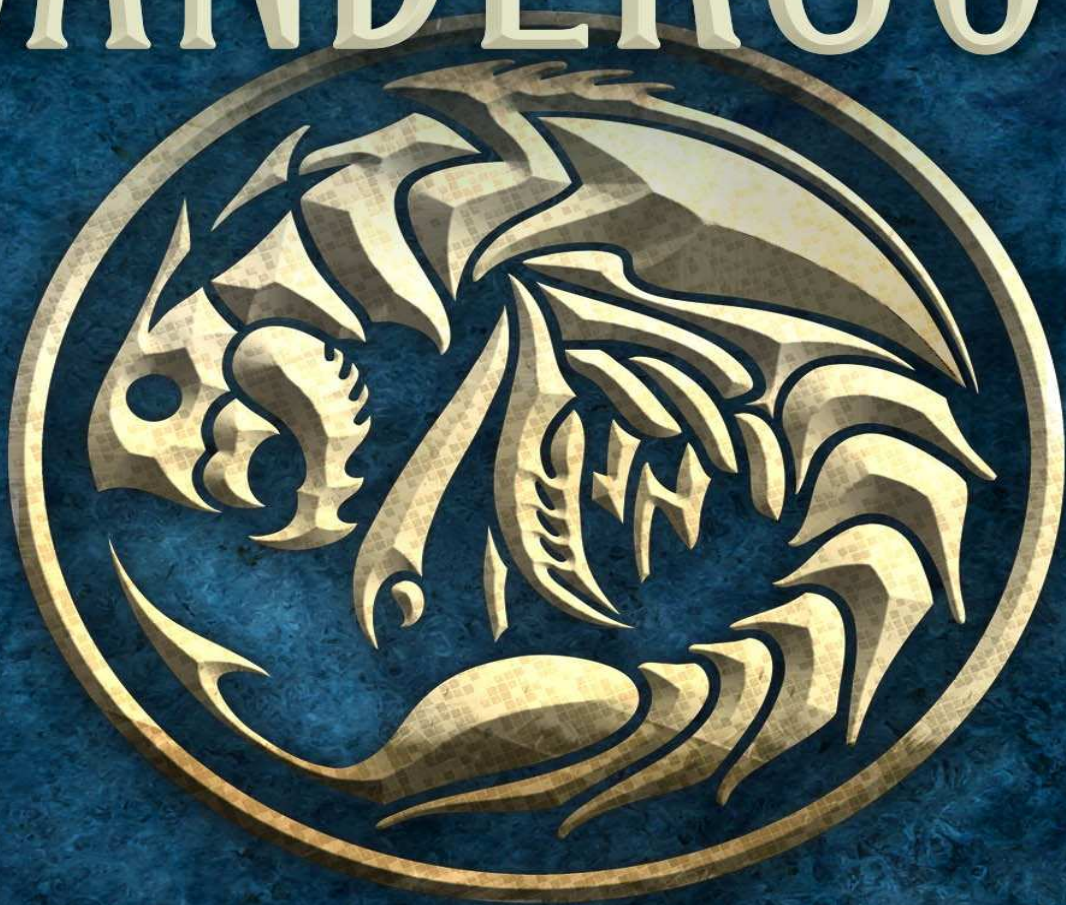


#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BRANDON SANDERSON



FROM THE STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE

DAWNSHARD

DAWNSHARD



BRANDON SANDERSON



A DRAGONSTEEL ENTERTAINMENT® BOOK

For Kathleen Dorsey Sanderson

Who is the person I know that best deserves her own larkin. (For now,
her cats will have to do.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I FEEL ESPECIALLY appreciative with this book, which was supported by the community directly. For those who don't know, this book was produced as a result of a successful Kickstarter campaign for the *Way of Kings* leatherbound. So the first acknowledgment is to all of you! Thank you for your active enthusiasm for this series, which I always thought would be too strange and too enormous to be popular.

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Brandon Sanderson

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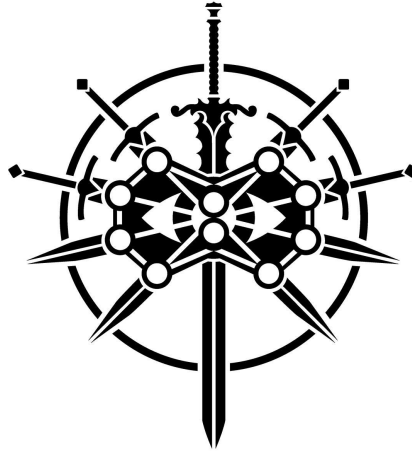
EPILOGUE

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PROLOGUE



NOTHING COULD COMPETE with the experience of dangling from the rigging tens of feet in the air—fresh sea air in your face—while looking across an infinite plane of shimmering blue water. The vast ocean was an open roadway. An individual invitation to explore.

People feared the sea, but Yalb had never understood that. The sea was so open, so welcoming. Pay her a little respect, and she would carry you anywhere you wished to go. She'd even feed you along the way and lull you to sleep with her songs at night.

He took a deep, full breath—tasting the salt, watching windspren dance past—and grinned ear to ear. Yes, nothing could compare to these moments. But the chance to win a few spheres off the new guy . . . well, that *did* come close.

Dok clung to the rigging with the tight grip of a man who didn't want to fall—rather than the loose control of one who knew he wouldn't. The fellow was competent, for an Alethi. Most of them never set foot on ships except to cross particularly wide ponds. This guy, however, not only knew his port from his starboard, he could legitimately haul on a bowline and reef a sail without hanging himself.

But he held on too tightly. And he grabbed the rail when the ship swayed. And he had fallen seasick on the third day. So while Dok was *close* to being a real sailor, he wasn't quite there. And since Yalb made a point of keeping an eye on new sailors these days, it fell to him to help Dok via a good pranking. If the Alethi queen wanted more of her people trained in Thaylen sailing

traditions, they'd need to learn this part too. It was educational.

"There!" Yalb said, leaning out and pointing with one hand as he swayed in the breeze. "You see it?"

"Where?" Dok climbed higher, scanning the horizon.

"Right there!" Yalb pointed again. "Big spren, emerging from the waters near where the sunlight reflects."

"No," Dok said.

"Huh. It's *right there*, Dok. Enormous sailorspren. Guess you ain't—"

"Wait!" Dok shaded his eyes. "I see it!"

"Really?" Yalb said. "What does it look like?"

"A vast yellow spren?" Dok said. "Rising out of the water? It has big tentacles, waving in the air. And . . . and a bright red stripe on its back."

"Well toss me overboard and call me a fish," Yalb said. "If you can see it, I guess you *are* a real sailor! You win the bet, then."

Of course, they'd made certain Dok could hear them whispering when they'd discussed these supposed "sailorspren," so he knew what description to give. Yalb fished a few chips from his pocket and handed them to Dok. Easy early winnings to facilitate Dok's playing along more and more. He'd see manifestations of the "sailorspren" everywhere until—after putting a huge bet on the table that he could catch one—it was revealed that there was no such thing as a sailorspren, and everyone would have a big laugh.

Way Yalb saw it, if a fellow was naive enough to get pranked, then he'd lose all his spheres *eventually*. Why not lose them to mates? Besides, they'd keep the spheres to buy everyone—Dok included—rounds on shore leave. After all, once you got your mates drunk, that was when you became a *real* sailor. Plus, once they were sloshed enough, maybe they would *all* see a bunch of bright yellow spren with tentacles.

Dok settled into the rigging. "Is it true you sank once, Yalb?"

"The ship sank," Yalb said. "I merely happened to be a resident thereon."

"Not what I heard," Dok said, his voice lightly spiced with an Alethi accent. "Didn't you tell people the whole storming ship vanished underneath you?"

"Yeah, well, I swallowed half the ocean before someone fished me out," Yalb said. "I wasn't exactly a reliable witness at that point, was I?"

And he'd find the sailor who was repeating that story, then sew his hammock shut. They knew Yalb didn't like talking about the night the *Wind's Pleasure* had gone down. It had been a good ship, with a better crew.

Of them, only three had survived.

The other two told the same terrible story, same as Yalb remembered it. Assassins in the dark—something worse than a mutiny. And then . . . the whole ship just *gone*. For months he'd thought himself insane. But then the whole storming world had gone insane, with Voidbringers returning, a new storm blowing in, and everyone at war.

So now he had Alethi on his ship. And he'd keep an eye on anyone new, to be safe. Dok seemed a good sort though, so Yalb was going to treat him right—by treating him wrong.

Yalb leaned out farther, trying to recover his mood. “Now that you've seen the sailorspren, you can . . .” He frowned. What was *that*? Marring the infinite blue beauty?

“What?” Dok asked, eager. “I can what, Yalb?”

“Hush,” Yalb said, climbing up to the eel's nest to wave at Brekv, who was on duty. “Three points off the port bow!”

Brekv spun and searched that direction, raising his spyglass. Then he swore softly.

“What?” Yalb said.

“Ship. Wait a minute. It's coming up over the curve. . . . Yeah, it's a ship, sails in tatters. Listing to port. How'd you ever spot it?”

“What banner does it fly?”

“None,” Brekv said, handing down the spyglass.

A bad sign. Why was it out here alone, during a war? Yalb's own vessel was a quick scouting vessel, so it made sense for them to sail alone. But a merchant ship would want an escort these days.

Yalb focused on the ship. No crew on deck. Storms. He handed the spyglass back.

“You want to report it?” Brekv asked.

Yalb nodded, then went sliding down the line past Dok, who looked on with surprise. Yalb leaped off the rope and hit the deck running, then was up to the captain's post in three jumps, skipping half the steps.

“What?” Captain Smta said. She was a tall woman, with her eyebrows in curls to match her hair.

“Ship,” Yalb said. “No crew on deck. Three points off the port bow.”

The captain glanced toward the helmswoman, then nodded. Orders went out to the men in the rigging. The ship turned toward the newly sighted vessel.

“You take a boarding party, Yalb,” the captain said. “In case your special experience is needed.”

Special experience. The rumors weren't true, but everyone believed them, whispering that Yalb had sailed on a ghost ship for years—which was why it had eventually vanished. There was a reason nobody would hire all three of the survivors together, and they'd had to go their own ways.

He didn't complain at the treatment. The captain had been good to take him. So if she ordered him, he'd do it. Indeed, though he was a mere seaman with no authority, even the first mate looked to him for orders as they finally pulled up beside the strange ship. Sails all torn to shreds. Listing in the water with a deck empty of even ghosts.

It didn't vanish beneath their feet as they explored it. An hour of searching later, they returned empty-handed. No sign of any ship's log, and no sign of any crew—living or dead. Only a name. *First Dreams*, a private ship the first mate remembered hearing about. It had vanished five months prior during some kind of mysterious voyage.

As Yalb waited for the captain and the others to discuss what to do, he leaned against the railing and studied the unfortunate ship, drifting forlorn. Was it fate that *he* should find this vessel? That the man whose ship had vanished now joined with the ship whose crew had vanished? The captain would want to break out an extra sail and bring this one home. Yalb was certain of it. They needed every ship in the war effort.

They were going to put him on it. He knew they were. The storming queen herself would likely demand it.

The sea was a strange mistress indeed. Open. Welcoming. Inviting. Sometimes a little too much so.





SOME PEOPLE MIGHT have considered it boring work to select a new trade expedition. To Rysn, it was a thrilling chase. Yes, she did it sitting in a room surrounded by stacks of papers, but she felt like a hunter all the same.

Among these reports hid so many interesting tidbits. Details of goods for sale, rumors of ports with needs that the war was making difficult to fulfill. Somewhere among all of this minutia was the perfect opportunity for her crew. She sorted through it like a scout creeping through the underbrush, quiet and careful, seeking the perfect line of attack.

Plus, diving into something so involved distracted her from other worries. Unfortunately, as soon as she thought that, Rysn couldn't help glancing at Chiri-Chiri. Covered in carapace, with large membranous wings, the larkin ordinarily spent her days pestering Rysn for food or otherwise getting into trouble. But today, like so many recently, the larkin was curled up, sleeping at the far end of the long table, near Rysn's pot of grass from Shinovar.

Chiri-Chiri had grown to roughly a foot long from her snout to the base of her tail—which extended another fifteen inches. She was big enough that Rysn needed two hands to carry her. The larkin cut an impressive profile, with her pointed mandibles and predator's eyes. But these days, her normally brown-violet shell had whitened to an almost chalky color. Too white—this wasn't a simple molt. Something was wrong.

Rysn slid along her bench. In the past, she'd preferred a tiny office set off from others. She now thought she'd done that unconsciously because she'd wanted to hide away.

No more of that. She now had a large office, in which she'd commissioned a variety of furniture changes. Though she'd lost the use of her legs in her accident two years ago, her injury wasn't as far up along her spine as other people she'd written to. Rysn could sit on her own, though doing so strained her muscles unless she had a backrest to lean against. Even then, she felt it was good practice to sit and strengthen her muscles.

Instead of a chair—or a series of them—she preferred long benches with high backs, which she could slide along. She'd ordered them built along the various long tables in the office, which also had a large number of windows. It felt so open and free now; she found it remarkable she'd ever preferred something much smaller and darker.

She reached the end of the bench, near Chiri-Chiri's nest of blankets. Rysn set down her pen and plucked a diamond sphere from the nearby goblet, then nudged it over to Chiri-Chiri. It glowed brightly, inviting the larkin to feast on its Stormlight.

Chiri-Chiri only cracked a silver eye and barely stirred. A few anxietyspren, like twisting black cross shapes, appeared around Rysn. Storms. The animal doctors hadn't been able to offer much aid—they guessed she had a disease, but said that diseases were very individualized to a species. And Chiri-Chiri was the sole member of her species any of them had ever seen.

Trying not to let the worry crush her, Rysn left the sphere near Chiri-Chiri's mouth, then forced herself to return to her hunt. She'd already sent a request via spanreed to someone she thought could help with Chiri-Chiri. There wasn't anything more Rysn could do until he replied. So, she scooted along her bench to resume her work. Then, however, she realized she'd left her pen. She began to scoot back to fetch it.

Immediately, Nikli bounded out of his position near the doorway and scrambled to grab the pen for her. Before she could arrive, the overeager man had the tool proffered.

Rysn sighed. Nikli was her new head porter, the man who carried her between locations when she needed help. He was from somewhere in the western Makabaki region, and though his Thaylen was good, he'd had trouble finding work. He stood out, with his face and arms covered in white tattoos.

He was eager to keep his job, but while she appreciated initiative . . .
“Thank you, Nikli,” she said, taking the pen. “But please wait until I ask for help before rendering it.”

“Oh!” he said. He bowed. “Sorry.”

“It’s all right,” she said, waving for him to retreat to the side of the room. His attitude wasn’t uncommon. When she’d explained the benches for her office, the initial response had been confusion. “But why?” the carpenters’ foreman had asked.

Ah, to be free of the “but why.”

To everyone else, her actions seemed odd. She was a trademaster, with her own ship and crew. She could order servants to fetch her anything she needed. And she did need help now and then.

The thing was, she didn’t *always* need help. It was a lesson she herself had been forced to learn, so she didn’t blame Nikli for the mistake. She shook off the minor irritation and refocused on her task, trying to recapture her excitement.

This would be her second voyage as a shipowner. Her first, completed two weeks ago, had been a direct back-and-forth trade deal that had let her and the crew grow accustomed to one another. It had gone . . . fine. Oh, the profits had been good, and the crew appreciated that. The deals she negotiated were their livelihood.

Yet there was something about the sailors, and their captain, that Rysn hadn’t yet figured out. Some hesitance to engage with her. Perhaps they were simply accustomed to Vstim and not Rysn, as her ways were slightly different from her babsk’s. Or maybe they wanted a voyage more engaging, more rewarding, than such a simple trip.

She sifted through her options, eventually settling on three different trade offers. Any of the three could be lucrative, but which to select? She mulled it over for a time, then wrote out a list of pros and cons to each deal, as Vstim had taught her.

Eventually she rubbed her temples, her eyebrow jewelry tinkling softly, and decided to give it a few minutes. Instead she reached for some spanreed communications that had come in recently—from women around the world who, like her, had lost the use of their legs.

Talking with them was exciting and invigorating. They felt so many of her own emotions, and were eager to share with her things they’d learned. Mura, an Azish woman, had designed several interesting devices to help in daily life, demonstrating marvelous creativity. Hooks and rings—with items hanging on pegs—to allow for ready access. Specialized hoops, wires, and curved rods to aid in dressing herself.

Reading through the latest letters, she couldn't help but be encouraged. She had once felt so isolated. Now she realized there were many people who—despite being strangely invisible to the world at large—faced her same challenges. Their stories invigorated her, and with their suggestions in hand, Rysn had ordered changes to her ship. A fixed seat and sunshade up on the quarterdeck, near the helm station. Changes to her cabin to make moving around and dressing easier.

During the ship's time in port, the carpenters were doing as she'd asked. Yet there had been so many confused looks. And that same awful question.

“But why?”

Why not stay behind and let an underling do the in-person negotiations? She could negotiate via spanreed for the true contract. Why did she want a station up on the quarterdeck, rather than making the voyage comfortable in her cabin? Why ask about a pulley system to get herself up and down from the quarterdeck, when there were porters who could carry her?

Why, why, why? Why do you want to live, Rysn? Why do you want to better your situation? She scanned the drawings that Mura had sent her. It was a recent design, done by an ardent in Jah Keved, for a different kind of wheeled chair. Rysn used the common type, with small wheels on the rear legs. It needed a porter who could tip the chair back—like she was in a reverse wheelbarrow—and push her where she needed to go. The design had been used for centuries.

But here was something new. A chair with large wheels you could move *yourself* with your hands. She'd need to have one of these commissioned. It wouldn't be of much use on a ship—and the streets of Thaylen City were probably too rough, with too many steps—but if only she could get from room to room in her own house, so many things would change.

She wrote a reply to Mura, then revisited her three possible trips, weighing them. A shipment of fish oil, some rugs, or some water barrels. All three were just so *mundane*. Her ship, the *Wandersail*, had been built for grander things. Granted, with the war, even simple trips were now dangerous. But she'd been trained by the best in the business to search for the opportunities no one else would take.

Search for the need, Vstim had always taught her. Don't be a barnacle, simply leeching money where you can, Rysn. Find the unmet desire. . . .

She decided to start over, but was interrupted by a quiet knock at her outer door. She looked up with surprise; she'd not been expecting company. Nikli,

after glancing for her approval, moved out into the antechamber to answer the knock.

A smiling man entered her office a second later. Rysn dropped her papers in shock.

The Reshi man had deep tan skin, with his hair in two long braids down over his shoulders. Talik wore a traditional Reshi wrap and tasseled overshirt, with his chest bare. She knew, from their two years of communication, that he generally wore one of several fine Thaylen suits when traveling. When he put on his traditional clothing, it was to deliberately remind people where he was from.

Seeing him left her speechless. He lived thousands of miles away from her. How was he here? She stammered, searching for what to say.

“Ah, so now that you’re a powerful ship owner,” he said, “you have no further words for one such as me? I guess I’ll be off then. . . .” He said it with a widening grin, however.

“Get in here and sit down,” she said, scooting down the table toward the far end, where it wasn’t so cluttered with papers. She waved for him to sit in a chair across the long table from her. “How on Roshar did you get here so quickly? I wrote to you only three days ago!”

“We were already in Azimir,” he explained, settling down. “The king wants to meet this Dalinar Kholin and see these Knights Radiant for himself.”

“The king *left* Relu-na?” Rysn asked. She felt her jaw drop.

“Strange times,” Talik said. “With nightmares walking the world, and the Vorin peoples uniting under one banner—an Alethi one no less—it was time.”

“They . . . We aren’t under an Alethi banner,” she said. “We are a united coalition. Here, let me pour you some tea.”

She took her grabbing stick and used it to hook the teapot by the handle to drag it across the table toward them. Talik—who had been so stern when they’d first met so long ago—leaped to his feet to help. He took the teapot and poured two cups.

She was grateful. And also frustrated. Not being able to walk was annoying, and *that* emotion people seemed to understand. But few understood the sense of embarrassment she felt—despite knowing she shouldn’t—at being a burden. While she appreciated the concern people showed for her, she worked so hard to be able to do things on her own. When people accidentally undercut that, it became more difficult to ignore the part

of her that whispered lies. That told her that because she was less capable in a few areas, she was worthless in general.

She was doing better about that lately. She didn't have shamespren hanging around these days. But she still wanted to find the right way to explain she wasn't some child who needed to be coddled.

"Gods far and near," Talik said as he handed her a cup, then sat back down. "I can't believe how the time passes. It's been . . . what, two *years* since you first visited us? Since your accident? Feels like only a few months ago."

"Feels like an eternity for me," Rysn said, sipping her tea and stretching her other hand out on the desk toward Chiri-Chiri. Normally, the larkin would hop over and sniff it when she did that. Today she barely stirred, letting out a soft chirp.

"I suppose we can catch up later," Talik said. "For now, can I see her?"

Rysn nodded, setting aside the tea and scooting over to scoop up the larkin. Chiri-Chiri batted her wings a few times, then settled down. Rysn held her so Talik could see, after pulling his chair around the table to settle down next to her.

"I've shown her to many animal doctors," Rysn said, "and they are baffled. Everyone thought the larkin were extinct, if they'd even heard of one before."

Talik reached to carefully touch Chiri-Chiri along the top of her head. "So big . . ." he whispered. "I had not realized."

"What do you mean?" Rysn asked.

"When Aimia fell," he explained, "the Na-Alind—a family among the greatshelled gods of the Reshi—took in the last of the larkin. Greatshells do not think or speak like people do, and the ways of our gods are strange. But best we can tell, there was a promise among them. To protect these, their cousins.

"I have seen only two other larkin. They were both decades old, but were small, no longer than a person's hand."

"Chiri-Chiri likes to eat," Rysn said. "A lot. At least she used to. . . ."

"In ancient times, larkin grew to larger sizes," Talik said. "They're supposed to remain small these days. Hidden. Lest men hunt them again."

"But what do I *do*?" Rysn asked. "How do I help her?"

"When we received your letter three days ago," Talik said, "I wrote to those on the island. The king's consort approached Relu-na. The answer is simple, Rysn, but not easy. Not easy at all."

“What?”

Talik met her eyes. “The island said to take her home.”

“To the Reshi Isles? I suppose I can go for a visit. How did you get through the occupied territory? The long way around to the east? We . . .” She trailed off, seeing his grim expression. “Oh. By her ‘home,’ you mean Aimia. Well, that’s not impossible. The Royal Navy has set up a few outposts on the main island.”

“Not the main island of Aimia, Rysn,” Talik said. “You need to take her to Akinah. The lost city.” He shook his head. “It is an impossible voyage. No one has stepped foot on the island in generations.”

Rysn frowned, stroking Chiri-Chiri and thinking. Akinah. Hadn’t she read that name recently? She gestured to Talik, then set Chiri-Chiri down and scooted back to her papers.

She found what she was looking for a few minutes later. “Here,” she said, holding it so he could lean down beside her and read. He didn’t ascribe to Vorin prohibitions on that. And, well, neither did Rysn, for all the fact that she wore a glove these days without complaint.

A ghost ship was discovered by a Thaylen military vessel some two months ago. Officials had traced it back to a voyage to the semi-mythical city of Akinah. The Queen of Urithiru, Navani Kholin, had put out a request for another ship to travel to Aimia and investigate a certain region. A strange storm where the ruins of Akinah were rumored to be found.

Queen Navani promised a reward to those who were willing, but so far none had taken up the offer. Rysn looked to Talik, who nodded encouragingly.

It seemed that Rysn needed to pay a visit to Urithiru.