



Dragonsteel

Brandon Sanderson

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This is Brandon Sanderson's Honor's Thesis for his undergraduate degree in English from Brigham Young University. It is unpublished but it is possible to borrow the physical copies. Sanderson has indicated that he would like to revise and release this work someday.

"A University scholar project" -- Brigham Young University.

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Dragonsteel Details

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Adam says

I would give this 3 stars for writing quality, but I'm giving it 4 because Brandon wrote this (280,000 words!) as his undergraduate honor's thesis, a remarkable feat. I don't know how he managed to finish college and write this book at the same time.

What I enjoyed most about this was seeing such an early stage in Brandon Sanderson's growth as an author. His talent for world-building, magic systems, and character development are all there, even if the story feels awkward and disjointed at times. If you are a Sanderson fan and you can get your hands on it, I highly recommend it, if only to see how far he has come as an author. However, I recommend you read Way of Kings before this, as a large chunk of Dragonsteel's storyline is also used (and done much better) in Way of Kings.

Kyle says

I respect this book for what it represents. But as Sanderson himself has said, it's not his best work. The story slows to a standstill at parts, the characters seem to act out of character at times, and the attempt at a love story becomes a bore. Since its a manuscript the formatting can be distracting, but overall manageable. What I really liked about this piece is the insights into the Cosmere. We see a proto-Hoid/Wit in his native land. We get a LOT of information on the three realms--Physical, Spiritual and Cognitive. And we even hear some explanation of the different magic systems. The non-plot parts of this book are definitely the most enjoyable and fruitful. In the grand scheme of things this book isn't about Jerick or Ryalla or Topaz, but rather understanding the Cosmere. Sanderson recycled parts of the story in the Stormlight Archives and has announced that eventually he will revisit the work with more experience and more polish. But that's not until all of Stormlight is finished...

Jacob Heiner says

This was an excellent book. A good portion (maybe 2/5) was very similar to events in Way Of Kings, so don't read this first. This really shows off some of Sanderson's strengths and if you've read other things he's written, you can see where many of his ideas started and you can see his progression as a writer. Hopefully this gets rewritten and published because it was great. The format of the book was somewhat irritating, though.

Brandon King says

Reading the book in pseudo-manuscript form was distracting at first, but I quickly got over it. The book was printed single-spaced in a tiny font on a hardback book of far greater than 8.5-11" paper, cramming a 300,000+ word book onto 200 pages. In addition, it didn't have the luxury of italics, and only the front of each page was printed.

But that's not important; what's important is the story. The best aspect of this book was the character growth; Sanderson managed to cover about ten years over the course of the novel, moving at a steady clip the entire time. As such, The protagonist Jerick goes from an aspiring lumberman to a rising student before moving to

the royal palace and becoming a scholar... which he then leaves behind to become a bridgeman, a soldier, and eventually, a general. At the same time, he is developing his "mocrikenisis", which allows him to see and manipulate individual atoms.

Countering Jerick is the servant to the princess, Ryalla. Her position in the palace gives her close proximity to many influential people, yet her status never allows her to even learn to read - at least, not until the princess grows bored of learning and passes her work to her servant. It also doesn't hurt that she too has Microkenisis, allowing her to control photons of light. This grants her invisibility and astral projection, as well as an awesome DBZ-esque blast. Jerick expends great effort to break her out of her shell of shyness, eventually exposing her wonderful personality underneath. Unfortunately, when Ryalla begins to bludgeon Jerick with teenage-love signs, he makes an abrupt transition into a complete bonehead, leaving Ryalla behind without a second thought.

Other characters of note include Topaz, the travelling Jesk who has wormed his way into a dozen governments and who acts as a Microkenetic mentor to Jerick; Bat'chor, the burly merchant who travels the land in search of Dragonsteel; Martis, the twisted son of a Duke who is determined to marry the princess and become king; and countless fathers, siblings, and bland supporting characters created to make the landscape more interesting.

Part of me doesn't want to go into detail about the plot, but part of me knows that 99% of you won't have the chance to read the single copy of this book that's available, so I'll provide some details. Jerick is the son of a lumberman, like his father before him. When a scholar comes to his town to teach the local students, Jerick jumps at the opportunity to learn and attends the school every day. Eventually, the king comes to visit, but while he is there, the town is attacked by the Sho Del - a race of white-skinned demons from far off lands. The only important loss in this battle is that of Jerick's Parents, but this allows the King to "adopt" Jerick and take him to the palace. When Jerick arrives, he is immediately smitten by the princess and does his best to win her - even though it's clear to the reader that Ryalla is far more important. After about 5 years of studying at the palace, the King is once again attacked by a Sho Del assassin, and Martis fights it off, winning the hand of the Princess. In a wave of angst-filled rage, Jerick storms out of the castle towards the Shattered Plains, where he hopes to win glory in the war against the Sho Del.

This is where things get confusing - anyone who has read "The Way of Kings" will recognize where the Shattered plains originated. Instead of Gemhearts, the soldiers are chasing after the Dragonsteel wells, where the incredibly valuable liquid Dragonsteel appears periodically. Instead of fighting the Parshendi warriors, they are fighting the Sho Del demons. Jerick joins Bridge Four, where he befriends Rock and makes enemies with Gaz.

This is where the book shows its weakness. The feeling of despair that bridgemen feel is significantly downplayed, and the danger level is about 1/10 of the bridge 4 that Kaladin claimed. The plot moves somewhat awkwardly, and events seem a bit fragmented. However, it's interesting to see how much Sanderson has developed as an author in the last 10 years, and the parts of the novel that weren't heavily rewritten were genuinely high-quality.

The last point to cover is the Avalanche, the last 10% of each Sanderson novel that merits a single, focused, 2-hour readthrough, even if it keeps you up until 3 AM. Thankfully, this book doesn't disappoint; a massive war breaks out in a dozen cities, a hundred important characters are killed off, and the magic system is drastically expanded. Topaz, the mysterious Jesk, is dramatically beheaded and tossed off the edge of a cliff. The last paragraph, however, describes an unnamed man, sitting at the bottom of a cliff, when a head washes onto the beach. He muses to himself, "I always thought it would be my head that grew a new body." The story is left very open-ended, a letdown for people like me who need to wait years before they can read the next installment, but rest assured: When Dragonsteel eventually becomes properly published, it will be well worth your time to read.

What I don't know is how on earth he's going to remove the entire aspect of the Shattered Plains from the novel, now that he moved that concept to another series...

Joseph says

I was lucky enough to get my hands on the one copy, available in the BYU library. While I leaned towards giving this book a four, the circumstances surrounding this book make me rate the book higher. The book is more of a manuscript, with many errors, so stands in need of a good edit. It obviously isn't intended to be read by a wide audience, since Brandon has yet to publish it. It feels like a rough draft and major changes will have to take place, namely the Shattered Plains will have to be removed since he used the idea for the Way of Kings. I asked Brandon about this book and he said that he intends to rewrite and publish it, though not for several years, and many key elements will have to be changed. That being said, I really loved this book.

The characterization was the main element that I loved. The protagonist, Jerick, is fantastically written. Being able to experience the excellent world-building through his eyes is also brilliant. The story is riveting and I found myself staying up late to finish chapters or storylines. I was a bit confused at the ending, but after rereading some sections and thinking about it for a while, it became a lot clearer. The ending is true to Brandon's style, both satisfying and very unsatisfying, making me want more. This book is written as the first in a series. Who knows how long it will take for him to get around to making this book, and potential subsequent books, happen. Whenever it does happen, I will definitely be buying a copy.

Tom says

I agree with Brandon Sanderson's personal evaluation of this - it's not his strongest work. The narrative pacing is off, and some bits of the story feel a bit disconnected. The book ends in an unsatisfying set of cliffhangers, without the sense of closure that he can now achieve even when dropping a ton of cliffhangers on you.

That said, it has a proto-Kaladin character and a proto-Hoid character and similarities to the Stormlight Archive generally, and it's fun to get some idea of how the whole story's developed in Brandon's mind and also get some idea of his progression as a writer.

I'm sure if he eventually releases a rewritten version it'd be great - there are lots of fun pieces here and a number of them have not yet ended up in his other fiction, so far as I can tell.

Laura says

I've been a fan of Brandon Sanderson's since before he was even officially published -- and it started with this book. "Dragonsteel" is still my favorite Sanderson book and I keep anxiously awaiting its public release.
