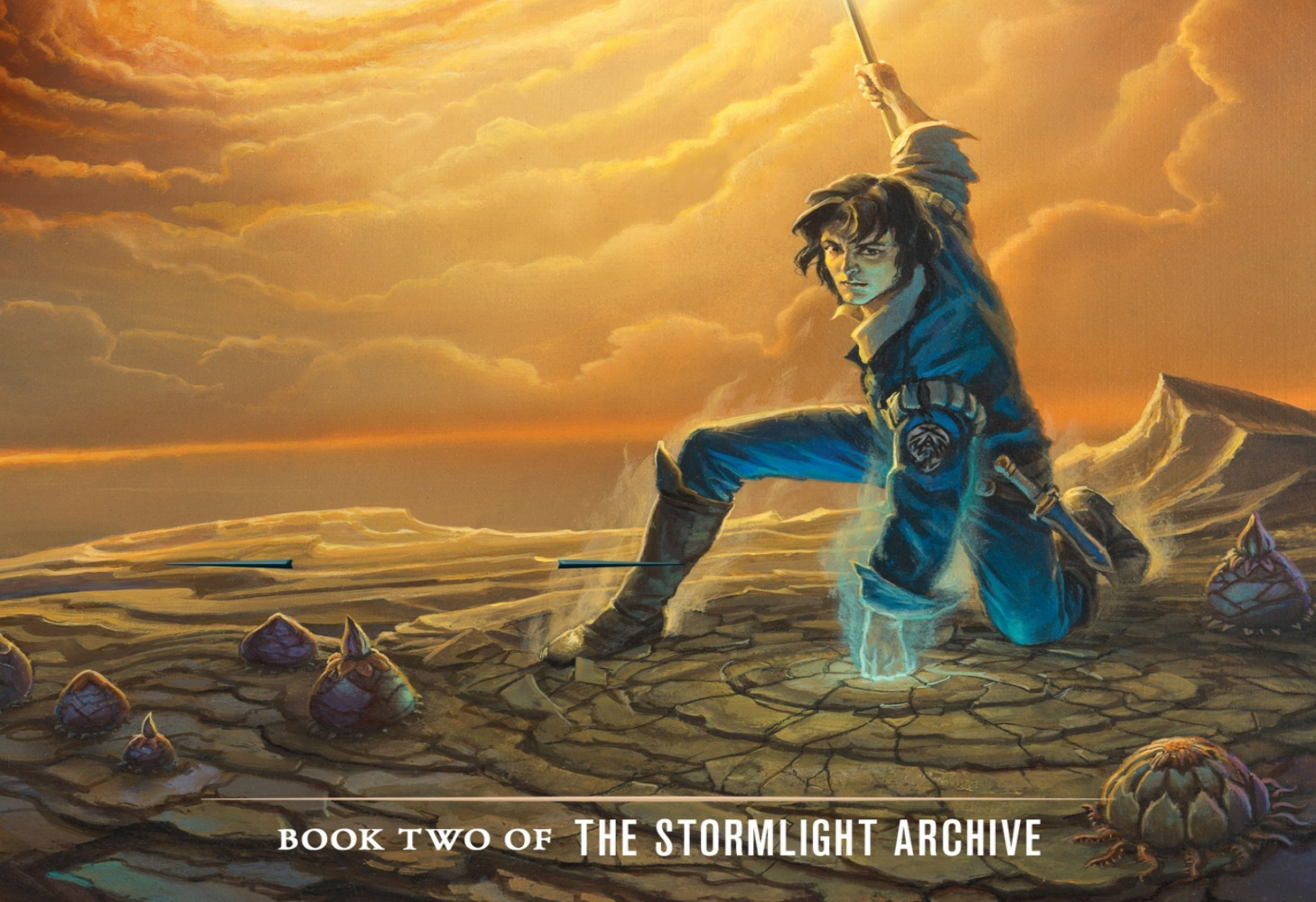


#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER

BRANDON SANDERSON

WORDS OF RADIANCE



BOOK TWO OF THE STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE



BRANDON SANDERSON

WORDS OF RADIANCE

Book Two of
THE STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE



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For Oliver Sanderson,

Who was born during the middle of the writing of this book, and was
walking by the time it was done.

ILLUSTRATIONS

NOTE: *Many illustrations, titles included, contain spoilers for material that comes before them in the book. Look ahead at your own risk.*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As you might imagine, producing a book in the Stormlight Archive is a major undertaking. It involved almost eighteen months of writing, from outline to final revision, and includes the artwork of four different individuals and the editorial eyes of a whole host of people, not to mention the teams at Tor who do production, publicity, marketing, and everything else a major book needs in order to be successful.

For some two decades now, the Stormlight Archive has been my dream—the story I always wished I could tell. The people you’ll read about below quite literally make my dreams a reality, and there aren’t words to express my gratitude for their efforts. First in line on this novel needs to be my assistant and primary continuity editor, the incumbent Peter Ahlstrom. He worked very long hours on this book, putting up with my repeated insistence that things which did not fit continuity actually did—eventually persuading me I was wrong far more often than not.

As always, Moshe Feder—the man who discovered me as a writer—did excellent editorial work on the book. Joshua Bilmes, my agent, worked hard on the book in both an agenting and editorial capacity. He’s joined by Eddie Schneider, Brady “Words of Bradiance” McReynolds, Krystyna Lopez, Sam Morgan, and Christa Atkinson at the agency. At Tor, Tom Doherty put up with me delivering a book even longer than the last one when I promised to make it shorter. Terry McGarry did the copyediting, Irene Gallo is responsible for the art direction for the cover, Greg Collins for interior design, Brian Lipofsky’s team at Westchester Publishing Services for compositing, Meryl Gross and Karl Gold for production, Patty Garcia and her team for publicity. Paul Stevens acted as superman whenever we needed him. A big thanks to all of you.

You may have noticed that this volume, like the one before it, includes amazing art. My vision for the Stormlight Archive has always been of a series that transcended common artistic expectations for a book of its nature. As such, it is an honor to once again have my favorite artist, Michael Whelan, involved in the project. I feel that his cover has captured Kaladin perfectly, and I am extremely grateful for the extra time he spent on the cover—at his own insistence—going

through three drafts before he was satisfied. To have endpapers of Shallan as well is more than I had hoped to see for the book, and I'm humbled by how well this whole package came together.

When I pitched the Stormlight Archive, I spoke of having “guest star” artists do pieces for the books here and there. We have our first of those in this novel, for which Dan dos Santos (another of my personal favorite artists, and the man who did the cover for *Warbreaker*) agreed to do some interior illustrations.

Ben McSweeney graciously returned to do more brilliant sketchbook pages for us, and he is a pure delight to work with, quick to recognize what I want, sometimes even when I'm not quite sure *what* I want. I've rarely met a person who mixes talent and professionalism in the way Ben does. You can find more of his art at InkThinker.net.

A long time ago, almost ten years now, I met a man named Isaac Stewart who—in addition to being an aspiring writer—was an excellent artist, particularly when it came to things like maps and symbols. I started collaborating with him on books (starting with *Mistborn*) and he eventually set me up on a blind date with a woman named Emily Bushman—whom I subsequently married. So needless to say, I owe Isaac a few big favors. With each progressive book he works on, that debt on my part grows greater as I see the amazing work he has done. This year, we decided to make his involvement a little more official as I hired him full-time to be an in-house artist and to help me with administrative tasks. So if you see him, welcome him to the team. (And tell him to keep working on his own books, which are quite good.)

Also joining us at Dragonsteel Entertainment is Kara Stewart, Isaac's wife, as our shipping manager. (I actually tried to hire Kara first—and Isaac piped up noting that some of the things I wanted to hire her for, he could do. And it ended up that I got both of them, in a very convenient deal.) She's the one you'll interact with if you order T-shirts, posters, or the like through my website. And she's awesome.

We used a few expert consultants on this book, including Matt Bushman for his songwriting and poetry expertise. Ellen Asher gave some great direction on the scenes with horses, and Karen Ahlstrom was an additional poetry and song consultant. Mi'chelle Walker acted as Alethi handwriting consultant. Finally, Elise Warren gave us some very nice notes relating to the psychology of a key character. Thank you all for lending me your brains.

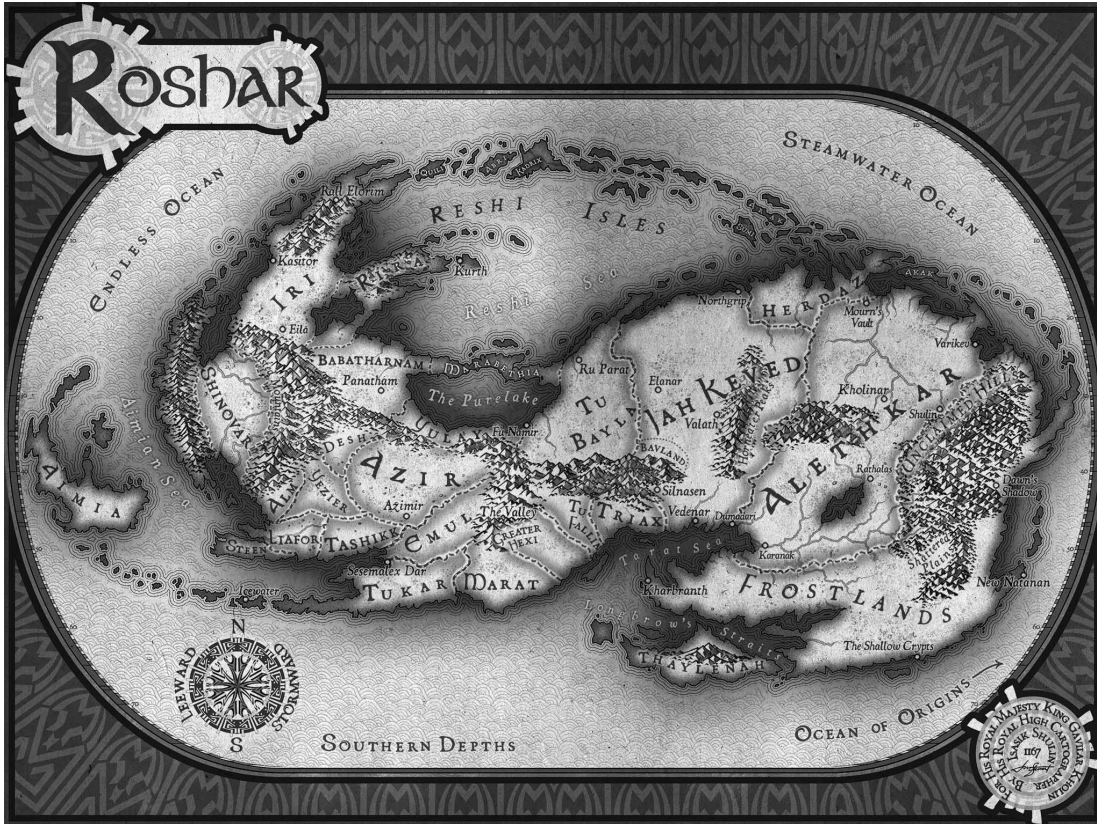
This book had an extensive beta read done under some strict time constraints, and so a hearty bridgeman salute goes to those who participated. They are: Jason Denzel, Mi'chelle Walker, Josh Walker, Eric Lake, David Behrens, Joel Phillips,

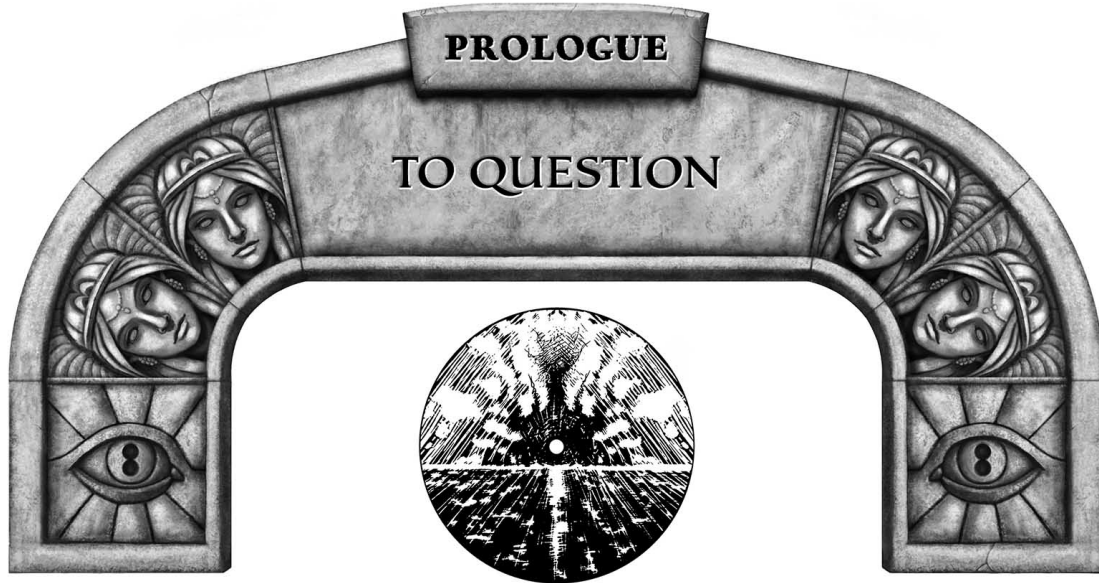
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My writing group managed to get through about half of the book, which is a lot, considering how long the novel is. They are an invaluable resource to me. Members are: Kaylynn ZoBell, Kathleen Dorsey Sanderson, Danielle Olsen, Ben-son-son-Ron, E. J. Patten, Alan Layton, and Karen Ahlstrom.

And finally, thanks to my loving (and rambunctious) family. Joel, Dallin, and little Oliver help keep me humble each day by always making me be the “bad guy” who gets beat up. My forgiving wife, Emily, put up with a lot this past year, as tours grew long, and I’m still not sure what I did to deserve her. Thank you all for making my world one of magic.





SIX YEARS AGO

Jasnah Kholin pretended to enjoy the party, giving no indication that she intended to have one of the guests killed.

She wandered through the crowded feast hall, listening as wine greased tongues and dimmed minds. Her uncle Dalinar was in the full swing of it, rising from the high table to shout for the Parshendi to bring out their drummers. Jasnah's brother, Elhokar, hurried to shush their uncle—though the Alethi politely ignored Dalinar's outburst. All save Elhokar's wife, Aesudan, who snickered primly behind a handkerchief.

Jasnah turned away from the high table and continued through the room. She had an appointment with an assassin, and she was all too glad to be leaving the stuffy room, which stank of too many perfumes mingling. A quartet of women played flutes on a raised platform across from the lively hearth, but the music had long since grown tedious.

Unlike Dalinar, Jasnah drew stares. Like flies to rotten meat those eyes were, constantly following her. Whispers like buzzing wings. If there was one thing the Alethi court enjoyed more than wine, it was gossip. Everyone expected Dalinar to lose himself to wine during a feast—but the king's daughter, admitting to heresy? *That* was unprecedented.

Jasnah had spoken of her feelings for precisely that reason.

She passed the Parshendi delegation, which clustered near the high table, talking in their rhythmic language. Though this celebration honored them and the treaty they'd signed with Jasnah's father, they didn't look festive or even happy. They looked nervous. Of course, they weren't human, and the way they reacted was sometimes odd.

Jasnah wanted to speak with them, but her appointment would not wait. She'd intentionally scheduled the meeting for the middle of the feast, as so many would be distracted and drunken. Jasnah headed toward the doors but then stopped in place.

Her shadow was pointing in the wrong direction.

The stuffy, shuffling, chattering room seemed to grow distant. Highprince Sadeas walked right through the shadow, which quite distinctly pointed *toward* the sphere lamp on the wall nearby. Engaged in conversation with his companion, Sadeas didn't notice. Jasnah stared at that shadow—skin growing clammy, stomach clenched, the way she felt when she was about to vomit. *Not again.* She searched for another light source. A reason. Could she find a reason? No.

The shadow languidly melted back toward her, oozing to her feet and then stretching out the other way. Her tension eased. But had anyone else seen?

Blessedly, as she searched the room, she didn't find any aghast stares. People's attention had been drawn by the Parshendi drummers, who were clattering through the doorway to set up. Jasnah frowned as she noticed a non-Parshendi servant in loose white clothing helping them. A Shin man? That was unusual.

Jasnah composed herself. What did these episodes of hers mean? Superstitious folktales she'd read said that misbehaving shadows meant you were cursed. She usually dismissed such things as nonsense, but *some* superstitions were rooted in fact. Her other experiences proved that. She would need to investigate further.

The calm, scholarly thoughts felt like a lie compared to the truth of her cold, clammy skin and the sweat trickling down the back of her neck. But it was important to be rational at all times, not just when calm. She forced herself out through the doors, leaving the muggy room for the quiet hallway. She'd chosen the back exit, commonly used by servants. It was the most direct route, after all.

Here, master-servants dressed in black and white moved on errands from their brightlords or ladies. She had expected that, but had not anticipated the sight of her *father* standing just ahead, in quiet conference with Brightlord Meridas Amaram. What was the king doing out here?

Gavilar Kholin was shorter than Amaram, yet the latter stooped shallowly in the king's company. That was common around Gavilar, who would speak with such

quiet intensity that you wanted to lean in and listen, to catch every word and implication. He was a handsome man, unlike his brother, with a beard that outlined his strong jaw rather than covering it. He had a personal magnetism and intensity that Jasnah felt no biographer had yet managed to convey.

Tearim, captain of the King's Guard, loomed behind them. He wore Gavilar's Shardplate; the king himself had stopped wearing it of late, preferring to entrust it to Tearim, who was known as one of the world's great duelists. Instead, Gavilar wore robes of a majestic, classical style.

Jasnah glanced back at the feast hall. When had her father slipped out? *Sloppy*, she accused herself. *You should have checked to see if he was still there before leaving.*

Ahead, he rested his hand on Amaram's shoulder and raised a finger, speaking harshly but quietly, the words indistinct to Jasnah.

"Father?" she asked.

He glanced at her. "Ah, Jasnah. Retiring so early?"

"It's hardly early," Jasnah said, gliding forward. It seemed obvious to her that Gavilar and Amaram had ducked out to find privacy for their discussion. "This is the tiresome part of the feast, where the conversation grows louder but no smarter, and the company drunken."

"Many people consider that sort of thing enjoyable."

"Many people, unfortunately, are idiots."

Her father smiled. "Is it terribly difficult for you?" he asked softly. "Living with the rest of us, suffering our average wits and simple thoughts? Is it lonely to be so singular in your brilliance, Jasnah?"

She took it as the rebuke it was, and found herself blushing. Even her mother, Navani, could not do that to her.

"Perhaps if you found pleasant associations," Gavilar said, "you would enjoy the feasts." His eyes swung toward Amaram, whom he'd long fancied as a potential match for her.

It would never happen. Amaram met her eyes, then murmured words of parting to her father and hastened away down the corridor.

"What errand did you give him?" Jasnah asked. "What are you about this night, Father?"

"The treaty, of course."

The treaty. Why did he care so much about it? Others had counseled that he either ignore the Parshendi or conquer them. Gavilar insisted upon an accommodation.

“I should return to the celebration,” Gavilar said, motioning to Tearim. The two moved along the hallway toward the doors Jasnah had left.

“Father?” Jasnah said. “What is it you aren’t telling me?”

He glanced back at her, lingering. Pale green eyes, evidence of his good birth. When had he become so discerning? Storms . . . she felt as if she hardly knew this man any longer. Such a striking transformation in such a short time.

From the way he inspected her, it almost seemed that he didn’t trust her. Did he know about her meeting with Liss?

He turned away without saying more and pushed back into the party, his guard following.

What is going on in this palace? Jasnah thought. She took a deep breath. She would have to prod further. Hopefully he hadn’t discovered her meetings with assassins—but if he had, she would work with that knowledge. Surely he would see that someone needed to keep watch on the family as he grew increasingly consumed by his fascination with the Parshendi. Jasnah turned and continued on her way, passing a master-servant, who bowed.

After walking a short time in the corridors, Jasnah noticed her shadow behaving oddly again. She sighed in annoyance as it pulled *toward* the three Stormlight lamps on the walls. Fortunately, she’d passed from the populated area, and no servants were here to see.

“All right,” she snapped. “That’s enough.”

She hadn’t meant to speak aloud. However, as the words slipped out, several distant shadows—originating in an intersection up ahead—stirred to life. Her breath caught. Those shadows lengthened, deepened. Figures formed from them, growing, standing, rising.

Stormfather. I’m going insane.

One took the shape of a man of midnight blackness, though he had a certain reflective cast, as if he were made of oil. No . . . of some other liquid with a coating of oil floating on the outside, giving him a dark, prismatic quality.

He strode toward her and unsheathed a sword.

Logic, cold and resolute, guided Jasnah. Shouting would not bring help quickly enough, and the inky liveness of this creature bespoke a speed certain to exceed her own.

She stood her ground and met the thing’s glare, causing it to hesitate. Behind it, a small clutch of other creatures had materialized from the darkness. She had sensed those eyes upon her during the previous months.

By now, the entire hallway had darkened, as if it had been submerged and was slowly sinking into lightless depths. Heart racing, breath quickening, Jasnah raised her hand to the granite wall beside her, seeking to touch something solid. Her fingers sank into the stone a fraction, as if the wall had become mud.

Oh, storms. She had to do something. What? What could she *possibly* do?

The figure before her glanced at the wall. The wall lamp nearest Jasnah went dark. And then . . .

Then the palace disintegrated.

The entire building shattered into thousands upon thousands of small glass spheres, like beads. Jasnah screamed as she fell backward through a dark sky. She was no longer in the palace; she was somewhere else—another land, another time, another . . . *something*.

She was left with the sight of the dark, lustrous figure hovering in the air above, seeming satisfied as he resheathed his sword.

Jasnah crashed into something—an ocean of the glass beads. Countless others rained around her, clicking like hailstones into the strange sea. She had never seen this place; she could not explain what had happened or what it meant. She thrashed as she sank into what seemed an impossibility. Beads of glass on all sides. She couldn't see anything beyond them, only felt herself descending through this churning, suffocating, clattering mass.

She was going to die. Leaving work unfinished, leaving her family unprotected!

She would never know the answers.

No.

Jasnah flailed in the darkness, beads rolling across her skin, getting into her clothing, working their way into her nose as she tried to swim. It was no use. She had no buoyancy in this mess. She raised a hand before her mouth and tried to make a pocket of air to use for breathing, and managed to gasp in a small breath. But the beads rolled around her hand, forcing between her fingers. She sank, more slowly now, as through a viscous liquid.

Each bead that touched her gave a faint impression of something. A door. A table. A shoe.

The beads found their way into her mouth. They seemed to move on their own. They would choke her, destroy her. No . . . no, it was just because they seemed *attracted* to her. An impression came to her, not as a distinct thought but a feeling. They wanted something from her.

She snatched a bead in her hand; it gave her an impression of a cup. She gave . . . something . . . to it? The other beads near her pulled together, connecting,

sticking like rocks sealed by mortar. In a moment she was falling not among individual beads, but through large masses of them stuck together into the shape of . . .

A cup.

Each bead was a pattern, a guide for the others.

She released the one she held, and the beads around her broke apart. She floundered, searching desperately as her air ran out. She needed something she could use, something that would help, some way to survive! Desperate, she swept her arms wide to touch as many beads as she could.

A silver platter.

A coat.

A statue.

A lantern.

And then, something ancient.

Something ponderous and slow of thought, yet somehow *strong*. The palace itself. Frantic, Jasnah seized this sphere and forced her power into it. Her mind blurring, she gave this bead everything she had, and then commanded it to rise.

Beads shifted.

A great crashing sounded as beads met one another, clicking, cracking, rattling. It was almost like the sound of a wave breaking on rocks. Jasnah surged up from the depths, something solid moving beneath her, obeying her command. Beads battered her head, shoulders, arms, until finally she *exploded* from the surface of the sea of glass, hurling a spray of beads into a dark sky.

She knelt on a platform of glass made up of small beads locked together. She held her hand to the side, uplifted, clutching the sphere that was the guide. Others rolled around her, forming into the shape of a hallway with lanterns on the walls, an intersection ahead. It didn't look right, of course—the entire thing was made of beads. But it was a fair approximation.

She wasn't strong enough to form the entire palace. She created only this hallway, without even a roof—but the floor supported her, kept her from sinking. She opened her mouth with a groan, beads falling out to clack against the floor. Then she coughed, drawing in sweet breaths, sweat trickling down the sides of her face and collecting on her chin.

Ahead of her, the dark figure stepped up onto the platform. He again slid his sword from his sheath.

Jasnah held up a second bead, the statue she'd sensed earlier. She gave it power, and other beads collected before her, taking the shape of one of the statues that

lined the front of the feast hall—the statue of Talenelat'Elin, Herald of War. A tall, muscular man with a large Shardblade.

It was not alive, but she made it move, lowering its sword of beads. She doubted it could fight. Round beads could not form a sharp sword. Yet the threat made the dark figure hesitate.

Gritting her teeth, Jasnah heaved herself to her feet, beads streaming from her clothing. She would *not* kneel before this thing, whatever it was. She stepped up beside the bead statue, noting for the first time the strange clouds overhead. They seemed to form a narrow ribbon of highway, straight and long, pointing toward the horizon.

She met the oil figure's gaze. It regarded her for a moment, then raised two fingers to its forehead and bowed, as if in respect, a cloak flourishing out behind. Others had gathered beyond it, and they turned to each other, exchanging hushed whispers.

The place of beads faded, and Jasnah found herself back in the hallway of the palace. The real one, with real stone, though it had gone dark—the Stormlight dead in the lamps on the walls. The only illumination came from far down the corridor.

She pressed back against the wall, breathing deeply. *I*, she thought, *need to write this experience down*.

She would do so, then analyze and consider. Later. Now, she wanted to be away from this place. She hurried away, with no concern for her direction, trying to escape those eyes she still felt watching.

It didn't work.

Eventually, she composed herself and wiped the sweat from her face with a kerchief. *Shadesmar*, she thought. *That is what it is called in the nursery tales*. Shadesmar, the mythological kingdom of the spren. Mythology she'd never believed. Surely she could find something if she searched the histories well enough. Nearly everything that happened had happened before. The grand lesson of history, and . . .

Storms! Her appointment.

Cursing to herself, she hurried on her way. That experience continued to distract her, but she needed to make her meeting. So she continued down two floors, getting farther from the sounds of the thrumming Parshendi drums until she could hear only the sharpest cracks of their beats.

That music's complexity had always surprised her, suggesting that the Parshendi were not the uncultured savages many took them for. This far away, the music

sounded disturbingly like the beads from the dark place, rattling against one another.

She'd intentionally chosen this out-of-the-way section of the palace for her meeting with Liss. Nobody ever visited this set of guest rooms. A man that Jasnah didn't know lounged here, outside the proper door. That relieved her. The man would be Liss's new servant, and his presence meant Liss hadn't left, despite Jasnah's tardiness. Composing herself, she nodded to the guard—a Veden brute with red speckling his beard—and pushed into the room.

Liss stood from the table inside the small chamber. She wore a maid's dress—low cut, of course—and could have been Alethi. Or Veden. Or Bav. Depending on which part of her accent she chose to emphasize. Long dark hair, worn loose, and a plump, attractive figure made her distinctive in all the right ways.

"You're late, Brightness," Liss said.

Jasnah gave no reply. She was the employer here, and was not required to give excuses. Instead, she laid something on the table beside Liss. A small envelope, sealed with weevilwax.

Jasnah set two fingers on it, considering.

No. This was too brash. She didn't know if her father realized what she was doing, but even if he hadn't, too much was happening in this palace. She did not want to commit to an assassination until she was more certain.

Fortunately, she had prepared a backup plan. She slid a second envelope from the safepouch inside her sleeve and set it on the table in place of the first. She removed her fingers from it, rounding the table and sitting down.

Liss sat back down and made the letter vanish into the bust of her dress. "An odd night, Brightness," the woman said, "to be engaging in treason."

"I am hiring you to watch only."

"Pardon, Brightness. But one does not commonly hire an assassin to watch. Only."

"You have instructions in the envelope," Jasnah said. "Along with initial payment. I chose you because you are expert at extended observations. It is what I want. For now."

Liss smiled, but nodded. "Spying on the wife of the heir to the throne? It will be more expensive this way. You sure you don't simply want her dead?"

Jasnah drummed her fingers on the table, then realized she was doing it to the beat of the drums above. The music was so unexpectedly complex—precisely like the Parshendi themselves.

Too much is happening, she thought. I need to be very careful. Very subtle.

“I accept the cost,” Jasnah replied. “In one week’s time, I will arrange for one of my sister-in-law’s maids to be released. You will apply for the position, using faked credentials I assume you are capable of producing. You will be hired.

“From there, you watch and report. I will tell you if your other services are needed. You move only if I say. Understood?”

“You’re the one payin’,” Liss said, a faint Bav dialect showing through.

If it showed, it was only because she wished it. Liss was the most skilled assassin Jasnah knew. People called her the Weeper, as she gouged out the eyes of the targets she killed. Although she hadn’t coined the cognomen, it served her purpose well, since she had secrets to hide. For one thing, nobody knew that the Weeper was a woman.

It was said the Weeper gouged the eyes out to proclaim indifference to whether her victims were lighteyed or dark. The truth was that the action hid a second secret—Liss didn’t want anyone to know that the way she killed left corpses with burned-out sockets.

“Our meeting is done, then,” Liss said, standing.

Jasnah nodded absently, mind again on her bizarre interaction with the spren earlier. That glistening skin, colors dancing across a surface the color of tar . . .

She forced her mind away from that moment. She needed to devote her attention to the task at hand. For now, that was Liss.

Liss hesitated at the door before leaving. “Do you know why I like you, Brightness?”

“I suspect that it has something to do with my pockets and their proverbial depth.”

Liss smiled. “There’s that, ain’t going to deny it, but you’re also different from other lighteyes. When others hire me, they turn up their noses at the entire process. They’re all too eager to use my services, but sneer and wring their hands, as if they hate being forced to do something utterly distasteful.”

“Assassination *is* distasteful, Liss. So is cleaning out chamber pots. I can respect the one employed for such jobs without admiring the job itself.”

Liss grinned, then cracked the door.

“That new servant of yours outside,” Jasnah said. “Didn’t you say you wanted to show him off for me?”

“Talak?” Liss said, glancing at the Veden man. “Oh, you mean that *other* one. No, Brightness, I sold that one to a slaver a few weeks ago.” Liss grimaced.

“Really? I thought you said he was the best servant you’d ever had.”

“Too good a servant,” Liss said. “Let’s leave it at that. Storming creepy, that Shin fellow was.” Liss shivered visibly, then slipped out the door.

“Remember our first agreement,” Jasnah said after her.

“Always there in the back o’ my mind, Brightness.” Liss closed the door.

Jasnah settled in her seat, lacing her fingers in front of her. Their “first agreement” was that if anyone should come to Liss and offer a contract on a member of Jasnah’s family, Liss would let Jasnah match the offer in exchange for the name of the one who made it.

Liss would do it. Probably. So would the dozen other assassins Jasnah dealt with. A repeat customer was always more valuable than a one-off contract, and it was in the best interests of a woman like Liss to have a friend in the government. Jasnah’s family was safe from the likes of these. Unless she herself employed the assassins, of course.

Jasnah let out a deep sigh, then rose, trying to shrug off the weight she felt bearing her down.

Wait. Did Liss say her old servant was Shin?

It was probably a coincidence. Shin people weren’t plentiful in the East, but you did see them on occasion. Still, Liss mentioning a Shin man and Jasnah seeing one among the Parshendi . . . well, there was no harm in checking, even if it meant returning to the feast. Something *was* off about this night, and not just because of her shadow and the spren.

Jasnah left the small chamber in the bowels of the palace and strode out into the hallway. She turned her steps upward. Above, the drums cut off abruptly, like an instrument’s strings suddenly cut. Was the party ending so early? Dalinar hadn’t done something to offend the celebrants, had he? That man and his wine . . .

Well, the Parshendi had ignored his offenses in the past, so they probably would again. In truth, Jasnah was happy for her father’s sudden focus on a treaty. It meant she would have a chance to study Parshendi traditions and histories at her leisure.

Could it be, she wondered, that scholars have been searching in the wrong ruins all these years?

Words echoed in the hallway, coming from up ahead. “I’m worried about Ash.”

“You’re worried about everything.”

Jasnah hesitated in the hallway.

“She’s getting worse,” the voice continued. “We weren’t supposed to get worse. Am I getting worse? I think I feel worse.”

“Shut up.”

“I don’t like this. What we’ve done was wrong. That creature carries *my lord’s* own Blade. We shouldn’t have let him keep it. He—”

The two passed through the intersection ahead of Jasnah. They were ambassadors from the West, including the Azish man with the white birthmark on his cheek. Or was it a scar? The shorter of the two men—he could have been Alethi—cut off when he noticed Jasnah. He let out a squeak, then hurried on his way.

The Azish man, the one dressed in black and silver, stopped and looked her up and down. He frowned.

“Is the feast over already?” Jasnah asked down the hallway. Her brother had invited these two to the celebration along with every other ranking foreign dignitary in Kholinar.

“Yes,” the man said.

His stare made her uncomfortable. She walked forward anyway. *I should check further into these two*, she thought. She’d investigated their backgrounds, of course, and found nothing of note. Had they been talking about a Shardblade?

“Come on!” the shorter man said, returning and taking the taller man by the arm.

He allowed himself to be pulled away. Jasnah walked to where the corridors crossed, then watched them go.

Where once drums had sounded, screams suddenly rose.

Oh no . . .

Jasnah turned with alarm, then grabbed her skirt and ran as hard as she could.

A dozen different potential disasters raced through her mind. What else could happen on this broken night, when shadows stood up and her father looked upon her with suspicion? Nerves stretched thin, she reached the steps and started climbing.

It took her far too long. She could hear the screams as she climbed and finally emerged into chaos. Dead bodies in one direction, a demolished *wall* in the other. How . . .

The destruction led toward her father’s rooms.

The entire *palace* shook, and a crunch echoed from that direction.

No, no, no!

She passed Shardblade cuts on the stone walls as she ran.

Please.

Corpses with burned eyes. Bodies littered the floor like discarded bones at the dinner table.

Not this.

A broken doorway. Her father's quarters. Jasnah stopped in the hallway, gasping.

Control yourself, control . . .

She couldn't. Not now. Frantic, she ran into the quarters, though a Shardbearer would kill her with ease. She wasn't thinking straight. She should get someone who could help. Dalinar? He'd be drunk. Sadeas, then.

The room looked like it had been hit by a highstorm. Furniture in a shambles, splinters everywhere. The balcony doors were broken outward. Someone lurched toward them, a man in her father's Shardplate. Tearim, the bodyguard?

No. The helm was broken. It was not Tearim, but Gavilar. Someone on the balcony screamed.

"Father!" Jasnah shouted.

Gavilar hesitated as he stepped out onto the balcony, looking back at her.

The balcony broke beneath him.

Jasnah screamed, dashing through the room to the broken balcony, falling to her knees at the edge. Wind tugged locks of hair loose from her bun as she watched two men fall.

Her father, and the Shin man in white from the feast.

The Shin man glowed with a white light. He fell *onto* the wall. He hit it, rolling, then came to a stop. He stood up, somehow remaining on the outer palace wall and not falling. It defied reason.

He turned, then stalked toward her father.

Jasnah watched, growing cold, helpless as the assassin stepped down to her father and knelt over him.

Tears fell from her chin, and the wind caught them. What was he doing down there? She couldn't make it out.

When the assassin walked away, he left behind her father's corpse. Impaled on a length of wood. He was dead—indeed, his Shardblade had appeared beside him, as they all did when their Bearers died.

"I worked so hard . . ." Jasnah whispered, numb. "Everything I did to protect this family . . ."

How? Liss. Liss had done this!

No. Jasnah wasn't thinking straight. That Shin man . . . she wouldn't have admitted to owning him in such a case. She'd sold him.

"We are sorry for your loss."

Jasnah spun, blinking bleary eyes. Three Parshendi, including Klade, stood in the doorway in their distinctive clothing. Neatly stitched cloth wraps for both men

and women, sashes at the waist, loose shirts with no sleeves. Hanging vests, open at the sides, woven in bright colors. They didn't segregate clothing by gender. She thought they did by caste, however, and—

Stop it, she thought at herself. Stop thinking like a scholar for one storming day!

"We take responsibility for his death," said the foremost Parshendi. Gangnah was female, though with the Parshendi, the gender differences seemed minimal. The clothing hid breasts and hips, neither of which were ever very pronounced. Fortunately, the lack of a beard was a clear indication. All the Parshendi men she'd ever seen had beards, which they wore tied with bits of gemstone, and—

STOP IT.

"What did you say?" Jasnah demanded, forcing herself to her feet. "Why would it be your fault, Gangnah?"

"Because we hired the assassin," the Parshendi woman said in her heavily accented singsong voice. "We killed your father, Jasnah Kholin."

"You . . ."

Emotion suddenly ran cold, like a river freezing in the heights. Jasnah looked from Gangnah to Klade, to Varnali. Elders, all three of them. Members of the Parshendi ruling council.

"Why?" Jasnah whispered.

"Because it had to be done," Gangnah said.

"*Why?*" Jasnah demanded, stalking forward. "He fought for you! He kept the predators at bay! My father wanted *peace*, you monsters! Why would you betray us now, of all times?"

Gangnah drew her lips to a line. The song of her voice changed. She seemed almost like a mother, explaining something very difficult to a small child. "Because your father was about to do something very dangerous."

"Send for Brightlord Dalinar!" a voice outside in the hall shouted. "Storms! Did my orders get to Elhokar? The crown prince *must* be taken to safety!" Highprince Sadeas stumbled into the room along with a team of soldiers. His bulbous, ruddy face was wet with sweat, and he wore Gavilar's clothing, the regal robes of office. "What are the savages doing here? Storms! Protect Princess Jasnah. The one who did this—he was in *their* retinue!"

The soldiers moved to surround the Parshendi. Jasnah ignored them, turning and stepping back to the broken doorway, hand on the wall, looking down at her father splayed on the rocks below, Blade beside him.

"There will be war," she whispered. "And I will not stand in its way."

"This is understood," Gangnah said from behind.

“The assassin,” Jasnah said. “He walked on the wall.”

Gangnah said nothing.

In the shattering of her world, Jasnah caught hold of this fragment. She had seen something tonight. Something that should not have been possible. Did it relate to the strange spren? Her experience in that place of glass beads and a dark sky?

These questions became her lifeline for stability. Sadeas demanded answers from the Parshendi leaders. He received none. When he stepped up beside her and saw the wreckage below, he went barreling off, shouting for his guards and running down below to reach the fallen king.

Hours later, it was discovered that the assassination—and the surrender of three of the Parshendi leaders—had covered the flight of the larger portion of their number. They escaped the city quickly, and the cavalry Dalinar sent after them were destroyed. A hundred horses, each nearly priceless, lost along with their riders.

The Parshendi leaders said nothing more and gave no clues, even when they were strung up, hanged for their crimes.

Jasnah ignored all that. Instead, she interrogated the surviving guards on what they had seen. She followed leads about the now-famous assassin’s nature, prying information from Liss. She got almost nothing. Liss had owned him only a short time, and claimed she hadn’t known about his strange powers. Jasnah couldn’t find the previous owner.

Next came the books. A dedicated, frenzied effort to distract her from what she had lost.

That night, Jasnah had seen the impossible.

She *would* learn what it meant.