

Rhythm of War

by Brandon Sanderson · Language: EN

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Overview

Rhythm of War is the fourth novel in Brandon Sanderson's epic fantasy series The Stormlight Archive, continuing the saga of Roshar as the war against the Fused and the forces of Odium escalates. The book follows multiple point-of-view characters, including Kaladin Stormblessed, who struggles with severe depression and post-traumatic stress while leading a squad of Windrunners in the defense of Urithiru, the Knights Radiant's tower-city. Meanwhile, Shallan Davar, under the alias of a spy, infiltrates the enemy city of Kholinar to uncover secrets about the Sja-anat, while Adolin Kholin ventures into the mysterious realm of Shadesmar with the deadeye spren Maya to restore her and unlock the secrets of the Recreance. Navani Kholin, the queen and a brilliant scholar, works to understand the nature of fabrials and the rhythms of Roshar, leading to a breakthrough that could change the war.

The novel's central arc focuses on the occupation of Urithiru by the enemy, who uses a powerful device to suppress the Radiants' powers and force them into a desperate struggle to reclaim their stronghold. Kaladin, stripped of his abilities, must rely on his wits and courage to protect the civilians and lead a resistance from within. Simultaneously, Navani is captured and forced to work with the enemy's scholar, Raboniel, to unlock the secrets of anti-Stormlight and anti-Voidlight, a discovery that could end the war but also carries immense moral implications. The story culminates in a series of revelations about the nature of spren, the origins of the Radiants, and the true history of Roshar, setting the stage for the final confrontation in the next book.

Rhythm of War matters because it deepens the philosophical and emotional stakes of the series, exploring themes of mental health, the ethics of war, and the power of knowledge. It is a pivotal installment that shifts the narrative from a straightforward battle against evil to a more nuanced conflict involving the nature of oaths, the cost of power, and the possibility of redemption for enemies. The book is praised for its character development, particularly Kaladin's arc, and its intricate world-building, making it a significant entry in modern epic fantasy.

Key Takeaways

- Mental health struggles are a central theme, and Kaladin's journey shows that seeking help and accepting support is a form of strength, not weakness.
- The nature of spren and their bonds with humans is more complex than previously understood, with implications for the entire magic system of Roshar.

- Navani's scientific approach to fabrials and the rhythms of Roshar leads to a revolutionary discovery that could turn the tide of the war.
- Adolin's bond with the deadeye spren Maya demonstrates that broken bonds can be healed, offering hope for the restoration of the Knights Radiant.
- The occupation of Urithiru forces the characters to rely on non-magical means, highlighting the importance of courage and resourcefulness in the face of overwhelming power.
- The enemy, the Fused, are not monolithic; some, like Raboniel, have their own goals and motivations that can align with the protagonists in unexpected ways.
- The book emphasizes the importance of understanding one's own identity and past, as seen in Shallan's and Dalinar's struggles with their histories.

Chapter Summaries

Part One: The Fourth Bridge

The novel opens with the coalition forces using the Fourth Bridge, a flying city, to transport troops and supplies. Kaladin leads a squad of Windrunners to protect the bridge from enemy attacks. He struggles with his mental health, feeling the weight of his responsibilities and the trauma of his past. Meanwhile, Shallan is on a mission to infiltrate the enemy's ranks, using her Lightweaving abilities to assume a new identity. Adolin accompanies her, but their relationship is strained as Shallan's multiple personalities become more pronounced. The part sets up the major conflicts: the war against Odium, the mystery of the Sja-anat, and the personal battles of the main characters.

Part Two: The Occupation

The enemy launches a surprise attack on Urithiru, using a device that suppresses the Radiants' powers. Kaladin, who is in the tower, loses his abilities and must find a way to fight back without them. The enemy, led by Raboniel, takes control of the tower and captures Navani. Kaladin organizes a resistance among the civilians and the few Radiants who retain some power. He discovers that the tower's defenses can be manipulated, and he uses his knowledge of the building to create safe zones. The part ends with Kaladin making a desperate plan to retake the tower, while Navani begins her forced collaboration with Raboniel.

Part Three: The Rhythm of the Tower

Navani is forced to work with Raboniel to unlock the secrets of the tower's fabrials. She learns about the rhythms of Roshar and how they can be used to create anti-Stormlight, a substance that can destroy spren. This discovery has profound implications, as it could be used to permanently kill the Fused. Navani is torn between her desire for knowledge and the ethical implications of her work. Meanwhile, Kaladin continues his resistance, using his knowledge of the tower's layout to evade the enemy. He also forms a bond with a spren named the Sibling,

who is the tower's own spren, and together they work to restore the tower's defenses.

Part Four: The Trial of the Oath

Kaladin faces a personal trial as he is captured by the enemy and forced to confront his deepest fears. He is put in a situation where he must choose between saving his friends and upholding his oaths. His struggle with depression reaches a climax, and he nearly gives up, but with the help of his friends and the memory of his family, he finds the strength to continue. Meanwhile, Shallan's mission in Kholinar takes a dangerous turn as she is discovered and must fight for her life. Adolin, in Shadesmar, makes a breakthrough with Maya, who begins to communicate with him, revealing secrets about the Recreance.

Part Five: The Last Day

The climax of the novel occurs as the resistance in Urithiru makes a final push to retake the tower. Kaladin, with the help of the Sibling, manages to activate the tower's defenses and drive out the enemy. Navani, having completed her research, uses her knowledge to create a weapon that can destroy the Fused permanently. She also discovers a way to communicate with the enemy's spren, offering a potential path to peace. The book ends with a major revelation about the nature of the war and the true history of Roshar, setting up the next book in the series.

Themes

- Mental health and depression
- The ethics of war
- Knowledge and discovery
- Redemption and forgiveness
- The nature of oaths
- Identity and memory

Notable Quotes

- "The most important step a man can take. It's not the first one, is it? It's the next one." — Kaladin recalls this advice from his mentor, Wit, as he struggles to continue fighting despite his depression.
- "I will protect those I hate. Even if the one I hate most is myself." — Kaladin's internal oath as he confronts his self-loathing and decides to continue protecting others.
- "The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon." — Wit (Hoid) explains the role of stories to Shallan, reflecting the novel's thematic depth.

- "You cannot protect yourself from sadness without protecting yourself from happiness." — A piece of advice given to Kaladin by a character, emphasizing the need to embrace all emotions.
- "The enemy is not the Fused. The enemy is the war itself." — A reflection by Navani as she considers the futility of the endless conflict.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Rhythm of War about?

Rhythm of War is the fourth book in The Stormlight Archive. It follows the war against Odium as the enemy occupies Urithiru, the Radiants' stronghold. Kaladin leads a resistance without his powers, Navani works with the enemy to discover anti-Stormlight, and Shallan and Adolin pursue separate missions. The book explores deep themes of mental health, the cost of power, and the history of Roshar.

Is Rhythm of War worth reading?

Yes, if you are invested in The Stormlight Archive. It is a slower-paced book focused on character development and world-building, but it delivers major revelations and emotional payoffs. Fans of Kaladin's arc will find it particularly rewarding. However, if you prefer action-heavy plots, this might feel less satisfying than previous volumes.

How does Rhythm of War end?

Spoiler: The resistance retakes Urithiru with Kaladin's help, and Navani discovers a way to create anti-Voidlight, which can permanently kill Fused. She also establishes a connection with the enemy's spren, hinting at a possible peace. The book ends with a revelation about the true nature of the war and the origin of the Radiants, setting up the next book.

Who should read Rhythm of War?

This book is for readers who have already read the first three Stormlight Archive books and are invested in the characters and world. It is also for those who enjoy deep character studies and philosophical questions about war and mental health. New readers should start with The Way of Kings.

How long does it take to read Rhythm of War?

Rhythm of War is about 1,200 pages long. At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it would take roughly 20-25 hours to read. Most readers take a few weeks to finish it, depending on how much time they can dedicate daily.