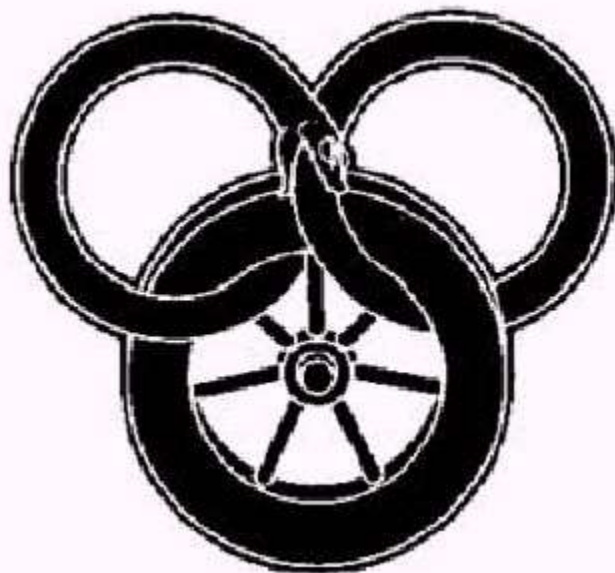


The Wheel of Time

By

Robert Jordan



The Strike at Shayol Ghul

by Robert Jordan



(A Preliminary Introduction)

by Jorille Mondevin,

Royal Historian to the Court of Her Most Illuminated Majesty, Ethenielle Kirukon Materasu, By the Blessing of the Light, Queen of Kandor, Protector of the Land, Shield of the North, High Seat of House Materasu.

One of the most important finds of recent years, perhaps since the Breaking, is a partial copy of no less than a history of the world from the drilling of the Bore into the Dark One's Prison to the End of the Breaking of the world. The original apparently dated from early in the First Century A.B. Despite the extreme paucity of material from the entire first millennium after the Breaking, we can only be thankful that the art of printing survived the Breaking of the World when so much else did not, and was indeed practiced to some extent during the Breaking itself, though under severe and restricted conditions. Considering the widespread destruction of The Trolloc Wars and the War of the Hundred Years, which although far less than the near totality of the Breaking still saw cities, nations, and far worse, knowledge, go to the fires, we must marvel at any writing that has survived more than three thousand years. What we know is based on fragments, copied and recopied a thousand times, but at least we know something from them. Even a little knowledge is better than ignorance.

Discovered in a dusty storage room in Chachin, the pages were in a chest full of old bills and receipts, students' copybooks and private diaries, some so foxed by age and with ink so faded as to be unreadable where the pages themselves had not crumbled. The fragmentary manuscript was readable, barely, but presented the usual problems, quite aside from the difficulties of translation and dealing with centuries of copyists' errors; such a history would no doubt be a vast, multi-volume work (please see the author's Note), yet of the two hundred and twelve surviving pages, the largest number of consecutive pages number six, and nowhere else more than two. Such dates as are given are totally incomprehensible, as no calendar dating from the Age of Legends has ever been found. Many references to cataclysmic events (dire battles and cities destroyed by balefire during the War of the Shadow, whole regions covered by the sea and mountain ranges raised overnight during the Breaking) and to such minutiae as the appearance of a certain person are but curiosities. The pages which might reveal exactly where these things happened, what their special significance was, the resolution or end result, are usually missing. Why then is this collection so important? First because, sundered as it is, it contains more information of the War of the Shadow than any other known single source, perhaps as much as all other sources combined in some ways. But even more importantly, it gives a great deal of information available nowhere else. And most importantly of all, the six consecutive pages and others which must be placed close to them contain the only known account of events surrounding what surely must be the most far-reaching single event in the history of the world, in any Age: the sealing of the Bore by Lews Therin Telamon and the Hundred Companions.

We still cannot be certain how long passed between the creation of the Bore and the actual beginning of what would come to be called the War of the Shadow, yet plainly at least fifty years and possibly more than one hundred were marked by a rapid decline in the social order and an equally rapid increase in a thousand ills that previously had been either rare or entirely unknown. War itself was a "new" discovery, it seems, though one quickly learned, some might even say perfected. The War of the Shadow tilted one way, then another, in fire and blood, over its course. During the first three years, the Shadow made great gains, and large parts of the world fell beneath the horror of the Dark One's dominion, however indirectly through human representatives. And surely, the presence of Myrddraal and Trollocs cannot be called indirect. Under the leadership of Lews Therin Telamon, the legendary Dragon of the Prophecies, much of what had been lost was retaken over the next four years, though not without reverses. At that point, a stalemate developed, and for nearly a year neither side was able to effect any gain despite fierce fighting, but when the stalemate broke, the Shadow began to advance again, slowly at first but with ever increasing speed. According to the writer of that fragmentary history, "It was as if every step forward by the Shadow scattered the spores of chaos before it, and feeding on what grew, the Shadow gained strength, so that its next stride was longer, and the next step would be longer still."

Huge areas had been devastated to varying degrees by this time as the war surged back and forth around the world, and it was obvious that while the Shadow was willing to starve or murder a great percentage of the population in the conquered territories, the forces of the Light could no longer sustain a protracted war. They