

The Stormlight Archive

The Stormlight Archive is an ongoing epic fantasy novel series written by American author Brandon Sanderson. The first of ten planned volumes, *The Way of Kings*, was published on August 31, 2010. The second, *Words of Radiance*, was published on March 4, 2014.^{[1][2]} The third, *Oathbringer*, was published on November 14, 2017.^[3]

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Publication history

From June to August 2010, Tor Books published sample chapters from *The Way of Kings* on its official website, along with an introduction by Sanderson.^[4] In its first week of release, *The Way of Kings* was No. 7 on *The New York Times* Best Seller list.^[5] In subsequent weeks the book was No. 11,^[6] No. 20,^[7] and No. 25.^[8]

In October 2010, Brandon Sanderson revealed that his tentative plan was to release the second book in the series in 2012, approximately two years after the release of the first book, due to writing the final book of *The Wheel of Time*, followed by the third book about a year later.^[9] However, after completing the first draft of *A Memory of Light*, Sanderson revealed the book would be pushed back to a 2014 release, almost four years after the first book.^{[13][2]} The second book was initially titled *Highprince of War* (referring to Highprince Dalinar),^[9] but Sanderson decided to focus the second book on Shallan, tentatively titling it *The Book of Endless Pages* and eventually settling on *Words of Radiance* with Highprince Dalinar's book planned as the third novel,^[10] titled *Oathbringer*.^{[11][12]}

Books

#	Title	Hardcover pages	Paperback pages	Chapters	Words	Audio	Publication date	Notes
1	<i>The Way of Kings</i>	1001 ^[13]	1280	75	383,389 ^[13]	45h 34m	August 31, 2010	Focus on Kaladin (His flashback narrative)
2	<i>Words of Radiance</i>	1087 ^[14]	1328	89	399,431 ^[14]	48h 14m	March 4, 2014	Focus on Shalain (Her flashback narrative)
3	<i>Oathbringer</i>	1248 ^[15]	1243	122 ^[16]	450,000 ^[16]	55h 02m	November 14, 2017 ^{[17][18]}	Focus on Dalinar (His flashback narrative) ^{[11][19]}
4							Fall, 2020 ^[20]	Focus on Eshonai (Her flashback narrative) and Venli (focus in the present) ^{[21][22]}
5								Focus on Szeth ^{[23][24]}

Ten books are planned in the series, broken down into two sets of five books each. Sanderson describes the planned story arc of the second set of five books as a "sequel" to the first set, with some appearances of characters from the first set.^[25] The fourth book is planned to take place a year after the events of *Oathbringer*. The biggest timeslip in the series will occur between the fifth and sixth book.^[26]

The Stormlight Archive novella *Edgedancer* about Lift, set between *Words of Radiance* and *Oathbringer*, was originally published in *Arcanum Unbound: The Cosmere Collection* on November 22, 2016.^[27] A standalone edition of *Edgedancer* was published on October 17, 2017.^[28]

Concepts

World

Roshar is the native name for the planet on which *The Stormlight Archive* is set. It is also the name of the supercontinent on which the main events of the series take place.^[29] People from Roshar are called Rosharans.^[30] Roshar is the second planet from its sun and has three moons, each of which waxes and wanes separately from the others.^[31] The world is periodically assailed by highstorms, storms characterized by a very violent storm front traveling from east to west (beginning at the Origin), followed by weaker rains. The lands in Shinovar, farthest west on the main continent of Roshar, are mostly protected from the highstorms by the high peaks of the Mist Mountains. Most plants that grow in Shinovar, which resemble real-world plant life, cannot grow in other parts of Roshar. Highstorms come frequently and, though they do not appear to follow a simple pattern, stormwardens are able to accurately predict their schedule through complex mathematics. Flora and fauna have evolved to cope with this condition.^[32]

Nations and regions

During the Heroic Epochs, Roshar was ruled by a coalition of ten nations known as the Silver Kingdoms. In the Era of Solitude, following the departure of the Heralds and the demise of the Orders of Knights Radiant, those kingdoms split into smaller ones:

- Alethkar
 - Frostlands
 - Jah Keved
 - Herdaz
 - Thylenah
 - Ti Shavaya
 - Triax
- Tu Fallia
- Greater Hexi
 - Marat
 - Tukar
 - Emul
 - Azir
 - Wulay
- Marabethia
- Babatharmam
 - Desh
 - Yeziel
 - Alm
 - Tashikk
 - Liafor
- Aemia
- Shinovar
- In
- Rira
- Rashi Isles
- Veden

Races

The Stormlight Archive features several different races, although most are often portrayed as different ethnicities of humans. Some of these races include:

- Thaylens** – Renowned traders and merchants native to an island nation. They possess long eyebrows that can be styled to either droop or curve behind their ears.
- Alethi** – Native to the nation of Alethkar, the Alethi are members of one of the four Vorin nations. They have a famed military heritage and are possessed of tan skin and dark hair.
- Veden** – Native to the Vorin nation of Jah Keved, the Vedens are characterized by pale skin and reddish hair.
- Natananati** – Native to the Vorin nation inhabiting New Natanan, the Natananati often wear gloves and have faintly bluish skin.
- Unkalaki (Horn eaters)** – A relatively rare race, the Horn eaters are called thus by other races because the Unkalaki consider animal horns, shells, and claws to be a delicacy. They possess reddish hair and dark skin, and stand well over seven feet tall. The Unkalaki homeland is in the mountains of Jah Keved. Their culture is very different from the other Vorin cultures.
- Parshendi** – A proud nonhuman race, living on Shattered Plains with a strong warrior culture. The Parshendi are viewed by many other races as savages because of their culture and past deeds. They have marbled red and white or red and black skin that forms patterns unique to each individual, and are at war with the Alethi during the novel's main timeline. They use spren to morph into many different forms, each with a unique function and set of abilities. These forms also change the appearance of the Parshendi who use them, for example taking warform makes them more physically able and grants them the mindset of a soldier. The warform allows them to be sturdier to perform physical labor. They also communicate through songs and rhythms in their heads.
- Shin** – A race native to the region of Shinovar. Shin have white skin and bald heads, lack epicanthic folds (unlike the other races), and stand shorter than most others, averaging five feet tall. They also have bigger and rounder eyes.
- Azish** – Native to the nation of Azir, the Azish have dark skin and hair. Azish storytellers (Wordsingers) travel the world, spreading knowledge of other lands and cultures.

Class structure

Much of *The Way of Kings* takes place within the nations of Alethkar and Jah Keved. Both of these nations divide their people into classes, primarily based on the color of their eyes. Those with dark eye colors (brown, dark green, charcoal grey) are mostly peasants (and can even be made slaves). Those with light eye colors (blue, yellow, tan, green, violet, orange, etc.) are the nobles and generally more educated ruling class. Within these classes, there are further class distinctions known as *nahn* (for darkeyes) and *dahn* (for lighteyes). Both have ten levels within. For the *nahn*, they range from slaves in the 10th *nahn* to full citizens with the right to travel in the 2nd and 1st *nahn*. In the *dahn* system, lighteyes in the 10th *dahn* are considered only slightly better than darkeyes, and a very rich darkeyed man or woman may marry into an extremely poor lighteyed family, in very rare cases. The 1st *dahn* is composed of the king and his family. Any person above 4th *dahn* is a Brightlord/Brightlady, owners of swaths of property, servants, estates, etc.

Spren

Spren are spirits in the land of Roshar which either cause, or are drawn to, different conditions or emotions. There are thousands of them. One character, Hesina, the mother of Kaladin states, "Spren appear when something changes - when a feat appears, or when it begins to rain. They are the heart of change, and therefore the heart of all things."^[33] Their intelligence varies, with liespren (Cryptids) and honorspren among the most intelligent, and more common spren, seen as forces of nature/emotion having little to no intelligence. Jasnah Kholin also mentions that the 10 orders of the Knights Radiant drew their power from spren. Some examples are Syl, an Honorspren who shares a bond with Kaladin, giving him surgebinding powers of Windrunner; Pattern, who created a bond with Shalain, allowing her to surgebind and soulcast; and Wyndle, who bonded with the thief Lift, allowing her to surgebind. Dalinar Kholin also binds a spren, the Stormfather, though he does so in an unconventional manner. Jasnah bonded an Inkspren named Ivory.

Some spren, such as flamespren, share characteristics with current observations in quantum mechanics. For example, when they are observed they remain stable in the recorded state, but when tested more thoroughly, they change as though at random. As revealed in the second book, spren "concepts and ideas" given physical form by the human collective subconscious. Among the many forms of spren, some are intelligent, possess self-awareness, and have even built their own cities. They reside naturally in Shadesmar, and often cross over into the physical realm. This comes at the cost of most of their self-awareness for the higher, more exalted spren, which they can regain by making bonds with humans. The sea and land are reversed in Shadesmar – what would be land on Roshar is a sea of black beads in Shadesmar, each representing a physical form on Roshar. Shadesmar also contains cities and a strange type of flora.

Surgebinding

Surgebinding refers to a group of ten magic systems that stem from Honor, one of the three Shards of Adonalsium present on Roshar. Each of Surgebinding's ten systems revolves around 'binding' two natural 'Surges', for instance Gravity and Adhesion, to the Surgebinder of life. Surgebinding is powered by Stormlight, and the ability is granted to humans through bonding with a Spren, a type of elemental spirit native to Roshar. There are ten Surgebinding's branches, with Windrunner and powers of Lightweavers (Transformation - Soulcasting and Illumination - Illusions), described thoroughly.

Windrunner is an ability where the wielder uses the power of Stormlight to affect gravity and adhesion. It is described in three methods known as the "Three Lashings". A Basic Lashing changes the direction of gravitational pull for an individual (causing the person to be pulled towards another object or direction instead of towards the center of the planet). A Full Lashing is described as creating an almost^[34] unbreakable bond between two objects until the Stormlight dissipates. A Reverse Lashing causes an object to have a much stronger gravitational pull, causing other objects to be pulled towards it.^[34]

The only individuals in the book seen to use Windrunner are Szeth-son-of-Vallano,^[35] Kaladin,^[36] the squires of Kaladin in Bridge Four, and through the visions of Dalinar, members of the Knights Radiant.

There are a total of thirty different magic-systems on Roshar, with ten tied to each of the three Shards of Adonalsium present on the planet; the ten branches of Surgebinding to Honor, ten as yet unseen systems associated with Cultivation, and the ten levels of Voidbinding thought to be tied to Odium.^[34]

Soulcasting and Shadesmar

Soulcasting is a practice where objects are changed from one form to another. It has proven able to turn rock into smoke, purify blood of poisons, and create food, and it has many other applications as well. Soulcasting is done by means of a device called a soulcaster that is powered by gems imbued with Stormlight. The type of gem placed inside the soulcaster determines what the caster can transform. With each use of a soulcaster, there is a change of the gem cracking and being destroyed, especially when a large amount of matter is changed.^[37] The main practitioners of soulcasting are the Ardens of the Vorin religion, however there are a few exceptions. Shalain's father's steward knew how to use a soulcaster.^[38] as he used Shalain's father's soulcaster.

Jasnah Kholin and, by the end of *The Way of Kings*, Shalain are capable of doing magic that has very similar effects to Soulcasting but does not require a soulcaster to be used, and does not require that the magic user be in physical contact with the object they transform.^[39] This book does not go into great detail, but the magic involves mentally communicating with an unknown source to enter a place called Shadesmar. Shadesmar is described in detail in the book but mostly consists of a world made from tiny glass beads. Once within Shadesmar the power from a Stormlight infused gem can be used to manipulate objects.^[40]

In an interview with Brandon Sanderson, Shadesmar is described as a Cognitive Access Channeling all the worlds in the Cosmere. Sanderson has confirmed that Hoid is very good at using Shadesmar, that this is how Hoid moves between worlds, and that people on other worlds within the Cosmere have ways of accessing Shadesmar which are different from those the characters in this book use.^[41]

Shardblades and Shardplate

Shardblades are powerful swords which have the ability to cut through any non-living matter with ease. When used on living creatures, they can kill or maim with a single cut by the blade passing through the living soul. They can also render limbs useless, when cut through their arm. The only known defenses against a Shardblade are Shardplate, shields called "half-shards", and another Shardblade. Those who own a Shardblade can summon their blade from thin air in ten heartbeat, and can make their blade disappear at will.^[42] The blades are rare and highly valued, and there are estimated to be fewer than one hundred known blades in the world.^[43]

Shardplate is full plate armor which both protects and strengthens their wearer. The armor provides protection against Surgebinding, as one wearing the armor cannot be "lashed" directly.^[45] Repeated strikes at the same spot on the armor by regular weapons or Shardblades can break the armor to crack and break. The armor can be repaired or "regrown" though it takes a long time.^[44]

A full shardbearer, one wielding both Shardblade and Shardplate, is a force capable of turning the tide of battle on their own. Kaladin and Syl express a revulsion to the Shardblades wielded by the Alethi. During Dalinar's visions he sees the Knights Radiant wearing Shardplate and wielding Shardblades, but he notes that the plate when worn by the Radiants glow. Additionally, the number of Blades and Plate worn by the Radiants is much greater than the number left in the world at the main timeline of *The Way of Kings*. There are also references to "Honorable" and "Dawnshard", though the terms are only applied to the weapons of the Heralds of the Almighty and only on occasion. An Honorable is a sword that gives the user Surgebinding abilities. One such sword is used by Szeth and allows him to Windrun. The Shardblades used by the Knights Radiant can be summoned instantly.^[45] They can also change forms. For example, Kaladin's Shardblade changes into a spren and again into a shield when fighting Szeth.

Most Shardblades are actually dead armor that come alive for a period of time by attaching themselves to their owner's heartbeat.^[45] Shardblades wielded by the Knights Radiant are the Knight's spren taking the physical form of a weapon (often a sword), hence these Shardblades are a physical manifestation of a living spren. There are also ten Honorable blades that each grant the powers of one order of Radiants. These weapons don't appear to be physical manifestations of spren, dead or alive, and were likely wielded by the Heralds until nine of them were abandoned at the end of Abharietum, or the last destination, Szeth, the assassin in white, uses an Honorable blade of Zerriean in the first two books, and the Herald, Nalan, wields the honor blade of the Skybreakers.

The Knights Radiant

The Knights Radiant originated through spren copying the abilities which the Heralds obtained through their Honorable blades. The Knights Radiant gained their power through spren by creating a bond with them called the Nahel bond. The bond gives the spren sentience while giving the human Surgebinding abilities. Two examples are Sylphrena, an Honorspren, that shares a bond with Kaladin, giving him the power to Surgebind, and Shalain, who created a bond with Pattern, a Cryptid native to Southeast and east Illusions. The Knights Radiant lived by their order's Five Ideals called The Immortal Words, with the First Ideal being the same for every order: Life before death, strength before weakness, journey before destination. The other four Ideals are different for each order, with the exception of the Order of the Lightweavers, having only the First Ideal. Lightweavers instead must admit truths to themselves in order to progress. Towards the end of *The Way of Kings*, Kaladin uses the Second Ideal for the Order of Windrunners: "I will protect those who cannot protect themselves". Near the end of *Words of Radiance*, Kaladin whispers the Third Ideal for the Order of Windrunners: "I will protect even those I hate, so long as it is right". It is hinted at the end of *Oathbringer* "that the Fourth Ideal is, "I will let go of those I cannot save", although this Ideal is not sworn.

Orders of the Knights Radiant

- Windrunners** – Manipulate the Surges of Adhesion and Gravitation. Bonded to Honorspren.
- Skybreakers** – Manipulate the Surges of Gravitation and Division. Bonded to Highspren.
- Dustbringers** – Manipulate the Surges of Division and Abrasion. Bonded to Ashspren.
- Edgedancers** – Manipulate the Surges of Abrasion and Progression. Bonded to Cultivationspren.
- Truthfinders** – Manipulate the Surges of Progression and Illumination.
- Lightweavers** – Manipulate the Surges of Illumination and Transformation. Bonded to Liespren (Cryptic).
- Elsecallers** – Manipulate the Surges of Transformation and Transportation. Bonded to Inkspren.
- Willshapers** – Manipulate the Surges of Transportation and Cohesion.
- Stonewards** – Manipulate the surges of Cohesion and Tension.
- Bondsmiths** – Manipulate the surges of Tension and Adhesion. Bonded to Godspren. There can only be three Bondsmiths.

Religion

Much of the world follows the Vorin religion. Vorinism tells of the struggle between the forces of the Voidbringers and the forces of the Voidbringers. The Voidbringers forced humanity out of its afterlife, called the Tranquilo Halls. They believe that upon death the soul continues in the past role, but towards the regaining of the Tranquilo Halls. In Alethkar, a man's highest calling is as a warrior in life to remain a warrior in the afterlife. The religion also tells of the Lost Radiants, an order who once fought against the Voidbringers during the wars against them on Roshar (known as Desolations). Vorinism gave the Knights Radiant the moniker "Lost Radiants" after they apparently betrayed humanity at some point in the distant past. Vorinism is arranged in devotions, whose ardens aim to assist people in advancing their Callings, which are tasks to which one dedicates their life as a method of worship. Each person selects a devotary based on variances in beliefs, talents or personality traits, and may change their selection at any point in their life. Some examples are the Devotary of Sincerity, who are encouraged to learn and ask questions, and the Devotary of Denial. Adolin Kholin's calling, for example, is Dueling. The priesthood of the Vorin religion are referred to as ardens.

Those who reject the existence of the Almighty, such as Jasnah Kholin, are referred to as heretics. Followers of other religions mentioned in *The Way of Kings* are Stone Shamans, Ysperists and Maakians.

It has been proven during the third title, "Oathbringer", that the almighty is dead. The Almighty was the God in Vorinity. There are, in fact, three Gods, the other two being Odium and Cultivation. Odium represents human passion, while all Cultivation wants is change.

Reception

Critical response and sales

The Way of Kings

In its first week of release *The Way of Kings* was No. 7 on *The New York Times* Best Seller list.^[46] In subsequent weeks the book was No. 11,^[6] No. 20,^[7] and No. 25.^[8]

An early review from the website *Unshelved* gave *The Way of Kings* a positive review.^[47] A review from *Eliist Book Reviews* pointed out small problems with the book, (black-and-white characters, too much exposition) but gave an overall positive opinion of the book.^[48] The website *SFReviews*.net gave the book a mixed review, praising Sanderson's writing and creativity, but criticizing its extreme length and overall death of action.^[49]

SF Reviews pointed out, "The ride is luxurious, the scenery is often breathtaking, but *The Way of Kings* is truly a long and winding road."^[50] KeepingTheDoor.com commented, *"The Stormlight Archive* is a series that, like Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*, George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Robin Hood's *The Realm of the Edgeworlds* epics, every fantasy fan worth their salt must read and be familiar with. This will be one of the giant series that will help shape the entire scene. Take a week off work now and go and buy *The Way of Kings*. You won't regret it."^[51]

Words of Radiance

In its first week of release, *Words of Radiance* debuted at No. 1 on the *New York Times* Hardcover Fiction Bestseller list.^[52] It also reached No. 1 on the combined print/ebook bestseller list and the *Kobo* Bestseller list.^[52] It was at No. 3 on the National Indie Bestseller list, and at No. 6 on the Southern California Independent Bookseller Association bestselling hardcover fiction list.^[52] The UK publisher of the book, Gollancz, debuted with *Words of Radiance* at No. 2 on the *Sunday Times* of *London* Bestseller list.

A review written by *ioj* called the book "an old-school, '90s fantasy-style behemoth"^[53] also commenting, "While Sanderson continues to build his characters and reveal who they are (especially in the case of Shalain's past) it still elings to one overarching plot that drives relentlessly to an ending that can only be described as 'epic.'^[53]

Another review published by *Tor* Books commented, "*Words of Radiance* capitalizes on the groundwork provided by *The Way of Kings*, building up the world and system while revealing many more potential points of speculation."^[48] It also said, "So to you, lucky reader, who have the choice of whether or not to buy the book, I give this advice: The journey will be worth it. Yes, you should buy this book. Yes, this is a series worth following to the end. I'm glad to be taking this journey, and I hope you will as well."^[48]

Awards and nominations

Year	Novel	Award	Category	Result	Ref
2010	<i>The Way of Kings</i>	Whitney Awards	Best Novel of the Year	Won	[54]
			Best Speculative Fiction	Won	[54]
		Goodreads Choice Awards	Best Fantasy Novel	Nominated	[55]
2011		David Gemmell Legend Award	Best Novel	Won	[56]
	2014	Whitney Awards	Best Speculative Fiction	Won	[57]
Goodreads Choice Awards		Best Fantasy Novel	Nominated	[58]	
Audie Award		Best Fantasy (audiobook)	Won	[59]	
2015		David Gemmell Legend Award	Best Novel	Won	[60]

Adaptations

Audiobooks

An unabridged audiobook version of *The Way of Kings* was released in August 2010 by Macmillan Audio and read by narrator team Kate Reading and Michael Kramer.^[61] An unabridged audiobook version of *Words of Radiance* was released in March 2014 by Macmillan Audio and is also read by Kramer and Reading.^[62]

A 5-part GraphicAudio version of *The Way of Kings* was released from March to July 2016. A 5-part GraphicAudio version of *Words of Radiance* was released from September 2016 to January 2017.^[64]

Films

In October 2016, the rights to the entire Cosmere universe were licensed by DMG Entertainment. DMG is fast-tracking an adaptation of *The Way of Kings*.^[65] Patrick Melton and Marcus Dunstan were hired as screenwriters. DMG founder Dan Mintz will produce the film, with Sanderson and Joshua Bilmes serving as executive producers. DMG also intends on simultaneously adapting the first book in Sanderson's *Mistborn* series.^[66]

Video game

A VR game, "The Way of Kings: Escape the Shattered Plains", developed by Arcturus VR, was released on March 2, 2018.

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