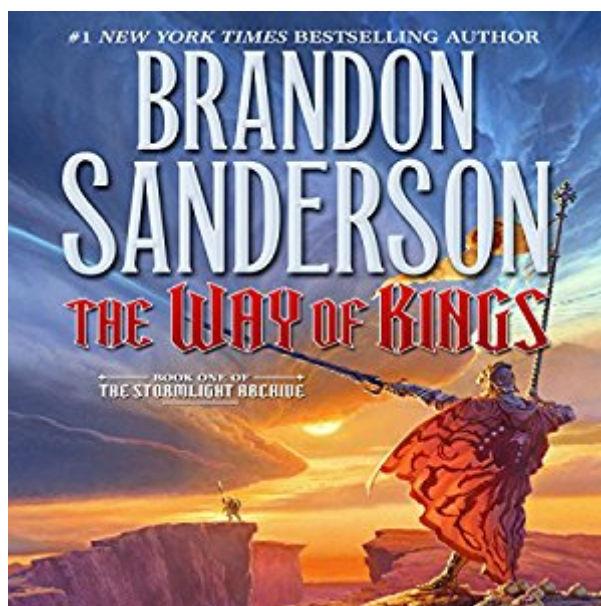


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The Way Of Kings: Book One Of The Stormlight Archive



Synopsis

Widely acclaimed for his work completing Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time saga, Brandon Sanderson now begins a grand cycle of his own, one every bit as ambitious and immersive. Roshar is a world of stone and storms. Uncanny tempests of incredible power sweep across the rocky terrain so frequently that they have shaped ecology and civilization alike. Animals hide in shells, trees pull in branches, and grass retracts into the soilless ground. Cities are built only where the topography offers shelter. It has been centuries since the fall of the 10 consecrated orders known as the Knights Radiant, but their Shardblades and Shardplate remain: mystical swords and suits of armor that transform ordinary men into near-invincible warriors. Wars were fought for them, and won by them. One such war rages on the Shattered Plains. There, Kaladin has been reduced to slavery. In a war that makes no sense, where 10 armies fight separately against a single foe, he struggles to save his men and to fathom the leaders who consider them expendable. Brightlord Dalinar Kholin commands one of those other armies. Like his brother, the late king, he is fascinated by an ancient text called The Way of Kings. Troubled by visions of ancient times and the Knights Radiant, he has begun to doubt his own sanity. Across the ocean, an untried young woman named Shallan seeks to train under an eminent scholar and notorious heretic, Dalinar's niece, Jasnah. Though she genuinely loves learning, Shallan's motives are less than pure. As she plans a daring theft, her research for Jasnah hints at secrets of the Knights Radiant and the true cause of the war.

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Customer Reviews

Here we go, folks: *The Way of Kings*, at over 1000 pages, is the first volume of Brandon Sanderson's projected ten-book series, *THE STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE*. At one book per year, we probably won't see the end of this series before 2020, especially given that Sanderson is first planning to finish up Robert Jordan's *WHEEL OF TIME*. So, if you're looking for a new series to read, this one has some advantages and disadvantages: on the plus side, there will be a lot of reading material coming your way; on the other hand, it'll take quite some time for all of it to get here. Luckily, *The Way of Kings* is a very promising start to the series. Unlike what seems to be most of the fantasy audience, I haven't been a huge fan of all of Brandon Sanderson's work so far, but *The Way of Kings* is easily his best work to date. The book has three main characters (Kaladin, Shallan and Dalinar) and a host of side characters, who occasionally also have chapters or "interludes" written from their point of view. The main story focuses on Kaladin, a surgeon's son forced to become a bridgeman -- a form of military slavery that involves carrying siege bridges in Alethkar's ongoing war with the Parshendi, who at the very start of the novel assassinate Alethkar's king. Dalinar is the late king's brother (and uncle of the current monarch), who along with nine other High Princes is running the war effort against the mysterious Parshendi. And finally, on the other end of the continent, there's Shallan, a young noble girl who wants to become the apprentice of Jasnah, a princess and famed scholar -- although Shallan's motives for seeking this position are not what they initially seem... Of these characters, Kaladin is the most fascinating and well-rounded one. Brandon Sanderson does a fantastic job building up his history and explaining his motivations in a series of flashback chapters that gradually ratchet up the dramatic tension and turn Kaladin into his most memorable character to date. On the other hand, the witty, independent Shallan was a bit too recognizable: add color-changing hair and you could almost confuse her for one of the sisters in *Warbreaker*. The heroic Dalinar falls somewhere in the middle: he's the lone wolf warrior noble, the only High Prince to follow the ancient Alethi Codes of War, and someone you can admire -- while at the same time being able to predict what's going happen to him in the midst of nine other, less noble High Princes. The book's blurbs inevitably point out that there's yet another main character, the world of Roshar -- but in this case, there's really something to this. It's hard not to be excited about a brand new fantasy universe at the start of such a long series. Brandon Sanderson performs a fine balancing act here, showing enough hints of the vast history and depth of this new world without revealing all of it. From the mysterious "prelude", showing events that happened 4,500 years before the start of the story, to the intriguing fauna and flora, to the nature and origin of the High Storms, to the question of what exactly a "spren" is... you'll end up with more questions than answers by the time you turn the final page, but you'll be intrigued and eager to read more. A testament to the

quality of this book: it's rare for me to read a book that's more than 1000 pages long and still wish I could immediately read more. Part of the reason for this is Brandon Sanderson's completely transparent prose. Some authors write prose you need to savor slowly -- Guy Gavriel Kay, Catherynne Valente, Janny Wurts. Their prose invites contemplation and appreciation of the rhythm, rhyme and sheer elegance of the words on the page. By contrast, Brandon Sanderson's prose has very little artifice to it: it just exists to tell the story. It's plain as can be, doesn't draw any attention to itself, and rarely if ever stands in the way of the story. However, it would be a mistake to underestimate how difficult it is to write a novel in such a way that you sometimes completely forget that you are, in fact, reading. Sanderson's prose never stands in the way of the reader's complete immersion. As someone who is usually very aware of what I'm reading and how many pages I've read, I often was surprised to look up and realize that I'd just read 30 or 40 pages without even being aware that I'd been reading. There's a real art to writing a compulsive page-turner like this, and Sanderson, who teaches Creative Writing at BYU, is becoming an expert at it. Not that *The Way of Kings* doesn't suffer from some of the same flaws as Sanderson's other works. Characters are often still a bit one-dimensional, and some of the plot devices the author uses are too predictable and transparent. The start of the novel, describing the assassination of the Alethi king, reminded me strongly of some of the action scenes in the *MISTBORN* novels, with the assassin using his magic to perform gravity-defying stunts, but fortunately the rest of the novel doesn't read like a video game's magic system turned into a story. It's also written more tightly and with less filler (which, again, comes as a surprise given the length of the book). The end is filled with rousing heroism and a moving, truly exciting climax, but after the Big Final Battle, there are a few big revelations crammed in a few short pages, and while those were fascinating and definitely sparked my interest to read more of the series, they also felt a bit rushed and anti-climactic. Still, *The Way of Kings* is, in almost every way, a better book than anything Brandon Sanderson has produced so far, and if the rest of *THE STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE* keeps up this level of quality, we may end up looking back on the *MISTBORN* trilogy as an early practice run leading up to a work with better balance, better writing, and a much larger scope. Finally, *The Way of Kings* is also a lovely book in terms of artwork. From the stunning cover illustration by Michael Whelan to the interior artwork, this book simply does everything right. Every few chapters, you'll find a full page of artwork, e.g. some pages from Shallan's sketch book showing Roshar's native animals and plants, or an illustrated page from the Alethi Codes of War. These aren't just beautifully done, but also relevant to the story. I've never really seen an epic fantasy integrate art into the novel in quite this way. *The Way of Kings* is an excellent start to a promising series that's sure to dominate sales charts and bookstore shelves for

many years to come. If you're already a Brandon Sanderson fan, this book will blow you away -- and if you're new to the author, you now can get started with the author's finest work to date.

I felt when putting a title on this review that the final words of "The Lord of the Rings" would be somewhat appropriate. I, like Samwise the Brave, have returned from a great journey. That journey lies within the pages of Brandon Sanderson's novel, "The Way of Kings". There are a couple bottom lines I'd like to make clear before I discuss this book in more depth, and I'll go ahead and set them up here to prevent anyone from unnecessarily spending their valuable time.

1. "The Way of Kings" is the best book I've read in a while. 9.5/10 on my scale.
2. I've noticed a lot of reviews draw comparisons between "Kings" and Robert Jordan's "The Eye of the World" / "The Wheel of Time" series. This got me thinking - it's probably good that I make clear what I think of the three prevalent fantasy-series touchstones before I discuss this book so whoever reads this knows how my mind works. This reader loved "A Game of Thrones" as well as the subsequent series, but found books 4 and 5 quite tedious. My reactions to Robert Jordan's WoT series are lukewarm at best - I found "The Eye of the World" to be derivative, predictable, and a lot of the time very poorly written. This being said, yes, I enjoyed it for what it was. I loved "The Lord of the Rings," but have clearer and fonder memories of "The Hobbit".
3. Books like "Dune" tax my patience. Heavily.
4. I hate reviews with spoilers. Be at peace, wary reader. Here, there be no dragons.
5. This book is over 1200 pages long. I've spent about three weeks reading it. This review is going to be long as well, and arguably nowhere near as well written.
6. Did I mention that I didn't like "Dune"? Now that we've gotten the introductions out of the way, on to "The Way of Kings" itself. I'll go ahead and call it TWOK from here on out. It sounds cool and it's easier to type. So. Here we go.

ATMOSPHERE: As I think I already made clear, this book absolutely blew me away. Carried me away might be a better phrase, actually, or transported me Elsewhere with a capital E. It did everything I want a fantasy book to do - took me out of my world and introduced me to one so fantastic, so alien, so unforgettable and yet so believable that I found myself thinking about it...well, all the time. I would describe the world in detail, but so many other reviews have beaten me to it I'll skip that and relegate myself to saying this - imagine an ocean floor without the ocean. I think someone may have actually already written that. Well done, anonymous person. You hit it right on the head. There are more mysteries in this world than there are answers, and whenever one question is answered another four sprout up in its place. The nature of the highstorms (and their somewhat ominous sounding "Origin") was of particular note to me, not to mention the nature of "spren," the strange spirits that accompany basically everything in the world. If I were to pick a character to fall in with, I'd roger up with Axies the Collector, a side

character from one of the Interludes who I sincerely wish Sanderson would make into an entire storyline. When you find yourself fascinated by the daily life of characters that have no bearing whatsoever on the overall storyline, you know the author has done something right with their Worldbuilding. This, actually, brings me right into my next point of review.

CHARACTERS: The book focuses on four main characters, or maybe it would be more accurate to say three and a half. Kaladin, Dalinar and Shallan account for the majority of the book, and though he appears far less frequently, Szeth-son-son-Vallano, Truthless of Shinovar (Yes, that's his name) accounts for what remains. There are a smattering of side characters, some utterly forgettable and others utterly unforgettable (Axies the Collector, for instance, who travels the world studying spren) and they form the interludes between parts. In the end, you'll care about some more than others. Fortunately, Sanderson did this on purpose. The result is that when one chapter ends, you're angry because you don't want to leave their storyline. And then you finish the next chapter, and feel the same way. And so on and so forth. It's similar to what Martin did with his Song of Ice and Fire series, except without the Sansa chapters. I noticed that one of the chief complaints about this book was that it has a lack of gray characters. This fascinates me, because gray characters tend to grate on me after a while. Again, I'll go ahead and reference that Other (pun intended) epic fantasy series, "A Song of Ice and Fire," for a reference point here. I love it when characters surprise me. I don't like it when there aren't really any heroes I feel like I can root for. George Martin, I'm talking to you here. But I digress.

Are the characters in TWOK relatively one dimensional? I suppose maybe they are. There are others who suggest the characters found in this book are largely derivative. I disagree, except to say that they are very typical heroes. I think I like that, though. I like that Sanderson has heroes who are capable of heroic things. Who else would a fantasy writer choose to follow? The uneventful people? Would that be like Holden Caulfield goes to Middle Earth? I don't know. Maybe it could work. The point is that Sanderson has characters I can get behind, characters I can fall in love with, who I can fear for (I'm thinking of one character in particular here) and who when they are in genuine danger I can start gnawing my fingernails. I thought the characters in this were great, for what they were. And let's be honest here. The last 75 pages have more twists and character revelations packed into them than the other 1125 pages combined. This brings me around to the next part of my thoughts.

PLOT, PROSE AND PROGRESS: One of the chief complaints about "The Way of Kings" is that nothing much happens in it. I blame this sentiment (and yes, I use the word blame because I think this is a shortcoming of us as readers) on the fact that we live in a largely instant society. We want everything NOW. Take, for instance, the adoration a lot of people have for "The Eye of the World". Things start happening pretty fast in that book and they don't really let up. For a reader like

me, that's boring. TWOK is more about setting up a storyline. It's a 1200 page introduction to a 10 book mega-epic that demands an enormous setup. It's the kind of book that has a prelude and a prologue, lots of interludes and lots of parts. This being said, I never once felt like the book was lacking in action. There are battles galore, intrigues, mysteries, romances and failures. There's a real sense of wonder and mystery in this world - its inhabitants are as baffled by it as we are as readers. This comforts me. I liked that I didn't feel stupid reading this book. A lot of the time, I was sitting there going "Wait, what's this now?" only to discover a character a few pages later going "So wait...what was that, then?" Sanderson is trying something interesting here, introducing a world where characters don't know what's happening. Unlike most other books, which have the standard Wise Old Person to tell them exactly what is happening, this book doesn't have one (yet). The characters, readers and story wander around in the dark with a candle, looking for something while hearing frightening sounds coming from the shadows. The Alethi Kingdom is at war, and yet everyone has a strange sense of creeping dread that we the readers are infected by. We know SOMETHING is coming - we just don't know what. Something called the Night of Sorrows. The True Desolation. What that means and who its bringing, we never do quite figure, but it sure doesn't sound like they're bringing sweeties. Brandon Sanderson has a strange way of writing. I say this fondly. His prose is never astonishing. When I read George Martin, for example, I usually come across a paragraph/line or two that I savor in my mouth for a bit before carrying on. Patrick Rothfuss does this too, and so does R. Scott Bakker. There are always those zingers that I text to my friends, often annoying them with my enthusiasm. Sanderson has none of that. His paragraphs are simple, his words elemental. He sets out to tell us a story, not wow us with his language. I'm wowed anyway. Prose this transparent, this clear, this unpolluted and convincing...it's a gift. In other words, his writing is deceptively intelligent. I was in awe for reasons I've never really been in awe before. In fact, when someone asked me for a good quote from the book, I was genuinely stumped. The book itself is a quote. It cannot be separated from itself.

OTHER FACTORS: One of the things that impressed me most about this book was the storyline of Kaladin. Kaladin himself may be your run of the mill hero (the general who became a slave, the slave who became a gladiator, the gladiator who defied an emp - oh, wait, wrong movie, I mean book, I mean - aw phooey...) but he's approached differently than I've ever seen a character like this approached in fantasy. Here, Kaladin earns his place as a leader by a painstaking process which unfolds over literally hundreds of pages. Leadership isn't a microwave meal, and neither is Kaladin's story. His struggles, his dilemmas, his obstacles and solutions are all strikingly realistic. As a current United States Marine, I found myself thinking a lot about some of the people I serve with while I read this. The portrayal of what it means

to be a leader that Sanderson has created here is uncannily accurate, and really gives some good guidance on what it means to be a better leader. This, needless to say, is quite impressive. I noticed some complaints that the women have hardly any role in this book. This is true. Only one of the three main characters is female, and she only has one of the biggest character twists in the story. (If you haven't caught the sarcasm dripping from my words, here's your cue to chuckle.) Look, I'm not going to deny that the women in this book are pretty much the same spunky independent females you get in most fantasy books, but I think that can boil down the fact that it's surprisingly difficult to write a female character everyone can get behind. The closest thing I can think of off the back of my hand is probably Katniss from the recent "Hunger Games" trilogy, and even she had her nay-sayers. Plus, she was written by a woman, which definitely helps. This is a story about war, and the women in it are certainly subject to a patriarchal society. I for one have a hunch they will play a bigger role later on in the series (in fact, the twist I mentioned in Shallan's storyline basically assures this). Magic is used in a way unlike anything I've really seen before. Rather than dying out in the world of Roshar, it's coming back, and no one really knows what it is or how to handle it. The result is exhilarating - magic feels mysterious, dangerous and intriguing. Exactly the way magic should feel, in my opinion - unless it's in "Harry Potter". For example, in TWOK, gems hold stormlight in them which is used to power magical armor called Shardplate or to light a street. Different colored gems means multicolored lanterns. As a result, streets at night turn into little disco parlors. This is just one of the many ways Sanderson uses magic in this world. Most importantly, I think, is the sense of wholeness that Sanderson's world has here. The amount of detail with which he can see the imaginary is nothing less than astonishing. The book comes with a copious amount of artwork inside it, which adds to the story in a way I've never seen used before. The art is beautiful and masterfully done, to the point that I want to buy the hardcover edition of this book just so I can have larger copies of it. WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE: Not much. I mean that honestly. I noticed one of the chief complaints amongst readers was that the book was too long. This made me chuckle a little bit. It reminded me of when I went to see "The Return of the King" in theaters, knowing full well that the film was going to run over three hours, and yet my friends still complained about how long it was. Friends and fellow readers. Please, for the love of everything that is holy, don't pick up a book that is 1200+ pages and then complain that it is long. Yes, it is very long. It was intended to be. It's a comprehensive, detailed look at a magical world. Not every moment is going to be spent in swashbuckling glory. There are going to be times when characters need to sit around campfires discussing the strange natures of markings on other character's chests. This book didn't come out of a microwave. Someone sat down and wrote out 1200 pages of great material that culminated in a

great book with a distinct beginning, middle and end. I dare you to try the same. Are there some parts of the story where the language gets carried away with itself? Sure. As long as I'm being honest, I actually had to put down the book a couple times to rub my eyes when a couple of the characters had incredibly emo moments. I also had to put a belt between my teeth early on to avoid breaking all my molars at the shockingly immature use of the word "storm" as a swear word. It's funny - the story addresses mature themes such as suicide, murder, rape, the controversy of religion - and yet when it comes to swearing, characters say things like "Storm you!" or even "Storm off!" I think my favorite was "Storm off!". I wondered the first time I read that if I had made a terrible mistake. Are there slow parts? You bet. There were a few slow parts in a couple other books that come to mind, such as "War and Peace," "Anna Karenina," "The Brothers Karamazov," even "East of Eden". "But Sanderson is neither Russian nor a Depression era Californian!" some people cry. Sure. He's not. He's a 21st Century American writer who wanted to tell a story about a war and a whole lot more than that. A few slow parts in a 1200 page book really isn't that bad. If you are looking for instant gratification, STAY AWAY FROM THIS BOOK. If you're looking for a world to roll around in and delight in, please, buy it and encourage this man to write more. I honestly don't know what I'm going to be doing for the next year. Last but not least, the real subject matter of the book - namely a couple of the twists towards book's end - made me hesitate. Understand now that this book has a very serious undertone to it, and when it hits you what this series is really about, you'll know. I can think of another fantasy trilogy which addresses themes Sanderson brings up late in this book, but I'm willing to operate on a little faith here. (For those who have read the book, you'll get the pun there.) The twists are great. A couple of them I genuinely didn't see coming, and they blew me clean off my rocker. One was underwhelming. One was genuinely bewildering. So it goes. In the end, I can't recommend this book enough. It's got great - albeit one dimensional - characters, an utterly original storyline with just enough of the familiar fantasy trope to make us feel at home in our own genre. The world it introduces to us is breathtaking, one which we will have no problem whatsoever spending 10 books frolicking in. The questions it raises at books end are tantalizing, not to mention dangerous. It is very well written, and the best thing I've read since I first met the Others north of the Wall over two years ago, shivering in the snow. Bravo, Mr. Sanderson.

Bravo. 9.5/10 **EDIT: Upon re-reading "The Way of Kings" in preparation for "Words of Radiance," I feel confident in its original score. I will keep a tally of the overall series here as it comes out, as well. **Book 1: The Way of Kings - 9.5/10 Book 2: Words of Radiance - 8.8/10, Excellent but unfulfilled due to pacing issues. My full review can be found here on -

http://www..com/review/R2GY81SK3HT0F/ref=cm_srch_res_rtr_alt_1

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