

TRESS
OF THE
EMERALD SEA
A COSMERE NOVEL

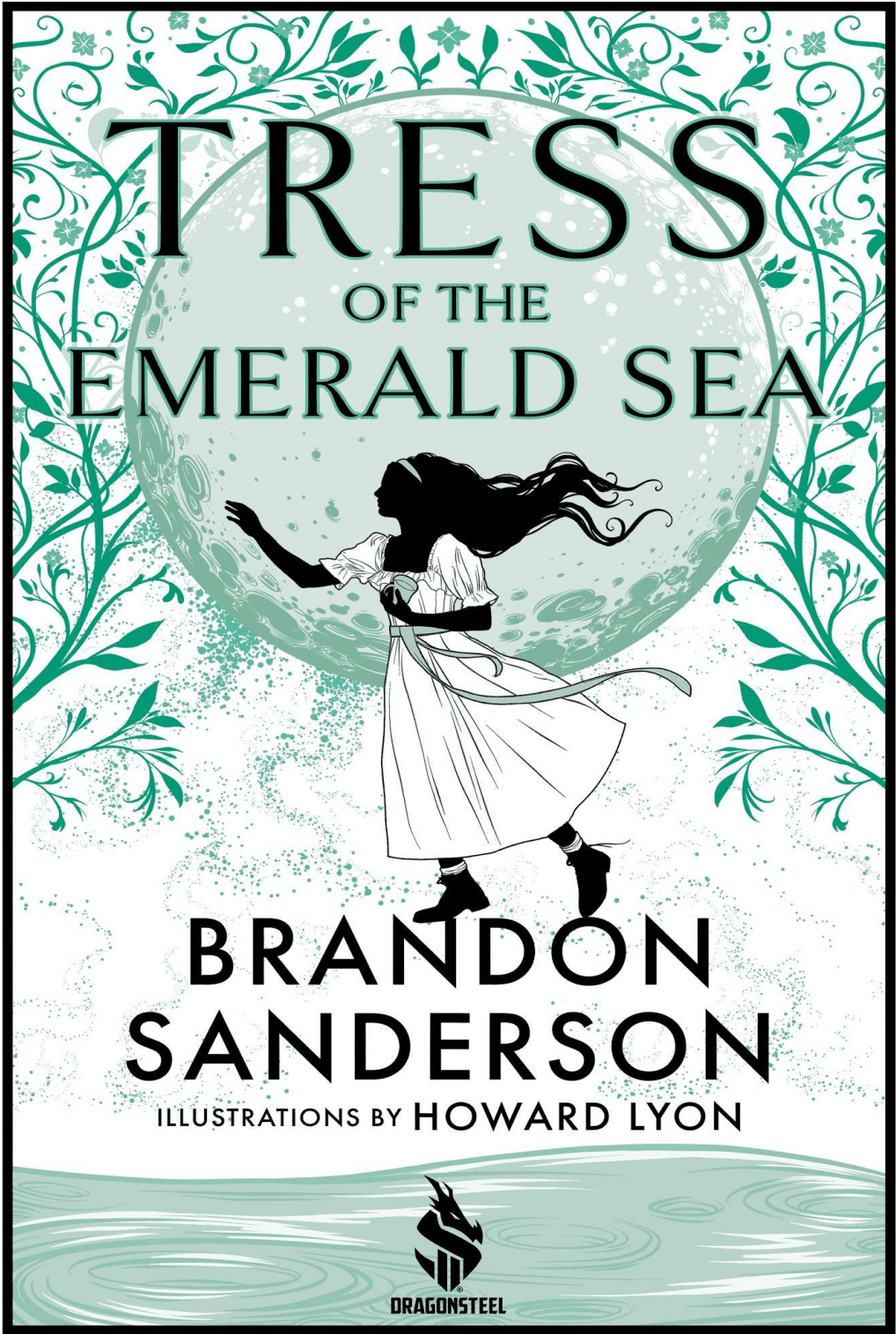
#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BRANDON
SANDERSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOWARD LYON







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TRESS OF THE EMERALD SEA

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FOR EMILY
Who has all my love

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WHAT A RIDE.

When I sat down to write this book on a whim, I had no idea where the whole project would end up going. (Be sure to check out the postscript at the end of the book, where I talk about my inspirations for it in ways that might be a little too spoilery to put up front.)

I envisioned something special for the four books from the 2022 Secret Projects Kickstarter campaign, but my team has gone above and beyond. This turned out to be an absolutely gorgeous volume. I know that many of you will be listening to the audiobook, which certainly has its own special artistry—but if you get a chance, make sure you leaf through the print version. Because wow.

It's fitting, therefore, to start off our thank-you with Howard Lyon. I envisioned these books being kind of an “artist's showcase,” where we picked an artist and let them go a little wild with what they wanted to do in creating the book. Howard did so much on this book. The cover, the endpapers, the interior illustrations—but really, the entire design owes a lot to him. Thank you, Howard, for being willing to take on this huge project. You did an amazing job.

Izaac Stewart is our art director at Dragonsteel, and was essential in making this all come together. Rachael Lynn Buchanan was our art assistant. Bill Wearne at American Print and Bindery really came through for us to get this thing printed, considering shortages. Many thanks, Bill. And I'd also like to thank all the people in the supply chain, from the paper mills to the cover and foil material suppliers, the press, the bindery, and the delivery drivers.

At Dragonsteel, our COO is Emily Sanderson. Our Editorial department is Peter Ahlstrom, Karen Ahlstrom, Kristy S. Gilbert, and Betsey Ahlstrom. Kristy Kugler was our copyeditor. Our Operations department is Matt “Are you going to do this in every book, Brandon?” Hatch, Emma Tan-Stoker,

Jane Horne, Kathleen Dorsey Sanderson, Makena Saluone, and Hazel Cummings. Our Publicity and Marketing department is Adam Horne, Jeremy Palmer, and Taylor Hatch.

These folks don't get enough credit for all the wonderful things they do to make my projects happen. In particular, with this Kickstarter campaign, I needed their enthusiasm and their wonderful ideas. (For example, the original idea for a subscription box was Adam's several years ago.) It was a lot of work to get all of this put together and executed, so if you have a chance, thank my team in person.

And, of course, we need to give an extra special thanks to my Fulfillment department. Kara Stewart's team worked long hours to get these books to you all. They deserve a round of applause, and include Christi Jacobsen, Lex Wilhite, Kellyn Neumann, Mem Grange, Michael Bateman, Joy Allen, Katy Ives, Richard Rubert, Sean VanBuskirk, Isabel Chrisman, Tori Mecham, Ally Reep, Jacob Chrisman, Alex Lyon, and Owen Knowlton.

I'd like to thank Margot Atwell, Oriana Leckert, and the rest of the team at Kickstarter. In addition I'd like to thank Anna Gallagher, Palmer Johnson, Antonio Rosales, and the rest of the BackerKit team.

We had a special sensitivity reader help us with this book—Jenna Beacom—and she was incredible. If you ever need someone to give you help on a book in regards to Deaf representation and how to write a deaf character, go straight to Jenna. She'll help you get it right.

Our alpha readers for this project were Adam Horne, Rachael Lynn Buchanan, Kellyn Neumann, Lex Wilhite, Christi Jacobsen, Jennifer Neal, and Joy Allen.

Our beta readers were Mi'chelle Walker, Matt Wiens, Ted Herman, Robert West, Evgeni "Argent" Kirilov, Jessie Lake, Kalyani Poluri, Bao Pham, Linnea Lindstrom, Jory Phillips, Darci Cole, Craig Hanks, Sean VanBuskirk, Frankie Jerome, Giulia Costantini, Eliyahu Berelowitz Levin, Trae Cooper, and Lauren McCaffrey.

Gamma proofreaders also included Joy Allen, Jayden King, Chris McGrath, Jennifer Neal, Joshua Harkey, Eric Lake, Ross Newberry, Bob Kluttz, Brian T. Hill, Shannon Nelson, Suzanne Musin, Glen Vogelaar, Ian McNatt, Gary Singer, Erika Kuta Marler, Drew McCaffrey, David Behrens, Rosemary Williams, Tim Challener, Jessica Ashcraft, Anthony Acker, Alexis Horizon, Liliana Klein, Christopher Cottingham, Aaron Biggs, and William Juan.

Last but not least, I need to give a special thanks to all of you who backed the Kickstarter project. I wasn't gunning for the number one spot—let alone double that. I just wanted to do something different, something interesting, and something cool. Your support continues to mean so very much to me. Thank you.

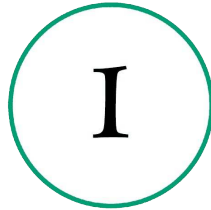
Brandon Sanderson



PART
I



THE GIRL



IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN, there was a girl who lived upon a rock.

This was not an ocean like the one you have imagined.

Nor was the rock like the one you have imagined.

The girl, however, *might* be as you imagined—assuming you imagined her as thoughtful, soft-spoken, and overly fond of collecting cups.

Men often described the girl as having hair the color of wheat. Others called it the color of caramel, or occasionally the color of honey. The girl wondered why men so often used food to describe women’s features. There was a hunger to such men that was best avoided.

In her estimation, “light brown” was sufficiently descriptive—though the hue of her hair was not its most interesting trait. That would be her hair’s unruliness. Each morning she heroically tamed it with brush and comb, then muzzled it with a ribbon and a tight braid. Yet some strands always found a way to escape and would wave free in the wind, eagerly greeting everyone she passed.

The girl had been given the unfortunate name of Glorf upon her birth (don’t judge; it was a family name), but her wild hair earned her the name everyone knew her by: Tress. That moniker was, in Tress’s estimation, her most interesting feature.

Tress had been raised to possess a certain inalienable pragmatism. Such is

a common failing among those who live on dour lifeless islands from which they can never leave. When you are greeted each day by a black stone landscape, it influences your perspective on life.

The island was shaped rather like an old man's crooked finger, emerging from the ocean to point toward the horizon. It was made entirely of barren black saltstone, and was large enough to support a fair-sized town and a duke's mansion. Though locals called the island the Rock, its name on the maps was Diggen's Point. No one remembered who Diggen was anymore, but he had obviously been a clever fellow, for he'd left the Rock soon after naming it and never returned.

In the evenings, Tress would often sit on her family's porch and sip salty tea from one of her favorite cups while looking out over the green ocean. Yes, I did say the ocean was green. Also, it was not wet. We're getting there.



As the sun set, Tress would wonder about the people who visited the Rock in their ships. Not that anyone in their right mind would deem the Rock a tourist destination. The black saltstone was crumbly and got into everything. It also made most kinds of agriculture impossible, eventually tainting any soil brought from off the island. The only food the island grew came from compost vats.

While the Rock did have important wells that brought up water from a deep aquifer—something that visiting ships required—the equipment that worked the salt mines belched a constant stream of black smoke into the air.

In summary, the atmosphere was dismal, the ground wretched, and the views depressing. Oh, and have I mentioned the deadly spores?

Diggen's Point lay near the Verdant Lunagree. The term lunagree, you should know, refers to the places where the twelve moons hang in the sky around Tress's planet in oppressively low stationary orbits. Big enough to fill a full third of the sky, one of the twelve is always visible, no matter where you travel. Dominating your view, like a wart on your eyeball.

The locals worshipped those twelve moons as gods, which we can all agree is far more ridiculous than whatever it is you worship. However, it's easy to see where the superstition began, bearing in mind the spores—like colorful sand—that the moons dropped upon the land.

They'd pour down from the lunagrees, and the Verdant Lunagree was visible some fifty or sixty miles from the island. That was as close as you ever wanted to get to a lunagree—a great shimmering fountain of colorful motes, vibrant and exceedingly dangerous. The spores filled the world's oceans, creating vast seas not of water, but of alien dust. Ships sailed that dust like ships sail water here, and you should not find that so unusual. How many other planets have *you* visited? Perhaps they all sail oceans of pollen, and *your* home is the freakish one.

The spores were only dangerous if you got them wet. Which was rather a problem, considering the number of wet things that leak from human bodies even when they're healthy. The least bit of water would cause the spores to sprout explosively, and the results ranged from uncomfortable to deadly. Breathe in a burst of verdant spores, for example, and your saliva would send vines growing out of your mouth—or in more interesting cases, into your sinuses and out around your eyes.

The spores could be rendered inert by two things: salt or silver. Hence the reason the locals of Diggen's Point didn't terribly mind the salty taste of their

water or food. They'd teach their children this ever-so-important rule: salt and silver halt the killer. An acceptable little poem, if you're the sort of barbarian who enjoys slant rhymes.

Regardless, with the spores, the smoke, and the salt, one can perhaps see why the king who the duke served needed a law requiring the population to remain on the Rock. Oh, he gave reasons that involved important military phrases like "essential personnel," "strategic resupply," and "friendly anchorage," but everyone knew the truth. The place was so inhospitable, even the smog found it depressing. Ships visited periodically for repairs, to drop off waste for the compost vats, and to take on new water. But each strictly obeyed the king's rules: no locals were to be taken from Diggen's Point. Ever.

And so, Tress would sit on her steps in the evenings, watching ships sail away as a column of spores dropped from the lunagree and the sun moved out from behind the moon and crept toward the horizon. She'd sip salty tea from a cup with horses painted on it, and she'd think, *There's a beauty to this, actually. I like it here. And I believe I shall be fine to remain here all my life.*



THE GROUNDSKEEPER