

Elantris

by Brandon Sanderson · Language: EN

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Overview

Elantris, Brandon Sanderson's debut novel, is a standalone epic fantasy set in the kingdom of Arelon, where the once-majestic city of Elantris was home to demigod-like beings blessed with magical powers. Ten years before the story begins, the magic of Elantris failed, transforming its inhabitants into cursed, decaying creatures known as the Shaod, and the city became a prison of suffering. The plot follows three protagonists: Prince Raoden, who is struck by the Shaod and secretly exiled to Elantris; Princess Sarene, his betrothed who arrives to find him presumed dead and becomes entangled in political intrigue; and Hrathen, a fanatical priest of the rival empire Fjordell, who seeks to convert Arelon or destroy it. As Raoden works to understand the nature of the fallen magic and restore hope to the city's inhabitants, Sarene uncovers a conspiracy that threatens the kingdom, and Hrathen's faith is tested as he confronts the true nature of his mission.

The novel explores themes of faith, identity, and the nature of power, weaving together political maneuvering, religious conflict, and a unique magic system based on AonDor, which requires precise geometric symbols. The story builds toward a climax where the three protagonists' paths converge, revealing that the fall of Elantris was not a curse but a consequence of a deeper magical imbalance. Raoden's determination to understand the Aons and his compassionate leadership become key to restoring the city and saving Arelon from invasion. Elantris is significant as a foundational work in Sanderson's Cosmere universe, showcasing his signature world-building, intricate plotting, and focus on character-driven fantasy. It stands alone as a complete narrative, offering a satisfying resolution while introducing concepts that resonate across his later works.

Key Takeaways

- Elantris is a standalone novel, so you can read it without prior knowledge of Brandon Sanderson's other works.
- The magic system, AonDor, is based on geometric symbols that require a connection to the land of Arelon to function.
- The fall of Elantris was caused by a disruption in the AonDor's connection, not by a curse or divine punishment.
- Raoden's leadership in Elantris shows that hope and compassion can thrive even in the most desperate circumstances.

- Sarene's political maneuvering demonstrates that diplomacy and intelligence can be as powerful as magic or armies.
- Hrathen's character arc explores the conflict between blind faith and true belief, questioning what it means to serve a god.
- The novel emphasizes that true power comes from understanding and cooperation, not from domination or fear.
- Elantris is set in the Cosmere, but it is not essential to read it to enjoy Sanderson's other series like Mistborn or Stormlight Archive.

Chapter Summaries

Part One: The Fall

The novel opens with Raoden, the prince of Arelon, being struck by the Shaod and transformed into an Elantrian. He is taken to Elantris, where he discovers a city of suffering and decay. Meanwhile, Sarene, his betrothed from Teod, arrives in Arelon and learns of his supposed death. Hrathen, a priest of Shu-Dereth, arrives in Kae to convert the nation to his faith, using political manipulation and religious fervor. The three protagonists are introduced, each facing their own challenges: Raoden struggles to survive in Elantris, Sarene navigates the political landscape of the court, and Hrathen plots to bring Arelon under Fjordell's control.

Part Two: The City of the Damned

Raoden, hiding his identity as the prince, begins to organize the Elantrians, giving them purpose and hope. He discovers that the Aons no longer work, but he starts to experiment with them. Sarene, now the princess of Arelon, becomes involved in the political intrigues of the court, forming alliances and opposing Hrathen's influence. Hrathen, frustrated by his lack of progress, faces challenges from his own religious order and from Sarene's opposition. The three storylines begin to intertwine as Raoden's efforts in Elantris become known to the outside world, and Sarene and Hrathen both become aware of the strange happenings within the cursed city.

Part Three: The Aon

Raoden makes a breakthrough in understanding the Aons, realizing that they require a connection to the land of Arelon. He begins to use the Aons to improve life in Elantris, creating food and light. Sarene uncovers a conspiracy involving the king's advisors, and she works to expose it. Hrathen, facing a crisis of faith, begins to question his mission and the teachings of his religion. The political situation in Arelon becomes more tense as the threat of invasion from Fjordell looms, and the king's health deteriorates. Raoden's discoveries in Elantris become crucial to the survival of the kingdom.

Part Four: The Invasion

The Fjordell army, led by Hrathen's superior, Wyrn, invades Arelon. Sarene and the Arelene forces prepare for battle, but they are outnumbered. Raoden, now fully understanding the Aons, realizes that the key to restoring Elantris lies in creating a new Aon that combines all the others. He works frantically to complete his research while the battle rages. Hrathen, having a change of heart, decides to help the Arelenes, and he reveals a secret that could turn the tide. The climax brings all three protagonists together in a final confrontation that will determine the fate of Arelon and Elantris.

Part Five: The Restoration

Raoden completes the new Aon, which he calls Aon Elantris, and uses it to restore the magic of the city. The Elantrians are healed, and the Shaod is reversed. The Fjordell invasion is repelled, and Hrathen sacrifices himself to save Sarene. The novel ends with Elantris restored to its former glory, and Raoden and Sarene married, ready to lead Arelon into a new era. The story concludes with a sense of hope and renewal, as the characters have overcome their challenges and found a new purpose.

Themes

- Faith and doubt
- Hope in despair
- Political intrigue
- Magic and science
- Identity and transformation
- Sacrifice and redemption

Notable Quotes

- "I am not a fool. I know that life is a wonderful thing to waste." — Raoden says this to himself early in the novel, reflecting on his situation as an Elantrian.
- "There is always another secret." — A recurring phrase used by Raoden, often when he discovers something new about Elantris or the Aons.
- "Faith is not about certainty. It is about trust." — Hrathen's internal reflection as he struggles with his beliefs.
- "The only way to get what you want is to help others get what they want." — Sarene's advice to a political ally, showing her diplomatic philosophy.
- "I am not a hero. I am a man who refuses to give up." — Raoden's response to a companion who calls him a hero.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Elantris about?

Elantris is a fantasy novel about a prince, Raoden, who is cursed into the fallen city of Elantris, where magic has failed. His betrothed, Sarene, navigates political intrigue in the kingdom, while a priest, Hrathen, plots to convert the nation. The story weaves their paths together as they uncover the truth behind the city's fall and work to restore it.

Is Elantris worth reading?

Yes, Elantris is widely considered a strong debut and a good entry point into Brandon Sanderson's works. It features his trademark intricate magic system, compelling characters, and a satisfying, self-contained plot. Some readers note that the prose is less polished than his later books, but the story and world-building are excellent.

How does Elantris end?

Spoiler: Raoden discovers a new Aon that combines all others, restoring Elantris's magic and healing the Elantrians. The Fjordell invasion is repelled, and Hrathen sacrifices himself to save Sarene. Raoden and Sarene marry, and Elantris is restored to its former glory, bringing hope to Arelon.

Who should read Elantris?

Fans of epic fantasy, especially those who enjoy intricate magic systems and political intrigue, will love Elantris. It's also a great starting point for readers new to Brandon Sanderson, as it's a standalone novel that doesn't require knowledge of his other series. Readers who appreciate character-driven stories with themes of faith and hope will find it rewarding.

How long does it take to read Elantris?

Elantris has about 200,000 words, so at an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it would take roughly 13-14 hours. Most readers finish it in a week or two of casual reading, or a few days if they read intensively.