spare those foolish enough to follow me. They knew not what they did."

Corsac's jaw tightened. His thick but well-kept beard did little to hide his scowl. He held his curved sword under Sofyross's throat as every muscle on his body twitched with the fury of betrayal. Corsac ripped the pendant off his neck, a symbol of their religion Sofyross also used to wear as their leader, and slammed it against Sofyross's staff. A beam of light shot into the sky and exploded into a giant illuminated image of Sofyross's weapon: a long staff with twin fanblades on either end.

Silence fell over the battlefield. The few dozen loyal to Sofyross who were still alive planted their weapons in the ground and knelt behind them as Sofyross had done. The remaining thousands of warriors stood at attention.

"The blood of every Prolia spilled today stains your hands and yours alone, Sofyross." Corsac lifted Sofyross's chin with his hooked blade, though he did not break the skin. "Your unholy betrayal will be taught until the end of time. Your name will be a reminder of how far we can stray from truth, from the path to Elevation."

"Yes, I know." Sofyross looked up at a man who, not long ago, would have laid his life down if Sofyross had asked. "I have failed you, Corsac. I have failed all the Prolia. I'm sorry. I am sorry, Corsac, for every drop of blood spilled in our misguided search for truth, and for the weight you will now bear once I am gone."

"Your words mean nothing," Corsac grunted, "Sofyross, the Wise." He spat after he spoke the epithet.

High in the heavens above, a ray of light began to form. Its piercing golden glow bathed the battlefield as it grew above the weary warriors. Those loyal to Sofyross looked up with scorn, while the remaining warriors fell to their knees in solemnity at the holy light.

Corsac took a step back from Sofyross and followed his brethren in prayer.

Sofyross glared up at the golden light. This moment was unprecedented; it would be spoken of in legends and written into their religious texts. Their gods, the Keepers, had not shown more than a whisper of their existence in eons. Their appearance now, to strike him

down, would solidify their holiness and strength in their followers' eyes. To those that remained devout, Sofyross represented evil, heresy, and the Keepers would cast down evil.

Both he and his weapon began floating upward, high enough that every warrior on the battlefield could see him. He stared at the heavens, prepared to accept his punishment. Sofyross had sown seeds of doubt in their religion, and now those seeds had borne fruit. His gods were cunning. They allowed their soldiers to root out Sofyross's resistance, but kept the spectacle of his demise for themselves. He breathed deeply as the light grew stronger. He couldn't escape the irony of his life, and his final understanding that age did not mean wisdom.

Like sulphur from the heavens, a pillar of golden light exploded from the glow. It ripped through the air, engulfed Sofyross and tore his once great temple in two.

As quickly as it had begun, it was over. The heavenly glow vanished as though it was never there. In its place was a fresh wound cutting through the land – scorched air and earth, dampened with the blood of the fallen, to remind all who saw it of but a fraction of the power that existed in the universe. That scar would never change, never recover. For all of eternity, Tegryn would be marked by the blinding might of the Keepers, the children of time.